

NANAIMO NEWS BULLETIN

NANAIMO-RAISED ARTIST MAKES OFFERING OF FORD F-150 SCULPTURE TO HIS ANCESTORS

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A bird's eye view of Nanaimo-raised artist Brendan Lee Satish Tang's life-size paper model of a 1984 Ford F-150 truck at the Nanaimo Art Gallery.
(Josef Jacobson/News Bulletin)

Artist Brendan Lee Satish Tang says it's a Chinese tradition to make burnt paper offerings to one's ancestors, and in his latest exhibition he's offerings symbols representative of his Nanaimo upbringing. He just hopes his forebears don't return to sender.

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Starting May 21 and continuing until July 11, Tang, who now lives in Vancouver, presents *Reluctant Offerings* at the Nanaimo Art Gallery. It's his first Nanaimo show since 2007 and while it's meaningful for him to make his return, he said it comes with "another level of pressure."

"There's people [in Nanaimo] that knew me when I was a kid so I feel like there is always the pressure of wanting to present something that people you know would find interesting," he said.

Tang describes the show as his most "raw and vulnerable" yet. Entering the gallery space will be reminiscent of walking into a forest campsite. The main component of the installation is a life-size replica of a 1984 Ford F-150 truck made out of watercolour paper set upon a campfire. Also on display are paper trucker hats and stubby beer bottles, and the trees in the clearing resemble those that hang from rear-view mirrors. There's also video of small burning paper trucks being played forward and backwards to represent a loss of communication with Tang's ancestors.

"When I say 'reluctant offering,' it's one of those things where I'm talking more about my distanced relationship with my ancestors and, though immigration and migration, losing contact with that history," Tang said. "It's reflecting on my own histories, my own personal history and disconnect, but also meditating and thinking about growing up in Nanaimo and growing up in Canada and what is that like and finding oneself within those spaces."

The show is also the first to engage with the NAG's new thematic inquiry: what is progress? NAG curator Jesse Birch said in Tang's case, that progress comes in the form of the adult reflecting on growing up in Nanaimo.

"It's about thinking about ideas around nostalgia, ideas around comfort and discomfort around certain symbols that he was around at that age, including a Ford F-150, of course, which is the centrepiece of the show," Birch said. "But it's mostly just thinking about that perspective looking backward to his young self looking forward to where he is now."

Tang's work often deals with concepts of hybridity and mixing of cultures. He said ideas around belonging and fitting in are "mulling over in my head a lot" because it's a reality he's lived himself.

"I don't get described as Canadian. When people look at me they're like, 'Oh, you're Canadian?' because I'm not white ... but then when I go abroad I definitely feel Canadian, so there's that part of it," he said. "And then there's also my Chinese and South Asian heritage ... and I was originally born in Dublin, Ireland, so there's a whole mix of figuring out where my place is and where I belong and where I feel like I belong."

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