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ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PING CHONG BUILDS BARRIERS IN ORDER TO  
CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

By Dana Friis-Hansen

Ping Chong, artist in residence in the Reference Gallery of the List Visual Arts Center September 9-29, is one of those artists who aims to make us see the awesome "Big Picture," to make us step back and see beyond what is before us in the gallery and consider not only how it relates to us in the immediate sense, but also the grander implications. Ping Chong departs from the multi-media theatre and collaborative television work that he is best known for to create his first environmental installation, entitled KINDNESS. The gallery will be open to allow viewers to watch the final planning stages and construction of the work, which will be completed on October 1 and remain on view through October 27.

The two distinct spaces which will form this room-sized work will contrast the the crisp dryness of the man-made, technological world of the mid twentieth century world with the organic, primeval qualities of the natural realm. Perception through one's senses will give the first clues for unraveling the mysteries evoked by the experience of KINDNESS. By manipulating materials, methods of craftsmanship, the quality and quantity of light, textures, olfactory qualities, scale, and objects from mainstream American culture, the artist will craft a very special space.

When memory and imagination begin to stir, the abstract references to a wide array of social and cultural issues begin to surface. The dark swampy region is mysterious, murky and cramped. Or is it a comforting, womb-like space? The man-made level is clean and bright, comfortable and familiar. But it would be neither familiar nor comfortable to our ancestors, nor to peoples outside of our western urban culture. From an architectural viewpoint, Ping Chong is building a "house" on a "swamp"-- we all know the implications of that. The floor, however stable, is a barrier which can be seen to divide the technological and the organic, but perhaps also the present and past, white and non-white cultures, as well as many other things.

Ping Chong watches the world around him and feels a strange tension. His background, as the child of Chinese immigrant parents and raised in the close community of New York's chinatown, and now working as an artist outside of that community, has provided him a particularly interesting vantage point from which to view mainstream American culture.

He has taken full advantage of his own life experiences and knowledge of the history and literature of this culture and

others to consider what is common and essential to human experience, as well as that which is specific to an individual or ethnic group. It is towards that end that Ping Chong works; to make us see, from a different angle, a Bigger Picture.

Ping Chong will talk about his work and screen his videotapes on Tuesday, September 10, at 7:30 PM. in the Bartos Film and Video Theatre, E15-070.

Jamake Higwater, noted author of The Primal Mind and other works on Native American cultures will present a lecture "The Primal and the Present" on Monday, September 23 at 7:30 in the Bartos Film and Video Theatre, E15-070.

A series of informal public discussions have been planned during Ping Chong's residence, allowing the MIT community and the public a chance to become familiar with the artist's work and concerns, while allowing him to further pursue topics of interest. The artist will meet with MIT and area scientists, scholars, and artists for noontime conversations on the following topics: "Point of View: Individual and Cultural Biases in Perceiving the World" (Friday, September 13); "A Vision Changed: Technology and Our Understanding of the World" (Tuesday, September 17); "The Artist and Ethnicity: 'The Other Confronts Culture Difference'" (Thursday, September 26). All discussions will be held in E15-305. All events are free and open to the public.

Ping Chong: Kindness was organized by the Committee on the Visual Arts, made possible through the support of the Massachusetts Council for the Arts and Humanities.