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'ZHI LIN: CHINESE RAILROAD WORKERS OF THE SIERRA NEVADA' COMMEMORATES THE 150th ANNIVERSARY OF THE COMPLETION OF THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD AND THE SACRIFICES OF CHINESE IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Artist Zhi Lin's work brings forth the forgotten history of Chinese workers that lost their lives constructing the Transcontinental Railroad. The exhibition will be on view at the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno from May 4 through November 10, 2019.



Reno, Nev. (April 17, 2019) – This May marks the 150th anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad. To mark the occasion, the Nevada Museum of Art presents an exhibition featuring the art of Zhi Lin, an artist who has spent much of his career making work that recalls the sacrifices of Chinese immigrant workers in the nineteenth century. *Zhi Lin: Chinese Railroad Workers of the Sierra Nevada* features mixed-media canvases, a video installation, and watercolor paintings that honor the nearly 1,200 Chinese workers who lost their lives to accidents, avalanches, and explosions in treacherous Sierra terrain near Donner Summit while constructing the transcontinental railroad. The exhibition will be on view at the Nevada Museum of Art in downtown Reno, Nevada, May 4 through November 10, 2019. To complement the exhibition, the Museum will host a commemorative ceremony and panel discussion with Zhi Lin and artist Hung Liu at 1:30 pm on Friday, May 10, the historic day when the final “golden spike” was hammered into the last rail in Promontory, Utah.

While most of the names of the Chinese workers have been lost to history, Lin is part of a growing group of artists and scholars working to weave their stories into America's broader historical narrative. By 1868 twelve thousand Chinese were employed by the Central Pacific, about 80 percent of the labor force on the transcontinental line, and monetary compensation was minimal. Accidents, avalanches, and explosions left as many as 1,200 Chinese workers dead.

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"Every day, people see and pass the railway tracks where Chinese workers once worked. Besides the grade or the rails, people find only trees on the ground and the sky above the sites," reflects Lin. "I hope that after viewing my work, when people look at the trees, at the sky, and along the passage of the old grade, they will be able to see the presence of the workers, tracing back to the 19th century."

Born in Nanjing, China, in 1959, Lin studied fine art at the state-run China National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, and at the Slade School in London, where he was trained in the traditional styles of Chinese and Western printmaking. Although he employs conventional modes of representation, his work became more political after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and Lin's subsequent move from England to the United States. His series *Invisible & Unwelcomed People* represents a four-year study of the vital role that Chinese immigrants played in the construction of the transcontinental railroad.

Traveling in California and Nevada between 2005 and 2007, Lin made watercolor sketches of tunnels, bridges, and other sites where traces of Chinese railroad workers remain but are easily overlooked. Rather than correct history by including Chinese people in his scenes, Lin's paintings underscore their absence altogether. The resulting artworks are haunting and at times abstract, provoking the viewer to contemplate the depth of the stories unfolding on canvases that extend as large as twelve feet wide, such as in *Iced Bones, Donner Pass, California, 1866-7, Building of the Central Pacific by Chinese Workers* (2013) and *Bloody Summer, Cape Horn, California, 1865, Building of the Central Pacific by Chinese Workers* (2013).

"The completion of the railroad—which linked the United States from east to west—is often celebrated as the grand achievement of America's Manifest Destiny and the 19th-century rallying cry for westward expansion of the United States," said Ann M. Wolfe, Andrea and John C. Deane Senior Curator and Deputy Director for the Nevada Museum of Art. "Zhi Lin provides us with an important opportunity to connect with forgotten stories, and to broaden our knowledge of our region's history."

To complement the exhibition, the Museum will host a *150 Year Transcontinental Railroad Commemoration / Panel Discussion and Ceremony* on Friday May 10 at 1:30 pm in the Nightingale Sky Room and Stacie Mathewson Sky Plaza. Artists Zhi Lin and Hung Liu will join Wolfe to discuss their artworks made in response to the sacrifices of Chinese railroad workers. Afterwards, a ceremonial gathering will take place at the exact time 150 years ago when the "golden spike" was hammered into the last rail at Promontory, Utah, by Leland Stanford. The program will include the recitation of the names of more than 800 known Chinese railroad workers between 2:27 and 2:47 pm – a twenty-minute period which the original telegram announcing the completion of the railroad was sent from Utah to Washington DC in 1869. Tickets for this honorific commemoration are available for purchase at nevadaart.org.

Zhi Lin: Chinese Railroad Workers of the Sierra Nevada will be exhibited May 4 through November 10, 2019, at the Nevada Museum of Art, located at 160 West Liberty Street in downtown Reno.

To access high-resolution images and captions, please visit: http://bit.ly/ZhiLin_NevadaMuseumofArt.

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The Nevada Museum of Art is the only art museum in Nevada accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). A private, nonprofit organization founded in 1931, the Reno-based institution is supported by its membership as well as sponsorships, gifts and grants. Through its permanent collections, original exhibitions and programming, and E.L. Cord Museum School, the Nevada Museum of Art provides meaningful opportunities for people to engage with a range of art and education experiences. The Museum's **Center for Art + Environment** is an internationally-recognized research center dedicated to supporting the practice, study, and awareness of creative interactions between people and their environments. The Center houses unique archive materials from more than 1,000 artists working on all seven continents, including Cape Farewell, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria, Lita Albuquerque, Burning Man, the Center for Land Use Interpretation, Ugo Rondinone's *Seven Magic Mountains*, and Trevor Paglen's *Orbital Reflector*. Learn more at nevadaart.org.

Header image caption:

"Chinaman's Chance" on Promontory Summit: Golden Spike Celebration on Promontory Summit, 12:30 pm, 10th May 1869, 2015. HD video projection on painting (charcoal/oil on canvas). 10 min. 41 sec. 76 x 135 inches.