Howie Tsui is a Canadian visual artist, born in Hong Kong (1978). Raised in Nigeria and Thunder Bay (Ontario), he received Honours BFA in painting from the University of Waterloo (2002). Tsui spent time living in Ottawa after his studies, and has recently relocated to Vancouver. He was the 2012 recipient of the RBC Emerging Artist Award, presented annually by the Council for the Arts in Ottawa and has been exhibiting his work nationally and internationally for over a decade. Recent solo exhibitions include Friendly Fire, Art Gallery of Southernwestern Manitoba, Brandon (2013); Horror Fables, Le Gallery, Toronto (2013); Celestials of Gold Mountain, Wil Aballe Art Projects, Vancouver (2013); Radiant Specters, Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco (2012); Friendly Fire, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston (2012); Celestials of Saltwater City, Centre A, Vancouver (2011); Horror Fables, MAI (Montréal, arts interculturels) (2010); of Manga & Mongrels, Gallery Jones, Vancouver (2010); Horror Fables, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa (2009); Horror Fables, Ace Art Inc., Winnipeg (2009); of Shunga & Monsters, Le Gallery, Toronto (2008); of Manga & Mongrels, G+ Gallery, Toronto (2007); of Manga & Mongrels, Gallery 101, Ottawa (2006) and Donkey Punch!, Wurm Gallery, Ottawa (2004). His works have also been included in notable national and international group exhibitions such as You Cannot Kill What is Already Dead, Doris McCarthy Gallery, Toronto (2013); Spatial Poetics XII: Release Me, Powell Street Festival, Vancouver (2013); Phantoms of Asia: Contemporary Awakens the Past, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco (2012); The Calendar’s Tales, 808 Gallery, Boston University School of Fine Arts (2012); Local Flora, Galerie SAW Gallery, Ottawa (2012); Monster, West Vancouver Museum (2010); Hut on an Island, Grasshut Gallery, Portland (2008); Crazians, World of Wonder Gallery, Hollywood (2008); Listen to your Heart, MOHS Exhibit, Copenhagen (2008); The Pleasure, Jaime Torres Bodet Cultural Centre, Mexico City (2007); Paper Pushers, Gallery 1988, Los Angeles (2006); Fresh Start, Arena 1 Gallery, Santa Monica (2006); I Am 8-Bit, Gallery 1988, Los Angeles (2006); Said and Done, AntiSocial Gallery, Vancouver (2006); My Culture Includes My Scene, Ottawa Art Gallery (2005); Then and Now, Gene Siskel Film Center of the Chicago Institute of Art (2005) and Semi-Permanent05: Sketchel, Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre, Australia (2005). His works have been placed in numerous private collections, as well as those of the Canada Council, the City of Ottawa, the Musée d’Art Contemporain de Baie-Saint-Paul and the Ottawa Art Gallery.

Howie Tsui works in drawing, painting and sculpture. His maturing practice - which astutely blends the highly charged socio-cultural issues of hybridity, identity and assimilation, as well as East Asian phantasmagoria, superstition, propaganda and fear with a distinctive, underground aesthetic - has gained considerable attention both within Canada and internationally. Tsui has developed a rigorous research-based practice in which he melds contemporary cultural references with those from Japanese manga, Hong Kong pop culture and Chinese and Japanese ghost tales. He is fascinated by the way that history, horror and the grotesque function in the present day and the way that traditional forms of image making – particularly that of Asian scroll painting – can be used today to document and re-present the Chinese-Canadian experience. In his
**Horror Fable** (2008-2010) series, for which he has become most well-known, he set out to mimic the techniques of historical Asian master painters. This suite of large-scale watercolour and ink drawings presents what he describes as “hyper narratives” – stories anchored around historical folklore infused with anecdotal tidbits, nostalgic images, and personal, childhood vignettes – all of which contain various elements of terror, fright or paranoia. Weaving together complex webs of fact and fiction, the series was a way for the artist to satirize and in fact undo the powerful role of fear contained within the original tale. These vibrantly coloured drawings sprawled upwards of three meters and allowed Tsui to experiment with his own subconscious responses to the stories, and to reflect on how fear has been used throughout history as a reminder of our mortality.

Tsui’s current practice has shifted slightly, and while maintaining an interest in traditional narratives, he has begun to focus on more recent stories, specifically those that recount Asian-Canadian immigrant experiences. In 2011 he collaborated with Centre A to gather together members of the Chinese community in Vancouver, and collect their accounts of travel and relocation to Canada, later transforming them later into an otherworldly magic lantern performance for the community. Many of the men and women’s stories were marked by unpleasant memories of hardship, abuse, labour and struggle and it was with this project that Tsui sought, by weaving together excerpts of these recollections with images sourced from Chinese cosmology and bestiaries, to:

> Undermine historical portrayals of early Chinese immigrants as a nondescript and hapless labour force … I think it is so difficult to feel something for these early immigrants when they have been, historically, so de-humanized, yanked of any sense of individuality or character. That is why my intention with the project is to transform these undistinguishable people into physically distinct creatures … [and to] alleviate any trauma or ‘allegorical ghosts’ that may still haunt the collective memory of Chinatown.¹

The project was also a way for him to connect “my isolated experience with a greater and historically present Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver.”²

Please cite in the following manner:

Rhiannon Vogl, Acquisition Proposal for Howie Tsui’s *The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island*, accession #46237.1-4, Curatorial File, National Gallery of Canada.

---

¹ Interview with Joni Low “Evoking Past into Present: The Spectral Imagination of Howie Tsui.” *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* (Nov/Dec 2011, Vol. 10 No.6), p.79

² Artist statement http://centrea.org/2011/05/celestials-of-saltwater-city/