

LIVING ROOM

LIVING GATE

An art proposal for
a sculpture
in Portsmouth Square,
Chinatown
by lee + boles faw



The “Living Room” sculpture of a Chinese gate is a welcoming threshold from the city into the square, using a play on words for the space of a growing tree for the “Living Room” of Chinatown and a message of hospitality for visitors and community members alike: ***When you welcome a guest, you have found your home.***

The gate consists of a bronze copy of a magnolia tree that will be felled in the park before its renovation, a tree that witnessed the last 60+ years in Portsmouth Square and Chinatown, a tree in Chinese culture that symbolizes ancestral strength and wisdom. This magnolia stood guard over the community fight for civil rights, culturally-competent services, and the formation of Asian-American identity. This bronze witness sits across the path from a living flowering tree in a stone planter in the opposite planting bed. The limestone planter will serve as a monumental plinth to hold up a powerful, living symbol for the greater community. English text (When you welcome a guest, you have found your home), Tagalog text (Sa pagyakap sa bisita, tahanan ay nadarama), and a Chinese cheng-yu 安居樂業 drawn by a master Chinatown calligrapher will be carved over and

through a simplified relief image of ocean water texture on the stone. As a result, the text is entwined with a texture associated with migration, feng shui, and ecology that can also relate to the dynamism of this particular community: a rootedness in place and history, connection and the sharing of resources – and the foundational strength and heritage that allows for flourishing and new growth.

The bronze tree will support a cantilevered top of the gate, which will be gilded to reflect light, a luminosity that changes perceptively as light shifts throughout the day. This cantilevered piece contains a generous opening for the living tree to grow through and thrive. The ancestral Portsmouth Square trees are therefore providing a “living room” for a new tree that will grow into and around the opening provided by the eternal bronzed magnolia. The piece gives testament to the strength of the Chinatown community, the cultural value of ancestral gifts and reverence for youth, revealing a time-based, radiant experience of history, possibility, change and resilience.

lee + boles faw is a collaboration of Summer Mei Ling Lee and Laura Boles Faw, artists who have executed public art projects in the US, China, and beyond. lee + boles faw collaborate because together they create stronger, more energetic, more complex synergistically alive results. Through this process, they champion consensus-building and collaboration with the community.

They have worked with over 25 Chinatown and AAPI organizations, including Chinese Culture Center, CMAC/Edge on the Square, Chinatown Community Development Center, Chinese Historical Society of America, Chinatown Youth Center, Clarion Performing Arts, Be Chinatown, Self Help for the Elderly, On Lok, Gum Moon Women's Residence, CCBC/Six Companies, Lotus Taoist Institute, and RAMS inc.

