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OPINION

Commentary: Pac Arts proudly shares stories from the Asian Pacific Islander community. We're not stopping now.



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APRIL 27, 2020 | 2:58 PM



Just over 11 weeks ago, the world was celebrating the historic Oscar wins of the film “Parasite” and heralding the rare but welcome Hollywood spotlight on Asian cinema. The surreal moment was especially exhilarating for Asian Americans, many of whom had long been fans of director Bong Joon-ho’s storytelling for the past 20 years.

Fast forward to today, and Asian Americans find themselves not only fighting the novel coronavirus pandemic but speaking out against increased reports of racism, xenophobia and acts of violence toward Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities.

This coverage of the coronavirus pandemic is part of your subscription to The San Diego Union-Tribune. We also provide [free coverage](#) as a service to our community.

Oh, how quickly things can change.

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At Pacific Arts Movement (Pac Arts), where we proudly present stories by and about API communities, the Oscars success of “Parasite” put a spotlight on our work through the San Diego Asian Film Festival (SDAFF), which has served hundreds of thousands of attendees since 2000. We were especially ready to welcome this broader interest in Asian cinema as we prepared for our 10th Annual SDAFF Spring Showcase in mid-April.

Instead, as the pandemic’s foothold in the United States became more apparent and its spread seemingly inevitable, Pac Arts made the difficult choice to postpone the event. In a period of increased and pronounced anti-Asian sentiment, our work seemed more critical than ever — yet in the end, nothing was more important than ensuring the health

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The postponement of our Spring Showcase represents much more than the loss of an eight-day festival — it is a loss of opportunities big and small, opportunities for API stories and their storytellers to be represented on the big screen.

It's the loss of opportunities for thousands of people to experience the magic of cinema while sharing laughter and tears with friends and strangers alike. The loss of opportunities to engage creative professionals from graphic designers to event planners, from projectionists to teaching artists, from interns to volunteers. But perhaps the greatest loss of all is the opportunities that events like SDAFF have in building community, bridging divides and inspiring a more compassionate society.

Beyond Spring Showcase, Pac Arts' high-school documentary filmmaking programs have also been curtailed. In-school programs were placed on hold as teachers, teaching artists and students all adjusted to distance learning. Our summer Reel Voices program remains in flux as we explore virtual program delivery while working to ensure students have equitable access to resources. These changes remind us that our core mission doesn't depend on DSLR cameras or professional editing software. It has always been about the stories shared and the process by which they're told.

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Pac Arts has since sprang into action in other ways. In early April, we organized with community partners throughout San Diego to author a joint statement denouncing the increased hate impacting API communities. Together we inspired the community to

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Coping with coronavirus

The pandemic sweeping the globe has changed everyone's lives, and we want to hear how it's changed yours. If you'd like to write an op-ed for us on a subject related to the virus, make it 700-750 words and send it to us with your name and a phone number so we can reach you.

If you have questions, email the community opinion editor at yoursay@sduniontribune.com. We're especially looking for expert voices and personal experiences. Thanks, and be well.

As the arts community rethinks the way we serve and engage our audiences now and into the future, Pac Arts has gone virtual through our new SDAFF Online program, including an upcoming monthlong celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May. Even as we shift online, we recognize that the ability to build community through shared experiences is as important as the films themselves — and so we are planning watch parties, remote Q&As and virtual mixers as well.

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and culture and shifting philanthropic contributions as well as existing challenges to engage audiences in new ways, all of which pose existential challenges to arts organizations.

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To the audiences, members and supporters who have helped organizations such as Pac Arts to thrive, your support will be more needed than ever to ensure we survive. When our physical doors reopen, we will need our community's support through engaging in programs, joining as members and investing financially in our futures.

The alternative — a world where arts organizations like ours are no longer here — is one we shouldn't have to imagine.

At Pacific Arts Movement, we are reminded that “arts” is in our name but not what defines us. Instead, we are committed to being a movement, one that always aspires to building a more compassionate, more inclusive tomorrow. Will you join us on this journey?

Lee is the executive director of Pacific Arts Movement, presenters of the San Diego Asian Film Festival.

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Kent Lee

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