

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

***Awing & Honoring Frederick Gao* Retrospective and Public Program Series at Sunderland Public Library**

April 2, 2024

Contact:

Katherine Umstot, Director

Sunderland Public Library

(413) 665-2642

director@sunderlandpubliclibrary.org

SUNDERLAND - Enter the inspiring world of Frederick Gao (1950-2023), an inner tapestry of lush landscapes, weathered New England barns, livestock and people, rendered into paintings and capturing his 30+ years of observing life in Western Massachusetts. Sunderland Public Library is hosting *Awing & Honoring Frederick Gao*, a retrospective art exhibit and a series of public programs inspired by his art. Unlike most retrospectives, where the artist has decades of pieces, showing gradients of their identity and perspective over time, Gao's body of work was produced through an impassioned flurry of just five years, resulting in the creation of more than one hundred gobsmacking oil paintings and ink sketches. Gao passed away in December 2023, before he was able to host a solo art show. Organized by his daughter, Boyuan Gao, this exhibit serves as a celebratory debut of Gao's work, which will be on display in the library's Lane Family Reading Room Gallery in May and June 2024. The exhibit can be viewed any time during the library's open hours.

Gao was born in the city of Xi'an, China, grew up in the height of the cultural revolution, and moved to the U.S. in the mid 80's as a student. Becoming a painter wasn't an available option, and thus, it wasn't until his retirement that he put paint to canvas – *or at first* – pen to paper. Nonetheless, it became an instant spell. For the first time ever, he was animated by a phenomenon of *awing* that came from within, and is the animating force that used him as a vessel to produce his vast body of work.

The spirit of *Awing and Honoring* is not to hastily or flatly look at art against a wall. The public is instead invited to engage in this theme of *Awing and Honoring* by experiencing the phenomenon of awing (inspiring awe or admiration or wonder), and honor Gao's life and legacy by doing so.

In the months of May and June, five phenomenal locally based artists will be presenting multi-sensory, experimental workshops that explore different themes of aliveness. Through the mediums of poetry, narrative and grief writing, plant medicine, visual art and clay, community members can come join these rich investigations and play. Workshops are designed for all levels, span different age groups, and are free to the public. RSVPs are required for some, due to capacity.

Public programs include:

- Exhibit Opening Reception on Saturday, May 4th from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
- *Mapping the Wilds of Grief* (a writing workshop for adults) on Tuesday, May 7th from 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
- *Exploring Inner & Outer Wilds: Embodied Nature Writing* (a writing workshop and nature walk for adults) on Wednesday, May 15th from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
- *Liminal Spaces: Finding Ourselves through Clay* (a ceramics workshop for people of all ages) on Saturday, June 8th from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
- *POEMS & PAINTINGS & POSTCARDS* (a poetry workshop for people of all ages) on Saturday, June 15th from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
- *Cartographies: Mapping the Interior* (an interdisciplinary writing and art workshop for adults) on Saturday, June 22nd from 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Sunderland Public Library Director, Katherine Umstot, was thrilled with Boyuan Gao's suggestion to host a public program series in conjunction with her father's exhibit. "Art is incredibly inspirational. I love the idea that people of all ages and abilities can be inspired by art and can transform that inspiration into art of their very own." The library often hosts different types of art workshops, and Umstot felt the series would be a natural fit in the library's public programs. "We have hosted visiting artist series before, but the concept of bringing in a wide variety of creative experts to lead a diverse series of workshops using the same artist's works as inspiration is very exciting."

For more information about the exhibit or any of the public programs in the series, please visit www.sunderlandpubliclibrary.org or call the library at 413-665-2642.