

Exploring Asian art

LI exhibits highlight an array of cultures

BY MARY GREGORY
Special to Newsday

May is Asian Heritage Month and no better time to celebrate the flavors of the East. With a thriving Asian and South Asian cultural presence here on Long Island, artists and exhibitions are bringing exciting voices and visions to local venues. While no exhibition can hope to express the experiences, visions, imaginations and realities of almost 60% of the global population, it's a great time to explore the work of Asian artists.

"GLOBAL ASIAs: CONTEMPORARY ASIAN & ASIAN AMERICAN ART FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF JORDAN D. SCHNITZER AND HIS FAMILY FOUNDATION"

WHEN | WHERE June 4-Sept. 18, Heckscher Museum of Art, 2 Prime

Ave., Huntington
INFO \$5 suggested donation, free 12 and younger; 631-380-3230; heckscher.org

The Heckscher Museum hosts the only East Coast presentation of this traveling exhibition, and possibly your only chance to see a six-foot pastel-shaded polka-dot tanuki. The ceramic sculpture by artist Jun Kaneko depicts the beloved Japanese raccoon dog.

"It's an actual animal," said curator Karli Wurzelbacher, "turned into a cartoon version, kind of like Smokey Bear. It's become an internationally known and beloved figure."

The tanuki is just one aspect of Asian culture that finds expression in the dozens of mostly prints by the 15 artists from six countries in the show. "It's really a window onto a much larger world of creative production," Wurzelbacher explained. "We hope that people will see the show and be inspired to learn more."

The first piece visitors encounter is Dinh Q. Lê's sculpture, "I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes." The title is taken from Walt

Whitman's "Song of Myself," and it's Wurzelbacher's way of tying Long Island's creative past with contemporary Asian art.

"What the show is doing is saying we really can't put a single label — Asian or Asian American — on any of these people, or on any of this art, or even the show, because we all contain so much in our individual identities," she said. "I think everyone will be able to find something to connect with."

"AUSPICIOUS DREAMS: TRIBAL BLANKETS FROM SOUTHERN CHINA"

WHEN | WHERE Through May 31, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Friday, Stony Brook University's Charles B. Wang Center, Skylight Gallery and Zodiac Gallery, 100 Nicolls Rd.
INFO Free; 631-632-4400, thewangcenter.org

The Wang Center celebrates Asian culture all year and this month's spotlight is "Auspicious Dreams," which offers an opportunity to become acquainted with several distinct Asian peoples and their ways of seeing, dreaming and making art. More than three dozen full-sized quilts, baby blankets, weavings and embroideries represent 11 Southern Chinese tribal groups. Blankets made from the 1700s to the mid-1900s include a rare, exquisite Li Dragon cover, once so coveted by rulers that individuals had to craft them in secret.

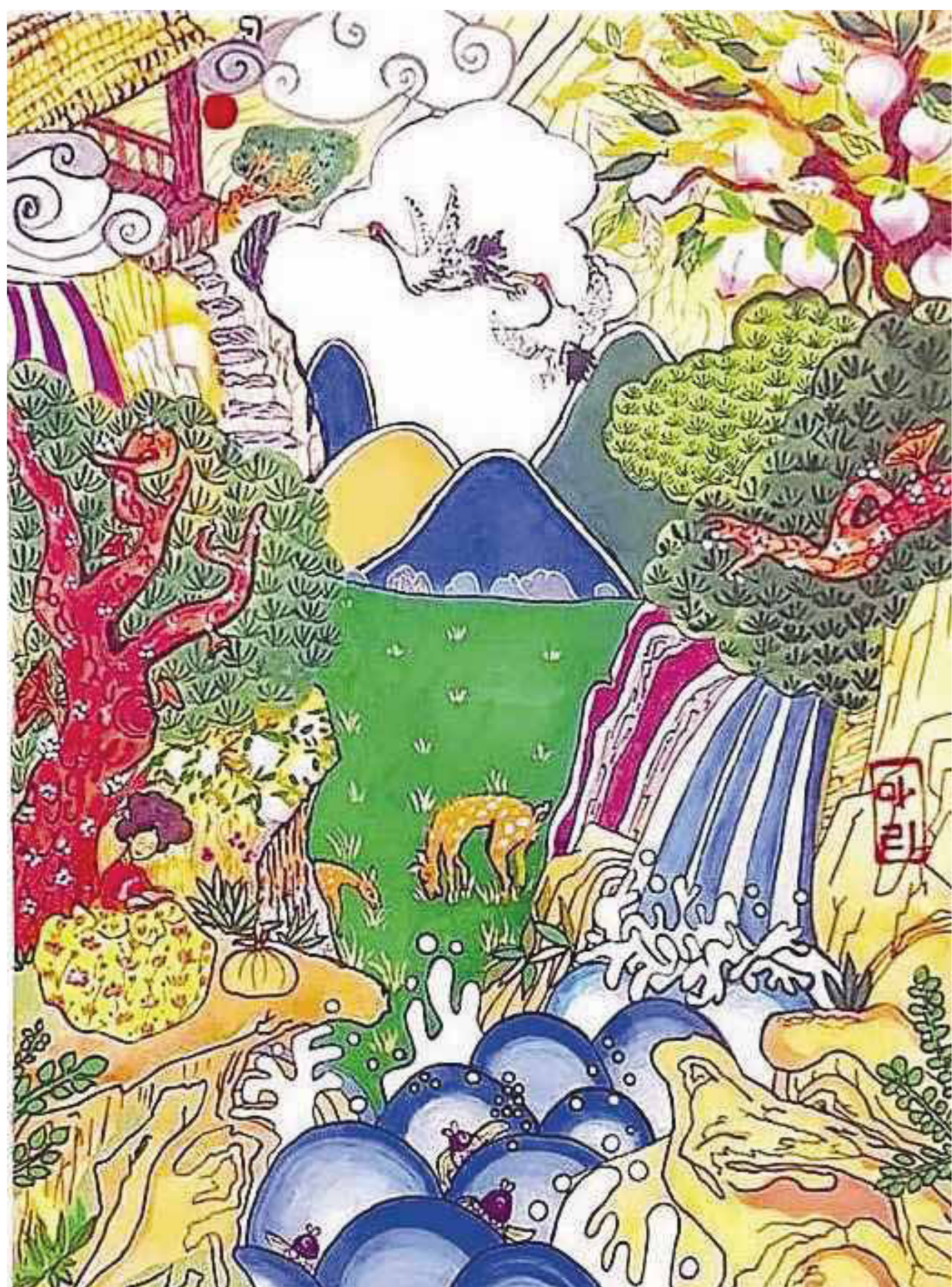
"The artists are all anonymous women," said Jinyoung Jin, director of cultural programs. "In some cases, it was part of their wedding preparations. They made elaborate blankets as a sign of their skills to show that they would be a great asset to their families."

Yet, the blankets were also much more, since they were designed to protect and bless those they covered. Look for dragons and cranes for luck and

Jun Kaneko's "Untitled. Tanuki," 2014, a glazed ceramic sculpture of a Japanese raccoon dog, will be on display at the Heckscher Museum's "Global Asias" exhibit.



Charles B. Wang Center's exhibition "Auspicious Dreams" features elaborate tribal blankets from Southern China.



Joan Kim Suzuki's fanciful, colorful "Spa Paradise" is part of the "Honoring the Past and Creating the Future" exhibit at Westbury Arts.

longevity and stylized patterns based on water and clouds. "This pictorial imagery is a language with which they communicate with the next generation," Jin said. "The patterns and designs are all full of symbolic meaning. They were meant to protect their children, their husbands, or themselves and ward off evil spirits."

"HONORING THE PAST AND CREATING THE FUTURE"

WHEN | WHERE Through May 27, 2-6 p.m. Friday and 2-4 p.m. Saturday, Westbury Arts, 255 Schenck Ave.

INFO Free; 516-400-2787, westburyarts.org

Six Long Island women artists whose cultural heritages stretch across the globe share works that reference identity, immigration, history and fantasy. In her "This Heirloom" series, Brookhaven artist and filmmaker Mara Ahmed creates layered images full of texture, color

and memories — some remembered, some imagined.

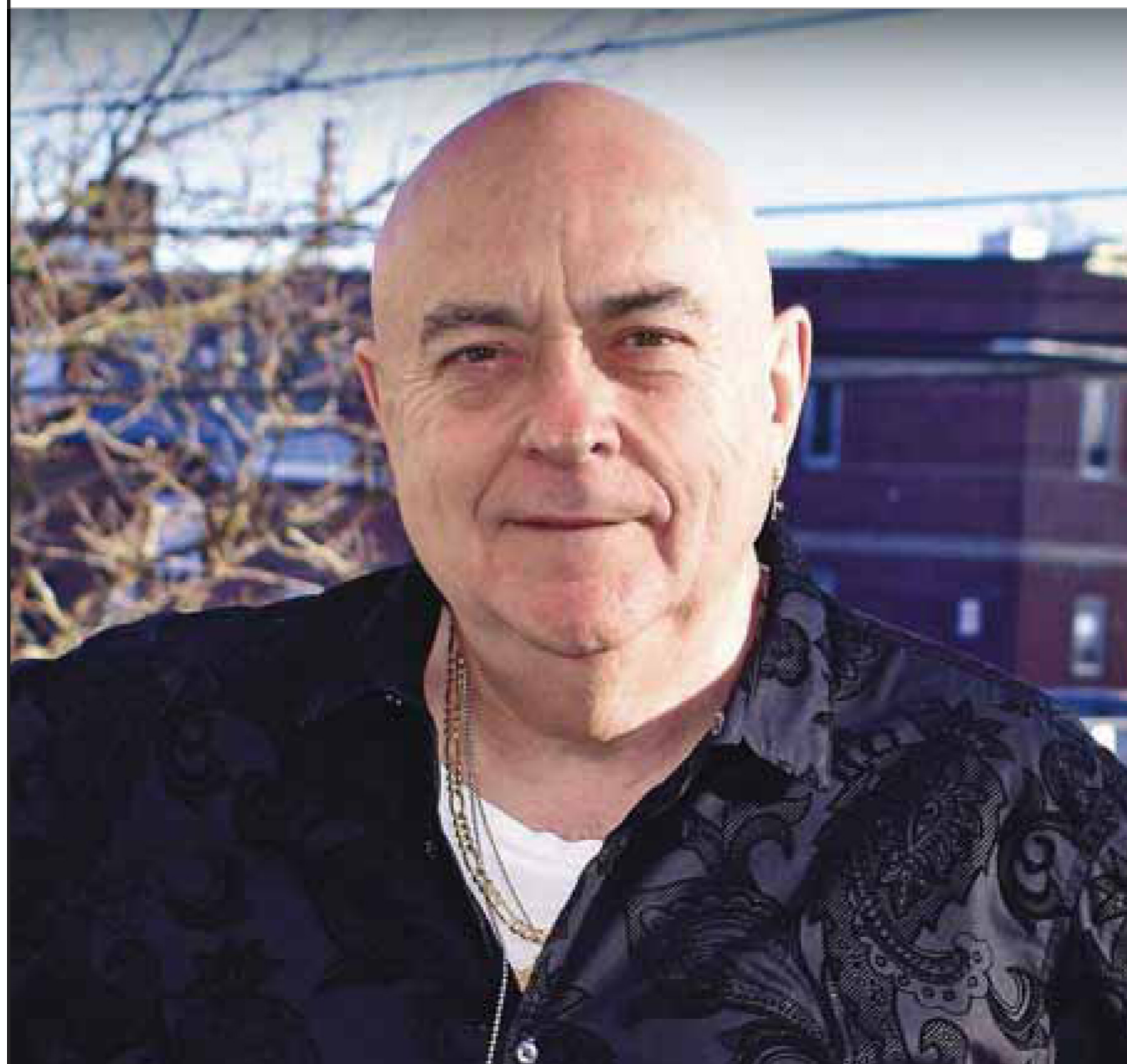
"Art," she stated, "allows us to imagine alternative futures."

Anu Annam, an artist, educator and curator from Commack, presents vivid portraits probing her own identity, while Port Washington's Safia Fatimi's sewn self-portraits are an investigation into digital versus analog creation and a study of her evolution as a woman.

Huntington's Patricia Shih, who earlier this month presented the musical program "Let's Go to China" at the venue, is also exhibiting a group of paintings. Nayyar Iqbal from Levittown is showing colorful landscapes and city scenes. And joyful concoctions of pop colors and traditional scenes are Korean American Joan Kim Suzuki's way to fuse her heritage with 21st century life. The exhibition forms a snapshot of a small group of Asian American Long Islanders with big visions.

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“It’s so horrible, you can’t imagine it happening to your child, and you don’t want to think about it — but imagine how it feels when you can’t not think it.”

VALLEY STREAM

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