Countdown to Riverside City College's 100th Anniversary

Below are three photos of Dr. Samuel D. Huang (Riverside City College Professor of Biology / Health Sciences 1974-1998). The first two were published in the “Viewpoints” student newspaper. The image on the left is from December 5, 1975. The center image is from December 17, 1976. The photo on the right is from the September 1983 “RCC Reports” District publication.

Dr. Huang was not only an educator but also an accomplished artist. When artists spot an empty canvas, they visualize what images “could be” on that surface. 40 years ago, at the beginning of his RCC teaching career, Dr. Huang spotted an empty canvas in the form of the first floor south exterior wall of the Life Science building. Today, on this wall appears an ecological mural that has been a part of the RCC campus since it was completed in 1975. The 10 by 55 foot mural, made up of metal objects, cement, acrylic paint, sealant and polyurethane coating, is indeed the creation of Dr. Huang. The mural was funded by a faculty grant of $1,500 from the RCC Board of Trustees. Several youngsters aged 8 to 14 showed up to help Dr. Huang with the project including his daughter. At the time of the mural’s completion Dr. Huang said:

“I feel it was a very good experience for them. Years from now when they come back here, they’ll be able to say that they helped make that”.

The mural features a jungle of blue-green foliage highlighted by a variety of animals. Dominating the mural are two human figures. One, a woman, is holding a falcon while other creatures nestle up to her. The other, a man, is playing a musical instrument from which flow wrecked cars, Freon gas, smog, a nuclear bomb, and other elements affiliated with modern society. When Dr. Huang first started the mural, he fastened metal objects to the ceramic block wall with bolts and epoxy glue and then covered everything with a quarter-inch layer of cement. Other figures were molded and later attached. All details were then painted in. The entire mural was covered with sealant and given a polyurethane coating which gave the mural a fine sheen. Dr. Huang had to work around objects that were on the building such as a water outlet and an ashtray that was (in those years) built into the side of the wall. Instead of getting rid of the obstacles, he merely adjusted them into the piece. Dr. Huang adapted much of his artistic ideas from Henry Rousseau, the 19th century French painter, who created similar tropical landscapes. A major problem with the mural was vandalism. According to Dr. Huang:

“Since it depicts modern society, it should also show that vandalism is part of such society.”

Much of the above account of the Life Science mural was modified from a December 5, 1975 “Viewpoints” newspaper article by Phyllis Irwin.

Thanks to Anthony Rizo for providing the photos below of Dr. Huang’s mural. The work of art is so large that it could not be photographed in one shot. Rizo had to take multiple images of the art work and “stitch” them together.
In 1977 Dr. Huang presented the 17th Distinguished Faculty Lecture entitled: “Focalism: A New Dimension in Art”. A biography was included in a pamphlet that accompanied the lecture. It read:

“Dr. Samuel Huang has a happy combination of expertise in both art and science, and is these talents he will bring to bear in this year’s Faculty Lecture. He was born in China in 1935 and came to the United States at the age of 10. He taught art in high school for two years after receiving his bachelor's degree in art education from the State University of New York at New Paltz in 1959. He left teaching and returned to school to study science, receiving his PH.D. in biology from St. John’s University, Queens, New York, in 1969. Dr. Huang has taught biochemistry at Fordham University and York College of the City University of New York and he has done research in hematology
and biochemistry at Nassau Hospital, Stony Brook University, and the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Eventually he became a dean at Hostos College of the City University of New York. But even then he taught art at night at the Greenhaven State Penitentiary. He came to RCC in 1974 and quickly became involved in many activities outside the classroom, serving on the Academic Senate, the Curriculum Committee and the Affirmative Action Committee. Two huge (50-foot) murals give evidence of Dr. Huang’s unique combination of talents. He has done such a painting at the Stony Brook University Medical Center which depicts health care, and he has done the dramatic mural on the lower south wall of the Life Science Building which expresses an environmental theme.”

Below left is a photo that appeared in the May 5, 1977 issue of “Viewpoints”. On the right is the cover of the 1977 Faculty Lecture pamphlet.

In 1985, Dr. Huang became the first RCC educator to be granted a full professorship. Below left is an article from the June 6, 1985 issue of “Viewpoints”. On the right, Dr. Huang is seen in full academic regalia in the 1980s.

In the November 8, 1995 issue of “Viewpoints”, Dr. Huang was profiled by reporter Katina Hoyo. The article read:

“Even though we can’t recall something, its images are still buried somewhere in our photographic minds. There is a build-up, a build-up of all these fears and horrors that ultimately affect us.” Two years ago, post-traumatic stress hit
Sam Huang in the classroom. On campus Huang is most commonly known as a biology professor, but there is more to him than that. Huang grew up in China during the horrors of World War II. When Huang was two, in his village of Nanking, 200,000 people were slaughtered in two months’ time. At age five, he stepped on a piece of shrapnel from a bomb. He contracted tuberculosis later and the same leg had to be amputated. “The nightmare of those days affects the mind,” Huang said. “It all goes somewhere in the memory banks.” When the post-traumatic stress hit Huang in the classroom, some students rose and embraced him. The support his students gave him was a golden moment for Huang. Since then, Huang has become even more involved in the community and lives of his students.

Huang has been nominated by the Riverside Chamber of Commerce for the Martin Luther King Award, which is given to outstanding community members who work to improve racial relationships. Huang plays a strong role in the “Hope and Help” program, working to steer youth towards alternatives to gang membership in the east side of Riverside. Huang is also strongly involved in the art community. His murals are on display at the Riverside Department of Motor Vehicles office, in the front of the Life Science building at RCC, as well as some in Washington D.C. and Moscow. Huang is sculpting, painting and writing a children’s book. His newest venture is tap-dancing. He has given five performances together with former RCC student, Sandy Potts. Huang said he feels such a strong tie to his students that he marches and sits with the students at graduation, instead of sitting with the faculty. Some of Huang’s students find him such a positive influence in their lives that he is like family. Some students even call him “Stepfather”. “I consider it a deep privilege to teach,” Huang said. “As teachers, we have an immense power to make a difference in students’ lives. Teachers can inspire students and encourage them to reach for their true potential.” Huang said he always knew he would be a teacher. Looking back through his past, he is not surprised he stayed true to his initial dream. “I can count on my fingers the number of teachers who made a difference. I want to be one of those,” he said. Huang has a favorite quote from a Sidney Poitier movie: “At the end of your life I want all of you to leave this world a little better than when you came into it”. Huang said: “I’ve always felt that I’m living on borrowed time and that I have a debt to pay to society.”

The first photo below appeared with the above article in “Viewpoints”. The second photo shows Dr. Huang, not long after his retirement, returning to the campus to touch up his mural.

Dr. Sam Huang, educator, artist and humanitarian, passed away on February 18, 2014.

It is 2 years and 2 weeks until RCC’s 100th Anniversary on March 13, 2016.

The Riverside City College Instructional Media Center is bringing you this five year countdown to RCC’s 100th Anniversary. Our intention is to give everyone a weekly glance at the many people and events that have been a part of the college.

Our thanks go to the RCC Digital Library Archives and the District’s Office of Strategic Communications and Relations for allowing us to use their photo and newspaper collections. Thanks as well to all of the RCC students and Faculty Advisors that were a part of the yearbook and newspaper staffs. Thanks also to Tom Johnson and Gilbert Jimenez who wrote “the book” about RCC’s history. “Riverside City College 1916-1981- A 65 Year History” is available in the RCC Digital Library.

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