



Name in English: Clarence Lee
Name in Chinese: 李健文[李健文]
Name in Pinyin: Lǐ Jiànwén
Gender: Male
Birth Year: 1934
Birth Place: Honolulu, Hawaii
Current location: Hawaii

Created the Chinese Lunar New Year stamps

Profession(s): Artist and Graphic Designer

Education: No degree, Pomona College (attended for 2 years); 1958, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Yale University School of Art & Architecture

Awards: 2004, Alfred Preis honoree for lifelong dedication to the arts and art education in Hawaii, Hawaii Arts Alliance; 2001, Living Treasure, Honpa Hongwanji Mission; 2001, KOA Award, KOA Gallery, Kapi'olani Community College; 1987, Silver Award, Hawaii Advertising Federation

Contribution (s): Clarence Lee is the founder and former president of Clarence Lee Design & Associates Inc. (CDLA), known as Hawaii's most reputable design firm. For over 40 years, CLDA has created commercial identities and given an international face to some of Hawaii's most well known brands. He is most well known as the designer of the Chinese Lunar New Year stamp series for the United States Postal Service. This was the first series of US stamps to acknowledge the existence of minorities in the United States other than African Americans. Lee has often remarked on how designing stamps has given him the opportunity to honor his Chinese culture by bringing his art and heritage to the American public. Lee has been lauded for his approach to design, making his work both unique and versatile. He writes: "We listen and learn. We try not to come to a project with any preconceived ideas".

Lee's mother was a Chinese-American born in Hawaii, and his father was an immigrant from China. Realizing his passion for art as a young child, Lee recalls some of his first artistic endeavors, drawing on the pink paper used to wrap meat from the butcher shop where his father was employed.

Lee graduated first in his design class at Yale University and was awarded the RR Donnelly Fellowship during his studies. Less than a year later, in 1959, Lee began his design career working for the Lester Beall Design Group and stayed there until 1961. In 1962, he worked as a designer for IBM Corporation in New York until 1965.

In 1966, Lee returned home to Hawaii and established Clarence Lee Designs. One of Lee's first well-known projects was the interior display he designed for the Hawaii pavilion at the World's Fair held in Osaka, Japan in 1970.

In 1992, Lee was chosen to design the first Chinese lunar stamp for the “Year of the Rooster.” The stamp, released in 1993 to correspond with the Year of the Rooster, was originally meant to be the only one produced. But millions of dollars in sales, mostly due to the efforts of millions of Chinese Americans and Chinese in China buying them for their stamp collections, quickly made the US Postal Service decide to commission Lee to produce the entire series of 12 Chinese zodiac animals. One stamp was released each year for the entire 12 year cycle ending in 2006. When asked if this stamp series was what he’d envisioned would be his primary legacy in history, Lee answered. “Not really, because when I was asked to do a stamp design, it was to do just one stamp.” In 1994, Lee also designed the first United States – People’s Republic of China joint issue stamp set featuring a whooping crane, a bird found in North America, and a black necked crane, found in Asia. Lee also designed a popular US stamp depicting a gymnast to honor the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Lee’s unique approach to aesthetics has influenced the design world for over 50 years. Lee explains his works by saying: “...in graphic design we're always trying to understand and digest what the visual problem is, and then we try to come up with a visual solution to that problem. In a way it's a similar thinking process of understanding the situation — whether it's the Chinese heritage or the 9/11 disaster — and then trying to understand it and trying to find some of the answers to it.”

In November 1992, the Honolulu Academy of Arts selected Clarence Lee for recognition in their Annual Artists of Hawaii Show. In 1998, The Queen Emma Gallery in Hawaii honored Lee with a commemorative exhibition entitled, “Clarence Lee: A Lifetime in Design.” Lee and his work have been featured in national magazines such as CA Magazine, IDEA Magazine, and Print Magazine. He was also one of the 128 American designers selected to contribute to the Survival Peace Poster project on display in Washington, DC., Hiroshima, and Moscow.

In 2004, noted dance choreographer, Liz Lerman, choreographed a dance tribute based on Lee’s lunar calendar stamp series to honor his designs’ “deep influence on the aesthetics that represent Hawaii both within the state and to the world.”

Publications/Patents: Clarence Lee has designed and developed over 200 graphic symbols and designs including the packaging used by Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut, Royal Kona Coffee and Hawaiian Plantations.

External Links:

<http://www.clarencelee.com/>

<http://www.knottywood-treasures.com/id24.html>

<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=44501>

<http://www1.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2008-07-24-voa27-66757177.html>

http://www.iolani.org/pdf/coverstory_spring05.pdf