

“When I was a child, the library was foundational to my family’s well-being. A free space, where my mother, who loved books and was adapting to reading English, could be at peace, taking her time, slowly reading. It was there that I saw her relax a little bit, losing herself in stacks of titles, shooing her two children away to go explore.

All material things were precious to my frugal immigrant family, making the library a wonder—a place I could scarcely believe to be real. Access to so much space, words, pictures, stories and art. I remember coming upon a shelf of artworks, what I now understand to be reproductions of drawings and paintings laminated onto plaques, and asking my mother what they were for. She said we were allowed to take them home. Surprised, excited and shy, I picked out a drawing of a robin. After checking it out, I placed it on the back of our couch, against the wall so I could look at it from where I lay. My mother hammered a nail into the wall and hung it for me. When it came time to return our books and the robin, I was excited to pick out a sailboat painting.

When we first began discussing a project at the Richmond Art Gallery, I described the context, with a particular mention of the public library in the building, because I knew Amy to be community-minded, with work that trickled into surrounding spaces, becoming glue between groups, individuals, and organizations. In considering the relationship between the art gallery and the library, I described the art-lending program of my childhood. To me, just a passing anecdote. Amy, in her quiet, determined way, made the grown-up version of this happen. Seemingly impossible—these are original artworks, after all, not laminate reproductions— Amy has opened an access point that I hope brings borrowers as much satisfaction and pleasure as I experienced.”

—Su-Ying Lee, curator