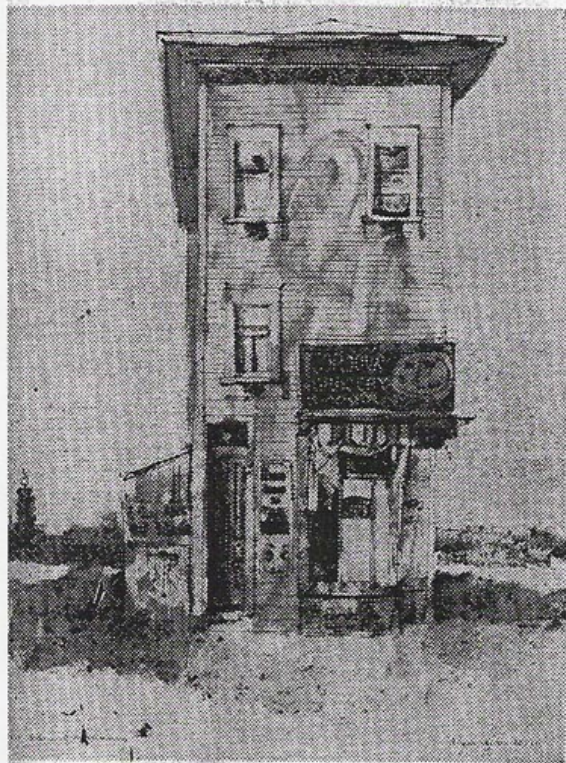


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# The Vanishing City Keeps This Brush Recording History



• East End House

By DAVID WATMOUGH *indesec*

**R**AYMOND CHOW is a 24-year-old Vancouver artist whose current source of inspiration is the vanishing aspect of this city.

It all began, he maintains, with sketches he made when he was about 13 or 14, of his grandfather's farm on Lulu Island — which has now been utterly razed and which now has a spanking housing development in its place.

Since that time the young Chinese-Canadian who is also an accomplished pianist, has directed a large portion of his creative activities in recording for posterity in drawing and wash techniques a miscellaneous assortment of buildings around Vancouver that have either already been demolished or are scheduled for destruction.

Chow, though, is far from being an antiquarian with artistic leanings. He is not concerned to depict a building merely because its future is threatened.

"A building only interests me," he says, "if its windows, or its roof, for example, have some specially intriguing shape or angle. On the whole I prefer the simpler, more modest kinds of domestic architecture than things like mansions."



But if Chow cannot be regarded as an historian or antiquarian he is willing to admit that a sense of documentation over his native city has something to do with his recordings on paper of over 100 buildings that have characterized Vancouver's past.

"The whole thing is very personal," he acknowledges. "In the first place I suppose there is something autobiographical in my reacting this way to houses I have known since childhood. And besides that, I'm off next Spring to Los Angeles to continue my art studies and it will be three years before I'm through. Who knows what will have happened to Vancouver in that time? Whether there'll be any of the older city to preserve?"

But there is another aspect entirely to Chow's art which should not be overlooked. This is his sense of humorous fantasy with its faintly satiric cast.

Chow himself explains this quality in his art in the following way. "I used to do very dull drawings of houses and then one day I thought I'd exploit the funny little signs you see everywhere — to give a bit of spice to my pictures.

"I've been concentrating lately on buildings in and around Chinatown and there are certainly plenty of odd little signs for my imagination to feed on there."

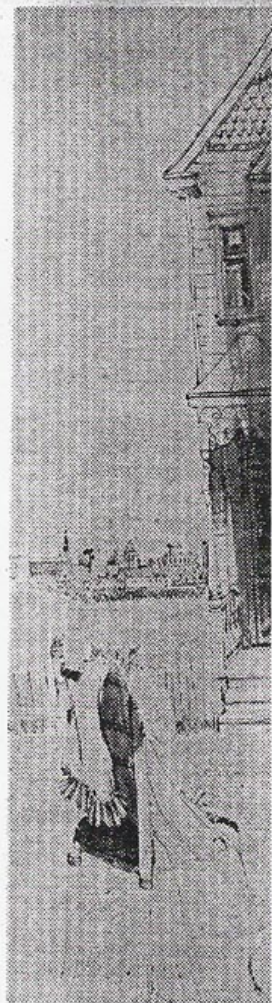


Chow speaks of the influence of Whistler's drawings of buildings but suggests the humorous twist is quite his own. The tiny messages inserted on minute door signs, across windows which are frequently puns, often quite scabrous, are the result, he says, of a playful taste that has had a surfeit of too serious drawings of human habitations.

"I like people to think at first that my work is just nice and conventional — pretty if you like — then jolt them out of their complacency with a little acid commentary. I want people to notice detail but notice the funny aspects that confront our eyes too."

To the many new buildings sprouting up, Raymond Chow has a somewhat ambivalent reaction. "I've been experimenting with the juxtaposition of the old and the new," he says, "but the trouble is the new buildings don't have any signs!"

As to the future, Vancouver's unofficial graphic recorder promises to return during vacations from the Art Centre School in Los Angeles and continue the task of committing this city to paper. "That is," he declares, "for just as long as Vancouver continues to be here on my return . . ."



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