

# Prairie Asians

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**Nakada**

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Ashok  
**Mathur**

Fred  
**Wah**

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*absinthe*  
Volume 10, #1  
Winter 1998

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**Wong**



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*Providing a foundation for the arts*

The Alberta  
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for the Arts



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CANADA'S YEAR OF  
ASIA PACIFIC 1997  
L'ANNÉE CANADIENNE  
DE L'ASIE-PACIFIQUE



# asians on the prairie

The prairie asian project began in 1997 when a few of us began talking about the various constructions of “asian-ness” in the canadian and diasporic context. Many of us who trace our asian trajectories through a history of colonization and immigration look to east and south asia as places of ancestry, but we also look to and from the canadian prairies as a place of home and of personal and familial history. We figured it was worth taking our sense of “situatedness,” of being prairie asians, to places in alberta where “prairie” and “asian” could meet. We began where the prairies meet the mountains, gathering at the Banff Centre for our first reading (and the only time all participants read at once). We followed this with a road trip to the south of Calgary, pausing to read and/or reflect at the Nikka Yuko Gardens in Lethbridge, Ludbreck Falls to the west (our cover image), up at the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre in the Crowsnest Pass, and then through the limestone boulders below. Our next road trip was going north to Grande Prairie where we read at the college and also at a wonderful coffee shop in downtown GP, the C-Spot. And finally, one of our number went to present his work at a fundraising event for the Asian Canadian Writers’ Workshop in Edmonton. That was the extent of our road-readings, but we hope this special issue of absinthe chronicles some of the spirit and excitement we felt during this tour. Interspersed through this issue are photographs and poetic reflections of the tour by Ashok Mathur 1,29,42,56,63,64; an excerpt from a forthcoming novel by Hiromi Goto 20; poems old and new by Fred Wah 16; a short story from Rajinderpal S. Pal 57; excerpts from Rita Wong’s first collection of poetry 30; selections from Mark Nakada’s first chapbook 48; a piece from Larissa Lai’s forthcoming second novel 4; and an excerpt from Tamai Kobayashi’s first novel 43. Thank you for joining us on the print version of the Prairie Asians tour.

— absinthe

# Fred Wah

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## Music at the Heart of Thinking #117

one time when Roy Kiyooka and I are driving west across the Burrard St. bridge we see a harvest moon over the armory, huge and bulbous along the top of the Molson clock. The two O's in the sign are missing. M\_ls\_n. I feel the cutting edge, Roy said, of an un named neon stalking my vernacular. Such forkt bedevilments of the Owl bespeak this midden dialect with which I paint the taint.

## **Music at the Heart of Thinking 120**

sighs, really, those end-of-the-day breath banks of silent sheet lightning  
that mist over the chest down the legs right to the toes while on the way  
undressing by the warmth of the stove as if the echoing thoughts of the  
day could be hung over a chair or left piled at the foot of the stairs



## Roy Kiyooka Jumped Calgary

..."final surge of sap"  
three months into Western Canada High School  
15 years old December 7, 1941 rebirth Japanese  
Pearl Harbour east Calgary Switzer's corner Canadian  
store corner coke radio sputtering how many nisei  
nights cold pith of Opal's stars and frozen fields

"a small 'i' felt as if a punitive fist kept clenching and unclenching behind  
my back but each time I turned to catch it flexing it would disappear into  
the unlit corners of our small log house"

hapless breath  
cross enemy alien  
birthright erased

unimpeachable body

caws

"I milked the cows churned the cream fed groomed and harnessed the  
horses rode the plough walked behind the disc and harrow cut each  
winter's supply of wood and hauled it home from the govt. wood lot. I  
helped birth pigs and calves and I helped the hired stallion hump our  
mares each spring"

voice on the phone  
just passing through  
otherwise  
no trace  
can't resist this westness

us prairie boys

out there "face

the same world

'Left' is

as 'Right' is"

jump 1946 cow town

art high and given

out

West is

as East is "hooping" thimbleful

not "final surge"

but gap



