

# THE ART OF ADAPTING

To mark Quebec's Intercultural Week, Gazette reporters talked to a few of the many creative-arts professionals who contribute to Montreal's cosmopolitan flair

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Painter  
Ligin Tan:  
student visa.

In 1987, Ligin Tan became the first student from mainland China ever to enter the Masters of Fine Arts program at Concordia University.

Tan hadn't intended to remain here. But following the 1989 political crackdown in China Tan decided — as have many other Chinese students in Canada — not to go home, even though he had a baby, then 2%, in China.

After months of effort — Tan is sparing with details, in part because many of his relatives remain in China — he managed to get the child into Canada.

After the strain and anxiety of all that, the difficulties of adjusting to his new surroundings and living as a student-artist have been slight in

comparison, Tan says.

Some immigrant artists complain that it's difficult to get a foothold in the Quebec art scene, and indeed all professional visual artists have an average income under \$15,000 a year.

But Tan has managed to have eight exhibitions, some in galleries and others in office-building foyers. And when he couldn't make a living painting, he has given private lessons and lectures.

The toughest aspect of his new life, Tan says, is the clash between "different cultural systems." While his painting reflects Western notions and approaches to art, they also are rooted in Confucian and Taoist thought and Chinese folk art and esthetics.

"We look at painting from these values and sometimes it is very difficult for white people to understand this," Tan explained.

And yet most of the people who have bought his paintings here are not Chinese, he said. "The Chinese here want traditional things."

Tan spoke only a thickly-accented, halting English when he arrived. Now his English is clear and competent, and he's working in French.

Tan said he is still here on a student visa, although Chinese students in Toronto who applied for landed immigrant status at the same time he did have long ago received their papers. "It seems that it takes about a year longer here than in Toronto or Ottawa."

— Ann Dunham