

Museum of Chinese in America Institutional Backgrounder

The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) is the leading museum preserving and presenting the history, heritage, culture, and diverse experiences of people of Chinese descent in the United States. Through innovative exhibitions as well as educational and public programs, MOCA promotes dialogue and understanding among people of all cultural backgrounds.

After 30 years of collecting, the Museum houses a collection of priceless artifacts, and rare library and archival materials indispensable for understanding this contemporary history, making it one of the most important national archives of materials about Chinese life in America. As Chinatown continues to recover from the events of September 11th, MOCA envisions itself to be the cultural and historical cornerstone, curator, educator, exhibitor, and research center of not only Manhattan's Chinatown, but for Chinese throughout America.

MOCA began as a Chinatown-based organization co-founded in 1980 by Charles Lai, John Kuo Wei Tchen and Chinese American artists, historians, and students who felt that the memories of the older generation of Chinese Americans would be lost without oral history, photo documentation, research, and collecting efforts. Now a focal point of the community's cultural life, the Museum has evolved into not only the keeper of the community's documented history, but the community's cultural history as well.

MOCA's original Mulberry Street location is in the heart of Manhattan's Chinatown on the second floor of the historic, century-old school building that was once Public School 23. Opened on November 1, 1893, and closing almost exactly 83 years later in October 1976, Public School 23 was built during the great tides of reform activity of the late 19th century, as New York struggled to educate the new waves of immigrants entering the city. MOCA's archives and collections are housed at this site.

In September 2009, MOCA will expand by opening a second location at 215 Centre Street, situated between Chinatown and SoHo. Housing MOCA's exhibitions and public programs, the stunning new site – designed by long-time supporter and renowned artist/designer Maya Lin – will increase the Museum's total size six-fold (when combined with MOCA's present space) and enable it to serve as a true national center presenting the Chinese American story as an integral part of the American story.