



WARREN CHANG

Voice of the Fields

The novelist John Steinbeck, who lived in Salinas, California, began writing a column for *The San Francisco News* called "Harvest Gypsies," telling the stories of migrant farmworkers driven by the depression and a catastrophic drought in the Midwest, to the lush fields of central and southern California.

During the same period, workers from Mexico migrated to the same area looking for the same work. The Hispanic workers remain with living conditions marginally better than those who came before. Their campers line the roads beside the fields where they are working along with school buses that take them to and from their simple housing.

Warren Chang turned from illustration to fine art nearly 20 years ago and has chosen to paint narratives of the fieldworkers near his home in Monterey County, California, the same fields worked when Steinbeck lived nearby. His narratives are "not obviously stories," he says. "They imply something is going on. It's left up to the viewer. They can be read in several ways. Great art seems to have more than

one meaning. It creates a richer experience."

Independent curator Helaine Glick has assembled an exhibition, *Warren Chang: Voice of the Fields*, showing at the New Museum Los Gatos, February 22 through June 16. She comments that his paintings "shine a rare and empathetic light on the communal experience and hard physical labor required to produce our food."

He likens his limited palette, initially the black, white, yellow and red of Anders Zorn (1960-1920), to black-and-white photography. "It has an ambience and a mood to it," he says. Bright color appears sparingly. Without subtle references such as a gas tank, plastic water bottle and the occasional piece of harvest machinery, the scenes could be of fieldworkers from centuries ago.

The workers' communal support is subtly observed in *Give Us Our Daily Bread*, 2017, implying a faith that sustains through the most trying conditions. ●

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1
Harvesters Resting, oil on canvas, 31 x 48"

2
Give Us Our Daily Bread, oil, 30 x 48"

3
Madonna in the Fields, oil on canvas, 30 x 24"

4
Flower Girl, oil on canvas, 30 x 36"



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