ALAN CHONG LAU (1948–)

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Alan Chong Lau is an American poet and visual artist. Lau began his poetic career in the wake of the 1970s Asian American movement, a surge of racial political consciousness inspired by the civil rights and anti-war protest movements. His first book, published with friends Garrett Kaoru Hongo and Lawson Fusao Inada, was entitled *The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99* (1978) after the name they had given to themselves for a 1977 performance in Long Beach and as well the highway that connected their childhood homes in different parts of California. The book is a series of peripatetic romps in a beat style refashioned for an Asian American context. In comparison, *Songs of Jadina* (1980), Lau’s first monograph and the winner of an American Book Award in 1981, is a much more contemplative, nuanced exploration of Chinese American history and the poet’s ancestry. Around the time *Songs* appeared, Lau was laid off from his factory job. He took a job as a greengrocer in Seattle’s International District, the city’s Asian American neighborhood. He kept that job for the next three decades. In 2000, he published his second monograph, *Blues and Greens: A Produce Worker’s Journal*, which is a poetic record of his experiences in Seattle. His most recent book of poems, *no hurry* (2007), is a reflection about his travels to Japan. Beginning in the late 1970s, Lau also became an active painter, developing a unique style that blended elements of Chinese calligraphy and the Northwest School. A retrospective of his work was shown at the Francine Seders Gallery in Seattle in 2012.

Key Critical Works:

Desoto, H. Y. (1983). ‘Rev. of *Songs for Jadina*.’ *MELUS* 10 (4), 78­–83.

Dempster, B. K. (2002) Alan Chong Lau. In: Guiyou H. (ed.) *Asian American Poets: A Bio-Biographical Critical Sourcebook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Kaneko, L. (1979) A Journey into Place, Race, and Spirit. *Amerasia Journal* 6 (2), 91­–95.