Please see outside Page 2.

Artist Ping Chong takes us inside his quest to explore definitions, labels in his life, and career.

The seeds of the "other" society should have a mixture that includes the "insider," the outsider, and the one in between. It's a fluid position that changes from time to time. Society and the individual have a relationship, a playwriting, a dialogue, a reflection. In an outsider's, "I'm the post," and an insider's, "in, in, in," the distinction is gray. In the middle, there is an illumination, in one person's, in our own. Experience is an artist who is an outsider in the world, an artist who is an insider, in an artist society.

Art is the creation of the performance piece "Undeniable Elements," which involves six people telling stories of their lives. 

ABOVE: Ping Chong is the creator of the performance piece "Undeniable Elements," which involves six people telling stories of their lives.

TOP LEFT: Canal and Lando's Restaurant, San Francisco. 

TOP RIGHT: Candle Burning, Restaurant facade.

Far left: Building exterior, Restaurant facade.
Continued from Page E1

have an opportunity to see one of Chong's explorations of "otherness" during two presentations of "Undesirable Elements," one of an ongoing series of works exploring the effects of history, race and culture on the lives of individuals. This will be the 17th time "Undesirable Elements" has been performed since it was first produced in conjunction with a New York gallery installation in 1992. Each performance is different and community-specific, so people who see "Undesirable Elements" in Madison will see something very different from what people attending the next performance at this summer's Spoleto Festival in Charleston, S.C., will see, or what people attending a performance in Tokyo, Japan, saw in 1995.

Each time "Undesirable Elements" is presented, it includes a cast selected from a pool of applicants on the basis of interviews with Chong, who asks each applicant a wide-ranging series of questions about themselves and their ancestry. The interviews are videotaped. After selecting six or seven participants, Chong weaves the material from their interviews — their histories and personal anecdotes — into a tapestry. The final script arranges the material in chronological order and is narrated by the people who lived the stories being told. However, the cast members are active participants in the entire process, says Chong.

"I don't like passive performers," he says. "I respect the creativity of every person on the performance team."

The participants usually read from the script. They do not "act," because, says Chong, "It's an oral history collage, not an act," because, says Chong, "It's an oral history collage, not an act." The Spoleto production, for instance, will have an all-female cast.

The six members of the Madison cast are from a wide variety of cross-cultural backgrounds. They range in age from 19 to 49. Only two have any training or experience as actors. Three are men and three are women. They include: Yan Xu (Chinese), Pabitra Benjamin (Nepali), Qua Her (Hmong), Angel Francisco Castelan Torres (Mexican), David Douglas Smith (Texan American) and Claudia Tatinge Nascimento (Brazilian).

Smith, 49, who owns Madison's Four Star Video Heaven, which he is trying to sell so he can pursue an acting career, is very enthusiastic about his experience in "Undesirable Elements." He says: "It's been fascinating because so much of the process has been about getting to know people from other cultures. I've always been really interested in otherness because I've been in and out of the dominant group. People see me as a large, white male and make assumptions that I'm a chauvinist. But I've also had experience being 'other,' both as a gay man and as a Texan who moved to the North."

Chong sees this production of "Undesirable Elements" as an opportunity for students at UW-Madison to get to know people on the campus who come from other worlds and to see beyond the stereotypes he believes are constantly offered by the media. But it isn't aimed solely at students.

"Any American should come to see this show because it's their responsibility to know who lives here," says Chong. He continues: "Americans make judgments based on stereotypes and they should know what the hell they're basing them on. We live in a diverse society, but we don't know each other."

**If you go**

- **What:** "Undesirable Elements."
- **When:** 7:30 p.m. tonight and Friday.
- **Where:** Margaret H'Doubler Performance Space in Lathrop Hall, 1050 University Ave.
- **Tickets:** Tickets are $8 at the Union Theater Box Office, 800 Langdon St. Call 262-2201.

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