



**IN THE PRESENCE OF**

**COLLECTIVE HISTORIES OF THE  
ASIAN AMERICAN WOMEN  
ARTISTS ASSOCIATION**

**CURATED BY CHRISTINA HIROMI HOBBS  
BERKELEY ART CENTER  
JANUARY 27—APRIL 20, 2024**

Detail of Betty Kano, *Love Letter #3* (1992). Acrylic on canvas, 36 × 36 in.

## EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION

*“What is an Asian American woman artist?”*

Karin Higa’s influential essay from 2002 recounts the historical exclusion of Asian American women from the male-dominated Asian American movement and the second wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s by tracing the art and lives of the following Asian American women artists: Ruth Asawa, Hisako Hibi, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Rea Tajiri, and Hung Liu. The author recognizes the specificities of the artists’ personal and collective histories, generational differences, and artistic practices, and she concludes, “What is the wisdom in grouping the diverse and divergent practices of these artists?”

While recent theorizations of Asian American femininity animated through the registers of ornamentality, inscrutability, invisibility, and silence have been organized around an understanding of gender formation as an individual process, *In the Presence Of* returns to Higa’s question “What is an Asian American woman artist?” through the frameworks of kinship, mentorship, intergenerational friendship, and community-building between artists in the group.

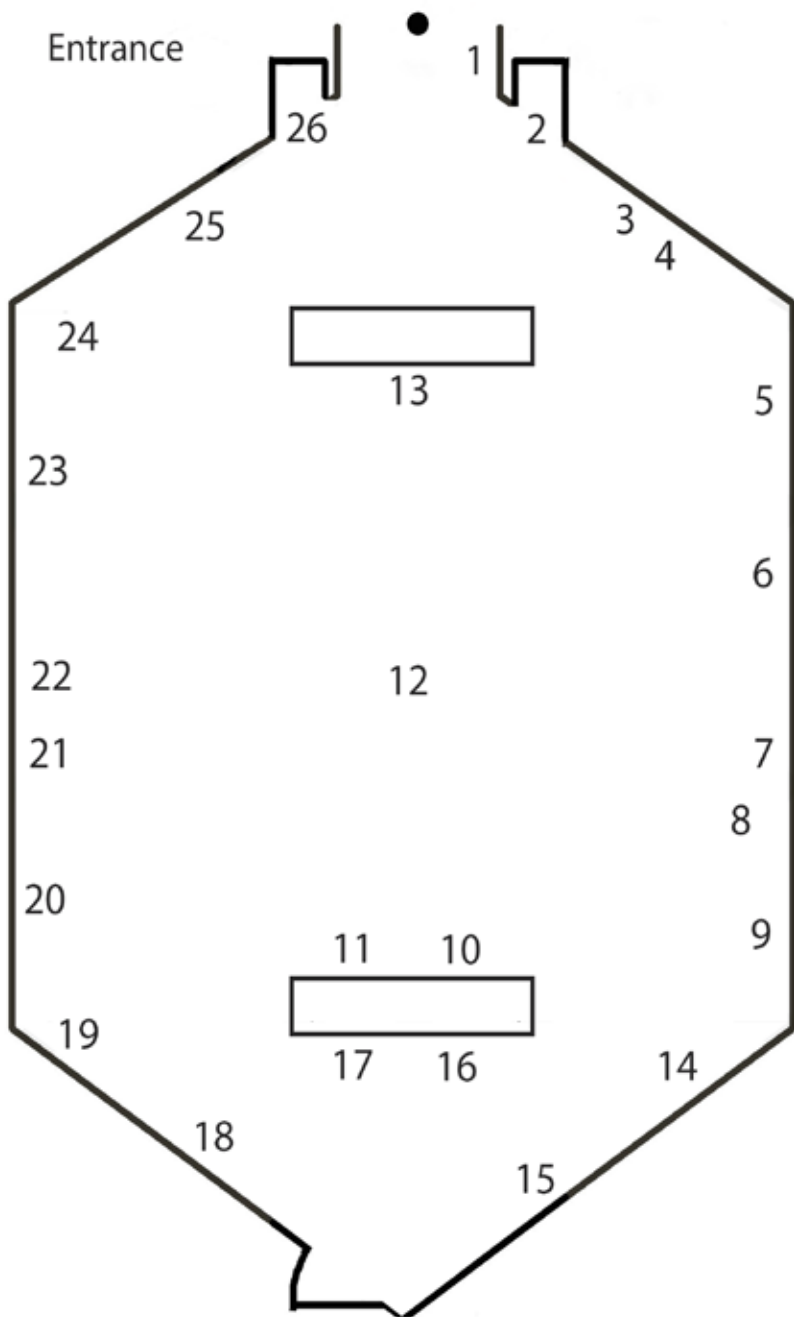
The Asian American Women Artists Association (AAWAA) was founded in 1989 by the artists Flo Oy Wong and Betty Kano with the ardent support of art historian Moira Roth as an ecology of support for Asian American women that provided the space for experimentation and the reimagining of “a place of one’s own.”

Through the production of exhibitions, slide presentations, symposia, and publications, AAWAA has sought to address Asian American women artists' historical absence within mainstream art institutions and their misrepresentation within the historical record. Over the past thirty-five years, the association has fostered the creative practices of hundreds of artists and writers in the Bay Area including Lucy Arai, Ruth Asawa, Bernice Bing, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lenore Chinn, Terry Acebo Davis, Shari Arai DeBoer, Hisako Hibi, Nancy Hom, Betty Kano, Genny Lim, Hung Liu, Barbara Jane Reyes, Pallavi Sharma, Cynthia Tom, Flo Oy Wong, and Nellie Wong. Founded in the same year that Carlos Villa held the symposia *Sources of a Distinct Majority* at the San Francisco Art Institute and one year prior to the creation of *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network* in New York, AAWAA's ongoing history over the past thirty-five years traces the development of Asian American art from the era of multiculturalism to the present.

Following the Women's Caucus for Art held in San Francisco in February 1989, Wong and Kano recognized the lack of Asian American participation and leadership, and with the support of Roth the artists reached out to other Asian American women in their network leading to the first meeting of AAWAA. According to Kano, an important recognition that influenced the group's formation was the realization that "in order to be successful in an art world dominated by white males, people of color needed to control the whole apparatus of art production," and therefore the association has not only produced exhibitions but also published writing on Asian American women artists and developed relationships with curators and scholars focusing on Asian American art including Karin Higa, Elaine Kim, and Margo Machida.

*In the Presence Of* takes its title from the feeling expressed by members at the early AAWAA meetings that the purpose of the organization at its founding was simply to be together. The exhibition foregrounds the relationships between artists involved in AAWAA as well as forms of remembrance that offered space for healing, reflection, and historicization on the artist's terms. Through the practices of tributes, gift-giving, and coalition-building, the exhibition seeks to highlight the collective practices between artists that the association has cultivated in order to present an archive that is at once celebratory, messy, caring, disjointed, and most of all, in process, as the association continues to the present day.





## EXHIBITION GUIDE

1. **Nellie Wong**, *Memories in Bloom*, 1988, Typescript, 15 x 12 in., Courtesy of Nellie Wong

### 2. **Video Excerpts from AAWAA's Oral History Series "Pass It On" Episode 1: Birth of a Movement**

"Pass It On" is part of the Asian American Women Artists Association's initiative to capture oral histories of AAWAA's members to add to their archives. The purpose of the initiative is to create a space that encourages a variety of members in their community to engage in meaningful dialogues and to record these conversations over time to build a collective portrait of AAWAA.

3. **Betty Kano**, *Love Letter #3*, 1992, Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36 in., Courtesy of the artist

4. **Vitrine Display**, Courtesy of the Asian American Women Artists Association and the Asian American Women Artists Association archives, CEMA 189, Special Research Collections, UCSB Library

The vitrine presents a selection of material from AAWAA's archive including an early mission statement from 1992, the chronology from the association's first catalog *Of Our Own Voice* published in 1997, an announcement for the *Cheers to Muses* anthology from 2007, and exhibition postcards ranging from AAWAA's inaugural exhibition in 1991 *Spirit of East and West* to the most recent exhibition *Jade Wave Rising*.

5. **Bernice Bing**, *Untitled*, 1989, 48 x 48 in., Courtesy of the Bernice Bing Estate

Bernice Bing was an early member of AAWAA who hosted retreats at her home in Philo and acted as a mentor to many of the younger artists in the group. She produced this painting the month following AAWAA's first slide presentation of Asian American women artists at Mills College in September 1989. The work was included in several group exhibitions during the artist's lifetime however it hasn't been shown in several decades.

6. **Excerpts from the Journals of Bernice Bing**, May 27-28, 1989, Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries

7. **Hisako Hibi**, *Time to Bloom, Time to Fall*, 1982, Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 35.5 in., Courtesy of the Hisako Hibi Estate

*"This life is transitory  
Time to bloom, time to fall  
as Spring comes and goes  
art continues in timeless time"*

- Hisako Hibi

Hibi was a member of AAWAA in the final years of her life and hosted an early meeting at her home in San Francisco. She presented work in AAWAA's 1991 exhibition *Aawaa-kin* in the month of her passing and the following year AAWAA dedicated the exhibition *Gathering* to her memory. *Time to Bloom, Time to Fall* reflects the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and the capacity for the art object to outlive the artist and act as a conduit of meaning through the efforts of those that carry on the artist's legacy.



8. **Ruth Asawa**, *Untitled* (S.501, Hanging Simple Open Curve), c. 1990s, Copper wire, 7 ½ x 10 x 10 in., Private Collection

Ruth Asawa's work was included in the early slide presentations of Asian American women artists that were introduced by AAWAA to audiences across the Bay Area. The looped copper wire sculpture *Untitled* is paired with Hisako Hibi's *Time to Bloom, Time to Fall* to highlight the artists' intergenerational relationship as Issei and Nisei (first and second generation) Japanese American artists working in the Bay Area in the decades following their incarceration during World War II.

9. **Lenore Chinn**, *Before the Wedding*, 2000, Acrylic on canvas, 66 x 44 in., Courtesy of the artist

*Before the Wedding* depicts the longtime AAWAA member Kim Anno and her partner Ellen Meyers in the artist's Oakland studio. Chinn worked collaboratively with Anno and Meyers to stage the studio with objects of significance to the couple, including a Buddha statue, which appeared at Bernice Bing's funeral service at the San Francisco Art Institute, Ellen's family heirlooms from Thailand, and an overly ripe red tomato from the artist Flo Oy Wong's yard. Chinn's meticulous attention to the objects in *Before the Wedding* articulates the couple's relationship to one another in part through acts of care and remembrance between the couple and their close friends.

10. **"Bernice Bing,"** Edited by Moira Roth and Diane Tani, 1991, Visibility Press, Private Collection

The art historian Moira Roth, who was central to AAWAA's formation, and the AAWAA member Diane Tani, established Visibility Press in 1991 starting with this catalog that was made in conjunction with Bernice Bing's solo exhibition at SOMArts. The publication is paired with Chinn's painting *Bing* to offer translations of the artist's practice that highlight AAWAA's

dedication to Bing's artistic legacy in a period when her work was overlooked by institutions.

11. **Lenore Chinn**, *Bing*, 2001, Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 64 in.,  
Courtesy of the artist

The painting shows Bernice Bing standing in front of a four-part panel inscribed with symbols of personal significance that were carefully researched by her friend, Lenore Chinn, including the façade of the San Francisco Art Institute where she received her master's degree.

12. **Shari Arai DeBoer**, *Library of Imagination*, 2009-2024,  
Bamboo plywood, California walnut wood, etching, artist  
books, Variable dimensions, Courtesy of the artist

Shari Arai DeBoer's central installation *Library of Imagination* houses a series of cabinets, shelves, and drawers that display objects and artworks that have shaped her practice as well as a selection of material from AAWAA's archives. The installation reflects the ongoing navigation that artists face between furthering their artistic practice and attending to their social commitments as well as the dialectical process through which this labor inflects their work.

13. **Pallavi Sharma**, *Meghdoot (The Cloud Messenger)*, 2015  
- Present, Mixed media with faux leather/shelf liners and  
strings, 81 x 120 in., Courtesy of the artist

Pallavi Sharma's *Meghdoot (The Cloud Messenger)* presents a constellation of clouds that honor AAWAA's founding members Flo Oy Wong, Betty Kano, Bernice Bing, and Lenore Chinn, as well as the South Asian feminist group the Gulabi Gang and the early AAWAA member Roshni Rustamji that she was introduced to through her involvement in the group.

14. **Betty Kano**, *To Theresa II*, 1983, Acrylic on canvas, 108 x 66 in., Courtesy of the artist

Betty Kano and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha were classmates in their Masters of Fine Arts program at UC Berkeley in the 1970s, and Kano produced *To Theresa II* in the year following her death. The first iteration of the painting was rendered in shades of white, the color that Cha was always wearing, however in the second iteration Kano represented Cha through a color that reflected her spirit, or how she chose to see Cha as opposed to how she was seen.

15. **Theresa Hak Kyung Cha**, *Being*, c. 1980, Postcard, 4 ½ x 6 in., Collection of Betty Kano

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha passed away prior to AAWAA's formation in 1982 at the age of thirty-one. Her work was included in the group's early slide presentations of Asian American women artists and through these efforts her work was rediscovered by the curator Lawrence Rinder, leading to her first retrospective. Cha mailed this postcard to her former classmate at UC Berkeley, Betty Kano, while she was living in New York.

16. **Terry Acebo Davis**, *Waiting for the Rain*, 2003, Copper-plate etching, 22 x 30 in., Courtesy of the artist

*Waiting for the Rain* charts Acebo Davis's family history and her relationship to narratives of Filipino immigration on the west coast. An archival photograph from the 1930s of her paternal grandmother, Ina Tousin, is mirrored by moon-like radiographs of her father's brain after he experienced a stroke. These registers are connected by a short poem that Acebo Davis wrote as she walked through a cemetery in Seattle where the writer Carlos Bulosan and many Filipino elders were buried. The poem carries the melancholy of a heartbreak that grieves

familial and communal loss without disavowing it.

17. **Genny Lim**, *Winter Place*, 1989, Kearny Street Workshop Press, Private Collection

18. **Bernice Bing**, *Untitled*, 1998, 12 x 12 in., Courtesy of the Bernice Bing Estate

*Untitled*, 1998, 12 x 12 in., Courtesy of the Bernice Bing Estate

*Untitled*, 1998, 12 x 12 in., Courtesy of the Bernice Bing Estate

This is the final series of paintings that Bernice Bing made at the end of her life. The works are arranged in proximity to Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Being* postcard to consider articulations of presence that are shared posthumously, and the viewer's relationship to such tender objects.

19. **Lucy Arai**, *2023.01*, 2023, Mixed Media (Cotton, handmade paper, silk, sumi ink, indigo, 18kt gold, acrylic), 6 ⅛ x 6 ⅛ in., Courtesy of the artist

*2008.09*, 2008, Mixed Media (Cotton, handmade paper, sumi ink, indigo, 18 kt gold, acrylic), 19 x 19 in., Courtesy of the artist

*2008.08*, 2008, Mixed media (Cotton, handmade paper, sumi ink, indigo, 18 kt gold, acrylic), 13 x 13 in., Courtesy of the artist

*2008.01*, 2008, Mixed media (Cotton, handmade paper, sumi ink, indigo, 18 kt gold, acrylic), 9 x 9 in., Courtesy of the artist

Lucy Arai traces her ancestral heritage through the Japanese textile practices of *sashiko*, the tradition of the running-stitch, and *temari*, the art of wrapped and stitched geometric patterns on handballs, which she learned from her relatives. The cartographic openings that she produces through handmade

paper that is dyed and stitched suggest a form of world-building that acknowledges the role of familial inheritance as well as the potential for craft practices to transcend linguistic boundaries.

20. **Hung Liu**, *Untitled (To Ed, Happy 60th)*, 1994, Lithograph, 26.5 x 34 in., Collection of Flo Oy Wong, Courtesy of the Hung Liu Estate

Hung Liu and Flo Oy Wong were close friends during Liu's lifetime and she gifted several works to Flo including this lithograph, which was a birthday present to her husband Ed. The inscription of the surface of the lithograph represents a form of intimacy that remains outside the scope of art market circulation and constitutes a part of the artists' shared archive.

21. **Barbara Jane Reyes**, *Poeta en San Francisco*, 2005, TinFish Press, Private Collection

Barbara Jane Reyes's *Poeta en San Francisco* traces the imprint of global conflict on the spatial and psychic terrain of diasporic subjects. AAWAA hosted a literary reading for Reyes in the year prior to the book's publication.

22. **Flo Oy Wong**, *Tiananmen Square*, 1989, Ink painting with brush, 52 x 62 in., Courtesy of the artist

Flo Oy Wong produced this painting following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 in which the Chinese government enacted martial law during student-led demonstrations. The painting reflects the artist's ongoing navigation of her relationship to China as a first-generation Chinese American whose imaginings of China that were instilled in her as a child had to be renegotiated following the massacre. As one of the co-founders of AAWAA, Wong fostered an environment in which members could engage with questions of identity

formation that were prompted by such historical events.

23. **Cynthia Tom**, *Flying Lessons. Inquire Within.*, 2023, Acrylic on canvas and gold leaf, 48 x 36 in., Courtesy of the artist

*Flying Lessons. Inquire Within.* suggests the transcendent potential of women's collectivity through surrealist allusion to an otherworldly dreamspace. As the former board president of AAWAA and the founder of "A Place of Her Own," an art-based healing program for women of color, the painting is also a reflection of her ongoing commitments.

24. **Nancy Hom**, *AAWAA 35th Anniversary Mandala*, 2024, Mixed media, 48 in. diameter, Courtesy of the artist

Nancy Hom created this mandala in honor of the organization's 35th anniversary to highlight central moments in AAWAA's history and the connections that AAWAA has fostered.

*Credits:*

Succulents by Nancy Hom. Flowers, petit fours, and appetizers created by Nancy Hom with the help of friends, including AAWAA members. Photos by Cris Matos, Willis Lai, Reiko Fujii, Lenore Chinn, Bob Hsiang, Diana Chen, Ivy Chen, Joyce Xi, and others. Photo processing and printing by Bob Hsiang. Thanks to Lenore Chinn and Joseph Blake for their assistance.

25. **"Asian American Women Artists Association (AAWAA): Introduction by Karin Higa,"** Courtesy of the Asian American Women Artists Association

Karin Higa was the former senior curator of the Japanese American National Museum whose experimental approaches to historical exhibitions during her lifetime shaped the field of Asian American art. She was commissioned by AAWAA to write this introduction to the organization in the mid-

1990s and it was included in AAWAA's 2003 Educational Presentation Packet.

## **26. Homage to AAWAA's Slide Presentations, 1992/2024**

The presentation of slideshows highlighting work by Asian American women artists has been a part of AAWAA's educational mission since its inception. This viewing room revisits the works that were included in the 1992 slide packet, many of which have never been exhibited and whose whereabouts are unknown, and places the work in conversation with that of current AAWAA members who were invited to submit slides for inclusion in the exhibition.

## **ARTIST BIOS**

### **LUCY ARAI**

Lucy Arai creates at the confluence of tradition and innovation with a humble needle and thread. She stitches sashiko, the running-stitch tradition of Japanese commoners, to express what is beyond her reach with words. It was through sashiko that she learned how to communicate across the language divide with her Japanese uncle as he transmitted lessons, culture, and the function of the stitches. Another tradition of Japan that Arai practices is the art of temari, intricately wrapped and stitched geometric patterns on handballs that flourished during the Heian Period (794-1185 AD) for Imperial and Noble girls to play games indoors. Taught by her mother, temari are forms through which Arai has learned about the nature of relationships and how dualities that polarize are part of the greater whole.

Luci Arai holds a Master of Fine Arts degree and Graduate Certificate of Museum Practices from the University of Michigan, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree cum laude, from the University of South Carolina. Arai is an active participant in the U.S. Department of State Arts in Embassies Program, a nominee for the 2005 Louis Comfort Tiffany Biennial Award, and was an AsiaAlive Artist at the San Francisco Asian Art Museum.

### **RUTH ASAWA**

American artist, educator, and arts advocate Ruth Asawa (1926-2013) is known for her extensive body of wire sculptures that challenge conventional notions of material and form through their emphasis on lightness and transparency.



Born in rural California, Asawa was first exposed to professional artists while her family and other Japanese Americans were detained at Santa Anita, California, in 1942. Following her release from an internment camp in Rohwer, Arkansas, eighteen months later, she enrolled in 1943 in Milwaukee State Teachers College. Unable to receive her degree due to continued hostility against Japanese Americans, Asawa left Milwaukee in 1946 to study at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, then known for its progressive pedagogical methods and avant-garde aesthetic environment.

Asawa's time at Black Mountain proved formative in her development as an artist, and she was particularly influenced by her teachers Josef Albers, Buckminster Fuller, and the mathematician Max Dehn. She also met architectural student Albert Lanier, whom she would marry in 1949 and with whom she would raise a large family and build a career in San Francisco. Asawa continued to produce art steadily over the course of more than a half century, creating a cohesive body of sculptures and works on paper that, in their innovative use of material and form, deftly synthesizes a wide range of aesthetic preoccupations at the heart of postwar art in America.

## **BERNICE BING**

Bernice Bing (1936-1998) was a queer Chinese American artist from San Francisco whose work engages with the formal and spiritual possibilities of abstraction through painterly gesture and calligraphic mark-making. Born in San Francisco Chinatown, she went on to study at California College of the Arts and the San Francisco Art Institute with instructors such as Nathan Oliveira, Richard Diebenkorn, and Saburo Hasegawa, the latter of whom was critical to her practice through the introduction to Zen Buddhism. As a part of the Bay Area art scene in the late 1950s and 1960s, Bing had her first solo

exhibition at the historic Batman Gallery in San Francisco and continued to exhibit alongside a community of artist friends over the following decades. She was an early member of the Asian American Women Artists Association and hosted several of AAWAA's retreats at her home in Philo. AAWAA has continued to honor her legacy through memorial exhibitions and the co-production of the documentary film *The Worlds of Bernice Bing* with the Queer Women of Color Media Arts Project in 2013.

## **THERESA HAK KYUNG CHA**

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982) produced in her short lifetime a body of work in a range of media including sculpture, film, performance, and poetry that coalesces around themes of war and displacement, the fragmentation and disciplining of language, and historical and ancestral memory. Born in Busan, South Korea, her family immigrated to the United States in 1962 when she was twelve years old. She received her B.A. and M.A. in comparative literature from UC Berkeley and later received an M.F.A. from the same institution.

In 1976 she studied at the Centre d'Etudes Américaine du Cinéma in Paris with Christian Metz and Raymond Bellour, among others, and in 1980 she moved to New York City where she worked for Tanam Press. She authored the poetry collection *Dictee* (Tanam Press, 1982) and edited the essay collection *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings* (Tanam Press, 1980).

## **LENORE CHINN**

Lenore Chinn, a native San Franciscan who graduated from San Francisco State College with a B.A. in Sociology, is a

painter, photographer, and cultural activist who works to create structures of personal and institutional support that will both sustain critical artistic production and advance movements for social justice. Portraiture is at the core of her visual art practice whether it is painting or photography – both are employed in her creative process.

A moment in time spontaneously captured by her digital camera, transmitted to acrylic on canvas, conveyed in modern archival print or shared on social media, these images document everyday life. As a body of work they are visual narratives that constitute an art history largely hidden from the public's perception of society and our particular collective experience.

Her current street photography chronicles a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. She has been active in the Asian American Women Artists Association since the group was founded. From 1988 to 1992, she served on the San Francisco Human Rights Commission.

## **TERRY ACEBO DAVIS**

As an individual blessed with dual vocations of an Artist and a Registered Nurse, Terry Acebo Davis has learned the art of balance, creating visual narratives that are deeply rooted in her Pilipina ancestry as well as her understanding of the science of healing. Furthermore, her artistic journey has been significantly influenced by the identity politics of the 1970's. Learning from insightful discussions with mentors Carlos Villa, Rupert Garcia and Moira Roth, she found these teachings also applied to her Asian American Feminist experience. Terry came to realize that assimilation was not her path, diverging from her parents' Pilipino colonial concept of Americanism.

In recent years, Acebo Davis's artistic content has evolved to

address the vulnerabilities of aging, while simultaneously highlighting the enduring relevance of diverse, layered histories and the persistence of racial inequity. Her artistic expressions have varied in scale and medium ranging from intimate works on paper to large scale interactive installations. These works have not only been exhibited regionally, nationally and internationally but have also allowed her to engage meaningfully with a global audience.

Beyond personal artistic endeavors, Terry has actively contributed to the community, as a lecturer, curator and by serving as Chair and Board member of various art organizations located throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. With her AAWAA sisters, Terry knew that together their leadership would help shape the dialog of diversity, equity and inclusion in contemporary art and academic circles.

## **SHARI ARAI DEBOER**

Shari Arai DeBoer is a visual artist working in printmaking, painting and book arts. Born and raised in the East Bay, she is a sansei, third generation Japanese American. After receiving her degree in architecture and working as an architect, Shari shifted her creative focus to visual art.

Her paintings and etchings are housed in the Alameda County Art Collection and Library of Congress Fine Print Collection. In 2018 she was awarded an artist residency at the Playa, a center for art and science in Oregon and was an artist-in-residence at the de Young Museum with the Asian American Women Artists Association.

As a past AAWAA board member, Shari supported the organization's administrative operations and major projects such as, Cheers to Muses anthology, The Worlds of Bernice

Bing short film and numerous exhibitions.

Shari continues to reside in the East Bay where she is active in organizations using art to build community. She is a member of Sansei Granddaughters' Journey, a collective of five AAWAA member artists.

## **HISAKO HIBI**

Hisako Hibi (1907-1991) was born in Fukui, Japan and immigrated to California with her family in 1920. She attended the California School of Fine Arts, which later became the San Francisco Art Institute, and throughout the 1930s she exhibited her work across the Bay Area. During the onset of World War II she was relocated alongside Japanese Americans living on the west coast to Tanforan Assembly Center and then to the incarceration camp at Topaz where she worked as a teacher at Chiura Obata's art school. After the war she moved with her family to New York and took classes at the Museum of Modern Art with Victor D'Amico. While Hibi's paintings during the wartime often reflected the physical and psychic interiors of the camps, in the following years her work became more abstract through the introduction of gestural brushstrokes and poetic inscription. In 1954 she returned to San Francisco where she continued to exhibit throughout the rest of her life. As a member of the Asian American Women Artists Association, Hibi hosted one of the early meetings at her home and participated in group shows. In the year after her passing, AAWAA dedicated the exhibition *Gathering* to her memory.

## **NANCY HOM**

Nancy Hom is an artist, writer, curator, and arts consultant. Born in Toisan, China and raised in New York City, she has been an

influential leader in the SF Bay Area art scene since 1974. Over the years, she has created many iconic images for community cultural events as well as political and social causes. Through her silkscreen posters, poetry, illustrations, installations, and curatorial work, Nancy has used the arts to affirm the histories, struggles, and contributions of communities of color. Since 2012, her main art form has been large-scale mandalas. Ranging in size from three feet to 12 feet, they cover a variety of subjects, including personal expressions and collective endeavors that involve direct community participation.

Nancy has nurtured the creative and organizational growth of over a dozen Bay Area arts organizations. In her decades-long involvement with Kearny Street Workshop, Nancy served as its director from 1995 to 2003. She has had a relationship with the Asian American Women Artists Association since it was formed in 1989, exhibiting as an artist and serving as an arts consultant, board member, and advisory board member.

Nancy's awards include the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters and Sculptors grant (2012) and the San Francisco Foundation Community Leadership Award (2013), plus grants by the California Arts Council, the San Francisco Arts Commission, and the Zellerbach Family Foundation. She is a Gerbode Fellow (1998) and a KQED Local Hero (2003). Her life story will be part of the Smithsonian's *Archives of American Art Oral History Program*.

## **BETTY KANO**

From the time Betty Kano graduated from high school in Richmond in 1962 and went to UC Berkeley, there was political activism around her. She was a graduate student at Berkeley when her studies were interrupted by her involvement in Third World Liberation Front actions against the university. The

eighties saw further activism as she organized *Art Against Apartheid*, actions against homelessness, and groups to attend the Havana Biennial in Cuba. In Cuba, she saw art as a galvanizing and spiritual force in the community. Her paintings grew with her political activism which expanded the horizons of personal agency.

In 1989 she co-founded the Asian American Women Artists Association as an attempt to bring Asian American women together to appreciate and support each other as artists. Through the years this support included developing slide packets, learning to curate exhibits, and professional development. Kano's involvement in the arts continued in the 1990s with Alliance for Cultural Democracy, a national organization that sought to emphasize the importance of arts in rural communities and by marginalized peoples. She also organized a Women of Color Camp and sought to raise the profile of Oakland's creative community as a Director of Pro Arts Gallery in Oakland.

Her work has been exhibited regionally, nationally and internationally, including at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Triton Museum of Art; Centro Cultural Tijuana, Mexico, and Havana Biennial, Cuba. Her artwork is included in: *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*; *Women Artists of Color: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook to 20th Century Artists in the Americas*; *Black Velvet, the Art We Love to Hate*; *International Review of African American Art and Mixed Blessings*, *New Art in a Multicultural America*. She received a Rockefeller Foundation Residency Fellowship in the Humanities and the "Sisters of Fire" Award by Women of Color Resource Center.

**GENNY LIM**

Genny Lim is the recipient of two lifetime achievement literary awards from PEN Oakland and the city of Berkeley. She has also served as San Francisco Jazz Poet Laureate and former SF Arts Commissioner. Lim's award-winning play, *Paper Angels*, the first Asian American play to air on PBS's American Playhouse in 1985, has been performed throughout the U.S., Canada and China. She is author of five poetry collections, *Winter Place*, *Child of War*, *Paper Gods and Rebels*, *KRA!*, *La Morte Del Tempo*, and co-author, with the late Him Mark Lai and Judy Yung, of *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island*, winner of the American Book Award in 1980. Lim has worked with past Jazz legends, such as Max Roach and long-time collaborators, Jon Jang, John Santos, Francis Wong and Anthony Brown.

## **HUNG LIU**

Hung Liu (1948-2021) was born in Changchun, China, growing up under the Maoist regime. Initially trained in the Socialist Realist style, Liu studied mural painting as a graduate student at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, before immigrating to the US in 1984 to attend the University of California, San Diego, where she studied under Allan Kaprow, the American originator of Happenings.

Best known for paintings based on historical Chinese photographs, Hung Liu's subjects over the years have been prostitutes, refugees, street performers, soldiers, laborers, and prisoners, among others. As a painter, Liu challenges the documentary authority of historical Chinese photographs by subjecting them to the more reflective process of painting. Much of the meaning of Liu's painting comes from the way the washes and drips dissolve the documentary images, suggesting the passage of memory into history, while working to uncover the cultural and personal narratives fixed - but



often concealed – in the photographic instant. Washing her subjects in veils of dripping linseed oil, she both “preserves and destroys the image.” Liu has invented a kind of weeping realism that surrenders to the erosion of memory and the passage of time, while also bringing faded photographic images vividly to life as rich, facile paintings. Around 2015, Liu shifted her focus from Chinese to American subjects. By training her attention on Dorothea Lange’s displaced individuals and wandering families of the American Dustbowl, Liu finds a landscape of overarching struggle and underlying humanity that for her is familiar terrain, having been raised in China during an era (Mao’s) of epic revolution, tumult, and displacement.

## **BARBARA JANE REYES**

Barbara Jane Reyes was born in Manila, Philippines, raised in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is the author of *Gravities of Center* (Arkipelago Books, 2003), *Poeta en San Francisco* (TinFish Press, 2005), *Diwata* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2010), *To Love as Aswang* (Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc., 2015), *Invocation to Daughters* (City Lights Publishing, 2017), *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2020), and *Wanna Peek Into My Notebook?: Notes on Pinay Liminality* (Paloma Press, 2022). She is also the author of three chapbooks, *For the City That Nearly Broke Me* (Aztlan Libre Press, 2012), *Cherry* (Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs, 2007), and *Easter Sunday* (Ypolitita Press, 2007).

An Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellow, a recipient of the James Laughlin Award of the Academy of American Poets, the Global Filipino Literary Award, and a San Francisco Press Club Journalism Award, she received her BA in Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, her MFA at San Francisco State University, and she teaches in the Yuchengco Philippine Studies Program at University of San Francisco. She has taught in the MFA programs

at Mills College and University of San Francisco. She lives with her husband, poet and educator Oscar Bermeo, in Oakland.

## **PALLAVI SHARMA**

Pallavi Sharma is a multidisciplinary artist, educator, and an independent curator. She has exhibited her works in many solo and group shows in national and international exhibitions since 2000. Her socially-engaged art practice addresses migration and the notions of memory, marginalization, patriarchy, and misogyny. Her practice and research interests' concern Asian American women's cultural production and activism.

She is founder and director of the nonprofit organization Inner Eye Arts and served in AAWAA board from 2009- 2021. Pallavi has been part of the Art Advisory committee of the City of San Ramon for several terms and held leadership positions.

She received her BFA and MFA from the Faculty of Fine Arts Baroda, and Ph.D. in Art History from the National Museum Institute of History of Art, Museology, and Conservation, New Delhi, India. She presently teaches at California College of the Arts, San Francisco in critical Ethnic Studies program.

## **CYNTHIA TOM**

Cynthia's artistic journey spans over 35 years, guided by intuition and spirituality. A dedicated advocate for women, she expresses her commitment through various mediums, from painting to photography, exploring surrealism, community, healing, spirituality, feminism, and social justice. Her work challenges traditional perceptions of female strength, encouraging women to reassess their power.

Having served over 11 years as the Board President and

Curatorial Director of the Asian American Women Artists Association, Cynthia played a key role in developing its culture and reputation as a new non-profit. As the founder of A PLACE OF HER OWN™, an innovative art-based healing program for women of color, she seamlessly integrates her personal artistic healing journey with a commitment to community well-being, emphasizing leadership development among women of color as an act of social justice.

In 2023, Cynthia earned two major California Arts Council awards. The Youth Speaks Artistic Legacy grant recognizes her lifelong dedication to championing women and fostering community healing. The Yerba Buena Center Creative Corp grant supports her project with Asian American therapists, utilizing creative tools to spark transformative conversations around trauma within culturally silenced spaces. Cynthia's impact extends globally, with contributions to the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art and inclusion in Portugal's *Surrealism NOW* exhibition. Her diverse body of work, present in national museums and academic textbooks, has earned numerous fellowships and residencies.

As an esteemed educator, Cynthia shares insights on trauma-informed art, Asian American women in the arts, and women in the community, impacting institutions like UC Berkeley and San Francisco State.

## **FLO OY WONG**

Flo Oy Wong, co-founder of the San Francisco-based Asian American Women Artists Association, is an artist, poet, and educator. She is a recipient of three National Endowment for the Arts awards, and has been a visiting artist at various colleges and universities. She has also been featured in articles in multiple publications. Growing up in Oakland Chinatown,

she spoke her family's ancestral dialect, Hoisan-wa. In 2018, Flo published her art and poetry book, *Dreaming of Glistening Pomeles*, inspired by her childhood.

In 2023, Flo was featured in the short film (Andi Wong, filmmaker), *Drawn From Life: the Creative Legacy of Flo Oy*, commissioned by the San Jose-based Contemporary Asian Theater Scene (CATS). Her film, sponsored by AARP and other contributors, was shown at the Silicon Valley Asian Pacific FilmFest, last October 2023 to celebrate her 85th birthday. Images from her Oakland Chinatown graphite drawings (1980 to early 1990s) will be featured on a collaborative mural with Desi Mundo in Oakland Chinatown, a project of the Oakland Chinatown Oral History Project funded by the Oakland City Council.

A member of The Last Hoisan Poets with her sister Nellie Wong and their friend, Genny Lim, Flo reads her poetry in English and in Hoisan-wa at many venues, including the De Young Museum and the Asian Art Museum.

## **NELLIE WONG**

Nellie Wong has published four books: *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park*, *The Death of Long Steam Lady*, *Stolen Moments* and *Breakfast Lunch Dinner*. Her poems and essays appear in numerous journals and anthologies, and at public sites of the San Francisco Municipal Railway. A building at Oakland High School is named after her. Nellie is co-featured in the documentary film, *Mitsuye and Nellie Asian American Poets*, and she traveled to China in the First American Women Writers Tour with Alice Walker, Tillie Olsen and Paule Marshall. She's taught poetry writing at Mills College and in Women Studies at the University of Minnesota. Nellie is the recipient of the 2022 PEN Oakland/Reginald Lockett Lifetime Achievement Award.

## ABOUT THE CURATOR

### CHRISTINA HIROMI HOBBS

Christina Hiromi Hobbs is an independent curator, writer, and art historian. She is a PhD student in the Art & Art History department at Stanford University with an emphasis on twentieth century American art, modern and contemporary art of the Asian diaspora, and the history of photography. Their work focuses on the intersections of history and memory, race and aesthetics, and the archive.

Her recent projects include co-curating the exhibition *No Monument: In the Wake of the Japanese American Incarceration* with Genji Amino at the Noguchi Museum in Queens, New York in 2022. The exhibition was featured in Artforum, Momus, Hyperallergic, The Guardian, and Public Seminar. She also contributed a short piece entitled “Image and Memory” to the preface of the paperback edition of Daniel James Brown’s *Facing the Mountain* published in May 2022 by Penguin Random House.

They have held research and curatorial positions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Modern Art Museum of Shanghai, Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center, and The Renate, Hans and Maria Hofmann Trust. Her scholarship has been supported by the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*We respectfully acknowledge that the Berkeley Art Center is on the traditional native land of the Muwekma Ohlone people. As guests, we are committed to being good stewards of our historic place and the vital role we play for the citizens of the Bay Area. To learn more about how to support East Bay indigenous communities, please visit: [sogoreate-landtrust.org](http://sogoreate-landtrust.org)*

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**Gallery Hours:** Thur-Sun 12pm-5pm