

# BERKELEY ART CENTER

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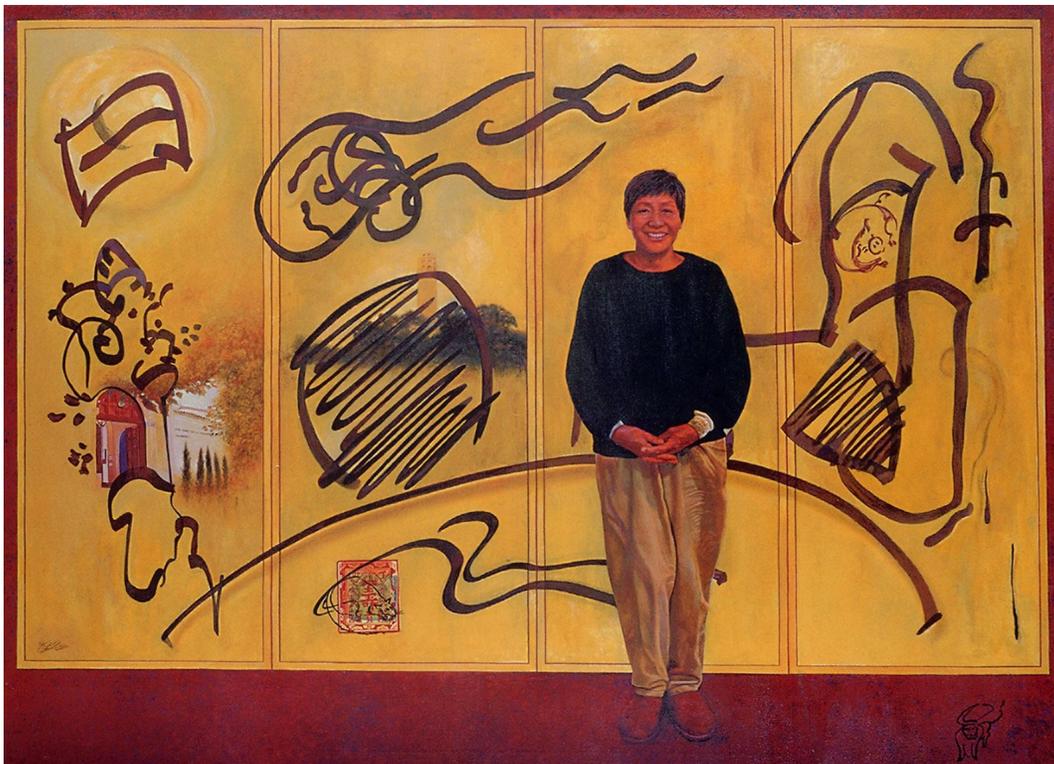
## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## *In The Presence Of: Collective Histories Of the Asian American Women Artists Association*

Curated by Christina Hiromi Hobbs

January 27 – April 20, 2024



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

January 10 , Berkeley, Calif. — **Berkeley Art Center** is pleased to present ***In The Presence Of: Collective Histories Of The Asian American Women Artists Association***, a group exhibition curated by Christina Hiromi Hobbs and co-presented by **AAWAA**. *In The Presence Of* seeks to highlight the work of artists associated with the Asian American Women Artists Association (est. 1989) in the

form of a historical survey. AAWAA is a historically important community-based institution devoted solely to supporting women artists of Asian descent, making it unique nationally. Throughout its more than 30-year history, AAWAA has served as a base for hundreds of artists ranging from established to emerging. This show seeks to introduce viewers to this significant institution of Bay Area Asian American history by featuring a selection of work by artists associated with AAWAA from its beginning to the present day.

*In The Presence Of* turns to Karin Higa's influential essay from 2002 that 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* comes back 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, Hung Liu, Pallavi Sharma, and Cynthia Tom**. 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.

“This is an ambitious exhibition that commemorates the legacy of so many important elders and arts leaders in our community who are overdue for recognition. We also honor the artists who have been involved with Berkeley Art Center and have shown in our gallery over the years who are part of AAWAA’s membership and history, including Hung Liu who has supported BAC and our arts community for decades. The impact that AAWAA has had on the Bay Area has been unacknowledged. We are thrilled to be co-presenting this exhibition with our peers from AAWAA’s current leadership, and are excited for the Bay Area to become more intimate with this important era of our regional history.” - Kim Acebo Arteché, Co-Executive Director

*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.

*In The Presence Of* will be on view from Saturday, January 27- Saturday, April 20, 2024.

*This exhibition is generously supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the RJ Louie Family Memorial Foundation, Ly & Rick Davis, and the City of Berkeley.*

#### **Public Programs:**

Saturday, January 27th, - Opening Reception, 4PM-6PM

#### **About the Curator**

Christina Hiromi Hobbs (she/they) is an art historian, curator, and writer based in the Bay Area. She is a PhD student in Art History at Stanford University with an emphasis on 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. Their master’s thesis looked to government photographs of the Japanese American incarceration during World War II. Departing from prevailing historical readings of this archive, she argues that the photographs from this period require a decolonial critique capable of rendering the incarceration within a longer history of settler colonialism. 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. The exhibition was featured in the September 2022 issue of *Artforum*, *Momus*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Guardian*, and *Public Seminar*. The brochure text is available

online through Issuu. They 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. She is currently working on a forthcoming exhibition slated to open in January 2024 in Berkeley, CA.

### **About our Presenting Partners**

Asian American Women Artists Association’s (AAWAA) mission is to advance the visibility and recognition of Asian American women in the arts. Through exhibitions, publications, public programs and an informative website, AAWAA is an accessible resource for educators, academics, researchers, arts and social justice communities and the general public. For more information, please visit: <https://www.aawaa.net/>

### **About Berkeley Art Center**

Berkeley Art Center (BAC) is a hub for artistic exploration and community building that champions work by Bay Area artists and curators. Nestled in Live Oak Park in North Berkeley, the gallery makes contemporary art approachable and accessible — for free — at an intimate scale. Since its founding in 1967, BAC has exhibited work by important local figures such as Robert Bechtle, Enrique Chagoya, Taraneh Hemami, Mildred Howard, Hung Liu, Jim Melchert, Chiura Obata, Sonya Rapoport, Betye Saar, Katherine Sherwood, Peter Voulkos, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others.

Berkeley Art Center is located in Live Oak Park at 1275 Walnut Street, Berkeley, CA 94709. Gallery hours are Thursday through Sunday, 12 pm to 5 pm. Admission is free. Generous support for Berkeley Art Center is provided by the City of Berkeley, the Alameda County Arts Commission, the California Arts Council, the East Bay Community Foundation/East Bay Fund for Artists, Mechanics Bank, Wattis Foundation, Zellerbach Family Foundation, and BAC’s members and donors.