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Over 100 works by Asian American artists acquired in 2023 to support the Asian American Art Initiative



Pacita Abad, 100 years of freedom: From Batanes to Jolo, 1998. Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, Patricia Geary Johnson Asian Art Acquisitions Fund. Courtesy of Pacita Abad Art Estate and Tina Kim Gallery.

STANFORD, CALIF.- [The Cantor Arts Center](#) at Stanford University announced the acquisition of over 100 works in 2023 by celebrated, underrecognized, and emerging Asian American artists—including Pacita Abad, Mel Chin, Ben Sakoguchi, Sasha Gordon, Hesoo Kwon, Kenneth Tam, Miljohn Ruperto, Stephanie Syjuco, and Benjamin Chinn—in support of the Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI). As a long-term commitment and investment on the part of the Cantor Arts Center and Stanford University to presenting and acquiring art made by Asian American and diasporic Asian artists, the AAAI, with the help of community supporters, has invested great resources into collection-building. The recent addition of over 100 works establishes the Cantor as home to one of the largest and most significant collections of Asian American art in the country.

A total of almost 400 acquisitions have now been made to support the AAAI since its conception in 2018 by co-founders Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, the Robert M. and Ruth L. Halperin Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Cantor and Marci Kwon, Assistant Professor of Art History at Stanford. The Cantor's permanent collection has consequently come to include such highlights as Ruth Asawa's *Untitled (LC.012, Wall of Masks)* (1966–2000) which is on long-term view; Bernice Bing's *Blue Mountain No. 4* (1966), which was featured in *East of the Pacific: Making Histories of Asian American Art*, one of three exhibitions in 2022 that served to celebrate the AAAI's public launch; as well as numerous works by Chiura Obata, Henry Yuzuru Sugimoto, and Wing Kwong Tse.

Alexander comments: "I am thrilled to continue our work to support Asian American art and artists through building our collection, which requires the thoughtful and deliberate dedication of resources, time, and attention. This year of collecting demonstrates the AAAI's commitment to supporting living artists as well as historical legacies, and my hope is that these acquisitions are as meaningful to the artists as they are to the museum. Together, we are not only redefining the Cantor's identity, but art history as it is being written."

Recent acquisitions that have been made since early 2022 span painting, photography, video, and sculpture by celebrated artists of Asian descent, including Pacita Abad, Mel Chin, and An-My Lê, as well as local Bay Area Asian American artists Heesoo Kwon, Benjamin Chinn, Reagan Louie, and Stephanie Syjuco. These works will not only support the AAAI's mission to serve as a vital art historical resource and educational hub for the scholarly promotion of Asian American art, but will also advance the museum's exhibition program. In 2024, The Cantor will present three new exhibitions directly related to the AAAI, as well as a permanent collection reinstallation showcasing new acquisitions, including several made in support of the initiative.

Spirit House (September 4, 2024–January 19, 2025) is the largest of the three forthcoming exhibitions in 2024 related to the AAAI. Curated by Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, the exhibition will showcase the work of more than thirty contemporary Asian and Asian diasporic artists and will be accompanied by a major catalogue. Using Thai spirit houses as an interpretive framework, the show will explore the ghostly, haunted, and affective dimensions of art and confront the essentially inescapable: life, death, and all that lies in between and beyond. The exhibition will feature a mix of emerging and established artists, including Nina Molloy, whose newly-acquired painting *Shrine* (2021–22) draws upon the vernacular architecture of Thai spirit houses. The exhibition aims to foster dialogue between a group of artists from primarily Southeast Asian diasporas, contextualizing contemporary artistic production through trans-historical and transnational perspectives.

In 2024, the Cantor will also present two focused solo exhibitions, one of the work of San Francisco-based filmmaker TT Takemoto, and the first museum solo show of the work of New York-based artist Livien Yin. This programming reflects the AAAI's dedication to supporting the work of living AAPI artists both locally and nationally.

Lastly, a forthcoming 2024 collection rotation dedicated to recent additions to the Cantor's permanent collection, co-curated by Roberts and Alexander, will also feature standout AAAI acquisitions such as Ben Sakoguchi's *Postcards from Camp* (1999–2001) and Sasha Gordon's *Almost A Very Rare Thing* (2022).

John and Jill Freidenrich Director of the Cantor Veronica Roberts comments: "It has been such a privilege and honor to support the growth of our Asian American Art collection since I became director in 2022. We are looking forward to sharing many of the new acquisitions that we have made in the past year with our exciting roster of exhibitions in 2024 and are deeply grateful to the Bay Area and national art supporters and galleries who have generously supported our commitment to championing Asian American and Asian diasporic artists."

ACQUISITION HIGHLIGHTS:

- Sasha Gordon's (b. 1998, Bronx, New York) *Almost A Very Rare Thing* (2022), is a painting that depicts two figures across from each other with one holding a ball of ripped out hair. This work alludes to Gordon's experiences with

trichotillomania, as she generates landscapes and scenes that touch on the pressures of conformity and deals with struggles surrounding cultural representation—drawing on her experience as a biracial Asian woman who grew up in a predominantly white space.

- Ben Sakoguchi's (b. 1932, San Bernardino, California) *Postcards from Camp: Shikata Ga Nai* (1999–2001) is a 27-panel painting by the Pasadena-based Japanese American artist that considers the lives of Japanese Americans in the United States during their incarceration in prison camps. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, forcibly removing 120,000 people of Japanese descent from their homes and relocating them to guarded camps at remote sites across the western United States. Sakoguchi and his family were among those interned and he spent his early childhood at the camp in Poston, Arizona.
- Lien Truong's (b. 1973, Saigon, Vietnam) *The Crone* (2022) was purchased with funds from the Aey Phanachet and Roger Evans Fund for Contemporary Southeast Asian Art. Taking Alex. E Harrow's description of "The Crone" from her novel *Once and Future Witches* as a point of departure, Truong depicts her paternal grandmother in this painting despite having no memory of her. The artist's grandmother passed away in Vietnam, then under French colonial rule, from tuberculosis when the artist's father was 10 years old. Painted from the only picture that the artist has of her grandmother, *The Crone* considers what it means to be frozen in time and memory as a grandmother, without being able to live out the experience of becoming the family matriarch—and all the familial and cultural respect that it accords.
- Pacita Abad's (b. 1946, Basco, Philippines, d. 2004, Singapore) *100 years of freedom: From Batanes to Jolo* (1998) traces the material history of the Philippines from Batanes, the Philippines' northernmost island, where Abad was born, to Jolo, the southernmost island closest to Malaysia and Indonesia. Incorporating a Muslim wedding tent, which Abad brought from Zamboanga; textiles that had been collected from all parts of the Philippines for more than 20 years; and stitched elements including lace, beads, sequins, and other adornments commonly used by women throughout the Philippines, this monumental work—made specifically for the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila in 1988 celebrating the centennial anniversary of Philippine independence—repurposes the form and function of a pennant, which was traditionally reserved for nationalized symbols, as a patchwork collection of the expressive cultures which constitute the Philippines. Although a valentine to her home country, Abad has strong ties to the Bay Area as well, as she decided to become an artist while living in San Francisco in the 1970s. *100 years* is prominently featured in the major retrospective of her work organized by the Walker Arts Center, currently on view at SFMOMA.
- Mel Chin's (b. 1951, Houston, Texas), *Revival Field Diorama* (2015) was purchased with funds provided by Suzanne Deal Booth. One of the most significant works to date by the MacArthur Genius Fellow, the diorama resulted from a decades-long project Chin created in partnership with USDA Senior Research Agronomist, Dr. Rufus Chaney, beginning in 1991. An interdisciplinary collaboration combining art, science, and public health, *Revival Field's* multiple iterations proved that mitigation of chronic soil pollution from toxic heavy metals was possible, using hyperaccumulator plants. *Revival Field Diorama* is a multi-part presentation that repurposes the soil, plants, and a plot marker from the field test used in the original field experiment. It is, in essence, a diagram of the *Revival Field* project's experimental process. This artwork underscores the critical role that artists play in raising awareness about the most urgent environmental and societal problems facing our planet, and reminds us that these problems cannot be solved by science alone.
- Kenneth Tam's (b. 1982, Queens, New York) video work, *All of M* (2019), looks at the high school prom to examine the role of social ritual in forming male identity and the physical trappings that enable sites of male homosocial belonging. Prom is understood as a coming-of-age event where adolescents dress up and perform as adults for one night, ritualistically marking the movement from one stage of life to another. In this work, a diverse group of high school seniors and adult men are brought together to enact a different version of the prom. Their participation in this re-performance speaks to the anxieties tied to normative gender expression, while also pointing towards possibilities for re-imagining both this ritual and themselves.
- Kenneth Tam's (b. 1982, Queens, New York) *Silent Spikes* (2021), purchased with funds from the Kahng Family Foundation, considers how Asian men have been stereotyped and maligned against the iconic trope of American masculinity: the cowboy. The two-channel video incorporates visual and narrative references to the labor strike organized by Chinese Transcontinental Railroad workers in 1867, as well as the loosely scored activities of Tam's participants, choreographed and free movements, and reflections that promote intimacy and connection to the self. This work has particular significance to the Stanford campus, where the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project, co-founded by Stanford Professors Gordon Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, has expanded our knowledge of the exploitative labor of Chinese immigrants that built the transcontinental railroad. Stanford's campus was not only funded with wealth gained through Leland Stanford Sr's position as president of the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads, but also, like the railroads, built with the backbreaking labor of Chinese immigrants.

- Reagan Louie's (b. 1951, San Francisco, California) *Cousin, Wing Wor, China* (1983) is a promised gift of Jane and Chops Wong in support of the Asian American Art Initiative. Behind Louie's young cousin, snapshots the artist's father had mailed from their home in Sacramento, California are visible alongside formal portraits of family members in China. Louie recalls being recognized by people he had never met when he first visited his father's birthplace, Wing Wor, in 1981, thanks to these snapshots. This work is one of twenty four photographs spanning the artist's career promised to the Cantor from Jane and Chops Wong and Bill Press and Elana Auerbach. In addition to work from his early projects exploring Asian American communities in California, the promised gift represents in depth Louie's over-50-year engagement with China, documenting the country's rapid change. These photographs depict the artist's friends and extended family at home—like *Cousin, Wing Wor, China*, community members and community spaces, and the built environment.
- Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's (b. 1964, Stourport-on-Severn, United Kingdom) *Feather/Dot after "Chief Red Shirt (Lakota) United States Great Plains" c. 1904* (2004) is part of the series, "An Indian from India, Portfolio 2" (2004–07), which stems from the artist's experience being asked where she is "really from" and having to clarify that she is Indian, from India. The series consists of a set of diptychs pairing self-portraits of the artist with nineteenth and early twentieth century portraits of Indigenous Americans, also (erroneously) called "Indians." Matthew's paired images note how these historical images perpetuated and reinforced stereotypes and highlight similar colonial and racist logics in how photographers in the United States depicted Native Americans and how nineteenth century British photographers working in India depicted their sitters.
- Stephanie Syjuco's (b. 1974, Manila, Philippines) *Afterimages (Interruption of Vision)* (2021) continues the Bay Area-based artist's practice of re-appropriating and altering photographs taken from the Philippines Exposition at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair by folding and crumpling them. This "living exhibit" featured 47 acres of "recreated" villages hosting and displaying more than 1,000 Filipinos from at least 10 different ethnic groups. The source photographs for these works were used to lend support to the United States' military activity in the Philippines, euphemistically referred to as a "civilizing mission." By obscuring the faces of the figures in the photograph by crumpling it, Syjuco denies us full access to the figures, undercutting the image's original anthropological gaze, drawing our attention to the constructed and complex representational politics at play at the World's Fair and in the photographic documentation of it, and demanding that audiences consider how, or even if, such images of colonial violence should be viewed today.
- Masami Teraoka's (b. 1964, Onomichi, Hiroshima, Japan) *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan/Tattooed Woman and Geisha III* (2018) is a gift of Masami Teraoka and Catharine Clark Gallery in support of the Asian American Art Initiative. This print belongs to Teraoka's series "McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan," which deals with American and Japanese cultural clash during American cultural globalization of the late 20th century. Teraoka visualizes his concern with American culture invading the world and the subversion of ethnic cuisine by American cuisine and its capitalistic ingenuity. In *McDonald's Hamburgers Invading Japan/Tattooed Woman and Geisha III*, a geisha figure holds a hamburger and looks on with jealousy as her blonde and presumably American neighbor enjoys a bowl of noodles. This work for Teraoka points to his view of American products and perhaps culture as seductive but ultimately devoid of quality and care.
- Heesoo Kwon's (b. 1990, Seoul, South Korea) *Premolt 5* (2022), a gift of Jennifer and Jacob Pritzker in support of the Asian American Art Initiative, is a lenticular lightbox that features a family photo of Kwon with her sister as young children. They are flanked by two avatars from Kwon's autobiographical feminist religion *Leymusoom*, which primarily exists in what Kwon has called a "digital feminist utopian world" consisting of 3D-scanned and modeled environments taken from actual locations from their family's history. In this place that spans time, space, and location, Kwon and her women ancestors shed—or molt—their human skin, freeing themselves of the oppressive nature of gender and patriarchy. The avatars pictured in *Premolt 5* are Kwon herself, one her present, pre-molt body and the other her future utopian post-molt body, which act as guardians of the child-version of Kwon and her sister.