

Rupy C. Tut: Renowned and Rising Artists of the Asian Diaspora Are in the Spotlight

By Anh-Minh Le

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The Faces of Ruth Asawa, an ongoing exhibition at Stanford's Cantor Arts Center, includes 233 clay masks by the late artist, including depictions of herself and her son, Paul Lanier.

Soon, museumgoers in San Francisco will have the chance to view works by two of the biggest Japanese superstars in the contemporary art world, at institutions only a mile apart. What's more, the Takashi Murakami and Yayoi Kusama exhibitions at the Asian Art Museum and SFMOMA, respectively, mark their first solo presentations in Northern California.



The current ICA San Francisco exhibition *Out of Place* features five of Rupy C. Tut's largest works to date, including the 57-by-37-inch "Portrait of a Woman," created with handmade pigments on hemp paper. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JESSICA SILVERMAN

When *Takashi Murakami: Unfamiliar People – Swelling of Monsterized Human Ego* opened last month – a dozen of its 75 works had never previously been exhibited – the artist himself was in San Francisco to celebrate the occasion (see page TK for details). The show runs through February 12, 2024, while *Yayoi Kusama: Infinite Love*, which will include two Infinity Mirrored Rooms, is slated for October 14 through September 7, 2024.

Taken together, it may seem like Asian artists are having a major moment here. But the Bay Area has a long history of notable artists of Asian heritage in its midst, and they, too, have been getting increased – albeit oft belated – attention in recent years.

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At Stanford's Cantor Arts Center, Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, the Halperin Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, curated the ongoing Ruth Asawa exhibition that debuted last summer. *The Faces of Ruth Asawa* features 233 clay masks that once hung outside the late artist's Noe Valley residence.

Alexander and Stanford assistant professor of art history Marci Kwon are co-directors of the Cantor's Asian American Art Initiative, established in 2021 and described as "dedicated to the study of artists and makers of Asian descent." According to Alexander, when she started at the Cantor in 2018, its collection — totaling about 38,000 — had fewer than 40 works of art by Asian American Pacific Islander makers. Since then, she says, "I've helped acquire more than 350 works of art to support the mission of the AAAI and have been able to place many on view."



A 1991 photo by Laurence Cuneo shows Ruth Asawa with her clay masks; the artist's practice "was much more diverse than often acknowledged," says curator Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander. JOHANSEN KRAUSE

In addition to Asawa, during Alexander's tenure, the Cantor has acquired pieces by other Asian American artists with local ties, such as Bernice Bing, Hisako Hibi, Michael Jang (who still resides in San Francisco), Chiura Obata and Carlos Villa. In the realm of contemporary artists, Christine Wong Yap, Heesoo Kwon, Cathy Lu, Stephanie Syjuco, TT Takemoto, Jenifer K. Wofford, Wanxin Zhang and Connie Zheng are some of the names to know, Alexander notes.

Earlier this year, the Cantor acquired three photogravures by Syjuco, who is part of the exhibition *What Has Been and What Could Be: The BAMPFA Collection*, at the UC Berkeley museum until July 7, 2024. Kwon and Zheng, meanwhile, are among the 30 artists participating in *Bay Area Now 9*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' triennial exhibition that opens October 6 and runs through May 5, 2024.

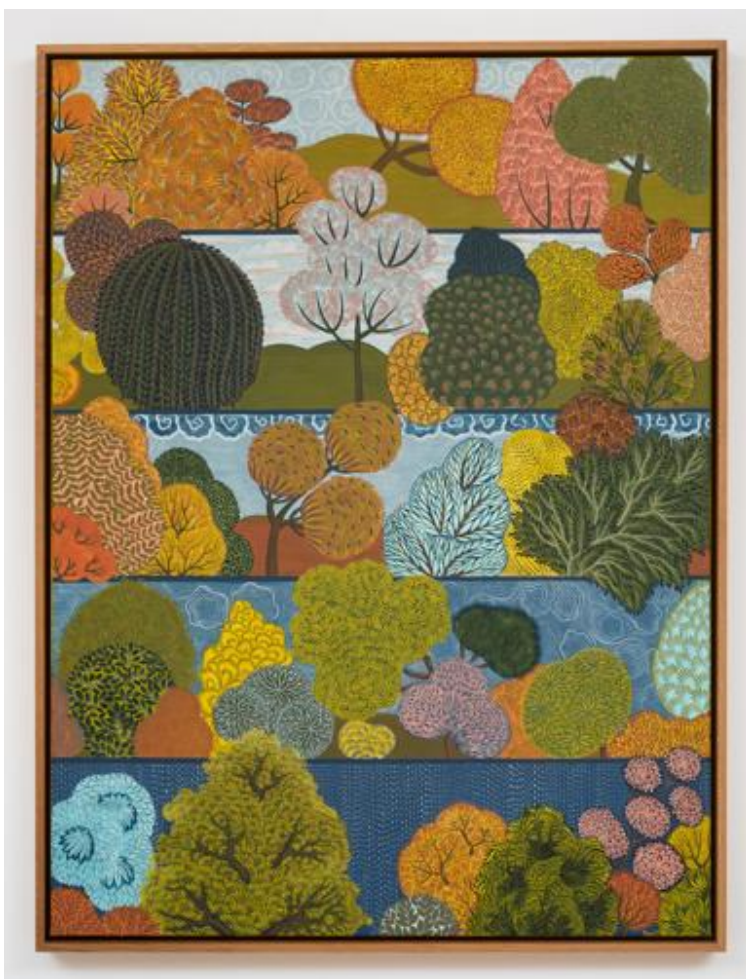
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Last year, the Asian Art Museum, which was founded in 1966, updated its mission statement to "specifically include Asian American culture and experiences," says spokesperson Zac Rose. In late 2018, Abby Chen was appointed its first head of department for contemporary art. "She's been instrumental in bringing in new works and partnering with artists so that we can begin to tell a richer story of Asians in America," says museum director and CEO Jay Xu.

Of its continuing efforts, he adds: "Ultimately, it's about ensuring we're a place that is relevant to our community, shares timely stories that reflect our lives today, and offers meaningful opportunities to connect through art." According to data released by the U.S. Census Bureau in July 2022, 37.3 percent of San Francisco's population is Asian.

Into View: Bernice Bing — curated by Chen — was initially set to close in May, but due to its popularity, it has been extended through December 4. Naz Cuguoğlu, assistant curator of contemporary art and programs, is organizing a group show opening January 19, 2024, that highlights acquisitions from Asian American artists, many with Bay Area connections: Jang, Lu, Syjuco, Takemoto and Wofford, along with Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Rupy C. Tut and Barry McGee.



Out of Place — on view at the ICA San Francisco through January 7, 2024 — features artist Rupy C. Tut's first pieces made on linen, including "All in a Day." COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND JESSICA SILVERMAN

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Tut's solo exhibition, *Out of Place*, just launched at ICA San Francisco, where it remains on view through January 7, 2024. Its five paintings employ historic techniques from her native India, such as handmade pigments. In the early days of her career as an artist, "to show in a museum felt like an impossible thing," Tut reflects. "It felt like museums weren't spaces for artists like me ... someone who is so rooted and so inspired by her heritage." A turning point was her inclusion three years ago in the inaugural *The de Young Open*, the San Francisco museum's triennial exhibition of works submitted by Bay Area artists. (The 2023 edition opened September 30 and runs through January 7, 2024.)

"My own understanding of my identity and belonging — that all is getting dissected, teased and then pieces of it pulled together into these paintings [at the ICA]," Tut explains, adding that "the curatorial team has given me the courage, saying, 'Your voice matters.' This show has been a way of finding my place within this ecosystem and saying, 'OK, let me try to make my own way of belonging. Because I want to belong here, and why shouldn't I?'"

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