

747 views | May 19, 2019, 08:02am

Contributions Of Japanese-American Artists Spotlighted At Heather James Fine Art, San Francisco



Chadd Scott Contributor 

Arts

I cover the intersection of art and travel.



Masami Teraoka, 31 Flavors Invading Japan, 1982, 35-color woodcut with hand watercolor on hosho paper, 11 1/8 x 16 1/2 in.

HEATHER JAMES FINE ART

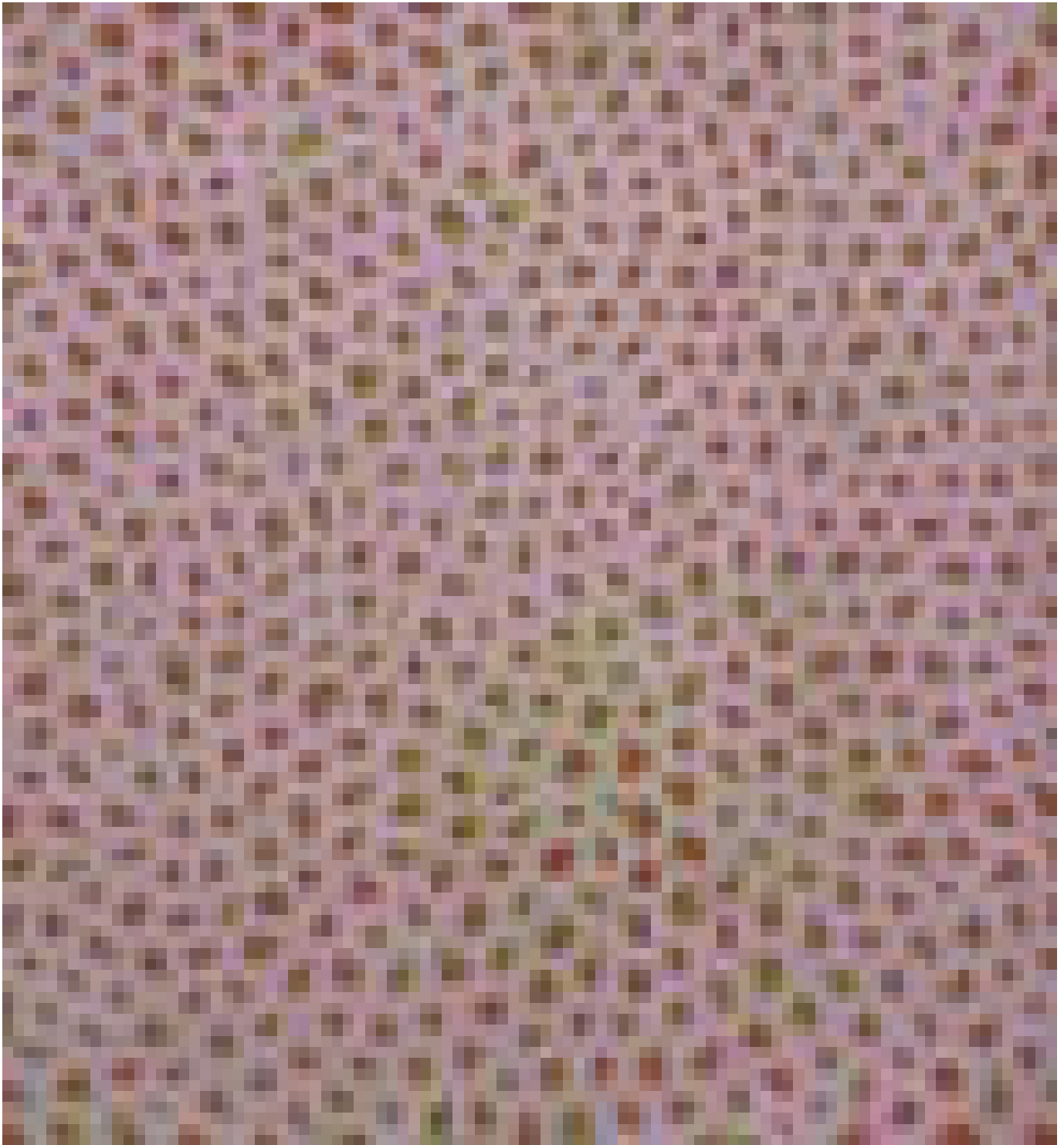
Since opening its San Francisco location in 2018, [We Were Always Here: Japanese-American Post-War Pioneers of Art](#) is the show Heather James Fine Art has been aspiring to host. It's a love letter to the city focusing on Japanese-American artists who have been central to San Francisco and beyond.

“The artists featured in the show forever altered and enriched the artistic landscape in the United States through their work,” Heather James Fine Art founder James Carona said when announcing the show. “It is especially fitting to present this exhibition in San Francisco, a city graced with a history of substantial cultural contributions made by Japanese-Americans.”

Yayoi Kusama highlights the show from a name-recognition standpoint. The massively influential contemporary artist saw her *Infinity Mirrors* exhibit in 2017-2018 travel to the Smithsonian Institution’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., followed by stops at Seattle Art Museum, The Broad, Los Angeles, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Cleveland Museum of Art, and High Museum of Art, Atlanta with sold out crowds greeting it at every stop.

“Kusama’s impact on contemporary art reverberates to this day through her long thread of influence on pop art and culture,” Exhibitions Assistant at Heather James Fine Art, San Francisco Christopher Huynh said. “From handbags to Instagram to the foundation of conceptual art, Kusama’s presence has become embedded in our world.”

Art lovers who know Kusama through her recent work will find enlightening seminal examples of her art from the 1950s in this show along with her “obsessive compulsion to spend endless hours filling vast canvases with ideas about infinity and endless networks,” according to Huynh.



Yayoi Kusama, An Island (13), 1955, Gouache on paper, 11 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. HEATHER JAMES FINE ART

George Nakashima and his furniture will also be familiar to visitors of the exhibit who've spent any amount of time watching PBS' "Antiques Roadshow" in the past three decades. "Roadshow" appraisers always go ga-ga for his tables and chairs.

1974 George Nakashima End Table | Celebrating Asian-Pacific Heritage Preview



The exhibition's title, *We Were Always Here*, helps educate visitors about the continually shifting nature of art history. Artists are constantly being lost, [forgotten](#), discovered and rediscovered.

“From Ruth Asawa to George Miyasaki to Kay Sekimachi, a picture emerged of artists who were once celebrated and many who have only recently re-emerged at a national and international level,” Huynh said. “We came across artists like Emiko Nakano who, along with Asawa, represented the U.S. at the 1955 Sao Paulo Biennale. She was a huge influence on Bay Area [Abstract Expressionism](#).”

The exhibit seeks to draw attention to its lesser-known artists by placing their work in dialogue with those of the “bigger names” like Kusama, Asawa, Shusaku Arakawa, a founding member of the Neo-Dada Organizers movement who represented Japan at the 1970 Venice Biennale, and Masami Teraoka who has received more than 70 solo exhibitions during his career including at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Yale University Art Gallery and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

“(A) surprise is Masako Takahashi’s strikingly beautiful Abstract Expressionist works from 1960, painted when she was only 18-years-old,” Huynh said. “We chose to also include a late work to illustrate the arc of her journey—a silk banner dyed in the Japanese clamp resist method called *itajime* into which she has woven her own hair as a means to scribe words shrouded in meaning by a mysterious language.”

Other sleepers resurface in the spotlight provided by Heather James Fine Art, San Francisco.

“We introduce gallery visitors to Emiko Nakano, a vastly underappreciated Bay Area Abstract Expressionist painter of the early 1950s,” Huynh said. “By the early 1960s, she had laid her brushes aside never to paint again. Despite her large impact, few know of her.”



No consideration of any aspect of Japanese-American life in the middle 20th century on the West Coast can escape the subject of internment.

Asawa was interned for 18 months as a child. She learned how to knit camouflage nets for the war effort at her camp. Later in life she would begin receiving commissions for public art projects in San Francisco and collaborated with landscape artists in 2002 to create the [Garden of Remembrance](#) honoring Japanese-American students forced into internment camps.

Sekimachi, Nakano and Takahashi are three native Californians who were interned. Takahashi was born at the Topaz Internment Center in Utah.

Isamu Noguchi, another artist with work on display, was living on the East Coast and therefore not subject to forced internment. He chose to enter the Poston War Relocation Camp in Arizona in the hopes of improving conditions there.

The internment of Japanese-Americans did not stunt their artistic development, a fact the exhibit makes clear.

“There is another narrative, one that highlights the incredibly fertile work, as hinted in the exhibition’s title, which these artists were developing after internment,” Huynh said. “In re-examining the decades after the war through this lens, we get a deeper understanding of art history that shows how much and how far Japanese-American artists were pushing the edge.”

Works on display in *We Were Always Here: Japanese-American Post-War Pioneers of Art* at Heather James Fine Art, San Francisco can be enjoyed and purchased through July 15.



Chadd Scott

I still remember visiting the Prado museum in Madrid. What I knew about art prior to that trip would comfortably fit on the end of a paint brush. My life would be change... **Read More**