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Berkeley Art Center honors Asian American Women Artists Association's past 35 years

Elise Fisher
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The Berkeley Art Center celebrates its 35th anniversary with exhibit titled, "In the Presence of: Collective Histories of the Asian American Women Artists Association."

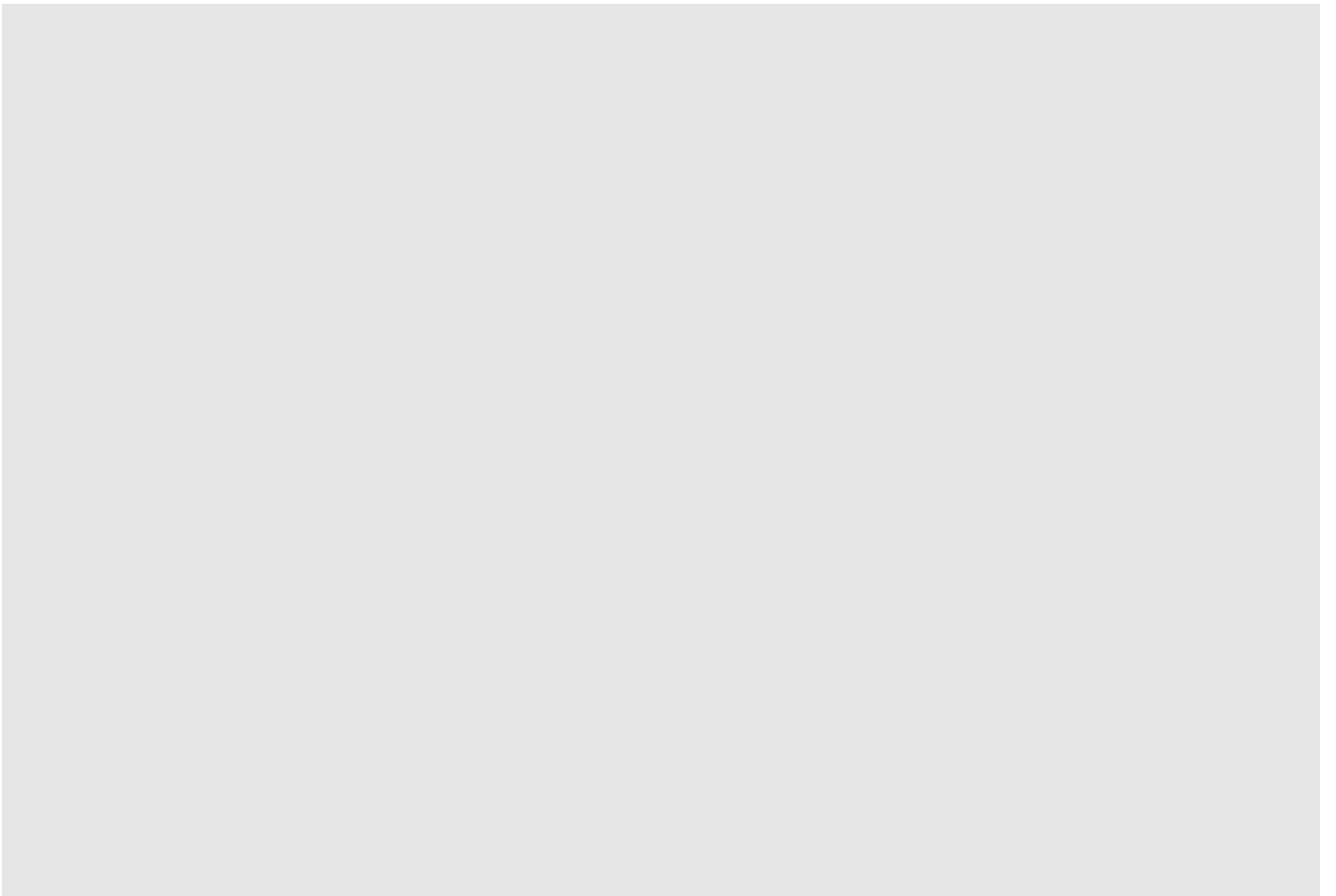
Aileen Park | Senior Staff

Berkeley Art Center opened an exhibit last week, set to run through April 20, titled "In the Presence of: Collective Histories of the Asian American Women Artists Association," or AAWAA, to commemorate its 35th anniversary.

The exhibit, curated by Christina Hiromi Hobbs, features 26 displays by 17 artists that give an overview of the AAWAA's history and put members' efforts from the past 35 years on display.

The exhibit is designed to introduce visitors to AAWAA and provide a glimpse into the work done by some artists who have been members.

"The show foregrounds the notion of presence to ask how the designation 'Asian American woman artist' might be understood through a collective or relational lens, rather than as part of an individual process," Hobbs said in an email.



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To give a glimpse into the history of AAWAA, the exhibit starts with a video from the organization's oral history series "Pass It On" in which founders discuss what inspired them to form a coalition of Asian American women artists in 1989.

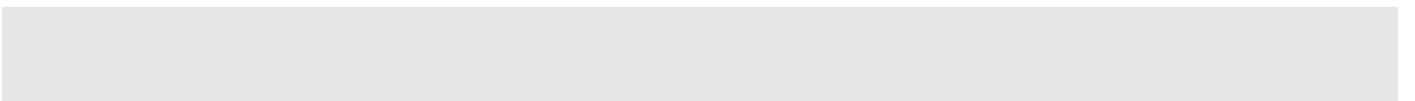
Flo Oy Wong and Betty Kano, the founders of AAWAA whose art is displayed throughout the space, recognized a lack of "Asian American participation and leadership" after they attended the Women's Caucus for Art in San Francisco, according to the exhibit's brochure which details each artwork's history.

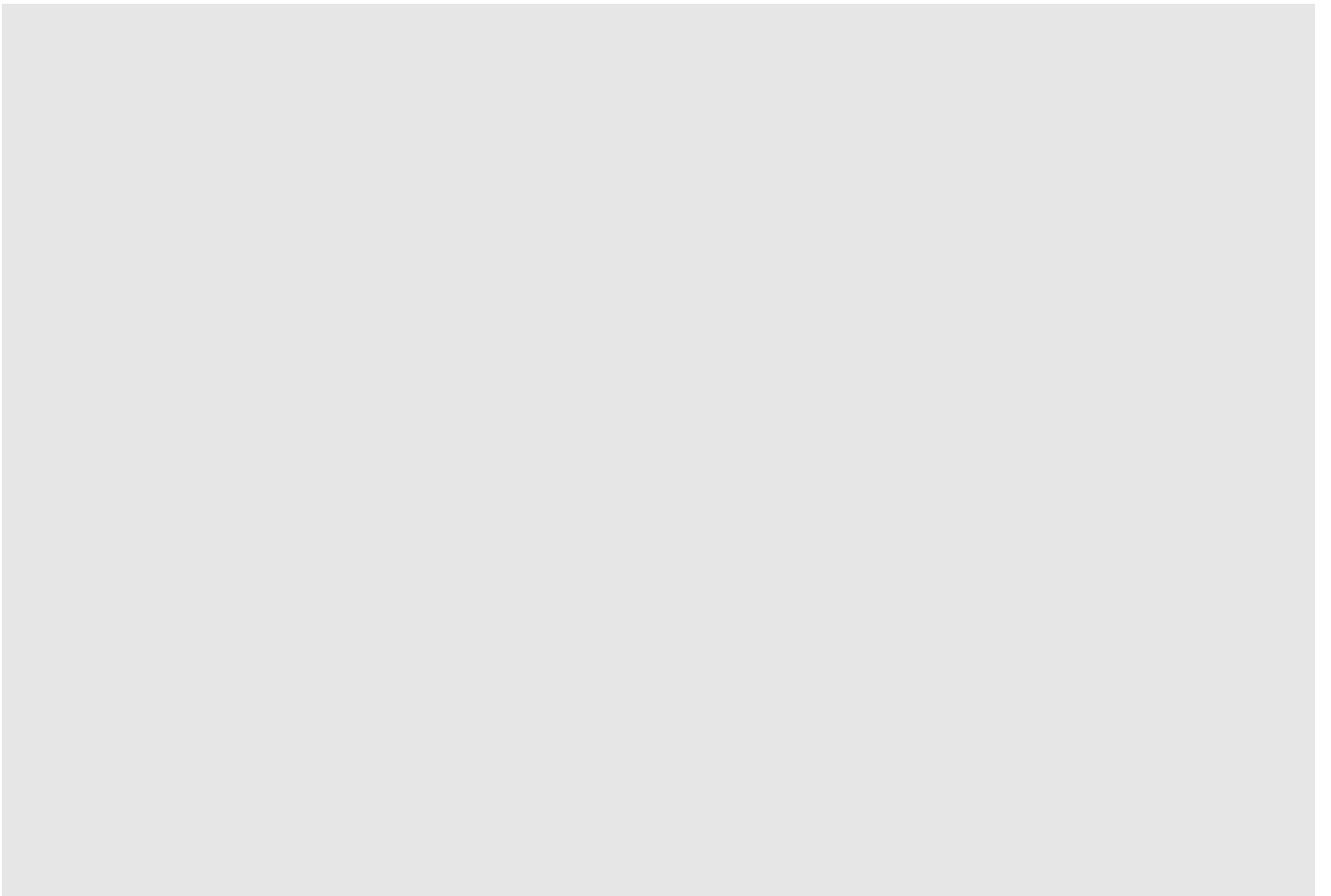
"In the current moment when there is renewed interest in artists from the Asian diaspora, such as the recent Bernice Bing and Hung Liu exhibitions at the Asian Art Museum and the DeYoung, it's important to recognize the work by local groups such as the Asian American Women Artists Association that have spent decades advocating for these artists and attending to their memory," Hobbs said in an email.

Other pieces including "Vitrine Display," materials from the AAWAA archive and "AAWAA 35th Anniversary Mandala," a mixed media piece by Nancy Hom that features a historic photo collection that details the early and evolving history of the organization.

In conjunction with these visual pieces, journal entries from May 1989 by Bernice Bing, an early member, recount the group's first meeting. In the journals, Bing notes they "felt strangely wanting to be a part of it."

"I was particularly moved by the ways in which the friendships and connections that the association fostered were present in their archives through forms as disparate as gifts between artists, portraits of fellow members, memorial exhibitions, publications, and collaborative art practices," Hobbs said in the email.





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Many of the paintings, sculptures, poems and etchings found in the exhibit display these relationships, from a painting by Lenore Chinn of Bernice Bing, to Kano's "To Theresa II," a visual representation of her classmate in the Masters of Fine Arts program at UC Berkeley, according to the brochure.

In AAWAA's 35 years, Hobbs explained, it has supported the work of Asian American women in the arts through literary readings, publications, educational initiatives and most recently, a program for emerging curators.

"There have been hundreds of artists, writers, and scholars whose work has been fostered by the organization over its history and the exhibition necessarily only presents a small selection of work by artists that have been a part of the group," Hobbs said in the email.

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