



Press Release
For Immediate Release

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Four Major Postwar Japanese American Artists to Be Exhibited in JACCC's Heritage X, September 12 to October 31, 2021

LOS ANGELES, CA – An exhibition of four Japanese American artists—Nob Hadeishi, Mike Kanemitsu, Keisho Okayama, and Sawako Shintani—who influenced the Los Angeles art scene in the early 1970s. Kanemitsu, Hadeishi, and Shintani met at the famous Chouinard Art Institute near McArthur Park, Los Angeles, which later became California Institute of Fine Arts (CalArts).

While all four artists might be said to be broadly under the post-war abstract expressionist umbrella in different ways and at different times, Kanemitsu's painting style is directly associated with New York abstract expressionism. Hadeishi's work was influenced by both the 60's New York and Los Angeles art scene. Okayama's work, ranging from color fields to figurative, tends to echo the movement's interest in the spiritual and unconscious. Shintani's sculptural work in bronze, cement, and clay also reflects the innovative, non-utilitarian spirit that emerged in California's ceramics community.

Nobuyuki Hadeishi was born in 1936 in Japan to US citizens from Hawaii. When World War II broke out, Nob and his older brother Tetsuo were separated from their parents who were interned at Tule Lake, until they could move to the US in June 1947.

At 15, he was introduced to Chouinard Art Institute by a friend. He studied full-time there while still a high school student at Dorsey, taking night and Saturday classes. "I told them I was 18 which was the minimum age required to study figure drawing classes there. And the lady that was collecting the fee wasn't all that particular and never required ID." He met Mike Kanemitsu and Sawako Shintani while at Chouinard.

Matsumi "Mike" Kanemitsu was born in 1922 in Ogden, Utah. From age three to 16, his grandparents raised him in Hiroshima. After briefly returning to Utah, he went to Japan to finish high school, but came back to the United States again to avoid being drafted. In Los Angeles, he found work as a gardener before enlisting in the US Army.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, he was detained in army camps in the Midwest while still on active military service, where he served as a medic, drew portraits, and decorated the officers' clubs. He eventually volunteered for the 44nd Regimental Combat Team for overseas service and was stationed in France as a hospital assistant. There, Kanemitsu met other artists and intellectuals who introduced him to modernist art and encouraged him to pursue formal art studies.

Kanemitsu was on the faculty of Chouinard Art Institute, California Institute of the Arts, and Otis College of Art and Design. His work was exhibited in major shows such as the Whitney Annual at the Whitney Museum of Modern Art in New York (1956), Museum of Modern Art in New York (1962), Hiroshima Museum of Modern Art (1986), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2000), and the Japanese American National Museum (2011).

Keisho Okayama was born in 1934 in Osaka, the middle son of a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist priest and his wife. In 1936, his father brought the family to the United States to serve a congregation in Watsonville, California. After the outbreak of war between the US and Japan, the Okayama family was first forcibly evacuated to Tanforan Racetrack in San Bruno, then to Topaz War Relocation Center, an internment camp in central Utah.

Okayama studied art at UCLA, where he received a BA in Art in 1962, and took figure-drawing classes at Los Angeles City College. He was prolific, painting and drawing throughout his life, producing work in pencil, sumi, watercolor, charcoal, oil pastel, and acrylic paint. He has said, "My primary concern has always been to establish a condition of feeling with forms in space that felt to me to be true. The images must feel real to me."

Sawako Shintani was born 1939 in Kobe to a family of artists. She received a BFA in sculpture at the Kyoto University of Fine Arts in 1962, and taught at the Kobe Women's College (1964-66).

She then studied sculpture and ceramics at the Chouinard Art School, where she met Mike Kanemitsu, Nob Hadeishi, Juanita Jimenez, Ralph Bacerra, Mineo Mizuno, Jun Kanekoo, and Hirokazu Kosaka. She settled in Los Angeles in 1970.

Though Shintani focused on ceramics in later years, she also sculpted in wood, concrete, and bronze, including several public commissions. "Harmony" (1985) is a large bronze bas-relief depicting a group of abstract figures, formerly located at 332 East 2nd Street and currently at Weller Court.

Hirokazu Kosaka, JACCC's Master Artist in Residence and exhibit curator, said, "These artists represent a unique intersection of Japanese American artists during an explosion of US postwar creative experimentation, three of them linked by the famous Chouinard Art Institute. They represent our artistic heritage."

Opening Date: Sunday, September 12th, 1 pm-4 pm

Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 12 noon-4 pm (closed on Mondays)

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Founded in 1971, Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC) is one of the largest ethnic arts and cultural centers of its kind in the United States. A hub for Japanese and Japanese American arts and culture and a community gathering place for the diverse voices it inspires – Japanese American Cultural & Community Center connects traditional and contemporary; community participants and creative professionals; Southern California and the world beyond. www.jaccc.org