

LEGACIES:
ASIAN AMERICAN ART MOVEMENTS IN NEW YORK CITY (1969-2001)

September 11, 2024 – December 20, 2024
Opening Wednesday, September 11th, 5–7PM

Legacies: Asian American Art Movements in New York City (1969-2001) is an expansive survey of artwork and archival material by artists that constitute and exceed “Asian American,” a cultural and national identity invented in 1968. *Legacies* uncovers how artists of Asian descent have historically negotiated identity in America as a set of situated practices and institutional structures amidst transnational diasporas, racial phantasms, and political imaginaries.

Presenting over 90 artists and collectives, *Legacies* is the first institutional survey exhibition focusing on artists of Asian descent who were based in New York City.

Legacies features works – paintings, drawings, sculpture, and new media, among others – that complicate definitions of “Asian American art” as singular and static through the lens of art history, cultural studies, and sociology. In addition to aesthetic concerns such as figuration, abstraction and materiality, the exhibition tracks how these artists addressed migration, displacement, racism, cultural autonomy, Western imperialism, societal violence, and representations of sexuality and gender through the decades.

Legacies also constellates three key artist collectives and organizations: Godzilla: Asian American Art Network; the Basement Workshop; and Asian American Arts Centre. All three organizations were artistic, social, and political hubs for diasporic Asian artists in New York that intersected with other marginalized communities.

Recognizing that “identity-based” categories of art are bound to the dominant racial ideology and political narrative of a nation, the exhibition instead focuses on a multiplicity of subjectivities, political horizons, and artistic expressions to interrogate life in America.

Organized by Howie Chen, Curator at 80WSE, Jayne Cole Southard, PhD., CUNY, and christina ong, PhD.

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Commission Projects

The exhibition also features newly commissioned installations, including a large-scale Washington Square Windows installation by new-media artist Shu Lea Cheang connected to the 30th anniversary of her groundbreaking film, *Fresh Kill* (1994).

Filmmaker Rea Tajiri presents an assemblage sculpture that expands on her groundbreaking *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (1991), a meditation on her family history and Japanese and Japanese American internment during World War II.

Exhibition Background

Legacies is the first survey exhibition exclusively focused on artists of Asian descent in New York City. Spanning three decades, the exhibition brings together the curatorial and academic research of 80WSE curator Howie Chen, art historian Jayne Cole Southard, and sociologist Christina Ong, who have each cultivated unprecedented access to artists, archival material, art work, and historical narratives from this time period.

Informed by scholarly explorations of racial identity, *Legacies* contextualizes the development of Asian American identity in the late 1960s. Now a commonplace demographic label, the term “Asian American” was first employed in 1968 by UC Berkeley’s Asian American Political Alliance as a progressive political identity, invoking a coalitional politics necessary for the Third World Liberation Front student strikes in the San Francisco Bay Area. Through an ethos of grassroots educational exchange, Asian American artists and organizations in New York engaged regularly with their West Coast counterparts, taking inspiration from Third World internationalism, the Black Power movement, the Chicano movement, and the anti-war, labor, and feminist movements to link political struggle with art and serve their respective communities. Thus, “Asian American” itself became a coalitional term contingent on uncovering diasporic and ethnic heritage, and its usefulness for political activism. *Legacies* expands on this to offer a broader understanding of the term’s significance and contradictions in art.

In addition to offering important historical insights, *Legacies* points to a site-specific understanding of this time period through analysis of related social movements and the geographic positionings of artists of Asian descent in and through New York City. New York, a global artistic capital since the mid-twentieth century and hub for immigration in the U.S., uniquely offered space for artists to develop their artistic practice and connect with others as part of the Asian diaspora. *Legacies* highlights these histories while underscoring both the sociopolitical and geographical movements of artists in New York City.

80WSE Gallery

Founded in 1974, 80 Washington Square East (80WSE), NYU is a not-for-profit gallery presenting contemporary and historical exhibitions. The gallery exhibits in two further locations, at Broadway Windows at Broadway and East 10th Street, and Washington Square Windows.

Curator Howie Chen and Gallery Manager Jon Huron.

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