

THEY PAINTED FROM THEIR HEARTS

PIONEER ASIAN AMERICAN ARTISTS

Edited by MAYUMI TSUTAKAWA for the WING LUKE ASIAN MUSEUM

ASIAN AMERICAN ARTISTS DIRECTORY

Compiled by ALAN LAU and KAZUKO NAKANE for the ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART / SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



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Table of Contents

PART I

- 4 Foreword
by Ron Chew
- 5 Acknowledgements and Lenders to the Exhibit
- 6 Introduction
by Mayumi Tsutakawa
- 9 A Short Chronology
- 10 Checklist of the Exhibition
- 11 Art in Seattle, 1900 to 1960
by Martha Kingsbury
- 21 They Painted From Their Hearts:
Pioneer Asian American Artists of Washington
by Mayumi Tsutakawa
- 33 Color Plates
- 49 Interweaving Light with Shadow:
Early Asian American Photographers in the Pacific Northwest
by Kazuko Nakane
- 61 Ghosts Like Us
by Lucia Enriquez

PART II

- 67 Directory of Asian American Artists
by Alan Chong Lau and Kazuko Nakane
Archives of American Art/Smithsonian Institution

Foreword

BY RON CHEW, Director, Wing Luke Asian Museum

The mission of the Wing Luke Asian Museum, since its inception in 1966, has been to rediscover, record and tell the story of Asian Pacific Americans in Washington State.

In the early years of this history, financial hardship—the inevitable burden borne by the immigrants and the generation bred in the era before World War II—forced most Asian Pacific Americans to focus on raw survival rather than creative pursuits of the heart. But each generation turns out its share of artists, no matter how few the nurturing influences or how harsh the conditions for expression. Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Filipino artists, though few in number at first, nevertheless found the time and means to create. They left behind a magnificent trail of works, some newly discovered in recent years, others reinterpreted for the quality of workmanship or their documentary value.

Since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, a younger generation of Asian Pacific American artists and others working in the cultural realm have searched for sources of inspiration. They have turned to individual artists who paved the way for them one and two generations earlier. Embracing these pioneer artists and their works with new understanding has helped to re-illuminate the Asian Pacific American story and the overall heritage of the Pacific Northwest. Artists can express—in ways historians and academicians cannot—the soul of a community: how people see themselves and the world around them. This book, *They Painted From Their Hearts: Pioneer Asian American Artists*, is a rediscovery and celebration of these Asian Pacific Americans who were our first generation of artists. Like Asian Pacific American pioneers in other fields of creative endeavor, many were neglected, misunderstood and unappreciated. Some achieved fame in their time; others died in obscurity. With this book, we re-enter their world and explore both their collective influences and their rich individual visions.

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With deep appreciation, we thank the major contributors to the exhibition, "They Painted From Their Hearts: Pioneer Asian American Artists":

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Introduction

BY MAYUMI TSUTAKAWA, *Exhibition Curator*

In 1980 Alan Lau and I, neophytes in the book publishing world, put our heads together and created the anthology *Turning Shadows Into Light: Art and Culture of the Northwest's Early Asian/Pacific Community*. Armed with an impressive article on early Japanese American photographers by Robert Monroe, we gathered a wide array of cultural expressions of our grandparents' and parents' early days. These ranged from the Filipino American boxing world to the restoration of the Nippon Kan Theatre to an exploratory article I wrote on the early Asian American artists of the Northwest: "They Painted From Their Hearts." Alan added fine contemporary poetry by Northwest writers such as Laureen Mar and Lawson Inada, evoking memories of the early days.

Fourteen years later, the Wing Luke Asian Museum has dedicated considerable resources to the full-scale production of an exhibition and catalog of the creative works of the early Asian American artists, set against the dramatic backdrop of the history of Asians in the Pacific Northwest.

The stories of these artists are fascinating and varied as are the tales of finding each of the pieces for the exhibition. Japanese Americans suddenly had to leave their homes upon evacuation in 1942. Many fine artworks were destroyed or stashed in a neighbor's basement. The paintings of Takuichi Fujii, painted in the 1930s, were discovered as a bundle of canvases sold at a flea market on Capitol Hill in the 1980s. Although some artists' paintings had been donated to the Seattle Art Museum before the war, most of the prewar paintings by Japanese Americans were brought out of basements or closets for this exhibition.

Of the eighteen artists in the exhibition, only six are still alive. So, the search for works by these artists brought me into contact with a number of families of the artists. I visited twelve of the families in Seattle, Kent and Bellevue.

I learned of stories surrounding each individual artist which were alternately humorous, inspiring and heartbreaking. In some cases, I found that the widows and children of the artists had the artworks stored archivally. In other cases, the pieces were as they had been left many years ago—stacked in dusty storage areas. In many cases, the families were thankful that the development of this exhibition and catalog would bring recognition to the artists.

Some of the works I researched in the Special Collections of the University of Washington and in the Okanogan County Historical Society in a remote part of Eastern Washington.

For the exhibition, we only had space to display two or three works by each artist, far fewer than I would have liked. I hope that other institutions pick up the idea and mount exhibitions by each of these artists in the future.

In this publication, I have attempted to provide both a backdrop and a description of the artists' lives and creative work. An essay about art in the Northwest was prepared by Martha Kingsbury. I have prepared an essay about the painters, and Kazuko Nakane has written about the artists. And I have included a contemporary artist's reflection on the meaning of the pioneer artists in an essay by Lucia Enriquez.

We are also privileged to co-publish the *Directory of Asian American Artists*, prepared through the Archives of American Art. This directory of more than one hundred artists provides an invaluable resource for students and scholars.

I wish to extend my sincere appreciation to all the artists and family members of the artists and the collectors for their cooperation in putting this exhibition together. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the staff members of institutions I worked with, such as Paul Karlstrom at the Archives of American Art/Smithsonian

Institution, Richard Engeman at the University of Washington Libraries and Marilyn Moses of the Okanogan County Historical Society.

Also, for their wise advice I wish to thank artist Alan Chong Lau, Barbara Johns of the Tacoma Art Museum, Rod Slemmons of the Seattle Art Museum, Margo Machida of the Asian/American Center at Queens College, Karin Higa of the Japanese American National Museum, John Braseth of Woodside/Braseth Gallery, Carolyn Staley of Carolyn Staley Fine Prints and Ayame and George Tsutakawa.

Furthermore, for helping me with all aspects of the catalog and exhibition, I am indebted to Ron Chew, Diane Narasaki, Charlene Mano and Ruth Vincent of Wing Luke Asian Museum; writers Kazuko Nakane, Martha Kingsbury and Lucia Enriquez; designers Paula Onodera Wong and Victor Kubo; copy editor David Takami; Paul Macapia, intrepid photographer, and to Michael Constans, dedicated handyman, without whose assistance I could not have completed *They Painted From Their Hearts*.

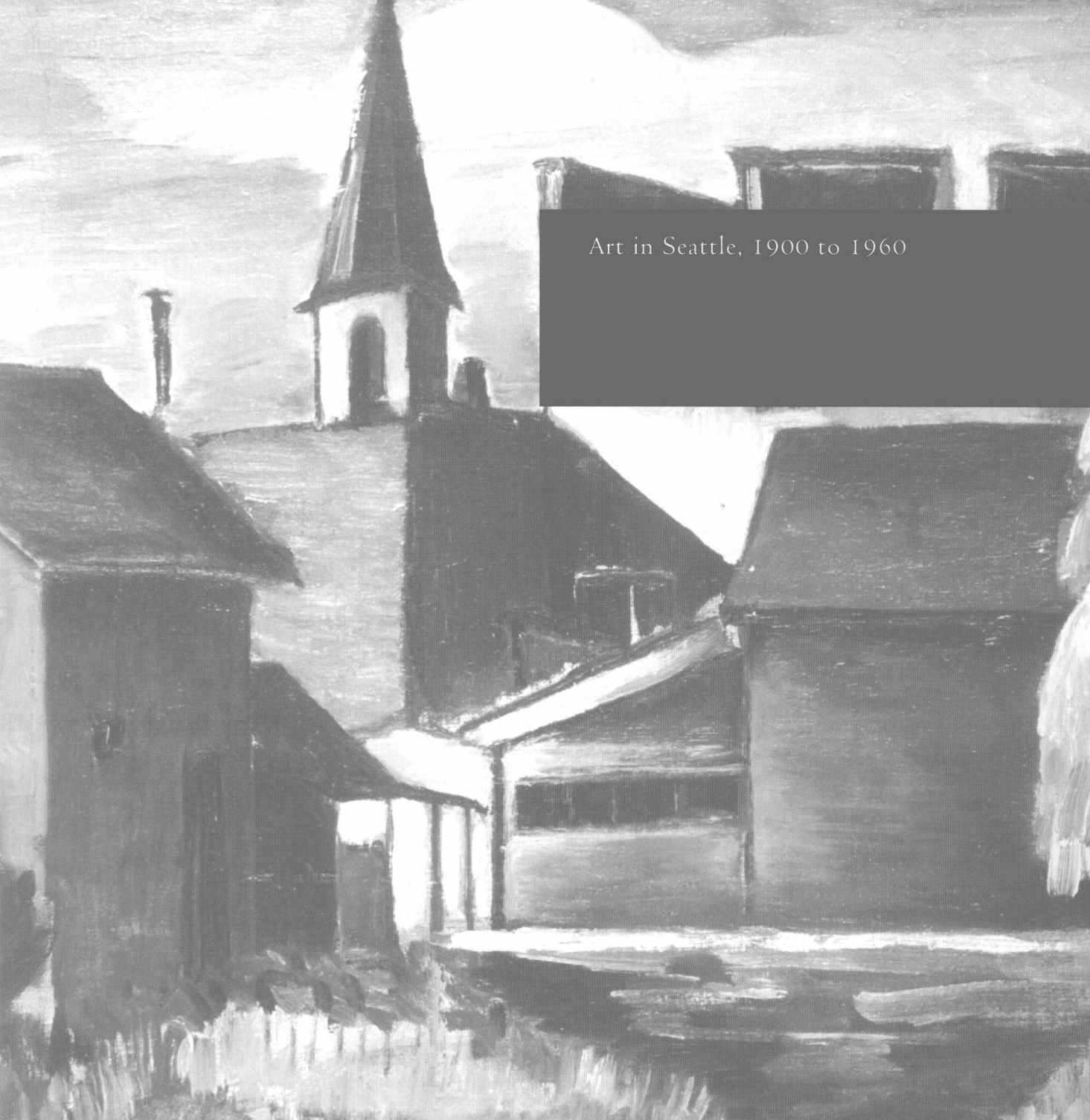
A Short Chronology

Asian Pacific American Immigration and Relevant Legislation

- 1860s First Chinese laborers come to Washington Territory.
- 1878 Washington Territory achieves statehood.
- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act bans immigration of Chinese laborers.
- 1888 Scott Act bars Chinese laborers from returning to the U.S.
- 1886 Washington State Legislature approves Alien Land Law to bar Asians from owning land.
- 1890s First Japanese laborers arrive in the Northwest.
- 1892 Geary Act extends Chinese Exclusion Act for ten more years.
- 1904 Chinese laborers excluded from immigration indefinitely.
- 1900s First Filipino students and first Filipino, Korean and South Asian laborers come to Washington State.
- 1907-8 Gentlemen's Agreement restricts immigration of Japanese laborers; "picture brides" are allowable.
- 1917 Immigration Act of 1917 bars immigration of South Asian laborers and prevents South Asians from bringing over their wives.
- 1921 Legislature passes another Alien Land Law to prevent Asians from owning or leasing land.
- 1924 Immigration Act of 1924 excludes all Asian immigrants except Filipinos as "aliens ineligible to citizenship." Targeted at Japanese Americans, it also prevents Chinese women from rejoining their husbands in America.
- 1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act limits Filipino immigration to 50 per year for U.S.
- 1937 State amends Alien Land Law to prevent Filipinos from owning land.
- 1942 Federal Executive Order 9066 authorizes ouster of over 120,000 Japanese Americans from homes on the West Coast.
- 1945 Chinese and Filipino women come under the War Brides Act.
- 1950s Guamanians and Samoans begin to arrive.
- 1952 Walter-McCarran Act passed; all Asian races became eligible for immigration and citizenship again.
- 1953 Korean War ends, Korean war brides and students begin to arrive.
- 1965 Immigration Act of 1965 allows increasing numbers of Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, South Asians and Southeast Asians to come.
- 1970s Refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and immigrants from other countries of Southeast Asia come to the U.S.

Checklist of the Exhibition

Sumio Arima <i>Boats in the Harbor</i> 1923 Oil on canvas Collection of the Arima Family	Kenjiro Nomura <i>Barn</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of George and Betty Nomura	Fay Chong <i>Uncle Post's Warehouse</i> 1947 Watercolor Collection of Priscilla Chong Jue	Paul Horiuchi <i>Wyoming Winter</i> 1949 Watercolor Anonymous Collection	Frank Kunishige <i>Dancer</i> ca. 1927 B & W photograph Collection of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries	Henry Takayoshi <i>Untitled</i> ca. 1950s B & W photograph Collection of Mieko Hada
Sumio Arima <i>Nude</i> 1923 Oil on canvas Collection of the Arima Family	Kamekichi Tokita <i>Self Portrait</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of the Tokita Family	Andrew Chinn <i>Returning Sail</i> 1941 Watercolor Collection of the Artist	Paul Horiuchi <i>Writing From the Past</i> ca. 1950s Mixed media Collection of Debra and Peter Rettman	Kyo Koike <i>Girl with Violin</i> ca. 1920s B & W photograph Collection of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries	Chao-Chen Yang <i>Apprehension</i> 1951 Color photograph Collection of Jean Yang
Takuichi Fujii <i>Bridge</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of Dan Eskenazi and Diane Leveque	Kamekichi Tokita <i>Texaco</i> ca. 1947 Oil on canvas Collection of the Tokita Family	Andrew Chinn <i>Seward Park</i> ca. 1950s Watercolor Collection of the Artist	John Matsudaira <i>Tombo Tsuri</i> 1953 Oil on canvas Collection of the Artist	Kyo Koike <i>Sea of Clouds</i> ca. 1920s B & W photograph Collection of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries	Chao-Chen Yang <i>3 Men in Chicago</i> 1938 B & W photograph Collection of Jean Yang
Takuichi Fujii <i>Yester</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of Dan Eskenazi and Diane Leveque	Kamekichi Tokita <i>Hunt, Idaho</i> ca. 1942 Oil on canvas Collection of the Tokita Family	Lawrence Chinn <i>Portrait</i> ca. 1950s Oil on canvas Collection of Frances Chinn	John Matsudaira <i>Prelude to Winter</i> 1960 Oil on canvas Collection of the Artist	Kyo Koike <i>Paris Streetsweepers</i> 1956 Color photograph Collection of Jean Yang	Chao-Chen Yang <i>Paris Streetsweepers</i> 1956 Color photograph Collection of Jean Yang
Takuichi Fujii <i>Still Life</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of Dan Eskenazi and Diane Leveque	Shiro Miyazaki <i>Sunflowers</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of George Tsutakawa	Lawrence Chinn <i>Landscape</i> ca. 1950s Watercolor Collection of Francis Chinn	George Tsutakawa <i>Dancers</i> 1947 Oil on canvas Collection of the Artist	Frank Matsura <i>Colville Woman</i> ca. 1910 B & W photograph (Original negative is in the Collection of the Okanogan Historical Society)	Johsel Namkung <i>916 Jackson St.</i> 1957 Color photograph Collection of the Artist
Kenjiro Nomura <i>Harbor</i> 1953 Oil on board Collection of George and Betty Nomura	Shiro Miyazaki <i>Still Life</i> ca. 1930s Oil on canvas Collection of George Tsutakawa	Val Laigo <i>Dilemma of the Atom</i> 1953 Oil on canvas Collection of Astreberta Laigo	George Tsutakawa <i>Rescue # 1</i> 1958 Oil on canvas Collection of the Artist	Frank Matsura <i>Waterfront</i> ca. 1901 B & W photograph (Original negative is in the Collection of the Okanogan Historical Society)	Johsel Namkung <i>California Coast</i> ca. 1950s B & W photograph Collection of the Artist
Kenjiro Nomura <i>Renton Bridge</i> 1938 Oil on canvas Collection of George and Betty Nomura	Fay Chong <i>Power Lines</i> 1958 Watercolor Collection of Priscilla Chong Jue	Val Laigo <i>Circus Piece</i> 1958 Oil on canvas Collection of Astreberta Laigo	Frank Kunishige <i>Vanities</i> ca. 1926 B & W photograph Collection of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries	Henry Takayoshi <i>Silent Sign</i> ca. 1950s B & W photograph Collection of Mieko Hada	



Art in Seattle, 1900 to 1960

Art in Seattle, 1900-1960

BY MARTHA KINGSBURY

IN 1900, SEATTLE WAS A RAW TOWN in a remote corner of the United States, just coming into a sense of itself. It had no galleries or museums where art was shown on a regular basis, no established network of artists and art lovers, no cultural identity beyond being an outpost on the celebrity tour circuit and a fledgling source of vaudeville shows for the Coast and Alaska. Within a half century, the area gave rise to art of vigor and diversity, including an artists' group of national and international renown.

Early travelers and immigrants depicted the region's mountains, and occasionally portraits of each other. Settlers like Emily Inez Denny and Harriet Foster Beecher painted delicate naturalistic views of the forests and shores around Seattle. Soon, professionally trained painters arrived from the East, including Edgar Forkner, Paul Gustin and Kathleen Houlahan. Abby Williams Hill in nearby Tacoma was an example of the self-invented cultural trailblazing of these early artists; she had contacts with the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railways to paint the scenic grandeur along their western routes. This made possible long summer camping trips with her children, when she worked on the contracted paintings, which she exhibited at a number of World Fairs.

A Seattle Fine Arts Society was established in 1908 and soon sponsored traveling loan shows and annual exhibitions of local artists. Its first public exhibition consisted of over four hundred Japanese prints loaned by sixty-three Seattle residents. Mrs. T. Koitabashi gave a demonstration of Japanese flower arranging during the exhibition. The Fine Arts Society helped other organizations initiate a permanent framework for the arts in Seattle. In 1909, the city hosted a fair it named the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. Seattle thus announced itself to the world as the pivotal

point linking the United States with the distant reaches of the North and Far East. The fair included exhibitions of historical and contemporary art.

While artists struggled to make a future for themselves, art also served nostalgic purposes. The first public art commissioned in Seattle was a bronze figure of Chief Seattle, sculpted in 1907 by James Wehn. Throughout the United States there was a strong sense of Indian culture as something passing away. Seattle residents collected Native American artifacts early enough to send some to the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and to include many in the 1909 A.Y.P. Exposition. The city's first artist of renown was undoubtedly Edward Curtis, whose poetic photographs depicted Native Americans in twilight stillness, evocative of quiet respect, reverie and nostalgia for a lost past.

Nostalgia aside, the cultural possibilities of the area were complex. Northwest Coast Native Americans were less nomadic than inland tribes; groups were deeply rooted around Puget Sound. They were not so drastically displaced as many of the Eastern Washington tribes, and remained part of the life of the area. Trade opportunities and railroad construction had drawn immigrants from China and Japan. There was a double edge to the East Coast settlers honoring these Native American and Asian cultures with esteem and nostalgia, for they tended to assume that these cultures were past, and that the future lay with their own artistic practices and museums. During the early twentieth century, increasing restrictions on Asians limited immigration, citizenship, and property ownership; while at roughly the same time, Native Americans were restricted not only regarding land and civic rights, but their Potlatch Ceremony—fundamental to their social structure and the purpose and meaning of many of their finest

“Seattle announced itself

to the world as the

pivotal point linking

the United States with

the distant reaches

of the Far East”

art objects—was prohibited. Only decades later were the legal rights and the viability and value of these artistic cultures gradually restored.

Seattle artists continued to describe the beauties of the Northwest terrain. But after World War I, painters and sculptors were increasingly drawn to the new freedoms of emotional and interpretative art forms. Exciting visual rhythms and pictorial structures were invented in Europe in the early twentieth century—styles that critics were quick to label Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism; and others that artists themselves called Dadaism, Surrealism. The modernist climate favored experimentation in art, not meticulous verisimilitude, and these challenging attitudes gradually gained ground in Seattle, too. Many modernist painters came to the area between the wars, including Malcolm Roberts, Rudolph Zallinger, Margaret and Peter Camfferman, and Margaret Tomkins.

With many more artists working and exhibiting, some artists' groups focused on a particular medium. Among photography societies, the Seattle Camera Club was especially vigorous in the late twenties. It sponsored meetings and exhibitions, and an ambitious publication, *Notan*, and its participants were internationally successful. Leading members like Frank Kunishige and Dr. Kyo Koike sought to make photography a fully expressive art, not simply a documentary technology.

The Northwest Printmakers, organized in 1928, solicited members from all over the United States and held regular exhibitions. Prints were an area in which the heritage of Asian art was indirectly present in Seattle. Ambrose Patterson, first head of the University of Washington art program, had not only exhibited with the radical Fauvist painters in Paris around 1905; he subsequently executed exquisite prints

in the most refined and nuanced manner of Japanese print influences. Also, Helen Rhodes and Walter Isaacs, who joined the staff there about the same time, 1920, brought influences of the design theories of Arthur Dow. Dow's widely admired esthetic system was based on the structural patterns of East Asian painting and Japanese prints. Throughout the thirties, printmaking was a vigorous medium in the Northwest, indirectly drawing visual strength from both Asian and Western heritages.

By the early thirties, Seattle had established permanent sites for seeing and making art. The Cornish School, founded in 1914, expanded into substantial new quarters in 1921, about the time the University art program got under way. Cornish flourished as a focus for integrated creative arts, and brought innovative artists to the area, including Mark Tobey in the early twenties and later John Cage. The city and University received a boost from Horace C. Henry's gift of his paintings—mostly nineteenth century landscapes—and a gallery to house them on campus. In 1933, the Seattle Art Museum opened in Volunteer Park, perched high above the city's commerce, harbor, and outlying bay and islands. The Museum's elegantly reticent Art Deco building was designed by Carl Gould, and extensive collections were given by Mrs. Eugene Fuller and her son Dr. Richard E. Fuller, who continued for decades to set its policy. Among his firm loyalties were support of contemporary local artists, and a deep love, shared with his mother, for the fine arts of Asia, which formed the core of their collections.

Art museums, art schools, and artists groups were scarcely established in Seattle when the Great Depression brought prosperity to a grinding halt. The sophisticated developments of European modernism had just established a toehold when American art turned emphatically toward local subjects and clear representational

styles. For these, it was believed, could best address the social and political concerns generated by a collapsing economy. While Americans regarded certain aspects of visual culture as delightful escapes from crisis (movies, for example, or streamlined modernist product design), the pictorial arts and sculpture had become, in everyone's minds, a serious undertaking involving cultural values. The young museums and art programs struggled against economic hardship; and though not all artists and groups flourished, the need for art was felt as never before. This was apparent when the federal relief programs decided to help artists along with other American workers. From 1933 through the early forties, government programs extended modest financial aid and implicit legitimacy to practicing artists. The Seattle painter Bill Cumming, in his memoirs of those days, has spoken for artists all over the country, recalling vividly how much it meant that art was protected through hard times as an integral part of the social fabric.

The Depression was a time of informal associations, when esthetic differences were overcome by the practical difficulties everyone faced. A cluster of Seattle painters, calling themselves The Group of Twelve, exemplified the spirited devotion of artists pushing on through rough times. In 1937, they managed a modest publication of their paintings and brief statements in a local press. The Group included independent artists and artist-teachers; local natives and newcomers; three Japanese; and three women members. Their paintings and statements varied. Some, like Kenneth Callahan and Ambrose Patterson, derived much from European expression to interpret the light and flora of the Northwest, while others, like Kamekichi Tokita and Kenjiro Nomura, were closer to social realism in their paintings of the dusty side streets of Seattle.

Economic hardship encouraged modest art works, like prints or private paintings, yet the government's commitment to art encouraged the opposite,