

# SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART TO PRESENT  
*KELLY AKASHI: FORMATIONS*,  
THE ARTIST'S FIRST MAJOR TOURING MUSEUM EXHIBITION



For Immediate Release

San José, California (June 28, 2022; updated September 21, 2022) — From September 3, 2022 through April 23, 2023, the San José Museum of Art will present the first major touring museum exhibition of Los Angeles–based artist Kelly Akashi (born 1983, Los Angeles). Organized by senior curator, Lauren Schell Dickens, *Kelly Akashi: Formations* presents an overview of nearly a decade of work, including glass and cast bronze objects, multipart sculptural installations, and photographic work. It also includes a newly commissioned body of work which explores the inherited impact of the artist's father's imprisonment in a Japanese American incarceration camp in Poston, Arizona during World War II. The exhibition will debut at SJMA and then travel on a West Coast tour. After SJMA, the exhibition will travel to the Frye Art Museum, Seattle, June 17–September 3, 2023 and then to Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, September 21, 2023–February 18, 2024.

“Since its founding, SJMA has provided a platform for emerging artists. We are honored to present Kelly Akashi's first solo museum exhibition and encourage deeper exploration of her work and unique practice,” said S. Sayre Batton, Oshman Executive Director, San José Museum of Art.

Originally trained in analog photography, Akashi is drawn to fluid, impressionable materials and old-world craft techniques, such as glass blowing and casting, candle making, bronze and silicone casting, and rope making. She often pairs hand-blown glass or wax forms with unique and temporally specific bronze casts of her own hand, each a unique record of the slow-changing human body. Akashi's interest in time—embedded in the materiality of many of her processes—has led her to study fossils, geology and botany, locating humankind within a longer geological timeline. Drawing on scientific research and theoretical inquiry, she explores fundamental questions of existence—about being in the world and being in time—cultivating relationships among a variety of materials and subjects to investigate how they actively convey their histories and potential for change.

“Akashi uses a familiar language of craft—of skilled experience and material knowledge—in a way that draws from tradition, but reveals internal encounters, juxtapositions, and relationships that push towards transformation. In one sense, you could say she's encouraging a material empathy—looking at stones as witnesses to human trauma—while she's also looking to interactions with materials, to geologic records, to make sense of her own history, as a human, and has a Japanese American,” said senior curator, Lauren Schell Dickens, San José Museum of Art.

The newly commissioned *Conjoined Tumbleweed* (2022) is a monumental bronze cast of intertwined plants collected from Poston, Arizona—the former site of an incarceration camp for Japanese Americans where the artist's paternal family, along with thousands of others, were relocated and imprisoned during World War II. It is presented with a variety of sculptures from throughout Akashi's career on rammed earth pedestals, such as *Be Me (Californian—Japanese Citrus)* (2016), a stainless-steel cast of the cultivated fruit whose hybrid identity reflects the artist's own heritage. The title “Be Me” is given to an ongoing group of works: an empathetic entreaty to dissolve boundaries between object and viewer, self and other. Particular subjects, weeds, flowers, shells, as well as traditional craft forms—footed vase, candle cup—reoccur, each encompassing particular morphologies and lineages in botany, palentology, and histories of craft.

Akashi's interest in thinking about cultivation, botanical time, and their relationship to self could first be seen in *Local Weed* (2017). The artist has an ongoing series of weed sculptures from the weeds in her backyard, drawn from life with meticulous tracings and entombed through lost-wax bronze casting. The exhibition will also include several large multifaceted sculptures—called “Complexes”—which incorporate their own systems of display. Evocative of scientific specimen tables, cabinets of curiosities, and domestic display furniture, these complex and detailed arrangements reveal the tenuous frailty of systems of classification and order.

## **ABOUT THE ARTIST**

Born in 1983, Kelly Akashi holds an MFA from the University of Southern California (2014) and a BFA from Otis College of Art and Design (2006); she also studied at the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste—Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. The artist's work was featured in the 2016 edition of the Hammer Museum's biennial, *Made in L.A.* Other notable group exhibitions

include *TITLE*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2017); *LA: A Fiction*, Musée d'art contemporain de Lyon, France (2017); *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann, and Kelly Taxter, Jewish Museum, New York (2016); and *Can't Reach Me There*, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2015). Winner of the 2019 Carolyn Glasoe Bailey Foundation Art Prize, the artist will have a residency and solo exhibition at the foundation in Ojai, California. Other residencies include ARCH Athens (2019) and Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, California (2019). Akashi's solo exhibition *Long Exposure* was curated by Ruba Katrib at the SculptureCenter, New York (2017), and her first solo New York gallery exhibition was held at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in February 2020. Kelly Akashi's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; CC Foundation, Shanghai; M WOODS, Beijing; The Perimeter, London; David Roberts Art Foundation, London; and Sifang Museum, Nanjing, China, among others.

## **PRESS PREVIEW**

Wednesday, August 31, 11am–12pm

See the exhibition before it is open to the public. Meet the artist Kelly Akashi and senior curator Lauren Schell Dickens.

RSVP to [msamay@sjmusart.org](mailto:msamay@sjmusart.org)

## **RELATED PROGRAMMING**

### **First Friday: Kelly Akashi: Formations Opening Celebration**

Friday, September 2, 6–9pm

Celebrate the opening of *Kelly Akashi: Formations* Galleries are open late with music by a local DJ. Stop by El Cafecito by Mezcal for a light bite and drink. Members receive a commemorative button and other special perks. Free admission.

### **Art 101: Glass**

Friday, November 11, 4–6pm | Offsite at Bay Area Glass Institute (BAGI)

Create your own glass artwork inspired by Kelly Akashi with our community partner, the Bay Area Glass Institute (BAGI). This class is designed to immerse you in the fantastical world of glass art and help you create an artwork referencing the natural and historical world.

## **SUPPORT**

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## **SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART**

The San José Museum of Art (SJMA) is a modern and contemporary art museum dedicated to inclusivity, new thinking, and visionary ideas. Founded in 1969 by artists and community leaders, its dynamic exhibitions, collection, and programs resonate with defining characteristics of San José and the Silicon Valley—from its rich diversity to its hallmark innovative ethos. The Museum offers lifelong learning for school children and their educators, multigenerational families, creative adults, university students and faculty, and community groups. SJMA is committed to being a borderless museum, essential to creative life throughout the diverse communities of San José and beyond.

SJMA is located at 110 South Market Street in downtown San José, California. Starting July 1, 2022, the Museum is open Thursday, 4–9pm; Friday 11am–9pm; and Saturday–Sunday, 11am–6pm. For up-to-date information about SJMA, visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org). Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors, and free to members, college students, youth and children ages 17 and under, and school teachers (with valid ID). Admission is free from 6–9pm on the first Friday of every month. For more information, call 408.271.6840 or visit [SanJoseMuseumofArt.org](http://SanJoseMuseumofArt.org).

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### **Press Images:**

[flickr.com/gp/sjma/58821A](https://www.flickr.com/photos/sjma/58821A)

### **Image Credit:**

Kelly Akashi, *Inheritance*, 2021. Poston stone, cast lead crystal, heirloom (grandmother's ring), 6 x 8 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist, François Ghebaly Gallery, and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.