

New Exhibition from BAMPFA's Permanent Collection Explores Themes of Impermanence in Art and Film



***To Exalt the Ephemeral: The (Im)permanent Collection* Showcases Works from the Museum's Collections and Archives that Highlight the Artistic Dimensions of Ephemerality**

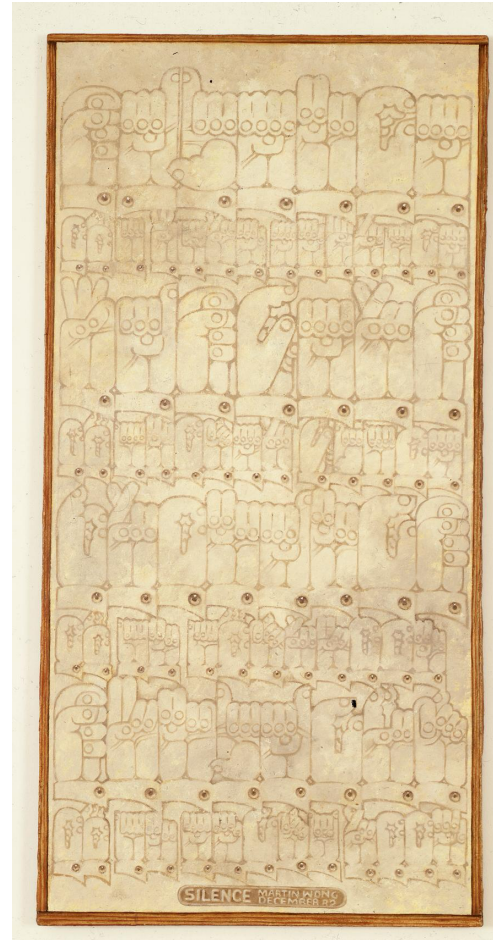
On View at BAMPFA from August 14, 2024 through July 6, 2025

(Berkeley, CA) July 16, 2024—A new exhibition at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) will spotlight the museum's distinctive history of collecting and exhibiting artwork that embraces experimentation and unconventional materials. *To Exalt the Ephemeral:*

The (Im)permanent Collection showcases a historically and geographically broad selection of over one hundred works from BAMPFA's art and film collections that convey ideas of impermanence in both their material processes and thematic concerns. A yearlong presentation that will occupy the entirety of BAMPFA's downstairs galleries, *To Exalt the Ephemeral* explores longstanding questions about how museums collect, steward, and showcase work by artists who incorporate ephemerality into their creative practices.

The thematic focus of *To Exalt the Ephemeral* draws from BAMPFA's unique history as an institution that has long embraced performance and non-object-based art—beginning with its inaugural decade in the 1970s, when the museum championed the vibrant Conceptual art and avant-garde filmmaking movements that were coursing through the Bay Area during that era. The exhibition also encompasses nine moving image works in the galleries from BAMPFA's collection of films and videos, and will also be accompanied by related film screenings in the spring, highlighting the dual commitment to art and film that has defined the museum since its inception. This multidisciplinary ethos is reflected in BAMPFA's uniquely collaborative approach to organizing the exhibition, which is co-curated by nine staff members across the museum's art curatorial and film curatorial departments.

Although *To Exalt the Ephemeral* spans nearly three centuries of history—including eighteenth-century paintings from the museum's South and East Asian art holdings—the exhibition focuses primarily on artwork from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which forms the foundation of BAMPFA's 25,000-work art collection. The exhibition includes work by a multigenerational,



multidisciplinary roster of artists, including Nayland Blake, James Lee Byars, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Sarah Charlesworth, Bruce Conner, Imogen Cunningham, Tacita Dean, Jay DeFeo, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hans Haacke, Eva Hesse, Andō Hiroshige, Sister Corita Kent, Paul Kos, Zoe Leonard, Chiura Obata, Silke Otto-Knapp, Estefania Puerta, Rosie Lee Tompkins, Cecilia Vicuña, Andy Warhol, Martin Wong, and many others.

Reflecting its transhistorical approach to the subject of ephemerality, *To Exalt the Ephemeral* is organized non-chronologically based on the following themes:

- **Performance: Scripts and Scores** - Drawing inspiration from early twentieth century avant-garde movements such as Dada and Futurism, performance art became widely known in the 1960s and 1970s as a radical new mode to blur the boundaries between art and everyday life. Central to the development of performance art during this period was the use of scripts and/or scores—instructions or guidelines that performers would interpret and use to establish a new relationship between audiences and the environments in which art was presented.
- **Materiality and Decay** - By foregrounding the inevitable instabilities and alchemical transmutations of materials, the artists in this section showcase how ephemerality can be central to the experience of an artwork for both the maker and viewers across time. The works on view incorporate both organic and industrially produced materials to transform them into something else entirely, appearing at once vulnerable in their mercurial state and monumental in their feeling and scale.
- **Atmosphere and Environment** - Paying careful attention to the shifting rhythms of the natural world, artists have long been inspired by the dynamics of continuity and change. Whether taking up their paintbrush to mark flurries of rain or snow, pointing their camera towards the gradual rise or fall of the sun, or creating architectural environments that account for the unpredictable passing of wind, artists have used their surroundings as source material to both catalog transformations and reassure themselves that some elements always remain.

- **Photography and Light** - Since its invention in the mid-nineteenth century, photography has had a wide range of uses, applications, and formal approaches. In photography, light is both an agent of creation and degradation—it gives birth to an image, yet too much exposure to light can also cause the image to fade. The artists in this section of the exhibition have turned the medium of photography onto itself to reflect how images operate within our lived environments, expanding the possibilities for looking closely at the textures and transience of daily life.
- **Memory and Memorialization** - The works on view in this section share a similar goal of commemoration, preserving the vital force of memories through artmaking. Through repetitive gestures, rituals, and documentation, artists have explored how the act of recording can accentuate our understanding of what it means to exalt temporary pleasures, setbacks, and all the moments in between. Using a variety of approaches to the act of memorialization, artists in this section demonstrate how memories can at once be profoundly affecting, yet fleetingly precious.

In addition to these sections, *To Exalt the Ephemeral* will encompass a dedicated video installation gallery, featuring Joan Jonas's ambitious five-channel video and multimedia installation *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* (2004-2006). Across five-channels of video presented alongside drawings and sculptural props, viewers traverse Jonas's eclectic visual and sonic references—ranging from imagist poetry and art historical texts to spiritual practices from across the globe. A shapeshifting piece from one of performance art's most monumental figures, *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things* offers a multisensory approach to how cultures archive their histories, and how they transform across space and time.

Reflecting the long history of performance art and other live programming at BAMPFA, *To Exalt the Ephemeral* will be complemented by a yearlong slate of public programs inspired by the theme of ephemerality, including a series of poetry readings that launches in September. Other programming highlights include a panel discussion in Spring 2025 led by BAMPFA's Chief Curator Margot Norton, which will bring together artists, conservators, and scholars to explore

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questions of art historical preservation that pertain to artwork made with experimental methods and alternative materials. More programming information will be announced in the coming weeks; visit bampfa.org for the latest updates.

“As questions around collecting and sustainability have grown more urgent in the art world in recent years, *To Exalt the Ephemeral* provides a platform for audiences to consider how museums care for artworks in their ‘permanent’ collections that are non-object based or ephemeral by design,” said Norton, who has been developing the exhibition since joining BAMPFA last year. “BAMPFA is uniquely positioned to illuminate these questions given the distinctive nature of our art and film collections and archives, highlighting the history of experimentation that has long defined both the museum itself and the artistic community of the Bay Area.”

“As part of our renewed focus on the BAMPFA Collection and the recent change to dedicate our lower level galleries to collection artworks, I am excited to launch the second yearlong exhibition that exemplifies some of the distinctive qualities that make these holdings so special,” said BAMPFA’s Executive Director Julie Rodrigues Widholm. “BAMPFA has embraced alternative and experimental forms of artmaking since our earliest years, a trailblazing approach that echoes throughout our collecting history into the present day.”

About BAMPFA

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) ignites cultural change for a more inclusive and artistic world. BAMPFA has been uniquely dedicated to art and film since 1970, with international programming that is locally connected and globally relevant. It holds more than 25,000 artworks and 18,000 films and videos in its collection, with particular strengths in modern and contemporary art and historical Chinese painting, as well as the world’s largest collection of African American quilts. As part of the University of California, Berkeley, BAMPFA is committed to artistic diversity through its robust slate of art exhibitions, film screenings, artist talks, live performances, and educational programs that shed new light on the art of the past and connect our audiences with leading filmmakers and artists of our time. BAMPFA sits on the

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edge of campus and downtown Berkeley, where it welcomes visitors from across and beyond the Bay Area in a repurposed building designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro.

Exhibition Credits

To Exalt the Ephemeral is curated by BAMPFA's art and film curatorial teams, including Margot Norton, Chief Curator; Tausif Noor, Curatorial Fellow; Anthony Graham, Senior Curator; Kate MacKay, Associate Curator of Film; Matthew Villar Miranda, Curatorial Associate; Susan Oxtoby, Director of Film and Senior Film Curator; Jon Shibata, Film Archivist; Victoria Sung, Phyllis C. Wattis Senior Curator; and Elaine Yau, Associate Curator.

Image credits

1. Sister Corita Kent, *with love to the everyday miracle*, 1967. Serigraph, 23 x 35 in. Museum purchase, Bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange, 2012.9.2.
2. Martin Wong, *Silence*, 1982. Acrylic on canvas. University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive; Purchase made possible through a gift of the Martin Wong Foundation and a bequest of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, by exchange. Copyright Martin Wong Foundation. Courtesy of the Martin Wong Foundation and P·P·O·W, New York.

Visitor Information

Hours

Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Tickets

\$14 general admission

\$12 non-UC Berkeley students, disabled, 65+

FREE BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff; 18 and under; one adult per child 13 and under; and artists in the BAMPFA collection/MATRIX

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