

MEDIA CONTACTS

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CCA Campus Gallery presents *Under the Guard Tower: The Watercolors of Chikaji Kawakami*

On view April 1 through May 15, the exhibition features watercolors created during the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans



Chikaji Kawakami (a.k.a. Nanpo) (1882–1949), *Untitled*, 1944, watercolor on paper, 12 x 18 inches. Collection Monterey Museum of Art. Gift of the Jim and Diane Coward Family Trust. 2023.012.024

San Francisco, CA—March 6, 2026—California College of the Arts (CCA) Campus Gallery presents *Under the Guard Tower: The Watercolors of Chikaji Kawakami*, on view from April 1 through May 15, 2026. Originally presented by Monterey Museum of Art from August 22 to December 15, 2024, the exhibition features 39 watercolors by Chikaji Kawakami (a.k.a. Nanpo), alongside four paintings by Chiura Obata.

Kawakami (1882–1949), trained as a painter and musician in Japan, immigrated to the United States in 1904. After the U.S. government issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, Kawakami was unlawfully incarcerated at the Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno, CA and

later at Topaz Internment Camp in Utah. During his three years of imprisonment, Kawakami created art to document daily life and sustain hope under unjust conditions.

“Kawakami’s depiction of nature can be understood in terms of his artistic choices, but it can also be viewed in the context of the environment and the specific restrictions created by his incarceration. By creating beauty out of hardship, his paintings became both a source of defiance and sanctuary from everyday life,” says curator Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Ph.D.

The exhibition also features four paintings by Chiura Obata, who founded art schools at Tanforan and Topaz and taught more than 600 internees. Under his mentorship, Kawakami developed a style that balances documentary precision with careful attention to nature. His paintings confront the physical constraints of incarceration through art that embodies beauty, observation, and resilience.

Opening panel and performance

A [panel discussion](#) takes place on Thursday, April 2, at 4:30 pm, exploring the role of art under oppression and the importance of artists such as Kawakami and Obata. Panelists include:

- Kawakami’s granddaughter Diane Kawakami Coward
- Monterey Museum of Art Director Corey Madden
- Curator Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Ph.D.
- Contemporary artists Masako Takahashi and TT Takemoto, whose practices address the legacy of Japanese American incarceration

The program features a performance by Nobuko Fukatsu on the biwa, followed by the opening reception at 6 pm.

Originally curated by Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Ph.D., Senior Adjunct faculty in CCA’s Critical Studies Program, for Monterey Museum of Art in Monterey, California, where it was presented from August 22 – December 15, 2024. Exhibition support is provided by The Tanimura Family Foundation, The Jim and Diane Coward Family Trust, Barbara Schilling and Richard Carr, The Henri and Tomoye Takahashi Charitable Foundation, and the Deborah and Kenneth Novack Creative Citizens Endowment.

Exhibition details

Dates: April 1—May 15, 2026

Opening Reception: April 2, 2026 | 6–8 pm

Location: CCA Campus Gallery, 1480 17th Street, San Francisco

Admission: Free and open to the public

Gallery Hours: Wednesday, 11 am–7 pm; Thursday and Friday, 11 am–4 pm

About California College of the Arts

Founded in 1907, California College of the Arts (CCA) educates students to shape culture and society through art, architecture, design, and writing. The college offers free public events and exhibitions that engage artists, designers, and the broader public in conversations around

contemporary questions. Its interdisciplinary programming provides a space for creative exploration and collaboration across artistic practices. CCA faculty and alumni continue to transform art and design in the Bay Area and beyond.