BAMPFA Receives Major Grant to Support African American Quilts Collection

Grant From Bank of America Will Support Essential Conservation of the World’s Largest Publicly Held Quilt Collection by African American Artists

(Berkeley, CA) June 13, 2022—The UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) has received a significant grant from Bank of America to support the conservation of its African American Quilts Collection, a cornerstone of the museum’s holdings and the largest collection of its kind.

BAMPFA is one of a small number of cultural institutions worldwide that have been selected as this year’s grant recipients by Bank of America’s Art Conservation Project, an annual program that funds the conservation of historically or culturally significant artworks that are in danger of deterioration.

The grant to BAMPFA will support critical conservation treatment for nearly one third of the museum’s holdings of more than three thousand quilts, many of which will go on view for the first time in a major exhibition at BAMPFA in 2024.

BAMPFA received the African American Quilts Collection in 2018 as a bequest from Eli Leon, the noted quilt collector and scholar who passed away that year. Spanning more than a century of American history, the collection encompasses works by hundreds of individual quilters—including celebrated names like Arbie Williams, Laverne Brackens, Gladys Henry, Sherry Byrd, and Angie Tobias, as well as many lesser known and anonymous artists. Most quilters represented in the collection are women, many of whom migrated to the San Francisco Bay Area from the southern United States. Among the collection’s most notable holdings are more than five hundred works by Rosie Lee Tompkins, who is...
widely considered one of the most significant quilt artists of the twentieth century; these works were
the subject of an acclaimed Tompkins retrospective at BAMPFA in 2020-21, which the New York Times
called “a life-changing, history-altering exhibition”.

Although Eli Leon spent decades amassing what is believed to be the world’s largest privately
assembled collection of African American quilts, he lacked the resources to comprehensively conserve
these works, many of which are extremely fragile or at risk of deterioration. Since receiving the
collection in 2018, BAMPFA has launched an unprecedented, multi-year initiative to provide the high
standard of professional care and scholarly attention that is needed to ensure these vital holdings
remain accessible to future generations. The grant from Bank of America is a crucial milestone in that
urgent effort, providing essential conservation support for 720 of the most at-risk quilts from the
collection.

The 2022 Bank of America Art Conservation Project recipients include 19 major art restoration
projects that represent a diverse range of artistic styles, media and cultural traditions across the U.S.,
the U.K., Australia, Ghana, Ireland, Nigeria, Spain, France and Mexico. Since 2010, Bank of America’s
Art Conservation Project has supported the conservation of more than 6,000 individual pieces
including paintings, sculptures, and archaeological and architectural pieces of critical importance to
cultural heritage and the history of art.

“We believe that the arts are a powerful tool to help communities thrive and create greater cultural
understanding, and we’re pleased to support BAMPFA’s conservation of this important quilt collection”
said Gioia McCarthy, San Francisco-East Bay president for Bank of America.

“As the institutional stewards of this unparalleled collection of African American quilts, BAMPFA takes
seriously our obligation to care for these irreplaceable artworks so that they can remain a vibrant
resource for scholars and the general public for decades to come,” said Julie Rodrigues Widholm,
BAMPFA’s Executive Director. “We’re tremendously grateful to Bank of America for generously helping
us to fulfill this commitment, and in particular for their discernment in recognizing that these quilts
created by Black women—most of whom lacked formal training or connections to the professional art
world—are every bit as worthy of conservation and support as work from the Eurocentric art historical
canon that is so often the focus of corporate arts philanthropy.”

**Bank of America Arts and Culture**
The Bank of America Art Conservation Project is a key demonstration of Bank of America’s arts
support worldwide, and part of the company’s environmental, social and governance commitment.
Through the Art Conservation Project, programs like Museums on Us®, loaning exhibitions through
the Art in Our Communities program, the Masterpiece Moment video series and sponsorships and
grants, we support a wide range of both local and world-class organizations. Our programs are
designed to have a positive impact on economies and societies throughout the world, and shine a light
on diverse cultural traditions. Through steadfast and strategic support, we have become one of the
world’s leading corporate supporters of the arts. To learn more about our arts and culture support and
programs, please visit bankofamerica.com/arts.

**Image credits**
Rosie Lee Tompkins: *Untitled*, 1996; quilted by Irene Bankhead, 1997. Velvet, found hand- and
machine-embroidered fabric, United States flags made of rayon and cotton, woven wool, batik,
polyester velour, cotton muslin, rayon linen, gabardine, cotton print fabric, and cotton muslin backing;
94 x 131 in; BAMPFA Collection, Bequest of the Eli Leon Living Trust; © Estate of Effie Mae Howard.

**About BAMPFA**
An internationally recognized arts institution with deep roots in the Bay Area, the University of California,
Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) is a forum for cultural experiences that
transform individuals and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and film. BAMPFA is
UC Berkeley’s premier visual arts venue, presenting more than 450 film screenings, scores of public
programs, and more than fifteen exhibitions annually. With its vibrant and eclectic programming,
BAMPFA inspires the imagination and ignites critical dialogue through art, film, and other forms of
creative expression.
The institution’s collection of more than 28,000 works of art encompasses pieces dating from 3000 BCE to the present day and includes important holdings of Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Japanese paintings and woodblock prints of the Edo period, Indian miniatures, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and conceptual art. BAMPFA’s collection also includes more than 18,000 films and videos, including the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, impressive holdings of Soviet cinema, West Coast avant-garde film, and seminal video art, as well as hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film.