

## BAMPFA Announces Major Bequest of Artworks from the Collection of Penny Cooper and Rena Rosenwasser

**Nearly 150 Artworks from Celebrated Bay Area Collectors Will Strengthen BAMPFA's Holdings of Modern and Contemporary Work by Women Artists**

**Exhibition of Cooper and Rosenwasser's Collection Opens at BAMPFA on March 4**



(Berkeley, CA) February 23, 2026—The Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive announced today that it will receive a major bequest of modern and contemporary artwork from the collection of Penny Cooper and Rena Rosenwasser, a Berkeley-based couple who are among the Bay Area's—and BAMPFA's—most dedicated arts supporters. The bequest encompasses nearly 150 artworks from Cooper and Rosenwasser's private collection, which consists almost entirely of work by women artists from the 1960s to the present. On the occasion of this generous gift, BAMPFA will present *Rhapsody: Works from the Cooper Rosenwasser Collection*, showcasing many of the works included in the

bequest, which will be on public view for the first time.

A celebrated criminal defense attorney and a cofounder of Kelsey Street Press, respectively, Cooper and Rosenwasser have spent the past five decades amassing a renowned collection of



modern and contemporary artwork by women artists, as part of their lifetime of advocacy for women in the arts and feminist causes more generally. Since 1977, beginning with a pivotal purchase of a textile piece by Lenore Tawney, the couple have committed to exclusively supporting work by women artists—and since that time, they have acquired work by early-career artists who went on to international acclaim, such as Marlene Dumas, Nicole Eisenman, and Jacqueline Humphries, among others. For more than fifty years, their collection has charted the contributions of women artists to important modern and contemporary movements, ranging

from Minimalism and Conceptualism to contemporary cross-disciplinary experimentations.

In addition to championing women in the arts, Cooper and Rosenwasser have also been steadfast supporters of BAMPFA dating back to the museum's founding in the late 1960s, when Cooper was a law student at UC Berkeley. Their promised gift marks the culmination of decades of generous support for the museum and its collection, to which they have previously donated more than fifty artworks in total—including important works by Jennifer Bartlett, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella that the couple acquired in the early 1970s, which are major highlights of BAMPFA's extensive modern and contemporary art holdings to this day.

Cooper and Rosenwasser's promised gift to BAMPFA encompasses more than sixty years of paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, and photographs by nearly 150 women artists, including such trailblazing figures as Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum, Agnes Martin, Julie Mehretu, Catherine Opie, Doris Salcedo, Kara Walker, and Carrie Mae Weems, among many others. A centerpiece of the bequest are six works by Kiki Smith, a close personal friend of the couple, who received a breakthrough solo exhibition at BAMPFA in 1991. Smith has contributed an essay to an illustrated catalogue that will be published in conjunction with the exhibition of

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Cooper and Rosenwasser's collection. The catalogue will also include essays by BAMPFA Curatorial Associate Tausif Noor and artist Richard Tuttle, as well as an extended roundtable conversation with Cooper, Rosenwasser, and BAMPFA Chief Curator Margot Norton.

On view from March 4 through June 28, *Rhapsody: Works from the Cooper Rosenwasser Collection* will display sixty-five works from the couple's bequest, a diverse selection that showcases the international and intergenerational character of their collecting practice. The exhibition is arranged into groupings reflecting on themes of abstraction, design, and representations of the body, mapping the tremendous contributions of women artists over the last half century. Gathering work from the 1960s to the present, the exhibition also traces the influence of second-wave feminism on artists as they navigated social and political transformation on a global stage. *Rhapsody* takes its title from a work by Jennifer Bartlett from 1975–76, which spurred Cooper and Rosenwasser's love of collecting art, when they were intensifying their commitment to support women artists in the Bay Area and beyond. The exhibition advances a deepening focus on gender equity in BAMPFA's art curatorial program, following other recent exhibitions such as *New Time: Art and Feminisms in the 21st Century*, *Amalia Mesa-Bains: Archaeology of Memory*, and *Making Their Mark: Works from the Shah Garg Collection*. *Rhapsody* is curated by Margot Norton, with Tausif Noor.

"Penny Cooper and Rena Rosenwasser have been championing women artists for over fifty years, and their impact in the Bay Area is extraordinary," said Norton. "It is an honor to care for these important works by so many groundbreaking artists, many of whom are deeply intertwined with BAMPFA's own history, and continue to tell their stories for many years to come."

"Museums have a responsibility to reflect the full breadth of human creativity, and for too long our collections—like those of institutions across the field—have fallen far short of that promise. The Cooper Rosenwasser Collection bequest gives us the rare opportunity to meaningfully right-size the representation of women artists in our holdings, and to do so with works of extraordinary depth and range. This is exactly the kind of transformative, long-view philanthropy

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that changes what a museum is capable of and we are so grateful to Penny and Rena for this generous gift," said BAMPFA Executive Director Julie Rodrigues Widholm.

In a written statement, Cooper and Rosenwasser shared, "We are sustained knowing that these works, having graced our Berkeley home during our lifetimes, will be permanently housed at BAMPFA, to be viewed and appreciated by students and visitors."

### **Image credits**

1. Lenore Tawney, *Way*, 1976. Linen weaving. Cooper Rosenwasser Collection. Photo: Chris Grunder.
2. Nicola Tyson, *Figure on Grey Ground*, 2004. Oil on canvas. Cooper Rosenwasser Collection. Photo: Chris Grunder.

### **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 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.

**For more information, contact A. J. Fox, Public Relations Manager**

[afox@berkeley.edu](mailto:afox@berkeley.edu)

**O: 510-206-6457 / C: 347-771-7152**

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