PRESS RELEASE

BAMPFA Exhibition Showcases Fifty Years of Pathbreaking Contemporary Art in MATRIX Anniversary Survey



On View from January 23 through April 18, 2027

MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation Showcases Five Decades of BAMPFA's Field-Leading Contemporary Art Series

(Berkeley, CA) October 26, 2026—In January 2027, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive will launch *MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation*, a major group exhibition illuminating the fifty-year history of the museum's signature contemporary art series. One of the oldest artist-centered exhibition programs in the United States, MATRIX has profoundly influenced the

MEDIA CONTACT **A. J. FOX** (510) 642-0365 afox@berkeley.edu

museum field, as well as the career trajectories of nearly three hundred artists who have participated in the program. In the year leading up to MATRIX's fiftieth anniversary in 2028, BAMPFA will celebrate and renew this legacy with an ambitious survey exhibition of MATRIX projects spanning the late 1970s to the present.



MATRIX was conceived in 1978 by BAMPFA's then-director James Elliott as a nimble, artist-driven program dedicated to creative experimentation—what Elliott called "a cumulative and ongoing statement" addressing some of the most vital issues of our time. Over the ensuing five decades, BAMPFA has organized multiple MATRIX exhibitions each year, providing a critical and open-ended platform for participating artists to make and show new work. MATRIX has a strong legacy of presenting work by emerging and underrecognized artists who went on to receive international acclaim, including Joan Brown, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Nan Goldin, Shigeko Kubota, Adrian Piper, Martin Puryear, Alan Sekula, Kiki Smith, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Cecilia Vicuña among many others.

MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation will present a constellation of artworks and ephemera that trace how the program has expanded the horizons of contemporary art and curatorial practice over the past half-century. In keeping with the experimental spirit of MATRIX, the exhibition is designed less as a conventional group survey than as a living archive of art and art history, encompassing correspondence, documentation, and other artist-produced ephemera alongside more than sixty artworks that have appeared in past MATRIX exhibitions. By including case studies of some of the most groundbreaking projects that have been produced under the auspices of MATRIX, the exhibition advances the program's foundational claim that artist-

centered exhibition models play a critical role in shaping contemporary artistic production and exhibition programming to this day.

MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation opens with the first three MATRIX projects by Ree Morton, Susan Rothenberg, and Ursula Schneider, and will partially restage contributions from each artist together again for the first time in nearly fifty years. Morton's *Signs of Love* (1976) represents the artist's final work before her death the following year; one of Schneider's *Cones* (1978) will be put on view for the first time since entering BAMPFA's collection; and Rothenberg's iconic painting of a horse in motion represents the work she showed as part of her first solo museum exhibition at BAMPFA. This same pathbreaking spirit extends to more recent works featured in the survey, such as Young Joon Kwak's kaleidoscopic sculptures composed of fragmented body parts in states of transformation, one of which was featured in this year's Whitney Biennial; recent acquisitions of works by Miyoko Ito, Berenice Olmedo, Amol K Patil, and Christina Quarles, which were part of the artists' first US solo museum exhibitions; and Arthur Jafa's *The White Album*, which was originally commissioned for the artist's MATRIX presentation in 2018 before winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale the following year. Other sections of the exhibition will encapsulate themes and modes of experimentation that have recurred throughout the history of MATRIX, ranging from conceptual and performance-based practices, photography and video installations, and politically engaged projects that respond to Berkeley's historical role as an incubator of political and social activism.

MATRIX has a rich tradition of inviting artists to extend their projects beyond the walls of the museum itself, ranging from Felix Gonzalez-Torres's citywide billboard project series to artistic collaborations with non-arts editorial publications such as *Native News*. In that same spirit, *MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation* will encompass performances and other activations that restage and reinterpret ephemeral moments from the series' history. In addition to an opening day panel moderated by Victoria Sung with former MATRIX curator Larry Rinder and 1989 MATRIX artist Nayland Blake, the exhibition will occasion a music and sound art performance by 2001 MATRIX artist Ed Osborn, as well as two interactive, interdisciplinary events presented

by 2010 MATRIX artist David Wilson with Kori Girard and Lucky Dragons. The full slate of live programming and other interventions will be unveiled later this year; visit bampfa.org for the latest updates.

BAMPFA will also dedicate its annual fundraising gala on April 3, 2027, to a celebration of MATRIX. This artist-centered event is expected to include participation and performances by artists represented in *MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation*. Additional details about the gala will be announced later this year.

“In many ways, MATRIX has been the beating heart of BAMPFA and has been central to its mission to catalyze and support some of the most ambitious projects by living artists today,” said BAMPFA’s Phyllis C. Wattis Senior Curator Victoria Sung, who is curating the exhibition with Curatorial Fellow Blake Oetting and Curatorial Assistant Omar Jason Farah. “*MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation* celebrates the program’s originating spirit of flexibility, spontaneity, and open-ended inquiry and will serve as a roadmap as we look toward the next fifty years of artistic experimentation.”

“Although contemporary wings of museums have proliferated in the last few decades, a commitment to presenting the work of living artists in museums was quite radical in 1978,” said BAMPFA’s Executive Director Julie Rodrigues Widholm. “Bringing current and experimental developments in artistic practice into public view has been a longstanding hallmark of our exhibition program. More recently, I enhanced the range of curatorial voices that shape the MATRIX series by expanding the number of curators on our team who curate exhibitions within it. This shift has created a more diverse and expansive view of contemporary art and curatorial practice today.”

About MATRIX

MATRIX, a changing series of solo contemporary art exhibitions, introduces the Bay Area community to exceptional work being made internationally, nationally, and locally, creating a

rich connection to the current dialogues on contemporary art and demonstrating that the art of this moment is vital, dynamic, and often challenging. Confronting traditional practices of display and encouraging new, open modes of artistic creation, MATRIX provides an experimental framework for an active interchange between the artist, the museum, and the viewer.

MATRIX was created at the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1974 by then-director James Elliott as an experimental pilot project, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. When Elliott became the director at BAMPFA in 1978, he introduced the program to the Bay Area. The series has since presented nearly 300 exhibitions at BAMPFA and has featured artists at pivotal moments in their careers, including Scott Burton, Sophie Calle, Jay DeFeo, Nan Goldin, Oliver Lee Jackson, Shigeko Kubota, Julie Mehretu, Adrian Piper, and Cecilia Vicuña, among many others. Over the past fifty years, the MATRIX program has served as a leading model for contemporary art exhibition practices, inspiring museums across the country to develop project series of their own that spotlight some of the most exciting artistic practices today.

About BAMPFA

Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive 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, 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.

Acknowledgements

MATRIX: 50 Years of Experimentation is organized by BAMPFA and curated by Victoria Sung, Phyllis C. Wattis Senior Curator, with Blake Oetting, Curatorial Fellow, and Omar Jason Farah, Curatorial Assistant.

The MATRIX program is made possible by a generous endowment gift from Phyllis C. Wattis. Additional funding is provided by BAMPFA's MATRIX Council.

Image credits

1. Ursula Schneider and Ree Morton, installation view of *MATRIX 1 / Ursula Schneider* and *MATRIX 2 / Ree Morton* at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, February 1–April 30, 1978.
2. Young Joon Kwak, installation view of *MATRIX 285 / Young Joon Kwak: Resistance Pleasure* at Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA), August 7–December 15, 2024. Photo: Graham Holoch.

For more information, contact A. J. Fox, Public Relations Manager
afox@berkeley.edu
O: 510-510-0365 / C: 347-771-7152