

PAUL THIEBAUD GALLERY

Arthur Okamura *Buddha's Garden*

February 17 – April 6, 2024

Opening reception: Saturday, February 17th, 3 – 5pm

Paul Thiebaud Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of *Arthur Okamura: Buddha's Garden*, its debut exhibition of works from the Estate of Arthur Okamura, on Saturday, February 17th, with a reception from 3-5pm. On view will be ten acrylic paintings featuring images of surreal Asian rock gardens, western floral gardens, and representations of the Buddha. A practicing Zen Buddhist for most of his adult life, Arthur Okamura's (1932-2009) works convey the sensibility of Zen in their brushwork, subject matter, and choice of palette. The exhibition will be on view through April 6, 2024.

A longtime lover of gardens, Arthur Okamura began painting both western and Asian rock versions in the early 1970s and returned to the subject repeatedly until shortly before his death in 2009. An avid traveler, Okamura often visited his friend Richard Crawford in Hawaii, who created and maintained a carefully curated specimen garden on his property. It was there during two visits that Okamura painted *Garden I*, *Garden II* (both 2003), and *Garden Patterns II* (2008), capturing the elaborate floral plantings in Crawford's garden. The densely applied brushstrokes and vivid, cascading hues in these works recall the many paintings Claude Monet painted of his gardens at Giverny in the early 20th century.

In contrast, the compositions of Okamura's *Rock Studies* each contain arrangements of three stones surrounded by fields of loose concentric lines that recall the raked patterns in Japanese sand gardens. Okamura's building up of the paint into articulated ridgelines both conveys a sense of energy emanating from the stones, while also lending a surreal aspect to each work. While Okamura never revealed the possible meanings behind his paintings, rocks in Asian gardens can have various, and simultaneous, meanings – islands, mountains, a source of natural power, and/or the figure of Buddha itself, to name a few.

Depictions of the Buddha figure is also a subject that Okamura painted at different points in his life. Included in the exhibition are two large-scale paintings of the Buddha seated in the lotus position. Each depicts the Buddha differently, with *Kamakura* (1994) being the most traditional in its use of pale jade greens and the layered drapery of the figure's robe, and the *American Buddha* (1994) being set against a gradated background of blues and purples and surrounded by radiating ridge lines like those found in the rock studies.

Born in Long Beach, CA, in 1932, Arthur Shinji Okamura grew up in the city of Compton, a part of greater Los Angeles. During WWII, Okamura and his family were first moved to the Santa Anita Racetrack Assembly Center and later sent to the Amache Internment Camp near Granada, CO. When the war ended, Okamura's family moved to Chicago. Between 1950 - 1954, Okamura studied painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also took classes at the University of Chicago and a summer seminar at Yale University. While still

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a student, Okamura had his first solo exhibition of paintings at Chicago's Frank Ryan Gallery in 1953. After moving to San Francisco with his young family in 1956, and later up the coast to Bolinas in 1959, Okamura began studying Zen Buddhism under master Shunryu Suzuki Roshi at the San Francisco Zen Center. Okamura also began teaching in the early 1960s, which eventually led to his tenure at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now California College of the Arts) from 1966-1997. Arthur Okamura died in 2009 at the age of 77.

Arthur Okamura's paintings, drawings, watercolors, and prints have been exhibited extensively across the United States and can be found in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Art Institute of Chicago; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Denver Art Museum; Phoenix Art Museum; Cincinnati Art Museum; Oakland Museum of California; San Jose Museum of Art; Crocker Art Museum; di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art; Bolinas Museum, and the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, among others.

For more information and press inquiries, please contact Gallery Associate, Greg Hemming at: greg@paulthiebaudgallery.com.