

A large red square with a white border, centered on a white background. The name 'Ruth Asawa' is written in white text in the center of the square.

Ruth Asawa



Background

- Asawa was born in 1926 in California to a Japanese-American family.
- She was sent to a Japanese internment camp from 1942-1943.
- Asawa studied to become an art teacher but faced discrimination because of her race.
- After attending Black Mountain College, Asawa began to focus on her art full-time.

Speaker Notes: Ruth Asawa was born in 1926 to a Japanese-American family in California. In 1942, the United States government sent her family—and thousands of others—to an internment camp, where people of Japanese descent were unjustly imprisoned during World War II. Asawa was interested in art from a young age and spent most of her free time in the camp drawing. In 1943, she was able to attend college to become an art teacher. Unfortunately, Asawa could not find a job because of discrimination against Japanese Americans during that time. She attended Black Mountain College and met many other artists who inspired and encouraged her. She began to focus on her art full-time.

Artwork

- Asawa made large sculptures out of woven wire.
- Asawa also made cast bronze sculptures and drawings on paper.
- Her work explored ideas and themes such as:
 - transparency
 - repetition
 - shadows
 - the natural world

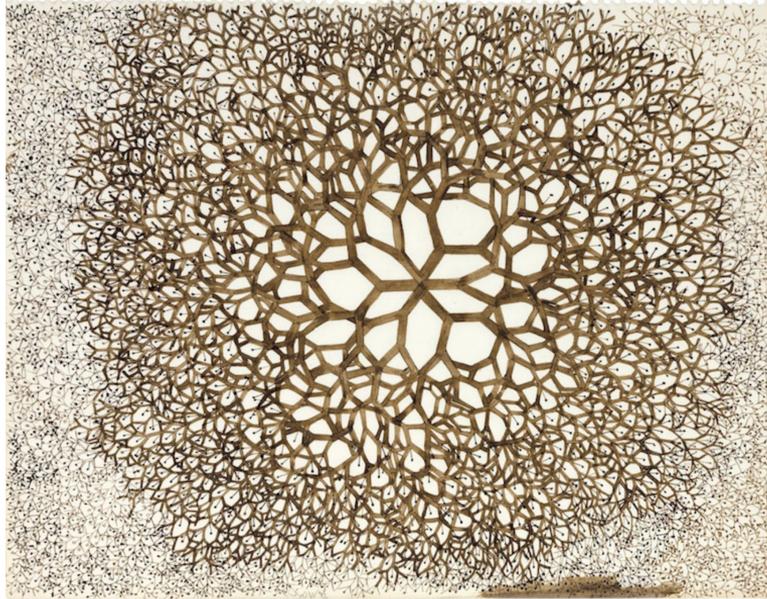


Speaker Notes: Ruth Asawa is best known for her woven wire sculptures, which she made entirely by hand. These sculptures took a tremendous amount of time and focus. When completed, these sculptures were hung from the ceiling, where the light could shine through them and cast interesting shadows. Additionally, Asawa made sculptures out of cast bronze and did drawings and paintings on paper. Almost all of her pieces reflect elements of the natural world. Some of her works look like tree branches, while others resemble water droplets, seed pods, or flowers.

Untitled, 1958



Speaker Notes: This untitled artwork is made of dark brown woven wires and is hung from the ceiling. The sculpture is symmetrical, with thin sections of woven wire between areas that balloon out. Some of these spheres contain smaller spheres inside them. Because the sculpture is mesh, the light shines through it and leaves shadows on the wall behind it. Instead of one sculpture, the shadows almost make it look like there are three sculptures hanging from the ceiling. The rounded parts of this sculpture look like water droplets. This helps to develop the peaceful, calming mood of the piece. The dark brown color of the wire adds to the idea that this sculpture is inspired by nature.



Speaker Notes: Although this is a drawing, this artwork looks very much like Asawa's wire sculptures. The ink used in this drawing is brown and black. The criss-crossing lines begin in the middle of the artwork and get progressively thinner as they get to the edge of the page. The lines look like tree branches growing outwards, with the thickest lines in the middle and becoming more delicate toward the ends. Like tree branches, there are sections that look almost symmetrical, but there are actually variations that keep the art looking organic and natural. Although the colors are dark, the mood of the drawing isn't exactly dark and depressing. Instead, it looks more like a tree in winter, waiting for spring.

Response and Impact

- People responded positively to Asawa's work and she had many art shows during her lifetime.
- Asawa has become even more widely known and appreciated since her death in 2013.
- Asawa and her work were featured on US postage stamps in 2020.
- Asawa is also remembered for her work as an advocate for arts education.



Speaker Notes: During Ruth Asawa's lifetime, she had a number of shows in major museums and galleries, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York. Although Asawa's art was recognized before her death, it became even more known and respected after her death; some of her works have sold for more than a million dollars! In 2020, the United States Postal Service honored her with a series of stamps featuring her wire sculptures.

But Ruth Asawa isn't just remembered today for her artworks. She was passionate about arts education and worked to start programs in many schools. She was also involved in the formation of an arts high school in San Francisco, which is now named the Ruth Asawa High School for the Arts.

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