

Ruth Asawa

*Sculptor, Educator,
and Trailblazer*

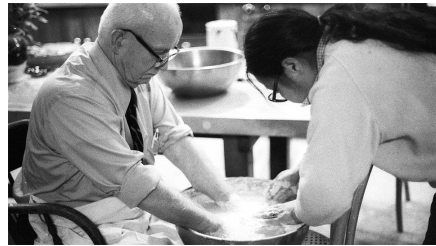


Background

- Born in 1926 in California to Japanese immigrant parents who worked as farmers
- Endured relocation to a Japanese internment camp from 1942 to 1943
- Studied to become an art teacher but faced racial discrimination and adversity
- Attended Black Mountain College and then pursued art



Asawa as a young girl (back row, far right), with friends at Rohwer Relocation Center in 1943



Asawa and Bucky Fuller, an influential teacher, working together on a sculpture

Ruth Asawa, a Japanese American artist known for her sculptural work, had an early life shaped by adversity and perseverance, which influenced her path as an artist. She was born in 1926 to Japanese immigrant parents who farmed in California, and she helped with the farm work from a young age. However, 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. Despite these harsh conditions, Asawa developed a strong interest in art at a young age and spent much of her free time in the camp drawing. After her release in 1943, she was able to attend a teachers' college with the goal of becoming an art teacher. However, because of widespread discrimination against Japanese Americans, Asawa was unable to complete her degree. As a result, she then enrolled at Black Mountain College, where she met artists who inspired and nurtured her. Eventually, these experiences led her to hone her craft and focus on her art. In conclusion, Asawa's tenacity and early experiences continued to guide her journey, ultimately shaping her into the artist she became.

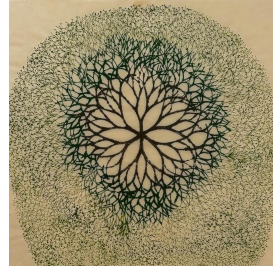
Artwork

Patterns of Persistence

- Sensational large sculptures of woven wire
- Cast bronze sculptures and drawings on paper
- Explored ideas and themes such as:
 - the natural world
 - resilience
 - repetition
 - shadows



Asawa creating a looped-wire sculpture, 1957



Asawa valued the act of drawing more than the drawing itself



*Untitled, 1958
displayed at SFMOMA*

Ruth Asawa, a prestigious sculptor known for creating art inspired by nature and resilience, is best known for her woven wire sculptures, which she created entirely by hand. Because of the careful, repetitive process, these sculptures required a tremendous amount of time, patience, and tenacity. Once completed, the sensational works were often hung from the ceiling, allowing light to pass through and cast intricate shadows. In addition, Asawa also created sculptures from cast bronze and produced drawings and paintings on paper. Across nearly all of her work, elements of the natural world are clearly reflected. For example, some pieces resemble tree branches, while others evoke water droplets, seed pods, or flowers. Overall, her art demonstrates how she drew on the beauty of nature, while the careful process of creating her work reflected her perseverance.

Response and Impact

- Positive response to her unique style
- Widespread recognition since her death in 2013
- Artwork featured on US postage stamps in 2020
- Leaves a lasting legacy as an advocate for arts education



Educating young artists



2020 Ruth Asawa postage stamp

"An artist is an ordinary person who can take ordinary things and make them special." —Ruth Asawa

Ruth Asawa, a trailblazing artist and dedicated advocate for arts education, achieved widespread recognition and left a lasting legacy. Throughout her career, she had numerous exhibitions in major museums and galleries, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York. Although her art was respected before her death, it became even more widely known afterward, with some of her works selling for more than one million dollars. As a result of her success, the United States Postal Service honored Asawa in 2020 with a series of stamps featuring her wire sculptures. However, Ruth Asawa is remembered not only for her artwork. In addition to being an artist, she was deeply passionate about arts education and worked to establish programs in many schools. For example, she helped found an arts high school in San Francisco, now named the Ruth Asawa High School for the Arts in her honor. In conclusion, Ruth Asawa's achievements as an artist and her dedication to arts education ensure that her influence continues to inspire future generations of artists.