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22nd Annual Asian American Arts Festival Cultivates Space for Community Healing and Celebration *Bay Area Artists to Explore Loss, Lineage, and Living On*

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, March 27, 2019 - Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center (APICC) presents the 22nd annual **United States of Asian America Festival**, a two-month showcase highlighting the experiences of local Asian Pacific Islander (API) artists and communities. Beginning May 2 and coinciding with Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, the festival bridges together over 25 producing artists to celebrate the breadth and cultural impact of API art-making. This year's selected Featured Artist is comedian **Irene Tu**, who will perform *Rest In Peace Irene*, a hybrid storytelling and stand-up show. Comprising a total of nineteen community art events, the festival will also present readings by **Jason Bayani** and **Kearny Street Workshop**, a food and storytelling program by **The Rooted Recipes Project**, a visual and performing arts showcase by **Resilience Archives**, and a day of *hula*, song, and oral storytelling with **`Ulumau Collective**.

This year's festival theme of **Collective // Memories** stands as a powerful statement of recognition for the tragic losses and critical legacies of long-time leaders in the Bay Area's API and arts communities. "Through the festival, I want to provide spaces for community remembrance and grieving," says Melanie Elvena, APICC's Artistic Director, "where we can collectively heal as we honor the countless contributions of those who have come before us. Especially this past year, we have lost significant artists and activists like Peter Yamamoto, historian and scholar Dr. Dawn Mabalon, and most recently San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi. I want our communities to be inspired by their legacies, so that we can critically reflect and imagine the different pathways and futures we are building."

Responding to this need for collective healing, this year's festival artists present work that examines themes of loss, lineage, and legacy. For Kearny Street Workshop, the nation's first multidisciplinary API arts organization, **Collective // Memories** means bearing collective witness to the lives and losses under violent regimes. For **`Ulumau Collective**, to remember is to invoke Pacific Islander storytelling traditions. For **The Rooted Recipes Project**, memory-making is something ongoing and shared, a collaborative process of culinary and cultural exchange.

Through the theme of **Collective // Memories**, Featured Artist Irene Tu is pushing her comedy in a different direction. "This year's theme really got me thinking about my personal relationship with my family and about death," she explains. "I haven't gone in depth about those topics previously, so my show this year will be much more personal and be a little more storytelling in style than straight stand-up." This opportunity to experiment with her comedy is not new for



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Irene as she reflects on her previous festival showings. “I got to do my first hour of stand up for my first festival and since then, I’ve really tried every year to do something that challenges me as an artist. I’m a stand up comedian by trade, but I keep pushing myself to write and perform outside my comfort zone.” Speaking to festival’s propensity to produce cutting-edge and community-oriented work, Irene states, “The community and audience that shows up for USAAF is incredible. They are the best audience members because they support API artists, but are also just fans of theater, performance, and comedy.” For this year’s headline performance *Rest In Peace Irene*, Irene Tu presides over her own funeral, confronting her fear of death and loss while prodding and playing with the blurred line of laughing and grieving.

The United States of Asian America Festival has long been a space for API artists, emerging and established alike, to create something new and very much needed. This year, positioned in a poignant moment of looking back, the festival is a cultivation and celebration of Asian Pacific Islander memory-making. Ranging from renewing intergenerational histories to cultivating community care, and spanning grief, revival, hilarity, and everything in between, the festival’s nineteen programs take place throughout San Francisco from May 2 to June 22. A comprehensive festival schedule can be found at apiculturalcenter.org/usaaf2019

HIGHLIGHTED FESTIVAL EVENTS

Festival Opening Reception & Agrarianaa: Art Inspired by APA Agricultural Roots | Co-presented by APICC and Asian American Women Artists Association (multimedia art exhibition)
SOMArts Cultural Center on May 2 to May 23. Kick off this year’s festival with a multimedia art exhibition featuring 25 artists and farmers rooted in the rich history of API agricultural crafts, legacies, and present-day community placemaking. Artists in the show reflect on ancestral farming and gardening practices, addressing topics such as migrant labor, environmental activism, land and food sovereignty. *This event is also an opening reception for USAAF.

“Locus” Official Book Release | Jason Bayani (literary reading)
The Bindery on May 3. Join us in celebrating the release of Jason Bayani’s “Locus” from Omnidawn Publishing. This latest collection of poetry and prose lays down tracks of memory to create a confident declaration of a distinctly Pilipinx-American voice, history, and artistic power. There will be readings by Jason Bayani and guests Javi Semejo, Mae Summer, and more.

Rest In Peace Irene | Irene Tu (comedy show)
Bindlestiff Studio on May 17 & 18. “Rest In Peace Irene” is a humorous look at one of life’s most serious topics: death. In this solo show, Irene explores what it means to grapple with your mortality while trying to live life to its fullest. Dark subject matter include: what to do in case of an apocalypse, preferred ways to die, how to grieve appropriately, and things to not say in front of your elderly grandparents. If you’re afraid of death, this show is for you. If you love death, see a therapist first, but this show is also for you.

KSW Presents: Even Still | Grace Shuyi Liew, Vidhu Aggarwal (poetry reading)



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Arc Gallery & Studios on May 24. "Even Still" is a poetry reading and panel discussion featuring Vidhu Aggarwal, Grace Shuyi Liew, and other local Asian American writers who grapple with the violences of colonialism and capitalism. We will address what it means to survive, to heal from, and to make space for ourselves under violent regimes.

Performing Visible Resilience | Resilience Archives with Lead Visual Artist & Archivist Mia Nakano & Director Kat Evasco (performance & visual art)

California Institute of Integral Studies on May 31. Stories of comedy, drama, and resilience are featured in this unique performance and visual arts showcase. A cast of LGBTQ APA artists share personal narratives on stage, while the walls feature larger than life portraits and tintypes from our partner the Visibility Project.

The Rooted Recipes Project | Kim Boral, Joseph Nontanovan, Aileen Suzara, Thuy Tran (food & storytelling)

Hummingbird Farm on June 9. Come to the table for some community meal-and-memory-making. Using the lenses of cultural foods and land-based practices, The Rooted Recipes Project seeks to share API stories and cultures in order to build solidarity across movements.

Mo'olelo: The Exploration and Perpetuation of Genealogy Through the Art of Storytelling |

'Ulumau Collective (dance, song, oral storytelling)

Buriel Clay Theater on June 22. The "Mo'olelo" (stories) of the 'Ulumau Collective will explore the art of storytelling through hula, song, chants, food & tattoo leaving our multi-generational audience informed, intrigued, and inspired to explore the importance of genealogical exploration, and the significance of how knowing your past can help guide & influence your future.

To see all nineteen festival events, please visit: apiculturalcenter.org/usaaf2019

WHAT/WHO

UNITED STATES OF ASIAN AMERICA FESTIVAL: Collective // Memories

Presented by **Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center** as part of Asian Pacific Heritage Month. Featuring nineteen events in music, dance, film, comedy, food, theater, literature, visual arts, and more showcasing Asian and Pacific Islander artists.

WHEN

May 2 - June 22

WHERE

Various Venues, San Francisco

FOR MORE INFO

www.apiculturalcenter.org

PHOTOS

High resolution (300dpi photos) available at:

<https://flic.kr/s/aHsmC7vzy5>



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ABOUT APICC

Our mission at the Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center (APICC) is to support and produce multidisciplinary art reflective of the unique experiences of Asians and Pacific Islanders living in the United States.

APICC was founded in 1996 by representatives of five nonprofit arts groups: Asian American Dance Performances, First Voice, Asian Improv aRts, the Asian American Theater Company, and Kearny Street Workshop. Since 1998, the center has promoted the artistic and organizational growth of San Francisco's API arts community by organizing and presenting the annual United States of Asian America Festival as well as commissioning contemporary art for and by the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

ABOUT USAAF ARTISTS

Asian American Women Artists Association (AAWAA) advances the visibility and recognition of Asian American women in the arts. Through exhibitions, publications, public programs and an informative website, AAWAA is an accessible resource and portal for educators, academics, researchers, arts and social justice communities and the general public.

Jason Bayani is the author of *Amulet* (Write Bloody, 2013) and *Locus* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2019). He's an MFA graduate from Saint Mary's, a Kundiman fellow, and the Artistic Director for Kearny Street Workshop. Jason performs around the country and debuted his theater show "Locus of Control" in 2016.

Irene Tu is a stand-up comedian, actor, and writer. Named one of the Bay Area's best stand up comedians and an "artist on the brink of fame," Irene has performed at numerous festivals and opened for Patton Oswalt and W. Kamau Bell. This is her third USAAF show.

Founded in 1972, during the height of the Asian American cultural movement, **Kearny Street Workshop (KSW)** is the oldest Asian Pacific American multidisciplinary arts organization in the country. They offer classes and workshops, salons, and student presentations, as well as professionally curated and produced exhibitions, performances, readings, and screenings.

The Resilience Archives is a movement strategy organization that combines arts education, visual arts, storytelling, collection and digitization of community archives into a living digital map to create stories, memories, and uplift the history of California Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer (LGBTQ) Asian Pacific Americans (APAs).

The Rooted Recipes Project is a collective founded by Kim Boral, Joseph Nontanovan, Aileen Suzara, and Thuy Tran. All work within the food industry and are activists, artists, and organizers. It is their connection through food and shared stories that they may reclaim their past in order to move towards a liberated future.

ʻUlumau Collective presents Hawaiian cultural arts, history and traditions through storytelling, performances and workshops. Founded by Susie Kagami, Hawaii Music Live and Kumu Kauʻi Peralto, Hawaiian cultural practitioner and language professor at Stanford University, ʻUlumau's mission is to preserve, perpetuate and share the significance of Hawaiian ancestral knowledge.