

# MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM

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To Kick-Off its Centennial Year, Mills College Art Museum Combines New Work by Kija Lucas with Augmented Reality and Historic Gems from Its Collection



**KIJA LUCAS: HIDDEN HISTORIES**

JANUARY 11 – APRIL 27, 2025



**PHOTOGRAPHY & THE SPECIMEN**

JANUARY 11 – MARCH 23, 2025

**OPENING RECEPTION: JANUARY 25, 2025 | 4:00-6:00 PM**

**Oakland, CA (October 30, 2024)** — Celebrating 100 years, Mills College Art Museum is organizing exhibitions throughout 2025 that showcase the museum's long history as a laboratory space for contemporary artists and highlight the artistic gems in its collection.



Kija Lucas, *Untitled*, 2024, Archival pigment print, Dimensions variable.

**KIJA LUCAS: HIDDEN HISTORIES**  
**JANUARY 11 – APRIL 27, 2025**

Kija Lucas uses photography to explore home, heritage, and memory. Through the seemingly neutral lens of scientific photography, Lucas emphasizes the beauty of her botanical subjects to speak to the embedded layers of history and meaning that impact our understanding of society. Lucas' images invite us to consider the ways our

environment shapes each of us, as well as the generations who have come before us.

Lucas' father was a gardener, and his devotion to the plant world cultivated her interest in exploring her roots through the lens of the natural world. She highlights not only indigenous and introduced (non-indigenous) botanical specimens, but also the tools used for plant propagation. Captured through photographic scans, her specimens are found at sites essential to her personal history throughout the Bay Area. *Hidden Histories* includes many plants specifically found on this campus and speaks to the many layers of use and cultivation embedded in this landscape.

Lucas grounds her work in direct opposition to 18<sup>th</sup>-century botanist Carl Linnaeus' system of taxonomy. In *Systema Naturae* (1735), Linnaeus established a rank-based classification of organisms that still serves as a foundation for biological understanding and that ultimately served as the model for the construction of scientific categories of race and sexuality. Questioning how we choose what is considered "natural," "beautiful," and "useful," Lucas treats the cultivated plants, weeds, native, and non-native species she gathers equally, challenging the scientific framework society has inherited from Linnaeus.

*Kija Lucas: Hidden Histories* is supported by The Jay DeFeo and Hung Liu Endowments and the William and Marilyn Mary Endowment.



Imogen Cunningham, *Magnolia Blossom*, 1925, Gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 in. x 13 5/8 in., Transfer from the Mills College Library, 1976.32

## PHOTOGRAPHY & THE SPECIMEN

JANUARY 11 – MARCH 23, 2025

Inspired by Kija Lucas's use of botanical specimens to reveal hidden histories, this selection of photographs from the Mills College Art Museum's collection explores various modes of the photographic specimen and their operations as forms of knowledge.

Specimens—those singular things meant to exemplify larger groups of objects, people, or phenomena—are often with the sciences. But any object or

creature, keenly observed through the camera, may be elevated to the status of a specimen.

The specimen is a longstanding vehicle for artists, who frequently explore how we project our experiences through things. Isolated in photographs, our everyday objects become specimens that sum up a relationship, evoke a desire, crystallize an identity or a memory. Artists like Kija Lucas—and in this exhibition, Shi Tou, Joe Deal, Binh Danh, and Jennifer Brandon—also slyly invoke the form of the specimen to critique classification systems and the cultural biases they reflect.

Never just a sample, every photographed specimen betrays a choice about representing the whole by example. Works in the exhibition explore specimens as emblems of place, anthropological evidence, teaching tools, cultural monuments, and exemplars of identities and communities. Others are more personal, deploying specimens as distillations of nature's order, tokens of memory, or surrealist thought-objects. While some adopt the look of clinical objectivity to draw upon the specimen's reputation for scientific fact, others opt for visual poetry to highlight artistic interpretation.

*Photography & The Specimen* is curated by Dr. Sarah Miller, Associate Adjunct Professor, Art History and is supported by the Bourne Special Gallery Projects Endowment.

### ABOUT MILLS COLLEGE ART MUSEUM

Founded in 1925, Mills College Art Museum is a forum for exploring art and ideas and a laboratory for contemporary art practices. Through innovative exhibitions, programs, and collections, the museum

engages and inspires the intellectual and creative life of the campus community as well as the diverse audiences of the Bay Area and beyond. [mcam.mills.edu](http://mcam.mills.edu)

Museum hours: Tuesday-Sunday 11:00am-4:00pm, Wednesday 11:00am-7:30pm

Admission is FREE and open to the public.

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