

**Family First Sunday:  
Art and Activism for Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month  
May 2, 2021 // 11am PST**



Welcome back to the Family First Sunday with UCR Arts. Today, we want to talk about something serious that has been going on lately. There has been a rise in discrimination or unfair treatment against Asian communities and nations. Here at the Gluck Fellow of the Arts and UCR ARTS, we condemn these harmful sentiments and send our love and support to the Asian community, at home and abroad. Today we are going to celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month for Family First Sunday through art and activism.

We are going to learn about the Japanese photographer Kusakabe Kimbei and the Japanese American activist and scholar Yuji Ichioka. Our art activity is inspired by Kusakabe Kimbei and his painted photographs.

Kusakabe Kimbei (1841–1934) was a Japanese photographer who ran a studio that made photographs mostly as souvenirs for tourists. In the early days after photography was invented, photographers would add color to the image after the photograph was created. On paper-based photographs, colorists painted thin layers of watercolor, adding color either just in certain areas for a pop of color or all over the picture. This was especially popular in Japan, where photographers made

elaborately hand-colored photographs for tourists, people who visited Japan from other countries, to purchase.



Kusakabe, Kimbei, *Shuttlecock*, undated, UCR/California Museum of Photography.

Kusakabe started out by working with European photographers Felice Beato and Baron von Stillfried as a photographic colorist and assistant. In 1881, Kusakabe Kimbei opened up his own workshop in Yokohama. By 1893, he was in charge of one of the leading Japanese studios selling art to Western customers. He created studio portraits (portraits are pictures of people) and he took photographs of outdoor landscape scenes. Since his pictures were made for tourists, they were idealized which means that they tried to make the pictures of people and landscapes look perfect. He also had sitters, or people who he took pictures of, pose in exaggerated ways, often dressed in traditional bijinga style clothing. “Bjinga”

means “beautiful person picture.” They would hold traditional props like instruments, fans, etc. This can be seen in his photograph *Shuttlecock* (Description: Two Women with Paddles Playing a Game).

During the time that Kusakabe made these pictures, Japan was growing, becoming more modern and like all countries, was influenced by cultures around the world. For example, while Kimbei photographed women in traditional clothes, most women actually wore the latest Western fashion trends during that time period like bonnets and bustles. His photographs also created a fascination with samurai culture even though the samurai had been disbanded for about 20 years by the time Kimbei started photographing. This aspect of Kimbei’s work made it seem that little had changed in modern Japan when in reality, the country had gone through major cultural transformations. This reinforced some stereotypes when the photographs were distributed in Europe and America.



Kusakabe, Kimbei, *Iris Blossoms at Tokyo*, circa 1870-1890, UCR/California Museum of Photography.

A **stereotype** is an idea or belief many people have about a thing or group that is based upon how they look on the outside, which may be untrue or only partly true.

You can see more of Kusakabe Kimbei's photographs in the California Museum of Photography's collection in our [emuseum](#).



Yuji Ichioka was born in San Francisco in 1936. As a child, he and his family were placed in an internment camp in Utah. Internment camps were prisons that Japanese Americans were forced in to during the World War II just because they had Japanese ancestry. After they were released, his family returned to San Francisco where Yuji finished school and then entered the military. After three years of military service, Ichioka enrolled at UCLA where he earned his degree in History. In 1966, he took a trip to Japan and enrolled into a master's program in Asian American studies at UC Berkeley.

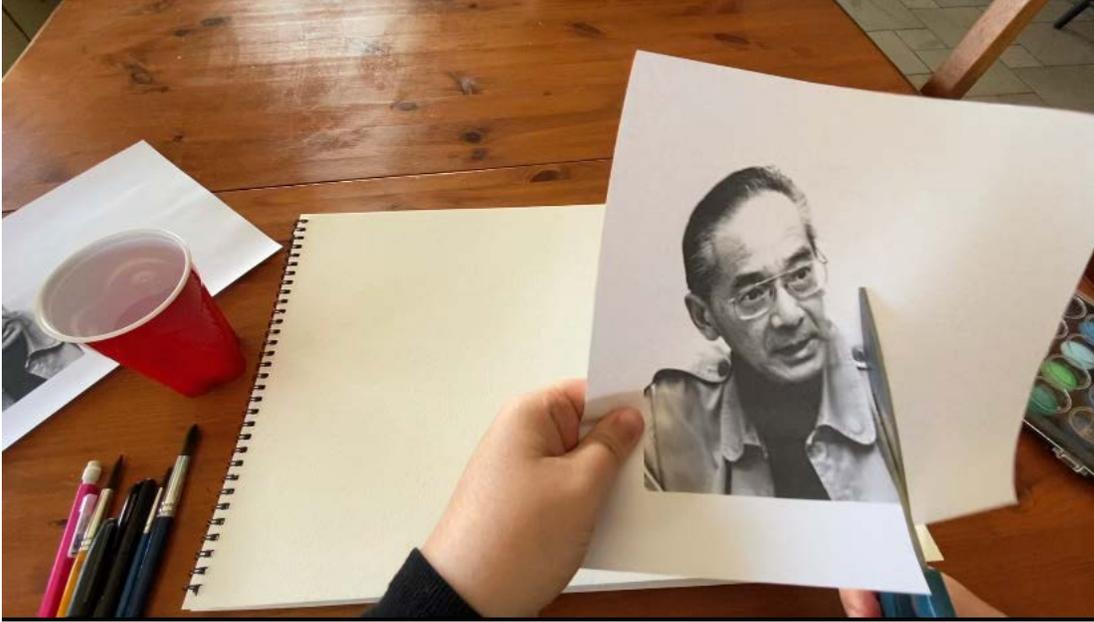
During his time as a graduate student, Ichioka and his colleague Emma Gee coined the term "Asian-American" when creating the Asian American Political Alliance group. The group was formed to provide Asian students of various ethnic backgrounds a space for them to come together and talk about issues that were important to them. Ichioka became an activist for

Asian-Americans, especially in the University of California system. An **activist** is someone who works hard to make political or social change. Ichioka also taught the first Asian American studies course at UCLA and became the director of the newly formed Asian American Studies Center. Ichioka's work and activism helped pave the way for Asian-Americans today. Because of his efforts, he is considered a leader and pioneer of the Asian-American Activist movement.

Now that you know a little bit about Kusakabe and Ichioka, follow the instructions below to create your own portrait of Yuji Ichioka or another activist who inspires you using a technique that is similar to the art of Kusakabe Kimbei.

Instructions:

- 1) Print out a picture of Yuji Ichioka or an activist of your choice



- 2) Next, cut out the image of your activist with a pair of scissors



3) Place your cut out onto your watercolor paper and trace around it in pencil



4) Make fluid lines across your watercolor paper to create little sections, in these sections feel free to write some activist phrases or draw some symbols that represent your activist's significance to the world



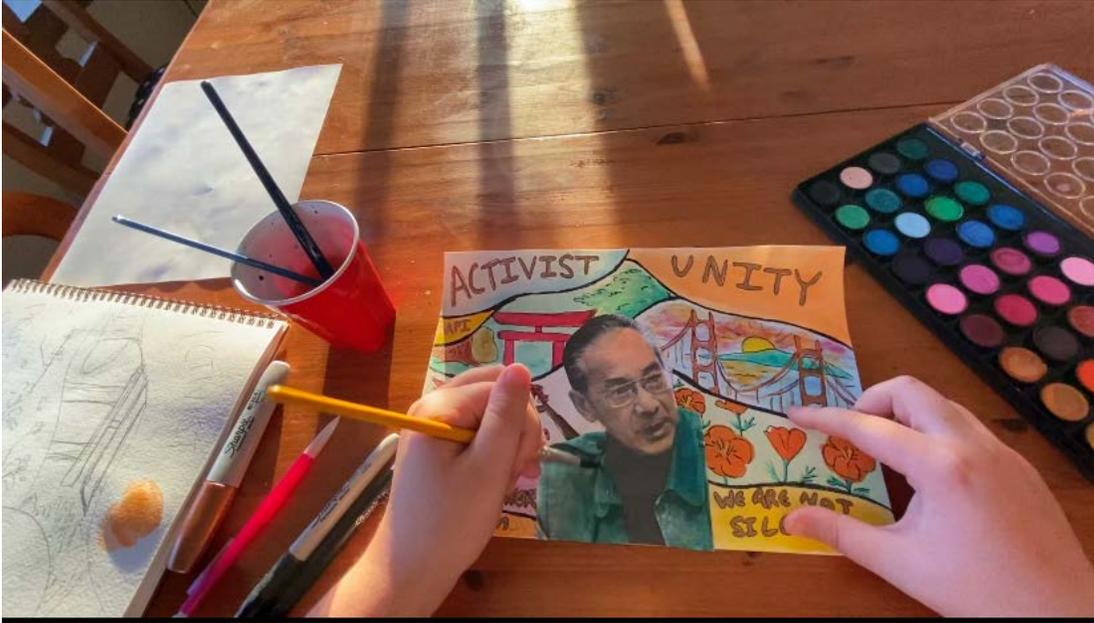
- 5) Using watercolors, paint over your sketches, feel free to use bright colors!  
Allow to dry



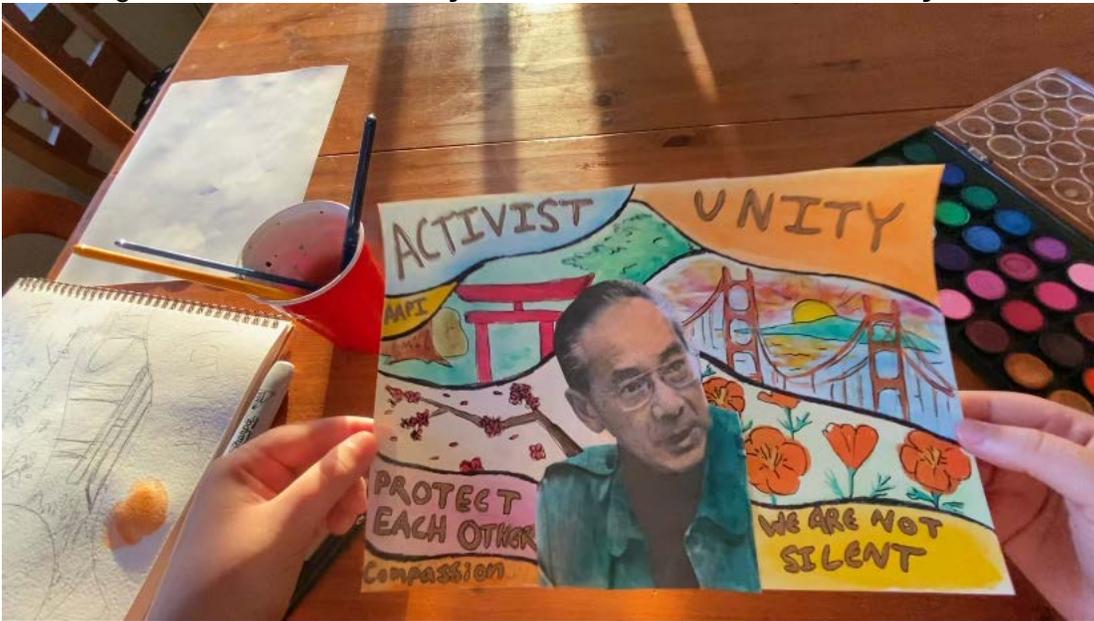
- 6) Once fully dried, draw over your pencil lines in black marker (for an added pop of color, outline your letters in metallic marker)



- 7) Take your cut out image and glue it onto your watercolor picture background



8) Using watercolors, color in your activist Kusakabe Kimbei style!



9) Step back and admire your activist artwork