

## INTERVIEWS

## Meet LA's Art Community: Asuka Hisa Is Busy Prepping the ICA LA as a 2020 Voting Center

An interview series spotlighting some of the great work coming out of Los Angeles. Hear directly from artists, curators, and art workers about their current projects and personal quirks.



Elisa Wouk Almino December 10, 2019

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Asuka Hisa (photo by Darline Morales)

Welcome to the seventh installment of the interview series *Meet LA's Art Community*. Check out our past interviews [here](#).

Asuka Hisa is the Director of Learning and Engagement at the [Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles \(ICA LA\)](#), where she curates public programs and special projects with artists. From 2000–2016, she was the Director of Education and Public Programs at the Santa Monica

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Museum of Art (SMMoA). Hisa was part of the core team that transformed and reestablished SMMoA with a new home in downtown Los Angeles and new identity as ICA LA in 2017.

She is currently a board member of Automata, an organization that presents experimental puppetry, film, music, and performance. She served as Arts Commissioner for the City of Santa Monica (2007–2011). In 2003, Hisa was awarded the insignia of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres from the French Ministry of Culture. Most recently, she served as a lead curator for *CURRENT:LA FOOD* (October–November 2019), a public art triennial produced by the City of Los Angeles’s Department of Cultural Affairs.

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Michael Rakowitz, “Beneath the Date Palms” (2019, Pan Pacific Park), CURRENT:LA FOOD Public Art Triennial, Los Angeles (photo by Kelly Barrie, Panic Studio / LA DCA)

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#### Where were you born?

Los Angeles, CA. The hospital was called Cedars of Lebanon. It later merged with Mt. Sinai Hospital to become Cedars-Sinai Medical Center (if you ever wondered where that name came from). At the time of my birth, the hospital was located on Fountain Avenue; the building is now bright blue and owned by the Church of Scientology.

#### How long have you been living in Los Angeles?

I’ve lived in Los Angeles my entire life except for a 13-year gap that was spent going to college and working in NYC, then living in France for eight years.

#### What’s your first memory of seeing art?

There were some curious artworks or art posters in the house growing up. My parents were not visual art-focused but they liked lots of interesting, eclectic things which shaped my taste for the same.

#### Do you like to photograph the art you see? If so, what device do you use to photograph?

I use my iPhone to document the art I see. It’s the easiest way. I’m bad at deleting so I currently have about 15K photos in my phone. \*sigh\*

#### What was your favorite exhibition in Los Angeles this year?

Anything that went on at the ICA LA, of course! I try to see as much as possible. It’s hard to pick one. Early in the year, I enjoyed the site-specific group show called *Henry is Blue* in an emptied Hollywood Hills home, co-organized by artists Despina Stokou and Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer. I dug the two-part *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s* curated by Mika Yoshitake at Blum & Poe. Caught *Pontormo: Miraculous Encounters* to see Jacomo da Pontormo’s luminescent “The Visitation” painting at the Getty. Most recently, we took a group to see

the Stuart Collection of public art on the UC San Diego campus; impressive and very cool.

### What's the best book you've read recently?

Novel: [The Friend](#), by Sigrid Nunez (Riverhead Books, 2018)

Work-related: [As radical, as mother, as salad, as shelter: What should art institutions do now?](#) (multiple contributions; Paper Monument, editor, 2018)

Up Next: [Why Karen Carpenter Matters](#) by Karen Tongson (Music Matters, 2019)

### Do you prefer to see art alone or with friends?

Both; however, if I really want to spend some time with the work ... it's best alone.

### What are you currently working on?

ICA LA has just been designated as an official Voting Center for the 2020 Elections, for the Primaries and the General. I've been working on getting this set up since before 2016 but we weren't open, yet, as ICA LA. I'm psyched. Everyone can vote here and enjoy a cultural experience!

### What is one accomplishment that you are particularly proud of?

ICA LA just completed its lead curatorial role for the [CURRENT:LA FOOD](#) public art triennial in partnership with the City of Los Angeles's Department of Cultural Affairs Public Art Division. In sum: 15 local and international public artists; 15 local public programmers; 15 public parks; 15 city council districts. This was a big project of mine that began its plan while we were still known as the Santa Monica Museum of Art (2014). It went from October 5 to November 3, 2019. A whirlwind.

### Where do you turn to for inspiration for your projects?

Inspiration is pretty much absorbed from all over the place; I'm a sponge.

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#### TAGS

Asuka Hisa

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