

# There's a massive new exhibit of California women artists: Here are 5 standouts you won't want to miss

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When you visit an art museum, you expect to see works of art by famous names. Not this time.

"These women are not household names," said Joseph Morsman, co-curator of a new exhibition of women artists from California called "Something Revealed: California Women Artists Emerge, 1860-1960" at the Pasadena Museum of History. "If you're a collector of prints, you might recognize Bertha Lum or you might recognize Mildred Bryant Brooks, but if I mention the name Mary Stevens Fish, the landscape artist, nobody knows."

Morsman and art conservator Maurine St. Gaudens have been doing their part to shed light on the accomplishments of these women. In 2016, St. Gaudens published "Emerging from the Shadows: A Survey of Women Artists Working in California, 1860-1960," a massive four-volume work showcasing 320 female artists, most of whom are relatively unknown beyond collectors.

To be included in the book, the artists had to be professionals working in California for a minimum of 15 years. In most cases, they were selected for their art pieces, although "sometimes their stories were so compelling we had to include them," Morsman said.

Morsman and St. Gaudens have now curated the exhibit, which will be at the Pasadena Museum of History Sept. 29-March 31. It will open with work by more than 150 artists from the book and will be partially re-installed with a selection of additional works in January.

"Most of the artists we're showing are not well known,," St. Gaudens said, adding that even the better-known artists are being represented with lesser-seen works. "We're really trying to broaden people's view of these artists."

Here are 5 artists featured in the show you'll want to see:

### **Vivian F. Stringfield, “Old Mt. Washington School, Pasadena”**

This Pasadena landscape painter, who worked as an art teacher in Pasadena and Los Angeles, worked in the Arts and Crafts tradition and is noted for her use of color. Stringfield would paint skies in bold oranges and greens, pushing the boundaries of her expression. “It takes a lot of nerve to use those colors, to do that kind of work, in her time period,” St. Gaudens said.

### **Mildred Bryant Brooks, “Black Mirror”**

A printmaker from Pasadena and South Pasadena, Brooks is known for her highly detailed images and specialized in works depicting trees and nature. The piece in the show, however, has a bleaker message and is seen as a departure from Brooks’ usually lively works.

“Because of the environmental issues that everyone is talking about these days ‘Black Mirror’ is so symbolic, especially because it was done in 1944. It says so much about what she was thinking and her love of nature,” Morsman said.

### **Mary Stevens Fish, “Yosemite”**

This Santa Barbara and Los Angeles painter’s work is from the late 1800s. Interestingly, she didn’t make sketches to finish her pieces in the studio like other artists, rather she did all of her work on site.

“She captured these incredible historical images of California,” Morsman said. “She would go out into nature and painted what she saw.”

### **Bertha Lum, “Japanese Marionettes Crossing a Moon Bridge”**

Raised in the Midwest, Lum traveled constantly, staying with family in Pasadena, Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as spending time in Asia. She is best known as a printmaker and for her signature “raised line” work. In this show, however, her paintings are being highlighted, as they are rarely displayed.

“She was an amazing painter, and it’s very much in that Arts and Crafts aesthetic. Her work spoke to what was going on in the Arts and Crafts Movement at the time, the love and embrace of Orientalism and all of the Japanese-inspired works,” Morsman said.

### **Ruth Miller Kempster, “Portrayal of Myself”**

This Pasadena painter won the silver medal in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics Art Competition, making her the only female in the United States to win a silver medal in

oil painting. Despite that, she remains relatively unknown. Kempster's work has not been shown publicly since 1958, although her silver medal-winning painting is at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens in San Marino. (A side note: Her uncle, Azariel Blanchard Miller, founded Fontana.)

"Her works are so avant-garde; they are so beyond their time that when you see them all together you realize why she wasn't terribly accepted at the time she painted," St. Gaudens said.