

The Here & There Co. Founders On Creating Connection to Promote Asian Diasporic Artists

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12–15 minutes



The Here & There Co. founding members Lisa Young and Steven Abraham and director of curatorial affairs Claire Kim. Photo by Rosa Chang

Founded in 2021, The Here & There Co. is a nonprofit dedicated to supporting and promoting artists of the Asian diaspora, providing a platform to connect them with curators and other key players who can help advance their careers. This month, the organization is partnering with PhillipsX for a curated selling exhibition titled “Dialogues” featuring dynamic interactions between four alumni artists from the organization’s residency program and renowned figures like [Yayoi Kusama](#), [Louise Nevelson](#), [Pacita Abad](#) and [Robert Rauschenberg](#).

The works on display in “Dialogues,” which runs through September 22, challenge materiality and our relationships with other entities, from [Huidi Xiang](#)’s playful yet unsettling metaphors of societal traps to [Justin Rui Han](#)’s complex visual systems and material congregations. Anna Ting Möller explores the “corporeal potential” of kombucha, while [Ye Qin Zhu](#) presents spiritual maps in his work.





Huidi Xiang, *Eye Print #4*, 2024; wood, 3D-printed PLA, 3D-printed PETG and resin, 6 1/4 x 5 1/2 x 6 in. (15.9 x 14 x 15.2 cm). Courtesy the artist

Observer recently chatted with The Here & There Co. founders Steven Adams and [Lisa Young](#), along with Claire Kim, the organization's director of curatorial affairs, to learn more about the organization behind the exhibition and the evolution of its vision and future direction.

The Here and There Collective (THAT Co.) was founded in 2021 to spotlight and support artists from the Asian diaspora through education, direct support and community building. How did this idea first take shape, and how did you turn it into a thriving nonprofit? What can you share about the organization's origins?

The Here and There Collective was born from our experiences as art collectors. Early on, we focused on collecting works by artists from the Asian diaspora. As we engaged in studio visits and got to know many emerging artists, we consistently heard about the lack of community and support. This realization sparked our desire to create a space where artists could connect, learn about one another and gain broader visibility for their work.

At the same time, we were lucky to encounter other diasporic artist communities early in our journey. Spaces like ARTNOIR, HAUSEN and AAPI Arts Network helped show us how to think intentionally and with care while starting small. And so we began by simply connecting people and raising awareness of the incredible work we were encountering. Over time, we recognized the need for a more structured approach that could provide ongoing support and foster real growth in the community. This led us to develop initiatives like our studio residency, expanded educational programs and online and offline community building.

As interest in what we were doing grew, so did our responsibilities. We needed to create a more formal structure to manage these initiatives, which led to the decision to transform the Collective into a nonprofit organization. This allowed us to build a sustainable platform that could offer more support to a broader audience of artists from the Asian diaspora. Our journey with The Here and There Collective has been driven by a desire to fill the gaps in the art ecosystem and create a lasting impact on the community we care so deeply about.





Ruth Asawa, *Untitled (S.032, Hanging Single-Lobed, Five-Layered Continuous Form within a Form)*, 1962; copper wire, 19 1/2 x 26 1/2 x 26 1/2 in. (49.5 x 67.3 x 67.3 cm). Courtesy of Phillips.

The Here and There Collective also facilitates connections between artists and curators. How has the platform evolved—did the spectrum of your activities expand?

The pandemic shaped our approach when we launched The Here and There in 2021, pushing us to start online. This digital beginning was an opportunity that allowed us to reach a broader audience quickly, using platforms like Instagram and IG Live to create accessible spaces for learning and connection. As the world began to reopen, we saw a natural progression toward fostering these offline connections. We started with simple in-person gatherings during art fairs in New York, which brought together people who had previously only known each other online. Seeing these relationships deepen in real life was incredibly energizing, with some artists even moving into the same studio spaces and sharing resources.

(SEE ALSO: [When the Strange Is Familiar and the Familiar Strange – Surrealism Turns 100](#))

The pandemic also made us recognize the need to provide more tangible support to artists and to think about what it means to build community in the art world. The former led to the creation of our studio residency program, which offers artists the time and space to create in New York City—a crucial step for those just starting their careers in such an expensive environment. When it came to thinking about the art world, having started from the position not as artists but as art collectors, we saw how it is an ecosystem inclusive of artists, collectors, curators, gallerists, writers, etc. As our community grew, we looked at how we could help foster a supportive ecosystem through informal events or more structured conversations like panel talks at institutions such as the Hammer Museum.

Looking back at the past four years, the evolution of our platform has been very organic. What began as a space to chronicle and connect Asian diasporic artists online has now become a dynamic online and offline community dedicated to supporting Asian diasporic artists in multiple impactful ways.

Asian diasporic artists encompass a broad range of cultures, languages traditions and sensibilities across the Asian continent. This includes not only East Asia—China, Japan and Korea—but also South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. How do you ensure that all these unique and diverse voices find their space on your platform while respecting and valuing their differences?

We often get the question “Do I count as Asian?” when we do the open call for the studio residency. In many respects, the question of what it means to be “Asian” is at the core of the idea of the diaspora itself. Our answer is always one of providing space rather than limiting it to rigid definitions. If you identify as Asian, you probably are—and you should apply to our open call! We try to check ourselves and push to represent a broad spectrum of Asian identities. Steven, being from Indonesia, feels a personal connection to this mission, as the lack of focus on Southeast Asian artists in the art world resonates deeply with him.



Ye Qin Zhu, *Clouds of the Heart Sutra*, 2024; mixed media on panel, 59 x 103 1/2 in., 149.9 x 262.9 cm. Courtesy of Phillips.

What can you tell us about the Studio Residency program?

Our Studio Residency program launched a few years ago and is designed to give artists the time and space they need to focus on their practice. We offer one artist six months in our studio space in Bushwick, Brooklyn. The space was an intentional choice, as it is in a building with other artists from our community. It allows for organic connections, peers and real-life advice, which are just as valuable as the studio space itself. Initially, we didn't