

BERNICE BING

b. April 10, 1936, San Francisco, California

d. August 18, 1998, Philo, California

ARTIST

“Drawing was the thing that kept me connected.”

Bing's body of work reflects her lifelong feelings of cultural duality.

A leading Asian-American artist, Bernice Bing spent her early childhood in a Chinese orphanage, in Caucasian foster homes and with her Chinese grandmother. She described her grandmother as having residual feelings of “anger and subservience” combined with an underlying strength. “For me there was the difficulty of being an Asian-American child going to a basically very middle-class white school and trying to assimilate both of these cultures,” Bing said.

Bing attended the California College of Arts & Crafts. After changing her study to painting, she encountered Japanese painting professor Saburo Hasegawa. A practitioner of Zen, Hasegawa’s structured lessons, Eastern philosophies, style, and introspection inspired Bing and influenced her life and her work.

In discussing her time with Hasegawa, Bing said, “I had no idea what it meant to be an Asian woman, and he got me started thinking about that.”

A three-month trip to Asia helped influence Bing’s most iconic works, in which she incorporated Chinese calligraphy. Just as her connection to her grandmother influenced her identity, so too did her trip to China. Her journeys through the streets, cities and small villages left her feeling that she was apart. “I suddenly realized that I was in the majority, yet, also, though I had the same skin color, I was a stranger,” she said. “My posture, my dress was different, my accent was quite different—everyone knew I was a foreigner.” Bing’s masterpieces reflect her lifelong feelings of cultural duality and incorporate Eastern technique.



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