

Karen Sako

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EDUCATION

- BFA with Honors, Visual Communications, Illinois Institute of Art, Schaumburg, IL — 2001
- Certified Web Designer, Illinois Institute of Art, Schaumburg, IL — 2008

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Art Instructor, Mainstreet Art Center, Lake Zurich, IL — 1997–2020
- Workshop faculty at Peninsula School of Art (WI), Dillman's Art Retreats (WI), Winslow Art Center Online, Antioch Fine Arts Foundation (IL), Odyssey at Stevenson High School (IL), Focus on the Arts, Highland Park High School (IL), Mainstreet Art Center (IL) and District 214 Visual Arts Day (IL).

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

Mundelein Arts Commission, Mundelein, IL — Sept–Nov 2025

- Developed a new body of work for Lure of the Local: Portals, a juried exhibition.
- Taught a Mixed Media Design workshop.
- Delivered a lecture on the Importance of Keeping a Sketchbook.
- Led a community sketch session.

The Empty Corner, Arlington Heights, IL — Nov 2022–Jan 2023

- Participated in monthly community outreach.
- Conducted art critiques, demonstrations, and artist talks.
- Presented a solo exhibition of new work.
- Mentored refugees in collaboration with the Viator House of Hospitality.

SELECTED JURIED EXHIBITIONS

2024

- Prairie Plein Air Competition, Al Larsen Center for the Arts, Schaumburg, IL — Best in Show (Juror: Don Yang)
- 4th Fridays at the Dole, The Dole Mansion, Crystal Lake, IL — Honorable Mention

2023

- Lure of the Local: Drawing You In, Mundelein Arts Commission, IL — Best in Show (Juror: Ann Rintz)
- Water Works, Mainstreet Gallery, Lake Zurich, IL — Award of Excellence
- Arlington Heights Plein Air Festival, The Empty Corner, IL — First Place (Juror: Elizabeth Shrenk)
- 4th Fridays at the Dole, Crystal Lake, IL — People's Choice Award
- Backstory: The Artist's Process, Guenzel Gallery, Fish Creek, WI (Curator: Crystal Chewsnik)
- NOAPS Associate Member Exhibition, National Oil & Acrylic Painters' Society (Juror: Ann Kraft)
- Art Comes Alive Spring, ADC Fine Arts, Cincinnati, OH (Juror: Litsa Spanos)
- Northern National Art Competition, Nicolet Gallery, Rhineland, WI (Juror: F. Lennox Campello)

- Seeing Red, ARC Gallery, Chicago, IL

2016

- Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women & Work, Koehnline Museum of Art, Des Plaines, IL — Catalog Exhibition
- The Collective Muse, Aurora Public Art Commission, IL — Third Place
- Continuing the Tradition 4, Iannelli Studio Heritage Center, Park Ridge, IL

2015

- Something About the Color Red, Long Grove Artist Guild, IL — Best of Show, People's Choice

AWARDS & HONORS

First Place — Arts Unlimited Contest, Daily Herald, Arlington Heights, IL — 2025

Best in Show — Prairie Plein Air Competition (2024)

Best in Show — Lure of the Local: Drawing You In (2023)

First Place — Arlington Heights Plein Air Festival (2023)

Best Narrative — NOAPS Associate Member Exhibition (2022)

Summit Award — Art Comes Alive, ADC Fine Arts (2021)

President's Choice Award — Painting R' Town Plein Air (2021)

Best in Show — Bits & Pieces, Midwest Collage Society (2018)

Best in Show — Hidden Detail, Naperville Art League (2018)

Best in Show — Art in Nature Plein Air, Crabtree Nature Center (2017)

Best of Show — 4th Fridays, Starline Factory (2017, 2019)

Best of Show, People's Choice — Long Grove Artist Guild (2015)

WORKSHOPS

- Beyond the Surface: Depth and Texture in Oil + Cold Wax — Winslow Art Center, Online, WA (2025)
- Beyond the Surface: Depth and Texture in Oil + Cold Wax — Peninsula School of Art, WI (2025)
- GO BIG! Embrace the Energy, Movement and Freedom of Painting Large in Oil + Cold Wax — Peninsula School of Art, WI (2025)
- Oil & Cold Wax Medium for Beginners — Peninsula School of Art, WI (2021 -2025)
- The Art of Layers: Discovering Oil + Cold Wax: Intermediate — Peninsula School of Art, WI (2022 - 2024)
- Abstract Landscapes: Exploring Texture and Color in Oil + Cold Wax — Idea Gallery, WI (2024, 2025)
- A Journey Through Oil, Cold Wax, and Collage — Dillman's Art Retreats, WI (2024, 2025)
- Mixed Media Design — Antioch Fine Arts Foundation, IL (2024, 2025)
- Abstract Landscapes in Oil & Cold Wax — Peninsula School of Art, WI (2020, 2021)
- Abstract Mixed Media Design — Focus on the Arts, Highland Park High School, IL (2018 - 2024))
- Abstract Mixed Media — Brushwood Art Guild, WI (2021)
- Mixed Media Collage — Odyssey, Stevenson High School, IL (2017–2024)
- Mixed Media Collage — District 214 Visual Arts Day, Arlington Heights, IL (2016–2024)

DEMONSTRATIONS

- Oil & Cold Wax: Creative Process, Elk Grove Village Artists Guild, Elk Grove, IL — 2024

2022

- NOAPS Associate Member Exhibition, National Oil & Acrylic Painters' Society — Best Narrative (Juror: Ann Hardy)
- NOAPS Spring International Online Show, National Oil & Acrylic Painters' Society (Juror: Tom Altenburg)
- Northern National Art Competition, Nicolet Gallery, Rhineland, WI (Juror: Robert Kanyusik)
- 4th Fridays, The Dole Mansion, Crystal Lake, IL — People's Choice, Core Team Award
- Large Works, Antioch Fine Arts Foundation, IL — Honorable Mention

2021

- Art Comes Alive, ADC Fine Arts, Cincinnati, OH — Summit Award (Juror: Litsa Spanos)
- Abstract Symphony, Naperville Art League, IL — Honorable Mention
- Water, Lagunaart.com, Mission Viejo, CA
- Painting R' Town: 1st Annual Plein Air Competition, Richmond, IL — President's Choice Award
- Paint the Town, Barrington White House, IL — People's Choice Award

2020

- Exodus, Aeon Gallery, Richmond, IL (Juror: Zmiya Mochoruk)

2019

- Emerging, ARC Gallery, Chicago, IL
- Rapture, Aeon Gallery, Richmond, IL (Juror: Cheryl Ryan)
- Collage & Effect, The Adler Arts Center, Libertyville, IL
- Best of the Best Show, Alliance of Fine Art, Oakbrook, IL
- 4th Fridays, Starline Factory, Harvard, IL — Best of Show

2018

- Rapture: The Devil You Don't, Aeon Gallery, Richmond, IL (Juror: Cheryl Ryan)
- Bits & Pieces, Midwest Collage Society — Best in Show
- Carmel on Canvas Plein Air Competition, Carmel, IN — First Place
- Paint the Town, Barrington White House, IL — Second Place
- Hidden Detail, Naperville Art League, IL — Best in Show
- Contemporary Nature, Union Street Gallery, Chicago Heights, IL
- Creative Insights, Addison Center for the Arts, IL — Honorable Mention
- Annual Juried Exhibition, Gallery on 16th, Racine, WI

2017

- It Figures, ARC Gallery, Chicago, IL
- Art in Nature Plein Air Competition, Crabtree Nature Center, IL — Best in Show
- Abstracts Matter, 311 Gallery, Raleigh, NC
- Curious Discoveries, Midwest Collage Society, IL
- Best of the Best Show, Alliance of Fine Art, Oakbrook, IL
- 4th Fridays, Starline Factory, Harvard, IL — Best of Show, People's Choice, 4Core Team Award

ART CRITIQUES

- 4th Fridays at the Dole, Crystal Lake, IL — 2024, 2025

COLLECTIONS

- Elke Velez, Velez Orthodontics, Bayamon, Puerto Rico
- Kristiina Sillanpaa, Kangasala, Finland
- John Sheck, China
- The Chatter Box of Long Grove, IL

PUBLICATIONS

- "Meet Karen Sako," Canvas Rebel, April 10, 2022 — [Link](#)
- Christopher Palcek, "New Empty Corner Art Gallery Brings More Culture in Arlington Heights," Daily Herald, Nov 3, 2022 — [Link](#)
- Blink Art Resource 2021/2022, p.178
- Scott C. Morgan, "5 Things To Do For \$5 (Or Less) This Week In The Suburbs," Daily Herald, May 1, 2019 — [Link](#)
- Sami Wendling, "Bays Sako Tackles Unconventional Art," Lake Geneva News, 2017 — [Link](#)

EXHIBITION JURYING

- 4th Fridays at the Dole, Crystal Lake, IL — 2023–2025
- IACS High School & JH Art Tournaments, Schaumburg & Downers Grove, IL — 2023–2024
- 33rd Annual Prairie Arts Festival, Al Larson Prairie Center for the Arts, Schaumburg, IL — 2022
- Members Show, Lake County Art League, Waukegan, IL — 2019
- 56th Annual Art Show, Palisades Art League, Savanna, IL — 2017
- Celebrate the Arts, Arts Unlimited Contest, Daily Herald, Arlington Heights, IL — 2014

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- National Oil & Acrylic Painters' Society (NOAPS)
- Barrington Area Artists Association
- Suburban Sketchers, Long Grove, IL

GALLERY AFFILIATIONS

- ADC Fine Art, Cincinnati, OH
- Aeon Gallery, Richmond, IL
- Epilogue Arts, Long Grove, IL
- Idea Gallery, Egg Harbor, WI
- Mainstreet Gallery, Lake Zurich, IL