

## BONSAI THROUGH THE SEASONS



This lovely Japanese Maple forest created by Ray Thieme illustrates the unique pleasure of the Four Seasons Exhibition of Deciduous Bonsai. People have the opportunity to witness Nature's cycle of transformation from the last of the tree's lush summer foliage, to the glorious fall colors, through the stark beauty of the winter silhouettes, to the bright colors of the spring as the leaf buds emerge first with their fall color, then turning green once more as the chlorophyll levels return to dominance. (See page 5 for more information about the design of this bonsai.)



# BONSAI TOMODACHI

## THE CLARK BONSAI MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

### CURATOR'S MESSAGE



Greetings to all,

People tend to want to recognize, and often celebrate, milestones. Birthdays, wedding anniversaries, marking the passing of the old year and ringing in a new one, all provide a reference for the progress of our lives. It's just what we do. Milestones give us a sense of accomplishment and pride in our endeavors, allowing us a look back, and forward, providing some perspective on the blur of passing days. The Clark Bonsai Museum is about to celebrate such an event. October 14<sup>th</sup> of 2025 will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Clark Bonsai Collection's move from the old Clark

Center for Japanese Art and Culture to the Shinzen Friendship Garden.. We will, of course, be hosting a celebration and you are all invited to join in the festivities. Details will be provided in future editions of *Bonsai Tomodachi*.

Before we get too far into celebrations planned for the new year though, I'd like to savor our successes in the old one. Our long-planned ambition to become a non-profit museum in our own right has at last come to fruition. We are now the Bonsai Foundation of the Central Valley sponsoring the Clark Bonsai Museum. This small miracle didn't happen without the dedication and enormous effort from the folks who were the old Clark Bonsai Collection Committee: Linda Jacobsen, Sally Ramage, Dwayne Berrett, John Wright and yours truly. It also could not have been possible without the unlimited support of our partners, the Golden State Bonsai Federation, the Fresno Bonsai Society and Shinzen Friendship Garden.

*Continued on page 2*

### EVENTS & EXHIBITIONS

**Four Seasons Exhibition of Deciduous Bonsai Oct 26-March 26**

**By Design: The Living Art of Bonsai April 6-July 6 ( See page 4-5 )**

**World Bonsai Day May 3**  
See [www.clarkbonsaimuseum.org](http://www.clarkbonsaimuseum.org)

**Wild Thing! Exploring the Wild Side of Bonsai July 12-Oct 12**

**10th Anniversary Celebration October TBA**



Opening Day Ribbon Cutting Ceremony  
October 2015

**Curator's Message continued from page 1**

If you will indulge me a bit longer, I'd also like to report some of the more dramatic additions to the Collection. As a museum, we strive to preserve, protect and present historical, cultural and aesthetic examples of California Bonsai Art. I am pleased to report that we have made some major acquisitions that symbolize our relentless march toward excellence in presenting the art of Bonsai. One, the result of a long and diligent effort to complete our examples of works done by major California Bonsai artists. Another, as often happens with museum acquisitions, occurred quite serendipitously.

Among our most prestigious assets is a California Juniper styled by none other than the legendary John Naka, who is widely



credited with popularizing the art of Bonsai worldwide. Our example of his Bonsai art has the further distinction of appearing in *Bonsai Techniques II*, a seminal work on the

art of Bonsai written by John and considered a "bible" among Bonsai practitioners worldwide. Additionally, we have among our holdings a distinctive curving "ribbon trunk" California Juniper Bonsai collected and styled by the late Harry Hirao, a close friend and contemporary of John Naka.



For many years we have worked to acquire a bonsai created by the late Ben Oki, also a close friend and contemporary of John Naka and the first Curator of the Bonsai Collection of the Huntington Library, Art Galleries and Botanical Gardens. Together, John Naka, Harry Hirao and Ben Oki represent the nexus of Japanese American development of the art of Bonsai in California in the post-World War II era. Although born in the US, John and Harry in Colorado and Ben in Sacramento, they all spent their childhood years in Japan returning to the US after the war. Only rarely spoken of by Ben, it is known among his friends and family that he was a resident of Hiroshima at the time of the atomic bombing.

All three men were recognized and received awards from the Emperor of Japan for their contributions to the art of Bonsai. I am extremely pleased to report that this year we acquired a California Juniper bonsai collected and styled by Ben Oki, thus completing a quest for examples of bonsai created by these influential California Bonsai artists representing an era of Bonsai and their connections to our collective history.

Our other major acquisition this year is the gift from the Bonsai Garden at Lake Merrett of two Japanese Black Pines that are reported to have been part of the Japanese Pavillion at the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Promoted as a celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal, a major engineering feat and symbol of American ascendancy upon the world stage, the Expo was also a clever scheme by the city fathers of San Francisco eager to put the disaster of the 1906 earthquake behind them and showcase the city as a major trade hub for the emerging Pacific markets. The two Japanese Black Pine bonsai we now have in the Collection represent the earliest recorded examples of the art of Bonsai on California soil.



The Cascade 1915 Japanese Black Pine currently on display in the current exhibition.

On your next visit to the Clark Bonsai Museum look for these new additions to the Collection and for other marvels of the fascinating art of Bonsai.



Julian Tsai and the curatorial team working on the Ben Oki California Juniper.

Salvador of Fresno "First time being able to stop by. What an amazing experience!"



## BONSAI OF THE MONTH: TEXAS CEDAR ELM



**CBCS 039**

Artist/ Maker: Unknown

Common name: Texas Cedar Elm

Botanical Name: Ulmus crassifolia

Date Acquired: July, 2018

Style: **Moyogi/ Informal upright** The trunk and branches incorporate visible curves, but the apex, or tip, of the tree is located directly above the trunk's entry into the soil line.

**Sabamiki Split-trunk, hollow trunk** This style portrays the visual effect of a lightning strike or other severe and deep trunk damage, which has been weathered over time. It is applicable to deciduous species, conifers, and broadleaf evergreens. The hollowed trunk is usually chiseled, making a hollow that can range in size from a shallow scar to nearly the full depth of the trunk.

Donor: Kimura Bonsai & Landscape Nursery/  
FPI Holdings Trust

**Texas Cedar Elm**, the most widely spread elm in Texas, typically grows in flat valley bottom areas. The common name 'cedar elm' is derived from the trees' association with juniper trees, for some reason locally known as cedars. In cattle country they are subject to predation resulting in the stripping of their bark, producing deadwood hollows from insect damage, carpenter ants and boring beetles being the most common in the region.

We do know that this tree was collected from the wild, but as often happens, this bonsai came to the Collection without much background information. So besides not knowing who the original artist is, we don't know if the hollowed scar along the front of the tree



is entirely due to natural predation or if there has been additional carving work by the artist who created this bonsai, inspired by observations of these trees in their natural environment.

*Jordan of Ogden UT. "Beautiful garden, loved the info shared and being able to see such awesome art."*

**You can support the Clark Bonsai Collection and its many world class bonsai such as this one by becoming a sponsor. Please visit <https://clarkbonsaimuseum.org/get-involved/adoptions/> to find out about the benefits of becoming a bonsai sponsor.**

**BONSAI BY DESIGN:  
The Living Art of Bonsai  
April 6-July 6, 2025**

**By Bob Hilvers**

All bonsai design is based on five fundamental trunk forms and inclinations. However, the fundamental forms only serve as a guide to what is possible as interpretations of nature's myriad tree shapes and forms. All bonsai design must also follow the basic aesthetic principles of line and form, balance and proportion, and perhaps the most pronounced use of asymmetry in any commonly practiced art form. For a bonsai artist to successfully create the image of a miniature tree, fundamental design and aesthetic concepts must be melded with an intimate understanding of the natural environments that influence tree characteristics. The *Bonsai By Design Exhibition* will explore the processes used by bonsai artists to develop distinctive and intriguing interpretations of nature's influence



The unexpected image of the lower trunk spilling beyond the confines of the pot and the upper trunk thrusting upward in a dramatic diagonal, creates a feeling of nature barely contained. The entire composition precariously balanced, filling us with an exciting sense of vibrant organic energy waiting for a chance to escape.

**THIS  
EXHIBITION  
MADE POSSIBLE  
BY A GIFT FROM  
MR. AND MRS.  
M. BURNHAM**



Nature has provided much of the visual interest in the design of this bald cypress bonsai and therein lies one of the challenges for Bonsai artists – how to preserve and depict the spirit of a wild tree in a confined environment. The tall, tapering trunk is thus accentuated providing a soaring and graceful image. The crown of foliage is carefully manipulated, resulting in a complex yet harmoniously pleasing blend of nature and intentional design.



Curiously the trunk lines in this bonsai dynamically diverge away from each other creating an initial impression of disharmony. However, the form of this bonsai is of two unequal visual components: the foliage masses on the separated trunks. However the asymmetrical balance between the major and lesser foliage masses reconciles the divergence of the trunks resulting in unexpected harmony.



**Bonsai By Design** Continued from page 4

This bonsai is often called "The Three Dancers." The narrow trunk width relative to the vertical height of the trees creates an elegant, graceful image. The rhythmic repetition of gentle curves in the trunks creates a sense of harmonious movement, as if the trees were dancing to some silent melody. Close your eyes and listen, can you hear nature's music? The trees do.



The line depicted by the trunk of a bonsai allows Bonsai artists to imply movement, shape, austerity, balance, rhythm and a host of other evocative visual messages. Straight lines can be static and uninteresting, yet, this composition is a collection of vertical lines offering a most alluring bonsai. How can that be? The spacing between the trunk lines seems random and each trunk differs only slightly in diameter with an almost imperceptible difference in inclination. No single tree completely obscures another. The result is a visually rich image using only straight lines, providing a testament to the aesthetic genius of the artist that created this composition.



*The Yamanakas of Fresno "Beautiful display of bonsai. Would love to bring friends here"*

Hardly the image of graceful line and asymmetrical form we often associate with the art of Bonsai, the proportions of this rugged coast live oak, with a heavy trunk and compact height, presents an image of wild power, contained but not tamed. A slight inclination of the trunk line only hints at a measure of dynamic movement and asymmetry. A pronounced scar in the center of the trunk, calloused over by generations of growth, gives visual emphasis of some ancient disaster and offers us a momentary glimpse into the tenacity of life. These design elements combine to create a complex visual image that consistently attracts the fascinated interest of our visitors.

The original artist of this coast live oak bonsai is Katsumi Kinoshita who has been a Bonsai artist for over 60 years, serving as the sensei (teacher) of the Monterey Bonsai Club and for other groups of bonsai enthusiasts. He is well known for his mastery of bonsai made from Monterey coastal native species. The Clark Bonsai Museum is honored to have several of his bonsai which are on display in the current Bonsai By Design Exhibition. During our celebration of World Bonsai Day on May 3, we will have the pleasure of honoring Katsumi Kinoshita in gratitude for his life-long contribution to the art of Bonsai and his generous support of the Clark Bonsai Museum.

## VOLUNTEERS AT WORK



Making & Displaying Japanese New Year (Shogatsu) Decorations



Giving families the opportunity to learn some Shogatsu games & traditions.



Turning 100 donated mature boxwood bushes into potential bonsai material.



Explaining to buyers how bonsai are made and cared for.



Inviting visitors to try the scavenger hunt or draw their favorite bonsai,



Giving tours of changing exhibitions to docents, visitors and students.



Transplanting, the biggest job for the curatorial team in winter.

## MEET DOCENT SLOANE LAIRD

By Judith Swick, Volunteer Coordinator



Sloane Laird visited the Clark Bonsai Museum (CBM) in Shinzen Garden a year after moving to Fresno and quickly realized it was a place that called to her, but it took a few years to actually apply to become a volunteer.

With her background in Art History and her love of gardening, the Clark Bonsai Collection's living sculptures spoke to her. Sloane states, "The Clark Bonsai Museum combines these interests by showcasing Bonsai as an art form."



The Clark Bonsai Museum in Shinzen Garden is a Fresno treasure and a lovely, peaceful place to enjoy, according to Sloane. This must be true because most Sunday mornings you can find Sloane welcoming visitors to the CBM garden.

In what spare time Sloane has, she enjoys walking her dogs and in her own words "being a servant to my three cats." One of these dear cats is Mochi, "Mo" for short. Mo was a wild kitten who lived in the CBM garden before his adoption by Sloane.

Welcome, Sloane, to the Clark Bonsai Museum Volunteer family.

*The Kubals of Nashville "Wonderful helpful volunteers."*



## 2024 Clark Bonsai Museum Donors

Sincere thanks to all of our donors this past year whose generosity has allowed us to continue to welcome increasing numbers of appreciative visitors, 37,000 in 2024; develop new educational programs and activities; improve the health and quality of the bonsai collection and continue the legacy of the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture where it all began over 20 years ago.

**Don & Lisa Asperger**

**Belmont Nursery**

**Dwayne & Rich Berrett**

**Willy & Yuko Blair**

**Brian Brandley**

**Tom Bohigian**

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**Hanford Bonsai Club**

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**Ted Falk**

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**Kim Kawaguchi**

**Jay Louie**

**Ruthie & Al Mcleod**

**Carol Nagata**

**Ron & Kathy Nishinaka**

**Vincent & Katherine Owyong**

**Sally Ramage**

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**SanJay Singh**

**Kimiko Sasaki-Schock**

**Marc Stamper**

**Judith Swick**

**Roger & Karen Tsruda**

**John Wright**

### IN MEMORY OF

**Borba Farms for Nadyne Yribarren**

**Patrick Linda for Besty Thompson**

**Mary Latimer for Howard Latimer**

**Helen Kawaguchi for Sam Kawaguchi**

**Mary Ann Latimer for Howard Latimer**

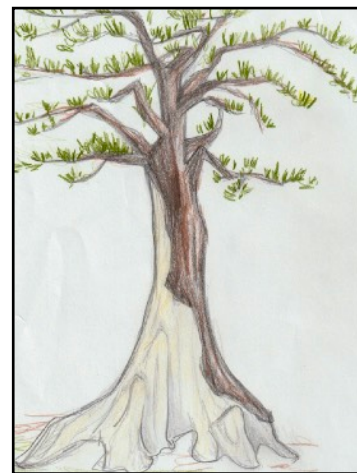
**Bob Hilvers, Dwayne Berrett, Linda Jacobsen, Sally Ramage for Bernice Dyck**

## VISITORS DRAW THEIR FAVORITE BONSAI

What began as an activity for kids a few years ago has become popular with visitors of all ages. Bonsai artists express their impression of trees when they create bonsai, and our visitors do the same through their drawings of their favorite bonsai currently on exhibit. The variety of styles below is just a small sampling. Our bulletin board gallery of visitor art has become a popular stop in any visit to the bonsai garden.



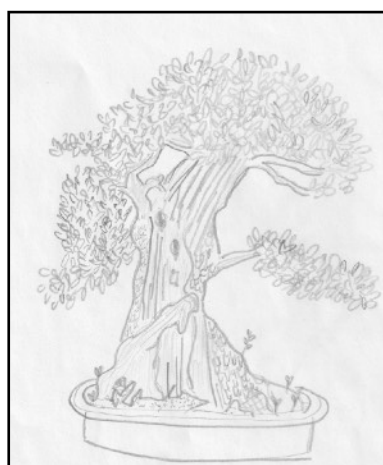
**Bald Cypress in  
Winter Silhouette**



**Bald Cypress in Spring  
Leaf-out**



**Windswept Juniper**



**Ancient Olive**



**Winter Jasmine in Bloom**



**Needle Juniper Forest**



**Prostrata Juniper Scene**