

ISABELLA
STEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

IMAGINATION TAKES ROOT IN WONDROUS GARDENS
AT THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

Ming Fay: Edge of the Garden

Flowers for Isabella

Yu-Wen Wu: Reigning Beauty, 2025

Lee Mingwei: Small Conversation

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Ming Fay in His Studio, c. 1990s.
The Estate of Ming Fay

BOSTON, Mass. (June 20, 2025) – This summer, imagination takes root at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in a [suite of exhibitions](#) exploring gardens as places of creativity and connection. [Ming Fay: Edge of the Garden](#) (Hostetter Gallery) celebrates the life and work of Ming Fay (1943 – 2025). Through the artist's immersive sculptural gardens populated with oversized fruits, seeds, and imagined hybrid plants, the exhibition showcases the unexpected splendor of the everyday. [Flowers for Isabella](#) (Fenway Gallery) brings together a selection of paintings, paired with archival photographs, depicting Isabella's most cherished floral varieties. With a collage of falling blossoms, [Reigning Beauty](#) (Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade), a recently-commissioned work by Gardner Artist-in-Residence Yu-Wen Wu, pays homage to Isabella's love of flowers as well as their fleeting beauty. Further highlighting nature's potential to spark imagination, Lee Mingwei's soundscape *Small Conversation* permeates the

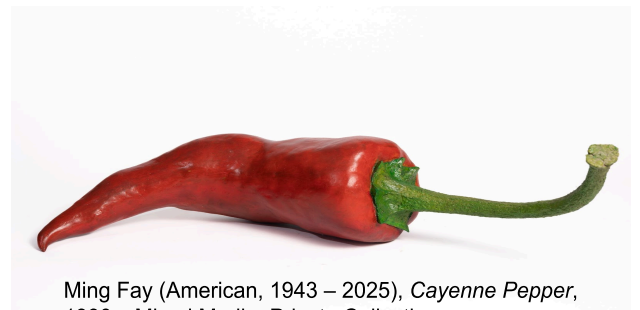
Museum's Courtyard with the subtle strains of crickets, cicadas, and frogs. On view at the Gardner Museum from June 26 – September 21 (with *Reigning Beauty* on view June 17 – October 14), these exhibitions expand our perspectives of gardens as spaces of personal expression.

Broadening our idea of what gardens are and can be in the city, *Where We Meet: Imagining Gardens and Futures* will take place at Pao Arts Center in Boston's Chinatown from July 18 – October 10. This companion exhibition, featuring the art of Ming Fay, Mel Taing, and Yu-Wen Wu, imagines how a garden functions and the role it can play for city-dwellers.

"Gardening and horticulture were central to Isabella Stewart Gardner's identity and her concept of art and beauty," explains Peggy Fogelman, *Norma Jean Calderwood Director*. "The Gardner is celebrating gardens throughout the Museum and beyond our walls. Vibrant botanical sculptures by Ming Fay, intimate floral paintings collected by Isabella, and thought-provoking contemporary works expand our notion of what gardens can mean to anyone who takes the time to marvel at their simplicity and magnificence."

Ming Fay: Edge of the Garden

June 26 - September 21, Hostetter Gallery,
Exhibition Curator: Gabrielle Niu
Assistant Curator of the Collection and
Exhibitions



Ming Fay (American, 1943 – 2025), *Cayenne Pepper*, 1990s. Mixed Media, Private Collection

"In my work I strive to demonstrate the wonder of even the humblest natural forms, lending the viewer a new appreciation of the ordinary." —Ming Fay, around 2000

Honoring the legacy of Ming Fay (February 2, 1943 – February 23, 2025), [Ming Fay: Edge of the Garden](#) is the first major exhibition of the New York-based artist's work in Boston and New England and the most comprehensive presentation anywhere to date. The artist's sculptural installations of wondrous gardens populated with colossal fruits, seeds, shells, and imagined hybrid plants blur the edges between natural and human-made, familiar and fantastic. The exhibition features more than 100 objects, including 80 of Fay's larger-than-life botanical sculptures. Ming Fay's gardens, which draw upon Chinese and American cultural references, were created as utopias—sites for connection, memory, and unbridled artistic creativity.

The first room of the Hostetter Gallery offers a glimpse into Fay's artistic process, inventiveness, and appreciation for the natural world across his fifty-year practice of studio art, public art, and teaching. Selected from his studio and archive, objects on view include notebook sketches, preparatory drawings and watercolors, and pages from zines that he published over the years. Various seeds, pods, and shells from Fay's collection of found natural materials, which served as sources of inspiration and subjects for his artwork, are also on display. The gallery features a video interview with Parker Fay, Director of the Ming Fay Studio and son of the artist, which was filmed in the artist's NYC studio.

This gallery also includes two Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644) bird-and-flower paintings from the Gardner Museum's collection. [Pheasants](#) (mid-1400s) and [Hibiscus and Ducks](#) (about 1500) evoke gardens and use cultural symbols to

express specific aspirations, with certain birds and plants conveying wishes of success and long life. Recently conserved, the eye-level display of these contemplative compositions presents an opportunity for close looking. In the exhibition's main gallery, visitors encounter Fay's towering botanical sculptures in fantastical, dreamlike gardens. The exhibition design's meandering pathways echo the Gardner's own [Monk's Garden](#), part of the Museum's outdoor greenspace, which can be seen below from gallery windows. Amongst an eruption of color, form, texture, and volume, three themes emerge—gardens as sites of connection, memory, and creativity.

A Garden is Connection: While living in NYC (1970s – 2010s), Fay sought ways to connect to the natural world. Spiky sweetgum spheres, twisty locust pods, and papery maple seed twirlers found on city sidewalks served as fodder for the artist who magnified their lines, shapes, and surfaces. Fay's encounters with vendors selling fresh produce in Chinatown inspired his oversized sculptures provoking us to ponder the personality of a ripe *Long Stem Cherry* (1990s), spicy *Cayenne Pepper* (1990s), or humble *Bartlett Pear* (1985). Many of Fay's fanciful sculptures are papier-mâché (constructed by forming paper pulp over steel wire frames and painting the surface), while others are made of bronze or ceramic. In *Money Tree*, a site-specific hanging installation, paper leaves sandwich real seeds, signifying growth and potential for the future.

A Garden is Memory: Ming Fay was born in Shanghai, China, and grew up in Hong Kong before coming to the United States for college in 1961. In his imagined gardens, Fay weaves strands of personal, collective, and historical memories, engaging with historic Chinese art and culture and relating the past

to his own lived experience as a member of the Chinese diaspora in America. Many of Fay's creations are imbued with personal stories and memories, like his *Wishbones* (1980s) that reference the custom of two people breaking a chicken bone, granting a wish to whomever gets the larger piece. Fay began this series after he wished for a child, and his son, Parker, was born shortly afterward.

Ming Fay's gardens incorporate sculptures of culinary and medicinal subjects that were important to the artist as a member of the Chinese diaspora. A large eight-pointed *Anise* (1989) is a sculptural rendering of a spice often used in Chinese cooking, while *Ginseng 3* (about 1988) depicts the medicinal root associated with longevity across East Asia. These works remind us that gardens can be sites for the preservation and sharing of cultural memory and knowledge. Memories can also be closely associated with scent. Close to Fay's sculptures of the seedpod and root, visitors can open the doors of a "scent station" to encounter the aroma of dried anise and ginseng.

A Garden is Creativity: Gardens are expressive art forms reflecting the experiences of the people who made them. Fay described his mixed-media works with sprayed polyurethane foam as a journey beyond the garden into "The Jungle." Reflective of his foundational relationship to the natural world, these works showcase the artist's unbridled creativity through unexpected colors and textures. This section highlights many of the fantastical hybrid inventions of Fay's vivid imagination, from *Prickus* (1990) to *Jungle Doo Dad* (2000s).

Where We Meet: Imagining Gardens and Futures

July 18 – October 10, [Pao Arts Center](#)

Guest Curator: Gabrielle Niu

Where We Meet: Imagining Gardens and Futures, a companion exhibition, will be on view at [Pao Arts Center](#) in Boston's Chinatown from July 18 – October 10. The exhibition explores gardens as green spaces for public art and sites for care and nourishment, memory and desire. Highlighting the roles that gardens can play in our communities, the exhibition encompasses a range of mediums—sculptures, drawings, photography, and live plant installations—by Ming Fay, Mel Taing, and Yu-Wen Wu. The Pao Arts Center and Gardner Museum also collaborated on a public program taking place at Pao on August 14 (see *Programming* below) and a zine, *Between the Bricks*, composed of artist illustrations of green spaces located between the institutions' Chinatown and Fenway neighborhoods.

[Pao Arts Center](#) celebrates and strengthens the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community of Chinatown and Greater Boston through access to culturally-relevant art, education, and creative programs. General admission is free to the public.

Flowers for Isabella

June 26 – September 21, Fenway Gallery

Exhibition Curator: Charles Waldheim

*Ruetters Curator of Landscape and Irving Professor
of Landscape Architecture*

Harvard University Graduate School of Design



Wilton Lockwood (American 1862 – 1914),
Peonies, about 1913. Oil on canvas.
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

“My garden is riotous, unholy, deliriously glorious! I wish you were here!”

—Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1898

Gardens, both interior and exterior, are integral to the Gardner Museum. Isabella envisioned her Museum (which opened in 1903) as an experience that integrated flowers and plants with artistic masterpieces. The Museum's design incorporated a blooming Courtyard and green spaces outside, and works of art with botanical imagery were among the many things she collected to display in the galleries.

The Museum's Fenway Gallery adjacent to the Courtyard hosts [Flowers for Isabella](#), paying tribute to Isabella's love of horticulture and her curatorial vision where living plants and fine art enliven each other. An expert gardener, Isabella often invited artists, especially American painters, to the Gardners' summer residence at Green Hill (Brookline), to capture pictures of her favorite flowers. Thirteen paintings will be on view, primarily canvases depicting her cherished peonies, irises, chrysanthemums, and nasturtiums. Isabella also commissioned extensive documentation of her gardens and greenhouses, and the exhibition includes a dozen photographs taken at Green Hill, which served as a testing ground for horticultural endeavors and incubator for relating art and plants.

Gardens were a creative outlet for Isabella. An archival photo shows Isabella sitting on her lawn at Green Hill where she had placed two paintings of Japanese Irises so she could enjoy them simultaneously with the blooms that inspired them. In [Japanese Irises](#) and [Japanese Irises](#), both painted in 1893, Alfred Quinton Collins (American, 1855 – 1903) depicts Isabella's delicate irises with thick dabs of contrasting colors. He portrays them in extreme close up, taking the viewer into the middle of the dense bed of purple and white blossoms.

[Peonies were another favorite](#) of Isabella's as seen in [Peonies](#) (about 1919) by Denman Waldo Ross (American, 1853 – 1935) showcasing the seasonal flowers in full bloom with shocking pink centers, and [Peonies](#) (about 1913) by Wilton Lockwood (American, 1862–1914). Isabella chose to display both of these still life paintings in the Macknight Room, the latter over her desk.

Isabella grew chrysanthemums in a range of shapes, colors, and textures. Dennis Miller Bunker (American, 1861 – 1890) painted a rainbow of [Chrysanthemums](#) (1888) in Isabella's Green Hill greenhouse. Bunker made this picture after returning to Boston from England where he and John Singer Sargent spent the summer experimenting with Impressionism under the influence of Monet.

Isabella also cultivated nasturtiums and hung them in the Museum's Courtyard each spring around the time of her birthday (April 14), a tradition that continues today. On a visit to the Museum, Arthur Pope (American, 1880 – 1974), color theorist and professor of art at Harvard University, documented the spectacle of the bright orange flowering vines in [Nasturtiums at Fenway Court](#) (1919).

[Yu-Wen Wu: Reigning Beauty, 2025](#)

June 17 – October 14

Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade

Exhibition Curator: Pieranna Cavalchini

Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of
Contemporary Art



Yu-Wen Wu: *Reigning Beauty*, 2025
(detail) © Yu-Wen Wu. Photo: Isabella
Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

A newly-commissioned work by Gardner Artist-in-Residence Yu-Wen Wu is displayed on the Museum's Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade as part of the Museum's

suite of garden-inspired exhibitions and this summer's inaugural [Boston Public Art Triennial](#). [Yu-Wen Wu: Reigning Beauty, 2025](#) is a collage of falling, wind-swept blossoms—the flowers are from photographs taken by Wu in the Museum's Courtyard and greenhouses. Paired with the image of a scholar's rock, the work reflects on the vulnerability of the natural world and the fleeting beauty of flowers.

In this work, Yu-Wen Wu is acknowledging Isabella's passion for flowers as well as the daily efforts of the Museum's dedicated horticulturists. The quiet power of the scholar's rock rising from below evokes traditions of Chinese gardens where these rocks represent a microcosm of the natural world. Here, it marks a place for contemplation in the midst of ephemeral flowers.

The Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade on Evans Way has been dedicated to commissioning and rotating new site-specific works since 2012. The fabric scrim serves as an outdoor canvas that extends the gallery space beyond the Museum's interior walls and serves as public art in the City of Boston.

Lee Mingwei: *Small Conversation*, 2017

June 26 – September 21, Gardner Museum Courtyard

Curator: Pieranna Cavalchini

The Museum's Courtyard will resonate with the subtle sounds of nature's insects and amphibians in *Small Conversation* by Lee Mingwei. The soundscape, made with the artist's voice, blurs the distinction between inside and outside, natural and artifice.

As a Gardner Museum Artist-in Residence, Lee Mingwei (Taiwanese, b. 1964) was enamored with the Museum's lush central Courtyard, considering it a magical urban oasis. During his residency, he asked himself where were the sounds of nature? So, he decided to create them himself, skillfully learning to imitate the songs of crickets, cicadas, and frogs. Just as the Courtyard is an artificial environment, tended by the Museum's horticulturists, so too were the sounds in this project all produced by a human. This multi-channel sound installation (originally created for the Gardner Museum in 2017 and reinstalled in conjunction with these summer exhibitions), aims to heighten our awareness of the fragility of nature and that these noises are disappearing not only due to environmental changes but also our inability to hear them—be it because they are ignored by us or drowned out by human noise pollution.

Programming

[Larger than Life: The Art of Ming Fay](#)

June 26, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Parker Fay, Director of Ming Fay Studio and the artist's son; Yng-Ru Chen, Founder and CEO of Praise Shadows Art Gallery; and contemporary art curator Eugenie Tsai join Gabrielle Niu, curator of the exhibition, to reflect on Fay's multifaceted creative life, his global artistic influence, and his resonant connections to Boston's contemporary art scene.

Drawing Inspiration: Live Sketching with Yuko Okabe

July 31 and August 21, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Visitors can immerse themselves in Ming Fay's garden and nurture their own creativity by making drawings in response to prompts by artist Yuko Okabe, inspired by Fay's fantastic sculptures and drawings.

What is a Garden: Connection, Memory, and Creativity

August 14, Pao Arts Center

Co-organized with Pao Arts Center, an evening of conversation, workshops, and food will feature Erika Rumbley, the Gardner Museum's *Stanley P. Kozak Director of Horticulture*; Sarah Hutt, Co-Coordinator on the Berkeley Community Garden Leadership Committee; exhibiting artist and Gardner Neighborhood Salon Luminary Mel Taing, and exhibiting artist and Gardner Artist-in-Residence Yu-Wen Wu. The program centers around themes of community, creativity, and urban gardening.

Engage Even More Senses

Saturday Open Studio

June 21 – September 20, Bertucci Education Studio, Gardner Museum

Every Saturday from 1 – 4 pm, visitors of all ages can explore their “unbridled artistic creativity” by creating a variety of flowers, fruits, and vegetables for an illustrated garden inspired by our summer exhibitions. The weekly activity, designed by *Polly Thayer Starr Visiting Artist* Rayna Lo, is free with Museum admission. (Children 17 and under always receive free general admission.)

On the Art Wall (outside the Bertucci Education Studio), visitors can cultivate a community garden with plant shapes of varying textures—e.g. burlap, felt, cork, grass. Several of the forms take inspiration from Ming Fay's sculptures, from pears and apples to wishbones and maple twirlers or even a cactus-inspired “prickus.”

[Café G](#) has been inspired by Ming Fay's botanicals and bounty of the garden, adding special items to their summer menu. The spicy stuffed pepper with cayenne romesco sauce is best when cooled down by a white peach-cherry sparkler and finished off with a pear tarte tatin with anise crème anglaise.

[Gift at the Gardner](#) gets into the spirit with sweet treats infused with edible flowers, unique gardening gear, and floral-inspired jewelry. For the serious

art-lover, limited copies of a bilingual monograph self-published by Ming Fay and prints of *Reigning Beauty* signed by Yu-Wen Wu make for special gifts.

Support

Ming Fay: Edge of the Garden and *Yu-Wen Wu: Reigning Beauty, 2025* are supported in part by Barbara and Amos Hostetter, Amy and David Abrams, the Barr Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, Wagner Foundation, the Barbara Lee Program Fund, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Fredericka and Howard Stevenson, and Yuchun and Agustina Lee.

Flowers for Isabella is supported in part by Barbara and Amos Hostetter, Amy and David Abrams, the Barr Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Henry Luce Foundation, Wagner Foundation, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Fredericka and Howard Stevenson, Yuchun and Agustina Lee, and by an endowment grant from the Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Yu-Wen Wu: Reigning Beauty, 2025, is featured as part of the Boston Public Art Triennial 2025.

The Artist-in-Residence program is supported in part by Lizbeth and George Krupp and directed by Pieranna Cavalchini, *Tom and Lisa Blumenthal Curator of Contemporary Art*. Funding is also provided for site-specific installations of new work on the Anne H. Fitzpatrick Façade on Evans Way.

The Museum receives operating support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which is supported by the state of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum invites you to escape the ordinary in a magical setting where art and community come together to inspire new ways of envisioning our world. Embodying the fearless legacy of its founder, the Museum offers a singular invitation to explore the past through a contemporary lens, creating meaningful encounters with art and joyful connections for all. Modeled after a Venetian palazzo, unforgettable galleries surround a luminous Courtyard and are home to masters such as Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo, Whistler, and Sargent. The Renzo Piano wing

provides a platform for contemporary artists, musicians, and scholars and serves as an innovative venue where creativity is celebrated in all of its forms.

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum • 25 Evans Way, Boston, MA 02115 • Hours: Open Weekends from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Weekdays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Thursdays until 9 p.m. Closed Tuesdays. • Admission: Adults \$22; Seniors \$20; Students \$15; Free for members, children under 18, everyone on their birthday, and all named "Isabella" • \$2 off admission with a same-day Museum of Fine Arts, Boston ticket • For information 617 566 1401 • Box Office 617 278 5156 • www.gardnermuseum.org

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