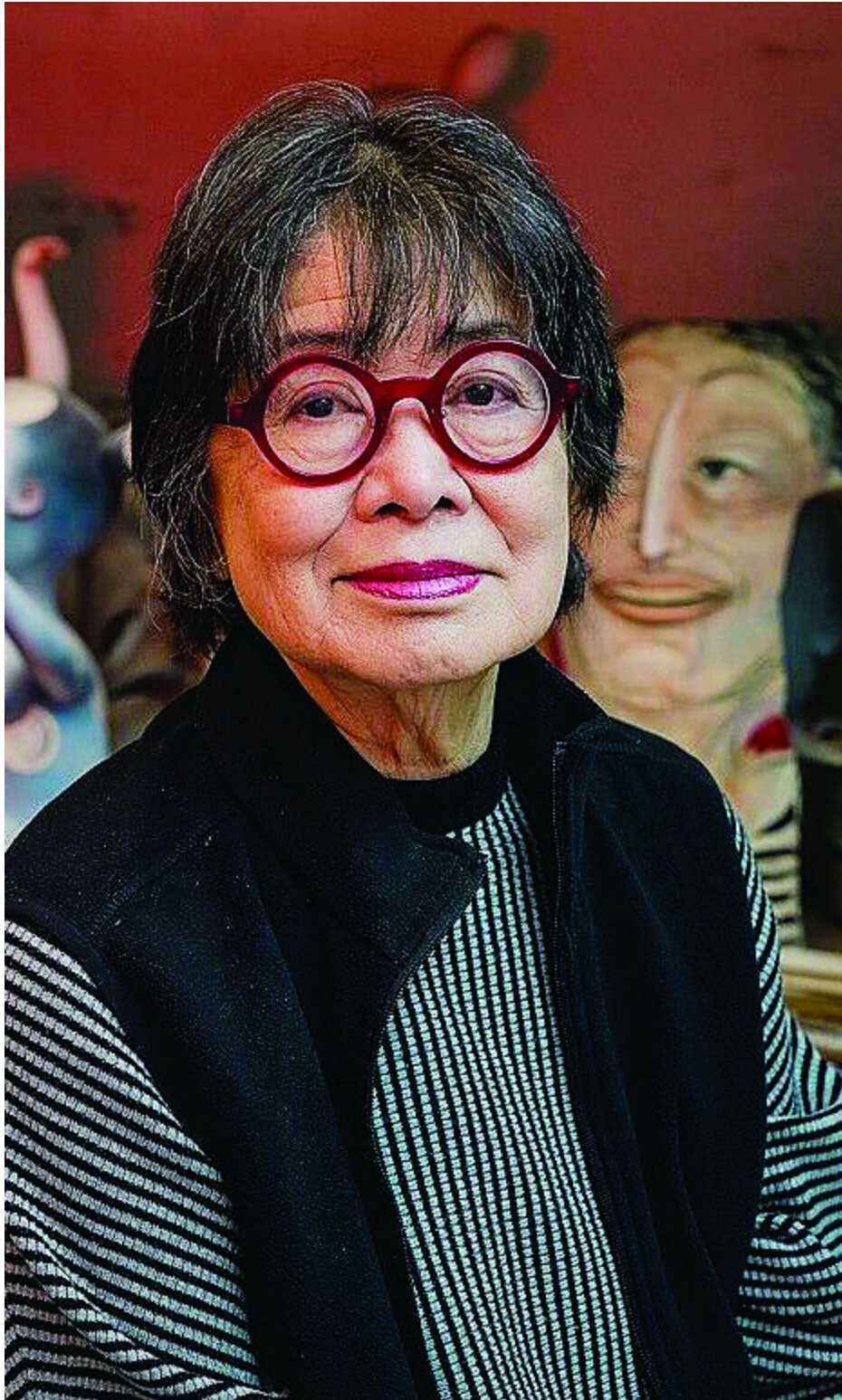


# **INSTALLED MEMORY**

Japanese American artist Patti Warashina's *Women With Pear* to be installed in former Trent Alley, Spokane's original melting pot



Women With Pear COURTESY OF ROB VINNEDGE



Patti Warashina at her studio in Seattle in 2022. COURTESY OF JOVELLE TAMAYO

BY KYRA GOEDKEN THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

Born and raised in Spokane, Patti Warashina went to Lewis and Clark High School and attended the University of Washington in Seattle. Her goal was to one day become a medical or dental assistant as encouraged by her family.

But Warashina's academic adviser had another idea: In her first semester, they signed her up for a beginning drawing class. She was afraid.

"I didn't even know what a charcoal stick was or anything," Warashina said. "I was really scared, more so than taking the academic classes."

This class, however, was a turning point in Warashina's life. She didn't go on to become anyone's assistant, and instead she became one of the most renowned ceramic artists of our time.

Warashina has won many awards over the years, including the prestigious Smithsonian Visionary Award in 2020. Her art is on display in public collections all over the U.S. as well as Japan and South Korea and she has been dubbed the "Queen of Northwest Ceramics." But, until now, Warashina's art has been displayed in her hometown of Spokane in temporary exhibits, like at Marmot Art Space or the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture.

Woman with Pear, one of Warashina's most iconic pieces, will soon be installed permanently at the Saranac Building in downtown Spokane.

Her inspiration for the piece stems from a teaching position she took in Rome after earning her master's degree in fine arts.

"I really loved Italy and the culture there, and of course the art there is just fantastic," Warashina said. "At that time, I was looking at a lot of sculptures and that was the inspiration I had when I got back."

Woman with Pear is a large bronze sculpture of the top half of a woman who has a pear on her head. Warashina hopes this sculpture makes the viewer inquisitive.

"It's strange to have this pear sitting on this woman's head," Warashina

said. “She could have been holding it, but one of the things I wanted to do was to force the viewer to confront this large pear on this woman’s head and bring attention to this strange situation.”

The pear itself is significant to the sculpture, because of its placement, but it’s also important to Warashina and her meaning behind it.

“Why the pear? The pear is a fruit, and the form of the pear is very feminine,” Warashina said. “It’s a symbol of peace, harmony and good vibes.”

Although Warashina has spent her life creating provocative pieces, and has fallen in love with the craft, she was only able to achieve so much because she worked hard.

“I don’t think of it as something special I get to do,” Warashina said. “I treat it like a job ... but being an artist is a privilege and I feel so lucky that, somehow, I was able to do this for my life.

Warashina also uses creation time as an escape.

“I think of it as almost like going to a psychiatrist, and you’re just kind of going out there and spilling your beans,” Warashina said.

Marshall Peterson, owner of Marmot Art Space downtown, has worked closely with Warashina for the past few years.

“This is Patti we’re talking about,” Peterson said, “and everything she does is magic.”

For the past two years, Peterson displayed *Woman With Pear* at the Marmot Art Space, but Peterson said releasing it to the public will serve a greater purpose.

Peterson sold *Woman With Pear* to Jim Sheehan who then donated it to the Trent Alley Project to be displayed in the Saranac Building in the historic Trent Alley District.

“The idea is that you open the doors to the Saranac, and you’re just blown over by this big piece of art,” Peterson said. “And then once you’re done basking in its beauty, you move on over to the Trent Alley plaques that have a real, honest discussion about the Japanese American experience here in



Spokane.”

The Alley is a significant location in Spokane’s history. It is one of the few remaining buildings left of the vibrant Japanese community that was forced to live on the eastern side of downtown due to the racial discrimination known as “redlining.”

The Saranac Building was originally a single-room occupancy hotel and has since been renovated and used as a space for art, shops and offices, and is home to the Magic Lantern Theatre next door to a historical marker funded by the Trent Alley Project.

The goal of the Trent Alley Project is to preserve the history of the once vibrant Japanese community there. Members of the project started by placing informational plaques in the Saranac in 2023.

“We’ve had other community members coming forward wanting to support the remembrance of Trent Alley, so the Patti Warashina sculpture is a huge investment for the project,” said project member DeAnn Yamamoto.

Warashina’s family lived near Trent Alley while her father worked as a dentist. Her father was born in Japan and her mother was a Japanese American.

Warashina’s success is exactly what the Trent Alley Project wants to celebrate when preserving Trent Alleys history.

“The investment was made not only for the beauty of art, but for the recognition of the Japanese community in the Saranac and in Trent Alley as a whole,” Yamamoto said.

Yamamoto’s family immigrated to America and settled in Spokane, where her father was born.

Her mother grew up in Wapato, Washington, and was sent to an internment camp during World War II for three years. Eventually Yamamoto’s mother and her family were freed and moved to Trent Alley.

“Trent Alley was not a glorious place by any means. The community knew it as Skid Row. It was a rundown part of town, but it was where Japanese were allowed to live,” Yamamoto said. Japanese couldn’t own anything above or reside above I think it was Ninth Avenue.”

Even though there were hardships and discrimination, Trent Alley became a close-knit Japanese community.

“The Japanese community stayed pretty tightly together, physically located in that area because of the inability to purchase land,” Yamamoto said.

“That’s kind of the good and bad of it because I had a great childhood,” she added. “I had a lot of mothers, a lot of people watching after me in the Japanese community. But it was all kind of born out of racism, really.”

The Trent Alley Project hopes to educate new generations of Spokane residents about the history of Japanese immigrants that lived in Spokane and the role they played in building Spokane and its culture.

The father of Joanne Ferris, another Trent Alley Project member, grew up in the Alley, while Japanese citizens were confined to the land below Ninth.

“There wasn’t a lot of money down there, so they worked very hard. It’s a part of our history, but it was totally erased,” Ferris said, referring to the demolition of Trent Alley in the early 1970s to make way for Expo ’74.

“So, there’s nothing left except the Saranac,” Ferris said.

These events make up Spokane’s history, which is why the Trent Alley Project is working with KSPS to create educational movies and a curriculum that can be taught in schools and to homeschoolers about the history of Japanese internment camps on the West Coast, Japanese American history in Spokane and the history of Trent Alley.

The purchase of Warashina’s sculpture and its permanent placement in the Saranac is a great way to get the word out about the historical importance of Trent Alley.

“The pear’s shape (in Woman With Pear) could reflect the dual expectations – not only as a woman but also as someone balancing two worlds,” Ferris said. “Our parents expected us to be good Americans in the face of racism. For Japanese Americans, particularly women, balancing dignity and resilience amidst visible and invisible challenges is like balancing a pear on your head.

“It’s not easily done.”

While there is no official date for the installation of the piece, it will likely be installed in December.

“It’s extremely flattering to be to be recognized in my hometown,” Warashina said. “It’s wonderful and I always admired Harold Balazs.”

Warashina will join the ranks of Spokane sculptors who have permanent installations in the city, like Balazs’ Rotary Riverfront Fountain and Paula Mary Turnbull’s Garbage Goat.

Now Warashina will be a permanent fixture in Spokane’s landscape providing historical significance and artistic beauty to an already artsy city.

“It always brings a smile to my face,” Warashina said. “I feel like to be in Spokane is to be with really great company.”