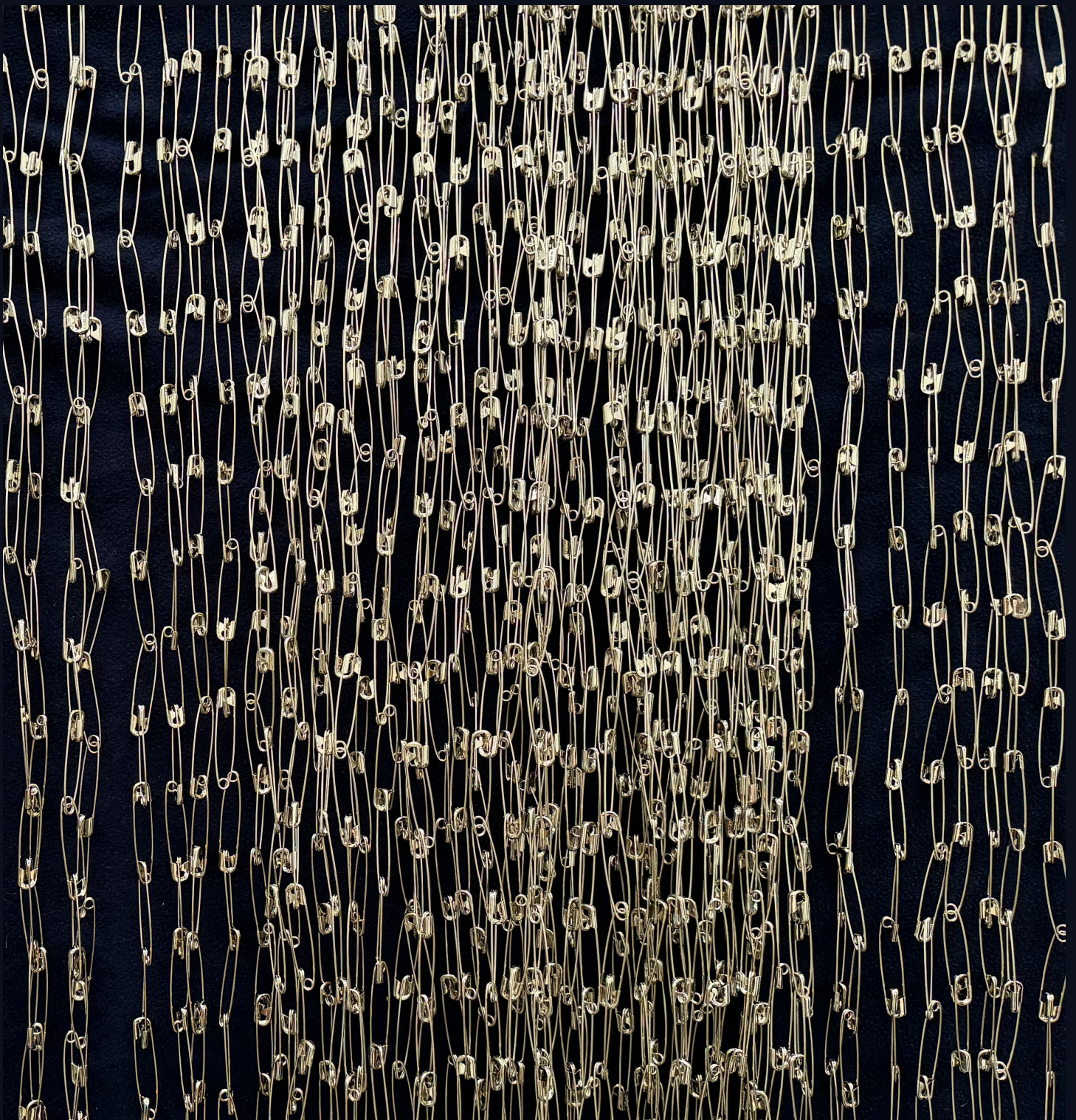


Tamiko Kawata: *Together II*



November 20, 2025 – January 24, 2026

Opening Reception: Thursday, November 20, from 6:00–8:00 p.m.

Alison Bradley Projects

526 W 26th St., #815, New York, NY 10001

Tamiko Kawata: *Together II*

Text by Sofia Thiệu D'Amico

Alison Bradley Projects is pleased to present **Tamiko Kawata: *Together II***, the artist's second exhibition with the gallery. Spanning six decades of creative inquiry, the exhibition brings together works on paper, sculptures, and a new site-specific installation. The exhibition opens on **November 20, 2025**, with a reception from 6:00–8:00 p.m., remaining on view **through January 24, 2026**.

As a young hiker in the Japanese Alps, **Tamiko Kawata** would crane her neck toward pine trees, mountains, and waterfalls—each encounter a lesson in scale and interdependence. These early experiences impressed upon her the sublime realization of one's own fragility and interconnectedness within vast natural systems. In our contemporary moment, where individual agency often feels diminished by legislative oversight, the omnipresence of media, and deepening political division, Kawata's artistic practice—and indeed her very way of being—urges a return to the small, the tactile, and the human. Her largest work to date, *Together II: Waterfall*, is a monumental, site-specific installation that magnifies the conceptual and poetic possibilities of her signature material: the safety pin. Through Kawata's transformative vision, this humble everyday object becomes a metaphor for collective resilience and interdependence.

While studying Sculpture at the University of Tsukuba / Tokyo University of Education, Kawata developed her practice under the influence of avant-garde movements such as Dada and Bauhaus abstraction—all of which championed unconventional materials and the social significance of artistic production in the immediate aftermath of the war. When she immigrated to the United States from Japan in 1961, these ideas found physical form in the most modest of materials. Faced with the practical challenge of resizing American clothing that hung too long on her frame, Kawata turned to safety pins—then uncommon in Japan—as a quick fix. Necessity, however, gave way to discovery. The safety pin's precise geometry, its quiet strength, and its capacity to bind inspired a career-long exploration. Kawata found beauty in what was meant to be hidden and supportive, a sense of elegance in the glint of steel, and a metaphor in the act of pinning. Through this object, she articulated the nuances of her diasporic experience: the interlocking of Japanese and American identities, the collective mending that defined her postwar youth, and the continual process of transformation through touch, adaptation, and intimate contact with the world.

Over the years, Kawata began ordering pins in bulk from a single wholesaler, Island Sewing Supplies, Inc., sustaining a relationship that now spans half a century. When contacted to fill the *Together II* order, Island Sewing's Gilbert Colon responded with disbelief: "I was twenty years old when you first ordered from me—now I'm seventy!" This enduring exchange speaks to the care that threads itself through Kawata's practice: an ongoing dialogue between artist, material, and community.

Together II: Waterfall comprises 150 boxes—over 600 pounds—of safety pins, totaling approximately 216,600 individual units. The work unfolds across the gallery walls as an immense, undulating wave of silver. At eighty-nine years old, Kawata embarked on this ambitious project in the same collaborative spirit that has long animated her work. In a new commission produced with Alison Bradley Projects, Kawata held a series of public workshops over two weeks in New York City. More than 130 participants—artists, students, neighbors, and volunteers—gathered to learn Kawata’s sculptural technique, assembling ten-foot chains of interlinked pins. The repetitive yet mindful act of linking pins became an exercise in both craft and communion, an embodiment of the interpersonal connections that sustain community life.



By openly inviting diverse volunteers of varying experiences into the creative process, *Together II* transforms collective labor into collective meaning. The installation foregrounds the generative power of organizing and mutual care in a time of fragmentation and uncertainty. As its title suggests, *Together II: Waterfall* continues the conversation begun with *Celebration/Together* (2020), a work that marked the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the defeat of Donald Trump, and Kamala Harris’s historic vice presidency. Similarly, *Together II* stands as both a political gesture and a social meditation—an act of gathering in the face of forces that seek to divide. Against the backdrop of resurgent nationalism, intolerance, and xenophobia, Kawata’s shimmering cascade of pins becomes a quiet but forceful countercurrent: a monument to inclusion, repair, and solidarity. The safety pin—long associated with working-class resilience and acts of mutual aid—here becomes a symbol of radical tenderness, linking together histories of labor, gender, and migration into one gleaming continuum.

Visually, the installation evokes the waterfall, a flowing torrent of silver that glimmers and sways against a deep indigo backdrop. This image draws from Kawata's concept of *nagare*, the unifying flow of a running stream merging into larger waters. Through this metaphor, *Together II* invites viewers to imagine themselves as part of a global current—each individual strand contributing to a greater whole. Kawata's sensitivity to materials mirrors that of a weaver, creating a texture that resembles draping fabric or rippling silk. The safety pin, humble on its own, gains strength through relation. The work thus becomes an embodiment of collectivity itself—its strength derived not from singularity but from the act of connection. The medium is the message: to link, to hold, to share weight is to be human.

In an era when traditional monuments—statues, plinths, memorials—are increasingly questioned for what and whom they commemorate, Kawata's work proposes a different kind of monumentality: one rooted not in power, but in relation. *Together II* asks us to reconsider what endures and holds us together when so much seeks to pull us apart. Built through many hands and infused with many stories, the work offers itself as a living monument—an overflowing, life-giving refuge celebrating the generative potential of interdependence.

Dates:

On view November 20, 2025 - 24 January 2026

Reception: Thursday, November 20, 6:00–8:00 p.m.

Location:

Alison Bradley Projects
526 West 26th Street, Suite 814
New York, NY 10001

Contact:

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Photograph courtesy of Robert Palumbo

Artist Biography

Born in Kobe in 1936, **Tamiko Kawata** came of age in post-war Japan. As such, a persistent defiance of traditional gender roles and class hierarchies became core to both her personal and professional mission. Kawata studied Sculpture at the University of Tsukuba / Tokyo University of Education, where she embraced Bauhaus design principles and the avant-garde aesthetic philosophies of Dada and Bauhaus, breaking free from the dominant “École de Paris” curricula popular in Japan at the time. After graduating in 1959, Kawata worked as an artist-designer with Kagami Crystal Glass Works in Tokyo and, as the company’s first woman designer, earned the second highest salary in the nation, and the highest national women’s salary at age 23. In 1961, satisfied with her glass work and seeking to escape the prevailing expectations of marriage, Kawata immigrated to the United States, settling in New York City in 1962 where she continues to live and work. Once there, built a successful professional life as a designer, producing jewelry and modernist home objects with an acute awareness of material properties. She attended the classes of Adda-Husted Andersen, a Danish silversmith, at the Craft Student League of YWCA. Soon after, Kawata later took her place in a teaching position there for metal fabrication and small sculpture classes from 1979 until they closed the facilities in 2005. After the Craft Students League, Kawata taught at 92nd Street Y until 2015 when her husband’s Lewy Body dementia progressed.

To encounter Kawata’s work is to engage directly with her biography: her intimate practice excavates the intersections of Japanese and American identity, especially the material particularities of her diasporic experience. Kawata first began using safety pins, not commonly used in Japan, to adapt to American clothing sizes, which were often too long for her. Beginning with a safety pin wearable art collection—which was written up in the New York Times in 1973—the artist began weaving them into metal sculptures in 1978.

As a sculptor, Kawata harnesses the safety pin’s interlocking, additive energy, to create delicate chains, sprawling meshes, gridded weavings, and undulating sculptural forms. Inspired by bamboo shoots, nests, and anemones, these works are both biomorphic and geometric. Skillfully experimenting with the textural qualities of metal and thoughtfully-timed exposure to the elements, Kawata achieves a range of tones, from a pristine nickel, to a golden tarnish, to a rich rust. The prosaic safety pin stands as an emblem of women’s labor, namely in the hemming of clothes and work with textile, craft, childcare. In the artist’s sculptural work, they become a clever response to adjacent movements and practices: they nod to Ruth Asawa’s organic looped-wire sculptures while also complicating the minimalist grids of Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt.

Kawata’s work has been the subject of many solo and group exhibitions. Key institutional holdings include Honolulu Contemporary Art Museum (Honolulu, Hawaii), Lafcadio Hearn/Yakumo Koizumi Art Museum (Matsue, Japan), Museum for Arts & Design/MAD Museum (New York, NY), Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Montreal, Canada), LongHouse Reserve Permanent Collection, (East Hampton, NY), and PREC Institute (Tokyo, Japan) among others.