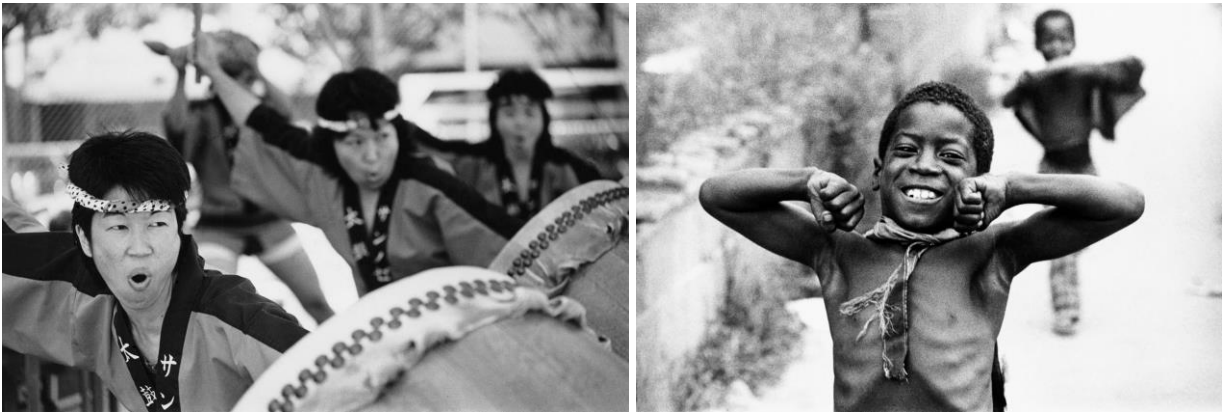


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Vancouver Art Gallery Presents the First Retrospective of Documentary Photographer Tamio Wakayama

Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama offers a powerful reminder of the role of art and memory in confronting injustice and sustaining cultural resilience



September 22, 2025, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̍əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Opening at the Vancouver Art Gallery on October 3, 2025, *Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama* is the first major solo exhibition dedicated to the late documentary photographer **Tamio Wakayama** (1941–2018). Through approximately 300 photographs, the exhibition spans more than five decades of Wakayama’s career, documenting social justice movements and communities across Canada and the United States. Wakayama’s images tell stories of resistance, joy and cultural resilience in the face of injustice.

“We are proud to showcase the significant yet underrecognized work of Tamio Wakayama, a visionary activist whose commitment to social change remains relevant and inspiring today,” say **Eva Respini** and **Sirish Rao**, the Vancouver Art Gallery’s Interim Co-CEOs. “In Wakayama’s photographs, we see not just history, but a life lived in search of justice and connection, from the deep struggles of the Civil Rights Movement to the quiet moments of joy that sustain us all. The opening of *Enemy Alien* coincides with the anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement and reminds us that these histories are not distant—they live on in families, communities, and in art.”

Born in New Westminster, B.C., in 1941—just months before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor—Wakayama’s commitment to photography and activism was deeply rooted in his own history. He and his family were among the 22,000 Japanese Canadians forcibly interned during the Pacific War (1941–45) of the Second World War. Labelled “Enemy Aliens,” they were stripped of their property and relocated to remote camps in British Columbia’s interior. The family later settled in Ontario. These formative experiences of injustice shaped Wakayama’s lifelong pursuit of social justice and redress.

In the 1970s, Wakayama returned to Vancouver and made the city his home, establishing a photographic studio and forging deep connections with the local Japanese Canadian community. He became an integral part of the era's dynamic cultural revitalization of the Japanese Canadian community, dedicating years to documenting cultural life.

Enemy Alien is guest curated by internationally known, Vancouver-based artist and independent curator **Paul Wong**, who knew Wakayama from the 1970s until the artist's death in 2018.

"I used to run into Tamio at the Powell Street Festival in the 1970s, cameras strapped to his body, completely immersed in documenting the life of his community," says guest curator **Paul Wong**. "Over the years, we worked together on projects that revealed his rare ability to tell stories of resilience, struggle and celebration. To now curate *Enemy Alien*, the first comprehensive retrospective of his work, is both an honour and long overdue. This is Tamio Wakayama's journey—from a place of hatred to a place of acceptance and peace of self."

The exhibition is divided into three key sections. The first presents Wakayama's photographs from the Civil Rights Movement in Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama, where he documented the grassroots organizing of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The second highlights his studies of everyday life in Canada, Japan and Cuba, including Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan and the Doukhobors in eastern British Columbia. The final section focuses on Wakayama's practice in Vancouver and his pioneering work chronicling the history of the Japanese Canadian diaspora, including the redress movement that helped revitalize the community.

The exhibition also features Cindy Mochizuki's documentary film *Between Pictures: The Lens of Tamio Wakayama* (2024, 70 mins). Through a combination of archival footage, hand-painted animation, narrative and newly recorded interviews, the film explores how Wakayama's time with the American Civil Rights Movement inspired him to return to Vancouver to document and celebrate the spirit of Japanese Canadians who lived in the former Paueru Gai/Powell Street neighbourhood before Japanese Internment.

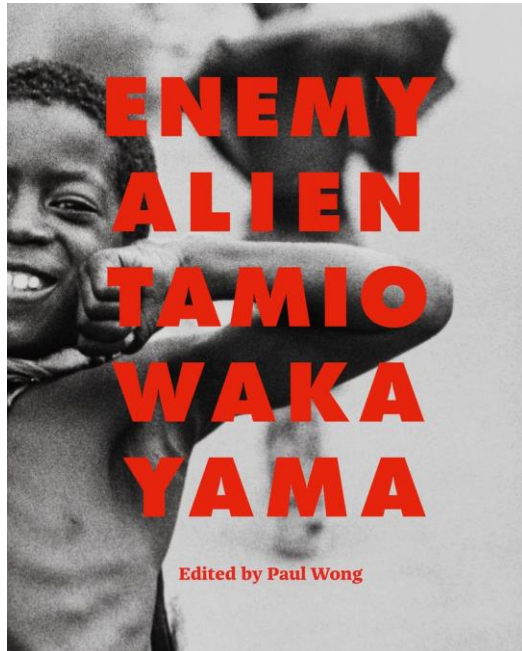
"There's something quite incredible about the subjects in Tamio's photographs, they display his ability to capture people in the moment. They show curiosity, intimacy and yet a proximity to these subjects that he loved. When we get a chance to view the photographs collectively now, we get an opportunity to make sense of his body of work as rare documentation of our collective histories," says artist **Cindy Mochizuki**. "He has this incredible body of photographic work on both sides of the border, and I thought it was important and necessary to bring that story to light."

Enemy Alien opens just days after the September 22 anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement, when the Government of Canada formally apologized for the wartime internment and dispossession of more than 22,000 Japanese Canadians. This timing underscores the continued relevance of Wakayama's photographs in preserving memory and amplifying stories of resilience.

The exhibition title, *Enemy Alien*, also carries unsettling urgency in light of the recent invocation of the American Alien Enemies Act. Last used during the Second World War to justify the forcible incarceration of Japanese, German and Italian noncitizens, the act remains a stark reminder of the fragility of civil liberties. Through photography and memory, this exhibition invites reflection on how societies choose to define belonging.

Enemy Alien: Tamio Wakayama is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery as an initiative of the Centre for Global Asias and guest curated by Paul Wong. This exhibition will be on view from Oct 3, 2025, to Feb 22, 2026.

Entry to all exhibitions is included with general admission. Visitors under 18, caregivers and Indigenous Peoples receive free admission year-round. For \$5 a month or \$58 annually, a **Gallery Access Pass** provides unlimited entry to every exhibition. Those who choose to become **Gallery Members** join a community that champions creativity and supports the Gallery as a gathering place for art, artists and the public—while enjoying unlimited admission, guest passes and exclusive perks throughout the year.



Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by the first publication devoted to Tamio Wakayama's remarkable photographic career. The book's centerpiece is Wakayama's unpublished memoir *Soul on Rice*, which is illustrated with his photos from the period. Essays by **Eva Respini** and **Paul Wong** situate the artist's practice within a broader art-historical context, and an interview with **Mayumi Takasaki**, Wakayama's partner of forty years, offers an intimate perspective on the artist's life and work. This richly illustrated catalogue is coordinated by **Stephanie Rebick**, the Gallery's Interim Director of Exhibitions & Publishing, and co-published by the Vancouver Art Gallery and Figure 1 Publishing with support from the Pamela and Dave Richardson Family and the Jack and Doris Shadbolt Endowment for Research and Publications.

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Image: Tamio Wakayama, *San Jose Taiko, Powell Street Festival, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1986*, silver gelatin print, Estate of Tamio Wakayama

Tamio Wakayama, *Boys playing in Vine City, Atlanta, Georgia ("Super Snick"), July 7, 1964, 1964*, archival inkjet print, Estate of Tamio Wakayama

ABOUT TAMIO WAKAYAMA

Tamio Wakayama (1941–2018) was born in New Westminster, British Columbia, mere months before Pearl Harbor and was soon forcibly relocated with his parents to an internment camp for Japanese Canadians, where they and some 22,000 Japanese Canadians of Nikkei were dispossessed of wealth and property and labeled “enemy aliens.” This early childhood experience of injustice would shape the rest of his life and practice. Later, as a young man, Wakayama was vacationing in Tennessee when the Birmingham Church Bombing happened; inspired by a deep sympathy for the activists, he drove straight to Birmingham, met John Lewis, and began working for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Atlanta, first as a cleaner and driver and soon as a photographer. For two years Wakayama produced campaign material and documented SNCC activists and actions in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama, including the 1964 Freedom Summer. After leaving the U.S., he photographed Indigenous and Doukhobor communities in Canada, everyday life in Japan and Cuba, and finally settled in Vancouver, where he joined the resurging Nikkei community and the Redress Movement, and for decades photographed the Powell Street Festival.

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931 on the ancestral and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America’s most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery’s celebrated exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region—through the Centre for Global Asias (formerly the Institute of Asian Art) founded in 2014. The Gallery’s exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Gallery’s new Art of Wellbeing lab furthers its commitment to community by promoting the role of art in fostering health and wellbeing. Developed in collaboration with healthcare professionals, researchers and Indigenous Elders, the lab creates opportunities for individuals to engage with art in ways that support mental, emotional and physical wellbeing.

Committed to inclusivity and accessibility, the Gallery welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to share perspectives, build community and shape our collective future through art.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the B.C. Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.