



## **Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education 50th Anniversary Kite Events: Rising Against the Winds of Resistance**

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Kites have served different purposes across cultures, transcending geographic, linguistic, and cultural barriers. The Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education (CFAE) kites, flown collectively on May 3, 2025, the finale kite flying event celebrating CFAE's 50th anniversary, had been flown with solo travels for events in Italy, Japan, Peru, Scotland, Taiwan, and throughout the United States. This multimedia essay of the multidirectional transcultural kite flying experiences contributes to the 50th anniversary celebrations of the National Art Education Association (NAEA) Women's Caucus, renamed Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education in 2023, and to *Visual Culture & Gender's* (VCG) 20th Anniversary volume.

The messages on the kites began at the NAEA Lobby Activism 2024 event in Minnesota to envision building a Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education. On the kites' surfaces and tails, participants expressed feminist values, principles, practices, and visions for the future. During the 2024-2025 year, amid increasing discriminatory and oppressive conditions, the numerous CFAE kite flying events enacted feminist art education throughout the world and with intergenerational involvement.

The multimedia visual documentation accompanying the empowered stories from kite flying events from March 2024 to May 2025 contributes to the mission of the NAEA Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education in advocating equity for women (and all who encounter injustice) towards eliminating discriminatory gender and stereotyping practices. The presenters' stories document the impact that creative feminist collective action has on their own practice and also provide approaches for bringing feminist values, principles, and practices into art education. More broadly, the kite flying events taking place in multiple global locations, and including intergenerational/intersectional pedagogical approaches, positively impacts coalition-building towards feminist activist socially-engaged art education. Each kite and kite flying event brings different feminist perspectives into respectful conversation in the stories that follow.

### Chien-Ling Chen's Kite Stories in Taiwan and San Francisco, USA

I participated in drawing on a kite at the CFAE Lobby Activism event, “Rising Against the Winds of Resistance” in March 2024 at NAEA in Minneapolis, and brought the kite back to Taiwan after the NAEA Convention. Feminism, for me, represents a profound awareness of the freedom to authentically “be myself” and the courage to transcend restrictive societal frameworks. In my daily life, I continuously navigate between multiple roles—those of an individual, an art educator, a wife, and a mother—within a social environment deeply embedded in female agency and strength. On the second day after returning to Taiwan, I attended a briefing session on the *Cross-Disciplinary Aesthetic Education Project of Taiwan Art Education*. I posed for a photograph with the kite alongside the two project leaders, articulating its symbolic journey from the United States to Taiwan (see Figure 1). In that moment, we collectively sensed the energy of shared consciousness and solidarity. Together, we are committed to advancing the work of art education in Taiwan, empowered by the sustained presence of female strength.

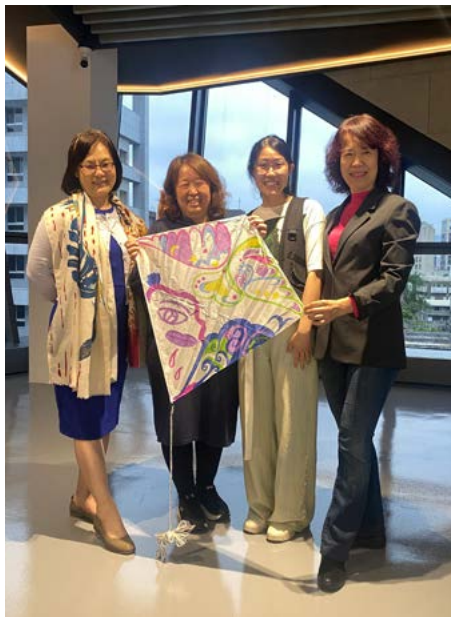


Figure 1. Chien-Ling brought the kite back to Taiwan 2024, and took the photo with two leaders of The Cross-Disciplinary Aesthetic Education Project of Taiwan Art Education.

At the end of the semester, I took the kite to my workplace school, and took a photo with my teaching partner and all the children in our class. I explained to my partner the significance of the kite flying for the school. The experience became a moment of collective affirmation—we recognized each other as central figures in the practice of education, as women grounded in strength and purpose.

I continued this kite journey with my family. My third child is a boy with special needs. When he was two and a half years old, my husband and I switched roles—I became the one who went out to work, while he became the primary caregiver. In addition to caring for our child with special needs, he also took care of our entire family. We entered marriage together, had children, and, for the sake of our family responsibilities, both of us have sacrificed a great deal of personal freedom. However, I know that my husband has willingly given up his own freedom to enable me to fulfill my desire for freedom. But in reality, neither of us should have to sacrifice too much. Our goal is to strive for a healthy balance where we can both have freedom. In this activism, I believe that as a biological male, he is also an important person in setting free the kite of freedom.

My research centers on Dr. Ann Kuo, a distinguished transnational scholar in the field of art education, whose academic contributions have left a lasting impact on Taiwan’s art education landscape. Bearing the weight of this scholarly responsibility, I crossed the Pacific from Taiwan to the United States, carrying not only the CFAE kite but also a sense of careful reverence. During my second visit to Dr. Ann Kuo’s residence in San Francisco, as a graduate researcher to organize all her materials from before she fell ill, we flew the CFAE kite together (see Figure 2), translating a symbolic act into a shared moment of memory and aspiration.



*Figure 2.* Chien-Ling Chen’s kite-flying in the Wildcat Canyon Regional Park, San Francisco, USA.

### **Liz Langdon, Jess Grubenhoff, Lori Santos and Christine Liao’s Kite Stories in the US, Italy, and Peru**

Jess Grubenhoff, Lori Santos, and Christine Liao helped me, Liz Langdon, create our kite at the NAEA CFAE Lobby Activism event in 2024. Jess was also a participant in discussing feminist theory in our year end ART ED Club meeting at the University of Kansas. I invited volunteers to fly the CFAE kite the following day at the Spencer Museum of Art, at an event modeled after Japanese kite flying festivals, which combines hands-on science as well. At the Kite Festival, the community learns about the physics of flight from students, along with the culture of Japan, which brings community members together.

Next I sent the kite off to Italy with Jess for Study Abroad in Fall 2024. Figure 3 is Jess’s story of independence and forming community through kite flying.



*Figure 3.* Video with Jess’s voice over the photos and video flying excerpt in Florence, Italy.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]

Lori Santos found the quote from Frida Kahlo, which we wrote on our kite: “I want freedom for the full expression of who I am” She took the kite to the southern hemisphere, to Peru, and empowered young women to fly it there. Figure 4 shows Lori Santos sharing a story of the impromptu occasion and the impact of kite flying for the young women in Peru.



*Figure 4.* Lori Santos sharing a story of the impromptu occasion and the impact of kite flying for the young women in Peru.

### **Christine Liao's Kite Story at the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in North Carolina, USA**

The kite was mailed to Wilmington, North Carolina, and was taken to nearby Carolina Beach on March 1st, 2025. It was a perfect day for kite flying with the temperature high around 73°F and wind around 20 mph. Three women educators shared their work, stories, and experiences and flew the kite at the beach. In the face of ongoing political challenges, they stood together, finding strength in each other and in the symbolic kite-flying activity. Against the clear blue sky, the kite flew high with the text "I Want Freedom for the Full Expression of Who I AM" clearly visible. With the wind carrying it higher, it feels like the kite and the message are shouting in the sky (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* Video of Liao flying the kite at the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in North Carolina, USA. [The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### **Laura Lee McCartney's Kite Story on the Texas Woman's University Campus, Denton, USA**

In 2024, I brought home the CFAE Lobby Activism kite that I had helped work on during the NAEA Lobby Activism event in Minneapolis with Hyunji Kwon, Ann Holt, and Glynnis Reed-Conway. Together in our small group, we wrote words of resistance as we reflected on our lived experiences at home and at work. We used markers to add our voices on the kite sail and tails that included the words:

- Power
- Listen
- Courage
- Survival
- Balance
- Fair
- Crazy busy
- Embrace Dialogue

That same spring semester, I was teaching the course, *Women in the Visual Arts*, at Texas Woman's University. The course was designed by my colleagues, Julie Libersat and Sara Ishii in the Visual Arts Division and shared with me. The course outline created by Julie and Sara included opportunities each week to explore the following feminist themes:

- Historical Contexts of Women in Art
- Women and/in Religion & Spirituality
- The Female Nude & Sexuality
- Motherhood
- Work & Labor
- Self Portraiture
- Depictions of Gender
- Institutional Critique & Social Activism
- War & Revolution
- The Dinner Party*

These weekly themes were especially helpful as my students prepared their responses for the kite activism event described here. After the NAEA Lobby Activism event in Minneapolis, I was inspired to create a culminating activism event for the *Women in the Visual Arts* curriculum. The students in the course were invited to synthesize our exploration of feminist theory and art that semester, using and adding to the original NAEA Lobby Activism kite. I carefully rolled-up and packed the original NAEA Lobby Activism kite tails and placed them in a storage bag to include with the kite as I imagined it traveling to the other participants in the extended kite project. I created a new blank set of five kite tails, and secured them with a metal grommet to attach to the original kite sail.

I showed the original NAEA Lobby Activism kite sail and tails to my *Women in the Visual Arts* students and told them more about the Lobby Activism event in Minneapolis. I divided the class students into five small groups and distributed a new blank kite tail to each small group. Then, I invited my students to work together to incorporate the weekly themes and ideas we discussed throughout the *Women in the Visual Arts* course that especially resonated with them on the new kite tails (see Figure 6). They could use pens and markers to add images and to

think about the design of their words. We had a class conversation about how their words could be used as powerful forms of activism. Below are just a sample of the many phrases and ideas the students wrote and illustrated on the new kite tails (see Figure 7):



Figure 6. TWU Students design new kite tails based on feminist themes.



Figure 7. TWU student kite tails attached to the original kite sail.

After the students completed the new kite tail pieces, we went to assemble the kite so we could fly it outside. Unfortunately, we realized the original CFAE Lobby Activism kite had been repacked with miss-matched cross-spar and spine pieces. The pieces we received in our package were much too small. There was no way to attach the cross-spar and spine support pieces now, and there was certainly no way the kite would be able to fly. We were all so disappointed! But, rather than give up—the students in the class rose to their feet and declared outloud, “WE CAN FIX IT!”

Suddenly, the students were digging in their personal tote bags, backpacks, and art supply crates, and they began calling out, “I have thread!” “I have painter’s tape!” “I have jewelry wire!” “I have a drinking straw!” Students brought their materials to the tables in the front of the classroom, and began working like engineers engaged in a creative problem-solving task to rig a new cross- spar piece that was long enough to support the kite sail (see Figure 8)! It was incredible to watch the students in our class work together and try different solutions. We had no idea if the extra weight of the new materials would even allow the kite to fly, but the students remained determined to fix it!



Figure 8. TWU students work together to repair the kite.

After the cross- spar piece was secure, we all went outside the classroom and lined up across from the TWU Science Complex and the Visual Arts Building on campus to join and amplify our voices in a “Human Microphone” chorus (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Amplifying our voices and flying the repaired kite on campus.

During the “Human Microphone” chorus, each of the five small groups of students had an opportunity to call-out three words or phrases from their groups’ kite tails for the class to repeat in chorus. The words the students amplified were:

Group 1: Resistance, Kindness, Cognition

Group 2: Consent is Hot, Don’t tell me I can’t because I’m female, Liberation

Group 3: All bodies are beautiful, Gaslight, Gatekeep, Girl boss, Don’t tell

me I can't because I am a female

Group 4: Femininity, Beauty, Trust Yourself

Group 5: MOM, individuality, lesbian

After several failed attempts, our kite only flew for less than ten seconds—but we cheered and celebrated as a group that the new support pieces held together just long enough for us to fly the kite and feminist kite tails “against the winds of resistance” and for us to connect with one another in shared activism (see video in Figure 10). It was a great collaborative culminating event for the *Women in the Visual Arts* class (see Figure 11)!



*Figure 10.* Video with Laura Lee’s voice over the photos and video flying excerpt on the Texas Woman’s University campus in Denton, Texas.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]



*Figure 11.* TWU students and Laura Lee McCartney holding the Lobby Activism kite on campus.

### **Ann Holt’s Kite Story, Fire Island National Seashore, New York, USA**

On April 7, 2024, I went out with my daughter Eldjima Djandabri-Holt (Elia) to Smith Point Beach at Fire Island New York on a cold and windy spring day. There to fly a CFAE kite, the breezes proved fortuitous. On this barrier island, April winds are still cooled by the ocean, commanding beachgoers into their layers to keep warm, while only a few miles inland, the same breezes are slightly softened and warmed by the landscape, carrying reminders that spring might soon turn to summer.

That day, bundled up, we launched our kite into the sky, as the sun tried to peek between the gray and white cloud cover. I held on to the kite at first while Elia took a video and some photos (see Figure 12) and our 6-year-old, chocolate lab, Callie ran around joyfully on the beach. We were there with the purpose of using art to convey a message between mother and daughter, and for I, to later share this story here with my colleagues in this article.



Figure 12. Video collage of Ann Holt flying the CFAE kite with her daughter on Smith Point Beach Fire Island, New York.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]

On that April day, with under three months left until graduation, Elia had an overwhelming desire to just be done with her high school experience. In January 2021, mid school year, she had become a new student in a new school district during the online era of Covid. She was usually the only Black girl in her AP and honors courses. Her given African name was constantly butchered by teachers who would never take the time to learn how to pronounce it correctly.

Five days before launching the CFAE kite, my daughter had become an official “adult,” an event which occurred along with several setbacks for women and girls happening in the United States in the wake of *Roe vs Wade* being overturned by the US Supreme Court in June 2022. In states where women held political power in office, women were able to enjoy more rights (Baker, 2024). However, even though there were record numbers of women represented in state political offices, women’s political gains, at the federal level were still relatively precarious (CAWP, 2024). Income disparity, food insecurity, and work-life balance continued to disproportionately impact women (Collins, Radley, Roy, Zephyrin, & Shah, 2024). Those advocating for and/or seeking access to reproductive

healthcare continued to be under attack by state and federal lawmakers with the nuances to the laws varying from state to state in terms of various accesses to abortion, contraception, sex education, gender affirming care, maternal care, and more (Forouzan & Mariappuram, 2024). Some states (Idaho, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wyoming) enacted gender-affirming care bans (Dawson & Kates, 2024; Forouzan & Mariappuram, 2024).

The last time I had engaged in kite flying before that day in April was with my own mother in 2006, on a hot, sunny, bright, summer day at Rehoboth beach in Delaware. My mother, now deceased, was 68 at the time, and Elia was only a few months old. While my mother’s generation had made and experienced many achievements in reproductive justice that would benefit my generation, this CFAE kite story takes place eighteen years later, a little over fifty years after *Roe vs Wade* was put into federal law, and two years after abortion rights were reversed back to the states.

I had the privilege of giving birth to Elia in Canada where I lived for twelve and a half years and had become a naturalized citizen. I had moved there in 1994 with my former husband and then two-year-old son Gabriel, who was born in California. I felt the stark contrast in women’s reproductive healthcare between the two countries. It impacted my experiences and life as a woman of reproductive age and eventual mother of three, starting in the U.S. from 1992 to 1994, then in Canada from 1994 to 2007, and later, back to the US from 2007 to present. In California in the early 1990s, I had the privilege of having easy access to Planned Parenthood. However, if I hadn’t had medical insurance, the costs for my prenatal care and delivery of my son would have been over 30K US dollars, which in today’s inflation rate hovers close to 70K. In contrast, my choice to not have or have children was respected and fully covered under Canada’s national healthcare for contraception, abortion, prenatal care, and/or childbirth. Moreover, if I had not been covered in Canada, and had to pay out of pocket, my next two babies would have cost a fraction of what prenatal care and delivery cost me in the United States. Further, when my middle child Simone was of age to go to daycare, she was covered by a national childcare plan that, at the time, cost everyone, regardless of income, 35 Canadian dollars a week (or 7 dollars a day) for full-time care, including delicious, healthy meals. In contrast to my second year as a mother

in California, trying to get Medicaid for my baby while I was waiting out the designated one-year grace period for health insurance to kick in through my job, I remember being treated with disrespect in the Social Service office, as if I had no right to something for which I was already paying taxes. In terms of childcare in California, I was fortunate that my fulltime job had Mondays off so that I could get my son into a cooperative daycare. This arrangement, cost more than triple what I would pay for my next child in Canada only a few years later. Moreover, I had to work a full day there every week, do one weekend clean up per month, and fundraise, to offset the monthly costs. I also had to pay a babysitter four days a week because my work hours went to 8:00 p.m.

My daughter Elia is mixed, but she identifies socially as Black; she is a Black woman with a White mother and a Black African father living in the U.S. and she has fewer reproductive rights here than I did living in this country at her age. What will my daughter's reproductive healthcare future look like if she decides to stay in the U.S.? Looking at the data (Gunja, Gumas, Masitha, & Zephyrin, 2024), her journey and experience with reproductive healthcare in this country was dangerous for women, with the highest rate of maternal mortality of higher income nations— and more than double the mortality rate for Black women. This is a fact with a long history of the medical system promoting distorted and racist constructions of healthcare for Black and Brown female bodies in the U.S. (Brown, 1998); and this was still the case (Willie, 2024) that day as we flew the kite together.

It is in this geo-political context of lived experience that my daughter and I stood side by side, quietly hanging onto the CFAE kite at a different beach than the one where I had been with my own mother, flying a different kite. Together we stood watching our kite fly as high in the air as the string would allow and then I shared with her the wishes I had for her life path. I told her how I wished for her ample access to being able to make her own, empowered decisions for her future—access to reproductive rights, access to pay equity, education, and knowledge, and all the opportunities for which she would choose to strive. But, unlike me, whose string was longer and more generous, her string is, for now, more tightly tethered—and her journey, from my perspective into the future, looks to be much more dangerous. Flying a CFAE kite is not going to save her; but on that day, it served

as a conduit for a message, and as I write now, it holds my reflection.

### **Lifting Voices, Defying Winds: Eunkyung Hwang's Collaborative Kite-Making Workshop at SUNY New Paltz, USA**

Since the NAEA Lobby Activism event in 2024, I have witnessed growing sociopolitical tensions and pushbacks around social justice and feminism. In this climate, amplifying marginalized communities' voices within our campuses has become more critical than ever as an art educator. On February 26, 2025, I organized a collaborative kite-making workshop at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz, where I currently teach. With the support of my colleague, Dr. Cheri Ehrlich, I opened the workshop to everyone in our university community who wished to amplify their voices amid ongoing pushbacks against gender equity and social justice.

More than ten students and faculty gathered for the workshop in front of the university museum lobby, where Cheri and I introduced the Lobby Activism kite and its collective messages. Participants engaged in collective discussions around the following prompts: *What does feminism (or social justice) mean to you? What does gender equity look like in your vision? How do you envision a more equitable world?* (see Figure 13). These open-ended questions encouraged participants to reflect on how these issues intersect with their own lives and experiences, and the ongoing struggles in advocating diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. Participants also envisioned how their hopes, aspirations, and messages might take flight—both metaphorically and literally—through the kites they created.

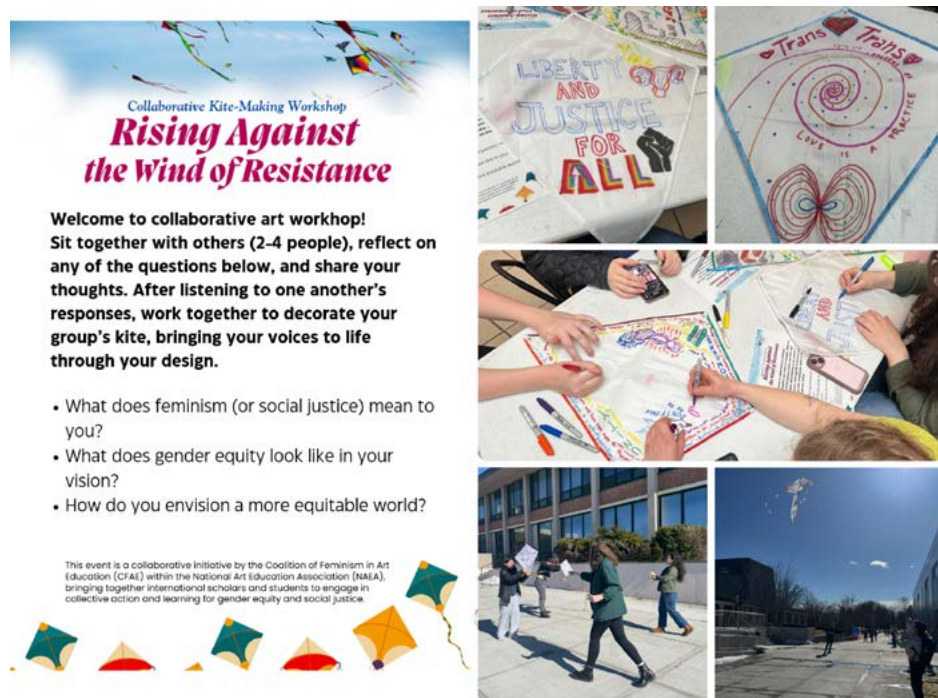


Figure 13. Photo collage of the collaborative kite-making workshop at SUNY New Paltz, showing workshop prompts (left) and participants' kites and engagement (right). Photograph by Eunkyung Hwang, 2025.

After sharing their thoughts, participants collaboratively decorated kites to express their perspectives and commitments to feminism and social justice. Grounded in their positionalities and lived experiences, they visually expressed their concerns, hopes, and solidarity related to issues such as racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive justice, global feminism, and beyond. The workshop concluded with participants flying their kites together on campus, alongside the kite from the 2024 CFAE Lobby Activism, symbolizing collective action and advocacy for a more just and inclusive society.

### Karen Keifer-Boyd's Kite Story at the Shores of Lake Erie, Ohio, USA

About a week prior to the kite flying event, I had asked family members and friends to think about what feminisms (emphasizing plurality of positions) means to them and to join me on Mother's Day to add images and text to the

Lobby Activism kite that I had brought home from NAEA in Minneapolis. On Mother's Day 2024, I laid the kite on my dining room table and set-out markers and asked each to find a place to contribute their perspectives.

As we drew on the kite, we discussed feminism. For example, #SayHerName raised awareness of injustice of Black women who had been murdered by police in the United States. As we wrote their names on the kite ribbons, questions arose that led us to look into intersectional gender and race discrimination that led to specific forms of police violence. In drawing "Woman, Life, Freedom: Mahsa Amini" on the kite tail, family and friends learned of the revolutionary uprising for women's rights that began in Iran in September 2022 and was taken up by Iranian diaspora and allies throughout the world. My adult son drew the iconic Rosie the Riveter and wrote "We Can Do It," which prompted discussion of solidarity with emphasis on "we" in uniting toward reproductive justice. His girlfriend wrote "Lead by Example," which is an intergenerational call to feminist lifeways. We then went on the beach on the shores of Lake Erie near Cleveland, Ohio, to fly the kite, cheering as it rose to the sky. Others on the beach, not in our group, took notice and feminist art education continued prompted by the kite as a work of art with the theme of coalition for feminisms. See Figure 14, 15 and 16.



Figure 14: Friends and family at a dining room table adding their perspectives of what feminism means to them by drawing with permanent markers on one of the 10 kites begun at the CFAE Lobby Activism event. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2024. Close-up of names added from the #SayHerName feminist hashtag activism to raise awareness of U.S. police violence against Black women. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2024.



*Figure 15.* Launching one of the 10 kites begun at the CFAE Lobby Activism event at a Mother's Day (May 12, 2024) sunset gathering on the shores of Lake Erie. Photograph by the Calder Boyd.



*Figure 16.* Video of Calder Boyd running with the kite, filmed by Tiffany Lasko on May 12, 2024.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### **Penn State Art Education Kite Stories, State College, Pennsylvania, USA**

On May 3, 2025, Penn State art education doctoral students, their families, Fulbright visiting scholar, and professors celebrated our supportive community and raised our resistance to injustice high into the sky. The following are each's multimedia story of their kite flying experience and perspectives raised into the winds of resistance.

#### **Adebola Adalumo's Kite Flying Experience: Memories Awakened, Magical Movement of Freedom, Resilience, and Hope**

Flying a kite on that faithful Saturday, May 3, brought back a flood of childhood memories from my country, Nigeria, that I hadn't revisited in years (see Figure 17). As I stood there, with my classmates and two of our professors, holding the spool, I was transported to the dusty fields of my youth, where I played alongside my siblings, cousins, and schoolmates. I could almost hear the echo of our laughter as we raced across open spaces, the wind tugging eagerly at our homemade kites. We'd chase them, stumble, fall, get up again, and shout with pure joy as our fragile constructions soared into the sky. The thrill of seeing our creations defy gravity was unmatched. But this time, it wasn't just a game; it was a celebration of our collective perspectives, raised high into the winds of resistance, soaring into the sky. That morning, there was something magical about the movement of the kites dancing in the sky, carried by unseen currents—a powerful symbol of freedom, resilience, and hope. That morning became more than just a fleeting escape; it was a gentle awakening, and a reminder of the dreams that are still waiting to be realized. It reminded me that despite the burdens we carry as adults, there is still room for joy, wonder, and play.



*Figure 17.* A magical moment of a kite dancing in the sky, carried by unseen currents. Photo courtesy of Lina Mumgaudyte.

### **Fouz Aljameel Kite Flying Experience: Autonomy, Visibility, Feminist Becoming**

As I picked this kite by chance, the message on it felt uncannily personal—as if it had found me, not the other way around. The words “freedom for the full expression of who I am” echoed deeply with my lived experience as a Saudi woman navigating between cultures, languages, and academic disciplines. Flying this kite became a quiet declaration of autonomy, of visibility, of feminist becoming. The moment captured here—sunlight, open space, collective joy—stands in stark contrast to the often-constrained forms of expression in digital and academic spaces. This image (Figure 18) follows my contribution as both a literal and metaphorical illustration of release and resistance.



*Figure 18.* Fouz. Participants fly kites across a wide green field under spring skies. In the foreground lies a kite with the handwritten message: “I want FREEDOM for the full EXPRESSION of who I am.” Photo by Fouz Aljameel.

The video (Figure 19) captures a deeply emotional and symbolic moment during our kite-flying gathering. The kite, marked with “Free Palestine”, rises while I sing a heritage song, echoing a long history of struggle, memory, and Arab identity. The lyrics—“ني بجل عو فرم / ني طس ل ف ق ب و ت ك م ني ن ج ل ا ب ل ق ي ف” “دي ه ش هم ا ن ط ب ب”—carry the weight of inherited resistance, even before birth. This moment is not only visual, but embodied: the kite’s rise feels like lifting a voice too often silenced. Through sound and motion, the video weaves personal and collective memory, fusing feminist care with political urgency.



*Figure 19.* A colorful kite bearing the words “Free Palestine” soars into the sky, accompanied by me singing a traditional Arabic song about Palestinian kids, dignity, and the Arab identity of Palestine. The audio resonates with collective memory and cultural solidarity. Video filmed and created by Fouz Aljameel. [The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### **Tawsif Al-Mehran’s Kite Experience: Quiet, Deliberate, Tender Resistance**

My parents, worried about the dangers of flying kites from the rooftop, never bought me one. City life was dense, fast, and distant—the playground too far; the sky often hidden behind wires and walls. But I was stubborn. As a fifth grader in Dhaka city, Bangladesh, I crafted a kite with my own hands and released it from our rooftop—mindful, yet unwavering. It flew briefly, tugging at the string, brushing against a freedom I could not yet name.

On May 3, 2025, standing on the grass in front of the Palmer Museum of Art with my wife and our one-year-old toddler, I held a kite for the second time in my entire life—this time as a father, husband, and immigrant scholar (see Figure 20 & 21). The wind was unruly, dancing with the rain, much like the scattered thoughts and emotions I carry across time zones and languages. Something ancient stirred as the kite resisted, then rose—higher. It felt like flying my soul—unfolding

old wounds, shedding doubt, crossing invisible boundaries. My son laughed. My wife smiled as she flew her own kite. When I took my turn, she held our son in her arms. And in the moment, I saw the quiet beauty of being held by love, lifted by memory, and carried forward by the wind.

The air was alive with stories—friends, classmates, mentors, and families sending their own kites, threads of connection dancing in the wind. We were bound by thread, by motion, and by intention. That shared moment reminded me that resistance isn’t always loud; sometimes it is quiet, deliberate, and tender. It’s the act of flying even when told not to, of loving even when stretched thin, of showing up again and again—and rising, impossibly and joyfully, with the wind.



*Figure 20.* Two friends begin flying their kites together, marking the start of a shared moment of joy and release. Photo courtesy of Lina Mumgaudyte.

*Figure 21.* A woman flies her kite as if sending her soul into another world. Photograph by Tawsif Al-Mehran

### **Eric Anthony Berdis’s Kite Wish for Palestinian Six-Year-Olds**

My first year of teaching first grade, we read “The Kite” from *Days with Frog and Toad* by Arnold Lobel (1979). As I was reading this story with the dramatics that matched Frog and Todd’s frustration in the story, I noticed the six-year-olds had blank faces. I paused, and I asked “How many of you have

flown a kite?" I was shocked that no one raised their hand. One student said, "It looks fun!" That night I went to the store and purchased as many kites as I could. The next day in teams we learned to build the kites and at recess we took turns practicing flying them. A decade later, with doctoral classmates Carly, Carrie and Simin, we painted a butterfly kite for Palestine. My classmates and I took that time to stencil out "Free Palestine" with the Palestinian Flag and watermelon symbol on each wing (see Figure 22). It was my hope that this gesture could bring attention to the genocide. As I was flying the kite (see Figure 23), I found myself laughing and crying the words of Frog and Toad "UP KITE UP!" Like in the story the kite was caught with the wind and flew higher and higher. I pray that one day Palestinian six-year-olds in Gaza will do the same.



Figure 22. Eric Berdis and friends painting a butterfly-style kite. Group selfie by Eric Berdis.

Figure 23. Free Palestine butterfly kite high in the sky. Photograph by Eric Berdis

### Linda (Shijing) Fu

Participating in the kite-flying activity organized by Dr. Keifer-Boyd offered me a moment to reconnect with my own strength. On the green lawn beside the Palmer Museum, I struggled to keep my kite in the air. Each attempt ended with it crashing, spinning uncontrollably in the wind. I kept trying, failing, and trying again. Later, I realized the kite was missing a "tail"—two strips that connects to the bottom of the kite and gives the kite balance. After attaching it, everything changed. The kite rose steadily, like a warrior finally equipped for

flight, rising not by force alone, but through adaptation.

The string between us, reminded me of the invisible threads that connect women across time and struggle. I couldn't sense the wind pressing against the kite in the sky, but I could feel its force transmitted through the trembling line. At that moment, I felt so powerful. Not because I overcame the wind, but because I endured, adapted, and rose above the tension with the kite. This balance between chaos and control, effort and submission, became a metaphor for resilience and strength (See Figure 24 and 25).



Figure 24. Linda Fu flying a kite Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd.



Figure 25. Students engaging with the Kite-flying activity. Video recorded by Karen Keifer-Boyd. [The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### Carrie Lordan Heron's Kite Story of Building Community

As we flew the kites together on the north end of campus that rainy Saturday morning, I found myself pausing to take in the faces around me, the faces of people I have come to know not just as colleagues, but as true friends. Each of us took turns attempting to launch our kites into the sky, laughing at tangled strings, cheering for unexpected lift-offs, and feeling the shared weight of kites that refused to fly. In those small moments of joy, struggle, and perseverance, we experienced something more than a recreational gathering. We were reminded of the deep bonds that have formed among us.

In many ways, the experience of flying those kites mirrored our journey as PhD students. Throughout our academic lives, we have supported one another through the soaring highs and inevitable lows. Through victories and setbacks, deadlines and presentations, but also through the personal challenges of life. We have shown up for each other not only in the classroom, but also in moments of vulnerability, grief, and celebration. These shared experiences have woven a tight-knit community built on trust, empathy, and care. Just as the many before us who have flown these same kites, we are bonded in an unspoken tradition of connection through this shared experience (see Figure 26).



*Figure 26.* Penn State art education doctoral students and faculty (left to right) Nasha Lindo, Wanda Knight, Rocket dog, Youngsoo Kim, Karen Keifer-Boyd, Adebola Adalumo, Yi-Ning Zhao, Eric Bendis, and Carly Sherman) made time at the end of the Spring 2025 semester to fly kites together. Photograph by [add name].

After the event, we gathered once more, this time around a table in my home. I welcomed each person and their family, and together we shared a meal, each person bringing a dish to share with the rest. Over plates of food and laughter, the sense of belonging deepened. In breaking bread together, we affirmed what the kites had already taught us, that friendship, built through both challenge and celebration, is what truly lifts us.

### Youngjoo Kim's Kite Story: From Korea to the U.S.

“Kite,” in South Korea, symbolizes flying away misfortunes and wishing for fortune. I often flew kites with the students I taught in South Korea, and they decorated their kites with wishful images. After I came to the U.S., I experienced the transition as a teacher to a student and flew one of the CFAE kites. The CFAE kites had diverse messages such as anti-war, feminist voices, and survival on Earth. What do I wish for while flying the kite? I questioned myself and thought of my students who drew wishful images such as receiving good grades on the exams, wishing to become classmates with their best friends, happiness for their family members, and having a tasty dinner that day. How about me? I wish for my students to continue to find joy in their every day. I hope they do not have to wish for survival. With my peers, our kites flew higher with the wind upward in the sky. My wish is my doctoral studies lifts my teaching and research like a wind for the students to uphold their daily lives. Further, I wish that kites could fly away misfortunes, give us fortunes, and all young children can have such wishes as my students for joy in their daily lives.



*Figure 27.* A student from Youngjoo's class drew and wrote her wish on a kite, implying her wish for her best friend to be in same class in the next year. Photo by Youngjoo Kim in 2023.

### Wanda B. Knight Reflection on the Kite Flying Event “Rising Above the Winds of Resistance”

As I stood on the lush green grass of Penn State’s beautiful campus on a warm spring day in May, the sky was a tumultuous mix of clouds and sun, a fitting symbol of the societal conditions that often feel oppressive. Around me, colorful kites danced in the gentle spring breeze; however, I held the string of a magnificent kite, meticulously crafted to resemble a fluttering butterfly, with vibrant hues adorning its wings (Figure 28).



*Figure 28.* Wanda B. Knight flying a butterfly kite to symbolize her journey of transformation and empowerment. Photo by Nashormeh Lindo, altered by Wanda B. Knight 2025.

Having contributed to developing the theme for the Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education kite flying event: “Rising Above the Winds of Resistance,” my kite and this theme symbolize my journey of transformation and empowerment amid the currents of resistance that have tried to hold me back as a Black female art educator in predominantly White, male-dominated spaces.

Looking at my butterfly kite, I remembered the challenges and obstacles I had faced—the weight of oppressive societal pressures that often felt as strong as the fiercest gusts. Closing my eyes for a moment, with my feet firmly on the ground, I felt a lightness, a sense of freedom. With each gust of wind, my kite seemed to come alive, its wings beating in rhythm with my heart. I was a butterfly

in flight, with my piece of sky. I was guiding my ascent and transcending barriers that had once tried to undermine and confine me. I was soaring to the highest heights, where the air was clear and the winds were gentle.

With each tug on the string, I could feel my kite dancing against the wind—a symbol of my resilience and determination to succeed as a Black woman in academia and art education. Despite the winds trying to keep the kite tethered, I held the string tightly, my lifeline to the sky, and I rose above resistance where burdens can’t fly. In that moment, I was not just flying a kite; I was flying my spirit, embracing the ethos of rising above challenges—teaching, inspiring, and leading through art.

I looked around to see students, their kites taking flight into the forceful winds. Each of us held a piece of resistance, learning to rise with it, above it, and beyond it. Together, we formed a tapestry of colors against the sky (see Figure 29). A community united in resilience and hope, our kites in flight symbolized our journeys and served as beacons for everyone watching.



*Figure 29.* Kite continuing to rise above the winds of resistance where burdens can’t fly. Photo by Nashormeh Lindo, altered by Wanda B. Knight 2025.

## Openings and Building Community: Brandi Lewis's Reflections on the 2024 Lobby Activism and the Finale Kite Flying Event

During the 2024 CFAE Lobby Activism Kite event, I led a small group of strangers writing prompts about what feminism meant to each of us as we collectively decorated our blank canvas. While I worked on adding words to our kite, a middle-aged white man walked over to me to ask what we were doing. He told me he was not that interested in feminism, but he liked to draw and wanted to know if it was okay if he joined. This small opening with a stranger is prescient to me as I think about all that we are facing against immigrants' rights, women's, queer, and trans rights, the safety of Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples, and the liberation of Palestinian, Sudanese, and Congolese people in particular. We are in a moment where relatively privileged people are coming in contact with injustice that does not directly negatively impact them, but some are willing to listen and engage in those spaces because community and art drew them in. It strikes me as an educator, especially an educator devoted to social justice work, how often we find openings with people who might not know or agree but are willing to listen, and how we can make those moments count. This man was not interested in feminism, but he stayed with us, talked with us, and, for a brief hour, was in community with us. I hope we planted a seed. I cannot know if this chance encounter with feminists shouting in a hotel lobby and inviting strangers to write and draw about their investments in social justice made a lasting impact on this man, but I can hope that it did, and I can hope that the next event will draw in others. I can hope that this man left our table and told a woman or queer or trans person in his life about how he met these wild feminists who made him feel included, shared their opinions on the importance of social justice, and they felt affirmed or seen by his engagement. These small conversations lay the groundwork and make room for larger ones. I hope our activism creates more openings, bringing in new forms of community and solidarity building.

As I reflect on the lobby activism event in 2024 and come full circle to the finale kite flying event in May of 2025, the sense of community I felt in the hotel lobby and later, standing in an open field, with all of these feminist activists, some strangers, some dear friends, I am struck by what we can do in community even in the face of immense uncertainty, heart-break, and unimaginable cruelty.

As I watched my colleagues running across a grassy field with fluffy clouds behind them, some flying kites for the first time, I saw pure joy on their faces as their kites lifted (see Figure 30). We laughed as we struggled to maintain control, kites bottoming out of the air, and as a friend's kite flew into a tree. I stood with sun on my face and breeze in my hair, admiring the beauty of the butterfly kite proclaiming "Free Palestine," while I watched a colleague hold his sweet baby close and another walk her dog as our friends ran free around them. These joyful moments, juxtaposed with the very real weight of crisis in the US and around the world, remind us of what sustains us and allows us to make change: collectivity and community. Our kites and built community are a call to action and a reminder that we have to make noise, be seen, and speak up about injustices in both our communities and others.



*Figure 30.* Video of participants gathering and flying kites at the Penn State Finale Kite Flying Event on May 3, 2025. Video by Brandi Lewis.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### Nashormeh Lindo's Kite Story: Let's Go Fly a Kite

I've always been fascinated with kites, not only for flying, but as a unique art form and metaphor for freedom. There are so many traditions, shapes, colors, designs and stories regarding kites. I've often considered making one or more, not so much for flying, but for expressing as a form of soft sculpture. Before that cloudy windy day this past May, I had never successfully flown a kite. As children, we'd sometimes get flimsy little paper kites in cracker jack boxes or from the dime store, but the street we lived on had too much traffic and the nearby Cobbs Creek Park had too many trees, so after trying with these little fake things, we'd just give up and opt to jump double-dutch or play hide and seek. My friend Nana used to refer to letters as "kites", so I often thought of them as message bearers. I later found this was prison language, but the idea of kites as messengers still seemed apropos.

Another thing that kept the idea of kites in my mind was the story of Benjamin Franklin's famous kite experiment with the key, which was a pervasive tale that was a central part of the country's founding mythology, told on our school trips to historic sites of colonial Philadelphia. It was also later immortalized with Isamu Noguchi's "*Bolt of Lightning*" sculpture that stands at the base of the Ben Franklin Bridge, and I am reminded of it every time I travel to my hometown, even though its metallic heaviness has never evoked the lightness or diaphanous nature of a kite in flight to me. When I moved to the Bay area, I was delighted to find that there was a kite flying festival every year around my birthday, and my friends and I would go and watch the astonishing array of kite types and flying skills demonstrated there. Single and double line, diamond, dragon, twirling, soaring and sometimes crashing kites. It was beautiful. It felt like freedom just observing the flying formations, and the different kite forms, bowed, sled, parafoils, box, and stunt kites. The range of aerial acrobatics on display there was awesome. I learned some of the lingo and watched in fascination as skilled kite enthusiasts made these stunning creations dance in the air. It was exciting both for the fliers and the spectators.

So, this May, in State College, I finally had the opportunity to experience that feeling of the kite lifting and riding on the wind, that slight tug and watching it staying aloft, defying gravity. Maneuvering the string and watching the kite

soaring in the sky felt spiritual. For a moment I regretted never having this experience before that day. Then I realized it had happened at just the right time for me, my personal growth and belief in the fact that I could always learn something new and life affirming. Plus, it was big fun and even though the day was cloudy, it was perfect. And even though I was initially a little frustrated at the idea of flying kites with finals looming, I must admit, I walked away with my pup, Dr. Rocket, refreshed, the stress slightly lifted and with a little extra joy in my step. As we wound down the experience a song came to my mind and I began to sing, not even realizing that I knew the words: "Let's go fly a kite, up to the highest height! Let's go fly a kite and send it soaring, up through the atmosphere, up where the air is clear, Oh, let's go fly and a kite!" (song writers, Richard and Robert Sherman, 1964, from *Mary Poppins* film). See Figure 31.



*Figure 31.* Let's go Fly a kite! Friends and Colleagues finding Joy in communal kite flying on a windy day in Happy Valley. Dr. Knight's butterfly kite kept threatening to land. I heard her say, "Come on, you're not a caterpillar anymore." Video by Nashormeh Lindo.

[Click on the image to activate video. The video is also available at this [link](#).]

### Carly Sherman's Kite Story of Connectivity and Collective Resistance

I felt free. Free from stress and the constraints often plagued upon graduate students during the final moments of the semester, and from the catastrophic changes our society seemingly experiences daily, at this point. Looking back, I was a participant in the original making of these kites during the National Art Education Association's (NAEA) Annual Convention in Minneapolis, Minnesota during the Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education (CFAE) (formerly known as the NAEA Women's Caucus) Lobby Activism event in 2024. This experience was my first official participation in the event since reading various stories of the history, for my master's thesis, in art education scholars Karen Keifer-Boyd, Linda Hoepfner Poling, Wanda B. Knight, Sheri Klein, and Adetty Pérez de Miles (2021) edited text *National Art Education Association Women's Caucus Lobby Activism: Feminism(s) + Art Education*. I still can recall the powerful group of feminists that gathered to make these kites and the stories of triumphant power and resilience that were told during the actual making of the kites. I ended up bonding with members of my state association, Ohio Art Education Association (OAEA), in a way that was new to me as we discussed the impact of feminism on our own lives, even working to dispel the negative emotions that had been engrained in our thinking of the term 'feminism' throughout our career. The act of making felt like the conduit for my connection with others, reamplifying what I tend to tell others about my profession: *I don't necessarily teach art, I aim to teach through art/artmaking*.

The feeling of connectivity and collective resistance carried through to the kite flying event on Penn State's campus during the spring semester of 2025, where a group of us gathered in front of the arboretum to share in each other's company, conversations, and activism. I remember the morning of, before arriving to the location, storm clouds rolled in, and my worry began to settle in as I feared our time would be ruined by the weather; however, much like our tendencies as feminists to persevere through hatred and patriarchal demise, we flew our kites to new heights before the rain even started. As a graduate student, I was nearing the end of my two years of coursework, so this opportunity to collaborate with my classmates felt like a time to reflect and think back on the experiences of my time with each of these remarkable humans. I ended up being able to fly a kite I

took part in writing on during the 2024 Lobby Activism event, and while doing so moved around the field and conversed with everyone in attendance—really being mindful to discuss the triumphs and challenges everyone had possibly faced during the past school year (see Figure 32). Many of us discussed with one another the long to-do list of items needing to be accomplished, but we all felt called to make the time to participate in a more relaxing and activist activity at the peak of our assignment deadlines. This is what really has stuck with me, as a graduate student, as a teacher, as a colleague, and as a feminist—when we feel called to connect and come together for one another—we make the time.



Figure 32. Connectivity through kite flying. Penn State University Graduate Art Education Association (GAEdA) President, Eric Anthony Berdis and GAEdA Past President, Carly Sherman pose with two kites from the event. Photo by Yi-Ning Zhao.

### Simin Zargaran's Kite Story: Care is Resistance

On May 3, 2025—the day of the CFAE kite flying event—I was not able to join. My daughter, Afra, had a fever, and I stayed home, holding her warm body against mine as my mind swirled with the weight of everything I was missing, and everything that was pressing on my heart. That day, I felt the ache of separation—not only from the event, but from the collective feminist presence I longed to belong.

Later, as I looked through your stories and photos, watching kites in the skies around the world, I found myself imagining: *What if I were there?* What would it feel like to hold a string rising into the wind, with my child beside me, in community, in joy, in resistance? That imagined moment became my offering.

I envisioned a kite that read: “**Care is Resistance.**” It carried the name **Mahsa Amini** and the chant: *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi—Woman, Life, Freedom*. It carried the pain and hope of Iranian women, of girls who dare to dance, of mothers who bury daughters. It carried the deep grief and anger I feel living in a diaspora while my homeland bleeds under violence and repression.

Just days ago, Israel launched direct attacks on Tehran. As an Iranian woman, a mother, and a feminist scholar in exile, I felt the ground shake under my feet—even here in Pennsylvania. The people I love are there. My memories are there. And here, in diaspora, I see how vulnerable my community is, caught between rising Islamophobia, surveillance, and silencing on one side, and the constant heartbreak of homeland on the other.

This imagined kite is my quiet declaration: that even when we cannot show up, we carry the wind of resistance within us. That care—of children, of memory, of each other—is not passive. It is political. It is revolutionary.

### Yi-Ning Zhao Kite Story: Threads of Diaspora, A Kite of Memory and Belonging

The kite carried not just my message, but the invisible weight of diasporic memory, freedom, and the longing to belong. On May 3, 2025, on the grass in front of the Palmer Museum of Art, the wind and rain were unpredictable, much like the emotional terrain I've been navigating since crossing continents as an

Asian woman, educator, and immigrant scholar. At first, the kite dipped, tangled, and spun in resistance. I fumbled with the string, felt the tension between gravity and hope. The line jerked. The sky turned. But with each retry, it lifted briefly, then higher, until it finally danced with the wind. That moment, fleeting yet powerful, filled me with a deep sense of freedom. So many small moments came rushing back. The reasons I came here, the moments that shaped me. I thought of all the support and love from my family: their unwavering belief in me, the invisible presence holding me up across time zones. I thought of my own resistance: not loud, but spiritual, persistent, shaped by dreams, exhaustion, and a kind of inner clarity that refuses to collapse.

The kite was not just a symbol, it also reminded me that I am not alone. The sky was not filled with just one kite, but many. Around me were communities, classmates, mentors, each holding their own string, letting their stories rise (see Figure 33). In that moment, I felt a surge of collective power and energy. I was surrounded by something stronger than the wind. It is support, solidarity, and a chorus of presence. It reminded me that feminist resistance does not always roar; sometimes, it trembles, adjusts, and rises again.



Figure 33. Back view of Yi-Ning Zhao and Nashormeh Norma Lindo flying a kite together on the lawn outside Palmer Museum. Photo courtesy of a classmate.

## Karen Keifer-Boyd Reflecting on Kite Experiences at Penn State, Pennsylvania, USA

Teaching, to me, is to facilitate experiences, to set-in-motion possibilities. In this case the kite decorating and flying experiences dovetailed with a plurality of feminisms dipped in personal lived histories. To grasp freedom there is responsibility to not only initiate but to bring people together, so each feels they are valued, they are heard. I endeavored to do so from orchestrating the 2024 CFAE Lobby Activism event in Minneapolis to setting in motion kite flights, and a site to collect stories, photographs, and movies, as well as by encouraging distributed leadership in transporting the kites from one to another (Figure 34). The 10 kites came together again at a CFAE session at NAEA in March 2025 and from there I brought them back to my home institution, The Pennsylvania State University. I invited all art education graduate students and faculty to fly the kites at a finale event on a Saturday after our last class for the semester. I invited all participants to share their kite flying experience to create a multi-authored multimedia essay for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of *Visual Culture & Gender*, resulting in a collection of 21 kite stories. Each kite story amplifies notions of feminism with many highlighting particular ways they have persevered navigating tensions to rise above obstacles towards freedom. Working with the power of the wind lifts one's spirit above real and perceived constraints to pursue meaningful goals in accordance with one's beliefs and values. With a kite in hand, each author soared above external pressures to find currents of resilience, building a coalition of feminisms.



Figure 34: At an NAEA 2025 session, presenters (left to right: Christine Liao, Karen Keifer-Boyd, Chien-Ling Chen, Ann Holt, Liz Langdon, Laura Lee McCartney) share stories of feminist activism art education with the 10 kites they stand behind created at the Coalition for Feminisms in Art Education (CFAE) 2024 Lobby Activism event and flown at 50 events throughout the year in celebration of the Women's Caucus 50th anniversary.

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**Simin Zargaran** is an Iranian artist, writer, and PhD candidate in Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University. Her research and practice explore feminist pedagogy, diasporic motherhood, and the cultural memory of educational institutions like Kanoon in Iran. Through visual storytelling, personal archives, and embodied reflection, she calls for art education that embraces tenderness as a site of resistance, especially in the face of state violence, exile, and gendered silencing.

**Yi-Ning Zhao** is a PhD candidate in Art Education and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Penn State University. Her work engages art-based research and feminist pedagogy to explore embodied knowledge as a site of resistance and care. Through feminist methods, she examines how creative practices can amplify the voices, rights, and agency of Asian women.