



ON SURFACE

YOSHIKO SHIMADA:  
BONES IN TANSU - FAMILY SECRETS

APRIL 25 - JUNE 6, 2009

OPENING FRIDAY MAY 8, 7PM

Yoshiko Shimada's *Bones in Tansu – Family Secrets* is the second in a series of four exhibitions taking place at **The Print Studio** in Hamilton between March and October 2009.

Under the title *On Surface*, the series features print-based works by four contemporary visual and media artists. The curatorial intent of this project is to explore the connection between the print/image and the meaning underlying its surface. Recognized as one of Japan's foremost politically engaged artists, Yoshiko Shimada has stimulated discourse on the visual culture of nationalism, and the complicity of women in war. The way history is told resonates with the mysterious and laborious effort congealed in a numbered edition of prints. Who and what is at work behind the creation of a narrative is equally relevant to artistic practice as to perceptions of social, political and historical truths. Since 2004, the artist has collected more than a thousand "family secrets" for this body of work during workshop exhibitions in Asia and Europe.

*On Surface* also featured Shelley Niro (February/March), and includes upcoming exhibitions by Delio Delgado (September/October) and Amelia Jiménez (November/December), curated by Ingrid Mayrhofer.



### 'Unspeakable (like her lock of hair in the drawer)'

In the English language, we call it the skeleton in the closet. The relative Japanese idiom refers to dirt under the carpet with an earthy subtlety that skirts around those other cultures going a step further, hiding away the corpse flesh and all.

If the purpose of idiomatic language is to slip a layer of obfuscation over our dirty deeds, then *Bones in Tansu* is an especially stealthy turn of phrase that cuts across cultures and stashes the stripped skeleton in spaces much smaller than a closet, in the Japanese tansu or dresser drawer that seems too shallow a grave for so many bodies. And the secrets concealed in the stacked drawers are very often matters of the body that is murdered, neglected or bartered – sex and violence preoccupy the silenced conscience brought to life in Yoshiko Shimada's ongoing project.

*Bones in Tansu: Family Secrets* insists on the complicity of the viewer who is initially cast in the role of the nosy houseguest by the need to engage in the opening and closing of drawers to view the work, an act that skews towards the voyeuristic in reading the secrets inscribed on the enclosed prints. This privilege is complicated by the inclusion of a curtained desk in the gallery for the writing of one's own secrets. The opportunity for coy exhibitionism lends immediacy to the archival thrust of Shimada's project, one that pushes forward to future sites where the secrets gathered in this show may contribute to the next, their identities left behind in the anonymity of travel like a businessman conferencing in Vegas.

Paradoxically, it is the artist's hand that performs this necessary negation of individuality. The gesture of printmaking, of layering literal transparency in both word and image, serves as the means by which these secrets are stripped of their identifications with the speaker. As mediator, Shimada



renders personal glimpses of past lives that reawaken a wider cultural memory of wars and civic liberties hard won and lost.

The two-way exchange of secrets enabled by *Bones in Tansu* contains a quiet tension between anonymity and intimacy at this meeting point of a collective consciousness. The voyeuristic viewer experiences relief in knowing that one is not alone in harbouring secrets – despite their disparate cultural origins, these secrets reveal a humanity held in common among the subtly shifting causes of shame. Choosing to pass a secret into the artist's keeping reflects a desire to share in that act of making difficult truths known, of being recognized and reconciled.

This gathering and display of secrets subverts the brightly shallow sheen of much contemporary Japanese art that celebrates popular culture and is symptomatic of a revelatory digital display of the self that seldom penetrates beyond the two-dimensional surface of being. In refusing these slick aesthetics, Yoshiko Shimada valorizes markers of time and age, holding our secrets in real-world constructs brought to life with smell and touch that wash away shameful isolation, like dirty laundry come clean at last and neatly tucked away.

*Stephanie Vegh, May 2009*

### **Yoshiko Shimada Artist Statement**

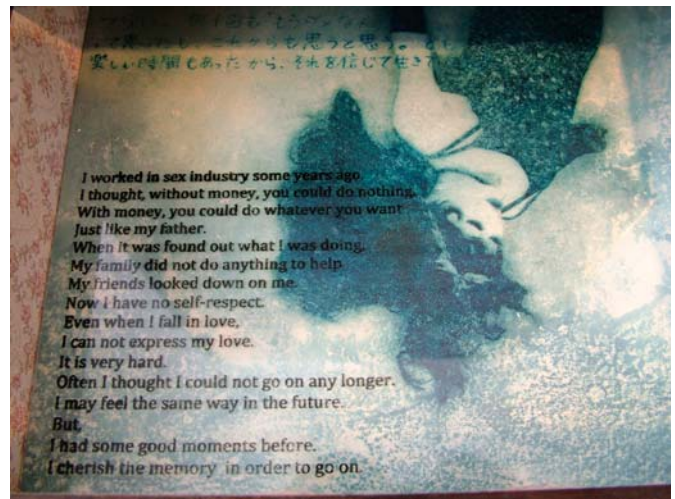
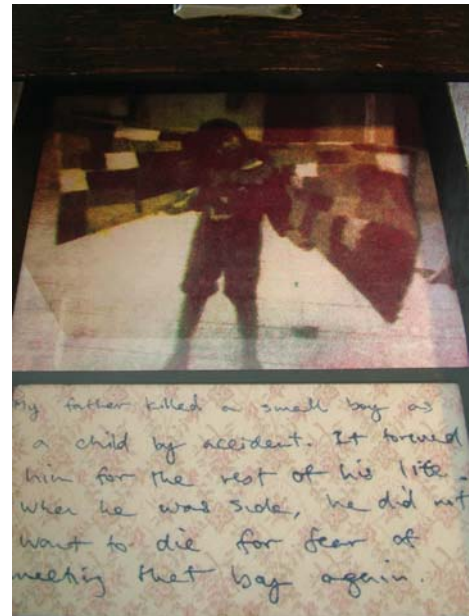
"*Bones in Tansu - Family Secrets*" started in Tokyo in 2004, and travelled to South East Asia through the support of a Nippon Foundation API fellowship. The project comprised installations, workshops and discussions in each location.

My objective in carrying out this project was to provide an arena for silenced voices, creating a safe space to express their experiences and share them with others in public without risking their privacy. The audience/participant was not the subject of a research project, but rather an essential collaborator in shaping the content of the artwork. I do not intend to provide answers to their problems, but I want the work to encourage people to relate to and empathize with each other.

The exhibition blurs the line between the public and private spheres and makes us aware that private and familial problems are not just personal, but also political.

### **Contributions to the exhibition have come from:**

- 2004 Tokyo; in 'Borderline Cases' a group show of Japanese and Korean women artists
- 2005 Tokyo; in 'Life, actually' Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art
- 2005 Seoul; in 'Fantastic Asia' Sunguk Museum
- 2006 Metro Manila; at the University of the Philippines in Diliman (UP Diliman)
- 2007 Chiang Mai; in Chiang Mai University (CMU) Art Museum
- 2007 Yogyakarta; at the Cemeti Art House
- 2008 Copenhagen; at Galleri Christina Wilson
- 2008 Marugame, Japan; Gallery Arte
- 2009 London; at Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University
- 2009 Hamilton, Canada; at The Print Studio Gallery





## Yoshiko Shimada

- 1959 Born in Tokyo  
1982 Graduated from Scripps College, Ca. U.S.A. B.A. in Humanities  
1994 Residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin  
1995 Recipient of Berlin City Women Artist Program Award  
1998-99 Recipient of Asian Cultural Council grant, Residency at P.S.1, New York  
2006 Recipient of Danish Arts Council grant DIVA. Residency in Copenhagen  
2006-07 Recipient of API Senior Fellowship grant. Residency and research in Manila, Chiang Mai, Yogyakarta (Indonesia)  
2008-2009 Recipient of Danish Art Council grant and Scandinavia-Japan Sasakawa Foundation  
2008-2010 Recipient of British Council PM2 award, residency in London and Kyoto

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 1995 Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo (also 96,98,2002)  
Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin  
1996 Keio University Art Center, Tokyo  
1997 Hiraya Gallery, Manila  
John Batten Gallery, Hong Kong  
*Divide and Rule*, A Space Gallery, Toronto  
1999 Asia/Pacific Studies Institute, New York University, New York  
2000 Kyoto Seika University Gallery, Kyoto  
2001 Centre A, Centre for Asian Contemporary Art, Vancouver  
2006 *Bones in Tansu – Family Secrets* University of Philippines, Manila  
2007 *Bones in Tansu – Family Secrets* Chiang Mai University Art Museum  
*Bones in Tansu – Family Secrets* Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
2008 Christina Wilson Gallery, Copenhagen  
2009 Stanley Picker Gallery, London  
*Bones in Tansu – Family Secrets* The Print Studio, Hamilton

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1995 *Age of Anxiety*, Powerplant, Toronto, Canada  
1996 *Gender, beyond memories*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo  
1997 *Lord of the Rim-in herself, for herself*, Hsing-chong Culture Center, Taiwan  
*Flexible Co-existence*, Art Tower Mito, Mito  
1999 *Windows-inside, outside*, Gwangju City Art Museum, Gwangju, Korea  
2000 *Dark Mirrors from Japan*, De Appel Foundation, Amsterdam  
Yume no Ato, Haus am Waldsee Berlin, Kunsthalle Baden-Baden  
2001 *Sex and Consumerism*, Brighton University, Aberystwyth Art Centre and others.  
*Spirits*, workshops and theater performance with Theatreworks, Singapore  
2002 *There*, Gwangju Biennale project 2, Gwangju, Korea East Asian *Women and Herstories*, Seoul Women's Center, Seoul, Korea  
*Attitude 2002*, Kumamoto City, Museum of Contemporary Art, Kumamoto  
2003 *City-net Asia*, Seoul City Art Museum, Seoul  
2004 *Borderline Cases*, A.R.T. gallery, Tokyo  
2005 *Life, actually*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo  
*Fantastic Asia*, Songkuk Museum, Seoul  
2006 *Mapping the Body* NRLA Festival, Tramway, Glasgow Sex Arbeit NGBK, Berlin  
2007 *Doll House* Shanghai Xuhui Art Museum, Shanghai

### Public Collections

New York Public Library, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Keio University Art Center, Kyoto Seika University, City University of New York

Artist: Yoshiko Shimada  
Guest Writer: Stephanie Vegh  
Guest Curator: Ingrid Mayrhofer

Images courtesy of the artist

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Gallery hours

Wed—Fri: noon—6 pm ; Sat: noon—4 pm



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