

Newspaper woman (Shinbunonna, 新聞女), Miyuk Nishizawa

On March 9, 2013 @Guggenheim Museum - A great night of something happened...

In early February 2013, Newspaper woman, her comrades and some AU members (Art Unidentified*) arrived in the USA. Kiki Nienaber (Director of Fuse Art Infrastructure) and Gregory Coates (Co-director of Lollipop Operations) hosted the Japanese artists in Allentown. They lived under the same roof for a month, each day bringing to life artistic events titled "Lollipop Gutai Influences." These included performances, exhibitions and workshops in Allentown and New York.

Shozo Shimamoto, Co-founder of the Gutai arts movement in postwar Japan and Miyuki Nishizawa's dear mentor, was clinging to his last moments of life when Miyuki received a personal invitation to perform at The Guggenheim Museum. Shimamoto passed away January, 25, 2013. Miyuki and the Newspaper Girls immediately abandoned their paid return tickets to Japan and vowed to meet the challenge to infuse the Guggenheim Museum with Shimamoto's expressive spirit, to deliver happiness to all visitors participating in the events and to transmit that happiness not through just one night performance but as an infinite newspaper dream!

*Guggenheim museum held the exhibition "Gutai : Splendid Playground" February 15 - May 8, 2013

The powerful performance lasts until midnight. The backstage is in chaos, filled with newspapers and working staff while visitors arrive at the entrance. The event opens with an exceptional newspaper dress whose hem reaches to more than 30 meters long. A sign instructs visitors: "Please walk under here". This work is in homage Shozo Shimamoto, one of whose participative and interactive works is called "Please walk on here" (1955).

Participants are supposed to walk under the long hem of the artist's huge skirt. They can touch the dress to turn it up, making a newspaper arc for visitors passing under. This long hem is intricately cut like lace fabric, making a sophisticated shadow on the floor (look at the picture!) In walking under the artist's skirt, the exciting ambiance envelops us.

After the opening performance "Please walk under here", a parade starts with assorted newspaper costumes and characters. Panels of Yoshiko Yamamoto's photography on the museum's long slope involve the visitors on the floor while people donning larger-than-life newspaper jackets and Miyuki and the Newspaper Girls parade together in newspaper dresses. According to Miyuki, the concept of the giant jacket is "to enjoy wearing it and looking at people wearing it...even if the most intelligent university professor wears it, they will look so stupid! That's the advantage of this work!"

Following the parade, a giant newspaper Teddy Bear appears slumped on the floor! A monster covered with newspaper shredded as thin as angel-hair pasta hair dances eccentrically around the giant teddy bear. Old-fashioned Japanese popular songs Enkas, 演歌 or Miyuki's original music (BGM), drift through your ears while you risk being stuck with bizarre, colorful labels indicating a discount price on your clothes. These are the same labels used to indicate discounts in Japanese grocery stores. Everything here makes us laugh and feel happy!

In the final act of this Gutai experience, you'll find Miyuki on the Guggenheim's spiral ramp, wearing a beautiful cloth which is one of Shozo Shimamoto's real works. She looks like an elegant and beautiful fairy.

Gutai mind and the birth of the Newspaper Woman

Shozo Shimamoto (1928-2013.1) is one of the founding members of the Gutai Art Association. Shimamoto coined the term "Gutai" – “embodiment” in Japanese. He is known for performance paintings such as cannon shooting painting, crane performance painting etc. He also founded the art association "AU" (Art Unidentified) which aims to give amateurs an artistic experience. In his later years, he contributed to these activities to educate and help people through the arts. The term "Shimamoto meme" refers to the transmission of Shimamoto's artistic mind and attitude towards the arts. This attitude is shared by many, including Miyuki, who was moved and touched deeply by his art and life. She is a follower of the Gutai conviction that Art is an activity for the liberation and opening of minds. Through her art, Miyuki overcame difficulties in her life. Art helped her to destroy the heavy chain that had long fastened her heart and then smash it into fragments.

In her youth, she suffered from strained parental relationships and social pressures formed by banal stereotypes. Pains she felt are not far from those we have when wearing un-suitable clothes, or by a corset confining our body from the chest to the hip. "Nyotaku"*, one of the most significant works of Shozo Shimamoto is worth analyzing. This important work received much unfair criticism and was misinterpreted by those who lack the capacity to understand its purpose. It was treated as a downright scandal in Japanese society. A play on the word "Gyotaku," or "fish print/impression," "Nyotaku" literally means "Female print." Nyotaku is an ink rubbing of a female body on paper. Miyuki stripped naked to model for the Nyotaku works, at one point completely nude. Ben Shimons, a renowned American photographer, was deeply interested in Nyotaku, saying that in Nyotaku women are natural and free, representing their lives as they were. Miyuki became one of Ben Simons' best loved models. He appreciated her inner energy and brilliant beauty. A young Miyuki gradually came to understand positive energy as the most important thing to survive in this world. The nourishing of her strong, exposed soul through her Nyotaku experience and Ben Simon's photographic work helped her to find her way towards "Newspaper Woman."

Miyuki is always smiling. In each of my personal encounters with her, and in her pictures online, she radiates happiness. I believe smiling people have a naturally positive influence on the world and enable the spread of joy by sheer presence. Smiling people are essentially much stronger than those who carry a depressed and sad look wherever they go. Miyuki's positive energy, something most worthy of being transmitted from one individual to another, is precious and irreplaceable.

Newspaper woman and newspapers

Newspaper woman uses newspapers as the main material for her artworks. Every day, vast quantities of newspapers are published to inform their readers of news, only to be thrown away soon after. Newspapers are printed day by day in vain... Before working as an artist, Miyuki Nishizawa, studied fashion at university and worked for a company as designer for 12 years. She was unmoved by the high-paced fashion industry and the contemporary consummation society. She felt sick watching those around her carry out a lifestyle where material objects are purchased in great quantity and frequency only to

be ignored or tossed aside. Indeed, the high-speed apparel industry's scheme is very similar to that of newspapers as a materialized mass media. She decided to drop out of the barren cycle of consummation in order to start carrying out artistic activities by using newspapers as compensation for things she had abandoned thus far.

Shozo Shimamoto, her master, also used newspaper as a material for painting in the beginning of his career. The work is commonly known as "Holes"(1954, Shozo Shimamoto, Work Paint on newspaper, Ashiya City Museum of Art & History). Its concept was born from the same moment of the avant-garde artist, Shozo Shimamoto. Shimamoto, whose parents had not allowed him to major in arts at the University, decided to apprentice himself to Jiro Yoshihara(the leader of Gutai Art Association founded in 1954). Shimamoto painted everyday without capturing Yoshihara's approval. In those days, just 5 or more years after the end of World War II , the young man who lacked financial means to buy canvas, superimposed newspapers on the wood frame, coated it with boiled flour (imported from the U.S.A through the GHQ*) and finished with white paint. One day when he was pressed to finish a painting, a hole was ripped on the canvas because its surface hadn't yet dried. - " Am I the first artist who invented a painting with a hole ?" - As he expected, Yoshihara ardently praised the "broken" painting and he afterwards gained a positive reputation abroad. When Shimamoto's early works obtained a durable existence with a permanent place in several museums, then newspaper canvas' were fossilized at the cost of its liberty. In contrast, newspapers in Miyuki's works are free and represented very differently: mobile, cut into fragments, shredded, teared, modeled, touched, worn, and thrown away immediately after her performances. Her newspapers live through a brief, joyful existence for the sake of Newspaper Woman's performance participants.

*GHQ (General Headquarters): After the World War, the Allied Powers held by Douglas MacArthur ruled Japanese government during the Occupation of Japan. Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) is the official title however GHQ was the term generally used in Japan.

The "Eco-Art" (Art for the ecology) is not the only reason Miyuki uses newspapers. If you look more carefully into the real signification of the use of newspapers in her artworks, you can clearly understand the important character of newspapers as a "mass

media". Contrary to the beauty and joy in her artworks, the contents of newspapers always represent information about horrible accidents, scaring wars, durable tribal conflicts or political discords and bad business. When we let our eyes to follow these articles about depressing events, we cannot avoid getting the impression that the world is filled with tragic stories, and actually, it may be a kind of truth.

I'd like to introduce one of the most reputable works titled "Peace Road", presented in a famous Japanese art magazine, *Bijutsu-Techo* on June 2004. In this work, she faced the tragedy of 9.11 of the U.S.A by collecting paper articles about the issue. She blotted out the part concerning 9.11 with five colors: blue representing our planet, and white, black, red, yellow representing people's skin colors. She created a 1.2 km long newspaper "Peace Road" passing through a shopping arcade in Kobe. An earnest hope for world peace and for contributing to people's happiness is shared concepts in Miyuki's work. This project is replicated worldwide, including several places in Japan and at Saint Mark's square in Venice, setting paper streets round the globe!

On February 11 2013, Monumental crane performance in Allentown

The crane performance is symbolic of the dynamism and energy of Newspaper Woman. While Shimamoto's crane performances were carried out to make a giant painting by throwing colorful, ink-filled glass bottles from the sky, it is Newspaper Woman herself who becomes a living sculpture in her crane performance. She wears a giant, 20 meters long newspaper dress. The giant paper skirt can enclose the spectators observing her from the ground as they look up into her skirt! Miyuki has a serious pathological fear of heights. However, her fears are undetectable as she appears chilled out and happy in the sky, sometimes releasing an elegant blizzard of falling newspaper fragments, like cherry blossom petals. The first task in Allentown this February was the crane performance. The preparation lasted all-night. There was heavy snowfall. Needless to say, rain or snow is most inconvenient for the paper works which break easily when wet. Journalists, local media interviewers and even the mayor of Allentown city came to see the spectacle. Miyuki felt heavy pressure knowing she was to carry out this performance in the place of the late Shozo Shimamoto, that is to say, she wouldn't be excused of any small mistakes.

This celebrated performance ended in great success, surrounded by applauding spectators and their smiles.

"Then, I was caught by some odd sensation. Before, I had been down on the ground clapping my hands with other spectators, to cheer him on. However, this time I was in Mr.Shimamoto's place, looking down at the people on the ground." said Miyuki.

The triumph of the crane performance in Allentown has a crucial significance for members of Shozo Shimamoto atelier, Newspaper Woman's group and Miyuki Nishizawa herself.

Her dear master "has retired from his activities in the real world," leaving amazing and testing opportunities for her and her comrades. This sensitive and fragile Nyotaku model has now become an independent artist who, suspended alone in the sky by a big crane, is applauded by people on the ground. Sometimes she appears in public elegantly or sometimes suddenly, like a guerrilla, making her beautiful music and dance experiences to spread joy to all people present. Everything she makes exists for "liberating people's minds" and for delivering happiness to each person she meets.

She said,

"I have succeeded in freeing my mind thanks to the arts, as well as Mr.Shimamoto and many friends around me as well. Then, I want to help people who currently have difficulties living joyfully by liberating their minds from their suffering, even if for just a moment. I hope this happiness will be spread to young people of the next generation."

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