

# TEMPLON



CHI HARU SHIOTA

*WALLPAPER\**, 01 juin 2020

## At home with artist Chiharu Shiota

By TF CHAN

In our ongoing series, we go home, from home, with artists finding inspiration in isolation. We catch up this week with Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota on creating art with her body, and the past lives of found objects



Chiharu Shiota's installations, often involving everyday objects entangled in a sea of blood-red, black or white yarn, leave a searing impression in the minds of viewers; not only for their exceptional beauty, but also because of the poignant way in which they represent personal narratives, and articulate complex feelings of longing and loss.

Representing Japan at the 2015 Venice Biennale, Shiota created *The Key in the Hand*, dangling 50,000 metal keys, collected from around the world, in a colossal red web above two wooden boats – a poetic metaphor for the distillation of individual

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experiences into collective memory. Catapulted to international renown, she has since staged solo exhibitions on five continents – including memorable takeovers of Berlin’s Nikolaikirche (2017) and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park Chapel (2018), and a 2019 retrospective that became the second-most-visited show in the history of Tokyo’s Mori Art Museum. Her output also extends to sculpture, video performance and even set design for prominent theatrical and operatic productions, the demand for which will only grow. We reached her, via email, at home in Berlin to talk about being liberated from the world of painting, the stories concealed within mundane objects, the joys of ephemeral installations, and art as a life-giving force.



**Wallpaper\*:** Where are you as we speak?

**Chiharu Shiota:** I am sitting at my desk at home. Luckily, my home is also my atelier. I have been drawing and working a lot. One of my cats has come to visit me. I have two of them, they are brothers. They always want to sit on my drawings, which is why I have an empty box next to my desk, so they sit inside the box instead of on

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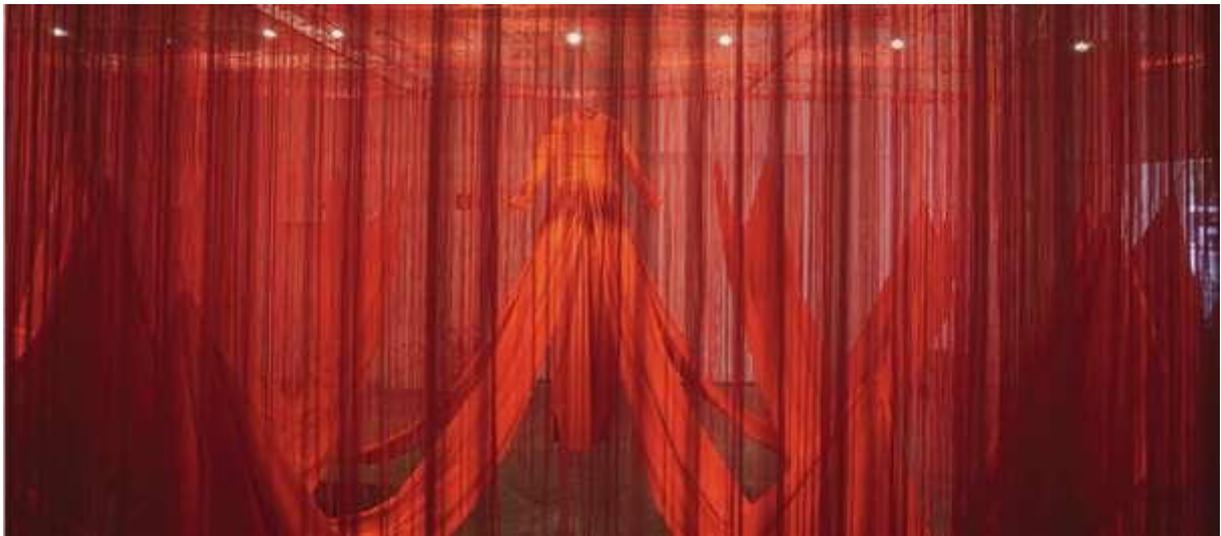
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my work. They always want to be the centre of attention. The window is open, and I can hear a train go by. All the trees outside my window are green now.

**W\*:** How has your background in painting influenced your performances and installations?

**CS:** During my second year of studying painting, I felt that I could not continue. Painting did not mean anything to me anymore. This art skill has such a rich history, but I had a feeling that it's not part of my history. Then one night, I had a dream that I was inside a two-dimensional painting. I could not breathe because of the oil paint pouring on me. This inspired me to create *Becoming Painting*. It was an act of liberation, and I understood that I could create art with my body.



**W\*:** Originally from Japan, you have been based in Berlin for more than two decades. How has the experience of different places and cultures shaped you as an artist?

**CS:** When I was living in Japan, I did not think about my cultural identity. But after moving to Germany, I met many people from different countries, and I began to

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reflect on my own heritage. I like to explain this experience with a metaphor. It is like pouring salt into a glass and adding water. When I lived in Japan, I was like the glass of water, but when I moved to Germany the water evaporated and the salt crystallised. Everything became crystal clear and I understood myself better.

**W\*:** You are known for artworks that offer meditations on mortality and afterlife. How has your relationship to the subject evolved over your career, and especially during the current pandemic?

**CS:** All my work is inspired by my life or by a personal emotion. I try to expand this emotion into something universal to connect with others. I have tried to express emotions in my art that I would never be able to explain. In the past, I have had to overcome some serious medical conditions, and creating art has helped me to survive. The current situation has also inspired me to work with new materials. Life will continue to push me.



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**W\*:** You have built installations from day to day objects: keys, luggage and window frames, to name a few. What did you find persuasive about these objects, and how do you incorporate them in your art?

**CS:** Many years ago, I bought some old suitcases at a flea market in Berlin. When I opened them at home, I could feel the existence of the previous owner. Even though I never met them, I could feel their presence. I believe the objects that surround us accumulate our existence. When I leave my bed in the morning, you can see traces of my body in the sheets.

**W\*:** What draws you to the idea of creating ephemeral installations that are delicate in construction, and often have to be taken apart rather than preserved after each show?

**CS:** The single line of thread is like a line in a painting. With the thread I am drawing in the air, in an unlimited space. With the material I can create new spaces. They might be deconstructed after the exhibition, but they will live in the memory of the visitors forever.

**W\*:** What has been your career highlight to date?

**CS:** It was a great honour to be asked to represent Japan at the 56th Venice Biennale, in 2015. In addition, the exhibition 'The Soul Trembles' at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo last year, which was the most comprehensive presentation of my work to date. There were photographs, sculptures, photographs of my stage designs and six large-scale installations, spanning 25 years. It was wonderful to see all my work in one place. The exhibition has toured to the Busan Museum of Art in South Korea and will continue to travel to Australia, Taiwan and Jakarta in the coming years.

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**W\*:** What upcoming projects are you most looking forward to?

**CS:** My next solo exhibition will be 'Inner Universe' at Galerie Templon in Paris, opening 30 May, featuring works that focus on the body. Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend, but I am looking forward to seeing people view my work again. There are also projects being prepared in South Korea, China and Japan that we haven't yet officially announced. I will also have my first solo show at König Galerie in Berlin in the beginning of 2021. I am looking forward to transforming the gallery.

**W\*:** Has the recent experience of lockdown prompted you to discover new themes for your work, or revisit old projects that you didn't have time for?

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**CS:** I have been drawing a lot at home. My drawings are inspired by life, and this situation has made me very creative. I always travel to install my exhibitions, but since this is not possible at the moment and will become more difficult in future, I have to rethink my work. While in my studio, I have been working on projects that can be shipped to the museum or gallery and installed without my presence.

**W\*:** What's the most interesting thing you've read or listened to in the past few weeks?

**CS:** I have watched many TED Talks in the past weeks. I have difficulties speaking in front of crowds, and I think it helps to watch these presentations. There are many fascinating topics: Guy Winch's talk on 'Emotional First Aid' was very good. He talks about how we favour the body over the mind, and what consequences this has. I recommend watching it.

