



# Imagination without Borders

Feminist Artist Tomiyama Taeko and Social Responsibility

EDITED BY

Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison

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Center for Japanese Studies  
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The images discussed in this book are available in full color on a permanent website hosted by Northwestern University at <http://imaginationwithoutborders.northwestern.edu/>

The black-and-white images provided here can serve as a convenient source to enhance the textual analysis. It is not possible, however, to fully appreciate the range, let alone the beauty, of the art under discussion in this format. At the same time, based on our experiences exhibiting this work, we believe that the visual experience of the website is more interesting and more meaningful when combined with the contextual explanation offered in this volume. While each is a coherent intellectual project on its own, we recommend using them together.

We have used standard Korean and Chinese transliterations for rendering Korean and Chinese names in English except for the titles of artworks. Most East Asian names are given with the family name first except for people who publish in English and prefer to invert their names to fit Western conventions, such as Yuki Miyamoto.

Many people have contributed to bringing this two-part project to fruition. Both editors began by hosting exhibitions at our universities. Thanks to the help of Kobayashi Masao and Gallery Fleur, a large body of Tomiyama Taeko's work was exhibited at Kyoto Seika University (2002). Leonard Swidler of Temple University and Im Ja P. Choi of the Women's Development Institute International showed "Remembrance and Reconciliation" at the International House in Philadelphia (2004). Ilse Lenz brought the same exhibit to Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany. At Northwestern, the Dittmar Gallery and the University Research Grants Committee provided resources, Dan Zellner and Tom O'Connell at Digital Media Services created an image-and-sound DVD that ran on a continuous loop for the exhibit, and Leah Boston and Cora Merriman dedicated a very long weekend of their lives to hanging the art on the walls.

The book, particularly the introductory chapter, was enriched intellectually by advice from Kendall H. Brown, S. Hollis Clayson, Huey Copeland, Rebecca Copeland, Christopher Gerteis, Charles Hayford, Jeff Kingston, Christopher Reed, Mark Selden, and audiences at Leiden University, Northwestern University, Washington University in Saint Louis, and Yale University. Jan Bardsley, Sarah Fraser,



and Laura Miller provided both good ideas and good company at various points along the way. The Buffett Center for International and Comparative Studies at Northwestern University bought transcontinental airplane tickets for Eleanor Rubin and Rebecca Jennison. J. Elizabeth Condie-Pugh translated Carlo Forlivesi's essay from Italian, Hara Ikuko and Okamoto Atsushi of Iwanami Press contributed to the discussion between Rubin and Tomiyama, while Mori Kazu made Elly's trip to Japan far more enjoyable than it could otherwise have been. Hitomi Tonomura and Bruce Willoughby of the Center for Japanese Studies at The University of Michigan moved the book to publication despite the ever-worsening climate for academic publishing.

As we now appreciate far more than before, building the website was a huge task. Kobayashi Hiromichi of the Tama University Art Museum provided many of the images and has been a crucial creative presence for many years, as did Ōta Masakuni at Gendai Kikakushitsu Press. The Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels kindly allowed us to use the images by the Marukis, and Tom Fenton contributed digitized versions of some images. Jan Bardsley, Lonny Carlile, Timothy George, Laura Miller, and Kerry Smith commented on the text. M. Claire Stuart, Sarah McVicar and, we are told, ten other people at the Northwestern University Library provided aesthetic judgment, technical skills, and considerable labor to make the website both beautiful and easy to use. Yumi Terada of Kita Kyushu University added the kanji titles.

Ongoing support for the artist's vision and endeavors from Hagiwara Hiroko, Kobayashi Hiromichi, Goto Masako, Ōta Masakuni, Hanazaki Kōhei, Kitagawa Furamu, Mutō Ichiyo, Ōshima Kaori, Fukuzawa Junko and many others has been invaluable for both projects. Kanzaki Mari's untiring attention to the organization and communication of important materials has been an enormous help.

Our deepest gratitude is to the artists Tomiyama Taeko and Takahashi Yūji, whose lives and creative work have inspired us in deeply satisfying ways.

Postcolonial Conscience:  
Making Moral Sense of Japan's Modern World

LAURA HEIN

Tomiyama Taeko, a contemporary Japanese artist now in her late eighties, deserves attention for the imaginative and powerful ways she has represented remembrance of Japan's twentieth century. Her subject for the last quarter-century has been Japan's colonial empire, its destructive wars in Asia, and the complicated emotional and social legacies left by both war and empire after 1945. Her work is also about the difficulty of disentangling herself from the priorities of the nation despite her lifelong stance of political dissent. Tomiyama's sophisticated visual commentary on Japan's history—and on the global history in which Asia is embedded—provides a particularly compelling guide through the difficult terrain of modern historical remembrance, all in a distinctively Japanese voice. Attention to her work can provide considerable insight into Japan's colonial identity and postcolonial angst; even more impressively, however, Tomiyama moves beyond critique of what is wrong in the world to a richly suggestive visual narrative of the crucial features of a better one.

Tomiyama is especially interested in exploring the complex ways that people can be simultaneously victims and perpetrators, sometimes with the same act. She focuses on remembrance not as trauma but as a moral stance of empathy. Tomiyama thinks like a poet—layering meaning on top of meaning, almost always finding a way to combine her ideas in both/and rather than either/or ways. She is creatively

ambiguous about some things—origins, identity, knowledge, legitimacy—while crystal clear about needless suffering, hypocrisy, misuse of power, sorrow, and empathy. She is also a sophisticated and technically proficient artist, and her effectiveness comes in part from the diversity and elegant execution of her images.

My first encounter with Tomiyama's art was in 1984, when I visited the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum to see Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi's newly completed mural of the Battle of Okinawa, on display before traveling to its permanent home at the Sakima Museum in Ginowan, Okinawa. The adjacent room held a linked exhibit of Tomiyama's black-and-white lithographs depicting Koreans who had been forced to work in Japan's wartime mines, and other postwar Japanese mine scenes. I was just then writing about the history of labor relations in Japan's coal mines, including the horrific treatment of Korean and Chinese slave laborers during the war.<sup>1</sup> Tomiyama's images impressed me as both social and aesthetic creations. This artist had obviously thought deeply and creatively about how to depict the difficult subject of coerced labor. She forthrightly acknowledged colonial violence, something that was much less common in Japan at that time than it became in the 1990s. She was also clearly familiar with the international oeuvre of modern printmaking and its use as a medium of social protest, particularly early twentieth-century German prints. The images were hauntingly beautiful and stayed with me for a very long time.

About a decade later I began writing about war remembrance in both Japan and the United States, and thought of that exhibit whenever I came across the assertion that Japanese remember World War II only as victims and never as perpetrators. In fact, war remembrance is, and always has been, far more diverse in Japan. Although there is some truth to the generalization that Japanese see themselves primarily as victims, either of their own government or of foreigners, ever since 1945 some Japanese have raised tough questions, not only about the way the Japanese government treated others during the war but also about the conduct of ordinary citizens.<sup>2</sup> Tomiyama's art rests squarely within this tradition.

After making the prints I saw in 1984, Tomiyama went on to produce several other series of paintings, prints, and collages that focused on Japanese brutality

1. This 1984 exhibit in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum included images from the 1950s through the images in *Pop out, Balsam Seeds! (Hajike hosenka)*, 1983). For wartime mining labor, see Laura Hein, *Fueling Growth: The Energy Revolution and Postwar Economic Policy in Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1990); Ohara Shakai Mondai Kenkyūjo, *Taiheiyō sensōka no rōdō undō* (The Labor Movement during the Pacific War), special volume in *Nihon rōdō nenkan* series (Tokyo: Rōdō Junpōsha, 1965). For a recent publication of photographs taken in 1945 of Chinese forced mine workers, see Carolyn Peter, *A Letter from Japan: The Photographs of John Swope* (Los Angeles: Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, 2006).
2. Laura Hein and Mark Selden, *Islands of Discontent: Okinawan Responses to Japanese and American Power* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); idem, *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000); and idem,



in Manchuria and violence against Korean colonial subjects. She attained a new level of international fame with her mid-1980s work on remembrance of the Korean women who were forced to provide sex to Japanese soldiers and sailors during the war, and I became reacquainted with her work then. Some years later, Rebecca Jennison submitted an essay to a journal I edited and later introduced me to the artist. One thing led to another, and eventually I hosted an exhibition of collages (see figure 1), prints, and multimedia pieces, called *Remembrance and Reconciliation: Tomiyama Taeko's Art*, at Northwestern University in early 2006.

Yet it soon became clear that, although my students and the other—mainly American—visitors to the gallery admired the pictures, they needed considerable knowledge about modern Asian history to fully appreciate Tomiyama's commentary. Like much of Tomiyama's work, this exhibit was crammed with deceptively pleasant images that simultaneously lull and disturb the visitor, who senses the malice implied just beyond the frame. (For more on "deceptively pleasant" presentations, see chapter 5.) Yet, without knowing the context for the collages and prints, the viewer had no historical framework for that implied malice. The more I explained, the more visitors were engaged by what they saw. That observation became the impetus for this book.

What kind of book, then, would best convey both the problems that Tomiyama was tackling and the significance of her interpretive strategies? Because Tomiyama's own influences are so varied, an interdisciplinary approach seemed most appropriate. She reads widely in literary, political, and religious texts, among other genres. All have influenced her art. The contributors to this volume—who are trained in art history, literature, religion, history, music composition, and the already interdisciplinary category of gender studies—provide a range of strategies for understanding the political, the poetic, the visual, and the passionate elements of Tomiyama's work and her place in the twentieth century. One concern is the lifelong tension Tomiyama has felt about being equally true to her artistic and political commitments, since despite the fact that this tension has been a source of pain for Tomiyama, it is clearly also productive for her. Because Tomiyama cares about recognition from the artistic world, we included responses by practicing artists as well as by academic analysts. Finally, while Tomiyama concentrates her attention on remembrance in Japan, discussion of Japan's past in isolation ignores the extent to which remembrance of official violence against less powerful people is something we must all reckon with. Precisely how the politics of remembrance plays out in Japan does differ from other places, however, and careful comparison can reveal

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*Living with the Bomb: American and Japanese Cultural Conflicts in the Nuclear Age* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1997). See also Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006); T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, eds., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).



Figure 1. Shaman's Prayer, collage 2002. The shaman, Tomiyama's alter ego, has been a creatively fruitful image for the artist, in part because it introduced a point of view that transcended not just the victim-perpetrator relationship but all contemporary human society.

interesting patterns. Our comparative focus here is the United States because many of us are American and because, since we write in English, we expect Americans to be a significant audience for this volume.

The chapters that follow take up a variety of issues and also move in rough chronological order through Tomiyama's work. This introduction, in addition to providing an overview of Tomiyama's sixty-year development as an artist and social critic, focuses on Japan as a postcolonial and national space and on Tomiyama's struggles to find an effective vantage point from which to critique both imperialism and nationalism. In chapter 1, Ann Sherif discusses the 1950s, when Tomiyama began her professional art career, and focuses on Tomiyama's relationship with her audiences. Sherif notes that although Tomiyama often describes herself as an isolated artist, she has shared many aspects of her working processes, aesthetic choices, and political concerns with other left-wing artists, such as the couple Maruki Iri and Toshi. Tomiyama met the Marukis shortly after the war and remained friends with them for decades, as their joint exhibit in 1984 would suggest. Sherif also discusses Tomiyama's lithographs from the 1970s on the Korean democracy movement and her depictions of coal miners discussed above.

In chapter 2, Rebecca Copeland concentrates on explaining why feminism was so crucial to Tomiyama's development as an artist. As Copeland argues, feminism not only gave Tomiyama new ways to see and to speak but also changed the way she worked. In the 1980s Tomiyama returned to oil painting and to the use of color, choices that she attributes to new perceptions built on feminist insights. Copeland focuses here on these oil paintings, particularly the series *Memories of the Sea*, completed in 1986.<sup>3</sup> She also draws connections between Tomiyama's work and the fiction of feminist writers Ōba Minako and Tomioka Taeko.

In chapter 3, Yuki Miyamoto focuses on Tomiyama's use of the figure of the fox to explore her ethical concerns by analyzing the 1995 series *Harbin: Requiem for the Twentieth Century*. Miyamoto shows how delving into Japanese folk religion deepens and makes more powerful viewers' understanding of Tomiyama's work. In particular, attention to the fox highlights Tomiyama's critique of the ways that ordinary Japanese citizens supported the conquest and rule of Manchuria. Miyamoto demonstrates the ways that Tomiyama deploys the fox to transgress the cognitive boundaries of national and gendered belonging. This chapter also reveals Tomiyama's sophisticated understanding of Japanese folk beliefs and religious traditions.

The next two chapters provide the perspectives of other practicing artists. In chapter 4, Carlo Forlivesi, himself a composer who has often collaborated with

3. There are two separate but linked artistic products with similar names: the paintings-and-collages series, *Memories of the Sea* of 1986 and *A Memory of the Sea: Dedication to the Korean "Military Comfort Women,"* a slide-and-music (now DVD) set created in 1988 from photographs of sections of the paintings and collages, paired with Takahashi Yūji's musical composition.



other music composers and dancers, takes up Tomiyama's long partnership with Takahashi Yūji. Takahashi has written music to accompany Tomiyama's slide shows since the mid-1970s, although Forlivesi concentrates mainly on their 2000 joint work *The Fox Story: Illusion of Cherry Blossoms and Chrysanthemums*. As Forlivesi explains, Takahashi, a well-known creative artist in his own right, has also challenged Tomiyama's thinking about her own work in various ways over the years. Many of their discussions have been about balancing their aesthetic goals with their joint political concerns. Forlivesi explores how this subject has complicated Takahashi's relationships with other musical artists as well.

Unlike all the contributors mentioned earlier, Forlivesi distrusts logic and logi-centric approaches to artistic production, which he finds confining. Since Takahashi shares this discomfort, Forlivesi is an effective guide through the challenging maze created by artists who hope to change other peoples' minds without in any way constricting their aesthetic choices. (I should add that although both musicians reject the need to explain themselves in words, they both publish essays at a steady pace.) Forlivesi also reminds us of a different kind of political framework—the patronage structure that affects all artists' access to funding and recognition. As he notes, some of the things he and Takahashi most prize as conditions for creativity, such as maintaining maximum indeterminacy of meaning, also affect their relationships with such patronage structures in complicated and not always welcome ways.<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 5 introduces Eleanor Rubin, an American printmaker and painter who treats many of the same themes and deploys some of the same imagery as does Tomiyama. Both have also thought carefully about how to expand their audiences. In the 2006 conversation published here, the two artists discuss their creative processes, including their reactions to the events of September 11, 2001, providing insight into the ways they use their life experiences to shape coherent presentations of themselves to the world.

In chapter 6, Hagiwara Hiroko initially returns to Tomiyama's first serious foray into painting in the 1950s. At that time she painted mine landscapes rather than their inhabitants, already making the visual argument that finding beauty in scenery not generally deemed beautiful was a way to find value in people not usually treated as valuable. Yet, as Hagiwara explains, Tomiyama was not happy with these images, which prompted her to experiment with different media and different forms of representation. That dissatisfaction spurred Tomiyama to ignore and manipulate the boundaries of artistic genres. Hagiwara ends with a discussion of Tomiyama's most recently completed series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of*

4. One of the composers discussed in this piece is Cornelius Cardew. For a more positive view of his music and ideas than that offered by Forlivesi, please see <http://www.ubu.com/sound/cardew.html>. Accessed January 18, 2009.

*Sea Wanderers* (2007–2009), and points out the connections between these images and her landscapes of fifty years earlier, giving a nice concluding overview of the trajectory of the artist's work.

## POSTCOLONIAL DILEMMAS

In Tomiyama's lifetime, Japan has radically changed its boundaries, its government, and its society. Defeat in World War II led to particularly big transformations. The defeat, followed by partition of the globe along Cold War lines, meant not only that Japan was stripped of its colonies by the stroke of a pen in September 1945, but also that Japanese postwar interaction with much of the former empire was largely structured by U.S. policies in Asia. The initial decolonization process was unusually short, and was subsumed into the general experience of defeat in war and the associated repatriation of 6.1 million people, both soldiers and civilians.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, until recently, scholarly and popular attention in Japan has focused more on recollections of the war than of the empire that also collapsed in 1945.

Japan, of course, is not the only former imperial power to lose its colonies after World War II and also to lose track of their former centrality to metropolitan life. We now see far more clearly than before that there really was no modern England without India, France without Senegal, or Japan without Korea and Manchukuo. Similarly, the international context of competition among the imperial powers profoundly affected what was once thought of as purely "domestic" behavior in a variety of ways for all nations. Nor has the colonial past stayed safely in the past. Rather, for everyone involved, the colonial experience has bequeathed a powerful legacy to the present, one that is still being recognized and reevaluated.

When the United States decided to make Japan the centerpiece of its Asian Cold War strategy during the postwar Occupation, the Americans not only forbade Japan from interaction with China, North Korea, and North Vietnam but also reorganized the rest of the region, both to integrate it militarily and to support expansion of the Japanese economy. The Americans forced South Koreans, Taiwanese, and most Southeast Asians to treat Japan as a favored ally by, for example, tying foreign loans for costly infrastructural projects such as dams and port facilities to Asian willingness to buy cement and engineering expertise from Japan. Unsurprisingly, the Asians resented this arrangement, not least because it helped the Japanese avoid reflecting on their past conduct as imperial overlords and wartime occupiers.

5. Lori Watt, "Imperial Remnants: The Repatriates in Postwar Japan," in Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen, eds., *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 243–56; statistic from p. 245.

Yet they had little opportunity over the next half-century to pressure Japanese to acknowledge the sufferings their nation had caused. Despite such structural barriers, however, some Japanese, particularly those like Tomiyama who interacted directly with other Asians, began thinking about these issues in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1989 two major events—the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the death of Emperor Hirohito, who had reigned since 1926—brought the question of how to remember and refigure Japan’s imperial past to the forefront of public discussion, a topic that is still unresolved. Much is at stake, particularly as American power diminishes globally and Chinese power increases. In the future, Japan will have to negotiate on more equal terms than it has in the past with the other countries in the region, and its government and citizens are deeply divided on how to think about this problem. Yet, as Gavan McCormack has recently argued, since the 1990s, to the dismay of many Japanese, political leaders have accepted ever-deeper levels of dependence on the United States while simultaneously generating a compensatory nationalism celebrating timeless Japanese culture. As the benefits to Japan diminish for tying its policies to American ones, the Japanese leaders who have pursued those policies have ratcheted up their empty rhetorical assertions about Japanese independence.<sup>6</sup>

For my purposes here, the key point is that in the Japanese case, issues of political autonomy and cultural authenticity, central to all former colonies, are a minefield for the metropole as well. In this respect, Japan’s postcolonial identity is inextricably braided into its status as favored client in the postwar American-dominated world order, on the one hand, and into the project of evading honest remembrance of presurrender empire, on the other.

When national cultural authenticity is perceived to be at stake, all aspects of culture are political, as H. D. Harootunian has been arguing about prewar Japan for many years.<sup>7</sup> More precisely, because culture in this context necessarily raises issues of nationalism, artists and other producers of culture who wish to distance themselves from the policies of the Japanese government face a particularly difficult challenge. To put the same point another way, while all nationalisms work to delegitimize critics, criticism gets harder the more cultural authenticity seems to be at stake. These are precisely the issues that Tomiyama—and many other Japanese—have found hardest to negotiate since 1945.

6. Gavan McCormack, *Client State: Japan in the American Embrace* (London and New York: Verso, 2007). For a longer discussion of compensatory nationalism, see Laura Hein, “The Cultural Career of the Japanese Economy: Developmental and Cultural Nationalisms in Historical Perspective,” in Radhika Desai, ed., *Nationalisms in the Alchemy of Neoliberalism and Globalization: From Developmental Nationalism to Cultural Nationalism in Asia*, special issue of *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2008): 447–65.

7. H. D. Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

Tomiyaama is a deeply political person who has been involved in left-wing politics since the early postwar years. For her, as for so many others, political community and creative practice are mutually constitutive and continually interactive. In an older idiom, one intimately familiar to all left-wing Japanese of Tomiyama's generation, political community and creative practice are locked in a dialectical relationship. She has something important to say—the first and most crucial ingredient to powerful expression.<sup>8</sup>

Tomiyaama's political engagements have been typical for left-wing activists of her generation, although she often portrays herself as a lone voice in the wilderness. She has long been deeply anti-war and highly critical of both the wartime government for its criminal folly and the postwar government for supporting American military adventurism in Asia. In the early postwar decades, as Hagiwara Hiroko discusses in chapter 6 in this volume, Tomiyama focused on issues of social class and directed her efforts at supporting organized labor. Although unions had been banned during the war, after 1945 they quickly became a huge force in Japanese politics. In the 1950s, when Tomiyama worked for a labor-union newspaper, nearly half the Japanese workforce, or 5.8 million people, belonged to unions.<sup>9</sup> These organizations cooperated with the newly legal Japan Communist Party and Japan Socialist Party, which also soon represented a substantial percentage of the Japanese population. At its peak, the Socialist Party captured close to a third of all votes in national elections in 1958.<sup>10</sup> Tomiyama, like the Marukis, joined the smaller Communist Party after the war—meaning, as Sherif explains for the Marukis in chapter 1, that she had to contend with the party leadership's strong opinions about politically "acceptable" art.<sup>11</sup>

From the 1960s on, Tomiyama also established connections with labor-union, peace, and social-justice advocates in other parts of the world, interactions that broadened and deepened her artistic work. Such transnational contacts have consistently sparked Tomiyama's imaginative breakthroughs over the years, revealing the extent to which her creativity relies on breaking free from the confines of nationalism. Her long-term efforts, and those of other Japanese like her, contributed to moving the subject of Japanese responsibility for war and empire to the forefront of debate after 1989.

8. For a survey of other artists with similar stances, see Ralph E. Shikes, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

9. Andrew Gordon, *Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 10.

10. The Communist Party was far smaller, capturing only 2.6 percent of votes in 1958, although it won over 10 percent of votes cast in the early 1970s. Masumi Junnosuke, *Contemporary Politics in Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 472 and 478.

11. Tomiyama left the Communist Party in 1965 to protest the party's acceptance of Japan's normalization treaty with the Republic of Korea.

Tomiyaama's thinking has evolved considerably over time, most importantly encompassing feminism and a sharper critique of imperialism. These issues for her are linked to each other and are also deeply personal. She encountered feminism in the early 1970s, through books by Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millet and feminist friends in Japan—an experience that changed her life, as it did for many left-wing women of her generation around the world. In Tomiyama's words, it was “as though the scales had fallen from my eyes.”<sup>12</sup> Tomiyama edited a volume of essays by Japanese feminist writers and scholars in the early 1970s, and published other “Second Wave” feminist works of her own. At around the same time, she worked with Matsui Yayori to build the Asian Women's Association and its many projects that fostered dialogue among women in Japan and other Asian countries about human trafficking, sexual violence, and war responsibility.<sup>13</sup>

Feminism provided a new grammar with which to articulate the meanings both of her own life experience as a single mother in a profoundly patriarchal culture and of contemporary Japanese society, and to connect those two things. Though creative work is always inherently autobiographical, feminism made this link more explicit to Tomiyama and provided new narratives with which to make sense of her life, ones that soon showed up as new interpretive strategies within her art.

In addition to helping her think through gender issues, the feminist insight that “the personal is political” showed Tomiyama how to incorporate her youth in Manchuria into her art. Tomiyama had spent her junior high and high school years in Dalien and Harbin, where her father worked for Dunlap Tyres, a British corporation that had opened its first Japanese factory in Kobe in 1913. Manchuria was then one of the most transnational spaces in the Japanese empire, where a wide variety of Japanese were joined by Chinese, Koreans, Russians, and others, all proposing different visions for Manchuria, visions that sometimes clashed and sometimes meshed in complex ways.<sup>14</sup> Tomiyama's own family, drawing a British paycheck while enacting Japanese government plans to populate Manchurian cities with a Japanese middle class, embodied this complexity. As Prasenjit Duara argues,

12. Tomiyama Taeko, interview Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison, Tokyo, May 2005.

13. Hayashi Hiroko, the Japanese translator of Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, is Tomiyama's friend. Her translation, *Sei no benshōhō: Josei kaihō kakumei no baai* (Tokyo: Hyōronsha), was published in 1975. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) was translated as *Sei no seijigaku* (Tokyo: Jiyūkoku Minshū, 1973), with Fujieda Mioko listed as lead translator. Tomiyama authored and edited a number of explicitly feminist works in the early 1970s, including *Shinchihei* (New horizons), *Watashi no kaihō: henkyō to teihen no tabi* (My Liberation: A Journey through the Borderlands) (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1972); and *Onna e no sankā: warera no kaihō* (In Praise of Women: Stories of Liberation) (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1973). More recently Tomiyama published *Jidai o tsugeta onnatachi: 20-seiki feminizumu e no michi* (Women Who Spoke to the Times: The Path to Feminism in the 20th Century) (Tokyo: Tsuge Shobō, 1990 [1976]).

14. Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

Manchuria is a particularly useful location for understanding how specific localities can simultaneously both support and undermine the legitimacy of the state, an insight that Tomiyama explores in her art.<sup>15</sup>

Tomiyama was a sensitive observer of power even as a teenager. When she was sixteen, at about the same time that she decided to become an artist, she read Pearl Buck's biography of her mother, Caroline Sydenstricker, published in 1936 and translated into Japanese in 1938. She was shocked by Buck's description of her mother's fluent Chinese, her friendly relationships with her servants, and the empathy with which she treated the local people.<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Sydenstricker took this stance to extraordinary lengths. On a sudden impulse, she invited a destitute Chinese woman—a total stranger—to move in with her family, where the woman lived for decades. Later Mrs. Sydenstricker adopted and raised the orphaned ten-year-old daughter of one of her Chinese friends. Prefiguring a theme that would become central to Tomiyama's work, Buck's mother gave poor Chinese women an opportunity to express their sorrows to a sympathetic listener, often for the first time in their lives.<sup>17</sup> When she read this book, it focused Tomiyama's attention on the ways that ordinary citizens enforced social discrimination. Mrs. Sydenstricker's attitude was in sharp contrast to the haughty way that Tomiyama's mother and the other

15. Duara embeds this point in a larger argument, that "national incorporation of the local is . . . [only] one factor or phase in a wider *process* of the formation of the local." He also identifies the power of the local as its ability to provide relief from alienation by "imagining a community of common purpose as well as sentiment." For Tomiyama, the specific localities of Harbin in Manchuria and Awaji Island in Japan clearly serve this function in an anti-nationalistic manner. Prasenjit Duara, "Local Worlds: The Poetics and Politics of the Native Place in Modern China," in Thomas Lahusen, ed., *Harbin and Manchuria: Place, Space, and Identity*, special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 13–45; quotes are from pp. 14 and 26. See also Joshua A. Fogel and Yamamuro Shin'ichi, "Chimera: A Portrait of Manchouguo: Harmony and Conflict," at *Japan Focus*, <http://www.japanfocus.org/products/details/2384>, posted on 16 March 2007, accessed on 13 January 2008. Professor Yamamuro's argument, which he published in Japanese in 1993, is much like Tomiyama's—namely, that Manchukuo functioned as a myth that blinded Japanese to the effects of their actions.
16. As Buck described her mother, "When she saw that these people were like herself, she began to treat them exactly as she would her own race, with no sense of strangeness." Pearl S. Buck, *The Exile* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1936); see pp. 156–62 for the servants, pp. 137–38 for the destitute woman, and p. 213 for the adopted daughter. This was translated as *Haha no shōzō* (Portrait of My Mother), by Fukazawa Shōsaku and published in Tokyo by Daiichi Shobō in 1938. Pearl Buck won a 1932 Pulitzer Prize for her 1931 novel *The Good Earth*, set in China. In 1938 she won a Nobel Prize for Literature. *The Good Earth* was translated into Japanese in 1935 by Nii Itaru as *Daichi chōhen shosetsu*, and published by Daiichi Shobō. In 1936 she published *Fighting Angel*, a biography of her father, a missionary in China. This was translated into Japanese by Fukazawa Shōsaku as *Tatakaeru shito* and brought out by the same press in 1937.
17. "I remember her sitting, many a day, at the window of her little living room, her mobile face twisted with sympathy, listening earnestly to a broken voice that went on and on. . . . Many of these woman were among the most downtrodden of their kind and have never in all their lives had the comfort of having one sit down to hear the burden of their poor hearts." Buck, *The Exile*, 153–54.

Japanese settlers treated *their* Chinese servants, making Tomiyama think about social responsibility, race relations, and the people in her own life.<sup>18</sup>

On later reflection, Tomiyama realized that she had participated in Japanese presurrender racial hierarchies in other ways as well. When she had attended an elite girls' school in Harbin (The Harbin Higher School for Japanese Women), she had noticed that the Korean students were not treated as well as their Japanese classmates.<sup>19</sup> The Korean girls were not only Japanese national subjects but also, like Tomiyama, the daughters of businessmen and officials in the Japanese colonial bureaucracy that "advised" the Manchukuo puppet government. Decades later, Tomiyama used this memory to help her think about how to depict the ugly race hierarchy at the heart of the Japanese empire.

Tomiyama moved to Tokyo in 1938 to enter the Women's Academy of Fine Arts (Joshihi Senmon Gakkō, now Joshibi University of Art and Design). The experience of growing up in Manchuria contributed to her sense of being neither fully an insider nor an outsider in Japanese society. Like other colonial settlers, she was pampered from the point of view of colonial subjects but also discernibly foreign to inhabitants of the Japanese home islands. Tomiyama's early frustration with the Tokyo political and art establishments reflects the alienation of a colonial settler returned to the metropole. After the war, that settler experience was suppressed from the Japanese postcolonial cultural imaginary, and Tomiyama rarely discussed it until decades later. This is a common experience for former settlers, both in Japan, as Lori Watt and Mariko Tamanoi have shown, and elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Tomiyama did not find ways to bring these life experiences into her art and into contemporary Japanese consciousness until the 1980s, when her art production became both more prolific and more profound.

18. This is central to how Tomiyama presents herself today. "What should I say . . . the colons [colonial settlers] can't see the lives of the colonized very well. I think that's true everywhere. Through reading Pearl Buck, I started to really see what life around me was like. So my own experience then began to overlap with hers and I started to see what was going on around me more clearly." Tomiyama Taeko, "History, Memory, and the Art of Dialogue," unpublished interview with Professor Len Swidler, translated and edited by Rebecca Jennison, recorded 10 July 2005 in Tokyo, p. 4. Also see "Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen" Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History: Tomiyama Taeko's Work* (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1995).
19. Tomiyama Taeko, "The Quest for Art throughout my Life," in Tomiyama Taeko and Takahashi Yūji, *Requiem for the Twentieth Century: Paintings and Music Come together to Tell the Tale of an Era*, The Third Chino Kaori Memorial "New Visions" Lecture (Kyoto: Medieval Japanese Studies Institute, Center for the Study of Women, Buddhism, and Cultural History, 2006), 37.
20. Watt, "Imperial Remnants," and other essays in Elkins and Pederson, eds., *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, "War Responsibility and Japanese Civilian Victims of Japanese Biological Warfare in China," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 32, no. 3 (July–September 2000): 13–22.

## RECKONING WITH THE NATION

At the start of her career, Tomiyama struggled to situate her art within established canons, particularly in relation to European art. This was as much a political as an aesthetic problem. Like many other students of her era, she was very informed about European modern artists and cultural trends. Tomiyama was an avid consumer of European and Hollywood films as well as the works of European artists and writers, such as novelist, playwright, and ardent pacifist Romain Rolland.<sup>21</sup> She was strongly attracted to the more intellectually free environment that she imagined existed in Europe, even though by 1938, when she began college, this image was far less accurate than it had been a few years earlier.

At mid-century, Europe still loomed large for most educated Japanese, not just for Tomiyama. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they had had no choice but to contend with the European discourse of civilizational superiority that provided intellectual rationales for imperialist projects. Japanese leaders had quickly decided that the only sure way to strengthen Japan's national position was to adopt the same formula of colonizing and making war on others. Although this strategy did indeed impress the world, it simultaneously deepened the belief that the Japanese copied well but had little in the way of independent modern culture. The price of joining the imperialists' club seemed to many Japanese to be—for Japan alone—spiritual and cultural suicide.

This way of conceptualizing national cultures, however, ignores both the vast transnational flow of ideas and the many common features of European and Japanese domestic conflicts over culture and politics. By the beginning of the twentieth century, let alone by 1938, Japanese artists and intellectuals were already exploring new ideas simultaneously with their European counterparts, and important concepts traveled in both directions. Nonetheless, the most common Japanese response to the fear of losing authenticity—and the one adopted by the government in the 1930s—was to insist on the unique nature of national Japanese culture and the unbroken tradition of patriarchal imperial rule.<sup>22</sup> As is well known, German and Italian leaders in the 1930s chose similar strategies for similar reasons, yet each of these societies struggled alone with its anxieties about cultural legitimacy, even though some people were aware of this congruence at the time.

These tensions over how to retain Japanese cultural specificity while appropriating Western norms were incorporated into Tomiyama's formal schooling, which

21. Tomiyama described the music composer Morita Masayoshi (1904–92) as an artistic and political mentor, particularly because he introduced her to the work of Romain Rolland. See Tomiyama, "The Quest for Art throughout My Life," 37.

22. See Alan Tansman, ed., *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).



focused on oil painting (known as *yōga*, literally, “Western painting,” in Japan). She also studied printmaking and drawing. Although a traditional art form, printmaking had declined and then revived in the early twentieth century, after Japanese artists realized how highly older Japanese prints were prized in Europe. In response, some visual artists resurrected older styles of printmaking, while others turned to more self-consciously modern methods—a set of responses that suggests the deeply transnational context of all possible approaches to art by 1938, when Tomiyama began college.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the nation-centered politicization of both painting and printmaking meant that Tomiyama’s forays into either form necessarily required taking a stand on the Japaneseness of her work, which for her was a stifling demand.

Things only got worse as Japanese leaders grew more certain that an apocalyptic war with the United States and Great Britain was inevitable. Their preparations for war included stricter policing of dissent at home. Before Tomiyama moved to Tokyo in spring 1938, the government had already arrested a group of “proletarian artists” in 1934, and it stepped up its surveillance of cultural figures even more after full-scale war broke out with China in mid-1937. Then, just as Tomiyama was growing interested in surrealism, the prominent poet Takiguchi Shūzō was arrested in 1941, on suspicion of being too left-wing because he had translated and published a book on surrealism by André Breton over a decade earlier.<sup>24</sup> In the harsh climate of wartime Japan, not only political dissent but also showing an interest in avant-garde European artistic movements was considered treason.

Left-wing Japanese such as Tomiyama rejected such nationalist, state-centered ideas and were appalled by the wartime state’s repressiveness. In an irony worthy of fiction, Tomiyama emerged on December 8, 1941 from a screening of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* to discover that Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor and declared war on the United States.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, despite her lack of enthusiasm for the war, Tomiyama could not escape the general Japanese anxiety of being considered derivative, a concern that haunted her work for decades.

Tomiyama’s difficulties were compounded by the challenge of being a female artist in mid-century Japan. Although all the students at her college were women, very few of them planned to become professional artists. At that point in her life, Tomiyama thought that the misogyny of the art world was a Japanese problem because she assumed that European women enjoyed a much larger space in which

23. See Kendall H. Brown and Hollis Goodall-Cristante, *Shin-Hanga: New Prints in Modern Japan* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and University of Washington Press, 1996).

24. Alexandra Munroe, “Avant-Garde Art in Postwar Japan: The Culture and Politics of Radical Critique 1951–1970” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 2004), 35.

25. Tomiyama Taeko, interview with Laura Hein and Eleanor Rubin, Tokyo, 10 September 2006.

to express themselves creatively.<sup>26</sup> She particularly admired the interwar German artist Käthe Kollwitz for both her art and her politics, and knew enough about German intellectual and political life then to refer to the Socialist theorist and activist Rosa Luxemburg simply as “Rosa.”<sup>27</sup> In later years Tomiyama emphasized this inspiration, juxtaposing photographs of one of her own lithographs with one of a sculpture by Kollwitz. As a young woman, however, engagement with the German printmaker’s work posed problems for Tomiyama that related directly to her desire to define herself as an artist. As Tomiyama explains in her discussion with Eleanor Rubin in chapter 5, she feared that if she openly acknowledged Kollwitz as an influence (even though the similarity is hard to deny), she would become pigeonholed as “the Japanese Kollwitz,” that is, as a woman who merely copied a Western female artist.

This problem of finding her own individual mode of expression diminished but did not disappear after the war. As Hagiwara discusses in chapter 6, Tomiyama found it so difficult to express opposition from inside Japanese society that she gave up painting for many years, although she continued to make prints. Nor was she unique in this respect. As Sherif explains in chapter 1, the Marukis struggled to find their creative stance in the 1950s, for some of the same reasons. Indeed, Alexandra Munroe argues that this desire to express dissent in authentic ways was the dominant concern for most postwar Japanese avant-garde artists. Not only did most of them hope to harness art as an agent for social and political change, but they also explored “the central question of cultural identity among non-Western modernists: how to be modern and not Western?”<sup>28</sup>

Strikingly, socially conscious artists in the West who were in other ways quite similar to these Japanese artists simply did not face the same challenge, as the discussion in chapter 5 between Tomiyama and Eleanor Rubin reveals. For Rubin, acknowledging the influence of figures such as Kollwitz has never carried the same kind of cultural baggage as it has for Tomiyama. Rubin considers herself a legitimate heir to Kollwitz and assumes that others will accept this claim without question. As a Japanese, Tomiyama has never felt that confidence. Equally revealingly, Rubin has borrowed freely from Japanese artistic models without any of the angst that Tomiyama felt about acknowledging European artistic inspiration (see figure 2).

26. Tomiyama Taeko, interview with Laura Hein and Rebecca Copeland, Tokyo, 6 August 2007. Hagiwara Hiroko is certainly right that at times Tomiyama uses “Western” to mean “bourgeois,” as Hagiwara notes in chapter 6. At other times however, the term “Western” stands for an intellectually freer environment than Japan in Tomiyama’s mind, and so mirrors Rubin’s use of “Japan.” Yet this symbolism remains more problematic for Tomiyama than it does for Rubin.

27. Tomiyama, interview with Laura Hein and Eleanor Rubin, Tokyo, 10 September 2006.

28. Munroe, “Avant-Garde Art in Postwar Japan,” 10.



Figure 2. Grief-Fragmented Language. This 1991 woodcut indicates that Eleanor Rubin's engagement with Japanese prints is far less complicated than is Tomiyama's relationship with transnational artistic trends, an asymmetry embedded in the different histories of the United States and Japan.

Japan operates in Rubin's consciousness as a symbol of imaginative and artistic possibility both symbolically and technically. It represents connections to faraway people without the need for verbal communication. This is not unusual: for over a century, Japan has been for many Americans a highly abstract symbol for rethinking American society and its relationships with the rest of the world.<sup>29</sup> Although Japanese have conducted similar thought-experiments about America at the same moments, the different places their two nations occupy in the narrative of global history means that they cannot have identical significance.

Given this asymmetry, readers in the West may be surprised at just how big a problem this issue was for Tomiyama. By the early 1960s, Tomiyama was deeply frustrated by the lack of models other than European ones and by the postwar turn to abstraction. She was also discouraged and exhausted by her political efforts on behalf of the coal-miners' union, particularly after a major union defeat in 1960 signaled the beginning of the end for the militant trade-union movement. Around the same time, the government ratified the Security Treaty with the United States on terms that were unacceptable to vast numbers of Japanese, and seemed likely to embroil them in new wars. These two events marked the reconsolidation of conservative political power in Japan, and Tomiyama shared her political disillusionment with hundreds of thousands of her compatriots.

While Tomiyama's frustrations were not unusual, her strategy for addressing them was. Tomiyama felt unable to express herself politically and artistically in Japan, and so decided to travel abroad in quest of ideas to revitalize her work. This decision required leaving her two young daughters with her mother, and suggests a single-mindedness that seems both desperate and ruthless.<sup>30</sup> Deliberately avoiding Europe, Tomiyama boarded a ship to Latin America in 1961, with several stops in Asia and Africa, supporting herself by publishing illustrated essays. She chose Latin America because some of the unemployed coal miners who had been black-listed for union activism had emigrated there, and she planned to write about their experiences in their new home. This and subsequent lengthy journeys to the Asian mainland changed the way she saw her own art.

The year Tomiyama spent in Southeast Asia, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Cuba, and Mexico, which she called her "tour of former colonies," brought home to her the extent to which European culture had been built on the

29. For a recent study that includes attention to artists' materials, see Christopher Bush, "The Ethnicity of Things in America's Lacquered Age," *Representations* 99 (Summer 2007): 74–98.

30. Tomiyama's common-law marriage had ended years earlier, leaving her with sole responsibility for her children on an artist's meager earnings. Although Tomiyama speaks openly about many aspects of her life, she does not discuss her complicated relationship with her mother and her daughters.

brutal exploitation of Asians, Native Americans, and Africans. Tomiyama's short visit to South Africa en route to Brazil also revealed to her the ways that European artistic movements such as cubism had appropriated African art in a process that had robbed Africans of subjectivity and recognized as art only the work of white people. Expanding her subjects to encompass slave ships and silver mines, she concluded that "when viewed from the South, the art of the North had begun to look as if it was being created only for the newly rich."<sup>31</sup> Tomiyama was further excited to see how Latin American art forms, including African-inspired music, both drew on and differed from European ones.<sup>32</sup> Recognizing that Japan's relationship to its colonies was part of a larger global pattern, Tomiyama now fully appreciated the transnational mobility of artistic ideas.

Subsequent trips to Central Asia, China, and South Korea inspired Tomiyama in several different ways. Politically, she began working with the Korean democracy movement, producing several series of lithographs on Korean prisoners of conscience, including one that Amnesty International used for a greeting card in 1971, and the cover art for a 1975 book of poems by Kim Ji-ha.<sup>33</sup> She later illustrated poems by Pablo Neruda after his arrest in Chile. These showed bold black-and-white figures trapped in tightly confined spaces. In a new direction for her work, her images of birds, butterflies, and silhouetted people penned in by coils of barbed wire simultaneously convey resiliency and fragility (see figure 22).

The transnational support network for Kim and other Korean prisoners brought Tomiyama and her work to New York and Chicago in 1975. International travel again gave Tomiyama ideas for new artistic directions, this time a collaboration with another politically minded, creative artist, Takahashi Yūji. As Carlo Forlivesi explains in chapter 4, Takahashi composes music for computers as well as traditional instruments to harmonize with photos of fragments of Tomiyama's paintings, combining the music and images into powerful slide-and-music performance art pieces.

31. Tomiyama, interview with Laura Hein and Eleanor Rubin, Tokyo, 10 September 2006; and idem, "The Quest for Art throughout My Life," 39–41.

32. Tomiyama also specifically mentioned the work of Brazilian artist Candido Portinari (1903–62) and the Mexican muralists; Tomiyama, "The Quest for Art throughout My Life," 40. The first non-Western, non-Asian exhibit in postwar Japan was on Mexican art, and opened in September 1955. Covering ancient to contemporary Mexican art, it started in Paris and was widely discussed in Japan; see Mitsuda Yuri, "'Bijutsu Hihyō' (1952–1957) shi to sono Jidai—'gendai bijutsu' to 'gendai bijutsu hihyō' no seiritsu," *Fuji Xerox Art Bulletin* 2 (2006).

33. See Kim Chi Ha [Ji-ha], "A Declaration of Conscience," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9 (1977). See also Tomiyama's series of lithographs entitled *Chained Hands in Prayer: Korea 1974* (1977). Two other series of lithographs were *On the Poems of Kim Ji-ha and Pablo Neruda* (1975) and *Kwangju [Gwangju], May 1980: A Prayer in Memory* (1980). Tomiyama also produced a series in 1982–84 on the forced relocation of Koreans, which she linked to the poetry of Yun Dong-ju, who died in a Japanese prison.

The plight of Korean political prisoners also focused Tomiyama's attention on Japan's responsibility for the *postwar* repressiveness of its former colony. The South Korean government at that time was still filled with men who had collaborated with the Japanese imperialist government before 1945. After the war, they had maintained power through the military support of the United States, which saw the Republic of Korea, along with Japan, as one of the pillars of its anti-Communist stance in East Asia. The cost to human rights in South Korea was very high, and Kim Ji-ha was only the most famous of the regime's many political prisoners. Tomiyama thought Japan should share the blame for the cruelty of the Korean regime. One of the prisoners she visited in Seoul, So Sung, was a Korean national who had been born and raised in Japan, and arrested while visiting South Korea on suspicion of spying for North Korea. Despite his lifelong status as a Japanese resident, the Japanese government did little to free him or even improve the appalling conditions of his imprisonment, until his friends organized a major civil rights campaign on his behalf.<sup>34</sup> This campaign was one of the crucial ways that some postwar Japanese began organizing social movements to push their government and compatriots to take greater responsibility for the imperial past. Once again Tomiyama was part of an important left-wing Japanese political movement.

Tomiyama's travels in Asia also provided her with "an Asian visual language" that no longer felt either imitative or nationalistic. She produced several new print series inspired by Central Asian imagery, such as, eventually, *Black River Horse* (figure 3).<sup>35</sup> By the 1970s, she had filled her mind's eye with so many different kinds of images that standard European ones were no longer her central references. Moreover, she had realized that Europeans had borrowed extensively from other cultures, and that such intercultural borrowing was a hallmark of much art everywhere, not just in Japan. Tomiyama now saw the international art hierarchy as the outcome of power struggles that had devalued indigenous forms of artistic expression. This insight did two things: first, it allowed her to focus directly on the violence implicit in the popular 1930s fantasy that the war would sweep clean the impurity of modern, Western-influenced life—that is, the promise of cultural renovation at the heart of Fascism. Second, it dissolved Tomiyama's anxieties about her own relationship to the Western artistic canon. She now saw various expressive forms as floating free of their original contexts, becoming available to whomever wished to engage and incorporate them in new ways.

34. So Sung, *Unbroken Spirits: Nineteen Years in South Korea's Gulag* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

35. The Afghan earth and sky is the theme of Tomiyama's newest series, begun in 2008, which features enormous paintings with an intense celestial blue background and a reworking of the Black River animal series in oil paints.



Figure 3. Black River Horse. This serigraph from 1995 was inspired by the Siberian landscape and Central Asian art, and was one aspect of Tomiyama's explorations of a personal "Asian visual language."

One central aspect of Tomiyama's new visual language was to develop the metaphor of traffic between the world of humans and that of spirits, in order to comment on relations of power within human society. The first and most important such image to appear in her work was that of the shaman, an often female figure in much Asian folklore, who commands powers that are neither good nor evil. Tomiyama first included the shaman in her narrative series from 1986, *Memories of the Sea*. That project also marked her return to colorful oil painting. In that set of large canvasses, Tomiyama brought feminism together with the rich symbolic resources of Asian folk religion in order to comment on the cruelty of imperialism and war, as well as on the hypocrisy of postwar Japanese society.

Tomiyama decided to focus on the Korean "comfort women" who were conscripted to provide sex to Japanese soldiers during World War II. Although many Japanese knew about this practice, the explosive combination of war, colonial oppression, and state-organized rape on a massive scale meant that few were willing to talk about it. Most of the women had died during the war, and those who survived were dishonored in their own societies and in Japan. The first such woman to speak out publicly, Kim Hak-sun, did not do so until 1991, five years after Tomiyama painted this series. As Hagiwara explains in chapter 6, following a conversation with a Korean intellectual about Japanese wartime practices, including the system of providing "comfort," Tomiyama deliberately set out to break this taboo and speak for those whose experience had been silenced by modern history. Tomiyama was one of the first Japanese to bring a feminist analysis to bear on this topic and, by so doing, found a surer voice for herself. Her later work on Southeast Asian women who were trafficked to Japan as sex workers, *Working in Kabukicho* (1991), explicitly connected the wartime sex slaves to contemporary imprisonment of Asians through prostitution and debt peonage. *Memories of the Sea* brought Tomiyama

a new level of artistic fame internationally when it was shown at the University of London in 1988, which subsequently raised her profile at home.<sup>36</sup>

Tomiyama has said that the shaman unlocked creative doors for her. This may be because the figure of the shaman allowed her to imagine a world characterized by female power and by an Asian identity that Japan shares but does not dominate. The shaman is pan-Asian rather than either Japanese or Western and, unlike other folkloric figures such as Momotarō the Peach Boy, was never featured in either imperialist or Japanese nationalist pageantry.<sup>37</sup> The shaman also highlights the complex nature of morality and the existence of a realm beyond ours, where earthly power and prestige mean very little. In her words, Tomiyama incorporated the “shamans who mourn for the dead, and who become mediums between the living and the dead, into my paintings so that we might know and mourn for the deep sorrows of those women who have been buried in the dark shadows of history.”<sup>38</sup> Rather than mobilizing her viewers’ outrage, Tomiyama aimed at their capacity to empathize.

Moreover, the shaman, like all mythic symbols, operates outside of a narrative of modernist or Marxist progress, the central organizing principle for postwar Japanese leftists. That narrative had offered rationality and universalism—both highly effective counters to emperor-centered nationalism, but ones that provided no escape from Tomiyama’s political frustrations with *postwar* society. At the same time, she felt no kinship with the elite Japanese art world, which seemed to Tomiyama to have abandoned the attempt to say anything of social importance. The shaman, an avatar for herself, cleared a path through this dichotomy for her.

At the same time, Tomiyama’s move toward mythical figures and imaginary scenarios allowed her to focus far more directly on visual representation of suffering victims than she had in the past. *Memories of the Sea* emphasizes the messy, unresolved, painful, shameful, and ambivalent problems left behind in the wake of war, directing attention to broken bodies and bereft families. In this respect, Tomiyama is much like the German interwar printmaker Otto Dix, another artist she admires.<sup>39</sup>

36. Tomiyama and Takahashi Yūji completed the complementary slide show/music piece, *A Memory of the Sea*, in 1988. Cynthia Enloe published *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives* in the same year (London: Pandora Press; San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1988), which raised similar issues. Global interest in identifying and condemning systematic military rape increased more after the widespread use of this tactic in Rwanda and Bosnia in the early 1990s.

37. See John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), especially 251–57.

38. Tomiyama, “The Quest for Art throughout My Life,” p. 43.

39. Unlike earlier in her career, Tomiyama is now able to acknowledge that she draws inspiration from artists such as Otto Dix while further elaborating and developing her “Asian visual language.” Tomiyama, interview with Laura Hein and Rebecca Copeland, Tokyo, 6 August 2007. For Dix, see Dora Apel, “From German Battlefields to Abu Graib: The Role of Photographs in Representing War,” lecture at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, February 24, 2007.



The Southeast Asian location of *Memories of the Sea* also allowed Tomiyama to incorporate into these canvasses the Balinese, Javan, and Bornean masks and puppets that she had collected on her travels, images that would take center stage in later projects. As Lisa Saltzman has argued, masks evoke remembrance by reminding viewers of people whose deaths are never spoken of, and so challenge them to bear witness.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, rather than appropriating these young women's point of view, Tomiyama is evoking them in order to chide those who, like herself, allowed the women to be tormented in their names.<sup>41</sup>

Tomiyama's treatment of the shaman is one example of what she calls her new visual language, but she has also developed several other important strategies that challenge established conventions. One is to combine a wide variety of artistic inspirations in a single piece in a highly imaginative and personal way. Her painting *Those Who Fly in the Sky* (figure 4), for example, was created after looking at an important silk funerary banner discovered in the early 1970s in an ancient Chinese tomb at Mawangdui. Tomiyama retains the color palette and much of the imagery of the banner, which shows the travel of souls from earthly life to the realm of the immortals.

The banner includes an image of King Fu Xi going to heaven in a chariot pulled by dragons. He represents the founder of the Chinese race and the first ruler of China, as well as showing the path to immortality. When Tomiyama looked at the banner, she thought, "Why is the king in the chariot? A woman giving birth is far more important."<sup>42</sup> Hence her central image is a standing woman assisted by attendants, a traditional birthing style in Japan.<sup>43</sup>

Tomiyama retained the bird in the moon and the dragons depicted in the funerary banner, which, like the shaman, have symbolic resonances both within Japan and in other parts of Asia. But she also layered on new meanings, drawn from wildly divergent themes in a highly personal way. *Those Who Fly in the Sky* is crammed with private symbols. The dragon represents the "education mama" urging her child to claw his way up the status ladder in Japan today while the Brazilian educational reformer Paulo Freire appears in the lower left corner, as Tomiyama mocks the cult of meritocracy through educational achievement and the way it organizes social ambition in postwar Japan.<sup>44</sup>

40. Lisa Saltzman, *Making Memory Matter: Strategies of Remembrance in Contemporary Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), esp. pp. 46–47. Saltzman identifies projection, silhouette, and casts as other indexical technologies that produce the same effect.

41. For discussion of this complex issue, see Chunghee Sarah Soh, "From Imperial Gifts to Sex Slaves: Theorizing Symbolic Representations of the 'Comfort Women,'" *Social Science Japan Journal* 3, no. 1 (2000): 59–76.

42. This substitution works linguistically as well, since Osama (king) is replaced by Osan (birth).

43. Sugitatsu Yoshikazu, *Osan no rekishi* (The History of Giving Birth) (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2002).

44. Friere's most famous book was *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which first appeared in Portuguese in 1968, in Spanish and English in 1970 (reissued New York: Continuum Press, 2007), and in Japanese in 1979. It argued that adult students and their teachers should connect literacy education directly to other efforts to improve the conditions of the students' lives.

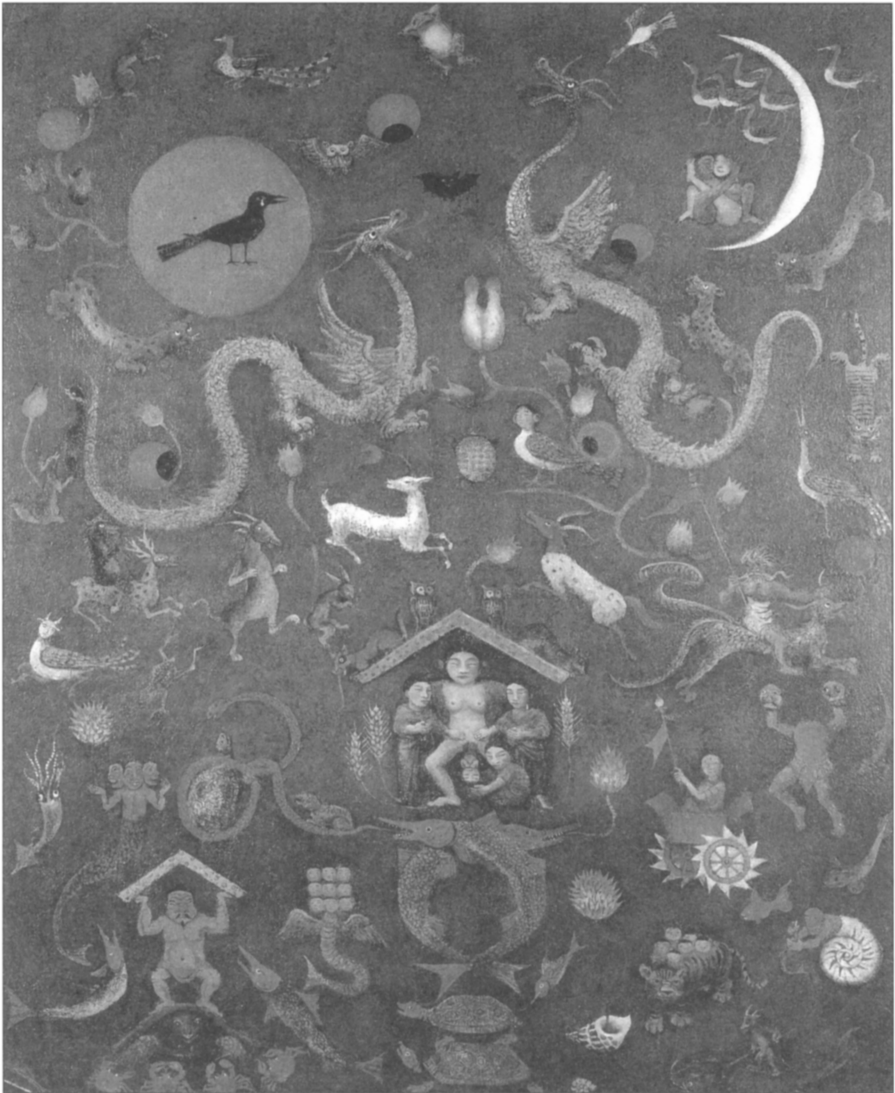


Figure 4. *Those Who Fly in the Sky*. From the early 1980s, this is Tomiyama's only oil painting in a twenty-year period and is her first forthrightly feminist image. It is based on a funerary banner discovered in an ancient tomb in Mawangdui China in the early 1970s.

The tiger in the lower right is from the book of Isaiah, when the lion lies down with the lamb and enemies are reconciled, although the African lion has been replaced by the Asian tiger. Meanwhile, the dancing figure with heads on his hands comes from the same ancient Chinese imagery as the funerary banner, while other

segments represent modern forced laborers. Animals, humans, and gods all pursue their own activities while the central figure brings a new person into the world.

As with *Those Who Fly in the Sky*, the cheery skulls and skeletons in the series *Memories of the Sea* draw on both Japanese and non-Japanese cultural traditions. They quote such Japanese sources as a famous medieval scroll depicting the land of the hungry ghosts and the drawings of Kawanabe Kyōsai, a nineteenth-century satirical artist whose specialty was cavorting skeletons.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, these paintings bow to Mexican Day of the Dead imagery, such as that in the work of José Posada.

The paintings are a map of Tomiyama's mind, revealing the lively and imaginative way she combines images and concepts. Her political point, being made in several different ways at once, is that everyone borrows images and symbols all the time. Her strategy of mixing mythical and real people, modern and traditional motifs, European, Latin, and Asian images, and folk and fine art disrupts the standard story of artistic norms moving from Europe to Asia. The work is deeply authentic precisely because it openly acknowledges her diverse sources of inspiration.

One of the reasons this strategy works so well is that Tomiyama approaches Japanese cultural tradition in exactly the same way she does the cultural traditions of other locations. Her process of creating an idiosyncratic pastiche is the same, regardless of whether an image comes from Japanese or Sogdian folklore, and is informed by the same analysis that frames prewar Manchuria as neither wholly Japanese nor wholly foreign. Tomiyama borrows from many different strains of Japanese tradition, both plebian and aristocratic, in order to reject the idea of a single national Japanese aesthetic that she first encountered in art school. For example, her series of four silkscreens of Japanese women who were sent early in the twentieth century to earn foreign exchange for the nation in the brothels of Southeast Asia (see figure 5) is modeled on now-highly valued eighteenth-century ukiyoe woodblock prints.

The health and happiness of these young girls were sacrificed by their families so that their brothers could continue in school, and also by the Japanese state so that the nation could modernize. Visually, the silkscreens refer to the long tradition of depicting women of the Japanese demimonde in prints, as well as to the even longer tradition of selling daughters into prostitution.<sup>46</sup>

Tomiyama also draws on the themes of classical aristocratic painting. Her *Harbin: Requiem for the Twentieth Century* of 1995 and *The Fox Story* series of 1999 blend different elements of Japanese aesthetic traditions in particularly interesting

45. Kawanabe Kyōsai is himself a key figure in East-West nineteenth-century mutual exchange. Timothy Clark, Gyōsai Kawanabe, and Lawrence Smith, *Demon of Painting: The Art of Kawanabe Kyōsai* (London: British Museum Press, 1993).

46. Amy Stanley, "Selling Women: Prostitution, Morality, and Markets in Early Modern Japan," book manuscript, 2010.

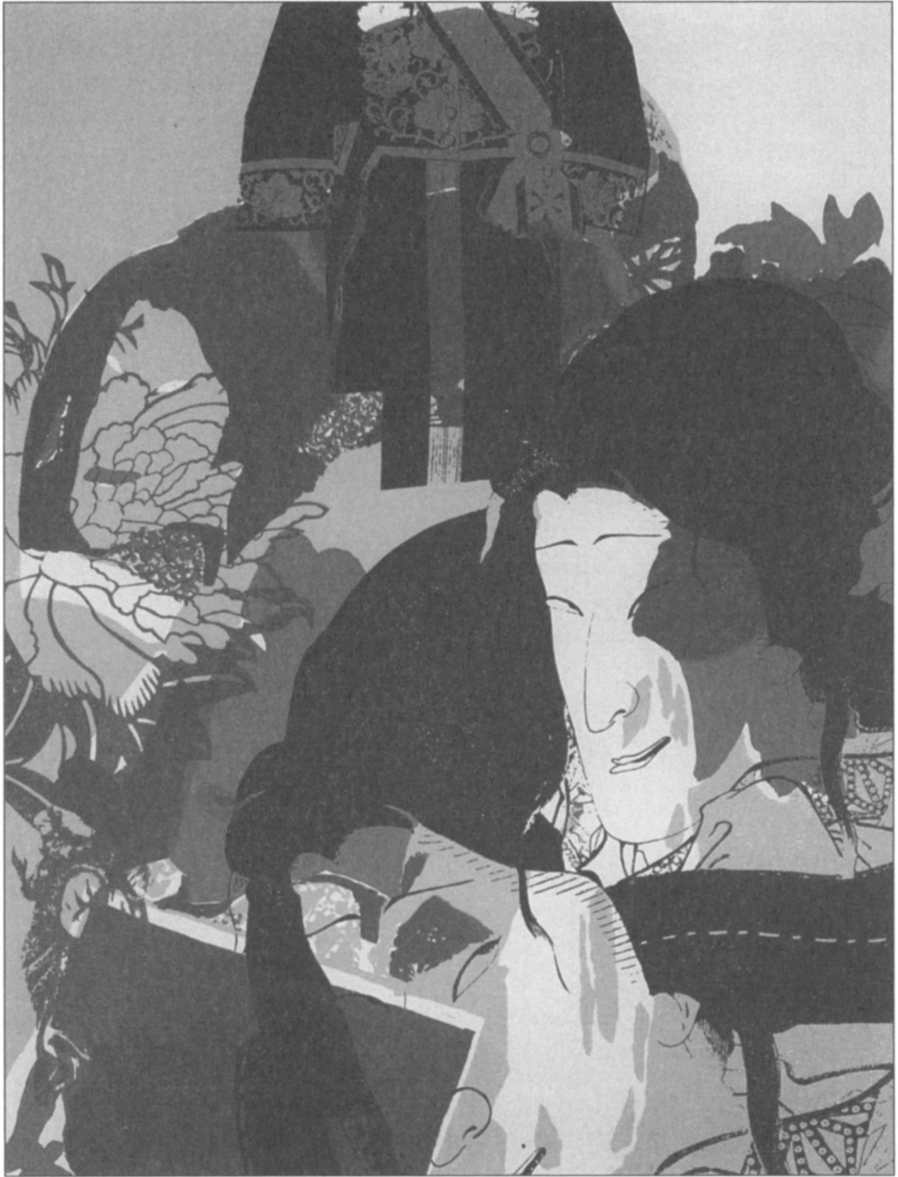


Figure 5. Sold off to the Continent. This serigraph from 1995 recalls early modern woodblock prints and the remarkable extent to which both the modern Japanese state and ordinary families raised funds by sending young Japanese women to brothels at home and abroad.

ways.<sup>47</sup> Both series include such elegant symbols of seasonality as the cherry blossom and the chrysanthemum. These two flowers acquired new modern significance as symbols central to the aesthetics of Japanese Fascism in the 1930s and 1940s. The cherry blossom was appropriated by the military as the emblem of the young kamikazes' noble self-sacrifice, because it is most beautiful as the petals fall from the tree and its season is so short. Both military officers and the families of the dead pilots referred to them as having become "cherry blossoms at Kudanshita," that is, spirits enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>48</sup> The golden chrysanthemum, which often appears in Tomiyama's work, is the official emblem of the emperor.

Tomiyama combines these highly aestheticized national symbols with others from the equally venerable but much earthier folk tradition of the fox. As in Europe, the East Asian fox is a trickster character, able to shape-shift and bewitch humans. And, as Yuki Miyamoto explains in chapter 3 in this volume, the fox is closely linked to the emperor, who is the high priest of Shinto and ritually responsible for the annual rice harvest. It is startling to discover that this icon of Shinto belief comes from Chinese folk traditions, although acknowledgement of both that ancient cultural appropriation and contemporary obliviousness to it today underscores Tomiyama's central points concerning the legacy of imperialism. In both these series, Tomiyama uses the theme of bewitchment to subvert the traditional associations of the cherry blossom, which in her hands becomes an emblem of the callousness and deviousness of the presurrender Japanese state toward the lives of its Japanese and colonial victims.<sup>49</sup>

Tomiyama also borrows from the long, irreverent tradition of satirical animal imagery in Japanese art, much of it explicitly celebrating political dissent.<sup>50</sup> Foxes figured prominently in mid-nineteenth-century lampoons of the last feudal government and the samurai elite. Artists such as Kawanabe Kyōsai, of dancing skeleton fame, carried these satirical practices into the Meiji period.

Tomiyama also deliberately inserts applied arts into her fine-art production, particularly the needlecrafts associated with women. Her most recent series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers* (2007–2009), includes her mother's embroidery image of the protective deity of fishermen, Ebisu, and his lucky net. The embroidered cloth was

47. These series also have become the basis for slide-and-music collaborations with Takahashi Yūji. Their joint work *Harbin: Requiem for the 20th Century* appeared in 1995, and *The Fox Story: Illusions of Cherry Blossoms and Chrysanthemums* was completed in 2000.

48. David Earhart, *Certain Victory: Images of World War II in the Japanese Media* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007).

49. Tomiyama combined the shaman, the fox, the coal mines, and remembrance of Korean forced laborers in another Tokyo exhibit in 2000, *Fox and Coal Mines (Kitsune to Tankō)*, held at the Setagaya Bunka Seikatsu Jōhō Sentaa, and described by Hagiwara in chapter 6.

50. Peter Duus, "Presidential Address: Weapons of the Weak, Weapons of the Strong—the Development of the Japanese Political Cartoon," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60, no. 4 (November 2001): 965–98.

used for funeral offerings, deepening the association with spirit passage between worlds.<sup>51</sup> Earlier, Tomiyama decorated the scroll-mounting of an empty and menacing military uniform, in her *Harbin* series (1995), with dancing figures cut from one of her mother's obi sashes.<sup>52</sup> Tomiyama is claiming a larger place for women's artistry, and is also acknowledging—perhaps inadvertently—a personal creative debt to her own mother.

By the 1980s, Tomiyama freely appropriated imagery from Western paintings into these creations, despite her earlier desire to liberate her art from the European canon as a canon. She now draws on selected pieces of it, just as she borrows ideas from the book of Isaiah. Thus, for example, the early sixteenth-century Netherlands painter Hieronymus Bosch is an important influence, particularly his disassembled bodies and whimsical scenes of the torments of the damned.

Tomiyama's collages take this practice of "sampling" even farther, as Hagiwara explains in chapter 6. In her seventies, Tomiyama started using the Internet: for example, finding a photo of Ahn Jung-geun, the Korean patriot who famously assassinated Itō Hirobumi, the first Japanese colonial ruler of Korea, Tomiyama incorporated it into a collage depicting Harbin Station, the site of the murder. Tomiyama's cultural mixing through her collage techniques complements her focus in the *Harbin* series on the multicultural architectural and artistic heritage of Manchukuo and the moral self-deceptions worked there. Her willingness to experiment with new media—not just new subjects—after age seventy is very impressive, too.

Tomiyama's recent paintings, in the series *Hiruko and the Puppeteers*, sustain her focus on transnational history, warfare, and Japan's relationship with Asia. They comprise a series depicting the journey of a group of Asian masks, dolls, and puppets from Central Asia to the Chinese coast; then on to Awaji, an island in Japan that was the childhood home of Tomiyama's parents and has a distinguished history of political liberalism; then to the waters off Southeast Asia and New Guinea. Japan is a stop along the way, but neither the cultural origin point nor the culmination of the journey.<sup>53</sup> The travelers include Malaysian and Indonesian puppets, Polynesian masks, and Japanese folk figures, such as Otafuku, who brings good luck. Tomiyama calls these puppets troubadours (*tabi-geinin*) to evoke the medieval wandering artists who carried culture with them, mingling ideas without regard to national borders.

51. Tomiyama, interview with Laura Hein and Rebecca Copeland, Tokyo, 6 August 2007.

52. This image of the empty uniform nicely illustrates the idea that the emperor operated as an empty space at the heart of Japan (the empty suit!), abdicating all responsibility. This argument is most closely associated with Maruyama Masao. See his *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

53. This series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers*, is predominantly green, unlike *Memories of the Sea* in blue and red, or *The Fox Story*, which was dominated by pink. It too has a DVD companion piece (with the same title) with music by Takahashi Yūji, 2009.

As discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6, the last painting in this series, an undersea depiction of the attacks on September 11, 2001, brought Tomiyama back to the theme of joint Japanese and Korean subservience to American military policy in Asia. The final canvas depicts the World Trade Center's twin towers burning in an underwater hell. Tomiyama also wishes to evoke an oil-field fire destroying the atmosphere as it provides the pretext for yet another war. She sees the present as a new moment of massive—and all too willing—self-delusion. As Tomiyama explained in September 2004:

In Japan today, there is ongoing silence about Japan's past history of military aggression in Asia. And now, with eyes closed to this history, the Japanese government has begun sending forces to Iraq. Even Article Nine of the Peace Constitution is in danger of being changed. I cannot help but feel a sense of crisis as we move into another war. When I watched it happen in Manchuria in the 1930s, followed by the Pacific War, I was only a girl who hoped one day to become an artist. Now at the age of eighty-four, I again ask myself what I might do. Again, I have taken to speaking in this small way through my art.<sup>54</sup>

Through her powerful acts of remembrance as an individual artist, Tomiyama highlights precisely the issues of cruelty and complicity that so many fellow Japanese wish to elide. Moreover, she models an ethics that challenges the rest of us to examine our own willingness to be deceived by our national leaders.

54. Wall Panel for Remembrance and Reconciliation: Tomiyama Taeko's Art exhibit, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, January–February 2006.

Art as Activism:  
Tomiyama Taeko and the Marukis

ANN SHERIF

With a striking sense of design and a clear progressive voice, Tomiyama Taeko has created a distinctive artistic identity for herself. In interviews, Tomiyama often defines herself as a solitary voice in Japan. She urges her audience to “look at my work and understand it as a statement of what one artist in Asia is thinking, especially one . . . in a country like Japan. . . . To think about and labor on things together with others outside of the Japanese context has always been important to me.”<sup>1</sup> Like novelist Ōe Kenzaburō in his 1994 Nobel Prize speech, Tomiyama highlights her links with broader Asian and international activist artistic communities, while deemphasizing resonances with similar people inside Japan. Interviews and speeches, like autobiography, may reflect the facts of a career, but they are also carefully crafted narratives in which the speaker fashions a heritage for herself, choosing certain affinities while consciously omitting others.

In this chapter, I consider Tomiyama Taeko’s work and career in the context of activist artists in Japan since 1945, rather than unquestioningly accepting Tomiyama’s self-presentation as a unique oppositional figure in relation to the mainstream artistic community. Indeed, Tomiyama’s career shares many common

1. Rebecca Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist’s Life and Work,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2001): 102.



elements with other progressive cultural figures of her own and earlier generations in Japan. Specifically, I compare Tomiyama's (b. 1921) work to that of painters Maruki Toshi (1912–2000) and Maruki Iri (1901–95), both of whom she knew well, and briefly to activist writer Kurihara Sadako (1913–2005). Of the many activist artists in Japan, the Marukis and Kurihara are arguably the best known internationally, and their works are easily available in the English-speaking world. Tomiyama and the Marukis share visual art as their primary medium, whereas Kurihara Sadako is a poet and essayist, but all four have strikingly similar careers in terms of themes and motives.

The creative works of these artists are widely divergent in formal and stylistic terms, and also in the media that they employ. However, they have all gained recognition for their long careers of social activism, and for their conviction, to borrow Rebecca Jennison's words, that art can be "a powerful tool and catalyst for social change."<sup>2</sup> There are a variety of ways that "political art" is recognized; praise by the mainstream art world (or lack thereof) is only one measure of its cultural influence. This chapter considers other related issues, including the changing venues for exhibiting activist art, the political and historical processes that influenced artistic choices, and the artists' relations to grassroots activism and social institutions, such as the educational system. At the same time, it is important to pay attention to formal qualities of the works, for it is through color, form, scale, and medium that the artist creates meaning.

Although the activist artists discussed here interacted with the aesthetics and institutional structures of the canonical Japanese and international art worlds, they consciously constructed their identities as artists and situated their works apart from the mainstream, whether by choice or by virtue of exclusion. An in-depth comparison of the relationship of these artists to the mainstream art world is outside the scope of this chapter.

Maruki Toshi and Maruki Iri are best known for their joint series of paintings about the human costs of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima entitled *Genbaku no zu*, (literally, "Atomic Bomb Paintings"), created between 1950 and 1982.<sup>3</sup> Since the early 1950s, the Marukis' A-Bomb Murals have been among the most recognizable visual evocations of the August 1945 nuclear events. John W. Dower and John Junkerman have introduced the Marukis' paintings to the English-speaking world through a book and a documentary film, *Hellfire*, while Maruki Toshi is also internationally known for her illustrated book for children, *Hiroshima no pika* (The

2. Ibid., 101.

3. John Dower calls *Genbaku no zu* "The Hiroshima Murals," while acknowledging the originally designated English title "The Hiroshima Panels." John Junkerman and John Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki* (New York: Kodansha International, 1985), 17–18. I refer to the murals as "the A-Bomb Murals," and refer (following Dower) to the individual parts of each mural as "panels."

Flash of Hiroshima 1982).<sup>4</sup> The Marukis exhibited their paintings in numerous countries around the world.

Among the many activist artists in Japan, the Marukis and Tomiyama are known for their pioneering treatment of significant social issues. All three have made names for themselves as the first professional artists to depict certain traumatic historical events. The Marukis were the first to represent the human cost of Hiroshima (or, more accurately, the first professional artists to have such works widely exhibited). The nationwide exhibits of their A-Bomb Murals in 1950–51 were exceptional during the Allied Occupation of Japan, when authorities banned representations of the atomic bombings.

Tomiyama initially became well known for a series of woodblock prints that evoked the 1980 Gwangju Massacre in South Korea, during which hundreds of pro-democracy protestors were brutally killed by the regime of Major General Chung Doo-Hwan. These prints include *Citizens' Power*, *Requiem for Gwangju*, *Prisoners*, and *Coming Armies* (1980; see figure 6).<sup>5</sup> She was among the first visual artists anywhere to take up this theme, in part because, unlike her South Korean counterparts, Tomiyama was beyond the reach of the dictatorial South Korean regime.

Nonetheless, in the Cold War 1980s, Tomiyama struggled to find venues for her Korea works at home, both because Japan was still culturally oriented toward the United States and because discriminatory attitudes toward people of Korean descent living in Japan were still common. The artist recalls, “Working on a theme related to South Korea brought me up against a wall of prejudice in the art world of Japan.”<sup>6</sup> The artistic establishment in Cold War Japan sought to stifle—through neglect or silence—activist artists who wanted to draw attention to controversial social issues. Yet, since the 1980s, Tomiyama’s audience has grown both within Japan and around the world. There are several reasons for this shift: the artist’s own success in identifying a distinct formal idiom and unique artistic identity for herself, her compelling employment of various media and means—such as slides and the Web—of reaching new audiences, and a greater emphasis on human rights and transnationalism in the broader political and cultural climate.

4. The film versions of both *Hellfire* and *Hiroshima no pika* are available on a single DVD, *Hiroshima no pika [videorecording]: Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima*, First Run Features; Noriaki Tsuchimoto, director; John Junkerman, writer, director. *Hiroshima no Pika* was directed by Noriaki Tsuchimoto, produced by Tetsujiro Yamagami; and *Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima* was produced, written, and directed by John Junkerman, executive producer John W. Dower, First Run Features, 2005/1986.
5. Reproductions of some of these Gwangju prints can be found in Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist’s Life and Work,” 111.
6. Tomiyama Taeko, “Shadows from a Distant Scene,” in “Asia e no shiza to hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History: Tomiyama Taeko’s Work* (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1995), 59 (original text, p. 69).



Figure 6. Prisoner of Conscience 12648 and other lithographs from the mid-1970s were Tomiyama's contribution to the international movement to support political prisoners in the Republic of Korea, such as the poet Kim Ji-ha.

Both Tomiyama and the Marukis attracted audiences precisely because they are emblematic of their times. In other words, we can detect in their work and focuses the urgent concerns of socially conscious people, both individuals and movements. Rather than regarding them as isolated rebels, this chapter seeks to illuminate the ways both Tomiyama and the Marukis, as visual artists, and Kurihara Sadako, as a writer, spoke for their own place, yet also addressed concerns of audiences beyond their own national borders.

As part of the process of establishing her identity as an artist, Tomiyama highlights her definitive break with certain conventional Western realist representational modes, which she learned as part of her art-school education and employed in her younger days. While she acknowledges her debt to other modernist approaches such as surrealism, Tomiyama experimented for decades with the goal of creating an independent artistic style. Her resistance to the label "Japan's Käthe Kollwitz" may derive partly from a desire later in her career to emphasize her identity as an Asian artist and her solidarity with other Asian peoples. As a mature, progressive artist, Tomiyama does not identify political parties or organizations as central to her career. By contrast, the Marukis, who openly acknowledged the influence of the Communist artist Käthe Kollwitz in their aesthetic approaches, never sought

to distance themselves from either openly Leftist figures or from European and American artists.<sup>7</sup> They joined—and then were purged from—the Japan Communist Party. Kurihara took yet another approach by framing her activism and rhetoric within the context of international anti-nuclear movements as they changed over time, rather than affiliating with party politics.

The Marukis' exploration of politicized themes with their A-bomb panels did not result in a radical alteration of their formal approaches, as was the case with Tomiyama. Both professional artists before 1945, Maruki Iri was trained in Japanese monochromatic ink painting (*suibokuga*), while Maruki Toshi focused on Western-style painting and book illustration.<sup>8</sup> She lived and studied art in Moscow in the late 1930s, a time when many artists admired the revolutionary spirit and Russian artistic imagination. In 1940, however, she also traveled, as had the French artist Paul Gauguin, to the tropical South Seas, in her case to the Japanese imperial mandate of Micronesia.<sup>9</sup>

After the war, the Marukis seized on the issue of nuclear weapons and depicted the suffering of the people in Hiroshima (and later Nagasaki) in their famous A-Bomb Murals. This was their first artistic collaboration, so they simultaneously adopted a new subject and a new style of painting. Initially, their engagement with the subject of nuclear weapons stemmed from personal motives. Maruki Iri had grown up in Hiroshima and lost many relatives on August 6, 1945. Maruki Toshi describes in her memoir their urgent journey back to Hiroshima only days after the bombing.<sup>10</sup> Before long, creating the A-bomb paintings became a consuming passion for the couple, evolving into an activist project that spanned several decades and garnered considerable domestic and international attention. The paintings express grief and profound sympathy for those who experienced the bombings.

Even as they worked together, the couple continued to use many techniques and concepts from their respective pre-1945 painterly approaches. Their extensive

7. Kozawa Setsuko notes Maruki Toshi's acknowledgement of the influence of Kollwitz's work on the Marukis; see Kozawa, "*Genbaku no zu*" *egakareta 'kioku,' katarareta 'kaiga'* (The A-Bomb Panels: Representing Memory, Narrating Painting) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2002), 124–26. Kozawa notes on p. 124 that Maruki Toshi was much influenced by Käthe Kollwitz.
8. Yoshida Yoshie (the name is written in katakana) describes Maruki Iri and Toshi's artistic training and pre-1945 artistic activities in *Maruki Iri, Toshi no jikū kaiga toshite no "Genbaku no zu"* (The Time and Space of Maruki Iri and Toshi: A-Bomb Panels as Art) (Tokyo: Aoki Shoten, 1996).
9. Kozawa explores Maruki Toshi's life and art in Moscow in the late 1930s and in Micronesia in 1940, as well as the significance of her interactions with imperialist visions of the "South" (*nanyō*) and the primitivism of Gauguin and other artists. See Kozawa, "*Genbaku no zu*" *egakareta 'kioku,' katarareta 'kaiga,'* 35–46; see also the exhibition catalog by Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, ed., *Bijutsuka tachi no "nanyō guntō*, (Artists and Japanese Micronesia) (Tokyo: Machida-shiritsu Kokusai Hanga Bijutsukan, 2008).
10. Maruki Toshi, *Onna ekaki no tanjō* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentaa, 1997), 113–21. Though most men of his generation served in the imperial military, Maruki Iri did not. He was deemed unsuitable for military service because of a birthmark on his face.

employment of nudes, for example, can be traced back to Toshi's prewar and wartime artistic styles. The A-bomb victims are portrayed nude for other reasons as well, of course, such as the fact that the Marukis wanted to capture the disorientation of people whose clothing had literally disintegrated from the force of the blast.<sup>11</sup> Their collaborative efforts required that they alternately assert and compromise their individual formal approaches, resulting in a unique mix of styles that retains aspects of their separate brushes (see figure 7).<sup>12</sup>

The Marukis employ a flat perspective, but their representations of human beings lie firmly in the genre of realism, describing individual human bodies and portraying their emotions in relation to one another. The enormous scale of the paintings means that many of the figures are almost life-sized, and the overall composition compelling. The Marukis seem to have purposely employed an unconventional format and style so as to displace the viewer's expectations of paintings, thus signaling the hellish and unfamiliar atomic landscape. The scale of each of the paintings is such that the viewer is forced to move in order to see the work in its entirety. This gives the viewer an impression of treading among the dead and wounded, walking in dangerous and uneasy proximity to their space. This experience of entering the world of the painting is difficult to capture in reproduction. When looking at small photographs of the murals, many viewers find the tangle of nude, often mutilated bodies distasteful. Indeed, the murals do not reproduce very well. Small, beautiful details, which tend to disappear when photographed and reduced in size, become evident when seen full-scale. The washes of black ink also do not copy favorably. However, many viewers in twenty countries have had access to the full-scale murals through traveling exhibitions.<sup>13</sup>

During the world tour, art critics were often harshly critical of the formal and aesthetic aspects of the A-bomb panels and some of the Marukis' other large-scale murals. Politically sympathetic reviewers—Japanese and foreign alike—all praised the Marukis' focus on the violence of nuclear arms, yet they differed greatly in their evaluation of the murals' artistic merits. Anticipating that the Marukis' innovative style might receive a chilly reception by the art establishment in England, British Marxist critic John Berger sought to preempt conventional art-critical views of

11. In *Hellfire*, the narration states that the murals contain mostly nudes because many of the survivors and victims of the bombings had their clothing blown or burned off. Maruki Toshi (as Akamatsu Toshiko) had worked as an au pair in Moscow in the late 1930s, and also went to Japanese-occupied Micronesia in 1940, where she painted vivid nudes. On Toshi's pre-1945 painting, see Kozawa, "Genbaku no zu" *egakareta 'kioku,' katarareta 'kaiga,'* 33–46, and Yoshida, *Maruki Iri*, 59–70.
12. Dower discusses their collaborative efforts in Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 25–26.
13. Between 1955 and 1960 alone, the A-Bomb Mural exhibits traveled to 19 countries, including Korea, China, the Soviet Union, Hungary, England, Holland, West Germany, Italy, Switzerland, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.



Figure 7. Fire Panel 3 (detail). This 1950 image is one panel of *Fire*, one of the Marukis' first huge paintings to depict the aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

the paintings by claiming the moral high ground for the works and demanding a separate standard of evaluation. As organizer of the London exhibit of the Marukis' A-bomb panels, Berger asserted that the paintings' subject matter was of such critical importance, at the height of the nuclear arms race, that critics should suspend normal categories of aesthetic evaluation. Berger's guarded stance is understandable, given the Cold War political climate. He did not want the Marukis' unorthodox formal approach to be used as an easy excuse for discrediting the controversial political stance of anti-nuclearism. Yet despite disagreement about the aesthetic merits of the couple's art, the paintings earned many advocates around the world.

Tomiyaama's work, in contrast, impresses the viewer in person and also in reproduction with its bold and approachable use of color and line. The work is easily legible both because of Tomiyaama's commanding sense of composition and because of her manipulation of familiar symbolic designs and icons. Since 1980, she has not dealt with the material or corporeal world so much as with signs that represent the iconographical system of empire and of a culture at war: brides and an emperor, mothers and soldiers, rising-sun flags and rifles. Tomiyaama seems largely uninterested in depicting individuals and instead focuses on categories of people. Her facial types often draw on preexisting images from a variety of genres: geisha from ukiyoe prints. Korean carved wooden masks, laborers from Socialist Realist monochrome woodblock prints, the familiar photographic image of nationalistic mothers who send their sons off to war. Some of the rare individual faces to be found are the photographs of historical personages included in the collages *Harbin Station* (discussed by Yuki Miyamoto in chapter 3). Tomiyaama also manipulates images from myriad folk traditions: foxes, dragons, and creatures from Chinese and Korean mythology.

In addition to culturally specific design elements, Tomiyaama shows a recurring fascination with universal mythical signs, such as the binarism of fecundity (women giving birth and female genitalia) and of death (skulls, skeletons). Formally, some of Tomiyaama's compositions suggest her interest in surrealism and cubism (such as the grieving face of a parent that slides apart in *For a Child Who Was Taken away and Killed*, figure 8). Tomiyaama uses both her many iconic creatures and a flat plane to evoke a dreamlike effect, suggesting the realm not only of myth but of the unconscious. Indeed, the artistic influence of surrealism speaks to this, as do design elements akin to those of Paul Klee and Jean Miro.<sup>14</sup>

Tomiyaama and the Marukis value "beauty," or a positive aesthetic, in contrast to the purposely ugly "anti-art" deployed by some other modern artists. In Tomiyaama's case, the brilliant colors of the images and her dazzling compositions show that she aims to capture and delight the viewer's gaze. Although the overall

14. "Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen" Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History*, 58. I thank Wendy Kozol for her insights on the formal and semantic aspects of Tomiyaama's work.



Figure 8. For a Child Who Was Taken away and Killed is part of Tomiyama's series, Coerced and Forlorn, made in the 1970s, and reveals her interest in surrealism as well as her social concerns.

effect may be pleasing to the eye, she purposely includes shocking and sometimes grotesque details. In the paintings that make up the series *The Fox Story* (1999) for example, numerous skulls, some wearing soldiers' helmets, and skeletal hands lurk among glorious, colorful chrysanthemums while birds soar beneath the full moon.

In Tomiyama's series of prints depicting mines, she connected her aesthetic appreciation with close observation of social reality, especially in the physical space



of workplaces and the bodies of laborers: “Most people thought of such scenes in the soot-filled mines as hell on earth rather than as beautiful places. However, I started to understand the coal mines, stained with the labor of so many people, as beautiful.”<sup>15</sup> It took Tomiyama years of experimentation to make those places and workers function as “art.” She wondered, “Is this a world that can be rendered artistically?” (*e ni naru sekai darō ka*).

The Marukis shared this dilemma of evoking beauty in subject matter that was considered by the artistic mainstream to be unsuitable for aesthetic treatment. Maruki Toshi explained their challenge: “We do paint dark, cruel, painful scenes. But the question is, How should we portray people who face such realities? We want to paint them beautifully.”<sup>16</sup> The beauty, for Maruki Toshi, lies in the details: a gracefully described finger or breast, though the dark lines of tortured bodies dominate the expanse of the larger canvas.<sup>17</sup> The use of monochrome painting suggests the influence of Iri’s training in traditional ink-brush painting, but the murals resist the use of “empty” space and the perspective characteristic of that mode of painting. The Marukis drained the canvas of color in order to suggest the gravity, the grimness, of the events represented—or, more precisely, to evoke the “wounds remain[ing] deep inside,” the trauma not only of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but of the World War in general.<sup>18</sup>

The Marukis’ adherence to blacks, grays, and blues (with very sparing use of shades of red and brown) conveys, in John Dower’s words, the “darkness of the modern age.”<sup>19</sup> This solemn focus on washes and lines of dark *suiboku* ink, overwhelming the space, also reflects their literal and emotional proximity to the war at the time they began the decades-long project of painting these murals. Maruki Toshi recalled:

After the war . . . many of our artist friends in Tokyo decided that we should try to paint healthy, cheerful portraits of Japan at peace. . . . But somehow, [we] inextricably ended up painting grief-stricken faces. No shining lights came from within. . . . We sincerely wanted to create op-

15. *Ibid.*, 68 (my translation of the Japanese text). The English translation in “Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History* (p. 58) reads slightly differently: “People did not necessarily find my depictions of coal mines beautiful; in fact many said they suggested scenes of hell. But for me the coal mines, soaked with the sweat of generations of laborers, were beautiful places.” See also Meguro Museum of Art, ed. *The Coal Mine as Cultural Resource: Art/Photography/Graphic Arts/Film of Japanese Coal Mines*. Tokyo: Meguro Museum of Art, 2009. Images of Tomiyama’s coal paintings, quotes, and interview appear on pp. 162–74.

16. Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 25.

17. Maruki Toshi notes her desire to include aesthetically pleasing details in the documentary film *Hellfire*.

18. Maruki Toshi, quoted in Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 123.

19. Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 26.

timistic, bright paintings but we realized that we would first have to communicate the nature of the darkness that kept encroaching on our work.<sup>20</sup>

In tandem with formal qualities, the processes of exhibition and reception are integral to an understanding of the Marukis' significance. Not only did the murals meet with significantly more positive responses when audiences saw them in person, but the social life of the paintings had a profound impact on their perceived meanings, even for their creators. The way people responded to the paintings also affected the Marukis' concept of art as activism. At that time, the newly democratic country in which they lived was recovering economically and materially from World War II, yet the couple's adherence to somber tones and serious themes indicated their belief that artists still needed to advocate for social justice in the present and bear memories of hardship in the past. Through communication with their audiences, they also came to view art as serving a therapeutic function for people afflicted with old, unhealed wounds and burdened hearts. In the 1950s, when they toured with their exhibits and interacted with viewers, the Marukis understood the murals as a site for exploring the trauma of the unprecedented violence of the recent war, beyond just the atomic bombings.

In the 1970s, the Marukis exhibited their painting in the United States for the first time, an experience that had a huge impact on them. They had declined earlier invitations to show their work in the U.S., suspicious of the motives of potential hosts in the nation that had dropped the A-bombs on Japan. Their experiences during the Vietnam War, however, helped the artists not only identify new avenues for political activism but understand some Americans as fellow anti-war activists. As Thomas Havens notes, many of the "antiwar civic groups [in Japan during the Vietnam War] carved out a new style of protest based on greater political participation, spontaneous action, and a rejection of the doctrinaire authoritarianism of the opposition parties, big labor, and the ban-the-bomb movement."<sup>21</sup> Bonds forged between Japanese and American anti-war groups highlighted the idea that patriotic citizens can—and do—have fundamental disagreements with their own governments. From this understanding arose international grassroots movements that transcended national boundaries and Cold War political tensions. The Marukis also faced hard questions from some of their American and, earlier, Australian viewers about the accountability of the Japanese military for its brutal treatment of prisoners of war and Chinese civilians. Moreover, their message of "No More Hiroshimas" was sometimes met with "Never Forget Pearl Harbor," leading them

20. *Ibid.*, 123.

21. Thomas R. H. Havens, *Fire across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan, 1965–1975* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 261.

to ponder the moral dimensions of Japanese imperialism and war in general. In this way, the interaction between artists and audiences in exhibition venues influenced the direction of their work.

Tomiyama employs media and formats innovatively in order to promote the accessibility of her art. In some exhibits, she displayed her paintings on unframed canvas so that she could roll them up and transport them easily from one exhibit space to another, no matter how near or far. Hagiwara Hiroko explains that Tomiyama rejects conventional frames for her works because her “concern is to politicize art, changing the way it is shown and seen. The canvases of the fox-people are mounted on antique cloth so they can be rolled up and made portable. This is reminiscent of the old scrolls, which were used for popular education and entertainment in Asia.”<sup>22</sup> Hagiwara thus relates Tomiyama to historical Asian cultural contexts, echoing the artist’s own self-identity as a citizen of Asia and the world, rather than Japan.

Tomiyama’s approach to exhibitions, including treating paintings like portable scrolls, is similar not only to that of painters of centuries past but also the Marukis. During their first Japan tour, from August 1950 through December 1951, the Marukis took their exhibit from Hiroshima to dozens of towns and cities throughout Japan, including Nagasaki, Tokyo, and Kyoto.<sup>23</sup> They, too, left the paintings unframed and unbacked, so that they could be rolled up and transported easily from venue to venue. This was not merely a question of convenience. In 1950, the Occupation’s strict ban on the topic of the atomic bombing had relaxed slightly because, with the revelation of a Soviet nuclear test, the United States no longer had a monopoly on nuclear weapons or secrets. Nonetheless, the Marukis had to be constantly wary of the Occupation authority’s watchful eye, to avoid possible sabotage of their exhibits. For example, the artists initially entitled the first A-bomb mural “August 6th” in order to avoid the term *genbaku* (A-bomb). Although the Occupation authorities never detained the Marukis, they and the Japanese police did arrest several exhibit sponsors, tear down posters, and interfere with visitors and volunteer speakers at the exhibit sites. According to art historian Kozawa Setsuko, leaving the paintings unframed facilitated a quick escape, in case the Occupation authorities showed up. The tension of the era is suggested by the brevity of the exhibit in each venue—an average of two to four days. Kozawa describes the format and movement of the Marukis’ initial touring exhibit as “guerilla” art.<sup>24</sup>

22. Hagiwara Hiroko, “Silenced by ‘History’: Tomiyama Taeko’s Harbin Series,” in “Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History*, 63, 73.

23. In Kozawa’s “*Genbaku no zu*” *egakareta ‘kioku,’ katarareta ‘kaiga,’* she notes 147 venues, dates, and attendance numbers for the Japan tour: first Japan tour (1950–51), 148–49; Nagasaki exhibit (1953), 153, world tour (1953–64), 202.

24. Kozawa Setsuko, interview with Ann Sherif Tokyo, May 2004; Kozawa, “*Genbaku no zu*” *egakareta ‘kioku,’ katarareta ‘kaiga,’* 148–50. Kozawa’s excellent book on the Marukis strongly informs my

Hagiwara Hiroko claims a unique status for Tomiyama in terms of her political stance and art—one that was as wary of Leftist orthodoxy as of nationalism:

In Japan the categorization “political art” is a degrading label for art that is thought to merely illustrate a parochial dogma. . . . But Tomiyama has never produced work that follows an established ideology, which preexists her art. Rather, she has long been a pioneer in pointing out the criminality and responsibility of ordinary people in terms of their complicity with Japan’s colonialist wars. . . . I know that many artists of other cultures have taken up issues such as colonialism and war in their work. But I do not know of any other artist who has produced art characterized by such a self-critical gaze directed at her or himself as assailant . . . in order never to be a colonial artist at this moment of history.<sup>25</sup>

After 1945, progressive artists who had experienced World War II as adults, such as Tomiyama and the Marukis, confronted the question of the artist’s relationship to politics and social justice anew. Along with many other idealistic people in the early postwar era, the Marukis and Tomiyama were initially drawn to Marxism, which offered both a scientific analysis of society and a vision for social change, in contrast to the irrationality of the pre-1945 Japanese state.<sup>26</sup> Marxism in Cold War Japan was not simply an intellectual exercise. Despite the strong anti-Communism of the Japanese establishment and its closest ally, the United States, both the Japan Communist Party (JCP) and the Socialist Party (JSP) in Japan were significant mainstream political parties whose members were regularly elected to the Diet. Although they were political parties vying for power domestically, the JCP and JSP also had to pay close attention to the demands of international Communist organizations, and to radical change in the U.S.S.R. and China. As a result, the Left became increasingly fractured from the late 1950s.

During the first decades after the war, Tomiyama worked closely with the labor movement, through which the agendas of the Communists and Socialists were often articulated. The Marukis, like many other artists and writers, joined the Japan Communist Party, and their first international exhibits were in Eastern bloc countries.

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discussion of their work here. Confusingly, Dower describes the paintings as originally mounted as screens and subsequently as hanging scrolls; see Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 18–19.

25. Hagiwara, “Silenced by ‘History,’” in “Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History*, 64–65. In Hagiwara’s Japanese text, she describes Japan today as a neocolonial presence in Asia (p. 74).
26. Laura Hein, *Reasonable Men, Powerful Words: Political Culture and Expertise in Twentieth-Century Japan* (Washington, D.C., and Berkeley: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, University of California Press, 2004).

The “established ideology” of which Hagiwara writes, then, is likely that articulated by the JCP and JSP. People of the Marukis’ generation were forced to take stands on each of the debates within the Left, both those generated domestically and international currents, such as anti-Stalinism. Indeed, many artists and writers were expelled from the Japan Communist Party because they refused to toe the party line, as was also the case for their counterparts around the world. Like Tomiyama, who strove to find a new idiom distinct from the Socialist Realism that dominated artistic work sympathetic to organized labor, the Marukis eventually found it necessary to define an artistic and political identity separate from those debates. Tomiyama would make a more pronounced effort to distance herself from the Left, especially as she found more compelling activist movements.

During the 1960s and 1970s, both Tomiyama and the Marukis encountered new schools of thought and varieties of activism that brought them to maturity as artists. Tomiyama was inspired by the growing feminist movement in Japan, itself part of a global movement to promote women’s rights, explore notions of womanhood and femininity, and, later, critique gender identity and its intersection with class and race.<sup>27</sup> Tomiyama’s long engagement with the evolving women’s movement helps us to understand the striking shift from her somber, subdued woodblock prints of Korean political prisoners (see figure 6) and male coal-miners to her exuberant multihued collages of mythical symbols, icons, and Asian women’s faces and bodies.

In the post-Cold War era, Tomiyama was able to articulate her own purpose as an artist, which is neither to provide entertainment nor dogma, but rather one of “generating debate.” Activist artists, by definition, foreground contemporary social issues in their creative work. In the context of a broader activist community, and in oppositional dialogue with the art world, Tomiyama challenged her audience to reconsider received notions of Japan’s history and national identity, especially its imperialist and militarist past—and, in turn, to resist the strong contemporary currents of neocolonialism and militarism. She harshly criticizes Japanese complicity in both imperialism and war at all levels.

Artists can fashion an identity for themselves through narrative, but they are also in danger of being pigeonholed and trivialized as single-issue advocates. Tomiyama is sometimes falsely identified as being only an advocate of the “comfort women,” just as the Marukis are often identified with the single issue of nuclear weapons. In fact, all three artists’ thinking about Japan’s moral and political responsibilities in the world changed radically over time. Maruki Iri and Toshi remained committed to an anti-nuclear message throughout their careers, but in fact engaged with many of the very same questions about war and empire as does Tomiyama.

27. Laura Hein, personal correspondence, 3 September 2007.

As Leftists during the Cold War, the Marukis' anti-nuclear thinking also found its basis in the idea (common on the Left) that capitalist, war-mongering America was the villain—although this is not evident in the images themselves. One reason that the governments of Communist-bloc countries gladly agreed to exhibit the Marukis' works in the 1950s was that they viewed the A-bomb paintings as a means of highlighting American willingness to use the weapons on populated areas, whereas the U.S.S.R. claimed to possess nuclear technology only for peaceful purposes. In the aftermath of the 1954 U.S. nuclear *Test Bravo*, which spread radiation across the South Seas, including polluting the Lucky Dragon, a Japanese fishing boat, the Marukis painted the works *Yaizu* (the name of the town where the fishing boat docked), which includes local people in a defiant stance, and *The Anti-Nuclear Petition* (both 1955). The hubris of a nation that would cavalierly set off such a powerful hydrogen-bomb test, putting at risk people and animals all over the South Pacific, seemed nothing but further proof of Japan's victimization by capitalist America. When the Marukis first showed the *Yaizu* painting, it included an image of Mt. Fuji. Other Japanese Leftists and some Communist governments, however, criticized them for naively invoking stereotypical “Japanese-y” imagery reminiscent of the bad old imperialist days, which were only too fresh in the memories of people in Japan, China, and other nations for whom the empire was part of lived experience. The Marukis then removed the image, replacing it with an image of the Lucky Dragon boat.<sup>28</sup>

This incident sparked a major reassessment of their political stance. Although the Marukis chose to comply in this case, they soon grew skeptical of political demands that they follow party ideology in their art. By the late 1950s, they had read in the newspapers about the horrific violence of Stalin's regime in the U.S.S.R.; increasing factionalism within the Eastern bloc further disillusioned them about international Communism.



Figure 9. *Yaizu*. This 1955 mural by the Marukis depicts Yaizu, the home port of the Japanese fishing boat and its crew who suffered radiation poisoning from the American hydrogen-bomb test in the Bikini Atoll.

28. Kozawa, “*Genbaku no zu*” *egakareta ‘kioku,’ katarareta ‘kaiga,’* 189–92.

Although they grew wary of party demands, the Mt. Fuji incident also led the Marukis to a stronger critique of contemporary Japanese nationalism. It was one of the first of many occurrences that forced the couple to develop a more nuanced response to issues of national identity, and to question the increasingly mainstream narrative of Japan as an advocate for peace without accounting for Japan's own past deeds. The dominant discourse of peace—which had evolved over decades from grassroots anti-nuclear movements, both Left and mainstream—had by then also emerged as part of the conservative Japanese government and media's search for a new national identity, one acceptable to the United States during the Cold War. Although the Marukis were key figures in the evolution of pacifist identity, they were not static in their political and artistic commitments.

During the 1970s, the Marukis participated in major public debates on the amnesia about Japan's militarist past, which had been enforced through the myth of pathetic, bombed Japan.<sup>29</sup> After decades of grappling with the moral and political responsibility of Japanese citizens for supporting militarism, anti-nuclear activists and many other progressive civic groups fully acknowledged the complicity of noncombatants and ordinary people in the atrocities of war and the injustices of empire. The Marukis participated in these debates from a very early stage, as their alteration of the 1955 *Yaizu* canvas to omit Mt. Fuji shows.

Often these issues arose as direct challenges by Japanese and foreign visitors to the Marukis' exhibits. In the 1970s, their growing awareness of Japanese prejudice and brutality toward Korean *hibakusha* (atomic survivors) led them to paint the mural *Crows* (1972). The label for this work reads:

After the bomb, the last corpses to be disposed of were the Koreans. . . .  
The Koreans were discriminated against, even in death. The Japanese  
discriminated, even against corpses. . . . We humbly offer this painting.  
We pray. Some five thousand Koreans died together in Nagasaki, where  
they had been brought as forced labor for the Mitsubishi shipyards.<sup>30</sup>

Another challenge proffered by visitors was that the Marukis' exclusive focus on Japan's nuclear events whitewashed the past, particularly the atrocities committed by the Japanese military on the Asian continent. Just as Tomiyama redefined herself as an artist of the world, rather than of Japan or of a specific ideology, so the Marukis expanded their subject matter to the horrors of war from the specific trauma of the atomic bomb, after listening seriously to their audiences both abroad and at home. They soon devoted themselves to a period of study about the Nanjing massacre and other atrocities, including many letters that Japanese veterans wrote to the couple

29. *Ibid.*, 198. Maruki Toshi's renowned children's book *Hiroshima no pika* (The Flash of Hiroshima) was also criticized for treating the atomic bombings ahistorically.

30. Quoted in Junkerman and Dower, eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 83.

about their own deeds during wartime. The Marukis then began to broaden the scope of their subject matter, creating *The Rape of Nanjing* (1975) to signal their own changed understanding of Japan's history and to encourage their audiences to learn more. Over the next decade, the couple collaborated on paintings dealing with injustices in Japan's domestic history—ones too often forgotten, such as the 1945 *Battle of Okinawa* (1984) and the more recent industrial mercury poisoning in *Minamata* (1981). They also framed the Japanese atrocities within global remembrance about genocide, for example, in *Auschwitz* (1977). For the Marukis, talking with viewers became a process of learning and change, and their willingness to rethink their ideas was reflected in their creative work.

Tomiyama and the Marukis have also all written extensively about their art, reminding us that, in much modern art, the object does not speak for itself completely; text often accompanies it. Any visitor to a museum of contemporary art will be familiar with extended labels explaining the “meanings” of the work or the artists' intentions. To achieve its specific political and didactic agendas, activist art must be linked to a specific historical event, usually by means of textual explanation. Thus Maruki Toshi insisted on written explanations for the individual panels of the A-Bomb Murals because “words can reach places paintings alone cannot reach.”<sup>31</sup>

The explanatory labels, in turn, are remnants of the potent process of the Marukis' painting tours around Japan in the early 1950s. At those exhibits, Maruki Toshi would explain the images to viewers as they stood before them. The couple's colleague, artist and critic Yoshida Yoshie, was also often present at the exhibit, and he, or college-student volunteers, would assist in explicating the paintings for viewers. The Marukis had intended their paintings to educate people about the effects of the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki but quickly realized that many visitors possessed painful memories of families and friends, not to mention houses and possessions, lost in both the atomic and incendiary bombing raids on dozens and dozens of Japanese cities. Toshi remembers one such woman who reached out to touch the painted image of a dead baby. Yoshida Yoshie also reported that *hibakusha* would sometimes interrupt his explanation of the paintings to present their own versions of the bombing and its aftermath to the other visitors standing nearby.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, people who were not from Hiroshima or Nagasaki quickly connected the paintings to their own wartime experiences, whether witnessing deaths on the battlefield or experiencing life in chaotic, burnt-out cities. Given that both the Japanese and Occupation governments preferred to defer a reckoning of the meanings of the war, the local exhibits took on the dual purpose of educating people about the bomb and, at the same time, allowing them to explore their own war-devastated lives. Thus the touring exhibit functioned as a form of activism.

31. *Ibid.*, 18.

32. Kozawa, “*Genbaku no zu*” *egakareta* ‘*kioku*,’ *katarareta* ‘*kaiga*,’ 175.



Kozawa Setsuko makes a crucial point when she describes the paintings as being the center, but not the whole, of the Marukis' traveling exhibits. While the representational aspect of the paintings was for many visitors the first opportunity to learn about the effects of the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the exhibit also had significant political and media functions. The tour publicized the Marukis' anti-bomb, anti-war message. In addition, many of those who attended the nearly 150 exhibits from 1950–53 signed petitions, such as the Stockholm Appeal, an international effort that defined the use of nuclear weapons as a war crime. Other petitions protested the remilitarization of Japan and the presence of U.S. military bases; still others appealed for international supervision of nuclear weapons. The progressive peace movement circulated such petitions, as did the Japan Communist Party. Although millions of people worldwide signed the Stockholm Appeal and similar petitions, only in Japan were the petitions located in venues where the A-Bomb Murals and photographs of the bomb damage were present. The Marukis were publicly recognized by numerous anti-nuclear organizations for their role in gathering so many signatures. Thus, as Kozawa argues, we can see that both these artists and their audiences regarded art as an appropriate vehicle for political and social activism.<sup>33</sup>

Tomiyama is not yet as well known as the Marukis, or as poet and essayist Kurihara Sadako, whose work also focuses on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and war remembrance more generally. All these artists suffered a cold reception from the orthodox art world. Tomiyama confronts the ambiguous status of “political art” in a capitalist society. As Hagiwara Hiroko points out in “Silenced by ‘History’: Tomiyama Taeko’s Harbin Series,” “Mainstream art journalism has categorized her as a political artist and rarely featured her work. People know her work through political journalism, which is not generally thought to be the route for showing art. In this country [Japan] the idea that good art should be sharply separated off from politics prevails.”<sup>34</sup> The growing recognition of Tomiyama’s work today, however, demonstrates that the market-driven art world is not the sole arbiter of artistic value and consumption.

Despite the eventual cultural acceptance of the Marukis’ paintings, however, the art establishment never altered its initially critical evaluation of their work. Instead, as Kozawa Setsuko has demonstrated, both foreign and domestic art critics refrained from appraising the murals in formal and aesthetic terms—as though they could not make a political point and also function as art—and quickly treated them either with silence or with tactful avoidance. The Marukis’ collaborative

33. *Ibid.*, 151–53.

34. Hagiwara, “Silenced by ‘History,’” in “Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History*, 64.

works on political subjects were frequently exhibited but rarely subjected to the critical gaze of professional art mavens.<sup>35</sup>

Yet although neither the Marukis nor Kurihara Sadako, for example, were embraced by the artistic and literary establishment, they have become well known throughout Japan. Through translation, Kurihara has gained a significant audience in the English-speaking world, while the Marukis earned even broader international recognition. One reason these three older activist artists captured the attention of mainstream culture to a greater extent than Tomiyama did is that, by the early postwar era, they had already established a stronger relationship with other social institutions—specifically, the educational system, media, and the government.

Equally importantly, the Marukis (and Kurihara) had seized on a theme of concern to citizens and the government—nuclear weapons. The ban-the-bomb movement grew into a mass movement in the aftermath of the “Lucky Dragon” incident, which brought home to people the extent to which atomic weapons remained a threat. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Marukis’ broadly humanist anti-nuclear message became increasingly acceptable to not only the general public but to political and educational leaders as well.

Yet another explanation lies in the accessibility and charm of Maruki Toshi’s work. Before the August 1945 bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Toshi was well known as an illustrator of children’s books and as a book-cover designer, and she continued to produce lively, appealing art for children. It might come as a surprise that the creators of the dark, somber murals could make images that would appeal to children. Yet Toshi’s colorful, attractive cover of the softcover book (*Genbaku yurusu maji*, No to Nukes, 1955), which details the First World Conference against A- and H-Bombs held in Hiroshima in August 1955, suggests why people of all ages might be drawn to her work. A round-faced, lovely young woman holds a happy baby in her arms; a ring of people from many nations surrounds them. This same image was featured on posters advertising the conference. Many years later, Toshi’s picture book *Hiroshima no pika* became one of the best-known juvenile works on the atomic bombs, both inside and outside of Japan.<sup>36</sup> This work earned the Marukis an audience for their more somber political art that they might not otherwise have had.

35. Kozawa, “*Genbaku no zu*” *egakareta ‘kioku,’ katarareta ‘kaiga,’* 188.

36. The Japanese title of Maruki Toshi’s book is used for the English edition as well (Harper Collins, 1982). A film version of *Hiroshima no pika* (a reading of the book with still pictures) is bundled on a DVD with John Junkerman’s *Hellfire*. Kozawa also notes that, during the 1930s, Maruki Toshi participated in cultural projects made possible by the Japanese government’s imperial expansionism, such as visiting South Pacific islands and painting the people she encountered there. She also notes that such activities were the norm, rather than the exception, in those days (Kozawa, 37–42).

Both Toshi's paintings and details of the A-Bomb Murals became some of the most frequently used images of the atomic bombs. In their 1950s films and literature, the Leftist-dominated anti-nuclear movement often employed details of the murals, such as the well-known mother and child image from Panel 5 of *Water* (1950). Many school groups visited the Marukis' museum in Saitama, outside Tokyo. After a brief resurgence of militarist attitudes in the late 1950s that turned out to be highly unpopular, successive prime ministers committed Japan to building a national identity based not only on economic growth but also on the anti-nuclear, anti-militarist stance supposedly guaranteed by Article 9 of the postwar "peace" constitution. This meant that the Marukis' role in culture was no longer anathema to political leaders, despite their Communist origins. In fact, government-approved textbooks included details of the murals—that is, until the 1980s, when the Ministry of Education ruled that some of the images were too disturbing for children, as part of a new official effort to rehabilitate Japan's war.

Local political sentiment in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had always accepted the Marukis' anti-bomb message. As early as January 1953, the Marukis enjoyed a broad range of sponsors for an exhibition in Nagasaki. Held in the Rōdō Kaikan (Workers' Hall), sponsors included not only labor unions (railroad employees, teachers), a physicians' association, student clubs from Nagasaki University, peace groups, resident Korean groups, and UNESCO, but also conservative political parties and six newspapers.

An outspoken progressive and *hibakusha*, Kurihara Sadako is best known to mainstream audiences for her poem "We Shall Bring Forth New Life" (*Umashimen ka na*, 1946; also translated as "Let Us Be Midwives").<sup>37</sup> She wrote mostly lyrical *tanka* poetry before the bombing, but became an activist poet as she started to grapple with the ethical and political dimensions of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. From the 1950s, she interviewed other *hibakusha* in Hiroshima, particularly Korean survivors of the bombings. Like Tomiyama, Kurihara made a point of extending her activism outside of Hiroshima. From the 1970s, she participated in international conferences, expressing her solidarity with activists in other parts of the world and energetically protesting the arms race, poverty, and exploitation. Many of her essays and poems challenge sanitized histories that promote the myth of Japanese victimization, and instead advocate justice.<sup>38</sup> Most famous among such poems is "When We Say Hiroshima" (*Hiroshima to iu toki*, 1972):

37. A list of titles by Kurihara Sadako available in English translation can be found at the Hiroshima University website on A-bomb literature <http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/bngkkn/database/Englishdata/BibliographyonA-bombLit.html>. Accessed May 18, 2008.

38. Kurihara Sadako, *When We Say "Hiroshima": Selected Poems*, translated with an introduction by Richard H. Minear, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies no. 23 (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1999), 42–44. Although working in a different medium, Kurihara, like Tomiyama, also employs the figure of the fox in her poetry, to highlight

When we say "Hiroshima,"  
 do people answer, gently,  
 "Ah, Hiroshima"?  
 Say "Hiroshima" and hear "Pearl Harbor."  
 Say "Hiroshima" and hear "Rape of Nanjing."  
 Say "Hiroshima" and hear of women and children in Manila  
 thrown into trenches, doused with gasoline. . . .  
 Say "Hiroshima,"  
 and we don't hear, gently,  
 "Ah, Hiroshima."  
 In chorus, Asia's dead and her voiceless masses  
 spit out the anger  
 of all those we made victims.  
 That we may say "Hiroshima,"  
 and hear in reply, gently,  
 "Ah, Hiroshima,"  
 we must in fact lay down the arms we were supposed to lay down.  
 We must get rid of foreign bases.  
 We first must  
 wash the blood  
 off our own hands.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout their postwar careers, Kurihara and the Marukis maintained their links with the nuclear weapons issue while broadening their political and artistic concerns as they matured professionally. Their constant engagement with concerns such as nuclear weapons and "peace," which remain integral parts of national identity in Japan, meant that the Marukis and Kurihara overlapped with mainstream culture for many decades—though perhaps not with the orthodox art establishment.

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the complicity of ordinary people in Japan with the regressive political aims not of empire this time, but of postwar Japan. In her "Nippon: Piroshima," for example, the speaker offers a scathing assessment of the mayor of the City of Peace (Hiroshima) by comparing him to the trickster creature. Kurihara's poem situates the fox in peacetime, and reveals the hypocrisy even of some Hiroshima mayors who deliver the Peace Declaration to the world on August 6 each year.

39. Kurihara, *When We Say "Hiroshima,"* 20–21. See also idem, *Black Eggs: Poems by Kurihara Sadako*, translated with an introduction and notes by Richard H. Minear, Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, no. 12 (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1994), and John Whittier Treat, *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

Tomiyama's work also deserves attention both as politics and as art. Speaking to a non-Japanese audience, Tomiyama Taeko emphasizes how much she values working "on things together with others outside of the Japanese context." Indeed, her deep commitment to stepping across borders and creating empathy for people regardless of their nationality distinguishes Tomiyama's compelling art. Particularly noteworthy is her attention to social issues that are not part of her own experience. Tomiyama's career has long intersected with broader artistic and activist communities, which clearly have contributed to the innovative and vital quality of her work. The mainstream art world is poorer for not engaging seriously with Tomiyama and her fellow activist artists, whose creativity and imagination speak to the concerns of many people at home and in the world.

## Art beyond Language: Japanese Women Artists and the Feminist Imagination

REBECCA COPELAND

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker appropriates the word adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language . . . but rather exists in other people's mouths, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.

—*M. M. Bakhtin*, "Discourse in the Novel"

Women's creativity, in other words, is prior to literacy.

—*Susan Gubar*, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity"

"The word," Lacan tells us, "is the murder of the thing."<sup>1</sup> For all writers, the effort to encompass the complexity of experiential reality within the smooth contours of language is frustrating—and all the more so for those who try to verbalize the unimagineably horrific events of such human madness as torture, genocide, mass murders, and atomic bombings. The wanton brutality of natural disasters leaves us madly searching for some means through which to encapsulate the scale, the magnitude, the terror. Even the seemingly "minor" events of individual catastrophe, as well as personal pleasure, defy expression. Words fail to capture the nuance, the somatic sensations of the experience, but they also threaten to reduce the event to the surface of the page—to make the inexplicable explainable, the incomprehensible somehow acceptable. For many victims of atrocities, silence is the only possible response. Among those who try to speak, the effort required to break through the silence is made even more fraught when the only language to which they have access is implicated, by association, with the perpetrators of the violence. A colonial subject, for example, whose native language has been lost, has no choice but to speak—even to speak in protest—in the language of the colonizer.

1. Jacques Lacan, as quoted in Alexandra Warwick and Dani Cavallaro, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and the Body* (Oxford: Berg Press, 1998), 23.

For a female subject of a patriarchal society, this problem is compounded by the politics of gender. Language, the very act of speaking publicly—of enunciating a *self*—has in many societies been consigned to the masculine realm. To use the idiom of the dominant culture, even when using that idiom in defiance, brushes uncomfortably close to compliance and thereby diminishes the voice, the power, the protest. The female voice longs, therefore, for a language of her own. Many Japanese women writers have sought their language within traditional discourses—myth, histories, and the poetic—by using these discourses in startling and disruptive ways.

Female artists in other media as well have found that the tools at their disposal—the modes of expression, the material, the critical apparatus they must contend with in order to produce their art—are often uncomfortably marked and defined by the dominant culture. To express themselves, therefore, they must find ways to avoid inadvertently acquiescing to the prevailing principles of male dominance. The challenges are many. To avail oneself of too bold an expression, for example, runs the risk of alienating viewers or opening oneself to the charge of trying to appropriate the male prerogative, of trying to be a man. Resorting to a mode that is too subtle or markedly “feminine” is equally problematic. The artist who chooses this path may be celebrated for her gentleness but is likely to be dismissed, her “womanliness” deemed less than significant.

This chapter considers how the artist Tomiyama Taeko uses feminist strategies to address the larger political narratives of World War II and Japanese chauvinism. The visual imagery that she deploys, while both stunningly beautiful and graphically unsettling, speaks for women who cannot speak for themselves. The process that Tomiyama adapts—using familiar iconography in unfamiliar ways—forces the viewer into a dialogue with her work, and through this dialogue the viewer is made to listen to, or at least to imagine, the voices of the repressed. Tomiyama’s strategies in art resemble the literary ones accessed by contemporary Japanese women writers. To more effectively highlight Tomiyama’s achievements, I begin with a discussion of the feminist writer and poet Ōba Minako (1930–2007), who is similarly noted for the potency of her images. Whereas Ōba’s art focuses on the interiority of the female subject, drawing on the intensely personal, she, like Tomiyama, foregrounds the effort required to confront the chauvinism of Japanese nationalist agendas. Whether dealing with thwarted female identity or the lack of social justice, both artists illustrate the fact that feminist expression always involves an act of imagination that goes beyond the “normal” human world, precisely because the normal world is male.

Rather than focus on the overtly political, Ōba chose to work through the smaller personal traumas of growing up female in a nationalistic, male-dominated society. Here and elsewhere, her art and Tomiyama’s find common ground in the

diligence with which they question the privilege and inimitability of power. And although Ōba did not spend her girlhood in the colonies, or on the periphery of the Japanese imperium, as did Tomiyama, she nevertheless experienced a dislocation that in some respects was perhaps more acute. Her father was a surgeon in the Japanese Imperial Navy, and the family moved frequently. Ōba's upbringing was conditioned by rootlessness and marked by the horror of the Hiroshima atomic bomb.<sup>2</sup> Eventually Ōba would marry an engineer who, like her father, had a job that required substantial travel. In the late 1950s they moved to Sitka, Alaska, where, lonely and unable to communicate easily with those around her, Ōba began to write and publish fiction in Japanese.<sup>3</sup>

Many if not most of Ōba's stories take issue with the status quo and launch direct or subtle attacks on the patriarchal system. Her experience overseas makes her focus on the quotidian assumptions of Japanese "normalcy" that much sharper than it would be otherwise. Adrienne Hurley observes, "Her fiction features characters who not only live outside of their native countries or reject their familiar surroundings, but who can call up magical forces and seek refuge in a world in which the supernatural and the real coexist. Although her fiction most often addresses very individual responses to worldly and other-worldly events, it also opens up new possibilities for understanding the politics of transnational identities in our contemporary world."<sup>4</sup>

To reach this "understanding," Ōba had to contend with the politics of language. Japanese language is bifurcated—or so Ōba's contemporary Tomioka Taeko notes in her 1983 essay "Women's Language and the National Language."<sup>5</sup> Children learn self-expression first from their mothers, but once they enter school are taught an entirely new linguistic system and are gradually weaned from their mother's tongue: "Before long they lose the ability to speak the other, earlier languages, which in turn causes them to grow ashamed of these ways of speaking. While the natal and peripheral languages are close to the climate and the natural features of a region and to everyday life, the school's 'national language' represents knowledge or

2. Ōba Minako was in high school in Hiroshima Prefecture when the bomb was dropped. She and her classmates were ordered into the city in the aftermath to give aid to the sick and dying. Of course, there was very little that she could do to help those injured by the bomb or its apocalyptic aftermath. The helplessness she experienced was stultifying. The images she saw carved themselves deeply into her memory and formed the basis for many of her later literary works.
3. Ōba's career was launched by her *Sanbiki no kani* (Three Crabs), which won the Akutagawa Prize for Literature in 1968.
4. Adrienne Hurley, "Demons, Transnational Subjects, and the Fiction of Ōba Minako," in Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel, eds., *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 90.
5. Tomioka Taeko (b. 1935) is a poet, essayist, and critic (not to be confused with the artist Tomiyama Taeko). For a translation of her 1983 essay, see note 6.



a means towards knowledge. This language has clearly become superior.”<sup>6</sup> The national language, Tomioka observes, is the language of print, the written word. And the written word represents the authority of the nation. In this sense, Tomioka’s formulation is in line with Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community.” Anderson argues that national consciousness is abetted by the development of print. Just as print fixes a language, offering it a stamp of authority and finality, so, too, does the imagined presence of the nation—which is defined by and which defines that language—come into being with the aid of print. Thus the written language, as Tomioka Taeko suggests, carries with it a political imperative that is masculine. In a society such as that of Japan, where the legal and social institutions had long been colored by a Confucian hierarchy that privileged men, the written word quickly became the bastion of men. To succeed in the academy as scholars or critics, modern women writers were required to write “like men,” in a language Tomioka tells us is “national.” This language bears the stamp of erudition. It also carries with it the assumptions of a male-inscribed national identity, an identity limned by politically drawn borders and military prowess. When women try to publish creative works, they discover that they are expected to present themselves “as women,” and employ an entirely different manner of discourse, one that is rich in orality, emotional nuance, sentimentality, and softness. Women who want to succeed in either arena must learn constantly to adjust their linguistic registers. Because women have been socialized to accept these linguistic feats, most go through life unwittingly conforming to the demands placed on them. But for some of them there is a constant, nagging sense of inauthenticity. They long to give voice to their frustrations but find their language inadequate to the task. Their language, after all, is the source of their dissatisfaction.

The perceived inadequacies of language for grappling adequately with the complexities of the female reality have encouraged some women writers to devise ways of circumventing the strictures imposed by language. They write against language—employing “national language” in unnatural, if not “unnational,” ways. They defy the order of masculinist discourse by disrupting the linear narrative, for example. Or they retrieve subversive characters from the backwaters of history or myth and re-animate them—borrowing their anti-language for their own angry tales.

### THE “CANDLE FISH” ANTI-LANGUAGE

Ōba Minako’s 1980 short story “Candle Fish” offers one such example. Here she writes of the friendship between two women: an American of Russian descent

6. Tomioka Taeko, “Women’s Language and the National Language,” translated by Joan E. Ericson and Yoshiko Nagaoka, in Rebecca Copeland, ed., *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women’s Writing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 136.

named Olga, and the unnamed Japanese narrator. The two women live for a short time “by a narrow inlet at the northernmost corner of the earth, where one is reminded of the Ice Age.”<sup>7</sup> Neither woman is particularly happy. Olga is raising two children after divorcing an abusive husband. The narrator, a struggling writer, lives with a husband who offers little companionship and a young daughter who cannot understand her. She begins to feel like a ghost in her own life. On summer nights, when she is unable to sleep, she crosses the damp marshy tundra between her house and Olga’s to visit her friend. Often Olga has just baked, and the smell of warm bread infuses the kitchen where the two women sit. They share stories. But the narrator’s English is flawed, and Olga knows no Japanese. The narrator can never really tell Olga who she is or what she feels. Still, she finds the silent physicality of their association profound. She learns to look for “meaning beyond words” and recognizes her time with Olga as “the most precious . . . in my life.”<sup>8</sup> Eventually, Olga moves away and they drift apart. Still, the narrator remembers those nights sitting in Olga’s kitchen, inhaling the sweet smell of baking bread. She remembers Olga’s strength and self-assurance, and she invents from her memories of Olga a phantom whom she calls “Tsukiko.” Appearing before her in the half light of sleepless nights, Tsukiko speaks to her in the language of candle fish (or Japanese bluefish, *Anoplopoma fimbria*):

I call the language in which Tsukiko and I talk candle fish language because when we talk neither the names we were given at our birth, nor our nationalities, nor the language we grew up speaking matters. We talk in a language that can only be understood between those who have lost the names given them at birth, the nationalities they were born to, and the language they have been raised to speak. Candle fish can swim to any shore of any nation.<sup>9</sup>

The language that the narrator invents frees her from the patriarchal claims of national, political, and gendered concerns. She has lost her name—the name that ties her to the *ie seidō*, or family system, as a man’s possession. She is neither her father’s daughter nor her husband’s wife. She is unbound. She is also stateless, freed from association by language to a particular national identity. Candle fish know no boundaries, recognize no national border. They are not claimed by their association to family, nation, or place. Charting their way through the seas, they are the figurative carriers of the female imagination—fluid, boundless, and incomprehensible to all but their own kind.

7. Ōba Minako, “Candle Fish,” in Yukiko Tanaka, ed. and trans., *Unmapped Territories: New Women’s Fiction from Japan* (Seattle: Women in Translation, 1991), 20.

8. *Ibid.*, 25.

9. *Ibid.*, 21.

I find Ōba's text profoundly moving. How brilliant to invent a language that circumvents patriarchal ownership, that frees women from the authority of logos—namely, from words, and particularly from the written word. Ōba's invented “language,” not to be taken literally, functions as a metaphor for the *need* women have to slip free of masculinist language, a language that binds us to roles and attitudes of submission. Of course we do not actually “speak candle fish”—at least not in our waking world. Candle fish is the language of dreams.

### DREAMING THE YAMAMBA

Dreams offer Ōba another mechanism for stepping outside the fixedness of patriarchal structures. Much of “Candle Fish” relies on the world of dreams. Tsukiko, the narrator's imagined version of Olga, comes to the narrator on the nights when she lies in the grey discomfort of sleeplessness, haunted no doubt by a laundry list of things undone, desires unfulfilled, the anxiety of inauthenticity. Tsukiko (literally, “Child of the Moon”) provides succor. She draws the narrator from her tortured bed and into a dreamscape of mythic proportion. Here the narrator gives vent to her innermost desires, releasing her pent-up spirit. The personification of the narrator's imagination—her hunger, her dreams—is the legendary *yamamba*, or mountain witch. More than candle-fish-speak, the *yamamba* represents all that men fear and women desire.

The *yamamba* of Japanese tradition was an old woman who lived in the mountains. She had amazing cognitive, physical, and magical powers—able to read minds, leap effortlessly across mountain crags, and transform herself at will. Despite her magnificent abilities, however, she led a depraved existence, never satisfied, always hungry. She preyed on men who lost their way in the misty tangles of her mountain paths. Legendary treatments of the *yamamba* render her as a horrific figure, her mouth fetid and stained with the blood of men: “The *yamamba* represents all that lies outside the social norm, beyond the boundaries of the civilized. She is a woman without a family, a woman who does not conform. Cast out from the security of social sanctuary—she runs through the mountains.”<sup>10</sup> The personification of unbridled female power—hideous and hated—the *yamamba* serves as a cautionary tale to men and as a warning to women everywhere to curb their appetites, whatever those appetites might desire. Intellectual freedom, sexual gratification, political power, the ability to name oneself—a woman's wants are figured as monstrous. They take her beyond the safe containment of home and leave her in unbounded mountainscapes.

10. Rebecca Copeland, “Mythical Bad Girls: The Corpse, the Crone, and the Snake,” in Laura Miller and Jan Bardsley, eds., *Bad Girls of Japan* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 23.

But Ōba Minako and other women writers of her generation found beauty and strength in the *yamamba*, and in other, similar images of the female demonic, believing that the hideousness inscribed to them was only a plot to deny women access to their power and wisdom. These writers rescue the *yamamba* from depravity and use her as “the embodiment of all women who defy the constricting rules of society.”<sup>11</sup> The *yamamba* is not implicitly evil. But, unable to contain her knowledge or deny her desires—as women are expected to do under a patriarchal social order—the *yamamba* emerges as a menace. Try as she might, she cannot make those around her understand her predicament, and so she becomes even more deeply implicated in a myth of terror. As Adrienne Hurley writes, “The *yamamba*’s struggle is emblematic of the difficulty women encounter when trying to represent their experiences within a patriarchal code—the dominant language—that is designed to exclude them and deny the very reality of their lived experience.”<sup>12</sup>

Mythic representations of the *yamamba* have her lurking deep in the mountains, which serve as counterpoint to the order and stability of the village. The mountains are boundless, dangerous, and outside the limits of the known. For the feminist writer, therefore, the mountains become an appropriate site for resistance, an image of female power and excess. In Ōba’s story, there are two significant landscapes. The first is the landscape of the narrator’s imagination, the mythic mountains of dreams where she gives vent to her *yamamba* fantasy. The second represents the setting for the frame story where the presumably real events take place—namely, the desolate inlet in Alaska, at the northernmost corner of the world. This is where the narrator lived with her husband and child, next door to Olga. It is in this remote region, in a land beyond borders—not really the United States, not the Soviet Union either, and no longer aboriginal—that the worlds of wakefulness and fantasy collide. The narrator is caught in a moment out of time, a frozen moment she describes as being reminiscent of the Ice Age, and in an environmental setting that is markedly “female” in its presentation. The inlet where the narrator lives undulates upward in a gentle curve, dotted by grasses before giving way to a mossy, wet wasteland and eventually to the sea. This “femalescape” provides the protagonist with a way to flee the strictures of the Japanese world back home. It offers her a brief moratorium on her performance of “woman,” and in that precious gap beyond borders, the narrator’s dream world leaks into her waking reality.

Ōba clearly resists the stereotypical view of woman as conforming to the duality of either submissive and good or aggressive and bad. She twists this duality by questioning the application of the label “bad.” Ōba contests other dualities as well. Her narrative disrupts logical sequencing. Dreams morph into reality, and vice versa. The character she invents for her dreamscapes—Tsukiko—steps over into the

11. Yukiko Tanaka, “Introduction,” in idem, ed. and trans., *Unmapped Territories*, xii–xiii.

12. Hurley, “Demons, Transnational Subjects, and the Fiction of Ōba Minako,” 97.

waking world. Readers are confused, not knowing where Tsukiko becomes Olga or when the narrator's imagination bleeds into reality. The blurring of boundaries, like the invention of candle-fish language, is intentionally unsettling.

### FEMALE ARTISTS AS TROUBLE-MAKERS

Feminist art unsettles, whatever form it takes. Occasionally, it offends. So complacent have we become in accepting the status quo, speaking the language of the mainstream, and assuming the mantle given to us that we need a good shake now and again to allow us to see what it is we need to see, and hear what needs to be said. Val A. Walsh notes, of edgy feminist art of the 1990s:

As *knowledge-makers*, women are *trouble-makers* and denote an epistemological/sexual crisis, which needs to be viewed creatively and positively, as a way forward. The Chinese word for crisis, *wei-ji*, is composed of the characters for 'danger' and 'opportunity'; *wei-ji* confirms the proximity of crisis and creativity.<sup>13</sup> This conjunction makes possible a reconceptualisation of both, divesting crisis of its negative and pejorative connotations (something to be avoided or ashamed of), and creativity of its esoteric and elitist connotations. Creativity becomes a function of 'crisis', that is *a situation in which something significant is at stake*; crisis becomes both function and feature of creative process as transformational and risky. Women *as crisis* then becomes a statement of our creative potential, of hope.<sup>14</sup>

For Ōba Minako, the "something significant" was her own creativity, her personal and deeply private need to explore that which was within her. Hers was a struggle to find a language—or in some cases anti-language—that would allow her to give voice to that which might otherwise have gone unspoken. For other artists, such as Tomiyama Taeko, that deeply private necessity takes on an intensely public aspect. Tomiyama speaks not just for herself and other creative women but for those who cannot speak, create, or even *be* at all. She speaks for the dispossessed, the wrongfully dead, the disappeared. Tomiyama Taeko finds her energy,

13. Val A. Walsh's reference to *wei-ji* as "danger and opportunity" is based on a misappropriation of the Chinese characters that has a venerable history—dating back to John Kennedy. Victor H. Mair, among others, has argued that the word "crisis" in Chinese cannot be interpreted as "danger and opportunity." See Mair, quoted in Glenn Kessler, "Rice Highlights Opportunities after Setbacks on Mideast Trip," *Washington Post*, Friday, 19 January 2007, page A14.

14. Val A. Walsh, "Eyewitnesses, Not Spectators / Activists, Not Academics: Feminist Pedagogy and Women's Creativity," in Katy Deepwell, ed., *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 55.

her *yamamba* rage, in using her art to advocate for those consigned to brutal and marginalized existences—for miners, immigrants, and sexually battered women.

The female artist, like the female writer, has no choice but to work within a medium that is already saturated with a masculine imperative. Art has a language of its own, a system of signs and practices that have been determined by tradition. The way the artist has been taught to see, select, compose, and critique, for example, is part of a long process of mimetic practice that has been devised and colored by the dominant political powers.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere in this volume, Hagiwara Hiroko discusses the frustration Tomiyama felt with the language at her disposal (see chapter 6). By the 1950s Tomiyama realized that her training in “formal Western-art-school aesthetics” was not adequate to the complex and searing stories she wanted to tell of human suffering.

Tomiyama’s work is, above all, editorial. Whether producing magnificent canvases, monochromatic lithographs, serigraphs, or, more recently, collages, Tomiyama’s art, since its inception, has been what Hiroko Hagiwara has termed “issue-based”:<sup>16</sup> “Heavily charged with political and historical awareness. . . . [her] work makes possible a shared process of critical scrutiny of Japan’s colonial history.”<sup>17</sup> As Hagiwara explains below, for a time Tomiyama made do with Cezanne-like landscapes—marshaling her formal training as best she could to meet her artistic vision. But eventually, like Ōba Minako, she had to hammer out a language of her own. And like Ōba, Tomiyama turned to what Luce Irigaray would describe as the multi-layered, multi-threaded discourse of disruption:

For what is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to exclusively “masculine” parameters, that is, according to a phallogocentric order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it—that amounts to the same thing in the end—but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an “outside” that is exempt, in part, from phallogocentric law.<sup>18</sup>

### THE NIGHT OF THE FESTIVAL OF GALUNGAN

In the following pages I highlight how Tomiyama uses the language of her art to disrupt and thereby force new ways of seeing. I focus on Tomiyama’s series *Memories*

15. See, for example, Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2006), 17–18.

16. As cited in Rebecca Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist’s Life and Work,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2001): 101.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, 61, quoting Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 68.

of the Sea, with particular emphasis on *The Night of the Festival of Galungan*. Tomiyama finished the paintings for this series in 1986, and the slide show version in 1988. She first exhibited this series of oil paintings in London and Berlin in 1988, as the Shōwa Emperor lay dying. The death of the emperor would eventually release hundreds from the spell of silence imposed upon them by the oppressive weight of the Japanese empire. But Tomiyama did not wait for that death. She had never been engulfed in that spell of silence and had already established her art in resistance to the Japanese nationalist agenda, whether past or present. While this series tells the story of the military comfort women, her story does not unravel in any sort of linear fashion—not even in a fashion that invites cognitive recognition. To do so would have made the story too smoothly logical, too comprehensible. Viewers could too easily compartmentalize the tragedy with a pat, “Ah, how sad,” and then be off to their next event of the day. Rather, Tomiyama engages her viewers with disconnects, puzzles, and complex images.

Much like Ōba before her, Tomiyama relies on the power of images to connote and connect in ways that depend entirely on viewer participation—in fact, that demand such participation. She does not tell us what to see. Unlike directive language, her selection of images suggests but does not limit our “reading” of her paintings to one or even two interpretations. Her images draw on a pool of collective experiences and anticipate the “shared process of critical scrutiny” that Hagiwara refers to (see chapter 6). Similar to Ōba’s dreamscapes, entwined with familiar myths used in unfamiliar ways, Tomiyama’s presentation of image is not closed or scripted. We are responsible for what we see, and our vision is informed by our own personal encounters with the selected images—images that are both fraught and fractured with meaning. The Japanese war flag, signed for success by the friends and family members of the soldier who carried it; the battle bugle; chrysanthemum medals—these images suggest the martial heroics of the Japanese Imperial Army (see figure 10). For some, these images connote valor; for others, loss; and for many, terror. Strewn as they are along the bottom the sea, the images suggest the impotence of the fallen. And yet they glimmer with implied menace. Retrieve them from the seabed and they could shine again.

At the lowest point of the painting—almost beneath the viewer’s notice—a row of soldiers sits silently. Their faces as dark as the seabed, they form the bedrock upon which the rest of the painting is built, as though the soldiers are themselves the primeval loam from which the monstrous imperium evolved. Individually benign, vulnerable even as they indulge in a coveted smoke, they are collectively horrific. The dark threat of the soldiers is amplified by the luminous fragility of butterflies, blossoms, and beautiful shells that vie for the viewer’s attention. Festival banners wave like seaweed tendrils above a mound of stark white skulls. A blue bird skirts past. Red hibiscus flowers, brown palm fronds, proud umbrellas—all speak to the fact that this is the festival of Galungan. A Balinese festival that occurs once every

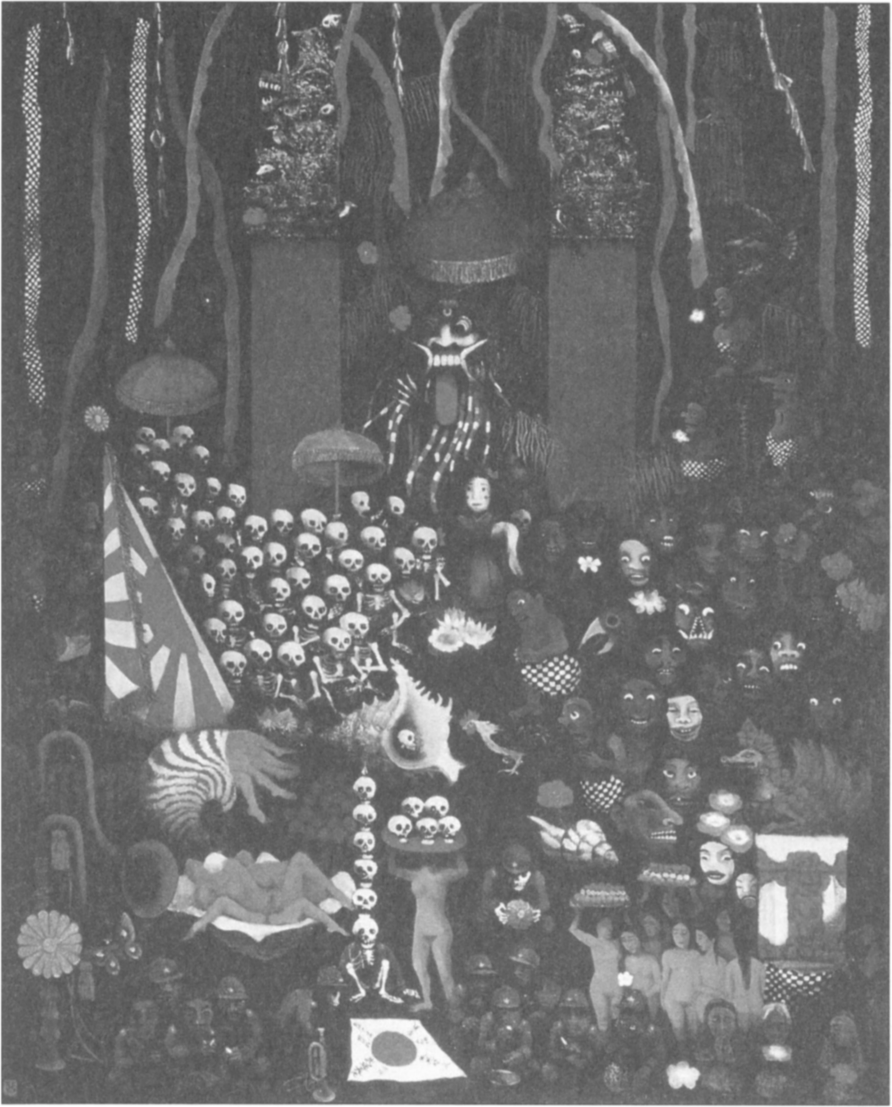


Figure 10. The Festival of Galungan, 1988, shows Tomiyama's mature painting style of large, jewel-colored canvases crowded with small figures, all testifying to a troubled past.

210 days, Galungan welcomes the return of deified ancestors—not unlike the Japanese Buddhist Obon festival. The spirits of the dead are welcomed home with gifts of food, prayers, and other offerings. At the high point of the festival, participants take part in the dance of justice, where the good *barong* spirit battles the evil witch Rangda. Good always triumphs and order is restored, the spiteful Rangda returned to the darkness.



But in Tomiyama's painting, the chaos of the festival is ordered by the evil witch herself, whose image holds center ground. Looming over all with mouth agape and tongue lolling, she checks the scene with her riveting gaze. The bird's flight, the parading women, the murmurs of prayers—all have been arrested. The stillness of the scene is suggested by the rooster, just below center, peering pensively into a shell at a skull that returns his gaze with similar regard. The frenetic energy implied by the festival has been frozen, stopped in place. Silent. Silenced by history.

Randga is another important female icon scripted into evil and thereby robbed of her own story. Like the Japanese *yamamba*, she represents the danger of disorder, of unexpressed desire—a desire that must be drawn as female to be appropriately quelled by masculine hegemonic discourse. Like the *yamamba*, she is presented as hideous, fearsome: eyes bulging, hair a tangled thicket, she feasts on corpses and aborted fetuses with beastlike fangs and claws. The derivation of Rangda is uncertain. Many link her to the Hindu deities Durga or Kali. She also seems to have a human antecedent in an eleventh-century Balinese queen who was abandoned by her king on charges of witchcraft and forced into exile in the forests, where her anger and humiliation transformed her into a demonic force. But the feminist Indonesian poet Toeti Heraty Noerhadi-Rooseno, in *Calon Arang: The Story of a Woman Sacrificed to Patriarchy*, re-tells the myth with a feminist perspective “as one of the power of the state (read male hegemonic power) versus the grassroots (read female submissive power).”<sup>19</sup> Was Rangda really evil? Or was it that her female power—able to withstand a king's armies—was so threatening it had to be nullified?

Where, then, does evil really reside? In Tomiyama's world, the line between good and evil is not clearly drawn. The “order” of civilization, the privilege of powerful nations, and the satisfaction of male desire have invited horrific destruction, as represented by the mounds of skulls and the sacrificial presentation of female flesh. Tension suffuses the canvas as former combatants brush up against their victims, as the gawking faces of the mask-like living reflect the profoundly contemplative gaze of the eyeless skulls. Nothing has been resolved. The carnivalesque grins (or are they grimaces?) of the festival-goers suggest the volatility of the scene. A stirring of the tide and the old tyranny could just as easily reassert itself. Postwar peace is tenuous; complacency, dangerous.

## RYŪGŪ-JŌ, THE DRAGON PALACE BENEATH THE SEA

*The Night of the Festival of Galungan* presents a topsy-turvy world, a world beneath the sea. In a way it suggests an alternative universe, a mirroring of historical reality

19. Rucina Ballinger, “*Calon Arang: A New Context for an Old Witch*,” first published in the *Jakarta Post*, Sunday, 5 November 2006; <http://www.saritaksu.com/ca-launch.htm>. Accessed 6 May 2008.

in which the events of the past remain forever in the present—staged permanently for viewer reflection. With its Balinese overtones, the scene encourages the viewer to associate the undersea world with Balinese myth, where the sea represents Rangda's realm of death, darkness, and the unknown.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, however, the scene hints at the mythic realm of Ryūgū-jō, the Dragon Palace beneath the Sea—a Japanese mythscape with important political overtones. The composition of Tomiyama's painting—with red totem-topped pillars flanking the gape-mouthed Rangda—slyly mimics the structure of the shrine dedicated to the dragon deity at Enoshima, south of Tokyo. In the latter, a large stone image of a dragon head—wildly horned and bewhiskered—looms above the dark opening to a cave. Red or sometimes purple Shinto banners and grey stone *shi-shi* lion-dogs line the sides of the mouth of the cave, which is thought to lead to Ryūgū-jō, the Dragon Palace beneath the Sea (see figure 11).

Ryūgū-jō was the undersea abode of the Dragon King, who possessed tide-controlling jewels and the ability to manage the weather in the realm above. The origins of this myth most likely come from both China and India. In Japan, Ryūgū-jō, built of red and white coral, has four chambers representing the four seasons. The kingdom, populated by fish, turtles, and other sea creatures, offers a microcosm of what occurs on earth—a parallel universe. Significantly, the daughter of the Dragon King, Otohime, was the grandmother of Jinmū, Japan's first emperor. The undersea kingdom, therefore, is directly tied to the birth of the Japanese nation. It is also linked to Japan's earliest colonialist efforts, since according to legend the semi-historical Empress Jingū (said to have lived in 201–69) prayed to the Dragon King before invading Korea (in an escapade that is clearly more mythical than not), and used the tide-controlling jewels he lent her to drown the Korean defenders so that she could conquer their lands. Over time, the myth of this undersea realm has been layered with a variety of redactions and later tales. For example, when the child-emperor Antoku was drowned at sea, along with the Taira fleet, during the historic battle of Dan-no-ura in 1185, he is said to have merged with the Dragon King. The palace he claimed there became the new home for his erstwhile imperial court. The Dragon Palace, therefore, is imbricated with jingoism and complicated with military history.<sup>21</sup>

20. Johanna Stuckey, "Goddesses and Demons: Some Thoughts," *MatriFocus: Cross-Quarterly for the Goddess Woman*, Beltane 2007, Vol. 6-3; <http://www.matrifocus.com/BEL07/spotlight.htm>. Accessed May 6, 2008: "While the Barong is a benevolent forest creature, Rangda belongs to the dark, to graveyards and, most of all, to the sea," Stuckey notes. "Bali's good spirits inhabit the heights, on or close to the sacred Mount Agung. The people live in the world between, in which they maintain the balance between good and evil by daily offerings and frequent rituals. Bali's evil spirits, on the other hand, infest the lower areas of the island, the lowest being the demonic sea."

21. See Elizabeth Oyler, "Daimokutate: Ritual Placatory Performance of the Gen'pei War," *Oral Tradition* 21, no. 1 (2006): 90–118.



Figure 11. Dragon Palace Cave. Legend has it that this cave on Enoshima Island is an entrance to the Dragon Palace beneath the sea. It links Japanese imperialism, both ancient and modern, to the Dragon King's realm, just as Tomiyama does in her *Memories of the Sea* series. Photograph by Laura Hein.

What lurks, then, in the watery realm of Tomiyama's Galungan festival? The birth waters of mythic Japan, the ancient spirits of Jingū's drowned enemies, the Taira court—all these infuse the silty seabed upon which Tomiyama sets her festival. And the bodies of the mythic past are joined by the bodies of the more recently fallen—the Japanese imperial soldier, the military “comfort” woman, and the incidental “native.” Tomiyama's undersea world is one of dynamic assimilation where dream and reality collide, where boundaries collapse, where fragments from mythic traditions across Asia merge into a single moment suggesting eternity—just as today the Galungan festival is meant to restore order, and festivals to the Dragon King and performances of Taira or Taira-era balladry are intended to pacify the spirits of those who inhabit the watery worlds below. But as Hagiwara notes, Tomiyama's artwork “does not seek to bring repose.”<sup>22</sup>

22. See Hagiwara, chapter 6, p. 135.

## THE SPIRIT MIKO: SPEAKING IN TONGUES

In describing the inspiration for her work, Tomiyama claims to speak for the long-forgotten, long-silent military comfort woman. As noted above, she produced her work just before the death of the Shōwa Emperor—a watershed event that freed at last the tongues of many of the victims of the Japanese Imperial Army. That is to say, Tomiyama's visual work preceded the voice of the victims. Acting like a seer herself, in order to speak for the silent, the artist turned to the provocative power of the shaman. In *The Night of the Festival of Galungan*, the image of a Korean shaman appears just beneath the gape-mouthed Rangda. Her white-faced mask offers a sharp contrast to Rangda's vermilion tongue—suggesting a synchronistic partnership between silence, language, and the potency of female power. While everything else in the painting virtually pulsates with a frenetic energy held painfully in check, the shaman's visage is curiously calm, serene, knowing. The central image among a panoply of competing images, the shaman's perspective dominates the scene. We listen to the story she tells. Tomiyama explains her decision to employ the shaman:

The history of the “military comfort women” had long been perceived as a social taboo to be hidden in the darkness of Japan's colonial past. To take up the issue in the world of visual art, I used the image of the “Spirit Miko” or shaman. She would hear the Korean women's deep grievances.

The Spirit Miko moves through the skies of Asia, listening to the tales of seabirds and fish, and visits the dead who have rested at the bottom of the sea for fifty years.<sup>23</sup>

The shaman is a figure shared between Japan and Korea, a figure beyond borders and one that is almost always female. Communing with the spirit worlds, the shaman speaks in a voice beyond national languages, beyond the limitations of time. The shaman has no need of human words or manufactured logic. She is inspired, and she speaks. She has no use for historical eras or the political associations of manmade nations. She drifts through space and time unbounded. Tomiyama's reliance on the shaman thus frees the artist herself from the strictures imposed by the Japanese empire, just as it frees the victims of that empire from their silence. They will speak. And they will use a voice—thanks to Tomiyama—that is not made to depend on politically determined language groups or even rational

23. Tomiyama Taeko, “Narrative and Memory,” pamphlet accompanying *The Fox Story*, multimedia presentation; slides and art by Tomiyama Taeko, music by Takahashi Yūji (Tokyo: Hidane Kōbō, 2000).

constructions. Their *yamamba*-like language is one of rage and sorrow. It has no need of words. Tomiyama replaces words with image. And she replaces the orderly teleology of historical reconstruction with a pastiche of competing images. Hers is a collage that suggests the fragmented deeper truths of the unutterable trauma of human experience.

She situates her story, her indictment, in a world that hovers between the real and the imaginary. Unlike Ōba's world of the mountains or arctic marshes, Tomiyama creates an undersea world. In her world, power is inverted. The oppressors, many reduced to mere bone, hover darkly along the seabed. One riveting figure—his face worn to a skull—contemplates the chrysanthemum seal—symbol of the Japanese empire. It was this symbol, this flower, which granted to the military man the authority that propelled his horrific excesses. It was this flower that allowed the deflowering of so many women.

But now—on the festival of Galungan—the chrysanthemum flowers have lost their shine. Leaden and dull, they lack the interest of other flowers adorning the ocean world and blooming in vibrant hues—red, magenta, and alabaster. A line of girls with translucent skin bear trays piled high with blooms. To their right a headless woman hoists a platter piled high with skulls. And to her right the broken bodies of countless women lie stacked one upon another. Their limbs, lustrous and smooth, are splayed to reveal beautiful, peachlike vaginas. The women lie on the half shell of a giant clam.

The clam is a symbol of the female genitals and also of virginity. Little girls are taught to be virginal—to hold tight to their maidenhood like a shell. For that very reason, the fare served up on most Girl Day celebrations in Japan includes the clam, and the flower used to honor young girls, the peach. But the girls forced to serve the Japanese empire as “comfort women” were not allowed to preserve their chastity. They were pried apart like shells, their pearl-like essence destroyed as their bodies were stretched and splayed and forced to accept man after man after man. Here they lie. Wordless. Headless. Silent. But the message they convey through Tomiyama's brush—lustrous skin amidst white bones, succulently pink genitalia so brazenly exposed—is deafening. The female body—served up as it is—discomforts the viewer, forcing us to accept the women's humiliation almost as if we, too, were complicit in their degradation. In a way, this unflinching exposure of the women restores to them some of their power. As Susan Gubar has noted, “The female body has been feared for its power to articulate itself.”<sup>24</sup> The women's bodies, now their only medium for self-expression, are remarkably forthright and defiant.

One danger of portraying trauma, particularly sexual trauma, for mass consumption is that of perpetuating the cycle of victimization. Photographs or de-

24. Susan Gubar, “‘The Blank Page’ and the Issues of Female Creativity,” in Elizabeth Abel, ed., *Writing and Sexual Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 76.

scriptions of brutality, even when meant to repudiate the perpetrator, nevertheless run the risk of creating spectator thrill. The viewer is placed in the position of the aggressor, and the victim remains a static object, visually consumed. Similarly, the factual, descriptive presentation of violence suggests that these traumatic events can be rationally articulated—and likewise *understood* by those on the outside. Approaches such as these minimize the extraordinary, horrific nature of the event. They tidy the event up, order the chaos, and make it “make sense.” But just as Ōba disrupts our preconditioned assumptions about the logic of narrative, so Tomiyama refuses to use her images teleologically. She vexes the hegemonic construction of history by mixing the living with the dead, the past with the imagined. Her pastiche of images functions with the same ambivalence and inconclusiveness as memory itself. In the process, she decenters the rapes, inverts the traditional stories of power, and challenges the reader to stitch together new stories from her array of floating metaphors. Guided by the shaman, we are forced to listen to voices we do not understand, look for clues along the seabed, struggle to decipher what we see, and in the process we enter into new territory, new levels of understanding. We become the storyteller.

Both Tomiyama and Ōba use their art to challenge male authority. Ōba is concerned with the way that authority has silenced female creativity and forced women into positions of unquestioning docility—threatening the intellectually active or artistically visionary woman by naming her a witch, labeling her hideous. She uses language in creative ways that discomfort her readers, forcing them to appreciate the powerful hold that language has had in locking women into submissive positions. Tomiyama, using visual media, challenges a masculinist system that bound women to outrages so horrific they can scarcely be spoken. Both artists betray a distrust of language saturated with masculinist agendas. They circumvent this language by decentering its power, inverting the accepted world order. They use their art to step across borders in time and space, erasing the man-made line in the sand, drawing on latent, often lost vestiges of female power. Inventing new worlds, new language, new modes of perception, they slip past the barriers of traditional expectation and open new territory for female self-expression.



## Fire and Femininity: Fox Imagery and Ethical Responsibility

YUKI MIYAMOTO

“Men have forgotten this truth,” said the fox.

“But you must not forget it.

You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

—*Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*, *The Little Prince*

Fire, femininity, spirit-possession, illusion, fertility, wealth, and cunning—a single image comprises these disparate terms in the Japanese imagination: the fox. This chapter explores the ethical implications of the multifaceted fox images in Tomiyama Taeko’s paintings through an examination of the fox in Japanese folklore. Attention to the history of this animal’s place in Japanese tradition will reveal that Tomiyama mines and manipulates the rich mythology of the fox, using it as a critical tool with which she highlights, inquires into, and also critiques the structures in Japan that have oppressed or “silenced” certain groups of people, particularly those who were colonized. This is because the fox in her narrative art—both the versatile animal and its associations—calls attention to, and problematizes, boundaries and frameworks of many sorts, evoking in viewers’ minds the ambiguous and mysterious nature of the animal as well as the social structures it defies.<sup>1</sup> Tomiyama’s use of the fox thus suggests that, although we may be unable to free ourselves entirely from such frameworks (and that an imprudent unmooring

1. Rebecca Jennison, “Remembering as Resistance: The ‘Shaman’ and the ‘Fox’ in the Art of Tomiyama Taeko,” *Journal of Kyoto Seika University*, no. 25 (2003): 185. *Silenced by History* is the title of the exhibition catalog of a series of Tomiyama’s paintings; see “Asia e no shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History: Tomiyama Taeko’s Work* (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1995).



would in fact be dangerous), our recognition of their arbitrariness, temporariness, and constructedness not only makes the oppressed visible but reveals what makes the system of oppression possible. In doing so, the fox's presence in Tomiyama's art asks the audience: What is the ethical significance, if any, of recognizing the structures of oppression and of mourning the oppressed? What might be at risk should we fail to recognize our conformity to such structures? Working closely with the fox, I would like to address these questions in the following pages.

### THE ETHICS OF REMEMBRANCE, RESPONSIBILITY, AND RESISTANCE

Before scrutinizing the fox and its association in Japanese folklore, let us examine briefly why Tomiyama's concerns for the oppressed are an ethical undertaking. The significance of Tomiyama's work lies in the fact that her art reveals how our social and cognitive boundaries can prevent us from seeing and hearing certain others, which consequently contributes to maintaining the structure of oppression. Hannah Arendt once said, "Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life."<sup>2</sup> Arendt then argues that securing the public realm where different opinions are allowed to appear—being seen and heard—can become the fortress against totalitarianism. Following Arendt's idea, philosopher Edith Wyschogrod maintains that "the effort to suppress alterity is an act of violence and thus inadmissible on ethical grounds."<sup>3</sup> Thus the category of "the silenced," according to Wyschogrod, already implies violence—the violence involved in depriving others of their voices. Indeed, "silenced" individuals embody the fact that harm has been already done to them; the recovery of their voices amounts to retributive justice, and therefore seeing them, listening to their voices, and mourning their suffering fall into the realm of ethics.

This conviction stems from a belief that human beings are responsible for their own actions and the consequences thereof. Furthermore, if, as Wyschogrod claims, ethics concerns the "sphere of transaction between 'self' and 'Other' and is to be construed non-nomologically,"<sup>4</sup> then one's responsibility also includes being responsible—response-able, answerable—to others. In other words, ethics designates the sphere in which one is responsible to oneself and response-able to others.<sup>5</sup> Thus

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 57.

3. Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

4. Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), xv.

5. Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas elaborates on this notion, claiming that not even our deaths put an end to our responsibility for the other. Alphonso Lingis summarizes Levinas's claim: "I am

ethics is not necessarily synonymous with norms in society. On the contrary, ethics in this context calls a normative claim into question. The fox in Tomiyama's art makes just such a stand against social norms of twentieth-century Japan.

If the category of the oppressed as the other, for example, is embedded in the social and cognitive structures from which we construct our own identities—in differentiating ourselves from those who are *not* us—then retrieving the voice of the silenced and challenging those social structures that suppress the other will, or perhaps must, take the form of resistance. What Takamura Kazuko claims about women applies in the context of Tomiyama's work: "Public mourning for the other or 'the enemy' is a form of resistance to disrupt the rigid dichotomy of in/out, we/they, or friend/foe."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Tomiyama's paintings, as we will see, amount to acts of commemoration and public mourning, dramatically enacting the ethics of remembering, responsibility, and resistance—all of which are intricately expressed through the use of the multifarious images of the fox.

## TOMIYAMA AND MANCHURIA

I primarily examine Tomiyama's work on Manchuria, where she spent her adolescence, and which she revisited later with her mature sensibility for the social structures that create the marginalized. Manchuria provided Tomiyama with a significant topographical vantage point for her series *Harbin: Requiem for the Twentieth Century*, revealing the arbitrariness of oppressive national, racial, and ethnic boundaries (see figure 12). The series emerged from reminiscences of her days in Manchuria, where she discerned a pervasive and deeply embedded structure of exploitation of the other—as well as her own victimization by and complicity with that structure. At once colonizer and colonized, Tomiyama came to recognize the finely drawn boundaries that separated her from the local Manchurians, as well as from the "Westerners"—a realization that only came to her long after she had left Manchuria. "I was the daughter of a pseudo-Westerner," Tomiyama recounts in retrospect, "employed by the British, working for them in a lesser status, assimilating their values and exploiting other Asians. That was what Japan was."<sup>7</sup>

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answerable before the other in his alterity—responsible before all the others for all the others. To be responsible before the other is to make of my subsistence the support of his order and his needs. His alterity commands and solicits, his approach contests and appeals; I am responsible before the other for the other." Alphonso Lingis, "Translator's Introduction," in Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), xx. One's existence, Levinas claims, is shaped by the other, and thus one's responsibility for the other emerges through this relation.

6. Jennison, "Remembering as Resistance," 184.

7. Hagiwara Hiroko, "Silenced by 'History': Tomiyama Taeko's Harbin Series," in "Asia e no shiza to Hyōgen" Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History*, 64.



Figure 12. Harbin Station, a 2002 collage using the 1995 Harbin collages reproduced as postcards, comments on Manchuria's complex history in her postcards of key events that took place there, both through the content and the constructivist art style.

Manchukuo, established in 1932, was a puppet state controlled by the Japanese military government. Being Japanese in this place thus implied an ambivalent status: on the one hand, it meant being perceived by local Manchurians as the privileged colonizer; on the other, it meant being less respected by Westerners, as newcomers to colonial expansionism. Although this was not Tomiyama's particular concern during the time she was a teenager there, we can surmise that she nonetheless sensed the ambiguity and ambivalence of her place in Manchuria and in the wider world. Later, Tomiyama gradually made sense of her experiences, understanding that she had in fact been straddling the threshold where different worlds—the world of the exploiter and the world of the exploited—came into contact with each other.

With this realization that she had belonged to two worlds, Tomiyama understood the harsh realities associated with the arbitrary divisions of race, nation, and political entities. Eventually, she found a way to convey this awareness by creating imaginary worlds inhabited by protean foxes—worlds in which the borders among humans, as well as between humans and animals, are blurred. This very indistinctiveness, as we will see, effectively brings to light the troubling reality of people constrained by societal and cognitive borders. Tomiyama's ingenuity thus appears in her simultaneously exhibiting two worlds, or two dimensions of existence, by

disclosing the borders transgressed by the fox. She paints a world that is illusory and fantastic, but that sharply reveals a grotesque reality.

Although Tomiyama first witnessed such exploitations in her adolescence, what compelled her to disclose them in her paintings was her realization that these structures of oppression are appearing again in Japan today. With its economic prosperity in the 1980s, Japan began, and continues, to receive foreign workers, largely underpaid and sometimes relegated to the sex industry—and too often without basic legal protections. Tomiyama felt called to represent her Manchurian memories as a way of examining and critiquing the boundaries that continue to enable the violent exploitation of others by rendering them invisible.

Particularly alarming to Tomiyama is the fact that people in Japan have once again conceded their responsibility as moral agents, reminding her of the postwar discourse that the military government had manipulated the Japanese people in order to enact its expansionist policy. Pleading that they had been duped, people disavowed their responsibility as accountable agents for wrongdoing during wartime. This justification has meant ignoring their own responsibility for having conformed to wartime policies and instead choosing a victim narrative in which the Japanese people unfortunately “lost their minds”—the state that Tomiyama likens to possession by the spirit of the fox. Similarly, today some Japanese are again naively—and negligently—willing to believe that the foreign workers coming from “the other side” of their national boundaries are necessary commodities for Japanese economic success, rather than giving critical thought to the socio-economic and cognitive structures that marginalize certain groups of people, and allow continuing exploitation. Indeed, after the economic “bubble” burst in the early 1990s, public discourse in Japan began to emphasize how the Japanese people had “lost their minds” in the frantiness of the bubble’s expansion—rhetoric that recalls the postwar discourse that also sought to excuse an abdication of moral responsibility.

In Tomiyama’s paintings, fox-possession is the most prevalent trope for illustrating evasion of responsibility, as something akin to spirit-possession—a position she critiques as a sham. At the same time, she is able to capitalize on the ambivalent character of the fox as a tool—on the one hand, for revealing the actual structures by which violence and exploitation emerge, and on the other, for recapturing the mechanisms of deception. This is a shrewd choice because ambivalence and spirit-possession are rife in literature and folklore portraying the fox.

## THE FOX IN JAPANESE LITERATURE AND FOLKLORE

Symbolically, fox images are ubiquitous in Japanese literature and folklore. Yet the origins and meanings of those associations are compound, even highly unstable and uncertain—a fact that in itself evokes the arbitrariness of the boundaries that

the human world imposes upon this animal. The fox is thus an apt metaphor for conveying the arbitrariness of all boundaries, and the Japanese evasion of moral responsibility, for at least five reasons:

1. *The fox crosses religious boundaries*: the fox is closely connected to, and appears in, Buddhism, Shinto, Hinduism, On'myōdō (based on Chinese Yin-yang philosophy, discussed below), and Japanese folk religion, and occasionally is worshipped itself, indicating the fox's slippery, ambiguous identity. The fox's ubiquitous presence, in turn, shows that the boundaries among these religious traditions are, in fact, arbitrary.
2. *As a trickster figure, the fox trespasses boundaries through transmogrifications*: the fox overturns power structures and relations through transgressive acts, particularly ones related to gender.
3. *The fox evokes fire, and therefore war*: the long-standing association between the fox and fire highlights the animal's capacity for destructiveness.
4. *The fox is thought to have the power of spirit-possession*: fox spirits, as I have mentioned, are believed to possess humans. But in contrast to other instances of spirit-possession (*mono no ke*) in Japan—in which a person, typically of a less privileged status, is empowered through gaining the voice of a deity or spirit<sup>8</sup>—fox-possession coincides with delusion and indicates a disruption of communication.
5. *The fox is associated with the imperial household*: the fox also plays an important role in the enthronement ceremony for new emperors. Japan's colonization and war were conducted under the name of the emperor, but the imperial household's association with the fox is often overlooked.

### CROSSING RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES

A careful observation of the fox as it appears across Japanese folklore and religious narratives calls into question the compartmentalization of religious traditions in

8. For example, interpreting the phenomenon of spirit-possession in *The Tale of Genji*, Doris G. Bargen states, "Heian women were not in a position to substitute—or appropriate—others with the same facility. Instead, by resorting to spirit possession, they, like the marginalized or severely stressed men in the histories, made an advantage of the disadvantage of less potent, precisely defined selves—by merging with the other, incorporating the other, or becoming the other." Bargen, *A Woman's Weapon: Spirit Possession in the Tale of Genji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 23.

Japan, such as Shinto, Buddhism, On'myōdō, and folk religions, and thereby forms the basis of Tomiyama's use of the fox image: namely, to reveal the limits of existing categories. Although the fox already appears in a Chinese fable of 333 BCE as a clever animal,<sup>9</sup> in Japanese literature the fox first appears in the ancient record *Nihonshoki*, compiled in 720.<sup>10</sup> *Nihonshoki*, along with *Kojiki* in 712, are the oldest written documentation of Japanese mythology, assembling folk tales and legends that trace the imperial family's lineage back to the gods and goddesses. *Nihonshoki* records the appearance of the white fox simply as a good omen—an association deriving from Chinese folklore—while other animals, such as snakes, sharks, wolves, deer, and wild boars, figure as deities there.<sup>11</sup>

The fox next appears as a messenger of Inari, a popular Japanese deity of wealth. The fragmented record of *Yamashiro no kuni fudoki*, compiled in the early eighth century, explains the origin of Inari worship as having been introduced by the Hata clan, which had come from China via the Korean Peninsula. This is important because Inari was then worshipped as the deity of agriculture, who eventually came to be confused with the fox.<sup>12</sup> Inari and the fox are sometimes revered in Shinto shrines, but are also venerated as Buddhist figures. In other words, from the very beginning, the deity Inari and the fox were not confined to a certain religious category—Buddhism or Shinto—but made appearances across religious boundaries. Despite the frequent convergences of Shinto and Buddhism in Japanese religious

9. The story tells "how the fox warned the tiger to be careful not to attack and eat him [the fox]: "The Sovereign of Heaven has privileged me among all animals by giving me greater cunning than to others. Should you devour me, you would certainly displease him very much." U. A. Casal, "The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch Animals of Japan," *Folklore Studies* 18 (1959): 1.
10. Nakamura Teiri, *Kitsune no nihonshi: kodai chusei hen* (The Fox in Japanese History: Ancient and Middle Ages) (Tokyo: Nihon Editaasukūru Shuppanbu, 2001), 2. According to Nakamura, foxes were present in the Japanese archipelago in the Jōmon period (or the Paleolithic period, from 13,000 to 300 BCE).
11. Ibid. Also see Hoshino Yukihiro, *Kitsune no bungakushi* (Literary History of the Fox) (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1995), 13.
12. Worship of the rice spirit developed into worship of Inari, who promises rich harvests, abundance, and wealth. Shinto priest and scholar Shimizu Kenji asserts that the Inari deity originated from Dakini, the Hindu goddess and servant of Kali. Dakini was also incorporated into the Japanese Buddhist pantheon as a deity of lower rank than the bodhisattvas and Buddha. In her Hindu, Buddhist, and Shinto incarnations, as discussed later, Dakini rides on a fox, also believed to be a messenger of Inari. Karen A. Smyers reports that although Buddhist and Shinto clergy strenuously deny that Inari is a fox, such denials ironically indicate that many people believe that Inari is actually a fox. She captures this confusion in her interview with a Japanese Inari worshipper: "Inari is really a [Shinto] *kami* but is worshipped at Toyokawa as a Buddhist deity—but I really feel it is more of a *kami* than a Buddhist figure. I don't think Inari is different from other *kami*, and may even be the same as the Christian God." Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 7. Also, "Some saw Inari to be a benevolent fox-*kami*; others were frightened of it. One said, 'Dakiniten is a fox-*kami* who eats people and is terrifying.'" Ibid., 8. During the Edo period (1604–1868), Inari and the fox became inseparable, and fox worship became extremely widespread.

traditions, Inari is particularly fluid. Inari is not only a Shinto deity and a Buddhist deity but also a protector of warriors as well as fishermen, and the representation of the rice spirit.

The confusion that the fox brings to religious divisions corresponds to the ambiguous status of people in the puppet state of Manchukuo, as expressed in Tomiyama's painting *The Foundation of Manchukuo*. Here the foxes wear red bibs, often associated with Buddhist deities, and stand in front of *shide*, Shinto paper ornaments used to demarcate the sacred from profane.

The Japanese title of *The Foundation of Manchukuo* 「満州国」建国祝典 speaks to the celebration of the establishment of Manchukuo, which was based on the ideal of cooperation among the five main ethnic groups in the empire: Manchus, Japanese, Han Chinese, Mongols, and Koreans. The painter's technique at once highlights and critiques the problematic and hierarchical relations among those groups. The painting is segmented into three main tiers that not only symbolize the real divisions among the groups but also question their belongingness: Do people in the bottom tier—in which bright celebratory Chinese characters signifying “joy” are in stark contrast to the somberness of the people's faces—belong to Manchukuo? What is Manchukuo, anyway? Why are the Manchurian emperor, Pu Yi, and his subordinates confined by the frame, and guarded by a fox-soldier armed with a rifle? It seems that such confinement ironically yet effectively reveals the socially constructed divisions that the fox ridicules by trespassing upon.

### THE FOX AND FEMININITY

The earliest folklore of the fox also describes another crucial boundary-crossing quality—namely, the fox's ability to turn itself into a human woman. The association of the fox and women has a long history in Japan as well as in East Asia more widely.<sup>13</sup> Several scholars assert that the relationship can be traced back to ancient Chinese philosophy. Referring to the *Xi yang za zu* 西陽雜俎, a ninth-century anthology of Chinese folk tales, for example, historian Yoshino Hiroko argues that the association of the fox with women stems from Chinese Yin-yang philosophy, which is based on the principle that everything is generated from the Great Ulti-

13. T. W. Johnson, who studied fox folklore in East Asia, shows that people in China tend to avoid the use of the character 狐 (*fu*) for fox, and instead employ 胡 (also pronounced *fu*). Johnson suggests that this choice indicates an intriguing relationship between the fox and women: “Nowhere could I find any comment on the reason for the choice of this particular character of the many possible choices having this same sound, though there seems to me to be an obvious reason in the component parts of the character, 古 (ancient) and 月 (moon), moon being the embodiment of the female principle.” Johnson, “Far Eastern Fox Lore,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 33, no. 1 (1974): 36–37.

mate, and is divided according to either yin or yang attributes. Something possessing yin attributes “seeks” yang energy to make an ideal balance. According to this philosophy, the elements of earth, femininity, and coldness express yin attributes, whereas sun, masculinity, and warmth partake of yang attributes. Yoshino explains that “since the fox belongs to the yin category, it inevitably seeks yang attributes. This is why even a male fox transforms itself into a human woman, in order to complement its masculine energy with the feminine yin attributes.”<sup>14</sup>

Steven Heine offers a perspective that further nuances the associations of foxes and women. Many tales invoke a fox transforming itself into a woman, and in particular a bride. “According to legend,” writes Heine, “the foxes are eager to steal a groom in order to rob his life force and have one of their own disguise itself as his bride.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, according to both the Yin-yang philosophy as well as folklore, the fox appears to require male vigor. But as this legend of the fox-bride suggests, the fox can access this male force only through sexual intercourse. This motif of seductive fox-women is found in Japanese folklore, On’myōdō legend, and Buddhist fables, again freely crossing genre boundaries.

Some Japanese legends describe a fox-woman who enters the human world, and these interspecies relations result in offspring with supernatural powers. Take, for example, the story of Tamamo-no-mae, a legendary figure in twelfth-century Japan. A fox transformed into a woman, she served and enchanted the retired emperor Toba with her beauty and intelligence.<sup>16</sup> The relationship between the fox-woman and an emperor is intriguing and suggestive (a point to which I return below), yet this story is only one of many narratives in Japanese folklore in which a man falls in love with and marries a woman who is really a fox in disguise.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the couple gives birth to a child who exhibits the superhuman ability to run as fast as birds fly. The suggestion, of course, is that this extraordinary power is inherited from the fox-mother. Eventually, according to folklore, the boy became an ancestor of a powerful clan in what is now Aichi prefecture. A similar story is found in the biography of Abe no Seimei, a renowned eleventh-century master of On’myōdō who was revered for his supernatural power to see and manipulate evil

14. Yoshino Hiroko, *Kitsune: In’yō gogyō to Inari shinkō* (Fox: Yin-Yang Thought and Inari Beliefs), *Mono to ningen no bunkashi* 39 (Cultural History of Things and Mankind) (Tokyo: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2001), 49.

15. Steven Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Kōan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 193.

16. The motif of the nine-tailed fox is still very popular in Korea and Japan. For example, there are popular movies in which the nine-tailed fox appears, as well as video games based on the Tamamo-no-mae legend.

17. Hoshino reminds readers of an episode of Toyotama Hime no Mikoto in the *Kojiki*, in which Toyotama Hime no Mikoto reveals her nature as a crocodile while she appears as a human-deity. Hoshino, *Kitsune no bungakushi*, 32–33.



spirits, cast spells, perform exorcisms, and predict misfortunes. His mother was also said to be a fox with nine tails.<sup>18</sup>

Stories associating the fox with feminine sexuality recall a well-known legend of fox trickery in medieval Japan that suggests that the fox reveals repressed sexual desire. This famous story is of a Buddhist priest, who, through his religious asceticism, supposedly sublimated carnal desires. But in the *Kitsune zōshi* (Picture Scroll of the Fox), popular among the aristocrats in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Buddhist monk is outwitted by a fox. Although he claims to be spiritually evolved to the point where he no longer feels sexual desire, the monk falls in love with a woman and lives with her for seven years in a lavish abode. But, as the scroll reveals, the monk has been enchanted by a dissembling fox who had transformed itself into an irresistible woman—and the seven years were really just seven days, spent not in luxury but beneath the floor of the monk's temple. Even though it was an open secret in that period that Buddhist monks rarely observed celibacy, the monk's repressed carnal desires are disgracefully exposed by the fox. Here we see the fox's talent not only for trickery but for disclosing, through that trickery, disastrous discrepancies between appearances and reality—discrepancies about what really *is*. In this delusion, the monk aggrandizes his own self-image as an attractive and sexual man who is appealing to a beautiful young woman, whereas in reality he is a typically failed monk whose ego is larger than himself. The monk's brief and squalid affair thus makes him pathetic rather than enviable. And revealing such a painful reality by using fantasy is, likewise, Tomiyama's forté.

Tomiyama draws upon these many associations of the fox with women, and also extends and elaborates that mythology in her paintings. Such associations are rife in *War and Illusion* (figure 13).<sup>19</sup> In this painting the soldier's face is blank, in unsettling contrast to the five women's faces occupying the right-hand half of the canvas. The soldier wears a Japanese-style kimono underneath his military jacket, but from the waist down his body is constructed of rifles. The chrysanthemum in the bottom center recalls the imperial crest, emphasizing the fact that the war was fought in the name of the emperor.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, at the soldier's feet are a geisha-like girl and two foxes. This juxtaposition suggests a connection between the fox and female sexuality that resonates through much folklore of the fox.

18. Although the nine-tailed fox is usually associated with women in Japan, Johnson examines an unusual Chinese case. In Fuchow, the fox with nine tails is used for male foxes, yet worshipped as the god of prostitutes. Johnson, "Far Eastern Fox Lore," 36–37. Smyers, too, reports that the deity Inari "became the protector of prostitutes, and this is probably because of the association of such women with foxes." Smyers, *The Fox and Jewel*, 135.

19. The full title of this painting is "War and illusion: In 1932 the Japanese army occupied Harbin. Then, the 'five nations in cooperation' and the 'royal road to paradise' made sudden appearances on the wasteland stage as the drama of metamorphosis from illusion to reality began. (Inspired by the fox in Japanese folklore)."

20. To be precise, the Japanese imperial crest is a sixteen-petaled chrysanthemum.



Figure 13. War and Illusion, a 1995 oil painting, introduces Tomiyama's trickster foxes, who delight in deceiving humans and leading them astray.

These various connections between foxes, women, and sexuality are all on display in *War and Illusion*. In addition, the women's hairstyle and the girl's *shamisen* (a musical instrument indicating that she is an "entertainer") suggest that the women in this painting are participants in sexual subjugation of one sort or another. Tomiyama's painting—with its juxtaposition of military trappings and women in roles of imposed sexual commerce—thus reminds its viewers that Japanese expansionism involved the exploitation of women. Much as the fox in folklore elicits an illusory world that discloses a disturbing reality, so the foxes in Tomiyama's painting, sitting innocently at the feet of the soldier with the geisha-like girl, imply the fate of these women. Flanked by the deity of prostitution in the form of the two foxes, the women in the painting are at once subjugated by war and subject to illusion.

While women like those depicted in this painting were controlled by men's oppressive carnal desire and sexual subjugation, the women at home—within their households in mainland Japan—were also controlled by an oppressive patriarchal system. However, despite the fact that in the domestic context women's identities were reduced to those of asexual nurturers of men and children, some women found this to be a sacred mission and were willing to adopt such a role. These images of (willfully) "controlled" femininity are particularly conspicuous in a pair of Tomiyama's paintings: *Sending off a Soldier* (figure 14) and *Illusion by Cherry Blossoms*. Both paintings depict a common wartime scene: a couple hurrying to be married before the departure of the conscript.

These two paintings evoke nostalgia, calling to mind the phrase *kitsune no yomeiri* (fox-bride's wedding), a Japanese colloquialism denoting a sudden rainfall. Though the origin of the phrase is uncertain, the idea behind it is discernable: people feel deceived when they get caught in an unexpected shower, especially when the sun is shining. They link such a shower to the fox, with its legendary capriciousness. Through these portraits of controlled femininity, Tomiyama highlights not only women's victimization but their accountability as moral agents during the war. After such rushed weddings, many soldiers did not return from the battlefield and their brides became widows, sometimes carrying babies. The paintings compel viewers to contemplate the fate of such women in the postwar period, and lead us to ponder how women's "happiness" is determined by a patriarchal society, and how their lives are valued only for their utility within that system. Women were seen as instruments for bringing baby boys into the family, so that the *ie* (Japanese family system) would continue through the male lineage, while simultaneously benefitting the patriarchal nation-state by bringing forth potential soldiers.<sup>21</sup>

21. The value of women's reproductive ability stems not only from the family system but also, particularly during Japan's "modernization," from the national project. As Yoshiko Miyake points out, "Women's reproductive roles were integral to the preservation of the family system, which was the basis of the state's rule, [and] the state promoted the slogan *ryōsai kenbo* ('good wife,



Figure 14. Sending off a Soldier. In this 1995 oil painting, Tomiyama expresses her horror at the ease with which Japanese in the 1930s—including herself—had accepted the idea that young people had a patriotic duty to hurriedly procreate and die for the nation.

wise mother”) to advertise women’s importance in the home.” Miyake, “Doubling Expectations: Motherhood and Women’s Factory Work under State Management in Japan in the 1930s and 1940s,” in Gail Lee Bernstein, ed., *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 269. She, too, sees women as serving a public function, and doing so in the *ie*, which is not a private space.

But by my reading, the situation is even more complex, for it reflects the ambivalences of the fox itself. Tomiyama's depiction of women as foxes not only raises the question of whether women were victims of war and patriarchal society, but also the question of whether they were complicit in the structure of war. In *Sending off a Soldier*, a group of fox-women in white aprons excitedly wave national flags to cheer the bridegroom as he departs for the battlefield. As art historian Hagiwara Hiroko points out,<sup>22</sup> the white aprons allude to one of the women's organizations dedicated to such activities as visiting bereaved families whose members were lost in the war, and taking care of sick and injured soldiers.<sup>23</sup>

Analyzing portrayals of these garments in women's magazines issued during the war, art historian Wakakuwa Midori observes that "those aprons symbolizing women during the war became a trademark for the Greater Japan Patriotic Women's Association (Dainippon Kokubō Fujinkai), and came to be recognized as a national uniform donned by women of the time."<sup>24</sup> According to Wakakuwa, aprons covering the front and sleeves, like those found on Tomiyama's fox-women in *Sending off a Soldier*, were originally worn to protect clothes from the wear-and-tear of housekeeping, particularly in the kitchen. Such household attire—desexualizing women by reducing them to nurturers—became a "uniform" for women, who were encouraged by the Dainippon Kokubō Fujinkai to wear them outside the kitchen.

Similarly, women's task of keeping the house was extended collectively to taking care of the nation-state. As mentioned earlier, women's reproductive ability is one example of women's bodies becoming not only a concern of the patriarchal family structure but also an object of control by the nation-state, which culminated in 1941's "Outline for Establishing Population Growth Policy" (*Jinkō seisaku kakuritsu yōkō*).<sup>25</sup> As their work was reinterpreted as a contribution to this patriarchal system of the Japanese empire, women's moral agency became swathed in and even swallowed up by large protective aprons, in a way that speaks of both subjugation and complicity.<sup>26</sup>

This sacrifice of individuality through the role of caregiver often provides women with a sense of self-worth, which could have led to their willingness to sup-

22. Hagiwara, "Silenced by 'History,'" 63.

23. Aikoku Fujinkai was established in 1901 and later became Dainippon Aikoku Fujinkai, or the Greater Japan Women's Association. "At the time [1942 on], the women's Patriotic Association embraced a membership of 4 million, and the Greater Japan Women's Association for National Defense, 9 million." Ueno Chizuko, *Nationalism and Gender*, trans. Beverley Yamamoto (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004), 17.

24. Wakakuwa Midori, *Sensō ga tsukuru joseizō: dainiji sekai taisenka no nihonjosei dōin no shikakuteki purōpaganda* (Women's Representation in the War: Visual Propaganda on Mobilizing Japanese Women during World War II) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2004 [2000]), 140.

25. Miyake, "Doubling Expectations," 277. Miyake also traces the history of the "Outline for Establishing Population Growth Policy" (*Jinkō seisaku kakuritsu yōkō*). See *ibid.* 277–79.

26. Wakakuwa, *Sensō ga tsukuru joseizō*, 140.

port the war. In her analysis, Wakakuwa examines illustrations from the magazine *Nippon fujin* (Japanese Women), issued by Dainippon Kokubō Fujinkai. The well-known slogan of the association proclaimed, “The soldiers run the risk of their lives, we run the whiskbroom to keep the house.”<sup>27</sup> The nice parallelism encouraged women to participate in the war effort by taking care of households in the absence of their husbands and other male family members. Meanwhile, supporting and fighting the war became sacred for both genders. Wakakuwa points out that aprons are often accompanied in these wartime visual representations by *tasuki* (banners), *hinomaru* (Japanese national flags), and the Yasukuni shrine.<sup>28</sup> All these elements appear in Tomiyama’s *Sending off a Solider*, again indicating the complicity of women in the execution of the war.

Depicting an imaginary world rife with symbols of war, in which everyone has the face of a duplicitous fox, Tomiyama’s paintings disclose the obscure border between reality and fantasy, victim and victimizer, and the passivity and activity of individual agents. Tomiyama’s foxes ingeniously draw attention to women’s simultaneous subjugation and culpability. Women were the victims of a patriarchal and militaristic society, rushed into arranged marriages and then left alone as widows to raise their children. They were also not passive victims but full participants in the war; thanks to those women proudly bearing *tasuki* who celebrated the “patriotic” task of housekeeping, men could become brave soldiers who might willingly brutalize others for their country.

### THE FOX AND FIRE

Tomiyama also deftly draws upon the rich association between foxes and fire in her paintings. These connections can be found, for example, in the mysterious fireballs called *kitsunebi* (literally, “foxfire”), which are thought to resemble the lantern lights used in a wedding procession, and which thus conjure up an image of the marriage ceremony of foxes. The phrase *kitsune no yomeiri* (fox-bride’s wedding), examined above, also signifies unidentified fireballs in the mountains. Interestingly, the combination of the fox and fire, like that of the fox and trickery, is found in many cultures.<sup>29</sup> In Japan, the fox is variously thought to predict fires, start fires, and also to protect houses from fire damage.<sup>30</sup>

27. “Heitai san wa inochigake, watashitachi wa tasukigake.” Emphasis mine.

28. Wakakuwa, *Sensō ga tsukuru joseizō*, 140.

29. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 141.

30. The popular picture scroll *Chōjū jinbutsu giga* (Picture Scroll of Birds, Animals, and Mankind) exhibits a fox holding its tail, the tip shooting a line of flame. Such a depiction has sometimes been interpreted as a phallic symbol, and ultimately a representation of fertility—a reading consistent with the image of the fox as a messenger of Inari, the grain deity, although male rather

Yoshino Hiroko's explanation of the fox's association with fire as being based on Yin-yang philosophy and the five elements provides an illuminating interpretation here. According to this philosophy, everything in the universe arises from the five elements: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Further, each element influences the other, either generating or overcoming it. Wood generates fire, fire generates earth (ash), earth generates metal, metal generates water, and water generates wood. Similarly, each element negates another. Wood overcomes earth, earth overcomes water, water fire, fire metal, and metal wood. This overcoming is not purely destructive but is thought to be necessary for regeneration, recalling the centrality of the concept of balance to this philosophical tradition. Numbers, colors, directions, and animals—real or imaginary—are also associated with each of the five elements.

The fox is connected with the earth element, perhaps due to the earthy color of its fur—the color yellow corresponds to earth<sup>31</sup>—and to the fact that it nests in the ground. Yoshino, however, speculates that the original notion that fire generates earth accounts for this association, with the link between fire, earth, and fox becoming confused over time in the Japanese imagination. Consequently, the fox, though belonging to the earth element, is believed to overcome fire. Interestingly, here again we encounter the pattern of the fox transgressing categories, and thereby disrupting the system.

Further relations between the fox and fire, though not obvious upon a first reading, are expressed in a popular satiric poem of unknown authorship from the Edo period:

In Edo, shops called "Iseya"  
and Inari shrines  
are as numerous as dog droppings.  
*Chōnai ni iseya Inari ni inu no kusto*<sup>32</sup>

Like Walmart today—and like dog droppings at all times—Inari shrines were numerous in Edo (present-day Tokyo). The reason this was so illuminates the tie between the fox and fire. By the eighteenth century, Edo was the largest city in the

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than female. U. A. Casal asserts that "the tail of the fox is presumed to contain the fertilizing power; when he goes through the standing rice he gives it the last fructification which produces the grain." Casal, "The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch Animals of Japan," 47. Casal also maintains that "the fox-tail is never anything but a conventionalized upright phallus. From a short 'stem' it sharply widens into a thick, vertical cylinder, surmounted by what is called a 'jewel,' the onion-shaped *tama*, often coloured red." *Ibid.*, 55.

31. While the white fox is often believed to be a good omen, the common fox observed in East Asia has yellow fur.

32. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 40.

world.<sup>33</sup> Most of its residents lived in houses constructed of wood and paper, making fire a serious threat. The fox's power to control fire, in the minds of the common people, contributed to the mushrooming of Inari shrines, where Edo residents offered supplications to the fox to appease him and thereby stave off the danger of their homes being consumed by flame. Inari and the fox are also often associated with the color red, which belongs to the element of fire. (Red-bean rice, for example, is often offered to Inari.)<sup>34</sup>

Tomiyama's paintings conjure up and play upon these various associations. In *The Foundation of Manchukuo* and *The Spirit of Yamato* (figure 15), she makes conspicuous use of the color red, which provides the startlingly bright background against which the paintings' figures appear. Reading her paintings in light of the commutative properties deriving from the philosophy of the five elements, we find Tomiyama drawing critical connections between war and blood—connoted by the color red—the fox, and fire.

*The Spirit of Yamato* also has a dramatic red background and suggests a history of violence and trickery. The Japanese national flag in the lower portion of the inset frame blends with the red background, evoking a melding of Japanese nationalism and war. Meanwhile, a group of foxes wearing red bibs stands between the flag and a military uniform heavily decorated with red badges and medals. These bibs, like those often found on statues of foxes and other supernatural entities in Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, display the word “donated.” In the original religious context, the word signifies that the bib was the gift of a pious believer. But here Tomiyama decontextualizes this religious symbol, giving a religious resonance to a new meaning in a military context. The word “donated” thus expresses piety toward the emperor, in the form of the donation of one's life to the “sacred” cause of war, while the red here takes on connotations of war and bloodshed—further dimensions of the fox's association with fire.

Viewers may wonder whether these foxes represent the soldiers who sacrificed themselves to the military uniform: Were they heroes who sacrificed their lives in the name of nationalism, for “the Japanese spirit”? Or were they deluded, as though

33. Citing historian Hayami Akira, William R. LaFleur offers insight about the population of Japan in the Tokugawa period: “Hayami Akira estimates that by 1725 Japan's population had reached thirty million. At this time Edo, with around a million inhabitants, was the largest city in the world.” LaFleur, *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 90.

34. Morris E. Opler and Robert Seido Hashima introduce an episode in Hiroshima where a girl was possessed by a fox. The local shrine priest came to exorcise it but at first failed. The fire that this priest made, however, consumed nothing, and eventually drove the fox-spirit out of the girl. Opler and Hashima, “The Rice Goddess and the Fox in Japanese Religion and Folk Practice,” *American Anthropologist New Series* 48, no. 1 (1946): 51.



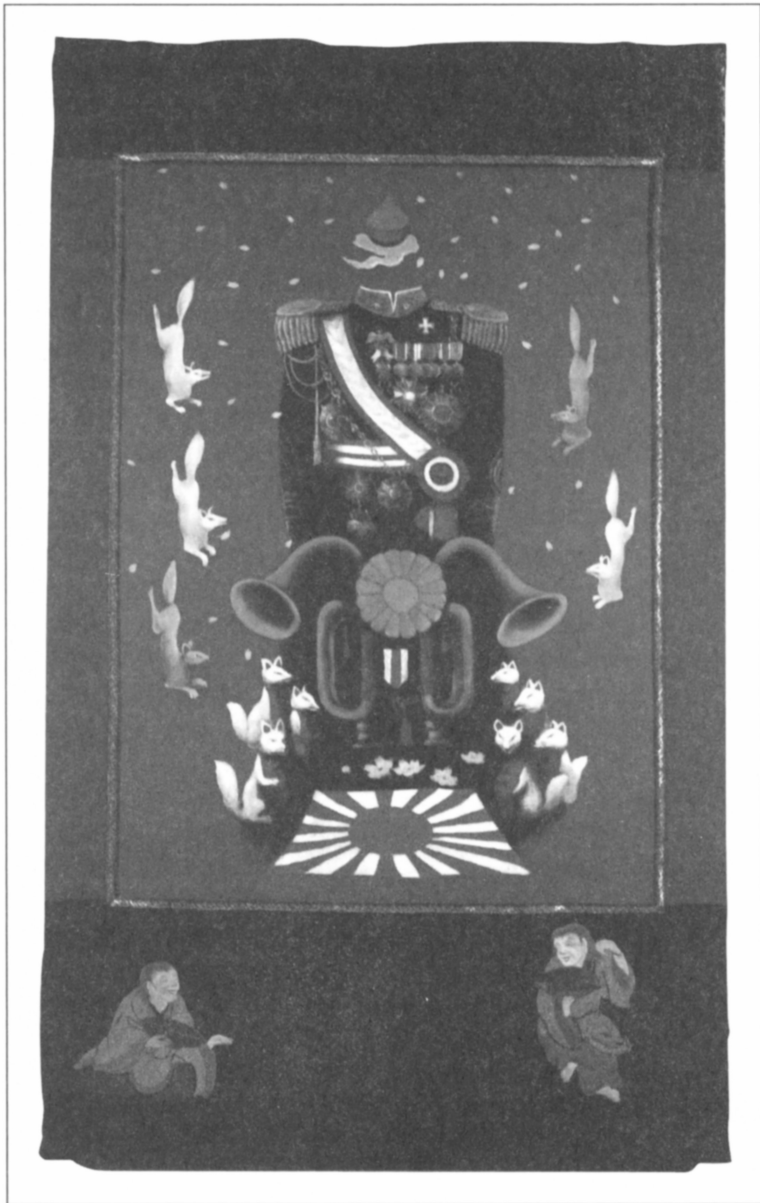


Figure 15. The Spirit of Yamato extends Tomiyama's signature theme, the abdication of responsibility for other humans, and ties it to Japanese society, the Japanese empire, and the postwar state by including cherry blossoms and the 16-petal chrysanthemum, the official symbol of the emperor.

under the spell of the fox's illusions, like the Buddhist monk? Through the use of the fox, Tomiyama's art questions whether or not one is accountable as a responsible agent when deluded or possessed—and it is to that question that we now turn.

### SPIRIT-POSSESSION AND ILLUSION

The most popular association of the fox is probably its ability to deceive humans, particularly to ridicule humans by enchanting them into an illusory world.<sup>35</sup> The story of a Buddhist monk in the *Kitsune zōshi*, cited above, is a good example of this kind of fox-possession. Philosopher Uchiyama Takashi introduces several patterns of fox-possession that he collected from villagers in Japan. In one tale, a villager encounters a traveler in the mountains who gives him a rice cake. As he devours the cake, enthralled by its delicious flavor, another villager happens to walk by and points out that the cake is actually horse droppings. In another version, a villager is told by a traveler of a place where hot water springs from the ground. Surprised, the villager finds it, but as he is enjoying bathing in the hot water, someone asks what he is doing in the cold river.<sup>36</sup> In both stories the deceived person enjoys fulfilling his carnal desire but is publicly revealed to be acting out a delusion.<sup>37</sup> In other words, perhaps the stronger one's desire, the more susceptible one is to fox-possession.

This, then, is why being deluded is no excuse in Tomiyama's mind—either when, as she put it, the “whole era [of the 1930s through 1945] . . . had been in the grip of fox-possession,”<sup>38</sup> or immediately after the war when Japanese claimed to have been duped, or following the burst of the bubble economy. As Tomiyama relentlessly reveals, the Japanese people were not only rational but actually enjoyed themselves in the delusion based upon their own desires, and thus showed a willingness for deception. What Tomiyama's foxes disclose in these paintings is that the rhetoric of being possessed is synonymous with an evasion of responsibility. Thus fox-possession is, in my reading of Tomiyama's work, tantamount to

35. For a different type of fox-possession, see Yuki Miyamoto, “Possessed and Possessing: Fox-Possession and Discrimination against the Wealthy in the Modern Period in Japan,” *Culture and Religion* 7, no. 2 (2006): 139–54.

36. Uchiyama Takashi, *Nihonjin wa naze kitsune ni damasarenaku nattano ka* (Why Aren't Japanese Deceived by the Fox Anymore?) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007), 26.

37. Anthropologist U. A. Casal's research discloses yet another enticing story, in which the commonly used greeting on the phone in Japanese, “Moshi moshi,” in fact stems from this fear of being tricked by a fox. “Moshi” is used to get people's attention. But since legend has it that the fox cannot repeat “Moshi” twice swiftly, saying “Moshi moshi” at the start of the phone call (as “Hello” is said in English) proves that the caller is not a fox. Casal, “The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch Animals of Japan,” 12.

38. Rebecca Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist's Life and Work,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no.1 (2001): 108.

self-deception. Similar self-deception is, for example, demonstrated over and over again in the global financial market, not just by Japanese. This, finally, is the heart of Tomiyama's understanding of the foxes' illusions: the fact that people are willing to be duped.

### THE FOX, INARI, AND THE IMPERIAL FAMILY

Although Tomiyama places responsibility for the war on people too eager to be deceived, she does not overlook the framework that gave rise to such (self-)deception: the imperial system. Thus her paintings relate to a history that closely connects the emperor's lineage to the fox<sup>39</sup>—a connection that Tomiyama uses to emphasize the deceptive and oppressive nature of the wartime imperial system.

In the imperial court and household, Buddhist and Shinto rituals, as well as those of On'myōdō, were never mutually exclusive. On the contrary, despite retaining Shinto rituals at court, it was common practice for retired emperors, empresses, and widowed princesses to become Buddhist monks and nuns, though the reasons for doing so were often political rather than purely religious. It is in this context that the shadow of the fox falls on the enthronement ceremony of a new emperor, conducted under the auspices of a Buddhist, rather than a Shinto, priest. Or we may say that the fox again appears to blur boundaries. During the ceremony, a regent secretly transmits the imperial *mudra* (hand gestures) and *mantra* (incantations) to the new emperor, in accord with Shingon esoteric Buddhist ritual,<sup>40</sup> which has tantric aspects common to both Buddhism and Hinduism.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the Hindu

39. One folkloric narrative that makes such a connection tells of Fujiwara no Kamatari (614–69), founder of the influential Fujiwara family. When Fujiwara no Kamatari was a child, a fox first violated him and then granted him a *kama* (as in *Kamatari*), or a sickle, and an incantation. Later, Fujiwara no Kamatari decapitated Soga no Iruka, a political enemy, with this sickle. After defeating the Soga clan, the Fujiwara became influential by marrying their daughters to emperors, who then became the mothers of later emperors. According to the *Inariki* (Record of Inari), this fox, which indirectly helped the Fujiwara family establish its political foundation through the sickle, is an avatar of Dakini, Kashima Myōjin (one of the deities consecrated at the Kasuga shrine, which is a guardian shrine of the Fujiwara clan), and Amaterasu (the sun goddess). In these stories, the fox appears both as Dakini and as the ancestral deity of the imperial household. The story can be found in the *Keiran shōyō shū* 溪嵐拾葉集. See Abe Yasurō, *Yuya no kogō: chūsei no sei to sei naru mono* (Empress in the Public Bath: Sacredness and Sexuality in the Medieval Era) (Nagoya: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998), 303. Abe refers to *Tenshō Daijin kuketsu* (Esoteric teaching about deity Amaterasu), which contains the same story in *Inari-ki*. *Ibid.*, 379, n. 11. *Tenshō Daijin kuketsu* claims that the documents were compilation of Kūkai's utterance on deity Amaterasu. For Kūkai, see note 41.

40. Nakamura, *Kitsune no nihonshi*, 108–9.

41. Kūkai (otherwise known as Kōbō Daishi), the founder of this esoteric Buddhism, the Shingon (C. Zhen yan, or “true word”) sect in Japan, studied in Changan with Indian and Chinese scholars. “The international character of Buddhism was very much in evidence in Changan, one of

goddess Dakini is the main deity in this ritual—and she always appears riding on her *fox*. As late as the thirteenth century, a statue of the fox, representing Dakini, was placed as a witness to this secret ritual.<sup>42</sup> Tomiyama is specifically interested in these religious links to the emperor, particularly the modern emperors, who presided over a new educational system that was designed as an organ for the new State-Shinto.

Children were taught about the imperial family's unbroken and sacred lineage from Amaterasu (the sun goddess) to the current emperor, and that the Japanese were superior to others because of this familial line. This belief, which was central to the school curriculum through 1945, makes all the more significant the fact that the fox—embodying a host of dangerous, negative attributes—also has close relations to the imperial family. Indeed, Tomiyama's employment of the fox motif in her paintings was inspired in part by Takahashi Yūji's opera *Foxes (Kitsune)*, which was based on the research of medievalist Yamamoto Hiroko; according to Tomiyama, Yamamoto “explored the connection between the fox spirit in Shinto and the structure of authority, particularly in relation to the emperor system.”<sup>43</sup>

For example, the Ise shrine is held to be the most sacred space for the imperial household because it is dedicated to Amaterasu Omikami, the highest goddess among the Shinto deities, and the ancestor of the imperial lineage. Ise shrine actually comprises two shrines, separated by a couple of miles, one of which is the inner shrine, whose main deity is Amaterasu, the sun goddess. The outer shrine, meanwhile, pays reverence to Toyouke no Omikami, who, according to the early ninth-century document *Toyoukeno miya gishikichō*, was appointed by Amaterasu to serve food. Thus Toyouke is a deity of *mike*, or sacred meals, and is also called Miketsu kami. Not only does the responsibility for food evoke Inari (the rice spirit or deity of agriculture associated with the fox, as already mentioned), but this Miketsu kami is often transcribed in Chinese characters as “the three-fox deity.”

The loyalty to the emperor promulgated through the educational system is critiqued in Tomiyama's *Instructing Imperial Subjects with the Ideograph “Loyalty.”* This painting dramatically reveals her abhorrence of “loyalty” to the *kokutai*, or the nation-body with the imperial household on top—that is, of the blind loyalty that not only forbids its subjects to ask questions but demands the unquestioning sacrifice of their lives. The lower portion of the ideograph, which also means “heart”

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the world's great cities at that time. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and southeast Asian students studies with learned teachers from India, Central Asia, and China and joined together to translate Sanskrit and Central Asian texts into Chinese.” Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., comps., *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Second Edition: Volume One—From Earliest Times to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 154. Given the multicultural characteristics of this Buddhist sect, the fox makes for an appropriate symbol of it.

42. Ibid., 130.

43. Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist's Life and Work,” 108.

or “mind,” resembles a charred snake, and is here pierced by a sword dripping with blood. The blood stains the Japanese flag that lies beneath the ideograph, as two white foxes dance on either side of the character. Blind loyalty, Tomiyama shows her audience, leads to bloodshed.

In paintings such as *Sending off a Soldier* (see figure 24) and *Illusion by Cherry Blossoms*, we might also be reminded of the fox-soldiers, whose names emblazoned upon the banners contain the character *chū* (loyalty), indicating loyalty to the emperor. Another character, pronounced *ken*, roughly means “dedication” but is, significantly, an onomatopoeia in Japanese for the fox’s howl. Their names thus at once denote their likeness to foxes and their devout loyalty to the emperor—yet, as has been clarified, foxes are traditionally not associated with loyal sentiment. On the contrary, the fox, as a trickster, enjoys fooling humans—again suggesting that the oppressive manipulations of the wartime system were matched by an equally troubling willingness to be deceived.

### THE END OF THE ILLUSION

What happens when the foxes’ deceptions are exposed? In the picture scroll *Kitsune zōshi* (mentioned above), a bodhisattva came to rescue the enchanted monk, debunking the fox-woman and her fox-servants. With their deceit disclosed and their identities revealed, the tricksters escaped the scene. In this narrative, the mischievous foxes can be seen running away, smiles on their faces—an image that resonates with the running foxes in Tomiyama’s painting *Manchukuo at Sunset*, 1945. The foxes in this painting, unmasked and fleeing, also evoke associations with members of the infamous Unit 731, who fled when the nature of their work was about to be discovered and disclosed. Disguising itself as a medical facility, Unit 731 performed clandestine experimental vivisections on POWs and the local Chinese people in Manchuria.

As the artist attests, upon receiving news of Japan’s upcoming surrender, members of Unit 731 “terminated” their human test subjects and destroyed physical proof of their experiments. In addition, “unit members and their families who were at the Ishii Unit garrison in Pingfang evacuated via the Korean peninsula straight away on the 11th and 12th of August [a few days before Japan’s official acceptance of the Potsdam declaration] in a special train.”<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the common Japanese people in Manchuria were either captured and interned by the Soviet army or left with nothing, returning home without any earthly possessions. “Japanese settlers

44. Tomiyama Taeko, “Shadows from a Distant Scene,” in “Asia e no Shiza to Hyōgen” Organizing Committee, ed., *Silenced by History: Tomiyama Taeko’s Work* (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1995), 61.

in the outlying areas,” continues Tomiyama, “only heard about the surrender after August 20. When they arrived in Harbin after making their way, starving, across the plains, they were completely exhausted, and the primary school for Japanese in the city was filled with the corpses.”<sup>45</sup> Intriguingly, however, unit captain Ishii Shirō received immunity during the Tokyo tribunal, and was spared any punishment in exchange for sharing with the United States the data from his experiments.<sup>46</sup> Those who had started the war by tricking the common people escaped safely from the scene, a tragic fact disclosed in Tomiyama’s *Manchukuo at Sunset, 1945*, where the foxes run off, much as they do in the folkloric tales—but here leaving behind foot soldiers and civilians to fend off the invading Soviet army. The fox’s illusion comes to an end, but the damage has been done.

Examining the fox’s role in Zen koans, Steven Heine writes, “images of foxes . . . operate as a force field suggesting illusion, self-deception, or a dreamlike liminal realm in which the contours and boundaries of reality are called into question.”<sup>47</sup> In her art, Tomiyama outfoxes the fox, both by creating illusions that reveal reality, disclosing culpable self-deception, and by unveiling and transgressing borders in order to exhibit the violence that they have produced. And she does all of this as a way of remembering those who have been silenced by history.

The multifarious figures of the fox in Japanese folkloric and religious representations show the ethical import of Tomiyama’s *Harbin: Requiem for the Twentieth Century*. Indeed, the various attributes of the fox correspond to Tomiyama’s voice: raising the question of responsibility for Japanese war crimes in Asia; inquiring into the system of (self-)deception; and questioning borders—national, racial, cultural, socio-economic, and gendered. Tomiyama employs the motif of the fox to at once express deception, delusion, and trickery and expose reality. She simultaneously rebuffs and confirms the dominant strain in postwar discourse about Japan’s defeat and responsibility for the war, which claims that the majority of the Japanese people were deceived by the government. Affirming historian Tsuda Sōkichi’s insights about this national narrative, John Dower writes that Tsuda similarly “acknowledged that the people had been deceived by a combination of legal oppression and military propaganda,” but then went on to call attention to the fact that Japan had had an elected parliament all through this period.<sup>48</sup>

Postwar Japanese society at large was reluctant to register its complicity, and instead was eager to play the role of victim; the Japanese people not only were negligent of their agency as responsible citizens—acting as though they had been

45. Ibid.

46. Ienaga Saburō, *The Pacific War, 1931–1945: A Critical Perspective on Japan’s Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 188–89.

47. Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 191.

48. John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 504–5.

possessed by the fox—but also failed to acknowledge their desire to be deceived. Tomiyama's art exhibits at once delusion and reality. It asserts that the central ethical issue from the postwar period to this day is Japanese people's willingness to be fooled—and by putting that foxlike trickery on display, it also tells us that such desire for deception is profoundly rooted in the system of boundaries. Danger, therefore, remains. Tomiyama sounds a warning, saying:

It was as if after the war, [the foxes] had cleverly transformed themselves once again. They are tricky, you see. They used their trickery to hide the past in a hole. Now they're back, living in the shadows of the chrysanthemum, which is still a symbol of the emperor system.<sup>49</sup>

The foxes—having fooled the populace and then escaped—are back among us, traversing and transgressing, and perhaps awaiting the opportunity to start yet another fire.

49. Jennison, "Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist's Life and Work," 108.

A Fox Story:  
The Creative Collaboration  
between Takahashi Yūji and Tomiyama Taeko

CARLO FORLIVESI

*Translated by J. Elizabeth Condie-Pugh*

Criticism is not my forté. Perhaps this is because I conceive of art as the possibility par excellence of evasion of stereotypes. I feel troubled by the attempt, however legitimate but often forced, to formalize it—because a critique, after all, always requires an act of formalization. The critic furthermore strives to pigeonhole artistic-creative concepts into professional or even popular criteria of knowledge, strongly influenced by the fashions of the historical moment and often by the self-promoting interests of the critic himself.

Art *develops* (and it is not just arranged and displayed) over time, both in the subjective experience of the individual and in the collective chronological experience that we all share: in a certain sense, experience not only transforms the subjective judgment of a work but changes the work itself, since art is composed not only of the cultural background and the environmental and social conditions in which it was made, but also of those in which it is consumed.

Art, and I don't mean just music, makes a marked impression on me. And yet it doesn't interest me to justify in words, much less written words, the impressions that I receive from it. Rather, I seek to know and deepen a part of my own creativity through another's artistic expression. Personally I'm not necessarily a fan of much of the music that I listen to and analyze, including the music of Takahashi Yūji: in the case of this musician, what interests me most is the rich artistic world



of eclecticism that emerged from his activities. Takahashi's willingness to combine diverse elements into his practice is characteristic of quite a few artists who have responded with vivacity to the social and cultural realities they encounter. However, this quality in itself doesn't assure significant results. Indeed, eclectics sometimes find themselves embroiled in rapid historical and social changes, as was the case for many musicians writing in the second half of the twentieth century: often their works failed to achieve any distance from the context in which they were created. These compositions interest me only in a very limited way. Thus in this chapter I don't venture an analysis of the music of Takahashi Yūji, but rather seek to reflect on its relationship to the works of Tomiyama Taeko. I am interested in the collaboration between these two artists because they induce—that is, remove and shift—other considerations in a dynamic that is not always necessarily linear; in fact, it might even be random.

In 2006, after I had visited *Remembrance and Reconciliation: Tomiyama Taeko's Art*, at Northwestern University, Laura Hein asked me to write on the artistic collaboration between Tomiyama Taeko and Takahashi Yūji, with particular relevance to the musical field and my personal musical experience. Though I accepted with enthusiasm, I was still not certain from which viewpoint I could present their work. I was most intrigued by the perspective of Laura's work: the collaboration between Tomiyama and Takahashi creates the necessity to "recover"—and therefore re-read—the actual story of the events that these artists commemorate *through* the work of art. We move *from* the legendary artistic creation *to* the real, or through "Myth and Reality," to use the words of Tomiyama herself. The collaboration between Tomiyama and Takahashi, which they define as "joined hands," has given life to work both simple and at the same time complex, figurative and musical, artistic and social, avant-garde and popular, that sinks its roots into one part of history (although it would be more correct to speak of "the stories of history") little known to most people: that part of bygone history that was swept under the rug. This forgetting happened fairly quickly for reasons of mutual expedience on the part of both the defeated (the Japanese) and the winners (the Allies). Moreover, Tomiyama is interested in the postwar period as well as the war. She describes postwar Japan as "a sort of colony of the United States,"<sup>1</sup> just as she recognizes the crucial importance of her personal American experience in the 1970s to her artistic, cultural, and political development.<sup>2</sup>

This vision of the politically committed artist was far more common for Tomiyama and Takahashi's peers than for my generation, in which most composers are strongly detached from social and political issues. Takahashi was also

1. Rebecca Jennison, "Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist's Life and Work," *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (2001): 102.

2. *Ibid.*, 107.

active in the movement against the Vietnam War, and from 1978 to 1985 he participated in the Suigyū (Water Buffalo) Band, which collected and performed Asian protest songs, in addition to his collaboration with Tomiyama.

Initially, moved also by a certain curiosity, I seized the chance to meet Takahashi Yūji in Tokyo.<sup>3</sup> His “chronicle,” or life story, fascinated me—not in the journalistic-narrative sense but as an epochal marker of the hopes (and partly unrealized utopias) expressed by artists of the second half of the twentieth century. Takahashi possesses renowned international experience, both in Europe and America, and he is one of the most significant witnesses of the period that embraced postwar modernism. Takahashi studied composition and piano in Japan in the 1950s, and then went to Berlin from 1963 to 1965 to work with Iannis Xenakis. He began his career as a composer in 1962, when he produced a piece for electronics and twelve instruments. After an extended stay in the United States, marked by many appearances as a piano soloist with major orchestras, he returned to Japan, where he introduced several contemporary composers whose work had never been performed there. Takahashi continued to compose new works and to record both his own music and pieces written by other composers, as pianist and as conductor.

Takahashi’s professional experience in the contemporary musical world, although in part one of disillusionment,<sup>4</sup> reveals the 1:1 ratio in the geographic-existential dimension of being a part of history, or, paraphrasing Imre Kertész, “the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history.” Both Takahashi and Tomiyama possess a rich life experience not only of artistic and literary impressions but of specific historical situations (and opinions about them) that embrace four continents. On the artistic scene for decades, they have given life to a series of joint works, intentionally open to multiple question marks. To use the deliberately ambiguous words of Takahashi, “All questions will be reflected back to those who have asked.”<sup>5</sup>

However, the validity of their collaborative works goes beyond its formal articulation, and it is this “going beyond,” so present in Takahashi’s mind, of which I would like to speak. Both artists seek to escape classic formal artistic canons in order to find new means of aesthetic expression apart from technical achievements. Their aesthetic desire is not to be gratifying in the sense of the beautiful so much as it is to be evocative—to go beyond the sensation that gives rise to the work, producing, above all, a “pressure” that is able to “push” one toward “reflection.” And, most importantly, it is in this reflection that the work is realized and its message is completed, at least to the extent that a “message” can be finalized into a single work.

3. Takahashi Yūji, interview with Carlo Forlivesi, Tokyo, 13 January 2007.

4. Jennison, “Tomiyama Taeko: An Artist’s Life and Work,” 106.

5. Tomiyama Taeko, “The Fox Story,” pamphlet accompanying *The Fox Story*, multimedia presentation; slides and art by Tomiyama Taeko, music by Takahashi Yūji (Tokyo: Hidane Kōbō, 2000).

To put the same idea in symbolic terms, the collaborative work acts as a “medium” across “time,” and its “narrative” becomes “spirit” through the art. This is “shaman as a metaphor,”<sup>6</sup> as Tomiyama herself expresses it.

In these terms, Takahashi Yūji’s creative works made to “accompany” those of Tomiyama Taeko cannot be understood through structural formalism, which is here completely irrelevant. The music is organized in a flexible way, meant to “coexist” with a series of images drawn from the works of Tomiyama and projected on slides or video. The system recalls, in modern terms, the musical-visual form of accompaniment that followed the narrations that Buddhist monks (accompanied originally by the *biwa*, the Japanese lute) began to perform in public across Japan in the twelfth century, as we know from scroll paintings such as the *Hungry Ghosts* and the *Hell Scroll*. Tomiyama has said that these are models for her, and that she views her work with Takahashi as a jointly created narrative framework for the images and the music.

Yet Takahashi found even this explanation too limiting, and argued that artists must concede to the public the freedom to move freely over the images so as to be able to listen to the music without interruptions or external overlap, leaving the listener “free to think.” This liberty to enjoy the artistic creation and its use as a metaphor for freedom from oppression is one of the leitmotifs of Takahashi’s thought, almost a *Weltanschauung* that treats art as something that doesn’t just influence one’s way of seeing the world but, above all, structures the interaction with one’s place and time. Takahashi is also a fervent promoter of eliminating copyright, which he condemns as a system for imprisoning culture and limiting its free circulation. Indeed, his official Internet site contains an appeal along these lines.

These two artists have exchanged such ideas over the last thirty years, sometimes agreeing to disagree, as part of the process of collaboration with each other. They occasionally challenge formally and philosophically essential concepts, like that of *hierarchy*, and prefer to think in terms of an interaction between the two arts. Their goal is to produce “new human relations” and, as Takahashi says, to offer their work “as a mirror in front of the audience.” I stress that these phrases are meant to be somewhat obscure, offering just a hint of the direction—if there is any definite direction—of Takahashi’s thought.

Along with this vision of “art as mirror,” another primary concern for Takahashi is the necessity to create “alternative perspectives,” to experiment, and to “go beyond making something interesting.” This last concept, the axiom at the heart of Takahashi’s philosophical thought, already sounds like an artistic manifesto: the composer focuses not so much on finding original solutions to aesthetic-functional problems (in order to stay within a structuralist lexicon) as on moving beyond all known perspectives. In music, this axiom has generated more than a few currents

6. Ibid.

of thought, often in conflict with one another. Takahashi has managed to handle (or redirect to his own convenience) this difficult position by means of an eclecticism—which we might compare at times to the stance of a *cultural guerrilla*—that permits him to act “without setting results.” His position—that we can come to define the philosophical with art, as we can with life itself—is also visible in the trajectory of Takahashi’s artistic career, which highlights an eclectic wandering and decentralization, not so much out of the personal restlessness that often drives the artist (without, however, excluding a priori this important factor) as for the sense of cosmopolitanism and transnational identity for which he personally, and postwar artists more generally, went searching. Takahashi’s method seems fundamentally to be a search for “reaction.”

As a witness and advocate of his time, Takahashi managed to maintain, even through his most radical period of militant engagement, a certain degree of ideological independence, one that shows in his work with Tomiyama Taeko. Neither of them tried to use the social commitment at the heart of their activities to build personal political power within the hierarchies of composers and painters. Nor did they seek leadership in left-wing political groups, although both were active against Japan’s support of the U.S. war in Vietnam and in the democracy movement in South Korea, among other movements.

Incidentally, since freedom is always *indefinable* by nature, any field of action—or of *evasion*—is difficult to define clearly. Moreover, it is very different to be a “Leftist” in Japan than to be one in Europe. Japanese Leftists have a different social impact and lack the logistical and economic support that their militant European colleagues have enjoyed for years. In this sense, Japan is more like the United States than Europe.

Takahashi’s music oozes a syncretism of acoustic-musical, ideological, and philosophical suggestions, showing which modern composers have fascinated him, from Iannis Xenakis to composers of the American school, such as John Cage and Earl Brown. But he has not limited himself to their ideas, as is evident in his other new explorations, especially his collaborations with diverse artists, including Tomiyama. For example, the theme of “finding the way,” another element of the Takahashian aesthetic, commonly underpins their joint works. They want to establish with each other and with their audiences a “way” to develop a social relationship that “pressures but does not try to get power.” Diversity is for Takahashi about not exhausting all one’s strength: through it he seeks to “keep an alternative” perspective against what is “fashionable.” His way to reach this “path” describes a process that reminds one more of an ascetic pilgrim’s route than of a targeted career track in the jet-setting international artistic circle.

In this context, it is interesting to note the near absence of compositions for orchestra in Takahashi’s musical catalog, which are normally considered essential for a composer’s success at the international level. Instead, works for traditional

Japanese instruments and/or with text in Japanese increase in number with the passing years, rooting him more firmly within the culture of the Land of the Rising Sun. There is a strong idealistic push in Takahashi's work, but he explains clearly that he aspires to "a minimal model of the ideal human relationship," rather than seeking to satisfy others or himself. Indeed, self-satisfaction seems not to be among the preoccupations of Takahashi Yūji, either as composer or as performer. Of course, there are many ways to achieve self-satisfaction, not always visible or shared with others.

I do not believe I go too far if I find in Takahashi's ethics an extensive compendium of diverse spiritual ideas—taking suggestions from Judaism, Christian asceticism, more recently Islamic mysticism, and naturally Zen Buddhism—all of which are strongly imbricated in Takahashi, together with contemporary secular humanistic culture. Takahashi embodies the cultivated artist typical of the post-World War II period, someone who doesn't accept religion but agrees to tolerate some aspects of it, who is infatuated with positivism but at the same time yearns for an Arcadian world "where art is close to nature."<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, Japanese grant to their *sensei* (master) the role of prophet and guide, and this person is Iannis Xenakis in Takahashi's case. Xenakis's ideas have had a strong and prolonged effect on Takahashi and have surely affected Takahashi's collaboration with Tomiyama as well. In Xenakis's formulation, the concept of "music" is dismantled into its "natural" and primordial form, or, rather, "sound." The notion of "sound" does not, however, diminish the idea of music as complex art. Instead, it turns toward an experiential dimension, apart from any social meaning, which is described by Takahashi as "Music that is not called MUSIC." One finds an ample measure of effective free space in the musical elements of his compositions with Tomiyama, each time put into play in a different way—between improvisation, audio samples controlled by computer, and graphic or traditionally marked scores. Takahashi brought a breath of fresh air to Tomiyama's work, and this element is more important than the music itself, which Takahashi actually acknowledges when he says he is unable (or does not wish) to call this "MUSIC."

In their collaborative work, Tomiyama and Takahashi are fundamentally oriented towards popularization and a broader audience. Yet my first reaction (and I was not alone) to the exhibit organized at Northwestern University was that it was anything but a popular and pedagogically accessible work. Rather, it struck me as conceptual art that is not linked to history in an obvious way but, on the contrary, is at times absolutely inscrutable to someone not profoundly familiar with the historical and psychological attitudes that fostered the work. This characteristic of the show was, from my point of view, remarkable. If, on the one hand, this art does not immediately satisfy the expectations of visitors (always a point in its favor, from my

7. Ibid.

perspective), on the other, it generates a sort of disquiet that is evoked not through the violence of the images and the music but from their non-violence, which I would venture to define as strongly *disturbing*. It is clear that our two artists desire to encourage through their work a direction of social commitment—“to question society, norms, and/or people’s daily lives.” But, returning to my impressions of the show, it is curious that at first glance not even their desire to question history and modern society was evident in an obvious way.

I draw from this lesson two brief observations. The first concerns the form of critiques of violence. Such a critique is often exerted in a loud way, conspicuous and sometimes even rabid, destined as such to become a mimicry of the violence itself, and inserting itself, perhaps unwittingly, into a dynamic of the destruction of the freedom of one’s fellow human beings. The mechanisms of emotiveness, from which it is certainly difficult to escape, often play into precisely the factors that foster a culture of annihilation of both the violated and those who exert the violence. Tomiyama surely seeks to avoid participating in this dynamic, given that the cycle that reinforces the culture of death is the focus of her *The Fox Story: Illusion of Cherry Blossoms and Chrysanthemums* (1999.) There the deceit of violence saves no one, in a sort of global and continuous “fox-like” imbroglio.

The second observation brings us to reflect on art as an instrument of social criticism and social commitment. Deploying art as a culture of non-violence and as a tool to denounce the abuse of power is a delicate activity to manage, and is too often manipulated to achieve only minimal goals of a commercial and political nature. At other times, art plays on superficial popular sentiments and is quickly forgotten. The creative work of Tomiyama and Takahashi is an experience securely bound to its time, but is also a challenge “against the times.” As I have already pointed out, Tomiyama considers herself symbolically a medium (*miko*) able to evoke the feeble voices of the weak and to take part in the drama of recalling injured souls. The spirits she evokes rise again from an ontological death that includes not only physical obliteration but the destruction of memory, and therefore of their last remaining dignity as well. The re-animated spirits pass through, always metaphorically, the sea of oblivion and therefore of history and, in this backward journey through time, seek their own pacification in the memories of the sea, as represented by Tomiyama in her 1988 work *A Memory of the Sea: A Dedication to the Military Comfort Women*. In this process, the spirits reveal their own story. In such terms, the “criticism” is neither an ethical judgment about the actions of others nor a way to lay down rules of behavior, but a humanization of the desire for justice that shifts from a cultural plane to a metaphysical one. Tomiyama’s critique lies at the very core—or, more formally, “in the remnants and in the insoluble memory”—of the individuals who have suffered violence. The critique “takes bodily form” in the truth of fact. The music that accompanies these sequences is often calm and meditative, occasionally even ambiguous, and devoid of that emphasis or passion that,

were it to satisfy more quickly the ear and “sentiment” of the listener, would conflict with the atmosphere of *authenticity* in which the art—and therefore the artist—seeks to become a witness.

Returning for a moment to my interview with Takahashi, one not-immaterial detail of his story is that he was frustrated with Tomiyama’s initial approach to the collaboration between picture and music, and was not really willing to collaborate with her. Their first productions were influenced by Japanese film documentaries of the times (which in their turn followed as a model the Eisenstein’s rhetorical strategy), where the music was exploited merely as background to augment the emotions of the listener. The music simply conveys the messages articulated by the narrative voice, soliciting sympathy for the subject by means of sentiment and sensation. In these collaborations, the story being recounted illustrated a specific political message that crammed the screen with information, without giving the listener the chance to reflect. Giving audience members the chance to let their thoughts roam freely through the images and the sounds, no longer overpopulated by concepts, is an achievement that these two artists only attained over time. Takahashi consistently pushed Tomiyama to superimpose a more symbolic and iconographic mood at the expense of direct political urgency. The multicolored images and the manifold spaces that coexist in her more recent large oil paintings are a significant development of the aesthetic that Takahashi promoted within Tomiyama’s art. Takahashi felt the original “message” oppressively, as an obstacle to drawing near the work of art, and therefore as counterproductive even for conveying that message. He wanted to transmit emotions and information in a way that leaves ample open spaces—where the eyes of the public can “question the pictures” without losing track of the work’s social relevance—and that therefore remains extremely political without being *simply* political.

From Takahashi’s perspective, the collaborative work in which he best accomplishes this dynamic is *The Fox Story: Illusions of Cherry Blossoms and Chrysanthemums* (2000.) This piece has special significance for Takahashi in the curriculum of his work with Tomiyama because it is the first time the music doesn’t serve merely as the sound background to the visual and narrative work. The music was actually written and recorded *before* the images, but the story line that the two arts follow is the same, and comes to light through a series of poetic subtitles that run during the video. An apparently simple meeting of artists requires trust (and therefore risk) in each other. This work seems almost to unburden itself of the politico-verbal weight that initially overloaded their joint pieces.

Apart from the value of the result itself (let’s not forget Takahashi’s declaration that he does not want to set results), Takahashi desires, above all, to have a working procedure that is artistically faithful to his own vision of the concept of “collaboration,” and that therefore indirectly keeps alive the potential to arrive at an outcome from a different point of view, “with no fixed answer.” As in the case of *Rashomon*,

the 1950 film by Kurosawa Akira, everyone involved is at the same time a spectator and a witness, and everyone can relive the scene from a variety of perspectives with his or her own eyes. For Takahashi, lack of definition is not a weakness but, if anything, a strength, a “space for the soul” where the two artists can meet in an equal collaboration, and where they can invite in the consumers of the work in ways that leave them free to think and reflect, too.

And yet something more remains beyond what is expressed, says Takahashi: “Still it remains something that could not be answered.” This claim makes any attempt to analyze his path rather complex, and in a certain sense becomes a blind alley. In fact, Takahashi has recently given up composing contemporary music. His thought easily enters into contradiction. A priori intellectual conflicts are not necessarily negative influences on art, and are to some extent even propulsive. But the way Takahashi, as well as many other Japanese composers, draw on a Japanese sensibility remains in part ambiguous and—although Japanese modern music theory and background is based on and fed by Western ideas—is fundamentally distrustful of Western thought, making it difficult to find a rational meaning for a certain way of doing things.

Along with this Eastern indeterminateness, I should add that avant-garde art that sprang from postwar modernism was on many occasions utilized by Leftist movements merely to criticize artistic conservatism for its support of the bourgeois world. Some people, such as English composer Cornelius Cardew (1936–81), who was critical of avant-garde music on these grounds, profoundly influenced Takahashi. Cardew denounced ordinary popular art as the subjugation of the working class; at the same time, he criticized modernist art and art in general as both elitist and a servant of imperialism. Following Mao, Cardew argued that the political point of view ought to be above the aesthetic, and severely criticized his mentor, composer Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928–2007), for reversing this hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> Such Maoist ideas led him to advocate free improvisations of an anarchic, chaotic flavor. In short, we might say that if the Maoist idea of music (and, broadly, “art”) sponsored by Cardew, among others, had been imposed, we all might be now singing simple pentatonic tunes set to some martial rhythms every morning before preparing for community gymnastics. Needless to say, someone like me—and many other scholars and artists—would be sent to some *camp* for re-education. And that probably would not be the worst of it.

Yet as time went on, such views grew less influential. A turning point in political-art commitment (and propaganda) occurred near the final years of the Cold War, when the dualism between the Communist and the anti-Communist

8. Cornelius Cardew, “Stockhausen Serves Imperialism,” in idem, *Stockhausen Serves Imperialism and Other Articles, with Commentary and Notes* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1974), 46–55.



hemispheres began to weaken and the two blocs progressively shifted from an ideologically armed stance to an economic-structural one: at the same time, art as an ideological instrument began to lose value—not definite objective value, but “use value.” The critical stance and typical *pasionario* of the 1960s changed course in the 1970s, leading to much greater attention to a renewed idea of *style* rather than to politically based *belief*. The 1970s witnessed the weakening of radicalism in politically engaged art all over the world, as fewer people tried to express their politics through art. Instead, they felt a renewed sense of urgency about expanding the expressive and communicative capacity of the artistic message. In addition, a third, more “human” reason is relevant—situational opportunism. New centers of production developed, ones capable of representing the local power of art and its creators. In other words, the various advocates of postwar modernism who enacted this transformation in the end became fathers and masters of a new artistic and intellectual conservatism in a process of evolving “from fire starter to firefighter.” Yet Takahashi and Tomiyama did not follow this path.

Interestingly, although Takahashi pushes Tomiyama to keep some elements of their projects intentionally unclear, he played the opposite role with Japanese composer Takemitsu Tōru (1930–96), pushing him instead to sharpen his political position. In Japan in the mid-1970s, Takemitsu, on the road to his own coronation as supreme composer of the Land of the Rising Sun, exactly followed all the steps that Westerners prescribe for a Japanese artist: first, he oriented himself to Western music as an expression of superior art; then he imitated the modern structuralist path, showing deference to European music; and finally he disengaged himself from it, as well as from the dead weight of Marxist political thought. The last move that Westerners expect from a Japanese composer is that he recover a Japanese identity, a step that Takemitsu accomplished almost mathematically, stimulating the exotic imagination of Europeans. He found the way to ride the wave free from critics, allowed himself to be anointed as the icon of Japanese music par excellence, and only then returned to Japan, bearing the international acclaim that then helped his popularity at home. I don’t want to insinuate that Takemitsu wasn’t sincere in his choices, or that he was purely planning his own career, but more than any other Japanese composer, Takemitsu knew how to satisfy the requirements imposed by Westerners and the global world of contemporary music production. In this sense, he indulged the expectations of the most bourgeois “neo-colonialist” artistic spirit. Still, even today, if a Japanese composer wants to have luck abroad, he should imitate the model of Takemitsu, as is argued by Peter Burt.<sup>9</sup>

The music of Takemitsu is easily formalizable, and even someone who is not an insider can jot down some banal comment, noting its “accessible” nature and

9. Peter Burt, “Takemitsu through the Eyes of the World,” in Takemitsu Tōru, *Takemitsu Tōru chōsakashū* (Collected Works of Takemitsu Tōru) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000), 1: 278.

rather pleasing “novel sonorities,”<sup>10</sup> solemnly depicting him (even though it sounds rather naïve and ridiculous) as “a Zen-Buddhist priest who has learned the utmost disciplines of mind and body,”<sup>11</sup> or using some other forceful image for consumption by simple minds.

Indeed, Isang Yun played a similar role for Korea. Yun, unlike Takemitsu, was strongly committed to politics, but his music was still reduced to cliché, albeit a Korean rather than a Japanese one. Typically, music critics have highlighted the problematic politics of the Korean Peninsula when discussing Yun. Japan, unlike Korea, went through a new youth in the 1950s under American “protection,” and hence critics looked for a calm and reserved artist, dreamy and languid.

Takahashi was disadvantaged in this process of gaining international acclaim because of the multiplicity of forms that his music embodies, rendering his profile indistinct in the eyes of the musical critic, unlike the “clearer” and more easily readable form of Takemitsu. A restless and eclectic figure like Takahashi didn’t fit into this worldwide puppet theater of the musical critic. The artistic critics prefer distinct and clearly identifiable paths that adhere to a simple national image, at times ignoring rich and articulated examples just because they do not fit neatly within defined styles and periods. It is interesting to note, however, that, like Takemitsu, Takahashi also developed an interest later in life in composing for classical Japanese instruments.

Takemitsu and Takahashi were friends and collaborators, with Takahashi helping Takemitsu on several occasions with such tasks as making sound tracks for films and arranging scores. Nonetheless, in 1976 Takahashi—probably inevitably—entered into strong disagreement with Takemitsu. Takahashi was already known throughout the modern musical world as a composer, in his capacity as an excellent pianist, and for his marked political commitment (which in its own way no doubt contributed to his international visibility). In those years Takahashi, like many other composers, embraced Maoist ideology, and to his eyes Takemitsu’s behavior expressed a servility that was open to criticism. Such an emphasis on politics was an unacceptable axiom for Takemitsu: this difference was in great part responsible for Takahashi’s critique of Takemitsu, although his statements then, no matter how courageous, today still sound unpardonably arrogant to the ears of many Japanese and non-Japanese alike.

Takahashi defined Takemitsu more or less as an “imperialist dog,” in the sense of an obedient servant to the imperialist system, a judgment not far from (and even emulating) the one that Cardew had passed on Stockhausen a short time before. The controversy exploded while Takahashi was preparing an issue of the journal *trans-Sonic*, edited by a group of composers that included both Takahashi and Takemitsu.

10. *Ibid.*, 1: 281.

11. *Ibid.*, 1: 283.

At that time, several composers embraced Marxist and especially Maoist theories, some more radically than others, including Frederic Rzewski, Christian Wolff, Cardew, and Takahashi. Takemitsu was fundamentally against the idea of political participation itself, and therefore the break was inevitable and critical. Only at the end of the 1980s did Takemitsu and Takahashi return to friendly terms. Apart from its sheer impact on the musical community, this incident ended up harming Takahashi's career, whereas in a certain sense I believe it helped Takemitsu's, by framing him as a "politically independent" composer who sought distance from the exhaustion of the political criticism that accompanied the Cold War.

It is worth noting that Takahashi himself was criticized in autumn of 1980 for his composition for pianoforte entitled "Kwangju, May 1980," a subject also portrayed by Tomiyama and commemorated by the two artists together, in the form of music and slides. This piece, composed in memory of the thousands of civilians killed by the dictator Chun Doo-hwan during an uprising at Gwangju, was negatively reviewed by political critics for being insufficiently militant. Takahashi's wish to leave his listeners "free to think" without oppressing them with slogans was not—indeed, could not be—tolerated from a rigorously political perspective. As Takahashi discovered, the goal of making politically unambiguous art that functions as art is simply not viable.

Different ways of implementing a single idea can lead to contradictory outcomes, just as the ideas of liberation and equality can subsequently justify methods of the Fascist-Stalinist mold. The artistic-political vision, then, is necessarily short-sighted when talking about aesthetics, where the typically bourgeois concepts of *beautiful* and *repulsive*, pleasant and unpleasant, create frequent contradictions that stifle discussion. One can substitute adjectives like *interesting* or *rich* to counter the nearly opposite concept of *simple*; these still belong, however, in part to the bourgeois sphere and don't manage to clarify the artistic point. Music *rich* in elements isn't necessarily more interesting than a *simple* composition, just as *elementary* music may have a greater utility for the public, though at the expense of narrowing the expressive and technical palette.

Let us also remember that art, and especially noncommercial art, needs an economic and environmental support structure. In the past—and still today, in a much more modest way—we find fundamentally only two types of artistic patrons: those who want the artist to praise the purchaser of the artwork, and those who want the artist to create something that satisfies their aesthetic enjoyment in other ways. Which of these two uses art as ideology? Those who want art in the service of a cause do—that is, those who shore up a particular commemoration, or a celebration of ideologies and models (political, religious, economic, etc.) that supports geographical or intellectual power. Inside this system artists are not merely tools being "used" but, together with patrons, are part of a defined circle where money and power are shared. This circle has always been for everybody—artists

included—a key to success. Sometimes, of course, creative artists are also the patrons of other artists.

Success in attracting patrons, more than any other issue, explains why more young Japanese composers aspire to the Takemitsu model. Fundamentally, his was the more successful career. But this is not the only reason. Anywhere one looks, *models* (or the way something or someone is showcased) are more powerful than *ideologies*. If, in an imaginary world, Takahashi had surpassed the fame of Takemitsu, would this mean that the majority of Japanese composers would now be interested in politics and social responsibility? My first thought was that the answer would be yes, but on reflection, I note that the young composers who are interested in Takahashi are more interested in his aesthetics of musical improvisation and his anti-academicism than in his commitment to social responsibility. That said, it is of course no clearer today than it was in the previous generation where the art of social responsibility is truly being made, who is active in it, and how to most effectively implement it.

Can we deduce that the previous generation has left little meaty and convincing artistic material on which the following generation can work? Cardew was confident that “when a group of people get together and sing *The Internationale* this is a more complex, more subtle, stronger and more musical experience than the whole of the avant-garde put together.”<sup>12</sup> I cannot agree. Political myopia toward art, regardless of the direction it might come from, leads in the short term to partisan endorsements, and in the long term to a radical indoctrination of artists, with the aim of patrolling and redirecting (or “re-educating,” to continue in Maoist terms) creative life.

In these terms, the durable collaboration between Tomiyama and Takahashi is all the more remarkable. Although Takahashi has again and again encouraged Tomiyama to combine forces with other musicians over the years, in the end the collaboration between these two artists has remained indissoluble and important to both of them. Their work continues to develop along a path of reflection and action, and, through different points of view, remains original and invaluable today. Art often rises from the extremities and margins—as Tomiyama Taeko states—of what is deemed worthy. Therefore, the real benefit of bringing art into social responsibility (or social responsibility into art) lies, above all, in creating awareness and a steady aptitude for looking at the boundaries where one finds “remnants” of humanity and “insoluble memories.”<sup>13</sup>

12. Kyle Gann, “Cornelius Cardew: Making Marx in the Music,” at <http://www.ubu.com/historical/cardew/index.html>. Accessed 25 June 2008.

13. Lev Koblyakov and Carlo Forlivesi, “Boethius in the Heart of Biwa,” in Olimpia Niglio and Koji Kuwakino, eds., *Giappone: Tutela e conservazione di antiche tradizioni* (Japan: Retaining and Conserving the Classical Tradition) (Pisa: Pisa University Press, Edizioni PLUS, 2010), 67–76.



Talking across the World:  
A Discussion between Tomiyama Taeko  
and Eleanor Rubin

INTRODUCED AND TRANSLATED  
BY REBECCA JENNISON

The following conversation took place in Tomiyama Taeko's home and studio in Tokyo on September 11, 2006. Here Tomiyama (b. 1921) speaks with Boston-based printmaker and painter Eleanor Rubin (b. 1940) about the relationships between their work and the times they have witnessed, their creative processes, how they choose to present themselves to the world, and the challenges each has faced as a woman artist. This dialogue further illuminates each one's art individually, while also adding to our understanding of the common ways that working across borders stimulates the creative imagination of these women artists.

The similarities in their situations as women artists is no coincidence. Writing about *Inside the Visible*, an exhibition of works by twentieth-century women artists, art historian Griselda Pollock argues that a feminist critique of modernist art histories has made it possible to see a "feminist genealogy of twentieth century artists who are women, creating other chains of association and dialogues across time and space," and helps us to recognize "unexpected links and conversations across this century's artistic moments at the margins as much as in the centers."<sup>1</sup>

1. Griselda Pollock, "Inscriptions in the Feminine," in M. Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 69.

Introducing Rubin, who has responded as an artist to the Vietnam War, and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not only highlights the question of the social responsibility of the artist but affirms Pollock's notion that looking in an explicitly comparative way at the work of feminist artists "offers a socially concerned alternative, threading female experience into the fabric of mainstream art through autobiography, narrative and collage."<sup>2</sup>

At the time of this conversation, Rubin was working on a series entitled *Dynamic Signals in Times of Danger*, which she developed in response to a group of Palestinians and Israelis who had begun flying kites over the high security wall newly built to separate them.<sup>3</sup> Tomiyama was completing a series of paintings and collages, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers*, that evolved in the wake of September 11, 2001. Both artists focus on the costs of war to individuals, and both believe that art has the power to move viewers to "re-envision" official versions of history. The legacies of World War II, the implications of racial contempt, and the ugly side of nationalism have shaped both artists' personal histories and the direction of their work.

For both Tomiyama and Rubin, these "chains of association" include ongoing active engagement with social movements that help them deepen and expand the imaginative vocabulary of their artistic practice. Today Rubin spends much time on the World Wide Web to learn about other people's activism, and both artists circulate their work on the Internet. For both women, the new technology has become a fresh way to feel connected to like-minded people elsewhere across the globe.

Rubin, whose early work was informed by the feminist movement and also by the movement to protest the Vietnam War, developed a range of imagery and techniques that merged her feminism with her creative artistic practice. The issues of social injustice and advocacy (including self-advocacy) for people who are especially vulnerable had engaged her long before the 1960s. She was, for example, deeply influenced by the example of Helen Keller. As a child she was attracted to Keller's story because she shared a home with a blind man, her uncle, who was a musician. Her mother also often mentioned her own grandmother, who had become deaf as a child. Rubin's admiration for Keller grew in later years as she learned

2. Ibid., 70.

3. Examples from this series and other work by Eleanor Rubin can be viewed at her website, <http://www.ellyrubin.com/>. Rubin's most widely reproduced image was used in a poster by the Syracuse Cultural Workers, which hosts a website, Tools for Change, full of ideas on how to teach conflict resolution and respect for human rights: <http://syracuseculturalworkers.com/aboutus>. The image, which shows polar bears, says, "Sticks and stones can break my bones but names will really hurt me." It can be viewed at the Human Policy Press website: <http://thechp.syr.edu/HumanPolicyPress/PosterGallery/sticks.htm>. Both sites accessed 24 April 2008. Recently this poster was chosen to accompany Elihu D. Richter, "Commentary on Genocide: Can We Predict, Prevent and Protect?" *Journal of Public Health Policy* 29 (October 3, 2008).

more about Keller's activism, her years as a socialist, and her articulate advocacy for people who were disabled or poor. Rubin also has been inspired by the courage of women artists who challenged indifference and claimed full personhood in their lives and work, such as Käthe Kollwitz and Frida Kahlo. Tomiyama too, although in somewhat different ways, was drawn to Kollwitz.

Like other women writers and artists striving to create both more personal and more socially aware visions of their worlds, Tomiyama and Rubin have produced works that reclaim or "re-write" patriarchal and nationalist versions of myth and history. Indeed, despite living on opposite sides of the world, they have been inspired by some of the same sources. As Rubin explains here, she became intrigued with the myth of Persephone and revisits the tale of Persephone's banishment to the underworld. After Hades, the king of the underworld, kidnapped Persephone, her mother, the Earth goddess Demeter, pined for her and was so distraught that nothing grew on Earth. She asked Zeus, Persephone's father, to force Hades to bring her home. Zeus said that Persephone could leave only if she had refrained from all food while in the underworld. Alas, Persephone had sucked on a few pomegranate seeds and so had to live for part of every year with Hades, during which her mother mourned her, explaining the recurrence of winter. Rubin was particularly struck by the way that Zeus punished Persephone for eating the pomegranate seeds, which had been a simple act of survival. She has created both prints and a series of watercolors that are about that moment in Persephone's story, and more generally about eating and resistance as a woman's story. The watercolors have titles such as *Poison*, *Consume*, *Nourish* (figure 16), *Migrations of Desire*, and *Eat Your Words*.

As Tomiyama notes here, she, too, turned to Greek myths in the 1970s, inspired by the work of the poet Robert Graves.<sup>4</sup> As with Rubin, these myths provided new ways to address issues of gender, patriarchy, and violence against women. Tomiyama was particularly engaged by the idea that eros was not just about human sexual desire but about being "in love with" the wind, waves, and the Earth itself. Somehow, reimagining eros as a force that draws very different things together gave her new artistic ideas, expanding not just beyond humans but also beyond living beings in any conventional sense, as the discussion of *Hiruko and the Puppeteers* here and in chapter 6 below shows.

Meanwhile, Rubin, like Tomiyama, has invented her own mythic vocabulary, in which various images represent elemental forces. Her prints and drawings are replete with birds, fish, and hybrid bird/women creatures. These creatures stand for vulnerable beings who cannot speak for themselves in a world dominated by war and enforced silences. In Rubin's work, menace is often hidden between the lines

4. Tomiyama Taeko, *Watashi no Girishia shinwa: erosu e no kairyū* (My Reading of Greek Myths: The Currents of Eros) (Tokyo: Dōshinsha, 1975).



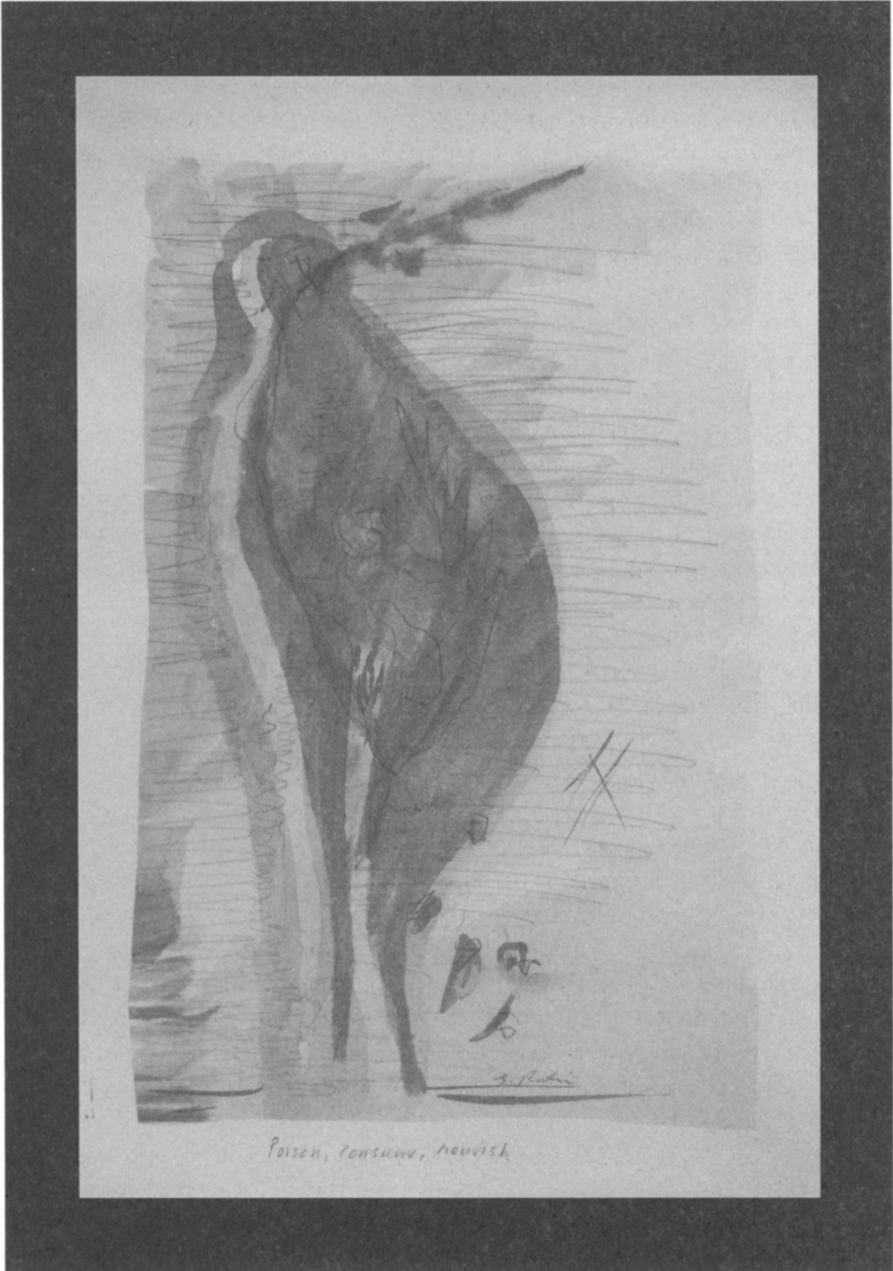


Figure 16. *Poison, Consume, Nourish*, watercolor, 1999. Like Tomiyama, Rubin often uses animals, especially birds, to stand in for humans. This series focuses on the troubled relationship many women have with their own bodies and with food.

or just outside the frame, as in *Far from the Daisy Cutter* (figure 17).<sup>5</sup> Their impact comes from the subtlety and beauty of these works.

In this conversation, both artists speak about their commitment to reaching broader audiences, and to exploring the intersections between personal and public memory. These concerns can be viewed in the context of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century feminist art, and invite comparisons with other artists active during this period, such as New York-based feminist artist Nancy Spero.<sup>6</sup> Just as Spero's work has recently been the object of attention in exhibitions that reexamine feminist art of the 1970s, so we can now see Tomiyama's work in the context of an emerging "critical feminist art history" in East Asia. Tomiyama herself created an informal forum in the early 1990s where critical dialogue about transnational

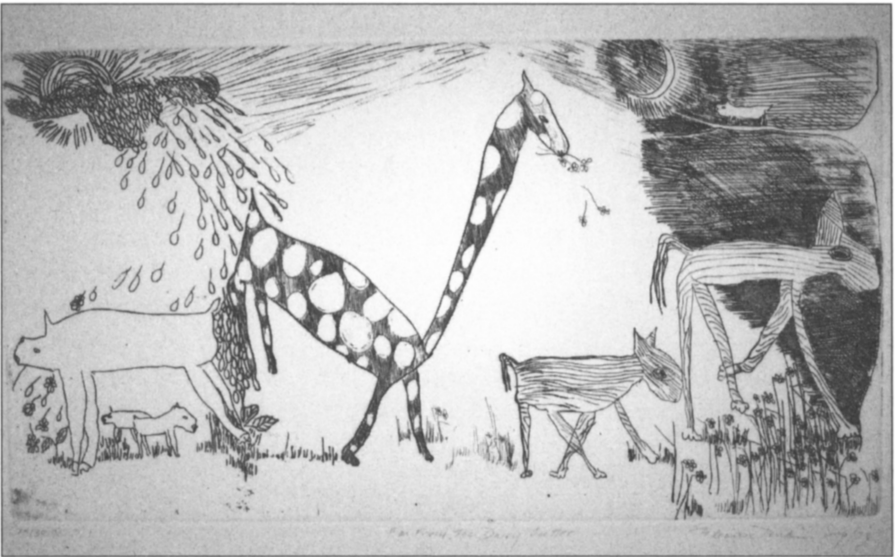


Figure 17. *Far from the Daisy Cutter*, Rubin's etching from 1972, provides a deceptively pleasant scene, evoking the destructiveness of the mammoth "Daisy Cutter" bomb hovering just beyond view.

5. A "Daisy Cutter" is a bomb that weighs in at 15,000 pounds and destroys anything in a 600-yard radius. First used during the Vietnam War, these huge bombs have since been employed in the Gulf War and most recently in Afghanistan. Although the Daisy Cutter is not a nuclear weapon, its use in battle has caused controversy because of its terrifying and utterly destructive nature.
6. I am indebted to Hagiwara Hiroko for pointing out this comparison. Nancy Spero's work appears in Lisa Gabrielle Mark, ed., *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

feminism, contemporary art, and a more critical history of Japan's colonial and imperial past could take place.<sup>7</sup> Since then, a small but growing number of feminist scholars, curators, and critics has begun examining how the modern history of Japanese art has been inflected by gender, class, and national identity.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Tomiyama presented her work at the Women's World 2005 Conference in Seoul, Korea, at a panel shared with Griselda Pollock, and both women highlighted questions of collective memory, art, and representation in a transnational feminist context.

Both Tomiyama and Rubin have also returned to their personal memories of their childhoods—filtered through their later perspectives as adult women—as inspiration for recent work. As noted above, Rubin was made aware of the challenges facing people with physical disabilities by living with her blind uncle, and later she had to face the emotionally devastating impact of mental disability when her mother developed Alzheimer's disease. Rubin's artwork in the early 1990s focused on her experience of watching the formerly energetic and articulate woman who had raised her diminish as a result of the tragic disease—and on the frustrations of caring for such a person.<sup>9</sup>

In her latest series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers*, Tomiyama also returned to memories of her parents and her sense of the world they represented, in a way that ties that intimate history to the pan-Asian past. Recently, she recounted that when traveling in Afghanistan to see the Bamiyan Buddhist sculptures in 1967, she passed some villagers who were gathered for a wedding and playing music. Their melodies triggered her memory of the performances of Awaji puppeteers she had heard as a child, accompanied by remarkably similar music. In particular, she remembered songs they performed at New Year's festivals in honor of the deity of fisherman, Ebisu. She learned more about the puppet tradition and its links to folk worship when she returned to Awaji for visits in the 1970s, research that eventually became the basis for *Hiruko and the Puppeteers*.<sup>10</sup>

7. Tomiyama formed an independent forum called Asia Women and Art Collective, which was active 1991–96. The aim of AWAC was to create a space for dialogue about intersections between feminism, art, and politics. At about that time, Tomiyama also republished an edited collection of essays that had first appeared in 1976, *Jidai o tsugeta onnatachi: 20-seiki feminizumu e no michi* (Women Who Spoke to the Times: The Path of Feminism in the 20th Century) (Tokyo: Tsuge Shobō, 1990).

8. For example, Kokatsu Reiko, senior curator at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, has curated two exhibitions of work by Japanese women artists. In *Japanese Women Artists in Avant-Garde Movements: 1950–1975*, a few of Tomiyama's early works were shown alongside those of Kubota Shigeko and Ono Yoko, both of whom were about ten years younger than Tomiyama, and both of whom left Japan for New York, where they were active in the avant-garde movement Fluxus. In contrast, Tomiyama remained in Japan and chose East Asia as the focus of her artistic and political interests.

9. More recently, Rubin has created a series of woodcuts and collages that focuses on Ōe Hikari, the autistic son of Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō.

10. Tomiyama Taeko, interview with Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison, Tokyo, 6 May 2008.

The Awaji puppets were an inspired choice for evoking an alternative “genealogy” of the Japanese and Asian past. In centuries past, puppeteers practiced their art in liminal spaces on the margins of more stable, property-owning agricultural communities. As Jane Marie Law explains in her fascinating study, *Puppets of Nostalgia*, these large Awaji dolls are religiously powerful “puppets of the road” rather than the more famous Bunraku stage puppets. It is also thought that puppeteers had outcaste status during the centuries of feudal rule in Japan. Puppeteers thus were at the bottom of the political hierarchy but also embodied the disruptive power to topple the entire structure by dissolving the divisions between sacred and profane—divisions at the heart of all caste systems.

Law concludes that, in the history of ritual puppetry, “fragments may be able to whisper stories to us, but are too often silenced by the larger, more fluid, constructed narratives of metahistories which give us the false impression of seamless-ness.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the fragments and traces that Tomiyama has used in *Hiruko and the Puppeteers* seem to whisper to us, giving us glimpses of other obscured or potentially disruptive histories, functioning much as Pollock’s “chains of associations and dialogues” do among women. The fragmentary and disrupted quality of those connections has a special resonance for women artists, for whom feminist expression has often meant asserting an obscured history.

This dialogue between Tomiyama Taeko and Eleanor Rubin invites further consideration of the connections that can be made by imaginative feminist readings of their work, and of how such attention also expands and deepens our understanding of art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These artists, especially when considered together, contribute to an ongoing conversation across time and space both about ways to sustain creative individual expression and about ways to link that expression to the social world.



**Laura Hein, moderator:** It is appropriate that we meet on the anniversary of the Al-Qaeda attack on New York and the Pentagon on 9/11. In my own case, much of my work has been about the difficulties that come up when you do not support your government’s own actions. I study how people manage to sustain their own hopes and communities in those kinds of circumstances. As artists, how have you responded to that event? In general, when we focus on the topic of art and society, or issues related to war and society, I am interested in your responses to the social impact of war.

11. Jane Marie Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyō Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 90.

## RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE

*Eleanor Rubin:* Just to acknowledge that we are meeting on the fifth anniversary of 9/11, it was amazing to wake up very early today and hear the thunder and lightning as if something terrible were happening in the skies. In contrast, on the very day of 9/11, 2001, on the Eastern Seaboard where I live, in Boston, where one of the planes started, I was driving to work and the sky was clear and blue as if the heavens were smiling. But 9/11 was one of the first times when a huge proportion of Americans felt as if they were in danger and had been victimized. Many cultures within America, black people, Native American people, have felt like victims and endangered by the dominant culture, but that day the people in the high-status buildings, the financial managers, were victims, too. Of course, some who died were the restaurant workers, firemen, police officers, secretaries, visitors to the buildings, and so forth. So on that day one of the images I retained—because some of the images were unbearable and I can't even remember them—is that of paper fluttering everywhere. The paper from the office buildings seemed like stray messages from the dead fluttering about. . . . I remember one tableau caught by a photograph on that day, a scene of chairs, tables, breakfast rolls, cups and saucers—a very ordinary breakfast scene where moments before people had been enjoying coffee together. The photo showed everything was covered in paper ash, an entirely white and lifeless remnant of human activity.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, writers of all kinds were called upon to make statements. Visual artists, too, but I think visual artists can't always respond that quickly. The most powerful visual images that came about immediately were from people who never thought of themselves as artists, who made personal signs in the streets desperately looking for news of missing family members. People posted a photograph of their son who was missing or their grandmother who worked in the dining room. They made decorations around the site of Ground Zero, which helped humanize the agony amid the rubble. These were people who knew that missing person. And some of those images have been collected and posted on the World Wide Web, and they are still the strongest when compared to ones by professional artists.<sup>12</sup> Even the most ordinary people respond to tragedy with art.

For me, one of my ways into thinking about the power of those moments was the destruction of twins. I am an identical twin myself, so the image of these twin buildings being shattered and torn apart, never to be connected physically again, was one thing that linked this idea to me.

But I have to say that the most powerful visual image I am aware of was a temporary installation that happened in New York six months after 9/11. Called "Trib-

12. The Art Project. See <http://www.theartproject.net/> Accessed July 18, 2008.

ute in Light,” it was visible for several weeks. From dusk until 11 P.M. each night, two beams of light rose into the sky from a site near Ground Zero. Many people wanted it to stay forever. People could see it from the sky, from airplanes and other tall buildings. I thought it was one of the most powerful ways of acknowledging the people who left the Earth and disappeared when the World Trade buildings collapsed, and it seemed to point the way toward a response to those deaths that was not violent. That ephemeral tribute left an indelible mark. As a visual artist I am always searching for the right vocabulary to comprehend and respond to powerful moments, and in this instance I felt as if these beams of light were a response I could learn from.

*Tomiyama Taeko:* On 9/11, I was lying in bed with a cold watching TV, and when I saw the images on the screen of the collapsing World Trade Center towers, I thought it must be a movie. It was impossible for me to imagine that this might be really happening—it seemed to transcend reality. On October 7th 2001, the day the U.S. military started bombing Afghanistan, we were holding an event to commemorate 25 years of my workshop, *Hidane Kōbō*, and to launch the new work *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers* at an exhibition at the Daikan Yama gallery. And it was on this very day that the U.S. attacked Afghanistan. So there we were, gathered to launch this new project, and for five years since then, I have continued to work on this series, using images and tales related to puppets, and it has evolved in close relation to world events. For me, this has coincided with the final phase of my life. My last cycle of works has intersected with the events of 9/11 and their aftermath.

This is not the first time I have experienced a war. When I was a fourth grader in elementary school, the Manchurian Incident took place. I began living in Manchuria shortly afterward, just when the conflict began to spread wider and wider. That was in Dalian and Harbin. Year after year, the war and fighting expanded. And when I think of that era and look at the invasion of Iraq, I feel the two periods are really very similar. Back then, Japanese in Manchuria worried about the Mukden (now Shenyang) bombings, which were a kind of suicide bombing, to put it bluntly. In those days, they didn't call it terrorism but *hizoku*, or “attacks by bandits.” Japan felt it was fighting a sacred battle that kept on getting larger.

In 1937 I was a student, and I remember that because of the escalation in the fighting, I was worried about whether or not I would be able to go to art school. My high school was awful; it taught us a wartime military curriculum. Just before the Nanjing massacre, we all had to line up and wave as the soldiers paraded in front of Army officials and then marched off to Nanjing. Everyone was singing songs. . . . I can't bear to remember it. In 1938, I was able to come to Tokyo to attend art school. Meanwhile, the war continued to escalate. I soon became frustrated

with the academism of the school and was expelled. But I continued to study art and soon developed an interest in surrealist artists. So the beginning of my career as an artist was marked by the Manchurian Incident, and now at the end of my life, we have another war, the one that started with 9/11. The past and present are of course different, but the situations overlap as well.

## REROUTING COLONIAL DOMINATION

*Hein:* In your latest project, you create a kind of counter-narrative, beginning from the margins rather than the center. I am impressed by the diverse sources of your images and puppets, and by the way Japan is part of that story but not central to it. For example, the puppets gaze, not from Japan toward Asia, but the reverse. And they are not from Beijing or Shanghai, but from the country regions of China. And with Japan, too, they come from Awaji rather than Tokyo. This is not just a critique of nationalism, it is a new way of thinking about one's place that introduces new concepts. This seems very innovative and imaginative. What is the process that led you to work in this way?

*Tomiyama:* I tried to express something about the war through my art, but I didn't experience the front lines of war. After the men came back, male artists began to paint scenes of the battlefields. I could not—and really did not want to—depict such scenes. For me, I did not take on this topic until much later, after I had immersed myself in the Korean democracy movement, after the 1980 Gwangju uprising and my work on that. Around 1970, I was active in the movement for the release of Kim Ji-ha, and I was producing work related to that struggle. And then came the Gwangju uprising, and I felt compelled to create work in response to it. It was after that experience that I began to explore themes more directly related to the war.

How can I explain? If you think about photos and paintings, they are different. One is a record, a document. A painting is not a document; it is about memory, and therefore very different. Moreover, I had to think about painting the war as a person from the aggressor country, the invader that did such horrible things in other Asian countries. It was a terrible dilemma for me to sort out what perspective or what angle I might paint from.

It was in the face of that dilemma that I hit on the shaman, a figure linked both to Korean culture and to feminism. The shaman listens to the pain and suffering of others. There is no nationality or national boundary associated with the shaman, so it provides a more “universal” perspective. When I struck upon the shaman as an image, then I could visualize the paintings, and that's when I was able to imagine the shaman going in search of young women, the former “military comfort women”

who were lost in the South Seas. And after that, I included the conscripted laborers, the Koreans who were forced to work in the mines. The shaman collected their bones for burial. That's what I focused on in the 1980s.

From the beginning, the shaman for me was a way to comment on both Japanese war responsibility and Asian history and culture. I made a trip to Germany in 1985, just before I started work on [the 1986 series of paintings] *Memories of the Sea*. That was just around the time that German president Richard von Weizsacker gave his speech apologizing for Nazism, on May 8th, the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war.<sup>13</sup> Together with the Marukis, I was on my way to Bulgaria to attend a peace conference and exhibition, and then to Germany to show my film, *Pop out, Balsam Seeds!* We were flying on Aeroflot, and the route took us across the Siberian plains. There was an announcement during the flight, telling us that we were about to fly over the Amur River. I looked out the window and saw the sharp, black lines of the Amur and its branches etched in the pure white, snow-covered plains, like a dragon, all flowing into Black Dragon Lake (Kokuryū Ko, near Harbin). It was like a painting on the white snow. I wondered who could have imagined such an amazing painting, this black, dragon-like river, as it was visible from the sky. We continued to fly over it for about 10 minutes—it seemed like a very long time.

As I looked down from the plane at the black river, I thought it must have been the Siberian shaman who had created this, and that Siberian shamanism must have come from this place. It was not until later that the idea came to me, but the opening lines of the narration accompanying the 1988 slide presentation *Memories of the Sea*—"I am a shaman, I am Miko . . ."—were inspired by seeing the Amur River from the sky.<sup>14</sup> If it hadn't been for that experience, I wouldn't have found a way to treat the comfort women issue in my art. It is an unpleasant topic, seen as something "sordid"—the military, sex—the most painful and unpleasant topic of all. My aerial view of the river made me feel that I was beginning to understand something about Korean shamanism, and so first the images and then the opening words of the text began to come to me.

Years later, in 1992, news of the many Japanese children who had been abandoned in Manchuria in 1945, the *zanryū koji*, emerged, and I went back to Harbin to find out more about them. My own memories started to come back to me as im-

13. In Berlin, where Tomiyama showed her film on forced Korean laborers at a conference organized by Asian Women in Solidarity, Japanese, Korean, and German women sat late into the night, eating and talking about war responsibility, prompted by Weizsacker's speech and Tomiyama's film. For more on the Marukis, see Ann Sherif's chapter 1 in this volume.

14. As mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter 2, Tomiyama finished the paintings for *Memories of the Sea* in 1986, and she and composer Takahashi Yūji completed the complementary slide show/music piece in 1988 (for more on Takahashi, see chapter 4). Here Tomiyama refers to the narration that was part of the audio component of the presentation.



ages, but I still didn't know where to situate myself, where to put myself so that I could paint. It was a question of my identity. . . . In colonial Harbin I was Japanese, but somehow not only Japanese. I am "of Japan," but I might also think of myself as East Asian, so I had to think in a slightly different way, to find a different perspective. If I thought of myself only as "Japanese" it would be hard to create work.

And just at that time, Takahashi Yūji produced an opera called *Foxes (Kitsune)*. I thought that if I could use this fox image, I might be able to create the impression I wanted. Fox images are found all over East Asia, as symbols of rice-growing culture, so I decided to use the fox in my new series of works.

### ARTISTIC AND POLITICAL INFLUENCES

*Hein:* I am not an artist, so I am completely unfamiliar with that creative process—for instance why, and how, you suddenly or gradually recognize a social problem as something you want to comment on. More than that, what happens afterward? For example, why exactly did you choose to focus on the fox? Why are the foxes flying? [*Laughter.*] More generally, which artists and artistic traditions have most influenced you? Were you influenced by the long indigenous tradition of using animal paintings, or *manga*, as political satire and commentary, for example in the late feudal period (Bakumatsu era) of the 1860s?

*Tomiyama:* Yes, the Bakumatsu-period artist I like the most is Kawanabe Kyōsai, who drew many frogs and foxes and all sorts of creatures. His work was very European in a way, at a time when most Japanese artists were too nationalistic. I think Kawanabe had the most modern perspective of all of those people. He interests me.

*Rubin:* I wondered if you had been influenced by Frida Kahlo when I looked at the painting of a woman giving birth, the one that was recently purchased by the Miyagi Museum of Art.

*Tomiyama:* No, I wasn't thinking of Kahlo at all. This came from an ancient Chinese funeral banner. [Tomiyama pulls out a photograph of the original banner and a reproduction of her painting *Those Who Fly in the Sky* (figure 4).] In the center here, you see the king, he is going to heaven. And there is a dragon; I looked at this and kind of took it apart. Here in my work are the forced conscripted laborers. These are the mines. Here, at the center, in place of the king, I put a woman giving birth [see figure 8]. And since this painting doesn't touch so directly on the war or on the emperor system, the Miyagi Museum could purchase it—because no one would understand these symbols.

**Rebecca Jennison:** What other kinds of places do you look for images?

**Tomiyama:** When I make collages and when I paint, I like to include images of things as if I am using different things in the kitchen. . . . I like to have a lot of ingredients on hand, things that other people wouldn't think of using. Unique things. One reason I picked images from Taoism and the astrology of Taoism for my current series is that no one else uses these things. I don't like to use things that others have touched. I really enjoy that. And I like to have as many different things going on in a painting as I can. I think Hieronymus Bosch must have been like that. When you look at his paintings carefully, you notice all sorts of things—"over there in the corner, there's that awful guy."

**Hein:** Both the artists here today use images of animals, and especially birds, a great deal. Elly, what are you thinking about when you do so?

**Rubin:** The Vietnam War era was when my work started to become political and was when I included a lot of animal images. I was trying to respond as an artist to the Vietnam War, to what I was seeing, what I was beginning to understand. I was a young mother at the time and not actively going to demonstrations, but I read newspapers. I saw the famous picture of children running from a napalm attack. It was a moment that I remember vividly. I was so overwhelmed from seeing that image in the newspaper that my very small children ended up taking care of me that morning. The photograph left me without words, and when I'm without words, then I turn to making images.

One image that I made then is deceptively playful, looking like something made for children. This etching has animals in it; it's fanciful and not dark, but is called *Far from the Daisy Cutter* (see figure 17), which was a kind of bomb the Americans used in Vietnam. So it was an image of being safe somewhere else. So I made this image that superficially looked lighthearted but hid menace between the lines or just outside the frame. That's characteristic of much political art or art struggling with difficult topics that I often respond to: a deceptively pleasant presentation that draws you in so that you're able to see what's really happening that's terribly wrong. I see birds as a spirit, a vehicle of movement between two realities, waking and dreaming. Birds are a symbol of hope and of vulnerability, so they speak to issues of war and peace.

That was my way of working at that time. I'm a printmaker who experimented with nontraditional materials. I built a collograph printing plate that had high edges that caught ink, and so I could make some very dark images.<sup>15</sup> And I made an

15. A collograph is a simple form of printing using found materials that are arranged in a collage, affixed to a board, and inked for printing on a press.

image with it that I called *Air War* (figure 18) that responded to that terrible photo of children running down the road. I created other images, such as a small etching called *Landscape Not Yet Destroyed by Agent Orange* (figure 19) evoking a defoliant that later came back to haunt American GIs who had their own syndrome of health difficulties. These were Americans who had been in the defoliated countryside. Now thinking about defoliation, I remember how attracted I was to some images in a glossy magazine, with subtle, beautiful colors, only to read the photo caption that said these were aerial views of defoliated land in Vietnam. So I felt a shock at myself—what am I doing, admiring these beautiful subtle colors when it was actually the absence of green, the absence of anything living anymore?

I was also influenced by the work of Käthe Kollwitz, one of the first women artists who had this range of presentation. People in America might know her beautiful black-and-white mother and baby images, but they may not know what really mattered to me, the very strong graphic image that meant “never again war.” I really could hear this scream. “No, never again war!” She made prints of mothers and babies and comfortable scenes and also *Nie wieder Krieg*, or “Never again War” in German, which was completely different.

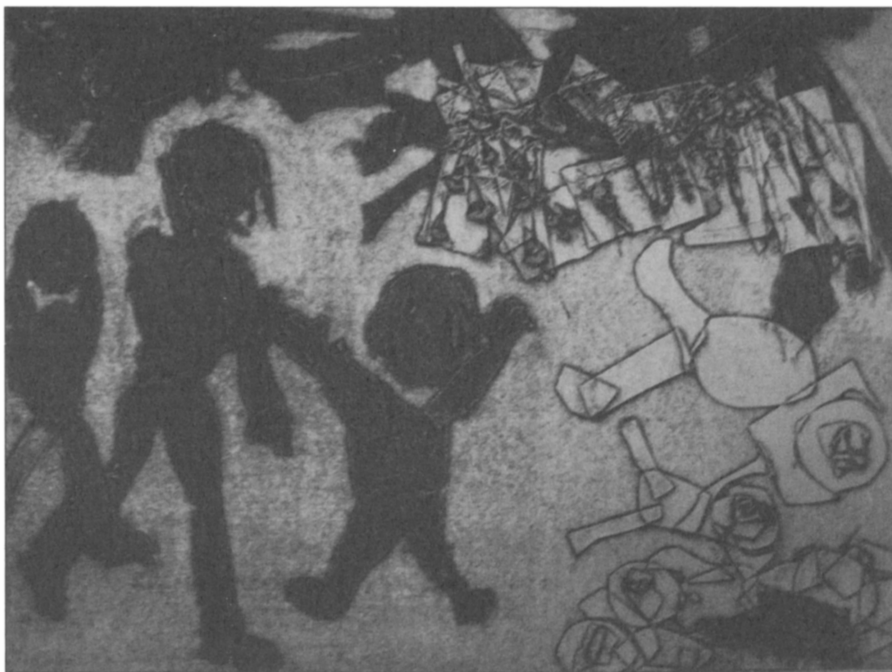


Figure 18. *Air War* is Rubin's 1969 reworking of the famous Vietnam War image of distraught children running down a road after being injured by napalm dropped from American airplanes. Collograph.

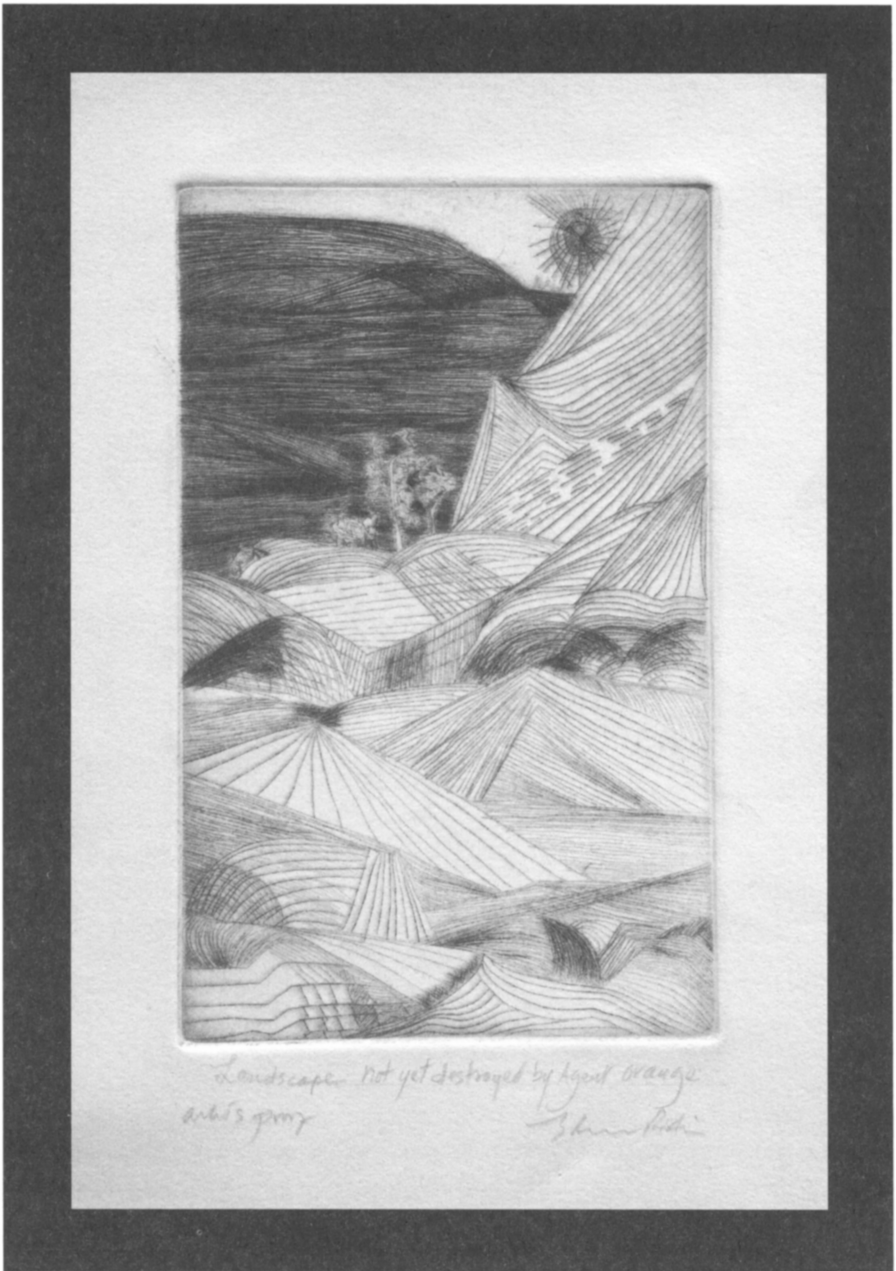


Figure 19. Rubin's Landscape not yet Destroyed by Agent Orange, a drypoint from 1968, comments on the staggering destructiveness implied by a weapon that stripped the Vietnamese jungle of its leaves and sickened American soldiers as well as Vietnamese civilians.

It is important to me that this is a print, which became a poster, and could reach many people who might never come to a gallery or a museum. And it was a combination of words and image, which helped me to feel that combining the two was a legitimate thing to do. I am especially proud that one of my images reached many people when it was reproduced in a magazine called *Liberation*, published by David Dellinger, who was a longtime anti-war activist and one of the men put on trial for disrupting the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago. My image, called *My Lai Madonna* (figure 20), was an unmistakable image of a protective mother figure and owes a debt to Kollwitz's strong work. I wanted to acknowledge the Americans' role in the destruction of that village and of families.

When I look at the way that you, Tomiyama-san, use puppets so effectively in your work, I think of Bread and Puppet Theater in Vermont.<sup>16</sup> Peter Schumann, the artist who founded the troupe, encourages participation by the public everywhere he goes and does performances with his life-sized puppets. He doesn't give stage performances. Rather, everywhere he goes he involves the community, brings in the children and grandmothers, a dancer maybe, and they use these puppets to tell the stories of difficulty, imprisonment, and war, and then he always passes out bread. They travel with a bread-making machine and oven and they pass out bread. Schumann is a big figure in my mind because of the way he involves the community.

Schumann recently did a series of images that were about Rachel Corrie, the young woman who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer in 2003, while she was protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes. I've been working out responses to the death of Rachel Corrie, too, in a series called *In Harm's Way*. Schumann wrote a play about her, *Daughter Courage*, which is very controversial because people who care about Israel—and that includes me—but who also care about all victims of war, find it disturbing. Her story calls attention to the pain that's inflicted by failing to find solutions to conflict, and the situation faced by Palestinians, Israelis, and others who try to intercede and prevent harm. Corrie symbolizes a young person, standing for what she believes, literally standing in harm's way, trying to protect others.

I've probably said enough, but I just wanted to mention why I thought Tomiyama's painting of a woman giving birth (see figure 4) owed some debt to Frida Kahlo and the way that the birth is depicted. In Western art, I would say that women really needed permission to paint such a thing, and that there aren't many paintings that do so. But Frida Kahlo did paintings about giving birth and about not being able to give birth because of her own injuries. She is one of the women figures who helped women artists widen the iconography and the vocabulary of what they can make visual.

16. The Bread and Puppet website is at <http://www.breadandpuppet.org/index.html>. Accessed 24 April 2008.



Figure 20. My Lai Madonna, 1970. Eleanor Rubin's prints criticizing the Vietnam War are similar to Tomiyama's in many ways, sharing both imagery and the moral message of social responsibility for vulnerable people.

*Hein:* I want to go back to Käthe Kollwitz. In 1984 when I saw an exhibit in Tokyo of Tomiyama-san's work, I thought of Kollwitz when I looked at those black-and-white prints of coal miners.

*Tomiyama:* Actually, I have tried to avoid Kollwitz.

JENNISON

*Hein:* Why?

*Tomiyama:* I admire Kollwitz, but I felt I was being labeled as an “anti-war Kollwitz.” Some people looked at my early work and thought I should become “the Japanese Käthe Kollwitz.” That would have limited me to only one thing, so I wanted to distance myself from Kollwitz. Emphasizing her influence would have made me more isolated.

*Hein:* Elly, did you worry about that kind of labeling happening with your work?

*Rubin:* I don't think my work really resembled Kollwitz's, and when I did the *My Lai Madonna*, I was not yet such a prominent artist that anybody would try to label me with one image. But I can understand why Tomiyama would feel that way, people saying, “Oh, that's been done.” Such comments end up taking the power away from one's work. What I admire about Kollwitz's art is how extraordinary it was at the time, and you really can't talk about posters and graphic arts and disseminating strong images without referring to it. But I can certainly empathize with not wanting to be boxed into doing only that.

## FEMINIST IMAGINATIONS

*Tomiyama:* When thinking about the culture men have created, what's most important to think about is the liberation of eros, the erotic revolution. If we're going to talk about a feminist imagination, we need to find new ways to give expression to eros. This needs to be more than just an exaggeration or reversal of male culture—the point is not simply to create an even bigger phallus. That's not what I want to do. Some women artists tried using images—some quite large—of the vagina in their art. I'm sure that was important at the time, but just as a counter-representation. To think about how women might create something really different is difficult but necessary—men have all the decision-making power. I would like to imagine something different.

*Hein:* For example?

*Tomiyama:* The culture we have had up to now is dominated by men, has been imagined and created from a male perspective of dominance and power, so we really need to completely take this apart at the foundation and express something new. If we look back to times long past, such as ancient Greece, the early temples, the cultures of kings and of imperialism, were all male cultures. The male-dominant cultures tend to create empire, which has continued for thousands of years.

In Germany some years ago, there was an exhibition that focused on the reexamination of culture from a feminist perspective, and it went back 30,000 years to the pre-patriarchal cultures. If we go back only 5,000 years, we find shrines built by patriarchal rulers and all that, but there were other forms of culture there, too, from before the Parthenon. I found myself going back, trying to imagine these very early cultures, and I came to the poet Robert Graves, who went along with researchers from Oxford and Cambridge to Greece and looked at the original versions of the ancient myths. He found that, at the source, these myths had emerged at a very unsettled time when the society was undergoing dramatic change from matrilineality to patriarchy. There are many examples from the myths of powerful goddesses, and tales of the reorganization and consolidation of a patriarchal system under Olympus. By returning to these original sources it is easier to find something that nurtures a feminist perspective. The main thing is to understand that we no longer need this imperialistic, patriarchal structure. We need to think of ways to imagine other possibilities, in other civilizations.

*Rubin:* I like your ideas and your need to ask, “Where is the power coming from?” I have looked to Greek mythology, too, focusing on the Persephone myth. One of the things that’s important to me, coming back to a more contemporary struggle and context, is the social pressure on women to behave a certain way, to restrict their desires.

## BRINGING ART TO BROADER AUDIENCES

*Hein:* In various ways, both of you have developed creative ways of bringing art to a broader audience. Elly, I am particularly impressed by your efforts to make the museum a space more welcoming to people with disabilities. Could you talk about that a bit?

*Rubin:* For 25 years, I was a museum educator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. My particular responsibility was to make the Museum more appealing and accessible to audiences who don’t come to see works of art in museums: older people, people for whom English is not their first language, and people with disabilities. These audiences included people who can’t hear well or see well, or who have limited physical mobility, or even mental and cognitive disabilities. I did not have training in this area, but I grew up with an uncle who was blind but a very accomplished musician, so I knew people could do a lot even with a disability. The first thing I did at the Museum was to appoint an advisory board made up of people who used wheelchairs, were deaf or blind or learning-disabled. Some of the board members were longtime advocates for disabled people, including those with mental



health disabilities. This board advised the Museum on ways to welcome people with disabilities. With their help, back in 1980, I realized there were all sorts of simple things we could do, such as make the doors easier to open, provide information in an audio format as well as a visual one, and in Braille or large type, and hang art lower on the walls so it is more visible from a wheelchair.

Over time, I also realized that I needed to involve everyone at the Museum in this effort: the security guards, the people who take tickets, the ones who give tours, the Web designers, everyone. I needed to increase their comfort level so that they would provide better help to people with disabilities. I thought about what I'd choose if I could say only one thing to busy Museum staff, and, with the help of the advisory board, I decided it should be a reassuring message. Museum workers worry that they won't be able to help when someone comes up to them using sign language or with a white cane. So the message is "Be Yourself and Say Hello!" And that message became the title of the training material that I created. This training pamphlet told the Museum staff that, yes, they can help, and here are some of the many ways to do so.

The best part was that it turns out that the changes we made helped everyone. When you make the doors less heavy, it helps people with kids in strollers, and elderly people, and even the Museum curators when they change the exhibits. This is called "universal design," but it means doing away with the barriers that make the Museum less welcoming. That was my job for 25 years.

*Hein:* Tomiyama-san, in your case, rather than bringing people into the museum, you have focused on taking art out to people where they are, haven't you?

*Tomiyama:* Yes, what I have been doing now for many years is trying to be a contemporary "wandering minstrel." For more than 25 years, I have tried to take my work out into the world. Partly this is because it is so difficult to present my work in Japan and Japan is so closed. . . . In the 1950s I began to make work about the Kyushu mines, the biggest labor struggle in Japan at the time. Some Kyushu miners went to the Ruhr in Germany and discovered that in the Ruhr mines, the workers were given heavy-duty shoes that would protect their feet if there was an accident. Sturdy shoes. But in Japan they were given only straw sandals. In Japan, workers were just told to work hard but were given no protection, and it was hard for them to speak out about those conditions. Another problem was the exploitation of women in the red-light districts around the mines in Kyushu. When the Ruhr miners came to Japan, the Japanese miners entertained them at these bars and brothels.

*Hein:* At that time, what audience did you have in mind when you made images of the mines? Was the art for people in big cities or for the miners themselves?

*Tomiyama:* I didn't really think about this much, but I knew that none of the people who went to the big galleries in Tokyo would want to buy these things. This is the face of modernity in Japan. Its patriarchal culture places so little value on women or on workers . . . and on human life. So the miners left Japan and went to Latin America.

After the war, Japan should have given at least some consideration to the question of war responsibility to both the conscripted laborers and the "military comfort women." If this all had been taken care of right after the war ended, it would have been much better. In the 1970s, during the student movement, the question of the war—asking what Japan did—got raised, but not powerfully enough. There really wasn't enough reflective thought; we had demonstrations, people expressed anger, but there wasn't enough attention to these questions. This is Japan's biggest problem.

I feel so sad and angry: What did we do? What did I do? And it is difficult to create art that represents Japan as anything other than the victim. When I try to show how many Korean people suffered, it is seen as a Korean issue. Perhaps it is easier to express this through artwork than through literature because the visual medium can communicate directly. But it is hard to find places to show such work here in Japan. Even though freedom of speech is guaranteed in the constitution, it is hard to express these things freely because everyone is afraid of the right wing.

*Hein:* After 9/11, it felt the same in the United States. That was the first time I ever felt that it was actually dangerous to express criticism of my government. I believed I had a responsibility to do so, but I worried about it.

*Tomiyama:* If we look at the context of the twin towers and what happened, we can see that all those "others" who were ignored by the United States exist, and they want to be heard. We can think of the short term, since 9/11, but we can also think in terms of the 5,000 years of patriarchy. Twentieth-century feminist art resonates across Asia and America because it deals with women's disappointments and sorrows. That's what feminism addresses.

*Hein:* Thank you for participating in this discussion.



## Working on and off the Margins

HAGIWARA HIROKO

Tomiyama Taeko has long been engaged with issue-based art, and her work is deeply charged with political and historical awareness. This chapter examines the historical, social, and ideological positioning of the artist, the way her creativity has developed, and how she has turned her marginality into an alternative site of production. The first section examines her journey to mining towns in the 1950s, in order to understand why and how she started her lifelong pursuit of art as a liberating force. It was during these years that she began questioning established ideas about aesthetics and audience, and reflecting on the experiences of being both an artist and a woman as she sought unique approaches to artistic practice.

The second section covers the unique medium Tomiyama has developed since the 1970s. Her marginality spurred her to invent a new way of producing and showing art. Although her works' political engagement has been seen by some as unwomanly, I argue that her struggles on and off the margins in fact register her womanhood. Her intellectual radicalism, which is informed by her feminism and anti-establishment sensitivities, is also placed in historical context. In the third section I focus on her latest series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers* (2007–9), which Tomiyama describes as her final project, and examine how she gives unique and dramatic visual expression to her long-standing concern with the question of imperialism.

## PAINTING MINES IN THE 1950S

Tomiyama's career as a painter started with landscape paintings of coal and metal mines (see figure 21). On her first visit to a copper mine in Hitachi in the early 1950s, she was guided down to a pit 500 meters below ground. She heard blasts in the distance, and then echoes followed by heavy silence. There was no light except that from the lamps on the miners' caps. The mine was an eerie place above ground, too. Its refinery discharged sulfurous acid gas that withered the trees and grasses in the surrounding area. The artist heard miners' stories about their plight as workers, their fear of being trapped in cave-ins, and the company's overbearing demand that they produce more copper at a faster pace. Tomiyama found those who worked hard underground beautiful, and saw the dry, coarse landscape as aesthetic material for her art. Her sense of the beautiful and artistic was unique in those days in Japan. The challenge of portraying that landscape was to haunt her for decades thereafter, giving shape to her subsequent life and work. But it would take her two more decades of exploration to find answers to these questions.

Tomiyama writes in one of her autobiographies that these experiences led her to want to transform her ingrained Western aesthetics—though “Western” referred



Figure 21. Mine Landscape. This mine landscape from the early 1950s was originally an oil painting in sere browns, but only this photograph exists today.

only to the training in Western art she had received in Japan—into something new.<sup>1</sup> In Tomiyama's terminology "Western" meant "high culture," which could not speak to ordinary people.<sup>2</sup> The challenge was not easy. She painted a landscape of a mine with a Cubist-like brushstroke (figure 21), and exhibited it at the salon of the Association of Free Art (Jiyū Bijutsu Kyōkai) in the early 1950s.<sup>3</sup> The essay she contributed to the exhibition catalog was entitled "Paintings as Reportage." Shortly thereafter she realized the painting was still very "Western," and thus could not work as reportage to disclose to viewers the miners' plight. She studied the history of artistic movements that had resisted rigid academic rules for art in the West, such as Futurism, Dadaism, and the Russian avant-garde of the early twentieth century. But these movements still felt remote to people in "the Far East," Tomiyama thought. She was also troubled by the fact that miners would not have an opportunity to see the painting, since it was in a Tokyo gallery. Her high hopes seemed to have made an unpromising beginning, leaving her frustrated, with a sense of huge problems yet unresolved.<sup>4</sup>

Tomiyama tried to resolve these problems by immersing herself even more in the miners' life and struggle, beginning with a visit to the Akabira coal mine on Hokkaido. In the decade that followed she visited over thirty mining towns, including Chikuho, Ohmuta, and Takashima on Kyushu, and Ashibetsu and Bibai on Hokkaido.<sup>5</sup> Though she had never imagined such a thing, her travels took her to some of the most turbulent and crucial sites of the political and social history of postwar Japan, while simultaneously defining her life and work.

Mining had been one of key industries of modern Japan since the late nineteenth century. Before World War II, miners had especially difficult lives. Like all prewar workers, they had few legal rights. It was even illegal to unionize. The mines were known for their extreme, harsh, and exploitative working conditions. Bosses, who controlled the miners' housing and food, were famous for their willingness to use violence. And in those days there were no laws protecting the environment. Intensive exploitation of mines helped Japan develop its heavy industry, and so meet the Western powers on even terms.

During the Occupation years after the war, both trade unionism and political party activism increased at amazing rates, partly because the Allied Occupation

1. Tomiyama Taeko, *Hajike hosenka* (Pop out, Balsam Seeds!) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1983), 84. Tomiyama has published autobiographical information on several occasions, most recently in Tomiyama Taeko. *Ajia o Idaku: Gaka Jinsei: Kioku to Yume* (Embracing Asia: A Painter's Life in Memories and Dreams). Tokyo: Iwanami, 2009.
2. *Ibid.*, 126–30.
3. *Ibid.*, 76. For the Jiyū Bijutsu Kyōkai (Association of Free Art), see [http://www.jb.vis.ne.jp/official/jiyu\\_bijutsu\\_kyokai](http://www.jb.vis.ne.jp/official/jiyu_bijutsu_kyokai), accessed 12 February 2009.
4. Tomiyama, *Hajike hosenka*, 82, 84, 85.
5. *Ibid.*, 76.

forces initially encouraged such groups as part of their policy of democratization. Miners' unions were legalized and immediately enjoyed rapid increases in their membership. But the political climate started changing when the Occupation banned a general strike in February 1947, which was to organize millions of workers from all the public and private sectors. Although Prime Minister Katayama Tetsu headed the first Socialist cabinet (formed in June 1947) and nationalized the coal mines, his decree lasted only for a few years. The United States now saw Cold War containment of the Soviet Union as a higher priority than democratization in Japan. This change only grew more pronounced when it became clear that the People's Army led by Mao Zedong was about to capture power in China. The situation on the Korean Peninsula was also both complex and volatile. The United States desperately wanted to make Japan a solid bulkhead of "the free world" in East Asia. In 1948 the right to strike was banned for civil servants. By 1949 a conservative prime minister was back in power, with official American support. In 1949 the new Labor Union Law was revised to limit the power of trade unions. And in 1950 the members of the Central Committee of the Japan Communist Party were banned from public life and the party's journal, *Akahata*, was discontinued.<sup>6</sup> All sorts of political campaigns by trade unions were discouraged. Over 20,000 unionist workers in mass media, public services, and the private sector lost their jobs. National control of coal mines was terminated.

In June of 1951, the Korean War broke out, further justifying repression of Leftists in the minds of both the reactionary administration of the Occupation and Japanese government officials. This so-called reverse course was considered justified in the face of "the grave menace of Communism." Since the United States purchased most of the supplies for the Allied forces fighting the Korean War from Japan, the conflict had sparked a huge increase in demand for coal production. These circumstances meant that coal miners' unions, organized in a national superstructure called *Tanrō* (the Japan Coal Miners Union, organized in 1950), were able to win back some of the power they had lost in the late 1940s, through such efforts as a 63-day strike to raise wages in 1952, and a 113-day strike at the Miike mine that forced the mine management to reverse the dismissal of 6,000 targeted workers in 1953. But the end of the "special procurements" of Japanese goods for the Korean War led to a business recession in mining industries.

This was the context in which Tomiyama began painting and writing about coal miners and their physical surroundings. When Tomiyama became a special correspondent for the *Tanrō* newspaper, her mission was to make periodic reports

6. The General Headquarters of the Occupation banned the journal *Akahata* (アカハタ) for good in July 1950. The Japan Communist Party subsequently started publishing *The Akahata* (赤旗) in 1952. The latter was supposed to be a republication of the former, but its continuity is subject to debate.

on economic conditions in the mines.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, she also had her own personal agenda. Tomiyama went on her pilgrimages to mining towns to search for a new way of making art based on new aesthetics.

Tomiyama's Cubist-like landscapes in oils convey the contradictions she grappled with during these years. Her pastiche of Cubism was a crucial choice when she was caught in a dilemma between the two currents available to artists in Japan in the 1950s—namely, Socialist Realism and various styles of European or American modernisms. Both directions seemed inadequate to her. On the one hand, Socialist Realism was monotonously sloganistic and often in fact indifferent to workers' lives. Tomiyama did not sympathize with any painter who subordinated her or his art to a political party, despite her ties to left-wing organizations. On the other hand, neither American Abstract Expressionism nor Pop Art, then fashionable in the contemporary art scene in Tokyo, seemed relevant to the beauty she had discovered in mining towns. Moreover, she did not feel accepted either by those who put politics first or those who ranked art higher. Because of the subject matter of her paintings she was often labeled a left-wing painter by critics in Tokyo, something that marginalized her in the art world. Yet in mining towns she was seen as a bourgeois, city-bred painter and treated as a questionable outsider. As a woman painter she was always told that her subject matter was unwomanly. Thus it was extremely difficult for Tomiyama to position herself in the contemporary art and political scene. As she recalled in 2007:

I felt estranged, facing a credibility gap. I was just a fledgling painter, poor and freelance. How could I be bourgeois? I felt uneasy when I was labeled left-wing. I never participated in nor sympathized with any party politics, because they were never seriously interested in the potential of culture. The idea of class seems unclear and not very helpful in understanding people's reality. And if the subject of mines is unwomanly, tell me what a womanly subject is. If I am to be marginalized anyway, I would rather remain on the margin anyway, to be independent and be myself.<sup>8</sup>

Even though Tomiyama was prepared for marginalization, she realized that as long as she kept painting in a Cubist-like style she would not be able to develop or to successfully express both her creative imagination and her politics. She now knew that these works could not help her forge a new way to integrate her politics into her art. For many years she continued to struggle with the disconnect between these early paintings and her ideal of an artistic practice that would liberate and change

7. Tomiyama, *Hajike hosenka*, 77.

8. Tomiyama Taeko, taped interview with Hagiwara Hiroko, Tokyo, May 2007.



society. And although she continued to think about those paintings, she found it hard to relate them to her later work. Looking back at the deadlock she faced in the 1950s, we now know that her work of those years spurred her into a search for politically creative art and artistically creative politics—a search that both was inspired by and could inspire social change.

Tomiyama continued to divide her time between coal mines and other political organizing, particularly against the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and American military bases in Japan. Both issues came to a head in 1959, when Japan’s largest labor dispute started. More than 4,500 miners were fired at the Miike mine. Other mining companies also presented “rationalization” policies that involved mass layoffs. By then, Japanese industries had begun importing cheaper coal and the whole national energy policy had already shifted to an emphasis on oil, dooming the coal industry to permanent economic depression. The labor dispute was said to be a nationwide struggle, capital versus labor. At about the same time, the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty was due to expire, and Tomiyama threw herself into the movement to protest its renewal. In 1960 Tomiyama divided her time between Miike and Tokyo, where she was engaged in movements against the treaty. Hundreds of thousands of people were deeply opposed to the treaty, fearing that Japan would become subservient to the United States.

After a year of political turbulence that ended in defeat in both struggles, the artist felt drained and exhausted. She decided to go to Latin America, tracing the fates of some of the Japanese miners who had migrated to Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia. That trip brought her a sense of world history seen from the Third World’s point of view. Starting from Japanese mining towns, Tomiyama went on her artist’s journey to probe the deepest strata of colonial history. She confirmed that what she had seen in the mining towns of Japan was part of a global institutional injustice. She also decided that her lifelong pursuit should be to explore the problem of global capitalism and global exploitation of workers and mining resources.

### A UNIQUE MEDIUM: SLIDE PRESENTATIONS AND COLLAGE

Tomiyama did not break her artistic deadlock until the mid-1970s, however, when she encountered Korean poet Kim Ji-ha, whose work cuttingly and satirically reproached the Japanese government for its long-standing interventions in Korea and also blasted the postwar South Korean government for its repressive nature. Tomiyama discerned a kindred spirit, and felt encouraged by the poet’s sharp historical consciousness.<sup>9</sup> Kim’s poetry had led to his detention for the offense of criticizing the South Korean government. In 1976 Tomiyama contributed some lith-

9. Tomiyama, *Hajike hosenka*, 187–88.

ographs to a 15-minute-long Japanese television program on the poet, called “Kim Chi Ha: A Christian in Darkness.” Kim’s trial was scheduled to be held soon afterward. The program was abruptly canceled by the public television station, NHK. NHK officials insisted that they had not been censored by the government, and that the station itself had decided against running the program, so that any censorship was self-imposed. The frustrated crew, however, remade the rejected program into a slide show with music and showed it widely, sometimes secretly, around the world, including in the United States, Mexico, and South Korea.

Inspired by this response to censorship, Tomiyama produced her own first slide presentation, *Chained Hands in Prayer: Korea 1974* (1977), which consists of 140 slides of her lithographs (see figure 22), and which was a visual response to Kim’s poems. “Mortification” (1974), the central poem in the presentation, was written in prison and published the following year when the poet, who had been sentenced to death, was miraculously released thanks to these and other international campaigns.<sup>10</sup>

The slide presentation solved another problem for Tomiyama. She had already stopped showing her work in commercial galleries because she had found it hard to reconcile herself to their intolerance of even a touch of politics. The question of audience had always been problematic for the artist. Her work had been appreciated by visitors to galleries in Tokyo, but these were not the people she most wanted to reach. Moreover, Tomiyama encountered much intolerance for her work in the 1970s-era context of repressive regimes in South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines, all of which were supported by the U.S. and Japanese governments. Tomiyama’s work, which celebrated Kim’s radical poetry and its criticism of Japan’s long-standing control over Korea, could not have reached a wider audience without the new portable and accessible medium. Like the NHK crew, Tomiyama started traveling to show her slide presentations, eventually finding supporting groups to distribute her work. *Chained Hands in Prayer* was shown in Britain, France, the United States, and secretly in the Philippines.

Thereafter, the slide presentation became the artist’s signature medium form. She produced several audio-visual pieces consisting of slides, taped narration, and music. This mixed media gave her a space to develop her own style of expression. The slide is usually used as an informal substitute for an “original” work of art, but Tomiyama presents slides as an entirely new medium. *A Memory of the Sea: A Dedication to the Korean “Military Comfort Women”* (1986), for example, is made of 100 slides and the running time is 25 minutes. It is portable, easy to reproduce, and accessible. And its production is affordable. Tomiyama begins with photographed parts of her large oil paintings, focusing, for instance, on piles of skulls that shine white among tropical shells and fish. These parts of her paintings are successively

10. Ibid., 214.



Figure 22. Chained Hands in Prayer. This lithograph from 1977 comments on the imprisonment of culture and nature as well as of people in contemporary South Korea.

brought into focus and projected onto the screen. In the darkness of the projection room, the audience shares the artist's message in images synchronized with narration and music. The colors and forms of the images become visible on the screen as light moves through the transparencies. It is an art of light that is distinctively different from the original paintings (see figure 23).

I must stress that the new medium, which was evolving outside of the mainstream art world, and therefore free from its evaluative gaze, was an important development, one that enabled the artist to deal with the subject of the comfort women. She based the story line of her work on her interview of an exiled Korean intellectual in Paris in 1985, long before 1991, when Kim Hak-sun, a former comfort woman from Korea, spoke out and revealed the official Japanese involvement in the construction and administration of military brothels. *A Memory of the Sea* did not just critically look back at the past but pioneered a debate about Japan's war crimes, which are not yet officially acknowledged to this day.

Tomiyaama says that this work did not seek to bring repose to the souls of former comfort women, but rather to rouse them. In *A Memory of the Sea* she evoked war memories that had long been appropriated for other purposes in state-authorized narratives, or silenced altogether, reconstructing them in a new context and from the viewpoint of the souls who had been silenced and ignored. Tomiyaama's art, which is charged with feminist sensibility and social responsibility, is supported by her desire for the reestablishment of relations based on truth and reconciliation. Such relations can be created only by dealing directly with the unquiet souls who call for justice, not by praying for their repose. Her works produced since the 1970s flow from the ideological context of the late 1960s in Japan, when the New Left movements, student movements, and especially the women's liberation movements emerged. In her autobiography, Tomiyaama explains that she found affirmation in the new trends, both in her feminism and in her search for ways to critique imperialism.<sup>11</sup> In an interview I conducted in 2007, she explained the encounter as follows:

I know that, as I had already gone through political and intellectual changes, the radicalism of the late 60s did not particularly change my life. But I came across, for the first time in my life, something I could really sympathize with. Feminism caught up with me at long last. And I thought that I could take up the issue of people's complicity with the imperialist war, if not in the form of visual art, then in some other articulate form.<sup>12</sup>

11. Ibid., 212.

12. Tomiyaama, taped interview with Hagiwara Hiroko, Tokyo, May 2007.

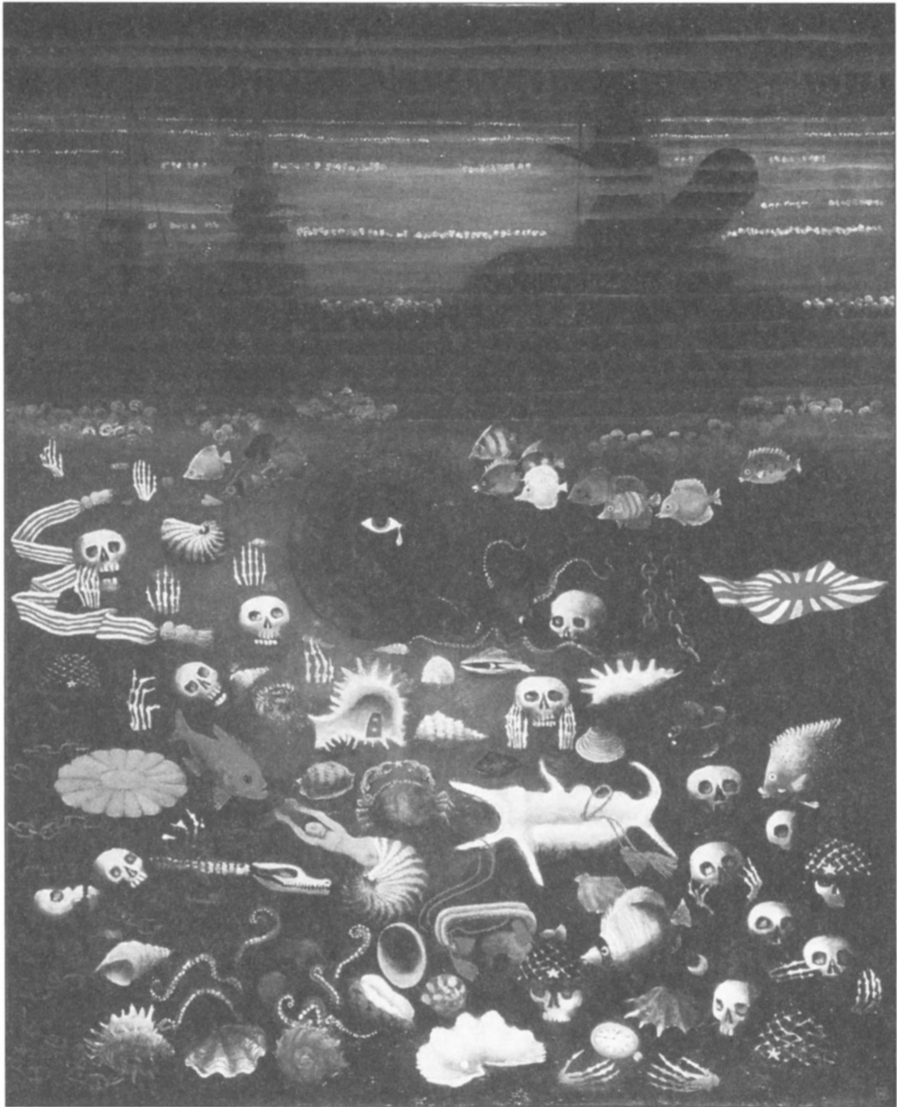


Figure 23. On the South Pacific Ocean Floor, 1988, is the companion painting to the Festival of Galungan and continues the narrative of wronged Korean women whose broken bodies lie at the bottom of the sea.

Tomiyama has always argued that while governments must fully admit, apologize for, and provide compensation for war crimes, relations based on social justice cannot be achieved without self-critical acknowledgment by common people of their own complicity. Indeed, sometimes this must precede official efforts. Though

many artists around the world have taken up issues such as imperialism and war in their work, far fewer have produced art that points out the criminality and responsibility of common people, including the artist him/herself. One way Tomiyama was able to do so was through the use of the slide show medium, which assured her of a broad audience.

Since she developed the slide presentation as her preferred medium in the 1970s, Tomiyama has changed her working practices. The pieces are now painted, printed, or collaged not just for display but also in order to be made into slide presentations, which focus on details of the pieces. She says that the representation on canvas and paper, on the one hand, and the slide presentations produced out of them, on the other, are two different works, rather than the original and its reproduction. The ease of reproduction of the slides is the most important element for her, because this quality allows her to reach a far broader audience. In this sense, both the medium and the audience are “democratized.” When she found her new medium, Tomiyama was ready to work independently, on and even off the margins of the art world. Thereafter she was to work without full membership in the established artists’ associations or a professorship at an art college.

Collage is another medium fully loaded with creative possibility for the artist. Several series of lithographs she made in the late 1970s and early 1980s consist of collages of photographs and her drawings. One piece from the series *Wild Rumor* (1979), inspired by Kim’s poem of the same title, is a collage of images of yen bank notes and monstrous heads, half-human and half-animal (figure 24). While the individual images do not specifically refer to contemporary Korea-Japan connections, the juxtaposition of the monsters with Japanese bank notes effectively conveys the artist’s sarcastic criticism of the back-scratching alliance between Korean high officers and Japanese big business. At the same time, the assembled images allow viewers to extend their own imaginations beyond the specific references.

The medium of collage helped Tomiyama make new analytical and artistic connections when she went back to the subject of mines in 1984, and again in 2000. Her landscape paintings in the 1950s had long been nothing but painful reminders of her intense years in mining towns, until she considered mines again in 1984. After several years of immersion in Kim’s poetry, in which Japan’s imperial rule from the 1910s to 1945 was often presented as the source of the postwar repressive regime in South Korea, Tomiyama began to think about the Korean miners who had been brought to Japan in the late 1930s and 1940s to serve as forced laborers in mines and construction sites all over the country. Individual Korean miners remained anonymous even in a register of deaths kept by a Buddhist temple in Chikuho, Kyushu, where workers who died were recorded just as “Korean,” attesting to the callousness of their Japanese masters. In the 1950s the stories of these dead Korean miners had only been mentioned in hushed tones, and Tomiyama herself had not paid much attention to them.



Figure 24. This 1979 collage, *Wild Rumor*, mocks the cozy relationship between postwar Japanese and South Korean leaders, and Japanese indifference to the repressiveness of the Korean government at the time.

*Coerced and Forlorn* (1984) is a series of lithographs made of collaged images of both the Korean miners who were forced to migrate to Japan and the wives they left behind. Tomiyama first drew and carved the images, then printed and cut them out so that she could construct collages. In one piece, ten Korean women stand straight, equally distant from each other. In another piece, women with halved faces stare at the viewer (figure 25). Since the background is white, the space in these two pieces is unspecified and neutral. They do not show the torments of the departed, who are not visualized in the picture. But their graphic arrangement urges viewers to think about the imperial history that claimed the lives of the oppressed and silenced. Tomiyama's distinctive motif of common people's complicity in Japan's war responsibility reverberates in these pieces. She now knew what she wanted to say, unlike when she had painted the oil landscapes of mines decades before. Her signature theme had become imperial rule, for which she thought she bore responsibility as a Japanese person.

In 2000 Tomiyama returned once again to the issue of mines, but this time she critically expanded her focus to include the exploitation of natural resources,



Figure 25. Coerced and Forlorn. This 1984 lithograph depicts the wives and mothers of Korean men who were dragged off to become slave laborers in Japan's wartime coal mines, never to return home.

including fossil fuels monopolized by empires and capitalists. For the collaborative exhibition *Fox and Coal Mines* (2000),<sup>13</sup> to which several artists contributed, she crafted marbled paper onto which she collaged images of ammonites, fossilized insects, Korean women mourning miners' deaths, the sooty hands of a miner, and miners' shacks (figure 26). Some are quotes from photographs taken by Motohashi Seiichi. Other images are from the artist's lithographs of 1984 and her sketches of the 1950s. Tomiyama combines cutout images, which she has detached from different contexts, to generate a new formation of images. The marbling, in nuanced grays, evokes ancient geologies, giving the space of the work a mythical character. The audience is invited on an imaginary journey to the ancient geological strata formed hundreds of thousands of years ago, while simultaneously being urged to face the modern imperial history that exploited both the ancient natural resources and the people of the twentieth century who were conscripted to mine them.

13. The collaborative exhibition *Fox and Coal Mines* (2000) was held at Setagaya Carrot Tower, Tokyo, from 11 November to 3 December 2000.





Figure 26. This collage from the 2000 show *Fox and Coal Mines* adds a dimension of environmental awareness to Tomiyama's long-time theme of protest against forced labor.

### HIRUKO AND THE PUPPETEERS: A TALE OF SEA WANDERERS

Collage on marbled paper is a technique that Tomiyama develops further in a new series, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers* (2007–9).<sup>14</sup> The artist's focus is now on the sea that has divided, linked, flowed through, and swallowed people's lives in Asia for centuries. The series is made of four acts. Act One is about drifting, and the exchange of people and cultures across the sea before European traders came. Tomiyama follows the transformation of Japan's popular folk god Ebisu (whose name can also be read "Hiruko" in Chinese characters), the guardian of fishermen, tracing his movements back from Awaji, Japan's small island where the artist's parents came from, to Taiwan, Indonesia, Korea, China, and Central Asia. The guardian deity is said to have been an unwanted baby called Hiruko who was discarded in the sea, either because of its illicit birth or a physical deformity ("Hiruko" means a leech-child). Along the sea route, this discarded child was transfigured into the tutelary saint Ebisu, who protects fishermen. Ebisu

14. Tomiyama began working on *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers* in 2001. The work was exhibited in the Tsumari Triennial 2009, Niigata.

is assumed to be a folk god generated out of people's compassion for a discarded child and their belief in other local guardians. Mythological studies have not shown the genealogical tie between the myths of Ebisu and Hiruko, however. The series is based on Tomiyama's own interpretation of history, parts of which are unknowable.<sup>15</sup>

Ebisu is worshipped in more than three thousand shrines all over Japan. Some of the shrines host an annual performance of puppet theater dedicated to Ebisu. And although puppets are artifacts with no minds of their own, they are infused with life and spirit in these performances. Tomiyama also imagines Indonesian shadow-puppet theater spreading and being transformed into the marionettes and puppets of Taiwan and Awaji Island. Thus the artist posits close connections between evolving cultures of puppets on Asian shores.

The two oil paintings and several collages that comprise Act One are filled with images quoted from cultures around the Western Pacific. This section of the series is about free navigation by fishermen, folk deities, and cultures of puppet theater. The artist gives testimony to an active exchange that ranged widely in terms of time and space. Tomiyama collages images of fishermen, Ebisu and other Asian saints, mythical Asian animals, an undecipherable script from ancient Central Asia, heads of Chinese and Japanese puppets, and embroidered theater banners onto the marbling pattern in pale turquoise and gold. In the oil paintings, Ebisu and the Indonesian puppet Wayan travel deep under the sea among jellyfish and sculpted images of a Sepic River deity from New Guinea. This first act, which is visually festive and mythical, encourages us to imagine these unknown histories of the sea route.

Another figure that appears repeatedly in this and later acts is the goddess Mazu. The myth of Mazu is based on a Chinese woman born in the tenth century. It is said that her prediction of a shipwreck and her farsightedness saved her father and brothers. After that event she became a prophetess, and later, the legend of Mazu's prediction became a popular folk belief in the coastal areas of China. Accompanied by two auxiliary deities, Senrigan (Clairvoyant One) and Junpu Mimi (Ears for Fair Winds), she was worshipped as the guardian of local sailors and fishermen.

Act Two, which consists of ten collaged pieces, is about the Age of Great Voyages. Here Tomiyama collages pages of the unequal treaty concluded between Holland and Formosa (Taiwan) in the seventeenth century. Its leaping and whirling

15. Hiruko is known as the firstborn child of Japan's founding gods, Izanami and Izanagi. The account of the nation's founding appears in the beginning of the *Kojiki*, the first official history of ancient Japan. Tomiyama believes that the story of a deformed or undesirable child survived the official editing of the national imperial history despite its unfittingness. She is interested in Hiruko's story because she thinks it reflects something old and indigenous preceding the *Kojiki* and the eighth-century state it supported. Tomiyama, taped interview with Hagiwara Hiroko, Tokyo, May 2007.

calligraphy in Dutch reminds us of the pompous bureaucracy of European power. An Asian diplomat without a head, who is dressed in a densely embroidered Western suit, symbolizes the collusion of the unprincipled elite with Western powers.

In this second act, cutouts are collaged onto the marbling pattern in black and gold, which implies the plunder and pillage that characterized the dark age of "Great Voyages." Mazu appears again, but in this act Tomiyama chooses more formalized images of her, displayed on a gaudy altar. Mazu is now a guardian of sea traders. In the Age of Great Voyages, the Portuguese, Spanish, and later the Dutch competed over East and Southeast Asian trade routes. They did not bring their own products to exchange, other than weapons, so they mainly competed over control of trade between China and other countries in the area. Chinese silk, for example, was imported to Japan exclusively by Portuguese merchants in the sixteenth century. Mazu belief, which does not advocate any specific teaching, expanded among Asians engaged with European traders in the coastal area of southern China. While images of lions and tigers generally symbolize sacredness and power in China, the ones that Tomiyama uses here, from photographs of Taoist shrines, look like ferocious fiends. Her point is that the vernacular deities survived and were transformed when the European superpowers came to control the Asian seas.

Act Three is about capitalist greed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Mazu and Ebisu were by then worshipped as guardians of worldly material prosperity, and they are shown glimmering in pink and gold. People's hope for a better life was appropriated by materialist greed. Puppets, into which life and spirit had once been infused to represent the human aspirations in front of gods, were now once again mindless objects cynically operated by humans. In this third act Tomiyama draws on childhood memories of her parents, who often entertained themselves by chanting stories from the puppet theater they had seen on Awaji. Many of these stories were about tragic love, unfulfilled dreams, and the absurdities of life, and reflected and represented people's sorrow and anger. But audiences were not energized by these performances; rather, they were appeased and placated. And they became resigned to the fates of the characters portrayed in the theater.

For the last century and a half, Japan's imperial power has advanced, sometimes through military force, toward other Asian countries. The western Pacific Ocean, which once cradled many different cultures, became a battleground for several wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Tomiyama visualizes the cultural transformation of Ebisu and Hiruko through collage, in which she uses images from New Guinean, Chinese, Manchurian, and Korean popular and indigenous art and anthropological sources. The collage pieces that form the main part of the series effectively convey complex layers of exchange, conflict, appropriation, and amalgamation among cultures and people in history. Collage as a medium has a nonauthoritarian origin. Cutouts are juxtaposed to create images and new meanings that are not implied in any of the component parts.

The series ends with Act Four, which includes two large oil paintings. The first shows a puppet theater without human performers. Puppets, which were abandoned at the bottom of the sea in the late twentieth century, after the invention of moving pictures, have now regained their own lives deep in the Pacific Ocean. Now the puppet theater is performed by forgotten, unwanted, deserted or destroyed spirits. These puppets are not manipulated by humans, but they themselves play the roles of greedy human beings. Generals with monstrous heads in military uniforms, the rich showing off their medals, and those obsessed with money—all played by puppets—are performing a weird theater. Set among the cast, Japan's imperial family crest blazes in gold. Human beings manipulated by puppets are now the nonliving, mindless puppets.

The final piece is an image of skyscrapers on fire, which reminds us of the event of 9/11. But it also might be a more general reference to capitalist cathedrals that once loomed high in prosperity and are now ruined. The wreckage of broken computers is piled up at the base of the towers. Raven-like creatures swarm over it. Ruins cover the sea floor, and the sea is in turmoil because of the many discarded spirits at its bottom. Tomiyama asks, when centuries of modern empires come to an end, what comes next? Yet, while the series is fully charged with a sense of global emergency, her canvases and collages are satirical and sometimes humorous.

The series *Hiruko and the Puppeteers* is full of images from Asian and Pacific cultures, such as dragons, Chinese gods and goddesses, Sepic deities, and various puppets and marionettes from Asian shores. Tomiyama's use of Asian images might be misunderstood by some as a return to "traditional Asian imagery," that is, a move that is somehow innate and natural but one that she previously resisted due to her early training as a Western-style artist. But I would argue that Tomiyama's use of these images is an innovative "re-imagining," as part of her strategy as an artist in the context of her unique and evolving work. Tomiyama knows that she is not inheriting the long-lived, premodern lexicon of visual symbols and images that developed in Japan and other Asian countries. Nor has her personal lexicon of visual symbols and images been generally transmitted in the process of Japan's modernization. The Asian images that appear in Tomiyama's work—lions, dragons, Mazu, and Hiruko/Ebisu, for example—are presented not in an organically traditional formation but in a uniquely arranged style. They are bits and pieces quoted from fragmentary sources she happened to come across or discovered through research. It was the writings of Pearl Buck and Agnes Smedley that sparked her interest in China, and those of Romain Rolland that led her to look more deeply at India.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, she is much more of a "modernist" than an "Asian traditionalist."

16. Tomiyama, *Hajike hosenka*, 31, 38, and 70; idem, "Ajia no shiza kara—gaka toshite, onna toshite" (From an Asian Perspective: A Reflection of a Woman Artist), in Tomiyama Taeko, Hamada Kazuko, and Hagiwara Hiroko, eds., *Bijutsushi o tokihanatsu* (Setting Free Art History) (Tokyo: Jiji Press, 1994), 5.

*Hiruko and the Puppeteers* is about modern European and Japanese empires, observed from the point of view of abandoned spirits who were silenced by official history. Different visual effects from collage and oil painting are merged and enhanced to appeal to a broad audience. The series has been made into a bilingual book and scripted DVD, today's alternative to a slide presentation, with music by Takahashi Yūji.<sup>17</sup>

Tomiyama Taeko has produced on the margins, and sometimes off the margins, of the art world. Her marginalization can be attributed to the issues raised in her work, and it has led her to create alternative spaces for showing it. Tomiyama has attempted to democratize her media so as to reach wider audiences, and thus share the process of critical scrutiny of modern imperial history. In Tomiyama's case, creating an alternative to established modes of showing, reviewing, and reproducing art has entailed creating alternative audiences, and also alternative perspectives for both making and seeing art. Ironically, the very conditions limiting Tomiyama's production have served to create a unique alternative base for the artist, which has, in turn, enabled her to keep on producing and developing her art for decades.

17. Tomiyama Taeko and Takahashi Yūji, *Hiruko and the Puppeteers: A Tale of Sea Wanderers*, bilingual book and DVD (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 2009).

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