

THE FRONT

YVONNE WAKABAYASHI

Tribute II, 2017, mixed media textile. Photo credit: Kenji Nagai.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

THROUGH THE FOLDS of *arashi shibori* that imprint memory on the fabric and the textile surface that remembers the dye, I record the values and sense of self that have been bestowed on me.

My work is enriched by the blending of the ancient Japanese cultural traditions of my ancestral heritage and new ideas and processes from the modern world. A strong sense of family that anchors and comforts me is fused with my art.

In 1983, my identity was reborn when I attended a workshop with Hiroyuki Shindo, a Japanese indigo master and a contemporary *shibori* artist. Soon after, I visited the Japanese town of Arimatsu where *arashi shibori* and indigo-dyed cotton for kimonos have been developed over centuries.

The ancient process of creating *arashi shibori* produces an undulating surface that is evocative of ever-changing waves - reminiscent of the ocean of my family's ancestral island in Japan. The waters of BC's coast, my present home, have also been a source of inspiration. I use sea anemones and other sea forms extensively as themes in my work.

I dye with silk that is produced by a small family mill in Japan's Gunma prefecture. This crisp raw silk with its sericin left in responds well to the crafting of sculptural forms and allows me to manipulate the undulating *shibori* pleats into wall pieces and artwear. Screen printing on this silk with metallic paints adds further body. As in nature itself, my art is both delicate and durable.

Technically, my process is an adaptation of Arimatsu's traditional *arashi shibori* in which fabric is wrapped around thirteen-foot wooden poles; artists, including traditionalists, now use plastic tubing. I use hot dyes, discharge baths, and metal poles to produce sharp pleats with strong retentive memory.

Teaching has kept me open to Western and modern processes. The reciprocal relationship between teacher and student has enriched and nourished my ideas and affirmed the endless possibilities with which to view and create art.

My goal is to continue exploring *shibori*'s possibilities, to combine it with Western aesthetics while always respecting and honouring its Japanese folkcraft origins. In this way, I make memory visible.

TRIBUTE II, 2017

The acclaimed Japanese Canadian artist Yvonne Wakabayashi is known for her exquisite textile pieces that embody in their material and visual forms memories of her family's ancestry and cultural heritage. *Tribute II* is no exception. Created in 2017 to honour the legacy of her parents, Koji and Ayame Tasaka, this poetic artwork encompasses multiple references to their distinct backgrounds and their entwined life histories. Her father, Koji, was born on Saltspring Island, and was one of seventeen siblings. When he passed in 1997, in honour of his memory, Yvonne Wakabayashi created *Tribute*, a precursor in materiality and form to *Tribute II*, which also includes on its upper-central panel an imprint of an archival photograph of the Tasaka family, the parents and seventeen children, on Steveston quay. Yet Koji Tasaka did not stay in British Columbia, when he was six years old, he was sent to Japan to live with his grandmother and he went on to graduate from Waseda University in Tokyo. While in Japan, he met and married Ayame, who was from the island of Sashima by the Inland Sea, a place steeped in family history, where Koji Tasaka's ancestors have lived since the seventeenth century. In 1937, the newlyweds moved to Vancouver to start their life as Japanese language teachers. Settling in Kitsilano, they had three children: Yvonne and her two brothers, Tom and Jack. During the Second World War, when the children were five, three, and two years old respectively, the family was interned in unofficial self-supporting camps in the rural communities of Blind Bay and Notch Hill on Shuswap Lake. For the three Tasaka siblings, this episode is fondly remembered as being a time of family bonding when they were taught the values of tolerance and resilience. Returning to Vancouver in 1949, Ayame Tasaka did not resume work as a language teacher but set up a dressmaking business, and recollections of her working with fabrics and sewing remain etched on her daughter's memories. Indeed, Yvonne Wakabayashi acknowledges that her mother was an important influence on her aesthetic sensibility and her artistic

trajectory. Growing up in Japan, Ayame learned the traditional art of flower arranging (*ikebana*) and that of the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*), and she shared this knowledge as well as her skill as a gifted seamstress with her daughter. Later, in the 1980s, when Yvonne Wakabayashi went to Japan and studied indigo and *shibori* dyeing and binding techniques, her cultural inheritance and biographical memories coalesced in her unique artistic practice. It is this coalescence and transmission of knowledge and remembering through material sensory practices – from the form and feeling of fabrics, through the techniques and aesthetics of making, to the potency of photographic images and more – that are embodied and conveyed in *Tribute II*. Its structural form is reminiscent of a *torii*—a gateway marking the entrance to a Shinto shrine where sacred things are kept. Below the central panel, hanging down vertically and cut on the bias, strips of raw silk are imprinted with archival images of family members and maps revealing relations and places of belonging. These delicate narrative strips echo the tradition of *o-mikuji* where blessings and predictions of fortunes are written on strips of paper and left at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples in Japan. The indigo-dyed *shibori* panels, which form a *torii*-like frame, are textured with dashed lines or paths leading to memory folds, and circular *kamon*, the unique family crests of Japan that date back centuries and indicate status and bloodlines. In this case, the *kamon* is the Tasaka family's crest, found on a gravestone on Sashima by the artist, which manifests her grandmother's Samurai lineage. *Tribute II* exemplifies Yvonne Wakabayashi's artistic virtuosity, her skill and sensitivity, and her emotional and intellectual engagement with her fascinating family legacy.

Nicola Levell, cover curator

BIOGRAPHY

Yvonne Wakabayashi (née Tasaka) is an internationally recognized, award-winning textile artist and a highly respected teacher. Following her BA, she gained an MA in education (specializing in art) from the University of British Columbia. Throughout her professional life, she has worked as a teacher, sharing her passion and knowledge of art history and practice. For decades, she has taught as an instructor and more recently as a guest lecturer in the fashion design program at the University of the Fraser Valley and in textile arts at Capilano University, BC. Her mesmerizing artworks have been displayed in more than forty exhibitions in Asia, Europe, Oceania, and the Americas.