Chiharu Shiota was born in 1972 in Osaka, Japan. She now lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Her work is widely exhibited and collected. In 2013 alone, solo exhibitions were shown at the Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, UK; Carré Sainte Anne, Montpellier, France; The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA; Museum of Art, Kochi, Japan; Manege, Moscow, Russia and the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney, Australia.

The New Art Gallery Walsall would like to thank everyone who has helped to install these works. They are Chiharu Shiota, Noriko Horie, Kiyomi Uozumi and Tetsuhiro Uozumi, with Maria Alambritis, Hannah Anderson, Rebecca Clark, Adam Darby, Jodie Edwards, Rhiannon Evans, Mike Gallagher, Jeremy Hunt, Alie Jones, Harinder Judge, Zachary Lupton, Jonathan Maddison, Sean Millington, Cabe Rice, Deborah Robinson and Kevin Storrar.

Deborah Robinson
Head of Exhibitions,
The New Art Gallery Walsall

*Quotes by the artist have been taken from an email correspondence between Chiharu Shiota and art critic Omori Toshikatsu. We are indebted to both for their permission to use these quotes.

Exhibition guide
Chiharu Shiota
Dialogues
17 January — 30 March 2014

a miscarriage last year. The ritualistic and performative elements of the works, together with their sensitivity to the earth, recall the work of Cuban artist Ana Mendieta, whose work has remained highly influential to Chiharu's practice.

If possible, I wanted to make something that would conceal my feelings, but I just couldn’t hide. I'm still frightened to imagine what kind of work might emerge before an exhibition. It's not that I'm frightened because I'm hoping to succeed; I'm frightened because when I work I throw all of myself out, and throw all of myself into my work even if it kills me.

Deborah Robinson
Head of Exhibitions,
The New Art Gallery Walsall

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Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota is renowned for her dramatic immersive installations which frequently utilise found objects such as clothing, shoes, old furniture, vintage suitcases and doors and windows from demolished and derelict buildings. Such items resonate with personal and emotional if elusive histories. Chiharu’s installation alters and energises the physical and architectural space, challenging our perceptions of the immediate environment and embracing the viewer as an integral part of the experience.

We are delighted that Chiharu has created two new site-specific installations for The New Art Gallery Walsall. The first, in Gallery 1, is comprised of around 400 vintage suitcases suspended from the ceiling with red rope. These battered and bruised suitcases evoke unknown yet powerful human stories; stories of journeys, of migration, of discoveries, of love and loss. The suitcases are hung low at one end of the gallery, becoming increasingly higher towards the other end, altering the usual orientation of the space and forcing the visitor to negotiate it in an entirely new way.

For the installation in Gallery 3, the artist employs her characteristic use of black wool which is woven across and through space, creating a dynamic and cavernous environment as the installation wraps around the viewer. Created within the woollen mesh are hundreds of black lines forms a surface and I can convey the feelings of all of these people to the viewer. Presence dwells within absence.*

Letters of Thanks was first created for the Museum of Art in Kochi, Japan in 2013. Both the artist’s parents were born and raised in Kochi but moved to Osaka to run a fish-box manufacturing plant. This work has a particularly emotional significance for the artist;

Chiharu’s installations alter and energise the physical environment which envelopes the visitor, becoming increasingly higher towards the other end, altering the usual orientation of the space and forcing the viewer to negotiate it in an entirely new way.

The reason that I’ve been able to continue using yarn is that to me it has nothing to do with handicrafts; it’s something that allows me to explore breadth and space like a line in painting. An accumulation of black lines forms a surface and I can create unlimited spaces that seem to me to gradually expand into a universe. When I can no longer trace a yarn installation or art object with my eye, it begins to feel complete. Piling up layer after layer creates an inescapable black deep... I have a sense that the truth emerges from a work for the first time when you can no longer see it with the eye. When I saw Monet’s pictures, it seemed as if he probably couldn’t actually see when he painted them. I believe that a work is something you make with your heart. If an artist’s job is to affect the viewer emotionally, the yarn that controls their heart sometimes comes to resemble a yarn installation or art object. I think that space is something you can convey through the things we say to someone. The yarn installation is about the things I say to someone. It is to express something, I express something to someone.

Chiharu also says of her characteristic use of black wool;

The successful realisation of a work such as this demands careful planning and teamwork. Chiharu’s vision is made tangible through the help of skilled and experienced assistants working with a local team, in this case, the gallery team together with an extended technical crew and a team of volunteers. I have had the privilege to work as part of this team for the past three years. Piling up layer after layer creates an inescapable black... I have a sense that the truth emerges from a work for the first time when you can no longer see it with the eye. When I saw Monet’s pictures, it seemed as if he probably couldn’t actually see when he painted them. I believe that a work is something you make with your heart. If an artist’s job is to affect the viewer emotionally, the yarn that controls their heart sometimes comes to resemble a yarn installation or art object. I think that space is something you can convey through the things we say to someone. The yarn installation is about the things I say to someone. It is to express something, I express something to someone.

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