

Yuri Shimojo
Mirrors

November 16 - December 21, 2024

Opening Reception
Saturday, November 16, 5-7 pm

Artist Talk Moderated by Gabrielle Niu, Assistant Curator, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum
Saturday, November 16, 4-5 pm

(Brookline, MA – October 15, 2024) Praise Shadows is deeply honored to share the newest body of work by Yuri Shimojo in the upcoming exhibition, *Mirrors*, her second solo at the gallery. This collection of ink paintings were made in the aftermath of her cancer treatment and diagnosis, the passing of her beloved dog and companion Rudy, and a long-delayed visit to Japan to parse through the archives of her deceased family and her samurai ancestors. Shimojo's fluid, intuitive painting style is an expression of these recent years of upheaval, loss, and healing. In the simplest sense, Shimojo paints to tell us that she is grateful to be alive.

An Artist's Talk moderated by Gabrielle Niu, Assistant Curator, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, will take place on Saturday, November 16 from 4 - 5pm. Tickets are \$5; register [here](#).

A special program organized by and held at the Boston Public Library, *Be Brave – Make Your Mark*, will take place on Sunday, November 17 from 1 - 4 pm. Shimojo will introduce her meditative drawing practice, followed by an interactive art marking workshop for participants where the artist will encourage each person to find their own world using ink, paint, pencil or marker. Registration required; [register here](#).

Collaboration is a hallmark of Shimojo's approach to developing the artworks in *Mirrors*. While the act of painting remains hers alone, for the first time in her artistic career, Shimojo has mounted the paintings as scrolls, working with scroll masters in Osaka. Another major collaboration is with three ink makers who gifted pigments and inks specifically for these new paintings: Heidi Gustafson, an artist and ochre specialist from the Pacific Northwest with a working archive of more than 600 pigments; Thomas Little, a North Carolina-based artist who dissolves iron from guns into ink and pigment for use in his—and others'—artistic practice; and Jason Logan, founder of The Toronto Ink Company, and an author, artist and ink-maker.

Of the eight new paintings mounted as scrolls, only one is horizontal, using a unique mounting technique called 横披(Oh-hi) or 横幅(Oh-fuku). Titled *Unbroken Line: Kyoto Mountain Green*, this was the first painting from her *Unbroken Line* series that was made in Japan. In 2023, Shimojo returned to Japan for the first time since the Covid pandemic and her cancer treatment. In her home and studio in Kyoto, situated on the verdant hill of the sacred pilgrimage path for ascetic mountain monks for centuries, this was the beginning of her emotional healing process. Reckoning with the aftermath of cancer, and also with her role as the sole and last custodian family's centuries-old archives, the process of painting a green unbroken line provided solace. The green Japanese watercolor pigment echoed the summer leaves outside the window.

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Indra's Net (2023) takes its namesake from the ancient Buddhist and Hindu story about the King Indra who stretches a kaleidoscopic net across the universe. At every intersection is a faceted jewel, each unique and reflecting all the others. This beautiful metaphor for interconnectedness later became a poem by the Japanese writer Kenji Miyazawa, which inspired this painting. Using a "Fog Gray" prismatic colored ink made by Jason Logan, Shimojo created a constellation that appears to ascend and multiply, each shining jewel depicted by this handmade ink an intentional wish by the artist to shine a light on humanity's connectedness.

Shimojo paints "mirrors" in six of the remaining hanging scrolls. Long fascinated by Shinto mirrors, as well as the oval motif of the *Brahmanda* (the "cosmic egg") in Tantric philosophy and art, the paintings each contain a portal for the viewer to enter. In *Mirror 1*, pink Sakura petals descend from the top of the painting, grazing a moon-like oval mirror before piling gently onto a mountain of petals. These petals were first seen on Shimojo's acclaimed painting *Sakura* from her Memento Mori series, where each petal commemorated the souls lost during the 2011 tsunami and earthquake that devastated Japan. The bronze-like background that permeates the painting was made by Thomas Little who gifted to Shimojo red and black iron oxide pigments derived from a shotgun. Once again, her delicate but powerful Sakura petals speak to the magnitude of lives lost. However, this time the infliction is gun violence, not natural disasters.

In some paintings, the mirror is barely discernible, like a phantom. In *Mirror 2*, black sumi ink traverses the paper like an abstract sutra. At eye-level, an amorphous oval-like form is revealed. "Moon Mirror" iridescent ink conjured from mica by Jason Logan is integrated within the lines and spaces occupied by the sumi ink. The effect is both jarring and grounding, calling for the viewer to deepen their exchange with the painting. Above the horizon line of the unbroken line is a hazy band stretching across the top of the painting. This mirage-like cloud was painted using pre-historic volcanic ash gifted by Heidi Gustafson. Inspired by Shimojo's earlier years living in the jungles of Hawaii, this pigment is traced to the 1.28 million years of volcanic ash from Mount Mazama that originated from Hawaiian eruptions, blown 530 miles north of where the ash originated. The story of the ash's travels from an underworld source and through the sky resonated with Shimojo. In the making of this ink, she recalled, "initially Heidi and I had the idea to collect soil from my ancestor's land. I made my pilgrimage to Japan, but it didn't feel right when I arrived. I realized that while I have much respect for my samurai lineage, their story and relationship to war feels different than my own journey. I was drawn to the nomadic journey of the volcanic ash beyond time and space. The pigment reminded me of my definition of HOME, validating my existence on Earth without a tangible family land."

A section of the exhibition is dedicated to these pigments, materials, and visual inspirations. On a table, jars and bottles from Gustafson, Little, and Logan, along with Shimojo's Japanese watercolors and brushes, reveal the collaborations that provided her with community and purpose during these years of healing. Remnants of beautiful paper and other ephemera line the wall directly above the table, along with an oxidized oval mirror, no longer functional as a reflective tool, but essential to this story. Near it is one more painting by Shimojo: a small work on paper of an oval lined with auras of color, a mirror. It is a jewel within Shimojo's net that reflects and refracts the universe's shared experiences.

About the artist

Yuri Shimojo is a Tokyo-born, contemporary Japanese painter who lives and works between New York and Kyoto. The last descendent of her samurai clan who lost all of her immediate family members before

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the age of 30, Shimojo has always used painting to express the interconnected emotions of impermanence. With minimal formal training in fine art, her style is grounded in the traditional Japanese performing arts practice in her upbringing. Using traditional Japanese watercolor and inks, her work combines the abstract and the surreal, working through the lens of universal compassion. Before she situated her studio on the sacred mountain in Kyoto, she spent many years in Hawaii studying indigenous healing practices and spirituality. Her publication includes a memoir of her unique childhood with her late family. She has exhibited in the United States and Japan and is in private collections around the world. Her work and storyline are featured in the documentary film *The Colour of Ink* (2022).

About Praise Shadows Art Gallery

Praise Shadows Art Gallery is a contemporary art program based in the Boston area with a focus on exceptional artists working in all artistic disciplines. Our worldview is informed by the notion that the artworld's untapped and unrecognized potential is worth cultivating, supporting, and championing. Since our founding in December 2020, the gallery has placed artworks by our artists in esteemed public collections, and our exhibitions have been covered widely in major international media outlets. Our work is grounded by partnering closely with artists to develop opportunities in traditional and emerging models of creativity and entrepreneurship—exhibitions, commissions, brand partnerships, new technologies, and original concepts that no one has ever tried before. www.praiseshadows.com

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PRESS CONTACT: gallery@praiseshadows.com