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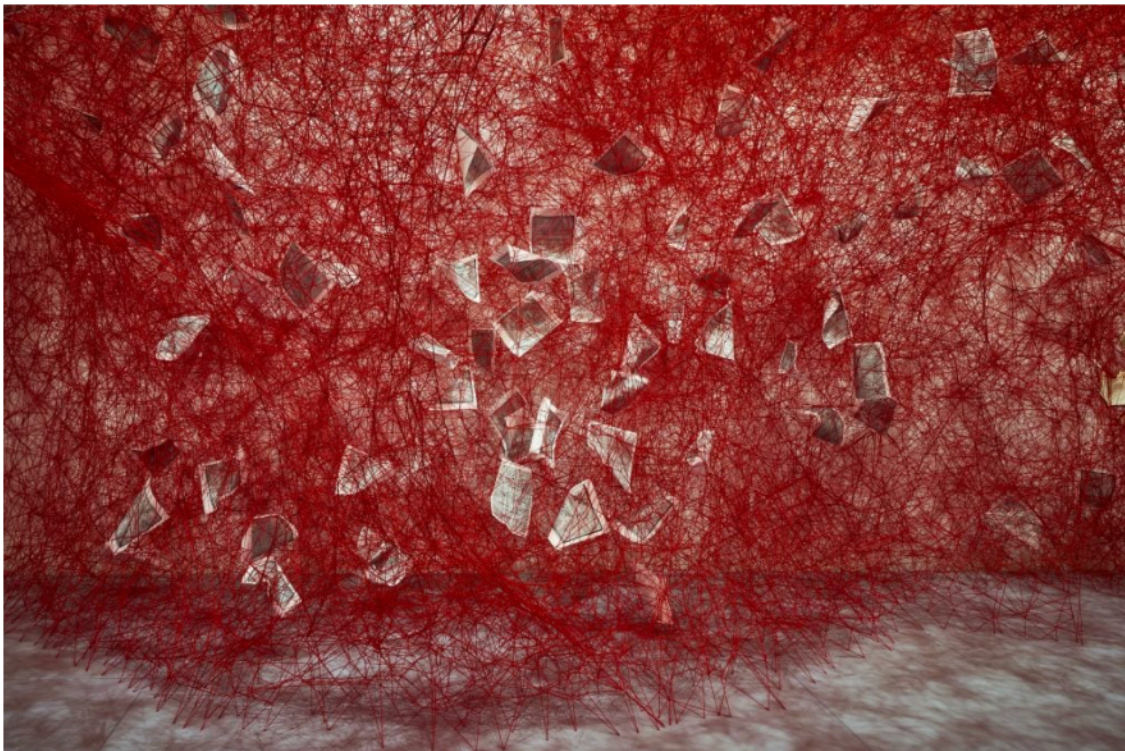
CHIHARU SHIOTA

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Art & Exhibitions

How Chiharu Shiota Weaves a Web of Memory and History, Thread by Thread

The artist has had museum solo shows on three continents this year alone—but her outing at Japan Society was her first in New York.



Installation view of *Diary* in "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries" at the Japan Society, New York, 2025. Photo: by Go Sugimoto, courtesy of the Japan Society, New York.

A deftly woven net of red string envelopes viewers at Chiharu Shiota's first New York museum show, at the Japan Society. The site-specific installation, which is studded with sheets of loose papers replicating excerpts from the diaries of Japanese soldiers from World War II, is one of two pieces the institution commissioned for "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries."

It's titled *Diary* (2025), and it commemorates the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. Shiota mined the holdings of the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, to create the artwork. It also features original diary pages written by German soldiers who fought in the conflict, reflecting the immigrant artist's own dual identity, as a Japanese woman who for nearly three decades has called Berlin home.

"There's a play between tangible memory, and then documents that have become digitized," Naomi Kuromiya, the Japan Society's senior research associate, told me.

For the second commission, for the museum's performing arts department, the artist also designed the sets for Yukio Mishima's *Kinkakuji*, in her North American stage design debut. The production is a one-man play starring Major Curda and directed by Leon Ingulsrud, adapted from Mishima's 1956 novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* in honor of what would have been his 100th birthday. It is based on a true story about a Zen Buddhist priest's arson attack that destroyed Kyoto's most famous temple, in the form of a monologue delving into his troubled psyche.



Major Curda in Yukio Mishima's *Kinkakuji*, adapted from the novel *Kinkakuji* (*The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*) for the stage by Leon Ingulsrud and Major Curda at the Japan Society, New York. Stage design by Chiharu Shiota. Photo: by Richard Termine.

Why Does Shiota Work With Red Thread?

Shiota is known for her signature use of thread, spun into all manner of webs, often in large-scale, ephemeral installations. But before she began experimenting with cord, Shiota was an abstract painter, majoring in painting at Kyoto Seika University. She still sees her work through that framework, describing her practice as “painting in the air.”

“The canvas was quite limiting for her artistically, and she felt like anything she did two dimensionally as an oil painter was just something that had been done before,” Kuromiya said.

Shiota and her team arrived in New York two weeks ahead of the opening, working tirelessly to build the dense, intricate netting. Over the years, she’s perfected her system, working down from the ceiling, letting the work fall into place. The resulting works take over entire galleries, consuming the space and drawing in the viewer.

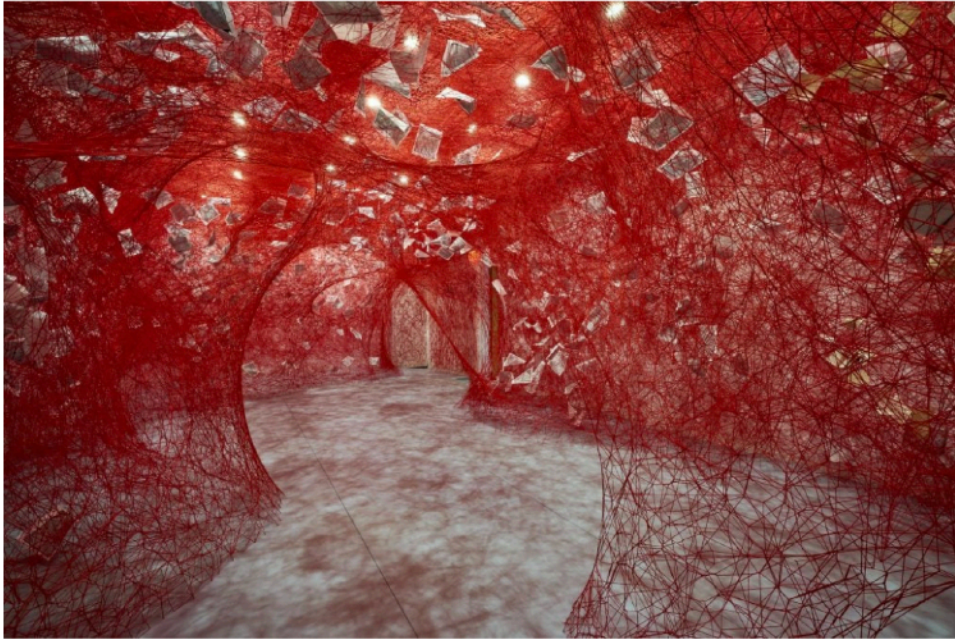


Chiharu Shiota with one of her installations in 2024. Photo: by Sunhi Mang.

When she first moved beyond the canvas, Shiota used black cord, to mimic lines of graphite in pencil drawings. The color red, of course, evokes blood, and the many threads recall a network of life-giving vessels and veins. Shiota was also alluding to the East Asian concept of the “red thread of fate,” an invisible string that is believed to bind together people who are destined to meet.

Objects we take for granted become powerful totems in Shiota’s work. Making art that incorporates people’s belongings, such as their historic wartime diaries, is a deeply personal exercise for Shiota.

“When she’s going through these papers, she feels that she’s connected to that person,” Kuromiya said. “And so, while we’re moving into the installation, it’s like we’re surrounded by thousands of people who aren’t with us anymore. It amplifies that idea of strangers being representative of human connection and relationships.”



Installation view of *Diary* in “Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries” at the Japan Society, New York, 2025. Photo: by Go Sugimoto, courtesy of the Japan Society, New York.

Another gallery recreates part of the staging for *Kinkakuji*, where the minimalist set was a hanging grid of Shiota’s red and white cords. A video shows how Curda moved through the space, the cords coming to life in response to his frenetic motion, and through the use of stage lighting that underscores the character’s mental deterioration.

“The set is very flexible,” Kuromiya said. “At times it becomes part of the scenery, or evocative of what he’s thinking.”

The show also includes Shiota’s behind-the-scenes sketches for the productions, and projections that activate the long white cords.



Major Curda in Yukio Mishima’s *Kinkakuji*, adapted from the novel *Kinkakuji* (*The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*) for the stage by Leon Ingulsrud and Major Curda at the Japan Society, New York. Stage design by Chiharu Shiota. Photo: by Richard Termine.

Using Thread to Make Waves

It's been a big year for the artist, who also has a current solo show "[Chiharu Shiota: Between Worlds](#)," at [Istanbul Modern](#). She just closed her largest-ever U.S. museum exhibition, "[Chiharu Shiota: Home Less Home](#)," at the [Institute of Contemporary Art Watershed](#) in Boston, and is wrapping up "[Chiharu Shiota: My House Is Your House](#)" at [Azkuna Zentroa, Alhóndiga Bilbao](#) and "[Chiharu Shiota: Silent Emptiness](#)" at [Red Brick Art Museum](#) in Beijing.

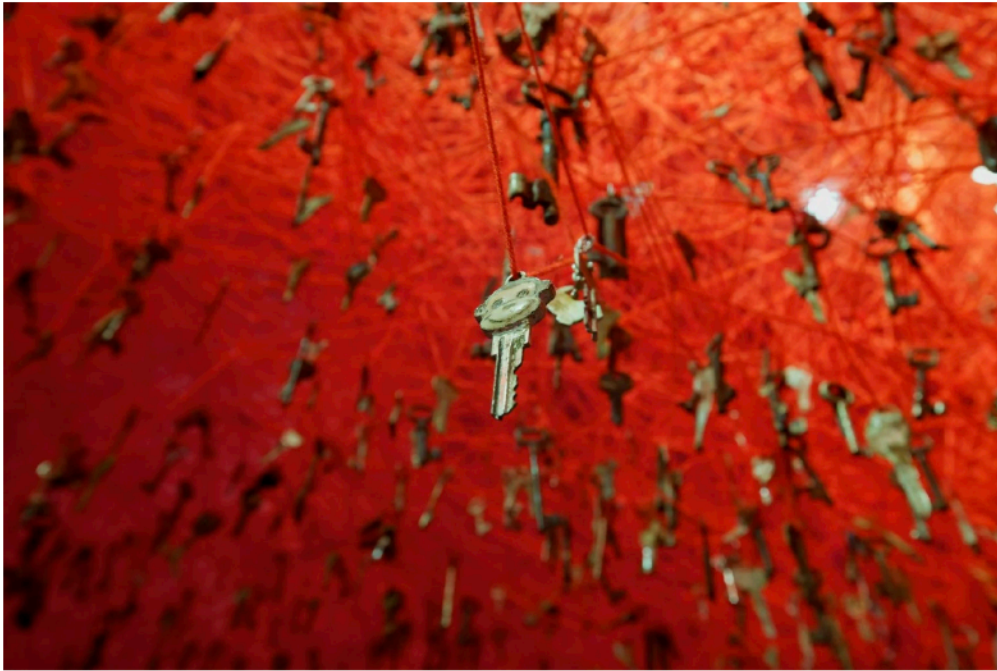
Before that, there was an appearance at the [Grand Palais](#) in Paris for "[Shiota Chiharu: The Soul Trembles](#)," a [retrospective](#) organized by Tokyo's [Mori Museum](#) featuring seven large-scale installations. The show has been touring to acclaim since 2019, and Skira published an [accompanying monograph](#) earlier this year. It will travel next month to the [Museo d'Arte Orientale](#) in Turin.



Chiharu Shiota, *Metamorphosis of Consciousness* at the Red Brick Museum, Beijing. Photo: by Sunhi Mang.

And the Japan Society show will be accompanied by a gallery show in Chelsea at [Templon](#). Shiota's installation *Echoes Between* will feature furniture surrounded by luminous fiber optic threads, creating the effect of a glowing cloud.

Shiota has also had [high-profile biennial appearances](#), including the 2019 [Honolulu Biennial](#) and the [Japanese pavilion](#) at the 2015 [Venice Biennale](#). For the latter exhibition, she collected 50,000 used keys from around the world and wove them into a crisscrossing installation suspended above two weathered boats, embedding the red web with intimate yet universal memories of home and everyday life.



Chiharu Shiota, *Key in Hand* (2015), detail. Installation for the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Photo: by Sunhi Mang, ©ADAGP, Paris, 2024, and the artist.

These monumental immersive installations are awesome to behold in person, and tend to draw large crowds. At the Mori, Shiota's retrospective drew over 660,000 guests, the second-most visited exhibition in the museum's history.

In anticipation of audience demand, the Japan Society expanded its hours, and is now open six days a week instead of four, including on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. (It is closed until September 30 due to restricted access during the United Nations General Assembly.)



Installation view of Chiharu Shiota's *Home Less Home* (2025) at the Institute of Contemporary Art Watershed in Boston. Photo: by Timothy Schenck, courtesy of the ICA Boston.

Life, Death, and Everything in Between

As commanding as the presence of her installations are, Shiota's work is in some ways as much about the emptiness of spaces in between the thread.

"She will say her work is about the presence of absence and the absence of presence," Kuromiya said. "She wants the installation to live on in your memory, but not to be something you can actually keep."

The cords in Shiota's work are about connection, between bodies, but also across time and space, linking one another through shared experiences, and memories. But there is also a darkness that runs through the work, a preoccupation with death and illness informed by the artist's having twice survived ovarian cancer.



Chiharu Shiota, *Wall* (2010), video still. Photo: courtesy of the artist, ©ARS, New York, 2025.

Wall, a haunting 2010 video on view at the Japan Society, shows the artist in a white, brightly lit room, lying naked on the floor. She is surrounded by clear thin tubes that appear to be pulsing with blood, as if Shiota's cardiovascular system has been removed from her body.

Shiota made another video, *Earth and Blood* (2013), after suffering a miscarriage. It's a six-channel video installation that cuts between footage of the artist's body and shots of earth and mud, sometimes with puddles of what looks like blood, bringing to mind the "Silueta" series of "earth-body" works by [Ana Mendieta](#) (1948–1985).



Chiharu Shiota, *Earth and Blood* (2013), video still. Photo: courtesy of the artist, ©ARS, New York, 2025.

The most recent works are a series of cell-like sculptures, formed from glass and fabric, that are inspired by cancerous growths. Shiota's take on our fragile internal organs speaks to grief, but also resilience and the possibility of healing.

At the entrance to the show, Shiota has suspended her sculpture *Beyond My Body* (2025) above the atrium's water feature. It's made of sheets of red suede into which the artist has cut a series of small holes to create a delicate, skin-like netting. It's a membrane that is strong despite its wounds, undergoing regrowth.



Installation view of *Beyond My Body* in "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries" at the Japan Society, New York, 2025. Photo: by Go Sugimoto, courtesy of the Japan Society, New York.

A Story That Spans Continents

Two sculptures of large metal house frames, their interiors filled with glittery webs of red thread, are shown here in a new configuration. A headless, abstracted female form sits in the center, her torso made up of what look like blood vessels, spilling forth like the train of an elaborate gown.

The two houses represent Germany and Japan, and the central figure only connects to one of them, illustrating the disconnect Shiota feels from one of her two countries whenever she is in the other. It's about coexistence, and the complex emotions that arise out of the sense of belonging to more than one place at once.

The work calls to mind *The Two Fridas*, [Frida Kahlo's](#) famous double self portrait, a blood vessel connecting a Frida in a European gown to her double in traditional Tehuana dress.



Installation view of "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries" at the Japan Society, New York, 2025. Photo: by Go Sugimoto, courtesy of the Japan Society, New York.

It's a reminder that while "Two Home Countries" is very much informed by Shiota's own personal experience, her story is also a universal one, transcending national borders.

In Boston, Shiota sought out that connection with local residents, inviting them to contribute to her installation *Home Less Home* by writing down their own musings about the meaning of home. The work became a repository of some 6,000 documents—including surprisingly personal handwritten stories—that catch your eye as you move through the pathway between a collective 100 miles of red and black polyester cord that hang down from the ceiling, surrounding paper memories fluttering above home furniture.



Installation view of Chiharu Shiota's *Home Less Home* (2025) at the Institute of Contemporary Art Watershed in Boston. Photo: by Timothy Schenck, courtesy of the ICA Boston.

The exhibition, part of the Boston Public Art Triennial, also included a new iteration of *Accumulation – Searching for the Destination* (2014/2025), a piece inspired by the solitary suitcase Shiota brought with her when she moved from Japan to Berlin in 1996. She suspended dozens of vintage suitcases inside a field of long red ropes, in a moving tribute to migration.

Suitcases don't just carry our physical things. They carry our hopes and dreams, our anxieties and fears, our memories of home and our visions for the future—our very identity. The effect is a journey frozen in time, suggesting new beginnings, but also raising questions about who this baggage belongs to, where it is headed, and why it has been abandoned.



Installation view of Chiharu Shiota's *Accumulation – Searching for the Destination* (2014/2025) at the Institute of Contemporary Art Watershed in Boston. Photo: by Timothy Schenck, courtesy of the ICA Boston.

Diary was inspired in part by literary scholar Donald Keene's (1922–2019) memoir, *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*. Born in America, Keene became a leading Japanese scholar at New York's Columbia University, eventually moving to Japan permanently. During World War II, he served in the Navy, stationed in Hawaii, where he was tasked with translating diaries left behind by Japanese soldiers.

But many of the diaries ended with an English message, requesting that the volume be returned to their families. As a memorial, the work responds to loss and historical trauma, but imbues our collective memory of the conflict with an undeniable beauty that ties us all together. It's a moving vision that invites reflection as we reckon with present-day challenges, on both a global and personal scale.



Installation view of *Diary* in "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries" at the Japan Society, New York, 2025.
Photo: by Go Sugimoto, courtesy of the Japan Society, New York.