

TEMPLON



CHIHARU SHIOTA

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How Cover Artist Chiharu Shiota Weaves Memory into Monumental Installations

Through immersive installations made of yarn and everyday objects, the artist gives form to emotions that remain unseen.

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Chiharu Shiota, "Infinite Memory," 2025, Installation: dress, ropa M+, Hong Kong Photo Dan Leung, Image courtesy of M+, Hong Kong @ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2026 and the artist.

Chiharu Shiota has built an internationally acclaimed creative practice around what cannot be held. The invisible threads that bind the human experience—such as memory, absence, and longing—are visualized in immersive installations of densely woven yarn, often stretching across entire ***architectural*** spaces. By transforming everyday objects and atmospheres into vessels of lived experience, Shiota's ***artworks***—including *House of Windows*, *Uncertain Journey*, *In Silence*, and *The Key in the Hand* at the Japanese Pavilion of the 56th Venice Biennale—have established her as one of the most important ***voices*** working today.

Her environments—populated by boats, keys, suitcases, shoes, windows, and empty chairs—materialize the emotional weight of personal and collective histories, inviting viewers to move through spaces where memory feels fragile and physically present. Most recently, her exhibition “Threads of Life” (February 18–May 3) at **Hayward Gallery** in London extends this inquiry, enveloping the brutalist interior in constellations of thread that suggest circulation, breath, and the persistence of life itself.



Chiharu Shiota, portrait by Sunhi Mang.

Born in Osaka and based in Berlin, Shiota's work is shaped by a life lived between geographies, languages, and states of belonging. While she resists a singular cultural reading of her practice, her biography informs hybridity, rooted less in symbolism than in sensation. Studying in Germany proved pivotal, offering both the conceptual freedom and material experimentation that would come to define her installations. Moving between **Japan** and Europe, Shiota has come to understand memory as something mutable: carried by objects, altered by distance, and felt most in moments of return and displacement.



Chiharu Shiota, “Crystallizing Identity,” 2025, at Swarovski Kristallwelten, Wattens, Austria, photo by Klaus Vyhnaek, courtesy of the artist and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2026.

Ahead of her traveling solo exhibition “The Soul Trembles” appearing at the *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts* in September, Shiota reflects with *Whitewall* on memory as a physical space, the emotional intelligence of materials, and the ways her work gives form to what remains unseen.

Visualizing Memory Through Objects and Space



Chiharu Shiota, “Dialogue From DNA,” 2004, Krakow, photo by Sunhi Mang.

WHITEWALL: You often talk about memory as a physical space. When did you first feel that memory had texture? That it could be made materially?

CHIHARU SHIOTA: I think I always knew, but there was also one specific moment. I had been living in Germany for a few years and visited my family and friends in Japan. I had missed Japan so much, but when I arrived, everything felt different—not as it existed in my memory. I had left some old shoes at my parents’ house, but when I wanted to wear them, they felt as if they no longer fit me, as if I had changed. This made me realize that our experiences and memories are contained in objects, and that is when I started to collect shoes.

WW: Why is memory something important for you to explore, honor, and visualize?

CS: I’m interested in memory because, without memory, I could not explain who I am. It’s part of our existence. We know it exists, but we can’t touch it. We can’t see it, but we can feel it. I want to visualize this feeling.

“Our experiences and memories are contained in objects,”

-Chiharu Shiota.

WW: Growing up in Osaka, and studying in Germany, you've navigated different cultural rhythms. How did your Japanese upbringing shape your relationship to the body in space? Repetition, expectations, or silence?

CS: I was born in Osaka, but I don't feel a strong connection between my work and Japanese culture. What stays with me is more a physical memory, like nature or feelings from childhood. Living in Berlin has shaped my life and my work much more. This is where I found the freedom, materials, and ideas to make art. So, the way I use my body in space comes mainly from my life here, not from Japanese culture.

Revealing Presence Through Absence



Chiharu Shiota, "Uncertain Journey," 2025, MAO, photo by Giorgio Perottino.

WW: Your installations give form to what is unseen, like breath, absence, and longing. Do you think of your work as revealing what's already there, or inviting something in? Why?

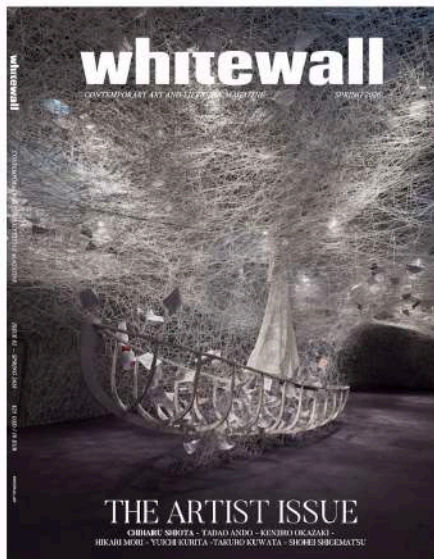
CS: This feeling of *existence in the absence* is always there. Memory cannot be seen, but it still exists. When someone dies, the body is gone, but I feel the existence of this person. I work together with material, such as suitcases that someone used before. I want to collect these memories in the exhibition space. I have never thought of either separate, because I think it's both. I am revealing something that is always there but I'm also inviting it into the space.

“Personal history and collective experience are connected,”

-Chiharu Shiota.

WW: Threads in your work often suggest both connection and constraint. How do you hold those meanings together?

CS: For me, it is about connection. The thread has a lot of meaning. It can be loose, tight, knotted, or cut, just like our relationships, but it is also a mirror of my feelings.



Chiharu Shiota Cover of the Whitewall Spring 2026 Japan Issue.



Installation view Chiharu Shiota, "Signs of Life" at Temple, NY, photo by Charles Roussel, courtesy of the artist and Temple.

WW: In pieces like Uncertain Journey, the individual and the collective seem to live alongside each other. How do you think about the tension between personal histories and shared experience?

CS: I try to connect the personal to something universal. I think personal history and collective experience are connected. Our individual stories come together and become one. Because of this, I don't see tension between them. The time of the COVID-19 pandemic shows this too. When it began, everyone was scared and uncertain about what would happen. We all had to stay inside our homes, apart from one another, yet we were living the same moment. Even in isolation, the experience connected us.

Chiharu Shiota Builds Installations Through Atmosphere



Chiharu Shiota, "Letters of Love," 2025, Jupiter Museum of Art, photo by Sunthi Mang.

WW: Your shows at Templon often open into ideas of thresholds, portals, and transformation. How does the architecture of the gallery's spaces inform the way you shape new work for them?

CS: For me, the first impression of an installation is the most important. I want to catch the viewer's heart immediately and then slowly tell my story. My installations work with space; the whole atmosphere of the installation changes with the space. Templon is like a white cube, where I can place my work and let it speak for itself. Sometimes I work in other places, like historic buildings, churches, caves, or abandoned buildings. These spaces carry memory and energy, and they change the work, as well.

"I am an artist 24 hours a day, seven days a week—there are no normal working hours,"

-Chiharu Shiota.

WW: Can you tell us a bit about your studio? What's it like there? What's an average day working there like?

CS: The energy in my studio is very nice, but I can't use it because I create my installations in the exhibition space. My studio is for testing materials, experimenting, and making sculptures and canvas work. I am an artist 24 hours a day, seven days a week—there are no normal working hours. Most of my time is spent traveling for set-ups or museum visits. When I am at home, I start my mornings working with my Japan office because of the seven-hour time difference. Then I go to my studio to prepare for museum shows with my team, and later return home where I can work on my drawings in my atelier.

WW: You've said that your work begins with a feeling before it becomes a form. Can you share an example of an emotion that ignited a recent body of work?

CS: Recently, I have been thinking that when I start planning or thinking about a new work, it feels as if I enter another world. Part of my body remains here, while another part stretches outward, and this is the feeling I want to express in my next show at NF Galeria. For the installation, my body seems to expand, reaching into another world, as if it has no limits, moving toward another planet or space. Of course, the installation still includes familiar objects like a chair and desk, but there is no physical body in the space, only traces, like the wires on the wall, which suggest the body and create a new environment, a new planet.

Material, Metaphor, and Emotional Memory



Chiharu Shiota, "Metamorphosis of Consciousness," 2025, Red Brick Museum, photo by Sunhi Mang.

WW: The materials you choose—from thread and boats to keys and windows—all carry metaphor and memory. What importance do the materials carry? Do they ever teach you something?

CS: Each material carries a different memory and is connected to human life. The boat carries not only people and memory, but also culture, and symbolizes the journey from one country or culture to another. When I was collecting the old keys. Many people wrote that they belonged to someone who had passed away, leaving the keys behind, and with them, so many memories, memories contained inside the keys. When I hold the keys in my hand, I can imagine their life and existence. I collected windows in Berlin, as I was fascinated that people from the same country, language, and culture, were separated by these windows and walls. While collecting them, I thought about how people must have felt looking from East to West Berlin. There is so much memory in that. The objects teach me about my own humanity and my existence in this world.

“The objects teach me about my own humanity and my existence in this world,”

-Chiharu Shiota.

WW: What do you see as a question that has remained constant in your practice? What is a question that has changed?

CS: I think my questions about death have remained. I was suddenly reminded that my life will not continue forever when I was diagnosed with cancer twice in my life. Everyone will die, but we tend to forget this in our daily life.

I think my question of home has changed. Every time I am in Japan, I miss Germany, and when I am in Germany, I miss Japan. I used to question whether I was Japanese or German, and now I feel that I am neither one nor the other and that it is possible to have two home countries.

WW: How would you describe your work in three words?

CS: Memory. Existence. Absence.