

# TEMPLON



CHIHARU SHIOTA

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## **‘She rips your heart out’: This Japanese artist’s fiery red installation swallows this S.F. museum**

By **Tony Bravo**, Arts & Culture Columnist  
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A view of "Diary," an installation in Chiharu Shiota's exhibition at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is on view through July 20.  
Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

“Diary,” the epic fiber installation by Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota, encompasses the 88-foot length of the Akiko Yamazaki and Jerry Yang Pavilion at the Asian Art Museum with 20 miles of red yarn.

The effect is like being immersed in scarlet spiderwebs.

The work, which premiered in 2025 at the Japan Society Gallery in New York to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II, includes pages from journals written by Japanese soldiers and postwar German civilians, suspended and connected by the yarn. Traversing the installation, viewers see rooms made from the yarn within the installation.

Though visitors are instructed not to touch it, it’s a thoroughly physical experience. The red of the yarn evokes entering the human body, floating in the bloodstream or perhaps traveling through the birth canal.



Artist Chiharu Shiota poses for a portrait in her installation, "Diary," at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco is on view through July 20.

Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

The artist herself has said the red threads symbolize the brain's neuronal pathways connecting memories. The work meditates on the tragic shared history of her native Japan and her adopted Germany, her "two home countries," a phrase that gives another Shiota work and her museum show its title.

Shiota, 53, was born in Osaka and moved to Berlin in the mid-1990s. Her family includes her husband, chef and photographer Sunhi Mang, and their daughter.

"In one diary, this Japanese soldier was writing in Japanese but at the end was writing in English, 'If you find my diary please send it to my family,'" Shiota told the Chronicle, noting that that English writing was meant in the event of the soldier's death. "It was moving for me."

Asian Art Museum head curator Robert Mintz, who curated the show, recalled being struck by "Diary" when he first encountered it in New York.

"It seemed as though these papers had just been caught by a gust of wind and were suddenly suspended," he said. "There was this sense of frozen time."



Handwritten diary pages from journals kept by Japanese soldiers during World War II and German civilians in the postwar years hang in a web of red yarn.

Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

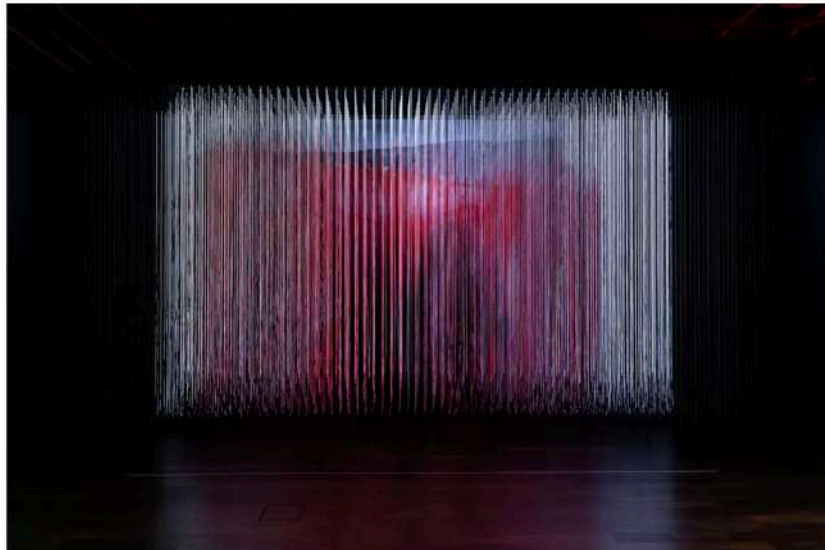
For Soyoung Lee, CEO of the Asian Art Museum, the power of Shiota's work was emotionally overwhelming.

"She rips your heart out," she said.

The installation is an impressive centerpiece to the exhibition "Chiharu Shiota: Two Home Countries," the artist's first solo museum exhibition in the Bay Area. It sculpture, video, works on paper and stage designs that explore themes such as belonging, impermanence and living with what Mintz called "in-betweenness." As someone who has had cancer, Shiota also frequently explores health and illness as well as the nature of time.

"It's important to understand that to her, the work is not political," said Mintz. "It's about remembering."

The exhibition comes at a high point in Shiota's career after more than three decades of making art.



"KINKAKUJI (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion)," is on view through July 20 at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco. Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

A two-time recipient of Japan's Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize, she has shown her work around the world, including at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Smithsonian Institution's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C., and the National Museum of Art, Osaka.

In 2015, she was selected to represent Japan at the 56th Venice Biennale.

More recently, the 2025 exhibition at Japan Society Gallery in New York was well received by critics, as was "Between Worlds" at Istanbul Modern. That same year also marked her largest U.S. show to date, "Chiharu Shiota: Home Less Home," at the Institute of Contemporary Art Watershed in Boston, as well as presentations in Spain and Beijing.

At the Asian Art Museum, her current show's title installation "Two Home Countries" from 2025, shares the galleries with "Diary." The work shows two metal house forms connected by a dress-form sculpture made of red rope that reaches toward the symbolic homes.



Chiharu Shiota's exhibition, "Two Home Countries," is on view through July 20 at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.  
Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

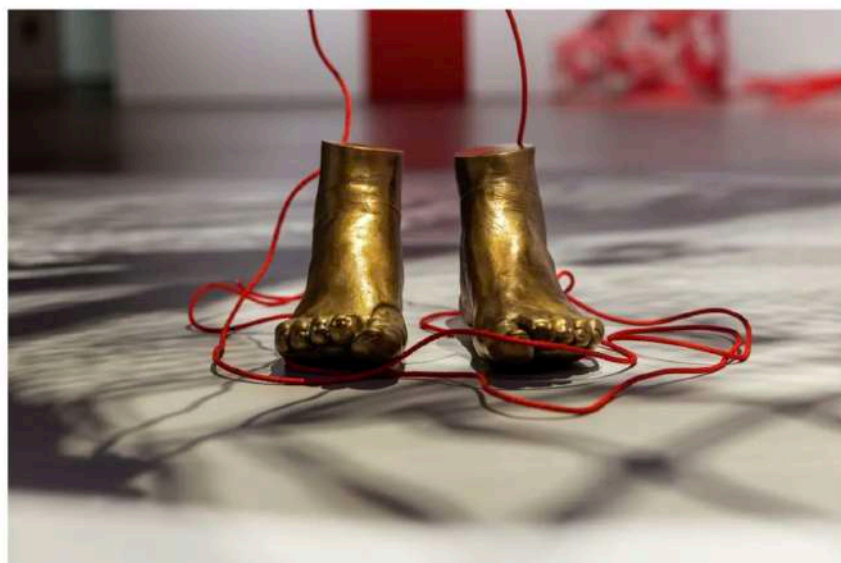
"When I stay in Japan, I miss Germany. When I stay in Germany, I miss Japan," Shiota pithily explained of the piece's meaning.

The red ropes have gesture and movement that resemble brushstrokes, which the Shiota noted is a nod to her initial ambitions as an artist.

"I wanted to be a painter, but I made installations," she said of her practice. "But still I feel I'm painting."

Those same qualities are true of "Out of My Body," a 2022 sculpture that shows a pair of bronze feet with red leather netting that seems to expand outward where the legs, torso and head would be. The work was created while Shiota, a double cancer survivor, was undergoing chemotherapy.

"I felt like I was not connected with my body," Shiota recalled of that time. "The human body is fragile. That's why I didn't use a solid material on top."



A detail of the installation, "Beyond my Body," on view through July 20 at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.  
Lizzy Montana Myers/For the S.F. Chronicle

Shiota's cancer experience emerges again in a series of glass forms, including 2024's "Cell," which resembles human organs wrapped in red wire.

“There’s something about these that are very uncontrolled,” said Mintz. “They’re chaotic, like a mass that is of the body, but not the body.”

Among her video works, “Earth and Blood,” created in 2013 after a miscarriage by the artist, is among the most intense.

Showing Shiota wiping a red substance across the screen, it was filmed when she was at an emotional low, avoiding going out in public. The white space where she filmed the work contrasts starkly with the red blood, not unlike the white of the journal pages against the red yarn of “Diary.”

The work feels like the visual equivalent of a primal scream.

“The topics, the themes that she deals with in this exhibit are so heavy,” said Lee. “But there’s such beauty.”

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