

**About *The Key in the Hand***  
*by Chiharu Shiota*

*Interviewer - Helena Cassinello San Segundo*

1. Now that we know what we can encounter when entering the Japan Pavilion at *La Biennale di Venezia*, could you explain the concept of *The Key in the Hand*?

Through my installation objects (the boat and the keys), my aim is to represent memories, opportunities and hope. The hanging old keys represent all these human conditions. They are held by a boat which symbolizes a hand wrapping and gathering each human being along with their important features. Visitors may feel as if walking around an ocean of memory. The keys are connected to each other by thousands of red strings. Keys are everyday objects that protect valuable things and by coming into contact with people's warmth on a daily basis, the keys accumulate a web of memories that coexist within us. They are a medium that conveys our true feelings and they are connected to one another just as humans are. They even resemble the shape of a human body.

2. The pilotis are like a box holding the whole exhibition area above. What is the connection between the video of the children shown in the Japan Pavilion and the installation itself?

The videos show different children explaining their first newborn memory. It made me think that what the children were saying was a mix of fantasy and reality interpreted as the first memory of a human being. The pictures of children holding keys mean hope and opportunity. We are entitled to a world of opportunities and prosperous future and holding a key in our hands is the medium.

3. Once you come into the Japan Pavilion, the room seems to be shining a bright red light due to the red web of threads. Why do you use this colour?

I use red because it symbolizes the colour of blood and therefore human relationships connected to one another. When the red string inside a rope is visible, you can view the connection of society.

The red line is invisible to the human's eye but it is strongly connected and once we are able to glance this piece of red thread, we can observe all relationships as a whole.

If an artist's job is to affect the viewer emotionally, the yarn that controls their heart sometimes resembles words that express a connection between people. Relationships using knotted, tangled, cut, tied, or stretched yarn.

4. Where do the old hanging keys come from, and how many did you manage to collect?

In total I collected 180 000 keys and 400 km of red yarn. They come from all over the world. I put boxes in museums around the U.S.A, Japan and Europe but people donated their keys when I posted an advert in the Internet too. Some people wrote a letter explaining the meaning of their key and others came up to me directly to hand it in. I had been collecting them with great support since April last year.

5. The installation seems complex and I imagine much effort was put into building that web of red threads. How long did it take to build up the whole installation and how many people were involved?

It took me a year and a half to move from the idea to creating the installation. Building the space in the Pavilion took me two and a half months approximately and ten people working on it.

6. How did you feel when you were asked to represent the Japan Pavilion?

Showing my work at this International Art Exhibition had always been one of my dreams and it became true.

Over the years, all Japanese artists that had shown their work at *La Biennale di Venezia* Japan Pavilion were currently living in Japan, and by the time the curator asked me I had already been living in Germany for seventeen years. For this reason, it was an honor to be asked to take part this year.

7. As you say, you have been living in Germany for many years now and you are Japanese. How do you merge these two cultures and in what way does it influence your work?

Since I moved to Germany I have been meeting people from all over the world, so it was at that point when I began to be aware of my Japanese cultural background. Searching for this identity actually helps me create.

As a metaphor, if you put salt into a glass, pour water into it, and then leave it for a few days, the water evaporates and the salt remains. Long time after, the salt turns into crystal deposits. So when I lived in Japan, I felt like being inside that salted water and when I moved to Germany, everything became crystal clear. Since then I have gradually become stronger as an artist identity with a clear perspective.

8. As you mentioned before, the boats play an important role in your Pavilion. What do they exactly represent?

The boats symbolize two hands catching a rain of memories, opportunities and hope. They seem to be moving forward floating calmly along a huge sea of global and individual human memory.

9. The main concept of this 56th Biennale di Venezia set by its curator - Okwui Enwezor is "*All the World's Futures*". How did you engage this title with your work?

When you hold a key, you own new opportunities and therefore your own future.

The boats symbolize the hands holding 50 000 keys and each one has the shape of a human body. The upper part is the head, and the lower part, the body. Keys open and close doors to new chances. We are the guardians of our individual and global future and every human being has a place and a purpose in this *World's Future*, whether it is to keep memories safe or to hope for a new beginning.

10. How did you get this idea for the Japan Pavilion? Where did you find inspiration for your work?

These past few years the Japan Pavilion presented works based on the earthquake and the Tsunami that followed, so I decided to convey not only past but also present and future. After facing the deaths of family members, the feeling of needing to keep something invaded me so I linked this feeling to all the possible meanings a key can have.

These boats carry and gather all those human features mentioned before that coexist on a daily basis within us and shape our own self. Humans are then connected to each other in this World by the red threads.