



Shadows of Minidoka

Paintings and collections of Roger Shimomura February 11–March 12, 2011 Lawrence Arts Center

Shadows of Minidoka

This exhibition of Roger Shimomura's art is presented with his personal collection of writings and objects created by Japanese Americans imprisoned in the United States during World War II. *Shadows of Minidoka* embodies the commitment of the Lawrence Arts Center to seek points of intersection between disparate media and perspectives.

There is a striking revelation in this exhibition that while the camps were not intended to foster creativity, somehow life and creative acts persisted. These are embodied in the works that Shimomura has collected. Students, scholars, collectors, artists and social activists will discover juxtapositions of destruction and creation, as well as a contemporary and historical study of xenophobia and society's response to it.

Shimomura has collected artifacts and papers from the ten camps that imprisoned Japanese Americans. Placed beside his paintings and lithographs, these items proclaim the humanity of those inside the barbed wire. By presenting Shimomura's artwork with his personal collection of artifacts and ephemera, shadows of hatred are revealed and acts of creation are illuminated.

—Susan Tate, executive director, Lawrence Arts Center



Carved wooden bowl
Found wood
Artist: Unknown
12" diameter
Camp: Minidoka, Idaho



Desert City
Acrylic on canvas
60" x 72"
2010

Roger Shimomura biography

Roger Shimomura's paintings, prints and theatre pieces address sociopolitical issues of ethnicity and have often been inspired by the diaries kept by his late immigrant grandmother for 56 years of her life. He was born in Seattle, Washington, and spent three of his early years away from his home, two of which were in Minidoka, Idaho, in one of the ten American concentration camps for Japanese Americans during World War II.

Shimomura earned his B.A. from the University of Washington, Seattle, and an M.F.A. from Syracuse University, New York. He has had over 125 solo exhibitions of paintings and prints, and has presented his experimental theater pieces at such venues as the Franklin Furnace in New York City, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. He is the recipient of more than 30 grants, 4 of which are National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships in Painting and Performance Art. Shimomura has been a visiting artist and lectured on his work at more than 200 universities, art schools and museums across the country. In 1999, the Seattle Urban League designated a scholarship in his name that has been awarded annually to a Seattle resident pursuing a career in art. In 2002, the College Art Association presented him with the "Artist Award for Most Distinguished Body of Work," for his 4-year, 12-museum national tour of the painting exhibition "An American Diary."

The following year, he delivered the keynote address at the 91st annual meeting of CAA in New York City. In 2006 he was accorded the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the School of Arts & Sciences, University of Washington, Seattle.

A past winner of the Kansas Governor's Arts Award, he was designated in 2008 as the first Kansas Master Artist and the same year was honored by the Asian American Arts Alliance of N.Y.C. as one of their "Exceptional People in Fashion, Food & the Arts."

Shimomura began teaching at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, in 1969. In the fall of 1990, Shimomura held an appointment as the Dayton Hudson Distinguished Visiting Professor at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota. In 1994 he became the first Fine Arts faculty member in Kansas University's history to be designated as a University Distinguished Professor. In 1998 he was the recipient of the Higuchi Research Award, the highest annual research honor awarded to a faculty member in Humanities and Social Sciences. In the fall of 2002 he received the Chancellor's Club Career Teaching Award for sustained excellence in teaching and dedication to students at KU. In 2004 he retired from teaching and started the Shimomura Faculty Research Support Fund, an endowment to foster faculty research in the Department of Art.

Shimomura is in the permanent collections of over 80 museums nationwide. His personal papers and letters are being collected by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, DC. He is represented by Flomenhaft Gallery, New York City; Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle; 8 Modern Gallery, Santa Fe; and Byron C. Cohen Gallery, Kansas City.

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ON THE COVER: Minidoka Maiden

Acrylic on canvas
72" x 24"
2010

LEFT: American Infamy #4

Acrylic on canvas
48" x 72"
2010
Loaned by Marilyn Thoma, Chicago, Illinois

our barracks and the washboard used by my grandmother, were saved by my mother and became the foundation for my collection.

Ebay, with its pinpoint ability to zero in on specific objects, made it possible for me to quickly focus my aim on possible purchases. Japanese Americans, not particularly known for their reverence of historical family objects, would not think of selling these types of things but would instead either give them away as sentimental mementos or put them in boxes labeled "for Goodwill" or "for Salvation Army."

Though most of the objects in this exhibition were purchased by me, inherited from kin or donated by friends, there are a couple that belong to close friends in Seattle who entrusted me with them for this show.

The items selected for this exhibition and catalog represent approximately 50 percent of the entire inventory I have collected over the past 20 years. These examples are intended to give a cross section of daily life in any one of the ten concentration camps as well as provide documentation of events that led to this shameful

episode. The intent of this project is neither to exhibit nor create the definitive exhibition and publication on the incarceration experience, but to share the unusual confluence where one former internee, an artist who paints about that experience, has also accumulated a collection of related artifacts of historical and social significance.

Recently I staged a similar exhibition in the Pacific Northwest that combined my paintings with my collection of items depicting World War II Asian stereotypes. While that collection of over 2,000 objects was given to the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, this camp collection has been bequeathed to the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.

Thanks to all the people, businesses and organizations that made this project come to fruition. This has been a remarkable project supported by remarkable people, and I find it a confirmation that, as I always say in my lectures, Lawrence is a very special place.

—Roger Shimomura

Wooden ship

Oil on bas relief
24" x 33"
Camp: Tule Lake, California
Loaned by Patti Warashina



Photos of Roger Shimomura and grandmother

Silver prints
Camp: Minidoka, Idaho



Coal shovel

Tin
19" long
Used by Yoshitomi Shimomura
Camp: Minidoka, Idaho

Artist's statement

There were ten concentration camps scattered throughout the western sector of the United States during World War II that wrongfully imprisoned over 120,000 people of Japanese descent, two-thirds of whom were citizens of this country.

Ten thousand of us, including all of my family and relatives, went to one of those camps; it was located in a South Idaho desert region called Minidoka, and it was there where all of my first memories of life began. After three years away from our home in Seattle, we were allowed to return and resume our lives.

Fast-forward almost 30 years to my landing in Lawrence, Kansas, with a university teaching position. Having grown up in Seattle, where diversity was commonplace, I rediscovered my own ethnicity in a Midwestern culture that provided daily reminders of my differences from everyone around me. Because of those experiences, I will always credit Kansas for providing me with the inspiration to make the kind of art that I do today.

The trajectory of my work would soon lead me toward investigating one of the most shameful moments in our shared history. In 1976, while on sabbatical leave from teaching, my initial foray into narrative painting began with the Minidoka Series (1976-78). Since then I have created over 75 paintings, 35 lithographs and at least 25 performance pieces that exclusively explore the incarceration experience.

Even to this day, I find myself returning to that theme despite my investigations into racial stereotyping, racism, mistaken identities and other cultural issues that continue to plague people of color living in this country. The resonance of the 9/11 tragedy continues to be heard and felt today and underscores the lack of resolution to these social ills.

Since childhood, I have had an appetite for collecting. Whether it was soda bottle caps, comic books, jazz records, antique toys or advertising display items, I have always been surrounded by the things I've collected.

Specifically, my interest in collecting camp items started when I discovered my father's scrapbook, maintained throughout his college and camp years. His and my mother's camp identification cards, along with other scraps of evidence from the camps, dot his scrapbooks from the 1940s. Other items, such as the tin shovel used to clean out the ashes from the wood-burning stove in



Night Watch #6

Acrylic on canvas
36" x 45"
2010