

Master of Arts in Modern Art History, Theory, & Criticism

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Hiromi Nakazawa

THESIS ABSTRACT 2004

Representing Identity Issues of Japanese-American Women in the Works of Mariko Mori and Lynne Yamamoto

The artworks of Mariko Mori and Lynne Yamamoto reveal Japanese and Japanese-American feminist issues with the influence of minimalism, of contemporary interpretations of Zen and Shinto, and of Confucian morality in contemporary Japanese culture. Recognition of Zen-influenced artworks in the West directs the acceptance of Western influenced Asian art. This interaction simultaneously appears while the notions of feminism and identity are introduced in Japan as part of the process of modernization.

Lynne Yamamoto is a third-generation Japanese immigrant, and her artworks, *Wash Closet*, *Ten in One Hour*, and *Submission for Chiyo*, show the reconstruction of Japanese-American female experiences and the similarities between minimalism and Japanese traditional aesthetics. Through these works, Yamamoto rewrites a story of her grandmother, a Japanese immigrant, who drowned herself in a Japanese-style bathtub a few days after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Because of the simplicity and indirectness of her works, they are accepted into mainstream Western art as minimalism. However, Yamamoto's minimal style is also relevant to Zen-influenced minimal art which resulted from the reinterpretation of Zen Buddhism after World War II. As minimalism pursued simplicity and tried to be true to the nature of the materials, Japanese Zen Buddhist culture—tea ceremony and flower arrangement—also seemed to value simplicity to seek the truth of nature in its materials.

Mariko Mori is an internationally trained Tokyo-born artist, and her works, *Tea Ceremony*, *Nirvana*, and *Kumano*, show a new representation of Japanese women caught in the tensions between Japan's rigid industrial growth and the preservation of traditional humanistic values, that have not easily changed and which have often contradicted Western value systems. Feminism traditionally opposes the modern interpretation of Eastern morality in Japan: the integration of Shinto and Buddhism with Confucianism, wherein men are considered superior to women.

The works of Mariko Mori and Lynne Yamamoto represent both traditional Japanese societal expectations toward Japanese women and also important questions concerning both Japanese and Japanese-American women's identities in the contemporary era. Both Japanese women and Japanese immigrant women have been trapped in between two different cultural value systems that often contradict each other in terms of feminism.

BIOGRAPHY

Hiromi Nakazawa was a coordinator/producer at the local TV and radio station in Yamanashi, Japan, before coming to the U.S. Her interest in the visual presentation of race and gender was influenced by her experience of growing up in Japan and then living in the U.S. as a foreigner.

THESIS COMMITTEE

Thesis Advisor: Stanley Murashige, *Associate Professor; Art History, Theory, and Criticism*

Thesis Reader: Maud Lavin, *Associate Professor; Visual and Critical Studies; Art History, Theory, and Criticism*

Second Reader: Audrey Colby, *Adjunct Associate Professor; Art History, Theory, and Criticism*