

WASHINGTON

Lynne Yamamoto
George Suyama Architects
2324 Second Ave.
Seattle, 98121
206/256-0809

Greg Kucera Gallery
608 Second Ave.
Seattle, 98104
206/624-0770

Possibly it is the result of a society gone strangely public in our information age, but memoir, especially memoir by relatively young artists, is increasingly popular. That one person's story, no matter how unique, is part of our collective tale, explains the power in both Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and Robert Mapplethorpe's "X Portfolios." These artists wrest formally beautiful imagery out of achingly personal material and masses of people have responded. Lynne Yamamoto's installations mine a similar terrain of self, made socially relevant.

Whether intentional or not, there is a clever, almost novelistic format to these two exhibitions. In the new alternative space at

Suyama Architects, Yamamoto's work deals largely with past family secrets. At the Kucera Gallery, viewers get to see materials descriptive of Yamamoto's present. The results segue neatly from one to the other, reminding us that the individual present is made out of a complex past.

Yamamoto deftly tells the story of her grandmother's life as an immigrant picture-bride in Hawaii, her subsequent job as a laundress on a plantation, and her eventual suicide at age 49. A large grid of ten- by eight-inch glass shelves holds multiple hand-pressed bars of soap mixed with strands of hair. Flanking the grid is a replica of the traditional wood bathtub in which Yamamoto's grandmother chose to drown herself.

It is a chilling story—the struggle of a Japanese laborer in Hawaii, and it could rest on its historical impact, but Yamamoto inserts herself into the installation. A small black-and-white photo showing the back of Yamamoto's neck is placed on the opposite wall. The nape of her neck looks somewhat shortened and her hair is unfashionably cut, making Yamamoto a sturdy, if somewhat somber-looking participant.

The continued exhibition in the Kucera space becomes curiously more vital. Here a milky blue wall is filled with hundreds of girl dolls made of translucent paper, paired and holding hands. There are intimations of cruelty. Aside from slight burn marks on each doll, a tiny, three- by five-inch video monitor shows Yamamoto painstakingly plucking out the hairs on her big toe. But the cruelty here is unabashedly self-inflicted and laced with notions of feminine beauty rituals. This show includes a photograph of the artist as well, this time in color with Yamamoto sticking her tongue out at viewers. It is a funny dénouement to the somber tone of her grandmother's story, this installation of intergenerational survival. Yamamoto shows us her grandmother's progeny, slightly burned, but irreverently making faces, and holding hands with other girls.

Frances DeVuono is an artist, teacher, and writer who lives in Eastern Washington.

Lynne Yamamoto
Untitled, 1998. Color photograph, 4 1/4" x 4 1/4"
Photo by Lucretia Knapp. Courtesy of Greg Kucera Gallery.

