

# Trans-Pacific Sitings

## The Roving Imagery of Lynne Yamamoto

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The conceptual sweep of Honolulu-born, New England-based sculptor Lynne Yamamoto's art spans oceans, continents, histories and social realities. Her far-roving inquisitiveness invokes the primacy of the Pacific in US history as the nation's first true far-western frontier, encompassing multi-valent flows of influences from around the globe that have long shaped and transformed this vast region. This awareness is equally imbued with an affinity with local histories and an acute sensitivity to the class and racialized hierarchies of the island society in which the artist was raised. Yamamoto's sensibility is closely inflected by her background as a descendant of Japanese contract labourers imported to toil in Hawai'i's plantation-based agricultural industry. Some of her female relatives also worked as laundresses and seamstresses in the camps that housed the workers, or later as domestic servants in the households of local Caucasian families. With its majority East Asian and Filipino population, Hawai'i occupies a signal position in her creative work and imaginative life, providing a dynamic space in which the artist traces localized intersections of multi-sited circuits of transnational trade, transport, labour and migration. Due to the islands' strategic North Pacific position, midway between East Asia and the continental United States, they have historically acted as a potent transcultural nexus, where the interests of many actors, indigenous and immigrant alike, converge and sometimes violently collide.

The United States' headlong maritime rush to the eastern shores of Asia, lured by lucrative trade with China and a market for the produce of a growing US whaling industry in the Pacific, significantly predates its overland expansion to the Pacific coast. Prior to the War of Independence, Britain proscribed the colonies' enlargement beyond the Allegheny Mountains, and its mercantilist system curtailed Americans' direct trade abroad. With independence recognized in 1783, barriers to foreign trade largely disappeared. Within a year a US ship sailed from New York to

Canton to initiate commerce with China. Six years later an American vessel arrived in Hawai‘i, and whalers from New England sailed round to the Pacific each year in ever-increasing numbers after 1791, leading to the nation’s first Pacific naval action during the War of 1812. Over the early decades of the nineteenth century Hawai‘i was swept up in the US pursuit of whaling and trade with Asia, becoming ever more bound to America’s mounting Pacific entanglements. Ironically, although the overland Lewis and Clark Expedition (the first American expedition to cross the territory of the current western United States) reached Oregon’s Pacific shore in 1805, the first Americans did not permanently move to the territory – the only West Coast region then under US control – until the mid-1830s. Yet, even though the trans-Pacific advance to Asia long preceded the US settlement of Oregon, in the nation’s popular imagination the grand narrative of westward movement is fixed solely on covered wagons traversing the continent.

Following the oceanic trajectories of American engagement in the Pacific, Yamamoto mines local environments in Hawai‘i and the continental US for traces of the historic relations that have indelibly shaped the peoples and cultures of the islands. Through evocative assemblages of objects, a hands-on artisanal use of materials and a research-based investigative approach, the artist suggests the generative possibilities of the local when conceived within larger contexts. Underlined by an abiding interest in the social significance of materiality – the ways in which material things are continually shaped by and shape human action and imagination – Yamamoto works from the personal and particular outward. Her art making is at once intensely introspective and intent on making connections in the public realm, by inviting close consideration of the interplay between subjective perceptions, emotional states and material conditions. Each piece is thus a distillation of the artist’s ongoing efforts to explore ‘all of these circles of meanings that emanate from different kinds of objects’.<sup>1</sup> Even as she moves to meticulously scrutinize and unpack the layered and often-occluded connotations that accrue to material objects over time, her primary motivation remains poetic, her choices located in aspects of personal and familial experience and triggered by intimate memories.

In seeking to produce layered encounters with historic patterns of circulation across national and cultural boundaries, Yamamoto’s projects offer richly conceived insights into Hawai‘i’s human geography as intrinsically constituting the sort of site aptly described as a ‘micro-environment with a global span’.<sup>2</sup> Approaching objects as surrogates for human intervention that symbolically mark history and place, and accordingly have their own biographies and affective presence, the artist pays close attention to elements of quotidian materiality to envision grand sociohistoric developments. For Yamamoto, accessible referents – apparel, foodstuffs, consumer products, built forms and landscapes, physical and natural surroundings – present vernacular touchstones to complex processes that conjoin and intermingle the Pacific and Atlantic worlds across space and time. The artist’s silent dialogue with material reality, therefore, is congruent with schemes, intellectual and artistic alike, to interrogate vital imbrications between large-scale global processes and the daily lives of ordinary people. In so doing, her projects provide multifaceted points of access to the sedimented transcultural histories that underlie the complex structures of all contemporary social orders.

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from my interviews and correspondence with Lynne Yamamoto between 2008 and 2012.

2. Saskia Sassen, ‘The City: Between Topographic Representation and Spatialized Power Projects’, *Art Journal*, vol 60, no 2, Summer 2001, pp 12–20

Yamamoto's guiding interests coalesce around the nineteenth century and the Second World War, periods of intensifying US enmeshment in East Asian and Pacific lands. The earlier era brought the Hawaiian Islands firmly within the American orbit, spawning the American-dominated socioeconomic environment in which the artist's forebears found themselves. The Second World War, in particular, carries profound resonances for the artist who came of age in postwar Hawai'i. Yamamoto is acutely aware of the pervasive effects that the 1941 Japanese bombing of the US Pacific fleet had on the local Japanese American community, including her immediate family. Not only did Japan's aggression bring the United States roaring into the war, leading to the internment of Japanese Americans on the US mainland, but it also severed ongoing contact with relatives in Japan. This time of great stress saw, furthermore, the tragic suicide of Yamamoto's maternal grandmother, who once worked on a Hawaiian sugar plantation. A number of artworks from the 1990s embody her efforts to come to grips with these traumatic events, and through them also to symbolically register the largely unheralded passage of the many Japanese women from earlier immigrant generations who confronted lives of hardship.

From her current location in New England the artist finds constant reminders that she abides in a region where mercantile interests benefited handsomely from the China trade, creating America's first millionaires and generating investment capital for the nation's burgeoning industrialization. Beginning in 1820, Protestant missionaries to Hawai'i also began their journeys on New England's whaling ships. Some became advisers to the indigenous Hawaiian monarchy, their families eventually dominating the local economic and political structure and causing the islands' 1898 US annexation. Numerous Hawaiians, royal family members among them, would become Christians, leading to the rapid demise of many indigenous religious and cultural practices.

In light of the thrust of American expansionism and Christian evangelism directed towards Asia, there should be no surprise that the earliest missionaries thought of Hawai'i as located in the Orient, viewing the native population as Oriental. Aware that the Pacific's oceanic expanse fades naturally into East Asian shores, and that the islands were themselves located halfway to Asia, they conceived of Hawai'i as a felicitous testing ground for China's conversion to Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries' mode of maritime transport from New England, moreover, highlights the wealth-generating magnitude of whale oil, a lighting source and industrial lubricant in the early years of the new American republic. With US whaling ships entering the Pacific in ever-greater numbers, the provision of supplies, services and native manpower for the growing fleet – as well as for merchant vessels bound for China with silver, furs, and sandalwood – became the sovereign Kingdom of Hawai'i's economic mainstay for half of the nineteenth century. As whaling expeditions extended their range, they made their way to fishing grounds off the coast of Japan and the Arctic Ocean. The safety and rescue of shipwrecked American sailors was thus cited among the putative reasons for Commodore Matthew Perry's 1853 opening of Japan. *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville's well-known 1851 novel, drawn from the author's 1840s experience of whaling, is set partly in New England and the Pacific during that era.

3. Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009, p 177

## GENTEEL AND SWEATING BONE CHINA

Yamamoto, spurred by her research into New England's post-independence seafaring history, including the *Moby Dick* saga with its profusion of biblical references, turned her attention to connections between missio-nizing, trade and colonization. All were aspects of often-predatory European exploration and America's early push to Pacific Asia that would transform Hawai'i into a hub for trans-Pacific shipping, and provide the US with a key naval base from which to project regional power. Accordingly, references to objects, imagery and locales related to the Second World War, and to the Eastern Seaboard's involvement in the Pacific whaling industry and maritime trade with China and Japan – conducted through Salem, New Bedford, Boston, New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia – figure prominently in several bodies of the artist's work and related projects, including *Genteel* (2010) and *Sweating Bone China* (2009). Shown in venues throughout the continental United States and Hawai'i, some take the form of site-specific exhibitions on great Northeast estates erected with fortunes amassed through trans-oceanic commerce, whaling and trade in enslaved Africans.

Yamamoto's working and exhibition methods are organically inter-related, featuring the selective reconfiguration of existing pieces and the crafting of new works, all of which are assembled in relation to a particular site – applying a mix-and-match-like process the artist compares to



*Genteel*, installation view, 2010, mixed media, dimensions variable, Oresman Gallery, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, photo: Lynne Yamamoto



*Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and US)*, 2007–2010, vitreous china, wood, 10.16 x 153.6 x 25.6 cm, detail of installation view, *Genteel*, 2010, photo: Lynne Yamamoto

*bricolage*. *Genteel* (2010) was first exhibited at the Oresman Gallery at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. The title refers to nineteenth-century Western precepts of gentility and to the elevated status that the trappings of polite society conferred, once transferred to Hawai‘i by New England missionaries. *Genteel* is organized around three thematic components: *Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and US)*, *Grandfather’s Shed (Lana‘i City, Island of Lana‘i)*, and *Insect Immigrants, after Zimmerman, 1948 (Hawai‘i)*.

Through an evocative interplay among assemblies of mixed media and sculptural objects, the artist alludes to the many intimate ways in which people’s lived experience, material circumstances, and the social and physical environment of Hawai‘i are complexly imprinted and transformed by larger systemic conditions. In so doing, this ambitious project gestures toward the pressures that historically transformed the Asia Pacific region. Among these overarching factors are: the centuries-long interrelated struggle for political, economic, and cultural predominance between diverse powers and cultures, the impact of colonialism and military involvement, the expanding circuits and flows of commerce, the production and exchange of goods, and the patterns of local migratory settlement that correspond to shifting demands for labour in ever more interconnected global markets.

*Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and US)* contains sculptural objects based on popular mass-produced foodstuffs ubiquitous in Hawai‘i and the Asia Pacific region. The commercial containers of these commonplace foods, associated with working-class cuisine in Hawai‘i, and with the artist’s postwar childhood, are cast in a ceramic medium known as white vitreous china. Arrayed to resemble a simple shop display, the castings of these items – canned processed meats

like Spam and Vienna sausage, evaporated milk, Cup/Pot Noodles and sardines – were produced during Yamamoto’s 2007 John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Art/Industry programme residency at the factory of Kohler, a manufacturer of bath and kitchen fixtures. Instead of simply reproducing these products’ recognizable packaging, the artist defamiliarizes their appearance by stripping out readily identifiable traits. By shifting the nature of the viewers’ rapport with visibly branded goods, Yamamoto invites audiences to see them afresh, to contemplate more closely, as she puts it, ‘the idea of these objects, and what they might represent in a larger sense’. The sculptural use of vitreous china purposely amplifies the medium’s associations with historic patterns of global trade, and, in particular, longstanding connections between the Asian Pacific and Atlantic worlds, by evoking the ancient circulation of Chinese porcelain wares that were highly valued in Europe from the sixteenth century. Imported in quantity by Britain’s North American colonies, beginning in the mid-1700s, they would in turn become a sought-after cargo for US–China trade.

Spam, among these prosaic provisions, retains a particular resonance for the artist because its introduction is linked to a vastly expanded Second World War American military presence in the Hawaiian Islands. Developed by the Hormel Foods Corporation in 1937 and packaged in a distinctive rectangular round-edged metal can, this processed pork product became an internationally recognized commodity during that global conflict. Spurred by wartime food shortages, Spam was distributed in bulk to allies like the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and China. Tracing the US armed forces’ global progress, Spam made its way to populations across swathes of the Pacific and Europe. The product has been absorbed into many diets around the world, often modified to suit local tastes in incarnations such as Spam *musubi*, the Japanese-derived finger food now popular in Hawai‘i. Currently there are large markets for Spam in Japan and Okinawa, South Korea, China, and the Philippines. Like Spam, but originating in Japan, the worldwide popularization of Cup Noodles provides Yamamoto with a contrapuntal Asian food-based connection to the Second World War era. The product – an instant noodle meal in a disposable container prepared with boiling water – was inspired by the chronic food shortages that gripped postwar Japan. Through the placement of the Cup Noodles and Spam castings alongside one another, the artist denotes that global trade and consumption have in fact often symmetrically flowed in both directions, ‘West–East and East–West’. Proceeding on the ‘opposite’ track, mass-marketed foodstuffs from East Asia are becoming an omnipresent feature in many postwar Western diets.

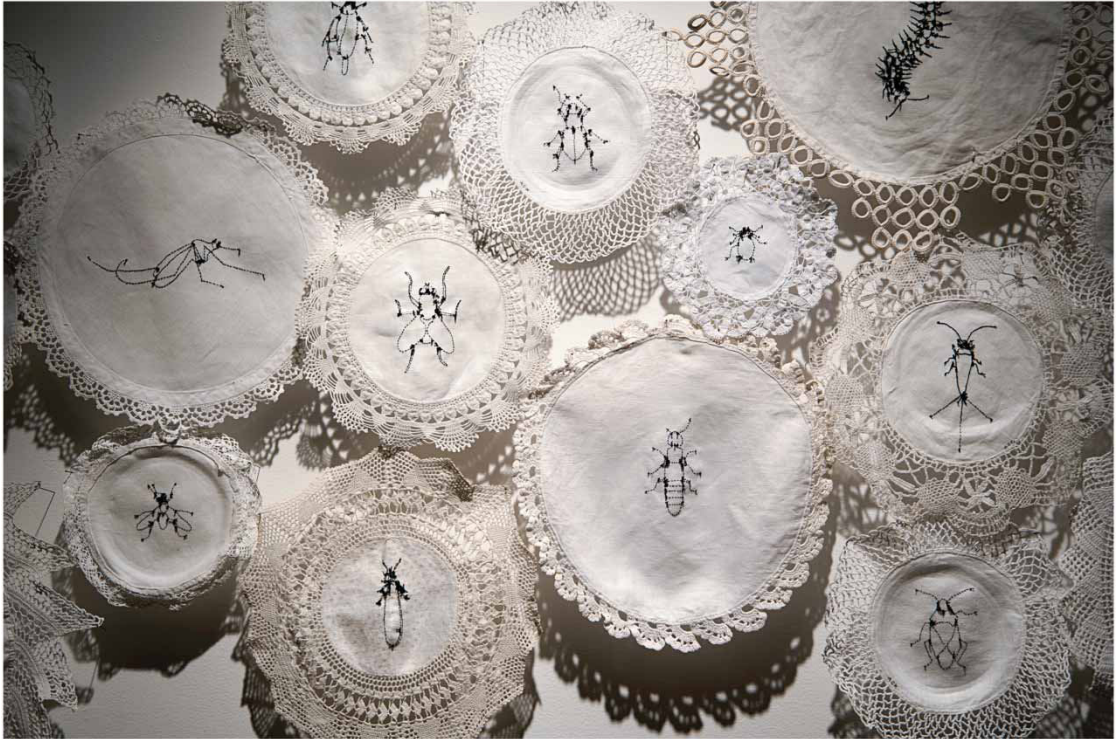
*Grandfather’s Shed*, a scale-model-like rendering of a structure hand hewn from locally salvaged materials by her maternal grandfather, provides Yamamoto’s most overtly biographical reference. This sculptural representation, inspired by the humble shelter cobbled together as a personal workshop, recalls the artist’s childhood visits to the Hawaiian island of Lana‘i where her grandfather had worked for the world’s largest agricultural estate devoted to pineapples. In 1922 New England-born industrialist James Drummond Dole developed the entire island as a single plantation, including a company town populated mainly by agricultural workers from Japan, China, Korea and the Philippines.



*Provisions, Post-War (Pacific Asia and US)*, 2007–2010, detail, vitreous china, 10.16 x 8.9 x 8.9 cm (Cup Noodle), 7.6 x 5 x 8.9 cm (SPAM), photo: Lynne Yamamoto

Digitally carved from marble, this miniature monument acts as the artist's memorial to her grandfather's memory, as well as a tribute to the creativity of ordinary people who handily adapted local resources to their own needs. Significantly, the building's roof was fashioned from corrugated iron sheeting used in constructing the plantation workers' homes. The artist also recalls that the material was incorporated into the military Quonset huts, later converted to civilian use, which proliferated throughout the islands during the war years. These observations led Yamamoto to think about how this omnipresent industrial product has travelled the world since its 1820s British invention as a cheap, easily transported and assembled building material.

Since 2005, Yamamoto has photographed architectural structures employing corrugated iron during visits to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma and Jordan, all formerly territories within the British Empire. Her fascination with this product finds recent expression in the 2011 *House for Listening to Rain*, an onsite sculpture built in the outdoor garden of the Contemporary Museum in Honolulu. The life-sized construction, inspired by childhood memories of plantation-style homes and the distinctive sound of tropical rain pelting these buildings, is a compact wooden lean-to-like structure supporting a sloped corrugated roof that provides a sheltered site of repose from which visitors can sit and gaze at the surrounding vista. The project's rough-hewn, minimal design recalls the use of natural materials, simplicity, and the meticulous attention to detail and proportion of traditional structures in Japan. The artist recalls that this aesthetic, emphasizing 'sensitively placed objects in space', made a lasting impression during visits to the ancient Ryōan-ji Zen temple and rock garden in Kyoto.



*Insect Immigrants, after Zimmerman, 1948 (Hawai'i), 2009–2010, detail, hand embroidery on found doilies, dimensions variable, detail of installation view, Genteel, 2010, photo: Lynne Yamamoto*

*Insect Immigrants, after Zimmerman, 1948 (Hawai'i)*, comprises a cluster of white linen doilies roughly embroidered with images of invasive insects now common to Hawai'i. The motif considers how overlapping processes of contact, circulation, migration and settlement have transformed Hawai'i's environment at all levels. This extends from alterations to the pre-contact biota through the introduction of new animal and plant species to the arrival of immigrant groups who brought diverse technologies, goods, foods and values. Pursuing her enduring interest in the material impact of the missionary presence on the islands, the artist amassed dozens of ornamental lace doilies. These act as stand-ins for the copious quantities of white linen the missionary families packed for their sea journeys, regarding their importation as required for proper, well-appointed and clean households in the remote Pacific. However, Yamamoto's fascination with linen's historic significance in US material culture extends beyond its role in the transoceanic transmission of social conventions and mores that imposed new status hierarchies on the Hawaiian Islands. It also suggests how American conceptions of civic culture and spiritual enlightenment are historically tied to perceived virtues of civilized Christian behaviour equally manifested through possessions, cleanliness, speech and deportment. In the pursuit of 'vernacular gentility', an emerging early nineteenth-century American middle class looked to precedents in Europe's 'aristocratic past' for rules of etiquette



and propriety.<sup>4</sup> Their quest generated a tremendous demand for more sumptuous manufactured goods like the missionaries' fine linens.

Yet the pristine state of the doilies, mounted in a cluster on the gallery's wall, is figuratively sullied by the central insertion of insects traced from an entomological text (by Elwood C Zimmerman) boldly outlined in black stitching.<sup>5</sup> The insects' images are hand embroidered, and each doily is inverted to expose the roughly threaded knotting on its underside, thereby foregrounding the 'less proper' or 'dirtier' surface that typically is hidden. This outwardly incongruous imagery emerges from Yamamoto's research, which reveals that many of today's island insects, like Hawai'i's human population, are 'immigrants' conveyed from distant lands. These include the mosquito, whose image also figures prominently in other projects, and to which she is extremely allergic. A wry humour is purposefully at work in this motif, suggesting how the concerted efforts of Americans to master a new environment could be effortlessly contravened by such apparently insignificant creatures. Nonetheless, the invasive arrival of some species, as the artist is aware, posed a real threat to the viability of the islands' agricultural development, in which many missionary families' descendants held a considerable stake – given their potentially devastating effect on monocultural crops such as sugar cane and pineapple. This migratory metaphor likewise extends to the social realm to sound a cautionary note. In this, the artist observes symmetries between the general 'alarm' inspired by a sudden proliferation of insects and fears aroused in the dominant US population by perceptions of too many foreign migrants living in their midst. In part due to her own family background, Yamamoto remains vigilant to the fluctuating ways in which immigrants, especially non-white immigrants, continue to be characterized and treated by US society at large.

*Sweating Bone China*, a precursor to *Genteel*, was mounted in 2009 at the Contemporary Museum in Honolulu. This room-sized exhibition shares many of the same mixed-media sculptural components with *Genteel*, including embroidered doilies and its repertoire of cast vitreous china objects, here displayed atop wooden pedestals. To this assemblage Yamamoto introduces dual elements of clothing: a man's white fabric handkerchief and a child's christening dress. The artist's recurring use of the colour white chiefly derives from its loose association with the linens, and the attendant ethnocentric perceptions of purity and cleanliness the missionaries implanted on the islands. But this foregrounding of whiteness might also be taken as an indirect allusion to the racialized, skin-tone-based class structure that arose with Hawai'i's growing Americanization.

Here, the freestanding, rigidly starched christening dress, once used in baptismal ceremonies, seemingly reveals the physical contours of its past owner as if a long-dead spirit still animates the object. A spectral motif to conjure a haunted counter-history, the dress's hushed allusion to absence is arranged to evoke the 'resonant ghosts of many journeys, of varying intents and purposes, beginning and ending in Hawai'i'.<sup>6</sup> The front of the garment is hand embroidered, from yoke to hem, with the distinctive outline of a nineteenth-century sailing ship in black stitches. This nautical design is copied from an antique piece of scrimshaw, a whale tooth engraved with the image of the whaling vessel *Averick*.<sup>7</sup> The *Averick*, departing the coastal town of New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1831,

4. Richard L Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1992, pp xiii–xix

5. Elwood C Zimmerman, *Insects of Hawaii: A Manual of the Insects of the Hawaiian Islands, Including an Enumeration of the Species and Notes on their Origin, Distribution, Hosts, Parasites etc.*, University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1948

6. Lynne Yamamoto, 'Sweating Bone China (2009), The Contemporary Museum', [www.lynnemamamoto.net/swbonechina/swbchitext.html](http://www.lynnemamamoto.net/swbonechina/swbchitext.html), accessed 10 October 2012

7. MacKinnon Simpson, *The Lymans of Hawai'i Island: A Pioneering Family*, Orlando H Lyman Trust, Hilo, Hawai'i, 1993, pp 26–27



*Sweating Bone China*, detail, 2009, hand embroidery on found christening dress, 76.2 x 40.6 x 35.5 cm, The Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i, photo: Lucretia Knapp

carried the Lymans – who were among the first missionary families to arrive in Hilo, Hawai'i – to the island where the artist's mother was born. As a founding symbol of the missionary presence, the vessel provides a harbinger of the far-reaching changes brought about through Protestant evangelization, including the quasi-colonial social milieu that greeted arriving Japanese contract labourers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Affixed on surrounding walls are paired linen doilies and a plain, man's handkerchief stitched in black thread with motifs referencing the objects, people and assorted living things that have made their way to Hawai'i. The doilies respectively sport a mosquito's image and the three-letter airport code 'HNL' (for Honolulu) embroidered in white

lettering on a black square. The latter recalls familiar luggage tags marking the artist's destination on regular flights back to the islands. The handkerchief bears a simple outlined depiction of Pearl Harbor's USS *Arizona* Memorial on the island of O'ahu, signifying for Yamamoto the 'procession of the military' through the islands. Many Americans pay homage to the 2400 American military personnel and civilians who died on 7 December 1941. Yet this commemorative monument, set atop the sunken hulk of a battleship destroyed in Japan's surprise attack, is also iconic in another way for Japanese Americans, as the incident would immediately alter and shadow the lives of their successive generations. Moreover, as Yamamoto tellingly observes, the air and naval assault by imperial Japan in fact 'solidified US claims on the islands'. The magnitude of human loss on that infamous day reinforced the general public's perception that Hawai'i, previously viewed as a distant exotic outpost, was an integral part of US soil. Hence, the islands were enshrined in the nation's historical memory as a sacred site Americans gave their lives to defend.

### CODA

Responding to the vortex of stresses buffeting Hawai'i, Yamamoto's projects suggest the generative possibilities in localizing collisions and intersections between distant sites, lands and histories. Yamamoto's approach to historical memory – solidly sited and anchored in quotidian experience – underscores the powerful influence that materiality exerts on cultural processes and human consciousness alike. Her artistic interests overlap with discourses on themes of material culture, the history of domesticity and the evolution of private life that have gathered momentum since the 1990s. Closely informed by the inescapable observation that objects acquire histories, value and 'social lives' through human use, the artist's intensive scrutiny of specific objects thus opens out to considerations of the ways they are assigned social meaning as they move through the world.<sup>8</sup>

Affinities between material culture and foodstuffs likewise offer compelling points of departure. Especially when associated with childhood, foodstuffs provide visceral mnemonic connections to sites mutually swept up and conjoined by far-spread events and circumstances. As with Yamamoto, circulations of consumer goods, culture and political influence through twentieth-century US military involvement in the Asia Pacific region are given concrete expression in artists' incorporation of references to products – Spam, chocolate bars, cigarettes – introduced by American servicemen into the local populations. In Michael Arcega's *SPAM/MAPS: World* (2001) and *SPAM/MAPS: Oceania* (2007), hardened slabs of Spam are fashioned into the landmasses of world and regional maps. Mischievously conceiving of this device as a cartographic emblem for the 'ongoing influence of the United States on many nations', this San Francisco-based artist appropriated Spam as the sculptural medium that best presents a haptic conduit to fond recollections of its consumption during his youth in the Philippines, when he was unaware of the historic reasons for its local ubiquity.<sup>9</sup> Another memorable example is *8490 Days of Memory* (1996) by Korean-born artist Ik-Joong

8. See Arjun Appadurai, ed, *The Social Lives of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.

9. Michael Arcega, correspondence with the author, 2 December 2011

Kang. Through the aromatic, chocolate-covered statue of General Douglas MacArthur, the artist alludes to conflicted recollections of a devastated landscape and the sugary treats handed out by GIs to hungry children – and registers his ambivalence over the sweetly alluring yet fragile promise of protection and plenty the US offered postwar South Korea.

Immediately recognizable international brands, such as Coca-Cola, likewise act as material yardsticks to engage with contemporary conjunctions of globalized consumerism, foodways and cultural change. To note their response to transnational influences, two Chinese sculptors, Beijing resident Ma Jun, and New York-based Zhang Hongtu, transpose the iconic flowery surface designs of Qing dynasty porcelain (1644–1911) to sculptural objects crafted in the conspicuous shapes of contemporary mass-produced consumer goods. Whereas each artist draws on antique chinaware to meld traditional and modern cultural signifiers, in the *New China Series* (2005–2007) Ma rendered items such as aluminium cans and plastic bottles manufactured by the Coca-Cola Company in multi-coloured ceramics to comment on the erosion of traditional Chinese values in a modernizing nation gripped by spreading consumerism. By comparison, Zhang's *Kekou-Kele* (2002), consisting of clustered blue-and-white Coca-Cola bottles, embodies the artist's ongoing experience of 'living within two cultures simultaneously'.<sup>10</sup> The directions taken by artists like these have precedents in earlier works like *From the Land of Porcelain* by Sowon Kwon, a Korean-born US conceptual artist. This 1993 installation referenced the historic trade in Asian porcelain wares and the influence of chinoiserie and japonisme on Western art, artists and arts patronage. Alluding to artist James A M Whistler's Orientalist nineteenth-century commission, *Harmony in Blue and Gold* (aka *The Peacock Room*, 1876–1877), the piece considered, 'how cultural projections and identifications can happen through the circulation of art objects'.<sup>11</sup> The installation was featured in a group exhibition entitled 'Trade Routes' (New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1993) that engaged issues of globalization and its uneven effects upon far-flung places, peoples, and economies.

Lynne Yamamoto's locational focus denotes the significance of place as a recurrent subject for art, and also signals how the ongoing conceptual realignment of Asian American art and artistic concerns proceed increasingly along transnational and inter-regional axes. The impact of this heightened attention to multiple global framings, often invoking themes of transnational circulation and materiality, is likewise evident in changing exhibition practices. Shows like 'transPOP: Korea Vietnam Remix' (Arko Art Centre, Seoul, South Korea, 2007), and 'Present Tense Biennial 2009: Chinese Character' (Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco) juxtapose art from Asian and Asian overseas communities to trace trajectories of groups, influences and historical relations, and even to manifest how notions of Asian-ness, nation and home are provisional and mutable. The organizers of 'Chinese Character', conceiving of contemporary Chinese-ness as straddling multiple points of attachment, solicited artworks by Chinese from the mainland and other parts of Asia, Chinese Americans, multi-ethnic Asian Americans and non-Chinese. 'Galleon Trade' (2007–2008), envisioned as a broadly based international art exchange, took as its subject circulation within spheres of former European colonial empires. Seeking to 'create new routes of

10. Alexandra Chang, 'The Art of Cosmopolitanism: Visual Potentialities in Ma Jun, Tomokazu Matsuyama, David Diao, and Patty Chang', in Christiane Brosius and Roland Wenzlhuemer, eds, *Transcultural Turbulences: Toward a Multi-Sited Reading of Image Flows*, Springer, Berlin, 2011, p 136

11. Sowon Kwon, 'From the Land of Porcelain', in Renée Green and Karim Aïnouz, eds, *Negotiations in the Contact Zone*, Assírio and Alvim, Lisbon, Portugal, 2003, p 97

cultural exchange', this series of projects was loosely inspired by the metaphor of sixteenth- to early nineteenth-century connections among far-flung sites in China, the Philippines, Mexico and California – all distant locations yoked together by trade from Canton carried along the Manila–Acapulco sea route to Spanish possessions in the Americas, and on to Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The sprawlingly ambitious 'Caribbean: Crossroads of the World' (2012) likewise attends to the current effort to point to transcultural convergences, located subjectivities and transnational dialogues.<sup>13</sup> This expansive rubric encompasses numerous islands and contiguous continents, manifold cultures, systems of belief, conceptions of otherness and relations of power. The framing of the three New York City exhibition sites offers unruly mixtures of art, historic photographs, ethnographic objects and material culture that conjoin peoples from Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. The project's translocal epistemology, emphasizing the enduring impact of complexly enmeshed sites with a global span, bears a fundamental kinship to Yamamoto's view of Hawai'i and the Asia Pacific region as a porous and dynamic zone through which diverse influences and points of connection ceaselessly flow. Art that surveys the impact of the global via the local confers a powerful lens to observe in microcosm the very real consequences – social, material, affective – of the intricate connections within which the world is thoroughly enmeshed. Ultimately, a socially engaged yet intrinsically poetic practice like Lynne Yamamoto's serves to inject a robust contemporary arts voice into these multi-located circuits of trans-historic experience.

12. 'Galleon Trade', <http://galleontrade.org/index.html>, accessed 7 October 2012

13. 'Caribbean: Crossroads of the World' was organized by El Museo del Barrio, Queens Museum of Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York City (12 June 2012–6 January 2013).