

Chiharu Shiota

Eye to Eye

June 1 –
Sep 10, 2023

MEDIA ORIENTATION
May 30, 2023, 11 am

OPENING
May 31, 2023, 6 to 9 pm

curated by Sabine Schaschl

Museum Haus Konstruktiv's solo exhibition on Chiharu Shiota (b. 1972 in Osaka, lives and works in Berlin) is the first to be dedicated to this internationally acclaimed Japanese artist in German-speaking Switzerland. Alongside recent paintings, works on paper and sculptural objects, the room-filling thread installation *Eye to Eye*, specially created for this Zurich exhibition, will be on display.

Chiharu Shiota is known for her poetic installations of densely interwoven threads that spread out in the space. Although she studied painting in Japan and Australia, this artist turned to performance and installation in the mid-1990s. The knotting and interweaving of threads, initially in black and later also in red and white, has enabled her to explore space and to draw in it, as if with a line. For Chiharu Shiota, her meshes of red thread also constitute an analogy to interpersonal relationships; thread can be tied and connected, but it can also become tangled or even torn. The net-like thread structures thus become metaphors for relationships of all kinds.

In *Eye to Eye*, the installation developed for Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Chiharu Shiota dispenses with such dense thread constructions. An overwhelming quantity of blood-red ropes hang vertically from the ceiling. Countless worn pairs of glasses and sunglasses that the artist has collected over time are knotted into them.

Increasingly, Chiharu Shiota incorporates used objects into her installations, because in these, she sees a direct link to the people who once possessed them. Although the former owners are not directly on site in this work, they are nevertheless present via marks left on the glasses. The presence of the absent is a concept that runs through Shiota's oeuvre as a common thread.

In *Eye to Eye*, Chiharu Shiota leaves it up to the audience to find their own connection to objects, to identify with them, to approach them with their own thoughts and memories. Although each visitor's perception may be different, the artist believes that the feelings we have are universal.

"Grief will feel like grief to each of us," she writes, "pain will be pain and love is love... We are all connected despite the differences. How much can we share the pain of others?"

Ideas and questions about human existence, for instance about where we come from, where we are going, and what remains of us once we are no longer here, also arise when viewing the exhibits on the 2nd floor. These all bear witness to Shiota's preoccupation with life, death, and "everything in between". *Out of My Body* (2020), the installation in the left-hand half of the room, features pieces of cowhide and goatskin dyed red and attached to the ceiling, floating at different heights in the space. A pair of bronze feet stand on the floor; they are casts of the artist's own feet. After being confronted with cancer for a second time, she felt a desire to make works out of durable materials for posterity. She writes about dealing with this disease, and her own mortality, as follows:

"When I was informed that my cancer had returned, the ground fell beneath my feet. In the hospital, my body was not my body anymore, my body was handed through a system, broken apart and put back together until I was whole again. My body has healed again and now when my feet touch the earth, I feel connected to life... We are all going to die someday. But death is not a limitation of our existence or memory. It belongs to the cycle of life as a new state of being. It is like moving to a bigger universe where our thoughts and memories remain. In the end, I transformed my suffering to create something new, which made me feel hopeful."

The fact that Chiharu Shiota sees death not as an end point, but as a moment of metamorphosis toward an altered state, is also evident in *Cells* (2022), which comprises what she considers organ-like objects, made of glass and surrounded by wire:

"The glass objects," writes Shiota, "resemble organs that are wrapped in wire. The wire restricts the glass and at the same time shapes the glass into a new form. It is an embodiment of the physical stress my body experienced during my chemotherapy. Cancer cells once growing in the body, removed, and new cells regrowing. The glass is fragile but at the same time so durable that it can be shaped into a new form. Old cells dying and new cells created with every breath of life."

State of Being (Books) and *State of Being (Dress)* are the titles of the two glass cases created in 2022 and placed in the right-hand half of the room. In one object, parts of a book purchased at a flea market have had red threads spun around them; the other object safeguards a worn white child's dress entwined in black thread. Here, the dress, which is a recurring motif in Shiota's oeuvre, acts as a substitute for the absent body. The artist generally perceives dresses as a "second skin"; they thus form the transition between interior and exterior, between the human being and the universe. The latter is additionally emphasized by the black coloring of the thread, because for Shiota, black is associated with depth, with the night sky or with the big bang from which the universe emerged. The poetic drawings in the *Connected to the Universe* series from 2023, produced using water-based crayon, are to be seen in the same context. Tiny black figures stand between or opposite large cell-like structures. The little people drawn in black are each connected, at navel level, to the red, blue or black visual worlds in their surroundings by incorporated red threads. Here, everything merges fluidly: thread and color, line and surface, conscious and unconscious, formulable and unnameable. "I was questioning how my body is connected to the universe," as the artist said in 2019, "and where does my consciousness go when my body is gone?" These drawings provide a possible answer to that question.

Chiharu Shiota studied painting at Kyoto Seika University from 1992 to 1996. After a study visit to Canberra, she attended universities in Germany: HFBK Hamburg from 1996 to 1997, followed by HBK Braunschweig until 1999 and subsequently HdK Berlin. She describes the creation of her expansive installations as an act of liberation from the confines of paper and canvas. Alongside installations, sculptural objects and drawings, she also realizes stage designs for theater and opera. Recently, she has returned to painting. Shiota's oeuvre has received international attention, particularly since the 56th Biennale di Venezia in 2015, where she produced the piece *The Key in the Hand* for the Japanese pavilion. Her artwork is regularly shown in group and solo exhibitions around the world.

MEDIATION PROGRAM

May 31, from 6 pm: OPENING

Speaking from 6.30 pm: Andreas Durisch, President of the Foundation for Constructive, concrete and conceptual art, Yoshinori Fujiyama, Ambassador of Japan to Switzerland, and Sabine Schaschl, Director Museum Haus Konstruktiv.

June 9 to 11: ZÜRICH ART WEEKEND

Program at: zurichartweekend.com

June 10, 11.30 am: SPECIAL GUIDED TOUR.

Sabine Schaschl, Director Museum Haus Konstruktiv, will guide in English through the current exhibition.

Registration is required at: anmeldung@hauskonstruktiv.ch

June 20, 6 pm: MEMBERS' TOUR

Exclusive tour of the current exhibitions followed by an aperitif for our members and those who wish to become members.

September 2, from 6 pm: LANGE NACHT DER ZÜRCHER MUSEEN

Program at: langenacht-zuerich.ch

Public guided tours take place on Wednesdays at 6.15 pm and Sundays at 11.45 am.

Information on other events and our digital program can be found at: hauskonstruktiv.ch

The mediation program on site as well as the press images are constantly updated.

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