

Press Kit
Exhibition

Tàpies' Centenary Year

Chiharu Shiota.

Everyone, a Universe

22 March - 23 June, 2024
Curator: Imma Prieto



Chiharu Shiota. *Everyone, a Universe*, 2024. Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona.
Photography: Daniel Solano. © VEGAP, Madrid, 2024 and the artist.

FUNDACIÓANTONITÀPIES

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies presents Chiharu Shiota's exhibition *Chiharu Shiota. Everyone, a Universe*.

- The Japanese artist, based in Berlin, intervenes in the exhibition spaces of the Fundació with a site-specific installation.

- The dialogue with the institution unfolds in a double sense: physical, responding to the architecture, and symbolic, acknowledging the parallels with Tàpies.

- The relationship with the earth, with past and memory, and the exchange between presence and absence, will allow the artist to weave a rereading of the past through evocation, but with an eye on the contemporary moment.

- The exhibition, curated by Imma Prieto, is accompanied by activities for all audiences, especially an inaugural conversation with the artist and the *Memory and trauma* seminar with the Rādika Foundation.

The work of Chiharu Shiota (Osaka, 1972) breathes a universality that appeals to the hearts and minds of people of different generations and from distant geographical locations, the massive scale of her works inviting the viewer to be part of this immersive experience. The artist succeeds in making presence evident in absence, like life and death. She is inspired by memory, trauma and uncertainty; concerns that are shared by all humans.

The artist and Antoni Tàpies (Barcelona, 1923-2012) share the ability to pose questions about the human condition through their work and through the use of common, everyday objects. Furthermore, both artists suffered a serious illness, and death appears as a recurring theme in their artistic careers. The work of the two creators also shows an interest in the concept of the wall, either as a border, as a limitation or as a witness to the past.

While Tàpies explains in his writings that the dramatic situation suffered by adults and all the cruel fantasies of his time were drawn and seemed to be inscribed on the walls around him, Shiota, for her part, affirms through this project that to be alive means to endure suffering, and that this is part of our existence: "Death forms a part of my work. I view it not as an end, but rather as a new beginning. For me, death represents a new state of existence within the cycle of life. Death is a state that moves towards a larger universe."

As part of the programme commemorating the centenary of the birth of Antoni Tàpies, the Fundació has invited Chiharu Shiota to intervene in the spaces of the museum building with of an artistic installation that explores the place from which we speak and from which we talk to each other. A recognition of the space as the place where the work is born, produced and, in this case, ceases to exist.

In the words of Imma Prieto, director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and curator of the project: “With this exhibition we delve into the most relevant binomials for human beings, the life-death or eros-thanatos dichotomy, which is essential for approaching Shiota’s work, but also that of Antoni Tàpies. At the same time, recognising it as one of the most quintessential ontological questions, we deem it necessary to open this space for reflection given the importance that memory acquires in our lives. In fact, it is from the life-death binomial that the three concepts structuring the exhibition unfold: memory, object and body. This is how memory becomes essential for knowing who we are and where we come from, a memory that reveals itself through the interaction with certain objects. Equally, it is in the body where the traces of what causes the presence of memory are collected; or its traumatic absence”.

Chiharu Shiota was born in Japan and studied in Germany, where she has lived for over twenty-five years. Death has been one of her concerns from the beginning, given that the search for the meaning of existence is often equivalent to the search around death and its denial. In 2005, when she became ill with cancer and faced the possibility of death, her awareness of what lies beyond personal disappearance became a major concern. “I came to the conclusion that living and dying actually belong to the same dimension”, she wrote to Mami Kataoka in 2019. “With death in front of me, I realized that there was a world shared by the universe that I had inside me and the outer universe. So it occurred to me eventually that my body was closer to that universe. When our time is up, we may dissolve completely into that universe. Perhaps death is not a return to nothing but, rather, a matter of integrating ourselves, beyond the extinction of life, into death, into a fusion with something bigger than ourselves. This is how I began to incorporate death into my work: death not as an end, but as something equivalent to life.”

Since her fight against the disease, Shiota has included body parts in her work, revealing the feeling of presence in absence through intermediary objects such as beds, chairs and shoes. In a text about the project she is presenting at the Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Shiota writes: “The objects in my installations always represent the existence of an individual. When I look at the chairs, I see people sitting next to each other, but each one is a universe unto themselves.” The installation includes 43 chairs purchased from flea markets and two thousand skeins of wool.

For the artist, the red threads symbolize the micro-universe made up of blood and blood vessels that circulate through our bodies and, in its most literal sense, also

make visible the mutual connections that bind humanity. In Shiota's work, the macrocosm and the microcosm are unified, so that, almost naturally, we perceive that there is an intervening force seeking to preserve the sense of order and balance. In her work, various contrasting dualisms are presented – life and death, dream and reality, inside and outside –, which, in turn, is also an attempt to find intermediate zones.

Shiota's search for fundamental truths gives rise to a certain universality that cuts through to the deepest layers of the subconscious. "I realized that for humans, dying is not just a matter of the mind expiring: it is the whole body that dies. Physics tends to deny the existence of the soul, but in accepting my own death, I felt that the soul exists. If the human body is made of atoms, these must not disappear... if the soul (consciousness) endures, even after death, what is the nature of the world and the universe we inhabit?"

Shiota's universe is indebted not only to her own life experiences, but also to the work of the Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930-2017), the Japanese Muraoka Saburo (1928-2013), and the Cuban Ana Mendieta (1948-1985), whom Shiota discovered in Japan and who has inspired the artist from the beginning of her career.

The exhibition *Chiharu Shiota. Everyone, a Universe*, curated by Imma Prieto, continues until 23 June 2024, and includes two installations, two works on paper and five sculptures that allow us to discover the connections between Shiota's work and that of Antoni Tàpies. The project is completed with several activities addressed to the general public and families, together with the educational programme, as well as other unique experiences, within the framework of the [Tàpies' Centenary Year](#). The aim is to further the knowledge of the work and thought of Antoni Tàpies, contribute to updating the reading of his work and create new ways of looking at his legacy.

Text of the curator

· Poetics of the thread that the body breathes

Creating spaces within spaces, establishing a dialogue with the specific architecture of each place with a single objective: to evoke deep emotions and reflections on life, time, memory and identity. Chiharu Shiota (Osaka, 1972) creates installations that are intimately rooted in structures already imbued with other people's stories. With her immersive and deeply poetic art, she invites us to explore the mysteries of the universe and the human soul, emphasising the dichotomy between life and death. In fact, it is from the binomial eros-thanatos that three of the concepts that structure the exhibition *Everyone, a Universe* unfold: memory, object and body. This is how memory becomes essential to knowing who we are and where we come from, a memory that can be revealed through interaction with certain objects. Equally, it is in the body where the traces of what causes the presence of memory are collected; or its traumatic absence. Shiota's installations are social, political and poetic invocations in which individual and collective claims converge.

The entire installation becomes a space for reflection and knowledge, opening windows to a past that is ours, from the present and with the intent of facing a conscious future. At the heart of Shiota's work lies thread, a seemingly simple yet powerfully symbolic element that becomes the medium through which the artist weaves her visual narratives. Her intricate webs of thread, stretching across the space like constellations in the night sky, remind us of the complexity of human relationships and the interconnectedness of our individual lives. Each thread, each node, carries the story of an encounter, an experience, an emotion, all of them intertwined with the others to form a tapestry of shared memory. It is necessary to pay attention to the colour, to the reddish colour of the threads that evoke blood. The frameworks generated by her installations become the circulation of blood and/or neuronal connections, invoking life, a world of possibilities.

In her installations, Shiota uses everyday domestic objects such as beds, chairs and clothing to create evocative landscapes imbued with a sense of intimacy and vulnerability. These objects, impregnated with the footprint of human life, become symbols of our earthly existence, reminding us of the fragility and transience of life. Wrapped in Shiota's webs of thread they take on a new dimension of meaning, inviting us to reflect on our own experience of the world and our connection to others. Taking memory as her recurring theme, Shiota has spent much of her artistic career exploring how individual and collective memories shape our identity and perception of the world. In many of her installations she uses personal objects, such as letters, photographs and toys, to evoke past memories and experiences. Caught in the webs of thread, these objects become tangible vestiges of memory, reminding us of the importance of remembering and honouring our

past. Shiota's performances are acts of pure poetry in motion, in which the artist becomes the instrument of expression. Through simple and repetitive gestures, such as weaving and unravelling threads, she takes us on a journey of introspection and transformation, where time fades away and space becomes a blank canvas for the exploration of the human soul. Each action is one of creation and destruction, a reminder of the ephemeral nature of life, where the eternal search for meaning in a changing world becomes neverending movement. Viewers must allow themselves to become part of the installation, to carry out the performative action, such that our presence comes into play with the cosmogony of threads causing memories to emerge. Shiota's art, with its deep emotional resonance and its timeless beauty, reminds us of the human capacity to create moments in which we experience deep meanings and atavistic connections. Within the spaces she inhabits, every gesture becomes movement and stands against today's world, a world marked by uncertainty and transience, by emptiness and superficiality.

Chiharu Shiota is an artist whose work transcends the boundaries of time and space, inviting us to explore the unknown mysteries of our psyche, of our subconscious minds, through a deeply moving artistic and poetic expression. With each installation and performance (whether hers or made by us transiting the space), she reminds us of the beauty and fragility of our existence and invites us to contemplate the universe within us. Her art has the capacity to evoke deep emotions and reflections on life and death, and it does so with subtlety and forcefulness, so that through this natural contradiction we come close to a thread, just one thread, a line that communicates and connects one with the universe. Thousands of connections generating moments of knowledge. Individual and collective memories of unknown times and spaces that are nevertheless our own. In her installations we can feel life and death beating: they recall images and words, neuronal connections through which thousands of information units circulate, personal, specific and unique, yet common to us all. And it is in these shared spaces that the nodules become a creative force, but above all a caring and welcoming force. Their red filaments could be cracks from which life seeps, full of referential symbols, such as the landscape of empty, joined chairs that the artist presents on this occasion, or the skin that takes root through their metallic feet.

As stated earlier, with this exhibition we delve into the most relevant binomials for human beings, the life-death or eros-thanatos dichotomy, which is essential for approaching Shiota's work, but also that of Antoni Tàpies. At the same time, recognising it as one of the most quintessential ontological questions, we deem it necessary to open this space for reflection given the importance that memory holds in our lives.

Imma Prieto

Text of the artist

· Everyone, a Universe

Antoni Tàpies and I share a common interest in asking the big questions on the human condition in our art and using ordinary, everyday objects to do so. While we arrive at different media and artworks, I share a deep understanding for his work. We both experienced the fate of a severe sickness and death is a recurring theme in both of our art. I don't find it surprising that we also have a common interest in walls, be it as borders, limitations or as witnesses of past times.

When I see used objects at flea markets – I can feel the existence of a person. Even though I have no information on the item or its former owners, I can feel their human presence inscribed in the patina. Which lets me question what it means to be human. What remains from us when our body is gone. I am not particularly interested in the object itself. For me, it is just a bearer of a former existence, a placeholder for the people who used it. The objects in my installations always represent an individual's existence. When I look at the chairs I see people, all sitting next to each other, but everyone is a universe for him/herself.

My art has changed since I was sick. My body was removed, broken, and put back together in order to heal. This has changed my relationship to it and after my recovery I made bronze casts of my arms, hands, feet, and legs. I wanted to scatter my body parts on the floor. My body is broken, but at the same time every single body part expresses much more emotion than my whole body could. I can relate why Tàpies worked with casts and reliefs of his body in his later work. I assume he was also driven by the wish to preserve it. My thread installations are usually discarded after the exhibition, they only exist in the memory of the viewers. When I was faced with death, I wanted to work with materials that would remain after my body was long gone and I also wanted my body to remain in some sort. My glass objects resemble organs that are wrapped in wire. The wire restricts the glass and at the same time support it. 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.

I have wondered how often one is able to experience death in a lifespan. To be alive means to endure suffering, it is part of our existence. Tàpies has thought a great deal about why a life without suffering is not possible. He has turned to Buddhism for answers and while I don't share the interest, I feel that 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. I try

to overcome my suffering by transforming it into something new, which I can share with the world, and this makes me hopeful.

The title of my exhibition comes from a famous quote by Tàpies “The dramatic sufferings of adults and all the cruel fantasies of those of my own age, (...), appeared to inscribe themselves on the walls around me.” I combined it with something I have written above. At Fundació, I feel the presence of Antoni Tàpies around me. It is an honor to exhibit here and to be in dialogue with the work and thoughts of a kindred spirit.

Chiharu Shiota

Biography

Chiharu Shiota was born in Osaka in 1972. She lives and works in Berlin.

Shiota's inspiration often emerges from a personal experience or emotion which she expands into universal human concerns such as life, death and relationships. She has redefined the concept of memory and consciousness by collecting ordinary objects such as shoes, keys, beds, chairs and dresses, and engulfing them in immense thread structures. She explores this sensation of a 'presence in the absence' with her installations, but also presents intangible emotions in her sculptures, drawings, performance videos, photographs and canvases.

In 2008, she was awarded with 'the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's Art Encouragement Prize for New Artists, Japan'.

Her work has been displayed at international institutions worldwide including the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2023); Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art (QAGoMA), Brisbane (2022); ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe (2021); Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington (2020); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2019); Gropius Bau, Berlin (2019); Art Gallery of South Australia (2018); Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK (2018); Power Station of Art, Shanghai (2017); K21 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015); Smithsonian Institution Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington DC (2014); the Museum of Art, Kochi (2013); and the National Museum of Art, Osaka (2008) among others. She has also participated in numerous international exhibitions such as the Oku-Noto International Art Festival (2017); Sydney Biennale (2016); Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (2009) and Yokohama Triennale (2001). In 2015, Shiota was selected to represent Japan at the 56th Venice Biennale.

List of works

CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Everyone, a Universe</i> 2024 Wool, chairs Dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist				2024 Glass, metal wire 27.5 × 17.5 × 11 cm Courtesy of the artist
CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Out of My Body</i> 2024 Cowhide leather, bronze, cord Dimensions variable Courtesy of the artist				CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Cell</i> 2024 Glass, metal wire 28.8 × 19.3 × 7.8 cm Courtesy of the artist
CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Red Line XII</i> 2012 Oil pastel on paper 136 × 200 cm Courtesy of Galería FERNANDEZ	NF/NIEVES			CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Cell</i> 2024 Glass, metal wire 26.6 × 28 × 21 cm Courtesy of the artist
CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Red Line XIII</i> 2012 Oil pastel on paper 150 × 100 cm Courtesy of Galería FERNANDEZ	NF/NIEVES			CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Cell</i> 2024 Glass, metal wire 32 × 27,4 × 17,5 cm Courtesy of the artist
CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Cell</i>				CHI HARU SHIOTA <i>Cell</i> 2024 Glass, metal wire 41 × 27.5 × 26 cm Courtesy of the artist

Public Programme

• Opening discussion

With Chiharu Shiota, Imma Prieto and Rosa Martínez.

Thursday, March 21, 2024, at 6 p.m.

Marking the opening of the exhibition *Everyone, a Universe*, the Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota, the director of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies and curator of the exhibition Imma Prieto, and the curator and writer Rosa Martínez, who has already worked and collaborated with the artist on other projects, will hold a discussion to explore Shiota's creative universe and to connect it with the spirit of Tàpies. While in conversation, all three will aim to establish a game of correspondences and a mirror effect, evoking symbols, rereading the past and thinking from the standpoint of the present.

• Seminar *Memory and trauma*

With Rādika Foundation.

Wednesday, May 8, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Session dedicated to exploring memory, beyond neural connections and the brain, as a dynamic structure connected to breathing, and trauma as an undigested and inherited experience. This seminar will feature the participation of Nazareth Castellanos, neuroscience researcher, Mario Salvador, psychologist and psychotherapist, and Maria Macaya, founder and president of Rādika, dedicated to giving voice to mental and emotional health issues.

• Discussion *Back and forth. East and West*

With Ricard Bru and Nana Shimomura.

Tuesday, May 28, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Fifth of the intergenerational and interdisciplinary series of talks *Today is Tàpies*, with the specialist in Japanese history and culture Ricard Bru and the multidisciplinary artist Nana Shimomura. Starting from the notion of modernity that eastern thought and art inspired in Tàpies, the discussion will examine the contribution of the orient in the western world, from the fetishistic gaze to the fan phenomena of Korean pop to the fascination with Japonisme throughout Catalan history.

Educational Programme

- Approximations

Every Saturday at 5:30 p.m.

Guided visit to current exhibitions *Tàpies. The Zen Imprint* and *Chiharu Shiota. Everyone, a Universe*, and an introduction to the history of the modernist building.

- Thread and memory: family workshop of memories and stories

By 3ART (Dimas Fàbregas, Marco Fragoso and Toni Vila).

Saturday, May 4, 2024, at 11:00 a.m.

3ART (Dimas Fàbregas, Marco Fragoso and Toni Vila) offers us a participative workshop through which we will connect personal stories, and to transform a space of the Fundació based on memories and emotions.

- *Art and the exotic imagination of other cultures. Other ways of looking; other ways of representing*

Training capsule for teachers.

Tuesday, May 7, 2024, at 6 p.m.

Dynamic face-to-face training capsule by 3ART (Dimas Fàbregas, Marco Fragoso and Toni Vila) in which theoretical and practical content will be worked on around Antoni Tàpies and his legacy, to deep in a more extensive and creative way and integrate, based on the figure of the artist, concepts applicable transversally to the school curriculum.

· Barcelona Poetry and Night of the Museums 2024

Saturday 18 May 2024, from 8.00 p.m.

As part of the programming of the Barcelona Poesia festival, the poet Miquel Desclot will recite a selection of poems included in the poetry anthology *En coixí d'herba* (On a Grass Pillow), which includes an extensive selection of classic Japanese lyrics, from the fourth century to the present day, with haikus and tankas chosen and transcribed by Desclot. The recital will be accompanied by the music of the shakuhachi flutist, Horacio Curti.

Saturday 18 May 2024, from 9.00 p.m.

During the Night of the Museums, the Fundació Antoni Tàpies offers guided visits to the current exhibitions *The Zen imprint* and *Chiharu Shiota. Everyone, a Universe*.

Press Kit

Contents available for media at <https://fundaciotapies.org/en/press/> and [images](#)

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