

Press Release

Yoshiko Shimada “It’s Not Yours to Decide!”

Sat. 15 April – Sat. 10 June 2023 11:00 - 19:00 Closed on Sun., Mon. and National Holidays



Ota Fine Arts is pleased to present "It's Not Yours to Decide!", Yoshiko Shimada's first solo exhibition in 21 years. Since the late 1980s, Shimada has been working on the theme of women and war, and has long been at the vanguard of feminist art in Japan and abroad. She is also known as a scholar of avant-garde art in 1960s Japan.

In this exhibition, Shimada will feature the Chu-pi-ren (Women's Union for Liberalization of Abortion and Legalization of the Pill), an organisation founded in 1972 to oppose the anti-abortion law and demand the lifting of the ban on the pill. The Chu-pi-ren, led by Misako Enoki, wore pink helmets with female symbols and engaged in radical and outrageous activities, which were widely covered by the media at the time, including weekly magazines and variety shows. Due to the way the Chu-pi-ren was portrayed in the media, the group is still being treated as a joke today, and not at all appreciated, even amongst feminists. Shimada, however, urges that the activities of the Chu-pi-ren, which clearly asserted women's "right to self-determination" regarding sexuality and reproduction, needs to be re-examined now.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights are human rights that allow women to decide for themselves, and the idea that these rights should be guaranteed is globally recognized as a goal for achieving Gender Equality, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Japan, however, the law requires spousal consent for abortion, even for unwanted pregnancies caused by domestic violence, and abortion surgeries are not covered by insurance. Women's health and human rights are still under the control of the state and its authorities.

Shimada likens the Chu-pi-ren to a prophet (Sybil), and attempts to revive the spirit of the Chu-pi-ren, who acted proactively to win rights from the paternalistic authorities. In this exhibition, we present photographic works, paintings, and video works that embody this determination. Rights are not something that someone hands you. And if someone tries to "grant" you the right concerning your own affairs, you should firmly declare: **"It's Not Yours to Decide!"**

[Yoshiko Shimada] Born in 1959 in Tokyo. Lives and works in Chiba. Shimada graduated from Scripps College in 1982 and received Ph.D. from Kingston University, London in 2015. She explores the themes of cultural memory and the role of women in the Asia-Pacific War, as both aggressors and victims. As methods of expression, she uses printmaking, installation, video, performance, research and archiving. She also works as an art historian and archivist. Her research interests include art and politics in the post-war Japan, alternative art education, and feminism. Her works have been shown widely in exhibitions such as "Fanatic Heart", Para Site, Hong Kong (2022-2023), "Spirit Labor: Duration, Difficulty, and Affect", GARAGE Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2021-2022), "Japan Unlimited", MuseumsQuartier Wien (2019), "After 'Freedom of Expression?'" Aichi Triennale (2019) and "Beyond Hiroshima" Tel Aviv University Art Gallery (2015). In 2017, she curated "From Nirvana to Catastrophe: Matsuzawa Yutaka and His 'Commune in Imaginary Space'" at Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo. She currently lectures on feminism and art at the University of Tokyo.

Talk Event

Yoshiko Shimada × Hiroki Yamamoto (Cultural researcher)

"Society and Art"

Date: Sat. 15 April | Time: 16:00 - 17:30

Yoshiko Shimada × Akiko Shimizu (Professor, The University of Tokyo)

"Feminism today and in the future"

Date: Sat. 20 May | Time: 16:00 - 17:30

* Only in Japanese.

* Further details will be announced on the website and SNS.

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT



It's Not Yours to Decide!

Yoshiko Shimada

Self-determination means declaring it is not yours to decide.

Ryuko Kurita, *Umeki kara hajimaru (Starting with a Moan)*, Shinkyō Shuppansha, 2022.

When we assert our "right to self-determination," especially our sexual and reproductive rights, we are often told: "But you can't just insist on your rights" or "You should fulfil your obligations too" or "Think about others". They say "the best way is to humbly explain and have people understand and reach a consensus beforehand". But we are all born with equal rights. It is not something that is granted or endowed by others, nor is it a barter with self-responsibility or obligation. And of course, it has nothing to do with religion or morality.

Chu-pi-ren as a prophet

Chu-pi-ren, established in 1972, was ostracized by the media and other feminists alike as "radical" and "ridiculous" for its direct action and assertion of the right to self-determination. But their claims are still very relevant today; they insisted on women's reproductive rights, demanded compensation for domestic violence toward women in the home (this was before the term "domestic violence" was known), established a women's party to bring women into national politics, and requested more women in full-time official government positions. Although Chu-pi-ren's methods were frowned upon as sensationalist, the members' actions clearly targeting authority are commendable today. Perhaps they raised these issues 50 years too early.

Resurrecting the Chu-pi-ren

For the following 50 years since the foundation of Chu-pi-ren, we have been continually told that "loudly asserting your rights" and "taking radical action" was "bad". Thanks to that (?) it took more than 40 years for the legalization of the birth control pill, gender equality has not progressed, and hate crimes remain rampant. We are fed up with seeking understanding and sympathy as "victims." We should fight for and win our rights. Chu-pi-ren embodied such a fighting attitude and spirit, and now is the time to resurrect the spirit of Chu-pi-ren in order to radically change the slave mindset that we have been tamed into adaption for 50 years. We are all born with equal rights. It is not something that is granted or endowed by anyone, nor is it a barter with self-responsibility or obligation. Of course, it has nothing to do with religion or morality.