

Teruko Yokoi. Tokyo–New York–Paris–Bern

31.01. – 10.05.2020

Born in 1924 in Tsushima, near Nagoya, in the Japanese province of Aichi, **Teruko Yokoi** is the daughter of a calligraphist. Having received painting lessons from an early age, at 25 she became a student of the renowned impressionist Takanori Kinoshita and relocated to **Tokyo**, where her works garnered prestigious prizes. As early as 1954, when the title of the capital of Western culture shifted from Paris to New York, Teruko Yokoi decided to move to the United States. She received a scholarship and entered the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Her figurative works gravitated toward a cubist analysis and, later, increasingly poetic and oneiric abstractions.

In 1956, Yokoi moved to **New York** to study under Hans Hofmann – one of the leading actors in the Abstract Expressionism revolution – and became part of the artistic milieu that introduced a new visual vocabulary when the world, ravaged by war, dehumanized by the death camps, and denied a future by the atomic bomb, was in desperate need of a new description. In New York, Yokoi met Kenzo Okada, Mark Rothko, Joan Mitchell, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, and other artists gathered around the then famous Martha Jackson Gallery.

Among these artists was Yokoi's future husband, Sam Francis, who would soon launch an international career with his large-format tachist paintings. In 1960, Yokoi, then with their newborn daughter, followed Francis to **Paris**, where she breathed the air of the impending cultural revolution, and where she was influenced by the Art Informel movement. After separating with Francis, Yokoi returned to Japan, but failed to make it her home again, and, in 1962, she decided to move to Switzerland and settle in **Bern**, where she has been living and working for more than five decades.

The story of Teruko Yokoi is one of passion, curiosity, and persistence. It is also an account of the experience of an artist who has worked despite and through the wounds of history, geography, race, and gender.

Teruko Yokoi. Tokyo–New York–Paris–Bern brings together a selection of works created between the 1954 and the late 1960s – the period of the artist's courageous trip to the United States, the exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel (1964), and her decision to settle down in Bern. These years were not only extremely prolific for Yokoi, but the works she created then also testify to the energy of the animated times. Stretched between cities on three continents, between Western abstraction and Japanese tradition, they capture Teruko Yokoi in a moment fully committed to creation. We accompany her here in a moment of experimentation – before she settled for her distinctive style – when her art appears as a dynamic mirror to the vibrant times of artistic revolt, to the political tensions of the day, and to the meanders of her personal story.

Even if her practice eschews mimetic associations, the forms she creates bring to mind still life or scenes from landscape painting, with windy hills, blossoming trees, flowers, and winding rivers. The violently brushed abstract motifs seem to have a calligraphic quality. The atmospheric delicacy of the palette and artistic touch is juxtaposed with the force of the gesture, while charming harmony abounds in an explosion of colours and forms. In the times of tensions and dependencies in the aftermath of the American defeat of Japan in 1945, the artist openly declared her sovereignty and freedom. In her canvases, the elements of both cultures not only intertwine but strike a perfect balance. Her art became the very place where she could declare and exercise her artistic, personal, and political independence.

Rather than follow purely chronological lines, *Teruko Yokoi. Tokyo–New York–Paris–Bern* looks at the tensions fluctuating throughout the artist's early works and traces her efforts to forge a new language of expression. It tells the story of an extremely vibrant artist whose highly original work emerged in the shadow and in the proximity of those who shaped the major narratives of twentieth-century art history.

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Teruko Yokoi - Biography

- 1924 Born in Tsushima, near Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture.
From an early age receives oil painting lessons from Kouki Suzuki, a member of Shunyo-kai Art Society. Graduates from Aichi Prefectural Tsushima Girls High School (today Aichi Prefectural Tsushima High School).
- 1949 Moves to **Tokyo**, attends the Joshibi University of Art and Design, and studies under Takanori Kinoshita.
Wins prizes in the *Issuikai* exhibition (1949, 1950, 1951) and the *Nitten* exhibition (1949, 1951).
- 1954 In January, moves to United States and enters the California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute) in San Francisco.
Receives a Top Honor Scholarship.
- 1955 In April, wins fourth prize at the *74th Annual Painting and Sculpture Exhibition*, held at the San Francisco Museum of Art. In May, wins a Japan Society Scholarship in the category of painting. In July, holds a solo exhibition of oil paintings at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco.
In September, moves to **New York** to study with the Abstract Expressionist painter Hans Hofmann.
- 1956 In April, takes part in a special exhibition at the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for the fifty-year anniversary of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.
Studies with Julian Levi at the Art Students League of New York in New York.
- 1957 Wins a prize at the *Philadelphia Annual Exhibition*, held at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.
Wins a prize at the *Twenty-Fifth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Paintings* at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.
- 1959 Marries Sam Francis.
- 1960 Moves to **Paris**, she is part of the group exhibition at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
- 1961 Returns temporarily to Japan.
- 1962 In May, moves to **Bern**.
- 1964 Shows works in March in an exhibition curated by director Arnold Rüdinger at Kunsthalle Basel (together with Walter Bodmer and Otto Tschumi).
- 1975 In October takes part in the *II. Berner Kunstaussstellung* entitled *Grossformate* at Kunsthalle Bern.
- 1991 Obtains Swiss nationality and citizenship of the City of Bern.
- 2004 In November, the Teruko Yokoi Hinageshi Art Museum is founded in Ena, Gifu Prefecture.
- 2008 In November, the Yokoi Teruko Fuji Museum of Art is founded in Fuji, Shizuoka Prefecture.

The exhibition

Duration of the exhibition: 31.01. – 10.05.2020

Opening times: Monday: closed, Tuesday: 10 am – 9 pm
Wednesday – Sunday: 10 am – 5 pm

Holidays: Open on Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday from 10 am – 5 pm

Public guided tours (in German):

Sunday, 11 am: February 09 / 23, March 01* / 08, April 05, May 10, 2020
Tuesday, 7 pm: February 11, March 17, April 14 / 28, 2020

* Public guided tour in English with the curator Marta Dziewańska

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Programme: www.kunstmuseumbern.ch/terukoyokoi

Curator: Marta Dziewańska

Catalogue

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Floorplan

Baseground new building

