

Celebrating Japanese film

Graffiti artist Tim Fukakusa's mural *Neon Otaku* is an homage to the Japanese pop culture and films he loved growing up

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Falling in love with tofu again

Chef Caroline Ishii shares a scrumptious Korean-inspired tofu stir fry recipe

Arts & Culture P. 8

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The spaces in between



PHOTO CREDIT: ELYSHA REI

Hand-cut washi paper study of a landscaped Japanese garden built by internees in 14B, Barmera, South Australia 1945-12, using the reference image from Australia War Memorial Item 123010. This piece was created by artist Elysha Rei during her artist residency at the University of Victoria.

Nikkei Australian artist Elysha Rei creates intricate hand-cut paper art layered with meaning and history

Kelly Fleck
Editor

TORONTO — While the sakura were in full bloom outside the Japanese Ca-

nadian Cultural Centre, inside, a different kind of sakura blossomed, Japanese Australian artist Elysha Rei's new installation called *Strength in Sixty Sakura*. Part of the JCCC's new anniversary exhibit, *60 Years of Friendship Through Culture*, the piece is constructed entirely of intricately cut paper, using *kiri-e*, a Japanese paper-cutting practice.

Two sakura branches reach out from opposite ends of the wall, adorned with 60 sakura, commemorating each year of education, partnership, and partici-

ation at the centre. The sakura represent the strength and resilience of the Japanese Canadian community, as captured in the history and programming of the JCCC.

"They're just so vested in symbolism, even today, they're almost

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Celebrating Nikkei sports legends at the Sakura Gala

Bill Hatanaka, Vicky Sunohara, Nick Suzuki receive Sakura Award

Dr. Jonathan Eto
Contributor

TORONTO — The Sakura Gala returned to the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre for the first time since the pandemic on May 13.

Celebrating Nikkei legends in Canadian sport, three generations of Japanese Canadian athletes were honoured with the Sakura Award, Sansei Bill Hatanaka, Yonsei Vicky Sunohara, and Gosei Nick Suzuki.

Dressed to the nines, guests, and dignitaries were treated to a night of glitz and glamour in celebration, support, and to fundraise for the JCCC.

Shiseido Canada, a top corporate sponsor, provided a sakura tunnel, creating a magical grand entrance with a coinciding themed backdrop for many photos. With an abundance of silent auctions, hors d'oeuvres, and beverages, the reception kept guests on their toes and in great spirits.

Kaiseki Yu-zen Hashimoto Restaurant treated guests to delectable Japanese gastronomy, and the evening was hosted by

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Ottawa Asian Hockey Classic brings families and cultures together

Tournament makes highly-anticipated return after 3-year hiatus

Andrea Sakiyama Kennedy
Contributor

OTTAWA — The puck dropped at the Ottawa Asian Classic

Hockey tournament during Asian Heritage Month in May 2023, marking the highly anticipated return to play following a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic. Held annually on Mother's Day weekend, the Ottawa Asian Classic has been running since 2009, said tournament organizer Naomi Katsumi, a hockey goalie and long-time volunteer

in the Ottawa and national Japanese Canadian community.

"I had participated in a similar tournament in Toronto, and I thought, why not create a tournament in Ottawa," said Katsumi, referring to the Asian Hockey Championships (*myahca*), which has been running in

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PHOTO CREDIT: MARC LAFLEUR/MARC LAFLEUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Ottawa Asian Hockey Classic lower rec champions Asian Invasion during the tournament on Mother's Day weekend, May 13 to 14.

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part of the Canadian vernacular. They line the streets and are in so many different parts of the country, but there's still that connection to Japan," Rei tells *Nikkei Voice* in an interview.

"I thought they're wrapped up with so much history and symbolism, and they would make really beautiful artwork."

Rei is a Japanese Australian artist based in Brisbane who explores narratives of cultural identity and site-specific history through paper-cutting and public art. Currently completing her PhD at the Queensland University of Technology, her work has been exhibited across Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Thailand, the U.S., and now Canada.

Rei was also drawn to the long history of cultural symbolism of sakura in Japan. Once a symbol of colonization, imperial Japan would plant sakura to transform foreign lands into Japanese territory. But following the Second World War, sakura became a symbol of peace and friendship between nations.

"In another sort of ironic twist, they became like olive branches or symbols of peace. Post Second World War and even in the '30s, Japan gave sakura trees into certain cities in Canada as a gesture of peace and goodwill," says Rei.

While the paper appears delicate, it's heartier than it looks, just like the sakura. Made with a synthetic polymer paper, a plastic-like paper often used in advertising, it can be cut but not torn and is unaffected by water or humidity—made to endure the year-long anniversary exhibit.

Before visiting Toronto, Rei was in Victoria for an eight-week artist residency with the University of Victoria's global project, Past Wrongs, Future Choices. During the residency, she researched Japanese Canadian, American, and Australian histories, also drawing upon her family history, to explore transcultural and ambivalent Nikkei identities in the postwar period.

During her time in Canada, she felt embraced by Japanese Canadian communities and felt an instant kinship with the Nikkei she met. Despite coming from different countries and backgrounds, in meeting and sharing stories, she found commonalities and shared experiences in their Nikkei identities.

"In between Japan and Canada and Australia, there's this third space of Nikkei identity, and I think that's where I've found that connection with people. We don't quite fit in either of those other spaces, but in that third space, we can talk about the same things together," says Rei.

"There's a lot of parallels about the internment, the displacement, the dispossession, and so forth, but even about celebrating what we love about Japan. We don't quite fit in when we're over there either, but there's still things about Japan that we can celebrate and ritualize in our everyday lives that maybe people without Japanese ancestry wouldn't understand."

Like many mixed-race Nikkei,



Left: Artist Elysha Rei stands in front of her art piece *Strength in Sixty Sakura*, at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. Right: A close up of *Strength in Sixty Sakura*, part of the JCCC's exhibition, *60 Years of Friendship Through Culture*.



PHOTOS CREDIT: SAMPHORS SAY

Rei's connection to her Japanese culture is deeply tied to her relationship with her grandmother. While her grandmother's postwar experience in Australia differs from the Japanese Canadian experience, parallels run through.

Born and raised in Japan, Rei's grandmother, Akiko, was working as a typist after the war when she met Glen, an Australian soldier stationed in Iwakuni, part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. They fell in love, married in 1948, and their first daughter was born in Japan. After being stationed in Japan for eight or nine years, Glen wanted to return to Australia with his young family, but the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act prevented that, says Rei.

Also called the "White Australia policy," the law aimed to limit non-white—and, particularly, Asian—immigration into Australia and wasn't completely dismantled until 1973. In 1952, Australia granted Japanese wives, children, and fiancées of Australian servicemen entry into the country.

Similarly to Canada, Japanese immigrants began arriving and settling in Australia in the late 18th century. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Aus-

tralia declared war on Japan, and within 24 hours, all Japanese Australians were rounded up and interned. The Australian Enemy Alien Registration Act was in place, and camps already existed for German and Italian prisoners of war. Following the war, almost all Australians of Japanese ancestry were deported to Japan, even if they were born in Australia. Only about 114 remained in the country.

In 1953, eight years after Japanese Australians were deported, Akiko was heading into a country

"I was close to my grandmother, and she was passing these stories on to me, and it just sort of hits you, this is my culture as well," says Rei.

with hostile attitudes towards the Japanese. She was among 650 war brides and their children immigrating to Australia, and by that point, she had not seen Glen for a couple of years.

Rei's mother was born in 1954, the second of four children and the first baby born to a Japanese war bride in the Australian state of Queensland. Rei has photos of a local newspaper article featuring her grandmother and newborn mother on the cover.

"I think it was this big risk that she took because some war brides never managed to reunite with their Australian husbands—they may have already had a family

back in Australia. She was really lucky to be reunited with him and was really embraced by his family, which also wasn't the case for a lot of other war brides," says Rei.

"I think she came to a country that was, for many people, not an easy one to come to if you were of Asian descent, let alone Japanese, because you were a former enemy of Australia."

During the war, Japan had breached Australia's home soil, bombing cities like Darwin and Townsville, and Australian prisoners of war from Japanese camps were returning home, sharing their horrific experiences. The anti-Japanese sentiment and racial discrimination against Japanese Australians "made it very difficult to be a Japanese person in the 50s and 60s in Australia," says Rei.

The small Japanese Australian community assimilated to survive. Some changed or Anglicized their names. Rei's grandmother only spoke English, even at home, to perfect her language skills. She cooked Western food and did not pass much Japanese culture and traditions to her children, says Rei.

"That was a real big loss of culture, and I think she tried to protect her children as much as she could by trying to assimilate

them to the point where they wouldn't be any different than they already looked... They just wanted to be Australian, and that was it. They weren't Japanese Australian," says Rei.

It wasn't until Rei became a mother that she started thinking about her Japanese ancestry. She began asking her grandmother questions about her culture and past.

"That's when you start to think about family history and ancestors, and I was really close to my grandmother, and she was passing these stories on to me, and it just sort of hits you, this is my culture as well," says Rei.

Akiko taught Rei how to cook Japanese food, shared stories about their ancestors, and the two travelled to Japan together, visiting all the places from her grandmother's past together. Akiko passed away last September at 95 years old.

Rei recognizes that since her grandmother first immigrated and when her mother was growing up, there has been a shift in the public perception of Japanese culture.

"It's probably very similar in Canada to Australia, where everybody loves Japanese culture, they love embracing all different parts of it, whether its karaoke, ikebana, or matcha lattes, it's a very celebrated culture that people like to enjoy, but it's taken only one generation to change that, and my mum's generation would have never been anything like that at all," says Rei.

During Rei's time at the University of Victoria, she explored the tension between the generational experiences of her family as Nikkei in Australia. She explores the contrast in her identity as a third-generation Nikkei Australian, from her pride in her Japanese cultural heritage to the intergenerational remnants of pain from the racial discrimination her mother and grandmother experienced.

Researching oral histories and archival records for Canada, Australia, and the U.S., Rei created an art series called *Kiri-e Nikkei: The interstices of diasporic displacement*.

One piece recreates a photo from the Australian War Memorial of a charnel house built by Japanese Australian internees. Traditionally, a place to bury skeletal remains, Japanese Australians built the structure to commemorate fellow countrymen who passed away in the camp. With excruciating detail, Rei recreates details down to the fencing and stone work entirely out of cut paper.

In another piece, she creates a *fuki* plant, or Japanese butterbur, often used for Japanese home cooking. As Japanese Canadians were uprooted from their homes in coastal B.C., some took *fuki* seeds and planted them in internment sites as food and a reminder of home. Long after Japanese Canadians have left, *fuki* continue to grow there, like markers of what once happened.

As Rei cuts away the paper, deciding which pieces to keep and which to let go, a narrative forms,

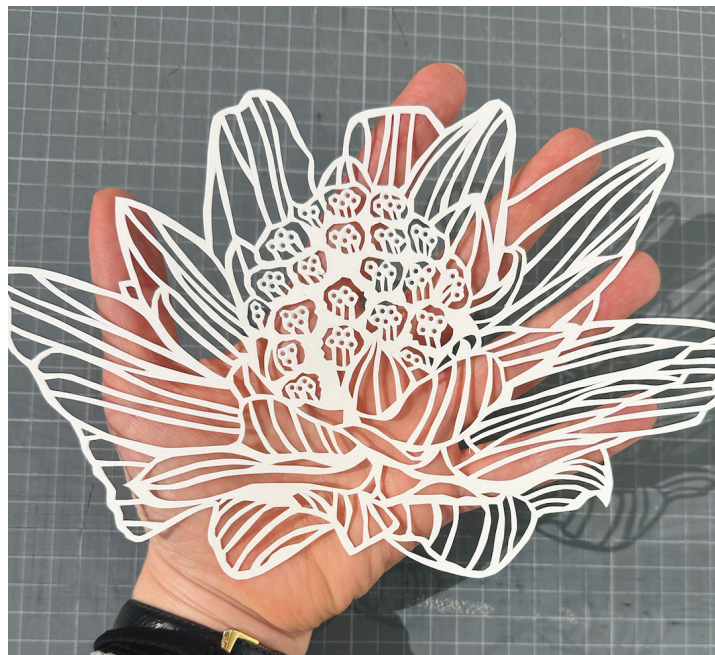


PHOTO CREDITS: ELYSHA REI

Left: Artist Elysha Rei creating a hand-cut image of a *fuki* flower during her artist residency at the University of Victoria. Right: Detail of hand-cut stone paper study of a *fuki* flower.

From FUKAKUSA P. 9

I wanted to be a part of this project for that.”

The mural is also an homage to the Japanese films he used to watch with his grandmother. His aunts, uncles, and father don't speak Japanese, likely a result of his grandparents' internment experience, says Fukakusa.

“For me and my family, and I'm sure a lot of other families and other Japanese Canadians, it took away a lot of culture,” says Fukakusa.

“Growing up, I didn't talk about my New Year's celebrations with my friends, you feel kind of embarrassed about it, almost like there's this weird carry-over shame from 60 years ago, and I didn't really get it until I got older.”

Only his grandmother could speak Japanese, and they would watch Japanese films together. For his grandmother, it was a way to practice her Japanese, and for Fukakusa, these were films he loved. It became a way for Fukakusa to connect to his Japanese culture and spend time with his grandmother. When Fukakusa was a teenager, one of the only places to buy Japanese films and manga was Chinatown.

“It can be a little awkward because it's just the box art, there's no description, and back then, you couldn't Google what the movie was about. So I would just buy it from the picture, and sometimes it would be a really weird movie or something really

dark. But just watching them together was nice,” says Fukakusa.

Pop Japan is a celebration of how Japanese pop culture has entered the North American mainstream, and Fukakusa is excited to be a part of it. As a teenager, anime and manga were not popular like it is today.

Now there are weekend-long conventions dedicated to anime, festivals celebrating Japanese cinema like the Toronto Japanese Film Festival and TIFF, and shelves of manga available at most bookstores.

“Even when it comes to anime, when I was younger, it was not popular. I was kind of a weirdo for liking it,” says Fukakusa.

“Most people were not really into it, and it was kind of an extra level of being a nerd. Now, it's so popular and celebrated, and everyone's favourite movie is *Spirited Away*, so just being able to share that with people is really important to me.”

During the exhibit's opening reception on May 10, Fukakusa finished the mural during a live-painting session, where guests could watch him paint and ask questions about his work and inspirations.

The evening was dedicated to celebrating Japanese Canadian artists and Japanese cinema and pop culture and was a moment to be proud of his Japanese culture. Especially because his six-year-old daughter, who is named after his grandmother, was there.

“Originally, my daughter and my wife weren't going to be able



PHOTO COURTESY: TIM FUKAKUSA

Artist Tim Fukakusa adds the finishing touches to his mural, *Neon Otaku*, during the opening night reception of *Reimagining: Narratives of tension and wonder* at the TIFF Bell Lightbox until July 4.

to come to the opening, then at the last minute, they were able to come, so that was a pretty big deal... just sharing that with her,” says Fukakusa.

“I want her to grow up being excited about and proud of [her culture], and show her friends, and not grow up the same way I

did, where I was very conflicted about it.”

To learn more about Tim Fukakusa, visit www.instagram.com/timmifuk/

To learn more about TIFF's Pop Japan series, visit www.tiff.net/pop-japan.

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noon until evening. Because of the staggered school day between elementary and high school students, classes were held in the same buildings, 'A' and 'D' in Tashme. The high school opened in September of 1944, and 90 students attended, split between the two buildings.

This double-seated desk is a small, long, narrow wooden desk with two cubby holes to accommodate two children. It was used in both elementary school and high school. The desks were acquired by the various Japanese language schools in Vancouver as the custodian sold off the items in 1943. The desk measures about 12 inches by 36 inches with a bench.

Because the desk is for children, it would have been very cramped for the high school students who were also required to share the desks. The fact that the Nikkei National Museum has the desk today is important in showing people the conditions Japanese Canadians endured to conduct education.

The school was restricted with limited supplies, so much so that the older students did not have access to desks that fit their growing size. Today, the desks have travelled across B.C., eventually finding a home at the Nikkei National Museum.

To explore more about the Tashme internment camp, please visit www.nikkeimuseum.org.



PHOTO CREDIT: ELYSHA REI

Elysha Rei, *Kiri-e Nikkei Kamon*, 2023 Hand cut paper with black paint.

From KIRI-E P. 10

visually and metaphorically.

“That positive and negative space and creating light and shadow is sort of a metaphor for illuminating certain things and bringing things out of the shadows. I like to hopefully put stories and histories in my work that need to be illuminated in some way and can enable people to learn something that maybe they didn't know before,” says Rei.

By the time the JCCC's 60th-anniversary exhibit opened, Rei had returned to Australia. One of the things she will miss the most about Canada is how she felt embraced by the Japanese Canadian communities in Victo-

ria, Vancouver, and Toronto. The experience has strengthened her interest in learning about and connecting more global Nikkei communities and sharing Japanese Australian stories and histories.

“I feel like since I've come to Canada and have globalized my identity as a Nikkei person, I just want to meet more Nikkei people and embed myself in these communities,” says Rei.

“I think our Nikkei community in Australia is so small comparatively, I'm going to miss being a part of the community in everyday life.”

To learn more about Elysha Rei, visit www.elysharei.com.

Okinawa's Karakoro brings *Naomi's Tree* musical to Toronto



PHOTO COURTESY: KARAKORO

Karakoro presents the musical adaptation of Joy Kogawa's *Naomi's Tree* at the JCCC on Aug. 17.

Karakoro adapts Joy Kogawa's picture book as a stage musical

TORONTO — Performing arts group Karakoro, who impressed audiences with traditional Okinawan Eisa dancing a decade ago, will return to the JCCC for a musical performance this summer.

Based on the picture book *Naomi's Tree* by Joy Kogawa, Karakoro director Yoko Matsui adapted the story to a stage musical. The story is about Naomi, a Japanese Canadian girl who lost

her mother in the atomic bombing during the Second World War when Japan and Canada were at war.

The story begins with a little child asking their grandmother, “What is today's story?” Once upon a time, in the land of the rising sun, now known as Japan, there was a beautiful cherry tree.

In spring, its pink petals would flutter, and the whole area would be filled with petals. The cherry tree said, “Oh, how gentle and peaceful this place is!” Many, many years passed, and the beautiful tree became known as the Friendship Tree. Japan is now

a peaceful place, but the cherry tree has seen many wars. So the cherry tree prayed.

Karakoro is a performing arts group from Osaka, Japan, and performs nationally and internationally. The group has performed at the JCCC three times, in 2013, 2014, and 2015.

Date: Thursday, Aug. 17

Time: 7 p.m.

Tickets: General \$35 + HST, JCCC members and children under 14 are \$28 + HST. Ticket sales start May 25 at the JCCC reception desk and TicketWeb
