



## PRESS RELEASE

### **JAPAN PAVILION**

**at the 53rd International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia**

**Miwa Yanagi**

***Windswept Women: The Old Girls' Troupe***

**Commissioner: Hiroshi Minamishima**

**Miwa Yanagi** represents Japan at the 53rd Venice Biennale with her installation entitled ***Windswept Women: The Old Girls' Troupe***.

For this installation, Yanagi will take the Takamasa Yoshizaka-designed Japan Pavilion built in 1956 and cover its exterior with a black, membrane-like tent. Invoking the original idea of a “pavilion” as a free standing or temporary structure, the fluidity and mobility of the tent form will turn the Japan Pavilion into a temporary playhouse. Inside, Yanagi will install giant 4m high photograph stands containing portraits of women of varied ages. A new video work and series of small photographs will also be shown. Upon entering, viewers will feel disoriented, losing their sense of scale and perspective as they walk among oversized works.

The motif of this installation is a troupe comprised exclusively of women traveling with their mobile house—a tent—on the top of their caravan. This tent, inspired by the novels of Japanese modernist writer Kobo Abe, has already appeared in Yanagi’s previous Fairy Tales (2004-05) series of staged photographs, and has been a key to expressing ambivalent themes such as the tensions between “life and death,” “past and future,” “confinement and mobility” and “everyday life and festival.”

The photographs of gigantic women Yanagi has created for Venice symbolize resolution. They stand unmoved despite being surrounded by turbulent wind. No matter happens, they will keep their feet planted firmly on the ground. Presented in ornately designed decorative frames, these women seem surreal but also embody an element of nostalgia. Although the images themselves have a macabre quality, they encourage us to embrace vitality. They take on added significance in Venice, where the threat of imminent death has been a concern for the city throughout its history, as well as in light of the critical economic recession currently affecting people throughout the world.

A catalogue will be published to accompany the installation in September 2009.

## Commissioner's statement

As seen in her early work "Elevator Girls" and more recently in series like "My Grandmothers" and "Fairy Tale", Miwa Yanagi is an artist who has, through her use of young girl and old women tricksters which symbolize "life and death," adopted a thoroughly affirmative attitude toward the circumstances of human existence within the maze of the "past," "present," and "future."

While dealing with "death" like the commander of a brigade winding its way through the labyrinth, Yanagi paradoxically attempts to bring out the real meaning of yet unborn "life," and within this unending mobility and fluidity captures the eternity of "life."

Thus, an "allegory," which is extremely easy to understand regardless of one's age or place of origin, floods the retina with the same degree of purity, and through the visual "story," leads to a unique Yanagi-esque world of sensation in which children become adults, adults become more adult, and more adult adults become more and more adult, before a transposition occurs and the more and more adult adults are read to by the children on a horizon which, with its phase of sophisticated humor couched in artistic expression, is deserving of high praise.

For the Japan Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale, Miwa Yanagi proposed an installation titled "Windswept Women".

Yanagi will take the pavilion, built as a symbol of national prestige, and cover it with a black, membrane-like tent, transforming it overnight into a temporary playhouse. In the space of that instant of momentary dislocation from "death" to "life," while capturing a variety of "strong winds" such as "authority," "convention," and "prejudice," Yanagi's old girls will appear like visitors from another world.

When they do, they will be revitalized as huge, full-sized "life" forms, which until that point had been kept under wraps, but now completely envelope the viewer. The "life" within these women, who should be small, is a transposed world that emerges when one recalls their actual size. They reveal themselves at the moment one becomes aware of this transposition, as Yanagi's theatre, filled as it were with "undying life," appears in Venice.

Juxtaposed with memories of the biennale that are imbued with the rejuvenation of "life" through "death," I am completely convinced that Miwa Yanagi's "Windswept Women" will bring great joy not only to the Japan Pavilion but to the Venice Biennale as a whole. The installation will also have special historical significance as something that expresses an appropriate amount of respect for the event and once again indicates Yanagi's arrival as an artist. And, by transcending feminism in its strictest sense, the work is certain to call to mind the fundamental power of art.

Minamishima Hiroshi  
Professor at Joshibi University of Art and Design

## Artist's profile

Miwa Yanagi was born in Kobe, Japan, and completed a postgraduate course at Kyoto City University of Arts. In 1993, Yanagi held her first solo exhibition in Kyoto, where she currently lives.

In 1996, she participated in the exhibition Prospect 96 in Frankfurt am Main. Since then, her work has been exhibited internationally. In 1999, she began creating the series My Grandmothers, which realizes the self-perceptions of several young women who were asked to imagine what type of woman they might become in fifty years' time. In 2004, she was invited to hold solo shows at the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin and the Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art in Kagawa, Japan.

An exhibition featuring her recent Fairy Tale series exploring relationships between young girls and old women was organized by the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, in 2005. She has also had solo exhibitions at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in 2007, and at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in 2009. Running concurrently with her exhibition at the 53rd Venice Biennale will be a wide-ranging overview of her work at the National Museum of Art, Osaka.

Preview: 4 - 6 June 2009

Exhibition: 7 June – 22 November 2009

Opening at the pavilion: Friday, 5 June, at 3:00 pm

<http://www.jpff.go.jp/venezia-biennale/art/e/53/index.html>

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Naoshima Fukutake Art Museum Foundation

SHISEIDO



Harmoge srl

TANDEM  
LAGERHAUS UND  
KRAFTVERKEHR  
KUNST GMBH

## List of works

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Windswept Women 1	2009	Framed photography	300 x 400cm
Windswept Women 2	2009	Framed photography	300 x 400cm
Windswept Women 3	2009	Framed photography	300 x 400cm
Windswept Women 4	2009	Framed photography	300 x 400cm
Windswept Women 5	2009	Framed photography	300 x 400cm
The Old Girls' Troupe	2009	Video installation	10min
Untitled I	2004	Gelatin silver print	56 x 40cm
Snow White	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Sleeping Beauty	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Rapunzel	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Little Red Riding Hood	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
The White Doves	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
The Wild Swans	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Erendira I	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Erendira II	2006	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Frau Trude	2005	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
The Little Match Girl	2005	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Cinderella	2005	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
A Lonely House	2006	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Brother and Little Sister	2005	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Gretel	2004	Gelatin silver print	40 x 40cm
Wandering Dune I	2005	Gelatin silver print	25cm diameter
Wandering Dune II	2005	Gelatin silver print	36 x 24cm

Miwa Yanagi: Windswept Women - The Old Girls' Troupe  
Press images



Windswept Women 1  
2009  
300 x 400cm  
Framed photography



Windswept Women 2  
2009  
300 x 400cm  
Framed photography



Windswept Women 3  
2009  
300 x 400cm  
Framed photography



Windswept Women 4  
2009  
300 x 400cm  
Framed photography



Windswept Women 5  
2009  
300 x 400cm  
Framed photography



The Old Girls' Troupe  
2009  
Video still

Please contact [venezia@jpf.go.jp](mailto:venezia@jpf.go.jp) for high resolution images.  
The installation view will be available from the end of June.

