

Looking into the Mirror Pond

LOOKING INTO THE MIRROR POND

Nana Shiomi

I am neither a painter nor a sculptor, but a printmaker. For me this is a statement. Every profession bestows on its practitioners a way of looking at things, an outlook on life. I honestly believe that all I know about the mysteries of life, I have learnt through my plates and prints.

Nana Shiomi

Nana Shiomi, speaking in tongues

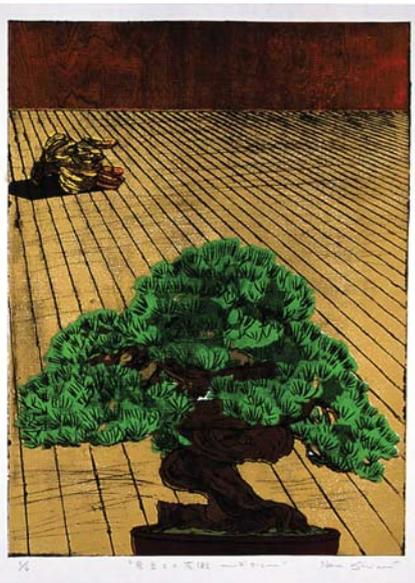
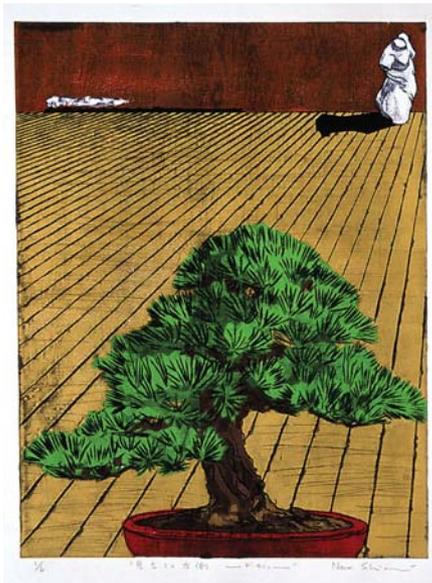
It is clear that the visual arts and music are not subject to the interpretive limitations that the myriad languages we speak impose. Every artist has a cultural context, but they respond to new stimuli that experience gives them. Japanese woodblock prints found their way to Paris and profoundly affected Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. African carving set the ball rolling for Cubism and Abstraction. Today, artists may be influenced by the Universal but each individual has to balance that against their own nature. Nana Shiomi is an extraordinarily accomplished artist whose technical achievements go hand in hand with a unique attitude gained from her understanding of her background viewed from the standpoint of a long-term resident in London. She is utterly true to her traditions, but with a perspective that living outside of Japan has given her. Nana speaks in tongues, from her deepest personal being and at the same time in a language that we have come to love and understand.

Professor Chris Orr

Creative ambiguity

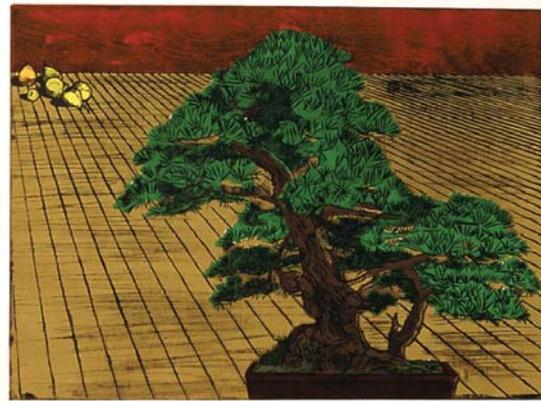
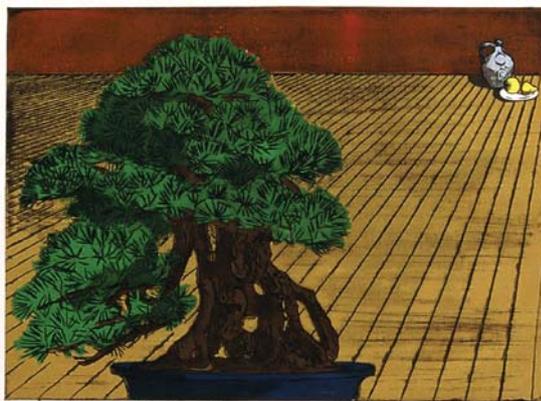
Since the mid 19th century Japanese artists have been under the influence of Western art and this often caused them to re-examine their cultural origins and seek their own artistic identities. By living and working in the West, Nana Shiomi has had her sense of cultural identity sharpened by the experience. In her work, she negotiates possible resonances between the East and the West, using her unique combination of two distinct sources. One is the very nature of print, particularly the woodcut, one of Japan's best recognised artistic genres; the other is Marcel Duchamp's thoughts about art. Both have greatly inspired her from the very start of her artistic career. The creative 'ambiguity' of the intriguing relationship between plate and print, and the notion that the original can be multiple, allows her to develop and express her view of the world in a way that challenges Eurocentric ideas and customary ways of viewing. The fascinating images lead us to play conceptual games, unfolding the intellectually profound and spiritually boundless world.

Kiyoko Mitsuyama-Wdowiak, Art Historian



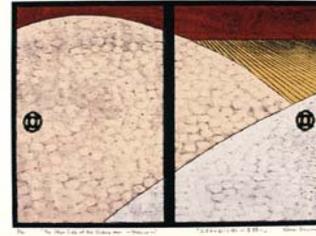
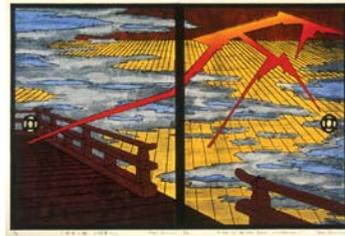
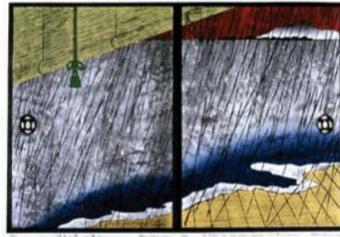
National, International

Filled with a desire to learn more about the world, I left my native Japan and came to live in the UK. But as I struggled towards my goal of becoming an international artist, I began to realize that if I were to embody internationalism in its truest sense, I must first understand my own national background. In other words, I needed to cast aside my own point of view and re-examine myself from the perspective of the other. It is not the quickest path to take, but I still believe it is the most reliable one. I discovered that it was only by traveling half way around the world to another country and through living there as a foreigner, that I could find the well I must dig.



"Right-hand Side and Left-hand Side Views of Mitate -De Chirico-" / 1996 / Edition of 6 / 77 x 110cm

"Right-hand Side and Left-hand Side Views of Mitate -Cézanne-" / 1996 / Edition of 6 / 61 x 140cm



This Side and the Other Side

If the picture frame is something like a window frame hung on the wall then a painting could be considered a landscape that stretches inside the frame. The black frames used in this series are the frames used for 'fusuma', Japanese sliding doors. The 'fusuma' partition a room, and function very much as doors do. They are frequently embellished with landscapes that represent the changing seasons. In this series I followed convention and depicted an open door over a closed one. There is a room beyond the door, through the window, or through the bamboo blind, through which one can see the river and ocean. Further still is an island and trees, signifying the existence of a different world. The scene on the surface of the 'fusuma' continues to reveal itself, going deeper, and still deeper. What is the other shore? What lies beyond the painting, on the other side of the door? Is it possible, that this side on which we live is indeed the other side? The 'other shore' in Buddhist terminology means the state of enlightenment, as well as the world of the dead.

"A Room on the Other Shore -Window-" / 2002 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"A Room on the Other Shore -Blind-" / 2002 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"A Room on the Other Shore -Screen-" / 2002 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"A Room on the Other Shore -Waterfall-" / 2003 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"A Room on the Other Shore -Moon-" / 2003 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"A Room on the Other Shore -Lightning-" / 2003 / Edition of 30 / 76 x 108cm

"The Other Side of the Sliding Door -Yoshino-" / 2004 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 77cm

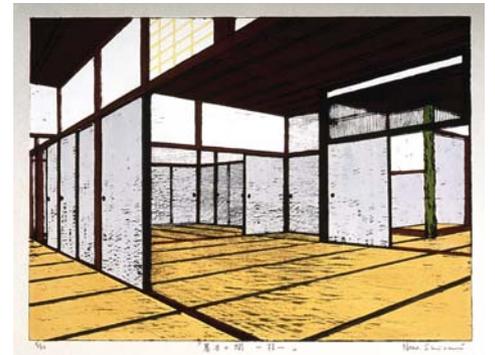
"The Other Side of the Sliding Door -Hokusai-" / 2004 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 77cm



Minimalism and Japanese Culture

When I look back at Japan's traditional culture, what astonishes me most is its modernity. The communicative potential of its simple symbolic systems, the sense of play evident in the way it created portable objects, the rationality of its use of space pushed to a minimalist extreme, the way it discards the superfluous and just hones the essential... In each of these qualities I perceive the spirit of the craftsman. It might sound strange but I believe that I learned the nature of the contemporary through Japanese traditional culture.

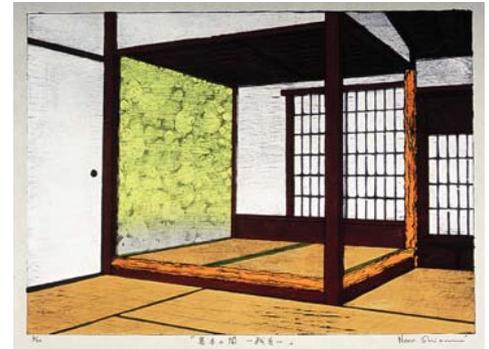
Japanese houses are constructed using natural materials. When we enter into a building with tatami mats, we take off



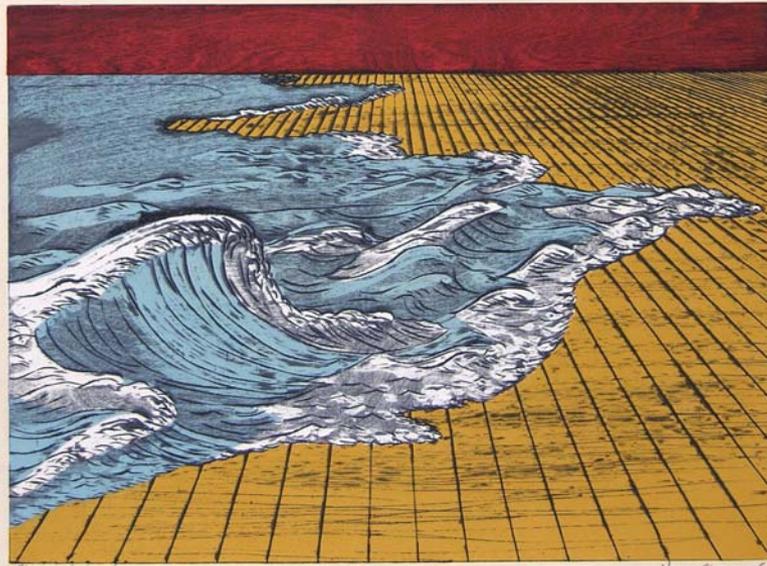
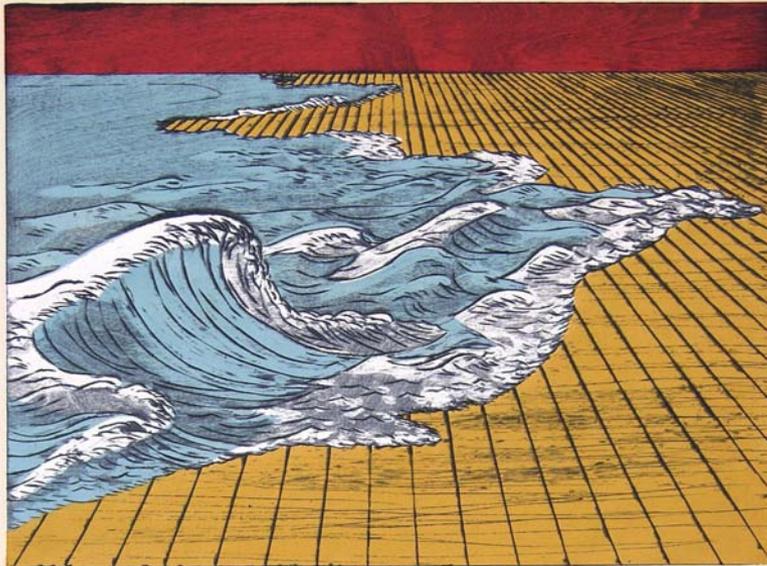
"Mirror Room -Katsura-" / 2006 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 137cm
 "Basic Room -Katsura-" / 2006 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 76cm



our footwear. Windows are made wide and full-length, with semi-transparent reed blinds and paper-covered panels used to separate internal from external space. The size of rooms can be flexibly adjusted using sliding doors and standing screens. When I think of the tokonoma, the tearoom and so on, these aspects of Japanese daily life let us glimpse our view of nature, our sense of beauty, our religious identity and spirituality. No matter what changes the future may bring, the Japanese will continue to take off their shoes when entering a house.

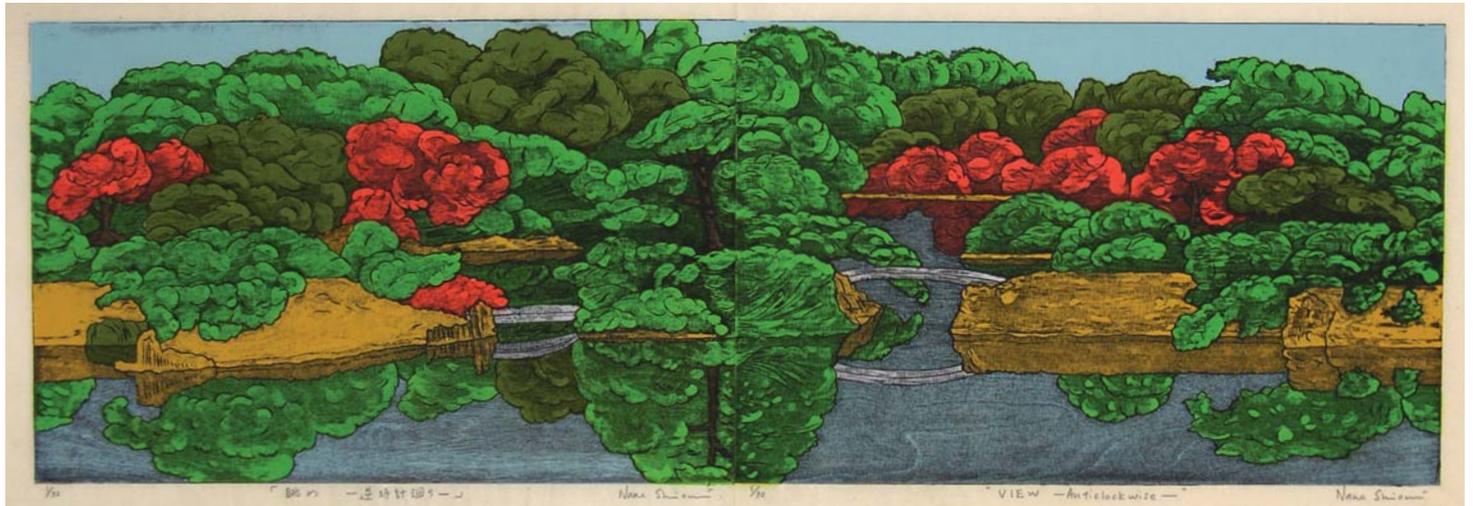


"Mirror Room -Zan Getsu-" / 2006 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 137cm
 "Basic Room -Zan Getsu-" / 2006 / Edition of 30 / 60 x 76cm



The Surging Waves and Myself

The multiple nature of the print medium is its strongest quality, not its weakest. Each print is not unique, but every print is an original. Therefore if you look closely enough, you will see that each print is also slightly different. The light and dark, the shading, the blurring of individual lines - these minute differences that I want you to fall in love with. "7th May 1956, 8th May 1956" is a vertically arranged diptych printed from the same blocks, in exactly the same way. The repeating motions of the waves, rising and falling day after day... Within that eternal repetition, one day we are born, another day we are gone. The world and myself. All I want to do with my work is to grasp for a second the world's tail.



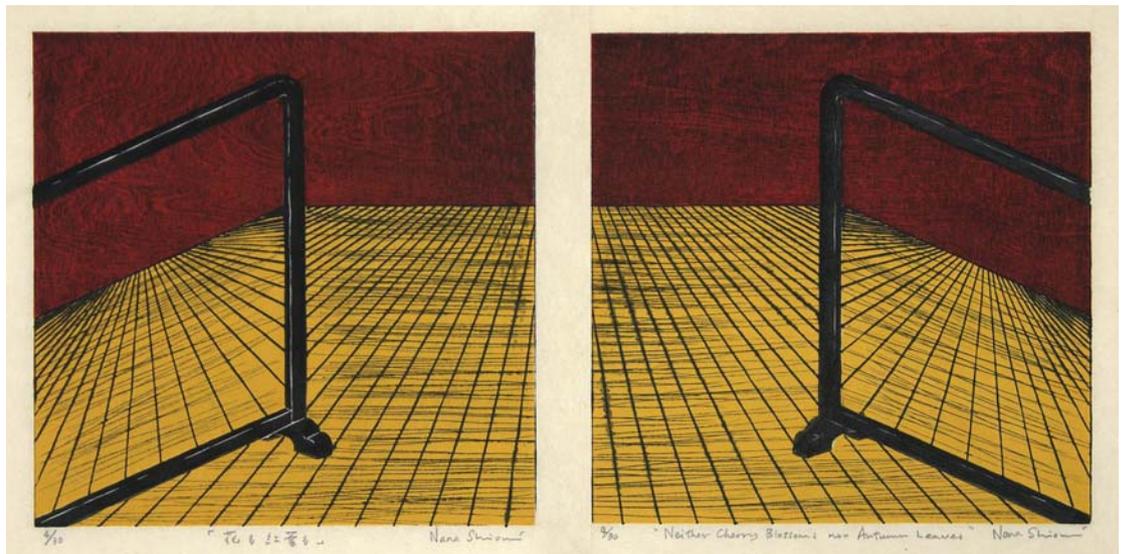
"View -Clockwise-" / 2007 / Edition of 30 / 54 x 133cm
 "View -Anticlockwise-" / 2007 / Edition of 30 / 54 x 133cm

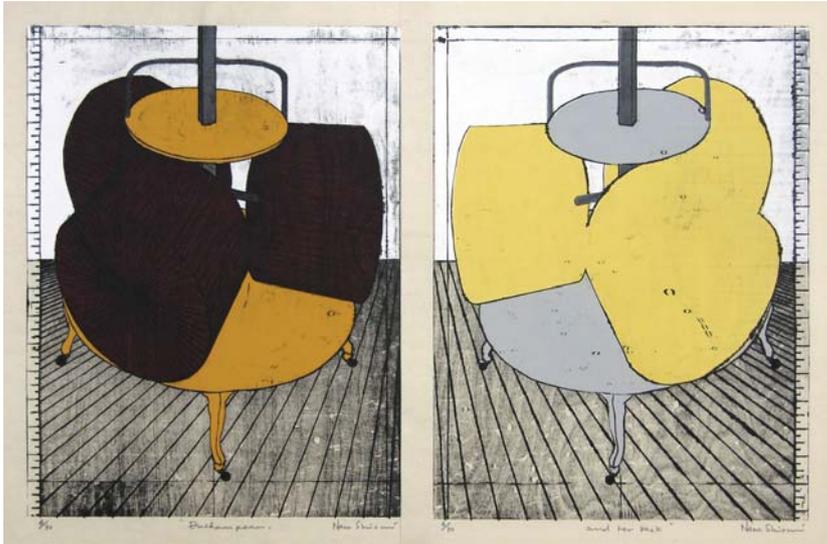
The World's Right and the World's Left

You can create an entirely different landscape from these two prints, depending on whether you join them A-B or B-A. In addition, I designed them so that you could join these prints to the left or right of them in a never-ending sequence A-B-A-B-A-B-A-B..... I envisage adding one to another until they encircle the globe and I can finally join the last B to the very first A, creating a vast looped landscape. Whether you choose to journey clockwise or anticlockwise is up to you.

How to Draw Emptiness

People create pictures because they want to depict something. But what if we want to depict emptiness? Would it be possible to use a picture to explain emptiness? "Neither Cherry Blossoms nor Autumn Leaves" is my response to that question. A pair of objects placed on an empty stage - a standing screen painted with a picture of an empty stage. The title is borrowed from a poem by the 12th century poet Fujiwara no Teika.





The Man Who Changed My Life

We cannot choose when or where we will be born. The time and the place in which you find yourself is determined almost entirely randomly, but for each individual that reality comprises their life. For me, it was chance that determined that I should come across an artwork by Marcel Duchamp when I was twenty - but that chance meeting was to have a decisive influence over my later life. Duchamp taught me that creating a piece of art is an act that has far more value and meaning than I had ever expected. He also taught me the importance of continuing to give yourself stimulating problems to solve. And the importance of continuing to search for an answer. And these are the most enjoyable things in life!

"Duchampean, and her back" / 2008 / Edition of 30 / 75 x 107cm

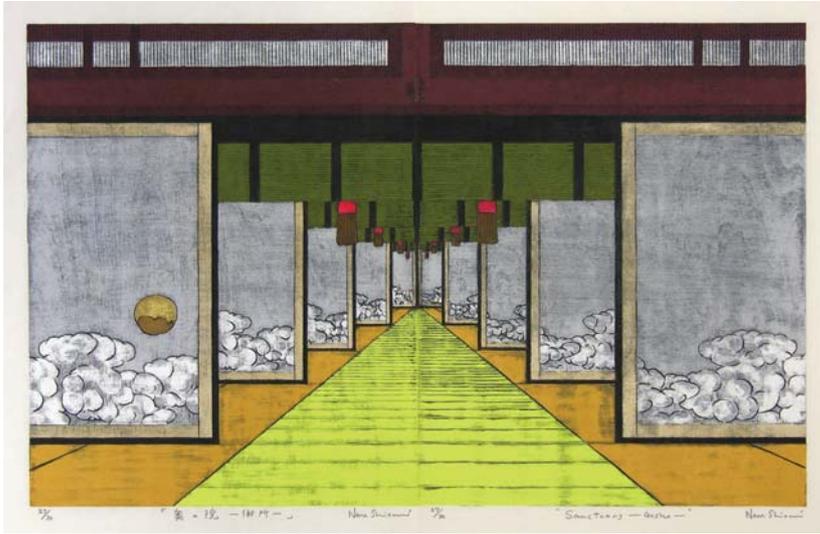


The Story of 凸 and 凹

The same staircase looks different depending on whether you are standing at the top looking down or at the bottom looking up. The way you understand a particular event is always dependent upon your point of view. And conversely, the way that someone explains their take on a particular fact will always reveal their position to you. Is a woodblock carved in relief or intaglio? Everything that happens to me forces me to clarify my own standpoint.

"Down the Up-Staircase! Up the Down-Staircase!"

2008 / Edition of 30 / 75 x 107cm



Something Lying Between Illusion and Reality

From ancient times, in both east and west, mirrors have been accorded a literary and philosophical significance that outweighs their practical usage. In stories such as that of Narcissus, or the mirror within Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas*, or *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, mirrors have been depicted as having the power to affect human psychology. In Japan too, mirrors are seen as being able to capture the shining brightness of the sun and thus are used as objects of veneration in Shinto. Or we can think of the Golden Pavilion (*Kinkakuji*) in Kyoto, which is always described as being one of Japan's most beautiful buildings - but if it had not been built next to a 'mirror pond' (*Kyoko-ike*), would it have been able to attain the same reputation for beauty? A certain power resides in the mirrored image. The connection between the real Golden Pavilion and its



image mirrored in the pond is the same as that between a woodblock and a printed image produced from it. Reality and its reflection. Form and image. What lurks in the border between the block and the print? Is it will... or action... or the divine itself?

Nana Shiomi Biography

Nana Shiomi was born in Japan, and studied at the Tama Art University (BA, MA) and the Royal College of Art. She has been living and working in London since 1989.

Shiomi makes contemporary woodcut prints, often using traditional Japanese icons.

Her woodcut printing technique is based on the traditional Japanese way of printing with water-based inks, but utilising new materials and tools, including contemporary Baren.

Recently, her works have been well received at:

“Matrix: An Unstable Reality” the 28th Biennial of Graphic Arts Ljubljana, SLOVENIA

Northern Print Biennale, Newcastle

Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy, London

“Daughters of Sun Goddess -Japanese Femininity-” at the National Museum in Helsinki, FINLAND

Her “Basic Room -Zan Getsu-” was short listed for the “Insight -Image of the Year Award-” at the RA Summer Exhibition in 2006.

This catalogue is published to coincide with my solo show,
“Looking into the Mirror Pond -Woodcut prints by Nana Shiomi-”
at Daiwa Foundation Japan House, London from 20 Jan. to 18 Mar. 2010.

My special thanks go to:

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Nana Shiomi January 2010

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