

This vessel—and all that surrounds it—is the result of a year-long collaborative process between Cindy Mochizuki and the members of Tonari Gumi (TG), the Japanese Community Volunteers Association, an organization with the mandate to support the health and well-being of largely Japanese-speaking elders in the Vancouver community.

Cindy Mochizuki and I initiated the collaboration with TG in the summer of 2015 as part of extended programming for grunt gallery's 30th anniversary year. Inspired by the idea of the kitchen as a place of creative connection (owing greatly to grunt's own 'hearth' – the now defunct kitchen space that housed many an unruly party over the years), Cindy's suggestion to work within the context of TG's commercial kitchen space was a brilliant expansion of our initial thoughts – and one that fully inhabited the idea of the *social* as central to both artistic vision and holistic wellness. And so *Shako Club* (or, "Social Club") began. Through a two-month long residency, Mochizuki had weekly workshop sessions with the members of TG, expanding on ideas of food, wellness, composition and flavour. As an observer and participant, I was honoured to share in this exchange, where discussions of recipes, ingredients and aesthetics fed directly into a larger sense of political and social commitment; the members of TG constitute a community of care, brought together through an organization formed in direct response to the traumatic effects of the internment of Japanese Canadians post WWII.

Shako Club concluded with a series of public sessions, where members of the public brought gifts to exchange for finely assembled obento boxes crafted by the artist and the participants. Kanten jellies, grilled salmon, onigiri and gyoza went out into the world suffused, one imagines, with the communal energy of their creation. And the project itself has evolved, as flavours do, into this unconventional 'publication'; we hope this cup and its contents bring you joy and contemplation.

Thank you for sharing this with us; here's to our many possible futures.

ARTIST STATEMENT Cindy Mochizuki

A white porcelain plate with the logo of the CP Air is stacked in the cupboards of many Japanese Canadian homes. When we had more than our usual 5 persons at dinner, we brought these dishes out. There seemed to be a never-ending supply of them as if the back of my cupboard was bottomless. I learned years later that in the 1980s, when Japanese Canadians sought Redress, the plate was used as an object to fundraise for social justice.¹ The plates remain in the cupboard and when the house spills over with guests, we feast on them.

On a weekly basis, the heart of Tonari Gumi's kitchen feeds a lively crowd of members – mostly seniors – and home-cooked lunches, traditional confectionary treats, and cups of green tea fuel a host of social activities. Its mandate to help provide social services for elders so that they may live long and independent lives resonated with me when we began first conceiving of *Shako Club* in the summer of 2015. Without fully being aware of what to expect, *Shako Club* took shape as an evolving, social space of artistic and culinary activities that also included a natural moment for knowledge transfer and an unconventional circumstance for strangers to meet. The knowledge was passed through the unspoken 'tone' of the kitchen and dining space: together the women of *Shako Club* knew how to be with guests, to make space, to ask questions, to share tastes, to remember recipes – to prepare food and to prepare it together. *Shako Club* produced both a calm and wild, raucous engagement with culinary making where energy levels and generations collided. It continues to remind me that the role of an elder need not only be situated in our historic past, but in a position where they can take the lead as we move into the future, divining and reminding us of all the possibilities we might continuously make anew.

¹ Miki, Roy "Constructing a Redress Identity," *Redress Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice*. Raincoast Books. 2004. (248)

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Shako Club

A project by Cindy Mochizuki, with the members of Tonari Gumi Japanese Community Volunteers Association
Residency: May 1st – July 31st, 2015

Shako Cup

Cindy Mochizuki and Maggie Boyd
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www.shakoclub-blog.tumblr.com

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grunt.ca



yama-mountains

umi-sea

cup

riku- land

(em)body

#

Starting place. A site specific. Stove as appliance as heat as hearth, spoons, ohashi, ingredients, an array of textures and colours a wild palette. Red wedges of watermelon, bright slices of orange, brilliant green fresh sansho leaves, cookies in the oven, timer, time for a cup of ocha. A space a movement of bodies between Nihongo and English and rice vinegar puckers in a small mixing bowl. Rich steam rises above the rice cooker. Kitchen. Palate.

Artful intentions are brought to the table. Bodies shaped by cells, experiences, memories, histories, legacies. Time. Hunger draws us to the kitchen; our bodies require food. Leaning over the sink to bite into a piece of watermelon, sweet juice trickling down the chin. Culture is possible only in kinship with others.

#

All art is political. We cannot help but bring our political selves to the art we shape with the intention of sharing it. The moment when two individuals intersect via the medium of art (an obento box, a cup of ocha), a political site is activated.

Japanese Canadians and people of Japanese ancestry in British Columbia were uprooted from their homes, lives, and livelihoods during WWII. Labelled enemy aliens, they were imprisoned and dispossessed by the Canadian colonial nation state. Japanese Canadians did not fully regain their rights until 1949, when they were finally given the right to vote. 1949. Not such a distant past. In light of this legacy, the fact that Japanese Canadians, into the third, fourth and fifth generations, continue to prepare and eat food of Japanese heritage can be considered a daily act of resistance.

The sharing of meals, with ties both cultural and familial, articulates a sense of home. We eat of it. And home moves into the body. Becomes body.

#

Food as translation of sea, mountain, land Ingredients brought to the table Through memory, place, story the transformation brings shape We assign symbols and meaning In our nature to do so Art a communication We cup in our hands reach across the table A gesture toward understanding The exact point where two stories meet Dozo enryo naku tabete mite kudasai Yama, riku, umi no nami, shio kaze community praxis

#

Gather in the kitchen. Sugoi ame ga futtemasu ne! Yet in the heart of the building it is warm. The warmest place. Where food is prepared so is love is action. The women draw close; paper, pencils, crayons on long tables. Voices rise and fall, a slow movement, like the umi, laughter breaking out, a bird alights. The women draw close, from memory and childhood, obento boxes with tamago, umeboshi, sake and otsukemono. Sandwiches in paper bags, fruit juice, celery stick. Images from the past. All the lunches prepared, all the lunches consumed, and time an infant grown to adulthood.

Images for the future.

We imagine ourselves, again and again. In resistance to narratives that seek to frame us. Against oppressive forces that would silence us if they could. We cannot be silenced. We are creatures full of dreams and longing. And food always brings us back. Grounding. Connects us to land and ocean, the blood of our very lives. Salty.

In the kitchen the heat takes on a glow. Hands knuckled with age, experience holds a knife, a steady *tak-tak-tak-tak*. Purple shiso leaves' slight prickle. The earthiness of gobo. The slightly scorched goodness of shoyu, sugar, savours and sweets on the tongue.

When the guests arrive, the exchanging of stories, of histories tied to food and memory, an ocean of time. Gifts.

The movement from idea to praxis. Real. Delicious.

#

Glossary for Found Symbols

Cup: *She waited as the tea steeped in the pot. Oolong, the artist said. The rich scent slowly seeped into the air. Moist. The rains had been falling almost daily for a month. Last year summer lingered, autumn stayed golden throughout September and into October but this year the 10th month was nothing but grey, rather depressing, truth be told.*

She had weathered far worse.

The tea was poured. Dark leaves, unstrained, flowed into the cup along with the liquid. A small sigh; such a beautiful shade of red-brown, but so clear. A warm, strong colour, perfect for this rainy day. Fragrant.

Make a wish before you take your first sip, the artist said. Negaigoto.

When she was a child and they wished for the rain to stop they made teru teru bozu and hung them from the eaves. During Tanabata Festival they tied wishes to bamboo branches.

She stared into the cup, her fingers clasping the corner of her glasses. All this time she'd been drinking tea and never known....

Fortune: All that you can carry in your hands. All that can fit in one suitcase. Maneki neko. A family fortune can be lost but true wealth is in kinship. Lucky is not a dog but a cat. Sipping a wish from a cup. Cupping your hand around your ear. The sound of the tides rising and falling. That's the ocean, breathing.

Taste: *She raised the cup to her lips and tipped the tea into her mouth. A fulsome taste; rounded, rich, slightly bitter, and a little bit sweet. This was what a wish could taste like. The artist told them to drink their tea, but let a little liquid remain in the bottom of the cup. You will swirl the contents, place the saucer on top, then flip the cup upside down. Turn over the cup and you will see the leaves have patterned. They may portray a scene, or they may be symbols. Draw what you see. Offer a translation.*

Translation: "Hajimete, konnano ne." Scattering of brown leaves against white china. Birds in flight. A snake. A boar. A figure with a walking staff. Riches arriving into one's life. Riding the lucky cat. Takaramono. Laughter. Sweets passed around the table. Sumimasen. You can use the sticks instead of the paintbrush. Sumi. The dark rich of ink against white paper. Meanings.

Abundance: *One wishes for one's wishes to be altruistic, she thinks. If there's only one wish, should I not make a wish of the community? Wishes for the community. Or a wish for my family. But if there is one wish, before one cup of tea.... A slow smile bloomed upon her face. There are enough wishes for everyone.*

Clay: Tea ceremony begins not with leaves and hot water, but with moist cool clay. Formed by plant and animal and mineral. Water. All that is life. Found in clay. A gift from the Earth's body.

Process: *Each of them received a small ball of clay. Soft-pressing down, around, a thumb's indent. Shaping informed by intention. Some of the women pinched the lip slightly outward, so that the bowl opened, a generous offering. Some of the women folded the lip inward, so that the when drinking they would feel like they were sipping secrets.*

"Maaa, jo-zu desune."

"liye—tondeemonai!"

Her friends chatted, laughing as they shared their thoughts, admired each others' handiwork. She was engrossed with the pliability of the material. The elasticity. How pleasing to be able to shape something and for that shape to hold. How curious this process has been, she thought. These art engagements with food and drink. From obento to tea to cup to clay, we are working backwards— returning to the source....

The mineral smell, the tacky stick of clay on skin. How it crinkled where the clay was starting to dry.

You can dab a little water onto the clay if it starts to dry out, the ceramicist told them, demonstrating.

She copied her actions, dipping two fingers into the bowl of water, then sliding the wetness upon the rim of her cup. Slick.

Sharing: Wakemasho. Language starts from two sides of a table and meet somewhere in the middle.

A story shared is a gift and the listening a gift, also. We take in words with our ears and eyes, through our very skin. They become a part of our bodies.

Home: *Yoi ichinchi datta, she thinks. Her shoulders feel a little stiff from unfamiliar activities, but how satisfying to know that the clay she had shaped is slowly drying in the ceramicist's studio. That it will be fired in the kiln, and will turn into cup. She will pour sake into it and place it at her late husband's altar. Ohhh, he would say. Yoku dekita. The tips of her ears heat up with embarrassment at her own imaginings. Maybe she will ask her daughter to find her some clay....*

Gift: You have brought home this gift. You will drink from it, or give it to another. You will find your fortune in a cup of your own making.