



Gallery
Sydney-East
Art & Design Consultancy

HIROMI ASHLIN TOWN OF PEARL #2

120 X 83IN / 305 X 211CM

BY APPOINTMENT, EMBASSY OF AUSTRALIA, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Hiromi Ashlin's "Town of Pearl #2" was created as an institutional piece specifically for her 2015-2016 exhibition at the Australian Embassy, Washington, D.C., USA. It is a fusion of her cross-cultural heritage as a citizen of Australia, born in Japan.

The Japanese-inspired elements of "Town of Pearl #2" are largely technical in nature, demonstrating Hiromi's masterful use of traditional origami materials. Large petal origami is employed throughout in a severely limited palette of natural colors embellished by the artist through delicate incense burning throughout.

Hiromi's "Australian" contribution to "Town of Pearl #2" is predominately thematic. She readily identifies with, and incorporates, the traditional Australian Aboriginal motif of viewing her "country" (Broome, WA) from the sky, depicting a landscape of hills, valleys and songlines signifying Broome's location within the traditional lands of the Aboriginal Yawuru people.

Each year Broome celebrates this fusion of different cultures in an annual festival called "Shinju Matsuri" (Japanese for "Festival of the Pearl"), which celebrates the Asian influenced culture brought here by the pearl economy and commemorates the important Aboriginal involvement in Broome's pearl industry.

Broome has a deep history based around the harvesting of pearls, starting with the initial cultivation of oysters for mother of pearl in the 1880s, to present day major cultured pearl farming enterprises.

The first pearl divers to work in Broome were the indigenous Australian Aboriginal peoples. They were "blackbirded" (enslaved) and forced to dive naked, with little or no equipment. Pregnant girls were used as divers as they were believed to have superior lung capacity. In 2010 the Shire of Broome and Kimberley commissioned a Memorial to the Indigenous Female Pearl Divers.

Asians and islanders began filling the dangerous pearl diving jobs in Broome after slavery was abolished. Diving suits were introduced to accommodate deeper diving and Japanese immigrants were especially valued for their experience in the pearl industry. The Japanese came to Broome to work on the small sailing ships and on shore-based activities supporting the harvesting of oysters from the waters around Broome. They were specialist divers and were an indispensable part of the industry until World War II.

The riches from the pearl beds did not come cheaply, however, and the town's Japanese cemetery is the resting place for the 919 Japanese divers who lost their lives working in the industry. Many more were lost at sea, and the true number of deaths is unknown.

In summary, Hiromi's powerful "Town of Pearl #2" commemorates Broome's physical beauty while testifying to the complex and sometimes difficult adjustments among Australia's diverse, ethnic populations.