

VALERIE MATSUMOTO

「八島光の生涯 — 信念を貫いた芸術家・活動家」

“The Principled Journey of Artist and Activist Mitsu Yashima”

Abstract:

My presentation focuses on the life and work of Mitsu Yashima, who was born Tomoe Sasako in Inno-shima in 1908. While studying art in Tokyo, she became a member of the Proletarian Artists Union where she met her husband, fellow artist Jun Iwamatsu. They left Japan in 1939, traveling on tourist visas to the United States where they first settled in New York. During World War II, they worked for the U.S. government, taking the pseudonyms Taro and Mitsu Yashima to protect their relatives in Japan. Eventually they settled in Los Angeles, California and opened an art school, but Mitsu spent much of her time doing art piecework to support the family. By 1970, she left her husband and moved to San Francisco, where she became involved in the Japantown Art Movement. Her lifelong efforts to combine activism, art, work, and daily life offer a window into the challenges she faced as a woman artist. Her political engagement, begun in Japan and continued in America, reflects the significance of transnational influences in the Asian American Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Representative works are:

*City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

“Pioneers, Renegades, and Visionaries: Asian American Women Artists in California, 1890s-1960s,” *Asian American Art: A History, 1850-1970*, eds. Mark D. Johnson, Gordon Chang, and Paul Karlstrom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 169-99.

*Farming the Home Place: A Japanese American Community in California, 1919-1982* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).