

Travelling exhibit about the life and work of Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani now on display in Portland

“Select Works by Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani”
 On view through September 16, 2018
 Emerson Street House
 1006 N.E. Emerson Street, Portland

The Cats of Mirikitani
 Film screenings
 May 29 & June 10, 7:00pm
 Clinton Street Theater
 2522 S.E. Clinton Street, Portland

An exhibit about the life and work of artist Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani (1920-2012) has opened at Emerson Street House in northeast Portland. Curated by Roger Shimomura and produced by Seattle’s Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, “Select Works by Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani” is a poignant exploration of the lasting impacts of war and discrimination and the healing power of creativity.

Mirikitani, who was interned by the U.S. government during World War II, was selling his art on the streets of New York City when he became the subject of a documentary, *The Cats of Mirikitani*, by filmmaker Linda Hattendorf. After the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, Hattendorf invited her documentary subject, the homeless, Sacramento-born, Hiroshima-raised Mirikitani, into her small apartment, and joined him on his road to healing.

After living in Japan during his youth, Mirikitani moved back to the United States at age 18 to pursue a career in art and escape growing militarism in Japan. He was living with his sister Kazuko and her family in Seattle when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Executive Order 9066 forced Jimmy and his sister to leave their home and move to separate internment camps hundreds of miles apart. Kazuko was sent to Minidoka in Idaho while Jimmy was sent to Tule Lake in northern California.



When the government required internees to take a loyalty test, Tule Lake became a segregation center where those deemed “disloyal” were congregated. Thousands there renounced their U.S. citizenship in protest, including Mr. Mirikitani. A lawyer worked for decades to help Jimmy and 5,000 other renunciants reclaim the citizenship they had given up under duress.

Mirikitani arrived in New York City in the early 1950s to try to resume his art career. When an art professor found him sleeping in Columbia University’s library, he was referred to the New York Buddhist Church, where he was provided room, board, and training as a cook. For years he performed seasonal work in resorts, summer camps, and country clubs on the east coast. While cooking at a restaurant on Long Island, he met Jackson Pollock.

Jimmy’s U.S. citizenship was finally restored in 1959, but he had moved so often that the government’s letter to inform him was never received. Eventually, he became a live-in cook on Park Avenue. When his employer died in the late 1980s, though, Jimmy became homeless and unemployed.

Within a year, he was living in Washington Square Park in New York City’s Greenwich Village, selling his artwork to survive. In 2001, he met filmmaker Hattendorf.

Screenings of Hattendorf’s *The Cats of Mirikitani* documentary are scheduled at the Clinton Street Theater, located at 2522 S.E. Clinton Street in Portland, on May 29 and June 10 at 7:00pm.

The display at Emerson Street House features about 30 pieces of Jimmy’s art, including works titled “Hiroshima Peace Memorial,” “Bamboo,” “Crab,” “Cat with Still Life,” “Korean Tiger,” and “World Trade Center.”

A book written by Loriene Honda featuring Mirikitani’s artwork, *The Cat who Chose to Dream*, was published in 2014 by

JIMMY’S JOURNEY. An exhibit about the life and work of artist Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani (1920-2012) has opened at Emerson Street House in northeast Portland. “Select Works by Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani,” a poignant exploration of the lasting impacts of war and discrimination and the healing power of creativity, was curated by Roger Shimomura and produced by Seattle’s Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience. (Photo/Masa Yoshikawa, courtesy of the Independent Television Service)

Martin Pearl Publishing. The book shares the story of a cat’s choice to be incarcerated at a World War II prison camp as a gesture of loving support to the Japanese-American family to whom he belongs. Readers witness through the cat’s eyes the devastating condition of the camp and the sense of injustice witnessing his family go through such a demoralizing experience.

The book also includes therapeutic relaxation and visualization techniques that allow young readers to share in the cat’s triumph over feelings of hopelessness and anger while seeing the cat’s use of breathing and visualization exercises.

Several copies of *The Cat who Chose to Dream* are available for purchase when viewing the art display (while supplies last).

“Select Works by Jimmy Tsutomu Mirikitani” is on view through September 16, 2018 at Emerson Street House, located at 1006 N.E. Emerson Street in Portland. The exhibit is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday from 1:00pm to 4:00pm and by appointment. To learn more, call (323) 632-6638 or visit <www.emersonstreethouse.com>.

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