



MARIANNA KISTLER BEACH
MUSEUM OF ART

MINIDOKA ON MY MIND

Paintings and Prints
by **Roger Shimomura**

**APRIL 5 –
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KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

By Aileen June Wang, Associate Curator,
Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

**ROGER SHIMOMURA
BEGAN THE SERIES
MINIDOKA ON
MY MIND IN 2008,
INSPIRED BY HIS
EXPERIENCE OF
IMPRISONMENT
FOR TWO YEARS,
IN THE MINIDOKA
INTERNMENT CAMP
IN IDAHO.**

around telling everyone that he was celebrating his third birthday. The first lithograph from the artist’s 1999 series *Memories of Childhood*, featured in this exhibition, visualizes the event.

Another source of material for the artist was the diary kept by his grandmother Toku Shimomura, who wrote fifty-six volumes spanning the time of her arrival in America until her death. Unfortunately, many of the early diaries are now lost, because Toku Shimomura threw them into a wood burning stove when the FBI was searching Japanese American homes for evidence of spying. She feared imprisonment for expressing sentimental feelings about her home country.²

Shimomura has used various sources of historical and personal material to expose, in his words, “shameful” moments in the history of World War II, as well as the persistent lack of understanding and recognition of Asian Americans as Americans. He collects artifacts and papers from all ten of the internment camps established in the western region of the U.S. In the current climate of war in the Middle East and the crisis of relocating refugees, Shimomura’s art endures as a testament to mistakes made as a result of fear, and underscores the importance of learning from the past.

Shimomura’s works bear certain signature characteristics intended to disarm, even as they challenge their viewers to think critically about assumptions regarding those who are different. Large fields of highly saturated colors, without shading, mimic the visually attractive style of print advertisements and classic comic books. Many images also reveal the influence of *ukiyo-e* (“of the floating world”) woodblock prints, which were produced in Japan in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and became a major Japanese export to Europe after Japan opened its doors to foreign trade. A distinct characteristic of these prints is the partial view into interior space, making it seem as if the viewer were an accidental participant. In similar fashion, *Block Party* shows a glimpse of Japanese men and women, through nail-studded walls, dressed in the latest American fashions and dancing the swing or jitterbug. Another device that Shimomura often adapts from traditional Japanese painting is the bird’s-eye view composition. In his *American Infamy* paintings, one sees orderly rows of barracks and small human figures engaged in various activities, sometimes obscured by clouds. Unlike traditional Japanese landscape paintings, however, *American Infamy* pantings reveal the source of the vantage point: camp guards standing in a watchtower.

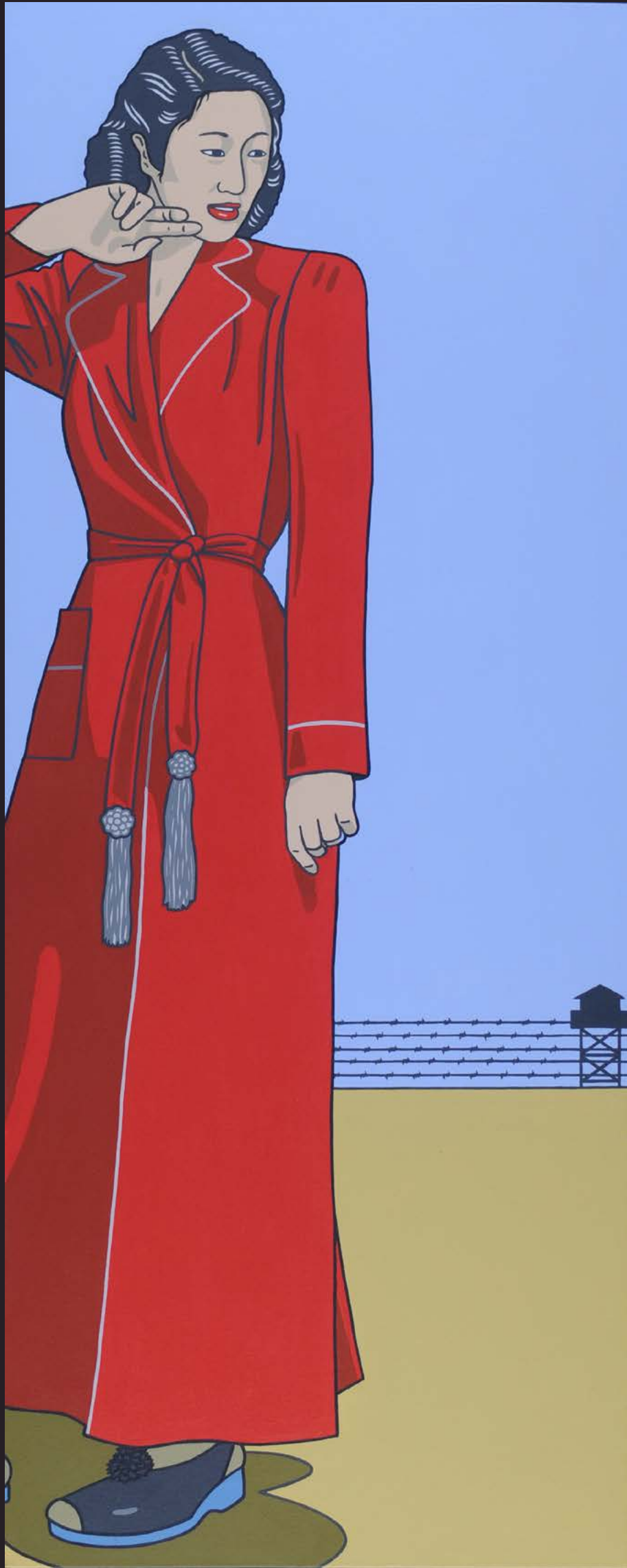
In his art, Shimomura reflects with irony on the condition of the American artist of Asian descent. His works allude to popular American culture significant to his personal experience, such as comic books and superheroes. During his career, however, Shimomura learned that his physical appearance and his name invited unwarranted expectations of what he should produce, that is, art with Japanese motifs. Turning this misconception on its head, Shimomura studied traditional Japanese art, applied for a grant to travel to Japan, and produced works with a “decorative Japanese woodblock feel,” but on the difficult subject matter of World World II or racial prejudice against Asian Americans. The artist has reasoned that “I have to somehow make work accessible.”³ “Minidoka on My Mind” represents Shimomura’s life-long mission to provoke a brutally honest dialogue about being Asian American.

1. Interview with the artist, October 30, 2015.
2. Correspondence with the artist, December 7, 2015.
3. Anne Collins Goodyear, “Interview with Roger Shimomura,” *Roger Shimomura: An American Knockoff*, Pullman, Washington: Museum of Art / Washington State University, 2014, 50.



American Infamy #6, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 104 in., courtesy of the artist

Morning Glory, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 24 in., courtesy of the artist



Block Dance, 2007, acrylic on canvas, 36 x 42 in., courtesy of the artist

“THIS EXHIBITION SHOULD SERVE AS A REMINDER THAT DURING TIMES OF INTERNATIONAL CRISES, OUR GOVERNMENT SEEMS TO CONSISTENTLY LOSE ITS MEMORY REGARDING PAST MISTAKES.”

— ROGER SHIIMOMURA

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Back Cover image: *Furlough #2*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 24 in., courtesy of the artist

