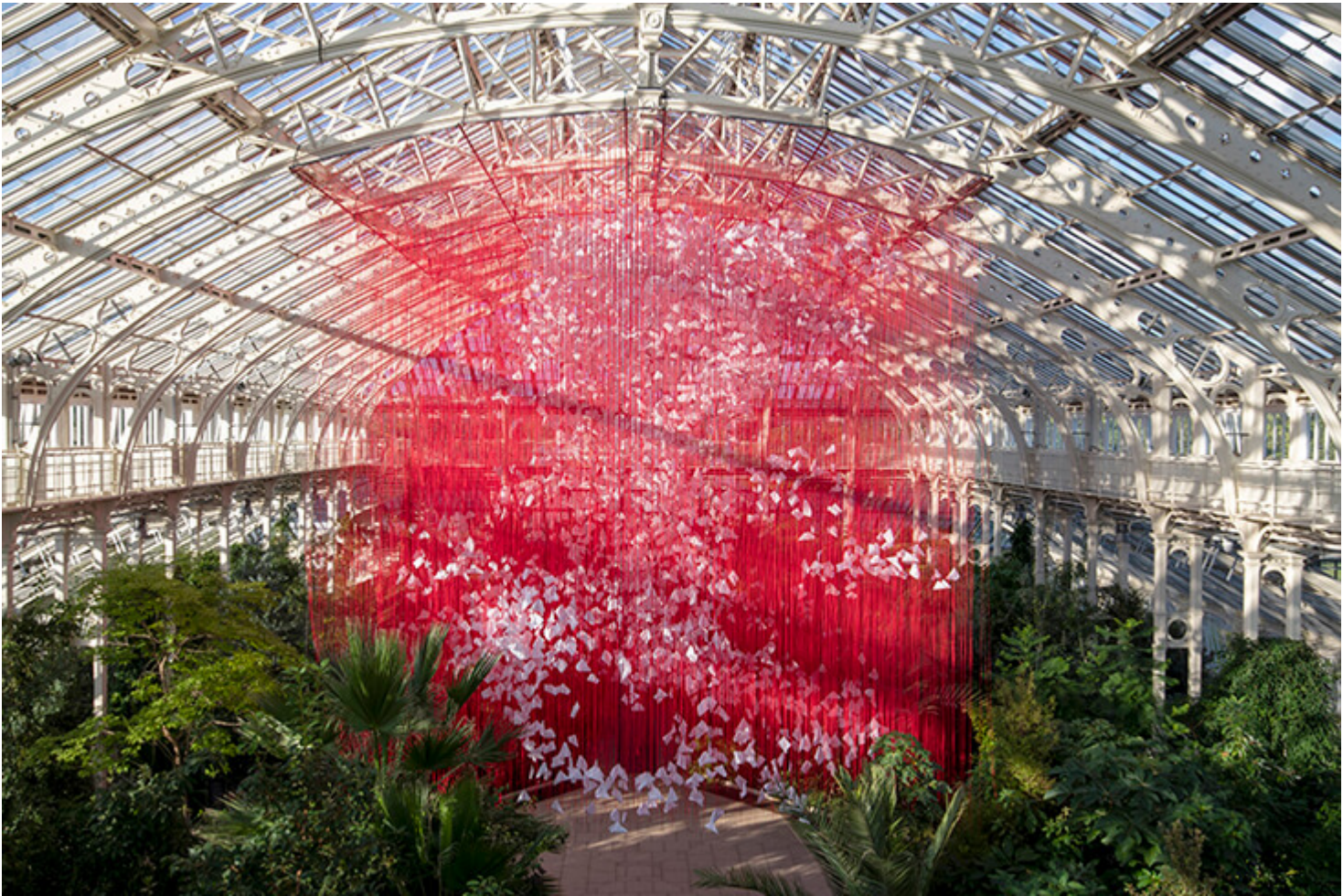




Weaving Webs: Chiharu Shiota's Contemporary Embroidery

## Description



Chiharu Shiota, One Thousand Springs, 2021, Royal Botanical Gardens, London

In Chiharu Shiota's dreamy world vast webs are cast across space, creating dense tangles that cloak and consume everything around them. This includes the ordinary objects that we so often take for granted, such as keys, books, and even boats and pianos. When absorbed into the foggy midst of all this thread, we see how easily the familiar becomes strange and unrecognisable, almost slipping out of the real, physical world and into something beyond. Made from yards and yards of wool and thread, her dazzling and all-encompassing webs spread out wide across the gallery space, asking us to question what embroidery is, and what it could be.





Chiharu Shiota © Jonty Wilde, Image Courtesy of Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Born in Japan in 1972, Shiota spent time studying in Australia and Germany. She is now based in Berlin, a cosmopolitan city that is filled with different nationalities and cultural references. But her art is still resolutely Japanese, echoing the same haunting presence and ethereal spatiality that has rippled through Japan's art for centuries. The colour scheme of red, black and white that dominates her art is also distinctly Japanese, and she ramps it up for dramatic effect, playing with the way these bold, simple tones carry an intense weight and drama when writ large across huge spaces.





Chiharu Shiota, Direction Of Consciousness, 2021

Shiota's earliest art was performance based, exploring the physical limits of her own body within space. She shifted tack in the early aughts, moving into object-based installations with a spectral, haunting atmosphere. It was the psychological weight of objects that first attracted Shiota to working with installation, and she would deliberately pick items that seemed to carry a certain lingering human presence. Clothing, empty door frames and beds occupied her early art, and she would try to instil something uncanny into them through unexpected interventions – soaking dresses in water and letting them drip, say, or arranging empty door frames into vastly gridded networks, as if offering up a series of gateways into the great beyond.





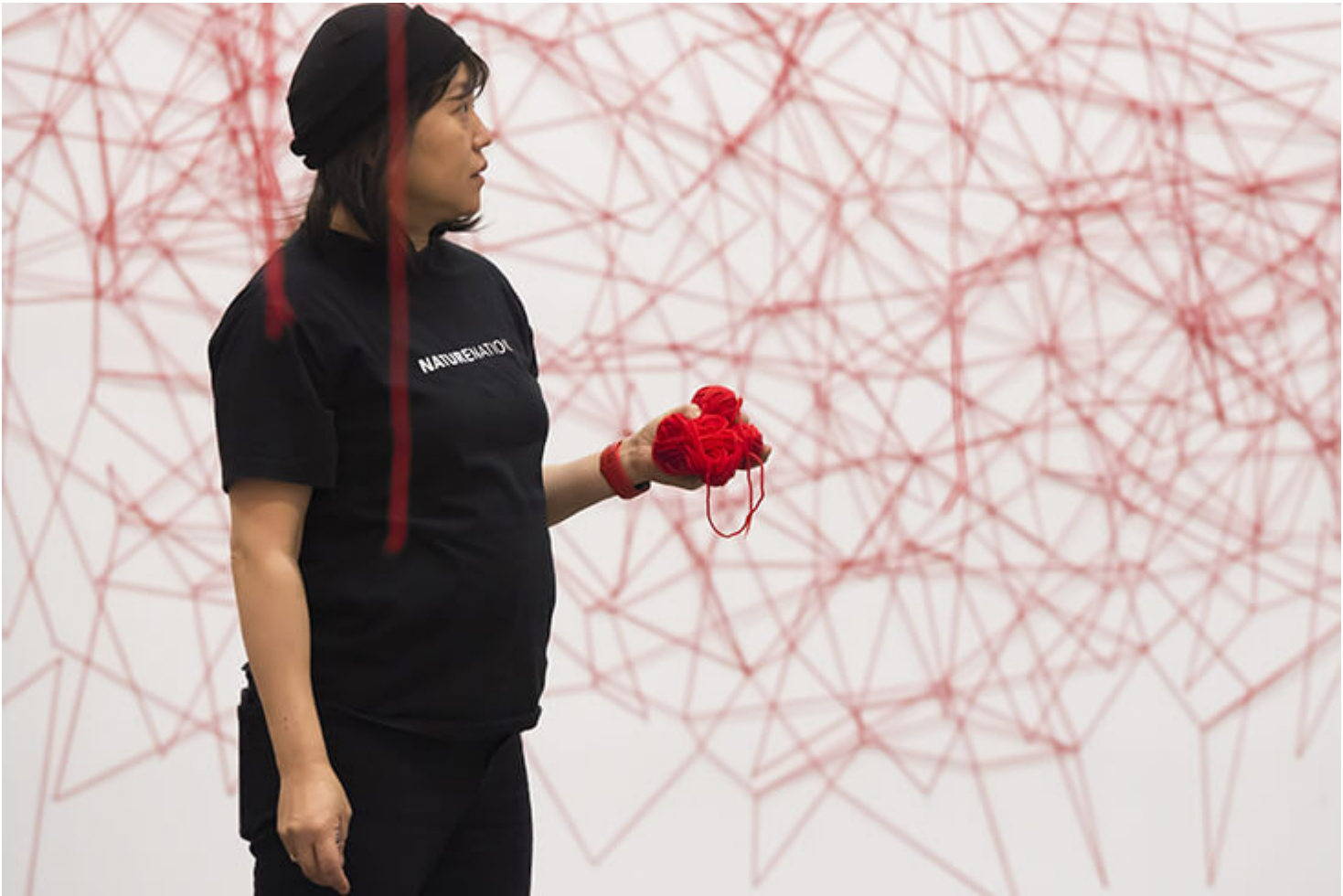
Chiharu Shiota, *The Key in the Hand*, 2015

It was in the early aughts that Shiota began bringing yarns into her art. She was struck with the way this seemingly simple, ordinary and utilitarian material could create such a visually arresting effect, weighted with the solid presence of making. Anyone who has ever woven can relate to her weaving process â the patience, dedication and concentration needed to push and pull the yarn in the desired directions over and over, sometimes having to unravel and start all over again. The exhaustive, physical weight of all this weaving hangs heavy in the air around it, creating a tactile and deeply moving physical presence.





Chiharu Shiota, *Unconscious Anxiety*, 2009



Chiharu Shiota at work

For Shiota, however, her installations are not merely about physicality and visual effect. She also delves into our deeper, unconscious human experiences, toying with how ideas around sleep, anxiety, memories and dreams can also be carefully woven in. The objects within her woven webs allude to these associations, and they carry with them a certain historical weight, having been used before many times over. Many of the items Shiota chooses also invite the possibility of escape — keys could open up doorways into another world, beds can lead us towards dreams, and boats suggest journeys into the unknown. But the objects displayed by themselves might not be enough to excite the imagination. Instead, thread becomes the gateway between the ordinary and the magical, clawing away at the boundaries of the real and dragging it away into another mystical realm. The psychological power of colour also plays a vital role in the understanding of her art — bright red, when wrapped into air over and over again carries with it

a raw and emotionally overwhelming effect, while black is dark and foreboding, creating a brooding, introspective quality that has occupied Japanese art for centuries.

## **CATEGORY**

1. PIONEERS
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