

Lynne Yamamoto at Information Gallery

In *Wash Closet*, a seven-part installation, Lynne Yamamoto continued her investigation of biography, femininity and labor in a strikingly poetic visual display. This array of diminutive crafted objects revealed Yamamoto's feeling for sensual materials while building on the documentation of her grandmother's immigrant life, a topic she introduced in earlier shows. Notably, Yamamoto's *Ten in One Hour* (1992), a small wooden tub containing lumps of handmade soap sprouting tufts of black hair, recalled the grand-

mother's life as a laundress on a sugar plantation. She had arrived in Hawaii in 1914 as a "picture bride," marrying a man she met for the first time at the dock. After a life of labor, she drowned herself in a bathtub in 1942, at the age of 49.

The installation's intimate scale intensified the implied despair in this history. *Wash Closet* occupied less than 400 square feet, and few of the exhibited objects exceeded a 5-inch radius. Most striking was a row of 280 flat-head nails driven into one gallery wall just below eye level so that they protruded slightly. Each nail head bore a single printed word. The leftmost nail read "arrive" and the last read "drown"; in between were "wash," "bleach," "boil," "marry," "fear," "love," "smile" and other terms that evoked the habits and acts of a confined life.

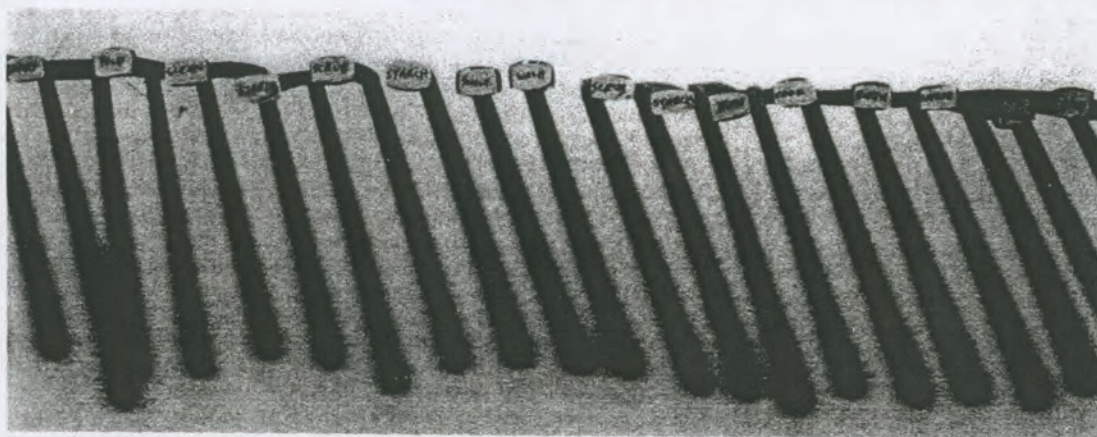
Other curious components of *Wash Closet* included moss, paper, balsa wood boxes, a tar-

nished silver spoon, faded photographs. A small glass vessel filled with tacks and plugged by a soft roll of cotton suggested the "aching body" that was its title.

Wash Closet came across as a respectful and inquisitive exploration of a character's life, imbedded in the socio-historic specifics of a particular time and place, rather than as a simplistic protest against patriarchal culture. Yamamoto's lyrical sense of materials foregrounded the persistence of a pride maintained even under conditions of drudgery. The installation as a whole evoked the coexistence of ritual and hope in domestic labor.

As a metaphor for sloughing off cultural trappings, the work's theme of cleansing may also suggest conflicting desires for assimilation by Japanese-Americans following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Yamamoto's work provides a welcome elaboration on the now-canonical theme of middle-class feminine domesticity after World War II that has typically been the point of departure for feminist theory in the age of consumer culture. Viewers can look forward to her next chapter.

—Sarah Bayliss



Lynne Yamamoto: One section of the seven-part installation, *Wash Closet*, 1993; at Information Gallery.