



Sharon Yamamoto: She combines a childhood love of fantasy and her classical background in her mythical, often mysterious works.

## ARTIST MAKES AMERICAN DEBUT IN BOCA

By Sue Semmes  
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Two weeks ago, a hand-stitched notebook mysteriously appeared at Sharon Yamamoto's new home in North Miami. It was a notebook of the pre-Raphaelite period Yamamoto had handcrafted as a scholarship college student some 30 years ago at Illinois Wesleyan University. The book's return coincides with Yamamoto's one-woman American debut Saturday at Ryals Gallery, One S. Ocean Blvd., Boca Raton.

An opening reception for Yamamoto's "Images Beyond Material" is from 5 to 8 p.m. Saturday, and the show continues through April 30. Fame has always loomed large in the life of Yamamoto, a third-generation Japanese-American artist who was born in Chicago, educated in Illinois and England, married to an Englishman, and a British resident for more than a quarter-century until returning to America.

The pre-Raphaelite notebook in question was a gift to a college English professor who was "quite an Anglophile," according to the artist. The teacher encouraged her to do graduate art studies in England.

"He allowed me to take his English Literature course on the condition that I turn in an art book," she recalls. "When the project was finished, I told him he could keep the book."

It was in London that she met Tony White, her

husband-to-be, and after a whirlwind two-and-a-half week courtship, she married in 1969.

"People think we are really different," she says with a ready smile. "He has a travel and publication business, and sometimes he wrangles me into helping him out. I think there is a definite snobbish element in art. Sometimes people think money and art don't go together, but I've never really had to support myself from art, so I can paint and draw as I please."

Yamamoto grew up in an artistic household (her father Todd was a professional saxophone player and her mother a talented singer), and she drew and painted from earliest childhood. Something that intrigued young Sharon was the family photo albums that showed her parents and grandparents at "camp."

"It was until I was a teen-ager that I realized my parents and grandparents were put in a relocation camp during the war," she reveals. "I had always thought it was some kind of summer camp. My parents had no bitterness about it. It's only been recently that my father has told me about his experiences in the relocation camps."

During the anti-Japanese paranoia of World War II, many Japanese-Americans were interned in camps, even though they had been born in America. Yamamoto's parents picked up where they left off after the war ended, and moved to Chicago from California for Todd Yamamoto's musical career.



'Travelling Companions,' an oil on canvas.

"Chicago was a great place to grow up," she recalls. "I always loved

going to the museums and studying the great artists. From the artists of the Renaissance to Franz Kline and Jackson Pollock."

Yamamoto combines both her childhood love of fantasy and her classical background in her mythical, often mysterious work, where human and animal forms sometimes become a very part of nature.

"I never begin painting knowing what I am going to paint," she insists. "My mind just points the way and I follow the direction. I'm very lucky. It's almost like I have a built-in camera that has recorded everything I have ever seen."

"Images Beyond Material" include older canvases that have been shipped from England and newer works Yamamoto has painted here in Florida.

"I paint not because people admire it, but because I'm trying to do my best," she says. "I've learned from teaching that flattery can be very, very destructive. I try to paint with the same spirit I had as a child when I used pencils, crayons and anything I could draw on."

For more information on Sharon Yamamoto and Ryals Gallery in 2002, call 246-2462.