

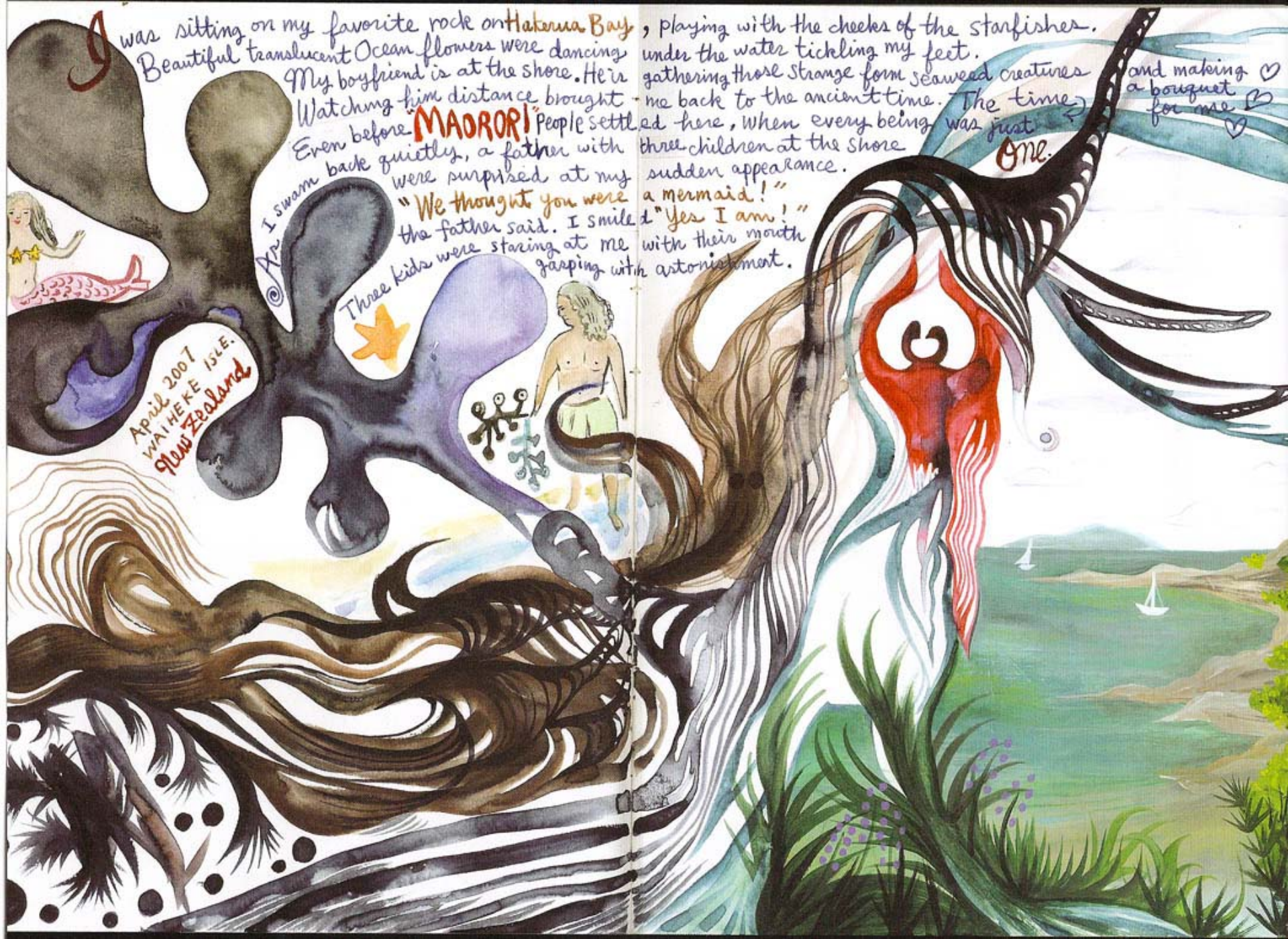
I was sitting on my favorite rock on **Hakereua Bay**, playing with the cheeks of the starfisher. Beautiful translucent Ocean flowers were dancing under the water tickling my feet.

My boyfriend is at the shore. He is gathering those strange form seaweed creatures and making a bouquet for me. Watching him distance brought me back to the ancient time. The time Even before **MAORORI** People settled here, when every being was just **ONE.**

Ap I swam back quietly, a father with three children at the shore were surprised at my sudden appearance. "We thought you were a mermaid!" the father said. I smiled "Yes I am!" with their mouth gasping with astonishment.

These kids were staring at me

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WAIHEKE ISLE.
New Zealand



Paper Planes

The Travel Journals of Barnstormer Yuri Shimojo

INTERVIEW BY JOHN LEE PORTRAIT BY GION
IMAGES COURTESY OF YURI SHIMOJO AND CWC INTERNATIONAL

These days everyone's got a blog, but the problem with blogs is they're not very colorful. Sure, you can add fancy flash animation, brightly-hued jpegs from the latest digicam, or kinetically expressive .mov files, but the tactility disappears; web journals simply don't compare to a beautifully illustrated, handwritten notebook.

No one understands this better than Yuri Shimojo. The 41-year-old artist, illustrator, author, and Barnstormer lives life to the fullest; and, luckily for us, she documents it in physical journals that are nothing short of brilliant. Whether she's in Brooklyn, Tokyo, or Maui, Shimojo succinctly captures the essence of unusual creatures living next to fantastic people in faraway places.

She has a gift for boiling her experiences down to what's immediate and personal, and the subjects are always unpredictable: vacation tan lines, alcoholics, British people with big noses, and dolphins all make appearances in her pages, rendered with a disarming combination of accurate detail and childlike simplicity.

Yuri shared a little of her story with *Theme*, and graciously let us put some of her pages in our pages.

Did you travel a lot while growing up?

Yeah. I grew up in an unusual family with an unconventional upbringing, which I wrote about in my autobiography, ten years ago last April. [Ed., It's recently been republished.] I wrote it because I had to [record] something about my experience—everyone in my family passed away before I turned thirty. Some from sickness, some from accidents. When my family passed away, I lost my home—my family was my home. So I guess since then, I consider my home to be inside of me, and I've been traveling [since then].

For me, traveling is not just [about geography]. I consider my life as a kind of a journey since birth. Last summer, after ten years, I got kicked out of my apartment on Bedford Ave., so right now I'm actually homeless. I'm finally moving to the jungle in Hawai'i, so it's like moving from one jungle to another.

His holiness the Dalai Lama is coming to Maui! The last time I was in Maui, I was invited to lunch by a lama who was building a temple in Maui. He grew up with the Dalai Lama, so when he comes, I get to meet him. Actually, I'll be one of 500 people, so it's not a one-on-one.

It sounds like you're a very spiritual person. Are you religious?

Well, all my family is "on the other side," so it's a natural way of communication for me. [It's] not a religion, but I've always been very sensitive to things you cannot see.

Do you ever feel spirits or anything like that?

Yeah, since I was born! Everyday!

So how did you start doing art?

In elementary school, every kid had to do a picture journal every day. The great thing was that, at the end, they bound all the journals for each kid. So I still have all my old journals.

Your commercial art and the stuff you show in galleries, is it different from your travel journals?

I show my work at galleries and have published some books and CD covers, [in addition to] commercial work. But my journal work has always been my favorite because I always want everything I do—even my fine art and illustrations—to come from my life. I put some kind of story [in my work]. Journals [have always been a] very natural

project, ever since I started to write.

When did you start to write?

Ten years ago, I started writing for this free paper in Japan; it was a column about my daily life. Around that time, I went through my family deaths, and somehow people really liked it, and I won an award. This publisher saw my column and wanted to publish essays about my life as an artist—at the time, I was working as an illustrator and I was on TV in Japan.

Wait, you were on a TV show?

Yeah, it was legendary! It was a cult TV show called "Bum TV," [a public-access-like show similar to] *Wayne's World*. It was broadcasted all over Japan.

Do you ever go back and read your old journals?

Yeah, sometimes. When I go back to read my journals, I can learn about myself. When I journal, my [daydreams and nightmares] become real.

Why do you travel so much?

I think I like to confirm the oneness. When I travel, I encounter many places, people, or cultures that are supposed to



Antonio's family run a little bar on the beach at Praia de Forte, the turtle reservation in BAHIA, BRASIL. They are the funkiest, craziest and the sweetest family we've ever met. The oldest brother Antonio has a golden heart but is an alcoholic, his younger brother Marcelo is a prominent soccer player but a trouble making playboy, their gorgeous sister Rosangela is a single mother waiting for her boyfriend to visit her again from Greece. Their magnificent mama Rosa's life is not as simple as she wishes, but she is the happiest mama in the world. They all look so cool and fashionable in the latest outfit which are sent by their beautiful older sister who works as a top Samba dancer in Germany. We fell in love with them and they fell in love with us. We almost got adopted by them and we didn't mind at all. We went to the carnival almost every night, and went everywhere in a Volkswagen carpool van. Brazilians are insane about dancing, especially people in BAHIA. They blast out the music from huge sound systems till seven in the morning and they never sleep. They dance to death, maybe they would still dance even after they die. Mama taught us how to do the steps so we could become semi-Brazilians. My boyfriend was 5000000 happy because he could dance with all those beautiful girls with "maravilhoso" butts. I was dancing with Antonio all night long and sometimes we were in the middle of huge circle. I was also able to win some bottles of beer by dancing with local men. They talked to me in Brazilian and I pretended that I totally understood.

The Brazilian music and dance with their passion certainly casted a spell on us. We were absolutely addicted to the dance and just couldn't stand still even in silence. The magical Brazilian rhythm was echoing in my head wherever and whenever. Antonio even called me "Yuri, the mini disco"!!

July 2000
BAHIA, BRASIL

Walking down the street in **RIO**,

I realized one funny thing. Well... **lots of Panties!!**

Not at only lingerie stores, panties were always at the store front, like **leading goods** at vendors, at discount stores, at street fairs.

Then I realized toilet seats were hanging at the hardware store's store front, too.

I remember our Brazilian friend André said "In Brazil, Men care more women's butts rather than their boobs. We say 'Tits for Americans'." I see, that's why I saw lots of bottom part goods.

I've seen lots of lingerie stores!! Panties were selling everywhere.

Store front, too.

Do I think too much??

RIO
Copacabana



A strange and unforgettable thing happened to me on New Year's Eve, 2001, on the Big Island of Hawaii. That evening, we visited an 88 years old Japanese "Nisei" woman named Bea at her house for a New Year's Eve Party. I thought it was ^{the} first time for me to meet Bea but after speaking to her I found out we ^{had} met before, a long long time ago.

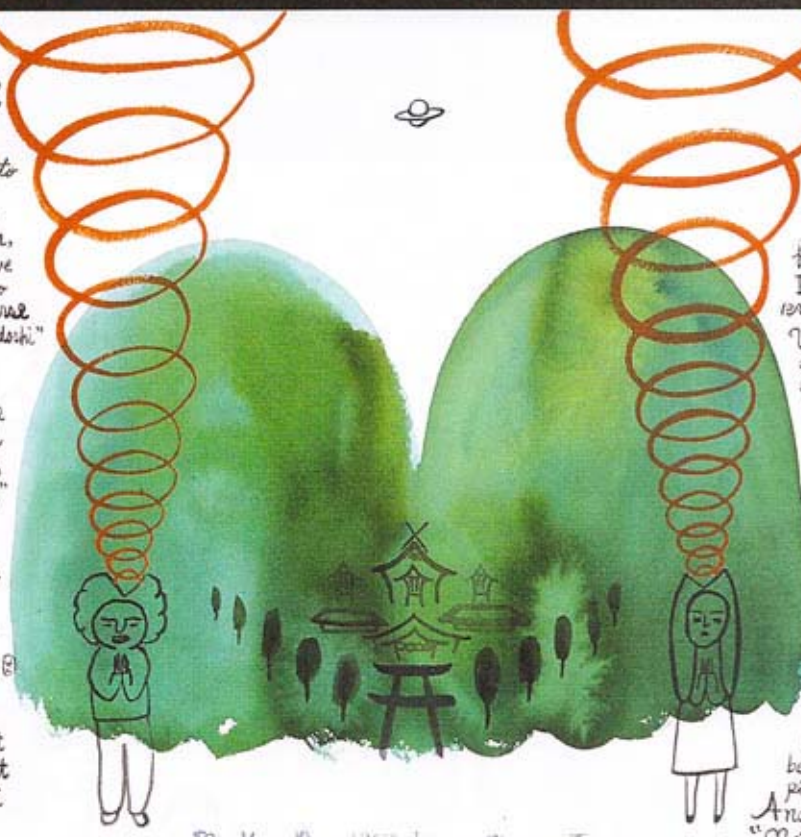
She told me she used to work at a gift shop at the Maunakea Hotel where I visited with my parents 25 years ago. I said to her that I've been there before, a long time ago. She asked me to describe my father. When I described him to her, she said "I remember him. He called me from Tokyo and I helped your family get a reservation because we were full booked. It was 1977. A little Japanese girl came to buy a candy bar with a hundred dollar bill! I guess your mom wanted small change." She remembered us when I was 10 years old!!!



The year, 1999 was a very tough year for me. I was 33 years old, the last year of the 3 years of "Yakudoshi", the critical years for women, based on ancient Japanese traditions.

In Japan, all women go to a Shinto shrine to pray for protection from upcoming 3 years of critical events when they become 31 years old. However, I neglected the tradition because I live in New York and I thought NY is too far for the evil spirit to come and curse me. But I was too optimistic. ^{My} "Yakudoshi" never forget the expatriot who lives across the sea. I suffered repeated accidents and illness throughout the year. And on top of that, my boyfriend was 25 years old that year and he was in the midst of the 3 years "Yakudoshi" for men. When we were in Japan at the end of 1997, we both got hospitalized for different symptoms. That was enough persuasion for both of us to believe in such mystery. We were both freaked out and decided to receive a Shinto rite to exorcise evil spirits.

On New Year's Day of 2000, we went to Izumo Taisha Shrine, the oldest and one of the most important shrines in Japan.



According to Mythology, which was compiled during the 8th century, this shrine is dedicated to Ohminushi-no-mikoto, a Shinto deity. We chose this Shinto Vatican to drive out the evil spirit.

The shrine is located at the foot of two low mountains of Izumo. The whole village was very quiet and peaceful like heaven. When we entered the shrine, we felt a very powerful energy from the air. It was very sharp. I felt as if my skull was opened up to receive spiritual power from head to toe. We thought that some undecipherable power was coming from those mountains. We heard later that the mountains are so sacred that it is protected and kept off-limit to the public. Even though the ceremony of the exorcism was performed by the priests together with tons of other prayers for other people, we believed it really worked because the year 2000 was a very peaceful and good year for us. And we certainly learned "Not to mess with old traditions."

New Year's Day of 2000, Izumo, Shimane, Japan



Her memories were astoundingly clear and she told me a lot of funny stories about my parents, who are both no longer alive. She said "Your parents made you come here to see me again." I couldn't stop crying. It was too spooky for me to believe, but I also know "There is truth even in fiction."

Dec. 31, 2001 Honokaa, Hawaii

I SAW THE REAL INDIAN'S LIFE

Driving down Hwy. 198 from MONUMENT VALLEY AT GRAND CANYON, watching spectacular MESAS around me and on and on....



We already O.D. ed of mystic landscape of South West by the time when we got famous G. Canyon.

We just confused how do Grand and left

Women wore very beautiful turquoise jewelry. Most men and women wore grasses.

Not at the

MONUMENT VALLEY and famous G. Canyon

What the impressive sight I appreciated more than G. Canyon was KFC of Tuba City in Navajo Reservation. It was the sight of REAL NAVAJO'S LIFE in 1998. I have never seen real Native Americans that many in one place. They love chicken.

The Average Chinese person is up before dawn, even earlier than roosters. They all go to the neighborhood parks every morning.

Elephant hill park in Kweilin, China is no an exception at all.

There were men and women of all ages, all of them extremely healthful people. Some people were just walking around with swinging both arms like pendulums, some were practicing tai chi with swords, and some were exercising with Chinese new wave electric music.

I saw a man holding a tai chi pose, frozen like a NYC city subway pantomimer. Another man was standing at the riverside howling to nobody forever.

Another

woman was bumping herself into a tree trunk every 30 second and shouting "HA!" (That scared me.) At the entrance of the park, tons of people were dancing ballroom style with huge smiles on their faces. Repetitious high-pitched music blasted from ultra-low key sound systems. It was a genuine rave party.

They all looked so well, enjoying their lives, although some seem to be involved in a love triangle that developed at this daily morning event.

The morning in Kweilin gave me a glimpse of the tremendous power of China.





be very faraway and exotic, but sometimes they remind me of my childhood or my own background. Those experiences make me very happy and confirm [for] me that we all come from one place.

When you're traveling, do you record on the spot?

It all depends. I have a sketchbook fetish. I love sketchbooks! When I travel, especially to places like India or the Amazon or Africa or China, I love to go to the local stationery stores. I love school notebooks that have the special thin paper that makes sounds if you put your lips to them and blow. Sketchbooks or notebooks inspire me to write.

When I travel I like to pick things up, like stuff from the street or even garbage. I like to collage those things. I love chopsticks covers, like with a funny panda bear or something; those are slightly different for all countries. It's the little things, like candy wrappers.

You write about such fantastic people in your journals.

Yeah, I feel so lucky. I just meet incredible people all over the world.

So these are real people?

Yes, real people.

Do you ever make people up?

No. Everybody is super-duper real.

How do you meet these people?

I'm shy, so I don't really introduce myself, but they just come sit down next to me and start to [talk]. When people who travel with me see my journals later, they always say I depict things and people well. I really

like to capture the atmosphere or essence around that person or thing. I don't draw or write from photographs; I really want to follow my memory. It's a spontaneous, rough feeling.

What's your most important travel journal?

I think my cross-country trip in '97 was very important because it [turned] me into a journal person. I also had a one-month Brazil trip; I had more experience [by then], so the artwork itself in the Brazil journal was tighter and more solid. I found my voice and [understood how to] write journals. [See page 33.]

Have you seen other people's journals?

When I saw Peter Beard's journals I flipped out. He lived in Kenya for a long time, and he collages with masks and snakes and stuff, so he has a huge sketchbook, but he can't physically close them. They're very inspiring.

Who was the most memorable person you met during your travels?

This one woman in China. When I was in China I wanted to [see for myself whether] everybody really meets each other in the park before dawn [to exercise]. I went into the park, and they really do! Crazy! And [there was this] one lady, I think she was doing some tai chi, she was bumping herself into a tree for an hour. Of course I couldn't watch her the whole time, but when I came back after an hour she was still bumping herself. [See page 35.]

How do you afford to travel so much?

Oh...because I am a punk-rock princess.

Did you win the lottery?

Yes, I think I won the lottery of life.

Lastly, why do you journal?

Journaling is so important for me because it's not only a profound therapeutic meditation, it also helps me on my self-cultivating journey. Even recording my daydreaming or scribbling down blah blah monkey mind thoughts, if I record my own point of view for the particular event with my own voice, it becomes my own reality.

Each person's reality is their own mind's creation. Nothing is real, but everything is real. If my journal inspires someone to "become themselves," that is so encouraging for me to [continue to] share my journals with others. ☞