

JAPANTOWN PROJECT

August 2009, I received a commission project from the San Jose Museum of Art. The project was to photograph the city's Japantown. I was told I had the freedom to photograph any subject as long as they relate to Japantown of San Jose. Soon after I flew to San Jose and visited Japantown for the first time.

Before I flew to San Jose, the SJMA gave me names of a few key individuals in the community. One person was Jimi Yamaichi, Director and Curator of the Japanese American Museum of San Jose. This small local museum was temporarily closed for renovation at that time. I met Jimi and he showed me the museum building which was still under construction and there was nothing inside. I asked him where items of the museum were and he told me they were in the storage. The storage was in the back of the under-construction building. He opened one of the doors and told me to follow. Inside was full of cardboard boxes. He held one of the boxes and explained that inside the boxes were things from the internment camps where the Japanese were forced to stay during the war. Some were things people used and some are what people made during such confinement.

I noticed one flower brooch. It was beautiful. Looking at it carefully, I noticed that the flowers were made with tiny shells. Jimi explained that the internment camps were located on dry lakebeds and the dry lakebeds used to be the bottom of the ocean. He said that if I dig underneath the surface I would find many seashells underground. He said because people were not allowed to go outside, they used whatever they could find inside the fence on the dry land. Many World War II internment camp survivors now reside in the San Jose area, and many items were their belongings, I was told.

I thought then things inside these boxes could be the essence of Japantown and I decided to search what else are inside these boxes.



CARVED BIRD PIN (VERSO) IN BOX



FLOWER BROOCH MADE WITH SHELLS 2



PIPE-CLEANER FLOWER ARRANGEMENT IN GALLON JUG, TULE LAKE, CALIFORNIA 2



PIPE-CLEANER FLOWER ARRANGEMENT IN MAYONNAISE JAR, TULE LAKE, CALIFORNIA