

MISSING HOUSE

Valencia, California 1986

Collection of the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, California

silkscreen on recycled paper towel

Missing House was the artist's first public artwork completed in the United States. The project focused on the house in San Diego owned by the Japanese-American family of Shinkichi Tajiri that had been confiscated, i.e. physically removed or "disappeared," from its neighborhood in 1942 during the family's incarceration in Poston, Arizona, a relocation camp during World War II.

After extensive research, including interviews with Tajiri himself, the image of the missing house was silk-screened on paper towels with a composition similar to the "advertisement" of missing children. The paper towels were then installed in public restrooms, which forced people to interact with, and "wash their hands of," the disregarded history of Japanese-Americans.

A restroom, like a house, is a very private yet public space. Tajiri, a natural born American, was considered Japanese and treated as an enemy at the onset of the war. "Recycled" as an American when he joined the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, he was finally disposed of, like a paper towel, upon his return to the United States.

This piece was dedicated to Shinkichi Tajiri, the artist's professor and mentor in Berlin in 1982.



Installation view