

PROGRAMME NOTE

The Hiroshima Panels (原爆の図, *Genbaku-no zu*) are a series of fifteen painted folding panels by the collaborative husband and wife artists Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi completed over a span of thirty-two years (1950-82). Panels depict the consequences of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as other nuclear disasters of the 20th century. The use of traditional Japanese black and white ink drawings, *sumi-e*, contrasted with the red of atomic fire produce an effect that is strikingly anti-war and anti-nuclear. Each panel stands 1.8 meters' x 7.2 meters.

The paintings depict people wrenched by the violence and chaos of the atomic bombing; some wandering aimlessly, their bodies charred, while others are still being consumed by atomic fire. Dying lovers embrace and mothers cradling their dead children. Each painting portraits the inhumanity, brutality, and hopelessness of war, and the cruelty of bombing civilians. The people depicted in the paintings are not only Japanese citizens but also Korean residents and American POWs who suffered or died in the atomic bombings as well.

The completed panels are:

- *i. Ghosts* (幽霊, *Yûrei*, 1950):



It was a procession of ghosts
in an instant all clothing burned
off,
hands, faces and breasts
swelled.

The purple blisters on their skin
were soon burst and peeled off,
hanging down like pieces of
rags.

With hands lifted half up,
they were ghosts in procession.
Dragging their ragged skin
behind them
exhausted,
they fell down moaning in heaps
and died one after another.

At center of explosion,
the temperature reached six thousand degrees.
A human shadow remains
on a stone step nearby.
Could a body vaporize?
Did it blow away? There is no one to tell what
it was like
at the moment
at the center.

Burned charred faces,
No one could tell one from another.
Voices weakened,
they told their names
but even then were unrecognized.

- *ii. Fire* (火, Hi, 1950):



“PIKA!” The blue-white light of
the flash
the explosion - -
the force - -
the heat wave - -
Never in heaven or on earth
had humankind experienced this.

In an instant all burst into flames
and the ruins were ablaze.
The dead silence of the vast desert
broken.

Some fell senseless under fallen
debris,
others desperately digging out.
All consumed by the crimson.

Glass shards pierced bellies,
arms and legs were lost.
People fell and were taken by the
fire.

“Hurry! Get out, quick!”
someone shouted.
“I can’t!” came the mother’s cry
from beneath the heavy beams.
“Then, the child!” the other shouted.
“You must escape yourself!
My child will be die with me.
She would only be lost streets.”
Helping hands were pushed away.

And mother and child were devoured
by swift flames of vermillion.

- *iii. Water* (水, Mizu, 1950):



Feet outward, heads inward.
Mountains of corpses.
Layer upon layer of bodies piled

A hurt mother clutching her child
running along the river.
Falling into the deep part
and scrambling back desperately

so as not to see the eyes, the mouths, the
noses.

In one forgotten hear of bodies not yet
burned
was an eyeball
looking out and watching us.
Was it alive?
Was just a maggot putting false life
into a dead face?

Water, water.
All wandering searching for water.
Fleeing from the licking flames
searching for a last drop of water.

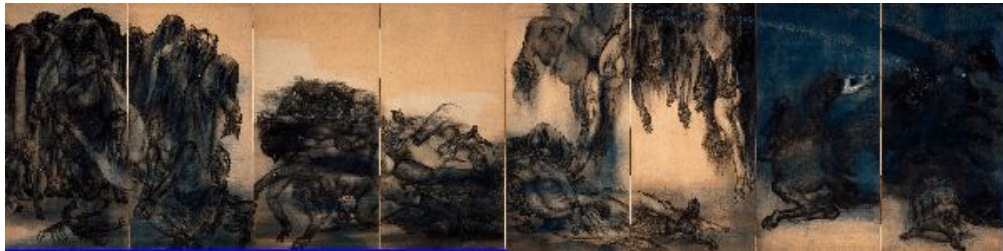
Glass shards pierced bellies,
arms and legs were lost.
People fell and were taken by the fire.

to the shallow.
Run! Through the fierce flames
enveloping the river.
Stopping only the cool her face in the water.

Run! Run!
Finally, to here.
Finally, she gave breast to babe
and found out it not alive.

A portrait of mother and child in the 20th
century.
Wounded mother and dead infant,
the statue of despair.
Let the mother and child be
a symbol of hope as it has always been.
It must be!

- *iv. Rainbow* (虹, Niji, 1951):



A naked soldier with a sword
and in military boots.
A soldier with broken arms and crushed
legs.
And covering their ragged skin with
blankets
stick soldiers hurrying to nowhere.

Stillness on the earth.
Dead silence like the sound of water
sinking into the ground.
Suddenly a maddened soldier pointed to
the heavens
screaming over and over.
“Here it comes! The B-29!”
There was no shadow of an airplane
anywhere.
Wounded horses, frenzied horses.
Raging crazy.

American soldiers who had come
to bombard this land were
taken prisoner and held captive an army
barracks.
The Atomic Bomb kills foe and friend - -
Two of them still in handcuffs
were found lying on the side of the road
near the Dome.

Dust and smoke from the hell
blown high, high up in the sky.
The cloud poured large raindrops
from its swelling shape.

And darkened was the sky.
But lo! A rainbow appeared
brilliantly in the seven colors.

- v. *Atomic Desert* (原子野, Genshi-ya, 1952):



There was no food or medicine.
Houses were all burned,
the rain came in.
No electricity, no newspaper to read, no
radio,
no doctor.

Both the dead and wounded
were food for maggots,
and swarms of flies buzzed.
The odor of the corpses was on the wind.

The Atomic Bomb exploded in human
hearts
as well as upon human bodies.
Heedless of naked and ragged skin,
they would search for lost children
day after day.

Even now,
human bones are found in the soil
in Hiroshima.



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