THE VIEW FROM WITHIN:
Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942-1945

A traveling exhibition organized by
Japanese American National Museum
UCLA Asian American Studies Center
UCLA Wight Art Gallery

GOAL:
To develop an understanding of the World War II American internment camp experience and of Japanese Americans from a Japanese American artistic perspective.

Students will:
• Examine the ironies of life in the concentration camps.
• Analyze different perspectives through artistic expression.
• Learn about the diversity of the internment camp experience.

Key concepts about art as a communication device:
• Art is a product and a reflection of the art maker’s experience.
• Art is not merely a representation of reality; it is the art maker’s interpretation of reality and the way the art maker conveys ideas and feelings.
• The art maker chooses, either consciously or subconsciously, the subject of the art and how he or she will present it.
• The art maker chooses his or her materials to help convey the message that he or she is trying to share and the materials reflect the artists’ environment.

Key vocabulary:
issei: A person born in Japan (first generation Japanese American) who immigrated to the United States and made his or her home here.
kibei: A nisei who was sent to Japan for education by his issei parents. After a few years of schooling, these nisei would return to the United States. Kibei were labeled by the U.S. government as the most likely to be disloyal during World War II because of their background.
irony: a manner of expression in which the meaning literally expressed is the opposite of the meaning intended and which aims at ridicule, humor or sarcasm.


II. View the slides of the works of art. Ask the students to examine the works of art. Describe what they see. General questions to consider:
What activities are depicted? What did people do in the camps?
Who do you see: women, children, elderly? What relationship did the art maker have with the subjects of the works of art? (parent/child; friend, fellow internee, etc.)
What did the artists include in their compositions? Why?
What kinds of media did the artists use? How did they acquire the materials?
What emotions do the works of art call forth? Why do you think the art maker made the art the way he or she did? What do you think the art makers were trying to communicate? How does the art maker communicate his or her ideas?

III. Using the catalog for the exhibition, *The View from Within: Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942-1945*, research the art makers. Were they professionals or amateur art makers? Were they *issei* or *nisei*? Men or women? How does this information change the way you interpret the art? How do you think the art makers’ perspectives affect their art?

Activities

**Chiura Obata**  
*Linoleum woodblock, 1943-1945*  
The linoleum block is the original block for a holiday card that Obata created while incarcerated at Topaz  

Shortly after their forced removal to the Tanforan Assembly Center, a group of inmates, including Chiura Obata, organized the Tanforan Art School. The stables at the Tanforan Racetrack in San Bruno, California, had been hastily modified to house more than eight thousand internees in the first stage of mass incarceration of Japanese Americans. Obata had been a member of the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley art department since 1932. Most of the internees of the Tanforan Assembly Center came from the San Francisco Bay Area, which had a significant number of Japanese American professional artists.

Questions for Discussion:  
- Why do you think Mr. Obata and other artists started an art school in Tanforan?  
- What image is carved into the linoleum block?  
- How was this block used?

**Hisako Hibi**  
*Laundry Room, 1943*  
Oil on canvas, 20” x 24”  

Privacy was virtually non-existent in the assembly centers and the camps. Bathrooms had rows of toilets with no partitions and long troughs served as sinks. Initially, they only bathing facilities were shower rooms; large open rooms with shower heads sticking out of the wall. Mothers bathed small children in the laundry rooms, which had large wash basins, but did not have washing machines.

Questions for Discussion:  
- What do you see happening in this painting? What do you think this painting was called?  
- What people and things do you see in the painting? What do you think the art maker was trying to tell us? What do you think was important to the art maker? What did the art maker do to give us these messages?

**Henry Sugimoto**  
*Old Parents Thinking About Their Son on the Battlefield, 1943*  
Oil on canvas, 19.75” x 24”  
Gift of Madeleine Sugimoto and Naomi Tagawa, Japanese American National Museum, (92.97.4)

Henry Sugimoto’s brother, Ralph, served in the segregated 442nd Regimental Combat
Team. The members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team were Japanese American volunteers and draftees from Hawaii and the ten mainland internment camps. They fought in Europe and the 442nd became the most decorated unit in United States military history for its size and length of service.

**Questions for Discussion:**
- What do you see? Who is in the painting?
- What is irony? How does the artist convey the idea of irony?

**Henry Sugimoto**  
*Rev. Yamazaki was Beaten in Camp Jerome, 1943*  
Oil on canvas, 39.25” x 30.25”  
Gift of Madeleine Sugimoto and Naomi Tagawa, Japanese American National Museum, (92.97.6)

In February 1943, the government issued a loyalty questionnaire to all adults in the concentration camps. The purpose of the questionnaire was to separate the “loyal” from the “disloyal” to determine which men would be willing and eligible to serve in the armed forces and which ultimately resulted in segregation of the two “groups.” Reverend Yamazaki was an Episcopal minister in Jerome who translated the questionnaire into Japanese for *issei*. Because of this, some believed the reverend was an agent for the government and therefore responsible for the labeling and segregation. Reverend Yamazaki was beaten by fellow inmates for his perceived complicity.

**Questions for Discussion:**
- What is happening in the painting? What do you think it tells us about life in the camps?
- Why might the art maker have painted this subject? Why do you think he painted it this way: at the moment of the beating, with the figures positioned the way they are?
- Research the Loyalty Questionnaire in *Japanese American History: An A to Z Reference* by Brian Niiya. What were the two controversial questions? Why do you think they were controversial? What do they imply?

**Writing Activities**

Select a work of art and write a story about what you see.  
**Suggestions:**
- Start by describing what you see and explain how it makes you feel: Who/what is the subject of the artwork? What is happening? What colors did the art maker use? What shapes did the artist use? How do they make you feel?
- Research: Using *Japanese American History: An A to Z Reference*, look up information about what is depicted: the specific camp, an event, a specific person. Using *The View from Within: Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942-1945*, research the artist. Where was he or she born?
- Was he or she an *issei* or a *nisei*? Where did he or she live before living in a concentration camp? What did he or she do for a living before being forced into a concentration camp?
- Write: Using what you have examined and the information that you learned through your research, write a story about the art work that you have chosen. Think about what happened or may have happened just before the moment of the painting and what may have happened after.

**Compare and Contrast.**  
**Suggestions:**
- Select two works with similar subjects by different art makers. Describe each one, explaining what the subject is, who is depicted, what materials the art maker used, what is happening in the art work. How do they make you feel? What makes the works different? What makes them the same?
Follow Up Activity

Show the videotape *Something Strong Within* to the class. This video features never-before-seen home movies of the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II. The video includes such images of daily life as parents and children eating in mess halls, women doing and men and women at work. There is also poignant and ironic images of Fourth of July parades, Christmas parties and New Year’s celebrations, testifying to a strength of community and spirit. This video was produced by the award-winning team of Karen L. Ishizuka (Producer/Writer) and Robert A. Nakamura (Director/Editor) with an original music score written and performed by Dan Kuramoto.
Hisako Hibi, *Laundry Room*, 1945
Oil on canvas, 16” x 20”
Gift of Ibuki Hibi Lee, Japanese American National Museum (96.601.15)

Henry Sugimoto, *Old Parents Thinking About Their Son on the Battlefield*, 1943
Oil on canvas, 19.75” x 24”
Gift of Madeleine Sugimoto and Naomi Tagawa, Japanese American National Museum (92.97.4)

Oil on canvas, 39.25” x 30.25”
Gift of Madeleine Sugimoto and Naomi Tagawa, Japanese American National Museum (92.97.6)
Chiura Obata
Linoleum Block, 3” x 5” x 2.5”

Sadayuki Uno,
Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, and Churchill, 1942
Carved pine, 4” x 2” x 2”
Gift of Hisae Uno, Japanese American National Museum (2000.15.1)

Sadayuki Uno,
Untitled (Guard Tower), 1944
Oil on canvas, 20 x 24”
Gift of Hisae Uno, Japanese American National Museum (2000.15.3)
George Hoshida, *Our Barracks: Lordsburg Internment Camp, Company D, Barrack #4, 7-4-42, 1942*  
Ink on paper, 6” x 9.5”  

Chiura Obata, *Talking Through the Wire Fence, 1942*  
Sumi on paper, 11” x 16”  
Collection of the Estate of Chiura Obata (22.1992.1)

Chiura Obata, *Hatsuki*  
*Wakasa Shot by M.P., 1942*  
Sumi on paper, 11” x 15.75”  
Collection of the Estate of Chiura Obata (22.1992.7)