Popular Protest in Postwar Japan: The Antiwar Art of Shikoku Gorō

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Popular Protest in Post War Japan: The Antiwar Art of Shikoku Gorō

by Ann Sherif

Begin with “Overview”
Popular Protest in Post War Japan: The Antiwar Art of Shikoku Goro

Table of Contents

Overview

Atomic Bomb Poetry Collection
  Atom Bomb Poetry: A Book
  Give Me Back Father
  Dedication
  The Injured & the Dead: Sketches
  Poems of Protest & Solidarity
  Mushroom Cloud Cover

Members of Our Poems Circle
  Tōge Sankichi
  Collaborators Near & Far
  Hayashi Sachiko
  Shikoku Gorō
    Soldier Artist
    Repatriated
    Survivor
    Hiroshima Dome

Our Poems Journal
  Peace Issue
  Marukis Issue

Street Poem Posters
  A Woman’s Hair Burning
  We Will Tell the Stories
  Mother and Child Fleeing
  Why?
  Stop It!

Legacies of Atom Bomb Poetry & Our Poems Circle
  Rivers
  2017 Revival
  Tōge’s Monument
  Toge San!

The Angry Jizo
  Place and History in Angry Jizo
  Creating an Atom Bomb Picture Book
  Peace Education & Story Telling
  Shikoku Gorō’s Angry Jizo Illustrations
  Legacy of Angry Jizo

Hiroshima Sketches
  Drawing in the Hypocenter
    Atomic Bomb Slums
    Aioi Bridge
    Memorial Mound for the Dead
    Panorama with Red Ball
  Representing Sites of War
    Koheibashi Bridge
    Black Pine of Hijiyama
Yanagibashi Bridge
Tsurumi Bridge
Expressing Hiroshima
Drawing and Viewing
Exhibiting Paintings
Inscribing the Cenotaph
Text, Image, and the War Dead

Glossary
Resources
Acknowledgments
Overview

This exhibit explores the vibrant grassroots artistic culture of Hiroshima, known as the atomic bombed city. From 1949 through the 1990s, local artist Shikoku Gorō advanced a bold and democratic vision for cultural life by bringing poetry to the streets & mobilizing visual arts to represent the vitality, beauty, and complexity of Hiroshima. The exhibit explores a set of influential books, along with other examples of socially committed art. Shikoku and his circles of collaborators illuminated pathways to civic engagement for the citizens of Hiroshima—hibakusha (atomic bomb survivors), vets, & younger generations.

Each of the sections of “Popular Protest in Postwar Japan” explores a significant book created by Shikoku Gorō (1924-2014) in collaboration with networks of artists and citizens around Hiroshima. The exhibit situates this grassroots art—books and related paintings, poems, posters, sketches, plays, and photographs—in the context of local and transnational social movements from 1945 to 2020. As you move through the exhibit, keep these questions in mind:

• How did Shikoku and other artists make their art and poetry visible and meaningful, despite their exclusion from the art and literary establishments?
• How did these books, pictures, and poems challenge viewers to envision their hometown in different ways from the atomic desert imagined from afar?
• How did Shikoku and other local activist artists advocate for social justice and oppose the nuclear arms race in the face of unresolved debates about Japan’s militarist and imperialist past?

Contents of Exhibit:

1. Atom Bomb Poetry Collection
2. The Angry Jizo
3. Hiroshima Sketches
   Glossary
   Resources
   Acknowledgments

Continue to “Atom Bomb Poetry Collection”
In 1951, with Cold War tensions rising as the superpower nuclear arms race accelerated, U.S. Occupation and Japanese authorities were on the watch for publications about the atom bombings that could be construed as criticism of the Occupation or sympathy for the Soviet foe. That didn’t deter the Hiroshima artists from locally publishing this book with the bold title 《Atom Bomb Poetry Collection》. Anxiety that the brutal war in neighboring Korea might turn into a nuclear World War III was one reason for their urgency. Hiroshima readers were attracted by the name of admired local hibakusha poet Tōge Sankichi on the cover; progressive literary critics in Tokyo sensed in the cover design an expression of their concerns about the nuclearized world’s perilous course. The book was later published by a mainstream publisher and has remained in print ever since.

What forces lead to the unlikely publication of this book? Who was involved? Why was the book so controversial in its day? How did it become a classic?

Although Tōge Sankichi’s name is the only one on the cover, the poet would have been the first to admit that that Atom Bomb Poetry resulted from his collaboration with a diverse network of people. Artist and Army vet Shikoku Goro designed the cover and illustrations. Tōge and Shikoku’s shared commitment to using art to better society had developed as part of their involvement in 《Our Poems Circle》, the group of young local aspiring poets & poets pictured here.

This famous Hiroshima circle constituted a node in a nationwide grassroots movement of “democratic culture” that evolved as part of post-war democracy. During the late 1940s and 1950s, civically-engaged cultural circles cropped up in communities throughout Japan. They had in common (1) democratic cultural formations that were inclusive and egalitarian, and rejected the hierarchy of the elite literary and art establishments; (2) practice centering on action in public space and mobile means of expressive arts, such as books, journals, plays, poetry readings, and street art; and (3) sustainability through fluid formation and dissolution, along with resilience in shifting political, media, historical, and aesthetic environments.

**Atom Bomb Poetry Collection Contents**

1. Atom Bomb Poetry: A Book
2. Members of Our Poems Circle
3. Our Poems Journal
4. Street Poem Posters
5. Legacies of Atom Bomb Poetry & Our Poems Circle

Begin with “Atom Bomb Poetry: A Book”
For a book with the alarming words “atom bomb” in its title, Shikoku Gorō designed a striking cover that evokes the human cost of war, but employs an abstract visual vocabulary & palette resonant with mid-20th century viewers. He describes a line of human silhouettes in orange, in postures of contortion, struggle or disorientation. The faceless figures are unable to find footing on the undulating background design.

From the start, the Allied Occupation (1945-1952) severely curtailed publication about the atomic bombings out of concern that frank depictions or images of the nuclear aftermath might undermine the legitimacy of the Occupation and the victory itself. As the U.S. sharpened its anticommunist stance at home and with allies like Japan, authorities increasingly cracked down on antinuclear protest movements associated with the left. Even this late in the Occupation, Tōge and Shikoku therefore sought out a like-minded underground local printer to publish this first edition.

**Atom Bomb Poetry: A Book Contents**

1. Give Me Back Father
2. Dedication
3. The Injured & the Dead: Sketches
4. Poems of Protest & Solidarity
5. Mushroom Cloud Cover

Begin with “Give Me Back Father”

Or, continue to “Members of Our Poems Circle”
Give Me Back Father

Poet Tōge Sankichi’s most famous poem in Atom Bomb Poetry Collection does not use the words “atom bomb.” The first stanza of this poem reads: ‘Give me back father / Give me back the old people / Give me back the children (Chichi o kaese haha o kaese / toshiyori o kaese / kodomo o kaese).

In the second and third stanzas, the speaker demands the return of humanity and enduring peace—presumably an ideal of peace that existed in the pre-nuclear age. Although the city did not experience air war until the morning of August 6, 1945, Hiroshima and all of its residents had experienced the extreme demands of Total War during the years that lead up to that day. The power of Tōge’s poem lies in the urgency and emotion evoked by the straightforward use of apostrophe, repetition and economical language. The themes of loss and separation would have resonated with many readers so soon after the World War.

Continue to “Dedication”
Dedication

Tóge dedicates the volume of poetry to “people who died in the August 6 1945 atomic bombing and those who continue to suffer the effects of radiation & other injury.” The Cold War context is evident in the Dedication’s inclusion of “people around the world who abhor the atom bomb.”

Despite its modest appearance, the Japanese book anticipated an international context, noting that the publication coincided with the Third World Festival of Youth and Students held in East Berlin that year. The theme of the enormous festival, part of socialist sphere cultural diplomacy, was “Peace and Friendship against Nuclear Weapons” and “Youth United against a New War.” Tóge and his collaborators struck a delicate balance between earning the support of diverse fellow citizens and walking the line with U.S./Japanese authorities who carefully maintained the promise of democracy as part of maintaining legitimacy as the “Free World,” even with the threat of war and ideological battle with the Soviet Cold War enemy.

Because of Occupation surveillance, Shikoku and Tóge chose the most economical and discreet technology to produce the first edition of 500 copies. Gariban (mimeograph) prints directly from a handwritten text, as is evident on these pages (read right to left, top to bottom). Compare the hurried cursive handwriting by the poet Tóge on this page with the uniform block printing by another writer on the “Give me back father” poem.
The Injured & the Dead: Sketches

These rough but evocative sketches by Shikoku Gorō are the first thing one sees in Atom Bomb Poetry. The line drawing shows a girl carrying a kettle; the text describes her giving water “to her mother, who is already dead.” On the facing page, the text presents Tōgē’s voice: “When [I] passed by an hour later, [she was] still giving [her mother] water. August 6, at Furutistcho.” In contrast to the rather abstract cover, these unsettling inner cover images are legible as the aftermath of an atom bomb. The images offer a preview of the poems in the book that graphically describe the destructiveness of the bomb. Since Shikoku was a soldier in Manchuria at the time of the bombing, he drew the images based on Tōgē’s narration of his experiences. Such collaborative work characterized the Our Poems circle.

Shikoku’s sketches feature motifs that appear frequently in Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors’ accounts: people whose clothes were blown or burned off by the a-bomb’s powerful blast and searing heat; badly injured people pleading for water. Shikoku also depicts a mother and baby, and a lone child, hands covering its face—powerful images that he would use repeatedly over his long career.

Some poems in Atom Bomb Poetry include description of people horrifically injured and killed by the atom bomb. Other poems portray the challenges that still plagued many hibakusha in daily life years after the bombings: radiation poisoning, keloids, social discrimination, & poverty.
Poems of Protest & Solidarity

Other poems in the book confronted the political specters of the early Cold War, currents that loomed large in a place as politicized as Hiroshima. "August 6 1950" tells of the armed police presence at the annual Peace Ceremony that authorities banned at the last minutes. Frustrated protesters reach for "antiwar handbills;" people who see the "smoke of the rocket launchers" in newsreels about the Korean War that started in June eagerly signed petitions against the bomb. The "petition" refers to the Stockholm Appeal, the first international mass petition against nuclear weapons, which originated in the Soviet bloc but was signed by millions of people of diverse political leanings around the world.

Despite the book's title, Tōge included several poems about solidarity with the Korean labor movement in Japan. As war ravaged the Korean peninsula, Koreans in Japan—many of whom had been conscripted as forced laborers during the Japanese Empire—also took advantage of the new democracy to march for their rights in the workplace. Our Poems Circle supported their cause, and Tōge composed "Song of Rage" with the struggles of Korean and other workers during the Japan Steel labor dispute in June, 1949, in mind. This labor action, lead by Japan Communist Party members, resulted directly from the Occupation "Dodge Line" directives to Japanese industry that, among other things, aimed at breaking labor unions and in particular Communist-dominated ones. In his diary, Tōge described with conviction about the day "Song of Rage" was read out loud to the strikers:

"workers listened with tears flowing ... Today's 'Song of Rage' is the first poem of mine that actually has been received with joy by the hearts of the people ... I can accomplish something!".

Tōge and his fellow Circle members sought collaboration with Koreans in Hiroshima, not primarily because they were opposed to the use of nuclear weapons, but because they were fellow leftists, labor activists, and socially engaged people who were searching for a common ground, despite the recent past of Korea's colonization by the Japanese empire.
Mushroom Cloud Cover


With the global rise of the antinuclear movements in 1950s and 1960s in both the US and Soviet blocs, the Tokyo publisher of one of dozens of reprints of *Atomic Bomb Poetry Collection* anticipates readers’ recognition of the iconic mushroom cloud as a ubiquitous symbol of nuclear weapons. Similarly, the names Hiroshima and Nagasaki became symbols of apocalypse, as the fierce nuclear arms race made people around the world realize that their town could suffer the same fate.
Members of Our Poems Circle

The young members in this photograph show their optimism for the new Japan, as they march on May Day 1950 for justice and democracy. Despite their cheerful faces, they had already faced significant challenges during wartime and Occupation. Hayashi Sachiko lost her parents and only sibling in the atom bombing. Three members were recently fired from their jobs during the purge of Leftists. Shikoku Gorō survived the army but then spent 3 years in a POW camp in the Soviet Union. Why did these young people believe that Our Poems poetry & journal could contribute to making Japan a more just society?

Members of Our Poems Circle Contents

1. Tōge Sankichi
2. Collaborators Near & Far
3. Hayashi Sachiko
4. Shikoku Gorō

Begin with "Tōge Sankichi"

Or, continue to “Our Poems Journal”
MEMBERS OF OUR POEMS CIRCLE (1/4)

Tōge Sankichi

The Our Poems circle’s impact cannot be separated from its founder and editor, revered poet Tōge Sankichi (1918–1953). Tōge’s charisma, passion for art and politics, and dedication to social justice attracted many young people to join the Our Poems Circle. As a hibakusha (abomb survivor) with seriously compromised health, Tōge needed his fellow circle members to visit him. Indeed, his apartment became the center of the group’s literary and political activity.

In Shikoku’s portrait, Tōge stands youthful and pensive before a repaired brick wall of the A-bomb dome near the hypocenter, holding a copy of the Our Poems journal in one hand. The graffiti on the wall in English above Tōge’s head speaks to Hiroshima’s international reputation as the start of the nuclear age.

A native of Hiroshima, Tōge Sankichi started reading and writing lyrical poetry, waka, and haiku as a youth. He was not drafted during the war due to lung disease, and survived the bombing at home, 3 kilometers from the hypocenter. He became a Catholic, and in 1949 joined the Japan Communist party. True to the democratic culture of the age, Tōge worked actively as a leader and mentor but emphasized the egalitarian nature of the circle by heavily featuring the work of the young members in the journal.

Continue to “Collaborators Near & Far”
Collaborators Near & Far

For a poetry group in a provincial city, the Our Poems circle (Warera no uta no kai) had unusually robust connections to Tokyo and the world beyond. Tokyo-based leftist painters Maruki Toshi and Maruki Iri, pictured here with the Our Poems circle, agreed to be interviewed for the Our Poems journal. The Marukis were already well known for travelling throughout Japan to exhibit their Atom Bomb Panel paintings. The Marukis' introduced Tōge to the Tokyo publisher Aoki Shoten and thus provided a national outlet for Atomic Bomb Poetry.

Tōge, along with some other Our Poems members, joined the Japan Communist Party in the late 1940s at the height of the party's popularity and representation in the Japanese Diet (Parliament). Our Poems' association with the authoritative leftist Shin Nihon Bungaku literary group headquartered in Tokyo is also noted regularly in the poetry journal.

The Our Poems Circle was not, however, a "communist front," nor did it rigidly adhere to the Eastern bloc directives. Culture circles such as this one are by definition not rigid or hierarchical groups or political parties, but rather associations that encourage knowledge construction, interpretation, and social engagement through cultural production, such as poetry composition. Our Poems also flourished in the complexity of its Cold War moment, which witnessed not only the terrifying nuclear arms race but also decolonization, coalitions among disparate groups who had a common goal, and struggles to realize human rights and social justice on the part of people who sought a third way separate from the increasingly rigid dogma and often dubious and unjust and violent practices of East and West blocs.

Continue to "Hayashi Sachiko"
Our Poems Member @ Hayashi Sachiko was 16 years old and working at a factory with other mobilized high school student at the time of the bombing. Her mother and younger brother perished when their house collapsed and burned; her father escaped from the house, but died a month later of radiation sickness. Hayashi published poems from the first issue of Our Poems. With mentoring from Toge and other circle members, Hayashi produced her most admired poem about the bombing “Hiroshima’s Sky” in December 1950. Hayashi wrote about more than the bomb. Several of her poems concern the July 1950 arrest of young Japanese and Korean antiwar protesters accused of violating Occupation regulations forbidding criticism of the U.S. Among the protesters was Hayashi’s boyfriend, an Our Poems and Japan Communist Party member, who was forced underground.
This hand-illustrated postcard from Shikoku to Tóge reveals their shared ideals & method: “August is the season of flames/Eyes of sadness and rage/we sing of peace at the top of our voices…” In the 1963 play Rivers, a character named Tóge explains the Our Poems’ approach to activism: “Even with the Press Code in force, literature has various methods at its disposal. By using all of these methods to let the people know about the truth [of nuclear weapons], we can help the peace movement grow. Hibakusha tend not to speak up; we ask people to sign the peace petition but they are afraid. Many are hesitant to speak up on their own. All quite understandable. But once they understand that others do empathize with them, they muster courage” and raise their voices.
**Soldier Artist**

During the months after his repatriation from Siberia, Shikoku created a thousand-page hand-written and drawn memoir of his experiences in militarist Japan, the army, internment in Siberia, and repatriation to Japan titled *Memorandum of my Youth* (1949). Then he turned to integration into Hiroshima society, with Our Poems circle as a primary means of engaging. Many, but certainly not all, circles understood themselves as being engaged in cultural and creative activities that were part of the “cultural front” fighting against imperialism and fascism, or as a site of developing a new subjectivity indispensable in a democracy. Rather than collaborating with the project of Free World economic progress that held appeal to many in the midst of material and economic devastation, the culture circle originated in progressive and leftist associations that sought to confront the inequities implicit in capitalism, the unresolved hierarchies and “difference” that meant discrimination and social and economic marginalization for many groups of people. The democratic thought encouraged by the Soviet authorities in the internment camps taught that art should serve the people, and art belonged in the hands of the workers, not solely in an elite art establishment. In Occupation-era Hiroshima, Shikoku was initially able to engage productively with a city energized by the optimism of the New Japan, and with like-minded people like Toge Sankichi and the Our Poems circle.


Shikoku’s blue ink self portrait as young artist with easel & still life is one of several he drew upon his return to Japan. Toge and his Our Poems circle responded to the experiences, political analysis, artistry and determination that Shikoku brought back from the Siberian camps.

Shikoku wrote *Memorandum* in a time before the revelations of the brutality of Stalin’s regime, before the fracture in the JCP, and the changes in cultural policy from the Cominform.
The positive intensity and teamwork that Shikoku emphasizes in this watercolor of Japanese internees in the Soviet camp huddled together to work on a journal Comrade suggests the attraction that Our Poem circle & its journal held for Shikoku once he returned to Hiroshima.

After its charismatic leader Toge Sankichi died and as the JCP fractured in 1951, Our Poems' circle and its remarkable journal suffered a decline in idealism and impact. However, this brief, fulfilling and vivid experience with Our Poems circle was sufficient to sustain and fuel Shikoku throughout his life. He met with discrimination as a "red" repatriate as he searched for employment but finally found temporary work at the City Hall, where he would eventually spend his career. Throughout his working life and retirement, Shikoku persisted at every turn in finding ways to put his beliefs, his art, and this framework into practice, and collaborating with other activist artists in Hiroshima.
Survivor

Many *Our Poem* members had experienced the bombing and aftermath, but Shikoku was a soldier in Manchuria at the time. On August 6, 1945, Shikoku’s younger brother Naoto suffered severe injuries from the atomic bombing and died several weeks later. Shikoku didn’t learn about his brother’s death until he was repatriated in 1948. Years later, Shikoku reflected, “the day I got home from [internment in] Siberia, I stayed up reading the diary [my brother kept until the day before he died]. That determined my life’s course.”

On the right, Shikoku employs washes of grey and black ink to suggest the burnt ruins of his hometown, with a lone weeping figure that he would use again in *Atomic Bomb Poems*. On the facing page, Shikoku paints his brother as he remembered him: a young and healthy student in his school uniform. The text on the bottom half is a poem that Shikoku wrote in memory of his brother:

> “I kick away at the black earth/my dead brother won’t be coming back... Green sprouts coming up from the scorched earth/keep growing!/Silent black earth/People who will never come back!/Brother!/Bite, bite deep into/my heart/into the hearts of everyone on earth.”

During the Asia-Pacific War, young people experienced the loss of friends, soldiers, and family in numbers that many of us now cannot imagine. Nonetheless, Shikoku especially poured his grief and love for his brother into poems and portraits. The video presentation *A Tale of Two Brothers Across Time*, narrated by actress Kiuchi Midori and actor and director Tsukamoto Shinya, powerfully evokes Naoto’s wartime diary.
Shikoku Gorō would return to the Peace Park to sketch and paint the A-bomb Dome repeatedly throughout his lifetime. This site of memory rested over the bones of the dead from wartime, and was close to the hypocenter where the Hiroshima bomb marked the start of the nuclear age. The Dome also signified to Shikoku this period of struggle and creativity with Our Poems during his youth, an experience that fueled his imagination and political commitment for forty years.
By the time *Atom Bomb Poetry* was published, Tōge and circle members had already built an enthusiastic regional audience through its journal *Our Poems*(Warera no uta), which featured poetry and essays. Shikoku Gorō’s design cover of *Our Poems*’ first issue, with a sketch of a healthy young laborer on a red background, suggests the circle’s intended audience of working class readers. Encouraged by the new postwar Constitution guarantee of equal rights for women, women actively contributed to the journal.

**Our Poems Journal Contents**

1. Peace Issue
2. Marukis Issue

Begin with “Peace Issue”

Or, continue to “Street Poem Posters”
Peace Issue

Shikoku Goro's cover illustration of the August 6 1950 edition of Our Poems draws on the dramatic imagery employed by the Marukis in Atom Bomb Panel paintings and Picasso's Guernica. The iconic mother and child in the center are surrounded by faces, torsos, and hands in various poses of pain, sadness, need, and agony. The following year, Shikoku would employ similar visual vocabulary such as nude figures (associated with the atom bombing) and disconnected body parts on a flat plane for expressing vulnerability and the disruptive violence of war in the book Atom Bomb Poems. This “Peace” issue is the first to feature multiple poems that name the atom bomb and an explanation of the antinuclear petition Stockholm Appeal. The article on the “Korean Problem” focuses on President Truman’s alarming statement that nuclear weapons might be used on the Korean Peninsula, as well as critique of the economic and military ramifications of Japan's role in the Korean War and the Cold War.

Long before the advent of television and the internet, journals and books were the primary means of circulating ideas, information, and images in the mid-20th century. The Our Poems culture circle employed such paper-based print media—rather than the rarified space of museums—as part of its goal to circulate its art and social critique widely.
This first-year anniversary issue of Our Poems features a Round Table Discussion with the Tokyo-based painters Akamatsu (Maruki) Toshi and Maruki Iri, along with other key cultural and activist figures such as renowned poet Kurihara Sadako, Masho Hiromi (writer and physician who was arrested by the Occupation authorities for one of his poems), former proletarian writer and Communist Tsuboi Shigeji. Hayashi Sachiko (using the pen name Hayashi Yukiko) also published her renowned poem “Sky of Hiroshima” in this issue. In the early 1950s, relatively few people spoke up about their atom bomb experience for political reasons or for personal reasons. As a Hiroshima writer noted in a different culture circle journal:

"People wonder why there is not a strong anti-bomb and anti-war movement from Hiroshima, less than in other parts of the country... Many bomb survivors don’t want to remember... They still have wounds that haven’t healed. And they don’t want to be reminded. ...The hibakusha... also suffer from social discrimination." (Ochifuji Hisayoshi, Espoir, Sept 1951, 56-57).
Street Poem Posters

A man with a bullhorn invites passers-by to sign an anti-nuclear weapons petition, while his colleague explains where to sign to a woman carrying a baby (seen from behind). Behind them are 3 eye-catching street poem posters. The one with the weeping child reads "Momma, Poppy--you died in the flash (pika)—now they've made an H-bomb. What should we do?"

Undaunted by the threat of arrest, the Our Poems Circle had many methods of putting to use poetry as a "weapon" in the fight for justice and democracy. One of their most compelling guerrilla methods was the tsuji-shi (street poem poster), which drew on classical genres that situated poetry and painting together in a single work, while innovatively claiming walls at foot-trafficked street corners throughout Hiroshima for pop-up exhibition space. The posters shown here are among the 8 extant of about 100 that Shikoku Gorō created together with poet Toge Sankichi between 1950 to 1953.

Street Poem Posters Contents
1. A Woman's Hair Burning
2. We Will Tell the Stories
3. Mother and Child Fleeing
4. Why?
5. Stop It!

Begin with "A Woman's Hair Burning"
A Woman's Hair Burning

The unsettling colors and woozy figures match the disturbing imagery in the poem: hair burning, bleeding, explosions, and a “city smelling of sadness.” The street poem poster demonstrates that Our Poems circle creatively engaged in a variety of alternative and grassroots civic activities to broaden the possibilities of dissent beyond large-scale protest marches.

Tōko Sankichi and Shikoku Gorō. "It was the Smell of a Woman's hair burning." Street poster. Watercolor on Paper. 1950–1953.
We Will Tell the Stories

"We will tell the stories and sing the stories of the love and anger and resentment of people who were trampled on in the homeland." Shikoku created the image by spreading paint on the soles of boots and stamping them on paper in order to suggest oppression but also the marching feet of protestors.

It wasn’t unusual for a sympathetic passerby to warn the poets that the authorities were on their way, which allowed the activists to quickly pull down the posters and nonchalantly walk away—or just abandon the poems and run. The multiple tack holes in the corners of the extant posters demonstrate that the Circle posted them several times.

Shikoku Gorô, "We Will Tell the Stories" ink on paper, 1950-1953.
Mother and Child Fleeing

Together, Shikoku, Tōge, and college students, union members, and other young people in the circle would create the tsuji-shi. Sometimes the poem came first. Working from the poem “Stop It!” Shikoku conceived of a dynamic composition that combined striking image and text. He used a brush in tsujishi to write provocative verse in big letters and drew bold images—some abstract and ghostlike, as in “It was the Smell of a Woman’s Hair” and others realistic as in “Mother and Child Fleeing” —so that passersby might pause long enough to add their signatures to a petition and talk about current events.

STREET POEM POSTERS (4/5)

Why?

With Töge's poem "Why?" Shikoku created a striking multi-media poster that included sketch, painting, and collage with newspaper clippings in order to evoke a young woman in the unsettling surrounding of a bombed city. The speaker of the poem describes her as a pan pan (sex worker for Allied Occupation GIs), but rather than condemning her, the speaker claims solidarity: "I too am a pan pan." Shikoku situates the figure and tumultuous cityscape swept up in broader political discourses by creating a collage of newspaper clippings that show powerful Japanese politicians in Tokyo, and snatches of headlines that would resonate powerfully with contemporary viewers "Fired" [for political beliefs]; "Conservative politicians;" and "Labor Movement Supports Workers." Though the Our Poems Circle members strove to create posters accessible to a broad audience, they did not underestimate citizens' ability to engage with works with complex messages and innovative technique.

Although Shikoku insisted that impromptu work with Töge resulted in the most effective street posters, it is important to recognize that their work, no matter how spontaneous it appeared, was grounded in established theories and methods of art. Drawing on his experiences in the Soviet internment camps from 1945-48, Shikoku published articles in the Our Poems' journal about art as method for social engagement and democratization of art. He explained how to write poems suitable for reading aloud at street protests ("avoid overly complicated rhythms " appeal to the heart more than to the mind"); best practice for chanting at protest marches; and a "how to" for tsuji-shi (street poems). Shikoku urged the circle to "appeal to the people (minshu) directly with poems and pictures, rather than distracting them with [elite] notions of literature and art."

Continue to "Stop It!"
Stop It!

In this poster, the eye-catching contrast between dark blue wash and white text accentuates the sweet, rounded cheeks and face, seen at different angles, of an eight-year-old child lost presumably in the bombing. The poem's speaker, still burdened by longing and sadness at the family's wartime loss, pleads "Stop it already! No more talk about memories" of the child.

Töge and Shikoku varied their approaches in order to keep the posters fresh and in touch with the pulse of the nation. They made each poster by hand, and took care to vary them in tone, method, and subject matter.

Some posters attracted passersby with their intimate subjects. During one creative session, Töge took inspiration for a poem from a sketch by Shikoku of a child weeping in the ruins of Hiroshima. After the bombing, orphans wandered the city. Parents searched for their children day after day in parts of the city that had been burnt to the ground in an instant by the atomic bomb.

The poster shown here does not mention the bomb, but the profound and widespread feeling of loss and grief expressed in this poem, even five years after the bomb burst, would have been palpable to many Hiroshima residents.

Shikoku made poem posters a number of times throughout his career, and continued to argue for their efficacy as a means of fighting for social change with art.
Legacies of Atom Bomb Poetry & Our Poems Circle

Although the Our Poems group disbanded in the mid-1950s, the group and its publications had a long lasting effect on Hiroshima literary and civic culture. Shikoku Gorō drew on the ideals and methods of the circle for more than 40 years. To the right, his sketch of a kamishibai version of The Angry Jizo told to a huge group of protesters in Hiroshima’s Peace Park in 1972. Determined to keep the inspirational model of idealism and dissent, subsequent generations have produced plays, poetry readings, and produced a monument engraved with Tōge’s poetry.

Legacies of Atom Bomb Poetry & Our Poems Circle Contents

1. Rivers
2. 2017 Revival
3. Tōge’s Monument
4. Tōge San!

Begin with “Rivers”
Rivers

The penetrating gaze of a mass of workers staring out from this poster expresses the intensity of social commitment that drove Tsuchiya Kiyoshi to write "Rivers" (Kawa), a four-act play about Toge San’kichi and the Our Poems culture circle. Tsuchiya (1930-1988) was a dedicated leftist who went underground for much of the Occupation. Inspired by the courage, passion, and unity of Our Poems circle, Tsuchiya did extensive research and interviewed Shikoku, among other former members. He produced the first version of his play Rivers in Hiroshima in 1963 on the tenth anniversary of Toge’s death. Set in Toge’s apartment, the play portrays the hopes and despair of the All Poems circle members as they debate the uses of art in protest and strive to better society during the Occupation.

1963 was also the year that The Japan Council Against A- and H-Bombs (Gensuikyo), the most influential anti-nuclear organization, lost credibility as it fractured over Cold War political infighting. Tsuchiya recalls that, on the day Rivers debuted, right-wingers drove through Hiroshima shouting from bullhorns, as if to mock what appeared to be the demise of the anti-nuclear movement, while 6,000 riot police patrolled the city.

Determined to create a play meaningful to college students who demanded a movement that could overcome the disfunctions of Gensuikyo, as well as in response to the tumultuous Vietnam War era, Tsuchiya produced a second and then a third version of the play in 1964 & 1965. Each revision expressed slightly more hope in its depiction of the Our Poems community of passionate activists & poets. For Tsuchiya’s fourth and final version of Rivers in 1972, the playwright elaborated on his motives for reviving the play: “I vividly remember how electrifying it was at the 1965 production to see members of the audience get up from their seats, put on their anvavr sashes, grab their flags, and head directly from the theater to the peace march.”

Put off by the flood of A-bomb elegies and A-bomb neuroses, ubiquitous prayers for peace, and resignation at the nuclear age, Tsuchiya advocated a return to the origins of the peace movement. For him, that was the fiery days of the Our Poems circle; the astounding power of a modest book like Atom Bomb Poetry; the unapologetic celebration of the working class on the journal covers; the courageous, at times reckless, political commitment of young people marching & passing out handbills in defiance of police orders; and the orphaned hibakusha for whom poetry became a space to face the pain of loss and war, but also to speak up against injustice.

Continue to "2017 Revival"
2017 Revival

In 2017, Tsuchiya Tokiko lead a group of actors in mounting a revival of Rivers (Kawa) by Tsuchiya Kiyoshi. The revival followed soon after a series of exhibits of Shikoku Gorō’s works after his death in 2014, and the publication of a facsimile of Our Poems journal and extensive scholarship on the circle & historical context. Rivers again found a responsive audience in a time of global instability and revival of nuclear threat and hatred.

Journalist Nakayama Ryōko played the role of Ichikawa, a character based on her own grandmother Hayashi Sachiko. In this climatic moment of the play, Ichikawa reads the poem “Sky of Hiroshima.” As the generation of Our Poems members passed, Nakayama was dedicated to learning about the social and cultural movement and the ways it spoke to her own time.

Although the character Shikoku Gorō did not appear in Rivers, his presence was evident: Shikoku’s works were projected on the stage; and more than one character in the play embodied his artistic and political commitments, as well as his humility. The production was also infused with the shared notion of struggle and a hope in the promise of democracy and justice, which resonated with audiences in various times of struggle, including the Vietnam War, 1960s student movement, and the rising nuclear threat from 2016.
Tōge’s Monument

In the center of the Hiroshima Peace Park, middle school students listen as their teacher reminds them of reading Tōge’s famous poem in school. The Monument Dedicated to Tōge Sankichi is inscribed with Tōge’s famous poem “Give me Back” in Japanese on the face and in English on the back. As part of peace education field trips, middle and high school students regularly visit the monument. Because the poem is all in phonetic hiragana script and the language simple, even young children are able to read the entire poem in the context of learning about the atom bomb.

Shikoku designed this monument for the 10th anniversary of Tōge’s death in 1963. In an effort to keep the memories of the bombing and nuclear issues alive, Shikoku made it a practice to sketch repeatedly iconic sites in Hiroshima such as this monument in the Peace Park and the nearby Atomic Bomb Dome, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
On the top half of the spread, Shikoku’s poem “Tōge san!” expresses sadness over the sudden loss of Our Poem’s mentor, who worked “with a passion that couldn’t be contained in your weak body.” The speaker pledges to “carry on your many efforts / crying out in the spirit of Hiroshima people with painful keloids/singing the hopes of people of the world who wish for peace.” This printed version of the poem in a 1970 book by Shikoku is paired with sketches similar to those in the first edition of Atomic Bomb Poetry. Shikoku originally composed this poem to be read at the memorial gathering for Tōge after his unexpected death in 1953. Just as Tsuchiya Kiyoshi’s play Rivers about Our Poems circle held deep meaning to audiences in turbulent times, “Tōge san!” resonated with Shikoku and readers during the Vietnam War.
Although primarily a local activist, Shikoku Goro did earn a nationwide reputation for his illustrations of the children’s book *The Angry Jizo (Okori jizo)*, created in collaboration with prolific children and young adult author Yamaguchi Yoko (1916-2000). Yamaguchi was also a native of Hiroshima, and an active member of one of Japan’s largest anti-nuclear groups Gensoikyo. Yamaguchi lost her parents and in-laws in the bombing, and saw the immediate aftermath of the atom bomb with her own eyes. As she walked her old neighborhood, Yamaguchi wondered what had happened to the beloved stone Jizo that she passed by so often on the back street.

Of the several versions of *The Angry Jizo*, the best known is the 1979 picture book. In wartime Hiroshima, a young girl finds daily comfort as she visits the neighborhood Jizo stone statue. Jizo (Bodhisattva) icons can be found along the roadside as guardians of children and travellers; neighbors leave flowers as offerings. This Jizo always has a smile on his face. On August 6, the bomb explodes over Hiroshima. Amidst the dead and dying, the badly injured girl finds her way to the Jizo. She calls for Mother, and for water. The Jizo’s face shows his anger at human folly when his expression changes into that of a fierce guardian Nio statue. The Jizo sheds tears into the girl’s mouth in her last moments. In the end, the Jizo’s head crumbles into a million pieces.

By the late 1970s, older activists such as Yamaguchi and Shikoku keenly felt the need to pass down the experiences of the Asia Pacific war to younger generations with the message that war and nuclear bombings should not be repeated.

**The Angry Jizo Contents**

1. Place and History in Angry Jizo
2. Creating an Atom Bomb Picture Book
3. Peace Education & Story Telling
4. Shikoku Gorō’s Angry Jizo Illustrations
5. Legacy of Angry Jizo

Begin with “Place and History in Angry Jizo”
Place and History in Angry Jizo

Angry Jizo frames the girl’s experience in the bombing with scenes of the city Hiroshima, showing an ordinary neighborhood before the bombing at the start, and the devastated area around the hypocenter with its iconic ruin, the Gembaku Dome, at the end. Both the text and image emphasize that the atom bombing happened when Japan was fighting a war, in order to resist the common narrative of Japan as victim.

The opening pages of Angry Jizo evoke a wartime Hiroshima neighborhood scene. The girl and a dog stand on the lower right, while a man in fatigues and a child looking at the Abai are on the left. Evident in the military style uniforms of the men working in the distance, the government mobilized all citizens for Total War. Even the girl has on modest and practical mompei cotton pants and wears around her neck a quilted hood for protection in case of bombing. Shikoku chooses dull shades of brown and beige to evoke the subdued back street; the only bright colors are the Abai’s red bib and the girl’s clothing.

The Angry Jizo closes with a full spread of the ruins of Hiroshima near the hypocenter in the aftermath of the August 1945 atomic bombing. Rather than returning to the neighborhood scene at the beginning of the book, Shikoku recalls another image in the book that shows this same area of central Hiroshima in the moments before dropping the bomb, a B-29 bomber flying high overhead. Here, the steel skeleton of the Industrial Promotion Hall looms in the upper left over the flattened city. Shikoku adds a symbol of hope with a cluster of small flowers in the lower right. Unlike the other illustrated pages, this spread includes no printed text.

In 1979 when Angry Jizo was published, the Dome was already an internationally known symbol of the apocalyptic potential of nuclear weapons. Now designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Gembaku Dome is centrally located in the Hiroshima Peace Park and is visited by millions of visitors from around the world each year.
Creating an Atom Bomb Picture Book

It took a team to successfully adopt Yamaguchi’s original text about wartime destruction of a neighborhood into a picture book suitable for young audiences. Why did this project come to fruition when it did? How did the book find an audience?

Between 1975 and 1980, the vigor of the nuclear arms race indicated the tensions between the superpowers, with the US and USSR adding about 10,000 thermonuclear weapons to their already huge arsenals in these years. In reaction, transnational anti-nuclear movements that had honed their skills during the Vietnam War revived as detente between the US and USSR faded and the possibility of nuclear apocalypse loomed. Concerns about the safety of nuclear power raised by environmentalists added a new dimension to the 1970s anti-nuclear movement.

It was in this context of high nuclear tensions that the children’s book publisher Kin no Hoshisha proposed a picture book version of Angry Jizo. Yamaguchi’s original story narrated a young girl’s experience through the bombing on August 6 and her death, and then depicted survivors’ efforts to remake the shattered Jizo in the years after the bombing. Initially, Yamaguchi hesitated at the idea of a picture book that ended with the girl’s death and omitted the search for the Jizo during Hiroshima’s recovery that was integral to her original story. However, the urgency of energizing the national and global anti-nuclear movements convinced Yamaguchi to allow the project to go forward with an abbreviated version.

As a trusted partner in the anti-nuclear movement and well-respected local progressive artist, Shikoku was the logical choice for illustrator.

The text of the most popular edition of The Angry Jizo, the 1979 edition, is not in the standard Japanese of Yamaguchi’s original text. Instead, the picture book features text in an oral story teller’s style (katari), with a tinge of Hiroshima-dialect that was written by actor Numata Yoichi. The illustrations by Shikoku dominate each page; an inset with Yamaguchi’s longer text in standard Japanese is also included. Numata devoted himself to travelling throughout Japan to collect folk tales, and to doing oral performances of folk tales before live audiences. After hearing a school teacher in Hiroshima reading The Angry Jizo, Numata decided to include the story in all of his performances for young audiences.

The Angry Jizo came into being in the context of the highly influential philosophy and practice of peace education (hevgyoi). Japan’s powerful teachers’ union, the JTU, had committed in the early 1950s to emphasizing peace education in public school curricula. Peace education emphasized anti-militarism, questioned the notion of Just War, and looked to the experiential authority of survivors of the bombings and war to enlighten readers about the horrors of war. Many other structures in postwar society bolstered the valorization of Japan’s “peace” constitution and Article 9, along with the advocacy against nuclear weapons by mainstream social movements, and the “Three Non-Nuclear Principles”.

As for the illustrations, Shikoku Gorô admitted that he found daunting the task of illustrating a children’s book about nuclear weapons. These bombs, he noted, are the most frightening things in the world.
Peace Education & Story Telling

Since its publication in 1979, Angry Jizo has been a favorite for public readings and performances. Indeed, Yamaguchi Yuko imagined that the story would be most accessible and compelling when read out loud. Even when Angry Jizo was still in manuscript form, Yamaguchi found its first audience in a classroom. She loaned the hand written text to a school teacher friend, who read it aloud to her students.

The picture book Angry Jizo that emerged from the Yamaguchi-Shikoku-Numata collaboration lends itself perfectly to being read aloud to a group. The large rectangular format of the book and the striking and straightforward images that dominate the page make it easy for audiences to see and understand.

Here, actress Kiuchi Midori does a public reading of Angry Jizo in Hiroshima with Shikoku’s illustrations on the large screen. As the audience of adults listen, the video demonstrates, Angry Jizo had the capacity to reach both young audiences and adults. Kiuchi’s dramatic rendering of the story here was tailored toward an adult audience. If there were children or young students in the audience, the reader would adjust the reading to make the story less frightening.

From the 1970s, Angry Jizo was often read at antiwar and antinuclear protest rallies, such as this 1982 mass gathering with huge illustrations by Shikoku and reading by Numata.

Large hardcover format of Angry Jizo, suitable for family or group reading.
In March, 1945, while she was 17, Shikoku moved from devastated Tokyo to Hiroshima. In the spring, Allied bombs rained down on Hiroshima, killing thousands, and the city was reduced to rubble. On August 6, 1945, the Atomic Bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Shikoku, then 17 years old, was working with her younger siblings on the outskirts of Hiroshima. She had just returned from the countryside when the bomb dropped. Her parents and siblings would later die in the aftermath.

In the book, the text is in the upper left of the spread. Shikoku uses smeared watercolors in black and purple to suggest the force of the blast. He leaves the source of the energy release, white, to evoke the blinding flash (pika) that many survivors reported seeing. In the book, the text is in the upper left of the spread.

On the pages immediately following the bomb blast, Shikoku revisits an image he had used in *Atomic Bomb Poetry* cover: Lines of injured people, their clothes blown off, flee from the fires. In contrast to the following pages (not shown here), Shikoku softens the images so viewers cannot see their burns and wounds, and shows the living, rather than charred corpses.

Again, Shikoku recreates the bomb cover: a girl kneels beside the Jizo, looking up and smiling at him. She looks up and smiles at the Jizo before the color drains from her face. With that, the Jizo shakes and his head breaks into a million pieces, mixing with the soot and sand that are no home to the hundred thousands of dead and the city -- pulverized and incinerated by the nuclear weapons.

"Continue to " Legacy of Jizo"
Like Shikoku, Yamaguchi was already a well-established and experienced antinuclear and antivar activist by the time she wrote Angry Jizo in the 1970s. In the 1950s, Yamaguchi engaged in public advocacy for hibakusha, but increasingly became a prominent figure in local and national antivar and antinuclear groups. She joined a Hiroshima group “Mothers Against the Bomb” along with other prominent writers such as Kurihara Sadako.

Yamaguchi stepped forth in 1963 as a leader in the Spiritual Adoption project that provided economic and spiritual support to children orphaned in the atomic bombings. She argued that Japanese people should make their own version of the Occupation-era Moral Adoption project originally spearheaded by American journalist Norman Cousins.

Yamaguchi, Shikoku, and other leftist activists persisted in their leftist and Communist Party affiliations despite attacks by rightest and mainstream politicians and media. In the 1970s, conservative politicians bashed the Japan Teachers Union (Nikkōshō), and public school textbooks that contained antivar or antinuclear content as leftist or communist-influenced. The Angry Jizo was one of several books harshly criticized.

Jizo on Left and Girl with Flowers on right (title page of Angry Jizo)
In Hiroshima Sketches (1985), Shikoku Goro introduces the city of Hiroshima through a series of drawings and brief essays. The cover of the small paperback book features a watercolor close-up of the ruined brick walls and skeletal top of the Atomic Bomb Dome (genbaku dōmu), a widely recognized symbol of nuclear warfare. Inside the book, Shikoku devotes only a few pages to the renowned Peace Park surrounding the Atomic Bomb Dome, and instead focuses visually on lively contemporary scenes of shops, train stations, festivals, street scenes and more throughout the city of Hiroshima. Shikoku emphasizes the many bridges that make the city—spread across a delta of six rivers and surrounded by green mountains—not only livable but pleasing.

Hiroshima Sketches Contents

1. Drawing in the Hypocenter
2. Representing Sites of War
3. Expressing Hiroshima

Begin with “Drawing in the Hypocenter”

Or, continue to “Glossary”
At the lantern festival (tōrō nagashi), people float paper-and-wood candle lanterns on a river in order to guide the spirits of ancestors back to their world. A long practiced ritual during the Bon Festival in August, the lantern festival took on public dimensions when practiced annually around the hypocenter in Hiroshima. Shikoku’s poem at the top of the pages notes differences in generational perceptions on this day: “Older people enclose their sadness in the flame/Young people give light to the Hiroshima’s spirit of peace/and float it on the flowing river.”

Drawing in the Hypocenter Contents

1. Atomic Bomb Slums
2. Aioi Bridge
3. Memorial Mound for the Dead
4. Panorama with Red Ball

Begin with “Atomic Bomb Slums”

Or, continue to “Representing Sites of War”
Atomic Bomb Slums

Shikoku did this sober painting around the same time as the cheerful lantern festival watercolor above. Both images depict the area around Aioi Bridge, the T-shaped bridge below the hypocenter, around which houses and businesses—mostly built of wood—were incinerated. This oil painting shows the "Atomic slum" (genbaku suramu) packed with wooden tenement houses built soon after the war by displaced survivors and others. To Shikoku, this area of the city served as a visible reminder of "the pain of the war long afterward." In the 1970s, the city tore down these low-income neighborhoods as part of beautification and gentrification of the area around the Peace Park in central Hiroshima. Shikoku built the picture frame with wood salvaged from one of the tenements and inscribed it "Lest We Forget."
Aioi Bridge soon after the atomic bombing, watercolor and ink, N.D. Hiroshima Sketches. pp. 32-33.

Shikoku was a soldier at the front in Manchuria on August 6, 1945, and he is not a hibakusha. He drew this image from a documentary photograph: "Hiroshima had 49 major bridges at the time of the bombing. Nine of those were burned or collapsed and were washed away. The typhoon and floods in September 1945 destroyed 20 more bridges. The bridges that survived were heavily damaged. Green trees were also burnt down, so all that remained was rubble and seven rivers. People aptly referred to Hiroshima as an 'atomic desert.'"

With Japan's defeat in World War II, Shikoku was one of tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers and personnel interned by the Soviet Union in Manchuria and Siberia. He repatriated in 1948. Goro had vivid memories of seeing his hometown for the first time since the bombing: "I pressed my forehead against the bus window and looked out into the darkness... Seeing the T-shaped bridge, I knew that I was back home." He sketched Aioibashi's distinct shape in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing.
Memorial Mound for the Dead

The Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound, located in Hiroshima’s Peace Park, is home to the remains of unidentified and unclaimed dead of the atomic bombing. Shikoku recalls that “One day, there was a 10-meter long white cloth draped on the low fence at the front of the mound. Written in large letters were the words ‘We dedicate ourselves to building a peaceful and just world without war’ and the signatures of several hundred committed elementary school students who had made the journey all the way from Hirakata [near Osaka].”
The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum displays atomic bomb materials and exhibits about the 1945 atomic bombing, nuclear history, and hibakusha. For conservation and curatorial reasons, the Museum has undergone several major renovations since its establishment in 1951. The East Building, built in the early 1990s originally welcomed visitors in the opening gallery with an extensive exhibition about Hiroshima's modern history before the war, war and imperialism that lead to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima, and a panorama of the city one second after the atomic bomb exploded. A red ball hanging from the ceiling represented the nuclear device as fireball. In this drawing, Shikoku shows museum visitors leaning on the railing around the panorama, and notes in the text below, "As I was sketching, visitors from abroad stood staring intently. Visitors who take the trouble to visit from afar doubtless have already learned about the destruction of Hiroshima. To truly know something, however, one must grasp it intellectually and with the senses. I understand this from drawing. In the panorama, there was something that summoned a single conclusion, regardless of country, religion, or ideological stance" (p. 155). As part of a major renovation of the museum in 2019, the panorama with the red ball was removed. It was replaced by a "white panorama," which is a computer graphic projection of the bomb explosion and the city seen from above, based on aerial photographs by U.S. military.
Representing Sites of War

Mobilization for War

With the technologies of airplanes and bombs, World War II brought the violence of war to towns and cities previously separated from the battlefront. The U.S. use of the first atomic bomb in combat on Hiroshima continued this widespread practice of air war, but with an utterly new and shockingly powerful weapon. Separate from the theme of nuclear destruction, Shikoku includes images in the Hiroshima Sketches that portray the multiple ways the city of Hiroshima contributed to the Japanese Empire’s building of a strong military for half a century before the bombing, as well as ways that the state and citizens mobilized for Total War from the late 1930s until 1945. During the Pacific war (1941-1945) when money and things were extremely scarce, Shikoku himself sadly came into his first set of oil paints and brushes when a family passed on those of their son, who had died on the battlefield (p. 114).

Representing Sites of War Contents

1. Koheibashi Bridge
2. Black Pine of Hijiyama
3. Yanagibashi Bridge
4. Tsurumi Bridge

Begin with "Koheibashi Bridge"

Or, continue to "Expressing Hiroshima"
Koheibashi Bridge

Shikoku uses washes to evoke a calm, atmospheric winter day at Koheibashi (Army Corps of Engineers Bridge). The text next to the image of a pedestrian bridge and snowy tree-lined riverbanks sets up a contrast between today's peaceful landscape and the built environment of Imperial Japan. Military personnel from the Army Corps of Engineers headquarters in Hiroshima constructed this suspension bridge in the 22nd year of Meiji (1889), in the early years of Hiroshima's development into one of the major military centers in Japan (pp. 110-111). Shikoku describes the mature stand of some 20 camphor trees (kusunoki) on the elevated banks in relation to city planning efforts to stem flooding downstream; a hedge of karatachi orange trees surrounded Army facility.

Continue to "Black Pine of Hijiyama"
Unusual among the images the book, this page is dominated by a sketch of a single large pine tree (kurotsu). The accompanying text recalls highly regarded Hiroshima artist Yamaji Sho, who was arrested and jailed by the wartime police, and died before the end of the war; and poet Sakamoto Hisashi, who was tortured by the Thought Police. The authorities banned his massive painting “Pine Tree” because, they claimed, the red silhouette of the tree “was Communist” (forbidden thought at the time). Shikoku explains, “Each time I see this pine near his house, I wonder whether it was this very tree that inspired that painting.”
“Yanagibashi (Willow Bridge) is splendid whether it’s a sunny day or raining, in the morning or the evening.” (p. 51). Shikoku includes several drawings of his favorite Yanagibashi Bridge, shown in this 1977 sketch as a pathway busy with pedestrians carrying umbrellas and people on bicycles. The atmospheric reflection of the lampposts and the bridge in the calm waters of the Kyobashi River and feathery willow trees evoke the peace and prosperity of 1970s Hiroshima. In a separate passage, Shikoku uses willows to remind readers of Hiroshima’s prewar prominence as the location of military headquarters and as a port from which naval ships sailed for China and the front. In the 1890s when Imperial Japan was building a strong military, Hiroshima rose in prominence. Shikoku notes, “When renowned poet Masakazu Shiki stayed in a Hiroshima inn as an embedded journalist during the First Sino-Japanese War, he composed the haiku ‘Oh Hiroshima/a place replete/with willow trees.’

After the August 1945 atomic bombing, it was said that 70 years would pass before grasses and flowers grew again. Many hibakusha found hope in the green buds emerged from scorched trees and flowers sprang up among the ruins in the weeks after.
Shikoku recalls that, after going to the movies when he was young, he and his older brother would often stop for a cup of sweet sake at a stall at the west end of this bridge. The nostalgic lyrical context of this page is significant for what it omits. During the 1930s and 1940s, Shikoku and his two older brothers were of the age to be conscripted as soldiers by Imperial Japan’s military and went off to war. It is their youngest brother Naoto, who never left Hiroshima, about whom Shikoku writes most vividly. “Eldest brother died at the front; the second son went missing in New Guinea. You and I were only 3 years apart in age, so before I went to the front in Manchuria, you and I were able to spend time together as adolescents and get to know one another well.” After Shikoku’s return from military service and Soviet internment in 1949, he was devastated to learn that Naoto had died from atomic bombing injuries and radiation poisoning at age 18. Naoto left behind a diary that detailed his service in homeland mobilization, the bombing, and its aftermath in painful detail. In retrospect, Shikoku traces his decision to commit himself to antinuclear activism to this loss: “I cannot help but conclude that my life course was decided by my brother’s diary.”
Expressing Hiroshima

Shikoku described his daily habits as including art: "I always carry a sketchbook with me so I can draw places that catch my eye. The images in this book are mostly a product of that habit of mine. A few are studies for oil paintings." The works in Hiroshima Sketches date from 1962 to 1985. In his 1975 A Hundred Bridges of Hiroshima (Hiroshima hyakkyō), a larger format hardcover book, Shikoku included multiple sketches of individual bridges from different angles. While Shikoku intended his Hiroshima drawings as a means of exploration of the city rather than as static objects for "artistic appreciation," he proposes that if he trains and composes them to "appeal to the senses" the images might have some artistic merit (Hiroshima Sketches, pp. 158-159).

Expressing Hiroshima Contents

1. Drawing and Viewing
2. Exhibiting Paintings
3. Inscribing the Cenotaph
4. Text, Image, and the War Dead

Begin with "Drawing and Viewing"

« Back to "Representing Sites of War"
In his 1949 journal about his youth in militarist Japan, conscription, internment in Siberia, and repatriation to Japan, Shikoku does recall taking a live drawing class and being praised by his teacher. Otherwise, Shikoku taught himself painting and drawing by copying many different art works, from Hiroshige's woodblock prints to contemporary painters, because his family was low-income and the disruption of the war.

Shikoku proposes that the reader use Hiroshima Sketches as a guide to "explore the meanings of Hiroshima and the allure of this city" (p. 158). Shikoku designs the book in a manner that explores not only the physical surroundings, but also layers of memory and history that contribute to the complexity of a city ambitious in its commitment to peace and social justice, even as it is burdened with a past deeply enmeshed in global currents of modern war and empire. Some pages represent sites with deeply personal meanings: the bridge Shikoku passed over as a repatriated imperial soldier after the war; the school where his brother was injured in the bombing; beneath the prosperous city, the bones of the dead.

Although Shikoku aims to provide readers with a deeper understanding of Hiroshima as a living community and vital place beyond the Genbaku Dome, his method also works as a means of advocating for collective action in opposition to nuclear weapons, war, and injustice.
Exhibiting Paintings

Ruins with Toge Sankichi poem (R) and Scene of Rebuilding of Woman’s Hospital, Watercolor on paper, early 1950s. (Hiroshima Sketches, pp. 62-63)

Though not part of the art establishment, Shikoku situated his expressive work in relation to canonical art and respected local poets and painters. From the Our Poems days in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Shikoku was active in building networks with artists, organizing non-juried exhibits, publishing with like-minded writers in journals. On the right page above the monochrome painting of ruins, he quotes a poem by much admired Toge Sankichi about the violence of the bomb. The facing page shows the rebuilding of a hospital; Shikoku notes his use of yellow to suggest wheat and dots of red to highlight human activity in this more hopeful image.
Inscribing the Cenotaph

The cenotaph inscription reads "Please rest in peace. The mistake will not be repeated." Peace Park, Hiroshima. Debates arose about the inscription, as it used the passive voice and did not acknowledge Japan's own role in the world war and colonialism. Shikoku commented, "I recall that, as part of the controversy over the words on the cenotaph, some people objected that the inscription makes sense for the perpetrators of the bombing but not for those who suffered its effects, and that it should be changed to 'we will not allow the mistake to be repeated.' As someone who lost close relatives in the atomic bombing, I initially struggled with the inscription. Eventually, I accepted it; now I believe that there is no other suitable wording. The only thing any human being can do is to bow to the spirits of those who fell victim to this concluding act of a foolish war and promise to never again repeat a mistake like that, whether we are hibakusha or not, Japanese or American."
Text, Image, and the War Dead

Shikoku carefully paired text and image in this book. Some of the text concerns the beauty of his beloved Hiroshima, but most passages narrate the entanglement of the built and natural environments with broader imperial and national histories and memories, as well as local and personal meanings. Shikoku revisited certain sites over a period of decades to sketch; other times he drew from memory. He explained drawing cityscapes as a process of grappling with the larger evolving meanings of Hiroshima as it oscillates between hometown, community, military center, city of peace, and contested global site in the nuclear age. At the same time, the book celebrates the richness of daily life there.

The book evokes Hiroshima as a beautiful city built on top of the bones of the war dead; a place once destroyed by a nuclear bomb but now alive with lush green trees, mountains, and a thriving built environment; a delta with a hundred bridges spanning the rivers so one might go home. The book also asserts an ethical stance against nuclear weapons, social injustice, and war, one consonant with the spirit of Hiroshima (Hiroshima no kokoro).

End of path “Expressing Hiroshima”; Continue to “Glossary”
## Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Japanese</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aioi Bridge</td>
<td>相生橋</td>
<td>Bridge in Hiroshima &amp; target of atomic Bomb on August 6 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allied Occupation</td>
<td>日本占領</td>
<td>Allied Powers occupied &amp; reformed Japan after the Japanese Empire’s defeat in World War II. Japan was allied with Nazi Germany &amp; Fascist Italy during World War II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 9</td>
<td>条</td>
<td>Article 9 of Japan’s postwar constitution renounces offensive war</td>
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<td>Atomic Bomb Poetry</td>
<td>関核詩集</td>
<td>Book of Tōge Sankichi’s poems, Illustrated by Shikoku Gorō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Pacific War</td>
<td>アジア太平洋戦争</td>
<td>Japanese Empire’s wars from 1931 to 1945 in Asian continent &amp; Pacific. Japan entered World War II as an Axis power in Dec. 1941.</td>
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<td>cenotaph</td>
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<td>memorial to the war dead</td>
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<td>genbaku</td>
<td>関爆</td>
<td>atom bomb, nuclear weapon used by US Military in August 1945 Hiroshima &amp; Nagasaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genbaku Dome</td>
<td>関核ドーム</td>
<td>Atom bomb dome in Hiroshima Peace Park Ruins of Industrial Promotion Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>genbaku slum</td>
<td>関爆スラム</td>
<td>Neighborhood of wooden huts built by Hiroshima residents along river banks soon after bombing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hibakusha</td>
<td>被爆者</td>
<td>atom bomb survivor, Hibakusha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiroshima</td>
<td>広島</td>
<td>City in western Honshu, Japan. Other spellings：ひろしま, ヒロshima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiroshima Peace Park</td>
<td>平和公園</td>
<td>Large park in central Hiroshima with memorials to the dead, museum, cenotaph and survivor trees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypocenter</td>
<td>墓心地</td>
<td>site of the mid-air detonation of atom bomb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kanazashibai</td>
<td>燃芝屋</td>
<td>Storytelling with picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jigō</td>
<td>地鎮</td>
<td>Stone icons, guardians of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuchi Midori</td>
<td>木内みどり</td>
<td>Actress, peace activist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maruki Toshi &amp; Iri</td>
<td>丸木敏夫丸木幸平</td>
<td>Painters famous for their Atom Bomb Panels(鶴田の朝)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear arms race</td>
<td>核開発競争</td>
<td>Cold War competition between US &amp; USSR to develop &amp; stockpile nuclear weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nuclear weapons</td>
<td>核兵器</td>
<td>explosive devices using nuclear power to destroy with heat, blast, &amp; toxic levels of radioactivity, threatening human survival &amp; the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunaka Yōichi</td>
<td>浅田陽一</td>
<td>actor &amp; storyteller who adapted the Angry Dao text for the picture book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace education</td>
<td>平和教育</td>
<td>Educational approach widespread in postwar Japan. Refutes war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>『川』</td>
<td>play about Our Poems circle by Tezhiya Kyoshi 塚淵雅. Revived by Tezhiya Tokiko &amp; others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shikoku Gorō</td>
<td>四備五郎</td>
<td>Artist, activist based in Hiroshima (1924-2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siberian internment</td>
<td>シベリア間留</td>
<td>With Japan’s defeat in WW2, the Soviet Union interned Japanese military personnel in Siberia from late 1945 to about 1949</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tōge Sankichi</td>
<td>坂本三吉</td>
<td>Renowned poet, activist, leader of Our Poems group in Hiroshima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tōrō nagasaki</td>
<td>ちからひし</td>
<td>lantern festival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warera no uta</td>
<td>われらの詩</td>
<td>Our Poems Journal: name of poetry circle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yamaguchi Yūko</td>
<td>山口勇子</td>
<td>Well-known author of children’s &amp; YA books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Continue to “Resources” *
Resources


Acknowledgments

This digital exhibition is a collaborative effort by a team of people. A primary inspiration is MIT Visualizing Cultures, with its goal of combining “images and scholarly commentary in innovative ways to illuminate social and cultural history.”

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**Research & Content Development:** Ann Sherif

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Dedicated to the memory of Kiuchi Midori.