

Our Warped Drive to this Day

Robert A. Jacobs

We live in a nuclear world. While we are all under the nuclear Sword of Damocles (not umbrella) and can suffer nuclear annihilation at any time, we are also immersed in an environment that has already been radiologically contaminated. Since the two nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki there have been over 2,000 nuclear weapons detonated. While none were in direct attacks on human beings the fallout clouds from these tests, especially of H-Bombs, have spread radiation all around the world. Nuclear test radionuclides have been found at the North Pole, in the Mariana Trench and on Mt. Everest. It cannot be avoided; it is ubiquitous. Additionally, the production of materials for nuclear weapons and reactors, mining and refining uranium, producing plutonium, has spread more radioactive particles into our soil, air and seas. Nuclear accidents like Chernobyl, Fukushima and many more whose names are not commonly known, extend this harm. Most of this history is invisible. Gaku Tsutaja has worked hard to see this history, and found a way to help us see it too.

Gaku's art immerses you in an aesthetic world of meaning and vision. Deeply wedded to our specific time and journey through history, her work engages and opens that history in visual story form, allowing us to encounter and interact with our present moment and our destiny.

Her work elaborates little known dimensions of nuclear history, seeking to embody a wholeness through exploration of its many parts. She presents a holistic vision of our encounter and manipulation of nuclear technologies and energies. Deeply rooted in historical study, she has created an ecosystem spawned from her own visual language that hews to the actual events and dynamics, but liberates this history to a dream of what did and what may still occur. She reorients our reception and inheritance of the nuclear story.

Filled with living creatures, Gaku's creations are freed from our insistence on their nationalities and races. Instead, her beings are divided by their actions—by their roles in nuclear historical drama. Some are animals, some are insects; what matters is what they do and not in whose name they act. While we typically learn nuclear history through separating nations and races, it is better defined by considering who was acting and who was being acted upon. De-

nationalizing this history is a bold step that places us all in a common location—as the recipients, as heirs. Did the scientists advance our capabilities to live a more harmonious life? Did our political leaders act to bring about a peaceful society? And did our military leaders consider our real security? We are all living now in a world under threat from nuclear weapons, nuclear reactors and nuclear waste, dividing us into nationalities and races is made irrelevant by our collective risk and the radiological contamination of the world we pass on to our descendants. Gaku shows us this collective journey, her work helps us to grasp our collective predicament.

But always it is beautiful. Graceful compositions, lifelike sculptures, hybrid beings, all interwoven in a multimedia ecosystem just like the one we actually inhabit. She has created a visual language that is at once familiar and dreamlike; confronting us with the mythic nature of our real lives in the nuclear shadows.

The series of *Daily Drawings: Spider's Thread* is simply amazing. Each complicated drawing done in only one day, in sequence to tell the complex story of the development of nuclear weapons and their use against human beings. Weaving from cohort to cohort, scientists, military leaders, laborers, victims living nearby production sites, targeted populations of children and parents and grandparents. A deeply nuanced history told through the daily practice of drawing: executed with deep compassion and clarity. For me it remains the most profound telling of the history of the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, far more moving and insightful than historical renderings which fetishize technology and obscure human beings. The history of nuclear weapons is a history of how human beings treat human beings, the technology, however profound, is secondary. Gaku grasps that this is not a history of security studies, it is a history of social encounter.

In *ENOLA'S HEAD* she sketches the history of the development and production of nuclear reactors and weapons, the harm they left at the sites of their manufacture, the nuclear attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, their impacts on the people living there, and their legacies on the environment, this time in multiple dimensions. Into a 2D world of drawings she casts 3D sculptures of anthropomorphic animal, plant and insect heads, builds a model of the vessel that

brings these worlds together—the Enola Gay—and weaves these visuals into dynamic digital film with live action, narration and music. It is a tour-de-force. We are as swept away by the aesthetic boldness and holistic nature of the artwork as we are by the storytelling. We are left to dwell with our own history, in repose in the world still bearing the radiological scars of this mythic origin story of the Atomic Age world.

In *Study with the Moon*, we are inside the dreams of the abandoned Enola Gay bomber before its resurrection and deification at the Smithsonian Institution. Like many gods in the waning of the moon it dreams about fullness, when it was aglow and commanded the attention of the world. When it was as bright as the sun and able to turn rain black. When none could turn away, none could escape.

Beautiful Sky Golf Course shows us that while the world must be understood as de-nationalized to grasp our true situation, it has always been experienced through lenses of nationality, ethnicity and race. America dreams of itself as a melting pot, but that pot has always had an inside and an outside, those welcomed to melt into Americans, and those excluded, no matter how deeply their stories mirror American dreams. Trapped in prison camps during the war, Japanese-American Issei respond to their exclusion by creating the most American thing they can—a golf course. A beautiful golf course for happy games played under guard and surrounded by fencing and weapons. A more real American dream than America dares let itself dream. A story told in drawings, sculpture, fabric, live action and video, it combines people's dreams for a safe life, a simple future for families, and other's dreams of protection, violation, and safety through violence. It is a dream that divides human beings from other human beings. It is a dream that sleeps embraced with cruelty. It is a dream that culminates in a nuclear attack on thousands of school children.

We must both dream and wake.

It is apropos that Gaku has built structures for us to encounter her images. Just as these homes, modeled on buildings built in both the internment camps, and in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world we live in today is also built in the ashes of the nuclear age. The global testing of nuclear weapons has distributed radioactive particles everywhere on Earth. A 2011 study found more radionuclides 2.3km from ground zero in Nagasaki from global testing than from the direct attack there in 1945. Our world is built of

atomic age ashes, sorrows and particles. Onto the walls of these buildings, Gaku's films loop like dreams. We are the creatures who tie these worlds together. We fought these wars, we made these weapons, we suffered from hatred and violence, we inflicted suffering. We must come home and lie down in this world we built. And then, we must wake up and raise our children into another world where we are learning the lessons of our past, and building a better world.

A fundamental reason that this understanding must be shared between us and our children is that even if we abolish nuclear weapons and reactors tomorrow, the long-lived, high-level nuclear waste will continue to put thousands of generations of our descendants at risk. This waste, hundreds of thousands of metric tons of it already sitting at sites all around the world, is not going to go away for 100,000s of years. This is the most substantial thing ever made by human society, it will outlast our cities and our cultures. We must teach our children about this history, and we must learn how to live on the Earth with a deep sense of awareness of the dangers our own societies have generated in the Nuclear Age. The visions of Gaku Tsutaja's artwork is an essential step in turning this history, and this destiny, into understandable visual narratives that can be passed down, that can endure, that can educate.

This artwork is rooted in deep compassion for human beings: what we have endured, what we have inherited, and what we have left behind. Take a walk around this exhibition. Then allow yourself a long daydream. Think about where you came from. Think about where the other people here came from. Think about where we are all going. Then look around again, at the images, at the sculptures, at the videos, at the structures. This moment and this place tie the past to the future, it is moving through you. Take this artwork inside yourself as you begin to take your next step...let's build from here, with our eyes open.

Robert Jacobs is a Professor of History at the Hiroshima Peace Institute and the Graduate School of Peace Studies of Hiroshima City University. He is a historian of nuclear technologies and radiation technopolitics. His book, *Nuclear Bodies: The Global Hibakusha*, published by Yale University Press this year, presents over a decade of field research in more than 20 countries on the effects of exposures of individuals and communities to radiation from nuclear weapon testing, production and accidents globally. He has published multiple books and articles on nuclear history and culture. Academia is a second career for Jacobs, who in a former life was a chef and worked in the organic produce industry.