

**PERCEIVING AND RESISTING: THE NEGOTIATIONS OF ART AND
PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE TANFORAN ASSEMBLY CENTER**

by

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in American Material
Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the ways that art and photography shaped the life at and the perception of Tanforan Assembly Center, one of the locations that held Japanese Americans during their World War II internment. Though the assembly centers are frequently overlooked in internment scholarship due to the relatively brief period they were in operation, in actuality they were areas in which the Japanese American internees developed vital methods of community and systems of resistance which allowed them to remain actively engaged with their surroundings, even as prisoners. At Tanforan, this community and resistance developed through the practice and production of art.

To articulate this reasoning, this paper analyzes the artistic production in three separate categories: the War Relocation Authority photography of Dorothea Lange; the development of the Tanforan Art School; and the artistic output of two professional painters interned at Tanforan, Hisako Hibi and Miné Okubo. The paper finds that while the photographic output of the camps lacked nuance due to the constraints of government regulations and the limited viewpoint of the photographer, the artwork provides a powerful account of the life of internees at Tanforan. The Tanforan Art School acted as mediator between the government agenda and the internee community, facilitating the production of such critical artwork while skillfully negotiating a place for itself within the camp's system of control.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In August of 1942, artist Hisako Hibi completed a painting of what had been her home for the past four months. The painting is an overview of a circular mass of buildings. It centers upon an oval cluster of an indeterminate number of buildings in rows, enclosed by a picket fence. The oval is encircled by a dirt track, beyond which lies a wider ring of buildings extending beyond the borders of the painting. The background is composed of a wave of rolling hills with a strip of sky at the top of the painting. Hovering over the building cluster towards the upper left corner of the painting is a small plane. The overall effect is that of a chillingly inhospitable environment, with the buildings packed so tightly together it seems impossible that there could have been movement and life among them. The only relief from the drab greys, blues, and browns that constitute the camp are the pale green of the hills and the blue sky. Painted from an angle seemingly outside and looking down on the camp, the perspective would have emerged from Hibi's imagination, as she could not have accessed such a vantage point. She would not have been permitted; Hibi was an internee at Tanforan Assembly Center, and as such, she was not permitted to step beyond Tanforan's barbed wire enclosure (figure 1).

Over a the span of two months in the late winter of 1942, the newly created United States War Relocation Authority transformed a racetrack in San Bruno,

California, into a prison camp. Known as the Tanforan Assembly Center, it was originally designed to be a straightforward processing center, holding small groups of Japanese Americans for a few days or weeks until they could be moved to permanent resettlement camps. However, the center remained open for nearly six months, from April 28 to October 13, and housed a population totaling 7,816 Japanese American individuals at its peak.¹ Throughout this period the center was what could impolitely but truthfully be called a mess, packed with uprooted men, women, and children spending their days and nights in whitewashed horse-stalls, living amid constant construction undergone to meet the demands of the growing population. Tanforan was also, by mere necessity, a community and home.

Tanforan was only one small part of a systematic relocation and imprisonment system. Between 1942 and 1945, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were forcibly evacuated from their homes and held prisoner by the United States government in locations spread throughout the west and as far east as Arkansas. This action was mandated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, issued on February 19, 1942, which authorized the evacuation from west coast military zones all persons deemed a threat to national security.² The executive order was the presidential culmination of a surge of widespread hostility towards individuals of Japanese descent living in the United States following the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan. The post-Pearl Harbor attitude towards Japanese Americans was in no way

¹ United States Department of War, *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation From The West Coast, 1942* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 3.

² Ibid.

new. For decades Japanese immigrants to America had already faced latent racial and cultural animosity. This animosity was repeatedly given legal sanction, most importantly by the Immigration Act of 1924, which prevented Japanese-born individuals from gaining American citizenship based on the assertion that the Japanese were too ‘alien’ to become American.³ With many barred from becoming citizens and the rest viewed as incapable of cultural assimilation regardless of their official status, the Japanese American community was already a suspect entity even before the advent of war concentrated and intensified such distrust. As J. L. DeWitt, the commanding Lieutenant General of the United States Army, stated in the opening pages of the army’s final report of the evacuation, “The continued presence of a large unassimilated, tightly knit racial group, bound to an enemy nation by strong ties of race, culture, custom and religion along a frontier vulnerable to attack constituted a menace which had to be dealt with.”⁴ By the mere fact of their existence, the Japanese Americans presented a threat. In February of 1942, the War Department elected to deal with this threat through evacuation and confinement.

In an astoundingly short amount of time, the War Department designed and implemented a systematic evacuation of Japanese Americans from the west coast, including California, Oregon, and Washington. Compelled to part with their communities, homes, and most belongings, all individuals of Japanese descent were

³ United States Congress, “Immigration Act of 1924,” 26 May 1924, United States Statutes At Large, Sixty-Eighth Congress, Session 1, Chapter 190, San Diego State University Department of Political Science. <http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/polsciwb/brianl/docs/1924ImmigrationAct.pdf>.

⁴ Department of War, *Final Report*, vii.

required to report to government checkpoints, where they were bused to assembly centers. Thirteen in total, these assembly centers were located in race tracks, fair grounds, and labor camps, and consisted of hastily-constructed barracks and makeshift living spaces. At these assembly centers, internees endured limited food supplies and poor living conditions as they were treated like prisoners of war, enclosed by barbed wire, monitored by armed guards, and kept under close surveillance. After a period of months, they were moved to the more permanent relocation centers in remote areas, where most were held through the end of the war.

Official government literature emphasized both the success of the internment process and the obedience of the internees. The persuasiveness of each argument was bent upon the perceived truth of the other. A demonstration of the willingness of the internees to be interned, and their lack of disobedience in the camps, carried with it the intimation that camp life was not such a hardship. Asserting the success of the camps in fulfilling a need and providing a safe and comfortable environment served as an explanation for the lack of protest. These attempts at propaganda by the United States were to some extent augmented by traditional Japanese attitudes that advocated acceptance in lieu of struggle in the face of hardship. More importantly, even in imprisonment, Japanese Americans needed to maintain a tenuous balance in a perceptual purgatory; never proven to be enemies nor given the chance to prove themselves innocent, the United States nevertheless assumed them to be predisposed to such hostile inclinations. Or as it was tersely put by DeWitt, "Their loyalties were unknown and time was of the essence."⁵ The camps themselves were by this logic not

⁵ Ibid.

prisons; they were safety measures for the good of both the United States and the Japanese Americans. For the internees, the majority of whom had been born in the United States and whom had never been to Japan, the camps presented themselves as testing grounds for their unknown loyalty. To protest against their treatment would not be a reaction against fundamental violations of the rights of United States citizens, but would reveal their 'alien' and hostile nature.

Thus while the iniquity of the internment policy and procedures are now well known, the historical record is still greatly colored by the concept of the Japanese Americans as obedient and passive. There was no documented public outcry, and the two examples of widespread resistance, at Poston and Manzanar, are set aside as exceptions rather than put forward as examples.⁶ Perhaps due to this perceived lack of resistance, the history of the internment has far too often fallen through the cracks of American history. The fact of it is generally, imprecisely known, but apart from within the Japanese American community, the internment lingers on the periphery of twentieth-century American historical discourse. This quasi-blindness is, in part, literal. Visual culture historian Marita Sturken has noted that the internment is one of the few major American twentieth century events that has contributed no 'image-icon' towards the American historical consciousness.⁷ It is arguable that the lack of a visual

⁶ For a discussion of the events at Poston and Manzanar, see Gary Y. Okihiro, "Japanese Resistance in America's Concentration Camps: A Re-Evaluation," *Amerasia Journal* 2 (Fall 1973): 20-34, http://garyokihiro.com/uploads/okihiro_1973.pdf.

⁷ Elena Tajima Creef, *Imaging Japanese America: The Visual Construction of Citizenship, Nation, and the Body* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2004): 17.

reference has directly resulted in the marginalization of the internment from twentieth-century history.

This absence of an 'image-icon' is not due to a dearth of actual images. In fact, there are many, the most numerous group being the photographs. With few exceptions, the photographic record of the internment comes entirely from 'outsider' photographers hired by the War Relocation Administration. The government made extensive efforts to monitor and shape a visual record of the camps. The foot soldiers of this effort were photographers, hired by the government to document the internment process. The purpose of these government photographers will be discussed more extensively in the following chapter, but the intent behind their hiring could be summarized as being both documentarian and propagandistic. The resulting photographs, numbering in the thousands, captured each stage of the internment, from the initial efforts at evacuation, to life in the assembly centers and relocation camps, to the eventual release and relocation of the internees.

The hazards of relying upon this flood of photographs to interpret camp life comes in the distorting parameters within which the photographers worked. Photographers faced a stringent list of specifications on what was permissible for them to photograph; forbidden elements included barbed wire, armed guards, and surveillance towers. They were rigorously encouraged to capture positive aspects of the internment, and to convey the success of the project. The photographers themselves underwent extensive background investigations, and their activity and resulting photographs were kept continually under government scrutiny. Ultimately, the photographers were expected to maintain in their photographs an untenable

balance of viewpoints: a representation of the government's activities as humane and appropriate, and a rendering of Japanese Americans as loyal, nonthreatening, and obedient participants in the internment process.

Beyond the officially sanctioned photographs, there is another body of images depicting the internment: those created by the internees. Cameras were prohibited items in the camps, and with a few significant exceptions, there were no photographs of camp life taken by the internees.⁸ However, internees overcame this barrier against capturing their surroundings through recourse to art: sketches, paintings, sculpture, and works in numerous, often ingenious, other media. Individuals who ranged from university-trained artists to amateurs adopting a new hobby made the best of scarce materials and difficult conditions to present their own views of their situation. Apart from material limitations, this artwork was free of censorship; no attempts were made to restrict what the artists chose to depict. Some of the artwork was created and maintained by individuals for their own private use, but much of it was completed in and intended for community settings. Especially in the case of the latter, this art was often made immediately public, in internal camp exhibitions as well as external ones.

To return to the question of why no set of images has risen to symbolic status, it is less an issue of the number of images, and far more the nature of the images and their treatment in the official histories. The photographs, taken by 'outsider' government workers, have been generally accepted and displayed as part of the

⁸ The most notable exception is Toyo Miyatake, who secreted a lens and film holder into Manzanar and photographed his surroundings using a camera constructed from scrap wood. See Jasmine Alinder, *Moving Images: Photography and the Japanese American Incarceration* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

factual, 'historical' record. These images are, however, highly unsatisfactory in presenting the entirety of camp life, and are weighted down by the propagandistic circumstances of their production. The artwork, highly individualistic, personal, and often impressionistic, has been reserved to articulate private histories, used either in tandem with the individual biographies of the artists or interpreted for emotional meaning and attitudes. It has also been used in numerous exhibitions, but for the most part only those at art museums. Kept separate, neither of these two groups of images, interpreted in isolation, has contributed a satisfactorily complete visual record of the internment experience.

To gain a stronger picture of the visual record of the internment camps, it is necessary to look at the varied body of imagery, and to understand the mixture of perceptions (and desired perceptions) about the camps. There is the outlook of the army and government, which conceived of the camps, designed them, and attempted to control their portrayal to the general public. There are the agendas of the individual photographers themselves, operating under government control but working also under the impetus of their own opinions and styles. And finally, there is the work of internee artists presenting a myriad of individual perspectives and styles, restricted by material but not by censorship. Analysis of a broader spectrum of visual culture of the internment allows the official record as documented by government photographers to be complicated by the critical and emotional protest inherent in internees' artistic renderings.

This thesis will attempt to analyze the documentary and artistic impulses that took place at one specific camp, the Tanforan Assembly Center. Tanforan has been

chosen due to its prolific output of art. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to incorporate the entirety of this activity, but this thesis will focus on two particular painters, Hisako Hibi and Miné Okubo, as well as one of the forces behind that artistic output, the Tanforan Art School. Pairing the visual culture with a discussion of the locus of artistic life at the camp, the Tanforan Art School, opens a window on the ways in which Japanese Americans negotiated their imprisonment, maintaining measures of control over their lives by both cooperating with and subverting government measures of control.

From their arrival at the assembly centers, internees were aware that their stay was temporary, but they were not privy to anything more specific. Repeated delays in finishing the resettlement camps coupled with a general reluctance on the part of the government to distribute clear information concerning the specifics of the internment plan resulted in rumors and misinformation. This state of uncertainty bred an atmosphere of suspended waiting among internees, and left the operators of the centers continually unprepared. In the case of Tanforan as well as others, the camp was in a constant state of hurried and inadequate construction. Dirty horse stalls were hastily whitewashed and linoleum thrown over manure-covered floorboards to create barely habitable dormitories. Additional structures were assembled in a similarly roughshod manner. At first only a single mess hall was in operation, which repeatedly failed to provide enough dishes, food, and eating space for the population it was set up to serve. Laundry and bathroom facilities were similarly inadequate, which combined with a malfunctioning sewage system and general overcrowding, created a hazardous health environment, one to which young children and the elderly were particularly

susceptible.⁹ As government officials worked hastily to meet the demands of the population, the internees adapted to their surroundings on their own terms.

Numerous books and studies have been published on camp life drawing on both the art and photography. There have also been multiple exhibitions of internee art- and craftwork in the decades since the camps closed. In the decades following the closure of the camps, the earliest histories tended to use the photographs as strictly documentary images. In the past decade or so this has changed, with scholars examining the propagandistic aim of the WRA as well as the ways in which individual photographers adopted or subverted that directive.¹⁰ Most recently, Linda Gordon has published an important study of the images of Dorothea Lange, arguing for her implicit condemnation of the internment process.¹¹ However, very few studies have examined the photographs and the artwork alongside one another as an interpretive method. Furthermore, most studies of the camps in general tend to pass quickly over the assembly centers in favor of a focus on the more permanent relocation camps. This thesis will seek to determine the extent to which both the WRA and the internees' attitudes and approaches to the confinement and containment of the camp spaces were shaped in the assembly centers prior to their move to the more permanent centers.

⁹ Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1946, 1973, 1983), 35-51.

¹⁰ For example, see Alinder, *Moving Images*.

¹¹ Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: Life Beyond Limits* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), and Linda Gordon and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

Discussions of the assembly centers tend to be elided in both personal accounts and historical studies. The relocation camps, as the intended destinations and the locations where the internees were held for the greatest duration of time, have received the most attention. Studies of the internment process focus either on the entire camp experience, blending the assembly center experiences into that of the camps, or place the assembly centers at the end of narratives of the initial evacuation. When internee life at the assembly centers is discussed, it is portrayed as an existence of frozen and frightened incredulity. The photographic record of the centers has provided a great deal of reinforcement for that perception. The artwork, on the other hand, reveals individual attitudes of resistance, with the internees critically engaging with their situation. The activity of the art school, held in government archival records of the assembly centers, reveals another facet altogether. Art school staff and students cooperated with center officials, but did so in order to regain aspects of control over their lives and to form a makeshift community.

The assembly centers served, both purposely and accidentally, as testing grounds for the systems that eventually took shape at the relocation camps. The formation of the Recreation Department under which the art school functioned is an excellent example of this process. According to government sources, there were no plans or expected need for such a department. The centers had been designed to provide for basic necessities of short-term survival, but nothing beyond that. The realization on the part of the internment camp administration of the necessity for community organization dawned slowly and reluctantly, and arose only as a solution for their concerns about maintaining order. Had this lethargic government action been

the only response at Tanforan, the center development would have been very different. However, internees displayed a consistent and persistent demand for activities and occupations, often taking the initiative and compelling the administration to officially back their efforts. In recognition that in order to achieve their own goals they needed to provide the camp administration with its desired structure and order, these organizations complied with the administration's rules. By doing so, the internees were able to pursue their own aims, forming organizations such as the Tanforan Art School that provided the community with respite, activity, expression, and instruction.

The Department of Recreation at Tanforan, developed to raise morale and provide structure for hundreds of restless and captive individuals, oversaw numerous activities and organizations, including sports teams, music classes, and other educational activities. However the art school was arguably the most successful, public, and active program at Tanforan. Conceived, organized, and operated by artist and professor Chiura Obata, the school was ostensibly under the administration of government officials, but Obata and the small staff he assembled provided the actual leadership of the school.

Artists Miné Okubo and Hisako Hibi, both associated with the art school, produced a very different documentary style than Lange. Hibi's oil paintings and Okubo's sketches from Tanforan are evident as charged personal protests, and are representative of other artwork produced at the assembly center. Not permitted the ownership or use of cameras, internees turned to other mediums instead, producing a vast body of artwork depicting life in the camps from a very different perspective. Artwork produced both as a result of the art school and by individual artists presents a

virtually uncensored and highly personal narrative of the life in the camps. These paintings and sketches serve as works of personal protest, emphasizing the isolation and alienation inherent in center life.

Focusing on the Tanforan Assembly Center, this thesis will juxtapose the perspectives of the WRA and the internees in how they perceived and portrayed the camp environment, comparing the photographs and the artwork produced in the center. Out of the thirteen assembly centers, Tanforan makes an excellent focus for such a study. The chief reason is the unparalleled organization and size of the arts school at Tanforan. This is due to its location; in the heart of the Bay Area and approximately thirteen miles from San Francisco, Tanforan became the temporary resting site of a substantial group of practicing artists and art professors. Due to its proximity to urban areas with strong artistic programs and offerings, the camp began with a number of individuals who were practicing artists, and finished with hundreds of individuals producing art. Tanforan has also been chosen due to the coverage provided by Dorothea Lange. Unlike many of the other photographers, Lange was known to be critical of the internment. The extent to which her photographs succeed in conveying this criticism, and to what that success means in actually interpreting the life of the camps, is a topic of debate. These three elements, the arts school, the artists themselves, and the photographic aims of Dorothea Lange, make Tanforan an ideal site for the study of the influence of visual and artistic thought on confinement.

These elements also ensured that the photographic and artistic output of Tanforan has held a dominant place in exhibitions and book illustrations that discuss the internment. The art school and its already famous founder, Chirura Obata,

garnered publicity at the time and in the decades following. Miné Okubo's simple sketches have been relied upon surprisingly often to represent camp life. The quality, intent, and meaning of Lange's output has been a matter of heated discussion, unlike many of her fellow photographers, whose images have been passed over as being blatantly propagandistic.

The Tanforan Art School and the works of artists like Okubo and Hibi is a testimony to the active and critical community life that developed at Tanforan. While the photographs of Dorothea Lange depict some of the difficulties internees encountered at the center, they do so in neglect of the efforts of the internees to combat these difficulties. The art school was a way for the internees to use the center structure to their advantage while simultaneously subverting its efforts at control. Both the activity of the art center and the nature of the art itself are evidence of that subversion, and it is by placing a study of these two elements alongside the photography that we are able, if only in retrospect, to fully witness Tanforan.

Chapter 2

PERCEPTION AND PROPAGANDA: THE GOVERNMENT PHOTOGRAPHY OF DOROTHEA LANGE

Japanese Americans had faced racially motivated hatred and discrimination for decades before World War II, their distinct racial differences and perceived cultural strangeness adding fodder to the general hostilities that habitually faced new immigrants. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, this racism was enflamed by fear and patriotic fervor. Majorities in the local communities, the media, and the general American population readily accepted the government's presentation of the necessity for the evacuation of Japanese Americans on the west coast. The lack of any major protest allowed the WRA to proclaim the evacuation to be a success. Nevertheless, there was a constant undercurrent of discomfort regarding what was happening. Even among those government officials who believed most strongly in the necessity of the evacuation, there remained a desire to keep the process and the individuals it concerned at arm's length. It is under these circumstances that photographers were hired by the government to document the process of internment. They were put on the scene to create an official record of the internment process, but what this record might look like was unclear. In the case of Tanforan, the photographer trusted with the creation of this record was Dorothea Lange. Her resulting photographs contain a peculiar blend of critique and obedience that renders them both images of covert protest and of grudging cooperation. How Lange operated within the restraints of her

position, and how she mediated between her personal feelings towards the process and the work she was expected to produce, are the subjects of this chapter.

Dorothea Lange was one of a group of photographers hired by the War Relocation Administration staff in 1942. Lange had worked as a government photographer since 1935, when she was hired by Roy E. Stryker to work for the Historical Section of the Resettlement Administration, which later became the Farm Security Administration. When the United States Army's Western Defense Command sought photographers to document the relocation process, Lange was one of those hired, likely due to her reputation with the FSA.¹² In total, Lange took 691 photographs for the WRA, her employment lasting an approximate year and a half.¹³ The body of her work includes photographic series taken at several assembly centers as well as at Manzanar Relocation Camp. In addition, she took numerous photographs of the circumstances of the evacuation, including the posted evacuation notices and the Japanese Americans moving out of homes, selling and storing possessions, and boarding of buses to the centers.

Lange's photographs constitute the entirety of the photographic record at Tanforan, aside from a few press photographs. She was present on the day of its

¹² Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 314.

¹³ Dorothea Lange, interview by Suzanne Riess, 1968, "Dorothea Lange: The Making of a Documentary Photographers," University of California Regional Oral Office, Berkeley, CA, transcript p. 191, http://www.archive.org/stream/documentryphoto00langrich/documentryphoto00langrich_djvu.txt.

opening, April 27, when her earliest photographs were taken.¹⁴ Thus she was able to bear witness to the transformation of Tanforan from a processing center to a temporary residence facility.

Historians writing about Lange's WRA position often note with irony that though she was hired by the WRA on the basis of her FSA work, and though the two positions had a great deal in common in terms of the situation, Lange's role as an FSA photographer was to inspire sympathy for the plight of the individuals she photographed, while her role as WRA photographer was to justify the internment process in spite of the upset it caused the individuals it affected.¹⁵ Beyond the obstacles faced in general by WRA photographers concerning what they could and could not photograph, Lange has stated she faced particular scrutiny, no doubt owing to her political views and background.¹⁶

Over the course of her employment by the WRA, Lange was openly critical of the relocation process, and became even more so in retrospect. Her husband Paul Taylor was an early, prominent member of the Committee on American Principles and Fair Play based at the University of California at Berkeley, one of the few groups to openly protest the internment.¹⁷ Lange's own dissension is documented extensively in

¹⁴ Karen Becker Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 26-7.

¹⁵ Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange*, 119-20; Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 314-5.

¹⁶ Lange, interview, 191.

¹⁷ Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 315.

letters she wrote to friends and colleagues.¹⁸ No doubt for reasons motivated by her employment, Lange did not participate in the opposition to the internment camps. The one exception to this was her involvement with a pamphlet produced by Caleb Foote protesting the internment. However, despite her personal misgivings about the process, she continued to work as a government photographer.

Lange photographed at Tanforan on three separate occasions.¹⁹ As mentioned previously, she was present during the center's opening, and photographed from April 27 through 29. She returned just over a week later, photographing from May 6 to May 9. Her final session at Tanforan was on June 16. Both of the first two sessions include photographs of Japanese Americans preparing to arrive at Tanforan as well as their first days at the center, while the final session shows Tanforan once it was a functioning center. On these occasions, not only was Lange present at three different stages in the process of internment, but her photographic attitude toward her subject from the earlier to the later photographs registers as very different.

Lange's photographs of the Japanese Americans prior to their evacuation depict their everyday life, with hints of the disruption that was to come. Many of Lange's photographs of the internees preparing to be relocated seem to have the intent of depicting the magnitude of the relocation process, along with the tumult, in the stage of the evacuation that Lange later described as "the process of processing."²⁰

¹⁸ Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange*, 122-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

²⁰ Lange, interview, 185.

This series of photographs, taken over the course of several days in April, consist mostly of distance, outdoor shots. One dominant subject is that of the baggage. Multiple photographs depict piles of luggage on sidewalks in front of houses, many with luggage tags fluttering in the breeze. While some of these photographs contain no people, others depict individuals, presumably the owners of the luggage, waiting with their possessions. She also depicts the process of the loading of the buses, including, in one case, photographing an armed guard, his gun clearly visible as Japanese Americans, including children, step onto the bus.²¹ The caption deliberately draws attention to the little boy about to board the bus after having his identity card checked by the guard (figure 2).

The photographs taken as the internees first arrived at Tanforan are images of mingled confusion and effortful composure. They mostly depict the internees in the center of the racetrack, where a great deal of the processing took place. For the most part taken in un-posed situations, Lange captures well-dressed individuals standing in the dusty ground of Tanforan, either walking or waiting. She favored photographing

²¹ Dorothea Lange, photograph, "The Japanese quarter of San Francisco on the first day of evacuation from this area. About 660 merchants, shop-keepers, tradespeople, professional people left their homes on this morning for the Civil Control Station, from which they were dispatched by bus to the Tanforan Assembly Center. This photograph shows a family about to get on a bus. The little boy in the new cowboy hat is having his identification tag checked by an official before boarding. --

Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- San Francisco, California. 4/29/42," WRA no. C-417, War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, UC Berkeley, Bankroft Library. Japanese American Relocation Digital Archives, accessed April 8, 2012,

<http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft087002p4/?docId=ft087002p4&brand=calisphere&layout=printable-details>.

images including children, some of whom react to the camera, some of whom she catches looking elsewhere.²²

The third group of images taken by Lange, in May and June, capture the beginnings of community life. Lange photographed the initial camp structure, including the barracks and the mess halls. She also photographed elements of Tanforan which were starting to be shaped by the internees, including the library, individual gardens, and the art school.

Assessing these images as a whole, it is apparent that Lange felt sympathy for the internees, but that sympathy does not translate into criticism of the WRA. Lange did choose to emphasize the innocence, and to some extent the victimization, of the internees. There is a passive resignation present in the internee subjects of her photographs, shown waiting in lines, sitting on luggage, and standing in front of flimsy barracks. However, the mild protest present in these photographs is overshadowed by Lange's adherence to government regulations. While Lange clearly empathizes with the internees, there is little to indicate from her photographs that she was critical of the actual process. Furthermore, while she did have limited success in capturing the poor conditions of Tanforan, she gained it at the expense of Japanese American agency, representing her subjects as helpless captives.

²² Lange, photograph, "San Bruno, Calif.--Families of Japanese ancestry arrive at assembly center at Tanforan Race Track. Evacuees will be transferred later to War Relocation Authority centers where they will be housed for the duration. -- Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- San Bruno, California. 4/29/42," WRA no. C-141, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3779n8c6/?docId=ft3779n8c6&brand=calisphere&layout=printable-details>.

Linda Gordon has argued that Lange's photographs constitute a "passionate protest against racism." She proposes that Lange had a specific strategy for the sequencing of her photographs, making a documentary argument for the immorality of the internment.²³ The sequence Gordon proposes begins with images depicting Japanese American life before their internment, taken so that Lange could establish their American identity. Her following photographs of the evacuation are thus intended to depict, according to Gordon, internees stripped of their previous lives, even more so once they were brought to the assembly centers, which Lange wished to show as dehumanizing.²⁴ Although this is certainly the chronological sequence in which Lange took her photographs, that she had such a clear strategy or documentary argument cannot be found in the evidence provided, and is not evident from a study of the body of her photographs.

It might be possible to find such clues in the captions, but a reading of the captions, and the circumstances surrounding them, do not make this argument more persuasive. Lange herself greatly valued her captions, viewing them as having the capacity to comment upon and enhance the images that they described.²⁵ However, the extent to which Lange's captions can be used to augment and interpret her photographs seems limited. While the captions are useful to determine the general place and situation of the photographs, beyond that they are too general to offer much

²³ Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 316, 319.

²⁴ Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 319-25; Gordon and Okihiro, *Impounded*, 26.

²⁵ Lange, interview, 204.

more. Furthermore, Lange's captions appear increasingly curtailed and hurried by the difficulties she was encountering in photographing the camps.

Lange seems to reserve her most editorial captions for the period of departure prior to the arrival at Tanforan. Lange fitted small editorial asides into many of these captions. For a photograph of a young couple in Berkeley, George and Michiko Uchida, at their wedding ceremony dinner, which took place two days before evacuation to Tanforan Assembly Center, Lange pointedly concludes with "these young people do not speak Japanese," a remark that seems to emphasize the couple's distance from Japanese culture.²⁶ Another caption, describing a photograph of a girl and a baby held in a young woman's arms, states that "the father of these children is a Buddhist priest now interned by the F.B.I.," endowing the image of two innocent-looking girls with the aura of forced abandonment.²⁷ Small editorial asides such as these contain Lange's most overt criticisms of the internment.

²⁶ Lange, photograph, "Berkeley, Calif. (2903 Harper Street)--Wedding of George and Michiko Uchida two days before evacuation to Tanforan Assembly Center. These young people do not speak Japanese. -- Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- Berkeley, California. 4/27/42," WRA no. C-342, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft038n999c/?docId=ft038n999c&brand=calisphere&layout=printable-details>.

²⁷ Lange, photograph, "San Francisco, Calif. (2031 Bush Street)--Evacuees of Japanese ancestry boarding buses which will take them to Tanforan Assembly Center. The father of these children is a Buddhist priest now interned by the F.B.I. -- Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- San Francisco, California. 4/29/42," WRA no. C-421, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft1t1nb0z6/?docId=ft1t1nb0z6&brand=calisphere&layout=printable-details>.

Her captions of photographs taken once internees had moved into Tanforan assume a far more neutral, and in some cases positive, tone. In many cases, the same caption is used for multiple photographs. For instance, seven photographs are accompanied by the caption: "San Bruno, Calif.--Families of Japanese ancestry arrive at assembly center at Tanforan Race Track. Evacuees will be transferred later to War Relocation Authority centers where they will be housed for the duration."²⁸ This caption is generally appropriate to all the photographs, all of future internees with their baggage in the dusty stadium at Tanforan, apparently having just arrived at the center and waiting to be processed by officials. One photograph is dated to April 27, 1942, while the other six are dated to April 29. This repeated application of the caption naturally limits and even obfuscates the specifics of the particular photographs. In one, a woman pulls the brim of her hat over her eyes, a handkerchief clutched in her hand (figure 3).²⁹ While it is unclear whether the woman is holding a handkerchief out of grief or just to shield herself from the dust, and thus unclear what meaning Lange wanted the image to have, the focus on the woman as the subject is denied by

²⁸ Lange, photographs, WRA no. C-127, WRA no. C-132, WRA no. C-133, WRA no. C-134, WRA no. C-141, WRA no. C-142, WRA no. C-143, <http://content.cdlib.org/search?keyword=lange&keyword-add=tanforan&facet=type-tab&relation=calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu&style=cui&sortDocsBy=&brand=calisphere&x=23&y=7>.

²⁹ Lange, photograph, "San Bruno, Calif.--Families of Japanese ancestry arrive at assembly center at Tanforan Race Track. Evacuees will be transferred later to War Relocation Authority centers where they will be housed for the duration. -- Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- San Bruno, California. 4/29/42," WRA no. C-141, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft3779n8c6/?docId=ft3779n8c6&order=1&layout=printable>.

the general caption. From this somewhat careless application of the captions, it can be concluded that Lange used her captions in a place-holding capacity, to identify photographs but not to enhance them.

The reason for this dimming of the editorial is debatable. Gordon contends that Lange might have written deliberately neutral captions in the hopes that censors would pay more attention to those than to the images themselves.³⁰ More likely these captions were written by a Lange who was increasingly beleaguered by the stresses placed upon her work as a photographer at Tanforan. She might even have intended the neutral captions to dictate the meaning of the photographs, and to smooth over anything that might have been perceived by rebellious by government censors. At any rate, they seem more the words of a photographer attempting to complete a job rather than words coding protest and critique.

The question of how the government photographers felt about the internment process, and even to what extent they were able to visually articulate their criticisms, is perhaps less relevant than the resultant impact of the photographs upon the contemporary perception and the historical interpretation of the camps. The extensive documentation taken by Lange and her contemporaries and preserved by the WRA is an extremely valuable resource as a record of the camp life, but in its superficial thoroughness it has too often been allowed to serve as the dominant, and indeed only, record. Furthermore, contemporaneously, the photographs made hardly any impact at

³⁰ Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 28.

all, and were barely shown publically. They were essentially unsatisfactory to all involved.

This precarious balance between acting on behalf of the internees while condoning the government's policies is perhaps most famously represented in the work of Ansel Adams, another WRA photographer. The impetus to represent internees as benign and agreeable, in fact, sprang from the photographers' efforts to work on behalf of the internees. In the period, the chief line in the argument against the camps was simple; the internees were loyal citizens or residents who posed no threat to the security of the United States. This was also the safest line of argument to take, as it permitted critics to speak out on behalf of those being imprisoned without openly challenging the government's actions.

Adams attempted to represent this lack of threat visually. A celebrated nature photographer at the time of his employment by the WRA, Adams was sympathetic towards the internees, but cautiously diplomatic in representing this photographically. In 1944 at the Museum of Modern Art, Adams exhibited a collection of photographs taken at Manzanar titled *Born Free and Equal*, which he later published in pamphlet form.³¹ Every element of the exhibition, from the title to the photographs to the text, evinces deep sympathy for the internees. He states his goal as striving "to understand the Japanese-Americans, not as an abstract group, but as individuals of fine mental,

³¹ Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal, photographs of the Loyal Japanese-Americans at Manzanar Relocation Center, Inyo County, California* (New York: U.S. Camera, 1944), Library of Congress Digital Collections, Library of Congress Digital Collections, http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=gdc3&fileName=scd0001_20020123001bfpage.db.

moral and civic capacities, in other words, people such as you and I.”³² And yet, despite this goal, he still strongly defended the policies of the U.S. government in placing the Japanese Americans in internment camps. While he admits that the policies might in retrospect seem unnecessary, “the fact remains that we, as a nation, were in the most potentially precarious moment of our history.”³³ Adams’ photographic technique for defending both the imprisonment and the prisoners is simply to concentrate entirely on the latter, allowing the former to act as a distant backdrop and a unchangeable reality. Of the fifty photographs he exhibited, the great majority was of individuals or groups, posing and often smiling at the camera, and shot from a slightly upward angle. This tactic, which collectively showcased the nobility and individual humanity of the internees, did so with hardly even an implied allusion to their circumstances.

Even this deliberately and apparently heartfelt positive attitude about the camps underwent scrutiny. Adam’s exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art fought delays and required a revision, apparently as a result of institutional squeamishness about the potential for controversy.³⁴ Adams faced the same pressure when publishing with U.S. Camera, which also wished him to change significant aspects of his essay. This squeamishness was in spite of the fact that Adams had received the government’s express permission to use the photographs in the first place, and the

³² Ibid., 24.

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange*, 146.

photographs and the text had been approved by the Project Director of Manzanar; the opening page of Adams' pamphlet expressly acknowledges the War Relocation Authority and Manzanar's role.³⁵ Furthermore, the "Forward" to Adams' pamphlet is penned by Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior during World War II, whose vaguely apologetic statement expresses the hope that "the wounds which [the Japanese American community] has received in the great uprooting will heal," and that "other Americans will fully realized that to condone the whittling away of the rights of any one minority group is to pave the way for us all to loose the guarantees of the Constitution."³⁶ Though the publication received favorable reviews, the only location where it found much success was San Francisco.³⁷ It is interesting to note, and of possible significance, that the inclusion of government permission, as well as the "Forward" statement by Ickes, were removed from the republication of *Born Free and Equal* when the publication was reissued in 1984 to accompany a traveling exhibition of Adams' original organized by the Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art, History, and Science.³⁸

Even the limited publicity that Adams achieved was more than Lange found. Initially, Lange's photographs made very little impact. In fact, most of her

³⁵ Adams, *Born Free and Equal*, 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 7.

³⁷ Ohrn, *Dorothea Lange*, 146.

³⁸ Ansel Adams, *Born Free and Equal: An Exhibition of Ansel Adams Photographs* (Fresno: Fresno Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1945, 1984).

photographs remained in WRA archives, inaccessible to her or anyone else. “They had wanted a record, but not a public record, and they were not mine,” Lange said about the photographs she took.³⁹ However, over the decades, her photographs have been ‘rediscovered,’ to some extent. In comparison of Lange and Adams, historians have often tended towards favoring Lange’s openly critical perspective over Adams. This opinion mirrors Lange’s own; she was openly critical of the extent of Adam’s cooperation with the government, and felt his images suffered as a result.⁴⁰

The rebirth of interest in Lange’s photographs started in 1972, when the California Historical Society curated “Executive Order 9066,” an exhibit of photographic representations of the internment camps. The show was curated by Masie and Richard Conrat, the latter of whom had served as assistant to Dorothea Lange in the 1960s.⁴¹ In the introduction to the exhibit catalog, the Conrats gave their interpretation of the types of photographs they encountered: “In the first category were photographs which had some historical significance but which failed completely as images. The second category consisted of photographs which failed in both respects. In the majority of these, the awkward presence of the photographer had made his evacuee subjects smile and try to project a sense of contentment and normality, thus completely betraying the truth of their situation.”⁴² Repelled by the smiles, the couple

³⁹ Lange, interview, 189.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 190-92.

⁴¹ Masie Conrat and Richard Conrat, *Executive Order 9066: The Internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1992), 6.

⁴² Ibid.

gravitated towards the photographs of Dorothea Lange, whose subjects are far less often caught smiling. The group of photographs that they selected has since been presented as a challenge to the more positive photographs of other photographers, most recently in Gordon's *Impounded*.

Historian Elena Tajima Creef has noted that the most widely reprinted internment photographs of Lange's are those with tragic imagery, those photographs depicting internees with distress, confusion, or grief visible on their faces.⁴³ This selection of photographs has often been used as a contrast with photographers such as Ansel Adams, who captured his smiling subjects looking markedly at ease in their surroundings. This dichotomy has created, according to Creef, "binary poles of representation."⁴⁴ Photographic presentations of the internment camps often present their viewers with two disparate ways to think about the internees; they were either heroic individuals persevering through difficult times, or tormented captives, victimized and helpless.

Naturally, while both of these viewpoints have truth to them, the reality is far more complex. It is unlikely, however, that any photographer could have captured the complexities of this reality. The WRA photographers, government employees operating as outsiders and attempting to photograph in a situation where the camp officials had evident doubts about their presence, had very little chance to control their experience, and legally had no control over the photographs once they were produced.

⁴³ Creef, 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Lange's attempts at achieving documentary truth were cluttered by the limitations she was compelled to place upon herself. Furthermore, the limited success that she had in providing photographs that reflected her feelings about the internment process was drowned in the government archives, where the photographs sat unseen for decades. The resurgence of interest in Lange's photographs has resulted in a distortion of the truth, both the truth of what she achieved and the truth of the camps itself.

Chapter 3

NEGOTIATING A COMMUNITY: THE TANFORAN ART SCHOOL

The Dorothea Lange photographs depict an atmosphere of confusion and stagnant captivity. While there is truth to this representation, to take it as the entire truth would be a great mistake. Nowhere else is this perception more greatly disrupted than in a study of the vigorous activity of the art school, whose run covered nearly the entirety of Tanforan's existence as an assembly center. Working through the art school, internees became participants and leaders in a camp life that they created, oversaw, and propelled with resourcefulness and purpose. The school was powered by the efforts of Chiura Obata and his dedicated staff, but was officially under the supervision of center officials, and was regularly required through weekly progress reports to demonstrate its importance as an instrument of order and morale-building. And yet the artistic output of these classes resulted in works of anger, grief, and protest against the center, works that were displayed at Tanforan and eventually at outside sites. Even the school's beginnings are a testament to a clear-sighted seizure of opportunity and covert co-option of authority. Had it not been for quick, organized, and effective action by Obata, it is unlikely that the school or anything like it would ever have come into existence. All the same, this reality has been occluded by the smooth way the school fit into the Tanforan leadership's desperate efforts to provide for and control the expanding community at Tanforan, which contrary to expectations

and planning, was not moving on any time soon. The Tanforan Art School faced the difficulties of negotiating an acceptable position within the camp governance, presenting itself as a positive force of control even as it provided an outlet for frustrations against that very control.

As has been noted previously, the assembly centers were intended to only board the internees for a very short period of time during which they would be processed and organized for transportation to the relocation camps. But by mid-April, when the mandatory evacuation went into effect, the camps were not yet finished. Once the process of relocation had begun, and once the Japanese Americans had moved out of their homes, retired their businesses, stored or sold their belongings, and placed themselves in army custody, the makeshift facilities at the assembly center were their only option for residence.

Only very gradually did the WRA come to that realization. According to the War Department's *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation From the West Coast, 1942*, they admitted that the "Assembly Centers were originally conceived and established as transitory facilities and their adaptation to longer evacuee residence became essential."⁴⁵ However, this concise statement does little to express the extent of the confusion, disorganization, and frustration that such a change in plans engendered. A list of workers requested by the chief of the Tanforan Assembly Center Division demonstrates the extreme lack of preparedness: one chef, twenty cooks, seven bakers, twenty waiters, sixteen dishwashers, fourteen roustabouts, ten stenographer-clerks,

⁴⁵ Department of War, *Final Report*, 51.

thirty common laborers, four carpenters, two electricians, and two plumbers.⁴⁶ From this list it is evident both that Tanforan's administrators were expecting small numbers, and that they saw their role as providers of nothing more than short-term and basic necessities.

This confusion and lack of information made any sort of communal planning a frustrating enterprise. One can see this extensively evidenced in documented attempts at organization. The Committee on Student Relocation, a group attempting to work on behalf of the multitude of college students whose studies were disrupted by internment, found itself stymied in its efforts by the unreliable stream of information that characterized the shifting state of the assembly centers. The group's "Third Report on the Japanese Evacuation Situation," prepared by a regional YMCA group on April 15, 1942, states that "The theory of the Assembly Centers is that they are to serve as places where the evacuees spend three to six days registering and submitting to physical examinations. Then they are to be sent on to the Relocation Centers," having grumbled earlier in the opening paragraphs, "Originally it was the intention of the Government to transfer people from the Reception Centers to permanent settlement camps. It is anybody's guess now whether resettlement centers will ever materialize...."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Chief Reception Center Division R. L. Nicholson to Pearce Davies, "List of Preliminary Work Crews," 8 April 1942, (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁴⁷ Dick Mills, "Third Report on the Japanese Evacuation System," 15 April 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-

From the point of view of the War Relocation Authority, this restlessness posed a potential threat to order. The government report openly states that “rumors were rampant, public feeling ran high, the affected groups were in a state of confusion, and unscrupulous interests were seeking to take advantage of misfortune.”⁴⁸ But through it was becoming increasingly clear that there was a need for some system to “meet the morale problem,” no plans had been laid for such organization.”⁴⁹

To add to the confusion some administrators even went so far as to suggest that organization and the establishment of programs for the assembly centers would be a waste of time and money. A memorandum from the Director of the WCCA to the Director of the WRA baldly laid out the situation: “assembly centers are not and cannot, without the expenditure of tremendous sums of money for space and facilities in duplication of those which will be provided on relocation sites, be designed to permit the development and maintenance of a vocational, educational, recreational and social program. Long residence in an assembly center is bound to have a demoralizing effect.”⁵⁰

The greatest victims of such confusion were the internees themselves. Increasingly pressed together in sparse, tight living spaces, afforded little privacy,

American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁴⁸ Department of War, *Final Report*, 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

provided with unsatisfactory amenities, and facing overcrowding that threatened to overtake resources and sanitation procedures, they faced a constant uncertainty concerning their futures and a dearth of options for what to do in the meantime. According to government reports, “no formal system of education or recreation was initially provided.”⁵¹ The reason given for this, as for so many other problems that emerged at the assembly centers, was that the length the centers would need to remain open was unanticipated. Dorothea Lange captured, with some success, the sense of waiting and arrested anticipation that overcame individuals in the camp, in her photographs of internees standing in long, trailing lines for everything from meals to laundry services. The predilection towards listlessness is also corroborated in internee artwork. The difference between the Lange photographs and the artwork, naturally, is that though the artwork expressed this ennui, it is evidence of activity to the contrary.

A few weeks into Tanforan’s operations, the WRA finally began to act. Recreation Departments were thrown together. At Tanforan Harry Leroy Thompson headed the Recreation Department, and the department staff was to include, by June, a total of 182 employees on the payroll. A report on the Tanforan Recreation Department’s activities in the first three weeks, from May 2 to May 26, refers to “stop-gap phases of recreation,” including the “erection of volleyball courts, the distribution of checkers, goh, and other quiet games, and the organization of a Center-wide social dance to be held that first night,” all measures designed to relieve “immediate pressure

⁵¹ Ibid., 207.

on the department” while it developed its organization.⁵² As Thompson stated in his report, “there is a need for recreational service, one that is almost too obvious to write about. When there are almost 8,000 people within 2 square miles, the need for leadership in the use of leisure time is certainly self-evident.”⁵³

By mid May, the Recreation Department reported seven recreation centers interspersed throughout the camp, one used as headquarters, one functioning as a library and study hall, and the other five used as area community centers for the individuals in the surrounding barracks. According to their report, efforts were being made to target two areas of the camp without adequate recreation centers nearby. In addition, there were two Pre-School Play Centers in existence, with an additional two slated for construction. Outdoor facilities consisted of five softball diamonds, one nine-hole golf course, four badminton courts, one tennis court, one model yachting course, two basketball courts, three touch football fields, nine horseshoe courts, and seven volleyball courts, as well as indoor facilities consisting of a goh and shogi center, a boxing gymnasium, and a social hall. The report singles out two recreation

⁵² “Tanforan Recreation Program,” 27 July 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁵³ H. L. Thompson, “Tanforan Recreation Program,” 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

programs with particularly extensive operations: Obata's art program and a music program run by Tom Tauji.⁵⁴

These reports clearly show that the Recreation Department viewed itself and was regarded by the internees as an institution of control. According to its own report the aim of the Recreation Department was to establish center-wide control, and specified that any divisions within the Department would be geographic "in order to inhibit cliques and minorities."⁵⁵ It can be inferred that the reference to "cliques and minorities" is related to the WRA's concerns for potential divisions between the Issei and the Nissei.⁵⁶ The report further stated that the department would oversee "the function of public recreation, private agency work, commercial recreation, and to a large extent, the private functions carried on in the home and in small groups."⁵⁷ The argument that the camps disrupted family life even while they created new sorts of communities is standard in both primary and secondary literature.⁵⁸ The Recreation Department became something of a catch-all for the creation and supervision of

⁵⁴ H. L. Thompson, letter to George Greene, 14 May 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁵⁵ "Tanforan Recreation Program," 27 July 1942.

⁵⁶ 'Issei' denotes Japanese-born individuals, and 'Nissei' describes first-generation Japanese-Americans who were born in the United States.

⁵⁷ "Tanforan Recreation Program," 27 July 1942.

⁵⁸ See, for example, Lawson Fusao Inada, *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000).

community life. To meet the need for leadership, the Tanforan administration even went so far as requesting lists of members from YMCA groups, looking for individuals who were tried and tested leaders.⁵⁹ The blurry borders of the Recreation Department's duties inadvertently made it responsible for aspects of camp order. In one letter dated to June 17, 1942, the Federation of Christian and Buddhist Churches at Tanforan complained of unsupervised dances and socials which lasted "till the very latest hours of the night," and requested that the department provide adequate supervision.⁶⁰

Most expressive of this mindset is the conclusion of the report on the Tanforan Recreation Program by Thompson, mentioned earlier. "Although an activities program cannot and will not supplant a work program, for a short time an activities program is a fair substitute. Under proper leadership and leadership training, it is possible to take up the slack that is left by a lack of a work program."⁶¹ From the standpoint of the War Relocation Authority, the activities of the Recreation

⁵⁹ Pacific Southwest Arts Council YMCA, "Suggested List of Names from YMCA Membership for Social and Recreational Leadership," no date (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁶⁰ K. N. Kumata, letter to H. L. Thompson, Director of Recreation, 17 June 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁶¹ H. L. Thompson, "Tanforan Recreation Program, 1942," no date.

Department were preventative measures, preoccupying the internees so that they would not get restless.

The conception, vision, and execution of the Tanforan Art School, instigated by Chiura Obata, carried out by staff, and made a success by its hundreds of students, could not have been more different. That it fit the Department's utilitarian aim of structure and control was both luck and strategy, and it won the school both legitimacy and limited institutional support. However, the school itself is testament to internee ambition and planning, as well as a concerted effort to create a community existing beyond the bounds of imprisonment.

According to statements by Obata, from the first days he entered Tanforan he had a plan in mind to set in motion an art school. As he later described, "in a situation where we were being forced into an unreasonable evacuation, to kill the burning heart, burning determination of these young people was very bad. Somehow we had to support the active, learning minds of the young people and provide them with a place where they could learn...My first thought was to open an art school and start teaching everyone."⁶² As noted above, the lack of information concerning how long the internees would be at Tanforan makes it more likely that Obata planned to start the art school at the relocation center, which at the time internees were led to believe they

⁶² Chiura Obata, "Obata Art School Survey, 1942," no date (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA; Kimi Kodani Hill, *Topaz Moon: Chiura Obata's Art of the Internment* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2000), 37.

would be sent off to within days of their arrival at Tanforan. However, there is no question that Obata reshaped this plan in response to the changing situation with remarkable alacrity, and certainly with more agility than the War Relocation Authority was capable. Within a few days of arriving at Tanforan, Obata applied to the Tanforan Adult Education program to set up an art school.⁶³ Evidence of the thoroughness of Obata's planning can be found in a mid-May report submitted to George A. Greene, the chief of the service division. Before registration had even begun, Obata estimated the total number of pupils to be 600, a number that was just a few dozen under the actual peak attendance numbers.⁶⁴

It is no surprise that Obata would have been compelled to teach. Born in Japan, Obata trained formally in sumi (ink) brush painting before moving to San Francisco in 1903, at the age of eighteen.⁶⁵ Since 1932, he had taught at the University of California in Berkeley, at first as a lecturer and then as a professor. Obata also had a rich involvement with the California artist community. Not only had there been numerous exhibitions of his work, but he belonged to several arts societies, and included among his friends prominent members of the Bay Area artist community. Not only was Obata well placed, his fellow internees included artists both artists and art teachers.

⁶³ Hill, *Topaz Moon*, 37.

⁶⁴ H. L. Thompson, letter to George Greene, 12 May 1942.

⁶⁵ Hill, *Topaz Moon*, 6-7.

Despite Obata's focused enthusiasm and his pre-formed network of colleagues, his initial struggles to start his art school highlight the Recreation Department's reluctance to extend itself. The recounting of the beginning of the art school, and of the sentiments created in the creation, are neatly preserved in a report submitted to the Recreation Department by the school's staff. The response of a weekly report to what was doubtless a form question asking what committees or councils were used in the development of the program, begins somewhat tartly, "There were no committees or councils used to develop the program. It was solely the idea of our Art Director-- Prof. Chiura Obata...."⁶⁶ Continuing, the report emphasizes again the leading role of Obata and his art school compatriots, and notes that only after "a rather long wait" did education director Frank Kilpatrick give them formal permission to proceed.⁶⁷ Accompanying this permission came the granting of a single mess hall; efforts at obtaining further funding from the education department stalled. Not to be thwarted, the school instead asked for contributions from the students, and the faculty supplemented this with whatever supplies they happened to have on hand.⁶⁸

Not only does this report highlight the difficulties of getting Tanforan officials to act on behalf of anything not considered a component of basic survival, but it also

⁶⁶ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942," 18 July 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

emphasizes the independence and leadership that were the mindset of the school. The report contains notes of reproach towards camp officials for being so recalcitrant in granting permission and funding, but more importantly it asserts that the school is a separate entity, formed as a result of Japanese American enterprise and operating in isolation of authority. Starting in July, the arts school was required to submit weekly reports to Tanforan's administration, as were Tanforan's other organizations. The reports listed the number of classes held, the schedule, enrollment numbers, and various activities conducted during the week. They also listed monetary usage and funding. The weekly reports were ways for the organizations at Tanforan to prove their cooperation and utility to the camp's administration. Yet couched in the language of the art school staff's weekly reports is an exhortation of the necessity for individual creativity, creativity that often found its expression in defiance. This combination of carefully cooperative reportage and assertive separatism characterized the Tanforan Art School's run, and permitted it to provide an outlet of expression even as it positioned itself as a exemplary tool of the center's need for control.

The weekly reports continually emphasize the extent of the staff's involvement with the school. This was something of a necessity. The unused mess hall that the center granted the school for usage was not very inviting. According to Obata, he and the faculty members "gathered together and immediately started cleaning and scraping the dusty, muddy floors and we even removed the ledges from the windows to take out the pile of accumulated sand."⁶⁹ Even once the faculty had cleaned out the mess hall,

⁶⁹ Chiura Obata, "Tanforan Camp Art School," 26 June 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly

it was hardly fit for usage as a classroom. Students and instructors faced issues of inadequate lighting, lack of tables, and an absence of partitions, which made it hard to hear, in particular when next to a children's class, which, as a report noted in understatement, were "apt to become a bit noisy".⁷⁰ Miné Okubo depicts many of these frustrations in a sketch showing her with a class full of rambunctious children, commenting that "classroom discipline was poor" (figure 4).⁷¹

In addition to the challenges of place, administrators faced the constant effort of obtaining supplies and funding. An itemized list of costs submitted to the Chief of the Service Division in June estimates the total cost of the entire enrollment to be \$647.50.⁷² According to department reports, the department was entirely dependent on donors for supplies.⁷³ After the Director of Education rejected a preliminary request for funds, the school staff petitioned friends, outside organizations, and fellow internees. In addition the students were also charged fees; suggested student enrollment fees were suggested to be fifty cents per child, and a dollar for all others.⁷⁴

Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁷⁰ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942," 18 July 1942.

⁷¹ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 92.

⁷² "Tanforan Camp Art School," 18 June 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁷³ H. L. Thompson, "Tanforan Recreation Program, 1942," no date.

⁷⁴ "Tanforan Camp Art School," 18 June 1942.

In addition to class fees, the school asked the students, at least initially, to contribute towards the purchase of art supplies.⁷⁵ Weekly donations were meticulously recorded in progress reports. The donations came sometimes from individuals, sometimes from organizations, both inside and outside the camps, and often consisted of very small amounts of art supplies, or even monetary donations consisting of three or four dollars. Larger-scale donations were contributed by various charities, church organizations, public school groups, art supply dealers, and museums. Naturally, this self-reliance was an immense advantage to Tanforan officials. “These people are ambitious and clever,” extolls H. L. Thompson in a report about the school, “and make various bits of equipment and facilities, so far as the raw material is available.”⁷⁶

A closer look at the contributions listed permits a clearer picture of what the efforts of the staff concerning fundraising might have been. They also indicate the extent to which the art teachers were involved in the outside art community. Faculty members entered the camps with their own supplies, and also petitioned their friends on the outside to send materials. For example, a July progress report mentions that two architects, Professor Howard Moise from the University of California School of Architecture, and Vernon Dalars, Regional Architect of the Farm Security Administration, visited two art school instructors, Siberius Saito and Shinji Yamamoto, bringing “a variety of used supplies for our architectural classes.”⁷⁷ The

⁷⁵ “Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942,” 18 July 1942.

⁷⁶ H. L. Thompson, “Tanforan Recreation Program, 1942,” no date.

⁷⁷ “Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 20-24 July 1942,” 25 July 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-

art school also appears to have been a venue for those outside the center to express support for the internees. Other organizations that donated supplies included the Berkeley Community YWCA, the Duncan, Vail Company (described as “art supply dealers”), the San Francisco Museum of Art, and several churches. Art teachers also made donations, often on behalf of their institutions, contributing course work forms and other classroom supplies. Multiple individual donors are also listed, some of whom made major contributions. One donation listing is given as “through Mrs. Harry Kingman,” indicating that Kingman rallied her own group of donors; in total, she contributed 120 drawing pads and 300 watercolor tubes.⁷⁸ Larger donations were unusual; most often the donations appeared to trickle in incrementally, and donations of as little as two dollars were meticulously recorded.⁷⁹ The inventiveness of the school in obtaining the supplies persisted throughout the school’s run; in preparation for the camp-wide travelling mess hall exhibition, a progress report notes the suggestion of asking each mess hall to pay in the form of fruits and vegetables, to be used as still life subjects.⁸⁰

American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁷⁸ “Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942,” 18 July 1942.

⁷⁹ “Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 20-24 July 1942,” 25 July 1942.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

From the point of view of the internees as well as the camp officials, the art school was a great success. Registration began on May 19th, and classes the week after.⁸¹ Classes were organized into three groups; the morning classes ran from 8:00 a.m. to noon, the afternoon classes from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and night classes from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. The total amount of weekly classes, after initial adjustments most likely due to attendance, ran to 24 morning classes, 50 afternoon classes, and 14 night classes, for a total of 88 classes per week.⁸² In addition to the classes, the weekly reports record that several lectures were held every week, often by Chiura Obata, but sometimes by other members of the staff. Attendance steadily crept upwards, with dozens of new students enrolling each week through the middle of August, when internees were informed that they would soon be moving on to the relocation camps; numbers peaked at 636 students.⁸³ The students themselves ranged from six to over seventy years of age.⁸⁴ The staff as of mid-July consisted of sixteen teachers, two supply keepers/janitors, a secretary, and Chiura Obata as the art director.⁸⁵ Among the teachers, most held or had been in the process of obtaining degrees from university art programs. Employment for internees was divided into

⁸¹ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942," 18 July 1942.

⁸² "Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 20-24 July 1942," 25 July 1942.

⁸³ H. L. Thompson, "Tanforan Recreation Program, 1942," no date.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942," 18 July 1942.

three pay scales: professional and technical, skilled, and unskilled.⁸⁶ The art teachers were considered professional workers.⁸⁷

The courses on offer seem to have been based on the expertise the professors could provide, and in their variety offered students something of which there was a shortage in internment: options. Courses included: figure drawing, landscape, still life, freehand brush work, art anatomy, sculpturing, mural painting, art appreciation, fashion design, interior decoration, cartoon, mechanical drawing, architectural drafting, commercial lettering and poster layout techniques, and classes in charcoal, pencil, watercolor, oil, crayon, pen and ink, pastel, tempera, and sumi.⁸⁸ Many of these classes, based on demand, were offered at multiple levels or to different age groups. The classes offered included traditional Japanese forms of art, including sumi, which in itself was an act of defiance in an environment where even the widespread use of the Japanese language was discouraged.

⁸⁶ T. K. Miller, Supervisor Finance and Records, "Procedure for Disposal of Paychecks to Evacuees at Tanforan Assembly Center," 4 August 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁸⁷ Administrator William R. Lawson to W. M Gundar, "Interoffice Correspondence," 10 August 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁸⁸ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Weekly Progress Report, 13-17 July 1942," 18 July 1942.

This aspect of the art school, the breadth of classes it offered and the range of students it drew in, was both a critical aspect of the way in which the school marketed itself to camp officials, and a vital way in which the school perceived of itself. It is worth quoting, in full, Obata's statement for the school, delivered in a report on the school:

In any circumstance education is an important as food to an individual whether young or old. We believe that art is one of the most construction forms of education. Through creative endeavors and artistic productions a sense of appreciation and calmness is developed and in consequence sound judgment and a fine spirit of cooperation follow. We feel that such high moral attitude is vital in the participation of the great wartime program for democracy. At Tanforan it becomes very windy and dusty but even the eucalyptus trees blowing and singing in the wind and harmonious hues of wild flowers playing beneath showing hazily through the dust like mist make a beautiful picture. Our aim is to guide our students to see and to appreciate the natural beauty about us and to show them the endless opportunity to touch Mother Earth which is so beautiful in this land.⁸⁹

The success of the school extended beyond the bounds of classes and school enrollment, and became a vital element of the wider community at Tanforan. The weekly progress reports also demonstrate the wider presence the art school had at the center. Most basically, the art school contributed or loaned paintings throughout its tenure. These paintings are noted as being sent out to buildings such as the hospital and the music school.⁹⁰ Throughout the summer there was a camp-wide traveling

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 27-31 July 1942," 1 August 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

mess hall art exhibition, in which twenty-eight paintings were rotated from one mess hall to another on a weekly basis.⁹¹ From July 11 through July 14, the art school held together with the Recreation Department an Art and Hobby Show, which included 321 student paintings. According to a recreation department report, the show was successful enough that it was continued an additional day and a half, and received a total attendance of over 9000 individuals.⁹² Another Art and Hobby show, this time held in conjunction with the Tanforan Mardi Gras, was held from September 5 through 7.⁹³ The art school's reach extended beyond Tanforan. In August, thirty-nine paintings were reportedly sent to the Merced Assembly Center to be exhibited in their own Art and Hobby Show.⁹⁴

Beyond the display of artwork, the art school also was kept busy contributing artwork for the various other activities around the camp. Weekly activity reports submitted by the arts school record the prolific and eclectic output of the art schools. For instance, in the last week of the school's existence, September 4 through 10, the

⁹¹ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 20-24 July 1942," 25 July 1942.

⁹² "Tanforan Recreation Program," 27 July 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁹³ "Tanforan Recreation Program, 31 August- 4 September 1942" 5 September 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁹⁴ "Tanforan Camp Art School, Progress Report, 27-31 July 1942," 1 August 1942.

art school produced twenty-four signs, five float decorations, seventeen posters, one backdrop, eleven cartoons, two banners, two certificates, and eleven plaques, all for Mardi Gras events.⁹⁵ They were also responsible for various building signs, including those that marked the library and the recreation centers, as well as other informational signs used throughout the camp.⁹⁶ Requests were made formally to the school through intercamp memos. One such memo requests that thirteen signs be made for the First Aid Classroom, dictating the various captions, including “Call a doctor” and “Hats off please.”⁹⁷ It is likely that the school also produced the election posters photographed by Dorothea Lange (figure 5). With lettering in both Japanese and English, the posters were intended to access a wide spectrum of individuals at the camps.

The school was also drawing outside attention, courtesy of both the faculty’s prior connections and general concern for the well being of internees. Obata arranged for an exhibition to be held at Mills College from June 27 through July 7 during the

⁹⁵ Kimio Obata, “Tanforan Recreation Program Activity Report,” 10 September 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁹⁶ Kimio Obata, “Tanforan Recreation Program Activity Report,” 28 May 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁹⁷ Yoshio Katayama, “Memorandum to the Art Department,” no date (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

Eighth Annual Conference of the Institute of International Relations. This exhibition moved the following week to the International House in Berkeley, and then to the YWCA Cottage of University of California. These exhibitions were covered by the San Francisco Examiner, The Chronicle, Oakland Tribune, and other newspapers.⁹⁸ A monthly report lists “several notable persons who have honored us by visiting the school,” including Kay Wahl from the San Francisco News and Norman Reasley, head of the Legion of Honor Palace of Fine Arts, as well as Dorothea Lange.⁹⁹

Art historians specializing in Asian American art have located in the internment a watershed period for the development of Japanese American artwork and artists.¹⁰⁰ Forced into condensed communities and offered limited opportunities for activities and occupation, the camps created circumstances primed for artistic development. Adjunct to this has been the post-internment attention given to artists, whose camp experience not only featured and heavily influenced their artwork but also lent focus and immediacy to the way the artists were publicized. Most prominent among these shows is *View from Within*, organized by the Japanese

⁹⁸ “Tanforan Camp Art School Monthly Progress Report,” no date (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Elaine Kim, “Interstitial Subjects: Asian American Visual Art as a Site for New Cultural Conversations, in *Fresh Talk/Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art*, edited by Elaine H. Kim and Margo Machida (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

American National Museum in 1992, on the fiftieth anniversary of the internment.¹⁰¹ Featuring the works of thirty-five Japanese American artists, most created in internment camps or other holding facilities, the exhibition was the first of its kind in scale, and the first to be organized outside of academic and Japanese American community groups.¹⁰²

The Recreation Department staff was officially taken off the payroll on September 12, 1942.¹⁰³ Ironically in terms of the unplanned and sluggish start to the department, by the end of Tanforan's run, the Recreation Department logged the third largest amount of payroll hours, behind the mess hall staff and Works and Maintenance.¹⁰⁴ Though the Tanforan Art School had concluded its run, the project was hardly abandoned. Most of the Tanforan residents were relocated to Topaz Relocation Camp in Utah, and quickly after the move the Topaz Art School was organized. The initial organization at Tanforan carried over to Topaz and the school continued to teach classes and organize exhibitions. Items such as the "Certificate of

¹⁰¹ Karin Higa, *The View from Within: Japanese American Art from the Internment Camps, 1942-1945* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992).

¹⁰² Ibid., 15-18.

¹⁰³ H. L. Thompson to George A. Greene, "Interoffice Correspondence," 1 September 1942 (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

¹⁰⁴ "Divisional Breakdown – Payroll Ending August 21, 1942," no date (National Archives Microfilm Record Group 499, roll 274), Records of Japanese-American Assembly Centers; Records of U.S. Army Defense Commands (World War II), 1942-1946, Record Group 499, National Archives at San Francisco, San Bruno, CA.

Attendance” are testimony to a well-ordered system endeavoring to provide instruction and encourage participation (figure 6).¹⁰⁵

The Tanforan Art School was a covert outlet for creativity and a carefully managed instrument for independence. It was an upstart and prescient organization that matched the belatedly recognized needs of the center administration. While it operated within the center rules, it also dealt outside of them, soliciting outside aid and drawing upon independently minded internee resourcefulness. By abiding by the rules of center organizations, it ironically harbored the creation of emotional and angry artwork with criticisms far beyond that which Lange and her contemporaries achieved.

¹⁰⁵ Adult Education Department Certificate of Attendance, no date, Hisako Hibi pictorial collection concerning the Tanforan Assembly Center and the Utah Relocation Center, 1973.049, UC Berkeley, Bankroft Library.

Chapter 4

PERCEPTION AND PROTEST: TWO ARTISTS AT TANFORAN

As much as Dorothea Lange wished to accurately portray life in the camps, she could never move beyond her position as a spectator and an outsider. While the internees were deprived of such documentary tools as cameras, they too sought to document their surroundings, and like Lange they also sought to convey the experience of being interned. This chapter focuses on a few examples of the artwork from the internment at Tanforan, in this case completed by individuals who were predisposed by profession and inclination to turn to art as a method of refuge and expression: the artwork of Miné Okubo and Hisako Hibi. These two women, both professionally trained, practicing artists at the point at which they entered Tanforan, fashioned distinct protests, one internal and emotional, the other outwardly-directed and broodingly critical.

Hisako Hibi was a reserved presence, both in her artwork and in the way she conducted her life. Despite her training as an artist, it is unclear whether or not she taught art at Tanforan, although she did teach at Topaz. She is not numbered among the teachers on the payroll at Tanforan, but several sources note that she taught children's art classes there as well as at Topaz.¹⁰⁶ Her husband Matsusaburo, himself a noted artist, was himself employed by the school and it is possible that Hibi assisted

¹⁰⁶ Higa, *View From Within*, 27.

him on an informal, volunteer basis. Hibi was born in Japan and emigrated to California as a teenager, and she met her husband while both were students at the California School of Fine Arts. In terms of her work while interned, Hibi is best known for her oil paintings, six of which she completed while at Tanforan. Of these paintings, two are still lifes, and the other four are outdoor paintings of the camps.

Miné Okubo prior to the internment was earning a living as an artist. At the time of the evacuation she was employed by the Federal Arts Program doing mosaic and fresco murals which had been commissioned by the United States Army.¹⁰⁷ Okubo worked as a teacher at both the Tanforan and Topaz Art Schools. While at both locations, she also completed a series of sketches based on her observations there, which she later redrew, organized, and published as a graphic memoir. Titled *Citizen 13660* after the numeric identity she was assigned at Tanforan and Topaz, she published the memoir in 1946, the first such work by a Japanese American who had been an internee. *Citizen 13660* consists of 206 illustrations, each paired with captions which range from the very short and curt to the long and descriptive.

In comparison, the two artists demonstrate sharp differences in their choice of mediums, subjects, and the emotional tone of their artwork. Okubo's sketches display a Spartan simplicity mirrored by the captions, which are similarly terse. The images often take a critical tone, which Okubo uses to express both humor and anger. Hibi's thickly layered oil paintings, on the other hand, are distinctly intended to convey and evoke sadness. In their subject matter, too, the artists have distinct preferences.

¹⁰⁷ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, ix.

Okubo's images are, for the most part, crowded with people. They are narrative-driven scenes, attempts to illuminate aspects of life at Tanforan. People are noticeably absent in Hibi's work. While she depicts the barracks, it is their impact rather than their reality that she strove to achieve, attempting to impart their oppressiveness, and the loneliness and isolation that she felt in their midst.

While Hibi herself is absent in her paintings, Okubo placed herself in nearly all of her illustrations, even those in which she was not the primary subject. In many instances she has no role in events described in the written narrative, instead presenting herself as an active spectator and observer. Sometimes this portrayed position is more subtle, and at other times it is jarringly obvious, such as two illustrations of herself standing in a barrack filled with older single men (figure 7).¹⁰⁸ With one of her captions describing the aimless lethargy into which some of these individuals sunk, their lives amounting "to waiting for the next meal," her sketches depict the rows of bunk beds, many of them holding men, either working at various activities or simply lying down. In both images, Okubo stands watching the men. By placing herself as spectator, Okubo shows her sympathy towards and yet disapproval of the men surrounding her.

She also uses her presence to demonstrate rebellion. While Okubo's presence in her drawings at times merely conveys a passive, observational criticism, her body language, and at times her actions, register rebellion. Describing the practice of daily roll call and curfew, the accompanying sketch shows Okubo reacting to the barrack's

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 63-4.

“house captain,” chin stuck out and lower lip protruding in unmistakable noncompliant defiance.¹⁰⁹ The following page notes the presence of “Caucasian camp police” prowling the camps, looking for suspicious actions. The sketch depicts one such policeman attempting to peer through a knothole in the barracks at two men smoking and playing cards. Apparently unnoticed by him is Okubo, who is herself peering around the corner watching him (figure 8).¹¹⁰ Okubo’s continual insertion of herself into her sketches serves as a constant reminder to the readers that she is in control of her narrative and what she chooses to depict. It also, in presenting her in the act of observation, gives her a presence and allows her to nonverbally react to the scenes she portrays.

Okubo appears to deliberately have skirted depicting the actions of the camp officials whenever possible. Okubo’s illustrations are nearly devoid of white faces; in particular starting with her time at Tanforan, they appear in few illustrations in the book. Okubo often phrases actions taken by camp officials in the passive. “All packages were inspected,” reads one caption; “All signs in Japanese were ordered removed,” reads another.¹¹¹ One contemporary reviewer even seized upon this willful blindness in a minority negative review, critiquing Okubo for neglecting to represent reality. The author points out the dearth of sympathetic non-Japanese, aside from a brief mention of Okubo’s personal friends, and calls this out as a glaring

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 60.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 61, 83.

inaccuracy.¹¹² However, it is far more likely that Okubo made this omission deliberately to call attention to the control the government was asserting over the lives of the internees.

Okubo's strong authorial voice did not go unnoticed, although the praise she received often overlooked her opinionated tone. *Citizen 13660* was published in September of 1946; as the first memoir of its kind, it received significant attention, and made Okubo a famous witness to the internment. A review in the *New York Times* describes the book as "remarkably objective and vivid and even humorous account. ...Mine was everywhere with her sketch pad, recording all that she saw, objectively yet with a warmth of understanding which personal involvement brought."¹¹³ The review is far less a literary or artistic critique of the work, and seems to see the work as a factual accounting of life at Tanforan and Topaz. The final line of the review, that these are "scenes likely to haunt the thoughtful reader," again describes the illustrations as if they were documentary images.

¹¹² Constantine Panunzio, "Citizen 13660 by Miné Okubo," *Journal of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 249 (January 1947): 209, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.nss.udel.edu/stable/1025481?&Search=yes&searchText=%22citizen+13660%22&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3D%2522citizen%2B13660%2522%26acc%3Don%26wc%3Don%26&prevSearch=&item=4&ttl=68&returnArticleService=showFullText>.

¹¹³ M. Margaret Anderson, "Concentration Camp Boarders, Strictly American Plan," *New York Times*, 22 September 1946, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.nss.udel.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=113138338&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1333937681&clientId=8331>.

Okubo herself promoted her images as documentary. Miné Okubo has described her artistic impulse and output as being as direct result of the ban on cameras: “Cameras and photographs were not permitted in the camps, so I recorded everything in sketches, drawings, and paintings.”¹¹⁴ While Okubo’s intent was perhaps more nuanced than that of the documentarian, Okubo took very seriously this goal of representation. Not only did Okubo emphasize the observational in her own artwork, she also did so for her class. “I help them to observe and to create.” For example I take groups out to laundry and tell them to observe. Later I ask them to draw what they thought was important.”¹¹⁵ When she was called to testify before the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1981, she presented the Commission with a copy of *Citizen 13660* to accompany her oral testimony.¹¹⁶ In that testimony, she described her process as such: “I kept the drawings objective and the brief text was not only to interest the reader, but to record this tragic incident of the war.”¹¹⁷ On the day of Okubo’s statement, she had assembled a collection of her sketches, drawings, and paintings in the back of the room, as an exhibition “for the public.”¹¹⁸ Okubo’s documentarian goal for her

¹¹⁴ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, ix.

¹¹⁵ “Tanforan Camp Art School,” 18 June 1942.

¹¹⁶ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, xi.

¹¹⁷ Miné Okubo, “Statement of Miné Okubo before the Congressional Committee on Wartime Relocation and Internment (1981)” (*Amerasia Journal* 30:2, 2004): 16, <http://www.metapress.com.proxy.nss.udel.edu/content/c16wh84001525461/fulltext.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

paintings took on a life of its own. For a review of a study of government practices at the internment camp in Poston, Arizona, one of Okubo's drawings of camp life is the sole accompanying image, and acts as the centerpiece of the article, with the text relegated to a border.¹¹⁹ According to Okubo, starting in 1975 publishers of textbooks started requesting rights to her drawings to be published in history books used in high schools.¹²⁰

Several of Okubo's sketches are similar in content and perspective to the photographs of Dorothea Lange. This is particularly true of the less intimate photographs. For example, Okubo's description of the evacuation process includes multiple sketches of piles of luggage with tags attached, and also of owners sitting and waiting (figure 9). As already described earlier, Lange took multiple photographs registering these events. Both women took particular concern to emphasize the tags with the identity numbers (figure 10). In Okubo's drawing, these tags are more legible than the names written on suitcases, and in one case the tag partially obscures the name. The captions, when taken individually, are worded similarly, describing the "baggage piled on the sidewalk" without adjectives or visible emotion.¹²¹ Like Lange, Okubo depicted the lines and the crowding. There are markedly similar composition

¹¹⁹ Robert K. Merton, "ADMINISTRATION---AND PEOPLE: What a Relocation Center Taught About the Science of 'Governance' Governance," *New York Times*, July 22, 1945, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.nss.udel.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=94858294&SrchMode=1&sid=5&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1333937947&clientId=8331>.

¹²⁰ Okubo, "Statement of Miné Okubo," 18.

¹²¹ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 24.

choices between images of these sort, both capturing the lines from the rear as they wind towards the buildings. Lange's perspective, from the ground, allowed her to capture only a glimpse of telephone wire and the neighboring barrack. Okubo, choosing a perspective angled from above, depicts several barracks, the telephone poles and wires, and the hills beyond the camp. The major difference between Okubo's drawings and Lange's photographs are not the choice of subject, but the perspective; Lange's shot of the line is taken at a distance, establishing that she is not herself in line, but is observing it from afar. Okubo's drawing is done seemingly at the end of the line, and she depicts her own image in the line.

By contrast to Lange and Okubo, Hibi's intent seems far less to convey information on the camps, and far more to convey the emotional impact the camp had on her. Hibi painted two known overview paintings of Tanforan camp. The first, completed on August 4, 1942, shows the entire camp along with the hills in the background (figure 1). Approximately three-quarters of the racetrack are shown, the rest cut off by the right edge of the canvas. In the center of the racetrack are rows of barracks crowded in so tightly that very little ground can be seen. This grouping is surrounded by the grandstands, around which more barracks cluster. The barracks are colored in a palette of greys, blues, and browns. Overhead in the sky on the right is a winged object that appears to be a plane. The second overview painting, "Tanforan Race Tracks" captures just eight of the barracks, again, pressed tightly together. Beyond these, after a space, she shows a cluster of eucalyptus trees, and beyond those the landscape surrounding the camp. Hibi's framing in all of her paintings conveys a

sense of feeling trapped, and the glimpses of the world outside the camp seem to taunt rather than offer hope.

As noted above, Hibi featured very few people in her paintings. In the three in which people are featured, “Barrack 9,” “A few renovated horse stables” and “Horse Stables,” they are small and faceless, dwarfed in scale by the barracks, which seem to press upon them (figure 11). At the same time, the figures seem isolated, disconnected from each other and their surroundings. Although descriptions of life at Tanforan have shown it to be very crowded, Hibi’s human subjects appear fairly isolated in the landscape. It is also notable that in all three the subjects featured most prominently in the foreground all bear burdens, what appear to be water pails. No photographs of Lange’s show internees doing any sort of heavy labor. In choosing the titles of two of these paintings, Hibi made a conscious decision to call the buildings horse stables rather than barracks. Hibi wanted her viewers to see the buildings as they were constructed, as buildings to house animals rather than people.

Unlike Okubo, Hibi did not make much of an effort to publicize her artwork upon her release, nor did she issue public statements about her life as an internee. She appears to have conceived of her artwork as part of her private and familial life.¹²² In this she appears as very reserved next to the outspoken Okubo, who clearly wished her images and her story to reach an audience. Hibi’s protest appears to have been a personal and internal act, carried out as an outlet for her emotions rather than reaching out to affect the public.

¹²² Hisako Hibi, *Peaceful Painter: Memoirs of an Issei Woman Artist* (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2004): 15.

From the point of view of both painters, the act of creating artwork was a form of defiance in itself. While at no point were there any limitations on documentation beyond that of the camera, there remained a general and open-ended suspicion on behalf of the guards of the internees' artistic expressions. Hisako Hibi recounted one such incident:

One bright day I went out with my sketchbook and sat near the barbed wire fence and started to sketch the hills of south San Francisco. When we had come to Tanforan in May, the hills were all green. The colors were now already changing from green to yellow ochre. I was busily moving the color pencils and crayons on the paper when an internal security officer came and took away the sketch without saying a word. I was terrified and too afraid at the time to ask him what was wrong with sketching that scene.¹²³

Okubo frequently shows herself with a sketchpad in hand, drawing scenes she sees around her. As Okubo frequently portrays herself showing indignation and demonstrating outrage, these images seem to present yet another facet of her exhibiting these emotions.

While historians have seemed eager to locate the subjective criticisms in Lange's photographs, there has been a tendency to praise the images of Hibi, Okubo, and other camp artists for their objectivity, and implicitly their lack of protest. The racial and cultural identity lingered sometimes uncomfortably in the way these paintings have been perceived. "There is little here, scarcely anything, that might indicate racial origin," states an exhibition review of a Riverside Museum exhibition of twenty one artists from the Japanese American Artists Group, which included works by Okubo and Henry Sugimoto. An October 1989 article on an exhibition titled

¹²³ Ibid., 16.

“From Bleakness” at the Gallery on Hastings-on-Hudson, which featured art and artifacts made at various camps, concludes somewhat bewilderingly that “whatever the reason—a sense of historical perspective, an acceptance of racism as an inevitability, cultural identity or a mixture of all three—the artists in this show seem devoid of grievance.”¹²⁴

Art was, for Miné Okubo and Hisako Hibi, a vehicle for expressing discontent, and for portraying a historical record in defiance of government bans on photography. Ironically, for all the government’s efforts to limit visual documentation of life at the center through the photography ban, they did not place such restrictions on art. This gap in the regulations was something upon which Hibi, Okubo, and many others at Tanforan capitalized. Their resulting images portray truths that Lange was never able to reveal.

¹²⁴ Vivien Raynor, “ART; Interned Artists, Devoid of Grievance,” *New York Times*, 15 October 1989, <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.nss.udel.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=115608462&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1333931573&clientId=8331>.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

The Japanese American internment lingers uncomfortably in the shadows of American historical thought. It shows itself in glimpses, but remains difficult to fully perceive in its entirety. Internment was the source of great hardship for the thousands of individuals upon whose lives it wreaked havoc, and yet it was never lit by the outrage that has met similar incidences of racism and unjust imprisonment in the twentieth century. The government took great pains to photograph the evacuation, the assembly centers, and the relocation camps. Yet in their efforts to control and censor those images they were left with pictorial evidence that was both unsatisfactory in presenting a positive image of the camps and even more unsatisfactory in capturing the truth of them.

Looking at the images that Dorothea Lange produced at Tanforan, what is most evident is the passivity of the individuals she captured. Lange was, from her perspective, photographing a historical event, and she was not particularly concerned with, or even aware of, representing the community into which she had stepped. Lange's critical perception of the internment process does emerge from her photographs; she pointed her camera at dusty, ramshackle barracks, lines of individuals standing in wait for food, piles of luggage heaped roughly in the backs of trucks. But her decision to veer more negative should not be mistaken for nuance. Her

photographic choices to capture some of the harshness of the situation, choices which have been magnified by those who wish to represent her as a photographer in revolt, at best represented the Japanese American internees as innocent victims, an image which leaves little room for their own hand in or perception of their surroundings.

Working simply off Lange's images, it is easy to acknowledge the unpleasant situation at Tanforan without recognizing the development of a community in confinement. Like the other assembly centers, Tanforan was intended to be a brief stop in the internment process, a hastily erected shelter to briefly contain and constrain abruptly anointed prisoners before they were transported elsewhere. Instead, the center directors found themselves with a growing population and elusive departure schedule. Searching for a solution to control what they determined to be a potentially volatile situation, the WRA settled upon the development of a recreation program. Though this they sought merely to instill order and channel energies.

Under this guise, the Tanforan Art School thrived. It employed artists and taught hundreds of students. It also engaged the community, both through exhibiting its artwork throughout the camp and by putting its activities toward work that could be used in various camp settings, from signs to election posters. From the perspective of the center administrators, the art school was a tool for the effect they sought; it was a constructive activity that occupied the time of the internees, supposedly distracting them from their situation. From the perspective of the internees, the art school had a very different purpose. Created in a determined effort to preserve the creativity and energy that the process of the internment had endeavored to strip away, the art school

provided a haven for emotional release and encouraged active and critical engagement with their surroundings.

At Tanforan, art served as a form of protest, both in the activity and the finished product. Art was, for artists such as Miné Okubo and Hisako Hibi, a vehicle for expressing discontent and for portraying a historical record in defiance of government bans on photography. And ironically, while the work of the photographers was scrutinized and their output censored, the internee artists practicing at Tanforan were free of such constraints. From this freedom emerge Hibi's oil paintings, which convey the isolation and suffocating drabness of camp life. Okubo utilized this freedom to construct a powerful account of life at Tanforan and Topaz, which vibrates with anger against the injustice of the situation even while it strives to demonstrate the depth of life and activity that developed among the internees.

The art school served as an organ of this protest. Disguised as a government asset, it used WRA funding and facilities to enable a critical and emotional artistic output. While artists such as Hibi and Okubo likely would have taken recourse to art regardless of an encouraging institution, the art school permitted them to pass on their skills to others, and for those others to engage with a program that permitted a mode of resistance that did not invite punishment or further restraint. Instead it offered a measure of freedom, and allowed them to adapt to their surroundings without being resigned to them.

FIGURES

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 1: HIBI'S TANFORAN ASSEMBLY CENTER. Hisako Hibi, *Tanforan Assembly Center*, 24 August 1942. Hisako Hibi Collection, Japanese American National Museum.



FIGURE 2: LANGE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE EVACUATION. Dorothea Lange, "The Japanese quarter of San Francisco on the first day of evacuation from this area. About 660 merchants, shop-keepers, tradespeople, professional people left their homes on this morning for the Civil Control Station, from which they were dispatched by bus to the Tanforan Assembly Center. This photograph shows a family about to get on a bus. The little boy in the new cowboy hat is having his identification tag checked by an official before boarding. -- Photographer: Lange, Dorothea -- San Francisco, California. 4/29/42. War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, WRA no. C-417, UC Berkeley, The Bankroft Library.



FIGURE 3: LANGE PHOTOGRAPH OF PROCESSING. Dorothea Lange, "San Bruno, Calif.--Families of Japanese ancestry arrive at assembly center at Tanforan Race Track. Evacuees will be transferred later to War Relocation Authority centers where they will be housed for the duration." War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, WRA no. C-141, UC Berkeley, The Bankroft Library.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 4: OKUBO TEACHING ART. Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1946, 1973, 1983): 92.



FIGURE 5: LANGE PHOTOGRAPH OF ELECTION POSTER, Dorothea Lange, "Building of the Tanforan Center are plastered at this time with all manner of locally devised posters incident to the election of five members of the Advisory Council. Three candidates were nominated from each of the five precincts." War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, WRA no. C-597, UC Berkeley, The Bankroft Library.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 6: TOPAZ ART SCHOOL CERTIFICATE. Adult Education Department Certificate of Attendance, no date. Hisako Hibi pictorial collection concerning the Tanforan Assembly Center and the Utah Relocation Center, 1973.049, UC Berkeley, Bankroft Library.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 7: OKUBO OBSERVING. Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1946, 1973, 1983): 64.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 8: OKUBO TRANSGRESSING. Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1946, 1973, 1983): 60.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 9: OKUBO'S EVACUATION. Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1946, 1973, 1983): 24.



FIGURE 10: LANGE'S EVACUATION. Dorothea Lange, "Tanforan Assembly Center (San Bruno, Calif.--These young evacuee volunteer helpers are resting a few moments from their big job of delivering baggage to evacuee families of Japanese ancestry as they arrive at this assembly center. Later they will be transferred to a War Relocation Authority center to spend the duration." War Relocation Authority Photographs of Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement, WRA no. C-346, UC Berkeley, The Bankroft Library.

[Image removed due to copyright issues.]

FIGURE 11: HIBI'S HORSE STABLES. Hisako Hibi, *A few renovated horse stables*, 1 August 1942. Hisako Hibi Collection, Japanese American National Museum.

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