

WITH THE HIROSHIMA PANELS ON MY BACK

(1971)

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1. THE BIRTH OF THE HIROSHIMA PANELS

ALONG A NARROW PATH in this sea-scented town, there is a lodge-like studio peeking through the trees. The black pine forest sings in the sea breeze while an abundance of wild lilies, glowing white in the dark, fill the air with their strong scent. This peaceful hill, which has been called Mount Mejiro for some time, stands behind the Ryūkōji Temple in Katase, on the coast of Sagami Bay. It was in this studio with broken windows and peeling white paint that the Hiroshima Panels [Genbaku no zu] were created.

Fifteen years ago, I was a frequent visitor to the studio. I was a literary youth exhausted by his own dissipation back then; this studio and the scholar Komaki Ōmi's residence in Inamuragasaki were the only places that could satisfy the hunger of this young man. A married couple, Maruki Iri and Akamatsu Toshiko (also known as Maruki Toshi), lived in this studio along with several artists, some of whom painted in a Surrealist style.

The first of the Hiroshima Panels, a work entitled *Ghosts* [Yūrei], was shown at the Japan Independent Exhibition in February 1950, while a trilogy with the additions of *Fire* [Hi] and *Water* [Mizu] was presented at the Maruzen Gallery in August the same year. Since I remember seeing these exhibitions, my first encounter with the paintings in the studio must have been around the winter of the previous year. The unmounted Hiroshima Panels had loomed on the walls amidst our endless debates on theories of art as we huddled around the crackling firewood heater in the intimate 20-square-meter studio. They had been an awfully shocking sight to behold.

“To most of the Japanese population, the cruelty remained obscure, and could only be glimpsed through abstract descriptions and photographs of the enormous mushroom clouds. This was precisely because all reports and photographs that documented the atrocities were strictly censored and forbidden to be publicly circulated during the occupation.” It had already been two years since the first exhibition of the Hiroshima Panels when the *Asahi Graph*¹ first released the photographs of the atomic bomb devastation with this statement, sending shockwaves across society. It wasn’t until the fall of 1952 when the magazine *Kaizō* [Reconstruction] ran a special issue² focusing on the atomic bombings. Despite much resistance, the late Tōge Sankichi’s *Poems of the Atomic Bomb* [Genbaku shishū] was printed in mimeograph for the Hiroshima Peace Conference in the summer of 1951; Ōta Yōko’s novel³ had not yet been published then. Hence the only sources of information given to the Japanese public at the time were the dubious novel *The Bells of Nagasaki* [Nagasaki no kane]⁴ and the photographs of mushroom clouds. You could imagine the courage it must have taken to present the panels at the time. I borrowed the trilogy and, along with a couple of friends, exhibited it in the main hall of an inn across from Fujisawa Station. We took note of every piece of A-bomb information we could find at the time and tried to share the Truth with the audience as we explained the artwork. However, we would later learn through many interactions with *hibakusha* [atomic bomb survivors] from Hiroshima and Nagasaki that it could barely even be called the Truth; the reality was far more horrendous. Nevertheless, more than a few audiences found the artworks to be hyperbolic. The disparity between the reality of Hiroshima and the reality of the audience troubled me, but in retrospect, the true challenge lay in the very nature of painting as a medium and the power of the imagination.

In the meantime, the collaboration of the Marukis continued, followed by the completion of the fourth work *Rainbow* [Niji] (1951) and fifth work *Boys and Girls* [Shōnen shōjo] (1951).

Countless drawings occupied every available space in the cramped studio. Based on these drawings, Iri would make a composition on the unfurled sheets of hemp paper and *torinoko* paper, conveying the turbulent movements of the crowd, whereupon Toshiko would add in the details. They used ink, Conté crayons, and vermilion

1 *Asahi Graph* Special Issue, vol. 56, no. 32 (August 6, 1952).

2 The November 1952 special issue was titled *The A-Bomb Devastation* [Kono genbaku ka]. *Kaizō* Special Issue, vol. 22, no. 17 (November 15, 1952).

3 Ōta’s novel *The City of the Corpse* [Shikabane no machi] was first published in 1948 by Chūo kōron sha with significant portions deleted. Ōta republished the work with the Fuyume shobō in 1950. For details, see Watanabe Harumi, “On the formation of *The City of the Corpse*” [Shikabane no machi no seiritsu ni tsuite], *Kokugo kyōiku kenkyū* no. 26-1 (November 1980): 297–305
<https://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/00024081>
https://jmapps.ne.jp/fukuyamabun/detail.html?data_id=40097

4 Nagai Takashi, *The Bells of Nagasaki* [Nagasaki no kane] (Tokyo: Hibiya shuppansha, 1949).

to depict the flames. In response to my questions, Toshiko would say, “I want to use as many traditional materials as possible, since we’re depicting the suffering of our people.” Nevertheless, there was nothing traditional about this artwork at all. The artists leveraged the dynamism of action painting in rendering the blaze with vermilion ink spilled from a small bucket. The third panel *Water*, whose breakdown of composition was noted by art critic Tokudaiji Kinhide⁵, ignored the principle of linear perspective and created a temporal space with surrealistic superimposition, which I found quite intriguing. On the other hand, I felt that the eighth panel and onwards were rather lacking, the expressions of their concepts banal and depictions of the crowd generic. These paintings had to pierce to the core of our humanity, which had been torn asunder in the process of phenomenal negotiation, being unable to fathom the immensity of what had happened beyond a shared perceptual threshold, even after the memory of the atomic bomb had already faded into the distance. Realism is not simply a matter of depiction. Beyond any compositional concerns, this 1.8-meter by 7.2-meter space had to be filled with disruption and conflict.

In any case, for roughly a decade after 1950, the Hiroshima Panels traveled throughout Japan and around the world, reaching places including China, North Korea, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, England, Denmark, West Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and other countries by the efforts of art communities and peace activists. I accompanied the Hiroshima Panels on a nationwide journey for about two years, from the end of 1950. In 1952, against the background of the Bloody May Day⁶ incident and news reports about the success of the American hydrogen bomb test, the exhibitions of the Hiroshima Panels constantly met with unexpected challenges, but the Marukis carried on with unwavering courage and persistence. How many thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands of people did we manage to engage in deep and intimate conversation? Gradually, I came to understand that each of these tens of thousands had already carried different Hiroshima Panels in their hearts. I also realized that some people would still refuse to acknowledge this reality, or choose to interpret it differently.

Thermonuclear issues still loom large and volatile, reflecting

⁵ Tokudaiji Kinhide, “About the Hiroshima Panels” [Genbaku no zu wo megutte], *Bijutsu Hihyō*, no.13 (January 1953): 10–15.

⁶ Bloody May Day [Chi no mēdē jiken] is a violent conflict that took place in front of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo on the 1952 May Day, just after the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty went into effect. A large crowd of protestors demonstrating against the Treaty clashed with police officers, resulting in the deaths of two protestors and more than a thousand people injured.

the current complex political landscape. I can picture various facial expressions that belie our ostensible solidarity. The Hiroshima Panels, now out of the Marukis' hands, continue to demand more diverse imaginings by many more viewers. I, too, must make my own Hiroshima Panels. After causing all kinds of trouble for the Marukis due to the mistakes of my youth, this was the major lesson I learned.

2. WITH THE HIROSHIMA PANELS ON MY BACK

WHENEVER I TRY TO ENCAPSULATE the past quarter-century with the word *sengo* [postwar], the term begins to balloon rapidly and become an uncontrollable and hypercomplex entity, even if I solely focus on “art and its peripheries” [*bijutsu to sono shūhen*].

As such, when I loiter around the idea of the postwar, racking my brain in vain—which is precisely what I’m doing at this current moment, transfixed in front of an impassable door, glaring at the blank manuscript paper—a man suddenly appears on the TV before my eyes, strange as it sounds. A forty-five-year-old man who wears a uniform cinched daringly at the waist, with his white-gloved left hand on the hip and his right fist pumping the air, roaring vehemently from the balcony of the Eastern Command headquarters of the Self-Defense Forces. Trampling past his glorious fiction, the man seemed to be trying to subjugate and defile reality, as if he wanted to sculpt and polish it as he did to his prose. But then when he saw a tremendous crevice growing before him, he hastily disemboweled himself and met his end—hurriedly closing the curtain on his catastrophe-driven aesthetics, and to place a wager on, in his own words, “the strange power that

summarizes one's long life with actions that explode like fireworks in an instant" (*Introductions to the Philosophy of Action* [Kōdōgaku nyūmon]). I didn't have a personal relationship with this man named Mishima Yukio, but we must have traversed the same emotional terrain in the postwar years that Mishima grappled with, the years in which "youths who missed their own death" on August 15 have lived through. Mishima had gotten weary of sleeping with the "mistress that is the postwar," and summarized his life in the treacherous dream where he slept with the mistress while violating a noblewoman of the jade palace. As I sat, stupefied by the image on TV, I could not help but wonder again how I would ever be able to summarize the postwar period.

I have my own sense of this era, but whenever I try to look closely, the details begin to multiply, each transforming into something monstrous, and together overwhelm me with an endlessly unfurling time-space.

Now it is the evening of November 25, 1970.

I can recall a vibrant inspiration sparked by Mishima Yukio's short story "The Cigarette" [Tabako] (1946) published in Kamakura Bunko's⁷ literary magazine *Human* [Ningen] in the immediate aftermath of the war. I was sixteen or seventeen then. *Confessions of a Mask* [Kamen no kokuhaku] (1949) was published a few years later. Mishima's angular and anxious face with a pomade-slicked regent hairstyle appeared in a literary magazine printed on low-quality rough paper; and if I remember it correctly, the photograph was accompanied by his comment, "I am delighted to see myself anchored to a photograph." What truly resonated with me was the pride he took in being part of the same generation as the "Yokaren⁸ dropouts" [yokaren kuzure], a gang of aviators turned burglars who wore white scarves and mid-calf boots and sped through the burned-out ruins of the war in trucks. The lingering grief of the smell of rising smoke mirrors the murderous rage Andō Noboru⁹ directs at the postwar era, as glimpsed in one scene from the movie *Eighteen Years in Prison* [Chōeki jūhachi-nen] (1967). But let us return to my life. In my case, it was the Hiroshima Panels that graphically penetrated my postwar era, wherein the monstrous truth of the carnage had been buried, and the postwar-as-mistress lay sprawled slovenly in the territory of legal fiction, upheld by the Jeeps.

⁷ Kamakura bunko was a book rental shop founded at the end of the World War II by the Kamakura literati. Immediately after the war in September 1945, the shop became a literary publishing house.

⁸ Yokaren is an abbreviation for "Kaigun hikō yoka renshūsei," the young naval aviator trainees in Imperial Japanese Navy. Many of those who completed the training constituted the core of the Tokkōtai [Special Attack Units] for suicide missions.

⁹ Andō Noboru (1926–2015) is a former yakuza leader who became an actor and starred in dozens of Japanese crime films of the 1960s and '70s.

Four or five years had passed since the execution of Tōjō Hideki and other Class A war criminals had been carried out by the same hands that had unleashed the atomic bombs. The blanched landscape of my psyche was even more unmanageable than the devastated landscape at the time, and I wonder if the Hiroshima Panels became kind of a milestone for my change of course. Nevertheless, there was no exhilarating sense of a fresh beginning. Without any means of grasping the situation by my own devices, I was running around with my mouth agape like the humans of the ostensible society of the future that appear in Manabe Hiroshi's¹⁰ illustrations, engulfed in a surging emptiness; along the way I stumbled upon the Hiroshima Panels.

10 Manabe Hiroshi (1932–2000) was an illustrator and essayist known for his book cover designs for many postwar sci-fi novels.

IF YOU GET OFF THE SHŌNAN ENODEN TRAIN at the Katase-Enoshima Station and walk along the mountainside of Ryūkōji Temple in the opposite direction from the sea, you will come upon thickly forested foothills half-covered with black pine trees. Though enveloped in the feverish hum of cicadas, the area traps the cool air of the valley in which abundant lilies glow in the dark. As you navigate your way along the path, you'll see the lights of a lodge-like studio approaching through the trees. This is where the couple Maruki Iri and Akamatsu Toshiko resided at the time.

The hill was called Mount Mejiro for a reason nobody knew. Apart from the studio standing on the hillside and an abandoned house called Gotō-en (also known as the haunted mansion), located at the peak with a superb view, there were no other buildings. The mountain was covered in thickets of three-meter-high trees and a pine forest singing in the sea breeze.

The studio had a cramped workroom barely exceeding fifteen square meters, with a wooden floor stained with paints and gofun pigments; two to three private rooms; a makeshift kitchen shielded by a rickety door panel that let the wind and rain blow through its cracks; and a deep well that almost seemed to suck you in. It must have been the beginning of 1950, or the end of the previous year when I first encountered the Hiroshima Panels in this lodge of peeling white paint. Born in 1901 (the thirty-fourth year of the Meiji era), Maruki Iri was forty-nine years old at the time, which means that Akamatsu Toshiko, who was born in 1912, must have been thirty-eight. I was twenty-one years

old. A couple of years earlier, the couple had moved from their former studio in Shiinamachi to this mountain lodge owned by Tsutsui Keisuke, an author of children's literature.

Let us look at the couple's personal histories. Born as the eldest son of a farming family in Asa-gun, Hiroshima, Iri moved to Tokyo in 1923 (the twelfth year of the Taishō era) at the age of twenty-two. Thereafter, he showed his works with the Seiryūsha association led by the nihonga painter Kawabata Ryūshi, took part in the Rekitei exhibitions,¹¹ and eventually joined the Bijutsu Bunka Association. Toshiko was born in Chippubetsu, Uryū district, Hokkaido as the eldest daughter of the Zenshō-ji Temple's chief priest Akamatsu Junryō. She studied at the Women's School of Fine Arts [Joshiji]. After working as a substitute teacher at an elementary school in Chiba, she too joined the Bijutsu Bunka Association. Since Hiroshima was Iri's hometown, they set foot in the city center just three days after the atomic bombing and witnessed with their own eyes what the writer Ōe Kenzaburo would later call "the worst misery of humankind." Back in their Shiinamachi studio, they kept producing countless drawings of the nightmarish image of miserably transfigured humans. Eventually, they moved to the residence in Katase when their health began to fail them.

Around that time, the Teigin affair¹² took place in the Shiinamachi branch of the Imperial Bank [Teikoku Ginkō] not far from the Shiinamachi studio; the novelist Dazai Osamu committed suicide with his lover and drowned himself in the Tamagawa Canal; Ueno Park by night was abloom with the poisonous flowers of male prostitutes, one of whom by the name of Oyuki punched the Superintendent-General of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police; a strip show called the "Picture-Frame Show" [Gakubuchi shō] began in the Teito-za Theater Shinjuku and gained tremendous popularity; streets were filled with vagrants and katsugiya peddlers who'd acquired goods through illegal means; addiction to methamphetamine, known locally as Philopon, spread from the kamikaze pilots; and the Queen of Boogie-Woogie, Kasagi Shizuko, sang in a growl, "If we live with smiles, *lucky come come.*" Under this atmosphere, defiant social movements gained momentum after the shutdown of the February 1 General Strike by the GHQ. Before long, a series of events including the Shimoyama incident, Mitaka incident, and Matsukawa incident¹³ took place in 1949, and the Red

¹¹ Rekitei exhibitions were organized during the period of 1938–1942 by the Rekitei Art Association, an innovative artist group of the nihonga Japanese-style painting in the mid-war period.

¹² In January 1948, a man appeared at the Shiinamachi branch of Imperial Bank and poisoned twelve people with a potassium cyanide solution and robbed their cash.

Purge swept through the country in 1950. The National Police Reserve Corps was established, and then the Korean War broke out. It was an era of incredible darkness heading into a season of utter humiliation.

The critic Yamada Munemutsu once claimed that “postwar consciousness had been split into two factions: one believed that prewar principles had irrevocably crumbled and new foundations were needed in order to move forward, while the other remained convinced in the continued veracity of their prewar principles” (*History of Postwar Thought* [Sengo shisōshi]). I belonged to the former consciousness, if anything, but was unable to devise any means to find these new principles. I spent my days in vain, asking myself hollow questions and feeling frustrated by an overwhelming sense of futility. The devastation festering within and outside of myself seemed much worse than I had expected. The landscape had transformed all too soon, without even a sound, ever since the white flag of surrender had fluttered on the clear, sunny day of August 15 at the anti-aircraft gun base on Mount Kamakura.

In 1929, Yamamoto Senji (colloquially known as Yamasen), a Diet member from the Labor-Farmer Party, was assassinated by a right-wing terrorist, while that same fall, the Wall Street Crash ignited the unprecedented Great Depression, engulfing every capitalist nation in the world. Amidst this turmoil, I was born as the eldest son of an officer working at the Ministry of Communications and Transportation. Tucking away my memory of the final neon glow of prewar Tokyo’s prosperity, I bore witness to the February 26 incident¹⁴ immediately before starting elementary school. The Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in the following year, and in the winter of 1941, when I was in the sixth grade, Japan plunged into the Pacific War. The next spring, I thus became the first graduate of the National People’s School [Kokumin gakkō]. Starting from that year, junior high school students were required to wear army soldier caps and gaiters and participate in military training, and before long students were mobilized to work at factories and farms. While I gazed admiringly at the older students in the Yokaren uniform who came to visit the factory, Japan experienced serial air raids from B-29 bombers, followed by eventual defeat in the war. The Emperor, once a living divinity, was now a man who went around repeating “Oh, yes” as he tipped his hat; a commissioned

13 These three incidents occurred successively in the summer of 1949 and were major mysteries connected to Japan National Railways. They remain unsolved to this day. The main suspects of the incidents were members of the National Railway Workers’ Union (NRU).

14 The February 26 incident [Ni ni roku jiken] was an attempted coup d’état on February 26, 1936, organized by a group of young radical Army officers who led some 1,400 troops with the objective of purging the political and ideological opponents in the government and military leadership.

officer at school [haizoku shōkō],¹⁵ who until yesterday had strode around with his clattering saber beating up students, traded his uniform for a business suit and transformed into an obsequious man; the “Western brutes” [Kichiku beiei] now threw tobacco and candy at the starving masses while swaying their good-looking hips; and the Japanese feminine beauties *Yamato nadeshiko* mutated into a new species that came to be known as “pan-pan girls.”¹⁶ The overturn of the value system was astounding, and yet seemed to come all too easily. As I wandered around the burnt ruins, I could not identify any connection with the world of before. I must have wanted to assuage my tremendous emptiness and frustration by leaving the house, abandoning my studies, and turning into a kind of intellectual vagrant. Perhaps it was a sentiment shared across my generation: from the age of fifteen to sixteen, I had anticipated certain death within the next five years. The Allies’ invasion of the mainland was imminent, and our generation would have to stand at the forefront of the apocalypse. The education we’d received as long as I could remember simply came down to killing as many enemies as possible and dying gracefully for the Emperor. The young men of fifteen at the time would, during their sleepless nights, ruminate on the pain or death they would suffer from gunshots or physical combat, while remaining completely incapable of telling anyone about these fears.

THE INTELLECTUAL REALM DURING the first few years after the war was like a Saturday afternoon, curiously open to and accepting of the outside world. Perhaps this had to do with the unique atmosphere of Kugenuma and Kamakura, where many philosophers and writers lived as close neighbors. Being a youth who had “missed my own death,” I couldn’t grasp a real sense of Life, which was tossed at me with Lucky Strike cigarettes instead of the Death that had gone missing. I was one of the literary youths who “hurried towards death” without any means of filling this void. I wrote a lot of poems and novels like suicide notes, fell in with a group of vagrants in Ueno, participated in a series of brawls with the help of alcohol I wasn’t used to drinking, and injected as much as 40 cc of methamphetamine a day, all the while falling into an endless darkness and assured in my sense that the gateway to death was just ahead of me. On the other hand, I was also a frequent

15 *Haizoku shōkō* were army officers who were assigned to junior high schools and other secondary and higher education institutions across the country to impart military knowledge to the students and conduct military training.

16 “Pan-pan girls” refers to street prostitutes who mostly solicited and served foreign soldiers of the allied forces.

visitor to the intellectual realm. I would pay visits to Hayashi Tatsuo, Hasegawa Minokichi, Komaki Ōmi, Hatanaka Masaharu, Fujimori Seikichi, Kuzumaki Yoshitoshi, Ōzuka Tomoichirō, Kita Kisuke, Kure Shigeichi, Oda Jinjirō, Miyauchi Kanya, Kunieda Kanji, Shimosawa Kan, Watanabe Shinichirō and others, in addition to the group of Kamakura literati who would hang out at the café near Kamakura Station. A sort of extraordinary ardor had enveloped the Shōnan area a couple of years earlier, when the Kamakura Bunko had published *Humans* and the Kamakura Academy had been founded. In such an atmosphere, I seem to have begun to feel something slowly filling me up. Little by little, I was drawn to the side of Life. I even went on to produce a small newspaper by selling advertising space on my own while handing out leaflets against the Eells statement at Fujisawa Station. The statement issued by W. C. Eells (1949), the Advisor on Higher Education for GHQ, set off the whirlwind of the Red Purge. Plainclothes police interventions in our amateur activism terrified me while simultaneously seeding a desire to see our situation through to the very end. It was a time when the word *freedom* began to settle into people's minds, just as the word *war* had done so until five years before.

The cover of the literary magazine *Human* was printed in two colors and included Akamatsu Toshiko's drawing of a nude woman rendered in a sepia-colored Conté crayon. I don't remember how it happened, but I began to frequent the aforementioned studio. In Inamuragasaki lived Komaki Ōmi, a terrific advocate of Henri Barbusse and a cultivator of the nascent socialist literature in Japan, who had launched with the novelist Kaneko Yōbun and others a literary magazine called *The Sower* [Tane maku hito] in 1921, which was the predecessor of *The Literary Front* [Bungei sensen]. I will never forget what Komaki taught me about life: that the severity one directs toward oneself can turn immediately into the gentleness and love that permeates the world. Komaki helped me to launch my newspaper. Perhaps it was his introduction that led me to climb Mount Mejiro in the first place.

Several young artists were living in the studio: Hamada Yoshihide who worked on oil paintings in a Fauvist style, Hareyama Ei who is now affiliated with the Avant-Garde Art Society [Zen'ei bijutsu kai], and Nonoshita Tōru who had come from the San'in region. There, I joined their endless debate on art theories, feasted on bowls of warm *sanpei*

soup, shared bottles of *doburoku* sake, and snuck onto the thin futons of the young painters who would sleep next to each other on the floor. Maruki would fix me with a friendly squint as he muttered in Hiroshima dialect, “You know, Yoshida-san, you’re an odd duck.” Then he would chuckle with amusement, looking up at the ceiling. From time to time, a piercing gleam lit up his eyes, as if he were contemplating or chasing an anguished thought. I don’t think that we ever talked about the atomic bomb in the beginning.

One night, however, I had an abrupt encounter with the panel *Ghosts*. The grotesque figures of about sixty nude women filled a sheet of 720 cm by 182 cm *torinoko* paper. Their hair was disheveled, faces swollen, bloated lips bursting, and large chunks of their torn skin slipping off. The level of instantaneous heat, which equaled that of the sun glaring six hundred meters above our heads, burnt off their civil uniforms and *monpe* work-trousers. A girl at Hijiyama Elementary School in Hiroshima, retracing her memories from when she was three or four years old, wrote: “When the atomic bomb is dropped / day turns into night / and humans turn into ghosts” (*Below the Atomic Clouds* [Genshi gumo no shita yori]).

An endless procession of barefoot ghosts had walked on the burning land while crying, “It hurts, it hurts,” their torn skin slipping off each finger like tangled strings; spreading these fingers, they held their blistered arms in the air to avoid rubbing them against their bodies. The late Ōta Yōko, a writer from Hiroshima, described them as “human tatters” [ningen ranru]¹⁷ who had been exiled from paradise, and were now banished from Humanity [ningen]. “I heard there were lines of charred people who walked in circles around the same place, again and again,” Toshiko told me in an unexpectedly calm voice.

It was a danse macabre. The world before my eyes or the reality I imagined through this image seemed to lie at an incomprehensible distance, which deeply unsettled me. A frightening coldness that humankind had never experienced before swept over me—to truly apprehend what had happened would make it impossible to stay sane. An impossible coldness, indeed. In prehistoric times, while some primates had already begun to evolve into humans in the southern hemisphere of the planet Earth, the glaciated northern hemisphere remained in an age of death, from which glacial striations occasionally

¹⁷ Ōta Yōko published a novel titled *Human Tatters* [Ningen ranru] in 1951.

bring back distant memories to us finite life forms. That terminal coldness was reborn right underneath the large fireball with a surface heat of seven thousand degrees Celsius—that’s what I thought as I listened to Toshiko.

Up until then, I hadn’t had many doubts about civilization. Even when being trained to kill with a bayonet [gobōken] and type 38 rifle, being targeted by a P-51 Mustang, or even during the B-29s’ scorched earth campaign, I had no way to question the war that had been affirmed as a matter of course in my mind. There were questions of a nation’s defeat and victory as well as collective death, but I neither had a chance to think about them as an issue of humanity, nor concern myself about the future of the civilization that humanity had created but lost control of. It is true that I had cared about the countless deaths consigned to obscurity as I observed the instant overturn of the value system following Japan’s defeat of the war. That may have helped incite my interest in peace activism, but it was rather like an instinctive reaction of my consciousness, which had been spellbound until five years earlier. Nonetheless, the hell I saw on the screen before my eyes was someplace even more fearful and foreboding. As I drank *doburoku* sake that night, I listened to Toshiko with a slightly unusual auditory perception, trying to identify what lay behind her words but to no avail. A chilly sea breeze blew in through the glass windows whose insulating putty had peeled off, fluttering the edges of that image of “human tatters” standing transfixed. In the deepening darkness outside the studio, a quiet wind blew through the pine forest, and the flame of the firewood heater burned briskly; at the bottom of these sounds and in the depths of human darkness, I was trying to identify an abnormal micro-vibration of the atmospheric pressure that was quietly convulsing.

TO EXPLAIN HOW I CAME to be fixated on something more anomalous than art, I may have dwelled too much on myself, even though this isn’t an autobiography. Since that night, my naïve conception of the lamentable death of an individual has slowly faded away. Eight years later, in his article titled “The Hiroshima Panels and Their Peripheries” [Genbaku no zu to sono shūhen]¹⁸ (1958) which won the Art Criticism Award of the *Bijutsu techō*, the art critic Oda Taturō

¹⁸ See Oda Taturō, *The Hiroshima Panels and Their Peripheries: Selected Essays* [Genbaku no zu to sono shūhen: Oda Taturō hyōronsen (Tokyo: Ryūkyū kōbō, 2022): 7–32.

analyzed the myriad naked bodies that appeared in the painting: “Overwhelmed and inspired at the same time by the sheer number of victims, the creator’s idea behind the work is based on the fact of its *instantaneous* occurrence. While this shrinking and expanding mechanism reveals a preoccupation with quantity, as a matter of fact, the artists’ fixation has to do with the questions of whether they faced an irremediable sense of solitude as a sole individual in reliving *that one moment* as a survivor, and whether they could withstand relentlessly ruminations on this solitude in confronting with that one moment.” Then he concluded, “The artistic expression is not dependent upon the sheer number of victims, but if this volume is the source of its creative energy, that energy is no different from a parasite on the intense violence of the atomic bombs.” But was it really the case? At least I had a different perspective in my encounter with the painting: what really mattered was not the quantity of victims but an event involving *Homo sapiens*.

As seen in the text of Akamatsu Toshiko, to which Oda refers in his article, the artist’s naïve surprise at the number of victims is rather evident. I do think now that such an approach would not be sufficient to denounce the situation. But I believe that the artists glimpsed something they did not know themselves. It was perhaps the same world glimpsed immediately after the *pika*¹⁹—that intense flash of light—by the two hundred forty-seven thousand individuals who died while looking at the atomic clouds twelve thousand meters above them. It is even more horrifying to imagine the world which these individuals might have peered through for a moment, without being able to fully comprehend. All of a sudden there was a flash, and something *incomprehensible* took place. There lies an inevitable contradiction in viewing the people who died without being able to fill the insurmountable gap between the moments before and after the event, while assuming one can *comprehend* what happened by viewing the image. This contradiction must have been shared by the artists, as well as with everyone who saw the artwork. It is not like you experienced a strong crash and did not understand anything for a moment, but later you found out that the train had derailed. Another strangely luminous world extended beyond, where we attained nothing even if we had the scientific knowledge of the atomic bomb and knew

¹⁹ *Pika* is a kind of onomatopoeia, or a mimetic word for a flash of light. The survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki called the A-bomb *pika* or *pikadon* (combining the words for “flash” and “detonation”).

the fact that it had been dropped. *Homo sapiens* as a consciousness will not dissolve even if the train gets derailed. What is hidden in the image of *Ghosts* is the dreadful cold that humankind is bound to encounter one day.

From that night on I began to make more frequent visits to Mount Mejiro. The second panel *Fire* was a collaborative work but drawn primarily in Iri's unique style. A number of people continued from the Shiinamachi days to model for the artists, and I, too, took off my clothes and became a model of their sketches. On the right end of *Fire*, crushed underneath the crowd of transfixed people, is a figure clawing desperately at the ground while struggling to rise up, whose face is drawn in the likeness of mine at the time. I clearly remember critiquing, at Iri's request, that there should be someone who makes a last-ditch effort to survive in this sea of fire, despite the rest of the crowds gazing at the sky with expressions of despair. That was my genuine feeling at the time. At last, my attachment to life could burgeon in this coldness that threatened humanity. Then came the third panel, *Water*. Before my eyes, new chapters of the Hiroshima Panels were being produced one after another. Witnessing this trilogy presented at the Japan Independent Exhibition in February 1950 and then at the Maruzen Gallery in August, I felt a natural desire to show this work to an even larger audience. I borrowed the trilogy, and with a couple of friends exhibited the panels in the main hall of an inn located across Fujisawa Station. The response from the audience was greater than expected. Under the U.S. military occupation at the time, all photographs and reports of the atomic devastation were under strict censorship. The poet and novelist Hara Tamiki's short story "Summer Flowers" [Natsu no hana] (1947) which first appeared in the journal *Mita Bungaku* and the poet Shōda Shinōe's collection of poems *Penitence* [Sange] (1947) were published illegally but remained unknown to the general public. Ōta's Yōko's novel *The City of the Corpse* [Shikabane no machi] was published in 1948 with portions deleted. The author of *The Bells of Nagasaki* was used by the GHQ,²⁰ while the U.S. confiscated from the Japan Film Corporation [Nihon eiga sha] a 12,000-foot film recording of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in September 1945, and many medical papers were banned from publication. It was only in August 1951, when the Hiroshima Peace Conference took place, that Tōge Sankichi's *Poems of the Atomic Bomb* was finally published; and the Marukis' picture book

²⁰Yoshida may be criticizing the fact that Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki* framed the devastation of the atomic bomb through Christian concepts of suffering and prayer. This novel was censored by the GHQ and published on the condition that it be combined with *The Tragedy of Manila* [Manira no higeki], the GHQ's account of the Manila massacre, referring to war crimes against Filipino civilians committed by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II.

Pikadon, published in the summer of 1950, was claimed to be in violation of Cabinet Order No. 325 and thus widely confiscated.

One day, in the fall of 1951, Nonoshita Tōru saw me on the streets of Fujisawa and asked me abruptly, “Yoshie-san, why don’t you come along and travel with the Hiroshima Panels?”

3. WITH THE HIROSHIMA PANELS ON MY BACK - 2

NOVEMBER 13, 1970, 3PM.

I’ve gotten off at the Higashi Okazaki Station on the Meitetsu Main Line. I was about to revisit the world of eighteen years ago, but for what? A sense of frustration weighed on me, as though I’d kept shirking my responsibility somewhere and continued to slide down layers of time like a silent avalanche, only to end up standing where I am; the irrefutable facts didn’t correspond with the fragments of my overwhelmingly emotive memory. When Amano Takuo showed up to pick me up in his car with his children, I hastily searched for a solution to ease my frustration. Amano looked at me with his friendly and sympathetic eyes, reaching out his arm to shake my hand.

The city of Okazaki seemed to have transformed in the last eighteen years.

“That was the A-bomb exhibition venue,” Amano said while driving, pointing to a building through the right-side car window. “Now it’s a credit union.”

Back in 1952, it had been the building of the Takahashi Department store. The Hiroshima Panels exhibition, held for five days from June 7 of that year, drew over ten thousand attendees of all ages and

backgrounds. The organizer was the Okazaki Association of Aichi University. Students at the university compiled myriad comments, collected from the visitors in a box located at a corner of the venue, into mimeographed booklets.

As I walked into the reception room at the entrance of Amano's house, decked with red *nanten* berries and *nanako* chrysanthemums in full bloom, I asked Amano impatiently, "Can you help me remember what happened that night?"

Eighteen years ago. Beginning with Stalin's Message, the year 1952 witnessed the signing of the Japan-U.S. Administrative Agreement, the announcement of the outline of the Subversive Activities Prevention Act, and the enforcement of the Peace Treaty, all between February and the end of April, marking a critical turning point of the postwar era. A series of despicable espionage cases committed by the authorities at different universities around the country fueled successive disputes between campuses and police forces. Then the Bloody May Day incident resulted in over a thousand casualties. "We're going through a difficult time. We must stay strong." I remember catching a faint wobble in Toshiko's words. A sobering tension surrounded the Hiroshima Panels that we carried on our backs. The Japanese Communist Party turned to militant policies after the Fifth Party Congress [Gozenkyō] (October 1951), culminating in the clandestine circulation of illegal documents including *How to Grow Flower Bulbs* [Kyūkon saibaihō], which described the organization and tactics of the party's core self-defense forces [chūkaku jieitai], and *Analytic Charts of the Nutrients* [Eiyō bunseki hyō] and *Vitamin Therapy* [Bitamin ryōhō], which provided instructions on weapons manufacturing. Molotov cocktails flew all around in this nationwide violent campaign. Once we arrived at each destination with our heavy luggage, we spent days working without pause to negotiate with local collaborators, inspect the venues, put up flyers and signs, and design the installation. Then we'd immediately find ourselves conducting gallery tours lasting more than an hour, five to six times a day, all while attending to recruitment activities for local peace organizations. Throughout that time, we were followed by uniformed and plainclothes police, both on the street and at the venue. Several days before Bloody May Day, there was an incident in which a man putting up flyers near the Yodobashi Bridge was shot by police

and severely injured; I often felt terribly nervous when setting out for an unfamiliar neighborhood late at night with a bucket and brush in my arms. The oppressive maneuvering of Cabinet Order No. 325 (the Punishment of Acts Prejudicial to the Occupation Objectives [Senryō mokuteki sogaikōi shobatsu hō]) was still in force at the time. As I mentioned earlier, the illustrated story book *Pikadon* authored by the Marukis—praised by Ōe Kenzaburō in his *Hiroshima Notes*²¹ as “one of the best reportages of the post-atomic-bomb human world” more than ten years later—was repeatedly confiscated. (I remember quite well that the authority would confiscate the booklets kept in the Japan bureau of the World Peace Congress and other offices every time they conducted a domiciliary search on different pretexts, even after Cabinet Order No. 325 had been repealed following the enforcement of the Peace Treaty.)

²¹ For English translation, see Ōe Kenzaburō, *Hiroshima Notes*, trans. David L. Swain and Toshi Yonezawa (New York: Marion Boyars, 1995).

THE EXTENT OF THE EXHIBITION’S SUCCESS can be seen in the fact that, after the Toyohashi exhibition and a brief return to Tokyo, we traveled all over the country in the order of Nagoya, Toyama, Kanazawa, Fukui, Takefu, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Nagaoka, Tokyo University of Education, Okazaki, and Hekinan, spending several days in each place and covering about ten locations in a month from April 26 to May 29. Nonoshita and I had already been to over ten locations since the late fall of the previous year, starting from Muikamachi City in Niigata, continuing to Tōkamachi, Kamo, Kashiwazaki, Sanjō, Takada, Niigata, and several locations in Tokyo, so we must have been quite familiar with the process by that time. It appears that on the night of May 7, after closing the Nagoya exhibition, I visited the Suiran dormitory on the Aichi University campus to see Amano and the other students who had helped us earlier with the Toyohashi exhibition. It *appears* so because I don’t remember if that really was the night of May 7. Only fragments of images both clear and obscure remain in my memory: a large puppet theater poster on the dorm room wall, documents of leftist politics scattered on the floor of the cramped dormitory, a commotion that broke out when it was revealed that the police had entered the campus, running out to the school grounds in the dark to find the looming shadow of a crowd, and somebody telling me that a notebook he snatched from a policeman contained information about the Hiroshima Panels exhibition and myself. These jumbled fragments

have been reworked over the years by the force of trauma, and thus are impossible to piece together. According to the newspaper reports, it had already been revealed that, in February, a man named Gotō Shun from the Tōkai regional branch of the Public Security Investigation Agency had committed espionage, employing students for three thousand yen a month. That was just before the Anti-Colonialism Day of that year. Since that spring, the first and second waves of the general strikes against the Subversive Activities Prevention Act, believed to be the largest of the postwar period, continued to surge while the police undertook a series of forceful crackdowns and provocations. Following the Aichi University Incident on the night of May 7, the infamous Waseda University Incident²² occurred the next day, in which five hundred armed officers of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police 4th Area Squadron burst in on a group of unarmed faculty and students, resulting in nearly hundred injuries.

AMANO TAKUO, WHO NOW CALMLY RECOUNTS his memory of that time, was a key figure in the Aichi University Incident. In the summer of 1970, the second court trial of this incident finally ruled police entry inappropriate, clearing the defendant of the charge of obstruction of public service and sparing him from sentencing. At this moment, he is making a final appeal to win a complete acquittal. By the time the second trial was held, eighteen years and three months had passed since the incident. Amano, who was twenty-two years old at the time, is now forty-one.

“I’m still holding on to the letter of encouragement you sent to me at the detention center,” said Amano. From the envelope addressed to Mr. Amano Takuo, Nagoya Detention Center, 2-2 Kamitatesugi no chō, Higashi Ward, Nagoya appeared a letter of my crude writing, parts of which were erased by the neurotic government officials. According to my letter, I heard the radio reporting on the Aichi University Incident in a restaurant near Toyama Station in the early morning of May 8. “Aichi University students tie up on-campus patrolling officers and snatch away their handguns, causing a late-night commotion”; “Aichi University students seize officers and place them in confinement, taking away their pistols.” Newspapers were filled with sensational headlines such as these. On the front page of the *Chūnichi Shimbun*²³

²² The actual Waseda University Incident took place earlier in October 17, 1950. This incident in 1952 is known as the May 8 Waseda University Incident.

²³ The *Chūnichi Shimbun* is a Japanese daily newspaper headquartered in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture.

on the evening of May 8, an article distributed by the United Press reported on a new nuclear test in Yucca Flat, Nevada, in which “a beautiful flash of dazzling light was seen through the thick clouds from the city of Las Vegas, 120 kilometers away,” with a striking photograph of the rising atomic clouds. I don’t need to describe how we felt reading this news during our trip. Around that time, it was just the two of us, Nonoshita and I, who were handling the traveling exhibition; the Marukis had moved on to their next projects. The Hiroshima Panels were made portable in a scroll format, rolled up and placed in a long wooden box, and we would carry them on our backs in a canvas pack. The artists’ drawings combined with photos of victims with keloids and other symptoms, as well as the *Pikadon* made into a panel display, became unwieldy in weight and size, almost too much for us to carry on our backs. Toshiko often said that wear and tear didn’t matter if it meant many more people could see the panels—our tattered military flags in the fight for peace. Though beaten up from overuse, they were invaluable. In some cities, there was no newspaper coverage of the exhibition at all, but just a few dozens of flyers with Nonoshita’s skillful handwriting and mimeographed handbills proved to be enough: no matter where we went, people would sniff us out and end up gathering themselves in front of the panels. Smoldering resentment hung heavy in the air, and quite a few people conveyed their animosity on the comment sheets, so impassioned that the tips of their pencils almost snapped under the pressure. Survivors of the atomic bombing would barge in, not only in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but in different cities across the country, to take the place of us exhibitors and recount directly their experiences of August 6 and 9, reminding us of the fact that myriad victims were now displaced and scattered across Japan. In Hiroshima, Yoshikawa Kiyoshi, known as “A-bomb No. 1,” stood in front of the panels several times and revealed the hideous keloids covering his entire back. In Nagasaki, a girl held out her grotesquely bulging burn scars to the audience, tears streaming silently down her face. In the Chikuhō coal mining region, a coal miner yelled at us “What a letdown!”; in Kanoya, Kagoshima, a National Security Force (the predecessor of the Self-Defense Forces established in July 1954) officer slammed his service cap on the floor in front of the panels. These potent responses revealed the different points of view from

which people confronted the panels. There often was a peculiar divide between their imagined points of view and the thoroughly political nature of the nuclear issues. I soon began to think about this discrepancy while allowing the coldness I had nurtured in myself to grow. Although Maruki seemed critical of the militant approach taken by the Japanese Communist Party at the time, I found myself increasingly concerned with violence as a result of my continuous dialogue with the Hiroshima Panels.

THE AICHI UNIVERSITY INCIDENT, triggered by unauthorized entry onto the university campus by two Toyohashi City Police officers, Uchida Hatsuji and Endō Shōgo, gave me a strong shock. Amano and fellow students who faced arrest were activists who'd help organize the Toyohashi Hiroshima Panels exhibition. The issue could not be trivialized; I saw this incident as a repression of peace movements, including our exhibitions of the Hiroshima Panels. The trial may have been conducted as a case of an alleged assault on the police officers, but there I saw the fangs of the power laid bare. I thought about that discrepancy, too. Nothing much could be done by appealing to "humanism." That coldness remained, opening a frozen yet oddly luminous field inside me; on the other hand, I could not contain my ferocious anger in the face of the reality that lay before me.

This time, I obtained an old train timetable to verify what had happened. The timetable made clear that to reach Toyama Station by the morning of the 8th and have breakfast at a nearby restaurant, I must have left Nagoya at midnight on the 7th and transferred to Takayama Main Line at Gifu Station. The Aichi University Incident happened around 11:30pm on the 7th, which meant that I had barely missed it. It's not that I ran away, but I was tormented by a nagging feeling that I'd long been on the run from this incident and the ensuing trial. Indeed, for eighteen years. It has continued to haunt me by forging a strange secret pact between my subconscious guilt for having escaped and the debilitating rage inside me. Such countless self-judgements have accumulated over the years, none of which has completed its prison term. Like a murderer, I have been serving a life sentence.

THE EVALUATION OF THE criminal acts committed in Hiroshima and

Nagasaki has been left in the hands of the victors. The argument that the atomic bombing ended the war and brought peace has remained unchallenged. This is truly a horrendous logic. I had already learned from someone about the secret agreement of the Yalta Conference. A report that contained the information, drafted by Edward Stettinius who served as the United States Secretary of State under President Roosevelt, became available in Nakano Gorō's translation when Cabinet Order No. 325 was repealed following the enforcement of the Peace Treaty. The document confirmed the fact that, having requested the Soviet Union to enter into the war against Japan, the United States hastily decided to drop the atomic bombs in August, altering their initial plan to invade southern Kyūshū on November 1, in light of the success of the humankind's first nuclear test in Los Alamos, New Mexico. The test had taken place on July 16. The Soviets' entry into the war would have helped annihilate the Kwantung Army, the most prestigious command in the Imperial Japanese Army, in which Japan's defeat was well anticipated even without deploying atomic bombs. In the agreement signed on February 11 of the same year between Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt, the United States requested that "the Soviet Union enter the Pacific War against Japan on the side of the Allies two to three months after the surrender of Germany, following the conclusion of the war in Europe" with the condition that "the South Sakhalin and neighboring islands, as well as the Kuril Islands, be returned to the Soviet Union." Let me outline the chronology of these events: Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945 (three months prior to August 8); the success of the nuclear test on July 16; the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6; the Soviet declaration of war against Japan on August 8; and the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki on August 9. Today this is a widely known fact, but it should have been obvious then, too, that the U.S. objective in the atomic bombing was not to force Japan to surrender. The structure of two superpowers, East and West, which would later manifest in the postwar period, had already been anticipated at that point. That is to say, the U.S. dropped the atomic bombs in Japan as an act against the Soviet Union. Japan must have become a frontline base against the Socialist states on August 6, even before its defeat of the war. It also had been foreseen that this new declaration of war would

effectuate a nuclear arms race between the two superpowers. These are what I spoke about in front of the Hiroshima Panels. In the summer of 1953, I worked with the Kagoshima branch of the Association of the Democratic Scientists [Minshushugi kagakusha kyōkai] to publish mimeographed leaflets denouncing the politics behind the atomic bombing.

THE CROWD OF PEOPLE DEPICTED in the Hiroshima Panels had nothing to do with inhuman politics. They had no idea about the properties of that blazing flash and what it meant. Sasaki Yūichirō's photo reportage *Hiroshima 25 Years* (published by the *Asahi Shimbun* in 1970) reveals to us the march of time, time passing without us knowing or even trying to know, unfolding like a fleeting panorama; but there seems to exist another temporality that is not captured here. The other temporality had stopped like a clock in Hiroshima, continuing to point to 8:15am until the end of the world. In the meantime, the devastation of nature and echoes of metallic sound cheerfully took part in this process of destruction. The panels *Ghost* and *Rainbow* (the fourth panel), in particular, convey foreboding in the landscape that would appear after humanity has been stripped away from humans, hence evoking a shudder of cold terror. It is perhaps undeniable that, being unable to bear this cold, the Marukis proceeded with carrying out a humanistic rescue operation, in which they heaped humans over a landscape deprived of humans, hence inversely creating a distance from the appalling foreboding. This weakness exposed the pitfalls that lay between realist painting and reality, and between reality and humanity, which were directly manifested in the anti-nuclear power movements and peace movements. This is why the humanists who often displayed their vulnerability ended up getting crushed amidst the power struggles of political factions. It's undeniable that they could not address the widening cracks in the ground amid this nonsensical fighting and bickering while continuing to wave the banner of humanism in a delirium of ignorance.

One thing that the Hiroshima Panels must condemn is obviously the most egregious form of violence in political power, but another should be the hopeless imagination of *Homo sapiens* that has begun to sprint toward the end while absorbing that violence. The fact that

over two hundred thousand lives were wiped out in a flash does not call for an emotional response to the magnitude of tragedy based on the stark number alone, but rather a question of whether we can imagine a moment when the two hundred thousand could become three billion. The same goes for painting just one person. I found the numerous monuments built in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to be pointless. The artist Okamoto Tarō once demanded that we create a vast desert at ground zero instead of erecting those artifacts. I find this view most logical because it points to the threshold of the hopeless imagination. The Marukis must have known quite well that there wasn't any truth in the countless naked bodies they were drawing. When it comes to the number of people depicted, there are only about fifty of those life-size figures in *Ghosts* and at most forty in *Fire*. That was the reality the Marukis had to depict as artists who had lost their families, and it's hard to say the extent to which this imaginary reality converged with the momentary reality experienced by those who dissolved under the blaze of atomic bombs, and with other varied imaginings that tried to take different perspectives. The Hiroshima Panels may not have conveyed even a fraction of the reality of the atomic bombs. Nonetheless, they can serve as a cruel entry into this imaginary world. Besides, it is worth noting that very few cases challenged the space of expression controlled by Cabinet Order No. 325 through the medium of painting, despite that an infinite number of attempts should have been made by painters to grapple with this enormous challenge. People were shocked and ashamed that the Hiroshima Panels unearthed one of the critical pieces; and they supported this endlessly traveling exhibition without hiding their agony. Among countless audience members I observed a strong sense of shame, not to mention fury.

This experience was barely enough to sustain me and propel me to continue my journey through forty to fifty more locations. However, the ferocious part of me became increasingly radicalized and less and less tolerant of organized movements. Sometimes during my travels, I became desperately decadent, disputing with local organizers and creating all kinds of trouble for the Marukis, who'd stayed behind in Katase and waited for my updates on the exhibition.

The Hiroshima Panels felt far away some days, and close by other days. Even so, that sensation of intense cold tormented me more and

more as time went on, almost ruining my confidence.

AS I KEPT TURNING the browned pages of newspapers from eighteen years ago, pondering what was about to unfold from there, I looked up at Amano Takuo, now a calm, middle-aged man sitting in front of me. I saw an air of cool confidence emanating from this man who had devoted half of his life to the long court battle that proceeded from his student-era incident. Looking back on the past eighteen years of my life, in which nothing could fill the void in my worldview and the sensation of intense cold never left me, I ruminated on this lengthy journey. I wonder where this torturous sensation of bitter cold could go. If I were to see myself in the image of Kitawaki Noboru's *Quo Vadis* (1949), the painting created as a symbolic monument at the outset of the postwar era, the path that lies ahead of me may be the strangely bright no man's land of the Ice Age.

In this painting, which was presented shortly before Kitawaki's death, a demobilized soldier stands at a crossroads and looks towards the horizon with uncertainty. We see dark clouds and heavy rainfall on one side of the horizon, and a demonstration march with red flags on the other side. A lone snail lies at his feet. "Quo vadis [Whither goest thou]?" Standing in the postwar wasteland, the man seems unsure and exhausted, even viewed from behind.

While I remain extremely wary of transforming this image into a representation of nihilism, I could not hold back my growing sense of emptiness. I remember that on the day of the opening of the Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels in Higashi-Matsuyama, Saitama, I was joined by avant-garde painters Nakamura Hiroshi and Bitō Yutaka, whom I had run into there. The image of *Quo Vadis* wouldn't leave my head even while drinking with them at an izakaya in Kawagoe. Countless people have passed through the Hiroshima Panels, in front of which I see the backs of lost "humans." The Hiroshima Panels, whither goest thou?

ON THE SAME NIGHT, I arrived at Tokyo station at 11pm. Ishikawa Isamu, a painter who'd spent ten years in New York, had just returned to Japan, and I was invited to a party at his house that evening. I called Ishikawa's house from the station.

I heard the cheerful voice of Ishikawa's wife on the phone:
 "It's not too late at all, please come by. Everyone is here—Baba Akira-san, Inaba Haruo-san, Toyoshima Hirotaka-san, and Konno Masaru-san—and getting quite toasty." The faces of my good old friends of the postwar era appeared in my mind for a second, then disappeared.

I put down the phone and went home alone, where I played a record while drinking some whisky. I played an Apple Records version of the Plastic Ono Band record, and soon heard Yoko Ono's wheezing yet expansive singing voice:

*Who has seen the wind
 Neither you nor I...*

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