



***American Concentration Camps:  
The Japanese American Experience***

**Exhibiting Gallery:** LH Horton Jr. Gallery, San Joaquin Delta College, Stockton, CA

**Online Exhibition Date:** January 21 - February 26, 2021

**Virtual Opening Reception:** January 21, 5:30pm PDT

**Curated by:** Gail Enns and Jan Marlese

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**Artists:** Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Reiko Fujii, Lucien Kubo, Wendy Maruyama, Tom Nakashima, Judy Shintani, Jerry Takigawa, Masako Takahashi

*American Concentration Camps: The Japanese American Experience* profiles the art of a select group of third generation *Sansei* artists. Their work addresses issues of displacement and injustice in light of their shared dark familial pasts. Utilizing a wide range of mediums and genres, the artists embrace their heritage and family histories. They demonstrate how contemporary artists have managed their challenging cultural, historical and political place in America. Each artist uniquely contributes something vital to the collective memory and struggles of the Japanese American people and culture as the events of more than 75 years ago continue to impact their lives today.

In 1942, President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 brought imprisonment to all Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. Less well known is that the Japanese living in South America were also affected by the bombing of Pearl Harbor in similar ways—through forced deportation, loss of property and cultural restrictions. Brazil has the the largest population of Japanese outside Japan, followed by Peru, Argentina, Colombia and Mexico. The United States has the second largest Japanese population outside Japan. Peru and Colombia deported a large number of their Japanese population to Panama and then later to the United States where they were relocated in concentration camps throughout the States. Brazil relocated their Japanese population internally and imposed laws prohibiting the use of the Japanese language.

The United States, in its brief 250 years, has repeatedly demonstrated unjust treatment toward minority groups—treatment far from what our founding fathers envisioned. From the beginning, our nation considered the Native Americans outsiders and an obstacle to the exploitation and development of the land. The effects of the institution of slavery still reverberate today in the residue of dehumanization perpetrated on African Americans. Over 75 years have passed since Executive Order 9066 was enacted - and many Americans are only now learning of this injustice. The critical need to know about this act of racial profiling in America couldn't be more timely and pertinent.

**Lydia Nakashima Degarrod, Ph.D.**, was born and raised in Chile where she says, *"I grew up without an understanding of my Japanese Peruvian born father's sense of alienation and fragmentation. After World War II, my father was forced to escape to Chile. In Peru he had been treated like the enemy and he had lost all of his family in the bombing of Hiroshima. As a Sansei living in California, I aim at understanding the suffering that my father experienced and my own sense of fragmentation and feeling of not belonging."* Her artwork evokes these feelings of being scattered and rootless expressed by many of the descendants of Japanese Peruvians who, because of their parents' fate, grew up in countries different from their parents. Nakashima Degarrod, Ph.D. She resides in the Bay Area and teaches at the California College of the Arts.

**Reiko Fujii** encapsulates snippets of the ordinary and not-so-ordinary with an artist's determination to preserve stories reflecting her expanding journey of self-discovery. She has evolved from exploring and transforming her inner self to gathering stories from her Japanese American heritage as well as beyond her own personal and ancestral scope. She investigates how immigration, culture, and imprisonment affected her ancestors, future generations and society as a whole. Not limited by a particular medium, Fujii chooses the materials that best communicate the depth, texture and feeling she wants to convey, including kiln-formed glass, performance, installation, photography, video, book arts, and found objects. Through her art-life

interactions, she has come to the understanding that the healing and transformation of society begins with the healing of oneself. Fujii was born in Riverside, CA and resides in the San Francisco Bay Area.

**Lucien Kubo** was inspired by the 60'S Civil Rights Movement, taking part in opposition to the Vietnam War, gentrification of the Japanese community, immigrant rights and supportive of the Japanese American Redress Movement. These experiences have influenced her artwork which is focused on combining her concerns for the Japanese American WWII imprisonment as well as the detention centers and family separation in the US today. *"My priority in social and community activism is focused on change, environmental action and the struggle for social justice. I create art which contributes to a collective Asian voice, a vision of change in a world with compassion, equality and peace."* Kubo was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where her parents lived after being imprisoned at Topaz, Utah, during WWII and spent most of her life in San Francisco where she resides today.

**Wendy Maruyama** is an artist, furniture maker and educator. She has transitioned from the making of traditional craft objects into the realm of social justice with a focus on Japanese incarceration. This chapter in her family history was heavily veiled. In older work she avoided any association with this connection; partially out of suppressed anger, partially out of just wanting to move forward. One piece in this exhibition, *The Tag Project*, is composed of sculpture created from replicas of the paper identification tags that prisoners were made to wear and a selection of objects that were used or made by the people in the camps. Maruyama maintains a studio and residence in San Diego.

**Tom Nakashima** feels the disconnection and isolation of the incarcerated through extended family associations. His own immediate family was spared as his father was drafted as a surgeon into the US Medical Corps during WWII. His paintings contain strong allegories pertaining to the unjust imprisonment that his family endured. *"Tule Lake/Manzanar Jail' is a metaphor for my concern about the current encampment outside El Paso housing some of the 2,000 migrant children near Crystal City, another of the American concentration camps,"* he tells us. He continues, *"the jail image is based on the steel cages used to house certain Japanese Americans at Tule Lake and Manzanar."* Nakashima was born in Seattle, Washington and currently resides in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Floyd, VA.

**Masako Takahashi** was born in Topaz, Utah, where many of the incarcerated from the San Francisco Bay Area were taken. She uses the kimono in her installations to represent lives—each kimono representing one life. She says, *"I embellish each kimono with something made from my white hair as a tribute and reference to the endurance of those who have gone before"*

*me. The kimonos are installed in a line with their sleeves just touching one another in an endless line. They speak to the struggles of the lives lived. They are not intended to portray life in a concentration camp or the event of an atomic bomb, but rather to address something humane in the viewer.”*

**Jerry Takigawa**, a photographer, designer and writer from Monterey, CA, has begun an exploration into his family’s undisclosed past, piecing together an historical puzzle of photographs, memories, and artifacts. “Looking through old family photographs, I found new meaning and appreciation for the struggles my family endured to create a home in this country. *‘Balancing Cultures’* is the most personal project I’ve undertaken,” says Takigawa. He continues, *“Originally an identity project—a way to understand my history and how it manifested in my view of the world—it has unexpectedly grown to inspire broader conversations about racism, hysteria and economic exploitation.”*

**Judy Shintani** focuses her art on remembrance, connection, and storytelling. She brings to light memories, repressed emotions and current feelings centered on the American concentration camp experience. She includes writings of many of those who were incarcerated and stories entrusted to her by their families. Shintani warns, *“Alarmingly, the American concentration camps recently came to the forefront as a place to house immigrant and refugee children and families facing hostilities in their own countries, and now, deportation from the United States.”* Shintani fears that *“The shadow side of us exists and fear makes us forget that we are all one.”* Shintani was born in Ames, Iowa and has lived most of her life in California. She now maintains a studio and residence in Half Moon Bay, CA.