

Mother and Child F8



Henry Sugimoto
Thoughts of Him, ca. 1965
Woodblock print
Courtesy of Madeleine Sugimoto

BACKGROUND

Vision of loneliness
I endure
in the green of spring
-Reiko Gomyo, Jerome
May Sky (193)

After Pearl Harbor, most Japanese Americans were classified as “enemy” nationals, given a 4C draft status, declared ineligible for duty and denied the right to enlist. However, in June 1943, men and women of Japanese ancestry were recruited for Military Intelligence Service and served mainly as translators in the Pacific theater. The public did not know about their service until information was made public in 1972 under the Freedom of Information Act.

In January 1943, the U. S. War Department recruited thousands from the camps for service in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team which was combined with Hawai’i’s 100th Battalion to form a segregated, all-*Nisei* unit. In all, over 33,000 Japanese Americans served in the military during World War II. Those who volunteered from the camps left their families behind barbed wire.

THOUGHTS OF HIM

This print by Henry Sugimoto once again honors the mothers incarcerated, in this case a mother whose husband is on active duty. It is a reworking of a 1944 painting titled *Thinking of Loved One*. Sugimoto's models for this piece were possibly his sister-in-law and her baby. Their large figures, executed in pure black and white and positioned in the center, dominate the composition. Surrounding them are elements of life behind barbed wire which the artist has embellished with patterned surfaces. There is furniture in the barrack apartment, probably homemade from scrap wood.

On the table to the mother's right is a photograph of her husband in uniform. Lying beside the framed photo is a letter, presumably from him. Ralph Sugimoto, the artist's younger unmarried brother, served in Europe with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and was wounded in combat.

Lying next to the mother on the bench is a fly swat, necessary for life in the Arkansas Delta where insects abound. Eddy Kurushima remembers hearing rumors that the mosquitoes in Arkansas were "as big as sparrows." Kurushima would later serve in the Pacific as a translator with the Military Intelligence Service.

Behind the mother is a baby bed with a rattle lying on its mattress. A clock sits on a shelf underneath a service flag signifying that a member of the family is on active duty. Curtains border the window which opens onto a guard tower and a sunflower growing just outside. Sugimoto has once again provided a view of the concentration camp beyond the intimate interior space through a rectangular window in the background.

ACTIVITY

Read *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow or Langston Hughes's poem "Lullaby" for inspiration. Pose in front of a mirror holding a baby doll. Observe the way your arms bend to hold the baby. Notice the difference in your sizes. Draw a self-portrait as a mama or daddy. Are you inside or outside? Include the setting in the background just as Sugimoto did in his print. Embellish your drawing with pattern.

Like the Japanese Americans, use found materials to make art. Draw with small sticks picked up outside and India ink. Paint the drawings with watercolors. Exhibit the paintings. In your journal, write an artist's statement, a paragraph that explains your watercolor painting. Add a thumbnail sketch of your work. Date the entry.



Sara, 3rd Grade
Mother and Child, 2004
India ink on paper

Fourth Grade Visual Arts Standards: A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.3, A.1.7, A.1.8, A.1.9; A.2.1, A.2.2, A.2.3, A.2.5, A.2.6, A.2.7, A.2.8; A.3.1, A.3.2, A.3.3, A.3.4, A.3.5, A.3.6, A.3.9.

Fifth Grade Visual Arts Standards: A.1.1, A.1.2, A.1.4, A.1.5, A.1.7, A.1.8; A.2.1, A.2.2, A.2.3, A.2.4, A.2.5, A.2.6; A.3.1, A.3.3, A.3.4, A.3.5, A.3.6, A.3.9