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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

To Die Not Holding a Gun, But a Paintbrush:
Kazuki Yasuo and Representations of War in Postwar Japanese Art

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Visual Studies

by

Benjamin Lowell Aaron

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair
Professor Eyal Amiran
Professor Kyung Hyun Kim

2020

DEDICATION

To

my wife, Liz

without whom none of this (and much else besides), would have been possible

*The concept of progress must be grounded in the idea of catastrophe
That "things go on like this" is the catastrophe*

Walter Benjamin
The Arcades Project

and to my parents, for making me an intellectual and a contrarian

*I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
T. S. Eliot
The Waste Land*

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Postwar Japanese Fine Art, Trauma Studies

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

To Die Not Holding a Gun, But a Paintbrush:
Kazuki Yasuo and Representations of War in Postwar Japanese Art

by

Benjamin Lowell Aaron

Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Studies

University of California, Irvine, 2020

Professor Bert Winther-Tamaki, Chair

My dissertation traces the life of Japanese oil painter Kazuki Yasuo (1911-1974). One of postwar Japan's most significant oil painters, he is not well-represented in English Language scholarship on the period, a lacuna this dissertation seeks to help rectify. The introduction presents a brief history of oil painting (Yōga) in Japan, the problems of representing war experiences in postwar Japan, and the cultural climate to contextualize Kazuki's corpus. The subsequent chapters recount Kazuki's life and work chronologically. Chapter One begins with his family background and early interest in art, particularly painting, culminating in his study at Japan's premier art academy. Chapter Two picks up with his graduation and chronicles his early career struggles, followed by his conscription and culminating in his capture by the military forces of the USSR. Chapter Three describes the conditions of the time spent by Kazuki, as well as hundreds of thousands of other Japanese POWs, in the infamous "Gulag Archipelago" of labor camps in Siberia. This time would go on to inform his most significant body of work, the Siberia Series. I also recount his repatriation after two grueling years in Siberia, and the eight-year interregnum that followed, during which he could not bring himself to represent his Siberia experiences. Chapter Four then focuses closely on the Siberia Series, which, after breaking through his extended representational silence, dominated his artistic output for the remaining years of his life (and continues to define his posthumous legacy). Here I also focus on the

analysis of paintings of the series and the broader meaning and implications of it, both in relation to Kazuki's oeuvre as well as significant postwar Japanese artists and postwar Japanese art more generally. Additionally, I triangulate Kazuki's position in postwar art, and his commonalities and divergences from significant war-related artists of his times. The Conclusion traces Kazuki's final days, as well as his postwar and posthumous legacy.

INTRODUCTION

NOTE: All quotations from Japanese language sources marked with an asterisk * are original translations by the author

Kazuki Yasuo and Memories of War in Postwar Japan

“First off, let me tell you about who I was before becoming a soldier.”^{1*}

In the chaotic immediate aftermath of the end of the second world war, over 700,000 Japanese soldiers were taken by the armed forces of the Soviet Union and sent to a network of forced labor camps in the notorious “gulag archipelago” scattered throughout Siberia and beyond. Despite such numbers, this aspect of Japan’s twentieth century wars remains something of a lesser-known footnote in a historiography more oriented toward Japan’s conflict with the United States. One of those hundreds of thousands of POWs was Kazuki Yasuo (1911-1974, Fig. 0.1), a gifted painter and art teacher from rural western Japan, conscripted late in the war. Kazuki endured forced labor, hunger, disease, and the violent abuse of camp guards and former Japanese officers, in the filthy, dangerous gulags of the desolate Siberian wilderness. Additionally, he suffered a deep homesickness made worse by the agonizing uncertainty of when, or if, he might return to Japan. After nearly two years he was repatriated, but irrevocably changed by his experiences. He would live out the remainder of his life in a profoundly ambivalent relationship with his traumatic memories, longing to close the door on that dark time in his life, while also returning to those memories, almost compulsively. In his memoirs, written shortly before his death, he describes finding a kind of peace with his experiences, as a

¹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia,” *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 41.

prerequisite for his art, stating “Without Siberia and the war, the “me” I am today wouldn’t exist. I wouldn’t be able to make the kinds of paintings that I make now.”^{2*}

Despite a deep corpus of writing on Kazuki in Japanese, very little has been written about Kazuki and his work in English.³ Part of the goal of this dissertation is to address this gap in scholarship on twentieth century Japanese art. Kazuki’s work also provides a compelling lens through which to view both the art of the postwar period and questions of personal and collective responsibility for those who had survived Japan’s catastrophic twentieth century wars.

Though Kazuki remains best known for oil paintings depicting his traumatic memories of the Siberian gulag, he was a diversely talented artist, working in media ranging from oil painting, watercolors, printmaking, objets d’art, painted ceramics, calligraphy, and more. His preferred, almost venerated, medium of choice was oil paints though. In addition to his Siberia paintings, he produced landscapes, genre scenes, still lifes, portraits, and ambiguous, lyrical scenes. From a specifically art historical perspective, Kazuki also provides an interesting index of the position of oil painting in Japan in his lifetime, a medium that has experienced a fraught history of highs and lows from its introduction in the late sixteenth century.

The Place of Oil Painting in Japan

Throughout his life as an artist, Kazuki navigated the fraught cultural relationship between Japan on the one hand and Europe and America (or “the West”), on the other. He

² Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia,” *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 62.

³ Perhaps the most significant published work on Kazuki in English is a chapter of Andrew E. Barshay’s 2013 book *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese POWs in Northeast Asia 1945-1956*. The book also features an overview of the Siberian internment as well as chapters on other former POWs who have related their experiences, the novelist and translator Takasugi Ichirō (1908-2008), and the poet Ishihara Yoshirō (1915-1977). Psychologist Yama Megumi has written several journal articles in English on Kazuki from a psychological perspective, in addition to her more extensive work on Kazuki in Japanese.

found himself in this fraught cultural space due to his unwavering devotion to the medium of oil painting, but he felt a certain unease at being caught in between what were often seen as irreconcilable cultural and aesthetic traditions. Kazuki was hardly the first Japanese oil painter to wrestle with this conundrum—on the contrary, grappling with this issue was typical of Japanese oil painters of his time, as well as the generation that taught him, and even their forebears. The perceived foreignness of oil painting, so different in form and technique than much of Japan's long running aesthetic traditions and media, had vexed many of Kazuki's predecessors. Japan has a long and quite storied history of cultural influence from China, though the cultural relationship between the two nations experienced a fraught and often contentious reassessment in the wake of Japan's modernization in the late nineteenth century. But the long-standing nature of the link between the two meant that any xenophobic anxiety about cultural appropriation or simply copying the work of foreigners was expressed quite differently.

Oil painting in Japan has a long history, but it has seen ambivalent receptions, at times being both exalted as a medium par excellence for portraying the phenomenological world and attacked as an alien technique unsuited to Japanese sensibilities. The word itself bears the stamp of this real or imagined otherness. The term most commonly used to refer to oil painting in the Japanese language is *Yōga* (洋画), literally “Western painting,” explicitly highlighting its European genesis.

The first encounter Japan had with the medium of oil painting came via the Society of Jesus, the internationally oriented apostolic missionary organization associated with the Catholic church, commonly known as the Jesuits. Visual media such as oil painting was an important part of the Jesuits' missionary program, and to support their efforts in East Asia they established an art academy in the 1590s to instruct Japanese students in late Renaissance and early Baroque painting styles. For their part, Japanese pupils impressed their Jesuit instructors with their skills at a heretofore unknown medium and technique (Fig. 0.2). Japanese painters working with the

Jesuits absorbed their teachers' lessons so well, in fact, that "the Japanese painting academy became a supplier of Christian image to churches and confraternities in Japan, China, and India."⁴

However, in the early seventeenth century, the military government of the Tokugawa Shogunate harshly suppressed Christianity in Japan, expelling the Jesuits and severely restricting contact with European nations. This break was not total, however, and interest in European representational media and techniques simmered on the margins of Japan's early modern visual culture. Lacking the kind of access to experienced teachers and materials that earlier Japanese Christian painters enjoyed via the Jesuits, artists and polymaths such as Shiba Kōkan (1747-1818, Fig. 0.3) explored oil painting as best they could under limited circumstances. Consequently, this period was somewhat superficial, as Japanese artists interested in the foreign medium "could only gather abstract information from books." Early oil painters "could not actually see the brushes, palette, and other items central to the work of artists working oils."⁵

A new phase of the history of oil painting in Japan began around the end of the Edo period, in 1868. The new Meiji government sought to master western painting methods as part of a broad approach to learning western techniques to strengthen the newly constituted nation-state. The dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the middle of the nineteenth century created the circumstances for a revival of interest in art and knowledge from Europe and elsewhere. In its waning days, the shogunate tentatively sought to master and utilize European representational techniques, but it was not until the new Meiji government in 1876 that a major effort to do so bore fruit. In its far-reaching efforts to strengthen the newly modern nation, the

⁴ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 4.

⁵ Yamanashi Emiko. "Western-Style Painting: Four Stages of Acceptance." *Since Meiji*, edited by J. Thomas Rimer, (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 23.

government sought to master European painting “not for artistic expression, but as the pragmatic acquisition of an applied technology alongside other instrumental necessities of the modern nation-state such as civil engineering, mechanics, telegraph technology, mining, chemistry, and metallurgy.”⁶

To this end the government created the Technical Arts School in 1876 and brought Western artists such as Italian painter Antonio Fontanesi (1818-1882) to teach Japanese pupils. Independent Art Historian Mayu Tsuruya explains how “[p]olitical favor was initially given to yoga when the nation’s first art school was established in 1876 to teach scientific, Western-style painting to aid the nation’s modernization.”⁷ Later, however, when state policies shifted “from an intense pursuit of Westernization to the formation of a national identity to empower the military and support industry in the late 1880s, official interest in yoga waned accordingly.”⁸ Near the end of the nineteenth century notable Japanese painters returned from sojourns studying in Europe. These returned artists, and the personal experiences and expertise they brought back, precipitated the third stage, whereby these artists took on the role of guiding future students and developing the local infrastructure of institutions and exhibitions.

Despite this long process of study, mastery, and localization, oil painting continued to face mistrust as a cultural form alien to, and somehow incompatible with, Japanese culture and aesthetics. *Yōga* occupied an ambivalent position in Japanese cultural life, one that was subject to dramatic swings in acceptance. In the 1880s a backlash with a nativist cast emerged, mirroring doubts about the speed and degree with which techniques and ideas from outside Japan had been adopted, across many fields. Domestic enthusiasts of oil painting such as

⁶ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 5.

⁷ Tsuruya Mayu "Sensou Sakusen Kirokuga: Seeing Japan’s War Documentary Painting as a Public Monument". *Since Meiji*, edited by J. Thomas Rimer, (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 103

⁸ Ibid.

Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924, Fig. 4), and Kishida Ryūsei (1891-1929, Fig 5) stemmed this tide though, and in conjunction with the government established a sophisticated art world infrastructure of schools, exhibition spaces and organizations. *Yōga* was institutionalized and came to be seen as part of a dyad with styles more closely associated with domestic painting traditions, called *Nihonga* (“Japanese pictures”). The government sponsored salon made this explicit, establishing separate submission categories for *Yōga* and *Nihonga*. It was in this bifurcated art world that Kazuki was trained and in which he worked and exhibited. *Yōga* was hardly monolithic, however, displaying a dynamic range of styles like its counterparts in Europe and elsewhere. The form experienced Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, and other schools and trends, avant-garde, conservative, and otherwise. Kazuki, and his peers, were acutely aware of developments and fellow artists outside of Japan.

Though *Yōga* experienced hostility or suspicion as being dangerously foreign, its star would rise again, in the service of the military. Despite potential misgivings about the non-native pedigree of the form, *Yōga’s* capacity for portraying realistic detail and depth earned it the favor of military authorities who sought inspiring images of the Japanese military in actual theaters of war. Many of Japan’s preeminent oil painters collaborated with the military to produce such works glorifying Japan’s military endeavors (Figs. 6-8). The xenophobic stigma periodically attached to *Yōga* was never wholly shaken off, but the form’s ascendance to the preferred medium for the depiction of “propagandistic scenes of heroic Japanese soldiers in battle” inoculated it somewhat during the period of Japan’s “total war(s)” in Asia and the Pacific. Individual struggles with the “intercultural medium” (as Bert Winther-Tamaki terms it) of *Yōga* would continue to plague individual painters, however.

Kazuki’s struggle to find an authentic aesthetic as a Japanese painter in an originally European medium merged in certain respects with his struggle to find an appropriate expressive language to represent his experiences in Manchuria and Siberia in a way that would do justice

both to his own memories and to the memory of those who would not return alive from Siberia. His stylistic solution to the representational impasse drew on both European and Japanese antecedents in figuration, media, and tonality, which I will address in detail in chapters three and four.

Problems of Postwar Representation of the War

Over and above the perceived friction of *Yōga's* “east vs. west” dialectic (in Kazuki’s, and other oil painters’ cases), many factors complicated the representation of Japan’s only recently ended wars in the years after 1945. These include issues practical, political, conceptual, as well as issues both general and specific to individuals. The devastation wrought by the war in the Japanese islands put many Japanese in a position of struggling simply to survive in the occupation’s early years. Additionally, though the Occupation encouraged the blossoming of personal expression as a rebuke to the oppressive policies of the war years, it still exercised a considerable degree of censorship. And though many Japanese were interested in telling their stories and listening to those of others, the experiences of former soldiers were regarded in a more ambivalent, even suspicious, fashion. And many ex-soldiers, including Kazuki, were not repatriated for some years following Japan’s surrender, forestalling the emergence of their stories.

After years on the increasingly beleaguered defensive, Japan at the time of its surrender was in a pitiful state. The United States’ extended firebombing campaign—far and away more devastating in lives and destruction than the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—had reduced much of the nation’s cities and its economy to skeletons. The extended focus on preparing for and prosecuting a “total war” had diverted resources away from the people toward the doomed war effort. Much of the resources still present in Japan in 1945 simply disappeared into the vast black market of the early occupation period, benefitting a small number of well-

connected or cunning operators at the expense of the many who suffered in hunger and privation.

The United States-led occupation made “democratization” one of its central goals, seeing the refashioning of a “feudal” and fascist Japan into a democratic, modern society as the best insurance against the danger of potential clashes between Japan and other nations in the future. The oppressive control of the militarized police state of wartime Japan was abolished, and freedom of thought and expression was encouraged. There were limits to this liberalization, however. The occupation maintained widespread censorship in the years after 1945, closely monitoring the media landscape as Japanese people found themselves with increased freedom of expression. Artists such as Iri and Toshi Maruki, for example, were unable to exhibit their collaborative works on the bombing of Hiroshima until 1951 due to strict censorship on that subject by occupation authorities.⁹

Additionally, former soldiers of Japan’s imperial armed forces faced the stigma of association not only with the shame of defeat but also with the dark open secrets of the military’s many atrocities across Asia. The delayed repatriation of POWs exacerbated this trend, as the “belated return of the POWs threatened to undermine the comfortable distance from war memories Japan managed to attain within just a few years after defeat.”¹⁰ Part of this ambivalence about returning POWs was due to the taint of association with Communism, as former POWs held for an extended period in the USSR. POWs’ “association with the ‘reds’ made them a potential threat to post-war society.”¹¹ And, due to his experience of extended internment in Siberia, many POWs like Kazuki were prevented, for at least several years

⁹ Michael J. Hogan, Ed. *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 128.

¹⁰ Yoshikuni Igarashi. “Belated Homecomings: Japanese Prisoners of War in Siberia and their Return to Post-war Japan.” from *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming, and Memory in World War II*, edited by Bob Moore, and Barbara Hatley-Broad. (Oxford: Berg, 2005) 119.

¹¹ Ibid.

(depending on their term of internment), from narrating their own wartime and post-surrender experiences.

The Cultural Milieu of Postwar Japan

The Japan that Kazuki returned to in 1947 was in many ways radically different from the one he departed for Manchuria in 1943, and one still in the middle of a dynamic period of change. The nation had forfeited its sovereignty and was administered by an American-led occupation regime from war's end until 1952. The occupation administrators instituted a broad array of reforms intended to prevent Japan from returning to the oppressive domestic and aggressively militaristic foreign policies of the empire at the height of its power. Central to this program was the drafting of a new constitution, the most remarked-upon provision being the renunciation of war as a sovereign right of the state. As John Dower explains: "In addition to the 'liberalization of the constitution,' the government was commanded to extend the franchise to women, promote labor unionization, open schools to more liberal education, democratize the economy by revising 'monopolistic industrial controls,' and in general eliminate all despotic vestiges in society."¹² While the degree of change is often overstated (and the degree of continuity understated), life for Japanese in postwar society was, in many ways, dramatically different than it had been before the end of 1945. Additionally, post-1945 Japan was not always eager to hear the stories of those like Kazuki. He, and other POWs' "attempts to tell their stories has not been easy in a post-war society eager to leave its wartime past behind and concentrate on national reconstruction."¹³

¹² John Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, (Tokyo: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999) 81.

¹³ Yoshikuni Igarashi "Belated Homecomings: Japanese Prisoners of War in Siberia and Their Return to Post-war Japan." In Bob Moore, and Barbara Hatley-Broad. *Prisoners of War, Prisoners of Peace: Captivity, Homecoming, and Memory in World War II*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005) 106.

Kazuki himself, though greatly relieved to be home, and to be free of the oppressive policies of wartime Imperial Japan, was deeply ambivalent about the state of Japan, and his own life, following his repatriation and reintegration into the society of his longed-for home. In his memoirs he expresses worry that the ease he enjoyed in his daily life (and by implication, Japanese society as a whole) put him in danger of experiencing a dangerous amnesia, a failure to appreciate and assimilate the lessons of the recent past. This could lead to a repeat of the many mistakes that led to Japan's disastrous and incredibly costly wars. Kazuki was also constitutionally something of a contrarian, skeptical of authority, owing perhaps to his strict upbringing. He recounts in his memoirs that "I never trust leaders or those who give orders, nor organizations from the left or right."^{14*} In this he mirrored others in the postwar period. Prominent art historian and curator Alexandra Munroe has described how, in the postwar art world, "[t]he collapse of faith in liberal humanism and Communism to penetrate the authoritarian and conservative structures of Japanese society led many to a state of introspective pessimism."¹⁵ Kazuki's project was introspective as well, though not pessimistic. His politics were not activist, like some of his peers, and his project primarily internal rather than oriented toward others or society. The danger to him was not that he would fall back into militaristic chauvinism of the kind that was official prewar and wartime policy—which, at any rate Kazuki expresses considerable scorn for in his postwar writings—but that he might gradually grow to neglect his obligation to the dead, to those friends who did not make it back to a postwar Japan that could afford to at least try to forget its traumatic recent past. But the Japan to which Kazuki returned also had an ambivalent relationship to wartime memories. The nation that had so recently experienced such

¹⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia," *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 41.

¹⁵ Alexandra Munroe. "Morphology of Revenge: The Yomiuri Independent artists and Social Protest Tendencies in the 1960s," *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream against the Sky*, edited by Alexandra Munroe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996) 151.

widespread war-related trauma was caught between its “desire to forget and its desire to remember the past,” an aporetic situation that “still persists fifty years after defeat.”¹⁶

As with the rest of Japan, the postwar art world immediately set about recovering from the war and the long running repression of the wartime regime. Bert Winther-Tamaki describes how “the postwar Japanese art world reestablished a full complement of reactionary, mainstream, and avant-garde institutions. Pre-war artists’ groups, exhibition organizations, and journals that had been terminated or consolidated by the military state during the early 1940s were quickly reconstituted, and new organizations were founded.”¹⁷ Japan also found itself welcome once again in the international art world. “With the defeat of the Japanese empire in 1945... Japanese artists found themselves back in the world system of modern art centered in Europe.”¹⁸ Kazuki was as eager as his peers to rejoin this reconstituted world, following his repatriation. He resumed his personal art practice, but, after incipient experiments with painting about what he had endured in Siberia, he struggled to return to the subject for many years. His early reaction seemed to be to turn away from the experiences, and after two tentative works related to his memories of internment, he entered a period of eight years of representational silence on the subject. However, after devising a style and conceptual basis for more direct representation of what he had experienced, Kazuki painted on the subject prolifically. Stylized bodies, gaunt, sickly, nearly broken by forced labor and hunger populate the tableaux of his Siberia Series, painted from the mid-1950s through his death in 1974.

¹⁶ Yoshikuni Igarashi. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 12.

¹⁷ Bert Winther-Tamaki. “Reestablishing the Art World During the Occupation, 1945-1952.” *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945-1989: Primary Documents*, edited by Chong, Do-Ryun, Michio Hayashi, Kenji Kajiya, and Fumihiko Sumitomo, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012) 31.

¹⁸ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press. 2001) 16.

Images such as the gaunt, starving POWs of Kazuki's "Siberia Series," such as *Hunger* (1964, Fig. 0.8), or the lone mutilated corpse of *1945* (1959) were not unique in Kazuki's Japan—representation of suffering bodies had already become something of a leitmotif of postwar art. In 1956 the art critic Nakahara Yūsuke was already pointing out the trend, writing that at the time, that it was "no longer strange to see paintings with human bodies suspended in the air, dismembered and deformed, or given some kind of grotesque appearance."¹⁹ This is nearly the precise moment that Kazuki had returned to the subject of Siberia, and the sometimes grotesque suffering figures that populate the Siberia Series come largely after Nakahara's comments. Some of the other artists engaging in this trend were veterans of the war, like Kazuki and Abe Nobuya (Fig. 0.9). Others were civilians (and I will return to them in chapter four), but after the physical and military assaults on the body had long ended, represented bodies continued to suffer on canvases. Kazuki would be unable to put this leitmotif behind him, working on images of suffering bodies until his own death in 1974.

The trajectory of Kazuki's life and work takes us from the rural environs of his upbringing, to Japan's most elite art university in the bustling capital, through a far-flung outpost of Japan's Asian empire, and then deeper into Asia and Russia's notorious gulags, and finally back again to Kazuki's rural idyll on the Sea of Japan. The contours of this peregrination have a distinctly modern cast, and Kazuki's story highlight some of the most significant events and trends in the history of Japan during his lifetime.

Though it took him nearly a decade to break through a representational silence on his harrowing experiences in Siberia, in the last two decades of his life he produced a monumental

¹⁹ Nakahara Yūsuke. "Locked Room Painting." *From Postwar to Postmodern: Art in Japan 1945-1989: Primary Documents*, edited by Chong, Do-Ryun, Michio Hayashi, Kenji Kajiya, and Fumihiko Sumitomo, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012) 80.

body of fifty-seven works collectively referred to as the “Siberia Series” (*Shiberia shiri-zu*). The works visually narrate his personal wartime and postwar experiences and interrogate issues of responsibility to the dead as well as for Japan’s wartime actions. Kazuki’s unique life and background make the Siberia Series a fascinating and illuminating lens through which to examine the effects of Japan’s wars and their traumatic legacies in the postwar period.

Introduction Images Supplement



Fig. 0.1. Kazuki Yasuo, smoking in his atelier, 1971. (Kazuki Yasuo. *Watashi no chikyū*, 133)



Fig. 0.2. Unknown Japanese Painter, *St. Francis Xavier*, Late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries, watercolor on paper, 61 x 48.7cm. Kobe City Museum. (O'Malley, *The Jesuits and the Arts: 1540-1773*, 318)



Fig. 0.3. Shiba Kōkan, 西洋人樽造図- *The Barrel-makers*, Eighteenth Century, Hanging scroll, oil on silk, 47.6 x 60cm. Private Collection. (Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 319)



Fig. 0.4. Kuroda Seiki, 朝妝 - *Morning Toilette*, 1893, Oil on canvas, 178.5 x 98cm. (Destroyed). (Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 374)



Fig. 0.5. Kishida Ryūsei, 道路と土手と塀（切通之写生） - *Road Cut Through a Hill*, 1915, oil on canvas, 56.0 x 53.0cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Selected Works from the Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 37)



Fig. 0.6. Miyamoto Saburō, 南苑攻撃図 - *Attack on Nanyuan, Beijing*, 1941, oil on canvas, 176.7 x 255.0cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Catalogue of Collections, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo: Watercolors and Drawings, Calligraphy, Sculpture, Supplementary Materials, War Record Paintings, 155)



Fig. 0.7. Tsuruta Gorō, 神兵パレンバンに降下す - *Paratroops Descending on Palembang*, 1942, oil on canvas, 194.0 x 255.0cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kōsaka. *Gakatachi No "sensō"*, 29)



Fig 0.8. Mukai Junkichi, 影 - *Shadow*, 1938, oil on canvas, 84.7 x 90.5cm. Fukutomi Tarō Collection, Tokyo. (Kōsaka. *Gakatachi No "sensō"*, 45)



Fig. 0.9. Kazuki Yasuo, 餓 - *Hunger*, 1964, oil on canvas, 162.7 x 112.3cm.
Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 83)



Fig. 0.10. Abe Nobuya, 飢え - *Hunger*, 1949, oil on canvas, 80.0 x 130.0cm. Kanagawa Prefectural Art Museum. (Hyōgo kenritsu bijutsukan, and Hiroshimashi gendai bijutsukan. *1945 nen ± 5 nen*, 137)

CHAPTER ONE

Misumi - Home and Inspiration

Kazuki Yasuo was born in Misumi—a small, rural town in northwestern Yamaguchi prefecture at the western edge of the main Japanese island of Honshu, in 1911, the 44th year of the Meiji period²⁰. Despite success in the art world’s center of Toyko, and throughout Japan, in his adult years as a painter, he lived out nearly his entire life in Misumi, his bucolic arcadia. This was interrupted only by his time in art school in Tokyo, brief stints as a teacher in Japan’s northernmost island Hokkaido, as well as Shimonoseki, on Yamaguchi’s west coast, and his time serving in the military in Manchuria and subsequent years of internment in the Siberian gulags of the Soviet Union. Though Misumi was worlds away from the near-irresistible gravity of Tokyo, the rural region Kazuki grew up in was the lynchpin of a personal cosmology that enabled him to cope with a rare extended experience of personal trauma. And, even after achieving a respected position in the art world, particularly the world of oil painting, Kazuki never considered leaving his rural environs.

In part a function of his upbringing in rural Yamaguchi, Kazuki harbors—as his works and words make abundantly clear—an appreciation for the beauty of the natural world that borders on religious devotion. This devotion was no small part of the psychological regime that enabled Kazuki to endure his years of Siberian captivity. His works cannot be understood without reference to his home of Misumi, and the natural world in general. Kazuki’s home sits at the foot of the low Mount Kubara, alongside the Misumi river, both frequent subjects of his landscapes.

²⁰ Modern Japanese historical periods are named for Imperial reigns. The emperor Meiji reigned from 1868-1912.

The Sea of Japan, another of Kazuki's favorite natural subjects, is a short distance away, its waters constituting the final natural barrier on his return home from Siberia in 1947.

Family Background

In addition to the influence of his hometown and natural world around him, the circumstances of Kazuki's early family life had a strong impact on his development and personality, though he was more reticent to talk about this than his beloved Misumi. He recalls spending much of his childhood alone, eschewing playmates and immersing himself alone in nature, recalling himself as "quietly well-behaved, preferring to go off into the hills to paint and draw the scenery rather than playing with friends."^{21*} This affinity for nature may have been in part due to the difficulties of his home situation.

Kazuki's family was one of some prominence in Misumi. His grandfather, Kazuki Shunrei (春齡 Fig. 1.1), was a doctor in the tradition of Chinese herbalism (*kanpō*), the scion of a hereditary line of herbalists that stretched back generations to the family's origins in Hiroshima prefecture, to the east. Shunrei's grandfather, Bunrei (文齡), was the first to bear the family name Kazuki (香月), after changing it from Hata (秦), and his son Genrei (玄齡) continued the tradition, followed by Shunrei.²²

Kazuki Shunrei was a significant personage in the village of Misumi. He had served as the mayor of the village, and in that capacity was deeply involved in the efforts to construct the San'in Main Line railway that stretches from Kyoto in central Japan to Shimonoseki on

²¹ Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyaraī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki* (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 198.

²² Ibid.

Yamaguchi's western coast.²³ A forbidding and stern figure, Kazuki describes him as being of the "Meiji spirit." He relates that "My grandparents were affectionate, but the spirit of people in the Meiji period was never to spoil children, and discipline was strict."^{24*} Shunrei sought to have his son, Sadao (Fig. 1.2), as well as later, Yasuo, an only child, continue the hereditary line of the family's *kanpō* trade.²⁵ Shunrei would, however, be the final Kazuki doctor of Chinese herbalism.

Shunrei's efforts to shepherd his son Sadao into the Chinese medicine trade were frustrated primarily by the latter's dissolute lifestyle. Sadao was known as something of a libertine, dissipating his body and accruing debts. His academic performance was insufficient to secure advancement to medical school, and so he pursued an education as a dentist instead. However, even this was too much for Kazuki's father, whose behavior continued to undermine the responsibilities assigned to him as the eldest son and as a father. Finally, Shunrei (as well as Sadao's second wife), having reached the limit of his patience for Sadao's shiftless behavior, expelled him from the Kazuki home in 1922.²⁶ He fled to Daegu, in Japanese-occupied Korea, where he "died a dog's death" in Kazuki's words.^{27*}

But Sadao's ignominious departure did not signal the only significant absence of Kazuki's early life. Kazuki's mother, Kazuki Yachiyo (née Mochiyama, Fig. 1.3) couldn't take the strict atmosphere of her husband's family household, and frequently fled to her parent's home nearby, though she would inevitably return. By the time of Sadao's unceremonious expulsion from the Kazuki household, however, she had already had enough of her unreliable husband's profligate behavior. She divorced him and left the Kazuki home in 1921, when young Kazuki was

²³ Kazuki Fumiko. *Kazuki Yasuo Isshun Issho no Gagyo* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2004) 48.

²⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 42.

²⁵ *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 198.

²⁶ Kazuki Fumiko. *Kazuki Yasuo Isshun Issho no Gagyo* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2004) 49.

²⁷ Kazuki Yasuo. *Watashi no chikyū II*. (Nagato: Kazuki Yasuo bijutsukan, 1997) 139.

in the fourth grade. She moved to Tsuwano in nearby Shimane prefecture, and remarried into a family known for brewing sake and soy sauce but remained in intermittent contact with the family following her departure.²⁸

Both his parents, having departed the household before his adolescence, left Kazuki to be raised by his (somewhat reluctant) grandparents.²⁹ Joining them was Kazuki's uncle, Masuo, who had taken Sadao's place in the medical/dental trade. Kazuki has said even less about his uncle than his parents³⁰, but his stern, even violent, grandfather Shunrei looms large in both Kazuki's memories and his art. While there are no noteworthy paintings of Kazuki's parents in his oeuvre, by contrast there are several of his Shunrei, such as *Grandfather* (1936, Fig. 1.4). The elder Kazuki fills the nearly square canvas, sitting cross-legged in a dark black-grey kimono, absorbed in a book cradled in his left hand, his right hand resting on his knee. Both hands are remarkably prominent, and somewhat out of proportion to the rest of the figure. This seems to presage Kazuki's later emphasis on hands in his Siberia Series works. The color tones—orange for the wall immediately behind the figure, and a pale teal for the floor—are in line with Kazuki's work of the time, and also seem to echo in some of his work produced after the end of the war. The work recalls portraits by Yasui Sōtarō (安井曾太郎 1888-1955), another oil painter often considered to have achieved “the pinnacle of modern Japanese portraiture.”³¹ In particular Kazuki's portrait of his grandfather bears a striking resemblance to Yasui's *Portrait of Mr. Fukai Eigo* (1937, Fig. 1.5). Both works depict a distinguished elder, bespectacled in a dark kimono.

²⁸ Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia, 198.

²⁹ Nomiya Kyoji, Hashi Hidefumi, and Kuboshima Seichiro. *Sensō ga unda e, ubatta e.* (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 2010) 6.

³⁰ The most significant exception to this is a scene in “My Siberia” in which Kazuki recounts how his uncle served to introduce him to his future wife, Fumiko, and acted as a go-between in the arrangement of their marriage. Fumiko and Kazuki remained married until his death in 1974, and she has served as one of the most important managers of his legacy in the years since. Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 55.

³¹ Kaneko Maki. *Mirroring the Japanese Empire: The Male Figure in Yōga Painting, 1930-1950: The Male Figure in Yōga Painting, 1930-1950*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015) 61.

But the works also share a clear influence of Fauvist-inflected Post-Impressionist Modernism. The younger Kazuki also seems, through his grandfather's absorption in his book, to communicate a kind of interiority that is seen as a crucial component of Yasui's storied portraits.

In addition to literally illustrating his grandfather, Kazuki also textually illustrates him, as well as their relationship, with a number of anecdotes in his autobiographical "My Siberia," published by the arts journal *Bungei Shunjū* in 1970. The work is organized as a series of vignettes, some narrating the circumstances behind some of his more noteworthy Siberia Series works, with additional autobiographical scenes, and ruminations on art, culture, war, and postwar Japan. In the early portion he details several occasions on which his grandfather, as part of his uncompromising approach to child rearing, carried out a strict corporal punishment regimen. In one instance that Kazuki describes, his grandfather caught him quietly eating tangerines he'd picked from one of the trees in the family's garden. Shunrei flew into a rage, equating Kazuki's innocent pilfering to thievery. He took some lit incense and used it to burn the back of young Kazuki's hand, leaving a scar that remained visible for the rest of his life.³²

Kazuki describes another incident of corporal punishment in detail in "My Siberia." By the third year of elementary school, Kazuki already longed to paint rather than use crayons or pencils. He had used watercolors at school and wanted some to work with on his own. Happening upon his grandfather's unattended wallet, Kazuki removed some cash, went straight to the stationery store, and bought himself a watercolor set. He brought it home, and set up in a dim storeroom, surreptitiously trying out his new materials. Absorbed in the new experience, Kazuki didn't hear his grandfather approaching until he burst into the room. Enraged, Shunrei dragged young Kazuki out into the garden, and brought out a traditional style Japanese sword in its scabbard. Kazuki recounts that as his grandfather scolded him for not simply asking for some

³² Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 42.

watercolors, “[h]e brought the sword he was brandishing down on my head. I didn’t avoid it, and he hit my head and my shoulders. When he struck, the sheath rang out with a bang.”^{33*}

Kazuki explains this and other misbehavior as a product of his lonely family situation. He was haunted by the absence of his parents, especially the fact that they were still alive despite their absence. In “My Siberia” he muses that “[m]aybe it was because I wasn’t convinced that I was loved. My father and mother were still alive, but they didn’t reach out to me.”^{34*} He goes on to conjecture that he would have been more obedient if he had been an orphan, and thus not saddled with the burden of wondering why his parents had left and remained mostly out of touch. In light of such circumstances, it is unsurprising that Kazuki sought escape in the rural environs of Misumi and develop such a deep connection with the natural world.

Early Interest in Art

Kazuki’s prodigious visual talents were recognized early, and he resolved to become an artist, and specifically a painter, while still a young child. In “My Siberia” he recalls that “one dazzlingly bright sunny day, watching the fruit ripen on a chinaberry tree in the garden, I remember deciding [to become a painter].”^{35*} Though he never aspired to follow in the patrilineal tradition of Chinese herbalist medicine as a vocation, he does attribute some of his early interest in art with a family connection stretching back into the past. Due to his family’s long association with local political elites in Yamaguchi, they had come into possession of works by the Unkoku School (*Unkokuha*).³⁶ The members of this school saw themselves as artistic heirs to the

³³ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004), 45.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁶ The Unkoku School (*Unkokuha* 雲谷派) of painters was based in the west of Japan, in what is now Yamaguchi, Kazuki’s home. The school was founded by Unkoku Tōgan (雲谷等顔 1547-1618), a retainer of the Mōri clan, who appropriated the name of Sesshu’s studio (Unkoku) as his artistic name, seeing

lineage of Sesshū Tōyō³⁷, whom Kazuki has also identified as a significant artistic influence. There were a number of works by *Unkokuha* artists in the possession of the Kazuki family.

In “My Siberia” Kazuki describes being totally engrossed by these works, poring over them for long periods in his early childhood. This was in part because, since his grandfather, through a combination of being a busy local man of import as well as an only reluctant caregiver, would frequently lock Kazuki in the storeroom. Thusly trapped, Kazuki made the best of his circumstances, availing himself of the premodern artistic works stored there. Though the works of the *Unkokuha* were primarily ink landscapes (*suiboku sansuiga*), quite different in media from Kazuki’s preferred realm of oil paints, the tonality of the Siberia Series, with its yellow ochre punctuated by blacks and greys, bear a striking similarity to much *Unkokuha* work.

Kazuki’s resolution to become an artist, and, specifically, a painter, came early, and so did his choice of oil paints as his preferred medium. In his fourth year of primary school, around the age of ten, a teacher who was new to his school introduced him to oil paints. Dissatisfied with the “cheap”, “thin” watercolors he had to paint with, he returned home each day from school haunted by the scent of the oil paints his teacher used.³⁸ Kazuki continued working on his art (and cutting class to ascend Mt. Kubara, or otherwise elude his grandparents and teachers), but dreamed of using the kinds of oil paints he could not yet get his hands on.

The most significant story that Kazuki relates about his mother in “My Siberia” is his “momentous decision” to enlist her aid in obtaining a set of oil paints so he could finally pursue

himself as continuing the earlier master’s legacy. Though Tōgan worked primarily in Kyoto, he retained close ties with his home area and patron Mōri Terumoto (毛利輝元 1553 - 1625), lord of the domains of Nagato and Suo, which comprise much of modern Yamaguchi and Hiroshima prefectures.

³⁷ Sesshū Tōyō (雪舟 等楊 1420-1506) was Japan’s most prominent and influential ink and wash painters of the middle Muromachi period (1336-1573). Born to a samurai family, he was educated as a Zen Buddhist priest of the Rinzai sect. His talent for art was recognized early, and he travelled to China to study both Buddhism and Chinese painting. Sesshū spent much of the latter half of his life in the area that is now Yamaguchi.

³⁸ Kazuki Fumiko. *Kazuki Yasuo Isshun Isshō no Gagyō* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2004) 50.

art in the way he so desperately wanted. Realizing, after his theft from his grandfather's wallet, that asking his stern grandparents to buy him an oil paint set would be fruitless, Kazuki wagered that he had no other choice but to implore his absent mother. Toward this end, when Kazuki was sixteen years old, he drafted a highly formal letter, the first he had ever written to his absent mother, with considerable ambivalence. In his memoirs, Kazuki relates his conflicted feelings: "I knew that my mother was alive and lived not all that far away, but I never really thought of her as a real live flesh and blood person. She had a theoretical existence, living only in my faint memories."^{39*} He did not initially receive a response, and so wrote a second letter, and then a third, in which he communicated his desire to attend art school and pursue a career as a painter. He describes feeling, in retrospect, "somehow rather embarrassed at the blatant wheedling."^{40*} His entreaties were successful however, and "she sent a splendid oil paints set."

Later, after entering art school in Tokyo, Kazuki began keeping in regular touch with his mother, for the first time since she had left the Kazuki home. He would also often stop by to visit her in Tsuwano when he returned home to Yamaguchi.⁴¹ Around the time he graduated from art school, he sent her 20 landscapes that he had painted. This renewed relationship continued through the time of his deployment to Manchuria after he was drafted, though his mother would pass away while he was still overseas in Siberian detention.⁴²

Kazuki's devotion to art, and neglect of his other studies, would, in the end, serve his own personal goals. He recalls hating school, attending only for the opportunity to engage in art activities. His rather low marks jeopardized any potential acceptance to a medical school, and consequently rendered the plan to follow in the professional steps of his grandfather unrealistic.

³⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 47.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 200.

⁴² Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 37.

This, in conjunction with his unwavering conviction to become an artist, as well as his long-recognized and prodigious artistic talents, helped to erode his grandfather's opposition to pursuing an art education and career.⁴³ The elimination of his grandfather's opposition was only the first significant barrier to his matriculation to art school, however. The more formal, official, barrier of the entrance exam would prove to be a tougher nut to crack for the young artist.

Art School in Tokyo

Kazuki first took the entrance exam for Tokyo Fine Arts School (now Tokyo University of the Arts) after graduating high school in 1929. Though confident of his chances at passing the exam, he was unsuccessful. The chances, even for a young artist as dedicated and gifted as Kazuki, were low—only three spots were available for a pool of forty applicants. Though crestfallen, Kazuki was undeterred. He remained committed to entering what was then (and now) Japan's most prestigious institution of art education, and, to this end, entered into the venerable Japanese tradition of becoming a "*rōnin*." The term, literally "wave person," originally referred to Samurai who, for whatever reason, no longer had a lord to serve, casting them metaphorically adrift in the rigidly prescribed premodern social class structure. The term was repurposed in the modern period (and is still commonly used) to refer to applicants for universities who fail the entrance exam on their first try, and then dedicate themselves to intense study in order to succeed on a subsequent attempt. Exams are held only once a year, but so significant is the determinative effect of one's alma mater that many *rōnin* spend years pursuing multiple attempts.

⁴³ Sakakura Hidenori. "Inochi wo kaketa gaka: Kazuki Yasuo no shōgai." from Kazuki Yasuo, and Kazuki Yasuo bijutsukan: *Watashi no chikyū II*. (Nagato: Kazuki Yasuo bijutsukan, 1997) 140.

In Kazuki's case, it took 3 attempts.⁴⁴ Following his initial failure, he moved to Tokyo and stayed at first with his uncle, Miyakuni Yoshifumi, who lived in Yukigaya, in the southwest corner of the metropolis. Committed to retaking the exam, he enrolled in the Kawabata Art School in Tokyo, to hone his design skills.⁴⁵ In 1931, when his uncle was transferred, Kazuki moved to the north portion of central Tokyo, staying at the Japan-Germany Association House. Also staying at the boarding house at the time were fellow young artists and Yamaguchi natives Furuki Mamoru, who preceded Kazuki at Tokyo Fine Arts School, as well as Matsuda Shōhei, and Amano Yoshihiko, who came a year after Kazuki.

Kazuki finally achieved entry into Tokyo Fine Arts College in April of 1931, enrolling in the Western/Oil Painting course. Up to this point, Kazuki had been enamored of the style of French Fauvist painter Maurice de Vlaminck. After he began his formal art schooling, Kazuki took a deep interest in the work of Van Gogh, particularly in his use of Prussian blue. He describes Van Gogh's characteristic hue as "[b]right and yet stubbornly chilly, seeming to tempt the viewer into the abyss of madness—that deep, peaceful blue captured me."^{46*} It was not only Van Gogh's expressive, colorful style that attracted Kazuki, but also the influence of Japanese Ukiyo-e prints on the Dutch post-impressionist painter. Kazuki credits this influence of Japanese premodern works on European oil painters as providing the Japanese artist a backdoor into understanding "Oriental painting," and a means of leveraging its aesthetic legacies. In addition to Van Gogh, Kazuki was also heavily influenced in his early art school years by Ando Hiroshige (by way of European artists like Van Gogh), Pablo Picasso, and, perhaps most of all, Umehara Ryūzaburō (1888-1986).⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 49.

⁴⁵ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 199.

⁴⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 48.

⁴⁷ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 199.

The influence of Van Gogh on Kazuki is clear in *Landscape* (Fig. 1.4), produced around 1931. The work is most striking for its fidelity to Van Gogh's model, in subject and style. Van Gogh's characteristic brushstrokes are on display, and a palette of warm earth tones and greens, befitting the bucolic rural scene that could as easily be the French or Flemish countryside as that of Japan. A Prussian Blue reminiscent of Van Gogh's dominates the sky. Kazuki's schooling would help him develop beyond such exercises in reproducing the masters, as *Snowy Landscape in the San-In Region*, from 1934 (Fig. 5.5), and *Landscape* (Fig. 5.6) from 1936 demonstrate.

In addition to the stylistic influence on Kazuki's work, Umehara's illustrious position in the world of Japanese fine arts would prove important to the development of Kazuki's artistic career. A member of the generation of yoga painters that preceded Kazuki, Umehara spent much of his early painting career absorbing the lessons of European, particularly French, painting. He venerated Renoir, seeking the master out when he lived in Europe and studied under his tutelage. After returning to Japan he became increasingly concerned about the problem of the perceived foreignness of oil painting to Japanese artists and audiences.⁴⁸ He worked to inject native Japanese sensibilities into his works and the medium, experimenting with *matière*, subjects, and figural proportions. From diverse European and Japanese sources, the "modified post-impressionism" he synthesized became a "quasi-official" academic style in the Tokyo art world.⁴⁹

Umehara was also quite active in the art world outside his atelier, helping to found such organizations as Nikakai in 1914, and Shun'yōkai in 1922, and joining Kokugakai in 1926⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ For a good discussion of this issue, which plagued several generations of Japanese oil painters, see Bert Winther-Tamaki *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012).

⁴⁹ Clark, John. "Modernity in Japanese Painting." *Art History* 9, no. 2 (June 1986) 225.

⁵⁰ Nikakai ("Second Section Association"), was established as a reaction to the perceived conservativeness of Japan's important Bunten exhibition organization. The group was founded in 1914 by Yamashita Shintarō (1881-1966), Ishii Hakutei (1882-1958) and other artists. The group continues to

During Kazuki's years in art school, Umehara was the chair of the selection committee for the annual Kokugakai exhibition. Kazuki's first submission to the annual exhibition in 1933, was a nude, a genre for which Umehara was particularly well known. On the back of his submitted canvas Kazuki wrote "In the style of Ume(hara) Ryu(zaburō)."^{51*} The work was not selected, but despite failing to catch the interest or approval of so significant an influence in this initial attempt, Kazuki would later develop a close relationship with Umehara, who became an important mentor and benefactor.⁵²

Another art world luminary who would become even more significant in Kazuki's life was Fukushima Shigetarō (1895-1960). Fukushima was an influential collector and critic, heir to a cooking oil fortune that enabled him to collect significant works of art internationally. In 1934 Fukushima displayed a portion of his collection, a number of works by the "École de Paris," the first time such works were exhibited in Japan. The collection featured 80 pieces, including

organize exhibitions (known as Nikaten), and remains Japan's largest independent oil painting organization. <<https://www.nika.or.jp/home/index.html>>

Shun'yokai ("Spring Sun Association"), is an oil painter's group founded in opposition to the Imperial Art Exhibition. It was formed in 1922 by Hoan Kosugi, Morita Tsunetomo, Ryūsei Kishida, Nakagawa Kazumasa, and Umehara Ryuzaburō (though Kishida and Umehara later withdrew). Shun'yokai website

The Kokugakai ("National Painting Association") is a private Japanese artists' exhibition society that holds annual juried exhibitions in a variety of media. It grew out of the Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai (National Creative Pictures Society), formed in 1918 by the Kyoto-based painters Irie Hakō Murakami Kagaku, Nonagase Banka, Ono Chikkyō, Sakakibara Shiho, and Tsuchida Bakusen. It was founded on the insistence of artists' total freedom of expression. The society was referred to by the abbreviation "Kokuten." In 1925, the society was broken into two divisions. The Japanese Painting Division ("*Nihonga*"), and the Western Style Painting Division ("*Yōga*"). The second Division later became the current Painting Division. The following year saw the society's first exhibition, also referred to by the abbreviation Kokuten. Though the Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai was dissolved in 1928, its second division was spun off as an independent organization called Kokugakai. In its early years, this new organization was influenced by prominent art critic and collector Fukushima Shigetarō (1895-1960). Fukushima organized special exhibits every year to introduce significant western painters to Japanese audiences. He included such luminaries as Matisse, Bonnard, Rodin, Bourdelle, Bernard Leach, Rouault, Monet, Renoir, Chagall, Picasso, and Cezanne, among others. These events served as instructional resources for oil painting members, and influenced those Japanese artists, who, like Kazuki, had no other opportunity to see Western paintings in person. The society consists of a total of five divisions: painting, craft, photography, printing, and sculpture. It has been organizing annual Kokuten exhibitions since 1926, with the exception of 1945.

⁵¹ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 200.

⁵² As an indication of the reverence in which Kazuki held his mentor, he kept a bronze cast of Umehara's hands in his atelier. Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 184.

twelve by André Derain, nine by Georges Rouault, five each from the “twin leaders” of the school, Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, one each from Georges Braque, Amedeo Modigliani, and Chaim Soutine, as well as 36 other works.⁵³

Fukushima became more than simply a critically influential booster and experienced mentor, but also grew into something of a father figure to the young Kazuki.⁵⁴ Fukushima would go on, in later years, to have profound effects on the trajectory of Kazuki’s career and life. In Kazuki’s early years, the recognition and support of Fukushima, and his close friend and colleague Umehara, would be the springboard for his entry into Japan’s prewar art world.

In 1933, in the third year of Kazuki’s art schooling, he entered the class of Fujishima Takeji (1867-1943).⁵⁵ A famous oil painter and contemporary of Umehara, Fujishima was known for developing veins of Romanticism and Impressionism in Japanese painting, inspired by European models. Fujishima had studied historical painting and portraiture in France and Italy and joined the faculty of Tokyo Fine Arts School on his return to Japan in 1910. As an artist, Fujishima’s credentials and achievements were unquestioned, described as “an inspiration, for the majority of the Western-style painters who worked during the entire prewar period.”⁵⁶ However, he comes across in Kazuki’s recollection as a less than stellar teacher.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Kazuki’s study with Fujishima continued his trajectory within the elite stream of Yōga practitioners of the day, despite his relatively modest background.

⁵³ Kazuki Yasuo: *“Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 200.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁵ Fujishima Takeji (藤島 武二 1867-1943) was born in the domain of Satsuma in Kyūshū to a formerly samurai clan. Orphaned at a young age, Fujishima lacked the resources of many of his contemporaries, but ascended to a position of considerable respect and influence within the Japanese art world. This was in part through elevation to a teaching position at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts by the influential Kuroda Seiki (sometimes referred to as the “father of modern Yōga” (*kindai Yōga no chichi*)).

⁵⁶ Takashina Shūji, J. Thomas Rimer, and Gerald D. Bolas. *Paris in Japan: the Japanese Encounter with European Painting*, (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 1987) 99.

⁵⁷ Hironaka Kenji. *Kazuki Yasuo*. (Yamaguchi-shi: Yamaguchi Shinbunsha. 2001) 33.

The Thirty Year Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki (2004) posits four distinctive stylistic periods in the course of Kazuki's work. The first of these, which they term his "Early Period" (*shoki*) spans from the middle of his time studying at Tokyo Fine Arts College to the early part of his time teaching in Shimonoseki (approximately 1931-39). They label this period his "seeking period" (*mosakuki*). Works of this time are characterized by a heavy influence of Van Gogh, Gaughin, and Umehara. Other prominent features of this style are "flatness, decorativeness and a novel compositional sensibility,"* as visible in works such as *Gate, Stone Wall* (1940, Fig. 1.7), and *Snowy Landscape in the San'in Region* (1934, Fig. 1.6).⁵⁸ *Snowy Landscape* served as his debut on the *gadan*, Japan's prestigious institutional painting scene.⁵⁹ The painting presents a winter landscape common to his home region of Yamaguchi. The work moves away from his clear earlier debt to Van Gogh, with a more somber palette and less exuberant brushwork than his *Landscape* of 1931. The work mirrors more closely that of his idol Umehara, such as *Sakurajima (red)* of 1935 (Fig. 1.7). The two are similar in subject and composition but diverge markedly in tonality. In Umehara's landscape, bold, colors outline the eponymous mountain, a frequent subject of his during this period, and the rooftops of the houses arrayed below. The mountain looms majestically over the structures and interspersed trees, dwarfing them. The mountain itself glows in tones of orange and crimson, highlighted by yellow ridges, the tones gradually tapering into blues and purples down through the base. In Kazuki's *Snowy Landscape*, snow-capped hills stretch across the horizon, beyond a nearly black body of water, underscored by simplified shapes and strong contours. The colors are far more muted, reflecting in part the seasonal distinction, and his decorative impulses are on display in the somewhat stylized hills on the horizon and the simplified hatching indicating the trees coving them. The work seems to presage Kazuki's later interest in stylization characteristic

⁵⁸ Kazuki Yasuo: "*Watakushi no*" *Shiberia*, 17.

⁵⁹ Kazuki Yasuo, et al. *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Seibu Honsha Kikakubu, 1989) 131.

of Cubism. He submitted *Snowy Landscape* to the Kokugakai exhibition 9 in 1934, which was the first time one of his works was accepted. The following year his *Snow Garden* was accepted for Kokugakai 10.⁶⁰

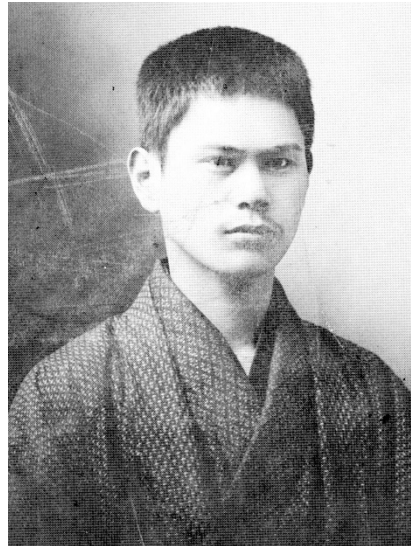
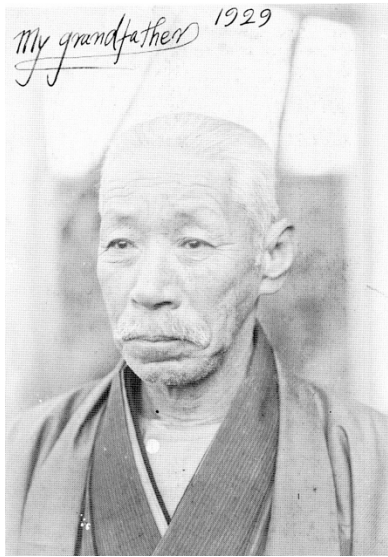
During this time in his life, Kazuki struggled to make ends meet as he pursued his education. To supplement his limited means, he worked part time as an illustrator of Children's magazines and picture books.⁶¹ The young Kazuki cut quite the bohemian figure (or at least the disheveled artist getting by on pluck portion of that notion). A friend describes his appearance "in a jacket with an upturned collar, surplus half-boots from the Russo-Japanese War... a crumpled hat, not at all an honest, upright" look.^{62*} The lean "starving artist" lifestyle Kazuki faced during his school days would considerably pale in comparison to what he would endure during his time in Siberian detention, an extraordinary abjection would become a significant leitmotif of his "Siberia Series" works.

⁶⁰ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 200.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 200.

Chapter 1 Images Supplement



Figs. 1.1-1.3. Kazuki's grandfather Shunrei (left), father Sadao (center), and mother Yachio (right). (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia* and *"My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 198)

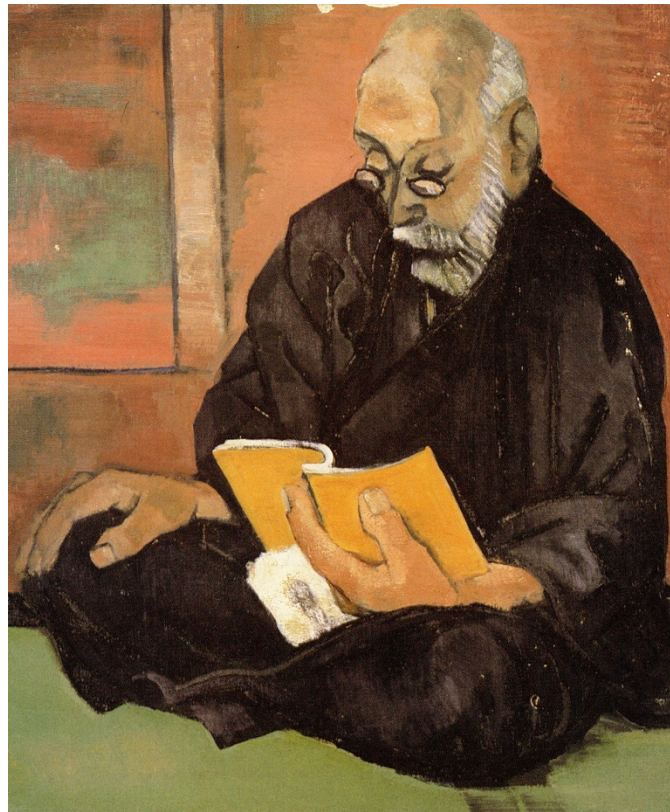


Fig. 1.4. Kazuki Yasuo, 祖父 - *Grandfather*, 1936, oil on canvas, 72.8 x 60.5cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, *"My" Earth*, 21)

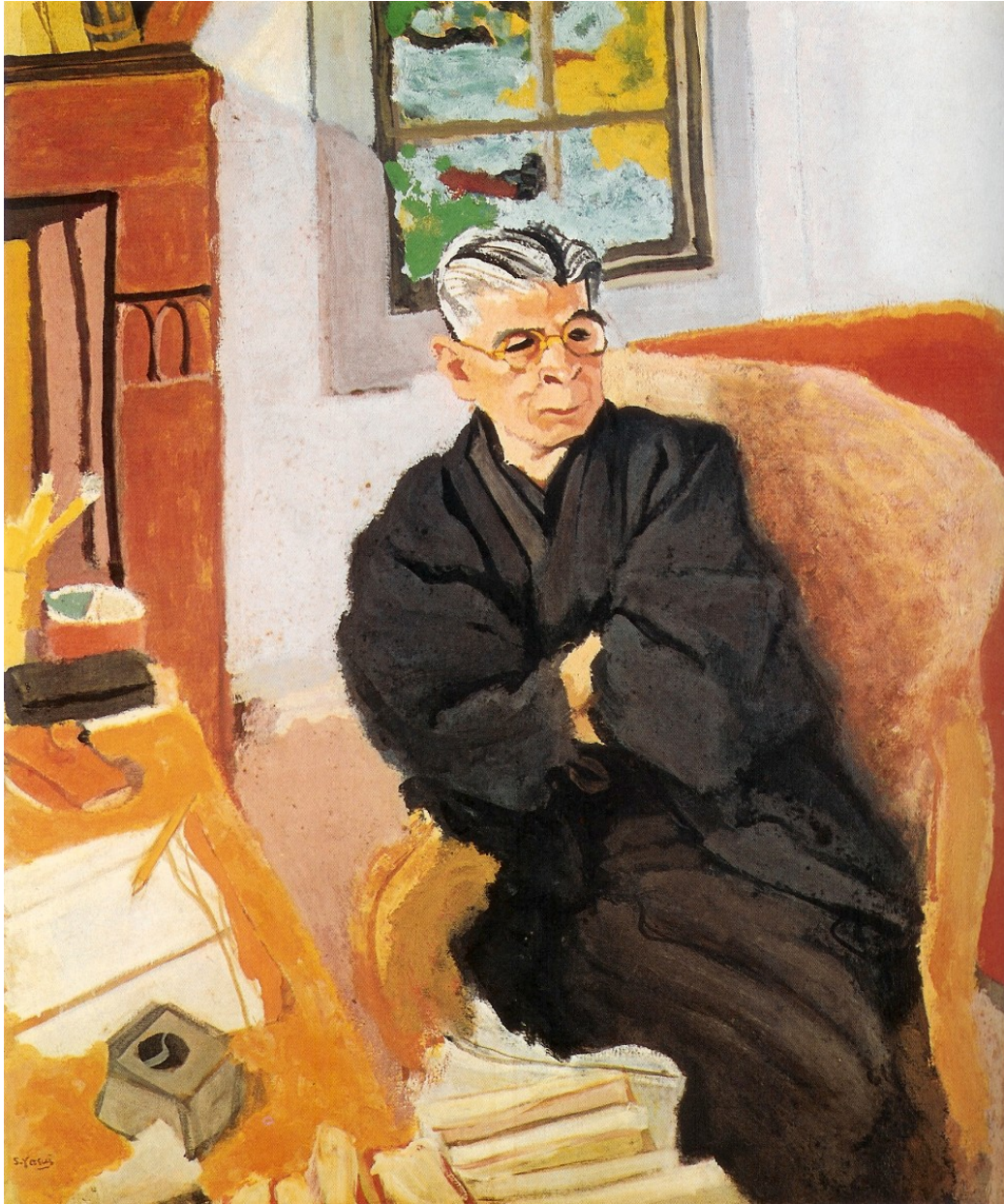


Fig. 1.4. Yasui Sōtarō, 深井英五氏像 - *Portrait of Mr. Fukai Eigo.*, 1937, oil on canvas, 92.1 x 76cm. Private collection. (Kaneko, *Mirroring the Japanese Empire*, 63)



Fig. 1.5. Kazuki Yasuo, 風景 - *Landscape*, c. 1931, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 72.8cm. Private collection. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 18)



Fig. 1.6. Kazuki Yasuo, 雪降りの山陰風景 - *Snowy Landscape in the San'in Region*, 1934, oil on canvas, 60.6 x 72.8cm. Private collection. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 19)



Fig. 1.7. Umehara Ryūzaburō, 桜島 〈赤〉 - *Sakurajima (red)*, 1935, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81.5cm. Private collection. (Tomiyaama, *Ryūzaburō Umehara Retrospective*, 109)



Fig. 1.8. Kazuki Yasuo, 風景 - Landscape, 1936, oil on canvas, 61.0 x 72.8cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 19)



Fig. 1.9. Kazuki Yasuo, 門・石垣 - *Gate, Stone Wall*, 1940, oil on canvas, 72.7 x 60.8cm. Private collection. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 23)

CHAPTER 2

Graduation and Early Career Struggles

Since 1898, the Tokyo Fine Arts School required every graduate of the Western Painting division to produce a self-portrait, and Kazuki painted his in 1936 (Fig. 2.1).⁶³ In it, he sits in a classic three-quarters perspective, facing the right of the canvas, but his eyes seem to peer out directly at the viewer. The palette is a subdued assortment of pale ochres and greys, punctuated by a black shock of hair and dark sweater beneath a pale grey blazer. His gaze seems both directed at the viewer and simultaneously oblivious of being seen. Art critic Hariu Ichirō describes the work as “capturing, without much exaggeration, a self that hides arrogant confidence in youthfulness.”⁶⁴ Without contradicting Hariu’s assessment, Kazuki’s image of self at this key turning point in his life seems to also quietly project a sense of vulnerability, his visage subtly betraying uncertainty.

The second work that Kazuki submitted for his graduation capstone is titled *Two Seated Figures* (Fig. 2.2), a composition based loosely on a photograph of some of Kazuki’s younger cousins (Fig. 2.3). The two youthful figures clad only in dark swim trunks, gaze in opposite

⁶³ This requirement was instituted under the directorship of Kuroda Seiki (1866-1924), sometimes referred to as the “father of modern *Yōga*”. Self-portraiture had never been a common genre in Japanese painting prior to the Meiji period, but, in part due to its status as a compulsory educational exercise, it “remained a major benchmark in the credentialing process of Yoga painters throughout the twentieth century.” Bert Winther-Tamaki discusses the significance of self-portraiture in Yoga’s development in Japan in the first chapter of his *Maximum Embodiment*, which traces the trajectory of the oil painting form in Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. See Bert Winther-Tamaki, *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012).

⁶⁴ Kazuki Yasuō, *Gashū Kazuki Yasuo*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 1975) 218.

directions, and but for the idiosyncratic half embrace they share, they seem to evince little awareness of each other. They appear to be seated on a beach, and green hills recede behind a swatch of blue representing a body of water. Beyond the blues and greens of the water, hills and sky, the color scheme is remarkably like that of *Self Portrait*. The figures have a relaxed naturalism about them, though one that does not hew too close to realism. The proportions of the figures' limbs seem exaggeratedly lanky, though this may be due to their ambiguous age. There is more of a sense of three-dimensional space than in *Self Portrait*, in both the evocation of a quasi-marine setting as well as a good deal more attention to the shadows playing across the mostly bare bodies of the two young men. The work has been cited as displaying the influence on Kazuki of early period Picasso.⁶⁵

Two Seated Figures suggests a direction that Kazuki's work would move into, particularly in the years before and after the end of the war and his time in Siberia: individuals or small groups of figures, increasingly stylized in their bodily proportions and poses, in ambiguous spaces defined in a simple palette of few major tones. The detachment of the figures, from both each other and the viewer, suggests a certain isolation. The image intimates an ambiguous interiority that Kazuki would develop in further works in the 1940s through the early 1950s.

Upon completing his degree at Tokyo School of Fine Arts, Kazuki received a Teaching license ("*kyōinmenkyō*" - the qualification necessary to teach at primary and secondary schools). Following graduation, Kazuki secured a position as an art teacher at Kutchan Middle School in Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. Unfortunately for Kazuki, this far-flung departure from his southwestern Yamaguchi home (as well as the art world in Tokyo) was accompanied by what he describes as a "terrible slump".^{66*} This period was difficult for several reasons, and

⁶⁵ Shimonoseki Shiritsu Bijutsukan, et al. *Botsugo 35-nen Kazuki Yasuo to 1940-50 nendai no kaiga: Jidai no zōkeishi-mōdanizumu kara aratana chihei he*, (Shimonoseki: Shimonoseki Shiritsu Bijutsukan, 2009) 7.

⁶⁶ Ōshita Tomokazu. "Kutchan Jidai no Kazuki Yasuo" in Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyaraī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30*

Kazuki recalls it in his later days as a period of profound loneliness, doubt in his abilities as an art teacher, and an ongoing struggle with the direction of his personal art practice. In the years following his graduation from art school, Kazuki wrestled with the vexing problem of reconciling the aesthetic sensibilities intrinsic and historically linked to his originally European media of oil paints, and his identity as a Japanese artist.

Yōga has faced a complex history in Japan, as discussed in the Introduction, with painters both before and after Kazuki wrestling with a perceived conflict between a foreign media and a native cultural sensibility. Even Kazuki's idol and mentor Umehara faced this difficulty and found his own idiosyncratic way forward. Like many of his predecessors, peers, and successors in the world of Japanese oil painting, Umehara's early career was characterized by a francophilic enthusiasm for European models (both literal and figurative). After a youthful sojourn in Paris, where Umehara sought out and received the blessing of his idol Renoir, he experienced difficulties on his return to Japan. He critiqued the European focus of *Yōga* as "the desolate dandyishness of a colony," echoing earlier criticisms of Japanese yoga.⁶⁷ To combat this in his own work, Umehara sought to identify bodily proportions of "Oriental" women, in contrast to European canonical figural proportions, and sought further aesthetic inspiration in premodern Japanese imagery. Works such as 1936's *Nude* (Fig. 2.4) showcase his "strategies for distancing his own art from French models" and the invocation of Japanese aesthetic traditions.⁶⁸ He also sought to alter the very materials of *Yōga*, adulterating his oil paints with mineral pigments used in forms such as *Nihonga*, more closely related to the materials Japanese painters had long used prior to introduction of oil paints.⁶⁹ Kazuki himself would later

Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 187.

⁶⁷ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 78.

⁶⁸ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 78.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

undertake similar efforts to alter the material qualities of his oils, though his reasons, and the effects produced, were quite different from Umehara's.

For Kazuki, inspiration for a breakthrough would also emerge in part from encounters with Japanese art of the past. Kazuki was introduced to the Momoyama/Edo period painter Tawaraya Sōtatsu (俵屋 宗達 c. 1570-c. 1640) by his friend and *yōgaka* peer Kurata Tetsu (庫田 透 1907-1994).⁷⁰ Kurata's introduction of this master to Kazuki helped him work through some of the visual and aesthetic dimensions of his "slump".⁷¹ In Kazuki's work we can see some hints of Sōtatsu, particularly in his pale brown backgrounds and use of a highly ambiguous space.

Kazuki felt trapped in an aporetic situation under the weight of native Japanese aesthetic traditions with an inability to develop a unique artistic practice that was true to both the (ultimately Western) form of oil painting and his own, Japanese, identity. Kazuki believed that "there is something in Oriental painting that resonates in our blood," and that "[e]ven Oriental painting that we find boring somehow puts us (Japanese people) at ease."^{72*} This was in contrast to *Yōga*, which conversely produced an inevitable "strange feeling."^{72*} In his memoirs Kazuki explains that "It was my wish to combine these into one."^{73*} Resolving the potential incompatibility of a conspicuously foreign aesthetic tradition and one's familiar, domestic culture,

⁷⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 54. Kazuki has described his friend as a sort of older brother (*ani*), using this precise term to address him in letters. Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyararī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki* (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 168.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁷² Hironaka Kenji. *Kazuki Yasuo* (Yamaguchi: Yamaguchi shinbun, 2001) 40. Kazuki posits few concrete examples of differences or incompatibilities between Japanese culture and *Yōga*, with the exception of the use of negative space and unpainted margins in "Oriental" painting. His (and many others') rhetorical recourse to a national or *racial*/foreignness, rather than specific aesthetic or technical factors, suggests that the conflict is more a part of larger debates on Japan's relationship to foreign nations (particularly, but not exclusively, Europe and the United States), and not, strictly speaking, aesthetic concerns.

⁷³ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 50.

was both a formidable artistic challenge and an absolute imperative for a Japanese artist so devoted to his specific medium. To be sure, Kazuki never claimed to have totally resolved this problem, but a certain “fusion” (*yūgō*) of the tension between familiar and alien aesthetics would come to be a significant quality of Kazuki’s mature style. The amorphous, decontextualized space of Japanese painting (drawn in part from earlier Chinese models) certainly materializes in much of Kazuki’s work, particularly in the Siberia Series.

In 1938, in the midst of his ongoing “slump” and loneliness in Hokkaido, Kazuki was thrown a lifeline. A former teacher of Kazuki’s from his middle school days told him of position as an art teacher available at a girls’ school in Shimonoseki, and suggested he look into it. Kazuki was only too happy to leave Hokkaido behind and return to his native Yamaguchi. On his way to Shimonoseki, a short distance from his rural home in Misumi, Kazuki stopped to visit his uncle, Masuo. He inquired if the young bachelor Kazuki had any marriage prospects and offered to act as a go-between to help him arrange a marriage. Kazuki agreed, leaving the situation completely in his uncle’s hands. In June of 1938 married Fujie Fumiko (藤家婦美子 Fig. 2.5).⁷⁴ She followed him to Shimonoseki, where she worked as a caregiver in a local kindergarten (*yōchien*). Yama Megumi, a psychologist who has written extensively on Kazuki from a psychological perspective, suggests that Kazuki’s ready accession to an unsolicited arranged marriage was in no small part due to the intense loneliness of the period he spent in Hokkaido, a view endorsed by art historian Ōshita Tomokazu.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Kazuki remained married to Fumiko until his death in 1974. After his passing, she became one of the most important stewards of his legacy, helping to arrange the foundation of his memorial museum in Misumi, editing and publishing catalogs of his works and exhibitions, and writing memoirs about her life with him.

⁷⁵ Yama, Megumi. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou* (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 75, Ōshita Tomokazu. “Kutchan Jidai no Kazuki Yasuo” in Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyaraī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 188.

Early Career

Even in the midst of personal struggles and a crisis of faith in his own abilities, Kazuki was not paralyzed in his art practice. He continued creating works and submitting them to the major exhibitions of the day. In 1938 he submitted two works to Kokuten 13, *Rabbit* (Fig. 2.6) and a portrait of his grandfather, Shunrei.⁷⁶ Though he was confident in their acceptance, he still wrestled internally with questions about his style and what direction he should proceed in, and found himself locked in a cycle of second-guessing himself, “lost in doubt.”⁷⁷ Going back and forth in his mind, he finally decided to withdraw the portrait of his grandfather, but *Rabbit* was chosen as a special selection, vindicating his decision to forge ahead in a new direction in his art practice.⁷⁸ Kazuki’s idol Umehara and his close associate, the collector and impresario Fukushima Shigetarō, two of the most eminent representatives of Kokugakai (and the broader Japanese painting world), were both impressed, and wanted to meet with the young and ambitious young artist. When Kazuki later went to Tokyo, such a meeting was personally arranged by Kazuki’s friend Kurata Tetsu.⁷⁹

Kazuki’s style in this period has been called his “Middle Period” (*chūki*). This lasts approximately from 1940-50, a period interrupted by his conscription and deployment (1943-1945), and internment (1945-1947). There is an increase in paintings depicting human figures, particularly youths, invariably shown from behind, or facing away from the viewer. The color palette shifts toward greens, blues and browns, amid an atmosphere that has been described as

⁷⁶ Shunrei would pass away in January 1942, precisely one year before Kazuki was conscripted. *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 201.

⁷⁷ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 54.

⁷⁸ Hironaka Kenji. *Kazuki Yasuo* (Yamaguchi: Yamaguchi shinbun) 2001) 43-45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

“a kind of deeply meditative lyricism”.^{80*} Representative works include *Hammock* (1941, Fig. 2.7), and *Water Mirror* (1942, Fig. 2.8). Several commentators have remarked on Kazuki’s consistent compositional choice, in works of this period, of facing his figures away from the viewer. Hiramatsu Tatsuo posits that “[t]hese youths facing away from the viewer are a painted version of his childhood mental landscape.”^{81*} Kazuki’s childhood, punctuated by his mother’s departure from the home when he was ten, his father’s death overseas the following year, and his grandmother’s death the year following that left Kazuki to be raised by his notoriously strict grandfather. The intriguing compositions, sphinxlike in their refusal to engage the viewer, with youths alone in ambiguous spaces evoke the kind of lonely times Kazuki spent in the hills of Misumi.

In his later memoirs, Kazuki describes being a lonely latchkey child, skipping out of school to roam the hills of Misumi alone. Early in the text he relates how “having to grow up with no father, no mother, no siblings, I was always lonely. I wasn’t needed by anyone.”^{82*} Seeing the anonymous figures in Kazuki’s paintings of this period, facing away from the viewer in an idle reverie, tinged by melancholy, one can easily imagine a young Kazuki, on “Mt. Kubara, which was behind my grandfather’s house, lazily lounging around and gazing at the clouds in the sky until evening.”^{83*} The issue of figuration, and particularly of the face, would return as a significant stylistic concern for Kazuki, as began to develop his “Siberia Series.”

⁸⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “*Watakushi no*” *Shiberia*, 17.

⁸¹ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo “shiberia Shirīzu” O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 134.

⁸² Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 37. This sense of worthlessness haunted Kazuki his entire life. In his later years he would remark (often when drunk, which was not infrequent) “I was an unnecessary person.”* Kazuki Fumiko. *Otto no Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo ni Yori Sotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 32.

⁸³ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 48.

Kazuki's home life rapidly became more complicated in this period as well, with the birth, in quick succession, of his children. Fumiko gave birth to a son, Naoki, in May 1939, followed by a daughter, Keiko in April 1940, and a second daughter, Hisako, in October 1941. Despite his transition into fatherhood Kazuki remained active in advancing his art career. He continued submitting to the Kokuten and Bunten exhibitions. In March 1939 his two submitted works were accepted for Kokuten 14, and the exhibition organization awarded him a scholarship for his continued art practice. In July of that same year, he submitted *White Flowers* to the Kokugakai New Person Exhibition. His submission was encouraged by Kurata Tetsu, and this occasioned a real deepening of their friendship.⁸⁴ In March of 1940, he submitted *Shelf and Pot* and *Withered Canna* to the 15th Kokugakai exhibition and was at that time awarded the Saburi Prize.⁸⁵ March of 1941 saw two more submissions accepted to Kokuten 16, but his work was rejected for October's Bunten. The Kokuten exhibition of 1942 accepted Kazuki's *Water Mirror* and *Hammock*, which had been rejected from the previous year's Bunten exhibition. *Water Mirror* was also accepted later for 1942's Bunten in October, but this would prove the end of Kazuki's life as a simple artist and teacher for some time.

Conscription and Deployment

Despite Kazuki's ongoing professional successes, a dark shadow loomed over all of his endeavors—the ongoing escalation of Japan's wars and the concomitant possibility that Kazuki would be drafted. The years following Kazuki's graduation from art school, as he navigated an

⁸⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 201.

⁸⁵ *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 201. Saburi Makoto (1898-1936) was an oil painter particularly known for his devotion to a realism in the vein of Rembrandt. After his death by suicide, his family established the Saburi Prize (which included a monetary award) to support up and coming Yoga painters.

incipient art career and the responsibilities of work and family, were increasingly tense in Japan. Kazuki has described how the steady development of Japan's imperialistic actions across east and southeast Asia and the Pacific, as well as domestically, seemed to occur in an unrecognizable place. As Kazuki puts it in his memoirs, "the smell of smoke lingered in the air in Japan."^{86*}

The possibility of conscription remained an anxious concern in the back of Kazuki's mind, but he did not consciously take it very seriously. Given Kazuki's evident facility in his chosen area of specialty, and the fact that he had not yet been drafted as a common soldier, it is somewhat surprising that he was not prevailed upon by the military to serve as a war record painter. Kazuki met most of the key criteria of war record painters, as laid out by Mayu Tsuruya. He was "male and was a graduate of the Western art department at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts," but had not "studied in Europe to acquire authentic Western painting techniques firsthand."⁸⁷ It is not clear if this lack of training in Europe might have made Kazuki less likely to be tapped by the military for such service. In July of 1942 he was approved for potential deployment with the Hiroshima 5th Division to Burma as a "painter in service" (*jūgun gaka*).⁸⁸ The reasons are unclear, but the army did not act upon this, however, and it seemed for a short time that Kazuki dodged a metaphorical bullet (and many literal ones).

Despite Kazuki's near-miss with military service, Japan's wartime situation was progressively deteriorating, and would eventually catch up with him. Though he had already come close to being pulled in directly by Japan's war machine, when he was finally sent unequivocal notice that he would have to report for military service, Kazuki and his family found

⁸⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 55.

⁸⁷ Tsuruya Mayu. "Sensou Sakusen Kirokuga: Seeing Japan's War Documentary Painting as a Public Monument"." *Since Meiji*, edited by J. Thomas Rimer, (Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 104.

⁸⁸ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 16.

it a shock.⁸⁹ The dreaded summons arrived in the mail in December of 1942. In *My Siberia*, Kazuki describes that when he received the order “I felt like, as a painter, I’d been given a death sentence.”^{90*}

Kazuki’s hopes of being passed over by the draft were not entirely a product of wishful thinking—there were concrete reasons to expect that he might avoid military service. At the age of thirty-one, he was only one year from the cutoff.⁹¹ Additionally, when he presented himself for the requisite physical examination, he was judged Grade C, which should have rendered him ineligible for conscription and deployment. The callup in January of 1943, however, was the first time that draftees of Grade C were also accepted for deployment.⁹² Moreover, Kazuki’s callup notice was classified “Training Summons,” and he believed that after three months of compulsory training that he would be able to return home rather than be deployed.⁹³

Kazuki was assigned to a machine gun unit in the Yamaguchi City 4th Division. He was sent to Yamaguchi City, and took part in training across from Jōeiji Temple, which had served as the home of one of his artistic heroes, the Muromachi period painter Sesshū Tōyō.⁹⁴ Kazuki found military training, particularly in the use of machine guns, to be nearly unbearable, commenting in his memoirs that “[f]orcing a painter into training to kill people was such an awful feeling as to bring you to tears.”^{95*} His “misery and regret” was all the more acute for having to

⁸⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 56., Kazuki Fumiko, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte* (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 54.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹¹ Kazuki Fumiko, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte* (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 54.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁴ Sesshū Tōyō (雪舟等楊 1420-1506) was the most well-known suiboku (ink and wash) painting master of the Muromachi period (1336-1573). During Sesshū’s stay at Jōeiji he designed the temple’s Zen rock garden, which bears the name Sesshūtei (雪舟庭 “Sesshū garden”) in his honor.

⁹⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 57.

train for war in sight of the stomping grounds of such an august and personally revered artistic figure such as Sesshū.

The painting *Clouds* (Fig. 2.9), from 1968, presents this specific memory, one of the few such Siberia Series works which are set within Japan. The tableau is murky, even for a series so characterized by a starkly somber palette. The composition is taken up mostly by the sky, a swath of cerulean blue which is uncharacteristic of the series. The periphery of the sky is limned with dark greys however, and three clouds, in a roughly rendered admixture of ochre, brown, blue and grey, punctuate the space. A lone gas mask sits in the center of the foreground, abutting the edge of the canvas, dissolving into the mottled blacks that describe distant hills. Only the lenses of the mask announce the presence of the ominous military gear, the placid clouds reflected in its lenses. Kazuki explains that the single gas mask “comes to symbolize all those soldiers who were snatched away, transformed into something inorganic.”^{96*}

During Kazuki’s training in Yamaguchi city Fumiko brought the children to see him every Sunday, and soon three months turned into four. Kazuki did well in his training, and was recommended for an officer’s exam, but believing that this would only increase the chances of being deployed, he demurred. Despite this, his orders were changed from short-term training to orders to deploy to Manchuria immediately, departing from Shimonoseki on the 6th of April. Kazuki hurriedly contacted Fumiko, asking her to bring some *sake* to see him off.⁹⁷ Kazuki and other conscripts gathered at a local middle school in the middle of the night, to be seen off by

⁹⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 57.

⁹⁷ Kazuki Fumiko, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte* (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 55.

their families. According to Fumiko, “[t]hough there were many people gathered to see (the men) off, there wasn’t a sound.”^{98*} The painting *Parting* represents this event.⁹⁹

Life in Manchuria

As much of a shock as conscription and deployment to far-flung Manchuria was for Kazuki, the difficulty and unpleasantness of his situation was considerably mitigated. Through the good graces of sympathetic commanders and the help of his family and connections back in Japan, he was able to continue his art activities to a remarkable degree. Kazuki was deployed to the city of Hailar and assigned to a supply shop tasked with equipment upkeep. As a result, he saw no combat and through the course of the war never fired a shot.¹⁰⁰ Despite this quotidian assignment, Kazuki was able to continue his art activities. He was fortunate enough to have “a commanding officer of understanding who permitted him to take a box of paints to Manchuria.”¹⁰¹ In April of 1943, while still in the process of pre-deployment training, he submitted two works to Kokuten 18 with the help of his family. They also helped him submit to Bunten 6 in October of 1943.¹⁰² In 1944, Kazuki produced a painting entitled *Hulumbuir* (Fig. 2.10), which he entrusted to a fellow soldier to deliver back to Japan for entry into Bunten 7 in 1944. The work is something of an exceptional one for Kazuki, fitting in neither with his earlier works nor

⁹⁸ Kazuki Fumiko, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte* (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 56.

⁹⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 57.

¹⁰⁰ Ogawa Masataka, “Kazuki Yasuo to Shiberiya” Tōkyō Sentoraru Bijutsukan, et al. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberiya Shirīzu* (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Sentoraru Bijutsukan, 1972) np.

¹⁰¹ Homma Masayoshi, “The Art of Kazuki Yasuo”. Kazuki, Yasuo, JAC Project, Tōkyō Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan, Kyōto Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan et al. *Kazuki Yasuo isaku ten = Posthumous exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*. Asahi Shimbun Sha, Tokyo 1975) np. See also: Ogawa Masataka, “Kazuki Yasuo to Shiberiya” Tōkyō Sentoraru Bijutsukan, et al. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberiya Shirīzu* (Tōkyō: Tōkyō Sentoraru Bijutsukan, 1972) np.

¹⁰² *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 201.

suggesting his future Siberia Series trajectory. The painting is strongly suggestive of Surrealism, far more than any other example in Kazuki's oeuvre. Two mysterious shapes, one with what appears to be a railroad spike driven into it, flanked on the right by a head turned away from the viewer toward the shapes. The leitmotif of a face turned resolutely away from the viewer is perhaps the only feature of this painting that would continue to figure into Kazuki's later works.

While deployed Kazuki was a tireless correspondent. He sent postcards back to his family on a near daily basis, usually decorated with scenes of life in Manchuria (Fig. 2.11). Kazuki also remained in touch with his mentors while deployed overseas. Kazuki's idol Umehara (who himself had spent a great deal of time in China) kept in touch with Kazuki, sending him a letter of encouragement in April of 1944.¹⁰³ In February of 1944 Kazuki received a new book, *The Age of Impressionism*, written by his benefactor Fukushima Shigetarō, as a gift from him. Fukushima had sent Kazuki a letter in May of the previous year. In it he reassures Kazuki that he can return to art after his military experience, citing the example of the French painter Odilon Redon (1840-1916), who had been drafted to serve in the army during the Franco-Prussian war. Fukushima had been reading a biography of the artist and likened the Frenchman's experience in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 to Kazuki's current experiences in China. In the letter he assures Kazuki that, like Redon, he can resume his life as an artist after the war ends, and that he would emerge from his military time with many valuable experiences that could enrich his art practice.

Kazuki himself felt a similar sense, relating in his memoirs that "when I received that death sentence, that was me as an artisan. But by means of the death of me as an artisan, the me as an artist could come back to life."^{104*} To Kazuki, the former was a chosen profession,

¹⁰³ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 165.

¹⁰⁴ Kazuki uses the English expressions (rendered in the *katakana* script used for foreign loan words) for both the terms "artisan" (*aruchisan*) and "artist" (*aruchisuto*) rather than Japanese language terms such as *shokunin* (職人 "artisan/craftsman") or *bijutsuka* (美術家 "[fine] artist"). Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia."

while the latter a way of life. Echoing the encouragement of his mentors, he labored to see an opportunity in the expected but unwelcome diversion from his art and life to deepen his art practice as a way of life rather than simply as a profession. This hope turned out to be more prophetic than he could have realized, as his time in Manchuria, and later Siberia, would put an indelible mark on his artistic work, and would thematically dominate the portion of his oeuvre that would achieve for him the greatest renown. Of course, we should remain wary of taking Kazuki's postwar words at face value. Such re-evaluations of his time spent in the military (and in Siberia) are unlikely to reflect his precise feelings during those times, rather than retrospective judgments, offered in an autobiographical narrative context decades after the fact.

One surprise that Kazuki experienced in his new life away from home was the degree to which the natural beauty of Manchuria (and later, Siberia) impressed him. The wide-open spaces of Manchuria, the intensity of the sun, and the terrain, so unlike his beloved Misumi, roused something deep within him. While in Hailar, he later recalled that “[being] in that magnificent prairie landscape such as I'd never seen before, sometimes I'd forget that I was a soldier, and there were times when I was transfixed by the intensity and beauty. In particular what captured me was the beauty of the sun.”¹⁰⁵ Though he had long felt a close affinity for the natural world, this wonderment was touched with a substantial ambivalence. The circumstances that had brought him to witness such natural beauty far away from home had corrupted the experience. For Kazuki, even the sublime sun of the Manchurian plains “was not a symbol of

Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 39.

¹⁰⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 58.

hope”, but rather, as it was “linked to the prison of the military.”^{106*} This ambivalence is the subject of his Siberia Series” work *Black Sun* (Fig. 2.12), painted in 1961.¹⁰⁷

The work is a nearly abstract landscape, with a crudely circular black blot in the upper center, hovering ominously over alternating dark and lighter bands representing the horizon. An intense canary yellow burns in the sky behind the black orb, blunted somewhat by a shimmering ochre haze. The black hole that is this representation of the life-giving powerplant that underwrites all life on earth seethes with an ominous, intimidating power. In this work, the awe-inspiring power of nature, one that Kazuki had long celebrated, metastasizes from the sublime to a threatening, unreachable, and irresistible power. That the sun is the literal symbol of the Japanese nation is clearly not lost on Kazuki, and this connection between the sun disk and the oppressive militarist state that Japan had degenerated into is a clear subtext. Kazuki would create other works that made even more direct use of a black sun device to suggest the malignance of the Japanese wartime regime, but without the aesthetic connection to the raw power of the natural world that animates *Black Sun*’s ominously ironic tenebrousness. Even so basic a natural symbol as the sun had been corrupted and had become “something dark that had lost its radiance.”^{108*}

As time progressed the war situation for Japan continued to deteriorate, both within Japan and throughout its rapidly shrinking empire. In 1945 back in Yamaguchi, Kazuki’s family was evacuated from Shimonoseki to the home of his uncle Masuo in the Asada neighborhood of

¹⁰⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 59.

¹⁰⁷ Kazuki has also recounted how this particular work is related to his mentor and quasi-father figure Fukushima Shigetarō. In the *Asahi gurafu* magazine (also known as *The Asahi Picture News*) published shortly after *Black Sun* was painted, he relates how the concept for a work based on his memory of the Manchurian sun, simultaneously beautiful and ominous, had long gestated in his consciousness. He felt he had to paint such a work, as part of what he refers to as his “War Defeat Series” (*Haisen shirizū*), but couldn’t bring himself to work on it until after Fukushima’s death, which had a profound impact on him. Kamon Yasuo. “Gendai no gakatachi” *Asahi gurafu* 11 Aug. 1961, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 59.

Misumi.¹⁰⁹ In June of 1945, Kazuki and approximately 1,000 fellow soldiers from the 19th division were moved from Hailar to Zhengjiatun.¹¹⁰ Though the American noose around the home islands grew ever tighter as 1945 wore on, Kazuki and his comrades were left increasingly isolated in the face of a different foe, the Soviet Union. At the Allies' Tehran conference in 1943, Stalin had agreed to enter the war against Japan after the defeat of Nazi Germany. In May 1945 they were free to redirect their considerable war machine to their eastern frontiers, and Japan's colonial lands on the East Asian continent.

Capture and Internment

How did more than two and a half million Japanese nationals fall into Soviet hands at the end of World War II, nearly the entirety of which the Soviet Union and Japan were not at war? The two nations had long been locked in a struggle for hegemony over northeast Asia but had each studiously avoided being drawn into hostilities with the other, neither being a position to open another major war theater. Toward the end of securing their borders with the other so that they could concentrate their military efforts on existing conflicts, Japan and the Soviet Union entered into the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in April of 1941. Nevertheless, Japan continued to maintain a large military garrison, known as the Kwantung Army, in its puppet state of Manchukuo to guard against the possibility of Soviet attack. However, by the waning days of the war, the Kwantung Army had been gradually attenuated by the redeployment of its most able units to other theaters and was caught unprepared for the full brunt of a Soviet declaration of war and advance into Manchukuo in August of 1945.

¹⁰⁹ Kazuki Fumiko, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte* (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 60.

¹¹⁰ Zhengjiatun (鄭家屯) is now a part of the contemporary city of Shangliao (双辽) in the People's Republic of China.

A tremendous number of Japanese nationals, both military and civilian, came under the control of the Soviets at the end of the Second World War. In the days following Japan's capitulation to the Allied powers on August 15, 1945, anywhere from 560,000 to as many as 760,000 Japanese soldiers were detained and later exploited for forced labor by the Soviet Union. Despite these rather significant figures, the events have been frequently overlooked, or rendered a footnote, in a historiography more focused on Japan's postwar relationship with the United States. According to historian of postwar Japan John Dower, the incarceration and forced labor of the Japanese taken in Manchuria was "by far the most extensive, protracted, and abusive treatment of surrendered forces" during World War II.¹¹¹ The Soviet Union, in keeping with its commitment to the Allies to enter the war against Japan, "attacked the weakened Japanese forces in Manchuria on August 8, 1945, in compliance with its pledge at the Yalta Conference and in response to President Truman's request at the Potsdam Conference."¹¹² Though a Japanese agent in Outer Mongolia attempted to relay information on the movement of Soviet forces on the night of August 8, due to the absence of a key military intelligence official in Harbin, the message went unheeded, and "the entire Kwantung Army was caught sleeping as a result of this intelligence failure."¹¹³ Consequently, the Soviet force, which vastly outnumbered their opponents, overran the Japanese defenders, and though sporadic resistance continued through the end of the month, the leadership of the Kwangtung Army officially and unconditionally surrendered on August 20. This brought 575,000 square miles of territory as well

¹¹¹ Dower, John. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co) 1999) 51.

¹¹² Ulrich Straus, *The anguish of surrender: Japanese POW's of World War II* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003) xiv.

¹¹³ Nimmo, William F. *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 8-9.

as “approximately 2.7 million Japanese, of whom 850,000 were military personnel,” under the control of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁴

The unfortunate Japanese POWs in Soviet custody at the war’s end faced a quite different, and far grimmer, fate than their counterparts who were captured by or surrendered to other Allied forces. By the first anniversary of the war’s end “most Japanese in areas controlled by American, British Commonwealth, and Chinese forces had been returned to Japan.”¹¹⁵ The Soviets, however, had not even begun to undertake a repatriation program. The primary reason for this delay was that Stalin had other plans for the vast numbers of Japanese still under Soviet control: the postwar Five-Year Plan for national reconstruction (1946-1950). The Pyrrhic victory over the Nazis had been incredibly devastating to the USSR, and among all nations involved in World War II, “the Soviet Union suffered by far the heaviest casualties, with military and civilian deaths... estimated at 20 million or more.”¹¹⁶ In part to offset a potentially crippling shortage of manpower, the Soviets transported 450,000 Japanese POWs to camps, mines and other work sites for use as laborers, made to endure “subhuman conditions,” in the furtherance of the USSR’s domestic reconstruction. The overwhelming majority of these sites were in Siberia, scattered among the vast expanse of the “Gulag Archipelago” that the Bolsheviks had inherited from, and been using for similar purposes as, their Czarist predecessors. In this elaborate network of concentration-style work camps, criminals, political prisoners, and other POWs were exploited for labor in brutal, slave-like conditions, as it had been since Romanov times. Japanese POWs like Kazuki were made to work tirelessly toward the fulfillment of unrealistic work quotas, toiling away with inadequate food and water, housed in crude accommodations that barely protected them from the harsh winters. Many died on the cramped, unhygienic freight

¹¹⁴ Nimmo, William F. *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 13.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

cars that transported them to the camps, or later from malnutrition, overwork, disease, the physical abuse of guards, exposure, or any combination of these factors. The Japanese government believes that around 53,000 POWs perished in Soviet custody, and though the Russian government has been increasingly forthcoming in helping the Japanese government learn more, a precise figure may never be known. According to the calculations of historian William Nimmo, “a final tally based on analysis of SCAP [Supreme Command Allied Powers] and Japanese government records, news reports, and estimates” indicates that of the approximately 2.7 million Japanese in Soviet hands at war’s end, 254,000 were confirmed to be deceased, and an additional 93,000 were missing, presumed dead, or otherwise unaccounted for.¹¹⁷ As John Dower trenchantly observes “the chaos of these numbers,” and the years spent at hard labor in the frigid expanses of Siberia, “suggests how essentially meaningless the formal dating of ‘war’s end’ was for many Japanese.”¹¹⁸ August of 1945 was more the beginning of the troubles of Japanese POWs like Kazuki, rather than the end, which was years away.

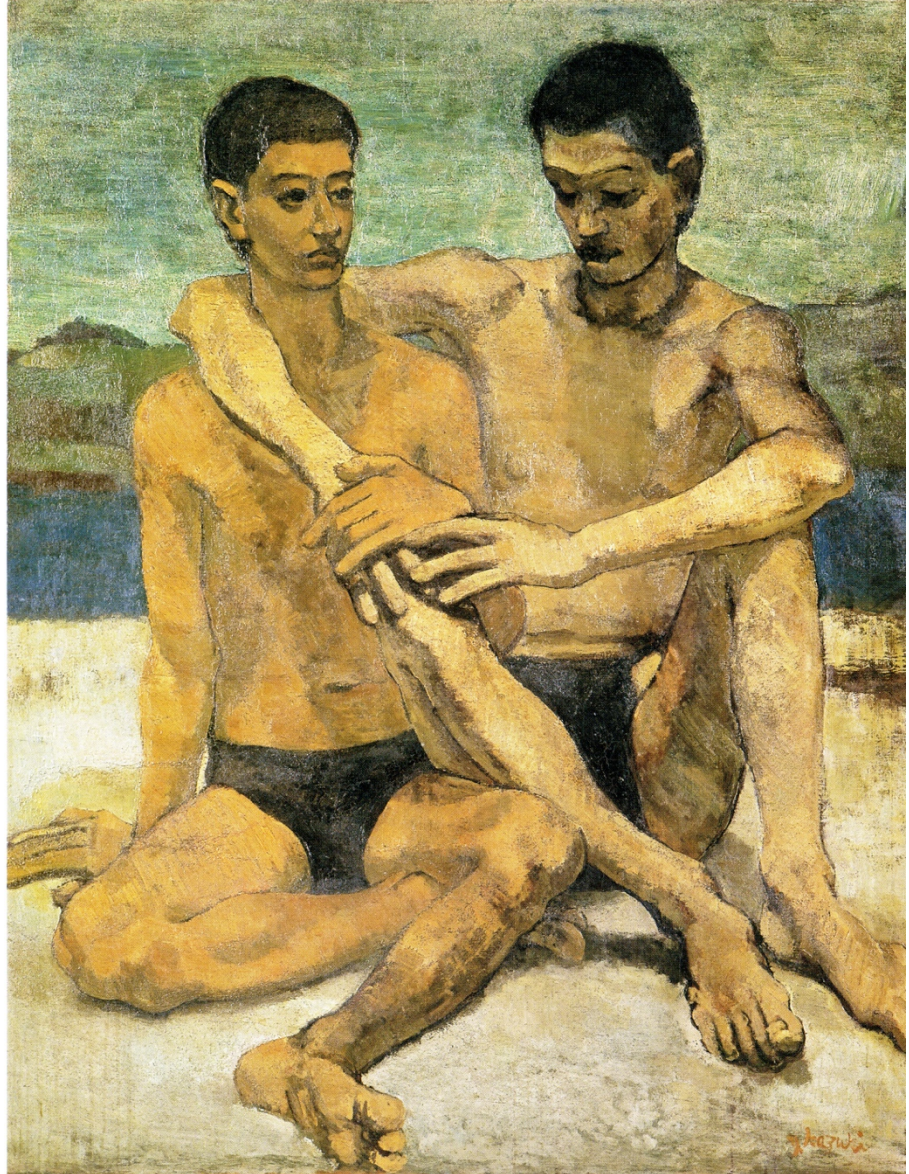
¹¹⁷ William F. Nimmo *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 116.

¹¹⁸ Dower, John. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999) 52.

Chapter 2 Images Supplement



2.1. Kazuki Yasuo, 自画像 – *Self-portrait*, 1936, oil on canvas, 61 x 45.5cm. Tokyo University of the Arts. (Kazuki Fumiko. *Kazuki Yasuo Isshun Issho no Gagyo*, 34)



2.2. Kazuki Yasuo, 二人座像 - *Two Seated Figures*, 1936, oil on canvas, 145.3 x 112.5cm. Private Collection. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 20)



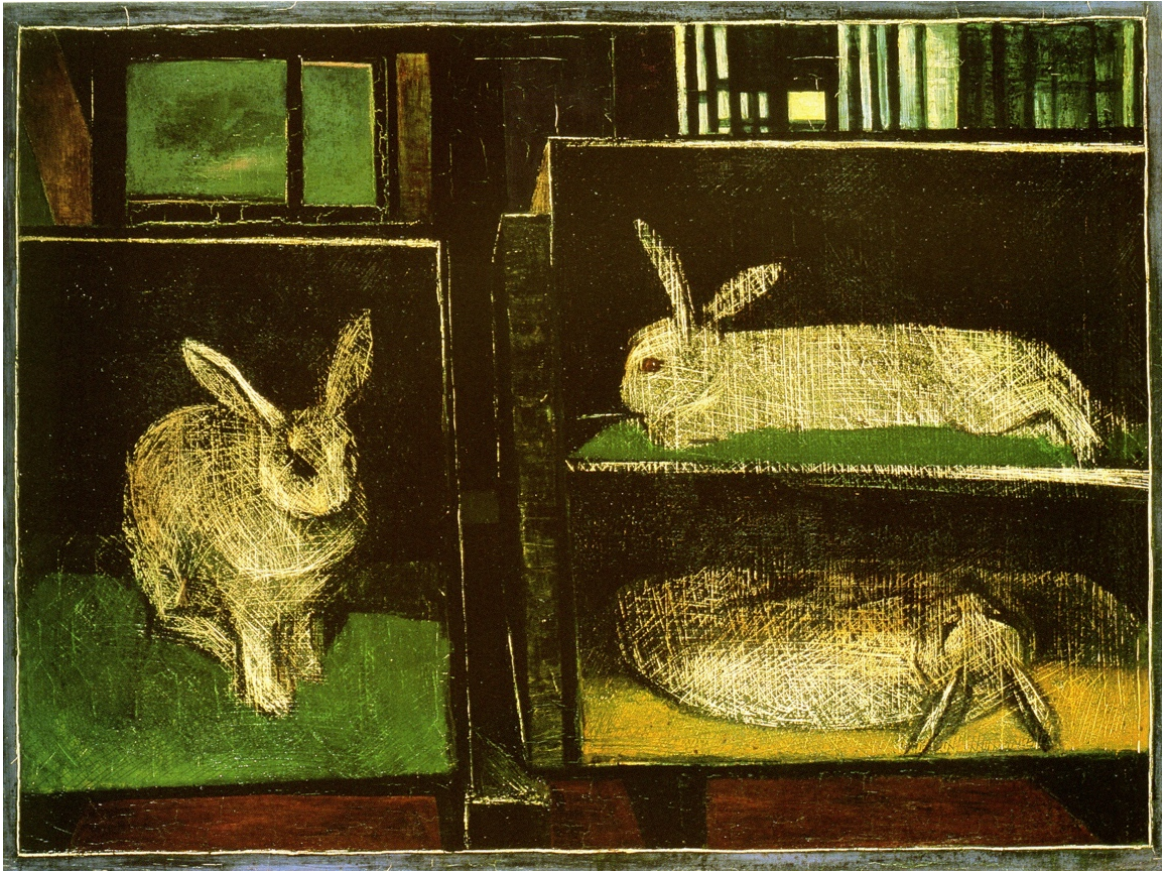
2.3. Photograph of Kazuki with extended family members that inspired the composition of *Two Seated Figures*. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki)



2.4. Umehara Ryūzaburō, 裸婦 - *Nude*, 1936, oil on canvas, 80.6 x 65.0cm. Hiroshima City Museum of Art. (Hiroshima Bijutsukan. *Hiroshima Bijutsukan Shūzōhin Zuroku: Nihon Yōga, Chūkoku*, 43)



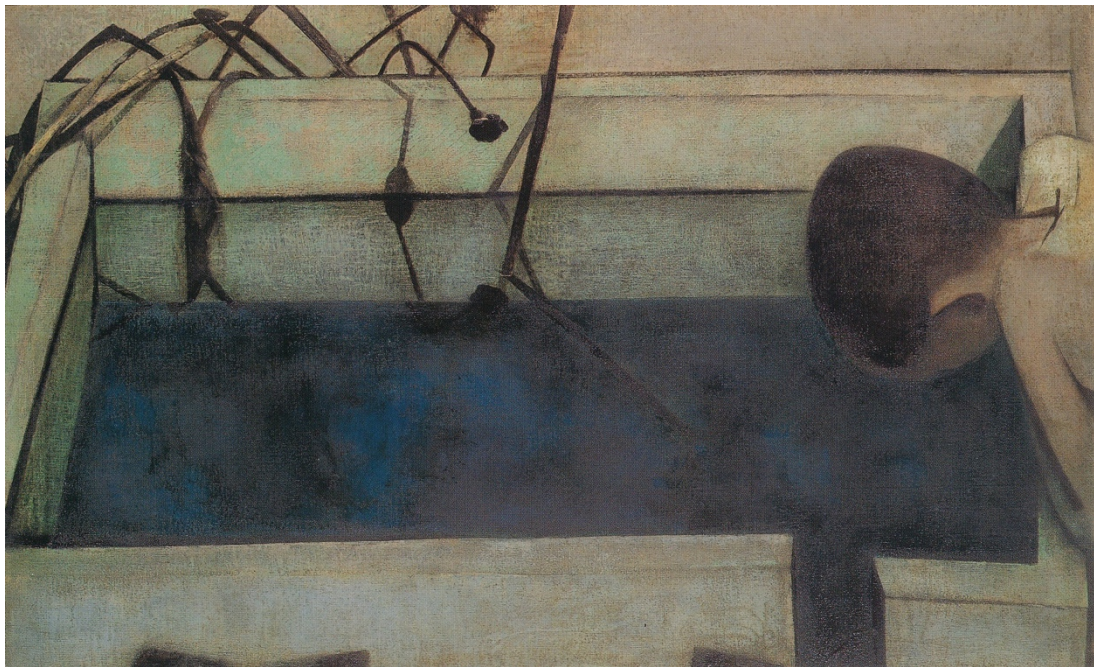
2.5. Kazuki's wife Fumiko, with their eldest son Naoki, 1942. (Kazuki, *Kazuki Yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, 181)



2.6. Kazuki Yasuo, 兎 - *Rabbit*, 1939, oil on canvas, 73.0 x 100.0cm. Private collection. (Kazuki, "My" *Earth* Vol. 1, 23)



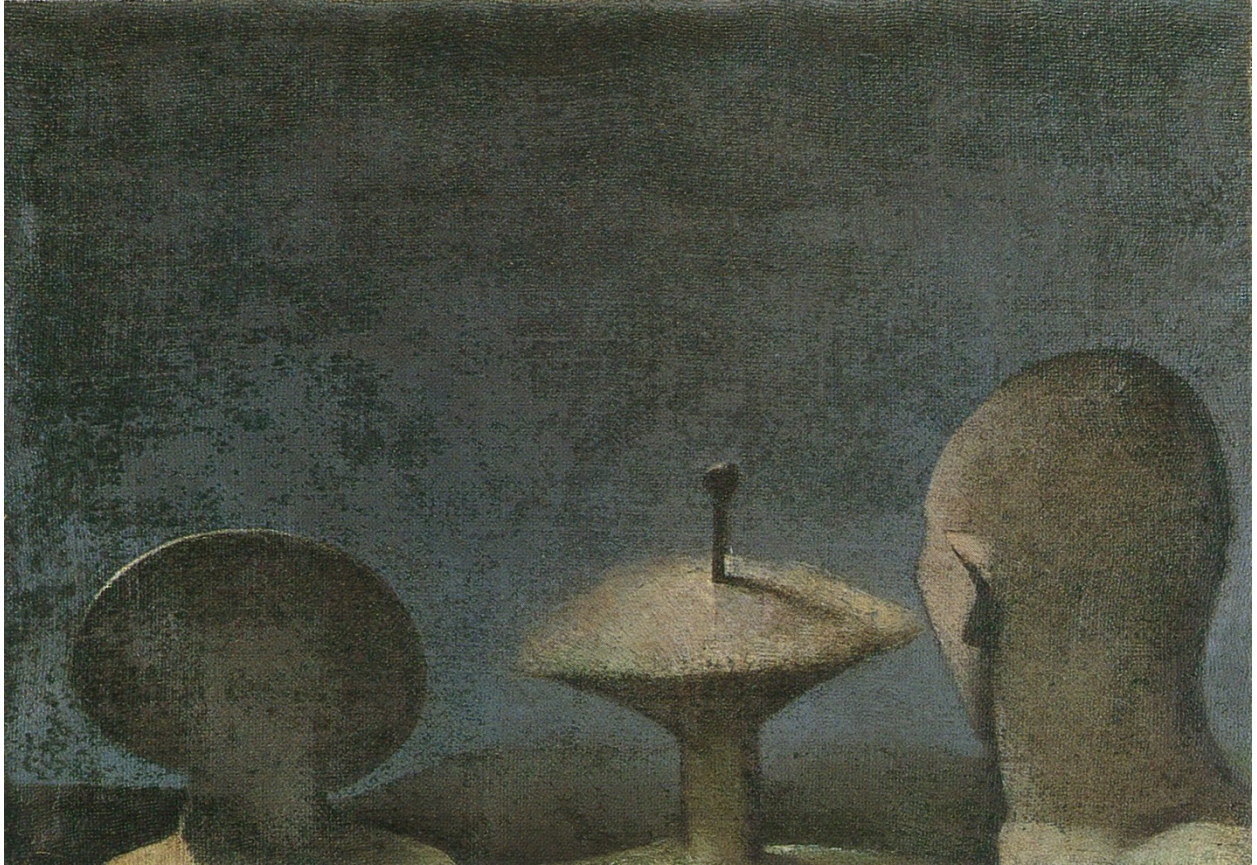
2.7. Kazuki Yasuo, 釣り床 - *Hammock*, 1941, oil on canvas, 73 x 117.3cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 24)



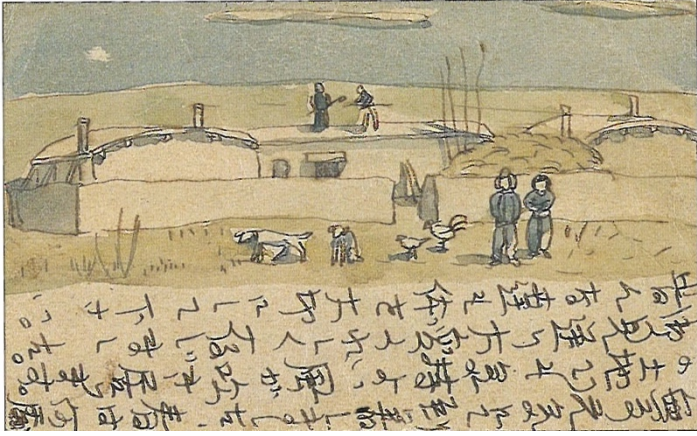
2.8. Kazuki Yasuo, 水鏡 - *Water Mirror*, 1942, oil on canvas, 72.3 x 116.5 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 25)



2.9. Kazuki Yasuo, 雲 - *Clouds*, 1968, oil on canvas, 116.1 x 72.9cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Art Museum. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 44)



2.10. Kazuki Yasuo, ホロンバイル - *Hulumbuir*, 1944, oil on canvas, 46.0 x 65.0cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, *Kazuki Yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, 80)



2.11. Kazuki Yasuo, Postcards sent from Hailar. Yamaguchi Prefectural Art Museum. (Kazuki, "My" Earth II, 134, 137)



2.12. Kazuki Yasuo, 黒い太陽 – *Black Sun*, 1961, oil on canvas, 116.1 x 72.9cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Art Museum. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 48)

Chapter 3:

Life in the Gulag, Repatriation, Interregnum

In “My Siberia,” Kazuki repeatedly disavows any desire to serve as a soldier. He characterizes himself as lacking the militarized patriotism relentlessly promoted in the Japan of his day, as a quiet but stubborn contrarian. In his memoir he writes:

I’ve been nothing more than a painter. In the army, or in the POW camps, I couldn’t completely become a soldier, completely become a POW. Neither the (Japanese) Imperial Army, nor the Soviet Union could force me to assume a persona like “soldier” or “POW,” they couldn’t force me to give up being a painter.^{119*}

Nevertheless, he was powerless to avoid conscription, and even more powerless over his fate once the Soviet Union declared war on Japan in August 1945 and rapidly overran the Japanese forces he was stationed with in Manchuria. But he would survive this and subsequent hardships, and eventually return to his rural home and his artistic practice. Upon his return he struggled with initial attempts to deal with his memories in the best way that he knew how, visually, and entered a near decade long representational silence on his time as a soldier and prisoner of war.

Kazuki broke through this interregnum in part by taking, at the persistent urging of his mentor and benefactor Fukushima Shigetarō, a fortuitously timed trip to Western Europe, right at the time that he was developing new stylistic innovations. The experience of the trip would help him achieve the material and conceptual breakthroughs necessary to enable him to represent his memories—and to re-present them to himself—in a way that did justice to those memories.

¹¹⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 32.

And, perhaps more importantly, to do justice to the dead comrades who populated so many of those memories.

To the North, to the West—to Siberia

When the Soviet Union detained Japanese POWs in Siberia in the wake of the war's end in 1945, some were not repatriated until as late as 1956.¹²⁰ While Kazuki would have to endure only around two years of detention, this early period of forced labor in Siberian camps was far harsher than the period after 1947.¹²¹ In the first days that the Soviets held Kazuki and his comrades though, perhaps the most unbearable part of their suffering was the uncertainty they faced. The POWs were packed into appallingly unhygienic freight cars and told nothing of their fate. Kazuki dramatizes this agonizing unease in one of the Siberia Series' most iconic works, *To the North, to the West* (1959, Fig. 3.1).

The directions cited in the work's title would provide relief to the POWs' suspense, but not in the way that they hoped. As the trains carrying the Japanese soldiers moved away from ports to the east that might lead them back to Japan, the reality that their repatriation would not be soon forthcoming gradually dawned on the unfortunate men. Kazuki describes how, crammed in, with no room to sleep, the men peered out the barred windows of the freight car, hoping to divine their path and destination, hoping, against mounting evidence, that they were going east, to Vladivostok, and from there, back to Japan.¹²² The painted representation of this memory depicts the gaunt, stylized faces that are the series' figural hallmark. Kazuki identifies

¹²⁰ Nimmo, William F. *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 113, Yulia Mikhailova and M. William Steele. *Japan and Russia: Three Centuries of Mutual Images* (Folkestone, UK: Global Oriental, 2008) 91.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹²² Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 76.

this work as one of the first in which he had fully developed this particular idiosyncrasy of the series' style, writing in "My Siberia" that "In this work, I depicted 'my face' for the first time. Up to then, I'd painted some portraits. However, I didn't [yet] have a face I could call "'My' Face."^{123*} The leitmotif of this "expressionless face is common to the Siberia Series."¹²⁴ * The expressions on the eight visible faces are uniformly placid, the anxiety of the soldiers communicated mostly through Kazuki's cramped composition. The eight visible faces are packed in close, cropped in behind the bars over the window, which several hands desperately grasp.

In the chaotic final days of the war, the once illustrious Kwantung Army, to which Kazuki was attached, had been significantly attenuated, with many of its better units dispersed to other theatres of the war.¹²⁵ In June of 1945, Kazuki, along with a battalion of approximately one thousand soldiers of the 19th Field Cargo Unit had been moved from Hailar to Zhengjiatun. The Soviet Union declared war on the 8th of August, and in response Kazuki and his comrades were again moved to Mukden on the 14th.¹²⁶ It was there, on the 15th that the Japanese soldiers learned of Japan's unconditional surrender.¹²⁷ While Kazuki describes some of his fellow soldiers receiving this news as "a thunderclap from a blue sky," he was unmoved. He wondered only why it had taken so long to end.¹²⁸ He took a knife and cut a tarp from the freight car to fashion a bag to carry his art supplies box. He describes how this helped him feel a sense of

¹²³ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 80.

¹²⁴ Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū* (Yamaguchi: Chūgoku Shimbunsha 2004) 47.

¹²⁵ Glantz, David M. and Jonathan House. *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995) 277.

¹²⁶ Many cities in China are known by different names depending on various factors such as era and language. The city now known as Shenyang (瀋陽/沈阳) was formerly known by its Manchu name, Mukden (奉天, rendered as Fengtian in Chinese). This former name, which is how Kazuki refers to the city, is read in Japanese as "hōten". In 1970, Kazuki painted a diptych with the title 奉天, usually rendered in English translations as "Mukden".

¹²⁷ Megumi Yama. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou*, (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 90.

¹²⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 69.

reclaiming his identity as a painter, rather than an unwilling soldier. For Kazuki, “the act of tearing up some of the materials of the Emperor’s army... was when I first really felt that the war was over.”^{129*}

The following day began Kazuki’s ill-fated trip to the west. Kazuki’s unit withdrew towards Korea, staying from the 17th in the city of Andong.¹³⁰ On the 22nd they were taken into custody by the Soviet military forces, and ordered to disarm. It was a month before they departed Andong, on the 23rd of September, heading north, arriving the next day back in Mukden. Once there, the units of Japanese soldiers were reorganized, and around one thousand men of the 48th Work Battalion (which included Kazuki) and five hundred of the 49th were loaded onto freight cars leaving Mukden. In November, the rail line forked at Achinsk, and the men continued on a branch line of the Siberian railway. On the 29th, the 48th battalion was subdivided into several smaller groups, and Kazuki and around 250 other demobilized soldiers were taken to Syya, in the mountains, and interned in a camp around four kilometers from the village.¹³¹ The Japanese POWs could not have known that their fate was to be extended exploitation at the hands of the Soviets. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008), the Russian dissident and perhaps the twentieth century’s most famous gulag prisoner, encountered some Japanese internees during his own term of imprisonment in the camps. He described their detention as “an act of revenge, as well as a means of holding onto manpower for as long a period as possible.”¹³²

¹²⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 69.

¹³⁰ Andong (安東/安东) is the former name of the city now known as Dandong (丹東/丹东), which sits on the Chinese side of the People’s Republic’s border with North Korea.

¹³¹ Syya (in Russian, Сьѧ) is a small town in the Republic of Khakassia, in the present-day Russian Federation. Kazuki renders this as セーヤ, (“Se-ya”) and in previous English translations of Kazuki’s writings, and about his time in Siberia, the term is usually Romanized as “Seya”. The town is better known for the ancient archaeological site of Malaya Syya, a settlement dating back nearly 35,000 years, than for the long defunct internment camp.

¹³² Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn. *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, I-II*. (Harper Perennial, 1991) 84.

As Solzhenitsyn's quote reminds us, one of the key reasons the Soviets detained the Japanese soldiers was to mercilessly exploit their labor, and they were put to work immediately upon arriving at various camps scattered across the so-called gulag archipelago. One of the primary tasks imposed upon Kazuki and his compatriots was woodcutting for fuel for electrical generation. This was their first experience of Siberia's brutal winters, which exacerbated the 10% attrition rate, with many former soldiers dying primarily from malnutrition caused by insufficient food provided by the camp authorities. The conditions at Syya, the first camp where Kazuki would spend a significant time, were the worst of any of the several locations that Kazuki would be interned.

Life in the Camps

"We were now merely a moving mass of flesh that was fast deteriorating from malnutrition and the general strain of life in captivity."¹³³

-Former POW Iwao Peter Sano

Kazuki later described the six months he spent at Syya as "the most miserable of my entire life."^{134*} Kazuki's experiences there are representative of the spectrum of the worst abuses of the gulag system, and the hardships experienced by the Japanese POWs. The unfortunate internees suffered from insufficient food, poorly constructed and maintained lodging, dangerous forced labor with little or no safety precautions, perfunctory medical attention, and brutality at the hands of the guards.

¹³³ Iwao Peter Sano. *1,000 Days in Siberia; The Odyssey of a Japanese-American POW*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 83.

¹³⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 87.

As military historian S. I. Kuznetsov notes, the official—already modest—guidelines for the amount of food POWs were supposed to receive, according to the official daily norms set by the Soviet Union’s Ministry for Internal Affairs “did not at all correspond to reality.”¹³⁵ The already meagre food situation was made even worse by corrupt camp officials who embezzled food and other goods meant for the POWs.¹³⁶ And these circumstances only exacerbated the reality that even the (fictional) norm was, under the circumstances, inadequate. Kuznetsov notes that “[i]n conditions of hard labor, after a short period such a norm of nourishment [as provided in administrative guidelines] led a person to malnutrition.” Additionally, some POWs were denied their food until after they had completed their work quotas or were given food based upon the amount of work they could complete.¹³⁷ The inadequate nutrition regime “led to the Japanese having to scour the paths and worksites outside the camp for edible plants to supplement their meager rations.”¹³⁸ Unfortunately for some, such acts of desperation “sometimes led to POWs suffering from illness or from inedible or poisonous plants.”¹³⁹ Kazuki dramatizes this desperate situation on canvas in 1954, seven years after his eventual repatriation, with *Shennong* (Fig. 3.2, discussed below).

The circumstances of the POWs’ housing were also deplorable. Kazuki and the other internees were frequently housed in “tents, planks from barracks, and mud huts, adapted as lodgings”, where temperatures sometimes dropped to 25 degrees below zero.¹⁴⁰ In some cases,

¹³⁵ S. I. Kuznetsov. “The situation of Japanese prisoners of war in Soviet camps (1945-1956)”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8:3, 1995. 614., Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 47.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 615-616.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ S. I. Kuznetsov. “The situation of Japanese prisoners of war in Soviet camps (1945-1956)”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8:3, 1995. 617

the POWs arrived at a camp that had no lodging for them at all, and they were made to construct their own accommodations.

The labor that the POWs were forced to perform was physically demanding and often dangerous under ordinary circumstances, and this was made significantly worse by the almost complete lack of even basic safety precautions. According to Kuznetsov, for the most part, “neither the administration nor the POWs themselves observed any sort of technical security (safety) measures.”¹⁴¹ He also notes that sawmill work was especially dangerous. In Kazuki’s description of such work, he mentions a fellow POW named Ishida, drafted at the same time as he, who was crushed under a runaway fallen tree a full two meters in diameter. The snow cushioned the impact of the tree, preventing his immediate death, but, severely injured, Ishida later succumbed to his injuries back at camp.¹⁴²

In general, many POWs like Kazuki report that the Russians “did not have a great deal of animosity toward the Japanese” perhaps in light of the brevity of hostilities.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, Japanese POWs also often suffered abusive treatment at the hands of camp personnel, particularly guards. The guards were often cruel to the POWs, frequently stealing their personal belongings, and gratuitous killing of internees, often flimsily justified as a reaction to “escape attempts,” were not unheard of, particularly in the early period of Japanese internment (which corresponds with Kazuki’s term of incarceration).¹⁴⁴ Kazuki describes being tempted to attempt escape himself, but dismissed such thoughts, realizing that even in the unlikely event he could evade the immediate presence of Soviet guards, a long, perilous, and completely unknown

¹⁴¹ S. I. Kuznetsov. “The situation of Japanese prisoners of war in Soviet camps (1945-1956)”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8:3, 1995. 624.

¹⁴² *Ibid* 106.

¹⁴³ Iwao Peter Sano. *1,000 Days in Siberia; The Odyssey of a Japanese-American POW*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 65.

¹⁴⁴ S. I. Kuznetsov. “The situation of Japanese prisoners of war in Soviet camps (1945-1956)”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8:3, 1995. 617-618.

ordeal awaited him so far from home. He wondered, as most of his peers did, “(h)ow many hundreds of kilometers to Korea, how could I finally make it that far? You’d be either caught and lynched by Manchurian (locals) or collapse from sheer exhaustion.”¹⁴⁵

In addition to the possibility of physical violence from their Soviet jailers, Kazuki and his peers also had to contend with violence from former officers among the Japanese POWs. In camps such as Syya, “the authority of the Imperial Army was still strictly observed.”^{146*} This was rather unfortunate for the already beleaguered enlisted and conscript POWs, as the Imperial Japanese military was notorious for the cruelty of its officers toward subordinates. Kazuki recalls in his memoirs the death of one POW named Imamura, who was severely beaten over his defiant attitude with former officers. In a dazed state due to a beating from a Japanese officer POW, he fell over into an open bonfire and later died of burn wounds.¹⁴⁷

All of the atrocious conditions described above were especially pronounced during the early period of internment.¹⁴⁸ The situation of Kazuki and his fellows was to improve at least somewhat after an initial period of extraordinary difficulty. As historian William Nimmo notes in his monograph on the detention of Japanese POWs in Siberia *Behind a Curtain of Silence*, “Prison camp life improved as the USSR began to recover economically and socially from the devastation suffered during World War II.”¹⁴⁹ The Soviet authorities were loath to relinquish their captive labor pool until after their war reconstruction needs were less dire.

¹⁴⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 76.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 106.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ S. I. Kuznetsov. “The situation of Japanese prisoners of war in Soviet camps (1945-1956)”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 8:3, 1995. 627.

¹⁴⁹ Nimmo, William F. *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988). 53.

At the beginning of June 1946, the Japanese POWs at Syya were ordered to move to Chernogorsk. The move was a welcome relief for Kazuki and the others, as the conditions at the camp in Chernogorsk were far less severe than those of Syya. Kazuki describes Syya as “among the worst camps,” and in comparison, life at Chernogorsk “seemed to be relatively rather easy.”^{150*} The difference between the two camps was, to Kazuki, “the difference between heaven and hell.”^{151*} In Chernogorsk, the men were lodged in an incomplete barracks, and were tasked with working on the lime plaster walls of the Map Division building. This experience would later prove fortuitous in Kazuki’s development of his signature Siberia Series style. The thick plaster of the work inspired the development of a highly textured, admixed oil painting *matière* distinctive to his later style (which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Four). After around two months at the camp in Chernogorsk, Kazuki and his fellows were moved to the incomplete barracks #2, and Kazuki, due to his background, was attached to the camp’s Command Section. In this capacity he was tasked with creating portraits of Stalin, the camp’s officers, and other activities that drew on his specific set of skills.¹⁵² Though he was still sometimes made to take part in the general manual labor projects alongside his fellow POWs, his overall workload was substantially reduced. Kazuki’s art activities brought him minor privileges from the camp authorities, for which he felt a certain degree of sheepishness, in light of the general suffering of the POWs.

Thusly, as he was able to do during his time as a soldier in Manchuria, Kazuki was able to practice art, after a fashion, while in the gulag, and this became a component of his efforts to endure his difficult circumstances. Learning of Kazuki’s unique skills, the camp authorities set

¹⁵⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 32.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 100.

¹⁵² Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyararī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki* (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 202.

him to work creating “instructional pamphlets and posters for the five-year plan which was being promoted at the time, a portrait of a group of officers to hang in the POW camp commandant’s reception room, and a portrait of Stalin.”^{153*} Kazuki was relieved to be doing something he actually enjoyed (though he was still made to do hard manual labor with his non-artist peers), but he harbored no illusions about the nature of his visual labor. He later relates in his memoirs that “[i]t’s not like I felt that I was practicing some sort of sacred technique of the artist,” adding that his artistic work for the camp authorities “was purely another kind of manual labor.”^{154*} In light of his activities producing works for the Soviets, when the group he’d been with ever since coming to Manchuria was moved, Kazuki was kept at the camp in Chernogorsk.

Unfortunately, none of the works that Kazuki produced for the camp authorities survives.¹⁵⁵ However, in addition to his compulsory artistic practice, Kazuki managed to engage in art-related activities that were more meaningful for him. Significantly, he began planning themes and motifs for works he envisioned undertaking after his eventual repatriation. Given the straightened circumstances of the camps, this was primarily limited to conceptual exercises, such as planning motifs and themes for future works to be executed at some indeterminate time in the future. He even found downtime to occasionally work on sketches to develop these motifs and recorded a dozen major themes on the inside lid of his paint supply box, which had been

¹⁵³ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 115.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 116.

¹⁵⁵ There is a possible exception to this. The Kazuki Museum in Misumi has in its collection six sketches of what appear to be Russian officers, or possibly Stalin, made by Kazuki in ink, crayon and watercolors on paper (Fig. 3.5). The sketches were displayed in 1994 as a part of the exhibition “Origins of the Siberia Series” (シベリヤ・シリーズへの原点展) at the Kazuki Museum in Misumi labeled as *Portrait(s) of Stalin* (スターリン肖像). The time when the sketches were made, or their purpose is unknown, however. Additionally, it is not clear who precisely is represented in the images, as the rank decorations and medals worn by the men represented differ across the sketches, suggesting different subjects. Kazuki’s superior officer, Ubara Takaaki, believes that though Kazuki produced pictures of Stalin and some Soviet officers, these sketches were made after the fact, rather than in Siberia, but this is not absolutely clear. *Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan Kenkyū Kiyō =: Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art* (Yamaguchi-shi: Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1999) 44.

given to him by his mother, and which Kazuki managed to keep during his entire time in Siberia, and bring home to Japan (Fig. 3.3).¹⁵⁶ He did this in the form of twelve Chinese characters, each indicating a motif (though some overlap to a certain degree). These were: 道 (road), 鋸 (saw), 朝 (morning), 陽 (sun), 伐 (to fell, as in woodcutting), 雨 (rain), 葬 (interment), 藥 (medicine), 月 (moon), 飛 (to fly) 風 (wind), 憩 (rest). Most of these twelve themes he later translated into major works in the Siberia Series. However, there is a certain tension between this categorization of motifs and the content of the paintings. Most of the paintings in the Siberia Series represent the sufferings and privations of the gulag—hunger, forced labor, homesickness, death, captivity.

With the exception of 葬 (interment), the characters Kazuki chose do not, on their own, necessarily suggest the extremely bleak atmosphere of the series. Several of the characters point immediately at their manifestations in the series, particularly features or dimensions of the natural world, such as “Morning,” “Sun,” “Rain,” and “Moon.” But at least 36 of the paintings in the series do not seem to fall into any of the twelve motif categories at all. “Interment” and “Sun” have the most, at four each, and “Rest,” “Flight,” and “Rain” each have two, but remaining categories each have only a single related work.¹⁵⁷ While keeping hold of his paint box through his time in Siberia was clearly critically important to him—to maintain a tenuous connection to his self-identity as a painter—it seems that after his return to Japan, the content of his Siberia-related works diverged from what he had imagined—and inscribed on that box—during his interment.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ In his memoirs Kazuki describes the means by which he was able to hold onto his art supplies box. The Soviets had confiscated the box, but a month into his interment a military doctor asked Kazuki for a demonstration of his skills, and pleased with the resulting impromptu portrait produced, returned to him the box, with a request that Kazuki paint a portrait of the doctor’s wife. He would go on to do art at the request of various camp authorities throughout his time in the camps. Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 95-96.

¹⁵⁷ Kazuki Yasuo, et al. *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbun Seibu Honsha Kikakubu, 1989) 143.

¹⁵⁸ Kazuki instantiates this practice into a work of the Siberia Series, the painting *Color Box*, painted in 1972. A recumbent figure occupies the central third of the horizontal canvas, mostly covered by an overcoat. One hand rests on each side of the face, which is almost completely obscured. Nothing else is indicated in the space, and the typical yellow ochre is darker and dingier than other works of the series.

These terms, brushed on his paint box, and a simple scene of the gulag etched into his mess tin (Fig. 3.4), were the only “art” produced in the camps that he managed to bring home to Japan.¹⁵⁹

Many of the works of the Siberia Series represent the various hardships and privations that characterized camp life. Typical of such works is *Shennong* (1954, Fig. 3.2, corresponding to the character 藥, “medicine”). A single visage, in the death-mask like stylization that populates Kazuki’s Siberia Series, peers out from a black rectangle, perhaps a window. An equally stylized hand holds an herb or plant in front of the lower portion of the face. Framing this window is the admixture of oils, soot and grit that renders the *matière* thick and heavily textured and renders the color palette dark and turgid—the series’ tonal trademark. The title refers to Shennong (神農 in both Japanese and Traditional Chinese characters, Romanized as *Shin'nō* in Japanese) a mythical king/deity of ancient China, said to have taught early peoples agriculture and how to use plants for herbal medicine. In Kazuki’s later explication of the piece, he describes how most of the soldiers in his group were farmers or had grown up in rural environs like himself. Kazuki’s own grandfather was a Chinese herbalist, and these factors helped him and his fellow farmboy POWs forage for food, and avoid potentially poisonous plants, even in the unfamiliar natural environment of Siberia.¹⁶⁰

The atrocious state that Kazuki and his compatriots were in reminded him, in later years, of contemporary atrocities far away. In “My Siberia” he made a direct comparison with the horrors of Europe, recalling: “Without exception, those who died were just skin and bones. After

The twelve Chinese characters Kazuki had inscribed on his box are roughly incised into the *matière*, six above the figure and six below.

¹⁵⁹ The Kazuki Museum in Misumi has a collection of sketches of Russian officers and/or Stalin (Fig 3.5) that are of unknown date and purpose. Kazuki describes creating portraits of Russian officers as well as Stalin in “My Siberia,” and it is possible that these sketches were for that purpose, and made while in Siberia, but their provenance remains unclear. *Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan Kenkyū Kiyō* =: *Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art* (Yamaguchi-shi: Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1999) 44.

¹⁶⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 98.

I came back to Japan, I saw a picture of survivors of Auschwitz, in a state like skin hanging from bones, and it reminded me of my soldier friends who died in Siberia.”*¹⁶¹

Around the beginning of the new year of 1947, Kazuki was finally allowed to send a single postcard to his family in Japan (Fig. 3.6). This brief missive is the only extant text from Kazuki during his time in Siberia. Due to strict censorship by the Soviets, he was compelled to write in the phonetic script *katakana*, rather than the Japanese language’s usual mix of Chinese characters and Japanese syllabary. The short message focuses on assuring his loved ones that he is well, inquiring after their well-being, and expressing his eager anticipation of reunification with them. He also mentions that he has been able to make pictures, and that he hopes to show these to them soon.¹⁶² The card is a clear effort to put a brave face on still quite fraught and difficult circumstances. Kazuki’s casual, straightforward style reflects both his usual plain-spoken personality while also masking his concern for those he loved so far away.

Repatriation

Despite Kazuki’s carefully crafted assurances to his family, he could not have known that his return to Japan actually was quite imminent. The decision was made in April of 1947, and by the 15th Kazuki was moved from Chernogorsk to the port city of Nakhodka, on the Sea of Japan. Though the Japanese POWs of Kazuki’s group were on the cusp of their repatriation, they were

¹⁶¹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 103.

¹⁶² The brief missive reads as follows:

“You must be very worried, but I’m feeling good, so please rest assured, I hope that everyone is doing well. Naoki, Keiko, Hisako must all be getting bigger, and I look forward to the day I return home. Father even sometimes paints pictures. I’ll paint beautiful pictures and can show them to all of you soon. Good wishes to everyone helping all of you out. I await details about how things are going there. Give my best to Mother. Take care of yourselves. I pray for your health. Goodbye.”*

Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 123.

still put to work, ordered to assist local farmers around the coastal city.¹⁶³ Several works in the Siberia Series depict this final leg of Kazuki's journey from Siberia to Japan, including *Nakhodka* (1961), *The Sea of Japan* (1972), and what might be considered the capstone work of the series, *Beach (Nakhodka)* (1974, to which I will return in detail in the next chapter).

On May 15, 1947 a final roll call was carried out for Kazuki and other Japanese POWs, and the Soviets loaded them onto the *Esan-maru*, a Japanese vessel for transporting repatriates. On the 21st, the ship arrived at Maizuru, a port on the Sea of Japan which was the primary point of repatriation of demobilized Japanese soldiers as well as civilians. The men were held for three days for quarantine and repatriation procedures, and then released with 500 yen of the new postwar currency.¹⁶⁴ As with so many of the key moments in his Siberian experience, Kazuki memorialized this long-awaited event, twenty years later, in the painting *Demobilization (Gangplank)* (1967 Fig. 3.5). He also discusses his return in "My Siberia." While travelling from Maizuru to Senzaki, to be met by his daughter, he by chance encountered his uncle on a train, who informed Kazuki of the passing of his mother. The news was a shock to Kazuki, who, despite a somewhat distant relationship with his mother, he recalled that "[w]henver I thought about home while in Siberia, my wife, children, and mother formed a trinity in my heart."^{165*} In addition to the paintbox that his mother had given him, and he had managed to hold onto throughout his time in Siberia, she'd also given him a sweater in his third year of art school that he also held onto throughout his internment. Something of a fetish, "a substitute for

¹⁶³ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 126, *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 202.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁶⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 131.

my mother” that he wore continuously, the garment became a symbol of the unrecoverable losses of his time away from Japan.¹⁶⁶

Indoctrination and Repatriation

In addition to the grueling physical privations that Japanese POWs endured during their incarceration, the Soviets had subjected them to an intense and multi-faceted program of Communist ideological indoctrination, which would come back to haunt many of the men after their repatriation. The conspicuous lag in the return of Japanese POWs to Japan led Allied observers to realize that “the Soviets were delaying repatriation in order to subject prisoners to intensive indoctrination, so that they might contribute to communist agitation upon their return,” and the POWs themselves soon learned that at the very least “a professed acceptance of Communism was a prerequisite to repatriation.”¹⁶⁷ These activities were assisted by POWs who themselves already possessed leftist leanings, as well as Japan Communist Party (JCP) members who had been exiled from Japan in the 1930’s. Indoctrination continued nearly unabated, even past repatriation, as JCP members in Japan were on hand to greet ships bearing returning POWs in an effort to seamlessly integrate the new arrivals into JCP activism.¹⁶⁸

As a consequence of their indoctrination under duress, the difficulties of the POWs did not end upon repatriation but were merely transformed into social and political problems rather than a physical and psychological battle for survival. The political climate in Japan at the time of the POWs’ return could not have been worse for the former detainees, and they found

¹⁶⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 131.

¹⁶⁷ Nimmo, William F. *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) 66.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 103.

themselves caught in the ideological crossfire of the early Cold War. Certain highly publicized returns involving returnees more vocally committed to Communism and the Soviets stoked fears that not only these “red repatriates,” but all POWs returning from the Soviet Union might actively work towards Communist subversion, or at the very least prove disruptive to Japanese society. Historian Lori Watt describes one such scene at the Maizuru Regional Repatriation Center, the primary intake processing center for the Siberian POWs, in the summer of 1949:

Plans for warmly receiving the men were thwarted, though, when the men who were finally released by the Soviets arrived in Maizuru. At the pier, they linked arms and executed a ‘landing in the face of the enemy’ (*tekizen jōriku*), that enemy being ‘the land of the emperor.’ Without greeting even their mothers, they sang the Internationale, danced collective farm dances, and clamored to join the Japan Communist Party.¹⁶⁹

Kazuki relates a similar experience, in narrating his own repatriation in 1970’s “My Siberia.” He recalls how, upon arriving at Maizuru

a Japanese political officer of the Communist Party gave a propaganda speech. I don’t remember it very well, but it was something about how now that Japan was under the occupation of the United States, we should consider our return home a “landing in the face of the enemy.” At any rate, when the speech was over, we all clapped enthusiastically, and collectively shouted “Stalin banzai*!” and threw our hands in the air. “Hitler banzai!” or “The Devil banzai!”... we’d have cheered for anyone.”^{170*}

Despite the ironic skepticism of the above quote, it’s not clear how Kazuki felt about his indoctrination. His commentary in “My Siberia” comes twenty-three years after the fact. Despite

¹⁶⁹ Lori Watt. *When empire comes home: repatriation and reintegration in postwar Japan*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2009) 128.

¹⁷⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 109.

the fact that “most of the Siberian detainees shed their socialist rhetoric upon arrival in Japan when provided with evidence, in the form of newspaper coverage, of American and Japanese attempts to free them from captivity,” the stigma of suspected Communist sympathies lingered.¹⁷¹

Many POWs had the misfortune of returning after the so-called “reverse-course” of the American Occupation authorities, which saw a dramatic shift away from the progressive reforms of the early years of the occupation. With the support of the conservative Japanese government, Occupation authorities had begun cracking down on the organized left in the media, government, and workforce with increasing vigorousness, especially on those suspected of having communist sympathies. Many companies discriminated against former POWs in hiring, even refusing to allow previous employees to return to their pre-war jobs. To make matters worse for the men, “unions within these companies, eager to distance themselves from the taint of communism and wary that Soviet detainees were willing to work for any wage, treated repatriates with similar disdain.”¹⁷² Squeezed between the opposing poles of an increasingly globalized ideological battle, the men found few advocates in the early postwar years. The Left, and actual communist sympathizers, were uncomfortable with “obvious victims of Soviet mistreatment and living proof of the failure of state socialism, [which] presented evidence contrary to the idea of a Soviet utopia,” while “detainees who provided more nuanced accounts of their time in detention, or those who had expressed sympathy for the Russian people, who suffered along with them, provided ammunition for the people on the right to criticize the detainees as pro-Soviet and communist.” In the end, “no group found any political use for the detainees, except as negative publicity.”¹⁷³ This doomed them to a political and social purgatory

¹⁷¹ Lori Watt. *When empire comes home: repatriation and reintegration in postwar Japan*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 2009) 128.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* 133.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* 134.

of sorts, the kind of which other more organized and savvy postwar returnee and “victim” interest groups, such as victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, civilian repatriates from Manchuria, and even wealthy landlords, managed to avoid.¹⁷⁴

Kazuki does not speak much of any postwar experience of discrimination based on his status as a Siberian POW returnee. However, his return, in the summer of 1947, was prior to the worst of the negative publicity, and this perhaps spared him harsher consequences. As was his frequently expressed wish, he returned directly to Misumi, and to teaching art. His main commentary on the extensive attempted indoctrination of POWs is his work *Demonstration* (1972, Fig. 3.7). In the work, dark masses of POWs stand lined up and marching, carrying brilliant red banners, a vivid contrast to the series’ characteristic background of formless yellowish ochre. His commentary on the painting reveals both the coercive nature of the Soviets’ “education” and also the hollowness with which most POWs embraced it: “I was forced to sing The Internationale for the first time at Nakhodka. We marched around the camp, arm in arm, from early morning. They told us that we would get to return home sooner if we did this.”* Kazuki himself never expressed any sympathy for communist political ideology, though this dismissal of the Soviets’ coercive attempts at indoctrination come twenty-five years later, so it’s not entirely clear how he may have felt while taking part in such activities.

¹⁷⁴ James Orr’s *The victim as hero: ideologies of peace and national identity in postwar Japan* meticulously describes the ways in which a variety of interest groups, such as the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese who were settlers in Manchuria, large landowners forced by the occupation authorities to sell their holdings at punishingly low rates, and others, managed, through shrewd political and social organizing as well as careful deployment of their status as “victims,” to win varying degrees and kinds of compensation from the Japanese government. Siberian POWs have to date had no similar organized lobbying effort for compensation. James Joseph Orr, *The victim as hero: ideologies of peace and national identity in postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001).

Return to Pre-war Life in Misumi

Finally repatriated after his continental tour of duty and Siberian internment, Kazuki immediately stepped back into the contours of his pre-deployment life. He arrived at his home in Misumi on May 24th and was reinstated to Shimonoseki Girls' High School on 31st, with a salary of 850 yen per month. He was soon transferred to Fukugawa Girls High School (which later merged with Otsu Middle School to form the new Otsu High School) where he would teach until his retirement in 1960. This was close enough to commute from the family home, where he would live for the rest of his life. In 1948, his wife Fumiko gave birth to another son, Masaki, and Kazuki resumed his activities in the art world.

Several years after his repatriation, Kazuki entered a "Transitional Period" (*katoki*), from 1951 to 1958. In his works, young men replace the children of earlier paintings, and the color palette of this period moves away from the blues and greens characteristic of Kazuki's earlier output. He began integrating white with brown tones, later continuing on to darker tones and blacks, foreshadowing his later characteristic Siberia Series style. His works from just before he was drafted and even during his short stint as a soldier (1943-1945, and so falling into this "Middle Period") are frequently described as having a "transparent lyricism" (*tōmeina jojō*).¹⁷⁵ The scenes presented have a languid stillness, with many depicted figures in states of repose, with soft lines and subdued color tones. We see the continued appearance of figures, faces still positioned away from the viewer, as in earlier works, but there is also the clear influence of Picasso and Braque's Cubism. Cubism was embraced early in Japan by artists such as Yorozu Tetsugorō (萬鉄五郎 1885-1927) and Tōgō Seiji (東郷青児 1897-1978). The postwar period saw a resurgence of interest in Picasso and Cubism after major exhibitions of his works in Tokyo and Osaka in 1951. Picasso had been an influence on Kazuki since his art school days,

¹⁷⁵ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 122.

as is evident in his graduation pieces *Two Seated Figures* (1936, Fig. 2.2) and his works from the first half of the 1950s. Typical of this period are paintings such as *On the Grass* (1950, Fig. 3.8) and *Rest* (1952, Fig. 3.9). These works, and others such as *Young Man with a Pigeon* (1954, Fig. 3.10), display the angularity and overlapping perspectives typical of Cubism, though the forms are somewhat more recognizable, less distorted, than much of Braque and Picasso's Cubist works. Kazuki's idiosyncratic motifs remain however—most of the works of this period retain Kazuki's characteristic compositional choice of facing any figures away from the viewer or otherwise obscuring their faces. In 1954 Kazuki's patron and mentor Fukushima Shigetarō, one of Japan's foremost authority on Picasso and a friend of the artist, described Kazuki as "The first Japanese painter to understand the essence of Cubism."^{176*}

In the latter part of this period Kazuki also began experimenting with mixing unusual materials into his oil paints, including sand, mica, soot and ash¹⁷⁷. Kazuki was not the only Japanese artist adulterating his paints with unorthodox materials—Kazuki's contemporaries in the Kyushu School (*Kyūshūha*) as well as the Gutai groups also explored altering their *matière*, and artists abroad, such as the French painter Jean Dubuffet was also mixing sand and tar into his *matière*. For the artists of *Kūshūha* the emphasis was on the commonplace, an egalitarian vision of accessibility seeking to "link materiality to people's daily lives."¹⁷⁸ For Kazuki the adulterated *matière* was a means to channel the concrete atmosphere of his gulag experiences. Works such as *Rest*, and *Parting* (1958 Fig. 3.11) typify this progression, presenting the distinctive Siberia Series style in works not included in the series, a trend that would continue

¹⁷⁶ "Inshou ni nokoru koten mitsu" *Asashi Shimbun*, 4 December 1954, quoted in Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 109. Though Kazuki's style moved away from Cubism as his Siberia Series style coalesced, he retained a strong affinity for the Spaniard—a reproduction of Picasso's *Buste d'Homme* (1969) hung in his atelier. Kazuki Yasuo, and Kazuki Yasuo bijutsukan. *Gaka kara no okurimono: shinshūzō saku hin yori*, (Nagato: Kazuki Yasuo bijutsukan, 2016) 29.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁷⁸ Havens, Thomas R. H. *Radicals and Realists in the Japanese Nonverbal Arts: The Avant-Garde Rejection of Modernism*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006) 99.

and expand to encompass works of all types until his death. These tentative experiments would eventually lead to the formulation of a distinctive style that Kazuki would use as the aesthetic foundation for his works on his Siberian experiences (developed in greater detail in Chapter Four).

In April 1948 Kazuki resumed his regular practice of entering juried exhibitions, submitting two works, the most significant since his repatriation, to the 22nd annual Kokuten show.¹⁷⁹ One of these, *Wind*, is far more typical of his works of the time, and is not associated with his Siberia works. The other, *Rain (Cattle)* (1947, which I will treat in greater detail in chapter four), however, was retroactively brought into what is considered the “canonical” group of 57 works of the Siberia Series. Kazuki had not yet begun to think of a coherent project of representing his memories of life as a soldier and a POW into which the Siberia Series would, over time, develop. He spent nearly ten years developing various motifs from his time in Siberia, guided in part by the motifs he had brushed in ink on his paintbox.

Kazuki occupied—and continues to occupy—an ambiguous position in Japanese postwar art history. While he had managed to navigate the difficult wartime years without becoming a painter of government-sponsored military propagandistic art, saving him from potential recriminations in the postwar era, he still found himself out of the postwar mainstream. At the same time, though he was distant from Tokyo, he was able to exhibit with relative frequency, in no small part aided by his association with Fukushima Shigetarō and Umehara Ryūzaburō.

The postwar art world, centered on Tokyo, with major groups such as Gutai in the Osaka area and *Kyūshūha* in Kyūshū, embraced the freedom available in a newly reformed political atmosphere. Avant-garde movements, both new and reconstituted, proliferated, and groups and individuals enthusiastically engaged the international art world. While the admixture of unusual

¹⁷⁹ Kazuki continued to submit to the influential exhibition until 1962, when he withdrew from Kokugakai. *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 202, 204.

materials into his *matière* was in keeping with certain postwar trends, in other respects Kazuki was aloof from the groups and some trends that characterized the postwar Japanese art world. He was disinterested in both the political activism of postwar "Reportage" artists, such as Yamashita Kikuji (山下菊二 1890-1973) or Nakamura Hiroshi (中村宏 1932-), as well as the heavy emphasis on novelty and plastic innovation so important to groups like the Experimental Workshop (*Jikken Kōbō*) and Gutai. He was older than most of the members of such movements as well, his career having been interrupted by both the war and his internment following it. Additionally, the Japanese art world was taken by storm by the so-called "Informel Whirlwind" beginning in 1956. Art Informel was the Franco-European counterpart to Abstract Expressionism, championed by French critic Michel Tapié. While Kazuki was not working in abstract works of the kind that dominated Art Informel, his increasing alienation from naturalism nonetheless also mirrors such trends of his time. Kazuki might also be seen as fulfilling the dictum of influential painter Okamoto Tarō (岡本太郎 1911-1996), who declared in 1948 that "art today must not be nice, it must not be pretty, it must not make you feel good."¹⁸⁰ While Kazuki did not embark on a project of self-consciously unpleasant art, explicitly seeking to discomfit the viewer, the rigorously arid bleakness of his Siberia Series tableaux dovetails with much work produced in Japan in the postwar years.

By the mid-1950s, Kazuki's work displayed both his own idiosyncratic stylistic choices as well as reflections of broader trends in Japan and painting globally. As the decade progressed, however, addressing his experiences in Siberia, particularly the trauma and loss of his friends, became increasingly central to his art practice. He worked through the 1950s to develop a visual language to represent his Siberia memories.

¹⁸⁰ Kanagawa Kenritsu Kindai Bijutsukan. *Kindai Nihon bijutsuka retsuden*, (Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1999) 315.

In 1955 Kazuki was watching a young laborer reconstruct a damaged wall in the garden of his home. As he recounts in “My Siberia”, the scene suddenly transported him back to his own experience of working on wall construction of a barracks at the Chernogorsk camp in Siberia. The quotidian labor of this experience would come back to Kazuki years after his repatriation. In the transposed space/time of Siberia/Misumi, seeing a laborer construct a wall in his garden served as the basis for a work that instantiates an important moment in the stylistic evolution of the Siberia Series. The Kazuki of postwar Japan is transported back to Siberia through his encounter with a laborer working on his home, instantiated on canvas in *Plasterer* (1956, Fig. 3.12).¹⁸¹ The eponymous worker, brick and trowel in hand, occupies the upper left corner of the composition, covered to his chest by the wall he is in the midst of constructing. Nearly all color is drained from the work, and the lone figure, in muddy ochres, browns and blacks, displays a hesitant abstraction. This work represents a key place in the evolution of Kazuki’s Siberia Series style. We see the “Black Matière” that would prove to become such a crucial touchstone not only of his Siberia Series, but of much of his later work, already on tentative display. Part of the reason for the transitional nature of the work’s appearance is that, though Kazuki completed it in 1956, he had actually begun the work shortly after painting *Rain (Cattle)* in 1947. According to Kazuki disciple Sakakura Hidenori, he had mostly completed the work by 1949, but in a different form than the work would later become.¹⁸² The wall displayed a brighter, reddish, coloration, similar to that of *Rain (Cattle)*, but subsequently Kazuki, in keeping with his trend away from color in his Siberia works, repainted it to the near black of its current form.

¹⁸¹ This work’s title in Japanese is Sakan (左官), which is frequently translated into English as “Bricklayer.” Though the figure in the painting is shown holding a brick and working on a brick wall, I have chosen the alternative “Plasterer” (which is also used in some Japanese sources providing an English translation) in light of the significance of the plastering (and not bricklaying) work that Kazuki references from his Siberia memories, and also for the significance of the plaster-like matière that is such an important material dimension of the Siberia Series, as well as much of Kazuki’s post-repatriation non-Siberia works.

¹⁸² Megumi Yama. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou*, (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 157.

Other features of the work reveal his ongoing stylistic evolution. The blocky quasi-abstraction of the face gestures toward the iconic “My Face” stylization that is another touchstone of the series, not yet fully developed. The sharp angularity of the shadows thrown across the workman’s face hint at the more rigorously defined, flattened, and sculpture-like features of his Siberia faces. Kazuki was confident enough in the work to submit it to the 2nd Modern Japanese Art Exhibition in May 1956. The work is an important stylistic and thematic turning point in the series, particularly in its tone and the figuration of the face, and I will discuss it at greater length in the following chapter.

Kazuki had yet, at the time of *Plasterer* in 1956, to fully arrive at his highly distinctive Siberia Series style, however. An extended, personal encounter with the visual cultures of Europe, the birthplace of his chosen medium of oil painting, would serve to catalyze the crystallization of various incipient stylistic experiments.

Kazuki’s European Tour

In 1956 Kazuki finally acceded to the repeated and enthusiastic recommendations of his mentor Fukushima Shigetarō to take an extended trip around Western Europe. Many of Kazuki’s predecessors and peers had spent time in Europe studying oil painting, notably his idol Umehara Ryūzaburō, who had sought out his own idol, Renoir, during his time there in 1909. Kazuki, however, lacked the resources to travel to or study in Europe during his art school days or early career. Even if he had possessed sufficient means to do so, travel abroad to Europe the late 1930s had become increasingly difficult in light of Japan’s ongoing wars and domestic political situation. But Japan’s defeat, and gradual re-integration into the postwar international order obviated such problems. So, on the 29th of October 1956, Kazuki and his wife departed Japan for an extended tour of several nations in western Europe.

Kazuki's first stop in his European peregrination was Paris. He stayed at the Raspail Hotel, which served as a home base of sorts for the entire European voyage. He left Paris to tour major cities of France in late November, taking in Cannes, Nice, and Aix-en-Provence. While in Nice, Kazuki met up with Fukushima (Fig. 3.13), who, along with Umehara Ryūzaburō's wife Tsuyako, took him to meet Pablo Picasso, at Vila Californie in Cannes.¹⁸³ Following this he returned to Paris at the beginning of December, remaining there for most of the month, working on landscapes and street scenes. On the eve of the new year, he departed for Spain, touring through Madrid, Toledo, Seville, Granada, Valencia, and Barcelona, returning to his Paris base on the 15th of January 1957, where he remained for the rest of the month. On February 2nd, he went to Italy, visiting the cities of Asti, Rome, Naples, Florence, Siena, Padua, Venice and Milan. After that he went to Switzerland, stopping in Zurich and Bern. He then returned to Paris on the 18th, and on the 24th went to Belgium, from whence he would journey back to Japan. Departing March 10th from Antwerp harbor, Kazuki and his wife returned home by ship, travelling via Panama and Los Angeles.

Kazuki's extended European tour was no vacation from his art practice, however. He produced a prodigious number of works: 80 watercolors and over 500 pages of sketches (Fig. 3.14). Many are of cathedrals and other old buildings, street scenes, countryside landscapes, stained glass windows, landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower, and similar sightseeing fare (Figs. 3.15, 3.16). After his return to Japan, Kazuki submitted four of these works, along with five sketches, to the Kokuten 31 exhibition in April 1957. A show focusing on his Europe works was held at Formes Gallery in Ginza, founded by Fukushima, whose prodding occasioned Kazuki's

¹⁸³ Kazuki, Yasuo, and Naoki Kazuki. *Watakushi No Tabi: Oshu Yugaku Sukecchishu: Seitan 100nen Kazuki Yasuo*, (Nagato: Kazuki yasuo bijutsukan, 2011) 184, *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 204. Kazuki's enthusiasm for Picasso would last throughout his life. In 1966 on a return trip to Paris Kazuki eagerly attended the Picasso Retrospective, and on his final trip to Europe, in the year before his death, Kazuki visited the Picasso museum in Vallauris, near Cannes. Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirizu" O Yomu, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 106.

extended tour in the first place.¹⁸⁴ Kazuki was quite conscious of the debt he owed Fukushima—in “My Siberia” he says that if he had not taken his trip to Europe, “then the Siberia Series would not have come to be as it is. That means that the biggest benefactor of the Siberia Series is Fukushima.”¹⁸⁵ Kazuki also managed to represent Japan in the 1957 Sao Paulo Biennale with the works *Young Man with a Pigeon* (1954), *Newspaper* (1955), and *Roadside* (1956).¹⁸⁶

But perhaps even more significant than the avalanche of landscapes, genre scenes, and architectural studies Kazuki returned with was the influence of European aesthetic traditions, viewed for the first time up close. Exposure to Romanesque architectural imagery of Christ’s suffering in particular helped him to develop one of the key stylistic dimensions of the Siberia Series: the relief sculpture-like visages that populate his figural paintings of Japanese POWs. Kazuki had harbored a longstanding fascination with such imagery, recalling: “since my student days I have been strongly attracted to the sculpture on Romanesque cathedrals. At Maruzen¹⁸⁷ bookstore, I’d gaze over a photobook of relief sculpture of Christ and his disciples.”¹⁸⁸ The faces of Christ and his disciples, such as those he saw firsthand on Chartres cathedral (Figs. 3.17, 3.18), and elsewhere in France, Italy and Spain (Fig. 3.19), would prove crucial to the development of this particular motif. The gaunt, sculptural faces of Christ, his disciples, and other martyrs, became the visual inspiration for his figural Siberia Series paintings (and prints),

¹⁸⁴ Fukushima founded Formes Gallery in April 1949, primarily to cultivate young artistic talent, but starting in May 1949, the gallery would hold annual solo exhibitions of Kazuki’s work. *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 202, 204.

¹⁸⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 81.

¹⁸⁶ *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 204.

¹⁸⁷ Maruzen is a well-known Japanese bookstore chain. Established in 1869 as Japan’s first joint-stock company, Maruzen is arguably the nation’s most famous bookstore. It has long been known as a haunt of writers, artists, philosophers, and scholars, valued in particular for its substantial selection of foreign books.

¹⁸⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 81.

with faces “illuminated from above with deep shadows.”^{189*} Kazuki saw in those European Christian images the faces of his friends, faces with “skin hanging loosely, sunken eyes, cheekbones sticking out, [that] surely evoked the sorrowful beauty of medieval images of Christ’s death mask.”^{190*} The general influence of Christian imagery is also clear across the Siberia Series. Kazuki discusses this in “My Siberia” as well, recalling that:

I was told that “my face” resembled Buddhist statuary, but to me, rather than the Buddha, it was closer to that of Christ. Of course, that was not all. I think that my face is a complex combination of all the elements which have influenced me, including Sesshū, and others.*

This innovation would accompany other stylistic changes critical to the mature style of the Siberia Series, which I will address in detail in the next chapter.

Upon his return from Europe, Kazuki’s ongoing experimentation in style and media would finally bring him to a place in his artistic practice where he felt he could do justice to his memories of the Siberian gulag. Perhaps even more important was feeling that he could finally do justice to the dead, in the only way he felt he could—aesthetically.

¹⁸⁹ Kazuki Fumiko. *Kazuki Yasuo Isshun Issho no Gagyo*, (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2004) 68.

¹⁹⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 104.

Chapter 3 Images Supplement



3.1. Kazuki Yasuo, 北へ西へ - *To the North, To the West*, 1959, oil on canvas, 72.9 x 116.7cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 63)



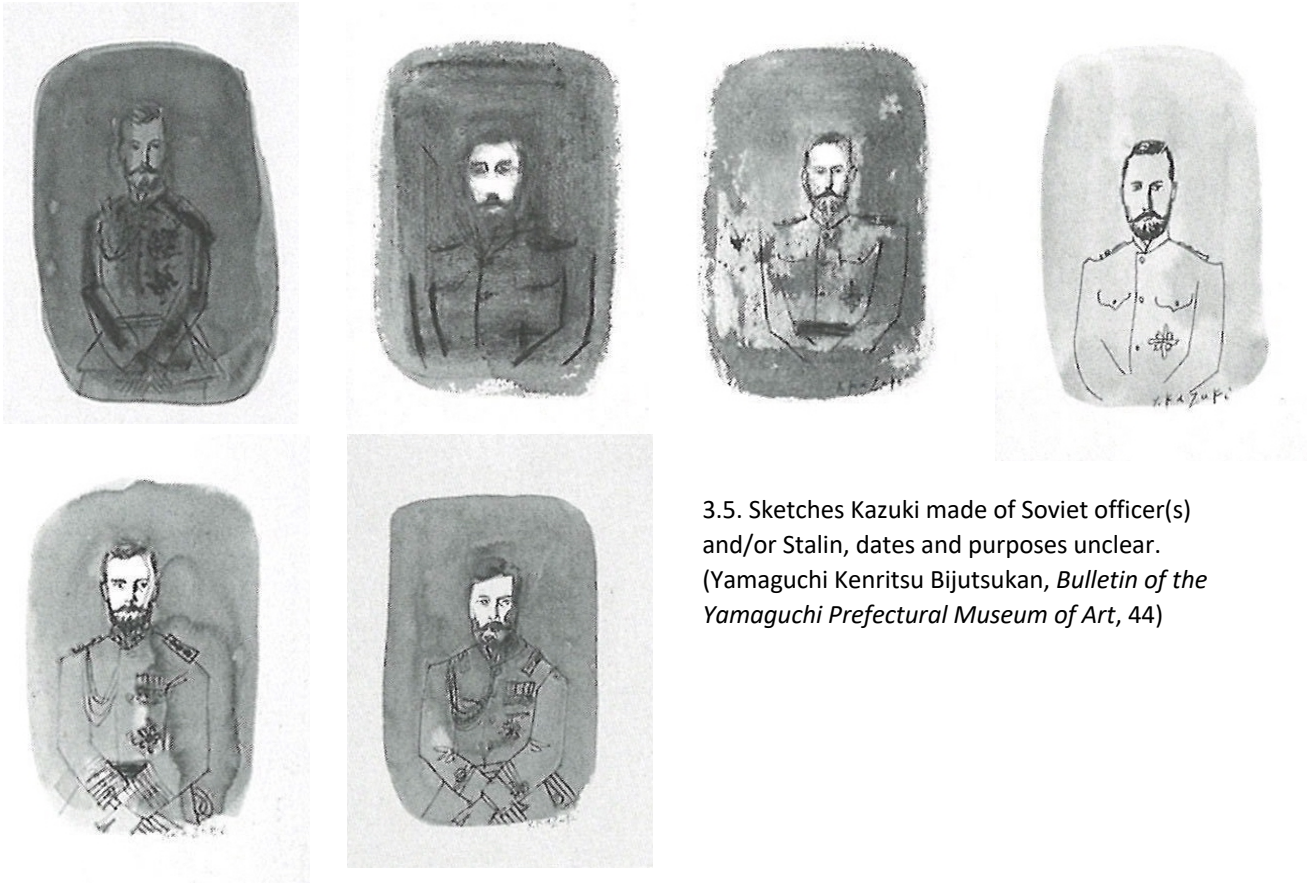
3.2. Kazuki Yasuo, 神農 - *Shennong*, 1964, oil on canvas, 91.3 x 60.8cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 72)



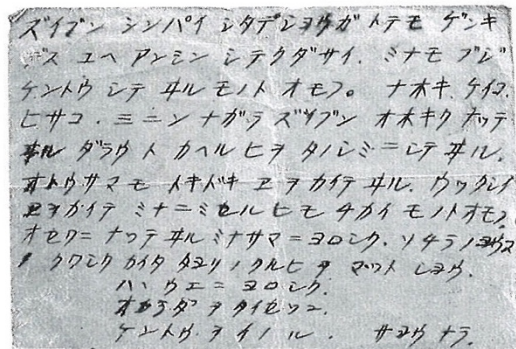
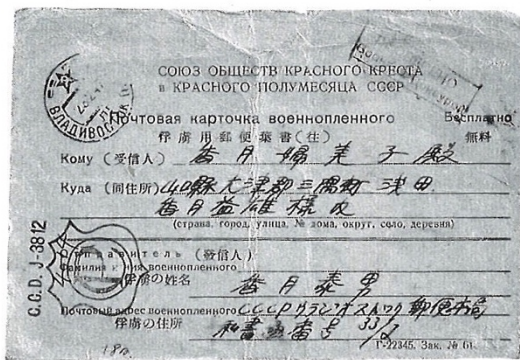
3.3. Kazuki's paint box, given to him by his mother, which he took with him to Manchuria and kept through his time in Siberia. (Kazuki, *Kazuki Yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, 113)



3.4. Kazuki's mess tin, with a saw, axe and "Y. Katuki" inscribed on the lid, and a scene of the gulag inscribed on the bottom. (Kazuki, *Kazuki Yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, 112)



3.5. Sketches Kazuki made of Soviet officer(s) and/or Stalin, dates and purposes unclear. (Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, *Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art*, 44)



3.6. Postcard from Kazuki to his family sent from Chernogorsk, 1947 (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 164)



3.7. Kazuki Yasuo, 復員〈タラップ〉 *Demobilization--Gangway*, 1967, oil on canvas, 162.1 x 111.6cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 98)



3.8. Kazuki Yasuo, デモ - *Demonstration*, 1973, oil on canvas, 97.0 x 193.0cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 93)



3.9. Kazuki Yasuo, 草上 - *On the Grass*, 1950, oil on canvas, 72.7 x 116.7cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 27)



3.10. Kazuki Yasuo, 休憩 – Rest, 1952, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 116.5cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 29)



3.11. Kazuki Yasuo, 鳩と青年 – Young Man with Pigeon, 1954, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 116.5cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 32)



3.12. Kazuki Yasuo, 告別 - *Parting*, 1958, oil on canvas, 73.0 x 117.0cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 40)



3.13. Kazuki Yasuo, 左官 - *Plasterer*, 1956, oil on canvas, 116.9 x 72.3 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 84)



3.14. Kazuki Yasuo (left), with Fukushima Shigetarō (right), and an unidentified friend (center), near Chartres cathedral, December 9, 1956. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, *Watakushi No Tabi: Oshu Yugaku Sukecchishu*, 12)



3.15. Kazuki with his wife Fumiko organizing works brought back from his first trip to Europe, 1957. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 40)



3.16. Kazuki Yasuo, ミラノ - Milan, February 14, 1957, crayon and watercolor, 37.0 x 30.6cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, *Watakushi No Tabi: Oshu Yugaku Sukecchishu*, 109)



3.17. Kazuki Yasuo, シヤルトル - Chartres, December 9, 1956, crayon and watercolor, 37.0 x 27.5cm. Kazuki Yasuo Museum, Misumi. (Kazuki, *Watakushi No Tabi: Oshu Yugaku Sukecchishu*, 37)



3.18. Unknown artist, South Porch, Left Portal, Chartres Cathedral, France, *Vincent*, c. 1194-1230, limestone. (University of Pittsburgh Libraries, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3AF CSP31631100>)



3.19. Unknown artist, South Porch, Central Portal, Chartres Cathedral, France, *James Major, James Minor and Bartholomew*, c. 1194-1230, limestone. (University of Pittsburgh Libraries, <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3AF CSP32630320>)



3.20. Unknown artist, Spain, *Crucifixion*, c. 1180, limestone, 154 x 98 x 20cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art. (Photo by author)

CHAPTER 4

The Siberia Series

Kazuki's tour of Europe, and the treasure trove of aesthetic inspiration it provided, came at a particularly fortuitous moment. Through the mid-1950s, he had been tentatively developing a variety of unique and highly idiosyncratic modifications to his painting materials and style, groping his way toward an expressive language that might accommodate the representation of his traumatic Siberia memories. These efforts were also not unrelated to his long-running efforts to reconcile his oil painting practice with a sense of authenticity as a Japanese artist working in the "Western" medium of oil paints. The style that he gradually developed owed its hybrid genesis to elements from the history of both Japanese and European arts.

Kazuki wrote that he believed that he would feel at some point that he had achieved his goals with the series at some point, but still he wrote: "When I paint I get the feeling that I'll never fully exhaust my Siberia experience."¹⁹¹ On the very first page of "My' Siberia," written in 1969, he states:

I've thought so many times 'This is the end of the Siberia series.' I felt this way when I painted *Nirvana* [1960]. I felt the same way when I painted *Repatriation (Gangplank)* [1967]. In 1966, when I painted *Self-Portrait (Mahorka)*, I intended to make a final statement of the "Siberia Series."¹⁹¹*

In the end though he worked on the series continuously from the late 1950s until his death in 1974, fulfilling his prediction that "I might paint Siberia until I die."¹⁹²*

¹⁹¹ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 30.

¹⁹² Ibid., 31. The works *Beach (Nakhodka)*, *Moonrise* and *Sunrise*, though considered finished pieces, were still on easels in his atelier at the time of his death. They are often considered to be his "zeppitsu" - a

Returning to Representing Siberia

While interned in the gulags Kazuki clung fast to his identity as a painter, continuing to plan motifs for works he intended to execute after his return home. He recalls years after his repatriation:

Even at moments when my life was in danger, I discovered beautiful things, I couldn't help but discover things to make into paintings. Spreading imaginary canvases in my head, I kept thinking about compositions to organize motifs there. Even when I was witnessed someone dying, I kept thinking how to transform that scene into a painting."^{193*}

Such aesthetic mental exercises were crucial to his efforts to endure the trials he faced in Siberia. As noted in chapter three, he managed to retain his painting supply box throughout his internment, etching onto it twelve characters representing planned motifs. The first two Siberia-related works that Kazuki produced were *Rain (Cattle)* (1947, Fig. 4.1), and *Burial* (1948, Fig. 4.2), painted almost immediately after his repatriation.¹⁹⁴ *Rain (Cattle)* came first. Kazuki had originally titled it *Rain*, and submitted it as his first post-repatriation work to the Kokugakai Exhibition in early 1948.¹⁹⁵ Kazuki scholar Yasui Yūichirō has called these two early efforts the

term denoting the final works of an author or artist, but also suggesting a kind of capstone for an their life work. Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 174.

¹⁹³ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 33.

¹⁹⁴ Among the twelve characters Kazuki chose, these works correspond to the characters 雨 (rain), and 葬 (burial) respectively.

¹⁹⁵ Megumi Yama. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou*, (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 110. *Rain (Cattle)* was first retroactively brought into the "Siberia Series" for an exhibition at the Kitakyūshū City Hachiman Museum of Art. Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, soshite "watakushi no"chikyū: botsugo 30-nen / "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, ed. Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan (Fukuoka: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004), 202.

“Original Siberia Series” (*gen shiberia shiri-zu*) to underscore the dramatic stylistic differences between them and the later works of the series.¹⁹⁶ Both works reflect elements of his pre-internment style, and both were done in standard oil paints on canvas, without the use of admixed materials that would later become the series’ media hallmark.

Rain (Cattle) presents a ground of uneven orange-brown tone, with two slashes of blue, small puddles, in the lower left portion. Above these is a dog that we see from behind, its head hidden by its foreshortened body, legs reflected in the puddles. On the composition’s extreme right side is the mostly cropped figure of a single cow, with only its head and shoulders visible, turning to look behind itself. A series of dark streaks angled from right to left suggest the first part of the title and are the only real indication of the eponymous precipitation.

In various stylistic respects *Rain (Cattle)* and *Burial* harken back to the works Kazuki was making prior to his conscription, deployment, and internment. Faces are obscured, or oriented away from the viewer, and the simplified figuration of the two men in *Burial* is in line with works such as *Hammock* (1941, Fig. 4.3) and *Water Mirror* (1942, Fig. 4.4) One figure in the latter even mirrors a figure in *Burial*. In the quatra-partite stylistic periodization of *The Thirty Year Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, this would place these first two Siberia Series works in the “Middle Period” (*chūki*), which straddles the years of his conscription and internment, 1940-1950. This similarity to pre-war works is not altogether surprising, especially in light of the fact that Kazuki created the composition in his head while in Siberia, only to, in his words, “spit (it) out” shortly after his repatriation.^{197*}

What they refer to as his “Transitional Period” (*katoki*) bridges such brighter works, with their “transparent lyricism,” and the darkened tones and heavily textured *matière* of his “Latter

¹⁹⁶ Kazuki Yasuo, et al. *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbun Seibu Honsha Kikakubu, 1989) 131.

¹⁹⁷ Kuwabara Sumio. "Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberiya rensaku." *Mizue*, vol. 737, no. 7, 1966, pp 66.

Period” (*kōki*). This period begins with Kazuki’s return to painting works representing his time in Siberia, after an eight-year interregnum, having through lengthy experimentation developed a distinctive style and media for this purpose. Works of this period have largely assimilated a similar—in many cases indistinguishable—style as the works of the Siberia Series.

Kazuki himself describes *Rain (Cattle)* as “a sentimental and even a little romantic picture,” going on to say of the work:

As I look back on it now, it’s too beautiful, too vivid. Why would I paint a place devoid of such color so colorfully? Perhaps, my spirit, devastated by the war and my life as a prisoner, unconsciously sought after some kind of compensation.^{198*}

As this quote illustrates, Kazuki found his pre-Siberia style to be somehow insufficient to the task of representing his traumatic memories—but developing one that was sufficient would take time. A return to the representation of his memories of the war and his internment, following an eight-year interregnum of representing Siberia on the canvas, would require nothing short of a revolution in his style. Through an extended process of experimentation, Kazuki would radically change his use of color, figuration, negative space, and *matière*, finally arriving at a style he felt could serve his representational and affective purposes. The development of these factors would be crucial to his ability to return to his memories, in the atelier, to represent them on canvas. His complex stylistic experimentation and evolution was nothing less than a prerequisite to the creation of the Siberia Series.

¹⁹⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 65.

Color

Since childhood Kazuki had been fascinated by color.¹⁹⁹ In his initial tentative forays into representing Siberia, the color tones, though not exactly exuberant, are rich and varied, including blues, greens, and remarkably warm orange and red tones. The visual contrast between *Rain (Cattle)* and *Burial*, and the later works of the mature “Siberia Series” is rather stark, perhaps most especially in terms of color. The warm and varied tones of these two paintings almost glow in comparison to the muted, dirty ochres, greys and blacks of works like *To the North, to the West* (1959) or *Shennong* (1964) that typify Kazuki’s mature Siberia style. The explanatory text Kazuki provided for *Burial* (which he further expanded upon in his memoirs) explains the reasons underpinning his color choices:

I had consciously chosen to paint with bright colors for several years after I returned home perhaps because I wanted to find a way to tell myself that this dark period in my life was now gone by. And I certainly wanted to depict the burial of my friends during the war in the warmest way possible.^{200*}

This philosophy would change however, over the course of his break from producing paintings about his Siberian experiences. Stylistic and thematic considerations would eventually lead to the distinctively subdued, even tenebrous tones that define the mature works of the Siberia Series, and beyond.

The question of color was much more than simply a stylistic preference, however, as the above quote suggests. While the Kazuki of the period immediately following his repatriation felt an obligation to depict his dead friends “as warmly as possible”, he nevertheless couldn’t escape a nagging feeling that such an aesthetic sensibility was somehow false, or worse—an affront to

¹⁹⁹ Megumi Yama. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou*, (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 162.

²⁰⁰ Yasuo Kazuki, et al, *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberiya shirizu* (Yamanashi-ken: Yamanashi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1995) 42.

the dead. Poet and scholar Andō Tsuguo asserts that “only forms remain in Kazuki’s memory, not color. To use color for representing the life that Kazuki and his friends endured in the gulag would be a lie.”^{201*} He goes on to claim that the preponderance of black in Kazuki’s Siberia works symbolizes oppression, suffering/sickness, death, and imprisonment.²⁰²

Kazuki did not, however, arrive at the feeling that a darkened color palette would be better suited to depicting the bleak memories of his time in Siberia in a vacuum. In-person encounters with specific works of Western Europe, during his extended tour in 1956-1957 left deep impressions on Kazuki that would influence his move away from a more colorful palette to the darkened tones typical of his later works. Nearly all works in the “Siberia Series” are dominated by two colors, a dingy yellow-ochre, and a dynamic, tenebrous black. Hiramatsu Tatsuo explicitly mentions Gentile da Fabriano’s “Adoration of the Magi” from the Strozzi Altarpiece (1423, Fig. 4.5), in Uffizi Gallery in Florence, as well as Leonardo da Vinci’s (unfinished) *St. Jerome in the Wilderness* (1480, Fig. 4.6), in the Vatican Museums, as being key to the development of the darkened, monochromatic ruddy brown tones Kazuki uses in the “Siberia Series.”²⁰³ The monochromatic tone of Sesshū’s *Huike Offering His Arm to Bodidharma* (1496, Fig. 4.7) also had a significant influence on the limited color range seen in the Siberia Series. Only ten paintings in the fifty-seven in the series deviate from this to include brighter colors, either a cerulean blue or an intense crimson (*The Flames of Karma*, 1970, Fig. 4.8, *Sea of Japan*, Fig. 4.13, *Demo*, 1973, *My Earth*, 1968, *Blue Sun*, 1969). These intense but sporadic bursts of color only serve to highlight the near total draining away of color that we see in the “Siberia Series” as a whole in contrast to Kazuki’s earlier works.²⁰⁴ Both Leonardo and Sesshū

²⁰¹ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 128.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁰⁴ Notably, most cases of intense color represent phenomena of the natural world. Intense ultramarine for the sea in *The Sea of Japan* (1972), the cerulean blue sky in *Blue Sun* (1969) and *Clouds* (1968), the furiously crimson fire of *The Flames of Karma* (1970), and the intense red of *Morning Sun* (1965) and

depict figures who endured extreme physical hardships—St. Jerome beating his breast with a stone, as a penitent in the Syrian wilderness, and Huike offering his very body to the Zen patriarch Bodhidharma to prove his devotion as a disciple. The motifs of suffering in the wilderness and enduring bodily mortification clearly appeal to Kazuki for his thematic purposes in the Siberia Series, over and above the stylistic influence of the monochromatic compositions.

Unpainted Margins

Another feature common to Kazuki's "Siberia Series" works is an idiosyncratic use of unpainted margins (*yohaku*) around the edge of the canvas. To Kazuki, the question of composition of margins in painting was one of the key issues in his ongoing attempts to reconcile the traditions of Japanese or Asian painting, and those of European painting. To Kazuki there is a fundamental difference between how these two traditions (as he characterizes them) understand a composition's margins. For Kazuki, "a characteristic of margins peculiar to Eastern painting, in contrast to precisely executed Western painting, is a freedom and flexibility."²⁰⁵ However, as Taii Ryō, curator at the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, points out, "[t]he question of margins was not only one of question of West and East, for Kazuki's painting production it carried crucial meaning."^{206*} Kazuki seems use the unpainted margins to foreground the representationality of his Siberia works, to make absolutely explicit the mediation that is central to these works. From his very first Siberia related paintings, Kazuki made clear the mediated nature of the tableaux. While he had not yet developed the various stylistic hallmarks of the series when he painted *Burial*, Taii notes that the negative space margin feature "is

Sunrise (1974). This could be accounted for by Kazuki's deep reverence for the beauty of the natural world, which he took aesthetic comfort in, even during his time in the harsh environment of Siberia.

²⁰⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 50.

^{206*} Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" *Shiberia*, 194.

common to Kazuki's works from the latter half of the 1950's onward."^{207*} And Kazuki's commentary on the work, as discussed earlier, highlights the mediated nature of the scene drawn from his memories.

By leaving an unfinished margin around the composition of the paintings in the Siberia Series Kazuki seems to be intentionally foregrounding the image's existence as image, rather than a two-dimensional "window" onto an image. The absence of image around the borders highlights the painting as artifice, as *mediated*. Additionally, the unfinished border suggests an image that is not necessarily an accurate depiction of real events—and the very use of such a device signals that accuracy is not one of Kazuki's major representational concerns. The hazy framing tells us not that this is something that happened—but rather that this is something that "happened/is happening" within another realm, a psychological realm, a fluid dimension of memory that defies rigorous, consistent representational fidelity (and temporality). The events presented to the viewer are still happening, they are not finished, and so, in a sense, are the paintings. As we have seen quite pointedly in *Bricklayer* (also painted before this stylistic element was fully realized), "the real scene and 'memory' overlap." Taii concludes that "Kazuki's negative space, it may be argued, represents the cosmos, that is, a large(r) space into which his memories have been integrated."^{208*} This temporal mediation is a crucial aspect of one of the series' purposes, as I will address later in this chapter.

Media/Matière

²⁰⁷ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia, 194.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

Though proficient in a variety of media, Kazuki's affective and professional focus had always been on oil paints. As with the other stylistic dimensions discussed above, Kazuki felt the need to develop media that would properly help him represent his internal Siberia on the external canvas. Hiramatsu Tatsuo posits that the approximately eight-year interregnum separating Kazuki's tentative early efforts at representing his experiences, in works such as *Burial*, was necessary to fully develop a style suitable to the task(s) at hand.²⁰⁹ In the art journal *Atorie* ("Atelier") Kazuki wrote a piece for an issue devoted to *matière* (as part of a series on oil painting techniques), reflecting on the imperatives of developing his media innovations: "The expression of a newly evoked emotion desires a new material, and the discovery of a new material gives birth to a new theme, which [for me] makes painting possible."^{210*}

Unlike much of Kazuki's earlier, pre-war experience works in oil, the texture of the *matière* on the canvas is a significant and conspicuous stylistic feature of his Siberia Series works. According to Kuwabara Sumio, Kazuki's distinctive, plaster-like *matière* can be seen from his small works show at Miyuki Gallery in Ginza in 1956.²¹¹ Hiramatsu Tatsuo, though, puts the initial experimentation that led to the *matière* as beginning around 1953.²¹² Kazuki's disciple (and former head of the Kazuki Memorial Museum in Misumi), Sakakura Hidenori, has said that the rough, plaster-like coating of oil paints admixed with materials such as soot and mica grit was explicitly meant "to evoke the 'texture' (*hada*) of the rough walls of Siberia on the canvas."^{213*} This idiosyncratic *matière* of his "Siberia Series" paintings then served as a kind of semiological index of the circumstances represented in those very paintings. Additionally, "*hada*"

²⁰⁹ Hiramatsu Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 126-127.

²¹⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. "Watashi no machie-ru". *Atorie*, no. 338, 1955. 90.

²¹¹ Kuwabara Sumio. "Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberiya rensaku." *Mizue*, vol. 737, no. 7, 1966, pp 66-74.

²¹² Hiramatsu Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 119.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 114.

is homophonous with the word for “skin” - an intriguing connection, suggesting the corporeal presence of bodies on the canvas. This echoes Bert Winther-Tamaki’s formulation of “embodiment,” which he posits as a defining rubric of Yōga. He conceptualizes this schema in four parts: “(1) the materiality of oil paint pigments on the picture surface, (2) the illustration of the human body, (3) the imagined somatic presence of the artist in the painting, and (4) rhetorical metaphors of political and social incorporation.”²¹⁴ Kazuki’s *matière* is a means to present a reality of bodies that exceeds a simple two-dimensional representation of a memory in the past. Hiramatsu contends that “to Kazuki, *matière* was not a simple matter of painting technique, but a way of turning toward one’s inner world.”^{215*} In a sense, after Kazuki’s repatriation—and the long process of developing the style of his Siberia Series—he is still the plasterer he had been in Siberia, though working on canvas rather than on walls.

Figuration - Kazuki’s Development of “My Face”

Thirty-two of the fifty-seven works in the “Siberia Series” depict human figures, but these individuals appear dramatically different from those in Kazuki’s pre-conscription and earlier post-repatriation works. While we see some fuller or complete figures, there is a distinct focus on faces and hands in the figural Siberia works. The preponderance of faces in the “Siberia Series” is doubly noteworthy in light of Kazuki’s earlier consistent tendency to depict figures facing exclusively away from the viewer.

What Kazuki refers to as “my face” (*watashi no kao*) is one of the series’ most distinctive stylistic features (Fig. 4.9). The eponymous laborer in *Plasterer* (1956, Fig. 4.20) displays an incipient form of the face, which by *Passengers* in 1957 had progressed toward increased but

²¹⁴ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 14.

²¹⁵ Hiramatsu Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 124.

still incomplete stylization. But by the time Kazuki produced *Going Home, To the North, to the West*, and *1945*, all painted in 1959, his distinctive face had fully crystallized, and would become a hallmark of the series. *To the North, to the West* is the first appearance of this conventionalized motif.²¹⁶ Kazuki writes in his memoir that this work is “the first time that I painted [what I call] “My’ Face”. Up to then, I’d painted many portraits. However, I didn’t [yet] have a face I could call “My’ Face”.^{217*} The numerous, highly stylized, faces we see in Kazuki’s paintings are consciously intended by Kazuki to serve not as representations of specific POWs, but rather an explicitly conventionalized representation of POWs in general. Kazuki meant to be quite clear about his representational intentions, stating early in his memoir: “There are as many Siberias as there are Siberian POWs. I have never had the presumptuous hope to speak for all Siberian POWs. In the spirit of relating my own personal experience, I expressed that on the canvas.”^{218*}

This highly idiosyncratic design, perhaps the most distinctive non-color or media visual characteristic of the series, has a hybrid origin. One dimension of this is what Kazuki describes as an artist’s search for their own face. He elucidates:

Gauguin paints only Gauguin’s face, and Modigliani paints only Modigliani’s face. To a painter, creating one’s own face is the beginning and the end. If you can’t create your own face, you might say you’re incomplete as a painter. I as well continued searching for a long time for my face. Especially after I began the “Siberia Series” I felt like I could not go further without my face.^{219*}

²¹⁶ Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū* (Yamaguchi: Chūgoku Shimbunsha 2004) 47.

²¹⁷ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 80

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

²¹⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 80.

Faces, once studiously avoided in Kazuki's earlier lyrical tableaux, had become crucial for him to assert his identity as a painter, a key component of articulating his Siberia experiences. Though Kazuki identifies the faces in his works as conventionalized stand-ins for individuals—universalized POWs—it is clear that these “generic” faces are also “his face.” In several instances in the series, faces in the paintings are meant to be a representation of Kazuki himself. This is most clear in *Self-Portrait Smoking Makhorka* (1966, Fig. 4.10) but is also the case for *Domoi* (1959, Fig 4.11).²²⁰ The lone figure in *Domoi* wears a shapeless felt hat (identical in color of the figure/face) but is otherwise indistinguishable from the faces seen in other figurative Siberia Series work. The other instance in the Siberia Series in which Kazuki depicts himself is *Nirvana*, though the face among the group that is Kazuki is the one who has, in his grief, buried his face in his hands, almost completely obscuring his visage. At any rate, insofar as Kazuki intended the “my face” motif to stand in for all Japanese POWs, then, by Kazuki's own definition, even if they are not literal self-portraits (with the exception of *Self-Portrait Smoking Makhorka*), they are painterly self-representations of a kind.

There is an additional dimension arising from European traditions as well. One particularly proximate influence on the development of his singular visage was European sculptural traditions, specifically that of Romanesque architectural relief sculpture.²²¹ This seems to account for the blocky forms that appear practically chiseled into the thick *matière*. According to historian Andrew Barshay, Kazuki says explicitly that the blocky face “is partly based on the Gothic statuary and death masks that he saw in France and Spain; it was also inspired by...

²²⁰ Makhorka (*Nicotiana rustica*) is a hardy, low-grade Russian tobacco smoked by the poor and working classes. It was readily available even in the gulags. In *Domoi*, though there is nothing specific to indicate that the figure is Kazuki himself, his disciple and Kazuki Museum director Sakakura Hidenori confirms to Kazuki scholar Yasui Yūichirō in an interview in *The Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art* that the work represents Kazuki. *Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan Kenkyū Kiyō =: Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art* (Yamaguchi-shi: Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1996) 22.

²²¹ Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū* (Yamaguchi: Chūgoku Shimbunsha, 2004) 47.

Leonardo da Vinci's (unfinished) portrait of St. Jerome in the Wilderness."²²² (Fig. 4.6, c. 1480) Hiramatsu goes into greater detail on this point, crediting not Da Vinci's fame as a "great master" ("kyoshō"), but rather the interiority and spirituality of the work itself as being the reason for its influence on Kazuki.²²³ St. Jerome's anguished visage is a key focal point in Da Vinci's work, and Hiramatsu contends, a focus of those features. He links this image to Sesshu's *Huike Offering his Arm to Bodhidharma*, (Fig. 4.7, 1496) another work which profoundly influenced Kazuki, particularly in his "Siberia Series." Though in this work by Sesshū we see only the figures of Zen Buddhism's patriarch Bodhidharma and his disciple Huike, Sesshū masterfully recreates the legendary and frequently represented intensity of the master's stern countenance. Kazuki is unsparingly laudatory in his critical evaluation of this work, writing in his memoirs:

Among Oriental style painters, Sesshū is one of those whom I admire the most. In my opinion, his *Huike Offering His Arm to Bodhidharma* (慧可断臂図) is a masterpiece among his works that should be counted among the ten greatest masterpieces in world painting history. Later, when I was struggling to paint human faces in the "Siberia Series", I learned many things from this painting.^{224*}

The dual influence of painting masters from Europe and Japan also undoubtedly appealed to Kazuki's lifelong "reckless desire" to reconcile the two disparate cultural traditions in which he felt so deeply invested. The religious nature of both works is also noteworthy, given the clear visual analogues to both Christian and Buddhist aesthetics in the Siberia Series, as well as their "quasi-liturgical" function (explored below).

²²² Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 78.

²²³ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirizu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 131.

²²⁴ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 55.

By the end of the 1950s Kazuki had broken through his early personal doubts about representing his traumatic memories, through developing a highly distinctive style and media to accommodate his aesthetic and spiritual purposes. With his Siberia Series mode thus developed, he would find himself representing memories and honoring the spirits of his fallen friends, compulsively, existing in a hybrid time-space of his own construction, from which he could not escape.

The Nature and Purposes of the Siberia Series

Kazuki's memoir, "My' Siberia", written in 1970 and originally published by the fine arts journal *Bungei Shunjū*, is loosely structured around the works Siberia Series produced up to that point.²²⁵ He underscores the significance of the series in the beginning of the text by explicitly stating that "others applied the title of Siberia Series to these works, and I've become somewhat well known as their creator."^{226*} By the time *Bungei Shunjū* published the work in 1970, Kazuki had been back in Japan for over two decades, and had been working on the Siberia Series in earnest for nearly fourteen years. However, perhaps it is precisely the remoteness of the experiences from their narration that provides Kazuki with sufficient clarity to relate his story. The eight-year period necessary to develop a visual language to express his Siberia experiences seems to suggest that an analogous interregnum was necessary to convey his story in the straightforward autobiographical narrative that is "My Siberia." In addition to the

²²⁵ In the Introduction to "My Siberia" Kazuki mentions having just completed *The Emperor*, and later discusses the work *The Flames of Karma*, also produced in 1970. The remaining thirteen works that were produced after "My Siberia"'s publication (and so not addressed within the text) are the diptych *Roll Call (Left & Right)*, *Lake Baikal*, and *-35°* from 1971, *The Sea of Japan*, *Color Box*, *Snow Covered Mountain*, *Hailar*, and *Road* from 1972, *Demonstration* from 1973, and *(Beach) Nakhodka*, *Sunrise*, and *Moonrise* from 1974. Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 30, 76.

²²⁶ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 30.

temporal gap between his Siberia experiences and his visual representation of his memories on canvas, there is an even wider gap between those experiences and his recounting of them in his memoir “My Siberia.” Many of the anecdotes related in the autobiography mirror earlier explanatory texts attached to various paintings of the Siberia Series upon their exhibition. In typical self-effacing style, Kazuki says of the work: “What I’ve related here in one way or another is only what hasn’t left me even after twenty-odd years have passed.”^{227*}

Though “My Siberia” is written in the first person, as most memoirs, the work was actually ghost-written by Tachibana Takashi. At the time, Tachibana was a graduate student in the Philosophy department at Tokyo University, and a fledgling journalist and “reportage writer.” As a ghost writer, his name does not appear on the original publication, but when the work was republished by Chikuma Shobō in 1984, they included, with the approval of Kazuki’s family, an afterword written by Tachibana elucidating the collaborative process of writing the memoir. This rekindled Tachibana’s interest in Kazuki’s life and work, which led him to create a documentary for the Japanese broadcaster NHK in 1995, and a book length work on Kazuki, his work, and his experiences in Siberia, entitled *Siberia Requiem Songs - the World of Kazuki Yasuo (Shiberia Chinkonka - Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai)*, published in 2004 by Bungei Shunjū.

In the introduction to *Siberia Requiem Songs*, Tachibana describes working with Kazuki to craft “My Siberia.” In mid to late 1969, he stayed in Misumi near Kazuki’s home, spending days with Kazuki, drinking and listening to him narrate his life story. He describes Kazuki as “a shy and lonely-seeming person, who, unless he got drunk, would clam up and not be able to tell a good story.”^{228*} The two would get drunk on wine, the presence of a guest overriding Fumiko’s usual strict control of Kazuki’s alcohol consumption. Tachibana makes clear that between the wine and the

²²⁷ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 133.

²²⁸ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 13.

digressive nature of Kazuki's reminiscences, their sessions were not a faithful recording of Kazuki's words. Tachibana, to the extent that he could, kept careful notes, and would get Kazuki's approval or revisions at the end of day. At the end of the process, he presented Kazuki with a rough draft of his notes from their meetings, to which Kazuki offered almost no edits, save for penning a brief afterword himself.²²⁹ In thinking about the work though, as Kuwabara Sumio notes, "[w]hat we must pay careful attention to is the reality that the Siberia Series was not painted in Siberia, but in Kazuki's atelier in the small village of Misumi in Yamaguchi prefecture, a quarter of a century after the war's end. This series is composed of paintings made in Japan, based on his longing for a Japan to which he'd already returned home."^{230*}

"My Siberia" is constructed around the paintings of the Siberia Series, but what precisely is this body of work, so carefully created and *curated* by the artist? Most simply, it is a body of 57 paintings (and related works in a variety of other media) that are based on his experiences as a conscript, POW, and repatriate. He created these works—with the exception of 1947's *Rain (Cattle)* and *Burial*—a number of years after his return to Japan. Beyond its status a major portion of his highly prolific artistic output, and the most widely celebrated portion of his oeuvre, we must understand the series as fulfilling a number of related, overlapping, and sometimes even discordant purposes.

The paintings are, first and most self-evidently, representations of specific and composite memories of his personal experiences as a soldier and later POW. This function is more complicated, however, than such a description might suggest. In addition to this, they are also what Andrew Barshay dubs "profane icons" - quasi-religious objects conscientiously crafted to propitiate the restless souls of his friends and comrades who perished under terrible

²²⁹ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 14-15.

²³⁰ Kazuki Yasuo, et al. *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbun Seibu Honsha Kikakubu, 1989) 125.

conditions. Further, they are an indictment of militarism and war. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, they are the very instantiation of a hybrid timespace from which Kazuki could not escape. I will now treat each of these functions in turn.

Representation of Memories

The magnitude of the Gulag's brutality is entirely missing from the photographic record: the cramped train cars used to transfer prisoners are never shown; the barracks, when pictured, are neat and decently appointed; and the internees themselves are rarely tired or thin and are—always—alive.²³¹

Aglaya K. Glebova, *A Visual History of the Gulag: Nine Theses*

Many of the works of the Siberia Series are tableaux presenting specific or composite memories of events Kazuki personally experienced. This is underscored by the narrative format of Kazuki's memoir "My' Siberia," in which he narrates the events or circumstances which inspired specific works through extended anecdotes. The scenes he presents range from the deeply poignant burial of friends, to the terrifying conflagration of *The Flames of Karma* (1970, Fig. 4.8) witnessed from the freight train transporting the POWs from Manchuria to Siberia, to the quotidian labors forced upon the POWs in captivity, and the occasional landscape declaring Kazuki's awe the natural world. This quasi-documentary feature of the series is common to other visual representations of internment experiences, such as those of artist (and fellow Yamaguchi native) Miyazaki Shin (1922-2018) and the artist, author, and publisher of numerous works on

²³¹ Aglaya K. Glebova, *A Visual History of the Gulag: Nine Theses*, in Michael David-Fox, editor. *The Soviet Gulag: Evidence, Interpretation, and Comparison*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016) 162.

Siberian POWs Satō Kiyoshi (1925-). Nearly all the works of the series have this quasi-narrative dimension, even if this purpose is only secondary, and it works along with the other purposes of the series.

However, the documentary dimension of the Siberia Series should not be mistaken for an insistence on the veracity of the events depicted therein. Kazuki makes it clear that he does not feel constrained to a strict fidelity regarding the precise circumstances of the events he represents. On many occasions he admits to altering visual or circumstantial details, usually describing how and why he has done so. This is evident from the very beginning of the series. In *Burial*, what was undoubtedly a dreary scene (or, rather, scenes, insofar that Burial is likely a composite memory, rather than a single specific incident) when Kazuki was in Siberia is, the painting enlivened by warm, rich colors, “to depict the burial of [Kazuki’s] friends during the war in the warmest way possible.”²³² This is also the case with *Imprisoned* (1965, Fig. 4.18), depicting a Soviet guard behind an observation window. Kazuki writes in “My Siberia” though that “In reality, it wasn’t like this. Inside the camp it was much looser. It wasn’t severe like a prison. There was no observation window, and no guards periodically peering in on what was inside the rooms.”^{232*} However, in order “to pointedly bring out the relationship between the POWs and the guards,” Kazuki felt that he visual devices such as a cell and observation window were necessary.²³³ This highlights the degree to which Kazuki sought to go beyond simply representing his memories. As Japan scholar Kyo Maclear argues: “The demands of trauma witnessing... surpass descriptive commentary and the documentary impulse.”²³⁴ Such was the importance of Kazuki’s representing his memories, particularly those relating to the deaths of

²³² Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 120.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 120.

²³⁴ Kyo Maclear. *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 10.

friends, that his arrival at a style suitable for such a purpose, beyond visual documentation, took nearly a decade.

Kazuki's relentless search for a style that so comprehensively eschewed naturalism—the Siberia Series' sculptural, liturgically-inflected figuration, its oppressively dark and turgid tonality, its ominously tumescent *matière*—militates against reading his work as animated by an impulse toward the documentary. Insofar as trauma relentlessly emerges from a psyche into which it cannot, by definition as trauma, be integrated, Kazuki's visual and textual representations of his traumatic experiences can be read as a means to rectify this aporia. If, as Roland Barthes has written, "Trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning," then artistic responses to such trauma as Kazuki experienced can be an artist's attempt to erect a representational framework through which to integrate experiences that otherwise resist standard regimes of cognition and memory.²³⁵ The manifest content, and, perhaps more significantly, the relentlessly repetitive impulse Kazuki experienced in creating his Siberia Series works, certainly suggest this. In light of this, it is worth remembering Freud's argument (summarized by Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent) that what is important is "the psychic material encoded within the memory... and not the retrieval of some literal truth or event," and that it is "virtually inconsequential to determine if the memory 'really happened' or not."²³⁶

"Profane icons"

Some of the more dramatic tableaux in the "Siberia Series" are of burial scenes. 1947's *Burial* (one of the two paintings of the "Original Siberia Series") establishes this leitmotif at the

²³⁵ Barthes, Roland, and Susan Sontag. *A Barthes Reader* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982) 209.

²³⁶ Nina Cornyetz, and Kieth Vincent, eds. *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Culture* (London: Routledge, 2010) 9.

series' very inception. Kazuki's commentary on this painting makes the series' second purpose quite explicit. His early desire to "depict the burial of my friends during the war in the warmest way possible" indirectly orients the work toward those depicted on the canvas, those who remain in the frigid earth of Siberia. As we have seen, Kazuki's position with regard to the propriety of his stylistic choices shifted dramatically, his desire to paint in such a way as to honor the fallen would remain strong, though his understanding of how best to do so would also evolve.

Historian Andrew Barshay characterizes the works of the series, particularly those like *Burial*, as "icons of the profane meant for ritualized commemoration."²³⁷ After *Burial's* initial foray into such commemoration, Kazuki did not return to the motif of interment until after he had fully developed and refined the "Siberia Series" style. The first significant return to the theme is *Nirvana* (Fig. 4.12), painted in 1960. This burial scene, set in the internment camp at Syya, like 1948's *Burial*, and dramatizing the same type of event, is nevertheless strikingly different in form. Nineteen blocky faces, stylized in a manner that characterizes the series, face the viewer, emerging from an amorphous blackened background, hands clasped in reverent prayer. A single figure has his face buried in his hands, in a clear expression of grief. Hiramatsu and Barshay both identify this distraught figure as Kazuki himself.²³⁸ Kazuki describes how the camp authorities forbade the prisoners from inscribing names on the grave markers, recalling that, "[f]or whatever reason, the Soviet soldiers couldn't handle this. One of them took me to the graves and made me scratch out the inscriptions. Instead, he made me inscribe their prisoner numbers. After that we inscribed only numbers on the grave markers."^{239*} This attempt to erase

²³⁷ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 74.

²³⁸ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 174. Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 78.

²³⁹ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia." Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 108.

even the deaths of POWs in the gulag evokes the chilling commentary on such practice by Hanna Arendt:

The concentration camps, by making death itself anonymous (making it impossible to find out whether a prisoner is dead or alive), robbed death of its meaning as the end of a fulfilled life. In a sense they took away the individual's own death, proving that henceforth nothing belonged to him and he belonged to no one. His death merely set a seal on the fact that he had never existed.²⁴⁰

No small part of Kazuki's program, in the creation of his Siberia Series, was to prevent precisely this theft of any meaning in the deaths of his friends and fellow POWs.

In this still relatively early period of Kazuki's mature Siberia works, an event brought the past-focused series squarely into Kazuki's present. On November 10th, 1960, Fukushima Shigetarō, Kazuki's patron, mentor, and close friend (and even something of a father figure, for someone who never really had a father) since his art school days, passed away. This contemporary loss merged with the loss of friends from Kazuki's days in the gulag, instantiated on the canvas in 1960's *Nirvana*. Barshay points out that, in addition to the work's dimension as a memorial to friends who did not return from Siberia, it "doubles as Kazuki's tribute to Fukushima Shigetarō, his patron, who had died not long before."²⁴¹ So intertwined were Kazuki's grief over his mentor and patron's passing, and his creation of *Nirvana*, that he reportedly brought preliminary sketches of the work along with him on a condolence call to Fukushima's family.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (Cleveland: World Pub. Co, 1961) 452.

²⁴¹ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 78.

²⁴² Megumi Yama. *Kazuki Yasuo: Kuro no Souzou*, (Tokyo: Toumi Shobou, 2016) 118.

Kazuki repeatedly stated that he believed that the “Siberia Series” would be a project that would have a beginning, middle and end, that he would at some point feel confident that he had achieved its purposes. He returned to many of the series’ leitmotifs again and again, and in 1963 restaged a burial scene on canvas quite similar to *Burial* and *Nirvana. Snow* (Fig. 4.13) presents four faces, mouths open in an apparent chant, hands upraised, standing vigil by a body, covered in a burial shroud hovering in the middle of the horizontal composition. This dead POW is completely obscured within the burial wrappings, revealing no parts of the body, no face, and no halo, as seen in previous works. A single face and hand are set apart in the upper left hand corner, of an individual who seems to be leading the makeshift memorial service, perhaps the Buddhist priest, who Kazuki describes as having managed to retain his vestments, who would read sutras at such ad hoc services.²⁴³ In the explanatory text Kazuki wrote to accompany the work (later expanded upon in his memoir), he describes how the attending survivors envied the dead, who, as spirits, were now free to return home to Japan. This particular burial scene is meant to present the moment “when the spirit slips out of the blanket-wrapped body, bidding farewell to its assembled soldier friends, and flies to the skies of home.”^{244*} Thus, *Snow* differs in purpose somewhat from *Burial* and *Nirvana. Burial* serves as a tentative foray into honoring the dead with a ex post facto burial, enlivened by color, and *Nirvana* presents the honored dead passing into a state of peace free from the sufferings of the gulag. *Snow*, however, reveals not the passage into a theological afterlife-state, but a spiritual return home. The burial scenes represent Kazuki’s effort to supplement the unconscionable inadequacy of the actual burials he took part in while in Siberia. He describes how, in the gulag,

²⁴³ Kazuki describes the priest as follows: “There was one Buddhist priest among the soldiers. One admirable thing about him was that he had held on to his monk’s stole, and had brought it with him all the way to Siberia. He read sutras for the dead.” Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 106.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 108.

“[my] sketches, and [the Buddhist priest’s] sutras, along with one digit of the pinky finger, cut off as a relic of sorts, served as the burial ceremony.”²⁴⁵

One of the closest visual parallels to *Nirvana* and *Snow* would undoubtedly be Käthe Kollwitz’s *Memorial for Karl Liebknecht* (1920, Fig. 4.14). The composition of the (monochrome) woodcut is remarkably similar to *Nirvana* in particular. Thirteen figures, including one woman holding a small infant, occupy the majority of the space, their anguished faces comprising a full third of the space. One figure kneels down, hat in hand, placing his right hand on the chest of the martyred Communist leader. The prominence of hands and faces, including Liebknecht’s, as well as the blocky, simplified, features, mirror Kazuki’s design choices, particularly those of *Nirvana*. The faces are much more distinct from each other than Kazuki’s conventionalized “my face,” and the crowding together of the visages suggests a larger immediate circle of mourners, in contrast to Kazuki’s more limited presence of fellow POWs. The memorialized deceased, in Kazuki’s case an anonymous fallen friend rather than Kollwitz’s specific political leader, are perhaps the two works’ most closely aligned features. Their stillness and profound sense of peace are both clear evocations of Christ and Christian martyrs. Both works aim toward the same essential purpose, memorializing a man felled by injustice, though diverging in the contrasting specificity of Kollwitz and anonymity—or rather the generalized representation of many victims—of Kazuki. Though Kazuki was well versed in European art, particularly painting, of his times, it is not clear that he was aware of *Memorial for Karl Liebknecht*, or Kollwitz’s work more generally. This question is somewhat beside the point, however, as the near-identical function of the two works, as well as a familiarity with historical precedents from Europe, makes even a coincidental congruence not at all surprising.

²⁴⁵ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia.” Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Siberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 106.

The most striking difference between Kazuki and Kollwitz's memorial scenes are the faces of the mourners. Kazuki's figures are of the uniform "My Face" that characterizes the series, the intentional abstracting of features to create a conventionalized stand-in for any and all POWs. Kollwitz, on the other hand, presents a variety of individualized faces on her mourners. Some stare at the deceased, some have their gaze cast skyward, some have their eyes closed. Near the image's center a woman holds a baby up to view Liebkecht. Though there is a certain degree of stylization consistent with Kollwitz's work, the faces evince subtly differentiated psychology. The uniformity of the faces in *Nirvana* blurs the line between the living and the dead—they could as easily be those who had passed before the shrouded figure, welcoming him to the other side as survivors sending him off. The lone face covered by hands is the only clear suggestion that it is the latter case, grief pointing toward loss and goodbye.

Not all of Kazuki's explicit memorials for the dead are of burial scenes, however. *The Sea of Japan* (1972, Fig. 4.15) depicts a Japanese POW who, en route to the port of Nakhodka, had died and was buried, an event for which Kazuki was not present. Like the earlier "Siberia Series" work *Burial*, Kazuki has subordinated accurate reconstruction of a scene he witnessed to present a scene more suitable to the memorializing purpose of the painting. Kazuki relates that though in the original scene, "only the boots on both [of the dead soldier's] feet were sticking out of the ground, but feeling sympathy towards the dead man's sorrow, I added his face and hands."²⁴⁶ Kazuki's commentary on both of these works underscores both his concern with remembering those whose deaths might otherwise be forgotten, and the degree to which he is, to paraphrase Psychohistorian Robert Jay Lifton, in thrall to death—or to the dead—and forever bound to serve them as a means to deal with his guilt over survival priority. As Lifton points out, in every culture there are protocols by which an individual "embraces the dead, supplicates

²⁴⁶ Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" *Shiberia*, 95.

oneself before them, and creates continuous rituals to perpetuate one's relationship to them."²⁴⁷ In traumatic or extraordinary encounters with death, however, such rituals and cultural practices can be radically disrupted. Such dislocation can lead to an inability to process the encounter in an appropriate or meaningful way, leaving survivors with lingering psychological difficulties dealing with the dead. Kazuki and his surviving peers live with survivor's guilt—what Theodor Adorno, speaking about survivors of the Holocaust in Europe described as “the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living—especially one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living.”²⁴⁸

The dead figure Kazuki depicts in *The Sea of Japan* is highly evocative of what Lifton calls the “homeless dead.” In Lifton's formulation, such unfortunates usually include “the spirits (or ghosts) of the following: those who died suddenly, through suicide or violence, while on a journey and far from home... and of those who have been denied proper rituals by their posterity.”²⁴⁹ Lifton's notion has particular relevance for the consideration of Kazuki's works and his motivations, and he continues:

This last category suggests the responsibility survivors feel for the homeless dead, and the implication that some form of ‘negligence’ has caused these dead to be ‘homeless’—that is, condemned to a miserable transitional existence in which they are capable neither of rejoining the living nor of settling comfortably among the other dead (sometimes also called ‘living dead’).²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Robert Jay Lifton, *History and Human Survival* (New York: Random House, 1970), 176.

²⁴⁸ Theodor W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*, (New York: Continuum, 1994) 361.

²⁴⁹ Robert Jay Lifton. *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, (New York: Basic Books, 1967) 492.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

Kazuki's commentary reveals how, in another explicit expression of obligation to the dead, even a man he never knew, he is presenting an admittedly counterfactual image out of a desire to propitiate an unknown man's spirit, and also to retroactively honor one of the "homeless dead" who came agonizingly close to returning home. This desire to do right by the dead can also be seen as a critical dimension of Kazuki's dealing with his trauma. Kyo Maclear has explored how trauma and atrocities, such as the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, shapes artistic responses. She identifies one role of art "within the reassuring terms of therapy." She continues

Through art, it is thought that patients will find the means to lend shape and coherence to their otherwise overpowering pasts. Following a Freudian model of trauma recovery, art has been seen to act as a redemptive force, moving to cure the afflicted of memory, breaking links to the past.²⁵¹

Kazuki was not the only artist creating paintings that functioned as almost religious icons memorializing the war dead, however. During Japan's war years, Fujita Tsuguharu (藤田嗣治 1886-1968, also known late in life as Léonard Foujita) was already a highly acclaimed oil painter, known for his fame in Paris.²⁵² But in the late period of the war, he reinvented himself as a useful tool of the wartime state, in the process reinventing the military's "*sensō sakusen kirokuga*" or "war record paintings." The military had worked with artists to create representations of battle scenes since late 1937, shortly after the beginning of the Sino-Japanese war, and over the course of the war, collaboration between the military and artists

²⁵¹ Kyo Maclear. *Beclouded Visions: Hiroshima-Nagasaki and the Art of Witness*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) 138.

²⁵² Ostracized from the postwar art world due to his high profile as a war record painter, Fujita left Japan in 1949 for France, where he remained until his death, acquiring French citizenship in 1955 and changing his name to Léonard Foujita.

“would develop into a dominant wartime cultural policy.”²⁵³ The military especially preferred artists trained in European oil painting techniques, privileging this medium for its capacity to present a clear, naturalistic scene. Artists like Fujita created such monumental tableaux of Japanese armed forces in the field for widespread public consumption. These propagandistic works were often quite large in scale, fit to be displayed at large public exhibitions sponsored both publicly and privately. These works, in the words of Maya Tsuruya, served as “commemorative representation(s) of war, designed to serve as monuments for visually reinforcing the wartime propaganda of national unity under the emperor.”²⁵⁴

As the tide of the war began to turn decisively against the Japanese empire, paintings such as those that characterized earlier efforts at glorifying Japanese military success and unbound confidence became increasingly untenable. Fujita’s response was a radical reconfiguration of the very genre of *sensōga*. No longer the picturesque vistas of foreign battlefields populated by resolute professional soldiers in the stylistic tradition of European historical painting, Fujita’s compositions are turgid maelstroms of carnage, wherein desperate, dying, and defeated Japanese soldiers struggled only to magnify the charnel houses of the Pacific, with no tangible benefit for their sacrifice. This is clearest in Fujita’s most (in)famous work, representing the doomed Japanese garrison on the Aleutian island Attu, *Last Stand on Attu* (1943, Fig. 4.16).²⁵⁵ The tableau presents a furious, chaotic scrum in turgid earth tones, a

²⁵³ Kawada Akihisa. *Gaka to Sensō: Nihon Bijutsushi No Kūhaku*, (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 2014) 28.

²⁵⁴ Tsuruya Maya. “Sensō Sakusen Kirokuga: Seeing Japan’s War Documentary Painting as a Public Monument,” in J. Thomas Rimer, ed. *Since Meiji: perspectives on the Japanese visual arts, 1868-2000*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 101.

²⁵⁵ The work’s title in Japanese is アツツ島玉砕 - *Atsu Tō Gyokusai*, and is sometimes rendered in English scholarship as *Attu Island Gyokusai*. The term *gyokusai*, or “smashed jewels” is a reference to a Classical Chinese literary text about the admirable morality of one who would destroy worldly valuables rather than compromise their loyalty. In wartime Japan the term became a popular euphemism for the death of soldiers facing reckless attacks on overwhelmingly superior forces, doomed attacks meant to damage the enemy or avoid surrender rather than achieve any realistic military objective. This was also related to the strategy of deploying attackers meant to undertake suicidal missions such as the “kamikaze” pilots and similar attacks carried out with specially designed submersibles.

melee of bodies engaged in pitched close combat, with the Japanese combatants hard to differentiate from their American opponents. As Bert Winther-Tamaki succinctly puts it, “Fujita’s deathly battle scenery was both a product and an abetting instrument of fascist social context that extolled violent sacrificial death.”²⁵⁶ Winther-Takami also points out that such vistas of bloodlust and carnage became “an increasingly common and officially sanctioned image in Japanese visual culture during the late-war period.”²⁵⁷ This glorification of carnage had a spiritual dimension for both Fujita and the many Japanese viewers of his war paintings. Fujita claimed that he felt the awesome weight of the spirits of the dead, such that in the process of painting *Last Stand*, he reported: “My own picture became terrifying to me, and I burned incense and placed flowers as an offering while I continued to paint.”²⁵⁸

In light of the reverent memorialization of dead Japanese soldiers seen in *Last Stand on Attu* and similar paintings, Kazuki’s “icons” become somewhat problematic. While there are significant differences in the circumstances of the events depicted, and of the works’ creation (to say nothing of the gulf between Kazuki’s direct experience and Fujita’s vicarious engagement with already heavily mediated propagandistic information). The presentation of suffering Japanese bodies has been criticized as (consciously or unconsciously) erasing the suffering of other Asian bodies at the hands of Japanese forces. While Kazuki’s expressed a personal distaste for war and Japan’s militarized cultural chauvinism that could not be more different from Fujita’s imperialistic carnage porn, the absence of non-Japanese bodies in the *Siberia Series* still gives one pause. The result of the focus on the suffering of Japanese military personnel, to the exclusion of other victims of the war, creates the danger of a hermetically sealed world where questions of why these men were in a position to be captured by Soviet forces, of what

²⁵⁶ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 143.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁵⁸ Fujita quoted in “Senkō taite kaita-meisaku ‘Attsu-tō gyokusai’ no sakusha,” in Hariu Ichirō et al., eds. *Art in Wartime Japan, 1937-1945 / Sensō to Bijutsu, 1937-1945* (Tokyo: Kankusho Kankōkai, 2007) 262.

atrocities they might themselves have perpetrated, of who should be held responsible for the staggering destruction wrought across Asia, are glossed over, or forgotten. John Dower cites the example of a collection of writings from promising young university students killed in battle during the war that became a runaway bestseller in 1950. For postwar Japanese readers, “It was [the university students’/soldiers’] deaths, rather than the deaths of those they might have killed, that commanded attention and were truly tragic. Indeed, there were no non-Japanese victims in this hermetic vision of the war.”²⁵⁹

Furthermore, the focus on the immediate physical suffering and privations of Kazuki and his peers creates the danger of placing even the blame for these specific men’s suffering solely at the feet of Stalin’s Soviet Union rather than sharing it with the Japanese wartime regime that irresponsibly put their own citizens in harm’s way for megalomaniacal imperial ambitions. Kazuki trains his scorn on Japan’s wartime leadership, but almost exclusively in his written commentary, particularly his memoir, rather than in his visual representations, which would have greater rhetorical force, insofar as Kazuki was a painter above all else. It might be hard to argue against the fact that Kazuki’s primary goal was not to make political statements that aligned with activist or reactionary politics of his day with his paintings. Additionally, the scenes that he represents are his own personal experiences, which did not include taking part in military actions or violence against civilians, nor encountering the Asian victims of Japan’s war directly. Kazuki was hardly naïve of the political stakes of the representation of atrocity, however, as his commentaries on his more obliquely political Siberia Series works makes clear. The sacralization of the suffering and death of Japanese POWs was a meta-political project, not premised on policies or a program as such, but to Kazuki absolutely essential, nonetheless. Andrew Barshay sees part of the purpose of Kazuki’s commentaries on his works as being “to bring out their latently political dimension, in particular to prevent their being read as an

²⁵⁹ John Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1999) 199.

expression of pure victimhood.”²⁶⁰ While Kazuki’s words do articulate a point of view that does not seem to seek to privilege Japanese victimhood, he doesn’t address this critical issue in many works, or the overall series and its absence of non-Japanese suffering.

Implicit anti-war texts

Though politics is clearly not the overriding concern in Kazuki’s artistic production, the “Siberia Series” can be seen as an implicitly anti-war text. Kazuki repeatedly expressed his distaste for being compelled to be a soldier and repudiated any sense of military obligation to kill for the nation. While Kazuki frequently inveighs against war and the attendant domestic oppression Japan experienced, it is not wholly clear what Kazuki’s opinions might have been during wartime. There are no extant writings on politics that predate his commentaries on the Siberia Series works or his more extended disquisitions in “My Siberia.” Kazuki scholar Yasui Yuichirō posits that the “Siberia Series” can be considered “anti-war painting”, but that abhorrence of war comes from a place of a humanistic reverence for life.²⁶¹ Masayoshi Homma echoes this, asserting that Kazuki “had a strong criticism against unreasonable war, war without consideration or justice. We may say that the Siberia Series is such a criticism.”²⁶² As most of the scenes Kazuki presents in the “Siberia Series” are of the quotidian labors and sufferings of the gulag, it is easy to see how a political critique could fade to the margins. However, several works bring out the critical potential of memories such as Kazuki experienced.

²⁶⁰ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 74.

²⁶¹ Kazuki Yasuo, et al. *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbun Seibu Honsha Kikakubu, 1989) 142.

²⁶² Kazuki Yasuo, *Kazuki Yasuo isaku ten = Posthumous exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki* (Tōkyō: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1975).

One of Kazuki's more pointedly political paintings is *1945*, painted in 1959 (Fig. 4.17). The title is, of course, the year that Japan's long-running wars ended, with the nation's surrender brought on in part by the horrifying atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of that year. The painting shows a single male corpse stretching across the horizontal canvas. The figure is shirtless, and his arms appear to be bound behind his back. The squared torso is completely crisscrossed by black striations suggesting a grisly and violent end. The painting is the same turgid yellow ochre/tan monotone that characterizes the series, punctuated by black lines describing the body, with blacked out eye sockets in a blocky face casting a shadow on the ground. The Arabic numerals "1945" appear in the upper right corner. A narrow unpainted border, Kazuki's signature framing device, surrounds the composition, lending the scene a sense of unreality, foregrounding its status as a re-presentation of an image glimpsed in the past, existing in the present as a memory.

In his memoirs Kazuki discusses at length the political implications that the "red corpse" confronts him with, as a Japanese subject who lived through the war. Kazuki's commentary on the work's background—and its implications—is worth quoting at length:

Just after leaving Mukden, I saw a dead body lying by the side of the railway track. It must have been a Japanese person lynched by the Manchurians. Its clothes were torn off, and it looked like it had been skinned... If that was skin though, the color was rather strange. It was completely desiccated, and looked as if frozen, with a reddish-brown color. On top of that, vertical stripes ran down the whole length of the body, as if it'd been painted red. It was just like an anatomy textbook showing human musculature. Was he skinned alive, or after he was killed?

After I came home to Japan, I saw photos of the fallen bodies, scorched black by the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima. At that time, in my head, the skinned body of the lynched Japanese I saw in Manchuria floated up, and the two dead

bodies, red and black, came to overlap. Those two bodies say everything about the year 1945.

In the twenty years since the war ended, the stories of the black corpses have been told again and again. Hiroshima and Auschwitz are held up as two symbols of the great war. The deaths of innocents there were symbolic of the general cruelty of war. Through the black corpse, Japanese people could feel that they had been victims of the war. Everyone shouted in unison “No more Hiroshimas!” It was like there had been no war besides the dropping of the atomic bomb, I thought.^{263*}

Such commentary shows that Kazuki was attuned to the politics of what is, and what is not, shown, and the specific dimensions of this question in the aftermath of Japan’s wars. Kazuki’s implicit argument is that we are seeing the wrong kind of Japanese victim—that the lynched soldier communicates more important—or at least more immediately pertinent—lessons than the charred bodies of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The work seems to address a major problematic aspect of Japan’s memory of Hiroshima, articulated by historians such as Lisa Yoneyama, who has written:

Whether within mainstream national historiography, which remembers Hiroshima’s atomic bombing as victimization experienced by the Japanese collectivity, or in the equally pervasive, more universalistic narrative on the bombing that records it as having been an unprecedented event in the history of humanity, Hiroshima memories have been predicated on the grave obfuscation of the prewar Japanese Empire, its colonial practices, and their consequences.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 72-73.

²⁶⁴ Yoneyama, Lisa. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space and the Dialectics of Memory* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1999) 3.

Additionally, one cannot help but wonder if the hyper-focus on the “pure” victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki blots out any attention or sympathy for others who suffered an extraordinary degree, as POWs like Kazuki did. Kazuki does not address the question of depicting only Japanese bodies and the potential for falling into the so-called “victim’s consciousness” (*higaisha ishiki*) that obscures the victimization of Asians and other non-Japanese through a focus on specifically Japanese suffering. As Thomas Havens observes, in postwar Japan, “There was no cathartic, galvanizing public confrontation with the issue of the average person’s responsibility for the wartime state’s acts of foreign aggression and domestic oppression.”²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the painting is Kazuki’s most direct interrogation of not only Japan’s culpability for horrors across East Asia, but also his own, as an instrument, albeit an unwilling one, of the Japanese Imperial war machine. Leading trauma theorist Cathy Caruth claims that “[t]he traumatized witness, in effect, carries a burden of knowledge.”²⁶⁶ In the case of Kazuki’s 1945, that burden is joined with a second one, the burden of ensuring that the witnessing of another traumatic atrocity—the bombings Hiroshima and Nagasaki—does not obscure the circumstances that brought a horrific end to the “red corpse.”

1945 was an early entry into the Siberia Series, painted in 1959, which was before the Vietnam War had become a major public issue in Japan. In general, though, the period during which Kazuki was working on the series overlaps almost precisely with the period that America’s war in southeast Asia, and Japan’s crucial cooperation with United States in the conflict, became an issue of intense interest to the Japanese public in the 1960s. Part of the reason for this was that the images of carnage in Indochina served as an uncanny reflection of the Asia-Pacific, still fresh in the memories many Japanese. Postwar literature scholar Bruce Suttmeier

²⁶⁵ Thomas R. H. Havens. *The Victim as Hero: Ideologies of Peace and National Identity in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001) 35.

²⁶⁶ Bruce Suttmeier. “Seeing Past Destruction: Trauma and History in Kaikō Takeshi”. *Positions* 15.3, 2007 471.

has written that the troubling photographic imagery coming out of Vietnam “[spoke] to the desires and fears of Japanese viewers, particularly to the nation’s troubled past, as both perpetrator and victims of atrocities.”²⁶⁷ Additionally, the late 1950s saw large-scale civil unrest and protest against Japan’s increasingly militarized relationship as a client state of the United States and crucial East Asian component of its Cold War containment policy. Such political reached a crescendo in protests against the ANPO Security Treaty in late 1959 and early 1960. Historian William Marotti describes an atmosphere in which “memories of wartime and the imperial state, prospects for future warfare, and a postwar history of suppressed aspirations” linked the recent wartime past and the postwar present.²⁶⁸ Though Kazuki does not address such protests or the Vietnam war explicitly in his writings or paintings, he cannot have been unaware of the discourse of the time. His concern about the possibility of another devastating war, is a significant subtext of both the Siberia Series itself as well as his commentary on it.

Several paintings of the series also play on the latent political dimensions of life in the gulag. The only work of the series that represents an explicitly political activity, although in a somewhat ironic fashion, is 1973’s *Demonstration*, discussed in chapter three. The work portrays serried ranks of POWs as a large undifferentiated black mass, carrying crimson banners. As previously noted, such stage-managed shows of support of communist ideals were essentially compulsory, though many POWs feigned sincerity in the hopes that such activities would expedite their repatriation. This is the only major Siberia Series painting on this theme, but Kazuki did produce objets d’art of demonstrating figures, usually protesting the Vietnam War.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ Bruce Suttmeier. “Seeing Past Destruction: Trauma and History in Kaikō Takeshi”. *Positions* 15.3, 2007 460.

²⁶⁸ Marotti, William. *Money, Trains, and Guillotines: Art and Revolution in 1960s Japan*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press. 2013) 134.

²⁶⁹ *Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan Kenkyū Kiyō* =: *Bulletin of the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art* (Yamaguchi-shi: Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1999) 37-38.

1965's *Imprisoned* (Fig. 4.18) presents a literal facing of one's oppressors, resulting in an astonishing moment of identification. The painting presents the wall of the lager, with the stylized, faintly described contours of the face of a Soviet prison guard, receding into blackness, peering out from a rectangular observation window on the composition's right side. To the left side is the hammer and sickle device of the Soviet Union, crudely inscribed into the textured matière. The wall presented is an even dingier grey than most of the works in the series. In Kazuki's explanatory text, he soberly muses that this guard, his proximate oppressor, is himself oppressed, also a victim of the politically and socially repressive militarized Soviet police state. In "My Siberia" Kazuki readily admits that he took the relationship between "the watcher and the watched" as a starting point and manufactured a more dramatic scenario to better illustrate his point.²⁷⁰ Kazuki muses: "If you think about the iron system of the army within the Soviet state, you could call even them prisoners."^{271*} Such moments of humane identification leaven what might otherwise be a harsher (though implicit) indictment of his immediate jailers. Kazuki reserves his condemnation for the Soviet state, implicitly criticizing its use of war as a tool of statecraft, as he critiques the Japanese war-state.

We see another moment of critique of the Japanese state in 1970's *The Emperor* (Fig. 4.19).²⁷² The canvas is taken up with a large black space, flecked with small white star-like snowflakes, from which rows of serene "Siberia Series" style faces peer, dissolving on the upper

²⁷⁰ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 120.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² This translation of this work's title from Japanese is difficult. Kazuki uses the single Chinese character 朕 (read in Japanese "chir") which is a first person pronoun for the exclusive use of the Emperor, sometimes likened to the majestic plural (the so-called "royal we") used by monarchs to indicate themselves. I have chosen to follow the translation used by *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, which, though it loses the first-person pronoun dimension, still indicates the Imperial personage. Other Japanese sources (notably *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū*, and *Kazuki Yasuo Siberia Series ten: Mainasu 35-do no Mokushiroku*) render the title as *Imperial Ordinance*. The American historian Andrew Barshay, who has translated Kazuki's "My Siberia" (tinting it "The Siberia Inside Me") extrapolates from the term's role as the Emperor's personal pronoun, styling it *His Majesty Speaks*.

and side borders into the usual mottled yellow ochre and negative space border. In the composition's center there is a horizontal, translucent grey rectangle, behind which the faces it overlays are transmuted into terrified, skull-like visages.

In his commentary Kazuki inveighs against the “old fashioned, pompous words” he and his fellow soldiers were forced to endure, along with frostbite conditions, on the Empire Day holiday in the year of Japan's defeat²⁷³. He declares the painting a personal expression of his ongoing resentment, stating “[I] couldn't not paint my personal grudge against imperial military orders that, weighing precious life, treated the lives of soldiers as if they were nothing but feathers, all in the name of the Emperor.”²⁷⁴ The commentary goes on to sarcastically quote a nationalistic military march song, before lamenting the “many who died in the name of the emperor.”^{275*} Though indirectly, Kazuki seems to say that the Emperor bears responsibility for the deaths of those “who died in [his] name,” including his friends. The painting and Kazuki's commentary seem to suggest that “if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the king that led them to it.”²⁷⁶ Kazuki's indignation, little softened in the twenty-three years since his repatriation, serves as an indictment (because a literal one was blocked by conservative Japanese and US authorities) of the Emperor both direct and oblique. The work seems to echo Shakespeare, who warned, in *Henry V*, against the sovereign trafficking lightly in the lives of his soldiers: “But if the cause is not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make when all

²⁷³ Empire Day(紀元節 *Kigensetsu*) was a holiday celebrating the founding of Japan, attributed to the quasi-mythical Emperor Jimmu in the year 660 BCE. The holiday was celebrated on February 11, based on a lunisolar calendrical reckoning for the beginning of the year. Prior to Japan's defeat in 1945, the holiday was a focus of nationalistic festivities and events, centered on the Emperor as a symbol of national unity. The holiday was abolished in 1948, but essentially replaced by National Foundation Day (建国記念の日 *Kenkoku Kinen no Hi*) in 1966, which remains an official public holiday. For more, see Stephen M. Ryan's chapter on Japan in Fuller, Linda K. *National Days, National Ways: Historical, Political and Religious Celebrations Around the World* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2004) 117-124.

²⁷⁴ Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū* (Yamaguchi: Chūgoku Shimbunsha 2004) 34.

²⁷⁵ *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 59.

²⁷⁶ Shakespeare, William. *Henry V. The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005) 4.2.139-141, p. 1150.

those legs and arms and heads, chopp'd off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day and cry all 'We died at such a place.'"²⁷⁷ Kazuki's characteristic faces are precisely those "heads, chopp'd off in a battle," returning to remonstrate their sovereign. Kazuki was, of course, not alone in his political critique in postwar Japan, and I will return to other artists' address of similar issues later in this chapter.

A Visual Representation of a Bifurcated World

If I have to keep having dreams about the Soviet detention, I am not sure when the 'I' in the dreams can finally come home. The 'I' in the dreams still wants to come home as early as possible.

-Otsuka Shigeru, former Japanese POW in Siberia, 1995

In addition to the above dimensions of the "Siberia Series," it is also nothing less than the instantiation, in oils, soot, ash, and grit on canvas, of a hybridized timespace. It is the incarnation of "*his*" Siberia, a space which both was and was not the Russian territory five-thousand kilometers from Japan, from the rivers and hills of Misumi, and a time which both was and was simultaneously not now and two decades in the past. As Taii Ryō suggests, the series "invites the viewer into a lyrically abstracted spiritual world by superimposing landscape and memory."^{278*} Barshay is even more explicit, calling one of the series' primary effects "a complex layering and interweaving of timescapes."²⁷⁹

²⁷⁷ Shakespeare, William. *Henry V. The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Orgel and A. R. Braunmuller (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2005) 4.2.139-141, p. 1150.

²⁷⁸ Kazuki Yasuo: "*Watakushi no*" *Shiberia*, 194.

²⁷⁹ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 71.

Though it may run counter to a common-sense notion of memory and temporality, this non-linear, dialectical process of memory is neither unique to Kazuki and his situation nor the realm of remembering generally. Sigmund Freud suggests that what we remember “will also be formed from residues of memories relating to later life as well.”²⁸⁰

Kazuki’s “My’ Siberia” was published in 1971, nearly a quarter century after his repatriation, a considerable gap he acknowledges in the very first sentence of the memoir. Consequently, we must take this into account when evaluating his commentary (both textual and visual) on events so far in the past. However, this also highlights the degree to which Kazuki exists in both the past of Manchuria and Siberia, and the present of Misumi, Japan. Several works in particular exemplify this bifurcated consciousness, beginning with *Burial*, and including 1956’s *Plasterer* (Fig. 4.20), and *(Beach) Nakhodka* (Fig. 4.21) from 1974, among others.

Plasterer, so crucial in Kazuki’s stylistic evolution, was also a turning point in the development of the hybrid temporality that characterizes the Siberia Series as a whole. The composition features the eponymous worker constructing a wall, an image suggested to Kazuki by his encounter after his return to Japan with a laborer repairing a wall in his garden damaged by the nearby river. This everyday encounter triggered in Kazuki the memory of doing similar work during his time in Siberia.

Plasterer represents something of a bridge between the “Original Siberia Series” of *Rain (Cattle)* and *Burial*, from 1948, and the fully crystallized style of the series seen following Kazuki’s European peregrination, from the late 1950s onward. This is in part because the process of the work’s creation literally spans the eight-year interregnum between these two periods. According to Kazuki’s close disciple Sakakura Hidenori, the painter began working on *Plasterer* shortly after completing *Rain (Cattle)* in 1947, and by 1949, the work was essentially

²⁸⁰ Freud, Sigmund, and Peter Gay. *The Freud Reader*, (London: Vintage, 1995) 315.

complete. He set the work aside for around seven years though, finally submitting it in May of 1956 to the Second Japan Modern Art Exhibition. After this show he revised the work, changing the coloration of the brick wall to a darkened tone closer to the “black matière” of the Siberia Series, as well as repainting the face of the figure.²⁸¹ The revision remains visible in the work’s final form, in particular, “[i]n the form of the left ear you can see that overpainted) face.”^{282*}

The pictured plasterer then is both the worker repairing Kazuki’s wall in Misumi in 1947, as well as Kazuki himself (and his fellow POWs) plastering walls in the gulag in 1946. While *Plasterer*, read through Kazuki’s commentary and the personal history that undergirds it, is perhaps the best singular example of this hybrid timespace, there are other works that typify this dimension of the series. *Burial*, with its representation of the past colored in tones reflecting Kazuki’s desire, in the present, to portray his friends warmly, is another example among many. But *(Beach) Nakhodka* (1974, Fig. 4.21) is perhaps one of the more poignant moments of this inescapable temporal nexus. Against the series’ usual turgid yellow ochre bordered with negative space, a wide swath of Kazuki’s “black matière” covers perhaps two-thirds of the composition, running from the upper left side to the lower right-hand corner. Within this darkened band are numerous small “Siberia Series” style faces, perhaps as many as two or three hundred, each three or four centimeters, peering from the darkness of this black zone. Above the band on the right side Kazuki has etched into the thick media the text “ИАХОТКА” (“Nakhodka”)²⁸³.

²⁸¹ Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai* (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 211.

²⁸² Yamaguchi Kenritsu Bijutsukan. *Kazuki Yasuo: Shiberia Gabunshū* (Yamaguchi: Chūgoku Shimbunsha 2004) 93.

²⁸³ This is a misspelling on Kazuki’s part. The correct orthography would be “ИАХОДКА.” His errors seem to stem from transposing Roman letters and from his unfamiliarity with quirks of Russian spelling. First, he has confused “И,” a vowel, pronounced like the English letter “E,” for the consonant “И,” equivalent to the English letter “N.” He has also used “Т” in the place of “Д,” an understandable mistake for someone with no formal instruction in Russian orthography. Nakhodka is indeed pronounced with an unvoiced “Т” sound, despite the Cyrillic letter “Д”’s voiced “D” sound. The difference is due to the devoiced “К” that follows the “Д,” which causes it to be devoiced, a phonological phenomena known as “assimilation.” This

The eponymous beach in (*Beach*) *Nakhodka* is in one sense a place on the shore of the Russian port of Nakhodka, on the Sea of Japan, where Kazuki pauses to look over his shoulder, and sees the faces of all those who will not join him, those who will never return (physically) to Japan. But it can also be read as Kazuki looking over his shoulder to the west from Japan. The Kazuki of 1947 poignantly realizes that many of his personal friends, as well as many more countrymen, will not return home, and the Kazuki of 1974 is unable to stop looking over his shoulder at their innumerable faces. And these two individuals are one and the same, existing in “his’ Siberia” on the canvas. In this, the painting is a kind of endpoint to the “Siberia Series.” Or, perhaps less of an endpoint than a cul-de-sac of sorts. The series cannot end—its very bi-temporality precludes this possibility. The “Kazuki” in Siberia wants to come home as early as possible. But if he keeps having dreams about the Soviet detention, and is continually compelled, in the space of his atelier in Misumi, to return to Siberia on the canvas, then he is not sure when the ‘Kazuki’ in the dreams—and on the canvas—can finally come home.

Nirvana is another example of this temporal dialectic. The work serves as a double memorial, for those who died in the past, in the gulag, and Fukushima Shigetarō, who died a decade and a half later. Even in the safety and comfort of his postwar life in Japan, loss cannot help but raise the spectre of unresolved grief from Siberia. Ultimately, the “Siberia Series” is “[Kazuki’s]’ Siberia.” Just as “[his]’ Earth” could not be divorced from the space of Misumi, and his life there, “[his]’ Siberia” is inextricable from the hybrid timespace visually represented by the works of the series, and textually represented in his commentary and memoirs.

War and the Postwar Art World

dimension of the work, and similar orthographic errors in other Siberia Series paintings, is treated at length in Furuta Hirotohi. “*'lahotoka' no Nazo; Kazuki Yasuo no Nagisa (Nahotoka) ni kisareta roshiago moji.*” Aichi bijutsukan kenkyū kiyō, vol. 3, 1996, pp 47-53.

Art historian Michael Sullivan has suggested that “[w]hen we consider how much suffering the Japanese people had inflicted and had themselves endured during the previous decade, it is extraordinary how little of this is reflected in postwar painting.”²⁸⁴ While painters such as Kazuki who represented their personal war experiences directly, were somewhat uncommon among his art world peers, they were not, however, the only commentator on Japan’s tumultuous recent past. Artists, authors and others addressed Japan’s wars, their own wartime experiences, and the enduring legacies of those wars in the postwar years. Some, like Kazuki, portrayed their own memories and experiences. Others dealt indirectly with the war by dramatizing the atmosphere of exhaustion and ambiguous moral reckoning in postwar Japanese society. These efforts carried varying degrees of political critique, though this was often ambiguous or ambivalent.

Representing Personal Experiences

Nearly all Japanese subjects, military and civilian, experienced the war, within Japan and throughout its Pacific empire and beyond. In the immediate postwar period artists were confronted with what role their experiences, and recent history, should play in their art and lives. Mitsuda Yuri writes that “[a] near impossible but unavoidable task in postwar art was the summation of World War II and Japan’s experience in it.”²⁸⁵ Some artists during the war years had direct military experience, while others experienced the war as civilians. Some were already artists during the war, while others became artists after their wartime experiences, drawing on their memories in later years in their artworks. While “[r]elatively few paintings were made on the

²⁸⁴ Michael Sullivan. *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 149.

²⁸⁵ Mitsuda Yuri. “Trauma and Deliverance: Portraits of Avant-Garde Artists in Japan 1955-1970” in Doryun Chong, and Michio Hayashi. *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde; [(November 18, 2012 - February 25, 2013)]* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012) 159.

theme of individual experiences at the warfront,²⁸⁶ Kazuki was not the only oil painter representing direct military experience. There were a number of artists, like Kazuki, who had experienced the war firsthand in the field. Doryun Chong states that for such individuals, “their worldviews and early artistic motivations were very much shaped by what they had been through and seen during World War II.”²⁸⁷

Furusawa Iwami (古沢岩美 1912-2000) was one such artist. Sometimes referred to as “Japan’s Dalí,” Furusawa was one of the most significant and influential Japanese Surrealists in both the prewar and postwar eras. He had a roughly analogous experience as Kazuki, as an oil painter also conscripted in 1943, sent to the front in China, and interned as a POW for a year following Japan’s defeat. While Kazuki struggled for years toward a style that would accommodate the representation of his wartime and postwar memories, this was not an obstacle for Furusawa. Surrealism was a framework that “provided Furusawa with a system for understanding and visualizing war experience.”²⁸⁸ Typical of his early postwar tableaux is *Hungry Ghost* (Fig. 22, 1952), a reference to a Buddhist notion of spirits afflicted with an unending and insatiable hunger. A gaunt, sickly, one legged veteran occupies the canvas’ center, surrounded by a tableau overflowing with grotesque detail, objects and figures suggesting death, war, rape, starvation strewn about, piling up upon each other. This particular figure escapes further bodily suffering in the painting space, to which Winther-Tamaki conjectures that “the actual evidence of the toll of history on this individual was so immense that the surrealist imagination was moved to withhold the more extreme resources of the

²⁸⁶ Mitsuda Yuri. “Trauma and Deliverance: Portraits of Avant-Garde Artists in Japan 1955-1970” in Doryun Chong, and Michio Hayashi. *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde; [(November 18, 2012 - February 25, 2013)]*(New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012) 159.

²⁸⁷ Chong, Doryun, and Michio Hayashi. *Tokyo 1955-1970: A New Avant-Garde; [(November 18, 2012 - February 25, 2013)]*(New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012) 34.

²⁸⁸ Bert Winther-Tamaki. “Oil Painting in Postsurrender Japan: Reconstructing Subjectivity Through Deformation of the Body”. *Monumenta Nipponica* 58.3, 2003. 360.

unconscious.”²⁸⁹ Works such as *Hungry Ghost*, and Furusawa’s comment on the Hiroshima bombing, *Demonic Music* (Fig. 23, 1948), seem the physical manifestations of his claim that “‘War Record Paintings’ don’t truly depict war.”²⁹⁰

Like Kazuki, Hamada Chimei (浜田知明 1917-2018) went to Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō, and also studied oil painting under Fujishima Takeji, graduating in March 1939. Unlike Kazuki, however, he enlisted in the army in Dec 1939, and in Feb 1940 was sent to Shanxi province in northern China. He was discharged in 1943, but re-enlisted in 1944, being deployed to the Izu islands south of Tokyo. While he made sketches while deployed, his real artistic debut came only after Japan’s surrender. Following the war Hamada began working primarily in monochrome etchings. His most significant body of war-related works is the series of etchings *Lament of a New Recruit*, in which bloated, distended corpses litter arid Surrealist-esque landscapes. Given their similarities, Hamada has often been mentioned in the same breath as Kazuki, both in his own day as well as the present. In the introduction to a 1966 interview with Kazuki, Kuwabara Sumio cites both artists as having left-leaning political inclinations, but both also characterized by aloofness from the direct activism on specific issues like other politically inclined artists.²⁹¹ More recently, In a review in the magazine *Rear* of the “War and Peace Exhibition” (*Sensō to Heiwa Ten*) held in 2015 at the Hiroshima Prefectural Museum of Art, Kakigi Noboyuki of Hiroshima City University directly compares Kazuki’s 1945 to Hamada’s work, citing both as having a stark simplicity in their presentation of war, in contrast to the lurid “garrulousness” of *sensōga* also represented in the exhibition.²⁹² Another artists who

²⁸⁹ Bert Winther-Tamaki. “Oil Painting in Postsurrender Japan: Reconstructing Subjectivity Through Deformation of the Body”. *Monumenta Nipponica* 58.3, 2003. 365.

²⁹⁰ Furusawa Iwami quoted in Sawaragi Noi, Aida Makoto. *Sensōuga to Nippon*, (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2015) 131.

²⁹¹ Kuwabara Sumio. “Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberiya rensaku.” *Mizue*, vol. 737, no. 7, 1966, pp 66-74. 66.

²⁹² Kakigi Noboyuki. “Kasshoku no jidai aragai nagara sensō no kakushin ni semaru hyōgen no kōkyō.” *Rear*, no. 36, 2016, pp 14-18. 16.

experienced military service was Abe Nobuya (阿部展也 1913-1971). Abe was drafted in 1941 and sent to Philippines, where he worked in the propaganda section, as a photographer rather than a painter. He was detained in a POW camp prior to the end of the war as Japan's military situation worsened, being repatriated in 1946. His scenes of stylized battlefield corpses mirror the gaunt figures of POWs in Kazuki's Siberia Series, but also diverge in their more direct evocation of wartime death.

Kazuki Yasuo was not the only former POW painter to emerge from Yamaguchi. Miyazaki Shin (宮崎進 1922-2018) followed a similar trajectory as Kazuki, growing up in the same prefecture, and attending Tokyo Fine Arts School. Several years younger than Kazuki though, he was conscripted in 1942, prior to graduating. He also was interned for nearly twice as long as Kazuki, not returning to Japan until late 1949. Miyazaki also has a book entitled "My Siberia," published in 1998. From the standpoint of the representation of the POW experience, rather than Art History generally, the most significant former POW who was not a professional artist is Satō Kiyoshi (佐藤清 1925-). Satō was not an artist prior to the war but studied oil painting at Musashino Art School (now Musashino Art University) after his repatriation, graduating in 1959. Satō's most significant contribution has been less in his paintings of his experience of internment in Siberia as his writing, editing, and publishing on the subject of the Japanese Siberian POW experience.

The experience of wartime Japan was not limited to soldiers only, however, and many civilian artists addressed their own memories of war. Maruki Iri (丸木位里 1901-1995) and Toshi (俊, neé Akamatsu Toshiko 1912-2000) are perhaps the most well-known Japanese visual artists to directly and relentlessly enter into war-related politics in their collaborative, monumental "Hiroshima Panels" (*genbaku no zu*) and related works.²⁹³ Iri and Toshi were

²⁹³ Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not referenced in the original Japanese title of the works. The title *Genbaku no zu* means "Atomic bomb panels." Though the works are usually referred to as "murals" in

married artists trained in radically different traditions. Iri was primarily an ink wash (*suiboku*) painter, while Toshi was trained in the European oil painting tradition, like Kazuki. They spent the war years in Japan, stubbornly resisting working with the oppressive military regime.

Iri had grown up near Hiroshima, though the couple was living in Tokyo at the time of the bombing. He rushed back on the first available train to attend to his relatives, followed shortly by Toshi. In Hiroshima, they witnessed firsthand the overwhelming death and devastation wrought by the horrible new weapon, and the tortuous existence of those not killed outright. The shadow of their memories of Hiroshima weighing heavily upon them, they came to the conclusion that they had no choice but to work on the subject. As they began the first painting of the series Toshi was recovering from illness likely brought on by her time spent in Hiroshima after the bombing, and they feared that she might die. She felt she needed to express her experiences as what might be her final testament.

Since the American occupation still forbade depiction of the subject at the time, at first the pair worked in secret. But it was this very graphic void that so urgently compelled the Marukis to put to image the unrepresented horror. Their work would be the first graphic depiction of the Hiroshima experience available to the Japanese, preceding even photographs. In 1950 they published a booklet of black and white drawings of Hiroshima entitled *Pika-don*.²⁹⁴ Soon after this, despite the Occupation authorities' reluctance to allow depiction of the bombing, the Marukis were permitted to exhibit the first five panels of their Hiroshima murals in 1950 and 1951.²⁹⁵

English, they are not painted directly on walls, as is the general sense of that term. The use of the term "mural" is doubly odd, as the Marukis frequently toured with the works, as far afield as the United States and Europe.

²⁹⁴ *Pika-don* literally means "Flash-bang;" the term used to describe the intense white light followed by a shockwave that was the atomic bomb's signature.

²⁹³ Michael J. Hogan, Ed. *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). 128.

Feeling that contemporary accounts of the bombing focused on the unprecedented destructiveness of the bomb on the city, to the near exclusion of the destruction of humans, the Marukis decided to go to the other extreme and “paint only people and nothing else.”²⁹⁶ Iri states that their goal was not to create a didactic work, but to ensure the preservation of their memories, and those of others: “we painted the bomb because we had seen Hiroshima, and we thought there had to be some record of what had happened.”²⁹⁷ The first panel the pair produced is entitled *Ghosts* (1950, Fig. 4.24), which employs the highly idiosyncratic and distinctive style that characterizes the couple’s collaborative efforts. Nearly two meters tall and seven meters wide, the work is an ambiguous vision of suffering that nevertheless possesses an almost chilling lyricism.

Reflections on the war and the postwar world

Fukuzawa Ichirō (福沢一郎 1898-1992) was one of Japan’s preeminent avant-garde artists of his day, an oil painter of the generation preceding Kazuki. He was involved in introducing Surrealism into Japan in the 1930s, following seven years spent in Paris. The Japanese wartime regime was suspicious of Surrealism, equating it with Communism or other subversive creeds, and in 1941 Fukuzawa and his fellow Surrealist, the influential poet and critic Takiguchi Shūzō (瀧口修造 1903-1979), were imprisoned by the government. He was released after five months, having disavowed Surrealism, and thereafter cooperated with the authorities, painting “conservative tableaus for the military bureaucracy,” and “contributing to the visual culture of national empowerment.”²⁹⁸ After war’s end, however, Fukuzawa returned to a motif of

294 Iri Maruki from his interview with John Junkerman, quoted in John Dower and John Junkerman, Eds., *The Hiroshima Murals*, 124.

295 *Ibid.*, 125.

298 Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012) 144.

naked human bodies in a desolate landscape with 1948's *War Defeat Group* (Fig. 4.25). A profoundly ambivalent work, the canvas represents both the devastation and carnage that Japan experienced. The work presents a pile of human corpses in a barren, anonymous landscape, but its these bodies show a surprisingly robust coloration and physical condition, and the tangle of overlapping limbs seem to suggest movement and energy, and even a powerful grip. Bert Winther-Tamaki suggests the term "living cadavers" for the bodies, pointing toward "the way they are enlivened with flesh tones and musculatures that recall the artist's early passion for Rubens."²⁹⁹ The artist highlights the work's ambivalence, in a formulation that recalls other notions of Japan's devastated state and its possibilities, stating that "[t]he present experience [of lingering devastation wrought by the war] is the prerequisite for the opportunity for recovery."³⁰⁰

Some artists' work addressed the violence of the war years in a more oblique fashion (though one still often connected directly with representations of human bodies), offering a critique no less powerful for its ambiguous nature. Nowhere is this clearer than in the work of Kawara On (河原温 1932-2014), who is more well-known as a conceptual artist, responsible for such works as his "Date paintings," featuring a specific date painted in a san-serif printed style font. In his earlier *Bathroom* series (1953-1954), however, he presents terrifyingly sterile and still tableaux of violence enacted upon bodies. This series presents paintings more in line with immediate postwar trends of suffering or mutilated bodies, though drained of any of the somatic hope of works like *War Defeat Group*. Tsuruoka Masao (鶴岡政男 1907-1979) also struggled in the ambivalent atmosphere of postwar Japan. His painting *Heavy Hands* (1949 *Omoi Te*) is a striking work evoking an ambiguous moral grappling, represented as a grotesque and baffling physical transmutation of the body, and is often held up as emblematic of the era.

²⁹⁹ Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 149.

³⁰⁰ Fukuzawa Ichirō, "Kō omou," *Bijutsu* 3, no.2 (1946), 28-29.

Kazuki's place in postwar art

Many artists in postwar Japan were, in the words of Ming Tiampo, "suspicious of the didactic realism of wartime painting sought new ways of expressing their views and engaging in the project of reimagining postwar society."³⁰¹ This is also true of Kazuki, in a somewhat low-key fashion. The extended process of developing the style and media of the Siberia Series was his way of not only trying to come to terms with a traumatic past, but also to understand and cope with an uncertain present and future. Some of the choices Kazuki made were not atypical for artists in the postwar era. In his book *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, Bert Winther-Tamaki traces the history of Yōga in Japan through the lens of "embodiment." The depiction of human bodies is a central component of this interpretive concept, and as his book demonstrates, the leitmotif carries through the wartime years to the postwar period. Winther-Tamaki argues that images of suffering bodies on canvas in postwar Japanese painting

were visualized to mediate real experiences conditioned by events of modern Japanese history. Fascism, total war, war defeat, occupation, and poverty were some of the social realities that painters experienced along with most other Japanese people during this period.³⁰²

Like Hamada, Furusawa, Kawara and others, Kazuki's representations of suffering bodies certainly mirror this trend, though his works flow more directly from specific personal experiences than some of the works of his contemporaries. Winther-Tamaki

³⁰¹ Ming Tiampo. "Body War, and the Discourses of History." *Art and War in Japan and Its Empire, 1931-1960*, edited by Ikeda Asato, Aya L. McDonald, and Ming Tiampo, eds., (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 349.

³⁰² Bert Winther-Tamaki. *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the Western Painting of Japan, 1912-1955*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012) 167.

further links such trends in postwar Japan with similar ones visible in other nations that experienced the global war. He argues that postwar Japan was “one of many disparate contexts of modern painting where crises of subjectivity triggered by the world war were addressed by painterly attacks on the human figure.”³⁰³ For Kazuki, the crisis of subjectivity was both based on, and inextricable from, his traumatic survivor’s guilt—his agonized grappling with what he owed to the dead.

³⁰³ Bert Winther-Tamaki. “Oil Painting in Postsurrender Japan: Reconstructing Subjectivity Through Deformation of the Body”. *Monumenta Nipponica* 58.3, 2003. 389.

Chapter 4 Images Supplement



Fig. 4.1. Kazuki Yasuo, 雨 〈牛〉 Rain (Cattle), 1947, oil on canvas, 72.9 x 116.1cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 46)



Fig. 4.2. Kazuki Yasuo, 埋葬 Burial, 1948, oil on canvas, 72.2 x 117.1cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 78)



Fig. 4.3. Kazuki Yasuo, 釣り床 - *Hammock*, 1941, oil on canvas, 73 x 117.3cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 24)

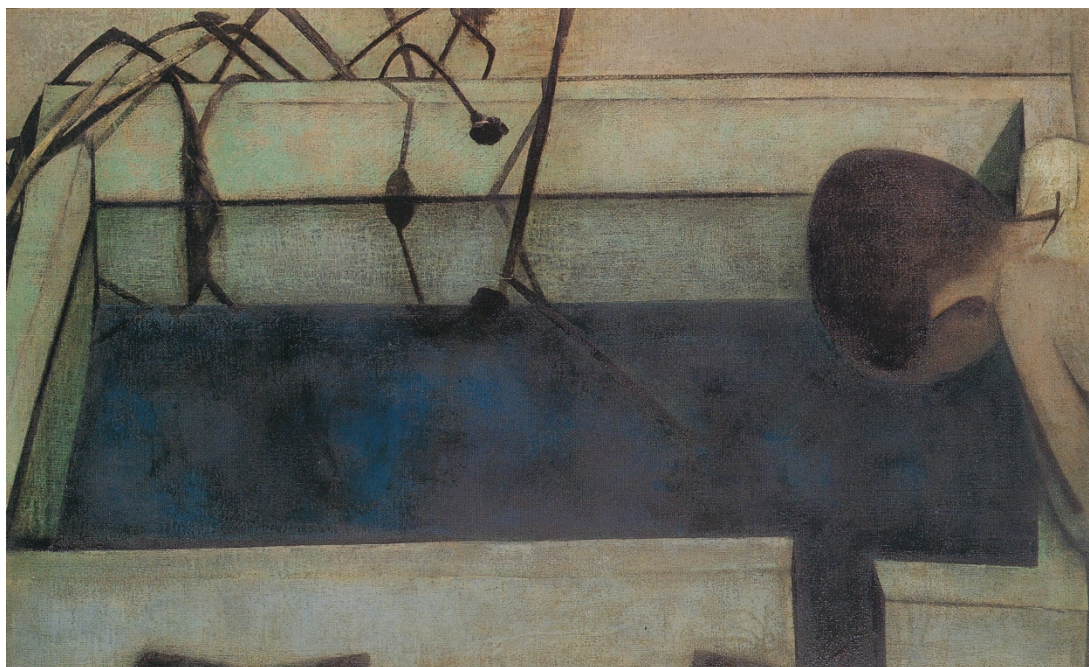


Fig. 4.4. Kazuki Yasuo, 水鏡 - *Water Mirror*, 1942, oil on canvas, 72.3 x 116.5 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 25)



Fig. 4.5. Detail from Gentile da Fabriano, *Adoration of the Magi*, ca. 1423, tempera on wood, 282 x 300 cm. The Uffizi Gallery. (Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth Century Florence*, 26)



Fig. 4.6. Leonardo da Vinci, *St. Jerome in the Wilderness*, ca. 1482, oil on wood, 103 x 74 cm. The Vatican Museums. (Moffatt, *Leonardo Da Vinci. Nature and Architecture*, 199)

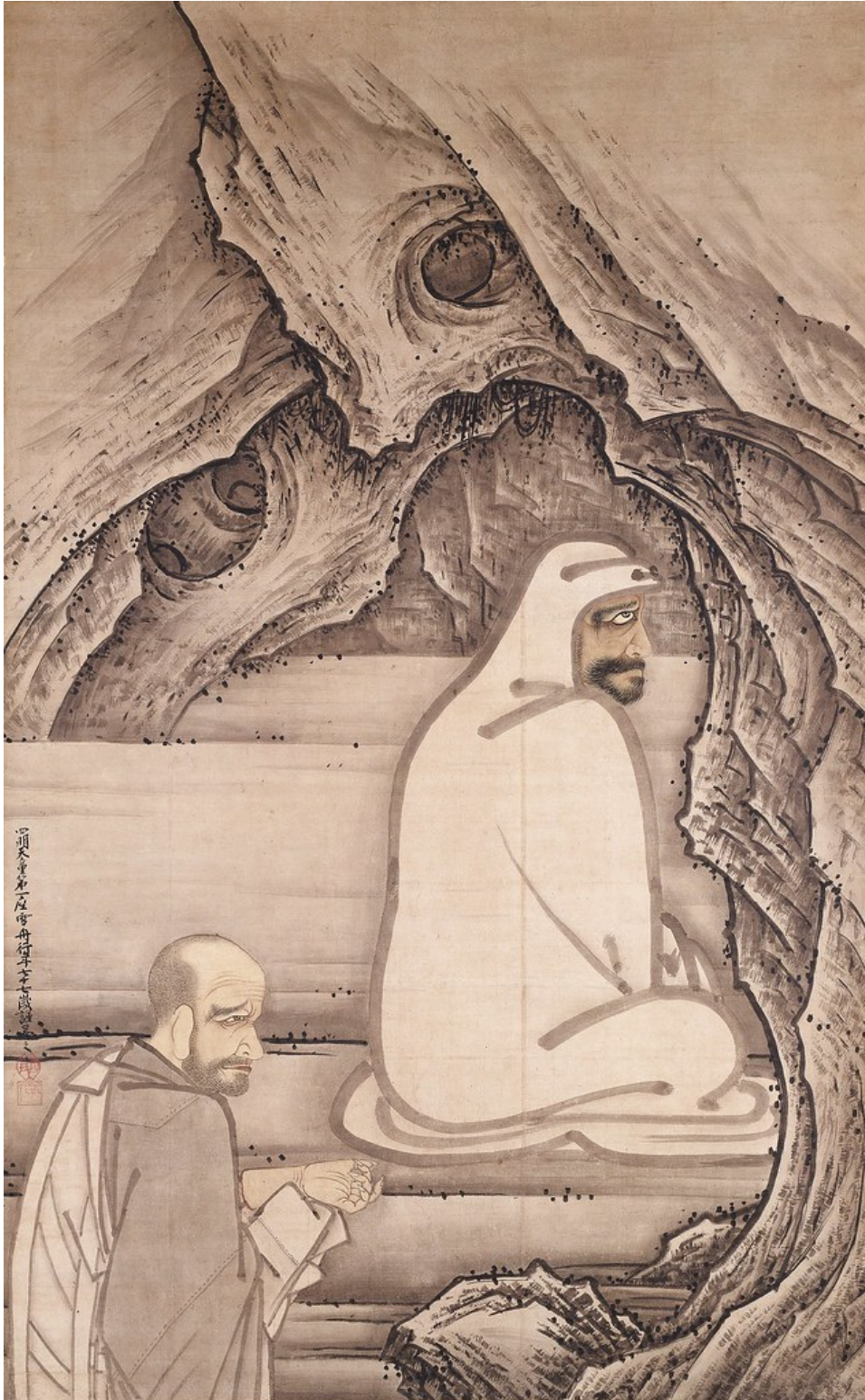


Fig. 4.7. Sesshū Tōyō, 慧可斷臂圖 - *Huike Offering his Arm to Bodhidharma*, 1496, ink and light color on paper, 199.9 x 113.6 cm. Kyoto National Museum. (Sesshū, *Sesshū: Botsugo Gohyakunen Tokubetsuten*, 160)



Fig. 4.8. Kazuki Yasuo, 業火 – *The Flames of Karma*, 1960, oil on canvas, 162.0 x 96.0cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 64)

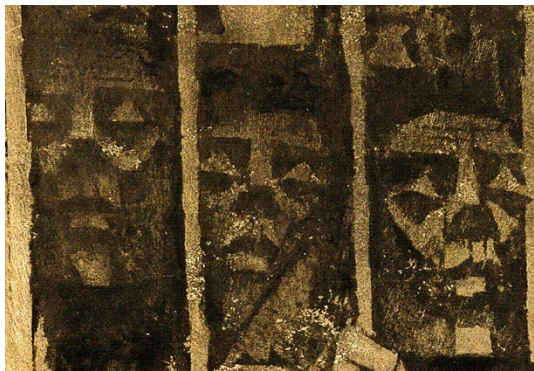
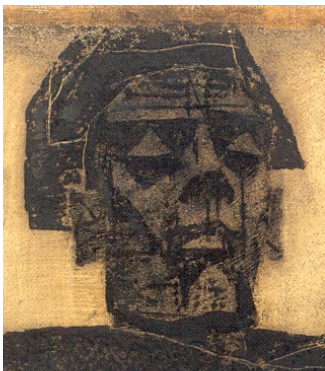


Fig. 4.9. Kazuki Yasuo, Details, ダモイ – *Going Home*, 1959 (Left), 北へ西へ – *To the North, to the West*, 1959 (Center), 涅槃 – *Nirvana*, 1960 (Right), oil on canvas. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 88, 63, 77)



Fig. 4.10. Kazuki Yasuo, 私〈マホルカ〉 – *Self-Portrait Smoking "Makhorka"*, 1966, oil on canvas, 72.6 x 116.8cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 99)



Fig. 4.11. Kazuki Yasuo, ダモイ – *Going Home*, 1959, oil on canvas, 72.8 x 116.7cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 88)



Fig. 4.12. Kazuki Yasuo, 涅槃 - *Nirvana*, 1960, oil on canvas, 130.3 x 194.3 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 76)



Fig. 4.13. Kazuki Yasuo, 雪 - *Snow*, 1963, oil on canvas, 115.5 x 162.0 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 75)



Fig. 4.14. Käthe Kollwitz, *In Memoriam Karl Liebknecht* (*Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht*), 1920, woodcut on paper, 47.7 x 63.7 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York. (Marchesano, *Käthe Kollwitz: Prints Process Politics*, 134)



Fig. 4.15. 日本海 - *The Sea of Japan*, 1972, oil on canvas, 96.0 x 194.3cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 95)



Fig. 4.16. Fujita Tsuguharu, アッツ島玉砕 - *Last Stand on Attu*, 1943, oil on canvas, 193.5 x 259.5 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. (Fujita, *Complete Works from the Museum Collection*, 22)

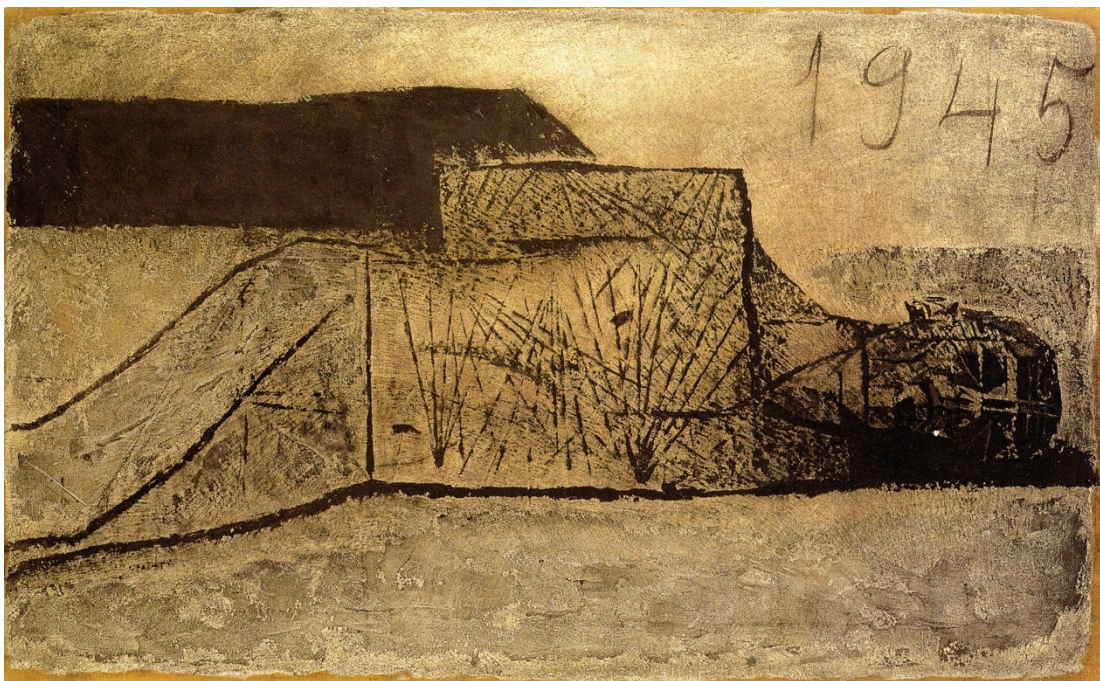


Fig. 4.17. Kazuki Yasuo, 1945 - 1945, 1959, oil on canvas, 72.8 x 116.7 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 62)

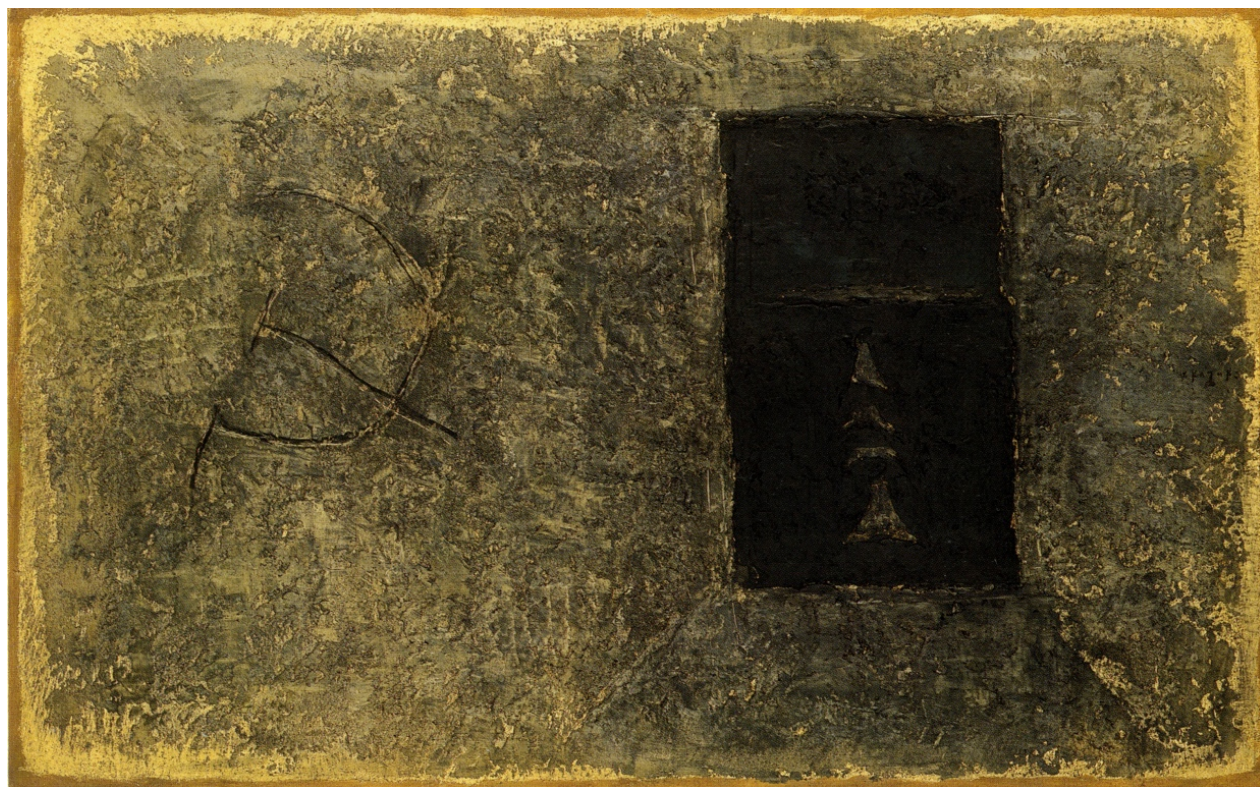


Fig. 4.18. Kazuki Yasuo, 囚 – *Imprisoned*, 1970, oil on canvas, 72.8 x 116.7 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 82)



Fig. 4.19. Kazuki Yasuo, 朕 – *The Emperor*, 1970, oil on canvas, 162.1 x 116.1 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 58)

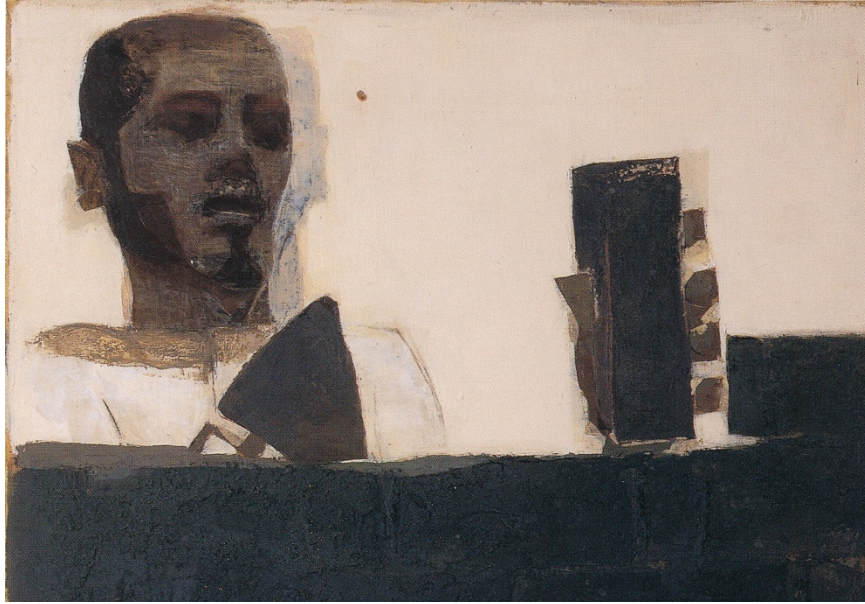


Fig. 4.20. Kazuki Yasuo, Detail from 左官 - *Plasterer*, 1956, oil on canvas, 116.9 x 72.3 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 84)



Fig. 4.21. Kazuki Yasuo, 渚〈ナホトカ〉 - *Beach (Nakhodka)*, 1974, oil on canvas, 96.5 x 162.0 cm. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 90)



Fig. 4.22. Furusawa Iwami, 餓鬼 – *Hungry Ghost*, 1952, oil on canvas, 289.5 x 205.0 cm. National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. ([source](#))

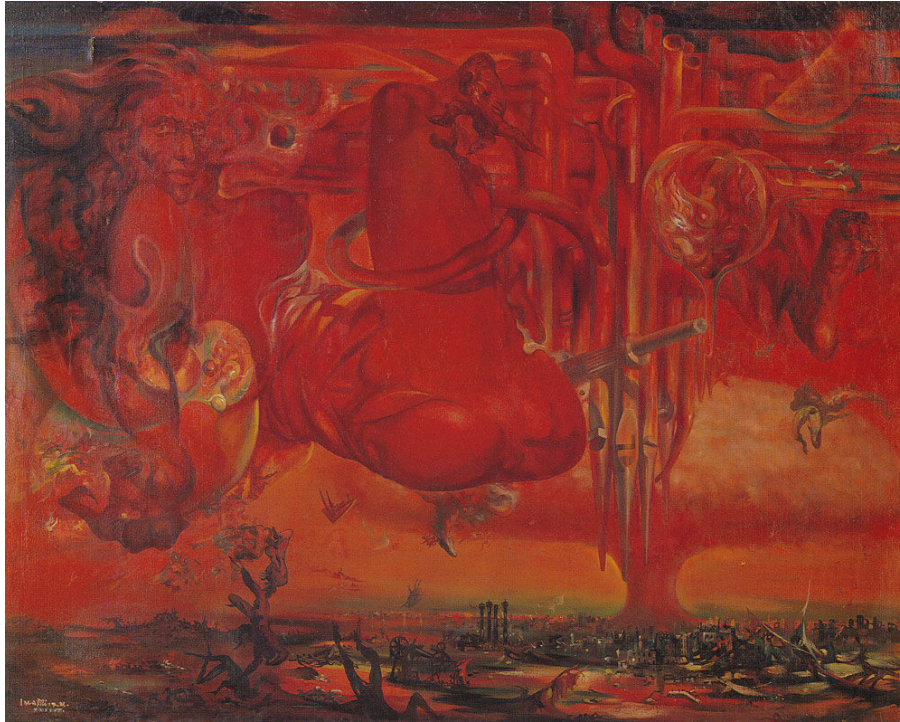


Fig. 4.23. Furusawa Iwami, 憑曲 – *Demonic Music*, 1948, oil on canvas, 151.0 x 192.0 cm. Itabashi Art Museum (Hyogo Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1945 ± 5 Nen, 140)

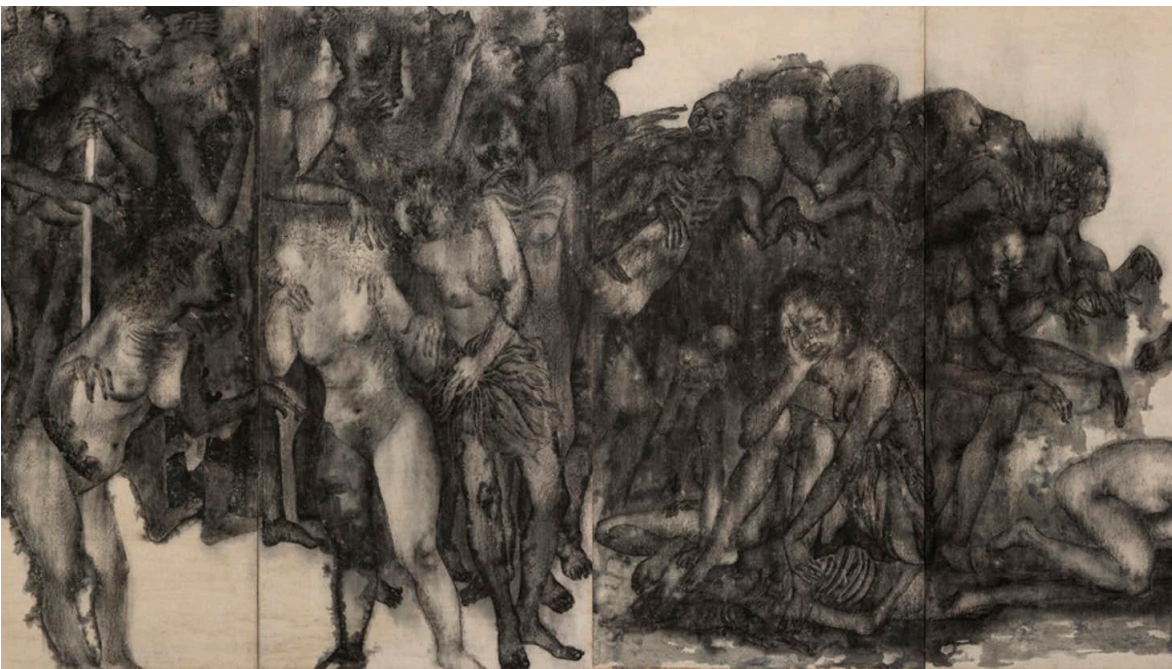


Fig. 4.24. Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, Detail from 幽霊 - *Ghosts*, 1950, ink on paper, 180.0 x 720.0cm. Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels. (Hyogo Kenritsu Bijutsukan, 1945 ± 5 Nen, 142)



Fig. 4.25. Fukuzawa Ichirō, 敗戦群像 – *War Defeat Group*, 1948, Oil on canvas, 193.9 x 259.1cm. The Museum of Modern Art, Gunma. (Winther-Tamaki, *Maximum Embodiment*, Plate 13)

CONCLUSION

Kazuki's Final Days

As Japan moved into the decades of the 1970s, there was an increasing sense that the nation had started to emerge from the “postwar” period. The nation had rebuilt from the ashes of wartime devastation, astonishing the world with its economic resurrection, symbolized by, and presented to the world through the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. Another generation had been born and come of age after 1945, the “Children Who Don’t Know the War” (*Sensō o shiranai kodomotachi*), as described in the title of a cheery and optimistic popular song of 1970. The 1960s drew to a close with a conflicted atmosphere—a remarkable sense of optimism in the wake of rapid economic success, as well as significant civil unrest. The former was trumpeted by the World’s Fair held in Osaka in 1970 called “EXPO 70,” an event characterized by an implicit turn away from memories of the war. The latter illustrated by widespread protests against the renewal of the Japan-US mutual security treaty (itself a kind of proxy protest against the legacies of the war). Turning away from the past seemed a crucial part of this postwar economic boom. Historian Yoshikuni Igarashi describes how, “[i]n the festive space of the EXPO, references to the Asia Pacific War were carefully erased, most notably in the exhibit on Japanese history in the Japan Pavilion, which leapt from the Meiji Period to the present without bothering to account for what lay between.”³⁰⁴ The increasing distance in time from the war’s end produced contradictory effects on the nation’s relationship with its war memories. On the whole Japanese society had reached an unspoken détente of sorts with its traumatic wartime memories, transmuting the postwar leitmotif of suffering bodies into a healthy national body. Igarashi describes a Japan where the “malnourished and lice-infested bodies present

³⁰⁴ Igarashi, Yoshikuni. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) 165.

immediately after Japan's defeat were physically and discursively recast as clean and productive by the late 1960s; bodies were detached from the memories of Japan's loss and cleansed of the nation's dirt, its memories of war."³⁰⁵ He further describes this Japan as a place in which the "trauma of defeat and loss has been articulated many times over," but "its original impact has lessened in each articulation despite attempts to retain it."³⁰⁶

To Kazuki, however, moving away from the representational project of his Siberia Series was unthinkable, and he continued representing the suffering bodies of Japanese POWs. However, in his late fifties, as the 1960s drew to a close, Kazuki's health began to decline. Smoking and drinking, as well as his frequent travel, domestically and around the world, took a toll on his health. His wife tried to mitigate his unhealthy habits, getting him to cut back to smoking ten cigarettes a day, but he resisted her efforts to curtail his drinking, though he did switch to beer from wine in an effort to mollify her³⁰⁷. Kazuki suffered from cardiac episodes, but stubbornly resisted the advice of his doctors as well as Fumiko's efforts.

In these later years Kazuki faced emotional as well as physical trials. The greatest emotional loss he suffered, perhaps in his entire life besides his experiences in Siberia, came late in life. In November 1971, Kazuki's eldest daughter Keiko died of cancer at the age of thirty-one, leaving behind an infant child. Her illness and passing was devastating to Kazuki.³⁰⁸ While she was fading away in a hospital in the nearby city of Senzaki he could barely bring himself to visit and see her suffering in such a deteriorating state. And after her passing, he was so grief-stricken that he couldn't bear to remain at the reading of sutras to mark the seventh day after her

³⁰⁵ Igarashi, Yoshikuni. *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) 199.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 209.

³⁰⁷ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 116.

³⁰⁸ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 114-116.

death.³⁰⁹ Already known as a heavy drinker, after Keiko's death, his dependence on alcohol deepened.³¹⁰ Writer for the Asahi News, Minamoto Hiromichi, recalling his visit to Kazuki shortly before his daughter's death, has called the toll of Kazuki's increased drinking (which was exacerbated by his refusal to head advice on his deteriorating health) a kind of "gradual suicide," culminating in his death two years later.³¹¹ These struggles made their way on to the canvas in Kazuki's work *The Sea of Japan* (19xx). Though representing the improperly buried corpse of a fallen POW, seen by Kazuki on his way to repatriation through Nakhodka, it also instantiates Kazuki's grief over the death of this daughter, much as *Nirvana* doubled as a tribute to his mentor, Fukushima Shigetarō.

Kazuki's second response to Keiko's death was even greater travel. In January of 1972 Kazuki and Fumiko went for a road trip around Kyūshū, and then to Sapporo for its famous Snow Festival. In March, they went with their younger son, Masaki, to Kyoto and Nara. Through the remainder of 1972, Kazuki and Fumiko also travelled to Greece, Spain, Morocco, and the Canary Islands. Then in April 1973 they journeyed to Seychelles, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, followed by Tahiti in August, and then Nice, Corsica, and Normandy in October.³¹² Hiramatsu Tatsuo conjectures that his increasing pace of travel was also a way to "flee the sadness of his daughter's early passing."^{313*} In spite of his condition, and his nearly non-stop travels, though, he continued to be prolific in his artistic output. Another reason for Kazuki's frequent peregrinations was financial. Though he never expressed a particular interest in accumulating

³⁰⁹ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 78, Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorissotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 78.

³¹⁰ Ibid. 104.

³¹¹ Kazuki Yasuo and Tachibana Takashi. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 227.

³¹² Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirizu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 226-227.

³¹³ Ibid. 227.

wealth, Kazuki enjoyed remarkable financial success as an artist. In the year before his death, he was Japan's top-earning painter, in no small part due to the many books published based on his travels.³¹⁴ Though his Siberia Series works were never made available for sale, his smaller scale works, prints, and books published of works based on his travels sold well. In his final years, Kazuki had been concerned about providing for his family after he passed.³¹⁵ He needn't have worried. As Barshay and Hiramatsu note, Kazuki was "quite wealthy when he died, at age sixty-two."³¹⁶

He had, as he had predicted in his memoirs and elsewhere, continued to create paintings and works relating to his experiences in Manchuria and Siberia, up until the end. The work *Beach (Nakhodka)* was still on an easel in his atelier at the time of his death. For his funeral, in Kazuki's coffin, his family "placed the palette he used while travelling, a brush, and an undercoated canvas."^{317*} Thus, Kazuki was granted one of his most significant desires, to, in his own words, die not "as an imperial soldier," but as a painter, "not holding a gun, but a paintbrush."^{318*} When Kazuki married Fumiko, he told her "My life line is short. So I went to see a palm reader, and was told that I was guaranteed only to live to sixty."^{319*} It's not clear how apocryphal this particular anecdote might be, but in any event Kazuki lived to be sixty-two,

³¹⁴ Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 227.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

³¹⁶ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 78, Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 78.

³¹⁷ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 140.

³¹⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia," *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 31.

³¹⁹ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 141.

passing away from a myocardial infarction on the morning of March 8th, 1974.³²⁰ As per Kazuki's wishes, his family took a portion of his ashes and buried them at the base of the San Juan/Carob tree in the family garden, a tree grown from seeds he had brought back from Siberia (Fig. C.1).³²¹ A descendent, grown from seeds taken from this tree in Kazuki's garden, grows in the courtyard of Kazuki's museum in Misumi (Fig. C.2). For someone like Kazuki, the tree seems a concrete affirmation of life, transported from a place haunted by the ghosts of his friends and fellow POWs, and further propagated at his home and his posthumous museum. The symbolism of life represented by a living thing of the natural world seems far more appropriate, for Kazuki, than a monument or memorial in the trappings of a religious or national ritual.

Establishment of the Kazuki Museum

As would seem appropriate for an artist who remained in Yamaguchi, nearly all of Kazuki's works are collected in his home prefecture. In 1974, 45 works out of 57 of the Siberia Series were donated to the Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art by Kazuki's family.³²² And in 1979, the museum established a permanent room for displaying Kazuki's Siberia Series works, where a rotating selection of the series can be seen year-round.³²³

³²⁰ Kazuki Yasuo and Tōkyō Sutēshon Gyarārī. *Kazuki Yasuo no Shiberia, Soshite no Chikyū: Botsugo 30-Nen = "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, (Fukuoka-shi: Asahi Shinbunsha Jigyō Honbu Seibu Kikaku Jigyōbu, 2004) 208.

³²¹ Kazuki had brought the San Juan seeds home to grow a tree to give the sweet beans it produced to his children as treats. When it finally bore fruit Kazuki eagerly gave some to his children to try. The children, however, spoiled by the readily available candy in postwar Japan, were unimpressed, to Kazuki's considerable disappointment. Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 68-69.

³²² *Kazuki Yasuo: "Watakushi no" Shiberia*, 208.

³²³ "History." *Kazuki Yasuo Bijutsukan: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo*. Yamaguchi Prefectural Museum of Art. Accessed August 13, 2020. <https://www.city.nagato.yamaguchi.jp/kazukiyasuo/history.html>. <accessed November 25, 2020>

Prior to his death, Kazuki expressed interest in having his works collected in a permanent museum in Misumi. In Kazuki's waning years, both his sons Naoki and Masaki were studying Architecture, and Kazuki asked if they might be interested in designing his museum. Both declined, to Kazuki's chagrin, citing the task as not appropriate one for a graduation project.³²⁴ After Kazuki's passing, however, Fumiko managed to secure plans for construction of the museum with the local municipal authorities, and Kazuki's sons agreed to design the museum building.³²⁵ Kazuki himself had wanted it to be sited on a hill by the Kazuki home, but the location was inconvenient from a traffic perspective, so it was finally constructed a short distance away, adjacent to a small hot springs resort.³²⁶ The museum was completed in 1993, opening in October (Fig. C.3).

The museum includes a recreation of Kazuki's atelier (Fig. C.4, 5). Initially, Fumiko was opposed to dismantling the atelier and reconstituting it at new museum. She recalls spending so much time with Kazuki in his atelier that having it gone from the home she spent so much time with him there, that she thought she'd be sad without the space at home. But later, when convalescing due to shingles the winter before the museum was built, she reconsidered the matter. Remembering Kazuki's entranced visit to Cezanne's atelier when they had visited Europe, she thought it could be beneficial to Kazuki's admirers and young painters. She also came to feel that she would pass eventually as well, and her personal feelings would be irrelevant. In the end, she reversed her earlier opposition, and the atelier in Kazuki's home was dismantled and recreated at the new museum.³²⁷ The Kazuki Museum in Misumi also sponsors

³²⁴ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 141.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid. On my first visit to the museum, I ate lunch at a small restaurant at the adjacent resort. In what was one of many kind and hospitable gestures, current head curator Kichijō Yasufumi (then a junior curator), who I hadn't noticed was also there eating, had an ice cream cone sent over to me at the end of my meal.

³²⁷ Kazuki Fumiko, and Kazuki Yasuo. *Otto No Migite: Gaka Kazuki Yasuo Ni Yorisotte*, (Tōkyō: Kyūryūdō, 1999) 141-142.

the annual Kazuki Yasuo Junior Painting Grand Prize Exhibition (香月泰男ジュニア大賞絵画展 *Kazuki Yasuo jyunia taishō kaiga ten*). The competition and exhibition aim to “celebrate the achievements of Kazuki Yasuo, a leading oil painter of postwar Japan, and to foster the open minds of young students and their ability to express their own personality.”^{328*} In recent years the competition has attracted over a thousand submissions from across the country. The exhibition and the awards ceremony are held at the Kazuki Museum in Misumi.

Kazuki’s Place in Postwar Art

The almost reverent tone of much current commentary on Kazuki’s work and legacy was not always the case—the reception of Kazuki’s Siberia works met with change over time. Japan had barely emerged from the occupation period when he had finally crystallized his Siberia Series style after 1956 and began painting his most significant works. This places the Siberia Series’ primary period right in the ongoing struggle of representation of the war that postwar Japan at large was still wrestling with. Andrew Barshay notes that “the first public response to Kazuki’s Siberia paintings was negative, even hostile.”³²⁹ Kazuki himself, writing in 1970, notes the ambivalence and negative reactions that his works were sometimes met with, relating how “[t]here are people who tell me to make more Siberia paintings, and those who suggest I wash my hands of it.”^{330*} Even fellow POW friends questioned the propriety of his representational project. Other POWs were sometimes even more pointed in their reaction, with Kazuki recounting an instance where “a Siberian POW who saw my work spat out “That’s not

³²⁸ Nagato City Website

<https://www.city.nagato.yamaguchi.jp/wadairoot/wadai/20161030kadukiyasuojunior.html> <accessed November 05, 2020>

³²⁹ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 59.

³³⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia,” *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 31.

Siberia.”^{331*} The nearly two decades that passed from the full realization of the darkened, textured style of the series until his death allowed a shift in attitudes regarding his work to take place. In his later years, some close to him in the art world began to question the quality of his output. Fukushima Keiko, the widow of Kazuki’s patron Fukushima Shigetarō, criticized his non-Siberia Series work, suggesting that he was spending too much time and energy on less significant work and away from his true role as an oil painter. And Kazuki’s friend since his art school days, fellow artist Kurata Tetsu, compared some of Kazuki’s output in his later years to the work of a studio like the Tawaraya studio without its master Sōtatsu, producing trifling or commercial works, such as his *omocha* (literally “toys,” though referring so wistful objets d’art made from idiosyncratic found materials) and the briskly selling books featuring art made for the purpose on overseas travels.³³² Despite such misgivings, on the whole Kazuki’s reputation, and the reception of the Siberia Series, has become more positive over time. In 1969, based largely on the Siberia Series, Kazuki was awarded the inaugural Japan Art Prize. Subsequent honorees include Kazuki’s peer Takayama Tatsuo (1970), architect Andō Tadao (1994), and fashion designer Issey Miyake (2000), among others. Andrew Barshay notes that this makes clear that “over the decade of the 1960s, the negative responses that initially met the dark palette of the Series had given way, and Kazuki’s work won broad public recognition.”³³³ Tachibana, in the afterword to *Siberian Requiem Songs*, states that “Since Kazuki’s death, the critical evaluation of the Siberia Series has only improved.”^{334*} This positive appraisal continues, with Kazuki’s

³³¹ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia,” *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 32.

³³² Hiramatsu, Tatsuo. *Senjō E Itta Enogubako: Kazuki Yasuo "shiberia Shirīzu" O Yomu*, (Fukuoka-shi: Kaichōsha, 2003) 228.

³³³ Andrew E. Barshay. *The Gods Left First: The Captivity and Repatriation of Japanese Pows in Northeast Asia, 1945-56*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 66.

³³⁴ Kazuki Yasuo and Tachibana Takashi. *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 389.

work being consistently exhibited, both in solo shows as well as group exhibitions, particularly ones curated around the theme of war or Japan's wartime history.

One significant position of Kazuki's work in postwar Japan, up to and including the contemporary moment, is that of a Japanese oil painter who did not collaborate with the military for propagandistic purposes. In addition to keeping him out of the penumbra of suspicion and shame that would attend being a military collaborator, celebrating war and nationalism, Kazuki's most significant body of work, the Siberia Series, communicates a clear opposition to war and narrow nationalism. Consequently, Kazuki is a painter whose work can be deployed free of the taint of association with the military and its excesses and atrocities throughout east Asia and the Pacific. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for his enduring postwar appeal. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this dynamic is the display of Kazuki's work literally opposite of war record paintings (*sensōga*) at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Kazuki's paintings have been shown as part of the permanent collection, in a room set aside for "Art During and After the War," encompassing the period from the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 through the Occupation period (which ended in 1952, following the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco the year prior). War Record paintings were displayed on the room's right wall, and on the left, as counterpoint, were works by Kazuki, as well as artists such as Matsumoto Shunsuke (松本竣介 1912-1948), and Ai-Mitsu (愛光 1907-1946). These artists were chosen because, as art historian Kaneko Maki puts it, they "are generally regarded as victims of the war."³³⁵ Wall text for this dyad describes the paintings by such artists as "works that aim to leave evidence of humanity."³³⁶ Kazuki represents a significant painter of his generation who can be appreciated without the baggage of artists such as Fujita Tsuguharu and others who worked with the military during wartime. This raises again the difficult debate over "victims'

³³⁵ Kaneko Maki. *Mirroring the Japanese Empire: The Male Figure in Yōga Painting, 1930-1950: The Male Figure in Yōga Painting, 1930-1950*, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015) 6.

³³⁶ Ibid.

consciousness”—the strategic deployment of works such as Kazuki’s suggests an anxiety over the perceptions of the historical legacy of *sensōga*, and the need to inoculate the museum, and Japan, against uncomfortable inquiry into the atrocities associated with its wartime past, instantiated in war record paintings.

Kazuki continues to attract attention even beyond the world of fine art and in a variety of media. A play based on his life, entitled *Kazuki: This is My Earth*, written and directed by playwright Shinagawa Yoshimasa (1957-), toured Japan and was also staged in a select limited US tour [was this just NYC and LA?] in 2004... The play presents a biographical narrative, presented in Japanese with English subtitles, through a prologue, six scenes, and an epilogue. The action jumps around through various periods of Kazuki’s life, including an imagined moment of meeting between his pre and post-Siberia selves. In the longest and most consequential scene—and interestingly the only one set in Siberia—Shinagawa dramatizes Kazuki’s attempts to document the faces of his dead and dying friends, a struggle Kazuki himself represents in 1960’s *Nirvana* and his commentary on the painting. The play has been restaged [in the city of Ube, Shinagawa’s own hometown, in Yamaguchi as recently as March of 2020, though it is not clear at the time of writing if plans for future shows in the cities of Nagato (which encompasses Kazuki’s hometown of Misumi, also the location of his museum) and Shimonoseki in 2020 will go on as planned.

In conjunction with his book on Kazuki, Tachibana Takashi was also involved in the production of a documentary, aired on NHK in 1995, entitled *Tachibana Takashi’s Siberia Requiem Songs: POW Painter Kazuki Yasuo*. This is in addition to over twenty programs, some on local Yamaguchi or regional broadcasters as well as on national outlets such as NHK, focusing on Kazuki from the mid-1960s.³³⁷ Additionally, there is a full-length Manga which focuses on Kazuki’s life, tracing much of the same narrative path as “My Siberia.” This is a not

³³⁷ *Kazuki Yasuo: “Watakushi no” Shiberia*, 243.

altogether surprising media iteration in a place like Japan, where graphic novel style works run the gamut of nearly every conceivable subject and audience. While there is a huge range of manga aimed at adult audiences, this recounting of Kazuki's life and work seem like a more accessible version of "My Siberia" aimed at younger audiences. The work hews closely to the narrative arc of "My Siberia," including Kazuki's numerous digressions on aesthetics, philosophy and history. Books on Kazuki's art, beyond exhibition catalogs, are also numerous, as are works by artists, close friends, and family about Kazuki and his life. Fumiko Kazuki has written extensively on her husband, most notably in her own (also somewhat brief) memoir *Otto no migite* ("My Husband's Right Hand"), published in 1999. She remains one of the most important figures in the ongoing management of Kazuki's legacy, frequently assisted by their sons.

An Indispensable Thorn

"Maybe I am still a prisoner. Imprisoned by my memories of Siberia, imprisoned by my memories of the war, as a Japanese person, imprisoned in Japan."³³⁸

In a certain sense, Kazuki never returned from Siberia. Tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers never physically returned to Japan, and many more, like Kazuki, never fully returned psychologically (as the poignant articulation of fellow POW Otsuka Shigeru from the previous chapter makes clear). The enormity and all-encompassing reach of Japan's catastrophic wars and defeat ensured that the experience haunted Japan well into the postwar period and beyond. The ongoing difficulty in mastering the wartime past has been an issue of considerable debate in Japan and in the broader world of Japan studies. The very term "postwar" has been endlessly

³³⁸ Kazuki Yasuo. "My Siberia," *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 121.

debated, with some positing that Japan remains, 75 years later, trapped in the “postwar” period, with no hope of real escape, like an insect trapped in ancient amber.³³⁹

Kazuki mirrored the ambivalent state of postwar Japan’s relationship with its recent past, a past of unprecedented violence and dislocation. He was cognizant of his position, and Japan’s, as his commentaries make clear. His fear that the postwar prosperity that Japan worked hard to build from the ashes of war would obscure the bitter lessons of that war is one that still resonates. Kazuki was not, however, an activist artist like Iri and Toshi Maruki, who travelled far and wide to publicly address, with their politically charged art, Japan’s wartime actions and the ongoing ramifications of the war. Kazuki’s project was a far more circumscribed, personal one. The Siberia Series was (among other things) a personal bulwark against the dangers of neglecting his own responsibility to the dead in particular, and to the future as well.

Near the end of “My Siberia,” Kazuki describes an unusual totem he keeps in his workspace:

In my atelier, I keep a scrap of barbed wire. I don’t really want to see any barbed wire in the world. I just want to forget absolutely everything about Siberia. However, at the same time I must not forget it, even if I forgot everything else. If not that, then what else should I remember? Living in Japan today, it seems like absolutely everything is conspiring to make me forget Siberia. Even I have been drawn to that tendency. At such moments I need a thorn piercing my heart. The barbed wire in my studio is such a thorn.^{340*}

³³⁹ In his introduction to *Postwar Japan as History*, labor historian Andrew Gordon addresses this, pointing out that “[a]s early as 1955, as recently as 1990, and numerous times in between, Japan’s postwar era has been deemed ‘finished.’” Andrew Gordon, editor. *Postwar Japan as History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) ix.

³⁴⁰ Kazuki Yasuo. “My Siberia,” *Shiberia Chinkonka: Kazuki Yasuo no Sekai*, Tachibana Takashi, and Yasuo Kazuki. (Tōkyō: Bungei Shunjū, 2004) 121.

Insofar as Kazuki's Siberia Series presents an unflinching look at a bleak dimension of Japan's war experiences, it can also serve as an "indispensable thorn" for Japanese viewers and others, a monumental, painted bulwark against forgetting the horrors that lead up to—and extended far beyond—the year 1945.

Conclusion Images Supplement



Fig. C.1. San Juan tree grown in Kazuki's garden from seeds that he brought back from Siberia.
(Kazuki, *Kazuki yasuo Siberia Series ten: mainasu 35-do no mokushiroku*, 115)



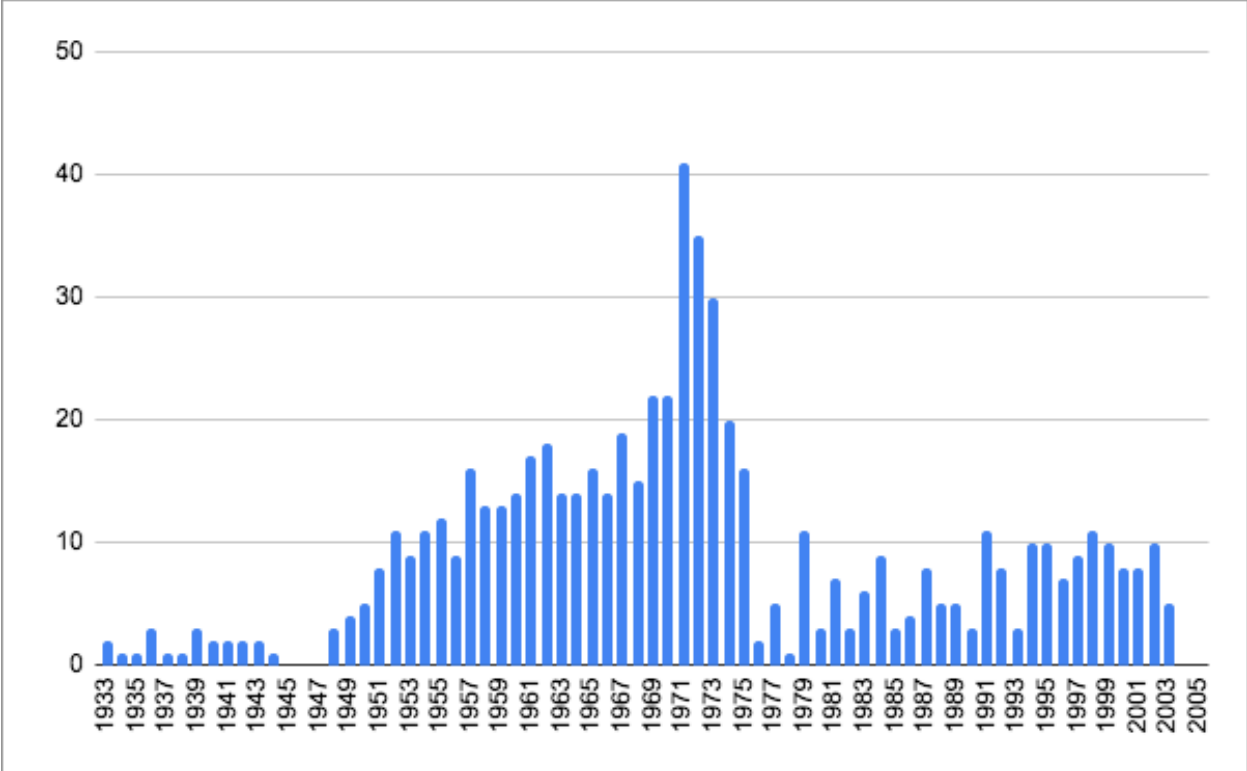
Fig. C.2. San Juan tree grown in from seeds of the tree in Kazuki's garden, surrounded by large-scale replicas of Kazuki's "omocha" ("toys"/objets). (<https://kamihigash.exblog.jp/16556609/> Accessed 11/18/2020)



Fig. C.3. Kazuki Yasuo Museum in Misumi, Yamaguchi Prefecture. (Kazuki, "My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki, 183)



C.4, 5. Recreation of Kazuki's atelier at the Kazuki Museum in Misumi, Yamaguchi. (Kazuki, *"My" Earth II*, 118)



C.6. Number of Kazuki Exhibitions by year, 1933-2003 (Kazuki, *"My" Siberia and "My" Earth: The 30 Year Memorial Retrospective Exhibition of Yasuo Kazuki*, 210-232)

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APPENDIX

Siberia Requiem Songs - Kazuki Yasuo's World

Part One - Reprint

“My Siberia” (1970, Bungei Shunjū)

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Introduction

It's been twenty-four years since the war ended, twenty-two since I was repatriated from Siberia. For twenty-two years I've been painting motifs of military life in Manchuria and life as a POW in Siberia. Beginning with *Burial*, which I showed the year following my return home, to my just completed *The Emperor*,³⁴¹ I've already done forty-three works. I don't know exactly when, but people applied the title of "Siberia Series" to these works, and I've become somewhat well known as their creator.

There are some people who tell me to make more Siberia paintings, and those who suggest I wash my hands of it. Even those who don't expressly recommend that I stop the series still ask questions like: 'why are you endlessly painting about Siberia?' To tell the truth, even I myself don't quite know why. I've thought so many times 'This is the end of the Siberia series.' I felt this way when I painted *Nirvana*. I felt the same way when I painted *Repatriation (Gangplank)*. In 1966, when I painted *Self-Portrait (Makhorka)*, I intended to make a final statement of the Siberia Series, and whatever memories, just as they came into my mind, found refuge on the canvas, like being tossed into a carry-all bag.

First off, I painted my self-portrait in the center of the picture. I'm smoking the Russian tobacco called "*makhorka*"³⁴² from a pipe I carved with a knife from a tree branch. Around that, I painted scenes of Siberia that remained in my mind, like a mandala. In the picture, there is a train car of prisoners on the Siberian railroad continuing westward. A panorama of the camp where I experienced such suffering. A mountain of firewood felled by forced labor.

³⁴¹ The title of this painting in Japanese is 「朕」 (*chin*) which is a special personal pronoun reserved exclusively for the emperor.

³⁴² *Makhorka (Nicotiana rustica)* is a hardy, low-grade Russian tobacco smoked by the poor and working classes. It was readily available even in the Gulags.

Even during those days of misery and toil, there were so many times I saw beauty that would make me suddenly sigh. Frost crystallized on a pane of a frozen window in the POW camp. The way the fruits of peonies, which I happened to see along the way to the forest where we did wood-cutting, broke apart like flowers, spreading out their seeds. I'll never forget two crows I saw flying in the snowy sky. And the small red sun, sinking in the sky along the mountain ridgeline, was also breathtakingly beautiful.

The more I paint, the more the memories call forth new images. My canvases have changed again and again. In this way, I'd complete one picture, but there were so many motifs that had to be omitted. I'd set up another canvas on my easel and begin another new work. Almost every year, I take up my paintbrush feeling: 'This is the last of the Siberia Series.' But then, while painting I think, 'Oh, I've got to paint that too' and the next idea naturally forms in my mind. When I paint I get the feeling that I'll never fully exhaust my Siberia experience.

Even now, I'm working on a new work, telling myself that this should be the last one. However, I'm not really confident that this one will be the final work. I get the feeling that I'll probably keep dragging along for years to come, continuing to paint pictures of Siberia. I might paint Siberia until I die.

What exactly was Siberia to me?

An old friend from the army came to see my solo exhibition and said he didn't want to see such things. "I don't want to remember those kinds of things about Siberia." he said.

It's the same for me. I don't want to remember such things about Siberia. However, when I'm in front of the white canvas, kneading oil paints, Siberia emerges. It's not that I think "I'm going to make a picture." The picture is already there. To put it bluntly, I just add in the paints.

Another time, a Siberian POW who saw my work spat out "That's not Siberia." Each of the tens of thousands of Siberian POWs has a different Siberia experience. Even among those from the same camp and the same time period, their experiences are different.

There are probably those who would see the beauty I saw of the two crows in the snowy sky as an ominous premonition. There were many in the POW camp who lost hope in humanity. But surely there were many who discovered the joy of living.

I had the experience of living in three camps over about a year and a half, but, based on the camp and unit, there was a surprising degree of difference among them. The camp at Seya, where I spent the first seven months, was one of the worst, but the camp at Chernogorsk, where I spent the latter part of my captivity, seemed to be relatively easy.

Of course, I heard that there were camps that were worse than Seya. For those who suffered forced labor incomparably longer than me, “my” Siberian experience might appear so trivial, so negligible, that it can’t be compared to theirs, or some might go so far as to suggest that mine shouldn’t be called Siberia.

There are as many Siberias as there are Siberian POWs. I have never had the presumptuous hope to speak for all Siberian POWs. In the spirit of relating my own personal experience, I expressed it on the canvas.

For the fifty-eight years since I was born, I’ve been nothing more than a painter. In the army, or in the POW camps, I couldn’t completely become a soldier, completely become a POW. Neither the Japanese Imperial Army, nor the Soviet Union could force me to assume a persona like “soldier” or “POW,” they couldn’t force me to give up being a painter.

I always told myself that I would survive. When I was a soldier, I was prepared for the possibility of dying. However, if I had to die anyway, I intended to die, not holding on to a gun, but a paintbrush. I did not want to die as an imperial soldier. Up until I returned home, I never once, for a moment, let go of the art supplies box I brought with me when I was first deployed.

As a painter, I always lived in a different world from the other soldiers. Even in moments when my life was in danger, I discovered beautiful things, I couldn’t help but discover things that could be made into paintings. Spreading imaginary canvases in my head, I kept thinking about

compositions and organizing motifs there. Even when I witnessed someone dying, I kept thinking about how to transform that scene into a painting. However, it is probably thanks to being a painter that I was able to step back and restrain myself even when fellow soldiers fell into sheer barbarism. I was thankful that I was a painter... Now, I paint Siberia. While painting, I can't but feel how happy I am to be a painter. Probably I'm just painting for myself. Each dab of paint is a salvation for me.

I always say, people don't eat for the sake of making a big shit. They eat for the sake of eating, because eating itself is joyous. My finished pictures are also like shit. They don't quite embody my pure joy in painting. I think that believing that you have succeeded when you've finished a picture is conceited. I'm always dissatisfied. I always feel that something is still somehow lacking. So, I continue painting. Some say this is an arrogant attitude, but this is how I feel, and I can't do otherwise. When painting Siberia, I experience Siberia again. What on Earth was Siberia to me?

In the past, Siberia swooped down on me, swallowed me up, washed me away. And now, it's my turn to bring that Siberia onto the canvas and try to capture it. When I experienced Siberia in the flesh, the situation was too cruel, too fast and bewildering for my mind to grasp the meaning. Together, my life as a soldier and as a POW was no more than four and a half years. I've already spent four times that much ruminating on my experience during those four and a half years.

I still can't express it well. But, with the scars engraved on my flesh and my memories as a key, I try, as faithfully as possible, to show my feelings and the things I saw then. Of course, I say "faithfully" but this doesn't mean that I try to do so realistically.

The persimmon leaves, in front of my eyes just outside my window, are lush and green now. If you pluck one of those leaves and shred it finely, it's still a persimmon leaf. Even in total darkness, when you can't see it with your eyes and can't recognize it as a persimmon leaf, it's a

persimmon leaf. If it withers and falls away from the tree it's still a persimmon leaf. However, if you burn that fallen leaf to ashes, it's no longer a persimmon leaf. When does the persimmon leaf become *not* a persimmon leaf? What is the reason that a persimmon leaf is a persimmon leaf? What is the essence of things?

That is where I want to be faithful. I pluck Siberia, tear it to pieces, remove the color, make it wither. It is probably more correct to say that it's not Siberia as such but rather the me who was in Siberia. I follow the memory of my senses minutely. For instance, what I was thinking about in that guarded train that kept running for days and nights through a panorama of tundra. What was it that I found as I listened to the regular sounds coming from the rail, as it became dark and my muddy military boots became one indistinct mass, and I sat on the floor with my hands holding my knees, my eyes cast vaguely down on those boots. Alone in my empty atelier at night, facing the canvas, I try to see it again.

With my paints and knife I try to call back the past images that had flowed away unconsciously. With some hesitation and experimentation, my knife discovers a form and finds a suitable color. I was relieved to find the me of past days that appeared to have been gone forever.

Maybe you could call my Siberia Series heresy from the perspective of pure painting. I don't want these paintings appreciated from the point of view of fine art that uses form and color merely as means of expression. However far the work is from realism, each line painted there, each color, each was born in scenes that actually happened.

When I try to be faithful to myself, it becomes increasingly difficult for others to understand. On the other hand, although I feel that I don't want to be understood and that this is only my own thing, I can't deny that I still feel, despite everything, that I do want others to understand me. However, I can't compromise. As a solution, I decided to attach some

explanatory notes. Like a novel that has some pictures in it. I thought why not paintings with notes when there are novels with pictures?

Probably because of the explanatory notes, there are many people who say, “I like it” or “I understand”. Then—how selfish I am! —I come to wonder whether I have degraded myself too much, given that people understand me so well. Revisiting my paintings with this in mind, I fall into self-loathing, finding them too vulgar. Conversely, when I hear “I don’t understand, I don’t understand” I become boastful and bluff; “you’ll understand, sooner or later,” but my heart feels somehow sad. What selfish creatures we are.

If you read the explanatory notes, you’ll understand that each work is a picture whose starting point was a specific scene, and my hope is to paint something that contains a universality that can be well appreciated as a single simple canvas even without explanatory notes, but it seems that getting there is rather difficult. At this point, the “Siberia Series” is nothing but *Kazuki Yasuo’s* personal Siberia. I think that’s good, that it couldn’t be otherwise. Perhaps, the particular acquires universality, not through bringing back that particularity or individuality to some vague generality, but, on the contrary, by pursuing it to the extreme, where you can’t go any further. As for universality and such, I leave that to the viewer to come to on their own terms.

I’ll probably forever continue digging up my Siberia.

“‘My’ Earth”

Since my repatriation, I’ve lived in the town of Misumi in Yamaguchi prefecture. This is my hometown. This is where I was born, and this is where I grew up. The town of Misumi is on

the coast of the Sea of Japan in Yamaguchi, a rural town only four stops down from Hagi toward Shimonoseki on the San'in rail line.

Though it's called a town, my hamlet is just a line of houses only about one hundred meters long, along the San'in Highway, with some more houses scattered among the rice fields. On the north side there is a small hill called Mount Kubara, and behind that is the Sea of Japan. Between Mt. Kubara and the San'in Highway the small Misumi river flows. My house, built on the banks of the Misumi river, looks as though it's being carried on the back of Mt. Kubara.

My family has been here for four generations, an ancestral line of doctors of Chinese medicine up through my grandfather. My father, as the eldest son, studied dentistry so he could become a doctor, but as a prodigal son wasted his life in debauchery, and drifted to Korea, where he died. That was when I was only a fourth grader. My mother ran out of patience for such a guy, and she divorced him when I was still young. After that she remarried, and once I entered art school, I started to keep in touch with her. But probably because I didn't have any memory of being raised by her, I felt somewhat odd when meeting her. My mother passed away while I was detained in Siberia. The people who really raised me were my grandparents and an uncle who took over the medical practice instead of my father.

It's not that I was bullied while I was being raised. But, having to grow up with no father, no mother, no siblings, I was always lonely. I wasn't needed by anyone. No one would care if I disappeared. There were times when I went so far as to think "Why don't I just die?"

Not all the memories of my hometown are pleasant ones. Nevertheless, whenever I dreamed in Siberia, it was invariably of my hometown. The house where I grew up was constructed in the Edo Period³⁴³ It was a rather magnificent building when it was new, but it's quite old, and even in the daytime there was a gloomy atmosphere in the rooms.

³⁴³ The Edo period, named for Japan's capital, Edo (now modern Tokyo), lasted from 1603-1868.

For some reason, while I was in Siberia I was frequently reminded of this house. Again and again in dreams, the image of it appeared to me. I can't remember the content of those dreams now, but almost always, my dreams were set in this old house. Even when I was awake, I often recalled my house. Because I was a legitimate child, when I returned home, the house would become mine. That being the case, I often thought about how I might remodel the house, how I might organize a workplace, and that kind of thing, if and when it should become mine.

Today that dream has been fulfilled, and I can paint in a workspace as I dreamed, in the house I dreamed of. However, the ironic thing is that the dreams I have in this house are always about Siberia. Idly watching the snow fall from the lager window, watching soldiers in clothes too pitiful to look at, limping along, heads drooping uniformly, returning silently to the gulag from the work site.

One time, I dreamed that we heard an announcement about "*domoi*" (homecoming) and were rejoicing, but suddenly another conflict between China and Japan arose, and when we heard, to our great disappointment, that our homecoming was to be delayed indefinitely, I woke up. Another time, I dreamed that we returned to Japan, overjoyed after disembarking at the port. Just then my name was called by an official, who told me, to my tremendous surprise, that I alone would be sent back to Siberia again, as my repatriation procedures were incomplete, and at that moment I woke up, drenched in sweat.

Before shipping out to Manchuria, I had planned to go to Tokyo as soon as I got the chance. I had the fixed idea that you must go to the center if you want to be a painter. If you live in obscurity in the countryside, you'll be forgotten. In Tokyo, you can mingle with your painter friends, stimulating each other while improving yourself. No motifs are born of the monotony of rural life. There was so much advice and so many lessons I wanted to ask of two people who I

looked up to as mentors: Umehara Ryūzaburō and Fukushima Shigetarō.³⁴⁴ That was my thinking. This only intensified my restlessness and dismay when I was drafted and it was determined not only that I wouldn't physically be able to paint, but moreover that I had to leave Japan. How I resented the war!

My plan was to become an established painter by age 35. If I went past 35 without becoming popular, then I'd have to give it up. I tormented myself with that way of thinking up until age 32. I made as much effort as others did. Albeit gradually, my effort was paying off. Somehow or another I was able to make paintings that were good enough to be properly called "paintings." Just as I was receiving such positive evaluations, the draft notice fell on me. I felt like, as a painter, I'd been given a death sentence. However, thinking of it now, when I received that death sentence, that was me as an artisan. But by dying as an artisan, I could be resurrected as an artist. Perhaps you can say that an artisan and an artist have different motivations. An artisan is someone who chooses painting as a profession, and an artist is someone who chooses painting as a way of life. Of course, the old me wasn't an artisan down to the bone. I wouldn't say that the me of today is perfectly an artist. Perhaps both of these two "me's" coexist.

However, even if the 30-year-old me struggled to work on expressive techniques as much as the me of today, it was less an attempt to come infinitely closer to the inner image. Rather, it should be seen as a futile effort, because I didn't have a firm basis inside myself; this led me to centering around some vague aesthetic judgment.

³⁴⁴ Umehara Ryūzaburō (梅原龍三郎 1888-1986) was an oil painter of the generation proceeding Kazuki. Umehara's style heavily influenced Kazuki, particularly in his days shortly after his graduation from Tokyo School of the Arts. Fukushima Shigetarō (福島繁太郎 1896-1960) was a wealthy and influential art collector, critic, and patron. He was instrumental in introducing European works and artists to Japan, both through his collecting activities as well as his writings on artists and movements. Both men would become significant presences in Kazuki's life, supporting his career through their influential positions in the world of Japanese fine arts.

Didn't I try to establish a style in an artificial way, rather than letting a style arise in a necessary manner by getting to an object? As a result, I was looking around for motifs that were good for painting, as popular writers sought good topics. The subject and the object were turned upside down. Because of that, I aimed at more skillful means of expression rather than better ones. The reason why I wanted to go to Tokyo was not unrelated to this.

What was I looking for, with contact and exchange with my fellow painters? Even if new motifs were born and I learned new techniques, that would have been only superficial. I forgot that what was necessary was not an external matter, but an internal one. Siberia thoroughly beat that "me" into shape. Only there did I learn that what I took for granted—you can paint—was actually a right for which I couldn't substitute anything whatsoever. Like a fish who doesn't know that water supports its life until it's deprived of it, I realized for the first time, only when it was lost, that painting had been supporting my life.

The value of a painted picture, and an artist's fame, these things are absolutely unrelated. I just really wanted to paint pictures. Motifs of the kind I'd had a hard time finding in my youth, now gushed forth infinitely. I had decided: when I returned to Japan, I would spend the rest of my life in my hometown of Misumi. Motifs are everywhere. Where I am, there are motifs too. Where in the world, besides the hometown that returned again and again in my dreams, would be a more suitable workplace?

Last year I painted a picture entitled "My' Earth." In the center are my hands, and around that I painted Misumi. There's the Misumi river, the Sea of Japan, and Mt. Kubara. The San'in rail line runs through it, and the San'in highway. There's the town hall, the elementary school I went to, the post office. Misumi is a small, small town, small enough to fit on a single canvas. The town's periphery disappears into the sky, and there in place of the cardinal directions I've written in five place names: Siberia, Hulun Buir in Manchuria, Imphal, Guadalcanal, and San Francisco.

“My Siberia”, for some Japanese people, was Imphal and Guadalcanal. Those who forced us to go off to Guadalcanal, to Siberia, ordered us to kill and die, went to San Francisco, and bowed to apologize for Japan’s wrongdoings. Of course, I don’t mean that all the delegates were those who led the war. However, although they were different individuals, it seemed to me that they were of the same class. I have absolutely no trust in leaders. I don’t tolerate anyone who reigns over an organization which orders a murderous war of man against man. I will never forgive those who recognize war.

I don’t mean to complain that the peace treaty itself was concluded. I remember feeling quite unconvinced. Was our struggle a mistake then? Was it a waste to sacrifice our lives for a mistake? Due to the mistakes of our leaders, we suffered the pain of death, and then, new leaders appear, promptly say it was a mistake and apologize. I can’t agree with this arrangement. I could understand if I myself, and each of us who participated in the war, would go to conclude a peace treaty. However, when a peace treaty is determined, somewhere I don’t know, and leaders I don’t know go there to conclude it, I wonder how different this is from when I found myself dragged out to the battlefield.

At any rate, I never trust leaders or those who give orders, nor organizations from the left or right. Even when I was a schoolteacher I worked hard alone, not entering any labor union. When ordered to do something, I shall refuse whatever orders I’m given. If there’s something to do, I’ll do it alone.

Siberia, Hulun Buir, Imphal, Guadalcanal, San Francisco. Misumi is my only sphere of life, but I never forget those five directions. My hometown, containing those five directions, that is “My’ Earth”.

*Clouds * Parting*

First off, let me tell you about who I was before becoming a soldier.

I was only a first or second grader in elementary school when I decided to become a painter. I don't remember anything else but, one dazzlingly bright sunny day, watching the fruit ripen on a chinaberry tree in the garden, I do remember deciding that. It's not like I declared my intentions to anyone though. In my little heart I thought that I would become a painter.

For generations my family were doctors in Mōri Han, but among my kin was a descendant of the Unkoku School, in the lineage of Sesshū (Tōyō).³⁴⁵ Quite a lot of their sketches remained in our house, and from a young age I was familiar with them. Maybe it's because of this blood lineage that I started making pictures without ever being taught by anyone. My pictures were great. People were always praising me for them. I had self-confidence.

In other subjects I got bad grades and was a terrible student. There were times that my personality was contrary. I was an eccentric child, stubborn and melancholy, probably because my parents weren't around. My grandparents were affectionate, but they were typical of people in the Meiji period.³⁴⁶ They never spoiled me, and discipline was strict. There was a tangerine tree in the garden. One day I picked a fruit and ate it without asking first, and my grandfather caught me, and twisted my arm up and called to my grandmother in a loud voice:

³⁴⁵ Sesshū Tōyō (雪舟等楊 1420-1506) was the most well-known suiboku (ink and wash) painting master of the Muromachi period (1336-1573). The Unkoku School (Unkokuha 雲谷派) of painters was based in the west of Japan, in what is now Yamaguchi, Kazuki's home. Founded by Unkoku Tōgan (雲谷等顔 1547-1618), a retainer of the Mōri clan, who appropriated the name of Sesshu's studio (Unkoku) as his artistic name seeing himself as continuing the earlier master's legacy. Though Tōgan worked primarily in Kyoto, he retained close ties with his home area and patron Mōri Terumoto (毛利輝元 1553 - 1625), lord of the domains of Nagato and Suo, which comprise much of modern Yamaguchi and Hiroshima prefectures.

³⁴⁶ Periods of modern Japanese history are denoted by the name of the reigning emperor. The Meiji emperor ruled from 1868 to 1912.

“Sneaking fruit like a thief! Burn his hand.”

No one intervened for me in times like those. Rather, my grandmother took the initiative and severely disciplined me. Coming out from inside the house with seaweed and a burning stick of incense, my grandfather firmly grasping my hand, she made a small ball with the seaweed, placed it on my hand, and applied the fire to it. I cried, and struggled with my arms and legs, to no avail. The fire burned my skin, and I gritted my teeth and endured the heat and pain. A scar from the burn remains on the top of my hand even now.

The Misumi River usually doesn't have much water. With the exception of the deep pools, I could stand up in it even as a child. But when typhoon season comes, the waters get murky, and the river becomes a fast, robust current. Swimming in such conditions was extremely thrilling. However, when my grandmother saw me doing this, on top of hitting me, she locked me in the storeroom. When the large bar came down, it was dark inside the room, even during the day. Sopping wet, I shook and rattled the door, bawling. Perhaps I was exhausted by crying and worn out from swimming hard; I fell asleep there. What I remember next is that she came to check on me in a worried state and shook me awake.

When I first entered elementary school, there were no notebooks and such; slate and waxy mineral pencils were our school supplies. Even during drawing period there was no sketching from nature. There were no crayons—how could we sketch without crayons? The first time I ever used a crayon was maybe in fourth grade. I was immediately enchanted with them. The crayons available at the little stationary store in Misumi were of inferior quality, and only six colors. At first I used them in total ecstasy, but eventually I got dissatisfied with them.

When I heard that you could get twelve colors of crayons in the city of Nagato, about eight kilometers away, I wanted them no matter what. I begged my grandfather for the money and made myself a box lunch with some rice balls. There was no public transportation at all at that

time, so, wearing *zōri*,³⁴⁷ I clopped along alone. As I was still a child, I expected the round trip would probably take five hours.

When I saw the long awaited twelve crayons at the stationery store, I couldn't restrain my excitement. My hand trembling a little bit, I opened the lid of the box, and the twelve various colored crayons were lined up neatly. I held the box up to my face and deeply inhaled the scent of the crayons. When I raised my eyes, the shopkeepers were looking at me with disapproving expressions. They were probably troubled by my polluting these important goods with my dirty muzzle.

Nervously, I said only "This..." and handed over the box, pulling some money from my sleeve.³⁴⁸ The shopkeeper smiled as he wrapped up the crayons for me. On the way home, I sometimes checked that they were still there through a small rip I made in the wrapping paper, and buoyantly hurried the eight-kilometer path home.

The next day, I proudly showed them off at school, though I knew I shouldn't have. Everyone gathered around me, making a big fuss, seeing these twelve crayons for the first time. I did a demonstration of the new colors a little bit on some paper. That afternoon, our class visited a shrine. After finishing the visit and returning to the classroom the crayons were gone. I suddenly went pale.

"Who swiped my crayons!"

Half crazed, I picked out whoever appeared to me suspicious, even only tangentially suspicious, and forced them to confess. Immediately the offender was identified. There was only one person who didn't go on the shrine visit and remained behind in the classroom. It had to be

³⁴⁷ *Zōri* are thonged, flat sandals, traditionally made of rice straw or cloth, with soles of lacquered wood, leather, or rubber, similar to "flip flops."

³⁴⁸ Many kimono have especially wide sleeves, and the extra fabric is often used as an ad hoc pocket to contain small items.

him. I immediately went to his desk and looked inside. He tried to pull one over on me, beating around the bush, but thoroughly rummaging through his school supplies turned up the stolen crayons. The next day I went to his house and directly explained the situation to his mother, requesting compensation. The following day, with the money I got from his mother in my pocket, I trudged along the eight-kilometer journey back to Nagato city and bought the twelve colored crayons.

I think it was about two years after that, I wanted watercolor supplies. While watching a teacher make watercolor paintings I thought, “*this* is painting.” I couldn’t bear anymore using crayons which can’t build up layers of color or produce subtle tones of light and shade. Besides, painting with a brush and palette seemed really cool.

I happened upon my grandfather’s wallet, carelessly tossed on the tatami room floor, and quietly took out some money. I flew to the stationery store and bought a watercolor set. It’d be bad if I was found out, so I went into the shed, and with the door shut started painting a picture in the half-light.

I took the cap off the tube and applied some of the paint to the palette. I dipped my brush in some water and started working with the paint on the palette. I mixed the colors, and depending on the amount of paint, I could change the color as much as I liked. Each and every act was like bliss. Immediately I was engrossed, starting on a picture on some drawing paper I’d bought. With two or three brush strokes I immediately understood how to paint. I forget how much time passed, enthralled in the watercolor.

Then the shed door was pushed open with a clatter.

“Yasuo, what are you doing in a place like this! Didn’t you hear when I called?”

The door of the shed was a door in name only, as it was just a plank nailed on. You could see right in from the outside. If I’d been farther into the shed it’d have been better, but since I

wanted light I couldn't go farther back where you couldn't see from outside. I was so engrossed in the picture, I couldn't hear my grandfather's voice, and couldn't see him as he approached either.

"Where'd you buy something like this? How'd you get the money!"

He suddenly questioned me. I couldn't say anything and was silent. There was no way I could've gotten money to buy the watercolors myself. In the end, I had no choice but to confess that I'd stolen from my grandfather's wallet. He grabbed me by the scruff of the neck like you'd grab a kitten and dragged me out into the garden. He stood me up there, and brought a Japanese style sword, a family heirloom, out from inside the tatami room. I wondered what he was going to do. Suddenly I noticed that the blood had drained from my face out of fear.

"This is what guys like you deserve!"

He brought the sword he was brandishing down on my head. I didn't avoid it, and he hit my head and my shoulders. When he struck, the sheath rang out with a smack.

"Why? Why didn't you say you wanted that? Why didn't you ask us to buy that for you?"

My grandfather's voice, as he hit and scolded me, had a somehow regretful echo. As he said, I should have asked him to buy it for me. But those words didn't come out of my mouth.

Certainly, I was a difficult child. I wasn't very obedient. I really hated the idea of being spoiled or begging for things. Maybe it was because I wasn't convinced that I was loved. My father and mother were still alive, but they lived far away from me. If my parents had been dead and I had been all alone, maybe I would have been more untroubled, just painting pictures.

When I was a fourth grader in elementary school, a teacher who liked to paint was transferred to my school. On days off and such, he'd go to a place with nice scenery, bringing along oil paints, and draw from nature standing in front of an easel. I often went with him and

intently watched. It's not because he was a great painter that I watched him painting, but simply because I was so drawn to the oil painting itself, rather than him or his paintings. Though this might sound arrogant—as one might wonder how a kid could criticize paintings done by an adult—I looked down on his workmanship. However, I was fascinated by oil paints. When I got home and took out the picture I'd painted with watercolors, it couldn't help but seem all too thin. Besides, the smell of oil paints was beyond words. I could smell the oil paints all the way until I got home and went to bed. I even thought I wanted some oil paints just so I could experience that smell all the time.

However, oil paints were incomparably more expensive than watercolors. I definitely couldn't buy some with money that I swiped from my grandfather's wallet again. Even if I asked him to buy it for me, the chance was slim. There was nothing to do but give up on something so out of reach.

It was in the fourth grade that I was eventually able to get some oil paints. I thought about every way I might get my hands on some, and finally I made a momentous decision and wrote a letter, addressed to my mother, who had just remarried. To be precise, my mother had married a third time into an old clan in a town in Shimane prefecture.

That was the first letter I'd ever written to my mother. I had memories of my mother as I remembered her from when I was a small child. However, to me my mother had no real impact on my life, existing only in a vague and distant way in my memory. I knew that my mother was alive and lived not all that far away, but I never really thought of her as a real live flesh and blood person. She had a theoretical existence, living only in my faint memories.

I was terribly embarrassed trying to write the letter. However hard I tried to say something, I couldn't find anything to say. Beyond the fact that we were related by blood, we had no common world at all.

“Dear (Mother), My apologies for not writing in such a long time...”

I wrote a perfectly formal letter that you could've sent to anyone. After all that, frankly I'd written to ask point blank for her to buy me some oil paints because I wanted them no matter what. Reading it over again, as a letter written to a mother from a child who hasn't seen her in years, I found it rather blatantly wheedling, and felt somehow embarrassed.

Yet my mother might also have felt guilty about her own child whom she had left behind. Before long, she sent a splendid set of oil paints. A letter accompanied it, but I didn't read it. Opening the package and pulling the paints out, I gently stroked the materials one by one, gazing at them... I never got tired of it.

At that time, I had unequivocally resolved to become a painter. No matter what, I thought, there was no other path I should pursue. At first, people in the family seemed to think that I'd follow in my father's footsteps and be a dentist. However, with my poor academic ability, there was no getting into medical school. My grades at the end of middle school put me second or third from the bottom of the class.

My middle school was what is now Otsu High School in Nagato city. I was in the inaugural class. There was something like sixty students, I think. In terms of making pictures I intended to be the best, but I was a completely terrible student otherwise. I hated school. Going was just unbearable. If it hadn't been for art, I might have quit school.

Even if I listened to the lesson, I didn't understand. I slept or ditched school. In the mornings I'd go to school but return home before the school day ended. Around halfway through the first year of middle school the San'yō rail line opened. I'd slip out of the classroom in time to catch the train, and went to the other bank, evading notice. On the other bank I went a long way to the train station and would ride the train all the way home to Misumi. However, if I went home, my grandfather would find me. So, I climbed up Mt. Kubara, which was behind my grandfather's

house, lazily lounging around and gazing at the clouds in the sky until evening. From the back of the house, I'd quietly check and then sneak inside the house. Since it was a rather large house, if you went in the innermost unused room, no one would find you there. I wasn't doing anything particularly special, just killing time, and I'd make a conspicuous entrance when I was supposed to. I skipped school for no particular reason. But just being at school was unbearable, so I cut class.

I guess people thought it was too late to correct me, and that I couldn't do any better, so they gave up. By that time, my grandfather had given up on getting me to study. At a middle school with no more than ten students advancing, how could one expect that I, second or third from the bottom of the list, could get into a Dentistry program? My grandfather probably had come to accept that.

Consequently, my desire to go to art school was accepted without that much resistance. However, art school was by no means easy to get into. I looked for a school whose entrance exam had no written component, a school who measured candidates based only on their practical painting skills. As for practical skills, I had absolutely no doubt about my ability, but the first year I took the exam I was readily rejected. After all, I was out of my league. There were forty spots in the class, and only three high school applicants were admitted. The remainder were those who'd failed and retaken the entrance exam a second or third time. The practical skills portion of the exam was doing a drawing based on a plaster cast in eight hours over the course of two days. It was a tough one-shot chance.

In the end, I bombed the entrance exam twice, but on the third try narrowly passed. During that two-year period, I boarded in Tokyo and studied drafting at the Kawabata painting school. In addition to these two years of having to study only design, the art school assigned me nearly nothing but studying drawing from plaster casts the first year and the human figure the second year. Any real painting study I had to do by myself.

The tendencies of my painting changed rapidly. Up until I entered art school, I liked Vlaminck.³⁴⁹ I adored his intensely screaming blue. Before long though, even more than Vlaminck's blue I became fascinated by Van Gogh's Prussian blue. Bright and yet stubbornly chilly, seeming to tempt the viewer into the abyss of madness—that deep, peaceful blue captured me.

Van Gogh then led me into the world of *Ukiyo-e*.³⁵⁰ That is to say, that by following the course of European modern painting backwards, I came back to Japan. In *Ukiyo-e*, I particularly like Hiroshige. From *Ukiyo-e* to *Sōtatsu*, from *Sōtatsu* to Nanga's *Shitao*,³⁵¹ I entered more deeply into the world of Oriental painting.

I think that art is the process of discovering oneself. It's probably because of my discovery of myself as an Oriental person, my discovery of myself as Japanese, that I came to be drawn to Eastern painting, while aspiring to Western oil painting.

As a method, I chose oil painting. However, when I tried to grasp Western painting, not superficially, but from its root, I saw the tremendous burden of its tradition, which forced me into despair. I was made aware that I couldn't paint western style oil paintings as someone born and raised in Japan.

³⁴⁹ Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958) was a French painter, known for his intensely colored landscapes. He is considered a key figure of the early twentieth century style of Fauvism.

³⁵⁰ *Ukiyo-e* (浮世絵 “pictures of the floating world”) was a genre of popular art that flourished in Japan in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Works were primarily woodblock prints or paintings depicting the demimonde of the urban red-light district, popular entertainment such as Kabuki, as well as folk and historical scenes, landscapes, and erotica.

³⁵¹ Utagawa Hiroshige (歌川広重, born Andō Hiroshige 安藤広重, 1797-1858) was a Japanese artist, considered by some as the last great master of the *Ukiyo-e* tradition. Tawaraya Sōtatsu (俵屋宗達 c. 1570-c. 1640) was a Japanese painter and designer credited with co-founding the Rinpa school, along with Hon'ami Kōetsu (本阿弥光悦, 1558-1637). The term *Nanga* is an abbreviation of *Nanshūga*, which refers to the Chinese Southern School of painting. *Shitao* (石濤 1642-1707) was a Chinese landscape painter of the early Qing dynasty (1636-1912).

What kind of oil painting is possible for Japanese people? From that point on, this is the thesis I have bet my life on to pursue as a painter. In the end, what I discovered was, in a word, a simple fact: I can work only within the tradition of Japanese painting. In other words, this means to pursue the spirit of Oriental painting with the tools of oil painting.

Certainly, there is something in Oriental painting that resonates in our blood. No matter how familiar we become with Western painting (i.e. oil painting) you can't avoid a feeling of something not quite right hanging about. But conversely, Oriental paintings, even those I find boring, somehow convey a feeling of tranquility. It was my wish to combine these into one.

One of the differences between Oriental and Western painting is in negative space. There exists a characteristic use of negative space in Oriental painting that is extremely flexible, in contrast to the tightly packed-in composition of Western painting. In Western painting, the negative space can have one interpretation only, but in Oriental painting, it can be interpreted in whatever way, depending on the viewer. I think this is one of the outstanding points of difference between the Oriental spirit and the Western spirit. To take an example in thought, it might be somewhat comparable to the difference between the philosophy of Aristotle and Zen dialogue.

Saying something about the use of negative space is easy, but working it out in reality on the surface of the canvas using oil paints is exceedingly difficult. It must be a negative space that makes use of oil painting. But, "painted negative space" is itself an internal contradiction. This is a big barrier. I don't think that I have yet overcome this completely. But I don't think my direction is wrong either.

In this day and age, one might wonder why we should still care about the tradition of Oriental painting. But even so, of course, I cannot throw away the idea that art is based upon tradition. No matter how avant-garde something appears, to the extent that it is true fine art, it must be born from tradition. What emerges as a phenomenon of contemporary art is like the part of an iceberg visible above the surface of the water. The part above the water is supported by a

part thousands, or tens of thousands, of times larger under the water. The ice underwater not holding up the supporting part is nothing but a stream.

What many Japanese oil painters since the Meiji period tried to do was to find a nice-looking iceberg, jump on it, and scrape a little off the top with a hammer. Of course, I don't mean all of them were doing that. Starting from a reexamination of the first iceberg I stood on, I discovered something unexpected: Although Western painting and Oriental painting look distinct and unrelated to each other, seen from the phenomenal perspective, you can say that at their bases they draw close together, of even that they are almost one and the same.

Although I said that I was drawn to Oriental painting, this doesn't mean I neglected studying Western painting. Yet, since it is disagreeable to chase after trends that change in the blink of an eye, the focus of my interest in Western painting shifted from the modern period to the classical period, especially to the full-blown origin period of the middle ages through the early Renaissance. What I discovered was Romanesque and Gothic middle ages painting, middle ages relief sculpture, and early Renaissance painters including Piero della Francesca among others.³⁵² The things there were exactly the same as the things I discovered in the tradition of Oriental painting.

When I discovered that, I felt a bright feeling, as if I'd broken through the cobwebs in my heart. Even if East is East and West is West, insofar as we are all human beings, there is something like a starting point for understanding. I felt that I had found such a thing. I even felt that I'd found some basis for my seemingly reckless hope of a fusion of Oriental and Western painting.

³⁵² Piero della Francesca (1415-1492) was an Italian painter of the early Renaissance. He is especially known for his cycle of frescoes *The History of the True Cross*, in the church of San Francisco in Arezzo, Tuscany.

I readily write about such an enormous thing, but actually, I've only quite recently managed to arrive here. It's the result of groping for a solution for half my life. In that time, I've experienced Siberia, and then had to experience European tradition on European soil with my own eyes and with my own body. Without these two experiences, I probably wouldn't be who I am now.

I've gotten (too far) ahead of myself. Back to the story.

Looking around at the art world of the time, "it appeared to me that the Kokugakai was to some extent going in the direction I had in mind."³⁵³ I was especially attracted to the leader of the Kokugakai, Umehara Ryūzaburō, so much so that gradually my painting came to resemble his. When I was a third-year art school student, I first submitted a landscape to the Kokugakai but it was rejected. The following year, *Snowy San'in Landscape* was accepted. After that, my works were chosen every year.

After graduating from art school, I was appointed as an art teacher, and around that time, I started having doubts about my work, and fell into a terrible slump. The above-mentioned search for a personal way forward was the toughest spot I'd ever been in. I thought that if I didn't paint, I couldn't break out of that slump. So, I tried various ways to break out of that state without knowing where I was going. When I was praised, I felt all the more terrible, because I knew the works people praised were not really mine. I was told that I was just copying this or that person. Especially when I knew that I based my works on someone else's, such comments produced an unbearable self-hatred.

³⁵³ The Kokugakai ("National Painting Association") is a private Japanese artists' exhibition society that holds annual juried exhibitions in a variety of media. It grew out of the *Kokuga Sōsaku Kyōkai* (国画創作協会 "National Creative Pictures Society," abbreviated *kokuten.*), formed in 1918 by a number of influential Kyoto-based painters. In 1925, the society was broken into two divisions. The Japanese Painting Division ("*Nihonga*"), and the Western Style Painting Division ("*Yōga*"). The second Division later became the current Painting Division. The society consists of a total of five divisions: painting, craft, photography, printing, and sculpture. It has been organizing annual exhibitions since 1926, with the exception of 1945.

This situation continued for maybe two years. Then, one day, my senior from the Kokugakai, Kurata Tetsu,³⁵⁴ taught me about Sōtatsu,³⁵⁵ which gave me a chance to break out of my slump. I wondered why I was trapped in European things and couldn't break away from them for such a long time, when such a great artist did exist in Japan. I finally recovered from my doubts and tackled a new job.

At that time a really great teacher from my middle school days living in Shimonoseki said that there was an art teacher position at a girls' school and asked if I'd come check it out. Shimonoseki is close to where I grew up, and I happily accepted his request. While on the way to take up my new appointment, when I dropped in on my uncle in Yamaguchi city, he said "I know a woman whom you might want to marry. Are you interested?" I had no idea what kind of woman he had in mind, but thought that if a third party (not directly involved) said that this would be a good match, then it must be. Therefore, I replied: "Yes, I'm very interested. Could you take care of things for me?"

Leaving the rest up to my uncle, I went to Shimonoseki. In that state, not knowing my partner well enough, I got married five months later to Fumiko, who is still my wife. We've been married more than thirty years. We've been able to get along so well, and for such a length of time, that she must have been a good match for me.

A year after coming to Shimonoseki, even though I still had some doubts, I was doing a fulfilling job. Every day when I picked up my brush and faced the canvas, it was like what I felt for the very first time was that "my" world came to reveal its form to me little by little, like peeling

³⁵⁴ Kurata Tetsu (庫田 昶 1907-1994) was a Japanese oil painter from Fukuoka, whose real name was Kurata Tetsusuke (倉田 哲介). He and Kazuki both attended the Kawabata Painting School, and both benefited from the assistance of the art world luminary Fukushima Shigetarō. Kazuki has described his friend as a sort of older brother (*an*), using this precise term to address him in letters.

³⁵⁵ Tawaraya Sōtatsu (俵屋宗達 1570-1640) was a Japanese painter and designer of the Rinpa school (琳派), primarily known for his decorations of calligraphic works done by his partner Hon'ami Kōetsu (1558-1637) with whom he is credited as co-founder of Rinpa.

away a thin skin layer after layer. However, I also wondered whether this was really my world. This must be my world, but I was anxious that people wouldn't understand it. Sometimes I said to myself: "No, this is ok, I should go my own way." But other times I was driven by anxiety and returned to the familiar ways I'd done things in the past.

I already had confidence that I could always get my work accepted to the Kokugakai and Bunten exhibitions.³⁵⁶ I recognized that much. To the extent that I would be satisfied with that status, I could be a painter of some prominence for as long as I wanted. However, that was it. At any rate, if I wanted to remain a serious painter, I wanted to have a world that I could clearly claim as my own. I wanted to construct a world by which I could say that I was genuinely convinced, a world that was nothing but my own work.

I prepared two paintings for the Bunten exhibition the following year. One was a portrait of my grandfather, and the other was a painting of a rabbit. You could think of the former as being an old-style painting, vague and indeterminate, one that people would probably categorize as Western. I was confident that if I submitted, it would absolutely be chosen. As for the other one, I threw into it everything I had. In retrospect, I would say that it was a rather organized painting. At that time, the work would have appeared innovative. I wasn't confident about its acceptance. I was afraid that it might be rejected. However, at the same time, I was also confident that it would even be awarded special selection status, if my style was ever accepted.

Several days before submitting them, I was in deep doubt, sitting in front of these two paintings. I thought that perhaps I could still try something challenging after I'd had another work

³⁵⁶ The prestigious and influential Ministry of Education Arts Exhibition (文部省美術展覧会 *monbushou bijutsu tenrankai*, abbreviated 文展 *bunten*) was an annual national arts competition organized by Japan's Ministry of Education starting in 1907. The Ministry's selection of judges, and the judges' selection of art, awarding of prizes helped shape the development of Japanese modern art. The organization was renamed to Imperial Arts Exhibition (帝国美術展覧会 *teikoku bijutsu tenrankai*, abbreviated 帝展 *teiten*) in 1919, but continued essentially unchanged. In 1946, following the end of World War II, it was again renamed the Japan Arts Exhibition (日本美術展覧会 *nihon bijutsu tenrankai*, abbreviated 日展 *nitten*) under which it continues to hold exhibitions to this day.

selected and won some fame. However, while comparing them over and over, I had to conclude that if I thought about how to proceed, I could imagine no other way than to deepen this new technique. Why should I refrain from publicly expressing to the world that I had come to grasp for the first time? It shouldn't bother me whether that would be recognized or not, because that was "my" world. So resolved, I decided to submit new works, and withdrew the portrait of my grandfather.

Rabbit was acquired as a special selection for the third Bunten exhibition. This was the first time I was able to hold on to my convictions as a painter. Perhaps I should say that it's less about becoming confident, than about believing in the universality of my conviction. I heard that leading figures in Kokugakai, Umehara Ryūzaburō and Fukushima Shigetarō, were greatly pleased with my picture, and wanted to meet me. In fact, when I went up to Tokyo, Mr. Kurata took me to meet both of them himself.

When I returned to Shimonoseki, I devoted myself to painting more than ever, with a new spirit. Since I had established my own aesthetic world that was recognized by leading figures, I felt that what I should do now was to pursue only that road at full speed. My children were born one after another, and everything in my private and professional life was going well.

At that time, the smell of smoke began to linger in the air in Japan. When I was at Kutchan Middle School in Hokkaido, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred, and the second Sino-Japanese war started. The National General Mobilization Act was proclaimed one month before I moved to a girls' school in Yamaguchi, and got married. It was in the year of the Nomonhan incident that *Rabbit* was chosen as a special selection.³⁵⁷ The following year, when I

³⁵⁷ The Nomonhan Incident (ノモンハン事件, *Nomonhan jiken*) is the Japanese term for a series of Soviet-Japanese border conflicts that occurred outside of the declaration of formal hostilities, lasting through the summer of 1939. Named after Nomonhan, a village on the border of Manchuria and Mongolia, the conflict is usually referred to outside of Japan as the Battles of Khalkhin Gol, after a river that passes through the battlefield. The Japanese Sixth Army was decisively defeated by the Soviet forces, leading to the frosty stalemate that persisted until 1945, when the USSR denounced the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality

received the Saburi Prize,³⁵⁸ the Tripartite Pact between Japan, Germany and Italy was concluded, and the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was established.³⁵⁹ A wartime regime was also gradually imposed on the art world. The Great Japan Army Military Service Painters Association and the Army Arts Association had already been established, and the Free Artists Association, because it had the term “free” in its name, was renamed to the Fine Artists Association.³⁶⁰

I felt as if this series of events was happening in another country. My concern had only been painting pictures. As long as I could paint pictures, no matter how the world changed, no matter what the circumstances were, it had nothing to do with me, I thought. The war was only a matter of secondary concern in that it might prevent me from painting pictures. I was far more concerned with the fate of my pictures than the fate of the nation.

I passed the physical examination as class C. Since I got the physical exam out in the country, among the sturdy farmer boys, my body seemed even worse by contrast. In fact, at the time I was thin, and my body weight was only 51 kilograms. Surely those like me wouldn't be pulled into the war, or so I assumed rather optimistically. However, before long came a time when I couldn't be so optimistic.

Pact (日ソ中立条約, *Nisso Chūritsu Jōyaku*, also known as the Japanese–Soviet Non-aggression Pact 日ソ不可侵条約, *Nisso Fukashin Jōyaku*) signed by the two parties in 1941, and invaded Japanese-held territory in and around Manchuria.

³⁵⁸ Saburi Makoto (佐分眞 1898-1936) was an oil painter particularly known for his devotion to a realism in the vein of Rembrandt. After his death by suicide, his family established the Saburi Prize (which included a monetary award) to support up and coming *Yōga* painters.

³⁵⁹ The Imperial Rule Assistance Association (大政翼賛会 *Taisei Yokusanka*) was created by Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe in 1940. It evolved into a "statist" ruling political party subsuming earlier political parties and social organizations into an essentially totalitarian one-party state.

³⁶⁰ In the late 1930s the military sought to consolidate its associations with artists engaged in the war effort, creating new organizations such as the Great Japan Army Military Service Painters Association (大日本陸軍従軍画家協会 *Dainippon rukugun jūgungaka kyōka*), which was later condensed into the Army Art Association (陸軍美術協会 *Rikugun bijutsu kyōka*). With this and other actions, the world of *Yōga* came ever more under the control of the military.

In 1941, with the outbreak of the Pacific War, the scope of the battlefield expanded in a single swoop, and troops leaving for the front departed from Shimonoseki station nearly every day. In addition to those classified as class A, those in class B were steadily being called up. While I was thinking that way, I was finally called up in January of 1943, and was assigned to the fourth unit of the Western Yamaguchi Division. This was the first mobilization of those in class C. The same year, the Japan Patriotic Arts Association was formed, and the following year the Art Exhibition Management Guidelines were issued, which suspended all public art exhibitions. Along with that, all art associations were dissolved.

Despite the fact that I'd been expecting it, the call-up notice was still a shock. I was called up when I was full of energy, having discovered what I would say with full confidence was really my own thing. It was when I was enthralled with my natural talent now coming into bloom. I felt all the more dismayed to be taken out to the battlefield to kill people exactly when I was feeling such joy.

Across the way from the Western Yamaguchi Division parade ground was a temple named Jōeiji. This is the temple where Sesshū lived in his last years, where he constructed a rock garden. Among Oriental style painters, Sesshū is one of those whom I admire the most. In my opinion, his *Huikke Offering His Arm to Bodhidharma* (慧可断臂図) is a masterpiece among his works that should be counted among the ten greatest masterpieces in world painting history. Later, when I was struggling to paint human faces in the "Siberia Series", I learned many things from this painting.

Every day, seeing this temple across the way, I had to run around, crawl around, with a rifle on my shoulder, and a gas mask on my face. Since I was supposed to be a light machine gunner, I also was made to practice shooting a light machine gun. Why would a painter be forced to train to kill people? I Felt so miserable as to bring you to tears. With this misery and regret, I painted *Clouds* (1968). This painting shows a single gas mask in the middle of the

parade grounds, as if to symbolize a troop of soldiers, transformed into something inorganic, with all their humanity stripped away. You see Jōeiji Temple, where Sesshū had been, the cerulean blue sky above, with white clouds floating by. And reflected in the glass visor of the gas mask is the endlessly blue sky. Another ironic memory was that during lunch break, the musical theme to Rene Clair's film "Liberty to Us" was piped in over the PA. I still find it very strange. Why was such music piped in? Maybe they didn't have any other records. Or maybe they just played not really knowing that it was the musical theme to "Liberty to Us."

After no more than three months of training, we were going to be dispatched to Manchuria. *Parting* (1967) was inspired by the departure scene at Shimonoseki harbor at that time. The movement of soldiers was a completely secret action. We didn't know when or where we were going until the very last minute, but we were allowed to let our wives know the departure date and time. Only a select few blood relatives came to see us off, and it was a sad departure with not even one Japanese flag waving. But in *Parting*, I painted small flags with black suns.

I don't know quite how the soldiers' destinations were sorted out, but in retrospect, I could say now that I was lucky to be sent to Manchuria. Some of those in the same regiment were sent to the Philippines, but the majority died in battle. Some of us were brought back to a ship and relocated to another place after we got to Manchuria. People said things like: "I don't know where (we're going), but it seems it's a place where you can see cherry blossoms." When I heard that, the image of cherry blossoms in full bloom floated into my head, and I envied them, as I was to stay in chilly Manchuria for some time. But later I learned that those who were relocated then were all assigned to defend Okinawa. They probably all died in the field.

*Black Sun * Morning Sun * Blue Sun*

Three months after I left Shimonoseki, I was a field freight workshop maintenance technician in the north of the Manchurian province of Xing'an. I was in the department responsible for repair and maintenance. They probably thought this assignment was appropriate because I'd learned drafting in art school. Hailar is a huge prairie about one-thousand kilometers northwest from where you depart Harbin and pass through the Greater Khingan mountain range, and very close to Manzhouli, a town on the border with Siberia.

To the Kwantung Army, who regarded the Soviet forces as their primary enemy, it was seen as a forward base, one step behind the front line. The unit was on a plateau called Dongshan, and the Yimin river flowed slowly beneath our gaze. If you took one step out of the town, the wide, flat prairie of Hulunbuir spread out beyond the distant horizon. To be in that magnificent landscape of the prairie such as I'd never seen before, I was sometimes struck, and transfixed by the intensity and beauty of nature, forgetting that I was a soldier. In particular what captured me was the beauty of the sun.

Hailar is around 50 degrees north latitude. Here, the sun does not reach its zenith. It reaches, at most, 30 degrees above the horizon. The sun rises from the east, and rolls down the sky southward, setting in the west. The sun always looked big precisely because it was near the horizon. As sunset approached, it seemed the entire sky was burning. On clear, sunny days, the vegetation of the prairie would reflect on the clouds, turning them green. However, for me as a painter, chained to the prison of the military, that sun was not a symbol of hope anymore, but something dark that had lost its radiance. This is what I painted in *Black Sun* (1961).

In *Morning Sun* (1965) I painted the sun beautifully. This is a picture based on a painting I made on a blank postcard that I sent home. I sent many postcards home. About half of them are completely covered with my little paintings. Since I'd also brought along watercolors, I was

able to paint it easily. Since I didn't really have a good chance to paint, in addition to making picture postcards to send to family, this comforted me.

It's in the morning that the sun looked the most beautiful. When autumn came, the soldiers were roused early in the morning and were rounded up to do cold-weather exercises. We were made to do marathons in bare feet. Hailar's summer was short, and its autumn was also short. Though it was Autumn there was already frost on the ground. The frost under our bare feet made a crunching sound. Eventually our feet became numb to the cold, and thanks to the sound of the frost breaking we managed to feel that our feet were moving. We began to run when it was still rather dark, and while we were running the sun gradually rose. Then my breath shone white in the light. Every morning, and just when I was nearly beaten down by the cold and fatigue, I'd look up, and the sun was burning so beautifully as to almost make me forget the cold and fatigue.

When the marathon was done, everyone was ordered to form up in a line and raise their hands. Holding a pose like the "banzai" salute, standing still, we began to feel severe pain, with blood going down our arms, fingertips visibly turning white. We were informed that this is an early sign of frostbite. When I felt the pain, a bit disconcerted, I quickly lowered my hands and rubbed them together in my crotch. The pain was severe when your hands came back into a normal state after aching. At times, we had such practices of thrusting our hands into water nearly zero degrees Celsius. As I rightly guessed, that was intended to teach us the threshold where frostbite began.

Blue Sun (1969) is a work drawn from the memories of military exercises on the plain of Hulun Buir. In the end, however, our troops in Manchuria never participated in a real battle. We only participated in exercises. What we did all the time was a crawling advance. Holding our guns reverently with both hands, we crept along, breathing hard, supporting our bodies with both elbows. Times like those, if you looked down, you'd often see many ants. The ants didn't have

anything to do with humans trying to kill each other, diligently running around doing their own thing. 'Oh, what a peaceful life, here on this ground'... sometimes I thought I'd rather be an ant.

I wanted to take such thoughts I had at the time and make them into a painting. But however hard I thought about it, it didn't become interesting as a painting. If you drew a nest of ants, in a desert like place, no one would recognize it. It's like a picture by Fontana³⁶¹ with a hole in the canvas. So, I thought, what if I were an ant? What do you see if you look up at the sky from within the nest? This is the picture I painted thinking that. I wanted to blot out the scene with black and green. However, obviously, it wouldn't be an interesting picture. It is said that when you look up at the sky from the bottom of a deep hole in the desert, you can see stars.

In order to paint this picture, I thought it was necessary to know a little more about what in the world an ant is, so for several days I crouched by an anthill I found near my house and observed the ants. To my surprise I learned that ants, which I had thought of as peaceful animals during my days training in Hulun Buir, are actually quite aggressive. Ants warred, rather than fought, each other. Divided into two camps, the ants killed each other insatiably. The more I looked at them, the more disgusted I became, which even made me think about giving up on this painting altogether. However, a second thought made me realize that it would be all the more appropriate to compare us, soldiers, with ants. Weren't we actually soldier ants chained to the prison of the military, always looking at the distant sky from a dark place like the bottom of the Earth?

I am a painter. Why is a painter in a place like this, doing things like this? I kept thinking like this, battered by rage and despair that knew no outlet. When will the war end? When will I return home to Japan? Will I get back on my feet as a painter when I get home? Unable to endure such

³⁶¹ Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) was an Argentine-Italian painter, sculptor and theorist. He is primarily known for founding the art movement known as Spatialism. Kazuki here is referencing monochrome paintings that he made in from the late 1940s on, in which he ripped holes or slashes.

thoughts, sometimes I'd take a tube of paint from my paint supplies box, remove the cap, and smell the oil paints. When I did, my head became giddily unsteady, like when one hasn't felt the touch of a woman in a long time and is suddenly hit with the scent of perfume from a woman's skin. Perhaps Fukushima Shigetarō caught such thoughts of mine, because he sent me a letter. Right after I arrived in Manchuria, I received one from him.

“Thank you for your many postcards. I passed through Hailar before the war. It was a really bleak land. At the time there were few houses, and a Russian-style station standing alone, but I suppose now that has changed. Not a landscape suitable for a good painting, but I think that it suits your painter's temperament. Only you can turn a bleak prairie into a painting. Perhaps you don't have any time to pick up your brush, so keep that impression deep inside of you.”

Right now, I'm reading a biography of Odilon Redon³⁶², where I found a rather interesting passage. Let me just write it down here: Redon recalled that at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, he was conscripted and experienced the war, and that war experience was very useful for his life as a painter. He also pointed out that this unknown world enriched his imagination; and military life, which didn't allow him to paint, gave him a long rest from incessantly improving his paintings. As a result, when he could finally take up brushes once again, he felt completely fresh. After all, the painting shows the personality of the painter. Therefore, the painter must be a genuine human. I think you're in a completely different world than before now.”

I was greatly comforted by this letter. I was very thankful to have a mentor who cared to this extent about me, a protégé thousands of kilometers away. I was comforted being so looked after. However, thinking about Fukushima's words of comfort now, I found that they literally

³⁶² Odilon Redon (1840-1916) was a French symbolist painter and printmaker. His early twentieth century works were heavily influenced by his exposure to Japanese art. Though usually considered a Post-Impressionist or Symbolist, his work is often considered a forerunner of both Dadaism and Surrealism.

applied to me since then, [having lived through the war after receiving this letter]. Without Siberia and the war, the “me” I am today wouldn’t exist. I wouldn’t be able to make the kinds of paintings that I make now. I can say as clearly as Redon did: “War was when my vision grew ten-fold, as it were. At this time, I became aware of my own natural talents.” Until then, I was conscious of my being a painter as an extremely mundane and ordinary thing. However, being forcibly prohibited from being a painter in that military theater, I came to realize that I was a painter, and only a painter.

*Smoke * Hawk * Amulet*

For a soldier in a foreign land, feelings of nostalgia are irresistible. When one or two people gathered to chat, the conversation was inevitably about home. So, it was at the cargo depot where I was working, when only three or so conscripted in the same year got together, one guy said: “what would you do if you were told you’d be sent home?” One guy said:

“What if they told you you’d be sent home if you ate your mess kit full of shit, what would you do?”

You might laugh at the absurdity of this, but to the soldiers this was a serious subject of consideration. Suddenly faces became serious, as everyone seemed to be asking themselves about this possibility.

“Nibbling at it is one thing, but you probably can’t eat it all.”

When one person lamented in such a way, everyone nodded as if to agree that he was right.

Near the hill where the cargo depot stood, there was a railroad that connected Manchuria to Qiqihar. The railway vanished beyond the distant plains. In contrast to the trains running

through the town, the trains set out in the large spaces of nature seemed to have a terribly negligible existence. The overwhelming sense of weight of the rail mechanism seen nearby totally vanished and looked as if it was just a toy. Whether because of the low temperature, or a different quality of coal, the trains' exhaust was surprisingly different from back home. The color was black, and thick, and lingering. If you looked from the hilltop, sometimes you didn't see the whole train linked to the locomotive engine, hidden within the smoke.

Every time I saw that I'd think "If only I could get on that train then I'd return home to Japan." At the same time, as a painter, when I saw the smoke I thought "this would make an interesting picture." My interest in the smoke was never exhausted, as it always drew different forms in the air and disappeared into the desolate scene. The smoke in that scene, was in itself a symbol of soldiers' feelings of homesickness. My painting of this is *Smoke* (1959).

In *Hawk* (1958) I entrusted the same feelings to a hawk. Even if soldiers manage to skillfully catch a train on the way to Qiqihar, managing to make it all the way to Japan would be quite impossible. If you can't cross the ocean, you can't return to Japan. The best thing would be to become a bird and fly away home.

One day, a falcon, startled by lightning, wandered bewildered into the rice mill of the cargo depot. Still just a fledgling, it seemed in somehow bad shape, flapping around unable to fly. I don't know who suggested it, but we began keeping the falcon as a pet. We attached a cord to its leg so that even as it got better it couldn't fly away. For food, we fed it fish guts and such from the cookhouse. Though still a juvenile falcon, it was a magnificent bird that possessed both a stately roughness and grace at the same time. But, on that day, like those who endure isolation, the falcon emitted a strange loneliness. I was fascinated by the falcon, and whenever I had time, I'd make sketches of it. But, one morning, the falcon had disappeared. It had bitten off the string with its beak and escaped.

I was sad when the falcon was gone, but I celebrated that the falcon was able to release itself under its own power. At the same time, I felt sad that we couldn't do the same. The string that bound us was not one that could be easily bitten off. *Hawk* is filled with memories of the falcon from that time. But, in order to strengthen its vitality and power to fly, I substituted a hawk for the falcon. With the wings of a hawk, maybe we could have made the long flight from Hailar to Japan.

We soldiers, almost without exception, wore amulets. I was no exception. I have never genuinely believed in the likes of gods or Buddhas, but nevertheless I had a Narita amulet and a Hachiman amulet in a red pouch that my wife had made³⁶³. Throughout Manchuria and Siberia, I never once let go of it, and when I was repatriated, I still had it on me. But I never expected that carrying a talisman around with me would somehow grant me grace. However, the reason I never abandoned it was that not only did I not want to waste the good will of the person who travelled to get it for me, but, maybe I sort of felt that I wanted something that I could depend on.

I also had a “thousand stitch belt”³⁶⁴. Whenever I saw it, I thought about my students at the girls' school. After the war started, requests for “thousand stitch belts” came to the school every day. In order to handle all the work, the belts would pass among the students even during class time. The students, grown used to it, added one stitch at a time, with complete apathy, passing it around like a neighborhood circular.

³⁶³ Narita amulets come from the temple Shinshō-ji (新勝寺), a Shingon Buddhist temple in the Narita area of Chiba prefecture, just northeast of Tokyo. Hachiman amulets are made by Tamukeyama Hachiman Shrine (手向山八幡宮), a Shinto shrine near Tōdai-ji, in Nara Prefecture, near Kyoto.

³⁶⁴ Thousand Stitch Belts (*Senninbari* 千人針, “thousand-person-stitches”) are strips of cloth, measuring approximately 15cm by 90-120cm, decorated with 1000 knots or stitches, each stitch normally made by a different woman. These were given to soldiers leaving for the front as amulets for good luck and a safe return. The practice of making *senninbari* to give to departing soldiers originated during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895. The extreme demand for such items, as more and more Japanese men were conscripted and sent abroad, necessitated the assembly-line style production Kazuki describes.

As someone with a burning passion for painting rather than teaching, I was maybe a failure as a teacher. However, when I was to depart and my thousand stitch belt was to be made, some of my students voluntarily came to me and asked to add one stitch to my belt, and seeing them carefully stitch it once and even some of them pained that they could not give another stitch, I thought maybe I'm not altogether that bad a teacher. Additionally, I carried locks of hair and pictures of each of my family members. In addition to photos of the children, I kept a photo of me and my wife from only about half a year after we were married on the back of the lid of my tobacco case. When I look at it now, we look surprisingly young.

In *Amulet* (1969), when putting all these things together as a picture, I thought I'd apply that photograph to the surface as it was. I took out the pictures from the case, covered with tears and scratches, discolored and yellowed. However, when I put it in the exact center of the #50 size canvas, it was really small. Since that plan did not work, I made an exact, enlarged copy of the photo, like a miniature. Though I intended to duplicate it exactly, my wife's face came out looking more beautiful than it was. For 31 years of married life, I said and did what I wanted to say and do. I was always selfish, saying and doing as I pleased, without caring for her. maybe I labored on this picture with the feeling of paying back a favor.

*Rain * Hulun Buir*

The plains of Hulun Buir, despite the name, remind one of a desert. Once May goes by, you can't even walk without dust-proof goggles. A cloud of sand rises up to make the sky yellow. In the summer, evening showers, like squalls, come along. Drenching downpours happen suddenly. Then, a huge rainbow draws an arc filling the sky. The beauty takes your breath away.

The first work I painted for the Kokugakai exhibition after returning to Japan was, as you may have guessed, *Rain (Cattle)* (1945). It's a sentimental and even a little romantic picture,

showing a pool of water in the traces of a rut on a grassy plain immediately after a sudden shower. As I look back on it now, it's too beautiful, too vivid. Why would I paint a place devoid of such color so colorfully? Perhaps, my spirit, devastated by the war and my life as a prisoner, unconsciously sought after some kind of compensation. It's probably the same reason I painted *Burial* (1945), which may be called the first work in the "Siberia Series", in gorgeous colors. My feelings at that time were such that I couldn't paint *Burial* exactly like a real burial in Siberia. The feeling that I wanted to bury my friends warmly, at least on the canvas. It seemed to take ten years to depict Siberia as it really was.

On the contrary, the reason why I continue to paint the Siberia Series now is that I'm afraid that not only my life but also my spirit would indulge in happiness, or worse, in lukewarmness. It's not just me. Maybe I want to warn all of Japan that they're soaking in a tepid bath. The war, and Siberia, were very real only a while ago. As the distance from Siberia to the postwar peace and economic prosperity of Japan was short, perhaps the distance from this to the next Siberia will be short.

It was finally in 1968 that I could paint not a romantic *Rain* but a true *Rain*. It depicts the same scene after the rain, but this time it's the rain that fell on the battlefield. After the war was over, there was a sudden evening shower. The blood shed in vain by soldiers, friend and foe, soaked into the ground. Whose blood it was or why it was shed, the rain and the earth knew not. As the rain washed away the blood, before long, the remains of the dead and weapons left behind by the war would fade away, and only memories would remember that this place was a battlefield. Even those would fade away and vanish as generations passed, after some years completely forgetting that this was a battlefield, then no one would know what those who risked their lives there felt when they died.

Certainly, the life of a human being is similarly meaningless. There will probably come a time when there isn't a single person alive who knows what kind of person Kazuki Yasuo was.

However, the struggle of painting is the struggle I myself wage. The struggle to kill other people is what I was forced to wage. The struggle I myself wage is at least to me not without meaning. The struggles I was forced to undertake were to me completely meaningless and vain.

By painting only the landscape of a battlefield, without painting any people or things, I tried to make a war painting that could depict the futility of war. From the time I was in Hailar, I thought like that. However, an image that seemed right to me didn't quite crystallize. I spent more than ten years in that state, and I'd half given up on the motif, then suddenly one day an ashen sun vividly floated up in my heart. I immediately understood what it was. After a summer rain in Hailar, the sun appeared an ashen grey. I never participated in an actual battle. Consequently, I don't know what a real battlefield is like. This could have been one of the reasons that I couldn't resolve the image. However, when the image of the ashen sun arose, I immediately knew that I'd discovered the war painting I'd been thinking about.

Another painting with a similar theme is *Hulun Buir* (1960). Abandoned on a large grassy plain, were weathered corpses. Though Hulun Buir is called a grassy plain, it's more like a desert. Because of the white sandy soil, once the bodies become bleached bones, they are indistinguishable from the white sandy soil. I never saw a human corpse like this painted in a picture. However, several times I've seen the process when cattle and horses and such die, are left untouched, decay, the flesh disintegrates, and before long are weathered to the point where only pure white bones remain. Even when it's human beings it's the same. Similarly, they decay, similarly only bones remain, and in the end the bones are absorbed into the sand.

Nomonhan is only about 150 kilometers from Hailar. The dead bodies of the Japanese soldiers who died in the Nomonhan Incident four years before must have been weathered as I

painted.³⁶⁵ And if we started a battle between the Soviet Army and the Kwantung Army³⁶⁶, the fate of my own body would be no different. The distance (difference?) between those who died and those who survived was just a thin line drawn by luck. What I painted in this picture is, I may say, what could have been the fate of my own body.

*1945 * Refugees * Mukden*

In August of 1945 the Soviet army suddenly issued a declaration of war, and advanced along the full length of the border like a surging wave. If we had been in Hailar, which was near the border, we would have been completely defeated. But, about three months prior to the Soviet's declaration of war our unit had withdrawn to Zhengjiatun, northwest of Mukden. Since the Kwantung army had changed the posture toward a central attack that it had held, the headquarters of the Third Field Army, to which our 19th Field Cargo Factory unit belonged, had been moved from Qiqihar to Mukden. First, we were ordered to build a warehouse in the mountains on the outskirts of Zhengjiatun, then to go further south to Korea, and construct a supply depot there. It was maybe the fourteenth when we arrived in Mukden. The downpour that had continued through the night stopped and the train slowly pulled into the station enveloped by the morning mist.

³⁶⁵ The Battles of Khalkhin Gol were a series of engagements in a border conflict between Japan and Russia that took place through the summer of 1939. The decisive battle is referred to in Japan as the Nomonhan Incident (ノモンハン事件 *Nomonhan Jiken*) after Nomonhan, a village on the border between Mongolia and Manchuria. The Japanese Sixth Army suffered a decisive and humiliating defeat at the hands of the Soviet 57th Special Corps.

³⁶⁶ The Kwantung Army (関東軍, *Kantō-gun*), originally formed in 1906 to defend newly acquired Japanese interests in Manchuria, was the largest army group of the Japanese Imperial Army from 1919-1945. It was largely responsible for the creation of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo and was one of the main Japanese fighting forces during the Second Sino-Japanese War from 1937. It was well equipped and trained, and by the end of World War II many of its elements had been redeployed elsewhere to deal with Allied forces led by the United States, leaving it seriously attenuated by the time the Soviets engaged them in August 1945.

That day passed in total confusion, but at night we stayed in a middle school building, and the next day, on the fifteenth, we were again on a freight train heading in the direction of Korea. I heard the news that the war was over when I was on that train. Probably the entire army was ordered to listen to the broadcast of the emperor announcing the surrender, but we'd already boarded the train car, and I don't remember hearing it. I think I first heard the news from a local resident who'd heard the broadcast. There were many people for whom the news of the end of the war came from out of the blue. However, in my case, in a sense it felt like a very mundane thing. "Ah, I see, it's over. Of course. It'd have been more natural to have ended sooner—why is it finally coming to an end now?" That's how I felt.

Then, the first thing that I did was to take a knife to cut a sheet there in front of me in the train car and make a bag for my oil paints box. It was in this very act in which I, as a painter, tearing up some of the military materials that belonged to the Emperor, first really felt that the war was over. I was no longer a soldier, I returned to being a painter. "In Japan now, there are no generals, no privates, no soldiers at all." I brazenly declared this to my fellow soldiers to their great astonishment. One of the veterans warned me, looking around worriedly: "How dare you say that?"

At that time, I never dreamed I would be detained in Siberia. The war is over. I can return home and take up my brush again. That's all I thought. The train turned south, and after two days came to Andong on the bank of the Yellow River. Many times, along the way we encountered train cars full of refugees. Those refugees were stuffed into open freight cars like tins of sardines, the tops of which were covered with sheets. In Manchuria in August, it is still hot. It must have been hot as a sauna under those sheets. All the faces, peering out through the sheet, were haggard with fatigue, weighed down with fear and anxiety. Like people being taken to penal servitude, they were uniformly silent, their vacant eyes staring outward. From a few of the cars, sometimes you could hear a baby crying loudly.

They'd lost all their worldly possessions, were bereft of hope, terrified of attack by the local Manchurians, furiously competing for the limited means of transportation. In the extreme confusion, people's hearts ran wild, and their wretchedness was plain to see. How many people were there who, desperately caring only for their own lives and nothing else, abandoned their children? Perhaps they did so unconsciously, but everywhere I saw children crying out for parents they'd lost sight of, absentmindedly standing there in a daze.

One morning, I saw a family of four walking along the railroad tracks in the morning mist. As they avoided the train passing by, they looked up at us with envy. However, I was envious of them. Even a small child of elementary school age, wearing backpack so big that I couldn't see its body, was led by the hand of its mother. I don't know if they safely returned to Japan or not. But they should be able to handle their pain and troubles together. They were of course unhappy parents and children, but, in my case, being apart from your wife and children for over a year, not knowing when we'd meet next, I was envious of just the fact that they were together.

Andong was full of refugees and soldiers. The border was already under Soviet control, and permission to cross the border was rarely given out. Soldiers were disarmed there and detained in lodging houses. Those called up locally in Manchuria, were discharged there, but the rest were just left hanging there for about a month, with nothing to do. A rumor went around that we'd be kept there at least until the end of winter.

Because of the anxiety of not knowing what was going to happen, some people tried to escape across the border. I was even asked to escape with them. However, if I was discovered, I'd have been shot and killed, and even if I was successful, I didn't know what kinds of dangers awaited me in Korea. Weighing the likelihood of successfully escaping and obediently waiting there to be sent home, in the end I chose persevering. Though I say "persevering," my thinking at the time was that after no longer than half a year I'd be sent home.

On September 23, our unit received orders to move. We weren't told where we were going, and we were crammed into freight cars like before. The train started going north. We started going back the way we'd come only a month before. We were uneasy, wondering what it meant that we were moving in the opposite direction of our native land. But at any rate there were few people who doubted that we were being sent home. By what route are we being sent home was the topic of discussion among all the soldiers.

When we left Andong, those of us soldiers in the freight workshop, could take whatever we wanted from the supplies, and we crammed our rucksacks full. There were people who made bigger bags when they couldn't cram things into their regular rucksack. They almost staggered under bags crammed with a mountain of clothes and food, thinking that these would surely be important goods when we get back to Japan.

However, as we went northward, our anxiety grew stronger. When we disembarked from the train in Mukden, we were gathered in a camp on the outskirts of town, and a reorganization of the units was carried out. Then everyone was provided with new winter clothes. The provision of winter clothes meant that, at the very least, we weren't going to be returning to Japan before the winter. Moreover, later on when we arrived at a small train station north of Sango, we were provided with black, cotton-padded Manchurian clothing. Since we kept being provided with winter clothing, we probably should have expected that we were going to Siberia. Or maybe, deep in our hearts, we already realized this. However, there was no one who dared to put this into words.

Leaving Andong, which was full of Japanese people, continuing our journey north, we gradually realized the gravity of our situation. The war was over. Thank you for your hard work. Let's go home. But the situation was not easy-going like that. As soon as the war ended, the enmity and hatred of the Manchurian people exploded. Neither I nor my unit did anything particularly bad worth mentioning. However, in China and Manchuria, I knew fairly well that

Japanese people, not just soldiers, did a lot of quite cruel things. I heard that all the inhabitants of a rebellious village were buried alive. According to someone who witnessed it, an old man at the bottom of the hole was screaming “Help me!” waving a roll of banknotes, and a soldier smashed his head in with a shovel, and when the old man crouched there, dazed—according to what I heard—they went so far as to throw more dirt on him. I heard this story, after getting to the camp in Siberia, and the soldier who told me that story in a grave tone:

“Then, why they did that, I don’t know myself...” And then he fell silent.

In the strange circumstances of war and the army, people often did these kinds of cruel and inhuman things without knowing why. Moreover, the majority of such guys are, taken individually, extremely ordinary, good citizens. As for myself, if I had been put in such a situation, what would I have done? When I ask myself, I’m not so sure. Even if I had avoided doing it myself, I might have been tacitly complicit. I am not a strong person. But, since I kept a painter’s eye to the end, I could have kept my sanity, even in the midst of madness. However, I am not so sure if I could have insisted on my sanity if I’d taken part in such atrocities. I was greedy for life. Or maybe not life, but rather to live long. In order to live as a painter, I had to survive this time of the madness of war. In Siberia as well, I did whatever I could in order to survive. I always thought that even if I had to do some dirty things, I’d definitely survive. If you had insisted on beautiful slogans like “be pure and right,” or “be humane to the end” you could never have survived in such unusual circumstances. I compromised to survive. I licked others’ boots. And I struggled.

When the train stopped at Mukden station, a train carrying refugees from Rehe province was waiting. For whatever reason, it was only women. Among them the younger ones were chosen, and one by one taken behind a latrine and raped by the Soviet soldiers. In addition to the outrageous behavior of the Soviet soldiers, we were always surrounded by the hateful glare of the Manchurians. There were probably Manchurians among them who had good will toward

Japanese people. However, for the majority of Manchurians the Japanese were nothing but enemies, those who had killed their parents and brothers. In the area around the train station Manchurians lined up along the tracks, spitting on our train as we went by, hurling abuse and cursing us.

Just after leaving Mukden, I saw a dead body lying by the side of the railway track. It must have been a Japanese person lynched by the Manchurians. Not only were its clothes were torn off, but it looked like it had been skinned. The train passed by just a short time, so it wasn't possible to make absolutely sure, but I was quite certain about that. If that was skin though, the color was rather strange. It was completely desiccated, and looked as if shrunken, with a reddish-brown color. On top of that, vertical stripes ran down the whole length of the body, as if it'd been painted red. It was just like an anatomy textbook showing human musculature. Was he skinned alive, or after he was killed? The lower part of the body had fallen into a ditch, and it was in a pose weakly holding one arm up toward the sky.

After I came home to Japan, I saw photos of the fallen bodies, scorched black by the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima. At that time, in my head, the skinned red body of the lynched Japanese I saw in Manchuria floated up, and the two dead bodies, red and black, came to overlap. Those two bodies say everything about the year 1945.

In the twenty years since the war ended, the stories of the black corpses have been told again and again. Hiroshima and Auschwitz are held up as two symbols of the great war. These places referred to the deaths of innocents, symbolizing the great cruelty of war. Through the black corpse, Japanese people could feel that they had been victims of the war. Everyone shouted in unison "No more Hiroshimas!" It was like there had been no war besides the dropping of the atomic bomb, I thought.

The red corpse was the year 1945 as the death of a perpetrator. A corpse lying by the side of the railway tracks. I didn't know the details. Maybe that man too had been deceived by

the fantasy of building a promised land in Manchuria, the son of a poor farmer or something, come to work on developing Manchuria, a guy who himself was a victim of the war. However, in my eyes, it reflected a compensatory death of a perpetrator. We were dragged into war against our will, forced to bear part of that burden. And then now we are being forced to atone. The red corpse suggests just that compelled fate.

It is someone else that should have been the red corpse. Those who still indulge themselves somewhere. That's what I thought. However, at the same time I felt that nothing could be done and watched the war begin. I thought nothing could be done when I became a soldier. I knew that Japanese people were doing terribly cruel things in China and Manchuria. Even then I was silent, not thinking anything could be done. Because of that, I thought that maybe nothing could be done about being made to atone.

There were countless red corpses in this war. We, prisoners of war detained in Siberia, were also turned into living red corpses, in a manner of speaking. As for me, try as I might, I still don't understand. What can be said about the red corpse? Who should accept responsibility for the red corpse? And what should we do to prevent red corpses from happening again? What should I do?

Maybe I've made the "Siberia Series" to keep thinking about these things. I can't really put it into words well. But, at the very least, I can say this: A deep insight into the essence of war, and a true anti-war movement must be born not from the black corpses but the red corpses. The tragedy of war is greater for those who had to become perpetrators than for those who suffered as innocent victims.

To me, 1945 was that red corpse.

If I could take this corpse into my arms and walk up to each and every Japanese person and thrust it before them, and then interrogate them to make them admit that no one was exempt, everyone was complicit, then I think that such an absurd war could never happen again.

All I could do, at best, was only to make a picture. Since I couldn't depict the skinned corpse well, I covered the naked body in striations. Then I wrote "1945" on the picture. I have my doubts as to what extent the picture conveys the red corpse that I saw. I depicted this in a painting in 1959. It was fourteen years later, and Japan was in an uproar over the revision of the Police Law³⁶⁷.

*To the North, to the West * Marsh * Frozen Earth * The Flames of Karma*

From Mukden we were on a covered freight car with iron lattice windows fitted in all four directions. However, crammed in like that, we couldn't stretch our legs while sleeping. The train continued northward, carrying dazed soldiers, continuing on day after day. There were some soldiers who, taking turns watching from the windows, managed to make a guess about our destination, but the more they tried the more they realized the futility of their efforts, and they became silent, sitting on the floor holding their knees.

The train stopped often. Perhaps it was running without a clear schedule. When the train stopped, we cooked in a camping pot and relieved ourselves, as a Soviet soldier carrying a machine gun kept watch over us. Since we had to go into the woods to gather kindling and take a shit, we could have escaped by finding a chance when the guards weren't watching us, if we had tried. However, even if we managed to flee that place, thinking about the danger that would await after that, we couldn't feel like running away. How many hundreds of kilometers to Korea, how could I finally make it that far? You'd be either caught and lynched by Manchurian locals or collapse from sheer exhaustion. Still, it seems there were some people who tried to escape.

³⁶⁷ In late 1958, the cabinet of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi submitted a bill to revise the Police Duties Execution Act (警察官職務執行法 *Keisatsu kanshoku mushikkou hou*), seeking to expand the Police's powers to detain individuals. The move was swiftly met with widespread opposition from a diverse array of groups, political and otherwise. Such civic action culminated in a widespread strike at the beginning of November 1958, and by the end of the month the government had backed away from the revision.

Sometimes the dry crack of a machine gun rang out, with the Soviet troops running and shouting in loud voices. As we continued north, this became less frequent. Since you'd get caught quickly if you tried escaping in the daytime, the guards were relatively lax. When night came, the Soviet soldiers would go car by car, doing a roll call of everyone, and when that was done, lock the door from the outside.

We soldiers, in uncomfortable positions in the cramped freight car, managed to sleep. Since I had a portable tent, I made it into a hammock and slept in that, so it was relatively easy for me, but for those on the floor it was terrible. Their heads and legs were overlapping all over the place. There was no light at all in the darkness. You could hear only the rumbling of the train's wheels. Even if you closed your eyes you couldn't easily sleep. The cold got gradually harsher. Someone would shout out: "Shut up!" hearing the muttering of two people laying side by side. Soon a terrible stillness returned. It was a communal life, to be sure, but what dominated was solitude and anxiety. From time to time there was a train station. At all of the stations Manchurians were gathered, trying to sell food to the Japanese soldiers. Taking out their little remaining money, or holding out whatever they had of value, everybody wanted sweet bean buns. Those without enough money or belongings watched this enviously.

The train passed through Harbin and continued northward. This meant that our hope of going to Vladivostok via Harbin was completely eradicated. Despite that, many still thought that we might be sent home somehow, via the Siberian railroad. As long as a slight, dim hope remains, people will cling to it to the end. What caused us to completely give up was after nearly a month we crossed the Amur river and entered the Siberian railway. The next morning after we were moved to a Siberian railway freight car, when I looked outside, the sun was rising behind the train. We no longer had any doubt: we were heading west. "Sure enough, we're screwed." Someone grumbled.

"Now I won't be able to get home before I die, will I?"

“That’s not true. It’ll be half a year, a year, till we get to go home.”

“No way, it can’t be just one year.”

Since I’m rather optimistic, when I heard such comments, all I thought was: “It won’t be all that long. And at any rate I’ll survive it.”

I’ve strayed from my story though. It was over five hundred kilometers from Harbin to the Amur River on the Manchurian border via Peian, the train passing through the plains of Manchuria, going north into the highlands. The scenery outside the car was entirely different from how it had been up to then. The surface of the earth blackened as if rotting. The Huma River waterway spread out and turned into a wetland.

The soldiers were both mentally and physically exhausted, and few gazed out the window of the train while it was running. Sometimes when something unusual came into view, a few rose up to look, but that continued for only a second and they sat down again like a sick person. I liked looking outside. Looking outside, I passed the time thinking only of “I could make that into a picture, but not that...” If not for that, I’d have been like the other soldiers, lonely, tired, and in a daze probably. Or unconsciously, to avoid that, maybe I forced myself to think about motifs for paintings. When I saw the wetlands, I thought: This is perfect for a picture. The earth looked as if it was in a sickened condition, and I even thought it really embodied the suffering, internal image of the soldiers.

After we’d passed through the wetlands, before long the train entered the tundra. In terms of latitude it was not all that different from Paris. However, even though it was the middle of October, winter had already arrived in the highlands, and the ground was frozen. That first view of the tundra gave us a premonition of what kind of place Siberia would be, where we would arrive before long, which trapped us in a dark mood. Sometimes, right in the middle of the tundra you could see a light Soviet army tank, chattering along with a tawdry sound. In the wake of the tank it left tracks stamped into the ground like a caterpillar. Beautiful tracks were

here and there, like the metal band of a watch, extended infinitely. The tracks on the tundra wouldn't disappear until the snow thaw the following summer.

I painted this in 1965. Just that year, for river repair work on the Misumi river that flows by my house a bulldozer came around every day, running around the riverbed. While watching the caterpillar tracks, like I hadn't seen in a long time since after the war, I was suddenly reminded of that Soviet tank running around the tundra. The bulldozer seemed like a tank, and the window of my house was like the window with the iron bars in the Manchu Train Company's car which was used to transport prisoners. Listening carefully, I could hear the incessant dull thrum of the trains.

At that time, I thought that no matter what, I had to paint a picture of that tundra. Certainly, the trace of those tank tracks imprinted on the tundra was something beautiful. However, I can't depict it as just a beautiful thing. While I was considering various ideas, I suddenly remembered this: when I was touring Europe, I saw a relief sculpture in the stone floor of the cathedral in Barcelona, a relief drawing of skulls. I decided to embed skulls in the tracks of the tank treads. In that way I could represent the meaning of the tank treads, the meaninglessness of a foolishly cruel war.

I painted *Wetlands* in 1961 and *To the North, to the West* in 1959. *To the North, to the West* is a noteworthy work of the "Siberia Series." In this work, I depicted "my face" for the first time. Up to then, I'd painted some portraits. However, I didn't yet have a face I could call "My' Face". Gauguin paints only Gauguin's face, and Modigliani paints only Modigliani's face. To a painter, creating one's own face is the beginning and the end. If you can't create your own face, you might say you're incomplete as a painter. I, as well, continued searching for a long time for my face. Especially after I began the "Siberia Series" I felt like I could not go further without my face. Although I had a feeling that an image was in the process of coming into focus inside myself, I was also frustrated that that image failed to form a clear figure in the end.

Around that time, all of a sudden, Fukushima Shigetarō recommended that I take a trip to Europe. When I was young, I was among those who yearned to go to Europe and was quite enthusiastic about such a trip. But after returning home from Siberia, despite many opportunities I could have had if I had just acted, I stubbornly refused. I thought that although it was customary for Japanese painters to go to Europe, it would be good if there was one among us who had never been there. Since Fukushima enthusiastically recommended that I go, I half-seriously replied: “If you want me to go so badly, then go ahead and make all the arrangements for me. If you do that, and say everything is ready, I’ll go.” But, to my surprise, just as I’d asked him, he had all the arrangements from A to Z, and told me that everything was ready. I had no choice but to go.

With Paris as a base, I’d tour around the south of France, Italy and Spain for about five months. Most of the time would be spent sight-seeing. I was most fascinated with medieval sculpture and painting, particularly Romanesque and Gothic. To tell the truth, since my student days I have been strongly attracted to the sculpture on Romanesque cathedrals. At Maruzen³⁶⁸ bookstore, I’d gaze over a photobook of relief sculpture of Christ and his disciples, and I wanted to get it so badly that I went so far as to cut back on my daily spending to purchase it.

The sculpture of this period has a very Oriental feel to it. Some of them appeared as if created by Master Mokujiki.³⁶⁹ For the first time I saw with my own eyes those works I’d only known from photos. This gave me the most important hint about how to create “my face.” Later, I was told that “my face” resembled Buddhist statuary, but to me, rather than the Buddha, it was

³⁶⁸ Maruzen is a Japanese bookstore chain founded in 1869. It is especially famous for its selection of foreign and non-Japanese language books and has long served as a destination for some of Japan’s most famous literary writers and artists, philosophers and scholars.

³⁶⁹ Mokujiki (木喰 1718-1810) was a Japanese monk from an ascetic Buddhist sect, who devoted the final decade of his life to producing wooden religious sculptures and distributing them to temples across Japan. His idiosyncratic style is quite different from Buddhist sculpture of the period.

closer to that of Christ. Of course, that was not all. I think that my face is a complex combination of all the elements which have influenced me, including Sesshū, and others.

My faces are all similar. The faces that appear in the “Siberia Series” have no individuality. I have abstracted the individuality on purpose. To the degree that soldiers were soldiers, their individuality had been snatched away. I painted soldiers. Painted them with the same faces. This is because what I wanted to portray was not individual soldiers but the “soldier” itself.

Probably, since I hadn’t been to Europe before that time, I hadn’t yet discovered “my face.” And if I hadn’t, then the “Siberia Series” would not have come to be as it is. That means that the biggest benefactor of the “Siberia Series” is Fukushima. I still regret that I couldn’t make many more good paintings and show them to him before he died.

Amur * Carrying Man * Passengers

Arriving at a black river, the Amur, we crossed by boat, at nighttime. The river at night exudes a somehow abysmal uncanniness. In the darkness, flowing from who knows where to who knows where, it was like being overtaken by fear and anxiety from behind. Looking at the water flowing majestically, not knowing where it came from or where it was going, I felt that fear and anxiety approaching me from behind, hanging over me from head to toe.

It was practically winter. Chunks of ice floated on the surface of the water. When large chunks of ice would come nearby, the Soviet soldiers would push them away with poles to prevent them from striking the ship. You could say that my real POW life began in Blagoveshchensk, a town on the opposite bank of the river. There we were made to do cargo loading for three days. We were made to carry hemp bags stuffed with sorghum and soybean meal, to be transported to Siberia railway siding just six kilometers from the harbor. One of the

hemp bags was about the size and weight of a bagful of rice. The POWs, backs stooped over from the weight of the bags they had to carry, looked like a procession of ants.

From the dark grey sky, sleet endlessly rained down. We walked very slowly and cautiously, since the surface of the road was frozen, and if you stumbled even a little bit you'd fall down and be unable to get back up. Because of this, even though we were carrying the bags only six kilometers, it must have taken two or three hours. This labor was quite exhausting to us, poorly fed as we were. While walking, some guys collapsed as if crushed by the hemp bags. We couldn't help them even if we wanted to, as we were too occupied with our own work. The only thing I could do was make my way step by step, cautiously watching my own two feet.

My hands and feet grew numb with cold, my hands liable to slip from the bag, and I had to stop countless times to readjust my grip. By the time we were forced to make this trip twice, it was already night. Our entire bodies were worn out, but we still had to make ourselves a place to sleep. Since there were no suitable lodgings, we pitched tents along the railway siding. When morning broke, the whole surface of the ground was frozen. Such cold made the tips of our fingers and toes numb when we tried to sleep, and I thought I'd get frostbite for sure sleeping like that.

Carrying Man (1960) depicts this transport of hemp bags. I made a variety of attempts to make this subject into a picture. There are other compositions of the same theme. Ultimately, the one I put into the "Siberia Series" was this one with the maximally abstracted silhouette figure. Indeed, when I try to recall the scene from that time, it felt like the bags were carrying the men, rather than the men carrying the bags. The carriers were no longer human, they were slaves, transformed into transport machines.

Two days later, we were taken on a red painted wooden freight car. Then the next morning, looking at the sun rising from behind us, our last hopes of returning home were cut off, as I wrote before.

After that, for almost a month we were running continuously to the west, to the west. Every day we ran endlessly through the snowy landscape, and at some point I found myself losing the sense of both time and space. Only when we passed by the shore of lake Baikal, I could guess that it was Lake Baikal because of the panoramic view of the water surface. After that I had no idea at all where we were anymore. Even after we were put in the internment camp, for a while we didn't quite know what part of Siberia we were in. We erupted in arguments over whether we'd crossed the Ural Mountains or hadn't crossed them. While we were travelling, an atmosphere of almost total demoralization dominated the soldiers, so much so that they felt: "I don't care anymore, take me wherever you like." As for myself, I once went so far as to think "why not go to Europe or Russia?"

The Soviet freight car had a stove. Since outside it was thirty degrees below zero, without a stove, we'd have frozen to death. But we were not provided with firewood. Every time the train would stop, we had to gather up fuel from the nearby forest. The food was awful. Only once, at the beginning, we had peas and wild oats simmered in butter. I thought that if you were fed this kind of thing, the life of a prisoner would not be so awful, but we never got a feast like that again.

After that, something like wheat flour was distributed little by little, and we took that and mixed it with (melted) snow and kneaded it into something like dango^{370*} and cooked it on the stove to make a meal. That was all we had. There were no vegetables or protein at all. That would surely bring about malnutrition. We had to eat even those things that normally would have been unpalatable when we were hungry. To tell the truth, there were often days with only two meals.

³⁷⁰ *Dango* (団子) is a soft Japanese dumpling-like sweet made with rice flour, often served 3-5 on a skewer.

Let me recall the itinerary that became clear to me later: right after we'd crossed the Enesei River, we branched off from the main Siberia railway line at a place called Achinsk and headed south for a while. Soon we were dropped off at a small town called Silla, located very close to the Ob river. From Blagoveshchensk to there was roughly 2,000 kilometers. When we went down to Silla, we were boarded at a place like a town hall, and after one day, we were taken by truck to a hamlet called Syya in the mountains about eighty kilometers distant. There we stayed for one night, and then were finally taken to the internment camp, where we had to walk a full kilometer along a snowy mountain road.

The eighty kilometers from Silla to Syya were tough. We were crammed into the cargo platform of an open truck, travelling in thirty degree below weather. Although wearing winter hats and winter clothes, our entire bodies seemed to freeze as they were. The condition of the snowy roads was bad, and the truck shook and shook. Our faces were stiffened as if frozen, and we could barely open our eyes. To make matters worse, on the final kilometer, the truck broke down, forcing everyone to walk. Walking, just dragging my feet along, I wondered who in the hell could survive in a place like this.

The representation of the scenes I saw from that truck is *Passengers* (1957). I laid out the skulls of a human and a horse, though there weren't any horses riding in the truck. To me, this truck seemed to be nothing but our transportation into Hell. It seemed that the only thing that awaited us was death. It even seemed as if the grim reaper rode along with us in that truck. This is what I wanted to express.

Snow (Window) * Sea (Pechka) Winter

The camp at Syya was one in the mountains, without a single house in the vicinity. The camp was about 60 square meters. There, three big barracks, a storehouse, stables, lavatories, barracks for the guards, and a doctor's office stood, completely surrounded by a tall wooden

fence. If you look at the picture on the back cover (Fig. A. 1), you can see roughly what it looks like.³⁷¹ There were maybe around 250 soldiers interned here. The second soldiers' barracks that we were in was divided into three rooms about the size of fifteen tatami mats. Fifty men were packed into each room.

The walls and the ceiling were of completely bare logs. A large traditional Russian-style stove was placed in the center, and the rest of the room was filled with two rows of bunk beds. Though I say "beds," they were just planks set out on platforms. And we weren't provided with anything for bedding. We slept with army blankets and coats stretched beneath or pulled over us as best we could. The bottom bunk was cold, but when you were sleeping on the top bunk, the heat of the stove was enough to make you sweat. However, those who slept on the top bunk woke up in the morning with faces blackened by soot. There wasn't that much smoke from the stove, but to make light we burned white birch bark. It was oily and it burned well, but the soot was terrible.

Siberian nights came early. By about five o'clock, it was pitch black. Since we had no electricity, no matter how bad the soot got, we had no choice but to burn the white birch bark. The camp buildings were rather old and looked like they were from a penal servitude camp from long ago. To house the Japanese soldiers, it seems they quickly increased the camp's capacity. Beds were made from shingles torn off the roofs. Looking at the tops of the buildings, you could see that only the bare bones of the roofs remained. Since snow would build up on the roofs, and freeze there, it made no difference if there were shingles or not. But, when spring came and the season of snowmelt began, snowmelt dripped down all the time, which was annoying.

The most vexing thing was the bedbugs. They were countless. There were so many that just looking at them would sap your will to exterminate them. Any little bit of exposed skin would

³⁷¹ Kazuki is referring to a sketch he made of the Syya camp, which was printed on the back cover of "My Siberia," originally published in 1970.

be immediately attacked by the bedbugs. When you're first bit by bedbugs, the place around the bite gets inflamed and swells, but after a time, your skin becomes accustomed to it. It doesn't show any particular reaction. Coming back after work and laying down one's exhausted body on a bed, you didn't even have the energy to raise your hands above your chest. When you closed your eyes, in an instant you felt that bedbugs were crawling up on you. Even realizing "Ah, now bedbugs are crawling on my cheek" you didn't have the energy to brush them away. "It bit me. Ah, bit me again. Fucker, it bit my hand." Vaguely feeling like that, before you knew it, you were asleep.

That cold, that fatigue, that despair. No matter how many words you pile up, I think that anyone who didn't experience it probably couldn't understand. In temperatures of 30 below zero, when you touched metal without gloves, your skin would get stuck, and when you forcefully pulled your hand away, it would tear the skin off.

The toilets were outside, and since they were just simple enclosures, they were especially cold. Both urine and feces would freeze immediately after being excreted. Since they froze as soon as they came out, a mound would accumulate. If you carelessly didn't look down, you'd be surprised by a sudden chill on your buttocks from what the last guy left there. However, though I say "other people's shit," since it was in a completely frozen state, it wasn't particularly foul. At times like that you just kicked it with your foot and it crumbled and rolled down.

The toilet was just a couple of long planks placed over a large hole about two meters deep. Since the length was also about two meters three people could go at once. In the mornings, for example, three people would be lined up, each staring at the ass of the man in front of him. It's not the stench but pity that came to my mind, because we'd lost so much weight, and seeing the bones sticking out on the buttocks of the guy in front of you was the most pitiful thing.

In the six months till the next spring in that camp were the most miserable time in my entire life. At that time, I thought that the Siberian POW life would be like that and there would be no difference, but later, going to other camps, and hearing others' stories, I realized that the camp at Syya was the very worst. There were several reasons for this. First, the camp commandant was crooked and was pilfering a considerable amount of stuff, making the already terrible situation all the worse. As for the food and working conditions, the International Red Cross had provisions for the treatment of POWs, and the upper management seemed to be in accordance with that.

However, before the time it reached us, little by little it was diverted along the way, and didn't end up making it to us. Taking cigarettes as an example, even though we were supposed to be distributed a certain amount per day, we hadn't received any at all after six months. Cigarettes were something that you could endure being without, but with food it was a matter of life and death. I'll explain this in more detail later on, but if food had been distributed as per the regulations, I think that not as many of my friends would have died.

The ringleader of this embezzlement was the camp commandant. Once, an inspector from the upper ranks of the army came. How flustered the commandant was. Suddenly the meals improved, and on the wall of every room hung a list about daily necessities provided to the POWs, including the provision of food. A guy who could understand Russian read it to us about the supplies we were due to receive, and everyone was shocked.

According to what I heard later, this commandant's misdeeds were finally exposed and the police arrested him for embezzlement. He might have been sentenced to death, but I don't know what punishment he actually received. But you could say that at least twenty people were killed by this man.

The only time that people in our group died was at Syya. Some died from illness and some died from injuries. But I think that most of them would have survived if we'd been given

enough food to avoid malnutrition. Even though at first, most of the 250 were engaged in work, after four months there were only about 50 soldiers going out for labor. Most were unable to move due to malnutrition.

Another thing that made the Syya camp so terrible was that the old Imperial army system and sentiment persisted in an intense way among the POWs. I heard this varied considerably depending on the unit. Later, I alone was moved from the camp at Syya to the nearby one at Komunar for a period of about two weeks. At that time, I immediately went to the Komunar officers' room, clicked my boot heels and made the appropriate report: "Corporal Kazuki Yasuo; I was ordered to be transferred to this camp." But the group of officers there just stared at me blankly. The decorum of the old Imperial Army, which persisted at Syya, had already collapsed there.

The Soviet army treated the officers different. They got more food, and weren't made to do labor. One of the officers was my immediate superior in the Manchuria days. When I couldn't stand the hunger, I had a subordinate deliver a paper with "Momotarō" written on it to him. Then he sent back a sorghum ball wrapped up in a paper with "kibi dango" written on it.³⁷²

However, in our unit, gradually consciousness of hierarchy was fading. It was the role of the officers who didn't work to bring lunch to the worksite. When we saw them come to the foot of the mountain, and call out "Heeeyyy! Time for Food!", the soldiers angrily yelled back "Bring it up here you idiots." But the officers weren't mad, and brought the meal up the mountain as told. In the beginning, though, we went down to where they were to eat.

³⁷² Momotarō the young hero of one of Japan's most well-known folk tales. Though oral versions of the tale may date from as early as the Muromachi period (1392-1573), it may not have been put into writing until the Edo period (1603-1867). Kazuki's request to his superior mirrors that of Momotarō's animal companions, when they requested *kibi dango* (黍団子 "millet dumplings") in exchange for their allegiance and help in defeating goblins known as *oni* (鬼).

The officers, since they didn't have many chances to show their authority, would sometimes snatch a soldier and promote him. In the shattered armed forces, rank wasn't particularly special, but everyone more or less accepted it with a resigned expression. Before long even I was made a corporal. The hierarchal class relationships, between officers and soldiers, were irritating, but the relations among the soldiers were also rough.

Quarreling over insignificant things never ceased. Once even I, when another guy used my mess tin, got into a fight and nearly decked him. In such a situation, anybody would fight over insignificant things, things that they would later regret. And then, among the men, there was almost no warm, human conversation. I have no memories of conversations from the bottom of the heart. Each person seemed to have shut himself up inside a shell.

Generally, we had almost no free time to talk. Coming back exhausted from the work site, there were a lot of times when talking seemed unpleasant. Even hearing other people talking was disagreeable. And yet, around the stove, there was some conversation-like talk. What was talked about was pretty set; when might we be going home, how our homes might have changed, only stuff like that.

Hometown scenery, food, our families... those were also topics of conversation. While listening to such conversations, we held our hands over the stove, and suddenly I got the feeling that some stains or spots on the stove plating looked like maps. Here was Siberia, here was Primorsky Krai, the band-like area facing that was Japan. And then, that must be where Yamaguchi prefecture was.

Ah, it was so far away. Since it was embarrassing to say things like that, I kept my mouth shut and just said such things in my heart. However, there must have been a lot of soldiers thinking similar things. The painting I made about this is *Sea - Stove (Winter)* (1966). There were guys who didn't take part in the conversations, staring absentmindedly out the window.

Sometimes I was one of those guys. It's not like looking at the outside from the window you'd see anything particularly new, though.

All the houses in Siberia had double pane glass windows, but the windows in the camp were single pane. Inside, if you got near the windows, it was chilly. The inside of the window was rough, covered over in frost. If you rubbed it with your hand, you could clear a circle in the middle of the pane, and look out through that. In Manchuria too the windows were covered in frost. Every time I saw that, I thought it was beautiful. Since it was so beautiful, I once held up a piece of paper and rubbed it with a pencil against the crystals to make a copy of the forms.

It wasn't just frost. The snow in Siberia was beautiful too. Siberian snow wasn't like the snow in Japan, even the way it falls is different. You should have seen the patterns of snow crystals. It's like they were sparkling as they fell. Even when it falls on your sleeve, it doesn't melt and disappear, but snow remained here and there, keeping their crystal-like shape. When I experienced this kind of natural beauty, I felt at ease. However, this didn't change my suffering.

*Woodcutting * Saw*

At the Syya camp, the labor imposed on us was woodcutting in the forest. This was to get fuel for thermal power plants. We were put into groups of about eight guys, divided among three tasks: those who cut the trees, those who took the felled trees and cut them into round slices about one meter, and those who then cut those slices.

The trees were so big that I couldn't reach all the way around them with both arms. If the diameter was only about one meter, it could be cut down in a relatively short period of time. However, if it was two meters in diameter, it took two days. At first we made a cut in a pattern, and then used a large 1.5 meter two- person saw. The trees were a kind of pine, and rather hard. To make these into round slices, of course, required a two-person saw over a meter long.

These two jobs were pretty easy tasks, technically, but cutting them into fuel logs was rather difficult work.

You would first place the edge of an axe on a round slice and then hit the top of the axe with a big hammer to break the slice, but if you didn't examine where the knots were, the slice didn't break well. Since, in the winter, the tree was frozen to the core, it broke in a way that pleased me. But, in the spring when the green wood returned, it was exceedingly difficult.

The prepared firewood was piled on the mountain slope as it was, but stacking it was also difficult. If it wasn't stacked well, it would collapse right away, since it was on a slope. The daily quota for a single team was five cubic meters of prepared firewood, piled up in the shape of a mound.

We got up at six, and started work at the site at eight. Even though it was eight, in the wintertime it was not yet bright, and day broke after work had begun. The end of the workday was around five, after the sun had gone down and it was dark, and usually we were able to more or less achieve the daily quota. When we were in good shape, we could do about eight cubic meters. When you did more than the quota, those on the team were given a voucher that you could exchange for an increased portion of sorghum rice balls.

Who would be on what team was decided randomly each day after arriving at the work site. Being paired with the seemingly strongest person wasn't necessarily the best, though. Those men worked energetically to get the extra sorghum rice. However, such vigorous work expended more calories than the increased portion of sorghum provided. As a result, those with stamina didn't necessarily last that long. Those who got more food also died.

The weak gradually got weaker. In the first place, since the food we were given was no more than what was decided by the norm, there was no extra food for increased portions. The increased portion was taken little by little from what should have been distributed to each of us.

One increased portion meant decreased meals for others. In order to achieve at least the quota, weak people worked so desperately that it was painful to watch. I didn't slack off, and I didn't try my hardest. I worked a reasonable amount, and in the end that seemed best.

At the work site we were accompanied by Soviet soldiers with automatic weapons. Like us, they also wanted to return to the warm barracks quickly, so what mattered to them was if we could achieve the daily quota quickly. Sometimes they showed us how to stack the wood a bit loosely, to pretend that we'd achieved the quota early. Sometimes the supervisor would come around, and could be very strict. Glaring at the new pile, when little gaps became apparent, he became angry and made us do it all over again.

In a place a little way away from our worksite, some peasants from Syya were engaged in the same kind of work, singing Russian folk songs, cheerfully working. The song naturally came around into a chorus. It was a wonderful thing. I couldn't feel good will towards Russians, but this song at least was great. I thought: "This is great" whenever I heard it. When we'd stacked a certain amount of wood, the peasants transported it on a sleigh along with the wood they'd collected. When spring came we used a conduit with valley water and floated it downstream.

I made two pictures about this logging work; *Woodcutting* and *Saw* (1964). When the large, tall trees would fall and raise a spray of snow, the cut ends would suddenly reveal themselves. The red color of the pine bark and the splendid pattern and concentric circles of the annual growth rings were beautiful beyond words. I was moved whenever I saw it. I completely forgot for a moment the cold that made my feet and hands numb, the fatigue to the point of dizziness from sawing work, and just gazed at that beauty. All around in the white snow, you could say that it was brilliant. It was like the refreshing feel of a Noh stage.

The saw was also beautiful. The blade of the massive saw made one feel an artificial beauty, in contrast to the cut pieces of the tree. Unlike the small, toy-like saws that Japanese

carpenters use, its size was about the height of a person, which I liked very much. Painting it, I wanted to bring that size out. However, trying to paint it full size, it'd end up overlapping the frame. Since I couldn't find any other solution, I bent it into a key shape and forced it onto the canvas. Even doing so, I wanted to convey the size. The glimmer of the sharp blade's edge, the fullness of the blade itself, such that it would bounce back when struck.

There's another image I got at the logging site that I've been thinking about turning into a painting, but I haven't been able to do it yet. There was this women's magazine in a care package I received in Manchuria. There was a picture spread of the Dream Changing Kannon from Hōryūji temple³⁷³. Since I really liked the photo, I tore it out and put it my knapsack. Even when I came to Siberia, I always kept it on me. Sometimes in the camps, I'd take the photo out and gaze at it.

Along the way to the worksite, a single pine tree stood out, just as a good tree should look, a bit apart from the other trees. Shortly after arriving at the worksite in the morning the sun would come up. Then the snow would shine in the sun, and the whole surface would sparkle with a rose color. Against a backdrop of rose colored snow, the snow-capped pines were ineffably beautiful. Without my realizing it, I came to revere that tree and see it as holy. And so, the image of pine trees and that of the Dream Changing Kannon came to overlap in my mind.

This image is still unfixed. For one thing, while coming home to Japan and living here, my senses gradually became vulgarized; I lost that sensitivity to sacred things, bit by bit. And I lost the sharp and pure feeling of life in the gulag, so that I can no longer feel the feeling of being so moved by one tree as to take it as holy.

³⁷³ Hōryūji (法隆寺, "Temple of the Flourishing Dharma") is one of Japan's most significant Buddhist institutions. Founded by the semi-legendary Prince Shotoku in 670 CE. The primary hall ("Kondo") is generally regarded as the world's oldest wooden building. The complex was registered as Japan's first UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. The "Dream Changing Kannon" is a statue of the Avalokitesvara (観音 "Kanon" in Japanese), the bodhisatva of compassion. The work was designated an official National Treasure in 1952.

Even if I succeed in turning it into a painting, I don't think I can make a good picture unless I can regain that deep emotion. If I were to go to see the real Dream-Changing Kannon at Hōryūji, then I might be able to, to recover the feeling of that moment, but I haven't yet done that.³⁷⁴

After cutting back some of the pine branches and returning to the camp, I made a spoon. When I was in Hailar, I'd picked up a fine, all-purpose knife. In addition to the knife, I had a drill and a flat chisel. I swiped them and brought them to Siberia with me. Even with several inspections, I managed to keep them hidden. First I roughly shaped the branch with the knife and chisel, and then later with a fragment of glass I picked up, I painstakingly sharpened the branch. I made this spoon so that when I got back to Japan I could scoop up a bellyful of simmered sweet black soybeans. For some reason I often longed for sweets. Though I'm more of a fan of spicy than sweets, things like daifuku mochi, ohagi, and sweet black soybeans frequently drifted into my mind.³⁷⁵

I also made a pipe. A Soviet soldier, in thanks for sketching a portrait of him, gave me some tobacco called "makhorka", and I thought I'd carefully save it and smoke it with my pipe on the train home from Siberia. I gathered fragments of the metal saw and carved a panoramic view of the camp on the back of my mess kit too. The drawing on the back of this issue is based on this. It's not possible to paint a detailed picture based on my memories alone. The medicinal flower I painted in in *Self-Portrait Smoking Makhorka* I also painted on the back of my mess tin. I also carved a woodcutting saw and axe on the lid of my mess tin.

³⁷⁴ Despite the prolific nature of his final years, Kazuki never did execute this particular motif in a Siberia Seires painting.

³⁷⁵ *Daifuku mochi* (大福餅) is a common Japanese sweet, made of *mochi* (Japanese rice cake) stuffed with a sweet filling, usually sweet bean paste (*anko*). *Ohagi* is a similar sweet, but made with *anko* in the mochi, rather than as a stuffing.

At night, I often did this kind of thing, alone, in silence, by the stove, since there weren't many others who I could talk to about these sorts of things. Rather than chatting, using my hands was how I kept myself distracted from feeling depressed. Since my paint box was confiscated during the inspection of our belongings, I couldn't paint. However, after a month I was summoned by a Soviet military doctor. I went [to his place] without knowing why I was summoned, and the doctor said that he wanted me to paint a picture to test me to see if I was a real painter.

He said, "If you really can paint, this is the picture I'd like to request." He seemed pleased when I showed him the portrait that I drew of him in pencil, and casually returned my paint box. Then he took out a photo of his wife and asked if I would make an oil painting of her. Starting with his wife, I also then painted a portrait of him, mountain landscapes, the chief's family, some guards and so forth. After starting to paint I got preferential treatment, and the time I had to go out to work was reduced, which was really helpful.

When spring finally came and the snow began to thaw, the Siberia that seemed like Hell became quite a paradise. The mountains and valleys were covered in flowers, flowers, flowers. It was so beautiful that I *didn't* want to paint it. How wasteful. I thought that nature was a luxury in a place such as this. Birds whose names I didn't know fluttered about in a flock, singing on and on, day and night. The food shortage and hard labor didn't change, but the soldiers' complexions began to improve. As for me, with my work reduced, being able to paint pictures, and thanks to that being given more food and tobacco, I was in pretty good spirits. Now, thinking back on that two-month period was probably the most pleasant time in my Siberia experience.

After that I was taken to the internment camp in Komunar. Maybe I was sent there because I'd gained a reputation as a painter and they wanted me to make them some pictures there. Going over the mountain in a weakened state was difficult, but along the way, nature was almost too beautiful. How enjoyable such a journey would be if I was a free man, I thought.

When I arrived at Komunar, there were no canvases or paint available. In the end I came back after about two weeks with almost nothing to do. In Komunar too the work was woodcutting, but since it was for private use, it was far and away easier than Syya.

Shennong

For the first three months, the food was extremely bad. It was only red sorghum that you feed to horses. This steamed red sorghum was put in a mess kit lid. That was one meal. It had no saltiness or oiliness. In spite of this, since I was starving at mealtimes, I gulped it down thinking it was delicious. During that three-month period, we were made to do the heavy labor of woodcutting with only sorghum, so it'd be a mystery if you didn't fall over. Later, in addition to sorghum, wild oats were also given out. We ate these in a porridge.

After spring finally arrived, salted lamb appeared on our table, and we could get some food-like food to eat. In addition to this, we were able to get rice confiscated from Manchuria. I say "rice" but, since it was unhulled, we had to thresh it. We put the rice between two planks, and ground it up, and tried, using something like a mortar that we made ourselves. But it didn't work that well. We ended up having to eat barely unhulled rice. When we chewed it in our mouths, we would push the rice grain out of the hull. After chewing for a while, we'd spit out the accumulated hulls with a "ptooey!" I thought about how, in Japan, I would have gotten mad and shouted at my wife if there was even one hull in the rice, going "ptooey!" "ptooey!"

As for the work, there was one enjoyable part. That was looking for food. I say food, but since we were in the mountains, there were only plants. There was nothing but wild grasses. In wintertime, we had to shovel the snow and search for them, unable to find anything.

While working as hard as necessary to complete our quotas, we desperately searched for something edible. If we didn't eat wild grasses, we'd be malnourished for sure. In terms of

what was missing, it was definitely vitamins. Because of this, we were tempted to eat anything that looked green. However, it wasn't the case that anything green was edible. It seems that there were some poor soldiers who got ill from eating poisonous grasses.

My grandfather was a Chinese herbalist, and so, like a boy who can recite sutras he doesn't understand, from hearing them so many times from a temple, without having formally studying it, I had picked up a bit of an understanding of wild plants. I had also watched my grandmother fetch some white gooseweed, boil it and then soak in soy sauce, or serve it with sesame seed sauce. Moreover, there were many in our unit who grew up in farming villages, and we put together our knowledge, which was quite considerable. For example, if a plant has thorny leaves, it's always edible. Also, there's no poison in cruciferous plants with four-petalled flowers.

We could easily identify plants that are also found in Japan, like green chives, mugwort, and lily, but there were many plants in Siberia that we'd never seen before. Among the Soviet soldiers, there were some nice ones who would tell us what was edible. When spring came, the whole mountain was covered in flowers, and it surprised me very much, because I didn't imagine that they would bloom as beautifully as they did.

We often ate chives, mugwort, and thistle. We'd bring back chives, place them on top of a Russian style stove, and eat them when they were soft. They had a smell like *matsutake* (pine mushrooms). Since at home, during seasonal festivals, we'd often eat mugwort stuffed rice cakes, it was nostalgic for me. We ate the roots of thistle and lilies. Seeing some dirt on something I was eating that I'd dug up from the ground, an officer, with a baffled look on his face, said:

“Are you gonna eat it like that?”

“Well, what I don't need will just come out as shit anyway.” I calmly replied.

Actually, though we couldn't be picky about cooking with dirty ingredients. It smelled somewhat earthy, but still tasted quite nice, like taking a big bite from an unpeeled potato. We also ate raw shepherd's purse. It was pungent and spicy, but delicious. I knew chickweed as chicken feed. Since chickens eat it, I thought even humans can eat it, but it didn't taste very good. We also ate Solomon's seal. There was also a kind of onion called rocambole that we ate raw. Since rabbits ate the Asian plantain, I thought I'd try that too, but it was so unappetizing that I quit after trying it only once. There was also mountain burdock. It was big, but hollow inside, and tasted bad.

I even picked some pine shoots and tried them. It had a slightly sour taste, that I could live with. When I felt like chewing on something, I'd take some pine sap and munch on it like chewing gum. When it came to quasi-foodstuffs, no one had any shame about it. We even gathered up and ate the discarded peels of potatoes that the Soviet soldiers ate.

Conflicts frequently occurred. Since problems especially arose about the quantity and who got what in the distribution of food, we started to decide this by drawing lots. Later when we were moved to Chernogorsk, we measured the amount with a scale, so that we each got exactly the same.

Compared to Syya, the food situation at Chernogorsk was better. We had only rye bread, but the amount was decent. Although, in addition to having husks in it, since it was baked poorly, it was sour and unappealing. Sometimes we were given not only black bread, but also cow innards, cheese, sheep meat, herring and such.

Compared to Syya, the difference was like heaven and hell. Not just the food, but also cigarettes, tea, soap (we had a bit of soap even at Syya) were distributed at fixed times. We could see that even among the Russians there wasn't enough soap, so we suggested trading for some cigarettes, and they were very pleased to do so.

At a camp like Chernagorsk, people in regular health, as long as they don't have any accidents, don't have to worry about dying. Even so, that didn't mean we always had enough to eat. Of course, we were always hungry. At one time or another, we were taken along to pick plants on a farm. There were potato fields there. The soldiers coming from Syya took grasses as well, but also dug up potatoes and quickly ate them up, with the dirt still on them.

When I came to Chernagorsk, I began to see civilians for the first time, which made me realize that the food situation of average Soviet citizens was also miserable. When the regular delivery driver came to the kitchen to announce meal time, we invited him to join us, and he ate the same thing as us, happily, saying: "Since you all are here, the amount of food we have is getting smaller, so we hope you can get home soon." At Syya, along with vitamins, protein was deficient. Unlike vitamins though, replenishment of this was difficult.

When we came to the camp there were a lot of mice there. So to catch the mice the Russians kept cats, but the cats disappeared right off. After that the number of mice gradually decreased, until in the end there wasn't even a single one. The soldiers devised all manner of traps and wiped out (and ate) the mice more cleverly than the cats.

Once or twice I caught a field mouse in the mountains. The tail was shorter than a mouse you'd find in a home. I quickly peeled off the skin of the field mouse I caught, sprinkled salt on it, roasted and ate it. It tasted kind of like a sparrow. I also caught and ate a snake twice. They were about forty centimeters long. At first I tried eating it after roasting it, but it tasted bad. Next, I tried making soup. I didn't have any salt on hand, so it didn't have any flavor, and wasn't very good. In the mountains of Siberia, even snakes have a hard time finding food, and so are mostly nothing but bones, and there isn't much you can eat.

Shennong (1954) is a painting of the memory of staying alive at the Syya camp by eating wild grasses. According to ancient Chinese legend, Shennong is one of the Three Sovereigns who was known as the one who taught the people agriculture. Additionally, by tasting many

plants he divided the poisonous plants from the medicinal ones and came to be a divine figure of Chinese herbalism. Consequently, Chinese herbalists celebrate Shennong every year on the day of the Winter solstice.

In my home there was a hanging scroll of Shennong attributed to Kano Tsunenobu.³⁷⁶ Every New Year's, it was customarily hung in the *toko no ma*.³⁷⁷ It's a painting of Shennong chewing on some pampas and mugwort. Chewing on dirty grasses in the Siberian mountains, suddenly I remembered this hanging scroll of Shennong. I thought that when Shennong tasted the plants, he was just like me chewing on dirty grasses. At the same time, I thought, isn't this just like the form of a hungry ghost in hell? My *Shennong* is the holy Shennong as well as the hungry ghost brought together as one.

Burial * Nirvana * Snow

I don't know how so many people died at the POW camp at Syya. There was a medical exam at the Amur River, and most of the weak were left there. Therefore, there weren't any dead on the railcars leading to Siberia. After being transferred to Chernogorsk, there weren't any more deaths around me. Those who died were all back at the Syya POW camp, dead from malnutrition and overwork. There were also other immediate causes of death, but indirectly, there's little doubt it was from malnutrition and overwork. Of the two-hundred and fifty, I think thirty or more died. It was more than ten percent.

³⁷⁶ Kanō Tsunenobu (狩野常信 1636–1713) was a painter of the famous Kanō School (狩野派, Kanō-ha). He succeeded his uncle Kanō Tan'yū (狩野探幽 1602–1674) as head of the school in 1674.

³⁷⁷ A *toko no ma* (床の間) is a recessed space or alcove in a Japanese tatami style reception room or entry usually used for displaying items of artistic appreciation, such as scrolls or Ikebana flower arrangements. The choice of display is often tied to specific seasons or holidays.

A little bird came along to the grove of trees in front of the POW camp, with a song like a Japanese white-eye. I heard it singing something like “jifutoriya.” It seems that this “jifutoriya” means “sick person” in Russian.³⁷⁸ Just like it was responding to that little bird’s song, every day the number of sick increased, and nearly every day we had to bury the dead. The bird appeared very pretty and adorable, but I also thought it was like a prophet of death.

No doubt one of the reasons why so many died was the cruel conditions we experienced, but there was another reason that the soldiers in my unit weren’t robust. The majority of these guys

were drafted on the verge of the end of the war, so many of them were older or in poor health. Even being ill, you had to work if the the Soviet Army Doctor examined you and said you were fit to work, and there wasn’t anything you could do about it. The examination was not worthy of the name, as it was so inadequate. They didn’t use tools like stethoscopes or thermometers. They had you strip down and checked your subcutaneous fat. When he could pinch enough fat on your buttocks, he determined that you were in good health.

I guess we weren’t considered humans. We were treated as disposable goods that could be consumed until nothing was left but skin and bones. It was more convenient if to be consumed as soon as it was possible. Given insufficient medical care and nursing, it was as if the attitude was “please die quickly”.

Without exception, those who died were just skin and bones. After I came back to Japan, I saw a picture of survivors of Auschwitz, in a state like skin hanging from bones, and it reminded me of my soldier friends who died in Siberia. There was a man named Okamura drafted the same year as me who died in the early period of detention. He also was from Yamaguchi, and we had been together all the way since Hailar. I heard that when his older

³⁷⁸ It seems that Kazuki is referring to the word *difteriia* (дифтерия “diphtheria”), a condition common among the internees. It is also possible the word he had heard was *distrofiia* (дистрофия “dystrophy”).

brother passed away, he married his widow. Okamura had acute pneumonia, and I felt sorry that he was wracked by painful breaths, but I thought of his wife, and couldn't help but pity her. Then I thought, "Yes, I thought, for solace, I'll paint Okamura's face." With that thought, I pulled out a military-use postcard that was on hand and started sketching Okamura's face with a pencil.

At first my hands grew numb from the cold, and unconscious tears flowed, and the pencil didn't flow as I meant it to. Sooner or later I suddenly noticed that I'd forgotten about Okamura, forgotten about his wife, and was absorbed in only drawing. The face of the dead seemed a terribly beautiful thing. There was an expression of tranquility in death known only to those who have suffered. You could say that something sublime hung around the dead. I was engrossed in the duplication of that beauty. Such a painter's determination seemed somehow cruel.

With the painting of Okamura's death mask as a starting point, whenever one of my war buddies would die, I would make a sketch of their face. They were all on military postcards, or the cutoff margins of drawing paper, simply sketched with a pencil, with a light layer of watercolors. I thought that if I could bring them back to Japan I could track down their relatives one by one to pass them along. However, while sketching the faces of the dead, I thought, what if I died? There was no one to sketch my face. When I thought that my heart felt cold.

In order to have a little bit of the remains, a military doctor would cut off the first digit of the pinky, when he put a knife on it, it cut easily with a crunching sound. The blood was frozen and didn't run out. I made a small box to put the pinky in. Day by day the number of such remains and sketches grew.

One day a Soviet soldier discovered these boxes, and, realizing what the contents were, burned them. "You don't need to mourn the dead. Just take care of yourselves who are still living." That's the explanation he gave when he took the boxes. However, I felt that taking care of myself, still living, depended precisely on mourning the dead.

Taking care of oneself doesn't merely mean to protect one's physical existence at any costs. The latter was what every soldier, including me, practiced so desperately, without anyone telling us to do so. Without hiding our meanness and vulgarity, each of us was fighting a desperate fight for survival, egotistically competing with all the other soldiers. To lose this race meant death. But, when friends died, we realized our ugliness for the first time, which caused us great pain in our hearts. However, that didn't last long, as we had to come back to the ruthless race and start it again for our survival. If we had ever forgotten to mourn for the dead, we would have stopped being human beings and instead turned into a herd of *gaki*, "hungry ghosts."³⁷⁹

So these sketches I made at great pains were burned, and I wasn't able to bring a single one back to Japan. However, each one (of my friends) lives on inside of me. The faces I paint in the "Siberia Series," the "my face" that I discovered at last, are none other than the faces of the dead I painted in Siberia. Those faces, skin hanging loosely, sunken eyes, cheekbones sticking out, surely demonstrated the sorrowful beauty of medieval images of Christ's death mask with a stark contrast of light and shadow due to the extent of their gauntness.

Whenever I paint a face in a picture of the "Siberia Series" I recall the faces of my dead friends. Many of them were soldiers that I'd never talked to, whose names and personal histories I didn't know. However, in front of their remains, when I sketched, blowing on my numb and unmoving hands to warm them up, I began to feel close to those men.

When our bodies were too weak to be sent out to work, we were put into the weak soldiers' room. There was always around forty people or so there. The facilities were not particularly good, and neither was the food. Just like the other rooms, it was just some bare

³⁷⁹ A "hungry ghost" (餓鬼) is a reference to a Buddhist notion of spirits that are afflicted with an unending and insatiable hunger, doomed to eating even excrement in a vain attempt to satisfy it.

wooden beds lined up. For ease of management, those who could not work were just assembled in the same place.

At one time I briefly stayed in the weak soldiers' room. At that time, another soldier who was sleeping nearby died. He had entered the Hailar unit later than me. Because of that I'd never spoken to him. He had an angular face but looked frail. He was maybe thirty-six, thirty-seven years old. Since he was physically past his prime, with the nutritional situation, hard labor was probably impossible from the outset. Thinking back, I realize that those who died first were the older ones.

Death from malnutrition was quiet. It seemed as if there was no suffering. No energy to speak, no energy to open your eyes, no energy to move your body. You've probably given up just about everything. You might have lost all confidence in humanity. Not even a final testament. I stopped taking his pulse, there was nothing to do but wait.

Just like this soldier, those who died did so without leaving a will. There was no one with the strength to even talk at the time of death. Even if they made a will, no one thought it could be taken back to our families in Japan. No one knew who to entrust it to. Also, no one knew who was going to die next and who was going to live to the end. Besides, many people died without anyone there to see it. It was not unusual for somebody to realize "Oh, this guy died" without knowing how much time had passed.

Next to the room for the weak soldiers was the room for the sick soldiers. In the sick soldiers' room, there were always about ten weakened soldiers lying down, those who were so weakened that they would die today or tomorrow. Those in the sick soldiers' room were nearly all sure to die.

Not necessarily all of them died from weakness, though. There were also some who died in accidents. A soldier named Ishida, who was drafted at the same time as me, died in an

accident at the woodcutting site. I heard a sudden scream, and when my head shot instinctively up, I saw, in the direction of the hilltop, a freshly cut tree had just fallen, tumbling down with a cloud of snow like smoke. The diameter of the tree was nearly two meters. You could not survive once pinned under it. Since I was far away I was safe, but those guys who were directly in its path scattered like rats. But you sank down thirty centimeters in the snow underfoot. Although I say "scattered like rats," from where I was watching their flight was excruciatingly sluggish. Just as I thought, one who hadn't gotten away fast enough was pinned by the tree, giving out a strange scream. That was Ishida. When he was pinned, since the snow had softened the shock a little, he didn't die instantly. However, he had contusions on his entire body, and a cerebral concussion, and he'd already lost consciousness. He was transferred to the sickroom at Kommunar, and he died there.

There was a guy named Imamura who had done the same upkeep work with me at the freight workshop in Manchuria, who would get hit by superior officers over the most trivial thing. At the POW camp in Syya that kind of thing was still going on, since the authority of the Imperial Army was still strictly observed. I say "hit" but it was more like getting beaten until you fall over and can't move. He'd gotten a cerebral concussion for sure. Imamura crouched by an open-air fire, but just then fainted and tumbled into the fire, and he died from burns across half his body.

When someone died, they were taken to an open-air storehouse and frozen. After five or so hours they were hard as a rock. This was their wake. Because they had probably died with empty stomachs, we offered up a ball of sorghum for them. Almost always, by morning someone would have stolen the sorghum ball and eaten it. It's sad, but we were all that hungry. No one blamed anyone for it. There was one Buddhist priest among the soldiers. One admirable thing about him was that he had held on to his monk's stole, and had brought it with him all the way to Siberia. He read sutras for the dead. My sketches, and his sutras, along with one digit of the pinky finger, cut off as remains, served as the burial ceremony.

After an all-night vigil, the body was placed on a door removed from the wall, and carried to the grave site. The grave was on the slope of a hill. We dug the snow and earth to a depth of about one meter, which took as much as five hours. It took so long because, on top of our weak physical condition, the frozen earth was hard, and the shovels just bounced off it. Since we were digging on a slope, while the deep part was about one meter, the shallow part was only a little deeper than the surface of the ground. Consequently, when spring came and the snow melted, there were a few bodies exposed.

The body was carried wrapped in a military blanket all the way to the grave. This was used in place of a coffin. Under the blanket, they had on only an undershirt and socks. When we dedicated the grave, we removed the blanket. Even though the blanket was a substitute for a coffin, we couldn't bury such a valuable item with the deceased. On the frozen surface of the ground, the thin, naked hands and feet were pitiful to see. We arranged the body with the hands folded over the chest.

After we put a cloth over the face, it was too heartbreaking to see the dead anymore, and we turned our backs and shoveled the dirt back in the hole. When the body was totally covered, we turned around and finished burying it. The four people who'd carried the door took turns digging the hole and burying the dead. When we were done, we returned home as if fleeing.

Burial (1948) is my painting of such circumstances. I had already composed this back in my mind when I was at Syya. It was a work I painted relatively soon after having returned to Japan. This became the first work of the "Siberia Series," but for a while after painting this, I couldn't paint anything about Siberia. I needed more time to process my experience. As a result, among the "Siberia Series" works, this one looks a little unusual. I've used many colors in such a bright and showy way in few works. For some time after returning to Japan, I consciously used a lot of color. Maybe to convince myself that this dark time in my life was over. One thing that I wanted to do was paint my friends' burials as warmly as possible.

After the deceased was buried, we set up a grave marker carved from white birch. Okamura died first, and for him we took soot from a Russian stove and dissolved it in water to make ink and wrote an epitaph. For whatever reason, the Soviet soldiers couldn't handle this. One of them took me to the graves and made me scratch out the inscriptions. Instead, he made me inscribe their prisoner numbers. After that we inscribed only numbers on the grave markers.

Sometimes, those of us who survived felt envious of the dead. "Good, he won't suffer any more" we thought. Because they'd suffered so much, we thought they must have entered Nirvana. I thought their spirits must have parted from their physical bodies and flown to their home in Japan sooner than us. I even thought that death would be better than continuing to suffer, if that meant being deprived of my physical body and returning to Japan sooner as a soul. It'd be good if there was a guarantee that after all this suffering, we'd return home, but we had a strong fear that we might end up dying in this camp, the only difference being that we'd suffered longer than those who died earlier.

Nirvana (1960) and *Snow* (1963) are paintings of such thoughts. *Snow* is a painting of the moment when the spirit slips out of the blanket-wrapped body, bidding farewell to its assembled soldier friends, and flying to the skies of home. The assembled soldiers watch with a mix of surprise and envy.

Nevertheless, thinking back on it now, what is strange is how the shadow of death appears on those right before dying. It's hard to articulate what exactly that is, but just looking at a face, you feel something that makes you think "Ah, this guy's close to death." Sooner or later, without exception, that man died. On those who are firmly determined to survive and return home, you couldn't see the shadow of death. However, once you began to harbor a feeling like resignation and think that you wouldn't make it, your face took on a lonely, left-behind look, and your body became weak, and before long you were dead.

In our unit, since there were a lot of farmers from Yamaguchi and Hiroshima, and many older guys, they were almost pitifully simple and honest. As a result, I think there must have been a lot of people who, brooding over their despair, had just given up on living.

Later, when I was moved to the Chernogorsk camp, those who had been there before me were entirely young soldiers from Tokyo, and I were surprised at how cheerful it was. They played homemade games from *Shogi* and playing cards to mah-jongg, and put on shows, singing songs and playing a homemade violin, and it was really quite enjoyable. In comparison, among the soldiers of our unit there were many who knew not a single pastime, as they had pursued the farmer lifestyle. Probably, to keep living, we cannot be only serious and need to have a spirit of play.

Line

In May of 1946, we got the order to move.

We set out on foot in the direction of Syya station, on the road we'd taken six months earlier in a shuddering truck in the snow. Dragging our tattered clothes and our boot-blistered feet, like a herd of sheep we sluggishly trudged along. We had no energy to march in formation. Particularly those who were physically weak followed along, walking slowly.

Since we were wearing overcoats and gaiters, the early summer sun was hot. We oozed sweat. Along the way, when we spied plants that looked edible, we pulled them up and gulped them down. When we were thirsty, we greedily chugged muddy water. At night we dozed on the bare earth. The daytime was hot but at night it got chilly. When we threw ourselves on the ground, backpacks as pillows, you could feel the roughness of the earth directly. When you opened your eyes to look at the sky, stars in the sky appeared to fall down on you like rain.

We walked for three days and two nights and entered the town of Syya. When we entered the town, the Soviet soldiers ordered us to line up and sing a song. I think maybe they did this to show the locals that we Japanese POWs were doing well and not being mistreated. We had no choice but to joylessly sing military songs. To have the locals hear this apathetic singing, only revealed all the more our wretched state though.

In the evening we were crowded into windowless freight cars. Before departure we were shunted again and again. At that point our rail cars were going east and going west. When we were going east, the soldiers let out a shot of joy, and when we were heading west, we felt despondent. We couldn't give up a glimmer of hope that we might go all the way down to Nakhodka. Even if we weren't going to Nakhodka, we wanted to get closer to Japan by even one or two meters. However, the final move was to the west. Now we were still further from Japan, and our hopes for returning home dwindled accordingly. The soldiers, feeling dejected, passed the night crouched on the floor in silence.

The following morning we arrived in a rather large town called Chernogorsk. It was lively, unlike rural towns like Syya. There was a coal mine in town and two internment camps. Most of the POWs were put to work as miners. Once again we were marched in groups all the way to the camp, and in the front garden, our belongings were inspected. My paint box was nearly taken away. A Japanese translator present bravely said "You don't have the right to confiscate our personal property," and we got our stuff back.

In this town there were around five-thousand POWs, so we weren't so intimidated just because we were prisoners of war. To me, tormented and oppressed like slaves, the attitude appeared surprising. However, after we got to the POW camp at Chernogorsk, before long we came to understand that this was not unusual, and the conditions at Syya were just especially bad.

When we arrived at the POW camp, four friends I'd been at the freight workshop with in Hailar were there. We were happy to see them, and called out and we embraced, rejoicing in our reunion. When they saw our only too shabby appearance, they pulled bread and cigarettes from their knapsacks and gave it to us. At the Syya POW camp, where they'd snatch away even the wild grasses from you, giving away bread like this was unimaginable. We had long forgotten that kind of human compassion. Receiving that bread, I felt ashamed of myself.

At the POW camp in Chernogorsk, we didn't often feel hungry, but that didn't mean that we were well fed. However, compared with those who came from Syya, everyone's complexion was much better. There were even some fat people there. To our eyes, it was a real mystery how fat guys could maintain their weight. Before long we too came to understand that, when we got enough food, we wouldn't die all that easily. The weakened gradually recovered their strength. There wasn't even a single person who fell over from malnutrition or overwork at Chernogorsk.

Even the atmosphere inside the camp, compared to Syya, was much better. As I mentioned earlier, we were even given leeway to amuse ourselves with gambling and other entertainments. Of course, we were still completely prisoners of war, our freedom snatched away, with the despair of the complete uncertainty of our homecoming flowing deep at the bottom of our hearts. There was some of the unpleasantness of human relationships. But compared to Syya, it was like heaven.

Line (1961) is a painting of a forced march of us soldiers in front of the Shira train station. I have tried to depict the extremely miserable feeling of reluctance, when we were forced to sing war songs.

*Plasterer * Hole Digger*

At Chernogorsk there were two POW camps. At POW camp #1, units who were deployed in the region stretching from Hailar to Manzhouli were confined and made to work in a coal mine. A little ways away from this was POW camp #2, where combat units from northern China were confined. The work of those at POW camp #2 was mainly unloading freight cars of equipment from a coal liquefaction factory, confiscated from Germany, as well being made to do a variety of other tasks. One portion of those at POW camp #2 were made to do work constructing a new POW camp, which was completed in winter of that year. I was at POW camp #1 for over two months, at POW camp #2 until winter, and then at the new POW camp until repatriation.

When entering POW camp #1, first, there was an examination. We were questioned about our special skills, etc. When I reported that I was a painter, they had me paint a picture. In a big camp like that, there was enough work to necessitate a trained painter.

However, my painting work ended after a short while, and then I was assigned to plastering walls. Perhaps they thought that there was not much of a technical difference between painting and plastering: both jobs were about daubing, the only difference being whether it was with colors or plaster. This new plastering work lasted for about a month, working every day. It wasn't at all interesting but wasn't physically demanding.

Later, when the new camp was done, I was made to do some plaster work once again. In order to make a bathhouse, they had me put up a brick wall. Stacking up bricks requires a high level of skill, but fortunately there was an expert there. He would exclusively set things, and we laymen would carry the bricks, and, at his direction, cement them.

Before long, winter came. In Manchuria, we wouldn't do cement construction work in the winter. Even if you thought to try, it wasn't possible, because the water you needed to mix the

cement would freeze instantaneously. In the long winter of Siberia though, you had no choice but to overcome such difficulties. You boiled some water, and mixed the cement with the hot water. As you kneaded it, gradually the temperature would decrease. If you didn't do it quickly, the cement would freeze and become unusable. Generally, when you started to daub it on, it would freeze almost right away.

In 1955, the Misumi river in front of my house flooded, and my house took on water. Since an old earthen wall crumbled, we called up a craftsman to construct a brick wall. While watching the young plasterer's brisk movements, I was reminded of the brisk forced labor of quickly laying bricks before the cement froze. I remember that while working with bricks at the camp, I was thinking that when I got back to Japan, I wanted to eat some sweet bean jelly about the size of this brick. While thinking that I hadn't yet eaten that much sweet bean jelly, I painted *Plasterer* (1956).

As autumn approached, another rumor that we were moving again spread. Backing up these rumors was the fact that there was another inspection of our belongings. The inspection was stricter and more thorough than any up to that point. The hopeful observation was whispered that, due to the strictness of this inspection, this must certainly mean that this time we were going to be repatriated. There was also a story that in another group, urinals and cooking utensils to be packed into the freight car on the trip home were made. Everyone was increasingly cheerful that this must be the case. Other groups of soldiers came and asked if we might contact their relatives when we were sent home. As if our repatriation were confirmed, we said things like "Sorry that I'm getting sent home ahead of you."

One week, two weeks after the inspections of our belongings, things began to look rather strange. One morning, we were suddenly ordered to assemble. We were gathered, carrying all of our bags, bread for lunch was distributed, and the move began. Our direction was not toward the train station. We crossed one dry, grassy hill, and when we came to a second one, all of us

understood that our destination was camp number 2. We remembered that we had passed this road when we were ordered to construct a new building inside camp number 2. Morning and evening, three large groups of soldiers at camp number 2 were shuttled on that road back and forth to the construction site on an American made ten-wheeled truck.

Those three groups of soldiers often sang folk songs on the truck. Ten-wheeled trucks, like military tanks, ran with a roar, kicking up clouds of sand and dust. As the truck passed by those of us who were walking, from within the din we could hear thin, long voices singing the mournful tinged folk songs, which were then immediately blotted out by the din again, and then another truck would pass by, and voices singing a different folk song could be heard. The dust-covered trucks looked small, heading toward the western sky red with the sunset. We could no longer hear them singing, but their voices echoed in our ears. Japanese folk songs never sounded as moving as at that moment.

In front of the gate to camp number 2 there was yet another inspection of our belongings. When we cast our eyes in the distance, we could see the saw-shaped mountain ranges of Outer Mongolia. The peaks were already covered in white snow. When we thought we'd have to pass another winter here, our hearts sank. There were some incomplete parts remaining in the new building in the camp we had entered. But we were thankful that there wasn't a single bedbug.

The work there, as I wrote earlier, was unloading machinery sent from Germany for a coal liquefaction factory. Compared to the work of woodcutting and mining, it was far and away easier. Since work was done through a system of assigning tasks to various groups, we were encouraged to work at our own pace.

Once a substantial part of this unloading work was completed, we were then ordered to construct a warehouse for storing the unloaded machines. This continued after moving to the new camp from camp number two. First off, we dug holes for erecting pillars. The ground was already beginning to freeze. Despite the fact that in the summer the sand swirled around in the

wind, once it was completely frozen, it was so hard it was like trying to dig hardened cement. Even though it was only a meter square and one meter deep, it took as much as two days. Since each person was tasked with digging an individual hole, you couldn't really slack off. *Hole Digger* (1960) is a painting of the digging of the holes for the pillars.

*Frozen River (Yenisei) * Star * <Barbed Wire> Summer*

While at POW camp #2, I was made to do a lot of work painting pictures. They were things like propaganda pamphlets and posters for the five-year plan which was being promoted at the time, a painting to hang in the camp commandant's reception room, a portrait of a group of officers, and portraits of Stalin. The kind of representational pictures I usually paint are not so realistic, but even I can faithfully paint a subject if I try to do so. The group of Soviet commissioned officers liked photo-realistic paintings, so that's the kind of picture I painted.

Some people might feel it profane to devote the sacred skills of an artist to making a picture of Stalin, but I didn't feel like that. It was purely a kind of manual labor. Therefore, I don't have any lingering affection for those works. With the same hands I grab chopsticks to eat or hold toilet paper to wipe my rear. It's the same. The same paint brush can be moved with my soul, or used as a mere tool.

Even just as a simple artist-laborer, getting used to the paints again made me happy. No matter what kind of technique, if you neglect to refine your skills, they immediately get rusty. In retrospect I think that it was after all very good for my skills to draw posters and portraits of Stalin at that time. I think that it's precisely because of this, that after I returned to Japan, I was able to pick up a paint brush and sit down in front of a canvas right away.

When I was being made to paint, I was really at ease. Sometimes, even when I wasn't occupied with painting work, I wasn't sent out on work details, and just sat around idly. When my

fellow soldiers saw me like this, I felt really guilty. I even had the time to try out sketches of motifs that I wanted to paint myself. I recorded the accumulated motif conceptions on my paint box so I wouldn't forget them. Even now that paint box is still around in my work area, and written on the lid are twelve motifs, each on Chinese character, such as "funeral", "road", "saw" and so forth.

It was maybe around the time when the frost began, suddenly we moved again. About a thousand men, whose core had been moved from the Syya and Komunar camps to Chernogorsk, were to be moved to Krasnoyarsk and Usuberi. It was rumored that those who were sent to Krasnoyarsky were put to work constructing roads, while those sent to Usuberi were tasked with woodcutting.

The reason that I was left behind at Chernogorsk was that I was a painter. Besides me, only about twenty soldiers who were doing agricultural work were left behind, so I had to bid farewell to the group I'd been with all the way from Manchuria.

They said: "Logging again? Logging in the winter sucks. But since we have some experience compared to before, it should be easy." Watching those of us who were being left behind with jealous eyes, they hurriedly departed. Of course, they were war buddies we'd suffered a long time with. Saying farewell was sad. There were fewer and fewer people to talk with, and I felt more alone than ever before.

Our lodgings were also changed. Since there wasn't a suitable place, at first we were with the medical office staff, and then we lived with the soldiers on the kitchen staff. As a result, during this time, I was able to get enough to eat. My body weight even surpassed sixty kilograms. From this time, I had less painting work to do, and I helped out with kitchen work and was sent out to worksites. The work was helping out at the sawmill. The Enisei river was a long distance east of the camp. The Enisei didn't look like much of a big river in these plains.

On the bank of the Enisei river was a big sawmill which was said to be one of Siberia's three best spots for lumber. The work here was sorting necessary material for warehouse construction and helping with the sawing. It wasn't a very easy job.

First, since it was far from the camp, the amount of time it took for a round trip was ridiculously long. Another difficulty was that open fires were prohibited, since the sawmill was full of timber. A cold wind blew down from the towering mountain nearby. With the wind blowing in, (being in) the interior of the sawmill felt like being inside a refrigerator. In winter there were days that were colder than forty degrees below zero. And also it was hard that smoking was prohibited. Moreover, since it was working with machines, you couldn't really get lazy, and had to be moving around diligently.

In the summer, felled lumber was continuously floated from upstream on the Enisei river, and then dragged up to the sawmill. Some of the soldiers, during the afternoon break time, would dive into the river and swim amongst the floating logs. As winter gradually approached, little ice floes started drifting in, and ice began to form around the floating lumber. When that happened, they'd stop floating the lumber down from upstream, and gradually the density and size of the ice floes began to increase. As the ice began to spread from the riverbank, the flowing water gradually narrowed, and suddenly one morning the water was gone, completely hidden beneath the ice. The thickness of the ice steadily increased, eventually you couldn't make out any water flowing beneath, and large trucks with chains wound around their tires could easily go back and forth over the top.

Sometimes I would wonder "Why does nature stay beautiful all the time while humanity changes and remains ugly?" At such times, my gaze would involuntarily return back to myself, and then I would be reminded that the very fact that I grasped my own pettiness there in the way I did had its own significance: nature would become great and beautiful only with me as a part of it, that its beauty would be nothing without me. There is a kind of beauty that only I could

capture. My eyes are unique and singular. That enabled me to become a painter. And I was here as a painter. I wasn't here just as one simple Japanese POW. This thought gave me a strange sense of happiness.

Speaking of nature in Siberia, I can never forget the beauty of the fleeting summers. The beauty of summer is the beauty of stars. The buildings of camp number two, as protection against cold, had subbasements. Winter was warmer than other places, but summer was humid. After the sun went down, it was cool outside. While enjoying the cooler night air, sprawled outside, the night sky as twilight fell, stars twinkled here and there, and before your eyes, the entire sky became a feast of glittering stars.

There was nothing to block your view, it was just stars, stars, stars as far as the eye could see. You could see the Big Dipper just straight overhead. The Big Dipper and Cassiopeia are about the only constellations whose names I knew. It's a shame I didn't know the names of any other stars/constellations.

I often fell asleep outdoors gazing at the stars. Returning to the room in the camp, reeking of humans, I had the feeling of being corrupted again. No matter how immersed in the beauty of nature I was, I couldn't forget the reality of captivity. When you lowered your gaze from the stars, you could distinctly see in the dark the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp. During my time in Siberia, I was torn between the stars and the barbed wire. Despite it all I was still a painter. However, I was only a captive painter. *Stars (Barbed Wire) Summer* (1966) is a painting that captures such feelings.

Imprisoned * Thorns * Hunger

Around us, all the time, there was barbed wire. Every time we looked at the barbed wire, we couldn't help but really feel that we were POWs. Even if there hadn't been any barbed wire,

there wouldn't have been any escapees. At least in Manchuria, escape might have been possible, but in these Siberian hinterlands, how could one escape and stay at large? At any rate, there was barbed wire.

We were ordered to put part of it up. Then, a Russian commissioned officer said to us: "We don't put this up to prevent you from escaping. We put it up to prevent common people from recklessly coming in and stealing and that sort of thing."

It was fun to reverse the roles of host and guest in one's imagination. The guards watching the POWs came under the surveillance of the POWs. If you think about the system of the Soviet state, and the iron organization of the army within it, you could call even them prisoners. From this point of view, I painted *Imprisoned* (1965). The picture is fictional—the camp at Chernogorsk was not made as a prison. However, to pointedly bring out the relationship between the POWs and the guards, I needed such devices as a cell and an observation window.

The guards went on periodic patrols. They opened the observation windows of the rooms one by one and took a peek inside. When the POWs inside the rooms heard the sound of the observation window opening, they all looked in that direction. The watchman was being watched. Those being watched were watching.

The thick wall, inscribed with the Soviet crest, separated the watcher from the watched, the watched from the watcher. In reality, it wasn't like this. Inside the camp it was much looser. It wasn't severe like a prison. There was no observation window, and no guards periodically peering in on what was inside the rooms. And of course, there wasn't a Soviet crest inscribed on the wall.

Nevertheless, of course, we were still being watched. It was also a fact that the thick wall called the state of the Soviet Union stood in our way. In order to make a condensed depiction of this relationship on the canvas, the only option was to depict it symbolically.

Brambles (1965) is a painting of barbed wire. As I thought about depicting not the concrete barbed wire but the wire itself, capturing it in its extremity, I ended up making a rather symbolic scene. At the stage of design, barbed wire extends horizontally, but with it, the distance to the reality was too close and it didn't approach the essence, so I decided to remove it altogether.

In my atelier, I keep a scrap of barbed wire. I don't really want to see any barbed wire in the world. I just want to forget absolutely everything about Siberia. However, at the same time I must not forget it, even if I forgot everything else. If not that, then what else should I remember? Living in Japan today, it seems like absolutely everything is conspiring to make me forget Siberia. Even I have been drawn to that tendency. At such moments I need a thorn piercing my heart. The barbed wire in my studio is such a thorn.

Every time I see barbed wire, Siberia comes back to life. I think that I have to keep painting Siberia. During our time in Siberia, barbed wire continuously pierced our hearts. No matter how much our treatment improved, how much our work became easier, as long as the barbed wire was there, we were made to feel like prisoners.

Maybe I am still a prisoner. Imprisoned by my memories of Siberia, imprisoned by my memories of the war, as a Japanese person, imprisoned in Japan. At the same time, imprisoned by this world, as well as by life. I feel that if I lost this consciousness of imprisonment, I would have nothing to paint any longer. Barbed wire is my indispensable thorn.

On an early winter day of flurries, we moved to a new camp we had to make with our own hands. Carrying just a little of our belongings on handmade sleds, we walked like a line of ants through the snow. When we arrived, the new camp, of course, was also surrounded by barbed wire. The snow was piled up on the wire, whose beautiful white line cut across the scene.

When you entered, it seemed the timber wasn't sufficiently dried, so the air was somewhat humid. Nevertheless, it was nice to be in a new place. You could see bright faces here and there. I was happy that the journey to the sawmill was halved. Up until then we'd had to walk in the cold for more than twenty minutes, but then we could make it in under ten minutes.

There were a lot of changes in the work after I got there. There was work related to the water supply. Riding on a tank driven by a Russian, we carried water from the town's water supply. That driver was friendly to the Japanese POWs. Although we could not communicate with words with each other, through only gestures we could easily understand each other's feelings. As an expression of gratitude for his good will, I asked him for a pencil and paper and drew a portrait of him. It was probably the first time that anyone had ever drawn his portrait, and he was very pleased.

A twenty-two- or twenty-three-year-old Russian farmers' daughter who worked together with us heard from somewhere that I was a painter and asked if I'd paint her a picture. She took out a small, faded photograph, apparently of her mother. Probably it was a treasured memento of her mother who'd passed away. Entrusted with the photo, I returned to the camp, and on some flimsy paper with a pencil, carefully drew a picture lovelier than the small photo.

I think it must have been around the only time that I was allowed to send a postcard back to Japan. Maybe to facilitate censorship, I had to write the whole thing in *katakana*³⁸⁰.

"You must be very concerned, but I'm feeling very fine, so please don't worry. Everybody is doing well I trust. Naoki, Keiko, Hisako... the three of you must have grown up quite a bit. I'm looking forward to the day I come home.

³⁸⁰ Katakana is the auxiliary phonetic script used primarily for representing foreign words in Japanese, but it can also be used to write standard Japanese.

Papa paints sometimes. I think the day will soon come when I can show you all the beautiful pictures I've painted. Send my best to those helping you out. Please tell me all about what's going on there, and we'll wait for news of when I will return home.

Best to your mother

Please take care of yourselves

I hope you're doing well

Goodbye

Until this postcard arrived, it seems the people in my family were extremely worried. According to what I heard after I got home, a rumor had reached them that I'd died in Manchuria. Such a rumor was not an official notification, so no one would believe it was absolutely true, but after that rumor no news came for more than a year. It was around when people began to think that it was actually true that I'd died that the postcard was delivered.

The food at the Chernogorsk camp was much better than at the Syya camp, as I mentioned before. In particular, we were happy that the group that went to help in the farmers' fields brought back potatoes, beets and so forth for our table. At Syya, to get vitamins, we desperately scoured the fields for edible plants, but here, even without much effort, we could more or less get the nutrition we needed. Sometimes we'd get some pigweed, boil it, and eat it in something like soy sauce. Since I worked in the kitchen, so I was able to keep my belly full, but it's not like everyone was getting as much as they wanted to eat. You could probably say that the small amount of food made the work even harder.

In any window you could see a group of soldiers pushing each other waiting for food to be delivered from the mess hall by those in charge of distribution. The painting I made of this is *Hunger* (1964). That face is precisely what hunger is. In order to equally divide up bread and rice, we weighed them. There was hunger in every eye glaring at the scale. on the train en route

to home from Siberia, at Nakhodka, and even after we returned home to Japan, hunger shadowed us.

I wonder when I was able to forget that hunger. Sometimes I'd be dumbfounded, sitting there in front of my plate. In my hometown of Misumi, the seafood harvest was quite plentiful. And people nearby yellowtail and eel. And you can catch large shrimp. You could eat as many sea urchins as you wanted. We make one of the best *kamaboko*, or fish cakes, in all of Japan. You can get your hands on different types and good quality meats. There's whatever vegetable you like. And perfect white rice along with it. And we lined up some wine sent away for from Yamanashi prefecture.

Finally, when I came to be able to sell my paintings, I had no difficulty in getting what I wanted to eat. I think my wife would probably be troubled if I die soon. She complains about how much I drink, but she always puts a delicious and nutritious meal on the table. In the face of that, sometimes I just can't believe it. Is this actually real, I wonder. If this is the way it is, where does that hunger go. Maybe, a feast before my very eyes, is nothing but just an illusion. Maybe no matter how much I eat, it's just an illusion, and I'd always be (stuck) in that hunger. Maybe I'd never be able to escape that hunger my whole life. Sooner or later, drunk on the wine, I give up trying to determine what's real, and give up altogether on thinking in such a drunken state.

The next morning, I got up and went to the worksite. Looking at the half-done painting there, looking at the scraps of barbed wire, looking at the paint supplies box and palette that I brought back from Siberia, I realized that there are two realities. The hunger of Siberia and the full stomach of here in Misumi. Thus, once again, I tell myself that I have to paint hunger on a full stomach, and paint Siberia here in Misumi. That repetition will probably continue.

Nowadays I drink a lot, but that wasn't the case when I was younger. In the camps there was no alcohol. That wasn't all that much of a hardship. However, it was probably difficult for the heavy drinkers. Once, a Master Sergeant and a soldier were each posted to do auto repair. It

seems these two guys really liked drinking. Smelling the gasoline, they seemed to conclude that it must be a kind of alcohol. They swiped some and drank it up. They greedily put some in a bottle and carried it back to camp.

“We’ve brought some alcohol!”

Roused by that voice, soldiers gathered together, and the two guys passed the bottle around, everyone taking a sip. I took a sip too. I thought it tasted good. I probably would’ve drunk more if they’d have let me. However, that night, the soldier who’d brought back the gasoline became mad, delirious, and died painfully. The Master Sergeant seems to have drunk less. He became totally demented, but he gradually recovered a short time later.

*Domoi * Nakhodka * Repatriation-Gangplank*

“*Skoro domoi*” (“Going home soon”) - I don’t know how many times I heard this. The first time I heard this, I thought it really would be “*skoro*” (“soon”), and happiness welled up inside me. However, no matter how much time passed, “*domoi*” never came. No one believed the Russians’ “*skoro*” anymore. When the snow started to melt, we happened to go to help a Chinese farmer in his field. He said, “Watermelons grow in this field, but they’re not for you to eat, ok?” Thinking about it now, that was the first sign of “*domoi*.”

One day, inside a freight car stopped at a siding at the train station, we were ordered to make a cooking stove out of brick. At camp number two, where we’d been before, we were deceived/tricked by a similar promise. So we didn’t fully believe in such a possibility, but this time, we came to feel that somehow or another it was like the real thing.

When the stove was complete, and we put a big pot on it, the real homecoming notification unexpectedly came. People hugged each other in joy, their feet not touching the ground, wandering here and there. People absent-mindedly leaned against the wall, as if their

strength had left them. There were many kinds of reactions, but every face was scrunched up in joyful tears. When the excitement subsided, we were once again struck with anxiety. Is it really true?

The next day there was a strict inspection of our belongings. Everyone took their clothes off, wrapped up in a blanket, set all their belongings in front of the tent, took off their boots and placed them nearby, and obediently awaited the arrival of the inspector. *Damoi* (1959) is my painting of this scene.

My state of mind at that time was this: I didn't care whatever they might take from me, if we really did get to go home. Up until then, how many times had we had our belongings inspected? It happened without fail when we moved to a new camp. Even within the same camp, sometimes there was a sudden inspection. After that, any items of value gradually disappeared, until no one had anything of value. Even such trivial objects as tobacco cases and leather bands had been taken from us. There wasn't anyone with a watch or a fountain pen or such.

Even after the inspection, until we boarded the train, I was still anxious. When we boarded, I was nervous until the train started running. When the train started running, I was nervous that it would stop, and when it stopped, I was nervous that we'd be dropped off there. Since I'd been waiting for nearly two years, and news of our imminent release was given with almost no notice, it was somehow hard to believe.

After travelling for about two days, when we got to Krasnoyarsk, all the officers were taken off the train. From what I learned later, they were kept there and made to do forced labor for another year. I felt a little sympathy for them, as they were detained after being brought all the way down to Krasnoyarsk, but I couldn't conceal feelings of scorn at their misfortune. Even though not all of them were like this, of course, many of the officers didn't work as hard as the

rest of us, and were cocky. Also, an understanding remained among us that even if they hit you, you couldn't hit them back. When there were no more officers around, it was a relief.

The area around the Siberian rail line, which had been a world of bright white when we first came through was wrapped in greenery this time. It was as if nature had completely changed along with our mood. But this time, we were too busy. Three large kettles were installed in the train car the cooks were riding on. In order to provide food for everyone, they had to work around the clock. Toward that end, there was a three-shift system, with people cooking continuously and determinedly. For a side, all we had was Russian style pickled cabbage, but we weren't dissatisfied with the food anymore.

Continuing for fifteen days, the train finally arrived at Nakhodka. A sandy beach and the brilliant ultramarine of the Sea of Japan spread out before us. Japan was almost right there. Due to the ship schedule, we had to wait there for three weeks. There were several camps, and in one of them were those who were in Syya at the same time that I was.

When we were helping the locals with farm work, we heard a rumor from somewhere going around that the more you sang the Internationale, the sooner you'd be sent home. In every camp, in every troop, day after day, whenever there was free time, we sang the Internationale. I thought the story was false, but we were in the frame of mind to do anything if it meant getting home even just a little earlier. We would have happily walked on our hands or turn around three times and bark like a dog, I think. Since I'd continued singing the Internationale for three weeks, it was completely stuck in my head. Even now, it will unexpectedly pop out of my mouth, causing an involuntary, bitter, smile.

The camp was made from an old naval tent. The interior had two levels, and the lower level was a dirt floor covered with just willow branches, and the upper level was a plank. Since there were so many people, we slept with our heads and feet alternating. Since it was rather

hard to sleep, sometimes I went out and slept in a ditch. The painting I made of sleeping in the camp like this is *Nakhodka* (1961).

It wasn't just the Internationale, the Soviet political officers came and said things like: "If Japan is boring then you could return and be welcomed back to Siberia." In our hearts, we were furious, but thinking that it was a bad idea to offend them, everyone clapped heartily, to flatter the Soviet officers. We were made to write our thoughts on the life of a POW in Siberian camps. Here too, so as not to run afoul of the authorities, I wrote that things were completely fine.

Three weeks later, the long-awaited ship arrived. It was the Esan-maru. We were assembled outside of the gate of the camp for a roll call. Only those whose names were called would be moved to camp number three, which was used for repatriates. Anxiety didn't leave me until my name was called, because some were sent back to Siberia because their names weren't on the list for the final roll call.

In front of the group gathered in camp number three, a Japanese political officer of the Communist Party gave a propaganda speech. I don't remember it very well, but it was something about how now that Japan was under the occupation of the United States, we should consider our return home a "landing in the face of the enemy." At any rate, when the speech was over, we all clapped enthusiastically, and collectively shouted "Stalin *banza!*" and threw our hands in the air. "Hitler *banza!*" or "The Devil *banza!*" ...we'd have cheered for anyone.

At the exit there was one more inspection of our belongings, and we were taken to the ship's departure point, and once more the number of people was confirmed. At these repeated, excessively insistent procedures, we felt irritated and our uneasiness increased. Looking at the Esan-maru in front of us, I thought about stepping up onto the gangplank. I wanted to set foot on the deck. Since we heard that some people were called back while on their way up the gangplank, our anxiety wasn't gone until we were standing on the ship's deck.

It wasn't just my mood—my health was bad too. My eyes had been injured on the Siberian railroad. The cooking car was in the front, and ash from the fires was constantly blowing back on us. I rubbed my face and the ash got in my eyes. I couldn't get medical care for this. All I had were handmade blindfolds to protect my eyes. After three weeks, it hadn't gotten better. I would say that, as a painter, eyes were the second most important thing after my very life. My anxiety about this was considerable.

Perhaps because of the sudden relaxation of stress after such a long time, here and there my body suddenly hurt, and the breakdown of my physical condition began. If I came down with some serious physical ailment here, I wouldn't be able to go home. Consciousness of that only served to keep me going.

As soon as I got on board, I went into the cabin and laid down. When the harbor signal sounded, I thought "Fuck off" and just lay there like that. I wasn't in the mood to see the soil of the Soviet Union moving off and feeling sentimental about it. Since the sprawling floor of the freighter shook, I could tell we'd put out to sea. "Fuck off, eh, you sons of bitches, serves you right, fucking idiots..." I threw out such profanity in my head at no one in particular. I didn't know who to say such things to, but I wanted to say it to someone. I almost wanted to shout it out in a loud voice.

After the continent had gotten far enough away that you could only see it dimly, I went out on the deck for the first time. Since there were only people on board, the ship must have been light. The water line was much higher, and the red sides of the ship that would normally be under the surface of the water peeked out. Even one third of the screws stuck out above the surface of the water. As the sea breeze blew, a long white wake surged forth from the stern, and I watched it intently for a good long while. For some reason, I couldn't quite believe it, I felt like it was an illusion.

It took only one night to reach Maizuru. From early in the morning, we went out on the deck, and waited to see the mountains, the soil of Japan. Japan was covered in green. I could see the fresh green leaves, as if burning, within the mist. To my eyes, accustomed to the dreary landscape of Siberia, the green pierced me painfully. It was frustrating to have one eye covered up with an eyepatch.

When I saw the military police on the bridge standing at attention, I felt uneasy again. I thought, once again, this time the United States will put us in camps, and force us to do heavy labor. The gangplank was lowered, and I stepped onto Japanese soil. Walking on the swaying gangplank, seeing the people gathered in the port, I felt as though I was a ghost. I felt like the guy in front of me, the guy behind me, we were all ghosts. Maybe I didn't feel like a ghost, but rather that I was carrying a ghost on my back. Maybe the ghosts of the over thirty war buddies who died at Syya came back with us on this ship, I thought. The painting I made of soldiers coming down the gangplank is *Repatriation (Gangplank)* (1967).

We were in Maizuru for three days for quarantine and repatriation procedures. They put DDT on our heads, administered five types of immunizations, gave us 500 of the new Yen, and at last sent us along to Kyoto on a train of repatriates. I left from Kyoto on the San'yo line for Asa, and from there transferred to the Mine line, heading to Senzaki. I unexpectedly met my uncle, who happened to also be on that train. "You finally made it home safely..." My uncle congratulated me, and then lowered his voice. "However, there's something unfortunate I have to tell you. Your mother passed away..."

Those words were really unexpected. Apparently, my uncle assumed that I knew about my mother's death, but I didn't. Shortly before this, in Ogōri, I had entrusted a letter to my mother to a soldier buddy on his way home to Shimane. All this time, I thought only that she'd been living in Shimane, but she'd died over a year earlier. That must have been when I was greeting the thawing snow in the camp at Syya. Whenever I thought about home while in

Siberia, my wife, children, and mother formed a trinity in my heart. Though my relationship with my mother was a little shallow, nonetheless a mother is a mother.

Suddenly informed that my mother was gone, I was struck dumb. Memories of my mother over the past thirty-six years rushed forth in my head. I regretted that she should have passed away after we'd seen each other, and our mother-son relationship had deepened. I wonder if my mother knew that I was always thinking of her painfully while I was in Siberia.

In my third year of art school, my mother knitted me a mottled color sweater and sent it to me. I always wore it with care. When I was deployed I took it with me, and even in Siberia I kept it. At the POW camp in Syya, a sentry spotted me and forcibly took the sweater. Since I didn't want to part with that particular thing, I begged an officer and got it back. While in Siberia, seeing it as a substitute for my mother, I wore it continuously. I brought that sweater, still in my rucksack, when I returned home. I opened the rucksack almost in tears, and softly grasped the sweater. I felt as if I'd lost one of the reasons for returning to Japan after such long hardship. My heart was heavy.

When I got to the station, as I'd sent a telegraph from Maizuru, my eldest daughter came to pick me up. When I was sent off to war, she was barely walking, but now she was going to be a first year elementary school student. Looking at me, she appeared embarrassed, as she probably had only a hazy memory of me. I was at a loss too. Father and daughter regarded each other with a look of surprise for a moment. I wanted to walk hand in hand, but had a strange feeling. Somehow, it didn't seem quite right.

Siberia and Japan, the war and the post war—the more I think about them, the more they appear to me to not quite fit, to not quite be right. I continue to make paintings to fill in those places. I feel like this is a mission given to me as a painter who was made to live through this Siberia experience. Also, I want to make good paintings. I want to paint better and better

paintings. By creating good paintings, I want to make “My Siberia” into “Everyone’s Siberia.”
Until then, things won’t quite seem right somehow.

Afterword

It makes me sad that I have to give an autobiographical narrative like this, as it makes me wonder if my end is drawing near, but I haven’t done so because I wanted to, but simply because I was asked to. What I think about in my workspace now, is that if I hadn’t experienced war, I’d have lived my whole life monotonously. Right in the center of my life, having that experience helped make me who I am. However, even saying that I experienced it, inside I feel like a bystander. Does the flow of time give me that impression, or because I am a human being who paints pictures... I wonder.

I’m not saying that everything I’ve related is accurate. What I’ve related here in one way or another is only what hasn’t left me even after twenty-odd years have passed, what has compelled me to paint “Siberia” as well as what I cannot paint. That’s why I’ve titled this narrative “My Siberia.”

January 9th, 1970

END

Appendix Images Supplement



Fig. A.1. Drawing of a map of the Syya labor camp, 1970. (Kazuki Yasuo. *Watashi no Shiberiya*, interior cover)