

TOPAZ ART PILGRIMAGE

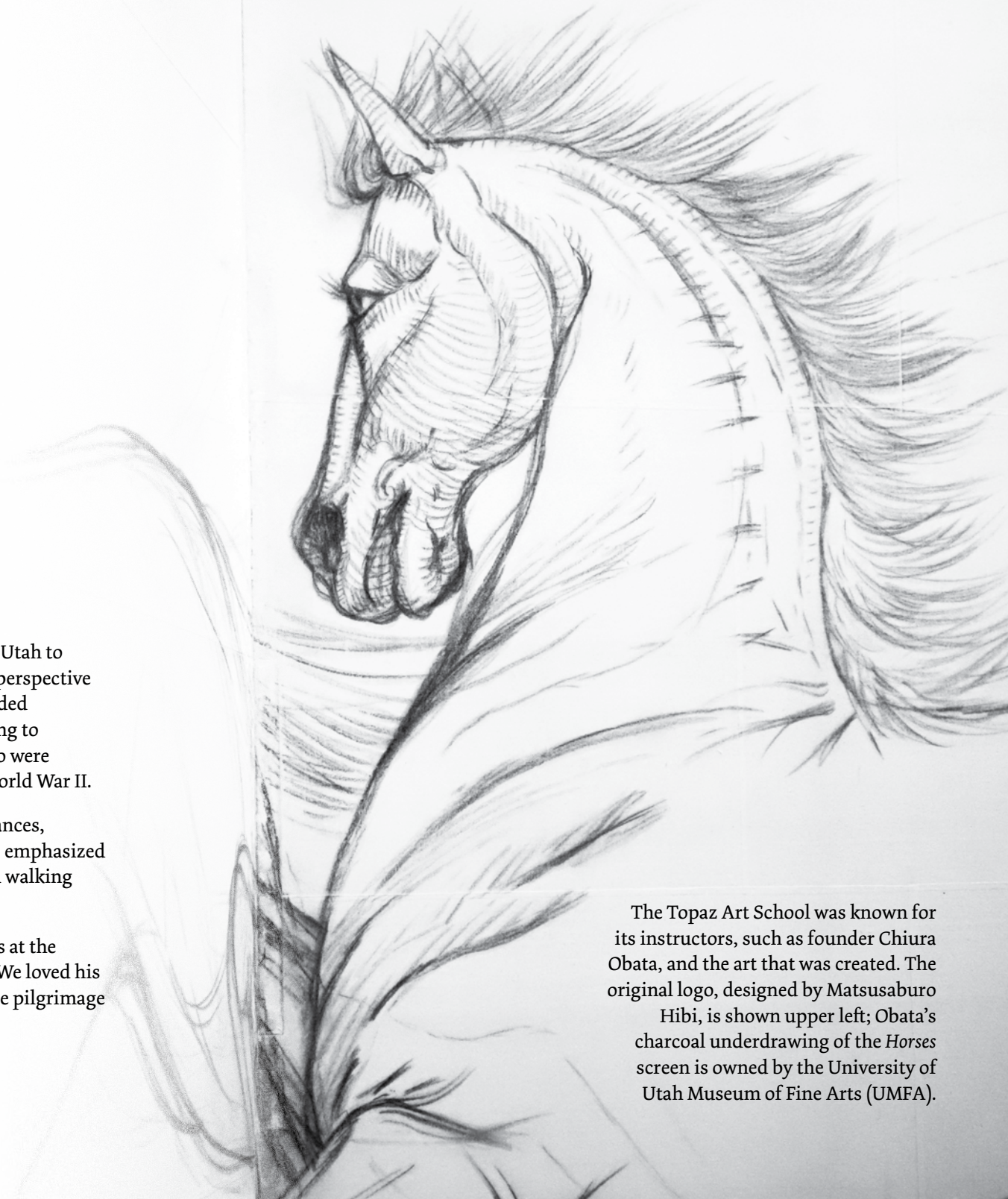
May 2-4, 2024



THE ART In May, more than 150 people came to Utah to experience the Topaz incarceration through an artist's perspective during the 2024 Topaz Art Pilgrimage. The group included survivors, their family members, and friends, all wanting to pay tribute to the 11,212 people of Japanese ancestry who were imprisoned at the Topaz concentration camp during World War II.

Through storytelling, activities, exhibits, and performances, pilgrims gained a better understanding of life at Topaz, emphasized even more by seeing artifacts at the Topaz Museum and walking among what's left of the historic confinement site.

Brad Shirakawa, photographer, took many photographs at the pilgrimage and compiled them as a remembrance gift. We loved his work and now invite you to enjoy some highlights of the pilgrimage from Brad's photos.



The Topaz Art School was known for its instructors, such as founder Chiura Obata, and the art that was created. The original logo, designed by Matsusaburo Hibi, is shown upper left; Obata's charcoal underdrawing of the *Horses* screen is owned by the University of Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA).

The pilgrimage began in Salt Lake City with tours of *Pictures of Belonging: Miki Hayakawa, Hisako Hibi, and Miné Okubo*, an exhibit curated by Dr. ShiPu Wang and presented by the Japanese American National Museum at the Utah Fine Arts Museum. Both Hibi and Okubo were part of the Topaz Art School.



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Emily Lawhead, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at UMFA leads the pilgrimage tour.



Ikebana teacher Keiko Kubo explains her art during a demonstration at the UMFA theatre. Over the weekend, visitors were treated to lectures, film screenings, *koto* and *shakuhachi* performances, literary readings, shodo calligraphy exhibits, block printing activities, historical photo displays, and walking tours of the Salt Lake City historic Japantown.



During a demonstration, Judy Nakaso (at left), Kay Yatabe, and Keiko Kubo stitch a Senninbari, or “1000 stitch sash.” It was traditionally sewn by Japanese women for soldiers going off to war to watch over and protect them.

In America, Issei mothers sewed Senninbari for their Nisei sons who volunteered or were drafted into the US military.





People view historical photos of the Salt Lake City Japanese American community before the war at the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple and the Japanese Church of Christ, which are the only two landmark buildings left in Japantown. The community is fighting for the historic district's survival along the one remaining block, currently a target for redevelopment. In 2007, it was renamed "Japantown Street."



Judy Nakaso walks along Japantown Street from the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple to the Japanese Church of Christ, which is across the street.

Jun Nakahara Dairiki was seven-years old when she and her family were forced to leave their home in San Francisco's Japantown before being imprisoned at Topaz. In her essay, "Topaz Fish Story" published online on "Topaz Stories," she recounted her father building a fishpond at Topaz. She also wrote about two previous visits to Topaz looking for some sort of closure to her incarceration years and wondering perhaps if she would ever find it.





Card making with rubber stamps and ink at the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple.

Mia Kodani, Chiura Obata's granddaughter, and Kirsten Mah.

Shirley Muramoto and her son, Brian Wong, play traditional and modern compositions on *koto* and *shakuhachi* for an appreciative crowd in the Great Hall of UMFA.





THE SITE After a two-and-a-half hour ride from Salt Lake City, the Topaz incarceration site seems a world away. Closed by the government on October 31, 1945, what remains today is the historic barbed wire fence, concrete foundations with greasewood dotting the desert dust, rock paths, gardens, and other evidence that people were there.



After years of fundraising and acquiring the land parcel by parcel, the Topaz Museum Board now owns and stewards the 639 acres where barracks housed Japanese Americans. One acre is owned by the Japanese American Citizen League chapters in Salt Lake City. Topaz is the only site of the ten camps that is privately owned. The Board protects the site and educates people about the gross violation of civil liberties suffered by people of Japanese descent who were in Topaz, with the hope that it will never happen to anyone else.





Standing at the windswept remnants of a coal pile at Block 4, Kimi Hill, left, explains the significance of Hisako Hibi's painting, depicting a mother's chore to gather coal to heat her barrack home at Topaz. Hibi was part of the Topaz Art School, founded by Chiura Obata, who is Kimi's grandfather.

During the pilgrimage, people were able to locate their family block and barrack numbers and place a sticker where they had lived. This single act makes a family incarceration experience even more real. It is often a bittersweet experience to realize how familiar some of the other family names are after realizing they lived so close to your own family.



"Don't you know they are still here?" – fourth-grade visitor at the site.





Docent Elaine Rose (at right) looks over a photo of the Topaz shoe repairmen and women.

THE MUSEUM Sixteen miles away from the incarceration site, the Topaz Museum in Delta educates 10,000 visitors a year about what happened to Japanese Americans during that dark period of history. Powerful exhibits feature artwork and unusual artifacts, along with personal memories of life at Topaz. The museum itself and all its contents were donated by Japanese Americans, Delta residents, and many others who believe this story needs to be told.

Eugene Fujimoto (at left) takes his first-ever look at the WRA (War Relocation Authority) Final Accountability Roster that lists his family at Topaz. There were binders full of these documents at the museum. He was amazed to find that his father, Kiyoshi, left Topaz for New York in 1945.

N A M E	OTHER NAMES	FAMILY NUMBER	SEX	DATE OF BIRTH	MARITAL STATUS	CIT.	ALI N. REGIS. NO.	TYPE OF ORIGINAL ENTRY	DATE OF ORIGINAL ENTRY	PRE-EVACUATION ADDRESS	CENTER ADDRESS	TYPE OF FINAL DEPARTURE	DATE OF FINAL DEPARTURE
FUJIMOTO, Komatsu		14729	F	7/3/96	W	A	2346366	TaAC	9/20/42	San Francisco, Cal.	3-3-E	Term-with Grant	9/20/42
Sakae		"	F	9/22/20	S	C	---	"	"	"	"	"	1/2/45
Akira		"	M	5/6/24	S	C	---	"	"	"	"	"	1/2/45
Kiyoshi		"	M	8/7/18	S	C	---	TaAC	9/23/42	Los Angeles, Calif.	"	"	10/2/45



Before the war, Tomoe Otsu was quite worried that the man of her dreams, Susumu Tomine, would not be able to join her during the evacuation as he suffered from tuberculosis. He did not accompany her to Tanforan.

In her diary, she wrote on April 27, 1942, "The news that I would not be able to go with him was the most painful thing. But the good news is that he will be discharged from the hospital in three months."

Three days before leaving Tanforan for Topaz, they quickly married on Sept. 15, in an office at the racetrack. No photos were taken. Three hours later, they parted again. Finally, after he arrived in Topaz on Sept 29, she wrote, "When he came off the bus with his guitar in hand, I couldn't help but run up to him and say, 'Su-sumu-san.'"

In the photo on display at the Topaz Museum, Tomoe wears a borrowed wedding dress for a "better late than never" official portrait taken shortly after Susumu arrived in Topaz. And they really did live happily ever after in Tomoe's hometown of Alameda, California.

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"On our first anniversary, I cried because we went to the mess hall for dinner, and then went to another mess hall for a movie where we sat on the floor . . . and I cried, 'This is no first anniversary.' . . . My husband said, 'Don't worry, there'll be other anniversaries.' And there were other anniversaries; we had 49 of them together."

—Anna Towata

What was dating like at Topaz? Young couples might share tomato soup around the pot-bellied stove or catch a movie at the recreation hall. One mother complained to administrators that teens sneaked out after curfew. Still, 136 couples got married at Topaz. They had to travel 40 miles one way to Fillmore, the county seat, to get a marriage license. Newlyweds often shared a room with their parents.



Susumu Tomine and Tomoe Otsu were married in Tanforan, but spent their wedding in Topaz. The newlyweds shared their barrack with Tomoe's parents. Tomoe Otsu, who moved to another barrack later, and Susumu Tomine eventually traveled to Alameda, California.



This standing cabinet shows wear over time, but the beauty of Chiura Obata's freehand brush strokes still comes through. The cabinet was built in Topaz by Sajiuro Morita in February 1943.

Keiko Kubo took time to peruse the daily diary writings of Topaz third-graders.

The Topaz Museum Board and 2024 Pilgrimage Committee wish to express appreciation to the following for their generous contributions and support:

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