



*Tule Lake Requiem: For Ted Nakashima, 2020*

Installed: 6" high x 36" wide x 2" deep

Closed Book Form: 6" x 4" x 1/2"

Since the late 1980s, Tom Nakashima has made over thirty Japanese folding screens. This sketchbook is one of them. Of the six images above, three of the subjects date back to the 1990s and the remaining three are current. In the 1990s he created or selected images for what he considered to be "certain intrinsic qualities or meanings." At that time, he thought mostly in terms of metaphor. He refers to the three remaining images in terms of an existential encounter - - he, as a reader, on first viewing the subject in his mind's eye.

Nakashima feels that iconography and symbol are not meaningful words to use in describing his art. He regards context as key to understanding. For example, the *Sanctuary* derived from Giotto, as he used it in older work, revealed his childhood Roman Catholic roots. But in 1990, he used *Sanctuary* in works linked to his aversion to various social constructs. Those included religion, clubs and corporations. He is a subscriber to the Groucho Marx quote, *I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member*. The above sanctuary is obviously related to exile and Executive Order 9066 - exile from sanctuary. At this point in time, it may relate to Hispanic sanctuary or lack thereof at our Southern border.

Many or most of Tom's images percolated up from his early childhood memories. They create for him a visual lexicon for just about everything he creates. The images, in his mind, are strong and varied enough to serve as actors in any of his plays. When practicing kanji in 1970s, he became aware of how the various images contained within one character could conjure multiple meanings. The wigwam is a beautiful structure that can be interpreted as shelter, but also as a kind of cage. What dwells inside gives it meaning. The tree is a natural life form that is all too often controlled by industry as a crop in service to mankind. This particular tree was sketched at the National Arboretum in Washington, DC. It is not a free tree but a captive one - a bonsai. Next to the wigwam stands *Tule Lake/Manzanar Jail*, an image of one of the horrible steel cages used to isolate the No-No Boys, or so-called troublemakers. Tom believes that his Uncle Ted was one of them. In making the above book, he cut holes in the drawing of the jail and slid behind it a picture of St. Sebastian - the martyr. The flesh like figure is still visible - lingering in the darkness of the jail.

In 1990, Nakashima designed the sets and props for the electronic blues opera *The E & O Line* produced by District Curators. Euridice (a songbird) needed a coffin for one scene so he built & gilded a coffin of wood and dowels. Tom's uncle, Ted Nakashima, wrote an essay for *The New Republic*, *Concentration Camp US Style*, that landed him in Tule Lake Segregation Camp for the duration of the war. They didn't like his song.

In one of Nakashima's sketchbooks is a drawing of a German coalmining cart. It sat in that sketchbook for years. Nazis used Jews as slave labor in coalmines to support the war effort. The US used incarcerated Japanese Americans at Tule Lake to grow vegetables for non-Japanese Americans. About the coal cart Nakashima says, "In the cart the martyr, perhaps Ted, needed a palanquin. I gave the *Martyr* an aureole like Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of many of our internee brothers, sisters and children presently lingering in cages on our southern border.

*The answer remains unknown : Was Ted Nakashima a No - No Boy. I think he was - at heart he was always a revolutionary who fought racism & injustice.*