

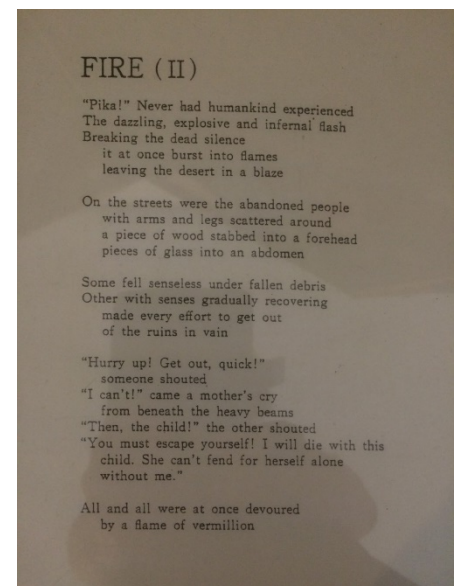


Key facts:

- **Date:** 1950
- **Size:** 1.8m x 7.2m
- **Materials:** 8 panel folding screen, ink on rice paper, mounted on wooden panels
- **Scope of work for Pearson history of Art A Level:** War in 2D, post 1850; Participants in 2D, post 1850; Memorials in 2D, post 1850 and 2D work from beyond the European tradition
- **Location:** Maruki Gallery for the Hiroshima Panels, Saitama Province, Japan

Art historical terms and concepts

- Sumie-e painter: brush and ink painting, traditionally on rice paper
- Byōbu: folding multi-screen panel



Subject matter and experience of conflict:

Iri Maruki arrived three days after the bombing of Hiroshima (6 August 1945) to search for his parents and siblings. Toshi Maruki arrived at the end of the week. Both lost family and friends among the 260,000 people who died as a result of the nuclear bomb. Iri's family house, two kilometres from the centre of the explosion, was still standing, but the roof tiles and windows had been blown out, and even the pans and dishes in the kitchen had been blasted away. After three weeks of helping the injured, cremating the dead and repairing damaged buildings, they returned to Tokyo.

Three years later, in 1948, they began working on the Hiroshima Panels as little information about the bombings had been made public. Their first work, originally titled '6 August' (now known as 'Ghosts') was displayed in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in February 1950. It was widely criticised: on the one hand for representing "a grossly exaggerated depiction" of the aftermath and on the other hand for being "too beautiful". For the Marukis, this highlighted the need for art to open up a channel of communication between those who had experienced the bombs

and those who had not, and to help the children of future generations to imagine the horrors of nuclear bombs and war and so to fight for their elimination.

The Marukis decided not to depict either the mushroom cloud or the Genbaku Dome, but instead to focus on the experience of the victims and those who attempted to help them. They wanted these panels to be both a record and a memorial. In this, their work shares a similar motivation with Picasso's **Guernica**, which records the shocking assault by Hitler's newly formed Luftwaffe on the Basque town in Northern Spain during the Spanish Civil War in 1937. (In this year, 1937, Toshi Maruki was working in Moscow as a tutor. This was also the year of the Nanking Massacre in China.)



Picasso **Guernica** 1937

This panel **Fire** shows groups of people dying of fire burns and fleeing in confusion. Scenes include a mother cradling her child, an old man attempting to pull a victim out from beneath a collapsed buildings, dead babies and wounded survivors.

Cultural, social and political factors

- **Artists' backgrounds**

Iri Maruki was born outside Hiroshima in 1901. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, he belonged to a number of avant-garde groups including both the Rekitei and Bijutsu Bunka. This group of Surrealist artists were the only art group in Japan to criticise war. He was a sumie-e painter who specialised in landscapes and animals.

Toshi Maruki was born in Hokkaido, in Northern Japan in 1912. She studied oil painting at the Women's Art School in Tokyo and then worked in both Micronesia and Russia. Influenced by both Gauguin and Russian painters, she worked on the human forms. Her figures show the idealised, muscled forms that might suggest reference to Michelangelo's depictions and the wider tradition of Western figurative painting.

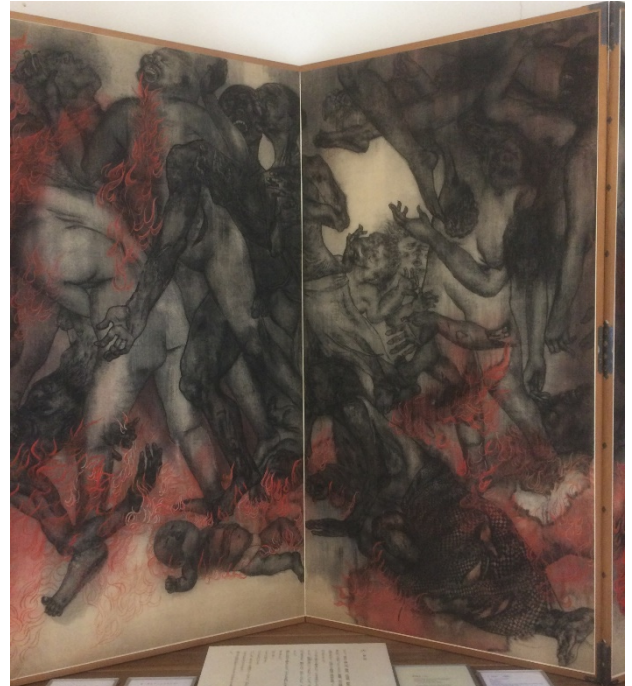


During the war, a ban was imposed on depicting nudes. After the war too, depictions of what the bombing did to human bodies was also prohibited.

• Background to the Hiroshima Bombing

In 1941, the Japanese Army attacked Pearl Harbour and the Pacific War began. At 8.15am on 6th August, 1945, the US Boeing Superfortress bomber, Enola Gay, dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The bomb, code named 'Little Boy' was the first use of the atomic bomb as a weapon of war. It detonated 580m above the Shima Hospital creating a 400m diameter fireball with a temperature over 7000 degrees Celsius.

The shockwave from the blast flattened nearly all buildings in a 4km range and an estimated 90% of people within 500m of the detonation were dead by that first evening. By the end of the year, more than 200,000 people had died from their injuries or acute radiation sickness, including many who had entered the city after the bombing to provide aid.



Developments in materials, processes and techniques

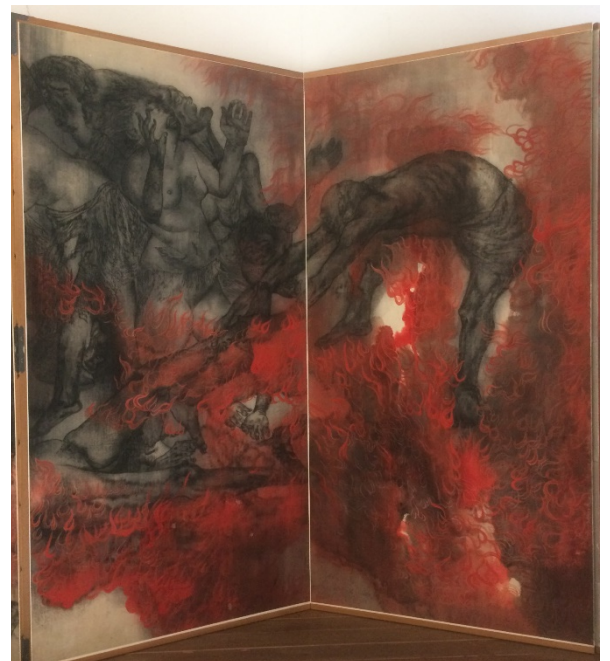


17th century byōbu folding screen

The multi-panel, folding screen (byōbu: in Japanese, the characters mean protection and wind) have been used in Japan since the 7th century CE. Since that date, it has been a popular format for Japanese painting and was widely used in castles, palaces and temples. With the development of paper hinges in the 14th century, the byōbu grew in popularity again as the hinges allowed artists to treat the multiple panels as a continuous painting surface.

Each of the ten works in the Hiroshima Panels series is a large, 8 panel screen measuring 1.8m x 7.2m. They are painted using India ink and Japanese style pigments in a collaborative effort by Iri and Toshi Maruki. They worked on the floor. Toshi sketched the human figures, which Iri would then ink over before Toshi drew it again on top of the ink.

The panels use the scroll method to show several episodes on the same scene at different points in time. Toshi said she did not want to draw from a single position using Western laws of perspective. You might find it interesting to compare the form and details of this work with the much earlier **Night Attack on the Sanjo Palace** (13th century) which is also on the Pearson specification. (You can find more information on this work on the Smart History website: <https://smarthistory.org/night-attack-on-the-sanjo-palace-2/> You will also find the shape of the licks of flame in much Japanese religious work showing the divine.



Colour is limited in the works which use monochromatic ink and, in **Fire**, a strong use of vermilion which has profound Buddhist religious connotations in Japan. The flames licking across the figures also emulate the flames seen around Buddhist deities in traditional Japanese sculpture.

By using the portable, folding screen, the Marukis were heightening awareness of the continued importance of ancient Japanese traditions. Simultaneously, they were able to exploit the advantages of the light weight of the work to facilitate their intended series of exhibitions to raise awareness of both the victims who died and to campaign for the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Toshi Maruki's drawing shows influence from Western traditions (see here: a drawing by Michelangelo to the right) in the three dimensionality and solidity of her figures. On the other hand, Iri's techniques and processes reflect his awareness and interest in the Rekitei and other Japanese styles.

Ways it has been used and interpreted by past and present societies

- **Practical and aesthetic functions**
- **Significance of original location and display choices**

Immediately after the bombing, information was still tightly restricted by the Press Code as enforced by US led Occupation forces. The first three panels (Ghosts, Fire and Water) were exhibited in a variety of temporary settings such as schools, temples and civic centres so that many people could see them and gain an insight into the impact and devastation caused. As so many of the first responders were also killed by the radiation, the Marukis' eye witness accounts were significant and necessary.

Between February 1950 and November 1951, the first five panels were exhibited in 350 locations in Japan and seen by approximately 9 million people.

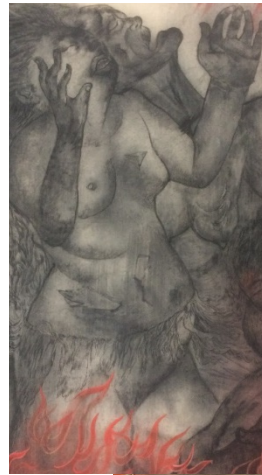
In 1953, the Hiroshima Panels were first toured internationally and shown in Hungary, China, Romania and Denmark. The Marukis were awarded a Gold Medal by the World Peace Council for their efforts to promote international peace.

- **Significance of subsequent display environments**

The panels are now displayed in a dedicated gallery in the Hiki Hills, northwest of Tokyo. Iri and Toshi Maruki continued to produce large screens on a range of subjects relating to war and the gallery displays all ten of the Hiroshima Panels as well as various later works, such as *The Massacre of Nanjing* and works in response to the impact of American nuclear testing of a hydrogen bomb over the Bikini Atoll on the Japanese crew of the fishing vessel, the *Lucky Dragon*.

In 1970, the Hiroshima Panels toured the United States for the first time. The Marukis added extra panels to the core collection to explore the impact of aggression on other groups. Panel 13 illustrates the Japanese massacre of POWs who were beaten to death by angry citizens of Hiroshima in the wake of the bombing in **Death of the American Prisoners of War**. Panel 14, **Crows**, highlights Korean victims who had been brought to Hiroshima as forced labour.

Having completed **The Massacre of Nanjing** in 1975, they went to Europe to collect ideas for their 1977 panel **Auschwitz**. They aimed to record the three massacres: Hiroshima, Nanjing and Auschwitz as testament to the war ridden 20th century.



The final panel **Nagasaki** (number 15) was completed in 1982. It is now on display in the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. This brought the Marukis' thirty year project to a close.

Questions to ask:

1. It is highly unusual to see two artists working together like this. Who else can you name? Perhaps Gilbert and George. What extra difficulties do you think these artists might encounter? And what might be easier?
2. Iri and Toshi Maruki had received very different artistic training and took responsibilities for different elements of the composition?
3. Can you cite influences for each of them?
4. Why do you think they chose to make these works as large-scale screens with 8 panels rather than a smaller handscroll like the **Night Attack on the Sanjo Palace**? What does this say about audience and location, exhibition opportunities/problems?
5. Although Japanese writing is traditionally read from top to bottom and right to left, it is hard to see a fixed way to 'read' this panel. Try reading it one way and ask your partner to read it the other way. Then compare notes. Why do you think the Marukis made this choice?

Further reading/watching:

John Junckerman documentary 'Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima'