

Miné Okubo's Masterpiece:

The Art of CITIZEN 13660

August 28, 2021 – February 20, 2022

“The humor and pathos of the scenes made me decide to keep a record of camp life in sketches and drawings.” - Miné Okubo, *Citizen 13660*



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

This year marks the 75th anniversary of artist Miné Okubo's illustrated memoir, *Citizen 13660*. When it was first published in 1946, it was groundbreaking. Not only was it the first book-length account on America's concentration camps from the perspective of a former incarcerated, but it was also an early example of a graphic memoir. In *Citizen 13660*, through a series of nearly 200 illustrations, each accompanied by a caption, Miné Okubo captured how World War II and the subsequent incarceration upended her life.

JANM is uniquely positioned to commemorate the milestone anniversary of this iconic work as a custodian of Miné Okubo's collection, which includes: myriad sketches that she completed while she was incarcerated at Tanforan and Topaz detention centers, the original drawings that she created for the graphic memoir, as well as a draft of the final manuscript.

For the first time, the materials comprising Miné Okubo's masterpiece are exhibited, revealing the art of *Citizen 13660*.

ABOUT MINÉ OKUBO

Miné Okubo was born in California in 1912. Prior to WWII, she traveled in Europe on a prestigious fellowship, studying and creating art. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Okubo family was forcibly removed from their homes and incarcerated. First, Okubo and her brother were sent to Tanforan Assembly Center, a racetrack outside of San Francisco, before they were moved to a more permanent concentration camp in Topaz, Utah. Okubo immersed herself in art while incarcerated at Topaz. She produced thousands of sketches, taught art classes, and co-founded a literary and arts journal, *Trek*. In 1944, Okubo was granted permission to leave camp and resettle in New York. *Citizen 13660* was published two years later.

ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY GUIDE

This activity guide was created by JANM's Education Unit to accompany *Miné Okubo's Masterpiece: The Art of Citizen 13660*. We invite you to enjoy it while visiting our galleries, and to take it home with you to continue to explore the work of Miné Okubo.

Please be mindful that while in the galleries, only a pencil may be used.

Citizen 13660 is available from the JANM store, and Okubo's work is available for viewing as a featured collection on janm.org.

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ACTIVITY 1: DOCUMENTING HISTORY

We can learn about the past by examining how events are documented by the people who experienced them. Photographs and artwork are two ways in which daily life within America's concentration camps has been documented.

Thinking about things like action, setting, and the emotions depicted and feelings communicated, how are these two forms of documentation similar? How do they differ?



Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Mori Shimada (92.10.2F)



Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Miné Okubo Estate (2007.62.90)

The photograph on the left was taken at Heart Mountain concentration camp by a photographer named Mori Shimada. It depicts meal time in the mess hall. The right image is Okubo's drawing, also showing meal time in a mess hall.

- What emotions can we see in the photograph? What about in the illustration?
- What does a photograph capture that a drawing doesn't?
- Do you think the people in Shimada's photograph knew he was documenting them?
- Do you think the people in Okubo's drawing knew she was documenting them?

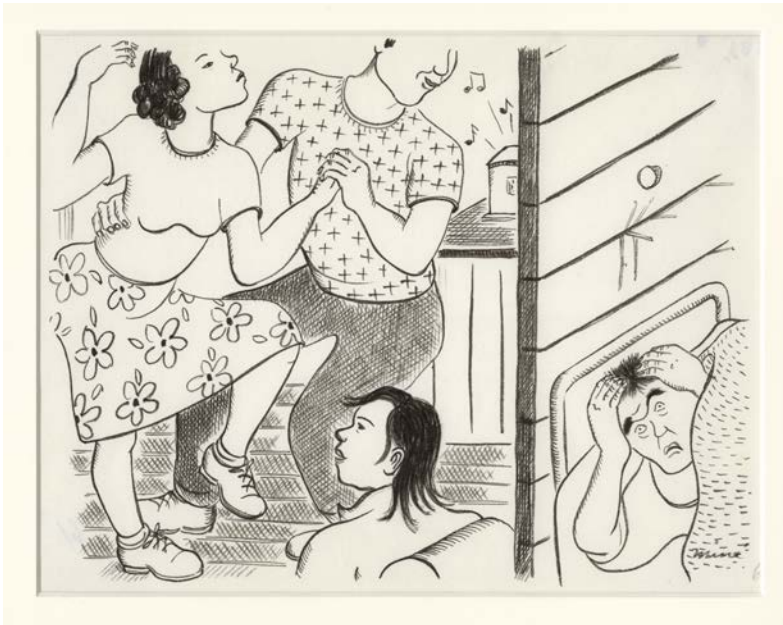
Photographs and drawings tell different pieces of a story. Okubo's drawings are incredibly dynamic and show the reader not only what she was experiencing at the time, but how she was feeling.

Okubo includes herself in the drawing in the lower right corner. How does the presence of the person documenting the moment influence how we look at it?

ACTIVITY 2: CLOSE LOOKING

“There was a lack of privacy everywhere. The incomplete partitions in the stalls and the barracks made a single symphony of yours and your neighbors’ loves, hates, and joys. One had to get used to snores, baby-crying, family troubles, and even to the jitterbugs.”

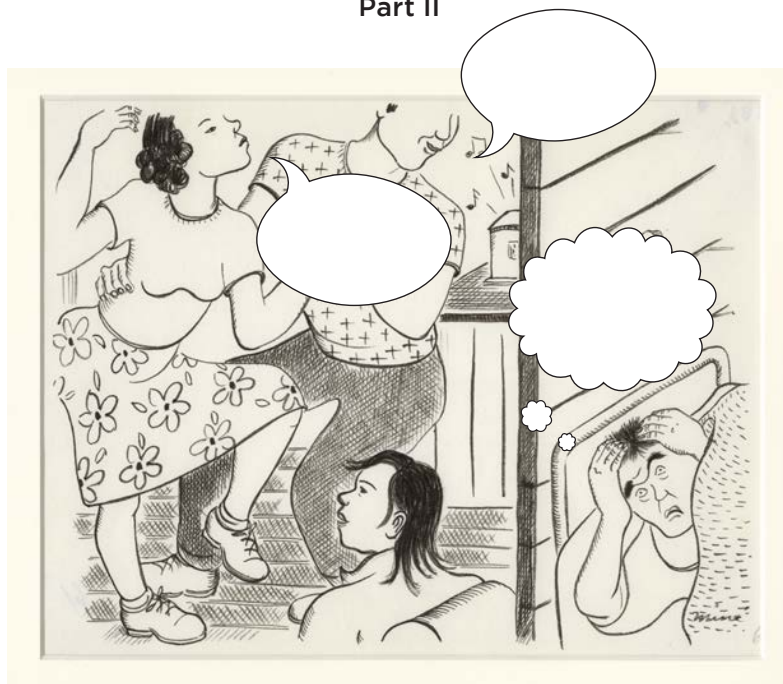
Part I



Look closely at the illustration to the left, paying special attention to the facial expressions of those depicted. What emotions are these characters portraying? Write a list of words to describe how the people in this image might be feeling.

Japanese American National Museum, Gift of the Miné Okubo Estate (2007.62.67)

Part II



Now think about what each person in the image is not only feeling, but also thinking (or saying). What could be going through their minds? Fill in the speech and thought bubbles for each character depicted. Are the characters in this scene happy or sad? What signs of conflict do you see in the scene?

ACTIVITY 2: CLOSE LOOKING (CONTINUED)

Part III

For an extra challenge, pick a character in the scene other than Okubo (she is in the bottom center of the image). Try sketching out an illustration of the same moment in time, but from a different character's perspective.

- Does this change how people are feeling at this moment?
- Does it change how they are interacting with each other?
- What is Okubo's role as a character (rather than as the narrator)?



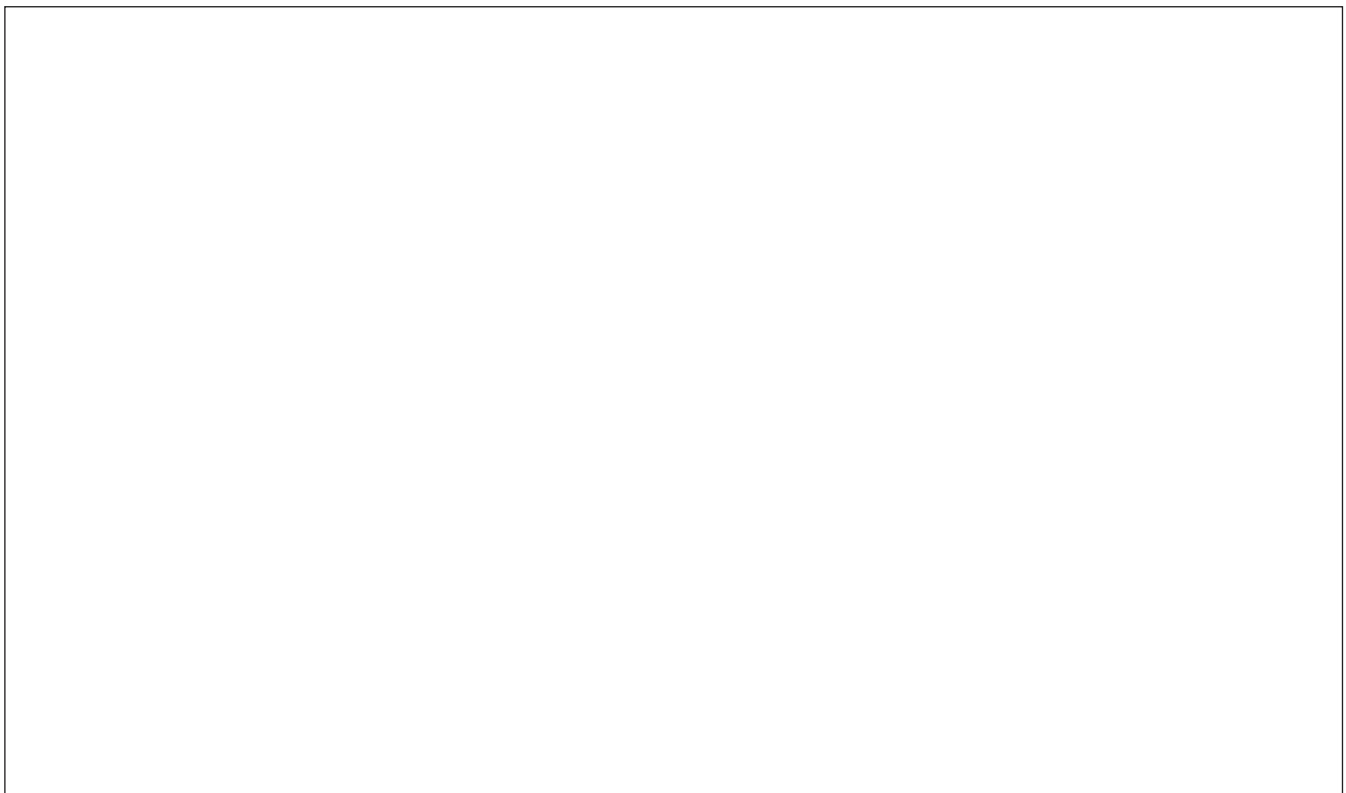
ACTIVITY 3: DRAW THE CAPTION

Okubo's work documenting her camp experience is often elaborated upon in the captions in her book. Her voice as a narrator shares the facts of daily life, as well as her opinions and individual experiences. Through her descriptive words and images, she gives us an authentic look at her incarceration experience.

Read this text passage from *Citizen 13660*.

"We had to make friends with the wild creatures in camp, especially the spiders, mice and rats, because we were outnumbered"

How would you depict what Okubo describes? Draw your own images to illustrate her words in the space below.



Now, find this caption and accompanying illustration in the exhibit, and notice the differences and similarities between your drawing and Okubo's.

- How did you each frame your scenes?
- Is the narrator seen in your drawings?
- What expressive devices (ex: humor, horror, etc) did you use?
- What feelings come across in each of your drawings?

ACTIVITY 4: SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

To create *Citizen 13660*, Okubo first drafted documentation sketches to capture her experience and then created final illustrations based on these initial sketches.

Look closely at the drawings labeled “A” and “B”. Drawing A is a draft illustration, while drawing B is what was published in *Citizen 13660*.

- What differences do you notice? Circle any differences you see.
- Some differences might not be obvious at first glance, what changes are made that are harder to ‘circle’?
- Why might Okubo have made these changes? What meaning might Okubo have wanted to more fully communicate?

A



Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Miné Okubo Estate (2007.62.206)

vs.

B



Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Miné Okubo Estate (2007.62.23)

ACTIVITY 5: SKETCH TO FINAL (OKUBO'S PROCESS)

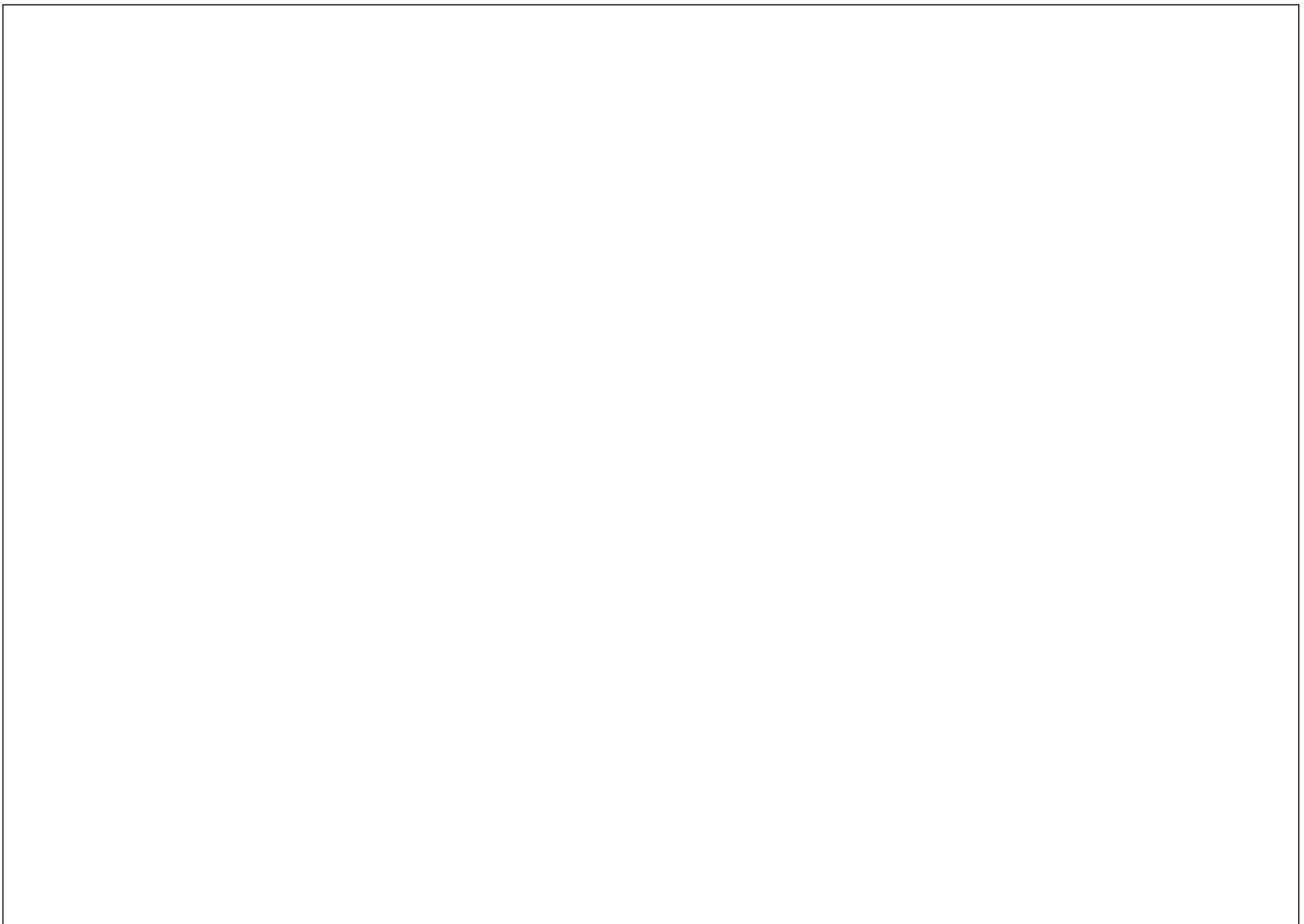
Take inspiration from Okubo's process and draw a series of quick sketches to document your trip to the Japanese American National Museum. Think of all the aspects of your visit that you would like to remember for the future and include as many details as possible.

- How did you get to the museum?
- Who did you see at the museum?
- Who was with you?
- What did you do at the museum?
- What part of the museum was most interesting or exciting to you? What will you remember most from the visit experience?

ACTIVITY 5: SKETCH TO FINAL (CONTINUED)

Now, use your draft sketches to inform a single, final drawing to represent your visit to the Japanese American National Museum.

- What did you learn from your initial sketches that helped you create your final piece?
- What changes did you make from your drafts for the final drawing? Why did you make these changes?
- What were you hoping to communicate with your drawing



Lastly, write a caption for your final drawing that helps others understand your visit.

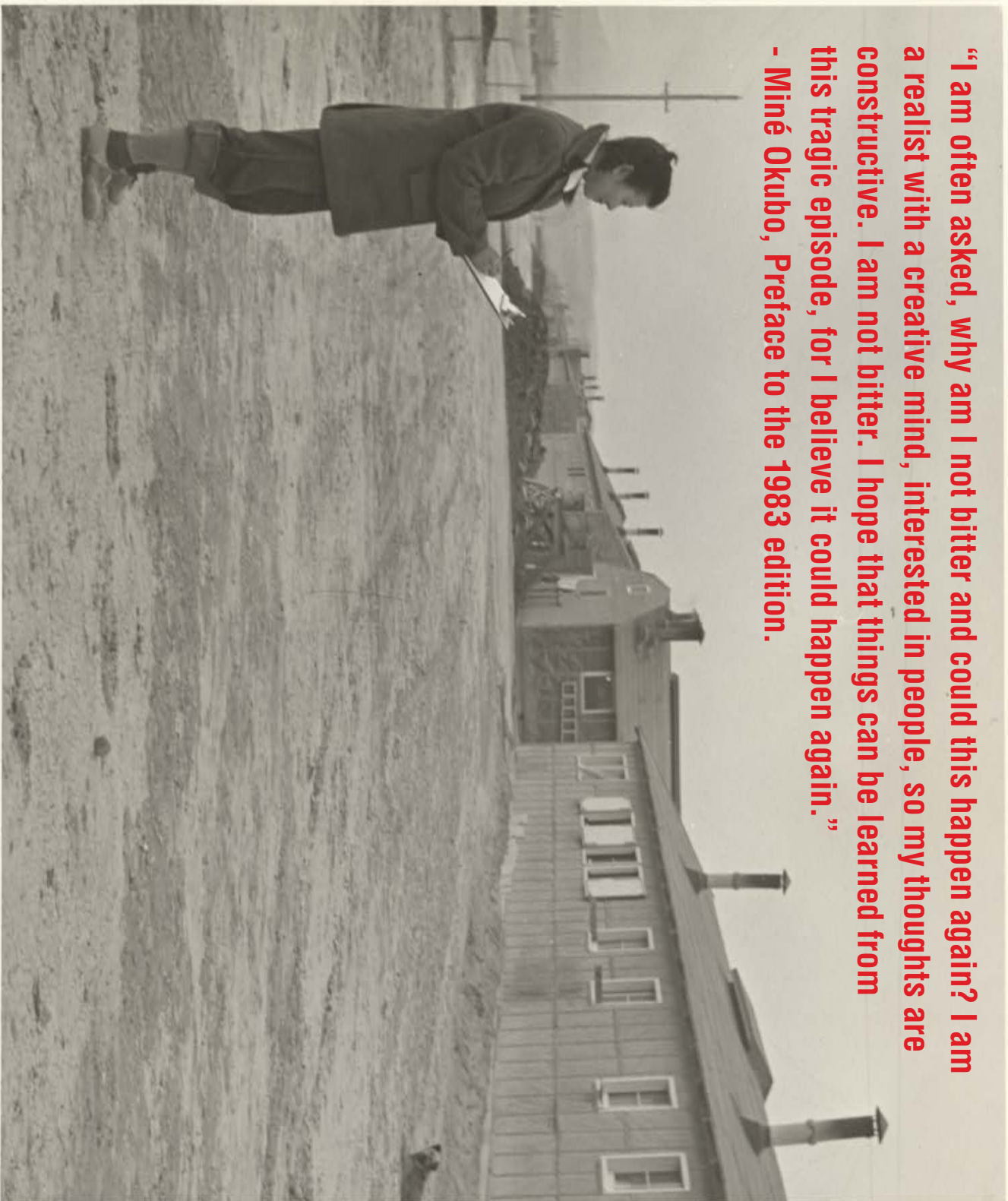
SKETCHES & DRAWINGS



SKETCHES & DRAWINGS



“I am often asked, why am I not bitter and could this happen again? I am a realist with a creative mind, interested in people, so my thoughts are constructive. I am not bitter. I hope that things can be learned from this tragic episode, for I believe it could happen again.”
- Miné Okubo, Preface to the 1983 edition.



Japanese American National Museum, Gift of Miné Okubo Estate (2007.62.549_1)

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