

A CALL TO ACTION

Welcome to the symposium “Plumbing the Depths of A-Bomb Sufferers’ Trials and Tribulations,” which takes place in the midst of the Oakland University Art Gallery’s showing of *Memorializing the Hibakusha Experience*. The exhibition marks the fiftieth anniversary of our institutional partner, the Wilmington College Peace Resource Center, and the eightieth commemoration of the A-bombing of Japan.

With its rich compendium of artifacts, handicrafts, photographs, photobooks, scrapbooks, monographs, periodicals, poetry, sculptures, videos, installations, and contemporary photo-based art—all bearing witness to the hibakusha experience—the exhibition provides a fertile ground for interdisciplinary reflection. Bringing together nine distinct perspectives drawn from the spectrum of disciplines explored at Oakland University, this symposium underscores the potential of visual culture to foster interdisciplinarity and introspection at a time when nuclear arms control is no longer subject to international agreements.

At this juncture in history, it behooves us to reaffirm the pledge inscribed on the cenotaph to the A bombed deceased at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, which implores us not to repeat the evil.

—Claude Baillargeon, Professor of Art History and Exhibition Curator



FUKUSHIMA Kikujirō (福島菊次郎, 1921–2015)

“Convulsions” (*Hibakusha NAKAMURA Sugimatsu*), 1954, from *Pikadon: Aru genbaku hisaisha no kiroku / Big Sudden Flash: A Report on an A-Bomb Victim* (Tokyo Chunichi Shimbun, 1961)
Hiroshima-Nagasaki Memorial Collection at the Barbara Reynolds Memorial Archives



MURASATO Sakae (村里栄, born 1933)

Hibakusha FUKUDA Sumako Painting the Dragon Dance, 1970
Hiroshima-Nagasaki Memorial Collection at the Barbara Reynolds Memorial Archives

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PLUMBING THE DEPTHS OF A-BOMB SUFFERERS’ TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM

FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026, 9:15 AM–3:45 PM

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, WEST WILSON HALL, ROOM 208

This symposium is organized in conjunction with the exhibition
Memorializing the Hibakusha Experience
Oakland University Art Gallery, January 15–April 5, 2026

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9:15–9:25	OPENING REMARKS
9:25–9:50	<p>SPEAKER #1: Tomoko Wakabayashi, Ed.D., Professor of Education, Department of Human Development and Child Studies</p> <p>“A-Bomb Poetry as an Avenue for Healing and Activism”</p> <p>Professor Wakabayashi explores the trauma and resilience of <i>hibakusha</i> (atomic bomb survivors) through A-bomb poetries. Her presentation focuses on how these poems serve a dual purpose: as a path for personal and collective healing and as a tool for global activism. In today’s turbulent world, these voices remain a vital call for peace and nuclear disarmament.</p>
9:50–10:15	<p>SPEAKER #2: Stephen Filler, PhD, Associate Professor of Japanese, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures</p> <p>“You Who Make A-Bombs: FUKUDA Sumako’s Message to the World”</p> <p>FUKUDA Sumako was an author, activist, and survivor of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Her unique literary voice portrays her personal hardships and makes a powerful call for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Professor Filler’s talk considers FUKUDA’s work and what it means for us today.</p>
10:15–10:25	MID-MORNING BREAK
10:25–10:50	<p>SPEAKER #3: Katy McCormick, MFA, Associate Professor, School of Image Arts, Toronto Metropolitan University</p> <p>“The Other A-bomb Sufferers: Hibakujumoku / Witness Trees”</p> <p>Eighty years after atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Professor McCormick examines the <i>hibakujumoku</i>: camphors, hollies, pines, and others, who continue to bear witness in schoolyards, temple grounds, and private gardens, warning, teaching, and testifying to the countless trials and tribulations shared by A-bomb survivors of all stripes.</p>
10:50–11:15	<p>SPEAKER #4: August Gorman, PhD, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy</p> <p>“Hibakusha and the Constructive View of Reparations”</p> <p>While <i>hibakusha</i> have received domestic support and humanitarian relief, they continue to seek true reparations. In his presentation, Professor Gorman shows how their vision is in alignment with the constructive view of reparations put forth by Olúfémi O. Táíwò, and symbolized by the <i>hibakujumoku</i>, injured “witness” trees that miraculously continued to grow despite their proximity to the epicenter.</p>
11:15–12:15	<p>KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Tanya Maus, PhD, Director, Peace Resource Center at Wilmington College</p> <p>“The Webs They Have Woven Will Hold Us: Reflections on Hibakusha and Human Rights in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries.”</p> <p>Dr. Maus’s talk reflects upon the ways in which <i>hibakusha</i> (atomic bombing sufferers) and their nuclear abolitionist allies participated in the construction of a global understanding of human rights in the second half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Though seemingly fragile, this web of interconnectivity will remain as a model of human dignity, rights, and justice into the future.</p>
12:15–1:15	LUNCH BREAK (with provided food)



Installation view, *Memorializing the Hibakusha Experience*, Oakland University Art Gallery, January 15–April 5, 2026

1:15–1:40	<p>SPEAKER #5: Ravindra Khattree, PhD, Distinguished Professor of Applied Statistics, Department of Mathematics and Statistics</p> <p>“Hibakusha and Science: A Statistician’s Perspective”</p> <p>Professor Khattree reflects on <i>hibakusha</i> from his perspective as a former senior scientist working at the <i>Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission</i> (now rechristened The Radiation Effects Research Foundation). There are many facts with untold stories, which cannot be described by pictures, numbers, or scientific studies. This presentation reveals the irony of the world benefitting from the research conducted by ABCC/RERF, while seemingly downplaying many aspects of their own findings.</p>
1:40–2:05	<p>SPEAKER #6: Jessica Payette, PhD, Associate Professor of Musicology, School of Music, Theatre and Dance</p> <p>“Krzysztof Penderecki’s Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima as Exemplar of Collective Angst in Postwar European Music”</p> <p>In 1960, Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki changed the title of a composition that was originally called 8’37” to <i>Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima</i>. This was both a decisive break from the prevailing abstraction favored by many European avant-garde composers who believed that art could not sufficiently reflect on the atrocities of World War II, and an acknowledgment that victimhood inflicted by warfare extended far beyond Europe.</p>
2:05–2:30	<p>SPEAKER #7: Olga Ehrlich, PhD, RN, CHPN, Assistant Professor of Nursing, School of Nursing</p> <p>“Nurses, War and Disaster—What Does it Mean to be Prepared?”</p> <p>In her presentation, Dr. Ehrlich blends personal narrative with health care statistics and nurses’ ethical responsibilities in attempting to discuss the concept of nuclear disaster preparation.</p>
2:30–2:40	MID-AFTERNOON BREAK (to clear the gallery)
2:40–3:40	<p>SPEAKER #8: Claude Baillargeon, PhD, Professor of Art History, Department of Art, Art History and Design</p> <p>Curatorial walkthrough, <i>Memorializing the Hibakusha Experience</i></p>
3:45	EVENT WRAP-UP