Calligraphy artist Aoi Yamaguchi reproduces poems as wall hanging during opening reception. More photos, pages 4 & 5.

—Noriko Shiota Slusser

By Philip Riley
SF State News

The 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami, devastating to thousands of Japanese and others around the world, reaped an emotional toll that continues to be felt today as the country rebuilds.

An exhibit at The Art Gallery in the Cesar Chavez Student Center aims to convey that emotional devastation by displaying poems, photographs, thoughts and artwork from Japanese citizens directly affected by the disaster.

"We hope that through this exhibit, we'll be able to share the direct experience and feelings of the Japanese people and provide more emotion than you'd see in a straight news report about the tsunami," said Professor of Journalism Jon Funabiki.

Titled "Voices from Japan: Tanka – After

By Eric Louie

Two years ago, people around the world were shocked by news of the earthquake and tsunami that pummeled Japan. Sparked by a magnitude 9.0 temblor off Japan’s northeastern coast on March 11, 2011, the disaster killed close to 16,000 people, destroyed the homes of hundreds of thousands more and left the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in shambles. Today, many in the United States look back on the disaster as a fading memory, a page in the history book of the world’s greatest natural disasters.

However, many people in the San Francisco Bay Area—where support has been strong—continue to work on assisting the recovery process in Japan. Far from being forgotten, they expect that the job of reversing the effects of the disaster will take many more years to complete.

This is the prediction of a group of artists, business people and community leaders who took part in a Dilena Takeyama Center roundtable discussion as part of the exhibit, "Voices from Japan: Tanka – After the Tsunami." During the three-week run, the center also sponsored a number of activities related to the exhibit, including a poetry reading, tanka writing workshop and a briefing for students who want to become involved in the recovery.

The center’s roundtable discussion was held on Jan. 31, just before the exhibit’s opening reception, with about two dozen people selected because of their active involvement in relief efforts. Staff of the Consulate General of Japan also attended.

“There’s still a lot of work to be done in Japan, in the U.S.,” said Jon Funabiki, a professor of journalism and executive director of the center. The center had held a much larger roundtable discussion in 2012 for the first anniversary of the earthquake. The purpose was to talk about the large support that emerged, particularly from the

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Tanka Exhibit Reveals Japan’s Hopes and Sorrow

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the Tsunami," the exhibit is presented by the Dilena Takeyama Center for the Study of Japan and Japanese Culture, a program focused on U.S. – Japan relations made possible by a generous gift from alumna and professor emerita Kay Takeyama Dilena. Funabiki is executive director of the Center.

The centerpiece of the exhibit, which ran Jan. 28 through Feb. 14, is a series of traditional Japanese poems, called tanka, which were published in a Japanese national newspaper in the year after the disaster.

The 31-syllable poems were written by ordinary citizens – housewives, farmers and fishermen – and reflect the country’s struggle to come to terms with the scope of loss and the effort to rebuild over the past year.

One such poem reads:

 dispatched to build
temporary lodgings
my son returns
with eyes that now take in
much more than in the past

-Miyako Tsuchiya. Kanagawa September 2011

"The tanka poetry that's published in the newspaper really shows the importance of literature and reflection in that culture; and it's all written by ordinary people, which is what's most fascinating," said Carolyn Ho, a creative writing graduate student and Manager of the Art Gallery.

"Tanka are revered in Japan and normally used to express very strong emotions," said Funabiki. The poems in the exhibit were collected by Isao Tsujimoto of the Studio for Cultural Exchange in Tokyo.

Also featured are photographs and videos by photographer Darrell Miho, calligraphy scrolls, and a collection of family photographs that were found washed into the streets following the floods.

An artist named Yoshito Sasaguchi collected the photos he found, many of which were damaged by water, and assembled them into a colorful collage.

"I like the idea that the water had an effect on these photos in a way that is horrific and beautiful at the same time," said Ho. "It helps people reflect on loss."

The exhibit also displays a series of prayers and messages written by 50 Japanese high school students who were given an exclusive look at the exhibit earlier this month as part of a cultural exchange program.

"Part of the mission of the Center is to strengthen the relationship between people in the U.S. and Japan," Funabiki said. "This exhibit really accomplishes that by focusing on these core human emotions."

(Reprinted from SFSU News, Jan. 28, 2013.)

More Media Coverage

For additional media coverage of the exhibit, please see:


Tanka—After the Tsunami

A Citizens Poetry Movement

Tanka Tradition Thrives 1,500 Years

The poems in “Voices from Japan: Tanka—After the Tsunami” were written by ordinary Japanese citizens using a 1,500-year-old literary tradition called tanka.

In ancient times, people such as aristocrats and warriors created tanka when they loved, when they mourned and even when they faced death. Tanka is a short poetic form that is composed of 31 onji (sound units or syllables) in five units (or lines) following a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern. Westerners may be more familiar with haiku, which is composed of 17 onji in a 5-7-5 pattern. Both are called waka, or short song.

Tanka originated in the seventh century, and quickly became the preferred verse form not only in the Japanese Imperial Court, where nobles competed in tanka contests, but for women and men engaged in courtship. Tanka’s economy and suitability for emotional expression made it ideal for intimate communication. In many ways, the tanka resembles the sonnet. Like the sonnet, the tanka employs a turn, known as a pivotal image, which marks the transition from the examination of an image to the examination of the personal response. In the late 1980s, contemporary poets revitalized the tanka for modern audiences.

Today tanka poetry is thriving. There are many fora for professional and amateur tanka poets, such as the weekly tanka column in the Asahi Shimbun, one Japan’s largest daily newspapers. Most of the poems in the Dilena Takeyama Center’s exhibit were published in Asahi Shimbun. They were selected by Isao Tsujimoto, director of Studio for Cultural Exchange in Tokyo, and first exhibited in New York in the summer of 2012. The poems were translated by three American experts: Laurel R. Rodd, professor at University of Colorado; Amy V. Heinrich, former director of C.V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University; and Joan E. Ericson, professor of Colorado College.

Here are five of the more than 30 poems that appeared in “Voices from Japan: Tanka—After the Tsunami.”

in broad daylight
the sea rose up and attacked–
a great tsunami
unimaginable in this world

—Nobuko Kato, Iwata
March 2011

my town
has become
Chernobyl,
and we have become refugees
with no hope of return

—Keiko Hangui, Fukushima
April 2011

because I have to
go on living
even on the day
of the atomic explosion
I am polishing rice

—Toko Mihara, Fukushima
April 2011

“I’m home,” I cry
as I enter
the empty house–
my voice responding
to the familiar smells

—Keiko Hangui, Fukushima
May 2011

building these coffins
filled with sorrow
for infants
for one-year-olds–
how tiny they are!

—Shojin Tamura, Tokyo
April 2011
Voices from Japan

Artist Aoi Yamaguchi, hands stained with ink, discusses meaning of three poems she reproduced during opening reception's a large calligraphic wall hanging.

Working in pairs, students read tanka poems in Japanese and English during special workshop.

Voices from Japan: Tanka—After the Tsunami was produced jointly by the Dilena Takeyama Center, Cesar Chavez Student Center Art Gallery and Studio for Cultural

An estimated 300 people from the campus and community attended the opening reception, which featured performances, music and Japanese food.

Photos: Noriko Shiota Slusser and Jon Funabiki
Rev. Masahato Kawahatsu of Konko Church conducts blessing and purification ceremony.

Gallery Manager Carolyn Ho welcomes guests, artists, performers to opening reception.

Landlocked ship in photograph by Darrell Miho symbolizes the work that still needs to be done.

Professor Midori McKeon is filled with emotion while reading tanka poem displayed on wall.

An estimated 300 people from the campus and community attended the opening reception, which featured performances, music and Japanese food.
Citizen Efforts Stoke Concern for Disaster Aid

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San Francisco Bay Area, which has deep local ties to Japan from late-1800s immigration to those working today in the Silicon Valley.

Worldwide, about $279 million had been raised for relief in the first year, more than half from the United States. Of that, $17.3 million came from California-based foundations, with nearly half of that coming from within the San Francisco Bay Area. Still others providing other assistance, such as training on mental health issues.

"People in the San Francisco Bay Area contributed tremendously to the relief of Japan," Funabiki said. "We thought with the opening of our exhibition today we would convene another."

"Many of you represent this growing citizen to citizen effort," he said.

Photographer Darrell Miho, who co-founded Ai Love Japan to shed light and direct help to survivors, contributed a number of the photos featured in the exhibit. Some of his images depict large overturned cargo ships on land, next to the shells of buildings.

Miho has talked to many survivors, including a man who, if the tsunami waters had risen a little bit more, would not have been here today. Since his original trip, he has been back several times. "Our main objective at the time was to document the disaster and see it," Miho said. "We're hoping the people will hear their stories, hear their message and want to help."

Based in Southern California, Ai Love Japan ("ai" means "love") has also held fundraisers, such as a concert featuring jazz fusion band Hiroshima and an evening in which a number of restaurants donated a percentage of their sales to the cause.

Oakland filmmaker Dianne Fukami showed a clip from her upcoming documentary "Stories from Tohoku." She talked about mothers shuttling their children some 50 kilometers (about 30 miles) just to play at a park because of high radiation levels where they lived.

"Shopping or playing at a park requires decontamination. Kids can't play," Fukami said. "I want you to see this ongoing dilemma from them on a very personal level."

Aoi Yamaguchi, a calligraphy artist, started Rise Japan, an effort where artists help raise money for the disaster. They've collected about $30,000 through two large art shows, a concert and a fourth event where they sold silk-screened T-shirts designed by local artists. Yamaguchi said it was the first time she had been involved in such a cause.

"I've always been really passive about disasters," said Yamaguchi, who is originally from Japan and now resides in San Francisco. "I thought of what I could do as an artist?"

Yamaguchi said more than 200 artists donated their work, with support for their events also coming from Sapporo beer and food from various restaurants.

"I was really amazed so many artists contacted me about ways to help," she said. She said many wanted to do something, but didn't have the connections to put their skills to use. "They don't know what they can do."

Megumi Inouye talked about efforts at her daughter's Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco that led to 500 backpacks and other school supplies being donated for Japanese students. Inouye said they continue to interact with the school, and they have seen pictures of students using their backpacks. "It made us cry," she said.

Inouye hosts the "Japanese American Journal" on television station KTSF and is program manager of a Japan Society of Northern California effort to support Japanese language and cultural programs in schools.

She has also been involved with the Japan-America Grassroots Summit and stayed with host families in some of the hard hit areas two years before the earthquake. She said personal connections are important. When the disaster happened she knew who to check-in with, and it also helped in access when visiting afterwards. Last summer her daughter led a group of visiting Japanese students. "It's just amazing how the community can come together on this."

Steve Yamaguma, a Silicon Valley design and marketing communications consultant, has been involved in various ways. Last year he helped organize a benefit concert in Fremont, and continues to spread the word on ways to help through a blog he started, abillionvoices.wordpress.com. "I think it's important to keep the awareness out there," said Yamaguma.

Miho Kazama is the communications coordinator at Tokyo-based Think the Earth, a group started before the earthquake that works to connect busi-
nesses and nonprofits to develop products and learning opportunities related to the environment. Projects include making stationery from denim, to a picture calendar that shows seasonal change, to informational campaigns promoting reusable drink bottles. Her group is also helping to get scholarships for orphaned students.

Kazama said the disaster opened opportunities to address contemporary social issues, such as how to address an aging population and mental health problems. These issues have become more intense since the disaster. "They can't talk to each other about their feelings," Kazama said. "There are so many social issues already."

As the roundtable ended, many said needs have shifted to the long-term. Miho said while immediate survival needs like food and shelter have been taken care of, the focus is now on jobs and infrastructure for raising the quality of life.

"Most of the individual needs have been met. The needs we see now are bigger," he said. For example, there aren't community centers or other places for people to gather with each other. "There are no places for kids to be kids and hang out."

Yamaguma said the devastation is allowing new approaches, such as more environmentally-friendly energy options. He has been working with the Cleantech Open, which works to bring ideas around energy and the environment a reality, in its expansion plans in Asia. "They really need jobs and housing, infrastructure and hope."

Yamaguchi said the focus is moving from offering aid to rebuilding together, and that there are many possibilities.

After the event, many of those who gave presentations said it has been a challenge keeping the momentum going. Inouye said soon the students at her daughter’s high school who attended when the earthquake happened will all have graduated out.

"It's going to be more of a challenge to engage students," Inouye said. One goal is to have the Japanese students visit. "We'll have to figure out long-term how to continue it."

Miho said after the initial effort, it is no longer in the minds of most Americans. "It's no longer current," he said. "It's very difficult to get people to connect."

Yet he said it will take a sustained effort before the damaged areas return to where they were. "We plan to keep going back for God knows how long," he said. "It's going to take more than 10 years for these towns to rebuild."

Isao Tsujimoto, director of the Studio for Cultural Exchange, who selected the poems displayed in the center’s exhibit, said he felt there was still a lot of energy from the United States.

"I very much appreciate it," he said.
Exhibition Acknowledgements

*Voices from Japan: Tanka – After the Tsunami* recognizes the more than 15,000 lives lost and the recovery and healing that continues today as result of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster that devastated northeastern Japan in 2011.

The exhibit and accompanying programs were produced by the Dilena Takeyama Center and The Cesar Chavez Student Center Art Gallery, which is led by manager Carolyn Ho. We worked in collaboration with Isao Tsujimoto of Studio for Cultural Exchange in Tokyo, who originated the concept and collected the tanka poems featured in this exhibit. We also thank:

Contributors: Asahi Shimbun, Kanji Chiba, Darrell Miho, Saori and Yasuhito Sasaguchi, the American School in Japan, the Konko Church of San Francisco. Poems translated by Laurel R. Rodd, Professor of University of Colorado; Amy V. Heinrich, former Director of C.V. Starr East Asian Library at Columbia University; and Joan E. Ericson, Professor of Colorado College.

Collaborators in San Francisco: Consulate General of Japan, Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Northern California, Rise Japan, Japan Society of Northern California, Ai Love Japan Project and SFSU’s Japanese Student Association, Poetry Center, Richard Oakes Multicultural Center and Japanese Language and Literature Program.

Opening reception performers: Brenda Wong Aoki, Mark Izu and Aoi Yamaguchi.

Supporters: United States-Japan Foundation and Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

Jill Shiraki served as manager of public programs, which included:

- Jan. 16–Pre-opening visit by more than 50 Japanese high school exchange students sponsored by the Laurasian Institute.
- Jan 31–“Reconnecting With Tohoku,” a roundtable discussion by community leaders, activists and artists engaged in fundraising and recovery efforts.
- Jan 31–Opening reception featuring performances by Brenda Wong Aoki, Mark Izu and Aoi Yamaguchi hosted by the Dilena Takeyama Center and Art Gallery.
- Feb 5–“Fukushima/Tanka/San Francisco: The Voice of NOW,” a bilingual poetry reading sponsored by the Poetry Center and Japanese Language & Literature Program.
- Feb. 6–“From Relief to Rebuilding: How Can You Help,” a student workshop sponsored by the Japanese Cultural and Community Center and Richard Oakes Multicultural Center.
- Feb. 12–Tanka Workshop conducted by the Japanese Students Association.

About the Dilena Takeyama Center

The Dilena Takeyama Center promotes leadership and new voices in the field of U.S.-Japan relations.

The center was made possible by a generous gift from Dr. Kay Takeyama Dilena, a distinguished alumna and professor emerita of business. With her gift, Dr. Dilena honors her brother, Yasuo Takeyama, a Hiroshima survivor, and her husband, James G. Dilena, a Pearl Harbor survivor.

Jon Funabiki, a professor of journalism, is executive director.

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