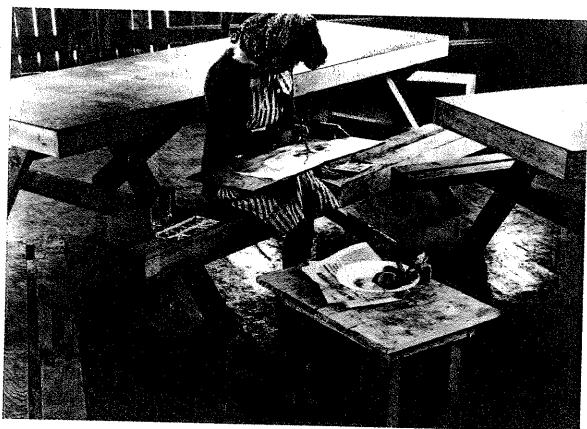
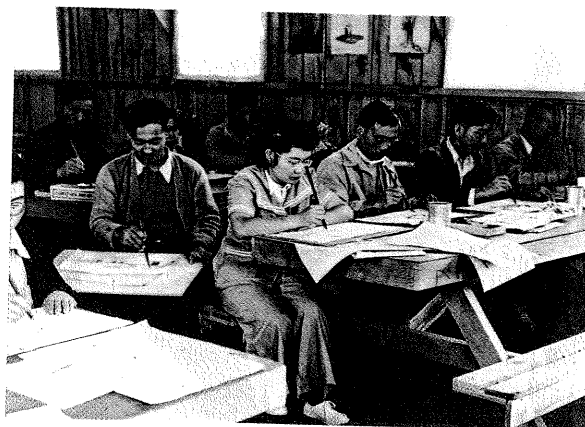


TOPAZ MOON : CHIURA OBATA'S

ART OF THE INTERNMENT



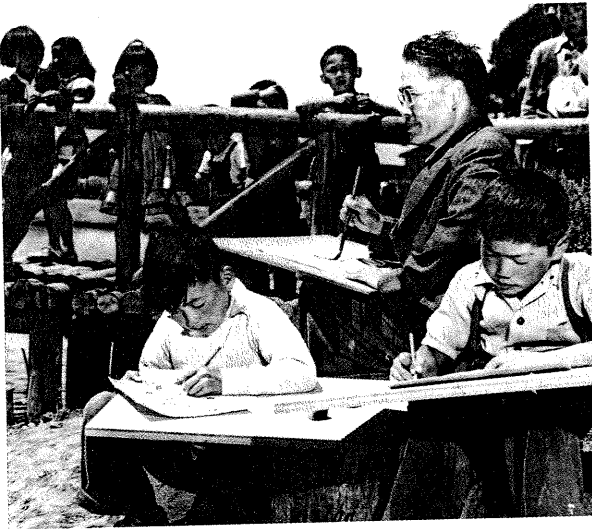
The still life class at Tanforan Art School.
June 16, 1942
Photograph by Dorothea Lange
Courtesy of the Bancroft Library
Banc Pic 1967.014:15HC-645



Chiura Obata's class at Tanforan Art School.
June 16, 1942
Photograph by Dorothea Lange
Courtesy of the Bancroft Library
Banc Pic 1967.014:15HC-646

seems just another indication of how askew these times are, that through something so unjust as mass evacuation I should find myself with some grand friends! Just doesn't make sense, does it? From another angle, though, everything I have done in connection with evacuees has been from a selfish angle—from a feeling of guilt that a thing like evacuation should have happened in this country of ours and that if all of us had worked harder at making democracy work, it wouldn't have—and from a hope that if I should someday find myself penned in behind a fence, under armed guard, there might be someone who would help a bit from the outside.

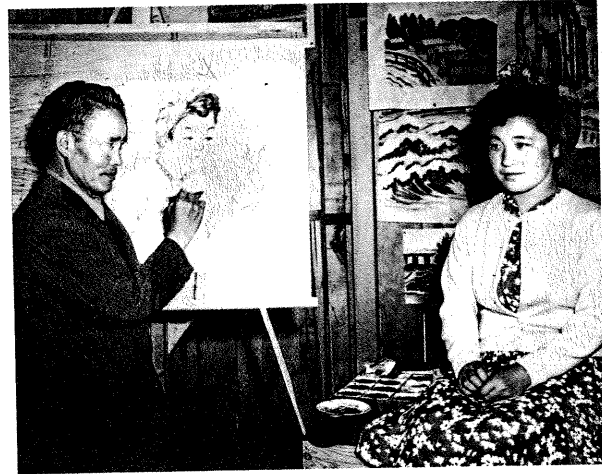
I'm glad if anything I did was of help to the school. I'm tremendously interested in the school and hope it will, through Mrs. Kingman and Dean Deutsch, find its way financially and continue its good work for keeping morale high. I'm sure it is part of the reason why Tanforan people had such sense of pride in all their accomplishments, and why, when I'd go down there for a visit feeling gloomy about the war and the evacuation, I'd come away with a lift and a confidence that the human race wasn't so bad after all. So long as it had people like the Obatas and Satos and Kajiwaras and Kunitanis and Marii Kyogoku and the rest in it. So you see you've helped my morale too!¹⁸



Obata teaching a children's art class,
Tanforan detention center, August, 1942.

Obata conducted his sumi painting classes either in the mess hall facilities or by the Tanforan race track. While giving outdoor demonstrations, onlookers gathered to watch the paintings of plants and landscapes emerging from his brush. He was particularly happy with the class participation of the Issei, the people who had suffered such a great loss of physical possessions and personal dignity. The Tanforan Art School manual proudly listed a description of students who were first time art students, including:

- *Mr. R. Kasai, 64 years old. Formerly a Tin dealer and Repairer in Berkeley for 12 yrs. and then*



Chiura Obata, Tanforan Art School, 1942.

operated a Floral shop in East Oakland for past 13 yrs. Had no training in art.

- *Mrs. T. Kobayashi, 56 yrs. old. Wife of Japanese Divisional Commander of Salvation Army. No previous training.*
- *Mr. Iwamoto, 76 yrs. old. Formerly a farmer but lately was day worker in S.F. No art training.⁹*

From July 11-14, the Tanforan Art School conducted an Art and Hobby Show featuring hundreds of the students' arts and crafts. The creativity and ingenuity displayed by the participants was a source of pride for the entire camp. The show recorded 9,000 attendees in four days, a number that reflected a high rate of returning visitors since Tanforan had fewer than 8,000 residents.