SECOND OPENING

In 2012, the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER) inaugurated the Gallery at the Center with the goal of presenting exhibits related to its core research and teaching interests. This fall, in order to widen the scope of our work, we opened the gallery to two guest curators. The first, a team led by art historian and Barnard professor Elizabeth Hutchinson, created the poignant *Across Time and Space: Inupiat Drawings from the 1890s at Columbia University*. Through contextualization of native Inupiat objects and practices, the group brought the work into visibility and contributed to the larger process of historical recovery and cultural survival led by indigenous communities.

The gallery is now proud to open *Colors of Confinement: Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Imprisonment in World War II*, a traveling exhibition guest curated by Eric L. Muller, the Dan K. Moore Distinguished Professor of Law in Jurisprudence and Ethics at the University of North Carolina. The exhibit features eighteen images by amateur photographer Bill Manbo shot during his term as an inmate at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming from 1942 to 1944. This was one of ten camps set up by the U.S. Government after the bombing of Pearl Harbor for the forced relocation of 120,000, mostly U.S.-born, Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. The rationale for internment was that the group represented a threat to American national security in the midst of World War II, yet none of the detainees, which included children, were ever charged. As a result of the detention, however, many lost their homes, land, and belongings; some were never the same.

The importance of this show cannot be underestimated. At one level, it comes at a critical time. With increasing fears of ethnic and religious minorities surfacing once again and calls by public officials for surveilling mosques, registering Muslims, and setting up detention camps in the United States and abroad, the exhibition allows us to consider the human costs of such unjust and unjustifiable actions by expanding our awareness about the Japanese-American internment experience, one of this country's most significant historical episodes of xenophobic persecution.

At another level, Manbo's photos themselves are rare in historical, technological, and aesthetic ways. Given the ban on cameras in camps located within the three-state perimeter of the Western Defense Command, the very existence of Manbo's images is, simply, exceptional. In addition, Manbo's insightful choice to use Kodachrome—a color slide stock that was barely seven years old at the time and was not normally used to chronicle news or public events—produces the effect of extraordinary intimacy and immediacy due to its translucent color palette. Likewise, Manbo's ironic juxtaposing of the beauty of the landscape and inmates with the symbols of American state authority and identity gives the images a haunting power.

Equally important, if less noted, is that Manbo's photographs bear witness to an inexplicable injustice faced with insurmountable dignity. This is strikingly evident in an image of Manbo's wife's father, Juntzo Itaya, whose dignified demeanor is both quiet testament and loud critique. Manbo's ability not just to see the barbwire but also to look from its confines allows us to imagine ourselves on the other side of the fence. In positioning us in this way, the photos contain the certainty, or at least the hope, that the people and their stories will not be forgotten, while transferring the shame felt by many inmates to the government that failed them.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner is director of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, and founding chief curator of the Gallery at the Center.

Bill Manbo

CATALOGUE

Untitled, 1943-1944
Mary and Billy Manbo look out over the Heart Mountain Relocation Center
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
From left to right, Mary Manbo, her father Junzo Itaya, her mother Rio Itaya, and her younger sister Eunice Itaya. Billy Manbo stands in front of his grandfather
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Billy Manbo walks along the edge of the camp's residential area
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
One of Heart Mountain's nine guard towers overlooks the camp's residential area from a nearby hilltop
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Six young children, including Billy Manbo at the far right, line up for a portrait in front of a barrack wall
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
A winter's day at Heart Mountain
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Billy Manbo gets an ice skating lesson
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Billy Manbo plays in the dirt with a friend
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Young girls at Bon Odori, an outdoor dance during the summertime festival of Obon that commemorates the spirits of ancestors
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Bon Odori dancers and fanciful dragon or bird in custom made of breakfast cereal boxes
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Kimono-clad Bon-Odori dancers
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Sumo wrestlers
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Camp's boy scouts and drum majorettes on parade
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943
Group gathers at the high school to see off hundreds of inmates who failed the government's written loyalty test
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Bill Manbo documents what was neither normal nor happy in his son Billy's surroundings
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Billy Manbo sits with his grandparents
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Billy Manbo grew up to work in the aviation industry
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

Untitled, 1943-1944
Dawn sky displays some of the colors of confinement
C-Print, 18 x 22¾ inches

GALLERY at the CENTER
CENTER FOR THE STUDY of Ethnicity and Race
Columbia University
420 Hamilton Hall
New York City

COLORS OF CONFINEMENT:

Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Confinement in World War II

GALLERY at the CENTER
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
DECEMBER 7, 2015 – MAY 18, 2016

COLORS OF CONFINEMENT:

Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Confinement in World War II

Eric L. Muller

The photos in this exhibition help us appreciate what the singer-songwriter Paul Simon meant in his lyrical tribute to Kodachrome: its "nice bright colors" really can "make you think all the world's a sunny day." But what if the subject isn't so sunny? That is the problem presented by Bill Manbo's Kodachrome photos of life behind the barbed wire of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center.

The images he took are beautiful. The camp comes alive in the bright white light of midday and the salmon hues of sunset. The subjects are vibrant in their fancy portrait clothing and their scouting uniforms and kimonos. So seductive is the beauty of Manbo's work that we can almost forget we are looking at a site of suffering and injustice. These are photographs of life in a kind of prison camp. However broad their smiles, the people in these pictures were living interrupted lives, or shattered ones. The music of their bright dances and parades masked a hum of dissent and discontent.

Manbo's photographs present us with an opportunity and a challenge. On the one hand, they give us the chance to appreciate the historical episode they depict in new ways. In the eyes of many viewers, the color format makes the subjects of the photographs more accessible and brands them less markedly as "historical" than does black and white. Appreciating the liveliness and the resourcefulness of the imprisoned community is, for many, an easier task in color. On the other hand, in their beauty the photographs challenge us to remember what life for these prisoners was like outside the photographic frame. They remind us to imagine the bleakness, boredom, and suffering that was all around these unjustly treated individuals.

Some background on the photographer as well as the history and the family featured in the photographs will help put artwork in context.

Untitled, 1943
Group gathers at the high school to see off hundreds of inmates who failed the government's written loyalty test

Bill Manbo, the photographer, was born in Riverside, California, in 1908, to a Japanese immigrant couple originally from the Hiroshima prefecture in Japan. Manbo's parents were "Issei" – first-generation Japanese immigrants to the United States. They could not become U.S. citizens because the law at that time did not permit the naturalization of Asian immigrants. Manbo, however, was a Nisei—a second-generation U.S. citizen—because he was born in the United States. The family moved to Hollywood when Manbo was a child. He graduated from Hollywood High School in 1929.

Manbo enrolled in a trade school to study auto mechanics. There he met Mary Itaya, a dressmaking student. Born in 1912, Mary was the oldest of three U.S.-born children of Junzo and Riyo Itaya, an Issei couple who grew vegetables on farmland they leased in Norwalk, California. Manbo and Mary fell in love and married upon graduating from trade school in 1933. Manbo opened a garage on Vine Street in Hollywood, while Mary found jobs as a seamstress and dress designer for a theater company and a private tailoring business. Manbo dabbled in photography and worked on miniature race cars and model airplanes in his spare time, while Mary kept up with current events and the fashion world. In 1940, Mary gave birth to a son, whom they named Manbo but called Manboy. Manboy was Sansei, a member of the third generation of Japanese Americans, the generation born to the Nisei.

Untitled, 1943-1944
Young girls at Bon Odori, an outdoor dance during the summertime festival of Obon that commemorates the spirits of ancestors

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, upended the lives of the Manbo and Itaya families and the rest of the West Coast's ethnically Japanese population. Federal government officials snapped into action and arrested Issei they viewed as community leaders, taking them to Justice Department camps for enemy aliens. Junzo Itaya, who had been a member of the parent-teacher association of a Japanese language school in Norwalk and had audited the school's books from 1938 to 1941, was among those arrested.

These arrests rounded up only a relatively small portion of the West Coast's Issei population, and they touched none of the Nisei. For the more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry in California, Oregon, and Washington who remained at liberty, life in the weeks and months after Pearl Harbor slowly grew more precarious. Rumors (all false) of Japanese assault by air, land, and sea circulated among a hysterical population. Seeing an opportunity, the nativist groups and agricultural interests that had long sought to kick the Japanese off the West Coast for racial and economic reasons began ramping up their calls for mass removal of all people of Japanese ancestry. A fear-mongering press joined these frightened and cynical voices. And to a man, the congressional delegations of the West Coast states amplified them.

Acceding to pressure from the military—and over the objections of the Attorney General—President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. That order gave the military blanket authority to designate zones—soon to include the entire coastal strip—from which it could exclude "any or all persons." The government deployed its exclusion authority selectively: while the Justice Department targeted certain German and Italian aliens (but not U.S. citizens of German or Italian ancestry) for arrest and detention, the military ordered the wholesale exclusion of every single person of Japanese ancestry, alien and citizen alike.

From late March through June 1942, neighborhood after neighborhood was emptied of its ethnically Japanese residents. Families typically had little more than a week or two's notice that their time was up, and were permitted to take with them only what they could carry. These conditions forced them either to make panicked arrangements for their belongings and pets or to abandon them. Neighbors snapped up the real and personal property of the departing families at fire sale prices.

Departure day for the Manbo and Itaya families was April 28, 1942. They reported for so-called evacuation to a barbed-wire enclosure at the Santa Anita Racetrack that the government euphemistically called an assembly center. In reality, it was a heavily guarded prison camp. Life at Santa Anita was considerably harsher than what is pictured in Bill Manbo's photographs of Heart Mountain in this exhibit. More than 18,000 people were crammed onto the racetrack grounds. Some 8,500 of them, including the Manbo and Itaya families, resided in hastily whitewashed stables that stank of the horses that had recently occupied them. People showered communally in the spot where horses had been washed. Army sentries with weapons guarded the camp's perimeter on foot and from a number of searchlight-equipped guard towers. Daily life consisted of lots of standing in long lines and idleness.

By mid-August 1942, the government began shipping people out to the ten permanent relocation centers that had been set up in desolate parts of the Mountain West and in the swampland of southeastern Arkansas. Heart Mountain, the camp depicted in Manbo's photographs, was one of those ten camps. Built on federal land and operated by a new civilian agency called the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the camp sat about sixty miles to the east of Yellowstone National Park in desolate northwest Wyoming.

The Manbo and Itaya families arrived at Heart Mountain by train on September 4, 1942, about three weeks after the camp had opened. The population at that point was approaching 5,000; it would exceed 10,000 by the month of October. Upon arrival they came up a small hill from the train depot and encountered a sea of tarpaper barracks on a barren plain beneath the striking lone peak of Heart Mountain. The barracks' so-called apartments offered little more than army cots with thin mattresses and blankets, a coal-burning stove, and a bare light bulb dangling from the ceiling. Manbo and Mary Manbo occupied a sixteen- by twenty-foot unit with their two-year-old son; Junzo and Riyo Itaya and their two other children shared a twenty-by-twenty-foot room just two doors down in the same barrack building. They did not need to leave the building to converse with each other; the thin walls between the rooms did not stretch to the ceilings, and so noises traveled the full length of the barrack. All basic services—food, laundry, and latrines—were communal. The mess halls, which were hard to stock with enough food for the more than 10,000 mouths to be fed, did not manage to provide reliable service to every inmate until the middle of 1943. Barbed-wire fences and guard towers surrounded the camp. Through the fall and early winter of 1942, makeshift schools and the camp hospital had only the most basic of equipment, and that in short supply. A camp canteen sold certain staples, but most of the inmates acquired much of what they needed to clothe themselves and furnish their living quarters by mail-order if they could afford it. Not until the spring of 1943 were inmates allowed to send for the cameras they had been forced to surrender as contraband a year earlier. Manbo took advantage of that opportunity and decided to shoot with Kodachrome, a technology then in its infancy.

It was on the foundation of these experiences of dislocation, deprivation, isolation, turmoil, and stigma that Japanese Americans built the lives pictured in Bill Manbo's Heart Mountain photos. To the extent that the photos show even a semblance of normalcy, that semblance was hard-won.

This essay was adapted from *"Outside the Frame: Manbo Manbo's Color Photographs in Context," in Colors of Confinement: Rare Kodachrome Photographs of Japanese American Incarceration in World War II*, ed. Eric L. Muller (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).