

The 50 Stories/Objects project “understand(s) the sensitivities” related to my request to alter their post titled “Murder Memorial Uncovered at Topaz” and they have removed an Obata artwork illustration. I would like to explain why the Obata family made this request.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kimi Hill, on behalf of the Estate of Chiura Obata

August 14, 2021

In July 2021, the 50 Objects/Stories project used artwork by Chiura Obata in a blog post and related social media posts, without requesting or receiving permission from the Estate of Chiura Obata. They acquired permission from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, which holds the painting in their collections, and allows use of Obata’s “Hatsuki Wakasa Shot by M.P.” artwork for non-commercial educational purposes. However, we felt that the intention of the provocative writing was a clear attempt to galvanize disapproval of a non-profit museum by using the public forum of social media. The Obata family refuses to be complicit in a campaign to discredit the Topaz Museum, therefore we asked the Smithsonian to withdraw their permission. On 8/3/21 we notified the 50 Objects' director to cease use of the Obata "Wakasa" painting, but the image was not removed from their Facebook page until 8/6/21. Meanwhile the post illustrated with Obata's art spread through social media and remains on the original email.

The Obata Family understands the significance of this particular artwork to the Japanese American community and the story it tells, which is why we deliberately chose to donate this painting, NOT to an art museum, but to America’s most prestigious history museum. We believe Obata desired his art legacy be used to promote understanding and consideration for one another, and not be used to foment divisiveness. Our family has had a 25 year relationship with the Topaz Museum and we have been impressed with the evolution of the museum, as it tackles many challenges, under Jane Beckwith’s calm and steady leadership. We look forward to continuing to support the building of community through the museum, learning the many faceted stories of Topaz together, and sharing the history and legacy of Topaz with all Americans.

Obata's goal was to teach, through his art, his philosophy of gratitude to Great Nature. At the conclusion of his oral history, which was conducted when he was 80 years old, this was his message:

“So, when you see things, not only the big, rich and abundant Great Nature in America, but if also if you look at the land and see many different details, you will find it embraces a very gentle and refined nature. That’s why, if possible, I hope that the nisei and sansei and all the great-grandchildren of the Japanese will study this Great Nature of America and respect it. Immerse yourself in nature, listen to what nature tries to tell you in its quietness, so that you can learn and grow.” Chiura Obata, 1965.