

35

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

NEW YORK

11 WEST 53rd STREET
TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900
CABLES: MODERNART, NEW-YORK

SARAH NEWMAYER, PUBLICITY DIRECTOR

March 29, 1944

TO City Editors
Art Editors
Education Editors

Dear Sirs:

You are invited to come or send a representative to

Press Preview of
WAR PICTURES BY CHINESE CHILDREN

Tuesday, April 4
2 to 6 P.M.

in the Young People's Gallery
The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street

The unusual and delightful drawings and paintings to be shown in this exhibition were made by Chinese war orphans between the ages of seven and thirteen in the schools of Chengtu, an ancient city near Chungking. They were brought to this country by the American Friends Service Committee.

The exhibition will be on view to the public from Wednesday, April 5, through Sunday, May 7.

For further information please telephone me at Circle 5-8900.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer
Publicity Director

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION OF WAR PICTURES BY CHINESE CHILDREN OPENS

AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

A bulbous Hitler in bilious green wash holds his head in his hand, and the picture hardly needs the title which its Chinese war-orphan artist gives it: Hitler says "I have a bitter headache." A landscape with the sacred mountain of Japan already bearing at its peak the flag of China, while crowds of allied planes fill the skies, is hopefully and perhaps prophetically entitled by its thirteen-year-old artist Fujiyama Next Year. A stalwart Chinese soldier borne on the shoulders of many children, holds aloft a temple in which an outline map of China symbolizes the entire country--this picture, drawn by a fifth-grade child, exemplifies Free China's conviction that "students are pillars of the state and the great wall of the race." A vigorous, bespectacled Roosevelt offering a bag of supplies to a rather grim Stalin in cape and boots illustrates American aid to Russia; the child-artist has titled the picture with an ancient Chinese phrase: Giving Charcoals in Snowy Weather, which may be translated into Western idiom as "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

These and other pictures by Chinese war orphans compose an exhibition, War Pictures by Chinese Children, opening today (Wednesday, April 5) in the Young People's Gallery of the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York. Brought to this country by the American Friends Service Committee, the drawings and paintings were made by children between the ages of seven and thirteen in experimental schools sponsored by Mme. Chiang Kai-Shek in Chengtu.

East and West combine in these pictures: a legendary Chinese figure with a modern gun may be depicted by Western technique; more often the subject is the struggle between China and Japan--a big Chinese boot stepping on a tiny Japanese spider; starving refugees; a caricature showing the Emperor of Japan and the puppet Emperor of Manchuria chained on either side of the same pole which is a huge sword. One series of four watercolors tells in pictures the popular Chinese legend of Mu Lan, the Chinese Joan of Arc. A scroll that unfolds like an accordion is composed of ten individual pictures with the overall title The So-called (Japanese) Royal Army.

This scroll is apparently a group project conceived and executed by small children to ridicule the Japanese army. Picture 1 shows some rather discouraged looking Japanese soldiers and carries the text "The people are forced to fight." Picture 2: a militarist cracks a whip on the streets of a Japanese city and the text says: "They didn't want to leave their lovely homes and dear ones." In picture 3 a Japanese wife hands a good-luck token to a soldier, above the title "They are afraid of death." Picture 4: "Escaping while forced to enlist." Picture 5 honors General Chiang by showing that Japanese soldiers meet "Long resistance to victory." Picture 6 is a scene of violent explosion and blood: "Our victory in battle." Picture 7 is again a violent scene with airplanes and explosions, in the midst of which amply armed and equipped Chinese soldiers lunge forward into battle. Picture 8 is a battlefield of dead Japanese with the only survivor in tears: "Left helpless"; Picture 9 is a sombre battleship: "Bones of the dead coming back to Japan." Picture 10 shows a Japanese woman standing at the doorway of her home awaiting her son's ashes and entitled "The expecting mother in Japan."

Miss Mai-Mai Sze, daughter of the former Ambassador to the United States and a graduate of Wellesley, has written an article for the Museum's Bulletin which will be published simultaneously with the exhibition. Miss Sze, who played the leading role in Lady Precious Stream on Broadway several years ago, is herself an artist.

She writes in part as follows:

"These drawings and paintings by Chinese children were done in some of the experimental schools in Chengtu, an old city west of Chungking famous for its unusually wide streets; center of a cluster of temples and ancient tombs, and capital of the province of Szechwan. It is today the refuge of several colleges and the home of many of the new educational methods in Free China.

"Some of the children have chosen traditional Chinese subjects to illustrate their points, using the old formulas for brushwork. A few wild geese at the edge of a pond, drawn with dry nervous strokes, manage to convey the tenseness of 'Alert for Emergency' with surprising concentration in the moment.

"Others have not hesitated to caricature savagely in western style Hitler, Japanese soldiers and, in fact, the whole adult world. The head of Hitler leans wearily on a hand. The firm outline is filled in with a flat wash of odious green and bears the title, 'Hitler Says--I have a bitter headache.' Inadvertently, this drawing seems to have fulfilled the first requirement of Chinese portraiture as expressed in the characters for 'portrait painting' - 'Hsien Chen' - meaning literally 'To write truth.' It also shows the sharp impression made by posters which, in turn, have been influenced by Russian work.

"Chinese cartoonists also have left their imprint on some of these pictures. The drawing of the tortoise nailed

down at its neck and feet, labelled at each point with the names of the five battlefronts in Asia, and with the Japanese flag waving on the end of a helpless tail - this is typical of the political satirists whose drawings are widely admired in China. Even the title, 'Can you Move?' fits the pattern.

"The most striking differences between these drawings by Chinese children and those by children in other parts of the world, are apparent in brushwork, in color, and in the use of space. Whether by some kind of instinct, or under the influence of pictures and paintings which they have seen at home or on the billboard, these Chinese children utilize the variations between the dry brush and the brush saturated with ink, between the kind of line which models and the one specifically for outlines. All colors are toned down to a soft key, their purpose being more to suggest than to display.

"The drawings seem unintentionally to carry out with amazing ease what painters in China have been taught for centuries, - the principle of 'rhythmic vitality,' - which states that the painter should be attuned to the rhythm of the universe and be able to express the movement of life. These children seem to be turning around to say to the old masters: 'See? We have managed to do so.'"

War Pictures by Chinese Children will be on view through

May 7. The exhibition will then be sent on a tour of the country by the Museum's Department of Circulating Exhibitions.