Oak Test
Operation Hardtack
Sergio Frutos
2017

Ink and acrylic on paper
70 x 100 cm

Framed 90 x 120 x 3 cm

Unique
Signed

SF-P 17-1



About this artwork:

The Oak test is conducted, at Enewetak Atoll, under the Operation Hardtack I series, on June 28, 1958. This was the 6th largest U.S. nuclear test, the initial height of the cloud was estimated to be 23.8 km, and produced an 8.9 megatons of TNT yield range.[1] Hardtack I included 35 total tests, which produced public health and enviromental concerns.[2]

In 1977, the United States military began decontamination of Enewetak and other islands. During the three-year, US$100 million cleanup process, the military mixed more than 80,000 cubic meters of contaminated soil and debris[3] from the islands with Portland cement and buried it in an atomic blast crater on the northern end of the atoll's Runit Island. The military members who participated in that cleanup mission are suffering from many health issues, but the U.S. Government refused to provide health coverage until 2022 with the passage of the Honoring our PACT Act.[4]

A report by the US Congressional Research Service projects that the majority of the atoll will be fit for human habitation by 2026–2027, after nuclear decay, de-contamination and environmental remediation efforts create sufficient dose reductions. However, in November 2017, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that rising sea levels caused by climate change are seeping inside the dome, causing radioactive material to leak out.[5]

Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.
J. Robert Oppenheimer referencing a verse from the Bhagavad Gita after witnessing Trinity, the first nuclear test.

1. *Operation Hardtack I Fact Sheet*. Defense Threat Reduction Agency. Fort Belvoir: 2015. ➞
2. *Operation Hardtack I*. Reports DNA6038F, ADA136819, United States of America Department of Defense. Washington: 1958. ➞
3. Stephen Schwartz. *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*. Bloomsbury Publishing. Washington: 2011 ➞
4. Carlotta Mohamed. “President Biden signs Queens lawmaker's bill into law to provide health care benefits for veterans exposed to radiation.” QNS. August 12, 2022. ➞
5. Mark Willacy. “A poison in our island”. ABC. Ultimo, Australia: November 27, 2017. ➞

About the project: Atom

[…]
“And so?” you ask your guide, *the nice one*.
“So, we learned to make stars,” he answers.
“I thought you told me that this was already like a sun.”
“Oh, yes, but it's not a real sun. Real suns don't work like that. They're much more powerful. So we made real stars.”
“I can't believe it.”
“And what do you think that white powder you've got there and this thermos I've got here are for?”
“The stuff that stars are made of?”
“Yes. And nightmares.”

> Antonio Cantó, “Así funciona un arma termonuclear. (How a thermonuclear weapon works)” *La pizarra de Yuri: historias de ciencia al calor del fuego (Yuri's blackboard: science stories by the fire)*. Guadalajara ; Madrid: Silente, 2011. →

The project Atom is based on archival photographs from nuclear tests and revolves around how the ‘atomic age’ is a turning point[1] and to which extent human stupidity can destroy the world we live in. Is possible the survival of humanity and living beings with whom we share the planet as we know it under the current system?.

The phrase “atomic age” has been around since 1945 in reference to the world’s reframing by the newfound human control over nuclear forces. Nuclear weapons prompted both apocalyptic visions of humanity’s annihilation through mutually assured destruction and promises of abundance, progress, and modernity through the utilization of atomic energy.

On the one side, the atrocities of mass destruction in Japanese cities, on Pacific Atolls, and other “testing sites” across the globe forever stamped the self-image of the human as an engineer of death. On the other side, harnessing nuclear power and the emerging nuclear sector were hailed as instruments of national security, a hotbed of technological innovation, a wellspring for electric household energy, and a radically modern means of investigating the natural world and improving human bodies and diets. But soon the smiling side of this Janus face faded, and threat of radioactivity became the scare phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth-century. Radioactive contamination has changed the natural and the social environment to an extent that brings a whole new register into focus: the possibility that life on this planet could end as we know it.[2]

Our current development, predating the planet, following the dictates of capitalism will certainly drive us to mass extinction.[3]

Since the nuclear test race in 40s and 50s, the world has advanced in nuclear technology. Today, a nuclear bomb could target a large-scale attack, at a longer range, and with much greater destructive force. People are increasingly concerned about the potential destructive humanitarian outcomes.[4] So long as nuclear weapons exist, it is inevitable that someday they will be used, whether by design, accident, or miscalculation. The danger of use of nuclear weapons is greater than ever before due to proliferation of nuclear weapons, terrorism, and political instabilities.[5]

1. Paul Crutzen and Christian Schwägerl, “Living in the Anthropocene: Toward a New Global Ethos.” *Yale E360*, January 24, 2011. →
2. A. Cundy, et al., “Radioactive Fallout as a Marker for the Anthropocene.” In: C. Rosol and G. Rispoli (eds) *Anthropogenic Markers: Stratigraphy and Context, Anthropocene Curriculum*. Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2022. →
3. Troy Vettese, “A Marxist Theory of Extinction.” *Salvage*, January 1, 2019. →
4. Shan Xu and Alicia Dodt, “Nuclear Bomb and Public Health.” *Journal of Public Health Policy* 44, no. 3 (2023): 348–59. →
5. Kathleen Kingsbury et al. “At the brink: Confronting the risk of nuclear war.” Opinion. *The New York Times*, October 10, 2024. →

Asnos estúpidos

Isaac Asimov

Naron, de la longeva raza rigeliana, era el cuarto de su estirpe que llevaba los anales galácticos. Tenía en su poder el gran libro que contenía la lista de las numerosas razas de todas las galaxias que habían adquirido el don de la inteligencia, y el libro, mucho menor, en el que figuraban las que habían llegado a la madurez y poseían méritos para formar parte de la Federación Galáctica. En el primer libro habían tachado algunos nombres anotados con anterioridad: los de las razas que, por el motivo que fuere, habían fracasado. La mala fortuna, las deficiencias bioquímicas o biofísicas, la falta de adaptación social se cobraban su tributo. Sin embargo, en el libro pequeño nunca se había tenido que tachar ninguno de los nombres anotados.
En aquel momento, Naron, enormemente corpulento e increíblemente anciano, levantó la vista al notar que se acercaba un mensajero.

—Naron —saludó el mensajero—. ¡Gran Señor!
—Bueno, bueno, ¿qué hay? Menos ceremonias.
—Otro grupo de organismos ha llegado a la madurez.
—Estupendo, estupendo. Hoy en día ascienden muy aprisa.
Apenas pasa año sin que llegue un grupo nuevo. ¿Quiénes son?
El mensajero dio el número clave de la galaxia y las
coordenadas del mundo en cuestión.
—Ah, sí —dijo Naron— lo conozco.

Y con buena letra cursiva anotó el dato en el primer libro, trasladando luego el nombre del planeta al segundo.
Utilizaba, como de costumbre, el nombre bajo el cual era conocido el planeta por la fracción más numerosa de sus propios habitantes.
Escribió, pues: La Tierra.
—Estas criaturas nuevas —dijo luego— han establecido un récord. Ningún otro grupo ha pasado tan rápidamente de la inteligencia a la madurez. No será una equivocación, espero.
—De ningún modo, señor —respondió el mensajero.
—Han desarrollado la energía termonuclear, ¿no es cierto?
—Sí, señor.
—Bien, ese es el requisito —Naron soltó una risita—. Sus naves sondearán pronto el espacio y se pondrán en contacto con la Federación.
—En realidad, señor —dijo el mensajero con renuencia—, los observadores nos comunican que todavía no han penetrado en el espacio.

Naron se quedó atónito.
—¿Ni poco ni mucho? ¿No tienen siquiera una estación espacial?
—Todavía no, señor.
—Pero si poseen la energía termonuclear, ¿dónde realizan las pruebas y las explosiones?
—En su propio planeta, señor.

Naron se irguió en sus seis metros de estatura y tronó:
—¿En su propio planeta?
—Si, señor.
Con gesto pausado, Naron sacó la pluma y tachó con una raya la última anotación en el libro pequeño.
Era un hecho sin precedentes; pero Naron era muy sabio y capaz de ver lo inevitable, como nadie, en la galaxia.

—¡Asnos estúpidos! —murmuró.

Publicado en: *Future Science Fiction*, Febrero 1958, p. 114
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