

On the morning of Sunday, August 6th, Eiko and I (Nora) arrived to the New York Buddhist Church to participate in their special memorial service for the victims of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 72 years later.

Eiko had been invited by Cheryl Ikemiya to perform and to speak about her own work related to nuclear disaster. I, looking for a way to remember and recognize this terrible tragedy, asked if I could join by continuing my drawing, Centipede, which also serves as an exercise in imagining the real impacts of massive violence.

I had never been to a Buddhist service, but there was a calm and devotion in the chanting and words spoken that felt very right for the day. Eiko told me afterwards that she was invited as a "guest" to add something to the memorial, not to make a show of her own. She thought she could offer her body as a conduit for viewers and herself to channel the dead: both those killed 72 years ago and the survivors who have recently died.

On this solemn day, Eiko began moving ever slowly and quietly. No music. People watched intensely and hardly moved. When she carefully drank water from a bowl, we remembered how people died wanting a sip of water. Eiko emptied her mouthful of flower petals into a woman's hand; she touched the statue of the saint that had been brought from Hiroshima. Her body grieved and we grieved; she didn't run off down the street as she often does in outdoor spaces; she walked slowly leading us into the church where the service continued with a gong, a Japanese flute, and Buddhist chants.

Eiko was also invited to give a speech ([full transcript](#)). She referenced her friend, Kyoko Hayashi, a Nagasaki atomic bomb survivor and writer:

Early in our friendship, overwhelmed by her stories, I said what many people might say to Atomic Bomb victims, "I can't even imagine." She looked at me eye to eye, and said, "Are you that stupid? Do you need to experience the A-bomb and radiation sickness to understand what being a hibakusha means?" Since then I have prohibited myself and my students from uttering this phrase, "I can't even imagine." Instead, I ask, how can we imagine other people's experience? How can we make the distance between here and there malleable?

This mantra of Eiko's hit me hard when I was her student. I felt permission to imagine, but also an imperative to imagine as a way to connect to events far away and prevent them in the future. Her challenge pushed me to lay down with a never-ending drawing to give attention and care to lives lost, to identify with them in my body. I continue to revisit this drawing in different spaces with different people to keep imagining and making that distance malleable. If any of you have suggestions about such occasions, please let me know.

Thank you to the New York Buddhist Church, to Cheryl, and to everyone who participated for allowing us outsiders to be a part of this day of remembering.

-Nora Thompson

Koma is performing his solo, *The Ghost Festival*, at Jacob's Pillow this week. He was happy to have lunch with Liz Thompson (director of Jacob's Pillow 1980-90) and Pam Tatge (current director of Jacob's Pillow).

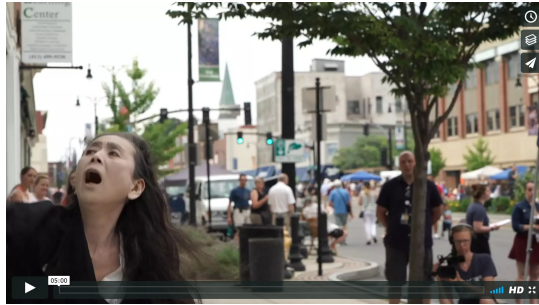
[More details on Koma's performances at the](#)



[Pillow.](#)

Here is a new video from Eiko's performance at a street fair in Pittsfield, MA.

[A Body at a Streetfair.](#)



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