

## **BOMBS** (1983)

Ben Sakoguchi

Ben Sakoguchi produced the suite of paintings, *Bombs*, in 1983 while taking a course in airbrush painting at Cal State LA with Daniel Douke. Made in the span of four months, the series consists of twenty-four paintings, mostly single-panel diptychs, which offer a graphic history of the development of nuclear weapons. Painted from government brochures, magazines and film stills, the work juxtaposes imagery of weapons testing, nuclear warfare and its ravages with the aesthetics of Pop art and photorealism, interrogating the relationship between advertising, mass media, and politics—a massive comic strip of folly and atrocity.

*Bombs* was painted at the height of the antinuclear movement, underway since the early sixties and galvanized by the accelerating cold war arms race in the late seventies and early eighties. By some tallies its high-water mark—when one million people descended on Central Park on June 12, 1982, to call for a halt to the arms race—is still the largest political demonstration in a single location in American history. The movement was, in a sense, successful, with swelling popular support for nuclear disarmament forcing Reagan into arms control negotiations with the Soviets, culminating in the Reykjavik Summit, in October 1986, where he and Gorbachev came close to abolishing nukes. But the post-cold war period was characterized first by a lack of political will where nuclear weapons were concerned, and then by the Bush Doctrine, the specter of proliferation as a cover for American imperialism—Bush and Obama’s mendaciously conceived war on Iraq, the longest in American history.

Today, the threat of nuclear disaster is cast anew, with media playing an even more critical role in the acceleration of global antagonisms. *Bombs* takes on a tragic new relevance, as a dotard with an itchy trigger finger and a penchant for political theater seems eager to add a new panel to the history of brutality depicted by Sakoguchi.

Ben Sakoguchi (b. 1938, San Bernardino) lives and works in Pasadena. During World War II, Sakoguchi and his family were interned at a camp in Poston, Arizona. After the war, the Sakoguchis returned to Southern California and reopened their modest grocery store. He received his BFA and MFA from UCLA and taught at the Art Department at Pasadena City College until his retirement in 1997.

