

expose and challenge historic and ongoing ableism, eugenics, institutionalization, and more.

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*Glenn Kaino: Aki's Market*. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, CA. Glenn Akira Kaino, Artist; Joseph Fellows, Lead Digital Designer; James Taylor, VR Engineering; Gideon Webster, Lead Fabricator; and the *Aki's Market* project team. June 30, 2023–January 28, 2024. <https://www.janm.org/exhibits/glenn-kaino>.

Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, California, is currently experiencing some gradual shifts in its landscapes, including the closure and disappearance of some Japanese American legacy businesses, as a result of the June 2023 opening of the Little Tokyo/Arts District regional connector station of the LA Metro. Amidst these changes, a virtual, imaginatively reconstructed 1957 corner store welcomes visitors at the Japanese American National Museum. This mesmerizing exhibition by artist Glenn Akira Kaino invites attendees to contemplate transgenerational memories of dislocation and engage in dialogues about the past and the present, the personal and the collective, and the static and the dynamic.

Once visitors step into the exhibition room, they encounter an empty space reserved for its virtual reality experience, “The Store,” along with some art pieces by Kaino. The exhibition then extends to another space for more collaborative artworks and to a theater showing a documentary about Kaino and the making of the exhibition. There are no designated sections or designated chronologies to follow, and visitors are encouraged to start their journey from any point. During the entire experience, visitors hear echoes of the song *Sayonara*, with a warm and embracing whisper of “*sayonara, mata kinasai* (Goodbye, come back again)” and “*sayonara, mata kuruyo* (Goodbye, I will be back),” inspired by the conversation Kaino used to have with his great-grandmother Toshime Hosozawa. In his zine *AKI2 K*, which is distributed in the exhibition, the artist explains these phrases as “an accent that is an artifact of the diaspora” which “represents a unique generational line.” Saying goodbye and manifesting the intention to come back signify the main theme of this exhibition: the transgenerational memories of dislocation particularly after the Japanese American incarceration experience.

*Aki's Market* was inspired by the store Kaino's grandfather Akira Shiraishi (the artist's namesake) had in East Los Angeles, serving both Japanese and Spanish-speaking communities. Initially, Shiraishi's dream was to attend Occidental College and become a football player, which was hampered by the incarceration experience. Kaino's art pieces, *Taken Inventory (Keep Stock)* and *Taken Inventory (Endless Field)*, tellingly demonstrate the forceful detachment of a young man's aspirations. According to Kaino, the two mirrored shelving units contain “an



Inside the main exhibit room where the virtual reality experience, “The Store,” is presented. (Photo by author)

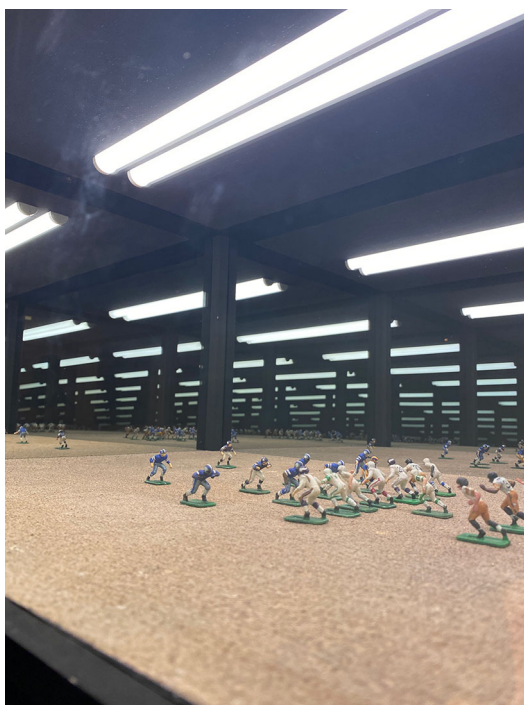
infinity illusion element” with unidentifiable SPAM cans (*Keep Stock*) and an endless football field (*Endless Field*), both representing things that are not meant for permanence. He highlights the lineage of the men named Akira in *My Grandfather Aki*, revisiting both his familial legacy and cultural heritage. A triptych of Akira Shiraishi, filmmaker Akira Kurosawa, and artist Akira Yoshizawa illustrates the inspirational currents that led to creation of the work presented in *Aki’s Market*. “In a way, I am a conceptual descendent of all of these Akiras,” the artist writes in his zine. “The Store,” one of the main features of the exhibition, not only reconstructs the store virtually but also extends a warm invitation to foray into transgenerational memories.

Adjusting the virtual reality enhancing goggles, one wonders if what they are seeing from its blurry lenses is truly real. Guided by a squeaky door, I entered “The Store.” I was greeted by a warm beam of sunlight from the windows. The dimly lit space was filled with groceries and sundries. Catering to its East Los Angeles clientele, “The Store” boasted a great variety of Mexican foodstuffs, such as canned menudo and pan dulce, as well as American staples such as Pillsbury pastries and Jif peanut butter. Wandering between the aisles, I found fresh fish in the deli case, which might have come from a catch pulled in by Shiraishi, an avid angler. Scattered throughout the space are traces of Shiraishi’s life. Pinned to the wall was a clipping of an article reporting Shiraishi’s



Artist Glen Kaino's *Taken Inventory (Keep Stock)*, which represents removal of identity and repetitive architecture, reflecting Japanese American incarceration experiences. (Photo by author)

scholarship award for Occidental College, which attendees learn never materialized. Shiraishi's wife, Sachiye Shiraishi, gently smiles in an adjacent photo. Standing in front of these vestiges, which illuminate the dreams and lives thwarted by forced relocation and incarceration, the message of the exhibition's music resonates. As Kaino writes in his zine, "*sayonara mata kuruyo*" may not sound fitting in conventional Japanese conversation, especially as a response to a close family member, because it implies you will not see them for a long time. Saying *sayonara* is a strong, and perhaps disquieting and definitive act of saying goodbye. It evokes an undertone of parting and a transience of belonging. Kaino's accompanying pieces, such as *Spontaneous Combustion*, "*sayonara mata kinasai*" and "*sayonara mata kuruyo*," offer greater insight into the multigenerational memories of endurance in Japanese American experiences. *Spontaneous Combustion*, for example, represents fragility through the tarred American flag, but it also demonstrates preservation of hope and ideals despite destruction. The shadows on the wall, Kaino explains, represent "the ideals that lie within us and our values [that] might still be preserved," even amidst unstableness and destruction. "The Store" allows the visitors to fully immerse themselves in a mesmerizingly reconstructed and reimagined space of collective and personal memories and therefore surpasses a mere replication or



*Taken Inventory (Endless Field)*, by Glenn Kaino, highlights the emotional toll of diverted dreams as a result of Japanese American incarceration. (Photo by author)

description of an architecture of the past. After exiting “The Store” and taking the goggles off, I looked back to see the area I was in. It was an astonishingly blank space that would make any visitor wonder about the simultaneous juxtaposition of nonexistence and existence, or belonging and removal. “The Store” is an engaging and effective way for museum attendees to visit and engage with the past utilizing virtual reality.

While *Aki’s Market* aptly and successfully reconstructs the corner store to immerse its visitors in the themes of intergenerational memories and heritage, a few additional details on the community may have provided a more comprehensive understanding. Shiraishi’s corner store in East Los Angeles served both Spanish-speaking and Japanese American populations, and more focus on geographic and demographic details would have showcased the multiracial and multiethnic make up of this community more clearly. As much as the exhibit utilizes an innovative and creative approach to present a new lens on Japanese American history, it has the potential to shed light on a less explored arena that centers on communities bridging Japanese American history and Latinx history in Los Angeles.

Nevertheless, without further revision, *Aki’s Market* succeeds in conveying personal memories to foster dialogues on collective memory, inviting us to enter an alternate realm of memories through the use of virtual reality. It effectively



Author in “The Store.” (Photo by author)



*Spontaneous Combustion*, by Glenn Kaino. Created by adding a tarring mixture to an all-white American flag. Over time, the tarring solution heats and combusts, leaving scars and destruction. (Photo by author)

combines the immersive experiences including the music and the zine with the more conventional exhibit pieces, such as Kaino's artwork. This combination provides visitors with a unique experience of visiting the past. This exhibit traces the memory of a family while making a crucial intervention in the narratives of Japanese American experiences.

Akane Takahashi, University of Southern California

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*Reflections on Grief & Child Loss: Understanding History (and Ourselves) Through Empathy.* President Lincoln's Cottage. Callie Hawkins, Director of Programming and Executive Director. November 12, 2020–Ongoing. <https://www.lincolncottage.org/>

*Reflections on Grief & Child Loss: Understanding History (and Ourselves) Through Empathy*, an exhibition at President's Lincoln Cottage, does an outstanding job expanding understanding about Abraham Lincoln, exhibit design, and the process of grieving—both individually and collectively.

One of the lesser-visited historic sites in the nation's capital, President Lincoln's Cottage is an independent nonprofit located in northwest Washington, DC and operated through a cooperative agreement with the Armed Forces Retirement Home and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Surrounded by the grounds of the Soldiers' Home, which has housed retired veterans since the 1850s, the Cottage served as a retreat for Abraham Lincoln for almost a quarter of his presidency. The Lincoln family first moved to the Cottage in the summer of 1862 in order to grieve the recent death of their son Willie more privately. This exhibit, located in the Visitor Education Center, seeks to connect this personal story of the Lincolns to the experiences of modern bereaved parents, reflecting on "the ways that the shared experience of grief can link parent to parent," as explained by the introductory panel. The exhibition's curator, Callie Hawkins, Director of Programming and Executive Director of the site, is herself a bereaved parent and adds that the exhibit is designed to help facilitate broader societal efforts to confront our collective discomfort with grief.

Approaching the exhibit, visitors first encounter a large wall introducing the exhibit's theme within the context of the Lincolns. Photos of the six Lincolns are arranged near a timeline, which visually highlights the tragedy of Mary outliving her husband and three of her four sons. A glass door in the center of this wall offers a partial glimpse of a stylized weeping willow, the central interactive element of the exhibit. Passing through this door, visitors can explore different themes arranged around the perimeter of the circular single-room gallery. Although the walls are gently angled to allow each theme to be experienced individually in any order, there is a logical progression from left to right. The first wall introduces, with photos and brief biographical statements, nine modern