

ARTIST'S PORTFOLIO

PETER DAVIDSON

Post 3/11, despite the destruction, Ishinomaki is still very beautiful

In July this year I was invited by a Doctor (with whom I have been collaborating recently as I had donated artworks to his hospital) to visit a remote fishing village, Ishinomaki, that had been mostly destroyed by the earthquake/tsunami on the eleventh of March. My purpose there was to capture some of the devastation with a view towards a more positive future.

After catching the Shinkansen (the bullet train) from western Japan through Tokyo, then up through Fukushima and Sendai, we were then driven towards Ishinomaki by car for the rest of the journey, armed only with television memories of what to expect.

Sendai had some damage but, as one closed in on Ishinomaki, the visible destruction would obviously have been extremely punishing if you were there at the time. Even now, four months later, nothing prepares you for the shock at the scale of tsunami devastation which is truly overwhelming.

Seeing the omnipresent ruins around Ishinomaki reminds one of the English painter John Martin and his apocalyptic phantasmical paintings, but not even he could have imagined this tragedy as it is very seldom catastrophes like this happen: it goes outside the realm of most human experience.

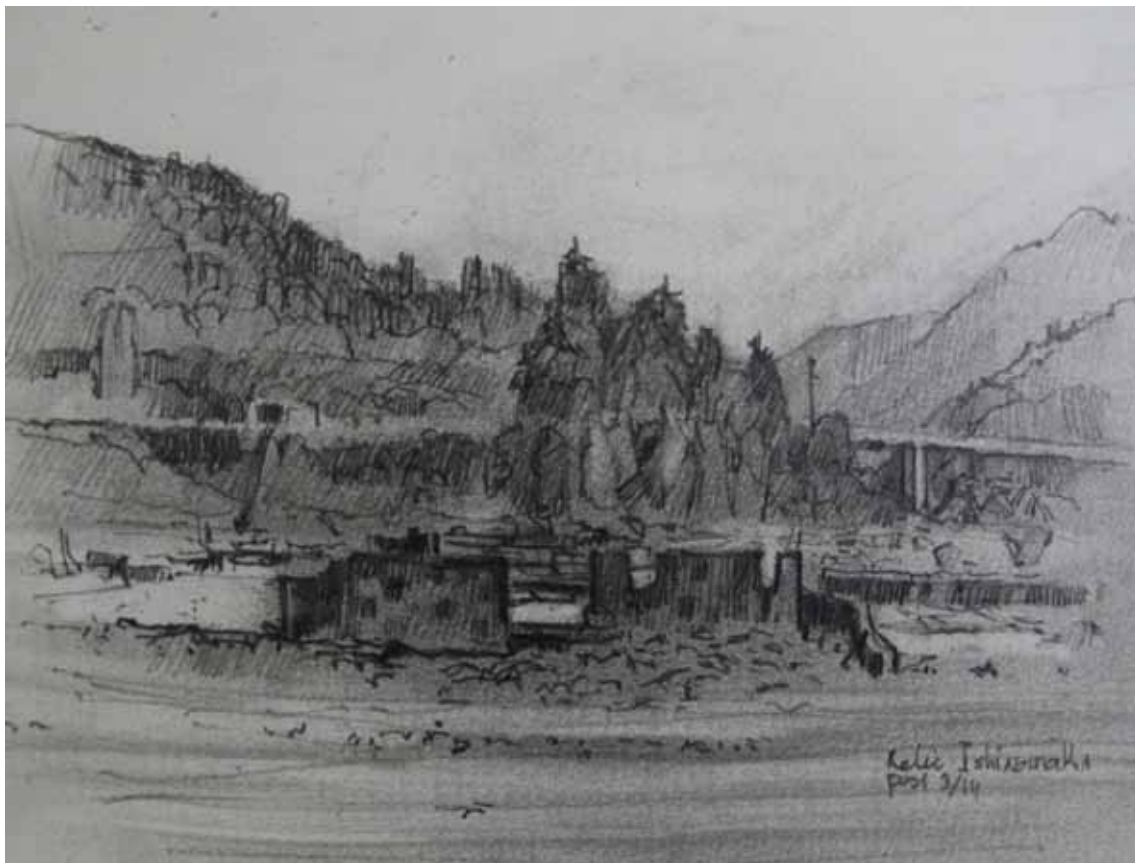
After arriving the doctors got to work on the remaining villagers who had come down from their temporary housing, now built further up the hill from the elevated traditional Japanese hotel that currently also serves as the doctor's consultancy room.

Walking down to the waterfront of the town through a debris of broken bowls, plates, sake cups, wires, buckled and twisted roads tossed around



The tsunami went straight over the top of these houses.

like rugs, smashed and ruined houses with almost no people around was a weird sensation, although there was the odd soul in the distance, a survivor perhaps. The forty metre high tsunami had left the harbor largely empty of fishing vessels, and whilst one walked silently and alone on a bright sunny day, one could not help but feel sorrow for those who were no longer with us as a result of the events of 3/11.



Relic Ishinomaki from the Black Graphics of Ishinomaki series

After the doctors had finished their consultations a welcome dinner was held in the hotel and my painting of cherry blossoms reflected in a pond was donated to the makeshift medical centre. All those present signed it on the back; it was moving experience as it seemed to signify positive change.

After three days of being in Ishinomaki the medical team returned to their respective cities in western Japan; for me it was back to the studio to paint two more paintings to be donated to the community for the follow up visit. This was hard because the memories were bleak. There are some sights in life that at times are hard to forget or erase, like the child's bike amongst the tsunami damage which now remains silent, unmoved amongst the rubble; one can only hope its owner survived.



The Child's Bike from the series of the *Black Graphics of Ishinomaki*

Given such melancholy reflections, the decision was made to paint something in line with what had been an experiment in the studio for some time. In essence this is the painting of light through time, as explicated by the Australian/British art historian David Bromfield who has written of my praxis:

He believes that it is possible to produce a single integrated image of a scene or place, as it is experienced through time. In doing so, he combines Monet's interest in the passing moment with Cezanne's obsession with the enduring substance of things. Each artist chose one half of the phenomenon, the experience of time and memory; Cezanne attempted to reach the underlying structure of a particular experience by ignoring the moment, Monet sought his sense of being in the moment alone.¹

Whilst in the studio remembrances flood in of time spent sitting at the window of Japanese hotel at Ishinomaki and looking out across the bay towards a mountain, with the evening summer sea mist creeping in silently, in light silvery, greyish blue ghostly tints against a greenish mountain in the afternoon's fading light which slowly obscured the peak, thus presenting a most sublime image to finish of a day of fresh sensations, tinged with sorrow and amazement at how beautiful this terrain remains with its stunning hues and tones.

The dominant mountain across the bay became the motif to paint through time, along with the submerged earthquake/tsunami damaged fishing wharf in front of it, with its myriad of shifting ochres, viridian emerald-greens and ultra-marine hues being the only reminder of what had happened on 3/11. As a result, on the planned return trip to Ishinomaki with the emergency medical team, this painting will be donated to the community temporary housing centre where it will then belong to the commune.



Ishinomaki Mountain Mist

Peter Davidson's works can be viewed at <https://sites.google.com/site/peterdavidsonpainter/home>

Notes

1. Davidson, P.W., *Towards an Idiosyncratic Calligraphic Vision in Painting*, 2009, p511.