

= Southern Cross (wordless novel) =

Southern Cross is the sole wordless novel by Canadian artist Laurence Hyde (1914 ? 1987) . Its 118 wood @-@ engraved images narrate the impact of atomic testing on Polynesian islanders . Hyde made the book to express his anger at the US military 's nuclear tests in the Bikini Atoll .

The wordless novel genre had flourished primarily during the 1920s and 1930s , but by the 1940s even the most prolific practitioners had abandoned it . Hyde was familiar with some such works by Lynd Ward , Otto Nückel , and the form 's pioneer Frans Masereel . The high @-@ contrast artwork of Southern Cross features dynamic curving lines uncommon in wood engraving and combines abstract imagery with realistic detail . It has gained appreciation in comics circles as a precursor to the Canadian graphic novel , though it had no direct influence .

= = Synopsis = =

The story tells of the American military evacuating villagers from a Polynesian island before testing nuclear weapons . A drunken soldier attempts to rape a fisherman 's wife during the evacuation , and the fisherman kills him . To avoid capture , the couple run to the forests with their child and hide . The child witnesses the death of its parents and destruction of its environment resulting from the ensuing atomic tests .

= = Background = =

Born in Kingston upon Thames in England in 1914 , Laurence Hyde moved with his family to Canada in 1926 . They settled in Toronto in 1928 , where Hyde studied art at Central Technical School . His strongest artistic influences included the painter Paul Nash and the printmakers Eric Gill , Rockwell Kent , and Lynd Ward ; he corresponded with Kent and Ward .

From the 1930s Hyde did commercial pen @-@ and @-@ ink and scratchboard illustrations , ran a business providing advertising illustrations , and made wood engravings and linocuts for books . He attempted but gave up on two series of prints , titled Discovery and Macbeth . Hyde worked in Ottawa for the National Film Board of Canada from 1942 until his 1972 retirement .

The wordless novel had enjoyed popularity in the 1920s and 1930s , but had become rare by the 1940s . Such books tended to be melodramatic works about social injustice . Hyde was familiar with some of Ward 's books and the German Otto Nückel 's Destiny (1926) . The only work he knew of the Flemish artist Frans Masereel , the form 's first and most prolific practitioner , was Passionate Journey (1919) , which he had read in a 1949 American edition . Like his forebears in the genre , Hyde had a left @-@ wing agenda that he expressed in his art . When Southern Cross appeared , the genre had been out of the public eye for so long that Hyde included a historical essay with the book to orient the reader . Hyde had asked Ward to proofread this history , but the book was published without Ward 's corrections ? errors remained , such as Masereel 's forename given as " Hans " , and a listing of only four of Ward 's six wordless novels .

= = Creation and publication = =

" Words are capable of expressing very complicated and very subtle notions ... But for directness and universal interpretation , pictures , under certain conditions , are unrivalled . It really depends on what you want to say . "

Hyde made Southern Cross to express his anger at American nuclear tests in the Bikini Atoll in 1946 following the atomic bombings in Japan . He worked on it from 1948 to 1951 . Each image is 4 by 3 inches (10 @.@ 2 cm x 7 @.@ 6 cm) , centred at the top third of the page and with broad margins . The one exception is of the bomb detonating , a 7 in x 6 in (18 cm x 15 cm) full @-@ page image that bleeds off the page . Hyde carved dynamic curving lines uncommon in wood engraving . Blacks overwhelms the figures they surround , and abstract images contrast with realistic detail in the flora and fauna .

Published in a limited edition by Ward Ritchie Press in 1951 , it was printed on Japanese paper with the images on the recto and the verso left blank . Rockwell Kent provided the introduction . Hyde dedicated the book to the Red Cross Societies and the Society of Friends . Hyde was not present at the book 's pressing and thus was not able to correct some blocks which had not been carved deeply enough to produce satisfactory prints .

The book was republished twice in 2007 : Drawn and Quarterly released a deluxe facsimile edition with additional essays by Hyde and an introduction by wordless novel historian David Beronä , and George Walker included Southern Cross in his anthology of wordless novels Graphic Witness .

= = Reception and legacy = =

" Man ... can tie himself up in words to the point of persuading himself that dropping atom bombs on people he 's never seen is a kind of shrewd move in an exciting chess game . He needs something simpler , like pictures , to remind him of what dropping bombs on innocent people is really like . "

In a talk with the CBC in 1952 , literary critic Northrop Frye praised Hyde 's visual skills , but said , " There 's no point in getting the book for your library unless you like the engravings themselves as separate works of art . " He found the book a quick read in contrast to the time it took to make it , and called its " continuity " a weak point . He considered the visualization of the bomb 's destruction of living things the strongest justification for the work .

Comics critic Sean Rogers praised the work , particularly the pacing and action sequences , but felt it had less impact than such earlier works as Masereel 's *Passionate Journey* (1919) or Ward 's *Vertigo* (1937) . Rogers found the anti @-@ nuclear message of the book less effective than that of later works in comics such as Keiji Nakazawa 's *Barefoot Gen* or Gary Panter 's *Jimbo* . Comics scholar Roger Sabin found the book unconvincing , " a well @-@ meaning but facile piece of agit @-@ prop " . Reviewer Erik Hinton praised the artwork while denigrating the story as " the progeny of historical lip @-@ service and the hot @-@ button anxiety of the destructivity of modern warfare " , and considered Ward and others of Hyde 's predecessors more proficient at the medium .

Southern Cross has gained appreciation in comics circles as a precursor to the graphic novel in Canada , though it had no direct influence on Canadian comics ? it was marketed to book connoisseurs , a world far removed from that of consumers of cheap entertainment that comics served in the 1950s . Copies of *Southern Cross* joined the collections of the National Gallery of Canada in 1952 and the Burnaby Art Gallery in 1987 . The book received an Honorable Mention for Best Book at the 2008 Doug Wright Awards for Canadian Cartooning , accepted by Hyde 's son Anthony .