Correction

SCIENCE AND CULTURE
PNAS notes that on page 8317, middle column, lines 1–5, “O’Hara Slavick’s photographs were taken 63 years after the United States released 60 tons of enriched uranium in a bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945” should instead appear as “O’Hara Slavick’s photographs were taken 63 years after the United States released about 60 kg of enriched uranium in a bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.”
And on page 8317, right column, second full paragraph, lines 1–7, “O’Hara Slavick has conducted a sort of benign and symbolic reenactment by exposing the objects to light, objects that have already been exposed to all of the energy of a thermonuclear blast: hard gamma rays, X-rays, ultra-violet light, visible light, and then infra-red light” should instead appear as “O’Hara Slavick has conducted a sort of benign and symbolic reenactment by exposing the objects to light, objects that have already been exposed to all of the energy of a nuclear blast: hard gamma rays, X-rays, ultra-violet light, visible light, and then infra-red light”.

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Radiated relics

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“The history of the atomic age is intertwined with that of photography. Uranium’s radioactivity was discovered through a photograph,” says Elin O’Hara Slavick. She is the first American to photograph objects from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum that were exposed to an atomic blast. O’Hara Slavick’s photographs were taken 63 years after the United States released 60 tons of enriched uranium in a bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The exhibition and book After Hiroshima develops the relationship between radiation, aftermath, exposure, and the visual language of photography.

O’Hara Slavick began making images of atomic relics at the museum while living in Japan with her husband, an epidemiologist with the Radiation Effects Research Foundation. She had access to the objects, many of them donated, to create autoradiographic images using objects that were still emitting radiation from the blast at Hiroshima. The artifacts were put on X-ray film in light-proof bags for 10 days to capture the traces. O’Hara Slavick also made rubbings of surfaces affected by the atomic bomb, as well as cyanotypes—which are made by exposing paper treated with cyanide salts to sunlight—and traditional photographs during her time in Japan.

O’Hara Slavick has conducted a sort of benign and symbolic reenactment by exposing the objects to light, objects that have already been exposed to all of the energy of a thermonuclear blast: hard gamma rays, X-rays, ultra-violet light, visible light, and then infra-red light. The artist likens the ghost-like cyanotypes to the white shadows that were cast by people and objects that were otherwise obliterated by the bomb.

“The process and problem of exposure is central to my project. Countless people were exposed to the radiation of the atomic bomb...Tracing and touching the sites of survival, destruction, exposure, and history seem to capture an essence of the trauma, a residual radiation, a lingering energy of such a profound event,” says O’Hara Slavick.

Like cyanotype photograms—where the item is placed directly on a light-sensitive surface—of botanical specimens by Anna Atkins in the 1880s, the cyanotypes of the blast artifacts by O’Hara Slavick in After Hiroshima can pose a question that has different answers: What in nature made this? Although the botanical prints include the name of the specimens, in the case of the objects in After Hiroshima, we are left asking yet another question: What is the name for this?

Photographs from the After Hiroshima can be seen at Daylight Project Space, in Hillsborough, NC, from April–May 2013, and at the Jeonju Photography Festival, War and Memory, in South Korea in May 2013. The book After Hiroshima is available from Daylight Books beginning in May 2013.