

## HOWARD KANEG

*No Boundaries*, 2005  
Acrylic on Canvas, 65 x 65 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: DAVID REESE

## ALAN CHEUSE

# Hakodateyama

**A**rrived at port: harbor of Hakodate, largest city on Hokkaido, Japan's northern island, where the winds blew cold and smelled of salt and wood smoke.

Japanese men in uniforms took him from the ship and sat him down in a small office in a wooden building near the pier. He showed them his military passport, and they nodded, and chattered. He understood nothing they said. Within a few minutes the men departed, leaving Philip with his thoughts, and a long while passed before they returned, accompanying a wiry man old enough to be Philip's father, who spoke to him in Russian with a Moscow accent.

"Captain, is it?" he said.

"Yes," Philip said, and stated his credentials, and noticed that his hand stayed steady as he offered the man his military passport.

"I am Anton Shscherbitzky," the old fellow said, extending a hand. "It will be a while before they finish looking over your document." As though he had done this many times before, he led Philip to a small room off the main hallway. There, someone had prepared tea for them, and they sat down at a table, Philip watching the steam rise from the cups set before them.

"Tell me your story," Shscherbitzky said.

Time passed in dreamlike fashion as Philip gave the white-haired visitor a brief account of the harrowing events

that had brought him here: how he had trained as a pilot in the Red Air Force; how he had been shot at while rescuing a fellow pilot shot down by marauding Muslim rebels in the desert near Khiva; how he had taken a bullet, he had survived and gone on rest and recuperation; how he had found himself posted to an air base in Khabarovsk, from which one morning he had flown out over the Sea of Japan, and as if in a dream of a dream, had headed out over international waters.

Philip found himself trembling, the teacup shaking in his hand, as he recounted to the old man what had happened next—how he had intended to turn around and head back to Russian soil, even as his oil light told him he had lost most of the fluid, and despite his best intentions—"No, no, worst," said the old émigré—he had crashed into the Sea of Japan.

"My mechanic," Philip said, "he nearly killed me."

"You think it was just an accident?"

"What was it?"

"It was an opportunity sent from who knows where," the old man said. "What happened next?"

A Japanese freighter, the *Kyoto Maru*, had found him standing knee-deep in seawater on the wing of the sinking airplane, and the crew had plucked him from the sea and the captain had delivered him to Hakodate.

"Destiny?" the old man said. With a surprisingly deft motion for his age, he crossed himself, all the while staring at Philip.

"An accident, from which I was miraculously spared?" Philip said. He recalled the clouds, the pewter-bright sea, the rush of the salt waters around his legs. There had been no God in sight, except for the sudden appearance of the *Kyoto Maru*.

Was this the way it had happened? He still wasn't sure.

Eventually an officer returned with his passport.

The old man said, "We can go now."

He led Philip to the door, where one of the Japanese officials conducted them to another office. There, one of them stamped Philip's passport and wrote something in Japanese beneath the stamp.

Off they went in an old car with—of course—Japanese markings, up from the harbor into the hills above the town. The man drove slowly, and Philip, exhausted to his bones, closed his eyes.