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Family Fare

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"More Great Waves, This Time of Grief"

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More Great Waves, This Time of Grief

News reports rarely include the voices of children. Reporters are reluctant to appear to exploit the very young, and the smallest victims of disasters seldom provide good sound bites. But virtually all children make art, and their pictures can be far more poignant than the most articulate descriptions by adults.

That is certainly true of the wrenching images in "Tsunami: Through the Eyes of Children," at the Asia Society. Organized by Nancy Blume and Miwako Tezuka, this show is a small excerpt from a project undertaken by Arlene Atherton, an American photographer who joined the relief efforts not long after the tsunami struck in December 2004. Unlike "I of the Storm," at the Children's Museum of the Arts last May, it does not emphasize depictions of hopes and ideals. Drawn in Indonesia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, these are portraits of loss.

The nine pictures show huge waves poised like hungry mouths to devour the shore, or giant rivers carrying away houses, cars and people. Victims struggle in the tide, their arms outstretched. In one drawing, boys and girls stand on rooftops in the water, while a larger figure, perhaps an adult, floats facedown. Another shows an overturned bus in the waves, tiny faces peering through its windows. A figure kneels over a body, shedding tiny penciled tears. Images of caring and survival also appear. In one, a small figure lowers a rope to someone in the water. People cling to trees and cars. Mosques, the bedrock of Islamic life, remain standing (as many did).

Unfortunately, no text panels give the ages or nationalities of the specific artists, and only an occasional title, like "Beach Lampuuk," identifies the scene. The main context is provided by a printed handout and a few of Ms. Atherton's photos. (More details are on the project's Web site, childrenspeaktsunami.org.)

Still, I can think of no better way to show children what this tragedy meant to their peers far away. The exhibition also has a special resonance for Americans: you cannot see it without thinking of New Orleans.

"Tsunami: Through the Eyes of Children," through Sunday in the Visitor Center of the Asia Society, 725 Park Avenue, at 70th Street, (212) 288-6400. Hours: today, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; tomorrow and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free.

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