Logos and Sculpture: Shigeo Toya's Theory of Sculpture

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What is sculpture? This is not only a philosophical question broached throughout history but a practical and personal one. Always self-questioning, renowned sculptor Shigeo Toya has long been at the forefront of contemporary art, exhibiting in numerous international exhibitions such as Venice Biennale in 1988 and as Japan's leading grand master, the First Kyiv International Biennial of Contemporary Art in 2012. Toya remains a renowned theorist, actively systemizing his sculptural theory through artistic practice and the associated physicality. He continues to be in demand as a lecturer, frequently the subject of art magazine interviews, as he is considered a visionary, continually addressing the question of sculpture's identity.

Toya has always needed to answer that question. In 1970, when Toya began his Japanese artistic career, he was conscious of the "Mono-ha (School of Things)", pioneering art movement, which denied that the artist had any role in shaping meaning in art which had been a predominant value in the West. At the time, Modern Art was thought to have disappeared. Toya even suggested that the word "Sculpture" be placed in parentheses, as it was a hypothetical concept.

After several attempts, in the first half of the 1980s, Toya began to present "Woods" sculptures which contained multiple surfaces indented by a chainsaw. I will argue that he developed a new form of "Sculpture" differing from that which preceded it. My analysis proceeds from an examination of his writing and interviews.

1. Memory- Shadow

Shigeo Toya was born in 1947, in Ogawa-cho, Kamiminochi-gun, Nagano Prefecture. Inspired by the work of Morie Ogihara (a Nagano-born Japanese Modern sculptor), he showed an early interest in Western sculpture. Ogawa-cho was a small village surrounded by mountains, where the old customs remained, Toya deeply admired the liberty that the practice of art, particularly sculpture, offered. After high school, he found a job in Tokyo, but he did not give up his dream, studying with Toyoichi Yamamoto at Aichi University of the Arts. While still a student, he won prizes at Kokuga-kai and began his sculptural career. Toya had a particular interest in the human-body and also studied anatomy at Nagoya University. After Rodin, many sculptors had focused on the energy and vitality of the human body. But Toya sought to observe and portray the reverse, the dead human body without energy.

In the same period, Mono-ha had gained mainstream recognition. Mono-ha artists such as Lee Ufan had become skeptical of the visual supremacy of Western Modern Art. These artists

denied a hierarchal relationship between artist and material; they viewed raw material as having an equal role in shaping the artistic process. American minimalist artists sought to shape the material in the least possible way; at one extreme they would no longer use any artifice in their work. This was the essence of modernity; the continual renewal, and reinvention of artistic practice.
Toya was attracted by this progressive view of art, in place of traditional sculpture focusing on the human figure. However, he could not give up the word "sculpture" when describing his work. He decided to re-explore the original state of sculpture outside the ideation of Modern Art.

In 1974, Toya presented his first solo show, "POMPEII・・79" at Tokiwa Gallery in Tokyo (fig. 1-4) . The title derived from the plaster casts that the artist had seen as a student while viewing archeological photos from Pompeii. When the volcano Vesuvius erupted in 79 B.C., volcanic ash fell on the surrounding communities. People could not escape as volcanic ash collected on their skin. As a result of vaporization, the bodies became an internal void encased in the accumulated ash. These were discovered in the nineteenth century. Archeologists made plaster casts of the remains, which showed Pompeii's occupants at the moment of death.

As Toya had become especially interested in the surface intervening between substance and space the exhibition included several blocks in which a substance gradually filled a void. Various powders of cement, grass, wood, and iron—accumulated on the transparent acrylic block, seeming to explore the border between space and materials. This manner of presentation differed from that of Mono-ha, whose work was often oriented toward spectacle and the theatrical. Toya's work focused more on ontological change, disappearance, substance, and process.
A subsequent series was titled "Monument of Memory," as the artist presented events and documented his action in memory. In *Bamboo Grove* (1975) (fig. 5-6), Toya wandered through a bamboo grove, stretching ropes along the trace of his steps and trying to visualize the sightlines of a viewer. In *Stone Axes* (1975) (fig. 7), he attempted to attach a stone fragment to a stick, thereby questioning the meaning now provoked by the figure as the result of the act. In *IOU* (1975), a bamboo flute was speared with burned tongs. The work portrayed not only damage to human-relationships, but objects—the stand holding up the work was accidentally deformed.
This series connected acts, focusing on causal relationship and accidents, with the "trace" of steps encompassing the memory of past incidents. Its title, " Monument of Memory," may seem to be a tautology, as "monument" derives from the Latin "monere" for"recall." Toya

explored the state of "monument" before it was formally defined as an architectural form. He defined his conception as pre-modern, finding his argument in the sculptural theory of Herbert Read and Rosalind Krauss.

When Toya used "monument" in reference to a modern city, he pointed out the cultural difference between the West's concept of citizenship and Japanese traditional community spirit. Even after World War II and modernization occurring afterward, sophisticated Japanese city habitats reflected a community spirit. They were not oriented toward public display, often reflecting Western citizenship, in the way of many modern cities.

Historically the erection of monuments derived from the impulse to remember the absent. Since 2000, digital images have overflowed everywhere. Toya became very interested in the absence of substance associated with this contemporary phenomenon. His work began to center on repeated themes of shadows. As for an episode of the Sicyon girl, he rendered a version of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia*, focusing on carving the outlines of a shadow, projected on an earthen wall. For the artist, existence had changed into absence at a specific space and time. This had to be marked, as in a monument.

2. Phenomenon

Toya then began a series of "Exposing 'Sculpture'," (fig. 8) building on an earlier attempt in *Bamboo Grove II*, where he intended to present an invisible lines, where his conscious awake on the actual site. He recorded drawings as physical reaction in space, seeking to avoid make forms from pre-existing conceptions and images, as well as making sculptures in the conventional sense of Modern Art. In this same period the sculptor participated in the publication revue, "Phenomenon," his interest again centering on the state before images emerge. In *Exposing 'Sculpture' IV*, Toya drew lines on a wall and floor, indicating the intersection of invisible lines from fragments of cut glass that were embedded in acrylic panels, set on the floor. In the next series, "Hypothetical 'Sculpture'," (fig. 9) he carved intersecting lines with contrasting volumes.

In the "From 'Carving'," "From 'Construction'" series, the installation gradually turned into the form of free-standing structure. He intended to re-examine traditional sculpture techniques of carving and modeling. In "From 'Construction'," (fig. 10) he constructed bundle with rafters, poking and adding as if he was modeling, bringing to life the sightlines that he had once drawn on walls. Conversely, in "From 'Carving," (fig. 11) he created and then dried plaster forms in which iron bars were embedded. He then carved the forms' surface. In the process of carving, volume was further reduced, increasing space on the front of the object. In the final stage of both reverse series, Toya combined both methods, setting up construction with rafters, placing plaster on one surface, drying, and carving. Then, Toya

allowed the surface to be accidentally scratched.

By 1983, Toya felt he was in deadlock, so he decided to burn all his work at the Nakatajima Sand Dunes in Hamamatsu City. He dug holes on the sandy beach, poured plaster into them, and inserted the rafters. Then he piled up several "From 'Construction'" works and set them alight. All that night he observed smoke rising, fire burning red, and charcoal cascading to the ground.

The burning was repeated at Hamakurogasaki Beach in Toyama-Prefecture and on the banks of the Ganges River in India. After burning, Toya exhibited what had remained after the fires--misshapen plaster masses taken from the beach.

In the following series, "Underground Room," he recreated various images that he had seen in the fires' smoke, on the flowing surface of the plaster. From this time forward, the artist would be interested in the surface of his work, which often contained multiple images, thus evoking multiple meanings. He also began to use color on the surfaces.

In 1984 Toya presented *Woods*, a series he engaged in working with the material. He now worked on a life-size scale, his work taking the form of a self-standing mass which had a specific visual image. The surfaces of his work featured numerous notches cut by a chainsaw, recalling the attempt of *Bamboo Grove* to depict an overhead- forest view through multi-centered, intersecting lines.

For Toya, it was important that surface, even that of a concrete mass, evoke the flow of air and a stream of water—that which is formless. Images were multi-layered and fraught with meaning. The artist cut with a chainsaw to create the image of flow emerging by chance, as the artist felt the physical vibration of the chainsaw. In this way Toya fashioned images caused by accident, showing the traces of his act, accomplished without artificially making a specific object.

3. Ontology-Relation

While a graduate student in 1975, Toya wrote in a research notebook that art is not a formal problem but one in the domain of personal ideas. This is similar to Mono-ha's concept of "self-limited agency" (n.1). For Toya, art history was not fixed ideology; history means that the artistic story continues in everyday life, so it is continually re-systemized, although its structure may change. While sculpture is a fixed classification, it also reflects the personal, and this is accumulated through years of practice. Differing sculptural personal forms emerge from differing ideation which derived from differing practice The series "Exposing 'Sculpture'," and "Hypothetical 'Sculpture" were about installation based on a relationship to space. "From 'Carving'", "From 'Construction'", were stand alone, emphasizing volume and solidity; over time the sculpture was dependent on changeable relationships, such as that with

the eye's sightline and the transformative effects of rust and accidental cuts in plaster.
When Toya presented *Woods*, he constructed rafters which he cut with a chainsaw, combining both carving and modelling as he applied his experience with the "From Carving" "From Construction" series. The final form did not show that process.
Woods could be seen as a -freestanding, static mass. Toya referred to it as "my sculpture," because it differed from "sculpture" in joint illusion or superstructure meaning. Modern sculpture had been de-constructed into time processes and site dependence. A mismatch occurred between surface images and inner substance. Toya believed that one can only ascribe meaning to the material substance of sculpture and its process, which is always connected to the sculptor's ideation. He posited that the "origin of sculpture is the cognition that the sculpture recognizes the distance between one's existence and another's existence and location" (n.2). As a result, he insisted on life-size scale. For him sculpture meant object, " otherness," and an element similar to an alter-ego substituting for the artist.

4. Structure

Before he presented *Woods*, all of Toya's exploration refuted "Rodinism," the sculptural theory concentrating on the internal life of the figure and freestanding construction. Toya was interested in traditional Japanese sculpture, which often focused on relief carvings.
Toya had been inspired by Takaaki Yoshimoto's "Incomprehensible Sculpture," published in 1973. According to Yoshimoto, sculpture comes come from the human impulse to mark material surfaces. Yoshimoto considered the relief to be a "primitive" state of sculpture, and argued that sculpture in the round was peculiar to Western modernism. Toya found that Yoshimoto's argument was similar to his quest to re-define sculpture in the eyes of structuralism.
Toya believed that the art of relief carvings could be specific to East Asian civilization. He was especially intrigued by the Japanese sculptor, Heihachi Hashimoto, who had worked in Mie, his hometown for long time" rejecting Modernism. Hashimoto also reevaluated the priest Enku, a folk sculptor of Buddha figures, whose work shows a spiritual interpretation of animism. On the surface of his wood sculptures, Hashimoto mentioned that "Sen" (spirit) could transform into a material substance, in his wrote text. The Zen doctrine that every substance is changeable informed Hashimoto's theory.
To Toya, Mono-ha's recognition of material seemed logical. Toya understood that the work of Hashimoto and Mono-ha was similarly anti-Modern and oriented to a pre-modernist view. While he wondered whether classification of sculpture into genres could end, he never thought that sculpture would. He was convinced that this period may have ended medium specificity, and thus ended Modernist sculpture (n.3).

How can we answer this question scientifically? Is sculpture really at an end?
Theories of sculpture are not consistent from the ancient period to contemporary, because "this genre always lacks the clear autonomous logic doctrine to keep purity of genre itself" (n.4). Art history had been defined as styles, which came to include sculpture. There was no obvious definition of Modern sculpture. Rosalind Krauss suggested that Modernist sculpture after Rodin was separated from its original setting. Her argument itself was derived from Greenberg's definition of Modernism as self-critical, autonomous, and medium-specific. It noted that art's classification into genres began during the Renaissance when artisans began to receive artistic recognition.
Even Rudolf Wittkower, who was critical of Greenberg's discourse, wrote that sculptural theory was based on the idea that technical argument, carving, and modeling described the history of sculpture from the ancient period to that of David Smith. Sculpture was a visual and tactile experience, mentioned by Giorgio Vasari, but its history had long been delineated calling for the development of formal styles focusing on only visual experience.
Toya drew installation plans for his sculpture, and these showed the space around his work, often in the form of a map or bird's eye view. The plans were thus a metaphor for the real world, conveying the content and meaning of his work and the thought behind it.

5. Fold-Woods-Surface

When Toya initially presented *Woods*, he adapted almost abstract forms. The surface had regular carved lines and was partially painted in vivid colors. After the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, he covered the sculpture's surface with ash. Made from burned sawdust and mixed with acrylic paint, *Wood's* material changed from organic to inorganic matter, covered to hide the grain and texture of real wood. Toya did not insist on using a specific wood, but he always used glulam. Initially he carved glulam covered with white ash because he did not want to see material that suggested natural wood. Thus, Toya's Woods sculpture was a representation of real forest but symbolized the "concrete" civilization of the modern city. *Woods* implies life-giving circulation and the status of his artificial material: life and death.
Toya thought that the tactile sense might be basic to sculpture, rather than the optical sense. Modern sculpture contains a structure at its center, but it is intangible. According to Toya, the tactile sense is fundamental since babyhood, a sense that gives essential connection with others, particularly with a mother. This connects with works like *Woods and I* (1988) (fig. 12), which portrayed the indistinguishability of the artist and wood subject and were previously mentioned by Haito Masahiko (n.5).
Following *Woods*, Toya presented bas-relief shapes implying the earth's surface, especially that of hollows and swamps. *Swamp* (1987) depicted a shallow hollow with numerous traces

cut with a chainsaw; *Something There* (1985) described a trickling flow. *Woods* (1986) (fig. 13) consisted of several units, each differing subtly. The viewer could walk through the units, which were set like a forest in the space. Toya's unit *Woods* developed the double meaning of forest; in space it became an actual wood that could be perceived from the inside, while on the surface it symbolized the entire forest as seen from a bird's-eye view.

Toya experimented with reverse and relational mass in some works. In *Animal Track I* (1989) (fig. 14), he cut a hole in its lower portion, as in a real animal track. Using the hole as a mold, he casted it with a bronze substance; what emerged was *Animal Track II* (1989) (fig. 14). In the early 1980s, he further explored relief structure as he thought it an elemental Japanese sculptural form, while later in the 1980's he expressed Japanese cultural mentality as a forest containing complex intersections.

After *Woods'* representation of a real forest, Toya seemed to want to escape from the woods. In 1989's *Death of Woods* and *Death of Kiln of the Elephant of the Woods* (fig. 15-16), Toya he adopted a more abstract style, separate from the subject matter.

6. Border

In the *Woods* series, Toya created deep surfaces which implied the thickness of borders between sky and earth. After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, when it seemed that binary conflict was decreasing in the world, the sculptor began to realize a border structure beyond that of a two-sided binary. This theme had been evidenced earlier in his border monument *Round Stone* (1985) which was inspired by an ancient Japanese border monument. He presented concave structure units, *Twenty-Eight Death I* (1989-90), *Spirit Regions* (1990) (fig. 17-18), which in formal aspect were reverse to the *Woods* works, and contained the meaning "Genius Loci," or "spirit of earth." He arranged these box units horizontally on a grid, implying the border of the worlds of life and death. According to the sculptor, the border monument symbolized the spirits of both Western and Asian civilizations. In 1994's *Viewing Doors II* (fig. 19), the border had the concrete shape of a wall, while in *Underground Room* (1994), the border structure had gained enclosure walls. The subject had grown closer to the structure, and the image had assumed a more literal shape.

This artistic "escape" had always been Toya's intention, and he began other series. In *From the 'Border'* I (1994) shapes overlapped with a house and other elements closer to the human. In *From the 'Border' V* (1997-8) (fig. 20-21), the artist shocked with a portrayal of juvenile delinquency in in Kobe, focusing on a 1997 murder. In it, Toya symbolized a moral border that had been crossed by the use of a rod-shaped protrusion. This long protrusion indicated the distance, and time necessary for acceptance of unreasonable incidents, and the distance toward what we should not do. The work had a clearly outlined grand-scale structure,

and a surface composed of richly varied folds.

7. Minimal Baroque

In the 1998 series "Baroque Rectangular Solid," Toya seemed to return to formal experimentation. He contrasted the eloquent folds with a Donald Judd-inspired minimalist surface, bringing dialectic aspects to the work. After *Woods*, the sculptor consistently avoided similarity between title, realized structure, and metaphor. Meanwhile the form had become more variegated, and titles indicated more and more abstract content.

In the series "Linkage," he re-examined and updated his 1970s "Exposing 'Sculpture'" and " Hypothetic 'Sculpture'" In the space the intersecting sightlines were drawn to a material substance, in which images from art history were hidden. The artist's intention seemed a recollection, remix of past images, he thought that 1990s simulation art recalled his past hypothesis experiment of 70's. In the series of "Metamorphosis into Wood," (fig. 22) he began materialized shadows. In *Projection Body* (2004) (fig. 23), Toya inserted the human silhouette inside the folds and materialized projection light. Beginning with the "Minimal Baroque" series, *Woods IX* (2008) (fig. 13) made a clear contrast between volume and a woven surface with a minimally-cut cross section. In *Cave V* (2011) (fig. 24), he presented a tin wall box structure with a tin wall cut with a grid, representing traces. This box structure developed further in *Cave IV, Memories in the Cave* (2011) (fig. 25) which was oriented toward viewer participation. In it, the box structure is visible depending on the view from outside.

Toya used the term "Baroque" in a different manner than its traditional definition. He amplified the definition to what he called "deterritorialization," dramatic folds ranging from small to large that were neither reflective of a classical and balanced concept of beauty, nor the reductive buildability of Modernism. As he had once cited sculpture theory from Takaaki Yoshimoto, Toya now cited the cultural morphology of Eugenio d'Ors, always capturing an image of historical structure, but applying it as a metaphor. His eloquent folds without specific meaning were the result of his attempt to avoid instruction and the literal image.

8. Logos and sculpture

Noriaki Kitazawa described Toya's 1984 *Woods* sculpture as an "inversion of conventional sculpture projected into the personal black box" (n.6). Toya had once considered sculpture as hypothetical, written in parentheses as, "Sculpture," but now even he would argue that sculpture may contain elements of the personal; it is not "joint illusion" for artist and viewer. In his work, division occurs between the visual image and the invisible meaning of content.

Often his work has been described as an order of "Medium－Surface－Form," what Toshiaki Minemura pointed out was a "complex system" (n.7). What comprised Toya's sculpture was not its elements, but causal relationships, the relationship that described as (—) between his ideas. Even if the work stood alone in space and was medium-specific, in its process it could become relational.

Citing Rosalind Krauss's Postmodern "mapping" theory, expanded fields can not only be applied on the site, but can be expanded on process of time, or process of causal relationship. This can also be examined utilizing anthropologist Alfred Gell's theory of material culture, which can be used to understand Toya's early work on the original state of sculpture, *Stone Axes, Milky Way* (1975). Outside of the Modern Art aesthetic, artistic practice has a social context, and an artificial object owes its agency to men, although not only men give meaning to the object. Without this premise, artistic context is not always the same as recipient context; artist intention and the meanings that recipients understand are separate matters.

Toya's sculpture no longer denotes the meaning of its content. Instead, his words visualize his intention and clarify the process of personal sculpture in "the black box." His sculpture engages relationally with the world, and his words engage in connecting the individual to the history and lineage of Art.

Words are another kind of joint illusion that exposes differences; they connect us with others, but our experiences are never precisely the same. For Toya, both words and sculpture are dialectics.

In *After the End of Art, and the Pale of the History,* American critic Arthur C. Danto wrote, "as far as appearances were concerned, anything could be works of art, and it meant that if you were going to find what art was, you had to turn from sense experience to thought. You had, in brief, to turn to philosophy." (n.8) In 1984, Danto speculated that the visual development of style had ended in the 1960s. 1984 was also the year that Toya's showed *Woods.* Here, art philosophy meets an artist's doctrine, both built on practice, physical sensation, reaction to an unexpected situation, and recognition of a particular world structure. The logic of these inquiries may be useful for contemporary art criticism.

Notes

1. Lee Ufan, "The Search for Encounter", *Bijutsu Techo No.324,* (Bijutsu Shupppan-sha 1970, February) p.17
2. *Shigeo Toya —Sculpture and Word, 1974-2013* ,(Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, 2014), p.141
3. op.cit., p.202

4. Herbert Read, *The Art of Sculpture* (1949), Japanese Translation by Eiji Usami (Nichibou Japan Publications 1956), p.5
5. Masahiko Haito “Bound- aries of Viewing Doors II seen through infra-mince: Shigeo Toya works after 1990”, catalogue of exhibition, *Shigeo Toya: Folds, Gazes and Anima of the Woods*, (Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, 2003), p.36
6. Noriaki Kitazawa, *The Genesis of the Kōgei (Craft) Genre and the Avant-Garde*, (Bigaku Shuppan, 2003) p.21
7. Masaaki Minemura, opening lecture at Shigeo Toya’s solo exhibition, *Memories in the cave*, Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, 2011
8. Arthur C. Danto, *After the End of Art—Contemporary Art and the Pale of the History,* (Princeton University Press 1997), p.13

This is the English translation from the original Japanese essay in ***Shigeo Toya —Sculpture and Word, 1974-2013,*** The Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, 2014.

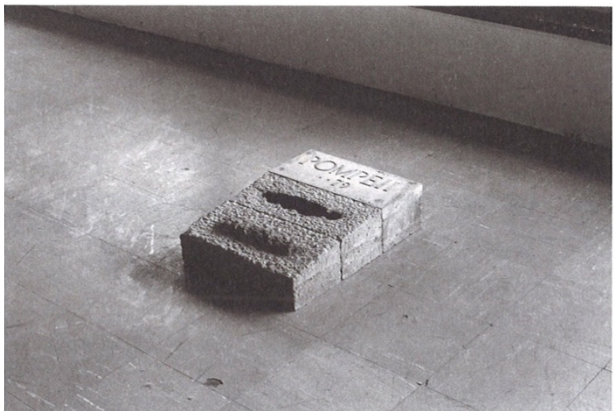


fig.1) *POMPEII・・79 (PART 1)*, 1974

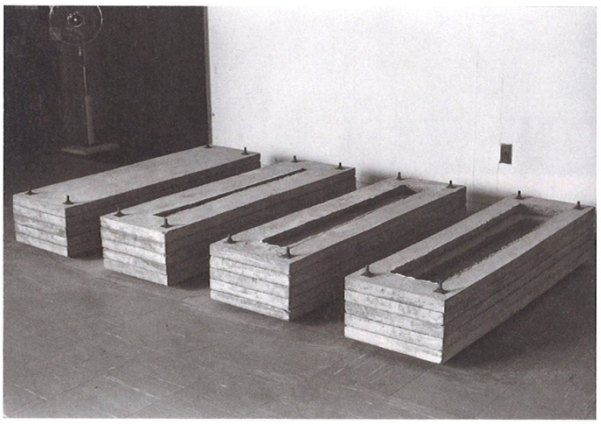


fig.2) *POMPEII・・79 (PART 1)*, 1974

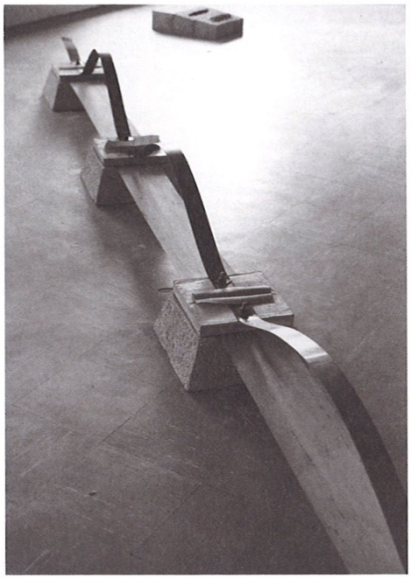


fig.3) *POMPEII・・79 (PART 2)*, 1974

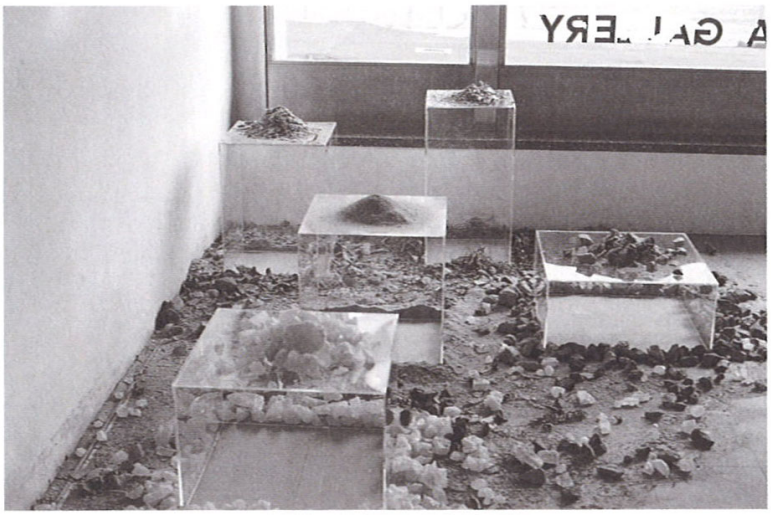


fig.4) *POMPEII・・79 (PART 3)*, 1974

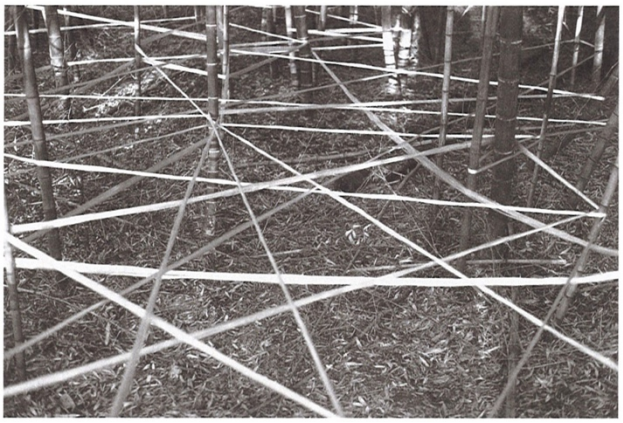


fig. 5) *Bamboo Grove II*,1975

fig.6) *Bamboo Grove II*,1975

fig.7) *Stone Axes*, 1975

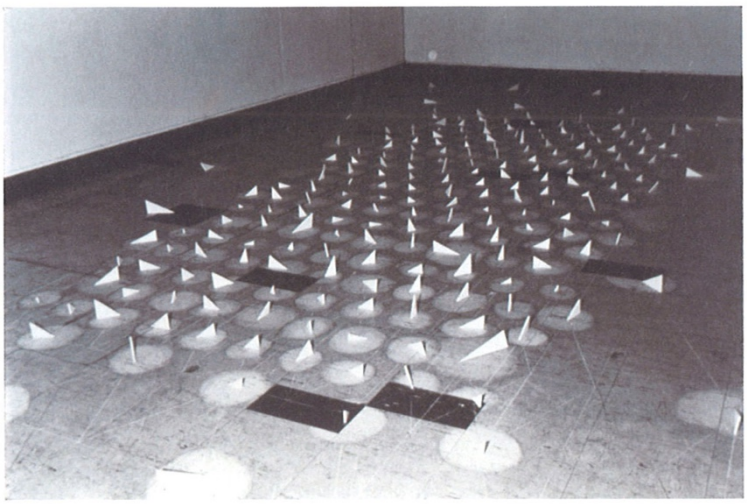


fig.8) *Exposing 'Sculpture' III*, 1976

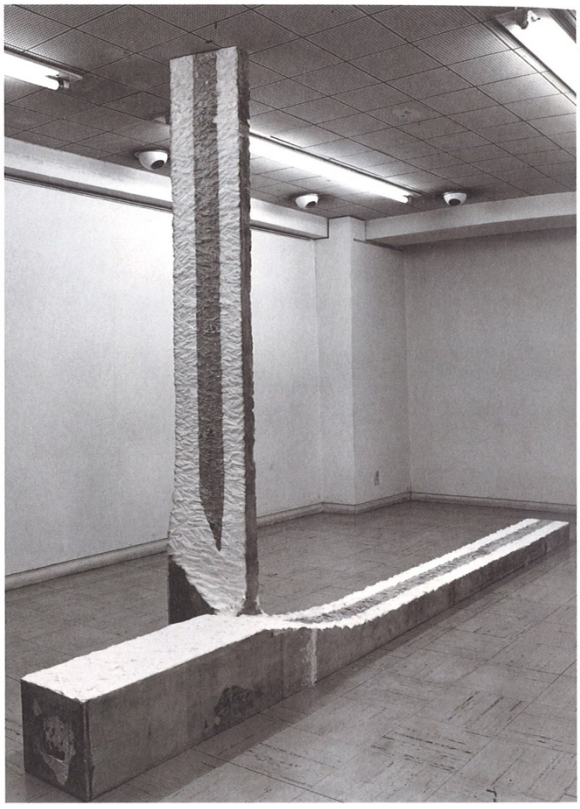


fig.9) *Hypothetical 'Sculpture' I* , 1978

fig.10) *From 'Construction', Linked Columns*, 1981

fig. 11) *From 'Carving'*, 1979

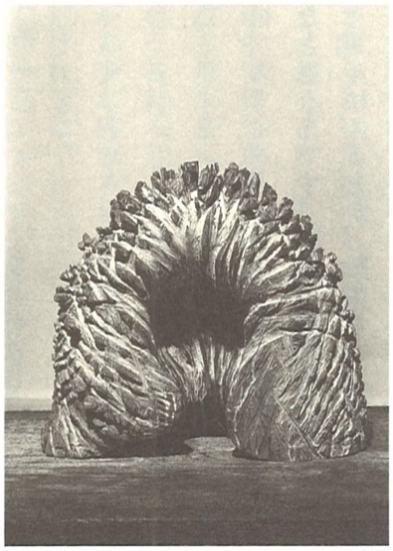


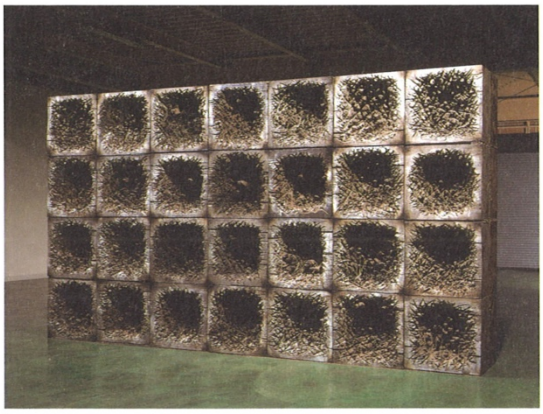
fig.12) *Woods and I*, 1988

fig.13) *Woods IX*, 2008

fig.14) From the right: *Animal Track I*, 1989, *Animal Track II*, 1989

fig.15) *Death of Woods*, 1989

fig.16) *Death of Kiln of the Elephant of the Woods*, 1989



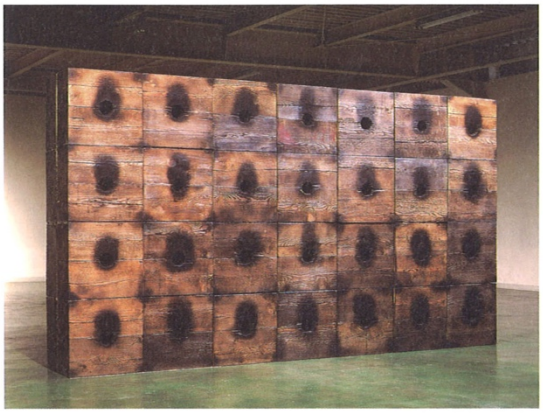


fig.17-1) *Twenty-Eight Death I*, 1989
fig.17-2) *Twenty-Eight Death I*, 1990

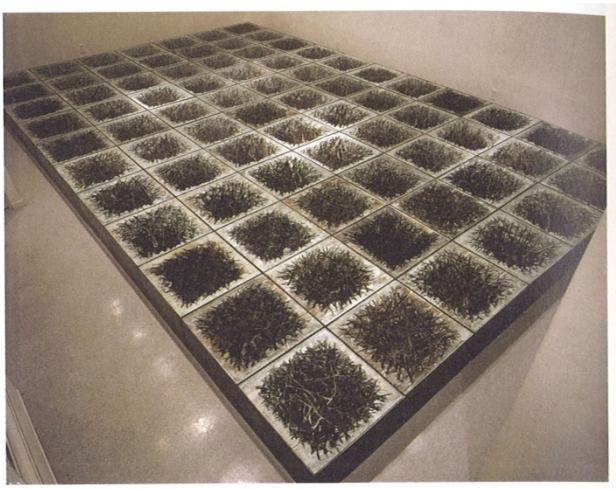


fig.18) *Spirit Regions*, 1990

fig.19) *Viewing Doors II*, 1994

fig.20) *from the 'Border' V*, 1997-98

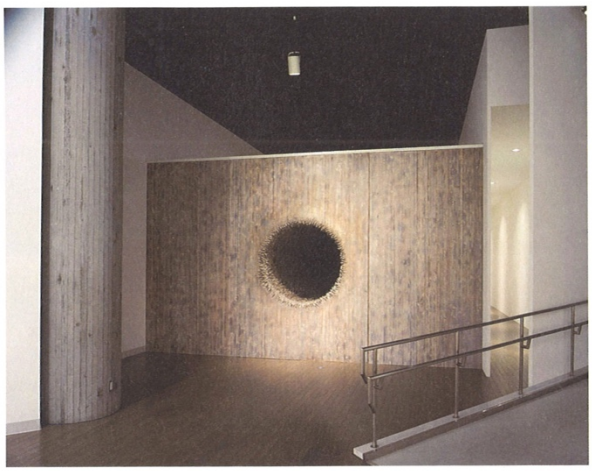
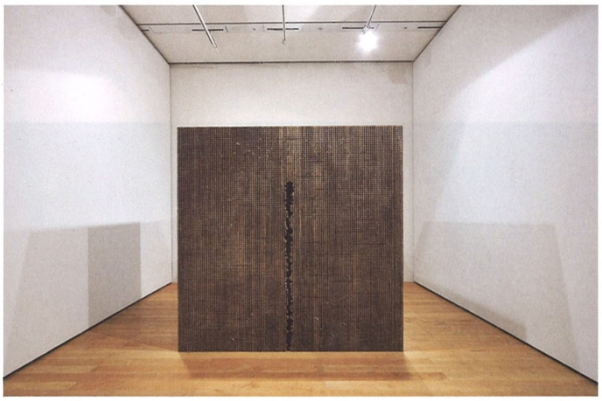


fig.21) *from the 'Border' V*, 1997-98

fig.22-1) *Metamorphosis into Wood 05- I* , 2005
fig.22-2) *Metamorphosis into Wood 05- II*, 2005

fig.23) *Projection Body*, 2004



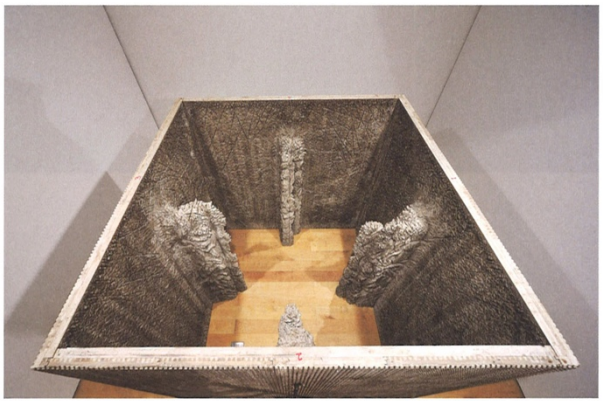


fig.24) *Cave V*, 2011

fig.25) *Cave IV, Memories in the Cave*, 2011