

## 'The God of the Mountain'

Surrounded by giant mountains, I am here,  
In Yamagata, Tohoku.

This is a tale I heard from a man who is training to be a monk in the mountains.

A long time ago, the god of the mountain was a woman, as the men who came to train to be monks saw the mountain as representing the place from which humans are born, the birth canal. They sensed femininity in the mountain.

It was also believed that the god of the mountain was a witch, and so it was forbidden for women to climb it. And even today traditions of mountain worship continue to make use of the metaphors of man and woman, with, for example, the custom of praying for a good harvest by raising a phallic symbol still existing in some areas.

People tend to see mountains as the boundary between "here" and "there" – the boundary between the "realm of humans" and the "realm of the gods." At times it was believed that the suffering of the people would be alleviated by the limitless heart of the gods, and so jizo deity figures were placed on the mountain trails to represent them.

March 11, 2011.

On the day that the world shook so much it felt like it would end, Yamagata was not far from the quake's epicenter, but no tsunami came.

Perhaps this place that has long guarded the mountains was on this occasion guarded by their god in return.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that on the other side of the mountains, countless lives were lost.

The energy that flows in the mountains feels to me like the beating of the heart of the earth.

Water gave birth to these mountains and created life. And, ironically, the same water that took so many lives also nourishes the mountains.

Since the time that the earth was made, the mountains have been watching. They know everything.

My thoughts go to the many lives that were taken on the far side of the mountain.

And with the prayers of the people who have lived on this land, I depict the mountains in my paintings and pray for the world.

October, 2011

Aki Kondo