

Shigeo TOYA Interview at his Atelier in Chichibu, October 28, 2016

I have used the “woods” like a metaphor, however what is fundamentally at the base of this structure is the relationship between mountains and valleys. I believe that in Japan and in East Asia in general, most countries are covered in woodlands. What indeed serve as the base of such woods are the mountains and valleys. There are peaks and there are lowest points, and there are places where there is the flow of water. I think about the very conditions of the spirit within the context of this uneven structure.

In structures with no place to conceal oneself such as a desert, there exists a “covenanted relationship” for people to mutually relate to one another. It is a spiritual structure that entails human beings to build a relationship of trust through means of a “covenant,” facing each other in an extremely direct and confrontational way in hopes to confirm one another’s intentions. In contrast to this, the perspective exchanged between human beings within the woods in a sense does not as frequently necessitate a direct confrontation or contention. Even the ways of interaction between the peoples of villages are slightly more intermediate, and is that which is somewhat spiritual and sensory. Rather than everything entailing a direct confrontation, it manifests as a more intricately complicated relationship and relational structure. I attempted to incorporate this kind of human relationship into the sculptural structure.

In doing so, as opposed to a sightline structure that is based on vertical and horizontal lines as appropriated in Western Civilization—although of course, such vertical and horizontal lines do also exist in Japan—in the woods it is the diagonal lines exchanged between the mountains and valleys that serve to formulate the structure of the sightline. For example, there are people who call out to one another between the foot of the mountain and the villages in the high areas, people encountering other people within the woods, the relationship with animals, and then there is the line of sight that looks towards the top of the trees and the water veins that lie embedded within the ground, as well as that which gazes across the land and up to the sky. The sightline structure that unfolds within us under such instances is in fact multi-centric, with several small centers being born amidst a woven space created through an intertwining of diagonal lines. This is what becomes the multi-centric structure of the “woods.” Although each is an independent structure, I simultaneously establish it as a single “woods.”

By arranging several of these, I invite people to walk around amongst them. I create this as in a sense embodying my certain view of the world. I had began creating “woods” as conveying the relationship between the line of sight and the structure under the consideration that multi-centric sculptures have the potential to manifest as sculptures of our very own selves.

In correspondence to this, one must think about the nature of the “surface.” This is again, a sculptural issue. In so-called Western sculpture, that which had seen the most development is Greek sculpture. In a sense, the perfection of Western sculpture could be said to have more or less met its completion within this context. The structures formulated are something that we learn from our teachers as a student, and such structures indeed stand vertically straight from head to toe. The vertical structures sway slightly to the right and to the left taking on various forms, yet what permeates throughout is a consolidated central core, and this is the fundamental structure of European sculpture. This (the woods) stands in the very same manner. It is standing, but not with a single core in the center, and rather maintains a

certain verticality while the respective surfaces develop. I tried to create a structure that is different from the structure of a systemized framework.

This structure in a sense is something like a relief, and I start by carving from a certain side and create the surfaces from one to the next, out towards the sides while rotating it. I don’t envision a precise structure within my mind to begin with. In terms of European sculpture, the basic structure is precisely established to begin with before the surrounding surfaces are developed. Whereas in my case I do not establish a central structure in advance, but instead it becomes to possess a certain fluctuating sense of verticality through my process of developing the surfaces of the mountains and valleys. This is the fundamental difference of how I create my sculptures.

The surfaces that emerge in this way are by no means defined as conceptual surfaces that are without substance and which serve to clearly partition the interior and the exterior. I had considered a surface structure that makes pleats within its surface, or is seemingly like a sheet of paper or cloth that is folded and developed. It is a way of thinking that is in a sense extremely similar to the structure of the woods.

Wood as a material is a physical matter with an opaque surface. Although glass is transparent, most other substances are opaque and therefore it is not possible to see even one millimeter beyond their surface. In thinking about how I could incorporate the sightline structure into this opaque matter, I devised a means of carving groves with a chainsaw and inserting iron rods into them. In doing so it becomes possible to imagine the inside of the matter. The sightlines that all exist in an interwoven way within the physical matter is what serves to give birth to its form. Since sculpture is recognized as the act of excavating these sightlines, I had experimented in doing that. This had been my initial incentive. I therefore used the chainsaw as a tool to make groves for this purpose. While repeating this process over and over again, the places carved away by the chainsaw and the parts that remain uncut between the respective groves come to appear like the relationship between mountains and valleys. And furthermore, if the places that have been carved away with something being inserted into them take on a minus form, then the remaining part in-between comes to emerge as a protrusion. These mountains and valleys, and the plus and minus protrusions seemingly interchange rapidly, enabling the surfaces to ruffle and fluctuate, and I thought, “Oh, this is interesting.” This way of working with the chainsaw was born as a result of trying to create a sightline structure that was reminiscent of the woods.

Although there is the term “Mono-ha,” the name itself is not something that had been appointed by the individuals involved, and in fact they had initially repelled against this manner of terminology. They had merely come to latch onto this term as it became more familiarized. When looking at the forms of various “Mono-ha” works, one can recognize how they are remarkably reminiscent of structural methods as seen in European modernism. At the same time, this means of combining natural objects and such seems to incorporate numerous structural elements of Yamato-e’s from the post Momoyama period and Higashiyama period. As a way of expression, this is combined with what one may call sensory minimalism. Sen no Rikyu had also tried to establish space through imbuing every single matter with sensory minimalism and seeking out small relationships between them. In a way, he establishes a similar structure.

It is basically about this “relationship,” but the sensation towards each and every matter, form, and quality is highly

refined. Then there is the sense of nature that is given rise to through this “relationship.” This I found to be a very wonderful thing.

That being said, when it comes to considering ways of thinking about “form,” they are in fact not too concerned about the “form” itself. On the contrary, Lee Ufan strongly criticized the very act of trying to conceive a “form” as being a modernist idea. He says this in terms of the image and form. He criticized that to make a form based on an image is that which pays heed to a certain arrogance of the Western modernist spirit.

My contemporaries and I spent our student days studying amidst this kind of historical context. We were basically taught at school to create “forms,” but when human beings who historically exist upon this earth engage in culturally creative acts, it is evident that the expressiveness of a particular “form” is something that is fundamentally inherent. It is not simply about humans selfishly creating forms through means of modernistic imagery. Such as the desire towards “form” and the sense of pleasure towards “forms,” the fundamentality for creating forms is something that has been present since the Stone Age. Our question was whether it was indeed plausible to abandon the expressiveness inherent within forms simply under the pretense of the term “relationship.”

I did receive certain influences particularly in sensory terms, however I had really pondered about the kind of ideological mindset that was necessary to recreate “forms” from scratch within such context. At the time there had been several movements, and notions related to the Higashiyama period and Rikyu had also been numerous present within the backdrop of Lee Ufan and Kishio Suga’s practice. Naoyoshi Hikosaka and Kosai Hori had also tried to incorporate structures of the Yamato-e or structures of Edo period panel paintings within their work. Hikosaka and Hori rather than had attempted to adopt the structure of linguistic expressions such as songs and poetry of the Heian era into his paintings. This kind of tendency had come to emerge between the 60s and the 70s.

Interviewer: Hikosaka and Hori rather than...

Yes, they rather than adhering to the “Mono-ha” had been in opposition of it, pursuing the direction of incorporating structures from Japanese Yamato-e works and panel paintings as well as formulating the picture plane based on the methods of the Kano School.

When thinking about where the origins of Japan’s art, and “Japanese sculpture” can be traced to, one could perhaps mention the Jomon era or Yayoi era. Yojuro Yasuda for instance tries to seek out the origins of Japanese sculpture within the Yayoi era, whereas Taro Okamoto considers it to be in the Jomon era. Then there is Yoshimi Takeuchi who attempts to discern the origins of culture in areas such as Asian Chinese art. When we talk about how we see Japanese sculpture in our context, fundamentally the most significant aspect is the legacy of Buddhism. In this way, I began to have my doubts as to whether the way in which we refer to something as “being a Japanese sculpture,” is in fact an accurate description.

I have never really appreciated sculpture in this kind of way. I appreciate Greek sculpture, Egyptian sculpture, and Michelangelo’s works, and I also appreciate Japanese Buddhist statue sculptures. In sensory terms I incorporate these references in an almost stateless manner. There is then the issue of whether it is necessary to define it using the term “Japanese sculpture.” The things that significantly characterize Japanese sculpture are aspects such as a certain sense of flatness, which we indeed learned in class through textbook examples of works by people like Yukio Yashiro, yet I

had felt a tremendous resistance towards the term Japanese sculpture as a means of conveying a characteristic quality of Japan. Defined in this way, it seems as if it simply falls into the bottom of a large bowl that is the very embodiment of Japan. Since this bowl that is a metaphor of the Japanese nation does not allow anything to pass through it like a sieve, the Japanese culture that stagnates at the bottom is subjected to being constructed in a nationalistic way. I thought that this was something rather dangerous, so I wanted to pierce the bottom of this bowl and enable things to pass through it. I do not mean to say that Japan does not exist at the bottom of this bowl, because it is indeed there, yet if it is possible to penetrate the bottom of this, what is in fact there is a formative consciousness that is common to all sorts of places whether it may be Celtic culture or peoples of the desert. As a human sensation that has of course existed since the Stone Age and which is common in all sorts of places within the world, the commonality of creating things and forms is something that can be recognized.

It is not about saying which parts of Edo to take back or defining the origins of Japanese culture as being in a certain place due to it being Japanized from a given point. Once the bottom has been penetrated, it becomes a matter of being a sensation that is common to all mankind. Within this context however, there are indeed various individual characteristics. These depend on each region, yet I didn’t want to name them as such and such a culture or as such and such sculpture. For example, one thinks about the way in which things in the Jomon era or older things that go beyond these times were made, or the means by how the paintings in the Lascaux caves were conceived. Amidst the relationship between light and shadow the relief-like structure within the cave had created the appearance of animals, and from there line engravings and scratch marks were made on the wall surfaces using sharp stones, later transforming into sculpture. This factor is almost the same for most places. You could say it’s the equivalent of child’s play. I thought about restarting from this point, and thus began again at the Stone Age. For instance, it’s about giving birth to forms through making stone axes or using string figures to do various things. It is about the attempts of people that were implemented before them being defined as art. What I did was to rethink about matters from this point and consider how to realize them as forms.

Toshikatsu Endo in this sense had a similar way of thinking to that of mine. We must begin with the five elements such as water, earth, and fire. I make scratches. My scratch marks create forms that become something engraved within space. The form of that which the sightline supports is gradually conceived. I wanted to try and start over from this point. My argument regarding the early 70s was to distinguish myself from the “Mono-ha’s” ideas and ways of thinking, and therefore although respecting their work I had wanted to create a sense of difference.

There is a text that was published in 1973 by Takaaki Yoshimoto entitled, “The Incomprehensibility of Sculpture.” What he refers to as incomprehensible is, as he says, “I cannot fathom why human beings despite them being naturally surrounded by stones and provided with plentiful trees and rivers, create forms of some sort that are not tools neither can be seen as being of any particular use. This is something that I really find incomprehensible.” This is wherein lies the incomprehensibility of sculpture. This is something that is incomprehensible, and cannot be understood forever. It is a wonder why people engage in making such things.

