

Ueda-City Museum of Art

Shinbism 3 Oct 12 – Nov 10, 2019

Masa'aki Maruyama

The existence of sculpture

A bronze block of modest size stands before me, its textures revealed by the play of the light across its dull surfaces. I find myself suddenly fascinated, unable to turn away as something archaic and fully formed seems to emerge. At first glance, the block appears geometrical, but its surfaces swell organically, overflowing with a tension derived from within. It is to these surfaces that the block, sometimes gently tilting and sometimes floating, as if defying gravity, owes its form. The outlines of its faces quietly define the whole. The groove cut into the top seems as if it has always been there, rather than being a feature added by the sculptor. As I observe the relationship between the groove and the surface that contains it, so a new relationship emerges between the block as a whole and the space it occupies. The surface reveals itself to be endlessly complex: a composite of scratches, subtle shifts in colour, unevenness and the myriad other traces of the sculptor's tools, as if time had been sealed in bronze. The work I have described here was on display in Maruyama Masaaki's studio .



Maruyama Masaaki was born in 1952 in Toyoshina-machi (today Azumino-shi) in Nagano Prefecture. He became a student of Sato Churyo in the sculpture department at Toyko Zokei University. According to Sato, “In a successful form, force and counterforce work together.” Maruyama’s conception follows from this. When a sculpture acts on the floor with force X, the floor returns that force X— then a sculpture can be said to “stand”. Sato goes on to say, “When the fundamental axis and direction of force emanating from a work at some point meet a resistant or delimiting axis and direction of force, the work achieves a subtle balance, triggering an aesthetic sense of well-being. This delicate balance can also be seen in Maruyama’s works. So, while there are differences between the styles of the two sculptors, if one looks beyond these divergences, an essential commonality can still be found.

After graduating from university in Japan, Maruyama went to Italy, where he studied sculpture for another 4 years at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan. During his training, he took part in group exhibitions, and after graduating had solo exhibitions in municipal museums and galleries in Italy and in the Federal Republic of Germany. He then spent 8 years in Stuttgart, during which time he participated in numerous exhibitions in Germany. The art critic Irmtraud Schaarschmidt-Richter has written of how “Japanese culture, seen from the West, seems quite alien, with utterly different priorities, and characterized by an extreme sensitivity to mood and feeling, but also to the coherence of forms and their surfaces, and to the maintenance of balance born from the tension between opposed forces. It is this balance, an expression of the spiritual, which is the essence of East Asian and Japanese art, even in modern times”. She points out that Maruyama, even as he absorbs the influences of European art, pursues the essence of Japanese culture. He moved to Italy to destroy a language of form that until that point had been his too and to discover a style of his own. Yet, from the insight that destruction and creation occur simultaneously, he developed an

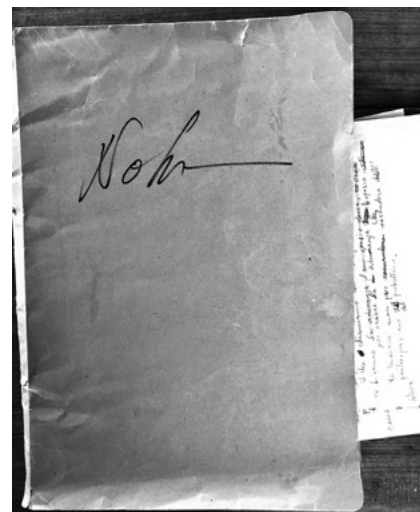


artistic practice predicated upon a decision to see the two cultures of East and West not in opposition to one another but rather in a dialectical relationship in which each is preserved while at the same time being transformed by contact with the other.

In his final essay at the Italian University, Maruyama turned his attention to Japanese Noh Theatre. It seems that after his move to Italy he felt the need to re-examine Japanese culture. In the commentary written for this exhibition, Maruyama refers to the way in which the much discussed expressionism and the organization of the stage in Noh leaves a vivid impression on the space of the theatre before going on to draw a connection between these aspects of Noh and the expressivity of sculptural form.

I am reminded of a performance on the Noh stage of the Hakusan shrine at Chūson-ji Temple more than 25 years ago. There, as the heat of the day faded, I watched Shirotamura played on an open-air stage, bathed in the colours of evening. Open-air Noh is an early form of this theatrical tradition, one in which the stage merges with nature to form a single, unified space. The wind blew, the rustling of the leaves could be heard, the smell of plants and trees was in the air. The conditions of time and place in which any Noh play is performed can never be reproduced exactly. When, with almost imperceptible dance steps, the actor appeared on stage, the atmosphere suddenly changed and the tension increased. When the bonfire was lit, a new world of unfathomable depth emerged. Performers, as well as the sounds of drum and flute, dusk and light, nature and audience, all merged into a harmonious whole. This experience was so powerful that even with the passing of time, these impressions have remained vivid in my memory.

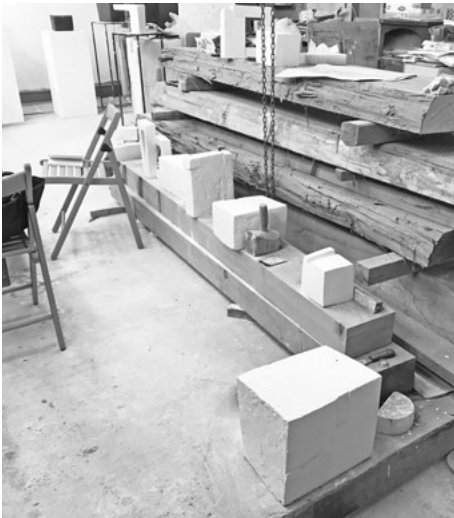
The beauty of Noh Theater is conveyed by the term “hana”, which is the Japanese word for “flower”. Essential to the expression of “hana” is the practice of subtle representation. It is said that “hana” can also arise when, although nothing happens on stage, the main actor, through practice, possesses the true grace of “hana”. This precisely is the nature of the practice sought by Maruyama; for him the



Quindi ogni rappresentazione è sempre compiaciuta, è fatta per il gusto degli spettatori, per il piacere, per il divertimento. Per questo concetto di tempo sostituisco il spazio. Il che diventa un concetto che dice con compiacimento (Maruyama) insomma questo significa è il posto, l'intero spazio che compiono il teatro di pubblico e il teatro del teatro. Di questo SPAM il mio polo è composto di Noh, perché il paese di performance è il suo e gli altri di teatro sono i suoi. Il teatro è pubblico e teatro accademico.

1) la danza è una completa parola del suono e pubblico e presenza completa con compassione, etica. Il che è diventato una compassione nello spazio.

2) Insomma la danza è un'azione che è un'azione per creare la danza. Il teatro è un'azione. La danza non può essere un'azione del teatro. La danza è un'azione del pubblico.



sculpture is a “flower”. Standing there before the sculptures, I felt the connection between Maruyama’s works and my encounter with Noh. Maruyama produces his plaster moulds in Azumino, in his studio with its high ceilings. He shapes and scrapes with his hands, surrounded by numerous white blocks of plaster. According to Maruyama, the size of the studio influences the way he works, and is one reason why the sculptures feel big. The finished plaster moulds are sent to a bronze foundry producing quality artefacts in Milan, where Maruyama once lived. The surfaces of the cast bronzes, carefully finished by Maruyama, are then coloured using acid by technicians at the foundry working to the sculptor’s instructions. On this occasion, the completed bronzes have been sent to Japan to be shown in the current exhibition. Here they enter into new relationships with space and the viewer, and it is a pleasure to observe how they exist, co-exist, and create space in the capacious enclosure of the gallery.



Nakajima Minoru, Curator Koumi-Machi Kougen Museum of Art
(Translation from Japanese by David Ruzicka)