

A Form of Silence

Letter to Maruyama Masaaki from Sakai Tadayasu

Whenever I try to think of your works, the day I first met you comes to my mind; I can remember it very clearly.

Wherever a man's memory puts down the first beginning of an impression: it will change according to the changes the acquaintance with whoever caused this impression, and the feelings towards this somebody, will undergo. A sculptor like Brancusi, who never saw his birthplace in Rumania, kept longing for distant places; whereas Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, who knew the places of their birth and upbringing by heart, could develop creative energies through this knowledge.

I met you in Toyoshina City, in Shinshu, your home. As you showed me around your studio on the outskirts of this city, and I encountered your works for the first time, I found in them a very quiet mood, just as if time had stopped for just an instant. Seeing works of art far away the city noise is not that rare, but here, I found myself in the middle of a carefree atmosphere, drawn in I think by the peculiari character of your sculptures.

I tried and touched the sculptures to see what they felt like. There were works in two or three rectangles, sometimes different in type, built up vertically. Especially interesting to me were those which joined together separate rectangular bronzes; very small and delicate carved lines hinting to the original form; that I found just great.

Everything superfluous is eliminated, and yet there was something soft, as if the artist's hand had been stroking the surfaces and squares of these rectangular bronzes; and sometimes, too, the touch made one think of ceramic or dark pieces of furniture. Yet one must beware of all-too-early symbolic and abstract thinking. Looking through the catalogue of your works from the second half of the Eighties, your experience in representational portraits of the human body seems to have an implicit influence. – The way this 'something soft' feels like seems to be attained quite naturally and unconsciously, but for a sculptor, all this is a matter of conscious planning, I guess.

Anyhow, your trick of fixing a circuit between men and nature is possible just because it's applied indirectly, and wouldn't be possible with a purely geometrical strategy, I thought.

If we open an origami ship, basically geometrical as it is, we come back to a flat leaf of paper; but we want a sort of development like opening a bud and becoming a flower; a German philosopher wrote this, Walter Benjamin; and that's what comes to my mind when I see your works; and also, that we can see here, in an indirect form, some part of your character that has a close affinity with your sculptures. This part is not just nice and friendly, as could be felt from watercolour painting, for example; rather it's silence, as fits a stone-like lump.

Anyway, I thought: how much company can a sculptor be, at all, during the time I am

talking about? When I tried to think how you would answer this sort of question, I realized that once more I had fallen into the critic's bad habit, and silenced these doubts. One occasionally comes to intrude into the originality of a sculptor, questioning everything, but in your case, I wasn't in the mood for this at all, I just kept running around excitedly, and looking at your works.

This studio visit was in May, 2002. The season had a cool, chilly feeling, it was the freshest season, when the mountains change their colour into a bright green, and one can encounter nature's change. Accidentally, the museum of my friend Mr I. had just been opened; the night after the opening ceremony, I received an invitation from your wife; and so we became acquainted. The next day, I stayed at your place until well into the afternoon, enjoying a wonderful and short time. Talking about sculpture, our talk became lively, and I remember we must have been talking quite a long time, never falling into theory though, rather, jumping all the time to and from between Japanese, German, English, and sometimes Italian.

One thing struck my mind: you interrupted your production for a while; so I asked myself if you hadn't been tempted by a sort of shadowy existence that appeared from its cave. Maybe this fear was unnecessary, artists sometimes need interruptions as a break before a new start; and for someone daily tackling bodies as concrete as sculptures happen to be, an occasional desire to go out just like that, into a hollow world of shadows, is just too natural. Similar to this 'empty world', Giacometti too gave up carving surrealistic sculptures in favour of those endless slim sculptures, he, too, invited by a hollow world, by the shadows from the cave. So after all, the dialogue with the world of your shadows I had been worrying about was just one more break in order to give your creative energies a chance, and my worries may have been groundless. Rilke too had been born from Rodin's studio. This rather resembles those productive pains someone gifted with superior sensitivity carves into his own soul; one might call it birth pangs. A poet carves the changes of the world into his heart and makes free use of the words which are his material, but unlike a sculptor, he does not want to change the world. In you, I thought I saw a form of silence.

Irmtraud Schaarschmidt-Richter has written about you that, regardless of how much time they may have spent abroad, there were artists firmly rooted in their own culture; and that you never tore out your roots. The cave, I feel, has something to do with these roots. An artist is, after all, less occupied with outward realities than with burning his own hands on his own inner reality. (I don't know why you carried Japanese atmosphere out of things Western, why you became aware of your inner weather-changes.)

Sculpture having to do with space, aiming at the future: You seem to regard this line of thought with a certain suspicion, don't you? Thinking about life having to do with a consciousness of time (memory), of course one has to interrupt one's work often, to spend a suitable time thinking.

What made the first encounter so decisive was, your works just had completely won me. No doubt about this. It's not easy to say why, anyhow they were to my taste and I thought them just great! That, too, is why I tried to imagine in what sort of room they would have

to be, tried to calculate their relative centrifugality, speculated on their connection with various extrinsic worlds. Yet – something really typical of your sculptures – they had their own universe, and prevented futile attempts to expand them. They already have the size that becomes them, and what makes their fascination so strong: they are measured by the same stick as your nature is. The gesture of your sculptures – which is what last point I wanted to make – full of secret attempt, nothing boasting at all, has a power leaving a deep impression.

I wish this exhibition the best of success!