

Extra edition: IIS Art work presentation [Dorveille]: There is something you can only express through pottery Saito Toshiju



Art work placed in front of the IIS Research building <archetype00021>

In the last article, we introduced “Dorveille”, a work about the time interval between the conscious and the subconscious when you are about to sleep.

The person, who made this work that can be considered even philosophical, is Saito Toshiju (Associate professor at the art school of the University of Tsukuba).

Saito wants to explore the uniqueness of creating something through pottery, and he is doing research on the creation of an educational program that uses pottery making as a way to communicate ideas.

We will ask him why is he so interested in artistic representations through pottery.

Since I have been doing pottery until now, I think that it is a way to express myself that suits me

- Why did you begin to do artistic representations using pottery?

When I entered the university, I was engaged in painting. I started doing it because I liked it. However, on the way I started to be worried about what to express, so it eventually became difficult to paint.

My interest started to change from representations in the two dimensional plane (surface) to three-dimensional representations. After exploring different things, I finally met pottery in my third year as a student.

- What did you find charming about pottery?

I was attracted by the process of mixing clay, giving it form, decorating it and finally firing it. Painting, since it involves painting directly on a canvas, is fascinating in the sense that you can continue painting forever until you feel it's complete. However, that also made it difficult for me to express myself. In the case of pottery, there is a moment when the piece that you shaped leaves your hands to be put in the oven. During that moment, since there is a certain distance between the work and yourself, many things can fail. I became fascinated with the fact that your representation includes that limitation (an inconvenient part). Since I have been doing pottery until now, I think that it is a way to express myself that suits me.

There is an archetype common among many things (animals, plants, genes, matter, molecules, atoms, quarks, etc.)

- There are many ways to express yourself in art. Some persons feel that they can express themselves better through painting, and some others through pottery. Which one feels better for you depends on the person, right?

In that context, it was a big moment in your life when you could find the way to express yourself that best suits you, right? Right now, what are you expressing through pottery?

Outside of the IIS and inside the University of Tsukuba you can find art works that belong to the work series [archetype]. Archetype is a concept originally introduced by the philosopher Carl Gustav Jung, and it is a way of thinking that there is something unconscious, a type, that is shared among all humanity and trespasses barriers such as nations and people. It's also called the collective unconscious.



Work placed inside the University of Tsukuba <archetype50024>

- It's difficult. I thought that the conscious and the subconscious is something that is made based on our experience. So maybe there is something shared by all humanity that goes beyond the experience of the individual, right? I understand somehow.

It's not that I'm expressing what Jung said as it is. It's not something only shared by the human race, but I think it's an archetype shared by many things (animals, plants, genes, matter, molecules, atoms, quarks, etc.).

It's hard to explain, but for example, before you fall asleep, abstract forms come to your mind. I want to give shape to them. In other words, it can be said that I'm expressing through pottery the collective subconscious that

I considered subjectively. Since it's subjective, there can be a person who views the work and thinks it's a giraffe or a dinosaur or even something more emotional. I think that it's interesting for the artist that different persons have different impressions. I don't mind what the person might feel through the work of art, but I want them to think, even if it's a little, that there is some deep and abstract world.

- It's hard to think about the collective unconscious, isn't it? For me, it's been an opportunity to think that maybe there is that kind of world. And you have a special preference for representing that abstract world through pottery, right?

I think that I'm making a practical use of pottery to represent the abstract world. I also mentioned it on the main edition, but pottery is made from mixing the clay, giving it shape and firing it in the oven at 1200C to 1300C.

I feel fascinating that the process in which the soft clay changes form and hardens into the pottery, and I think that this process is fundamental for representing something through pottery. Of course, I don't know if I'm really representing an archetype with that, but still ...



Saito is explaining how by changing the proportions of metal oxide the final pottery changes

I saw the moment when the participants connected with each other during the workshop of "pottery-making as communication"

- Forgive me for my rudeness, but I have the feeling that your works of art have many points that normal people can't understand.

(Laughs). However, I want them to understand. My works of art are made from several parts that look like 3D-puzzles, but by using those characteristics I try to make the viewers understand it. When I have to present the works in a museum for example, sometimes I host an event where I make the work of art with the viewers. By doing that, I hope they can understand better the abstract works. I started that kind of workshops 20 years ago, and even now I still continue them.



A scene at the workshop inside the Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum where people construct the artwork

- Even now? What kind of workshops are you doing?

Recently, I am looking into doing an educational pottery workshop as a communication tool to connect the citizens of Tsukuba with the victims of the Tohoku earthquake of 2011.

At first, it looks like a good activity but it's a very delicate subject. Since pottery is something that can break, it might bring bad memories of the earthquake and the tsunami, so I think it might be somehow impertinent. After the earthquake I've been wondering what I can do with my art to help the recovery.

There were many problems, but when I finally managed to do the workshop, I could see how the participants got connected by giving shape to the clay. Even though they didn't talk about their different lives and backgrounds, I think it was an opportunity to share some time together, and I think a bond was born from that moment. I want to contribute to solve problems by frequently doing this kind of workshops.



A group photo from the workshop [Connecting people through pottery-making] that started after the earthquake

Official FB project site <https://www.facebook.com/yui.utsuwa/>

Up to here was the interview to Saito. What did you feel? Were you fascinated by pottery? I think that you can represent abstract things, because pottery is full of emotions and feelings.

And I was fascinated by the fact that new bonds can be made through pottery. I felt that I came in touch with the deepness and greatness of the value of art. Different from science, art makes people plentiful.