

Introduction to IIS art works "Dorveille"

There are things that can only be expressed through pottery ~Toshiju Saito's -



There are six kinds of art works in total exhibited in IIS. Today, we introduce one of those works: "Dorveille". In this work, short rods are aligned cluttered. But what does this exactly mean? Toshiju Saito (Associate Professor in the Art and Design School at the University of Tsukuba), who is specialized in ceramics and the author of this work, explained "I gave shape to the sensations we all have experienced at least once in our lives"

Shaping the mysterious sensations of the moment when you fall asleep

What exactly is this exhibition representing?

It represents the mysterious form of time between the subconscious and the conscious mind. I think everyone has also experienced that, the moment right before you fall asleep many ideas come to your mind, old memories revive and vivid images flash in your head. I expressed that sensation using 191 pieces of pottery.

- I also get lost in my thoughts when I get inside the futon. Sometimes when lying down, good ideas are born and I think "Let's work on them tomorrow!".

In my case, when I get an idea and fall asleep I frequently forget it (laughs). In this exhibition, the right part represents the conscious mind when you are awake, and as you move to the left part, you can observe how the subconscious surfaces when you are falling asleep. Of course, this doesn't mean that these conscious minds have a specific shape, but it is the shape I gave through my subjective feelings.



Toshiju Saito during the interview

There are things that can only be expressed through pottery

- What we are usually aware is the conscious mind, and deep inside is the subconscious with fading memories and feelings, right? I can also sympathize with the idea that the subconscious arises when falling asleep. When I look at the work in detail, I can see that the right part, representing the conscious mind, is made of a metallic sharp color and as you move to the left part, representing the

subconscious, it becomes like pottery that hardened as if metal had melted. I feel like the subconscious and the conscious minds are expressed in this way.

You noticed well (laughs). In each piece of pottery, I put something like the mentality inside the consciousness. These kind of expressions can be only be realized through pottery.

Pottery starts by kneading and shaping the clay, and then firing it in a kiln that reaches 1200 °C ~1300 °C. Even though the same clay is used and fired at the same temperature, the resulting piece of pottery can be different depending on the concentration ratio of metal oxides (manganese dioxide, cobalt oxide, iron oxide, etc.) inside the clay.

For example, by changing the amount of feldspar and silica in the clay, the glaze of the resulting piece becomes glassy, and by adding metal oxides, the glaze becomes colored and melts. Regarding this work, as you move to the subconscious side, the left part, the pottery has a higher ratio of metal oxides, so you see that it has a matte color and it looks as if it had melted. Even if it is a fact that changing the quantity ratio creates the change, I also feel something emotional by the way it changes. I think that the nature of this kind of pottery is suitable to represent something like the depths of human psychology.

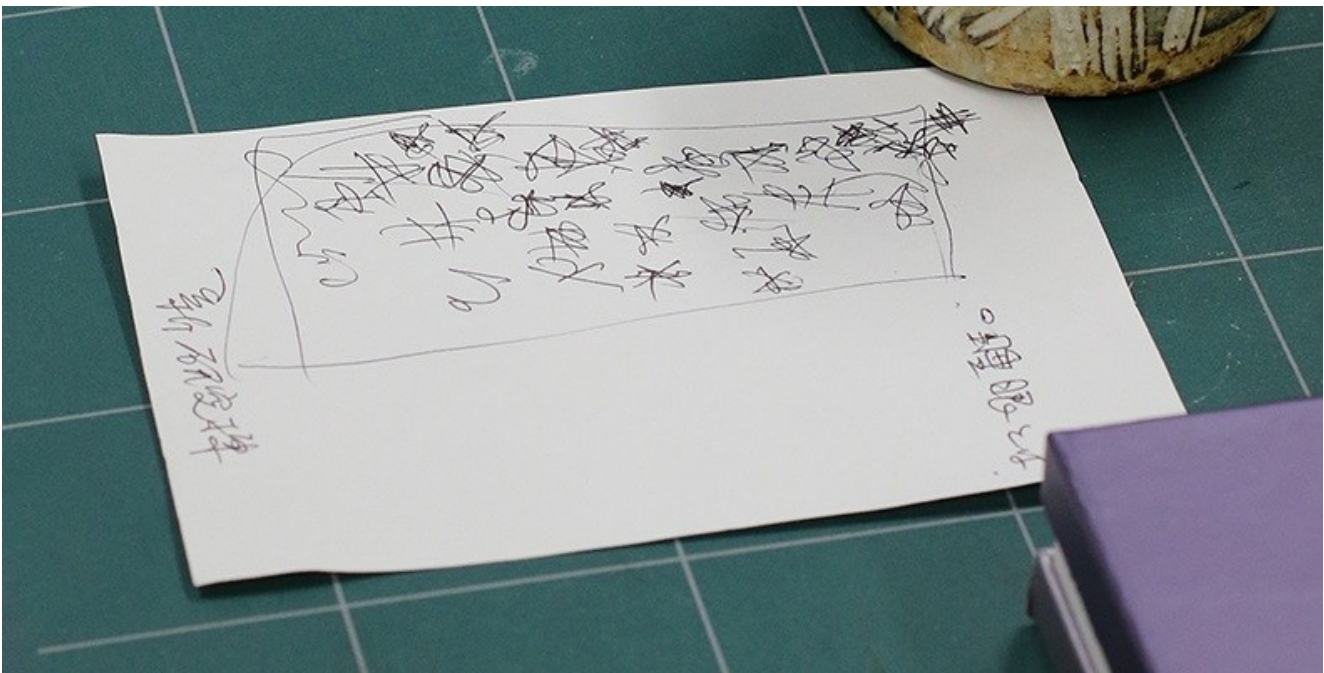


(Left) Pottery representing the subconscious, (Right) Pottery representing the conscious mind

From ideas born from sketch to pieces of work with emotional attachment

- So many different outcomes just from subtle changes in the components! Certainly, there is a similar feeling with that of the complex human psychology. What made you come with this idea?

In April of 2014 I was called to attend a meeting with the University of Tsukuba Arts School director and professor Yanagisawa, where I heard from him the idea to build a new research building. Professor Yanagisawa, who studied for a long time in the United States, wanted to create a space for promoting research activities, and he was talking about incorporating arts in the IIS building. When I heard that, it had not been yet decided whether I was going to be on charge or not. At that moment I was just thinking "why do I have so many thoughts just before falling asleep?", and somehow I drew a sketch, more like a scrawl (laughs).



Notes sketched at the time of the meeting

- **The sketch is almost the same as the actual finished work. What process did you follow to give it shape?**

Honestly, I struggled considerably until giving it shape (wry smile). At first, when I proposed the plan to hang the pottery pieces on the wall considering that they shouldn't break and that there was a limit of weight,

everyone around me told me “It’s impossible”. But, I felt the strong motivation from professor Yanagisawa, and after discussing it several times I managed to somehow realize it. From there, I made a plan together with the students from the Arts Department, and I made a workshop to make pottery together with people who work in this research facility. By doing so, I thought that maybe it was possible to make pottery pieces with emotional attachment.



Pottery made together with the people who actually use the IIS building

I made these pieces with grateful feelings towards all lives

- So the thoughts from the people working at the research facility were also incorporated, right?

So far I heard a variety of things in this talk, like the conscious mind and the subconscious, like the feelings from the researchers put into the work, but I would like to know from yourself, Professor, what do you want people to feel when they look at this work?

Since people have different feelings when looking at a piece of art, I think that it's fine for everyone to feel different things when looking at my work.

I don't mind if they don't really understand it, or even if they don't like it at all. It's enough for me if they get some kind of stimulus. Of course, my thoughts are there inside the work.

- What are those thoughts?

I don't want to say it because it will sound dull, but I put my feelings for the "repose of souls in life". Researchers put their souls in their research, and that research is supported by the lives of many mice. Some may criticize the use of these lives, but the research progresses thanks to them. So, I put in my work all these grateful feelings towards all lives. It is not that I put these feelings somewhere in particular, but that I made it with these feelings in mind.



I felt once more that our research is accomplished through the thoughts of many people and the sacrificed lives. Just the other day, I remember that some people who visited IIS said "For us research seems inorganic, but when we see the researchers from IIS, we felt their respect for life and their passion to investigate sleep". From now on, I will also promote research activities with this in mind.

Next time I will send Associate Professor Saito's interview extra edition. I think that I also felt when I briefly looked at this blog, that Associate Professor Saito is challenging himself to represent the depth of human psychology through pottery. Next time, we will introduce more about these activities. Look forward to it!

Toshiju Saito laboratory:

<http://www.geijutsu.tsukuba.ac.jp/~toshijulab/>