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Satoshi Saito, Sculptor living in Canada

Akatoki, Commemorative Monument for Nagano Olympic

Full of shout and cheer at the base of the bobsled and luge run on the site of the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano Prefecture. There stands, majestically, a stone monument 1.8 meters high. The sculpture, entitled Akatoki, is the most recent creation of Satoshi Saito. Mr. Saito told me, with a wry smile, “My 95-year-old mother, who lives in Ina city, may have finally understood my work when she first heard about this monument.”

37 years ago Mr. Saito left Japan to study econometrics at the graduate level at McGill University in Montréal. In Canada, through a friend, he was introduced to a community of poets and artists. After a year or two living among such men and women in the vast natural beauty of that country, he took a new path in life and became a ceramic artist.

“Observing the rapid developments in the society, neighboring United States, I realized my own contribution as an economist would be irrelevant,” Mr. Saito told me.

Mr. Saito met a fellow ceramic artist, Louise Doucet, married her, and returned with her to Japan to work in Mashiko, in Tochigi Prefecture, with Tatsuzo Shimaoka and with the late Shoji Hamada.
After returning to Canada, and gradually over the subsequent years, Satoshi and Louise became established ceramic artists. Then, at one point, becoming dissatisfied with the limits of clay, they started to explore another artistic medium. They found in stone sculpture a more satisfying expression of volume.

In 1968 they bought 50 hectares of farmland in a remote Québec village, where they renovated a nineteenth century house and built a workshop. They raised their family, tended chickens, watching cows on the pasture and grew vegetables on the farm, and in a largely wordless time and space continued their passionate pursuit for "what is beautiful, silent but strong."

"It was difficult for my wife, as I had no fixed income," Mr. Saito told me.

"Sometimes I was criticized for not having remained at university and ultimately becoming a professor myself. But living in the country you come to taste food deeply, experience the joy of eating fresh vegetables and chickens you have raised yourself, and you experience the joy of meeting people gets stronger."

The works created by this sensitive artist of such exceptional sensibility, an artist who is immersed in nature and who accepts nature wholeheartedly, never fail to move city dwellers. Exhibitions of Mr. Saito’s works at a variety of galleries in Japan, as well as the exhibition at Ebisu Garden Place in Tokyo, have all been well received.

"The more I work the more beautiful forms seem to come to me. So it seems I still have a long way to go."

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