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East meets West

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
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In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

East Meets West

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Introduction

At the age of 21, I left my country and traveled to Europe. This was my first experience of leaving my country for one year. This journey opened my mind in many ways. When you are a traveler, you cannot stay in one place for very long even when you are having a good time in a new environment. The time comes when you should move on to another place and start all over again. As a traveler you meet new people and live in new places. You feel your life will begin anew each time you stop, but then the time comes, when you will leave this place and start all over again.

When I was young I kept traveling in this way for a long time. This experience in my youth built up my mentality and strongly affected my way of thinking. I became a kind of person, who felt that I should keep moving, not only through travel, but throughout my life. My experience made me believe in myself and allowed me to keep moving a head to fulfill my dream. "Never give up and stop, because tomorrow will be fine" this has become the most important sentence for my life and through my work I would like to say this to others.

East meets West

I grew up in a far eastern country, Japan. Eastern culture started from India and China, then it passed through Korea and came to Japan. Our country is the final station of eastern culture. I consider our culture to be very simple and at the same time sophisticated. My sense of beauty is strongly influence by my culture. Japanese culture appreciates "the way it is". For example, you will see simplicity and sophistication in a Japanese garden. The Japanese create small examples of nature in their gardens. There are small mountains, rivers, forests and fields landscaped in a natural way.



Japanese garden



Western garden

On the other hand I see that the controlling of nature is important in western gardens. In Japanese gardens there are stones, trees and grass, which are perfectly shaped by people. I am able to see the beauty of "the way it is ", from old Japanese wall paintings "Fusuma, e" which gave me the idea for my works surface decollation. The

Japanese made their painting materials from natural sources. They ground different colored mineral stones into powder and mixed it with rabbit glue. Their color was so natural and very different from European oil painted pictures. I have developed my own technique to create the same color that old Japanese painting have. I am trying to create the atmosphere of ancient Japanese culture in my work.



Fusmae



Early work

The shape and content of my work is strongly influenced by our culture. In the early period of my work I created symbols for my own shrine. The top had a fish made from bronze casting; I created this as my own god for my own worship. I believe there is no religion to worship, just the belief and appreciation for the destiny of my life. My philosophy of life is “the worship of nature”, the same as “Shinto”, which is the Japanese religion from ancient times. “Shinto” is the worship of nature and there is no God to believe in.

The second stage of my work is influenced by our surrounding objects; I am able to see beautiful shapes, structures and details on surfaces from everyday life, especially from nature. I believe that nature is the best teacher for artists. For example the shape of a rolling stone from a river is so graceful and perfect. I have a strong appreciation of the shapes created by nature.



Second stage works, image from nature

The old Japanese style house structure is different from western houses. It has an “Engawa”, which is a corridor along the edge of a house facing the garden. The divisions from the “Engawa” to the rooms of the house are only paper sliding doors called “Fusuma”. Japanese people like to live as near to nature as possible, even when they are in their homes. Western people like to live in a more warm and comfortable surroundings separate from nature. In Western culture, the houses are built from stronger and more permanent materials to protect the people from the power of nature. The life style of modern Japan has greatly changed but the idea of living close to nature is still in my blood.



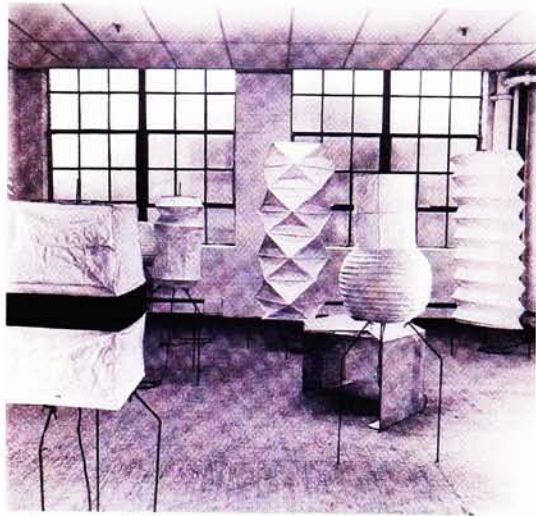
Old Japanese style house Western style house

As a young man I lived out of my country for six years in the United States and Europe. I have been strongly influenced by Western culture especially “the idea of the vessel”, artists in the West use the shape of the vessel to express feelings and emotions and do not necessarily think about the way we use it. It would be hard to find this kind of freedom in Japanese culture.

I began to study glass art at California College of Art and Craft in 1983. In the early 80's people were very interested in breaking with tradition and general common sense. I felt the power of the “Flower Movement”, “Pop Art”, “Woman's right”, etc, all were fighting for freedom from a controlled society. I learned the importance of liberation from a preconceived idea for living. Japan has such a long history of “Dou”, which means “The Way”. For example “Ka-dou” is flower arrangement, “Sa-dou” is tea ceremony, it is almost the same conventional culture for art. The rules from ancient times still strongly exist in Japanese minds and breaking through a preconceived idea is so hard for Japanese people. However my way of thinking has changed due to my experience of living for six years in Western counties. The ideas, shapes and structures for my works are totally free from any preconceived ideas. I am able to create the shapes and the structures for my pieces from my own conception.



1981, Cooling Tower Teapot



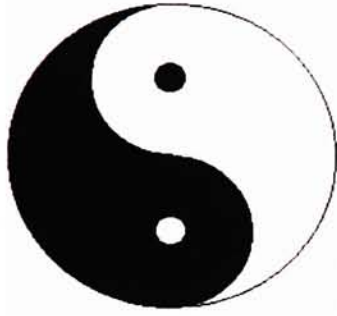
Isamu Noguchi, Akari Lamp
Image from Old Japanese Lamp

The great Japanese sculptor Isamu Noguchi, crated his works between the two cultures, East and West, looking for his own identity. I would like to say; “ I am creating my work to give a sense of feeling between the two cultures, my journey of “From East to West”. I will continue to make my work, looking for myself.

The concept of my work

I have already discussed my travel experience of when I was young. Traveling to me is the same as the journey of life. Life cannot always be the same. it will change sooner or later. There is a day and night in the same circle. Happiness will connect to sadness and sadness will connect to happiness. Both will be in the same circle and will be rotating. I feel life can be so simple. If you believe in tomorrow and keep moving a head, a sunny day will be waiting for you. You should also remember that a sunny day will turn to a rainy day sooner or later. All human beings have to follow this simple theory, whether you like it or not. My first traveling experience out of my country for one year in Europe when I was 21years old, taught me this simple idea. Since then, I mentally became more optimistic and strong. I understood that my life is strongly ruled by this idea and is the most important core of my life.

The image of the fish that I draw on the surface of my works is a migrating fish. He has to keep swimming the whole of his life. When he stops swimming, he will die. He has to keep swimming a round in the ocean until he dies. I believe that I have the same destiny of life, as this type of fish. “The Fish” is the symbol of my life style and a massage for others,” Just keep swimming, tomorrow will be fine as long as you do not stop.”



Light and Dark in the same circle



My fishes

The surface decoration of my work

I have developed my own surface decoration technique. I pick up small pieces of color glass onto a blowing pipe and make a small bubble. Then I gather hot glass four-five times from out of furnace. After the final gather, I blow the hot glass to half the final size, I then apply silver foil, which is called "Sumi". "Sumi" is a thin silver foil between leaf and foil. This has a nice thickness for glass blowing. When I have covered whole glass surface with silver, I start to blow the glass bubble again. The glass has to have more than a half-centimeter thickness. I make the shape that I want it to be. When the shape is finished, I apply another sheet of silver, I have to make sure that the silver sticks strongly to the surface of the glass; otherwise the silver will fall off later. The piece will be able to be taken out from the annealing oven after more than 12 hours of annealing time. Using drumming tools like a dentist use, I start to draw the fish images onto the silver surface of my glass piece. Before I dip my piece into electro plating bath, I apply masking materials onto the surface of fish, this process will keep the fish part of the surface of the silver and will stop the silver part of the surface becoming copper, except the fish part. Now that I have the silver surface and the copper surface on my piece I am ready to complete the process. The final step of patination of the copper surface takes place. I use the old Japanese patina called "Rokushiyo-u", which is copper rust from a special recipe, only one company in Japan still makes this patina. I mix copper sulfate with water and this patina will react only with copper and turn the copper surface to some different colors. Almost all of old Japanese metal works were colored with this patina style using this coloring technique. My piece's surfaces have a look and an atmosphere of old Japanese style wall painting.

The biography of my works

Since 1988, I have used the theme of "From East to West", I had developed my ideas and have shown my graduation works show at RIT in 1989.



From East to West



From East to West

In 1990 I started to introduce some movement into my work, which represented images and movements of the humans body.



From East to West



From East to West

I kept looking for shapes from the natural environment and I transferred some of these natural objects into my works in 1992.



East to West "On the Ice"



East to West "On the Stone"

I built my own glass studio out-side Tokyo. In 1994 I started to have an interest in the human body and the structure of a dog's body.



From East to West "Hito" From East to West "Inu"

I kept working on the surface decoration and shapes of my work. In 1996 I began to think about creating images on the inside of my glass. I thought about how I could create these images in my work and started to create solid glass works .



Experimental work

From East to West"Katamari"

In 1998 I was invited to Waterford Glass Factory, in Ireland, as residence artist for two weeks. Visiting, the land of Ireland, I was impressed by the Celtic Sprit, I started making a series of work titled "Scene of Celt" .



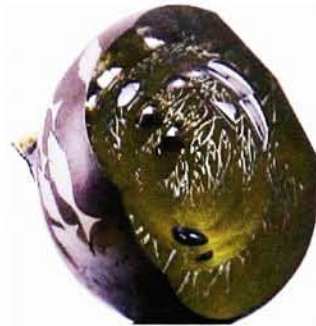
Scene of Celt

I was interested in seeing migratory fish swimming in a fish tank at an aquarium. This scene greatly impressed me and I tried to create this image in my glass work. Finally,

in 1999 I was able to create my own aquarium image in the inside of my work.



The migratory fishes are swimming



In 2000, I took an idea from “Ikebana” which is Japanese flower arrangement. I started to put glass blown fishes, like “Ikebana “, inside thick and heavy vessels, which are cut and polished, I called the series “Fish catcher”.



Ikebana



Fish Catcher

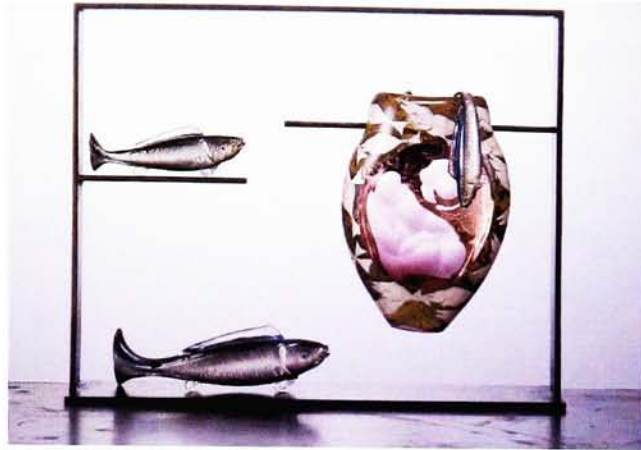


Fish Catcher

I have been making the “Fish catcher” series for three years, creating different shapes and sizes. I became tired of grinding the bottom of my work. The Vessel has to be ground on the bottom to make it stand, so, I came up with the idea of hanging the glass vessel on the metal frame, this series is called “Fish Hanger”.



Fish Hanger



Fish Hanger

Conclusion

There are many ways for the artists to express himself. Modern Art, Conceptual Art, Fine Art, Craft, etc, artist have many different opportunities. I believe there is not one important category for art. The importance is for the artist himself to find his own way. He has to find the best way to express himself. I believe that the artist has to first enjoy what he has created.

Hot glass is the most important material for me to express my ideas. Glass has many characters because of its clear color. It can also be changed like any other materials, clay, metal, stone, etc. Glass is the best material for creating a world inside of a piece because of its transparency. I enjoy the freedom, which clear glass gives me.

I enjoy the process of glass blowing. I would like to say that the glass blowing is like "The dancing with material". Hot glass is controlled by gravity of the earth; when I stop turning a blowing pipe, it will start to drop, when I start to spin the pipe, it will spread. Hot glass has its own movement following the rules of nature. I cannot push it too much; there is no way to control it perfectly, however I cannot be timid, otherwise it will start to control me. When I achieve a harmony with glass, it begins to follow my wishes.

The dialoged with the material is one of the most important aspects of a glass artist. From the experience of glass blowing, the glass teaches me about the shapes and gives me important ideas and inspirations for new work. When I look at the work that I have made or lumps of cold glass I get many ideas for future work..

My concept of work is so simple. I gather inspiration from traveling in my young days, and from my surrounding and objects that I see from every day life. I keep creating my works trying to evolve them and myself at the same time. In my final goal "I would like to be proud of my self as an artist especially as a glass artist."