

SHINJI SUZUKI

Shino Artist

Sep 2022

SHINJI SUZUKI EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW(PART 2)

Tosei Kyoto Gallery is currently holding a solo exhibition of Shinji Suzuki. In this issue, we introduce Part 2 of our interview with Mr. Suzuki.



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—How did you come up with the objects which feldspar is attached like cloud?

A little difference in the layers of feldspar can make a difference of tens of thousands of years. The generation a little before ours used to pay a lot of money for a good layer of feldspar with few impurities. After all, everyone wants the big fatty tuna. But the big fatty tuna part of the feldspar is becoming more and more depleted. However, I felt that it is a pity that there is a layer which people do not pay attention at all, even though they are made of the same type of feldspar. It is a matter of course that good things can be made using good materials. But I think a good artist should be able to draw out the potential of natural materials and how to make the best use of them. That is how my feldspar series began.



(Photo: Objects of feldspar series)

—How is it actually made?

For this piece, a bowl vessel which is easy to break is made, surrounded by it, and fired in a gas kiln. However, if the bowl is just a round shape, it would look too enclosed, so the shape is made to match the shape of the stone, and the bowl is later collapsed and removed to complete the piece. Until I established the technique, I tried mixing stones with glaze and stirring them to see if they would stick together instantly, and I even tried using a stainless-steel net, but I was completely wiped out. Metals, in particular, lose their viscosity and become crumbly as they oxidize.

The feldspar in this series is still fired in a gas kiln that I built myself, because the feldspar would explode in a wood-fired kiln.

—You built not only the wood-fired kiln but also the gas kiln yourself.

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Until I built a wood-fired kiln, I had been using only this gas kiln for nearly 20 years. I once had a junior pottery come to visit my studio, and he was surprised at how small the kiln was (laugh).

In my mind, having my own kiln was the first thing I thought about. If you use someone else's kiln, you are too reserved and can only produce safe pieces, so you have to try your own kiln and make a lot of mistakes to understand.



(Photo: Gas kiln built by Mr.Suzuki)



(Photo: Wood-fired kiln completed in 2020)

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(Photo: Inside the wood-fired kiln)

—What is the glazing process?

Many people think that with a lot of glaze, we glaze the larger pieces first, but actually it is the opposite. The thickness of the base material differs depending on the piece, whether it is a sake cup, a tea cup, a pitcher, or an object. If the pieces are large and the base material is thick, they absorb a lot of glaze, so I vary the density of the glaze depending on the piece. If you don't thin out a large piece, it will absorb too much glaze. Conversely, the perfect glaze thickness for a large piece would be too thin for a sake cup. Therefore, the glaze is applied thickly to the smaller pieces first, and then gradually thinned to apply to the larger pieces. However, even I explain like this, the difference in the thinness of the glaze is very small.

I also keep the pieces that fail and use them to test the glaze. I use them to get the glazing process underway before starting the actual glazing. With the potter's wheel, I can say that I will work for another hour, but with glazing, the conditions and flow of the glaze can change if I leave for an hour, because the glaze is affected by the climate and precipitates quickly.. So when I glaze, I tell my family to think of me as if I were not there. It is such important work that I would do even wear diapers.

—How did Purple Shino come to be?

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Shino itself was a series of failures, and I was in a state of groping, not knowing what to do. I asked many people, but they just sucked all the information out of me and told me that I just had to burn it long enough without any logical reason. After all, I was told that I would be lucky if I could make only one piece of Shino in my lifetime, and that I would be lucky if I could make a good piece when I was 70 or 80 years old. I decided that I would never be able to make a good Shino, so I decided to focus solely on Shino and do my best research.

It was during this time that I had a chance to talk with Mr. Hideto Ito. Mr. Ito was a senior artist who mainly worked with porcelain, and he was a local artist who had held solo exhibitions in Tokyo and won awards. I saw that Mr. Ito was exhibiting a few Shino sake cups at a solo exhibition and immediately contacted him. He graciously invited me to his house.

We were talking and it was lunchtime, and he quickly made me a delicious pasta dish, and the plate it was served on was so stylish. It was many years ago, but I still remember that moment well. He looked at my test piece and said, "I don't know, I just started too. I know you are having trouble with it, but what I don't have is this color. I can't produce this color." I had met many people, but this was the first time I had someone look at my work objectively. I had always thought that this purple color was a failure, but now I could see that I could expand this possibility.

—That is a nice story. So, finally, is there anything you would like to tell through Shino?

I believe that Shino is not a chemical feldspar glaze where ash is added to make it easier to dissolve or to adjust the ingredients, but the feldspar itself. Therefore, it depends on what kind of feldspar you use and how you cook with it. I am often asked what the definition of Shino is, whether it is the kiln used, the feldspar, the mogusa clay, or even whether it is OK to draw underglaze iron painting, but not overglaze painting. I don't think it is necessary to make such decisions. If I can give form to the fun of Shino, I can enjoy it and feel good about it. The style of my work changes depending on how I perceive it from time to time.

I would like many people to see my work at my solo exhibitions. I know that there are many limitations for each person, such as living far away from home, but in this age of convenience where things move on a screen, I would be happy if people could come to see my work. I want people to feel what cannot be conveyed or understood only by the flat surface of a photograph.

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The Shinji Suzuki exhibition finally ends this week, September 24.

We hope you will take this opportunity to enjoy Mr. Suzuki's energetic works. We are looking forward to seeing you at the gallery.

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