

# SHINJI SUZUKI

*Shino Artist*

Sep, 2022

## SHINJI SUZUKI EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW(PART 1)

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*Tosei Kyoto Gallery is currently holding a solo exhibition of Shinji Suzuki.*

*In this issue, we introduce Part 1 of our interview with Mr. Suzuki in his new studio.*



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## **Suzuki Shinji**

**1976 Born in Gifu City, Gifu Prefecture**

**2000 Completed Tajimi City Ceramic Design Institute**

**2002 Built a kiln in Tajimi City**

**2007 First solo exhibition at Kuroda Toen (Ginza '09-'21)**

**2009 Solo Exhibition (Contemporary Ceramics Salon Tosei, Daimaru Shinsaibashi/Osaka '10, '12, '14, '16, '18)**

**2012 Solo exhibition at Matsuzakaya Nagoya '14, '17**

**2018 Moved to Kani County**

**2020 Build anagama kiln with clay blocks**

**2021 "Shinji Suzuki Ceramic Exhibition -Arrow Standing on Stone-"**

### **—How did you get started in ceramics?**

Originally, I worked for a subcontractor of a major car manufacturer, making 300 parts a day. I lived near the company, so when they saw the lights on in my room, They would say, "Oh, Shinji is there. We are short on staff, so let's have him come over." I worked so hard that I had no time to spend money. Although I had saved up some money, it was not a job I could continue for long, considering the night shifts and I had always wanted to do something more simple since I couldn't get a real sense of what it was like to be told that a car part was "used here"

But back then, we didn't have smartphones like we do now, and job searches were exclusively paper-based. Three years passed in the blink of an eye, and I became impatient that I could not quit at this point. While I was reading a business magazine, which usually introduced about cool young people who had left big companies to start own business, I notice the article about a man who had started his own pottery business, with the sea of Izu in the background and a little ceramic doll on his desk. I had always loved surfing, so I thought, "If I can make something cooler than this doll near the ocean, I can make money. The article said "Tajimi," so I thought, "Where is Tajimi? So I went out to look for a pottery shop, using the smoke as a sign.

### **—So it all started with one article.**

I found a sign for a ceramic artist's store near the Gifu Prefectural Ceramic Museum back then and went to visit. The man in the shop told me "There is no work for you now that the ceramic industry is in decline" I was told, "You've never made ceramics before, so it's impossible" Of course, that is true. As it turned out, he was mistaken, but he told me that the "Tajimi City Institute of Ceramic Design" was an institute that I could attend while receiving unemployment

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insurance. So I looked up and I find out Tajimi is the very popular school which is very difficult to get in ! but I was already working at the time and had no intention of attending back a four-year university, so I thought I could manage for two years in Tajimi and decided to apply.

That is when my battle began. First of all, when I heard that the exam required sketches, I went directly to the school to show them my sketches, but they immediately snickered at me and said, "You will never get in" So I went to a drawing school while working, and repeated the process over and over again, bringing all the drawings I had made in the previous two weeks back to the school to show them. My goal was not only to have my drawings seen, but also to have people remember my face. Since I was working for the company, I had a lot of chance to meet sales people from outside, and they told me, "Shinji, the secret of sales is to first sell your face," so I believed their words and went to the school over and over again.

But I was told by the staff, "This place is funded by taxpayers' money. What do you think the neighbors would think if they saw someone dressed like you and thought their tax dollars were being spent on someone like you? What else are the neighbors going to judge you on? " so I said back, "I'm not even a student here yet, and even today, until a few hours before I came here, I've been working. We are both working people, so it is not right that there is already a hierarchical relationship between us. We should be on equal footing"

## —Still you didn't give up.

I was more determined to pass the entrance examination than to find the school itself attractive.

I continued to go to the school and got the first number in the examination, and at the interview, I was even told, "I thought you were one of our students. I was even told "weren't you a student of ours? So I was in a state of mind that there was nothing more I could do. If I had failed, they would have been blind to me.

## —How did you get started with Shino ?

When I was a student at Tajimi, we had an assignment to choose a theme and do research on it, and only Shino was not chosen by anyone in my group. I guess Shino was old-fashioned and not very popular. However, one of the members of the group told me that his father worked at the Suigetsu kiln on the potter's wheel, so he and I decided to go and learn about Shino. But at that time, I had not yet decided to focusing on Shino, as I was still firing in a gas kiln and touching the porcelain clay.

Also, the owner of the pottery where I was working part-time at the time often asked me, "When are you going to quit, Shinji? He was the kind of person who would pay for part-time work so that he could have opportunities to interact with young students in order to get inspiration from them, so he told me, "You can stay here forever, but there is nothing more to learn from here. With those words, I wanted to make a decision before I turned 30, so I quit my part-time job without having a clear direction.

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From that day on, I have no income. But I have to pay rent and utilities. And of course, I couldn't buy raw materials. I was wondering what to do when I saw a stock of feldspar that I had bought for making my own glazes. I had feldspar, and I could manage clay. Then the story of Shino I heard at the Suigetsu Kiln came to mind, and I thought, "I can do it with Shino."

## —That's how Shino began

But the feldspar I had at the time was mass-produced and had rounded corners, and there were no feldspars that melted slowly and were suitable for Shino.

So I thought I had to change the raw materials, so I took what little money I had and went to a raw materials shop.

And there the man was sorting through them with the forklift, and he said "I found some good stuff. But the bags have been gnawed on by rats, and we don't have enough to sell to everyone, so take some home to try it out. Let me know if you think you can use it" I tried the feldspar and found it to be very good, so I went back to the store and said, "I'll take it. That was my first encounter with the feldspar I use now. The bag that was gnawed on by the rat had the phone number of the mine where the feldspar was obtained, and I called and went to see the owner of the mine to see the site where this feldspar was obtained. This was the beginning of a business relationship that continues to this day.

How was the Part 1 of the interview?

In Part 2, we will introduce Mr. Suzuki's passion for feldspar and the characteristics of glazing. Please look forward to the next edition.

<<<Continue to Part 2>>>