

July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 Kobe Shimbun

## About Susumu Shingu

by Tadao Ando (architect)

### The Hymn of the Life Played by the Wind

Donation of works to the Prefectural Museum of Art

Half a century, keep running on the front line

“Aurora III · IV,” the sculptures by Susumu Shingu, appeared over the big stairs of main lobby of Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art at the beginning of last month. When you look up, colorfully painted 18 panels in red, blue and yellow turn around shining reacting to the delicate current of air and create ever changing world of colors. The museum, having been obliged to close because of COVID-19, opened with a lot of anxiety. The artist, who loves Kobe and Hyogo, gave the best present for the museum’s new beginning.

(captions for photos)

1. The author (left) with Mr. and Mrs. Shingu in Arimafuji Park  
(April, 2014 / provided by the author)
2. “Aurora III” and “Aurora IV” Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art  
(photo by Ryota Akiyama)
3. Susumu Shingu in front of Chambord castle with his sculptures  
in the canal and in the garden = Chambord, France  
(October, 2019 / Kyodo Press)

### The Friendly Personality

It has been 50 years since I got to know Shingu-san. The first encounter with him was at Shoho Gallery in Osaka in late 1960s. It was just before I opened the office right after my return from the round-the-world trip. As it was a one-man show by the artist who returned from Italy, I dropped in and found the artist himself. He showed me around, and we talked about the design in Milan and so on. We had

a nice time talking till it got dark in the coffee shop next door. The genuine elite artist who had graduated Tokyo University of Arts and had been to Italy with the Italian government scholarship had his first solo exhibition in Milan. He knew also the trend of contemporary architecture and spoke the names of star architects such as Kenzo Tange with the ease of a friend of the same age. At that time, it was like a completely different world to me, but I was able to fully understand his friendly personality.

He appeared as one of the eight artists with Taro Okamoto and Isamu Noguchi at the time of Expo '70 in Osaka. Since then I have been watching Shingu-san, who has been running on the front line till today, from a distance. He moved his base to Sanda, Hyogo about 30 years ago, but the offer from the world never stops. In the fall of 2019, his solo exhibition was held at Chambord Castle in France, which is related to the 500th anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci. He is literally a world-class sculptor. However, he is still the same as when I met him 50 years ago. He always has calm and sincere look with somewhat fluffy atmosphere. You never know if he is listening or not listening to others. In short, he is as free as the wind, and behind such surface, the strong will as an artist, which has been passed through for half a century, appears and disappears.

Susumu Shingu, who makes sculptures that fluctuate with the power of wind and water, is said to be the leading figure in so-called "kinetic art" (moving artwork). It originates from Alexander Calder's mobiles in the early 20th century, but such a formal genre division is not necessary for this artist. You will understand it if you look at his project "Wind Caravan," which involves going around the world's remote areas with wind sculptures to learn about the climate, culture and people of each land. Shingu-san is trying to express not the moving sculpture itself, but the "invisible" energy of nature that moves it. What he is trying to convey is the affectionate message for human beings who should live with Mother Nature.

### Light of Hope in Hyogo

What he does is not an expression for expression. He says to "create for the future of the planet Earth." Probably because of that attitude, he accepted immediately, about 30 years ago, when I asked him to cooperate in the "Children's Sculpture Idea International Competition" at the "Hyogo Children's

Museum" in Himeji. In a new attempt to raise the idea of outdoor sculpture to children in Japan and abroad, and to let it be realized by professional artist, I was convinced that nobody but Shingu-san could do it. But it was the busiest time for him with his first world traveling outdoor sculpture exhibition, "Wind Circus." I knew that it was an unreasonable request, but he accepted with a smile saying, "it's wonderful that children are the main characters." Thus, from 1988 to 2007, 20 unique sculptures were created by him from the "dreams" of more than 40,000 children from 109 countries around the world. In 2018, this project was revived after 10 years to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Museum, and two energetic sculptures that are as good as others have been added to liven up the children's forest.

Whenever Shingu-san's work appears in the building that I designed, I feel frustrated and envious thinking that "this is the world that architecture cannot make." It seems that the artist over the age of 80 is still keeping many ideas and projects at heart. The scale, such as the concept of "Breathing Earth" for creating a future village using natural energy, keeps expanding beyond the framework of art as the years progress. Even today, at the studio in the forest of Sanda with his beloved wife, he continues to climb up the unexplored stairs step by step while listening to the voice of the wind. His existence is definitely the light of hope for the culture of Hyogo prefecture.