

THE SANKEI SHIMBUN /March 1st, 2022 / Seeing is Believing

(The second of the trilogy)

Enough for the Past – the Future is Bright

Sculptor Susumu Shingu – 84

From a painter to a three-dimensional artist

He was born in Toyonaka, Osaka as the youngest of four male brothers. Susumu's father, who worked for general trading company, often stationed overseas, and the house was full of books and pottery collected by his father. Among them, it seems that the collection of ancient cloth (old cloth with high antique value) was of a considerable level, and famous painters such as Hakutei Ishii and Shoen Uemura sometimes came to borrow it as a reference for drawing kimono and some other props.

(Caption for the photograph)

Susumu Shingu who opens one of his own pop-up books and looks satisfied. (photographed by Mizue Torikoshi).

It seems that his father was showing to such big masters the study of young Susumu, who had been fond of drawing since he was a child. "Everyone praised me because they wanted to borrow the collection, and they promised me to be a big painter. My father was very happy."

When Susumu was in the 4th grade of elementary school, there was a chance to show his paintings to Ryohei Koiso, a distantly related Western-style painter. "Susumu isn't so special that you're crazy," Koiso said to cool father's head. He added, "Susumu might play baseball when he reaches junior high school." However, Susumu kept painting a picture all the time. He went from Toyonaka High School to Tokyo University of the Arts, where he entered the Koiso class, where he had a connection, and studied oil painting. After graduating, he studied abroad in Italy as a scholarship student. While learning with the painter Franco Gentilini, he changed his style of creation from concrete painting to abstract painting, and then to three-dimensional objects. A turbulent era when US President John F. Kennedy was assassinated and Marilyn Monroe committed suicide. Shingu also went forward steadily. "Enough for the past. I don't think it's a waste. Mysteriously, the future looks brighter than the past. " After returning to Japan as a three-dimensional artist, he exhibited sculptures such as "Floating Sound" that moves with the power of wind and water at the Osaka Expo in 1970. In recognition of this, he was invited by Harvard University as a visiting artist and went to the United States. He could become a professor if he clung, but after obtaining a pilot license for a small airplane, he returned to Japan in 1973. He built a studio in a mountain village in Toyono-cho, Osaka Prefecture, and worked on his creation. "The reason why I got the pilot license was because I wanted to live on an island. I wanted to

concentrate in creation."

Shingu published the first picture book "Strawberries" in 1975. The beginning was that he got to know Isamu Noguchi, a world-famous sculptor in the United States. After lunch at Noguchi's studio, strawberries were served for dessert. When Shingu said, "I know everything about strawberries," Noguchi said, "Monks find a world in the stones by the road, and you are the same." After returning to Japan, *Strawberries* was made into a picture book, and the printed book was shown to both Noguchi and Koiso. "Noguchi-san liked my writing and said that it was very interesting. He said also that the pictures are not bad either. Koiso-sensei said, [This is like a book made by a foreigner.]"

"Wind sculptor" continues to produce three-dimensional works and also works on picture books such as *Spider*. But *Strawberries* is the book of memories that triggered his picture book writing.

(Caption for the photograph)

A photo taken with his family around 1945. The third person from the right is his father and the second is Susumu Shingu. (provided by Shingu).

Interviewer: Toshikazu Masaki, Editor-in-Chief