

An interview with Setsuko Ono

Setsuko Ono, Yoko's younger sister, is exhibiting for the first time and the exhibition will take place at **Daiwa Foundation Japan House** in **London**, moving to **Asia House** in March. Much like Matisse's cut-outs, Setusko's art is based on **steel sculptures** that she welds creating silhouettes and open spaces. Her London exhibitions will include also **VR technology**: visitors will be transported to Japan, to look at her outdoor permanent sculptures at the Hara Museum.



Setsuko Ono, Migrants, 2016, stainless steel, 67 x 79 x 79. © Chan Chao

We asked her a few questions on her life and art.

What is your study background?

I have a B.A. in English Literature from the University of Sacred Heart in Tokyo and M.A. and PhD from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies of the University of Geneva.

I also attended the Continuing Education Program at the Corcoran College of Art and Design while working at the World Bank in Washington D.C..

Finally in 2007 -2009, I spent several months working at Les Ateliers des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Paris.



Setsuko Ono

You were born in Tokyo but lived between Europe, the USA and Japan. Did this mixture of cultures influence your art?

Yes the mixture of cultures certainly influenced my art. However, it is completely at a subconscious level. For example the curator of Hara Museum in Japan said in 2005 that my sculptures are like the traditional Japanese art of *kirie orkagee*. I realized that he was right after I read

his remark, although I had been working with steel for many years. My belief that art should incorporate real time, so that minimum planning is necessary, came from an experience as a teenager attending John Cage's concert "4' 33" . Toshi Ichianagi a Japanese composer explained to me the philosophy behind the concert. Long after I started being an artist, in 2017, I realized that I was imbued with John Cage's philosophy without ever reading about it or listening to his other compositions. This way of creating art is wonderful, because you are free to follow the flow of your emotions moment by moment. However, it is also very risky. Each work of art becomes a big gamble. The more you plan ahead and prepare your work, the less the risk that the end product will be a disaster. Most creative work (not only visual arts but scientific discoveries) is irrational and the end product cannot be planned ahead.

For me as a visual artist, the risk is greater because I reject almost totally planning in sculpture and to a lesser degree in painting. It is also exhilarating because each time I face empty sheets of steel or canvass, I am gambling an important moment of my life.



Setsuko Ono, Acropolis Down Under and Rising Moon, 2015, steel, 115.8 x 76.2 x 76.2. © Chan Chao

Are there any artists that influenced you?

There is no particular artist that influenced me. But I have gone to museums and galleries in Western Europe, Japan, the United States and Russia whenever I travelled, and it was often. In 2009, I did imitate consciously Jeronimo Bosch's "Garden of Delight " when I saw a postcard from Prada Museum in Madrid. In 2015, I imitated the styles and/or content of George Roualt and A.R. Penke in painting the series " Travels of Mouflon". In 2017, I was moved by Auguste Rodin's clay sculptures that were exhibited in the renovated Rodin's Museum in Paris. I used these sculptures as models for my paintings,

“Amaterasu, Sun Goddess” and “Joy”. No artist has ever depicted women’s sexual parts in such dynamic poses. It was usually with women passively lying down and opening their thighs. To me it was a glorious statement: what is more important than women’s sex. From it the whole world was born and causes so much daily delights in our existence.

But these are exceptions, because what I enjoy in art, is the freedom, freedom from anyone, great masters, or gallery owners .

What were your first creations? When did you start using steel?

Since I have always painted and made drawings from childhood, I first focused on sculpture when I took formal courses in art. Some of my first sculptures are on my website. I have tried all media: clay, wood, stones, bronze and plastic. In 1995, I started to concentrate on steel.



Setsuko Ono, Gates of War, Gates of Peace, Acrylic, charcoal, pastel on canvas, 274 x 457

What tools and materials do you use for your creations?

I use a Mig welder for cutting and welding. For stainless, I use a Tig welder for welding. In bending small pieces, I use small bending machine or my own muscles. This is possible because I use very thin steel. For public sculptures, I work in steel mills where there are many types of bending machines.



Setsuko Ono, Dreams, 2012, Stainless steel, 4.1 x 5.2 x 4.6 m.
© Ken Shimizu

What do you express with your art?

Through my art, I dream about love and the joy of life. Sometime I cannot help but express anger at injustices.

What would you like to add to your art? How far would you like to take your creations?

I would like to paint and sculpt as many satisfactory works as possible. By satisfactory, I mean that they should fully satisfy my aesthetic sensitivities. As Rodin said, "My own pleasure is my only guide". I am also seeking opportunities to build public sculptures in different cities of the world. I am now in discussion with New York City's Organization for Public Art to build a sculpture in a park in New York at the end of 2018.

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