

VISION OF THE INVISIBLE

In the autumn of 2015, I went to Mt. Kōya, one of the most mysterious sacred religious sites in Japan. It is a town made up of 150 Buddhist temples located at an altitude of 800 meters above sea level. It dates back to 816 when Kūkai, also known as Kōbō Daishi, the founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism in Japan, founded Kongōbu-ji Temple there. Today, there are 117 temples clustered around Kongōbu-ji, the head temple of Shingon sect of Mt. Kōya, in addition to the main temple, Hojuin. Until 1906, women were excluded from entering the area. However, wanting to see the temple town was not the only reason I made the trip to this complex of Buddhist temples in the mountains.

I left Tokyo and arrived in the town of Mt. Kōya in the late afternoon the same day. I headed for Muryokoin so I would arrive before dark. I had already made arrangements with an Italian Buddhist priest who was waiting for me there. After talking about the history of the temple for a while, I was shown to the second floor. When we got there, he pointed: "That's it", to the garden outside. Below, there was a long, thin stretch of garden along the foundation of temple building that headed for hills above, and in the middle, a large boulder. I could see a blue disk in the center of the boulder. It first appeared to be a mysterious glistening object, but from a different angle, I realized that it was reflecting the blue sky above. The lawn in the center of the garden was surrounded by a variety of trees, creating a kind of peaceful paradise protected from the outside.

I kept going back and forth in the corridor to look at the boulder, confirming its shape, and observing the sky reflected in a steel disk. Depending on the angle, the view differed quite a bit. As dusk gradually approached, the disk began to turn red as it reflected the setting sun. Since the disk was on the upper surface of the boulder, I thought the best way to appreciate this work was to look down at it from the second floor. From there, I took a number of photographs with a camera and telephoto lens.

At the priest's suggestion, I descended to the first floor and gazed at the boulder from the corridor. This time, the disk appeared rather thin, something like a faint line. But even then, one could see a rather clear reflection of the sky and feel its strong presence in the center of the garden.

I put on some wooden clogs and entered the garden. Without getting too close, I tried to look at the work from a distance. The surface of the natural boulder was embedded with an artificial disk. But it reflected the sky and made me feel the boundless expanse of nature. The artificial and the natural were in conversation. A dialogue between complex natural and minimal forms was emerging. It was an artwork, and at the same time, only half was art. It was both a made object and nature. As a work, it was one that gave me the feeling of mysterious harmony and dialogue.

This work by Diego prompted me to rethink my understanding of art. It made me ask exactly what art was. Art is not simply a formed object or sculpture made by humans that exists in opposition to nature. Art asks how the context of the work, its surrounding space, can be incorporated into the work, and at the same time, it is a vision of how to design the relationship with the work's milieu or environment.

I think it was the 1990s when I met Diego. I don't remem-

ber the first time we met or exactly how we met. He would sometimes let me know about his work and his exhibitions. This time, when I heard that his work had been permanently installed in a Buddhist temple in Japan, I felt that I had to see it.

Diego's works are basically minimal and colorful. Many of the works are distinguished by the use of strong primary colors such as red, yellow and blue. Shapes tend to be simple and clear-cut. In an art context, they might come under the category of Minimalism. But they are quite different from the Minimalism of the 1960s that pared down art to color and shape.

Art of minimal forms has actually taken two different directions. Modernism promoted the concept of a pure, universalistic art that culminated in American Minimalism. According to Donald Judd, art is nothing more or less than what we see; its forms and visual appearance are its content. Rejecting art as narrative or symbolism, Judd aimed for pure, autonomous work without relation to its surroundings.

However, the other Minimalism incorporates content that is not visible. Existing within the simple forms, it is spiritual and mysterious. Rather than being the product of Modernism, it is classical, deeper, and more varied. It doesn't lean toward being efficient; it is human. It is not logical, but rather symbolic. Diego's work clearly fits in the latter context. His work cannot be simply reduced to issues of color and form. In many cases, it is set within the context of the sea, mountain forests, geography, and the changing light or within the architectural spaces of the Italian Renaissance and its antique-looking floors, walls, and ceilings, thereby creating new meaning and dialogue with the various sites. We sense that art is more than what we see, not just a question of color and form, and that within it, there is content that cannot be seen.

This brings me back to the relation with Mt. Kōya. That is because the Buddhism of Mt. Kōya is *émikkyo* or esoteric Buddhism, that is, esoteric teachings within the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. These teachings cannot easily be seen, but must also be grasped through meditation. Art and religion have different contexts, but we can read in the relation between what can and cannot be seen in Diego's work something that appears similar to the Buddhism of Mt. Kōya. When it comes to art, half of the meaning is more or less produced by the viewer. The meanings contained and connected within are a vast sea of possibilities. Our impression of Diego's work changes with the site. His work has a different poetry in California, Germany, Italy, and Greece.

In the temple-town of Mt. Kōya, his work opens onto the land and is sublimated into light. The land leads to the deep recesses of the earth and the light reaches the sky. This work will continue to be in this site for the next two hundred years. And every day, it will reflect the sky. It is a dialogue between the land and the sky, and symbol of eternal time. It is something beyond art – perhaps we could say that it is proof of human existence.

Fumio Nanjo