

A Solitary Path and the Eye

From space, we have learned to watch the Earth as it turns. Many people, too, have begun to write the histories of their own lives. I have self-published books such as *Jumping Knife*, *Jigadō: The Way of My Painting*, and *Contemporary Art: My Case*. Besides these, there are many manuscripts that could be gathered into books at any time. My painting continues each day, alongside my writing. Since October 1986, I have devoted myself especially to large-scale NUI (stitch works) by now, more than fifty pieces, ranging from 100 to 300 *gō* (*Japanese size*), have taken shape. Almost none have been shown. They are not made to be sold. They are the stubborn will of the socially weak to live strongly — and at the same time, my greatest pleasure. During this same period, I also wrote *Contemporary Art: My Case* through a special source of income.

There are those whose fate has turned on a single flash of light, hovering between life and death. There are others born into privilege, who walk an ultra-elite path from the beginning. As for me, with an innocent yet forceful will, I twisted my course toward the path I loved.

Let me trace that road from its beginning. As a child, I grew up deep in the mountains, where my adoptive father made charcoal. In elementary school, hard of hearing and slow of speech, I was often bullied. In return, I discovered the quiet joy of making things alone. A fortune-teller once told my mother, “This child will not reach adulthood — and even if he does, he will end his own life.” Speaking of such things: during the great earthquake in Oku-Tango, when our house stood on the brink of collapse, a ninety-year-old shrine maiden led me out of the darkness. When I once vomited blood and lost consciousness, a doctor said I would not live past the next day. There were many other events, as though the god of death had marked me.

In poverty, I left school after elementary education and entered service. Though I studied alone, I ran away from home determined to become a painter. I wandered through cities such as Kobe and Yokohama, only to sink into the bottomless swamp of gambling. To survive, I was driven into brutal labor, enduring physical and mental suffering alone, unseen. There were bloody fights. At one point, I stood at a crossroads: a path from which I could not expect to return alive in order to avoid military inspection, or returning home stripped bare.

Then, all at once, I left a life among urban gangsters and found employment in a rural environment considered elite. Though tormented by feelings of inferiority, I

settled there and, out of place as I was, continued to learn alone. Among old books, I found Surrealism and Dada.

My experiences of work through the hands include simple hand sewing and packing salt. Through the eyes: the worksites of shipbuilding, casting, and steelmaking. Among these, the sight of boiling iron stirred even a timid person like me. Looking back, these experiences taught me one thing: whatever adversity one faces, never deceive one's own eyes.

— That is one lesson.

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