

IEZUMI Toshio - Discovering Form

Introduction

Toshio Iezumi (1954-) laminates, grinds, and polishes sheet glass to create glass works. By choosing a handheld angle grinder (1), used in stone carving, as his glass grinding tool, he has obtained a method of creating in close dialogue with his material. Responding to the feel of the glass as he grinds, Iezumi gropes his way toward discovery of a glass form in the rectangular glass block. In Iezumi's hands, the surface of the ground and polished glass comes to undulate like a water and obtains a rich expansiveness and sense of volume. Light permeating or reflecting from the glass object, moreover, produces illusionistic images. In this text, I will look at Iezumi's glass works, which exude the mystery of existence, and examine the striking, ever-changing artwork world he has created during 30 years of glass endeavor, from three aspects: "Form emergent from layers," "The created form and reflected image," and "The feel and the form enabled by the grinder."

Form emergent from layers

At Tokyo Glass Art Institute, Iezumi studied glass blowing and casting, glass cutting, glass enameling, and sandblasting sheet glass. The sheet glass ranged in thickness from 2mm to 2cm, and when several sheets were layered and laminated, the glass took on a deep green color. Iezumi, struck by the profound transparent color produced by layering the glass, felt drawn to sheet glass as a material and began creating with it as his medium.

In producing *Surface* (1984), Iezumi used low refractive index silicon to laminate layers of sheet glass and travertine, a lightweight white rock. Owing to the silicon, he discovered, the rock section vanished when he peered inside the laminated glass at a certain angle, and instead, he gazed into infinite space. Iezumi, struck by the strange phenomena born in the layered glass, set to work in earnest using laminated sheet glass. His *Light and Water* produced in 1989 is a vertically stacked work, suggestive of modern architecture, created by assembling blocks of cut and laminated sheet glass. Then, in *Light, Water and Air* (1990), he partially frosted the glass using sandblasting (2), created blocks of laminated glass, and vertically stacked them. Here, by slightly staggering the frosted glass's range when layering the glass sheets, he has achieved a beautiful work whose interior gradations create an impression of depth. The two works are both maquettes (small models) fabricated by Iezumi in the first stage of producing the actual works. In his production process, he first embodies his concept in a small-scale maquette instead of

making designs and sketches. The maquette he then realizes in full scale. Some of the works he creates in this way reach four meters in height and are installed in outdoor locations.

Up to this point, Iezumi was using laminated glass blocks to construct works displaying a vertically ascendant form. In 1991, however, he produced *Light and Water in Space*, a work of laminated glass blocks constructed horizontally, flat on the ground. With its left-right symmetry, the block assembly looks organic and suggests multiplying cells.

Here, by lightly shifting his perspective from vertical to horizontal, Iezumi substantially altered the impression made by the artwork's form. In this way, Iezumi spent the late 1980s creating works exploring the character of industrial sheet glass as a material having inorganic hardness and transparency. He had seen possibilities in the qualities obtained with sheet glass, simply by layering it—depth and clarity of color, forms that obtain profound interior spaces, and formal freedom arising from the infinite possibilities for assembly. Amid his progress, then, Iezumi began seeking a new stage of creative development.

The created form and reflected image

Around 1991, Iezumi began to employ an angle grinder, used in stone carving and polishing, as a tool for shaping glass. Mastering this technique required extensive experimentation in grinding and polishing the glass surface.

"At first, I found it truly hard to grind the glass," he recalls. In *Concavity and Convexity* (1992), he has ground and polished the glass surface just enough to produce soft concavities and convexities. The resulting appearance suggests bubble shapes floating to the surface surrounded by dimples. He added heat reflective glass—a glass that reflects light—to the interior layers, with the result that light, unable to penetrate the object, appears to trace the concavities and convexities in the glass surface. Does the surface protrude or contract? The "Concavity and Convexity" of the work's title hinders our judgement and leaves our eye to simply wander about the formal illusion Iezumi has created. By varying the depth and range of his grinding, he makes the concavities and convexities appear to move in different ways, thereby achieving formal illusion through the interplay of penetrating and reflecting light. Then, he also varies his display of the work by standing it, laying it flat, turning it front to back, rotating it top to bottom, and hanging it on a wall. By changing our perspective on the work, he alters its expression. In this way, he opened the door to a new stage of exploration.

Surface, produced in 1995, is a large-scale work composed of 3 square forms. Circular and

half- circular shapes appear in the surfaces of the laminated sheet-glass forms. The work, installed outdoors in a flat position, uses reflection to inset the sky's changing appearance and swaying trees around the circular and half-circular shapes, thereby introducing the element of passing time. Another work entitled *Surface*, produced in the same year, is a large sculpture propped against a wall or interior furnishing. Because of the water-like undulations over its entire surface, the work complexly reflects its surroundings and confuses the viewer's perception. These large- scale works display incremental, moment-by-moment change born from the interplay of their concavities and convexities with phenomena occurring in the work's environment.

Iezumi's "Projection" series, launched in 1996, are wall-mounted works that further explore his *Surface* concept of mirroring the surrounding space. In form, he has moved from shapes based on squares to circular, oval, and rectangular shapes. The works' mirror-like surfaces, although meticulously ground and polished, do not produce a perfect reflected image as in a mirror. In their wavy organic surface—of ground and polished concavities, convexities, and undulations— images elongate, contract, and swell, and reflections of surrounding phenomena of all kinds dynamically intermix. Normally, we see our own image in a mirror. In Iezumi's glass form, however, the image we expect to see of ourself and our surroundings does not appear. Owing to the form's concavities and convexities, all is transformed into something incomprehensible. Wanting to make sense of the puzzling image reflected there, we try moving this way and that. Where is our own image, we wonder; where is the place we now stand in? The more we search for the image we expect to see, the more we are drawn into that undulating surface. In this way, the imagery reflected in Iezumi's glass form motivates viewers to satisfy their curiosity or dispel their anxiety about what they see.

The feel and the form enabled by the grinder.

As he gained mastery over grinding, Iezumi around 1995 became able to freely create forms giving play to his sensibilities. This can well be seen in his "Projection" series. He now began expressing the soft undulations, concavities, and convexities not in the surface of a square form but as independent forms, complete in themselves.

For his "Vessel" series, produced from 1996, Iezumi moved from square forms to the creation of bowl-shaped objects. The artist, who says, "I felt I wanted to display only the concavities and convexities," cut away the square's edge to create a simple form arcing from

bottom to top that accentuates the surface concavities and convexities. Due to his use of heat reflective glass, light cannot deeply penetrate the form but instead reflects as if tracing the concavities and convexities that spread like ripples in water. Iezumi's meticulous grinding and polishing work yields serene undulations so natural to the eye, they hardly appear the product of a human hand. Among the works of this series is one entitled *Water Vessel*, which suggests a bowl filling with water from deep within. Viewers contemplating the surface of the piece, which seems to spread like water to the outer edge, are apt to think they "want to touch it and see how it feels." The "Move" series Iezumi embarked on in the 2000s grew out of his "Projection" series. In "Move," the wall-mounted forms of "Projection" became free-standing objects that rise with undulating motion. Here, the concavities and convexities and the undulations he had previously framed in geometric circles, ovals, and squares have been completely re-conceived and embodied in objects, each displaying its own distinctive movement. Iezumi had until then consciously erased the laminated glass section, but in this series, the section fleetingly appears in the form's interior space and awakens complex movement in its intersection with the contour line. His use of heat reflective glass, furthermore, introduces reflected light, with result that the surrounding space is reflected in the glass form. In "Move," three elements born from Iezumi's grinding—the overall form, the section appearing in the interior, and the reflected imagery—animate the form with the multi-layered interplay of their movement.

Then, in the "Form" series. Iezumi has undertaken from 1998 until recently, we see soft, transparent forms, striking for their deep green color and profound sense of volume. Here, he relinquishes the heat reflective glass employed since his "Concavities and Convexities" series. Creating a square form using only laminated sheet glass, he grinds and polishes it to an organic, rounded shape. When using the angle grinder, Iezumi breathes in sync with the action of its high-speed diamond blade (3), increasing and reducing its power as he grinds. Continually confirming the feel of the glass as he grinds, he gropes his way toward the form he seeks. In the rough grinding stage, the glass is a rock-hard, whitely opaque mass. With continued polishing, however, it grows pliant and transparent like water and changes to a form filled with deep color. On seeing this transformation of the glass, which exceeds his own expectations, he always gets a fresh sense of surprise. "As I grind," he says, "I keep thinking, 'This is strange, what am I doing?'" While inquiring of himself and his material, he grinds and polishes and, out of this process, delivers his form. He is also responding to the feel of the material as he grinds. Particularly in his "Form" series works, of which he says, "It's like tofu" and "It feels soft," he dialogues with his material as he grinds and reflects that dialogue in the object's form. Certainly,

the viewer, on seeing Iezumi's pliant glass form with its wondrous transparency and sense of volume will want to touch it to see if it is soft or hard, light or heavy. In recent years, then, new developments appear Iezumi's "Form" series, such as his introduction of a mirror in the interior space.

Conclusion

For Iezumi, an artist of broad vision who views things from multiple standpoints, the choice of sheet glass as a medium was inevitable rather than coincidental.

By laminating sheet glass, a space having profound, transparent color is obtained inside the glass form. By grinding and polishing the laminated sheet glass to create concavities and convexities, and undulations, Iezumi gives movement to form, color, and reflected image. Iezumi's creative action of discovering a form in laminated glass is also an endeavor to answer his frank question: "This is strange, what am I doing?" His question, then, speaks to us, the viewers, from the form created and images reflected in it. "What is happening? This is strange." The deeply mysterious form before us ignites our desire to confirm it with our senses of sight and touch. It ignites the fundamental human desire to confirm existence by seeing and touching.

Toshio Iezumi's glass forms reflect us and the world we live in, sometimes humorously and sometimes with distortion. Looking closely at his forms, we are made to sense his free spirit residing within them. Above all, they press upon us the importance of discovering the world with our own innate sensibilities.

- (1) Iezumi has written as below concerning angel grinding: A handheld grinder powered by compressed air and electricity. By changing to blades with different cutting edges, materials of many kinds, metal, stone, and glass, can be cut and carved.
- (2) A technique of blasting sand onto glass with high-pressure air to create frosted glass or sculptural relief effects.
- (3) Iezumi has written as below concerning the diamond blade: Around a circular metal disc (1-2mm thick), fine metal chips containing diamond particles are distributed. The blade is mainly used for cutting and polishing stone or concrete. It can also be used in cutting and grinding glass.

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Toshio Iezumi Exhibition catalog:

Toyama Glass Art Museum 2017 | pp.20-22

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