

# K i s a g e s c a p e



This work uses the “Kisage processing,” a hand scraping technique to depict the surface on the metal as if it were the surface of a lake. It can be considered a sculptural work, or when displayed on a wall, it can be seen as a painting work.

Kisage processing is a type of metalworking that creates minute depressions in the finishing process during manufacturing in order to reduce the frictional resistance of metal planes that are sliding and moving. It is used on machine tools, or mother machines, which are used to make machines, so the machining process requires a higher degree of precision. This technique is usually done by hand by only skillful artisans, and until recently was considered impossible by automation or robots. I have a sense of respect and admiration for the richness of expression that emerges when people interact with tools, and for

*Kisagescape*  
Aluminium, 70 × 70 × 1cm

the acts that people perform using tools that are within the range of human hands. I believe that this is because there is joy and pleasure to be had there. For example, just as plowing a field with a hoe or rowing a boat with the oars, the same is true of creative activities that can be done with only a pencil, brush, chisel and mallet. I also feel that when one uses greater power than that, one may not be able to handle it.

Furthermore, in this work, what is expressed in metal, which has a hard image, is a soft shimmer like the surface of water, a longing that is always present in me. I am very interested in the surface of things, and it shows in my oil paintings as well. I don’t know why, but I am always looking at it from the perspective of gliding above its surface. And metal is also liquid if

# S H I N K U D O



# A N S W E R F R E E



# Circle of Dragon



*Circle of Dragon*

Pencil on paper, incense ash, 3700 × 5780cm

Shortly before the start of the corona pandemic, I was injured in a bicycle accident that resulted in a broken jaw. While recuperating at home and the subsequent restrictions on going out, I searched for what I could do now and decided to start drawing, using only paper and pencil, which I was able to obtain at the time. Through this experience, I learned once again that it is possible to create with what is available at the time, even without access to special equipment or materials. For example, a Busshi, a Japanese sculptor specializing in Buddha statues such as Enku (1632-1695, early Edo period) and Mokujiki (1718-1810, late Edo period) they traveled around the country carving Buddhist statues with only their sculpting tools. In this way, I have gained confidence in my ability to continue creating, no matter where I am or what the circumstances are. This may be described as a sense of relief.

Somewhere along the line, creating became an “indispensable activity” for me. It always came up as a pure impulse, and I was aware that if I suppressed it, it would erupt in a distorted way. Therefore, in the midst of these various changes, the decision to set up an atelier in my apartment was a welcome change that lowered the difficulty level for me to continue creating, and allowed me to engage in production as an extension of my daily life, an act that is nothing special, just like sleeping, eating, and breathing. This means that the assumption that production, for me, is an indispensable act like a vital activity, and therefore requires a lot of special equipment to sustain it, has been peeled away, which naturally led to relief. This is how I have come to believe that I will be able to continue creating for the rest of my life, in whatever form that may take.

My drawing technique is to continue to draw in repetitive arcs without outlines. It is as if I were drawing out the haze that has yet to take shape or form in my mind, as if everything is still in a chaotic state with no boundaries, directly connected from my brain to my hand and to the tip of the pencil. For a while, nothing appears as a shape, but as I continue to draw over time, something tangible gradually appears, and then the whole picture is connected. Among those shapes I could see, for example, hearts, blood vessels, mushrooms, snakes, many arms, the Virgin, and so on. It seems that way, by seeing the inner chaos surfaced and visualized as it is, I am able to consider what was in me.

Through such a process, I made this work from fragments of ideas that came to me while making several drawings of a size larger than my body, and from the beginning I was aware of what I wanted to draw. I spread the paper over the entire floor space of my studio and continued to draw this work every day. That is, the size of this work is the size of my room, and I think it is fair to say that it also expresses me to the maximum extent possible at that time. And by actually exhibiting it like this, I feel as if I have transported the space as it was.



*- Circles -*

I remember that at that time, while I was drawing, I was suffering so much, not only physical pain from the injury. However, by the time I finished the drawing over a long period of time, various kinds of attachments had disappeared, and the final act of scattering all the ashes from the incense I had used during the production was born. This work was a kind of culmination in my work in this technique, and as such, it was an important passing point for me. Also, if someone tries to see what would happen if an artist is given a piece of paper and a pencil, this would be my answer. After this work, I continued to make drawings using not only black pencil but also carefully selected colors, which were gradually transformed and expressed as my oil paintings.

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And here again, you can see my obsession with the “line” and my hope for its expressive potential. Here, however, I have taken a form developed from the technique of drawing. That is to say, the motif naturally comes into relief as I transmit the hazy overall image from my brain to my hand, and from my hand to the brush, and balance each brushstroke on the surface, harmonizing the overall feeling of the painting. This is also the technique used by the aforementioned Buddhist master, Busshi. What it means is that the Buddhist sculptor digs out what lies dormant in the wood,

and as a result of sensitively considering the grain, material, humidity, and dryness of the wood and maintaining a balance without resisting the flow of the wood, harmony is created, namely, the Buddha image seems to emerge naturally. I feel the same way, something in me came to the surface as a result of working on these paintings, one brushstroke at a time, using carefully selected colors. It could be, for example, the image of the eruption of Pompeii, fungi creating clouds in the sky, the earth and heaven merging or something ascending, or the three angels.

D e l f t



I have always questioned the easy use of too many colors in the paintings, so I limit the colors as much as possible. The choice of colors is also a source of inspiration for me. For example, in this painting, the oil paint named Delft Blue reminds me of Johannes Vermeer’s painting *The Little Street* (1658-59), which depicts his hometown Delft. Therefore, the process of creation is slightly different from the other two works. I think this shows my respect and appreciation for painting. When I see a painting, I first feel a sense of initial impulse, not logic, but rather a sense of how wonderful painting is. The sense of presence emanating from the work is something that can be felt without any post-thoughtful understanding of the background, such as the story, technique, or concept behind the painting. I always try to keep this in mind in my work.

*Delft*

Oil on canvas, 62 × 52 × 4.5cm

the environment changes, for example, deep underground in places like the core or the mantle. Therefore, I would be happy if I could expand the range of impressions that normally we have of materials as stereotypes.

In the production process of this work, as with drawing, there is a sense of a kind of flow experience. The repetition of monotonous repetitive movements, the bell-like sound of metal clashing with metal, hearing only my breath, and the feeling that time has stopped are all focused on each moment. I have shown it as a performance in the annual shows a couple of times, and it seems to function as a device or a kind of doorway that leads the beholder to an awareness of what is happening in the present moment, which is always overlooked.

In addition, this work also includes the question of where the beginning and the end of the work is, and where is the completion of the work as a whole. With this technique, I can keep on scraping until the metal is gone, and even after the scraping has lost its shape as a plate, the metal will still exist as fine fragments that have merely changed their form. I am interested in the question of where all things begin and end, not only in the realm of art, but in all things that have form. In the case of my work, if it is on display somewhere, I will go there and continue working on it if I feel the need to do so. I think it is natural that nothing stays in one form and keeps changing, even if it looks like a hard, unchangeable substance. As you can see the concepts of *panta rhei*, flux, or impermanence may be recalled.





These works are based on my obsession with the “line,” which is my intrinsic quality that continues from my drawings, that is, my realization that everything can be represented by a line. And whereas with the drawings, I was exploring from a state that had not yet been formed, this one adopts the shape of the cap itself as an outline. I always wear the same type of cap, and these tired caps are a kind of trademark for me.

*Boshi (vein)*, this piece can be seen as if it is lined with blood vessels. There is a sense that we are seeing something under the skin that would normally be invisible. And this piece, *Boshi (lichtenberg figure)*, can be seen as if lightning is running. This seems to suggest that all the sensations, thoughts, and reactions that occur to us, that is, all that we believe this is the world, are produced by impulses in our brain, such as only minute amounts of electric current, which also cannot be seen normally.



*Boshi (vein)*  
Oil on cotton cap, 28 × 17 × 10cm



*Boshi (lichtenberg figure)*  
Oil on cotton cap, 28 × 17 × 11cm

We humans are all pretty much the same in terms of the body’s work that takes place inside of this mere surface layer, i.e., under the skin. But that fact is overlooked, and how much weight people give to adopting and judging information that is only on the visible surface that I am often wondering about.

These oil paintings, like the caps I mentioned earlier, begin with a deconstruction of painting. In other words, it is a process of delving into the concept of painting, deconstructing it, and reconstructing my own concept. I believe which support, color, shape, and method I choose, and how to express them, will naturally be shown as proof of my involvement there.

The first characteristic development seen here is that the framing itself is oil paint. It starts with the question of what exactly is it that we perceive as a “painting”? Perhaps this is a perspective I have gained from my experience working with sculpture, but I believe that I am not looking at the illusion of the painting on the flat surface or the content and stories of the painting as the actual state of the painting, but rather the paint on the canvas and the way it has changed itself as a three-dimensional object.



*Three yellow aura*  
Oil on jute canvas, 62 × 72 × 4cm



*Three violet rise*  
Oil on jute canvas, 52 × 42 × 4cm

Perhaps I am referring to the state of the painting as it was before it was named a “painting. This is one of the ways of expressing a way of being in which the medium and the frame are not separate, but one and the same.

This is a technique that I have been using since I was studying art in Japan, and I am not trying to imitate any preexist technique. A few years ago, I learned of a similar traditional craft technique called Rogan painting, which has been handed down in only one family in India. Of course, the result is different from my work, but I feel a kinship with it, partly because we share the same Asian background.

This oil painting has emerged as a kind of culmination of my working process over the past few years. Having originally studied art in Japan, strongly influenced by Western art, I decided to move to Germany to experience European art firsthand, and by chance I had the opportunity to enroll and study art here at HFBK Hamburg fortunately. A man who came to Germany from Japan encountered the Japanese painting of Nirvana in Germany. This feeling of being crossed time and cultural backgrounds, thereby returning to my original self, which appeared after various contingency connections and realizations, also appears in this work as it is. In that sense, this work is a pure expression and can be said to be my very being, extracted from me at this time.

This motif of “Nirvana” began several years ago, when I came across a Japanese painting of Nirvana that was painted anonymously from the 15th to 16th century located in the collection of the MK&G: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg. Since then, this image has appeared again and again in my mind and strengthened its presence. I could not get the image out of my mind, so I adopted it as the topic of my graduation thesis. I also began to carefully research the metaphors and anecdotes associated with the Buddha and the people and things depicted in the Nirvana painting.

The painting of Nirvana is a picture depicting the state of the Buddha at the time of his death. An old representation of Nirvana is found in Gandhara, in the northwestern part of present-day Pakistan, a relief from the 2nd to 3rd century. Nirvana paintings in Japan mainly refer to those drawn on paper or those in the form of hanging scrolls, with the oldest surviving ones



*Nirvāṇa*

Oil on jute canvas

201 × 151 × 4cm

dating back to the 11th century. Since then, the painting has continued to be produced, and although it is basically a depiction of the death of the Buddha as read from the Nirvana Sutra, or a copy of an existing painting, the depiction varies depending on the period, and it is possible to see the world and interpretation of the people of that time in the painting. In particular, the creatures that are said to have gathered at the time of the Buddha's death, we can glimpse the range of knowledge of the people of that time, from mythical imaginary beings to the addition of creatures unique to that area. Thus, even though there is a framework like a certain type, the painting of Nirvana has continued to change according to the times and places.

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The painting of Nirvana translated in Japanese is “Nehan-zu,” the meaning of the word “Nehan” is a nirvana, and the meaning of the word “zu” is often translated simply as “painting,” but the etymology of the word “zu” suggests that it is a representation of an object or position using lines and points, or a collection of points, lines, and planes that make up a single form. Therefore, in this work, I think using the technique of painting everything with lines is suitable as a method that follows the expression of “Zu” itself.

Furthermore, to give a little insight into my own interpretation of this painting, the Nirvana painting usually depicts the world on the ground and the sky, including the clouds and the moon, which are the world that can be seen from the ground only. From my view of living in the present age, however, I wanted to express that there is a big world below ground as well. Since I came to Germany, I often went to the forest and was greatly influenced by nature. And I became especially interested in mushrooms, and started to research them. Then I learned about the depths of the world of mycelium, or fungi, and that mushrooms are the largest living organisms in the world. Therefore, the participation of fungi seems natural to me since the painting of Nirvana depicts the gathering of all living things in mourning at the time of the Buddha’s death.

The fact that the Nirvana is painted in oil symbolizes when and by whom it was painted, and at the same time, it is an expression of my respect for the great painters and my gratitude for the miracle of being able to see their works that was created centuries ago and still exists today. It also reminds me of the feeling I had when I came to Europe and saw many paintings, as if I was connected to the painters of the past.

Given my longing for oil painting and my constant wishes to create masterpieces or like OOPARTS, the choice to paint it in oil has naturally occurred. Just as my encounter in the 21st century with the 15th to 16th century Nirvana induced me to confront death and the pursuit of truth, I would be more than happy if my works could be also discovered someday in the future, and if it brings some feelings to someone, and if it led to open a door for something at that time.



- Animals, insects and mycelium -

I also would like to offer the opportunity to the beholder to experience the art work directly by touching its surface, smelling its fragrance, and feeling it with their own sensations, rather than relying solely on visual information with distance, like an art appreciation at the museum. Then I would be very happy if the work is remembered not through thought or verbal memory by reading the caption or description, but through sensations that can be felt only by that person, accompanied by a real sense of reality. In that manner, the way to experience existence directly, hope that the beholder will feel the sense of being present, the sense that this is all there is.

Through this series of graduation works, I spent a lot of time confronting myself by repeatedly asking myself questions, and I was able to experience the collapse of stereotypes that I had unquestioningly believed in and to reconstruct my concepts, as well as to gain many realizations. In that process, I was able to reaffirm that I was okay with just being who I am, which brought me back to my original self. It is obvious, but I could not be anyone else, I do not need to be anyone else, no one could take my place, and no one could walk my path. I think that it was a great opportunity for me, who had long admired and studied Western art, to realize that I was actually good at being who I am, rather than trying to dissemble unnaturally or cover me up. Otherwise, my works with such Asian and Japanese motifs would not have been born.

And the determination, the guiding principle, that I have derived from this realization is that I will simply walk my own path. I do not have to say this out loud, but I have always been this way, and this was the only path for me from the beginning. But knowing this has given me a more bird’s eye view of the whole picture. And I can see that “my path” here does not mean that it is good enough only for me, that it is not something to be pursued by force to the exclusion of others in a selfish way. It is not of a nature to be confrontational or hurtful to others. This is because all beings, not just me, are unique beings that appear in harmony with nature as they are. Each one is simply following their own path, which cannot be replaced, in which no comparison can be made and no such thing as good or bad, enemy or ally, or problem can appear.

Moreover, I would like to write down my current answer to the question of what art means to me. For me, “art” means no purpose, no attachment to the result, no expectation of anything, no action to produce something or no use for something, just exist. This is where all the answers lie, and art can be redefined in my own way as a way of being and an activity that all people can engage in.

I have been suffering and striving to graduate for a couple of years, and looking back now, I see that everything was not my own personal effort, but was kept alive by a strong and great flow. I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to all the phenomena and their “Engi, dependent co-arising” that continue to appear even now. In particular, a special acknowledgement to Professor Rajkamal Kahlon, whose mere presence there has brought about a great transformation in me, thank you very much. And to all my classmates whose diverse cultural backgrounds have inspired me through their beautiful works and the exchange of ideas, Thank you! I would like to thank Mr. Egbert Haneke for his support when he hired me as a tutor in the photography lab, and for reaching out to me and helping me out many times when I was facing the obstacle. I truly appreciate your kindness. I congratulate HFBK University of Fine Arts Hamburg and all, for your bright path ahead. Thank you for making my school days memorable as well. And I, also will walk my own path, expressing myself as I am at any given moment.

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Shin Kudo