

# Couple use stone, light and shadow to make lasting images

Plowing is sculpting. The image struck me as I sat, martini in hand, on the deck of a friend's farmhouse in early evening, watching the farmer in his tractor go methodically back and forth across the field. He transformed it into a vast utilitarian pattern of earthen serpents whose divisions seemed deepened by the setting sun.

Though not effortless, his sculpting appeared thoughtless. His industry was only accidentally creative. But it occurred to me that what he was doing was part of a continuum of carving out the land to reduce it to its essential fertility – a fertility that offers survival. It began with the crude, crucial and painstaking clearing of forest.

At the end of a grove of tall maple trees by the edge of the plowed rows I was observing stands a true and magnificent sculpture. Its juxtaposition with the furrowed field is a vital one. The sculpture is a great polished piece of varied and interactive facets in the hardest, blackest South African granite. It is both strong and delicate, brooding or brilliant, depending on your vantage point and the light and time of day.

In a short space of time, I have come to love this piece, not to understand it, but to use it in my understanding of things both reliable and unreachable, things mundane and transcendent. It is a piece, that, like the land itself, faces a constant meeting with the elements and changes with them, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, season by season.

Like the land itself, it has been carved from some-

thing seemingly impenetrable to a fertile core. What it gives back is a spirituality, a kind of growth, an enduring insight into the precious environment it exists within. It responds to it, expands it; gives it focus.

"Stone is so many things," says Satoshi Saito, partner in the artistic duo of Doucet-Saito. His wife is Louise Doucet. "It is old, sometimes 3 billion years old, but it also can be new; that is, freshly cut. It is heavy and durable but it is also very, very fragile. And it is both inert and alive."

I spent a perfect summer morning – one of the last in June – with Satoshi and Louise at their farm in the Eastern Townships. We sat under soft pines on the crest of a hill overlooking the 19th-century rooftops of the village below. Beyond and beyond is the land that the Doucet-Saito sculptures embrace.

There are several works on their property, monumental in scope, austere but inviting, a commingling of expansive curve and angle, of thrust and of niches that seduce the light into shadows of stirring intimacy. There are tons of granite in place: the purest and whitest from local quarries for the sculptures, huge silvery blocks of it for the pedestals. And below ground, five-foot-deep foundations of cement.

The two sculptors work with stonecutters in a near-



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living. It is different, dangerous and precarious work cutting 15 or 20 tonnes of costly granite suspended by a derrick. It is not work the tradesmen are used to: the meticulous, relentless, intricate shaping of rock into huge abstract forms. A piece can take several years.

Satoshi and Louise feel real respect and a growing sense of friendship for the men who help bring forth their complex visions. The relationship is a remarkable balance of differences and strengths.

Call it an assured equipoise. The sculptors' entire life together seems an enviable example of contrast becoming confluence. To their pastoral solitude, they bring urbanity. To their relationship, they bring the profound and embedded passions of two radically different cultures. From that comes an art that embodies both a Shintoist "sensible spirituality" and a Québécois vivacity. (And three fine sons!)

The art itself forms an aesthetic equilibrium with its place. (Besides the works in the Eastern Townships there are a number of sculptures in Japan and several in Ontario.) Each piece is an epiphany, and like all epiphanies, solitary and momentary. And yet every work has been born of ancient rock and though transformed, will always be ancient. In its new space it becomes a symbol of permanence amid transition. And every work, though "bound" by its line and

shape, is boundless because it provides an opening into a new vision of its surroundings.

Perhaps the most delicate balance of all is the balance between the creative and economic: a balance that at its most basic is about the existence or non-existence of a work. A sculpture remains a scaled-down plaster model in the bright Doucet-Saito studio attached to the house if there is no financing to take it to its monumental form in stone. While each piece is the fastidious collaboration of two reaching imaginations, it is also a major project. A sculpture begins with the purchase of a monolithic piece of stone – perhaps internationally, through a broker – and only ends with its heartstopping installation on site. In between is an enormous investment of dollars, time, technology and perfectionism.

There is the wisdom of time and the energy of onset in the Doucet-Saito sculptures. Each one shares in the birth, death and regeneration that surrounds it and each one invites the viewer to be a witness.

"We live in an information age. Everything is facts. No one remembers very much of anything. There is a place for sculpture. For something everlasting. When I look at a space and see something in existence that has never existed before, but will continue to exist long after us, I feel real joy," Satoshi told me.

*Roche et terre*

*S'embrassent: âmes diverses et sûres:*

*Courbe éternelle.*

A little gift of French haiku for Satoshi Saito and Louise Doucet to describe the way they bring a mystical and infinite harmony to diversity.