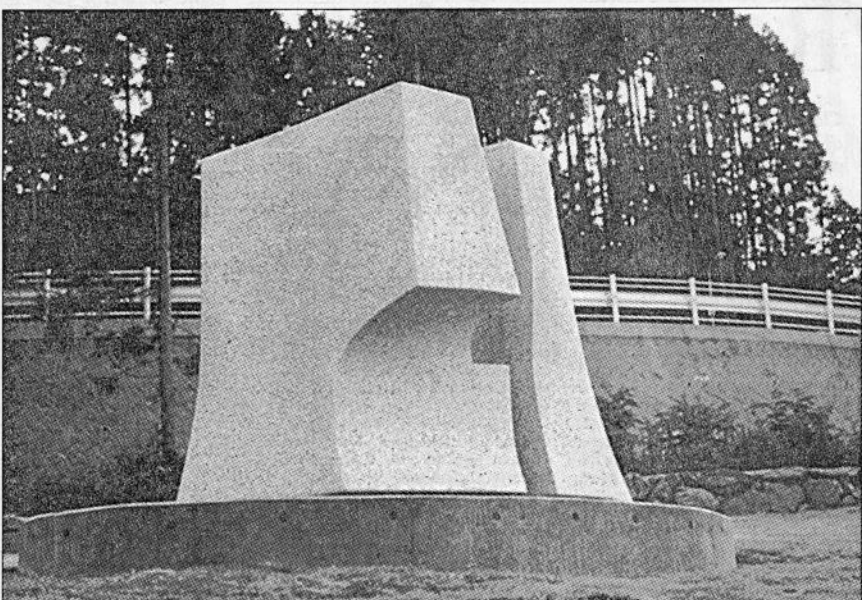


VISUAL ARTS



ANTOINE SAITO

Akatoki (Alba), Satoshi and Louise Doucet Saito's sculpture at the Nagano Olympic Games.

Sculptors get Olympian boost

Townships couple picked for Nagano installation

It took an Olympian event to remind us of two excellent artists, who have been labouring quietly in their Eastern Townships studio for more than two decades without as much as a peep from local art critics in years.

The event in question is the coming Winter Olympic Games in Nagano, Japan, and the artists are Louise Doucet Saito and Satoshi Saito.

Their sculpture has been selected by a Japanese jury to commemorate the games, and in connection with this honour the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Sherbrooke has organized an exhibition of the couple's works.

They were one of three laureates of a sculpture competition held in anticipation of the Nagano Games, and for Satoshi Saito the news was, well, news to him.

"I didn't know we were chosen," he said in a phone interview, "and to be honest with you, when I heard it I didn't think too much of it."

All that changed when he visited the site for the sculpture, and discovered the company he and his wife found themselves in: the other three laureates included Toyoshige Watanabe, Atsuo Okamoto and Minami Tada, all well known and respected artists.

Each sculpture was to celebrate a different discipline, and the Saito's granite work marks the bobsleigh and luge track.

"It's a very prominent site," Saito said, "and some people have already seen the work and said it was very beautiful. We don't have a very direct response (to our work), like painters for example, except for this time."

The Saitos are acclaimed in Japan, but they are yet to be given the recognition they deserve in Canada. Part of the reason is that the couple does not seek exposure, remaining happily ensconced on their farm in Ways Mills.

"We are not known at all," laughed Saito, who is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy, "but it gives us time to work. Till now we have been very fortunate to produce what we like."

They first came to the public's attention in the 1970s as excellent ceramists and later as contemporary sculptors. In the '90s, the Saitos began working in stone, and the Nagano sculpture is an example of their at once minimalist and monumental style.

They work together, signing their name as one person, fused into a rare symbiotic relationship, their combined energy and vision resulting in one-of-a-kind art.

Talent runs in the Saito family. Their son Antoine is a photographer, while the younger, Benoit, is a talented graphic artist, whose works are on display at Galerie Luz.

They all share a quiet, self-effacing disposition, and a poetic vision illustrated by Satoshi Saito's reflections on the Olympic sculpture, which has been named Akatoki (Alba), after visiting its site:

"I was touched by the beauty of this region. My gratitude went to our ancestors and the gods of these mountains, keeping the place in front of our eyes so beautiful for thousands of years. The sculpture... is intended as a gift to delight our ancestors and the gods of the Izuna mountains."

"I can only hope that the natural beauty of this region will be sustained through the coming millennium and that this sculpture proves to be a pleasing offering to the gods."

✦ Works by Louise Doucet Saito and Satoshi Saito are at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Sherbrooke, 241 Dufferin St., Sherbrooke, until Feb. 8. Information: (819) 821-2115.



DOROTA KOZINSKA

✦ Benoit Saito is exhibiting his graphic works at Galerie Luz, 30 Notre Dame St. W., until Jan. 31. Open Thursday to Saturday, 1 to 5 p.m. Information: 982-9911.

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Now that the worst of the storm effects are behind us, museums and galleries are back in full swing, getting ready for the spring season of exhibitions. The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts reopened its doors on Jan. 16, but if you missed the George Segal exhibition, you're out of luck. It ended, as scheduled, on Jan. 11. It's impossible to hold over large shows, as the programming is done years in advance.

(A lot of galleries found themselves in this predicament, with only a few days left in many exhibitions, as the next ones are getting ready to be mounted.)

The MMFA, like the McCord Museum, was operating its generators throughout the power shortage. "We were able to maintain optimal conditions for our collections, and there was absolutely no damage to any work of art," Mayo Graham, the museum's chief curator, said.

And, like at the McCord, several employees, forced to abandon their unheated homes, found shelter in the museum.

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This is an important year for the Centre International d'Art Contemporain de Montréal – the year of the long-anticipated Biennale de Montréal. It will replace the annual Les Cents Jours d'Art Contemporain de Montréal event.

The main exhibition of the Biennale, titled *The Dreamcatchers*, will be split into three themes: Poetry, Humour, and the Everyday. The list of international artists participating will be made known in May.

Right now, CIAC is showing photographic works by Nova Scotia artist George Steeves in a traveling exhibition organized by the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (an affiliate of the National Gallery of Canada).

About 175 black-and-white shots document the peripatetic artist's life and entourage, as he unabashedly snaps pictures of friends and acquaintances in their least public guises.

He's not loath to take informal – as in shocking and scandalous – photographs of himself and many of his self-portraits are on display.

✦ *George Steeves: 1979-1993* is on till March 15 at 314 Sherbrooke St. E. Information: 288-0811. Or visit their web site: <http://www.microtec.net/ciac>

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An exhibition of a different kind of photography opens Feb. 5 at the Art Gallery of Ontario. Julia Margaret Cameron: *The Creative Process* will feature 90 works by this Victorian era photographer. Cameron (1815-1879) was largely self-taught, and she had the gumption to embark on a career few women of her day would have dreamed of.

It was virtually impossible for Victorian women to achieve professional recognition as a photographer, yet Cameron managed to leave behind a rich body of work. She did studies of famous personalities of her time and traveled to faraway places like Ceylon (now known as Sri Lanka). The exhibition includes shots from her voyages as well as an 1864 photograph she declared her "first success."

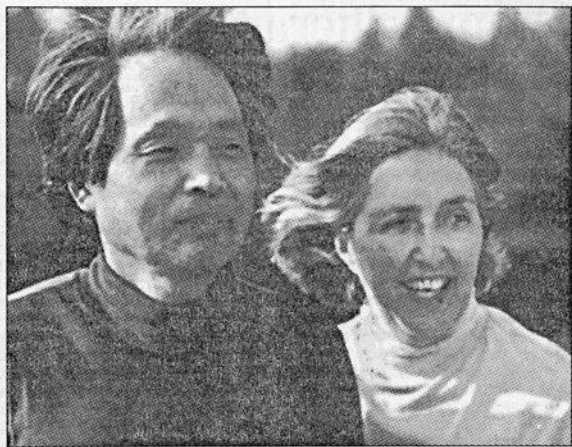
✦ *Julia Margaret Cameron: The Creative Process* is on until May 3 at the AGO, 317 Dundas St. W., Toronto. Information: (416) 977-0414.

✦ ✦ ✦

And if you're already in Toronto, why not pop in to the Royal Ontario Museum to catch a magical show at the museum's theatre. *The Conjuror* has been held over until Jan. 31, and it is what the museum's director and president, Lindsay Sharp, calls "the first of many extensions."

The Conjuror is written and performed by master of classic sleight of hand David Ben with the co-operation of Patrick Watson, who co-wrote and directed the 90-minute show. Ben performs feats of magic conceived for an adult audience, and it's estimated that by the end of the month *The Conjuror* will have produced over 420 eggs from his cloth bag. No rabbits were mentioned.

✦ *The Conjuror* is at Theatre ROM, 100 Queen's Park, Toronto. There are evening and matinee shows, and ticket prices are between \$18 and \$40. For information call: (416) 586-5846, or check ROM's website: www.ticketmaster.ca



Satoshi and Louise Doucet Saito.