Today’s weather report for Southern California warns of hot winds up to 50 miles per hour. For those of you who live outside the LA basin area, these “Santa Ana” winds can blow 40 to 60 mph with temperatures more than 100 ° F and can continue for more than a day. For those of us who raise bonsai, it is a genuine threat. A potted plant can dry out quickly in this environment. When one is home all day it is manageable but while on vacation you have to depend on sprinkler systems or the kid next door. (Note: He was doing just fine until I caught him smoking some dry maple leaves so now I’m all automatic sprinklers.) The first thing I did this morning was to make sure all my bonsai were soaked and I moved some into a shadier location. As I was watering I couldn’t help but notice the stones on my bonsai benches (for “yo seki”) were looking very secure, as if to say, “We like water but we don’t depend on it”.

Bonsai need to be pampered. It takes years to create and train bonsai. Stones don’t need to be trained, just positioned for optimum viewing. Stones don’t need to be fed or trimmed. They don’t need to be repotted. Bonsai take time to develop to suggest an advanced age. Technically, stones are as old as they are going to get. The “yo seki” process, although it is described as “aging the stone” is used here as applied to wine and women. The changes I have observed in my aged stones are that some display more color and have a softer tone, just like wine and women...

However, our stones are dependent on us. They need support- a daiza. No matter how explicit, the stone is not a suiseki until it is displayed in a daiza or a suiban. Further, in Japan, it is suggested that the suiseki be stored in a wooden box (kiri-bako – hako) made specifically for the stone (and daiza). Writing on the box contains the history of the stone, identifying the owner and prior owners and other data. Provenance of every object of art should be a common practice. Unless you have a proper box, you should add your name to the daiza whether you made it or not. The stone will “live” forever, but like the bonsai, we won’t. Stones in your collection could be admired by a future owner. If it is a great-great grandchild they should be able to say proudly, “I had a really crazy relative who worshipped rocks”.

~Larry Ragle
ANNOUNCEMENTS: Marge reminded us about the Santa Anita exhibit (see page 12). Flash Partch is moving to Napa but has agreed to continue mailing the newsletter. If we go to another printer, there may be a price increase. We will need to consider raising our dues either for everyone or just for those who get the hard copy. Please think about the possibilities and we will make a decision before the year is out.

STONE OF THE MONTH (waterfalls). Sizes are in inches, width x height x depth. We expected this classification to be a bit more popular. If you have a suggestion for stone of the month, please let Nina know.

Al Nelson 5 x 6 x 4

Lois Hutchinson 4 x 10 x 3

Edd Kuehn (via email) 3.25 x 2.25 x 1.75

Larry Ragle 5 x 8.5 x 4

Larry Ragle 5 x 5 x 3

Don Mullally 6 x 5 x 3.5

Lois Hutchinson 4.25 x 2 x 2.5
Richard Turner showed slides of many artists' work as a means of explaining the similarities between making art and collecting viewing stones. He began with Henry Moore whose work is often mentioned in connection with viewing stones because of his dramatic use of positive form and negative space. Moore’s contemporaries Barbara Hepworth and Jean Arp do similar stone sculptures. The installation of American artist Michael Heizer’s Levitated Mass at LACMA last year raised the public’s “rock consciousness” but it has little in common with viewing stones. Los Angeles artist Woods Davy makes sculptures by pinning stones together. Another L.A. artist, Lyn Foulkes, did large and beautiful paintings of rocks earlier in his career. British artist Tony Cragg’s (below) sculptures bear a coincidental resemblance to scholar's rocks but they are, in fact, computer generated forms based on human profiles. Joel Morrison’s lumpy, stainless steel forms that look like stones are inspired by the shapes of black plastic sacks of garbage. British artist Damien Hirst collects scholars’ rocks and the late American artist Jason Rhodes included scholars’ rocks in his complex and cluttered installations.

Isamu Noguchi’s California Scenario in Orange County and his garden for the Japanese American Community Cultural Center in Los Angeles both evidence an aesthetic that references Japanese gardens and suiseki (above). Korean artist Lee Ufan creates arrangements of stones on pillows using locally indigenous material to articulate architectural spaces in much the same way that suiseki activate suiban. (See Aiseki Kai newsletter vol. 29, issue 11, pages 3, 9.)

Chinese artist Zhan Wang, who has worked with stones for most of his career, creates sculptures by forming stainless steel over stones that vary in scale from tabletop to garden size. (See above referenced newsletter and vol. 27, issue 4, pages 2-3.) He also created a stainless steel version of the Floating Island of the Immortals anchored on a barge off the coast of Denmark and has proposed launching his steel replica of a meteorite into space to replace the original meteorite that landed in China. His most recent piece is a high-speed video of an exploding rock which is shown in slow motion forwards and backwards. It is projected on the walls of the gallery in which all the pieces of the original rock, which have been replicated in stainless steel, are suspended.

Among other artists inspired directly by scholars’ rocks and viewing stones is pop artist Roy Lichtenstein (right) who did a few stylized sculptures of scholars’ rocks in cast aluminum which he then painted. Brice Marden does abstract paintings based on scholars’ rocks in his collection. Sui Jian Guo has used computer software to design a huge painted steel version of a small stone. Ugo Rodinone makes large scholar's rock-like sculptures using foam that is covered with a matrix of gravel and cement. Takanori Aiba, uses stones as a base for his invented environments - 'cities' - that contrast the human and natural worlds. Sculptor Richard Deacon has painted on small stones in an abstract expressionist fashion and has also created two large ceramic stone-like sculptures. The work of ceramists Arlene Shechet, Meng Zhou, Julia Kuinin and Doug Blecher is all inspired by their interest in viewing stones. Andrea Cohen’s adventurous sculptures of stone-like forms are executed in painted plaster.

Anna Sew Hoy has done scholars’ rocks sculptures in both clay and Sapporo beer cans.

Benedict Ernst (right) sculpts recycled Styrofoam into suiseki-like forms and displays them in a suiban. One of Lui Dan’s best-known pieces is a set of large drawings of Richard Rosenblum’s Old Man stone (below). Tai Xiangzhou and Luo Jian Wu do similarly detailed paintings using brush and ink.
Dear Phyllis,

Well, first of all, 340 tons of granite won’t fit into one hand so I am relieved that I will not have to consider its eligibility for any upcoming Huntington show. Secondly, I have taken the time (in fact, three times) to go see the *Levitated Mass* by Michael Heizer and, personally, have absolutely no empathy for either the rock or the installation. Whether it is ‘art’ or not is out of my jurisdiction. (Those interested in such a discussion can do a simple online search, wade through endless discussions and decide for themselves.) For me, it suffices to say that the rock has absolutely no inherent aesthetic quality. Even judged just as a rock there is no profound sense of age, patina, shape, mineral composition, rich color or of the formative geological process. This is a big chunk of fractured quarry rock that is in short, as anti-suiseki as one can imagine!

Despite its title, the rock is decidedly not levitated; in fact, it is not even elevated. It is so obviously supported – awkwardly lying and anchored at ground level (left) – that the name is downright silly. In theory, one is to fully experience it by walking into the 456’-long below-ground-level viewing slot and there, 15 feet beneath, looking up (above). Worse, the positioning is neither balanced nor under the kind of interesting, unbalanced dynamic tension that one might associate with Chinese scholar’s rocks.

Artificially and abjectly set in a non-natural environment, *Levitated Mass* is presumptively billed as environmental art, but I feel that it is unnatural and ultimately anti-human, lacking any elevating aesthetic value. Our own practice of stone appreciation – be it viewed as an arcane curiosity or art – is more natural and, I will wager, will continue to elevate more visitors.

On the next page, enjoy some natural stone masses for comparison and your viewing pleasure.

---

Dear GuyJim,

In last month’s lecture, Richard Turner mentioned the large rock art (*Levitated Mass*) that was installed at LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) last year. I am skeptical, what is your opinion?

*Phyllis Steen*

---

GuyJim

---

*Ask GuyJim*

**Dear GuyJim,**

In last month’s lecture, Richard Turner mentioned the large rock art (*Levitated Mass*) that was installed at LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art) last year. I am skeptical, what is your opinion?

*Phyllis Steen*

---

Dear Phyllis,

Despite its title, the rock is decidedly not levitated; in fact, it is not even elevated. It is so obviously supported – awkwardly lying and anchored at ground level (left) – that the name is downright silly. In theory, one is to fully experience it by walking into the 456’-long below-ground-level viewing slot and there, 15 feet beneath, looking up (above). Worse, the positioning is neither balanced nor under the kind of interesting, unbalanced dynamic tension that one might associate with Chinese scholar’s rocks.

Artificially and abjectly set in a non-natural environment, *Levitated Mass* is presumptively billed as environmental art, but I feel that it is unnatural and ultimately anti-human, lacking any elevating aesthetic value. Our own practice of stone appreciation – be it viewed as an arcane curiosity or art – is more natural and, I will wager, will continue to elevate more visitors.

On the next page, enjoy some natural stone masses for comparison and your viewing pleasure.
The views expressed in this column are personal, perhaps irreverent, irrelevant or just plain wrong and do not reflect the consensual view of California Aiseki Kai. Send your viewing stone questions (or comments) for GuyJim to jimreaves@roadrunner.com or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 or call (310) 452-3680.
In January of 2010, a private show simply entitled “The First Exhibition of the Genkokai” took place in the extremely cold city of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan. Held at the Hoshun’in sub-temple of the famous Zen temple Daitokuji, the profound content of each display forced visitors to ask broad questions such as “What is bonsai?” “What is suiseki?” “What is the nature of elegance and refinement?”

I, the editor of WABI magazine, had the opportunity to witness the event and summarize here the world created by these exceptional individuals who gathered together to attain a higher level of understanding, and who view life as a living expression of aesthetic beauty – something we should all aim to do.

Bonsai and suiseki have spread far beyond Japan to the outside world, but I cannot help feeling that the essence of what may be called “Japanese beauty and aesthetics,” which has developed over hundreds of years of history, has not yet been truly transmitted along with them. It is my hope that these pages will inspire readers, fellow lovers of bonsai and suiseki, to rethink these ideas as they apply to the arts at hand.

The head abbot of the Hoshun’in had the following to say about the Genkokai exhibition. He would like lovers of bonsai and suiseki to aim for a more contemplative, meditative approach. Quietly gazing upon the stones and trees displayed here, I recall Zen monks who have undergone extensive training and devoted years to ascetic practice. Stand, walk, sit, and lay down. They clothe themselves and partake in meals. They do away with all unnecessary things, and make a simple yet refined life their way. The stones and trees now within this Zen temple have beautifully become as if one with the space. Each of the suiseki and bonsai displayed in the various rooms and alcoves interweave Man with Nature, possess the ultimate Beauty, and contain the heart of Zen.

Sokushu Akiyoshi, twenty-third generation abbot of the Hoshun’in, a sub-temple of Daitokuji, Kyoto
Daitokuji – The Birthplace of Medieval Japanese Culture

A spiritual energy flows through the calm, tranquil air, and the further one enters into its space, the deeper the exceptional artistry of this Zen temple becomes. It is precisely this spirit that members of the Genkokai continuously pursue.

This is not like other articles I have published in bonsai magazines in the past, simply introducing the objects on display at a given exhibition. As I will explain in greater detail later, this show was significant not only because it was the first exhibition for the group, but also because there exists within each of the members a profound desire to “seek truth” in what they are doing. Looking at the displays, I heard someone say, “It is as if the entire exhibition is one single, spiritual work of art.” I am not confident that my poor writing and the quality of the photographs will be able to sufficiently convey the meaning behind the show, but I would like to try and guide readers through the exhibition from the perspective of a solitary viewer walking through the space.

The main gate of Daitokuji. I wonder at the number of historical figures who have passed through it.

**The Temple Where Sen no Rikyu Practiced Zen**

Daitokuji was founded in 1324 by Kokushi Daito (1282 – 1337), and was made the top of the five Gozan Zen temples by the decree of Emperor Godaigo (1288 – 1339), being honored with the name Honcho muso Zen en, or “Zen Temple Without Equal in all the Land.” Though it was destroyed in the Onin War that took place from 1467 to 1477, it was revived by the Zen monk Ikkyu (1394 – 1481) and has enjoyed great prosperity ever since. In addition to being given its imperial rank, the temple is well known as the place where the founder of the wabi style of tea, Sen no Rikyu (1522 – 1591), practiced Zen, and also the place where Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1536 – 1598) held funeral services for Nobunaga Oda (1534 – 1582). Located in the northern Murasakino district of Kyoto, the main gate is well aged and of the sturdy construction so typically found in Zen temples. Passing under the main gate and looking toward the chokushimon, or “messenger’s gate,” – a type of gate once used only by imperial envoys, the one currently at Daitokuji being the former south gate of the imperial palace – you encounter a solemn row of pine trees that lead toward the rear of the temple complex, passing by the main hall and the lecture hall. Stopping by the main hall to say a prayer, I noticed a large juniper towering overhead, which according to a nearby sign was planted some 350 years ago when this particular hall was reconstructed. Seeing this tree reminded me of another impressive juniper at Kenchoji, one of the five great Rinzai Zen sect temples of Kamakura. From the time Zen Buddhism was introduced to Japan and began to spread, junipers and other trees were planted wherever temples were constructed. Looking at these trees brings about a comfortable, warm feeling as I imagine that the concept of bonsai was in part inspired by the forms of great old trees such as these.

Continuing toward the end of the path, the sub-temple Hoshun’in comes into sight. The Shinjuan and Daisen’in, other historically significant sub-temples of the greater Daitokuji complex, are located...
just before the entrance of the Hoshun’in, revealing through narrow gaps in the fence the fact that this place was an important center of Japanese medieval culture. In the five to ten minute walk from the main gate to the entrance of the Hoshun’in, I felt as if all five senses had been cleansed, and I recall a slight feeling of tension building as I approached. It would be best for readers to experience firsthand, but this feeling of anticipation that builds as one grasps the opportunity to visit a place like this for a specific purpose is not limited to Zen temples, but can be felt in any number of historical places in Japan. Walking these paths and contemplating the exhibition ahead, I recognize the important function of the Daitokuji, an overwhelming location, in completing the atmosphere of the Genkokai show.

Exhibition Venue – The Four-hundred Year Old Hoshun’in

The Hoshun’in is the highest-ranking sub-temple of Daitokuji, and there is a long stone path leading from its first gate to the main hall, which I could see in the distance rising above the walls with a noble, dignified air. Alongside the gate was a sign, reading “First Exhibition of the Genkokai.” Seeing this announcement for a bonsai and suiseki exhibition here in the exceptionally beautiful grounds of a famous Kyoto temple left me with mixed feelings of great anticipation and anxiety.

Bowing once at the outer gate and carrying forward, I couldn’t help but feel a somewhat softer atmosphere than that experienced along the paths that had brought me here. On the right side was the aged earthen wall forming a perimeter around the neighboring Daisen’in that gave that distinct feeling of an old temple, yet to the left was an endless bed of beautiful, well-maintained moss, amongst which were planted a number of Japanese maples of unassuming height with thin trunks and good branch movement. Though the air was that frigid cold of late January, I wonder if the fresh green moss and the crimson of the Japanese maples were selected in order to bring peace to the eyes and hearts of visitors to the temple in winter.

While relatively young in light of Japan’s ancient past, the main gate of the Hoshun’in is steeped in history. Here I also caught sight of a sign for the Genkokai exhibition, disturbing the otherwise peaceful world around me. The eaves of the gate were lined with tiles featuring the prosperous Maeda family’s crest, the umebach, or “potted plum.” Of the many military elites, tea practitioners, and others would gather, making it a central hub in early seventeenth-century Kyoto culture.

The Hoshun’in was built in 1608 by the wife of the powerful military general of the Kaga domain, Toshie Maeda (1539 – 1599), who became a nun after her husband’s death, abandoned her given name Matsu for the Buddhist name Hoshun’in, and established the temple with her sons Toshinaga and Toshitsune. Consecrated by the monk Sohaku Gyokushitsu (1572 – 1641), the Hoshun’in became the Maeda family temple and served as a cultural salon where aristocrats,
generals that struggled for power in Japan’s Sengoku period (1467 – 1573), Toshiie Maeda rose with a spear as his weapon of choice to become one of the five commissioners charged with maintaining power after the death of Hideyoshi Toyotomi, and his family managed to live through the tumultuous events faced by warrior society of the time. I was once again moved at the sight of this very real piece of Japanese history standing before me.

The Chambers Gallery curated two exhibitions (in 2002 & 2009) of work by artists inspired by viewing stones. Featured artists included Robert Oxnam, Hong Lei, Zhan Wang, Brice Marden, Roy Lichtenstein and others. Richard, himself, curated Home/Office Landscapes: Contemporary Scholars’ Rocks and Viewing Stones for Chapman University’s Guggenheim Gallery in 2007 (above). Works by Jacci Den Hartog, Meng Zhao, Andrea Cohen, Skeet McAuley, Jessica Hutchinson, Rachel Rojany and Richard were shown alongside traditional stones from the collections of James and Alice Greaves and Ann and Jean Horton. (See newsletter vol.25, issue 11, pg 3) In the 2011 Structure and Absence exhibition at the White Cube Gallery in London curator Craig Burnett paired scholars’ rocks with contemporary works that shared the dynamic tension of positive form and negative space characteristic of so many scholars’ rocks. Richard continued with illustrations of parallels between the art world and the world of viewing stones, the most obvious one being that paintings and photographs of the natural world such as those by Alfred Beirstadt and Ansel Adams (below) are inspired by the same reverence for nature that motivates stone collectors. (See newsletter vol. 29, issue 4, pg 6.) One of the criteria for evaluating both images and stones is their ability to successfully evoke the landscapes they reference. Another is formal qualities – color, texture, form, etc. – that may be applied equally to sculptures and to stones.

Stones, according to Richard Rosenblum and others, are ‘found objects’. Pablo Picasso pioneered the concept when he used a printed image of chair caning and rope in a 1912 painting. Marcel Duchamp’s
exhibition of his "readymade" Fountain, (left) a signed urinal, in 1917, questioned both the role of the artist and the nature of art itself. Artists such as Joseph Cornell, and later, Robert Rauschenberg, (below, left) were known for their found object sculptures. If stones indeed are found objects, then there are significant similarities between what we do when we collect and display stones and what artists working with found objects do. The impulse to see, as Picasso did, a bull’s head (left) in the combination of bicycle handle bars and seat is the same impulse that inspires a stone collector to carve a daiza that resembles rabbit’s paws for a stone that looks like a lop-eared bunny (left).

However, both found objects and stones bring with them their unique histories of associations and implications. Additionally, artworks and stones alike have their respective provenances. A stone once belonging to Melba Tucker, (right) for example, can be compared to a painting formerly owned by a collector like Peggy Guggenheim.

Finally, mounting a stone in a daiza is the equivalent of putting a sculpture on a pedestal. Moreover, stands for stones, whether they are in modest Japanese style or the more flamboyant Chinese style, are crafted for specific stones and are intended to harmonize with the stone in much the same way that Constantin Brancusi’s “bases” for his sculptures are intended as a continuation of the sculpture itself (above). The daiza proclaims the stone to be a work of art. It asks the viewer to regard it as an aesthetic object. As such, the daiza functions much like the vitrines and shelves used by contemporary artists like Haim Steinbach (below), Joseph Beuys and Jeff Koons who

between the two practices. Artists typically use the detritus of industry and urban life, we use natural materials. Artists often use multiple found objects in a single work, we generally display a single stone.
create a context for ordinary objects – basketballs, (left) vacuum cleaners, (below) cereal boxes – that present the found objects for aesthetic contemplation. Richard concluded his talk with the promise of a future talk about creativity and innovation in stone collecting and display and an invitation to club members to let him know about creative approaches to viewing stones that they have used themselves or are aware of.

Thank you, Richard, for another great talk and giving us lots to think about again.

**Tokokazari Competition Winner!**

Joseph Gaytan was one of ten participants in the tokokazari competition in Hanford. He took first place with his display “Longevity” (right).

After the awards were made, the judges offered a few suggestions to improve on Joseph’s vision. They felt that the scroll and the tree should “mingle” and that the boat should be off to the side on its own *jiita* and to the rear of his composition (right).

We think Joseph put his heart into his display and that really is the point, isn’t it.

---

**California Aiseki Kai** meets on the 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:30 pm at the Nakaoka Community Center located at 1670 W. 162nd St, Gardena, CA. Second floor. We do not meet in Nov-Dec.
Coming Events

**SANTA ANITA BONSAI SOCIETY**
49th Annual Show, May 25-27, at the L.A. Arboretum, 301 N. Baldwin Ave., Arcadia. 9:30-4:30. Demos at 1:00 each day. Sales. For more information:
Contact Marge Blasingame at 626.579.0420

**DESCANSO BONSAI SOCIETY**
43rd Annual Show, June 15-16, 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada/Flintridge. 9-5. Demos 11:00 and 1:00 each day. Sales. Admission to the exhibition is free with admission to Descanso Gardens. Saturday night reception 6-9; light refreshments, auction and raffle. For more information descaso-bonsai.com or contact Michael Jonas at 818-776-0813.

**KOFU BONSAI KAI**
Bonsai at the OC Fair, July 16-28, OC Fairgrounds, 88 Fair Dr., Costa Mesa. Wed-Fri, noon to midnight, Sat-Sun, 10AM-midnight. Adults, $11, seniors $8, parking $7. For more information, go to ocfair.com

**GOLDEN STATE BONSAI FEDERATION**
Convention XXXVI “Outside the Box”, October 31–November 3, Marriott Burbank Airport Hotel, Burbank. David DeGroot, Suthin Sukosolvisit, Peter Warren. For more information: gsbfconvention.org

**REFRESHMENTS**
Thank you Marge Blasingame and the Ragles for the April appetite appeasers.
Our May munchies will be provided by Emma Janza, Maria Atkinson and Phil Hogan.
If you are unable to attend on the night for which you signed up, please contact Lois so she can make other arrangements. Thank you!