

Opening speech for the exhibition 'A Scene with Tea' by Keiko Sato
in Shofukan (Japanese Tea Garden) Rotterdam

Konichiwa, Hello everybody,

Some of you may-be wonder why I was invited to give an opening speech at the exhibition of Keiko Sato.

We met in 2007 at the presentation of a book in The Hague, where we were introduced to each other because of my connection to Japan. As a Zen Buddhist I spent on several occasions many weeks in different monasteries in Japan and as an artist Japan has been a great inspiration for my work.

But the main connection between us is about the subject matter. We both made artworks about the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Keiko's work has a lot to do with time and materials, which are changing.

Her work reflects in some ways through destruction and creation the time we are living in.

And we are experiencing a changing time on all levels.

Of course I am also referring to what has happened recently in Japan, not only the earthquake and the tsunami, but also the disaster with the nuclear plants in Fukushima.

Quoting from an article 'History repeats' that was written recently by Kenzaburo Oe in the New Yorker on March 28.

'This disaster unites, in a dramatic way, two phenomena: Japan's vulnerability to earthquakes and the risk presented by nuclear energy. The first is a reality that this country has had to face since the dawn of time. The second, which may turn out to be even more catastrophic than the earthquake and the tsunami, is the work of man. What did Japan learn from the tragedy of Hiroshima?

One of the great figures of contemporary Japanese thought, Shuichi Kato, who died in 2008, speaking of atomic bombs and nuclear reactors, recalled a line from 'The Pillow Book,' written a thousand years ago by a woman, Sei Shonagon, in which the author evokes 'something that seems very far away but is, in fact, very close.' Nuclear disaster seems a distant hypothesis, improbable; the prospect of it is, however, always with us.'

The lesson that we learn from the current disaster will depend on whether those who survive it, resolve not to repeat their mistakes.

The way a Zen Buddhist could look at it has more to do with the interdependence of all things.

The pain of one part of humankind is the pain of the whole of humankind. And the human species and the planet Earth are one body. What happens to one part of the body happens to the whole body. An event such as this reminds us of the impermanent nature of our lives. It helps us remember that what's most important is to love each other, to be there for each other, and to treasure each moment we have that we are alive.

In the work of Keiko Sato violence and peace are present at the same time. The tea is coming from nature and so is the glass and the copper.

Nature will take over the 'scene with tea'.

After ruin new life will follow.

I like to end with a saying, which comes from Tibet.

'Tragedy should be utilized as a source of strength.

No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful the experience is, if we lose our Hope, that is our real disaster.'

With this Hope I declare the exhibition open.

Domo Arigato.

Madelon Hooykaas, April 9th 2011