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You And I

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Artist Statement

Nao Yamamoto

My art is a trail of my life path, a way to see who I am, and show my respect to Nature.

Art has always been with me through my entire life. I was born to a father who is an art professor makes contemporary art and a mother who is ceramicist worked for her father in Japanese traditional pottery. In my childhood, I enjoyed making random shapes with clay or building small houses with cardboard, wood, or fabric rather than playing with a doll or going out with my friends. My parents had studios in our house. I remember watching them working on their projects everyday, and sometimes they asked my brothers and me for help. Moreover, they often took me to opening receptions, museums and the galleries in Japan. I've never questioned what art is because it was something always around me and part of my life.

The environment I grew up with allowed me to cultivate an appreciation for both contemporary art and traditional craft, I still respect the Japanese culture, the aesthetics and attention to tableware as well as fine sense of space and balance. However, great contemporary art works often astounded me, and those experiences made me realize that Japan is just a tiny part of this big world. I began to travel to many countries to seek different culture and expanding experiences to art. Once in a while, I visited New York and Los Angeles, the mecca of contemporary art. The experience of art, culture and the environment changed my perspective, and I felt like it took me beyond the narrow culture

of Japan. It didn't take long for me to begin dreaming of a life in the United States as an artist.

The more I created my art pieces, the more I became aware of the difference between craft and contemporary art. Craft art is more about techniques, knowledge and design while contemporary art is about ideas. Since I recognized my art as the way to represent myself, or even have conversations with myself, I became devoted to a contemporary art practice. I admire contemporary art because there is always ways to improve. I come up with new ideas or better solutions when I am developed as an artist. It has been so exciting to see my thoughts made visual and how I've been changed by creating my art.

Four years of campus life in Japan taught me not only how to make art works, but also how to think as an artist. I always enjoyed the conversation with one of my professors that helped me to see what I am trying to represent through my art. I respected that he valued students' energy and love toward their works rather than that expectation of a sophisticated ideas or designs. I was able to talk about abstract invisible feelings to him, and he helped me to figure out until it became decent point of views and opinions as well as how to express it. He always taught us to question the reasons for every single detail of our art pieces, such as why it is this size, why it is made of these material, color, shape, techniques, etc. He ingrained the importance of being aware and asking myself if this is really the best way to represent my thought. I developed my abilities to think and talk as an artist in my casual conversations with him.

Living in the United States revealed a Japanese part of me, which I didn't want to admit. I wanted to be an individual, free and independent. However, not only my

appearance and accent, but also my way of think based on the Japanese culture indicated that I don't belong here. When I recognized the Japanese in me, I felt like I couldn't go anywhere else, or couldn't be anything else. It was like a curse for me deciding who I am. I believed the fact that I couldn't get away from my culture, family, or experience, limits my life as well as it has supported me. On the other hand, I knew I derived my aesthetic sense of space or balance and respect for nature from Japanese culture, and it is an important part of my body of work. It is important to know where I come from or what inspires me, but I wanted to see what I would be with my own potential, not the environment. So I tried to get away from my roots, and looked for who I am beside Japanese.

On the way to find my identity, I became aware that I have nothing, but art. Through my life, I see art and I see my feelings, and I think of art and I see my thoughts. Moreover, I express myself through my creations. I believe that it is necessary to know myself to create powerful art pieces and see an objective point of view about myself through comparison with me and other people. When my thoughts and techniques come together in an appropriate way, I'll finally find the way to represent my thoughts visually allowing me to communicate with people beyond language, i.e., sympathy. Having objective point of view is also important to build good relationships with people. I consider learning art as a way of developing social skills as well.

I have long created my art pieces based on the simple beauty of glass. I was obsessed with glass, and I was looking for the way to emphasize what I see in it. One of my favorite series "Haku-Haku" was inspired by the fragility of glass. The blown glass pieces shaved to the utmost limit create the feeling of tension as well as a transient

moment of glass. Meanwhile, I saw one of my professors in the United States call her tools with personal pronoun such as “they” or “guy”. I really liked that she treated her tools and glass as if those were her partners. When a glassblower forces glass to be in certain shape roughly with his tools, glass won’t show its delicacy. Therefore, glassblower needs to understand the characteristics of glass and use gravity to guide it into beautiful forms. During the glassblowing process, I would sometimes see the molten glass as a creature that has a consciousness and tries to challenge my skill or mastery. This idea helped me to create a different body of work which represented my experience or relationship with glass sculpture rather than the materiality of glass. For example, “homesick” series represents the conflict living in the United States as Japanese through the combination of glass and fiber. Now glass become not only a material, but also my fickle friend which reflects my inspiration and concentration.

I value hand-made objects rather than machine-made mass-production because of the time, thought or passion the artist spends on the art. I even believe that great art pieces have a piece of artist’s heart remains in it, and the reason people come to museums or galleries is to see art and collect art because they value that piece of ‘heart.’ When making art became my career instead of just an interest, I thought of the value of art. Moreover, I realized the importance and meaning of making money with art. Unlike other jobs, artists don’t have specific guidelines. They create something according to their aesthetics or thoughts, name it art, and people value it. Art is essential for me to live a life solid. Therefore I don’t want to forget about why I am making art, because if I started to create my art for money instead of the inspiration, it is no longer art but just a product.

Now I create my art, and I realize that there is nothing that compares with the beauty of Nature. For me it is overwhelming because any life form doesn't think about the meaning of life, but only thinks about surviving. The gathering of small eggs or seeds and small bugs makes me feel the power of life. Each one seems insignificant, but when gathered in abundance, it is overpowering, and I feel the vibrant force of life. Like my art series "Ripples" and "Lumps," hundreds and thousands of round glass pieces and the reflecting light represent momentary lucent lives. When I am at a beach, in a forest, or in the middle of a desert, I feel that it is ridiculous to think the meaning of life. The simple, pure, clean force of life in nature inspires me to just live, strongly but simply. I believe we have lost that notion in complicated contemporary lives. What I'm trying to do is to reinterpret elements from nature to celebrate the power of life, both in its significance and in its insignificance.