

Looking for the Soul

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Forward	5
Encounter with the Dog	11
The Cat and the Tortoise	18
Paul the Octopus	32
Glassblowing Workshop	46
Kintsugi	64
The Scent of the Soul (Coda)	82
Looking for the Soul (Works)	88
Bibliography	110
List of Illustrations	112

Foreword

There is an invisible “something” in the world. Yet few can put into words what it truly is.

This story begins in Hasselt, a small town in Belgium. One day, a small stranger grows curious about the existence of “souls.”

“Who am I?” and “What is a soul?”

Through five stories, he seeks answers to these questions by meeting and discussing with unique characters, such as a scholar and a craftsman, each of whom is looking for the soul. It is a journey in search of truth and a story that is at the same time a fantasy.



Fig 1. Holy plate



Fig 2. Holy plate

Fig. 3. Found plates



Fig. 4. Holy plate in Maas



Fig 5. Nathalie from Looking for the other half



Fig 6. David from Looking for the other half



Fig 7. Found gloves

Encounter with the Dog

“You’ve got to be kidding me. Rain again?”

I thought it had finally cleared up, but soon enough, the sky darkened, and rain started pouring down. It had been raining constantly for a while. Apparently, that’s just how winters in Belgium are. This is Hasselt, a small town with a population of about 70,000. Despite its size, it’s the capital and largest city of Limburg. Now that December has arrived, the temperature has dropped considerably—it’s full-on winter. A few people here and there walk by with umbrellas. How did they know to bring them? Did they leave home after it started raining? No, it had just started. They must have checked the weather forecast. I really need to start doing that. No matter how sunny it looks, I should trust the forecast and carry an umbrella.

“Why is it rain and not snow? It’s winter! This makes no sense. And why am I even here, all alone in this town I barely know?”

“Woof!”

“I had a job, a girlfriend... I wasn’t alone. I had a normal life. So why? Why am I in a town I’d never even heard of before, completely alone? Hasselt? Where even is Hasselt?!”

“Woof! Woof! Woof!”

“And what’s with all the barking?!”

“Woof, woof! You’re the one talking to yourself.”

Lost in my despair, I hadn’t noticed. When I turned around, a dog was standing there.

“...Whoa! A talking dog?!”

“And you’re a talking glove. That’s way weirder. I’m a living, breathing creature of course I can talk. But you? You’re just an object. No soul, nothing. You talking is what’s actually creepy.”

“Huh? Am I the weird one? I have two arms, two legs, just like everyone else. I’m practically the same as you.”

“You’ve got one extra!”

“So do you! You’ve got that wagging thing on your back!”

The dog was unknowingly wagging its tail.

“That’s my tail! You, on the other hand, are a glove. You’ve got five fingers, right? Don’t compare us.”

“That’s rude! I have a soul! That’s why I can talk! I’m a glove with a soul. You just don’t understand because you’re

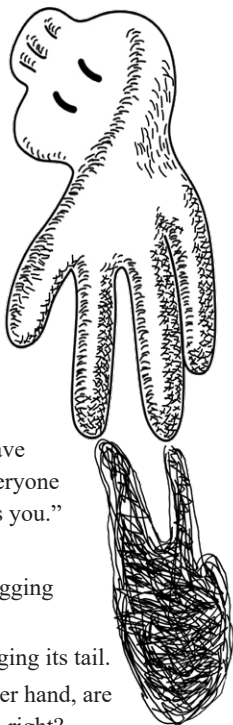


Fig 8. Holland looks back

I wasn't entirely sure if I actually had a soul, but I had blurted it out in the heat of the moment. What even is a soul? Does having one mean you can talk? Does it mean you can move? Do all things that can talk and move have souls?

The dog tilted its head. "I don't know. Never heard of that. Wait, actually... someone did mention that objects can sometimes gain souls."

That unexpected response caught me off guard.

"By the way, what do you do?"

"Can't you tell? I'm lamenting."

No point in hiding it now; the dog had already heard most of my monologue.

"No, I mean, what do you do for a living? Are you working?"

...That's embarrassing.

"Oh, you said what do you do for a living? I'm a student. I study fine arts at the PXL university."

"Oh? What kind of art?"

"Sculpture. I repair broken things and turn them into art. See, I'm practically a hand, so I'm good at working with my hands."

"That makes sense. Do you have pictures? I'd love to see."

"You want to see?! Yeah, I have some. This one's called *Holy Plate*. I found a broken plate on the street in Maas. Cars passed by, completely ignoring it. When I started

picking up the pieces, one car was coming so I stoped picking and waiting beside. The car honked at me. I didn't know why, but it did. That's when I realized—my job is to notice what others don't. The broken plate was dirty, wet, miserable. I restored it, made it holy.” (Fig.3,4)

The dog listened intently. “It's beautiful. But why 'Holy'?”

“It died when it broke, right? And when I restored it, it came back to life. Like Jesus. So, Holy.”

The dog nodded in understanding.

“And this one is called *Looking for the Other Half* (Fig.5,6).

One day, I found a single glove on the street. Lonely, wet, abandoned (Fig.7). I took it home, cleaned it, let it dry in the sun. But it was still lonely.

I gave it a pair. Have you ever seen *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*? In the film, she sings a song about the origin of love by Plato. According to Plato, humans were originally complete, with another face on the back of their heads, four arms and four legs, but one day they incurred the wrath of God and were split into two.

Since that day, humans have been looking for their other half. That's what I saw in the glove.”



One creature
Platon idea

Fig 9. Plato

“That’s very you. You’re looking for your other half too?”

“Exactly! I found myself alone, just like that glove. I’m looking for my missing half. Speaking of which, earlier you mentioned someone told you about objects having souls. Who was it?”

“Oh, right! It was Shiro. A friend of mine. A cat living in Antwerp. She’s from Japan.”

“A dog and a cat... as friends?”

“Of course! What kind of stereotype is that?”

“Fair enough, sorry. But Antwerp, huh... that’s pretty far.”

“Not really. Just an hour by train.”

The dog said it so casually, like it could just hop on a train itself. As if dogs can do that without humans!

“For me, it’s a long journey! I’m a glove! Even climbing stairs is a challenge. But I’ll go. Thanks!”

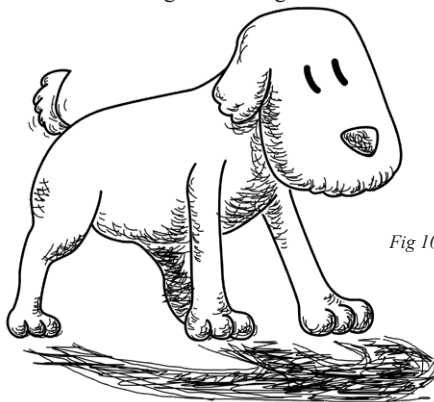


Fig 10. Elle

Do I have a soul? I had said it with bravado, but I really wanted to know.

“I turned to the dog. “Oh, by the way, my name’s Holland.”

“I’m Elle. Nice to meet you. Tell Shiro I said hi.”

“Will do. See you around!”

Elle trotted off.

Antwerp, huh? What kind of place is it? I know it’s famous for fashion. Even I’ve heard of it. And it was in *A Dog of Flanders* by Marie Loise de la Ramée, wasn’t it? They made many films about this book even in Japan where everybody knows Nello and his dog Patrasche. This should be interesting...

Fig 11. Nello & Patrasche



The Cat and the Tortoise

Finally, Antwerp! I've only heard a little about this place, but will I be okay? I wonder how big the city is. Just from the view outside the train, I could already tell it was on a completely different level from Hasselt.

What a beautiful city, Antwerp. Hasselt is clean, but it has a different aesthetic appeal. And there are so many people here! There's even a tram running through the city. I wonder if I'll be able to meet the cat Elle told me about.

After walking for a while, switching between trams and navigating through the crowds, I finally got close to the park I was looking for.

This should be the park where the cat usually comes to play... but is she here today? It would be a problem if she wasn't—after all, I came all the way to Antwerp for this. Wait a minute—could that be the cat? It matches the description I was given.

“Hey, are you the cat from Japan?”

“That’s right. Everyone calls me Shiro.”

“Then you must be. That’s a nice name! I’m Holland. Nice to meet you.”

“Something about you makes me want to sink my claws into you and fluff you up. So, what do you want?”

“Uh... could you not do that, please?” I said, laughing.

“You don’t seem too surprised that I’m talking, even though I’m just a glove. I came here because I heard about you from Elle, the dog from Hasselt. Elle said you once told him that objects can have souls. Oh, right—Elle also sends you his regards.”

Shiro looked like she was trying to recall something. After a moment, her expression changed slightly, as if something had clicked.

Does she really remember Elle? Then, staring into the void, Shiro started reminiscing.

“Elle, huh... That brings back memories. We used to fight over my favorite glove toy all the time. It was just a regular glove. Nothing more than a glove. But you—you’re a talking glove. That’s interesting. Do you have a soul?”

Somehow, I felt like our conversation wasn’t entirely connecting. Was she really listening to me?

“That’s exactly why I came—to talk about that!”

“Oh, right, right. But here isn’t the best place for a conversation. Want to come to my house?”

toward her home.

Hearing that she used to play with a glove made me feel a little uneasy, but being carried like this was probably the most natural way to move around without drawing too much attention.

Shiro hopped along the streets and slipped through a slightly open window into her house. Typical cat behavior—I had to admire her agility.

“I’m home.”

As Shiro spoke, I noticed a large tank inside the room.

Inside was a tortoise.

“Welcome back. You picked up another glove toy?”

The tortoise spoke to Shiro in a familiar tone. They must be close friends.

“No, this isn’t a toy. His name is Holland.”

“Oh, so it’s a toy named Holland? You’re giving them names now?”

“No! He’s not a toy. He’s a glove named Holland.”

“Oh, so he’s a glove named Holland? And you’re naming

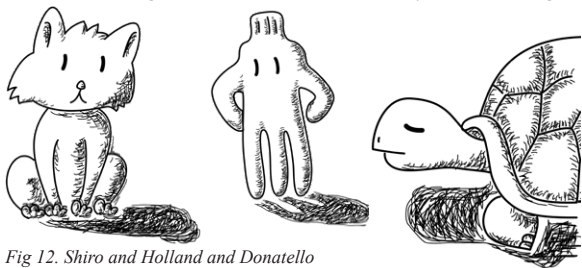


Fig 12. Shiro and Holland and Donatello

gloves now?”

Shiro scratched her head and placed me next to the tank. I sat up and spoke to the tortoise.

“Shiro didn’t name me! My name is Holland. Nice to meet you. As you can see, I’m just a half glove.”

The tortoise widened his eyes and pressed his face against the glass.

“A talking glove!? Shiro, what’s going on!?”

“Yeah, I was surprised too, when I first met him. Actually, I’m still surprised. Apparently he has a soul, even though he’s just a glove. It’s the first time I’ve seen anything like it.”

I didn’t like how she said “just a glove” like it was some kind of insult. What’s wrong with being a glove? Just because they’re animals, do they think they’re superior? I felt slightly irritated, but I had to admit their reaction made sense. After all, other gloves don’t talk. It was natural for them to be surprised. I decided to let it go.

“This is hard to believe... but you *are* talking. I’m Donatello. Nice to meet you.”

Shiro turned to me, then to Donatello, and said,

“See? I told you before—when objects are used and cherished for a long time, they gain a soul. That’s what’s happening here.”

“But isn’t that supposed to happen after 100 years? That’s when they turn into ‘*Tsukumogami* (Fig.13),’ right? Also, no offense, but Holland doesn’t look like a 100-year-old glove to me.”

“That’s true. I haven’t been around that long. Honestly, my



Fig 13. Tsukumogami

memories from when I was just a regular glove are pretty fuzzy. But if something really does change after 100 years, do I turn into a god, or a monster?”

Shiro nodded, as she listened.

“*Tsukumogami*, right? In Japan, there’s a belief that objects used for 100 years gain a soul and become *Tsukumogami*. I read a book about it. According to the story, around the years 964 to 967, people began to find the idea of objects transforming creepy, so they started throwing them away in their 99th year. Ironically, that resentment—being discarded just before gaining a soul—ended up turning the objects into *Tsukumogami* anyway. That’s why the kanji for *Tsukumogami* can also be written as ‘九十九神,’ which literally means ‘99 gods.’”

“Honestly, I think it’s kind of cool that objects can gain a soul. So why throw them away right before it happens? It doesn’t make sense. People cherish their belongings for so long, only to discard them at the last moment.”

Donatello seemed to have heard this story before and nodded along.

“I thought everything already had a soul, though? Isn’t that why people respect objects?”

“No, it’s not a soul—it’s a god. In Japan, there’s a belief in ‘*Yaoyorozu no Kami*’—the idea that gods exist in everything. It’s not that objects gain souls, rather, it’s that gods are believed to inhabit all things in nature. That’s a bit different from what we’re talking about here.”

Holland thought for a moment and asked,

“Since objects are made from natural materials—where gods are believed to reside—they may have the potential to gain souls.”

“Maybe. That might have influenced the idea of *Tsukumogami*.”

“Even hearing it again, it’s hard to wrap my head around. In our way of thinking, only living things have souls. Even the smallest soul belongs to something like an insect or a plant. Objects aren’t alive, so they can’t have souls.”

“Different cultures, different perspectives. But I’m talking, right? That means I must have a soul. Otherwise, how could I move and speak?”

“Yeah... That’s true, but still...

I read a lot of philosophy books, because I like them. According to Socrates, the concept of the soul was considered to be separate from the body and immortal, suggesting that the soul survives even after the death of the body. And he said something like ‘the soul determines one’s quality of life and actions.’

So, Plato presented a more structured theory of the soul based on Socrates’ ideas. He was assuming that the soul is immortal, that it existed before it inhabited a body, and that it repeats with reincarnation. In the *Republic*, he presents the soul as a principle of rational and moral life. It’s defined by self-motion and thinking. Rocks don’t move unless something else moves them. Animals and people move by themselves. He then explained that the soul is composed of three distinct parts. The first is the *logistikon*, the rational part; it is located in the head, where truth and wisdom are sought.

The second part is the *thaumoeides*, and it moves in the chest, where emotions incite people to either love or hate, feel anger or courage, and act accordingly. And the third part is the *epitumetikon*; it is located in the abdomen and is associated with desire and appetite, which prompts the pursuit of physical pleasures and material desires. He believed that a just and virtuous life would arise from the harmonious balance of these three parts, with reason maintaining control. That, and he also suggested that the soul, through reason, has access to eternal and unchanging truths beyond the material world.

But Aristotle, a student of Plato, offered a different perspective in his book *De Anima*, or, ‘On the Soul.’ He defined the soul as the “primary reality” of the living body, the life force or essence, inseparable from the body. Aristotle then classified the soul into three hierarchical levels corresponding to the various life forms. The first is the nutritive soul; it is present in plants and responsible for growth, nutrition, and reproduction. The second is the sensory soul, present in animals, and includes the faculties of perception and movement in addition to the nutritional functions. The third is the rational soul, which is unique to humans and includes reasoning and intellect based on the nutritional and sensory functions.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not regard the soul as an independent and immortal entity, but rather as an essential form that realizes the potential of the organism. More importantly, for Aristotle, the soul is present in different sorts of beings, from plants to people. And when it comes to people, the soul and the body were interdependent. You see, for the Greeks, the soul complicates life – it’s everywhere but in

Holland quietly listened to Donatello's explanation. No, that's a long story. He talks so much, it's almost like a lecture. I thought turtles move slowly, so they talk slowly and don't talk much. But it's quite the opposite. He talks a lot.

"So, according to Aristotle, there are four causes of things, and these are the agents or processes that bring something into existence or cause change. Simply put, he asks, what brought this into being? Or, what caused this? He outlines them as: The material cause, which is what something is made of (e.g., a statue is made of marble), the formal cause, which is the essence of the thing (e.g., the shape or design of the statue) the effective cause, which is the subject or force that brings something into existence (e.g., the sculptor who carves the statue), and the final cause, which is the purpose or goal of something (e.g., a statue exists for artistic appreciation or religious belief). In order to fully understand something, we need to analyze it through these four different kinds of causes. So, I'll explain these causes in more detail at a different time. For the moment, it's important that you see that, for the Greeks, life is levelled; they have tried to explain rationally, logically, the reason for everything that happens."

That was long. I'm sorry, there were moments when I almost fell asleep in the middle of it. But I'm sure I heard something interesting.

"You know a lot, don't you? Is it because you've been alive for a long time? It was a long story, too. It was an interesting story, really. But that doesn't mean those theories are correct, right? If the body and soul are separate, as Socrates and Plato said, isn't it possible that the soul, which is-

separate from the body, inhabits things? There are a lot of reincarnation anime these days, you know! Just like that.”

“By the way, the word ‘anime’ comes from the word ‘anima.’ Did you know that?”

“No, that’s not the point right now!”

“Well, well, don’t say that. It is possible, but since only living things can have souls, I can’t imagine objects starting to move. That would be horror.”

“Ugh, that’s harsh. Am I a horror story?”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

Then, Shiro, who had been listening to their exchange, said, “But you know, Westerners also say ‘he’ and ‘she’ to machines and cars, don’t they? That means they anthropomorphize things, right? Then maybe they feel the soul. Because they feel a human-like connection with those machines and cars, right?”

Looks like Shiro got the better of Donatello.

“Well, it’s true that I often say it like that, but when you use something for a long time, you get attached to it, and start to notice all its little quirks, right? I think people describe it that way because the feeling is similar to having a relationship with a person—but I don’t think they literally believe it has a soul.”

“I don’t think even Japanese people actually believe that objects have souls or intentions! But they do sense something like a faint or subtle presence. The other day, I was taking a walk in Zuidpark next door. I think it was the Watergate. They made a window look like an eye, like a



Fig 14. Water gate noon



Fig 15. Water gate night

face! It's because people can imagine that the building is going to talk. You can feel the soul in something that makes you feel that kind of attachment, can't you?"

"Well... maybe it wasn't there to begin with, but it could be related to Japanese philosophy, or maybe even the influence of anime... Either way, it's a philosophical or spiritual idea. Why don't you try looking into it from a scientific angle? Like physics or quantum mechanics or something?" said Donatello.

"That sounds complicated... I've never studied anything like that. But maybe I'd learn something useful. I'll give it a try."

"Good idea! You might find it interesting." said Shiro.

Holland felt a little anxious about whether or not he could understand it, but he decided to look into it. After that, the three of them spent time chatting about all sorts of things before heading home.



Fig 16. QR code for the video

Fig 17. Looking for a soul

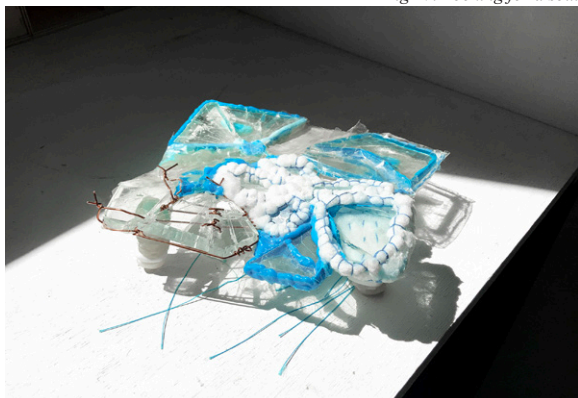




Fig 18. Octopus from Looking for the other half

Paul the Octopus

Since the day I talked with Shiro and Donatello, I've been thinking a lot.

When comparing the concept of the soul in the West and Japan, it seems that in the West, living things are seen as somewhat special. It's not surprising that living beings possess something different from other materials simply because they are alive and move by themselves. I understand the feeling of wanting to consider animals and plants distinct from objects like stones or water. But somehow, this perspective feels very much centered on reason / human-centered. Then again, no living creature spends time thinking that deeply about such things—it's only natural to see the world from one's own perspective.

In Japan, there have always been numerous natural disasters earthquakes, typhoons, droughts, floods, tsunamis, and

volcanic eruptions. Without scientific explanations like we have now, these disasters were probably perceived as events caused by divine beings. Since disasters were an integral part of nature, people likely felt that gods existed throughout the natural world. That would also be the case in Europe, too. In ancient times, there was a god for anything that happened in life. But that changed into a monotheistic vision, where one god explained everything and where slowly gods no longer were needed to explain everyday life. What's interesting is that this belief extended to objects related to human life—such as household deities, like the god of the toilet or the god of the kitchen. If divine spirits could reside in stones, grains of rice, or water, then perhaps these things were seen as worthy of more reverence than humans. If that were the case, it makes sense that objects could also be considered to have souls. In Japan, stones or ponds are sometimes enshrined, which might be because they were perceived as more sacred than humans at times. In a way, this seems like the complete opposite of the Western perspective, even though in Christianity you also have shrines for every saint and the entire Europe is filled with their relics, pieces of their body, clothes that they have worn, etc.

Of course, it's not about which viewpoint is correct. I can resonate with both. However, as a lone glove, I personally prefer the Japanese way of thinking. That said, the nature of the soul in ancient Greek philosophy was fascinating as well.

While doing repairs, I realized something.

For example, when the rim of a plate gets chipped—some people continue using it as is, while others throw it away.

What is the difference between a plate that is kept and a plate that is discarded? Did something vanish the moment it broke? And if so, could that missing element be its soul? I don't want to simply repair objects—I want to restore the souls they lost when they broke.

To do that, I need to understand souls better. If an object loses its soul when it breaks, or if some part of its soul still lingers afterward—then maybe I shouldn't just repair things.

What if I also tried breaking them? Breaking an object, fixing it, then breaking it again, and fixing it once more. By repeating this process, I might discover something.

'Looking for a Soul' (Fig.17)

This video work, (fig.16 QR code for the video link), explores the idea that when something breaks, its soul is lost, and when it is repaired, its soul is revived. Through the act of repeatedly breaking and repairing a glass plate, I hoped to capture that process.

In reality, I couldn't clearly sense a soul's presence.

But as I continued, I found that breaking the plate became emotionally difficult, and I felt something new when repairing it.

That, at least, was undeniable.

I realize I've been leaning toward the spiritual and philosophical. As Donatello suggested, maybe I should approach this scientifically as well.

But then again—physics? Quantum mechanics?

Where do I even start? I can't just pick up a physics textbook out of nowhere...

Maybe start with a Video search engine?

There are so many videos, though. Too many. And a lot of unrelated ones keep popping up.

Oh, how about this one? Hmm... No, that's not quite it.

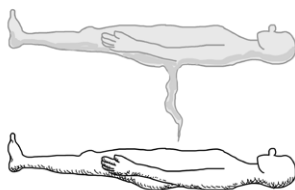
What about this? "Paul's Door"—seems a little spiritual, but...

"Hello, world! Today's topic is near-death experiences and *out-of-body experiences*..."

Out-of-body experiences? That might be connected to the idea of the soul.

Fig 19. An out-of-body experience

"An *out-of-body experience* is when a person in a near-death state perceives themselves from outside their body. Many describe floating



above themselves, looking down from the ceiling. Some might think it's just a dream, but there are cases where people accurately describe things in another room or outside the building—things they normally wouldn't be able to see. Interestingly, many who have had these experiences say the out-of-body world felt more real than reality itself. Perhaps our world is a dream, and the *out-of-body experience* allows us to perceive the true world. And maybe what

separates from the body in these moments is the soul. Since it sees not through eyes, but through something deeper, the world appears more vivid...”

That... actually makes a lot of sense.

I wonder if I can talk to this person? Maybe I should send an email.

A few days later, Holland received a reply.

Hello, this is Paul.

Thank you for reaching out! I'm glad you enjoyed the video.

I see you're researching the soul—like you probably noticed from my video, it's a topic I'm very interested in as well.

If you'd like, I'd be happy to help.

Would you be open to a video call? I'd love to hear your thoughts too.

—Paul

Wow. He replied so politely. I'm nervous, but this is an opportunity. I'll do it!

A few days later, we scheduled a call.

As Holland sat in his room with his laptop open, waiting, a video call came in from Paul right on time.

“Hello, this is Paul.”

“Hello, this is Holland.”

“Uh...”

“Uh...”

“Oh, uh, what is it? Please, go ahead.”

“Oh, is that okay? Well, um, in your videos, I could only hear your voice, so I didn’t realize... You’re an octopus?”

“Yes, I’m Paul the Octopus. And you, Holland, what are you? A glove? Are you alive?”

“Yeah, well... I’m a glove. I think I’m alive. That’s why I started researching souls—to figure out how I ended up this way.”

“I see. Learning about yourself is important. But sometimes, knowing yourself can also be painful.”

“I’ll do my best. Anyway, I found your video about *out-of-body experiences* really interesting. But from a scientific perspective, what do you think?”

“Right. It does sound a bit spiritual, doesn’t it? However, Nobel Prize-winning physicist Roger Penrose proposed a very interesting theory in his book *Shadows of the Mind*.

He argues that human consciousness is based on quantum mechanics.

Quantum mechanics has several strange properties, one of which is called *superposition*. (Fig 21) This means that something can be in state A while

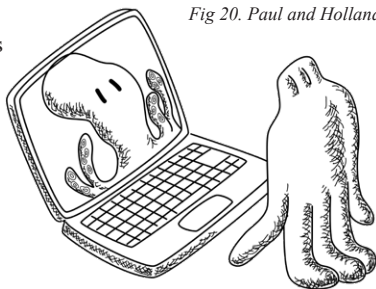


Fig 20. Paul and Holland

State A : ICE CUBE



State B : Melting ICE



State A & B



Fig 21. Superposition

simultaneously being in state B. Similarly, human emotions are never singular; we always feel multiple emotions at the same time. According to Penrose, when an electron collapses, a specific thought or feeling emerges, and through this continuous process, consciousness is formed. He also suggests that entangled quantum particles exist somewhere in the universe, and after our bodies are gone, consciousness returns to the universe.”

“Wait a minute. What exactly is *quantum entanglement*?”

“*Quantum entanglement* is one of the fascinating properties of quantum mechanics. When two subatomic particles are entangled, measuring one instantly determines the state of the other, no matter how far apart they are. These pairs of particles always exist somewhere in the universe.”

“Fascinating or not, is that really possible? And the whole *superposition* thing—are you telling me that the moon, when hidden by clouds, is simultaneously a full moon and a crescent moon? That sounds impossible!”

“I completely understand why you’d feel that way. Even Einstein struggled with this concept. However, in the world of quantum mechanics, it is possible. That’s why some physicists believe that consciousness itself might exist on a quantum level.

Additionally, some theories suggest that the universe has up to 11 dimensions. From our perspective in three-dimensional space, we may only be able to observe one state (A), but a higher-dimensional perspective might be able to see both (A and B). I believe that while our physical bodies exist in three-dimensional space, our souls might reside in a higher dimension.”

“Whoa... I thought this was just a spiritual discussion, but now my brain feels like it’s going to explode. Subatomic particles are so tiny and have such weird properties that it’s hard to believe. But if my consciousness is made up of these particles too, then maybe my existence as a living glove isn’t so far-fetched?”

“Perhaps. There are even ghost-like particles called neutrinos that can pass through atoms without interacting with them. They don’t stick to anything or repel anything; they just pass through, unnoticed.”

“Seriously!? Then maybe souls are made of such particles,

wandering through the world until one finally settled inside me, a mere glove!”

“I don’t know if that’s how it works, but it’s an interesting idea. Kind of like reincarnation.”

“Thank you so much for today. This was a really fascinating conversation. Actually... I kind of admire octopuses. You have eight arms—or, well, hands. I used to be a pair of gloves, but now I’m just one. I only have five fingers. I’m really envious of you.

I’m actually an artist, and I create works using myself—this single glove. One of my pieces is called *Octopus from Looking for the Other Half* (Fig 18). Can I tell you about it?”

“Of course!”

“Thank you. My fascination with octopuses started when I watched the Netflix documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, which follows a single octopus from the moment the filmmaker meets it until its death. I had assumed it would be just like any other sea creature—like a fish or shellfish—but it turned out to be incredibly intelligent. It even communicated with the cameraman and seemed to have a connection with him, almost like an animal would. I was moved when the octopus, who had developed a kind of friendship with him, eventually died.

Later, I traveled to Korea and ate a live octopus that was still moving after being cut up with a knife. It was a cruel act, but the taste was incredible. Life is complicated. Then, I found a single lost glove and started repairing it,

creating its missing pair. I thought about how even humans sometimes choose to live alone. So maybe a single glove could do the same—choosing to be alone and transforming itself in order to survive.

A single glove has five fingers, but an octopus has so many more. Perhaps a single glove, wishing for more hands, would transform into an octopus in order to live. That's the concept behind my artwork."

"Hmm... As an octopus myself, that's a bit of a heavy story. But I appreciate your admiration. By the way... do I look delicious to you right now?"

"Of course not! We're friends now! I'd never eat my friend!"

...But deep down, Holland couldn't help but crave some takoyaki.

Fig 22. Takoyaki

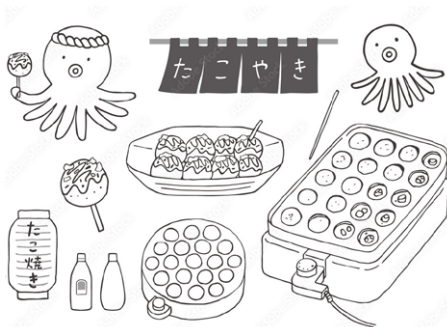




Fig 23. The first cup



Fig 24. Soul of a flower pot



Fig 25. Warm Chimney



Fig 26. Soul of a half glove



Fig 27. Whisky glass



Fig 28. Warm chimney

Glassblowing Workshop

I am currently trying to understand the shape and nature of the soul. It's a vague, cloud-like process—but it feels like me, because I'm a half glove. Yes, I'm something that might have a soul... maybe. I'm an ambiguous existence. And I'm really enjoying the process. Toward the end of the summer, I had the opportunity to participate in a glassblowing workshop. It was perfect timing because I had started making glass works in the previous year, and I wanted to continue it for a while longer. That happened in Germany. A bit far, sure—but it sounded like fun!

In Japan, when we make something by hand, we use the expression “breathe the soul into it” when we complete the final stage of the work. A little bit like Giuseppe Penone and his *Breath of Clay* (1978), the clay sculpture that he shaped with his body and his breath. Blowing into molten glass to make a shape—doesn't that feel like the

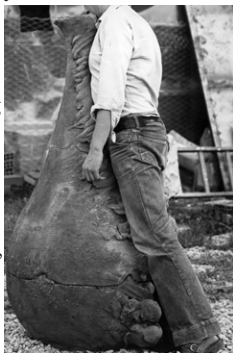


Fig 29. Breath of clay

perfect act for shaping a soul? What if I breathe into glass while speaking a word? Doesn't the soul of that word take shape? I started to believe I might just find something. And so we arrived at the school in rural Germany, Institut für Künstlerische Keramik und Glas der Hochschule Koblenz (IKKG). But in terms of size, it's not that different from Hasselt, or maybe a little bigger. We are going to stay here for a week, and where are we going to sleep? In tents. Yup, a tent set up on school grounds. Is it comfortable? Well, I make it work. But forget the sleeping arrangements; the one teaching how to glassblow was Max, the pig. He taught me very politely and supported me in this and that.

First blowing (*Fig 23*)

"Let's start with something simple," he said. "But first, I'll make a sample cup to show you how it's done."

With that, he began to work without hesitation. His handiwork was so skillful that I could not help but admire it. As I watched him work, the glass seemed to expand effortlessly, and he seemed to be having a lot of fun. Watching him, I felt as if I could make anything I wanted.

"It's like this. Let's start by touching the glass. Let's make a circle or something random without blowing."

At first, I did as he said. It's like kneading honey. The glass is falling down rapidly. It didn't take the shape I wanted. Well, that's how it goes the first time. Next, I'm gonna try blowing glass.

"As before, you have to keep it moving. Once you get a

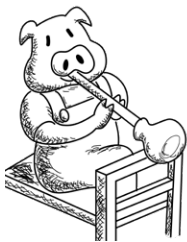


Fig 30. Max and Holland



little air in, the rest is easy. The first time is the hardest.”

Again, I did as he said. I try to breathe into it. What? I thought I was blowing into it. What’s wrong?

“Blow harder!”

I’m blowing.

“Even harder!”

I’m blowing.

“Okay, I’ll reheat it and we’ll try again.”

No, no, no, no. I was trying like he said. It’s not going in at all. My muscles in weird places are cramping up. Talking while blowing air into the glass? Hell no! It’s absolutely impossible. I totally underestimated this. I’m sorry. While reflecting on this, I managed to complete my first small cup. After all the hard work, the shape is a bit distorted, but I’m already feeling attached to it. It was a good first day, but tomorrow is the big day.

Second blowing (Fig 24)

The next day, after discussing with Max and the teachers about what I wanted to make, I began to seriously work at this. I had not prepared a mold because I did not know that there was a method of using a mold and blowing glass into it to create a shape. I wanted to take the shape of a broken object, so I brought a broken flowerpot and a half pair of gloves that I found. I wanted to capture the form of something broken. With advice from Max and the others, I made a mold using the flowerpot and a half glove. I started with the flowerpot.

“Do you want to make a pattern? If so, pick the glass colors you like and scatter the grains here on the table.”

“I think I need a little something... hmm, maybe some blue.”

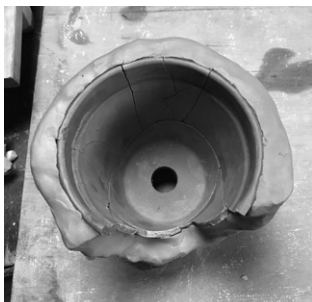


Fig 31. Mold for Broken flower pot

“Then I’ll help you, and you can blow it by yourself.”

Max gave me detailed instructions and guided me through the process. It was going well. I scooped molten glass from the kiln and shaped it. Max added a piece of blue glass on top, and I shaped it again. Then he reheated it. I received it while standing on the platform. Then, I blew into the mold. The broken flowerpot had already been prepared and covered with clay. Hot glass was blown into it. The flowerpot

Max said,

“That looks good. Hold your breath. OK, I think that went well.”

“Yes, I think it looks good.” The blown glass was put into the kiln and left to rest for a while.

“After tomorrow, when the temperature drops to room temperature, you can take it out. What’s wrong? Something bothering you?”

“I think it went well, but to be honest, I thought it might have been better to leave it clear. I also wanted to show the cracked pattern a little more...”

“Then let’s prep that and do it later. Next is the glove. Just in case, anything with synthetic fibers is no good—it’ll burn and release toxic gas when it touches the hot glass. By the way, are those gloves your relatives or someglove you know?”

Fig 32. A leather glove swollen with plaster

“No, nothing like acquaintances or anything like that. To be honest, I also don’t know who I am, whether I am just a glove or something else entirely. Anyway, I brought two gloves, but the knit one looks like acrylic fiber, so it’s no good. But this one is stiff



old leather, so I think it'll be fine."

"I see, looks like it. What happened to this thing? Well, if you want to get the glove shape clear, you'd better put plaster inside and harden it."

"Let's start with that."

Third blowing

Soaked in water, the rock-hard leather glove softened. I poured the plaster mixed with water into it. It became a little fat. But I think it's not so bad.

"It's so fat, huh? We can't blow directly onto it, so let's put blocks around it. Then blow from the side to pressure the glove."

We placed the blocks around the plaster-filled glove to create an enclosure.

"I'll blow it because it's going to be bigger this time. Hold the blocks in place. Are you ready?"

As soon as he said that, Max piped up glass from the kiln.

"Yes, please. This time try clear glass. No color."

"Got it."

"I've just added air, and I'll scoop up the glass one more time to make it bigger."

The glass at the end of the pipe grew about two times larger. Then he spun it around to equalize its size, Max said.

"Now it's time."

I held back the block, and Max got on the platform and blew the glass to the side of glove. Then, with a sizzling sound,

smoke and the smell of burning leather wafted through the air.

“Move the blocks!”

The glass cooled, and we hurried to remove the blocks and the glove. But the glove wouldn’t come off.

Crash!!!!!!!!!!!!

We couldn’t get the glove off, and it broke. It was a failure.



Fig 33. Broken soul

“The glove couldn’t come off because the glass went all the way to the back side.... I don’t know if this glove was alive or not, but it’s completely dead for now. The glass is dead, too.”

...

“I guess so. There is nothing we could do. But I’ll keep a record of this broken part, too. It’s not usable itself, but it’s beautiful.”

“That’s true, but you’re going to try again, right? Let’s start with the flowerpot first and do it again!”

“Of course I’ll give it another try, and the flowerpot is ready!”

“Cool. But before, let’s take a break and start again.”

We took a short break. I didn't even notice at first—too focused, working like mad. But yeah, the glove really was burned. The smell hit me hard. Real. Acrid. Like something final. But I'm not made of leather, so it wouldn't smell the same. I'm synthetic—poly something. If I burned, it'd be worse. Toxic. Sharp. Like bad gas.



Fig 34. Burn glove

Fourth blowing

Rehydrated now. The break's over.

"All right, I'm ready. Are you? I'm going to blow this time, so just say stop when it feels right." Max said.

"Okay, I will do."

He quickly inflated the glass for the second flowerpot. Unlike gloves, it is not that big, so the amount of glass is small. And when Max does it, it's faster anyway. When the glass was shaped, he stood on the platform. Once again, hot glass is blown into the clay-covered broken flowerpot. The glass bulged out from the chipped part.

"Stop!"

"Yeah, this one looks good."

The first piece came out really well—as an object. Solid, clean. I was happy with it at the time. But I’m shifting focus now. I’ve been thinking more about the idea of the soul—trying to understand what that would even look like. That’s actually why I came to this workshop. I wanted to find the shape of something invisible. So I think it makes more sense to focus on that. If we’re talking about the soul, it probably shouldn’t be something obvious. It should be subtle. Maybe even hard to see. Transparent might actually be better.

Fifth blowing *(Fig 26)*

The flowerpot went well, so I rebuilt the setup to try the glove again. This time, I used clay to stop the glass from going behind it—and to make sure there was no space between the glove and the block.

I think it will work this time.

“It looks like the second glove is ready. Do you want to do the blowing this time?” Max asked.

“This time, I want to blow it myself.”

Max started prepping for the second attempt, and I helped him. Everything was the same as before. I took hold of the pipe with the glass while standing on the platform. With Max’s support, I placed it into the glove mold. The glass felt thicker and heavier than before. I tried to blow into it, but nothing much happened. It was really tough. It just wouldn’t inflate.

“Blow harder!” said Max.

I tried, but it still wasn’t working. I just didn’t have the

breath for it. The glass cooled down, and the glove shape was only faintly visible.

“I barely inflated it at all.”

“There was a lot of glass. You needed more force. And the longer you take, the more it cools. Let’s try again tomorrow.”

“Yeah... tomorrow. We’ll try again tomorrow.”

Glassblowing is harder than I expected. The heat is intense, and there are so many steps—each one demanding full attention. You have to stay focused, drink plenty of water, and move quickly before the glass cools. It’s easy to make mistakes.

I’m starting to feel like glassblowing isn’t just a craft—it carries a deeper meaning. And the glass itself feels meaningful. At least, to me.

Glass has an ancient history. The earliest glass beads date back to Mesopotamia, sometime before 4000 BC. It’s a material unlike any other—transparent, shimmering when polished, and it doesn’t rust or decay like metal or wood. Its beauty can last almost forever. For thousands of years, people have been drawn to it, using it in sacred rituals, or wearing it as royal adornment. There’s something timeless about it.

What fascinates me even more is how it behaves. Heat turns it into liquid, and as it cools, it becomes solid again. It’s shapeless, but it holds shape. It seems colorless, but can be tinted by the slightest element. It’s transparent, yet not quite invisible. And somehow, all of this reminds me of the soul.

The soul is uncertain. We don’t know if it truly exists—we

can't see it—but we feel it. Just like glass, it's shaped by outside forces. It's affected by what happens around it. Even though it's invisible, we believe in it. That's why I think transparent glass is the perfect material to explore the shape of the soul. And when creating shapes in glass, you always need a mold. It's essential in glassblowing, and also in casting. This idea of the mold—or the act of shaping something through a mold—might be something I can work with. If a soul is something that drifts, perhaps I could create a mold to capture and give form to that soul. Or, if living beings are shaped by their souls, then maybe the soul itself could be expressed as a mold. Hmm... I haven't quite figured it out yet, but I feel like I'm beginning to see new possibilities.

Sixth blowing (*Fig 25*)

On the final day—like people say, the third time's the charm—I was determined to make it work. This time, I made the setup a little smaller using clay, hoping it would help

“Looks like you're ready for round three,” Max said. “We don't have much time left, so let's get going.”

“Yeah, I'm ready. Let's do it.”

“What's the plan? Want to blow it yourself again?”

Fig 35. A Glove Mold



helped with the setup, following his lead exactly. Max made all the calls, and I just did my part, staying sharp, doing what I was told. All I could do was hope.

The glass started to grow, and Max adjusted the shape, making sure it would fit smoothly into the mold. It looked good.

“Okay, get on the platform. Once it’s heated up one last time, I’ll hand it over. You just blow hard.”

“Got it,” Holland said, stepping up, ready for this final shot.

A tense moment.

Max hands me the glass pipe, and carefully guides me into position over the mold.

“Now—blow! Harder... harder!”

This time, the glass expands just right, stretching to cover the glove. It’s working.

“Okay, stop,” he says, quickly moving to unblock the pipe.

“I think that went pretty well... though—ah, yeah, there’s a little crack around the edge. What do you think?”

I lean in, looking closely.

“Yeah... I see it. But I still want to keep it. It turned out pretty well. And... this might be the last one.”

I’m not sure if I’ll get another chance, but I feel like I made something worthwhile. Something interesting.

Max looked over and said,

“If we’ve got time, let’s try again. You can take a break while I help the others.”

Of course—I’m not the only one here. This is a group workshop, and Max is guiding everyone, not just me.

So whether or not I get to try again depends on more than just time. Max is tired, too—I can feel it—but still, I want to be ready, just in case. I'll prepare everything so I'm ready to go if the chance comes.

I made a mold for the glove out of clay. But there was something else I'd been quietly thinking about—my favorite pair of whiskey glasses. I broke one of them a few years ago. Back then, I didn't have the skills or mindset to repair it. I wanted to do something, anything, but in the end, I just threw the broken piece away.

Now, though, I wonder—if I bring that lost glass back into my mind and shape it again, could I somehow heal it? Could I restore its soul, and make it a pair once more?

So I made a mold for the whiskey glass too, unsure which one I should prioritize. After some time passed, the other students wrapped up their work, and it turned out there'd be enough time for just one more session.

Seventh blowing (*Fig 27*)

"I think we've got time for one more. Do you want to try the glove again? Or something else?" Max asked.

What should I do? Honestly, part of me wants to try the glove again—really make it work this time. But I also want to try the whiskey glass. I'm torn.

And Max... he's clearly getting tired. It's been a long day, and even though we'd do it together, he carries most of the physical load. If he's worn out, there's a good chance it might not go well. And I already made it through a third attempt with the glove. Maybe that's enough for now.

The whiskey glass is smaller, and it shouldn't be too

difficult. And maybe, just maybe, it's the right time to give it another life.

"I want to do the glove, but I'm going to go with this one. It's the mold for the whiskey glass."

"All right, that's fine. Since this one's smaller, it'll go faster if I handle it. Mind if I take over? We're short on time."

"Yes, please do."

"There's a bit of space at the bottom of the mold, so I'll drop in a little glass first, then blow."

With that, Max began the final round of glassblowing. The piece was small, and in his hands, the whole process was quick and surprisingly smooth. It almost looked effortless. He blew the glass into the clay mold, and just like that, it was done. It turned out even better than I had imagined. Holland looked over at Max. He was wiping sweat from his forehead, smiling faintly.

"Thanks," Holland said.

"For what?"

"For... everything. For letting me try so many times. For staying patient."

He gave a shrug.

"That's what I'm here for."

And so the workshop came to an end. It was a fun, unforgettable experience—my first time blowing glass. I'm really glad I came. I'm especially grateful to Max. He taught us with care and supported us every step of the way,

and thanks to him, I think each of us was able to create something meaningful.

*Hot glass flows into the mold,
burns what it touches, fierce and bold.
A flowerpot, a half glove—
burned like a cremation.
The clay and blocks held them like a wall,
a coffin.
In the coffin, the shapes arise,
They are the objects left behind.
The shapes from them
are the souls of them.
The glass held shapes the soul once wove,
drifting near the pots and glove.*

(Fig 28)

All was done, I was getting ready to return to the small town of Hasselt. This place had also been small, like Hasselt, and just like there, it rained a lot. But it was not bad. Maybe it was because I had such a good experience here. And now, I was looking forward to going back to Hasselt.



Fig 36. Jiawei's plate before



Fig 37. Jiawei's plate after

Kintsugi

Shiro once told me that if you take good care of things and continue to use them, they eventually possess a soul. I also heard about a Japanese repair technique called kintsugi.

Kintsugi is a process that involves many steps over several weeks, using mainly Urushi (Japanese lacquer), a natural adhesive made from purified sap from the sumac tree. As the name of the technique suggests, gold powder is often sprinkled on top of the lacquer as decoration, though it's not always gold. Basically, it seems that repairing is the most important thing, and the emphasis is placed on not disturbing the inherent value, color, and existence of the ceramics to be repaired.

I found this fascinating. Ever since I had such a good time trying something new at the glassblowing workshop, I wanted to take on another new challenge. Besides, one of my works, '*Soul of a half glove*,' which I made in the

glassblowing workshop, had a broken part. If I could repair something like that glass art, I would. In a cool way.

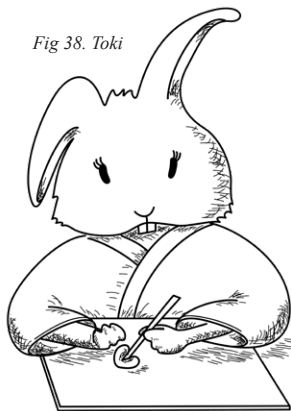
First, I need to find a place to learn kintsugi. So I searched online. There are quite a few. It seems there are a lot of classes where you can learn it. But some of them are called ‘new kintsugi’ or ‘easy kintsugi,’ which use resin and brass powder instead of traditional materials. I think I can do this by myself without learning. If possible, I’d like to learn traditional kintsugi. Maybe even as an internship or something, if I’m lucky. But for now, I’ll start by sending a few emails.

I sent out a few emails. After a while, I got a reply — they weren’t accepting interns. Well, I guess it’s not that easy to find one. Then came a reply from the third place I contacted. To my surprise, she said she couldn’t pay me, but if I was willing, she would accept me. It had been easier than I thought to find an opportunity.

Of course, that meant I would have to go to Japan to learn kintsugi. It’s a long way from Belgium, but I didn’t really have a choice. Besides, I could learn kintsugi and go sightseeing at the same time — not a bad deal.

So, Holland flew to Japan as soon as he could.

Fig 38. Toki



I could only stay for about two months because of school back in Belgium. Two months was enough for sightseeing, but I wondered if it would be enough time to really learn kintsugi, with all its careful, time-consuming steps. I was a little worried.

Actually, I was feeling a bit dizzy... Could it be — that COVID-19 thing? Was it still around?

I bought a test kit just to be sure. Sure enough, it was that. What should I do? I didn't feel too bad, but I knew I could still infect others. I decided to call the studio.

"Hello, my name is Holland. I'm from Belgium, and I'm looking forward to starting my internship."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Holland! Hello. I'm glad to hear you made it to Japan safely. Your first day will be this Saturday."

"I mean... that's the thing. I seem to have caught COVID-19. I think I'll be fine by Saturday, but there's still a risk of spreading it. What should I do?"

"I see. Are you feeling all right? Just to be safe, why don't you start next Monday instead?"

"Thank you. I'm feeling okay, but I agree — better to be cautious."

"All right then. We'll see you next Monday. Please take care until then."

So my first day was moved to next Monday. I hoped everything would be okay...

Meanwhile, my first impression of Japan was simple: the weather was beautiful. It's winter now. The sky had been

endlessly cloudy and rainy in Belgium. But since arriving in Japan, I hadn't seen a single cloud. The seafood was incredible, too. In Belgium, we have sushi, but it's not real sushi. Here, the fish of sushi is so flavorful with the fat, and the taste is completely different.

I spent a few quiet, restful days like that, and before I knew it, Monday had arrived. I was nervous, but also excited. The kintsugi class would be held in Shibuya. It was at night, but unlike Hasselt, Shibuya was packed with people. So many people. Tall buildings everywhere. However, there was even an old-fashioned alley lined with bars, a little tourist spot tucked among the skyscrapers. The class was held on the second floor of a building there.

"I'm Holland, nice to meet you."

"Hello, oh my gloves! Good evening, my name is Toki."

"Good evening, you are a rabbit."

"Yes, that's me."

Toki the rabbit would be teaching me kintsugi. At this point, I don't even question the fact that an animal was talking and teaching me things. After all, she was the sixth one I'd met.

First of all, introduce myself.

"I'm a sculptor studying at a school in Belgium. I mainly repair broken objects and create new works of art. A friend once told me about kintsugi, and I thought it sounded like something I'd like to try. I'm really looking forward to learning it."

"By the way, how did you find me?"

I explained that I had looked online and contacted a few studios that seemed easy to get to. Toki's place was actually the third one I contacted. "I saw the website and thought it looked really nice."

"I see," she said. "These days, a lot of people just use Instagram, but if you take the time to make a proper website, people still find you."

After introducing ourselves, we chatted a little more about Belgium and about me as we got ready for the class.

There are two classrooms: one in Shibuya, and another in Higashikitazawa. The Shibuya studio is small, just enough space for two or three students, while the Higashikitazawa classroom can fit about five or six. Classes are held three times a week, and students can choose which days they want to come. Since Holland was only staying for two months, he was allowed to join three times a week.

In kintsugi, Urushi is used in almost every step. It needs moisture to dry and harden, and this takes several days. That's where a special wooden cabinet called a Muro comes in. The Muro keeps the humidity at the right level, so when we finish work for the day, we place the plates and cups covered with Urushi inside it to cure properly.

I had brought along some broken plates and cups, so I could practice kintsugi with them.

Toki taught me step by step.

Fig 39. Muro



First, we made something called Mugi-Urushi, which works as a kind of glue. It's made by mixing water and flour into a dough-like Gnocchi, then combining it with Urushi. The first step was to repair the broken dishes using Mugi-Urushi.

Toki said,

“Mr. Holland is pretty dexterous, even though you're a glove!”

“It's almost like a real hand, so yes, I'm very dexterous.”

Toki laughed and added,

“I don't know how it

happens with gloves, but just so you know — some

people are allergic to Urushi. It can cause an itchy rash.”

“I should be fine. I'm made of acrylic fiber, after all.”

Even though Mugi-Urushi is a substitute for glue, it doesn't stick right away. Until the Urushi dries, the pieces can still shift a little. So I have to hold them steady and make sure they don't move.

If there are only a few cracks, it's manageable, but if the whole piece is cracked, it gets pretty tricky.

“I had heard that kintsugi took a long time, but now that I was doing it myself, I really understood why — so many steps, and so much waiting for Urushi to dry. I could only stay for about two months... would I be able to finish?”



Fig 40. Mugi Urushi

“Exactly, Kintsugi takes time. But once you finish one step, you usually can’t work on it again that same day. If you kept a good pace, maybe you could make steady progress, little by little. Even if you couldn’t finish everything in two months, as long as you finished at least one piece and went through the full process once, you could always continue the unfinished work back in Belgium.”

“Let’s work hard toward that goal!” Holland said with a smile. With that in mind, we decided to focus on completing one dish as much as possible, while also repairing a few others on the side.

Holland attended kintsugi class three times a week.

There were always a few other students. Sometimes he saw familiar faces, but usually it was different people each time. Most of them were a bit older.

Kintsugi classes aren’t exactly cheap, and maybe young people today don’t feel as strongly about carefully repairing and treasuring their tableware.

One day, I asked another student about learning kintsugi. He was working on a white teacup, but he said it wasn’t his favorite. He had just brought it because it happened to be broken. I asked him if he felt more attached to it now that he was repairing it, but he answered that it still wasn’t anything special to him. I was a little disappointed. I had hoped he would say that through kintsugi, he had grown to love it. Maybe he just wanted to learn the technique itself. Well, I know, there are all kinds of people in the world.

Winter in Japan is really sunny. Even though the temperature is low, it doesn’t feel too cold. Toki was also taking

a break during the New Year's holiday, so there would be no kintsugi classes for a while. Since it was the beginning of a new year and I had some free time, I decided to take a little trip.

I had heard that the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa was famous. It looked great from everything I had read, and Ishikawa Prefecture is by the sea — the seafood there sounded delicious too. I quickly booked a seat on an express bus.

Just as I finished, I felt something shaking a little. An earthquake? It wasn't a big one where I was, but I wondered where the epicenter was. When I checked... what? Seriously? Ishikawa Prefecture?¹

I had just booked the bus to Kanazawa! And it wasn't a small earthquake either — magnitude 7.6! That's huge. Even in Tokyo, the shaking was strong enough to feel. I turned on the TV and saw that many houses had collapsed. Japan really does experience a lot of earthquakes. The museum in Kanazawa had announced it would be closed for the time being. I had booked my trip for three days later, but obviously, I couldn't go anymore.

Still, there was no need to cancel the trip entirely — I could just go somewhere else. After some searching online, I decided on Aomori. There were several museums there that looked interesting.

It might be cold in the Tohoku region, but I thought, why not?

1: 2024 Noto earthquake: This was happen true story, a few hours after I (Wataru Sato) booked an express bus to Kanazawa.

I visited five museums located in Hachinohe, Towada, Aomori, and Hirosaki — a collaboration known as AOMORI GOKAN. When I arrived in Aomori by bus, it was a little chilly. The sun was out, but there was still snow on the ground here and there. Aomori turned out to be a much bigger city than I expected, and it was quite tough to visit all five museums.

I got to see a wide variety of works by artists from Aomori, like Yoshitomo Nara, as well as many international artists like Ron Mueck.

But the piece that left the deepest impression on me was Location (5) — an artwork that recreated a dining room entirely in the dark. My sense of distance and space was completely thrown off. Maybe because I'm good at making objects but not as confident when it comes to creating large spaces or installations, this kind of work really captured my attention. It wasn't just about looking — it stirred my emotions and my senses in a way I hadn't expected. And when



Fig 41. Location (5)

I checked the artist's name, I was surprised — it was Hans Op de Beeck, from Belgium! I saw his work once at PXL. What a coincidence.

Overall, I felt the trip to Aomori was really meaningful. I was able to experience so many different artworks, and it gave me a lot to think about. How can we create a work of art that moves the audience emotionally? Or perhaps, could the act of stirring my own emotions itself become the artwork?

A few days after returning from my trip to Aomori, the kintsugi class resumed.

After gluing the broken dishes together with Mugi-Urushi, the next step was to smooth the glued areas. We shaved the joints clean and applied Kokuso-Urushi (a mixture of wooden powder and Urushi) and Sabi-Urushi (Urushi mixed with polishing powder), almost like using putty to fill the gaps. Once again, after applying the Kokuso and Sabi-Urushi, we placed the pieces inside the Muro to dry. After drying, the surface was carefully scraped and smoothed.

“Even just sticking the broken plates back together makes them look like they’re coming back to life,” Holland said.

“There’s still a lot to do,” said Toki.

“I know...”

“By the way, Toki, do you know anything about Sashiko — the stitching technique for repairing clothes?”

“I know a little bit. It’s a different technique from kintsugi, but it’s also a form of repair, kind of similar in spirit.”

“I’m interested in Sashiko too. It’s also a traditional method of repair, right? Kind of like mending you see in Europe.”

“Yes, that’s right. You could say it’s similar to mending. But there’s also a method called Boro — a kind of patchwork repair. Maybe you’re mixing the two a little.

I learned more about it from an article I found online. I knew a little about both Sashiko and Boro before, but reading that article made the differences clearer.

Apparently, Sashiko was originally used to strengthen fabric or add extra warmth to clothing, while Boro refers more to repairing holes: you apply a cloth patch from behind and stitch it together.

At first, I thought Sashiko and Boro were basically the same thing, but it turns out there’s a subtle difference.”

“These days, especially on Instagram, I often see jeans repaired with visible patches and decorative stitching over the tears,” Holland said.

Fig 42. Sashiko

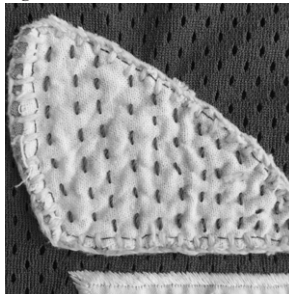


Fig 43. Boro



“In Japan, though,” Toki said, “people usually try to make repairs less noticeable — patching with a similar-colored cloth from the inside. My mother used to mend clothes like that too.

But now, influenced by the image of kintsugi — making repairs visible and beautiful — people are starting to use different colored cloth or add stitches that stand out. It’s like a ‘kintsugi of cloth,’ I guess. Although the original philosophy behind kintsugi is a little different.

Also, I think the essence of Boro and kintsugi is fundamentally different.

Kintsugi involves repairing high-class, valuable items by using gold. In the past, ordinary people couldn’t afford gold — if their dishes broke, they just continued using them as they were, without repairing them with anything fancy. Meanwhile, Boro were worthless scraps of fabric, patched together with whatever cloth people had at home. People couldn’t afford to buy new clothes, so they had no choice but to repair what they had.

As a result, I think both kintsugi and Boro carry a sense of wabi-sabi, finding charm in imperfection, but their origins are very different.”

While we were talking, today’s work came to an end. Next time, we’ll shave the Sabi-Urushi again on some of the pieces. But one piece is ready — we’ll sprinkle powder on it to complete the process. I felt relieved that I’d be able to experience the full kintsugi process.

But then, something felt strange. Was it my imagination?

No, my skin was definitely itchy. Really itchy. I put on some anti-itch ointment for insect bites, and it helped a little, but it didn't completely stop the itch. Scratching only made it worse, so I just had to endure it.

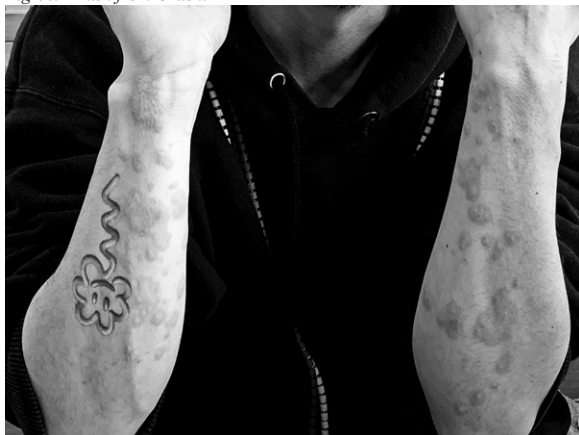
Was this... a rash from Urushi?

"Oh no, you got a rash from Urushi," said Toki. "I get itchy too, when Urushi touches the soft parts of my skin. But if you keep working with Urushi for a long time, you build up a resistance. Since you are a half glove, though, it's hard to see when you get a rash."

"You can't see by appearance, though. It is very itchy. I have to wear rubber glove from Today. I am a half glove..."

Despite the discomfort, I managed to complete the final process. I brushed black Roiro-Urushi over the joints and

Fig 44. A rash from Urushi



let it dry. Then I painted red Roiro-Urushi on top, completely covering the black. When the red began to set and darken slightly, I sprinkled gold powder over it. Finally, I completed one piece. There were still a few small things that bothered me about it. But it was my first time — I guess that's just part of the learning process.

In kintsugi, if one step is done carelessly, the next step becomes even harder. You have to work carefully through every stage. If you're not satisfied, you have to redo it, and redoing it takes a lot of time and effort. Maybe that's where the true value lies: in the time, the care, and the work itself.

The philosophy of kintsugi is rooted in the uniquely Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi.

Wabi means finding spiritual richness within something that appears crude or incomplete on the outside.

Sabi means appreciating beauty in things that are weathered, worn, and decaying with time.

Nothing in this world is perfect. We learn to appreciate things as they are — damaged, rusted, changing — from beginning to end. Through this, we find fulfillment not in what is whole, but in what is lacking. We discover the spiritual within imperfection.

In kintsugi, it's important to remember that it is a method of repair — not an opportunity for the artist's design to overpower or interfere with the original vessel. However, even within that repair, there are subtle artistic choices: the thickness of the kintsugi line, whether or not to sprinkle powder, and whether to use gold or tin powder. Each of these small decisions, along with the craftsman's skill, can

greatly change the final result. When repairing, we must focus on the vessel itself, without being concerned about expressing ourselves. By doing so, the broken parts are naturally brought into focus. Maybe this restraint — the choice not to impose oneself — is a very Japanese way of thinking.

Of course, I don't think it's wrong to express yourself through your work. But self-assertion shouldn't always be the priority. When repairing something, you first need to look closely at what is broken, and understand it deeply: What will you repair? How is it broken? How should you repair it? Even in these quiet decisions, your individuality naturally comes through.

Another thing I found fascinating while learning kintsugi was how Toki described to the repaired parts as scenery. In Japanese, 'scenery' usually refers to nature mountains, rivers, forests. Maybe it's because the patterns created by kintsugi are accidental, yet somehow echo the same kind of aesthetic we find in nature's scenery.

Kintsugi was a lot of fun, but at the same time, it was hard work — and that's exactly why it became such a meaningful experience for me. Actually, going through the process of kintsugi has changed the way I feel about repairing things, and even the way I approach my work. Maybe it's about my attitude when I repair something or the feelings I develop toward the thing itself. It's hard to put into words, but I feel like the atmosphere of my work has changed since then.

Although I haven't had a chance to use kintsugi techniques in my own creations yet, I'm sure it's already influencing

me. I hope to incorporate kintsugi into my next project.

“Thank you so much for everything, Toki. I am a half-glove, and I’m not talking clearly or moving fast. I’m sure there were times when I was clumsy and frustrating to deal with. But you taught me so patiently for two whole months. It may sound short, but attending class so often made those two months feel very full and meaningful. Thank you again.”

Toki smiled and said,

“It’s true — there were times I felt frustrated because you are a half-glove and not talking clearly or moving fast. But it was fun, too. I hope you’ll continue working on kintsugi after you return to Belgium.”

“Yeah... you’re right,” Holland answered. “Once I’m back, I’ll be busy with a lot of things... but I’ll do my best. I really want to keep going!”

“I’ll be waiting to hear from you. If you have any questions, feel free to ask. And when you finish something, send me pictures!”

“Of course! And if I ever come back to Japan, I’ll definitely get in touch. And if you’re ever free, let’s have dinner together!”

With a smile, Holland said goodbye to Toki and returned to Belgium from faraway Japan.

Fig 45. A pair in one glass tree





Fig 46. A pair in one glass tree broken by me

The Scent of the Soul

After returning to Hasselt, I got back to work. And finally, I completed *The glass tree*.

The glass tree was meant to hold two broken coffee cups I'd found in the same place. I wanted to repair them and connect them through this sculpture. But the bottom part of the piece was slightly tilted—some glass had been chipped away. To test the balance, I slipped a tissue underneath it. Then, while I looked away to retrieve the original broken cups, it tipped over and shattered. It felt like time slowed down as I watched it fall.

Why did I use a tissue?

Why did it have to happen?

I don't have the energy to make another one. I have one more piece at home, split in two. Should I repair one side and use it? Should I leave it broken as it is?

Either way, the design wasn't right. It lacked balance.

Kintsugi demands a lot of energy and time. Maybe I repair it with UV resin.



Fig 47. broken cups



Fig 48. Glass tree

The first time I tried making this glass tree, only the base cast successfully—the top part failed because the temperature didn't rise enough. The second time, the base cracked in the kiln, the mold collapsed, and the glass flowed unevenly. That was last year. A week ago, the third attempt finally succeeded, though the base was a little low. And now today, I knocked it over and broke it. It really was discouraging. But even as I picked up the pieces, I didn't want to throw them away. So maybe... the soul hasn't left it yet. Just like in the video *'Looking for a Soul,'* I've broken and repaired the glass plate over and over. We create artworks, but sometimes they break. Then we can repair them and turn them into artworks again. The process of repairing and the act of repairing itself add a story and deeper meaning to the work. Maybe that's what it means to be an artist.

Probably this cycle of breaking and repairing reflects something deeper in us, not just as artists, but as human beings. Humans are imperfect, and we all do things we're not proud of—sadly, that's just part of being human. Imperfect people repair imperfect, broken things in an effort to make them whole. We can never truly be perfect, but we keep repairing, again and again, driven by a longing for perfection. No matter what we do, we're always struggling through life, whether we succeed or fail. That struggle is how we grow.

But that doesn't mean the scars of the past—or the things we've done—disappear.

We don't repair them to hide them, but to embrace them, just like in Kintsugi. It's their imperfections that make them beautiful.

Kintsugi also teaches the value of continuous care for things through gentle and patient reparations. When people and objects spend time together, something deeper grows between them. In that bond, the presence of a ‘soul’ begins to take shape. That feels more natural than the idea of a soul suddenly being born after a hundred years. Maybe that’s true. It may sound a little unpleasant, but lately, I haven’t changed my bedsheets or pillowcase for a while. Sometimes, my own scent lingers on the fabric. Some people might think it smells bad, but to me, it’s familiar and strangely comforting. It doesn’t bother me—if anything, it makes me feel at ease.

In the same way, perhaps things that are used over time absorb a kind of scent of the soul, just like how our own smell clings to them. That lingering scent becomes memory, and memory becomes soul.

Despite what Kintsugi teaches us, we live in a consumer society. So many things are cheap, and when they break, we just throw them away and replace them. Recently, there’s been more talk about sustainability, and some people are changing their habits—but not enough.

No matter how industrialized or mass-produced something is, it was still made by someone, for someone. Even if we never see their face, every object carries the trace of a person’s intention. That’s why I don’t want to discard things so easily.

We can’t stop consumption or waste entirely. But I want to resist it—even just a little. If something breaks, I want to repair it. Most people don’t care. But I want to repair things and turn them into art that touches the heart. I give form to the soul of objects to remind people: things have souls. We

should treat them with care.

Still, should we really keep everything? Should we repair every broken thing? I don't think so. That's the limitation of what we can do—we must choose.

And for me, that choice is always hard. I find it difficult to throw things away.

I have encountered broken things by chance and have repaired them each time. This chance encounter may be important. It can be said that we met something by chance, but it might also be because we met it inevitably. Sometimes, the objects we already own feel deeply important; sometimes, they don't. Each time something breaks, we have to decide, "Is this worth saving?"

We feel people's memories and emotions through things. We choose to repair those that carry strong feelings. I believe that when a thing holds memory or meaning, the soul has already started to live in it. And by repairing it, I will keep mending the soul, too.



88 Looking for the Soul



Fig 49. Burned glove



Fig 50. Yashiro(社) and Flowerpot



Fig 51. Flowerpot



Fig 52. Yashiro(社)







Fig 53. Glass Shoes



Fig 54. Glass Shoes

Fig 55. Warm Chimney





Fig 56. Coffin





Fig 57: Works in progress





Fig 58. Sorry it was an accident







Fig 59. Sorry it was an accident



Fig 60. at the EXPO



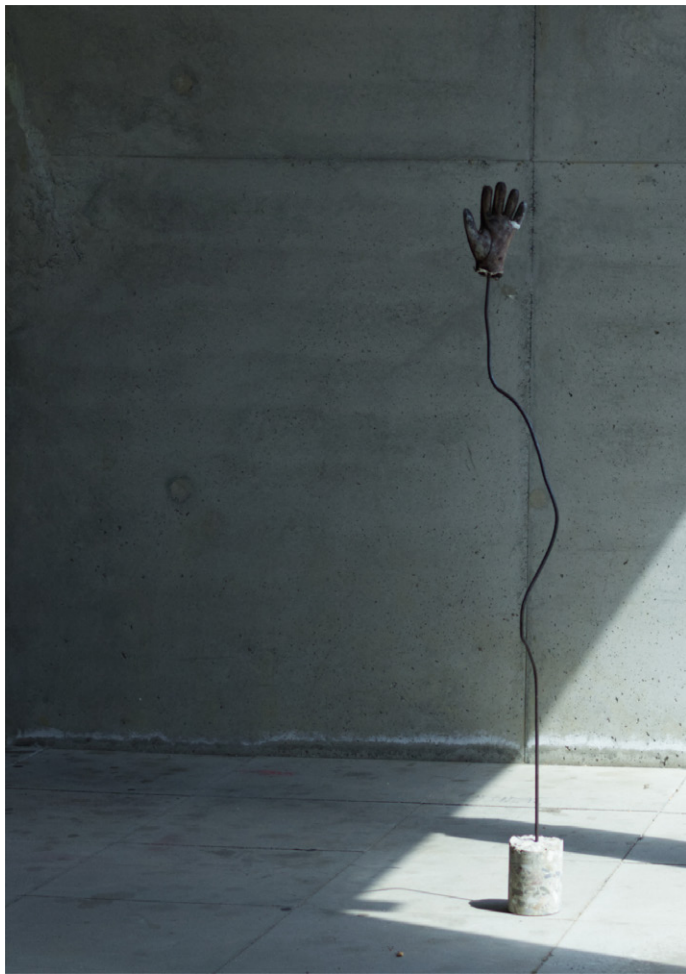




Fig 61. Burned glove and Warm Chimney

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List of illustrations

- Fig 1-2. Wataru Sato, Holy plate (2023), Found broken plates, Cotton, Thread, Fabric
- Fig 3. Wataru Sato, Found plates (2023), Photograph
- Fig 4. Wataru Sato, Holy plate in Maas (2023), Photograph
- Fig 5. Wataru Sato, Nathalie from Looking for the other half (2023), Found half pair of glove, Cotton, Thread, 25 x 35 cm
- Fig 6. Wataru Sato, David from Looking for the other half (2023), Found half pair of glove, Cotton, Thread, Fabric, Leather, 25 x 35 cm
- Fig 7. Wataru Sato, Found gloves (2023), Photograph
- Fig 8. Wataru Sato, Holland looks back (2025), Illustration
- Fig 9. Wataru Sato, Plato (2023), Illustration
- Fig 10. Wataru Sato, Elle (2025), Illustration
- Fig 11. Batist “Tist” Vermeulen, Nello & Patrasche (2016), White marble, cobblestones, 150 × 300 cm. Photograph by unknown photographer. Source: Reddit, https://www.reddit.com/r/aww/comments/iyyg6y/in_antwerp_belgium_you_can_find_this_sculpture/. Accessed 13 Sept. 2025.
- Fig 12. Wataru Sato, Shiro and Holland and Donatello (2025), Illustration
- Fig 13. Ayako Ishiguro, Tsukumogami (2015), Illustration. Source: Machida, Ko (町田 康). つくも神 (Tsukumogami). 講談社, 2015. ISBN: 9784062197335.
- Fig 14. Wataru Sato, Water gate noon (2025), Photograph
- Fig 15. Wataru Sato, Water gate night (2025), Photograph

- Fig 16. Wataru Sato, QR code for the video of Looking for a soul (2024)
- Fig 17. Wataru Sato, Looking for a soul (2024), Glass plate, PP tape, Copper line, Glue, Cotton, Thread, 15 x 10 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 18. Wataru Sato, Octopus from Looking for the other half (2023), Found half pair of glove, Cotton, Thread, Fabric, 25 x 35 cm
- Fig 19. Wataru Sato, An out-of-body experience (2025), Illustration
- Fig 20. Wataru Sato, Paul and Holland (2025), Illustration
- Fig 21. Wataru Sato, Superposition (2025), Illustration
- Fig 22. Chi-bou, Takoyaki. Digital illustration. Source: PIXTA, <https://pixta.jp/illustration/77729062>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2025.
- Fig 23. Wataru Sato, The first cup (2024), Glass, 6 x 6 cm
- Fig 24. Wataru Sato, Soul of a flowerpot (2024), Glass, 20 x 10 x 10 cm
- Fig 25. Wataru Sato, Warm Chimney (2024), Glass, 25 x 27 cm
- Fig 26. Wataru Sato, Soul of a half glove (2024), Glass, 25 x 27 cm
- Fig 27. Wataru Sato, Whisky glass (2024), Glass, 10 x 15 cm
- Fig 28. Wataru Sato, Warm Chimney (2025), 30 x 16 x 170 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 29. Giuseppe Penone, Breath of clay (1978), Clay, 147.5 x 71 x 76.5 cm. Photograph by Luigi Gariglio. Source: Giuseppe Penone, <https://giuseppepenone.com/en/words/breaths>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2025.
- Fig 30. Wataru Sato, Max and Holland (2025), Illustration
- Fig 31. Wataru Sato, Mold for Broken flowerpot (2024), Photograph

- Fig 32. Wataru Sato, A leather glove swollen with plaster (2024), Photograph
- Fig 33. Wataru Sato, Broken soul (2024), Photograph
- Fig 34. Wataru Sato, Burn glove (2024), Photograph
- Fig 35. Wataru Sato, A glove mold (2024), Photograph
- Fig 36. Wataru Sato, Jiawey's plate before (2024), Photograph
- Fig 37. Wataru Sato, Jiawey's plate after (2024), Ceramics, Urushi, Tin powder, 20 x 20 cm
- Fig 38. Wataru Sato, Toki (2025), Illustration
- Fig 39. Kudo Shigeki, Muro (2018), Wood, 40 × 40 × 40 cm. Photograph by unknown photographer. Source: CONFORT, “本格的な機能と耐久性、金継ぎにも向く漆風呂”, <https://confortmag.net/本格的な機能と耐久性、金継ぎにも向く漆風呂/> (Accessed 13 Sept. 2025).
- Fig 40. Wataru Sato, Mugi Urushi (2024), Photograph
- Fig 41. Hans Op de Beeck, Location(5) 2004/2008, Mixed media, 928 x 1417 x 618 cm. Photograph by Hans Op de Beeck. Source: Towada Art Center, <https://towadaartcenter.com/en/collection/location-5/>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2025.
- Fig 42. Wataru Sato, Sashiko (2025), Photograph
- Fig 43. Boro (textile fragment). Source: KUON, “3 Kinds of Boro,” KUON Official Blog, <https://kuon.tokyo/blogs/blog/3-kinds-of-boro>. Accessed 13 Sept. 2025.
- Fig 44. Wataru Sato, a rash from Urushi (2024), Photograph
- Fig 45. Wataru Sato, A pair in one glass tree (2025), Glass, Leather, Repaired cup, 40 x 30 x 15 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 46. Wataru Sato, A pair in one glass tree broken by me (2025), Glass, Leather, Metal, Wood, Repaired cup, 50 x 60 x 25 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee

- Fig 47. Wataru Sato, Broken cups (2023), Photograph
- Fig 48. Wataru Sato, Glass tree broken (2025), Glass, 40x30x15cm
- Fig 49. Wataru Sato, Burned glove (2025), Burned glove, Plaster, Metal, Concrete, 15 x 10 x 130 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 50. Wataru Sato, Yashiro(社) and Flowerpot (2025), Photograph
- Fig 51. Wataru Sato, Flowerpot (2025), Leather, Broken pot, Thread, 15 x 15 x 15 cm
- Fig 52. Wataru Sato, Yashiro(社) (2025), Leather, 20 x 25 x 30 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 53-54. Wataru Sato, Glass Shoes (2025), Glass, 40 x 30 x 35 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 55. Wataru Sato, Warm Chimney (2025), Wood, Glass, Leather, 30 x 16 x 170 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 56. Wataru Sato, Coffin (2025), Glass, 30 x 50 x 30 cm
- Fig 57. Wataru Sato, Works in progress (2025), Photograph
- Fig 58-59. Wataru Sato, Sorry it was an accident (2025), Glass, Meeree's rice bowl, 15 x 15 x 25 cm. Photograph by Meeree Lee
- Fig 60. Wataru Sato, at the EXPO (2025), Photograph
- Fig 61. Wataru Sato, Burned glove and Warm Chimney (2025), Photograph by Meeree Lee

