

Tribute to Toko and The Zojoji

In order to properly thank Toko Shinoda for all she has done for me and my gallery I decided to make an exhibition as a tribute to her. But the more I contemplated it, the more I realized that it would be wise to take this opportunity to thank not only Toko Shinoda, our famous artist, but also the lofty Zojoji Temple which has housed her largest work, "The Past, The Present, The Future," since its installation in 1974.

The painting was first shown to me by Toko-san herself one night in 1979 when we had met at a cultural event. She had been asked to contribute three images of her work for a book, and I had been asked to write three chapters for it. At the end of the meeting Toko-san suddenly invited me to dinner, but explained that before the dinner, she had to look in at her work which was being photographed at a temple. I did not quite grasp what she was talking about, but was honored to be invited to dinner by this famous lady artist whom I had recently interviewed and written about for my column in the Mainichi Daily News.

Off we went in her car, the driver having been waiting for her all the time, and we went to the Zojoji Temple. Although I had passed this iconic temple and even knew that its gate was a national treasure, I had never entered its premises and was quite taken with its grandeur. Toko-san led me to a huge room which was decked with lights and where photographers were busy capturing the glory of "The Past, The Present, The Future." It made an impression on me that I still clearly remember after almost forty years.

A few months later I summoned my courage and begged the leader of the Temple to allow me to use the site of the wondrous paintings to stage an exhibit of Toko's work. He quickly refused but after weeks of my continuous pleading slowly relented and assigned me three days for my exhibition; it turned out to be a huge success - 500 people attended the opening - my career as an art dealer was established. During these many years I have shown Toko's paintings all over the world and now It is time to pay her back with something that no one else could provide.

Toko-san has become 105 years old, and the Zojoji Temple is in its 600th year, and I have become 82. The exhibition I have planned includes some of Toko's master paintings from my own collection and other special works acquired from my gallery by devoted collectors and lent with their kind understanding. I know I can never repay all of Toko's kindnesses, but I hope you will join in seeing her special works that I have assembled. I also have to thank the Zojoji Temple for exhibiting Toko's painting since 1974.

Norman H. Tolman

