



May Program

Subjective or objective, that is the question. **Larry Ragle** will lead a mind boggling open discussion on just what is abstract.

All natural viewing stones are abstract to some degree by the very fact that they are suggestive of something other than what they actually are, a relatively small rock. We all have stones that create discussions, some more than others. How many times have you heard someone say, "Why does he call that an island stone? I see a sleeping dog". Bring your thoughts on abstract versus explicit.

If you have any thoughts on the subject but are not able to attend the meeting, please email Larry no later than May 25th and we will include them in the meeting.

See you on the 27th.

Stone of the Month

Let's tie the stone of the month to our discussion of abstract stones. Please bring 3 stones, one that you believe is totally abstract, that is, you see no recognizable shape, one that you see differently, depending on the light, time of day or ingested *saki*, and one that you believe is explicit. These stones should be of the quality and material appropriate for our shows.



Is Lois's stone a fish facing right or the head of a camel, facing left?

We had promised to reprint **Richard Ota's** articles from *Rafu Shimpō*, 1961 and 1968, beginning with this issue. Unfortunately they remain unavailable to us at this time. We hope to see Mr. **Ota's** work in print at some point, if not here then in a form available to us.

Ota & the Elusive Abstract Stone

If there was a contest for the #1 Japanese philosopher in the Western world of stone appreciation, **Richard Ota** would win, hands down. Mr. **Ota** is a scholar, a *bunjin guy*. For starters, he is the "anonymous" author of the article, *Sui-Seki*, that appeared in *Bonsai in California*, Vol. 1, 1967. (I say "anonymous" because no author was credited on the page or in the table of contents.) It is here that he authored the quintessential phrase that I quote repeatedly, "**What you see is not what I see**" describing the mystery and the ambiguity inherent in *suiseki* appreciation in the deepest sense. Further, in his article **Ota** also identifies the subjective, personal nature of *suiseki* by saying, "**No two stones are alike. The impression a person receives from a stone is singular, to him and him alone**".

Years later, maybe 30, he walked up to me at a show and said, "I wrote that article". I have no idea why it took that long. Nevertheless, **Ota's** article has been my inspiration and guideline for appreciating stones and explains the range of viewing stones **Nina** and I collect- totally abstract, suggestive or explicit, but 100% in the Japanese tradition.



These stones were found in the early 1980s in the Eel River. The one shown above from 2 views is totally abstract, and on page 3, one is somewhat abstract, suggestive of Rodin's *The Kiss*, one is suggestive of distant mountains and one is very suggestive of a large animal.

As I look at these photos I realize how fortunate we are and how much delight we had finding these stones. **Ota's** slogan, "**Something to remember the day by**" is so true.

Larry Ragle

April Meeting Notes

by Linda Gill

ANNOUNCEMENTS: **Jean Horton** and **Cliff Johnson** are putting together another trip to China - Kunming, tribes, stone pictures, quarries & museums for 2 weeks. It will be in May 2010 or maybe for the stone show in Luzhou.

Stone of the Month (Yuha) **Bruce** showed 3 rocks: 2 overhang stones with great skin and a black fish. **Cliff** had a Chinese stone that could be a mountain range when shown horizontally or an abstract if upright. **Kyra's** hut stone was found last year. **Joe James** brought a collection of 18 small stones and **Phil's** 2

stones were donated by **Ann**. **Linda** missed the 'texture stones' last month so she brought them this month: a pitted blue sudachi and a veined stone, both from the Kern. **Richard Turner** had a cream and greenish tinted stone, **Marge** had a plateau stone, 2 coastal stones and a far mountain, **Tom Culton** had 2 islands, a concretion pinnacle, a skull and a brown car. **Apinya's** stone was a sandstone wave. **Sarah** and **Hatsumi** found "Ann's stones" and it was said that **Pat & John Palmer** found a fossil. Please see below for those not mentioned above:



Ann Horton's non-representational stone, both front and back.



Nina's bridge stone



Larry's coastal rock



Lee Roberts; collected with Tony Thomas and Melba Tucker



Joe James; one of 18



Hanne Povlsen; golden heart and shelter ridge.



Bonnie McGinnis; same stone, two views



Buzz Barry's low mountain range came from the raffle



Bruce McGinnis



Marge Blasingame, old cast iron wood plane found in the desert

April Program Notes

by Linda Gill

Jim was unable to present his program since he was at **Alice's** bedside so **Larry** was the last minute stand in. **Larry** showed slide programs that he made in his computer class: *Two Days at the Huntington* - about the CBS Bonsai Show and Ralph's Malachite Show and *The Adventures of California Aiseki Kai* about the 2008 and 2009 trips to the Yuha. We expect that **Jim** will present his program at a later date.

Abstract Stones

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Al Nelson's black pyramid



Larry showed this as a shore stone for years until a viewer passed by and said, "That's Rodin's, *The Kiss*". [We flipped the picture on the right so it is easier to see the resemblance.]



Al's overhang stone



Some see a foot, once a part of a stone sculpture, while others might see a distant mountain scene.



John Palmer sent this photo of his stone (5 1/2") from the Yuha and the scene we were looking at where he found it! A nice match.



Can you see anything other than a buffalo or an ox? Larry found it about 3 feet deep in the Eel River with the aid of a snorkeling mask.

Ask Guy Jim

Dear GuyJim,

DOES SIZE MATTER? I started looking for large, 150lbs+ suiseki to display with my four-man bonsai. During a judged show remarks were written, “too large to be a proper bonsai”. I was stunned, left wondering? I had always believed as a guy that bigger was better! Please advise; I’m all ears!

Joseph A. Gaytan, Whittier, CA

Dear Joseph,

“Bigger is better” reflects a youthful outlook. With a quick look around our club, you will confirm that youth is not overly represented. “Smaller and subtle” is more conducive to prolonging the pleasure (of stone collecting) and bespeaks of maturity ... and, weaker backs!

In keeping with a new personal resolution, **GuyJim** is not going to engage in any attempt to decipher what range of stone size is acceptable to which group of Japanese connoisseurs and what they consider to be appropriate terminology; rather, I refer you to the sidebar summary about sizes. It suffices to say that I haven’t a clue as to what merit the Japanese may find in very small stones; as to larger stones, the one that comes to mind is the often reproduced white *tora-ishii* (below).



Setagawa Shiro-tora-ishii, 28 1/3" x 13" x 5 1/2" (72cm x 33cm x 14cm)

In all my perusal of Japanese books and magazines, I do not recollect many massive stones.

I think most of us accept the commonly expressed view that suiseki are ideally held in one hand or at least should be manageable by one person. Obviously, the latitude of such a definition can be stretched a bit depending on whose hands are doing the lifting. Within Aiseki Kai, big stones have been closely associated with the late **Dr. Wahl**, **Harry Hiraio** and **Richard Aguirre** – note that even most of their stones can be hefted by one strong or foolishly determined man. However, most of us refer to these large stones under the sobriquet of ‘viewing stone’, not suiseki. As far as I am aware, no one has put forth specific guidelines regarding the acceptable size parameters for ‘viewing stones’. This is probably for the better as any such rules would surely lead to exceptions that then beg further explanations.

Alice and I have a few large stones including a couple of three-man Eel River stones. We have never considered them to be suiseki. They were collected specifically for use in formal museum exhibitions. As viewing stones we use them in museum galleries where a few larger, dramatic stones help draw attention, provide some visual relief from the more traditional stones, and establish an aesthetically pleasing ambience for the show. In addition to ‘advertising’ the show from a distance, large, physically stable stones may be used as ‘touch-stones’ providing the visitor with a tactile experience – as well as keeping fingers out of trouble elsewhere! [My usage of the hyphenated ‘touch-stone’ is meant to retain ‘touchstone’s abstract meaning of ‘a point of reference’, but also emphasize the act of physically touching.] Recall that the club annually displays Harry’s large Wyoming stone at the entrance of the Huntington Show with the admonition to “Please Touch”. **Alice** and I have included a touch-stone, usually ‘Transcendence’, as a featured part of all our exhibitions (below). At the Mingei Museum we also



'Transcendence' presented low for touching at Descanso Gardens

allowed the public to touch a three-to-four man Eel River range within the gallery (top page 5) In last year’s Beyond the Black Mountain Exhibition at the U.S. Bonsai & Penjing Museum we expanded the concept by including stones with different textures, supplementing the smoothly worn ‘Transcendence’ from the Eel River





Eel River Mountain Range at Mingei Museum (38" long; 150+ lb) with a heavily textured Kern River stone and a desert stone from Garnet Hill that feels like sandpaper (below).



'Touch-stones' at Beyond the Black Mountain Exhibition



While the above three touch-stones were all manageable by *moi*, in more permanent displays where security and stability would be paramount concerns, larger stones could work even better because of a reduced danger of movement. Otherwise, my best answer to your question would be that while very large stones may be used in unique circumstances, they have no place interspersed within a 'normal' bonsai or suiseki exhibit setting as by size alone, they will attract undue attention, disrupt the ambience, and distort and

misrepresent the focus of the show ... bigger is sometimes just that: bigger, not better.

Finally, I first think of suiseki as stones of a more intimate size, at least in part because of the appealing vision of an ancient Chinese scholar keeping his favorite stone within his sleeve.

GuyJim

Note that I hope to address the question of stones at the other extreme – very small stones –next month.

The views expressed in this column are personal, perhaps irreverent, irrelevant or just plain wrong and do not reflect the consensual view of California Aiseki Kai. Send your viewing stone questions (or comments) for GuyJim to jimgreaves@roadrunner.com or 1018 Pacific Street, Unit D, Santa Monica, CA 90405 (310) 452-3680

Sidebar about Size

We are often asked if there are rules governing the size of suiseki/viewing stones. At the small end, Alice and I have stones that fall below an inch in their maximum dimension. While such tiny stones may in fact contain incredibly detailed 'views' and bring great pleasure when held in the hand, as a practical matter under conditions of an exhibition, they become more of a curiosity. At the other extreme, very large stones that could well be used as garden stones (*niva-ishi*) might still be accepted as viewing stones when used indoors or even outdoors if displayed in isolation from the garden landscaping, itself. For both suiseki and other types of viewing stones, the most commonly adhered to rule is that the stone should be manageable by one person. Here are some parameters for suiseki size as presented by several sources:

Hideo Marushima mentions that in *Bonsan Higou*, published in 1772, the dimensions of the ideal stones are given as:
 5 7/8 - 8 1/4" long and 3 1/2 - 4 3/4" high
 (15 - 21cm by 9 -12 cm)
Proceedings of the International Scholarly Symposium on Bonsai and Viewing Stones
 Washington, D.C., National Bonsai Foundation, 2002
 ISBN 0-9074392-4-5. Page 176.

Covello and Yoshimura mention this range of size:
 Miniature: 3 - 4" inches long by 1 1/2 - 3" high
 Maximum: seldom exceeding 24" long by 12" high and 12" wide.
 Covello, Vincent T. and Yoshimura, Yuji: *The Japanese Art of Stone Appreciation – Suiseki and Its Use with Bonsai*
 Rutland, Vermont, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1984
 (several reprints)
 ISBN 0-8048 1485-6. Page 26.

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Chrysanthemum Stones Lead the Way

by Tom and Hiromi Elias

Most people will remember 1976 as the year that the United States celebrated its 200th anniversary as a country. However, it was more than that. It was also an important milestone in the history of suiseki in the U.S. The bicentennial year was not the first time suiseki arrived here. In fact, there are known situations where suiseki and other stones were brought much earlier. Despite this, little attention was paid to these early introductions.

The bicentennial was widely celebrated throughout the country all year long and attracted considerable attention. In the stone appreciation world, three high profile events occurred that included excellent Japanese stones. These newsworthy events helped to develop an awareness of stone appreciation and, in particular, chrysanthemum stones.

The best known of these three occasions was the bicentennial gift of 53 bonsai and six suiseki to the people of the U.S. from the people of Japan in recognition of the 200th birthday of the U.S. The trees and stones came to the U.S. National Arboretum (USNA) in Washington, D.C. to form the nucleus of what would eventually become the finest collection of Japanese bonsai in North America. The six suiseki formed the basis or the beginning of what emerged into a world-wide collection of outstanding stones at the arboretum. A large natural, white-flowered chrysanthemum stone donated by **Kiyoshi Yanagisawa** was one of the six stones presented by the Japanese. This and the other five stones are occasionally displayed in the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum at the USNA.

Less known is the fact that the Nippon Suiseki Association presented an outstanding, very large chrysanthemum stone to U. S. President **Gerald Ford**, also in 1976, as a part of the bicentennial. This was a recognized excellent stone in Japan and was featured in the book *Excellent Japanese Suiseki Directory* edited by **Kenji Murata** and published in 1969. Mr. **Tanekichi Iozaki**, original owner of this stone, named it *Moon Night Chrysanthemum* because it reminded him of viewing chrysanthemums by moonlight. Notice of this gift was published in a full page spread with text and a photograph in the November, 1976 issue of the Japanese magazine, *The World of Aiseki*. This Neo Valley stone with its dark red matrix and numerous small flowers was officially transferred to the National Arboretum for inclusion in their collection of Japanese bonsai and stones. Millions of people have viewed this



Moon Night Chrysanthemum stone presented to President Gerald Ford by the Nippon Suiseki Association in 1976.

stone and the white-flowered chrysanthemum stone mentioned in the preceding paragraph. First time visitors to the stone collection readily recognize chrysanthemum stones and are amazed at their natural crystalline formation.

A third gift of four exceptional chrysanthemum stones was made in 1976, but this time on the other side of the country. This event has been largely forgotten and the stones dropped from sight of the stone appreciation community until now. Our research on chrysanthemum stones in Japanese journals revealed that a delegation from Nagoya, Japan visited Los Angeles in August, 1976. Nagoya Mayor **Masao Motoyama** presented Mayor **Tom Bradley** with numerous gifts including four chrysanthemum stones. Los Angeles and Nagoya are sister cities; thus, it was not surprising when 56 government officials and business leaders traveled from Nagoya to Los Angeles for several days of meetings and ceremonies. One of the stones was a large, about 100 kilograms, stone with a dark gray matrix and red, blue, and white flowers. The stone was originally owned by Dr. **Koichi Shiraki** who donated the stone to the city of Nagoya for presentation to Mayor **Bradley**.

After several months of searching, we were finally able to locate specific information about this event and the location of one of these stones. An article in the August 13, 1976 *Los Angeles Times* described the visit and some of the gifts presented by the delegation from Nagoya. The article mentioned only one of the stones, the largest one from **Shiraki**. We contacted the Los Angeles Natural History Museum, art museums, the University of Southern California, and finally ended at





Neo Valley chrysanthemum stone that was presented to Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley. The stone is approximately 56 cm wide, 47 cm high, and 27 cm deep.

the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs. **Timothy Mc Gowan**, Arts Manager in the Department of Cultural Affairs, confirmed that they have the large **Shiraki** stone in

their possession. We were informed that Mayor **Bradley** kept two of the chrysanthemum stones in his office during his tenure. After he left office, only one of the stones was transferred to the Office of Cultural Affairs. The status of the other stones is unknown; but, continued searching may eventually reveal their location.

These three high profile bicentennial events were significant factors in promoting suiseki and stone appreciation in the United States. They lit a small fire that helped feed a newly emerging interest in Asian stone appreciation. We know that suiseki and chrysanthemum stones arrived in the United States from Japan years before 1976 and the many bicentennial celebration events. For instance, the Earth Science Club in Los Angeles displayed 100 stones shipped from a stone club in Nagoya in 1970. This shipment included 50 fossils and 50 suiseki, including several chrysanthemum stones. But, this is another story for another time.

Sidebar about Size continued from page 5

Felix Rivera applied the following terms:

<i>Mame</i>	(miniature)	1-6" (2.5-15cm)
<i>Kogata</i>	(small)	6-12" (15-30cm)
<i>Hyojun</i>	(medium)	12-24" (30-60cm)
<i>Ogata</i>	(large)	24" (60cm) or greater

Further, using statistical analysis, he determined that the average suiseki in Japan measured 14.04 inches wide by 6.52 high by 7.14 deep (35.18 x 16.3 x 17cm)

Rivera, Felix G. *Suiseki – The Japanese Art of Miniature Landscape Stones*

Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1997
ISBN 1-880656-27-2. Pages 69,70

Years ago, **Harry Hirao**, in a personal communication, provided me with the following terms for both bonsai and suiseki:

<i>Tisei</i>	under 3"
<i>Shito</i>	3"
<i>Mame</i>	3-6"
<i>Shobin</i>	6-8"
<i>Kifu</i>	8-13"
<i>Chubin</i>	13-18"

You may take your choice, but we opt for a stone we can carry as being the defining size!

Refreshments

Thanks to **Bruce McGinnis, Sachiko Dennis, Don Mullally and Marie Luise Fischer** for appeasing April appetites.



May munchies will be provided by **Emma Janza, Marie Atkison and Kit Blaemire**.

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

Contact People

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Newsletter Committee

May Contributors: Linda Gill, Jim Greaves, Tom and Hiromi Elias and Larry Ragle.

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We hope you will participate. Please send any submissions to ragle@cox.net no more than 10 days following our monthly meeting. Thank you!

**Ragle
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



Leaves no stone unturned

See us on the web

aiseikikai.com



Coming Events

AMERICAN VIEWING STONE RESOURCE CENTER

Thematic Exhibit: *Eternal Rhythms: Seasons & Time*
Melba Tucker Gallery at the National Bonsai & Penjing
Museum, U.S. National Arboretum, Washington, DC.
Continuing – June 2009 (29 stones)

SANTA ANITA BONSAI SOCIETY

47th Annual Show, May 24 -26 at the LA Arboretum, 301 N.
Baldwin Ave, Arcadia. 10-4. Demos 1:00 each day. Sales. For
more info: see website www.sabonsai.org

DESCANSO BONSAI SOCIETY

39th Annual Bonsai Exhibit, June 13-14, Descanso Gardens,
1418 Descanso Drive, La Canada. 9-5. Demos 11 and 1 each
day, sales. Reception June 13th at 6:30 in Van de Kamp Hall.
Live auction and raffle. For more information see website:
descanso-bonsai.com or call **Michael Jonas**: 818.776.0813

CALIFORNIA SUISEKI SOCIETY

14th Annual Suiseki Exhibition, June 13-14, Lakeside Garden
Center, 666 Bellevue Ave., Oakland. 10-5. Sales. For more info:
Felix Rivera, 510.527.6255 or email felixsuiseki@gmail.com

**Always check Golden Statements Magazine
Calendar section for additional coming events**

ORANGE COUNTY BONSAI SOCIETY

46th Annual Bonsai Exhibit, June 13-14, OC Buddhist
Church, 909 S. Dale Ave., Anaheim. 10:30-4. Demos 1:00.
Sales, raffle. Info: ocbonsai@gmail.com or call **Ken
Schlothman** 714.553.7516

REDWOOD EMPIRE BONSAI SOCIETY

26th Annual Bonsai Show, August 29-30, Santa Rosa
Veterans Memorial Bldg., 1351 Maple Ave., Santa Rosa.
Sat 10-5, Sun 10-4. Demos 1:30 both days. **Yasuo Mitsuya**
and **Kathy Shaner**. 200+ trees, sales, raffle. For more info:
Bob Shimon 707.884.4126 or email shimon@mcn.org.
Website: rebsbonsai.org

HAWAIIAN BONSAI ASSOCIATION

Bonsai Ohana II Convention, September 25-27, Pacific
Beach Hotel, Waikiki. Demos **Tohru Suzuki** and **Mel Ikeda**
For more info: hawaiibonsaiassoc.org

GOLDEN STATE BONSAI FEDERATION

"A Southwest Bonsai Journey",
Convention XXXII, November 5-8,
Riverside. Marriott Hotel. Suiseki convention
within a convention. www.gsbfcconvention.com

