

Shodo Canada Awards Ceremony Speech November 7th, 2021

Sue Chen

Mr. Sasayama, Mrs. Shimizu, Mr. Heron, Maeda Sensei, and everyone in attendance, good afternoon. Thank you all for coming and congratulations to all the winners and participants of the 14th Japanese Calligraphy Competition in Canada. I am truly honored to speak on behalf of our Shodo Community. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Sue Chen and I've been studying Shodo under Maeda Sensei for over 10 years.

My first lessons took place at the Waterloo evening class. Professor Fred Thompson introduced me to Sensei when I was preparing my Master's thesis on architecture and calligraphy. My memories of that class were the deep conversations around science or philosophy and the passionate debates around food. The practice of Shodo was rarely if ever mentioned. Sensei teased that my presence made the evenings very serious because I asked a lot of questions. In one of my earliest lessons, I remember her grabbing my hand to demonstrate movement when writing a character. This was the first time I thought of calligraphy as a choreography of the mind and body. As I was given examples of different scripts, styles, compositions, and themes I began to correlate brush writing as a spatial practice; marking time and movement with careful considerations to the tools, techniques, structure, composition, and quality of lines. Sensei's guidance played a pivotal role in my academic career and she ignited my lifelong passion for Shodo.

Over the years I've audited several of her classes. Saturday morning at U of T is my regular timeslot but I've joined the afternoon group on occasion. I even managed to drop in at the JCCC, now notorious for its 7 - 8 year waitlist. Each class is distinct. Some are reserved, while others are chatty. Every group is a mixed bag of backgrounds, personalities, and affinities. Ages 5 to 85, novice or experienced, all are welcome. Sensei's ability to create inclusive lesson plans is to be commended. Furthermore, when faced with lockdowns, she swiftly pivoted from in-person to digital teaching. With so much disruption and uncertainty, Shodo classes kept us connected. With the support of the Waterloo tech team, the virtual class is immersive, challenging, and dare I say, fun! The "fruit basket" system offered samples suitable to a wide range of skill levels and interests. Whether practicing Kana writing, drawing sheep, or learning about persimmon dyed paper, exposure to this content deepens our understanding of

calligraphy as well as Japanese culture. The group critique of homework teaches us “what and how to look”. Instead of languishing, I believe we all improved!

It is rare that an established artist is willing to teach, let alone drive from city to city, invest in new technology, and share trade secrets. A good teacher is proficient at transferring skills. A great teacher recognizes the unique qualities of a student and amplifies them. Every year, Sensei works hard to find themes and create samples that will resonate with each student. In my case, painting is my advantage and she is always searching for compositions and ideas that will complement this skill. I have seen this process repeated over and over and the results speak for themselves - just look at the variety of styles, techniques, and compositions exhibited this year and in all the years past.

Calligraphy is simultaneously easy to grasp and hard to master. It requires very few tools and basic techniques to start. However, obtaining mastery is a lifelong pursuit that requires encouragement and guidance. Teaching calligraphy implies that the relationship between the instructor and the student is ongoing. We are very privileged to have a teacher who is so generous with her time and so invested in our success. To quote writer Muriel Spark *‘The word ‘education’ comes from the root e from ex, out, and duco, I lead. It means a leading out. To me, education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul.’*

On behalf of all of your students, thank you Maeda Sensei for being our creative beacon.