



Japanese Bronze By Katsuhiko Saito: Sleeping Sesshu



500 EUR

Signature : Katsuhiko SAITO ????

Period : 20th century

Condition : Parfait état

Material : Bronze

Length : 18 cm

Height : 12 cm

Depth : 13 cm

Description

This evocative bronze sculpture, entitled "Sleeping Sesshu" (???? / Nemuru Sesshu), is a poetic and highly individual work by the Japanese sculptor Saito Katsuhiko (????, born 1942), an artist associated with

the prestigious Nitten exhibition tradition during the late Showa period. The sculpture combines historical imagination, Zen-inflected tranquility, and refined sculptural craftsmanship into a work of exceptional atmosphere and sensitivity.

The subject refers to Sesshu Toyo (1420-1506), the legendary Zen monk-painter widely regarded as one of the greatest masters in the history of

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Japanese ink painting. Sesshu revolutionized Muromachi-period monochrome landscape painting through his powerful brushwork, expressive abstraction, and profound spiritual depth. He was among the first Japanese painters to travel to Ming China and assimilate continental ink traditions into a distinctly Japanese artistic language.

Rather than portraying Sesshu as the austere artistic titan celebrated in art history, Saito presents him in a deeply human and contemplative manner: reclining peacefully, half-asleep, surrounded by mice that wander freely around his robes. This unexpected tenderness transforms the historical figure into an almost folkloric presence, suspended between Zen meditation, dream, and quiet humor.

The theme of sleeping Zen figures possesses a long tradition in East Asian art. Medieval Zen paintings frequently depicted monks and eccentrics in states of sleep or relaxed contemplation, symbolizing detachment from worldly concerns and harmony with nature. Images such as the celebrated "Four Sleepers" compositions embodied ideals of spiritual peace, enlightenment, and coexistence between man and animal. In this context, the mice surrounding Sesshu may be understood not merely as decorative companions, but as symbols of natural innocence and untroubled existence within a world free of fear and hierarchy.

Saito's interpretation is distinctly modern while remaining rooted in Japanese aesthetic tradition. The bronze surface is modeled with remarkable vitality: textured, irregular, and alive with shifting reflections of light.

Rather than polishing the sculpture into academic smoothness, the artist

preserves the immediacy of the sculptural process, allowing the tactile quality of the clay model to remain visible in the final bronze. This expressive surface treatment recalls the broader development of postwar Japanese figurative sculpture, where emotional presence and material sensitivity became central artistic concerns.

The composition itself is exceptionally balanced.

Although horizontal and intimate in scale, the sculpture possesses a quiet monumentality. The relaxed posture of the reclining figure creates a flowing rhythm across the bronze base, while the small mice animate the foreground and edges with subtle movement. The contrast between the serenity of the sleeping monk and the lively activity of the animals produces a gentle narrative tension that gives the work its charm and humanity.

Saito Katsuhiko belonged to an important generation of Japanese sculptors who emerged during Japan's postwar cultural expansion. His career developed within the framework of the highly influential Nitten exhibition system. In 1966 he was recommended as a member of the Japan Sculpture Association; in 1972 he received the prestigious Nitten Chunichi Prize, followed by further recognition at the Nitto Sculpture Exhibition in 1975. By 1976 he had attained associate membership within the Nitten Association itself -- an important distinction in the hierarchy of modern Japanese art institutions.

Alongside his exhibition career, Saito became active in monumental civic sculpture. His commissions included symbolic statuary for Gamagori City's Takeshima recreational complex, a clock tower

for the Toyota Regional Cultural Plaza, and the architectural wall sculpture Dance of the Sun for the Toyota Civic Cultural Center. These public works situate him firmly within the generation of artists who shaped the visual identity of modern Japanese civic architecture during the economic and cultural flourishing of the late Showa era.

"Sleeping Sesshu" reveals another dimension of the artist's oeuvre: intimate, reflective, and quietly philosophical. The sculpture can almost be interpreted as a meditation on artistic genius itself.

Sesshu -- the great Zen painter whose ink landscapes conveyed silence, emptiness, and spiritual vastness -- is here shown at rest, detached from worldly ambition, accompanied only by humble creatures moving peacefully around him. The work captures an atmosphere profoundly aligned with Japanese Zen aesthetics: simplicity, stillness, naturalness, and compassionate observation of the small details of life.

The accompanying signed tomobako (wooden storage box), inscribed by the artist and bearing his seal, further reinforces the sculpture's authenticity and cultural integrity. In Japanese artistic tradition, the tomobako forms an essential extension of the artwork itself, preserving provenance and affirming the direct connection between artist, object, and collector.

Altogether, "Sleeping Sesshu" stands as an exceptionally lyrical example of late Showa bronze sculpture: intellectually rooted in Japanese cultural history, technically sophisticated, and emotionally restrained yet deeply humane. It unites historical homage, Zen sensibility, and modern sculptural

expression in a work of rare poetic resonance.