

PERSONALITY: KLAUS KAMMERICHS

A dragon from the East meets one from the West

Sculptor Klaus Kammerichs turns perception around to create a double-dragon in Nanno-cho in Gifu Prefecture.

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He has been called a magician and a cult figure of modern art, but Klaus Kammerichs prefers to describe himself as someone who deals with the phenomenon of perception. His latest work, an approximately 4-meter high concrete sculpture called "The first East-West double dragon" has been constructed in Nanno-cho, 20 kilometers south of Ogaki City in Gifu Prefecture and will be officially opened for public viewing from June 11.

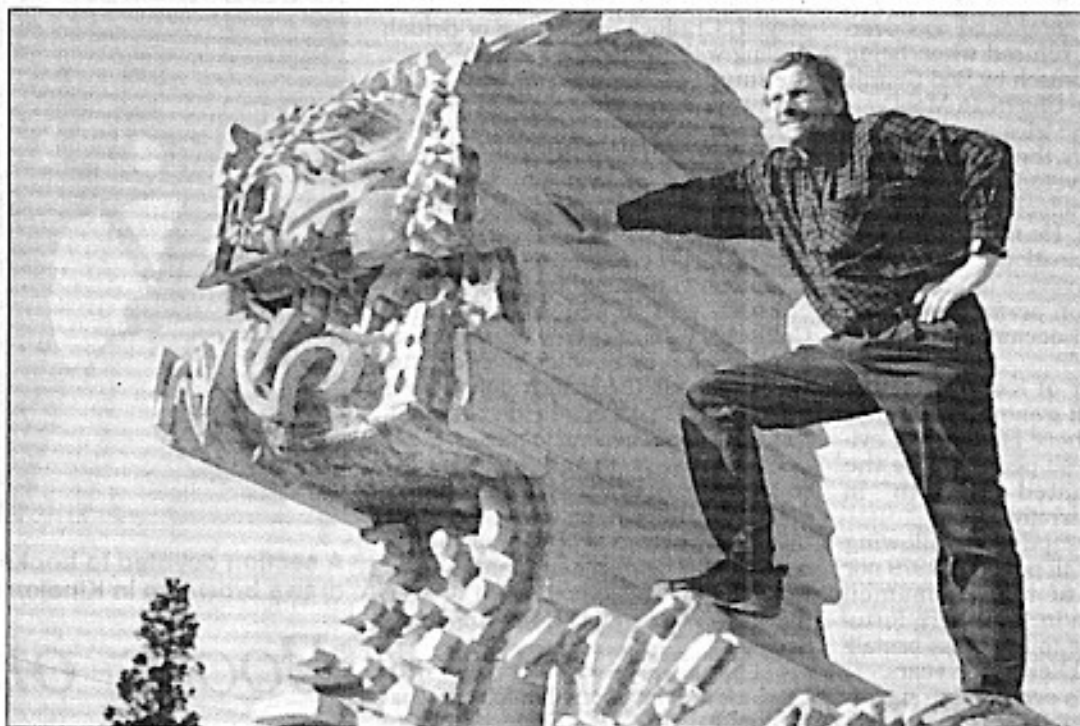
Born in Iserlohn, Westphalia, Germany, in 1933, Kammerichs became concerned with three-dimensional photography from a very early age. "As a child I looked through those glasses used for getting a 3-D effect from photographs, and I always had a strong feeling that 3-D was more than special...spiritual," he says. Kammerichs studied painting, engravings, different types of graphic arts and photography and turned to sculpture almost by accident, during the student revolutions in Germany of 1968.

"It was a type of personal revolution for me," explains the artist, who now works mainly in Dusseldorf and

came to Japan for the dragon project in January. "I had been working with a friend on some photographs, showing hands holding out one, two and three fingers. I was traveling on a train and all of a sudden I had this idea—why not bring them to 3-D? When I got home I made a 3-D hand with plastic layers which became, from a certain view, a realistic hand holding three fingers out...three fingers for three-dimensions."

Since this initial discovery, Kammerichs has worked chiefly with sculpture, mostly in concrete but also in plastics and polystyrene foam. His work is extraordinary in that it comes into focus, with three dimensional effect, from only one angle; from every other angle the sculptures look like abstract models and could possibly be appreciated just as abstracts, if the onlooker is unaware of Kammerichs' technique and fails to stumble upon the precise viewpoint.

Kammerichs' most famous sculptures include Beethoven, the Mona Lisa, an entire ice hockey team and a piece that almost magically catches movement, Tour de France. One of his most unusual models is a bust of Frederick the Great at Breitscheid Place in Berlin, a



Klaus Kammerichs climbs the dragon in Gifu Prefecture.

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huge climbing landscape with a cafe in the collar. It looks like an abstract playground at ground level, showing a realistic view of the bust of Frederick from an airplane at approximately 2,000 meters.

Kammerichs' relationship with Japan began almost 20 years ago. During his first large art exhibition at the Dusseldorf Art Hall, a Japanese visitor approached him and said she had seen similar works of art in Japan.

"This is not such a good thing for an artist to hear."

Kammerichs immediately got in touch with a German contact in Japan who put him in touch with Japanese artist Shigeo Fukuda. "I got his catalogue," explains Kammerichs, "and liked it and felt that we were thinking in the same way but, thank goodness, with different results." The two artists have worked closely ever since.

Kammerichs has been plagued throughout his career by some art critics who seemingly ignore the variety of levels of understanding that Kammerichs work

offers. "There is a general feeling," insists Kammerichs, "that in terms of art journalism, if anybody is able to understand what someone is doing, it can't be good. So this is my life-long problem. I am a little bit angry that many of the professionals working for art magazines and many of the museum people are a little arrogant."

Recalling an early meeting with the Gifu Prefectural Government, commissioners of the model in Nanno-cho, Kammerichs remembers his

inspiration for the piece. "All of a sudden I said dragon, but I didn't know what I would do and so went away and thought about it."

The model itself is actually two dragons, a meeting of East and West. "I like simple, clear things," he continues, "which gives me problems with the museum people, but my sculpture is the impact of the traditional Eastern dragon and the Western fantasy/computerized dragon, and there is a special point where they meet."

Situated at the confluence of the Ibi, Nagara and Kiso rivers and placed in the open mountain air, Kammerichs hopes his dragon will attract a lot of attention. He also encourages a hands-on experience: "I climbed today to the absolute top," he laughs. "And I think if I can climb on the head then children can too...if they have the endurance."

Kammerichs' sculptures are extremely difficult to explain in words, and a visit to one of them can occupy the viewer for hours. The simplicity referred to by some of Kammerichs' critics is not the whole story, and listening to the person who deals with the phenomenon of perception himself, creating each new model is no easy option. "I like this spiritual idea that you are working on something which is a step more abstract," enthuses Kammerichs, "that you have an idea and the rest is just a block of complications."