

Tale of the Exploding Jizo
by Janet Selby

I made my first Jizo statue a few years ago, before I began sculpture classes at Tom Bass's sculpture school, and before I knew anything about Buddhist iconography or symbols, or characters. I had seen Jizos before when I visited Japan and loved the statues I had seen there in the street – an everyday part of the landscape.

I had just begun regular sitting at the Zendo which had clarified and aligned my ideals and lifestyle with Buddhism, so making the Jizo was a natural expression of my mood at the time.

I wanted it to be strong and enduring, so I made the model out of clay intending it to be fired. The face emerged gently smiling, with kind eyes and long ears. I made it hollow and not too thick, or it might explode in the kiln. Then I took it to the local hobby ceramics factory to get it fired, as I had done in the past with other projects. Yet when I returned a few days later to pick it up, the kiln person handed me a shoe box and said "There's been an accident". Inside the box was the fired Jizo – in pieces!

It had exploded in the kiln due to an air bubble, or varying thickness, or any number of reasons. The kiln person was so sad. It was nobody's fault. And, as I consequently found out, nothing is irreparable.

Luckily, the head was whole and the hands were still in gassho, but the shoulder was splayed and the body scattered in myriad slivers of robe.

When I got home. I laid out the pieces. This was a 3-d jigsaw puzzle, which nobody had ever solved before! Using a strong adhesive I patiently worked piece by piece. Finally the Jizo emerged once again whole and complete.

Cracks of experience now show throughout the figure, yet he holds his hands in gassho, expressing gratitude for this life.

*This life,
Just now,
Smiling.*

Janet Selby
March 2004