



Bring it on!

I don't write too often about my printmaking work when doing the stories for this weekly series. As you can well imagine, if I were to focus exclusively on that part of my life, these stories would soon become very boring - "Oh, another story about printmaking!" So although it does get mentioned now and then, and regular readers are certainly aware what I do for a living, I try to keep my work in the background for the most part. This week though, it is going to step right up, front and center!

I have just finished reading my morning newspaper, sitting with a cup of mild coffee at hand, browsing through the day's news. In the paper I noticed a story that forced me to ask an interesting question about my life and work. The story didn't mention printmaking; it was about violin making in Italy. Here's a short quote: *"The market for violin-making in Cremona appears today to be saturated. With 120 workshops, ... this town of 70,000 can take no more new entrants. Yet students from all over the world ... keep pouring in to learn Stradivari's art."*

So there we have an example of an old European tradition that is obviously in no danger of dying out - quite the reverse; a great many young people are interested in working in the field. I was curious to follow this 'thread', so I did an internet search for other examples of old traditions being either maintained or being brought back to life. What I found surprised and even shocked me. Let me list a few examples for you, pretty much at random.

Interested in renaissance musical instruments? There are hundreds of people reproducing them. Interested in medieval clothing? Dozens of people are making and selling it. Early tools? Again, dozens of people are making them, everything from old chisels and planes, right back to stone axes.

How about food ... would you like to taste stone age food? No problem; there are people specializing in reproducing prehistoric menus and food. Paintings? There are so many listings of people making authentic reproductions of paintings that I can't even scroll through them all.

Anything and everything that I can think of is represented by at least some listings; maintenance of old traditions is a giant business these days, all over the world. In pretty much every possible field, there are many people involved in bringing it back to life, and in keeping it alive.

You know what I'm going to say next, don't you! Yes, there is one particular field that has gathered almost no attention whatsoever, the reproduction - using original techniques - of Japanese woodblock prints. As far as I can discover, there seems to be only one foreigner in the world interested in coming to Japan to do this!

An especially puzzling point is that other parts of Japanese culture gather a huge amount of interest from young people from other countries. Japan is a huge 'magnet' for people from all over the world who want to study older traditions. They are learning shamisen, biwa, traditional dance, rakugo, boatbuilding, carpentry, and of course every type of martial art. But not traditional printmaking.

I suppose I shouldn't complain; after all, this means I have no competition. How would I like it if we had a situation like Cremona, *"... students from all over the world pouring in ..."* Well, I think I would like that a lot; for one thing it would mean I would no longer have to worry about getting supplies! And as for 'competition', I think strong competition would inspire me to keep improving as much as I could.

C'mon kids ... where are you? Bring it on!

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