



Another Turn of the Wheel

So here we are, almost at the end of another year. Tomorrow is New Year's Eve, and then the day after, we get our annual chance at a 'fresh start'. Being the end of a year though, it's always interesting for me to take a look back at the past 12 months, and do a kind of survey of what I have accomplished during that time.

For many people in society it is difficult for them to get an accurate measure of their accomplishments; most company workers for example, cannot easily 'see' what they have done during the year. The company might be successful, but how much part did they themselves play in that success? In my case though, it's actually very easy to take an inventory of the year's work - I could actually stack it up on the desk in front of me!

Setting aside such intangible things as time with family and friends, let's simply have a look at this year's 'stack' of work done ...

The main part of my job is of course making woodblock prints. The production this year has not been large in quantity compared with past years. In the early part of the year, I produced about 80 copies of the complicated scroll print. After a period of planning, I then began production of the prints in my new 'My Solitudes' series, and to date, three of them have been completed, in editions of 200 copies each. Just this past week, I wrapped up printing work on the new year cards that are currently in the mail, nearly 300 of them. In addition to these new prints, I produced additional editions of some of my older prints, for sale through my Mokuhankan publishing venture.

So down in my riverside workroom I made around 1,200 prints this year, ranging from small postcard prints up to the very complex original prints and the large scrolls. That's a nice pile of carving and printing work!

But of course, I have a work desk upstairs too, and a lot gets done there; the My Solitudes prints are combined with chapters of a book, and three of those came off my 'press' this year, at 10,000 words each. (I also did the actual printing out and folding of every sheet of every copy of the books myself, before sending them to a part-time worker for sewing together.)

I wrote, produced and printed another four issues of my Hyakunin Issho newsletter this year, its 18th year of continuous publication.

My collection of internet websites grew a great deal over the course of the year. A new site had to be created for the Solitudes series, and - as part of my responsibility to pass on as much printmaking knowledge as I possibly can - nearly every stage of production of the recent prints has been documented there, involving a huge amount of work.

And of course, always on schedule, A Story A Week has marched along all year. 52 new stories were written, recorded and published - and not just on the Story A Week website, but in both physical books and eBook versions.

Speaking of eBooks reminds me that I also published another volume in my ongoing series of eBook versions of previously out-of-print books on traditional woodblock printmaking. People all over the world are reading these to learn more about printmaking!

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As for more 'public' activities, this was an unusual year in that I made no TV appearances at all. I got a good radio interview, a few newspaper stories, and a selection of magazine feature articles though, to make up for it! And of course, speaking of publicity, I held a week-long exhibition back in January, the annual event that sucks up a huge amount of time ... and money ...

Ah yes ... money. The close of another year brings with it the close of the current set of books for my business accounting - a year's worth of invoices, receipts, ledgers, etc. etc. This alone makes a huge pile of paper, and I would never be able to get it all done without my computerized bookkeeping system. But there it all is, now ready to be sent off to my accountant ... neatly tabulated and totalled.

And that total is ... zero. Once again this year, as with every year recently, there is absolutely nothing left in the bank. The production expenses of all these projects are so high, that just nothing is left at the end of it all.

But for production of beautiful prints and interesting books, it has been a busy time, and I suppose - thinking of the long term - that is more important than the money. It's been another good year of work ...

See you next year ... next week!

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