



If the Shoe Fits ...

I have just had my yearly print exhibition - a week-long show at a Tokyo gallery, where I displayed the new work completed over the previous year. One of the main reasons for having these annual exhibitions is to spend a bit of time with people who are collecting my work. Quite a number of the collectors take the opportunity to come down for a visit; they've already got the newest prints, so nothing in the show is new to them, but this is their only chance to sit and talk with me. It's frequently a bit difficult for me to recognize some of these collectors when they come in the door; after all, I only see them for a few minutes a year, so may not recall their face, but they never have any trouble recognizing me!

There is though, another reason for holding exhibitions, and of course that is to sell prints. Much as I like making them, if nobody decided to buy any, I wouldn't be able to continue my life as a printmaker. So there are order forms placed here and there in the gallery, and I am always happy when somebody decides they would like to purchase some of the things they have seen on display.

These days, woodblock prints are not an item that most people have in their home. Back in the Edo period many people owned prints - perhaps a picture of a favourite kabuki actor, or a novel illustrated by Hokusai - but they are not common at all nowadays. And that reminds me of the famous old story about the two shoe salesmen who went to a tropical island looking for business. They got off the boat and walked down the main street of the town carrying their sample cases, and as they walked along, they noticed that the people of this island were all barefoot. They each rushed to a telephone to call their head office. One spoke gloomily to his manager, "I'm coming home right away; the people here don't wear shoes." But the other one shouted excitedly into his telephone, "Send me more samples as fast as you can! Nobody on this whole island has any shoes yet!"

Which approach do you think I should take with selling my woodblock prints? As far as prints go in our modern society, pretty much everybody is 'barefoot'. So should I forget it, assuming that nobody really wants them, or should I take the viewpoint of the second salesman - that once people see them, and learn more about them, they will be eager to have some? I'm sure you can guess my answer!

Hearing this story, perhaps you are now worried about coming to one of my exhibitions; you might be thinking that if you come in the door, I will make strong efforts to sell you something! Well, you have nothing to worry about; I never put pressure on people to buy prints, and there is a simple rule in the gallery - I never ask anybody if they would like to buy anything; the prints are there, the ordering information is there, but other than that, I do no 'selling'. No, you are safe; if you come into the gallery barefoot, you have every chance to walk out the same way ...

But be warned, some of my 'shoes' are so beautiful!

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>