



Accounting for Time

Have you ever wondered about the relationship between the time it takes to 'make' something, and the time it takes to 'use' it? It is interesting to think about this, and whether or not this balance is important.

The other day I was over at Sadako's place. We had been out somewhere together, and as it happened were headed back to her home just at midday, so she offered to prepare lunch for the two of us. I didn't check the time as we came in the door, so I can't give you an exact figure here, but I guess it took her around ten minutes to create a nice 'quick' lunch for us, raiding her fridge for ingredients, then preparing a sauté and a salad. We sat peacefully for at least a half-hour enjoying the meal.

Ten minutes - by one person - in preparation, resulting in 30 minutes - times two - of enjoyment. That seems like a pretty good use of time! (Don't ask what the ratio would be like if it had been me doing the cooking!)

It is when I am buried in a particularly complex carving job for my printmaking that I end up thinking about this topic. The block I am working on the past couple of days is a good example; it is covered with areas of fine detail, which take many hours to carve. The complete set of blocks for this print will perhaps take me between three and four weeks to carve, and once they are ready, I will begin printing, spending around six weeks producing the 200 copies of this print that I intend to make. When you include the earlier time I spent on the design, I guess it will add up to around three months of work all told.

What happens though, at the other end, when the collector opens the package? He certainly doesn't spend three months in intense scrutiny of the print, does he! He will study it - if I am lucky - for a few minutes I guess, and in years to come will occasionally open the package and take another look now and then. But even if you were to multiply this by 200 (for all the collectors), I rather doubt that the 'enjoying' time adds up to as much as the 'making' time.

I see a similar imbalance at my exhibitions, when I observe people moving along the row of prints on display, sometimes not even stopping the motion of their feet! A 'making' time of months, resulting in a 'consuming' time of seconds!

There is a huge contrast between this printmaking and the work of, say, a computer programmer. When I created a computer program for handling the paperwork of my business, I spent a couple of months of evenings on it, perhaps around a hundred hours. But since then, it has saved me much more time than that - and it looks to continue to do so for many years to come.

And that seems to be the key. To make this into a 'fair question', one has to think about the future. Just this morning, for example, I was listening to some Mozart on the radio; more than 200 years after he spent time writing that music, many people are still enjoying many hours listening to it. So yes, it does balance eventually ...

For a Mozart!

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