



## Basket Case (II)

I get occasional visits from some of the people who are collecting my prints. As I have an exhibition only once a year (usually) I don't have many opportunities to meet the collectors, so whenever one of them asks "May I drop by for a short visit?" I of course agree to the request. A young man from Australia came by recently; he has been collecting my work for a few years, and has visited once before - we enjoyed good discussions about many things, among which was the place and function of the craftsman in contemporary society.

When he arrived at my home this time, he was carrying a shopping bag. For a moment I was afraid he was bringing something for me, but this turned out not to be the case; simply he had made another stop before coming to my place, and this was his shopping. But he thought I would be interested in seeing what he had purchased, so he opened the bag and showed me what was inside.

It was a basket. At least, he said it was a basket, but I would never have recognized it as such. It was a tangle of dried vines, forming a lumpy, roughly circular shape. He put it on the table, and mentioned that he would be using it at home to hold fruit. He then explained to me that this was an art object by a quite renowned craftsman, and that he had been looking forward to acquiring one for quite some time. He pointed to a book up on one of my shelves - a glossy 'coffee table' book on Japanese crafts - and when we looked inside, I found that this exact basket design was indeed featured there; it is apparently quite well known.

You can perhaps guess where our conversation then turned; he asked me whether or not I could guess how much this basket had cost. I couldn't even try, and he mentioned that it was 60,000 yen. This is exactly the same price that he paid me a few years ago for one of my Surimono Albums print sets - ten highly complex woodblock prints, bound into an album.

Now don't misunderstand. This story is not about how people pay a 'ridiculous' price for a tangle of akebia vines, when they could get ten wonderful prints for the same price. When you think about the economics involved - I was able to produce 200 of those albums during the course of the year, but I suspect the basket weaver would not be able to produce so many of these baskets over the same time period - there is probably no contradiction.

For me, this basket means nothing, and I wouldn't consider such a purchase to be 'worth it' at all. But of course, other people have different views, and that craftsman perhaps makes a very good living, perhaps indeed is quite famous. Both of us, the basket weaver and myself, are very happy that there exist such people as this collector, with both the desire, and the means, to make such objects part of their daily life.

We have an expression in Japanese - 'ju nin to iro' - which is perhaps applicable to this situation. 'Ten people, ten colours', which in English might be most simply expressed as 'To each his own.'

But I still maintain - as I look at the photograph of that basket in the book - that I much prefer the woodblock printed colours!