



Darwin and Me

Do you remember - a couple of months back - that I wrote about how I am sometimes a bit 'paralyzed' when faced with a project to do, because I have trouble deciding on the best way to proceed with it? Well, I hope you do, because today I can report that I have recently managed to make significant progress on overcoming that handicap!

For years, I have been planning to write an instruction book on traditional Japanese printmaking. On my website I have had the outline of an 'Encyclopedia' of the craft in place for more than ten years, but have only managed to fill in a very small portion of the content.

There are so many decisions to be made! Should the information be presented in a nice fat printed book, or should it be a set of DVDs? Should I perhaps just expand the work I have done so far on the website? Which way to go ... which way to go? There is of course, no single 'best' answer to all the questions, but the difficulty in deciding which way to go, exacerbated by the vast scale of the project, has resulted in no progress at all being made in recent years.

How then, can this instruction book ever become reality? I am not getting any younger, and although I am quite healthy, I will presumably lose energy steadily as I gradually get older; a project like this will never get any easier! But a couple of months ago, in frustration over my lack of progress, I started to think about how I could get the project moving again. And I had a good idea. Instead of trying to climb the huge mountain of an 'Encyclopedia' that I have been visualizing, I would start with a smaller project, putting together a simple and concise framework of information that would guide a beginner through a first simple print. Perhaps later on, using that as a 'base', I would issue supplementary volumes that would expand and build on the techniques outlined in this first one, but I wouldn't think about that at this point. I would just focus on a reachable goal, and leave the 'dreams' for later.

So that is what I decided to do. And by setting down that strict limit - to stick to the basic information necessary to get through one's first print - I managed to actually get it finished. Not only finished, but published. And not only published, but out and on the market. I wrote last week about having to make daily visits to the Post Office recently to deliver packages - well, it isn't just the Gift Prints filling my backpack, there are always copies of my new book flying out too!

I've been using the word 'book', but for those readers who haven't yet seen it, I should mention that this is an eBook - it doesn't exist on paper, but in a form that is read on a computer screen. Those packages I mail out contain discs, not 'volumes'. I was chatting by internet video with a friend in England the other day, and he was very disappointed when he heard that I had no plans to produce an actual printed version. I understand his feeling - I too am a book-lover from way back - but I have a pretty clear vision of a new way of presenting information that is becoming possible ... an 'amalgam' of text, illustration, video and audio.

My new book not only explains, it illustrates and demonstrates - something that is simply not possible with traditional publishing methods. And as for my friend's complaint that eBook readers are neither comfortable, nor cheap, nor practical, nor useful, I simply have to ask him to wait a bit. Technology in this field is advancing at an astonishing pace, and it will not be long at all before we have available electronic 'tablets' of such sophistication that even hard-core bibliophiles such as myself will find them irresistible, and yes ... even essential.

The 'book' - an object that has served us very well over the past few centuries - is about to take a major evolutionary step, and I intend to be part of it!

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