



... the Best of Times ...

Already, we've come to the end of yet another year of 'A Story A Week', as incredible as it may seem (to me at least!) I won't bore you with chat about 'how quickly' the years are flying by; if you don't yet understand that, then nothing I can say about it will have any meaning for you, and if you are at a stage of life where you understand it all too well, then nothing I can say about it will *interest* you!

I'm not sure how to characterize this year that is now coming to a close. For me business-wise it has been a very difficult year, as you may well imagine, with our newspapers having been full of news about the global financial crisis every day. But you know, I have to say that I'm not ready to blame 'the system' for the fact that sales of my prints have been low in recent years. Of course in times of economic difficulty, there will be fewer people with the resources available for purchasing woodblock prints, so this recession does have an impact, but my own feeling is that my current financial situation is the normal result to be expected from the business decisions I have made.

A few years back, I took on the very difficult project of making a large scroll print, even though I thought it might be a 'tough sell' in the market. I was right; it was. And then, without waiting for my finances to recover, I immediately took on the long three-year 'My Solitudes' project of original prints, something that I knew was also not going to be easy to sell. I was right about that too!

My point is that my current situation is - for the most part - self-inflicted; I could have taken an easier route by producing print sets that would have been more 'popular'. Just why I didn't do that isn't quite clear, even to myself. My stated motivation when beginning both of those projects - that I wanted a good solid challenge in my work - is certainly true, but wouldn't it have been a matter of common sense to temper the challenge with a dash of practicality, and think about 'the market' too?

The problem though, is that there really is no easily discernable 'in between', and in truth, all my print projects *have* tried to balance the two factors: providing an interesting challenge and finding a place in the market. In recent years, I have perhaps pushed a bit too far in one direction though, and next spring when I announce my next project, I am clearly going to have to find a better 'happy medium'.

Perhaps you have heard that famous quote about one's appearance: "Nature gives you the face you have at twenty, but at fifty you get the face you deserve." I very much think this is true, and I think it has a wider applicability too. Barring outside factors completely beyond our control (a major accident, or the onset of a severe disease), I think that by the time one gets to my age (I am now 58), the way you are living is pretty much the way that you *want* to live, whether you consciously realize this or not.

Do I mean to say that I *want* to live in a tight economic situation, in a house cold in winter, with no savings and no pension? Well, when you put it like that, I would have to answer 'no', but these things are just part of the overall picture. I have not so much chosen them, as *rejected the alternative*. Apparently, it is somehow important for me to avoid the 'safe and secure' life that I enjoyed once upon a time as a company employee. Do I understand why? No. Does this bother me? Not at all. I am now pretty much happy with who I am, even though I certainly don't 'understand' myself all that well.

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On his website an internet acquaintance of mine, printmaker Andy English, wrote this about himself: "*I dream my dreams and stagger contentedly through life,*" and I like that; I like it a lot. And lest you feel that this perhaps gives an impression of a person who is just sitting, watching, and doing nothing as life passes by, I can assure you that this is not the case. Both he and I can do the same thing - turn around from time to time and marvel at what we see behind us: a 'trail' of solid accomplishment ... books written, prints printed, lessons taught, and lessons learned.

Yes, it has been yet another very good year!

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