



Do Not Fold ...

These little stories of mine are generally written down at least a couple of weeks in advance of the publication day for each one. That gives time for them to 'sit' a bit, so when I come back to do some editing, it's a bit easier to identify the places where my thoughts are not so clear, or where there are outright errors. (And of course, it gives Sadako some time to help with preparing the 'roll-over' vocabulary guidance for Japanese readers.)

But when my printmaking work gets backed-up and time starts to get tight, there isn't always the luxury of having a long preparation period, and so it is this week. Publication time is just about twelve hours from now, and ... here I am, sitting down to write this one!

One of the reasons for time being short the past couple of days, is my dependence on a 'labour-saving' device I have here in my workshop. Eh? A machine to help me with my printmaking?

No no ... it's a machine all right, but nothing to do with the printmaking - it's a paper folder, and I use it for such jobs as folding the pages of the newsletter and other various printed things that I need to send out. This weekend it is being used to fold a little flyer for publicizing the upcoming exhibition. When I ordered these flyers from a printing company I didn't purchase the 'tri-fold' option that they have available, as that was a bit expensive, and - because I have my own paper folding machine here - it wasn't necessary. I planned to simply load up my machine, make the proper size settings, then just punch the Start button and stand back while it did the job.

Nice idea.

When I started though, the first few sheets jammed. I made adjustments, but it still refused to operate smoothly. I tried this and tried that, but just couldn't get it to work. Looking at the manual, I discovered why - I had ordered these flyers on a nice thick paper, to give them a 'solid' feel in peoples' hands, but this machine is only rated to work on paper somewhat thinner than what I had purchased. It wasn't going to work.

So during every spare minute during the past few days I have been standing there running the sheets through this machine one by one, using its 'manual feed' option. Some of them get crunched, but most of them do manage to get through to the other end, although it is taking a long long time.

It's an interesting comparison with the other work that I am doing this weekend - printing some of the colours on my current woodblock print, the Seacoast in Spring. That work too, requires a very high level of 'tolerance' between the parts: the soft damp paper has to be lifted from the stack, placed with exquisite registration on the block, then rubbed with 'just right' pressure to make the transfer of pigment from wood to sheet. At least that's how it is supposed to work, but there are many inconsistencies: the sheets of paper vary slightly in thickness from one to the next, the cover of my baren changes as it wears down during the morning's work, the condition of the wood changes as it builds up moisture, and even my own ability to concentrate varies at different stages of the long and repetitive process.

But unlike the paper folding machine, which simply 'crashes' when faced with an input that exceeds its designed specification, this human printing machine is pretty good at handling the constantly varying inputs,

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making sub-conscious adjustments constantly as the process moves forward. If you had been watching me print this morning, and had taken a mental snapshot of how I did the first sheet in the stack, for comparison with the final sheet a few hours later, you would almost certainly have seen a very different series of motions.

So these machines are all very well, as long as things go exactly according to plan. But I think that our own ability to be flexible and 're-program' ourselves as necessary, will give us the edge for quite some time to come!

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