



Friends, Customers, Collectors!

It's Sunday morning here in Tokyo, and in a few minutes (literally!) I'll be heading out the door to take the train downtown for the final day of this year's exhibition. This is my 20th show in Tokyo, and is the first one that is being held in a Ginza gallery. I had the first few exhibitions in a very small local gallery, then used a very nice one in Shinjuku for a number of years, until it closed, forcing me to search elsewhere. After a few times exhibiting in Yurakucho, I decided to finally 'take the plunge' and hold this year's show right in the heart of Tokyo's main gallery district.

It has been a very interesting experience. None of the galleries that I have previously used opened directly onto the street; they were 'hidden' inside larger buildings. So this is the first time that I have been able to see the stream of people passing by back and forth. Now a woodblock print exhibition is not a very exciting 'attraction', so of course far and away most of the passers-by do just that - they pass by.

At first, I enjoyed standing in the front window watching the people go by, but as nobody ever came in while I was standing there, I started to think that perhaps it would be better if I stayed in the back of the room, out of sight. But it doesn't make much of a difference; not one in a hundred - far less actually - even so much as turns towards the windows to see what is there.

But although the exhibition hasn't proved to be a big 'draw' for the general public, it has still been quite busy. Many of the collectors and fans of my work make it a habit to drop by my exhibitions whenever they can; it's really the only chance we have to see each other and kind of 'catch up'. Because I regularly send out a newsletter, the collectors always know pretty much what I am up to, but of course I have no reciprocal knowledge of *their* activities.

What kind of things do I learn? Much of it is just casual 'news': Akemi-san gave me an update on where her daughters are at in school, Tomomi-san told me that she has gone back to university to get certification as a language teacher, and yesterday I heard about the rock climbing activities in the Yoshizawa family for the first time! Sometimes the news is more serious, as it was yesterday afternoon when I learned of the recent passing of one of the printers in the traditional craftsmen's association.

The guests and I end up talking about anything and everything ... except woodblock prints! That's a bit of an exaggeration of course, as most of them do ask some questions about the prints they have received, and I am always eager to hear their impressions of the work. As you might guess though, I never hear anything negative in such comments; everybody is far too polite for that. If I want good solid criticism, this isn't the place for me to find it!

The gallery floor is also the place where some of the collectors decide to let me know that they would like to continue collecting, by telling me "The plan for the next series looks interesting; please continue sending us the prints." I am of course very happy when they do, and not just because I am getting an order for prints. In my eyes, a 'repeat customer' is far more gratifying than a new one. These people have 'tried it', they 'like it', and they want more. So when I send out those prints I *know* they are going to a good home. For someone in my line of work, it doesn't get any better than that.

But now I have to run for the train, for the final day of this fun - trying to remember names and faces as people stroll in the door, and then getting reacquainted with these people who are feeding me!

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