



Hear Me Roar!

Given that I spend most of my days peacefully by myself in the workshop, 'exhibition week' provides so many experiences that I am sure I could write a full year's worth of stories from them! I think that would start to get a bit boring for the readers though, so we'll just have one more, before letting it go for another year.

I mentioned last week that this was the first time being in a street-level gallery, and also the first time in the Ginza. So you can believe that I did a lot of people-watching from the large front window. The street onto which the gallery fronts is one of the quite narrow 'back streets' of the Ginza (there is no way that I could possibly afford to be on the main front street), and the building on the other side is a large modern one, which means - of course - that it has a long blank wall broken only by the entrance doors. The replacement of vibrant shopping streets with faceless large buildings is something that I think is a huge mistake of contemporary urban planners. I think property developers should be forced to preserve a 'human' scale along the street instead of leaving nothing visible but a barren canyon, down which the wind usually blows harshly.

When I first checked this gallery though, I thought that having the 'blank' large building directly in front might benefit me, as people walking by would naturally look towards the 'interesting' side of the street, rather than at the bare wall. Unfortunately this wasn't what happened. It turns out that the shop inside that building - a famous New York department store - is very well-known, and *this* was the destination of most of the people who came into view. They simply headed straight for the store entrance, looking neither left or right, and disappeared inside.

That large building has an underground parking garage attached, and the entrance/exit for this was visible from my door. During the course of the exhibition, I learned a great deal about cars that I didn't know before. This was a great education for me! For example, I learned that Mercedes S-class cars come in two versions, normal and 'long' (although they confusingly have the same numbers on the vehicle itself). All week I watched the parking lot attendants scramble madly to wave off a 'long' type each time one pulled into the entranceway, as these do not fit their lift system.

I learned that most modern luxury cars are very low slung, under the 1.55 meter limit imposed by this garage, but many less expensive cars are over that limit and thus excluded, which is a kind of interesting method of social 'stratification'. I also learned that the kind of people who drive a Bentley will think nothing of leaving their car (which is too large for the garage) parked on the street for hours directly blocking all view of a small gallery where a woodblock print exhibition is being held.

But the most interesting thing about expensive cars that I learned was the sound of a Porsche Carrera. The first time one of these came down the street into the parking facility, I thought perhaps there was something wrong with it - such a strange noise! It sounded like something inside the engine was being torn apart! But after hearing the same sound a number of times I came to realize that this was the 'normal' sound of that car. Towards the end of my week, I got to the point where I would hear the sound in the distance as one of them turned into our street, and then a few seconds later it would come into view, confirming my guess.

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That parking facility is completely automatic - people drive onto a platform, and leave their car to be 'swallowed' by the automated system as they head into the store. A couple of hours later they emerge, arms full of shopping bags. The attendant punches a button, their car is brought up from the depths, and after dumping all their bags into the trunk or the back seat, off they go.

I watched this go on all day every day all week long. Lexus, Mercedes, Audi, BMW, Porsche, Jaguar, and many others I couldn't recognize, all passed in front of my window in a steady stream.

My own customers, without exception I think, walked up to the gallery from the nearby subway station.

I don't think I'll be going back to the Ginza next time.

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