



That's Mine!

A few weeks back I mentioned in the weekly story that I had 'opened up' my workroom a bit and was training a new printer to work here together with me. That project has been progressing quite well, if slowly, and I suspect that this change will not only have an effect on my printmaking work, it will be a rich source of topics for Story A Week too!

One of the major things that Tsushima-san (the new printer) and I are wrestling with is how to share the printing tools. In the case of an established printmaking workshop, there are two rough categories of tools - 'shop tools' that are available for any of the workers to use, and personal tools kept by each worker, which other craftsmen would never touch. In the first category would fall such things as special large (and expensive) brushes that are not often needed, while the second type would include each printer's personal baren, which are made and adjusted to each person's particular tastes.

As my entire printmaking experience has been in a 'one-man' shop, *all* the tools here are mine alone, are prepared to my own style of working, and are stored in a way that is convenient to me. Sometimes in the past I have had visits from other printmakers, and have shown them my tools, but none of them would ever think of reaching out and picking up a baren without my permission. And when I am visiting another workshop, I would never touch the tools unbidden.

Tsushima-san has of course come here completely empty-handed, and as it is still far from clear that she will be making a career out of this, it does not make any sense to force her to purchase her own set of tools at this point. So she is sharing mine. The first few days, she had no idea which ones to use, so I placed them on her bench as required. But she has learned quickly, and we are now in a situation where I will be sitting at my bench working, and she will open my baren drawer, pick out the one she needs, and begin using it.

Now I certainly cannot complain about this, because the whole thing is happening at my instigation (and for my future benefit), but it is sometimes not all that comfortable! Imagine somebody in your house going through your closet and drawers and selecting which of your clothes they will wear! And what is worse, using them for a while and then simply putting them back in place!

For of course she has no experience at all yet of how to properly care for the tools; we have not yet begun the 'lessons' on such things as re-covering the baren, or properly washing and softening the brushes.

Well, it can't be helped. And I have already begun to rectify this situation. After seeing how quickly she progressed during her first couple of weeks, I phoned Goto-san the baren maker and put in an order for one to be made for her. And yesterday I dug out a box of brushes that were donated to the workshop some years back by the widow of one of my collectors, who had been a printmaker - an amateur actually, but an amateur with good taste, who had purchased professional level tools. She and I will select some from this collection, and begin the process of teaching her how to care for them properly.

And I can smile to myself and think about what will probably happen some months from now, when the next new printer-trainer arrives here to begin work. Tsushima-san will learn how it feels to have somebody reach over and grab one of her tools ...

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