



The Arts of Conversation

Today's story is about inspiration. Or perhaps it's about serendipity. I'm not sure which of those two will feature more prominently!

As my 'Mystique of the Japanese Print' series drew closer to its final stages, I began to think about what sort of prints I should make next. Many factors come into play in making this sort of decision, including general feedback I receive from collectors, a consideration of economic factors, and of course my own printmaking interests. By the time I began work on the last print in the Mystique set, I had narrowed my choices down to a couple of options, and a couple of weeks later, I had basically decided what to do.

When I discussed my new idea with some people around me though - Sadako, my family, and some of the collectors - I found that nobody was really enthusiastic about it. The general feeling was that it seemed 'OK', but nothing special. So I refrained from making any public announcement about what I would do next, and continued to mull things over.

I had been doing just that - thinking about the new series - while riding my bike home from shopping one day a couple of weeks ago, when I was 'interrupted' by the sight of somebody I knew. K-san, one of my long-time collectors - and I do mean long-time ... more than 20 years! - lives in that area, and when I saw her walking along, bundled up in winter clothes and with the ubiquitous white mask on her face, I immediately jammed on my brakes, jumped off the bike, and greeted her.

"Hello! How are you! Are you on the way back from the Post Office?" (this was nearby ...)

She seemed a bit taken aback, but replied in the affirmative. I pressed on, asking if she was OK in this flu season (she was), if she was busy (she was), and expressing interest in the musical instrument case she was carrying. I knew from the shape that this was the instrument known as a Taisho Koto, which is a simplified version of the traditional koto, commonly played by ladies of her generation. I hadn't know that she played it.

And this is where our conversation derailed. As she replied, she adjusted her mask, and I realized with a shock that I had made a big mistake. This wasn't K-san, but was another elderly lady of similar appearance! I had kind of 'assaulted' this random lady on the street, and she had replied to my inquiries with as much courtesy as possible, even though she didn't know me from Adam!

I of course apologized profusely, bowing as I did so, and she smiled back gamely, bowing and apologizing herself. I then got back on my bike, and rode off towards my home.

Now of course there was no damage done, and I simply laughed at myself as I rode along, "You idiot, Dave! You're lucky she didn't bop you with her instrument case!"

And then ... thinking of the koto, and of K-san, who is a calligraphy teacher, the idea suddenly came into my mind that these things could perhaps be brought together in some way for my next project. One thought quickly followed another, and in the short space of a few seconds, I had it. The theme of my new series could be 'Japanese Arts'. What a rich and deep vein this would be to mine for a couple of years: calligraphy,

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sculpture, architecture, painting, pottery ... the list just goes on and on and on. I could select images that not only depicted each of these topics, but perhaps even educated the collectors too ...

By the time I got home, it was set, decided, done, cooked. I headed straight for the computer, ran up a quick mockup of a website to announce the project, and sent it off to a few people for their reaction. Jackpot! This time they responded with enthusiasm - the enthusiasm that had been completely missing from my earlier proposals.

So here we are. The series is now pretty much planned, the website is done, and we're ready to open this up. Today's 'A Story A Week' readers are the first to hear the public announcement of this new project. Please head over to [the new site](#), which opened just a few minutes ago, and take a look!

And a big 'thank you' to the lady on the street ... I'd like to thank her more formally, but I think that if I see her again, I had better just ride past in silence!

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