



## Just so!

Today's little episode is something that happened a few years back at a small local exhibition I was part of. One of the commercial promotion organizations - perhaps it was the chamber of commerce - had arranged for a group of artists/craftspeople from the community to have a kind of display event in a small hall made available for our use by a local company. There were about a half-dozen of us included: myself the print-maker, a copper sculptor, a potter, a furniture maker, and a group of students from the arts department of a nearby university.

We were all assigned spaces around the room in which we set up our displays, and as the 'crowds' really weren't worthy of that name, we mostly spend the weekend sitting around chatting with each other, and getting re-acquainted. (We don't have all that many opportunities to see each other, so the chance was quite welcome.)

The furniture maker had been given the wide space in the center of the hall in which to set up his fairly large items, and one of these was a long low table made from a single large slab, cut from I think perhaps a *keyaki* (zelkova) tree. This became a kind of 'gathering place' for us; he hadn't brought enough chairs for everybody, but a few sat down at the table itself, and the others stood around.

At one point, somebody in the group had an idea. He walked over to the pottery table, selected a very small little vase, and returned and placed it 'just so' at one place on the large slab. Everybody murmured approval. The appearance of the table had been greatly improved.

I couldn't resist trying my hand at this too. I went to the fabric corner set up by the students, came back with a small scrap of cloth, and placed it under the pottery item, angled also 'just so'.

Applause!

He picked up the challenge, and began looking around the room. Now at this point I have to admit that because this was some years ago, I can no longer remember exactly what 'hands' the two of us played as the game progressed. A small tangerine - with a perfect green leaf - appeared at one point, a counterbalancing object was placed far down at the other end of the table, and so on and so forth. Each and every time, the overall appearance of the 'display' was clearly improved.

I do remember one of my 'moves'. Rather than place yet another object into the arrangement, I pondered the table for a moment, then reached out and *removed* something I had placed earlier. Again, the appearance was improved, and again - applause.

It was huge fun, and I have to admit that I think the episode helped me establish some 'cred' in our little community. These people have the impression that 'the Japanese' are a people with a fairly advanced aesthetic sensibility, and for me to be able to play this game at their level did raise my estimation in their eyes.

So how did it end? The game simply dissolved quietly when a group of visitors came into the hall, and we had to scatter back to our respective stations. But perhaps the ending that I have re-played in my own mind many times over is more satisfactory. My opponent became gradually more desperate in his attempts to keep

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up with my masterly moves, and finally, after I had played an absolute masterstroke (excuse me, but memory fails and I can no longer remember exactly what this was ...) he bowed his head in defeat, and resigned. The crowd - now numbering many dozens of entranced onlookers - broke into sustained applause, and I took a deep bow.

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