



Fit to Print

Most days, I try and spend at least a few minutes with my morning newspaper. A few years ago, when my work was not demanding quite as much of my time as it currently does, this was more than a few minutes; I generally read it through quite carefully, reading even items that were merely of passing interest. But these days I frequently do no more than glance at the headlines, and it is a rare story that pulls me in to read in its entirety.

We are of course now coming to the end of the era when the newspaper exists as a physical object delivered to our door every morning. Like most people these days, I get most of my news and information from the internet, and am pretty much ready to end my subscription to my local paper. I only keep it up as a kind of support for an organization that has helped me with my printmaking endeavours quite a lot over the years, but there are limits to how long I can continue with such a sentimental gesture.

The fact that most news transmission is now global rather than local has affected my work a lot, particularly in forcing a 'dispersion' of my collectors. Back when the Japan Times would write a story about me, it might result in a few more people living in Tokyo beginning to collect my work. These days, when a major blog publishes something featuring my prints, it can result in orders arriving from any corner of the planet.

That's good news on the face of it, but the other side of the global/local change is experiences like the one I had the other day. I was asked by a European acquaintance whether or not I had seen a major print-related exhibition that had recently been held here in Tokyo. Eh? I hadn't heard about it. He knew about it even though living in France, but I here in Tokyo had known nothing.

My upcoming decision on just when to cancel my subscription is compounded by the fact that in my workshop we use quite a stack of (used) newspaper sheets in our printmaking work, to help us keep the prints moistened properly as we work on them, but I think the reporters and other staff might not be so proud to feel that *this* was the main reason why I purchase their product!

And that aspect of newspapers - their possible uses over and above simply reading the stories, reminds me of an episode from when I must have been about eight or nine years old. Geography (and maps, particularly) was one of my interests, and my parents had given me a world map to study. This was about the size of our kitchen table, and I remember laying this out on the table, and - all around the circumference - pasting small photos of current world leaders that I had clipped from our newspaper. This was back in the late 50's, so these must have been quite grainy and of course only black and white, but that was of no concern. After pasting each one in place, I drew a line connecting each man with his country. I think I must have had the idea that I would 'collect the whole set' in the sense of finding an image of the leader of all the countries on my map, but I am sure that I got nowhere close to that goal.

The map was long ago tossed out, but when I look up a reference now to see just which leaders must have been represented in my clippings collection, I get a bit of a shock. Eisenhower, Khrushchev, Nasser, de Gaulle, Tito, Chiang-kai Shek ... Franco ... It reads like a listing from an book of ancient history. Am I *that* old?

Where's Napoleon? How did I miss *him*?

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