



Waving an Antenna

Over the 25 years or so that I have been making a living from my woodblock printmaking activities, there has been a major shift in the way that people find out about my work. Back in the late 80's when I started sending prints out, the 'formula' was pretty simple: make some prints, rent a gallery, notify the media, open the doors and wait for people to come in. Hopefully, among the visitors would be enough people who found my work attractive enough to collect.

This system worked quite well for me for many years. It wasn't always smooth sailing, because a good part of my success in any given year depended on the whims of the newspaper editors and TV producers, but most of the time things went pretty well, and some of the time it was absolutely fantastic.

Gradually though, it became more and more difficult to sustain that pattern. Many galleries closed, the media became less interested in what I am doing, and after a few years in a row of failed exhibitions, it became clear that I should re-think my approach.

The internet provided an obvious alternate route for exposing my work, and indeed, this is now how most people do become acquainted with my prints. The 'net has 'saved my life' in that sense, and my prints now fly out to collectors in a much wider range of countries than I would ever have thought possible.

There are a couple of reasons though, why I am not willing to accept that my work should only be available through a computer screen. First is that woodblock print of the type that I produce are quite tactile objects, and really do look best when seen in real life, and not on a monitor. Over and above this though, I am gradually becoming a bit worried about the direction our society is taking in this respect - imagine a future in which all of our commerce is conducted over the internet. What will our townscapes look like without shops? Will such towns be comfortable and pleasant places in which to live?

Because I am concerned about this, I myself now try to balance my own shopping between the internet and local retailers. It's not always possible to support local shops, because as we all know, places like Amazon frequently offer incredibly cheap prices, so the premium we have to pay to shop locally can be very high.

But how does this discussion affect my printmaking? I don't have a shop, do I?

Well ... starting yesterday morning, I do. My Mokuhankan venture opened its first physical location yesterday, with a shop in Nakano, a major transportation/shopping hub in Tokyo. As you can imagine, rents in Tokyo are extremely high, so we don't have a very large shop, and we are only able to display a small selection of our prints.

In fact, all we have room for is the new Chibi Heroes collection!

Yes, there you have it - the Mokuhankan 'Antenna Shop' - a transparent display case 40cm by 40cm by 40cm, part of a 'cube shop' in the Nakano Broadway building, famous for its collection of shops devoted to pop culture - anime, gaming, etc.

You've all heard of the famous Capsule Hotels in Tokyo, where you can rent a space just large enough to lay down for the night. Well, welcome to 'Cube Style', just enough space for a few woodblock prints to show their faces!

Is this the beginning of something great? Only time will tell!

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