



Who's Who

Just over a half-year ago I mentioned in passing in a couple of these stories that we had won an internet auction for a couple of boxes of printmaking tools and supplies. At that time, I didn't talk much here about the actual tools themselves, because I discussed those quite extensively on my blogs, and didn't want to repeat it all here.

But now that we have had a chance to use these tools extensively, we have not only learned many things about them, but these two boxes have turned out to be very important to our work here, that we cannot imagine how we could possibly have continued had they not come along.

It would take up all the space I have available to list all the 'goodies' that we found in the two boxes, but far and away the items that have been the most useful to us are the barens - the printers' rubbing tool. Indeed, it was the fact that I could see a few barens in the auction photograph that led me to take the gamble in the first place. The tools that were visible had an air of authenticity about them, enough to encourage me to bid over \$2000 for the box, against tough opposition (I obviously wasn't the only person convinced of their worth!)

When we received the packages, and could properly inspect the contents, it turned out that there were five immediately useable barens included. In order to help the staff arrange their work properly, I took this opportunity to properly organize our baren storage drawers, assigning each baren a particular spot in the drawer, and giving it a number, so that we would be able to easily refer to them when discussing which baren to use for a particular job.

As it turned out, this was a transformative idea. Instead of clumsy conversations trying to identify the tools - "No, not that one, I mean the one that's a little bit stronger, you know, the one I showed you last week ..." - we all quickly caught on to using the numbers as ready identifiers; "You'll probably be best with #2 for that job, as long as your paper is nice and soft. If not, then try #6; it has a bit more 'bite'."

Because of this, everybody in our shop is now developing a good understanding of how the tools differ and of which one might be best for each particular job. But something else has happened along the way - no sooner had the barens become easily identifiable like this, than they started to develop actual personalities, something that wasn't present when they were 'anonymous'.

Just last week, I-san was looking in the drawer for a baren for a particular block she was going to work on, and found that #7 - the one she wanted to use - was already in use by another printer. She asked me about another one, "What's #10 like; I don't remember using it before ..."

I replied, "Yes, #10 is like that. He's the guy whose name you can never remember. He has a kind of 'average' personality; you'll probably get along with him OK, but you probably won't find him very interesting." She then asked about #4, and my reply came instantly, "You really have to watch that guy carefully. He has a vigorous and forthright personality - he can really handle tough jobs - but he's the kind of guy that every now and then will 'lose it' and pick up a chair and smash it against the wall. I lost a few prints to him just in my last batch. Please treat him with caution ..."

She replied that she had once known a guy like that, and we began to toss around the idea that perhaps we should consider giving our barens actual names, instead of the more dry numbers, but we thought the better of it. We have frequent visitors here, sometimes including TV crews, and it's perhaps safest to stick with the numbers.

No point going out looking for trouble!

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