

# My JOB--Washi and Etching

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## 1. “WASHI” Fertilization-ground Artists’ Emotion

In May, 1988, the Machida City International Printmaking Art Museum was planning a work-shop to be conducted by a German artist , Horst Janssen. I said “was planning” because this invitation which was so expected , unfortunately could not be realized due to health problems cropping up just before departure from his country. However, his exclusive print technician, Freilinghaus came to Japan in his place and introduced a part of Janssen’s work.

This technician, Freilinghaus was not just a printer but was an eccentric person and known as a expressionist of shocking erotic and masochistic human character. It was also thought he might be influencing in some way the images of Horst Janssen, the representative artist and leading printmaker of West Germany. Janssen was widely known for his watercolor works but after meeting Freilinghaus and especially after experiencing the printing effect on Washi, he seems to have become fascinated with copper plate etching as one possessed. It should be especially mentioned that the fact that Freilinghaus selected Gampi and Mitsumata Washi papers contributed greatly to the tremendous increase of work and a new development of expressionism since Janssen’s fascination with copper plate etching.

As everyone known, etching is a type of print medium expression which must leave the total completion of expression dependent on the printed effect. When we realize that in printing, not only technical skill but also selection of ink and paper has an important meaning, then it may be possible to fathom that Janssen’s fascination to copper plate etching was in part due to his discovery of Washi.

In February, 1972, I was invited to the specially established Art Department of Kochi University and gave a concentrated lecture on copper plate etching. I knew Kochi was historically famous as a producing center of Washi and in between lectures, I visited those papermakers remaining in Takaoka and Ino-cho. At that time, the copper plate etching technique which had its roots in Europe was firmly established

in Japan and it was a period when word of "etching boom" was even starting to be heard. However, regarding tools and materials for copper plate etching, paper was the only item that had to be imported from France. Carrying on the desire of the pioneer, Tetsuro Komai who worked very hard to establish genuine copper plate etching in Japan, it was my wish to foster this effort and I was hoping for a Japanese variation of copper plate etching using domestic materials and my visits to papermaking works was an idea with an eye to that objective.

Because of the thick and long inner bark fiber of Kozo Washi, it is not an appropriate paper for copper plate etching. Troubles arise, such as the tacky ink filling the concave areas of paper causing poor definition of print lines. However, paper called "Nacré" which is highly esteemed in France was thought to be made using Japanese techniques and also Gampi print, a technique often used by domestic artists as a method of printing by pasting a sheet of Gampi paper over western-style paper was resulting in a unique soft and tasteful effect so I thought there may be some room for innovation from these standpoints.

Fortunately, I was able to gain the acquaintance of the former Chief, Kaname Betchaku, of the Kochi Paper Industrial Laboratory and he agreed to assist in development of a new paper based on its suitability for use in copper plate and lithograph printing.

Western-style paper used for printing was mainly made from raga in the past but in recent years, it is made from cotton pulp called linter. At that time, 2 kinds of printing paper made from cotton pulp were produced but including test papers made by the fore-said laboratory, these papers were not better than foreign papers which could also enhance the unique expressionism of the Japanese. For some time, exchange of test papers and results of test printing between the laboratory and myself continued. Gampi and Mitsumata papers were found to be highly adaptable to oleaginous ink and therefore suited the Japanese which has been fostered by a temperate climate. Finally, a newly created paper called N. B. paper was made by making a sheet by the Tamezuki method and overlaying it with a thin Gampi ply. It took 3 years to make it into a marketable product but with the timely opportunity of being involved with the movement for promotion of local industries by Kochi prefecture, Mr. & Mrs. Kanatoshi Ozaki of Ino-cho are making a wonderful paper with cotton pulp as a base. Moreover, it was found out that "Nacré" was a specially made Mitsumata paper.

Incidentally, Horst Janssen was an avid fan of Ukiyoe and was so enthusiastic that he once imagined himself as Hokusai and etched his own form fishing by the riverside. However, it is interesting to see that the most sensitive part of his artistic

nature was printed on Gampi and Mitsumata paper. Admiration of the Orient in Europe is unusual for anyone other than Janssen who has in a straight-forward manner injected his artistic style directly into Washi.

Intellect, emotion and volition comprise the mental factors of human beings and to me , it seems that “intellect” permeates western-style papers while “emotion” is interlocked into Washi. Compared to Europe where the object of paper was thought only to transmit, record and preserve “intellect” , it seems to me that in Japan , “emotion” was described and also fostered by this vehicle.

European civilization has reached a saturation point and has come to a standstill. As a result, considering the being newly rediscovered at the end of this century, I am surely not the only one who deems this development a great point of interest.

## **2. About Etching**

After washi, let's talk about Etching. Through magnifier, the tortuous lines on the etched copperplate are like the banks eroded by rivers and the edges of the copperplate that is nearly completed etched feel rugged, just like a fluctuant, varied and deserted coast. If you can land onto the bottom of the grooves etched, what in your sight, I think, should be the red cliffs like the Grand Canyon. Anyway, what on the copperplate is the landform of the earth, which was eroded by nature in countless years.

By cutting the anticorrosion films on the surface of the copperplate with a needle and then immersing the copperplate in etchant, the etcher carves pictures he described on the surface of the copperplate. It normally takes 20 or 30 minutes to 1 or 2 hours. Though this period is only a twinkling comparing with the eroding by the nature, but the job of etchers is to minify the eroding process by the nature in thousands years into their hands to put it on the copperplate.

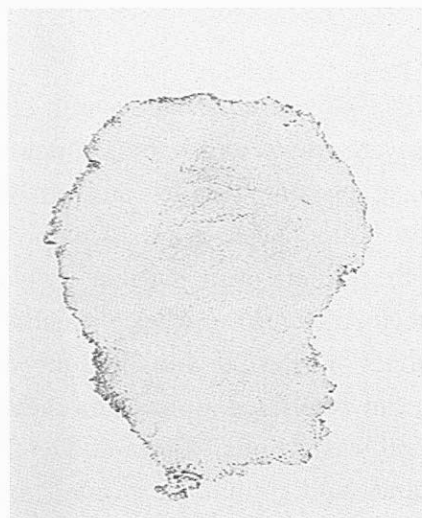
In 1977, I came back after living abroad for one year soon my health went worse because, being unaware of that the antibodies in my body, which were cultured gradually in the past, had disappeared, my frequently touching etchant and organic solvents caused somatic reaction. While corroding copperplates, I corroded the body of myself. One year before going abroad, touched by the verse of Mistukaru Naiko , “Nothing can not be corroded”, I published etching collections named *The Laud of Great Corruption* and *The Laud of Corroding Sea*. Or this might be a kind of karma. Since then, I have been strongly concerned about the relationship between the corrosion and myself.

In 1983, I put the original copperplate of *Transportation-III* barely into etchant, and took it out to print the form of the copperplate every two hours, which exhausted gradually due to corrosion. The copperplate became smaller and smaller in the etchant, and finally like a gold leaf after 36 hours. There were 18 etchings printed during this period. The whole figures in the picture were weaker, shallower and disappearing like leaving away. All these seemed to me were irreplaceable beautiful things. Whether the works printed after 8 hours or after 20 hours had the same value to me, making me to understand that works can be printed at many moments of time. The process of etching the copperplate, which was originally regarded as the unique, in fact, could not be divided into stages and works could be printed at any time during the process. This has confirmed a plain truth: whether it is copperplate, myself, the plant, or the earth, the relation between each other only occurs at the moment when we realize that we all exist in the process of the great corrosion. Works are the figures into which this relation is translated.

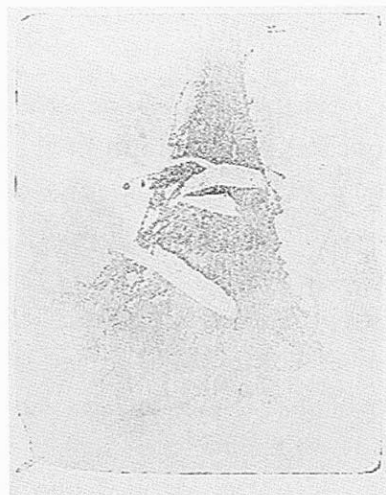
The narrative order seemed a little upside down in the context. But what I felt since I returned from abroad was like coxcombical feeling deviating from realism and became problems before my eyes. Maybe I could briefly explain that there is enough calmness for starting everything. In the day life full of information, even it's difficult to really feel.

Such several things gathered together, I continuously published kinds of serials from "Position" to "Eroding", even the transposition between trial edition and composing. This was what I undertook since 1977 or so.

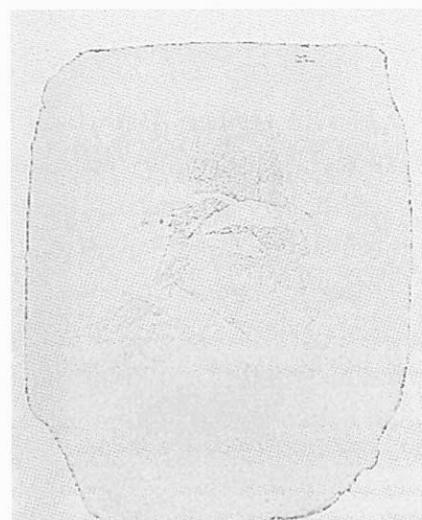
In recent years, the white and black had also captured me. For etchers, the white was what's worked on, and the black was that of not. That's to say, through eroding after drawing, what's printed with full ink became black. Though no so, the black and white is of binary opposition, contradictory and polarization and that is what I am looking for. With contradictory and congruous earth plane in the same picture, tension and confrontation, congruity and co-existence gradually are becoming another theme.



(1) 腐蝕6小時



(4) 腐蝕30小時



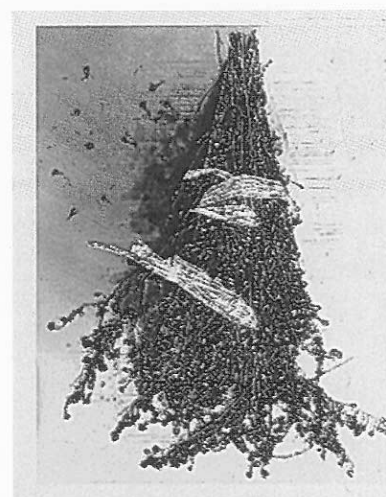
(2) 腐蝕14小時



(5) 腐蝕34小時



(3) 腐蝕22小時



(6) 完成作品

Transposition-轉位-III

56.5x44.8

1979