Tetsuya Noda: An Appreciation by Daniel Bell

A version of this essay originally appeared in the Ukiyo-e Society Bulletin, a publication of the Ukiyo-e Society of America, Inc.

Tetsuya Noda is arguably the best printmaker in contemporary Japan. In 1998, when the Japan Print Association published their ninth and penultimate volume to commemorate the best of printmaking in Japan, Noda was invited to lead off the album of ten artists. His print, "Homeless in 'Ueno" was widely commented on and praised in the Japanese press.

Noda first won attention in 1968, at age 28, only four years after graduation from the prestigious Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music(Geidai), when his first entry into a competitive exhibition won the International Grand Prize of the Tokyo International Print Biennale. His astonishing prints combined an innovative technique of subtly rearranged photographs scanned through a mimeograph screen and printed with traditional woodblock techniques on a woodblock printed background. This was the first time that a photograph incorporated into a print had received such a prize. Afterward, this mixed-media technique became widely employed in printmaking around the world, and was recognized as a new form with great expressive qualities. It was Tetsuya Noda who at age 28 had initiated this advance.(1)

It was not only the novel technique, but also the composition of the subject matter that was so intriguing. Noda presented two companion prints:one of his own Japanese family, the other of the Israeli family of a young woman, Dorit Bartur, whom he would soon marry. The two families juxtapose the commitments of his life. Yet there is no attempt to emphasize any exotic differences. Presented in stark simplicity, with surrounding details eliminated, each family sits on a rococo sofa, one in green(Fig.1), the other in red(Fig.2), with a bonsai tree in the one and a dog in the other. The names of the family members are written by hand in small rectangles above each head. The families are in the foreground of each picture; the background is a woodblock beige color. Everything is pared down to the simple essentials. We encounter each family directly. These qualities become the touchstone of all of Noda's work. There are no flamboyant details, no effort to dramatize or create something “exotic”. He is presenting the world he inhabits and what he sees. And yet, in each print, there is a quality of immediacy on Noda' s part that is communicated to the viewer. To use a vernacular phrase, we are "hooked," though we do not often know why. Such is the power of all compelling art.

Over the years, Noda has won innumerable international prizes. In 1978, he became a lecturer at the National University of Fine Arts and in 1991, a full professor. Two volumes of a catalogue raisonné, issued by his dealer, the Fuji Television Gallery in 1992, list(with illustrations) 358 works. Since then, according to Noda, he has done about fifty more— a remarkable feat, considering that each print is applied with a baren by hand, pressing down the ink through the screen.

I first saw Noda' s work in 1992, when a friend took me to a major show at the Fuji

TV Gallery in Shinjuku. I was captivated by the variety of prints—landscapes, his family, even an amusing one of a bowl of cigarette butts in a photo on a woodblock background (Fig.3). This, Noda explained, was his way of showing his son, Izaya, how many he had smoked in one day. But prosaic as the subject matter seemed, the arrangement of the butts, jumbled together in the handsome bowl, was no longer just the ends of cigarettes but a striking pictorial statement. What was also clear was that none of these images were photos, for they did not have the literal, hard-edged outlines of a realist photograph. Each of the images had a sensuous quality that focused my gaze.

I was most taken with a large (51X81cm) print of a bending squash with a delicate yellow flower, framed by several tendrils, against a textured background of earth. What also interested me technically was that because of its size the print had been made in eight sections; each section was notched by a register of a delicate line, which showed how they all fit together. The registers called subtle attention to the way the woodblock technique was combined with the screen printing. And withal, there was a quiet repose.

The print was untitled. All of Noda s works are untitled, marked instead by the word Diary and the notation of the date (in this instance, Aug. 19, 1991). The print exemplified for me what I can only call, inadequately, a Japanese sensibility—a phrase I shall try to explain later. I purchased the print. It hangs on the center wall of my Cambridge living room, half the world away from Japan, part of my aesthetic life. I have, in fact, become a collector of Noda's prints.

During the past decade, I have traveled to Japan at least once a year, as a director of the Suntory Foundation. I now have about a dozen Noda prints, having sought out some of the earlier ones that attracted me. Some are portraits of his family, or activities of his children; others depict fruits, such as oranges spilling out of a box, each orange with a full volume that reminds one of Cezanné, without in any way being a copy. These prints, too, demonstrate variations of his technique.

My major collecting interest over three decades has been in prints where I can find various states of an image so that I can trace out what may have been the printmaker's creative intentions in the changes of states before publication. My major collection of European printmakers include Felix Buhot, one of the explorers of Japonisme, Albert Besnard and Jacques Villon, prints of Manet that one can link to his paintings, and those of Whistler, that indicate the influences of Japanese printmaking. Among Japanese printmakers, I have collected Yoshitoshi, especially where I can find drawings to indicate the later prints—and the actor prints of Shunko and Shunsho. It may be apparent, therefore, why Noda's continual experimentation attracted me.

Each of Noda's prints is taken from his life surroundings, so his work as a whole forms a visual autobiography that is unique in the field of printmaking. Each print begins with a photograph, but these are not images that call attention to themselves as a "statement" as, say, in the work of a Robert Frank or a Walker Evans. In the transformation that takes place as Noda reworks these images, there arises what Walter Benjamin once called an "aura", a quality that is lacking in most prints today because of the loss of tradition and context.

So I began my quest to understand how these effects are gained. This is not an effort to be comprehensive, but the reflections of a collector trying to explain to himself, if not to others, how Noda has been able to achieve his mimetic magic.(2) The appearance in recent years of Noda s work in three venues, a British Museum publication, a show at the Fogg Museum of Harvard University, and another at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, provided me with a starting point of my quest.

In the book Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum (1990), a volume that ranges from the arts of Buddhism to twentieth-century prints, a Noda print (Fig.4) of his daughter, Rika, about age three and a half (Diary; June 24th '78) is presented with this description:

All Noda's prints are simply titled with a diary date, and almost all are based on the artist' s own photographs as their starting point. In this sense they are exceptionally personal. In spite of this, Noda' s reputation is higher in the international circuit than that of any other Japanese, even of Akira Kurosaki... It is perhaps futile to ask how he has managed to add to a photograph of his daughter the monumental dignity that this great portrait powerfully expresses.(3)

That is the challenge. Is it "futile" to ask: how?

A second print (Fig.5), this one a lithograph, incorporates a photograph of Noda's young son Izaya, on a gray veiled background. The foreground features a set of haphazard scribbles in dark outline with a touch of color. This print (Diary; Sept. 1st '74, no.65) was included in the show "Touchstone: 200 Years of Artists Lithographs", at Harvard s Fogg Museum in 1998. As Marjorie Cohn, the curator of prints at the Fogg, remarked: "The lithographer retains all of the expressive range of traditional drawing media, and attractive options such as scratching and blotting, and even direct bodily contact, can be substituted for more academic procedures." Ms. Cohn then wrote:

Noda permitted his subject, his young son, to participate in the print by applying both his fingertips and his scrawled line drawings to provide a more autographic reality than his photo-lithographed image which appears through a gray tone behind them, as if at arm's length.

In the show itself, the Noda print was hung next to one by Jasper Johns, Skin With O' Hara s Poem, where the choice of draftsman' s tracing paper carried the trace of his anguished presence and the power of a fingerprint to certify the artist's commitment to the image.(4)

The third print (Fig.7), the one of the squash in Noda's garden, that I alluded to earlier, was borrowed from me for the show PhotoImage: Printmaking 60s to 90s, at the Boston Museum of Arts, Summer/Fall, 1998. The show was devoted to the exploration of the visual vocabulary that takes photomechanical reproductions, and uses dot and screen techniques to transform them into creative prints. The show featured Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Hamilton, Chuck Close, Joseph Beuys, and Andy Warhol, among others.

In the catalog, Clifford Ackley, the organizer of the show, contrasted Noda with the German painter Gerhard Richter, who used a muted range of soft-focus grays to achieve a

“ghostly beauty”. About Noda, Ackley wrote:

Diary; Aug. 19th '91, a pale, rather mysterious image in soft-focus grays with a delicate touch of yellow, began when Noda made a close-up photograph of a blossoming squash in his garden. The photograph was then adjusted, "cooked and seasoned" by Noda to his expressive purposes ...ln the final image, silkscreen printing melds quietly with traditional printing to produce a work that occupies a position halfway between traditional Japanese wood-cut artists such as Utamaro and contemporary Western artists such as Richter.(5)

Noda, clearly, is an original, a man whose mastery of modern techniques compare with the best of contemporary printmakers. Yet he is also Japanese, very much aware of the traditions of Japanese art that formed his sensibility. How do the two mix? The further quest for me is to understand him in the context of his time and place.

Japanese art in the twentieth century can be divided in to two somewhat radically different periods. The first half, before World War II, can be identified, predominantly, with the Shin-Hanga movement. These were printmakers, often highly competent technically, who tended to shy away from the turmoil, disarray, and sprawling nature of the emerging urban life that was splitting open the village neighborhoods of Tokyo and Osaka.

The three representative print artists of this time were Shinsui, Hasui, and Hiroshi Yoshida, who were all self-consciously aware of the Ukiyo-e tradition. Not only did they not break with it, but they sought to reinforce it by denying changes brought by industrialization and political forces of their times. Shinsui drew Ukiyo-e beauties, but gave them a "sugary" presence evocative of modern fragrance advertisements. Hasui did landscape prints of rural villages, but romanticized these by placing them in twilight and rain, with lighted doorways or lamps to remind viewers of the past. Urban life never appeared in his sight. Hiroshi Yoshida did night scenes of Kyoto, it s twilight imagery and "shadows” praised by Junichiro Tanizaki for masking the filth and unsightliness of the metropolis. Yoshida's magnificent views of mountains in Switzerland and Japan, Whistlerian in their mood, were made distinctive by his marvelous control of color in shading the steps to the skies.

What these Shin-Hanga printmakers were doing, as Hollis Goodall has noted, was expressing in visual form what the noted novelists such as Junichiro Tanizaki and Yasunari Kawabata were articulating in their novels—a rejection of modern Tokyo life, the loss of cultural identity, and the desire for more traditional values--or, as in the eroticism of Tanizaki, a throwback to the tangled- sexual relations of the Heian period, and the desire for the use of natural materials, such as wooden seats on toilets, as against plastic. One can rarely find a sense of the first explorations for democratic expression as in the liberal ideas of Yukichi Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University, in the Taisho period, let alone any criticisms of the harsh militarized regimes, with their suppression of thought, in the early Showa rule of General Tojo.(6)

If Japanese art before the war was predominantly oriented to the past, the explosive themes after 1945 were self-consciously avant-garde(Zen-ei Bijutsu), exploiting the phrase that had been advanced during the Taisho period, when interest in Western modernism had first been explored. But now this became expressed in what a Guggenheim Museum show

later called “a scream against the sky”, the desire to reject everything and begin from absolute nothingness, to banish any and all traditional and aesthetic modes of artistic expression.

Much of this is summed up in the Gutai group(Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai), founded in 1954 by Jiro Yoshihara, a wealthy oil painter. In his first manifesto, Yoshihara declared “the art of the past is fraudulent. Let s bid farewell to the hoaxes piled up...in the drawing rooms... Lock up these corpses in the graveyard.”

Art-making emphasized willful rites of destruction: Paint was applied with watering-cans or remote-control toys; materials were tin cans, water, smoke and electric bulbs; works of art were trampled on by the artists’ bare feet.

The Hi Red Center specialized in neo-Dada happenings that sought to shock the public and catch the newspaper headlines. Their activities merged with Fluxus, later one of the most widely reported and documented art movement in the post-war years. Since Fluxus emphasized conceptual art happenings, the very ephemeral nature of the work guaranteed that one could only talk of it after the moment had passed. One of the leading Fluxus artists, Yoko Ono, created a work called Smoke Painting, in which the viewer was asked to burn a canvas with a cigarette and watch the smoke. The piece was completed when the canvas turned to ashes.(7)

The impulses behind these movements were a radical opposition to cultural orthodoxy and social conformity. While the impulses were understandable, the difficulty was that they were not indigenous to Japan other, perhaps, than the feelings about nature. The rhetoric was derived from the tired and stale avant-garde movements in the West of about a half-century or more before. The Gutai manifesto is an empty echo of Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto of 1910, which called for the destruction of the museums and the enthronement of the Bugatti racing cars instead of the Venus de Milo. The irony of all this(or is it only the logical outcome?) is that the museum today is the depository of such avant-garde art and, as with the Guggenheim Museum in 2000, features a show of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle.

Printmaking in Japan, after the war, remained centered on woodblock. But here, too, Japanese printmakers moved away from the past, albeit in a quieter and more muted fashion. The initiating figure was Kanae Yamamoto, the founder of Sosaku Hanga, whose use of the curved chisel, irregular edges, and gouged depressions reversed the Ukiyo-e process. A major figure, Koshiro Onchi, began the movement to more abstract art. Two of the printmakers singled out in the British Museum volume, Gaku Onogi and Chimei Hamada, went in different directions. Onogi created works of "mesmerically strange shapes”, painterly in expression, which he called fukei, or “internal landscapes”. Hamada produced faces that expressed fear, horror, loneliness and futility, powerful images which often left lingering impressions long after one had left the prints.

Two other individuals stand out in the early postwar years. One was the photographer Shomei Tomatsu, who, in a series of searing, hard-edged photographs in the 1960s, chronicled both the disfigurement of individuals who had survived the atomic-bomb explosions, and images of the aftermaths of other disasters, the shards of wrecked houses and

ships. The subject matter is unrelenting, made more dramatic by Tomatsu s use of close-ups, to eliminate any distance from the images and to emphasize the sense of shock.(8)

The other individual was Shiko Munakata, whose unique prints, driven by a forceful energy, made him Japan, s most celebrated artist, and brought the modern Japanese print to the notice of the rest of the world. His crowded black-and-white prints, the figures sometimes looking like those in Indian erotic art, fused the ancient folk Buddhist and Shinto aesthetic with a contemporary French idiom. Munakata is greatly admired by Noda, who wrote me: “Munakata’s prints remind me of an action painter like De Kooning, because his way of working with woodblocks was direct and intensive. His way of carving produced strong, powerful lines and forms which gave his work such a forceful character. I like his freedom of spirit, the energy and movement that is felt throughout his work."

And yet, with due respect to the few figures one can single out, a survey of contemporary Japanese prints leaves one with a dispirited feeling. The large Kodansha volume Contemporary Japanese Prints I, the comprehensive presentation of 600 prints, by 370 printmakers, demonstrates how derivative most of these are from Western prints—decorative, abstract without form, kitschy, with few references, if any, to the past, either in style or subject matter, and showing neither a sense of continuity with past masters, nor evidence of individuality. All of which bring us to Tetsuya Noda.(9)

Tetsuya Noda has never been part of any movement, artistic or political. What has been remarkable is the consistent attention over thirty years to his own experiences: what he sees in the life of his family and friends, of travel and domesticity, of the world of nature, not abstractly but in the fruits of the garden that he tends. His world is one of quotidian involvements. The Ukiyo-e printmakers lived for the moment, dramatizing a particular passion or posture. Noda seeks almost prosaically to record what he sees, as souvenirs, in the double sense of the word—as mementos, or as memories of the effort to pin down time before it is lost. Noda has been very much his own man, and his prints carry a distinct recognizable stamp.

Noda’s prints are personal, but not subjective; figurative but not representational; realistic but not pictorial; recognizable without being literal; graphic without being picturesque. They are there, there. Yoshitoshi's Meditation by Moonlight" shows a holy man sitting among rocks beneath the full moon. It is a powerful print, but the power is accentuated by the full red robes, the open hairy chest, the setting of the dark rocks as against the bright contrapuntal moon. In the Noda portrait of his daughter, there is only the simple forthright presence within an open space enclosed by a beige border. And we are instantly drawn to that image. One can say that Noda is like Ozu’s Tokyo Story, as against Mizoguchi’s Ugetsu.(10)

Noda has remarked that the camera is his sketchpad. But that is only the starting point for an understanding of the artistic process. In his oft-quoted "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin declared that "photography freed the hand of the most important function which henceforth devolved only upon the eye looking into a lens." Benjamin, writing from a quasi-Marxist point of view, was intent on showing how

technology had served to make an art work lose its aura, and, paradoxically, to make any individual using a camera into an "artist" —especially in these days of point-and-shoot cameras. Yet as Noda has demonstrated, it is the re-working of the initial image, the choice of re-arrangement and emphasis, the fusion of expression (and expressive intimacy in the case of Noda) with form, that is the hallmark of the great artist. In fact, the only works of art today that are free of the hand of the artist are the "ready-mades" and found-junk pieces that are regarded with awe by some theorists of modern art.

Noda's distinctiveness lies in three things: the remarkably consistent subject matter of his work; the structure and configurations of his compositions; and the novel techniques, self-consciously derived from Ukiyo-e, which are the means of realizing his intentions.

His compositional innovations can be seen quite early. The print No.70 (Fig.9) (Diary; April 27th, '70 in New York) shows in the lower half a lightly printed, soft-focused photograph of a convivial group of seven individuals sitting around a large striped couch, their names typed in small letters, while above them, in the top half of the print, more darkly printed, are some large clouds, that seem vaguely like a woman's legs and torso. The contrast of the two halves is striking. The print projects a sense of a floating world. Noda later explained that the print was taken at the New York loft of his friend Masuo Ikeda, at a party of friends. Ikeda at the time employed clouds in a blue sky as a motif, so Noda, using an airbrush to draw on the lithographic plate, incorporated that in his work. The woman-shaped cloud is a homage to the erotic themes that have been the main subject of Ikeda s work.

One of Noda's most astonishing and compelling prints is No.96(Fig.10) (Diary: June 11th, '71), which shows, in the lower foreground, the eyes and head of a man(recognizably Noda)with heavy, dark eyebrows and hair, and behind him, occupying five-sixths of the space, a lightly penciled drawing of a synagogue. Three figures sit at a reading-table, or bimah, the area framed in light blue: candles shine dimly on the table, a lamp hangs above, and on the wall the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Along the wide borders are some vases with flowers, and many of the items are marked with red pencil. The immediacy of the strong foreground image— the brow and head—stands against the profusion of detail in the larger field.

The print is clearly one of the most personal in all of Noda's work. It is the “souvenir" of Noda’s conversion to Judaism, which he undertook in order to marry Dorit Bartur, the young Israeli woman who appeared in his prize-winning print of "My Two Families" in 1968. As Noda wrote me about the print: “No.96 is a drawing which was made directly on a zinc plate showing the old Jewish Community Center Synagogue in Tokyo, where I studied Judaism with Rabbi Tokayer. The two other men are also rabbis (they had to be invited for the confirmation of my conversion). These three rabbis and my self-portrait in the foreground were transferred onto the plate from the screened photo image in order to print them together with the drawings done in lithographic printmaking techniques. The words written on the background are the precious notes I had been taking during the Rabbi s lectures. The names of the rabbis are added in small letters with a red pen." The print is wondrous to behold.

Noda is often playful in his prints, creating visual puns with both the subject and the technique. No.230(Fig.11)(Diary; August 10th, '79) is a photo of his young son Izaya, showing his mouth wide open with some missing teath; in the background is series of layered drawings of pencils and mathematical equations, yet these are also overprinted on Izaya's face, creating a winning and amusing picture. As Noda explained: "The image of the face came first, and the equations later. In this print I also wanted to stress the growing of Izaya's second front teeth, symbolizing the development of a child's wisdom. I made another print with a similar subject, No.207, a year before with a missing milk-tooth on the lower front jaw. The figures 8 and 7 appear besides his nose. Hachi is 8 and Nana is seven, so together Hana, which means “nose" in Japanese, is a play on words and numbers.”

In much of his most recent work, Noda has been moving toward abstraction, yet not for its own sake. The print “Homeless in Ueno”, (Fig.12) which he did for the album of the Japan Print Association, began as a gesture of social criticism. An imperial visit had been announced to the park at Ueno, the section of North Tokyo that houses Geidai, the national university, and the major Tokyo museums. In anticipation of the visit, the park had been cleared of homeless and their makeshift housing, in order to provide a “clean” vista for the Imperial family.

Noda made a print that fused the park grounds, trees, and sky, but left the outline of one tent to show the presence of the homeless. The print as a whole is one of large, unified beauty. As Noda wrote me, again:"Regarding the homeless print as you rightly mention, it looks somewhat abstract and that was my intention. The gradual reclining (parabola) line on the top is the shape of the tent, and the sky is above the line which is the narrow unprinted part. When looking at the forms created by the shades of trees, seen on the surface of the blue-colored tent, the shadows by themselves created a naturally beautiful form. Therefore, although the inspiration came from a totally realistic subject matter, it gave birth to an abstract effect. Using photo image, I often search for abstract, mysterious, or humorous elements in order to tickle the imagination of the viewers. I also wish to show that it is possible to include various abstract elements in realistic settings."

Noda has earned a place in printmaking history by pioneering the mixed-media technique that uses a woodblock background with a silkscreen stencil. A superficial observer might think that Noda is simply heightening the effect of the photo. But this is far from what he does. Noda chooses a photo negative, and makes changes by cutting away parts and enlarging others. On the developed image he sometimes draws or paints with graphite or watercolor, to create a very different image from the one that first appeared through the camera lens. The image is then fed into an electric scanner (originally a mimeograph machine that he first saw at the university), which burns tiny holes onto a stencil that is fastened to the underside of a silkscreen. Meanwhile, a sheet of Japanese paper, usually washi, is printed with a woodblock to provide the ground. The screen is then lowered into position over the sheet of paper, and ink is rolled over the mesh of the screen, transferring the photo image onto the woodblock ground. If the print is a large one, there may be six to eight different sections, each printed separately by hand, the registers matched up so that the

final print can be seamlessly joined. Nothing is left to chance. As one writer has described the routine, the process has to coordinate "the viscosity of the oil-based mimeograph ink, the size of the perforations in the stencil, the absorbency and texture of the paper, and the density of the water-based woodblock inks. A slight imbalance in any of these factors can change the character of the final print." One of the fascinating effects of the way the oil-based mimeograph ink relates to the underlying surface of the water-based woodblock ink, is to produce what another observer has called "the tarnished-silver quality", of Noda's prints.(11)

Given his early schooling, Noda is completely aware of the Ukiyo-e tradition. In Ukiyo-e printing, the key-block is made first and the other color blocks are super-imposed in separate pulls. This is possible because the water-based colors are transparent, so that the subsequent color-sheets do not cover the key-block lines that act as guides for the printer. Noda uses the photoscreen print in place of a key-block. The woodblock background is printed first, then the color blocks are applied, using registration marks, as in Ukiyo-e printing.

Yet Noda's prints differ from traditional Ukiyo-e prints in singnificant ways. He rarely makes prints of strong colors, provocative designs, or utilizes mica ground or embossing to provide highlights, as in some Ukiyo-e prints. He uses subdued, quiet colors, combined of traditional water-based Japanese woodblock inks. In the water-based woodblock inks, the colors are absorbed into the fibers of the Japanese paper, while the oil-based inks stay on the surface of the paper, when printing. (12) This gives his work a special warmth.

Noda departs further from traditional Ukiyo-e composition in his handling of space. Objects are placed, untypically for Japanese aesthetics, at the center. His portraits contain no distractions to take attention away from the subject. Landscapes have a low horizon line that, as Judith Callender observes, recall the style of the seventeenth-century Dutch masters. Yet there is often a sensuousness, created not by the urushi-e, or the lustrous black lacquer of a Ukiyo-e print, but by the warm natural color of ripe fruit on a vine, or of four peaches on a plump pillow. Such prints often contain puns that do not escape a local viewer, for example the "Pillow Pictures", which may also be known to sophisticated Western readers of books such as Ivan Morris's on the Heian period.

It is the combination of this meticulous technique and compositional arrangement that provides the clues to the appeal of the Noda prints that I first discussed at the beginning of this essay. In the squash print shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, two blocks were used for the colors. The thin gray background and the yellow gradation of the flower were printed using water-based colors. The other parts, including the squash and the stems, are not printed areas, but are part of the carved area of the woodblock. What the viewer sees as a simple garden scene is the complex layered blending of two sets of images. The outcome is a delicacy of a single color in the repose of a larger garden, which may be one definition of Japanese sensibility.

In the instance of the striking print of Izaya' s scribbles, hung at the Fogg, Noda writes that as he was preparing some zinc plates for a new work, his son started to scribble on

those plates. Amused by this, Noda then took a photograph of his son, which was then transferred onto another sensitized zinc plate. The veiled photograph was printed first, and the scribbled drawings printed on top of the photo image. So what seems to a viewer to be a child scribbling on his own photo, actually was two separate plates, combined in an unusual way, producing the image that the Fogg compared to the adjacent Jasper Johns, who had drawn his hands directly on his plate. Like the Johns, it was the layering that created what seemed to be a single image.

There remains the challenge of the British Museum commentator, Lawrence Smith, the question "too futile to ask" about the mysterious power exerted by the portrait of Rika, dressed in her long pajama, like the Royal Family-style party dress, staring back at the viewer with her feet peeping out from under her dress.

The answer, I believe, lies in the nature of Japonisme, introduced in France by the Goncourt brothers in the 1870's, which had so weighty an influence on Western artists like Whistler, Vuillard, and others, an impact commemorated, one can say, by the Ukiyo-e print hanging in the background of Manet's portrait of Zola.

The appeal of Japonisme was its emphasis on flatness and surface, and on the use of the color field to define space and the picture plane, rather than on the detailed modeling of forms, or the illusion created by perspective, which had shaped Western art since the Renaissance. "We must close the shutters", wrote Maurice Denis, one of the theoreticians of Impressionism. And in mid-century America, Clement Greenberg, the panjandrum of abstract expressionism, declared that flatness of the picture plane, ruling out of consideration any other style as retrograde.(13)

What Noda has done, I would argue, is to create a "reverse Japonisme." In his prints, he often leads the viewer to cross the threshold, to bring him or her into the space, to show the scene or even become part of it. How? If one looks closely at the portrait of Rika, the frame of the beige border, and the baseboard running horizontally across the bottom, create a spatial depth. And we move then inside of it. The spatial depth locks us into the print, and we share the immediacy and the power of the girl' s gaze.

This, I believe, is the extraordinary originality of Tetsuya Noda, a man without theoretical pretense—and possibly without such theoretical intention. He has created an oeuvre that bears the imprint of everyday life as a tireless, enduring set of images. More important, perhaps, is the innovation of a remarkable technique and compositional aesthetic that invites us, often compels us,to enter the space of his images and live within it. That, I believe, is his mark on printmaking history.

(I) I should point out that Warhol and Rauschenberg, among others,had combined photoimages with silkscreen techniques. but neither had used a woodblok background, which gives the distinctive texture to Noda's prints.

(2) Noda's work is not easily available in the United States. The editions, from fifteen to forty of each print, are limited because they are all pulled by Noda by hand and sell out quite quickly, especially in Japan. Helen and Felix Juda were among the first collectors of contemporary Japanese prints. In 1971, the Judas began publishing the Newsletter on Contemporary Japanese Prints, edited by their curator, Irene Drori. The Newsletter, circulated internationally, appeared until 1977 with a total of nine issues. Noda, who had stopped off in Los Angeles on a world tour, was the featured artist in the first number of the Judas Newsletter. In all, the Judas collected about twenty-one Noda prints, usually purchasing these directly from the artist. These were all sold in the Christie's sale of the Helen and Felix Collection, on April 22, 1998. In November 2000, there was a show of Noda's work in the Don Soker Contemporary Art Gallery in San Francisco.
There have been many articles written about Noda's work. The bibliography in the two-volume catalogue raisonne lists about 95 articles, plus 25 essays and talks by Noda himself. The catalog lists 13 prizes and 63 institutions as possessing Noda's work, including almost all the major museums of the world. The catalog gives numbers to Noda's prints, and I have used those numbers in my discussion of Noda's prints in this essay.

(3) Lawrence Smith, Victor Harris, and Timothy Clark. Japanese Art: Masterpieces in the British Museum (London: British Museum Publications, 1990. No.248, page 246.

(4) Marjorie B. Cohn and Clare I. Rogan, Touchstone-200 Years of Artists' Lithographs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museum, 1998). Ms. Cohn's quoted remark on lithography is on page 11, her discussion of Noda and Johns on page 27.

(5) Photo Image: Printmaking 60s to 90s, by Clifford Ackley, with staff members of the MFA print department, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1998. Page 11.

(6) For a discussion of the Shin-Hanga movement, see the monograph of that title, the book published in conjunction with the show at the Los Angeles County Museum, January-June 1996. The comments of Ms. Goodall are on page 15. The comments on Tanizaki are my own, with reference to the novel Some Prefer Nettles, and the comments on toilets, in In Praise of Shadows.

(7) The major source in English on these Japanese avant-garde movements is the volume Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky, edited by Alexandra Munro (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). My statements are drawn from pp. 22, 24, 83-84, 218-219.

(8) I may add here the work of the photographer Daido Moriyama, who, though influenced by Yoshitoshi, goes further in his theatricality and eroticism to present images that overwhelm a viewer, as, for example, a female leg in fish-net stockings protruding from a brick wall against a foreground and background scene of electrical and telephone wires. See, Daido Moriyama, Stray Dog, by Sandra S. Phillips, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1999. (The image is plat 94, catalog no.194).

(9) On Shotnei Tomatsu, see Japanese Art After 1945, pp. 164 et seq. Noda's comments on Munakata arc in a private communication, June 12, 2000. The survey of Japanese printmakers, in Contemporary Japanese Prints I (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983).

(10) If one seeks for influences on the thematic concentrations of Tetsuya Noda's work, one might find it first in his uncle Hideo Noda, who, though he died a year before his nephew was born, was a distinct presence in the household, in particular because of the paintings and drawings that hung in the house. Hideo Noda studied in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, and, as opposed to those who studied in Paris, was immersed in the realism of the work of artists such as John Sloan, Edward Hopper, Robert Henri, Jack Levine and William Cropper. The realism of these artists was shown in their depictions of streets and subways and fire escapes in the city, the lonely figures and settings by Hopper and others. For an account of this period, see Japanese Artists Who Studied in U.S.A. and the American Scene, a show at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1982, published by the museum.
Among contemporary artists working in a vein similar to that of Tetsuya Noda, one can point to Jim Dine, with his concentration of subjects, such as his wife, figures, hands, robes, shells, flowers, et al; Wayne Thiebaud with his paintings of cakes and other edibles, presenting a sensual, almost gooey culinary overflow; and Richard Diebenkorn's paintings of urban street scenes, such as the "Berkeley" and "Ocean Park" series, which stretch recognizable streets into near abstraction. A monograph of Dine's Subjects was published by the Alan Grist-ea Gallery (London), August 2000. Thiebaud's paintings were exhibited at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in August to September, 2000;

(11) Judith Callender, "Creating a Middle Way." ARTENTION INTERNATIONAL; March & April 1989, published in Hong Kong, p.80.

(12) As Noda also told me: "For a long time I have been using the paper made at Ogawamachi in Saitama Prefecture, an hour and a half by train from Tokyo. 'ate paper I use is made from mulberry bark, but twice the thickness of the usual one. I go there once a year with my students to show them how Japanese paper is made in the traditional way."

(13) For an instructive reference, see the chapter "Flatness and the Floating World." in Timothy Hyman, Bonnard (London: Thames and Hudson,1998) pp.13-34 Donald B. Kuspit, Clement Greenberg. Art Critic (University of Wisconsin Press, 1979) pp.32 and 85.

Daniel Bell is the Henry Ford II Professor of Social Science Emeritus of Harvard University and Scholar-in-Residence at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. As a print collector, he serves on the Visiting Committee of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Fogg Museum at Harvard University.