



From *Specimens of Insects*, ©2000, by Shinsuke Minegishi

SHINSUKE MINEGISHI

COMBINING WESTERN AND JAPANESE

WOOD ENGRAVING TRADITIONS

Rollin Milroy

VANCOUVER ARTIST SHINSUKE MINEGISHI presents an interesting amalgam of Western and Japanese printmaking traditions. Born and raised in Tokyo, Minegishi has lived and worked in Canada since 1994, establishing an international reputation for the technical skill and unique artistry of his wood engravings. Asked to name artists whose influence can be seen in his work, Minegishi's answer reflects his combination of Japanese and Western cultures: Japanese wood engraver Hitoshi Karasawa, and Leonard Baskin, the American artist famous for his sculptures, wood engravings, and beautiful fine press books. It is telling that these are very much contemporary influences; while Minegishi works in centuries-old printmaking methods, his engravings reach far beyond the simple role of illustration that has predominated the medium in the West.

Earlier this year Minegishi was awarded the Grand Prize at the 2003 Kyoto International Woodprint Association exhibition. This is just the latest success in the 33-year-old's still young career. His work has been selected for numerous group and solo exhibitions, including a major show in Shin-Yokohama last summer. He has also won first prize at the First Biennial International Miniprint Exhibition (Vancouver, 2000); received Canada Council grants; and started teaching at Emily Carr, where he received his diploma in fine arts.

In explaining why he has chosen printmaking as his primary medium, it is interesting to remember Minegishi's invocation of Baskin as an influence, and that Baskin's first success was as a sculptor.

"Printmaking fits somewhere between painting and sculpture. The final image is two dimensional, yet the process of image making, such as carving a woodblock, scratching a metal plate, or etching a stone is quite three dimensional. I am attracted to that," Minegishi says.

Baskin's passion for creating books that combined wood engravings with letterpress and fine binding may also have helped entice Minegishi to try his hand at similar projects over the past year. In 2002 he was commissioned by Heavenly Monkey to cut six engravings, based on sketches by Hieronymus Bosch, to be used as illustrations for an experimental edition of H.P. Lovecraft's *Shadow Over Innsmouth*. These were subsequently reprinted earlier this year in a small volume titled

Innsmouth Look, the first book to feature Minegishi's engravings printed from the original blocks. (Reproductions of his engravings have been used to illustrate three volumes of poetry by his mother, Ryoko, published in Japan.) Copies of this book have been purchased by a number of international special collections libraries, including the British Library.

"The biggest difference between what I usually do and what I do with Heavenly Monkey is the motivation. I am a fine artist, meaning what I do is to satisfy only myself. When I work for Heavenly Monkey, there is a certain guideline to follow and I have to satisfy two people; myself and the publisher. Even so, I still don't think too much of the audience because that would make me a graphic artist. Yet, I enjoy the fact that my works will be in the hands of people, such as myself, who would appreciate book arts and small engravings."

The success of the Innsmouth projects encouraged Minegishi to undertake a second commission from the press; he has just completed 10 botanical engravings to accompany an upcoming materia medica written by Barbara Hodgson, to be published later this year. The project highlights the artist's interest in small-format engravings, with intricate detail.

Minegishi's attention to technical excellence can be refreshing at a time when many schools and artists reject the need for technique in creating art. Asked about the directions his work will take him, Minegishi's reply emphasizes the importance he places on technique in artistic growth.

"My approach to making art is hands-on, with a lot of hard work. I will keep on creating many, many works. I'm also interested in sharing my knowledge of printmaking. I've been to many studios, and I've learned many different techniques. I'd like to show people what's out there, or the alternative possibilities for their image making. It could be in casual instruction, in our studio, or more formally, in an institution."

Shinsuke Minegishi's work can be viewed at the Malaspina Gallery in Vancouver; contact Amphora's editor for further details.

Rollin Milroy is the publisher of Heavenly Monkey. He first commissioned Minegishi to engrave a press device in 1999.



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