

Nomi no Kai

The second in our series of original wood engravings by contemporary Canadian artists is by SHINSUKE MINEGISHI. Asked to create a press mark for an imaginary press-one that never existed, and probably never will-Minegishi has looked back to Japan and the circle of modern artists who inspired his art and interest in wood engraving.

Nomi no kai was the name given to a group of six Japanese wood engraving artists who came together in 1977. It wasn't a fine press with multiple engravers, but a group of individual publishers. In Japanese, the word nomi has three meanings: a flea, a chisel, and to drink. Kai means a group. In addition to their shared passion for wood engraving (i.e., the chisel), this group also became infamous for their drinking, and so interpretation of the name Nomi no Kai—a group of nomi-becomes ambiguous.

It is this ambiguity and spirit that I attempted to capture in a press device for a single, collective Nomi no Kai imprint, something that never existed. The main purpose of Nomi no Kai was to promote the art of wood engraving through group shows, and also to stimulate each member's artistic motivation. Although the group issued annual newsletters for five years, it did not function as a publisher. Each member published their own books and produced fine art prints.

Hayao Hiwazaki was the leader, and the remaining five members his followers. Hiwazaki had great charisma, and his work and philosophy of art influenced many young and upcoming artists. Not only did he make his own blocks for engraving, but before cutting down a tree he would purify it with sake and salt. The burins became a part of his body when he carved. To his followers and students, every word he uttered was simultaneously meaningful and poetic.

One of his followers among the Nomi no Kai group was Hitoshi Karasawa, who currently is the leading artist in contemporary wood engraving in Japan. He has written numerous stories about Hiwazaki, including Hiwazaki's catalogue raisonné, published by Kochi prefecture museum in 1995. When Karasawa talks or writes about his mentor, he is very passionate and shows how much Hiwazaki meant to him.

As time went on, all the members began to pursue their individual interests. Nomi no Kai ended when one of the members passed away in 1988. Hiwazaki himself passed away in 1991. A life of drinking took its toll, and in the end he succumbed to cancer. He was fifty years old.

Nomi no Kai is a legend. The collective revived wood engraving as a fine art form in Japan, and influenced many artists and followers. I am one of them, and Hitoshi Karasawa has become my mentor. Without the accomplishments of Nomi no Kai, I, as a wood engraver, would not exist.

A subsequent, expanded and larger version of Minegishi's Nomi no Kai image was published in a pamphlet by Wessel & Lieberman Booksellers in 2006. Following the tradition started by Jim Westergard in the last issue, Shinsuke has initialed a few dozen copies of his print. These have been distributed randomly among the Society's members. The next issue of Amphora will feature an original print by Michael Kluckner.

Shinsuke Minegishi spent most of this past summer in Tokyo, where he had a major month-long solo show of over 40 new works at Gallery OM. Over the past year he has become increasingly interested in Pop Art, and the Tokyo show was the first public exhibition of a number of large prints

that reflect this new direction in his art. The new prints were created using the combination and layering of lithographic, woodcut and wood engraving techniques and images that have characterized Minegishi's work in recent years. And, Minegishi says, he's become interested in working "really big."



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*Wood engraving by Shinsuke Minegishi.
Printed from the block by Jan Elsted at Barbarian Press.*