

ON: COLLABORATION – CULTIVATING TRUST

On Dedication

Akiko Tamura and Takashi Miki are papermakers for Iwano Heizaburo – an Echizen papermaker whose studio is dedicated not only to traditional papers including Torinoko, but also of custom papers for artists and recently have been collaborating on large scale interior and exterior architectural paper installations with Eriko Horiki. They both work in teams as papermakers, and over okonomiyaki share some insight into the nature of collaborative production papermaking.

How is it different to work in these two different ways – comparing projects for designer papers with Eriko Horiki to your usual work on Iwano paper?

AT - Working for Iwano Heizaburo is about making paper that has been transferred down the generations for more than a thousand years. But working with Eriko Horiki is a new way of working for us. Iwano's paper has withstood history. It is made in the way we were taught. It is paper where you are preserving the methods passed down to you by your elders. But with Eriko Horiki you watch excitedly as every single new piece is brought into the world. "Wow - is this kind of thing really exhibited somewhere? Who will use it? Who will see it?" It is somehow very exciting. Making traditional paper, one has always to keep the rules - it is important for us to keep the same way of working. Horiki's work is different - defiant.

To preserve the traditions of the paper that you make, some people might think it's impossible to do to this standard - how do you achieve it? How do you train your body and mind to do it?

We are just taught, and we abide by it - you have to love what you do though. More than just learning - by loving it you come to know how to make it. It's not easy to make - and you know, Miki came here because of his love for the craft. And, that's how you learn - by putting your heart and soul into it. To follow the ways set out - its not something that happens overnight certainly, as the years go by it becomes part of you. As you stand by the vat over time your body gets used to doing that.

How do you get the perfect paper again and again?

TM - It's not that its perfect at the start, but if you come together as a team and everyone is thinking: "Let's get it the same again, lets get it the same", after that, to an extent you are able to get the same results.

AT - The paper that is pulled isn't perfect. It is manmade, handmade, and there are slight differences each time.

TM - But it's over and over again saying: "Let's do it the same, let's do it the same". It takes a few years in the beginning... five years, seven years?

AT - Seven years isn't enough. It's handmade stuff, it's not something that you can, say, crank out of a computer. It's all in the *hands*. Hands as well as *sense*... a sense for the neri, a sense for the pressure, a sense for... the spirit of paper.

When you are making large paper versus small paper - what dynamics change?

AT - Small paper you can make yourself, with your own two hands. But large paper is *teamwork*. Of course, for that you need a leader. If there's no leader it all goes out of kilter pretty quickly. So the leader of the team is responsible.

What kind of leader do you need to be?

TM - You need to be able to harness things together, to coordinate the process. It's production work so you have to be mindful of what you are producing - this needs adjusting this needs attention, if mistakes appear you have to know how to fix them. But it's all a team effort.

What if the leader doesn't accomplish that very well?

AT - If things keep going wrong, the leader isn't fitting in with the movements and the rhythm. And, if things keep going wrong, what you end up making won't be quite right, so everyone needs to be fitting in with each other smoothly.

You work in teams of two and threes in the studio here. Do the leaders alternate?

AT - If it starts to become difficult for the leader to do their job, their eyes become bad for example, there is a change made. The next person takes over. And the work that is made then also changes, a little bit. It changes. But even though it does - the task is to keep it the same.

TM - ...and as a member of the team - your task is to submit yourself to the leader.

What makes good paper?

AT - Good paper comes from the fibre. It's also if the fibre changes. The water, the fibre, and the process. The neri too. And, the people...

So if you simply have the right ingredients, you can make good paper?

TM - If you have the experience.

AT - Even if you have all the right ingredients - you can't not have the right experience.

But what kind of experience is necessary?

AT - You have to have made *a lot* of paper.

Nothing besides that?

TM - Sensibility, I guess.

AT - yeah if you don't have the right sensibilities, no matter how many times you make it, you won't be able to make paper that is any good. No matter what you do, you won't be able to do it. But I really believe - its if you like it - if you are really passionate about it ... if you are just making it over and over, you may get better, you may not. But I think that you're only as good as how much you love what you are doing.

When did you start to make paper?

AT - I was born here in Echizen, and my parents made paper, and so everyone in the house made paper, and so I started to make it too - it was passed down to me. Next year it will be 50 years since I started. But Miki - he came to work here by choice - through loving the paper. We are fundamentally different in that sense. However, this kind of job, I don't think I knew in the beginning that I would come to appreciate it the way I have... If you have the energy you can do almost anything with your life.

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