

## Right Place Right Time

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Kobayashi Keisei from Japan and Chen Qi from China are both undoubtedly outstanding printmakers with substantial influence and distinct styles.

Kobayashi's art career began in 1963 soon after Japan was catapulted into an age of rapid growth; Chen Qi was born this year, thus, between the two lies a 20-year gap. As Chen Qi began his studies in the early 80's, the timing coincided with the beginning years of China's economic reform. 20 years is about the same range of time that had passed between the two countries' economic peaks as well.

Following times of stagnation and exclusion, liberated thoughts and welcomed information have suddenly allowed for fresh insights and proved to be an excellent timing for the youth to catch up on the society's progress. Some souls could thus begin to grow and blossom, such as Kobayashi Keisei and Chen Qi.

From concerns in the vicissitudes of social reality to exposing the shifts in our surrounding environment, Kobayashi's work has been gradually leaning toward optimistic depictions of the future; his incisiveness has softened, and his once aggressive imageries have embraced a gentle touch in an effort to convey his wishes for all "beings" (sheng) to live in harmony. Chen Qi's work has progressed into continuous explorations into a hybrid of abstract shapes and cultural sentiments through continuous observations at his surrounding objects and scenes; his perspective pierces deep beneath the surface, his former complex elements are now simplistic, and his imagery seems so enigmatically mystical as it attempts to probe at the significance of "life" (sheng).

Kobayashi is skilled at expressing through the techniques of wood engraving, and he has been dedicated to this particular approach for half a century. On the other hand, Chen Qi never strayed from his native water-based woodblock printmaking technique for over thirty years now. Having completely immersed themselves in studies and experiments, the two have not only reached the top in their respective fields but also discovered the appropriate vehicle in which to carry and accentuate their profound concerns of "life" or "beings" (shen). Their dedication has also enabled opportunities for ancient forms of artistry to be bettered, and the motto of "unity and growth with artistry" was thus born. Chen Qi's practice is based upon "growing and evolving upon the foundation of techniques", while Kobayashi says, "Artists think

with their hands,” and it exactly rings true.

The paths these two have taken might have seemed incongruous with the course of time and space as people never shied from voicing their criticisms and doubts. The two's unyielding stance and, luckily, them having been born in an era that accepts different voices allowed for their individual discourse to spring, and frees them to respond to the era from their distinct perspectives. As Kobayashi once said, it would be futile to discuss his work once the factor of time is removed. Times make the man just as men have enriched the times, and is that not a great tale of our times?

Of course, one cannot choose how you were born - it never was up to people's will. Yet the path to greatness is paved for those who are resilient and make the most of the changing times, not for those without a specific objective or tenacity. Chen Qi once said, “Having been born in this magnificent era, we should complete the tasks handed to us so as to not waste the time we are in, and to not squander our lives of limited years.” The proverb of *Right Place Right Time* seems to be exactly so.

The sea that lies between China and Japan seems to keep the two close yet far from one another. For thousands of years, the two countries have been conflicted with feelings of familiarity and alienation; the two share an extensive history that is interwoven with rich cultural exchanges first propelled by our ancestors. As printmaking exchanges between China and Japan grow increasingly active in recent years, both countries wish to read just their perspectives through the opportunity as well as to, again, initiate reciprocity and write a new chapter in history. The exhibition is held just as spring nears, which is made possible by the circumstances of our time - it is a great tale that realizes the truth of the old proverb: *Right place, right time*.

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