

A Better Understanding

Dan Hardison

If we truly enjoy something, would it not be normal instinct to want to learn more about it? Would it not be true that the more we learn and understand about a subject, the more fully we can appreciate it? Would this not be true in the arts as well?

I had a friend who loved opera. He actually took voice lessons not because he wanted to be a singer, but to have a better understanding of the music and the dedication and talent required to produce it.

I myself learned to read music and to play the guitar because of my love for the instrument and music in general. Although I no longer play today, does not this knowledge drive my appreciation of music and in particular my preference for guitar music?

There is the old cliché of someone viewing an abstract painting and commenting, “Oh, I could do that”. So why not? The truth is, that even though something may appear simple, it is usually much harder to achieve. But if it is something we really enjoy, why not try our hand at it. The worst that could happen is that in the end, we would have a better appreciation of the artistic effort.

Many times, it is this quest for learning, for understanding, that increases the enjoyment of the art. After attending an exhibition of white-line woodblock prints many years ago, I became fascinated with the medium. Later, I attempted to teach myself the technique. After much reading and observation of other artists’ work; after the trial and error of trying to perfect the craftsmanship of carving the block and developing the technique of printing the individual colors; after many failures and many hours of frustration – success. But whether or not I ever create another white-line woodblock print, I now have an even greater understanding and appreciation of the process – as well as a sense of accomplishment.

Poet Luci Shaw has said, “Everybody's born with the ability to create in one form or the other... If we could just reawaken that

freedom to express ourselves in those creative ways, a lot of healing would come, because it's making us whole people again. It's not just this practical, left-brained, functional person, who's able to make a living and keep body and soul together. If we only had a functional world that would be enough; but God, in his grace, has given us this wonderful extra, beauty, which shouldn't just be an extra, it should be integral to our psyche.”

River Tug

white-line woodblock print, 11" x 8 1/4"

By Dan Hardison

