

Noda's world



Tim Clark presents
a display of prints
by Noda Tetsuya

'I thought the contrast between the Japanese family and the foreign family was interesting. You know, the strongly paternalistic Japanese family, with its dictatorial patriarch, as opposed to the freer and more individualistic Western family. By presenting this, I aimed at showing the really fascinating differences between Japan and the Occident.' Thus commented print artist Noda Tetsuya (born 1940) about the pair of 1968 works featuring his own family and that of his bride to be, Dorit Bartur, which won him the International Grand Prize at the Tokyo International Print Biennale that year. (Young Tetsuya stands on the far left, Dorit is seated on the far right.) In the nearly fifty years since, Noda has created some 500 further works that continue his mesmerising 'Diary' series, using

the unique combination of colour woodblock and photo-based silkscreen onto handmade Japanese paper that he has made his own. Personal snapshots are rigorously reworked to become subtle mementos of universal significance: 'what's in a life?' we are constantly prompted to ask.

The themes of the Diary series began with the relationship with Dorit, their international marriage and Tetsuya's conversion to Judaism. Children Izaya and Rika followed and we share the intimacies of their growing up. Since 1975 a series of 'present past objects' – that is, gifts (presents) from friends of fruits, fish, flowers, ceramics and their wrappings – has extended the oeuvre to elegant still life. Travel in Japan, USA, Europe, Israel and elsewhere in Asia has prompted monumental landscapes.



Diary: Aug. 22nd '68 (left) and Diary: Sept. 11th '68 (right), by Noda Tetsuya, printed 1969, colour woodblock and silkscreen, given by the Artist

Since his retirement from teaching at the Tokyo University of the Arts (formerly the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts) in 2007, the artist's third age has blossomed in a succession of powerful colour works. The mood can be playful or contemplative. Composition is critical: 'I often search for abstract, mysterious or humorous elements in order to tickle the imagination of the viewers. I also wish to show that it is possible to include various abstract elements in realistic settings.'

A blurred station platform seen through the train window; children splashing in the bath; bread being toasted for an invalid parent: Noda's beautiful prints make us acutely aware of the passing of time, and for that we are acutely grateful.



Diary: Feb. 23rd '10, in Kashiwa, by Noda Tetsuya, 2010, colour woodblock and silkscreen, purchase funded by JTI Japanese Acquisition Fund

The special display of Noda prints can be seen in the Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries, Room 94, to 5 October, britishmuseum.org