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## DAYS IN A LIFE: THE ART OF TETSUYA NODA

October 22, 2004 – January 16, 2005

Asian Art Museum Presents Exhibition Showcasing Japan's Greatest Living Printmaker

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, JULY 29, 2004—Over the past century, few artists have consistently followed an autobiographical road. To think that one's life is important enough to make it the focus of one's art can be an act of pure folly and egotism or it can involve a humbling and sincere self-examination that draws on observations of small universal truths. Beginning October 22, 2004, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco will present *Days in a Life: The Art of Tetsuya*

*Noda*, an exhibition showcasing the work of perhaps Japan's greatest living print artist Tetsuya Noda, whose career of nearly forty years has followed the latter, quieter path. Featuring 57 prints and 3 three-dimensional works—each capturing the sublime beauty of the workaday world—that span 34 years of the artist's career (1968 to 2002), *Days in a Life* provides an intimate view of Tetsuya Noda's highly personal work, while underscoring his reputation as possibly the most original, innovative, and thought-provoking Japanese printmaker of his era. On view through January 16, 2005, *Days in a Life: The Art of Tetsuya Noda* was organized by the Asian Art Museum and is curated by Robert Flynn Johnson, curator-in-charge, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The exhibition is accompanied by a full-color 80-page catalogue.

Tetsuya Noda was born in 1940 in Kumamoto Prefecture and has lived in Tokyo since 1958. He first gained international recognition in 1968 when he won the International Grand Prize at the Tokyo International Print Biennale, and in the following years was invited to represent Japan at the Sao Paulo Biennale (1971) and the Venice Biennale (1972). In the decades since, he has continued to win printmaking awards, and has exhibited widely. His works are included in major museum collections



*Diary; Feb. 17th, '92.* Woodcut and silkscreen on Japanese paper. Lent by Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, museum purchase, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts Endowment Fund and partial gift of Don Soker.

including the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Hirshorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the British Museum; among others. In 2003, Noda was awarded the prestigious Medal with Purple Ribbon, a highly coveted honor bestowed by the Japanese government to individuals who have made important contributions to academic and artistic developments, improvements and accomplishments.

Maintaining illustrated diaries since childhood, Noda has always found it important to keep a record of his life. However, it was not until the 1960s that he found the ideal means of expressing this impulse. At that time—after an unsatisfying period in school during which he specialized in painting—Noda turned to printmaking as his primary medium. Moreover, Noda pioneered a mixed-media method that combines images from photographic plates and drawings, using both silkscreen and woodblock printing practices. Refined and altered by the artist, the images are printed on fine Japanese paper with additions of woodblock backgrounds and accents. At first glance, the resulting hybrid nature of the works may be unexpected and unnerving to viewers used to more conventional methods, but after closer inspection, the prints reveal a delicate nature.

Noda is a rare Japanese artist who has made his own life his subject matter. Since 1966, he has documented his life through his “Diary” series of prints. That word, along with a date and sometimes a location, is the title of nearly every work that Noda has created, including those on view in *Days in a Life*. Literally a “life work,” the “Diary” series includes hundreds of prints recording and interpreting both significant and minor—or so they may seem—personal events.

The majority of Noda’s prints on view in *Days in a Life* are based on snapshots of his wife Dorit Bartur (the daughter of the Israeli ambassador to Japan) and their children, friends, and mundane features of their surroundings. The subjects—a blurred figure on a train, food on a table, gardening equipment—are all treated in a highly personal manner. Noda often extracts one element from a scene: for example, in one print a tabletop is covered with all the ordinary clutter of everyday use, but floats in the print field without a context. Noda’s presentation is very intimate, making viewers feel that he doesn’t so much make his daily life public, but rather he invites them into his private space.

*Days in a Life: The Art of Tetsuya Noda* is on view in the Asian Art Museum’s Hambrecht Gallery, located on the first floor. The works are presented in chronological order that not only trace the passage of Noda’s life, but also chart his development as a print artist. Two of the earliest works in the exhibition, *Diary; Aug. 22nd '68* and *Diary; Sept. 11th '68*, represent an early breakthrough for the artist. After some tentative attempts in which photo-imagery was unsuccessfully combined with abstract expressionist gesture, Noda caused a quiet sensation by incorporating a bold combination of photography with traditional use of paper, inks, and woodblock printing. Although only twenty-eight years old and entering a competitive exhibition for the first time, Noda won first prize with these two

prints in the prestigious Tokyo International Print Biennale of 1968. The works are traditional and formal, but at the same time eccentric and avant-garde. The subjects are ceremonial group portraits—one work a portrait of the artist's family and the other of the family of his fiancée (now his wife), Dorit Bartur. Noda transformed the works by placing the figures low in the composition with much blank space above.

At the core of Noda's work are his ties to his family and his friends. Because of the self-revelatory nature of his art, one is able to observe how he commemorates those relationships. For example, the ashtray that is the subject of the later work *Diary; March 19th, '91* is the artistic outgrowth of a generational struggle between Noda (who has never smoked) and his son. Noda wrote concerning the genesis of these works:

“My son Izaya had a habit of using any kind of container—cups, cans or bottles—he would find at home as an ashtray, and to my regret he smoked a lot every day. I might say that one of my purposes in producing these works was my hope that my son would eventually stop smoking for the sake of his health. It was a lot of work for me to make such large prints, and I hoped he would see them at my show and would be impressed by them. As you can imagine it does not always work this way! . . . They are the largest prints I have produced. I sometimes joke about it, saying that I had to spend nearly one month in order to finish each work while it took Izaya only one day to smoke these cigarettes!”

As a Japanese man married to a woman of Israeli origin, Noda often explores cross-cultural issues. Noda is rarely confrontational in his art, but there have been times when he could not avoid expressing strong emotions, as in the work *Diary; March 27th and 28th, '02*. The print expresses the shock he experienced of seeing a report on television of a suicide bombing at a Seder in Israel. (The bombing occurred the day before the report; hence the two dates on the print.) Noda explained:

I am not a religious man in any way, but having an Israeli wife I am invited almost every year to the Passover Seder. It is still for many Jews one of the most celebrated ceremonies. It is a time to think about the importance of freedom and share time with family and friends. No one should be left alone on such a day. On March 27, 2002, we were invited to share a secular kind of seder with an Israeli family from a kibbutz who were living in Tokyo. Since I . . . make my sketches with my camera, you can imagine me sitting in front of both parts of the image, one facing the Passover table and the other facing the tragedy on our TV set. Although these problems are happening in the Middle East, I cannot but feel concerned and involved, and they are very much a part of my life now.

In two later portraits Noda continues the loving dialogue begun decades earlier between himself and his wife. In *Diary; Feb. 17th, '92*, Noda elegantly portrays Dorit intensely absorbing the news of the world reported in The Japan Times. In *Diary; April 24, '97*, Noda humorously depicts himself sound asleep beneath a discount store advertising handout. Despite the highly personal nature of

the work, the sly contrast of levels of attentiveness and of reading matter reveals a portrait more self-effacing and devoid of ego than self-reverential.

The works on view in *Days in a Life: The Art of Tetsuya Noda* are borrowed from private Bay Area collections; the Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco; and from the artist. After its presentation in San Francisco, the exhibition will tour to three or four other venues (to be confirmed) from late 2005 through late 2006/early 2007.

### Media Preview

A media preview for *Days in a Life: The Art of Tetsuya Noda* will be held on Thursday, October 21, 2004, from 9:30 AM to 12 noon, with a gallery walk-through at 10:00 AM led by Robert Flynn Johnson, curator-in-charge, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The artist and his wife are scheduled to attend the preview. Complimentary refreshments will be served. Please RSVP to [pr@asianart.org](mailto:pr@asianart.org) or call (415) 581-3712.

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### **About the Asian Art Museum**

The Asian Art Museum is a public institution whose mission is to lead a diverse global audience in discovering the unique material, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements of Asian art and culture. Holding nearly 15,000 Asian art treasures spanning 6,000 years of history, the museum is one of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art. Once located in Golden Gate Park, the museum now resides at its new, expanded facility at Civic Center Plaza. An architectural gem featuring a dynamic blend of beaux arts and modern design elements, the museum's new home is the result of a dramatic transformation of San Francisco's former main library building by renowned architect Gae Aulenti (designer of Paris's Musée d'Orsay) into a showcase for the museum's acclaimed collection and exhibitions.

- **Information:** (415) 581-3500, or [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org).
- **Location:** 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102.
- **Hours:** The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, with extended hours until 9:00 pm every Thursday.
- **Admission:** \$10 for adults, \$7 for seniors, \$6 for youth 12–17, and free for children under 12. Thursday evenings after 5 pm admission is just \$5 for all visitors except those under 12 and members, who are always free. **Target Tuesdays:** The museum offers FREE admission to all on the **first Tuesday** of every month, courtesy of Target Stores.
- **Access:** The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access, please call (415) 581-3598; TDD: (415) 861-2035.

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