

**Interesting**

**Owls**

*in contemporary*

*Japanese art*

Scops owl (*Otus* sp.) by Yoshiharu Kimura



## Introduction

The printed art of Japan has included pictures of birds for about three hundred years. During this period the popularity of owls as subjects for printed art has increased dramatically, as shown below.

60-year interval	1710-1769	1770-1829	1830-1889	1890-1949	1950-2009
number of artists drawing owls	5	4	16	16	100

A likely reason for the dramatic increase in the popularity of owls as subjects for art in the last sixty years is the change in their symbolic association. Since the 1950s owls have been considered to be symbols of good luck and protection from hardship. These associations are based on similarities between a Japanese name for owls (i.e., fukurō) and the words for luck (fuku) and no (fu) hardship (kurō). Before 1950 the negative Chinese association of owls with ingratitude (because owl offspring were thought to eat their parents) was also prevalent in Japan.

The two types of owls depicted most often in post-1950s Japanese art are scops owls (*Otus scops* and *Otus lettia*) and the Ural owl (*Strix uralensis*). Scops owls have prominent ear tufts while Ural owls do not. In real life neither owl is particularly eye-catching (pictures 1 and 2). Presumably their dull colors allow them to blend into the background and hide from both their prey and predators. To make these owls more interesting many Japanese artists changed their colors and (or) shape. This virtual exhibition includes thirty examples of these more interesting owls. The examples were chosen from the Reader Collection of Japanese Art which includes several hundred post-1950 owl prints. Owls with prominent ear tufts, presumably modeled on scops owls, are shown in prints 1-15 and owls without ear tufts, presumably modeled on the Ural owl, are shown in prints 16-30. For each print the following information is provided: names of the owl model and the artist, printing method, title and print size.



Picture 1 : scops owl (*Otus* sp.) by Eiichi Kotozuka



Picture 2: Ural owl (*Strix uralensis*) by Tōshi Yoshida

1 Scops owl by **Gashū Fukami**, woodblock print entitled surrounded in green, 220 x 295 mm



100/100

緑の中

gashu

2 Scops owl by **George Ueda**, screenprint entitled collared scops owl – older brother, 125 x 165 mm



100/200

アコ/ハズク

-ジョージ-

u-george

3 Scops owl by **Morikazu Maeda**,  
woodblock print, 150 x 125 mm



4 Scops owl by **Fumio Kitaoka**,  
woodblock print, 150 x 125 mm



5 Scops owl by **Hiroaki Yoshioka**, lithograph, 455 x 635 mm



6 Scops owl by **Shiko Munakata**, woodblock print, 260 x 390 mm



7 Scops owl by **Motoi Ōi**, screenprint, 380 x 455 mm



39/250

Motoi Ōi

8 Scops owl by **Hiroshi Kabe**, screenprint entitled owl III, 155 x 200 mm



20/50

2003 (III)

H. Kabe

9 Scops owl by **Nobuyoshi Koga**, screenprint entitled March 3, 105 x 150 mm



3月3日

Nobuyoshi Koga

10 Scops owl by **Keisuke Ohba**, screenprint entitled love, 105 x 150 mm



LOVE E-A Keisuke.O.

11 Scops owl by **Kaoru Kawano**, woodblock print, 285 x 430 mm

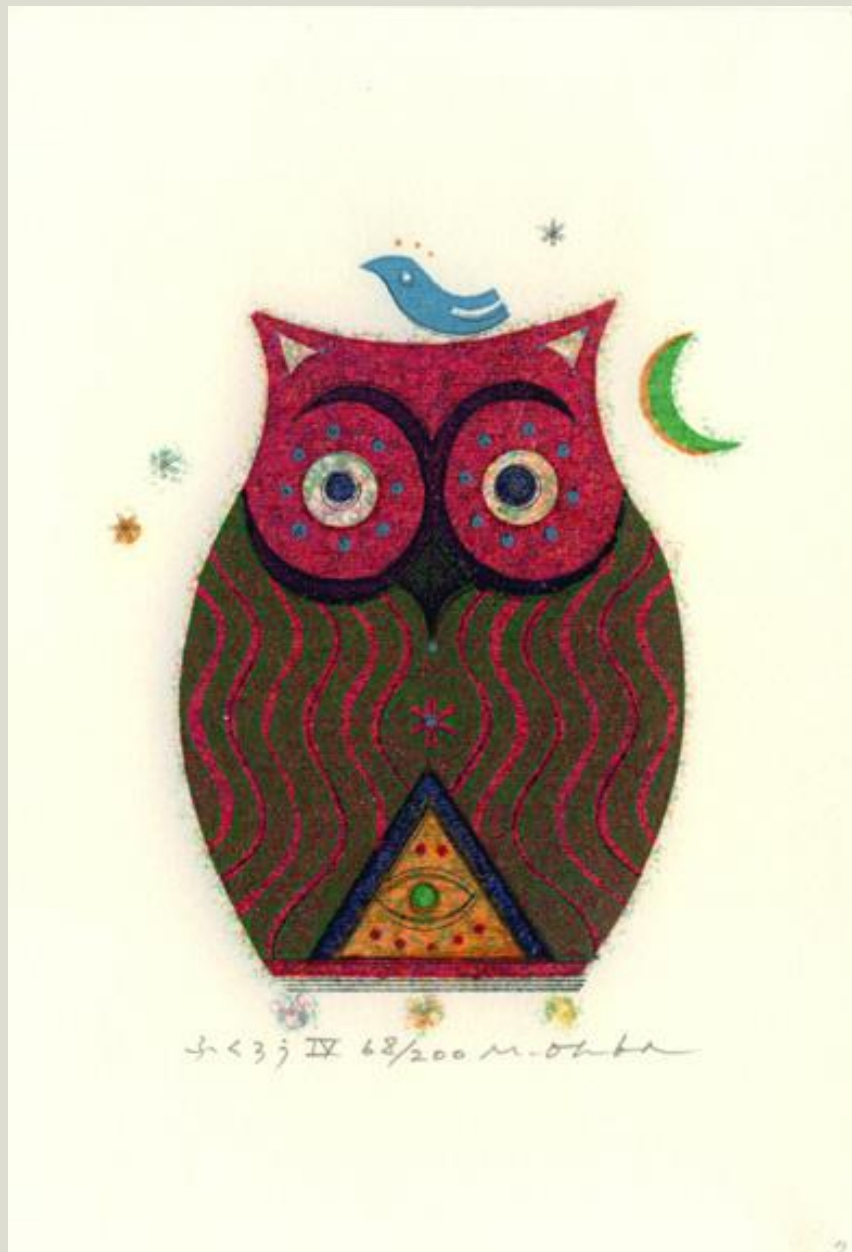


12 Scops owl by **Iwao Akiyama**, woodblock print entitled can't sleep, 360 x 460 mm

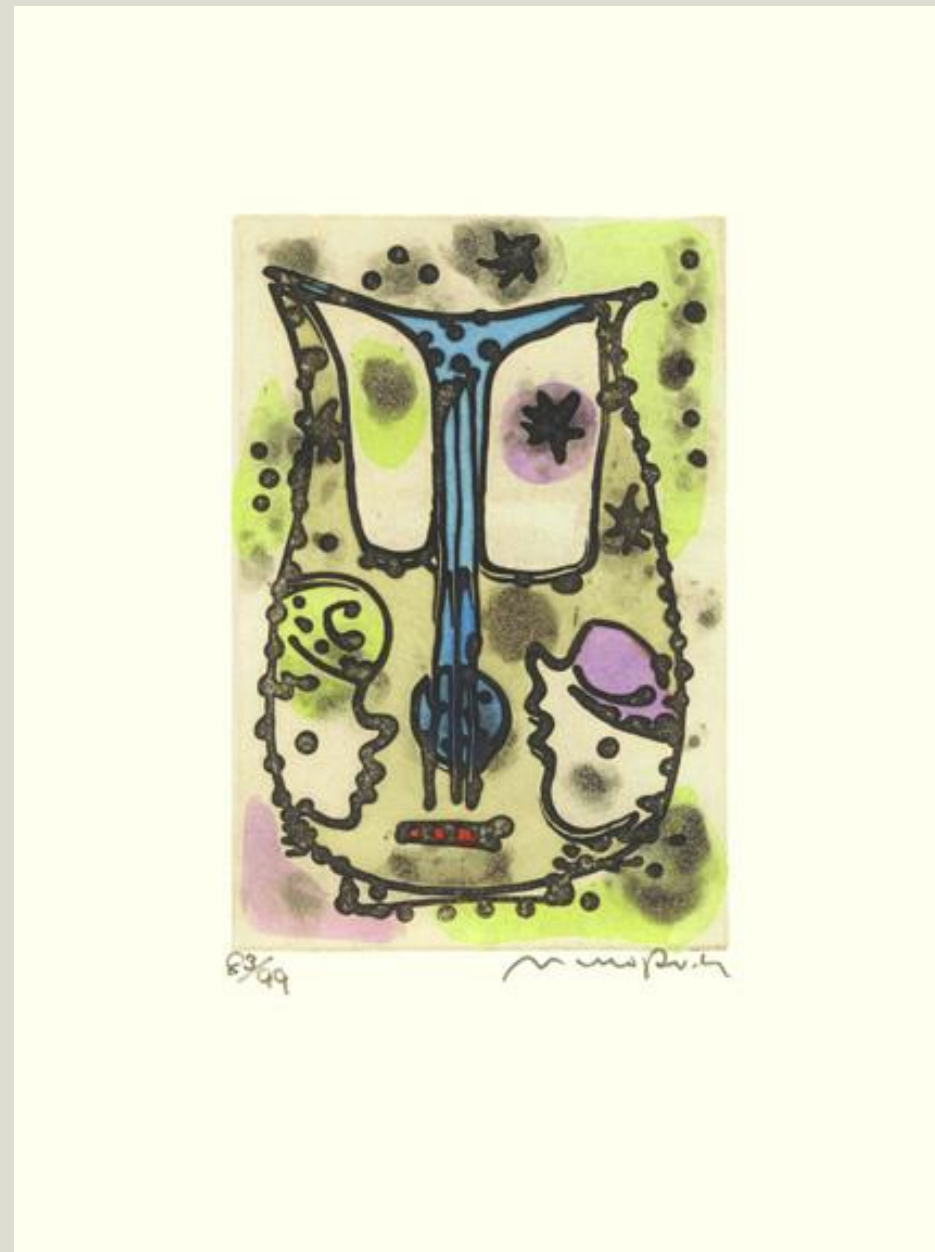




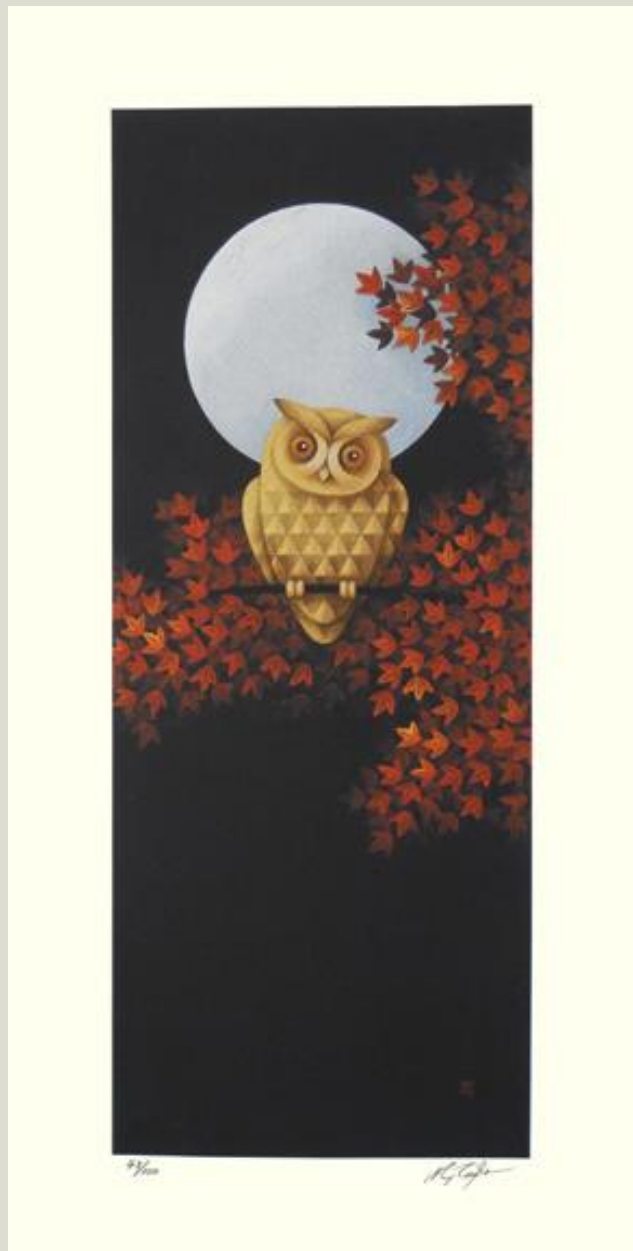
13 Scops owl by **Masao Ohba**, screenprint entitled owl IV, 135 x 195 mm



14 Scops owl by **Minoru Yokota**, intaglio print, 190 x 250 mm



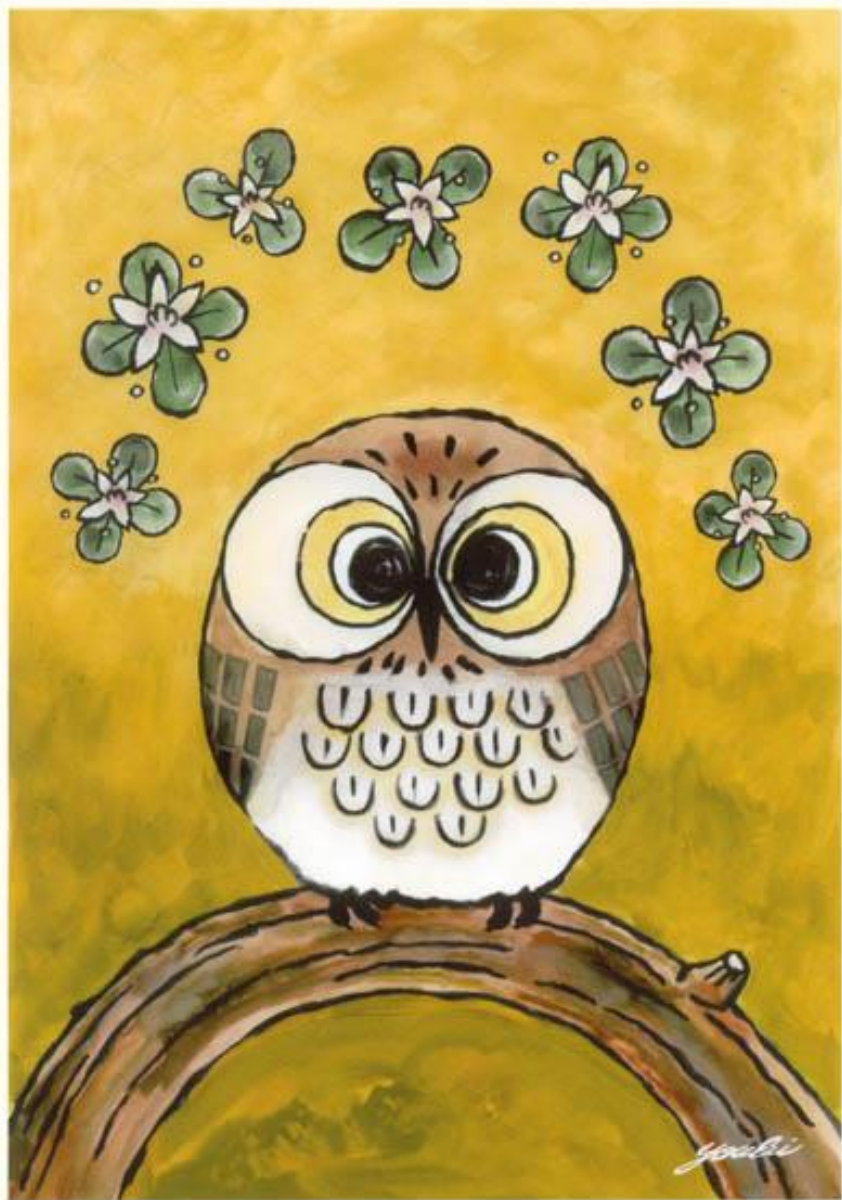
15 Scops owl by **Masasuke Chiba**,  
screenprint entitled autumn, 300 x 600 mm



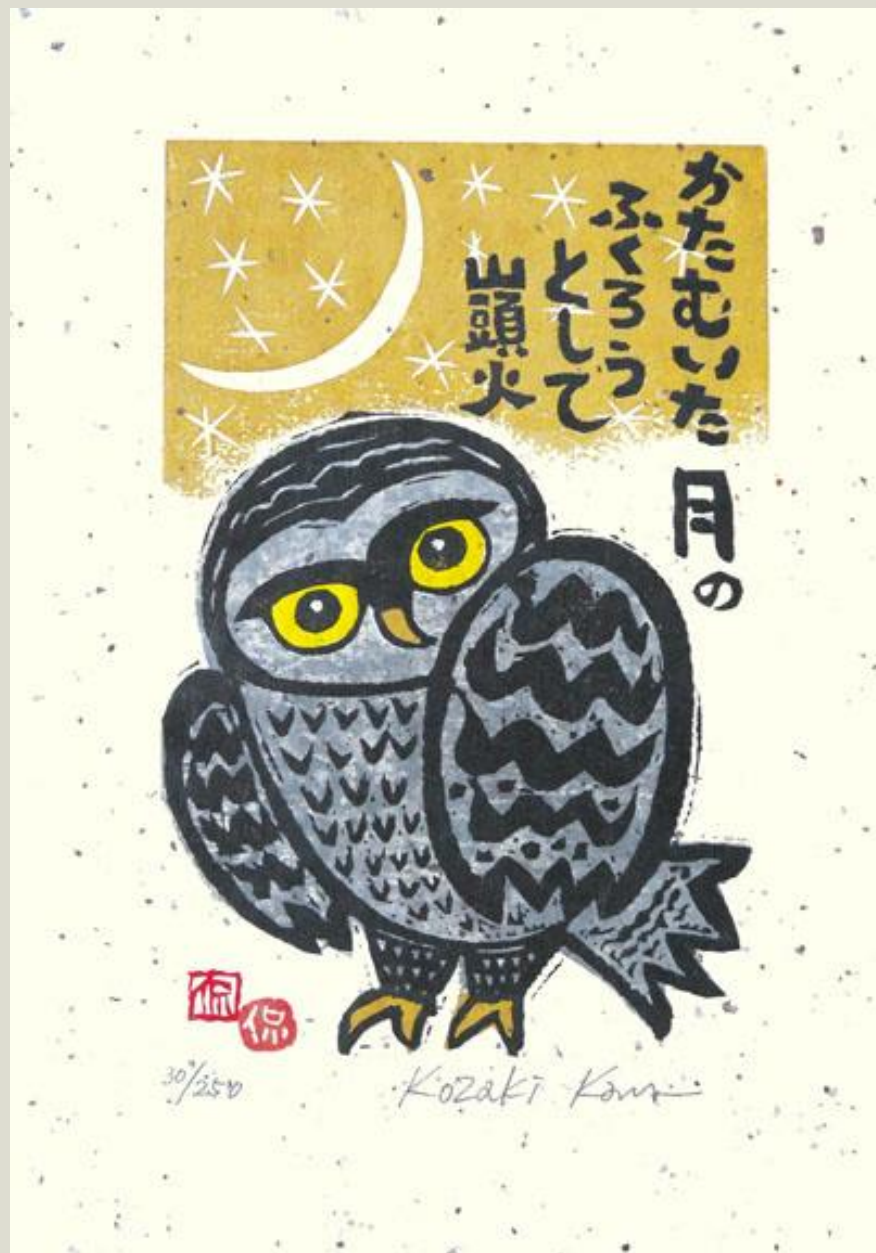
16 Ural owl by **Kichiemon Okamura**, stencil print, 415 x 555 mm



17 Ural owl by **Ayaka Sen**, screenprint entitled Midas touch, 200 x 275 mm



18 Ural owl by **Kan Kozaki**, woodblock print, 220 x 320 mm



19 Ural owl by **Fumiaki Fukita**,  
woodblock print entitled many  
days child sitting, 605 x 470 mm



20 Ural owl by **Hiromitsu Sakai**,  
digital print, 425 x 295 mm



21 Ural owl by **Keisaburō Tejima**, woodblock print entitled owl's wood, 300 x 380 mm



22 Ural owl by **Tomikichirō Tokuriki**, woodblock print, 250 x 350 mm



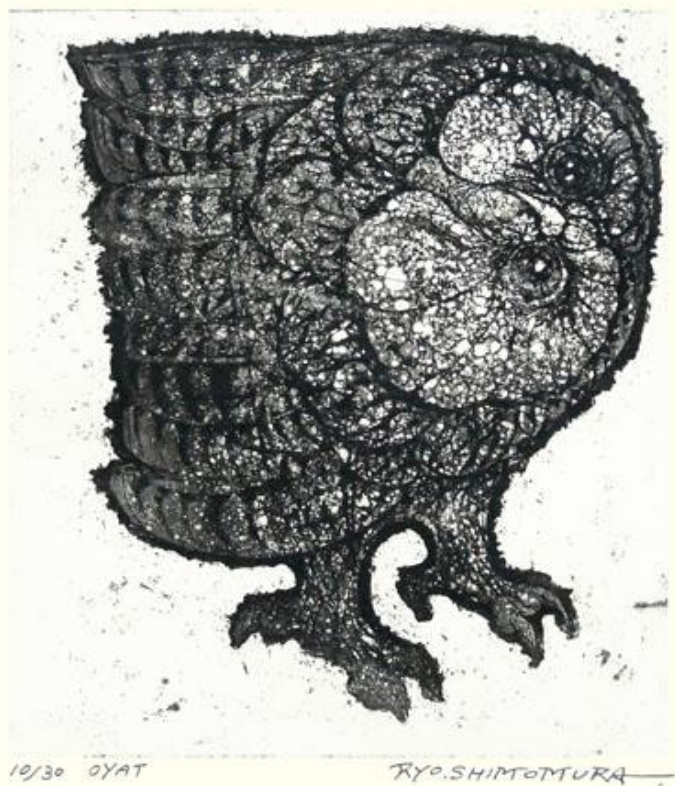
23 Ural owl by **Kōhō Ōuchi**, woodblock print entitled spring dance, 245 x 245 mm



24 Ural owl by **Ray Morimura**, woodblock print, 180 x 195 mm



25 Ural owl by **Ryōnosuke Shimomura**, intaglio print  
entitled OYAT, 240 x 265 mm



26 Ural owl by **Masaki Shibuya**, woodblock print  
entitled kung fu forest No. 7, 120 x 135 mm



27 Ural owl by **Yoshiharu Kimura**, woodblock print entitled saint B, 335 x 375 mm



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28 Ural owl by **Rokushū Mizufune**, woodblock print entitled lonely wisdom, 215 x 285 mm



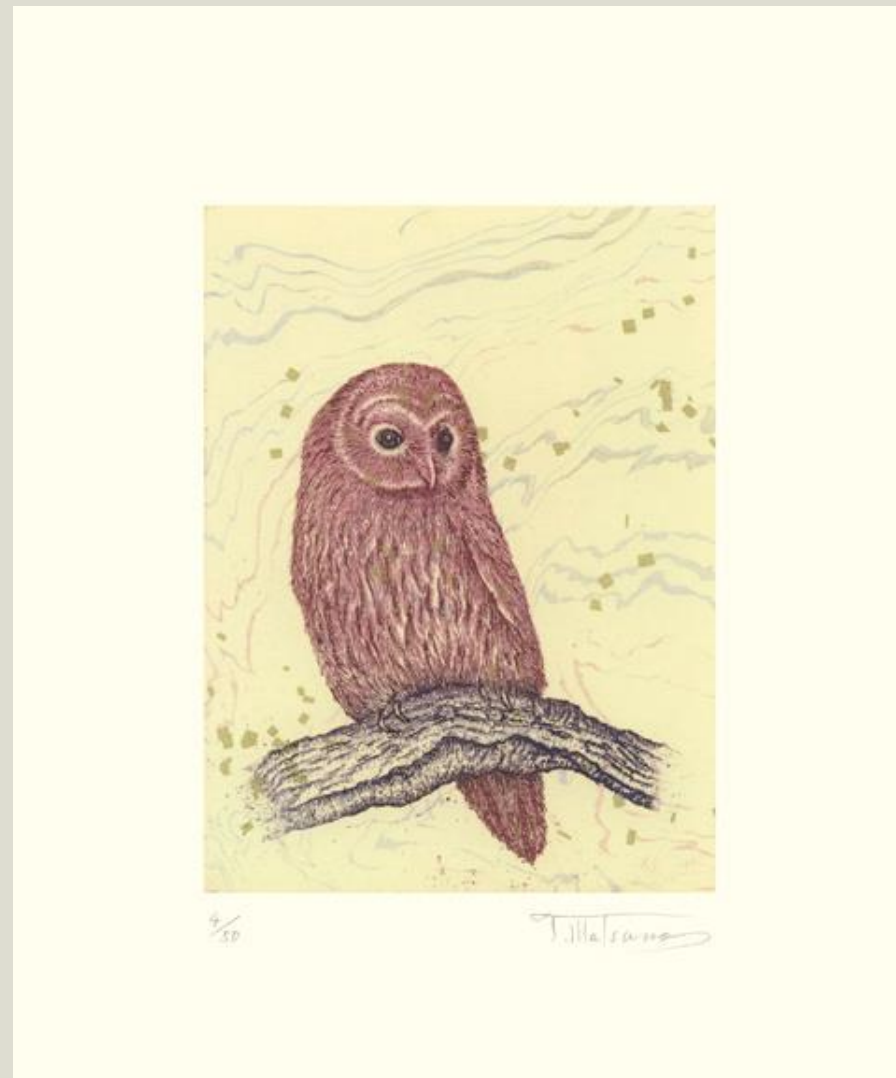
MIZUFUNE RO  
34/50 孤獨の智慧 R. Mizufune



29 Ural owl by **Kōzō Onishi**, woodblock print, 125 x 110 mm



30 Ural owl by **Tomiko Matsuno**, intaglio print, 210 x 250 mm



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