

From the introduction to 2000 Dragons by Don Ed Hardy

1976 was a Dragon Year in the twelve-year Asian zodiac cycle and that's when I got the idea to make some kind of special art piece in 2000, two cycles away. By 1999, although still tattooing, the greater part of my energy had happily returned to focus on my personal art: painting, drawing, and printmaking. As the year progressed and I thought about the upcoming historic Dragon Millennial year, the most obvious thing was to do a painting incorporating 2000 dragons. Then it seemed appropriate to continue the "auspicious numerology" and create a 2000-square foot painting in a long scroll format. The problem was what materials would work. Paper would be too fragile and canvas too heavy. I was working with master printer, Bud Shark, at his lithography studio in Lyons, Colorado; and Bud, ever conversant with interesting solutions to complex projects, suggested Tyvek. This synthetic paper has a variety of commercial uses, including building insulation during construction, as well as postal and FedEx mailers. It has incredible tensile strength and is ultra-lightweight and impossible to tear, although easy to cut. After testing some small samples with various materials, this seemed the perfect solution.

In December 1999 I had a five-hundred-foot roll of the material delivered. At the time, my workspace was a disused, tiny one-car garage at the back of our yard, built in the 1920s, only eleven by seventeen feet. A friend built a plywood easel bracketed by two vertical dowels, allowing about six feet of working surface. This allowed the material to be rolled across like a spool of film in a camera. I had no grand plan of what the scroll would look like, except that the initial dragon would be a version of the old Chinese story of a carp leaping a sacred waterfall ("Dragon's Gate") and, upon reaching the top, transforming into a dragon. For centuries, this classic parable has encouraged people to strive and succeed. On New Year's morning I was ready to launch. So I started the work with that sketchy idea but determined to not really plan or think about what would transpire as I went along with neither under drawing or corrections, just direct painting. The point was to fill a quota, somewhat like a contest to guess the beans in a jar in an old Carl Barks *Donald Duck* comic. To keep track of the progress, each dragon was numbered in Chinese characters; and a careful notation was made of the exact length covered at each sitting, time spent, and a running tally of the total to date. All this was entered in a ledger that became a record of not only these statistics but the music played while painting as well as random thoughts.