

## Ya'akov Boussidan *Continual Motion*

The memory of his mother sewing in the lamplight while surrounded by the animation of shadows on the surrounding walls has remained an abiding image and influence on Ya'akov Boussidan. A painter, ceramicist, photographer, acclaimed maker of hand-made books of Hebrew texts, Boussidan's prints in particular have become a means to explore a constantly changing landscape of shape and form, light and shadow. He has adapted a long established black and white print tradition to a highly personalised exploration of the visual experience of motion. This has preoccupied him over a thirty year period and, in the most recent series of digital work, shows little sign of abating or reaching any kind of resolution.

At the age of ten, in 1949, Ya'akov Boussidan experienced the enforced exile of his family from Egypt as a result of the Arab-Israeli war. A new life in Israel came at a time when the kibbutz movement had little interest in recognising art as a formal subject, while the prevailing art colleges pursued a brand of European modernism influenced by French post-impressionism in preference to the promotion of a Jewish tradition. What is now recognised as a turning point in his life saw him enrol with an independent teacher Professor Yoseph Schwartzmann (1906-1985) at his atelier in Tel Aviv. 'Officially this only offered four hours a week but there was always homework. It represented a different school of teaching'. A student of Käthe Kollwitz in Berlin, Schwartzmann taught 'the art of observing and questioning through drawing; always wanting me to open up questions rather than provide the answers... I was offered knowledge like an old pipe.' It was his teacher who made enquiries about pursuing his studies in England and which, at the relatively mature age of twenty-seven, saw Boussidan awarded a Rothschild Foundation Scholarship to study printmaking at Goldsmiths College, London.

As an art student in mid 1960s London, there was the impact of a youth culture driven by the ethos of all being possible and acceptable. Goldsmiths itself was in the midst of replacing an established tradition with new course structures and modes of appraisal. Paul Drury (1903-1987), the Head of Printmaking came to represent a welcome point of support. 'He was both cynical and a constructive teacher, not believing in the fashionable but in the search of ones own mind and nature'. To an outsider, encountering for the first time the various institutional clubs and groupings that seemed to constitute the surrounding art world, Drury's independence of mind appeared all the more welcome.

Access to presses and printing facilities at Goldsmiths facilitated a concentrated period of etching in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The choice of black and white allowed for a negation of anything that was irrelevant and for an uncompromising investigation into the changing face of essential structures. A series of ten large etchings entitled *Motion* in particular began to crystallise Boussidan's concerns. The sequence focused on loosely titled male and female forms moving expressively and defiantly over the paper surface. At times there is the inclusion of figurative elements, as in the arched forms of the *Couple*, but more often there is a total negation of physical attributes for a molecular form of abstraction. 'The shape, one against another, produces a nervous tension between what is positive and what is negative'.

This intensity had a lot to do with the density of black that was realised from mixing and experimenting with ones own inks, and the relishing of textural effects achieved by deep and minimal scratching alongside deep biting into the plate itself. Here the idea of the abstract cut-out is little concerned with the decorative but rather with conveying a spatial existence.

Anyone visiting Boussidan's home in Lewisham for the past thirty years will be immediately struck by the realistic portraits and still life painting filling large areas of the wall space. This combination of painting in colour and working graphically in black and white is not though as contradictory as it may first appear. 'I don't worry about reconciling the two. Black is a colour within life, paired down, while painting is full colour...I mix a number of blacks to provide the warmth there and the cool here...Galleries would prefer colour and still many find my approach too strong. I equate it with the way one writes with a pen, you can't see it in colour'.

The move in the last five years to digital work has not so much abandoned the qualities of etching and inking as sought to apply this knowledge to the faster, more controllable qualities of a computer. The process starts with a pencil drawing on paper which is fed into a computer programme, Photoshop, and manipulated before output as an ink jet print. 'I can work in an elemental way feeding shapes into the computer and then work on building up the quality of black'. In the same spirit of sketching, trials are printed out on a small A4 size before moving to the larger scale.

The results, once again collectively entitled *Motion*, have provided Boussidan with a method of increasing the exposure of his unrelenting structures while retaining a sense of fluidity. Shapes appear to work calligraphically, like ancient symbols on an uninterrupted ground without any hint of linear relief and only the occasional layer of grey tone. Reclining silhouettes make the most of the full dimensions of the paper surface, avoiding repetition but proclaiming a relationship to each other. Elsewhere there is the contrasting dialogue between a solidly blocked *Standing Male* and the acrobatic tension of a *Bending Female*.

In the increased possibilities of proofing, Boussidan has been drawn to the idea of making 'a speeded up statement'. Sequences of movement and more dramatic alteration can now be retained and utilised as never before. 'When it works, it works, it is difficult to explain' embodies the open and chancy approach that is being adopted to process. The exhibition format may not in fact be the natural ally of this artist. Ya'akov Boussidan is rather drawn to the notion of images whose impact can be seen from the perspective of a car driver that has little time or need of particular detail. The computer is rather providing him at present with a tool for extending and clarifying his ideas about the continuum of change, without sacrificing a commitment to the endless experience of black.

Tessa Sidey  
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