



Headdress: 2007, monoprint 57cm x 65cm Rebecca Jewell

Methodical Adventures

Susan Aldworth, Rebecca Jewell and David Skingle share a deep commitment to printmaking as a means of self-expression. They are also concerned by its being perceived as mere 'flatwork', somehow not worthy of serious consideration. This latter is reflected in the closure of many university printmaking departments. This is not just a reluctance to fund 'small' student-staff ratios but also – and perhaps a less forgivable ignorance of the processes that make art – there is an ill-perceived notion of technique which demonstrates a palpable lack of understanding that art is a language and language is only articulate when technically proficient, and it is this proficiency that allows sublime freedom of thought and expression.

This exhibition shows three bodies of work where there is a commonality of ethos – where method is process, and process is adventure, resulting in an iconography of great visual clarity and conceptual depth. That it all comes from the print room at London Metropolitan University (where Aldworth is visiting Research Fellow, Jewell is Artist-in-Residence and Skingle is Head of Printmaking) is an indication of the creative atmosphere and technical merit that exists there and deserves support.

Large polished zinc plates and the question 'What if?' spoken by Susan Aldworth have marked the starting point of her many etchings and now monoprints. This work exploits the chance alchemy of purpose and process, of method and material. 'What if?' becomes action and the hard polished zinc plate is lightly aquatinted and transforms to acquire the dull sheen and texture of skin that readily accepts rolled black ink. Not dour bible black but a luscious 'mer d'ebene' upon which to venture. 'What if?' and a play of placement begins with veins of thread (inked or not), of spirit globules that slowly dissolve the ink and form small convulsing exquisite 'bleeds'. Finally French chalk dust falls in controlled flurries to bring form to the black; it illuminates the dark.

With these elements in place the plate is run through the press. The print is taken. The resulting image is a record of rehearsed chance and

embodies one more methodical adventure. Inevitably, after discussing this new image, the question is 'What if?'.

Looking at the paintings, monoprints and drypoints of David Skingle, one is aware of a quiet insistent state of being. Initiated by painting, the colour, marks and surface are reinstated by monoprinting – the chance of process demanding a re-examination of the essential transferable content. This evolution continues with the monochrome drypoints where emphasis shifts to the autographic mark and where Hiroshige emerges from Tapias. All the images share motifs – the hint of a ceremonial sword (in fact bound wooden skewers made as a gift for him by his daughter Catherine) being an obvious overlay, but more equally shared is a procession of touch that responds to the chosen medium. The idea accepts mediation by the materials used with a precision that is almost self-effacing. The sun and age-blistered doors of Barcelona, an evening squall at hashi, are here combined and celebrate with clarity consequential acts and thought.

The use of objects to print from is both fascinating and poignant; vividly re-presenting the real has dynamic and potentially disturbing results that go beyond the narration of photography. There is an inevitable hesitation in discerning meaning; the 'reality' gains a new significance. Jewell uses this process to investigate the construction and re-interpret the meaning of historical artefacts discovered during the exploration of 'new worlds'. The resulting work is not illustration; there is a true sense of the physicality of the object and a reverence for its original purpose. The painstaking re-exploration of individual elements to recreate the original object displays precision of technique and also, through its final presentation, the concerns of the artist. Visual form and content are as important as the academic history.

Like Aldworth and Skingle, Jewell's use of printmaking engages process as both means and end, resulting in images that are self-referential both in technique and content.

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OPEN: Tuesday – Friday 12- 6pm



Cover: *A Gift at Parting*: 2009, screenprint
30cm x 41.5cm David Skingle



Methodical Adventures

Susan Aldworth
Rebecca Jewell
David Skingle

1 – 29 May 2009

OPENING RECEPTION:
Thursday 30 April 2009
6 - 8pm

UNIT2

Methodical Adventures

"A print affirms the need to remember and the impossibility of forgetting"

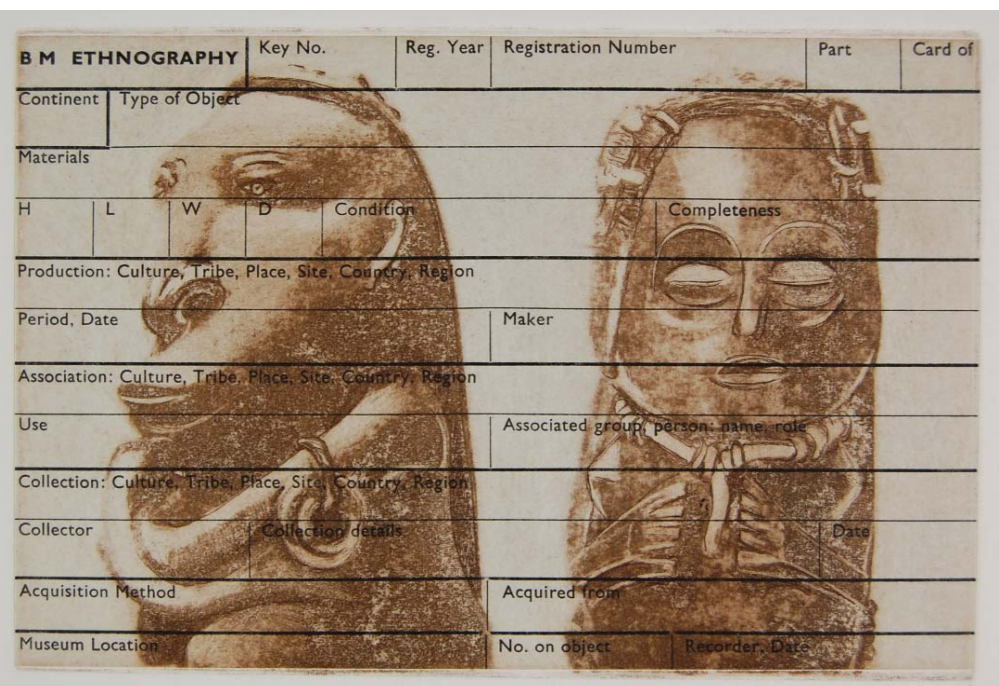
Louise Bourgeois

Georges Braque's phrase "Methodical Adventures", taken for the title of this show of three very different artists united by their use of printmaking, is a contradiction. Adventure implies a journey into new, uncertain, uncharted territory. Methodical (slightly pejorative in English) is a labour-intensive, plotted and directed process. We know from experience that contradictions are fruitful. We love the sheer contrariness and unpredictability of life. We live with the dynamic of opposites. Our biology and our planet are dependent on the tiniest atoms and molecules in forceful distinction. Our culture is founded on the expanse of human debate. Art thrives in a territory that is both abstracted from and driven by the demands of purpose.

The adventures we can go on with these three artists are in many ways deep in the certainties of craft and manufacture but are equally flights of fancy. The common observation of today is that the electronic digital world challenges the practical and down-to-earth traditions that have been forged in workshops and studios. In our globalised and interdependent world, each person has only a transitory grip on the particular and much concern with the general. The tactile has been usurped by the virtual. That assumption is challenged by the adventures these artists take us on.

Rebecca Jewell is the closest to the exotic connotations of adventure presenting us with images derived from rare, magical and probably sacred objects. Currently, besides being Artist-in-Residence at London Metropolitan University, she has a studio space at the British Museum's ethnographic storeroom. For many artists the collection that is unseen and unedited for display is the most fascinating. Here the mind can wander with serendipity.

It is the virtue of the wonderful Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford which manages to let its visitors search through material without hierarchical categorisation. Rebecca trained originally as an

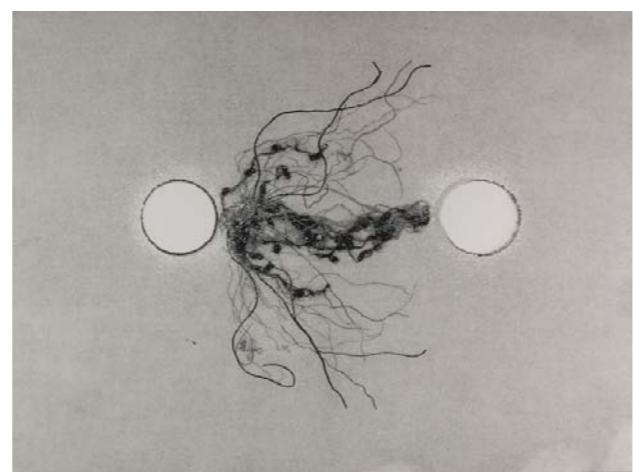
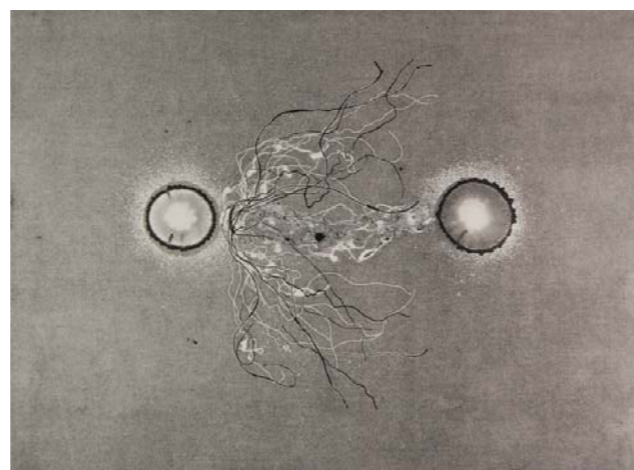


In Storage: 2008, etching 31cm x 25cm Rebecca Jewell

anthropologist. Her everyday encounter in the British Museum's ethnographic storeroom is with the 'acquisitions' and appropriations of past adventurers and suggests a journey of re-evaluation and re-contextualisation. What we once thought of as a far and distant land is now a low-cost air flight away, but our relationship to these cultures is still a complex negotiation.

David Skingle dreams of Zen, aligning his printmaking process with teaching and the sensibility of accidental discovery. His fascination with Japanese culture reminds us that it was in China and Japan that the invention of printing occurred long before Europe perfected the basics of printing that were to transform the culture. The notions of control, predictability and repetition and hence important discovery are the hallmarks of cultures that understand printing. In Western culture there would be no Gates without Gutenberg. David's concern is with nuances and hidden layers. The ritual of the print room and the simple beauty of the print process, ink on to paper, the logical interdependence of positive and negative, the climactic revelation of the action of the press are his methodical adventures. Unlike the situation with other art forms, the visual artist is invariably a teacher, but not necessarily in a formal sense. Every artist who presents their work in public takes on something of the role.

Susan Aldworth takes us into the interior of the mind and body. In an earth that has been extensively plotted by Google so that at the touch of a button we can summon up instantly a particular patch of the planet, the greatest remaining unknown territory is inside ourselves. Until recently, for most of us, the first encounter with the complex universe that inhabits our bodies has been when we get ill. A hospital starts to investigate what up to then we have largely had to take for granted. We had little more than the medieval explanation of humours and metaphors to describe our body's workings but this is now being fully revealed to us by new scanning and nano-investigative techniques. Artists have been standing by the bedside, fascinated by this new visual world just as they were when explorers brought back evidence from hitherto unknown regions of the world. Susan confronts us with images of tunnels of consciousness and unconsciousness, passages between life and death. Like Narcissus, we are staring into a deep abyss. We are looking at ourselves looking at ourselves.



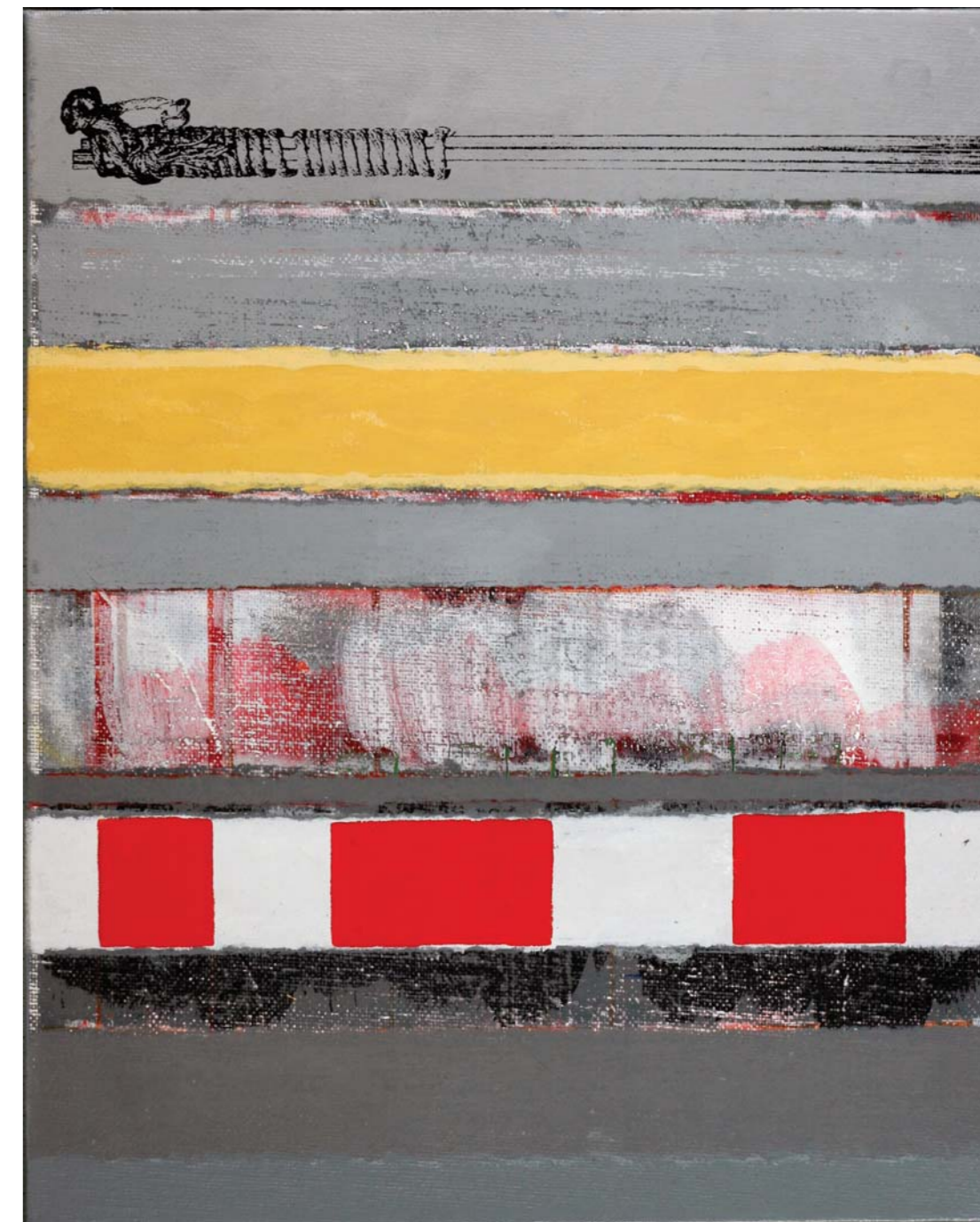
*Out of Body 4 (triptych): 2008,
monoprints 50cm x 65cm Susan Aldworth*

In fiction the hero or heroine frequently leaves home to go on an adventure. Whether in Pilgrim's Progress or Moby Dick, the journey is beset with difficulties. For our "Methodical Adventurers" there is a double play between distance and closeness. The adventure of the artist is largely a stay-at-home affair, philosophically risky but physically safe. The role of the artist as the objective witness in foreign places is largely redundant and it is in the workshop and studio that the challenges arise to explore the new unseen. Printmaking is a location for adventurous investigation, a centre for a contemporary alchemy. It was William Blake who recognised the revelatory and transformative power of the print process, " ...the infernal method, by corrosives which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surface away and displaying the infinite which was hid."

For the past 100 years art schools in Britain have usually nurtured printmaking workshops. It is possible that the powers that be understand something of the educational value of transferrable skills, but do they realise that these places are revolutionary in spirit? The traditional print workshop is usually a collective experience. The atelier system prevails. The student learns from the teacher by word and example and the teacher frequently learns from the student. In many places there are artist-in-residence programmes and professionals work alongside beginners. There is an equality of purpose. The interchange of ideas and methods, the co-operative and communal excitement of working together engenders a creative market place unlike the normal isolation of artistic practice. Rauschenberg declared that the print workshop for him was a necessary relief from the loneliness of the painting studio.

The revolutionary thing about the workshop is the chance to repeat, refine and transform material and ideas into substantiality. I would argue that all art, including the two-dimensional, should aspire to the condition of sculpture. It should hold its own in physical and intellectual dimensions. The making must be thorough and fully accomplished to allow the work to survive intact when detached from the artist's stewardship and protection amidst a critical and often indifferent world. We need to admire and evaluate the methodical but also embrace and enjoy the adventure.

Professor Chris Orr, RA, MBE. Head of Printmaking Department
at the Royal College of Art, 1998 – 2008



*Gift: 2009, painting on canvas, acrylic paint with
screenprint 30cm x 24cm David Skingle*