The Determined Line...
The Residence Gallery presents...

The Determined Line...
A solo exhibition by Ben Gooding,
curated by Ingrid Zee.

6 March – 29 April 2015,
229 Victoria Park Road, London
EVERYTHING STARTS FROM A DOT,
Wassily Kandinsky famously mused. His
sentiment was echoed by Paul Klee in a
lecture to the Bauhaus on 14 November
1921, a year after he joined: “I am starting
precisely there, where the pictorial
form begins, with the point that is set
in motion... a line is a dot that went for a
walk... an active line on a walk, moving
freely, without a goal.
A walk for a walk’s sake”.

Identifying the origins of the pictorial
tradition in a mark, a travelling dot,
underscores the importance of the line
in art. The journey started by Neolithic
man echoes to the present day. It touches
Ingres, Rousseau and Matisse. Mondrian’s
intuitively constructed horizontal and
vertical lines distill the harmony and
rhythm of beauty. Nothing ends with a
neat ‘punkt’ so the line becomes important
in the transition to postmodernism.

Manzoni’s pivotal Linee were shown at the
Ayimut Gallery in Milan in 1959, laying
the ground for Martin, Marden and Hesse.
Such material and process-led, Minimal
influenced postmodernism is the tradition
from which Gooding’s work grows. The line
forms Riley’s paintings; for Goldsworthy it
is the essence of drawing. Twombly owns
the child’s line and Long walks it.

If a line is a travelling dot passing through
and extending space, it is also a passage
through and an extension of time. For
Manzoni, the line was infinite. “Time is
something different from what the hands
of the clock measure, and the Linea does
not measure metres or kilometres but
is zero, not zero as the end, but as the
beginning of an infinite series”.

So line comes to symbolise infinity, yet,
continuing Manzoni’s philosophy, in the
inscribed lines of Gooding’s work infinity
is not ‘out there’ and transcendent, but
here and imminent.

Rich surfaces of Perspex and copper
are overlaid with rhythmic lines that
investigate the action of both tracing a path
and leaving a trace and are thus inspired
by our primal mark making instincts.
As a process, mark making exists in
a dialogue between controlled gesture
and spontaneous action. Gooding’s work
traverses these dialectics. Though one can
sense that his oscillating marks might
derive from spontaneous hand movements,
they have, nevertheless, been applied to the
work in a controlled and deliberate manner,
using stencils. These are (pre)determined
lines, making Gooding’s work a conflation
of gesture and control.

Gooding’s strategic use of tools both
prescribes routes as well as restricts
his skill as a draftsman. This quest for
unmediated expression originates in the
Surrealist automatons: ‘here again it is not
a matter of drawing, but simply of tracing’,
yet Gooding is less concerned with
‘unconscious’ imagery than the repetitive
nature of the mark. His layered traces
scratch across the surface delineating
the duration of the mark-making process,
with each action remaining engraved
as material evidence of bodily action.
Gooding’s work flags a challenge to drawing
from within, his marks being scratched
into the surface. They rely on friction
and abrasion, processes of removal, for
existence. In this sense he offers a subtle
exploration of what it means to draw,
extending the bounds of the medium out
towards texture and repetition.

The interplay of lines create visual
experiences that elicit fleeting optical
vibrations. Gooding accomplishes
astonishing visual variety working
exclusively with line, which comes to
embody movement and energy: “Another
interpretation of line is as a visual trail
of energy that has been drawn across a
surface, and is a manifestation of the life
energy of the person that made it”.

This positioning prompts us to consider the ways
in which artists are manifest in their work
and reframes our understanding of ‘leaving
a trace’, a fitting thought to lead us into
the harnessed energy of Gooding’s work.

1 Paul Klee, Beiträge zur Bildnerischen Formlehre, BP/11, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, 1991
4 Andre Breton, First Manifesto of Surrealism, 1924
5 Mick Maden and Jack Southern, The Drawing Projects: An Exploration of the Language of Drawing, Black Dog
Publishing, 2011
Determined:
The quality of being determined; firmness of purpose:
The process of establishing something exactly by calculation or research:
The controlling or deciding of the nature or outcome of something:
A tendency to move in a fixed direction:

Line:
A long, narrow mark or band:
A straight or curved continuous extent of length without breadth:
A direct course:
A contour or outline considered as a feature of design or composition:
A series of related things:
A Conversation with Artist & Curator
Caroline Jane Harris.

Caroline Jane Harris: As your work derives from systems and a lack of expression, how did you get to your starting point, what is the genesis of your process?

Ben Gooding: I will often start by making a tool and setting restrictions that the work is bounded by. I see the work as much as a “result” derived from an equation or set of rules as anything else. Once these initial decisions have been made, no further decisions can be taken during the course of production. I’m interested in using a system to generate something beautiful, but I relinquish control and follow a programme.

One thing people often ask is “what was your inspiration?”. I often think this is a misplaced question because the work is very much a product of its own production and in this respect it feeds into itself. I think it was Richard Serra who said “work makes work” and I find that a very powerful mind-set.

CJH: I’m interested in the ‘tool’ that you make at the start of your production, as ultimately it decides the overall aesthetic of the piece and the pattern created. Is it an existing profile or an invented landscape that you use?

BG: The tool is the line. I will either draw an automatic line tracing out an arbitrary and irregular course, or I will carefully measure out a sinewave with compass and ruler. Either way, this initial line will be cut into a sheet material, such as condensed polystyrene, which can be refined by sanding to form a profile. It is this profile which allows me to repeat multiple lines.

I like the very low tech nature of working this way. The labour of shaping and cutting by hand are important steps in the process for me and I might spend a whole day just drawing, sanding and redefining an edge until I’m happy. But I’m always surprised by the compositional effects that are generated, I never know exactly how a certain form will ultimately translate into a finished work.

CJH: And is there particular consideration around the thickness of the line or the spaces between them?

BG: With the scored works I don’t measure a distance between lines and allow a slight variation to occur, but the slight inconstancy can actually accentuate the quality of a line. The negative space between two lines is also a line, and becomes a part of the whole.

With the perspex works the decision about the distance the lines are set apart is crucial and is one of the variables that can be altered. There is a balance to be made; if the lines are too densely packed you start to lose sight of the underlying layers and so the composition becomes obscured and rather static, too open and the work lacks a certain dynamism.

"1893", scored copper 60x60cm
With the graphite drawings, the composition is entirely dependent on how a highly irregular line interacts with a regular set of points which are mapped onto the canvas beforehand. The spacing of the lines is pre-determined by these factors which can change for each work.

The screen prints are where I have experimented most with line density, thickness and eccentricity. That’s simply because you can make more in a shorter amount of time and in effect cover more experimental ground. For example I’ve learnt you get a lot more tonal mixing of colour with thicker lines, but a lot more intricacy with thinner, a more wave like movement with a gentle line, and much more “noise” with a highly eccentric one. There is no right or wrong method, but you have to be aware that the slight decisions made at this stage can greatly affect the final work.

**CJH:** It seems important for you to make the work by hand, is it important for the viewer to know?

**BG:** I think so yes. People are becoming increasingly used to objects being laser cut, 3D printed and digitally rendered. While all of this new technology should be exploited by artists and designers, I have personally always been drawn to the analogue. There is a certain ontological quality an object is endowed with by the time invested in it. It almost becomes a physical momentum of time spent.

**CJH:** Picking up on your Richard Serra ‘work makes work’ comment, do you see each piece as an evolution of the last? Or do you work on projects which have a start and an end?

**BG:** “Work makes work” for me means that the work comes out of the work, rather than from some great inspiration. Much of what I do is about tweaking certain variables, whether that is the curve of a line, the angle of a rotation or the frequency or regularity of linear iterations. So as you start to explore a particular way of working, an expansive range of possibilities becomes apparent and so when you come to make the next work, one thinks about which of these variables might be altered. As I say, you never know how such and such a variable will affect a finished piece, but that just means there’s a reason to make it.

It is this constant pushing and pulling of the initial conditions to which the work adheres that is of interest, and so in this respect I suppose you can talk of an evolution from one work to the next.

**CJH:** Are there different tools relevant to different materials or are you interested in the translation of one tool across different mediums?

**BG:** Different materials require slightly different kinds of tool, but effectively that tool will always be in the form of some profile that defines a linear motion. I have even taken a profile I like and modified it so it can be used for a different medium. And different techniques have their own problematic issues.

The tools made for perspex need to have the leading edge raised off the surface or the ink will bleed, the shear pressure of scoring hundreds of lines with a steel needle starts to erode a profile over time and literally wears the material away, very large profiles start to bend and buckle and require all sorts of strengthening to keep them true. Working out these problems is strangely rewarding!

But I am interested in how these tools can work across mediums. You might not be able to tell but the same profile could have been used to make a copper scoring tool. It has been used has changed and results in a vastly different object. I enjoy how a set form has a plasticity to the way it can be utilised.

**CJH:** In your quest for accuracy in the process of making, do you see the role of mistakes as a positive or a negative?

**BG:** I am very much interested in what one might call the “tremor of the hand”. Although I am always attempting to follow a process as accurately as possible, there is this human limit to what the hand and eye can achieve. It would be entirely possible for say a computer or machine to follow such a procedure with exactitude thus eradicting any inaccuracies and indeed, it is entirely possible to contrive.

However when I set the variables that determine how a work is made, the slight errors that creep in become an implicit part of the work which brings a certain aesthetic nuance. I’m not trying to make mistakes, but in a conscious way, however it was a conscious decision to make the work by hand and I accept the imperfections that arise as a result of this.

**CJH:** You said that you use this system to generate something beautiful, do you know from the start how a piece will look? What if you generated something ‘ugly’, would it be a failure in your eyes?

**BG:** That’s a very good question! There is on the one hand a desire to make something of aesthetic value, and on the other this requirement to adhere to a stringent and imperturbable system. So the operation that generates the object is not concerned by how it looks, yet this object is intended to be looked at. An interesting predicament.

Some works, I’d say, are more successful than others, and those aesthetic considerations filter down. Although I can never tell how a work will ultimately look, I can infer that working in a particular way will produce (hopefully) something close to what I liked in a previous work. But you never know for sure and that is part of the excitement I suppose.

**CJH:** There’s something very interesting in the relationship between the almost cold, mechanical, strict process of production, the hardness of the material (I’m thinking particularly of the metal pieces) and the sharp edges left behind, in conjunction with the soft, undulating organic looking patterns which it generates. Are you concerned with these contradictions or are they just a by-product of the process?
I enjoy such contradictions. The metal sheet is static, blank, opaque, yet by simply scratching a line into this surface it becomes activated. There is suddenly dynamism, vibration, a dance of light that is responsive to your own movements. I always describe the scored works as occupying a grey area between drawing and sculpture because although they are certainly “drawn things”, they act as 3 dimensional objects. It’s like drawing with light!

The heaviness and solidity of the material is transformed into this undulating, mercurial surface. However, I think the mechanical nature of such production finds particularly interesting results with the graphite drawings. These have a sort of lyrical or musical quality yet every mark is part of this “cold” and detached process.

I’m often reminded of the fact that every DNA molecule is made up of only 4 base “letters”, yet from those 4 initial letters the entire range of life is constructed. So “cold” and “mechanical” can produce some stunningly complex and beautiful forms! Similarly I am interested in how great complexity is derived from great simplicity and that goes to the heart of my thinking.

CJH: How long do you spend on each piece? Do you enjoy the process of making or is it just a job that needs to be done in order to get to an end result?

BG: There is a labour involved with this kind of work, and I don’t necessarily think you have to “enjoy” the act of making something if you believe it will ultimately have been worth making. The final result is what I have in mind so the rather laborious process to get there is simply a means to an end. You need a good work ethic, and some good back ground music helps!

“Untitled”, unique screen print, 60x60cm
"Untitled", unique screen print, 60x60cm

"Untitled", unique screen print, 60x60cm
“Untitled”, unique screen print, 60x60cm

“Untitled”, graphite on canvas, 122x122cm
“Untitled”, graphite on canvas, 122x122cm

“1368”, scored copper, 50x65cm
“1017”, scored aluminium, 50x50cm

“945”, scored copper, 50x65cm
“Axis: No I”, 6 layers of hand drawn perspex, 60x60cm

“Axis: No II”, 6 layers of hand drawn perspex, 50x56cm
Ben Gooding...

Born: 21st of November 1981, Ipswich, Suffolk, England...

Education:


Ma in Fine Art from Central St. Martin’s (Byam Shaw), 2007/2008.

Selected Shows:

2015 - “From Centre”, curated by Patrick Morrissey and Hanz Hancock of Saturation Point Projects, London.


2012 - “Cork St Open”, Cork St Gallery, London.


2006 - “Spherical Void”, studio residency at King’s College, Cambridge.


www.bengooding.co.uk
bgood.art@hotmail.com

“Untitled”, 6 layers of hand drawn perspex, 60x60cm
Acknowledgements:
Ingrid Zee for agreeing to and curating this show.
Odin for exhibition installation.
Miles Khan for the graphic design of this catalogue.
Caroline Jane Harris for interviewing me.
Louise Penelope Malcolm for writing the forward.