



Toni Davey

Toni Davey is coming full circle now, proof of the inescapability, for an artist of their personal voice, their perennial concerns and their visual handwriting. Early on she had a passion for filling in the squares, very precisely, on any gridded paper she could lay her hands on, then, following sculpture studies at Hornsey and then Chelsea Colleges of Art, she worked as an architectural model maker and now she is working again with architects, currently working on a nine metre long etched drawing on glass for a building in Salisbury. Early photographs of her post-college show her standing in front of a large woven wooden structure; the concern with light, grids and sequencing already very evident. She now works with paper. "It seems to fall naturally into my chosen way of working, whilst also revealing its own qualities that both surprise and thrill me with their unforeseen outcomes."

Starting with grids on paper, Davey translates her meditative processes into sequences of infinitesimal changes, creating a narrative. She cuts and scores paper then pushes the cut edge out in a developing sequence which leads from less to more light, producing a moving wave of light and shadow across and through the surface. Within her practice,

"the idea of 'form being manipulated by light' is replaced by 'light being manipulated by form' as it makes its journey through the broken plane". The work is subtle and controlled, infinitely variable, and once the paper is pushed out, very fragile. The quality and colour of the paper she uses is crucial. After endless trials discarding many, often high quality, papers, she now uses a mid-weight cartridge which has exactly the right qualities of weight and colour to achieve the cuts and folds that reflect the light in the most effective way.

Recently she has started to make use of a precision laser, a computer programmed cutting machine, which has opened up new possibilities both in terms of scale and intricacy. Faint single marks where the laser burns as it cuts the paper has introduced a further element of colour, creating a softness at the edges that distinguishes these from the stark whiteness of the hand cut pieces. "I experimented with controlled ways of burning marks onto paper before I made any connection with how the laser cuts. Now I want to explore this further, bringing together the different elements of what is drawn, folded, handcut, burnt and laser cut."

Davey's fascination with bending and folding manifests itself in her sketchbooks, revealing the influence on her work of Noshi, the Japanese art of

ceremonial wrapping. Folding page after page in a progression of tiny changes in the position of the fold on each page, results in magical sculptural objects. "Wonderful natural things happen and the flat plane of the paper comes to life." The sequence of folds develops a swell that rises and falls in a crescendo, suggesting not only the underlying relationship with Japanese design but also a reference to the stylised waves in prints by Japanese artists Hokusai and Hiroshige. She cites Le Corbusier's chapel at Ronchamp as an early influence, but the artist she refers to again and again is Agnes Martin, "she blows me away"; and it is clear that Martin's grid paintings and precise methods resonate strongly with her work.

To simply say that mathematical precision is inherent in Toni Davey's work is to ignore the exquisite beauty and fostered unpredictability within it. Her pieces represent an ongoing enquiry into infinite possibility.

Fiona Robinson

Portrait photograph by Richard Sercombe

Article from Evolver Magazine. September 2009