



Prix de Print No. 32

The Night Way by Bob Schneider

Juried by Lisa Bulawsky

This iteration of the *Art in Print* Prix de Print has been judged by Lisa Bulawsky. The Prix de Print is a bimonthly competition, open to all subscribers, in which a single work is selected by an outside juror to be the subject of a brief essay. For further information on entering the Prix de Print, please go to our website: <https://artinprint.org/about-art-in-print/>.

Bob Schneider, *The Night Way* (2018)

Etching, 29 x 22 1/4 inches. Edition of 24. Printed and published by Flatbed Press, Austin, TX.

The *Night Way* is a large, hard ground etching by Austin-based artist, poet and musician Bob Schneider, printed and published by Flatbed Press. Utilizing the verso side of a canceled copper plate found at Flatbed, Schneider developed this image as he typically does, drawing whatever comes to mind; in this case, he responded in harmony with the unintentional marks on the back of the plate. It's a messy image with moments of vivid specificity and Lynchian strangeness. As an image and a title, *The Night Way* suggests a dark and brambled, chimerical whirl of precise dream fragments that can only partially be recollected in the light of day. In Schneider's dream, a figure submits to the viewer by turning away, the head cocked slightly, exposing a small ear, arms crossed behind the back in a contorted and unnatural pose. The arms, hand and head are described with very fine lines drawn closely together in undu-



Bob Schneider, *The Night Way*, 2018,

lating waves. These marks interact serendipitously with the found marks already etched into the used plate. Environment and mood are created by that history of materials and process, by the acid that bit into the back of the plate in its earlier life, seeping into the central seam between the sheets of contact paper applied as a protective backing. As a result, the spines of the plate and of the figure merge auspiciously. Appropriately enough, the plate is the matrix and the skeleton for the figure as it twists. The back of the old plate is the back of the new figure. It can also be seen as the neglected underside, the underbelly, the unreachable subconscious. There are echoes here of the unsettling lithographs of Odilon Redon and of the tortured *Sainte Sebastienne* by Louise Bourgeois.

The printers at Flatbed Press who have worked with Schneider over the last 20 years—Katherine Brimberry, Robert Brown and Tracy Mayrello—prepare his plates with a thinned liquid hard ground that allows him to draw in slender lines that are etched to print a deep black. The hard ground surface is, in a sense, a reiteration of “the night way.” Dark and waxy, the ground is a seductive invitation for drawing. No other surface accepts mark-making with such buttery ease. A good hard ground permits an artist to skim and direct a sharp metal point across the surface as though it’s gliding on a skating rink just after the Zamboni has finished its final round of resurfacing. For Schneider, the glide enables vigorous doodling that frees the mind and sharpens mental focus.

Like fellow Texan Terry Allen, Schneider is a multidisciplinary artist recognized for his work in music and art. He has directed much of his energy toward songwriting, touring and recording for the last two decades, while maintaining a steady practice as a visual artist, working in collage and sculpture as well as etching. He develops groups of prints in spates, taking stacks of plates to the recording studio, where he works on them during the abundant down time that occurs throughout the process of making a record. *The Night Way* is one of a group of plates made in 2008 while recording his solo album *Lovely Creatures*. While the BAT (*bon à tirer*) and one impression were pulled then, the rest of the edition of 24 was not printed and published until this past year.

Schneider was introduced to etching as an undergraduate at the University of Texas, El Paso, where he studied with



printmaker Kurt Kemp. The lineage is clear: Schneider’s work relays a signal that traveled through Kemp from its originator, the groundbreaking printmaker Mauricio Lasansky. Part of what makes this print so compelling lies in the many histories it awakens.

When drawing, Schneider lets the image come through his hand; he tries to get himself out of the way and let the unconscious take over. In *The Night Way*, this Surrealist strategy of automatism is joined to the Dadaist interest in the role of chance. Marrying these strategies to the process of etching points to one of the great paradoxes of printmaking—on the one hand, there is the common belief that making prints requires mastery and a craftsman’s attention to method, material and protocol; on the other, there is the recognition that making prints requires surrendering to the will and constraint of process and press, relinquishing a certain amount of control and choosing to collaborate with the accidental. Printmaking attracts artists who are drawn to this paradox—a creative process that demands proficiency yet is fraught with insubordination, manifesting in a

productive distance between us and the image. In a 1986 article, Ruth Weisberg paraphrased British printmaker Michael Rothenstein, noting “the irreducible essence of printmaking [is] an embrace, one body pressed against another.”¹ The body of the plate presses against the body of the receiving surface in private, often under the blankets! The maker cannot know or see what happens there in that blind and furtive space. It’s an intimacy that is choreographed by the artist but not participated in directly. Bob Schneider’s *The Night Way* embraces and celebrates the intermingling of skill, chance, desire and process that is printmaking at its best. ■

Lisa Bulawsky is an artist and printmaker, a professor of art, and the director of Island Press in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis.

Notes:

1. Ruth Weisberg. “The Syntax of the Print: In Search of an Aesthetic Context,” *The Tamarind Papers* 9, 1986: 52–60.