

Woodcut

This exhibition focuses on the simplest and oldest printing technique in the history of art: the woodcut. It is a relief process, in which tools such as chisels and gouges are used to carve an image into the surface of a wooden block. The raised areas that remain are the image to be inked and printed. To produce a line, for instance, one must cut out the areas on either side of it, which is why the margins of a woodcut line are always different from each other. Then, the artist uniformly applies typographic ink to the raised area, using a roller (brayer). Finally, he or she places a paper onto the surface of the block, and uses a ball made of fabric to gently press it, until the ink is transferred from woodblock to paper (while the cut away or recessed areas remain blank on the printed paper). To create a polychromatic print, it is customary to use a separate woodblock for each color, or to paint the block manually.

The woodcut technique was first in use in Egypt and China in the seventh and sixth centuries AD, for the dissemination of information, since it allows for the production of multiple copies from a single woodblock. In Egypt it was used for decorating textiles, and the first

prints on paper were produced in China (where paper itself was invented). There were several peaks to its use as a form of artistic expression. Its first heyday was in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe, culminating in the work of German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. It was also popular in eighteenth-century Japan, where its mastery surpassed the work done by westerners. Another zenith was reached in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when it was revived by German Expressionism. Nowadays, some print artists combine woodblock printing with other techniques, which was traditionally deemed unacceptable.

The history of Israeli woodblock printing begins in 1912, in Germany, with the artwork of Jacob Steinhardt, and continues to this day, although there is no local woodcut movement as such. Some of the artists working in this technique are represented in this exhibition (although a good many are not). The participants include young artists, who use this technique not for its reproduction abilities, which enable one to produce each work in a multiple-copy edition, but because they are interested in exploring its boundaries. They expand the scope of the technique and introduce new aspects into it, such as changing the quality of the line or giving expression to the

relationship between paper, line, and woodblock in the finished artwork.

Although this is a relatively uncomplicated way of printing, and most artists print their own woodcuts, in the twentieth century print workshops became common. Run by a professional printer, they greatly contribute to production of quality prints in diverse techniques, including woodblock printing. There are two highly professional print workshops in Israel: the Jerusalem Print Workshop, headed by Arik Kilemnik, and the Gottesman Etching Center, Kibbutz Cabri, directed by Ofra Raif.