

## *Along the Lines of Guillaume Azoulay*

Guillaume Azoulay and Jeanine Natale

Bittan Fine Art, Valley Village, CA, \$135.95 USD, hardcover (160p)

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To open the pages of *Along the Lines of Guillaume Azoulay* is to release an explosion of line and form, a retrospective of the artist's remarkable work. No matter that the artist himself laments, "...this book thing will inevitably be some sort of official halt, and that is the frustrating part! I am continuously hatching new plots, concepts that I struggle with at the very moment, so when does one hold the brush back and say: 'go to press!'" Given the astounding creativity on display here, one cannot doubt that Azoulay's grand experiments will continue.

Azoulay, a self-taught artist, has created a style that is immediately identifiable. Using straight and wavy lines in concert, he shapes flat space into miraculous motion and form. Crosshatchings and parallel lines result in remarkably complex tone pictures, some so packed that they must be viewed at a distance in order to resolve themselves into sense.

This gorgeous coffee table book, a collaboration between the artist and Jeanine Natale, groups Azoulay's work by media. Given his prolific career, some pages contain several works; unfortunately, these index pages reproduce the etchings and serigraphs in too small a size for the viewer to gain their full impact. Full-page reproductions are the norm here, however, they are often breathtaking.

Pen and ink originals and originals on canvas open the retrospective. Considerably more space is given to Azoulay's etchings and serigraphs, including an explanation of their creation. The book also briefly explores Azoulay's mixed media works, luminaires (glass sculptures illuminated with colored light), and giclées. Where the serigraphs involve pigments applied in layers to create a serene gradient of color, the giclées are a pop-art explosion. The book closes with a biography of the Moroccan-born artist, followed by a word portrait of the Casablanca of his childhood memory.

Certainly the main attraction here are the prints of Azoulay's amazing images. As he says, "The subject matter is totally unimportant. Instead observe the balancing of masses and voids, the interaction between darkness and light. The theatrics of composition are far more compelling than mere anecdote." Still, Azoulay's seems to have a fondness for jungle cats and horses, both of which often appear in his work. As well, he has taken the engravings of Gustave Doré and "reinterpreted" them into a biblical suite that pays homage to Doré even as it shows Azoulay's unique touch.

Some of the artist's discussions of his works are unnecessarily esoteric. Azoulay's language is occasionally baroque—one must reread several times to fully grasp his point. As a result, the final sections about his life and early experiences in Casablanca are less compelling than his art, which speaks for itself. These minor quibbles aside, *Along the Lines of Guillaume Azoulay* is a wonderful visual tour of the career of a modern artist.

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