

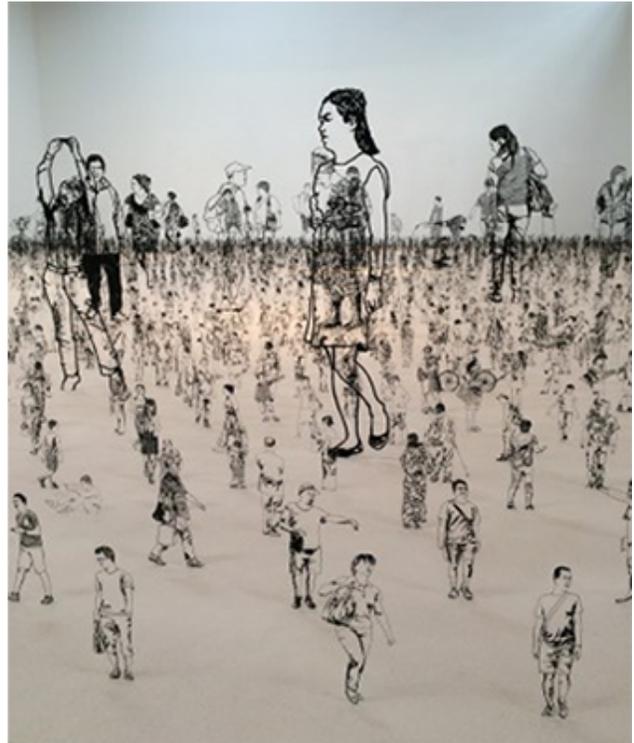
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Zadok Ben-David

People I Saw but Never Met at Shoshana Wayne Gallery

April 8 - May 27, 2017

By Jody Zellen



Would it be possible to remember everyone that passes us by? How do we determine who stands out in a crowd and why? These are some of the questions at the root of Zadok Ben-David's dramatic installation *People I Saw but Never Met*.

Israeli born and London based, Ben-David has been making photographs of people he has encountered on his travels over the years and has recently transformed these pictures into delicate sculptures. This ongoing body of work, first exhibited in 2016 in Sydney, Australia, now comprises over 3000 small-scale and 45 larger-sized metal figures. The original photographs are reduced to black and white line drawings which are then transferred to stainless steel (and/or aluminum) and chemically or hand etched (depending on the final size). The resulting works are flat sculptures or, in essence, three dimensional drawings where shapes are created by contiguous lines surrounding negative space. The figures have a presence, defined by absence. In the installation, each figure stands vertically attached to a small base hidden under a bed of light-colored

sand, carefully arranged en-mass on the floor of the expansive gallery space. Together they become a global portrait of humanity coexisting within the confines of the installation.

It is hard to settle on the best vantage point from which to see the work as it is impossible to enter into the installation. Viewing must be done from the edge looking into the receding space. The desire to get closer is purposely frustrated. Ben-David has carefully positioned the figures creating patterns and pathways that lead the eye from small to large and edge to edge. Most of the figures are small, no taller than a foot, yet rather than recede, they appear denser further away. There is an implied movement among the static figures, yet none are propelled in the same direction. Like a complicated drawing, Ben-David's installation is beautifully layered. The figures are open and transparent, defined by lines meaning one can see through them: the leg or torso of a larger figure frames a cluster of small figures. While some families and groupings are depicted, for the most part Ben-David presents isolated individuals. Many appear to be walking or captured standing still, although some are playing or riding a bike. The diversity of action is less important than the diversity of type.

While the floor-based installation is the most dense, complex, and impactful work in the exhibition, Ben-David also isolates specific groupings of his figures and presents them encased in plexiglas boxes. For example in *Made in Japan*, 2017 more than 50 figures are position across four rows like trophies. They represent a selection of the people Ben-David photographed during trips to Japan. The array focuses on the disparate modes of dress, postures and bodies prevalent in contemporary Japan. The boxes offer a way to see the figures close-up and reveal the texture, detail and precision of the cut metal. Intriguing and overlapping shadows are cast on the wall further emphasizing the intricacies and dimensionality of the figures. The titles of the other boxes — *Just Another Day*, *Here*, *There and Anywhere* and *High Noon* (all works 2017)— suggest the randomness of the arrays and that Ben-David's collections are intuitive and formal, as opposed to rigorous classifications.

Ben-David has captured the thrill of people watching and has transformed something fleeting into something concrete. He presents the diversity of the world and allows viewers to create their own narratives.

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