



On McArthur Binion's first visit to Paulson Bott Press, he created several different monoprints and five edition prints. He is a man who keeps moving. The monoprints allowed him to stay busy while the prints were being worked out. In these images, you can find his birth certificate and pages from his address book, which contain the names of many people from his circle. He refers to these as his DNA works. The prints are organized with strong graphic elements, circles and grids, but within those geometries is very personal information. More is revealed the more one looks. He recently retired from teaching to focus exclusively on making art.

– Kenneth Caldwell

**Paulson Bott Press:** When you came to Paulson Bott Press, did you have an idea of what kind of images you were after?

**MacArthur Binion:** I knew exactly what I wanted.

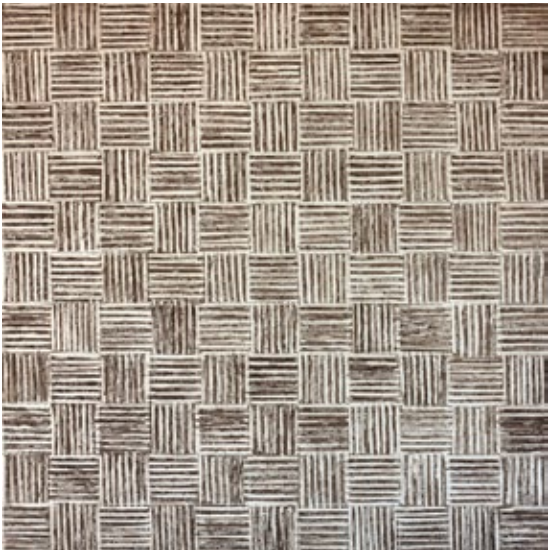
**Q:** Were you surprised by the process?

**MB:** My undergraduate degree is a combination major of drawing and lithography. I kind of know this print-making thing.

**Q:** So in this print, there is a combination of your birth certificate and your address book?

**DNA: ETCHING: I, 2015**

Color aquatint and sugarlift aquatint.  
40.5" x 27.5"; Edition of 35



### **DNA: ETCHING: II, 2015**

Color aquatint and drypoint  
37.25" x 37"; Edition of 35



### **DNA ETCHING III, 2015**

Color aquatint and softground etching  
37.25" x 37"; Edition of 35

**MB:** I call it my phonebook. This was started in the early 1970s. In the early 1970s, you only communicated three ways: eye-to-eye, telephone, or the United States mail. I was a full-time painter in New York without a teaching job. I sold work on my own. Everybody you know would be in your address book, because it was the source. That's how I started these paintings. They're called DNA studies. And they were based on my phone book. Between my phonebook and my birth certificate, that's my entire life. That's what we got.

**Q:** Where did the grid come from?

**MB:** I call that handmade geometry. I want the work to be inside of a very strict context with my DNA, my exclusive DNA, because I've gotten to a point where I think that that's what the goal is, to be the only person that's doing that kind of work. By repeating the grid, I think I have created more of a continuity—I'm trying to grow abstraction. What better way to do it but work with very basic visual elements? I have worked long enough to be able not to have to be smart anymore. So right now I just make art.

**Q:** You've retired from teaching. Are you going to make art all the time?

**MB:** I lived in New York from 1973 to 1992. I only taught two of those years, so I was a full-time painter. I'm going back to that—get up every day and go to my job in the studio.

**Q:** Do you live in your studio?

**CF:** Absolutely not. I go to work. Every day, I'm in the studio by 7:30, and I work. It's just work. There's no sound. There's no music. Nothing like that.

**Q:** Do you have any assistants?

**MB:** I have an assistant who works a different time than me. He's a nighttime person. I'm an early morning person. So it works out fabulously.

**Q:** What's your typical day like?

**MB:** I work an hour and a half. I take a short break. I eat very little food. I've got some nuts and fruit. But when I'm working really hard, there's a beautiful garden, and I take breaks there about every two hours for about 15 minutes. I'm in the birds and fruit trees and everything. It's beautiful. And I go back to work. And that's my routine, and it's my joy.

**Q:** How is making prints different than painting?

**MB:** It's so different from the painting. Etching is more intellect, and my painting is purely

emotional. "Intellect" meaning process. You have to see the results, and you have to ink it up, and you have to wet the paper and run it through the press several times.

**Q:** And you think about the order and the colors?

**MB:** What's so good here is that I don't have to think about that stuff at all. These guys, they do their job, and I do my job. We are coming out with some amazing results. And this is just five days. Look at this.

**Q:** Tell me about minimalism and your work.

**MB:** When I started out, there was a basic minimalist idea about an artist having his own materiality. I moved into New York in the heyday of minimalism. And my ideology fit with that like a glove, because I was who I was. And also, I had developed my own way using crayons. I used paints and crayons mixed in a painting, long before Jean-Michel Basquiat. For me, the handmade geometry, along with my own materiality, is the important thing. I don't want to take too much time on minimalism.

**Q:** It fell out of favor?

**MB:** Yeah. But I don't want to be in favor, ever. That's boring. Because if you're in favor, then after that you're also not going to be in



**DNA: ETCHING: V, 2015**

Color aquatint, spitbite and sugarlift aquatint  
37.25" x 37"; Edition of 35



**DNA: ETCHING: IV, 2015**

Color aquatint  
40.5" x 27.5"; Edition of 35

favor. "No. Go away."

**Q:** Do you feel with this work that sometimes when you're working you're almost in a trance?

**MB:** No, no. It's not a trance at all. It's a possession that I have. It's called work. Which goes along with the idea of not having to be smart anymore.

**Q:** Were you hesitant that these prints wouldn't look like or relate to your paintings?

**MB:** No. I'm trying to make something that's totally different than my painting, but they resemble each other. They're in the same family.


**Q:** Do you ever make notes or sketch when you're traveling or doing something else?

**MB:** I'm going to be traveling—I go to Europe for three weeks, and I'm going to use a sketchbook for the first time in years. I love sketching. In the studio, there's a lot of stuff around. I'll make working drawings for paintings, very quick. But I decided I'm not going to work on paper for three years. And it's almost up. So I'm starting to work on paper again. I love paper.

**Q:** So you don't worry about what move to make in a work?

**MB:** I don't worry about that. If I'm anywhere near who I think I am, I don't have to worry. It's all me. This is what I mean about not having to be smart anymore. Just make up art. That's a really nice place to be. Every artist wants to be here, because it's a really comfortable, meaningful place to work.

**Q:** Agnes Martin used to say that it wasn't even her.

**MB:** Well, she was much more spiritual than I am. I wasn't going to use that word, but I saw her work when she was alive. I used to look forward to seeing her paintings, because who had the nerve to make the paintings so simple? That's what painting is. And so she broke it way down to just graphite pencil on canvas, and the canvas has some kind of primer, and that was it. So for her, she reached this place where she could communicate her spirituality with just a simple graphite pencil, and then make it into a series of shapes. And her spirit just grew. 



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