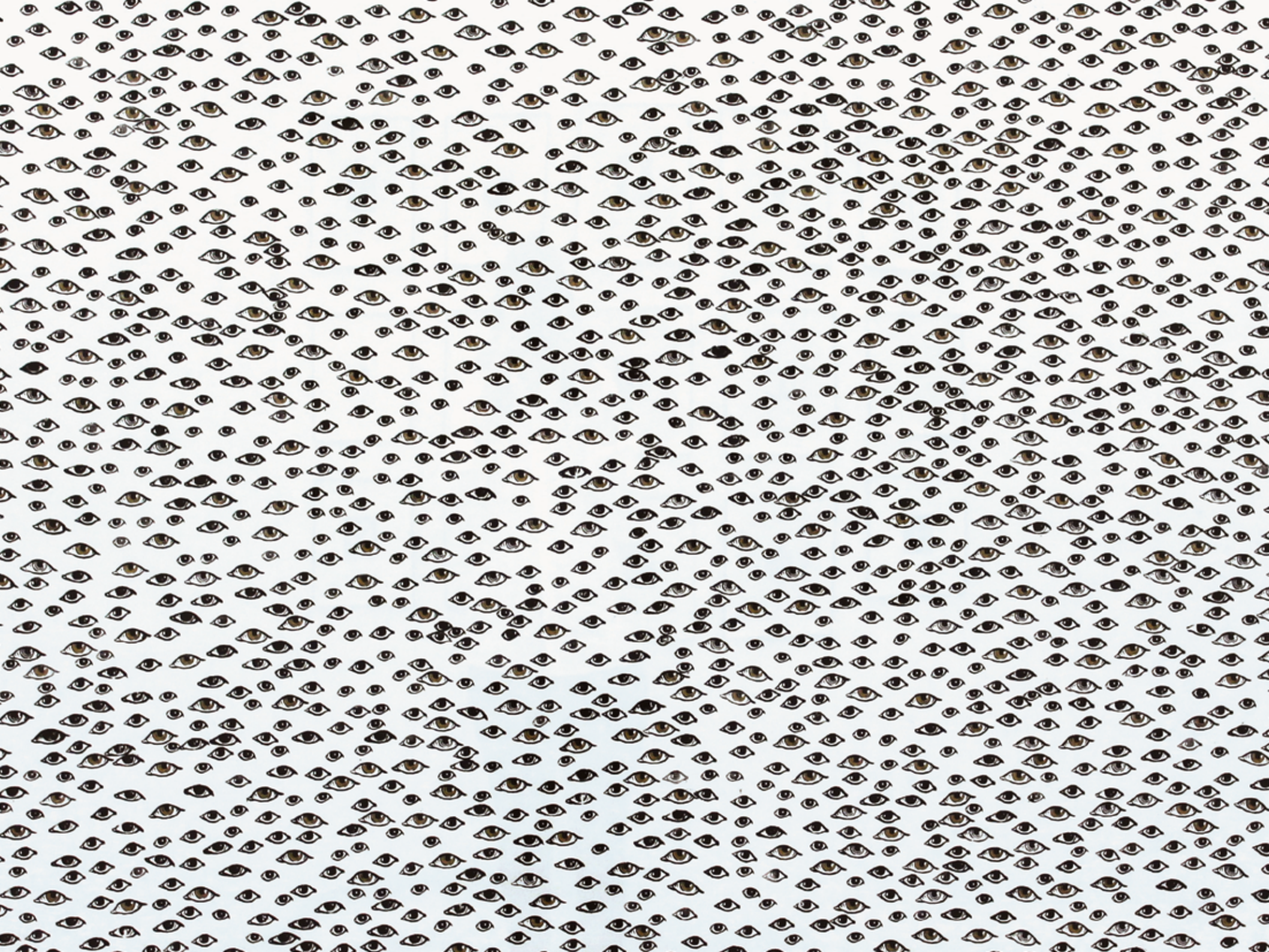


FIONA POLE:  
"À LA RECHERCHE  
DU TEMPS PERDU"

GALLERY AOP  
JOHANNESBURG  
2016







## Fiona Pole:

### “À la recherche du temps perdu”

The long goodbye	p 7
Stand alone	p 25
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Mais, quand d'un passé ancien rien ne subsiste, après la mort des êtres, après la destruction des choses, seules, plus frêles mais plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles, l'odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps, comme des âmes, à se rappeler, à attendre, à espérer, sur la ruine de tout le reste, à porter sans fléchir, sur leur gouttelette presque impalpable, l'édifice immense du souvenir.

*But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.*

Marcel Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*

## In Search of Lost Time

Although the title of Marcel Proust's famous seven part novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu* is often translated as *Remembrance of Things Past*, a more literal translation used commonly today, is *In Search of Lost Time*. The first version almost suggests a mnemonic recall of events; the second, an involuntary reminiscence of the elusive. Either way, memory has always been encoded through a trace, a detail, a suggestive synecdoche.

The mnemonic tradition, legend has it, started with the poet Simonides of Ceos who attended a rich banquet, where he sang lyrical hymns to his host and to the twin gods Castor and Pollux. Called by an anonymous messenger, apparently sent by these twin protectors, Simonides briefly left the banquet but found nobody outside the door. Meanwhile the roof collapsed, crushing the house and all the guests beneath the ruins, disfiguring them beyond recognition. Simonides remembered where the guests had been seated and the stories they had told, and thus with his help the relatives of the guests could identify their dead. A miraculous survivor of the disaster, Simonides discovered the techniques of memory used by ancient orators, connecting places in the familiar environment to stories and parts of the conversation, but realizing the connections between them are often arbitrary, semiotic, rather than symbolic. In other words, a sign often triggers a flood of memories.

The involuntary flood of emotive associations is characteristic of what the narrator in Proust's novel experiences, who, in the famous "episode of the madeleine" early on in the plot, found himself engulfed with memories. Dipping the insignificant little biscuit, the madeleine, in a cup of tea, inadvertently evoked his whole childhood in a small provincial French town. Involuntary memory, triggered by sensory experiences such as sights, sounds and smells, Proust seems to say, conjure important memories for the narrator.

Fiona Pole's hallmark as an artist is proposing a seemingly endless array of arbitrary signs, ranging from suitcases, aeroplanes, keys, chairs, boxes, and boats in an attempt to trigger a host of involuntary memories. These signs are often offered singly or in combination with one another. The "traces" she leaves behind in her art for the viewer to contemplate, range from the inanimate to the silhouettes of animated human figures. Viewers often respond to these silhouettes by saying they are reminded of a family member or of a happy family gathering or celebration.

Gilles Deleuze, psychoanalytical theorist of note, believes that the focus of Proust was not memory and the past, but the narrator's learning the use of "signs" to understand and communicate ultimate reality, thereby becoming an artist himself. The ability to "read" Pole's "signs" thus would make us all artists.

Understanding reality is like opening the segments of a fan, each new segment revealing another, more complex and complicated view of the whole. Walter Benjamin, modernist

philosopher, takes this metaphor one step further; he speaks about the "fan of memory" that uncovers new layers of forgetting but never reaches the origin: "He who had once begun to open the fan of memory, never comes to the end of its segments. No image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside." And yet another step in "remembering" and not forgetting is taken by Umberto Eco whose concept of the *ars obliualis* implies that "... one forgets not by cancellation, but by superimposition; not by absence but by multiplying presences." In other words, the art of memory is akin to a vast palimpsest of speculation, with one image, one sign continually replacing another in an ever increasingly complex whole.

The artworks on Fiona Pole's exhibition "À la recherche du temps perdu" are presented in five parts to the whole of her body of work: *The Long Goodbye*; *Stand Alone*; *Mes Familiars*; *Memory*; and *Stories*. Each one constitutes a different facet of encoded, stored and retrieved information that make up her memory, represented in a treasure trove of images. These memories are shared visually in order to trigger yet another flurry of memories on the part of the viewer. They are neither sentimental nor nostalgic. Her images are too austere, too essentialist for such notions. "Nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art" writes Charles Maier. The word nostalgia is often used dismissively. "Nostalgia is essentially history without guilt" writes Michael Kammen. Nostalgia in this sense is an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure, according to Svetlana Boym.

Proust ends his novel, *In Search of Lost Time* with Part 7, titled, *Le Temps retrouvé*, often translated as *Finding Time Again*, or also known as *Time Regained*, or even *The Past Recaptured*. After a lengthy exposition of the experiences of the narrator while he is growing up, learning about art, becoming a member of society, and falling in love, Proust seems to suggest a coming to terms with all that. A work of art, he suggests, can recapture that what is lost and thus save it from destruction, at least in our own minds. Art triumphs over the destructive power of time. We are all capable of producing art, if by this we mean taking the experiences of life and transforming them in a way that shows understanding and maturity. Fiona Pole touches that nerve in our minds that enables us to come to terms with our own memories of good and bad times, and of all manner of places and people in our lives as well.

Wilhelm van Rensburg

Research Associate  
Visual Identities in Art & Design (VIAD) research centre  
Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture (FADA)  
University of Johannesburg (UJ)

Chapter 1  
The long goodbye



*Untitled (Paris)*  
2000  
Reduction linocuts

Top  
*Untitled (Old men walking)* 465X310mm

Left  
Top to bottom  
*Untitled (Man going around corner)* 73X82mm

*Untitled (Man in front of café)* 94X118mm

*Untitled (Girl walking)* 132X94mm



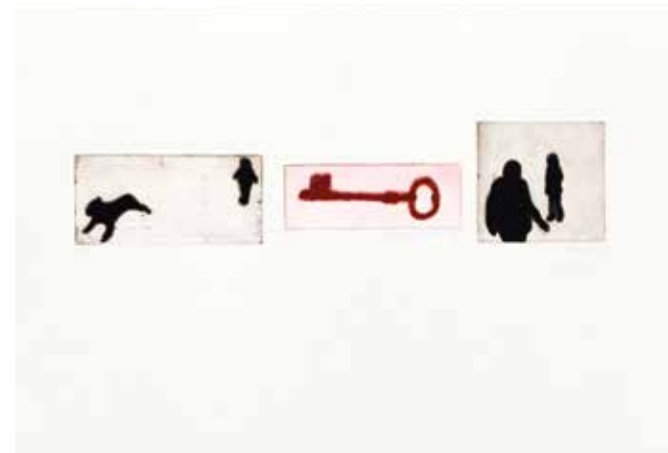
*The plane*



*The suitcase*



*Arrivals*



*The key*

*Coming home*  
2008  
Carborundum, mezzotint, drypoint  
Edition 15  
350X480mm



*The long goodbye*  
 2007  
 Portfolio of 20 carborundum prints, etched text pages  
 Edition 10  
 340X307X25mm

Right  
*The long goodbye I – V*  
 2007  
 Carborundum prints  
 Edition 15  
 410X750mm





Hillbrow tower



Waiting



Street corner



Post office



Travel line



Fate line



Anderson street



The runner



Main street



Heart line

Joburg series  
2009  
Carborundum print, drypoint  
Edition 15  
400X300mm





*Winter coat*



*Cold hands*



*Suitcase*



*Take off*



*Stranger*



*Rest*

*Leaving*  
2008  
Carborundum on aluminium sheeting  
Edition 15  
505X655mm



*Barefoot*



*Summer dress*



*Handlines*



*Uphill*



*Heavy bags*



*Packing up*



*House keys*



*Waiting*



*The case*

*Packing up*  
2009  
Sugar lift on Japanese paper, chine collé  
Edition 15  
210X290mm



*Slow walk*



*The road*

*Empty chair series*  
2010

Drypoint, deep etching, roulette wheels on copper plate  
Printed on Angoulême paper, type Richard le bas  
Edition 15  
212X164mm



*Forget-me-not*



*Please write*



*Unsent letter*



*Phone lines*



*Long distance*



*Call me*



*The stroll*



*Empty chair*



*Two chairs*



House of cards



Paper house



Golden egg



Nest



Paper plane



Straw house



Flock



Drifters



Silver cage



Flight



Homing pigeon



Wingspan

Flight  
2011  
Hard ground etching, drypoint, roulette wheels on copper plate  
Edition 15  
181X176mm





*Acacia dealbata*



*Crinum ligurdiae*



*Leonitis ocyfolia*



*Saintpaulia*

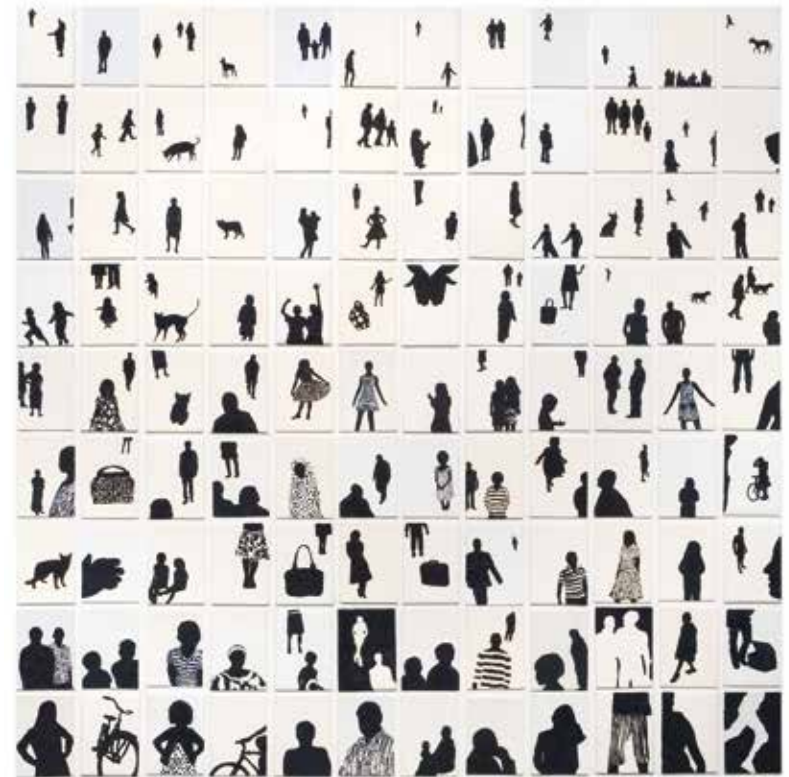


*Agapanthus africanus*



*Valtheimia bracteata*

*Les Fleurs*  
2008  
Carborundum print, drypoint  
Edition 30  
325X460mm



*Heartland*  
2009  
Carborundum, glue, paper  
Variable installation  
110 individual artworks, each 130X90mm



*Flight path*



*Jump*



*Catch me*



*Walk away*

*Catch me*  
2010  
Drypoint  
Edition 15  
270X180mm



Walk away  
2010  
Indian ink, watercolour  
Variable installation





Window  
2015  
Multi-plate carborundum etching  
Edition 10  
605X605mm



Wooden girl II, I & III  
2010  
Drypoint on copper plates  
Printed on Angoulême paper  
Edition 15  
310X178mm



*Red cat*

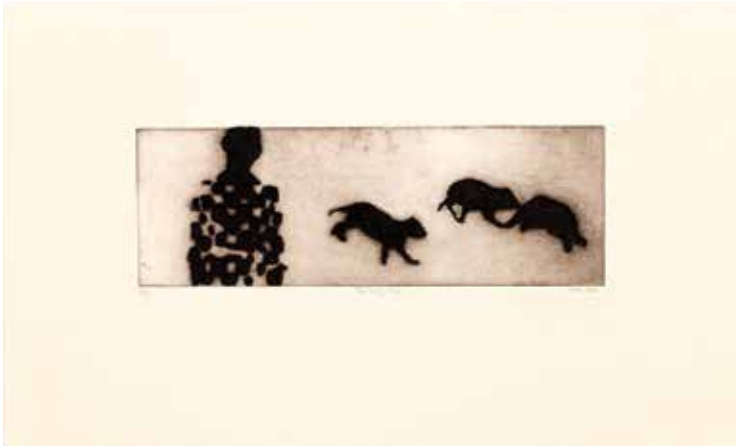


*Dancers*



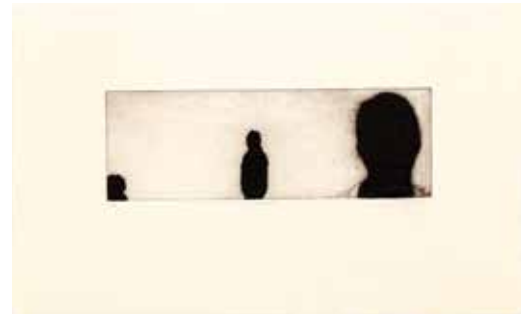
*The lost day*

*The lost day*  
 2013/14  
 Multi-plate carborundum etching on copper plate  
 Edition 5  
 660X505mm



*Barking dogs*

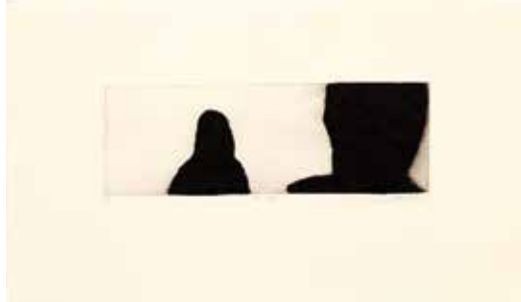
*Distance series*  
2014  
Carborundum on copper plate  
Edition 10  
Appr 180X300mm



*In the middle*



*The return*



*The couple*



*Distance*



*Standing still*



*First day*



*Lost girl*



*Suitcases*  
354X268mm

*Lost girl series*  
2010  
Drypoint using two copper plates  
Edition 15  
310X200mm





*Girl standing*



*Black feet*

*Girl standing series*  
(Series of 7)  
2012  
Ink, coloured pencil on paper  
194X163mm

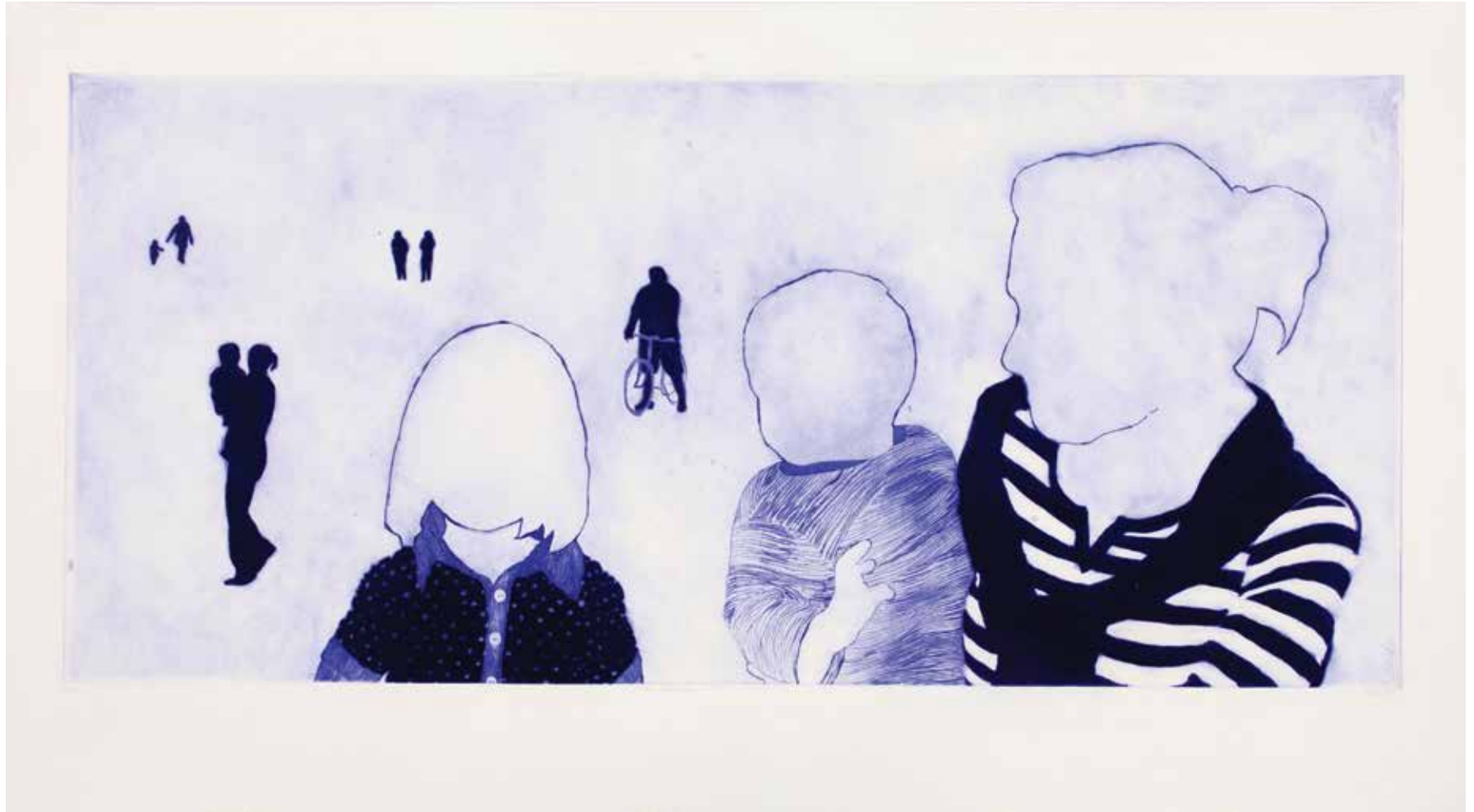
Chapter 3  
Mes familiers



The 'self' that exists in Fiona Pole's art is carefully crafted by simultaneously disclosing, inventing, transcending and epitomizing biography. She invents her 'self' through creative ingenuity, not by obvious fictitious means, or by deception. There is, rather, a playful solemnity in her work. For some artists 'self' knowledge is sometimes discovered through the process of creating art. For others, establishing 'self' is a prerequisite for creation. Fiona Pole generates as much knowledge about herself and her world in and through her art, as she asserts her artistic self in and through these works.

From *Heartland I Handlines*, 2009

*Sisters*  
2009  
Carborundum print  
Edition 15  
720X500mm



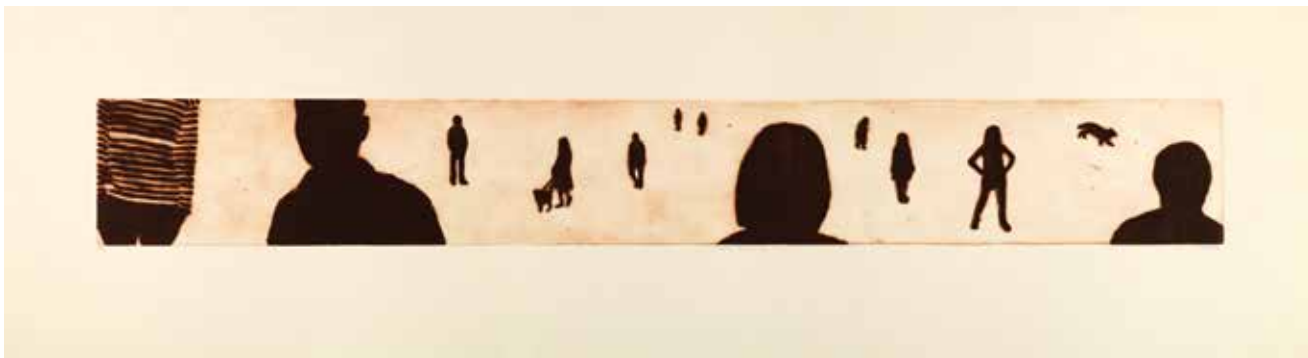
*Sunday afternoon*  
2007  
Carborundum print, drypoint  
Edition 15  
705X1240mm



*Another winter's day*



*Family history*



*Mirror*

*Family history series*  
2014  
Carborundum print  
Edition 4  
385X1385mm



*Holiday I, II & III*  
2008  
Sugar lift, aquatint, drypoint  
Edition 15  
480X350mm



*Wooden boat, Bather (girl) & Bather (boy)*  
2015  
Etching, softground, roulette wheels  
Edition 2  
455X380mm



F.S



T.P



A.M



C.D



G.S



B.P



O.P + L.P



O.P



G.P



R.W



O.P + D.P



F.P + J.N



A.V



P.K



L.P

Mes familles 2015 Reduction linocut Variable editions Variable sizes (appr 130X110mm - 169X251mm)



## Chapter 4 Memory

For her *Memory boxes* project (2001), Fiona Pole wrote to 100 prominent South Africans, asking them to share with her a childhood memory. She received 8 responses, and used the stories in the letters to configure two images for each story. The images were rendered in etching or linocut, and printed on the lid and on the inside surface of the base of each memory box. A facsimile of the original letter is folded up and placed inside each box.

The following South Africans responded to Fiona Pole's request to share a childhood memory for this project: Prof Kader Asmal, MP Minister of Education; Archbishop Desmond Tutu; Helen Suzman; Gillian Slovo; Pamela Jooste; Tito Mboweni; Patricia de Lille, PAC Member of Parliament and Chief Whip, and Dr Wendy Orr, Director: Transformation and Employment Equity.

December 31, 2001

Dear Fiona,

Sorry it has taken me so long to reply to your letter. I've been ferociously busy. Hope I'm not too late.

A favourite childhood memory:

The moment in 1959 and I was seven and my mother drove up the driveway in her snub nosed Citroen and, getting out the car, gave us three sisters each a packet of crisps. It was a moment of sheer joy – not because we were deprived in any way, but because for the past few months we had, along with our parents and their cousins and many black people in South Africa, being boycotted potatoes.

The reason for the boycott was that it had been discovered that the police were "giving" prisoners who'd been arrested for breaking the pass laws (all black South Africans had to carry passes which gave them permission to be in any white area) to white farmers who ran potato farms. The prisoners then became slaves to the farmers, working long hours in terrible conditions for no money – a number of them were killed. My mother and other journalists discovered that this was happening and wrote about it – and thus there was a boycott of potatoes. The boycott was successful – the police were prevented from giving more prisoners over. And so we were able to eat crisps again and you know, how after deprivation, things taste extra especially good but I think my joy was as well, because my mother was so happy that they had succeeded.

Hope that will do.

All the best

*Gillian Slovo*

Gillian Slovo



*Memory boxes*  
Hand made box with  
hand printed lid and  
inside, accompanied by  
a facsimile letter  
2001  
Etching, linocut  
Edition 16

PARLEMENT VAN DIE REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA  
PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Verw./Ref.

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8000

870 Marks Building  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Parliament  
Cape Town

June 7 2001

Ms Fiona Pole  
46 Rue Sedaine  
Paris, 75011  
FRANCE

Dear Fiona

Thank you so much for your letter of April 30 2001 and please accept my apologies for the delay in replying – my life has been absolutely hectic as a result of the arms deal scandal. Your studies sound fascinating and you have my best wishes for a successful final year. I do hope that I am not too late to be able to be of assistance to you. Here is a childhood memory, as requested:

I came from a very poor family. We received new shoes for Christmas only every second year. One year it was not my turn, and my father decided to paint my old shoes late on Christmas Eve. Unfortunately the paint ran out while the second shoe was only halfway. Naturally I refused to go to church for Midnight Mass, but my mother insisted that I must go and sit in the car with my dad outside, listening to the service.

I hope this helps. Kind regards

*Patricia de Lille*

Patricia de Lille  
PAC Member of Parliament and Chief







In October 2003 Fiona Pole asked a group of thirty five children from Tembisa and the surrounding area to record one of their first memories in written form. The children were all born in 1994. Subsequently she translated eight of these documents into images to create the print portfolio 1994 - new memories - 2004.



On the 13 of February at my house we just got a huge I was playing with my sister and my friend said she was going to the shop and a big big truck was unloading beer bottles and then a blue car and my friend started out my name she coast the road from the other side of the truck and I went in front of the truck the blue car ran after my foot and I was skating and screaming and the man in the car took me and my mom to the hospital and it took me 17 days to walk again.

Janelo



I remember when my father had a man on the street. We went to jail for 5yrs and then he started again but they never found him 5yrs later there he was at home Wuyona was afraid of him now noone know who he is. They still looking for him.

Mangela

1994 - new memories - 2004

Portfolio of 8 prints, accompanied by a facsimile letter  
 Aquatint, etching, drypoint, roulette wheels, embossing, chine collé  
 Edition 30  
 510X510X18mm



*In memory of Anna 1936 – 2000*  
 2007  
 Portfolio of 20 prints  
 Deep-etched copper plate, drypoint, embossing  
 Edition 30  
 335X305X27mm

Right  
*In memory of Anna 1936 – 2000*  
 2007  
 Deep-etched copper plate, drypoint, embossing  
 Edition 8  
 1040X785mm





*The new dress I & II*  
2007  
Carborundum print  
Edition 15  
610X515mm



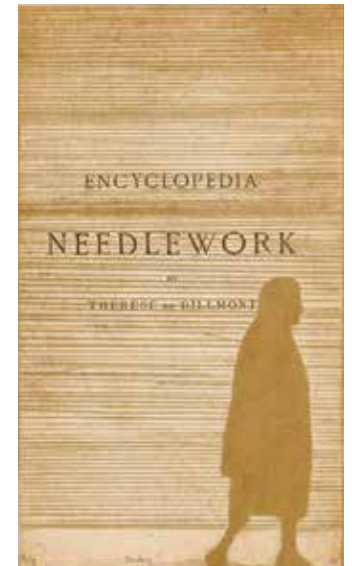
Installation photograph



My grandmother's hands



Stitching



Mending



The gatherer



Stockinged feet

My grandmother's hands  
 (In memory of Jean)  
 2014  
 Etching, found paper  
 Edition 15  
 138X80mm

In the body of work exhibited in 2015 at GALLERY AOP under the title *'le monde flottant'*, Pole references the world of Japanese art, the floating world, to which it is often likened, and in particular, its famous printmakers, such as Kawanabe Kyōsai, a pupil of the famous Katsushika Hokusai. One of Pole's iconic works on this exhibition references Kyōsai's famous woodcut, *Crow on a snowy plum branch*, c. 1880. Kyōsai, known as a fiercely individualist and independent Japanese printmaker, worked during both the Edo and Meiji periods which saw Japan evolving from a feudal to a modern state. Kyōsai was known for his exuberance, which also extended to his technologically excellent draughtsmanship. The same can be said of Pole's approach to printmaking.

It is said that Kyōsai's first aesthetic shock was at the age of nine when he picked up a human head that was severed from its body in the Kanda river. Perhaps this explains Pole's penchant for the isolated image on the picture plane of the paper. She is known for the solitary image that is beautifully executed in minute detail through an intricate network of printmaking techniques.

*Fables and other stories*, 2015



*Kyōsai's crow*  
2015  
Linocut, chine collé  
Edition 5  
970X920mm



When my ship comes home



Standing bear

Fables  
2013/15  
Etching, chine collé  
Edition 15  
Variable sizes (165X162mm – 212X213mm)



Wooden legs



The crow



Traveller



Story teller



Burden



The long wait



Guardian



*Thought foxes*

The Thought Fox

by Ted Hughes

I imagine this midnight moment's forest:  
 Something else is alive  
 Besides the clock's loneliness  
 And this blank page where my fingers move.

Through the window I see no star:  
 Something more near  
 Though deeper within darkness  
 Is entering the loneliness:  
 Cold, delicately as the dark snow,  
 A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;  
 Two eyes serve a movement, that now  
 And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow  
 Between trees, and warily a lame  
 Shadow lags by stump and in hollow  
 Of a body that is bold to come

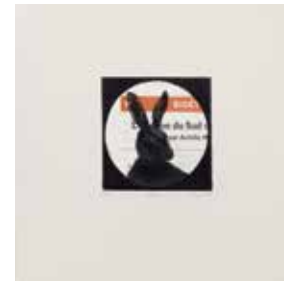
Across clearings, an eye,  
 A widening deepening greenness,  
 Brilliantly, concentratedly,  
 Coming about its own business

Till, with sudden sharp hot stink of fox  
 It enters the dark hole of the head.  
 The window is starless still; the clock ticks,  
 The page is printed.

From *New Selected Poems 1957-1994*, Faber, 1995



*Holly sleeping*



*Hare*



*Flying fish*



*Secret keeper*



*Wild dog*



*Grey day*

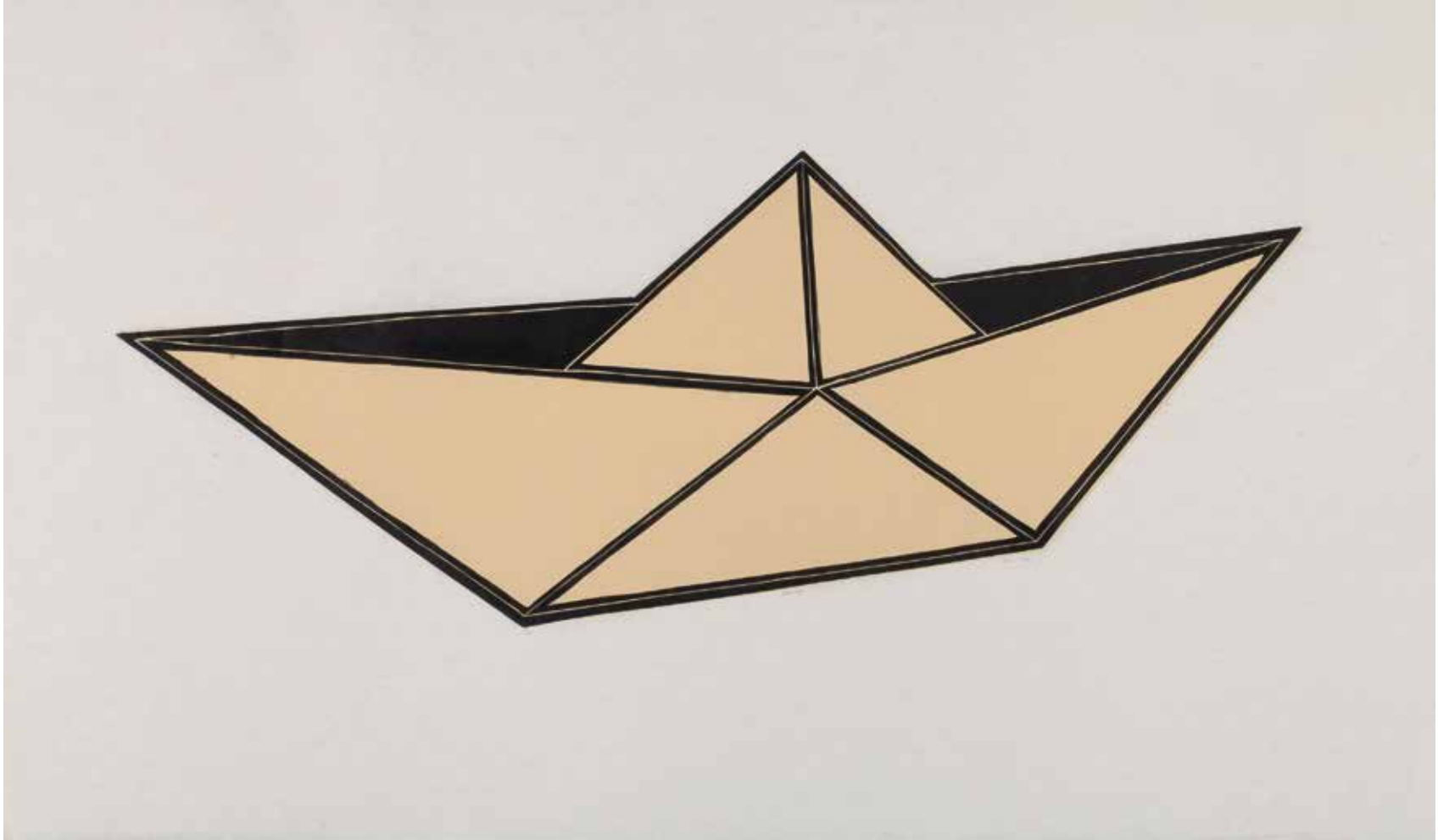


*À travers le Transvaal*





*Tailor-bird*  
2014  
Linocut, chine collé  
Edition 5  
1115X785mm



*Bateau*  
2015  
Colour linocut  
Edition 5  
530X900mm



*Plaster*



*Block*



*Box*



*Book*



*Boat*



*Brick*



*House*



*Suitcase*



*Dice*



*Door*



*Joker*

"The objects that represent home, the journeys both physical and metaphysical that take you away from home, the things you leave behind and the things that get taken along with you are important threads in this body of work." Fiona Pole, 2011

*Small objects*  
2011  
Drypoint, roulette wheel  
Edition 15  
175X123mm



Installation GALLERY AOP 2015



*Wolves at the door*  
2014  
Etching  
Edition 263  
Variable installation  
175X235mm each



*Empty nest*  
2015  
Linocut  
Edition 10  
695X815mm



*My mother's hands*



*Le fou*



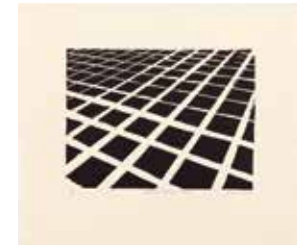
*Joker*



*House of cards*



*Red herring*



*Yellow brick road*



*Open hand*



*Black bird*

*Noir et blanc*  
2015/16  
Linocut, chine collé  
Variable editions  
Variable sizes (140X97mm - 147X210mm)



*The gift*



*White rabbit*



*Sly fox*



*Box*



*Song bird*



*Tortoise*



*Hourglass*



*Paper boat*



*The parcel*



*Pawn*



*Shelter*



*Fawn*



*Straw man*



*Magic hands*



*Snow bear*



*Boat*



Fiona Pole was born in 1974 in Benoni, South Africa. She studied at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, where she obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) degree in 1996. In 2002 she graduated from L'École Supérieure Estienne, Paris, France with a mention of excellence. She specialises in printmaking and has had a number of exhibitions in South Africa and abroad. Having lived in Paris for over ten years, she and her family have returned to South Africa. She lives and works in Johannesburg.

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition *Fiona Pole: "À la recherche du temps perdu"* at GALLERY AOP, Johannesburg, April 2016.

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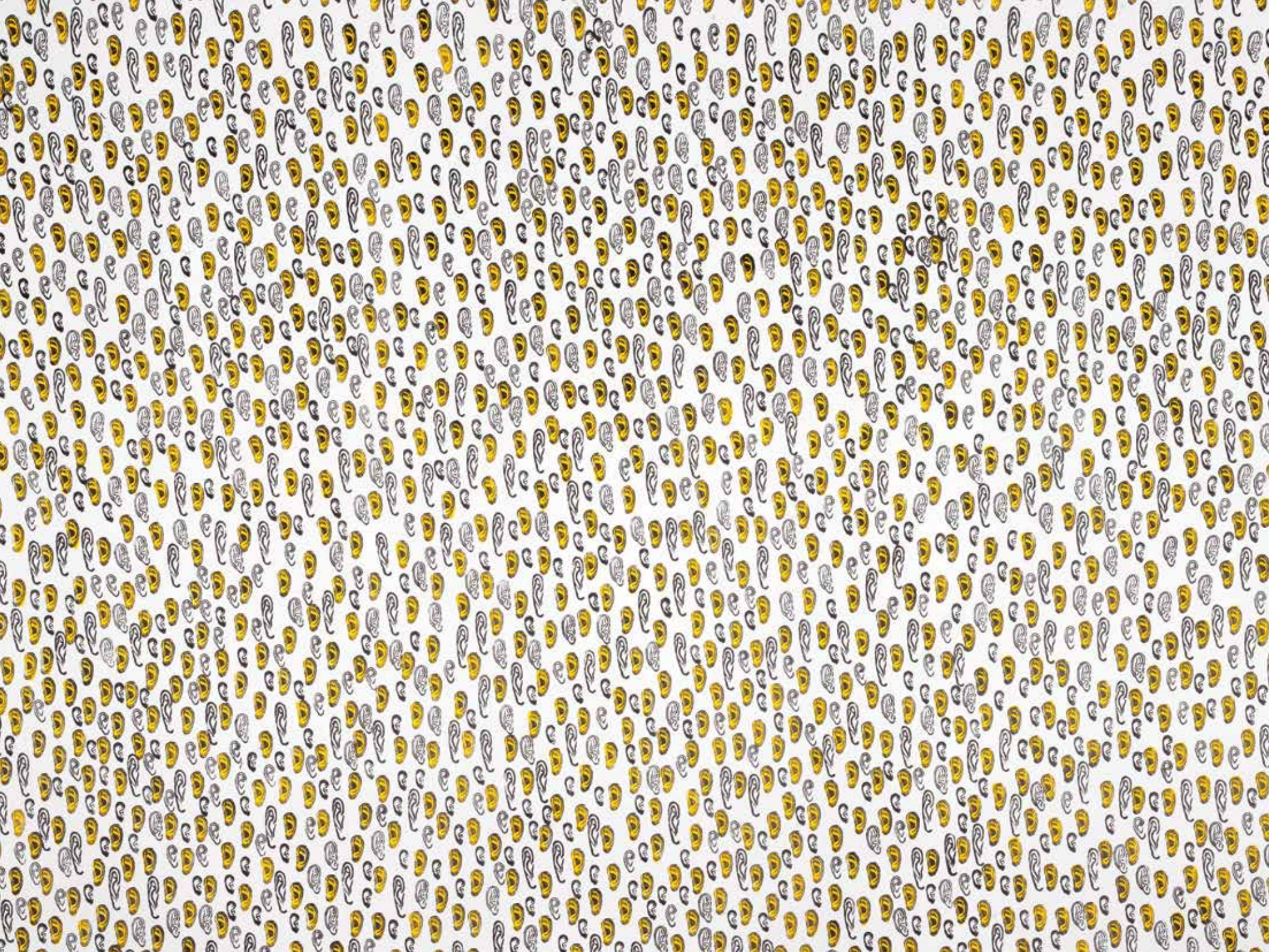
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Press Fleury, the atelier, Johannesburg 2016

Following page  
*¿Puede usted ver las luces?*  
2014  
Ink on paper  
1300X2500mm







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