

PATRICIA WILSON - ADAMS

stain me with the intensity of **black**

7 July - 26 August 2018

**U.R:** Looking back over a long artistic career, where was that first Eureka moment?

**P.W-A:** I grew up on a very isolated rural sheep property and I think the first notion I had that you could be an artist was when my mother would go and sit on a hill with a little viewfinder frame and she would paint delicate watercolour landscapes.

Years later at high school I had a falling out with the Latin teacher so I got “kicked out” into the art class. I quickly realised this was a great opportunity, and I went on to win a place at the National Art School in Sydney.

**U.R:** You talk about your early life which is always important for artists. There are a number of recurrent themes that surface; one is the landscape but as an elemental rather than a pictorial force. Can you elaborate?

**P.W-A:** I’m not a literal or descriptive artist and I am certainly not didactic. I want to create a sense of being in place and in an environment ... also there is a sense of loss. I look at a huge range of things that I can bring back into a studio/gallery setting to achieve some sort of connective aesthetic.

**U.R:** ... which is often abstracted, so another important element in your work.

**P.W-A:** Yes. I guess for me abstraction has always been a process of distillation – a sifting through of the essentials. I think I might qualify as an “eccentric abstractionist” as described by the American art critic Lucy Lippard – a sort of post Post-Minimalist.

**U.R:** Repetition and pattern are also key for you. Where do you think this instinct might come from?

**P.W-A:** It’s easy to say that it’s a feminist construct and that it comes out of knitting or something, but I have this notion that we as humans would never have survived if we hadn’t had the capacity to recognise pattern. On the savannah if you didn’t recognise pattern, something ate you! So I relate a lot of it to working on the land and being in that bush environment such as dappled shade along the creeks or the pattern of trees along a ridgeline. The pattern in the *Phainō series* – *Bloodletting* 2017/18 for example comes from a small fragment of hardwood that I picked up in Central Australia years ago.

**U.R:** So your work is embedded in the details of country, which leads me to ask how do you think non-Indigenous Australian artists can best respond to the challenges and inspirations put forward by Aboriginal art and artists?

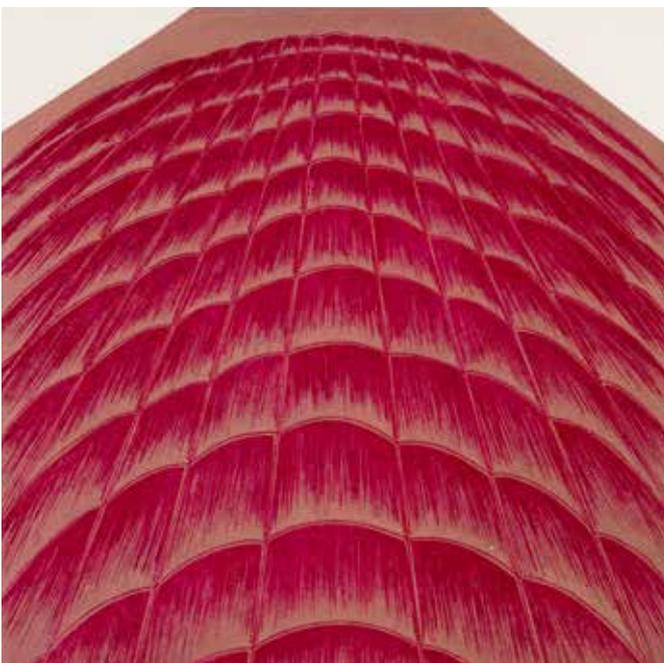
**P.W-A:** I suspect there’s not an artist in Australia who hasn’t been affected by looking at Aboriginal art. It has given us a huge shot in the arm in terms of how beautiful and how meaningful it is. I do recognise that in a sense I am dealing with similar issues – a similar *terroir* – but from a very different cultural perspective.



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**U.R:** Literature, text and in particular poetry inform your work too. Are there any special writers or pieces that have triggered bodies of work?

**P.W-A:** In this show for example I reference John Donne and the exhibition's title comes from a poem by Robert Graves. However a lot of the text work comes out of making artist's books where using other people's texts is unsatisfactory, so I have tended to write my own texts. It is always those poetic cadences and the love of language that influences me. I had a very good education in English literature and I read widely. Another thing that left a deep impression on me was that at school we chanted the Psalms almost every day.

Also, a lot of text is gridded and I love using things like readily available stencils and my letterpress printing. I have a limited number of fonts but I'll have a go with my press that doesn't print terribly well, but I like those imperfections.

**U.R:** As a visitor to your studio I know you've got an interest in print technologies but could you elaborate on the importance of objects?

**P.W-A:** Things like my presses and trays of font sit with all sorts of natural and found objects that have taken my eye. I like everything for its possibility, or its graphic qualities ... bringing the environment and memory into the studio. I can just look at something and go "oh yes!" ... and start drawing.

**U.R:** That's a lovely notion, the idea of memory aids – all the more so in an age of digital media and constant technological innovation. Does the anachronistic quality, the hand made and the gestural mark have a special resonance now?



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**P.W-A:** I admire people who can do absolutely amazing things with new print technology but I come out of a totally different time and culture of making and yes mark making is an important conduit. That whole notion that one has within one's self the capacity to just lay down a mark or put it out there ... it's fresh, it's direct. A lot of that comes out of say looking at Japanese culture, Zen Buddhist calligraphy, the Gutai artists. I'm quite happy to descend into chaos and try and pull things back. A good example of this is *Phainō series – Bad weather II* 2017; at one stage this work was totally out of control!

**U.R:** Reduction and reversal are very much part of the printmaker's strategy, and I suppose chance is an element as well?

**P.W-A:** Chance is a big element as is the use of the grid.



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As Schiller, an 18th century German philosopher said, “we have two obvious drives the sense drive and the form drive”. If you only have the sense drive you live on pure emotion and burn out. But if you only live by form there’s a sterility there; a lot of my work I think goes back to that notion of leaving a bit to chance, working between the two drives to create tension.

**U.R:** Regular travel and artist’s residencies have been important catalysts for new work: can we track direct cultural references in your survey?

**P.W-A:** Not really. I am not a documenter of travel, however it was France in the 1970s where I had the most seminal experiences. I went there to work at Atelier 17, S.W. Hayter’s workshop in Paris as a dilettante and came back to Australia a dedicated printmaker. But even as a printmaker my work looks very different, I’m not a signature artist. I usually have several lines of enquiry open, it’s a polyvalent approach. To my mind the underlying aesthetic pulls it together ... if that makes sense?

**U.R:** Yes – the inevitability of a personal style! So if art is an enquiry, when does an idea have to be realised as a sculptural form rather than as a printed image?

**P.W-A:** I think that comes through materials. I can sit on materials for years until I think of what I want to do with them and then it’s a Gestalt moment. A particular example of that is the bronze *The smell of peaches always makes me cry* 2009. I had those peach seeds for a few years before it came to me how to use them. So there’s a huge nexus in sculpture between materials and ideas. My sculpture actually came from making artist’s

books. There’s a work called *Markers for a crooked way* 2006 in which I was actually trying to do something else and it failed, so I started putting these little bits of cut up etchings onto the top of Japanese bamboo skewers and then I had to work out how to stand them up. A big crossover comes from printmaking too, which deals with multiples. Most of my sculptural works are multiples ... lots of little things to make one big thing.

**U.R:** Contingency is the mother of creativity after all! And as you relate here, paper is a central material in your work.

**P.W-A:** The paper always carries the matrix of the print and it depends on scale or technique, for example in *The Myall Lakes series*, as engraving requires a smooth paper that lets the line stand proud. The *Phainō* series are on huge pieces of Rives BFK, a paper that can take a hell of a beating. You build up that knowledge through years of working with paper.

**U.R:** Finally, I wanted to talk about black. You’ve made black an important idea and a feature in this exhibition. Can you build on the symbolic and creative forces of this “colour of all colours” which has had periods of being somewhat taboo - certainly for painters?

**P.W-A:** It’s the printmaker’s primary tool. You proof in black ... if I proof in black I can see exactly what’s happening on the plate. I’ve never considered myself a colourist, so for me black is a fundamental, like working with stone or timber. Everyone starts with pencil and paper, essentially black on white. Needless to say, there are plenty of black and white prints in the exhibition. And of course, all our primary texts have come down to us in black and white.

Transcription by Danisha Nigii



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## FOREWORD

I first met Patricia Wilson-Adams in the 1980s through a shared passion – the practice of printmaking. Several decades later it is indeed a great privilege to be working together to present this major solo exhibition.

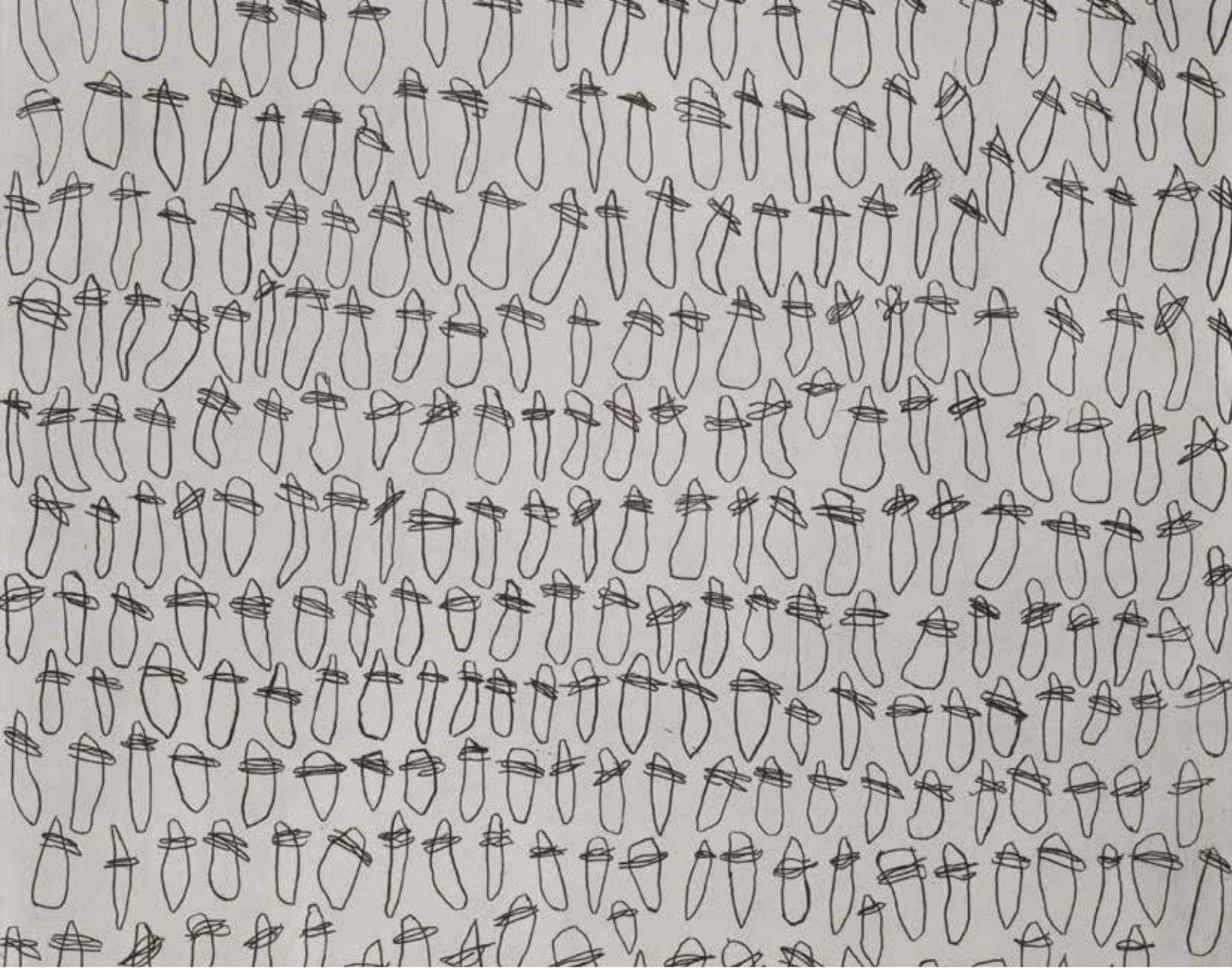
Newcastle Art Gallery has collected Wilson-Adams' works of art since the 1970s and this exhibition provides yet another opportunity to develop a project that showcases a local artist from the collection. With a prodigious academic and artistic career, her practice is embedded in the abstract and the continuous exploration of mark-making techniques. The influence of literature and poetry is fundamental, as is her minimalist approach to image and text.

Wilson-Adams describes herself as an artist for whom the project dictates the form, materials and medium. Most of her creative life has been as a printmaker, hence the exhibition title *stain me with the intensity of black* - the artist's reference to a lifetime with black Charbonnel etching ink stains under her fingernails.

The works of art selected explore issues concerning the environment, cultural landscapes, land usage and the place of the individual within these spaces. Comprising installations, prints and sculpture conceived with found objects, paper, stone and wood; the exhibition pays tribute to a highly accomplished artist whose attention to detail and precision is absolute.

My sincere thanks must go to Patricia Wilson-Adams for her boundless enthusiasm and generosity in supporting the Gallery's vision for this long-overdue survey exhibition.

Lauretta Morton  
Director  
Newcastle Art Gallery



## IMAGES

### Front cover:

*out in the I know nothing country - pollen project* (detail) 2009  
intaglio, spit bite and collagraph  
50.0 x 50.0cm  
Artist collection  
Image courtesy Dean Beletich

### 2.

*The Phainō series - Bloodletting* 2017/18  
intaglio stamp print and pochoir with blood  
76.0 x 76.0cm  
Artist collection

### 3.

*From the centre (squared)* 2013  
intaglio, aquatinting and spit bite  
50.0 x 50.0cm  
Artist collection  
Image courtesy Dean Beletich

### 4.

*The pink hill* 1974  
engraving  
29.9 x 30.1cm  
Purchased 1975  
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

### 5.

*Markers for a crooked way* (detail) 2006  
intaglio, bamboo & perspex  
dimensions variable  
Artist collection

### 6.

*The smell of peaches always makes me cry* (detail) 2009  
bronze  
dimensions variable  
Artist collection

### 7.

*Seedlings for a New (England) arboretum* (detail) 2013  
relief prints, microscope slides, wood & gesso  
dimensions variable  
Artist collection

### 8.

*Cairn* 2018  
stone and found brass bell  
dimensions variable  
Artist collection

### Overleaf:

*The Phainō series - Bad weather II* (detail) 2017  
cyanotype, relief print and intaglio  
76.0 x 76.0cm  
Artist collection

### Back cover:

*out in the I know nothing country - wire ties* (detail) 2009  
intaglio  
50.0 x 50.0cm  
Artist collection  
Image courtesy Dean Beletich

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Published for the exhibition

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