

EMILIE PUGH
MOTIONS OF THE MIND

Exhibition: 29th June - 20th July, 2017

Flat 3, 61 Cadogan Square
London SW1X 0HZ

M I C H A E L
GOEDHUIS



MOTIONS OF THE MIND

Emilie Pugh was born in London in 1988 and studied at Byam Shaw School of Art and at the Ruskin School of Art and Drawing at Oxford University. She currently lives and works in London.

This appearance of a conventional, almost traditional artistic background, is deceptive and belies the reality of her emergence as one of the most restlessly boundary-breaking young artists of today's generation.

Artists who are Emilie Pugh's contemporaries today are confronted by a critical dilemma. On the one hand, they have access to a multiplicity of aesthetic choices and the freedom to do anything they want. But on the other, they have to cope with the pressure to conform to the demands of a 'culture of repudiation' which they assume feeds the expectations of the academic and commercial art-world.

They are working in a world where the conditions for the existence of a genuine avant-garde no longer survive. Everything is now permitted and nothing resisted. Where boundaries no longer exist, it is impossible to violate them. This poses the problem of how to attract attention... how to be more extreme than anyone else and leads often to modes of art or thought in which modern sensibility is corrupted by productions of kitsch, politics, social theory, gender issues or some other academic, pop-orientated baggage. And it doesn't change anything to adopt the word transgressive as a substitute for avant-garde. Today there is no avant-garde.

One becomes particularly aware of this by visiting this year's Venice Biennale. Despite some arresting and original works, so much of the art seems to try too hard. The effort to be new rather than true provides a dramatic contrast to the cultural world of a hundred years ago when the thunderclaps of unequivocal aesthetic innovation broke upon society. From 1880 to 1930 one of the supreme cultural experiments in the history of the world was enacted in Europe and America. It was an era that produced an aesthetic and intellectual renaissance that rivalled in its artistic consequences the Renaissance of the 15th century. And since 1940 it was refined upon and creatively exploited by other richly inventive art movements. But in the past twenty years or so it has often been transformed into a parody of its old self.

What has been lost in 2017, the post-modern age, that the avant-garde had in 1917, is idealism, energy, confidence and the belief that there

were new profoundly exciting scientific, psychological and cultural worlds to explore. And above all the sense that art, in the most noble and disinterested way, could express in illuminating metaphors that era's radically and rapidly evolving culture as well as respond to the massive changes in thinking that were taking place. The explosive emergence of Nietzsche and Freud and the concentration of scientific advances around 1900 that led to the identification of the electron, the gene and the quantum, were combining to transform society's experience of life for ever.

Today's political and politically-correct 'avant-garde' has a very different experience and agenda although it shares a profound awareness of the accelerated rate of change generated by science and technology. The difference that has taken root however over the past century, at least in the West, is the contrast between the thrilled embrace of the new by the pioneers of the last century and the anxious retreat by today's artists into solipsism and/or clamorous appeals on behalf of issues of gender, racism, political ideology and other approved categories.

These often pathetic attempts at artistic insolence, so ubiquitous in Biennales and museum exhibitions and the art departments of universities and colleges, have nothing to do with any authentic avant-garde, nor despite their claims, do they have the effect of transforming our thinking about art itself. I do not of course speak of individual talents, of which there are numerous shining international examples, but about group impact on aesthetic thought.

Emilie Pugh provides a vital and unexpected example of precisely one of those individual talents who have no truck with identity politics and who are courageously running against much of contemporary cultural orthodoxy. Her work incorporates daring pictorial disquisitions, not on an ideologically formed fantasy world and its self-referential plot lines, but on an attitude of honesty to the imperatives of lived experience, an attitude of openness to the aesthetic and moral traditions that have defined our culture.

She puts it well herself. 'I am guided by the interconnectivity of all living things. I draw on systems of belief from the spiritual to the scientific, the micro to the macro and the conflicting or confluent forces that govern them.' She is interested in capturing the experience of the ephemeral nature of things... 'we exist in a state of constant flux'.

In this sense she joins the Cubists in wanting to represent all possible 'views' of an object or concept and in her particular case a rounded vision, intuitive and emotional, of the rich inter-connectedness of things. She has a profound sense of multiplicity as the governing element of reality... Picasso's 'I paint forms as I think them, not as I see them'.

In order to press her driving perceptions into tangible form she restlessly experiments with a versatile range of media: drawing, burning, gunpowder, chemicals, thread, 3D installation, incense stick and light as well as pen and ink.

Her titles are suggestive and guide us vividly to the subject. In *Anatomy of Thought* (pp. 20-21) she refers to her 'mindscapes' that unravel intuitively, 'at any moment, there are countless thoughts... which intersect, overlap, influence and distort one another. Everything that we experience adds to the complexity of our inner sea...'

Or again: *Trailing Edge* (p. 22). The catalyst for these works was a visit to the Fluid Dynamics lab at Imperial College. Here her intellectual interest in fusing through her art her response to the life of the soul with that of her passion for science, enabled her to study the flow of patterns created when particles are forced over and around static objects.

Her *Corrosive Light* (pp. 6-7) series shows her interest in neurology and the brain and led to her studying a book *Portraits of the Mind* which helped her to analyse ways of expressing electrical impulses and neurological pathways.

In *Murmuration* (p. 19) she has been moved by watching a film of starlings in flight... their graceful, boundary-less, lyrical swiftness epitomised for her the elusiveness of life's (and nature's) ever changing flux.

And in the *Internal Apertures* (p. 10-12) series she indulges her rich gift of draughtsmanship. These works are anatomical... like cropped apertures from a microscope. They are consistent with the theme that is embedded in all her work, that of boundaries and their fluidity. 'The meeting' as she says 'between our bodies and the world.'

We have the pleasure therefore in this exhibition to show and catalogue 14 of her recent works whose range encompasses all of her experiments... experiments I must add which she is often reluctant to believe have reached fruition. But had I listened to her misgivings we would never have enjoyed the great privilege of working with her for this exhibition.

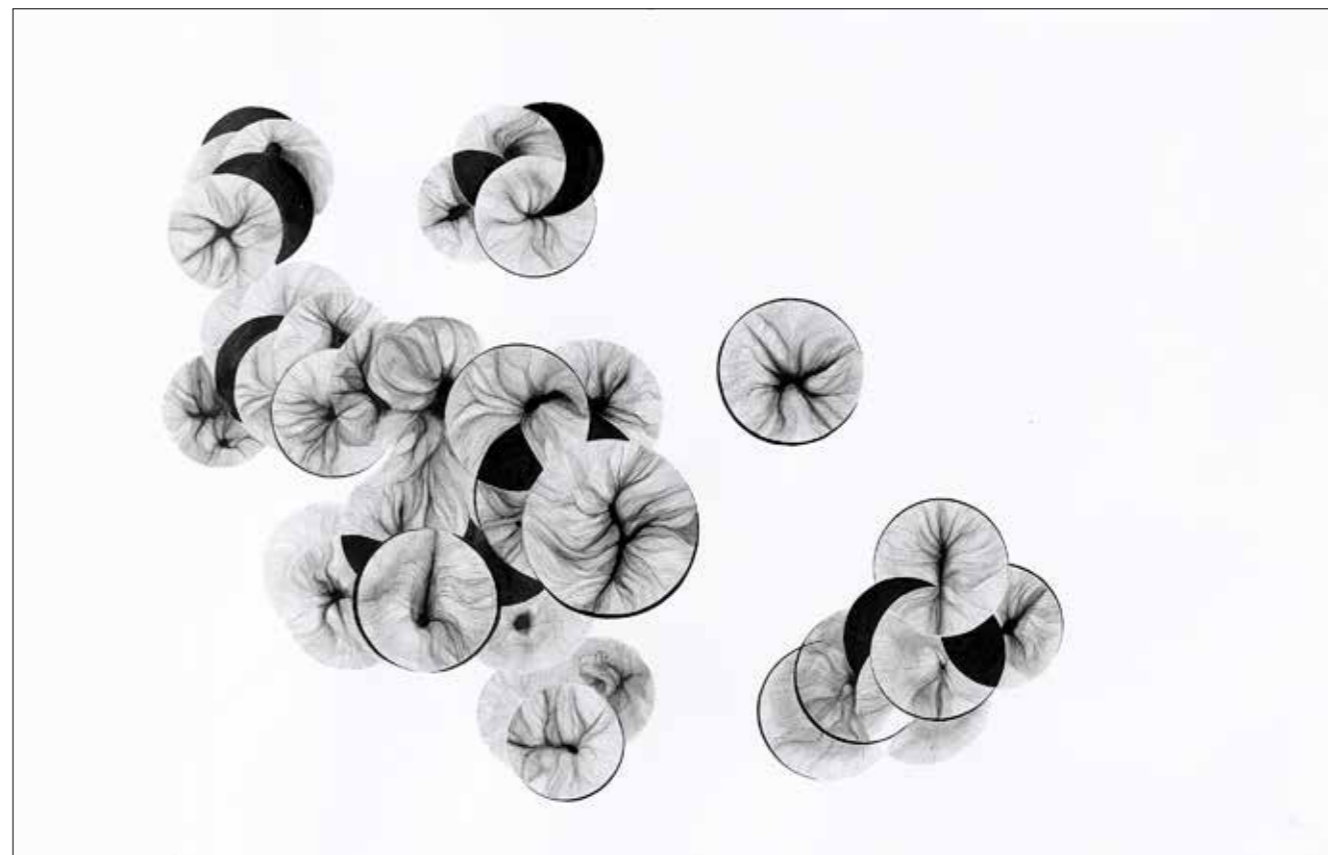
MICHAEL GOEDHUIS



above and overleaf

INTERNAL APERTURES I, 2017

Ink and black watercolour on paper
23¼ × 23¼ in (60 × 60 cm)



above

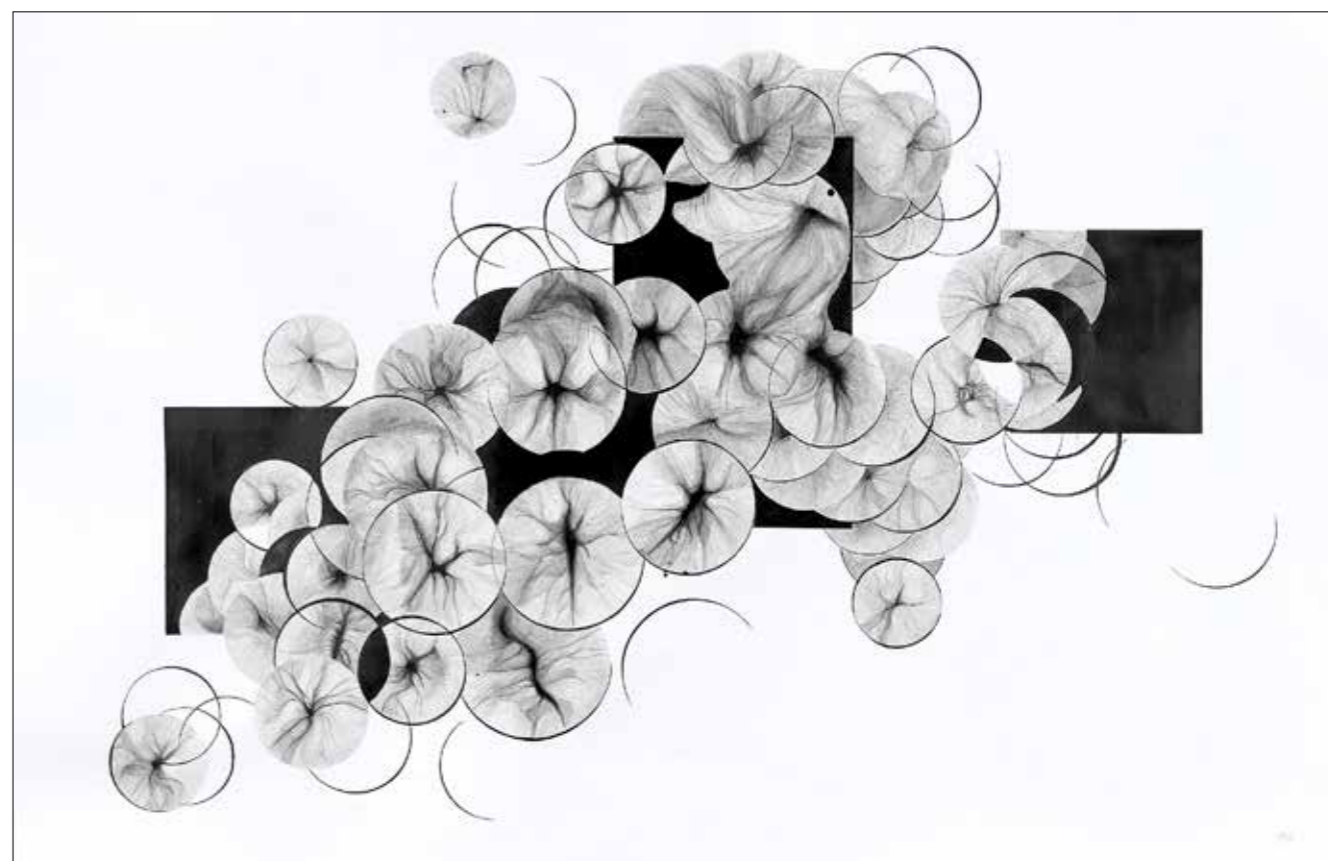
INTERNAL APERTURES II, 2017

Ink and black watercolour on paper
30⅓ × 47½ in (77 × 120 cm)

below

INTERNAL APERTURES III, 2017

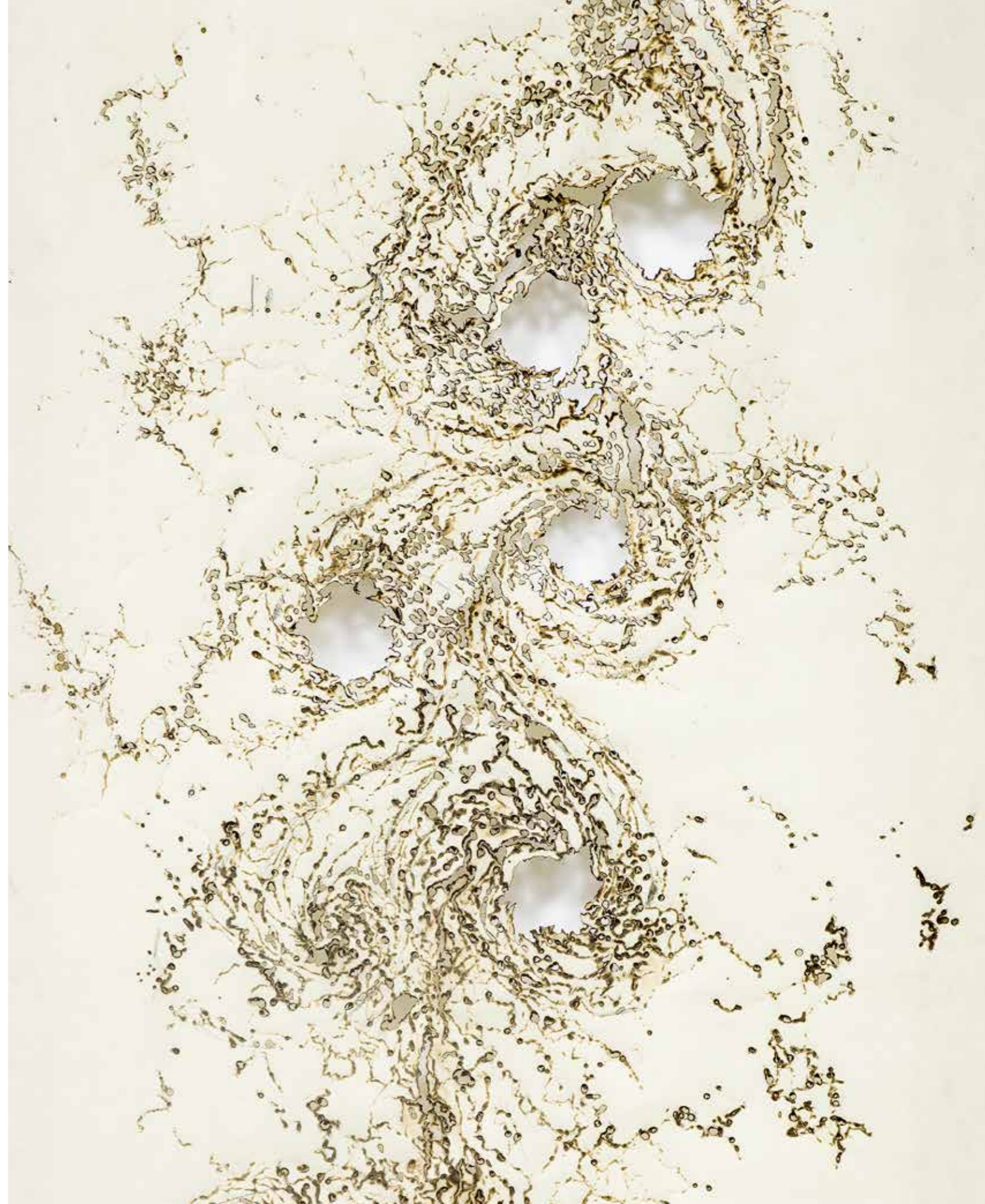
Ink and black watercolour on paper
30⅓ × 47½ in (77 × 120 cm)







TRAILING EDGE, 2017
Incense and soldering iron
burnt *kozu* paper
50½ × 23¾ in (128 × 60 cm)





SIEGE, 2017

Incense burnt *kozuke* paper and gold leaf
29¾ × 29¾ in (76 × 76 cm)



CORROSIVE LIGHT II, 2017

Bleach drawing on ink prepared paper
24¾ × 17½ in (63 × 44 cm)



CORROSIVE LIGHT III, 2017

Bleach drawing on ink prepared paper
24¾ × 17½ in (63 × 44 cm)



DIPTYCH: CLOUD ROOT (INK) | CLOUD ROOT (BURNT), 2016

left: Chinese ink, watercolour and pen on paper
right: 15 individual layers of incense burnt rice paper
Each panel: 15½ x 19 in (39.4 x 48.3 cm)

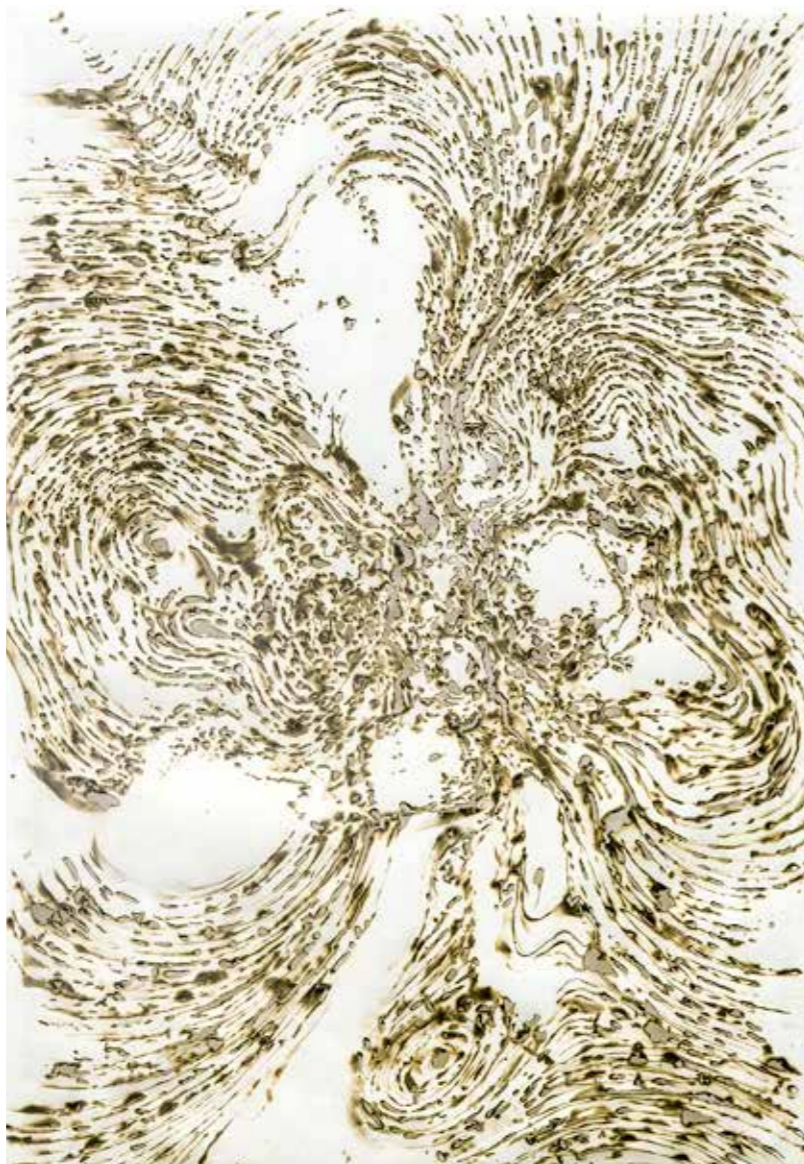




SOLAR SNARE, 2017
Incense burnt *kozuke* paper
30¾ × 30¾ in (78 × 78 cm)

DESCENDING FLAME, 2016
Giclée archival print on German etching paper
59 × 27½ in (150 × 70 cm)





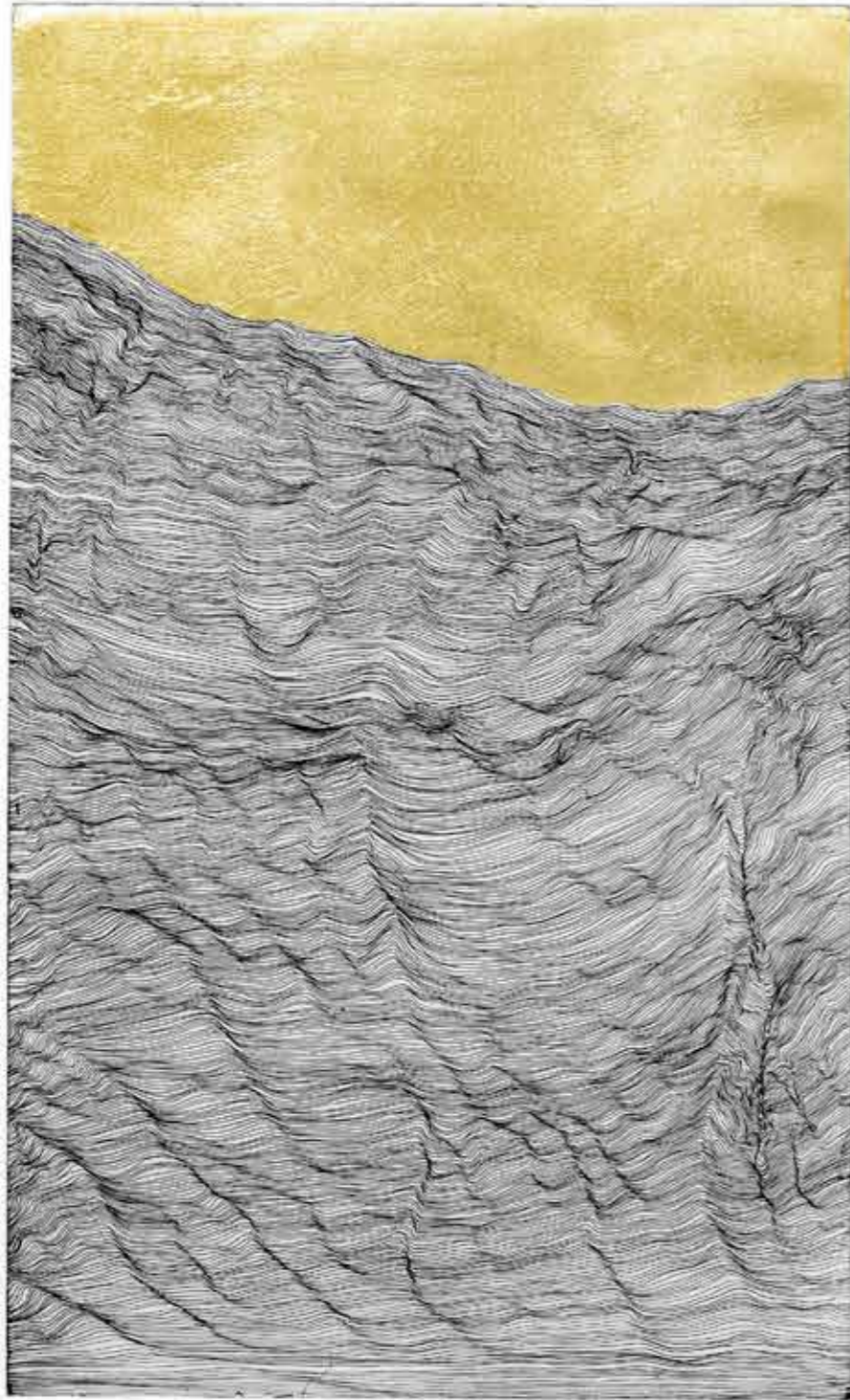
TURBULENCE, 2017
Incense burnt *kozuke* paper
20½ × 14½ in (52 × 36 cm)



MURMURATION, 2017
Incense burnt *kozuke* paper
53¼ × 35½ in (135 × 90 cm)

overleaf
ANATOMY OF THOUGHT, 2017
Ink on incense burnt *gampi* paper
51½ in × 83¼ in (131 x 213 cm)





BLACK MOON, 2016

Copper plate etching with gold leaf and black velvet
32 3/4 x 46 in (83 x 117 cm)

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PHOTO: GIULIA SAVORELLI

EMILIE PUGH

Born London 1988

Education

- 2006–2007 Byam Shaw School of Art, London
- 2007–2010 The Ruskin School of Fine Art and Drawing, Oxford

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 Hunter/Whitfield Gallery, London
- 2016 States of Becoming, Cob Gallery, London
- 2014 Tracing Pathways, Kunsthalle m3, Aterlierhaus Mengerzeile, Berlin

Selected Group Exhibitions and Awards

- 2017 Drawing Now Paris, Cob Gallery, Paris
- 2016 Art Miami, Michael Goedhuis Gallery, Florida
- 2015–2017 Cold Folds, Blacks Club, Dean Street, London
- 2014–2015 Interact, East Wing XI Courtauld, Somerset House, London
- 2014 BFAMI auction, PHILLIPS, Berkeley square, London
- 2014 In-Tra, Emilie Pugh and Alice von Maltzhan, The Asylum, London
- 2014 Material Identity, Rook and Raven Gallery, London
- 2013 Natural Perceptions, 68 Dean Street, London
- 2012 Sustainability, The Botanical Gardens, Oxford
- 2011 The Other Art Fair, The Bargehouse, London
- 2009 Art Thou Maid, Ruskin And Goldsmiths, Oxford
- 2009 Radcliff Science Library, Oxford
- 2009 Oxford University Press, Oxford
- 2009 Morph, North Wall Gallery, Oxford
- 2008 Box Ladder, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford

Prizes

- 2015 Longlisted for Aesthetica Magazine art prize
- 2009 Shortlisted for Pirye Prize, Oxford University Press

Residencies

- 2013–2014 Aterlierhaus Mengerzeile, Berlin
- 2009 Draw International, Caylus