

READ ME

An exhibition presented by the North-West
University Gallery in collaboration with the
Origins Centre Museum, Wits



This catalogue is produced by the North-West University Research Niche ViNCO (Visual Narratives and Creative Outputs through interdisciplinary and practice-led research) in conjunction with the North-West University Gallery and published on the occasion of the exhibition **READ ME**, organised by Jo-Ann Chan and Tammy Hodgskiss and curated by Amohelang Mohajane.

The exhibition being generously hosted by the Origins Centre of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, from 16 May to 13 July 2019.

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Jo-Ann Chan & Amohelang Mohajane

CATALOGUE DESIGN

Jo-Ann Chan

© 2019 **TEXT** Jo-Ann Chan , Tammy Hodgskiss, Amohelang Mohajane

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Faculty of Humanities
North-West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa

EXHIBITION STATEMENT

We read one another's eyes, our skins, our curves and our angles like books written in the language of human form. Our bodies tell the stories of the lives that we've lived – every scar, every chosen mark and every learned gesture, a generator of biography. As human beings, the biographies we create are not restricted to our own bodies. We leave our stories in the landscape – we leave our marks. In turn, the landscapes we touch leave their marks on us. Invisible marks. Marks that run deep and long and so far into history that we have forgotten some of them. But the landscapes that we have forgotten have not forgotten us – our stories remain etched in their bones. Etched in a language we no longer recognize; and so, the story of the landscape goes unnoticed and unread. Landscapes that were once important to man, that were once revered, now lie neglected because we no longer recognize ourselves in them.

The Redan rock engraving site near Vereeniging in the Gauteng province is just one of these landscapes. Despite the titles of 'national monument' and 'provincial heritage site', it is now a derelict cultural landscape. No longer fenced, covered or monitored, it is exposed to both natural and human interference. Graffiti, litter and the acid rain, produced by the industrial activity characteristic to the area, are but a few of the factors that are contributing to the deterioration of this open-air rock art landscape. The preservation and conservation of sites like this one is hardly simple – between law, ethics, cultural sensitivity and financial responsibility, few viable options remain.

READ ME is an interdisciplinary body of creative work that responds to the Redan rock engraving site's plight by conceptually imbuing it with a personal narrative identity. The landscape's narrative identity is explored and reconstructed through the lens of forensic anthropology. The landscape is approached as a physical body carrying lingering cues to a psychological being with memories, interactions and resulting narratives that now lie unread.

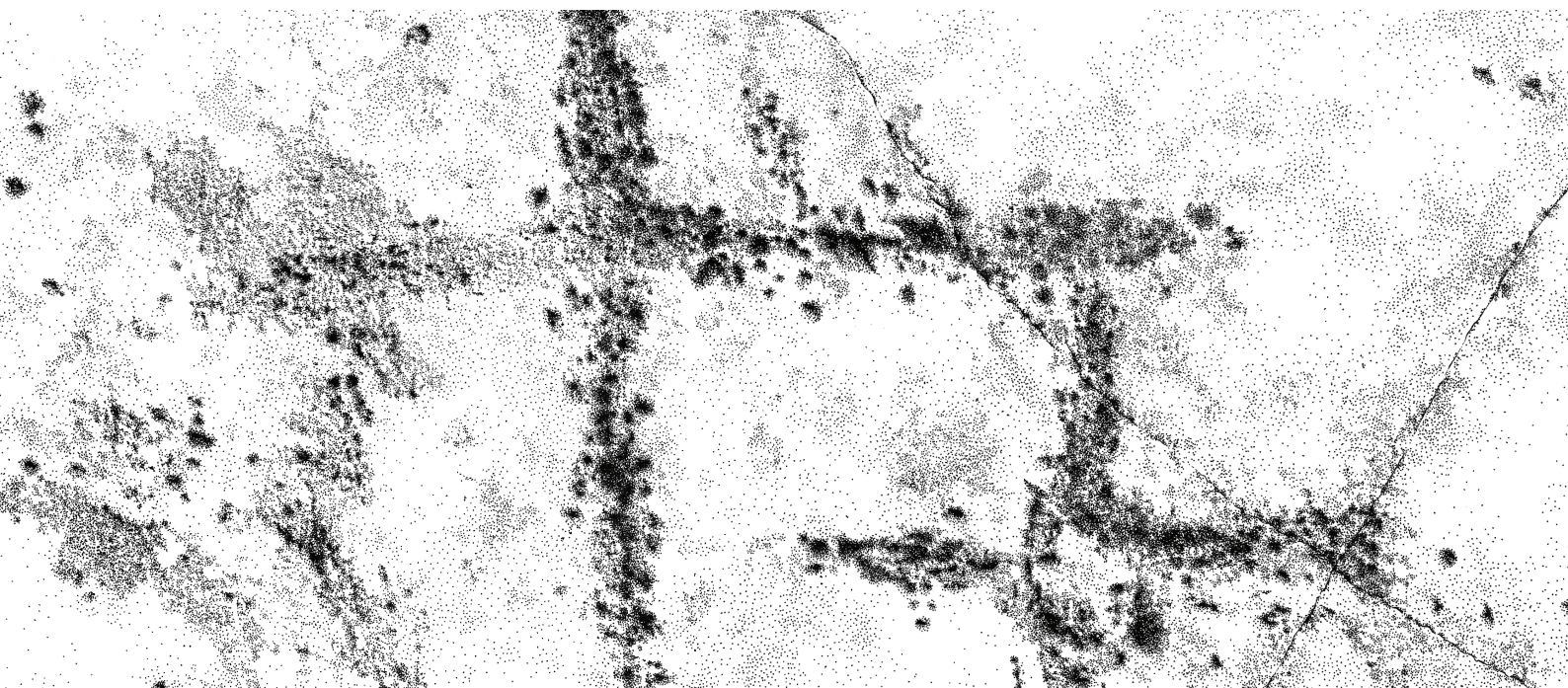
JO-ANN CHAN

READ ME

ORIGINS CENTRE GALLERY, WITS

16 May - 13 July 2019

DIGITAL CATALOGUE



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FOREWORD

It is a pleasure to present **READ ME** by Jo-Ann Chan at Origins Centre, Wits. This exhibition, curated by Amohelang Mohajane, brings together various disciplines and modern technology to encapsulate and appreciate the beautiful engravings from the rock engraving site, Redan. The rock engraving site, like many other historical sites in South Africa, has many people living just a few kilometers away from it, but who do not know about the enormous beauty and history that the site holds.

I hope that this interdisciplinary project fuels conversations about the past – how we view it, interpret it, interact with it, and gain meaning from it. Southern African rock art tells the stories of many communities – hunter-gatherers, herders and farmers – who lived in southern Africa thousands of years ago. Many of these stories have not been recorded in text, but are preserved through the art.

It is perfect timing that this exhibition is here at Origins Centre, celebrating rock engravings and reiterating their importance in southern Africa's history, as later this year we will be celebrating the opening of the Origins Centre Rock Engravings Archive. The archive, curated with the Rock Art Research Institute at Wits, is the largest archive of rock engravings and through it we hope to obtain more information and

interpretations about these beautiful pieces of art and the people who created them. Many of these pieces were moved many years ago from their places of origin, mostly in the aim of preserving them, but in turn removing them from their original landscapes and contexts. Can one obtain more stories from a well-preserved engraving whose origins we are unsure of or from engravings that are damaged and eroded, but in their original setting? Today, every effort is made to conserve rock engravings in their original context, but sites like Redan demonstrate that this does not always happen as planned. It is my hope that an exhibition such as this will help create awareness of the Redan rock engraving site, and other rock engraving sites in southern Africa, and how much beauty and history we are losing by inadequate preservation and conservation measures.

DR TAMMY HODGSKISS
ORIGINS CENTRE CURATOR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition is but one goalpost in the broader **Visualising the Voices of Redan** project. Thus far, it has been a five-year journey that started with an introduction to the Redan site and the many discussions, incubation periods, creative exploration, problem-solving and many helping hands that followed has brought us here. My heartfelt thanks go out to:

DR TAMMY HODGSKISS for the logistic and marketing coordination

AMOHELANG MOHAJANE and her team for the curation and installation

NORMAN and **CHARMAINE CHAN** for the construction of the display cases

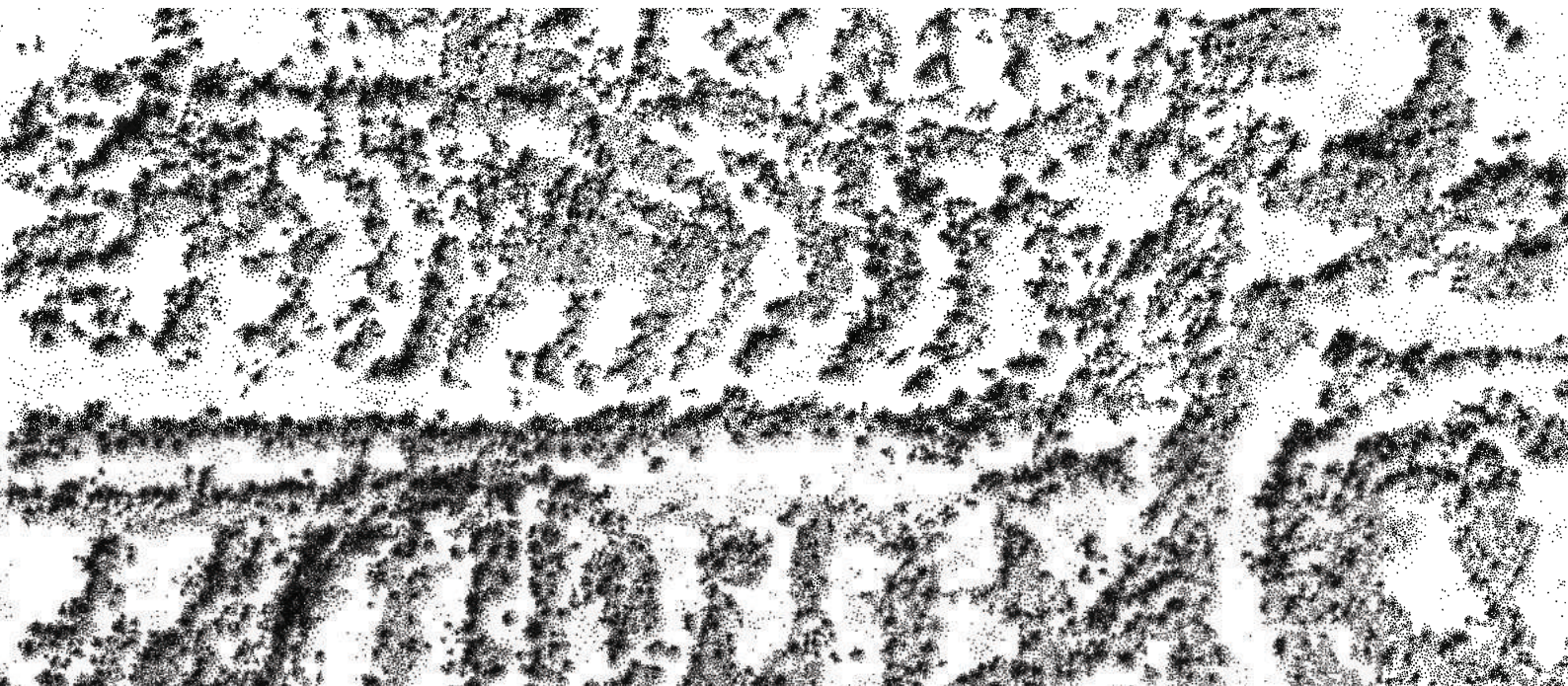
MARTIN CHAN for the photography assistance

ADRIAN LAMOUR for the 3D construction and printing

ADRI BENADÉ for the technical and production assistance

The contributions made to the development of this project by the encouragement and guidance of **DR IAN MARLEY** and **PROF. RITA SWANEPOEL** cannot be stressed enough. Thank you for your mentorship and friendship that extended well beyond the submission of the Master's Degree that kickstarted this project. I sincerely believe that Ian believed in this project much more than I did at the start, and without his continued promotion thereof and the networks that he made possible, this would not have come as far as it has.

Also, NWU extends its appreciation and thanks to The University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg acting through its Origins Centre for hosting the **READ ME** Exhibition.



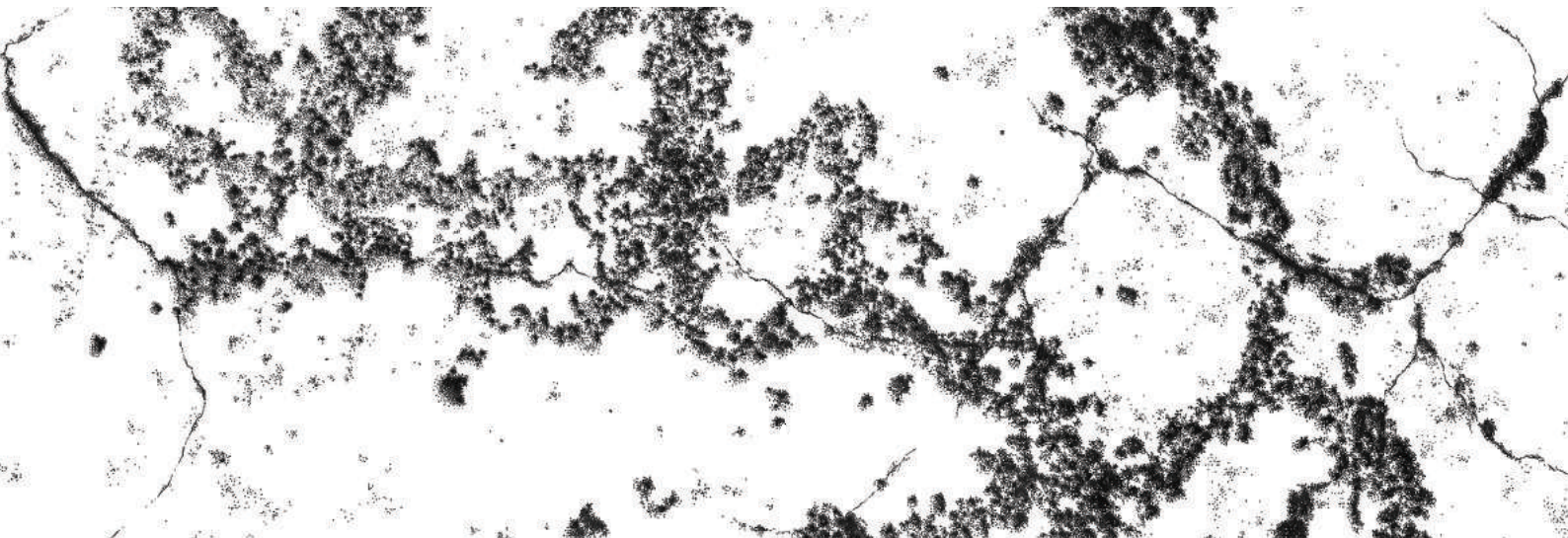
INTRODUCTION

It has been a pleasure to introduce this body of work and this space to one another. Their themes and interests are exceptionally well-aligned and as much as the space enriches this exhibition's body of work, we hope the work will enrich the space.

This exhibition is but a single interpretation of a small part of the world of rock art as viewed through the eyes of an illustrator and visual communicator. This experimental engagement acts on the natural human impulse to preserve what is left. It employs illustration in its well-used role as a means of documentation. Of the engravings still visible at the site, only a small portion is represented in this exhibition, and thereby preserved to a degree through record using a labelling system initiated by the rock art researchers Alexander Robert Willcox and Harold Pager in 1967 and built upon by Dr Marguerite Prins in 2005. Forensic anthropology, as a field of practice applied only to human remains, is a counter-intuitive framework with which to contextualise this non-human entity and, as such, instigates questions about the predominant anthropocentric view found in most interactions with landscapes and in land management as well as how we assign value to objects, places and people.

Beyond just documentation, this exhibition also delves into the possible world of the motifs of non-representational rock engravings as an intentional, readable and decipherable language. The engravings are therefore not considered to be just doodles in the rock by idle herdsman (Jeffreys, 1953: 15), or the documentation by San shamans of synaptically generated symbols. This interpretative framework would equate the gestalt of the site to an unacknowledged book that we hope will one day not only be read, but be understood.

AMOHELANG MOHAJANE & JO-ANN CHAN



CURATORIAL STATEMENT

AMOHELANG MOHAJANE

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY GALLERY CURATOR

The exhibition opening of **READ ME** comes at a time where South Africa is at a milestone politically, with the country's sixth national democratic elections having just passed on the 8th of May 2019. Twenty-five years into democracy, the land question remains a burning issue in the South African political and social landscape. While South African news and media coverage is indicative of a society that experiences it as an issue that urgently needs to be addressed, it is hardly the only historical issue with which we grapple today. Prioritization and representation are themes that inevitably arise from a history such as ours – fraught with inequality and power imbalances. This exhibition proposes or speaks to similar themes, I believe.

South Africa's history and heritage is a contested field of inquiry where the preservation of the past finds itself at loggerheads with the redressing of its resulting inequalities. This is evidenced by the unrest at various universities in recent years that has found its focus centred on statues and memorials from the Apartheid era. It is often said that history is written by the victor and thereby, in South Africa, one dominant perspective was preserved and prioritized, while indigenous knowledge, traditions and memorials were left largely neglected until the signs of their existence are no longer understood. This is the case for the rock art site that this exhibition converses with. The Redan rock engraving site is the only major rock engraving site in Gauteng yet it is vandalised,

inaccessible, overgrown and although it is mentioned on tourism websites, very few know its locality or how to get there. Instead, a heritage site, because that is what it is, an instance of an under-represented voice, is becoming progressively neglected and obliterated by industrialisation.

Jo-Ann Chan's exhibition, **READ ME** is a vision - a new platform of debate where design coupled with modern forensic anthropology makes us aware of this call to learn, see, investigate and "READ" further into the question of this heritage site. It is a call for someone to hear the landscape call – the silence of the site as it screams words in a language we don't understand. Chan's contemporary illustrations merge the site's petroglyphs with Western glyphs to produce enigmatic images that awaken the rock engraving site as a physical body that now communicates with human beings of the present day.

This exhibition grew out of collaborative efforts and is a continuation of a long-standing, continuous social and historical dialogue that few truly understand.

READ ME is an exchange between the artist and two institutions of higher education that aims to engage people to explore both historic and contemporary art. It is an absolute pleasure to have curated this phenomenal body of work and I hope it opens up conversations and further reinterpretations of the Redan rock engraving site.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

JO-ANN CHAN

This exhibition and catalogue are part of the larger **Visualising the Voices of Redan** project that was initiated in 2015 under the NWU research entity Visual Narratives and Creative Outputs through interdisciplinary and practice-led research (ViNCO). This project grew beyond the planned scope and continues to grow. It has taken on a life of its own and is simply dragging me along with it for no other reason than that I let it.

On reflecting on the nature of the growth and development of this project, 'negative capability' seems to be a very appropriate descriptor. This phrase was first articulated in 1817 by the Romantic English poet John Keats in a letter to his brothers. While it was never repeated nor ever expanded upon in meaning by Keats himself, it has been discussed by scholars from diverse fields ranging from aesthetics to sociology (Hebron, 2014). My own interpretation of this phrase in the context of this body of work

positions it as a mindset that is reminiscent of the critical reflective practice associated with practice-led research.

By advocating the importance of being able to remain in a position of uncertainty instead of reaching for answers, Keats seems to propose the necessity for some level of passivity in the creative process. He encourages the creator to acknowledge what is uncertain and allow it to remain that way – "half-knowledge." The mindset he proposes subverts the roles of reason, objectivity and logic that require us to seek facts, to have a certain answer for moments of uncomfortable uncertainty.

In many ways, it evokes the same sentiment that the French philosopher Voltaire (1770) offers with the words "doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one." While certainty is comfortable, it can also blinker. In a world that is

“ ... several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason – Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetrallium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. ”

- John Keats, 1817 -

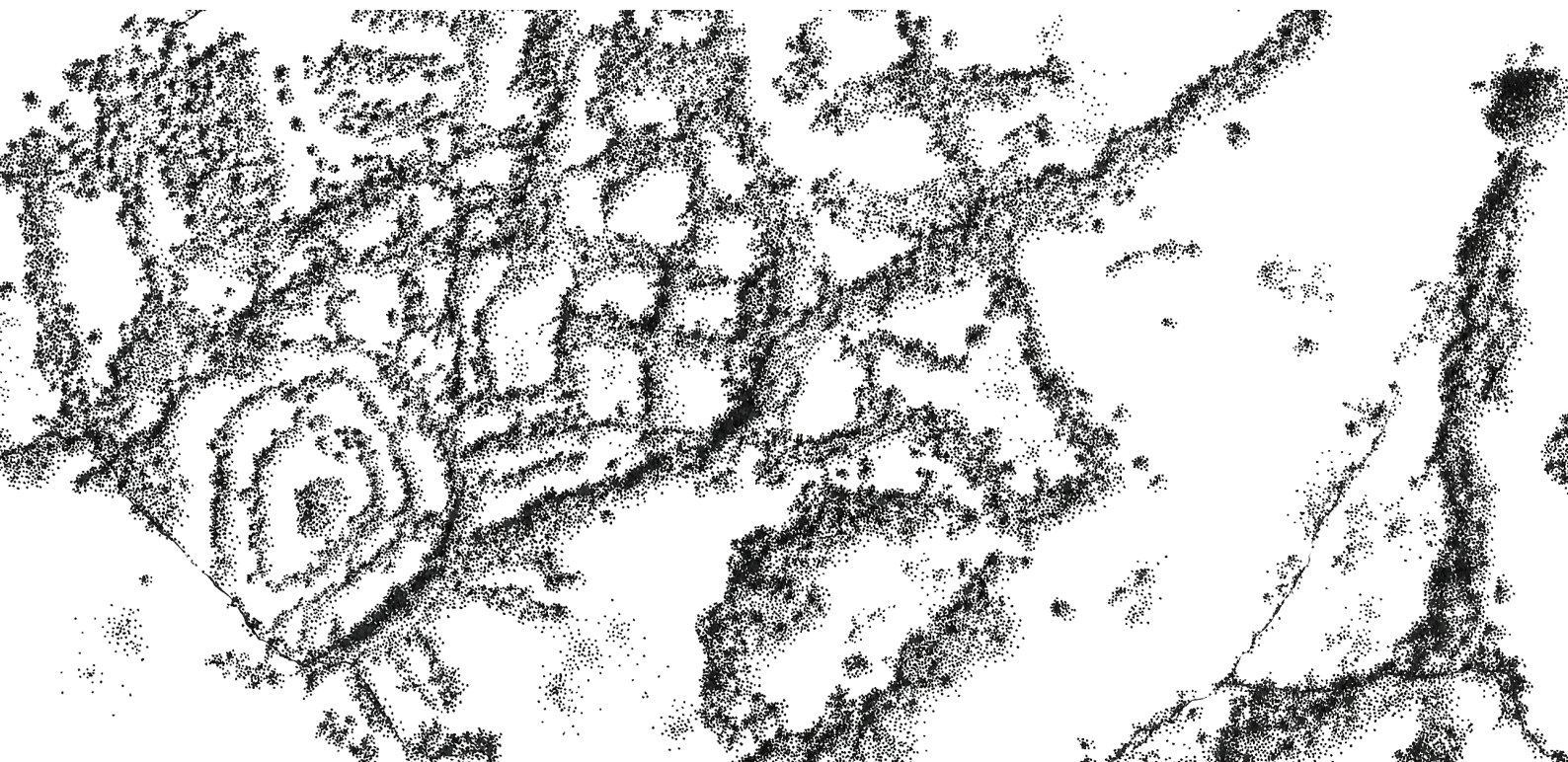
increasingly subjective and ever-expanding, and in which reality is being rewritten by innovations such as virtual and augmented reality, gene-editing and artificial intelligence, our definitions of *possible* and *impossible* are under disruption. Doubt fosters an invaluable ability to question and an openness to change.

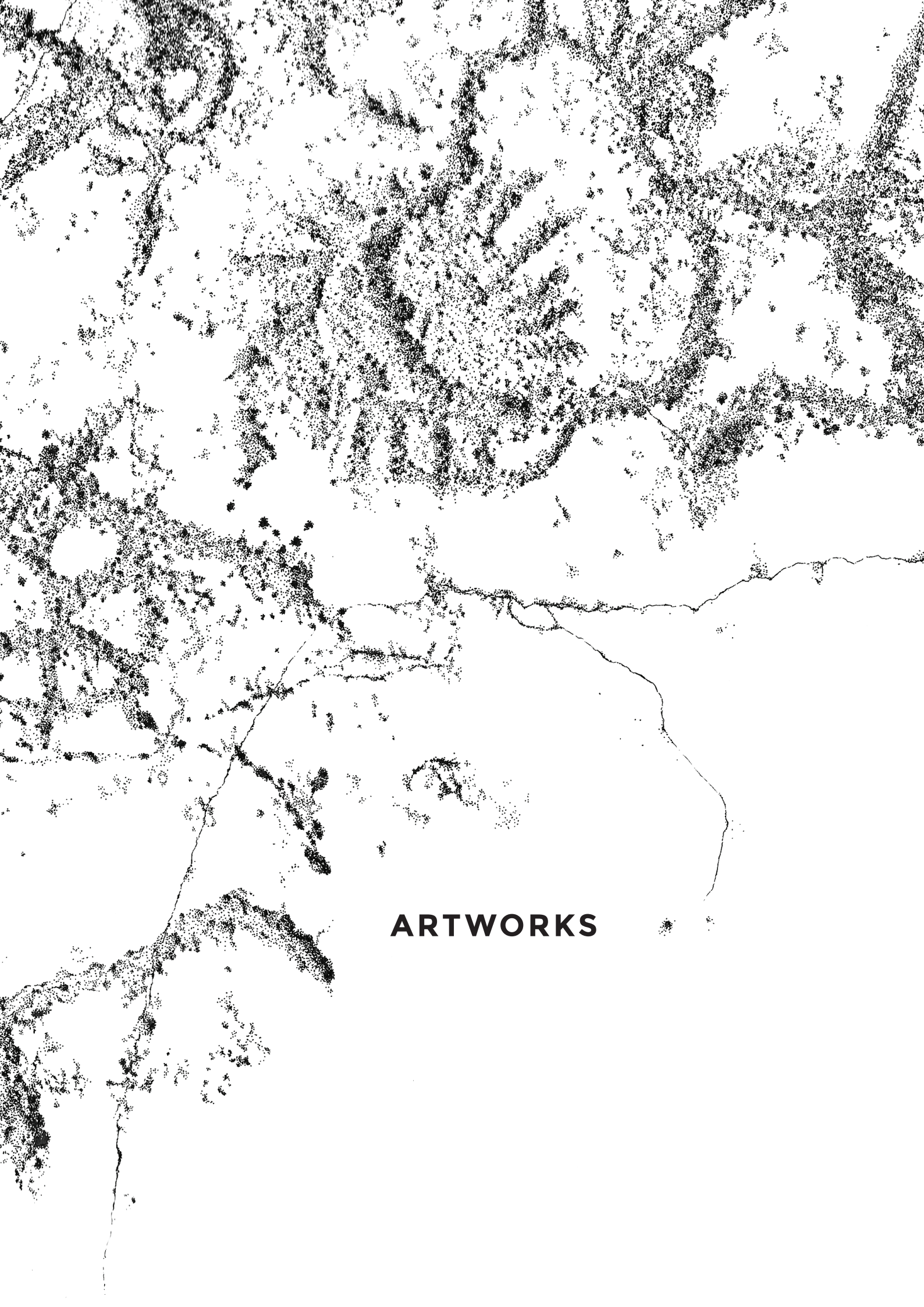
I am trained as a designer – to find and solve problems. In order to find solutions, both intuition and logic, or uncertainty and reason are crucial. To separate the two categories seems an act of folly. However, in order for both to contribute meaningfully to the creative process, some degree of passivity is required; and this is where I am in agreement with Keats' proposal.

Reason would dictate the need for a certain plan. Intuition and uncertainty would encourage exploration without the need to fit within that plan. To be quiet in the throes of making in order to listen to two contradictory voices (or more) and give each what is due even if it causes confusion and

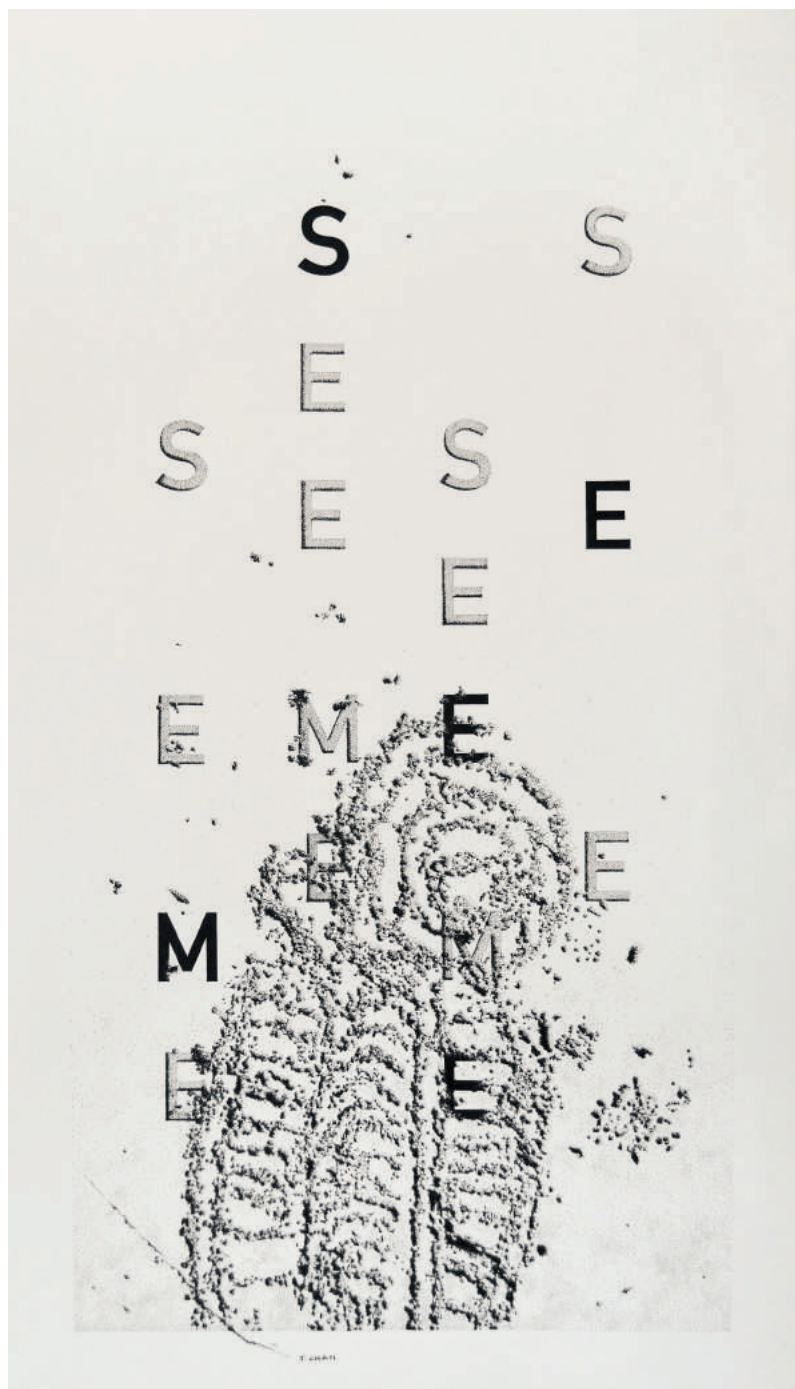
uncertainty, suggests that a creative endeavour knows better than its creator, what it should be. It has a better understanding of where it should go and how to get there; if only the creator would shut up and listen. This mindset imbues the process and creative endeavour with agency.

There were many aspects to the body of work included in this exhibition (and many that are not) that are the result of this type of open mindset. They were not part of the planned scope; but they were what the project seemed to ask for – the attempt at a complete documentary survey of the site and its engravings, photogrammetry of the nearby sinkhole, 3D reconstructions (many of which did not work), illustrated glyphs, the *Windows from Redan* series of prints. These unplanned additions undoubtedly enriched the work and my understanding of what could be possible and they were due to serendipitous creative opportunities that, had I not taken on a passive role, would never have been seen; and had I followed only logic and reason, would have been ignored even if they were.





ARTWORKS



SEE ME

Fineliner pen

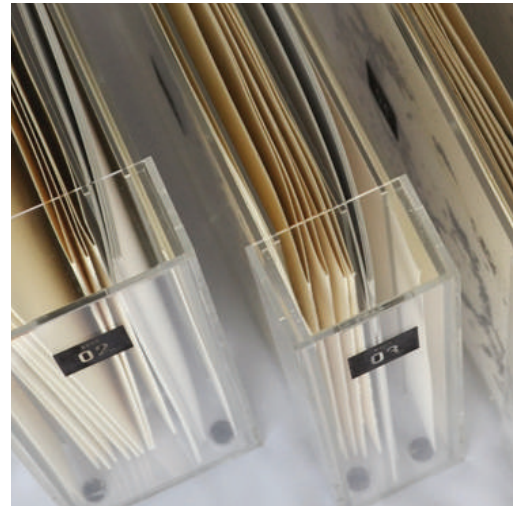
2019



HEAR MY STORY

Fineliner pen

2019



THE VOICES OF REDAN

Artist's book set

Plexiglas, Etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique book object, 2017

Each artist's book captures a phase of a forensic anthropologist's typical workflow beginning at an introduction to the case and remains, then followed by an inventory of the scene and evidence, the construction of a biological profile, a trauma analysis and finally identification. In this way, each book becomes a chapter of the larger story of how I, as artist, engaged with the site.

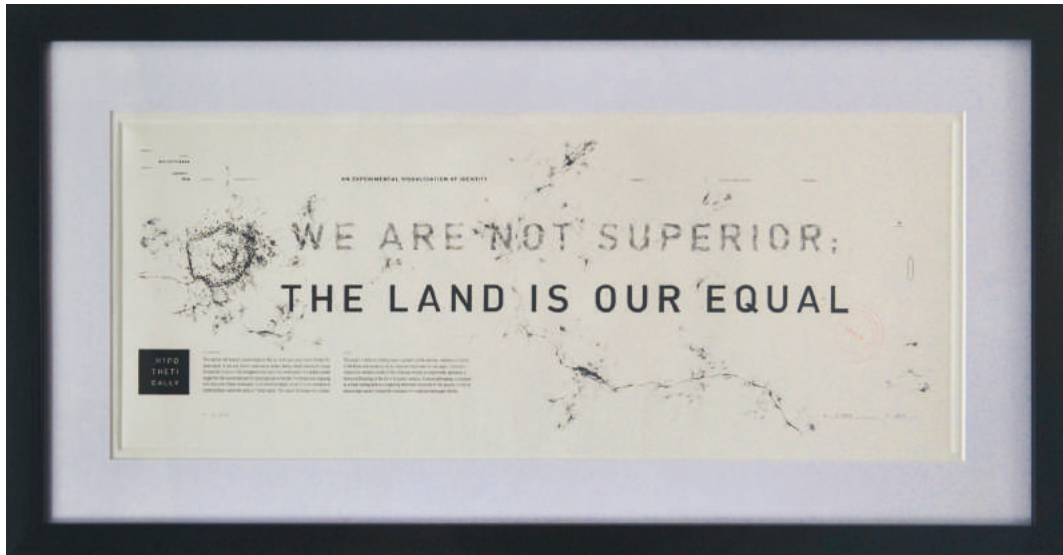


BOOK ONE: AN INTRODUCTION

An artist's book that forms part of the larger set titled "The Voices of Redan"

Plexiglas, etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique object, 2017



A PREMISE

A page from book one

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



MERE ROCKS

A page from book one

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



DECEASED

A page from book one

Giclée and etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017

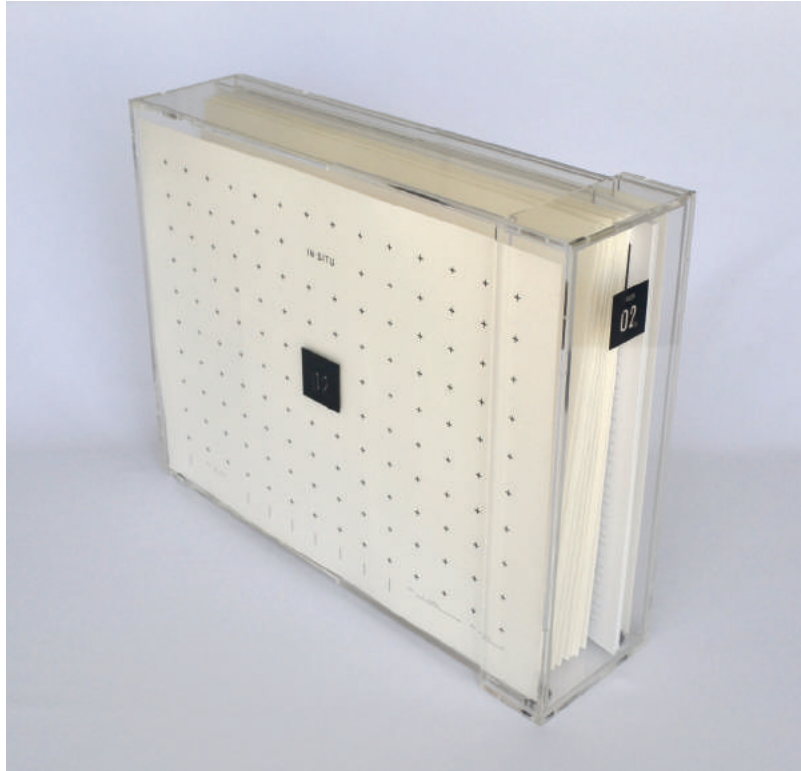


REDAN TRIPTYCH

A page from book two

Giclée and etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



BOOK TWO: IN SITU

An artist's book that forms part of the larger set titled "The Voices of Redan"

Plexiglas, etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique object, 2017



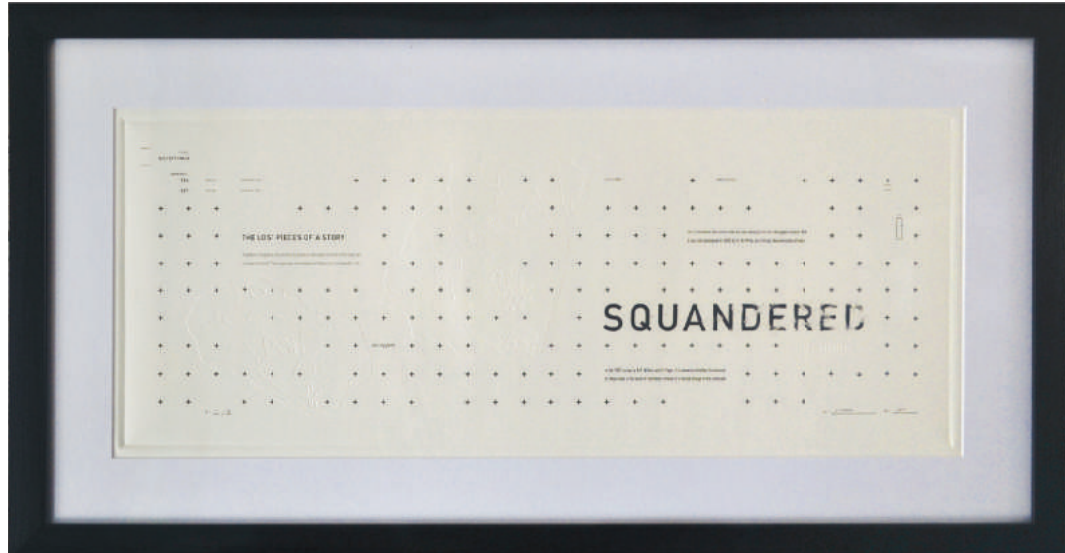


OUT OF PLACE

A page from book two

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



SQUANDERED MEMORIES

A page from book two

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



BOOK THREE: BIOLOGICAL PROFILE

An artist's book that forms part of the larger set titled "The Voices of Redan"

Plexiglas, etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique object, 2017



STATURE

A page from book three

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



AGE

A page from book three

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



A NEW DAWN

Digital photograph

2019



BOOK FOUR: BETWEEN LABEL AND BODY

An artist's book that forms part of the larger set titled "The Voices of Redan"

Plexiglas, etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique object, 2017



ON MAKING

A page from book four

Giclée etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



ENTOPTIC

A page from book four

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



ADOLESCENCE

A page from book four

Giclee and etching print on Fabriano rosapina with blind embossing

Edition 1 of 3, 2017



BOOK FIVE: A PAST AND A PRESENT RECONNECTED

An artist's book that forms part of the larger set titled "The Voices of Redan"

Plexiglas, etching and giclée prints on Fabriano Rosapina

Unique object, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 1

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 2

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 3

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 4

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 5

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

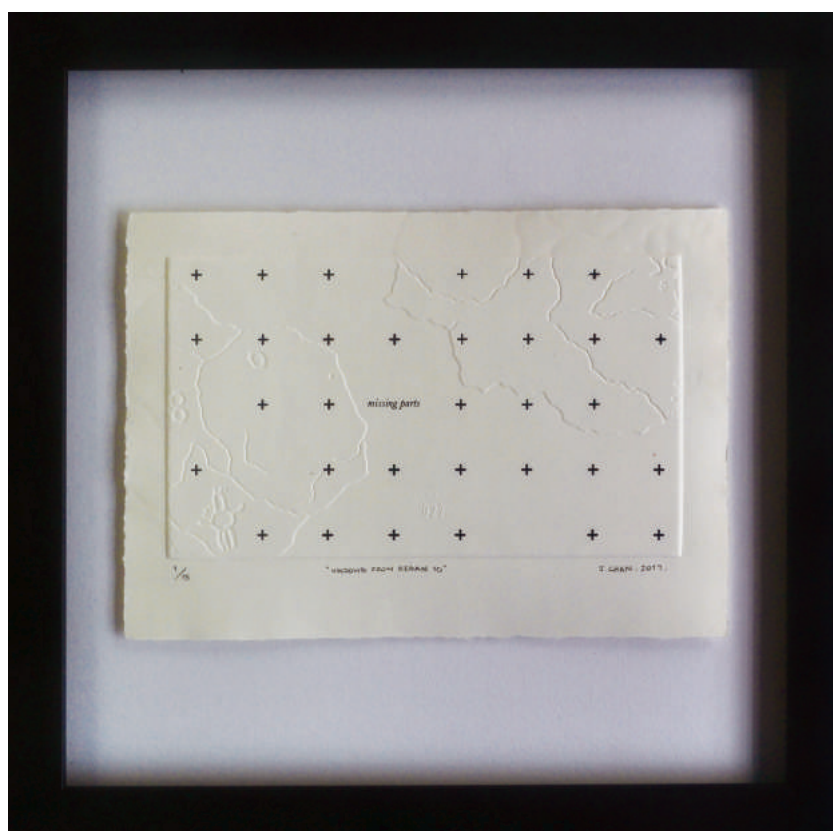
Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 6

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 7

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

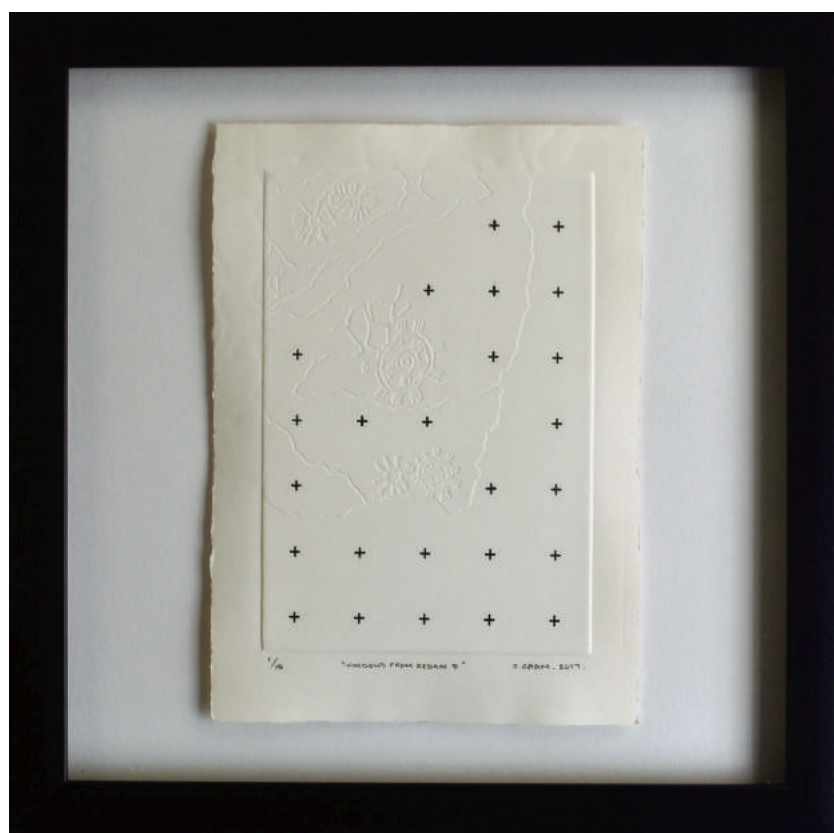
Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 8

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 9

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



WINDOWS FROM REDAN 10

Etching print on Fabriano rosapina

Edition 1 of 15, 2017



RECONSTRUCTION 1

3D reconstruction of engraving K13

Production assisted by Adrian Lamour

Full colour scintered sandstone 3D print

2017



RECONSTRUCTION 2

3D reconstruction of engraving P4

Production assisted by Adrian Lamour

Full-colour scintered sandstone 3D print

2017



RECONSTRUCTION 3

3D reconstruction of rock L

Production assisted by Adrian Lamour

Full colour scintered sandstone 3D print

2017

Rock | C Engraving | 17



EXHIBIT | *01 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: A

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

It is not my intention to present these unique engravings as poorly executed Western glyphs, but rather to visually draw the correlation between the two in function, through visual metaphor.

Rock | C Engraving | 15

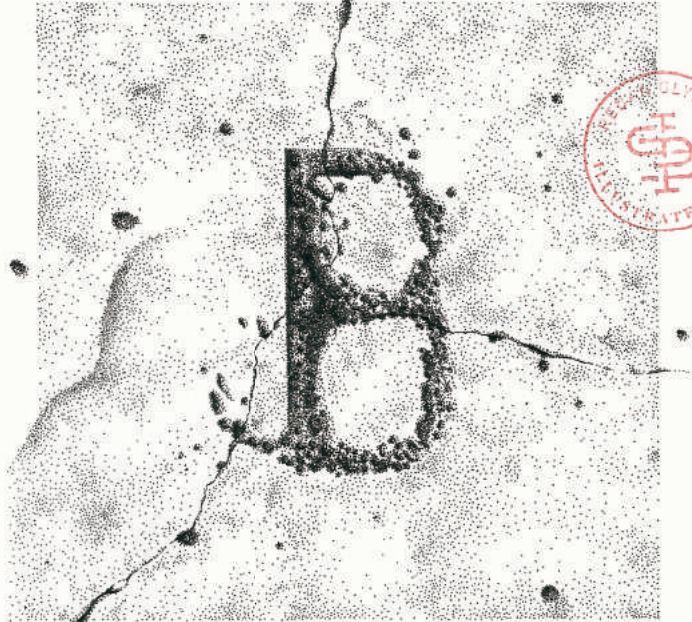


EXHIBIT | *02 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: B

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | M Engraving | 04

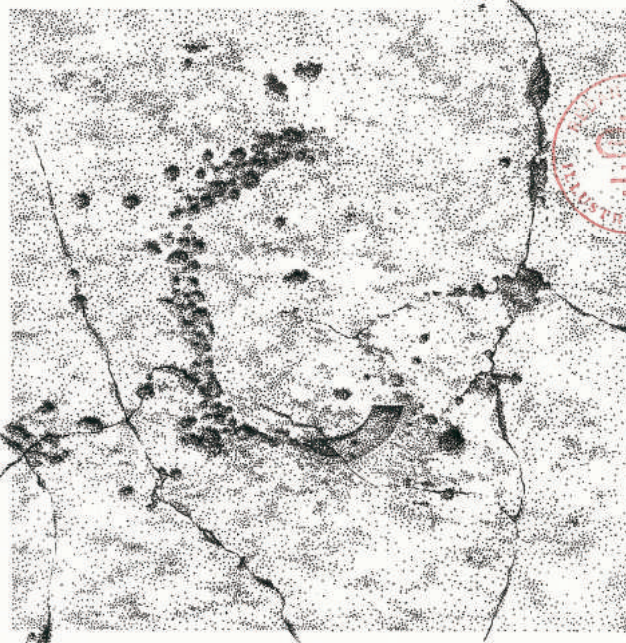


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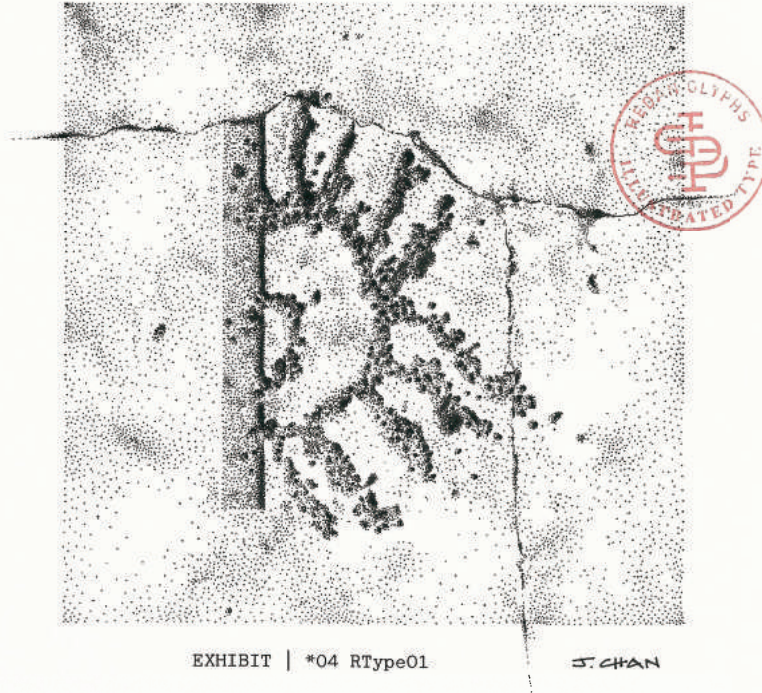
J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: C

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | K Engraving | 50



REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: D

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | D Engraving | 19

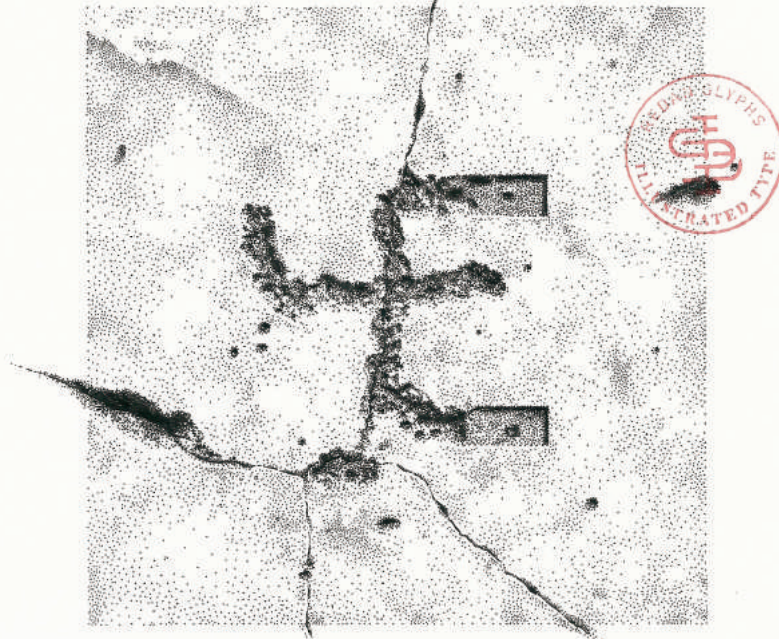


EXHIBIT | *05 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: E

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | X Engraving | 17

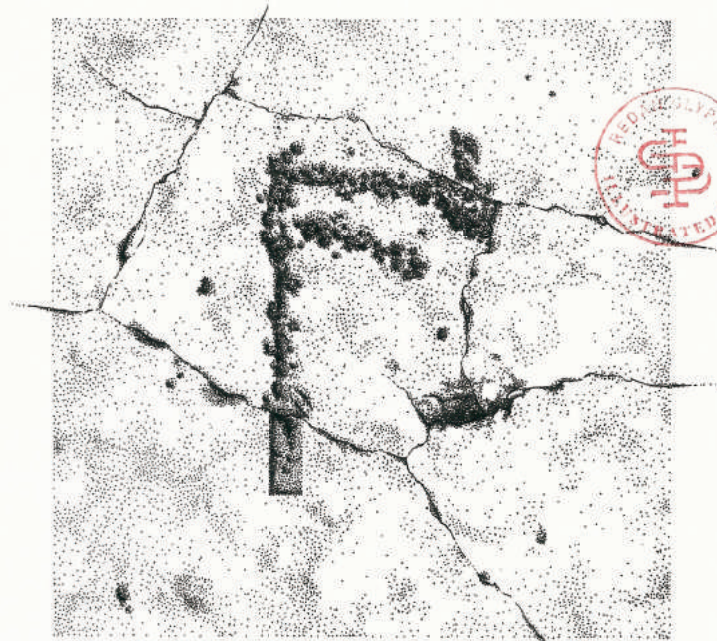


EXHIBIT | *06 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: F

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | C Engraving | 20

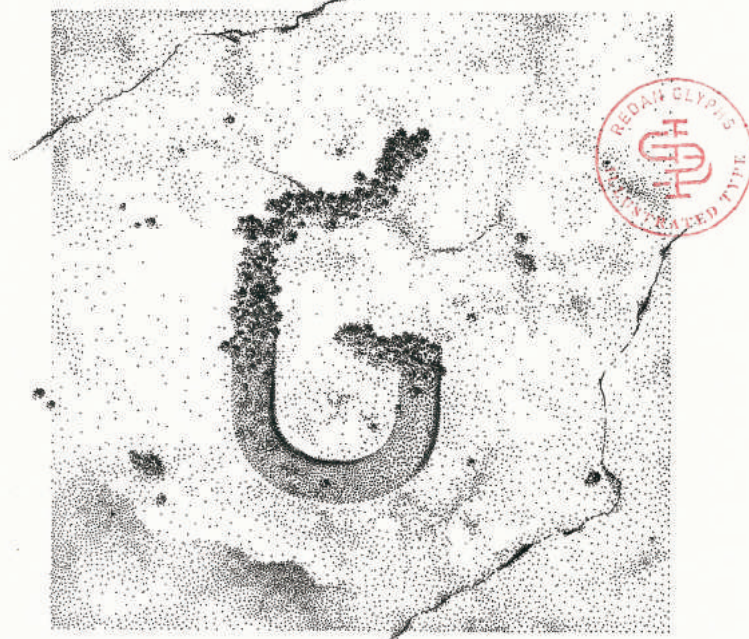


EXHIBIT | *07 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: G

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | F Engraving | 07



EXHIBIT | *08 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: H

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | D Engraving | X08

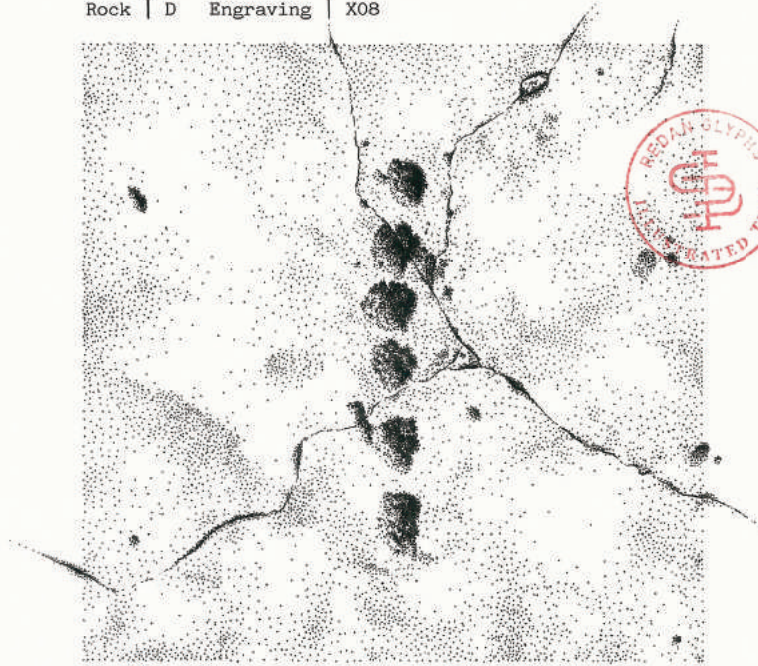


EXHIBIT | *09 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: I

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | K Engraving | 58

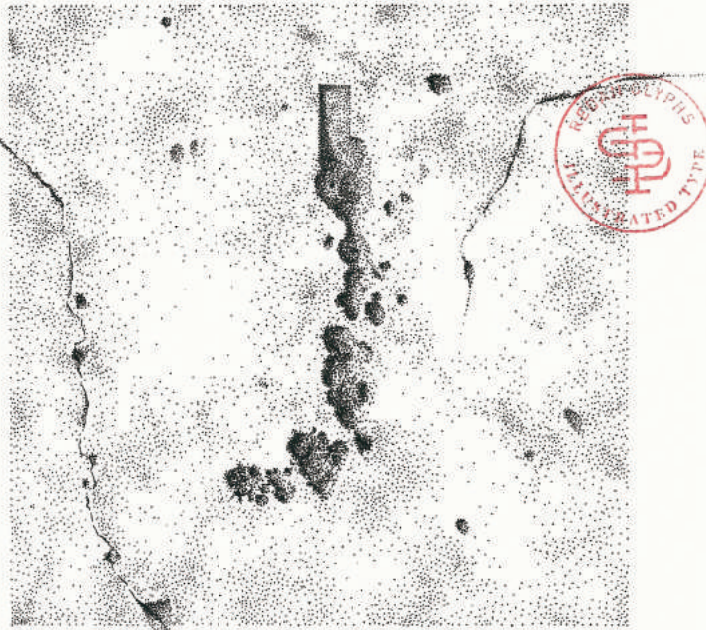


EXHIBIT | *10 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: J

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | C Engraving | 04

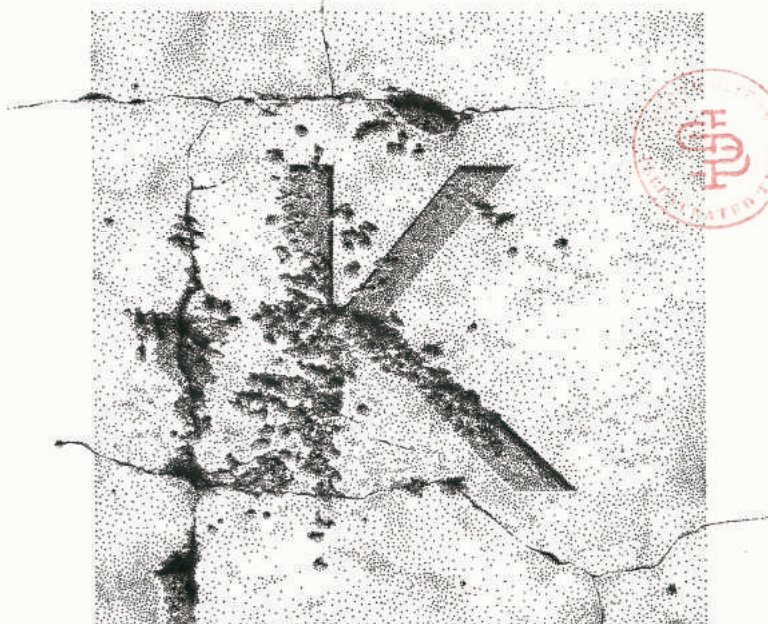


EXHIBIT | *11 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: K

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | L Engraving | 09

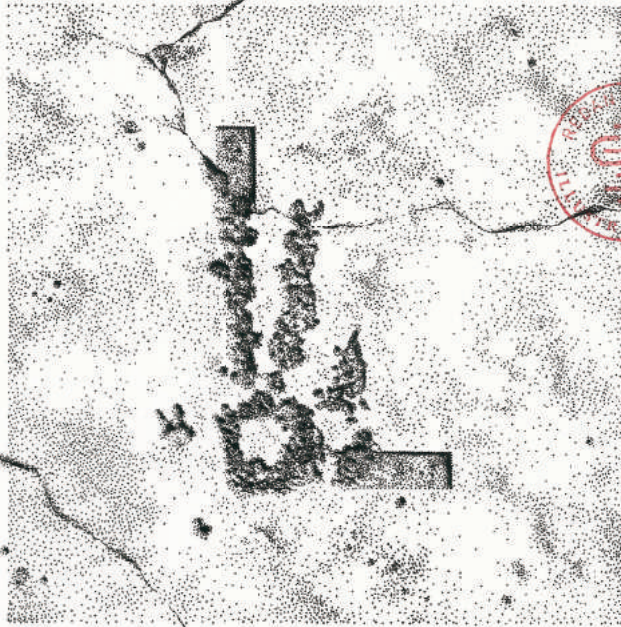


EXHIBIT | *12 RType01

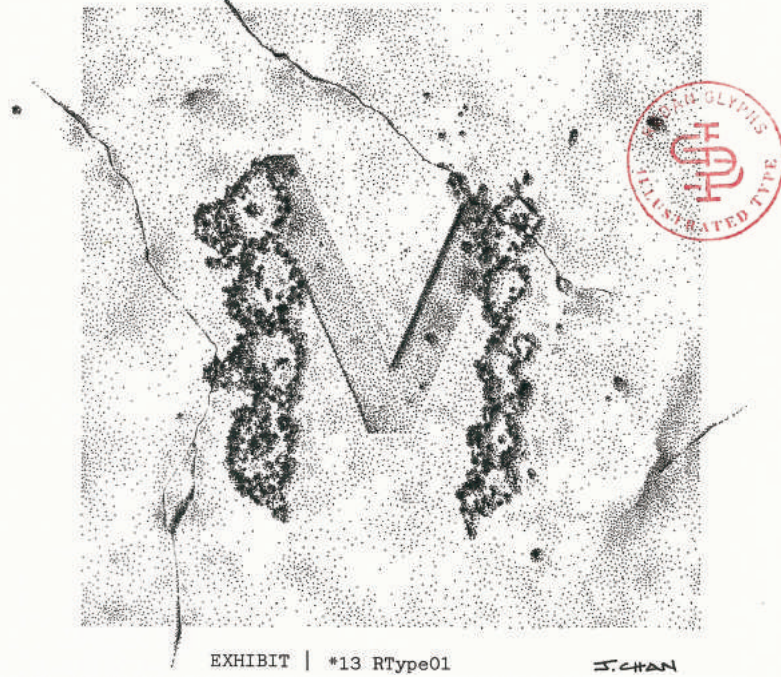
J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: L

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | K Engraving | 48



REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: M

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | M Engraving | 09

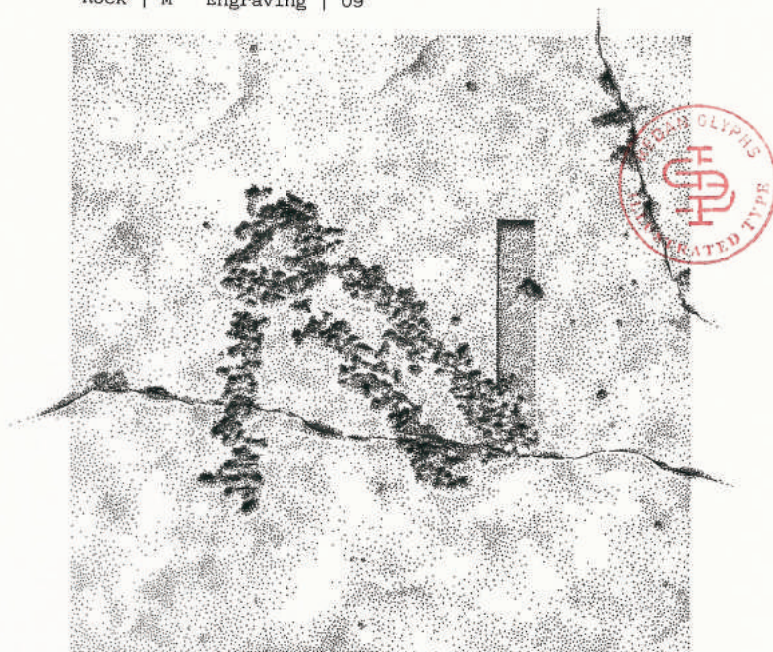


EXHIBIT | *14 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: N

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | M Engraving | 06



EXHIBIT | *15 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: O

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | D Engraving | 18

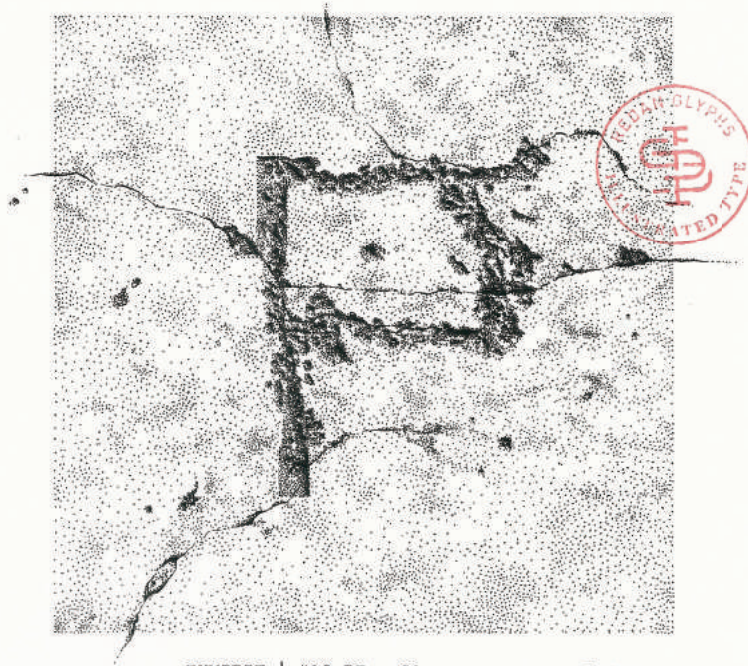


EXHIBIT | *16 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: P

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | J Engraving | 03

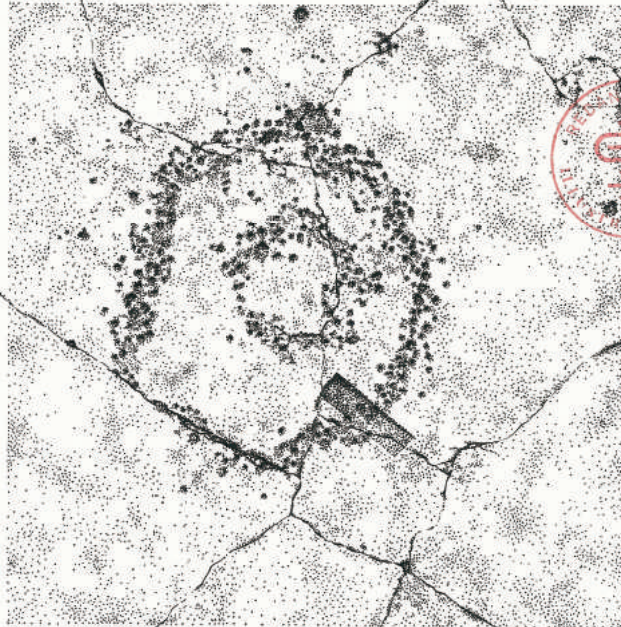


EXHIBIT | *17 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: Q

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | C Engraving | 07

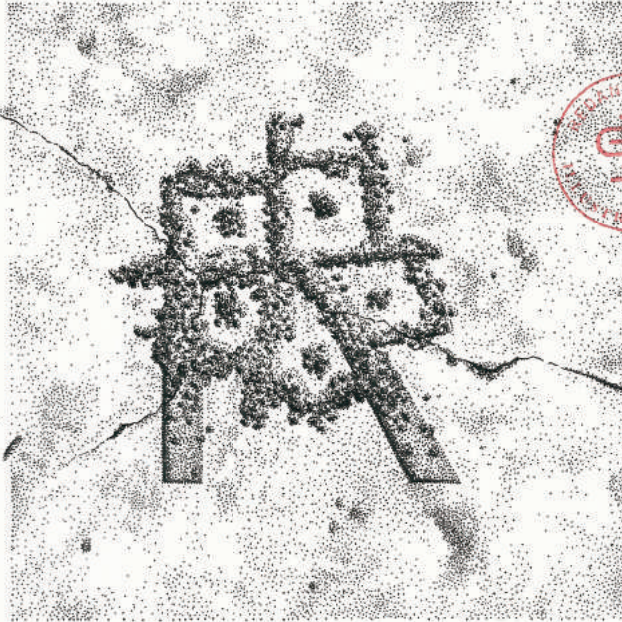


EXHIBIT | *18 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: R

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | M Engraving | 07

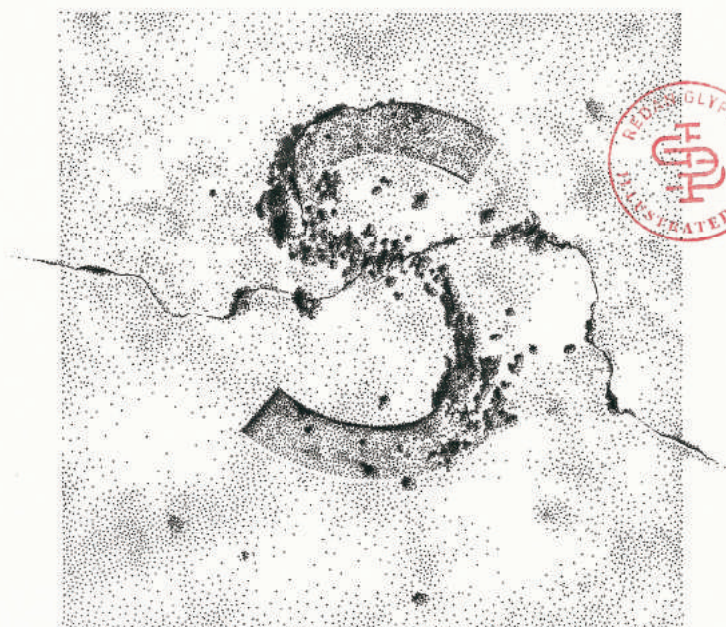


EXHIBIT | *19 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: S

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | M Engraving | 01

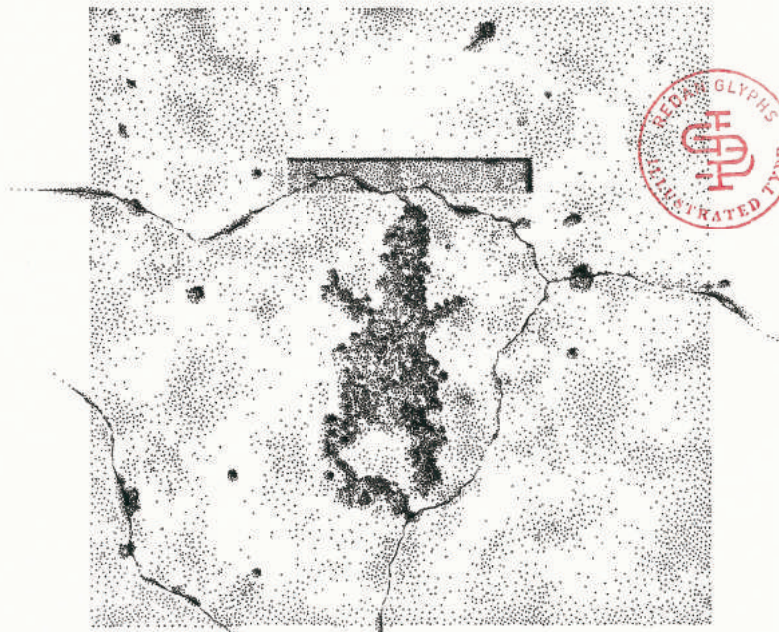


EXHIBIT | *20 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: T

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | F Engraving | 01

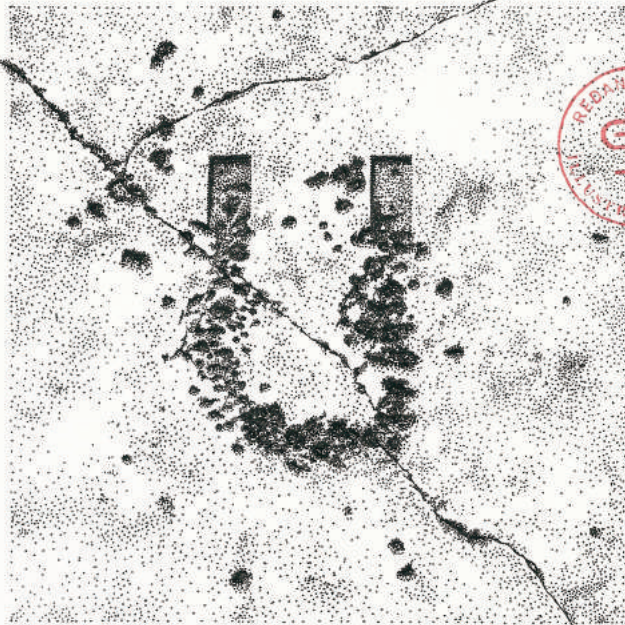


EXHIBIT | *21 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: U

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | G Engraving | 01



EXHIBIT | *22 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: V

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | C Engraving | 09

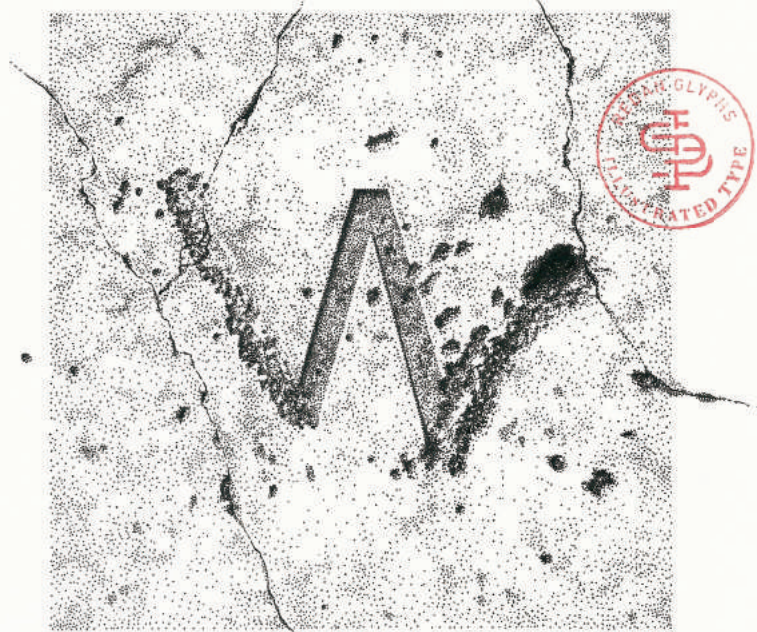


EXHIBIT | *23 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: W

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | F Engraving | 02

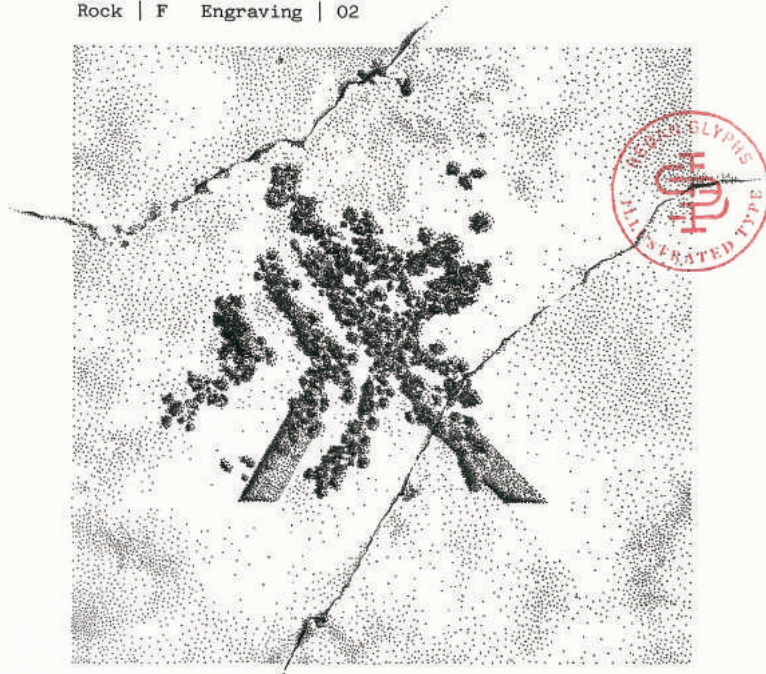


EXHIBIT | *24 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: X

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | R Engraving | 01



REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: Y

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019

Rock | N Engraving | 02

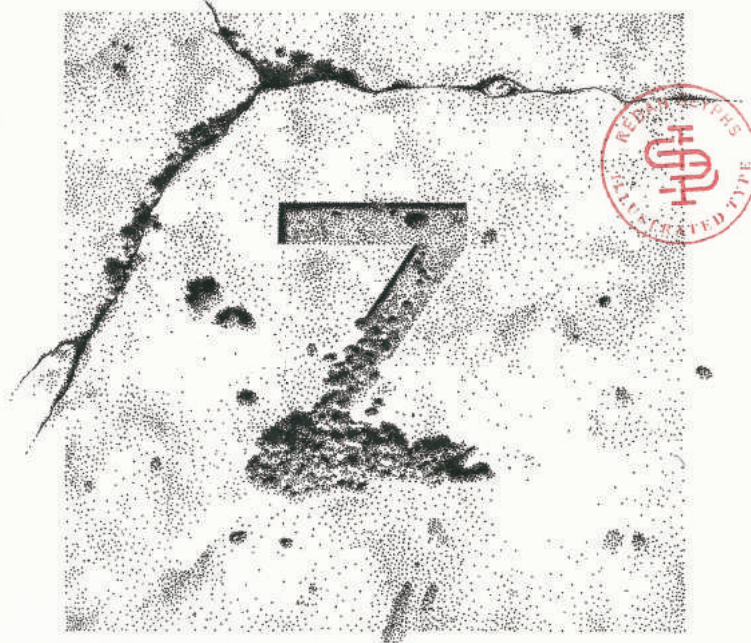


EXHIBIT | *26 RType01

J. CHAN

REDAN ILLUSTRATED TYPE: Z

Fineliner pen, typewriter, stamped pigment ink

2019



THROUGH THE VEIL 1

Digital photograph

2019



THROUGH THE VEIL 2

Digital photograph

2019



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Jo-Ann Chan is an illustration lecturer at the North-West University and a graduate from the same institution. In this capacity she has presented papers on practice-led research, design education and artist's books at both national and international conferences. She functions within the NWU research niche ViNCO (Visual Narratives and Creative Outputs through interdisciplinary and practice-led research) with research interests that include text-image relationships, artist's books and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Trained as a graphic designer, Jo-Ann Chan identifies herself as an illustrator and book artist. Her creative work consistently operates within the collaborative space where fields overlap – the collaboration of the digital with the analogue; of the sciences with the arts; of theory with practice. She has taken part in exhibitions nationally, most recently, **Booknesses: South African Contemporary Artist's Books** (2017) and **Disappearance** (2017). She continues to engage with creative practice through the Johannesburg chapter of the Artist's Book Club, her own authorial practice and freelance work.

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