

WHITNEY MCVEIGH  
NEW INK PAINTINGS

*Exhibition:* 15th October - 20th November, 2015

Flat 3, 61 Cadogan Square  
London SW1X 0HZ

M I C H A E L  
GOEDHUIS



above

INVENTORY: INVISIBLE COMPANION (DETAIL) -  
St Peter's Church, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, 2015

PHOTO: PAUL ALLITT

## FOREWORD

AS AN ART DEALER primarily focused on Asian paintings and works of art, my visit to Whitney McVeigh's studio this July (encouraged by my family who had extolled the beauty of her ink paintings to me over many years) was a matter more of amateur curiosity than professional interest.

Her studio was smaller . . . much smaller . . . than I had expected. Its packed space was astonishing: a blend of a 19th century philosopher's study and a contemporary installation. Texts, old books, manuscripts, frayed ancient documents, newspapers in countless languages, drawers filled with her own drawings and notes and mysterious found objects . . . stones, clocks, letters, suitcases, typewriters, old frames and photographs . . . jostled for space with her own finished paintings and monotypes.

As she laboriously extracted one large painting after another from this literary *wunderkammer*, I was for the first time able to view these subtle pictorial disquisitions on memory, egoism and the passing of time (amongst many other preoccupations). It was a matter of moments for me to suggest working together on an exhibition.

Whitney McVeigh is a painter, filmmaker, poet, installation artist, passionate reader and collector. Born in New York, she grew up in London from the age of seven and still lives and works here, although her travels have taken her to India, Mexico, China, South Africa and Syria, amongst many other places, since she graduated from the Edinburgh College of Art.

Her work runs against much of contemporary cultural orthodoxy in producing for the viewer a visual experience that is unostentatious, poetic, evocative, psychologically probing and unabashedly beautiful.

McVeigh challenges expectations and cultural norms in diverse ways. She is equally comfortable with choreographing an installation of found objects, for example her 2015 exhibition in Kettle's Yard and her participation in the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, as directing film or continuing her long exploration of ink paintings on paper. And she is a gifted poet.

In many ways her paintings evoke visual comparison with the contemporary Chinese ink paintings that we, as art dealers, exhibit and to which she was exposed while she spent time in China in 2007. However,

despite her interest in the Chinese aesthetic, her work differs from the language of Asian ink painting. Nor clearly is she interested in expressing the world of today in a pictorial language that is linked to, but builds on, the aesthetics of ancient China, which is the aspiration of the avant-garde ink artists in China today.

On the other hand, there is in her work a close affinity to the *purpose* of art for the scholar-artist in China. For the Chinese painter or calligrapher, the ultimate aim was, and remains, the cultivation of an inner life that is connected to a moral stature befitting one's status as a scholar. For them, as for Whitney, the ultimate 'beauty' of a work does not depend on its beauty. It is the result of its inner truth and it is this moral concept that exhorts us how to lead our life . . . what Proust called '*la vraie vie*' - the inner life of instinct, intuition and the fugitive ideal which persists underneath the surface of our everyday world.



The association with Proust is relevant. Much of her work is to do with memory, discovery and continuity. Unlike most popular culture today, she aspires to make art that has no political agenda but is a source of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment. Like the Chinese, she is trying to inspire a special form of aesthetic response, and even of moral elevation, by recapturing and collecting moments of the past . . . her past . . . and sealing them off, safe from the fingertips of the future and the depredations of technology.

Her excavations into her own deepest experience, fuelled by her collection of residues from the past and from all over the world, is not so much indulgent

*above*

AMBROTYPE

Found object with hand-painted necklace, 2012

self-examination as an attempt to make connections and to restore continuity through the association of disparate 'items'. It is these intuitive juxtapositions, both in the 'found objects' and in her free-wheeling play with pen and brush on paper, that ignite our . . . the viewer's . . . imagination to reconnect with our own forgotten depths.

Her work for this exhibition is confined to her ink paintings and monotypes, but the themes that are explored in the paintings are precisely complemented by her configurations of found works, installations and painting over old documents (a small sample of which are illustrated in this introduction).

The paintings themselves range from pure gestural abstraction, as seen in *Infinite Space*, to eloquent forms that await interpretation and where the 'subject' is just discernible, as well as technical innovations in the richly textured monotypes, such as *Integrated Body*. Common to all is a persistent and relevant dialogue between abstraction and oblique references to the tangible world.

While, as we have seen, there is a pictorial sympathy between Asian brush painting and her ink works, McVeigh's cultural roots are embedded in western art history. She has absorbed a rich mixture of influences, from the *Prodigal Son* drawings of Daumier through to André Breton's 1920's experiments in automatic writing, the haunting intimacies of Joseph Cornell's boxes and the weighty abstractions (and writings) of Robert Motherwell. More explicit links are evident in her interest in the work of Louise Bourgeois, Emil Nolde and Yves Klein. Her work also is marked by a sophisticated literary quality shaped by immersion in the work of artists' texts, world literature and particularly the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud, Jorge Luis Borges and Walt Whitman, all of which have gradually permeated her aesthetic personality.

Despite an ambiguity in many of the paintings (and even more in her treatment of the found works and fragments) she has not been drawn into the teasing intellectual parlour games espoused by some of her fashionable contemporaries, nor is she interested in peddling the latest post-modernist polemic or political agenda. In other words, she is not so much concerned with what's 'new' as with what's true. And it was this sense of utter commitment to a moral and aesthetic seriousness that I experienced whilst looking at her paintings in her extraordinary studio that has led to this wonderful exhibition.

Michael Goedhuis



**THEOLOGIAN, 2011**  
Ink on paper, 38 × 28 cm (15 × 11 in)



**MAP OF MEMORY, 2015**  
Ink on paper, 38 × 28 cm (15 × 11 in)



**INTEGRATED BODY, 2014**  
Acrylic on paper, 101 × 56 cm (39¾ × 22 in)



**NOTES ON LAND, 2011**  
Acrylic on paper, 101 × 66 cm (39¾ × 26 in)



LAST OF THE WIND  
SHIPS, 2012  
Ink on paper,  
102 × 153 cm (40 × 60¼ in)



**INFINITE SPACE, 2014**  
Ink on paper, 76 × 56 cm (30 × 22 in)



**ECHOES OF HISTORY, 2014**  
Acrylic on paper, 105 × 75 cm (41½ × 29½ in)





HERZOGIN CECELIE (LAST OF  
THE WIND SHIPS I), 2012  
Ink on paper, 102 × 153 cm  
(40 × 60¼ in)



NOTES ON LANGUAGE, 2014  
Ink on paper, 153 × 102 cm (60¼ × 40 in)



PRIMITIVE BOTANY  
(AFTER BORGES), 2012  
Ink on paper, 59.4 × 42 cm (23½ × 16½ in)



*Previous spread, left*

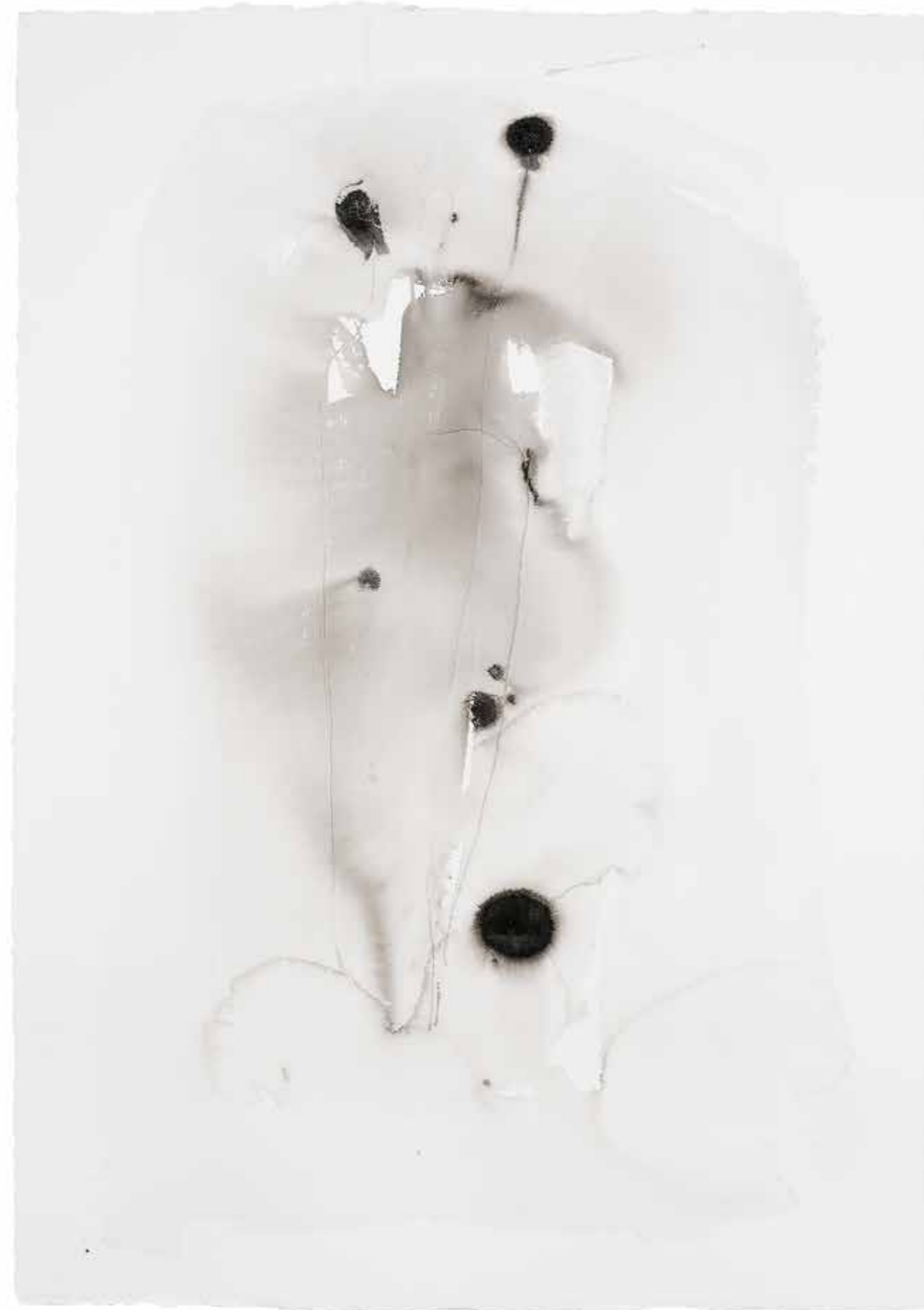
**STUDY (AFTER FIVE STUDIES FOR THE PRODIGAL SON), 2012**

Ink on paper, 59.4 × 42 cm (23½ × 16½ in)

*Previous spread, right*

**PRODIGAL SON (AFTER DAUMIER), 2012**

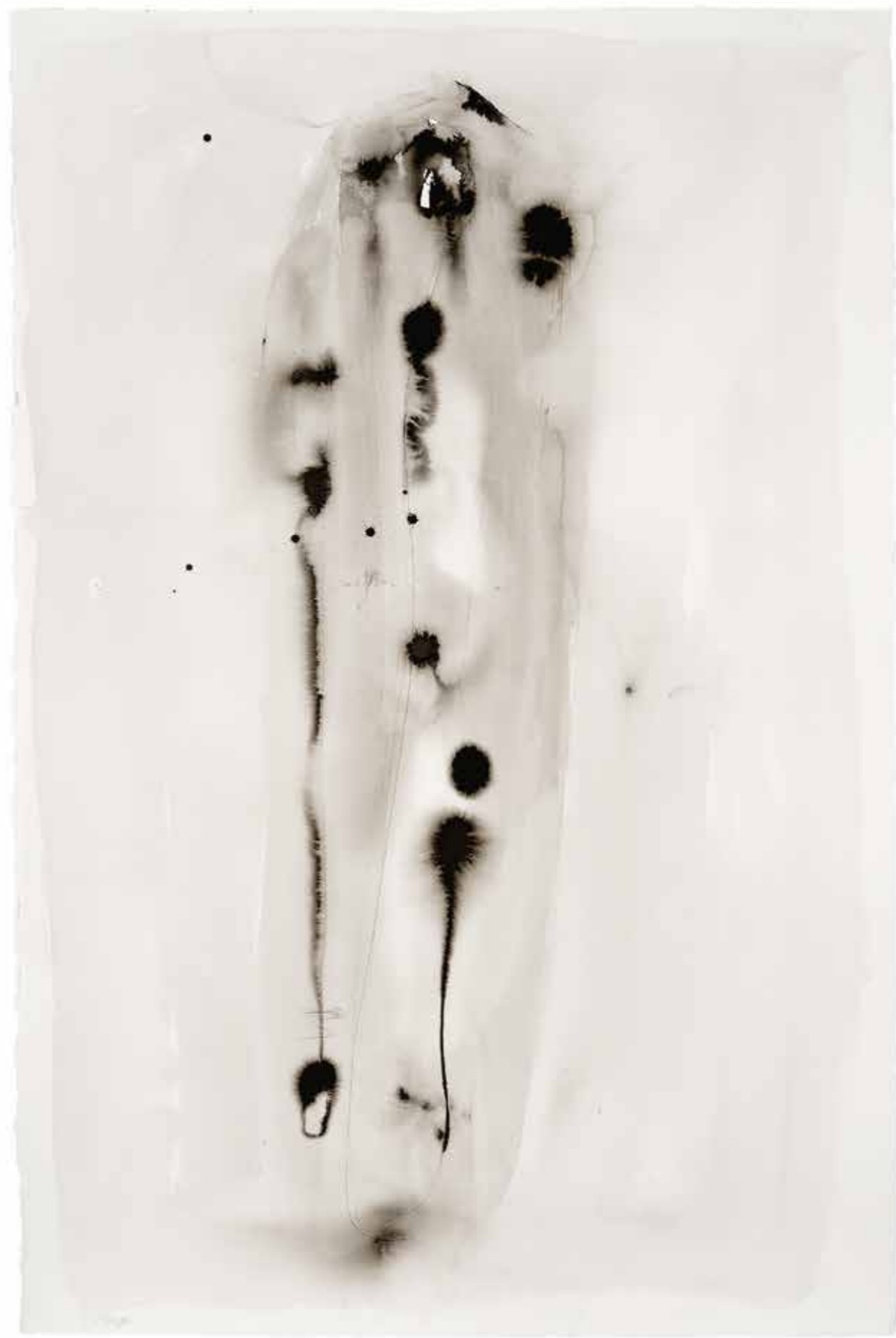
Ink on paper, 59.4 × 42 cm (23½ × 16½ in)



**PLACES OF MEMORY, 2014**  
Ink on paper, 105 × 75 cm (41½ × 29½ in)



THE VISITATION, 2012  
Ink on paper, 75 × 105 cm (29½ × 41½ in)



*Previous page, left*  
**UNTITLED, 2006**  
Ink on paper, 105 × 75 cm (41½ × 29½ in)

*Previous page, right*  
**HIS MEMORY, 2014**  
Ink on paper, 153 × 102 cm (60¼ × 40 in)



**THE KISS, 2007**  
Ink on paper, 105 × 75 cm (41½ × 29½ in)



## WHITNEY MCVEIGH

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### EDUCATION

- 1993 - 1996 BA Honours degree in Painting,  
Edinburgh College of Art
- 1988 Certificate in Sotheby's Education

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Inventory: Invisible Companion*, St Peter's Church,  
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge
- 'Birth': Origins at the end of life*, Kurashiki University  
of Science and the Arts, Okayama, Japan
- Rocking History* (performance), University of Science  
and the Arts, Kurashiki, Japan
- 2013 *Hunting Song*, Gervasuti Foundation, 55th  
Venice Biennale 2013
- Into the Void*, House of St Barnabas, London
- I'll walk beside you*, Metropole Hotel, Venice
- 2011 *Dialogue*, David Krut Projects, New York
- Archaeology of Memory*, Nirox Projects, Johannesburg
- Archaeology of Memory*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town
- 2009 *New Work*, A Foundation, London
- 2006 *New Work*, Charing X Gallery, London
- 2001 *Beyond the Self*, Sable Gallery, Edinburgh

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *Drawing Biennale*, Drawing Room, London
- 2014 *Light Switch*, Extinction Marathon online,  
Serpentine Gallery
- Unlocking the Diary, Archiving of Nameless Memories*,  
Folkestone Fringe for Folkestone Triennial
- Publish /Curate*, T J Boulting, London
- 2013 *Articulate*, Victoria Miro Gallery, London
- Glass Stress, White Light /White Heat*, 55th  
Venice Biennale
- Flesh Reality*, Point Zero Project Space, London
- Icastica*, Glocal Women, Arezzo Biennale, Italy
- 2012 *Metamorphosis: The Transformation of Being*, All Visual  
Arts, London
- 100 Curators, 100 Days*, Saatchi Art Online, London
- Now & Future Japan*, Gazelli Art House, London
- Kaliphilia*, Vegas Gallery, London
- Collection 16*, Smac Gallery, South Africa
- Imprint*, David Krut Projects, Johannesburg
- 2011 *The Return*, House of the Nobleman, London
- Fugitive Vision*, David Krut, New York
- 2010 *Identity Theft*, Mimmo Scognamiglio Gallery, Milan
- Collective Noun*, Trolley Gallery, Faggionato Fine Art,  
London
- Collection of Peter Nobel*, Museum of Modern Art,  
Salzburg

- 2009 *CIGE Art Fair*, Arcaute Contemporáneo, Monterrey,  
Mexico
- Drawing Room Biennale*, Drawing Room, London
- London Original Print Fair*, Royal Academy of Arts,  
*Vision 21*, Bonhams, London

### RESIDENCIES & FELLOWSHIPS

- 2015 Fellow in Creative Practice, London College of  
Fashion, University of the Arts, London
- 2012 All Visual Arts, London
- BBC Correspondent for Central Asia Arts Program,  
Kyrgyzstan
- 2011 David Krut Projects, Johannesburg
- Nirox Projects, Arts on Main, Johannesburg
- 2010 Nirox Foundation, Cradle of Humankind, Gauteng,  
South Africa
- 2008 Centro de Las Artes, San Agustin, Mexico Fernando  
Sandoval print studio, Oaxaca, Mexico
- 2007 NY Arts Beijing, China

### LECTURES/DISCUSSIONS

- 2015 'Birth': Origins at the end of life - In conversation  
with Amy Bluett, Royal Academy of Arts, London
- Transformative Storytelling and the Art of Human  
Memory with Professor Ayami Nakatani, University  
of Science and the Arts, Kurashiki, Japan
- Art as Archive, Archive as Art, London College of  
Fashion, University of the Arts, London
- Cultures of Resilience, Centre for Sustainable  
Fashion, London College of Fashion, University of  
the Arts, London
- 2014 In conversation with James Putnam, House of St.  
Barnabas, London
- 2013 In conversation with Charlie Hall, Shoreditch  
House, London
- 2012 In conversation with Astrid Schmetterling and  
Frances Williams, Now & Future Japan, Gazelli Art  
House, London
- 2010 Wits University, DIVA, Johannesburg
- Artists Proof Studio, Johannesburg
- 2009 Victoria de Menil Salon with Zara Hayes, London
- 2008 Pecha Kucha, Lecture Mufi Museum, Oaxaca,  
Mexico
- 2007 Louise Bourgeois Salon, New York

### TELEVISION

- 2012 *Art in Kyrgyzstan*, BBC Kyrgyz Television
- 2009 *BBC Where is Modern Art Now*, presented by Gus  
Casely-Hayford
- 2009 *'Free the Artists'*, Saatchi Art Online, CNN News