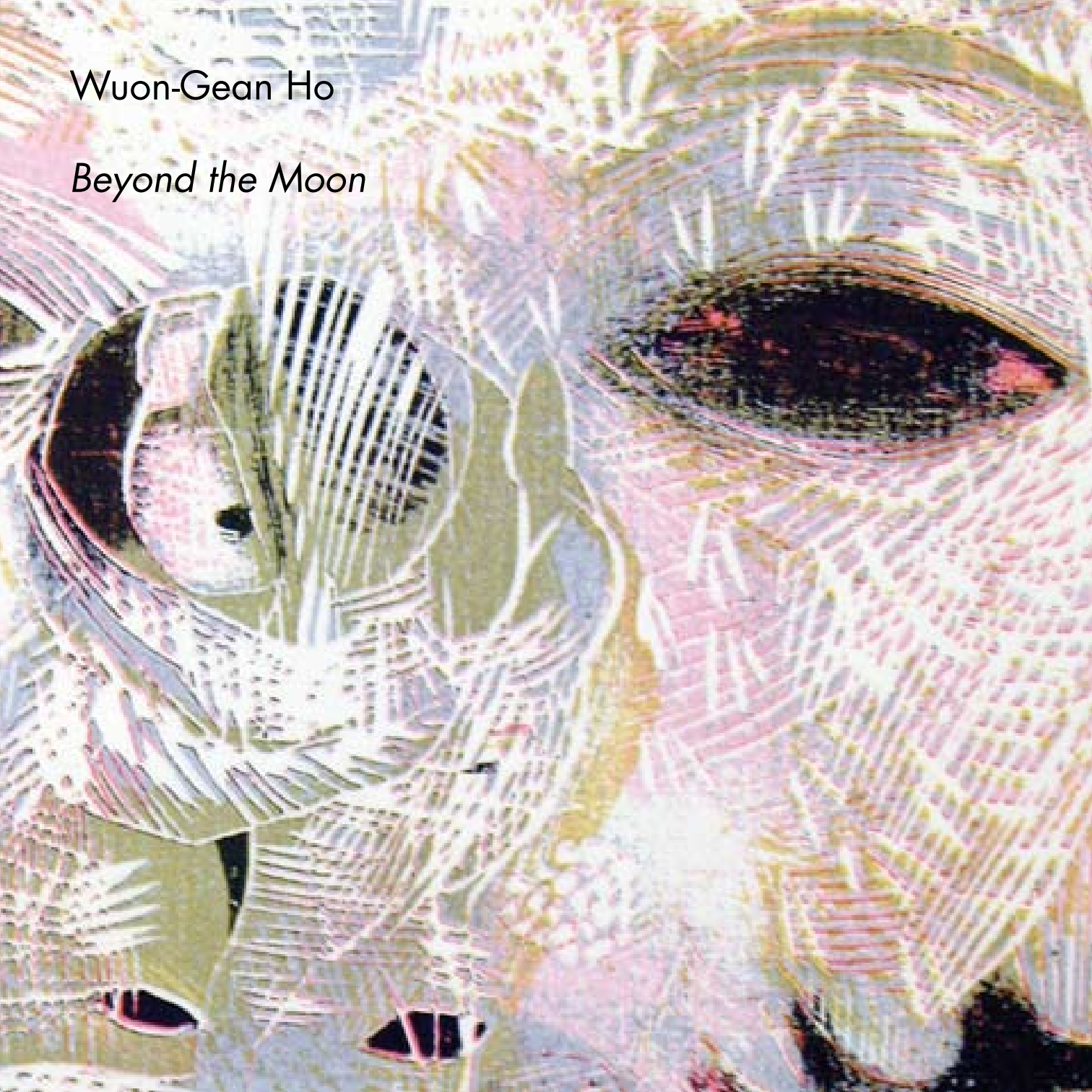


Wuon-Gean Ho

Beyond the Moon





Wuon-Gean Ho – Representation of the Body

There is a well-documented relationship between an artist and the representation of their own body. The Renaissance writer and architect Vasari, in *The Lives*, points out how painters tend to depict themselves in every piece. It is most obvious when looking at the shape of the hands and feet in their paintings: these hands and feet are often the hands and feet of the artists themselves. The fact that Vasari enjoyed playing this game of analysing body parts is of little importance, as art historians since then have built on his ideas for their own hypotheses. Vasari simply observes that artists do this, while suggesting ironically that the process is an unconscious one.

Wuon-Gean Ho has taken the (un)conscious representation of her own body as a starting point for her recent work. Wuon-Gean is an internationally renowned printmaker who originally trained in Japanese woodblock printmaking. This required discipline in studying the technique and craftsmanship, and persistence in discovering its expressive potential. Entering the printmaking world through the rigor of Japanese woodcut has meant that she has approached printmaking in one of the most complicated and profound ways. She subsequently developed her own artistic language from this foundation.

The concept of the multiple, which is one of the fundamentals of printmaking, is also the precursor to the concept of the multiple in sequence. From making multiples, to making sequential multiples, Wuon-Gean has also recently begun to explore performance art. Her practice stems from a deep and spiritual love for the representation of the body. Her refusal to see her own body as simply an “animate object”, and her love for dance or for movement and flight have become the focus of exploration and discovery.

When bored, she takes out from her bag one of a dozen flip-books she has made and invites us to play with it; straight after viewing these, something deep clicks inside, something close to respect. These books are perfect tiny objects, that often use photographic sequences made with a stop-motion technique, created using herself as subject, object and protagonist. These mesmerising objects and brief films show the artist’s body levitating, spinning or suspended in everyday spaces that have been transformed into unreal cinematographic sets. This is most evident in her short stop-motion film, *Costanza*, made during a residency in the Castle of Montefiore Conca, Italy, in 2011.

With the same mental freedom and playful approach, Wuon-Gean made the sequence of 29 prints that make up the *Lucid Mask* series (2010), in which she immersed herself in a dreamy imaginary world that goes far beyond the ploy of the animation. These

prints tell of visions and different worlds, each one becoming a place of narration. This was a huge project, meticulously planned, where an internal universe made of stories unfolds.

A different approach was used for the sequence of 40 images in the *Dancing Dress* series (2011-12), which originated from photographic studies of flight. In every photograph, Wuon-Gean emptied the dress of the body it contained, which was her own, and by carving it as a linocut print transformed the remaining dress into an icon. This sequence of prints was animated as *Shift* (2012) and leaves us stunned with its dynamic force, as it takes us to another dimension, where the movement of each frame naturally slots into the animated whole.

The exhibition is complemented with a sequence of carvings that neither represent the body nor explicitly explore animated movement. These prints tell of the silence of a forest made only with tree trunks, branches and light. It is a sort of suspended moment that invites you to gather your thoughts in silence, to think of the beauty of a body in motion, and of the magic of its interpretation.

Umberto Giovannini

Cocoon

Sleeping, I watch you
Draw your body in,
Slowly retracing
Some familiar blueprint.

You knot your limbs
Rooting yourself,
Fortress body,
Spine arcing,
Buttocks defiant.

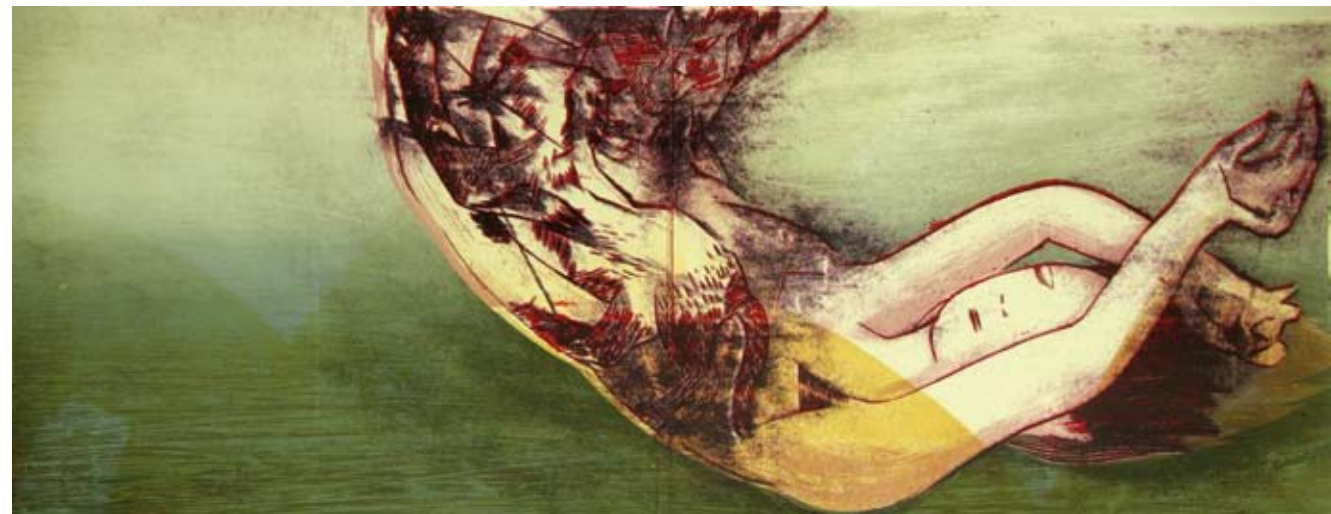
The soles of your feet
Are like parchments,
Naming your Gods
In a lost language

Your half open eye
Tremors like a moth's wing
Unseeing,
Its vigilance turned inward,

Guardian of the vast spaces
Within which you run.

Steve Edwards





Clockwise from top left, *Sleeper Peony*, *Sleeper Snake*, *Long Sleep*, *Sleeper Dog*
Silkscreen, 2009

Lucid Mask

This series of prints explores the hidden stories and experiences behind one's past, under one's skin. These thoughts have been projected and magnified on the surface of the face, inspired by memory, identity, events and place. The masks reveal individual and specific truths, initiating and celebrating transformation.

The concept behind the series *Lucid Mask* is in part inspired by the idea of lucid dreams. In lucid dreams the dreamer feels like they have woken within the dream itself and take control of the dream flow. Symbolic and strange things still occur, but they have a heightened sense of reality. The dreamer feels like their eyes are open and they can blink. The dreams are taken from the internal bank of memories that we process during sleep. These memories become stronger the more they are recalled and pondered upon.

The animation *Lucid Mask* can be viewed on youtube:

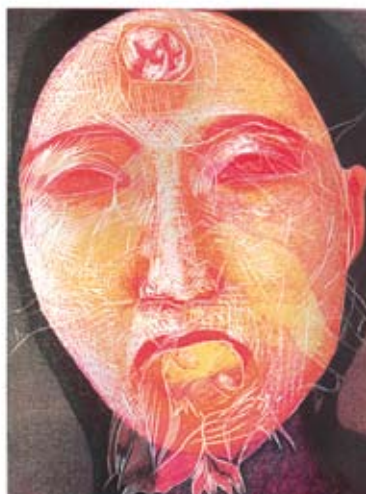
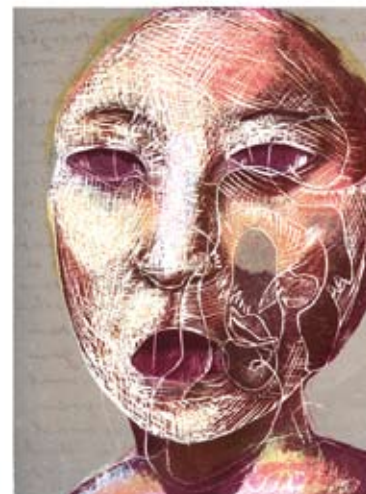
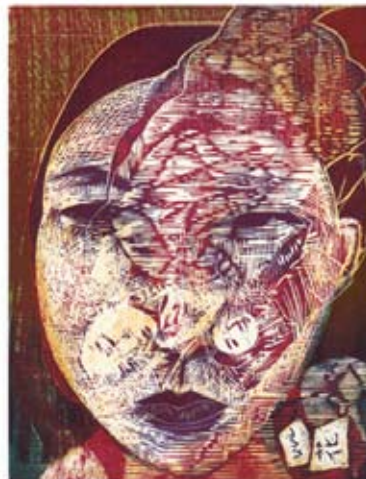
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_fq15nMcrnM



Masks Unmasked

The silkscreen prints that make up the Mask Series explore the notion that we have more history and emotion in the make up of our true personality than can be conveyed by viewing the surface and texture of the face alone.

The masks combine imagery from myth, concrete interactions, savage emotions and strong aspirations. They blur the boundaries of traditional portraiture and symbolic depiction. Some of the small histories are described on the surface of the face, and others are hidden in shadows or ambiguous tattoo-like lines.



From top left: *Mask Ka*, *Mask Bite*, *Mask Beast*, *Mask Lovers*, *Mask Forest*
Second row: *Mask Hook*, *Mask Bun*, *Mask Knot*, *Mask Crane*, *Mask Fire*
Silkscreen, 2008

Swallow Span

This is a long narrative book made of 10 linocut monoprints that form a continuous story eight metres long. The pages are arranged as a concertina, within a book cover that measures 180 cm when fully open. To turn the pages, the viewer has to use the full sweep of their arm span, echoing the title of the book. The story is about a girl's dream. From her sleeping figure spills a strange night time sequence, where birds inhabit indoor spaces, and shadowy figures float and meet each other in a dark garden. The perspective lurches and tilts matching a bird's swooping gaze. Towards the end, the imagery and storyline in the book becomes folded into pages, and we realise that it is a book within a book, with the creative process including carving tools, cups of tea, notes and sketches depicted at the end.



Swallow Span, Linocut monoprint, 2012

Shadow Dance

These prints were inspired by photos from the Crow's Shadow Institute of Arts archives, in Oregon, USA, that depict members of the confederated tribes of the Umatilla from the past hundred years. The series explores the way clothes are like a sort of skin or mask to the body, concealing as well as revealing identity and aspirations. The empty clothing itself is a hybrid of colonial and native dress, poignant artefacts of a culture under change.



Top image:
Shadow Dance Apart

Second row:
Shadow Dance 01,
06, 03, 08, 07;
Shadow Dance
House, Twins, Suit

Dancing Dress Animation

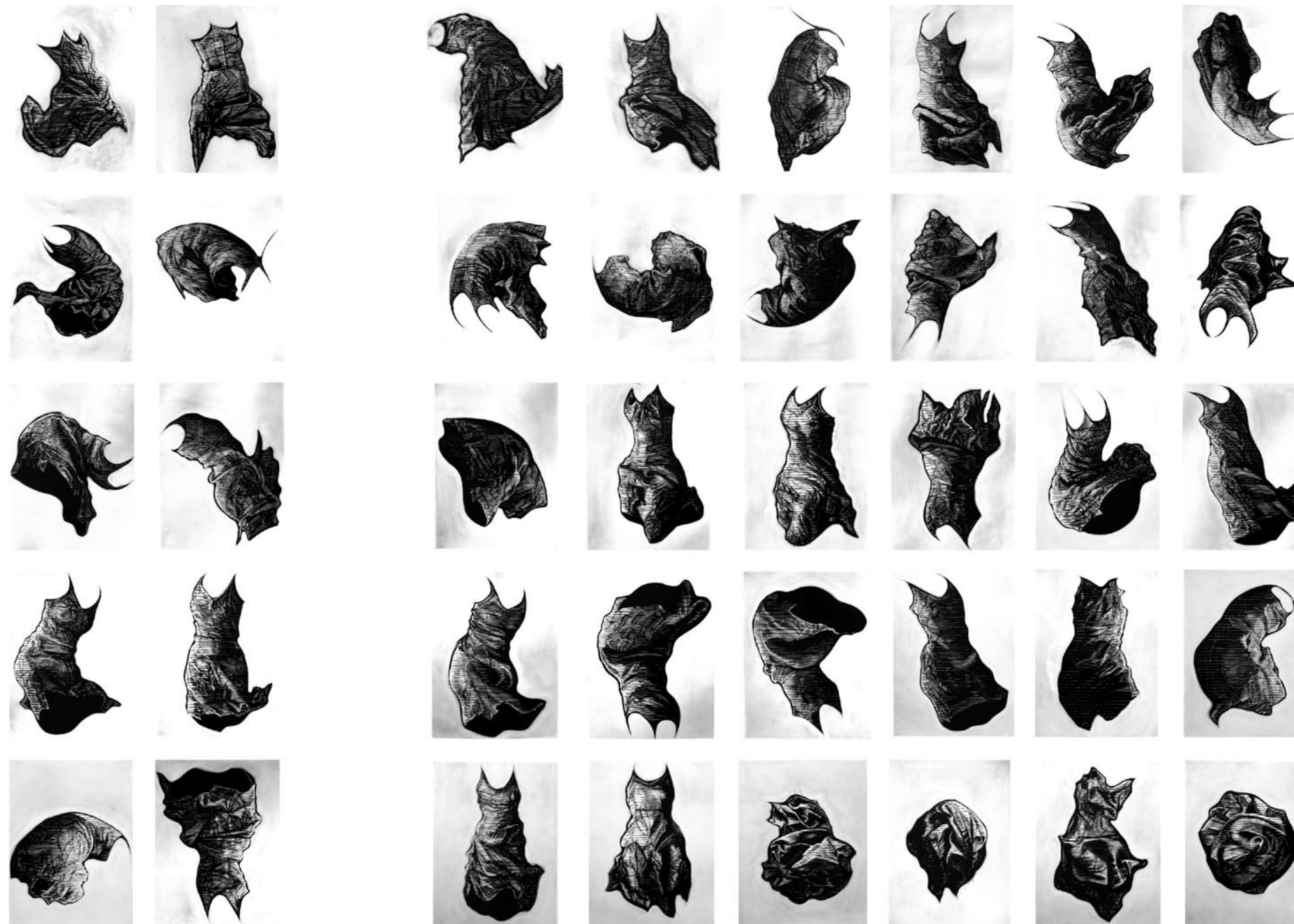
Shift is an animation that lasts 3 minutes 5 seconds. It is composed of around 800 frames which have been made from blended hybrids of 40 different prints of a dancing dress.

The prints were made as linocuts and printed before scanning into the computer and using photoshop to create the in-between poses.

The dress starts out as a piece of crumpled cloth but quickly unfolds and starts to dance.in the wind.

The animation can be viewed on youtube
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTyCksf-cCo>

40 dancing dresses,
numbered 1-40 from top left,
linocut, 2012



Costanza

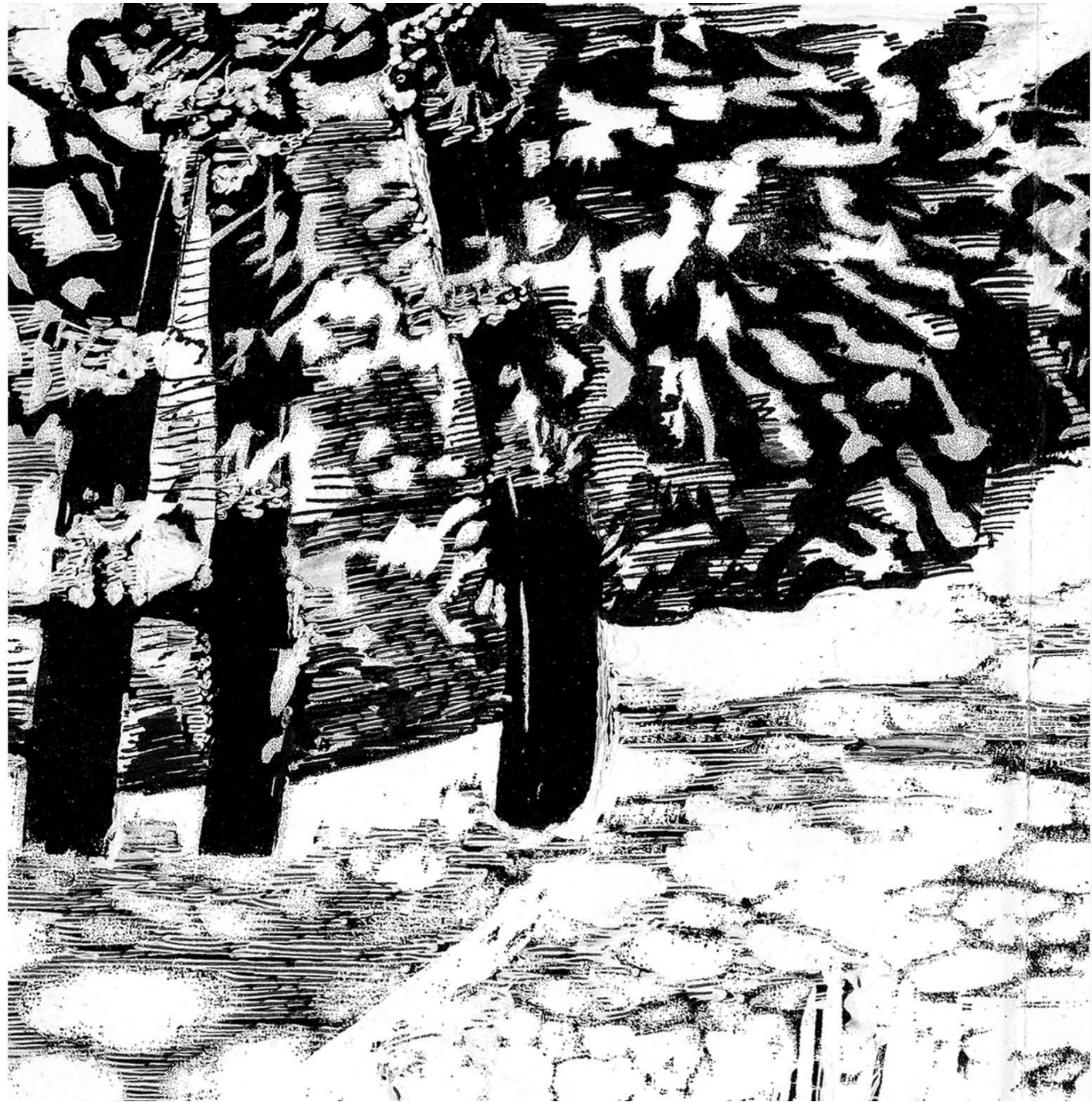
The ancient fortress of the Malatesta family in Montefiore in Italy is more than 600 years old and set up high in the hills with a panoramic view of the sea. It is where Costanza, a well-educated heiress from the 15C used to spend her summers. Having married at 14 and been widowed by 19 she then took a string of lovers, one of whom happened to be an influential German naval officer with substantial military power. The couple were deemed a threat to the empire, and assassinated on the command of Costanza's very own uncle. The room in the castle, which was supposed to be her room, has a high vaulted ceiling, and in the mornings a spot of sunlight tracks across the floor for an hour or so.

The short film *Costanza* imagines her ghostly feet leaping and playing in the sunlight, looking like inverted flames that lick and lap the floor. Their movement is much like that of a moth which is irresistibly drawn to the light, the source of its eventual demise.

The animation can be viewed on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTA0AofQrwg>



Still from *Costanza*, 179 still photos animated as a stop frame animation, 2011



Codex to the forest

Do you think flying close to water
is like running by a wall?

She couldn't quite recall the last
time she'd had to amuse and defend
herself alone.

Powder snow gusted and flopped off
the treetops, charting the outline
of the laden branches briefly in
the air.

The sun scent sparkled in her
forehead and on the skin above her
eyelashes. She blinked.

She made short hops in the snow,
which swallowed her foot to shin
quite clearly; then, encouraged by
the path, started uphill.

The chapel of branches above her
sieved sunlight like a loose net.
Intrigued, she bounced the branches
of the twiny ponderosa, shaking
snow free from the starburst twigs,
then pulled sheets of dry bark from
the trunks like multiple scabs.

She stamped and skidded on sheet ice
puddles to make them squeak and
crack.

Innocently white blankets and
mounds of snow beckoned her to be
stirred up and danced on. So she did,
cautiously, alone.

Warped stumps, blackened pits and
charcoaled branches stood leanly,
almost vainly, at the hilltop,
slenderised and purified by fire.
Here the shadows were blue and her
steps broke lurching patterns
through the fragile crust.

The breath in her nose crackled
and condensed, pulling on the hairs
with a sharp pain. Below she could
see slurry shell covered slopes, a
smallish brook gushing with the melt,
and roots tugged and whipped by water.

Above the majestic caldera curved
beyond her field of vision.

The trapped sky seemed to vibrate
to the echo of her pulse.

She stepped sideways off a branch,
and slipped, and fell softly
backwards, deep pillows of snow
around her. Slowly and gently she
sank into the snow pack that wrapped
itself around her ribs like angels
hands.

If I slept here it would be days
before I might be missed,
she thought.

As she lay, the animals started
to come.

First she saw a hefty buffalo. It
approached from the stream, water
on his beard. He paced his bulk
nearer and nearer, though she felt
no fear. Breathed in her lack of
understanding. Saw her desire for
change. Stepped on her ribcage, and
crushed her. Straddled her body and
spoke.

I have done as you wanted,
forgive me. He lapped her with his
thick warm tongue and drank her
blood.

Swiftly next came the mountain lion
from behind the flanks of pines. He
shook her body and loosened it from
her soul. Padded towards the shadows
with her feet clasped gently between
his teeth. Propped her before the elk
and said,

Between our families let us feast!

Welcome home sister, we have waited
a long time for you to come, the
elk murmured deeply.

On his command, the crows flew
towards her neck, and delicately
pecked through the skin, tissue and
vessels; it was the squirrels
and raccoons that pulled apart the
muscle and bone.

Dropping her body, they wrapped her
soft hair into knots around the
ponderosa and weighted it still with
shards of ice. Her eyes were wide
open, the pupils the jet black of
death, and her skin radiated a
fragile blue luminosity.



Wuon-Gean Ho graduated in History of Art from Cambridge University, before taking up a Japanese Government Scholarship in 1998 to study traditional woodblock printmaking in Kyoto. She has since held residencies in various countries, notably Caldera Arts Center, Crow's Shadow Institute of the Arts and the Sitka Center for Arts and Ecology, all in the USA; the Bluecoat Arts Centre and Aberystwyth School of Art in the UK, and the castle of Montefiore Conca in Italy.

She is the recipient of several awards, including the John Purcell Paper prize in 2007; the Printmakers' Council prize in 2009; and the Birgit Skiöld Memorial Trust Award of Excellence, for a book, *Embrace*, which is now in the National Art Library in the V&A Museum in 2010.

She has twice co-curated the Qijiang International Print show in Chongqing, China, in 2009 and 2011, and was an invited panellist for two printmaking conferences: the 6th *International Multidisciplinary Printmaking Conference*, UK, 2009, where she talked about *Beautiful Beasts* (how printed imagery lends itself to depicting monstrous beings); and the 40th Southern Graphics Council International Conference in New Orleans, 2012, where the topic was *Movement in Print* (including static and dynamic images about the depiction of human movement).

Her prints and books are regularly shown in the UK and abroad, including the *Vancouver Drawn Festival*, Canada, Art Beatus Vancouver 2010, the 6th *International Artist Book Triennial*, Vilnius, 2012; and the 9th *International Biennial of Contemporary Prints*, Liège, Belgium 2013.

She is based in London, where she teaches woodblock printmaking, and is an active member of East London Printmakers, where she makes most of her prints, books and animations.



Wuon-Gean Ho

Beyond the Moon

Prints and Animations

PRINTIAU AC ANIMEIDDIAD

School of Art Gallery

Oriel yr Ysgol Gelf

The School of Art, Aberystwyth University

Yr Ysgol Gelf, Prifysgol Aberystwyth

26 November 2012 - 8 February 2013

Tachwedd 26, 2012 - Chwefror 8, 2013

Blog <http://www.printplay.wordpress.com>

Website <http://www.wuongeant.com>

