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## resurrection series - etchings 2012

*'I do not etch the plate I erode it...'*

Initially inspired by William de Kooning's 'black and white paintings' with their striking tonal contrasts this series of etchings produced in early 2012 are now more so identified with 'resurrection' as many of them were made from old zinc plates that had been put to one side by the artist. Over many years the plates had been gathering dust and dirt being part of a pile of failed or not very successful attempts at etching; their surfaces already 'sculpted' with grooves to print other images which often did not hold the artist's attention. Creativity involves much exploration and often leads to experimental ends with the knowledge gained in the process applied at a later time to conjure a more resolved, finished image. Many of the zinc plates had to be sanded back creating unexpected textures which intrigued the artist and which were often outside of his direct control. With new layers of aquatint as well as much time in burnishing the plates the paradox occurred that by such 'weathering' of these 'eroded' surfaces the plates were revived to form new, fresh images. Although some of the works are pure abstractions they are included in this overall collection dealing with the Australian landscape as the rough-hewn textures remind the artist so much of the grainy, pocketed surfaces of this ancient continent's rock. However, they are included in the catalogue outside the main gallery. The twelve images in this series were produced intermittingly over a period from late March to early May 2012; some of the smaller works are from fresh plates but the thought for these prints were somewhat generated by the other 'regenerated' images which preceded them (and denoted as reworked plates). The muse then departed and the artist awaits a return as there are many other old etching plates that can be brought back to life as well as a plethora of new ideas, concepts and insights in his mind that could be materialised in the future on new plates as well.

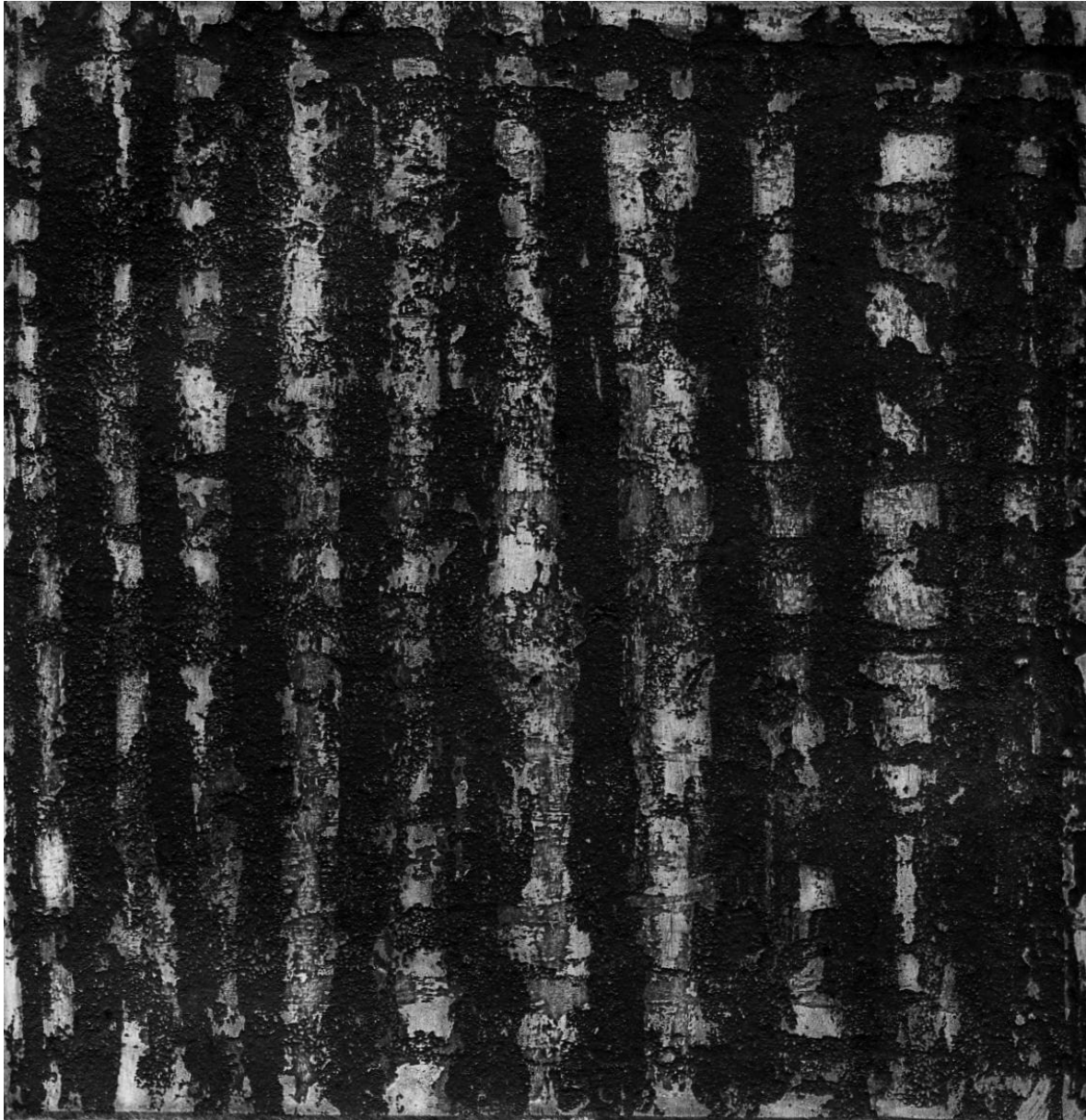


Mottled undulating rock with line grooves and black hole. Middle Head. Sydney Harbour.



*'Fabric of the Universe.'* 8" X 8". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

This plate along with the following two were first roughly covered with two cross hatch rows of sugartint which would then emerge through the thin layer of hard ground that would cover it to reveal bare zinc that would be covered with rosin and exposed to nitric acid to make a black impression: one row of vertical lines going across the plate and another row of horizontal lines going down the plate. A somewhat primal attempt to express the 'cosmic mesh' as well as make some reference to the stellar currents that oscillate through the universe as echoes to the original creation explosion. Eventually after repeated reworking of the plate there is only an intimation of the original crosshatching as the rocklike texture attempts to capture the essential binding fabric of the universe which both shapes reality into a coherent body as well as allow it to be fluid at the same time: to flow and be firm simultaneously. I understand how the universe can be perceived as a river.



*'Black Poles'*. 8" X 8". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

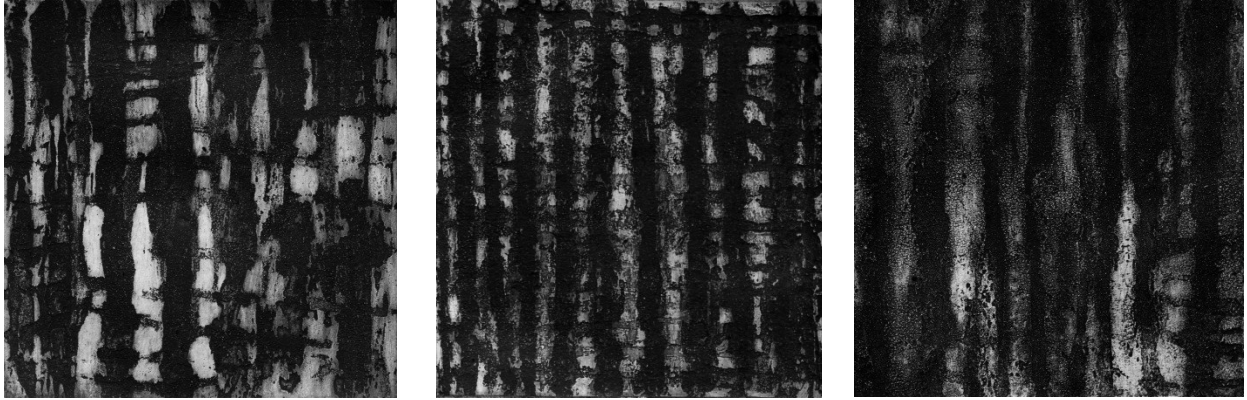
The title is in reference to Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*. Pollock was an artist whose large canvases visually epitomised the underlying co-ordinated structure of the universe. The artist would often be annoyed that viewers saw a pre-eminence of chaos in his work as he himself desired to comprehend the beautiful order of nature. I do likewise. I also venture to suggest the idea that the 'poles' are each like the axis of the Earth whose magnetic properties allow gravity to occur which in turn allows an atmosphere and therefore also allows life to occur. Perhaps, the overall gravity of the universe is underpinned by cosmic 'magnetic poles' to allow it and its creative forces to fully throb.



*'Resurrection'*. 8" X 8". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

In my first attempt to rework the plate the patterned image was rather flat and lifeless and so I came up with the idea of covering the whole plate with aquatint to make it all black. As if working on a mezzotint I then burnished the plate to revitalise it and give it life leaving the various degrees of lighter areas to produce a mysterious quality. Light emerging from darkness to overcome it: as it was Easter I was immediately drawn to the parallel of the Resurrection thus the title. To make an afterthought remark the contrasting tonal shades in an abstract way hark all the way back to the dramatic spirituality of Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* which pleases me.





These three images form a triptych loosely based on the overarching idea of the first image in this series looking at the notion of the very material substance of the universe. It is as if a microscope has been able to zoom in to the very crevices and cracks that have resulted over time as the basic molecular structure of the cosmos 'ages' with the passing of so many billions of years. Yet, despite such stellar erosion the universe maintains a tight order and rhythm that allows it to exist as a single entity which will not suddenly dissipate and shred into a trillion parts. Within this organic structure there seems to be always ever new forms of existence birthing into material form and within this mystery called the cosmos is the even more extraordinary mystery called life.

In nature regular patterns such as those known as fractals can be discerned to give credence to the notion that there is an underlying organised order to creation. In the case of Platonism natural regular forms are mere attempts at imitating the ethereal 'Absolute Forms' from which visible reality corresponds too. What at first sight appears chaotic and random in natural phenomenon is actually the playing out of natural forces that work at shaping Nature as if doing it in a conscious way. Unless I am mistaken it is possible to design mathematical models to even predict what such natural energies can do and to comprehend what they have done. The universe has the equal contributions of the 'randomness' of quantum theory and the 'predictability' of the theory of relativity mysteriously working upon it in an intertwine way by which humanity is yet to understand and which is equally a micro as well as cosmic ir/regular process that leads the artist, musician, philosopher, architect, mathematician, scientist, astronomer as well as the theologian to consider worthy to explore. Nature is a mystery. The human soul is a mystery. A relationship between the two entities seems to exist and as for myself one is motivated to at least attempt in an artistic way to consider its ultimate significance – so as to more fully perceive what it means to be human, yes to be fully human as finite physical beings in an infinite universe which allows us to also be 'infinite' through the human imagination as soulfully reflective of nature's earthly and cosmic dimensions.



Coastal rock fractal step crack; straight line crack on Jervis Bay rock shelf; straight line rock crack at Stotts Reserve.



*'Cosmic Tracers.'* 9.5" X 7". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

This image was initiated on Anzac Day and thus these bands can be viewed as giant rhythmic columns of white laser light which, like tracer bullets, mark out the furious celestial forces of the initial creative explosion as they continually shoot outwards in this ever expanding universe.



sepia version





*'Reed Universe.'* 11" X 8". B & W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

This image harks back to an earlier much smaller print of reeds based on a Cooks River mangrove. However, the first impulse for this print was to consider the cosmic pulses that infiltrate that much grander 'river' which we call the Universe. Whether one wants to focus on river reeds or streaks of celestial light I find there is a sense of peace about this image; a certain stillness that allows one's mind to meditate on life and on creation.



sepia version



*'Galaxies Swirling Towards a Black Hole.'* Middle Head. Sydney Harbour.

8" X 6". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

I noticed this white speckled pattern on some rocks around a black hole and I envisaged them as swirling galaxies caught up in the gravitational pull of a black hole that would suck them into nothingness. Is death too merely an inevitable black hole whose 'gravitational pull' we call age take each being over into its 'event line' to a new mysterious dimension?





*'Shell Nebula.'* Gordons Bay. 9.5" X 7". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate (reworked).

A nebula is gaseous and results after the death of a galaxy. However, I envisage it as a hard shell and this conception results from my understanding that Georgia O'Keefe saw shells as typifying eternity due to their long lasting hardness. (In turn flowers were seen by her as expressing the fragility and mortality of life seeing their very beauty was transient). A nebula will pass away but compared to the miniscule life span of an individual – or even of the whole human race – this glowing cosmic cloud exists for an eternity. Thus the duality of the thought of something ephemeral as hard and stable resides comfortably in my mind without any semblance of inward conflict with this metaphysical contradiction: 'reality' is sometimes more applicably suited to exist within the mental realm.



sepia version



*'Dark Matter Nebula.'* 6" X 4". sepia. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

The art of Jasper Johns is noted for challenging the viewer's perception of reality such as diffusing the reality between 'high art' and the 'everyday object' which echoes the Duchampian concept of the readymade; yet what interests me more so about the art of this intriguing American artist is a far deeper philosophical questioning of trusting our physical senses to perceive what is physically 'actual' or real through his disorienting/decontextualising use of everyday subject matter to make the eye 'work' at trying to 'realise' what exactly the eye is looking at as there is an ambiguity to his paintings and prints which leads the viewer to uncomfortably realise all is not what it seems; his art echoes Magritte (who Jasper Johns admires) to some extent but I feel there is a clarity to Magritte's visual manipulations which can be eventually sorted but not so readily with Jasper Johns. Yet, what Jasper Johns aims for is to extend the viewer's mind beyond what is 'real' - that is: the usual illusionary trickery of perspective which is the standard bearer of much that is considered as normal art practice since the time of the Renaissance.

However, perspective is actually a 'mirage on the eyes' making the viewer believe in a three dimensional representative space which does not really exist; which in reality is actually impossible to exist on the two dimensional 'window' plane of the canvas. Modern physics with, for example, the formulation of quantum physics as intimated by Max Planks, comes into play for we now know that what appears stable to us in the physical world is merely different combinations of buzzing particles that create in contradictory ways different aspects of matter from gas plumes to liquids to so called 'solid' steel. Perspective merely deceives the eye to convince the brain that what is being viewed is as real as the 'real world.' Yet neither the scene painted or the actual scene that is being copied by the artist can be viewed as being what they truly are. Our five senses more or less convince us that what is around us is real in much the same way that Renaissance perspective convinces us what we see on the picture plane is real; yet we are learning that our five senses are merely filtering to us a 'reality' that our minds can cope with as other aspects of reality such as the multi-dimensional reality of a microscopic quantum universe - which helps to create what we see - is held back from our daily conscious perception of



everyday matter. Perhaps, just as well, for it is a micro-universe difficult for us to conceptually comprehend. However, if human consciousness is to reach full fruition - so as to reach a fuller humanness - what Jasper Johns confronts our senses with in his art - that disrupts our present conditioned way of looking at the world - is to be very welcomed.

The unconscious could be equated with the nether world of quantum physics while the 'high conscious' Neoplatonic realm of Ideal Forms advocated from the time of Aristotle all the way up to the time of Plotinus in the early foundation centuries of Christianity is more akin to the Theory of Relativity. It seems even that for the last few hundred years the matter of the Universe has been seen as a uniform substance as it has become accepted theory that the same star particles that form the Earth and the living things on it – including human beings – and that have formed (and continue to form) the furthest celestial fires from us are essentially the same; it is in the process of cooling and local cosmic variations that different molecular structures form different materials as varied as living cells to rock to blood to water. The universe as uniform equates to a universe that is a stable entity yet we know quantum theory defies that 'secure' evaluation and there is much effort these days to resolve what is in state of pre-ordained uniformity with what is in constant inconsistent unpredictable flux. Thus, one may put forward the artistic challenge that in much the same way science is seeking an overall unified theory of everything connecting quantum theory with relative theory art can delve towards a unity between the perceived unified 3-D illusionism of western linear perspective and the metaphysical conceptual explorations into an art quantum 'fourth dimension' that Marcel Duchamp pursued and which the likes of Jasper Johns considers.

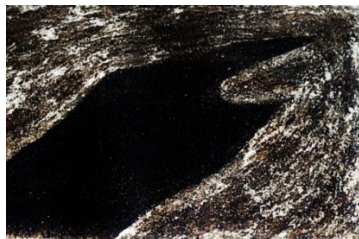
Michael Cricton in his book 'JASPER JOHNS' states how Cezanne noted that for painter the eye and the brain had to work together with the eye revealing what nature beholds while the brain could logically organize every visual sensation so as enable the painter to personally express his or her response to nature; what Michael Cricton asserts from Cezanne's opinion is that in art history although the eye and brain are two poles which complement each other the twentieth century was a time when the brain had the upper hand so to speak over the eye. Certainly, a case in point is Marcel Duchamp's conceptual art which is aimed at stimulating the mind rather than further exciting the eyes with 'retinal art'. Visually speaking however it is to be noted that the emergence of Cubism with its emphasis of a multi-persepective fragmented analysis of its subject matter led to a breakdown of the tradition of linear persepective in European art. The mind involves deeper engagement and the viewer is no longer passive and must become more active in comprehending what is before him or her or as Duchamp had surmised it is ultimately the spectator which provides supreme meaning to a work of art and correspondingly it is us – as artist, as medical practitioner, as physicist, as astronomer, as musician, as historian, as ruler, as ordinary person-on-the-street and so forth that ultimately provides both social and empirical meaning to the world; to the universe in which we live. It could be said that 'mind art' one is no longer simply 'presented' with a 'window' through which to view a particular reality but one is invited to become involved in shaping what reality may actually be - allowing art to become a catalyst for the mind to consider new conceptual possibilities rather than displaying - or reinforcing - present perceptions. A more interactive dialogue may also be opened up between creator and spectator. All of us may eventually become increasingly aware of the manner in which we give meaning to our existence and to which we can mis/trust that our meaning is 'true' or 'real' or 'absolute' or 'social' or relative' or 'scientific' or 'objective' or 'subjective' or 'binary' or 'un/changing' and so forth...thus our organic brain by way of that ephemeral mystery 'within it' – the mind – can lead to heightened thought processes that allow the synapses – those cerebral connectors – to evolve once more to see with 'new vision'.

In the new age of cyberspace it seems the conceptual experimentations of forward thinking artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Jasper Johns can lead to greater human in/sight especially when on a cultural



and psychological level there are may come a redefinition of time – a keystone of our everyday perception of reality – in the same way that Einstein exposed that time itself is relative to the speed of an object in relation to mass and gravity diminishing its former Newtonian absolute quality. As the darkest recesses of the human mind links up more consciously with its ever awakened consciousness to arrive at a higher perception of ‘quantum time’ which may become as familiar to us as our present understanding of time in relation to the theory of relativity. Furthermore, there are also the social conditions of present day reality that art can also explore and which also play a major role in our definition and redefinition of reality *per se*. (After all, art has always played the dual role of both serving a propaganda purpose for the status quo as well as to initiate an ideological breakdown of the prevailing beliefs of the day to herald in a new status quo that in turn will need to be challenged by new ideas and so on and so on...such is the general cyclic nature of much human activity continually oscillating between tradition and innovation).\*

It is time to remark on the etching *Dark Matter Nebula* which is a deliberately very simple work that involves a grainy textured area surrounding a ‘pitch black’ shape whose outline originates from the ‘shell nebula’ of the etching with this title. Yet what appears as a straight forward negative space contains ‘dark matter’ which although invisible to the ‘naked eye’ may also be viewed as solid and yet what one may really be seeing (through a celestial ‘window’) is the immeasurable dark space of the universe; the grainy rock like texture surrounding it could be seen as the uncountable mass of billions of stars that leads to an impenetrable ‘solid look’ but is truly an ephemeral gaseous cosmic expanse. In other words one may view this image two ways much like the well known hour glass outline that can also be viewed as the profiles of two human faces. (Truth or deception: which is it or is it both at the same time undermining the Aristotlian binary view of reality and matter so prevelant in the West’s thought processes). What is considered as accepted reality can often be a case of one’s point of view for it was commonly though the Sun revolved around the Earth as a material ‘reflection’ of of a theological idea that redemptive ‘Man’ (as women were excluded, as Eve who was conveniently *first* decieved by Satan was ‘temptress’ leading to Adam’s sinful downfall) as God’s ultimate representative was at the centre of the universe until it was scientifically ‘seen’ that it was rather the Earth that revolved around the sun. It is not how we *actually* see the world but rely on an Enlightenment understanding of a cosmic reality that it is us who are actually moving and not the Sun. (We are still but we are moving). Thus this etching can be viewed conceptually two ways as a representation of a conceptual appreciation of the dynamism of human perception which still needs to be very much explored as intimated by Jasper Johns as well as by – perhaps the one truly great ‘art visionary’ of the twentieth century – Marcel Duchamp.



*Dark Matter Nebula* and the etching which follows *Ghost Nebula* which can be viewed together as a diptych as both look at the complementary underlying theme of human perception and reality.

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\*Having recently finished reading Helen Langdon’s *Caravaggio* I cannot not help but feel that today’s art world has reached a similar state of artistic stagnation that had befallen Rome after the grandeur of the High Renaissance. It was then Caravaggio’s radical new earthy naturalism appeared. One hopes for an equivalent innovative modernism comparable to the modernist artistic advances at the turn of the of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century . Yet, it was Duchamp who coyly remarked in the 60s that the next great artist will be ‘underground’ ; away from the present crass hubris of a gawdy commercial art gallery scene.

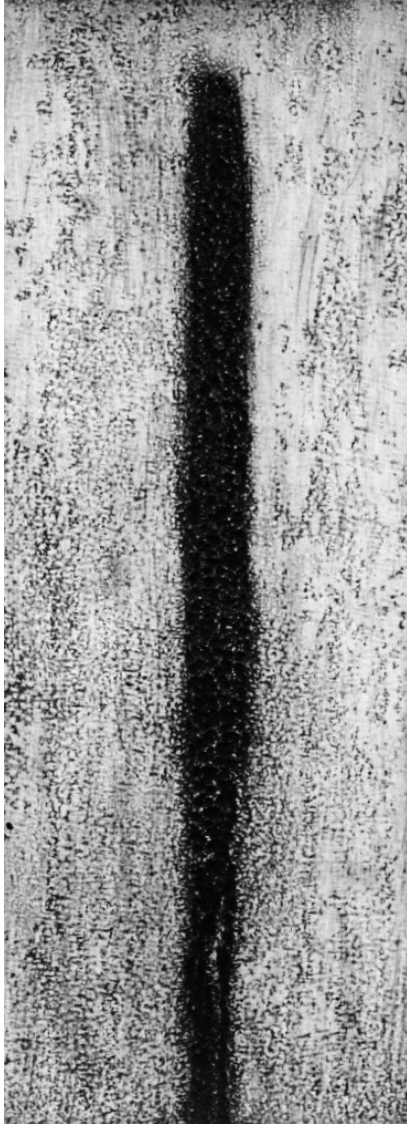


*'Ghost Nebula.'* 6" X 4". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

Something that we can see that is no longer there. Astronomers tell us when we look at the stars some of those that we see no longer exist. Thus this etching is what we are viewing is the light released from such now extinguished fiery furnaces. It is simply the case that the light waves have taken uncountable years to reach Earth. What we are seeing with our eyes are 'light ghosts' and raises questions about the natural laws of the universe affecting our physical perception of it. Light photons that are real registering an object that is no longer physically present.



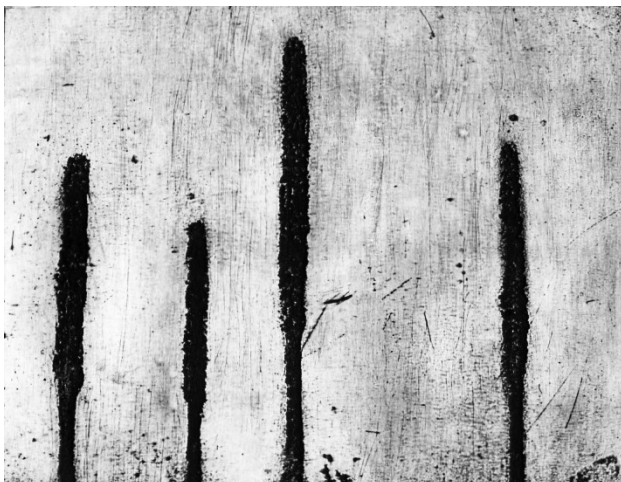
Caves Beach. NSW South Coast.



*'Note of the Universe.'* Royal National Park.

7" X 2". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

Walking back from the Curramoors these long very dark brown long stalks were sighted on a scrub plain as if stabbing the sky. I was reminded of musical notes and thought how an ancient astronomer such as Ptolemy thought of the solar system and stars aligned on a series of musical spheres and of a modern artist such as Kandinsky corresponding colour harmony to an underlying musical structure of the universe to create 'visual music' that would eventuate in spiritual, life enhancing 'vibrations of the human soul'. A cosmic symphony for each individual being. (The Lithuanian musical composer and mystical nature painter M.K. Ciulionis also crossed my mind who it is said influenced Kandinsky).

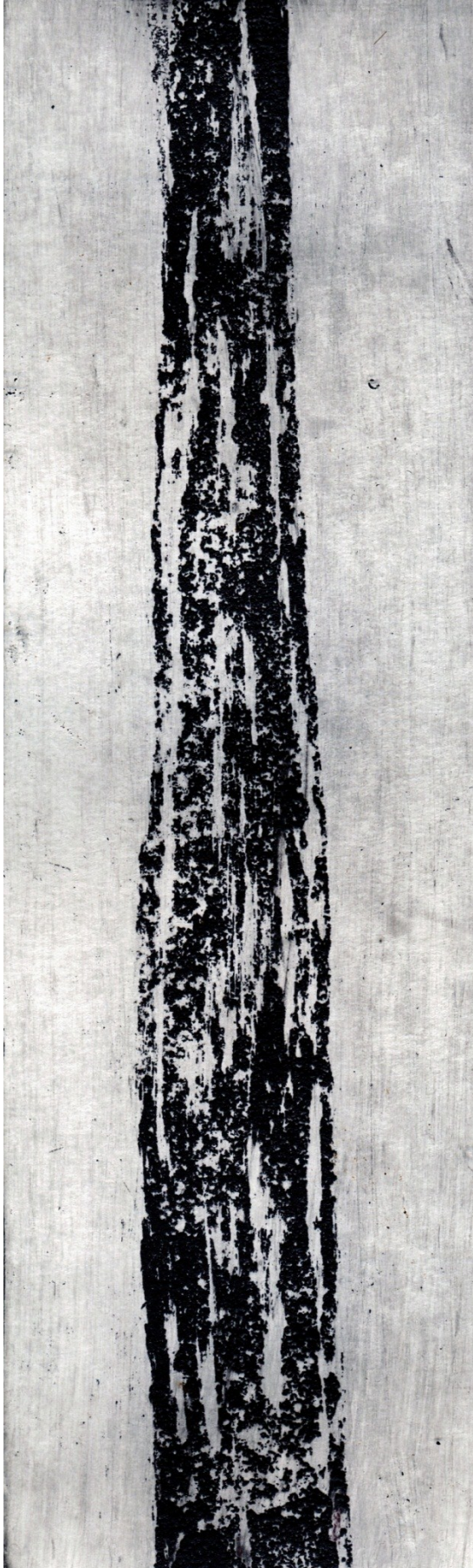


*'Chord of the Universe.'*

7" X 5.5". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

In this rather raw image is a collection of 'notes' forming a chord. A musical chord followed by other chords form a unifying series of sounds which can be compared to the mathematical equations that underpin the structure of the universe. One can wonder and meditate upon on how a few musical notes - like a few mathematical digits - can be rhythmically organized in an infinite variety of ways to express and highlight the innumerable dimensions of a seemingly boundless cosmic reality.





*'Pillar of Time.'*

Minnamurra Rainforest. Jamberoo.

9.5" X 3". B&W. aquatint. sugarlift. zinc plate.

This image of a tree was achieved with one mindful calligraphic brushstroke using sugarlift; a few seconds of time passing to initiate an 'icon' to which one may focus the mind on time eternal.



*'Dark Matter Stems of the Universe.'* Wollli Creek.

8" X 6". sepia. sugarlift. aquatint. zinc plate.

This textured image also explores the boundaries of human perception. The dark columns are based on three trees in Wollli Creek; in this etching they can be viewed either as enclosed foreground masses or as 'open-ended infinities' of a cosmos beyond the other galaxies in the 'positive spaces' around them. It is a continuum of the issue of the way we view the visible world; to process it, so as to (subjectively/objectively) comprehend 'what *is* reality' (as first hinted at in *Dark Mass Nebula*). Although originally based on trees I have used the term stem (rather than trunk) in the title as *stem* is a word that more readily implies organic growth (such as in the term 'stem cells') and to imply not only the infinite celestial growth of the universe but also the mental 'growth' of the human mind that is also without end - like the cosmos. It should also be noted that our human imagination can be envisaged as multi-dimensional; which on a conceptual level supersedes our known three-dimensional universe. The three stems may also be considered as referencing the number three which is a number commonly implicated with the divine. The texture for this image belongs to a scratched up etching plate that was sanded back to reveal and accentuate the multiplicity of textures which initially emerged from the natural process of the plate gradually eroding over time. Sugarlift was then brushed on to form the three dark strokes on which eventually an aquatint was applied.