

**Rules
&
Facts**

Acknowledgment

A special thank you to Emanuel Navaretta

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Hugh Merrill Bio 2022

Hugh Merrill is an artist, educator, writer and community activist. In 1985 he had a one-person exhibition at the Nelson Atkins Museum, and his work is collected in over 50 museums including the New York Museum of Modern Art, Kansas City Kemper Museum, Cranbrook Art Museum, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and the Poland National Museum of Poznan. He is a long-time professor at the Kansas City Art Institute. In 1996, he collaborated with French artist Christian Boltanski on the city-wide community arts project *Our City/Ourselves: Portrait of Community* at the Kemper Museum. Hugh was the president of the Southern Graphics Council International from 1991 to 1993. He developed Chameleon Arts and Youth Development as a resource for disenfranchised youth communities which provided over 1 million dollars for community arts and youth development programming during its 25 years. Merrill was selected as one of 42 international artists for Richard Noyce's book *Printmaking at the Edge* published in 2006. Hugh has been awarded multiple grants including 2 NEA grants, Melon Foundation, Yaddo Fellowship, and the 2007 Distinguished Education Award from the Southern Graphics Council International. The Nelson Atkins Museum invited Hugh to curate *Print Lovers at 30: Celebrating Three Decades of Giving* in 2008. In September of 2010, his retrospective *Divergent Consistencies* was exhibited by the Leedy Voulkos Art Center.

Hugh is the author of:

Divergent Consistencies: 40 years of studio and community artwork

Shared Visions: Thoughts and Experiences in Social Arts Practice

Preaching to the Choir: thoughts on contemporary printmaking

Learning Journal: Teaching in Foundation

Nomadic, published by 39 West Press in 2016

Dog, published by Stubborn Mule press in 2018

Whiteout: Journey of Privilege, published by Spartan press in 2019

Making and Collaboration, published by Chameleon Press^s

Rules & Facts



Rules for Writing the Dead and Facts of Fictions: the etchings/monotypes of the early 1990's

I have found over the decades that for me image making is the discovery of pictorial possibilities that show themselves as I spend time working on the image. I do not have a preconceived solution for the image. Yes, I have a direction and knowledge of what I want and how to move towards it. The importance of geometry and architectural linear forms are underlying forces in the development of many of my images. But I do not have a picture of the finished product in my mind or drawn out on paper. My process is much more fluid, based in chance, working, physical change and recognition of possibilities.

This process can be referred to as the studio narrative, a dialogue of give and take with the materials, guided by knowledge acquired in a deep commitment to consistent studio work. The content that directs my efforts are concerns for architectural space and the forces of nature in conflict. The activity of making directs my eye to discover the correct conceptual and visual solutions in the making of each image. There is not an aesthetic perfection that guides the outcome. Each image always falls short of perfection and is the documentation of my struggle. My friend, Mary Kenealy, says I seem to will a work into existence.

Return to Sequential etchings: Rules for Writing to the Dead and Facts of Fictions

I heard through the grape vine that Emanuel Navarrete, one of his mentors had passed. Emanuel had introduced me to many artists and poets, including John Cage and Allen Ginsberg.

“When I heard that Emanuel was gone I really wanted to talk to him, thank him and simply be near him. This at first seemed impossible but as I went to work in the print studio, I came up with a series of rules for writing letters to dead folks. Oh yes, the first rule is no! Don't tell people the rules, the process is private and not to be discussed. So, I went to work on a single 24x44 inch zinc etching plate as a method of being close and communicating with Emanuel again----- and it worked.”

After several years of making large relief prints in color and installations I returned to making sequential monotype etchings as I had done with the Lucky

Dragon Suite, as the method of communication with his friend and mentor. He began the series Rules with the image of a bridge that had no real beginning and no real end. One side was dark and the other light. The plate was heavily worked with scraping and sanding prior to drawing the bridge image onto the plate. He wrote backwards by hand the rules for writing the dead. Then printed the plate. Again, he scraped away and sanded the bridge image searching for new images and visual relations along the way. The series Rules for Writing the Dead ended with the 6th monotype a grey watery landscape space devoid of a central image. He felt the communication with Emanuel was also completed when he arrived at this 6th image in the series. This work has never been exhibited.

Facts of Fictions 1989-1993

Merrill then decided to continue the process of making large sequential etching monotypes with no specific historical or narrative focus, the story or images would come out of the physicality of the etching process guided by his dream like memory. His first drawing was related to the copies of baskets and the images floated from the surface of the plate as he continued drawing, etching, scraping, and printing. He pulled images or states from the plate, changed the plate again and again until the plate could no longer be productively worked. Then he would start a new plate and continue the process. The title for the project became Facts of Fictions.

The first plate in the Facts of Fictions series of 8 monotypes were subtitled Woven Journey. This plate morphed into Factory: the killing floor containing another 5 images. At this point the plate was too damaged to continue so a new plate subtitled Hands Up was begun. This sequential investigation included over 10 prints of which 6 were edited out of the series and destroyed, leaving 4 new sequential monotype etchings. Lines were etched all the way through the metal surface creating embossed images and white text. The rectangular shape of the zinc plate was also etched into an organic form.

A third new plate was begun subtitled Power Heads (of war). The images of male heads came from the faces of soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War recorded/photographed by David Douglas Duncan. Again over 20 images or states were pulled off the plate and most were edited out and destroyed leaving the 6 images in this portion of the Facts of Fiction project.

Large heads of Roman senators and female torsos were the next subject for the continuing series. The female torsos had morphed into a pregnant female. Merrill destroyed most of these images, plates and prints. When asked about why these were destroyed, he responded that they seemed evil. These prints were kept in the

studio print file for years. Then over a decade later he burned the prints in a fire pit.

The process had been going for about 4 years from 1989 to 1993. Merrill determined to do one final plate and sequence of images. This final work in the Facts of Fictions project was subtitled Left Right Below and included bits of information from previous drawings that had occurred in the 5-year progression of monotypes. Again, the plate was purposely deeply etched creating an embossed text by etching completely through the zinc plate. At this point the Facts of Fiction project or series was complete and Merrill moved on to other concerns.

Thoughts from Jeanette Powers interview and writings on Hugh Merrill's sequential etching process. Consistent Divergencies: Etching Hugh Merrill by Jeanette Powers

Merrill says:

"The destruction and distortion of the plate through the process of the acid attacking the metal is both the entropy that causes decay in all things and the reclamation of the natural process over the built environment."

The process is one of ongoing construction and destruction informed by his early meetings with John Cage and Allen Ginsberg. Their Zen spiritual and philosophical interest relating to the creative process had a deep effect on Merrill. Merrill saw that as soon as an image is printed from the plate, the plate can then be reworked and changed. Leaving a ghost image of the previous workings, keeping underlying marks and broken bits of images from the prior state.

Another inspiration for many elements of Merrill's visual style is Christ Crucified between the Two Thieves: Large Oblong Plate (The Three Crosses) State III, produced by Rembrandt in 1653. This is an early example of a print produced in various states. Merrill's multiple state changes initiate the same type of philosophical questioning as beat poets, Zen masters and the Pope himself.

The plates are deeply etched and the edges are ripped lines of metal, the paper is lucky to survive the printing without ripping. The drawing, scraping away, grinding of the metal and redrawing the prints take on a ghostly greyness like a disturbing dream about issues important but not easily remembered. Each image slips and move before the viewer's eyes and the destination uncertain but frightening. Merrill says:

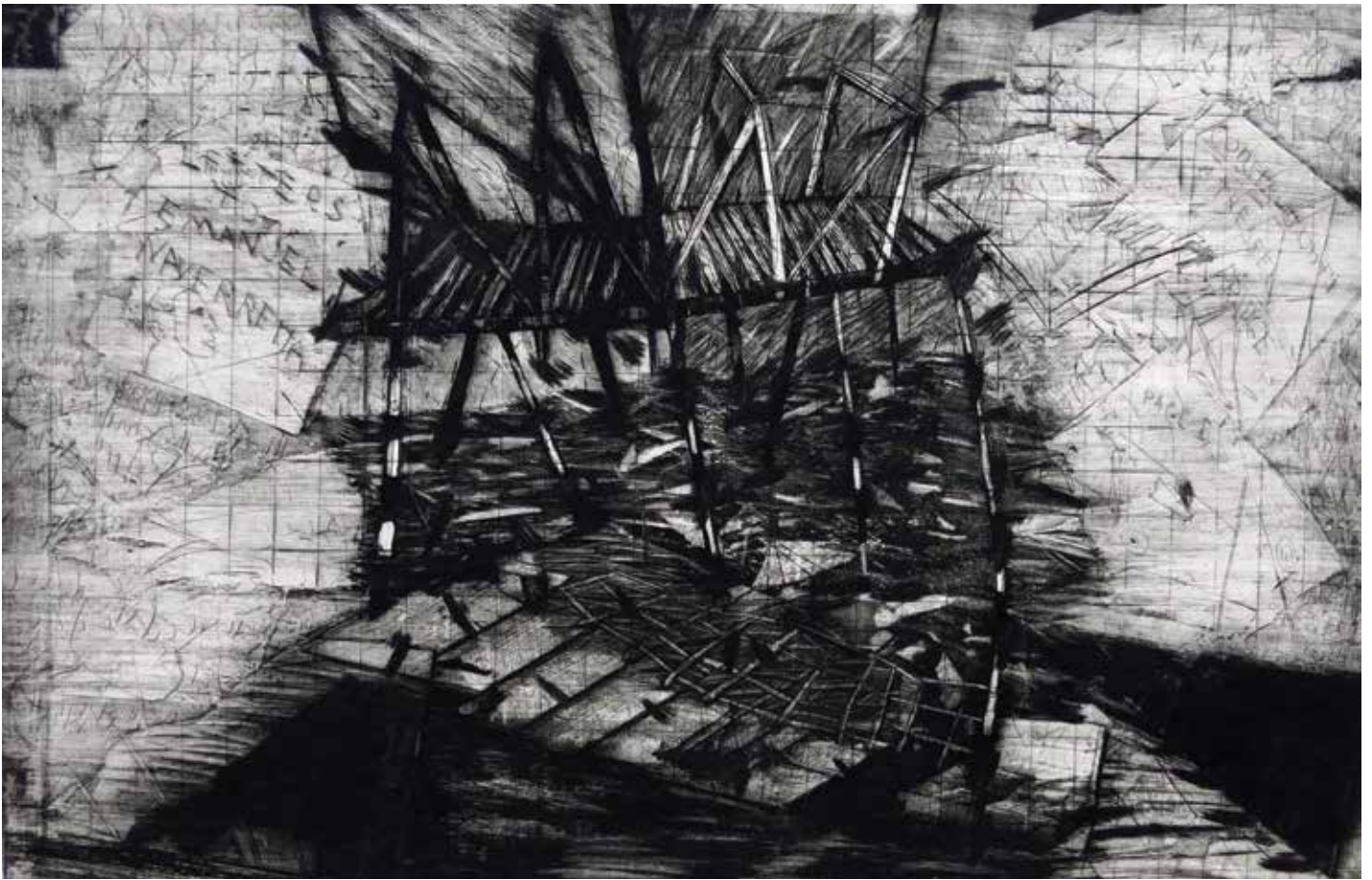
“The slowness of printmaking begins with the mark, a physical gesture, drawn forcefully on the plate. The plate has to be placed in an acid bath where the length of time and the potency of the acid make the final determination as to the depth and tone of the drawn mark. Etching on a metal plate provides a durable, sculptural surface that can take a great deal of physical manipulation.”

Rules For Writing the Dead

Rules for Writing the Dead and Facts of Fictions

Rules-Merrill 1-6 24x44 1990

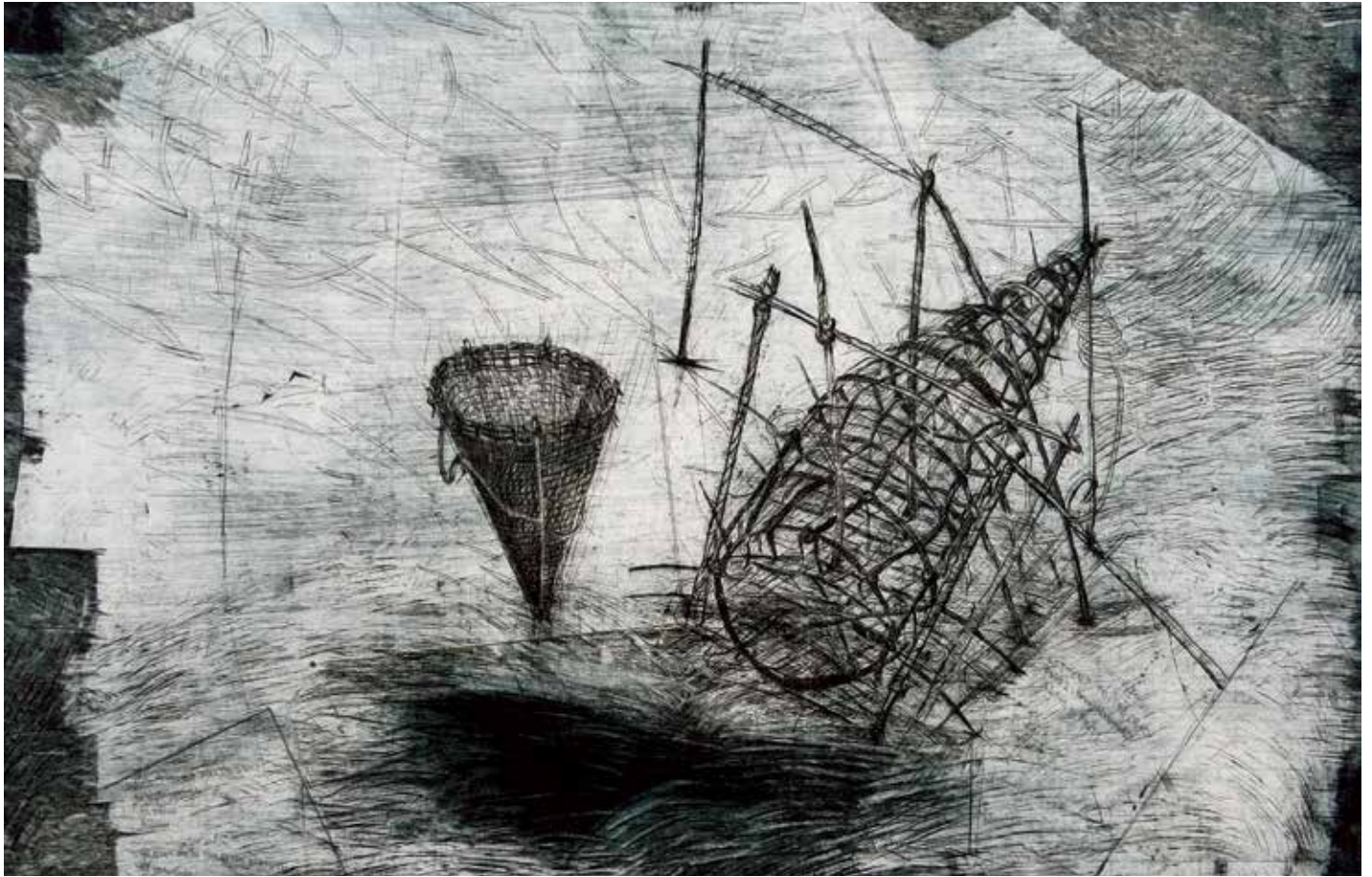




1 Rules



2 Rules



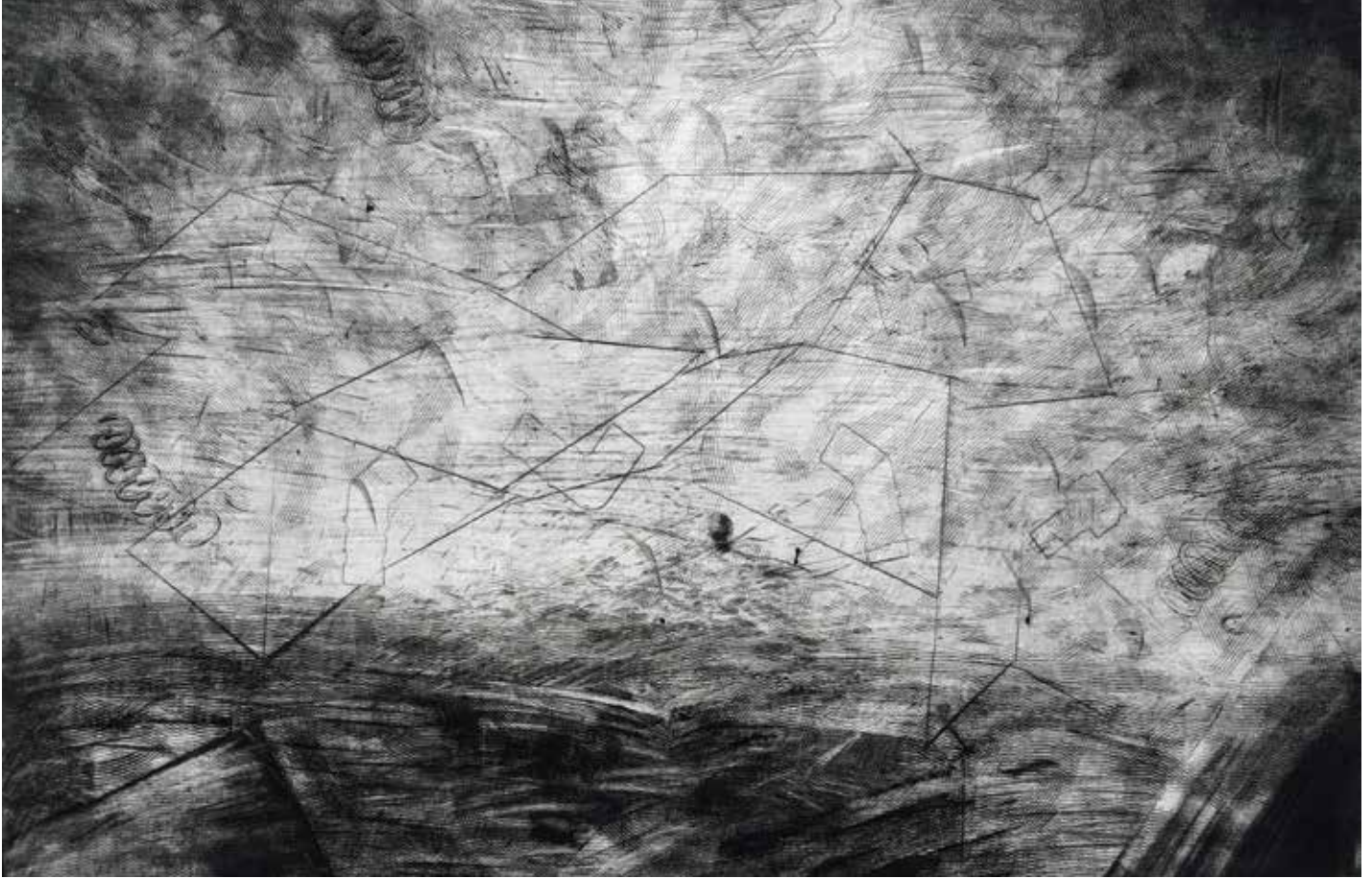
3 Rules



4 Rules



5 Rules



6 Rules

Facts of Fictions

Rules for Writing the Dead and Facts of Fictions

Facts of Fictions 1-8 Woven Journey 1991-1993 (24x44) circa 1990

Facts of Fictions 9-13 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993

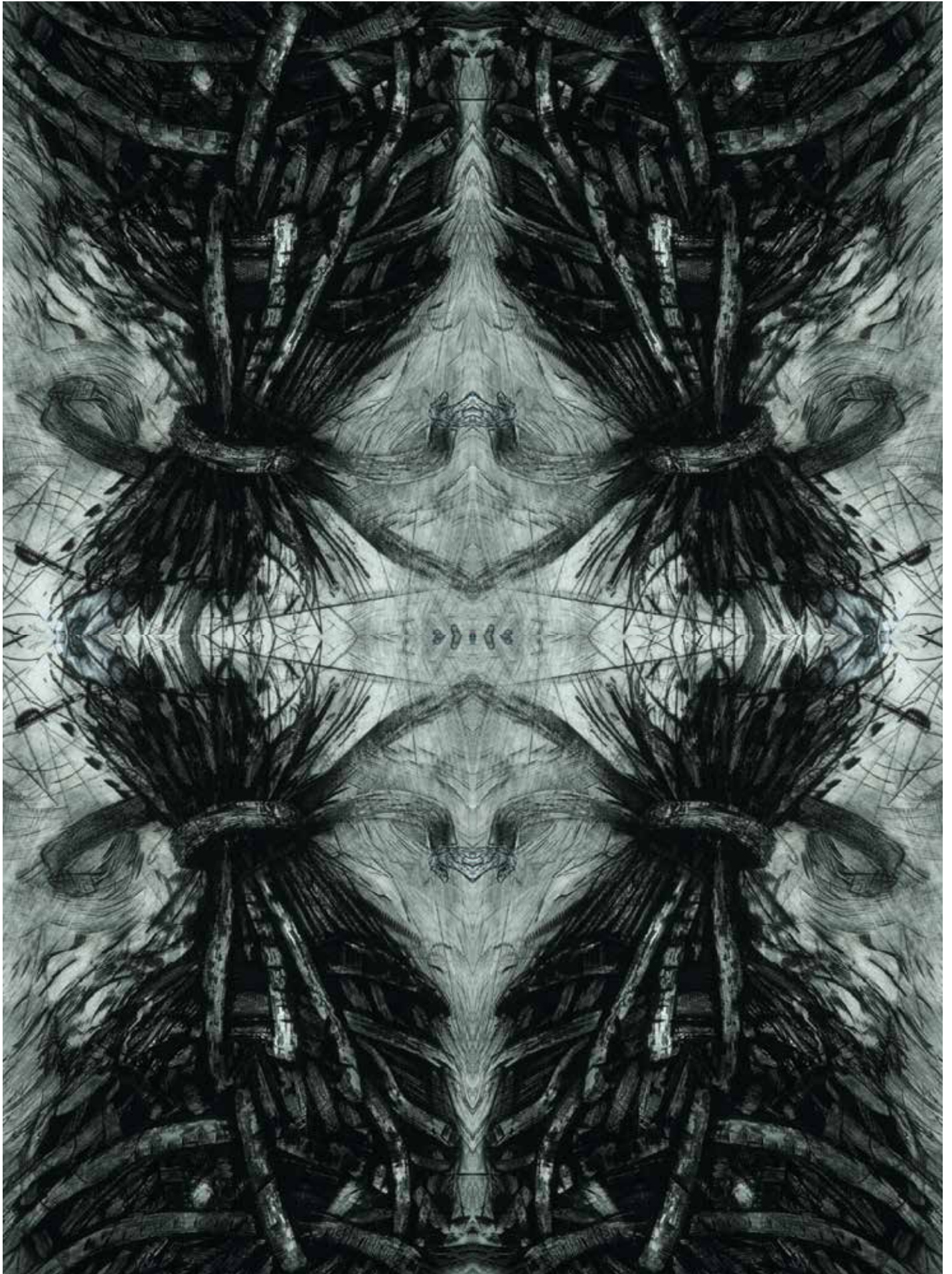
Facts of Fictions 14-16 Hand Up 1993

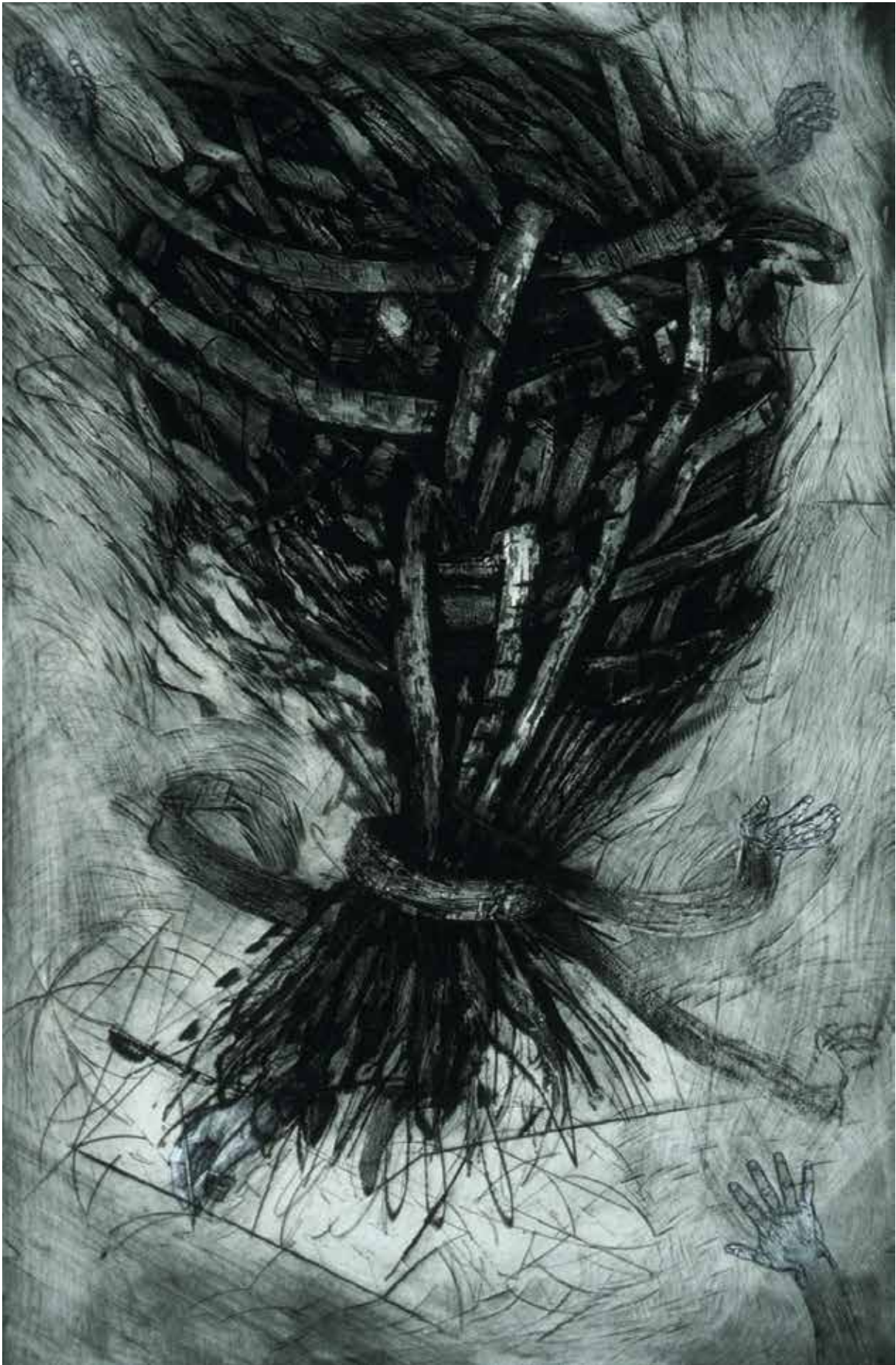
Facts of Fictions 17-22 Powerheads (of War) 1994

Facts of Fictions 23-27 Left, Right and Below 1995

**Facts of Fictions 1 (24x44) circa 1990
and so on..**

**Facts of Fictions 1-8 Woven
Journey 1991-1993 (24x44)
circa 1990**





Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 1



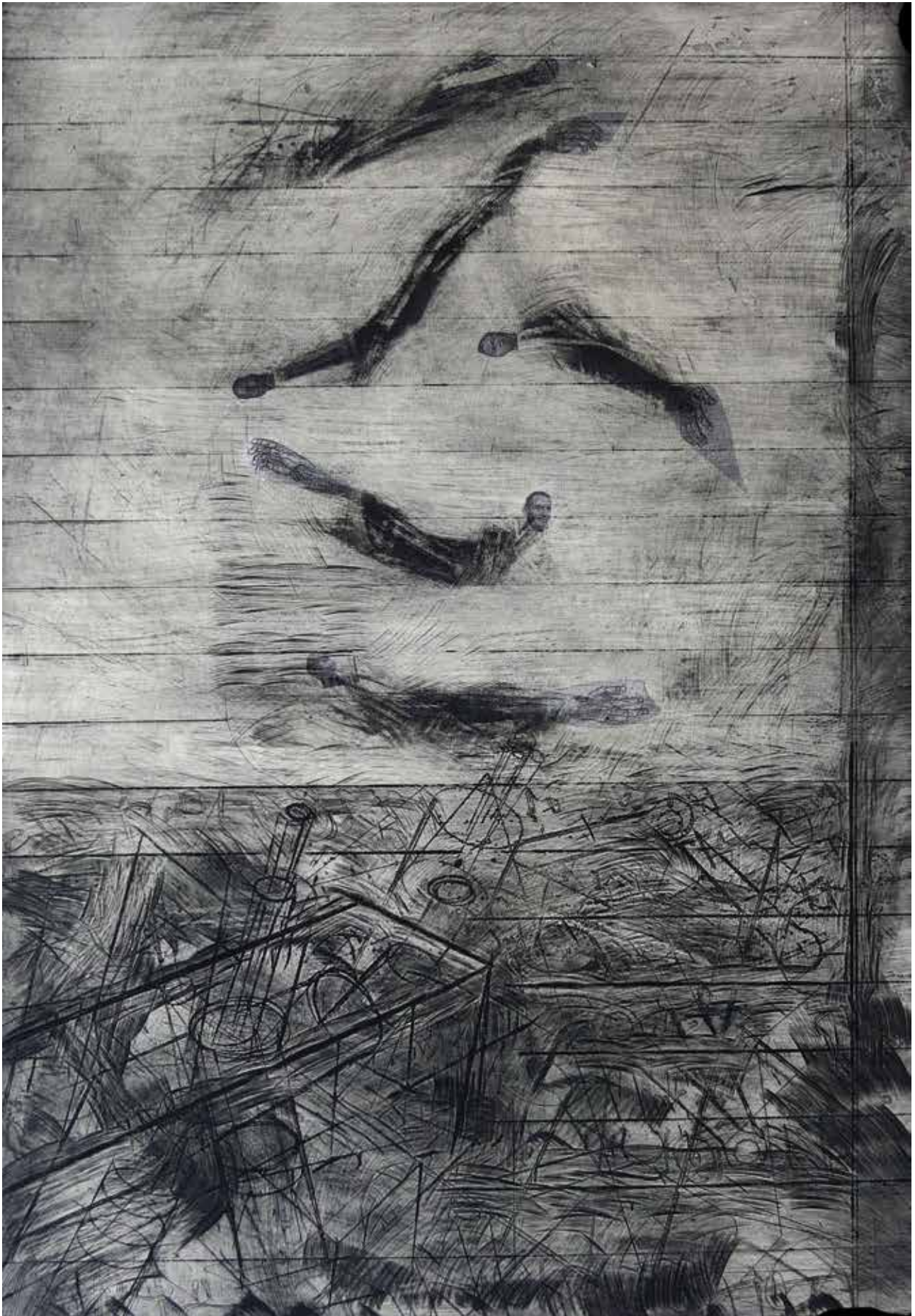
Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 2



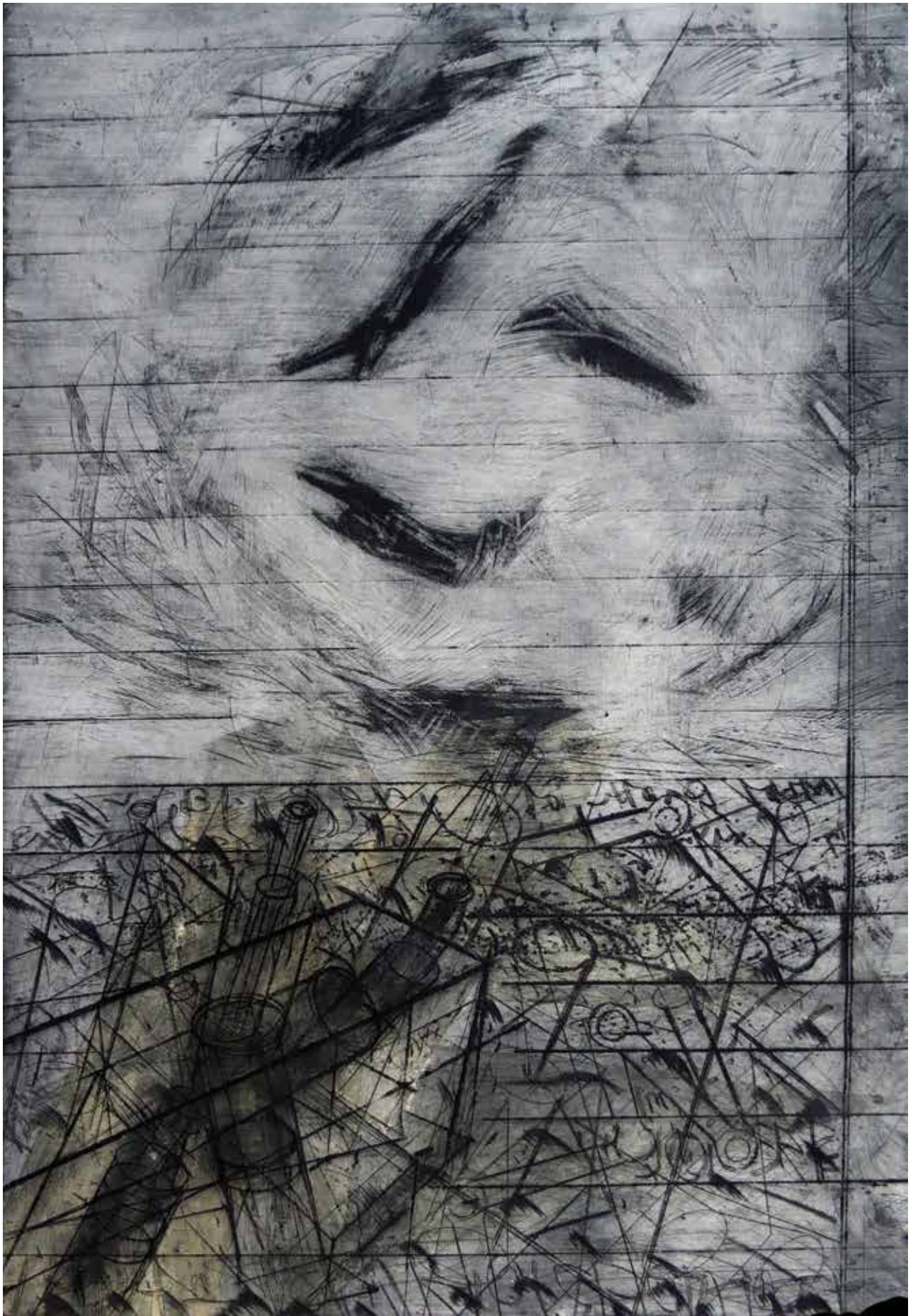
Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 3



Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 4



Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 5



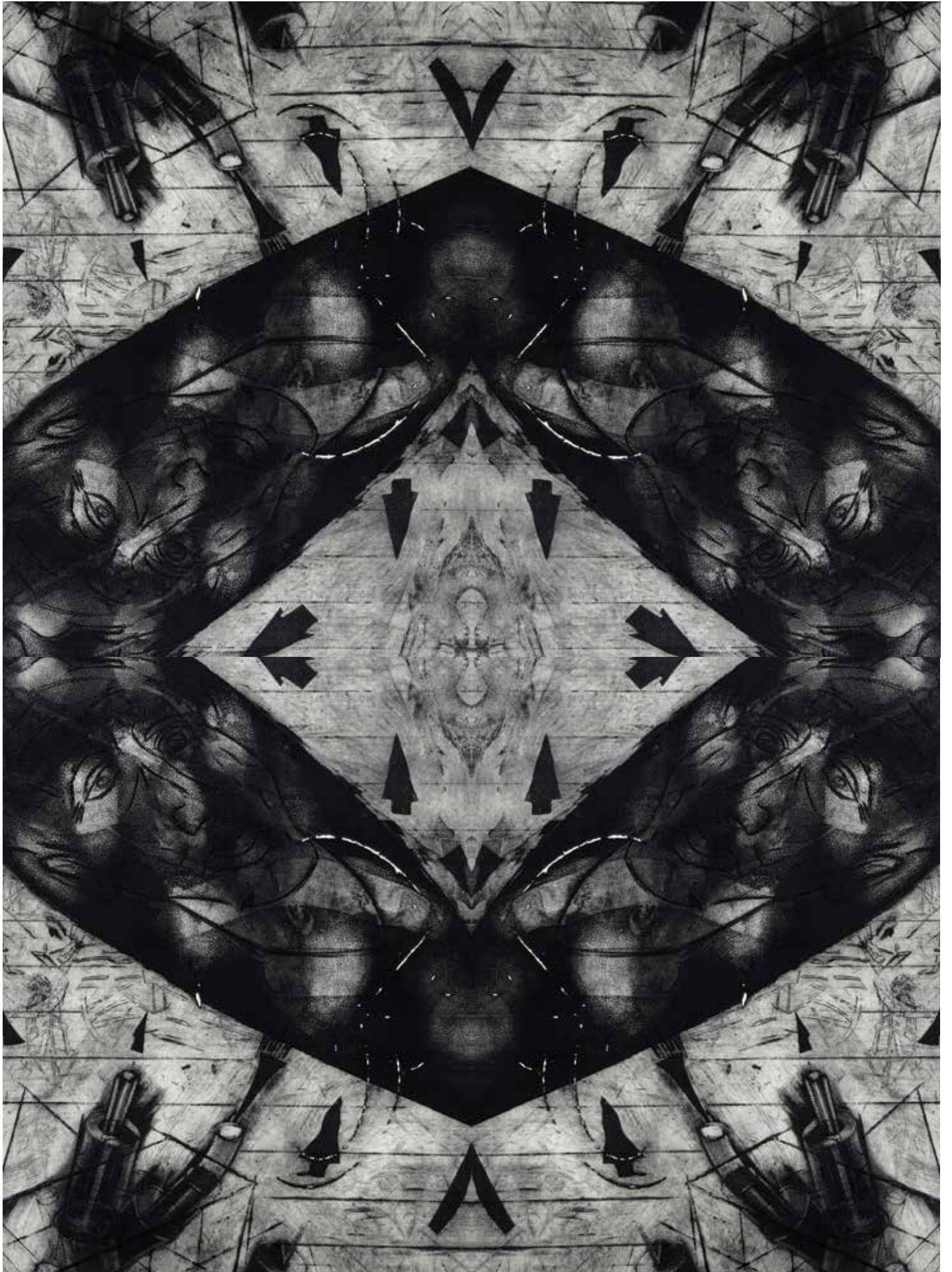
Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 6



Facts and Fictions Woven Journey 7



Facts of Fictions 9-13
Factory The Killing Floor
1992 1993





Facts of Fictions 9 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993



Facts of Fictions 10 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993



Facts of Fictions 11 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993



Facts of Fictions 12 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993



Facts of Fictions 13 Factory the Killing Floor 1992 1993

Facts of Fictions 14-16 Hand Up 1993





Facts of Fictions 14 Hand Up 1993



Facts of Fictions 15 Hand Up 1993



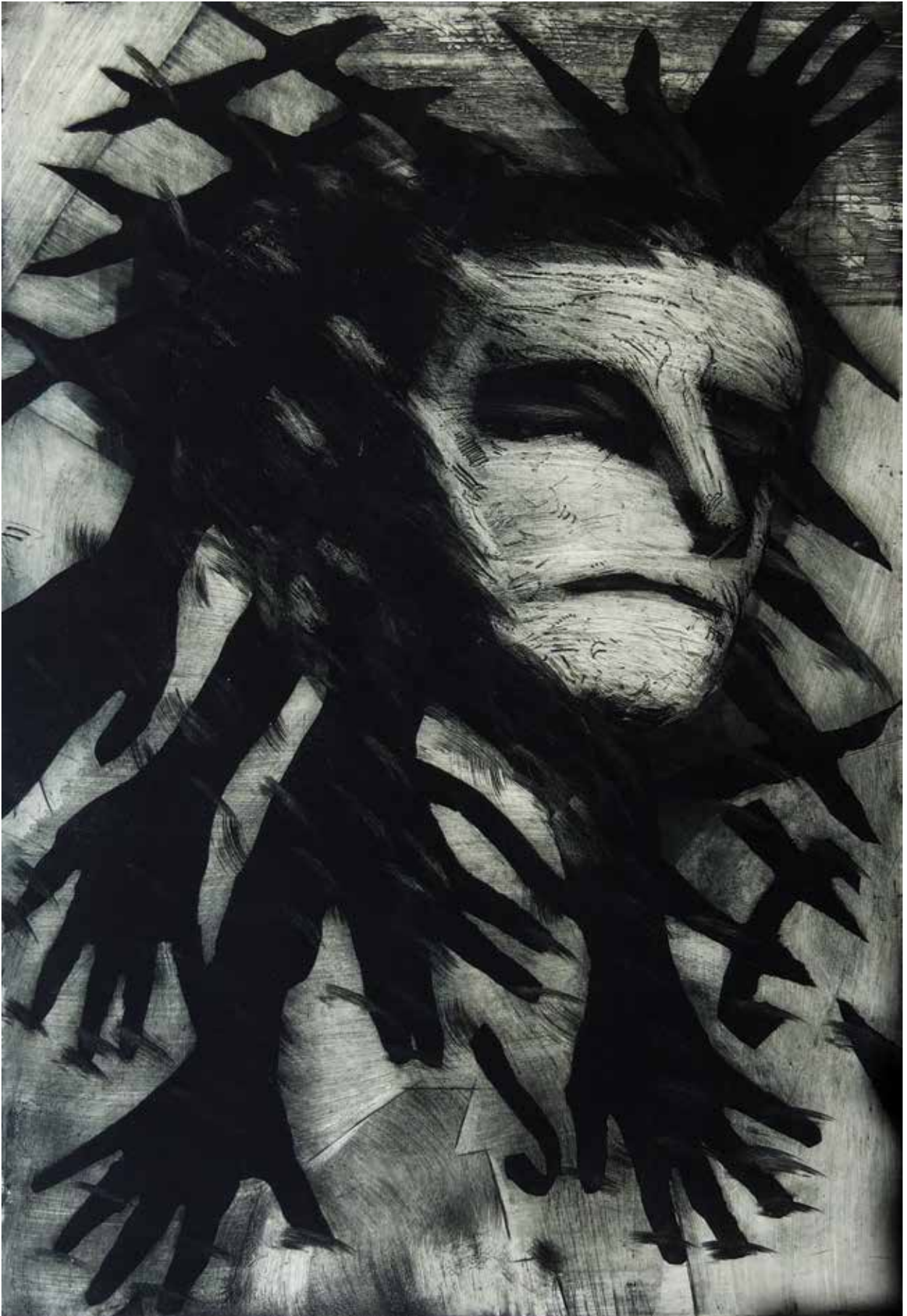
Facts of Fictions 16 Hand Up 1993

Facts of Fictions 17-22
Powerheads (of War)
1994

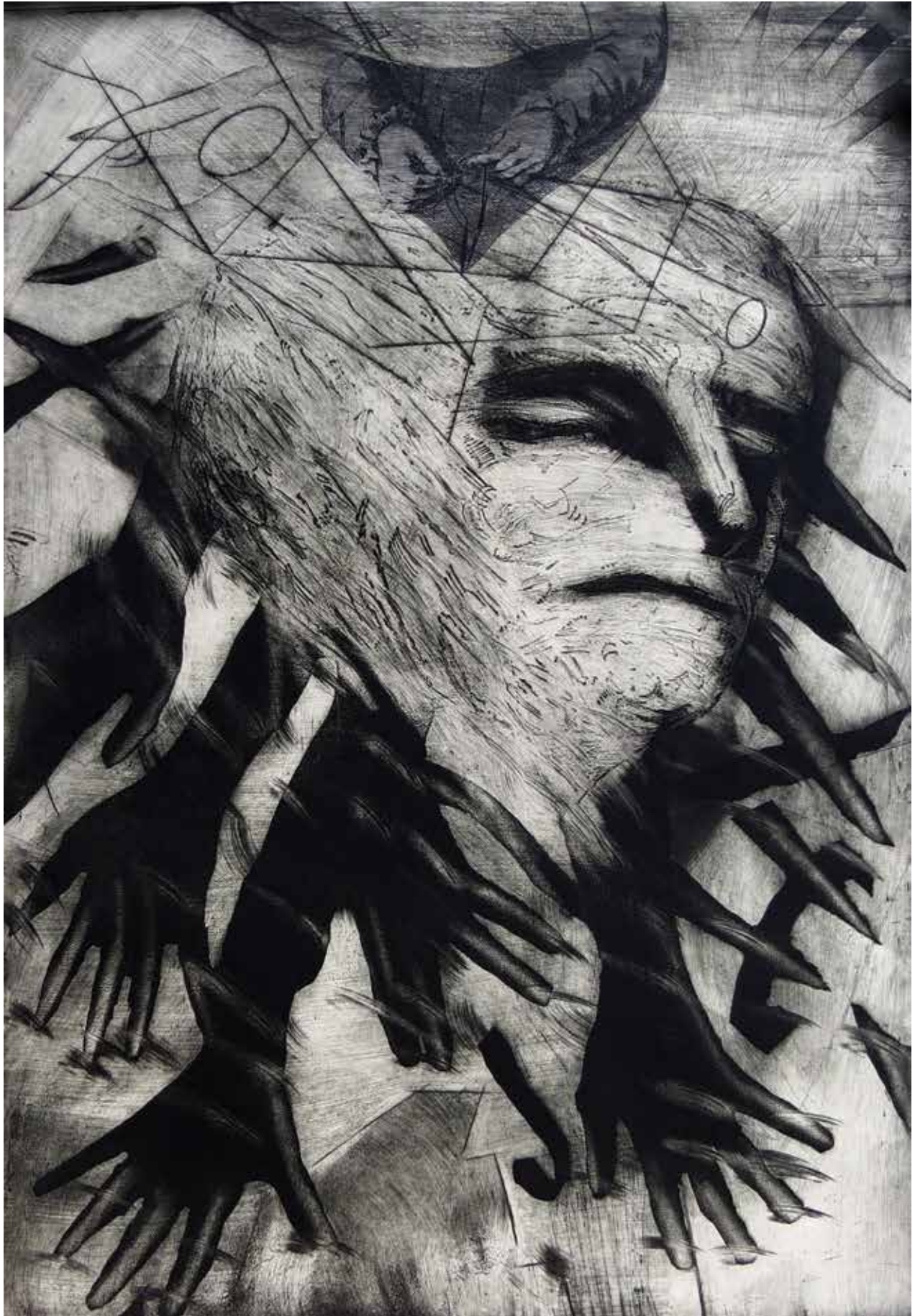




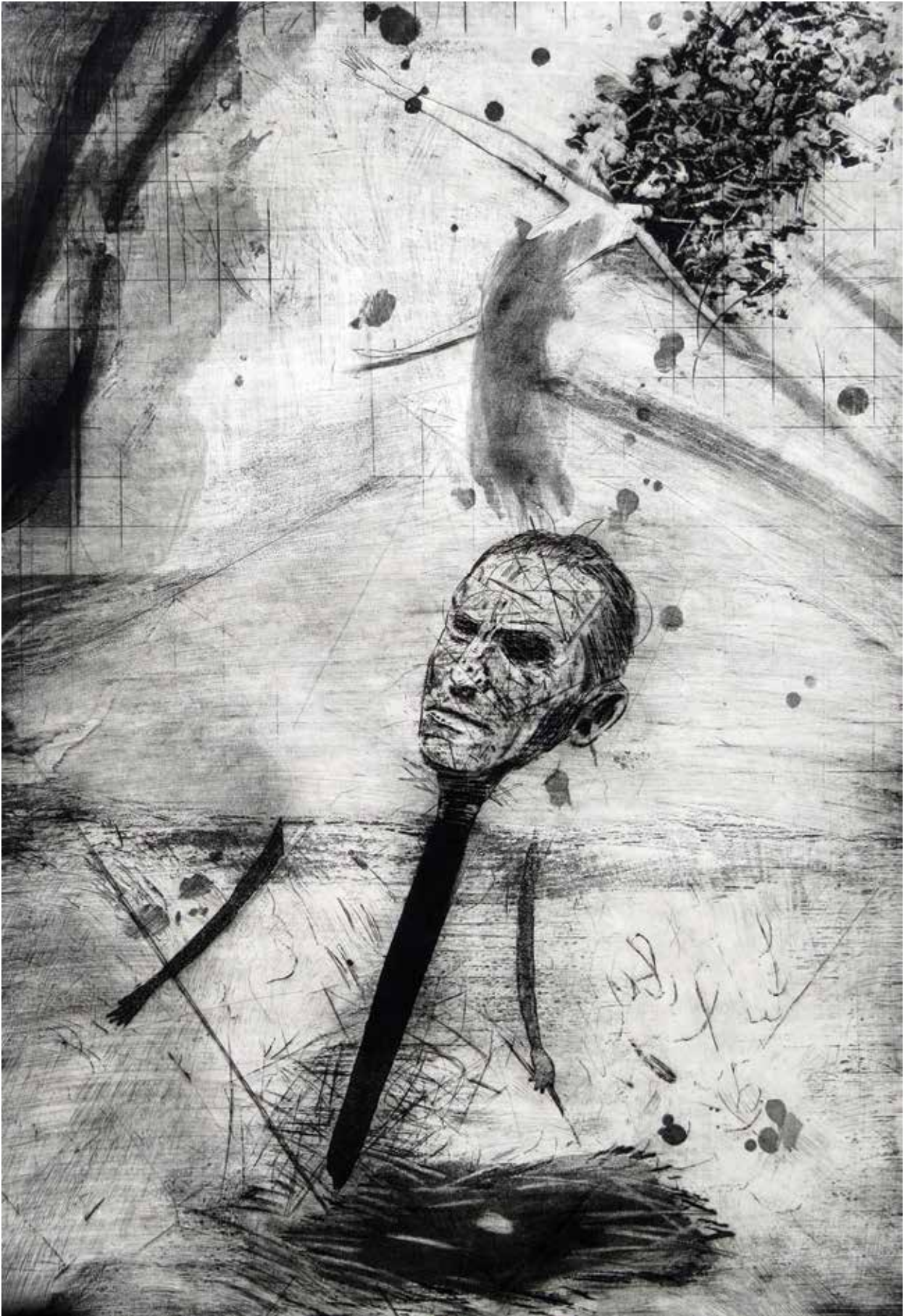
Facts of Fictions 17 Powerheads (of War) 1994



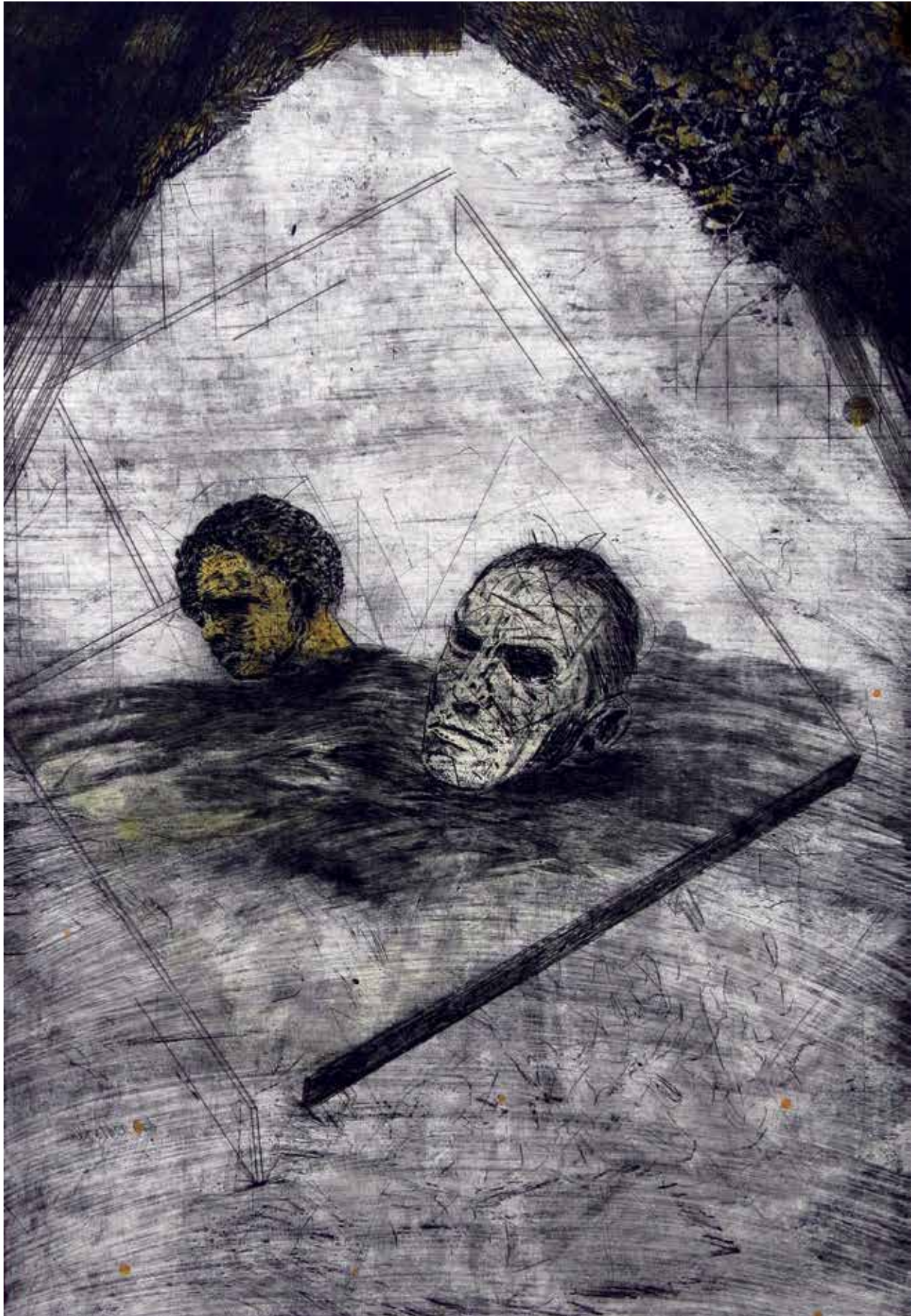
Facts of Fictions 18 Powerheads (of War) 1994



Facts of Fictions 19 Powerheads (of War) 1994



Facts of Fictions 20 Powerheads (of War) 1994



Facts of Fictions 21 Powerheads (of War) 1994



Facts of Fictions 22 Powerheads (of War) 1994

Facts of Fictions 23-27
Left, Right and Below
1995





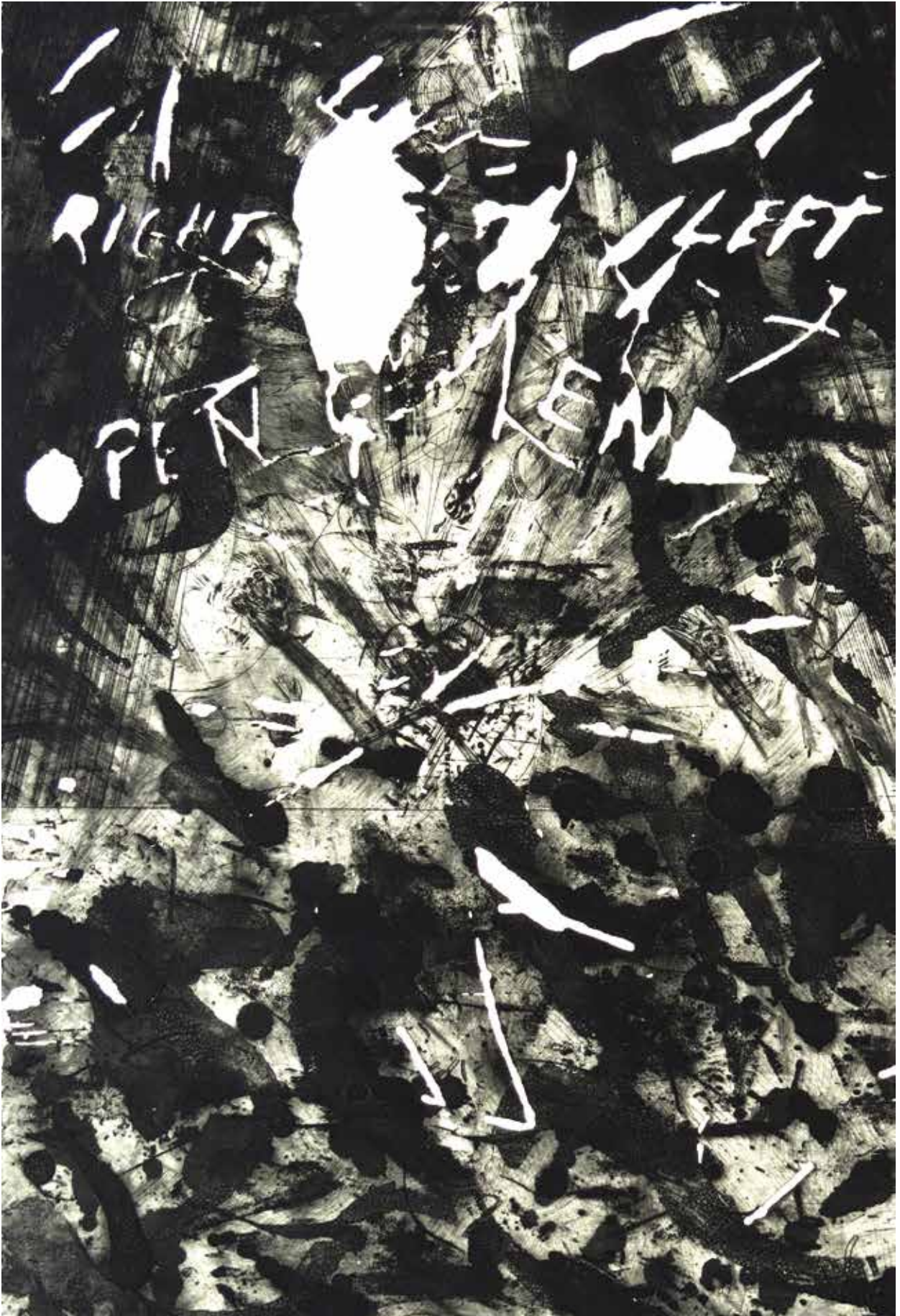
Facts of Fictions 23 Left, Right and Below 1995



Facts of Fictions 24 Left, Right and Below 1995



Facts of Fictions 25 Left, Right and Below 1995



Facts of Fictions 26 Left, Right and Below 1995



Facts of Fictions 27 Left, Right and Below 1995

