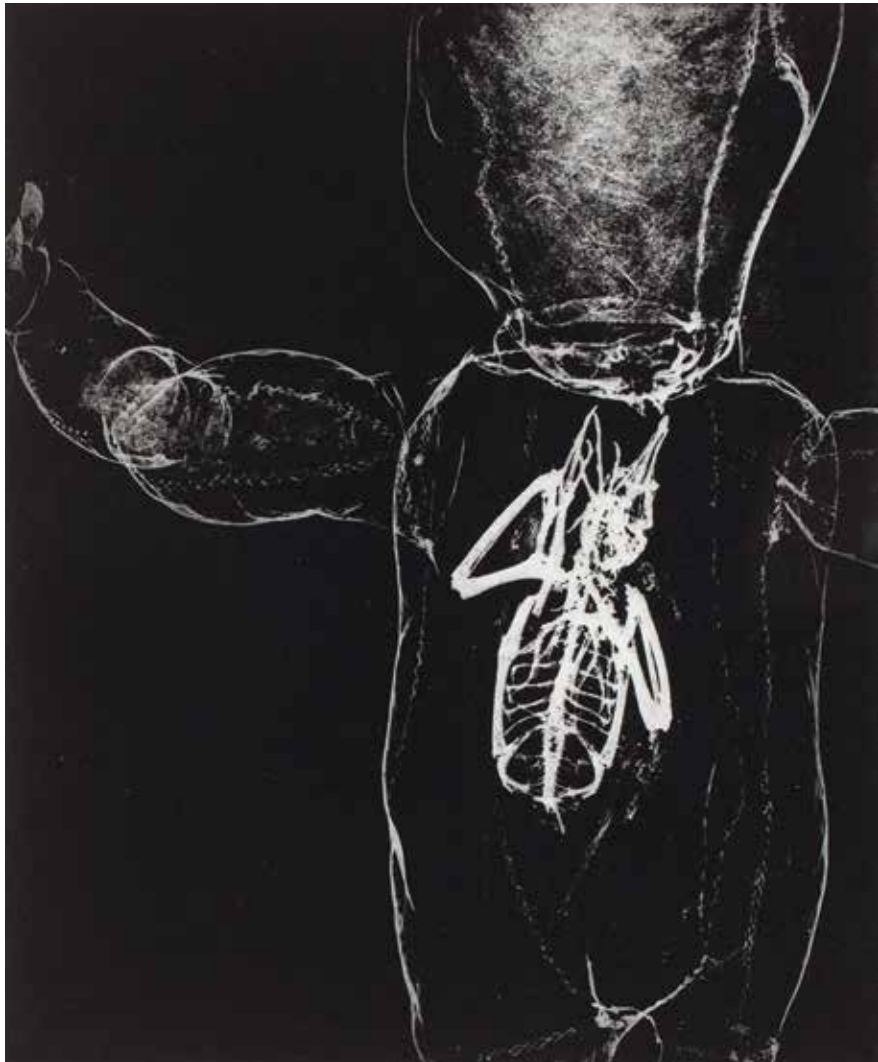


**Rosemarie  
Marriott  
skimmeryk**



## The Heart of the Matter

Wilhelm van Rensburg

*Did you know that at one time live birds were put into the hollow bodies of dolls instead of stuffing? The frantic efforts of these helpless and terrified little creatures to free themselves gave the doll the appearance of being alive, or driven by clockwork, and was a distinguishing form of entertainment which amused adults and children alike. (Hutchings, 1963:111)*



The notion of a 'live' doll with a beating heart is quite audacious in an age where almost everything exists as one or other form of representation. The memetic quality of such an object is quite staggering. Rosemarie Marriott gets to the heart of the matter; so to speak, in her new body of work, which comprises of polymer etchings, polymer etching plates and sculptural dolls. Prompted by a strong attachment to a rag doll made by her mother when she was a young girl, she relates the story of how a sibling beat the doll into 'submission', allegedly for being naughty, and breaking one of the legs in the process. Afterwards, Marriott could never look at the doll in the same way. In her current body of work she embarked on sculpting doll-like figures, often executed in animal parchment, sometimes with their

heads modelled out of the dried scrotums of antelope. In one of them she happened to insert the carcass of a dead bird she had found in her garden. Marriott then x-rayed these sculpted dolls. The graphic quality of the x-rays (literally, the 'host of ghost images', as the title of her exhibition, *skimmeryk*, suggests in Afrikaans) prompted her to develop the images onto a series of polymer etchings.

Dolls, in folk tradition, are often made of a vast array of natural materials, ranging from seed pods, to corn cobs, maize ears, palm pulp, hammered bark, pine combs, acorns, chestnuts, dried plums, plant roots, raffia and cork. In some West African cultures, dried meat is moulded into the shapes of dolls, which are then covered in real fur (Kandert, 1992).

Dolls are often used in traditional cultures as fertility symbols. They are connected with the religious aspect of social life. The stylized wooden dolls with round, disc-like heads from the Ashanti of Ghana, for example, are used to protect young girls from evil, due to their alleged supernatural powers. Besides this, their appearance was to have inculcated a sense of beauty. During games, however, they were used like ordinary toys. These figures were also symbols of fertility and were worn for luck by pregnant women (Nel, 1998).

Front cover (detail): *gefladder 1* (see p5)

Right: Doll made for Rosemarie by her mother



gefladder  
2012 –14  
tanned antelope skin  
found bird  
550X440X105mm

An interesting transition occurs when some traditional cultures appropriate modern dolls, such as the ubiquitous mass produced, store-bought, plastic Barbie doll (white), and adorn it with traditional beadwork clothes, such as the *Abandwana* dolls from the Ndebele in South Africa. These dolls serve as surrogate 'children' for young women during puberty, but they also speak of modernity, especially the body shape of the Barbie doll that embodies notions of western stereotypes of the ideal, modern woman (Nettleton, Charlton and Rankin-Smith, 2002: 72).

How very different are Marriott's doll sculptures. By comparison they are fragile, fetus-like, almost pre-symbolic in nature. They seem to have been untimely plucked from the womb. In an astonishing conceit Marriott likens the heads made of the dried antelope scrotums, to the ability to generate semen, which in turn, conceives life. Their heads become the seat of life, so to speak, not their genitals.

The image of the carcass of a dead bird in the chest cavity of one of these dolls, is equally compelling. The heart is a bird, but a dead one at that. I am reminded of one of the fairy tales of Oscar Wilde, *The Birthday of the Infanta* (1891). A dwarf is brought to court to amuse the Spanish princess on her special day. She and her royal play mates laugh at his deformity, but he takes it as a form of compliment, until he sees his own face in a mirror and realizes that he has all along been mocked. He dies of a broken heart. Upon learning the news, the *Infanta* haughtily says: "For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts."

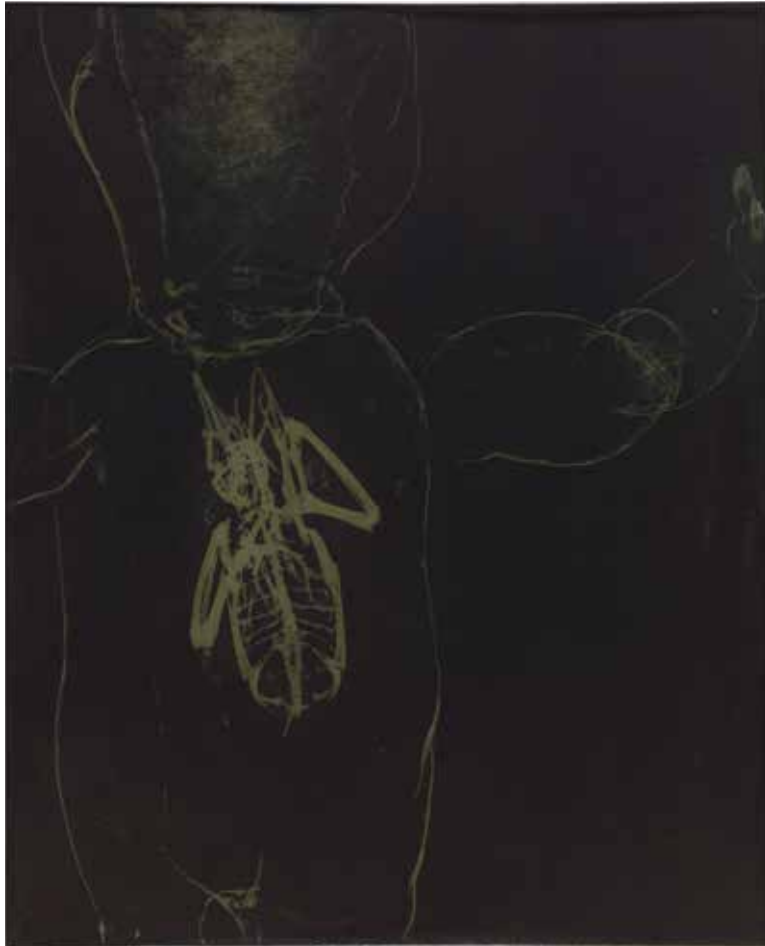
The doll, as a symbol, appears more often in psycho-pathology than in main stream traditional symbolism. The patient makes a doll which is kept carefully hidden, his/her personality being projected into the toy. The heart, the essence of the doll, however, seems more pertinent in Marriott's case. In traditional ways of thought, the heart was taken as the true seat of intelligence, the brain being merely instrumental. All representations of the 'Centre' have been related in some way or another to the heart, either through correspondences or through substitution, as in the case of the chest cavity of her dolls. Laying bare the heart, whether in the form of a dead bird or a small animal carcass, seems to be an act of immense courage. Marriott's fragile creatures are then about courage in the end.

Hutchings, M. 1963 *Dolls and how to make them*. Mills & Boon Ltd.

Kandert, J. 1992 *The World of Toys: The Fascinating History of Folk Toys*. Hamlyn.

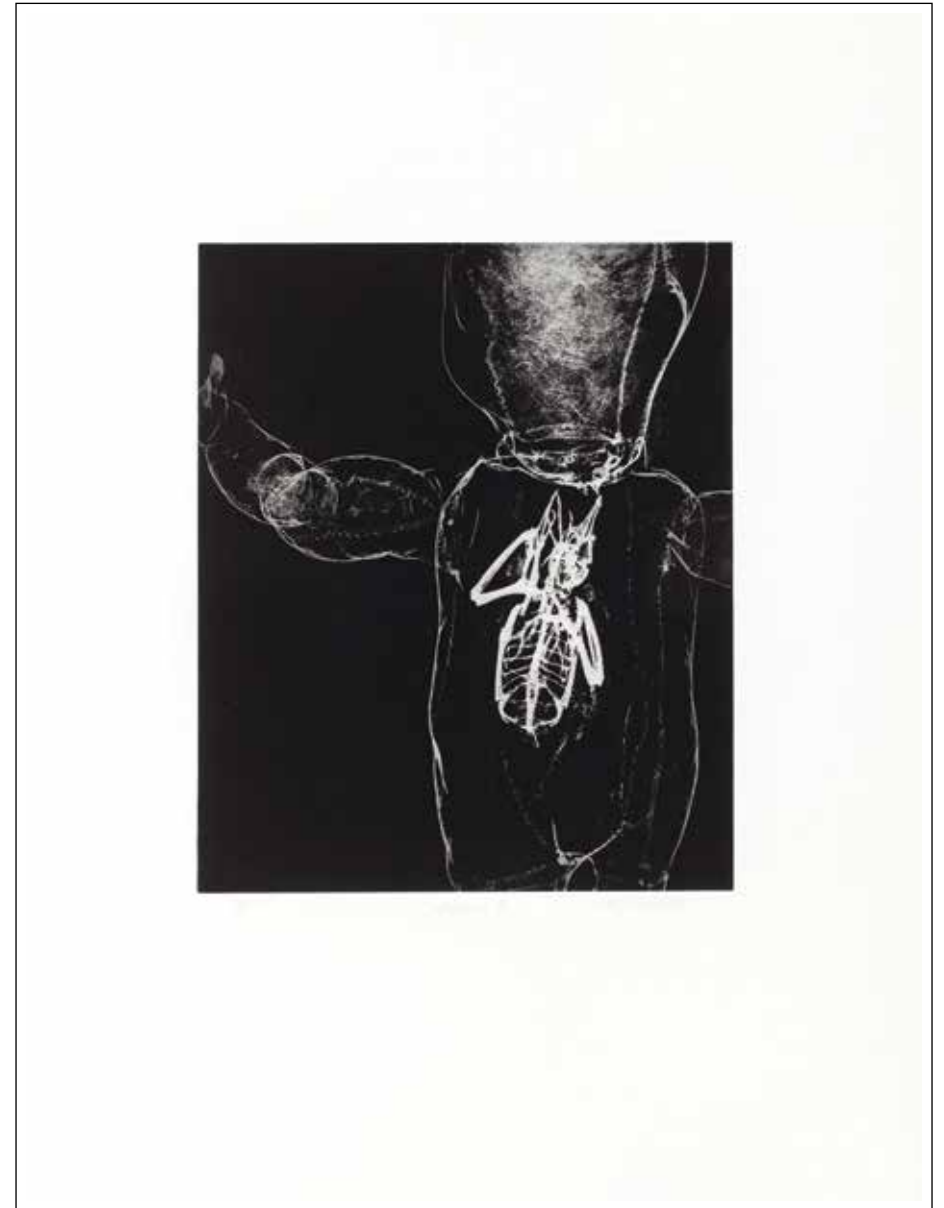
Nel, K. 1998 *Evocations of the Child: Fertility figures of the southern African region*. Human & Rousseau.

Nettleton, A., Charlton, J. & Rankin-Smith, F. 2002 *Engaging Modernities: Transformations of the Commonplace*. Wits Art Museum.



polymer etching plate

Right: *gefladder 1*  
 2015  
 polymer etching edition 3  
 650X500mm



*geheim 3*  
2014  
tanned antelope skin  
380X110X70mm

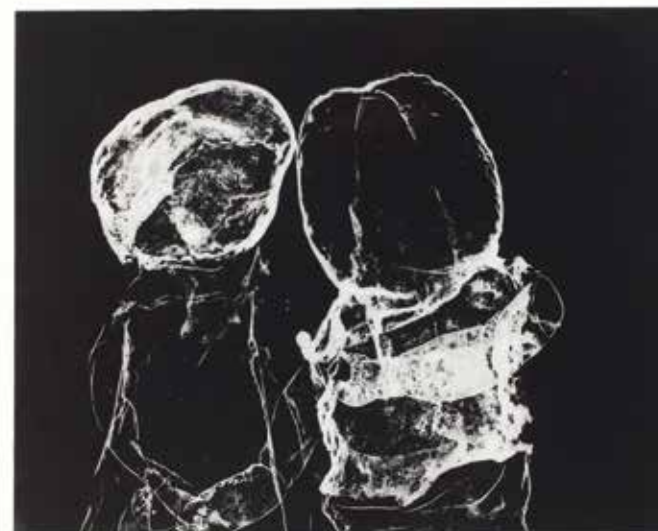




*geheim 1*  
2014  
tanned antelope skin  
380X110X70mm

*geheim 2*  
2014  
tanned antelope skin  
355X190X115mm

Right: *geheim*  
2015  
polymer etching edition 3  
650X500mm



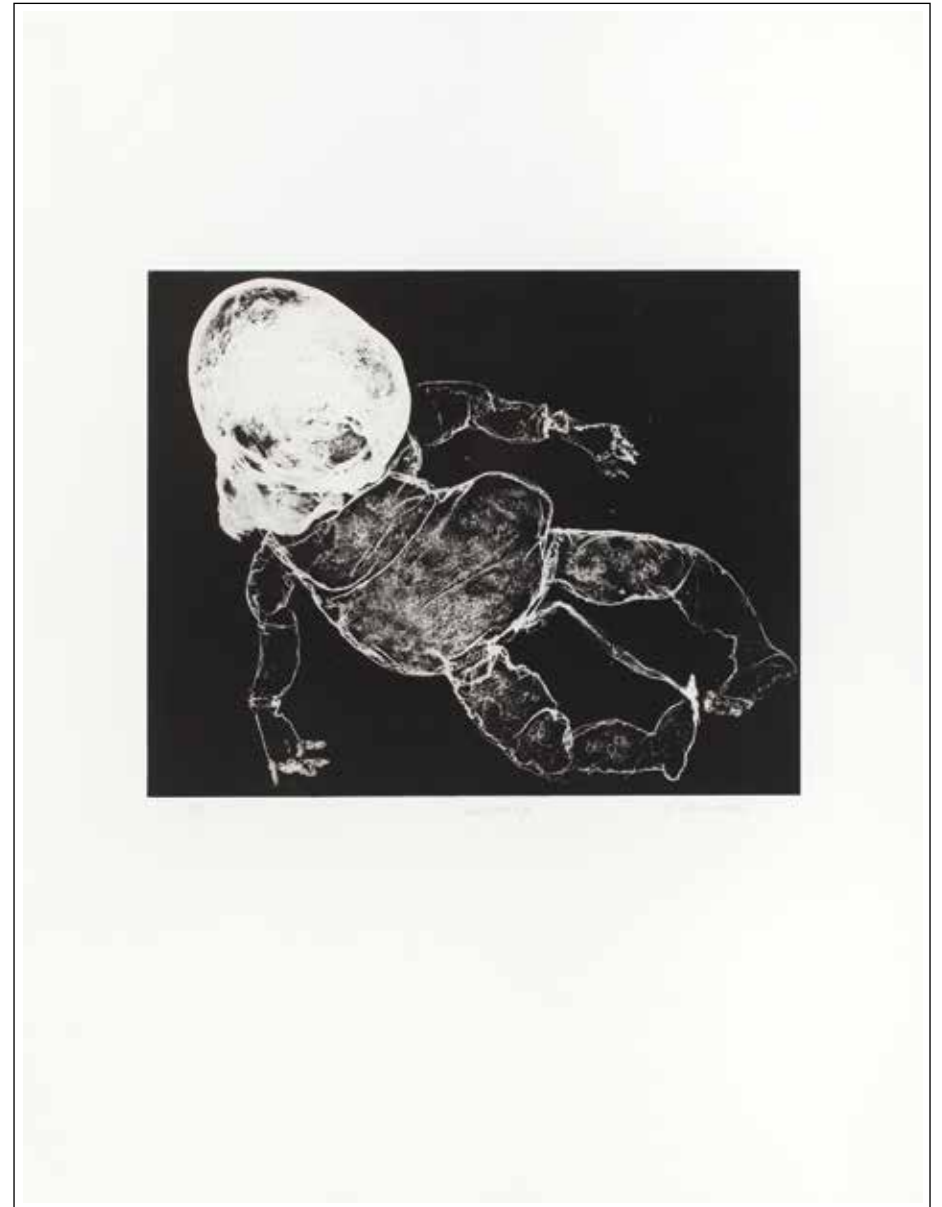


polymer etching plate



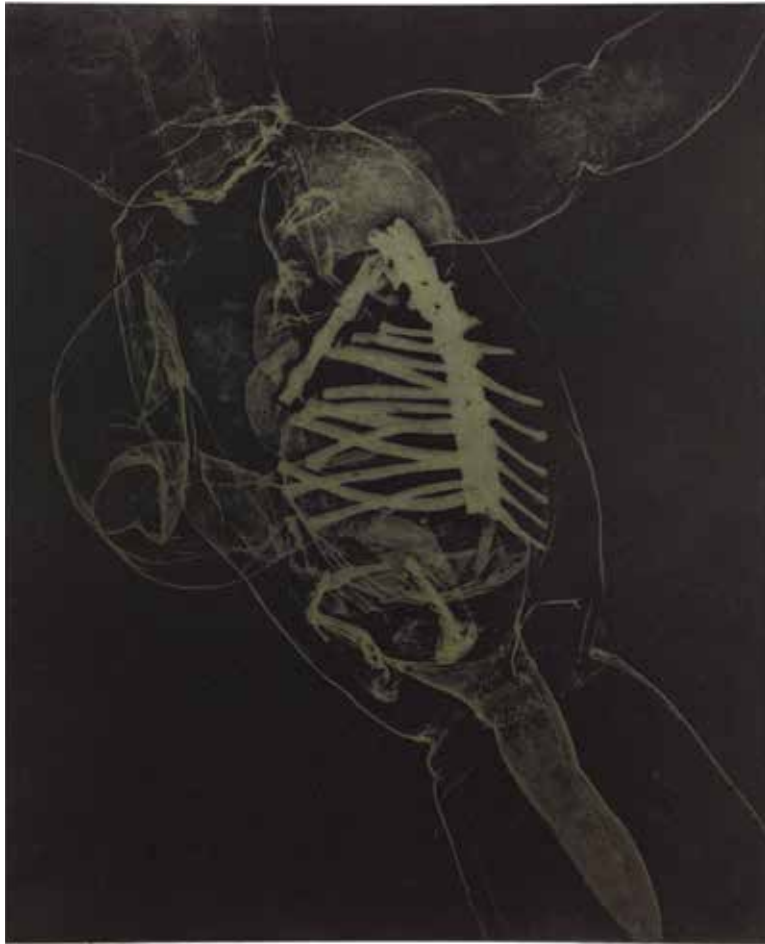
Left: *eiesoortig*  
2014  
tanned antelope skin  
280X170X110mm

Right: *eiesoortig*  
2015  
polymer etching edition 3  
650X500mm



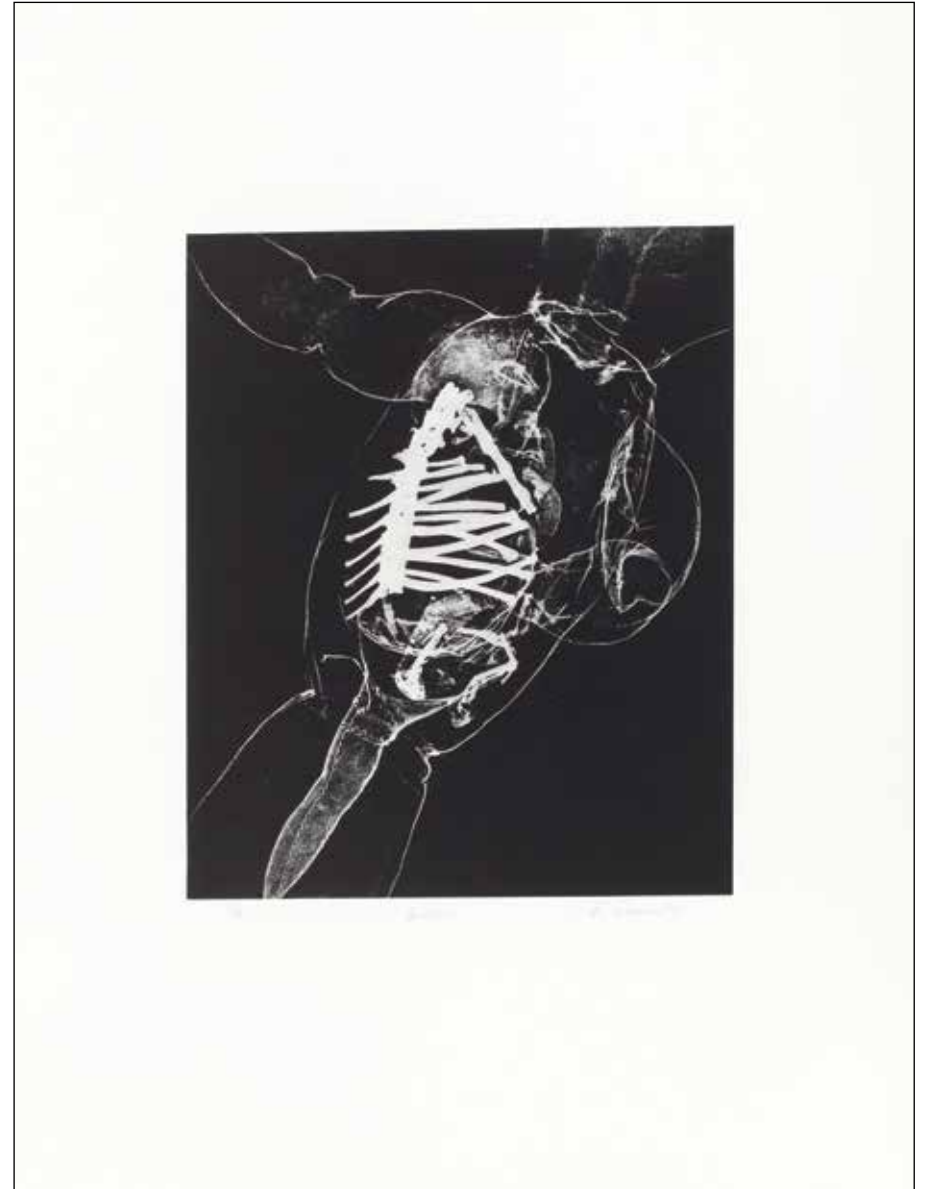
*vervreemd*  
2014  
tanned antelope skin  
290X1700X100mm





polymer etching plate

Right: *beskerm*  
 2015  
 polymer etching edition 3  
 650X500mm





polymer etching plate

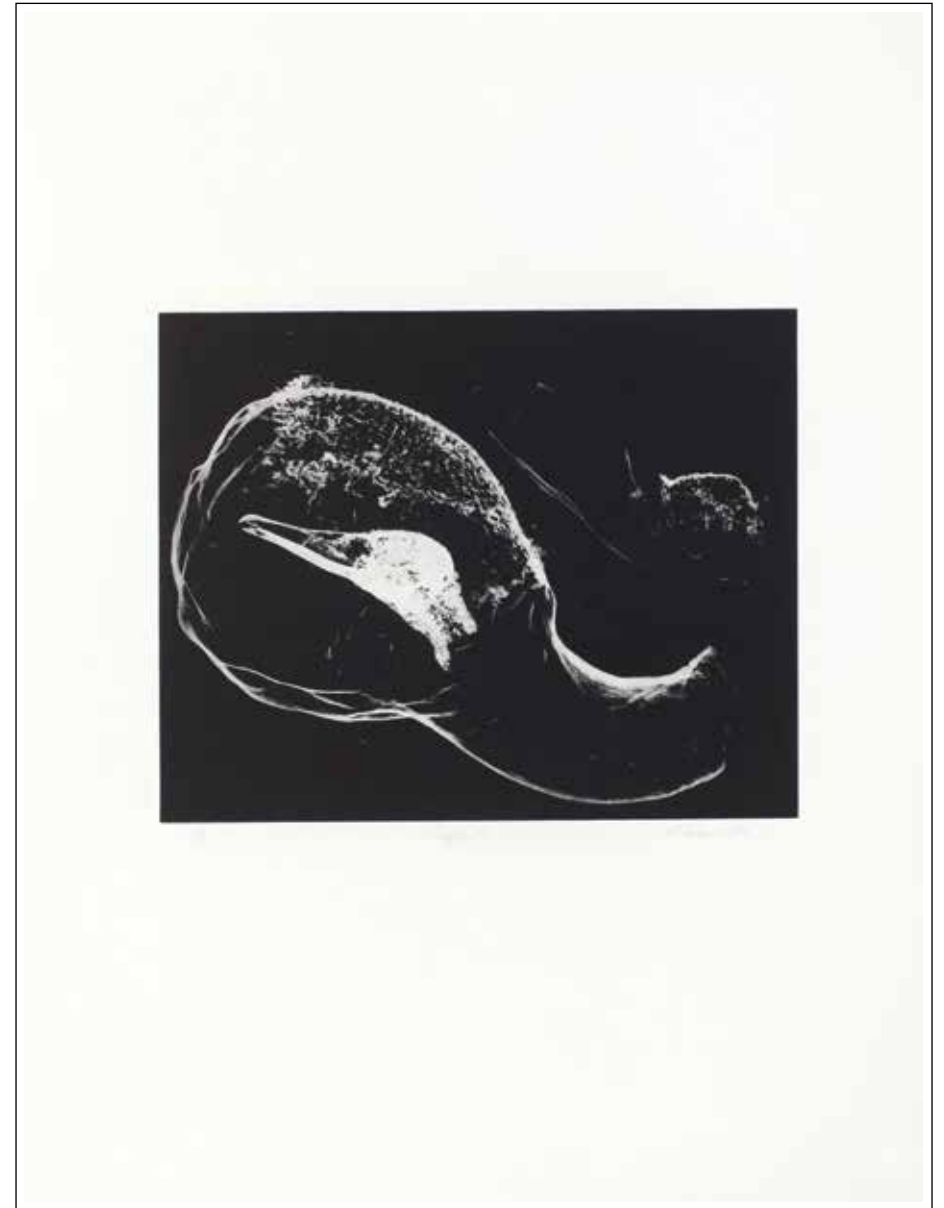
Right: vloed 2  
2015  
polymer etching edition 3  
650X500mm





objects used for *ingeperk*

Right: *ingeperk*  
2015  
polymer etching edition 1  
650X500mm



Rosemarie Marriott was born and grew up on a farm in the Kuruman district, Northern Cape, South Africa. She obtained a BA Degree from UNISA (1974) and an Advanced Diploma (Fine Arts) from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (1996).

Marriott has had numerous solo exhibitions since 1986 (the most recent, a travelling exhibition, titled *relaas...* (Oliewenhuis Art Museum, Bloemfontein, North West University Gallery, Potchefstroom, William Humphreys Art Gallery, Kimberley, KZNSA Gallery, Durban and UNISA Art Gallery, Pretoria, all during 2012), and has also participated in group exhibitions (the most recent ones being *This Place/Displace*, UJ Art Gallery, Johannesburg, 2012, *Exhibition of South African Artists* at Espace Cultural "l'Hermine" in Sarzean-Bretagne, France, 2012, and the ABSA group show at the KKNK, Oudtshoorn, 2015). Her work can be found in private, public and corporate collections in South Africa (notably Pretoria Art Museum and Johannesburg Art Gallery) and abroad. She has published many catalogues about her work, and her art is discussed in academic journals such as *de arte* (November 2010) and *Art South Africa* 06(01), 2007. *skimmeryk* is her second solo show at GALLERY AOP.

The polymer etchings were printed by Fiona Pole, the atelier, Johannesburg

This exhibition accompanies the exhibition *skimmeryk* by Rosemarie Marriott at GALLERY AOP, May/June 2015

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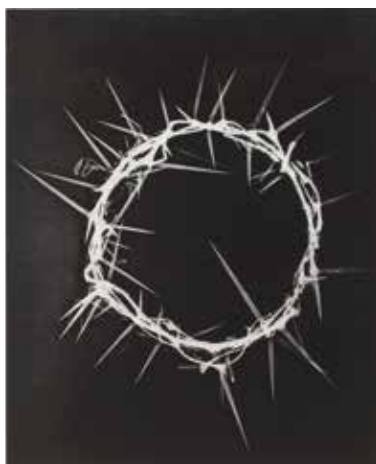
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GALLERY AOP, 44 Stanley Avenue, Braamfontein Werf (Milpark),  
Johannesburg, South Africa

info@galleryaop.com www.galleryaop.com



*versugting* 2015  
polymer etching edition 1 650X500mm



*afwesig*  
2015  
polymer etching edition 1  
650X500mm