

# FINDING THE SUBLIME

Fiona Hamilton

It is hard to put into words the impact that studying MA Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking has made on my practice. Conceptually and creatively, my work has been taken to a new level. My confidence in my own work and ideas has increased dramatically, and I have learned so much and grown as an artist in an intense but enjoyable year and a half.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

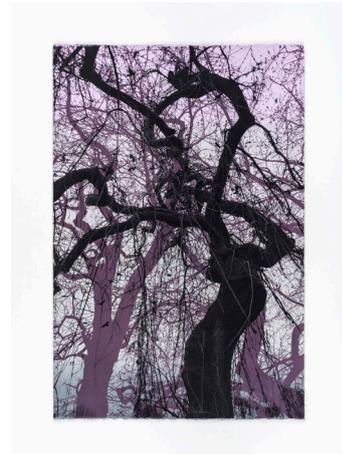


Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure titles and information:

- Figure 1: Colony of Black Headed Gulls, screen print, 2020
- Figure 2: Harbour Gulls, screen print, 2021
- Figure 3: Branches (purple), screen print, 2021
- Figure 4: Branches (gold), screen print, 2021
- Figure 5: Robin, screen printed laser cut wood decoration, 2019

**PRE-MA**

I had a commercial creative practice before the MA, with a fairly graphic outlook. I used a lot of drawings in my prints that were mostly screen printed featuring bright colours and halftone graphics. My subject matter leaned towards the natural. I graduated in 2002 with a Graphic Fine Art degree and a couple of years later I opened a gallery (Soma Gallery) and shop space with a focus on graphic art, printmaking and paper items. This style and the artists I worked with probably influenced my own practice until I started the MA. Photography has always been a big part of my work and I would use my photographs to make my prints, either as reference material or as the artwork (Fig. 1-5)

**DURING THE MA**

One of my aims when starting the MA was to learn as much as I could about as many processes as I could. Running a printmaking business for almost 20 years has meant I know a lot about and am keen to know more about print. Although one of the tutors warned me against this approach, it didn't really stop me (Fig. 6-7). I did, however, listen to the tutors about my own conceptual development. They nudged me towards making work about literature which, as it turned out, was a great way to give me the structure that I needed.

Etching was a process that I discovered suited my drawing style quite early on in the MA, particularly drypoint. Another was wood engraving. I made a series of etchings and engravings based on Aesops Fables after exploring the mythology of birds which have featured in my own practice quite heavily. I also made work featuring trees which are a regular feature of my photography (Fig. 8-12).

Sarah Bodman made me really question my interest in these themes and what I was trying to say, while at the same time to be less process led, "think about the why, not the how". This, and the way she would push me to question my ideas further, is something that has stayed with me.

I spent a lot of time experimenting with processes, questioning what I was doing and why I was doing it. I didn't deviate away from natural themes, I stayed within a fairly narrow focus to help me to understand my interest. What was I saying or questioning with my work: am I responding to environmental issues, an appreciation of nature, the change of the seasons? What was I interested in and why? (Fig. 13-14)

I found the research essay very helpful. My work was beginning to lean towards the concept of the sublime via landscapes and natural subject matter. Investigating the links between these and how contemporary artists used the sublime drew me towards the environmental sublime also known as the eco-sublime. This answered some of my questions and gave me a focus. I discovered a lot of artists who were working in and around this area, and began to look at how the modern version of the sublime, which incorporates the environmental sublime, differs from the original romantic version.



Figure 6



Figure 7

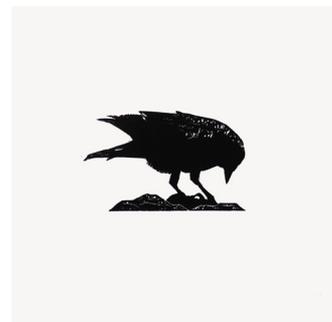


Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 6: Print Faster, letterpress, 2022  
 Figure 7: Foxgloves, stone litho and letterpress, 2022  
 Figure 8: Pecking Jackdaw, wood engraving, 2022  
 Figure 9: The Shabbiest Possible Mouse, wood engraving, 2022

I realised that making work directly about climate change and eco-terror or guilt wasn't necessarily something I wanted to do. I wanted to balance this with something more positive. This line of research introduced me to Suzanne Simard and her book 'Finding The Mother Tree'.

This book details her discovery of the ectomycorrhizal fungal network under the forest floor, the 'wood-wide-web' connecting individual trees, protecting seedlings from infection and trading water and other nutrients. Thanks to Simard's research, some policy has changed for the better and though cautious, she offers the potential for positive change through knowledge.

My intention for this body of work was to evoke the concept of the sublime to make us consider our place in relation to the natural world and the importance of mature mother trees in healthy eco-systems. The use of dark colours and warm tones, along with layering and highly detailed mark making, give an ethereal and occasionally a slightly unnerving sense. Use of chine collé with Japanese tissues can give a faintly shiny or almost glowing effect, along with the use of earth tones and metallic pigments to enhance and to add depth (Fig. 15-19).

## POST MA

Since finishing the MA I have exhibited my work in a number of open exhibitions and galleries. I have been a member of Spike Print Studio for several years so am lucky to be able to return and make the most of the facilities there. I have led demonstrations and workshops, and given talks on printmaking and professional practice.

I have continued to make work based on Simard's 'Finding The Mother Tree'. I have also continued to look to literature for inspiration. Two important texts that I have followed 'Finding The Mother Tree' with are 'Entangled Life' by Merlin Sheldrake and 'Underland' by Robert MacFarlane. I am currently working on a large etching incorporating themes from 'Underland'.

There are a lot of crossovers between these three books. MacFarlane has a chapter in 'Underland' featuring Merlin Sheldrake and his work, who discusses Simard's theory in both this chapter and his own book, 'Entangled Life'. Similarly, there are many thematic and subject matter connections with these books and many of the artists working within the environmental sublime, bringing to mind the connectedness of 'The Wood Wide Web'.

## REFERENCES

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Macfarlane, R. (2019) *Underland* [online]. London: Penguin. Available from:



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

Figure 10: Noctua, etching, 2022  
 Figure 11: Mortus, etching, 2022  
 Figure 12: Corvus Monedula, drypoint etching with monoprint detail, 2021  
 Figure 13: Pine Crown, drypoint, 2022

<https://r2.vlereader.com/EpubReader?ean=1780241146422> [Accessed 09 January 2023].

Sheldrake, M. (2020) *Entangled Life* [online]. London: Vintage Digital. Available from: <https://www.vlebooks.com/Product/Index/2162050?page=0> [Accessed: 09 January 2023].

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## AUTHOR

### Fiona Hamilton

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Fiona Hamilton is a Bristol based printmaker. Her work explores the ecological sublime and an appreciation of the majesty of nature. She uses detailed intaglio etching along with lithographic printing and chine collé to draw the viewer into an ethereal landscape that has an impact on our sense of place in relation to the natural world.

She uses primarily black and white with natural tones of chine collé, and sometimes layers of lithographic texture to introduce warmth to the stark palette. She works from on-site sketches, photographs, notes and memory to create her prints.

Fiona has an MA in Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking from The University of the West of England (2023). Previously she studied Graphic Fine Art at Canterbury (2002) and established Soma Gallery in 2004. Fiona exhibits regularly in open exhibitions and sells her work through a number of galleries in the UK. She works from Spike Print Studio.



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 18



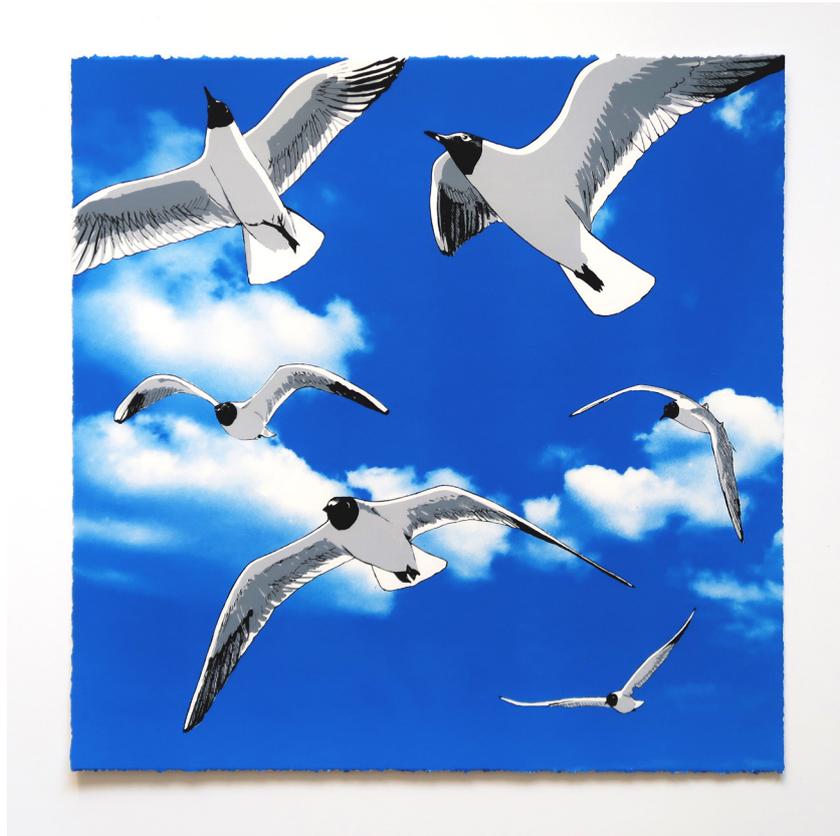
Figure 19



Figure 17

Figure 14: Sycamore in Autumn, drypoint with chine collé, 2022  
 Figure 15: Autumn Light, drypoint with litho printed chine collé, 2022. Photographed by Jo Hounsome.  
 Figure 16: Autumn Pine, drypoint with chine collé, 2022. Photographed by Jo Hounsome.  
 Figure 17: Greville Smyth Cedar, drypoint with chine collé, 2022. Photographed by Jo Hounsome.  
 Figure 18: Greville Smyth Pine, drypoint with chine collé, 2022. Photographed by Jo Hounsome.  
 Figure 19: Winter Chestnut, drypoint, 2023. Photographed by Jo Hounsome.

IMAGE GALLERY

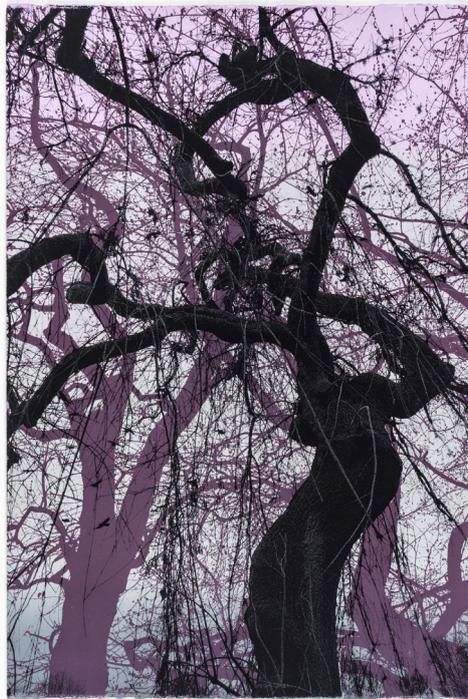
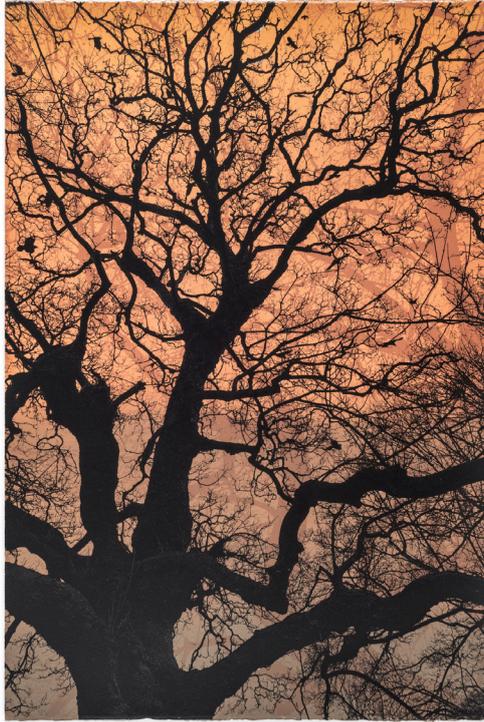


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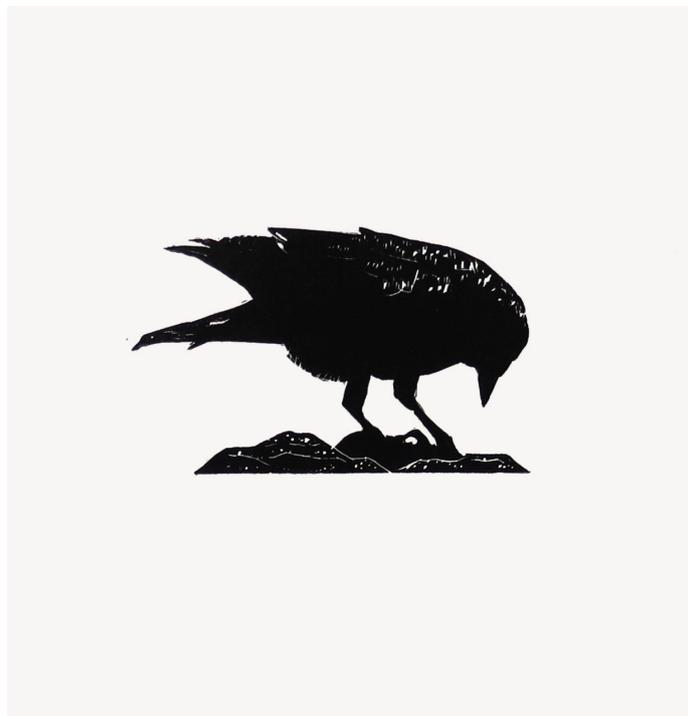
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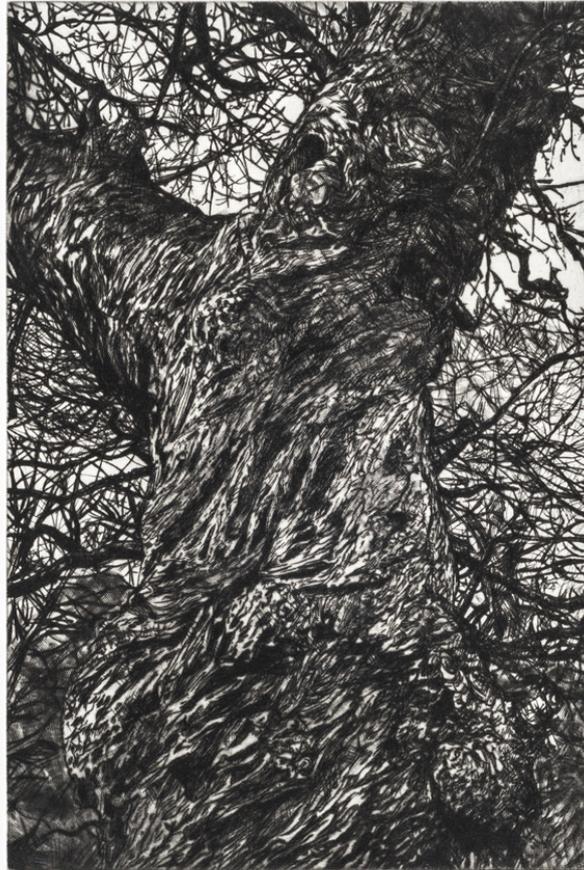
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Figure 18: Greville Smyth Pine, drypoint with chine collé, 2022.



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'Winter Chestnut'

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Figure 19: Winter Chestnut, drypoint, 2023