

Flying High

ARTIST'S EYE Leonie Bradley interviews Kirsten van Schreven about her enigmatic drypoints, which won the *Printmaking Today* prize at the National Original Print Exhibition

LB What was the inspiration for your print *Airframe V*?

KS I am fascinated by the iconography of war and often use original wartime photographs for my inspiration. I find these stark, spectral images haunting and evocative, and I try to capture their particular luminescence, atmosphere and quality of light. My work is influenced by the traces and iconic images associated with conflict, from the abandoned radar installations of the Second World War, inspiring my series of *Array* drypoints, to the skeletal and architecturally aesthetic frameworks of partially built airships for my *Airframe* series and U-Boats for my *The Weight Of Water* series.

LB What is it in particular that attracted you to the airships?

KS *Airframe V* is based on several drawings I made from original photographs of the airships Graf Zeppelin, Hindenburg and USS Macon under construction. I was intrigued by these aircraft in particular as their seemingly frail structures navigate under such high external pressures. I also love their feeling of scale – they appear monumental yet are structurally fragile and constrained within the confines of their hangars, anchored by networks of scaffolding and ladders.

LB Much of your work shows a preoccupation with war.

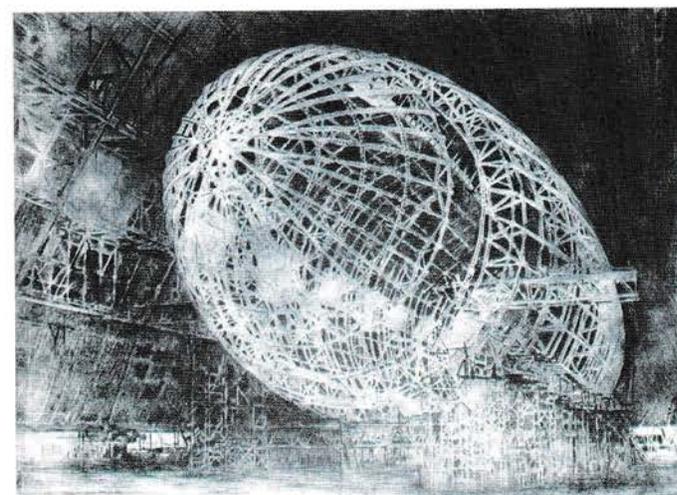
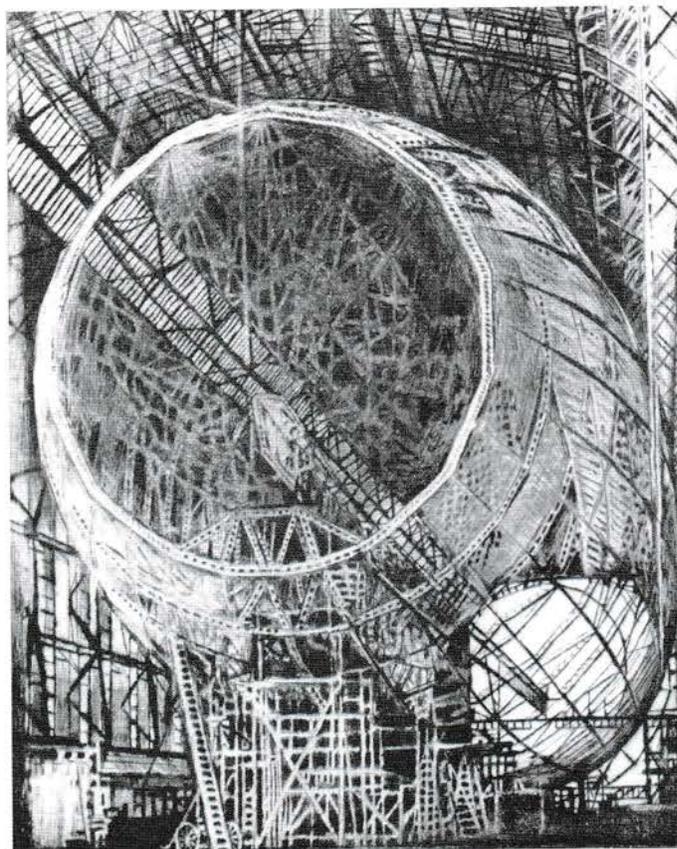
KS My life has been measured in conflict and war. I grew up in the latter part of the twentieth century in the shadow of the Cold War and its constant threat of nuclear conflict, I.R.A bombing campaigns, the Falklands War, the two Gulf Wars and the current 'War on Terror'. Within my own immediate family my maternal great grandfather would never speak of his time in the trenches of the First World War and my paternal grandfather died in a POW camp in Germany in 1944. My Dutch father survived the German occupation and the infamous Hongerwinter of 1944-45 in the occupied Western Netherlands. His earliest memories are of Lancaster bombers flying low over his town of Den Helder in April 1945. However, instead of being on a bombing run they dropped nearly 7,000 tonnes of food in a ten day period over that part of Holland as part of Operation Manna, saving my father's life. This family history and the fact that without the iconic Lancaster I wouldn't be here inspired my very first drypoint *Fourteen Days*, exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition 2016.

LB Drawing obviously plays an important role in your work.

KS My first love is drawing. I've always drawn – as a child I would be found in corners quietly sketching away. I love how much drawing directly relates to the process of printmaking. I find that working directly onto a plate using the drypoint technique gives me a full range of different marks and tonal qualities that enable me to translate my ideas and images into prints.

LB When did you start printmaking?

KS I originally discovered the joy of printmaking as an undergraduate painting student at Maidstone College of Art in the late Eighties. I rapidly moved away from painting and transferred to the excellent Printmaking department led by Mike Birtchnell, where I laid the foundations for my love of etching, and the drypoint technique in particular. I went on to complete a Masters Degree in Printmaking



at Chelsea School of Art under the guidance of the late Tim Mara, mostly working on monochromatic woodcuts and subdued, atmospheric monotypes.

LB What are you working on at the moment?

KS My work continues to move on from the previous series and I am currently proofing two new sets of drypoints – small ordnance icons entitled *Parabellum* and *Still Life*. These explore colour for the first time, using neon pinks and blues and applied gold and silver leaf and have become more personally symbolic in their theme of constricted power and contained pressure. I feel that although these two series are much smaller and less monumental than the earlier prints, they are far more private and intense.

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Work can be seen at Southbank Printmakers, Gabriel's Wharf

Images

Airframe I (2017) Drypoint etching, 260 x 210 mm

Airframe V (2017) Drypoint etching, 300 x 400 mm