

THESIS

HOODOO AND THE LAW: MOSTLY PRINTED WORKS

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

HOODOO AND THE LAW: MOSTLY PRINTED WORKS

This paper discusses the relationship of ideas to their media, through the relationship of contents to a book and through the use of aesthetic barriers. The conceptual content of the artworks produced center around epistemological self-betterment and practical mysticism. I discuss in this paper my thought process, the work itself, and the works intended functions. I discuss the idea of the book and my rationale behind working in printmaking.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii.
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv.
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1.
2. STATEMENT ABOUT THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE WORK.....	2.
2.1 THE BOOK.....	2.
2.2 THE FIRST FOUR WORKS.....	3.
2.3 THE REST OF THE WORKS.....	6.
3. WHY PRINTMAKING.....	7.
4. THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRINTING AND BOOKS WITH CONCLUDING THOUGHTS.....	9.
PORTFOLIO OF IMAGES.....	11.
P1. MAIN PORTFOLIO.....	12.
P2. SELECTION OF IMAGES TAKEN FROM THE BOOKS.....	22.
P3. SELECTION OF RELEVANT PAST IMAGES.....	25.
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	26.

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES 1-3.THE GRAND LIE.....	12.
FIGURES 4-6 THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SHED SKIN.....	13.
FIGURES 7-8. MYTHOS.....	14.
FIGURES 9-12 THE LAW.....	15.
FIGURE 13. HOODOO #1 (FRIENDS FOREVER BOUND TOGETHER).....	16.
FIGURE 14. HOODOO #2 (JUST LIKE ANIMALS).....	16.
FIGURE 15. HOODOO#3 (WE BROUGHT YOU TO THE CLOUD KINGDOM [...]).....	17.
FIGURES 16-17. HOODOO#4 (RETIERING A POPPET).....	18.
FIGURES 18-19. HOODOO#5 (VICE TRAPS).....	19.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a similarity between the contemporary notion of the archetypal artist and the archetypal monk. Both function in communities of like-minded individuals, both are devotees of the ideological variety, and both submit to practice for the sake of practice. The focus of this research entails my attempt to understand this similarity by focusing my practice on epistemological self-betterment and practical mysticism¹. In this paper I will discuss the conceptualization and the methodology of my thinking, my choice in media and the media's implied relationships.

Previous to the project presented in this thesis, I was working in a decidedly more technical and literal manner. For example in the Lithograph series *Nine Views of the Holy Mountain* (see relevant past work section of portfolio), the imagery is clearly defined to a point where the work almost shouts at the viewer with a very stoic sort of sermon. The subject matter I am dealing with in my work is lofty by nature and it's easy to crutch on that loftiness. In order to get around this didactic almost condescending feeling and to avoid relying on purposive subject matter, I needed to pull away from concrete imagery.

This led to a string of aesthetic decisions such as the inclusion of abstract and non-representational modes of exploration, and reactionary thinking in terms of methodology. The idea of representation was not lost, however it is used more sparingly, and in conjunction with purely material visual experience.

¹ Epistemological self-betterment and practical mysticism: a description of the endeavor to expand and develop my understanding of the limitations of my singular perspective in relationship to how I interact with the world and with people; and the tools I use to attempt this such as meditation or making things.

2. STATEMENT ABOUT THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE WORKS

When approaching new work I begin a strategic conversation. First and foremost for work to occur there needs to be a stream of consciousness. The stream of ideas is then simplified into a line of logic, which is a small group of ideas that soundly or unsoundly make sense in some way. The logic line (group of connected ideas) is what ends up being the content depicted or alluded to in the final object. The logic doesn't have to be deeply meaningful or highly complicated. It is often better that it isn't either of those things. Second, I need to be able to see the thing, meaning at least one part of the logic line must be visually understandable or make a reference to current or potential reality.

Lastly, the strategy and tactics for delivering the logic line are conceived. The work presented here employs an aggressive stall strategy. There are multiple blockades and obstacles planted in the work that serve to slow down the process of viewing the work. The slower the process of viewing the work the longer the work has for making its case or leaving an impression. There are multiple tactics attempted, including the book as a presentation format, the subversion of the multiple, stacking metaphors, and the insertion of nonsense to create this idealized post-modern viewer generated meaning.

2.1 The Book

The book can function as a multifaceted symbol for information, and for ideas of sharing and hiding. The book shares information with the person who opens and reads it; at the same time, the book hides information from the person who does not open the book. This makes the book unique with respect to other visual art forms that project constantly and openly into a room. The book then must be handled with a different mindset; it presents multiple opportunities. Books have the capacity for linking groups of works, intentional sequencing and pacing among other things, all of which are taken advantage of in the works presented herein.

The book, as a format, has an inherent occult-ness.² The book format acts as a barrier. It serves this function in two ways: an initial visual wall the viewer can only pass by opening the cover; and a request of effort and restraint on the part of the viewer in dealing with the presentation of the pages inside one at a time, giving important due process to each one and their order. It's an act of hiding and a plea for discovery.

The book, when viewed in this regard, can be considered a metaphor for occult material. That metaphor was the launching point for this work. It allowed me a way to fully control a specific context of the viewer's experience. It recast the viewer as the reader. This recast was an, "Aha!" moment. The book makes art a closed experience, and an experience one actively chooses to engage in.

So, the book is a metaphor for occult ideas, as well as a metaphor for free will and choice.

2.2 The First Four Works

There are four books created that each attempt to grasp at visually separate notions of what I think I believe about the world.

The Grand Lie and *The Life and Times of the Shed Skin*, (Figs. 1-6) are complementary books that were formed in tandem, one via meticulous effort and feverish production, and the other from complete and total apathy. They're a balancing act between efforting and allowing. *The Grand Lie* shows the fruits of effort, laid out in a neat row one at a time in small format. The pacing is manipulated by non sequitur transitions³ allowing for a dual directionality, the hope for the interaction being that the viewer feels comfortable flipping back and forth in an attempt to forge connections. Transitioning via non sequitur also does away with any sense of progression,

² Occult: verb, to hide or obstruct view; adjective, hidden from view; not easily comprehended or understood; not yet revealed. (the pejorative association with the supernatural exists for this word in colloquial speech however that association is a remnant of the word's relevant usage history) -Merriam Webster

³ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Harper Perennial, New York City, NY, 1993, 74-81.

allowing the book's meta space to be free. This book is where I most explicitly explore ideas of viewer generated meaning. Despite the fact that I, as the maker, have specific ideas about what the progression means or the meaning of specific images in specific contexts, those meanings are generated from my standpoint as a viewer of my own work. It is the viewer's job then to form meaning within the jumble, and without a viewer's effort to affix meaning to the work it remains comfortably occult.

... *the Shed Skin*, however, is a group of images formed by incident and happenstance and printed at whim in large format. The imagery is the result of abuse to the plate backing while creating *The Grand Lie*. So where as *The Grand Lie* was the product of effort, ... *the Shed Skin* is the product of allowance. As the maker, I see the individual plates printed in this book as if the information (the pictures on the opposite sides of the plate) is still just on the other side, in a scary nebulous place that sits somewhere between the ink and the page. The book asks you to read between the lines without there being lines to read between. As a counterpart, it is the visual opposite: one is large format one is small format, one's cover is black, the other cover is full color, one is restrained one is reactive. The two books are considered one piece.

Mythos (Fig. 7 and 8) expresses interest in the myth, as a literary object and how it functions as a transactional means of uplift. The book is composed of four parts, each of those parts are four pages long, arranged in a specific order. The book functions by manner of aspect to aspect transitions⁴, which slows the pacing of the book, in turn, slowing the progression⁵ of the book, in order to compliment the work's austerity. The four stories are: *Nyx Lays the Golden Egg of Creation*, a verse by Homer, *Capricorn Runs and Escapes Typhon*, the Roman version of the story of Agipan, *The Rape of Someone*, and *Leda and the Swan*. The four stories are

⁴ Aspect to aspect transitions: A device used for narrative progression in sequential visual media by means of moving from aspect to aspect within a single scene through multiple panels or pages. This differs from other narrative progression devices, the much more common action to action transitions where the reader follows the actions of a character from one panel or page to the next, or the much less common non sequitur transition where juxtaposition, symbols, and random momentum drive the progression. Scott McCloud, 74-81.

⁵ Keith A. Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book*, Keith Smith BOOKS, 1984, 414.

each a metaphor for stretches of human history. As a creation story *Nyx...* represents the beginning, the expansion of our brains and our split as animals from *Homo habilis* and our beginnings as *Homo sapien*. *Capricorn...* represents the great migration of people out of Africa and the establishment of separateness as peoples. *The Rape...* is the agricultural revolution the creation of culture and of property, hence the nod to the stories inherent plurality on the title page. It's a metaphor for individuation. *Leda...* lastly, parallels a myth of chaotic cultural intrigue with the break-neck, chaotic progress we've experienced since the industrial revolution.

The last book is called *The Law*, (Fig. 9-12) it is a proclamation of the human condition. In it, I seek to illustrate a correlation between the rules for attempting to control/utilise emotional vibration and the ages of man, birth, life, and death. This book is constructed with three inserts that fold out and each show one intaglio/photolitho hybrid print. This fold out serves two functions: one is to reinforce the hiding/revealing metaphor, the other is to act as sort of a speed bump to literally slow down the experience. Each images conveys overlap between the two content generating ideas, therefore creating new content. Depicted are an angel (taken from the description of Seraphim in the Bible), a hyena, and a broken skull. These three images act as symbols that propel the overarching theme described more blatantly in the pages of the book with the words, "You're born. You Live. You Die." The logic lines connecting the content (whatever is literally depicted in the book) are, of course, absent when the book is read/viewed. This leaves the reader/viewer to fill-in-the-gaps. Filling-in-the-gaps is a meaning generating device, the reader/viewer only needs to know that they can be connected in order to connect them, and the connection made will be inherently more satisfying than any connection given. Filling-in-the-gaps now plays into the initial stall strategy implemented by the book.

I am very much interested in spiritual seeking. I believe that we are ever-expanding, growth-seeking co-creators, who exist to create, to learn, and to understand. That notion is the basis for the content of the works (but only the content I need as a maker in order to construct the work, not to dictate what the work means). There is a need in these works to condense lofty

statements concerning the human condition into glyphs, one liners and indecipherable nonsense This condensation is a means of mocking myself, or more accurately a means of mocking my desire to “do” or “say” something with my art. I felt very much that when I moved into bookmaking territory, I somehow started a climb out of an ivory tower I had locked myself in.

2.3 The Rest of the Works

The final portion of my thesis consists of a group of objects called *Hoodoo*. *Hoodoo* consists of three remarked intaglio prints taken from images in *The Law*, each paired with a wabi-sabi calligraphic statement, drawn with a four foot brush, (*Hoodoo #1(Friends Forever, Bound Together)* (Fig. 13), *Hoodoo #2(Just Like Animals)* (Fig. 14), and *Hoodoo #3(We Brought You to the Cloud Kingdom, to Party with the Party God)*(Fig. 15). There is also one remarked intaglio print taken from *The Grand Lie* presented with cow’s teeth, and a protection charm (*Hoodoo #4(Retiring a Poppet)* (Fig. 16 and 17). Lastly, there is a pair of vitrines meant to act as vice traps, (*Hoodoo #5(Vice Traps)* (Fig. 18 and 19). The remarque in this instance is another example of a barrier, this time its an aesthetic barrier. The remarque was done in ballpoint pen and felt marker, materials that typically denote work in progress. Their aesthetic works against the printed mark and looks under considered. That quality (its unconcernedness) is a trap set for sharpened aesthetics (people who frequently view art). The printed mark is then the treasure at the other end of the trap, and the two together with their respective counterparts make the experience.

Because these project out into space as pictures with the wall, they have an effect on the space. There is a notion that a picture is useless, or that art more generally, must be useless, what does it do but sit there? Well, it does just that, it sits there, and influences the space around it. Art changes how you act when you enter a space. For instance one acts differently when one walks into a space with Peter Max prints on the wall as opposed to a space adorned with Rothko. This is where the idea of the vice traps came from. I wanted to

create/curate a group of objects that could function as charms in order to draw in energy from the room, filter out negativity and send it back into the room clean.

3. WHY PRINTMAKING?

Intaglio is by far the most present print process in this body of work, specifically because the intaglio process offers the artist convenience in editing without ever putting a hold on progression; because at any point where a decision blocks creative progress it can be circumnavigated. Once the initial draught is complete and specific core decisions have been made at each intermediary step the artist is presented with a group of identical products that in the development stage are called proofs. Here the artist can explore multiple avenues of completion for the finished image. The limit of potential lines of exploration are only dictated by how many proofs can be taken. It is this step that I am personally fascinated with.

Printmaking provides, by default, the opportunity to exploit a singular image in multiple fashions. This can function almost like a safety net; the artist can work knowing any idea that pops into his head is a potentially executable final product. All future decisions, regarding the image in question are all viable, non-exclusive options. The variations that can be found within a single image between it and other print and non print media are virtually endless. Variations on a theme or literally variations of the same picture is a compelling idea that conjures questions of individuation versus homogeneity and vice versa. Using this method, the inspiration to finish often is accompanied by multiple new ideas. Printmaking is unique in that way, leaving artifacts of unfinished states of itself behind as it progress to an end product. It has also inspired specific aesthetic decisions in the thesis work that I am unsure would have been made without the process' influence. It has influenced the thought process regarding the forming of images.

4.THE RELATIONSHIP OF PRINTING AND BOOKS, WITH CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The book, in the history of information technology, is arguably the most important innovation after paper⁶. Paper made it possible for large amounts of information to travel. The book, loosely defined, starts with the scroll format, and stays that way from circa 2400 BCE until the shift to the codex around the first-century CE.⁷ The relationship between books and information is one that has been knit together since the inception of the book. The book is a vessel, with the information inside. The relationship between the print and information is of the same nature; however, where the book is the vessel for the information, the print is the visage. The earliest printed book that still survives today is a copy of the *Diamond Sutra*, printed with a woodblock formatted as a pseudo-codex with a front and back cover with a single accordion folded sheet of paper which created separate pages. It was printed in China in 868 BC.⁸ The first printed codex was a Bible printed in Germany in 1456, the *Gutenberg Bible*, so-called for the printer. Interesting that they are both religious texts.

While the printed book was in its infancy the manuscript reigned. The copying of books by hand was an art in and of itself with mystic connotations. This mode of production made the information in books sacred, making the book sacred by proxy. The act of copying a book by hand is a task similar to that of Buddhist sandpaintings: tedious, almost pointless tasks that take a great deal of discipline, mind-power, and focus. The underlying idea is that since life is fleeting that which is beautiful is fleeting and that serves as the reason for the cultivation of beauty. This parallels the artist and the monk archetypes and informs how I see Art and the making of

⁶ This definition of paper includes papyrus sheets.

⁷ David L. Gants, Florida State University, [Book History Timeline](http://english8.fsu.edu/Courses/ENG4834_S11/Book_History_Timeline.pdf), http://english8.fsu.edu/Courses/ENG4834_S11/Book_History_Timeline.pdf

⁸ ["Online Gallery - Sacred Texts: Diamond Sutra"](#). Bl.uk British Library. 2003-11-30. Retrieved 2010-04-01.

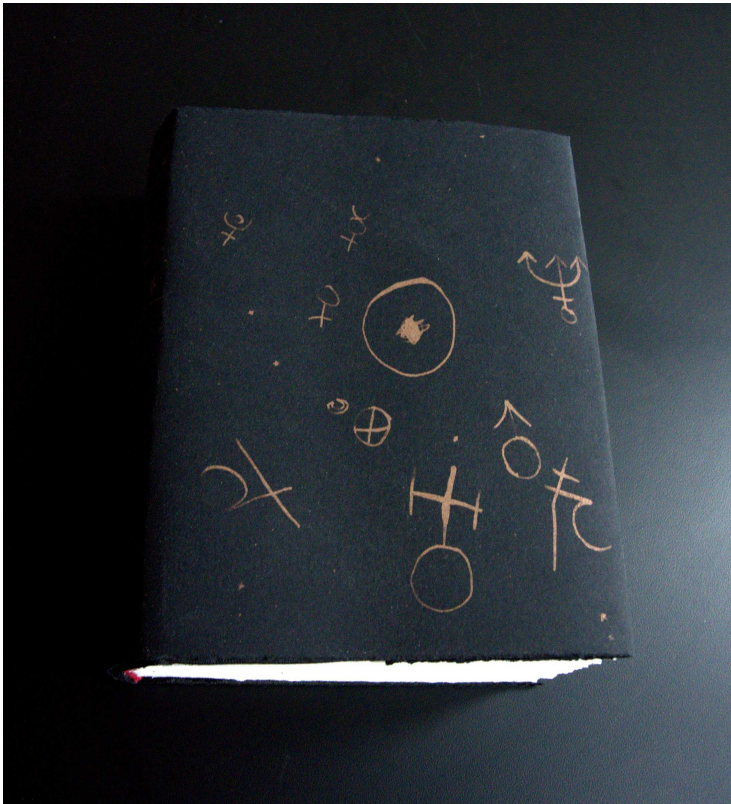
things, in general, as a spiritual exercise capable of serving the purposes of epistemological self-betterment.

All that being said, prints have a longer history with books than they do with the wall. I do not, however, want in my work to discuss this relationship; I believe that is the job of the art historian. Instead, I want to utilize this relationship in the creation of relevant new works, in an attempt to do my small part to save their fraternal nature for posterity. I'm glad I got to make the work.

PORTFOLIO OF IMAGES

MAIN PORTFOLIO.....	12.
SELECTION OF IMAGES TAKEN FROM THE BOOKS.....	20.
1. SELECTIONS FROM <i>THE GRAND LIE</i>	20.
2. SELECTIONS FROM <i>THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SHED SKIN</i>	22.
3. SELECTIONS FROM <i>THE LAW</i>	24.
SELECTION OF RELEVANT PAST WORKS.....	24.

MAIN PORTFOLIO



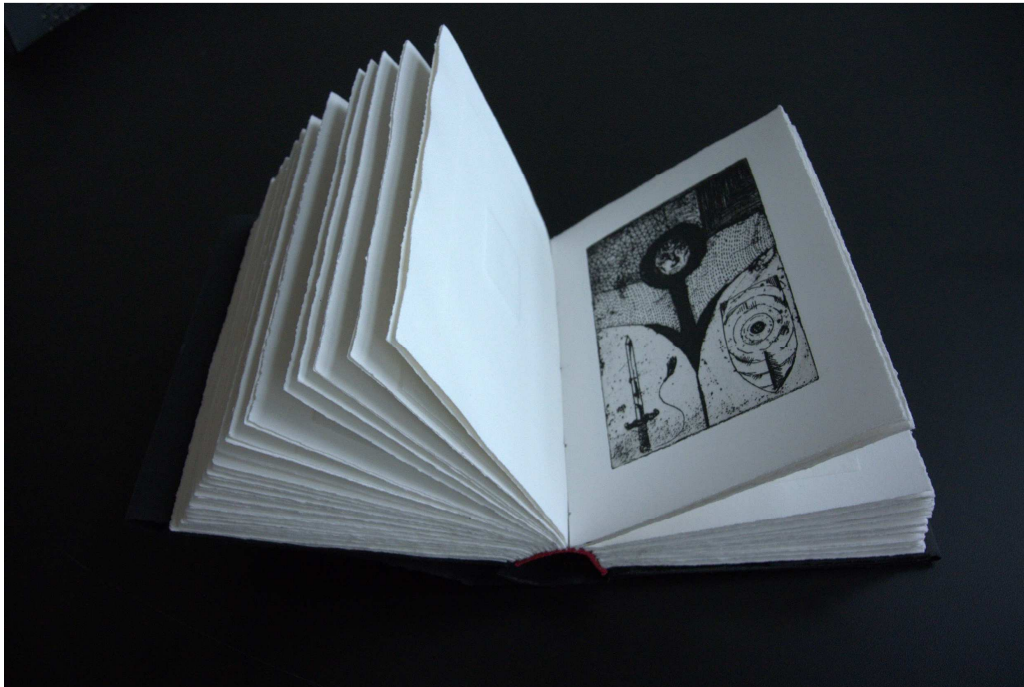
Figures 1-3

Title: The Grand Lie

Description: 8 1/2"x6 1/2"x2 1/2"

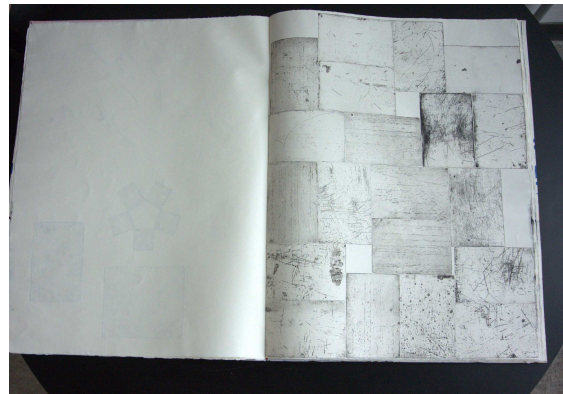
Handbound Intaglio Printed Book

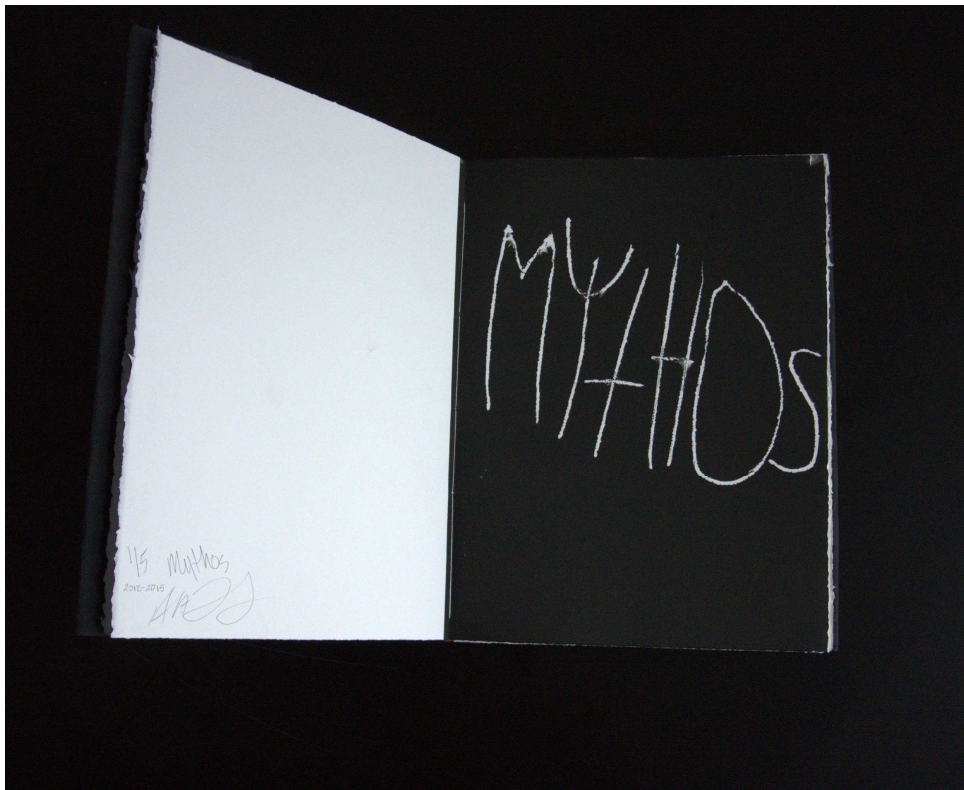
2014





Figures 4-6
 Title: The Life and
 Times of the Shed Skin
 Description: 26 ½"x20
 ¼"x ¾" Handbound
 Intaglio printed book,
 with Acrylic, Latex,
 Enamel, Asphaltum
 cover.
 2015





Figures 7 and 8
 Title: Mythos
 Description: 15 1/4"x 11 3/4"x1" Handbound
 Intaglio Printed Book
 2014





Figures 9-12

Title: The Law

Description: 10 ½"x13 ½"x1½" Handbound
Photolitho and Intaglio Printed Book
2015

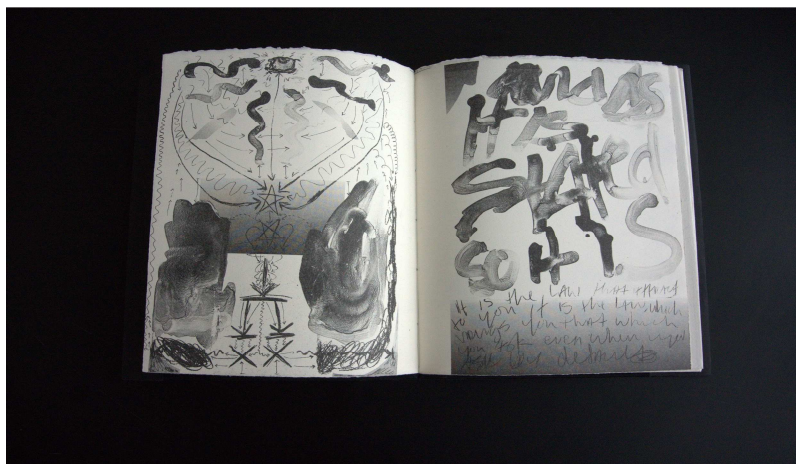




Figure 13.
 Title: Hoodoo #1(Friends Forever, Bound Together)
 Description: 20"x26" Intaglio print on paper with ball point and felt tip remarques. 18"x24" Sumi Ink on Paper
 2015

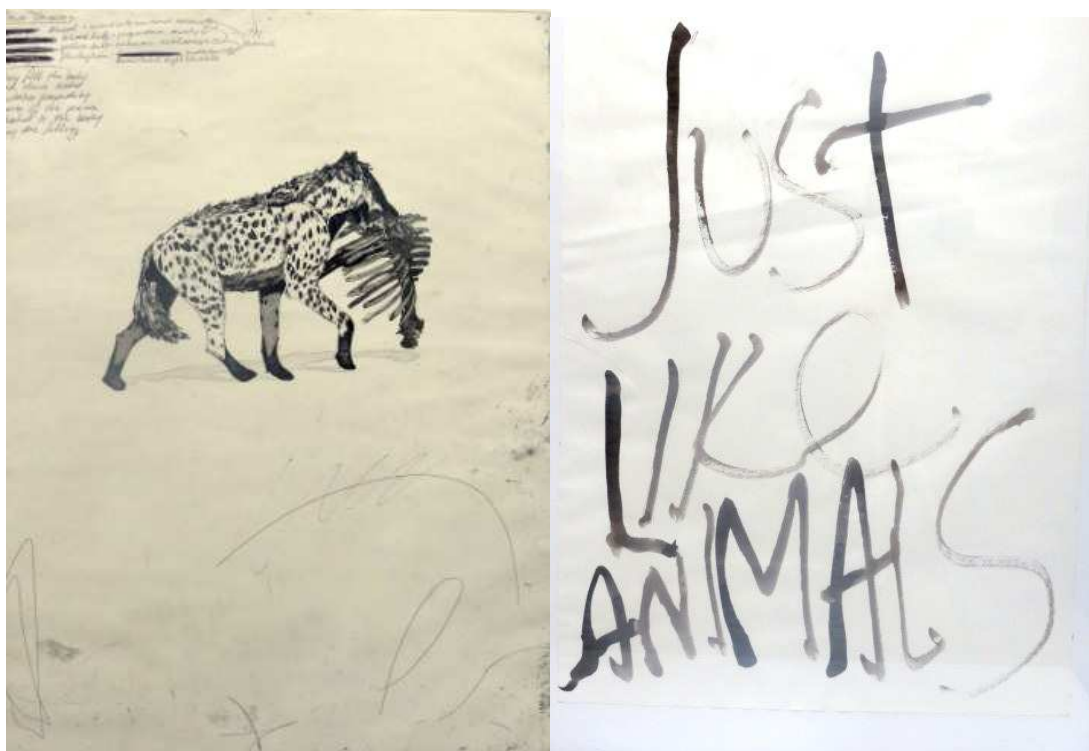


Figure 14.

Title: Hoodoo#2 (Just Like Animals)

Description: Description: 20"x26" Intaglio print on paper with ball point and felt tip remarks.

18"x24" Sumi Ink on Paper

2015

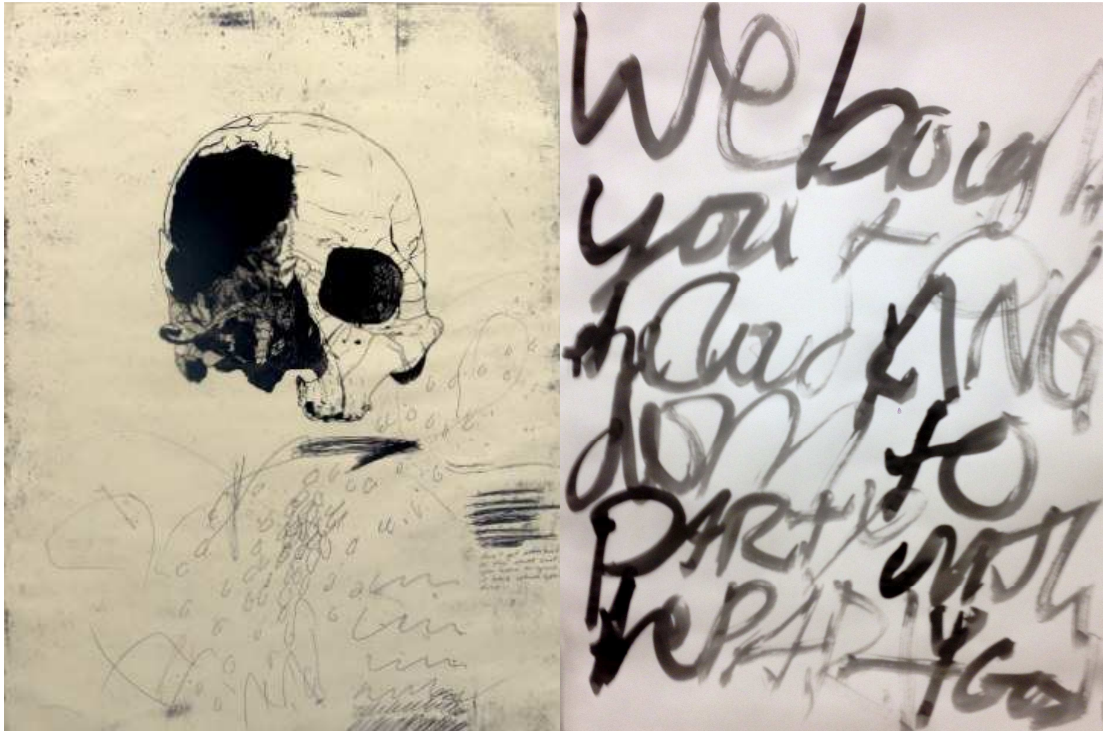


Figure 15.

Title: Hoodoo #3 (We've Brought You to the Cloud Kingdom to Party with the Party God)

Description: 20"x26" Intaglio print on paper with ball point and felt tip remarks. 18"x24" Sumi Ink on Paper

2015



Figures 16 and 17.

Title: Hoodoo#4 (Retiring a Poppet)

Description: 6"x8" Intaglio Print on paper with ball point pen remarque, cow's teeth, steel t-pins & Cotton Poppet: Black Cotton Duck, Cotton Thread, Plastic Buttons, Silk Pins, Dragon's Blood Root Extract, Sandalwood Oil, Dried Patchouli, Sea Salt, Rosewood, Cotton Batting

Frame size: 8 3/4"x11"x2 3/8"

2015



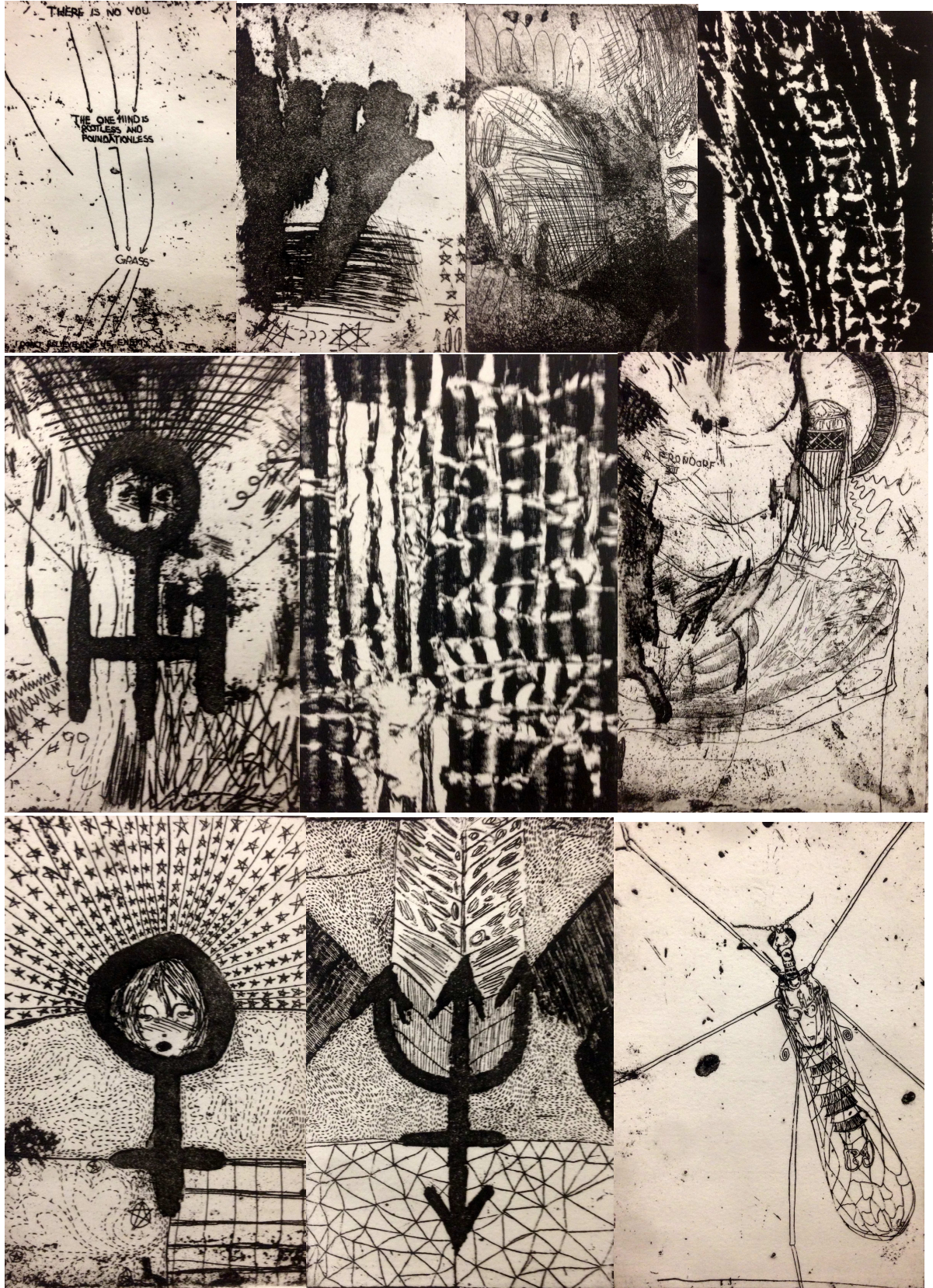
Figures 18 and 19
 Title: Hoodoo#5 (Vice Traps)
 Description: (Fig. 18)
 14"x14"x12 ¾" Vitrine
 containing Liquor Bottle, Dime,
 Wool-Eating Moths,
 Hummingbird Moth, Latex
 Enamel, Printing Ink, Cotton
 String, Green Twigs, Rose
 Quartz, Glass, Intaglio Print,
 Sumi Ink
 (Fig. 19) 16 ¾"x13x10 ¼"
 Vitrine containing Handmade
 Book, Acrylic, Bronze Powder,
 Rose Quartz, Found Bottles,
 Sterling Silver, Wire,
 Cigarettes, Cotton String,
 Twine, Moth, Bee, Wasp,
 Petrified Citrus Fruit, Robin
 Feathers, Intaglio print, sumi
 ink.
 2015



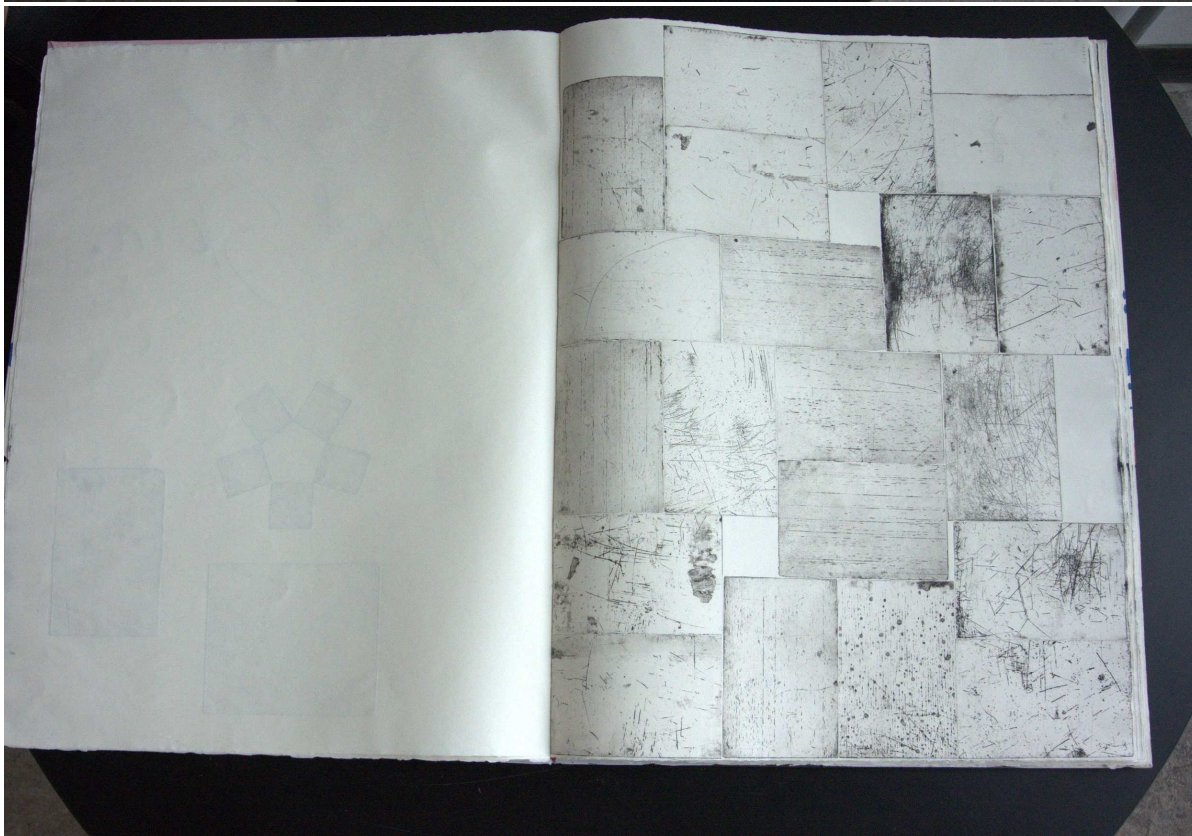
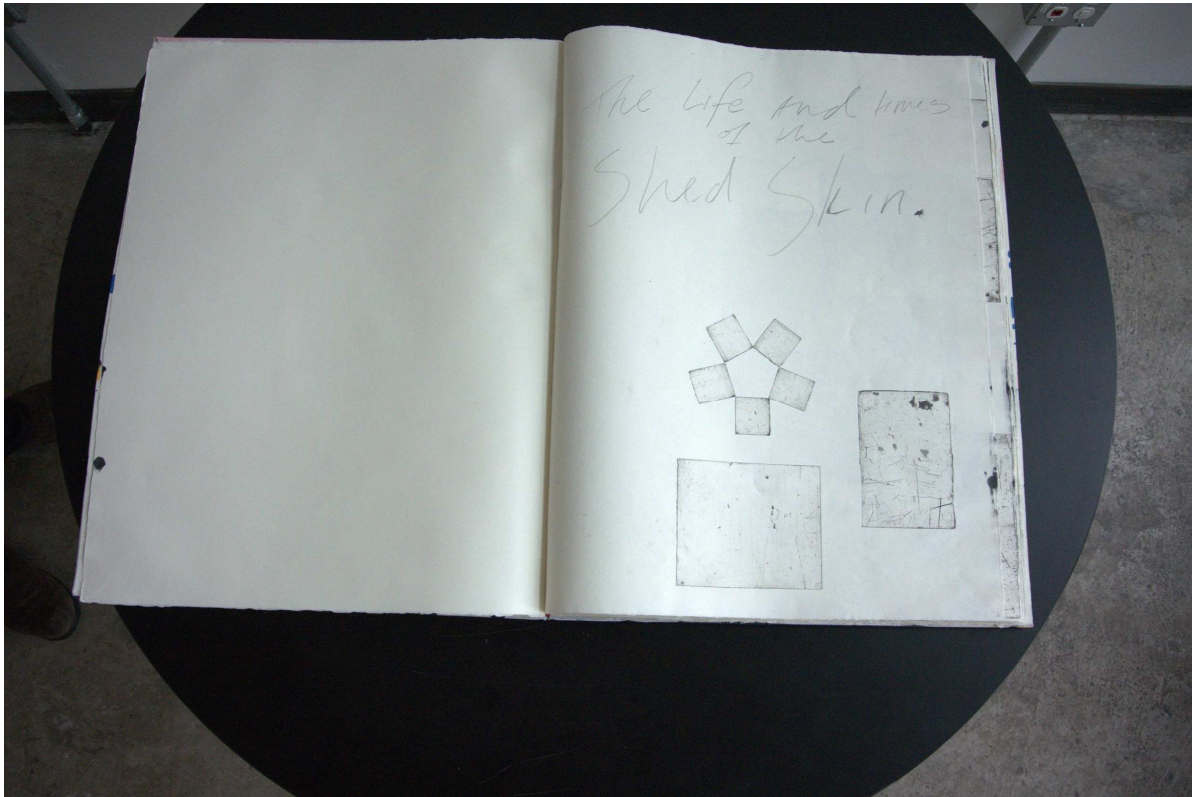
SELECTION OF IMAGES TAKEN FROM THE BOOKS

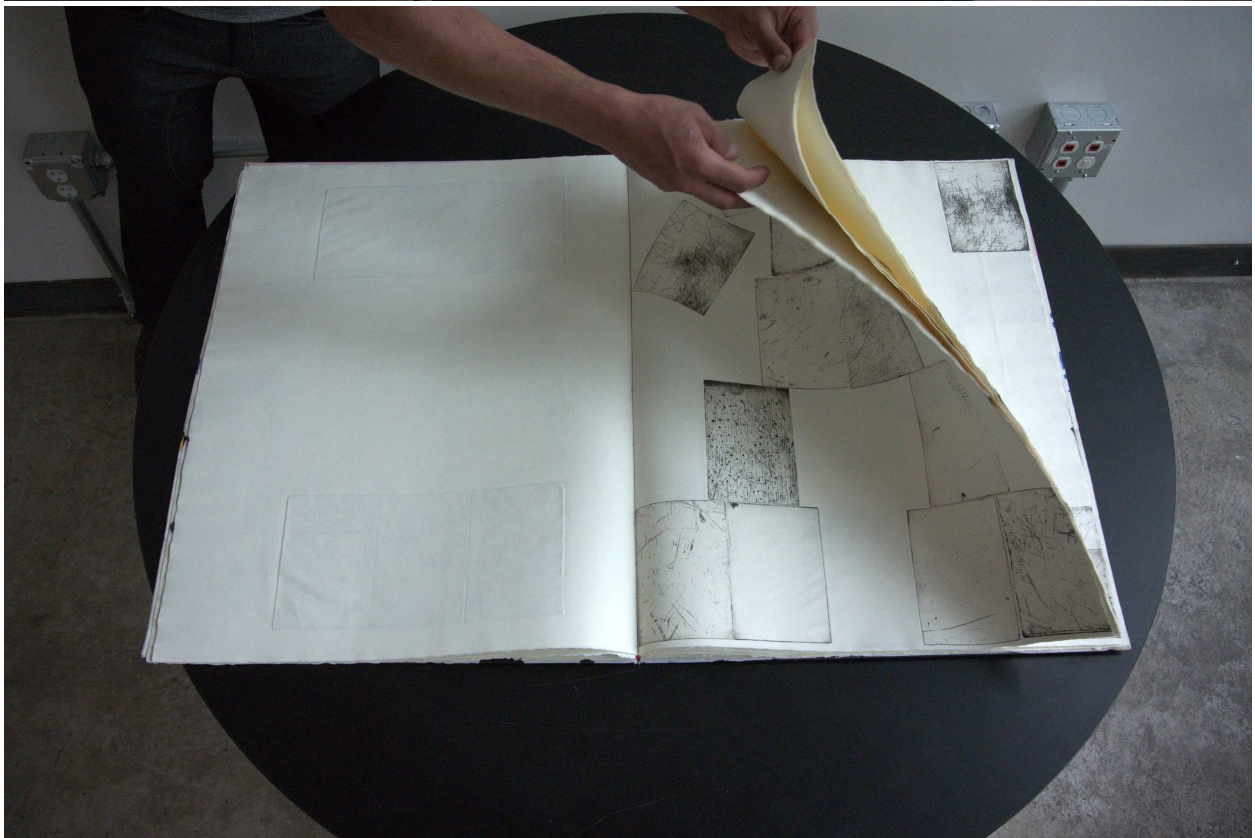
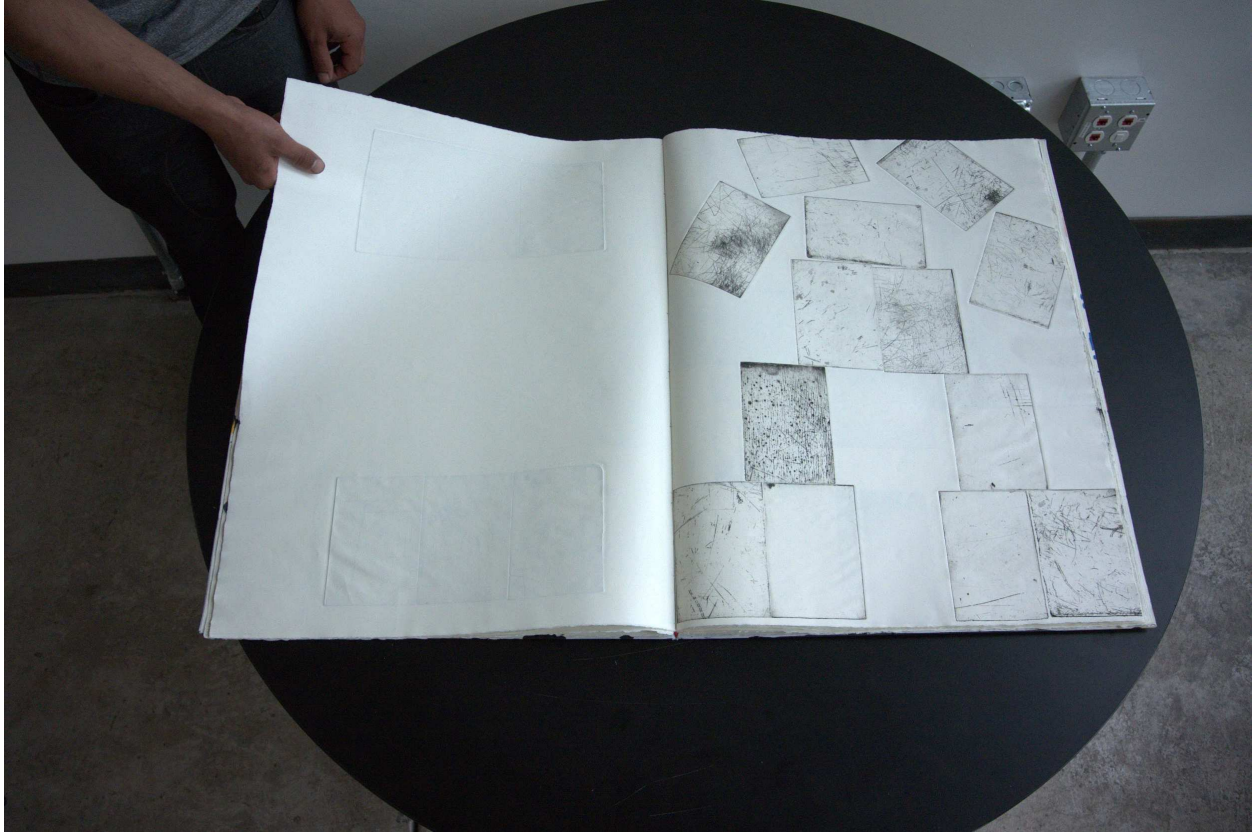
1. SELECTIONS FROM THE GRAND LIE





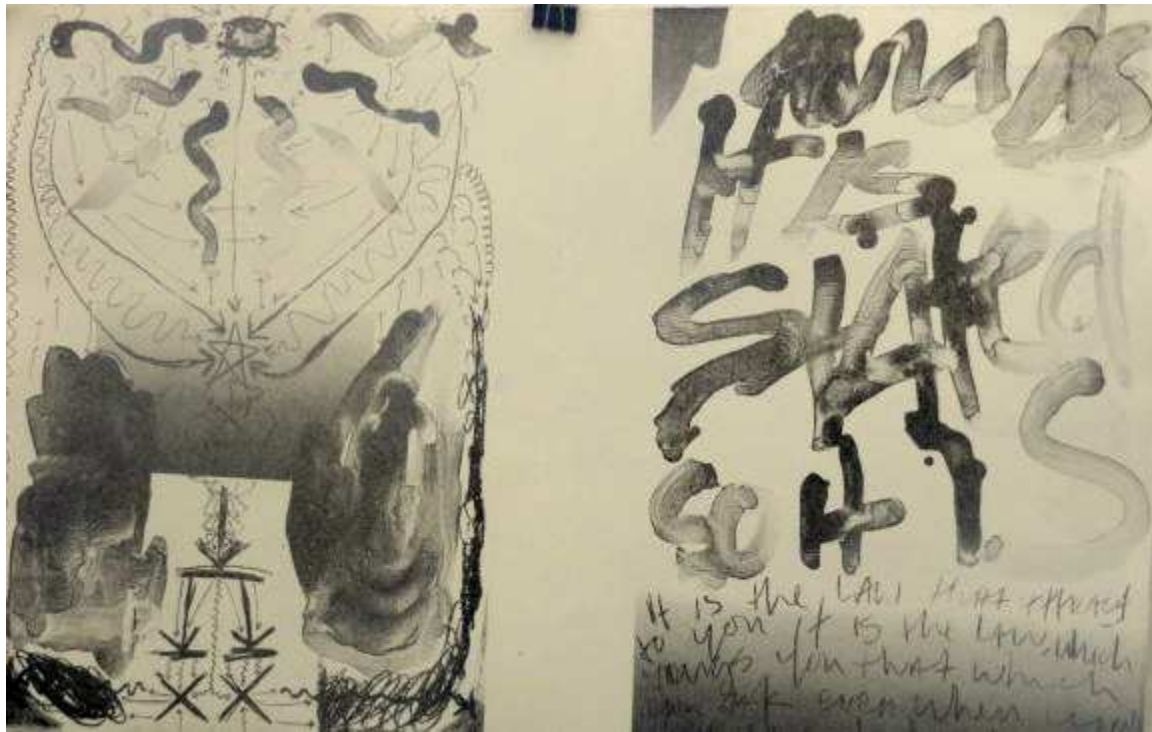
2. SELECTIONS FROM THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE SHED SKIN





3. SELECTIONS FROM THE LAW





SELECTION OF RELEVANT PAST WORK



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Smith, Keith A. *The Structure of the Visual Book*, Keith Smith BOOKS, Rochester, NY. 2010 (1984).