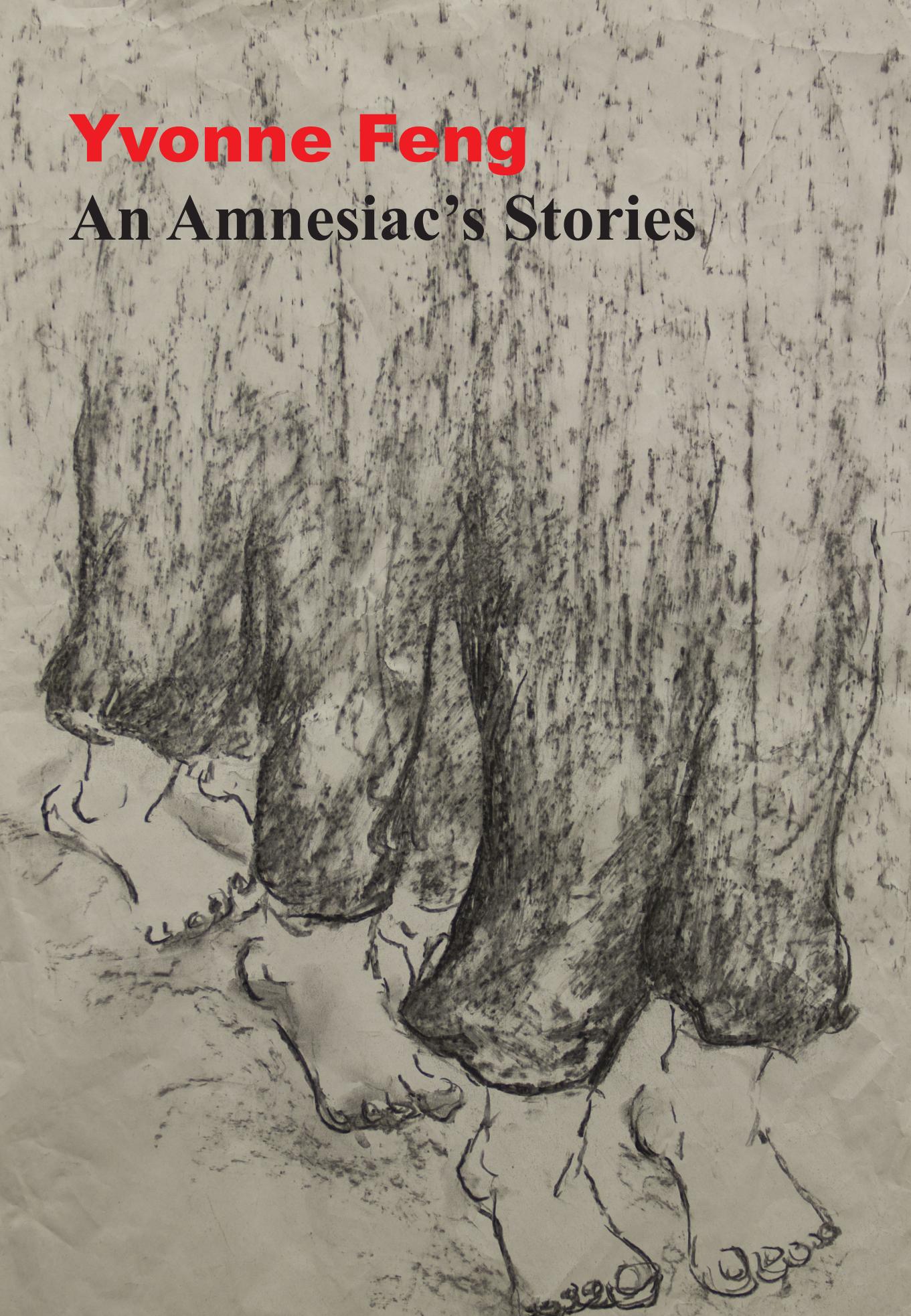


**Yvonne Feng**

An Amnesiac's Stories



## Foreword

A year ago, when I first encountered Yvonne Feng's drawings and paintings (during the selection of the *Now in Reverse* open call), I was intrigued by the intimate and personal narrative in her work over which an invisible threat was hovering. Among them, one drawing in particular depicted this threat, and it instantly assured me to include her in the exhibition. *You are one of us* (2014) portrays a soldier on the top of a column, emerging from waves of floating bodies, with his machine gun pointing down at them.



During the *Now in Reverse* exhibition, Feng was voted by the public as one of the two favourite artists and rewarded with a solo show. Since then she has been working on a new exhibition of paintings and drawings presented here at the Hundred Years Gallery, titled *An Amnesiac's Stories*.

The artist's amnesiac experience started from an unexpected phone call about a detention. Since then, the artist has submerged herself in the sea of blurred images and colours of emotions that come back to her. She turns her memory and fantasy into ambiguous imagery to provoke particular narratives and psychological states. For me, her work suggests a political statement of our modern society and mirrors us in the collective powerless situations in which, at any moment, any of us can become an agent of the State's power, or its counterpart, the victim. Her work presents no clear sight of identity, narrative or memory...just stills, clues, shadows and impersonal objects. A sense of psychological intensity presides over her current work, leaving us with an uneasy wonder in the void.

The threat which struck me in the drawing *You are one of us* has transformed into a more intimate and mysterious kind in the present exhibition. Amnesia is a deficit in memory, but what the artist has presented here is her desire for the lost. These stories are not truly forgotten and they are traceable through her touches.

Montse Gallego, Director  
November 2015

## **Yvonne Feng**

She wondered about the borderline between memory and imagination. Was it enough that images just appeared? Was there any unoccupied space, passages that were simply blank or even fuzzy indistinct blurs that constituted a not knowing? Anyway images never seemed to linger or curl in sensual patterns of becoming but rather they burned. At time she imagined that there were ashes beneath the images she painted so much so that the charcoal she employed for drawing stood for this. Not that she would ever say such things. Such things sound ridiculous when said in public as if it might be a case of cheap attention. Anyway the image should be enough. There was always a doubt about this though. What is enough?

What is the image? She remembered a reading group or a discussion that started with that question. Did the image come out of nothing? It would make sense in a strange way because then there would be a play of absence and presence. She thought of how faces disappeared from her paintings. Aren't faces always on the edge of disappearing? Faces are either vivid or faded so are absorbed into the optics of these conditions. Sometimes it is just easier that the face is elsewhere to the image in the painting. In this state it is a force but a force that doesn't appear. She remembered talking about the way her paintings are always an intensification of forces that either appear or are withdrawn from appearing.

The studio seemed to be a remote place at times. Of course a lot of people passed through and there was always a lot of chatter with this. Maybe there was a studio in her mind, a place that no one could enter. Images would pile on images, constellations form, fracturing and condensation occur, so many operations all out of view. Not only would this stand as a studio but also a theatre. In a way this is not just another kind of place but a threshold state through which the place of encounter is production. A laboratory of intensification she mused to herself. The idea of intensification occurred a lot. Friends constantly told her that she was intense and tutors often remarked about the way her paintings had or possessed intensity. She would smile to herself because they had never entered her laboratory of intensification. Not that anyone could. She thought that this was the place that she burnt things but with

that thought touched her hands in order to detect burn marks. She also realised how quickly she moved from one type of studio to the next type of studio. It was not a case of simply having a key though. There was in fact no easy way of describing such a passage. Of course this might be a simple way of thinking about the difference between mind and material as if there might be a simple way for such things.

Seminars always seemed to go around the question of the relationship between the seeable and the sayable or between theory and practice. It was like being placed in the centre of a riddle that will never be properly solved. She made paintings and then was obliged also to speak, whereas because there might be things that words are not adequate for, she would paint. Everything was in the wrong order. To talk about a painting was to make it real but the impulse of the painting was related to its ir-reality. Even if life experience gives rise to a painting, it doesn't mean that it returns to this self the same source in the sense of being a mirror. Images that she thought collected the dust of the real but that she never confused for essence. Maybe dust stood for what can be extracted, like the indifferent neutrality of the world. Did images rest on dust? In excited moment she might have thought embers. She even thought of saying that the aim of her paintings was to burn but then she had nothing to support this and anyway she was too small to say such things. That is how things are in this world was her self correcting censorship of her wilder side. Of course burning would relate to destruction of violence. To figure was also to disfigure. It is a couplet. It is desire that is the force that disfigures. Her paintings were intense because they opened out channels of desire. Desire relates to fire and to pulsation. Above all things she wanted her paintings to possess a pulse. In fact if a painting could embody a pulsational intensity then she wanted to be a platform for such a thing.... even a desiring, pulsational intensity. But this is not so easy yet it sounds good when it rolls off the tongue. So much comes with a roll of a tongue. Paintings can heat up language.

Once someone talked to her about the mystery of what other people think. In such moments she would hunch her shoulders as if to say something along the lines of what to ex-

pect. After all it was what kept relationships going and what broke them down. Relationships exist on that strange edge of knowing and not knowing. Art is when that relationship is at a precarious point and exhibits the danger of sliding down either way. Both sides of this equation make it pretty dumb. She liked those edges in all things or at least that is what she thought. Life was more painful that way. She needed to be on the edge of things so that her cut might be decisive. To paint in order to commit even though painting is a commitment to indecision. Another paradox, but like desire, paradoxes create movement. One moment on a treadmill, the next in free fall, that is how it is. Did she know the difference between seeing and feeling? Not really. Painting with one eye open and one eye closed meant that her passage across worlds stayed open.

She had to give a talk the next day. She wrote: "I open my eyes fully and no words come to me but when I close my eyes words are incessant. Words flowing, words ceasing, eyes closed, eyes open; this does not follow the pattern of life but yet it is a pattern. I follow such pattern when I paint and it is intense because it is not based on habit. I want to burn my habits when I paint in order that something new might take its place. No matter if you do not wish to see this or feel this, this is my gesture which strips me of my subjective will. This gesture delivers me to my outside which is naked. These words contain a gesture that render naked the claims that are issued from the principle of reality. That is all."

Jonathan Miles

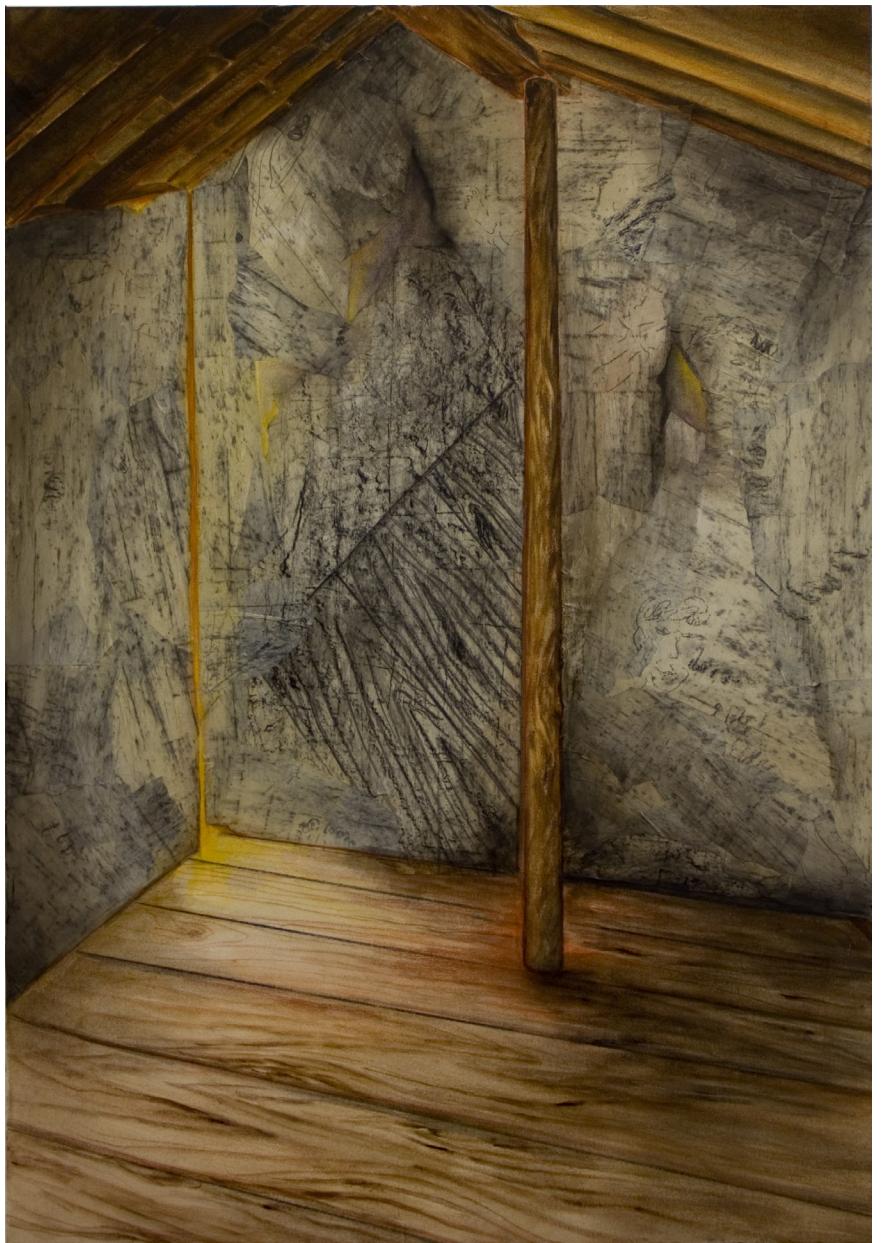








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Yvonne Feng (b.1989, China)  
Lives and works in London, UK

Education

2014- PhD Fine Art (practice-led), Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London  
2014 MA Painting, Royal College of Art, London  
2012 BA Fine Art, Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London

Award

2015 Excellence in Drawing Award, The Arts Club Charitable Trust (winner)  
2014 Art Graduates Prize, Herbert Smith Freehills & Works in Print (shortlisted)  
Beep2014: Wales' International Contemporary Painting Prize (shortlisted)  
Griffin Art Prize (shortlisted)

Solo Exhibition

2015 *An Amnesiac's Stories*, Hundred Years Gallery, London

Selected Group Exhibitions

2015 *Creekside Open 2015*, A.P.T Gallery, London  
*Psychoanalytic research in the 21st century: Where we are now*, Freud Museum, London  
*Griffin Art Prize 2014 UK*, White Moose Gallery, Barnstaple, Devon  
2014 *Now in Reverse*, Hundred Years Gallery, London  
*Drawing from Here and There*, Elysium Gallery Offsite, Swansea  
*Griffin Art Prize 2014 UK*, Griffin Gallery, London  
*Beep 2014: A Portrait of the Artist as...*, Elysium Gallery Offsite, Swansea,  
*From Here and There: Drawings from Swansea to Colorado*, Clara Hatton Gallery, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, USA  
*Show RCA 2014*, Sackler Building, Royal College of Art, London  
*You know, I...Instinct with thinking!*, Hockney Gallery, Royal College of Art, London  
2013 *PNTG NOV. RCA Year 2 MA Painting Show*, Henry Moore Gallery, Royal College of Art, London  
*Notes to Self*, Dyson Building, Royal College of Art, London  
*Royal College of Art Fine Art Work in Progress Show*, The Kensington Galleries, Royal College of Art, London  
2012 *The Slade School of Fine Art BA/BFA Degree Show*, The Slade School of Fine Art, UCL, London  
*Vincula*, UCL Art Museum, UCL, London  
*New End Art Foundation Exhibition*, New End Art Gallery, London  
2010 *EXHIBITIONISM*, East Wing Nine (Part 3 Academy Hang), The Courtauld Institute of Art, London  
*Transfer-A Slade/Strang Collaboration*, UCL Art Museum, UCL, London

List of Works

1

*You are one of us*  
2014  
Ink on Chinese paper  
45.5 x 69.5cm

2

*Plaster/Phone*  
2015  
Oil on polyester and canvas  
61 x 101.5 cm each

3

*Shadow*  
2015  
Charcoal, acrylic and oil on canvas  
170 x 130 cm

4

*Jade bracelet*  
2015  
Oil on board  
40 x 60 cm

5

*Trace of cracks*  
2015  
Charcoal, acrylic and newsprint on canvas  
150 x 110 cm

Images on front, inner and back pages:

*Drawing*  
2015  
Charcoal on newsprint  
84.1 x 59.4 cm

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