

Left *Threnody* (1993) Linocut on Nishinouchi paper, 600 x 425mm. Edition: 30

Below *Regeneration Glyphs: Rebirth I and II* (2026) Linocut on Yogo Gami paper, 945 x 550mm each. Edition: 25

G.W. BOT



A Thread of Hope

The abstract linocut landscapes of **G.W. Bot** strike a delicate balance between resilience and fragility, writes **Gill Saunders**

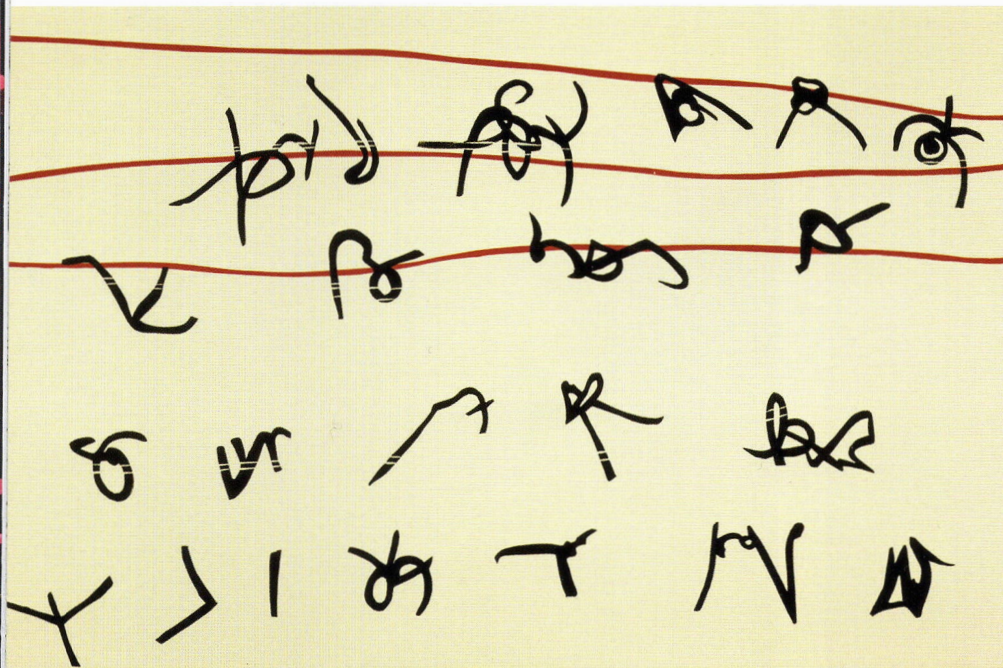
Late last year, when choosing works to illustrate a new history of linocuts [forthcoming September 2026], I revisited a print by the Australian artist G.W. Bot (aka Christine Grishin) which the V&A had acquired in 1997 – *Poetry of a Drought*, a linocut with chine collé. Seeing it again I was struck by two things. At first sight it confounded my expectations of what a linocut looks like – the dense network of fine

thread-like lines which anchor the headless figure to the ground seemed too delicate to be the product of lino-cutting. And the imagery – inspired in part by the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries made around 1500 and now in the Cluny Museum, Paris – appeared rich in ambiguous metaphors relating to motherhood, as well as a physical and spiritual connection to the landscape, features of which are hinted at in a palimpsest of shadowy marks.

Intrigued by the making and the meaning of this print, I was prompted to explore Bot's work further, and in particular, to interrogate the thinking behind her choice of linocut as her primary print medium. In a symposium paper delivered in Canberra in 2001, Bot explained that she found linocut to be liberating because 'it does not carry with it the crushing dead hand of tradition'. She considers the process to be 'an uncharted medium without codified orthodoxies',

PROFILE

Below *Script* (2006) Linocut on Magnani paper, 590 x 920mm. Edition: 25



a medium that can capture the 'preciousness and intricate fragility' of a Banksia flower but also convey 'a vast monotony of tone'. Though she works with various media, Bot has remained loyal to linocut over decades, developing an extraordinarily expressive range of mark-making to craft a distinctive and original body of work. She values above all the medium's intrinsic directness and immediacy, whereby an image can be pared to the barest essentials – a process she likens to writing a poem rather than a novel.

In speaking about her work Bot has often used nature analogies – for example she has described linocutting as 'like working with the surface of the earth' – apt, given the way that the sharp tools carve into and excavate the pliable lino in a process akin to digging or ploughing. Much of her work from the 1990s embodies this 'earthiness', as in *Ancestral Journeys* (red ochre) (1994) (and its companion, *Ancestral Journeys*, with a dark ashy ground) in which the paper is saturated with pigment and crossed with fragmented marks that suggest the passage of humans or animals across the desiccated soil of the outback, but also resemble cracks in drought-dried mud. Her colours, as here, are elemental – black, white, red, sometimes a warm yellow or a clear sky-blue – but always used with a restrained specificity, never as a decorative addition.

Bot's close connection with the land and with the natural world is reflected in her artist name; inspired by Aboriginal beliefs, she chose the wombat as her totemic animal because it is prevalent where she lives; the particular form of the name derives from 'le Grand Wam Bot', a term used by early French explorers.

In her engagement with landscape Bot has developed a singular iconography which is often likened, both by Bot herself and those who have written about her work, to calligraphy. Discussing *Scarred Manuscript*, a large double-layered linocut from 2000–01, she describes the myriad complex details as 'irregular calligraphic marks crawling over the blackness' and there is marvellous sense here, and elsewhere, of the marks themselves as animate elements creating an impression of flow, or sway. This can be seen earlier in *Threnody* (1993) a snowy landscape seen from above, with massed stick-like trees casting shadows across an undulating white ground. A tribute to Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe, this print was (as Bot told British Museum print curator Stephen Coppel) 'a lament for the crucifixion of the landscape, inspired by flying high across frozen wastes' on the way home from New York.

Right *Blue Moon Poet* (2026) Linocut on tapa cloth, 1420 x 615mm (irregular). Edition: 10

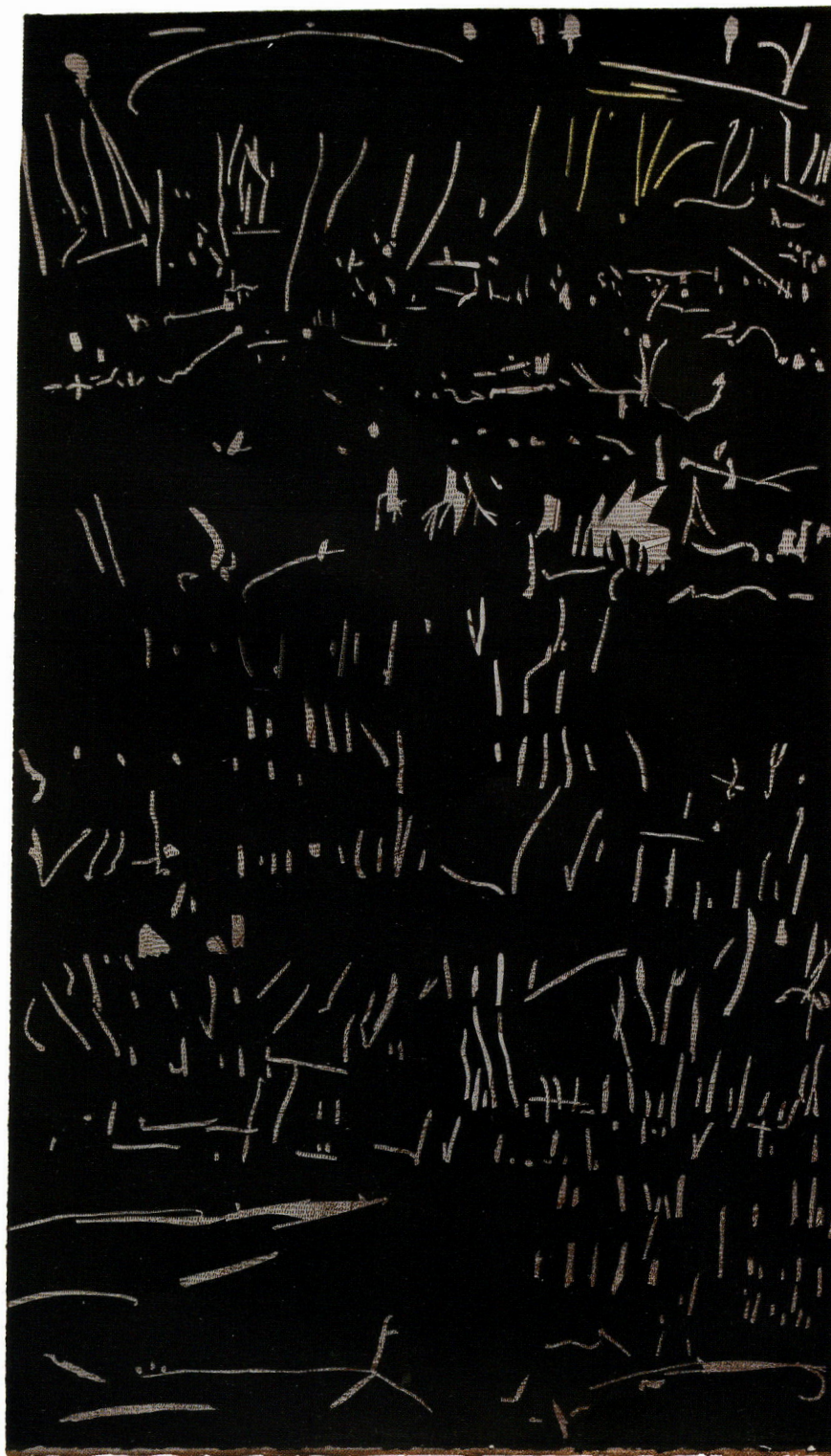
Bot has described herself as 'a very site-specific artist' and it is from her many sketches of the land around her home that she has developed a lexicon of signature motifs which she calls glyphs. These glyphs have a marvellous malleability and can be read not only as abstract calligraphic forms but also as allusions to aspects of the land – trees, eroded rocks and dry gullies, brush scrub and grassy fields, the weathered posts of paddock boundaries. In *Script* (2006) the glyphs, together with the red horizontals, suggest lines on a page overlaid with handwriting, or perhaps musical notation, but they can also be seen as threads of barbed wire – a common feature of stock fencing in the outback. The result has a spare but evocative eloquence. More explicitly, the forms which populate *All Hallows Glyphs* (2009) offer an exuberant account of new life springing from seemingly dead stumps.



Much of Bot's work reflects and explores the ways in which humans depend upon the natural world and shape it to their own ends. The garden – a place of safety, privacy and spiritual sustenance carved out of the wild – features repeatedly. In *The Keeper* (2002), fine dots, like embroidery stitches, contrast with areas of close short lines to create a moiré effect; the tendrils of climbing plants 'sew' the robed figure in place, so that it becomes enmeshed in the landscape of which it is the titular guardian, at one with nature, not separate from it – an idea which is central to Bot's philosophy.

In a more recent work, *The Tree of Life*, also, in *the Midst of the Garden* (2021) printed on Magnani paper and tapa cloth, dense patterns of flowers and foliage present a luxuriant garden as a refuge and fertile nurturing space. The title refers to the biblical Garden of Eden, but the central motif, with its twisting trunk and peony-like blooms, appears to have its origins in the sinuous flowering trees which featured in 18th-century hand-painted Chinese wallpaper panels, a source emphasised by the yellow central oblong. What Bot describes as the 'kinetic' properties of tapa (made from the bark of the Mulberry paper bark tree) are fundamental to the qualities of the print. She has spoken eloquently of the importance she attaches to her choice of support and the distinctive characteristics of various papers, and of materials such as tapa. For the clear-cut anthropomorphic forms of *Glyph – Family Portrait at Midday* (2011) she chose what she calls a 'bold' Magnani paper, whereas for *Bent Glyph – Homage to Corot* (2017), delicate in its cutting and printing, she preferred the 'sensitivity' of a Mulberry paper. She achieves these nuances of texture and effect by controlling the entire process, printing most of her linocuts herself in her home studio, using an etching press.

Describing gardening as 'an act of optimism' Bot believes that to lose a garden is to lose hope. Gardening in a land of dramatic extremes such as Australia is a challenge but also a sign of faith in the future. Whilst Bot's work repeatedly acknowledges the ravages of drought, fire and flood, and the prints reflect escalating



Scarred Manuscript (2000–01) Linocut, kozo and BFK papers, 940 x 545mm. Edition: 25

threats to the natural world, she shares the Aboriginal view that such devastation creates the circumstances for 'the green shoots of rebirth'. In her latest works, notably the *Regeneration Glyphs*, we see 'a thread of hope' in the careful balance between fragility and resilience, with the foregrounded silhouettes of blackened

trees set against a lyrical flow of lines which conjure burgeoning growth in the land beyond.

G.W. Bot will be exhibiting at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London, in October 2026

