

## JULIA PHILLIPS

Four rectangular indentations press sharply into the white paper, their edges deep and precise against the swollen surface of the page. Stretched between the geometric depressions is a monoprint of a sheer fabric that splays like a dissection display. The tension of the stretch reveals rips within the printed material, which appears held together by a dark seam that runs down its length; the seam separates at the center and reconnects a few centimeters down, forming a diamond shape at the core. The sheer material represented in the print, stretched and pulled at the seams by a ghostly set of constraints, is the crotch of a pantyhose. Part of a series of relief ink prints on paper, *Expanded V* (2016) elicits a psychosomatic punctum particular to Julia Phillips' practice: a combination of vulnerability and control that rests unresolved.

The integrity of boundaries has been an ongoing interest in Phillips' oeuvre; the artist's sculptures examine and critique the interrelated discourses of space, race, gender, and psychoanalysis. Phillips constructs fragile ceramic objects and stages scenes that study the power dynamics informing public and intimate social relations between differing bodies. The concept of penetration, as both a physical and psychic act, serves to interrogate ways in which power is exerted over other subjects, their bodies and their unconscious, in the service of disembodiment and objectification. Traces of the artist's body abound in the scenarios of unequal exchange, questioning and disrupting the historical and phenomenological constructs through which the viewers order their physical and unconscious worlds. These are constructs which, more often than not, work in the service of dominant and disempowering ideals. The works implicate the bodies of both the artist and the viewer, revealing the ways in which, as Hortense Spillers points out, certain subjects are flesh but not necessarily body, and pulling the viewer into considering those positions.

The splayed and broken hosiery in *Expanded V* reminds us of the protective role of pantyhose as a second skin, and through its rupture, of skin's vulnerability. The prints are as tactile as Mona Hatoum's rubbings on wax paper from the mid-1990s,

which transformed the domestic into the provocative and often menacing. Both the relief ink print of the pantyhose and the indentations that hold it in position serve as indexical markers of violent power that render both print and paper vulnerable. The black ink of the print harkens to Zora Neale Hurston's note of feeling one's blackness most poignantly when "against a sharp white background." The marks holding the pantyhose in place exhibit what Édouard Glissant describes as the powerful ploy of transparency, which insists upon full exposure under the guise of equality, all in the service of control. However, such acts of transparency and pure indexicality further entrench subjectivities that can only affirm their identity in relation to their othered referents. As Phillips extends the series of *Expanded* prints, the ruptures in the hosiery are sutured; much like in the work of Louise Bourgeois, deconstructive and reparative impulses oscillate in the work—as in our psyches, which can be obliquely revealed but remain ambivalently refractory.

—Nomaduma Rosa Masilela

*Expanded IV*, 2015  
Relief ink, offset lithography, acrylic ink on paper  
66 × 102 cm

*Operator I (with Blinder, Muter, Penetrator, Aborter)*, 2017  
Partially salt-glazed ceramics, brass screws, stainless steel plate,  
metal wheel table  
104 × 117 × 45.5 cm

