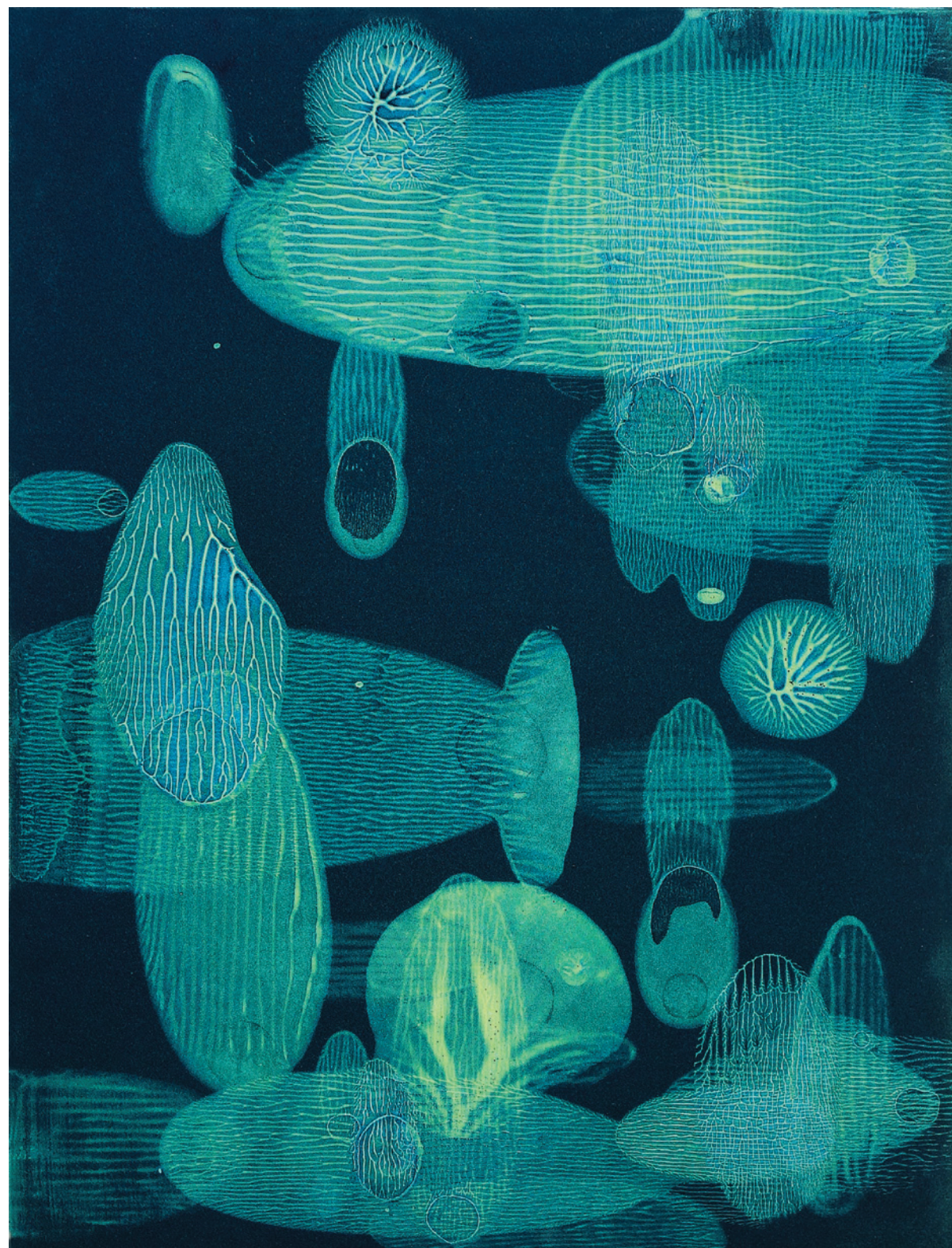


ENRIQUE LEAL

Abyssalia II, 2016.
Silk mezzotint, 10.5 x 8 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

LISA ALLEN ORTIZ

Stem

Her body also is.
Connecting ground to bloom
the veins and length
the water up and down.

When she was seed
she huddled in the dirt, feet
reached for the underside.
Back then, the sun was.

Pain is stored this way,
not the memory but
the amygdala. What is body
but a battery of tremors?
Back then, song.

What she doesn't recall
grows to tumor
in her throat, words for things
stuck in there like wicked bones.

What she wanted
she gained by growing.
Her body was marked
with nodes, her body
danced marvelously in wind.

A woman comes from where?
A woman becomes what?

A bloom of head
that petals fall from.
Seedpod head
at the desiccated end.

She connects this idea
to that. She stands tiptoe
at the beach and the horizon
lifts just slightly more.

One might say
our bodies change the world—
brief combustion in the dirt.

Her feet are roots
her head comprehensible
as cloud.

She lay down in the murk of her,
sickness leaking in her throat,
a windpipe without wind—
what is life but a practice
of bending down to die. She slept.
She ate.

She bought some land.
She built a house.
She was tall but shortened.
Briefly, she tended children.
Tree of children.
Meadow child. Fruit
in mouth of child.

A human face,
the greeting that it makes of teeth.
Like the verb, living is a trick
of action. What she imagined
might have happened.

The up and down of stem.
The wavering of stem.
What a brief summer that was.

How plants communicate
through roots, how she imagined
some nights she might discern,
a click, a groan, how sickness
slowed her wit,
sharped her quick.

What does a woman
have? A heart, a node,
hands like fragile leaves,
a tendency, a willingness
to lie down in the dirt.

The nature of stem:
to be straw, the fate
of stems: to be cultivated
into the earth
for next year's grass.

The stars hang upside down,
the earth becomes a sky,
the earth, you know, is heaven.
That summer she was a line
of golden green, connecting
rock to rock—

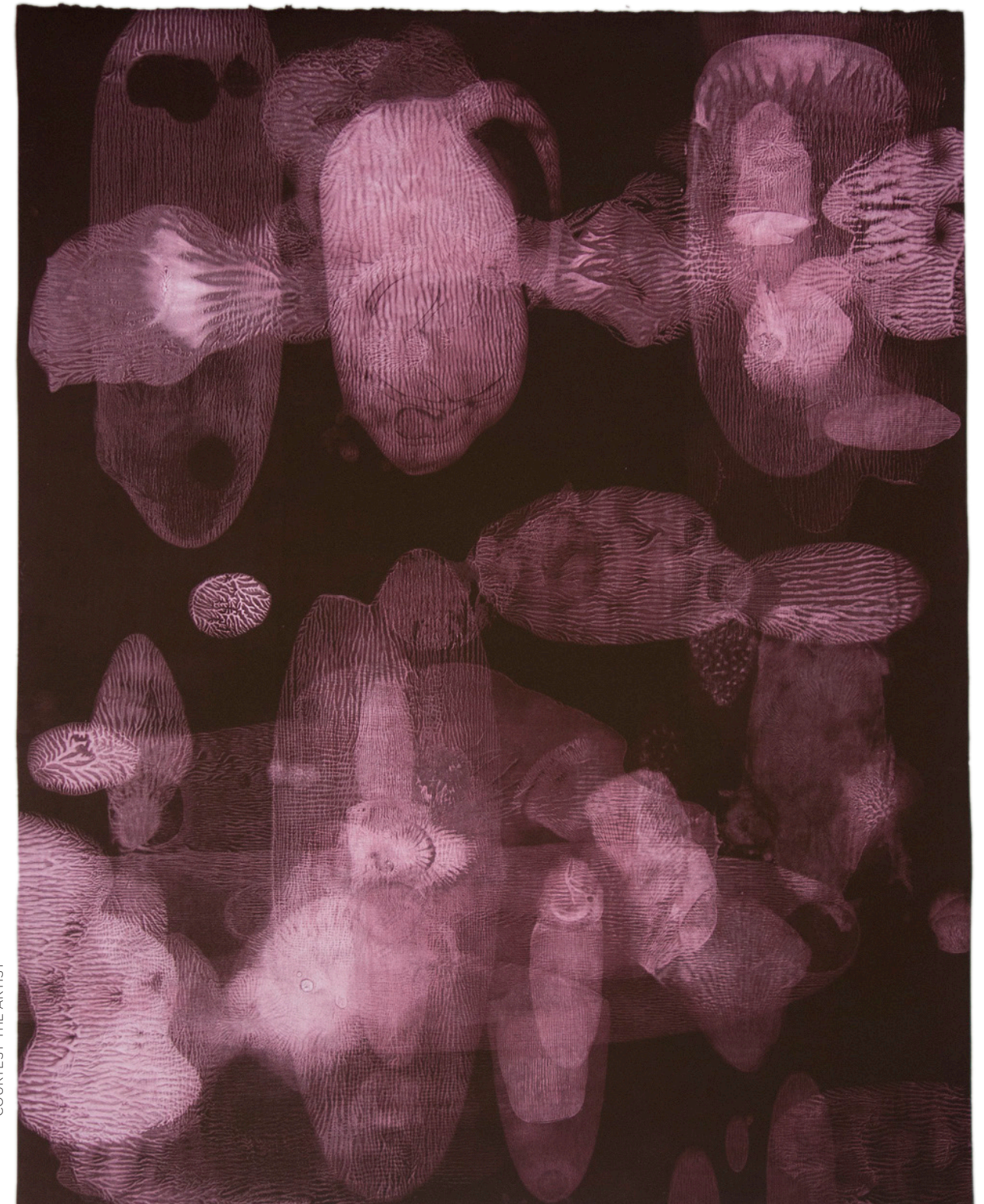
the lake that summer,
the house, the table, the wine
they drank, the lips she painted
poppy red. The world so drunk
on self.

Petals on the ground for one
glorifying day. How brief
beauty is
and will be, briefly,
then and then again.

Santa Cruz resident **Lisa Allen Ortiz** is the author of *Guide to the Exhibit*, which won the 2016 Perugia Press Prize, as well as two chapbooks: *Turns Out* and *Self Portrait as a Clock*. She managed to make herself a website where you can learn more: www.lisaallenortiz.com

ENRIQUE LEAL

Abyssalia XV, 2017
Silk mezzotint, 42.5 x 30.25 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST