

## Artist Statement by Lisa Swards

This body of work is an extension of my *White Parachute* exhibition held at *fortyfivedownstairs* in July 2013. Consistent with its theme, these new works included in "*Flight from Silence*" also draw on memories during wartime.

My focus however has now shifted from the personal human element to a group of little-known heroes of the war, that is the Homing Pigeons of Europe and Australia.

These birds have a long history of service during wartime action, as far back as when news of Napoleon's defeat reached England by carrier Pigeon well before horsemen arrived. Thus the call up of the Pigeons as a pivotal point in the reflections of war should not be surprising.

The story of War Pigeons and in particular the subjects of my new body of work, being the 32 Pigeons awarded medals for WW2 service, is one of remarkable bravery, with their delivered messages contributing towards saving countless lives during WW2.

Always interested in the symbolic power of birds, my interest led to research into the thirty-two Pigeons, which form the focus of my current works. Two of these Pigeons are Australian, they have been taxidermied, and they currently reside at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

I have attempted to poetically yet playfully recapture their unique names, service numbers and stories within a wide range of mediums including paintings and works on paper that incorporate contemporary and traditional printmaking applications ... images in which these medal recipients and the elements of this historic period co-exist.

The large scaled paintings reflect the vast night skies that the Pigeons crossed. These make a stark contrast to the works on paper, of silent and cold forest imagery; forests from where and into which they made their daring journeys. To honour these little creatures, small individual etchings, drypoints and monoprints, form a heroic tribute wall.

The use of Drop Parachutes is to acknowledge their importance in combination with the Pigeons. They were used in WW2 to deliver items such as medical supplies and mail, and some Pigeons made landfall via such transport. In the installation of vintage drop parachutes the avian and wartime experience of flight, risk and valour subtly converge.

## The Dickin Medal

The Dickin Medal, a large bronze medallion, bears the words 'For Gallantry' and 'We Also Serve' – written within a laurel wreath. The ribbon is striped green, brown, and pale blue representing water, earth and air to symbolise the naval, military, civil defence and air forces.

The medal was instituted by Mrs Maria Dickin. It is awarded to any animal displaying gallantry and devotion to duty whilst serving with British Empire armed forces or civil emergency services. The award is commonly referred to as 'the animals' Victoria Cross. As of April 2014 the Dickin Medal has been awarded 65 times. 32 WW2 messenger Pigeons are recipients of this medal for their life-saving action in conflict.



Information sources:  
[www.anzacday.org.au](http://www.anzacday.org.au)  
[www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)

Acknowledgement and gratitude is extended to Jane Peek, Curator Military Heraldry and Technology, and Craig Blanch Assistant Curator Heraldry and Technology, **Australian War Memorial (AWM) Canberra** for sharing information and arranging a personal viewing of the two Australian Pigeons who are taxidermied and reside in storage at the AWM.

## Dickin Medal Pigeon Recipients (1943-1947)

<b>White Vision</b> SURP.41.L.3089	<b>Commando</b> NURP.38.EGU.242	<b>Mary</b> NURP.40.WCE.249
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<b>Winkie</b> NEHU.40.NS.1	<b>Royal Blue</b> NURP.40.GVIS.453	<b>Tommy</b> NURP.41.DHZ56
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<b>Tyke (George)</b> 1263 MEPS 43	<b>Ruhr Express</b> NPS.43.29018	<b>All Alone</b> NURP.39.SDS.39
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<b>Beach Comber</b> NPS.41.NS.4230	<b>William of Orange</b> NPS.42.NS.15125	<b>Princess</b> 42WD593
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<b>Gustav</b> NPS.42.31066	<b>Scotch Lass</b> NPS.42.21610	<b>Mercury</b> NURP.37.CEN.335
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<b>Paddy</b> NPS.43.9451	<b>Billy</b> NU.41.HQ.4373	<b>NURP.38.BPC.6</b>
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<b>Kenley Lass</b> NURP.36.JH.190	<b>Broad Arrow</b> 41.BA.2793	<b>GI Joe</b> USA43SC6390
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<b>Navy Blue</b> NPS.41.NS.2862	<b>NPS.42.NS.2780</b>	<b>Duke of Normandy</b> NURP.41.SBC.219
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<b>Flying Dutchman</b> NPS.42.NS.4480	<b>NPS.42.NS.7524</b>	<b>NURP.43.CC.1418</b>
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<b>Dutch Coast</b> NURP.41.A.2164	<b>Maquis</b> NPSNS.42.36392	<b>Cologne</b> NURP39.NPS.144
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## Australian Army Signal Corps

**DD.43.T.139**

**DD.43.Q.879**

# White Vision's Story

She is standing strong and almost ghostlike, ready for flight: Artist's interpretation of *White Vision*, service number SURP.41.L.3089.

In October 1942 Catalina, a British warplane hit a wave of horrific weather during a mission under Captain Ted Southern. Forced to ditch into the Atlantic, radio transmission was lost. Southern wrote location details, inserted information in leg capsules of two carrier Pigeons that were released. One was lost. The other named White Vision made it back to home base Shetland, battered and having flown 60 miles in gale force winds with no visibility. Delivering the vital message to the RAF who was then able to find the Catalina stranded at sea. White Vision saved 11 lives that day and was awarded the Dickin Medal on 2 December 1942.



**Gallery Hours:**  
Tuesday - Friday 11am - 5pm  
Saturday 12pm - 4pm



**fortyfive  
downstairs**

Images: **Front**, *Drop chute II*, digital archival print on BFK cotton rag framed, 700 x 520mm; **Back**, *2,175 days and the woods are silent' (detail)* 2015, mixed media on BFK Rives cotton rag 300gsm, 1200 x 2450mm; **Inside**, *The Recipients' (detail)* 2014, individual etchings, dry-points, monoprints 135 x 190 mm on BFK Rives 300gsm, framed 1320 x 1000 mm, unique state; **This page**, *White Vision (detail)*, 2015, mixed media on BFK Rives 300gsm, 500 x 600 mm, unique state. Photographs by Chris van der Spuy.



## Lisa Sowards Flight from Silence

Exhibition opens Tuesday 12 May 2015, 5pm - 7pm  
Opening Speaker Dr. Julie Cotter

Exhibition runs 12 - 30 May 2015

Printmaking, paintings, works on paper  
Installation of vintage drop parachutes

[www.lisasowards.com.au](http://www.lisasowards.com.au)



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