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# DARIO ROBLETO | SPECIAL PROJECT 2017

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*The First Time, The Heart (First Pulse, Flatline)*, 2017, Lithography on hand-flamed and sooted paper, lithotine lift and shellac on Rising Drawing Bristol, Diptych, each 11 ½" x 14 ¼", Edition of 20

## ***The First Time, The Heart (First Pulse, Flatline)***

by Dario Robleto

The human quest to represent our bodily form is ancient. From the earliest known cave drawings tracing the curvature of a hand, the masterworks of the human figure by Leonardo di Vinci, even modern medical imaging that maps the terrain of our brains at the level of the neuron, humans have yearned to understand themselves and others through marks and images. Perhaps this deep rooted desire found its most essential form through the invention of an image we often take for granted, and which for the first time in history gave us visual access to the living heart: the pulse wave.

But to visualize this fundamental movement of life is to suggest the possibility of visualizing its opposite: the stillness of death. As revolutionary as it was to invent a new image of life through a simple rhythmic curve, that same curve, stretched long and taut, has produced no less an iconic image of our existence: the flatline.

But where are the first pulse wave and flatline ever recorded? Whose hearts were the first to offer their form, their remnants of a lived, emotionally complex life embedded in the oscillations of a wavy line? What technology needed to be invented to record the long-thought inaccessible heart?

Like the earliest tracing of a hand on an ancient cave wall, these milestones in the history of images should be remembered, honored and empathized with in their ability to universally convey something essential about us over long stretches of time. The diptych of prints, *The First Time, the Heart (First Pulse, Flatline)*, created by Robleto with Island Press, brings together the first successful scientific attempts to mark these poles of life (1853 and 1870, respectively), which changed the way we understand ourselves and communicate our bodies.

Although still very crude, with both the pulse wave and flatline images physicians now had an indirect window into the heart's behavior, which would revolutionize the scientific study of health and disease. But these lines were not only medical, they were also philosophical in the long arc of human self-reflection. Humans are beautifully creative in the ways we hope meaning—essences—are literally in the lines, images or objects we create to hold them. The first pulse wave and flatline should be remembered as part of that history.



To honor the original method of image recording used by 19th century physiologists—mark making in soot—Robleto, working with Island Press, devised a novel printing method merging lithography with hand-flamed and sooted paper. A high-resolution scan was taken of the original, historic pulse lines, which were printed lithographically in transparent ink. The paper was then hand-flamed, depositing an atmospheric layer of soot over the image area. After the paper was briefly submerged in a bath of shellac and denatured alcohol to fix the soot to the paper, lithotine (a purified, petroleum-based solvent) was applied to the printed lines and text with a brush to gently lift the image from the soot ground, revealing the white lines.



*Flatline, detail of The First Time, the Heart (First Pulse, Flatline)*

**NOTE:** *The First Time, The Heart (First Pulse, Flatline)* is a special print edition that is part of a larger project by Dario Robleto titled, *The First Time, The Heart: A Portrait of Life, 1854-1913*, a set of 50 prints housed in a clamshell portfolio box, also published by Island Press with an expected release date of April, 2018.

Dario Robleto lives and works in Houston, TX. He has had numerous solo exhibitions since 1997, including the Menil Collection, Houston, TX (2014) and the Baltimore Museum of Art (2014). In 2008 a 10-year survey exhibition, *Alloy of Love*, was organized by the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College. Notable group shows include *Prospect 4: The Lotus in Spite of the Swamp*, New Orleans, LA; *Explode Every Day: An Inquiry into the Phenomena of Wonder*, MASS MoCA; and *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2004). Robleto is the recipient of the 2007 Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant and the 2009 USA Rasmuson Fellowship. In 2015 he joined a distinguished team of scientists as the artistic consultant to the “Breakthrough Initiatives”. He served as an Artist-in-Residence in Neuroaesthetics at the University of Houston and at the SETI Institute. He was recently appointed as the 2016 Texas State Artist Laureate.

## IslandPress

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### ISLAND PRESS

Island Press is a research-based printmaking workshop and publisher committed to education and innovation in contemporary print editions and artist projects. Visiting artists work side by side with the master printer and students in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. The result is high-quality print editions of technical complexity created in a unique setting where artists and students share skill sets and ideas.

Island Press is project-driven and collaborative, tapping into the place where the artist’s creative research intersects with the all of the

possibilities of the print studio. Recent artist projects include editions with Lisa Anne Auerbach, Radcliffe Bailey, Squeak Carnwath, Willie Cole, Chris Duncan, Tom Friedman, Orly Genger, Ann Hamilton, Trenton Doyle Hancock, Nina Katchadourian, Shaun O’Dell, Lisa Sanditz, Beverly Semmes, James Siena, and Paula Wilson.

Island Press was founded in 1978. Past visiting artists include Hung Liu, Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, Joyce Scott, Juan Sanchez, Nick Cave, and many other great artists.

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