

portfolio | arshad hakim

link to the essay, [here](#)

*this essay is about letting go
or sleeping in bent light*
2023
essay in a publication titled, *inordinate skies*

arshad hakim

2023
essay

this essay is about letting go or sleeping in bent light

The Context:

A playlist acts as a memory. The after-effects produce a sensorium that has already been felt and lived. A memory to drench myself in, to feel familiar. It has been months since this loop formed and now I don't know if the comfort is a sedative or a stimulant.

I send the poem to a friend as a message. We share poetry with each other when we come across something resonant. She sends a smiley face as a reply. I can feel her smile over my blue screen.

The Mise-en-scene:

Walking. Along the street, the park, while getting groceries; the rhythms of everyday life. Thinking of the 'what ifs' and 'perhapses'. I take a screenshot of a poem titled 'Small Sentence to Drive Yourself Sane' by Lew Welch¹ from my Twitter feed:

*The next time you are doing something absolutely ordinary, or even better
the next time you are doing something absolutely necessary, such as pissing, or making love, or shaving, or washing the dishes or the baby or yourself or the room, say to yourself:
"So it's all come to this!"*

The Gesture: An Incantation.
Close your eyes and feel the earth moving beneath your feet.

Think of the sky; it's night and the light makes it appear violet [read as violent]. The clouds move rhythmically, with soft changes in shape. And then there is volume. He tells me to look up as much as I can, and when he does that, I think he wants me to escape or he wants to escape, for those few brief seconds.

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A self-recursive refrain that I keep telling myself: I am open to you because I can afford you. I think of you, all of you. I oscillate between affordance and attendance;² does my affordance to you translate into attending to you? Memory takes over at this point, the sky, your smile, the frown, the sharpness of your nose, your boyish gait in an old man's body, the old man's charm, the rush in your speech; his sense of certainty, the ease with which he moves, the assuredness of knowing who and what he is. I take all of this in, look at the sky, and say to myself: repeat the incantation for however long you want.

[This text is written at 3,791 metres above sea level; suspended. Flatness and depth dance in a mirage.]

Robert Ashley in *Private Parts. The Park* at 06:28, speaks, *the other side works with the things that are alongside us, the attachments.*³

For the longest, I thought I was bound to him and to the idea of him, bound in the ways he moves, how he sees the world, what he makes of it—all of it. There was a madness to it. And then I replaced 'bound' with 'attachment'. The attachment of being in relation, reciprocity, reconciliation, and resignation, with him.

I make a playlist for him and I call it: *fragments: i see you in shards.*⁴ The list of songs in it moves between joy, longing, hope, and what it might feel to hold power. There are five tracks in it: a two-part EP released by Parallax Editions, the tracks titled, *Ride and Flowers; the theme from Gay Man's Guide to Safer Sex; Japanese Planetarium* by Legowelt; and *IWD4U* by Prince interpreted by El Perro Del Mar.

The soundtrack is the genre of ineloquence most conventional to melodrama: it is what tells you that you are really most at home in yourself, bathed by emotions you can always recognize, and that whatever material harshness you live is not the real, but rather an accident that you have to clean up after, which will be more pleasant if you whistle while you work.

² I would like to thank Sheena Sarda, for pointing me towards this shift from affordance to attendance. She speaks of attendance in the context of care and the question of what it means to attend to a care-taker. See: "SEA Conversations To Infra-red Care: 26. A Collective Reading on Care." YouTube, 30 Sept. 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v88_wde9b0Y.

³ I first heard Abley years ago, and like most music, I go back to it at points when I feel I need to. The first track in *Private Parts. The Park* begins with a man in a hotel, trying to figure something out. What makes me go back to *Private Parts* is L. Ashley's voice. The song's lyrics are framed in telling the story, which are vague at best, but leave me with a sense of comfort. The album ends with a solo decanting various kinds of twilight, and then says, "Dear George, what's going on? I am not the same person I used to be." —Abley, Robert. "Robert Ashley - Private Parts (1978) Full Album." YouTube, 7 Feb. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QoHjWjNSL_k.

⁴ See, "Fragments: i see you in shards." SoundCloud, soundcloud.com/arshad-hakim-198346503/sets/fragments-i-see-in-shards. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

He said: i want he who can bend gravity, and when he bends light, he shall see me.

I told him:

*The world has to survive the long episodes in which one or one's people do not know what to want, apart from something vaguely affective; then there are episodes in which crisis threatens survival norms and everyone's scrambling to find an anchor and the resources seem limited, except for those of aggression, which are unlimited; and then there is the ordinary in which incompatible needs and fantasies are always on the table, related to structural crisis or the singular chaos people bring to relationality. My point here is this: incompatible needs and fantasies induce ambivalence. Internal chaos produces external chaos, that expresses it without copying it. Any social theory worthy of its ambition requires a space for enigmatic, chaotic, incoherent, and structurally contradictory attachments; it needs a way to assess the attachment needs that put people in relation without promising to deliver "a life" that feels cushioned. There is no cure for ambivalence. This is what it means to move within an object world.*¹⁰

Exit Seductress.

¹⁰ Bierman, Lauren. "A properly political concept of love: The case of love in ten pages." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2011, pp. 653–691.

¹¹ Credit: Z. Levay, NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope image (open source). See: www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw2310a/. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.

¹² Credit: Z. Levay, NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope image (open source). See: www.spacetelescope.org/images/potw1712a/. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023.



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This is the story of the changing of the light.
Of what transformations are and what they do.

This is the story of an eclipse, or many eclipses—the change in and of light making us believe in the magnificent and the insignificant.

The film takes its cue from *The Stellar Rays of the Stars* by Al-Kindi and a re-reading of Iblis's narrative by Husayn Ibn Mansur al- Hallaj—foregrounding the image and the phenomena of the eclipse. *The Stellar Rays of the Stars* is an astronomical and astrological treatise by Al-Kindi, who was a philosopher during the Abbasid period. He proposed that rays from the stars travel in straight lines and when those rays reach an object they carried some part of the star within them; in turn affecting the object that the light has touched. Working with Al-Kindi's framework, I speculate on how he would frame shadows—light being blocked by an object and the effect light being blocked can have on us.

Three Sufi Saints re-read the story of Iblis and propose that he is a lover par-excellence. The narrative of Iblis mimics the narrative of the fall of Lucifer within Judo-Christian theology. The Sufis defend Iblis by stating that he does not prostrate to Adam as per God's command, because he is so much in love with God that he couldn't take his eyes off him. Within Sufi Iconography, Iblis is known as the Peacock Angel, Black Light and the Tresses of a Lover.

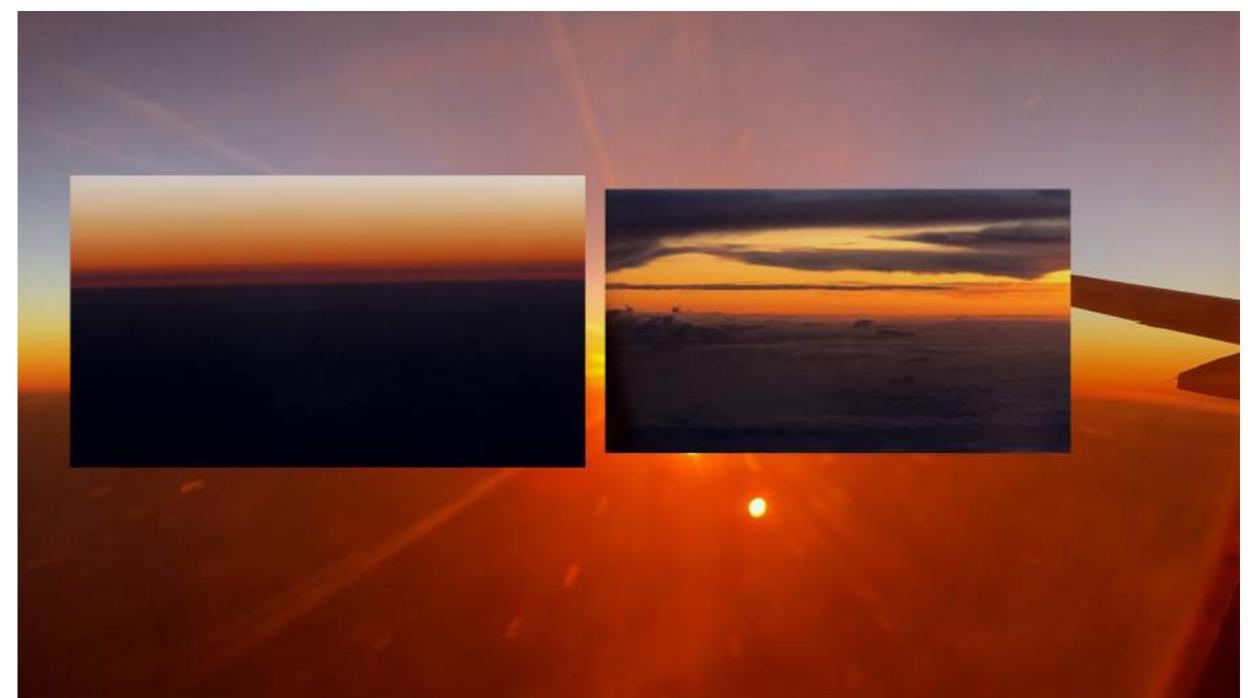
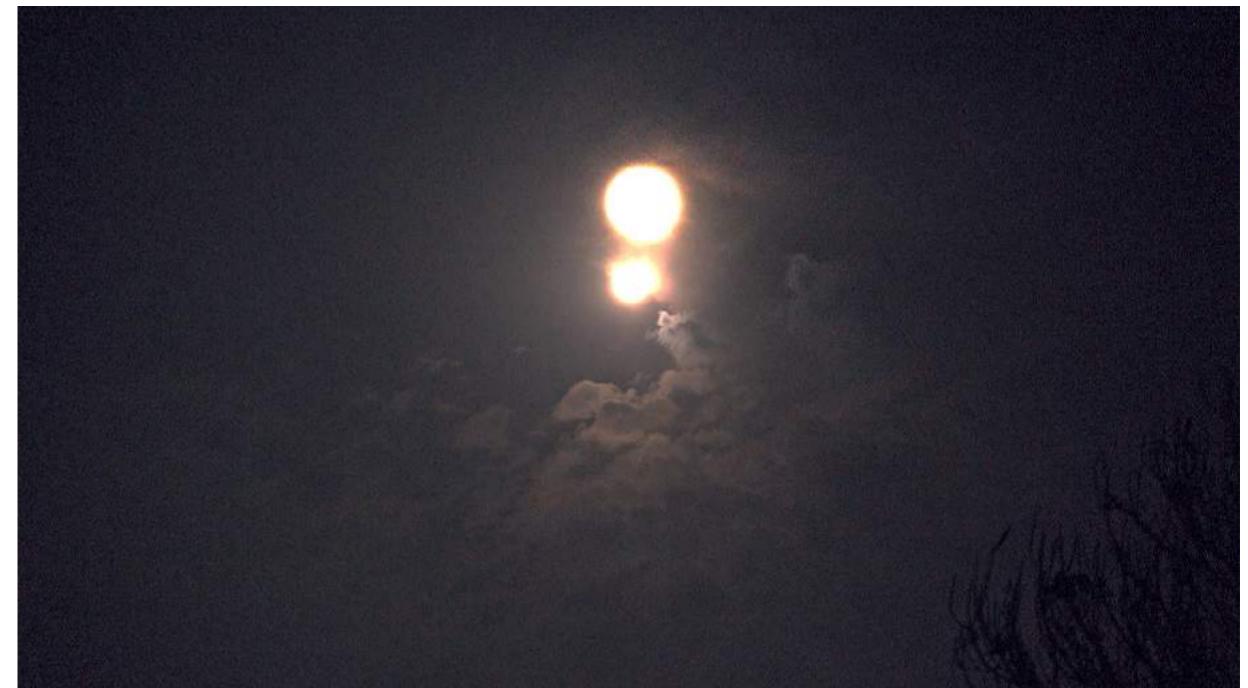
Framed within a dialogue, the film speculates the effects of light changing and marks them on the registers of the ethereal, the emotional and the theological.

*to see the sun at midnight/
loving against time*

2023

digital film with sound, 28 mins 34 secs

This film was made possible through the support of the Generator Cooperative Art Production Fund, 2021-22.



film stills
contact the artist for preview access

In an experimental piece—part-prose, part-poem—arshad hakim stays with an image. Through jumps, cuts and loops he tells and never shows, a moment as freeze-frame, as screenshot, as kinetic imprint. A force that suspends everything. Interlaced with music, literature and theory, *Suspended Volatility* takes us on the transmutative path of a lived moment to image to memory to software and finally, to history.

—Arushi Vats, Editor, ASAP Fiction

Link to essay [here](#)

Suspended Volatility: Act 2

An Interior Image

ARSHAD HAKIM | AUG 20, 2022

How should I describe getting into water?

Do I mention how cold the water felt, or that being submerged felt like I belonged, or that the moisture felt like home, or that I wanted to be swept away by the high tide, or that looking at water hypnotised me, or that the twilight reflecting on water possessed me, or that I was haunted by golden light crashing on the shore.

Wet
glistening, yet
inundated
a movement that is between levitating and floating.

Time is reduced to 75% of its actual speed.

he
him
his

Hunted.
Windswept.

How do I describe how the wind feels?

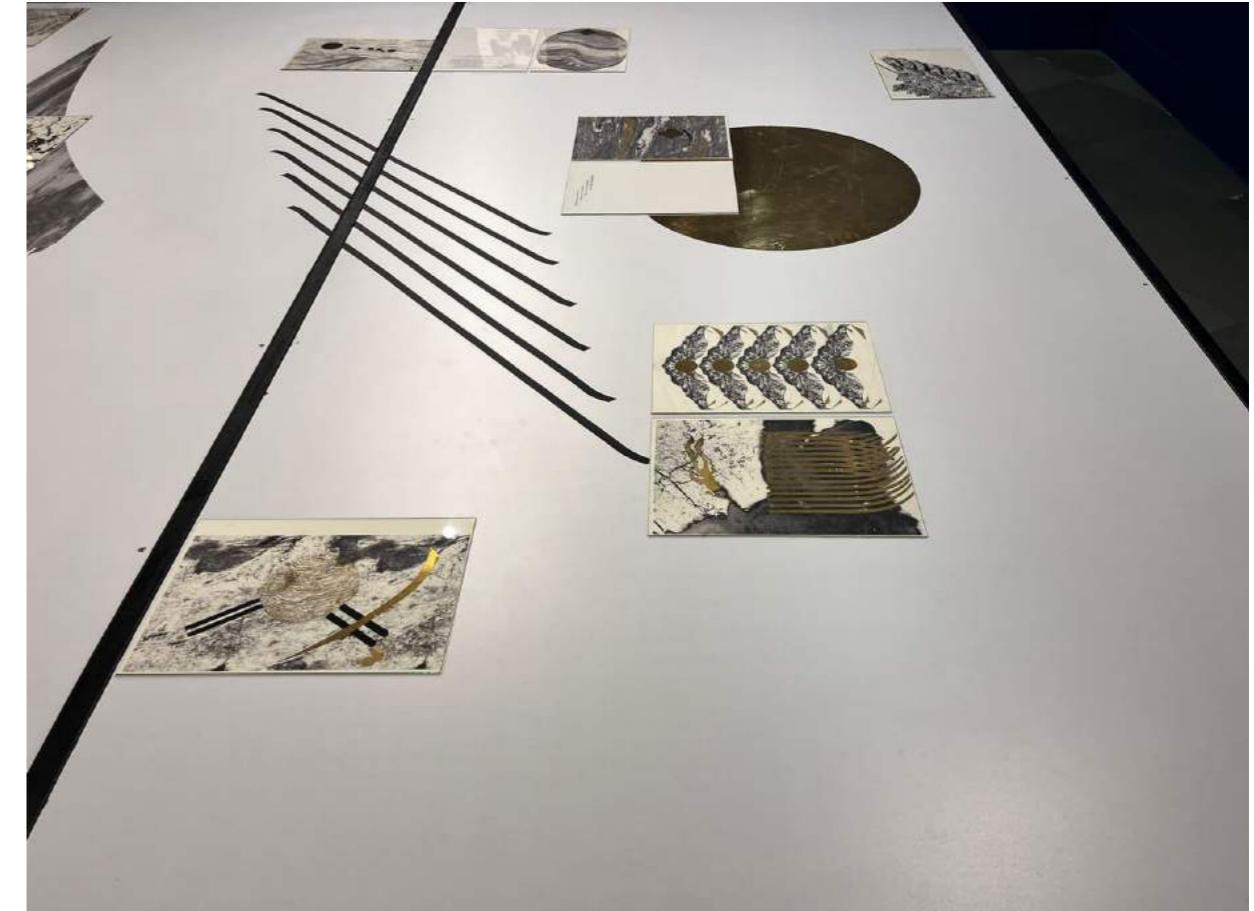
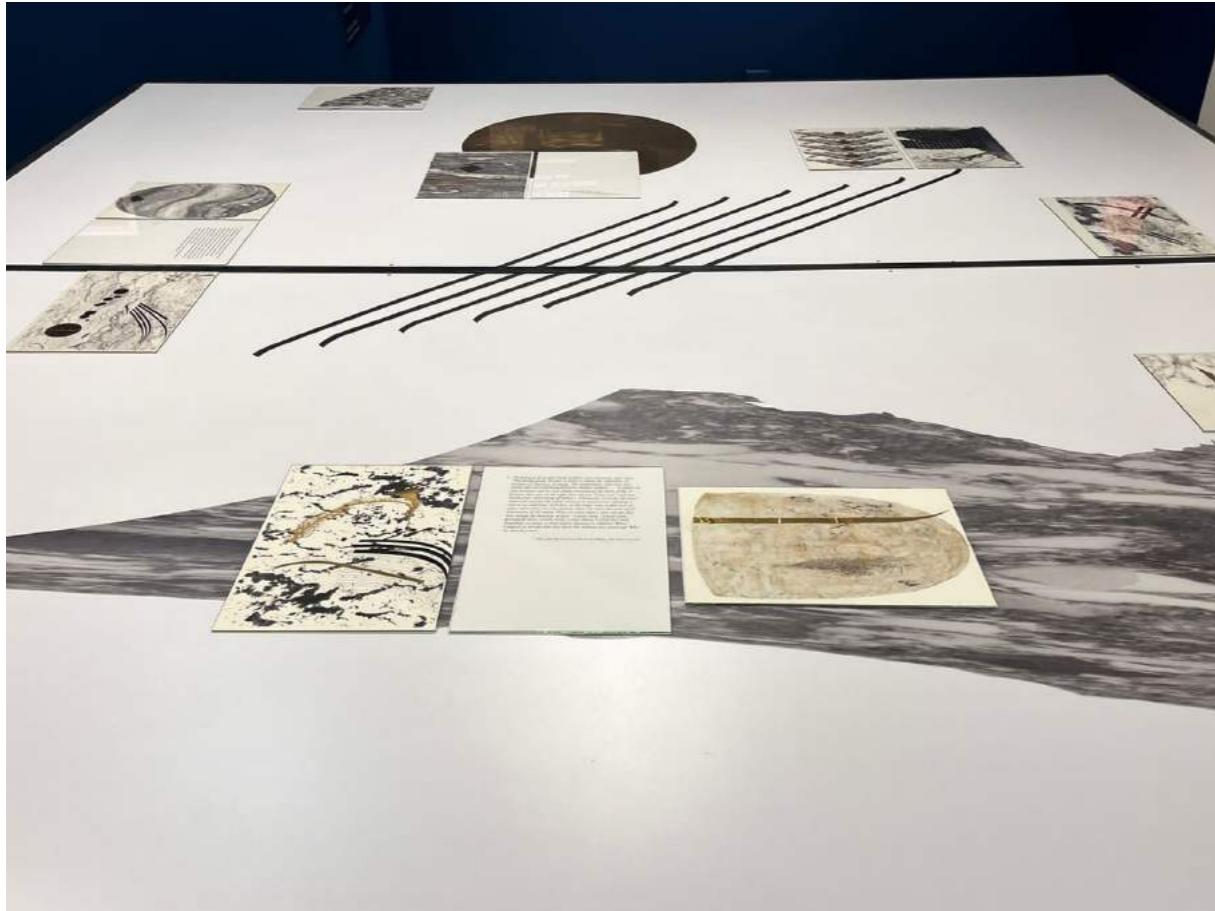
[David Wojnarowicz](#): In the shadow of forward motion: the meaning of the title is: Consider you're in a car and you're speeding along the expressway, and everything you see out of the corner of your eye that doesn't register in the pursuit of that speed, in terms of motion, is what's in the shadow. It's all things quietly occurring within the absence of sight that take place in the pursuit of speed, in terms of motion.

Suspended Volatility: act 2: an interior image

2022

text

this piece was commissioned for ASAP Fiction.



ghost rhythms

2022

digital print, gouache, gold ink, and gold vinyl on paper
21 x 29.7 cm (series of 15)

display images from *inordinate skies* at new delhi



1. *The presence of another being mobilises your attention, your senses. That feeling grows, becomes a desire to repeat the experience. It becomes an itinerary. A voyage. The imagination takes over that reality and starts building fantasies, dreams, projects . . . It creates its own necessity, and in some people encompasses the whole of life. It becomes that voice in the night that tells you "I love you," and that knocks your whole being off balance. Ultimately, it reaches the zones where you question the whole universe; it domesticates thinking, it ends as an addiction. And then, in the tragic cases, it falls into an abyss, where there are cries of pain, where the lovers lose sense of all dimensions, of all reality. These are times when a poet can say that love changes the direction of time.¹ Linear time, cyclical time, geological time, cosmic time, a time where I could feel your heartbeat on mine, a time where distance is additive. What happens to people who live their life without any yearning? Who do they become?*

^{1.} Adnan, Etel. *The Cost of Love We Are Not Willing to Pay*. Hatje Cantz, 2011.

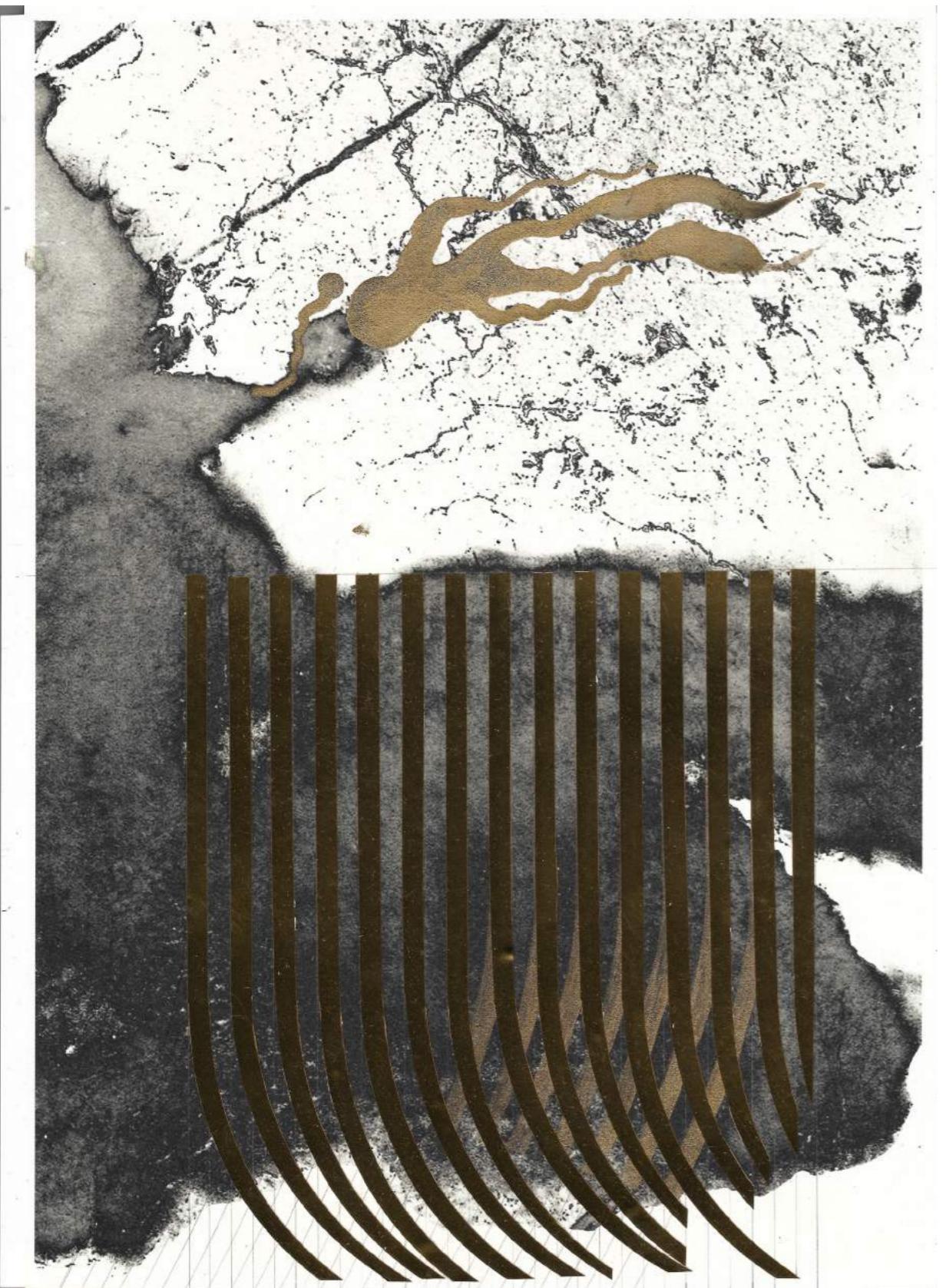


2. A desire not named desire; a rhythm not named rhythm.

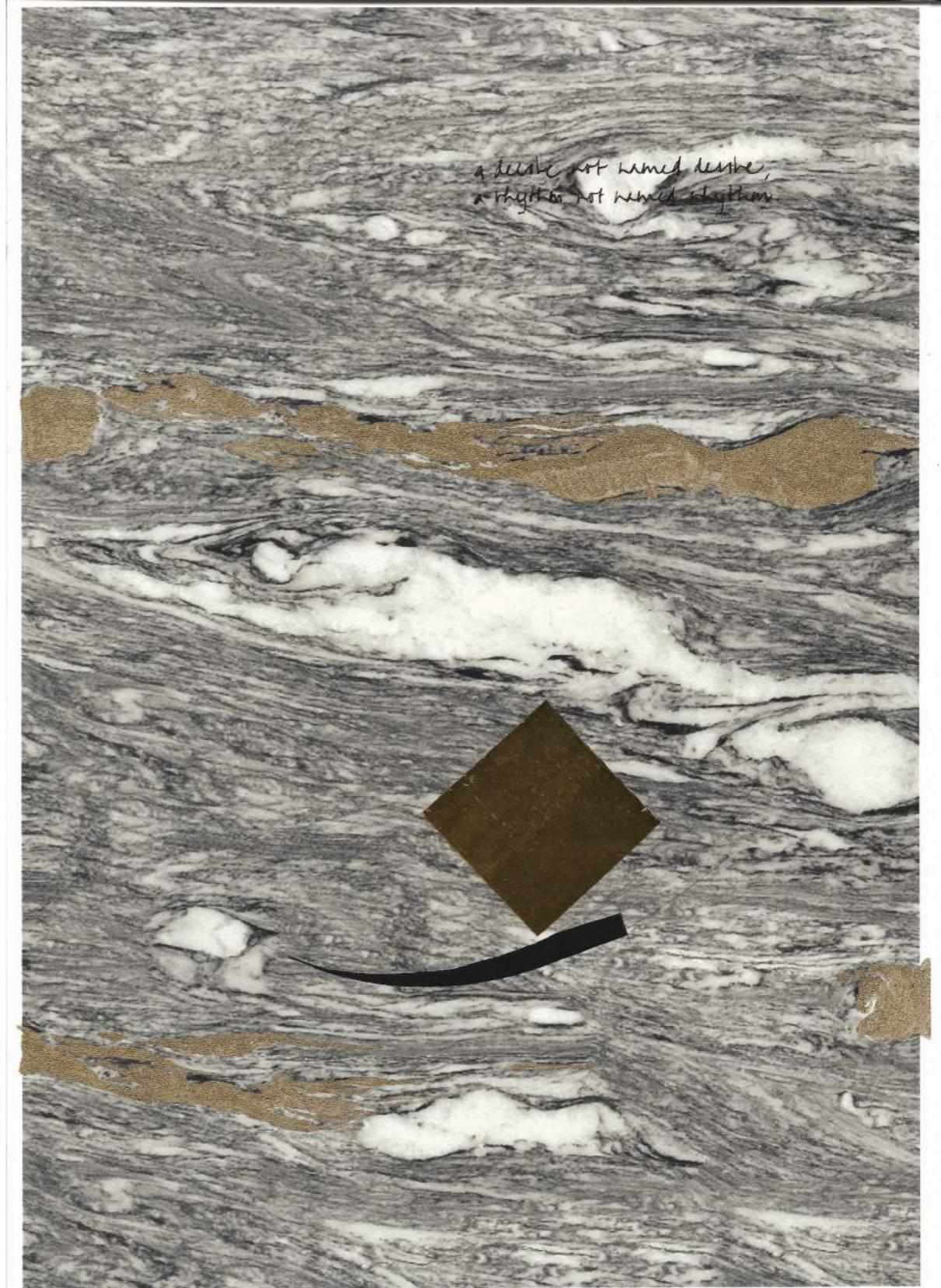


Distance value. Distances
distance vector separation
distance versus resentment
distance versus beauty





3. Distance versus intimacy,
Distance versus separation,
Distance versus resentment
and, distance versus beauty







4. "This last phenomenon is presented to the camera by Jan Zalasiewicz, the British geologist who was one of the first proponents of the Anthropocene... Standing in front of a tunnel excavated into the sandstone, he describes "Ghost Strata", theoretical lines of strata imagined by geologists in places where rocks would once have been but have since eroded or been destroyed by humans, because "even rocks are just passing through". In other words, they are projections, invisible yet omnipresent, which cumulatively amount to the entirety of the Earth's history." (From a review written by Giovanni Marchini Camia of Ghost Strata, a film by Ben Rivers).
A ghost strata as an inscription of time and of capital machinery:
a ghost strata as a cinematic space; ghost rhythms.





This lecture is about how a body moves while one is dancing, what sensations are generated during this event through these movements and they lead to zones of inflicted autonomy. Taking this as its premise, the lecture describes various conditions that occur within this temporal frame and how the body and communalities become vectors—a *Temporary Autonomous Zone* that operates within the frame of the night.

The lecture takes two digressions in order to illustrate vectors of movements that may not rest within the body but are rooted in the body—taking instances from cosmology and Islamic theology. The lecture also has components of electronic music—techno, jungle, amongst others, which provide an mise-en-scene to this thought.

Performance Document [here](#)



this is the rhythm of the night

2019
Lecture Performance
approximately 50 min

image from *Beau Travail* by Clare Denis, 1999

The film's central pivot rests on the idea of a dislodged and a fragmented sense of consciousness, where boundaries—between what one is and what is not—are hazy. As a result, this consciousness lacks a centre, and is constantly looking for one. By doing so, it acts as a parasite looking for a host, to attach itself to and consume. Linked with the idea of the parasite, is the idea of nihilist subjectivity; where points of not knowing and points of meaninglessness become generative sites for forging ideas around this dislodged consciousness.

Taking this as a base, the film explores these ideas of parasitic time in relation to a lover; notions of heat, self-immolation and how they are intrinsically tied to notions of nihilism. The film is sourced from a range of ideas and sequences, which include: a confrontation scene from *Solaris*, 1972 (By Andrei Tarkovsky), *Self Immolation by Qung Duc*, 1963 in Saigon, Vietnam and the *Promethean myth*.



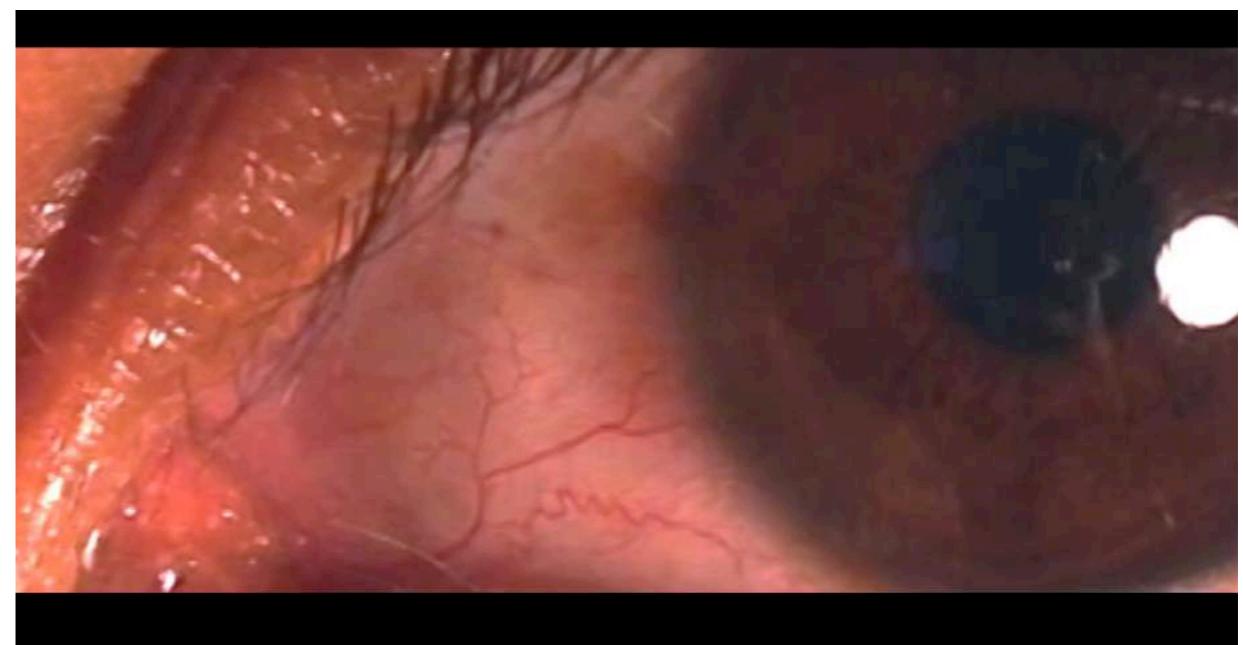
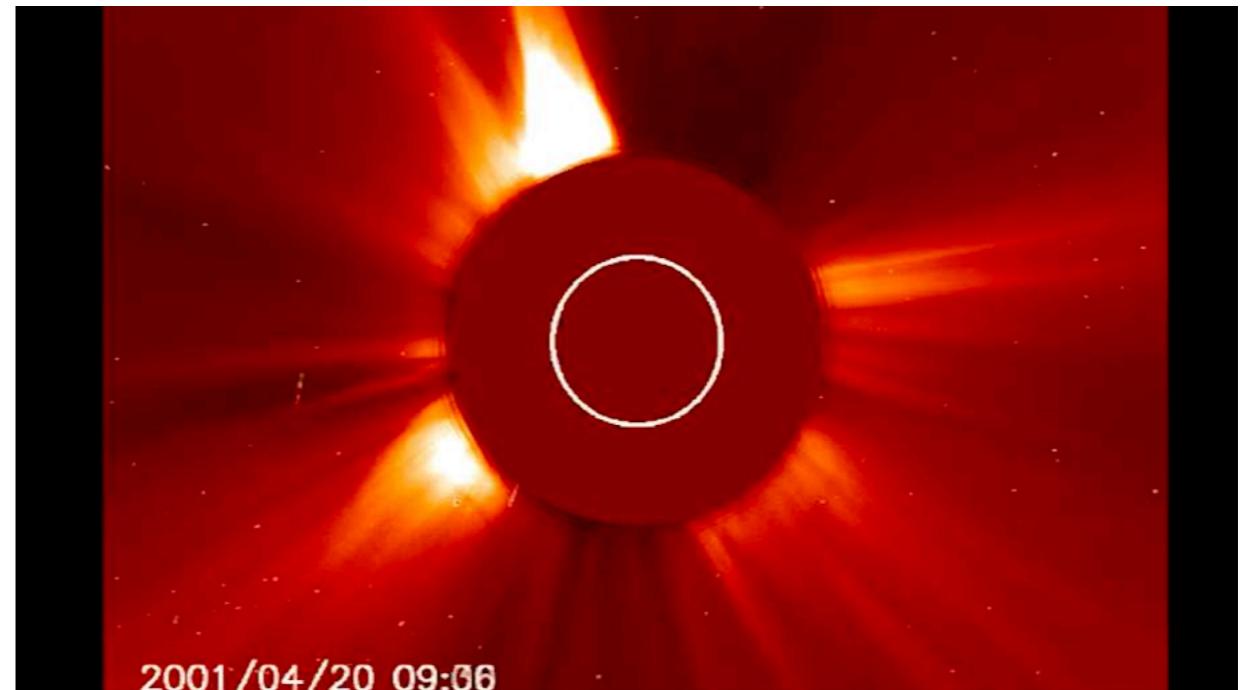
at the overturn

2018
Digital Video and sound, 17min 55sec

film stills
contact the artist for preview access

My impulse of making this video was to repurpose a sequence from *Blade Runner*, 1982 by Ridley Scott. I was intrigued by the sequence where Roy (replicant) confronts Dr. Tyrell (Head of the company who manufactures these replicants), asking the doctor to extended his life (according to the plot the replicants are very human like. Their life is cut shot to 4 years in order to prevent any revolt from them). My intrigue was: What does it mean to ask for more life? Why are we plagued by this existential question and how does it address the time that we live in?

The second video is a found footage taken from the NASA archives. It captures solar flares and magnetic waves emitted from the sun for a period of a month, which has been compressed to a minute. The piece is played on two separate screens, which are placed keeping the back of the screens together.



***it was high noon and i slept with the sun
(after Blade Runner, 1982)***

2017

Digital Video and sound, 3minutes 40sec and 1 minute;
loop time: 13min 06sec

film stills
contact the artist for preview access

These set of drawings are of an internal monologue of a cyborg in love. The cyborg couldn't recollect what the monologue was, it only remembered how it felt, and "feeling" was alien to it. It thought of its body, what responses the body had to its condition and how memory shaped what it felt. In this case, feeling something was to disintegrate.

Images within these drawings are sourced from an open-source cellular archive.

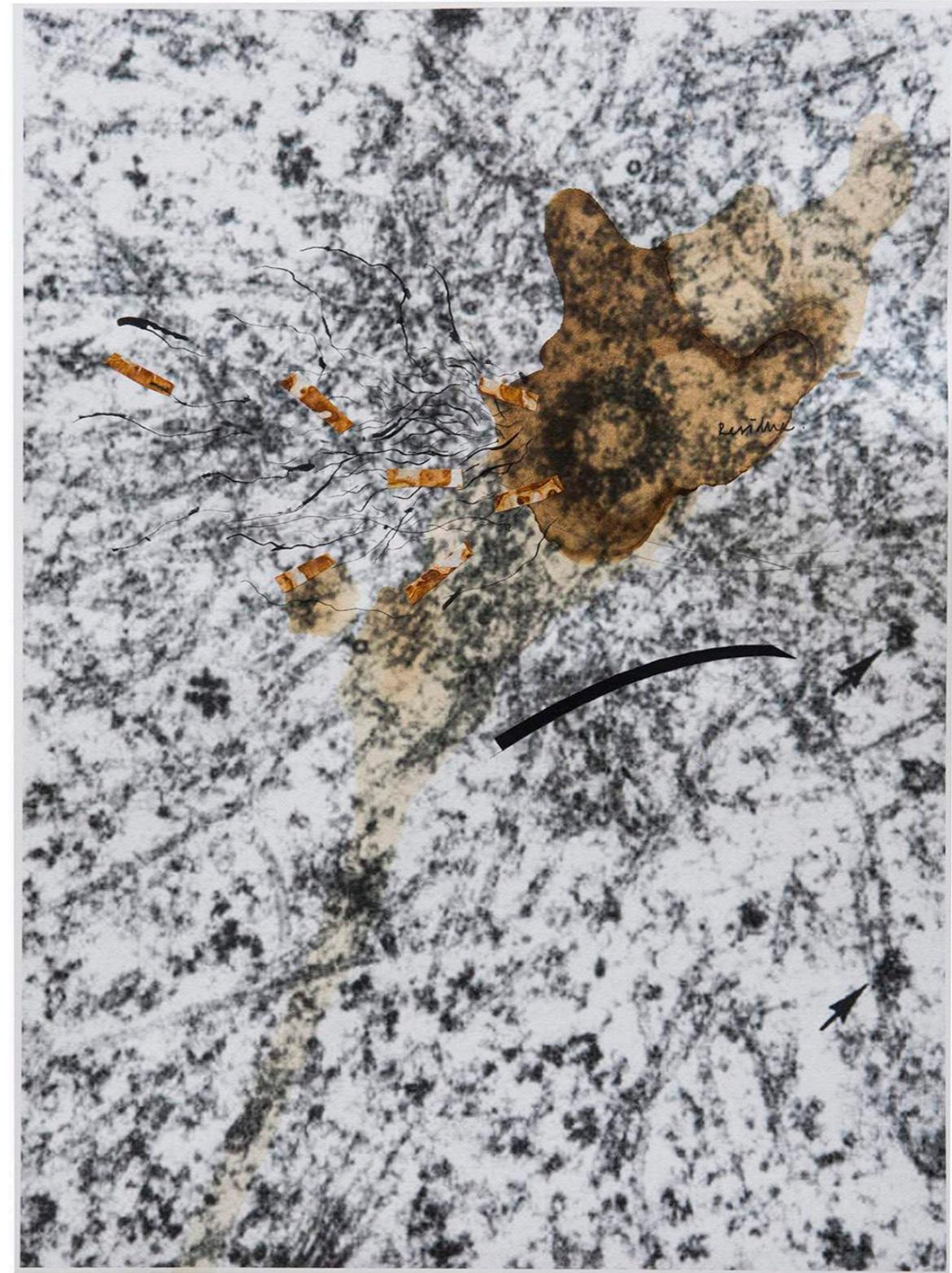
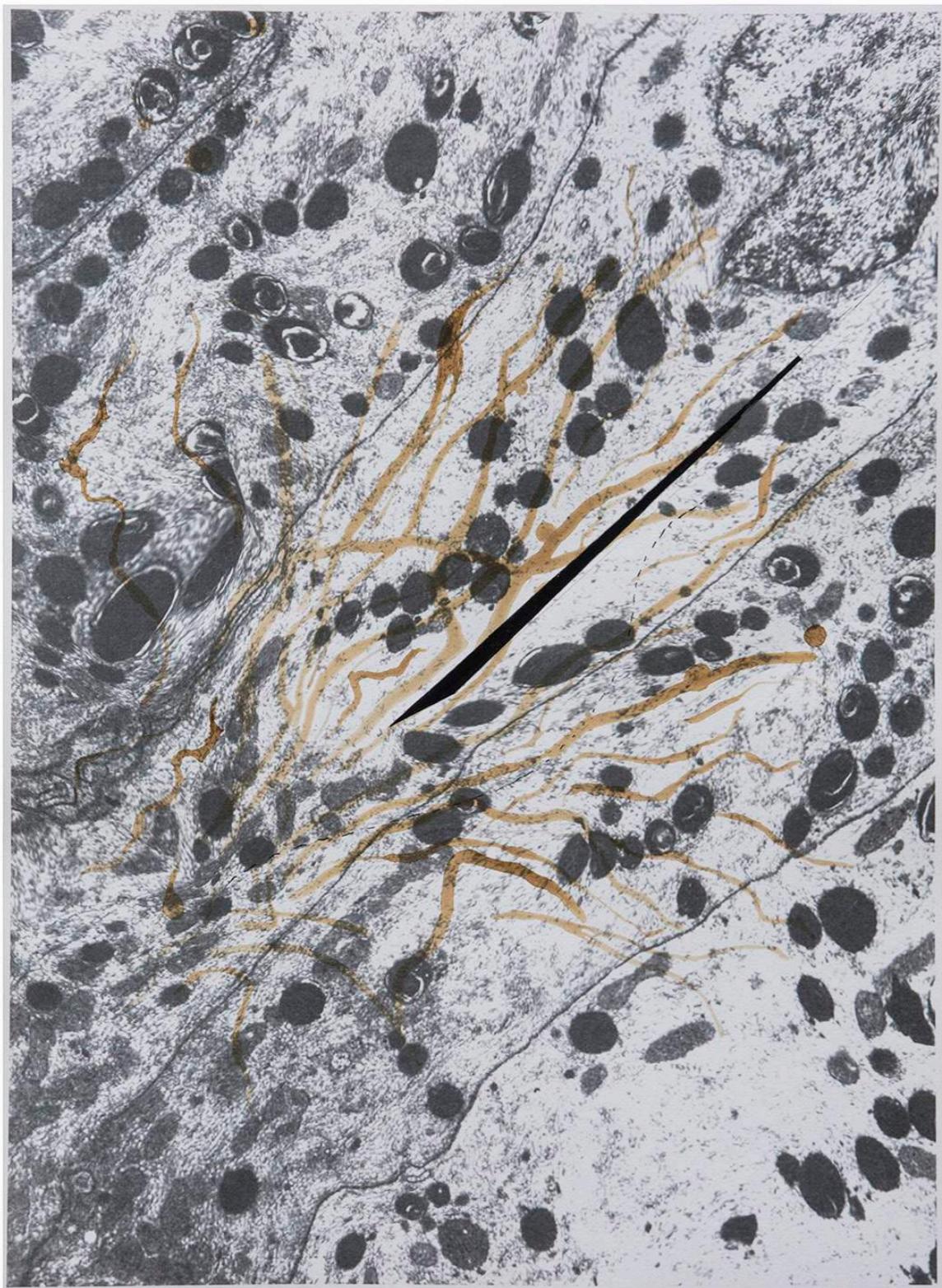


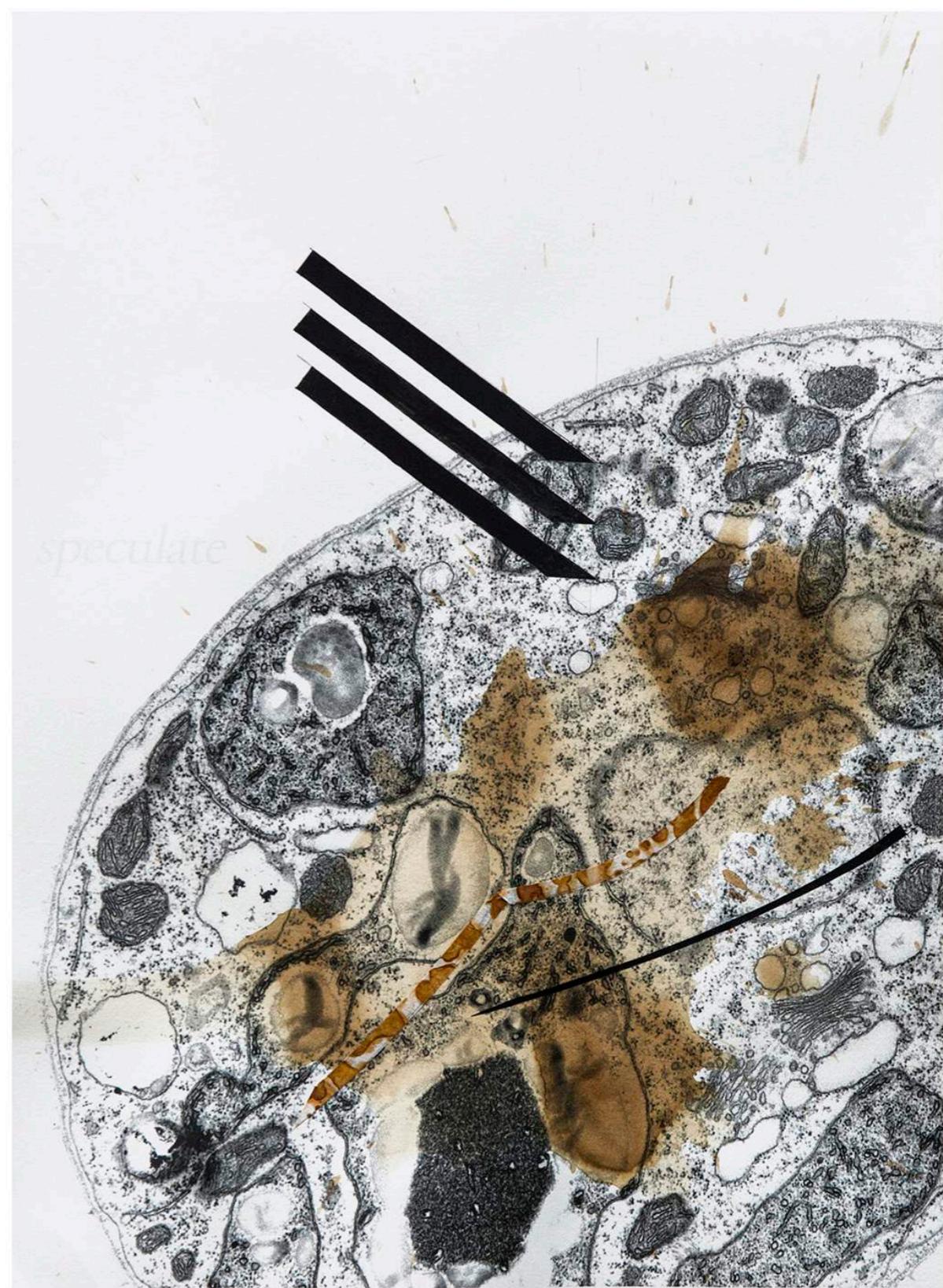
stages in return that i did not want

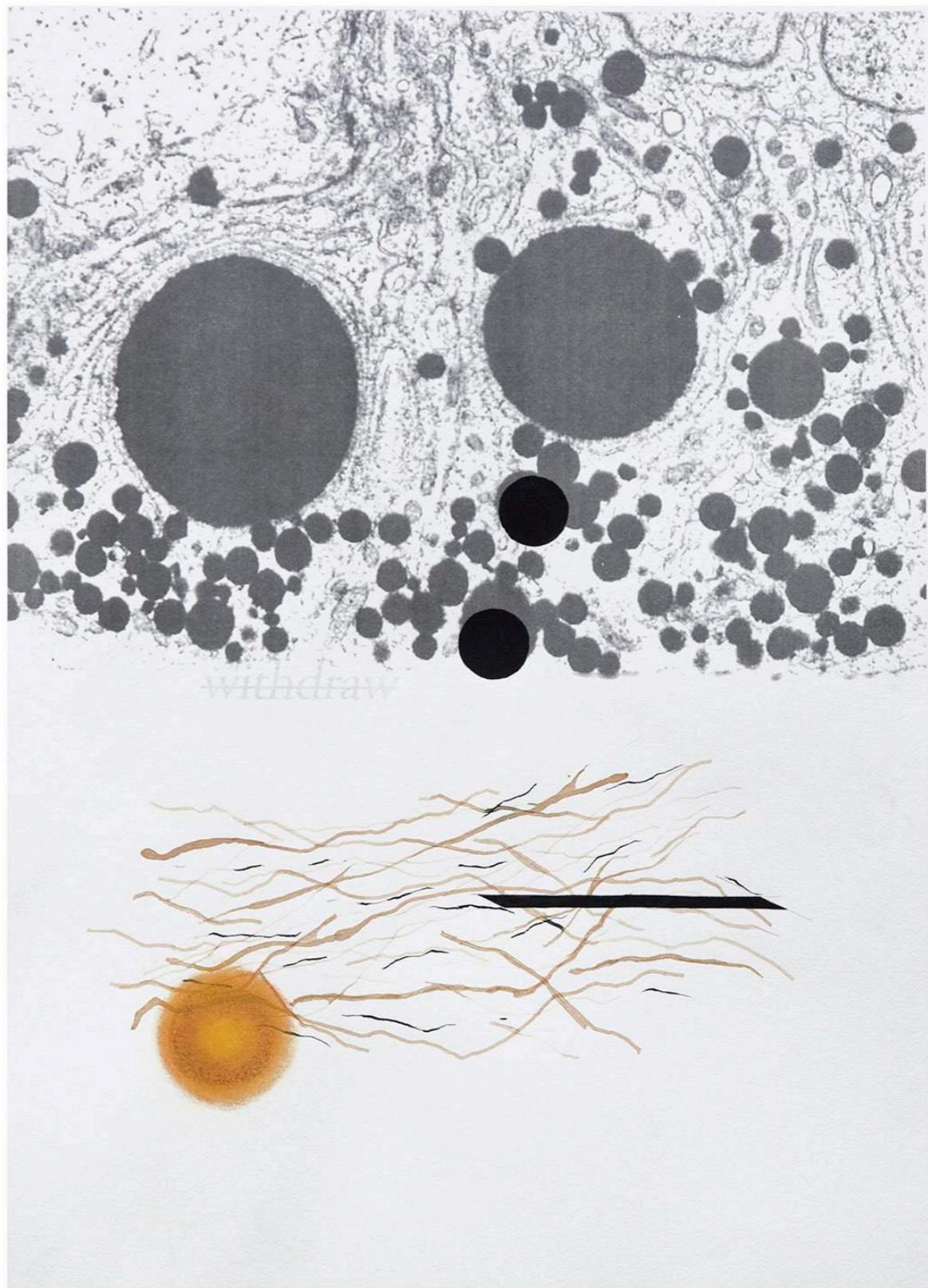
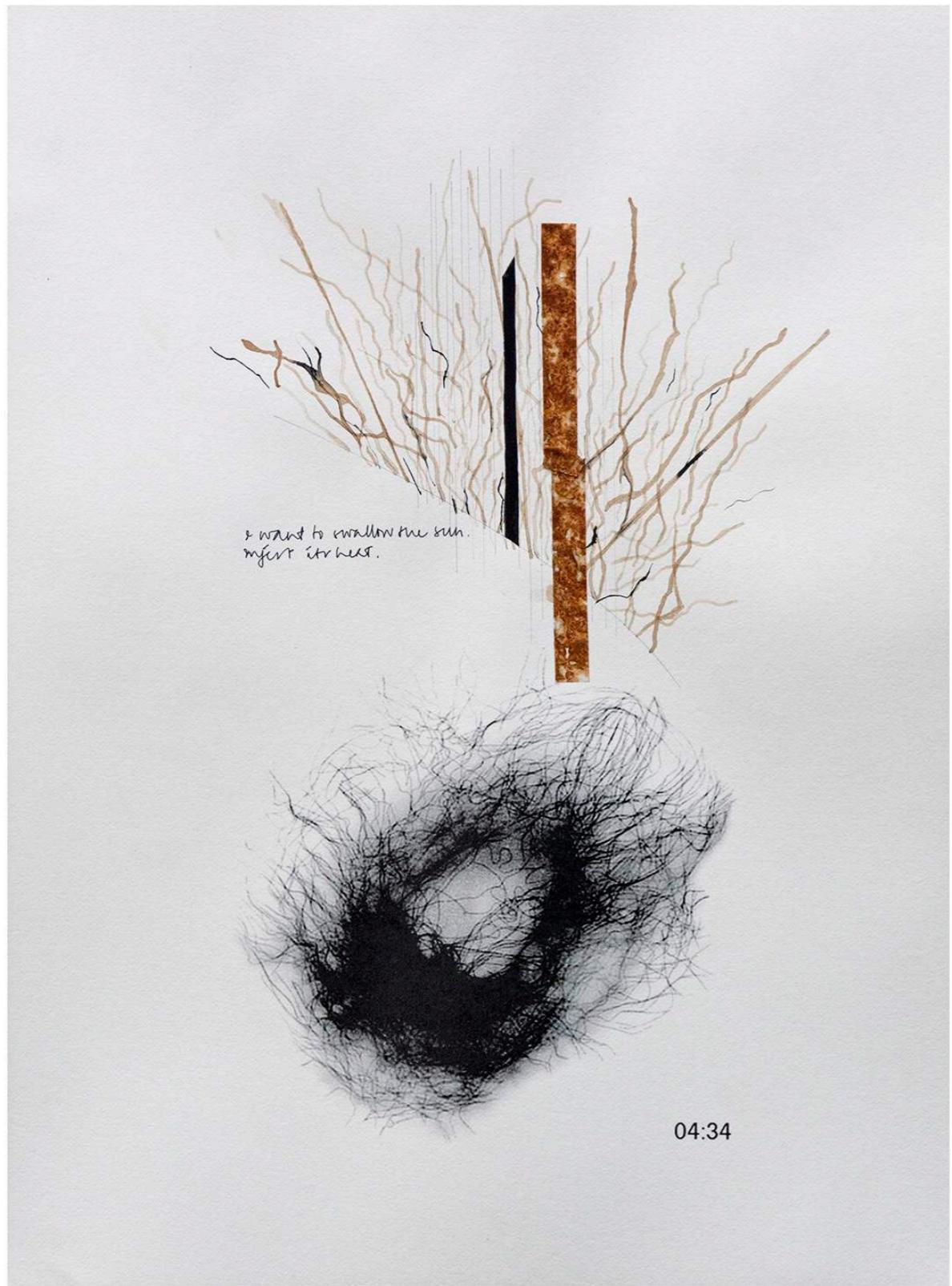
2016

Digital print, rust transfer, tea stain and
gouache on paper
27.94 X 38.1 cms (series of 09)

display image from
a voyage of seemingly propulsive speed and an apparent absolute stillness
at Gallery Ark, Vadodara











agitate

soak



This work was conceived while these few words kept going around in my mind: Refrain/Resist/ Hesitate/Wait/Agitate/ Dance/Red/Inertia/Speculate/Rush/Revolt.

Additionally, I had recently seen Sergei Parajanov's, *Colour of Pomegranates*, and there is a line within it, which states that *you are fire, your dress is made out of fire*. This line was tweaked to 'I am fire, my dress is made out of fire' and was running with the words on the LED board.



ouroboros

2016
12 X 1.5X1 feet, LED Scrolling Board

display image from *Imagined Futures, Reconstructed Pasts*
at Bikaner House, New Delhi
contact the artist for documentation videos

Flubber is a 1997 rom-com movie, a remake of *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961), directed by Les Mayfield and starring Robin Williams. The section that I have taken from the movie is when Robin Williams is making Flubber at his basement cum lab. This section becomes ironic as a scientist is producing a material, which he does not have much control over and has human like qualities—Williams gives a strand of his hair into the solution that makes Flubber. The movie becomes relevant for me as I had seen this during the 2002, Godhra pogrom which was state funded and I was living in Ahmedabad, where I was affected. This memory resurfaced during the Dadri lynching episode (2015), where the university where I was studying in was a few miles away from Dadri and I used to go there almost every second day.

9 snapshots accompany the video from the same clip, where Flubber being green in color has changed to red and on the 10th sheet is a dua (prayer) for “ghar ki hifazat”(*ayatul kursi*)—the sheets being displayed on a light table.



Flubber, 2002 (after Flubber, 1997)

2016
Digital Video and sound, 9min 14 sec, on loop

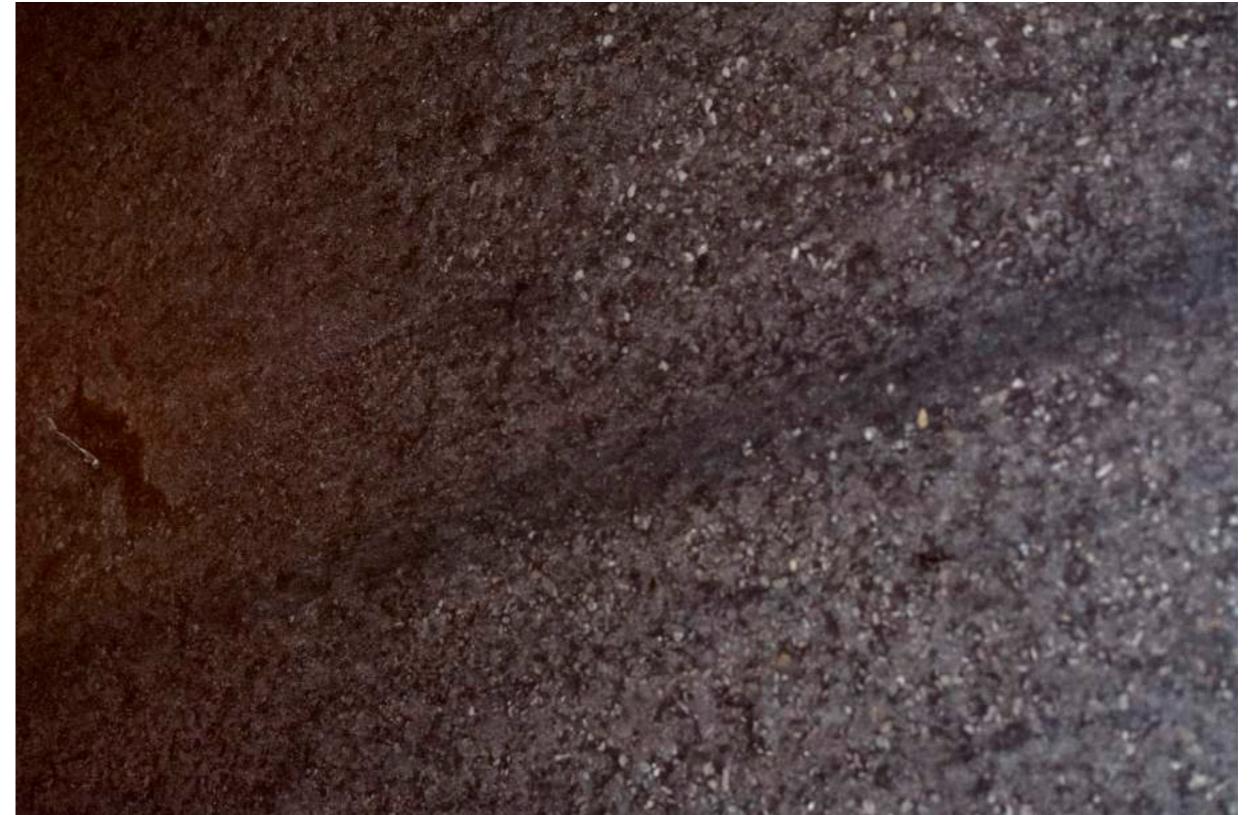
screenshots from the video
contact the artist for preview access



9 Snapshots from Flubber, 2002 and handwritten ayatul kursi

2016

Inkjet prints and ink on paper
21 x 29.7 cm (series of 10)



static photographs

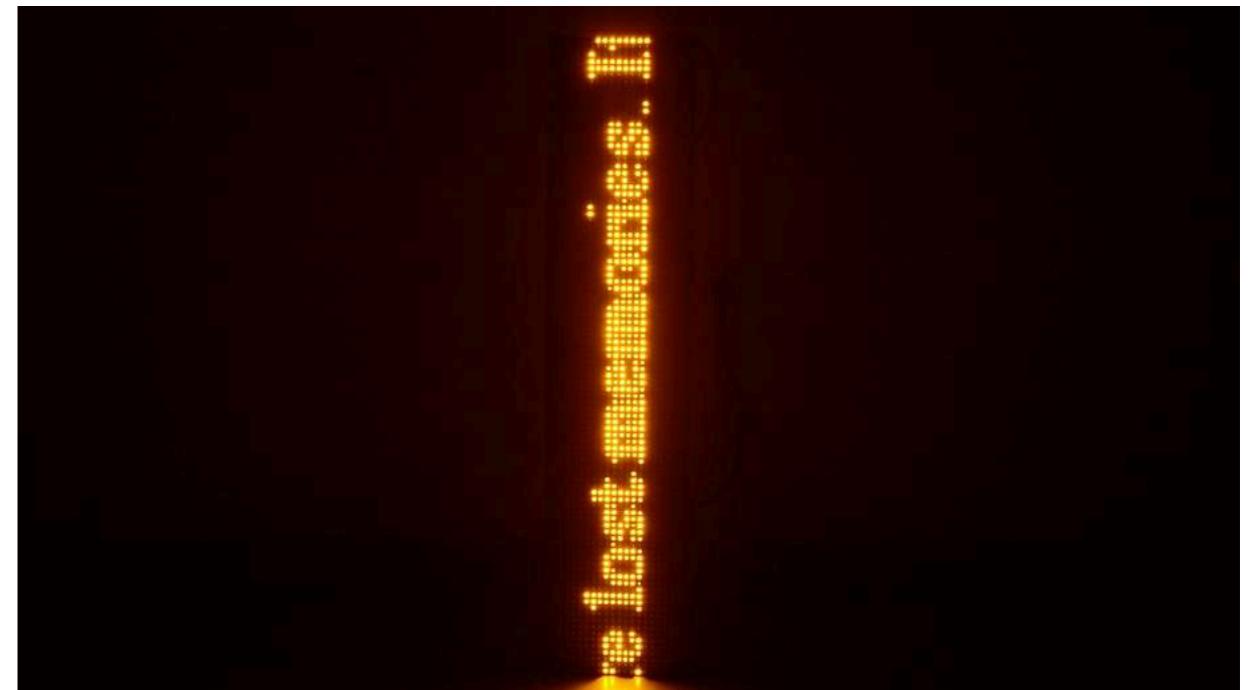
<https://vimeo.com/171442212>

2016

archival ink on paper and sound
20.32 X 30.48 cms (series of 12)

The photographs were shot during a storm, later edited and synced with static sound

The LED strip came as a response to living in a homogenised space and the sense of alienation that it creates. I kept going back to the opening sequence in 2046 by Wong Kar Wai, where the year 2046 is seen as a time warp and where memories are held still. In that sense, the homogenised space where I was living became 2046, where everything was held very still and I could move in and out of it. Taking this as my trigger and from what I had written, a new text was written in order to intensify the sense of alienation.



***nobody really knows
(after 2046, 2004)***

2015

LED scrolling board
dimensions variable

screenshots from the documentation video
contact the artist for preview access

Lessons of Darkness, a Sci-Fi/War film by Herzog; documents the retreat after the first Gulf War. The film is largely shot from a helicopter and has biblical narrations as audio. As an aftermath of the war, there are huge oil spills, documented from a helicopter, seen from above. One does not know if it is water or oil. In order to fix the underground oil pipelines, the workers burn the oil in order to exhaust it. What results is a column of fire.

The entire film is divided into chapters, the image that is used is taken from the chapter titled, *Life without Fire* (Trans. Leben ohne feuer)

The audio is as follows:

leben ohne feuer (live without fire)

Trans: two figures are approaching an oil well.

One of them is holding a lighted torch.

What are they up to?

Are they going to rekindle the blaze?

Is life without fire become impossible for them?

Are you going to rekindle the blaze?
Is life without fire unbearable for you?
(After *Lessons of Darkness*, Herzog)
Nov 2015



***Are you going to rekindle the blaze?
Is life without fire unbearable for you?
(After, Lessons of Darkness, 1992,
Werner Herzog)***

2015

archival pigment print (edition of 3)

21.08 X 17.95 cms



arshad hakim is an artist and filmmaker. He is interested in conditions of impasse, interludes, parentheses, suspension and interruptions. He works with forms of narrative that are first-person, fragmentary and non-linear; and makes video/film essays and drawings derived from philosophy, film, theology, music and poetry.

Link to CV, [here](#).
arshadhakim19@gmail.com