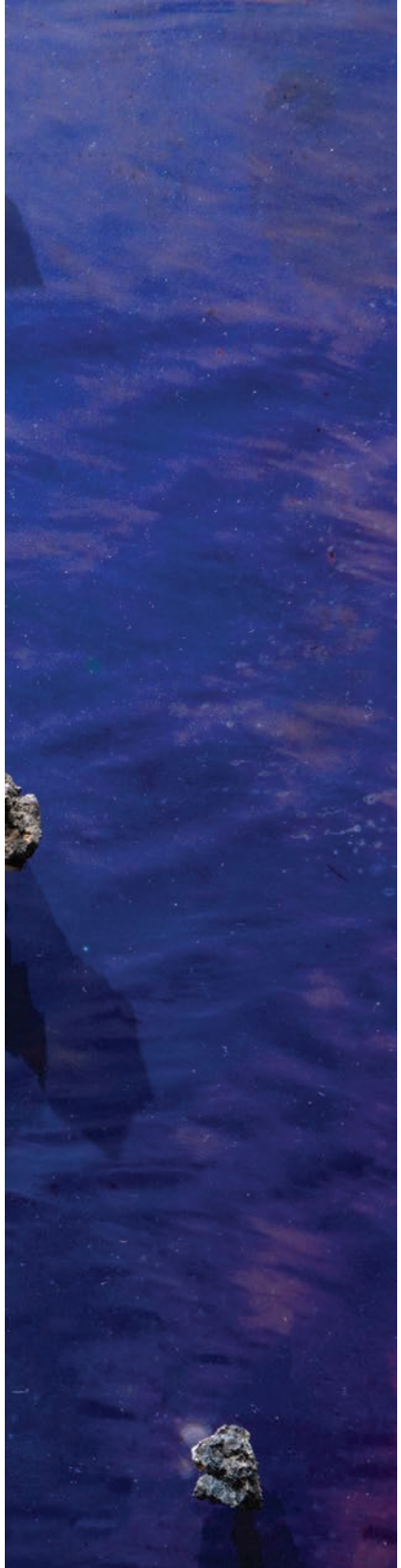
CASUAL INVISIBILITY

JEREMY BOLEN

INTRODUCTION BY BRIAN HOLMES



Through a glass, discreetly

by Brian Holmes

What do images see? How can we explore the invisible? What responsibilities come with new eyes?

These are some of the questions that radiate from Jeremy Bolen's recent body of work, *Casual Invisiblity*. Using a layered visual vocabulary, the exhibition invites us to experiment with the hidden fabric of perception. Beta rays, urban light, volcanic dust, chemical pollutants and even raw asphalt enter into an oblique relationship with photographic recording. The resulting works gesture at an entire civilization's blindness. At stake here are science, the senses and the proliferating signatures of a more-than-natural world.

Large plexiglass panels lean at angles against the wall, alongside black-and-white prints of similar dimensions. The plexiglass panels are stippled with translucent patterns of color, bright and stubbornly foreign to the eye. Yet we are in recognizable surroundings, on the shores of Lake Michigan, right next to the retired nuclear reactor of Zion, Illinois. The massive cement blocks of the breakwater are clearly visible in the shadowy prints, which seem to have been overexposed or damaged in places. Slowly you come to understand that the negatives were buried in the ground, to absorb radiation at exactly the spot where the pictures were taken. Raw color film was buried there as well, to record the subtle traces of the beta rays. Documentary photography has been pushed off the traditional spectrum. Both the psychedelic panels and the damaged prints remain strictly indexical: but they point to something no human eye can perceive.

What you see in the gallery are the unplanned traces of energies the camera was not designed to capture. What you don't see at the reactor itself are the unplanned side-effects of nuclear engineering. Between the two stands an instrument of vision that has been taken apart and repurposed for new aims. At issue here is a broader artistic method, which uses improvised devices to bring planetary-scale transformations into the traditional formats of representation.

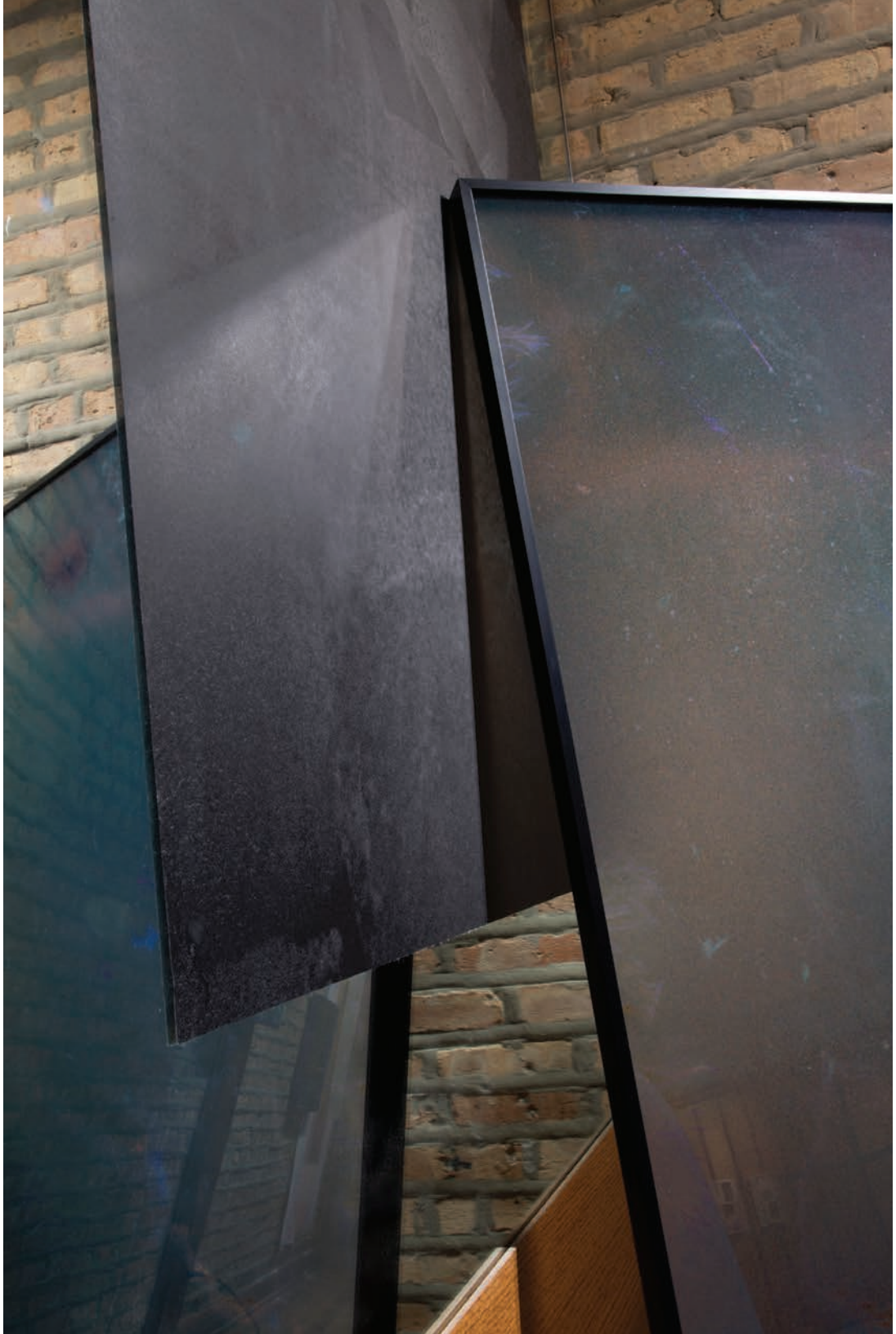
Bolen's remarkably up-to-date images peer out from the dustbins of forgotten crafts and sciences. Glass-plate negatives recording solar flares have been salvaged from Yerkes Observatory, whose telescopes

were rendered obsolete by light pollution. The pictorial works where these negatives appear have been sprinkled with volcanic ash, capable of filtering sunlight and thereby changing our relationship to the stars. The color photographs of rippling water, which seem to capture a toxic sheen on the surface of Lake Michigan, have actually been dipped in the lake itself, creating an indexical trace through directly chemical means. “What you don’t see might hurt you,” is the first and most obvious conclusion. The oddest things in the show, however, are perfectly visible: they are broken bits of asphalt glued on top of the water images. What’s so casual about that? In conversation, Bolen suggests that we circulate fluidly in our cars over endless ribbons of petroleum waste, without ever thinking about the vast drilling, transporting and refining operations that enable our afternoon at the beach. Fallen on the surface of the image like a meteor shower, the angular concretions of asphalt are visible blind spots: the detritus that helps produce every view of a pristine landscape.

The intriguing thing about these works is that they offer material equivalents for some of the most currently relevant issues in the philosophy of science. Chief among these is the question whether our knowledge of the world can ever be disentangled from a nature reshaped by collective action. Bolen inverts the famous claim by the Enightenment philosopher Giambattista Vico, who held that historical facts were the only ones we can truly understand, because unlike natural phenomena they are directly produced by human beings. Instead, Bolen shows how much of what industrial humanity has made is thoroughly invisible, and how the unseen share of any given landscape conditions our perception of all the rest. Using art to explore the possibilities and limits of the instruments of vision, this work ushers its public into the convoluted feedback relations of the Anthropocene.

Volcanic ash, of exactly the kind that clings to the Yerkes Observatory pieces, takes on a whole new relevance in this context. For climate scientists, it offers clues about the suspended particles that may someday be used to block solar radiation, forestalling the devastating effects of global warming. But the remaining question is always about the unplanned consequences of industrial modernism. Will those geoengineered aerosols also block the view of the stars above our heads? What other changing realities will we need art to perceive in the very near future?

Civilization’s breath is a fog on the mirror of nature. We’d like to just wipe it off, but we inevitably find ourselves dealing with our reflections multiplied in all those tiny droplets. Meanwhile the continent of invisibility grows, like great concrete blocks on a shoreline receding into darkness. Decorum prohibits any frontal confrontation with such weighty matters. It takes much discretion even to mention them in polite society. Bolen’s philosophical speculations come on softly, without declarations or diatribes. Spidery cracks of knowledge appear in the traditional formats. Forgotten consequences of modernity emerge from the humanist mirror. You feel you’re on the verge of an encounter, but with what? Intimate invisibility, in casual dress.



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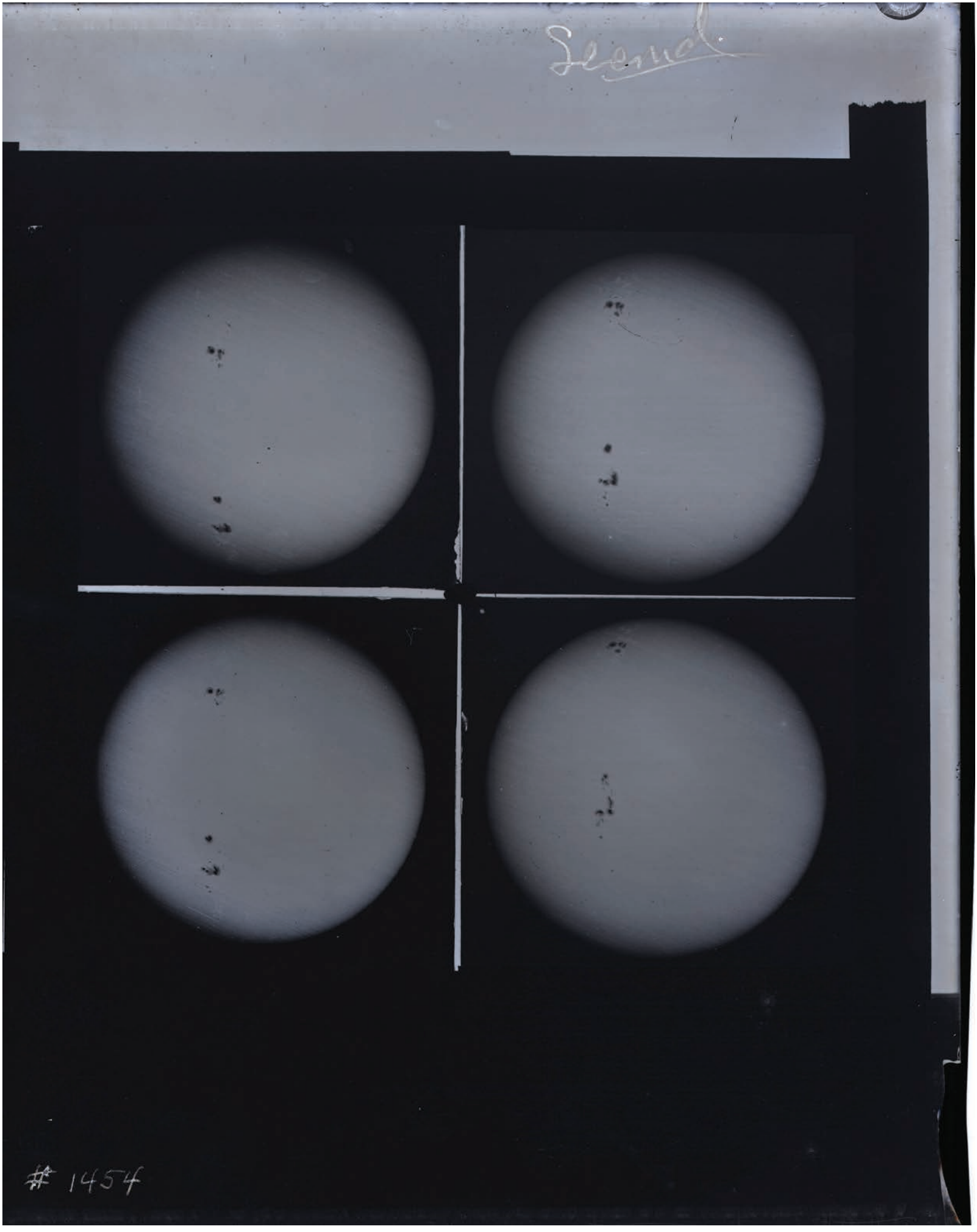
Sloan
1454

3 or 4 f/22 FH

No. SC 271

Date

Object Nova Lacertae of 19. triple slide showing nova as it appeared Aug 7, 1907, before the out burst as a 13TH magnitude star on Dec 31, 1910 when it was of about the 7th magnitude, and on Sept 29, 1911 when it had faded to the 11th magnitude

R. A. and Dec.

Exposure Time

Remarks Photographed by Barnard with the 10" Bruce lens.

Observer

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SC 271
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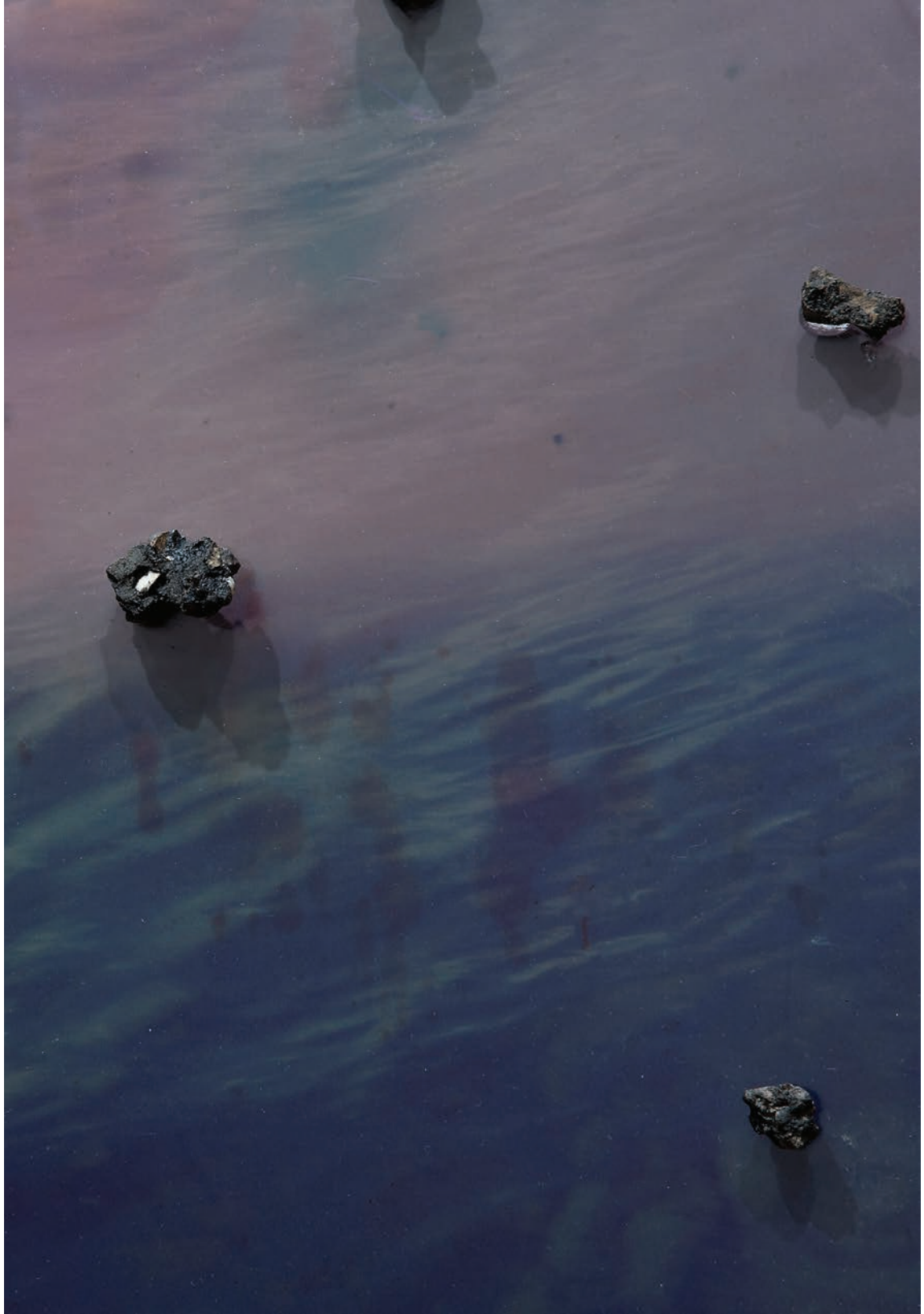
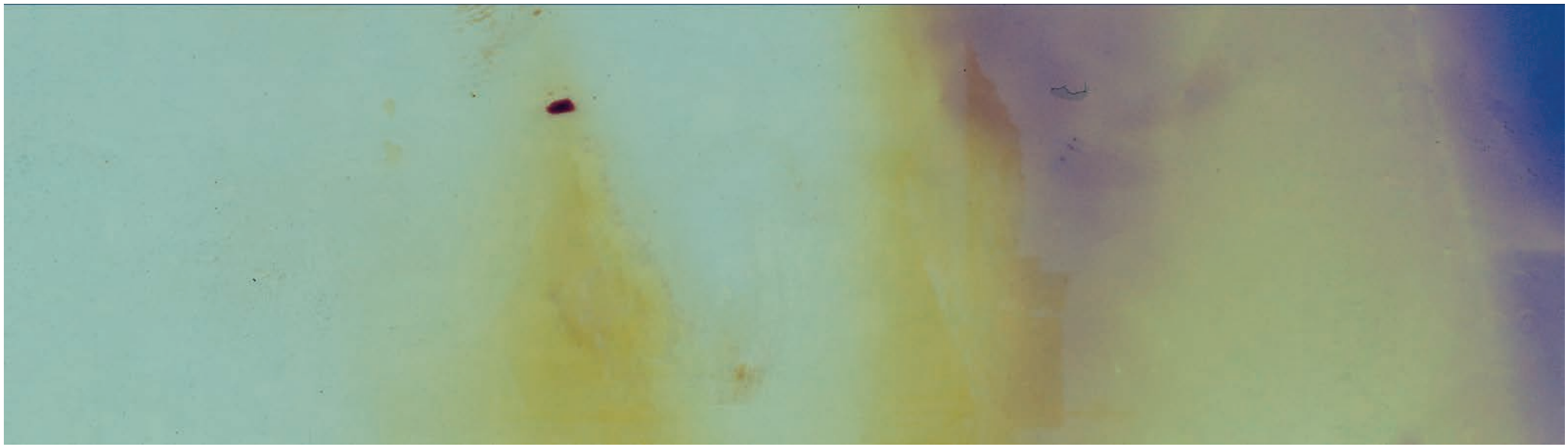
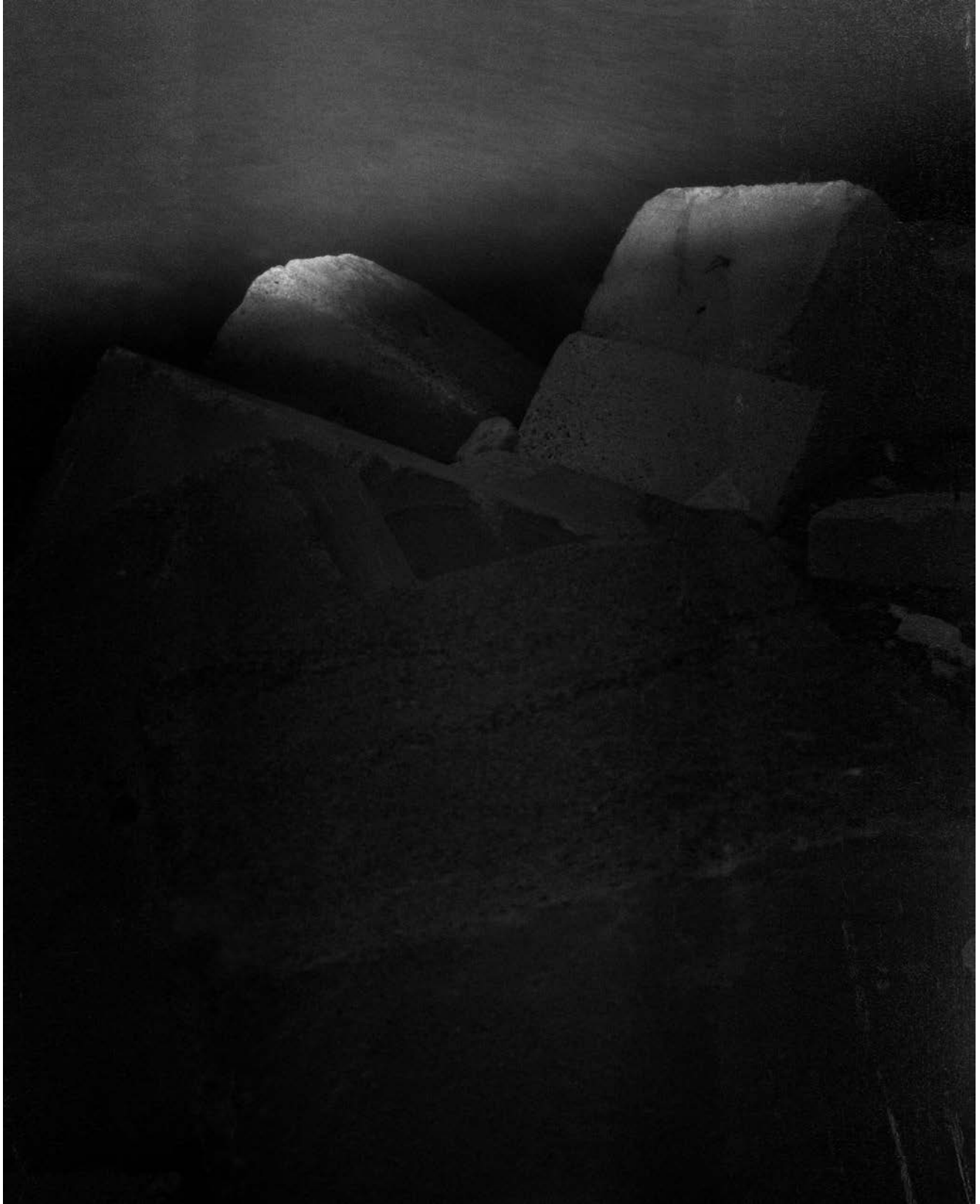
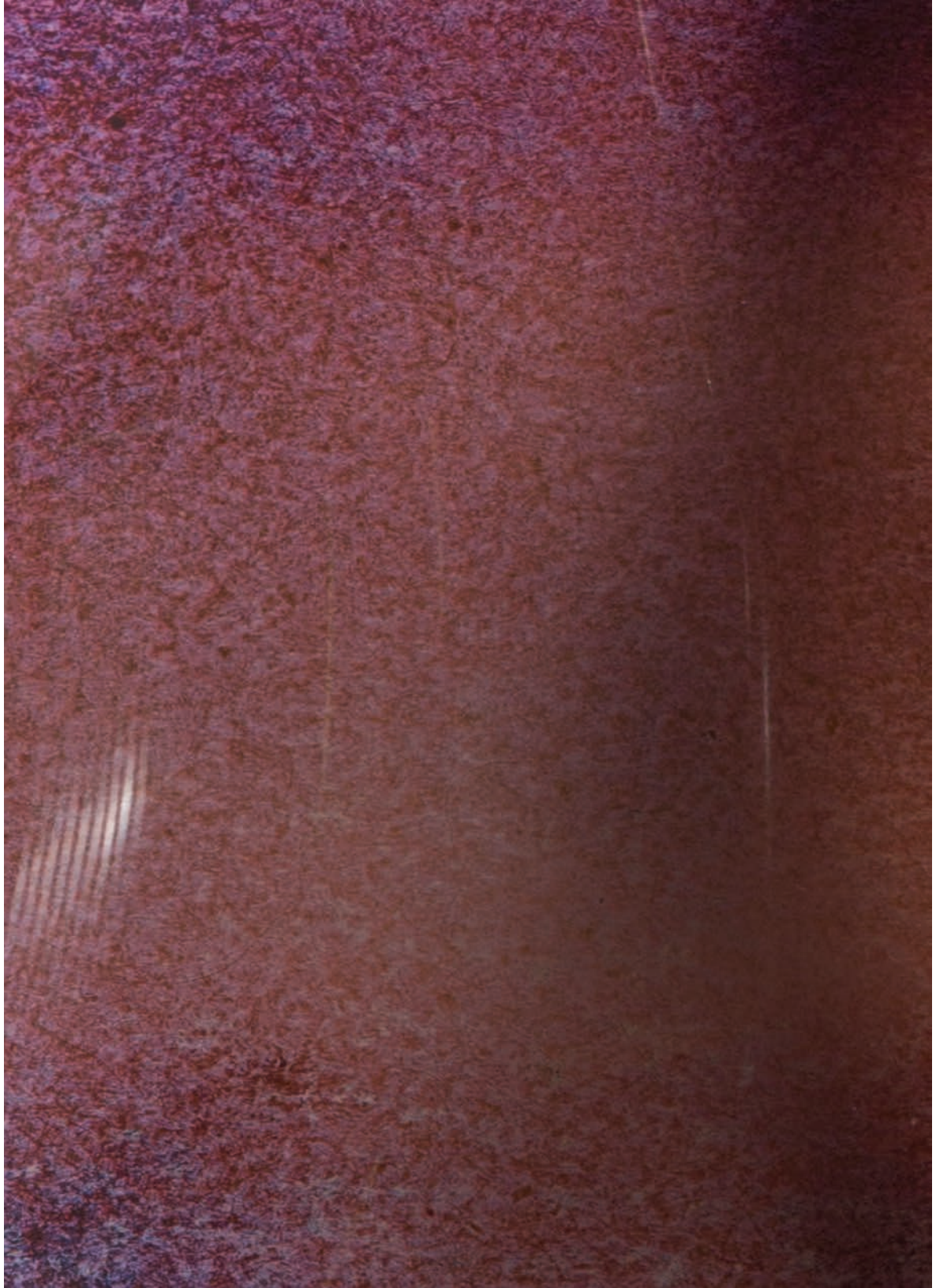
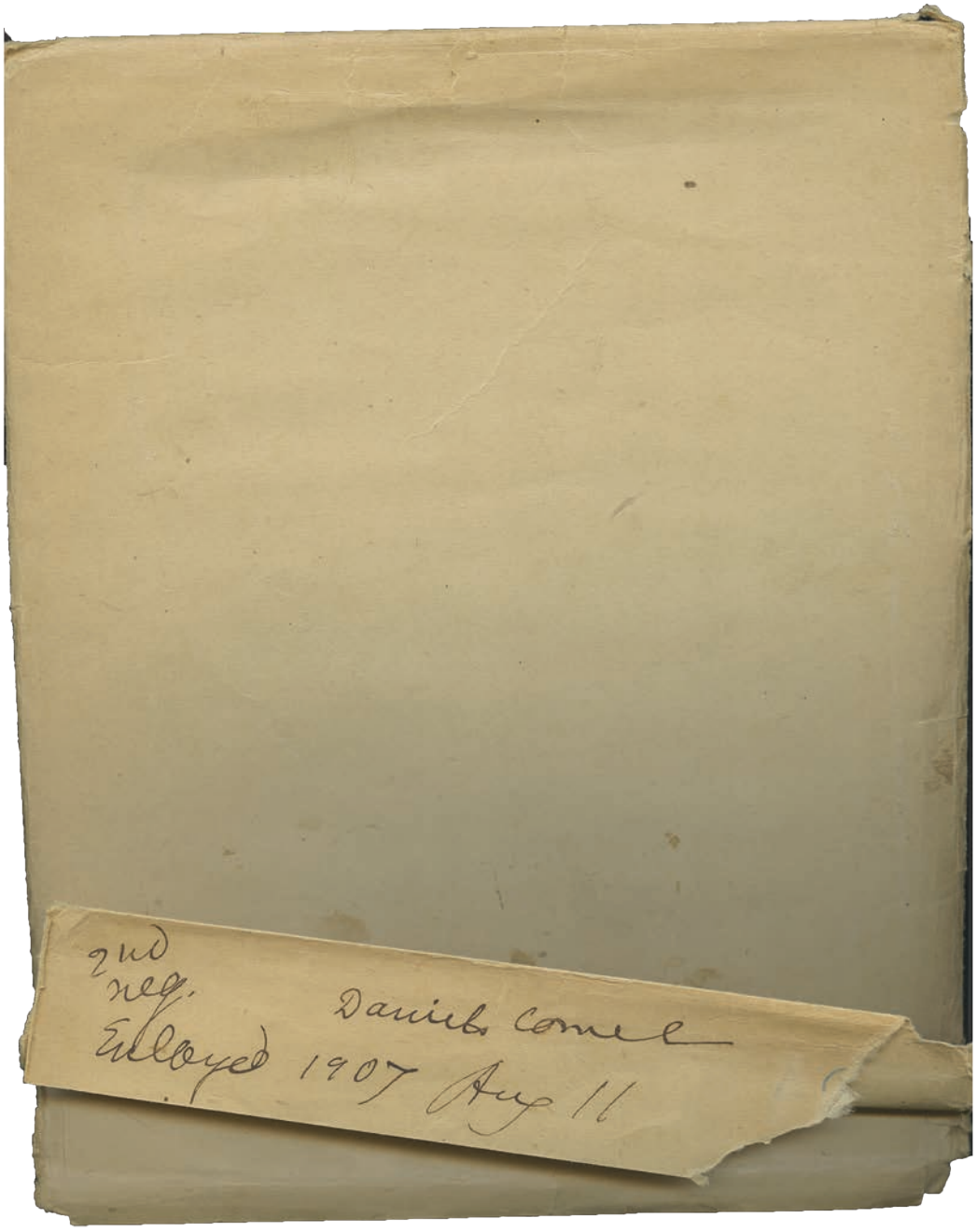
40-INCH REFRACTOR
YERKES OBSERVATORY
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
WILLIAMS BAY, WISCONSIN 53191







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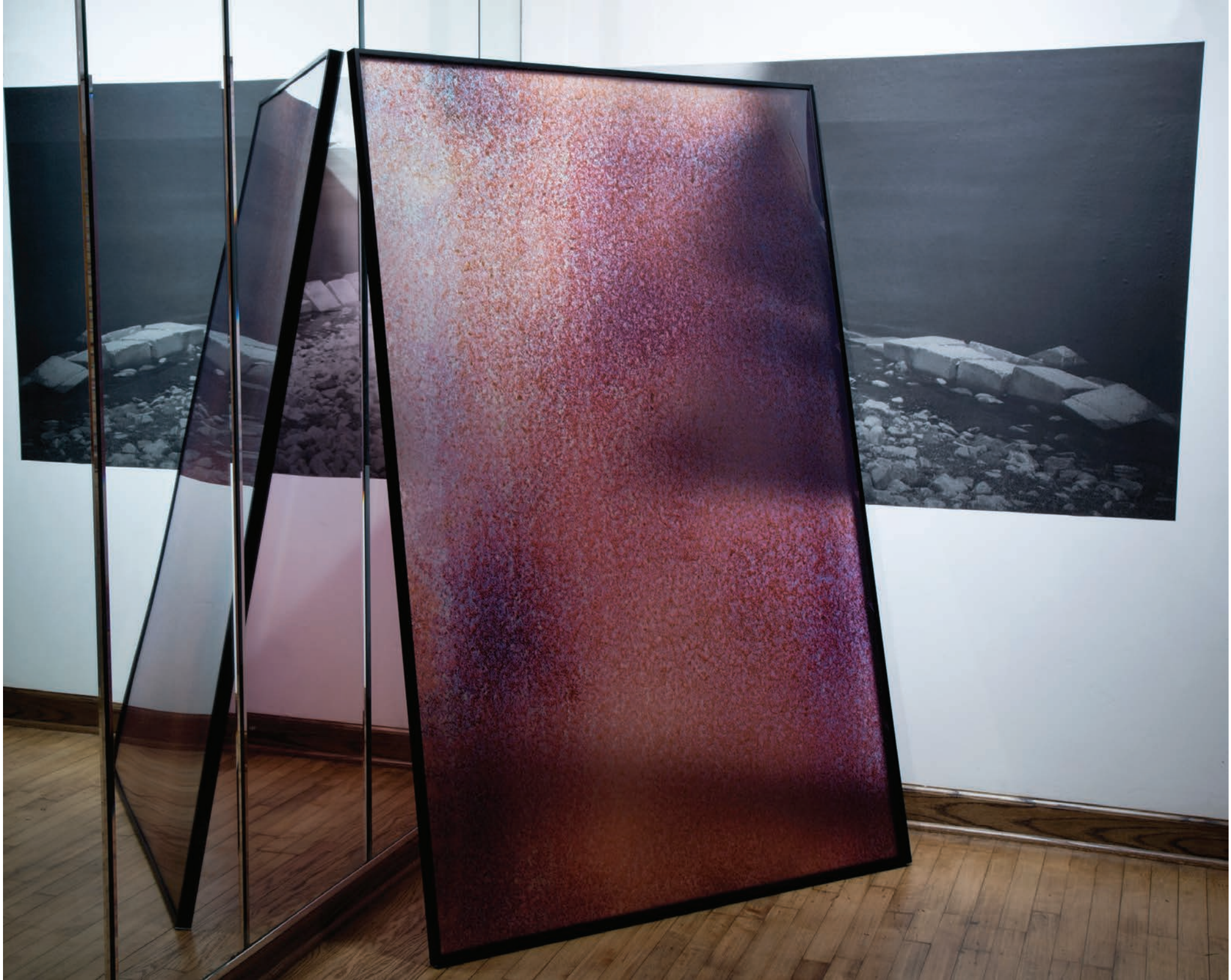
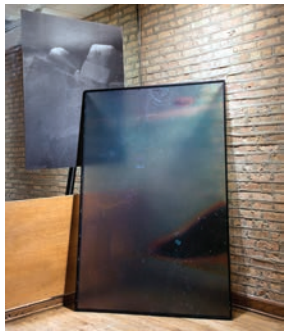


Zion, Illinois Burial #2
Photo Tex Print from Buried Infrared Film.
52″ x 42″. 2018

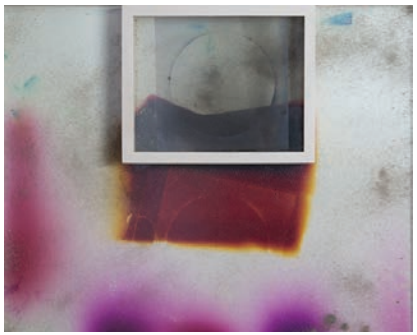
Zion, Illinois Burial #7
Photo Tex Print from Buried Infrared Film.
52″ x 42″. 2018

Lake Michigan and Asphalt #1
Archival Pigment Print, Asphalt, Acrylic.
36″ x 38″. 2018

Zion Burial #4 and #5
Archival Inkjet Plexi Print from Buried Film and Archival Pigment Print on Photo Tex.
72″ x 48″ and 42″ x 54″. 2018

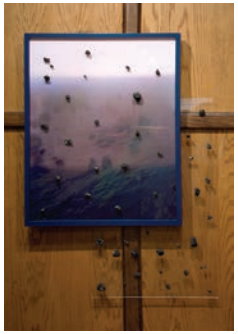


Zion Burial #2 and #3
Archival Inkjet Plexi Print from Buried Film and Archival Pigment Print on Photo Tex.
72″ x 48″ and 54″ x 42″. 2018



S-231716 1949/2018
Yerkes Observatory/Chicago
Glass plate negative from Yerkes observatory, chromogenic print exposed to chicago night sky, volcanic ash from Mt. St. Helens.
20″ x 24″. 2018

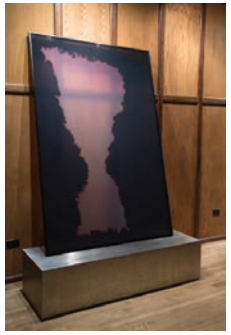
S-214713 1948/2018
Yerkes Observatory/Chicago
Glass plate negative from Yerkes observatory, chromogenic print exposed to chicago night sky, volcanic ash from mt. st helens.
20″ x 24″. 2018



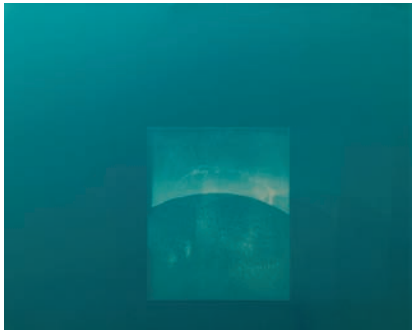
Lake Michigan and Asphalt #2
Archival Pigment Print, Asphalt, Acrylic.
43″ x 32″. 2018

Zion, Illinois Burial #2
Photo Tex Print from Buried Infrared Film.
52″ x 42″. 2018

Zion, Illinois Burial #9

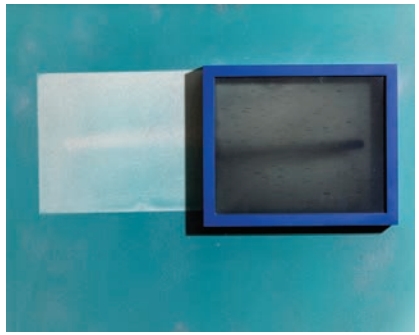


Zion, Illinois Burial #1
Archival Inkjet Plexi Print from Buried Film.
72″ x 48″. 2018



S-151820, 1918/2018
Yerkes Observatory/Chicago
Chromogenic print.
20″ x 24″. 2018

S-151820, 1918
Yerkes Observatory/Chicago
Glass plate negative from Yerkes observatory, volcanic ash from Mt. St. Helens.
38″ x 20″. 2018



MW 38-2110 1907/2018
Yerkes Observatory/Chicago
Glass plate negative from Yerkes observatory, chromogenic print, volcanic ash from Mt. St. Helens.
20″ x 24″. 2018

Thank You:

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