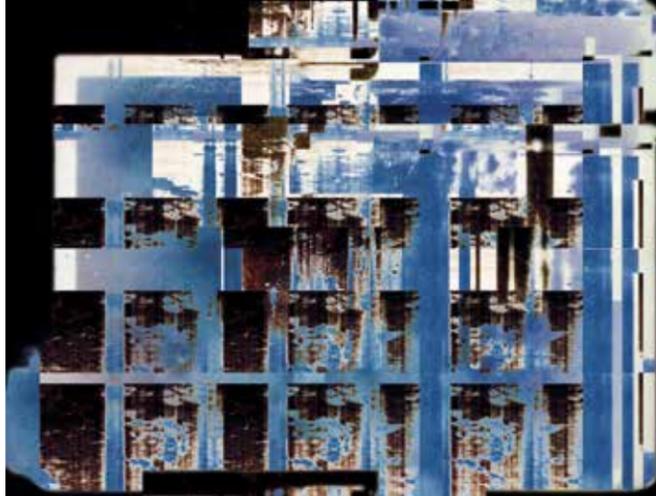




HYPERGRAPHIA

Chris Friel





Hypergraphia: a behavioural condition characterised by an intense desire to write



Hypergraphia | 150,000 Image Mosaic

FOREWORD

Paul Sanders

Hypergraphia. What is it? To be honest when I first saw the word written down I had to question myself that it was even real.

On further reading it came as no surprise why Chris Friel chose 'Hypergraphia' as the title for this body of work.

Defined as 'a compulsion or intense desire to write or draw', Hypergraphia can easily be transferred to the art of photography and the relentless drive to produce many thousands of images.

This body of work is not made up of just random snaps, it is layers and layers of depth, colour, mood and emotion seen and born over an extended period spent in a small white room with a single window.

There are 150,000 images in the complete set, one for approximately each minute of the 100 days Chris spent hospitalised in 2018, locked in a space that would leave many of us creatively numb ...

His desire to create in these circumstances is unbelievable, the intensity is of almost manic proportions.

Chris has always had a way of connecting his deepest, most personal experiences to his photography. His creativity is intriguing, often delivering more questions than answers, causing us to pause, reflect on our response and resonance with the images.

The works in this book, one image from each of the 100 days, and also in the videos, are at times disturbing, some are almost frightening, similar to running through the corridors of a nightmare that one can't wake from.

Strangely the rhythm and flow of the images ceases to be disturbing and becomes hypnotic, especially if you can watch the video installations with the soundtrack by Matthew Herbert.

The haunting and distorted snatches of sound wash around you, it is incredibly powerful, leading to an almost meditative state of mind making one curious on so many levels that you feel as if you are swimming through experience.

What I find so captivating is that to view these images you have to be of an open mind, to see with a fascination that will allow you to free fall into the experience rather than judging them

as single images- although they are each beautiful in their own right. It is the overall power, depth and abstract expressive nature of the work that guides you through from minute to minute, tracking Chris's timeline through the 100 days of his hospitalisation.

The desire to create, to see, to explore is strong but often when faced with trauma, loss, emotional, physical or mental challenges we stop creating, stop being curious. We lose any connection with the world around us.

Curiosity and vulnerability give birth to creativity and from these seeds powerful, emotive and perhaps disturbingly truthful images are born.

The truth we see here is Chris's truth, born out of an exploration of himself and his circumstances.

Many photographers get lost in the 'how' people make images, rather than the "why".

Why do I create? How do I explore how I feel about this?

These are the important questions- questions most of us shy away from for fear of what we might find as answers.

True creativity comes from facing and owning your vulnerability, your fears, hopes, dreams and giving yourself permission to explore, dig into and work through to the next level of questions this type of journey yields.

Personally I have no idea how Chris creates his images, and to be honest I don't care- and nor should you. What is revealed by the images is a hauntingly deep dive into the psyche of a truly creative genius, one of a kind, a man whose work allows us to openly ask questions about the power of art to help or express the challenges we all face from mental health difficulties.

INTRODUCTION

Peter and Lucy Jones

Photography has always been a way to express inner feeling. Too often, though, an image can be “closed”, hiding emotion and expression, and not allowing the viewer to enter, explore and feel.

Chris Friel’s work is the opposite. It is open and honest. It tackles the difficult subject of the mind and mental illness and comes from Chris’s personal experience. Spending time with it gives space for our minds to absorb and placate issues, mental or physical, loneliness, distress, coming to terms with change or loss, or the pressures of life and the world we live in. It delivers hope.

This is why we are so gripped by Chris’s work and delighted to exhibit it in Ludlow.

We are trustees of the Photo Space charity, where volunteers use the process of photography to help people with difficulties in their lives, in particular mental health.

There is more openness today about mental health, less stigma and less fear. But much remains to be done. Too many bottle up their feelings and do not seek help.

The role photography can play is best described by people we work with ...

“When I feel low, it can be difficult to open the front door. With a camera around my neck, I can leave my home and feel normal. I have a purpose and do not feel exposed.”

“Photography makes a connection with a world I do not feel part of.”

“I am dyslexic. With photography I do not need to be able to read and write well. I just need to have the buttons explained and I can get on with it.”

“The real pleasure of photography is that it forces me to slow down and really look, never easy in our rushed world, so a chance to stop, look and see is truly valuable and rewarding.”

Chris’s work is hugely important in helping us make more people aware of mental health issues, to break down barriers and to show that there are many practical things, like picking up a camera, that help build self-esteem, confidence and wellbeing.

Chris is, rightly, described as “a creative genius”. He pushes boundaries, challenges orthodoxy, and sees the world differently.

This book is a treasured, lasting memory of a wonderful experience, a hugely talented artist, and Chris’s contribution to mental health awareness. We are truly grateful.

Trustees
the Photo Space Charity CIO

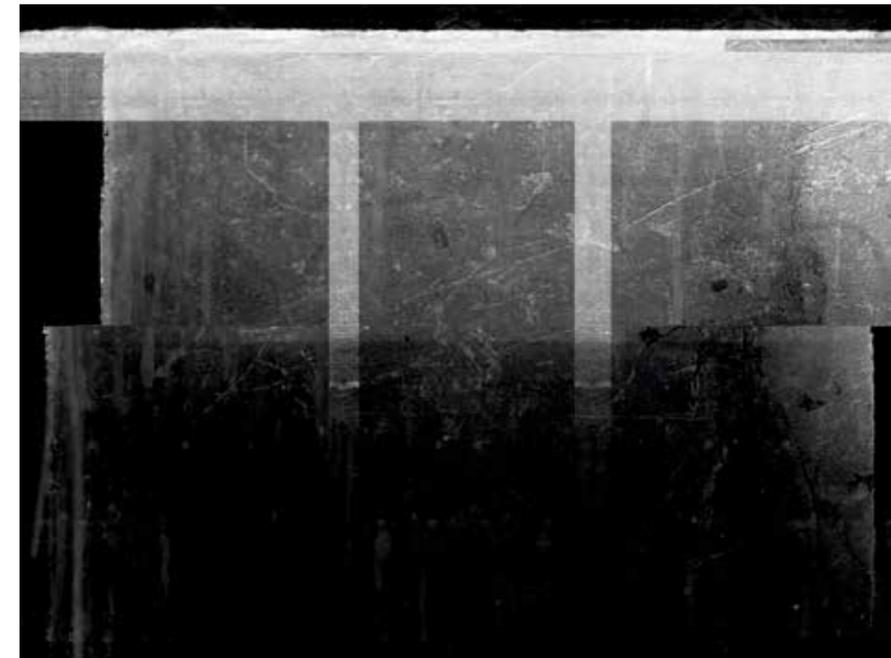
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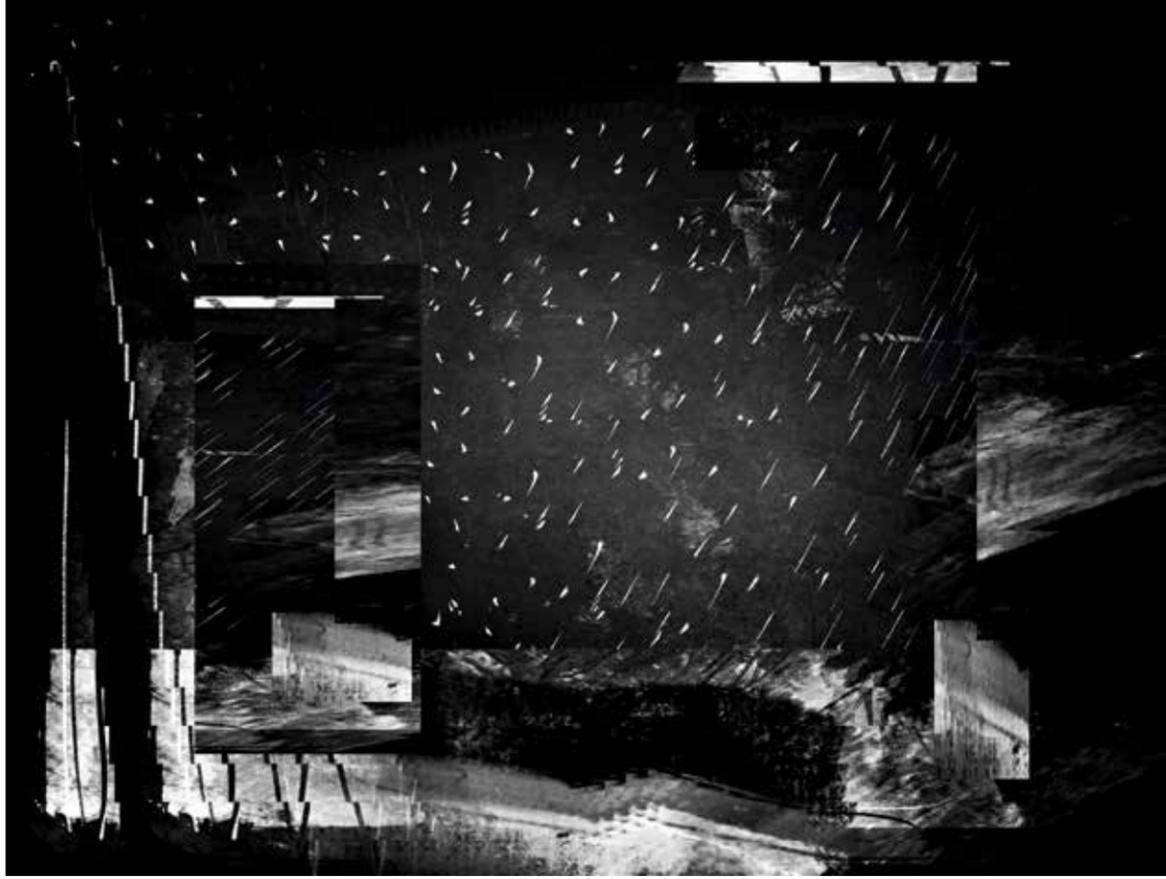
Chris Friel

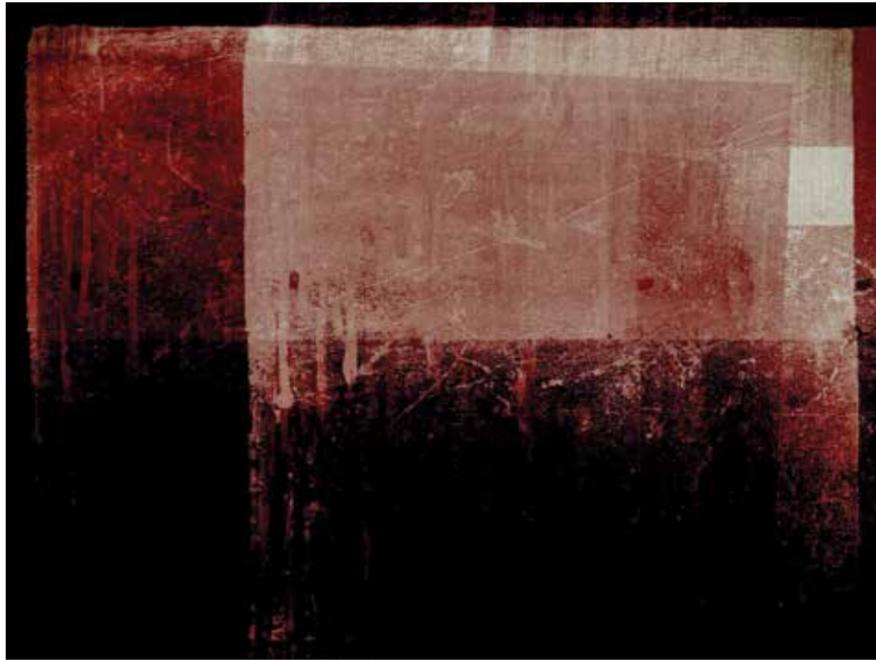
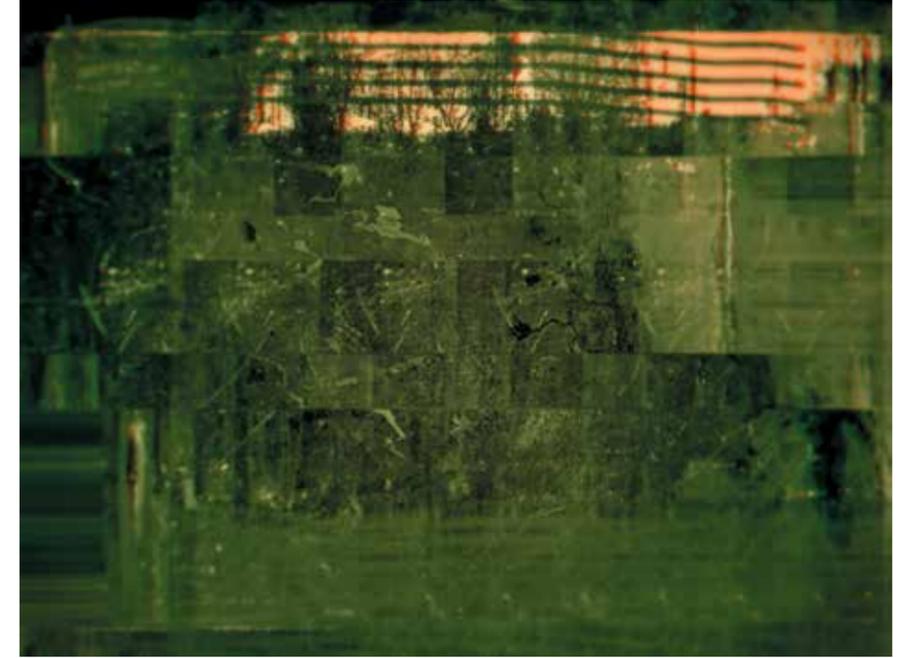
one hundred days

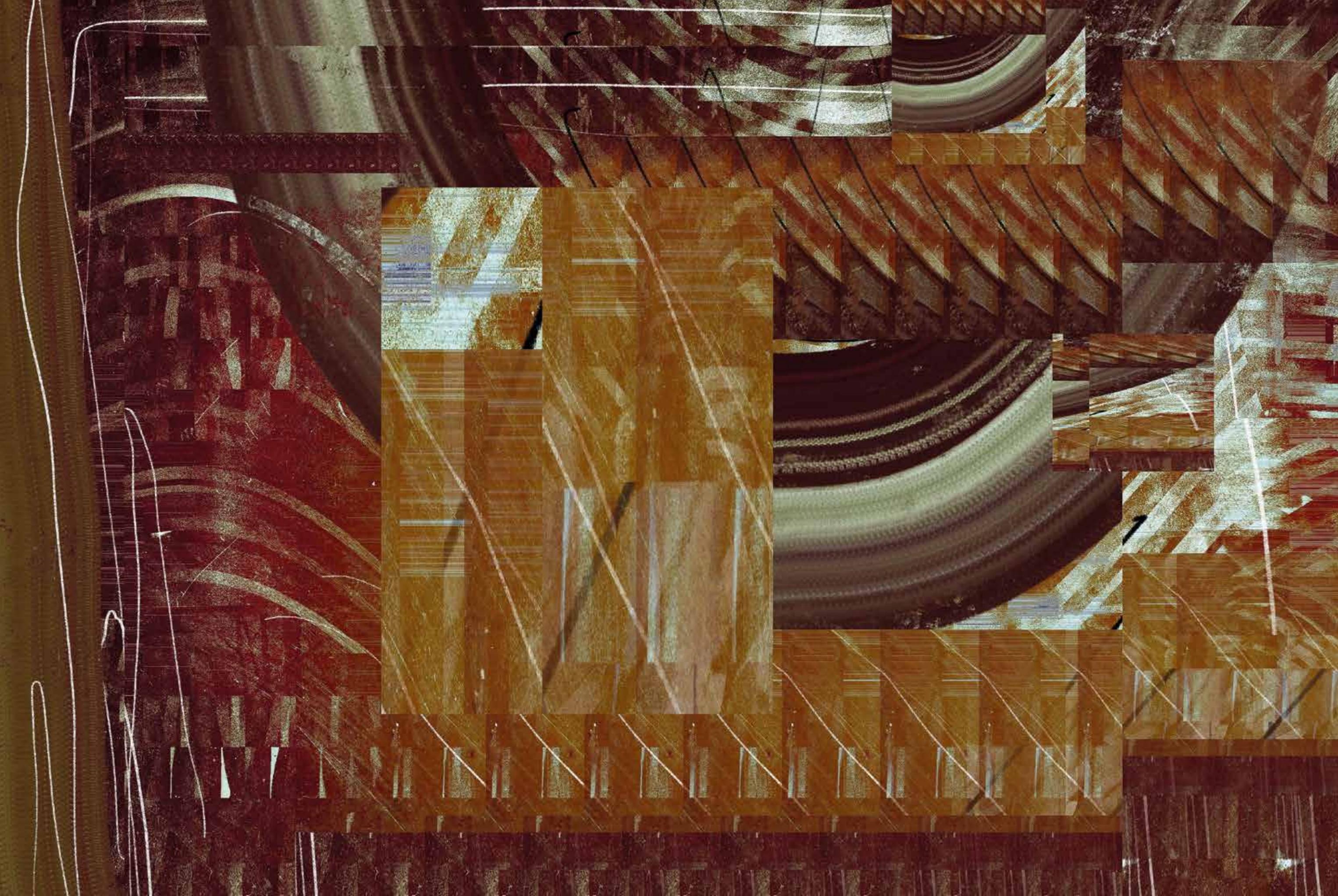
“How do I know what I think until I see what I say”

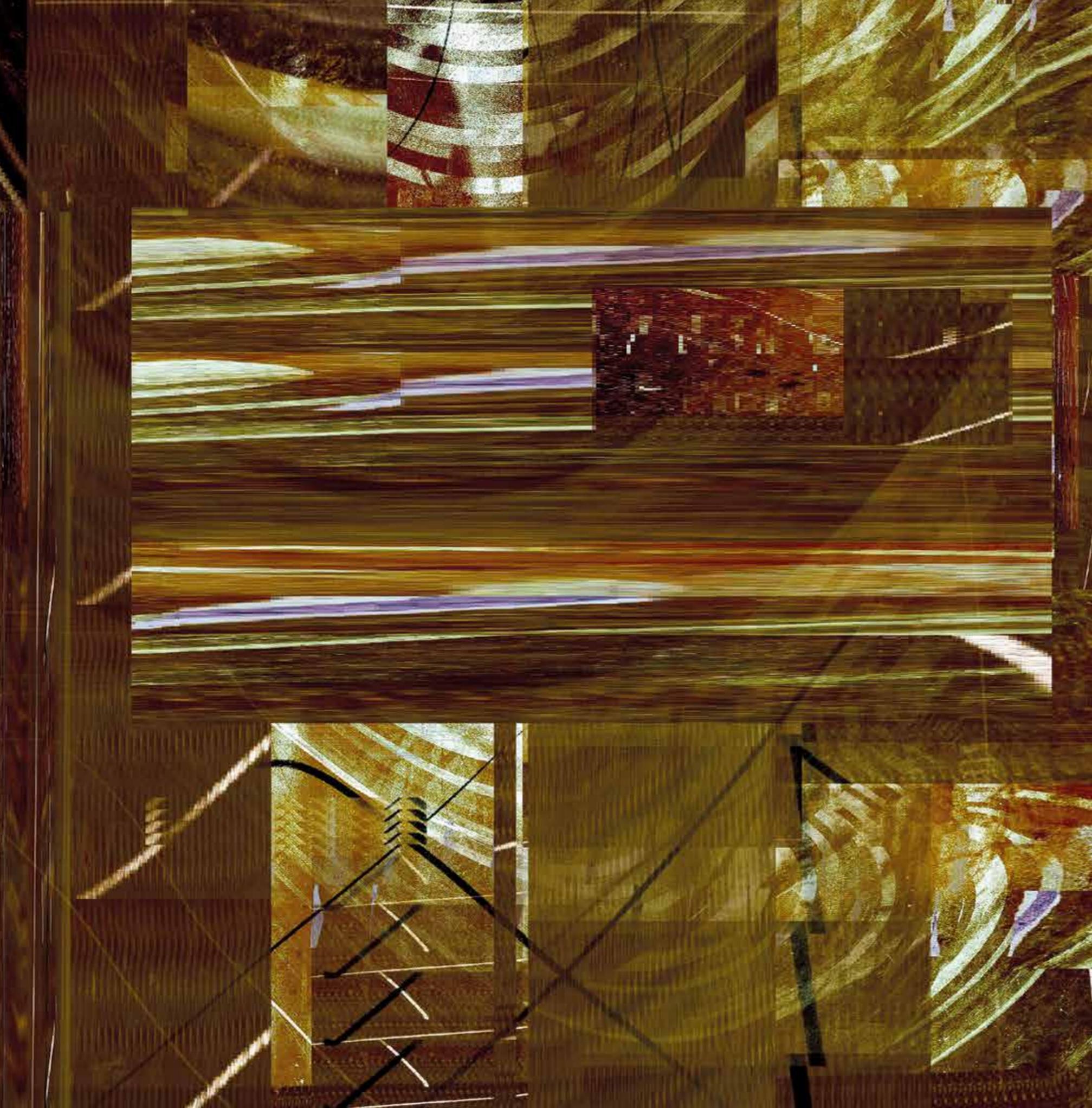
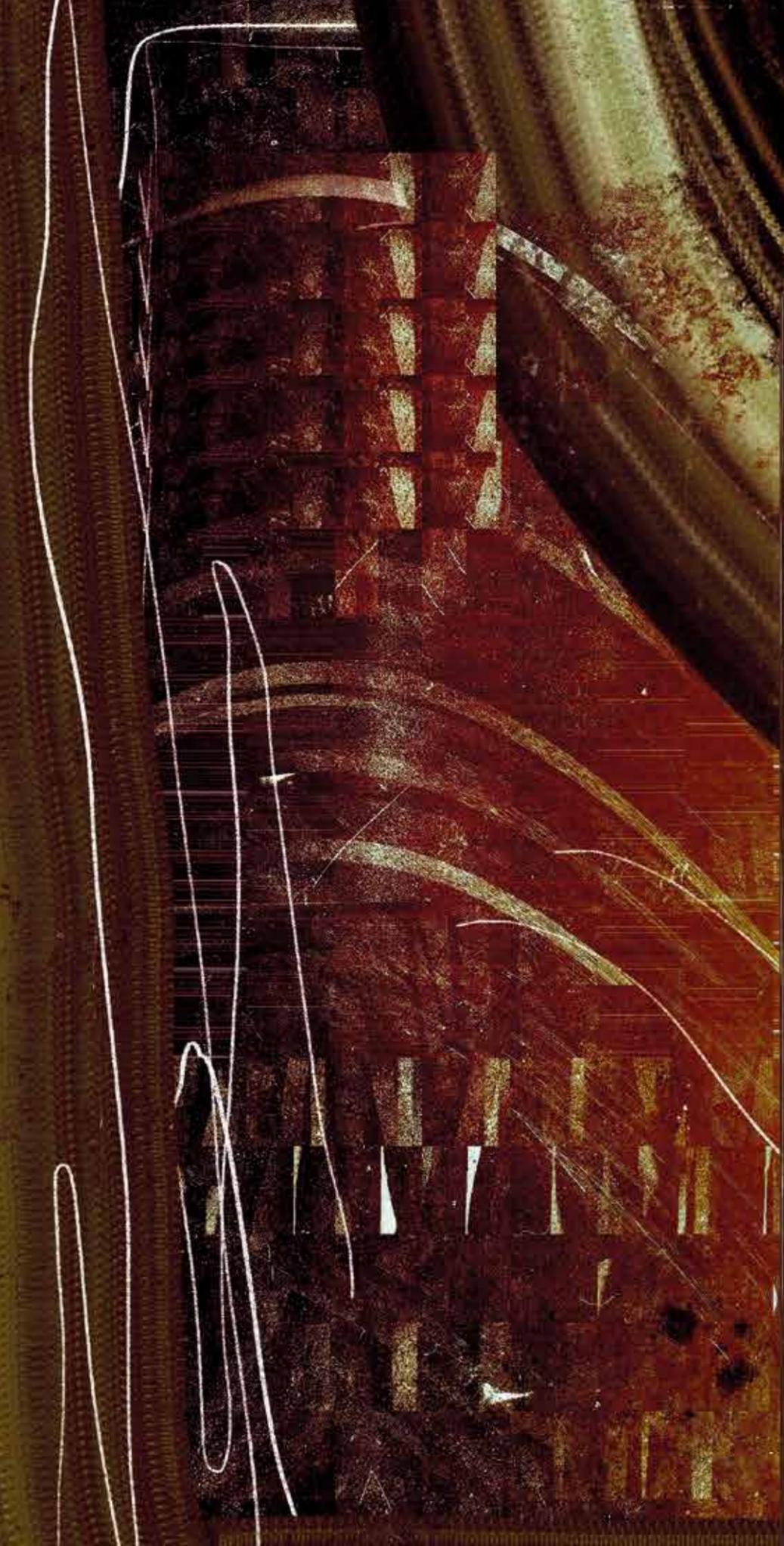
E.M. Forster¹



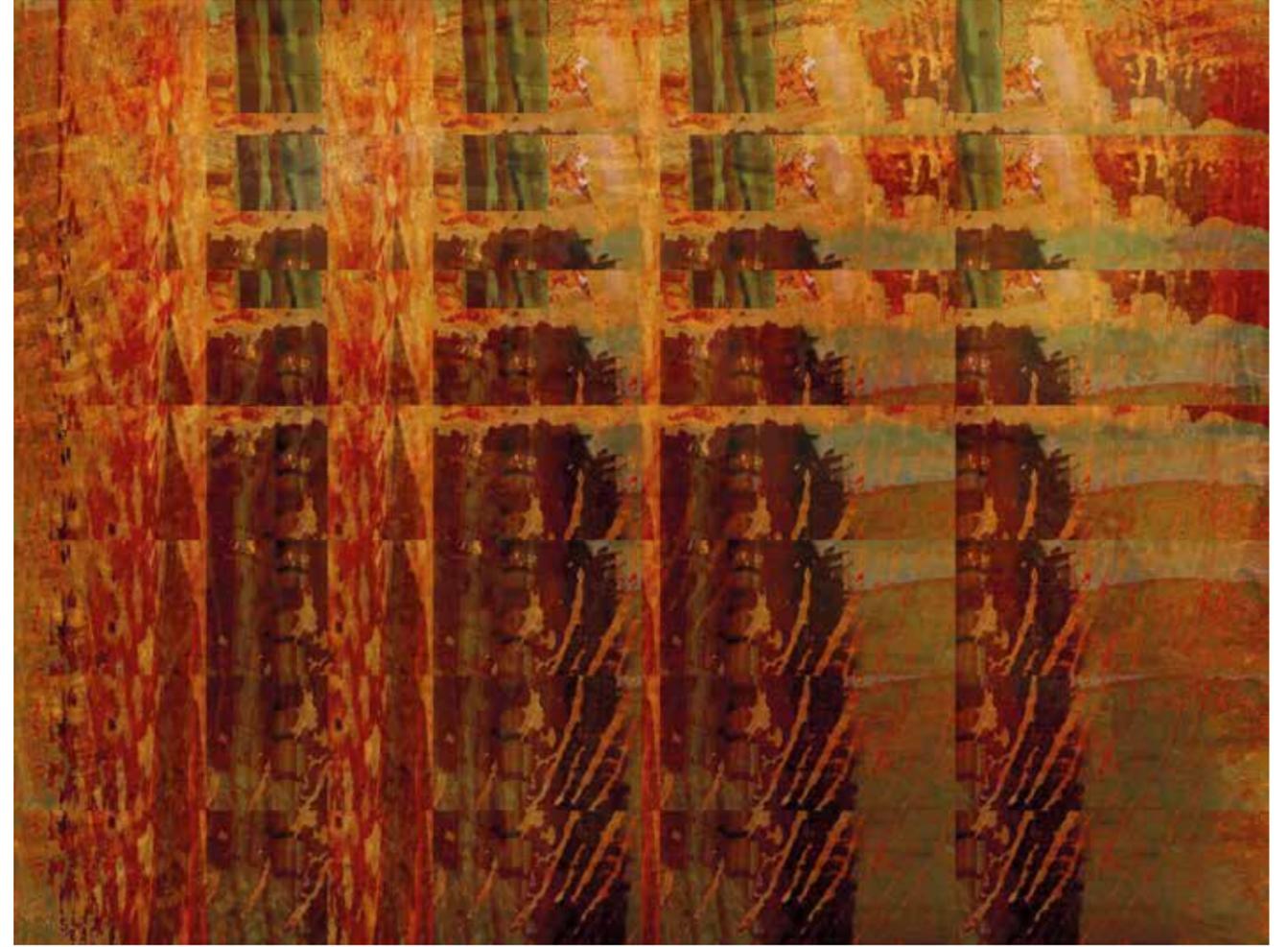
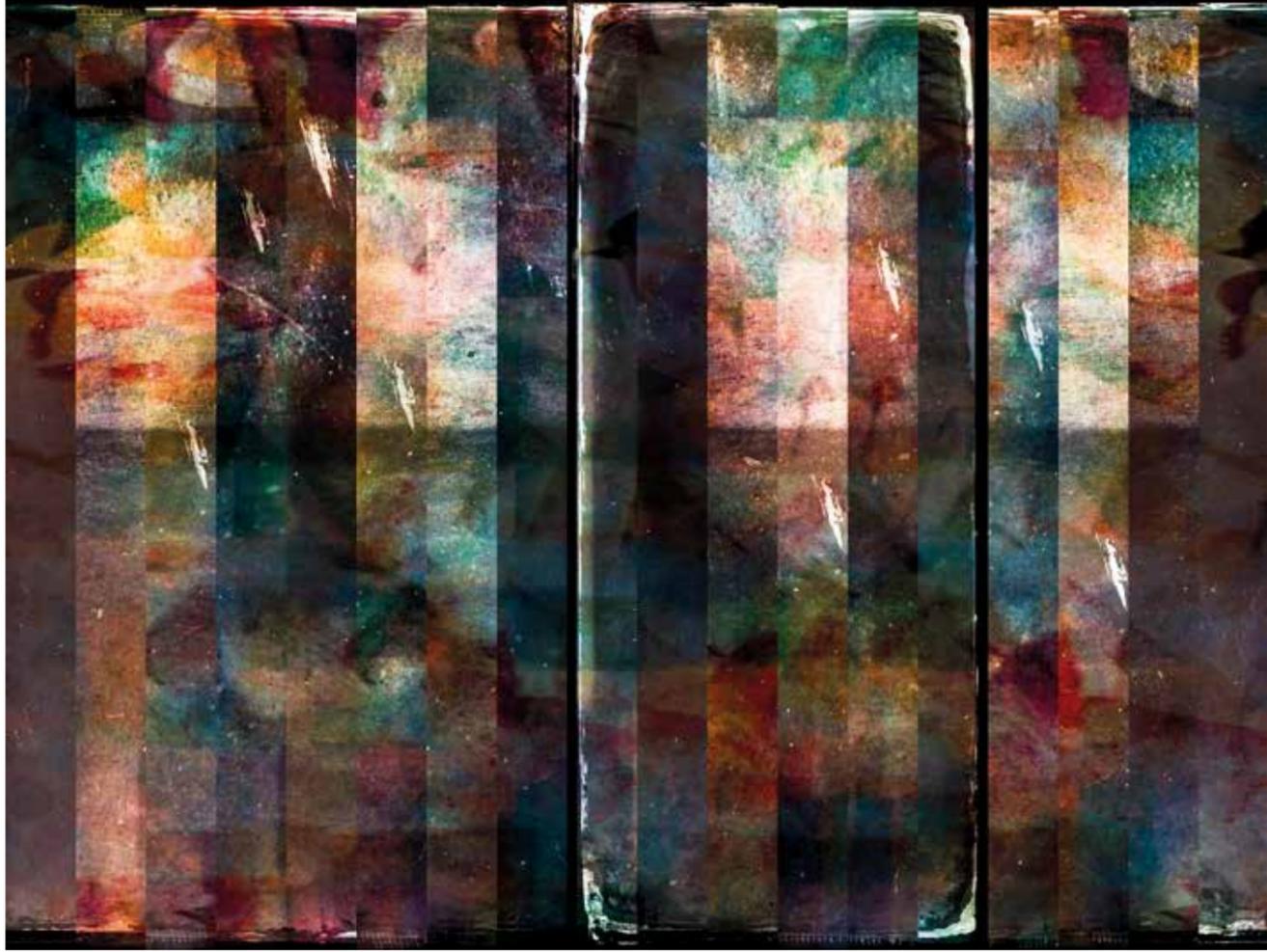




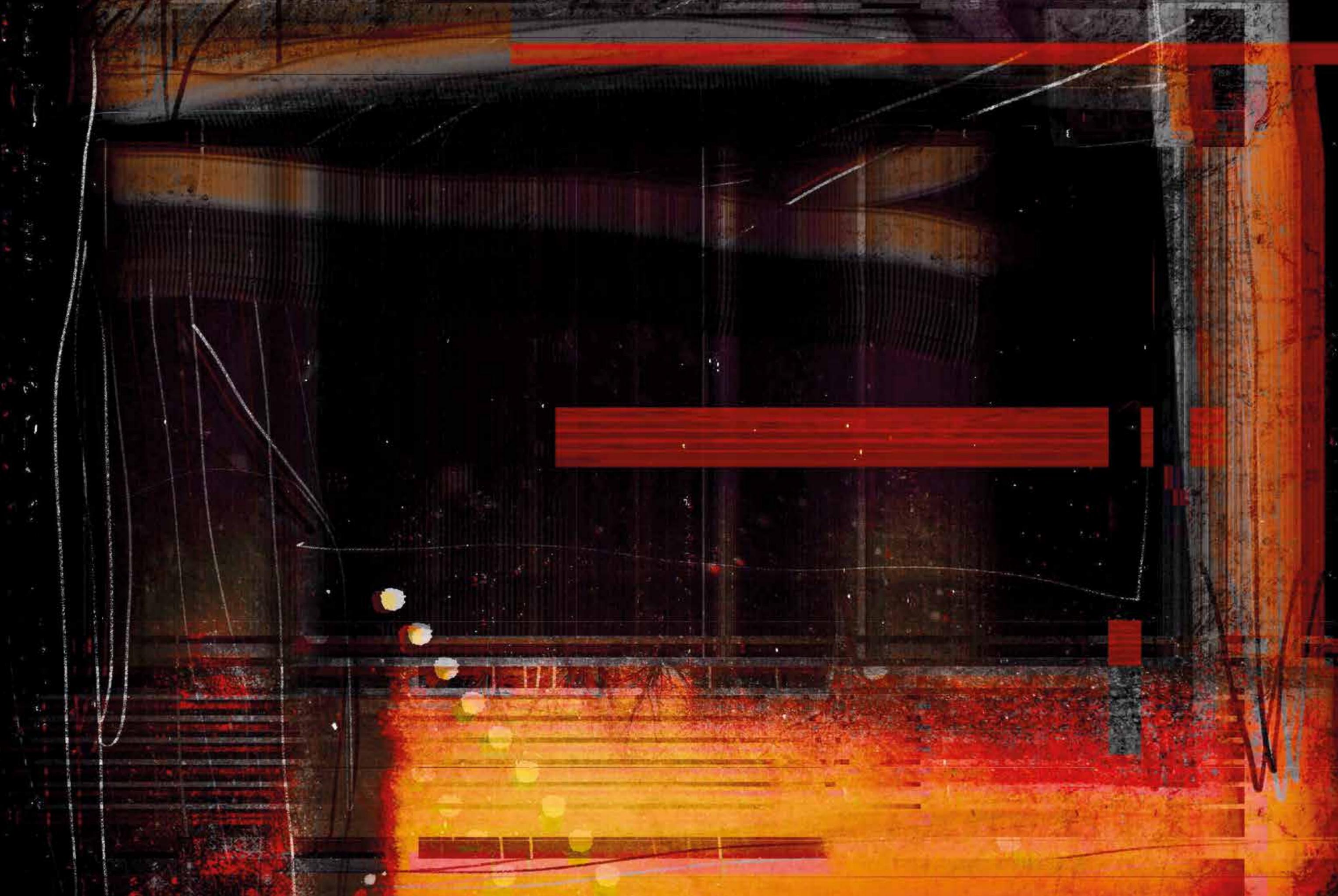




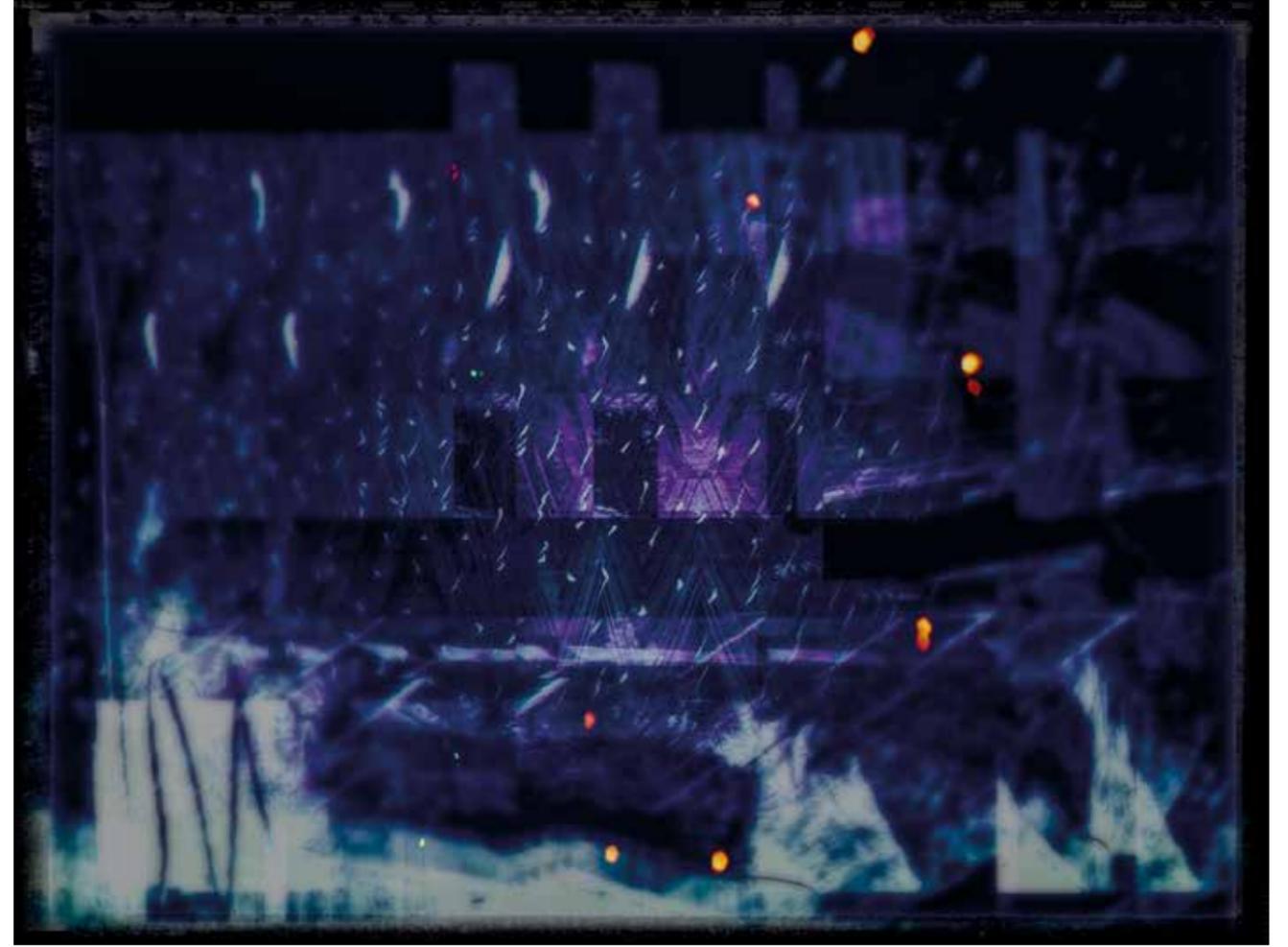
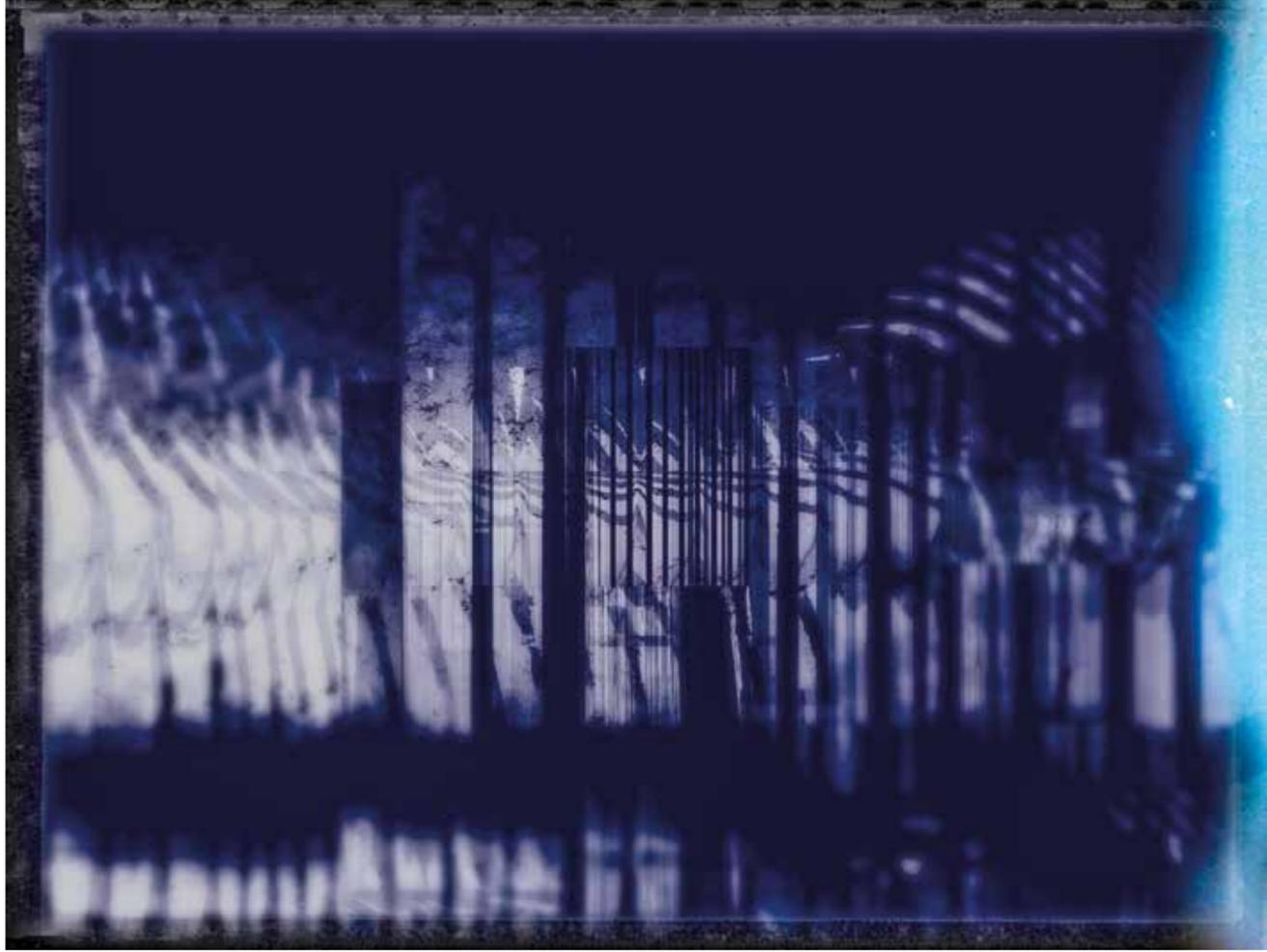


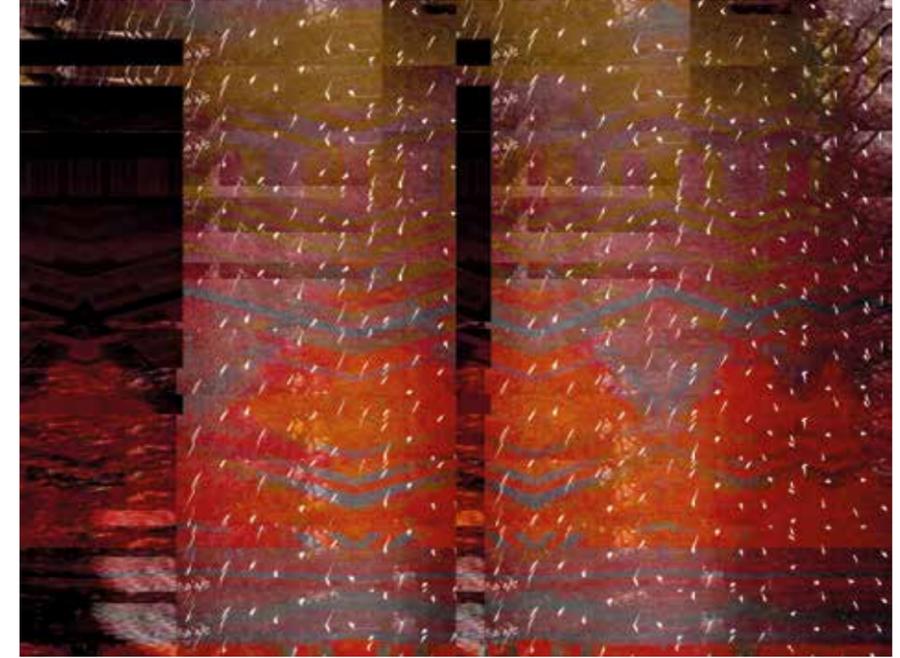


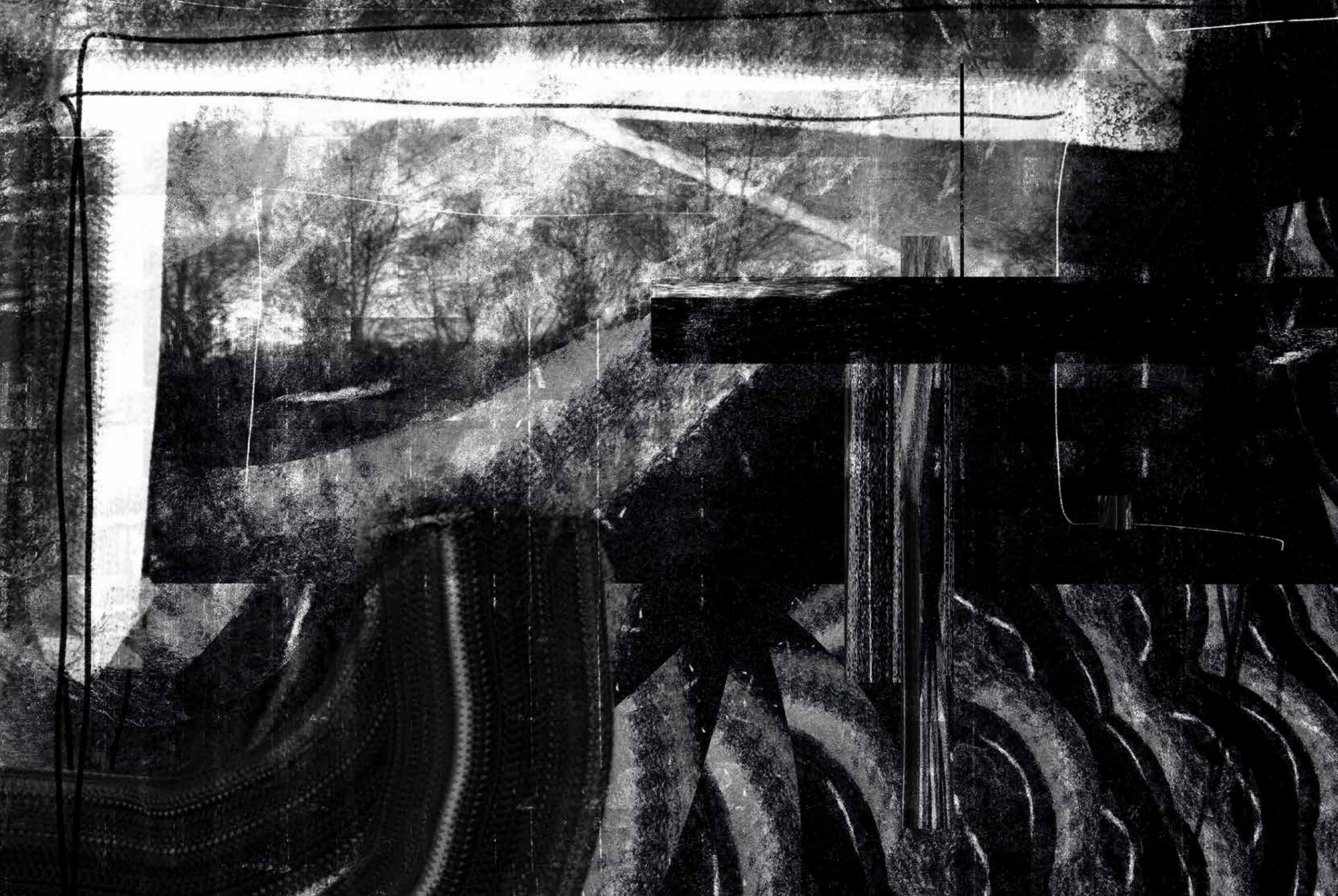


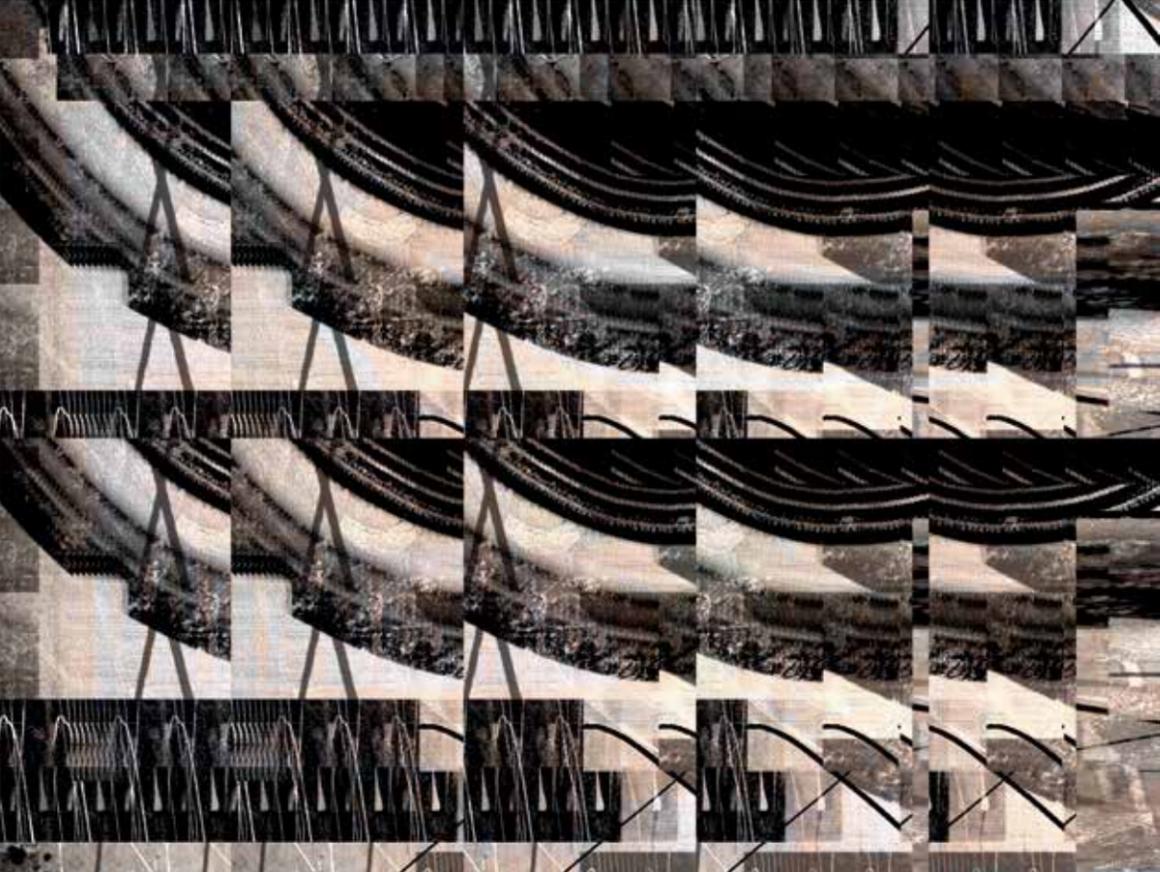


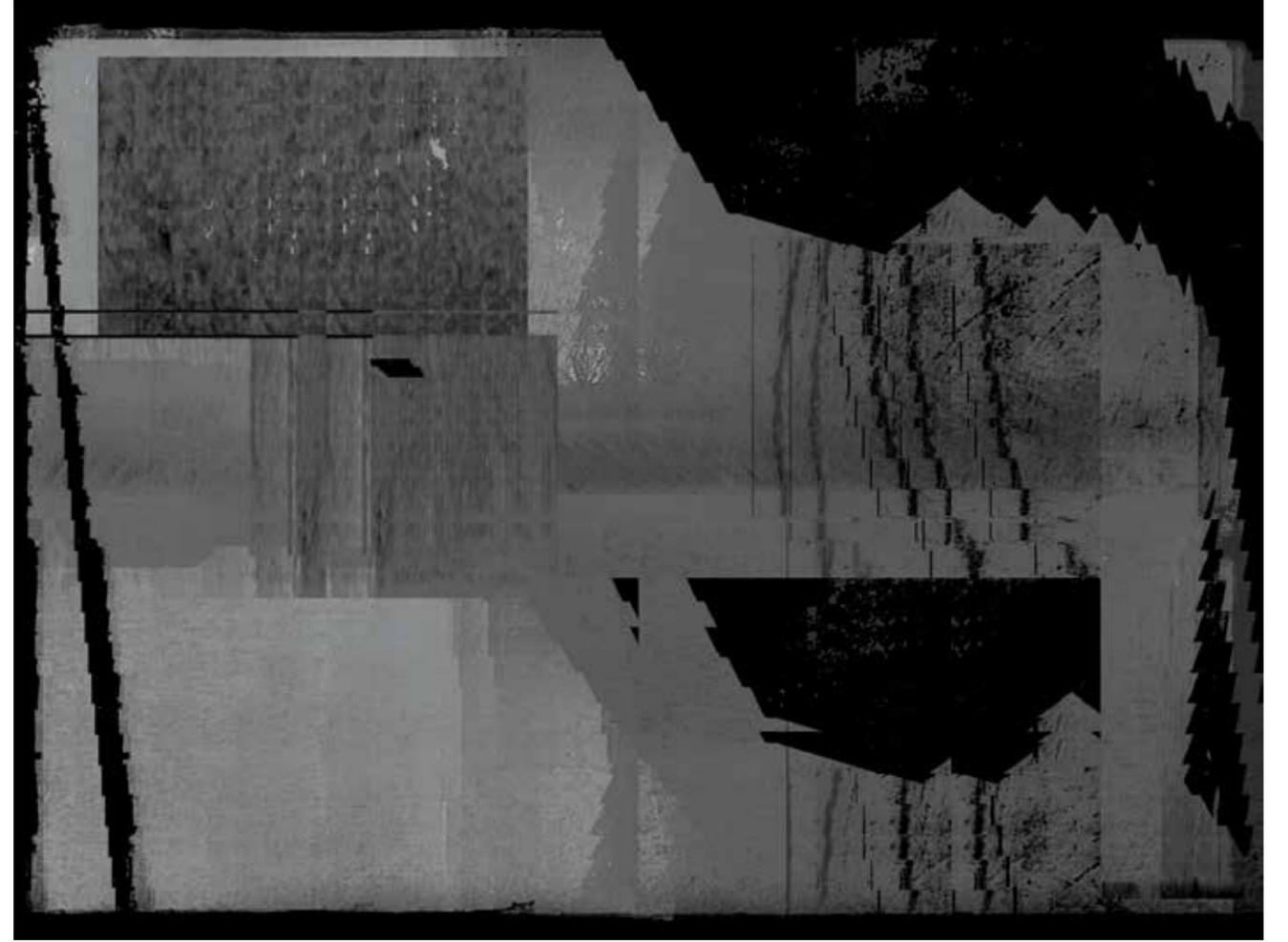
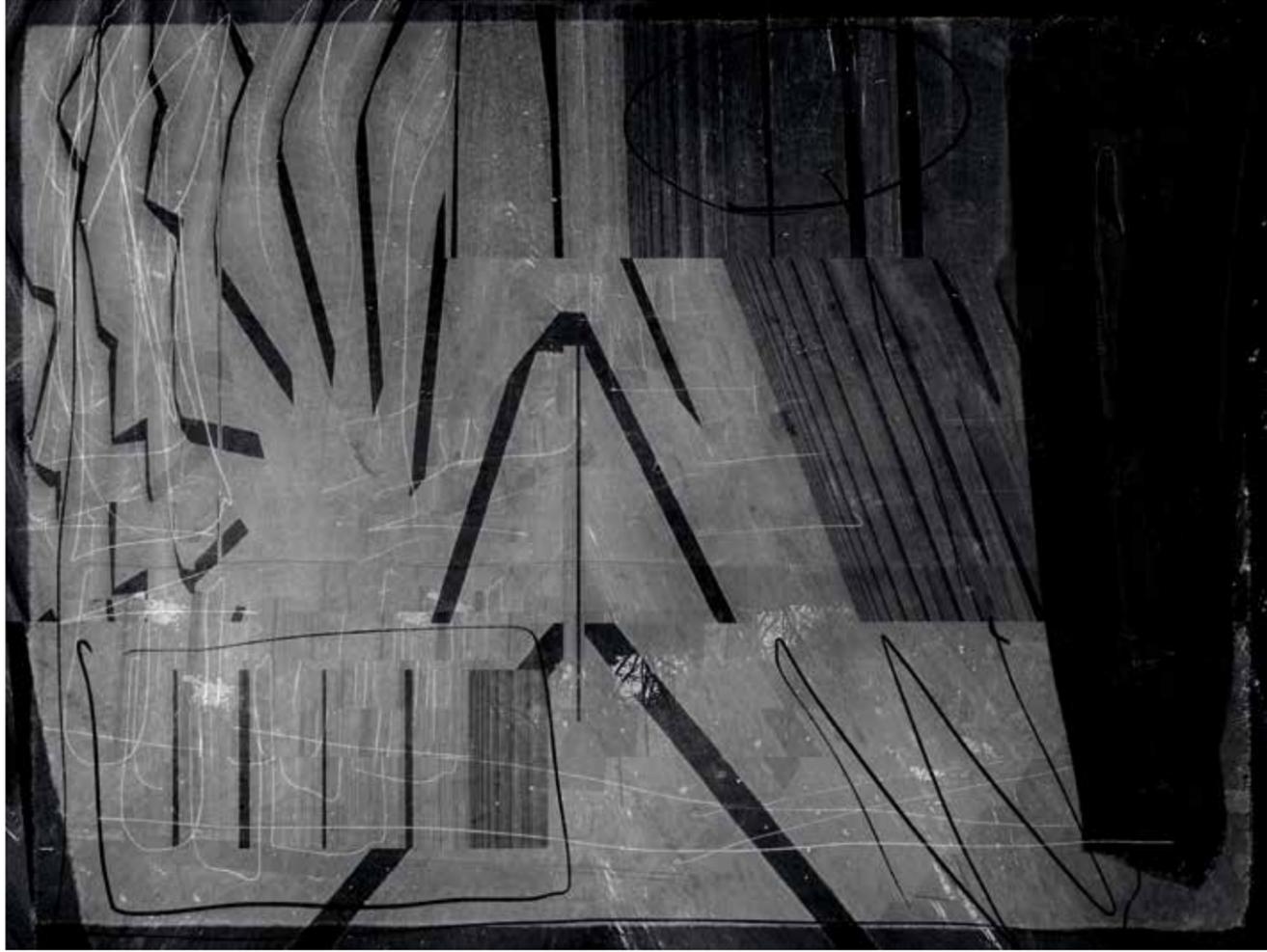


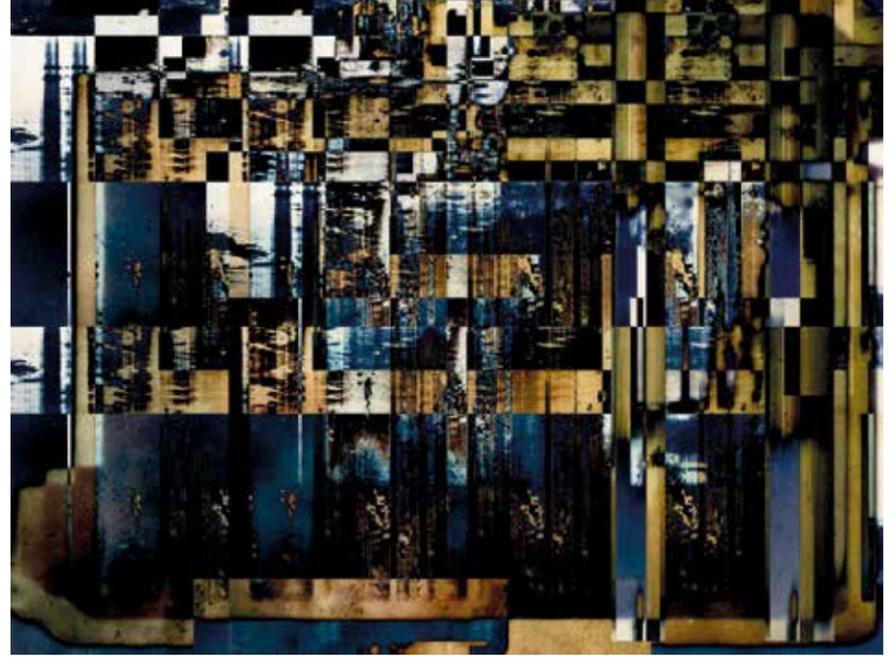
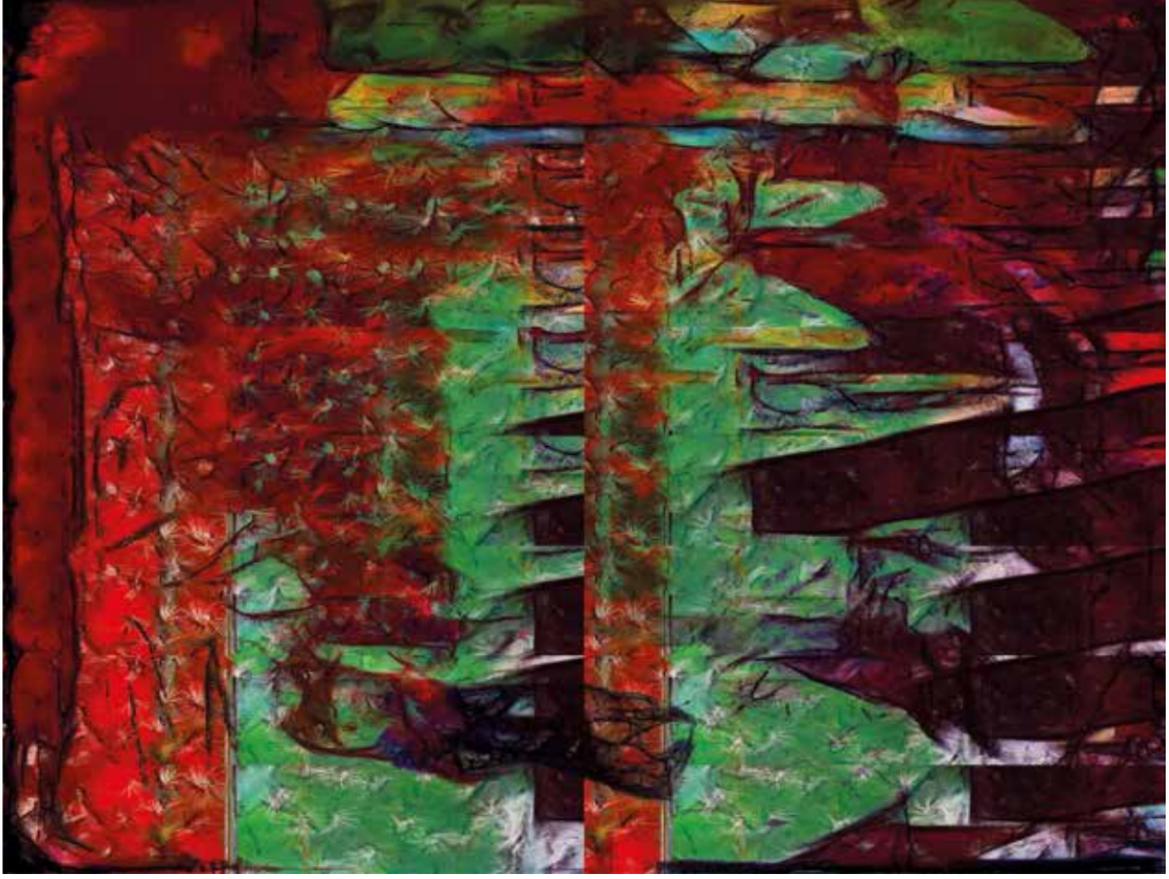


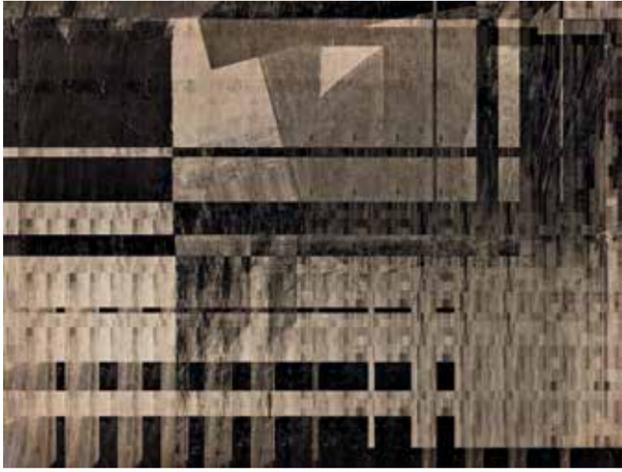
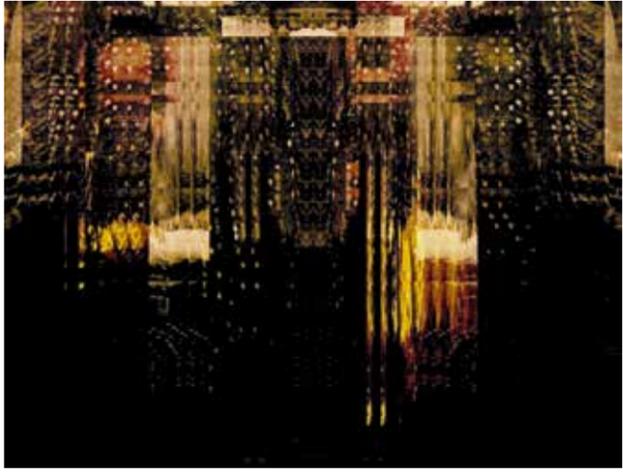
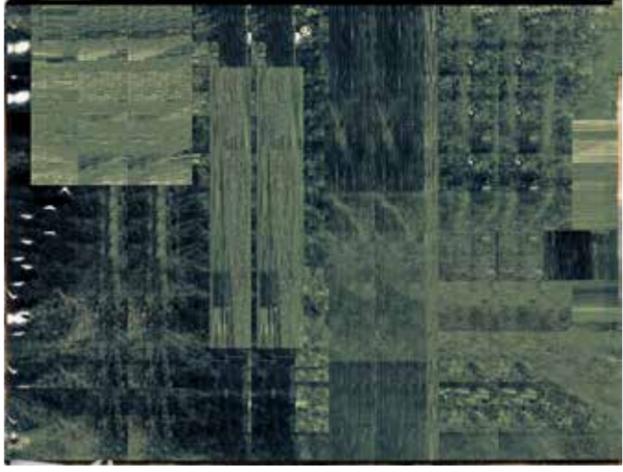


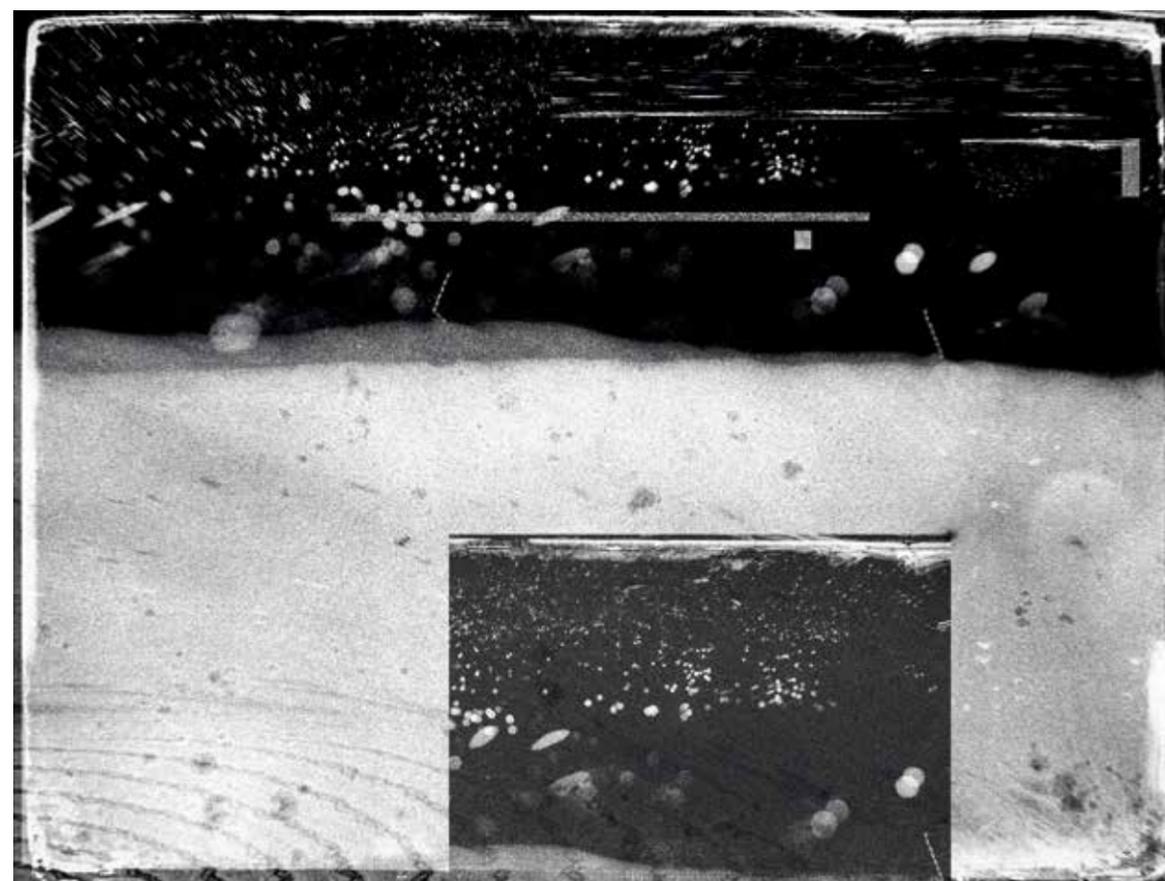
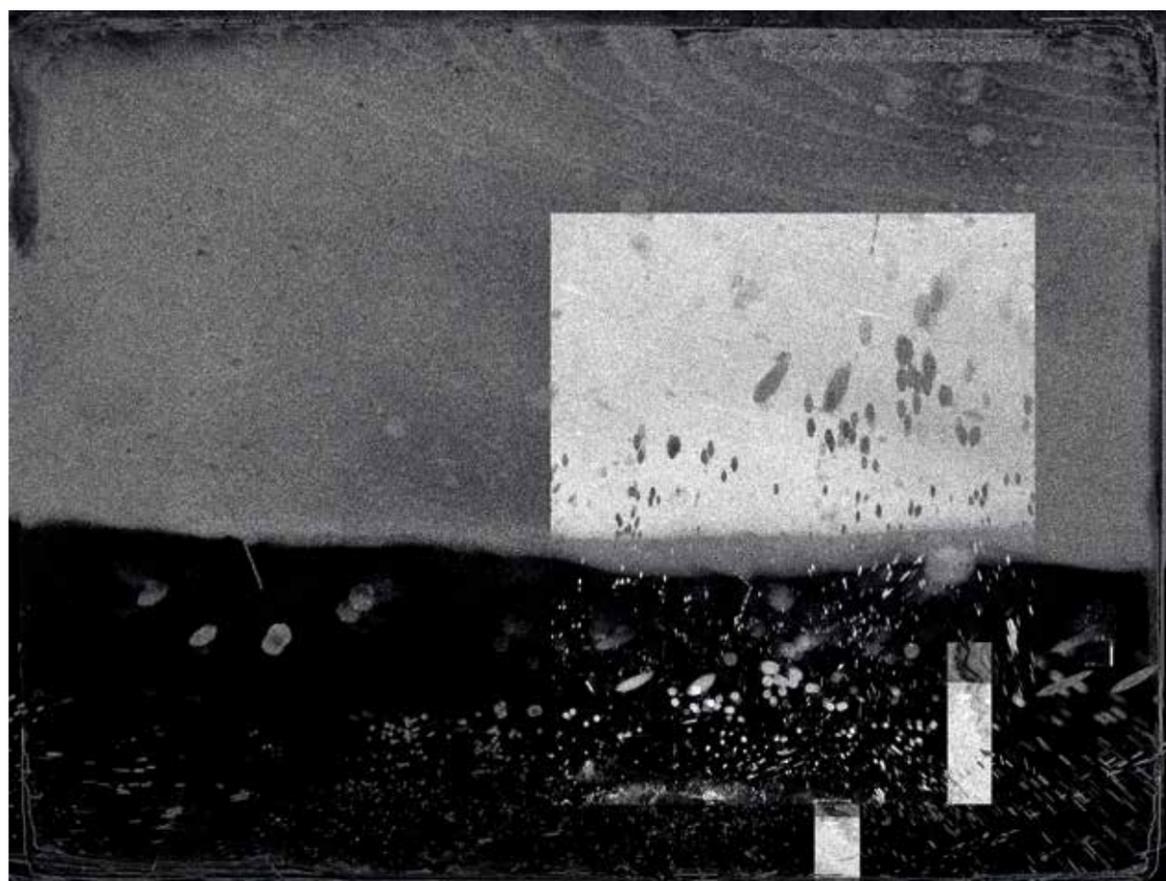


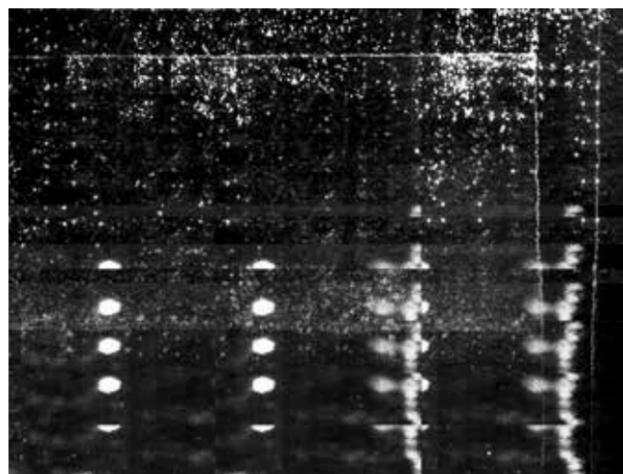
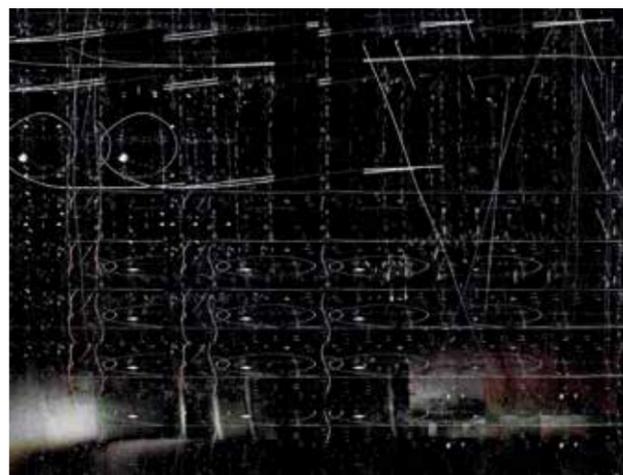
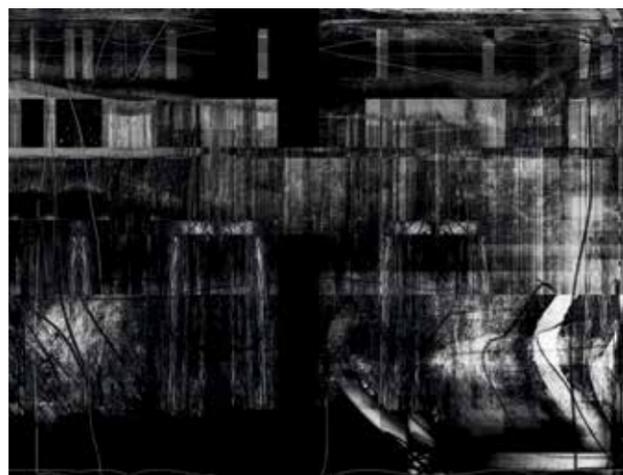
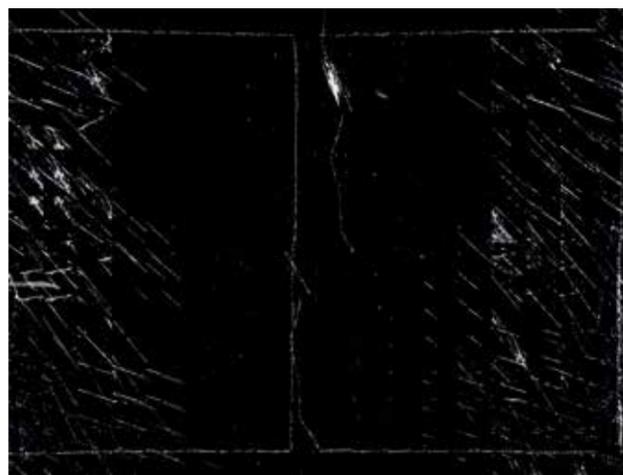


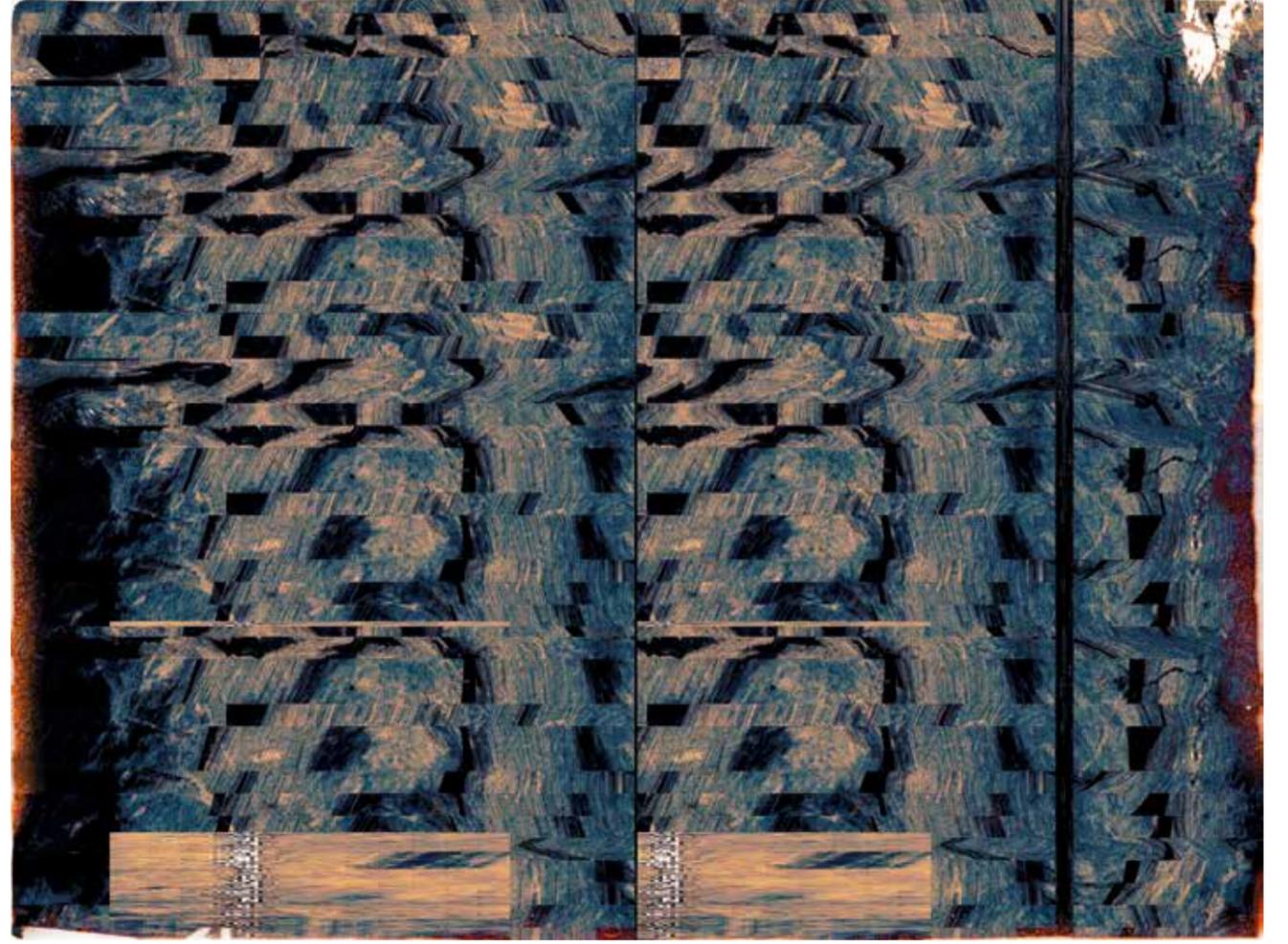
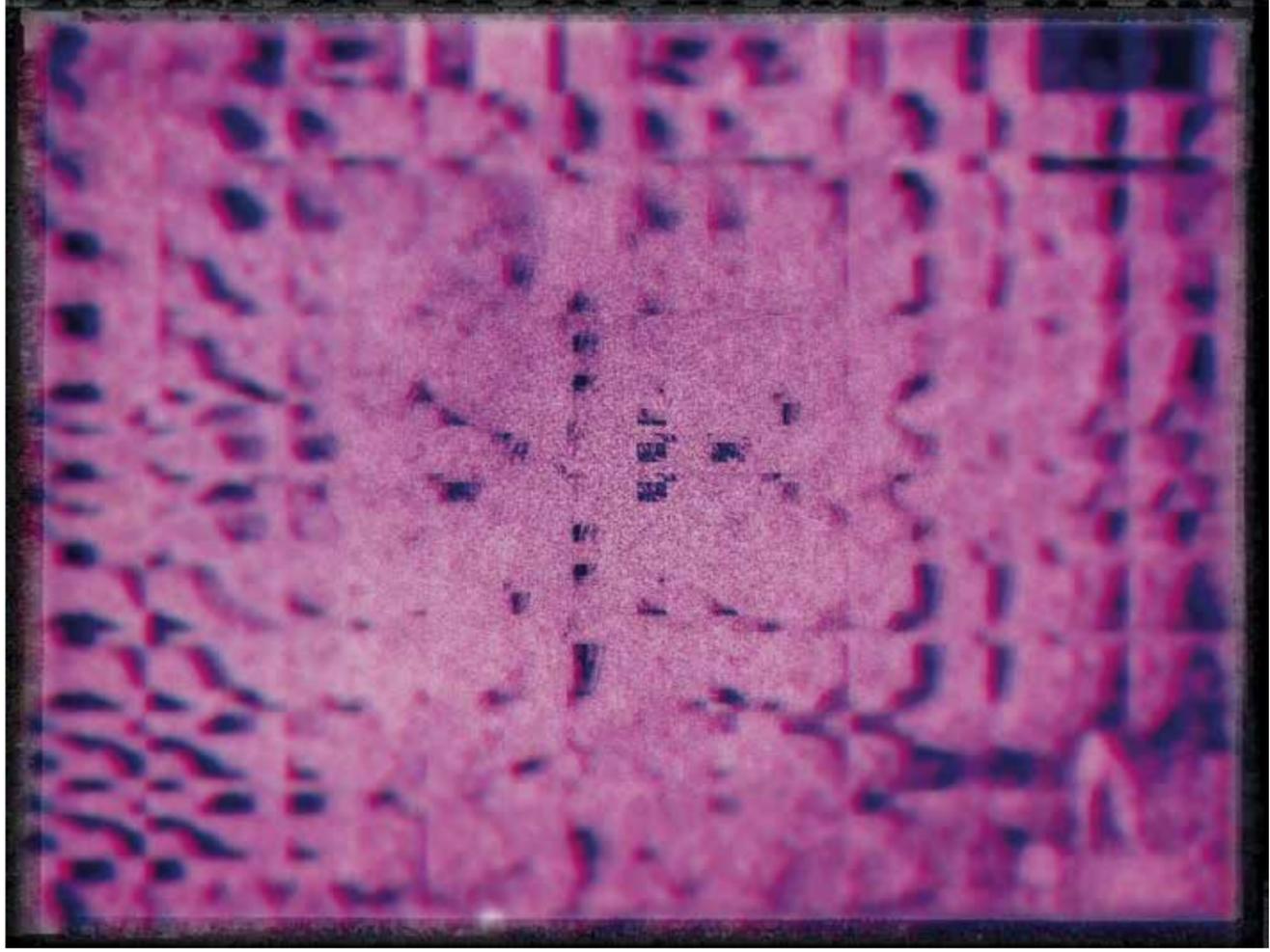


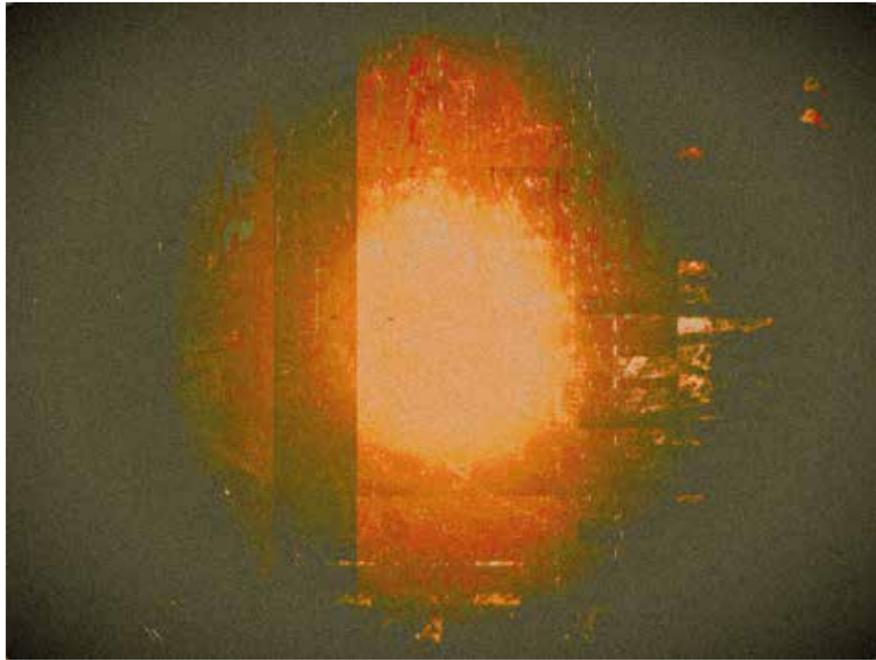
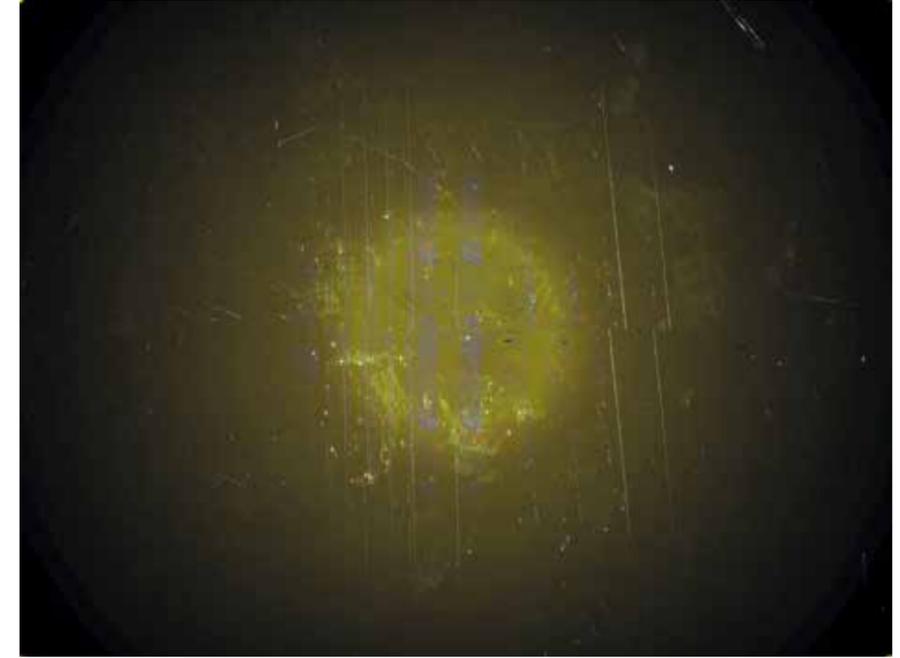
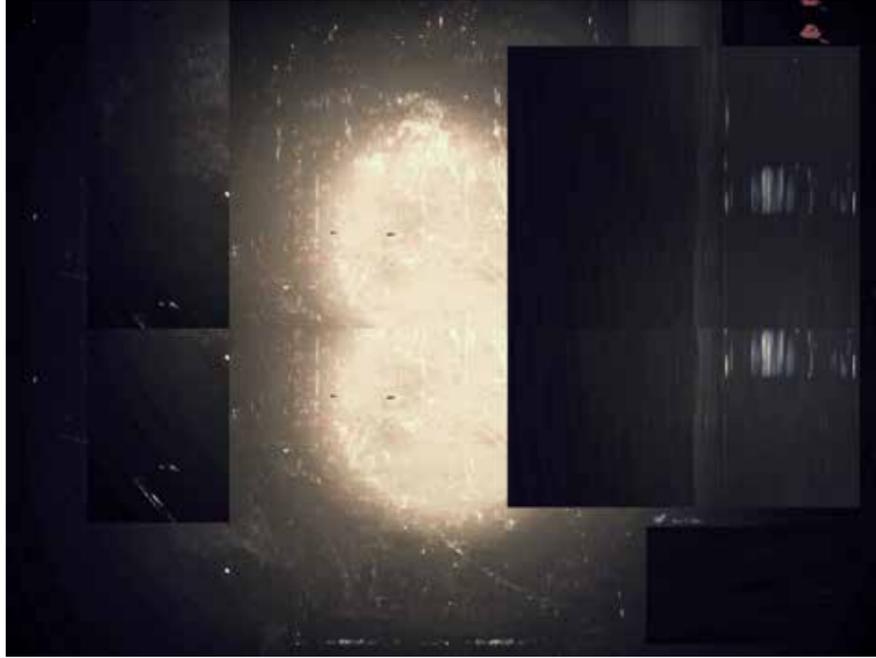


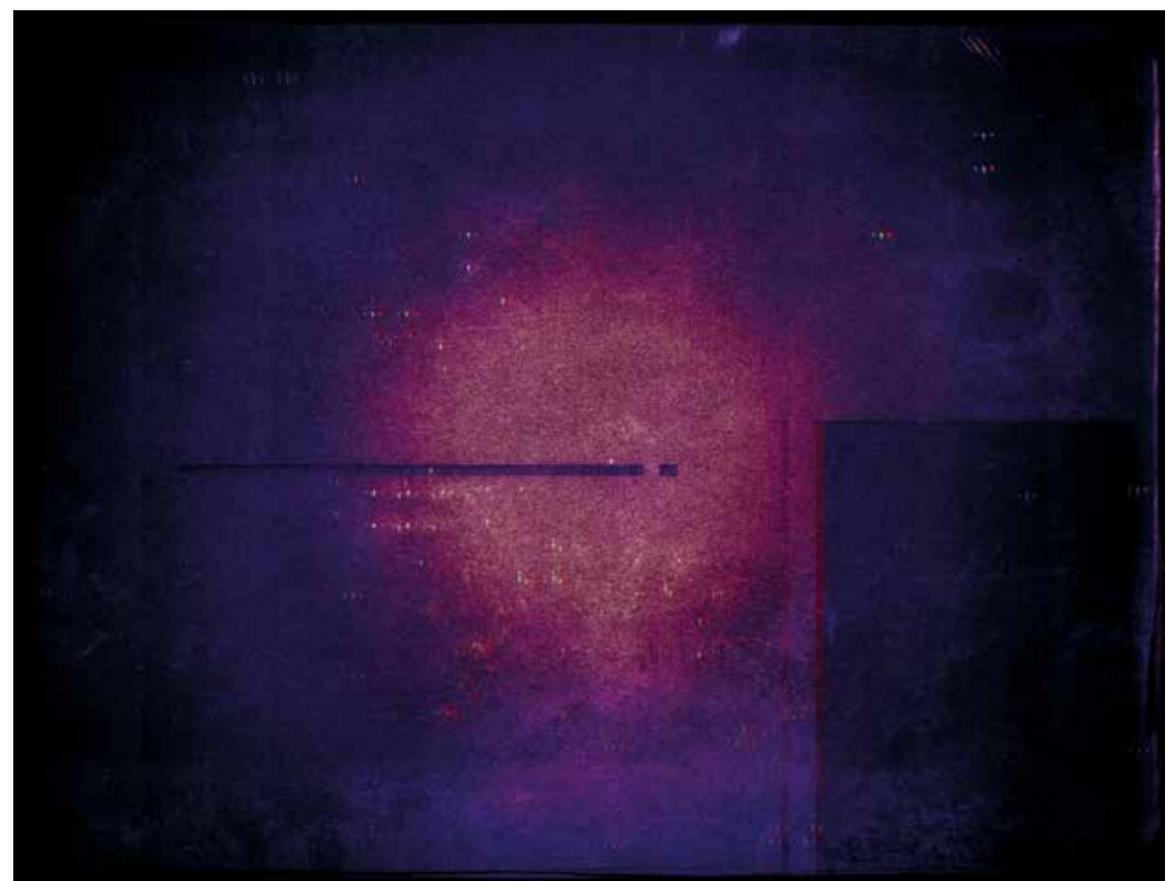




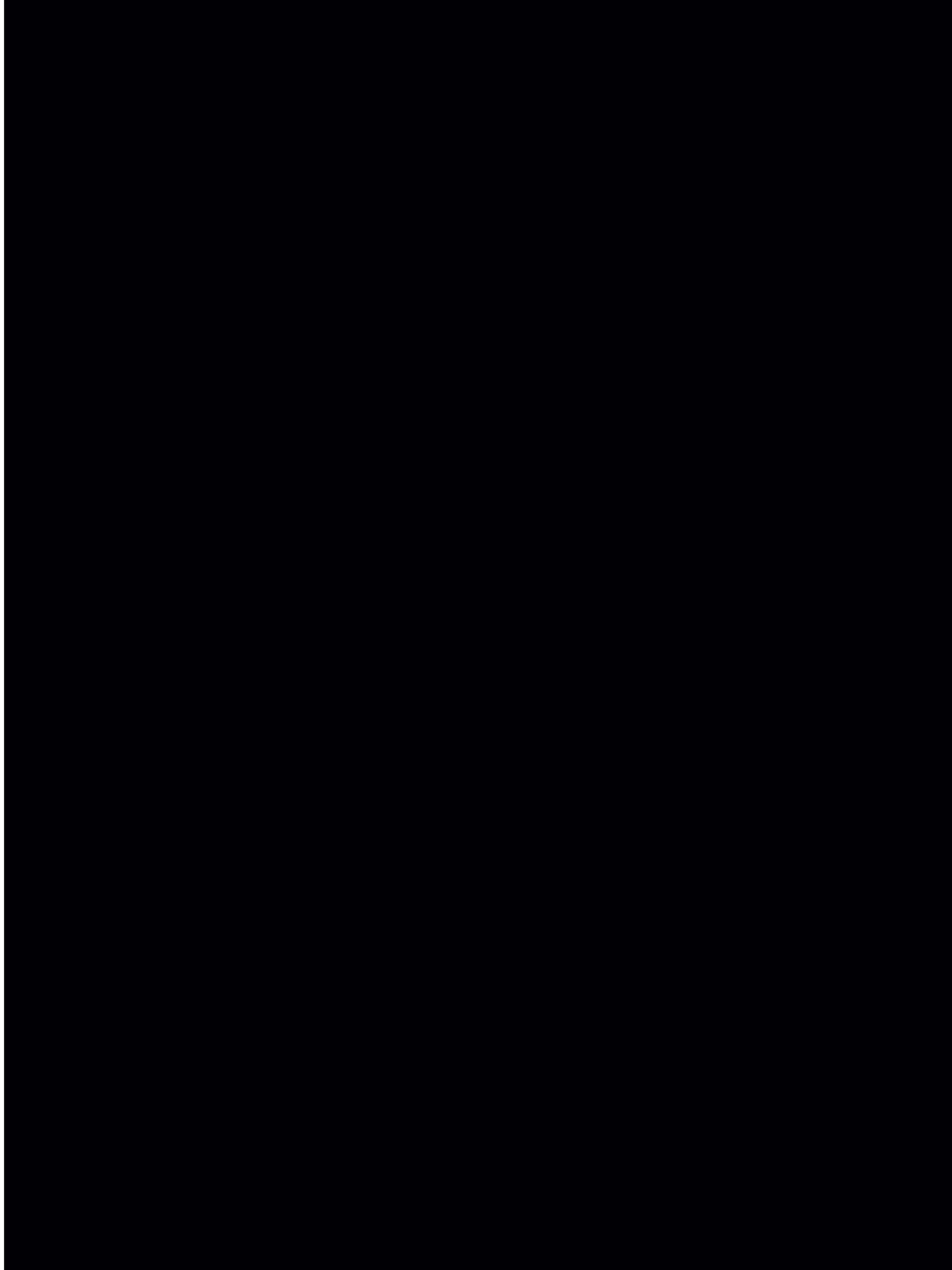
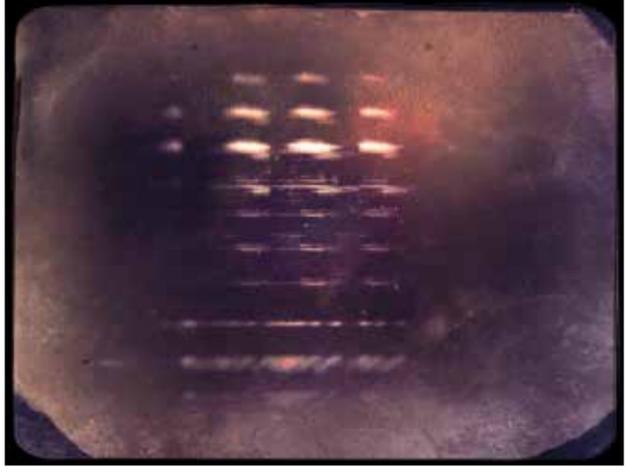


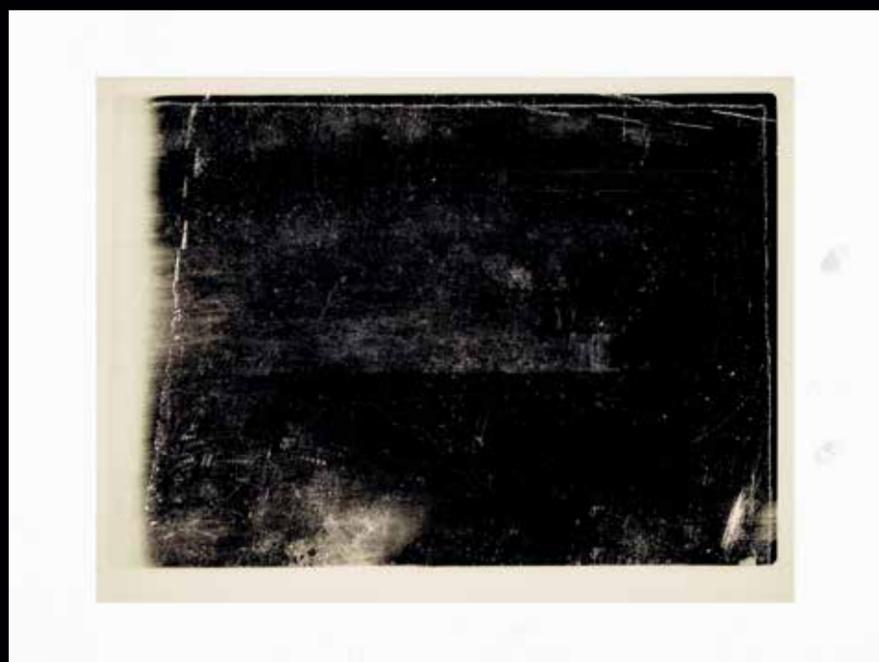
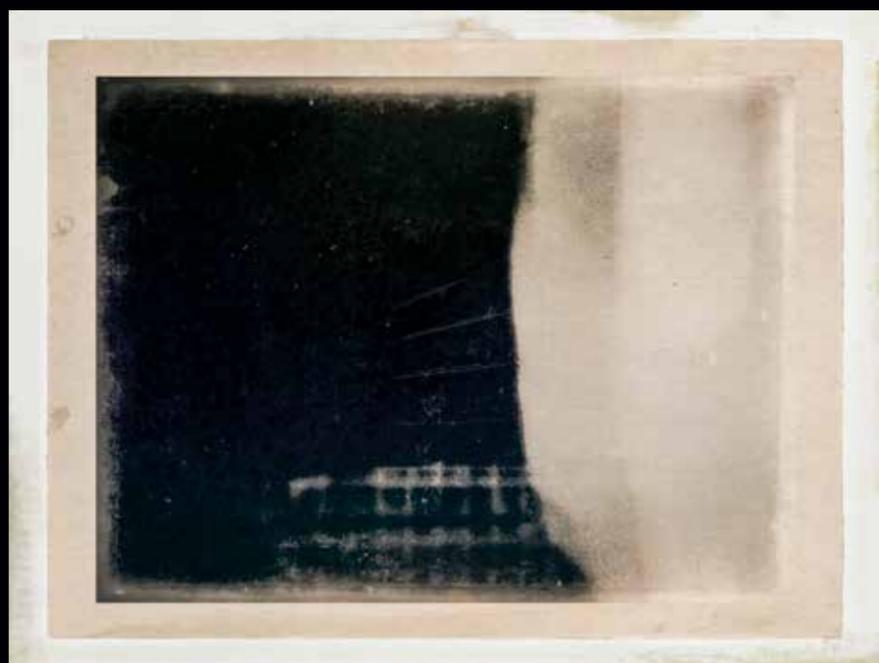


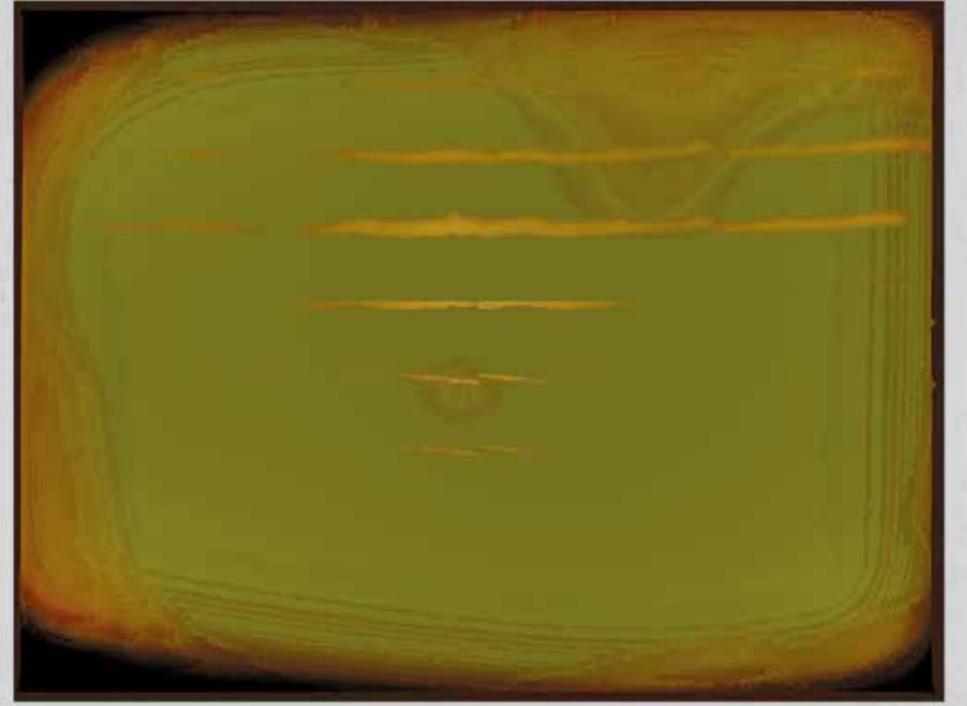
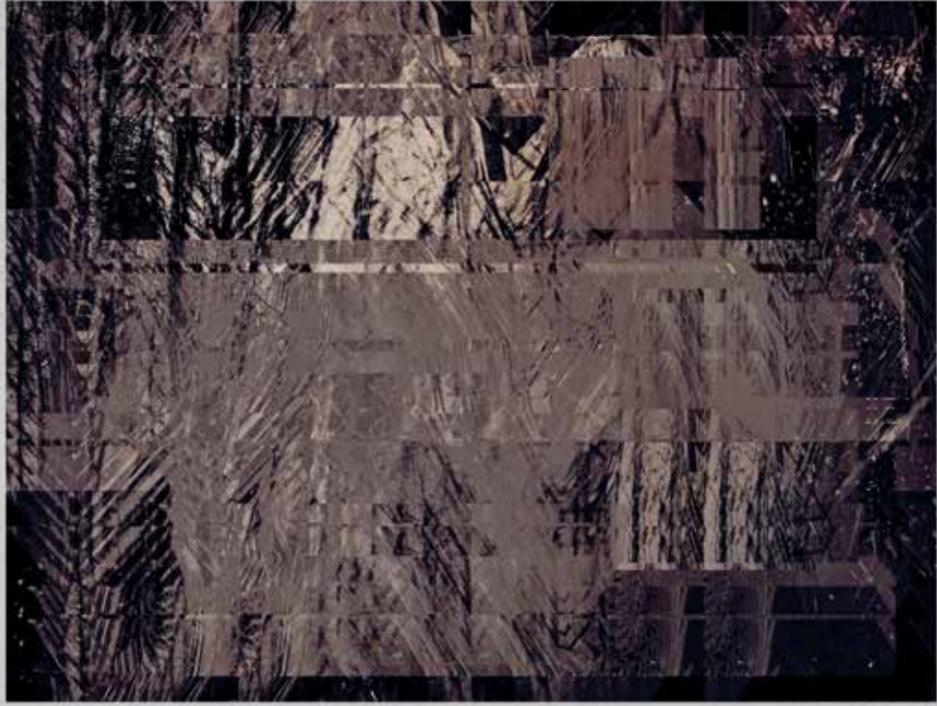




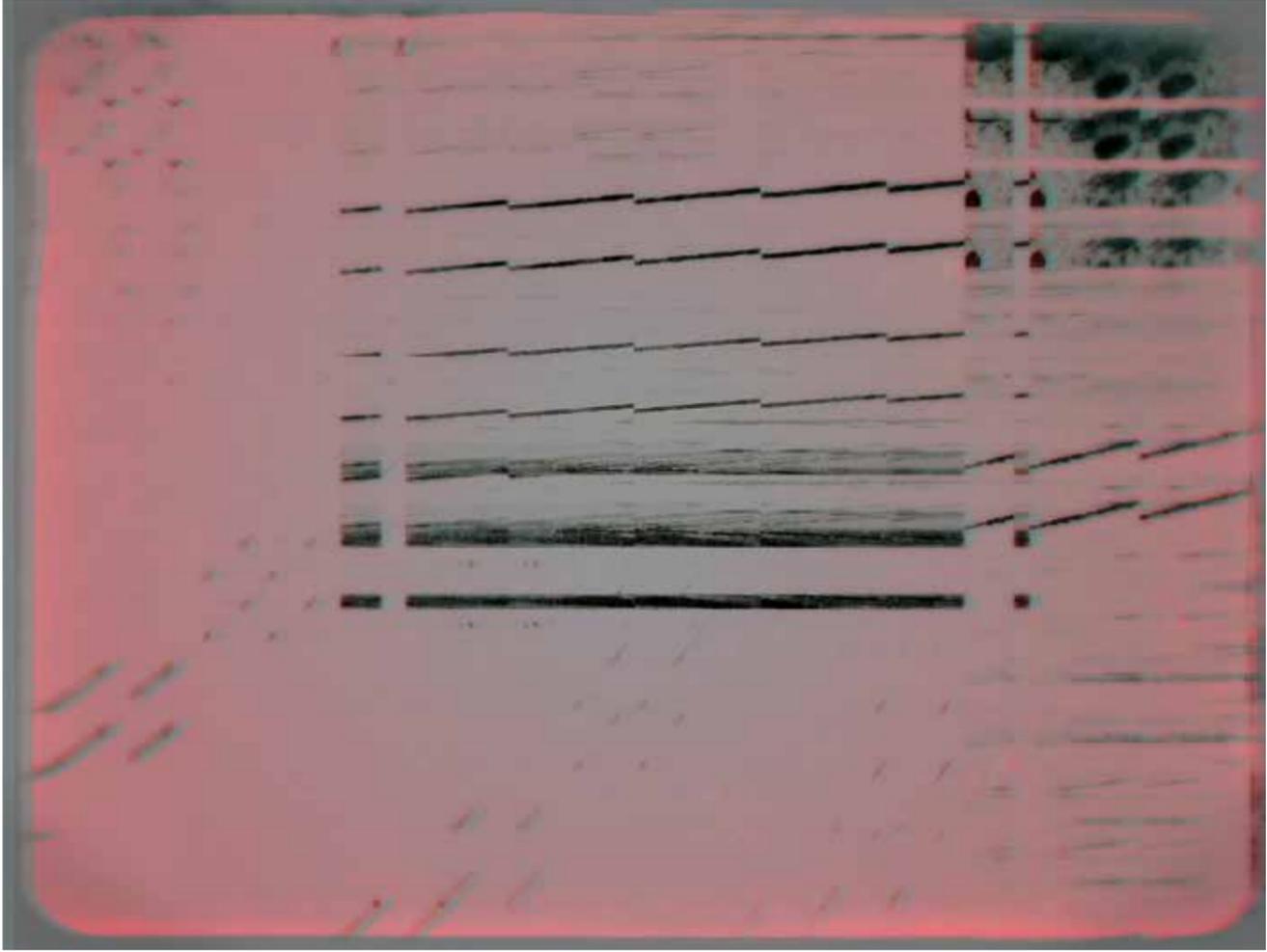


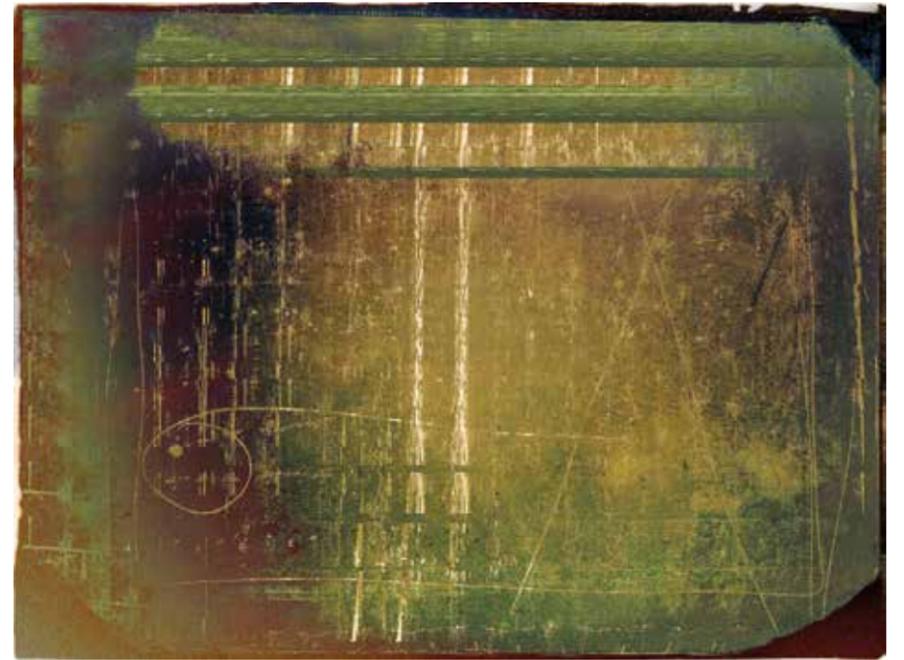
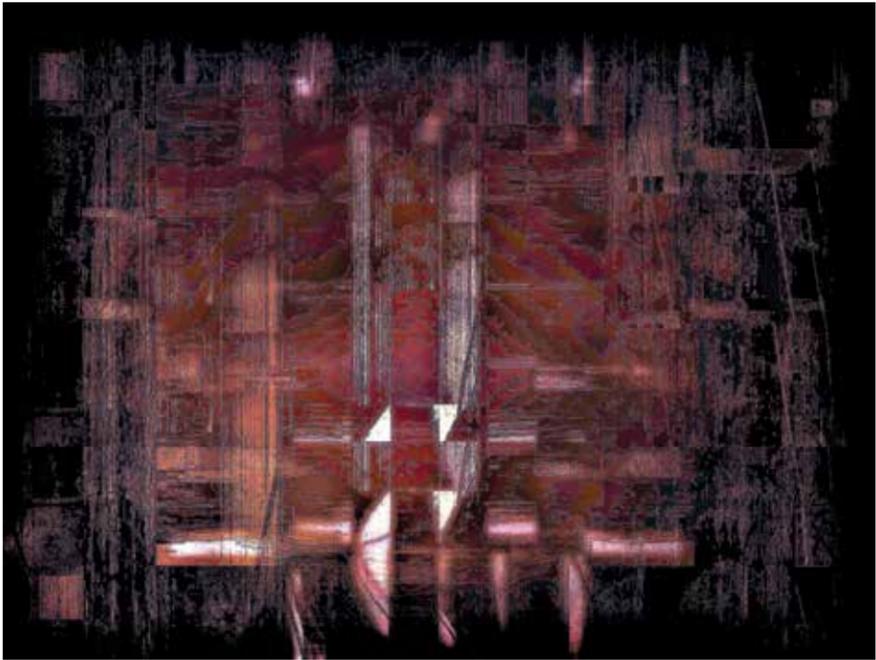
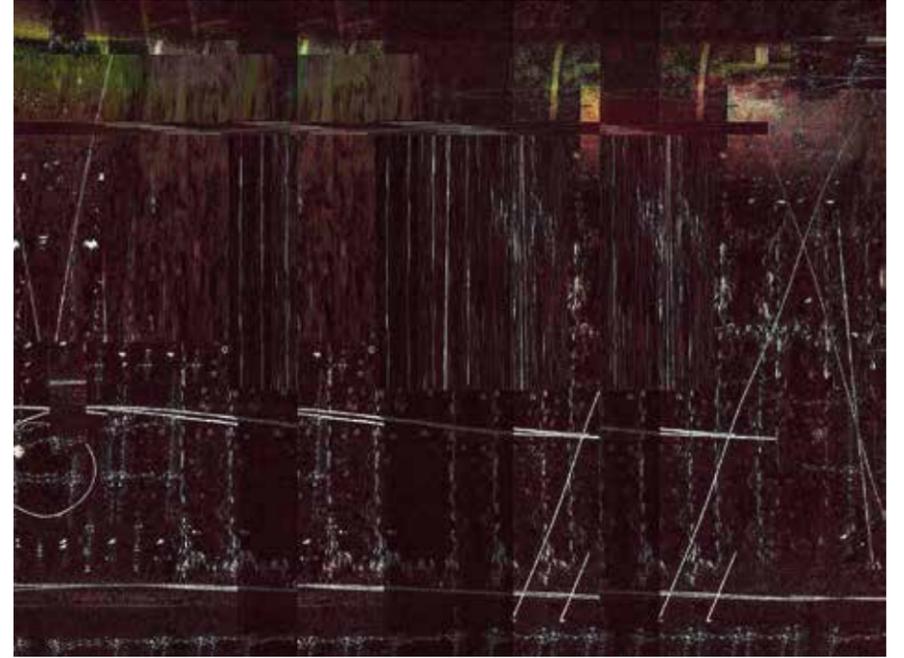
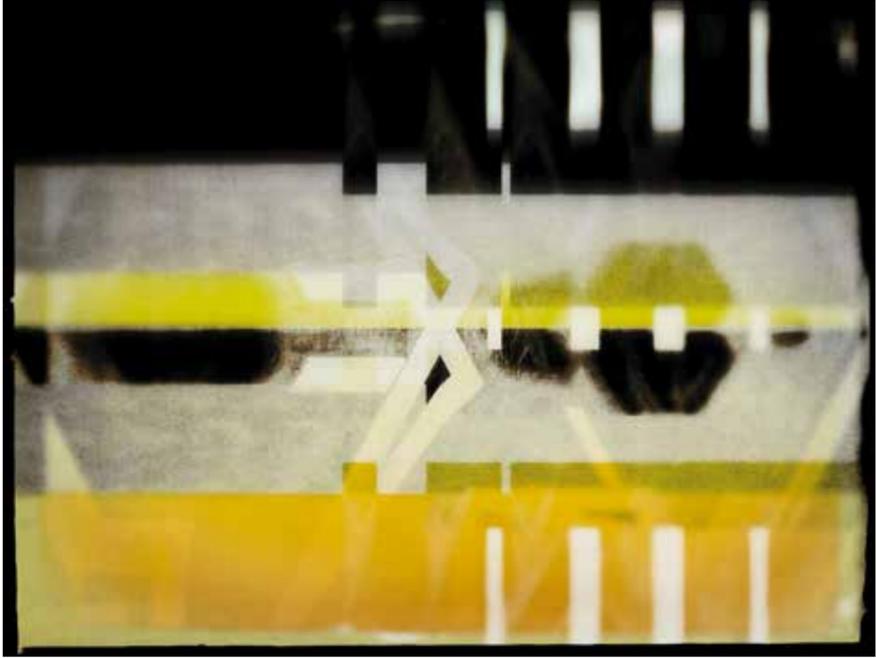


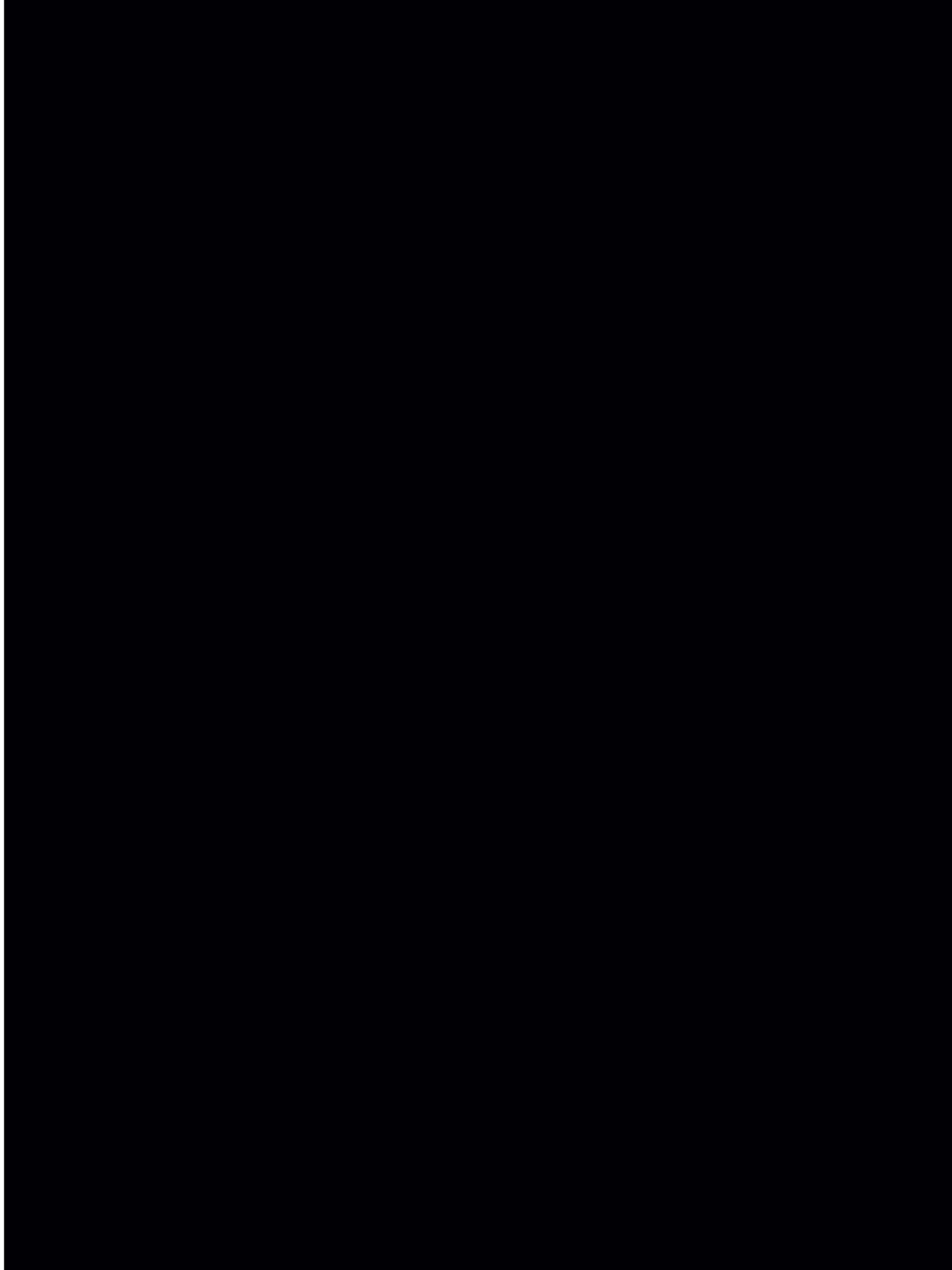


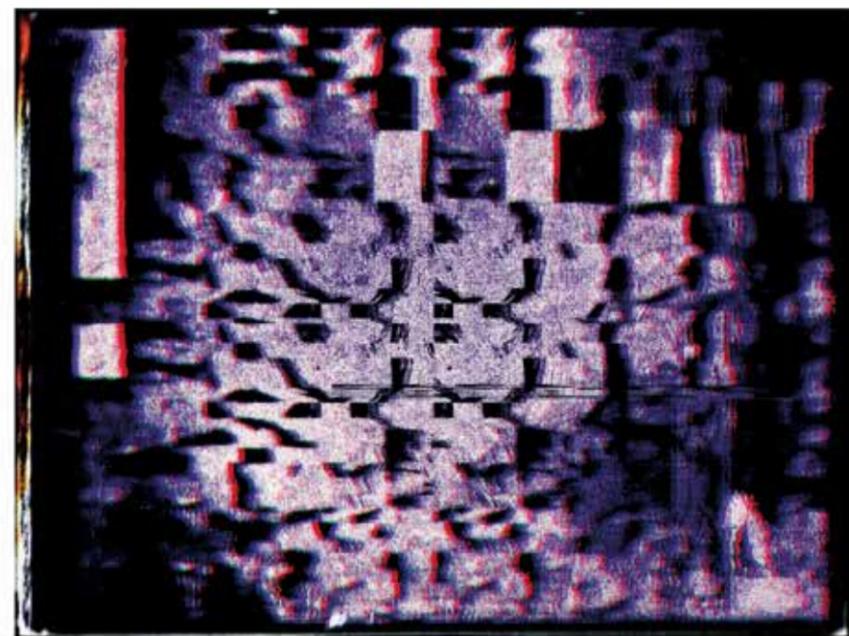


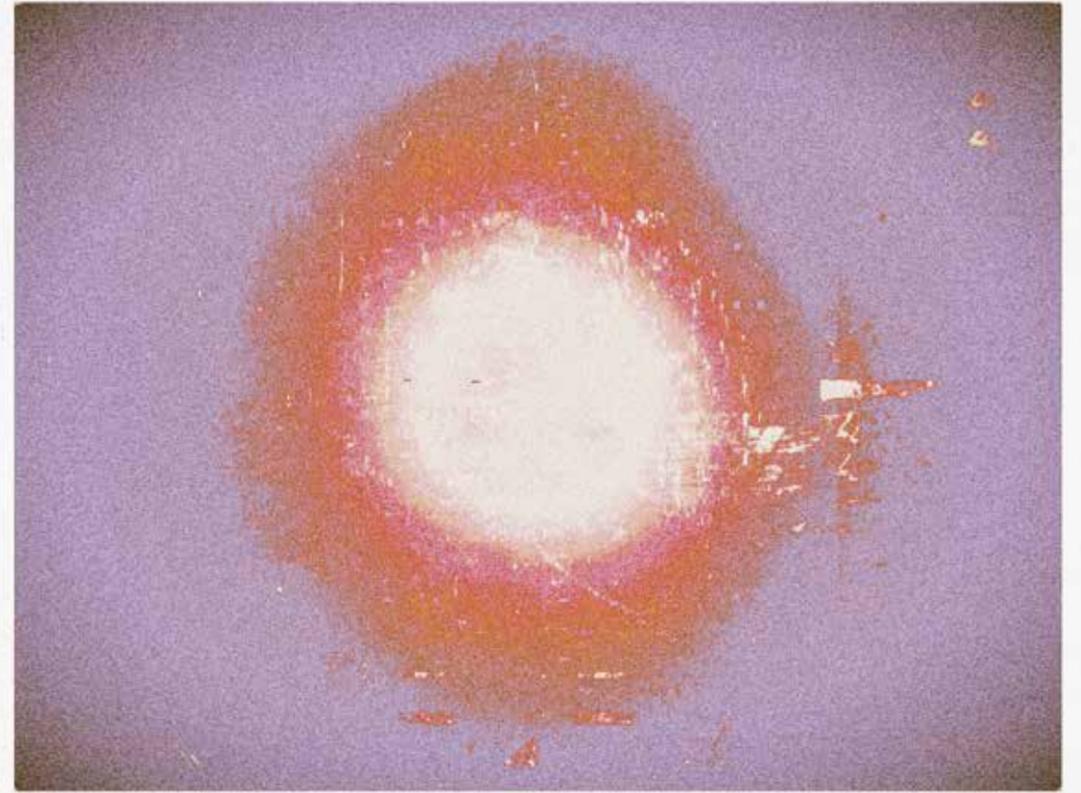
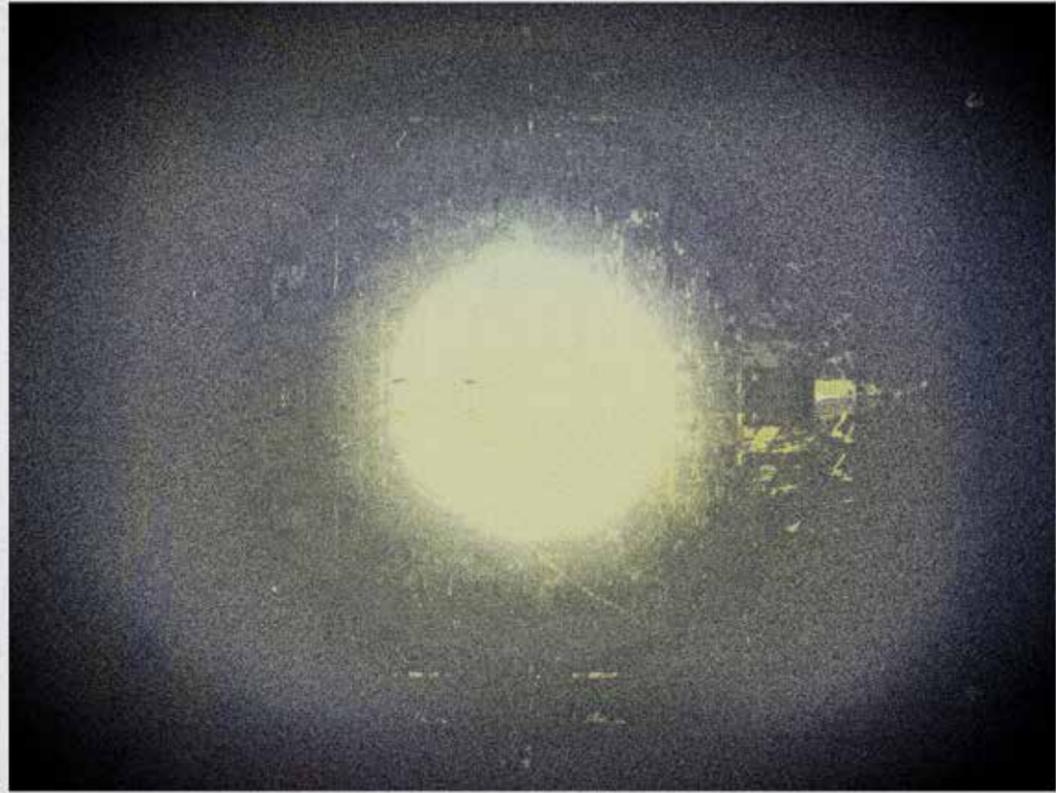


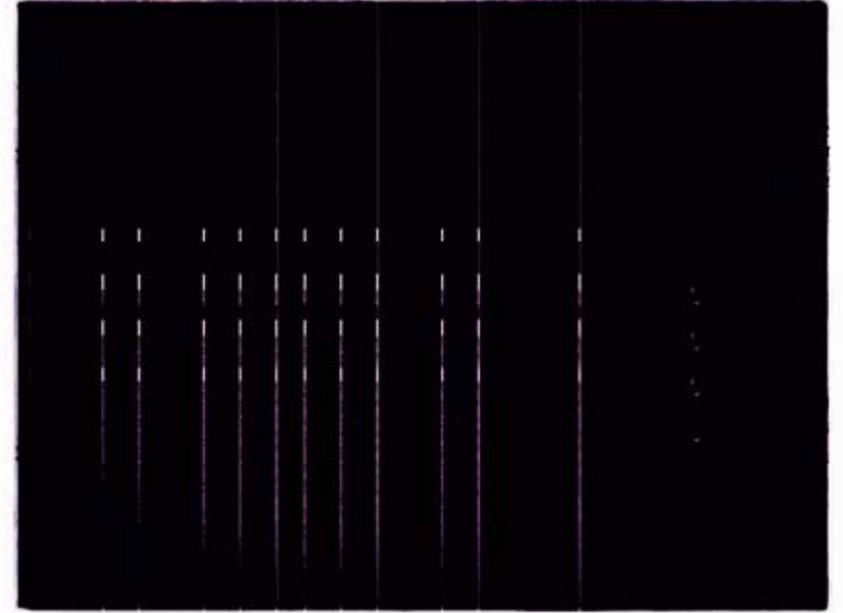




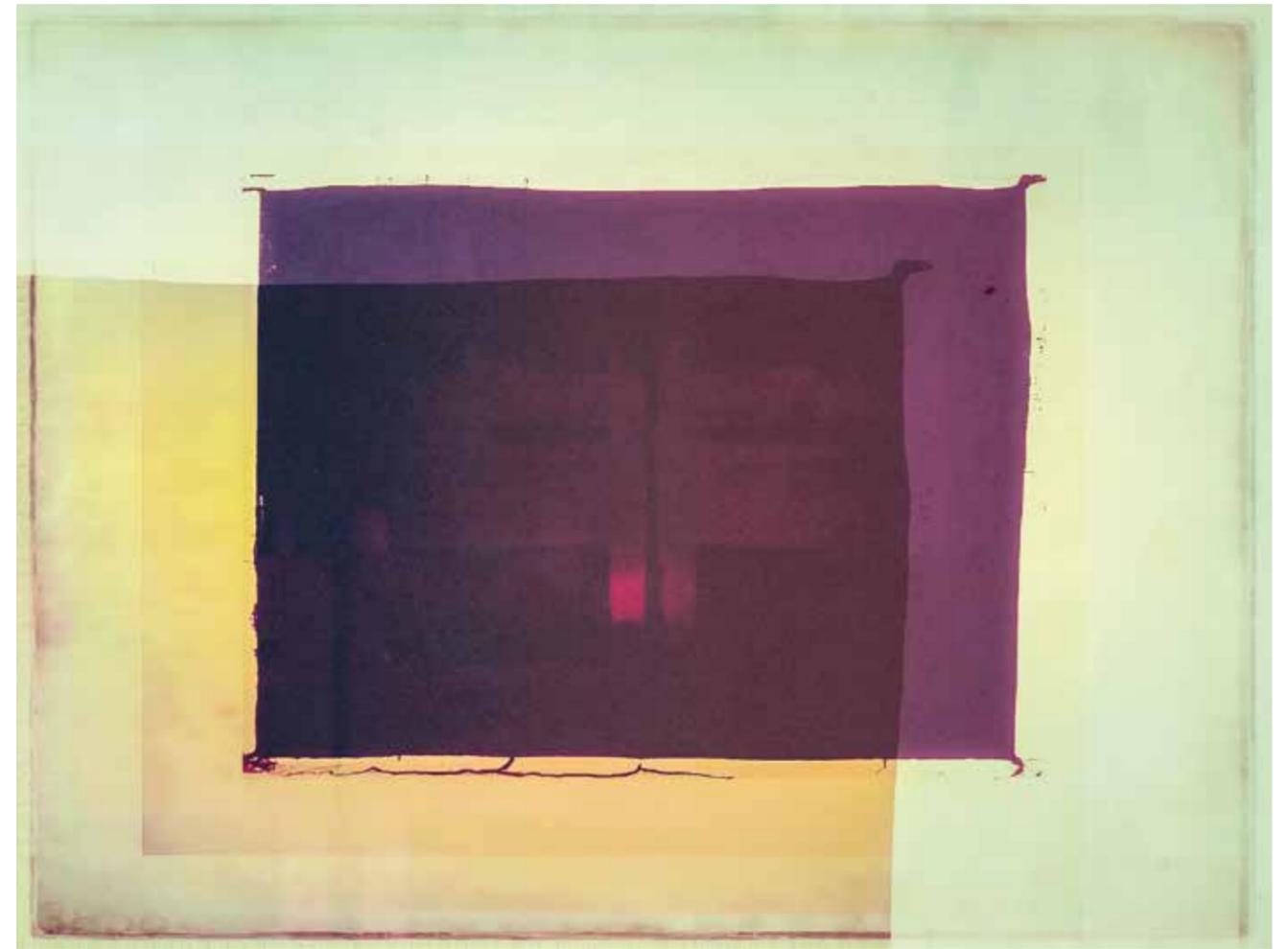
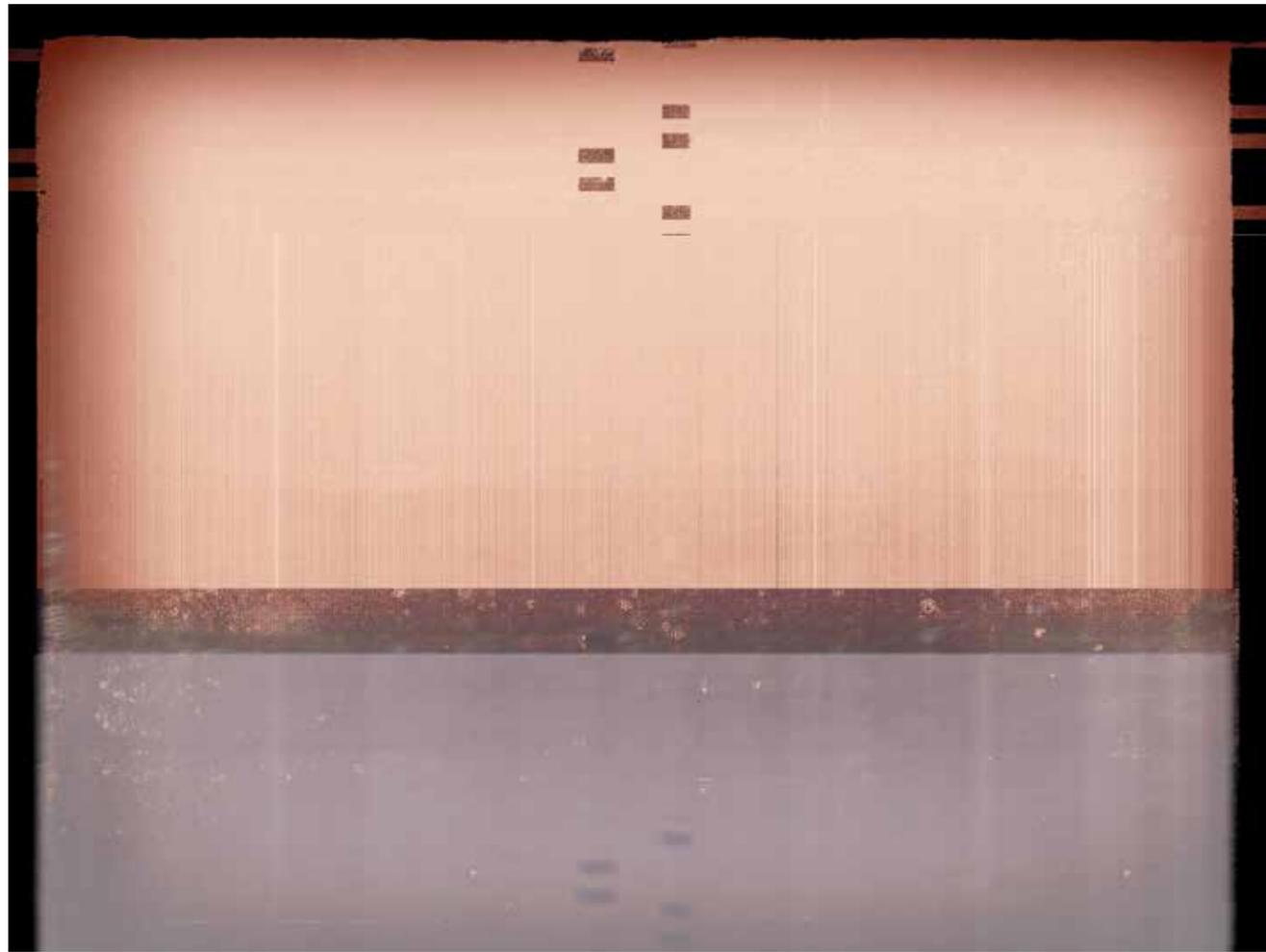


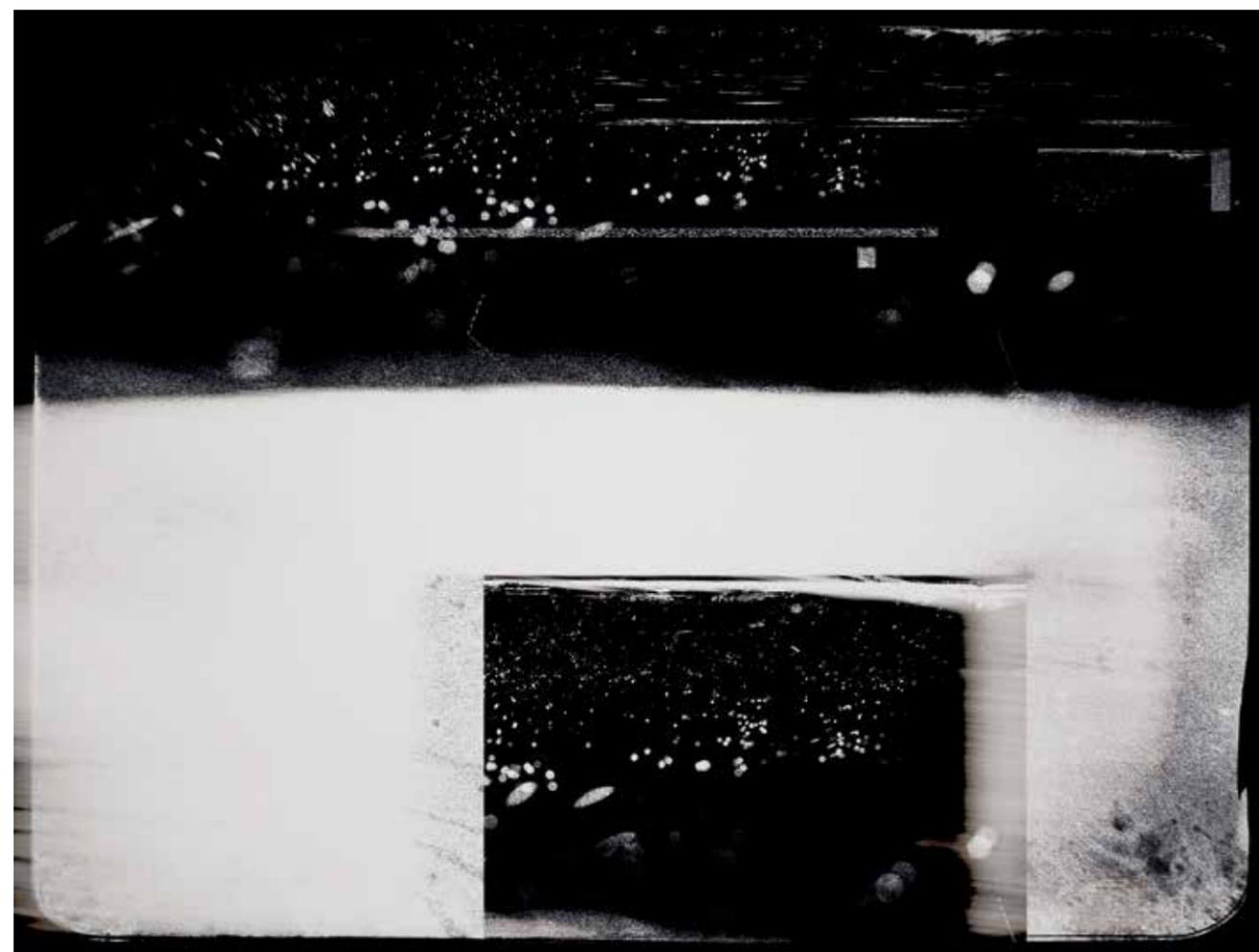


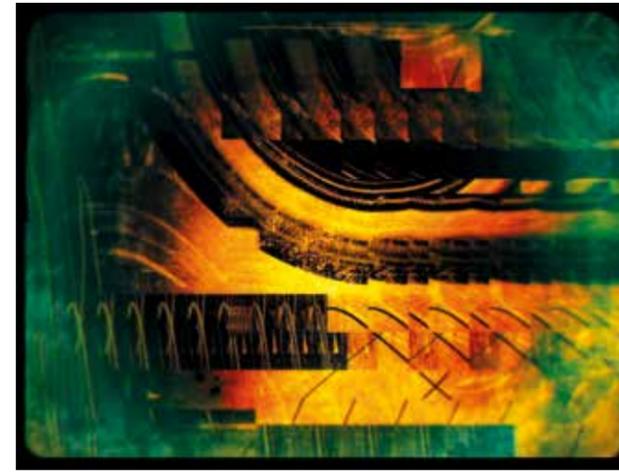
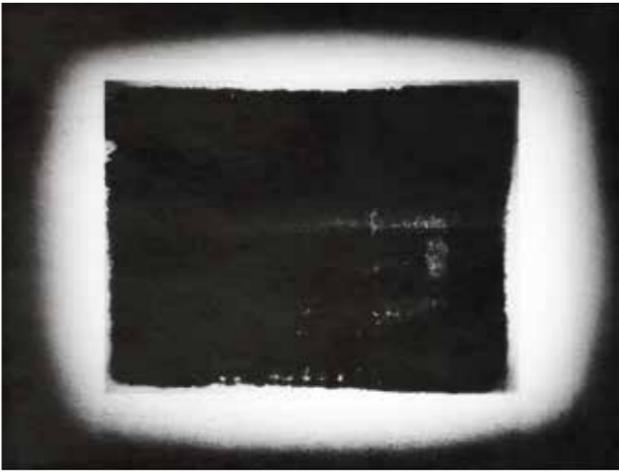
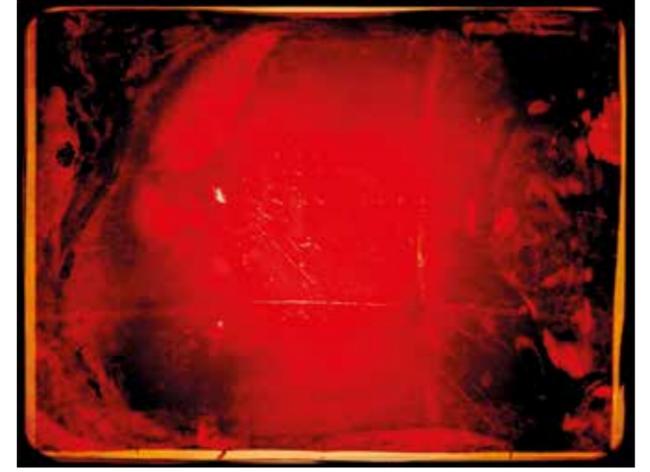
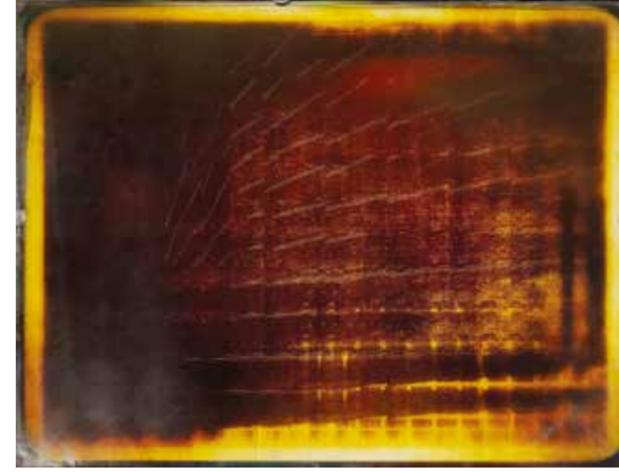




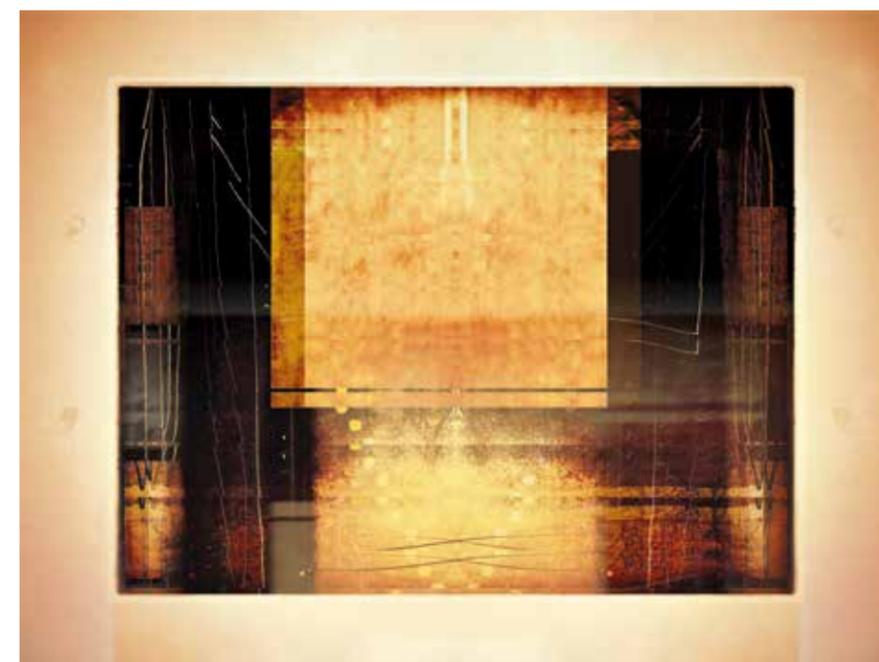




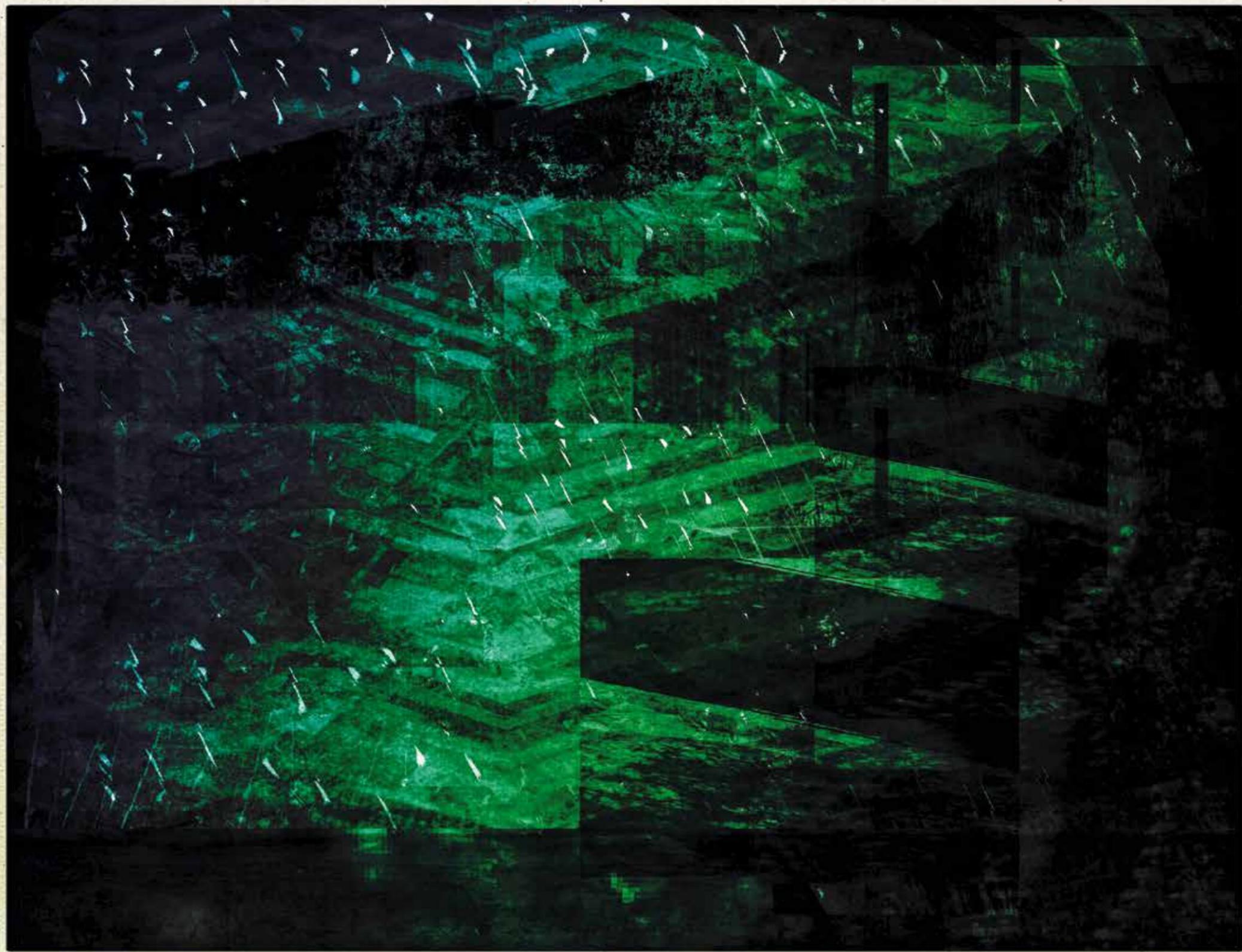














“My friends tell me I must stop saying in public that I ‘hate all my novels’. What I mean is that I am profoundly dissatisfied with everything that I have done simply because it is not good enough by my standards. On the other hand I begin every new book in the complete conviction that this time I shall get it right”

John Banville

HYPERGRAPHIA

Alice Flaherty MD, PhD

Why would researchers invent a medical jargon word for a phenomenon - the powerful desire to write - that belongs to art? And why would a visual artist adopt that neologism for his own work? "Hypergraphia" is a word invented by neurologists to describe the behavior of some patients whose seizures originate in the temporal lobe. Hypergraphia also occurs with other conditions that affect the temporal lobe, including mania, paranoia, and the rebound mildly energized mood that can follow a depression. The temporal lobe, one of whose functions is to interpret communications from others, is the part of the brain that permits or withholds our ability to experience meaning in words, relationships, events.

Hypergraphic patients may spend hours at a time writing, and the occupation seems intensely significant to them. Often the writing is detail-focused and repetitive, and its quantity doesn't always guarantee quality. But it doesn't preclude it either, and the hours, days, and years of hypergraphic practice help. As W. H. Auden noted, "The best poets write many more poems than the bad poets."

Talented hypergraphic writers include Fyodor Dostoevsky, Teresa of Avila, and Lewis Carroll. Some people with hypergraphia also paint or compose music. Vincent van Gogh and Robert Schumann, for instance, wrote thousands of letters along with their prolific painting and composing. Almost all people with hypergraphia are intense conversationalists, driven to communicate to others the things they find meaningful, by a force that can feel larger than themselves. The word "hypergraphia," despite its whiff of disinfectant, gives a modern name to that force, one that in the past might have been called the muse.

Hypergraphia interests me for personal reasons. Soon after I finished my neurology training, I gave birth to premature twins. One of them died just before birth; the other just after. For ten days, I was filled with normal grief, but on the morning of the eleventh day I woke into a world that seemed utterly changed, bursting with meaning that pressed on me from all sides. I had to write ideas down on post-its, toilet paper, anything that came to hand. I wrote so I wouldn't forget, and also to keep myself from speaking, from cornering strangers and pouring out my sorrow to them. One preoccupation was a desire I knew was hopeless, to find my tiny babies and bring them back inside me, where they could be safe.

Why do we seek out sad art when we are sad? I began to pay more attention to my own patients' art, and what triggered it. Over the years, scores of people have shown me the creative activities they have turned to after profound personal loss. I wrote a book about hypergraphia and its opposite, creative block. Later, I published it-- because writing to yourself on toilet paper is a crazy thing to do, but if it gets published, then, poof, it transforms you from a crazy person into an author.

But why we publish is different from why we create. Art therapists mislead us with their proposal that self-expression is therapeutic. Art is about reaching out, about connection with others. Perhaps a cry for help is not the most sophisticated form of utterance, but asking for aid and giving it are the bonds which hold society together.

And who reaches out more to an absent other than someone who is bereaved? The psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott proposed that the first art is the transitional object, the blanket or bear the child wraps its arms around when its mother is away. Hanna Segal said we make art to preserve a lost world.

The eminent landscape photographer Chris Friel has turned his gaze to a small hospital room which held him for 100 days after his son died. The images are the opposite of landscapes; the viewer is not even sure there is a window. Glimpses of raindrops or a row of faint trees appear and disappear like hallucinations.

The photographs, taken at a rate of one per minute, are repetitive in the way that landscapes and the seasons are, in the way that chaos theory tells us life is. The rhythm of the images, their visual rhyme, is the passage of the day after day that he spent in that room. That rhythm soothes and frightens us into believing that sudden change is impossible. I will be in this small room forever. People who are now alive will always stay alive. Especially, always, our children.

Besides decoding meaning, the temporal lobe helps us recognize landscapes and faces. It is also the source of visual and auditory hallucinations. When the faces of those we love are gone forever, we think we see them everywhere. They appear in crowds and vanish around each corner. They float through the air of empty rooms and leave trails of afterimages in their wake. But Friel's room is more empty than that; it leaves trails only of itself. It is the same each day, but what it excludes--the frantic events of the world outside--is never the same. What is worse than being inside a locked room in an asylum? The word "asylum" gives the answer. What is worse is outside the walls, the absence there.

Friel's art transubstantiates an empty room into a container of meaning. These images reach out to us.

Dir., Movement Disorders Fellowship, Massachusetts General Hospital
Assoc. Prof. of Neurology, Assoc. Prof. of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

EXHIBITION

The exhibition of *Hypergraphia* in Ludlow by the Photo Space Charity coincides with Mental Health Awareness Week and the Ludlow Fringe, 13 May to 10 July 2022. It features five thousand images shown as immersive slideshows on screens in venues across the town. The soundtrack is by renowned composer Matthew Herbert. A selection of images has been printed by Doug Chinnery to display in the Photo Space gallery. A 4.7m mosaic of Chris's 150,000 images is displayed outside the gallery.

the Photo Space Charity CIO
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tpsc.online

Peter and Lucy Jones would like to thank the support of the many, including:

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- Matthew Herbert, soundtrack, matthewherbert.com.
- Susan McGilveray, who introduced us to Chris, framedlight.co.uk
- Paul Sanders, who helped launch our charity, discoverstill.com
- Joe Wright, JW Editions, publisher of this book, jweditions.co.uk

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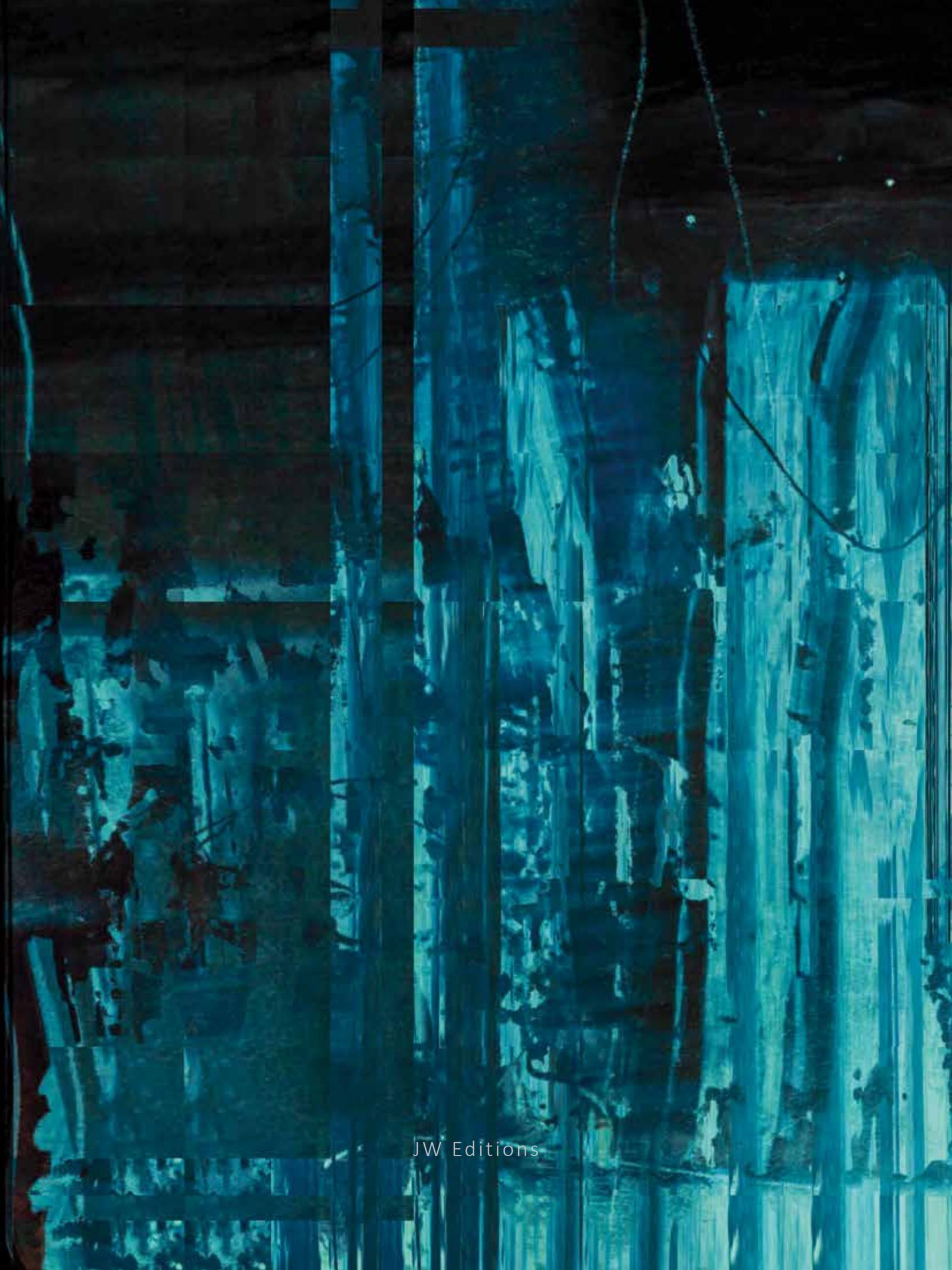
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