

‘Busy Working with Materials’

Transposing Form,
Re-exposing Medardo Rosso

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Foreword

This volume, primarily composed of images, is both intended to complement the dissertation and to be a self-sufficient work, which offers consideration of the relationship between my artistic practice and Medardo Rosso's final sculpture, *Ecce Puer*. Brief notes offer explanation of processes, sequence, and aspects of making the works. They do not try to conceptualise themes, references, or my opinion of what the works are 'about'. Why this would be undesirable is noted in the foreword to the dissertation and elaborated throughout that volume.

Although composed as a book and styled to correspond with the dissertation's formatting, this volume of the doctorate has always been intended to be viewed as a fullscreen .pdf, and the typefaces scaled accordingly.

In the following my artworks are broken down into discrete, chronologically overlapping series, presented as chapters. However, integrated into these are images of *Ecce Puer* which exist as explicitly more than documentation of the sculptures, but not necessarily as my 'artworks'. It might have been clearer to present my engagements with *Ecce Puer* as individual chapters, but there is equal conceptual justification, and greater enjoyment, in integrating them into the other images: I have coupled each series developed from *Ecce Puer* alongside the series of my artworks to which they have greatest chronological relevance, on the assumption that – in language which the dissertation will clarify – they will become good friends.

Despite a desire for concision, the nature of the project – exploring processes and the development of ideas through repeated making – has led to the works presented numbering more than I had hoped. Conversely, although part of a project exploring process, the works presented are in no way a faithful record of the whole process but, rather, are greatly edited to bring a conscious focus and narrative to a body which could have been presented through entirely different works to suggest the same or other themes. Even ignoring its tediousness, I believe that the apparent merits of a comprehensive survey of all works to illuminate process would be illusory. It would require a naïve understanding of documentation and photographic reproduction – a view hopefully impossible when one has considered Rosso's practice – to imagine that presenting photographic documentation of all works would comprehensively allow latent connections to emerge: photography necessarily removes many dimensions from a work and the photographer is always presenting their perspective to offer limited aspects of them. Given this, the intention for this volume of the doctorate is not to present the viewer with a surrogate for works which can't be present (as the handbook suggests should be its role), but to work with photography to develop an engaging visual narrative in a discrete whole. As such, this volume desires to be self-sufficient and not merely supplementary to dissertation or artworks, the latter forming a third strand of the doctorate, having complex relationships both with the dissertation and this volume of images.

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In and Out, 2013(2008)–2015

In and Out is an ongoing series, or possibly two, developing works from the materials and processes from which I used to make paintings. The colourful works (*In*) are pigmented resin casts taken from the inside of the folded metal trays on which I used to work. The silver pieces (*Out*) are clear resin casts of the outside of the trays (that is, of the painting surface). The silver is deposited on the reverse (i.e. the cast surface), using a nineteenth-century mirroring technique. This sort-of mimics the feel of the original metal, except the amount used is typically just on the cusp of covering the surface, yet isn't fully opaque or uniform. Although a casting process, the resin layer pulls any incidental grease, grime, etc., from the metal surface, making both groups rather like prints.

In the above I refer to *In and Out* as one or two series. As might be expected given the troubles encountered when using 'series' in discussion of Medardo Rosso's works, in this instance this term is also problematic. Although each work can be reduced to one or the other – *In* or *Out* – and the materials (although not necessarily the processes) are similar within each, special relationships develop between specific works which bind them into smaller groups which, against all Linnæan convention but in accordance with common use, I term families. I could have used several other ways to edit and group this rather-too-sizeable body or works, but for this thesis I have opted to focus (although not exclusively) upon those which have the most resonant relationship with direct relatives.

This spread:

Untitled (In), (2008–)2013

Pigment, gold acrylic, deposited
dirt, epoxy resin, glass fibre,
honeycomb aluminium

96 × 69 cm

Following spread:

Untitled (In), (2008–)2014

Pigment, gold acrylic, deposited
dirt, deposited silver, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium

96 × 69 cm

Untitled (In), (2008–)2015

Pigment, gold acrylic, deposited
dirt, cyanotype drips, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium

96 × 69 cm







In the summer of 2008 I made many metal trays in several materials – mild and stainless steels, aluminium, brass, and copper – with the intention of using them as supports for an ongoing body of paintings. Over the years these trays had varied fates, with four of the original ten 96 × 69 cm ones moving from studio to studio, coming into service as make-shift desks, coffee tables, weights, shallow trays for washing paper, testing grounds for sandpaper, inefficient hand towels, etc. Developing from other things I'd been doing, in 2013 I made casts of the insides of the four remaining trays. The cadmium yellow from the aluminium was my favourite.

After the casts were made, the trays resumed their lives as clutter, on call for general use. In 2014 I recast in mars black the aluminium tray's interior, which had in the interim been employed in a desperate attempt to rescue some silver solution from a leaking glass-fibre tray. Sometime between making this second cast and 2015 a few errant drips of sodium hydroxide (again, from silvering), had etched streaks into the surface. This was cast in a mix of cobalt turquoise and titanium white.









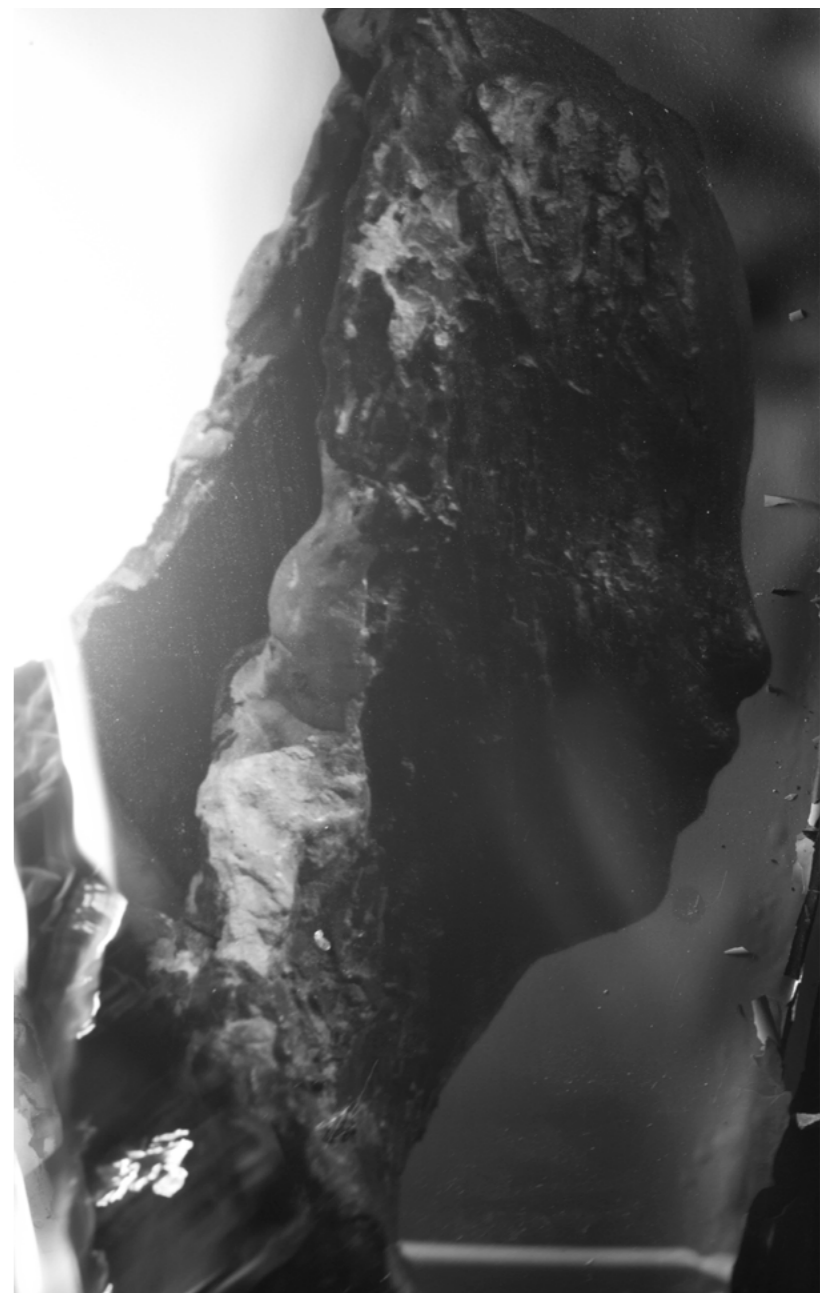
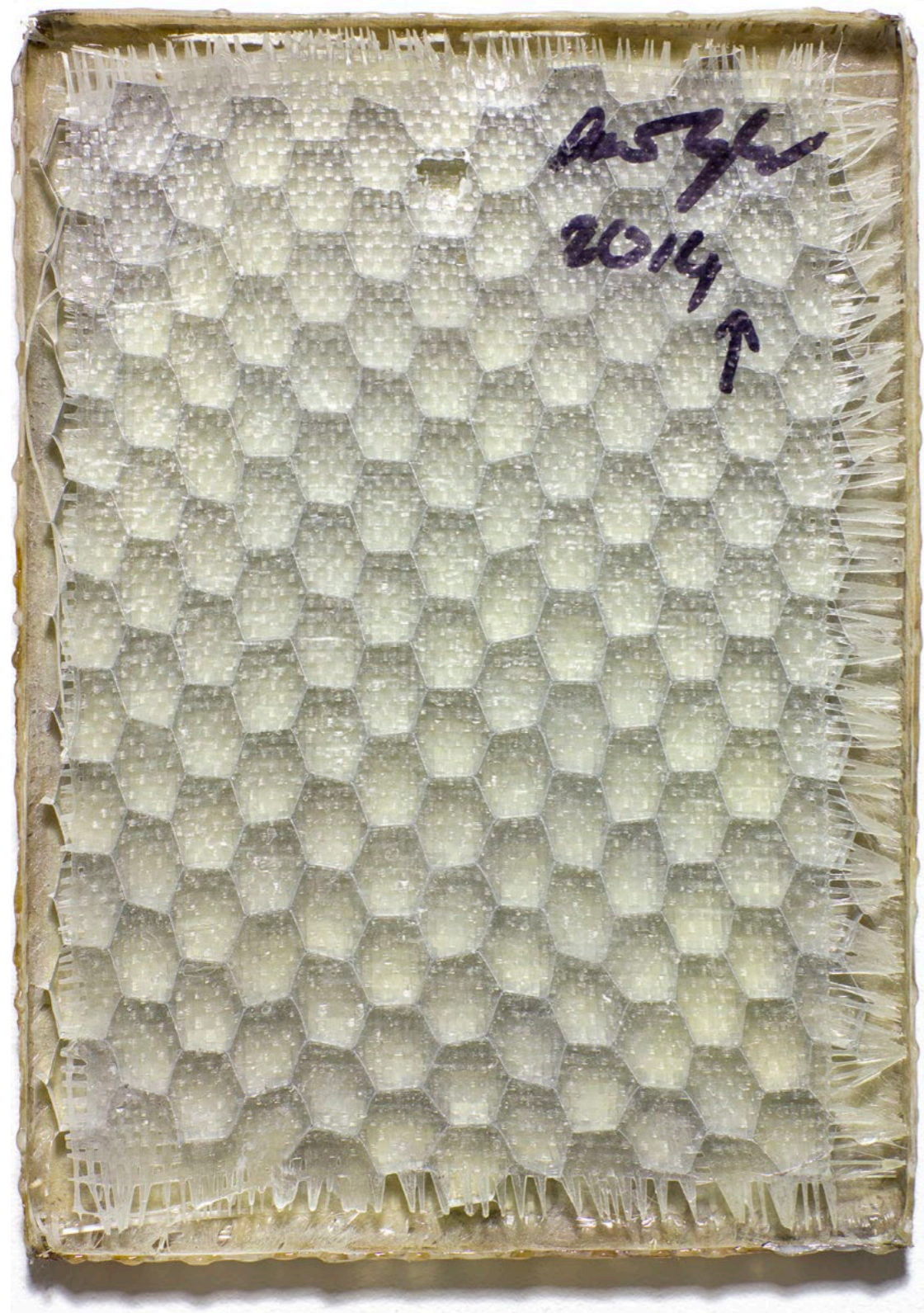




The images of *Ecce Puer* which accompany this chapter are all developments from the bronze currently in Venice. Inkjet prints of this work were made from digital photographs which I took in 2013. The prints were then pinned to a darkroom wall and set alight at the bottom. Whilst they were burning a several-second-exposure photograph was taken, the only source of light being the print's conflagration.

Untitled (Out), 2014
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
30 × 22 cm







Untitled (In), 2014–2015
Iron oxide, pigment, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
69 × 48 cm



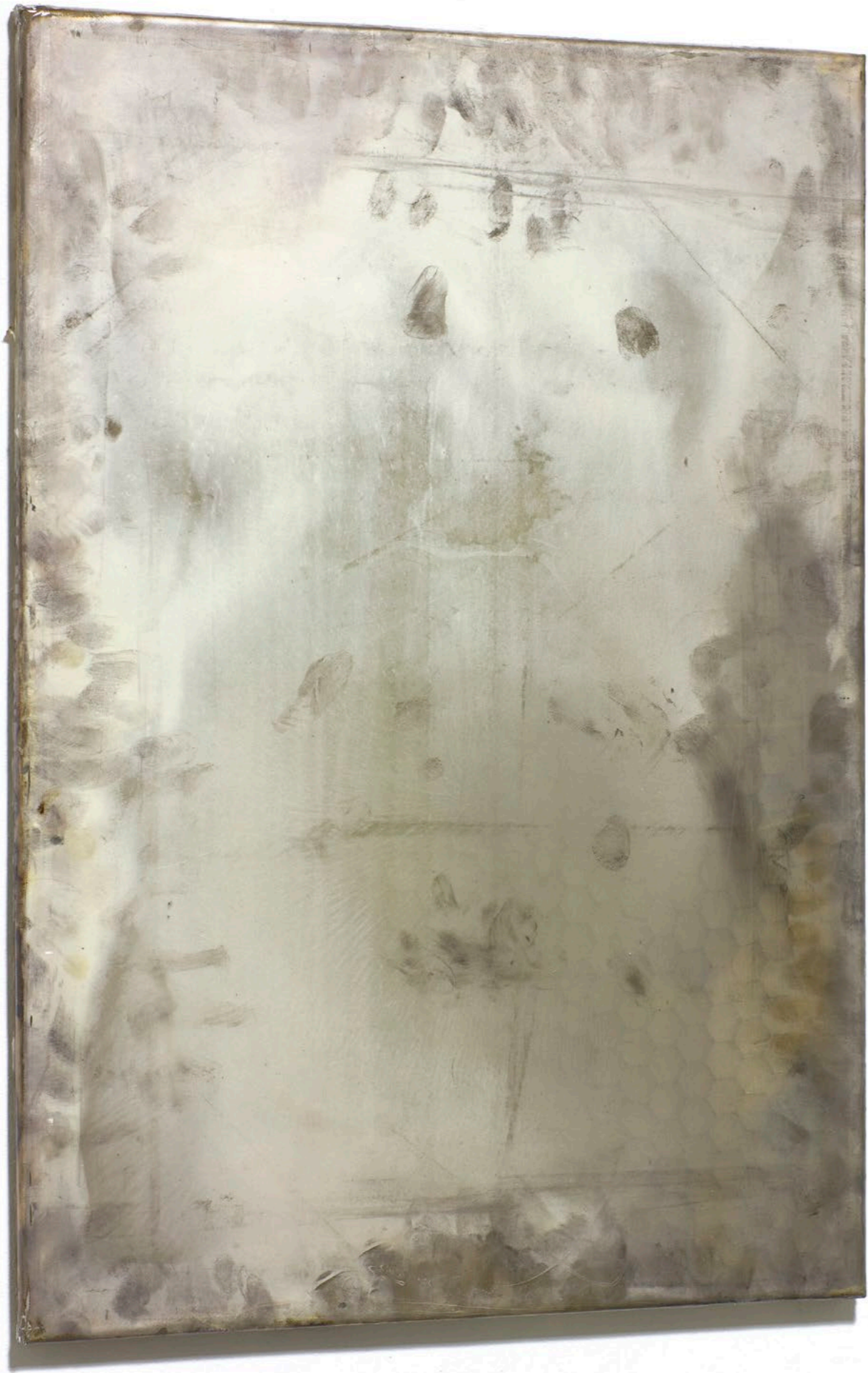
These two works are made from the inside and outside of the same mild steel tray. The initial interior cast was broken in the process of removing it from the metal. This failure eventually turned out not wholly unproductive as it removed the mineral oil with which mild steel is typically protected from rust. The light-green cast was the first I made upon my return after four months' absence from the studio, the rust developed during this period transferring to the surface of the resin.

Untitled (Out), 2014
Silver, epoxy resin, glass fibre,
honeycomb aluminium
69 × 48 cm









This large lavender work involved a return to the aluminium tray with which I had made a series of ten hanging paper works in 2010 (appendix A). During making these the aluminium was subjected to an unusual array of finger prints and trestle scratches.

Untitled (In), (2010–)2013
Pigment, spray paint, dirt, epoxy
resin, glass fibre, honeycomb
aluminium
195 × 120 cm

Following work:
Untitled (In), 2014
Pigment, dirt, epoxy resin, glass
fibre, honeycomb aluminium
30 × 22 cm







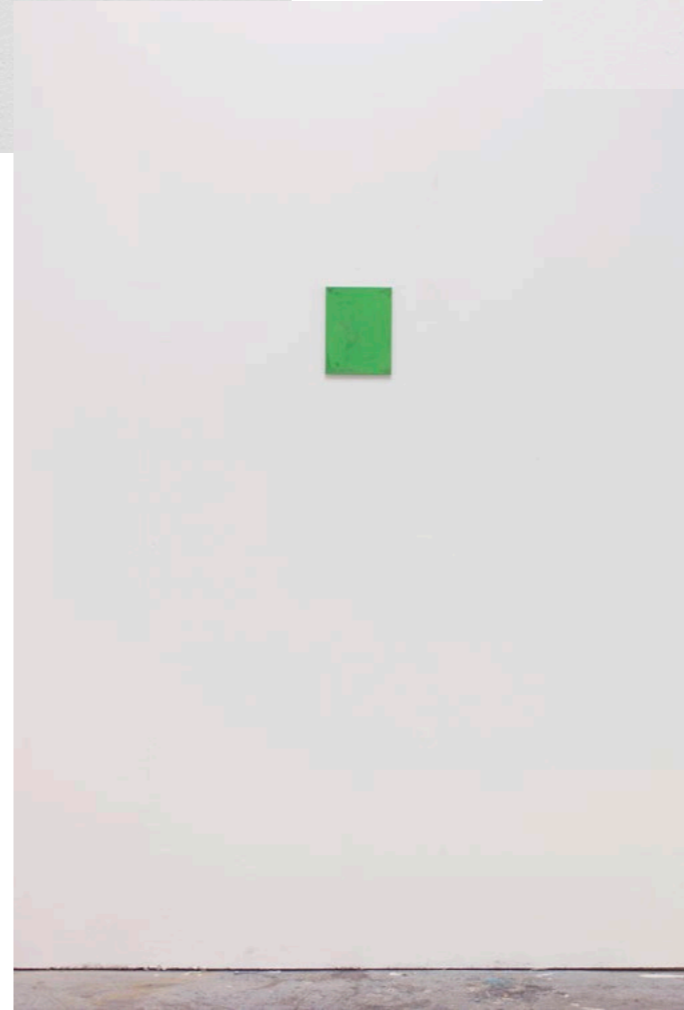


All works:

Untitled (In), 2013–2014
Pigment, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
69 × 48 cm







Untitled (Out), 2014
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin
21 × 16 cm





The process through which these works are made has been alluded to in rather simplified terms, e.g., 'it is cast from the front of a sheet of metal', etc. Over the course of making the several-dozen silvered works, no process was directly repeated because none has yet seemed quite right.

Visually, the desire is to have as little resin as possible in front of the silvered layer. However, as no release agent can be used to remove what is, in effect, an adhesive, from the metal's surface (the only release agent is the grease and dirt incidentally present, which would be greatly altered by adding a layer of additional material), the resin needs great strength to peel away in one piece. It also requires a layer of flexible resin to aid release – rigid resin would be too good a glue and would snap. The cast must also be rigid to maintain its plane surface during the silvering, a process in which the whole tray must be heated. This led to making the silvered object very rigid, through the use of honeycomb aluminium reverse; the object could now be sanded back down to as near to the silvered surface as possible. The predictable problem with this is that the desire to sand back as close to the surface tended to result in the surface itself being sanded and, in a half second, destroyed. This was made more likely because the works could never be quite as flat all over as the metal. A sensible alternative seemed to be removing the resin from the metal and then sanding it, allowing any catastrophes to occur before the costly silvering and time-consuming build-up of resin and glass fibre. Several such pieces were successful, but the very thin resin layer, coupled with glass fibre layers, led to the occasional hint of glass fibre weave coming through in relief. To avoid this, I tried using a thicker first layer of rigid resin poured into the tray. The combination of a thicker layer of an exothermically curing resin and a very thin flexible surface led, as it cured, to the original resin layer expanding, which formed a shallow trench running across the work.



Untitled (Out), 2015
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
69 × 48 cm



After initially rejecting the process which resulted in the previous work, a similar approach was again used, this time filling the thin resin shell with about 7 mm of resin, after taping the edges to a rigid surface.

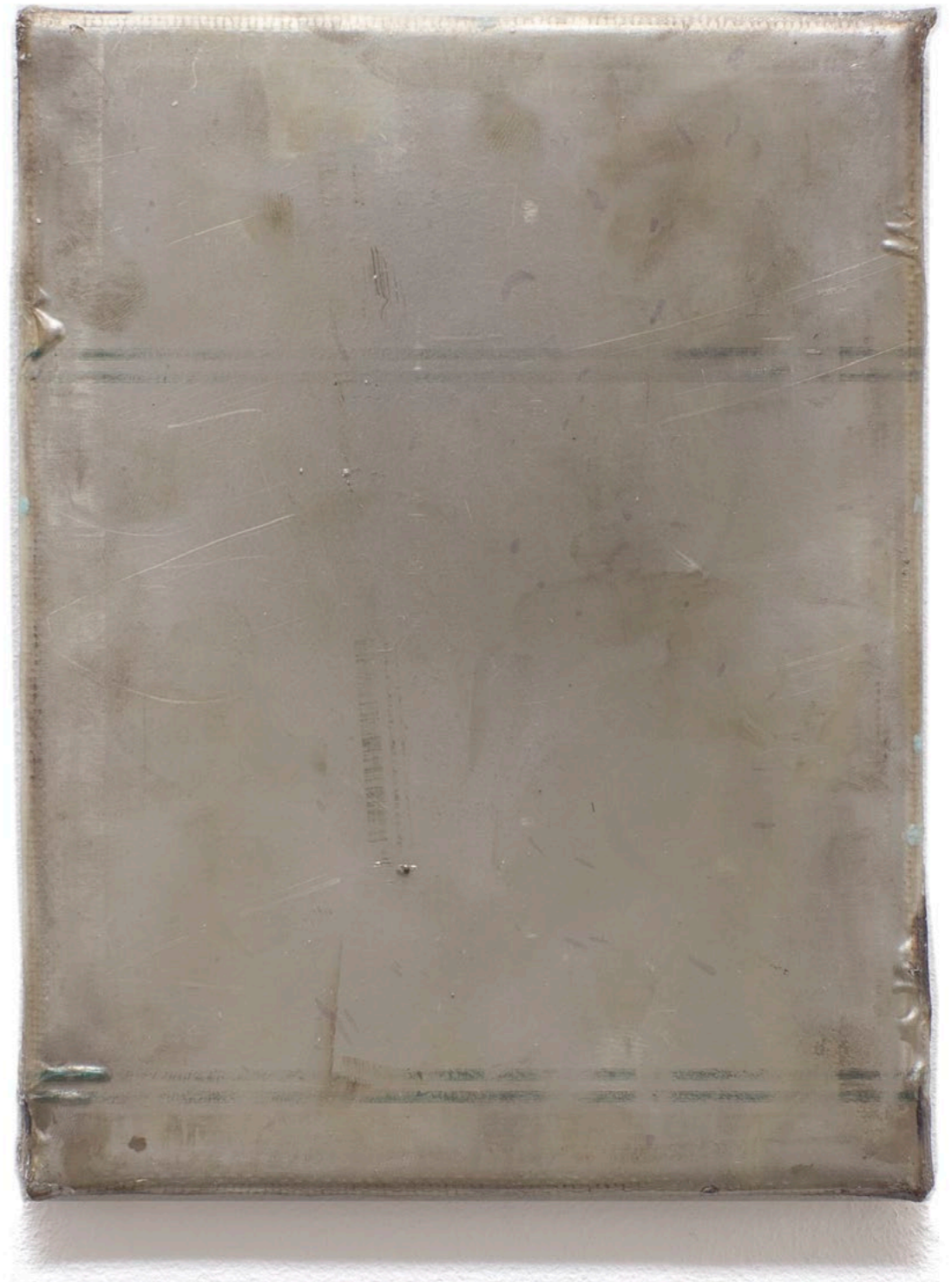




Untitled (In), 2015
Pigment, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
21 × 16 cm



Untitled (Out), 2015
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
21 × 16 cm



The following and two previous works were made from one stainless steel tray. The first 'out' work is an impression of the protective plastic laminate in which the stainless steel is supplied, which had begun to delaminate from the metal at the edges. As one can see from the detail to the right, the light-turquoise interior cast was made first, excess pigmented resin from which forms drips down the edge of the first silver work.



Untitled (Out), 2015
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin
21 × 16 cm



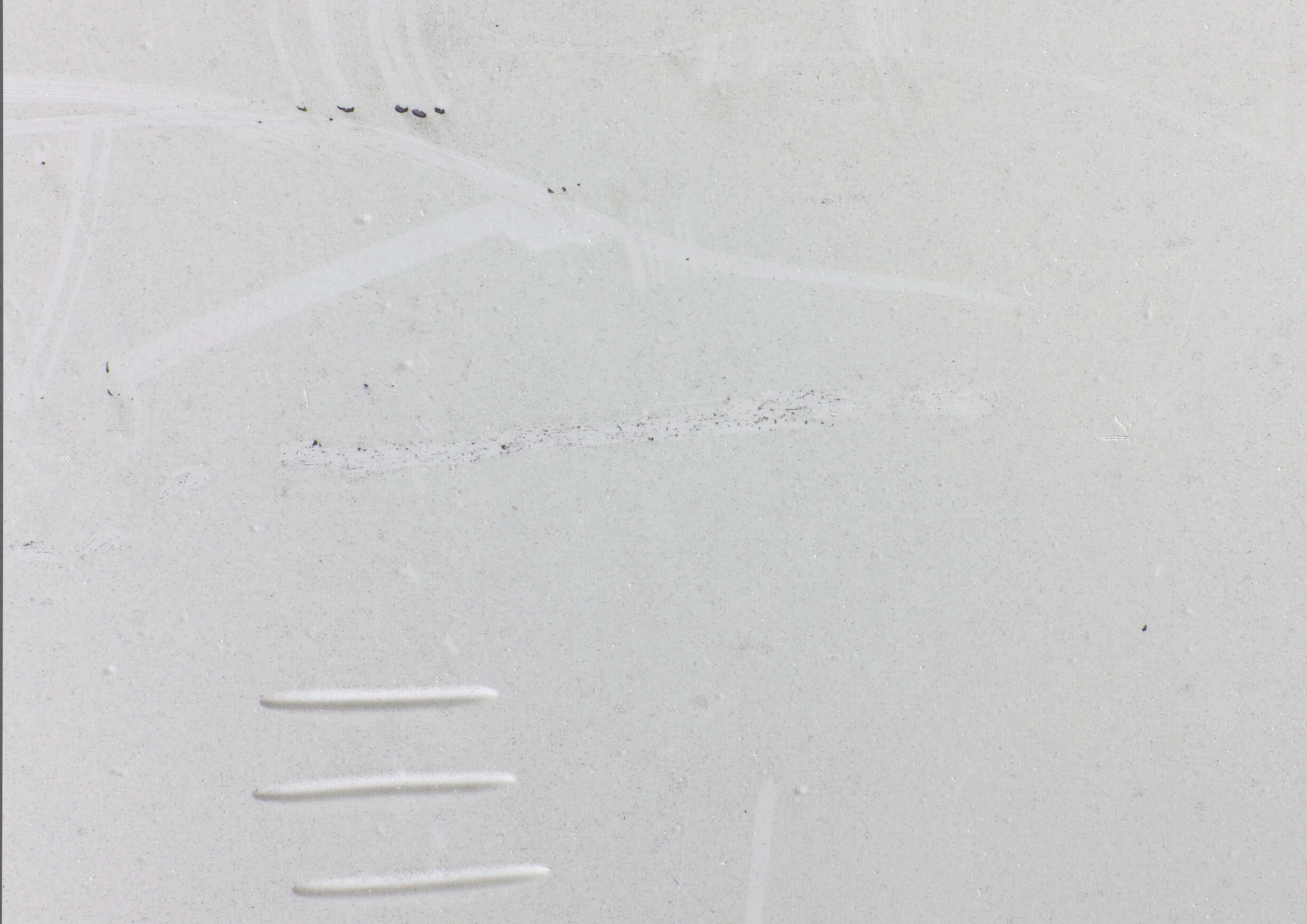


Untitled (Out), (2010–)2015
Silver, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
122 × 115 cm





Untitled (In), (2010–)2014
Pigment, deposited dirt, epoxy resin,
glass fibre, honeycomb aluminium
122 × 115 cm







Moonlighting, 2013–2015

On 2013's shortest night I sat outside in a field near Oxford watching an old Olympus OM-2 camera take a four-hour-exposure photograph of a small work by Roger Ackling. Having a big roll of black and white photographic paper in my studio (which I'd turned into a darkroom to experiment with the pictures of *Ecce Puer* which accompany this section) I decided to keep myself warm by playing with it and an old painting on 9 gsm abaca tissue paper, using this translucent work as a negative for a contact print. At dawn I returned to the studio and developed it.

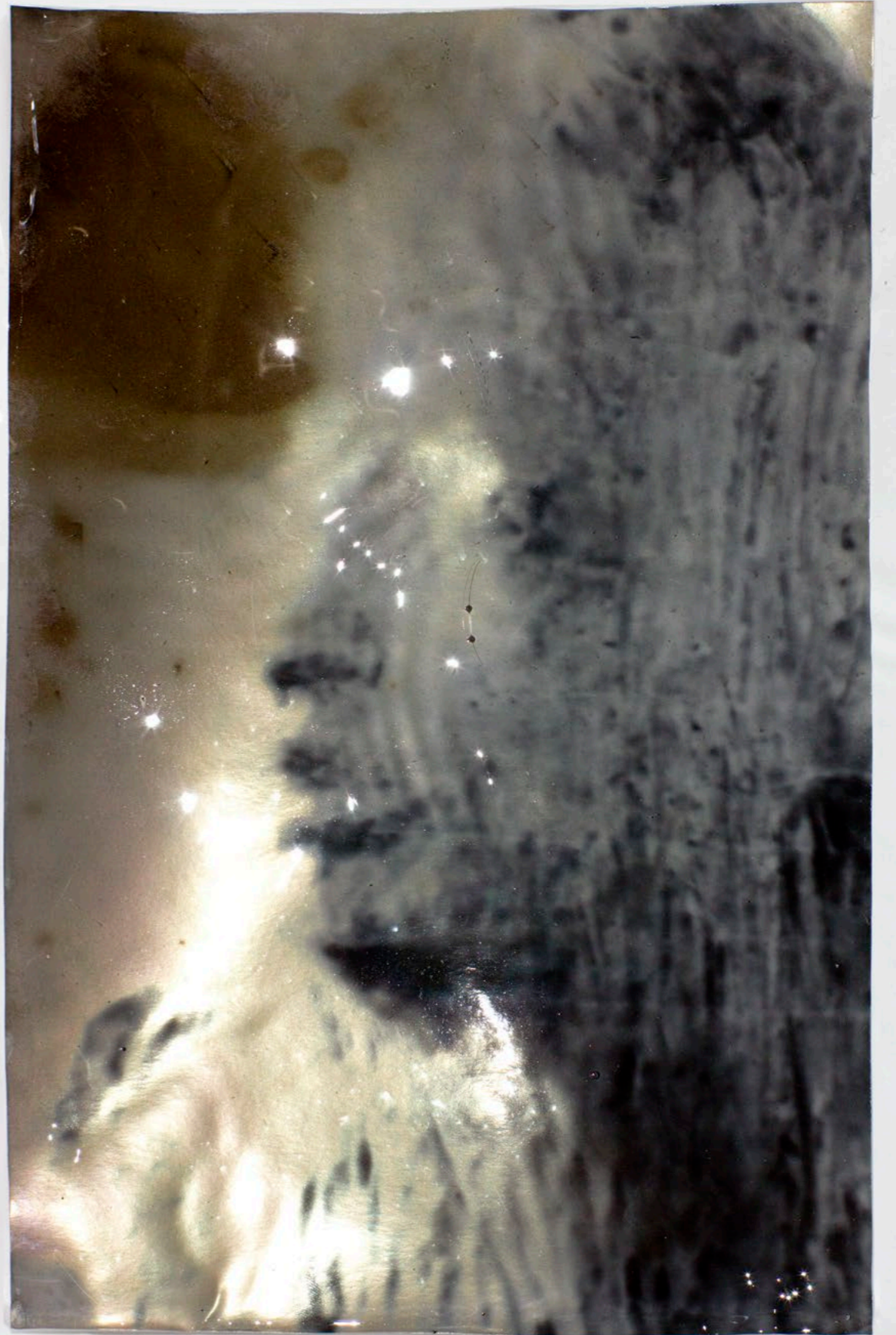
About two dozen of these works were attempted, with limited success as I struggled with the many variables, each of which could ruin what I retrospectively had to accept would have been wonderful things. On the reverses of the works are written the location, day and time of the original exposure. The photographs became as much indices of the environment of their exposure as of the painting: the dew-fall onto their surfaces; the ground on which they were placed (the grass transferring water to the photographs' reverses, offset to the photographic surfaces upon rolling them up); snail trails; my clumsy handling; etc.



*Oxford (a field towards Marston),
midsummer's night, 20th June 2013*
23.50-00.08, 2013
Silver gelatin print
250 x 200 cm approx.







The images of *Ecce Puer* which accompany this section are all developed from the plaster currently in Edinburgh. Digital photographs I'd taken of this sculpture were transferred to 35mm negatives by photographing a computer screen with the images on it. I then converted a small room into a darkroom and played around with black and white printing. All the resulting photographs are silver gelatin prints, made using standard Ilford resin-coated paper and chemicals. However, through abusing these materials – depleting developers and saturating them with silver salts, leaving paper developing overnight with slight illumination, etc. – the results vary greatly in colour and sheen. The main effect I pursued was a 'self-patination' of the print with a layer of silver in the highlit areas. I'm not quite sure how I achieved this and it wasn't a consistently successful process. A few weeks after starting this body I also started the experiments which evolved into the '*Out*' works featured in the previous chapter.

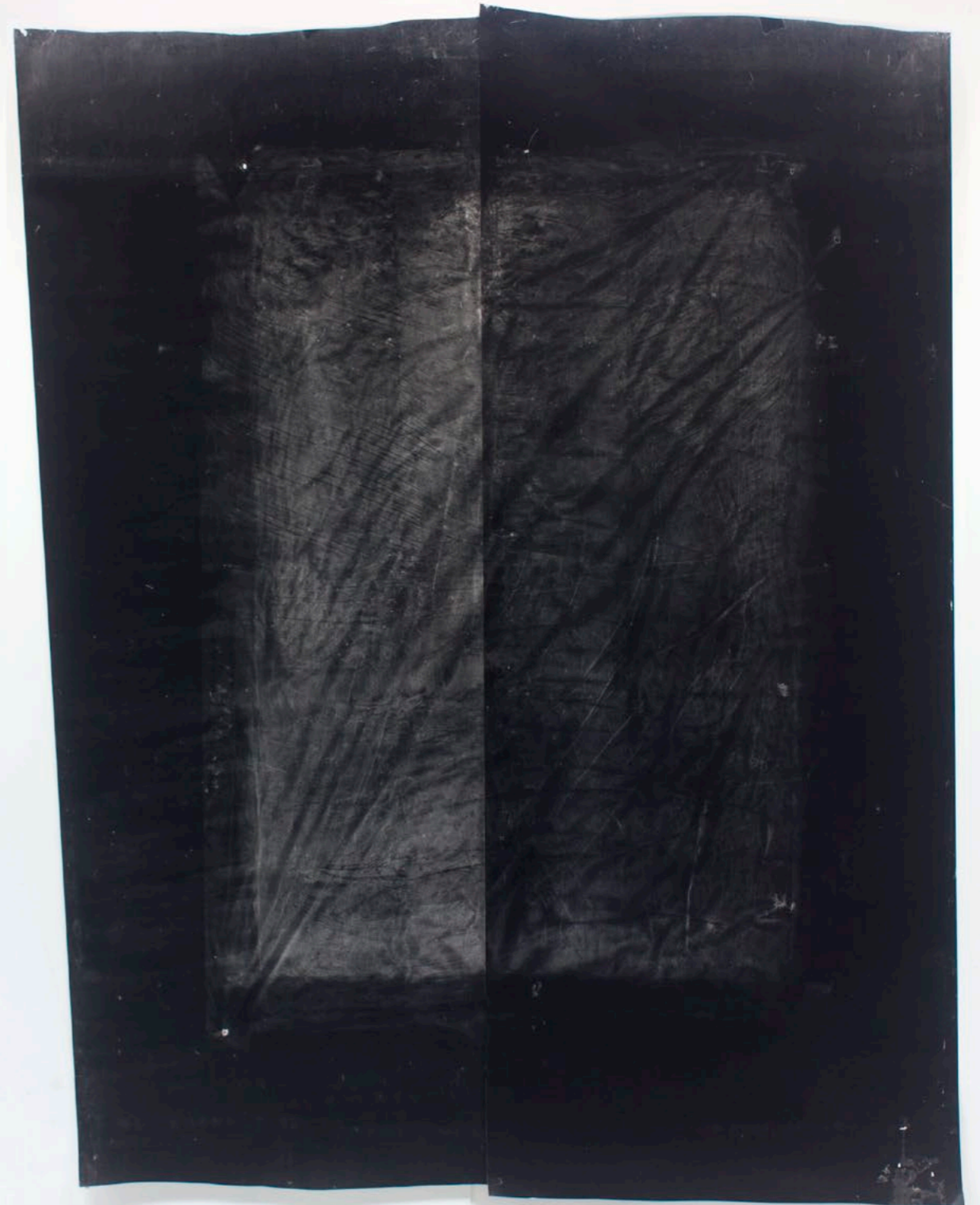
The resulting photographs proved remarkably hard to convey in digital reproduction. For their documentation here I have resorted to returning them to the developing trays in which they were made, and photographing them with camera-mounted flash through moving water. This wasn't an intended allusion to the sentiment of Merleau-Ponty which features prominently in the dissertation: 'When through the water's thickness I see the tiled bottom of the pool, I do not see it *despite* the water and the reflections; I see it through them and because of them.'

Oxford (Magdalen College recreation ground), 22/08–23/08, 23.42–00.48,

2013

Silver gelatin print

250 × 200 cm approx.



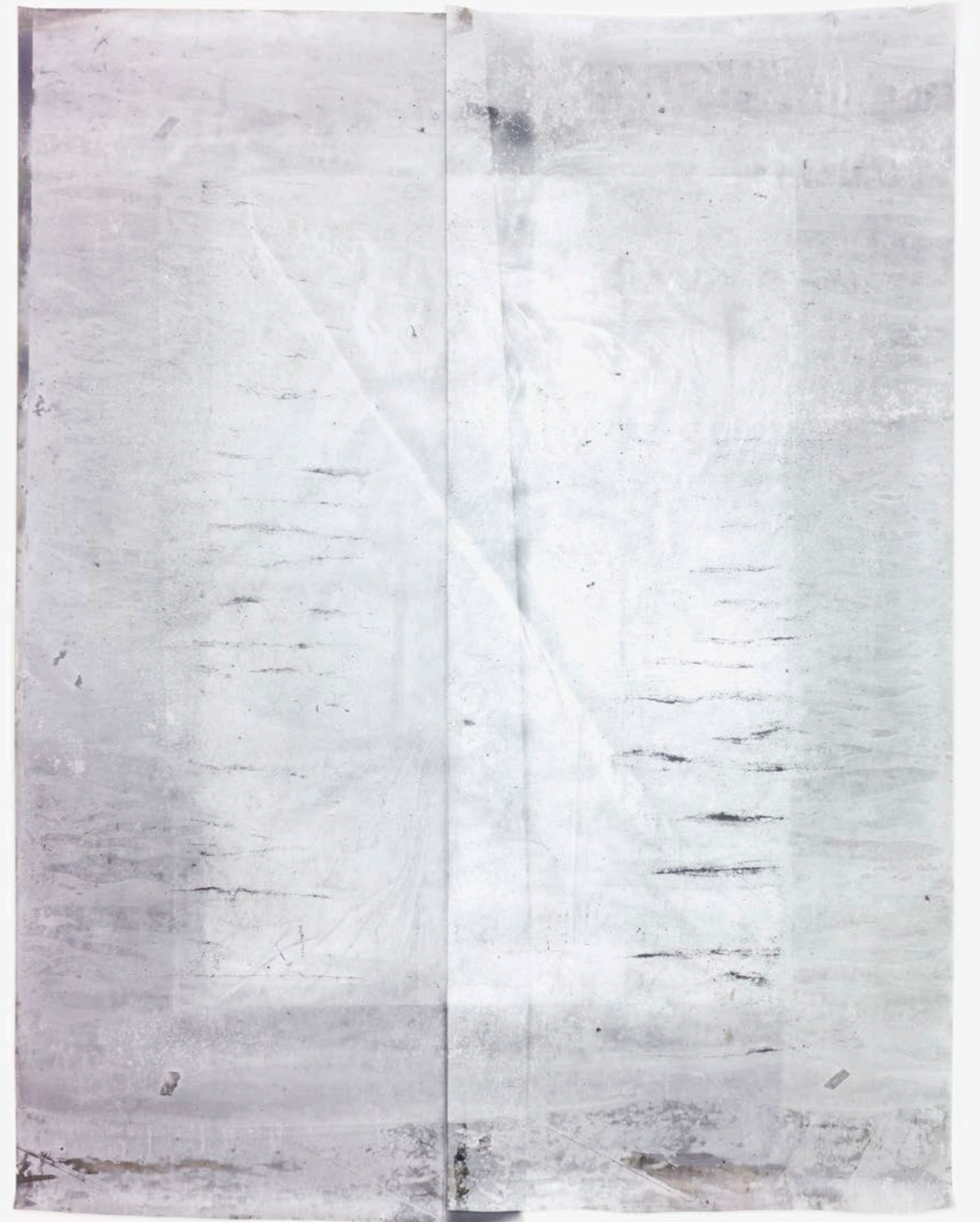
*Oxford (Parks), Sept. 22 23.15–Sept
23 00.02, 2013*
Silver gelatin print
250 × 200 cm approx.





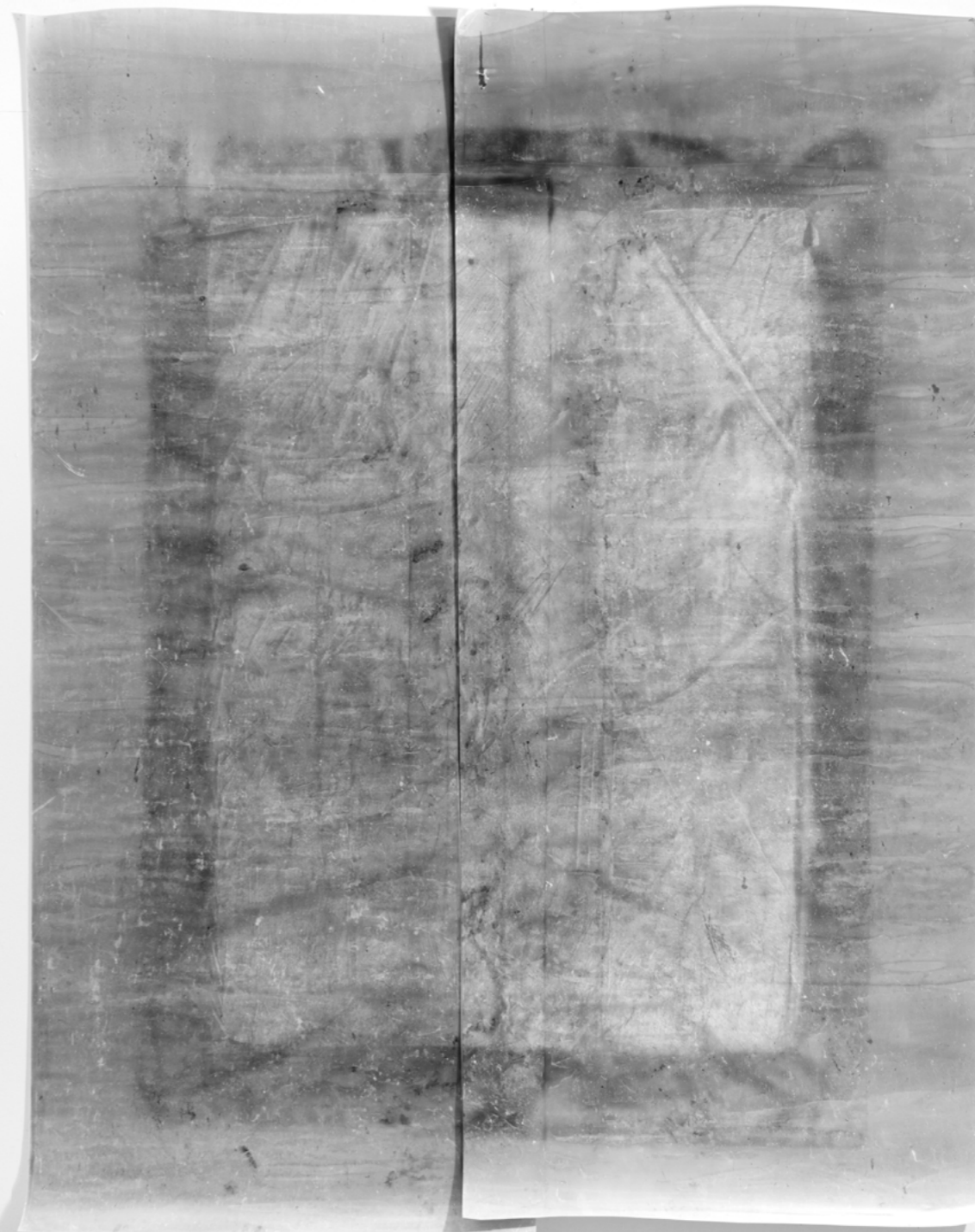


Oxford (Parks), anthill, 28/8 01.40–
2.25, 2013
Silver gelatin print
250 × 200 cm approx.



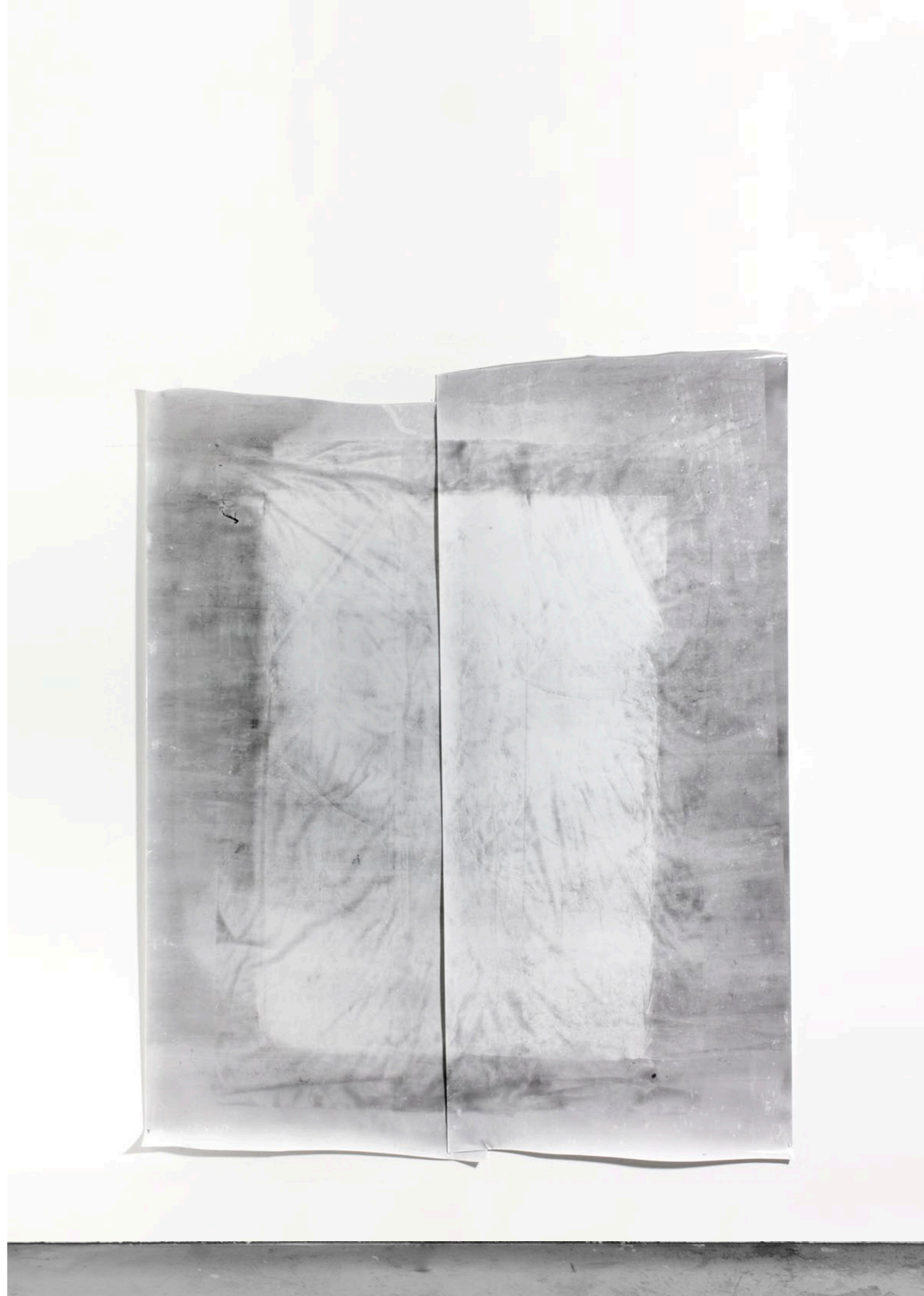


Dinton 01/07/14 23.55-00.10, 2014
Silver gelatin print
250 × 200 cm approx.

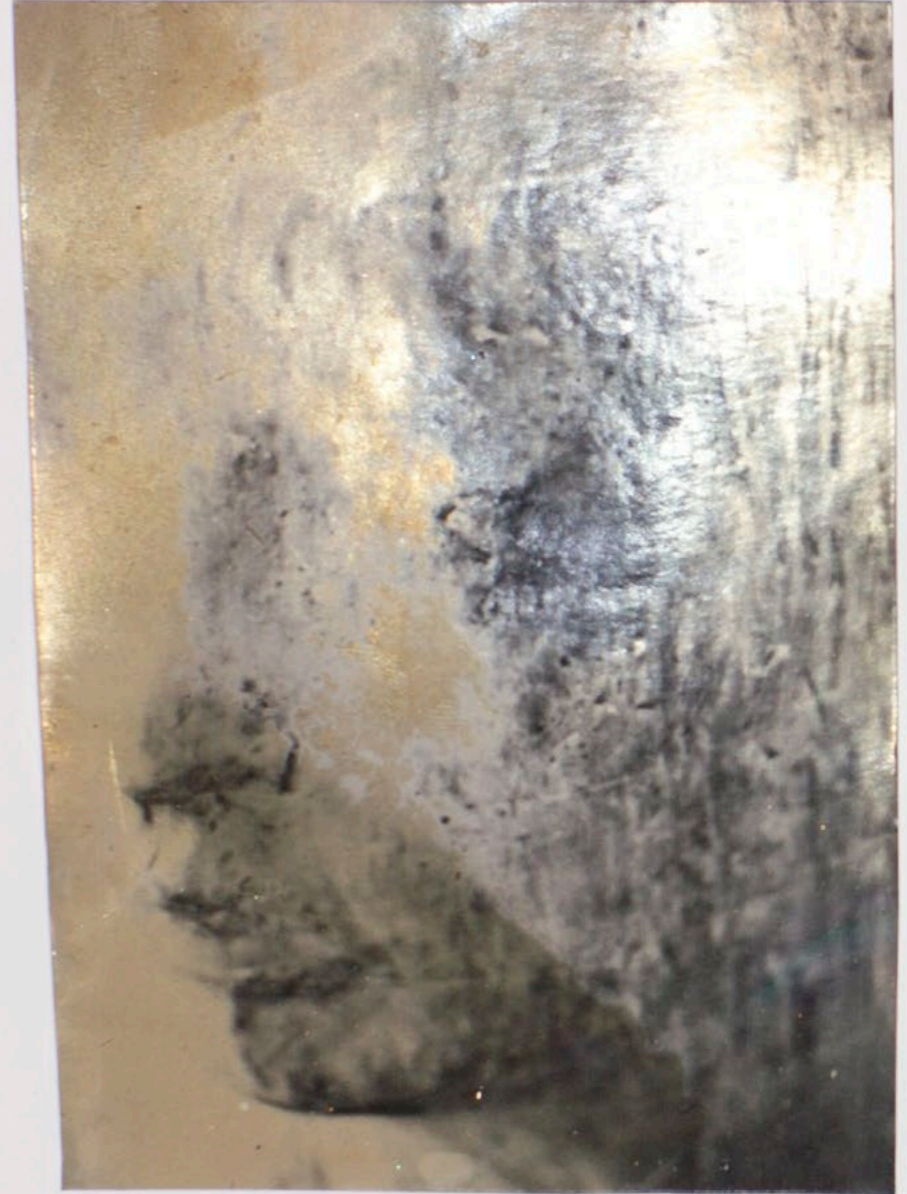
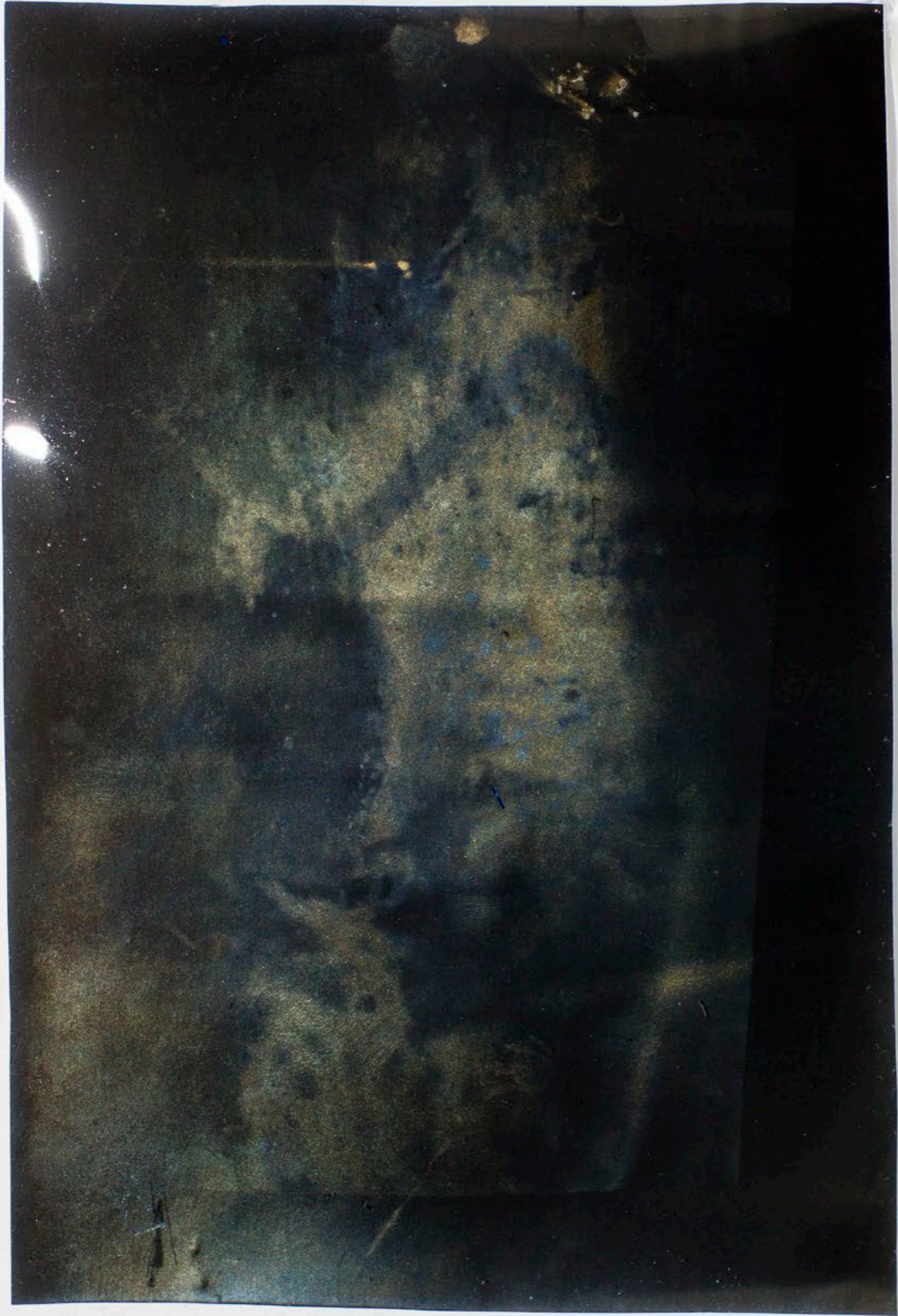




*Dinton 23.4.15, 22.22–23.23, crescent
moon, Bath tub, Old developer,
Malory Towers, 2015*
Silver gelatin print
250 × 200 cm approx.





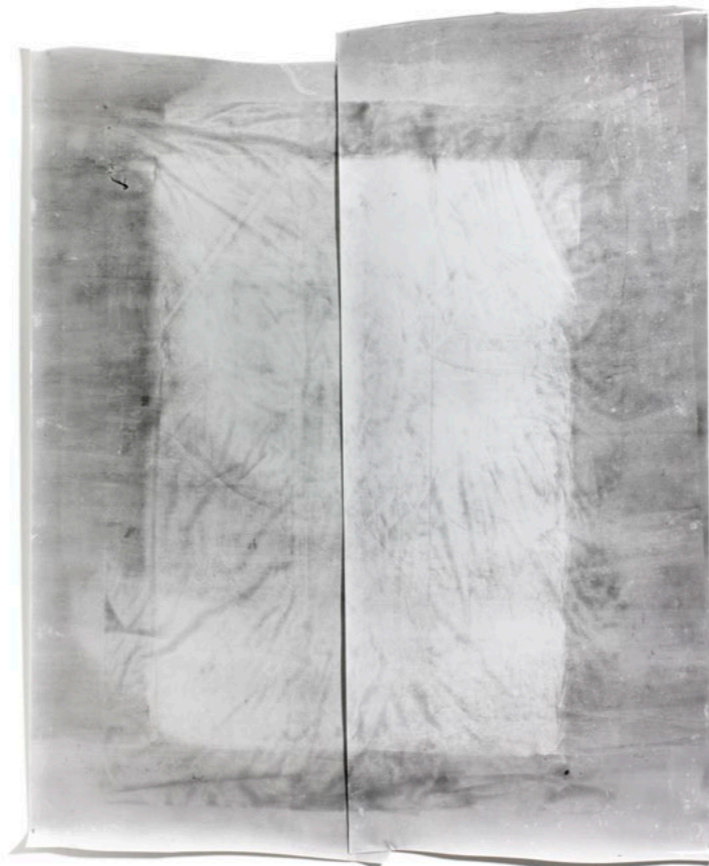
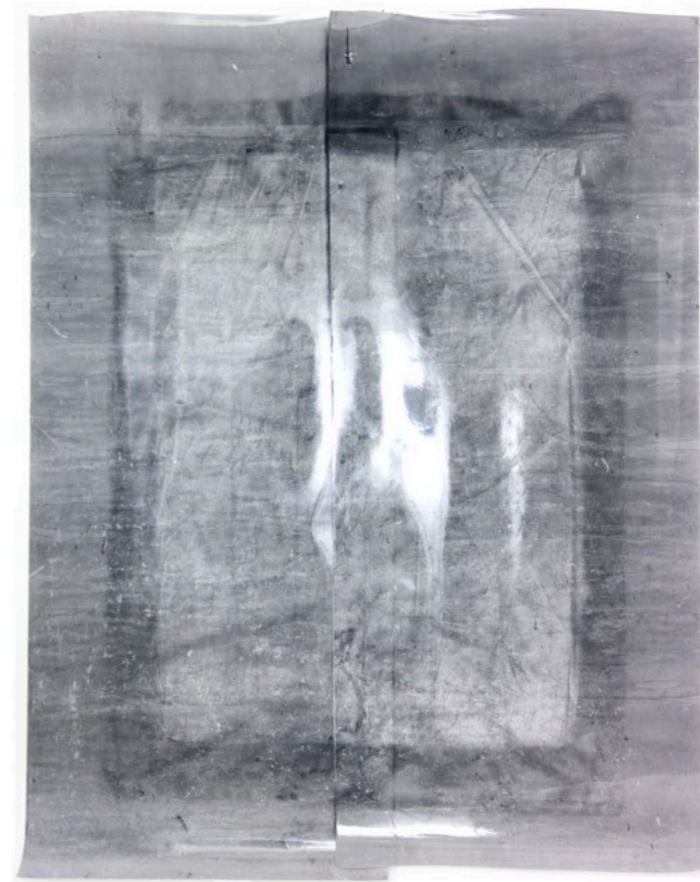
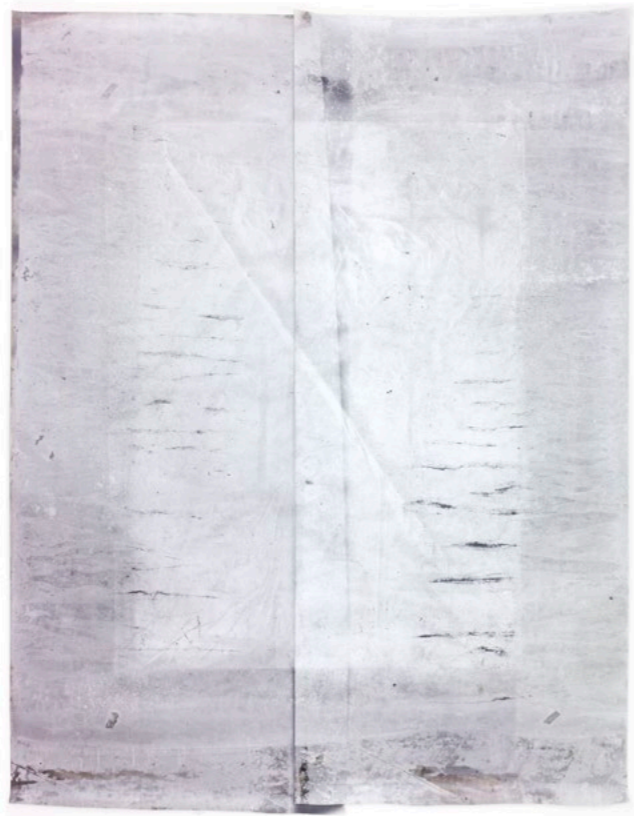






Fire exit











Skying, 2014–2015

An ongoing series of abstract cyanotypes. These works developed from the moonlit photographs and are a continuation of a long-standing interest in the relationship of painting and photography. Those reproduced here are all on paper. Recently I have been working on stretched cotton drill fabric, but have omitted documentation of these because I feel they have not yet reached a point where they have enough collective weight to do anything beyond that achieved in the paper works.



*Hampstead Heath, 24th August 2014,
12 noon – 1pm*
Cyanotype on 640 gsm cotton rag
mounted on honeycomb paper
69 × 47 cm

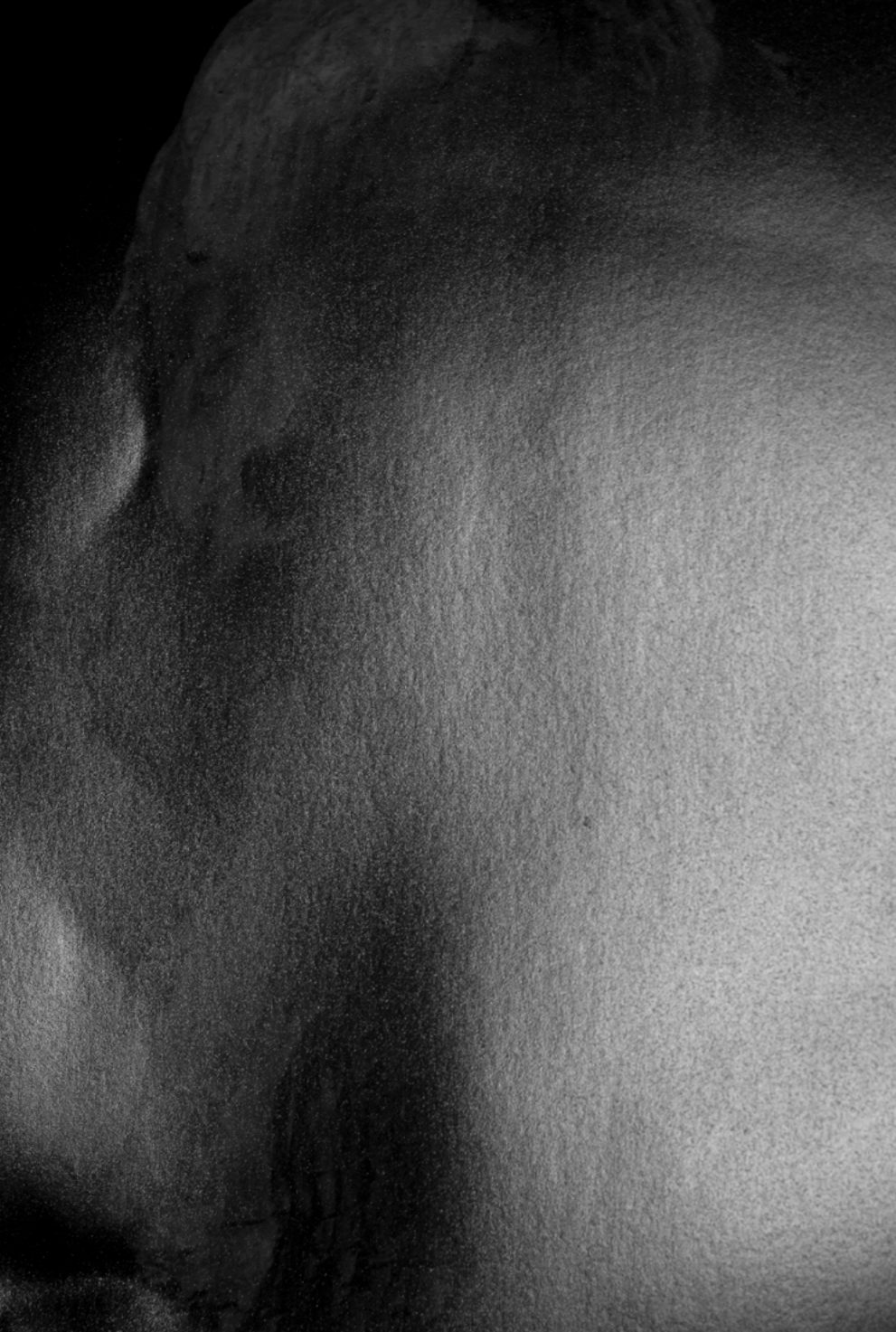


The previous work is a good example of a cyanotype uninfluenced by environmental factors other than the sun's UV light, the result being a deep Prussian blue (my cyanotypes are rather darker than most). The facing work was exposed for an entire day and, during the six hours before sunrise, the even coating of chemicals was reconfigured by the dew on the grass on which the paper was resting. The resulting dappling offers an unintentional image of altocumulus clouds.

The images of *Ecce Puer* which accompany this chapter are all developed from the plaster in Milan. Inkjet prints of digital images of this work, taken in 2013, were rephotographed with strong frontal lighting.

*Dinton, 22nd August 2014 00.00–
23.59*
Cyanotype on 640 gsm cotton rag
mounted on honeycomb paper
69 × 46 cm



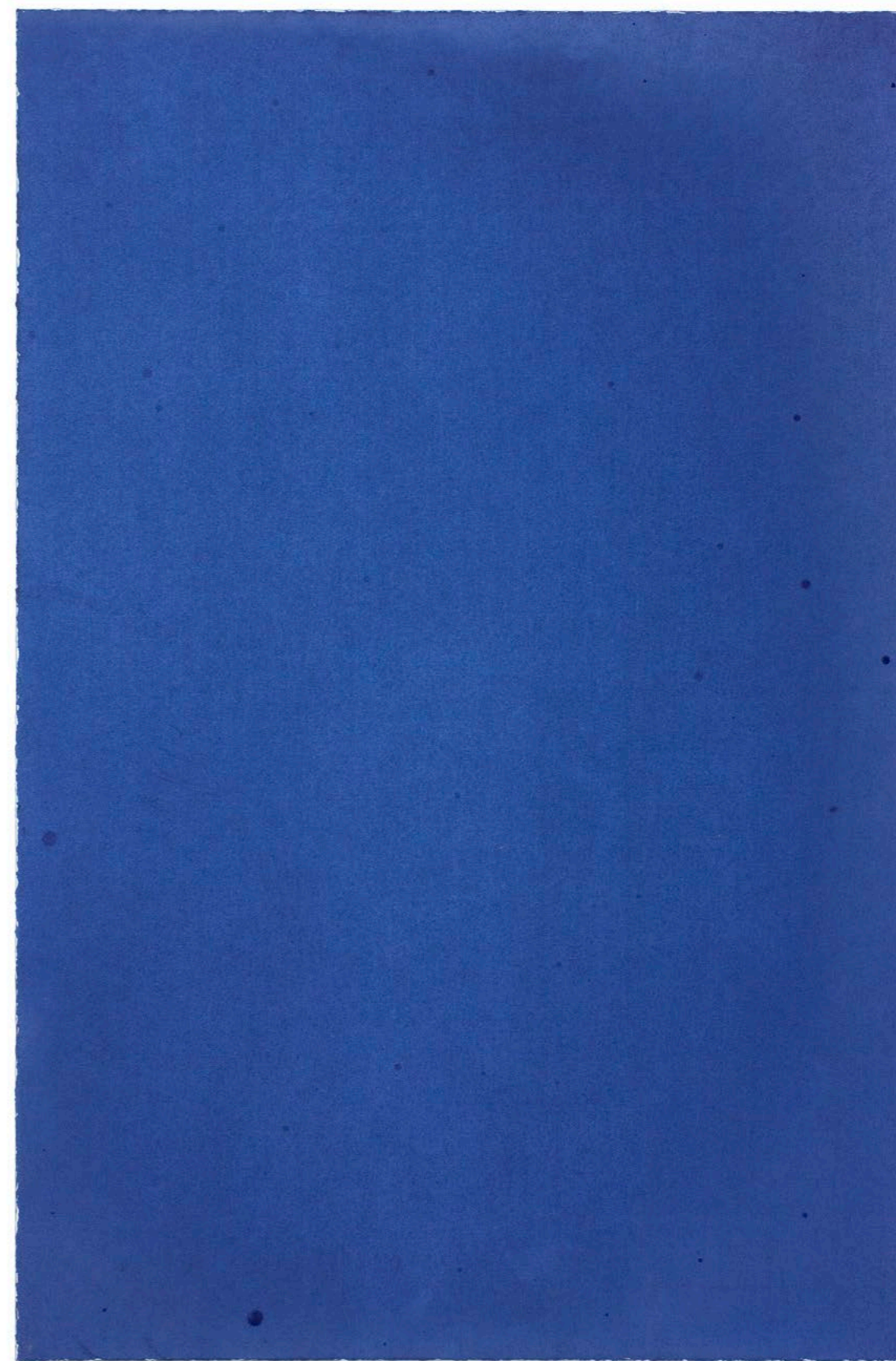


*Dinton, 21st–22nd August 2014,
20.08–05.55 Sunset–Sunrise*
Cyanotype on 640 gsm cotton rag
mounted on honeycomb paper
69 × 47 cm



The few drops of rain left darker patches. I'm not sure why but it's a repeatable result.

*Dinton, 22nd August 2014, 12.00–
00.00, slight shower, 15.00*
Cyanotype on 640 gsm cotton rag
mounted on honeycomb paper
69 × 47 cm





The paper was coated very liberally. The areas with the most coating had more than the amount needed to impregnate the paper, leaving a layer on the paper's surface. The sunlight cured this top layer, but didn't reach through to the impregnated paper. When washed, the areas with too much solution were washed bare. The clumps of fibre from which the paper is made absorbed the solution differently, resulting in the paper's fibrous structure becoming very evident.

*Hampstead Heath, 24th August 2014,
09.20–10.20*

Cyanotype on 640 gsm cotton rag
mounted on honeycomb paper
69 × 47 cm



On 22nd August 2014, from an hour before sunrise until an hour after sunset, a cyanotype photograph was exposed for an hour each hour.

*Dinton (22 August 2014, 04.55–
05.55) – the hour before sunrise, damp*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 05.55–
06.55) – the hour after sunrise, cloudy*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 06.55–
07.55) – some sun*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm

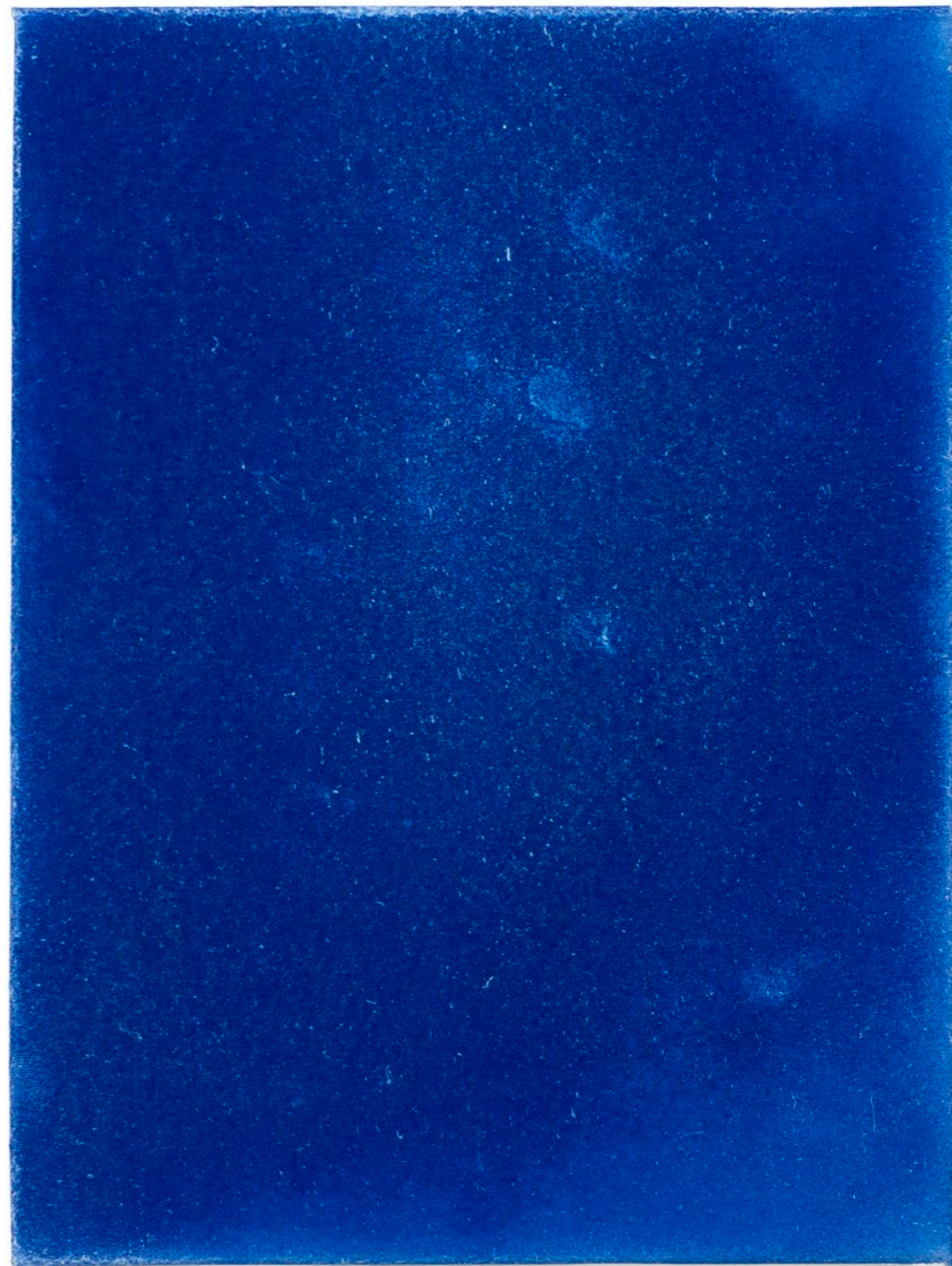


*Dinton (22 August 2014, 07.55–
08.55) – cloudy*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm

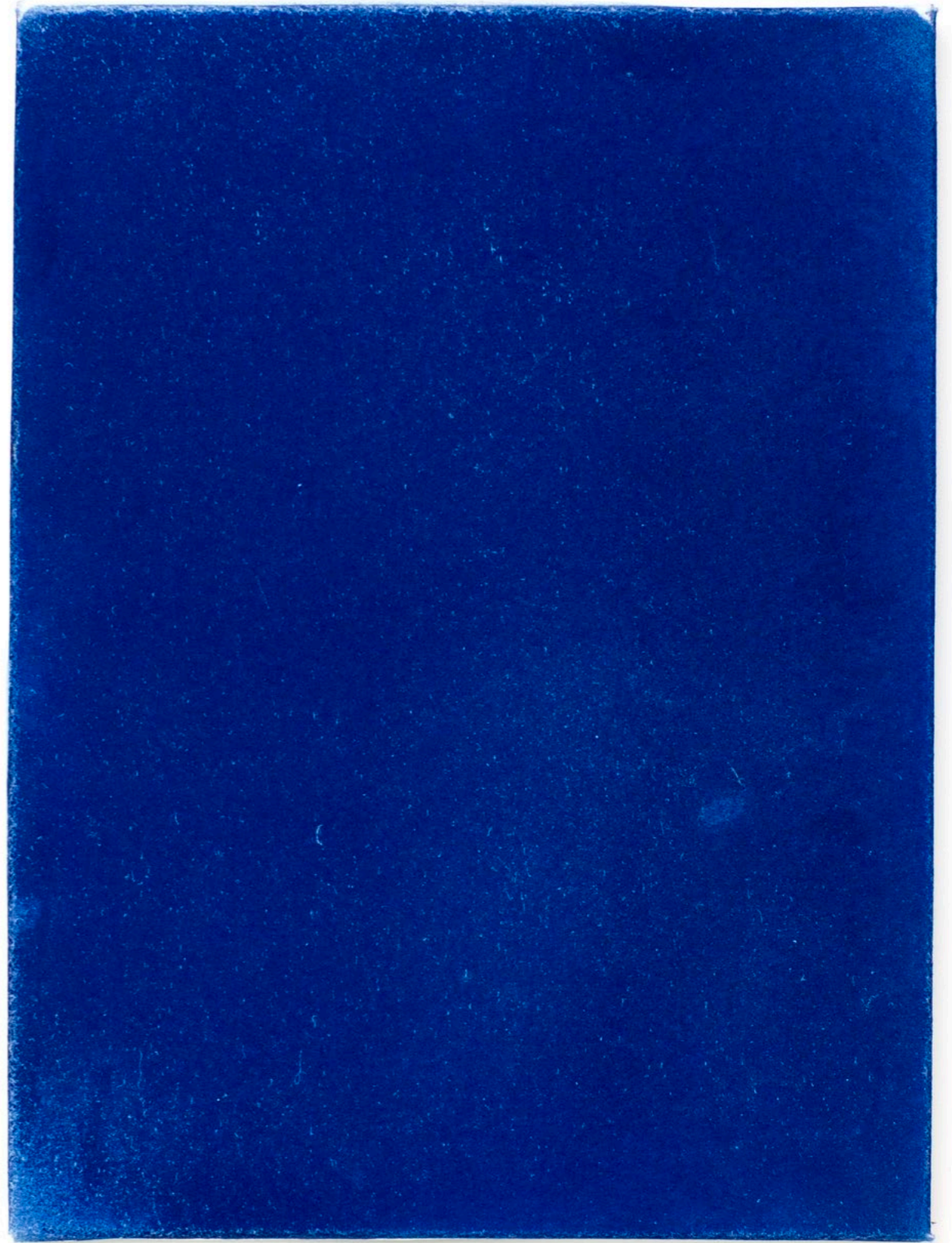




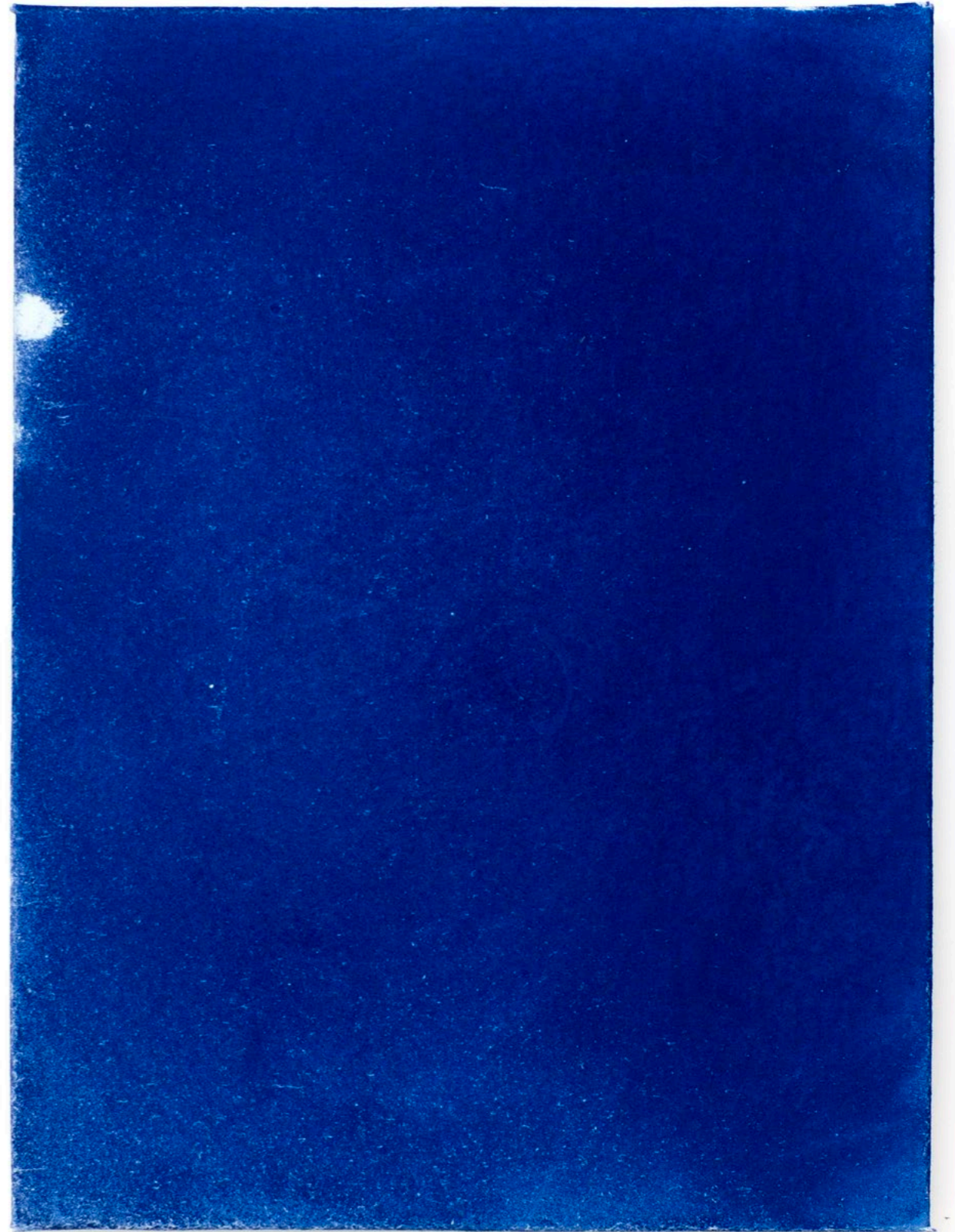
*Dinton (22 August 2014, 08.55–
09.55)*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



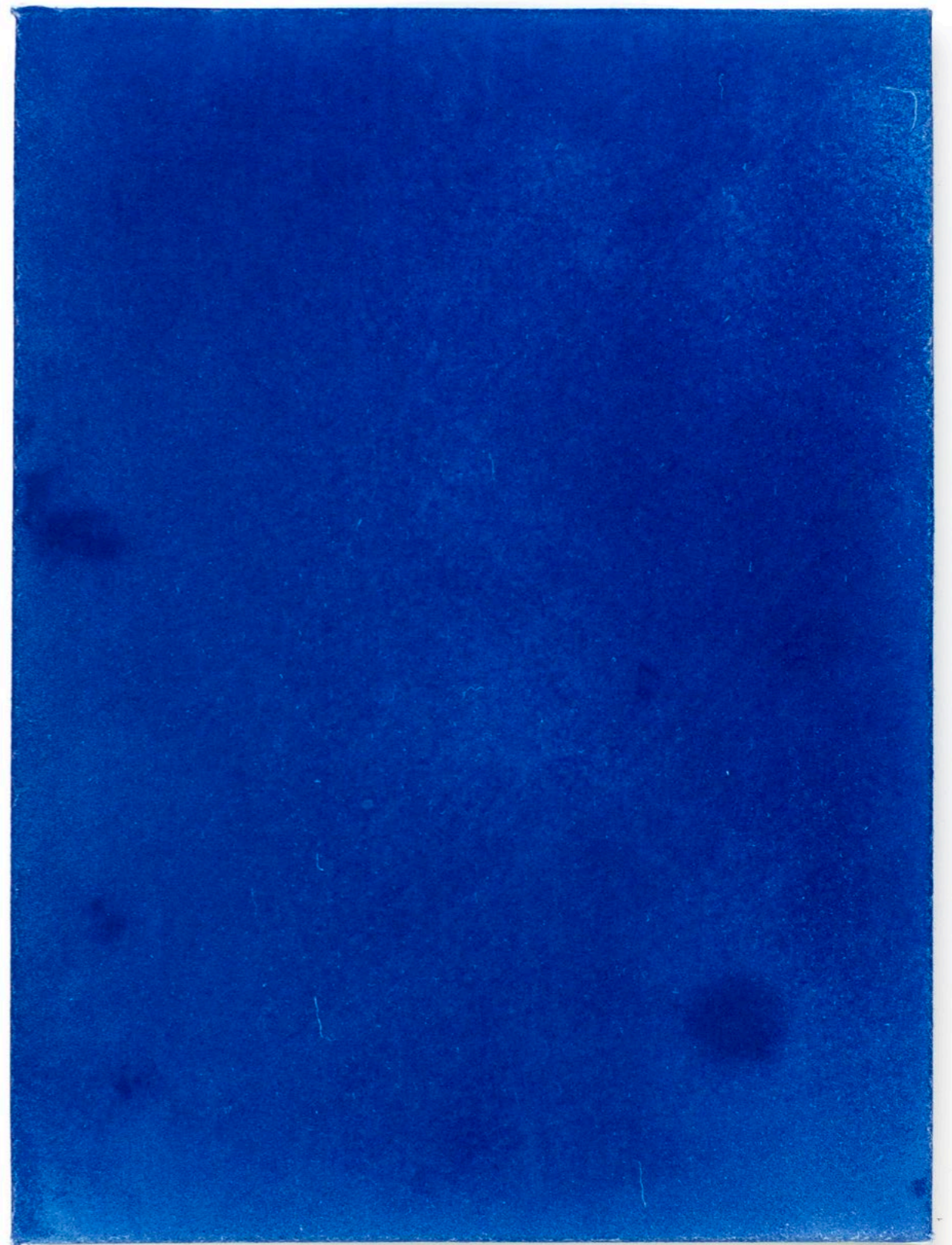
*Dinton (22 August 2014, 09.55–
10.55) – broken cloud*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



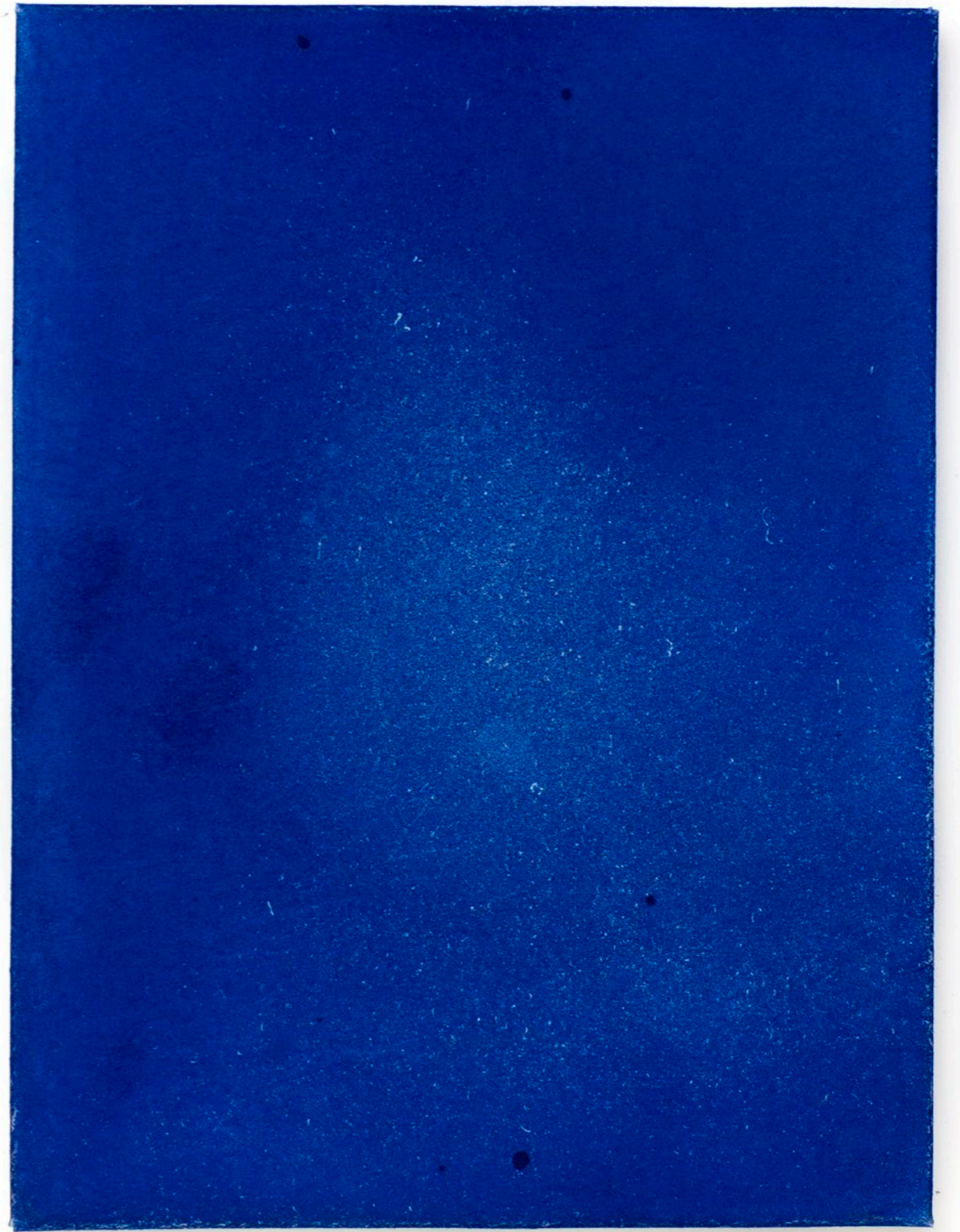
*Dinton (22 August 2014, 10.55–
11.55) – sunny start, cloudy*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 11.55–
12.55) – bright patches*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm

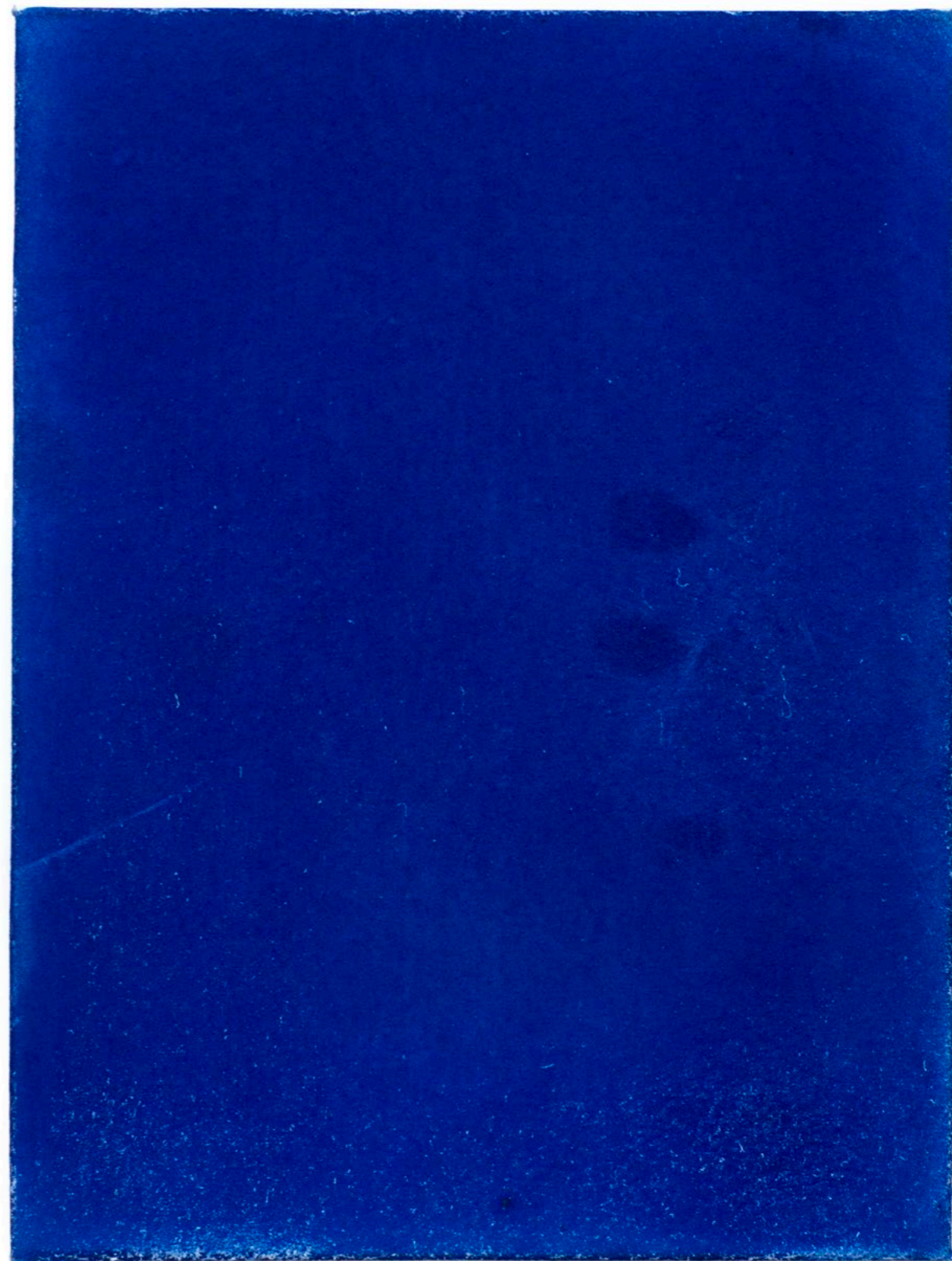


*Dinton (22 August 2014, 12.55–
13.55)*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm





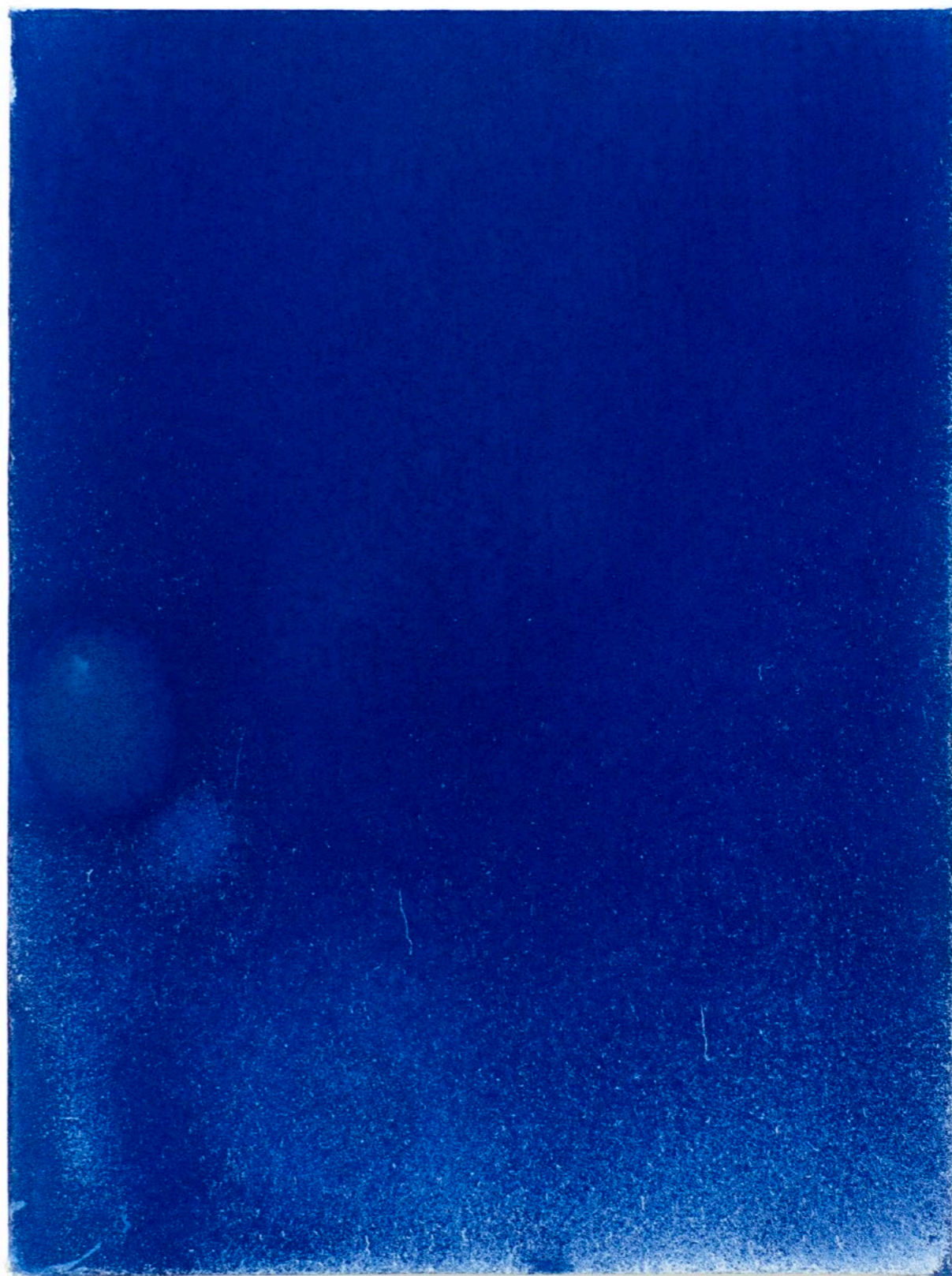
*Dinton (22 August 2014, 13.55–
14.55)*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



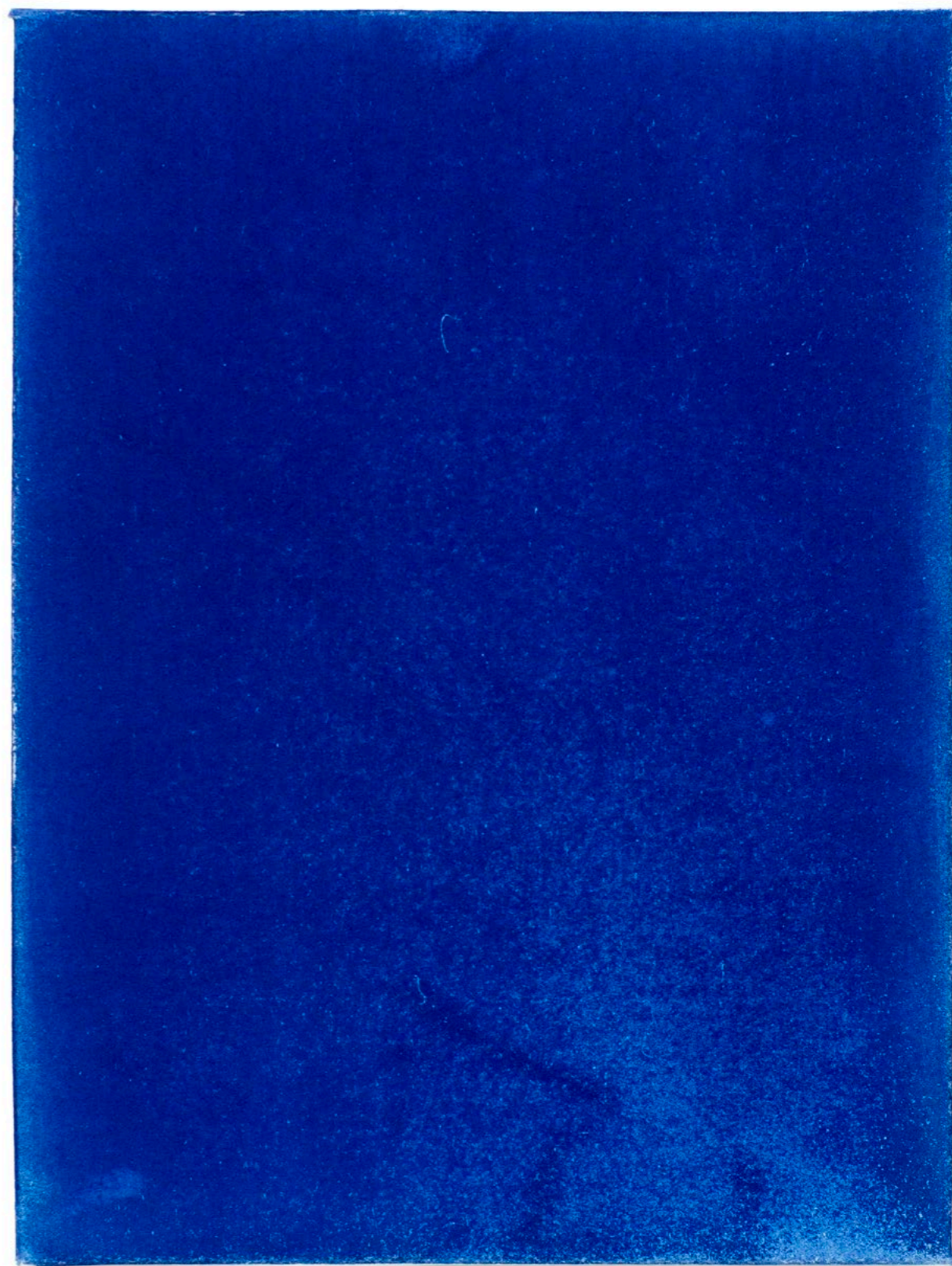


*Dinton (22 August 2014, 14.55–
15.55) – broken cloud, a few drops
rain*

Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 15.55–
16.55) – some sun*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



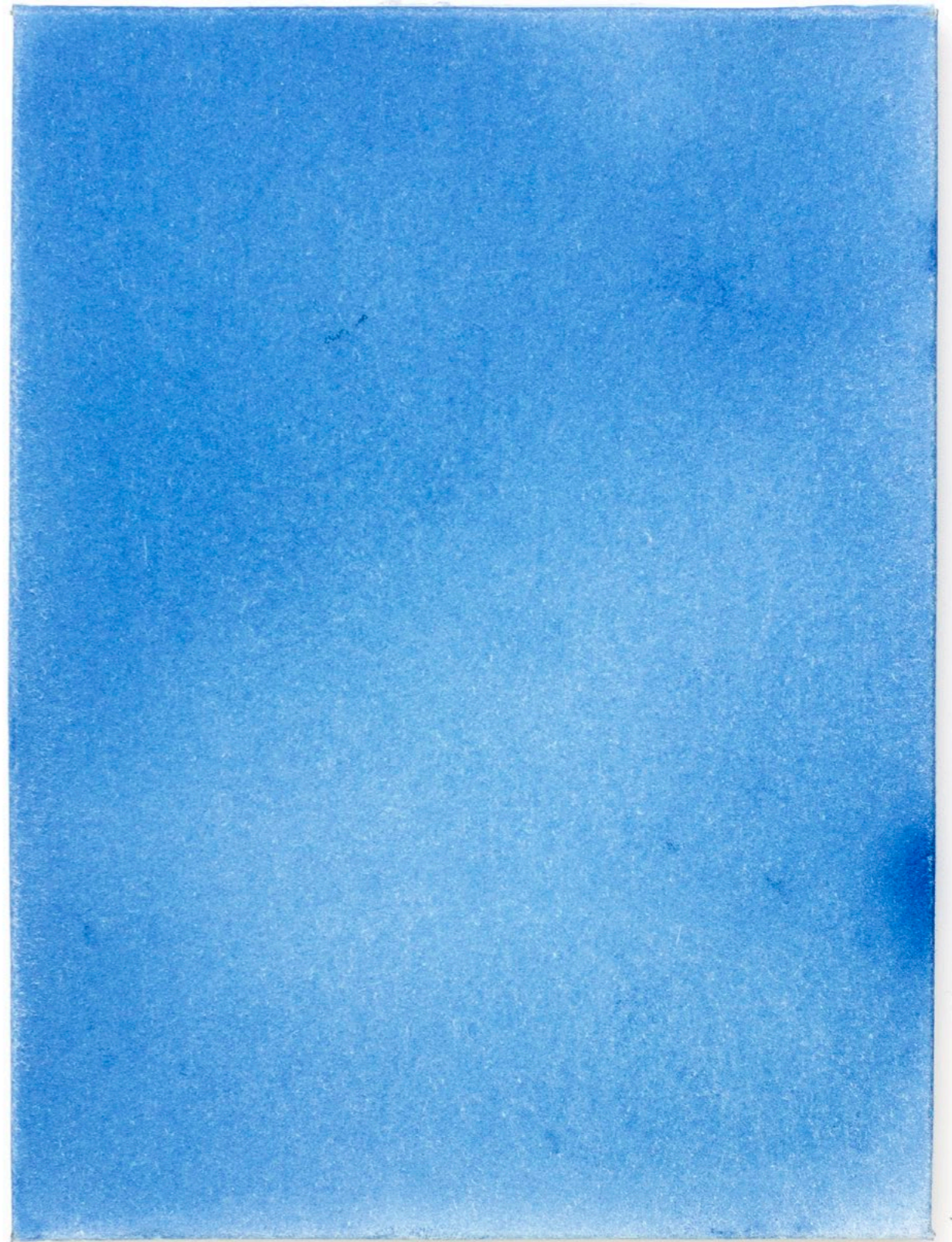
*Dinton (22 August 2014, 16.55–
17.55)*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 17.55–
18.55) – cloudy, somehow bright*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 18.55–
19.55) – dim*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



*Dinton (22 August 2014, 19.55–
20.55)*
Cyanotype on 310 gsm Arches
Platine, honeycomb paper
21 × 16 cm



Appendix A



Untitled, 2010
Aluminium powder, acrylic
medium, 9 gsm abaca tissue,
aluminium tube.
195 × 120 cm

Following spread:

Untitled, 2010
Copper powder, acrylic medium, 9
gsm abaca tissue, aluminium tube.
195 × 120 cm

Following spreads, all three:

Untitled, 2010
Graphite powder, acrylic medium, 9
gsm abaca tissue, aluminium tube.
195 × 120 cm









