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TIME PIECES

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

By

Laurel Johannesson

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Abstract

This paper accompanies an exhibition of visual art entitled "Time Pieces". Chapter one provides a general introduction. Chapter two discusses the theme of memory that is a common thread throughout the work. Chapter three looks at the genre of self-portraiture and its relationship to the construction of the self. The hybrid medium that I utilize is discussed in chapter four. As well as prints, the exhibition includes a number of book structures or containers and it is this subject that is looked at in chapter five. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the works that comprise the exhibition "Time Pieces".

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Table of Contents

Page

Approval Page..........ii

Abstract..........iii

Acknowledgements..........iv

Table of Contents..........vi

List of Figures..........viii

Chapter One: Introduction..........1

Chapter Two: Memory's Echo..........4

The Science of Memory..........6

The Rememberer..........9

The Power of the Past..........12

The Artist and Memory..........18

An Echo..........21

Chapter Three: Seeing Myself..........23

Comprehending the "I"..........24

Observing the Self..........25

Ceaseless Transformations..........27

On the Surface..........31

Metaphors for the Self..........33

Distorting the Self....36
Disguising the Self....40
The Self's Mortality....45
The Image of the Other....46

Chapter Four: Defining a Medium....48
Artists and Technology....49

Chapter Five: The Container....53

Chapter Six: Time Pieces—The Exhibition....58
Conclusion....66

Bibliography....68

Figures....76

Works in the Thesis Exhibition....141

List of Figures

Figure 1 **Julia Margaret Cameron**. May Prinsep, 1870. Albumen print. 12 x 10 inches. Collection of the University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Gernsheim Collection. Wolf, 1998. *

Figure 2 **Edward Burne-Jones**. The Golden Stairs, 1880. Oil on Canvas. 105 x 46 inches. Collection of the Tate Gallery, London. Prettejohn, 1997.

Figure 3 **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**. Beata Beatrix, 1864. Oil on Canvas. 34 x 26 inches. Collection of the Tate Gallery, London. Prettejohn, 1997.

Figure 4 **Frederic Leighton**. Lieder ohne Worte, c. 1860-1. Oil on Canvas. 40 x 25 inches. Collection of the Tate Gallery, London. Prettejohn, 1997.

Figure 5 **Parmigianino**. Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror, 1524. Oil on (convex) panel. 9 5/8 inches diameter. Collection of Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. Gould, 1994.

Figure 6 **George Frederick Watts**. Self-portrait, 1904. Oil on Canvas. 27 x 21 inches. Collection of the Watts Gallery, Compton. Brooke, 1994.

Figure 7 **Vincent Van Gogh**. Self-portrait with a Japanese Print, 1889. Oil on Canvas. 24 x 19 inches. Collection of the Courtauld Institute, London. Tsukasa, 1992.

* See the bibliography for sources of figures.

Figure 8 **Vincent Van Gogh**. Self-portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe, 1889. Oil on Canvas. 20 x 18 inches. Private Collection. Bronkhorst, 1990.

Figure 9 **Vincent Van Gogh**. The Chair and the Pipe, 1888. Oil on Canvas. 36 x 29 inches. Collection of the Tate Gallery, London. Bronkhorst, 1990.

Figure 10 **Vincent Van Gogh**. A Pair of Shoes, 1887. Oil on Canvas. 13 x 16 inches. Collection of the Museum of Art, Baltimore. Bronkhorst, 1990.

Figure 11 **Edvard Munch**. Self-portrait with Burning Cigarette, 1894-5. Oil on Canvas. 44 x 36 inches. Collection of The National Gallery, Oslo. Eggum, 1989.

Figure 12 **Eadweard Muybridge**. D: Using a shovel. E,F: Using a pick, 1885. Collotype print. 11 x 10 inches. Muybridge, 1979.

Figure 13 **Andy Warhol**. Untitled, 1964. Gelatin-Silver print. 7 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches. McShine, 1989. © Andy Warhol/SODRAC (Montreal) 1999.

Figure 14 **Michelangelo**. Last Supper, 1541. Fresco. Detail from the Sistine Chapel. Pietrangeli, et al., 1986.

Figure 15 **Michelangelo**. Last Supper, 1541. Fresco. Detail from the Sistine Chapel. Pietrangeli, et al., 1986.

Figure 16 **Michelangelo**. Sistine Ceiling, 1541. Fresco. Detail. Pietrageli, et al., 1986.

Figure 17 **Caravaggio**. David and Goliath, 1607. Oil on canvas. 49 x 39 inches. Collection of Galleria Borghese, Rome. Gilbert, 1995.

Figure 18 **Franz Xaver Messerschmidt**. Innerlich Verschlossener Gram, c. 1770-83. Tin cast. 17 inches. Collection of Schloßmuseum, Stuttgart. Kris, 1932.

Figure 19 **Bruce Nauman**. Hologram C from first Hologram Series: Making Faces (A-K), 1968. Holographic image on glass. 8 x 10 inches. Collection of Sperone Westwater, New York. Halbreich and Benezra, 1994. © Bruce Nauman/SODRAC (Montreal) 1999.

Figure 20 **Lucas Samaras**. Photo-Transformation, August 19, 1976. SX-70 Polaroid photograph. 3 x 3 inches. Photograph courtesy of Pace Wildenstein. © Lucas Samaras

Figure 21 **Cindy Sherman**. Untitled #122, 1983. Color photograph. 35 x 21 inches. Collection of Eli and Edythe L. Broad, Los Angeles. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures. © Cindy Sherman.

Figure 22 **Cindy Sherman**. Untitled Film Still #3, 1977. Black and White photograph. 8 x 10 inches. Collection of the artist. Photograph courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures. © Cindy Sherman.

Figure 23 **Hippolyte Bayard**. The Drowned, 1840. Salted paper print. Collection of Société Française de Photographie. Macdonald, 1979.

Figure 24 **Duane Michals**. Self-portait as if I Were Dead, 1968. Gelatin-silver print. 5 x 7 inches. Collection of Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. Michals, 1984. © Duane Michals.

Figure 25 **Joseph Cornell**. Grand Hotel Voyageurs, 1950-4. Construction. 18 x 12 x 5 inches. Jaguer, 1989. © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation.

Figure 26 **Joseph Cornell**. Soap Bubble Set (Lunar Space Object), c. late 1950's. Construction. 10 x 14 x 4 inches. Collection Rhett and Robert Delford Brown, New York. Waldman, 1977. © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation.

Figure 27 **Joseph Cornell**. Taglioni's Jewel Casket, 1940. Wood box containing glass ice cubes, jewelry, etc. 5 x 12 x 8 inches. Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Waldman, 1977. © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation.

Figure 28 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memory Book III, 1999. Gold leaf, Image transfer, etc. 10 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 29 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memory Book IV, 1999. Gold leaf, Image transfer, etc. 10 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 30 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memory Books V – VII, 1999. Gold Leaf, Image transfer, etc. Various sizes. Collection of the artist.

Figure 31 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memory Journals — Volumes VIII – XIV, 1999. Gold leaf, etc. Various sizes. Collection of the artist.

Figure 32 **Laurel Johannesson**. Six Views of a Moment, 1998. Digital print. 48 x 67 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 33 **Dante Gabriel Rossetti**. Rosa Triplex, 1874. Red Chalk. 20 x 30 inches. Collection of the Hearn Family Trust. Clair, 1995.

Figure 34 **Fernand Khnopff**. Memories, 1889. Pastel. 50 x 69 inches. Collection of Musée Royal des Beaux Arts, Brussels. Christian, 1978.

Figure 35 **Edward Burne-Jones**. The Mill, 1870. Oil. 36 x 78 inches. Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Christian, 1978.

Figure 36 **Clarence H. White**. Morning, 1905. Gum-bichromate print. 9 1/2 x 7 1/2 inches. Collection of The Art Museum, Princeton University, Princeton. Clair, 1995.

Figure 37 **George Seely**. Untitled, 1906-7. Photogravure on Japan paper. 6 x 7 1/2 inches. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Clair, 1995.

Figure 38 **Laurel Johannesson**. Wings of Silence, 1998. Digital print. 44 3/4 x 36 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 39 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memory's Echo, 1999. Digital print. 53 1/2 x 36 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 40 **Edvard Munch**. The Sick Child, 1896. Lithograph. 17 x 22 inches. Collection of the Munch Museum, Oslo. Prelinger, Parke-Taylor, 1996.

Figure 41 **Edvard Munch**. The Sick Child, 1885-86. Oil on canvas. 47 x 42 inches. Collection of The National Gallery, Oslo. Prelinger, Parke-Taylor, 1996.

Figure 42 **Laurel Johannesson**. The Rememberer, 1998. Digital print. 46 1/4 x 35 1/2 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 43 **F. Holland Day**. Hypnos, 1897. Platinum print. 6 1/4 x 4 1/2 inches. Collection of The Royal Photographic Society, Bath. Clair, 1995.

Figure 44 **Laurel Johannesson**. Fragment I, 1998. Digital print. 50 x 35 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 45 **Laurel Johannesson**. Fragment II, 1998. Digital print. 35 x 40 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 46 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memento Mori I, 1999. Digital print. 48 x 26 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 47 **Laurel Johannesson**. Memento Mori II, 1999. Digital print. 48 x 27 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 48 **Laurel Johannesson**. Anamnesis, 1998. Digital print. 50 x 32 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 49 **Anonymous**. Loie Fuller Dancing, c. 1906. Kallitype print. 6 x 4 3/4 inches. Collection Musée Rodin, Paris. Clair, 1995.

Figure 50 **Anonymous**. Loie Fuller Dancing, c. 1906. Kallitype print. 6 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches. Collection Musée Rodin, Paris. Clair, 1995.

Figure 51 **Laurel Johannesson**. Reliquiae, 1998. Digital print. 51 x 35 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 52 **George Seely**. The Black Bowl, 1907. Gum-platinum print. 8 x 6 inches. Collection of The Royal Photographic Society. Clair, 1995.

Figure 53 **Laurel Johannesson**. Looking for Yesterday II, 1999. Photolithograph (duotone). 30 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 54 **Laurel Johannesson**. Looking for Yesterday III, 1999. Photolithograph (duotone). 25 3/4 x 30 1/2 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 55 **Laurel Johannesson**. Looking for Yesterday IV, 1999. Photolithograph (duotone). 24 3/4 x 30 1/4 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 56 **Laurel Johannesson**. Looking for Yesterday V, 1999. Photolithograph (duotone). 24 x 30 1/4 inches. Collection of the artist.

Figure 57 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 58 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 59 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 60 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 61 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 62 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 63 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

Figure 64 **Laurel Johannesson**. Installation view of the exhibition "Time Pieces".

~ One ~

Introduction

The works in the exhibition "Time Pieces" represent a selection from work I produced during the past two years of the Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Calgary. This work explores the meaning, sense and emotions related to the theme of memory. Since autobiographical memory can be considered a key to the self, it seemed logical for me to utilize the genre of self-portraiture to convey this theme.

It became evident to me that no one medium could satisfactorily capture the idea of memory. I had to find a medium that would best express this particular theme. Although I consider myself primarily a printmaker, the work in this exhibition involves a wide variety of media. The work is two dimensional as well as three-dimensional, and utilizes photography, digital media, monoprinting, and lithography. In several of the works I combine techniques and processes to create what one could call a hybrid medium. Yet each of these works share a common thread within the exhibition—the theme of memory.

In the following chapter I will discuss memory as it relates to science, literature, and art. Subsequent chapters will deal with the genre of self-portraiture, the three dimensional container and the hybrid medium I utilize. I will

conclude with a discussion of the works that comprise the exhibition "Time Pieces".

~ Two ~

Memory's Echo

In this world, time is like a flow of water, occasionally displaced by a bit of debris, a passing breeze. Now and then, some cosmic disturbance will cause a rivulet of time to turn away from the mainstream, to make connection backstream. When this happens, birds, soil, people caught in the branching tributary find themselves suddenly carried to the past.

— Alan Lightman
Einstein's Dreams
pp. 13-14. *

* See the bibliography for sources of epigraphs.

Memory is often thought of as a passive or literal capturing of reality. Many people are inclined to see our memories as a series of family pictures stored in the photo album of our minds. However, we do not store judgement-free snapshots of our past experiences but rather hold on to the meaning, sense, and emotions these experiences provided us. Memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves.

We construct our autobiographies from fragments of experience that change over time. As University of Calgary art theory professor Paul Woodrow writes:

> Remembering is not the reanimation of fixed and fragmentary traces,...it is an imaginative reconstruction built out of a past which is in the process of continually being updated and realigned. Every perception is a creation and every memory is a re-creation.[1]

Although we like to think our memories are accurate and reliable, we often reconstruct them to suit ourselves. Memories are often ephemeral and distorted, on the one hand, and subjectively compelling and influential, on the other. Yet, even though memory can be highly elusive in some situations and dead wrong in

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[1] Paul Woodrow, "The Spectacle of Memory," in Barbara Milne: Island (Catalogue of an exhibition held at Calgary: Paul Kuhn Gallery, The Times Press: 1998), p. 10.

others, it still forms the foundation for our most strongly held beliefs about ourselves. Autobiographical memory is the key to the self. It is the psychological process that creates identity and integrates personality. After all, who am I if I am not my memories?

The Science of Memory

Different people recollect very different aspects of their everyday environments. Scientists are in agreement that the brain does not operate like a photocopier or a camera. Questions such as what aspects of reality remain in memory once an episode has concluded have challenged philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists who have tried to decipher the nature of remembering and forgetting. Greek philosophers believed that memory is like a wax tablet on which experiences are imprinted. William James and Sigmund Freud both believed that memories are like objects placed in rooms of a house. The *reappearance hypothesis*, a term coined by cognitive psychologist, Ulric Neisser, is the notion that faithful copies of experience are kept in the mind, and recur again in their original form. Instead, Neisser proposes that only pieces of information are represented in our memory. These fragments of experience then

form a basis for the reconstructing of a past event.[2] Our sense of self depends heavily on these fragments of elusive remnants of experience. What we believe about ourselves is determined by what we remember about our pasts. Memory is part of the brain's attempt to impose order on the environment.[3]

In the last few years, new insights into the brain substrates of elaborative encoding have come about as a result of studies that utilize new functional neuroimaging techniques such as positron emission tomography (PET) and functional magnetic resonance imaging (functional MRI). These tools allow scientists to observe the activity of particular brain regions while people perform tasks designed to analyze perception, language, memory, and other cognitive processes.

Each hemisphere of the brain's cerebral cortex is divided into four major lobes. The frontal lobes consist of distinctive subregions that play important roles in processes such as encoding, strategic retrieval, working memory, and recall of source information. Specific regions within the occipital, parietal, and temporal

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[2] Ulric Neisser, Cognitive Psychology (New York: Appleton Century-Crofts, 1967), p. 285.
[3] Gerald M. Edelman, Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1992), pp. 102-105.

lobes participate in the storage of different aspects or attributes of long-term memories. These cortical areas work together with inner sectors of the brain, such as the hippocampus, to allow us to remember explicitly our ongoing experiences.

The hippocampus is a small, horseshoe-shaped structure hidden deep in the inner parts of the temporal lobes. Extraordinarily, it receives input from nearly all regions of the cerebral cortex, through a smaller region known as the entorhinal cortex. These inputs run through the hippocampus in a series of three successive synapses. After passing through these structures the signals then loop back to the entorhinal cortex and are relayed back through reentrant fibers to the cortical areas that supplied the original connections. Cells inside the hippocampal loop receive simultaneous connections from the midbrain and sensory areas. For many years memory researchers have focused on the hippocampus because research on brain-injured patients suggested that damage to the hippocampus can produce a severe loss of memory for recent experiences. There is no doubt that the hippocampus is one of a number of

anatomical structures that play an important part in explicit remembering and are necessary for the construction of long-term memories.[4]

Together, these physiological and behavioral aspects of the brain exhibit that memories of past experiences are natural and inevitable outcomes of the ways in which we think about and analyze the world. Only those aspects of experience that are targets of elaborative encoding processes have a high likelihood of being remembered subsequently. More extensive elaborations leave more behind. They promote rich recollections of what we saw, felt, and thought during an episode. To a great extent, then, our memories are built on our elaborations. While the scientific aspects of memory are important, it is the subjective activity of building these elaborations that is responsible for our most powerful memories.

The Rememberer

Remembering an event has more to it than merely retrieving different kinds of information. There is also a conviction that an event is a part of your personal history. It is related to events that came before and have occurred

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[4] Ibid., pp. 106-107.

since. Something special about the subjective experience of explicitly remembering past incidents separates it from other uses of memory. This is something that is often overlooked in scientific analyses that portray memory as a device for storing and retrieving information. For it to be experienced as a memory, the retrieved information must be recollected in the context of a particular time and place and with some reference to oneself as a participant in the episode. When we are talking about episodic memory we must consider the subjective experience of the person who does the remembering, referred to by cognitive psychologist Endel Tulving as the *rememberer*. Stressing the intimate relationship between the rememberer and the remembered, Tulving observes that:

> The particular state of consciousness that characterizes the experience of remembering includes the rememberer's belief that the memory is a more or less true replica of the original event, even if only a fragmented and hazy one, as well as the belief the event is part of his own past. Remembering, for the rememberer, is mental time travel, a sort of reliving of something that happened in the past.[5]

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[5] Endel Tulving, Elements of Episodic Memory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 127.

Nearly a century earlier, psychologist and philosopher William James made a similar assertion:

> Memory requires more than mere dating of a fact in the past. It must be dated in my past. In other words, I must think that I directly experienced its occurrence.[6]

James added that personal recollections have a "warmth and intimacy" that identify them as a "property" of the self.

Tulving's idea of remembering as "mental time travel" touches on something truly remarkable. As rememberers, we free ourselves from the constraints of time and space, reexperiencing the past and projecting ourselves into the future at will. This remarkable feat is something we all engage in each and every day of our lives.

As discussed in the previous section, scientific findings and ideas concerning brain mechanisms of retrieval are crucial to understanding the fragile power of memory. However, it is important to think about the conceptualization of retrieval on a psychological level. For instance, how does the subjective experience of remembering occur? A simple answer is that a retrieval cue, such

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[6] William James, The Principles of Psychology (New York: Macmillan, 1890), p. 650.

as someone asking about a particular occasion, in some way activates a dormant engram of the event. However, memory retrieval is not that simple. For the rememberer, the engram or the stored fragments of the event and the memory or the subjective experience of recollecting a past event are not the same thing. The stored fragments contribute to the conscious experience of remembering, but they are only a part of it. The retrieval cue itself is an important component. The retrieval cue is often seen as something that merely arouses or activates a memory that is lying dormant in the brain. However, the cue most often combines with the engram to produce something new—that being the recollective experience of the rememberer, which differs from either the cue or the engram. This idea was evident in some of Marcel Proust's writings, where memories emerge from comparing a present sensation with a past one, much as a stereoscopic vision emerges from combining information from the two eyes.

The Power of the Past

Experiencing the personal past took on an unusual, even overwhelming, significance for Marcel Proust. He developed an intense and unrelenting obsession with memory that he explored through art. No work of literature is

more closely associated with human memory than Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu (1913-1922) best known in English as Remembrance of Things Past. It is difficult to overstate Proust's obsession with recapturing the past. Most of the eight volumes that comprise A la recherche are concerned in one way or another with personal recollections or meditations on the nature of memory. Proust's writing reflects his passionate conviction that the self could be grasped only through an understanding of memory and time. Proust provides the first detailed documentation of *the search for lost time* as a means to the search for the self.

For Proust memory is a creative rather than a recalling function. It exists in a timeless dimension. The creative aspect of memory is perpetually organizing, synthesizing and regulating experience, disclosing a unified and coherent structure of the self that otherwise would not be a fact of experience or would not be discovered by experience. Memory carries out its synthesizing, and regulating function, assembling those unique patterns of memory-structures into one unique but ever-changing whole, forming the self or the character of the experiencing individual.

The attempt to reconstruct the self becomes the pursuit and recapture of time in experience or memory. Proust accepted the view of time as composed of distinct and unrelated moments, and started with the premise that individual momentary impressions are separate and discontinuous. To begin with the assumption that the self must be illusory, and to end up in discovery or rediscovery of self-identity is a fascinating insight. Proust notes that:

> One is no longer a person. How then searching for one's thoughts, one's personality, as one searches for a lost object, does one recover one's own self rather than any other?[7]

He shows us how, by the employment of memory in the sense of creative imagination.

The most dramatic memory-related incident of A la recherche du temps perdu involves the narrator, Marcel, visiting his mother, who serves him tea and pastries known as *petite madeleines.* After dipping a madeleine into the tea and tasting the mixture, he is overcome by an unexpected, overwhelming, and entirely mysterious sense of well-being. He asks:

> Whence could it have come to me, this all-powered joy? I sensed that it was connected with the taste of

[7] Quoted in Malcolm Bowie, Proust Among the Stars (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998), pp. 3-4.

> the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Where did it come from? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?[8]

He tries to induce the experience again by tasting several more mouthfuls of the potent mixture, but each experience is weaker than the previous one, leading him to conclude that the basis of the effect "lies not in the cup but in myself."[9] He suspects that the tea and cake have somehow activated a past experience, and wonders whether he will be able to recall it consciously.

Finally, the moment comes when the mystery is resolved:

> And suddenly the memory revealed itself. The taste was that of the little crumb of Madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my aunt Leonie used to give me, dipping it first in her own cup of tea.[10]

Proust notes that he had never elsewhere encountered the combination of smells and tastes that made up the episode at his aunt's house, thus making them unique cues for an elusive but powerful memory:

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[8] Marcel Proust, In Search of Lost time, "Swann's Way", trans. C.K.S. Moncrieff, T. Kilmartin, D.J. Enright, (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), pp. 51-52.
[9] Ibid., p. 52.
[10] Ibid., p. 53-54.

> But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting and hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.[11]

When the memory revealed itself the narrator saw that memory could be both fragile and powerful. Memories elicited only by certain tastes and smells are fragile: they can easily disappear because there are few opportunities for them to surface. However, memories like these that have remained dormant for a long period of time and have survived are also exceptionally powerful.

Reexperiencing one's past sometimes depends on chance encounters with objects that contain the keys to unlocking memories that might otherwise be hidden forever. However, Proust's recognition that *involuntary* recollections are fleeting, lasting only several seconds, and depend on rare confrontations with particular smells or sights, leads him to alter the focus of his quest for the past. As the novel progresses, his search for self-understanding

[11] Ibid., p. 54

depends increasingly on the active, *voluntary* retrieval of his past. Proust explores the self-defining role of voluntary recollection in the final novel from the series, Time Regained. At a gathering of old friends whom Marcel has not seen for many years, he strains to recall their identities and to place them in the context of his remembered experiences. In so doing he achieves a synthesis of past and present that heightens his appreciation of his own identity.

In a 1922 letter, Proust also draws on concepts and analogies from the science of optics to develop an analogy of time and memory. He writes:

> The image (imperfect as it is) which seems to me best suited to convey the nature of that special sense is a telescope, a telescope pointed at time, for a telescope renders visible for us stars invisible to the naked eye, and I have tried to render visible to the consciousness phenomena, some of which, having been entirely forgotten, are situated in the past.[12]

Proust continues to develop this optical analogy. He contends that the experience of remembering a past episode is not based merely on calling to mind a stored memory. Instead, a feeling of remembering emerges from the comparison of two images: one in the present and one in the past. Just as visual

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[12] Quoted in Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Binoculars: A Study of Memory, Time, and Recognition in* A la recherche du temps perdu (New York: The Colonial Press Inc., 1963), p. 46.

perception of the three-dimensional world depends on combining information from the two eyes, perception in time—remembering—depends on combining information from the present and the past. Proust scholar Roger Shattuck explains:

> Proust set about to make us *see time*.... Merely to remember something is meaningless unless the remembered image is combined with a moment in the present affording a view of the same object or objects. Like our eyes, our memories must see double; these two images then converge in our minds into a single heightened reality.[13]

Proust achieved the penetrating insight that feelings of remembering result from a subtle interplay between past and present.

The Artist and Memory

In a general sense, all art relies on memory—every work of art is affected, directly or indirectly, by the personal experiences of the artist. However, some artists have made the exploration of memory a major subject of their work. Some of the personal, experiential aspects of memory that are difficult to communicate as effectively in words can be conveyed with considerable potency by the artist.

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[13] Ibid., pp. 46-7.

Visual artists have created evocative depictions of the subjective experiences of the rememberer. For example, in the nineteenth century, portrait painters and some photographers showed people engaged in introspective acts of remembering, and conveyed the poignancy of their recollective experiences through emotion-filled facial expressions, supporting context and titles suggestive of charged memories. Artistic depictions of the rememberer are suggestive and even provocative.

For example, Julia Margaret Cameron, in a photograph of 1870, depicts a woman holding a hand mirror (fig. 1). This was customary practice for representations of memory and also a traditional attribute of images of vanitas. The woman seems not to be viewing herself but instead she looks behind herself. Her eye is visible in the mirror. Metaphorically, she looks retrospectively to the past.

Edward Burne-Jones, in The Golden Stairs (1880, fig. 2) depicts a serpentine staircase winding up the picture surface with little hint of spatial depth. A group of near-identical women descend, their perfect feet barely touching the steps. Their bodies seem freed from the law of gravity. The sense of endless circling in a space that has no beginning and no end seems timeless. Is there in

fact only one woman here? Are the rest simply a memory left by the one who came before?

Dante Gabriel Rossetti often depicted women in what could be considered reverie or at the very least introspection. In Beata Beatrix (1864, fig. 3), the female figure appears trancelike as if in a state of reverie. To her right, softly lit, stands a sundial—a keeper of time. Clocks and sundials have long been symbols for the passage of time. Their psychological intent, in large measure, was to assert the transitory nature of human life.

Similarly, one of Rossetti's slightly later English contemporaries, Frederic Leighton, also often portrays his subjects in a state of trancelike reverie. In Lieder ohne Worte or "Songs Without Words" (c. 1860-1, fig. 4), the German title refers to a series of piano pieces by Mendelssohn, literally songs without words since they have no vocal line. It is possible that Leighton may have been aware of "Mendessohn's ideas about how the pure sound of music conveys meanings that are independent of the intellectualism of spoken language."[14] Leighton depicts a figure who, according to art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn, "abandons

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[14] Elizabeth Prettejohn, Rossetti and His Circle (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1997), p. 46.

herself to pure sensory experience, listening to the sound of birdsong and flowing water, the 'songs without words' of the title."[15] As with Proust, perhaps these *sensory experiences* are stimulating the subject's memory, reminding her of the past.

An Echo

The primary focus of my images is the female figure in a state of introspection or reverie. The works are about my own memories as well as the collective memories of women exploring their own psychic landscape. My work is an escape into time travel. It is a tour of my universe in search of my *self.*

I interweave memory and imagination. The individual and the collective memory on which I draw are always present in an imagined manner. To me the past is not dead; it lives on. The relationship with what has gone on before is expressed in the work in the mysterious manner in which elements from a past are echoed. The echo resounds throughout the work, while never expressly betraying its origin. The works do not describe—they evoke. Memory here is

[15] Ibid., p. 42.

subject to a process of imagining, leaving it hovering near the point of total absence.

Such an appearance, shaped to a crucial extent by absence, preserves the past in the stratification of its multiple layers and its essential irretrivability. Imagination alters memory and separates it from the here-and-now. What is given in the image is simultaneously taken away. This creates a gulf in the work that gives it the potential to escape any strict connection with a specific time. A veil of oblivion is drawn over the work; the work rests under this veil, waiting to be re-imagined—to be remembered and then forgotten anew.

~ Three ~

Seeing My Self

Who is it that can tell me who I am?

— William Shakespeare
King Lear
Act I, Scene iv

If autobiographical memory is the key to the self then it seems appropriate that I utilize the genre of self-portraiture to facilitate this theme. The German Expressionist artist Otto Dix remarked that:

> Self-portraits are confessions of an inner state....There is no objectivity there, only ceaseless transformation; a human being has so many facets. The self-portrait is the best means of studying them.[16]

Indeed, the self-portrait is generally considered an act of introspection, a search for the truth of the self. In this chapter I will discuss the genre of self-portraiture and the means by which the artist may go about deciphering the self.

Comprehending the "I"

In portraiture we frequently have the advantage, or at times the disadvantage, of having an artist interpret for us the inner persona of the subject being depicted. In self-portraiture, however, we are confronted with a much different set of issues. No longer is it just us viewing and reading the face of another person, nor is it a simple case of one individual artist estimating the

[16] Quoted in Erika Billeter, "The Exhibition," in Billeter, ed., Self-Portraiture in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Image (Lausanne: Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, 1986), p. 8.

character of another human. In self-portraiture, where the artist and the subject are the same person, the dynamics of reading, interpreting, analyzing, and revealing involve by definition a cycle of self-regard, self-presentation, self-revelation, and self-creation. Moreover, facing one's own image in an attempt to achieve an honest and convincing representation of the self invariably embodies the realization that the inner and outer are ultimately distinct, that there are at least two selves, one accessible and another hidden, and that comprehending the "I" in self-portraiture is truly comprehending an "other". As to how the self is presented is solely the artist's decision.

Observing the Self

In his Sketchbook Notes, published in 1965, the American artist Jasper Johns discusses various options open to the artist for rendering or including a self-portrait within a work. He states that one should "avoid a polar situation."[17] He differentiates between two distinct forms of observation, referring to them, curiously, as "watchman" and "spy":

> The watchman falls "into" the "trap" of looking. The "spy" is a different person....There is continuity of

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[17] Jasper Johns, "Sketchbook Notes," Art and Literature, no. 4 (Spring 1965), p.185.

> some sort among the watchman, the space, the objects. The spy must be ready to "move", must be aware of his entrances and exits. The watchman leaves his job and takes away no information. The spy must remember himself and his remembering. The spy designs himself to be overlooked. The watchman "serves" as a warning. Will the spy and the watchman ever meet?...The spy stations himself to observe the watchman. If the spy is a foreign object, why is the eye not irritated? Is he invisible? When the spy irritates, we try to remove him. "Not spying, just looking"—Watchman.[18]

The watchman is a neutral observer carefully monitoring the objective facts of his or her surroundings. The spy is a prying voyeur anxious to get a glimpse of some hidden secret. The watchman does not have to think, simply look. The spy, however, must surreptitiously steal about, remembering while remaining overlooked. In the following pages I will utilize these categories put forth by Johns.

Despite the rather odd juxtaposition that Johns uses, this duality described in this passage does provide a helpful way of describing the two distinct facets of the artist.[19] The artist must observe with precision both the physical presence of

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[18] Ibid., pp. 185-192.

[19] Von Carla Gottlieb, "Self-Portraiture in Postmodern Art", Allraf-Richartz Jahr, no. 42 (1981): p. 280.

the work being created as well as the visual look of what is being pictured. The artist needs also to penetrate beneath the surface of things and adjust whatever secrets of the self are discovered for representation on that surface. By avoiding a "polar situation", the artist becomes both watchman and spy; nowhere is this duality more apparent than in the self-portrait, to which Johns alludes.

Ceaseless Transformations

The skilled reader has the chance to pry, much as a spy, into the hidden character and psychology behind the face and confront the persona of the subject. In almost any given face two distinct selves are suggested concurrently: a readily available exterior self formed by the face and its distinctive features; and a relatively privileged interior self only hinted at by the visible face. It is sometimes assumed that the "real" self—the one customarily hidden beneath the surface—is decipherable from the face's outer features and gestures. Most actual faces and portraits are thus read for their hints of inner personality and character.

Facial expressions are temporal experiences, engaged as they most often are in what Dix referred to as "ceaseless transformation". Early physiognomists understood this; they clearly distinguished between physiognomy as a study of the facial expressions in stasis and pathognomy as a study of the face or body in motion. But in order to clarify and systematically classify the various emotions, humors, passions, and psychological states exhibited by the face, they tried to distil from this flux various sets of measurable expressions.[20] According to historian Patrizia Magli,

> To isolate a face is to isolate a permanent form, of one whose "unchanging traits" are to be perceived through a process that attempts to freeze the face's state of constant flux into a state of immutability....It is the time of a "measure" that stills things, develops a formal image and locks it into an absolute fixity, wherein it then interprets proportions, defines outlines, and attempts to establish essential traits.[21]

However, the self is also something that can be constructed, created, or assumed and thereby invariably falsified. Actors have known this all too well for centuries, as have most artists when it comes to recording their self-portraits.

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[20] Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, The Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions From Facial Expressions (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc. 1984), pp. 1-9.

[21] Patrizia Magli, "The Face and the Soul," trans. Ughetta Lubin, in Zone 4: Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part 2, ed. Michel Feher et al. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), p. 87.

Photographer Richard Avedon maintained that every self-portrait is a form of acting or performance.[22]

Portraits can be interpreted as maps of the subject's inner selves. Self-portraits are even more revealing—charts of the most personal sort usually done in quiet complicity with the self, the only other being usually present at the time. While to some extent faces in modern and especially contemporary art have become more ciphers than texts to be decoded, self-portraits have for the most part stayed remarkably true to their traditional values of unmasking the artist's ego or persona.

In his "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," poet John Ashbery responds to Parmigianino's self-portrait of 1524 (fig. 5), in which the Italian Mannerist painter depicts a distorted self-image as seen in a convex mirror or globe held in his right hand. Ashberry contends that "the soul establishes itself" in the painting, and the point expressed in this particular work is that

> The soul is a captive, treated humanely, kept/
> In suspension, unable to advance much farther/

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[22] Richard Avedon, "Borrowed Dogs," in Ben Sonnenberg, ed., Performance and Reality: Essays from Grand Street (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), p. 17.

Than your look as it intercepts the picture.[23]

Something of the inner passions is revealed precisely at that interception of picture and looking, of display and observation.

When the subjects are artists portraying themselves, the viewer's curiosity is that much keener, more direct, and intensely personal since the self-portrait is by definition unmediated by anyone except the combined personality of watchman and spy. The watchman simply looking and the spy prying for secrets are the two inextricably joined halves of self-portraiture. Delineating the facts and the existence of the self is the job of the watchman; searching for the essential identity of the persona and the meaning of that self is a matter for the spy. How well the watchman and the spy perform their tasks, as well as just how the facts are put down and how they are interpreted or expressed, is as wide-ranging as the personalities of the individual artists despite the many attempts to categorize and outline the various subgenres of self-portraiture.

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[23] John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a convex Mirror," in Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror (New York: Viking Press, 1975) pp. 68-69.

On the Surface

Fundamentally, a self-portrait charts the isolated face and/or body of the subject. The self-portrait records the artist staring back into the camera, looking away, posing, reflected in a mirror, or otherwise represented in some manner. What we see is what was for a moment. What we see, also, is only the outward appearance, the surface of the subject. Photographers, in particular, have comprehended this from the start; what concerns them is light reflected from the surface of things and captured on film. Avedon explained it best:

> The point is that you can't get at the thing itself, the real nature of the sitter, by stripping away the surface. The surface is all you've got. You can only get beyond the surface by working with the surface. All that you can do is to manipulate that surface—gesture, costume, expression—radically and correctly.[24]

The problem, then, rests in how the artist radically alters the surface in order to get beyond it when there is only the surface with which to work. D.H. Lawrence asserted that

> Each man [sic—gender not changed from original] to himself is a picture....He is a complete little objective reality, complete in himself, existing by himself,

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[24] Avedon, "Borrowed Dogs", p. 17.

> absolutely, in the middle of the picture....We are what is seen; each man to himself an identity, an isolated absolute, corresponding with an inverse of isolated absolutes.[25]

Erika Billeter also commented on the isolation of the self-portrait, remarking, "every self-portrait imparts a sense of loneliness."[26] Whether the artist places himself against a landscape, an interior, or an empty background, he is always alone.

Because looking in a mirror makes the viewer aware of him or herself, the theme of the self-portrait is a natural origin of the artist's initial consciousness of him or herself as a creator, with all the joy and misery that role implies, and of his or her art as deliberate illusion. The self-portrait is the first subject in art history to deal with self-consciousness as a theme, to disengage subject from object and recast them as observer and observed.

Parmigianino and many other artists have captured their self-images as reflected in mirrored surfaces. Mirrors are like screens on which the artist is able to look at his or her reflection and find a way to accept one's body, appearance,

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[25] Quoted in Jean-Francois Chevrier, "The Image of the Other," Staging the Self, ed. James Lingwood (London: National Portrait Gallery), p. 12.
[26] Billeter, "The Exhibition," p. 9.

history—in short, him or herself. However, photography had a particularly marked effect on self-portraiture because for the first time artists could see themselves as others saw them: to see themselves as they "really" were, or so it appeared, without the complicated intervention of the mirrored image. From a practical point of view, some artists, freed from the need to scrutinize themselves closely in a mirror, accepted the camera in their working practices and used photographs to help portray themselves in ways impossible before. The unfinished final self-portrait by George Frederick Watts (fig. 6) was begun only a few weeks before the artist's final illness struck in 1904. In order to draw the distinguished profile view with closed eyes he made use of a photograph, rather than mirrors.[27] The lowered eyelids seem to signify the close of his life.

Metaphors for the Self

By the dawn of the twentieth century art had reached a stage where all of an artist's work was considered self-referential and every work, whatever its ostensible theme, could become a metaphorical self-portrait. Van Gogh became the best known Post-Impressionist self-portraitist. In fact he became nearly as

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[27] Xanthe Brooke, Face to Face: Three Centuries of Artist's Self-Portraiture (Liverpool: The Bluecoat Press, 1994), p. 108.

closely associated with self-portraiture as Rembrandt, and who during a far shorter period was almost as prolific. Between 1886 and 1888 he painted twenty-two self-portraits, invariably concentrating on the head and shoulders, conveying expression through paint and color handling alone. He continued to produce them during his mental breakdown and hospitalization in Arles, including the two which show him with bandaged ear (1889, figs. 7,8). His self-portraits did much to create the myth of Van Gogh as tormented genius and grew to symbolized the artist as misunderstood, neglected, mad and self-destructive. The myth became so compelling that since then it has often been assumed that all self-portraits were created for the reasons that might have stimulated Van Gogh, as an outcry against society's alienation of the artist. However, as can be seen here, many other factors produce the impulse to portray oneself.[28] Indeed Van Gogh began to use the self-portrait as a form of self-analysis. Van Gogh's The Chair and the Pipe (1888, fig. 9) is an example of this type of self-portrait. The straw chair lit by daylight with his pipe on its seat and spring bulbs sprouting in the background captured Van Gogh's relatively optomistic mood in 1888,

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[28] Albert J. Lubin, Stranger on Earth: A Psychological Biography of Vincent Van Gogh (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1996), p. 163.

though one threatened by the underlying message of death symbolised by the smoking pipe with its reference to the biblical phrase "for my days vanish like smoke" (Psalm 102:3). Van Gogh had painted objects, such as a pair of boots (1887, fig. 10), as metaphors for himself on other occasions. He often trudged through Montmartre to Clichy and Asnières, seven miles there and back, wearing these heavy hobnail boots.

For an Expressionist artist like the Norwegian Edvard Munch this type of self-portrait also became a way of displaying his own subjectivity, projecting his interior state of mind. Munch's self-portraits often had a psychological intensity heightened by theatrical lighting and elements of play-acting. This is evident in his Mephistophelian Self-Portrait with Burning Cigarette (1894-95, fig. 11). The light emphasizes the face as well as the hand with the cigarette. The hand was painted with great sensitivity, appearing at the same time strong and delicate. The face expresses something of the same quality. He appears as if in a trance. It is as if the artist looks into himself; he is concerned only with what happens behind the retina.

Distorting the Self

The self-portraitist is not limited to a single, ostensibly objective image by which to correctly go beyond the surface. Obviously there can never be any single "truth" discoverable in even the most objectified and clinical self-portrait, only mere attempts at visualizing a momentary, selected facet of the persona. Even the straightest and most direct self-portrait will reveal only a partial and imaginary self. Nor can a serialized set of self-portraits over time hint at more than synoptic representation. Conversely, because an artist abandons objectivity for any of the imaginary distortions open to him or her, does not necessarily mean that the self-portrait will gain an advantage in probing the artist's psyche, just that the end product will look novel or different.

Photography in particular has a wide gamut of techniques available to distort any conventional idea of the "normal" self-portrait: photomontage, photocollage, optical deformations, blurred motion, selective focus, serialization, chronophotography, the photogram, and others. Nearly all of these options afford the artist an opportunity to create visual analogues of psychological states, to construct or deconstruct an image whose text is neither not real nor beyond reality, and to replace the conventional self-portrait with one that might be called

irréal, to use a term coined by the French symbolist poet Stephane Mallarmé. The term suggests neither the unreal nor the surreal but rather something just to the side of reality, something dreamlike. Manipulated, pushed, deformed, the artist can be reconstructed as if in another state—not real, just to the side of it.

Fracturing and multiplying the self-image are other means of constructing the self. Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotograph of his nude self swinging a pickaxe (1885-87, fig. 12) appears proto-photocinematic. Andy Warhol also makes use of sequential images of the self. The four deadpan countenances of a tuxedoed Warhol posing in a photobooth (1964, fig. 13) become progressively more radically cropped. As such photos show, effacing, marking, and otherwise physically obliterating the "normal" look of the subject are additional means by which the artist can suggest an inner state of mind or interior agitation.

Although the condition of the inner state of the artist's mind and the idea that artists suffer seems a modern cliché, as early as the sixteenth century the artist's awareness of himself as tortured by visions, fantasies and the sense of mission and responsibility caused some artists to identify with martyrs. No longer witnesses, they now imagined themselves the subjects of martyrdom. Michelangelo expressed his feelings about the ordeal of art or possibly his

patrons, by painting a distorted self-portrait on the flayed skin held by St. Bartholomew in the Sistine Chapel Last Supper (1541, figs. 14, 15). St. Bartholomew was flayed; his skin is his traditional attribute. For the neo-Platonist Michelangelo, the body was a "rind", a "decanter" that bottled up the spirit, a "dark tomb" for the mind.[29] Made miserable by the difficulty—both physical and emotional—of painting the Sistine ceiling, Michelangelo considered himself martyred by art. There are at least ten alleged self-portraits by Michelangelo, all expressing some kind of suffering. Perhaps the most revealing is one as the decapitated Holophernes on the Sistine ceiling (1541, fig. 16). This is the first example of a category of the self-portrait that is peculiarly significant regarding the psychology of the artist: the bizarre form of the decapitated self-portrait head.

Michelangelo may have been among the first but was hardly the last to depict himself as a severed head. The split between intellect and the senses, the mind and the body, metaphysical idea and physical embodiment, presented a terrible conflict. Martyrdom by decapitation was one of the most popular seventeenth-century themes. In Caravaggio's David and Goliath (1607, fig. 17),

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[29] Quoted by Robert J. Clements, from the sonnet "Io sto rinchiuso" in Michelangelo, a Self-Portrait (Englewood Cliffs,N.J.: Prentice-Hall,1963), p. 128.

Goliath's decapitated head is an anguished self-portrait. In recent times, a number of artists have mutilated their own images, distorting their features even more grotesquely than Caravaggio contorted his own grimacing severed head. The eighteenth century sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt made a series of self-portraits deforming his face into madly exaggerated expressions of mania and depression (fig. 18). But these were as much scientific as emotional. They were used to show emotions for teaching and expressive purposes. Today, Bruce Nauman's holographs of himself leering and grimacing (fig. 19) remind us of Messerschmidt's self-investigation, albeit with a more personal, less scientific outlook.

Similarly, in 1976, in an image of himself along with his reflection, photographer Lucas Samaras manually pushed and dragged the emulsion of the Polaroid print before it solidified, completely reconfiguring the image of his body into a nebulous, inchoate shape (fig. 20). According to Samaras, the image "discloses the broken, twisted, unlovable shapes the self discovers when it looks within."[30] In an instance like this, where the figure is seen as acting out some

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[30] Ben Lifson, The Photographs of Lucas Samaras (New York: Aperture Foundation Inc., 1987), p. 44.

personal or dramatic code, Avedon's notion of portraiture as performance or "extreme stylized behavior" becomes very clear.[31]

Disguising the Self

The performance aspect of self-portraiture takes on a slightly different cast when the person portrayed is playing a role in disguise, or otherwise fictionalized. Ultimately, of course, every self-portrait is a fiction, a portrait of someone else, and an arena in which another is confronted or an alter ego encountered. The twentieth-century art historian Kirk Varnedoe suggests that through such surrogates as public and private roles the artist is able to "simultaneously expand his persona and control access to his personality."[32] He goes on to observe that "the theatrical overtone—the implied consciousness of an audience before which the self performs as self, or in the role of self—is especially disturbing since the division between observer and observed must first occur within the artist."[33]

My first experience with self-portraiture came by accident. One day, unable to get my usual model but with an urge to photograph, I made my first

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[31] Avedon, Borrowed Dogs, p. 19.
[32] Kirk Varnedoe, "The Self and Others in Modern Portraits," Art News 75, no. 8 (October 1976): p. 67.
[33] Ibid., p. 70.

self-portrait by the light of a single bulb in my basement. The result was a revelation. I suddenly realized that I photographed others for what I saw in them of myself. I had been searching for a *continually vanishing* quality of expression that would, perhaps, reveal something ineffable and also transcendent. By using myself as the subject, I was freed from the search for that specific and peculiarly familiar trait in another person that catches the eye.

In many self-portraits, the artist's face is nowhere to be seen, but embedded in the work are his or her feelings, observations, handwriting, and particular interests. A self-portrait need not contain a physical likeness of the sitter. On the other hand, even when a self-portrait contains the artist's image, this work need not be a self-portrait, although it is a document of the self. So if documentary likeness does not make a work a self-portrait, what does? I believe it is the artist's intention that accounts for what a work is or is not.

The works in the exhibition "Time Pieces" are often somewhat disguised self-portraits. The self is guarded. The works disguise more than they disclose. The blurred images of a disappearing person remind the viewer that all self-images are mutable and elusive. I do see my work as self-portraiture. However, likeness is not my primary goal. There is a psyche that is hidden behind the

likeness. There is a palpable evidence of introspection and reflection behind each of the works.

The response that I most often receive from the viewer is that the work is of an intensely personal nature and while they do not know why, he or she feels inexplicably moved by the imagery. There is a subliminal or ineffable connection made.

Few of us are willing to disclose our inner selves to an anonymous crowd. Hence, the self-portrait presents the added interest to its viewer that he or she has to puzzle out not only what it is that the artist has revealed of the inner self but also what he or she has concealed. I have created self-referential images with layered meaning. I am aware of the role of the subject and the way the viewer will read meaning into the image. No image can be taken at face value—so in these images the viewer is faced with the presence and intent of two artists, one as the maker of the image, and the other as subject.

My works combine fantasy with memory. Old photos, objects from past history, nostalgic settings, and superimposed images originally separated in time are used to explore roots—both personal and historical. The past symbolizes a way of remembering someone lost in memory. The images appear like

apparitions. The lens becomes a mirror reflecting both inner vision and outer presence. As the recording of my human visage turns toward introspection, the self-portraits become diaristic. Rather than from facts and events of daily life, the images draw on my emotions. It is a quasi-diaristic way of working from a personal repertory of feeling.

My works do not hide my identity and are concerned with my appearance and feelings. Certainly this must qualify them as self-portraits. All of the self is not revealed and much is concealed. However, it is what I have chosen to reveal. Perhaps the watchman is more powerful than the spy. Or perhaps that says more about my *self* than any revelation could.

As I have indicated, it is no longer clear when a self-portrait is a self-portrait. This is certainly the case with American photographer Cindy Sherman. She disguises herself as different female types, then photographs the result (fig. 21). The photographs constitute a powerful commentary on the social roles of women (fig. 22). By using herself as the model for every one of her photographs she is arguably producing self-portraits. But by disguising herself in every image she is broadening the concept. In fact, she denies that her work is self-portraiture. She has observed that "these are pictures of emotions personified,

entirely of themselves with their own presence—not of me. The issue of the identity of the model is no more interesting than the possible symbolism of any other detail."[34] Perhaps it is self-projection. However, it is certainly a fascinating development within the genre of self-portraiture. Her images are not images of *Cindy Sherman*; yet Sherman is present in the manner in which she imagined them, dressed them, lit them, composed them, posed for them, and photographed them.

Photographers like Sherman have been acting before the camera since the early years of the medium. The most famous and possibly the earliest case would be that of French photographer Hippolyte Bayard, who posed himself as a drowning victim in 1840 (fig. 23). Naked to the waist, his sagging body is propped up by cushions between a candle and a broad-brimmed straw hat. His eyes are closed, denying his function as maker of the image and reinforcing that precarious distance of observer and observed. Bayard, who was the first photographer given a one-man show, inscribed the back of this print with a statement regretting the fact that a year before the French government had

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[34] As cited at http://www.metro-pictures.com/cs/cs/htm, "Untitled Statement", Documenta 7, (Kassel: Documenta, 1982).

awarded a pension to Daguerre, thereby endorsing his photographic invention and not Bayard's; although Bayard had also devised a photographic process, he received nothing. So he faked his suicide before the camera, demonstrating his disappointment.[35]

The Self's Mortality

Self-portraiture is ultimately a confrontation with the self's mortality. The self that stares back at the artist was once, when the image was made, and is no longer; marking a time, it portends the inevitability of death. While this may be true in any self-portrait, certain artists, like Bayard, address the point directly. Others do so more subtly.

In his 1968 self-portrait, photographer Duane Michals stands to the right, arms crossed, quietly contemplating his own dead body stretched out on a gurney to the left (fig. 24). The subtle image evokes Bayard's famous drowned man. However, it differs remarkably from the earlier image. Michals seems to suggest that the self-portrait can no longer merely don the disguise of some fictional other in affirmation of any singular self, pictured or otherwise, living or

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[35] David Lee, "Photography", Arts Review, Vol. 38 (October 24, 1986): p. 567.

not. In this portrait the artist pictures himself as two, one living and one dead, simultaneously existing side by side. A profound sense of loss runs through much of Michal's work. Reluctantly accepting the passing of youth and innocence and of the transcience of the physical world, Michal's work recognizes one's aloneness that is closely linked to the sense of mortality.

The Image of the Other

Multiple personality, alter ego, fantasy role—self-portraits portray another self, even in the most clinical depiction. Anyone looking in a mirror discovers first of all a fixed image of him or herself—a persona to which an attempt is made to restore movement or life by a range of grimaces, facial gesticulations and minuscule gestures.[36] One is attempting to act on and alter his or her persona. It is the same in self-portraiture. Every self-portrait is inevitably, by its very nature, a doubling, an image of the other. The self that looks is simply not the self that is rendered and looks back at us. Given this freedom, anything is possible. What is shown may be anything the artist wishes or may deal with any issues he or she desires to represent as either simile or metaphor. Dressing up or making up, the

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[36] Chevrier, "The Image of the Other," Staging the Self, p. 9.

self can be like any other. Disguising the self can also disclose another persona, another self that for whatever reasons is customarily veiled or not openly apparent. The "imaginary" becomes the image.

These images affirm the individual selves of the artist, not as shards or fragments but rather, as Ashbery's poem put it, "...as everything as it/ May be imagined outside time—not as a gesture/ But as all, in the refined assimilable state."[37] Each self-portrait also seems to evidence the essential multiplicity of selves that are the artist and by implication shows that none of us in turn is a singular self. The watchman observes the outer appearance; the spy investigates the meaning or meanings of the inner soul. In a self-portrait they just may have a chance of meeting.

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[37] Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," p. 77.

~ Four ~

Defining a Medium

Wouldn't it be funny, if one could pierce the future, and find that photography was accepted as the great art form, because the mind —'intelligence' is more comprehensive—could be directed through a machine in a purer form.

— Edward Weston
The Daybooks of Edward Weston,
p. 228.

When I began the Master of Fine Arts program, I also began a search for a medium or a combination of media that best enabled me to convey the ideas I had about memory and the construction of the self. Previously, I had utilized a process that was suitable known as solvent transfer. Although pleasing to me on technical grounds, it was also extremely toxic. I challenged myself to master a new less toxic tool and a new technology—the computer.

Artists and Technology

Artists have been experimenting with new technology throughout history. For the past two hundred years, beginning around the time of the Industrial Revolution, the introduction of new technologies has promoted everything from pessimism and fear to admiration and enthusiasm. One such technology was the development of the first widely used photographic process, the daguerreotype. Just over a century later in 1946, the first all-digital electronic computer was introduced. At that time, it could not have been imagined that the computer could have connections to the arts, let alone that it would develop the dramatic and far-reaching creative uses that we see today. More than fifty years

after its introduction, the computer had assumed countless roles—in much the same way that the camera has established itself as a multi-functional tool.

Indeed the revolution of photography enabled printmakers to use new techniques and chemical processes and apply these to the technology of printmaking. Computers appear to offer as dramatic a challenge as that issued by photography one hundred years ago. Manipulating photographs with a computer is now common place. The ink-jet printer is beginning to be seen by some as a printmaker's tool.

In my current work I start with photography, then move to a monoprinting technique known as image transfer. I then translate this to the computer. I sometimes take the image a step further through the lithographic or etching process. This exemplifies a principal direction emerging from computer technology, one that could be described as a hybrid form of montage. Layered in the imagery of computer montage is a possibility to merge memory and temporality. This process mirrors the way in which our memories are subjected to changes and manipulations.

In several of my works layers of images meet layers of temporality. What could sometimes be described as sentimental deconstructions or reconstructions

of the self reintroduce the idea of subjectivity into art production, while at the same time demonstrating the fluidity of the digital image as an ideal mechanism for constructing memory in terms of experience.

The bond linking emotion and imagery has been a continuing presence in the history of photography. Photographs have come to serve more than mimetic functions; they attempt to capture states of mind. There is a particularly strong relationship between photographs and memory. Sigrid Weigel writes that according to Freud, "Memory is inscribed into the body in the form of structure, in response to certain perceptions, the repetition of affects and mental images associated with them."[38] Memories make their mark on the unconscious; functioning as indexical signs in that through the marks they make, they become comprehensible. Photographs are also indexical signs: marks left by light on film and paper. The relationship of photographic images to memory is often framed in terms of the fact that a photograph shows *what once was*. Additionally, this

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[38]Sigrid Weigel, Body- and Image-Space (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 153.

relationship between photographs as indices of visual and memories as indices of events, both marking the unconscious, makes photographic media particularly well-suited for dealing with history and memory.

It has always been my contention that the first objective of making art is to achieve a compelling image; that aim demands a felicity in its implementation. A medium need not sit in isolated purity. There is nothing that forbids paint and photography from combining on a single surface or requires that lithography can never benefit from a liaison with the computer. I see no virtue in circumscribing the technical means of realization. The image will always be more important than the rationale of its execution.

~ Five ~

The Container

I've always been intrigued by small boxes or chests...containers that open and close; elegant keepers of precious possessions. I remember being given a small ballerina jewel box as a child. It was a place where I kept all of my tiny treasures. Now, years later, I would consider myself somewhat of a collector of containers of all descriptions. As well as being a collector, I am a creator of embellished boxes that are also reminiscent of books.

Artist Joseph Cornell is famous for his highly distinctive boxes. The boxes are simple, usually glass-fronted. Behind the glass are photographs or bits of Victoriana arranged in curious combinations (figs. 25,26). Cornell sometimes included anecdotes in his constructions. For example, Taglioni's Jewel Casket (1940, fig. 27) contains the following legend:

> On a moonlight night in the winter of 1835 the/ carriage of Marie TAGLIONI was halted by a Russian highwayman, and that enchanting creature commanded to dance for this audience of one/ upon a panther's skin spread over the snow beneath the stars. From this actuality arose the legend that to keep alive the memory/ of this adventure so precious to her, TAGLIONI formed the habit of placing a piece of artificial ice in her jewel casket or dressing table/ where melting among the sparkling stones, there was

> evoked a hint of the atmosphere of the starlit heavens
> over the ice-covered landscape.[39]

The story refers to Marie Taglioni, a ballerina of the Romantic era. The daughter of a well-known Italian choreographer, she achieved her greatest fame when she danced the title role of "La Sylphide" in Paris in 1832. When Cornell read that she traveled with her own *jewel casket* in which she stored the gems that she had received from kings and tsars, he was inspired to create a replica of the famous box. He also included glass cubes to represent the melting ice described in the legend.

With Taglioni's Jewel Casket Cornell departed from his usual glass-fronted shadow boxes and instead modeled his construction after a jewelry box. A medium-sized wooden chest, it is lined with rich brown velvet. In place of Taglioni's precious jewels, the artist substituted a string of fake diamonds which is pinned to the inside of the box top and dangles gracefully below a sheet of blue glass inscribed with the story.

As can be seen with the Taglioni piece, Cornell's works were often obscure with strange details that were not easily unraveled. He was retentive

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[39] Kynaston McShine, Joseph Cornell (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1980), p. 287.

with meaning, giving nothing away. He resisted instant communication with the viewer just as he resisted easy intimacy with the people in his life. The objects inside the boxes were not just random assortments of material but souvenirs of a quest, a chronicle of infatuations whose meaning was as complicatedly inward as a private journal.

Boxes, according to philosopher Gaston Bachelard, are "complex pieces that a craftsman creates...[they] are very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding places."[40] This notion would seem to relate to the fact that Cornell, according to Cornell researcher Mary Ann Caws, "was shy and secretive, yet he had a compelling effect on those who came in contact with him, many of whom describe the atmosphere he created around him as magical."[41]

Cornell constantly regretted the passing of time and the incapacity of the pen to hold down the moment.[42] If this notion is undeniably Romantic, the effort

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[40] Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 81.

[41] Mary Ann Caws, ed. Joseph Cornell's Theater of the Mind (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), p. 21.

[42] McShine, Joseph Cornell, p. 11.

to represent the moment is decidedly Symbolist in tone and technique. Each box seems to work by the ineffable associations among the objects.

Cornell attempted to achieve an aged timelessness in his works. He would varnish and polish the wood so that it would have an antique appearance. He left boxes outdoors to achieve a weathered look. To encourage the paint to crack and peel, he sometimes placed a construction in the oven. All of this was to add to the suggestion of times past.

Like Cornell, I am trying to create a sense of times past with my box constructions (figs. 28-31). I use the book shape since books are often the keepers of memories. For instance, diaries keep our most closely guarded thoughts, and photo albums store our visual records. These books are my visual records—my memory books. I produce the boxes from beginning to end. Once the book structure is constructed I layer on fragments of gold leaf and distress and stain the surface to imitate an antique surface. I then mount image transfers or small gilded objects inside. The contents are like souvenirs of the past. Sometimes I utilize verdigris finishes or crackle glazes. The boxes that are more like books with interior spaces have an antique quality. This simulated antiquity suggests the physical traces of the past and an aged timelessness.

~ Six ~

Time Pieces

The Exhibition

A room that resembles a reverie…

— Charles Baudelaire
The Parisian Prowler: Le Spleen de Paris Petits Poèmes en prose.
p. 6.

In both the works and the installation of the exhibition, I have tried to set up a contrast with regard to the intimacy of the work. Through a combination of warm colours, scale and seductive imagery the viewer is invited in and in fact enticed into thinking all the work is of an intimate nature. However, not unlike the books encased in glass, the viewer is kept at a distance—unable to gain easy access—to look inside. There is a deliberate distancing. While some of the prints are of a large scale, others are smaller. The book constructions are smaller still. The large prints evoke a past or otherwise remote experience and, at the same time, refer to the present. However, the present is impersonal compared to the intimate and direct experience of the past. Nostalgia is evoked in the distance between the present and an imagined experience. There is an obliqueness to the work that leads the viewer to surmise that the self-portraits are less intimate and open than they initially expected. The self-portraits are both open and closed, revealing and veiling. It is a combination of scale as well as the nostalgic content that creates this distancing in the work.

Nostalgia is a deep sense of loss that creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia like any form of emotion is always

descriptive, both real and imagined at the same time. Hence, we sometimes see the world through rose-coloured glasses or conversely as terrifying visions. Nostalgia seeks a past that has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack. This point of desire that nostalgia seeks is in fact the absence that is the very generating mechanism of a desire for memory.

I seek both to distance and appropriate the past. I am searching for an internal relation between past and present that is made possible by their juxtaposition. My search is both aesthetic and thematic. I use references from the actual past in order to create a constructed past available for consumption.

The works in the exhibition "Time Pieces" are redolent of another time. Influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists, I often include characteristics of these movements in my work. Six Views of a Moment (1998, fig. 32) has close ties with works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Fernand Khnopff, and Edward Burne-Jones. The multiplication of a single likeness provides a narrative element. As in Rossetti's Rosa Triplex (1874, fig. 33), the work becomes an iconization of several appearances of the same figure as it returns to the arena of memory. Similarly, Khnopff's Memories (1889, fig. 34), exudes the dream-like air

that memory conveys. In this work, which recalls a time released from time, the same figure can go on duplicating itself endlessly like the expanding ripples of a wave. The work also evokes a sense of tension and suspense, as is often the case with Khnopff. Exhibited in 1890 in London, it was known as the Tennis Party. Khnopff frequently visited England and was acquainted with Burne-Jones, whose painting The Mill (1870, fig. 35) is in some ways similar to Memories. Another Burne-Jones work that was discussed in chapter two, The Golden Stairs (fig. 2), also relates to this work in that it is a striking example of a visual echo. It is a multiple image of what appears to be the same subject.

Symbolist in nature, Six Views of a Moment evokes an atmosphere while never expressly describing its subject matter. With this piece, I wanted to convey the sense of the passage of time and the multitude of selves there in. While there are six representations of the self, they do not see each other. Their gaze never quite connects with any other. They are looking but not seeing. For this reason, I considered titling this piece Searching. For each of the incarnations seems to be searching for another self.

Clarence H. White's Morning (1905, fig. 36) and an untitled work by George Seeley (1906-07, fig. 37) share similarities with my work Wings of

Silence (1998, fig. 38). All three works illustrate the principles of pictorialist landscape representation. There is a separating of solid forms into abstract surfaces that consist of low contrast lights and darks. The limited pictorial depth causes the figure to become unified with the landscape. The subtle use of light enhances the symbolism of the composition. The figure dressed in white, typically a symbol for purity or innocence, conjures up representations of the Madonna.

The work Memory's Echo (1999, fig. 39) has similarities to Edvard Munch's The Sick Child (1896, fig. 40). Munch often utilized personal memory in his depictions of love, life and death. He said, "I do not paint what I see, but what I saw."[43] According to Munch researcher Arne Eggum, while Munch was working on the painted version of The Sick Child (1885-86, fig. 41) "he was trying to recall the contours and colours he 'had recorded in his inner eye—on the cornea', imprinted at a moving moment in his youth. He reworked the painting many times in order to make 'the emotion vibrate'."[44] Munch often emphasized the

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[43] Quoted in Ragna Stang, Edward Munch: The Man and His Art (New York: Abbeville Press, Inc., 1977), p. 34.
[44] Arne Eggum, trans. Birgit Holm, Munch and Photography (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 36.

artist's emotional experience. In The Sick Child, he wanted to express the painful, traumatic feelings surrounding his memory of his sister Sophie's illness and death when she was fifteen and he thirteen. So profound was Munch's experiencing of his sister's death that he was compelled to work with the image repeatedly in both paintings and prints.

A photograph I first saw at The Royal Photographic Society in Bath, England has characteristics in common with a print I had produced months earlier entitled The Rememberer (1998, fig. 42). Hypnos (1897, fig. 43) by F. Holland Day, depicts a youth with eyes closed breathing in the perfume of a flower. The poppy and the bird's wings attached to his head with a headband identify the subject as Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep, brother of Thanatos (death) and son of Nyx (night). In Symbolist art, representations of Hypnos are closely connected with Mnemosyne, the personification of memory. In the exhibition I place The Rememberer together with Fragment I (1998, fig. 44) and Fragment II (1998, fig. 45). The *fragments refer* to the sensory stimulants that often trigger powerful memories in the rememberer. As was discussed in chapter two, Marcel Proust with his writings depicted this aspect of memory with considerable effect.

All three of these works as well as Memento Mori I (1999, fig. 46) and Memento Mori II (1999, fig. 47) contain another symbolic element that I sometimes use in my work. That is the flower. According to art historian Wendy Slatkin, "flowers often symbolize the transience of life and inevitability of death."[45] They are often included in portraits of women, usually as a memento mori image evoking the moralizing judgements of the passing of earthly beauty.

Anamnesis (1998, fig. 48), Greek for remembrance is reminiscent of two anonymous photographs of Loie Fuller Dancing (c. 1906, fig. 49, 50). The sweeping, blurred fabric in all three of these images creates an ethereal quality. The figure is barely tangible in its ghost-like appearance. It is shaped to great extent by its absence and its essential irretrivability.

The same could be said for my work Reliquiae (1998, fig. 51). This piece shares commonalties with another photograph that I first saw at the Royal Photographic Society. George Seeley's The Black Bowl (1907, fig. 52) has the same veiled quality as Reliquiae. Both works are subtle in their appearance, hovering on the edge of absence. There is a dissolution of solid structures into

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[45] Wendy Slatkin. Women Artists in History from Antiquity to the 20th Century (New Jersey: Prentice –Hall, Inc., 1990), p. 123.

abstract low-contrast bright and dark surfaces, along with the limitation of pictorial depth. This causes the figure to meld into a unity with its surroundings. At the same time, the subtle use of light and/ or brightness corresponds to the symbolic expression of the composition.

Simulated antiquity is evident in Reliquiae. This quality also appears in many of the other pieces. In much of the work, there is evidence of erosion or a wearing away of time. The edges of this print imitate an appearance of decay or mold. Reinforcing this idea is the title Reliquiae, from the Latin *reliquus,* which means remains.

As discussed in chapter five, simulated antiquity is also present in the book constructions (figs. 28-31). They are reminiscent of another time. In the exhibition, while some of the books are open and reveal their contents, others remain closed, concealing what rests inside. The viewer, who might just as easily pick up a closed book and open it revealing its contents, is unable to do so. Enclosed in glass cases, the books are protected from the viewer who is only allowed to wonder at the hidden contents of the closed containers.

The effects of time and the relevance of memory are also evident in the series of lithographs entitled Looking for Yesterday (1999, fig. 53-56). The prints

are all a brownish sepia color evoking times past. This series draws on many influences, experiences and memories. The works revolve around my British ancestry. My grandfather emigrated from England to Canada in March 1905. Ninety-four years later while I was a visiting student at the Royal College of Art in London, I journeyed to his birthplace. The text in the prints is taken from poems in his journals and letters he wrote back to his family in England. These letters often described his memories of special places and events. I traveled to all the places mentioned in the letters, experiencing it through the combination of the places I saw and the words he wrote. In this way, the images are stereoscopic both in their appearance and their concept. I was able to see it all through his eyes. The hands and eyes in the prints are those of my ancestors who remained in England and were often the recipients of his letters. A student at the Royal College of Art observed that the hands are like *spectres*. In many ways they are. They are the ghosts of memory.

Conclusion

It is fitting that the external media in which we pass on our personal memories—including family photos, portraits and other heirlooms—are in some

ways characterized by the fragile power that I discussed in chapter two. These physical traces of the past may fade, decay, and even change over time, but they continue to exude a compelling emotional aura.

I am fascinated by the relationship between time and our attempts to resist its passage by immortalizing events or moments in enshrinements of objects and images. As these images become veiled by time they lose their clarity, definition and meaning but retain a visceral presence that carries the energy and emotions of the moment in which they were created. It is just this emotional aura that I hope to have conveyed with my "Time Pieces".

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Figures

Figure 1

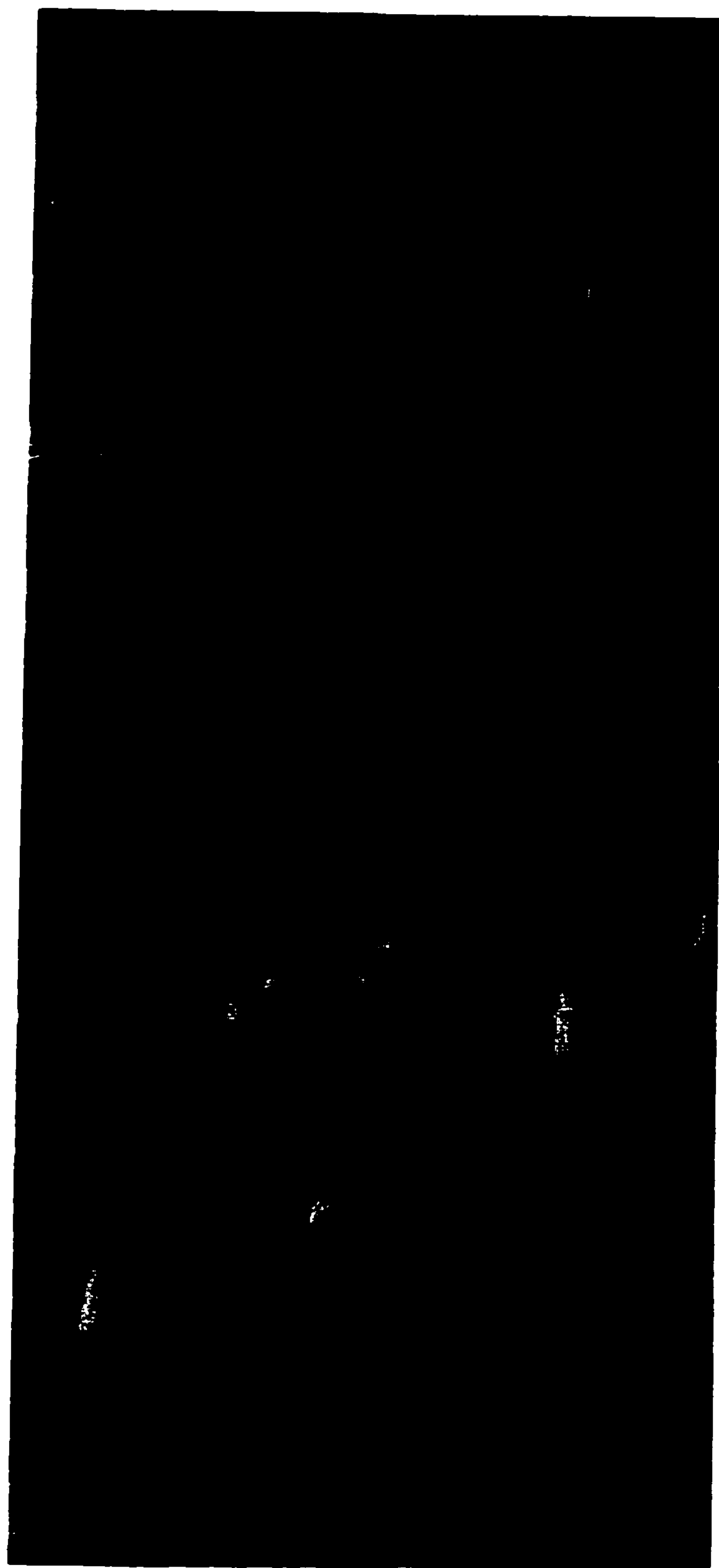


Figure 2

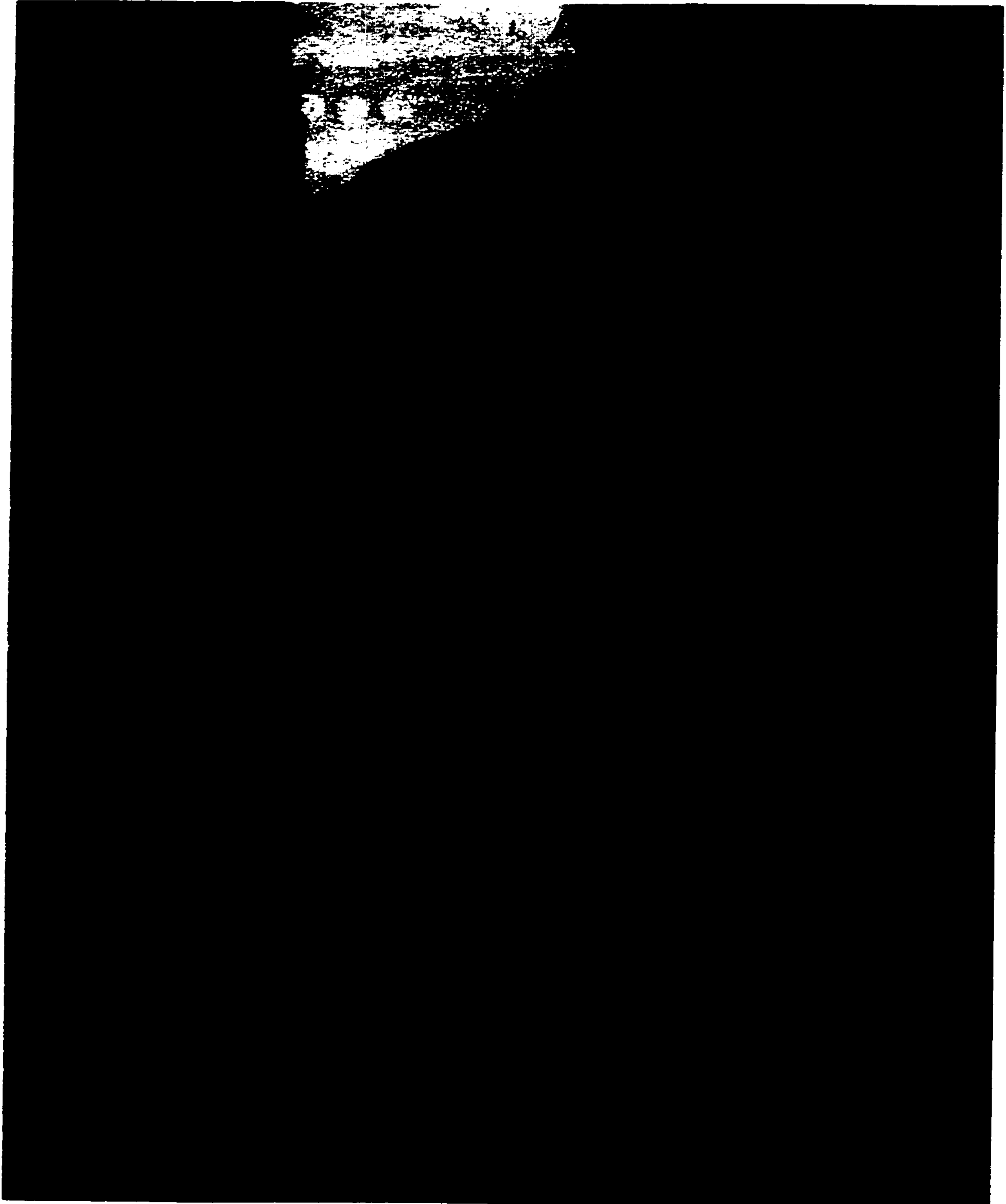


Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

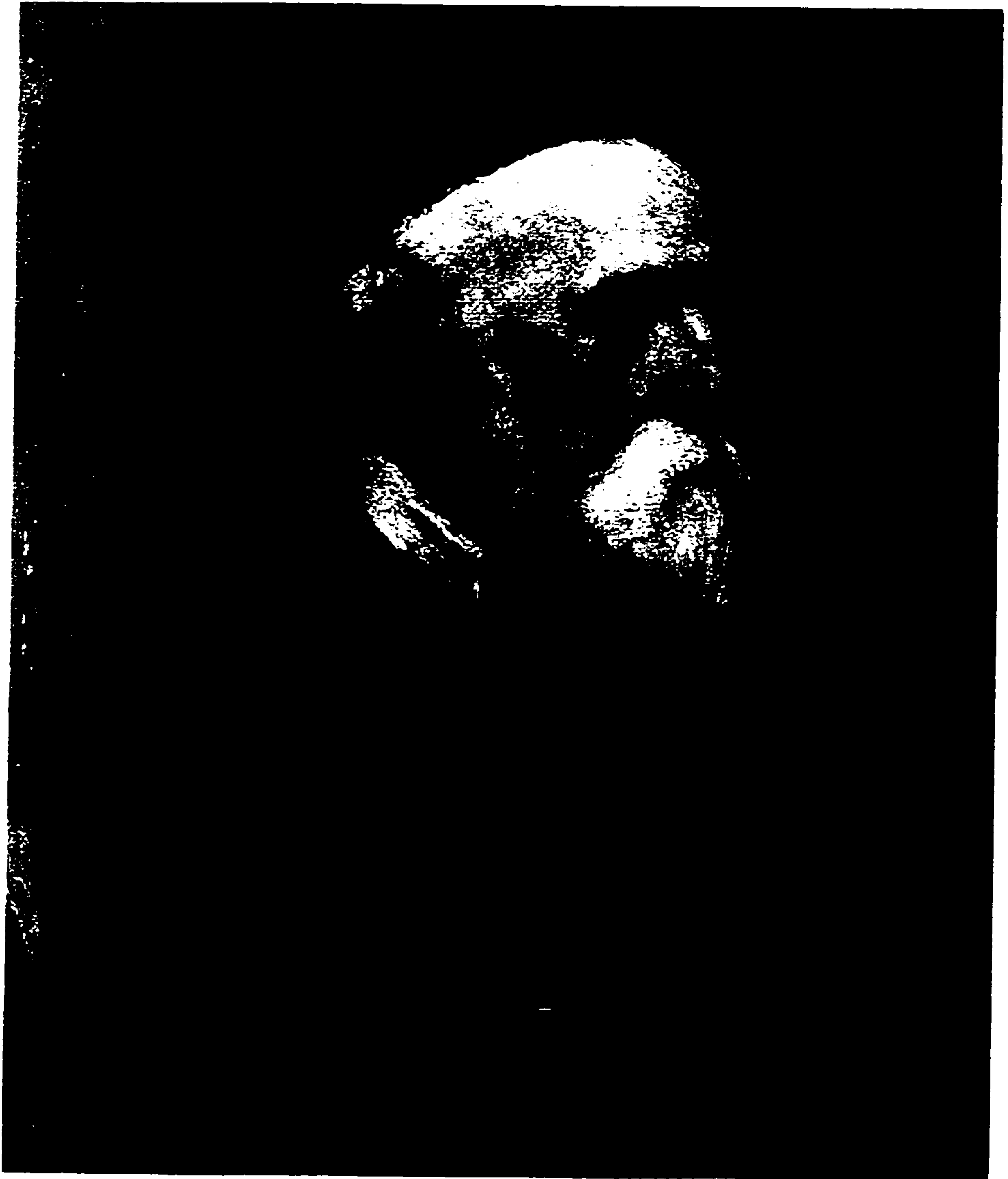


Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

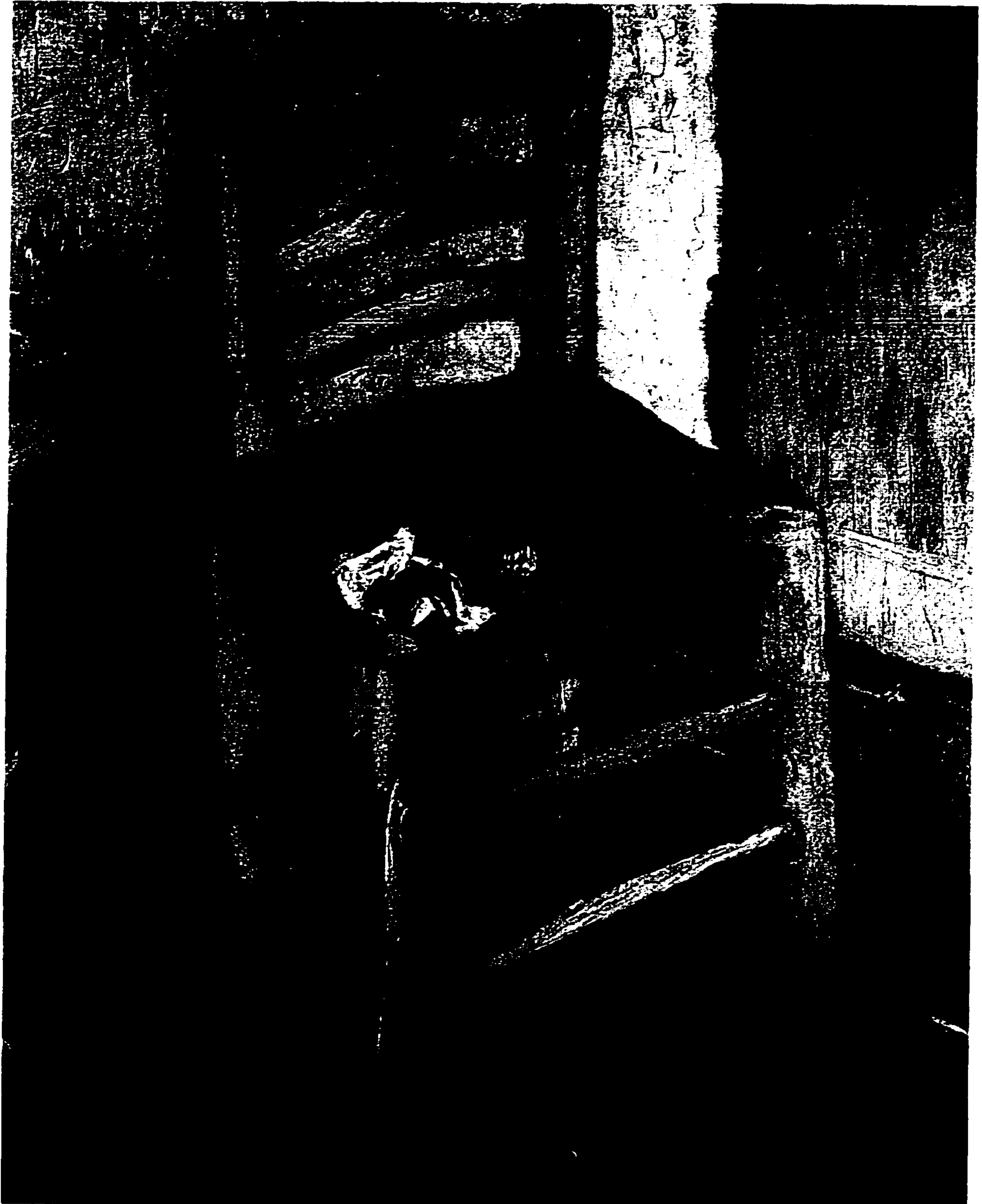


Figure 9

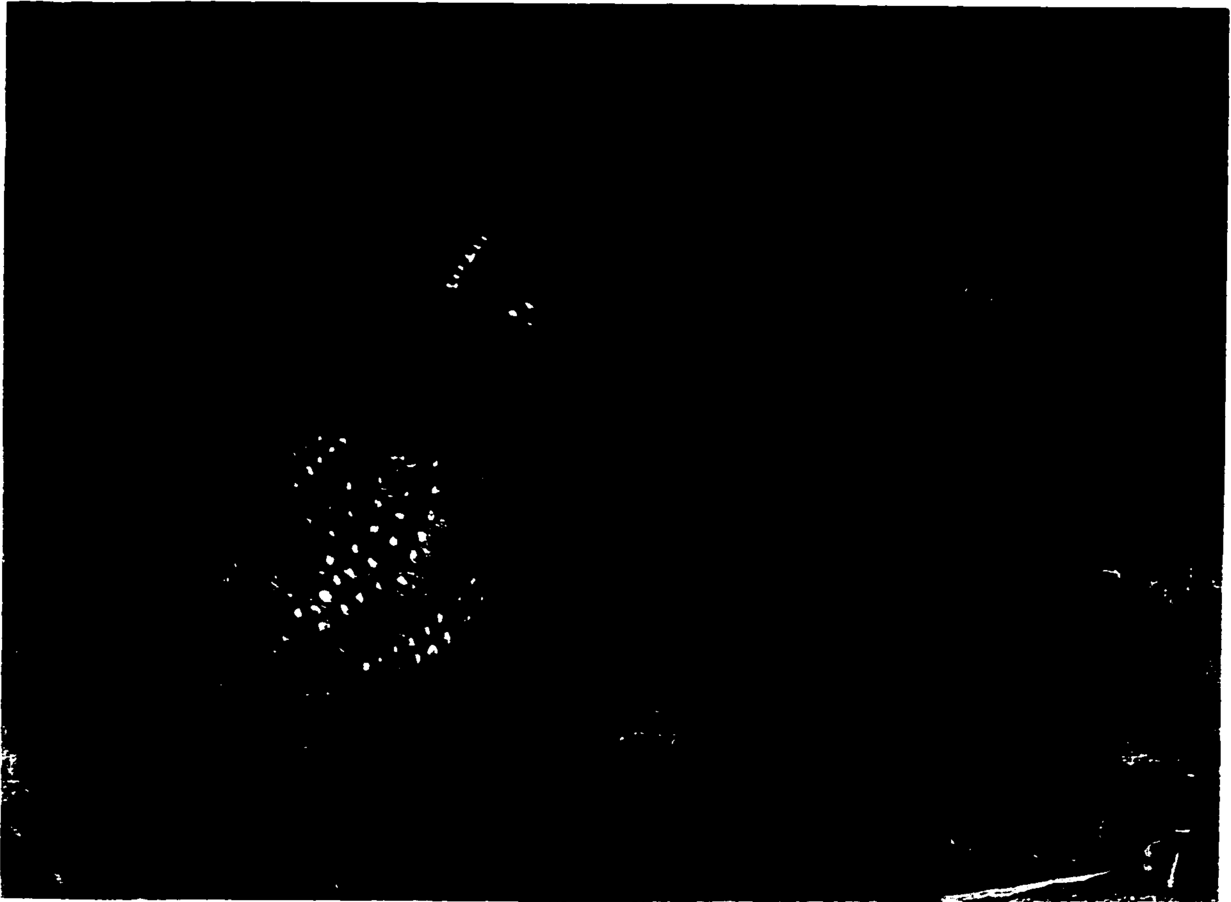


Figure 10

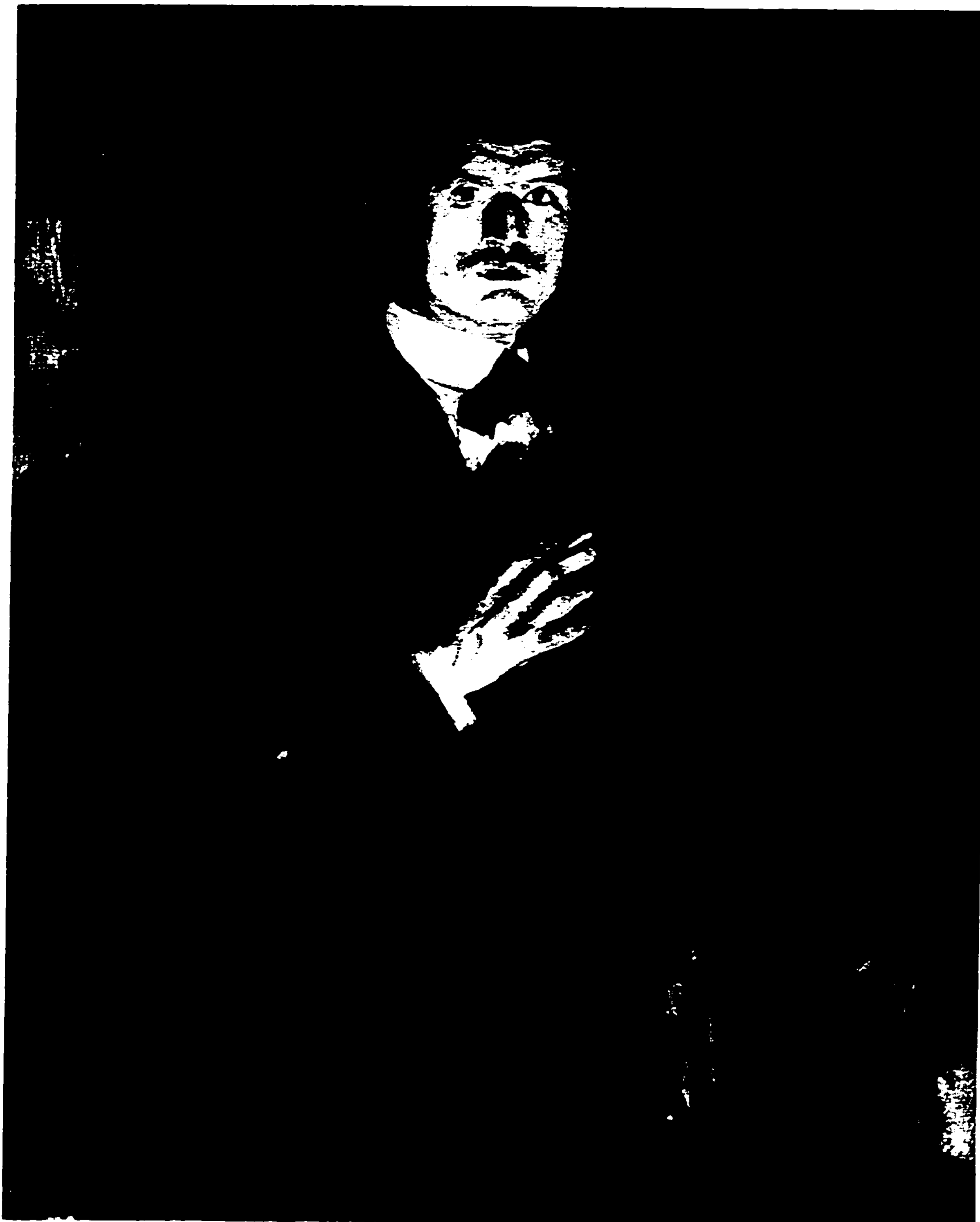
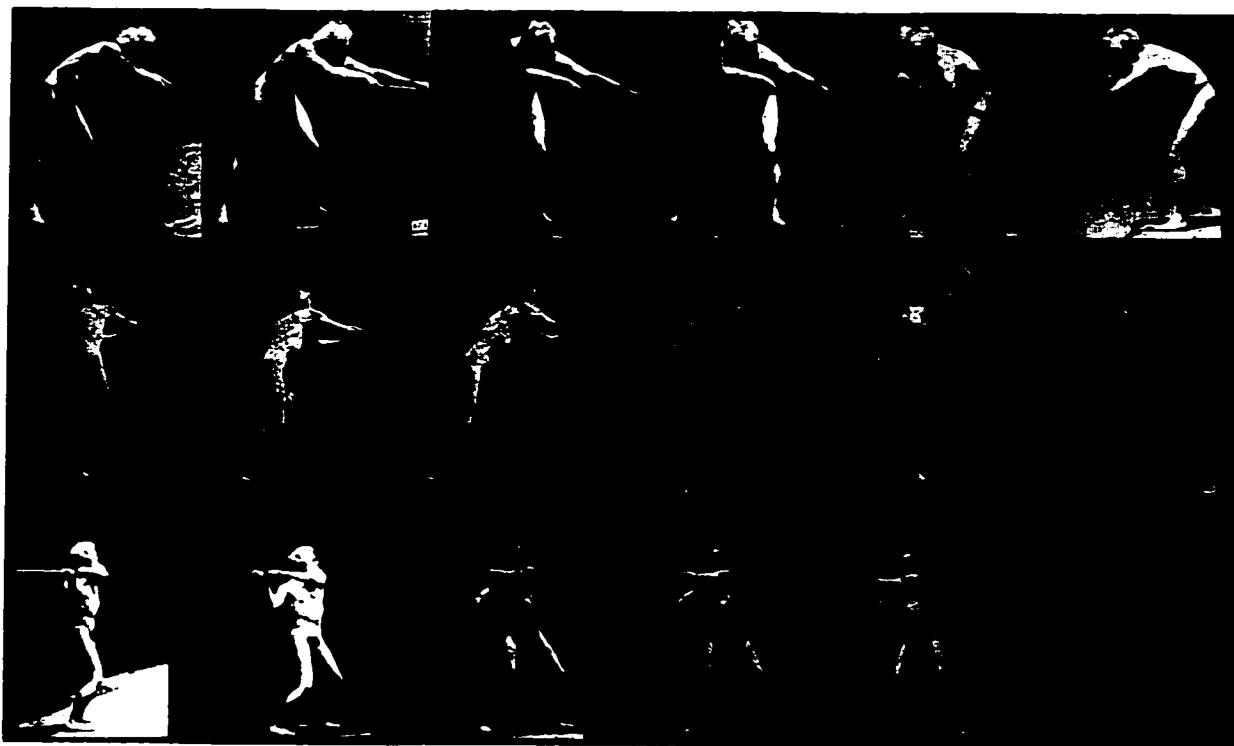


Figure 11



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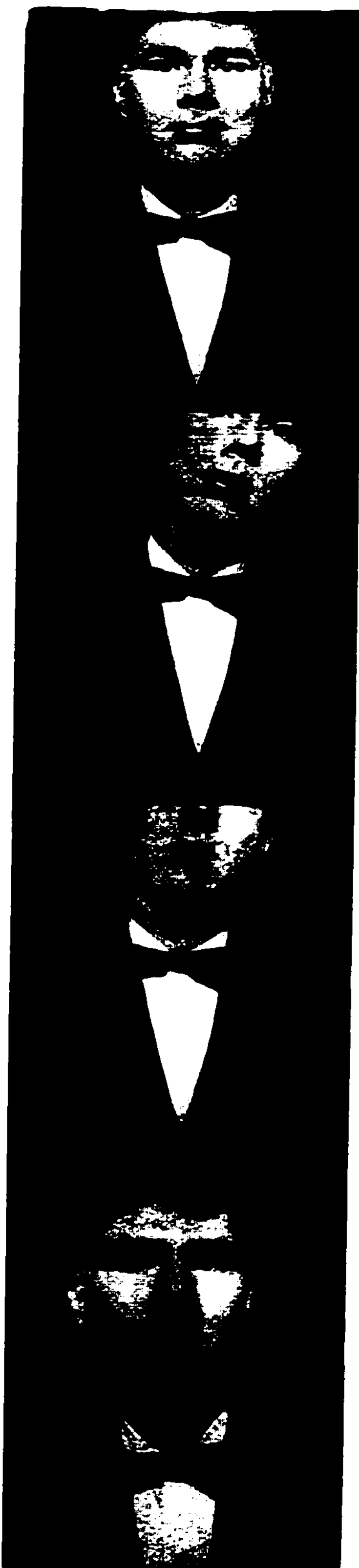

Figure 13

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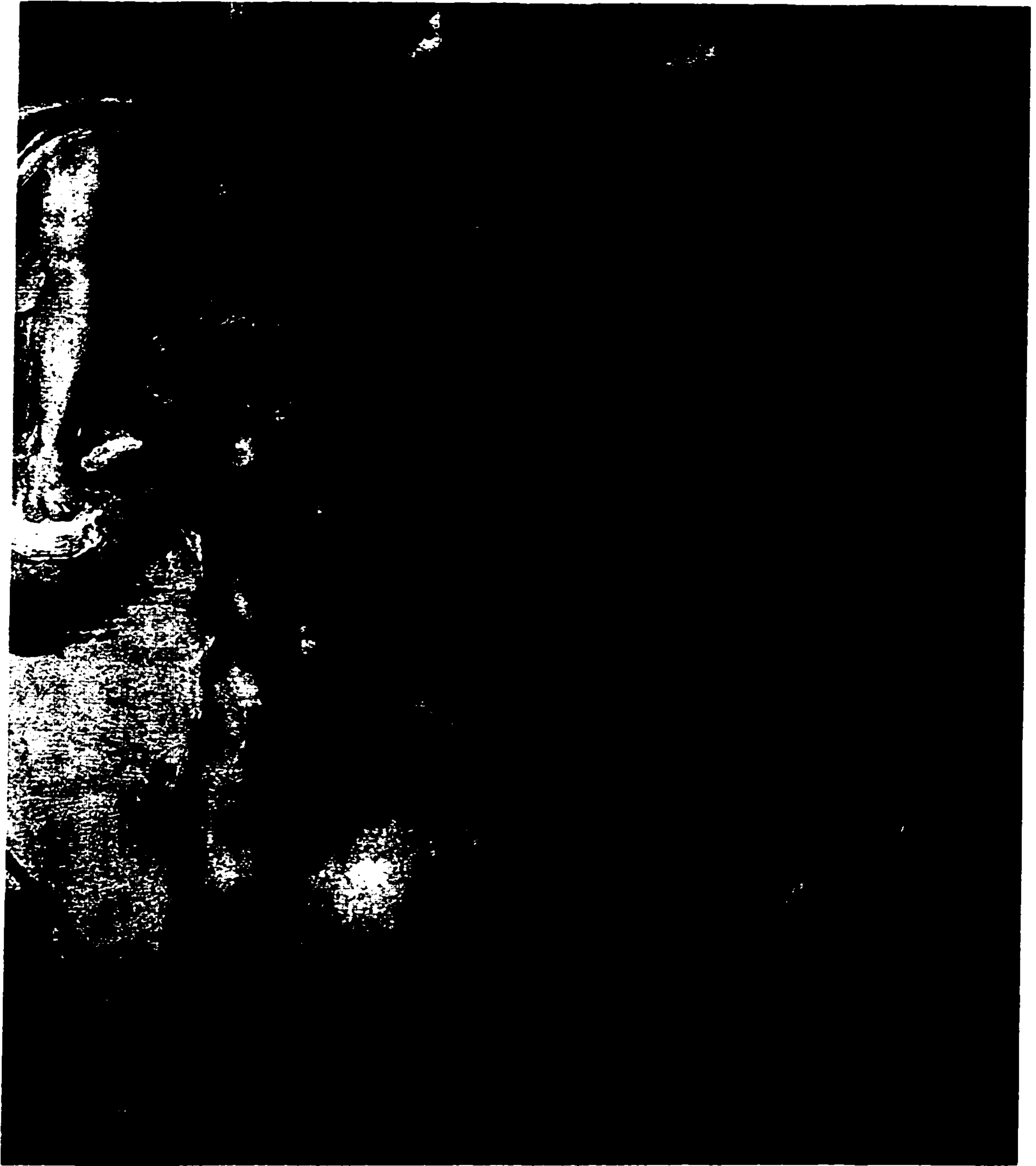

Figure 14

Figure 15

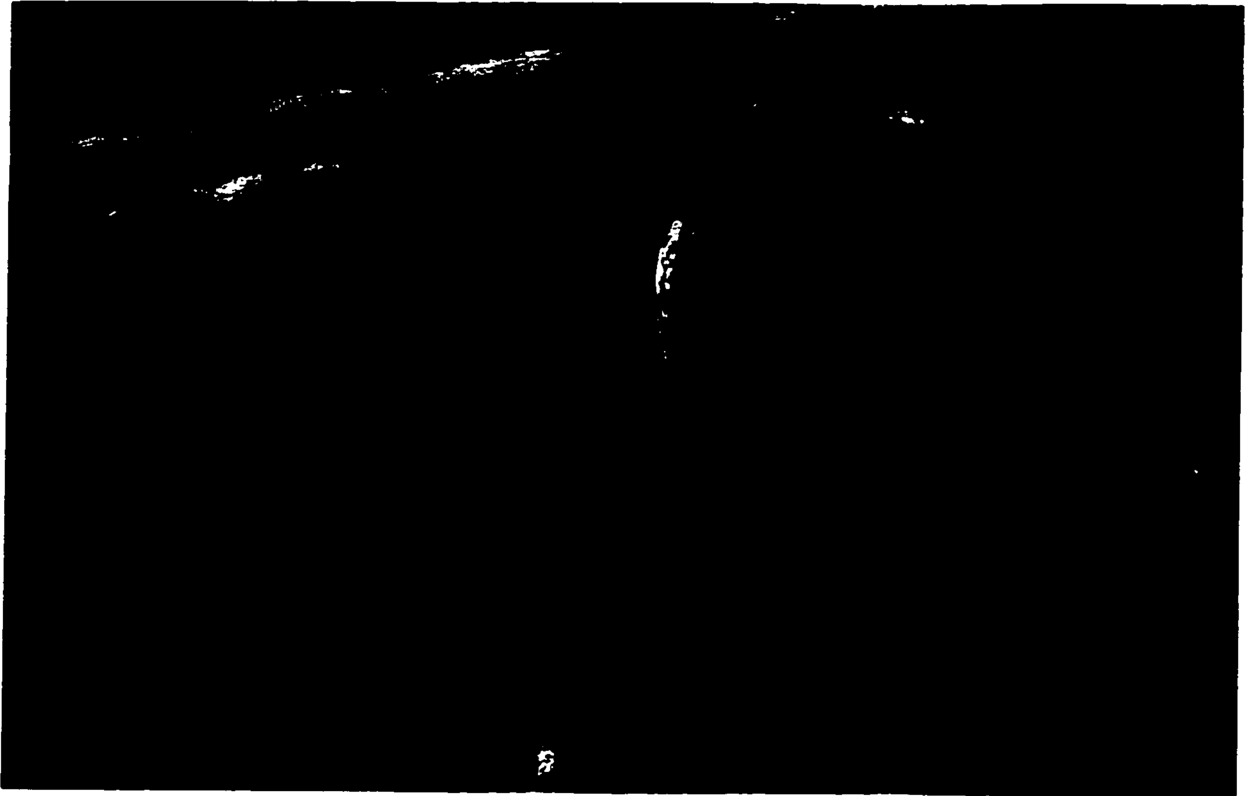

Figure 16

Figure 17

Figure 18

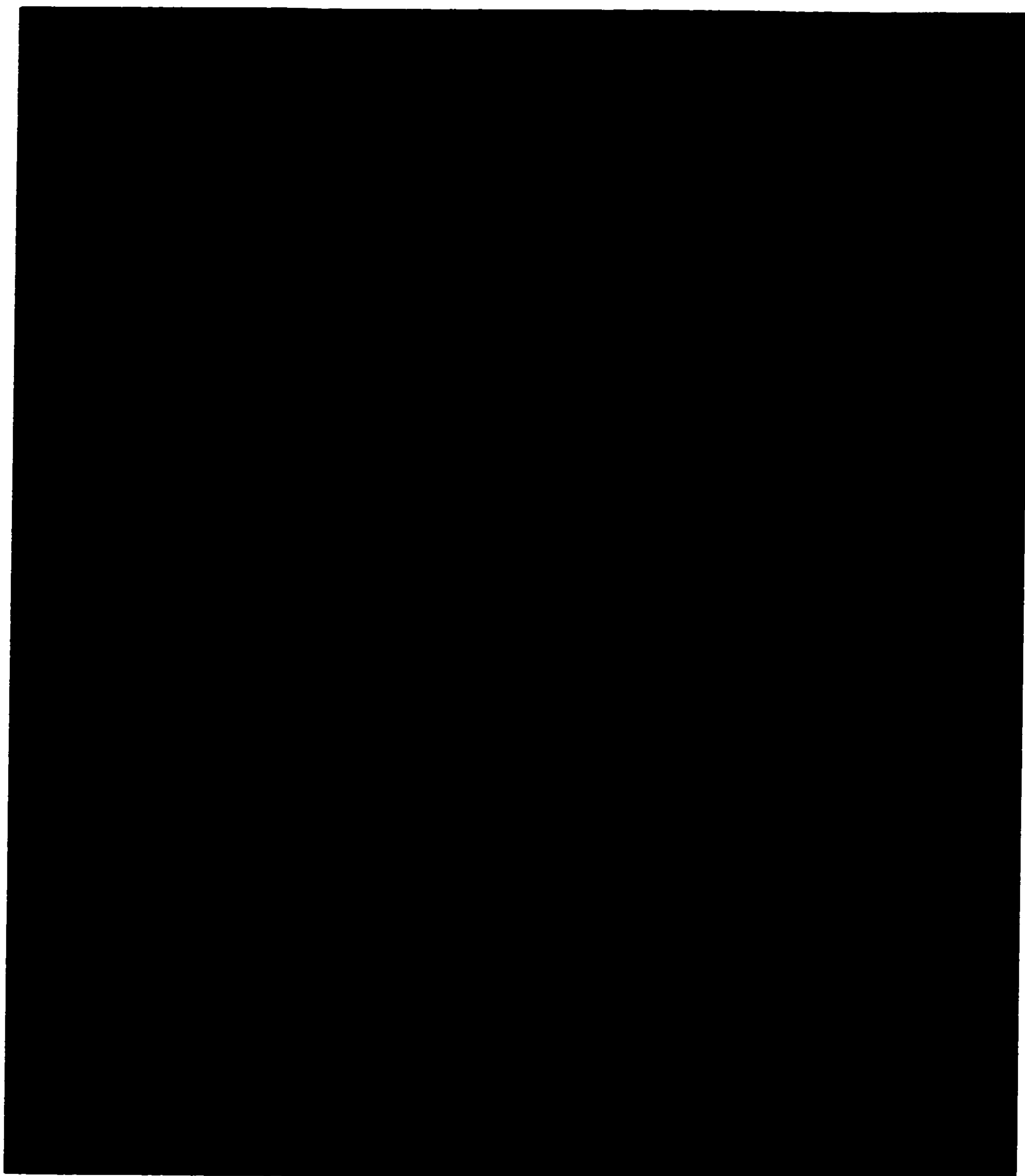

Figure 19

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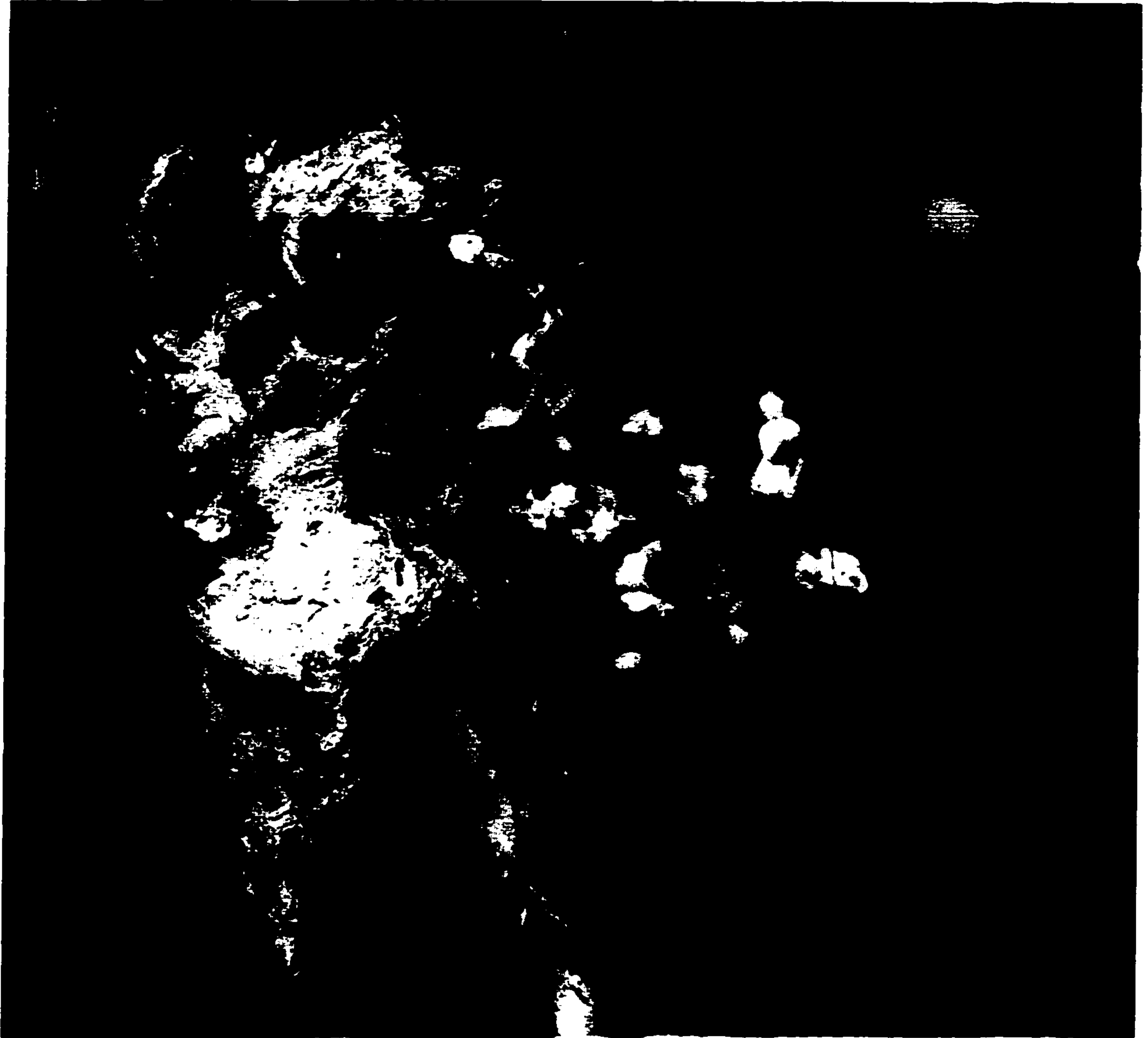

Figure 20

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Figure 21

© Cindy Sherman / Photograph courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures

Figure 22
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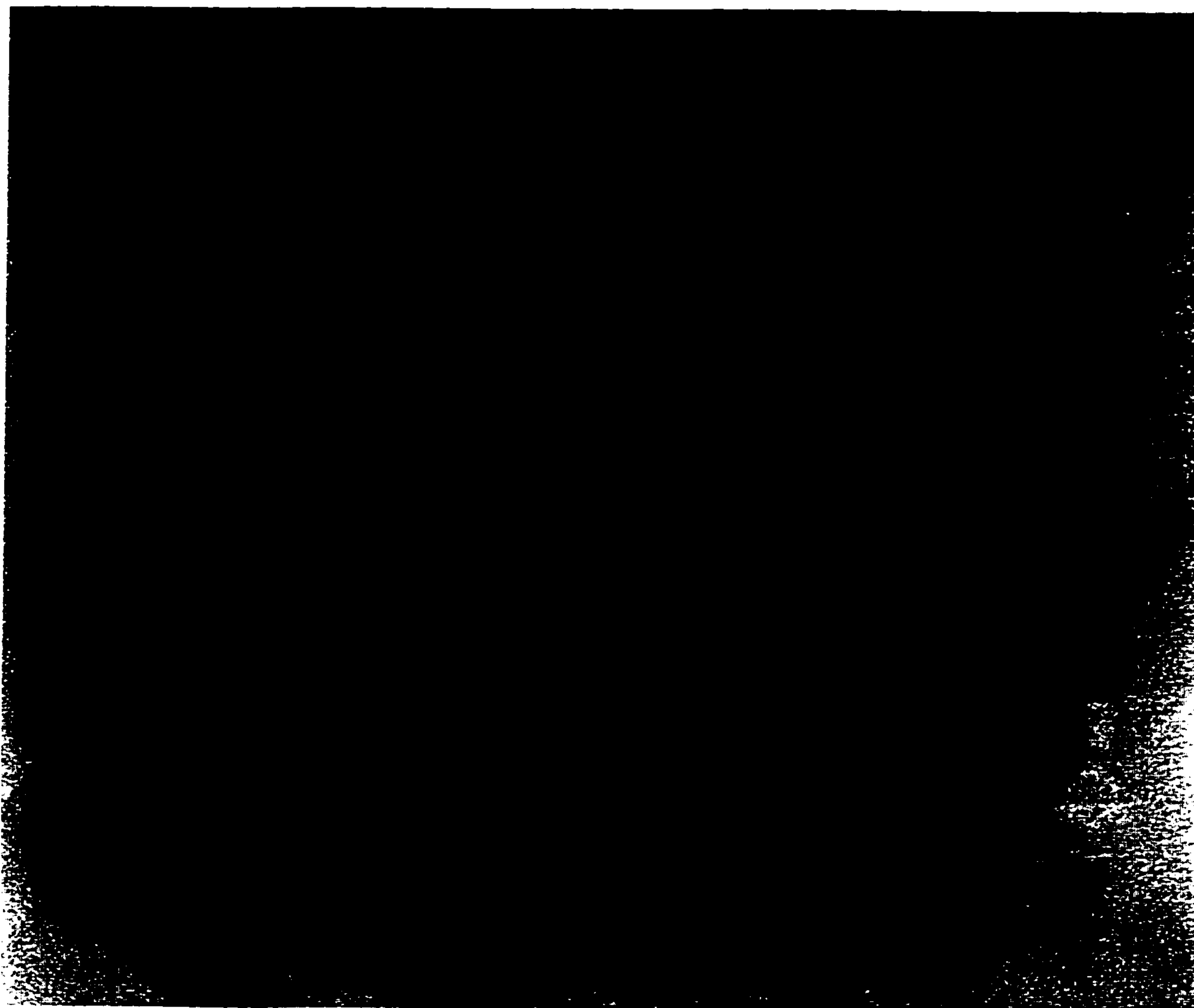

Figure 23

Figure 24
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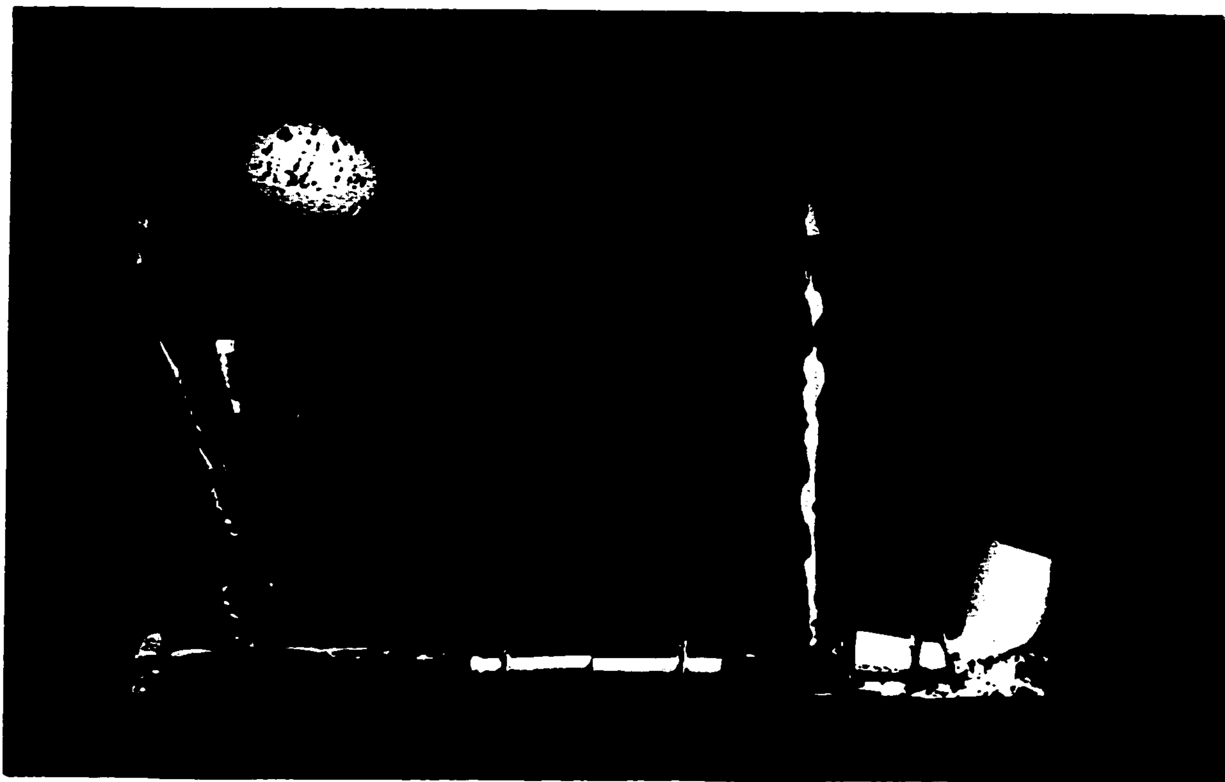

Figure 26

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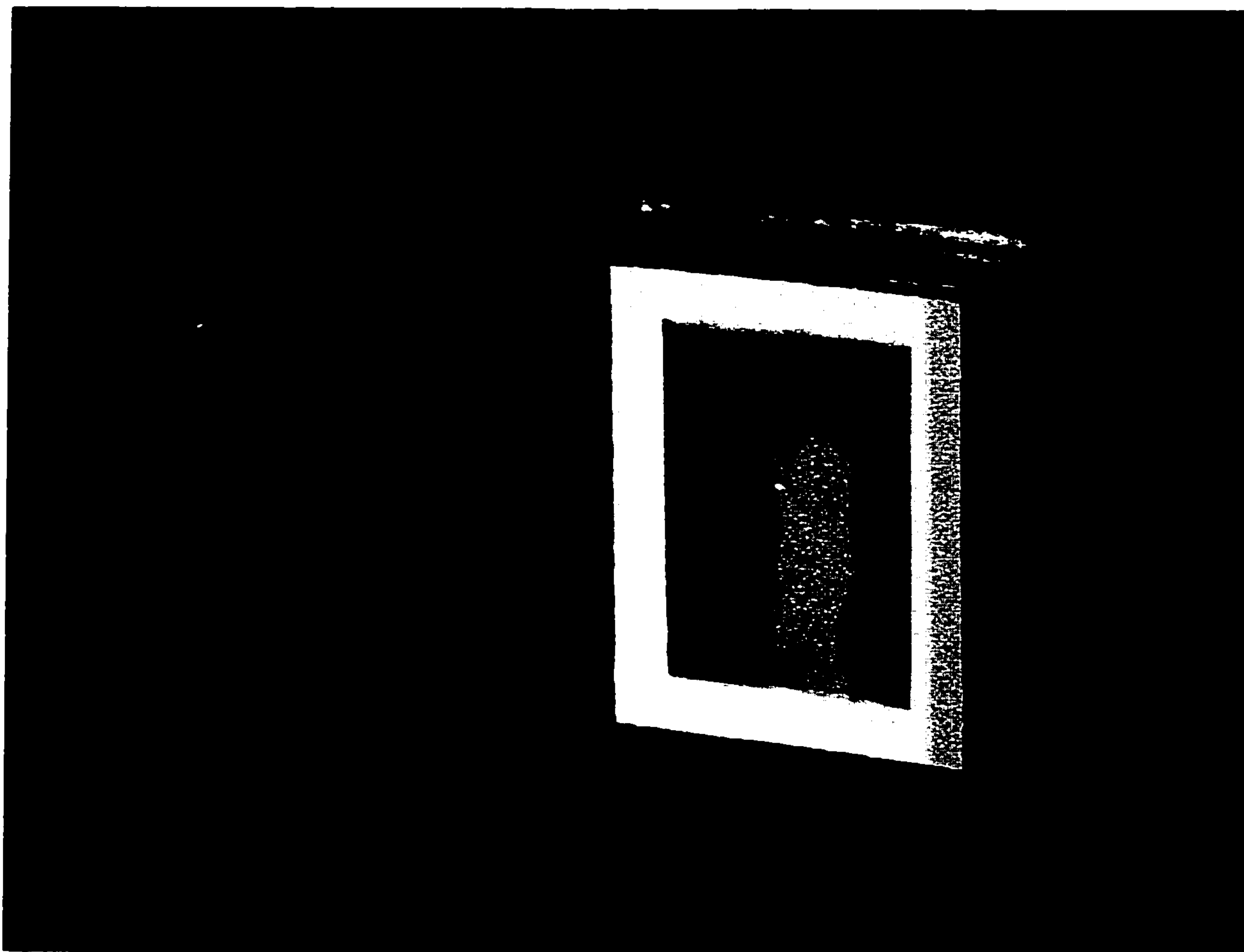

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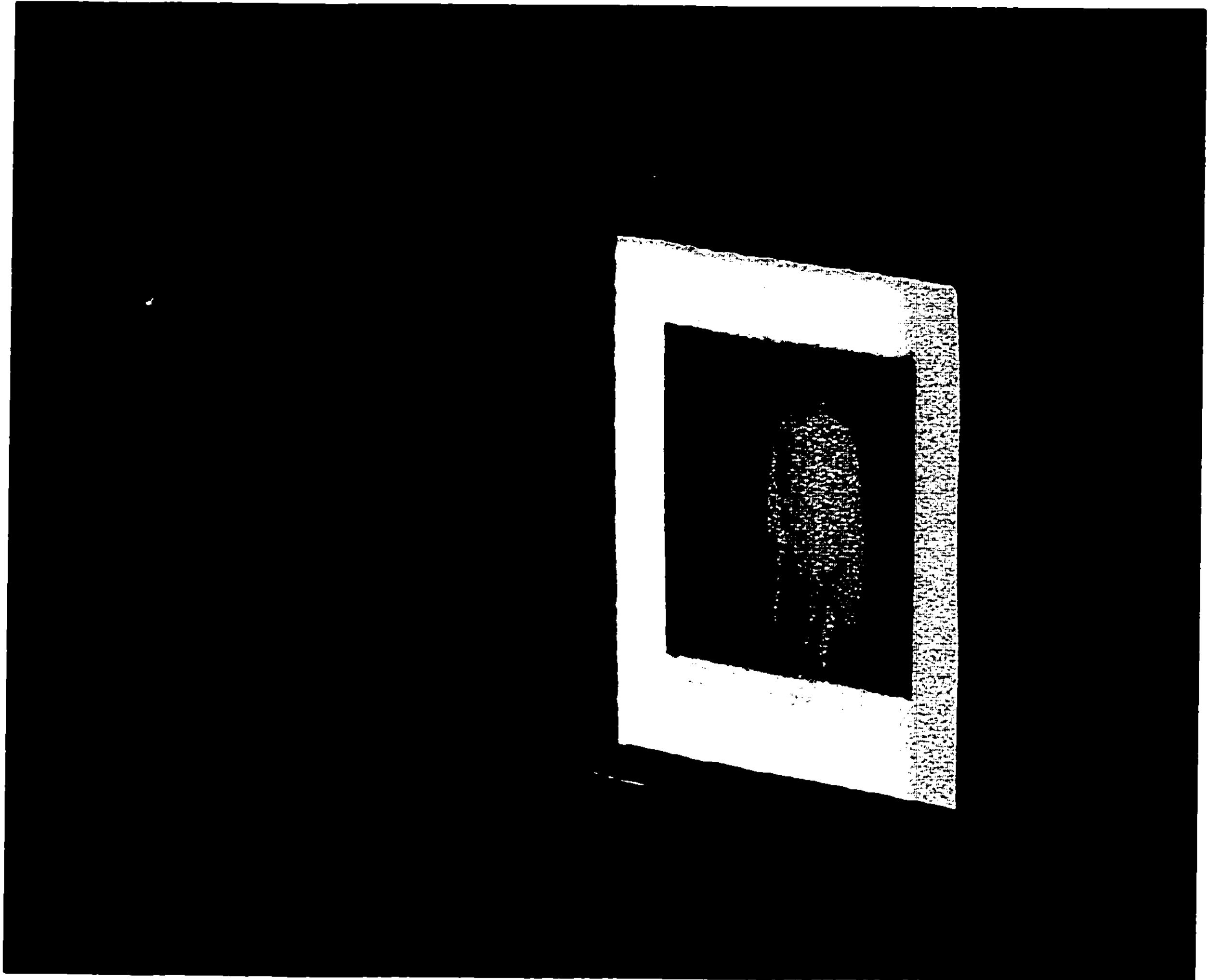

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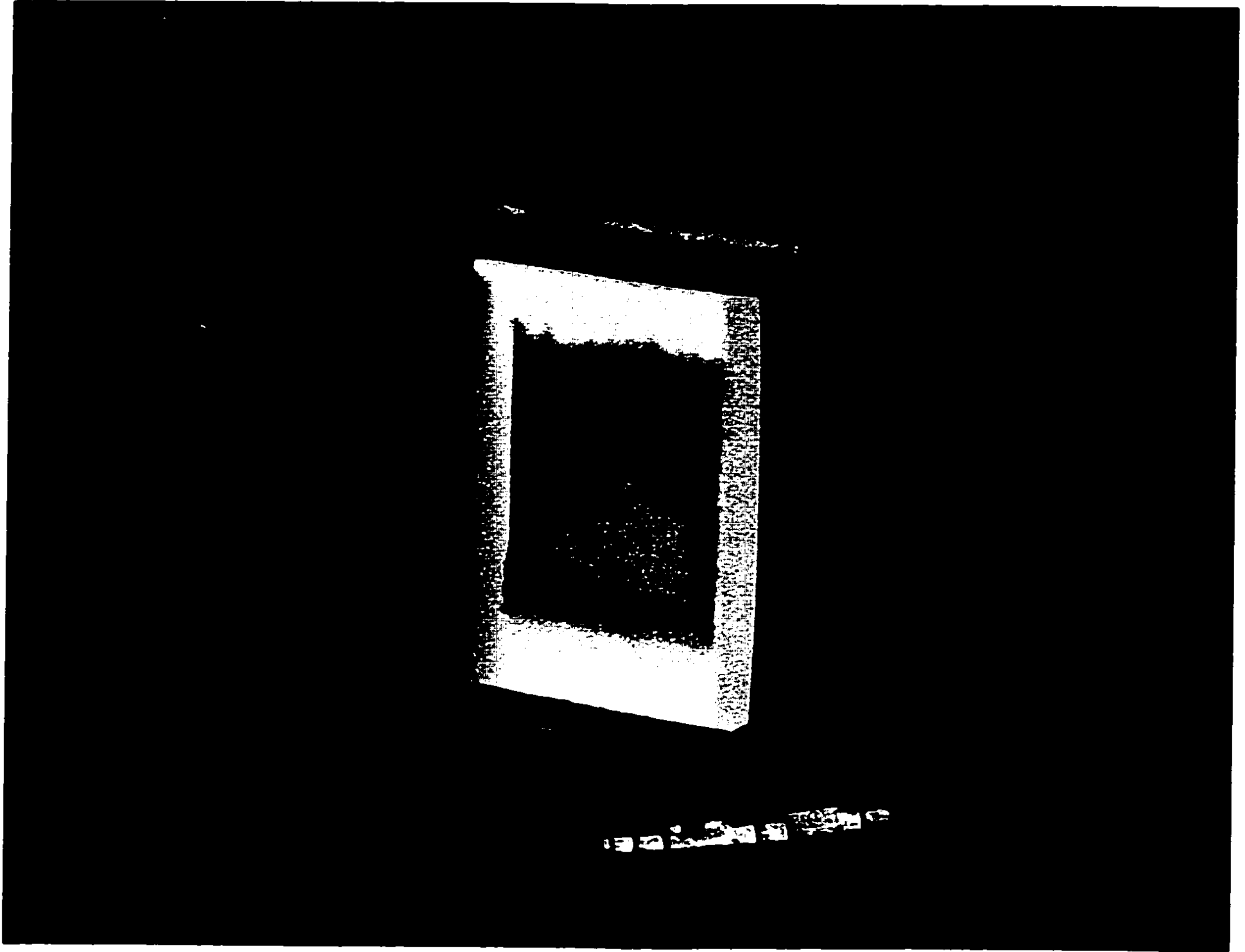

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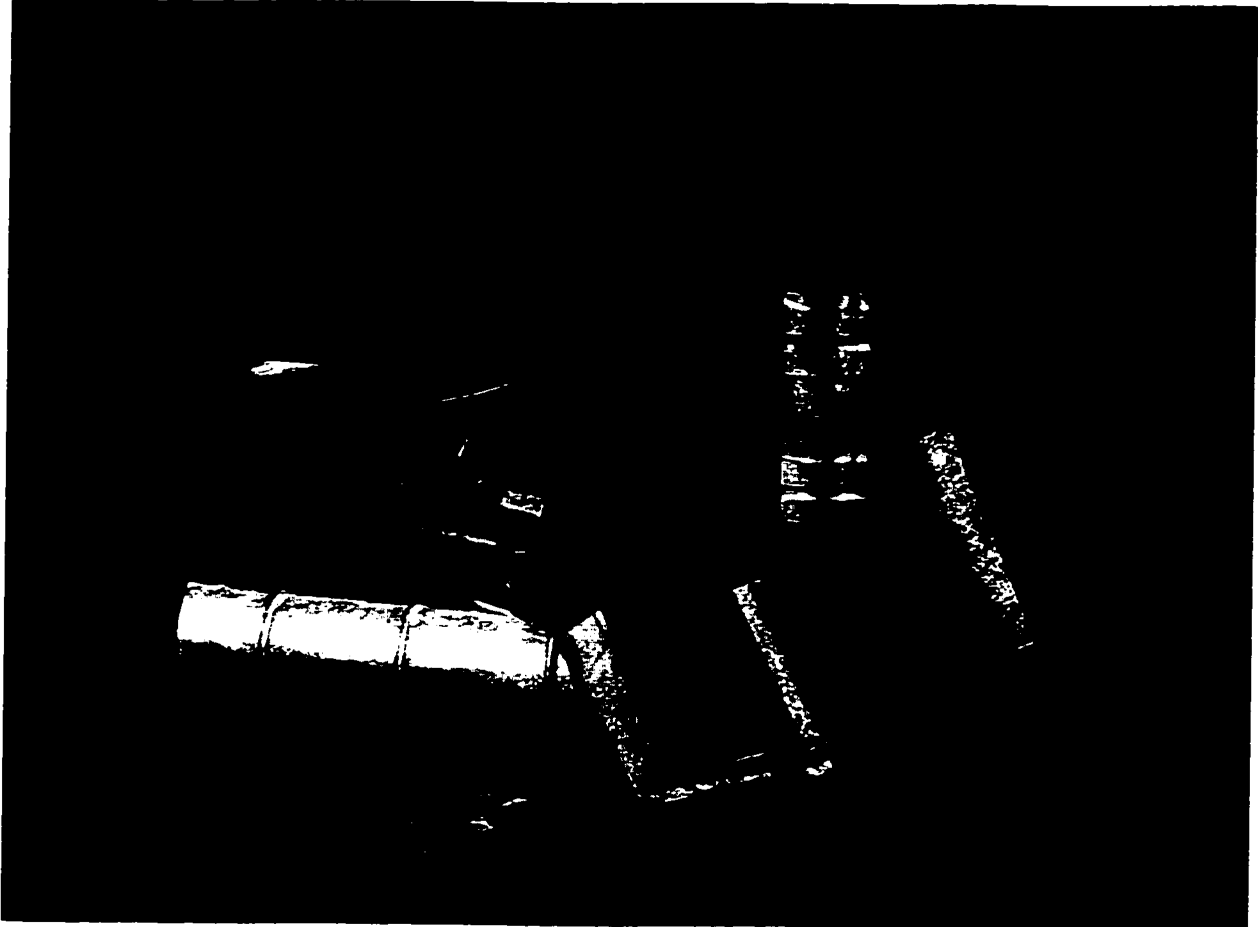

Figure 31

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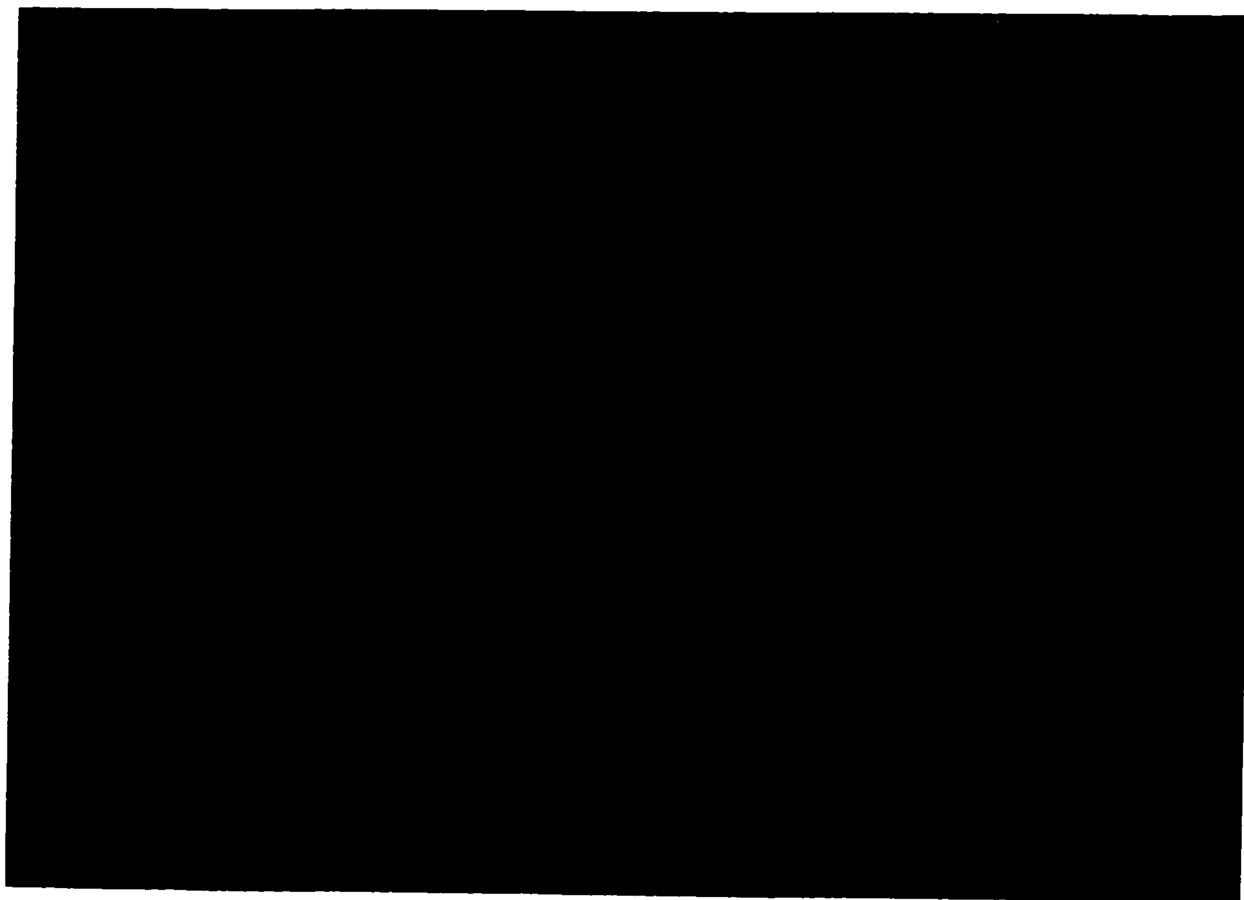
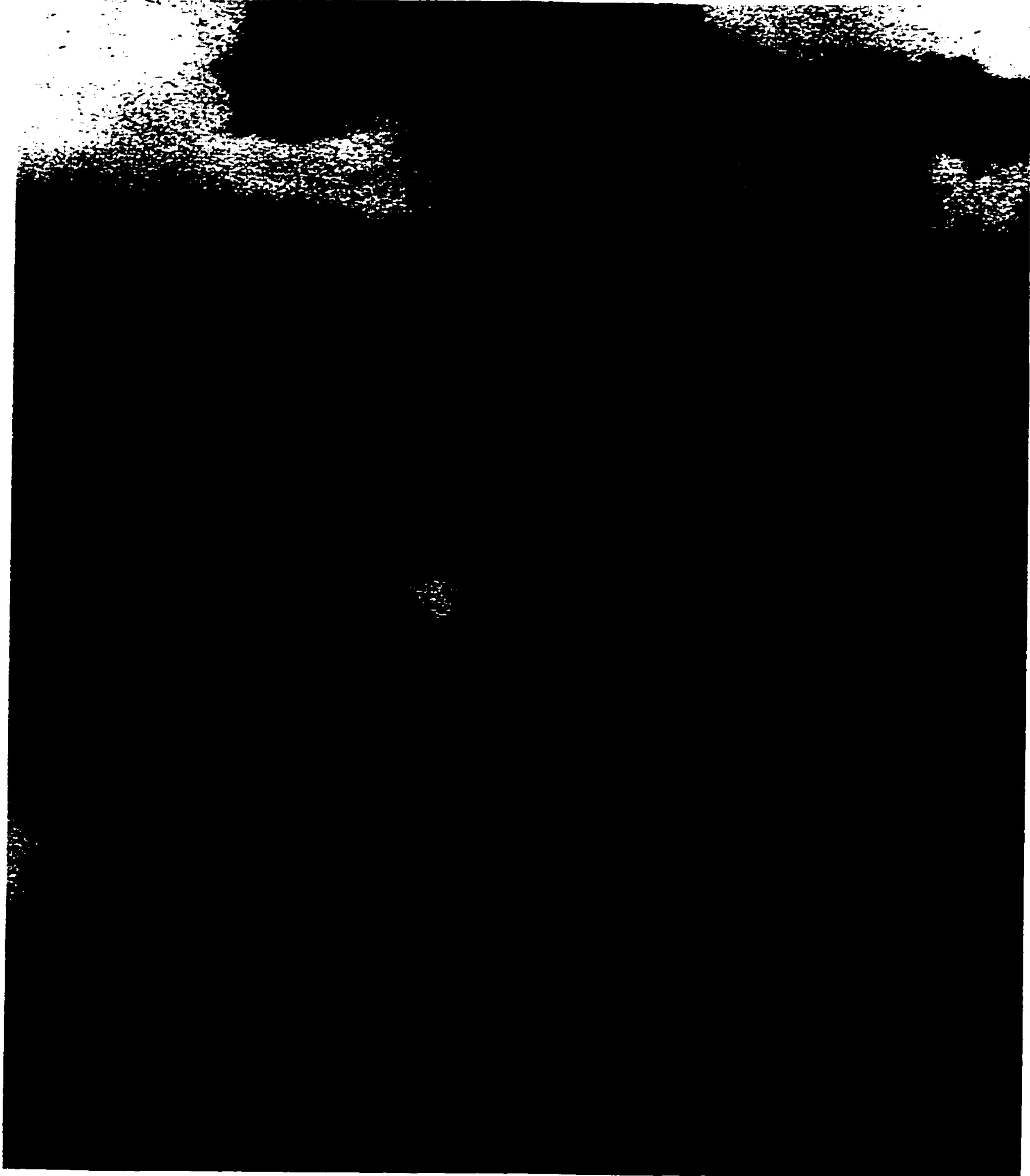


Figure 33

Figure 34

Figure 35



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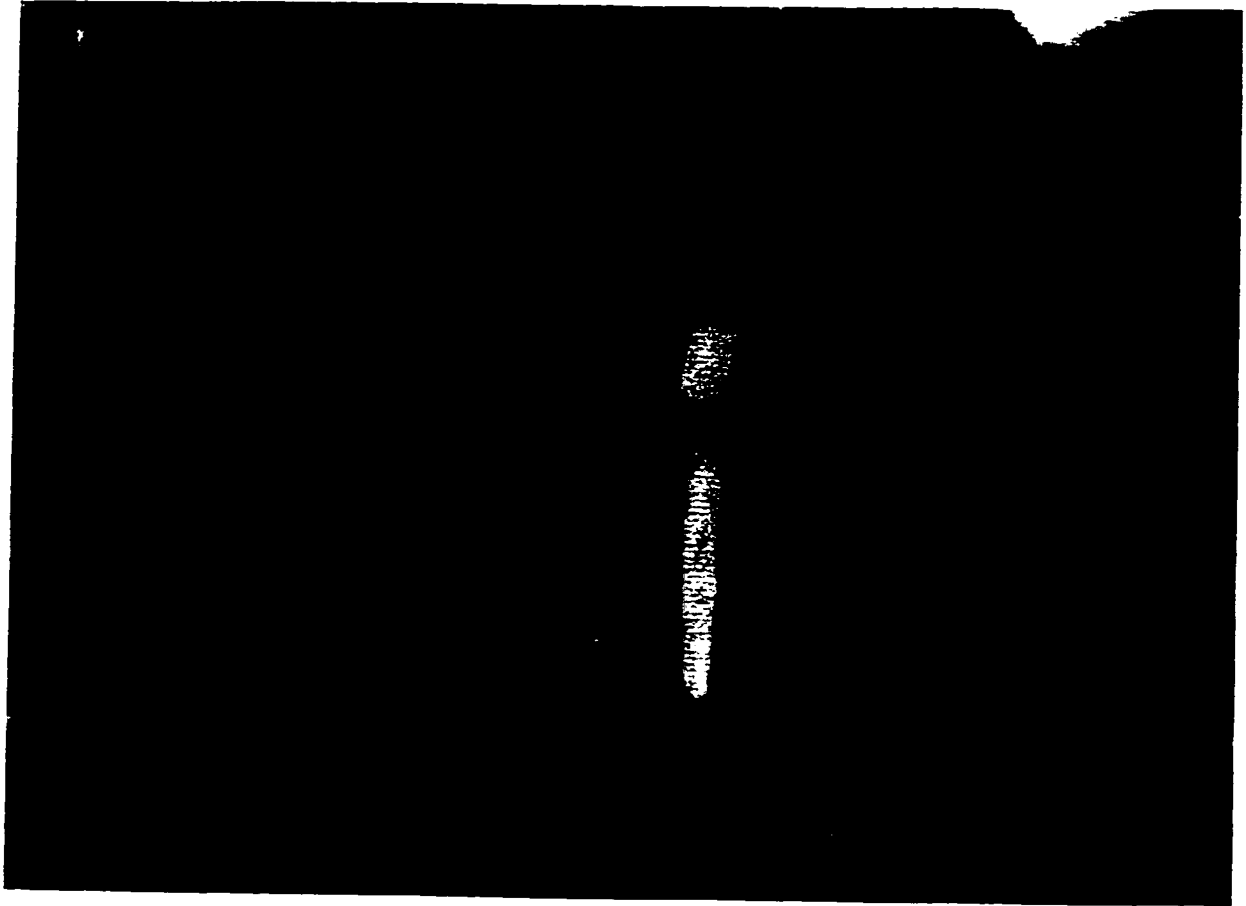

Figure 37

Figure 38

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Figure 41

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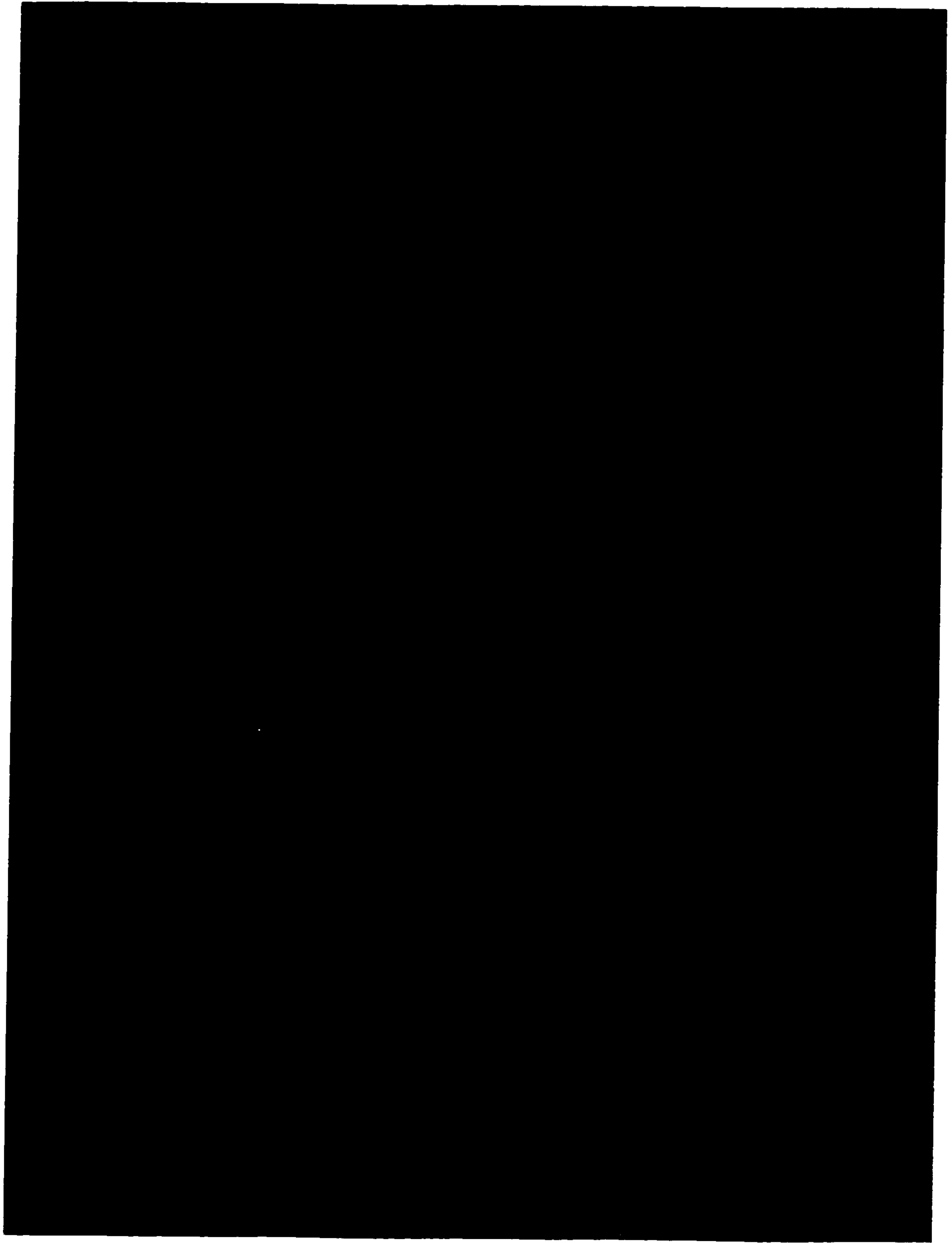

Figure 43

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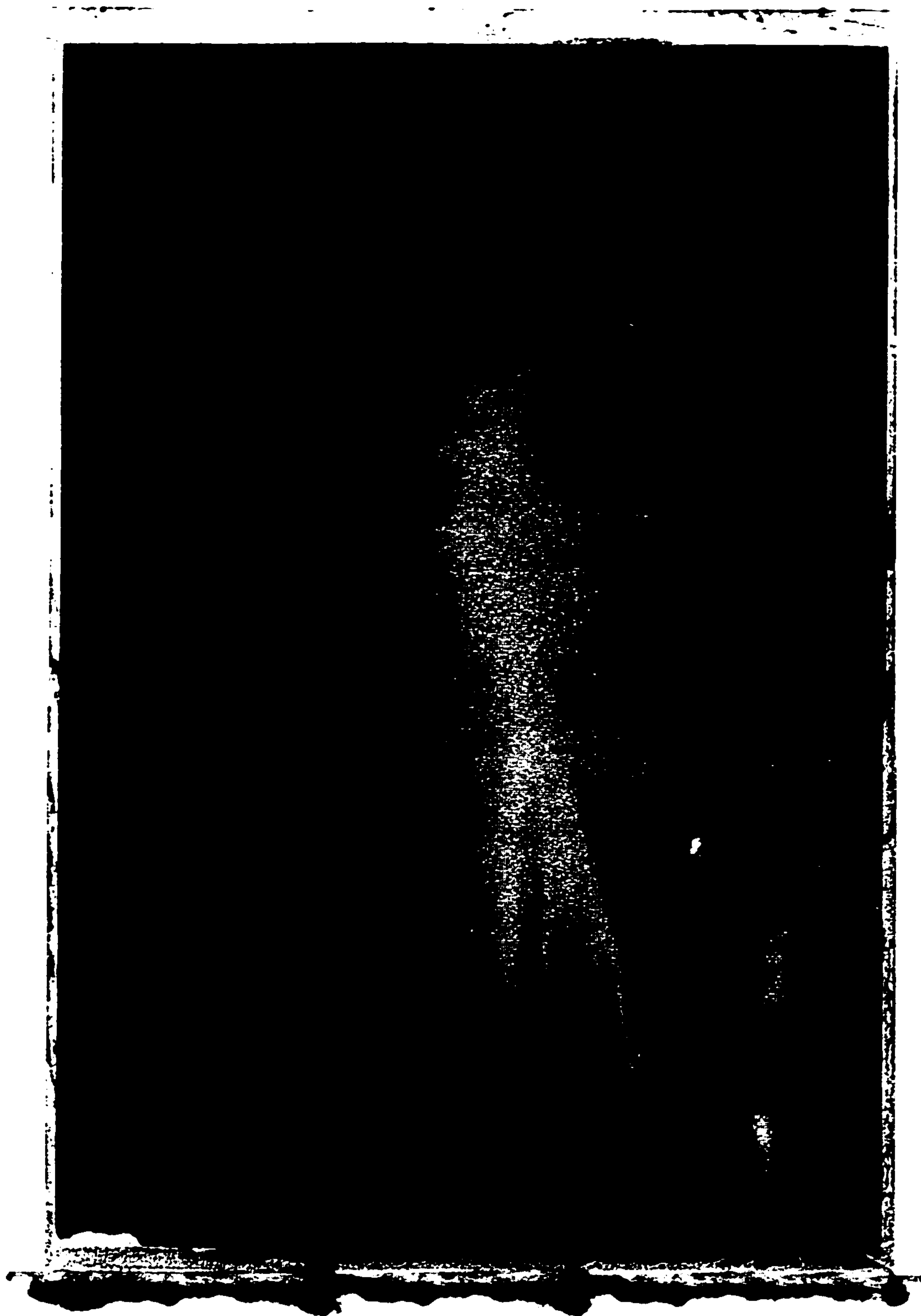

Figure 48

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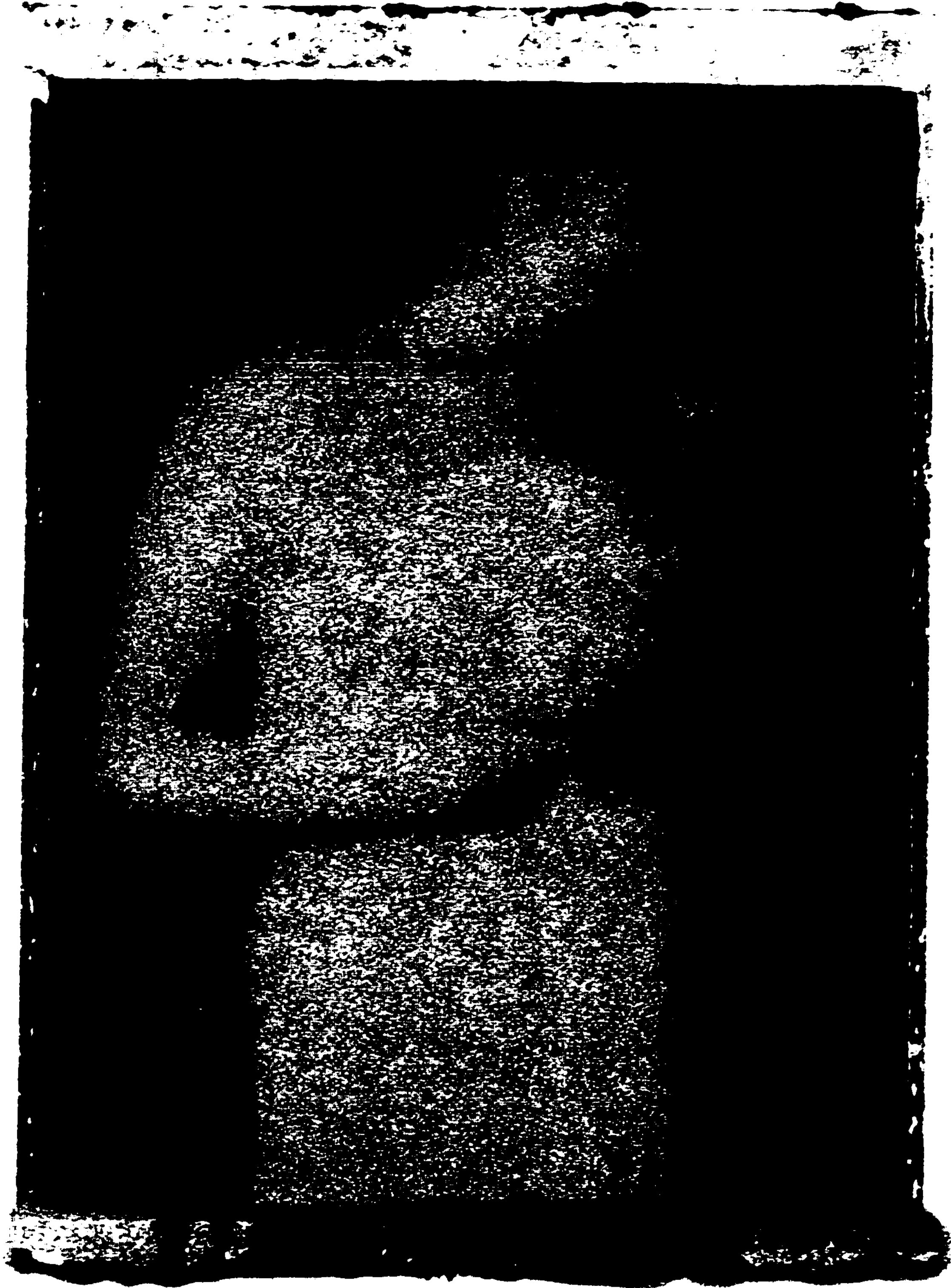
Figure 49

Figure 50



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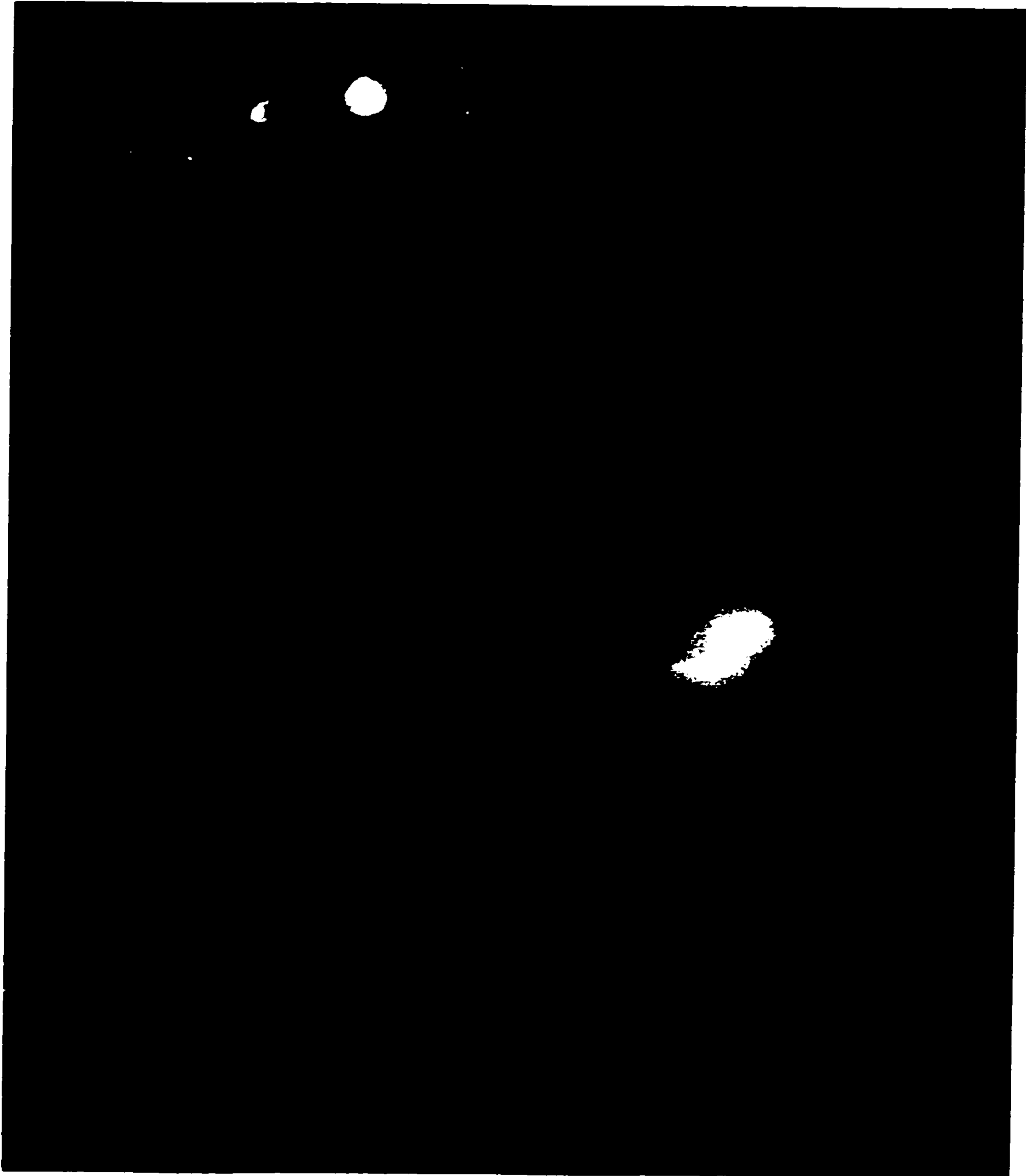

Figure 52

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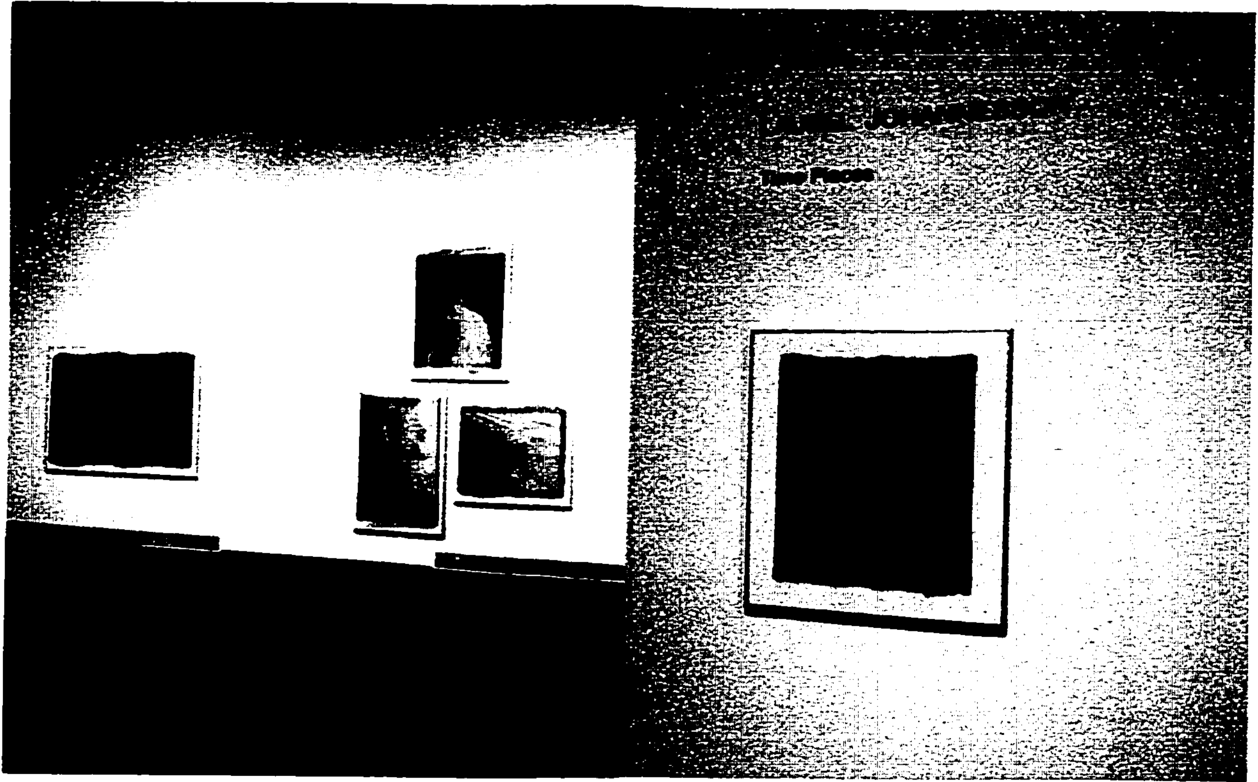

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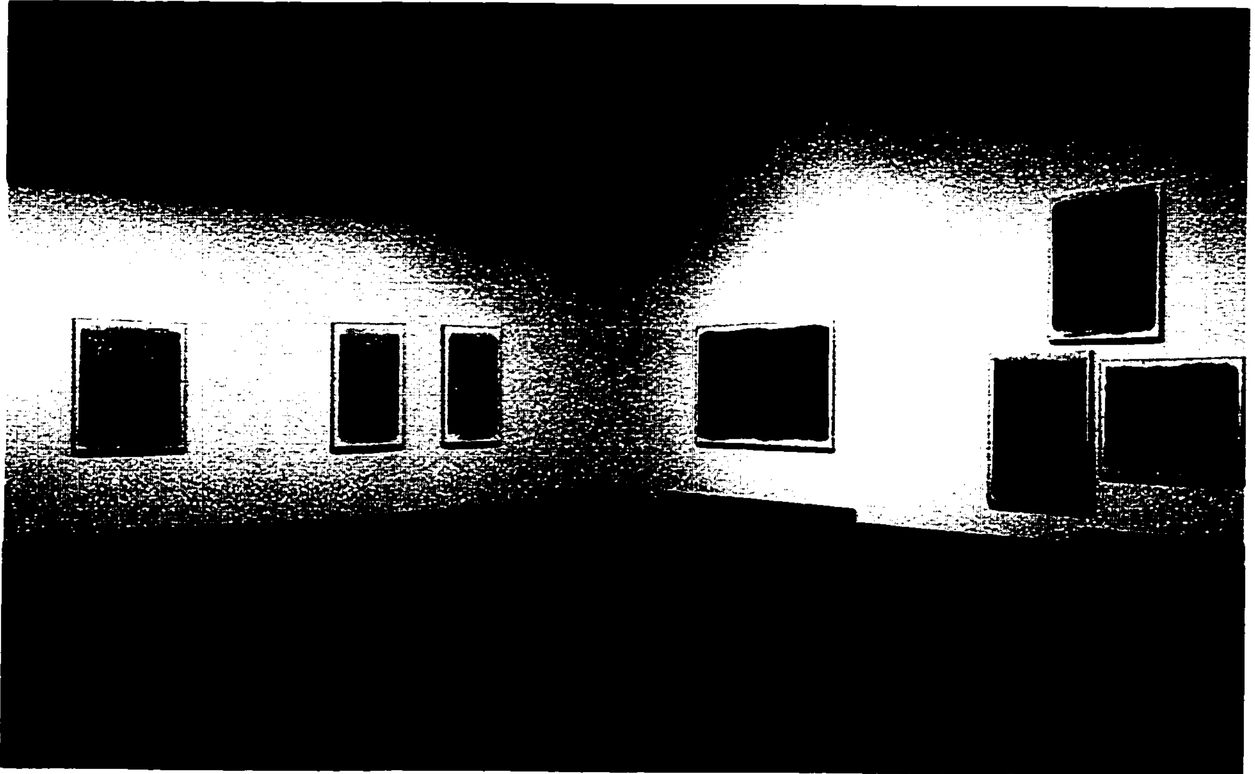

Figure 58
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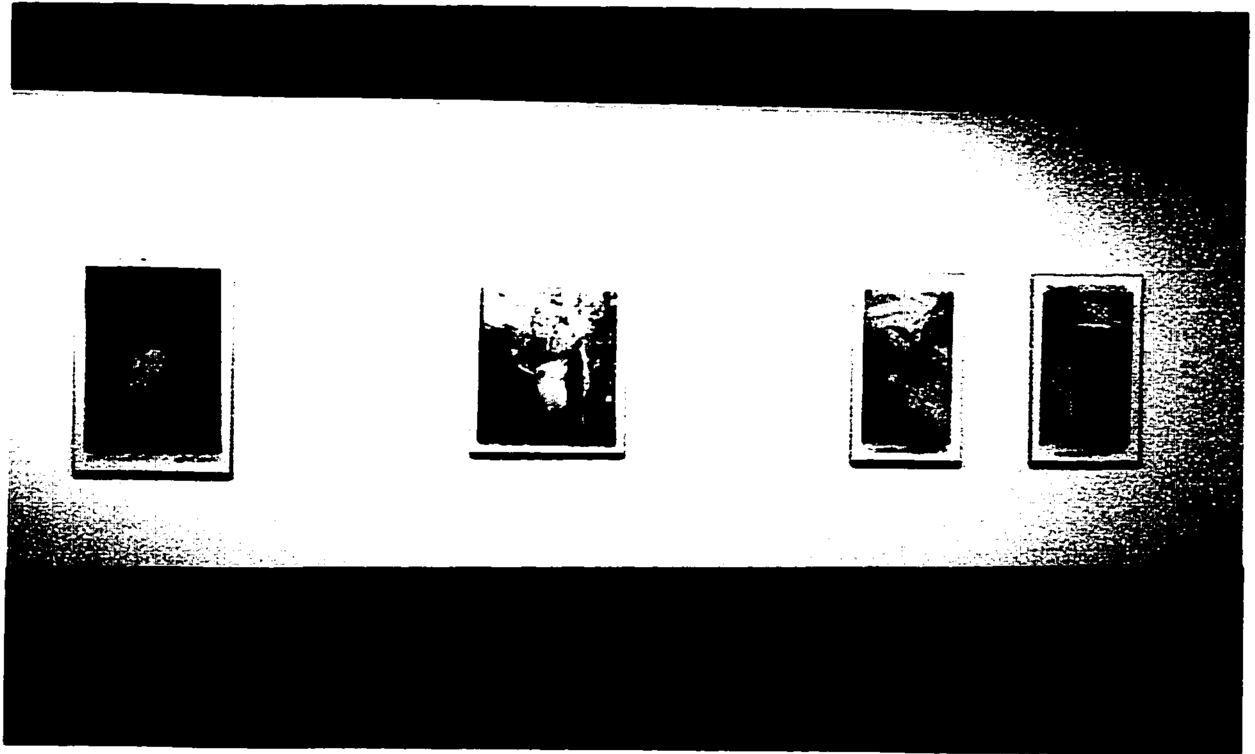

Figure 59

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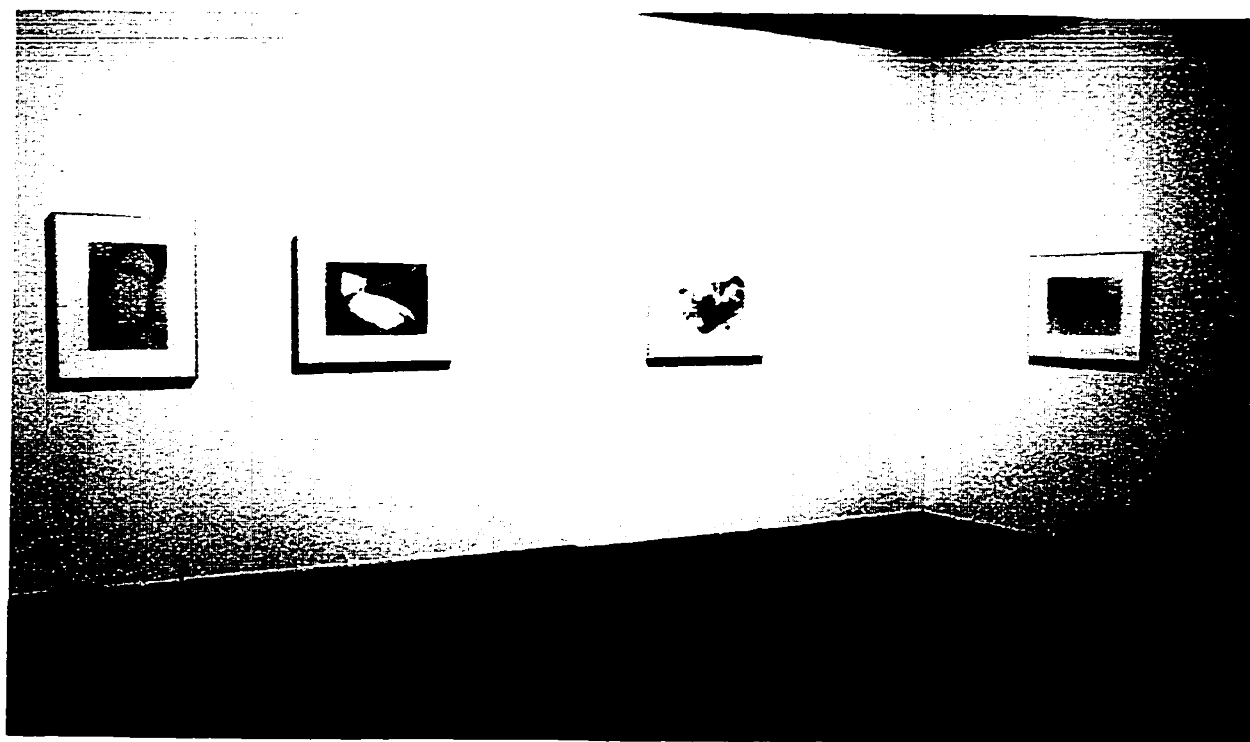

Figure 61

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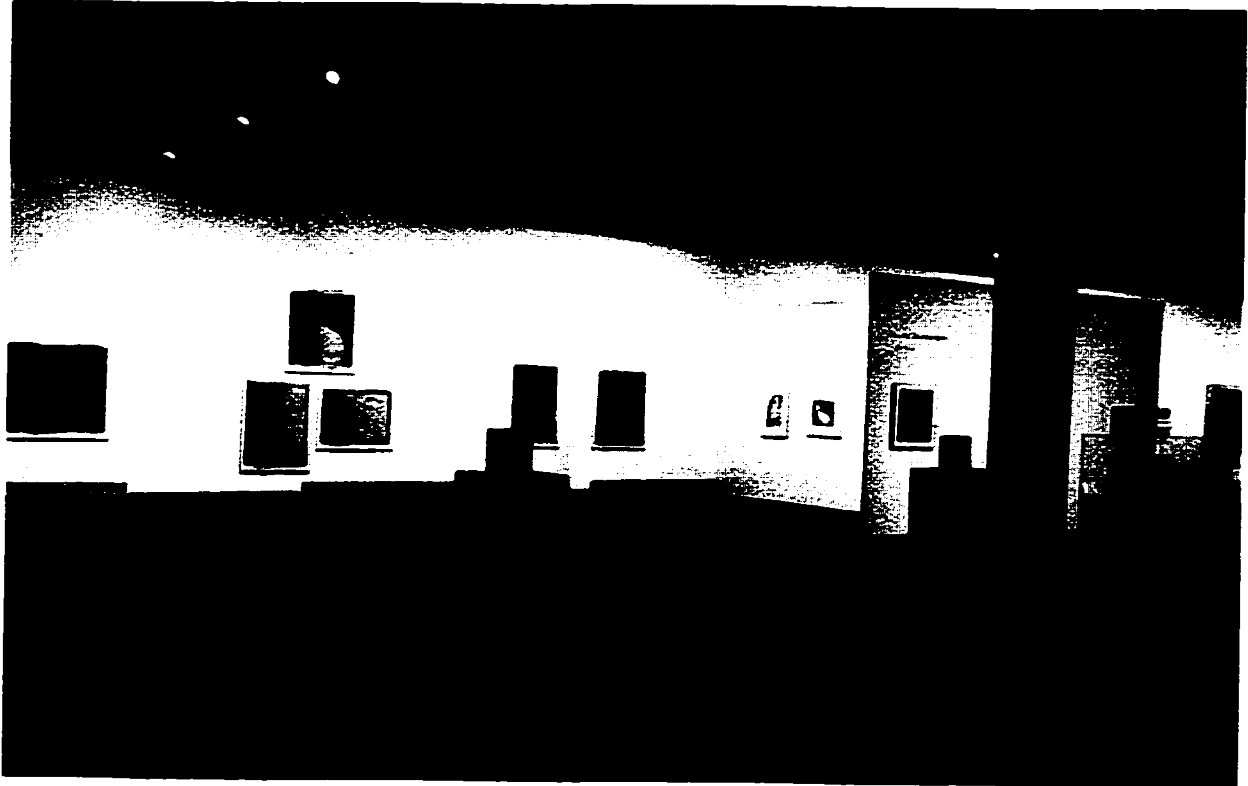

Figure 62
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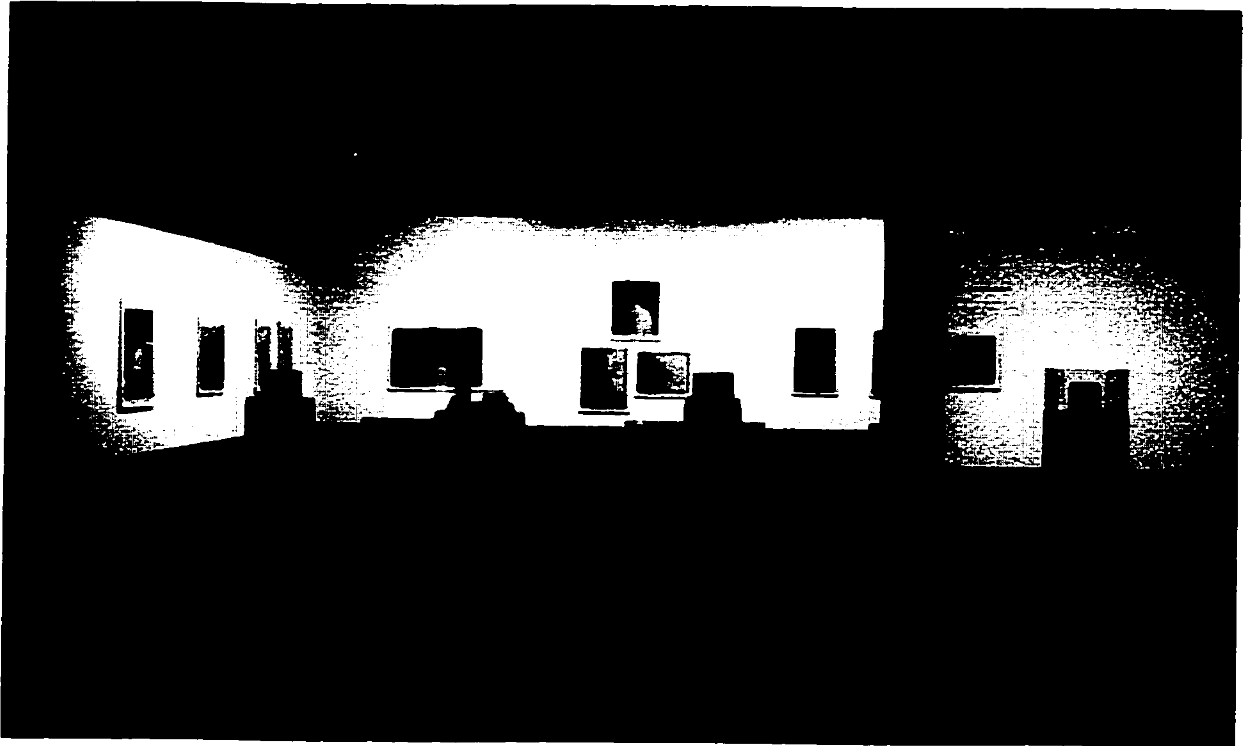

Figure 63

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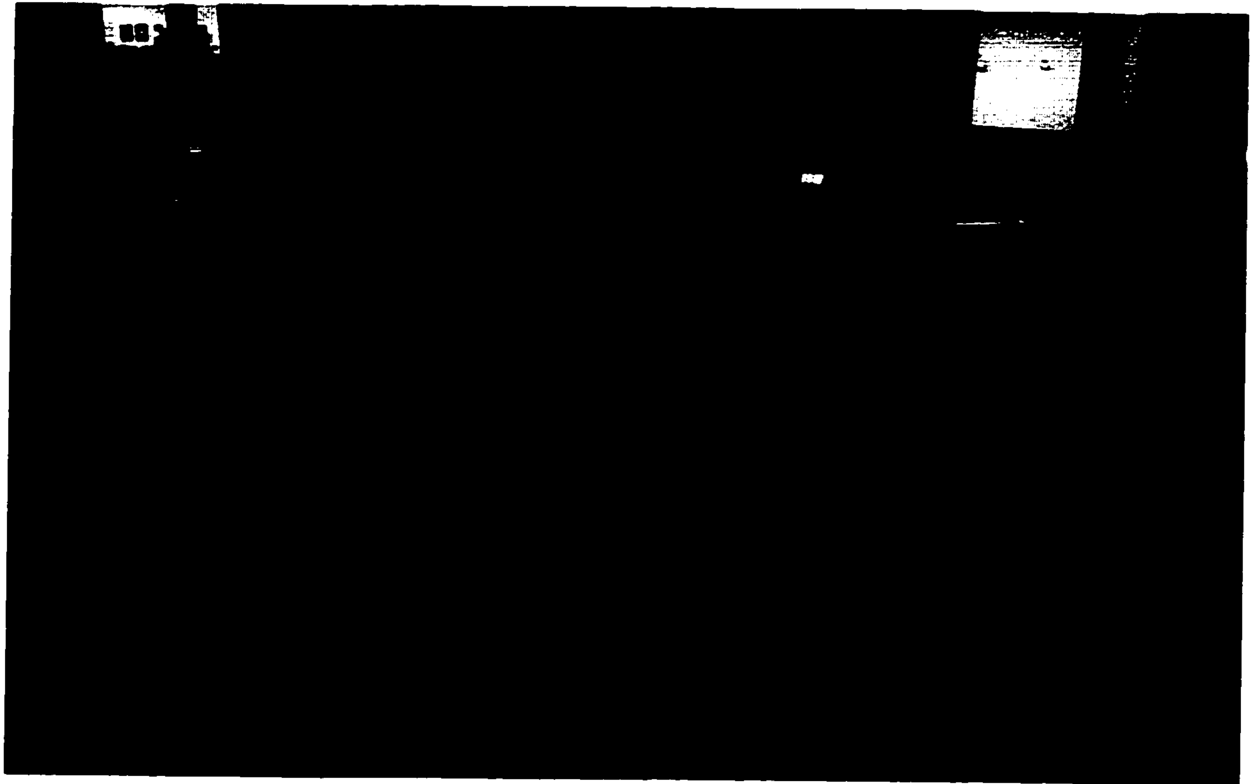

Figure 64

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Works in the Thesis Exhibition

To view works from the thesis exhibition, please refer to the original slides housed in the slide library of the Department of Art at the University of Calgary or to the previous figures.

Memory Book III
1999.
Gold leaf, Image transfer, etc.
10 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches.

Memory Book IV.
1999.
Gold leaf, Image transfer, etc.
10 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 2 3/4 inches.

Memory Books V – VII.
1999.
Gold Leaf, Image transfer, etc.
Various sizes.

Memory Jounals — Volumes VIII – XIV.
1999.
Gold leaf, etc.
Various sizes.

Six Views of a Moment.
1998.
Digital print.
48 x 67 inches.

Wings of Silence.
1998.
Digital print.
44 3/4 x 36 inches.

<u>**Memory's Echo**</u>.
1999.
Digital print.
53 1/2 x 36 inches.

<u>**The Rememberer**</u>.
1998.
Digital print.
46 1/4 x 35 1/2 inches.

<u>**Fragment I**</u>.
1998.
Digital print.
50 x 35 inches.

<u>**Fragment II**</u>.
1998.
Digital print.
35 x 40 inches.

<u>**Memento Mori I**</u>.
1999.
Digital print.
48 x 26 inches.

<u>**Memento Mori II**</u>.
1999.
Digital print.
48 x 27 inches.

<u>**Anamnesis**</u>.
1998.
Digital print.
50 x 32 inches.

<u>**Reliquiae**</u>.
1998.
Digital print.
51 x 35 inches.

<u>**Looking for Yesterday II**</u>.
1999.
Photolithograph (duotone).
30 1/2 x 23 1/2 inches.

<u>**Looking for Yesterday III**</u>.
1999.
Photolithograph (duotone).
25 3/4 x 30 1/2 inches.

<u>**Looking for Yesterday IV**</u>.
1999.
Photolithograph (duotone).
24 3/4 x 30 1/4 inches.

<u>**Looking for Yesterday V**</u>.
1999.
Photolithograph (duotone).
24 x 30 1/4 inches.