

*David Noonan
Only when it's cloudless*



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This exhibition is presented on the lands and waters of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. TarraWarra Museum of Art acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the original custodians of this land, and we extend our respect to their community, their Ancestors, and their Elders, past, present and emerging.

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Tudor Style 2003
(cat. no. 1)

Foreword

TarraWarra Museum of Art is proud to present *David Noonan: Only when it's cloudless*, a major exhibition by one of Australia's most significant contemporary artists. Noonan's work is distinguished by its monochrome palette, its exploration of various media—including silkscreen on linen, collage, tapestry and film—and the combination of figurative and abstract imagery found in the public domain.

The title of this exhibition (a title that the artist has given to the central installation) is adapted from Yoshida Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*. In this book, the 14th century Japanese Buddhist monk offers the observation that we should be more mindful of our present moment and not look at the moon 'only when it is cloudless'.

The exhibition engages with the fleeting nature of images, the memories they engender, and the juxtaposition of figures and abstraction, in ways that allow interpretation to remain speculative and open. Noonan's highly inventive combinations of representation and pattern, light and dark, and line and shape, resist labels. The exhibition is conceived as a spatial montage.

Exhibitions of this scale and complexity would not be possible without the tremendous support of our major exhibition partner The Balnaves Foundation. The Board and staff of TarraWarra Museum of Art express our immense sadness

at the recent passing of Neil Balnaves AO. We have been extremely fortunate to be one of the beneficiaries of the Foundation's visionary spirit of collaboration. Through the long-term commitment of The Balnaves Foundation, our Museum has been able to bring to the Australian public the following exhibitions: *Howard Arkley (and friends ...)*; *The Sculpture of Bromwyn Oliver*; *Rosemary Laing*; *Patricia Piccinini & Joy Hester: Through love ...*; *Assembled: The Art of Robert Klippel*; *Looking Glass: Judy Watson and Ybonnie Scarce*; and this exhibition *David Noonan: Only when it's cloudless*. Neil's dedication to and enthusiasm for the arts in Australia will be sorely missed. We extend our deepest sympathies and appreciation to the Foundation and Diane Balnaves, Hamish Balnaves (CEO), their fellow Board members and Amelia Hart (Grants Manager).

We are enormously grateful to David Noonan, who is based in London, for his tremendous dedication and commitment to this exhibition over many months. David's close collaboration with us on this project has been an immensely rewarding and enriching experience.

We also thank Jennifer Higgie for her evocative and insightful catalogue essay on David's new film, *Mnemosyne*, 2021. We acknowledge the generous support of the Gordon Darling Foundation which has made this publication possible.

We extend our gratitude to the private and public lenders to the exhibition, including the Art Gallery of Ballarat; Art Gallery of South Australia; and National Gallery of Victoria.

We also thank Noonan's representative galleries: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney; Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne; and Modern Art, London.

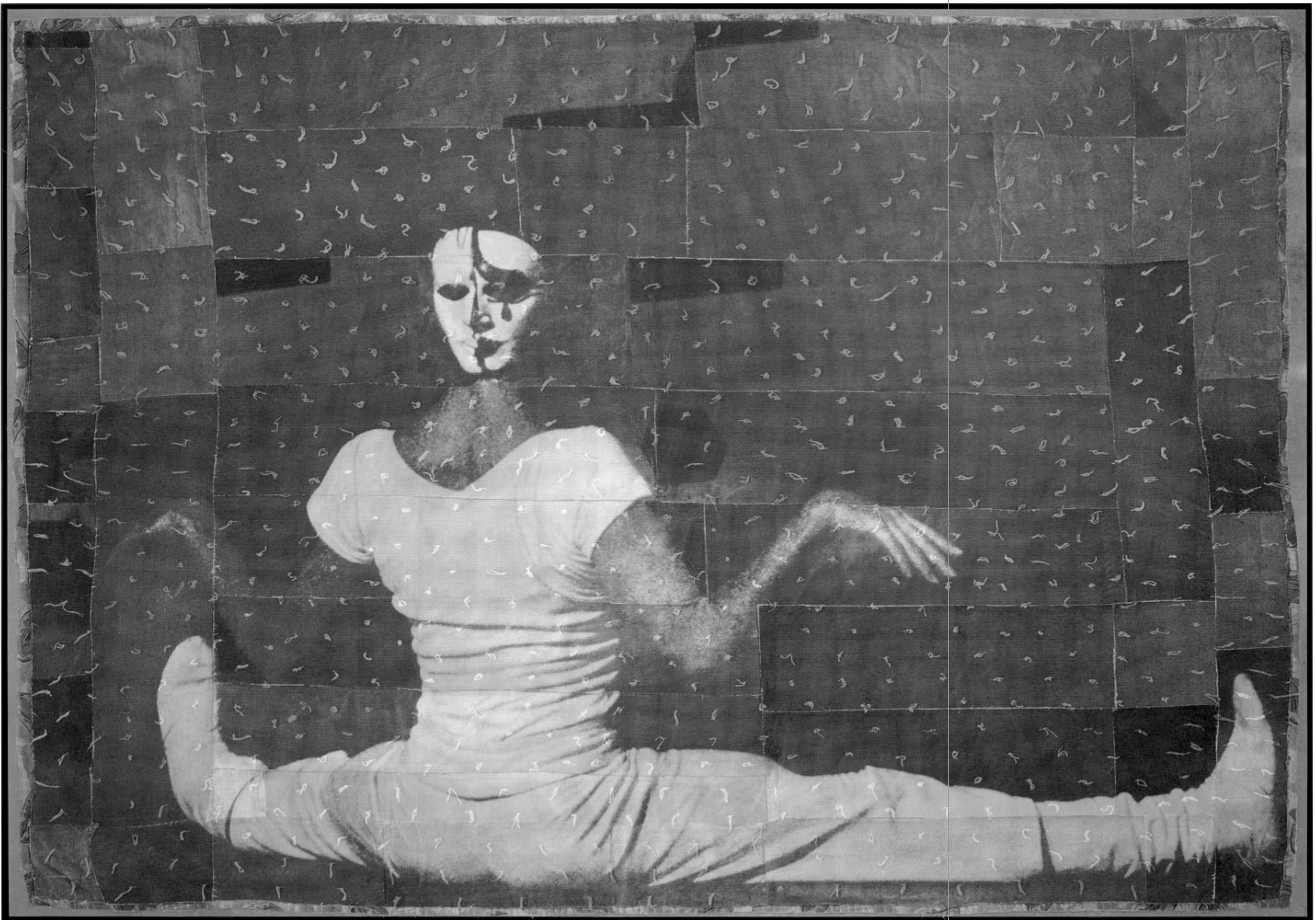
This exhibition has also been generously supported by the TarraWarra Contemporary Donor Circle.

Finally, we thank and acknowledge our founding patrons, Marc Besen AC and the late Eva Besen AO, for their remarkable gift of the Museum and its collection; the long-term support of the TarraWarra Museum of Art Foundation; the Inaugural Foundation Supporter: the Besen Family Foundation; the Board of TarraWarra Museum of Art; our sponsors: Arnold Bloch Leibler Lawyers and Advisers, Chubb Insurance Australia, and AON; our major partners: Paoli Smith Creative; IAS Fine Art Logistics, and the RACV; our education supporters: Bennelong Foundation; Erdi Foundation and the Scanlon Foundation; and our media partner The Saturday Paper. My gratitude is also extended to the staff and volunteers of the Museum.

Victoria Lynn
Director

Untitled 2015
(cat. no. 16)





Mask 2015
(cat. no. 10)

Untitled 2015
(cat. no. 15)



Untitled 2016
(cat. no. 17)

PAGES 14–19:

Untitled 2016
(cat. no. 19)

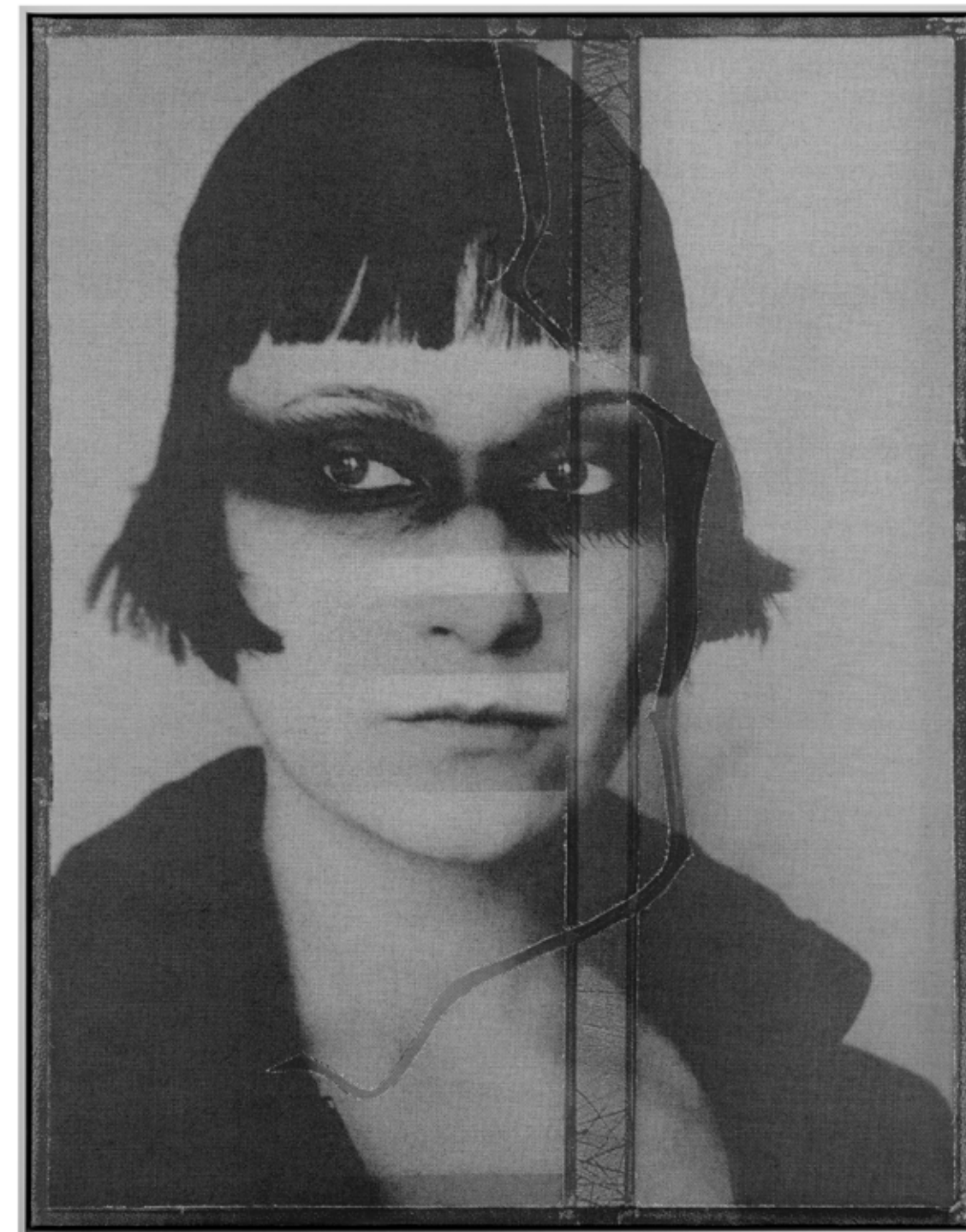
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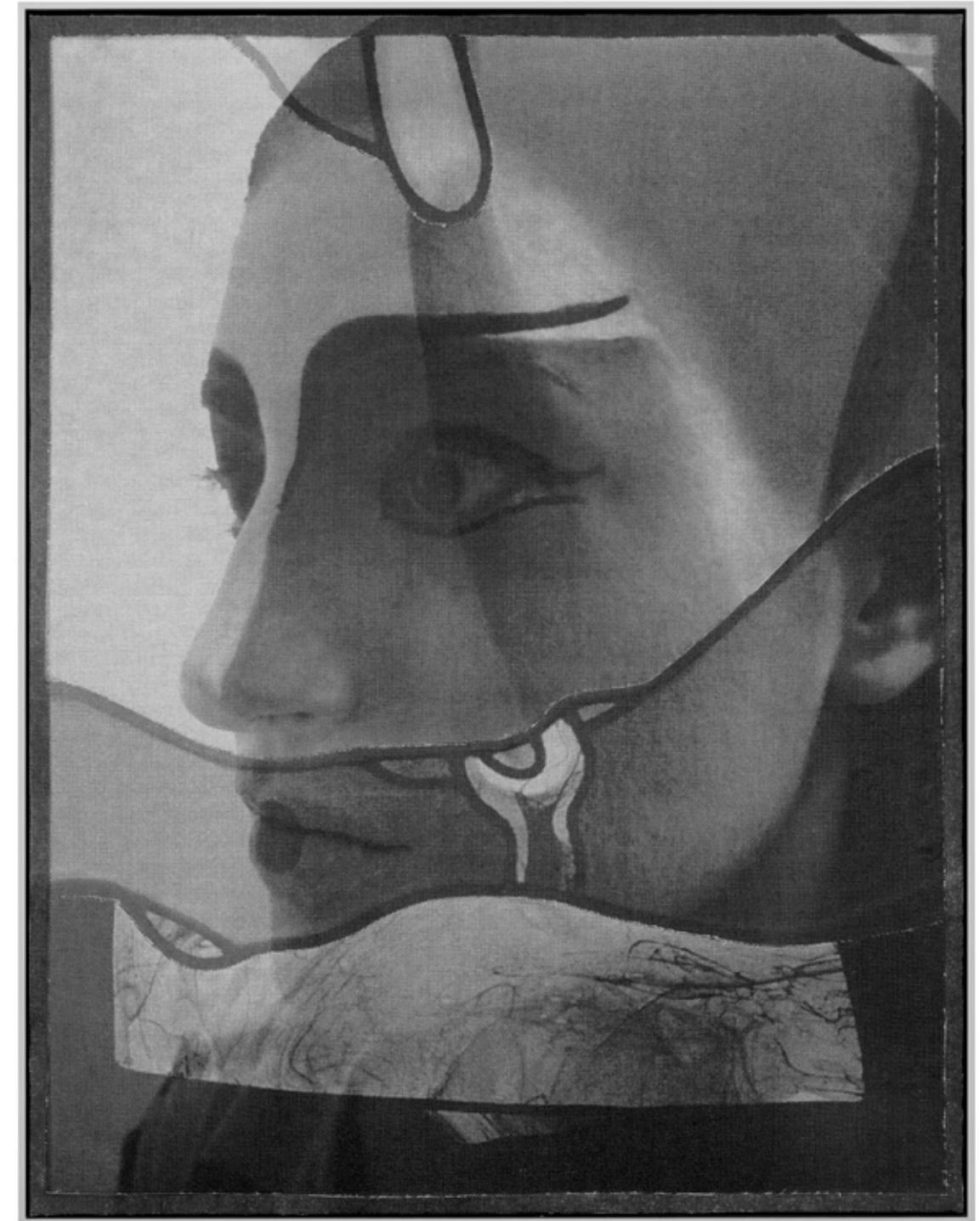
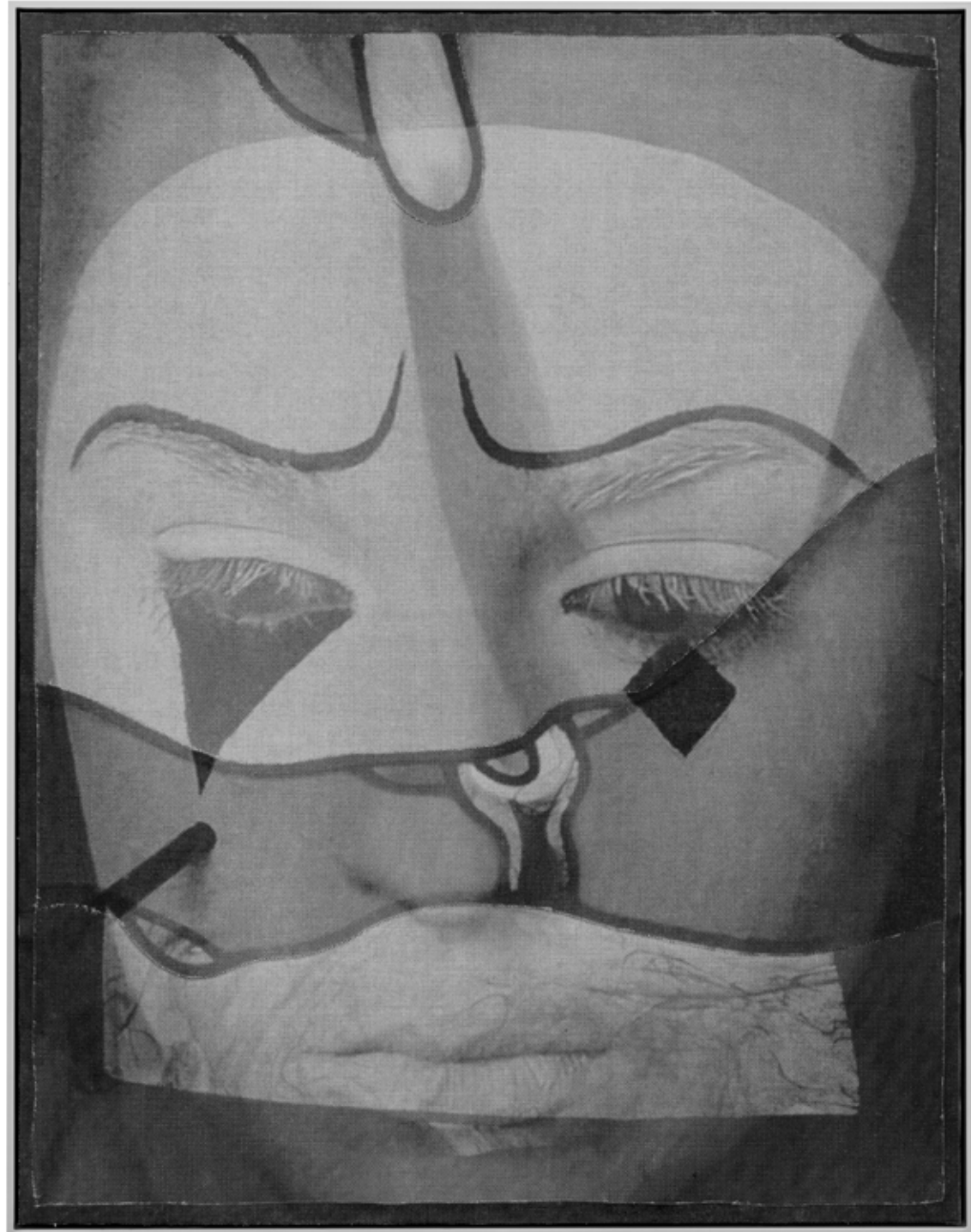
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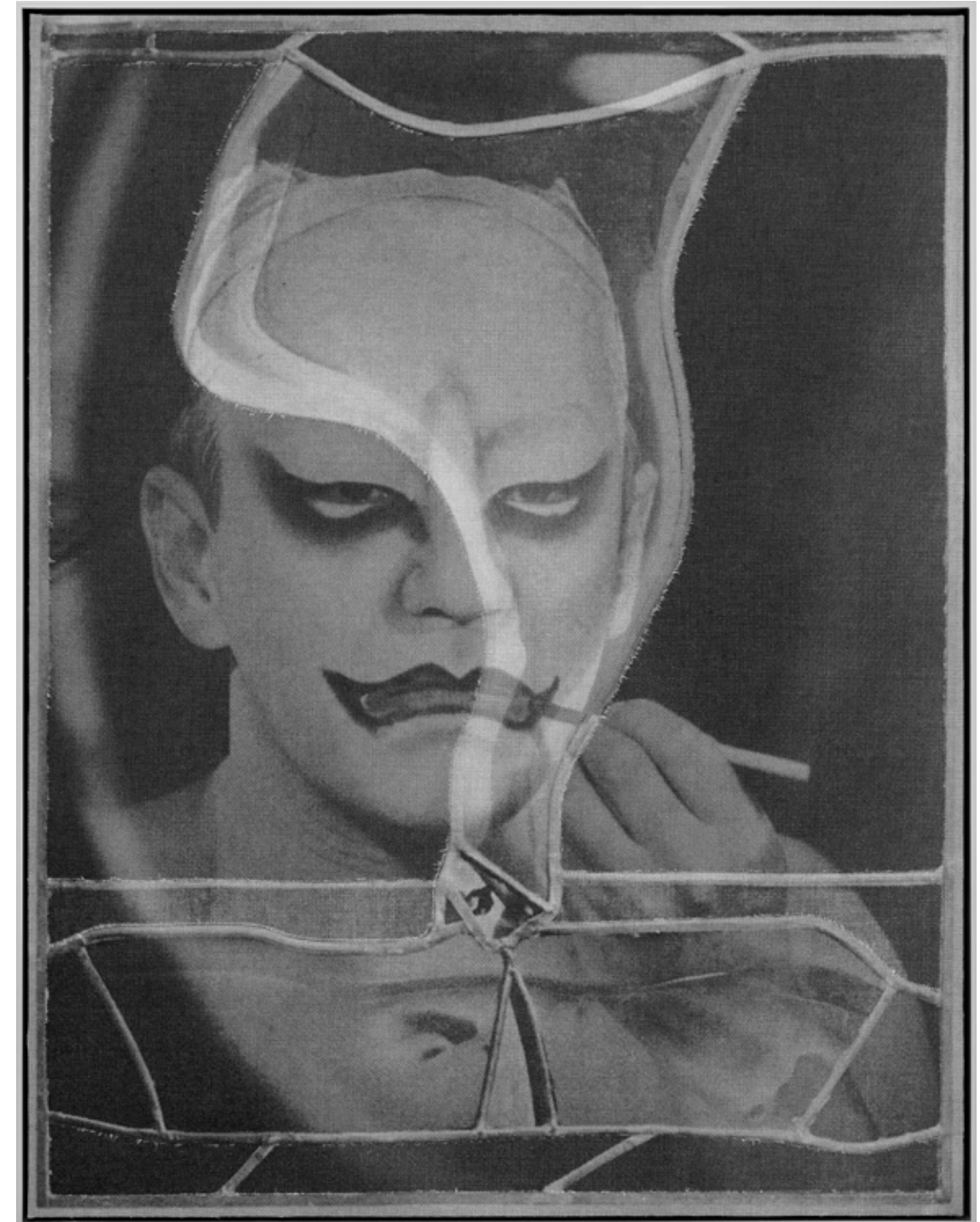
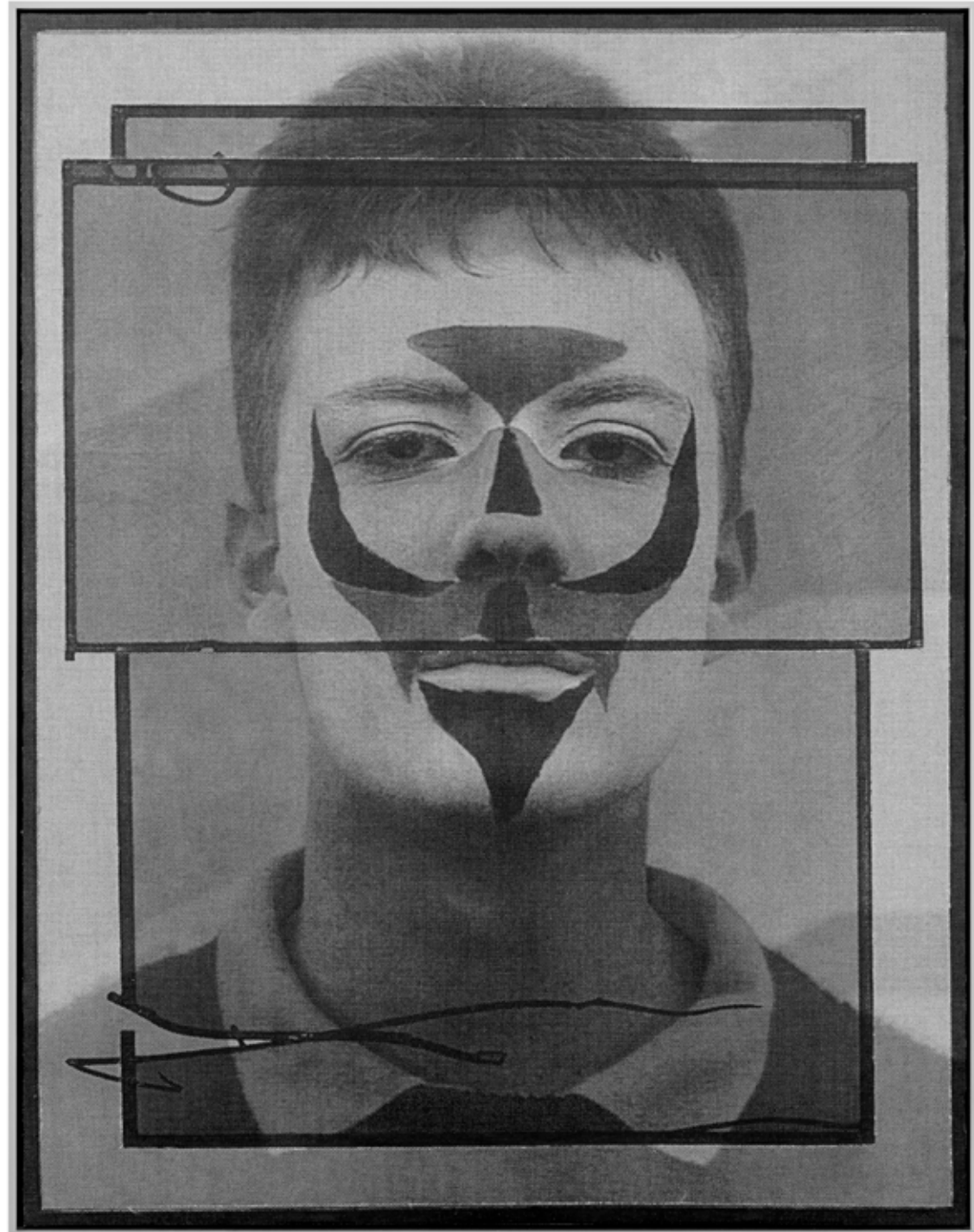
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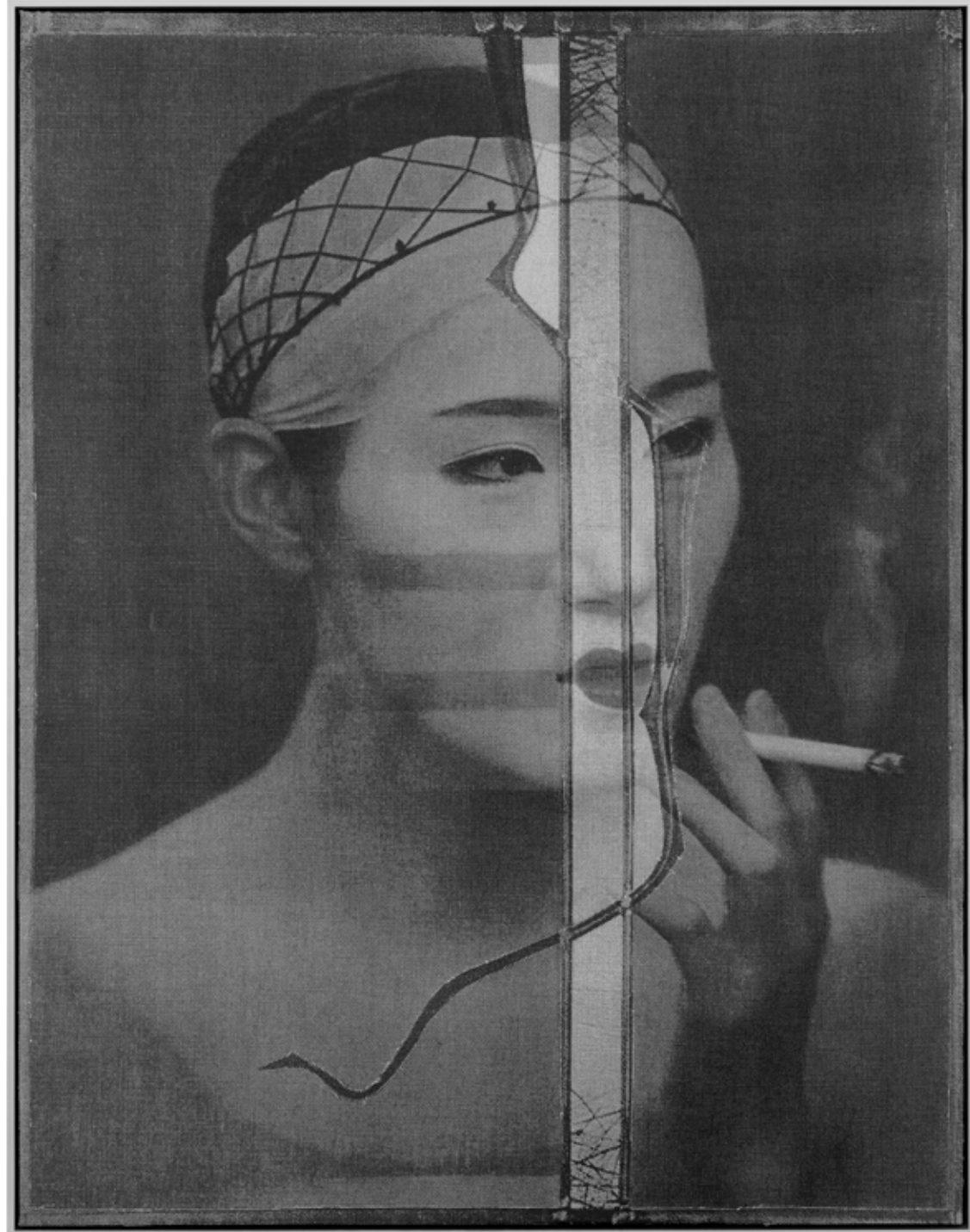
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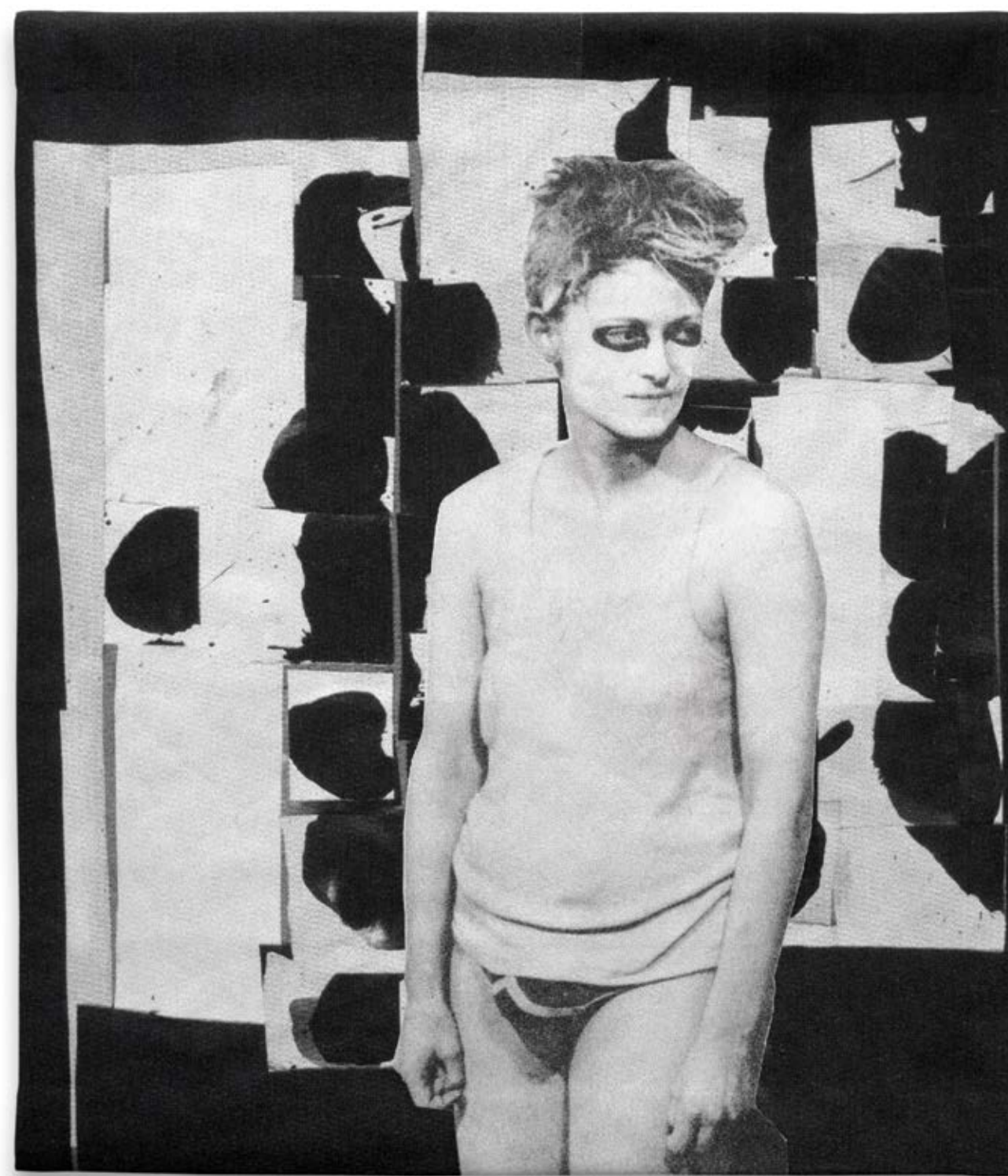


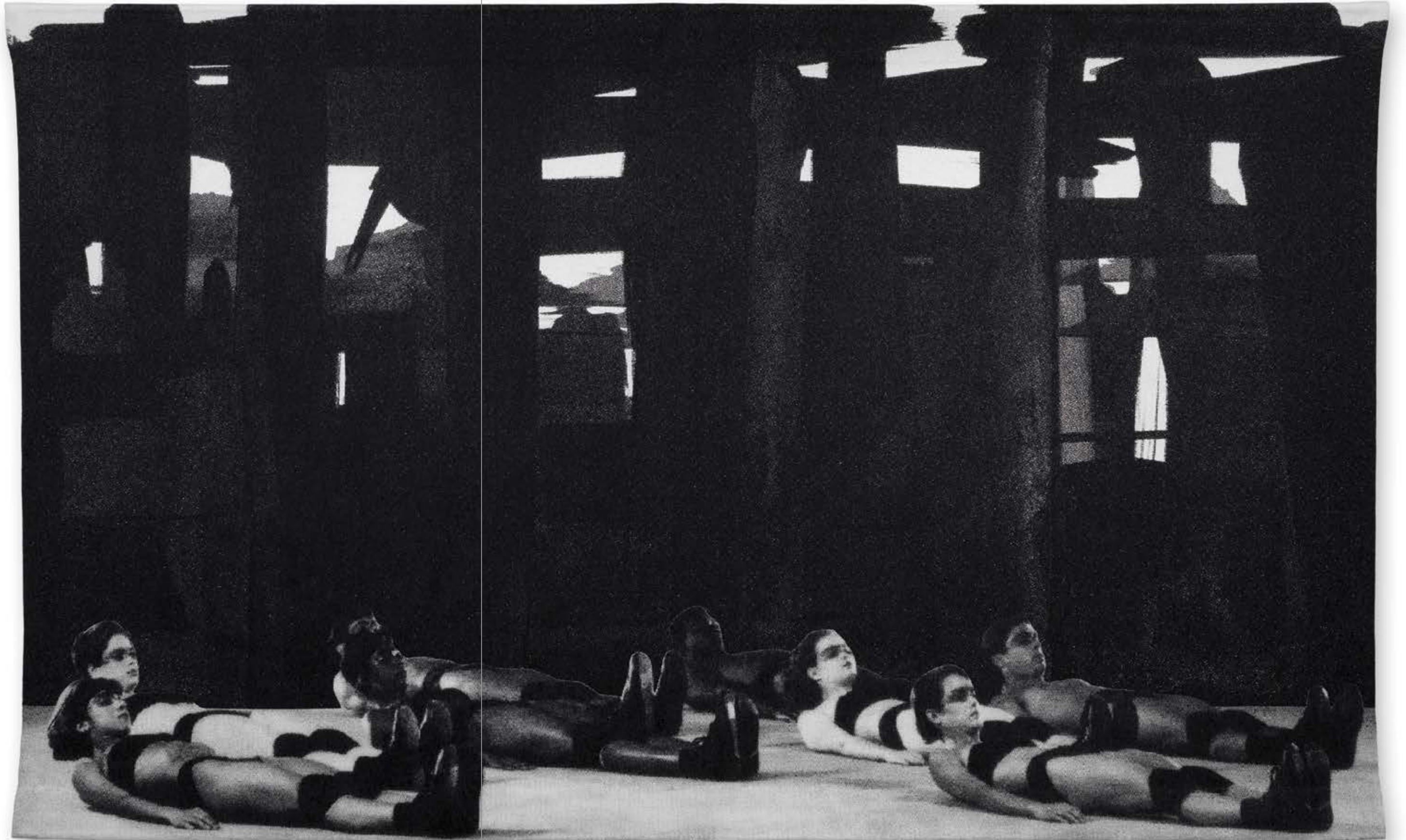






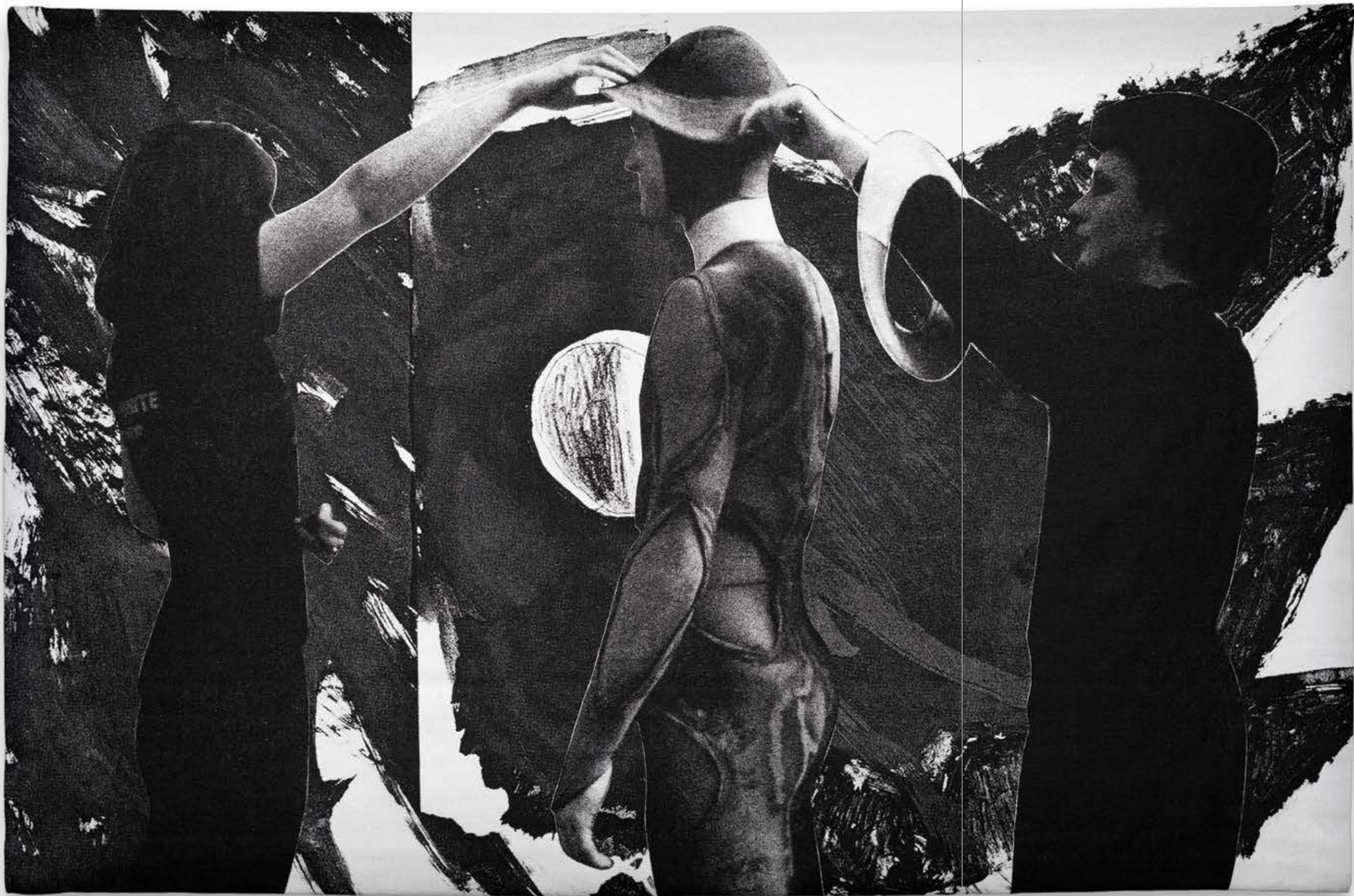
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(cat. no. 29)





Untitled 2019–2020
(cat. no. 38)





Untitled 2021
(cat. no. 44)



Untitled 2021
(cat. no. 43)



David Noonan's *Mnemosyne*

Jennifer Higgin

Mnemosyne is the Ancient Greek goddess of memory, the daughter of heaven and earth and mother to the nine muses—the source of artistic inspiration. She invented language, ruled over time and was a female Titan; she knew not only what was, but what would be. Her name was given to the river that flows through the underworld and to knowledge systems based on oral communication: origin stories passed from generation to generation before the invention of writing. Art would be bereft without her. New ideas, new images bloom from Mnemosyne's legacy.

The Ancient Greeks knew, as we do, that we are nothing without our memories: they are central to cultural understanding and our conduit to the dead, as well as the living; they resurrect the long gone, animate the recent past, shape the future. They are not, however, always to be trusted and are rarely straightforward. We grapple and argue with them, even as we depend upon them. A smell, a glance, a touch, a feeling, a texture; the look of something or someone—all can prompt Mnemosyne's arrival. (She is capricious.) The art of memory is an imprecise science because humans are not machines. Each of us navigates the world with maps of our own making.

David Noonan's new 20-minute, 16mm film *Mnemosyne* echoes the fits and starts, the solace and vagaries of memory. Black and white images float into view before disappearing behind billowing yellow or black clouds; time glides slowly on in its inexorable way. The film opens with a billboard of curious cartoon figures holding farm produce; they dissolve into an image of Japanese fish kites tugging in the wind, then a single diamond kite adrift in the sky. Luminous yellow clouds fill the screen; they disperse to reveal a traditional Japanese play enacted in a wild garden. In the blink of an eye, new characters appear: a smiling mother in a belted raincoat, holding the hands of her children. The yellow turns black and the saturated golden sunshine is replaced with something more ominous. A woman lies prone, dead or asleep, granules of sand on her face; she is supplanted by a collage of simple wooden toys. Non sequiturs abound. Characters and places come and go: the faces of children in hand-made masks or veils, dancing figures in black leotards, inscrutable buildings, schools, sculptures. At times, what is recognisable becomes something more ambivalent: delicate, wave-like pencil marks, peeling wallpaper, paper slashed, torn, pock-marked, stabbed; smoke like feathers or waves, rendered in graphite.

Mnemosyne is a study in immersion, a journey into the heart of a picture—and picture making—itsself. It's a film about time, memory and personal resonance that developed organically, via instinct and mood. To make it, David

embraced ambiguity and messy connections; he welcomed happy accidents in his deep dive into some of the images he has collected from antiquarian bookshops, charity shops and old magazines for more than two decades. His criteria for selection was simply that the images moved or intrigued him. To create the film's richly emotional texture, he shot the story boards through a fish tank filled with water into which he dropped various pigments. The patterns they formed were, of course, unpredictable; colours swirl across images like smoke billowing across the sky. The result is a work that mimics the ways memory itself operates, with unexpected connections, leaps in reason, a skittish sense of longing.

Mnemosyne was filmed on a 1959 Bolex wind-up camera that has to be rewound every 90 seconds. This ensured that the process couldn't be rushed, which is apt—conjuring memories is a meditative process. The choice of camera is significant: David shot his first film, *M3*, on the same type of camera in 1997 and the way *Mnemosyne* is viewed—ideally, across six LED screens housed in a freestanding two-metre-high structure, with a steel bench for visitors to sit on—echoes the minimalist sculptures that have long influenced the artist.

The hypnotic soundtrack is composed and performed by David's old friend Warren Ellis—a nod to their shared youth in Ballarat. The music weaves in and around the images: an irregular rhythm beating with cyclical elisions, chimes, drones. A violin is plucked; a soft, golden note repeatedly

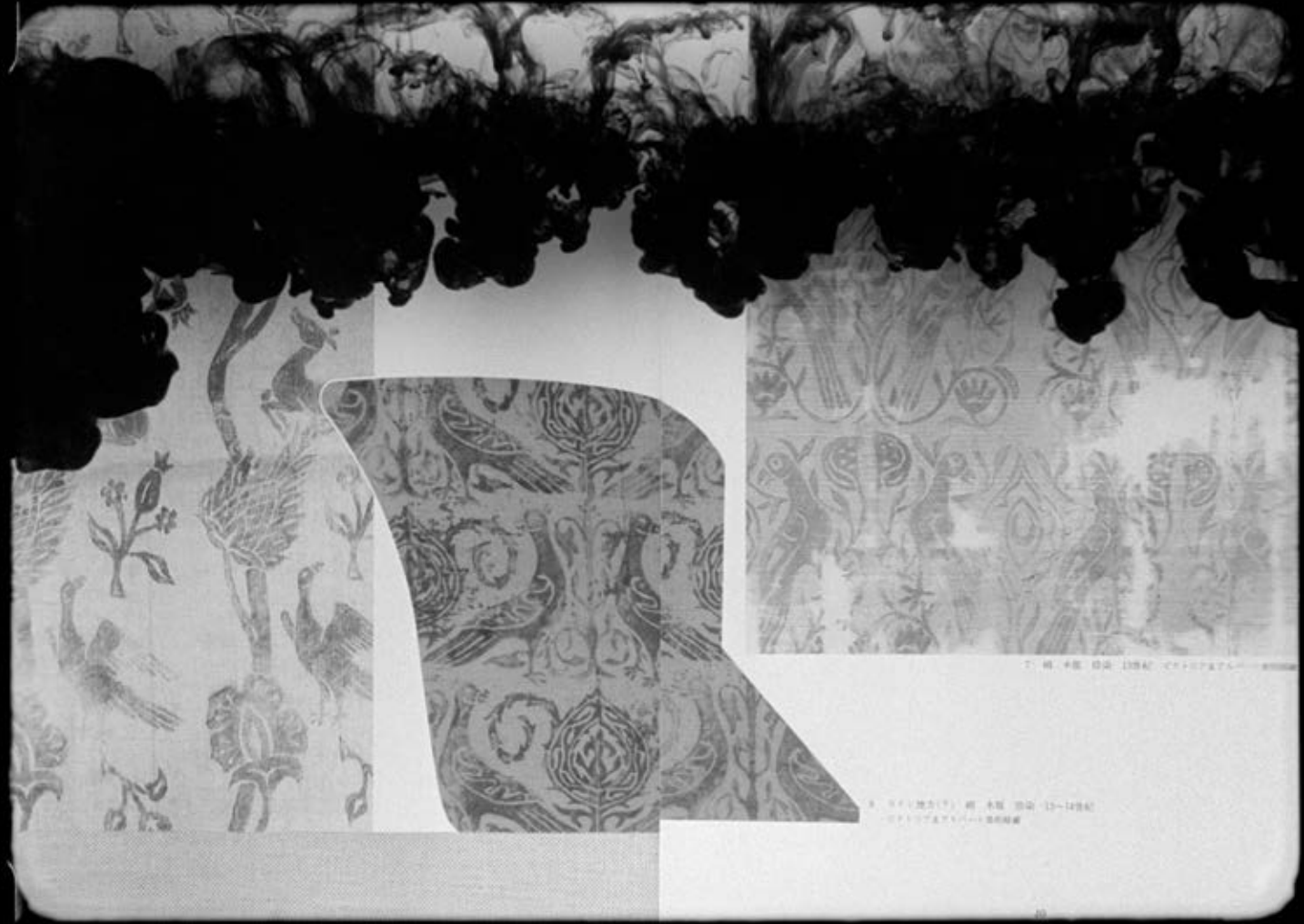
struck; space hovers between notes. It's like deep thought made flesh; a song for the future, heard long ago.

Mnemosyne is a filmic collage. Like memory, it performs in fragments. Images appear from nowhere and exit to somewhere else, as if triggered by something just out of reach. Appearance is rarely logical; it does not always do what we want it to do or look as we expect it to; it can break your heart, help you heal, enrage you. The film's ambience conjures a daydream; it's de-centred, non-linear, associative. A smile, a lifted hand, a sense of melancholy or joy, all become permanent, etched in the fabric of time, even as they disappear. It reiterates: we live, we change, we remember. *Mnemosyne* is both deeply personal and generous: you don't need to know the details of David's memories to be moved by what you see. (Images morph to fit particular needs.) It's not important to identify who everyone is, where they are, what they are doing. It's enough to recognise our common humanity. Kinship is revealed in a glance.

Mnemosyne's atmosphere is at once elegiac and oddly joyful: it honours quiet connections, sees the beauty in a gesture, understands the truth in a look, the comfort of objects and rituals. Humans, it makes clear, are such fragile beings; the myriad ways we communicate—to ourselves and to each other—is nuanced, delicate, often mysterious, frequently misunderstood. This is where memory's imprecision is a consolation. We filter what we need. To travel well into the future, we have to make peace with our past.

PAGES 37–48:
Mnemosyne 2021 (film stills)
(cat. no. 40)













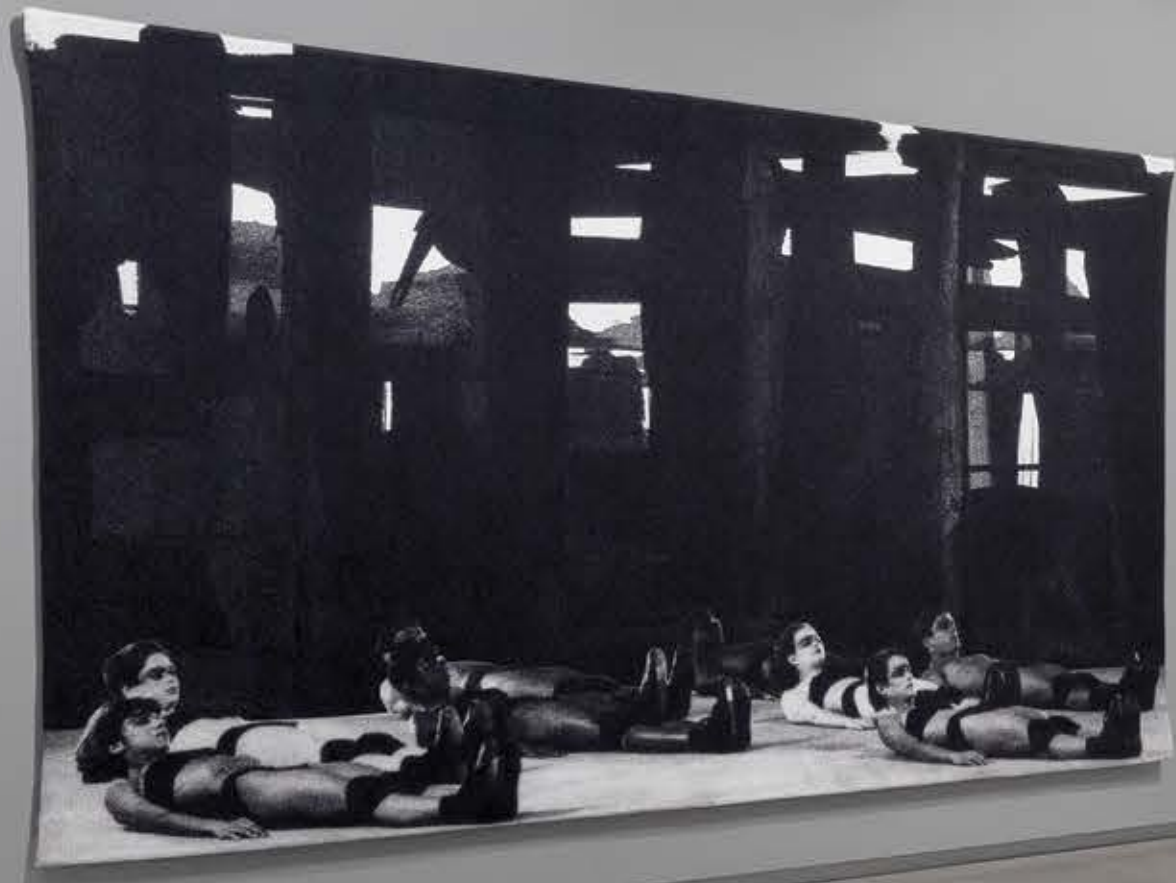


PAGES 50–87:

David Noonan: Only when it's cloudless
installation views, TarraWarra Museum of Art, 2022
Photography: Christian Capurro













PAGES 60–75:

Only when it's cloudless 2021
(cat. no. 41)















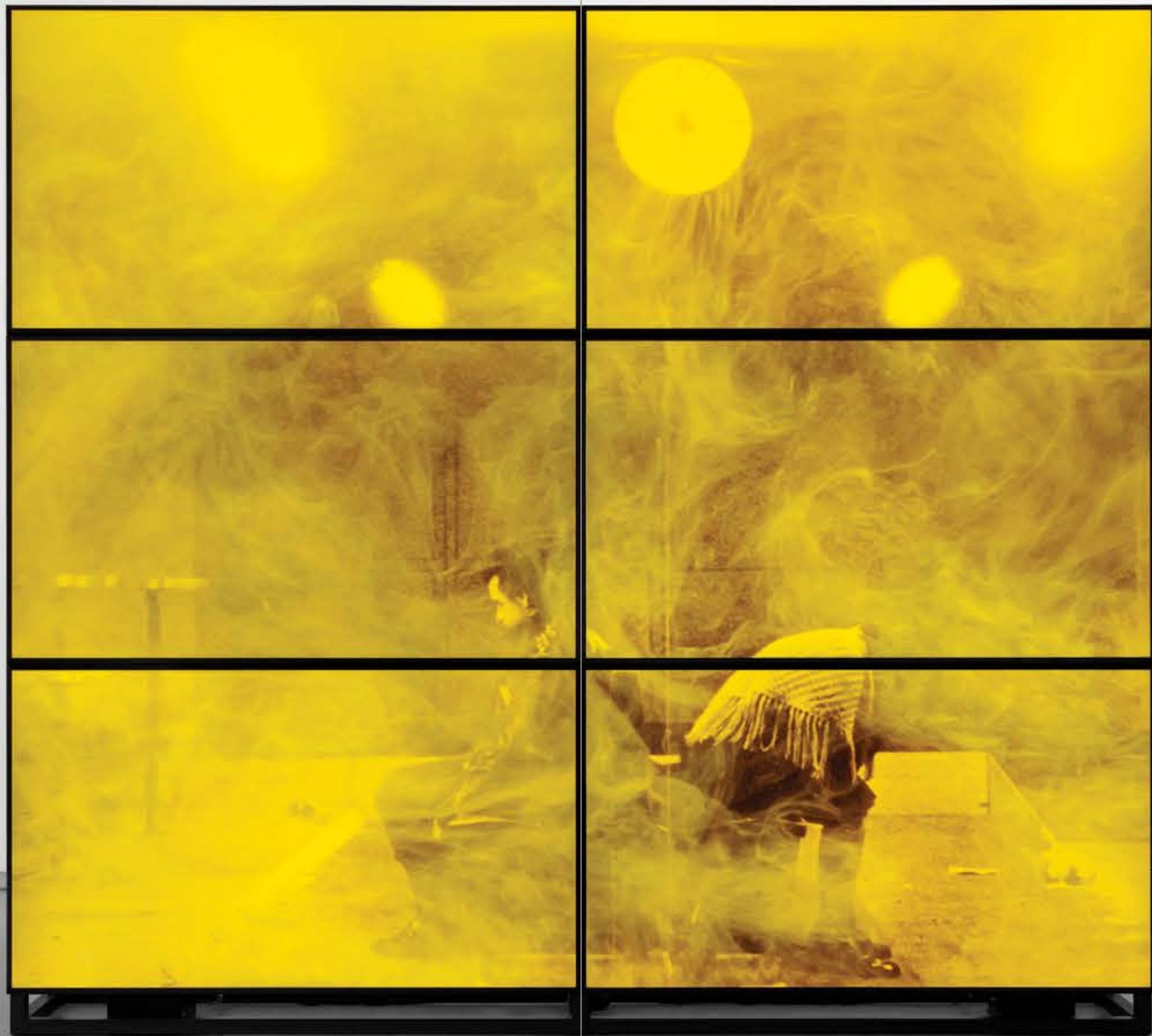






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PAGES 89–93:

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 31)

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 32)

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 33)

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 34)

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 35)

Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 36)

PAGES 94–99:

Untitled 2011
(cat. no. 2)

Untitled 2012
(cat. no. 4)

Untitled 2012
(cat. no. 5)

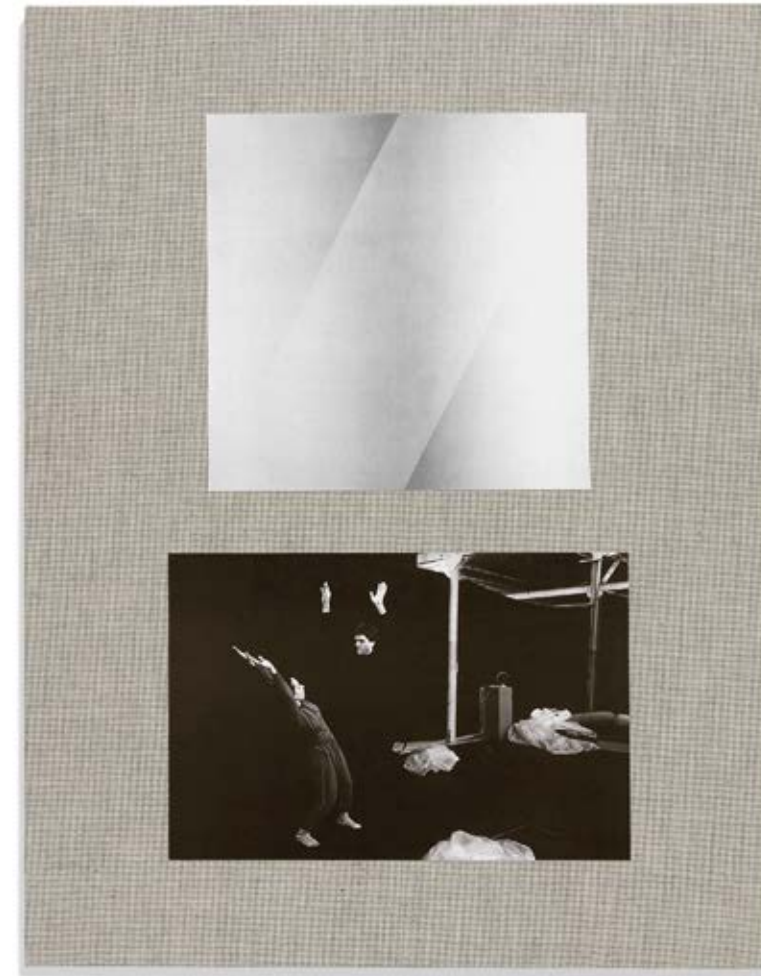
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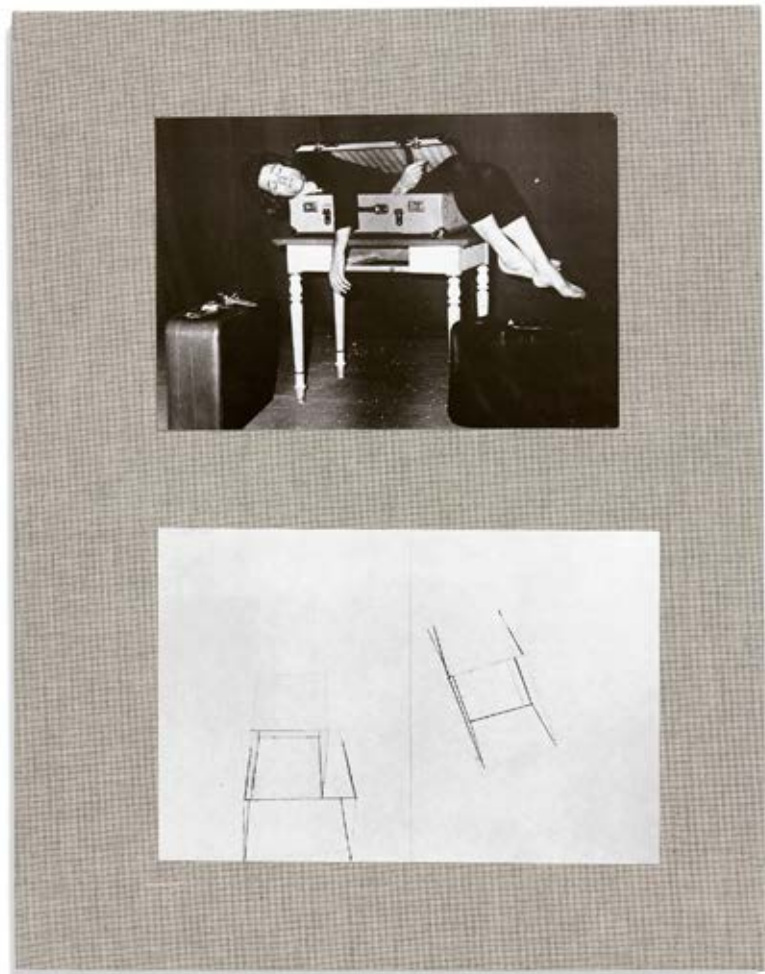
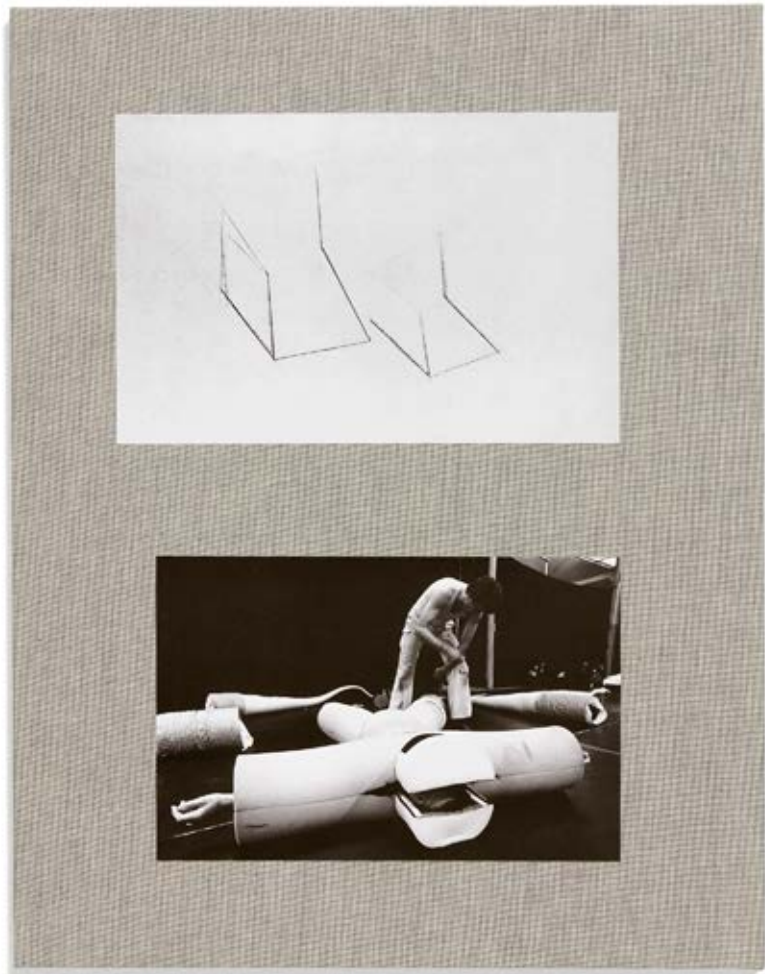
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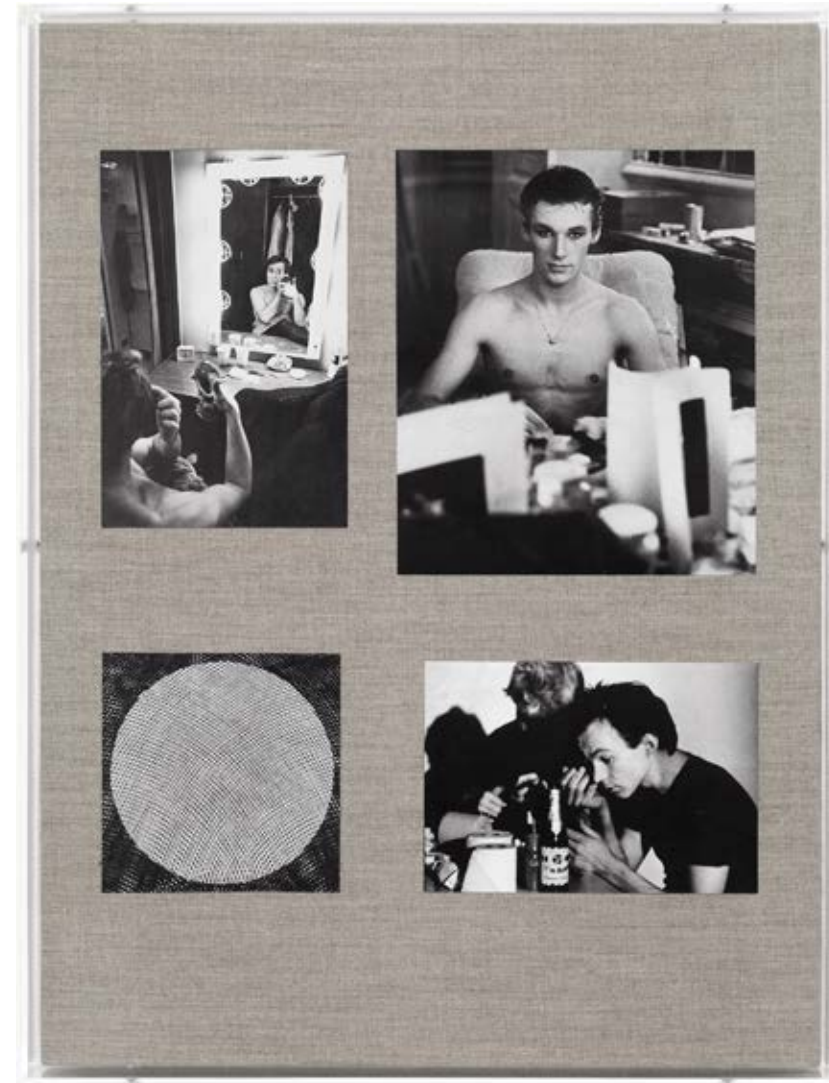
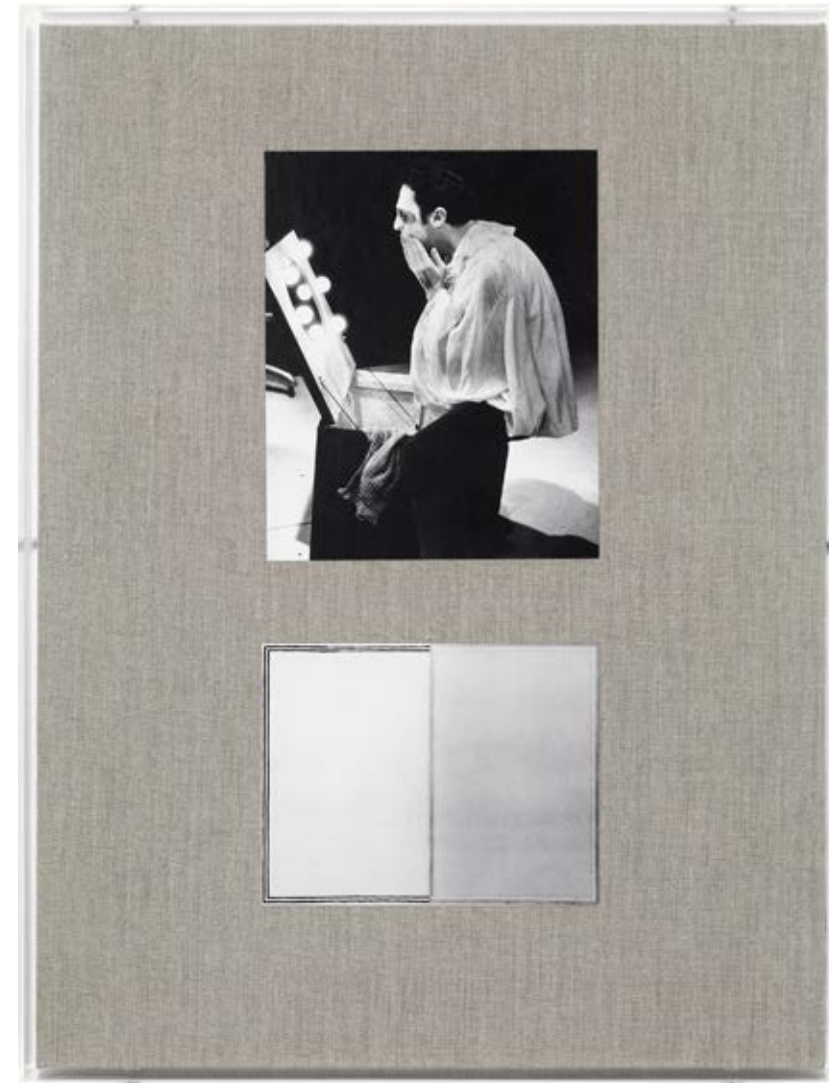
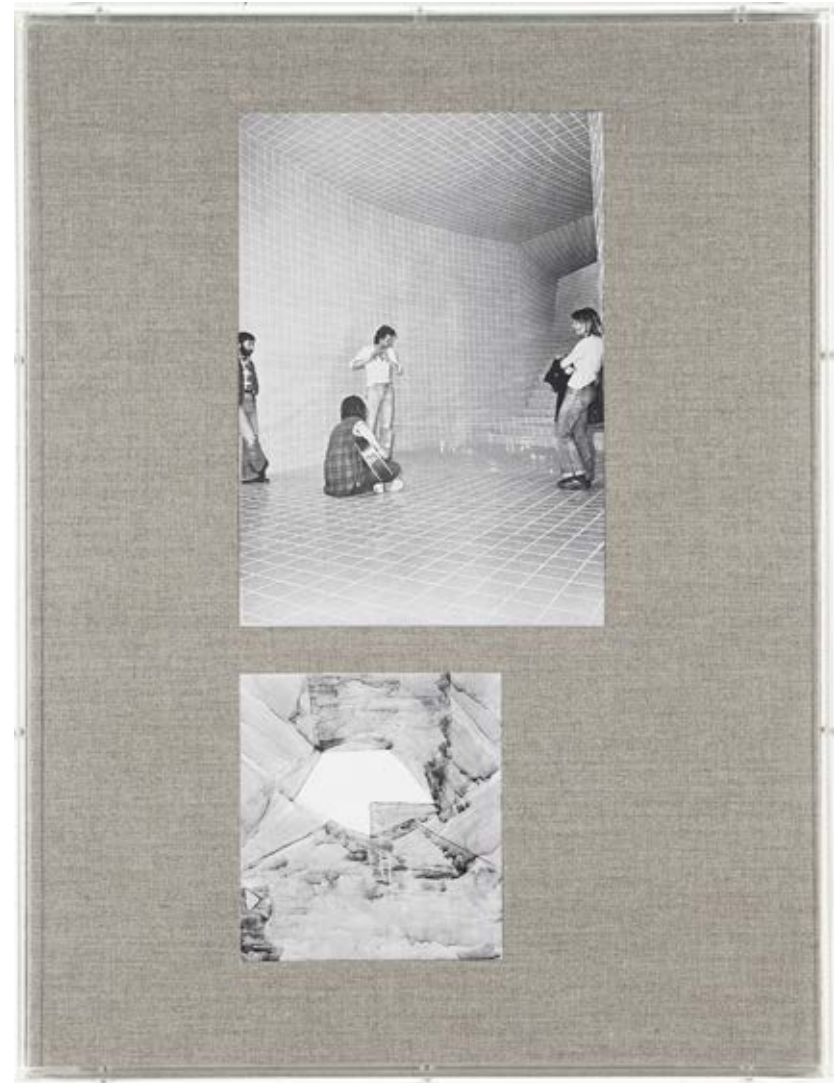
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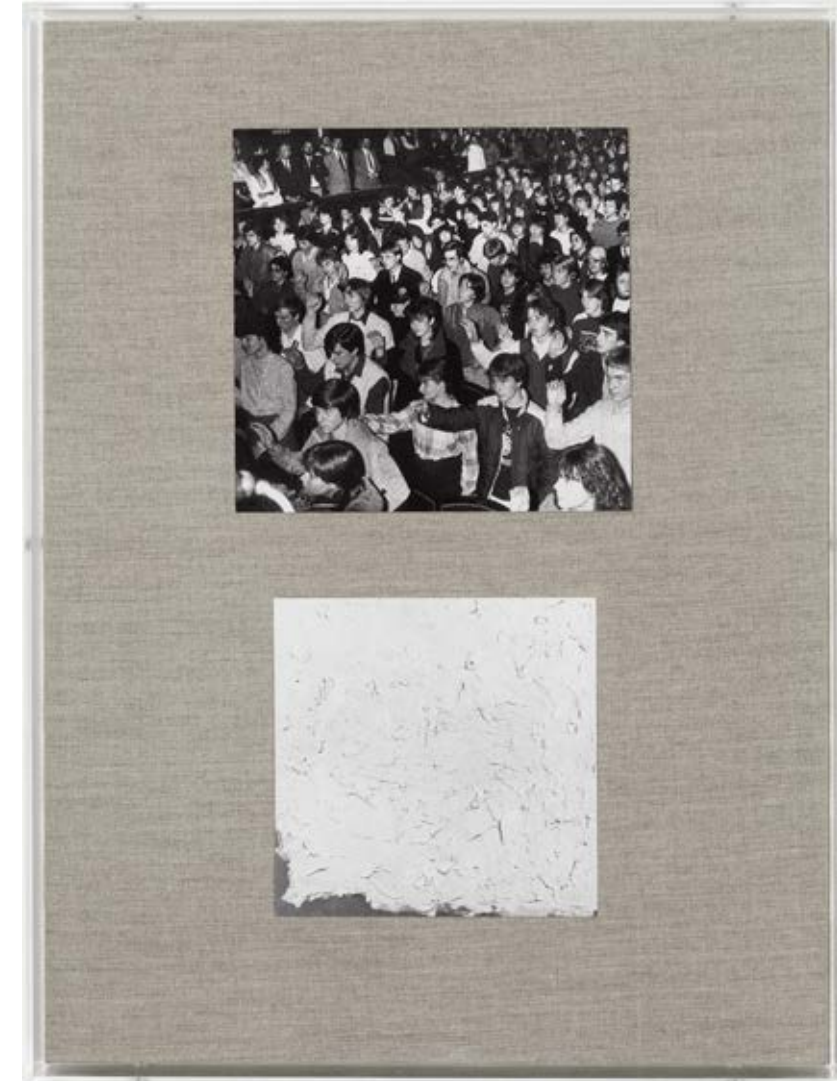
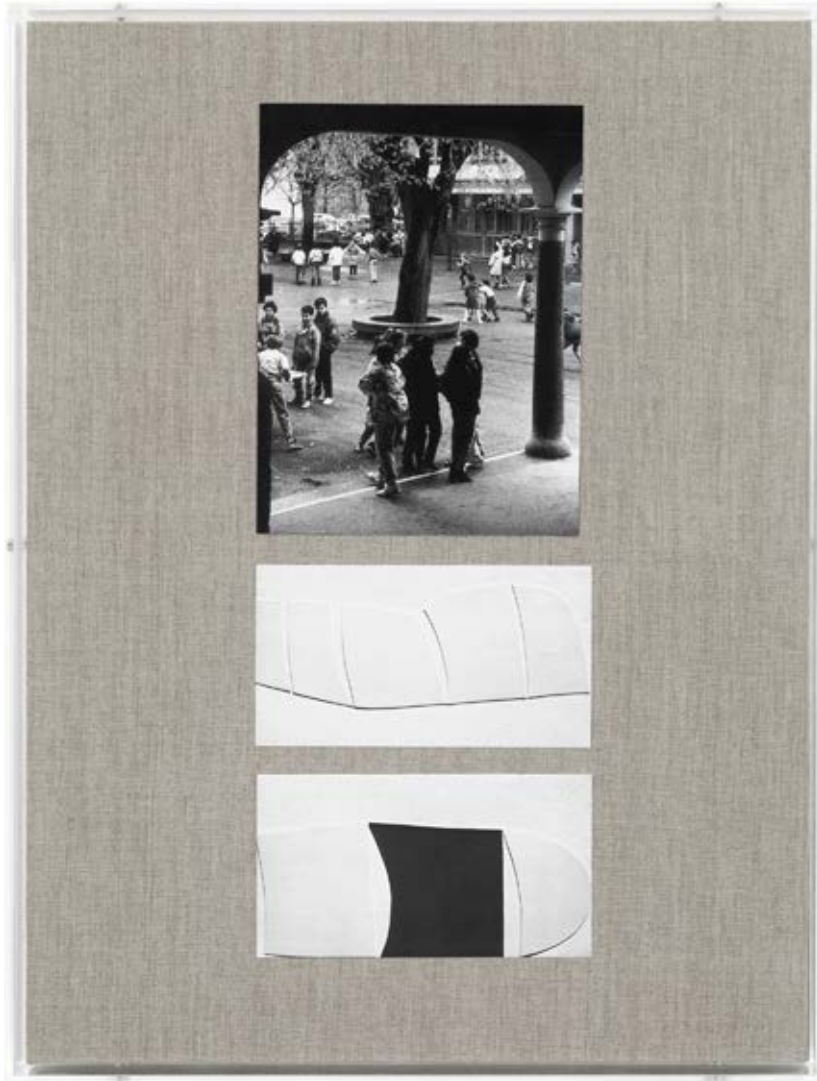
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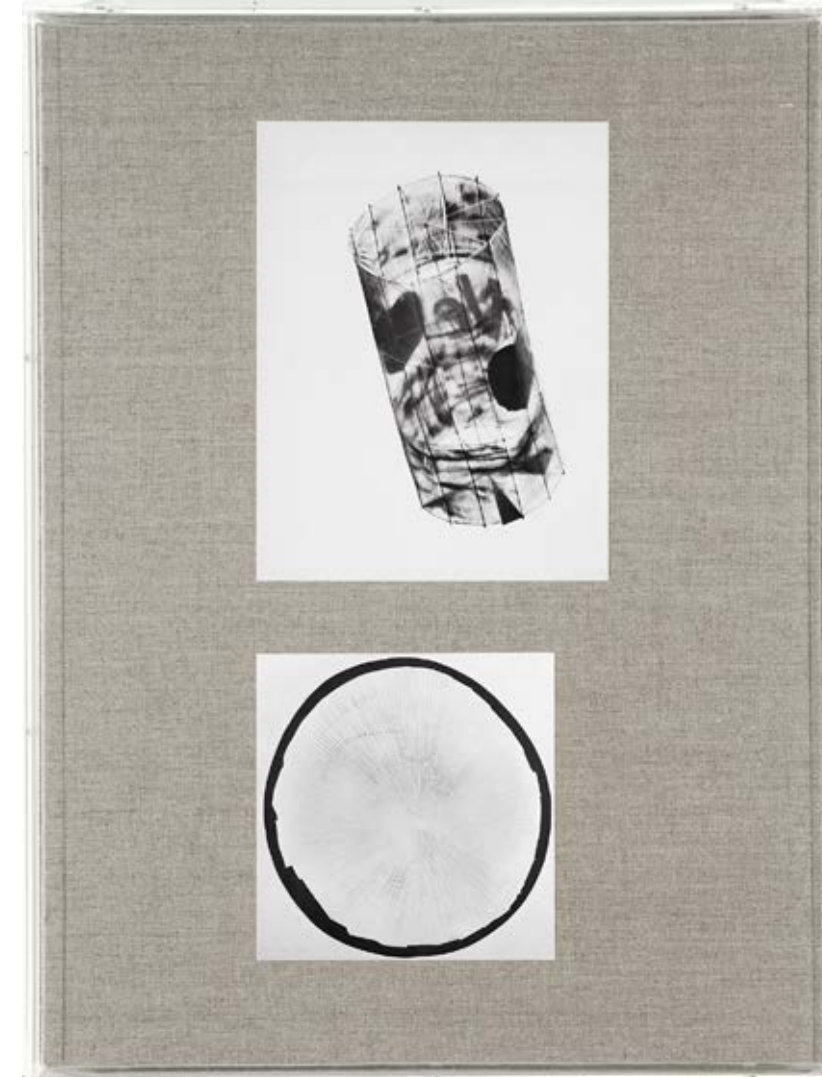
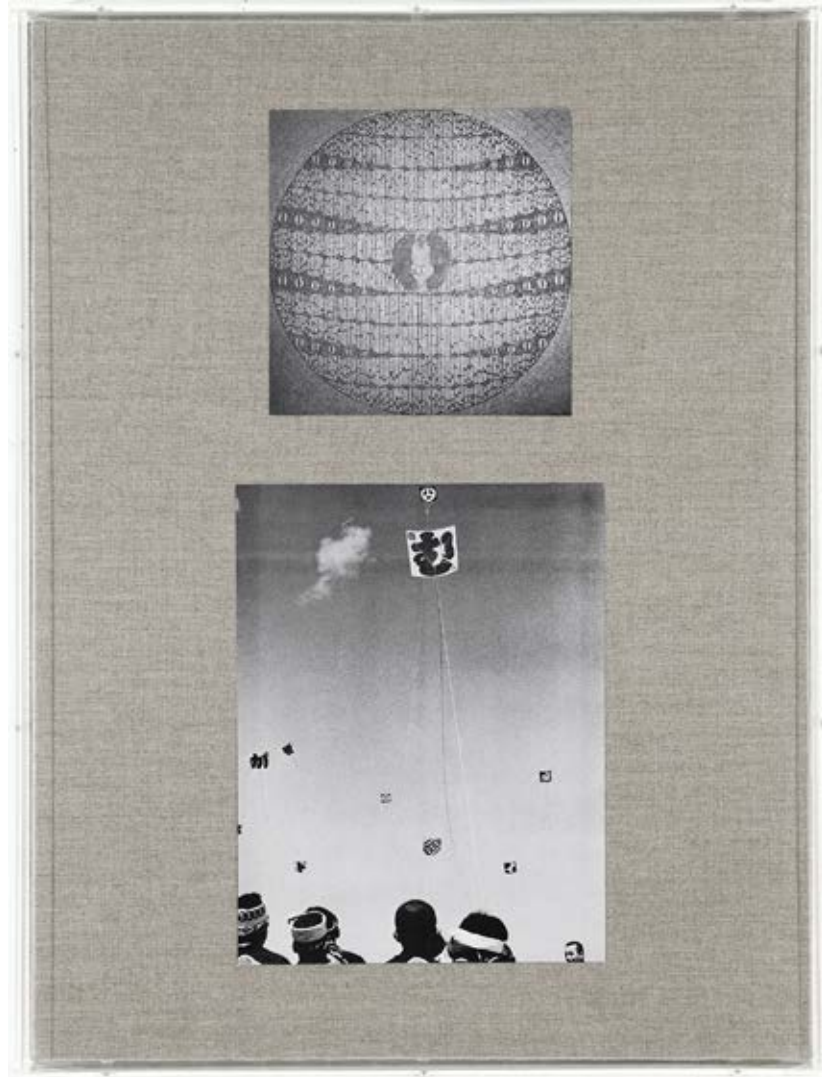
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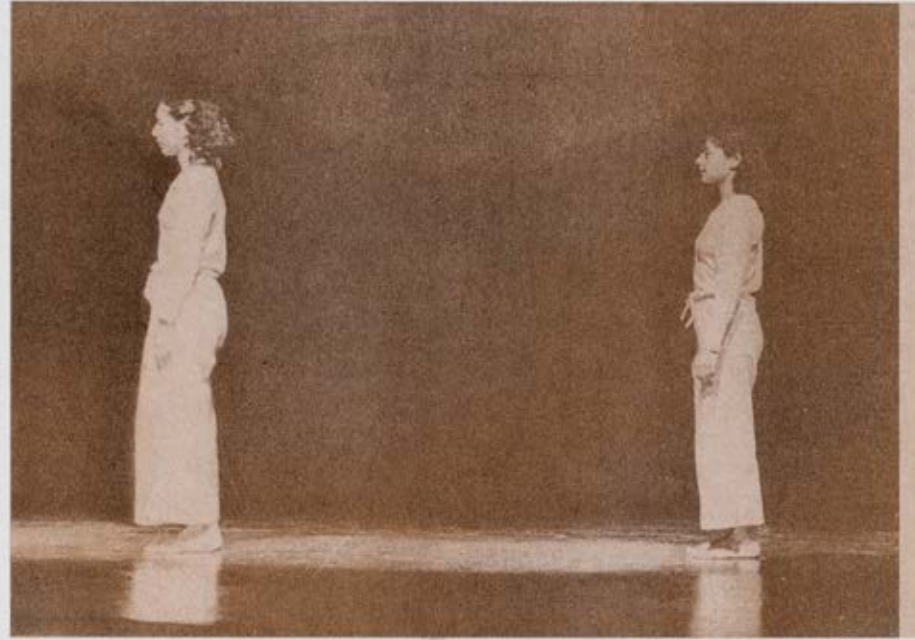




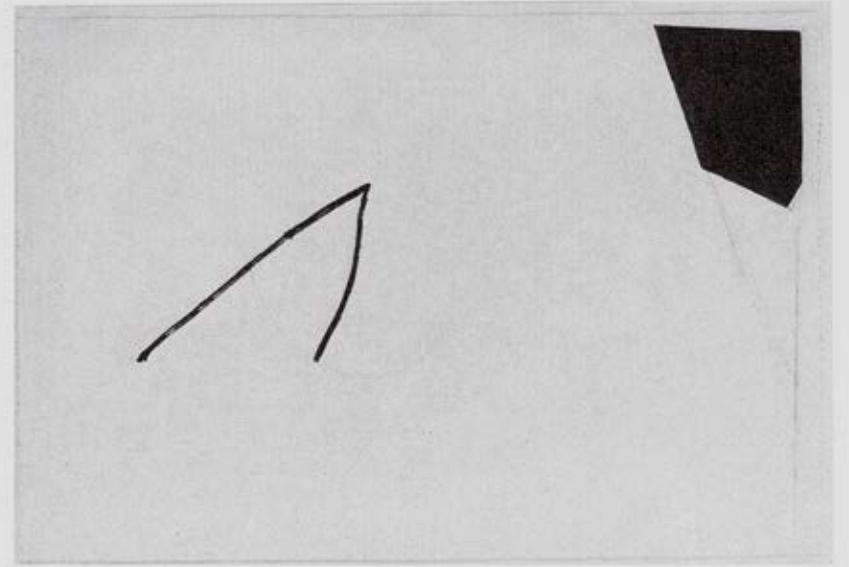




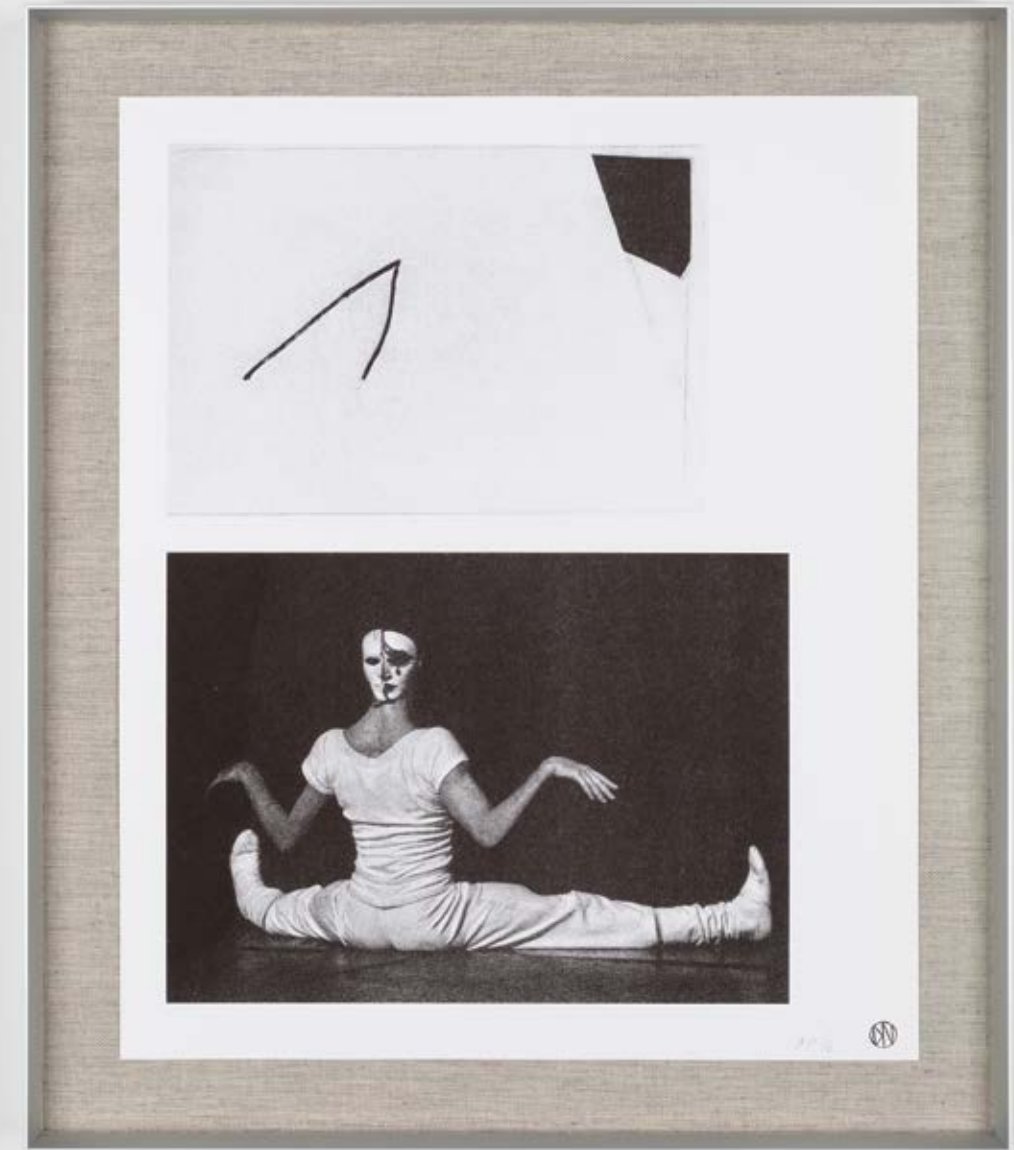
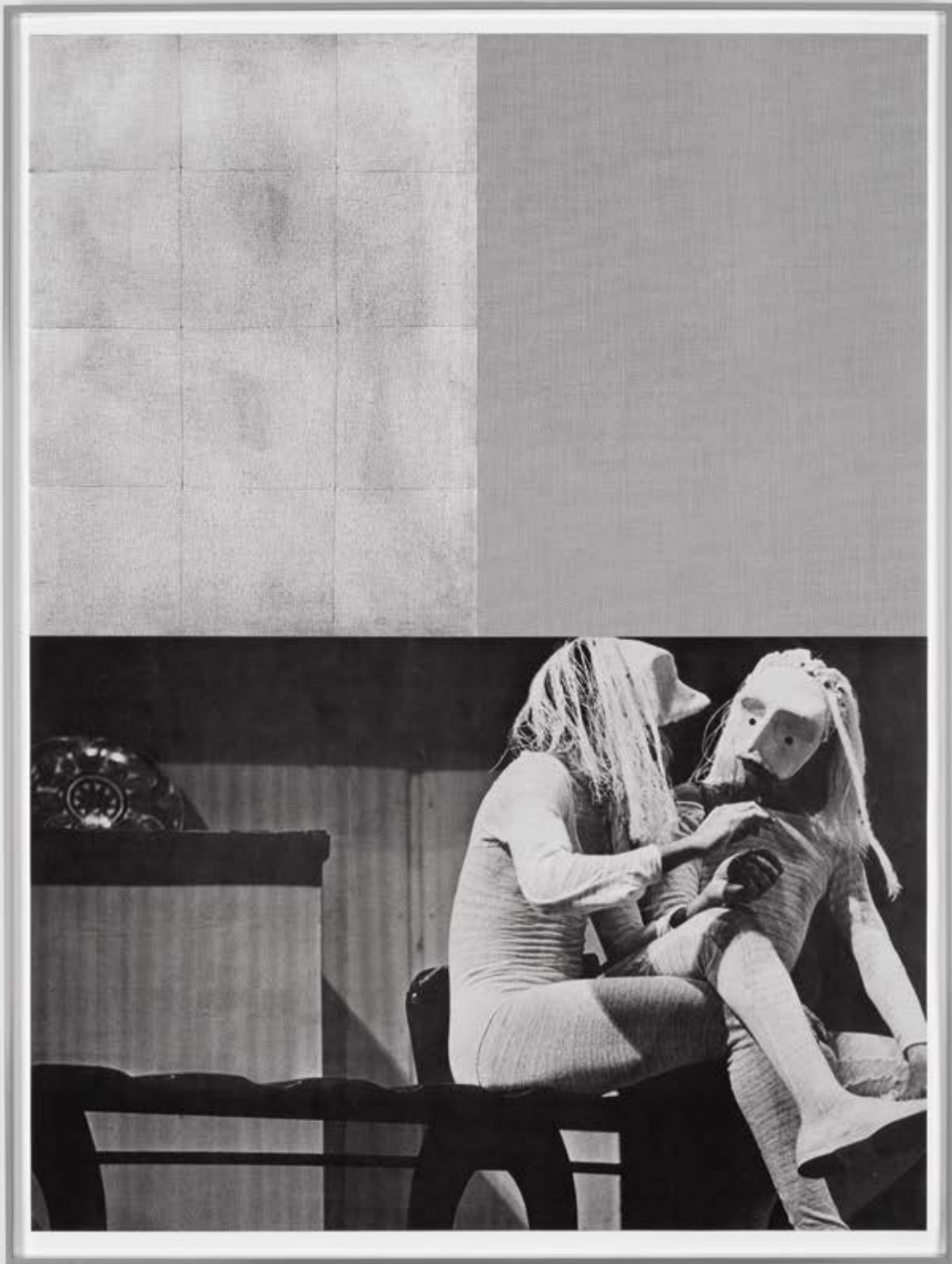




2019 *[Handwritten signature]* 4/6



2019 *[Handwritten signature]* HC



OPPOSITE:

Untitled 2017
(cat. no. 25)

PAGES 100–101:

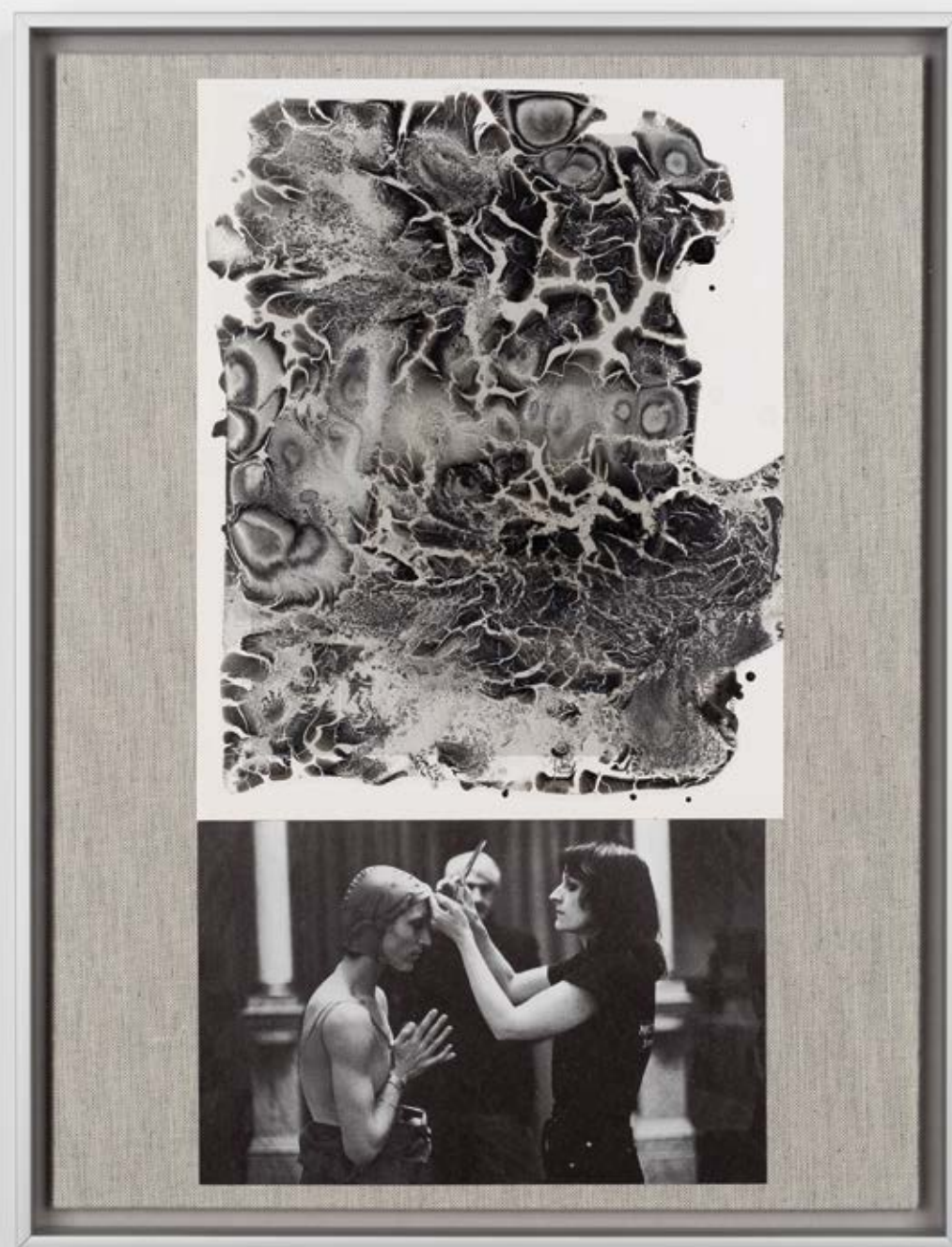
Untitled 2019
(cat. no. 37)

PAGES 102–103:

Untitled 2015
(cat. no. 11)

Untitled 2020
(cat. no. 39)





The mystery of co-belonging

Victoria Lynn

The title of this exhibition, *David Noonan: Only when it's cloudless* (a title that the artist has given to the central installation), is adapted from Yoshida Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenkō*.¹ In this book, the 14th century Japanese Buddhist monk offers the observation that we should be more mindful of our present moment and not look at the moon 'only when it is cloudless'. He stresses the impermanence of life, creating a volume of fleeting moments and memories. In a similar vein, David Noonan's works—comprised from a personal archive sourced from books, magazines and other printed ephemera—encapsulate the transitory life of images. His archive, however, is not meant to signal important moments in history, as an official archive might. Rather, it is an artist's archive: images are unhinged from their original context and set into generative, tender and, at times, ephemeral combinations.

Curated in close collaboration with the artist, this exhibition has been conceived as a spatial montage, inspired by the ways in which each of his artworks contain multiple combinations of imagery. As such, the placement of each piece in the Museum's space is conceived as part of a single installation and the relations between them are finely tuned. However, in Noonan's works, a collage fragment is not absorbed by its combination with other fragments. Similarly, the individual artworks in this exhibition are not subsumed by an overall narrative. Rather, the fragment and the artwork are given space to breathe; they 'co-belong'.²

It is the nature of collage that the image—often a fragment of a larger whole—is always restless, never settles, and is open

to shifting perspectives. This multifaceted assemblage allows for ideas and images to rub up against each other. Rather than producing a seamless narrative, the stratification created by collage evinces an artistic and experimental energy in which one image cohabits with another, without merging. One form does not subsume the other. Nor does a combination of fragments take on a sequential relationship. It is the coming together that forms the relation, not a comparison of like with like, but an activation. Against the grain of narrative, collage is speculative and open.³

The exhibition includes several suites of collages on linen that offer fascinating insights into the artist's creative process and the ways in which he draws on images from diverse sources in highly inventive combinations of representation and abstraction, figures and pattern, light and dark, and line and shape. Collage (and its attendant variations of montage and assemblage) also manifests in Noonan's tapestries, silkscreens, sculptural installation, and film. In the artist's collages on linen, images are juxtaposed without impinging on one another, floating and hovering in proximity to one another. Similarly, the relations between the images within a tapestry, or a silkscreen, remain open. Noonan's use of the fleeting image resists categorisation. The memories that they engender are myriad. They resist labels and dates. Instead, they are situated within the exhibition as if they are part of a newly shared world—a world that is restless and temporary.

This co-belonging (a term that I borrow from the French philosopher Jacques Rancière's idea of the 'sentence-image') is deeply ethical. While contemporary society is replete with inequity and division, there is also a heightened awareness of what we share: the earth, the pandemic, and the effects of climate change. As such, to fragment and disperse the found image (to work with the incidental) is not necessarily to further fragment the world in which we live, but rather to underscore the nature of co-belonging in a shared world, despite, and with, our differences. This fragmentation is not a method of shattering, crumbling, or splitting the image, it is instead a process of temporary ensembles, clusters,

Untitled 2021
(cat. no. 42)

and assemblages. Collaged, layered, montaged, woven, Noonan's combinations come to generate new links, potential connections, and alternate futures.

The spatial montage in this exhibition has been conceived with the viewer in mind. They are encouraged to experience tentative associations and the fluid poetry of becoming that is typical of collage and its history. If, as poet and critic Marjorie Perloff describes, the collagist 'establish[es] continuity between one's private universe and the world outside, to make from what is already there something that is one's own', then the viewer can, in turn, take from the collage something that is in the world outside of themselves and make it their own.⁴ In this way, Noonan's fragments can also come to 'belong' to the viewer, albeit in tentative ways. This provisional nature of collage—a world in bits and pieces that is brought together through the artistic action into an unexpected relation—underpins the exhibition. We become aware of both the absence of the seam and the presence of the juxtaposition that comes with the perpetual intermingling of images.

Throughout the exhibition there are several figures who are masked, in disguise, or wearing face paint or make-up: their appearance is a medley of facial form and theatrical tropes. Noonan will often layer an abstract composition above or beneath a masked face—for example, stitched or pasted linen pieces create an alternate patterning across the surface of the image. The figure and the pattern intersect, as if to camouflage, distort, or rhyme with one another. While we might assume that the original context for the masks is performative or theatrical, they could equally arise from subcultures, the music scene, or protest marches. Moreover, gender is often unidentifiable, emphasising the artist's interest in what lies outside the defined and measured conventions in our communities.

The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that the site of the carnival (from Roman times to the medieval period)—the place where masks were worn—functioned in opposition to official society and sat on the edge of art and

life. There was no stage and the festivities spilled out onto the street. Conventional class hierarchies disappeared on festive occasions. According to Bakhtin, the carnival experience of the people, 'opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal ...'⁵ Noonan's use of the tropes of carnival reveals a similar interest in outsiders, figures who temporarily inhabit another world. In this sense, his works are about the potential for images to transform and revitalise.

Tudor Style, 2003, is an important precursor for Noonan's interest in carnival or theatrical costume. It takes some time to realise there are two people in this silk screen on wood, as the face of the smaller figure is painted with a black stripe that almost obliterates any facial features. The actors are partially camouflaged by their strident black and white costumes that play with the geometric patterns directly behind them. Background and foreground become intertwined. Figuration and abstraction become indistinguishable. Stage and architecture are equally intermingled, creating an uncanny, almost absurd, *mise-en-scène*.

In a series of works that Noonan exhibited at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in 2016 entitled *Lead Light*, the artist has layered curvilinear and geometric forms from the leadlight window tradition, over images of various faces applying or wearing make-up. The curve of an eyebrow is echoed by the curve of the window edge. The symmetry of face paint is underscored by the intersecting equilibrium of rectangular shapes. The natural linen upon which these images are then silkscreened is treated with a thin layer of pearlescent pigment, further referencing the idea of a window. This series evokes the question of who is watching and who is being seen? A window is a form that we see through, but a leadlight window offers defined fragments and odd borders. Here, the leadlight reference further obfuscates and abstracts the made-up faces, creating a collage of parts.

Mask, 2015, presents a seated dancer, legs outstretched to either side, with a mask on the back of their head. The image has been superimposed on what appears to be a quilt, but it is in fact a found image of a handmade quilt that has been silkscreened onto the linen. He has subsequently torn the linen and reassembled it as a collage following the seams in the original quilt. This creates a *trompe l'oeil* in the work. The face of the mask is split in two, with a black tear drop and black lips on the right. While traditional Japanese masks would carry within them a type of emotion such as anger, or represent a figure, such as a demon, Noonan finds images of masks that are less symbolic, visages that give rise to a speculative and indeterminate presence.

Rather than emit an emotion, the masked figures in Noonan's works tend to be imbued with an ambiguous sense of being. While the face may indicate one perspective, the body will suggest another, creating a disjunctive scene. This is also apparent in the work *Untitled*, 2015, a silk screen on dyed linen collage in which two seated figures are engaged in what appears to be an animated conversation while wearing almost animalistic theatrical head coverings. Another work, *Untitled*, 2015, utilising elements of the same image of the handmade quilt in *Mask*, features a figure with a punk/new wave haircut and a patch of white in the centre of their face. Are they being prepared for a performance? Or do we see them after it has taken place? *Untitled*, 2016, a Jacquard tapestry of a figure with black eye make-up and sharply drawn lips, intersects with a series of vertical shapes that bisect the surface of the image. Noonan allows the two images to intermingle in a sustained tension, so that one image does not dominate the other, but rather they both co-belong in the tapestry. *Untitled*, 2019, is a Jacquard tapestry of a young figure dressed in a singlet and underpants and wearing face make-up, against a background of torn black and white forms. Like many of the figures in Noonan's works, they appear awry, almost caught off guard, as if contemplating a situation beyond the image—the abstract torn forms in the background providing no clues. Just as the mask covers over personal attributes, so too Noonan's works resist conventional notions of identity or type.

Noonan's recent tapestries (both *Untitled*, 2021) include a figure being prepared for a performance. The backgrounds in these two works consist of abstract brushwork and torn edges. In one tapestry, we see the performer being attended by two assistants, each touching the performer's hat. The unfamiliar circular object that balances on one of the assistant's arms, echoes the circle of white in the background. In turn, our eye is drawn to the curved rim of the hat and the enclosing collar on the performer. This circular white shape recurs throughout the exhibition. It could be read as a full moon, or a void. There is no depth of field in these works. Even though these images are woven together, the cut-out nature of collage is maintained.

Furthermore, the images appear worn or washed out. They are like traces of the original, as if they have been photocopied numerous times. A trace is a dialectic image, for it is an interruption in the present, while also being a product of something that existed in the past. It is suddenly emergent yet also relates to some past situation. Its meaning is created through this leap in time between the present and the past. In the hands of Noonan, traces are montaged into collages and assemblages. The gaps that are formed in the process of this dialectical relationship between an event and its trace, and between diverse elements within the artworks, allow new meanings to arise. These juxtapositions are the methods by which the artist cleaves open a space for alternative, if fleeting, interpretations.

Perhaps the most complex single piece that Noonan has ever made, the installation *Only when it's cloudless*, 2021, is on the scale of a theatrical stage set. The work consists of 11 panels: six are black and five include silkscreened images. Each panel is constructed from two sheets of aluminium that stand back-to-back with a small gap in between. In the six black panels, screenprinting ink has been rolled onto bookbinding linen which has then been adhered to the metal sheets. In the figurative panels, the compositions appear on both sides of the structures as mirror images of each other. Each of the image panels has an irregular edge that follows the form of the body. Like a sculptural collage, these works exceed the

rectangle, and puncture the space of the viewer. The soft, impressionistic quality of the images disrupt the smooth lines of the aluminium structures. They resist coming into focus and defy the modular and predictable spaces of the museum's architecture. A subtle interplay of surfaces can be seen within the materiality of the works themselves, between the soft, light absorbent texture of the linen exteriors and the hard, narrow aluminium interiors.

In the figurative panels of the installation, what appears to be documentation of an amateur production—or perhaps an occult ritual of some kind—is rendered by the artist in soft, almost blurred imagery, casting contrasting dynamic, deep shadows. The figures are dressed in white garments and perform in an improvised space comprised of a similarly draped fabric resembling the interior of a tent. The use of doubles throughout the space, combined with the granular imagery, lends the work an eerie quality. In one image, a young woman holds two candles while a figure below her leans back in ecstasy. In another, a young man performs next to barren branches. It is as if we are amid a mystical or supernatural action.

The central panel in the installation shows a makeshift moon hovering above a small structure which could either be a shrine, or a 1980s boom box. Moons, or white circles, appear in other works. For example, in the Jacquard tapestry *Untitled*, 2019, a figure holds a moon-shaped mirror. It is important to note that Noonan is not drawing on the lineage of meaning and interpretations of the shrine or the moon itself. Rather, he uses images that could reference the moon, but can also look like cut-outs of simple circles and discs. This ambiguity heightens the mystery of the work.

Moreover, the black panels not only recall minimalist sculpture from the 1960s, but also the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1968, who based this structure on the minimalist art of the period. Noonan's installation generates a similar uncanny atmosphere — these structures are both 'out of place', while also situated in alignment with the museum's geometry.

In his seminal essay 'The crux of minimalism', the American art critic and historian Hal Foster argues that minimalism contained within its own logic the antecedents of the temporal-based art that followed in North America in the 1970s. Describing this as a 'rupture', Foster argues that the viewer is encouraged to perceive minimalist sculpture as occupying space, rather than as simply an object.⁶ Although minimalism's serial nature, modular structure and industrial materials appear modernist, they are also the beginning of the breakdown of modernism, because the artwork was experienced in real space and time; it encouraged the viewer to walk around it. In 1966, the American minimalist sculptor Tony Smith famously described this aesthetic as follows: 'there is no way you can frame it, you just have to experience it'.⁷ Indeed, minimalism was often criticised for its theatricality.⁸

Following Foster's argument and in the context of TarraWarra Museum of Art, we might consider what this installation performs in the modernist architecture of this museum. As a gridded assemblage in which we can wander, *Only when it's cloudless* transforms the main gallery into a kind of stage. As the viewer circles in and through these objects, we are both observer and observed. We meet the figures in this work with equal measure. We co-belong in the space with them, as they do with each other, with an unexpected sense of ease. We become a fragment in this larger play of juxtaposition, shadows, and sharp angles. And yet, the mystery remains. Reflecting the spatial montage at play in the exhibition, it is impossible to create a narrative sequence through one's experience of this work.

In the last two decades, several exhibitions have considered both the idea of the theatre, and theatricality, as it relates to art.⁹ As curator and theorist Ute Meta Bauer proposes, artists who deal with the theatrical do so to 'deconstruct so called factual reality'.¹⁰ In the space of the museum, we are encouraged to view the work in fragments, almost as if they are scenes within a much larger whole. However, the ways in which they link is dependent on our own navigation in the space. This is temporal and specific to each viewer. We

become an actor in the space, part of the 'play'. As with most theatre, this requires us to suspend disbelief. The advantage of the assemblage is that, as a participant in the space, we can choose to be either within the drama or outside it. We can move between fiction and reality.¹¹ The important distinction to make is that Noonan is not presenting a live performance, but rather the traces of one, distilled into a set of image-objects. This is not the deconstruction of theatre so much as a collision between theatre and installation, stage and museum, performer and spectator.

There are two further works in the exhibition that feature performing bodies. *Untitled*, 2015, (from the TarraWarra Museum of Art collection) shows a dancer intersecting with stripes which recall the minimalist paintings of the French artist Daniel Buren as much as they do the geometric background in *Tudor Style*, or, indeed, the structure of a quilt. The stripes bend in line with the dancer, following the diagonal lean in her torso, and echoing the pointed gesture of her hands above her head. As she moves, so does the geometry of the silkscreen. Abstraction and figuration rhyme. The performer's body becomes rhythm itself—the trajectory of gesture, body, and line give the sense that the image is moving. As such, the space of the performance disappears and the body is woven into the surface of the work.

In the tapestry *Untitled*, 2019-20, a group of figures lie on a stage, their heads and feet turned upward. Their bodies are covered with minimal clothing, and their legs appear to be bound in black strips of fabric. Their eyes are brushed with black make-up. This could be a performance, or it could be a ritual of some kind. The scene is juxtaposed with a backdrop comprised of broad painterly abstract marks, thereby making a link between two kinds of gesture: painterly and bodily.¹² The layout of the figures constructs the space in the same way that the abstract mark making above creates a spatial plane. Rebecca Schneider has discussed the notion that the performance artist's body 'becomes a kind of archive and host to a collective memory'. That is, the body remembers the gestures of previous performances, it is like an archive of

the performative trace through which the past can erupt in the present.¹³ With the simple configuration of the body in this tapestry, we come to consider our own body, and what it remembers. The work captures the uncanny nature of what lies in between one memory and another. Like memory itself, the image is ambiguous and undefined. This is a liminal space.

Noonan's recently completed *Mnemosyne*, 2021, shot on 16mm film, is presented in a sculptural form across a bank of six large screens. The title of the film is inspired by the Greek goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, who has the power to grant the dead access to memories. Watching this work, we experience a series of still images—which include kites, children, gatherings, dancers, street parades and images of a surface being cut—across which the camera slowly pans from left to right. Periodically, liquid clouds of acidic yellow and black dye float down and across the images. This introduction of colour into Noonan's overall monochromatic palette—which has previously informed and characterised his practice—adds an ethereal quality to this film. This is further enhanced by the evocative score by the Australian musician and composer Warren Ellis whose soundtrack is haunted with a sense of both tense expectation and melancholic tones.

Noonan's filmic composition calls to mind the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* (a vast assemblage of traces in itself) which builds a picture of nineteenth century Paris through the minutiae of appearances.¹⁴ In the section entitled 'Convolutés', Benjamin's thinking is conveyed through a collection of quotes juxtaposed with his own text. They are aphorisms that relate to one another like a montage, as if the author is trying to grasp at dialectical images through this fragmenting process. In the section on the *flâneur*, who walks the streets and arcades of Paris, Benjamin seeks to interpret the urban environment by collecting and assembling images of streets, warehouses, types of lighting, fashion, prostitution, interiors, and more. For Benjamin, the definition of an 'image' is 'that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at

a standstill ... the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent'.¹⁵

For Benjamin, the 'constellation' is not like a grouping of stars but rather a sudden crystallisation formed through the juxtaposition of fragments, a 'momentous conjunction'.¹⁶ This is a form of co-belonging. As each image in *Mnemosyne* gives way to the next in the slow pan from left to right, the memory of one image impinges on another. Rendered in black and white, these images elude specificity and explanation. Instead, we are witness to suddenly emergent conjunctions. For Benjamin, such instances offer a redemptive moment. But for Noonan, redemption is not the goal or purpose. Rather it is the intermingling of fiction and reality, of art and life.

As the acidic yellow liquid descends over this highly evocative sequence of images, there is a palpable sense of foreboding. One can't help but associate this with the effects and experience of the ongoing global pandemic, descending on us like a haze and transforming the world as we knew it. Yet there are also images that express joy and freedom. This is the mystery of co-belonging, not so much to contrast worlds, but to belong in the world in a shared way, despite differences. Co-belonging seeks out the incidental as a part of a larger relationship with the world. The art of Noonan invites us to reflect on the liminal spaces that exist in and between the images. Ambiguous, uncanny and enigmatic, these temporary conjunctions touch on the impermanent and shifting worlds that we share.

- 1 Yoshida Kenkō's *Essays in Idleness: The Tsurezuregusa of Kenko*, (trans. by Donald Keene), New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- 2 Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, (trans. Gregory Elliot), London: Verso, 2007, p. 55. In the original French the word co-belonging is *une co-appartenance*, the latter being a feminine substantive from the verb *appartenir* ('to belong') and related in the distant past to the now-mostly moribund English 'appurtenance', which means a belonging or an accessory. (With thanks to Associate Professor Justin Clemens, The University of Melbourne for this interpretation). It is perhaps this underlying meaning that gives the term co-belonging its richness as a metaphor, because it means to both be co-present, or co-habit, but also refers to matter that might be regarded as an incidental accessory. Such incidentals may be understood as fragments, such as a piece of paper torn from a book.
- 3 The art historical and theoretical precedents of collage and montage, which span the history of modern art, anthropology, philosophy, and media theory are important precedents for the notion of co-belonging. Key writers include Maria Lind, Aby Warburg, Georges Didi-Huberman, Sergei Eisenstein and Donald Kuspit.
- 4 Marjorie Perloff, 'The Invention of Collage', *New York Literary Forum*, 1983, pp. 10–11; pp. 5–47 cited in David Banash, 'From Advertising to the Avant-Garde: Rethinking the Invention of Collage', *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2004, pp. 2–3.
- 5 Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Excerpts from the introduction to Rabelais and His World', (trans. by Helene Iswolsky), in Ute Meta Bauer and Anca Rujoiu (eds.), *Theatrical Fields: Critical Strategies in Performance, Film, and Video*, Singapore: NTU CCA; London: König Books; and Umeå, Sweden: Bildmuseet, 2016, p. 79.
- 6 Hal Foster, 'The crux of minimalism' in Howard Singerman (ed.), *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art 1945–1986*, Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.
- 7 Tony Smith, cited in Hal Foster, '1967/1987' in *1967: At the Crossroads*, Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, 1987, n.p.
- 8 See Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood' in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968, pp. 116–147.
- 9 *Il Tempo del Postino: A Group Show*, curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno, Manchester, 2007; *A Theater without Theater*, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007; *The World as Stage*, Tate Modern, 2007; *Theatrical Fields*, Bildmuseet Umeå, 2013 and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, 2014.
- 10 Ute Meta Bauer, 'Theatrical Fields: Theory, Theater, Theatricality' in Ute Meta Bauer and Anca Rujoiu (eds.), 2016, p. 17.
- 11 This strategy is not new. There is a rich history of experimental theatre, dance and performance in which the spectator becomes part of the action and the division between stage and audience is dissolved.
- 12 This is a link that has also been made by Hans-Thies Lehmann who argues that in 'postdramatic theatre', text is replaced by abstract forms, such as music and imagery, citing the example of modernist abstraction as an important precursor. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, (trans. by Karen Jürs-Munby), London: Routledge, 2006.
- 13 Rebecca Schneider, 'Performance Remains', *Performance Research*, vol. 6. no. 2, 2001, p. 103.
- 14 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.
- 15 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. N2a, 3, 462.
- 16 Anthony Auerbach, 'Imagine no Metaphors: The Dialectical Image of Walter Benjamin', *Image [e]* Narrative [e-journal], issue 18, 2007, n.p., http://www.imageandnarrative.be/thinking_pictures/auerbach.htm, accessed 29 September 2019.

List of works

All measurements are height before width before depth.

- 01 *Tudor Style* 2003
silkscreen on wood
69.8 x 50.6 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat
Gift of the artist, 2019
- 02 *Untitled* 2011
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 03 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex diptych, 62 x 47 cm each
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 04 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 05 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 06 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 07 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 08 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 09 *Untitled* 2012
paper collage on linen, perspex
62 x 47 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 10 *Mask* 2015
silkscreen on dyed linen collage, steel tray frame
203 x 287 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Ballarat
Purchased with funds from the Art Gallery of Ballarat Foundation, 2018
- 11 *Untitled* 2015
digital pigment print collage, silver aluminium frame
84 x 64 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 12 *Untitled* 2015
digital pigment print collage, silver aluminium frame
84 x 64 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 13 *Untitled* 2015
digital pigment print with embossing, printed on Somerset Photo Satin 300gsm
70 x 50 cm (sheet)
edition of 30 + 5 APs
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 14 *Untitled* 2015
silkscreen on linen collage
222.5 x 122.5 cm
TarraWarra Museum of Art collection
Purchased 2015
- 15 *Untitled* 2015
silkscreen on dyed linen collage, steel tray frame
214 x 229 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 16 *Untitled* 2015
silkscreen on dyed linen collage, steel tray frame
204 x 146 cm
Courtesy of the artist and House of Voltaire, London
- 17 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2017
- 18 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, Victorian Foundation for Living Australian Artists, 2017
- 19 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
Private collection
- 20 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
Private collection
- 21 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
Private collection
- 22 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
Private collection
- 23 *Untitled* 2016
silk screen linen collage mounted on wooden panel, steel frame
90 x 70 cm
Private collection

- 24 *Untitled* 2016
unique Jacquard tapestry
150 x 110 cm
Collection of Sunday's Circle
- 25 *Untitled* 2017
silkscreen on paper, hand collaged in two parts
73 x 58 cm
edition of 20 + 5 AP
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 26 *Untitled* 2019
giclee print collage on linen, mounted on aluminium, perspex box frame
105.2 x 85.2 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 27 *Untitled* 2019
giclee print collage on linen, mounted on aluminium, perspex box frame
105.2 x 85.2 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 28 *Untitled* 2019
giclee print collage on linen, mounted on aluminium, perspex box frame
105.2 x 85.2 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 29 *Untitled* 2019
Jacquard tapestry
195 x 165 cm
Private collection
- 30 *Untitled* 2019
Jacquard tapestry
195 x 135 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 31 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 32 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 33 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 34 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 35 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 36 *Untitled* 2019
paper collage on linen, perspex
45 x 35 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 37 *Untitled* 2019
Riso print
diptych, 45.5 x 34.5 cm each
edition of 3
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 38 *Untitled* 2019–2020
Jacquard tapestry
250 x 420 cm
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
James and Diana Ramsay Fund 2020
- 39 *Untitled* 2020
Riso print
38.5 x 32 cm
limited edition of 120
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 40 *Mnemosyne* 2021
16mm film
film duration 00:20:35
Cinematography / Editing: Munéyuki Sugiyama
Sound composition: Warren Ellis
Courtesy of the artist and Modern Art, London
- 41 *Only when it's cloudless* 2021
silkscreen on linen, aluminium, steel
11 parts, 215 x 146 cm each
Private collection
- 42 *Untitled* 2021
collage on linen panel
43 x 32.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
- 43 *Untitled* 2021
Jacquard tapestry
195 x 290 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 44 *Untitled* 2021
Jacquard tapestry
195 x 290 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 45 *Untitled* 2022
silver gelatin print, aluminium frame, linen window mount
38.5 x 40.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Modern Art, London and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 46 *Untitled* 2022
C-type print, aluminium frame, linen window mount
38.5 x 40.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Modern Art, London and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 47 *Untitled* 2022
C-type print, aluminium frame, linen window mount
38.5 x 40.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Modern Art, London and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 48 *Untitled* 2022
C-type print, aluminium frame, linen window mount
38.5 x 40.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Modern Art, London and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne



Untitled 2015
(cat. no. 14)

Biography

David Noonan's collage works, films, paintings, sculptural objects, tapestries and installations are characterised by a complex layering of found historical and contemporary images. In his work, he is interested in the liminal and temporal; in the dialogue between figuration and abstraction and a de-linear sense of time; in ambiguities, contradictions and in-between spaces.

His work often displays a monochromatic palette that references his source material and presents a distilled aesthetic. He explores how materials behave together and influence each other to create a form of visual and material harmonics that inform his creative processes.

Noonan was born in Australia in 1969, he now lives and works in London. He received his BFA from Ballarat University College and undertook his post graduate studies at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, Australia. His work has been presented in numerous solo exhibitions including the Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Chisenhale Gallery, London; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery, Philadelphia; Foxy Production, New York; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; HOTEL, London; Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia; Modern Art, London; Xavier Hufkens, Brussels; Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

Noonan's work is held in numerous international public collections, including Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Mamco-Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Geneva; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; British Council, London; CAA Art Museum, China Art Academy, Hangzhou, China; Depart Foundation, Rome, Italy; Mona – Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart; Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago; Saatchi Gallery, London; and TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville.

David Noonan is represented by:
Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
Modern Art, London

Contributors

Jennifer Higgie is an Australian writer who lives in London. Her latest book, *The Mirror & The Palette: Rebellion, Resilience and Resistance: 500 Years of Women's Self Portraits* is published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. She is currently working on a book about women, art and the spirit world. She also writes screenplays.

Dr Victoria Lynn is Director of TarraWarra Museum of Art and the author of three books and over 80 articles and catalogues. Previous roles have included Curator, Contemporary Art, AGNSW; Visual Arts Curator, Adelaide Festival; and Director, Creative Development, ACMI. Since joining as Director at TarraWarra, she has curated exhibitions with Pierre Huyghe (with Amelia Barkin); Patricia Piccinini and Joy Hester; Judy Watson; Yhonnie Scarce; and Rosemary Laing, along with several group exhibitions including the TarraWarra Biennial 2012: *Sonic Spheres* and the exhibitions, *All that is solid ...* and *The Tangible Trace*.

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David Noonan: Only when it's cloudless

24 March – 10 July 2022

Curated by Victoria Lynn

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COVER:

Mnemosyne 2021 (film still)

(cat. no. 40)

