

Overgrowth

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Prologue

I am often in awe at the capacity for life to exist beyond my means to perceive it.

In my youth, I experimented with psychedelics; psilocybin mushrooms most notably. Two particular incidents come to mind; one in which I laid down upon a beach in Northern Michigan and could feel the entire energy of the lake through the sand. I felt that I was not separate from this massive body which ebbed and flowed. I walked along the beach and marveled at it. I was alone quite utterly and yet present in a realm in which I did not exist, in which I was irrelevant to the state of this organic reality and yet a pervasive shared consciousness the basis of it all. Not my own consciousness, not the crass limits of my human perception, but a broader existential consciousness. This was all for me, it was me, and yet I was it as well.

The other incident; a tree came to life before my eyes. I saw it towering over me, looking at me, suddenly making its presence known. It was *alive*, it was aware, and it lived in a higher state of consciousness than I did. I was terrified of it, terrified of this alien life form which I had previously regarded as a sort of sentimental ornament of life. This Lovecraftian being existed in plain sight, its truly grandiose nature unknown to we mammals who scurry about the forest floor. I fell to the ground and collapsed in a state of terror.

I remember an episode of spiritual awakening in my mid 20s as well. At a time of deep personal loss and struggle, feeling utterly desolate, alone, and helplessly so, I reached out and said a prayer, a novel thing for me. I was met with a feeling, completely palpable and sentient, which told me rather plainly that there is nothing one can do that will separate them from the love of God, from the divine unity inherent in all things. I felt an intense sense of healing and spiritual uplifting which has not left me since.

These experiences all combine within me to produce a sentiment towards elemental form, an undercurrent running through the structures of the universe and life itself. The sort of patterns that you see when you close your eyes, the forms shared by blood vessels, nerves, lungs, and even trees. A sense of this pattern, always moving, always vibrating, never still, that under-girds this entire reality. Something that is always present and we yet remain blind to, if we could only open our eyes to see.

Overgrowth

A dense overgrowth of several entangled bushes, branches grown over each other, intertwined and inseparable beacons of life, evokes an underlying pattern of life. It posits that life is built on top of life and entirely enmeshed upon itself, that all things are together and contingent on each other, with no illusions of separation driven by the constructs of our perspective.

These photographic compositions generally are formed of exactly that. Dense views of leaves and branches, tightly cropped to the point in which they become more of a pattern than a strictly pictorial representation. They become representative of a broader phenomenon than themselves, they are allegorical, archetypal. The world tree, the tree of life, classic religious archetypes, come to mind; and yet these are not pictures of the whole tree; just a few branches of it, twisted and tied around each other, needing each other to grow.

Nearly all of these photographs consist of multiple exposures, but not of separate scenes. Often they are, rather, the same scenes exposed at multiple points of focus, offering different focal perspectives. This results in a sense in which the light of the scene begins to partially obscure itself. The inclusion of multiple perspectives, multiple points of focus onto the same scene functions to undermine the purported centrality of the human ego as the mediating construct of reality.

Human perception from its most basic premise, the concept of the ego as a place of centralized experience, is done away with here in favor of overlapping perspectives, and the resulting entropy and distortion as they begin to obscure each other. Our patterns of ocular focus, the sharpness which we favor, is contrasted and obscured by a myopia with equal claim towards reality.

The use of analog photographic process also allows for particular elements of chance, entropy, and shifts in perspective. Film allows a photographer to make choices that exist as vague heuristics, rather than deterministic algorithms. One can choose what sort of film to shoot, and how to process it, and various ways to alter the processing, and yet allow for highly variable outcomes. Especially when processes are altered in ways that introduce a purposeful entropy, in this case with a direct and randomized color solarization of slide film, there is an innate suspension of perspective and control embedded in the process. This process can be steered in broad ways, but the outcome is a mix of both the artist's perspective and intentions, and the technical perspective of the process and the film apparatus itself.

Film process in this way is often synonymous with the conceptual basis of this work, that of an existing pattern in which the ego, the human construct of unified perspective, is no longer the central force. Film itself evokes the theories in which all things originate as heuristic patterns, as Platonic forms, as capacities in themselves rather than concrete objects. Likewise, color darkroom processes expand upon this even further, allowing for light itself along with the seemingly random effects of

dust and flows of chemicals to visually impact the works themselves. While such elements are generally eschewed as unfavorable within a normative aesthetic, there is a strong element here in which they contribute to a multiplicity of perspectives. They offer the perspective of the technical process itself, at odds with, or in this case embraced by the photographer.

These various elements ultimately serve as points of obfuscation, of transfiguration, as glitches. There is a signal existing in the latent image that is bombarded with noise, noise itself being the basis of the “glitch” as a concept.¹ From the beginning, there are elements of process that introduce noise in the forms of chance and entropy, offering a diversity of perspectives beyond normative human sight. The hallmark here is that of unpredictability; an allowance, an embrace of entropy within the photographic process in such a way that produces unexpected, novel information. This is the central point of experimental photography, the place in which such examination becomes, fundamentally, a question of human freedom.²

The ultimate result of this unpredictability is a denial of the primacy of the human ego as the singular construct that shapes reality. By embracing the unexpected, the artist seeks freedom beyond the confines of their own perspective. But what explains the broader appeal of this phenomenon? What explains the broader sympathy towards strange film photography, towards glitched digital images? Why are we so enraptured with images that deny themselves?

Ultimately the appeal comes not entirely from the message, but from the capacity to speak a message within a language that we understand implicitly. The universe itself is chaos, entropy, yet formed into basic underlying patterns. Trees, lungs, blood vessels, nervous systems, galaxy clusters; these all resemble each other in uncanny fashion. We categorize these as forms, archetypal patterns that exist throughout our experience of reality.

Discussion of these forms finds its origin, traditionally, with Plato. Plato’s theory of forms stated, essentially, that the physical world which we experience is a manifestation of underlying timeless, absolute and unchangeable ideas. These ideas form the qualitative structure on which reality is experienced. In a proper sense, each form is a blueprint of perfection, the utmost pinnacle of a specific quality or idea.³

In Platonic thought, these forms exist beyond our perception of reality. As characterized in the famous allegory of the cave in *The Republic*, what we perceive as reality are in fact mere shadows of the real things, the underlying forms, which we do not perceive directly. Yet, in our experience of the world we encounter these forms as archetypes and categorize them in such a way.

Crucially, the psychological construct of the ego is placed at the center of this phenomenon. In Freudian thought, the ego is the aspect of the self fundamentally responsible for the mediation of reality.⁴ In platonic terms, the ego is thus the construct responsible for experiencing, processing and categorizing these archetypal universal forms. The ego is the filter by which one sees the shadows on the wall, and constructs a meaningful interpretation of them, which constitutes our perception and

1 Menkman, “The Glitch Moment(um)”, 11.

2 Vilém Flusser, “Towards a Philosophy of Photography.” p. 81.

3 Plato, “Timaeus”.

4 Freud, “The Ego and the Id”.

experience of reality.

Following Freud's argument, the ego is not only responsible for mediating our perception of external reality, but also for mediating between the various constructs of the self. The ego must manage the often competing desires and impulses of the id, the super-ego, and reality. While the id, for example, acts according to its innate desires for pleasure and destruction, and the super-ego internalizes cultural rules and morality, the ego above all seeks stability, a perfect "ego-ideal" of the self. This is, of course, unattainable in varying degrees; the ego is caught between these three competing impulses, and the greater the discord, the greater the resultant neurosis.

The aesthetic overlapping of chaos and form in this work mirrors the structure of the universe as well as ourselves. There is chaos in the mind, along with form and sense, which we do our best to piece together into a cohesive person, our concept of the ego. We experience the chaos of the world, and piece it together into forms and categories that make sense of the broader whole. Yet, what is often lost in this process of categorization is the fundamental unity of things.

This begins to hint at the appeal of elements of chaos, randomness and entropy, within otherwise figurative works. There is a simultaneous flattery of the ego's predisposition for stability and easy categorization, as well as an acknowledgment of our own more primal chaos. There exist ideal points of tension along this broad spectrum, points of harmony that seem to highlight both, and these become appealing to us by our very nature.

In the realm of photography this tension is particularly important. Increasingly we live in a world of images, a world in which images themselves constitute as great a portion of our reality as physical reality itself. We no longer see images as mediated abstractions; in their normative depictions, we see them as fundamentally real, as truthful, and thus utterly expected. In fact, we have grown to live in them, and they in us, and familiarity breeds contempt.

The normative image becomes synonymous with the constructed ego, favoring stability and easy categorization, a "quick read." Complex, distorted, and unfamiliar images begin to move the mind away from this insular perspective towards the fundamental multiplicity of perspectives that form the true basis of consciousness. Form and sense are appealing, but the inclusion of chaos hints at the underlying togetherness that pervades our attempts at categorization, a sort of divine mysticism with a profound view of the unity of the cosmos.

The psychedelic experience, as well as the classic mystical experience, are often characterized by a profound shift in perspective away from the singular individual into a broader cosmic whole which they are a part of and included within. Fundamentally, these are shifts in perspective, be they neurochemical or spiritual; and yet they produce a similar change in sentiment.

Photography, by this point with an equal claim to our experience of reality, can also clearly elicit similar experiences via profound shifts in its own perspective. The introduction of chance, randomness and entropy into photographic process is one way to achieve this, as it begins to bring the photograph away from pure depiction, instead hinting at the inclusion of the photographic subject within the broader chaotic whole of existence. The photograph, with its own perspective shifted by

the introduction of noise into the technical process, becomes a locus for the shift of the viewer towards a broader, more inclusive consciousness.

For that reason, this exhibition purposely featured a single figurative image of the artist holding a tree branch among a wider selection of distorted, naturalistic works. The single image of the artist functioned as a metaphor for the viewer and humanity itself, with the lone figure as a visual metaphor for the human experience, dwarfed by, yet entirely placed within the broader field of consciousness.

The lone figure on the landscape, the viewer realizes, is not alone at all. They are connected to the universe beyond their own perception, beyond their perceived isolation. Smaller than the landscape, they are the utmost signifier of the expanded human experience, as the forest lives within them and they in it. The viewer in the gallery is no different, and stands in the same place as the artist conceptually, dwelling within this expansive worldview.

History

Several periods of art history come to mind as relevant for this body of work, along with several artists and authors.

Pictorialism, one of the first artistic movements in photography, is of course the foundation in an art historical sense for photographs which deny a sense of realism. Characterized by soft focus, a painterly aesthetic, and the consideration of the photograph as an art-object rather than a depiction of reality, Pictorialism can be seen as a response fundamentally to the question of photography's place as an artistic medium.

Notable artists of this movement for consideration in relevance to this work include Alvin Langdon Coburn with his series (perhaps the first) of abstract photographs, Oscar Gustave Rejlander's work with photomontage, and of course Anne Brigman's notable photograph *Soul of the Blasted Pine*. Coburn's work established the precedent for the potential of photography to explore purely abstract aesthetics, which touches strongly on the elements of abstraction in this work.¹ Rejlander as well, employing a photomontage technique, exposing multiple images onto photographic paper in order to create elaborately staged visual collages, was an early explorer of non-normative photographic process as a means to create work.² Brigman's seminal photograph posits a continuity between humanity and nature, with the nude female figure atop the dead tree stump standing in for the body of the tree itself.³

Artist-photographers from the outset, particularly in the Pictorialist movement, set out with determination to answer a fundamental question; can a photograph be a work of art, or is it merely a depiction of reality? Ultimately, the answer becomes not an either/or, but a yes/and. Questions about the nature of art works have long since passed this fundamental divide; indeed, the question of even needing to define such things is now in doubt.

While the Pictorialists were fundamentally concerned with the relationship of photography to painting, the relationship of photography to art, contemporary fine-art photographers are perhaps more concerned with the relationship of artistic photography to the broader photographic world in which we live. The ubiquity of the image in contemporary society seems to require some sort of response, some sort of distinction. Yet, can we even properly distinguish between them, and if so, are such distinctions even necessary or helpful?

One can posit that in this way, the implementation of a Pictorialist aesthetic and methodology

1 Alvin Coburn, "Vortograph." MOMA, New York City. <https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/inventingabstraction/?work=54>

2 Oscar Rejlander, "Two Ways of Life." The Met, New York City. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/294822>

3 Anne Brigman, "Soul of the Blasted Pine." The Getty Museum, Los Angeles. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/334829/anne-w-brigman-soul-of-the-blasted-pine-american-negative-1908-print-1909/>

posits a clear distinction between these works as art-objects and the broader photographic reality. These photographs make no claim towards realistic depiction, yet they are extraordinarily real as objects themselves. This goes at least part of the way towards explaining the appeal of the glitch in contemporary art works; as previously discussed, there are certainly broader psychological and spiritual predispositions at play as well.

The next movement of significant relevance to this work is the onset of color photography as a valid artistic medium in the 1970s/80s. This is most significantly found in the writing of Vilém Flusser and the work of William Eggleston.

Flusser went to great lengths in his work *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* to explain the nature of the photograph as fundamentally an abstraction in itself rather than a literal depiction of reality. Particularly in regards to color photography, Flusser explains that although it seems more realistic than black and white photography, color is actually more abstract, as the use of color requires a dramatically increased level of mediation in its process. In his argument, more channels of possible inputs lead to more complex and novel information. Presenting novel information, of course, is what Flusser presents as the fundamental task of the photographic artist, to provide new ways of seeing.

Crucially, Flusser presents this fundamental task as one that addresses human freedom writ large. The experimental photographer, in his view, is unconsciously positing a radical human freedom within the context of the technical apparatus. He writes,

With one exception: so-called experimental photographers—those photographers in the sense of the word intended here. They are conscious that Image, apparatus, program and information are the basic problems that they have to come to terms with. They are in fact consciously attempting to create unpredictable information, i.e., to release themselves from the camera, and to place within the image something that is not in its program. They know they are playing against the camera. Yet even they are not conscious of the consequence of their practice: They are not aware that they are attempting to address the question of freedom in the context of apparatus in general.⁴

In addressing the question of human freedom through playing against the camera, experimental photography also begins to question the limitations of the human ego as the central mediator of perspective. For the artist as well as the viewer, an expanded perception results, one beyond the limits of normative sight. The human experience is not the central aspect of the work; rather, a re-orientation of human sight towards an expanded field of archetypal forms. This is a central premise of *Overgrowth*.

Eggleston's work becomes particularly interesting in this realm for the fundamental tension between his subjective compositions, those of seemingly ordinary objects and places, with the intensity of the inherent abstraction of the medium of color photography itself. Eggleston's choice to print the majority of his work using a dye-transfer process heightened this, as it resulted in particularly intense levels of color saturation. Describing his notable 1973 photograph *The Red Ceiling*, Eggleston

4 Vilém Flusser, "Towards a Philosophy of Photography." p. 81.

said, "When you look at a dye-transfer print it's like it's red blood that's wet on the wall..."⁵ The photograph's subjective depiction, that of a ceiling light in a red room, a somewhat ordinary place, becomes intensely abstracted through the medium itself.

The rebellious ennui of the 1990s and 2000s comes into play here as well with the work of Ryan McGinley, Scott Treleaven, Dash Snow, and particularly with Wolfgang Tillmans. The work of each of these artists went a long way towards expressing a particular sort of frustration and desire; that of transcendent revolt in various forms.

McGinley's work of the period is characterized by images of human figures in nature. Often nude, they're shown walking, running, falling, swimming, in states of action enmeshed into natural surroundings. There's a strong element of transcendence throughout these works, of the elemental interconnection between humanity and nature. Occasionally McGinley made use of certain process-based techniques for distortion; his notable photograph *Falling Light Leak* comes to mind specifically.⁶ The use of light itself as a natural phenomenon impacting the film medium as a means to convey a sense of naturalism is a prominent element of his work. McGinley's blend of process-based distortion and naturalistic transcendence sets a strong precedent for the work of *Overgrowth*.

Scott Treleaven's collage work is relevant for much of the same reason; a notable depiction of humanity enmeshed in nature, in this case via his physical interventions in the form of collage. Eschewing pure photographic depiction in favor of collage has much the same effect as employing process-based distortion; it puts the human subject onto the same plane as the natural elements of the photograph by virtue of reducing it to a state of object-hood as a singular physical artwork. In Treleaven's case, skulls feature as a prominent symbolic element of his work, as a *memento mori* that denies the primacy of the human experience. His collage *flowers (in the dustbin)* shows a young man perched atop a pile of them, with flowers in the background.⁷ Life is shown intermixed with death, growth preceding from both, and human primacy equated to a slight, transitory grin.

Dash Snow's series of polaroids inform this work for their abandonment of conventional elements of photographic composition and reliance on the medium itself to convey a sense of intimacy. There's a clear abandonment of the human ego in the spirit of his work; the Polaroid becomes a manifestation of something purely driven by the id, of parties and half-nude figures, of a rapaciousness at odds with the world. His photograph *Untitled (Dakota Smoking)*, a notable example of his oeuvre, shows several nude figures in sexual embrace, on a bed, while one of them smokes a cigarette.⁸ His work is most important in relevance to *Overgrowth* for the dialogue it presents, the clear placement of the camera apparatus at the intersection of these various psychological constructs. Without reducing the agency of Snow as an artist, a psychoanalytic reading here establishes a basis for an analysis of the broader field of photography. Snow as the ubiquitous id-driven photographer creates a basis on which photographic work can be examined in a similar light.

5 William Eggleston, "Greenwood, Mississippi". The Getty Museum, Los Angeles. <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/126324/william-eggleston-greenwood-mississippi-american-1973/>

6 Ryan McGinley, "Falling Light Leak." Arthur.io. <https://arthur.io/art/ryan-mcginley/falling-light-leak>

7 Scott Treleaven, "flowers (in the dustbin)". Artfacts.net. <https://artfacts.net/exhibition/scott-treleaven-who-are-you-an-agent-for/18183>

8 Dash Snow, "Untitled (Dakota Smoking)." Artnet.com. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/dash-snow/untitled-dakota-smoking-a-9Sjrs9epIPsdQqJc6m8Amg2>

Wolfgang Tillmans has alternated between strict representation and abstraction throughout his career, often blending the two together in installations that play with form and scale. His series *Freischwimmer* is particularly relevant for its use of the medium of the chromogenic print as a means of abstraction.⁹ Likewise, his 2001 exhibition *Supercollider* made use of process-based chromogenic prints, and a mix of pure abstraction and lens-based nature images.¹⁰ Tillmans' installations often play with form and scale as an interplay between abstract, process-based works, along with more normative depictions; in this way, he engages with the same fundamental tension as *Overgrowth*, that of the tension between the construct of the ego and its dissolution. His process-based approach to the medium set a notable precedent as well, particularly for the use of the chromogenic print, and was highly influential in the choice of that process for *Overgrowth*.

Two other contemporary artists come to mind for their relevance as well; Edward Burtynsky and Anastasia Samoylova. Their photographic work documenting various landscapes centers around the impact of mankind upon nature. While their work is perhaps more overtly political in their examination of the impact of humanity upon the natural landscape, their concern is certainly shared here, and simply approached more from a place of metaphysics than politics.

Burtynsky is most notable for depicting the sublime horror of industrialization, chemical spills, toxic pools and the like. His series *Tailings*, for example, depicts the environmental aftermath of metal mining and smelting.¹¹ The strange beauty of bright orange chemicals flowing through a leafless landscape is fundamentally in tension with the horror of what it signifies, the deterioration of the landscape by human hands. The play with perception here, reminiscent of a Fauvist approach in which anomalous color transcends its source, takes on new meaning in the context of what is actually a normative depiction. Burtynsky's work is relevant here for both the employment of photography as a means of expanded perception, as well as for its examination of human impact and perspectives on the natural landscape.

Samoylova's recent work *Floodzone* centers on the impact of climate change on Miami, employing a sort of constructivist sublime aesthetic to depict the tension between the cityscape and encroaching nature in the form of floods and hurricane damage.¹² Similar to Burtynsky, she employs a more normative, "straight photography" approach in her process. The unfamiliarity takes place solely in the scenes themselves and in her camera work, framing, positioning and the like. Samoylova's work demonstrates the capacity for photography to induce shifts in perspective simply by virtue of the innate qualities of the medium alone. By photographic composition, she is able to depict the discord between human activity and the natural landscape; in her work, poignantly, as the landscape begins to pervade the urban environment.

On the subject of literature, it would be hard to deny the influence of the famed poet Robinson Jeffers on this work. Jeffers is most notable for the "anti-humanist" philosophy espoused in his poetry, positing a sort of radical humility of mankind before nature. The denial of our collective

9 Wolfgang Tillmans, "Freischwimmer." MOMA, New York City. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/164471>

10 Wolfgang Tillmans, "Supercollider." Galerie Daniel Buchholz, Köln. <https://www.galeriebuchholz.de/exhibitions/wolfgang-tillmans-super-collider/>

11 Edward Burtynsky, "Tailings." <https://www.edwardburtynsky.com/projects/photographs/tailings>

12 Anastasia Samoylova, "Floodzone." <https://www.anasamoylova.com/projects#/floodzone/>

egocentricity, the denial of humanity, for Jeffers is not surmised by political ideals of lessening consumption, or even more radical pro-agrarian ideologies; it ultimately comes with death. His poem *To the Stone-cutters* presents this inevitability:

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
Challengers of oblivion
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall down,
The square-limbed Roman letters
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
Builds his monument mockingly;
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems.¹³

Jeffers' work stands as an anti-monument, claiming that even the grandest works we construct will inevitably decay as we do. Yet, the solution to this existential crisis is found in thought; our works still hold solace and meaning, though they do not last forever. This is his testament towards a radical interconnectedness, in which everything is intertwined and divinity pervades through all.

Ernst Jünger's writing has also been highly influential, thinking specifically of his work *The Forest Passage*. The forest, for Jünger, becomes a metaphor for an inward state of rebellion against tyranny and fear, be they of the world, or of the mind. Regardless of outward conditions, this manifests psychologically, the forest as a metaphor for the innate strength one finds within, opposed to the assaults of one's super-ego, the hyper-critical element of the self. Crucially, this presents itself as a fundamental mystery. Jünger writes,

The forest is *heimlich*, secret. This is one of those words in the German language that simultaneously contains its opposite. The secret is the intimate, the well-protected home, the place of safety. But it is no less the clandestine, and in this sense it approaches the *unheimlich*, that which is uncanny or eerie. Whenever we stumble across roots like this, we may be sure that the great contradictions sound in them—and the even greater equivalences—of life and death, whose solution was the concern of the mysteries.¹⁴

The mystery of the forest, for Jünger, is thus the mystery of life and death, and the fundamental tension between them. Presented in the same work, Jünger's theory of *symbolshwund*, of "symbol-erosion", presents the same tension in aesthetic terms, in which deteriorated symbols evoke both meaning and nihilism. The capacity for archetypal forms of the forest, partially deteriorated and obfuscated through photographic process, to function as allegories of this great mystery, owes much of its theoretical basis to Jünger.

13 Robinson Jeffers, "The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers." p. 18.

14 Ernst Jünger, "The Forest Passage." p. 49.

Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* certainly deserves acknowledgment as well, as perhaps the seminal text regarding the psychedelic experience. Simply put, Huxley introduced many (this artist included) to the possibility of psychedelic-induced shifts in perspective. The fundamental questioning of the nature of reality is a hallmark of Huxley's work, as well as this exhibition.

Last but not least, the influence of the Book of Ecclesiastes must be acknowledged, as it posits a deep humility of mankind before God and nature. The book asks the fundamental question; where do we find meaning if everything we do is ultimately undone? The fruit of our labor is vanity, the vanishing of the wind; the things we make won't last forever. Our meaning comes rather in our interconnected joys, in eating and drinking together, in the contentedness we find in the process of our labor rather than its outcome, all culminating in a deep respect for life beyond us and for its origin.

In large part, the analytical narrative presented here makes use of a style of Hegelian dialectic. The bias here lies in the premise that time itself plays out in such a way that cause and effect have discrete meaning; that the influence of pictorialism can be traced into contemporary art as part of an ongoing dialogue, for example. Such perspective makes for a convenient narrative, and convenient framing for this body of work, but without proper contextualization as such, would do it a great disservice. Such framing, in many ways, is itself a construct of human perceptions of linear time, and at odds with the central premise of the work.

Ultimately, the operative concept here is that of mystery, of revelation. The extent to which these various movements, artists and writers can be seen as relevant, and even causative to this work exists only insofar as they too shared in exploring the fundamental mystery of life and death as it relates to human freedom. Expanded perception, photographic and otherwise, can have no other goal but to see beyond the veil of human life, beyond even death, towards a place of radical freedom and interconnectedness. This exists itself as a primal underlying form, beyond time, and what draws all of these diverse bodies of work together is that they all have glimpsed it, consciously or unconsciously, and been drawn into the mystery together.

Process

This work was produced entirely using analog photographic processes. For the color chromogenic prints, the initial photographs were taken on Kodak Ektachrome, a color-positive slide film. Generally, they were comprised of in-camera multiple exposures. This slide film was then subjected to a solarization process mid-way through its development, in which the partially developed film was subjected to colored light from an LED bulb. This bulb was set to simply cycle through its colors over time; the exact color which impacted the film was thereby random. The film development was then completed, resulting in positive slides altered (mainly in the shadows) by the colored light.¹

These positive slides were then printed onto color-negative Fujifilm Crystal Archive Type II paper within a standard color darkroom process. Printing positive film onto negative paper resulted in an imperfect inversion in the final print, with significant color shifting. Each slide was masked during exposure with a sheet of unexposed, developed Kodak Portra film, in order to balance it more towards the required color space for color-negative photo paper. This was a strong recommendation of a notable guide produced by Kodak on color film processes in 1973.²

The prints were exposed using an Omega Dichroic color enlarger, and then developed using RA4 chemicals in a Jobo processor. This involved placing the prints inside a large drum; notably, this drum was not dried off between prints, and the small bit of water left from each cycle left unique visual distortions each time, as the developer chemical adhered to wet areas more quickly than dry areas. This subtle effect resulted in unique prints, incapable of precise reproduction.

The gelatin silver prints were also produced using a traditional black and white darkroom process. Apart from the single portrait of the artist, this involved stacking multiple negatives in the enlarger tray, exposing a print, and then exposing that print to light again mid-way through its development. This was accomplished by placed the partially developed prints back into a tray of water, and then placing said tray under an enlarger, set to expose for a pre-set amount of time. The prints were then placed back into the developer and processed normally. Notably, the subtle effect of light diffraction through the water during the second exposure produced a significant amount of ghosting and vignetting; this resulted in, once again, unique prints incapable of precise reproduction.

1 See Figure 7.

2 Kodak. "Creative Darkroom Techniques", 101.

Epilogue

As I grow older, I find myself with plenty of time to reflect on the experiences of my youth. My experiences with psychedelics shaped me deeply, and left me equally edified and traumatized. Spiritual experience likewise has unveiled so much to me, in deep and various ways, and yet there is darkness there too, and I have seen it.

It becomes rather curious to consider photography as a means for expressing internal experience. The photograph seems by its nature dependent on the external world. Light must enter the lens from outside the camera to make the image. Yet, the photograph has become precisely my medium of choice for what amounts, in large part, to deep personal reflection upon the limitations of my own perception. What things did I see, or fail to see, that made me who I am? What contradictions still exist in my own being that I seek freedom from?

The forest feels like home within this struggle. Not a specific forest, not a specific place, but the forest for what it signifies; that I am part of life, that I am alive, and that my existence is not alone. The forest is a destination and a state of being, the final resting place and the place of birth, as trees grow, die, and are born from one another. Life is built upon life in endless cycle, divinity pervading throughout, all pointing back to the primal source in which all things are unified.

The beauty of photography as a means for expressing interpersonal experience then comes precisely from its external nature, precisely from its reliance upon the world. In its own being, the photograph points towards an interconnectedness between our internal perception and broader existence. This seeming contradiction is, rather, a bridge held in tension upon which we might walk in order to see beyond ourselves.

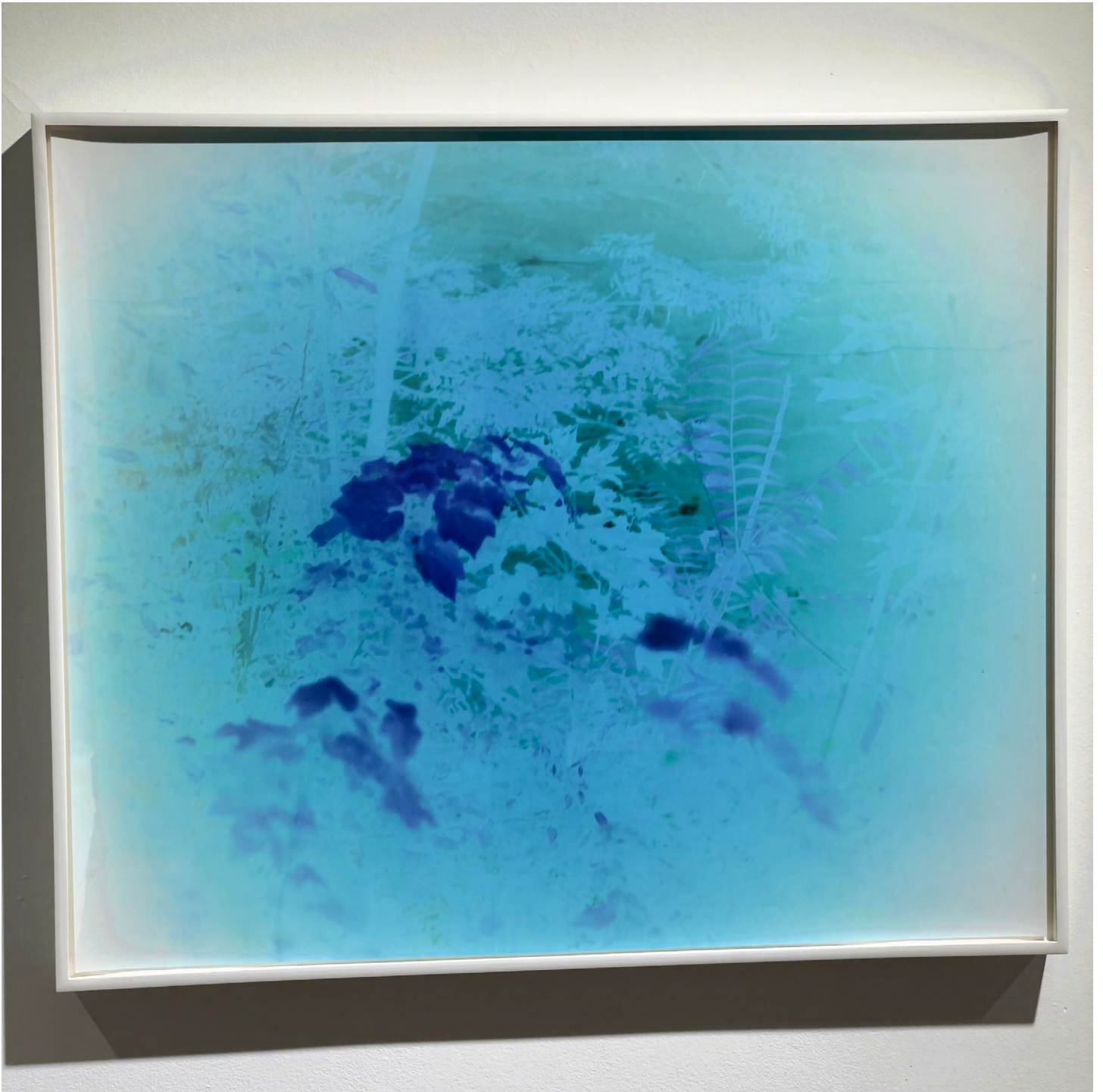
These strangely colored patterns of trees point to something beyond myself, and for that I am grateful, as such insight feels unattainable in my daily life. Far from enlightened, I am disillusioned, still striving for meaning. This work reminds me for brief moments that such striving is not in vain.

Beyond time, we will be young again.



Nebulous Star Cluster I Am, 2020. Chromogenic Print, 24"x20".

Figure 2



Void Is Blue, 2020. Chromogenic Print, 24"x20".

Figure 3



Shadow at the Heart, 2020. Chromogenic Print, 24"x20".

Figure 4



In Which I Become A Tree, 2020. Gelatin Silver Print, 24"x20".

Figure 5



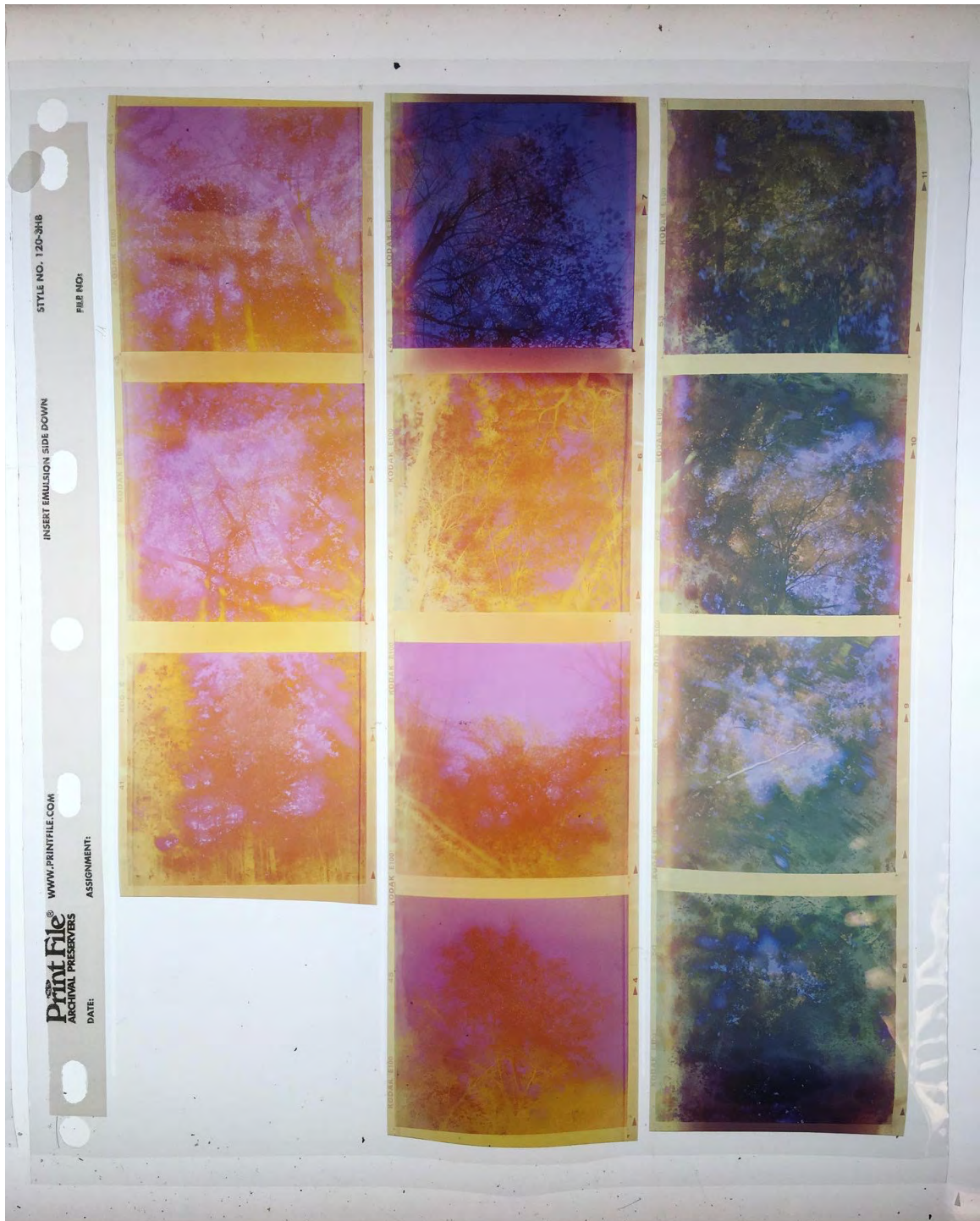
Overgrown, 2019. Gelatin Silver Print, 24"x20".

Figure 6



Overgrowth Exhibition Installation at CEPA Gallery, March 2021.

Figure 7



Solarized Kodak Ektachrome slides, fall 2020.

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