



**SHUBHA TAPARIA
CRESCENT**



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Shubha Taparia: A journey from transformation to being.

By Nicoletta
Lambertucci

“I feel that I’ve always been a very positive person and my work has been about change, about transience, and how things have very different meaning with the passage of time and how we survive.”

Every time I encounter Shubha Taparia's work I am impressed by the joyous energy it emanates. In particular I am captivated by the thoughtful playfulness every work delivers with clarity and simplicity. In this essay, I wish to pay homage to the uncanny presence I feel when confronted with Taparia's practice: it is simultaneously tangible and intangible.

Shifting freely and experimenting between mediums such as photography, painting, video, performance, sculpture and immersive installation, Taparia's work is a state of mind. One that reflects the ever changing nature of all things, and it does so with the awareness that there is always a permanence in the intrinsic transience of matter. With the exuberance of a gifted child, the artist gathers inorganic and apparently forgotten objects from industrial landscapes and presents us with their utterly poetic significance and beauty.

Investigating the essence of worldly things is a journey that has taken Taparia to explore many places and directions. What I gather from her unbroken and multi-layered research is that, the more you focus on the process and abide on the constant change and physical transformation, the closer you get to the truth. A truth that is immutable and absolute.

In her monumental installation 'Crescent' from 2021, the artist recreates a vivid scene she experienced of the huge Nash Terrace restoration, which was dramatized by the scaffolding and the wrapping materials all around it. The geo textile in front of the curvilinear architecture was theatrically glowing with lights at night.

The installation, produced specifically for her large studio space in North West London, is 18 meters long, 6 meters high and 2.8 meters deep. When entering the space, you are confronted with a temporary scaffolding structure that is covered by the same kind of wrapping material as the one she saw in the construction site. The work becomes a filter through which the audience can experience all sorts of industrial elements - such as ladders, gates, shipping pallets, tubes, grids, netting and boards – as light.

In Crescent what is usually hard, heavy, unnoticed is radically transformed into something ethereal, light. The commonplace and utilitarian construction tools and equipment become weightless shadows; seemingly casual patterns delicately composed with a light and masterful touch please the eyes and calm the spirit. This paradigm shift is pointing at the ways in which we perceive the physical





world, in particular how objects of all kinds carry cultural and emotional meaning with them and how these meanings radically change over time. In this immersive installation, the tools and elements used for creating, holding, protecting and lifting were later discarded and forgotten, so becoming invisible, yet more powerful as shadows etched into the viewers mind and memory.

The scale of the installation overpowers you in size. Here, something almost miraculous happens: you are suddenly met with cinematic structure that envelops and embraces the viewer. I felt immersed in an elaborate balance of two forces: one rather masculine produced by the rigid grids and straight lines, and one more fluid and flexible, which comes from the transparency and curve of the wrapping material. The balance between feminine and masculine is perfectly integrated in every aspect of the work, though the impression of a luminous crescent moon – that invites contemplation, gazing, and being drawn into the forms of light and shadow.

Silhouette of an Unknown Landscape, from 2018, is the result of a similar fascination, conceptual premise and processes, but doesn't have the proximity in terms of physical closeness to the audience. Silhouette of an Unknown Landscape was triggered by a scene that Taparia saw in Regents Park, London where sunlight and atmosphere filtered through a large building covered in scaffold and geotextile revealing the beauty of the interim. When on display, the site-specific installation hangs from the ceiling 30 meters by 10 meters in size. Here, the ghostly shadows are floating, and the industrial objects are elevated and transformed into a sky populated of magical beings. This work confronts you from above, creating a sense of vertical, surreal and almost god-like presence of light and shadow reminding us strongly of ancient painted ceilings and of sacred architecture.

Taparia expands the conversation on invisibility and how things get into a state of flux in another work that directly references Silhouette of an Unknown Landscape. In the photographic series Spirit in the Inanimate, from 2019, details of the installation are rendered elegantly in eight C-type prints mounted on Dibond. Reminiscent of the early 1900s science and photogram experiments, these monochromatic works evocatively transform the objects into abstract lines and shapes. The ropes and ladders are now vibrating monochromatic arrangements. The lines are slightly blurred and sharp. The materiality of each object has mutated into a

state of unformed, full of potential, essence. The harmonious relationship between lights and shadows is so meditative that you almost forget they once had a mundane function.

The surreal beauty of desolated landscapes; the poetic nature of what is left behind; the hidden and secretive spirit in what seems lifeless. These are all aspects that the artist carefully and with great precision brings together in a harmonic ritual that resembles a musical score. This is particularly visible in the video work titled Performance.

11 minutes long, Performance was realised in 2018 and shot at the stunning location of the Averard Hotel in London. Three main characters occupy the scene: an allegorical statue of The Science, framed by a scaffold tower, a plastic wrapped Virgin Mary with Child, and a mannequin. It is clear from the start that these aren't simply statues. They are animated, breathing, living sculptures. The work has an outstanding soundtrack edited by the artist specifically for the work, and it is composed of recordings of various urban environment sounds collected between Manhattan in New York, London's Mayfair, the Land's End in Cornwall, the Duomo in Milan, Nikiti in Greece, and the Buddhist caves at Ajanta in India.

The original sculptures were found and photographed in various locations but in the video they become living beings, telling stories of power and the lack of it. Not only uncanny, Performance has a powerful and dramatic visual language that, paired with the sound, puts on stage the fast and numbing pace of our society and how even the most revered objects can turn into forgotten relics.

There is serenity and deep intelligence in every work that Taparia produces. In fact, when focusing on how everything changes, even those things that seem too powerful to fade away, a new sensitivity comes at the fore. One that appreciates the details and the nature of our reality as is: transient. Following and accepting the continuous and insatiable process of transformation not only adds beauty to everything we look at, but it could even allow a glimpse of eternity as a state of immeasurable grace.



Works



Crescent, 2021
6 x 18 x 2.8 m

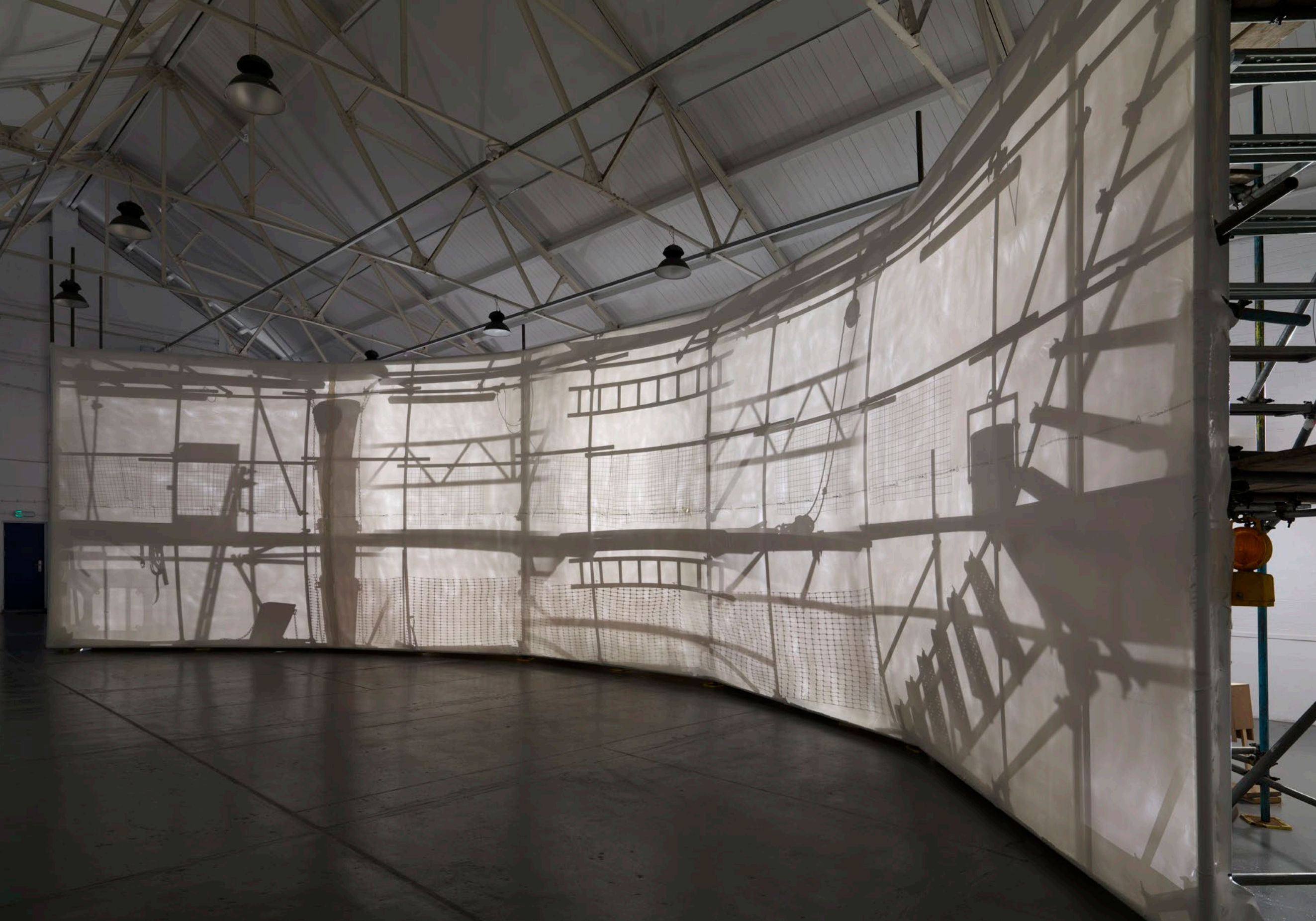


CROSSING
NOT IN USE

PEDESTRIANS



CROSSING
NET IN USE



Crescent, 2021 (Detail)
6 x 18 x 2.8 m

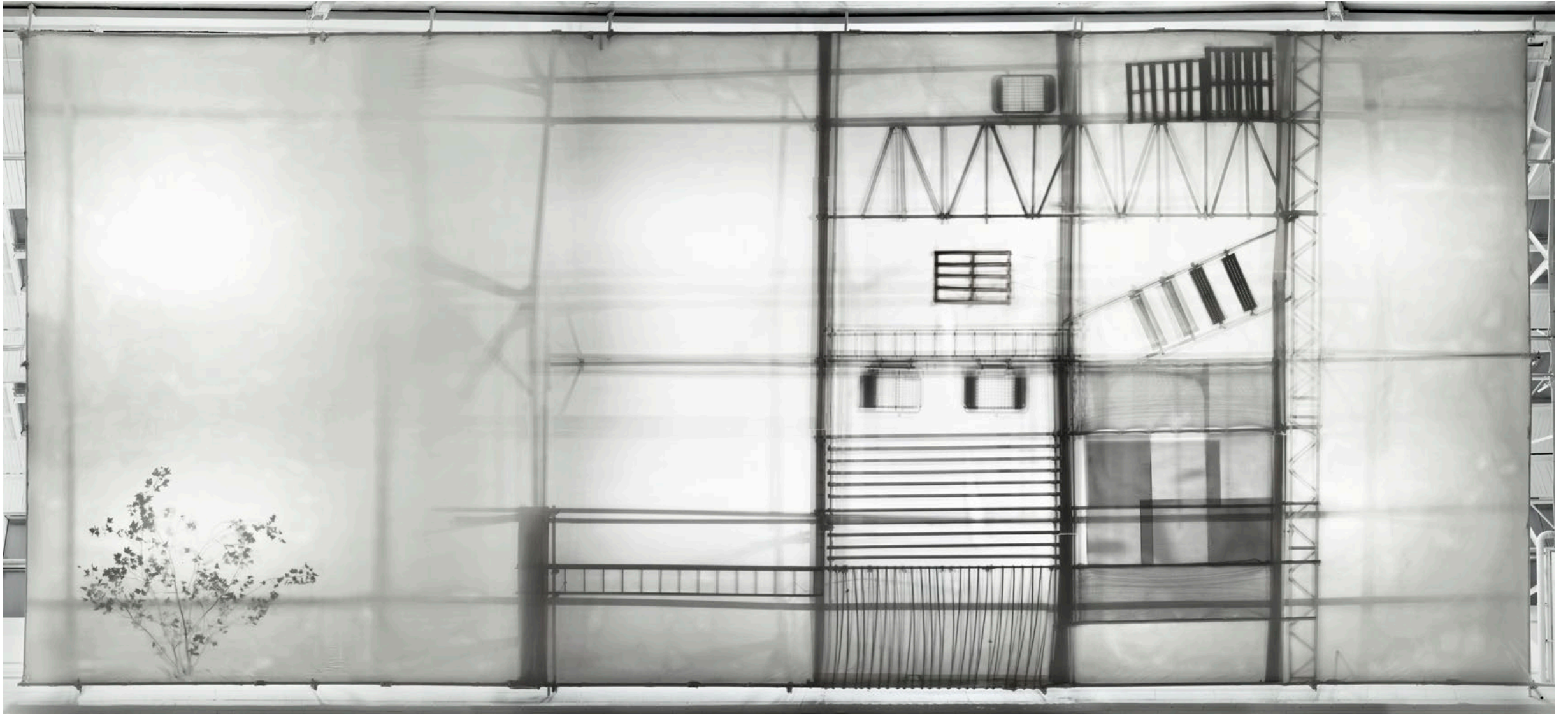






Crescent, 2021 (Detail)
6 x 18 x 2.8 m





Silhouette of an Unknown Landscape, 2018.
C-type print. 112 x 245 cm.

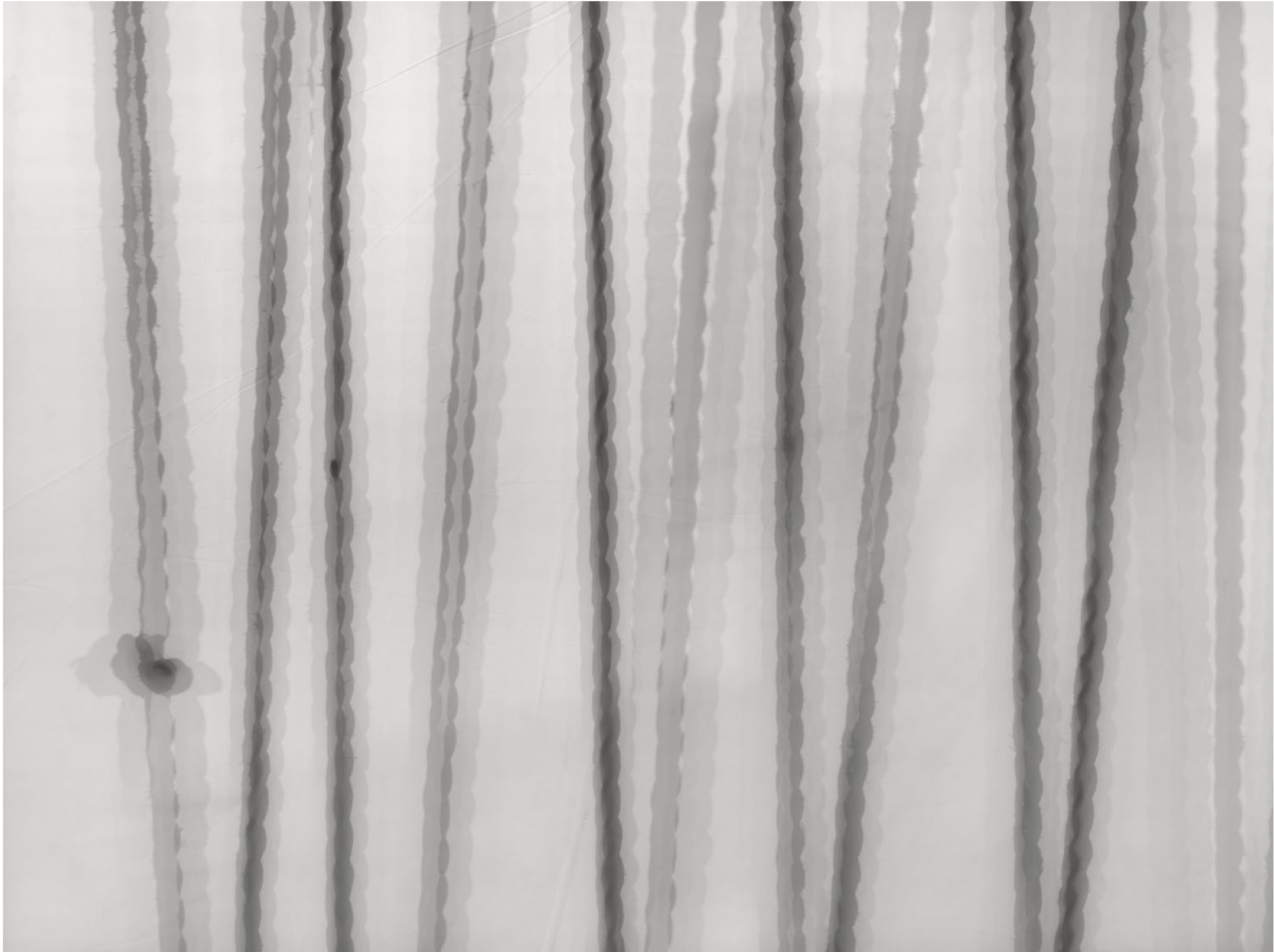




Pallets, 2019.
C-type print. 84 x 112 cm.

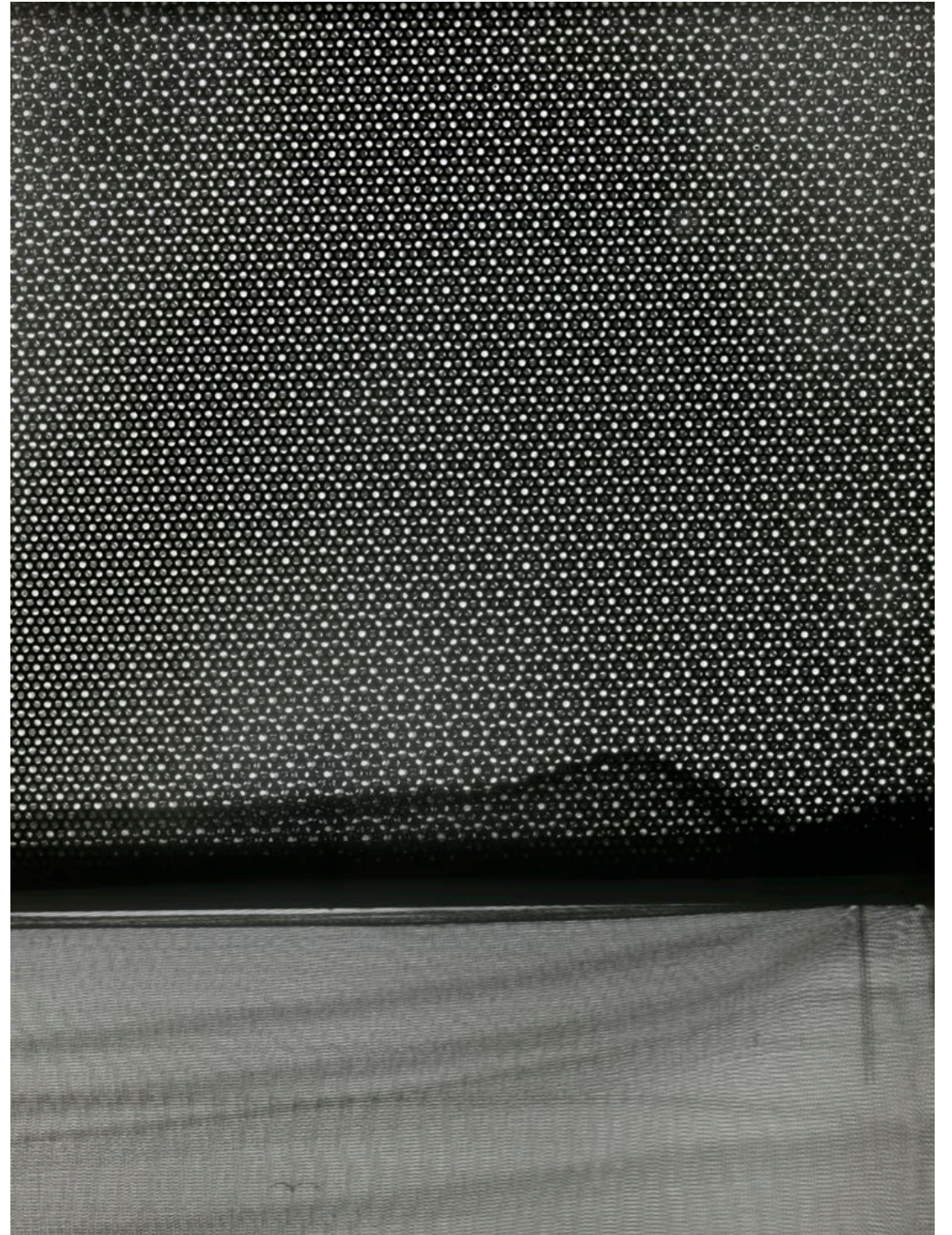
Tubes and Wooden Planks, 2019.
C-type print. 165.4 x 124 cm.





Ropes, 2019.
C-type print. 63.7 x 85 cm.

Perforated Sheets, 2019.
C-type print. 73.4 x 55 cm.

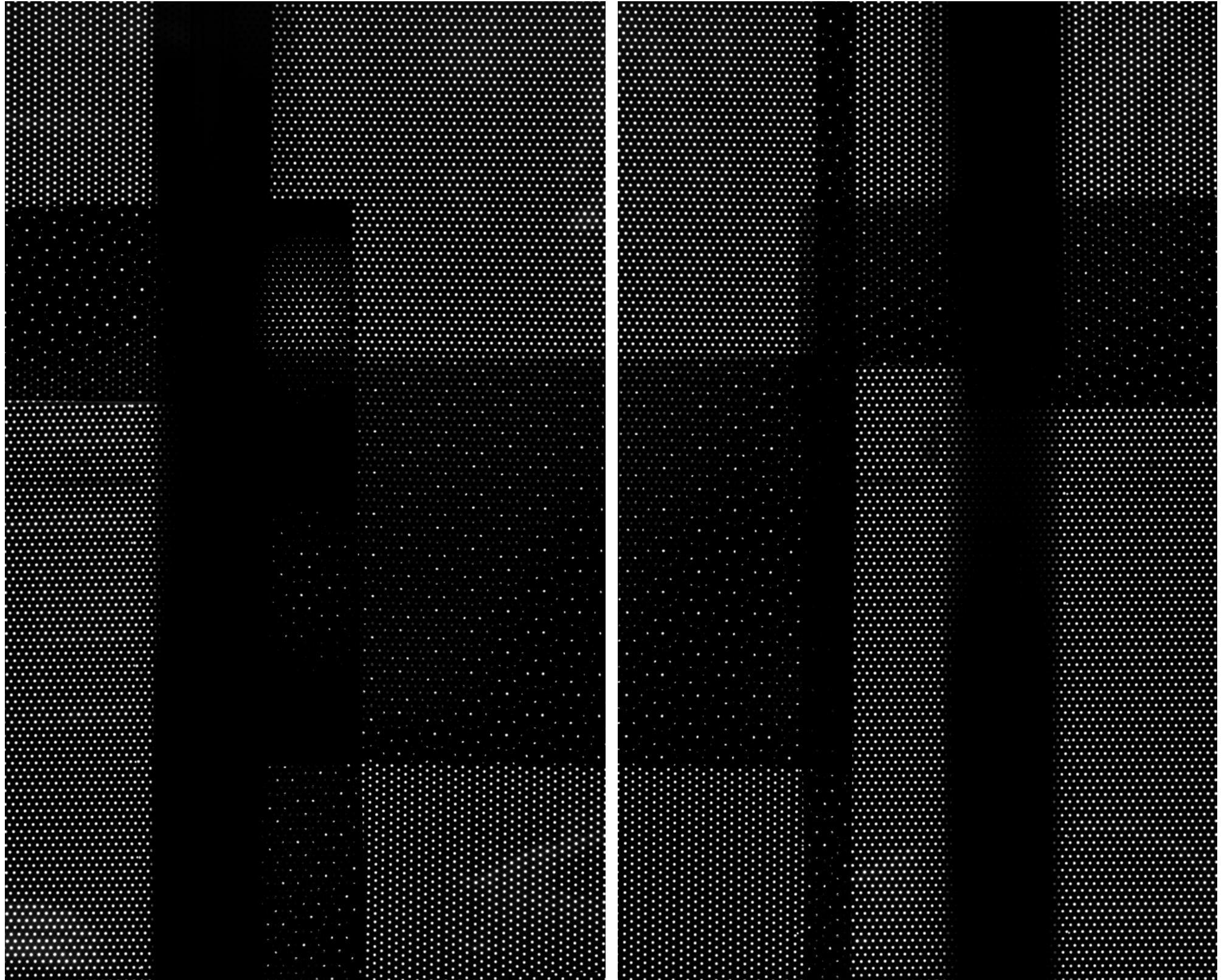




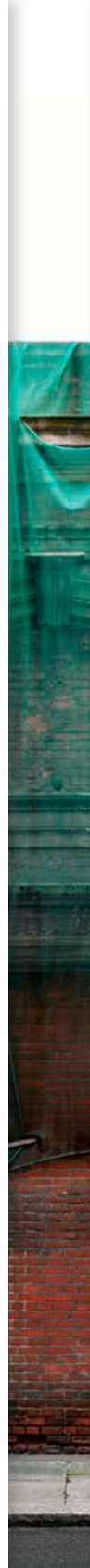
Tubes, 2019.
C-type print.
124 x 165.4 cm.

Scaffolding Nets, 2019.
C-type print. 94.7 x 71 cm.





Mesh, 2015.
Diptych.
C-type print. 140 x 158 cm.



Smithfield Street, 2020.
Triptych.
Archival C-type print.
122 x 390.4 cm.





Performance, 2018 (Film stills).
Kodak 16mm Vision3 film, 11m36s.



Performance, 2018 (Film stills).
Kodak 16mm Vision3 film, 11m36s.



Shubha Taparia in conversation with Maitreyi Maheshwari

“I feel that I’ve always been a very positive person and my work has been about change, about transience, and how things have very different meaning with the passage of time and how we survive.”

MM: What came first when you were working out the idea? These shadow shapes or the scaffold structure which was fine-tuned for the shapes that it produced?

ST: The first thing that came was the shape of the curve. That's what really attracted me about the place this is inspired from, the Nash Crescent in London. The curve would not normally be so deep, but because we've made this structure indoors, we worked out the form of the scaffolding accordingly. What was important was to get the distance between the poles we needed for this curve.

MM: So, the idea is that everything in the scaffolding serves a functional purpose. And the placement of them - was that an aesthetic decision? For example, the oblique ladder, the dust chute, the horizontal ladder, and the staircase - the oblique lines here compared to those horizontal lines - what was the motivation to space them the way that you've positioned them?

ST: In a scaffolding you wouldn't find these elements together. But the decisions came in very much a natural way, thinking through 'if this is here, what would be the logical thing to do?' I was not trying to produce a design here or trying to look at it aesthetically. I tried to work out the balance between different things and how they'd be used normally.

MM: Other than the curvature, does this configuration bear a direct relationship to the Nash building that you were looking at?

ST: The Nash building has always fascinated me. For years I have been documenting it, at various stages of its resurrection.. It is quite overpowering yet it envelops you in a warm embrace. I think I have managed to bring the same character into my work. We see scaffoldings of different shapes and sizes scattered around an urban landscape but it was the curved scaffolding on the Nash Crescent which was particularly fascinating and unusually dramatic when lit up.

MM: There is something very theatrical and playful about the way you've taken the language of the outside street and brought it inside into a structure which is also very street like. When you see these structures, like the scaffolding, the

shrink wrap that covers it, out in actual locations what is it about them that you want to draw people's attention to?

ST: We don't really associate the construction sites with anything aesthetic normally. They are just these really intruding, imposing heavy structures that disrupt our daily lives and landscapes. But when I first spotted a scaffolding with the sunrays filtering through it and then again when it was lit up in the night, it was striking! It had transformed and revealed itself on a screen with light and shadows, subverting associations with it. I was surprised also at the fact that it made me forget about what was behind, as normally it is the building behind that is permanent and that's staying, and scaffolding is the bit that's ignored. It came as a revelation that these scaffoldings are an important element of transient intermediate urban landscapes, an important instrument of change, renovation and repair, with great aesthetic possibility.

MM: There's also a relationship that runs through so much of your other works to the idea of preservation. For example, the work you did at the Averard Hotel with the cracks in the wall, which you painted with gold. It drew attention to the flaws and the damage but celebrating it by filling it with something precious like gold. It's looking at how that damage can be made beautiful or made to be seen as something aesthetic as well.

ST: The idea of filling with gold was highlighting a spirit in the broken, damaged walls and the beauty that comes with the different phases of their historical past gathering and losing some bits along the way.

MM: A sense of heritage of whatever is historically in the fabric of these buildings that needs to be preserved or restored. The scaffold here is symbolic of a renovation process. This structure serves the purpose of rejuvenating something that is historic and this idea that you can give something life again.

ST: It brings hope that you are going to get something beautiful. That whole process is beautiful. The scaffolding is almost a marker for something happening.

MM: There's this thing about what we do when we want to preserve something, what we do in order to hang onto something. That passion can be both productive and destructive. That passion to keep something and hold onto it can also actually stop new things from coming.

ST: Some things are essential, and some things are unnecessary. Depends on what purpose it has served, how it has remained. Having said that, a lot of things change their meaning with time, which I have dealt with within many of my works. An abandoned building for decades could be used for something fantastic. It's really about a person's vision of things. But change I feel is inevitable.

MM: This work takes away the dependency on the original and what was behind the scaffold. It actually makes you think about these temporary measures we create. It collapses these different time spans: the historic building that's been there for centuries transforms into something that has been there for weeks. It collapses those two time spans into something that exists simultaneously allowing something to be both very old and very fleeting.

ST: It is ephemeral as opposed to something that you expect to remain forever. Isn't that amazing, that you collect these ingredients and then do it to some other building? These same steps and ladders must have gone from building to building doing that. It's such a noble purpose. How the building is restored is a different matter, but these components of the scaffold, I find really beautiful. I feel like they've been to so many places and served such a beautiful purpose of transforming something or making something last a little longer.

MM: Or sometimes being part of something that has to be pulled down. Each individual element has experienced that whole cycle of generation and degeneration of what a building does.

Another question is how these structures occupy a public space. A building is designed as a way of guiding people. It's a space for people and it controls people. The shape of the curve of the Nash Crescent guides you in a semi-circular way around. It's created a road that must move in a semi-circular way. This was mostly for aesthetic reasons as it isn't a practical

function necessarily to have curved roads. Yet that aesthetic decision moves traffic, moves people in a particular way. Once you get inside all the rooms are shaped in a particular way. The scaffold then adds this other layer of shaping bodies on that street in relationship to the rest.

ST: The shape of a curve, and the way these wooden boards and poles protrude out of the curve indicate continuation, a circularity of generation and degeneration..it is symbolic when bodies move on this circular road..

MM: I think one of the things you said previously about this geo-textile acting as a membrane that does have a skin like quality. And like skin this is covering the skeleton behind or beneath it.

ST: It is containing, protecting, and covering a very complex structure that's behind it.

MM: Also, when you look at this work, so much attention has gone into how you reveal the skeleton. Each element of the shadow is very crisp. This image that's coming through the 'skin' becomes very precise. What you have is effectively a giant projection screen that's pulled tight like a drum, in which the shadows become an image of the structure. Why turn this very functional skeleton into something that is an image of itself?

ST: It is very much what I stumbled upon on an actual construction site when the sun rays filtered through a scaffolding. This natural phenomenon became an obsession and what I have in Unit 7 is an attempted simulation of that.

MM: The light through these structures becomes a kind of mark-making. There is almost a rhythmic score here. There's a musicality to how you get these beats with the different bars and chutes: here is a heavy moment, over there is a lightness.

ST: I have spent so much time observing the workings of the construction site For example the rhythm and the pace of the cranes moving up, down and along the skies. I find them very lyrical, musical, poetic, even if their music can't be heard, they affect change. In fact I have made a video work called Symphony of the Flying Objects which is in six frames

showing cranes moving up and down in each frame, carrying different objects, performing a sort of silent symphony. And in Crescent it is again the same, you are absolutely right in your observation.

MM: There's an integrity to this structure needing to exist in this way. And yet it does achieve that sense of fluidity between these different elements; the connections make sense. You will flow from here, to here, and there, and create that sense of rhythm in the experience. That you are, as with anything, when one walks in there's that sense of being guided, and you're being led into looking at this landscape: your eyes are being drawn in one way, directed around to look at these different lines and angles. It becomes a massive landscape painting or historic dioramas.

ST: But it's all temporary and that's the beauty of it.

MM: One of the things that comes out of your works is that you then photograph these objects and sculptural installations. I'm curious why when a work is celebrating transience and the temporary that you also transform it into something more permanent?

ST: You are referring to the photographs that I take of these screens with shadows? When we go on our travels or the everyday, it is just fleeting moments, and we do capture them in a camera. In a photograph we notice things we would've otherwise missed. With our naked eye we get a general feel of a landscape but it is the details that make the whole picture, so they need to be emphasised. My photographic work continues to explore the installation and takes a form of abstract images, exploring the materials behind the screen in their aesthetic possibilities as well as their material force.

MM: The structure is already writing with light and shadows, and this extends that idea into something that is then fixed. It plays with this idea of a camera obscura or a giant pinhole camera. You have previously worked with street mime performers to recreate or animate architectural elements. Do you see this work relating back to the performance pieces that you did?

ST: Yes absolutely. I've always focused on transience and time, on how time affects our role as we're expected to go through these different phases. I think everything that is inanimate also goes through the same kinds of phases and with every phase they gather something in there. In the work Performance, the three protagonists that represented religion, science and materialism shared a common fate in different locations, different hands and along different time periods.

MM: So you think even things inanimate have a spirit, for you is the shape and the form of this structure is about capturing the spirit? Does it have a spirit in itself, or is its spirit given to it by whatever was its host - the host building behind it?

ST: How the host building contributed to the spirit of the scaffold structure became quite clear in the process of building it. It was a very uphill task to build a structure without its backing. Having said that, I think the materials that I have used, themselves, have been to various places. They have also been forgotten and discarded. They have had their own history and that contributes to the feeling that I get. By the builders and us working in it, and with the spirit of the space of Unit7 that hosts it, everything sort of gathers into layers one on top of the other.

MM: There's something really lovely about the idea that something that is so temporary, and throwaway is a catalyst for something.

ST: It is an important instrument of change and That's the way I see it and why I find it more interesting than what's behind it.

MM: How much do you think that sense of time within all of your work, which shifts between the very temporary and transient and the very fixed and situated, is trying to understand or unpick what a life cycle itself is?

ST: I think it is the shadows and light that represent the transient and the metal structure that's behind that represents the permanent, the curve in a way represents the life cycle.

MM: The lighting is really particular to that. It has a spooky ethereal feel to it.

ST: What I saw in the actual setting was enigmatic, but to recreate that moment indoors was a task that soon appeared to be an impossibility! The scaffolding was not linear, we had to avoid the shadows shuddering, the double shadows, at the same time the light could not escape in the room to retain the effect of a night sky, the very shape of the curve that attracted me the most posed the biggest challenge. And then one fine day when I adjusted what would turn out to be the final adjustment, I got my eureka moment and the balance was achieved!!

MM: There's also something very makeshift: some of these structures look like you've botched them together to serve the function of filters and shutters for the lighting.

ST: I used all the materials you would use on a construction site.

MM: It's such a different experience, a different reading of this structure when you see it from the other side. When you look at it from that side, it very much feels like the work is the image, whereas when you come into it, you think no, it's actually a sculptural installation. It's so much cleaner and so minimal on that side compared to this.

ST: One would never imagine there would be so much behind it.

MM: I'm not sure if it's still relevant, but you've also talked about this work in relation to the moon and constellations.

ST: I thought the physicality of the surface, because of the blow torch effect on the geo-textile, creates this kind of cloudiness. It resembles the surface of the moon with the light and shadows. The shape itself is also associated with regeneration, with fertility, protective as well as nurturing, much like the function of a scaffolding. Upon entry to the sight of the robust scaffolding, the scene soon changes dramatically to a cinematic display of light and shadows giving an impression of a crescent moon, inviting contemplation.

MM: It's trying to strike that balance between something that has the integrity of what it is, yet still being deployed as something that is much more metaphorical.

ST: We are talking about what has existed or what exists in a natural way, and you find the beauty or the soul in it.

MM: It also reminds me of those Mondrian paintings with the geometric lines - the white and black ones. Those paintings are such a celebration of geometry but also this idea of the city. He was so inspired by the grids of cities and that energy and vibrancy. There are also references to the early photography of Moholy Nagy as the shadow extends to create this image. There's a lot of early 20th century art that feels very visually similar even if it's not conceptually connected.

ST: Also relates to the Readymades..

MM: In a way, you're using the scaffolding like a readymade. This idea that you are working with these existing materials and creating or referencing these existing forms by working and collaborating with a scaffolder, who is essentially just saying that in order to do this, this is the minimum that would need to happen. You've given over the control of the artist to something that is much more functional and practical and then finding the beauty within that process.

There is also an interesting tension between the spectacle of the big image, and the detail and of how close do you want people to go. You can go right up to it, but how much of what you're experiencing is about reading the scale of it? My instinct is to want to understand what the things are that are producing these shapes. How do you retrain the eye to see the pattern without the object that produces it?

There is also this instinct of wanting to make or recognize patterns that becomes its own strange form cloud spotting.

ST: As I said, when you stand in front of the screen installation, you get a certain feeling, be it of calm or contemplation or whatever.. this happens because of the scale and the shape. With the photographs one can explore the range and scope of the material force. Both the installation and the photographs aim to take you into a world that you probably couldn't imagine with the materials that make it.



Illumination – Averard Hotel, 2016
Installation view. Site-specific installation
with gold leaf Dimensions variable





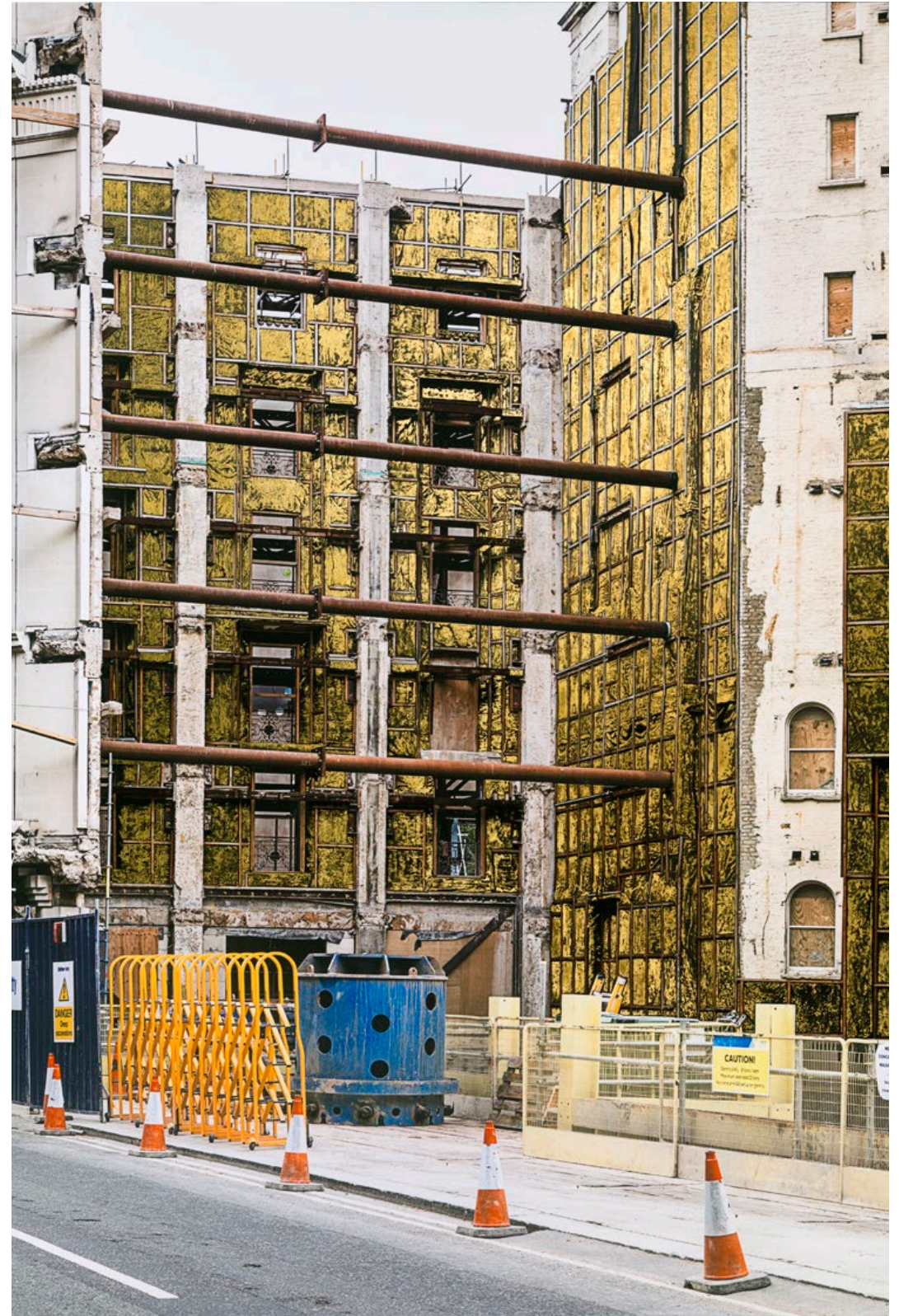




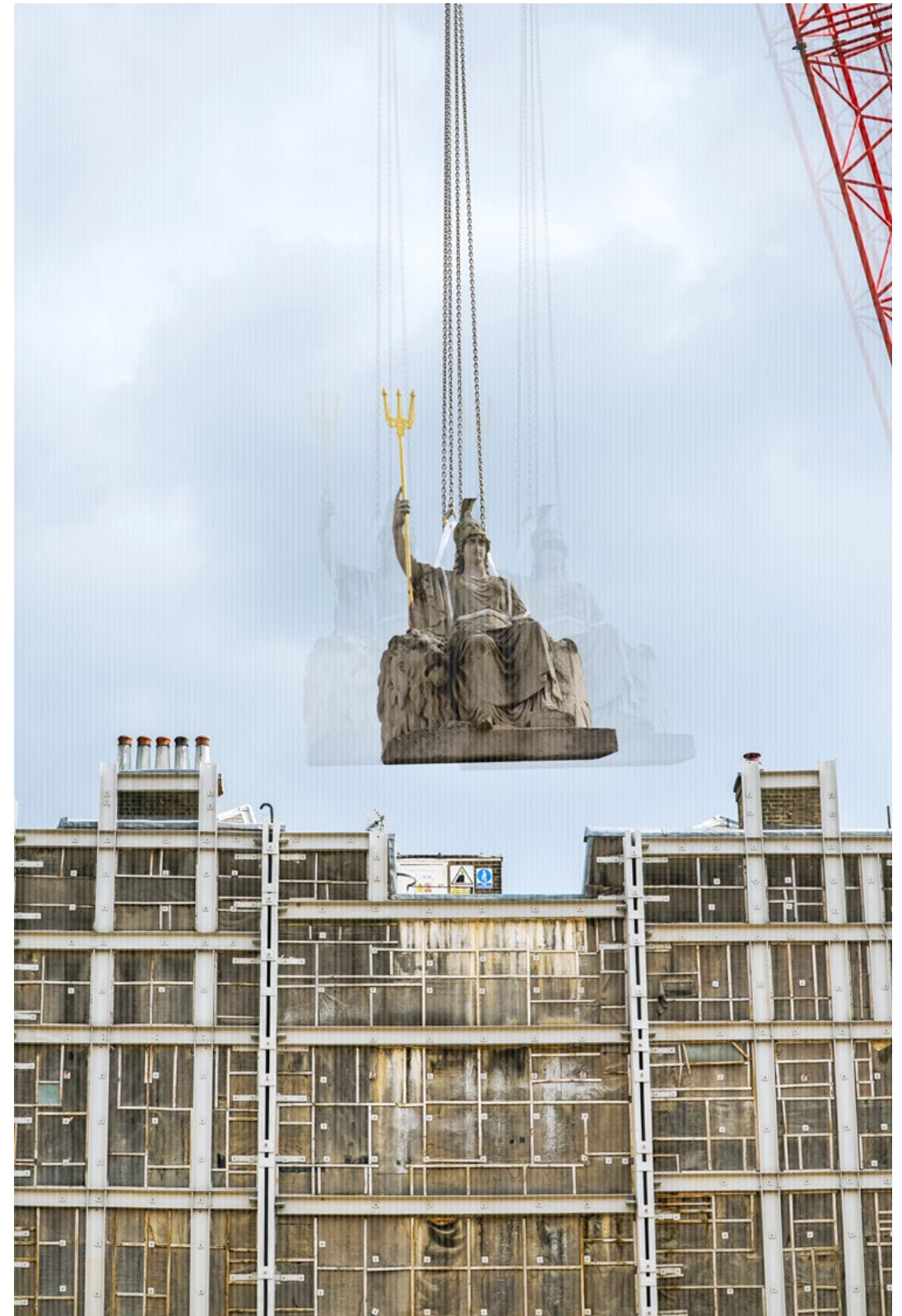
Palace Street (i), 2019.
24 Ct gold leaf on Fine Art Pigment
Print on German Museum Etch
paper. 101 x 151.5 cm.

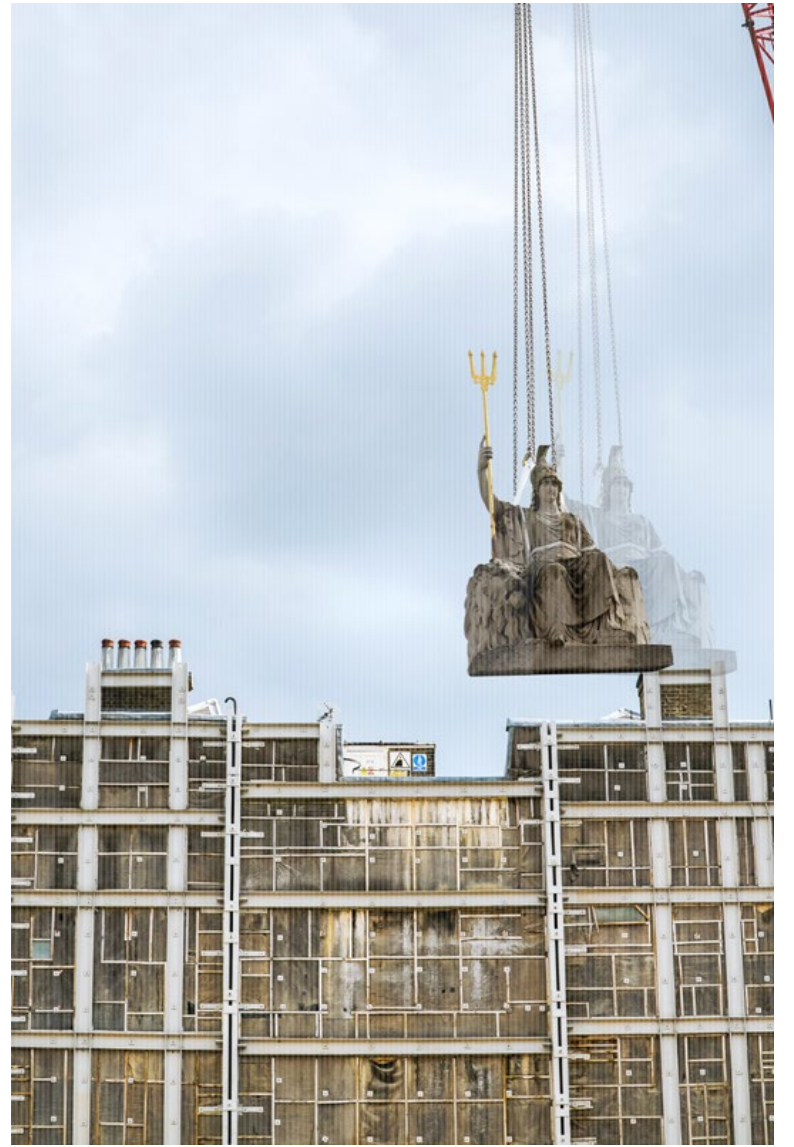


Palace Street (ii), 2020.
24 Ct gold leaf on Fine Art
Pigment Print on German
Museum Etch paper.
127 x 91 cm.



Perrum quam, od maximint
adistin eos apereruptio. Itam
alique plique pa doluptate
pa versper atureperi volorep
erunda venis vent omnimusant





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