

2018 — 2021

Prototype #1 to Works for a cosmic feeling

Fabio Barile

The space of possibilities is constituted by the patterns of neural activity that are possible given the structure of one's brain architecture (or connectoma). As a whole, the latter determines the possible patterns that may exist within it. In other words, it contains the matrix of all the perceptions / ideas / behaviors we are able to have.

Beau Lotto, Deviate

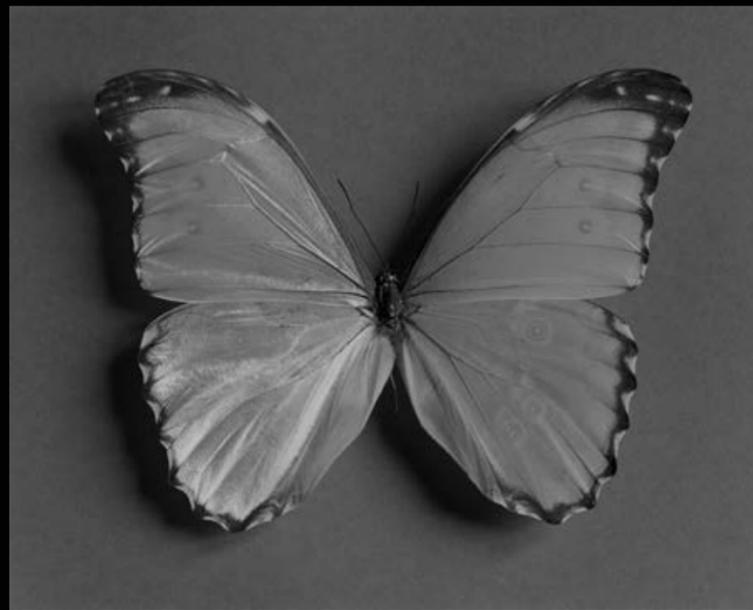
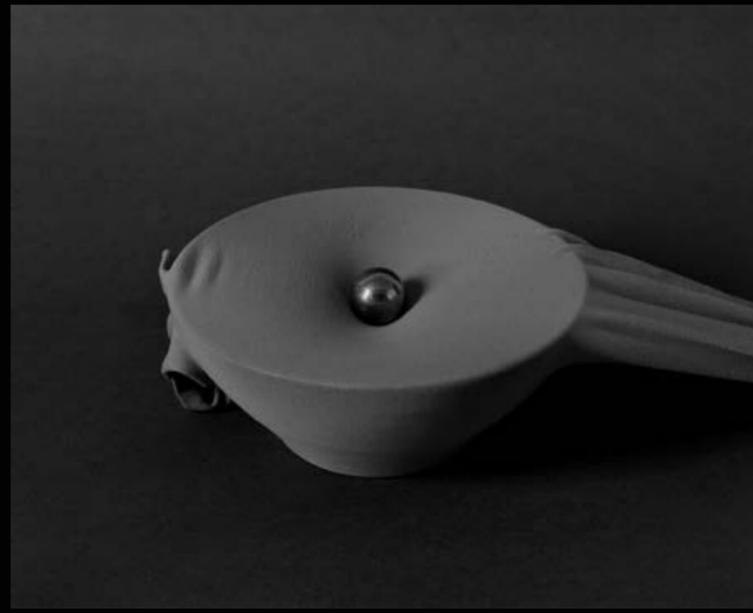
What links the Museum of Comparative Anatomy of La Sapienza to the concept of map? Mapping is a process intrinsic to human thought. Measuring reality, creating relationships between its elements, allows us to stay in the world, we also do it for unattainable places, like the stars. The maps, as well as being a valid tool for territorial positioning, are also a powerful generator of imagination, we have a beautiful evocation in *Lisola di Arturo* by Elsa Morante. When we look at a map, without being in the represented place, our imagination is activated with sensations that act as connectors between the lines drawn on that map and our experience of the world.

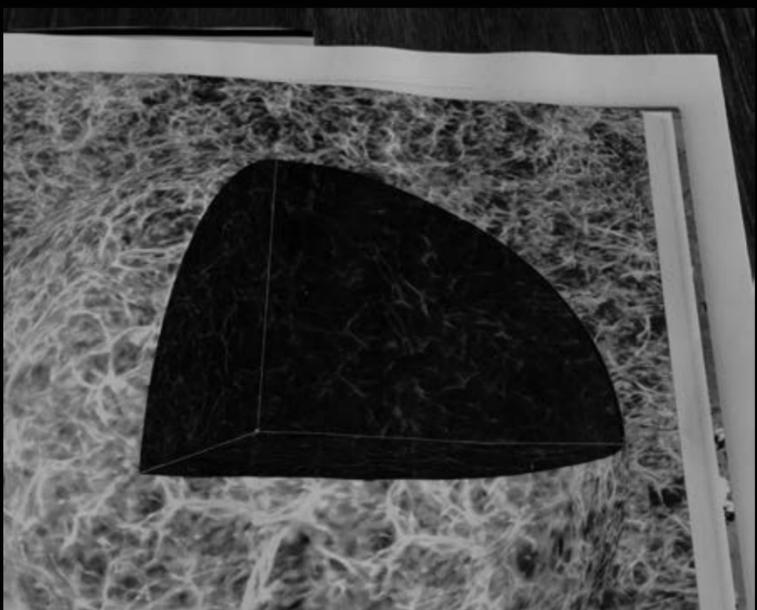
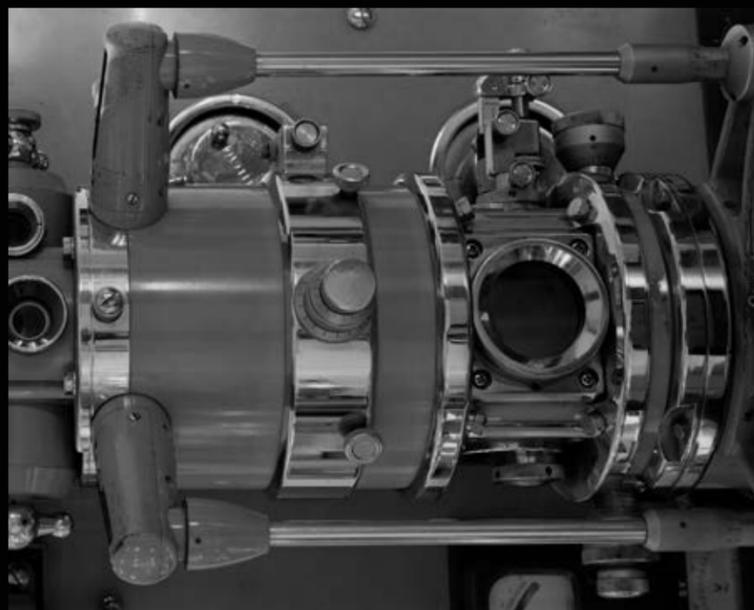
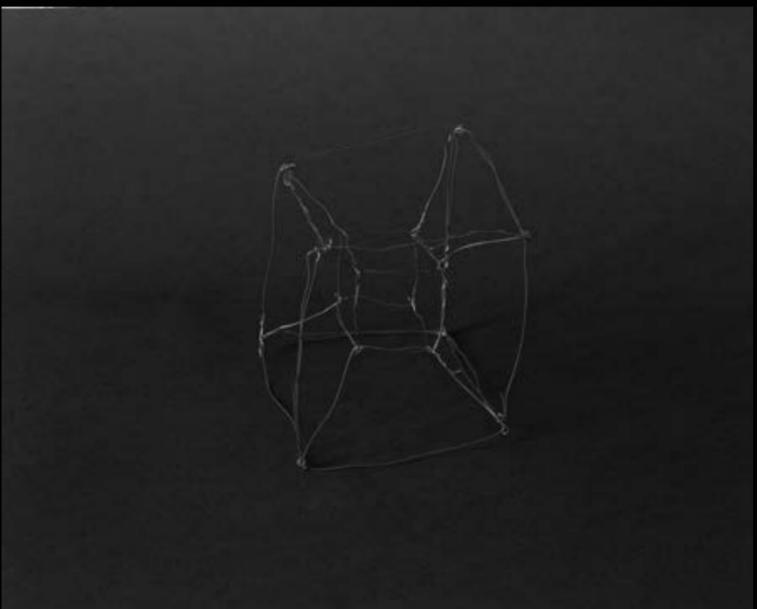
So, I wanted to try, using as a propeller a map of the Milky Way, a process of localization and branching of my conception of the world.

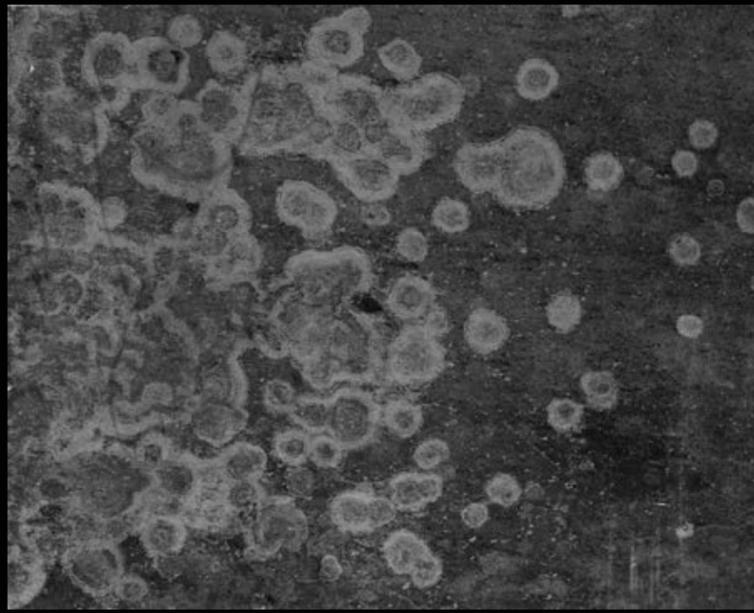
The work created specifically for the exhibition at the Italian Geographic Society is an attempt to give shape, through photographic practice, to my space of the possible. Using a large contact sheet, they are returned without a conscious filter and, at the same time, with ever wider connections mental associations dictated by pure observance with the intent to comprehend, meant at the root as CUM PREHENDERE, or to take together, to grasp. In this way a wide range of relations is activated between the elements that make up this atlas of human perception.

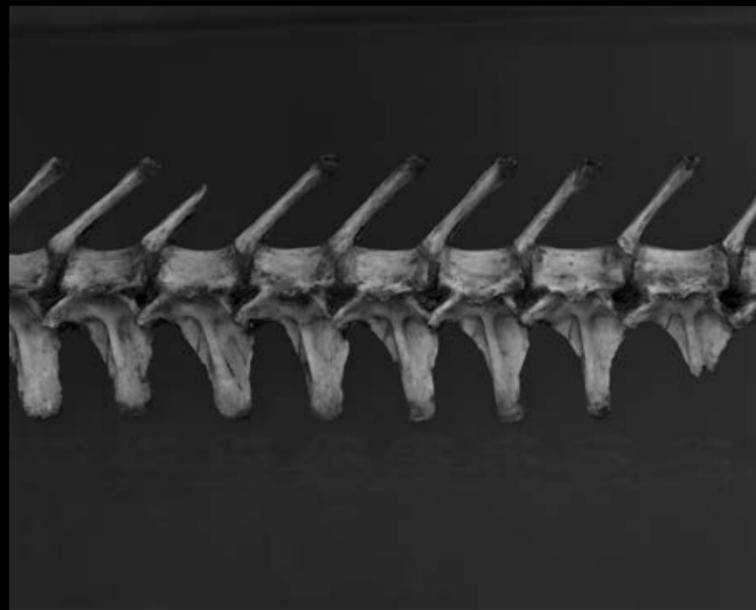
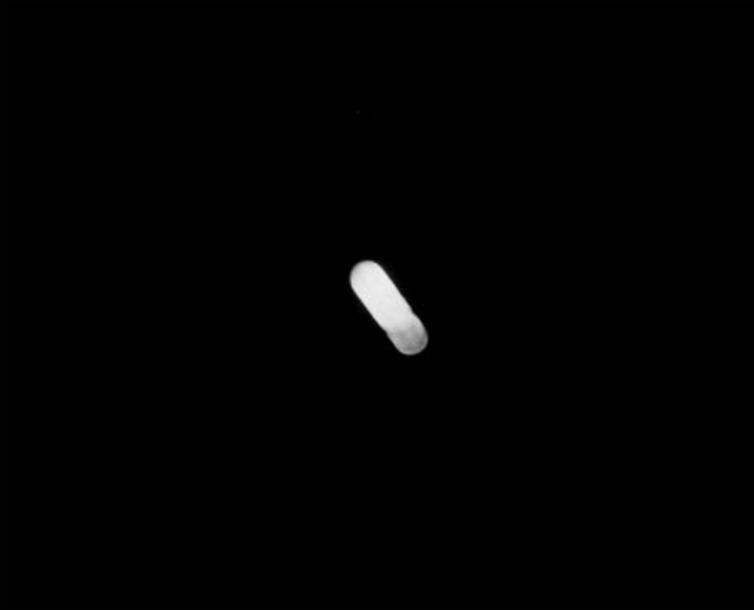
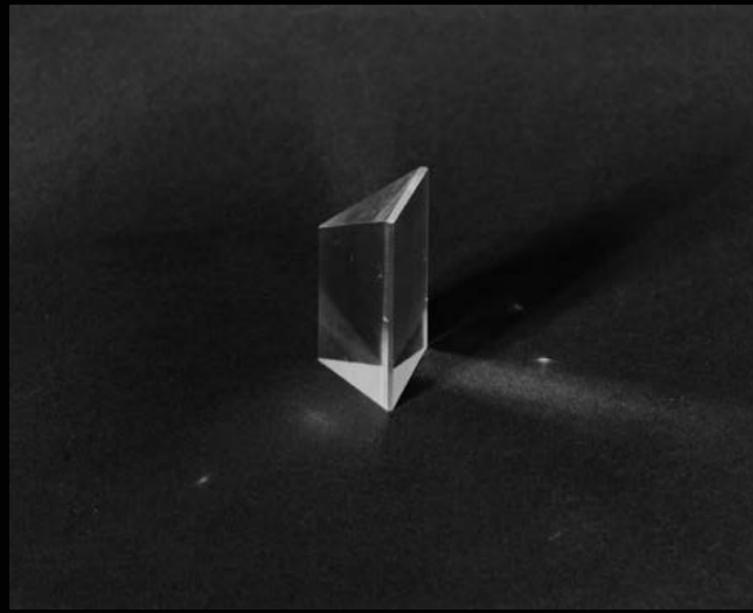
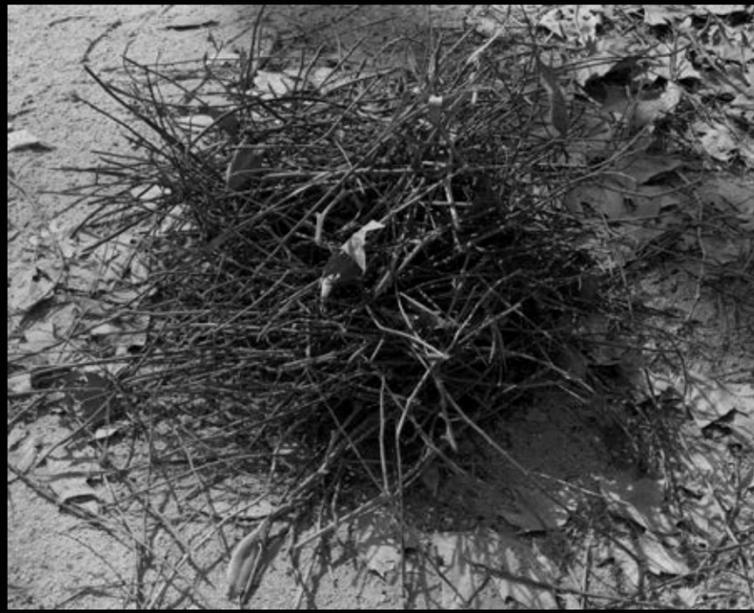
From the observation of the anatomy of living beings, which allows us to reconstruct the tree of life, I moved towards an imaginary space, with suggestions related to the observable universe, associated with instruments used by navigators to orientate in their journeys and a series of representations of landscapes realized both inside and outside my home, to show the potential of an exploration that is always possible, without preordained boundaries.

The represented space thus takes shape from the relationships that are created and not from the individual images, giving the possibility to the observer of the work to draw their own internal narrative.









Works for a cosmic feeling 2018—ongoing

Works for a cosmic feeling is a collection of photographic works employing the tools of science and philosophy to explore what Romain Rolland (in a 1927 letter to Sigmund Freud) called “an oceanic feeling” - referring to the sensation of being at one with the universe.

Whether observing the way in which the branches and leaves of a forest organize themselves, how a bi-dimensional surface bursts into the third dimension or the attempts to recreate animal made structures, the works are endeavors to examine, connect with, and indeed depict, a different level of reality - within the limitations of the photographic medium. Following the Taoist concept of the “valley spirit,” embracing all the waters that flow within, the works in their whole acts as a stream of consciousness and an immersive voyage into the concepts of becoming and that of interconnectivity, adhering to the notion that everything is greater than the sum of its parts cornerstone of the Theory of Complexity.

The works explore multiple trajectories in an attempt to behave as a complex system, embedding the process of transformation through time as an integral part of the work itself. Incoherence and imperfection are considered as driving forces rather than issues.

“We are the result of a series of imperfections that have been successful. Our brain and our genome, two of the most complex systems that nature has produced, are full of imperfections.

Imperfect structures make us understand how evolution works: not as an engineer who systematically optimizes his inventions, but as an artisan who does what he can with the material available, transforming it with imagination, arranging and rearranging. Even the natural history that has brought us here is a catalog of imperfections that have worked, starting from that infinitesimal deviation in the primordial quantum void from which the universe was born.”¹

“How do we come to think of things, rather than of processes in this absolute flux? By shutting our eyes to the successive events. It is an artificial attitude that makes sections in the stream of change, and calls them things [...]

When we shall know the truth of things, we shall realise how absurd it is for us to worship isolated products of the incessant series of transformations as though they were eternal and real. Life is no thing or state of a thing, but a continuous movement or change.”²

¹ Telmo Pievani, Imperfezione, 2019

² S. Radhakrishnan quoted in “The Tao of Physics” An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism by Frifjof Capra.

Fabio Barile's series *Works for a Cosmic Feeling* (2018 – ongoing) seems to undertake, perhaps inadvertently, an almost impossible attempt: to reconcile the decisiveness and fragmentary of the photograph with the notions of uncertainty and the feeling of flux. For this still expanding body of work Barile employs, as he writes in a statement about the project, 'the tools of science and philosophy to explore what Romain Rolland 'in a letter from 1927 to Sigmund Freud' called "an oceanic feeling"'. Barile describes this concept as referring to 'the sensation of being at one with the universe'. He also mentions the Daoist concept of the 'valley spirit', referring to embracing the waters that flow inside. Barile recognises that the medium he employs has its limitations, yet he sets out 'to examine, to connect with and to depict a different level of reality.'

How should I take in this work? In the PDF I received from Barile, containing a selection of about 40 images, he tells the viewer that these images 'can either be treated as autonomous works or viewed as if entangled in an oceanic net.' To what extent do the metaphors 'oceanic feeling' and the 'oceanic net' support my viewing?

There's surprisingly little water to be seen except for an image of calm waves and a diptych of water vapor in the form of clouds. But what surprises me in this bewildering array of images is the tension it calls forth between the macro and the micro worlds. Whenever I try to wrap my head around the near infinite scales in both directions my body protests in a way that I could describe as yielding a sense of cosmic vertigo. If this has anything to do with an oceanic feeling it must be the simultaneous realisation that one is lost in space while at the same time one must feel at home in it.

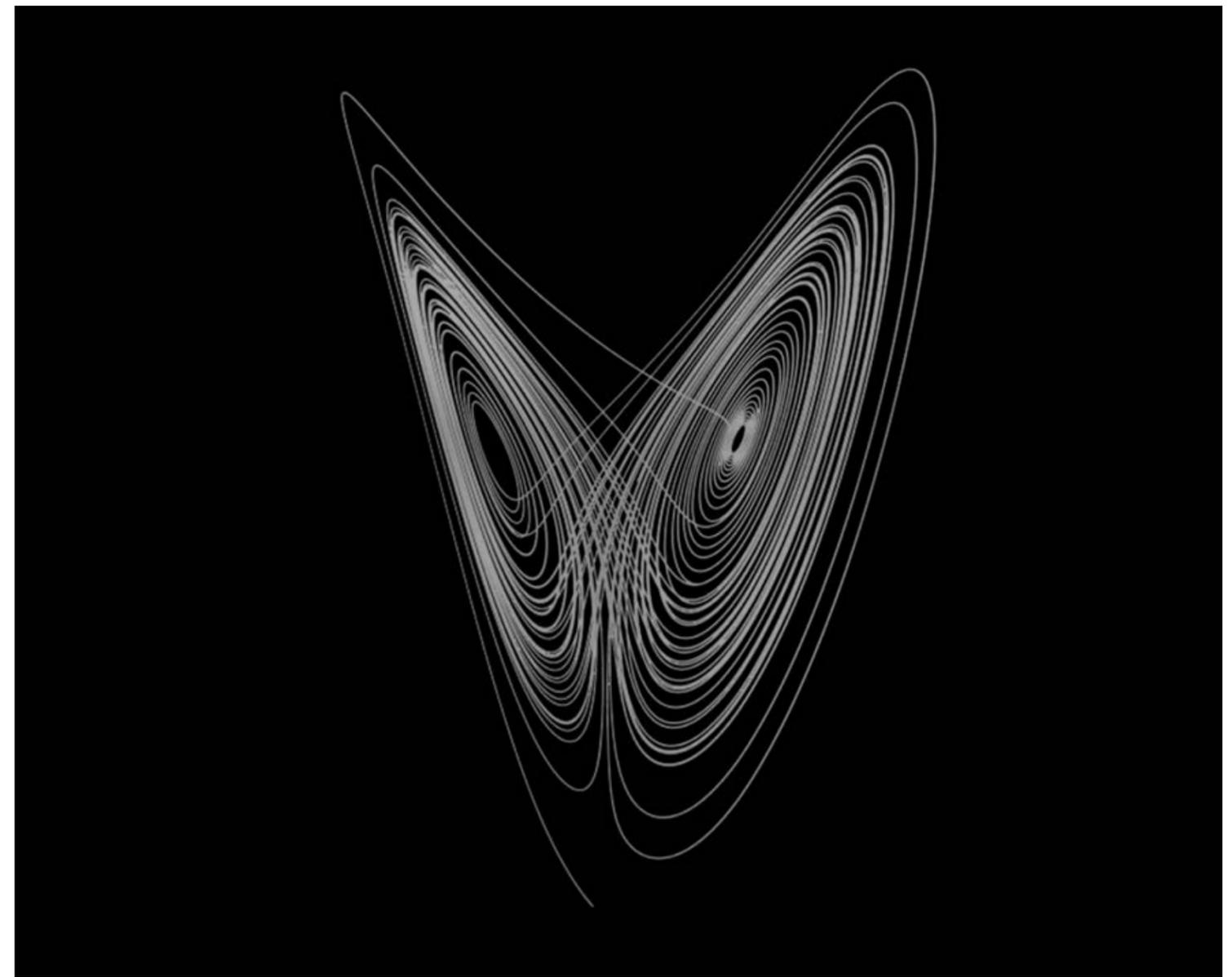
Barile's work circles around existential questions of the history of the earth and of life and around notions of knowledge and certainty. In an earlier series, *An Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution, and Restoration of Land* (2014-2018), part of which was on show at Foam in the On Earth group exhibition (2020), Barile focuses on the mutual impact between geology 'rock formation and deep time' and life forms. For Barile the history of the earth and of humanity, to single out the most complex life form, are essentially the same. Playful pataphysical experiments on the kitchen table mimicking the ways of science, in simulations and studies of powerful geological features and events such as fault lines, tectonic compression or the earth's magnetic field, amount to what the poet Wallace Stevens calls 'the planet on the table'. It is this force field between the ungraspably large and the size of things within our reach that fascinates me. Are the ways of miniaturisation as performed by hobbyists and artists alike a means of coming to grip with the cosmic and our modest place within it?

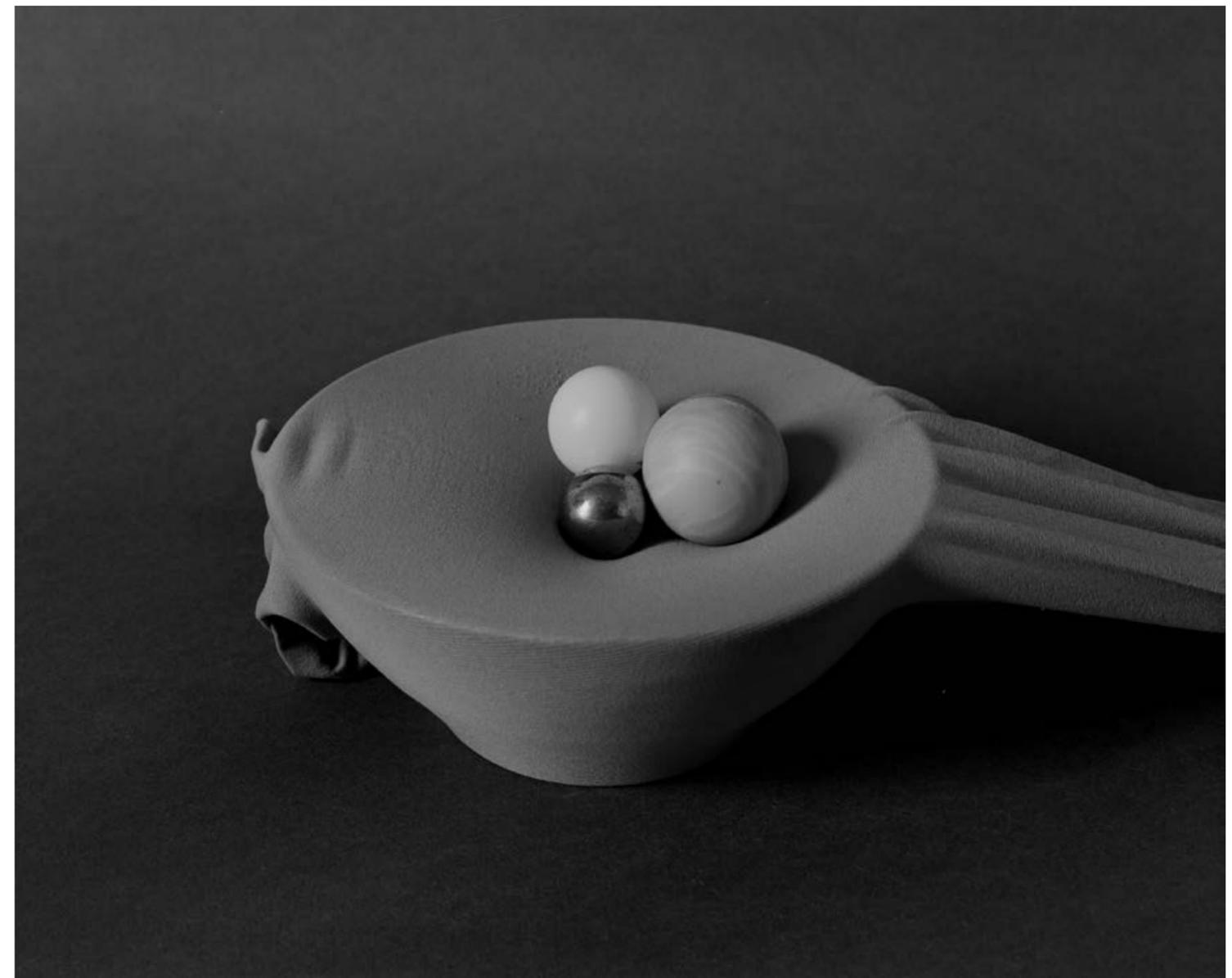
In a long-distance conversation that I had with Barile, marked by technological instability and disruption, we talked about big concepts as evolution, complexity, knowledge and certainty and how for Barile his project of *Works for a Cosmic Feeling* is about mapping and connecting his numerous scientific, historical and spiritual interests. The blurriness of clouds is telling in that regard, as clouds obfuscate a clean view on things and come to stand for out-of-focus ideas. And like the flux of clouds is complex and hard to predict, so Barile wants his project to instill the viewer with a sense of awe that transcends certainties.

Now I seem to begin to better understand the idea of an oceanic feeling, which has to do with a form of surrender and resignation, with sensing the process of becoming and with trying to ungrasp things in the spirit of the Dao. In the *Daodejing* the Dao is being compared to water. In the beginning of chapter 78 I'm reading: 'There is nothing softer and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things.' Elsewhere in the *Daodejing* there is also reference to the weak overcoming the strong. Dao has no purpose, does not strive for anything, but is the way things are and the way things go.

Within the gray-scaling of Barile's photographic multiverse a photograph showing his wife's back becomes a patch of deep time containing multiple celestial bodies, rocks become soft like skin, the out-of-focus image morphs the model of a helium hydride molecule 'the first molecule to ever form when our universe was young' into a mysterious rendering of a black hole. Pondering again the collapsing of scale in these photographs that appearing on my backlit computer screen are equally graspable as ethereal, I'm reminded of the final line in a late piece of verse by the poet W.S. Merwin, from a poem called 'Youth' in the volume *The Shadow of Sirius* (2009): from what we cannot hold the stars are made

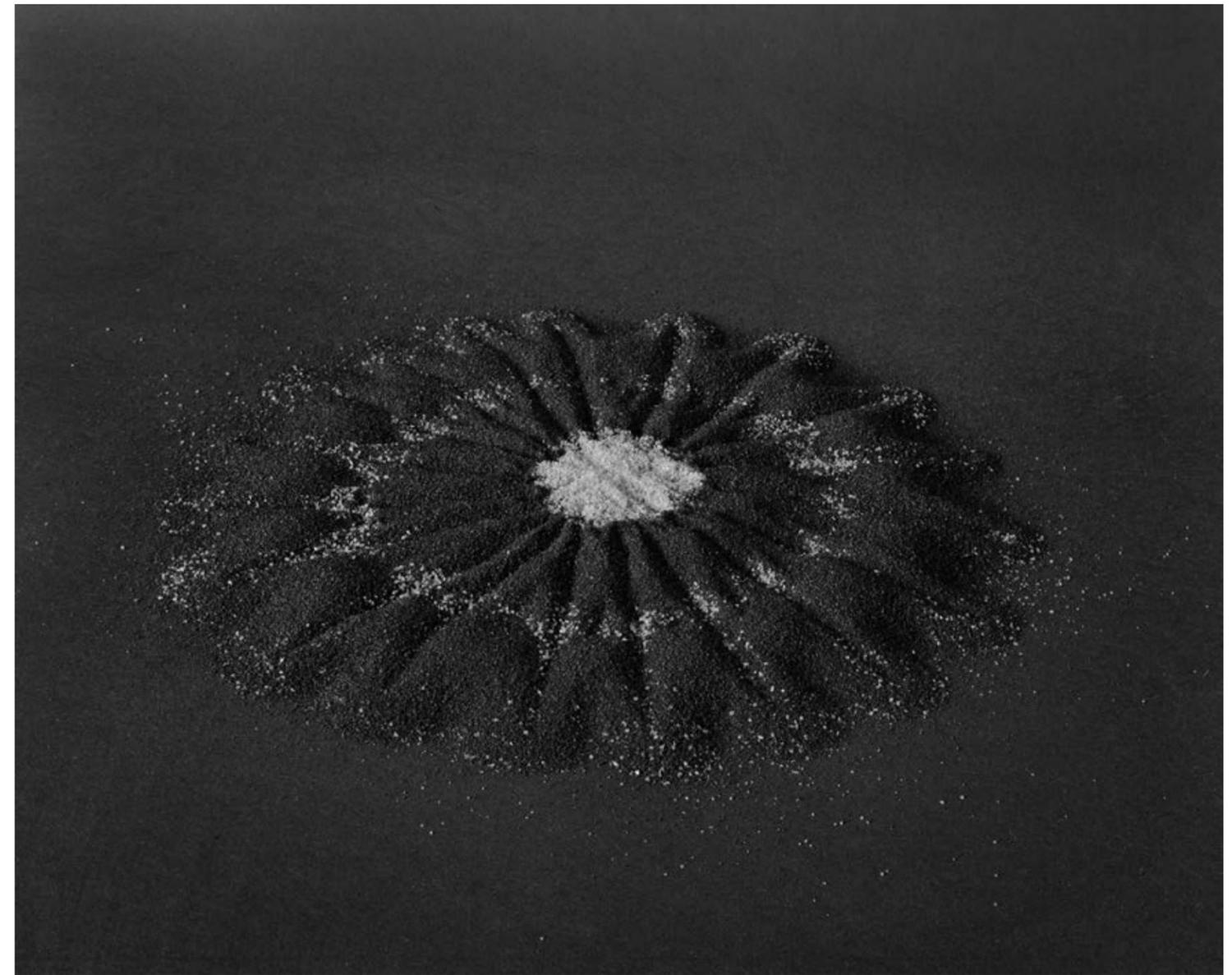
— Text by Taco Hidde Bakker

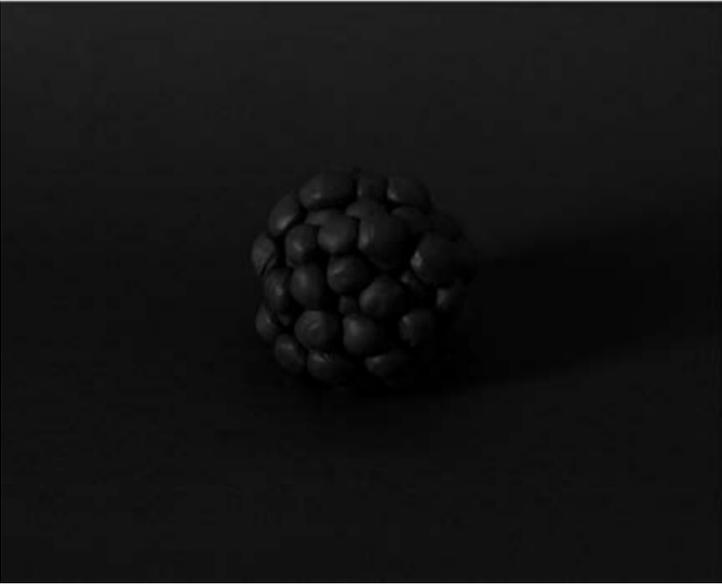


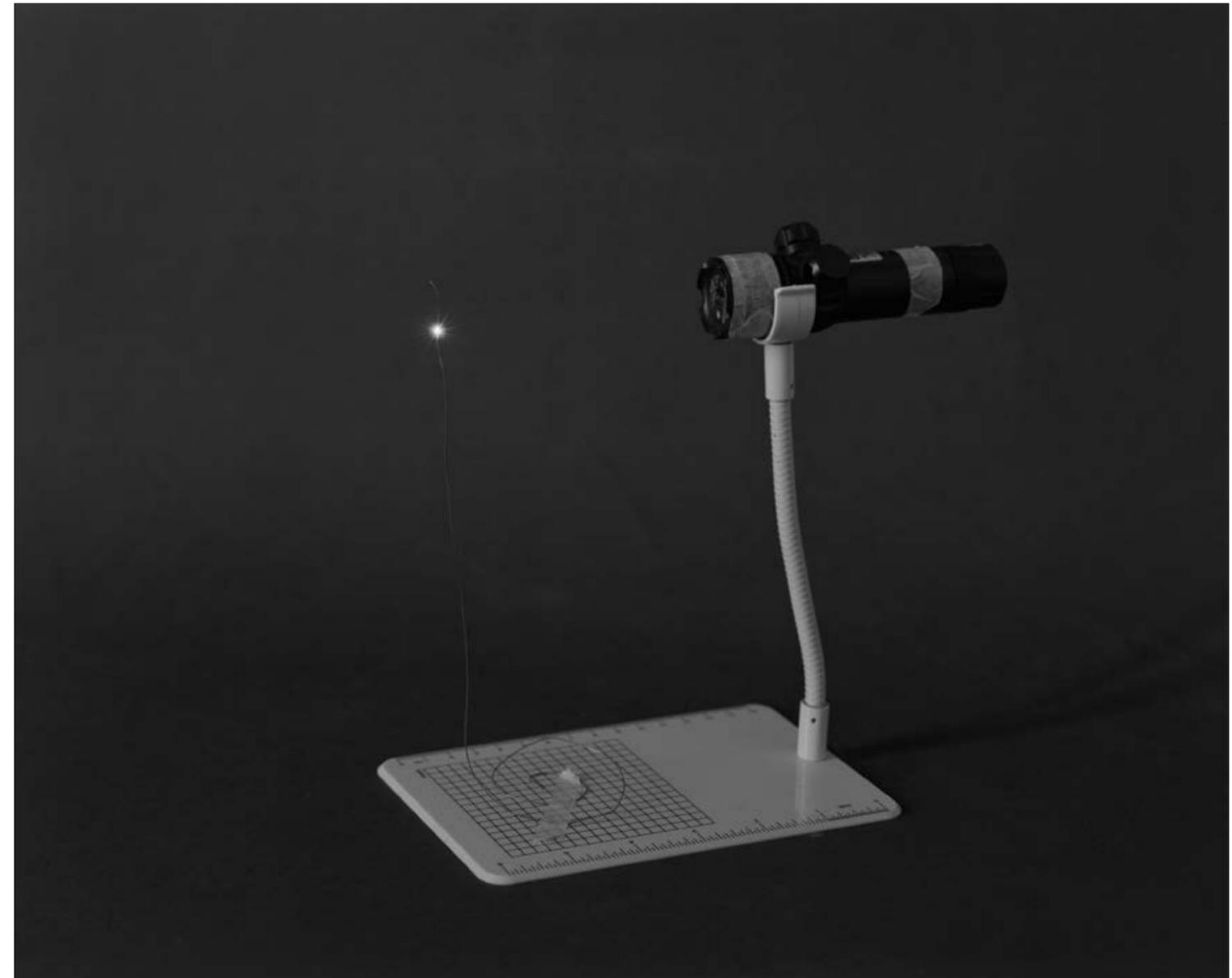












Tool for interference pattern n°2,
Microscope support, metal wire and laser pointer.
2020

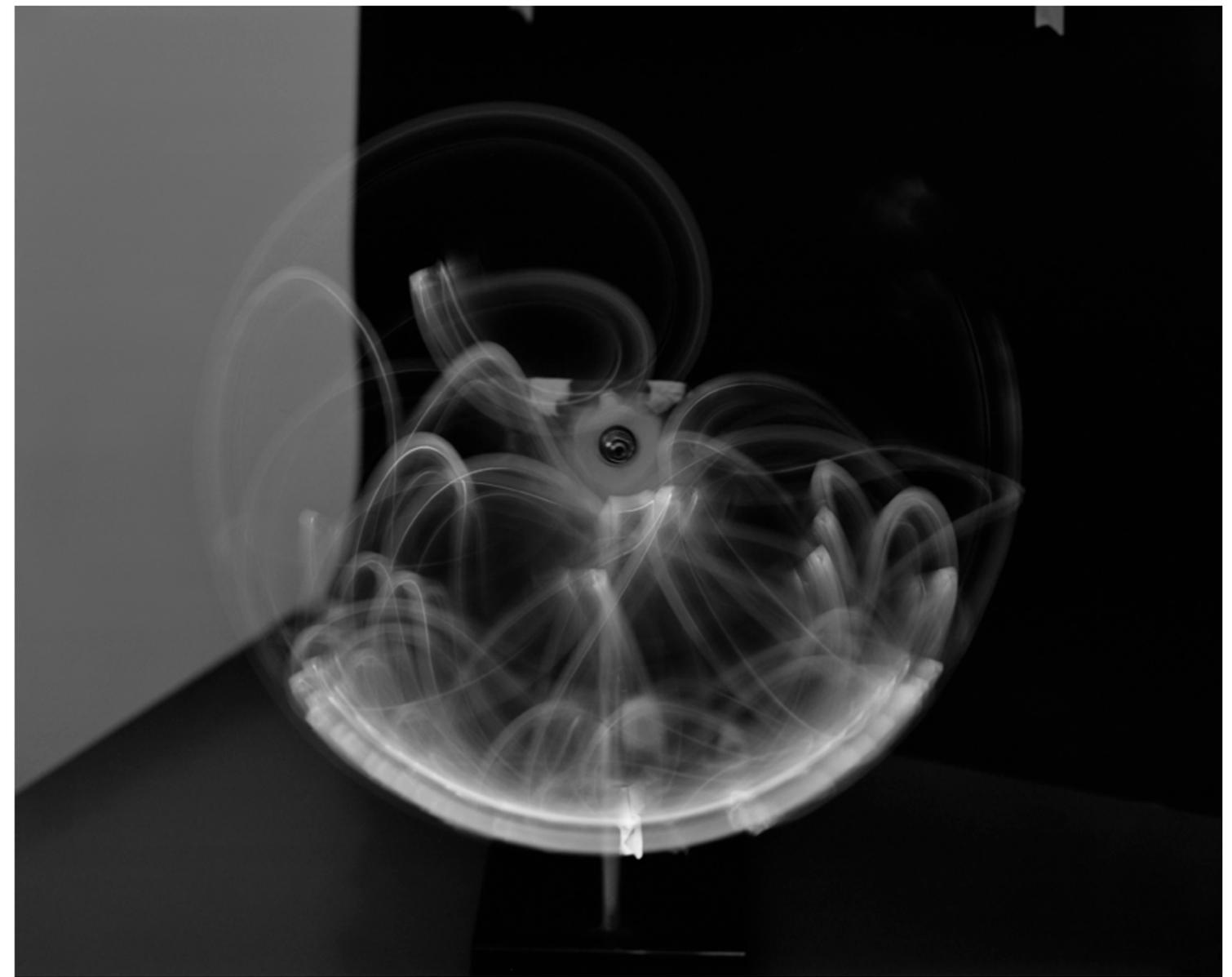


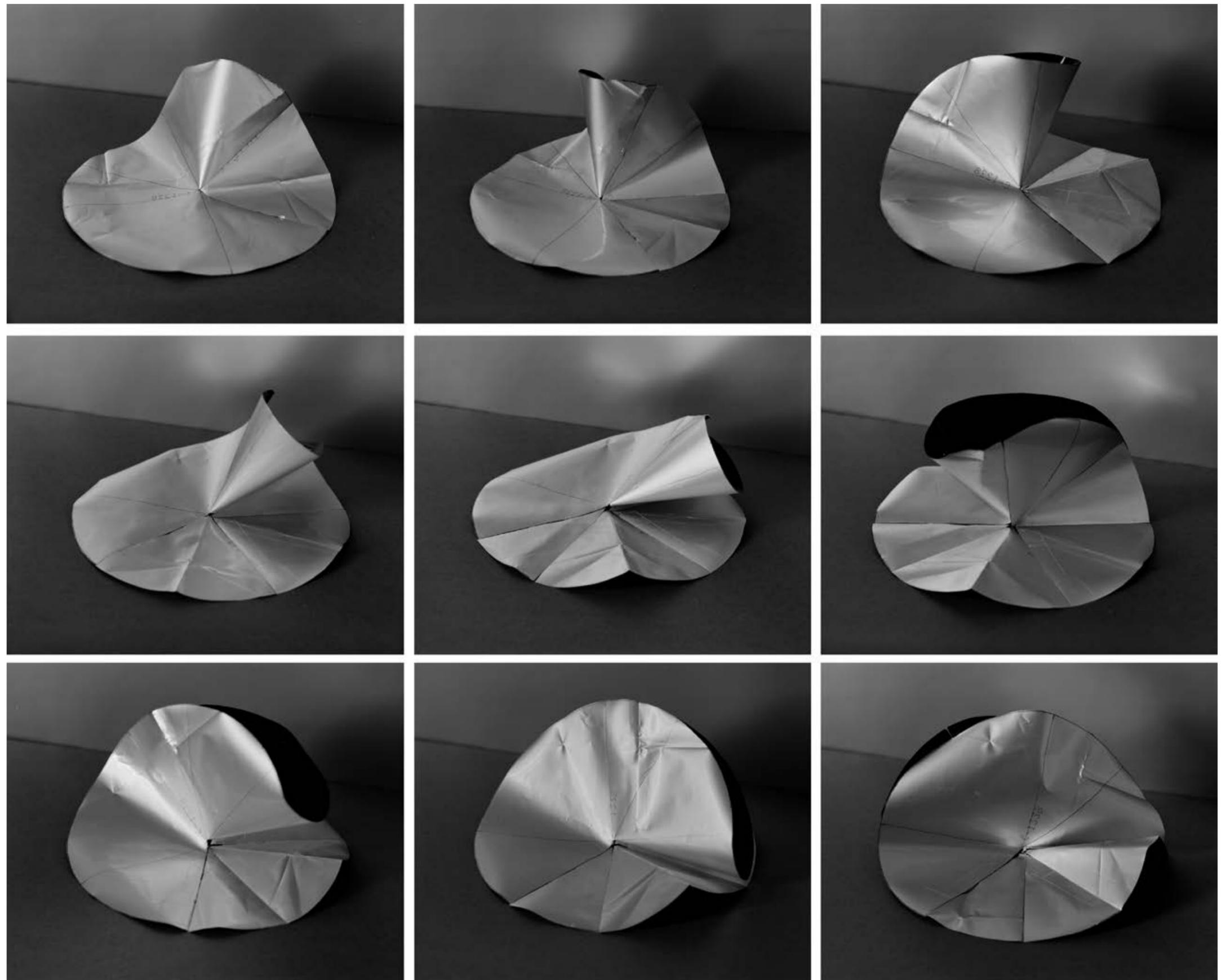


Sveva's eye as close as i can get.
2018

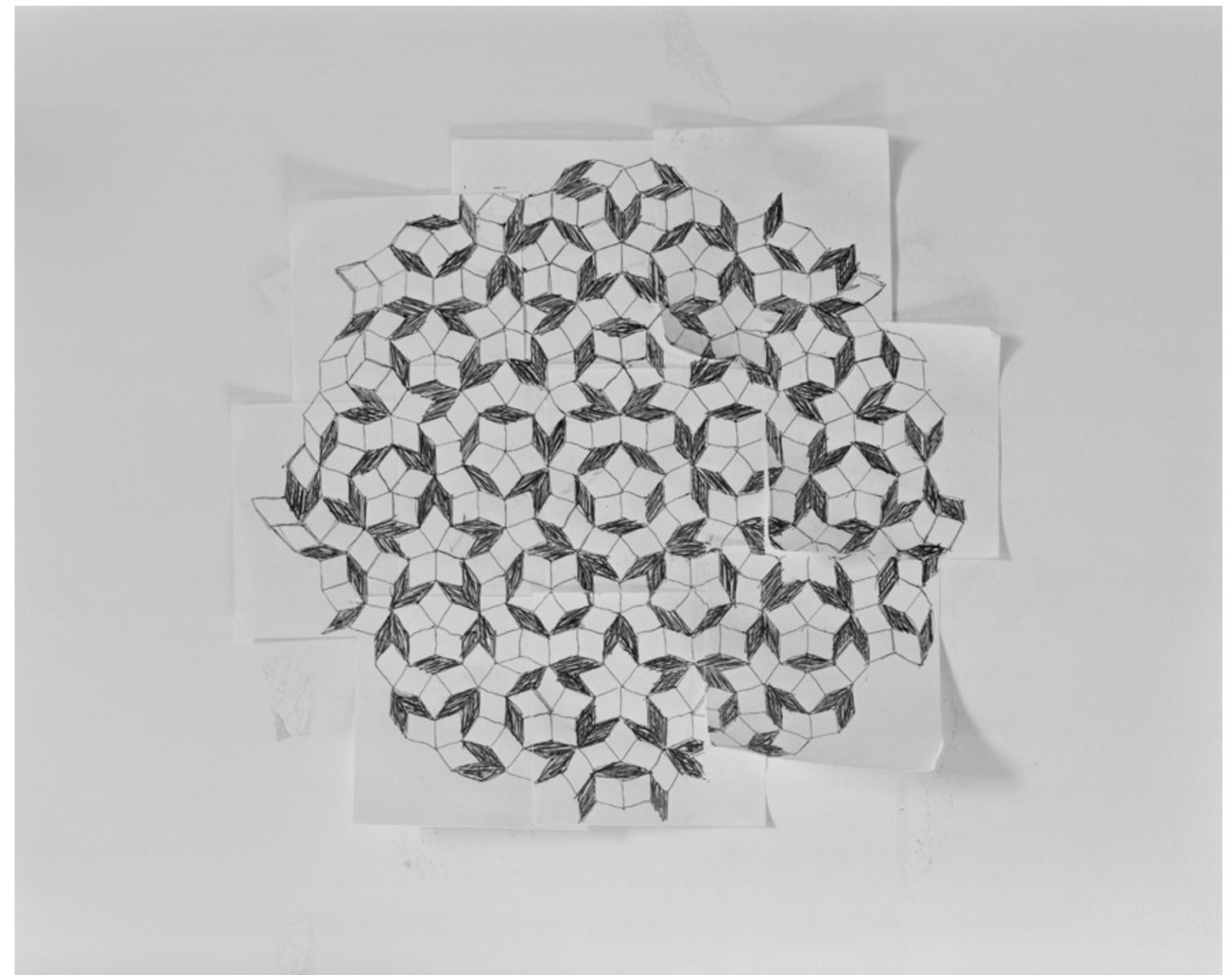


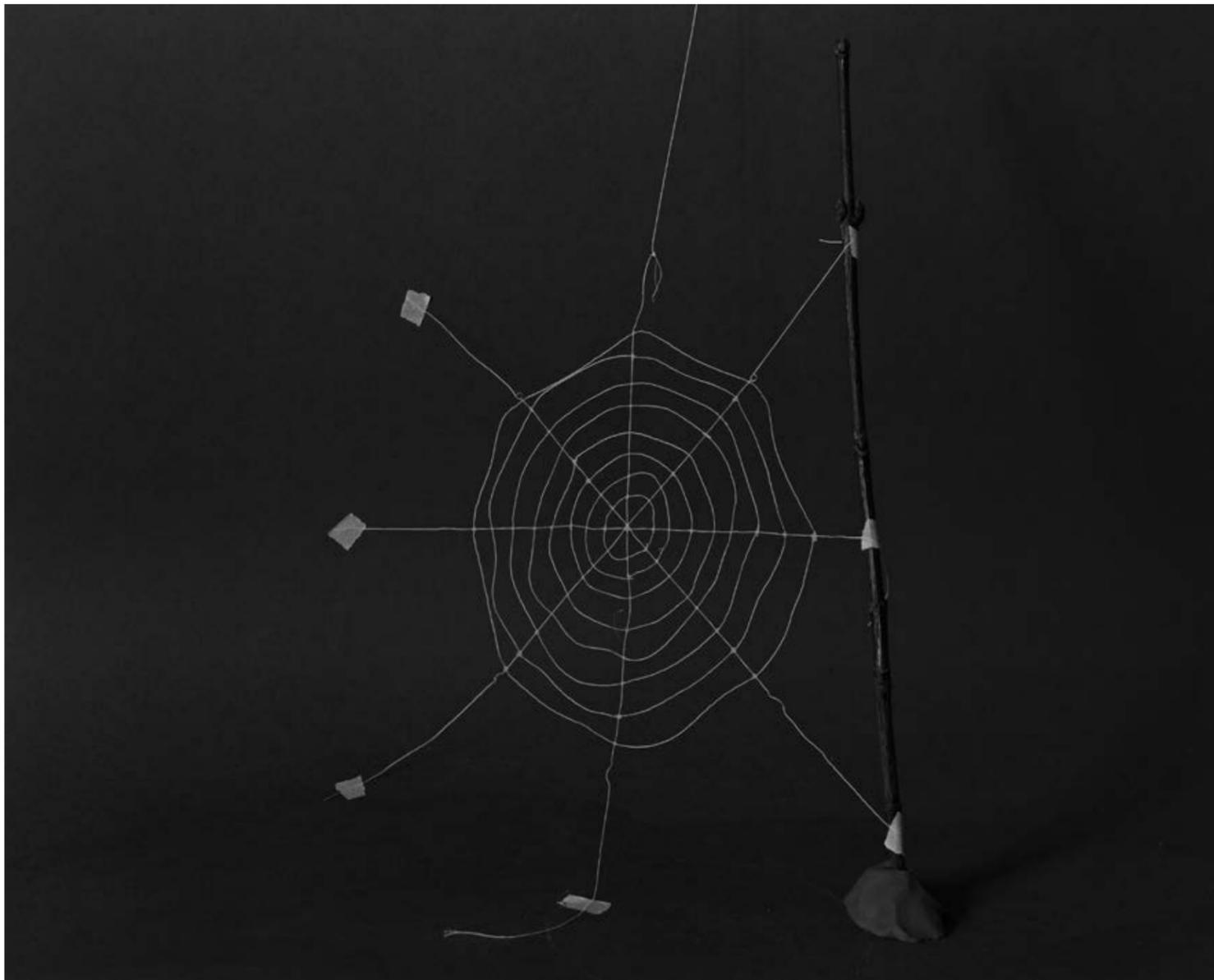
Evolution of a cloud, 4 shots.
2019





9 steps for the incrementation of a 2D 360° surface to a 767° surface.
2018





Attempt to make a spider web,
cotton wire and glue.
2020

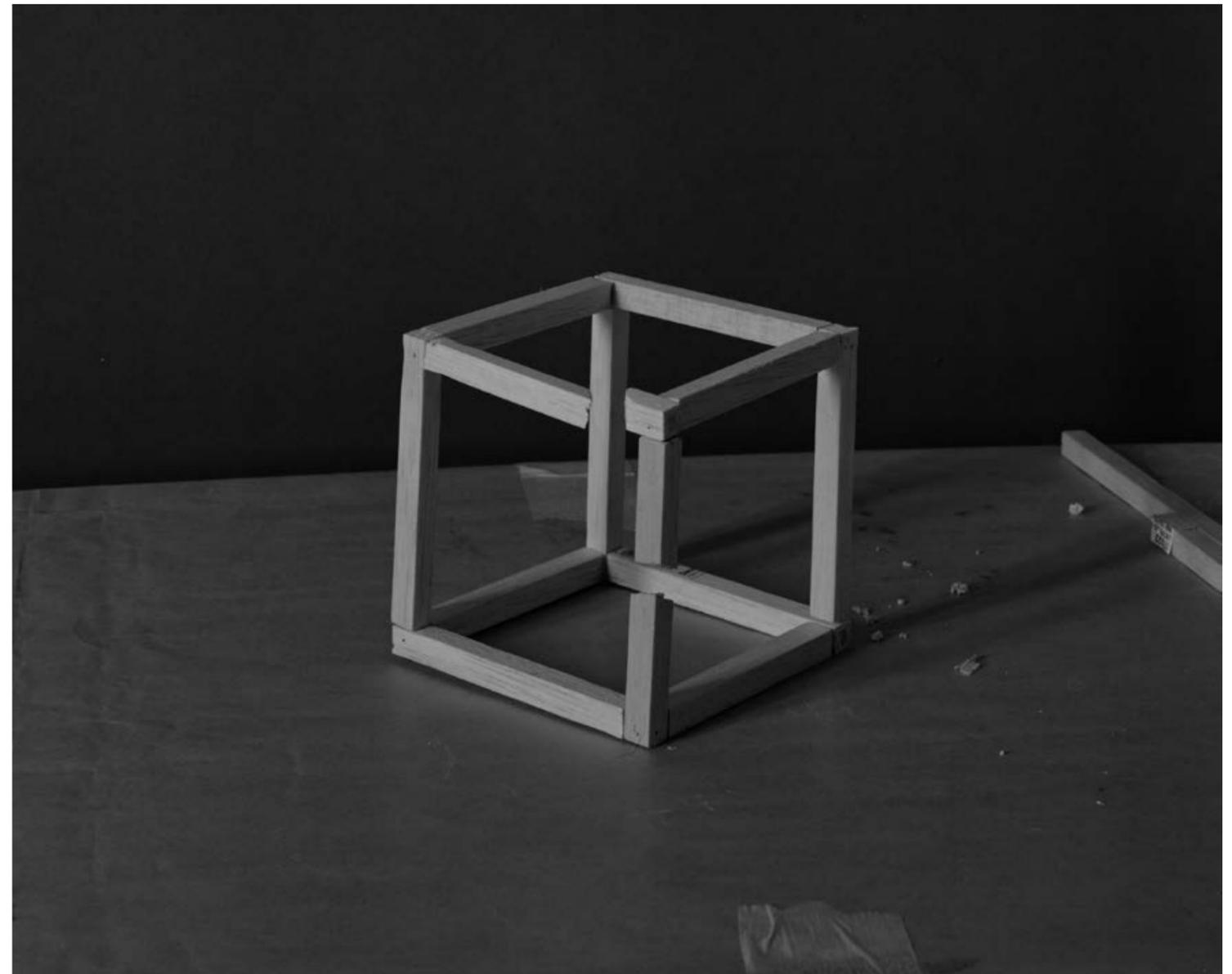


Leopard's skeleton.
2018



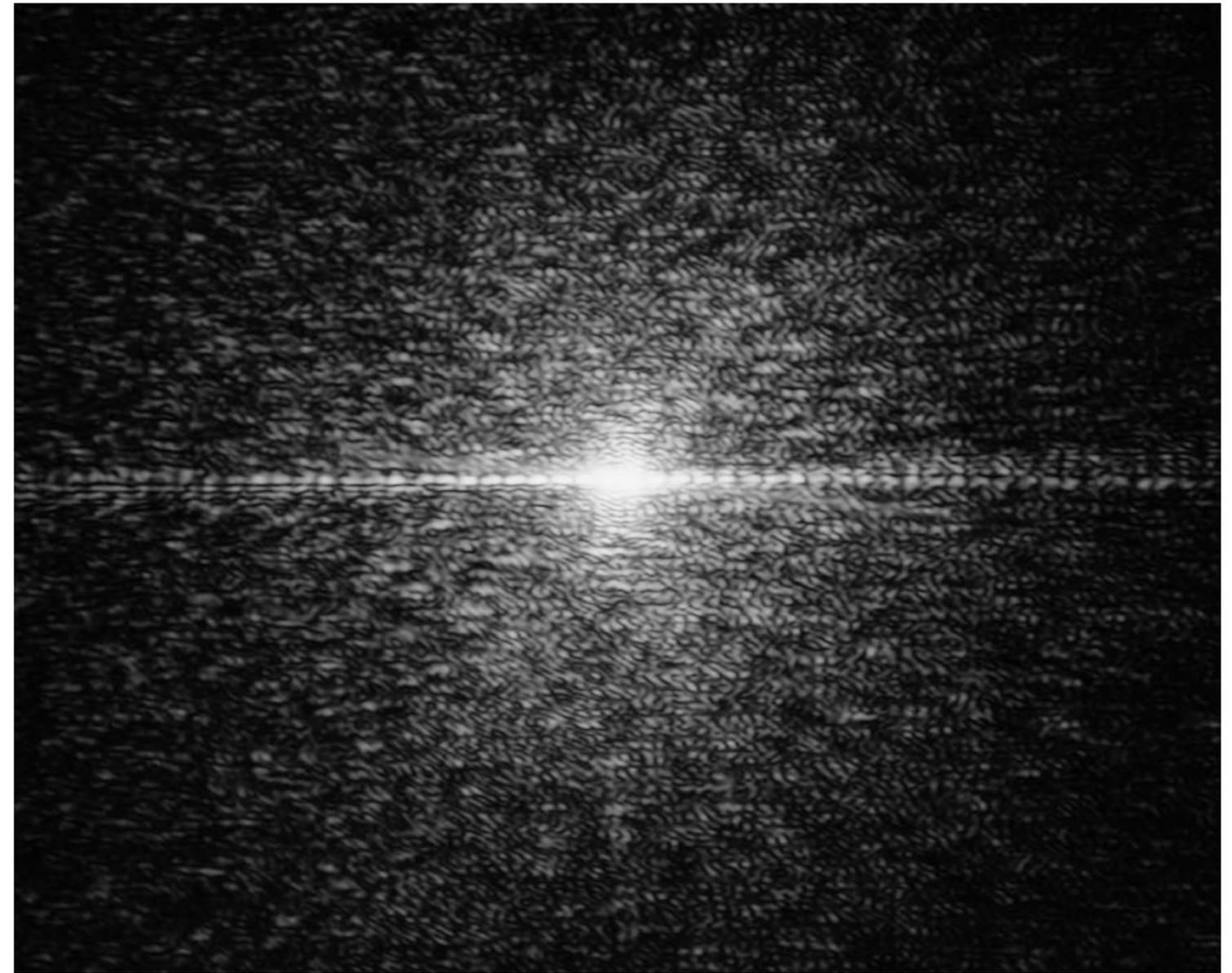


Sveva as Janus Bifrons.
2020

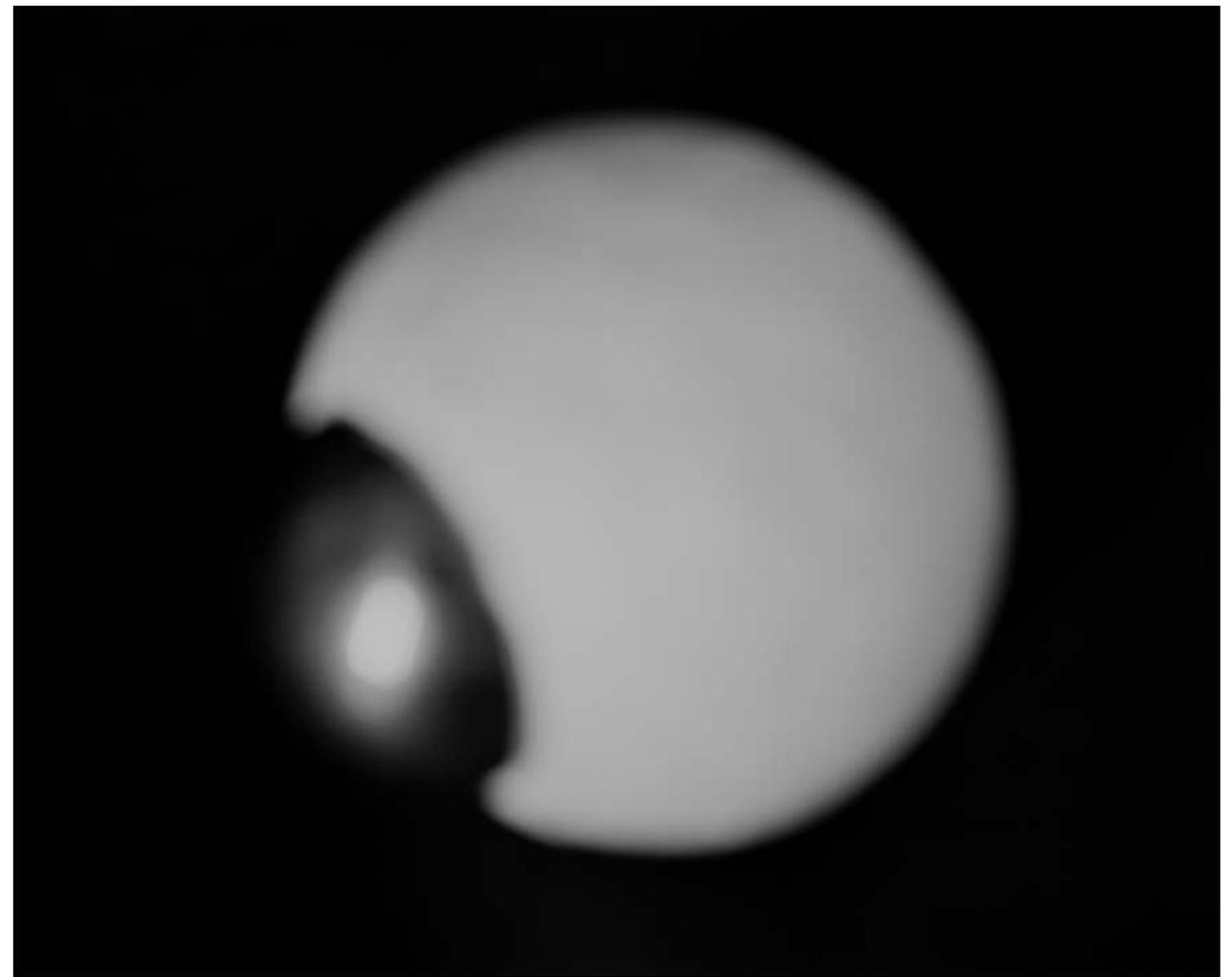


Irrational Cube.
2020





Laser Interference pattern #2,
direct splitted laser beam on 4x5" film.
2019



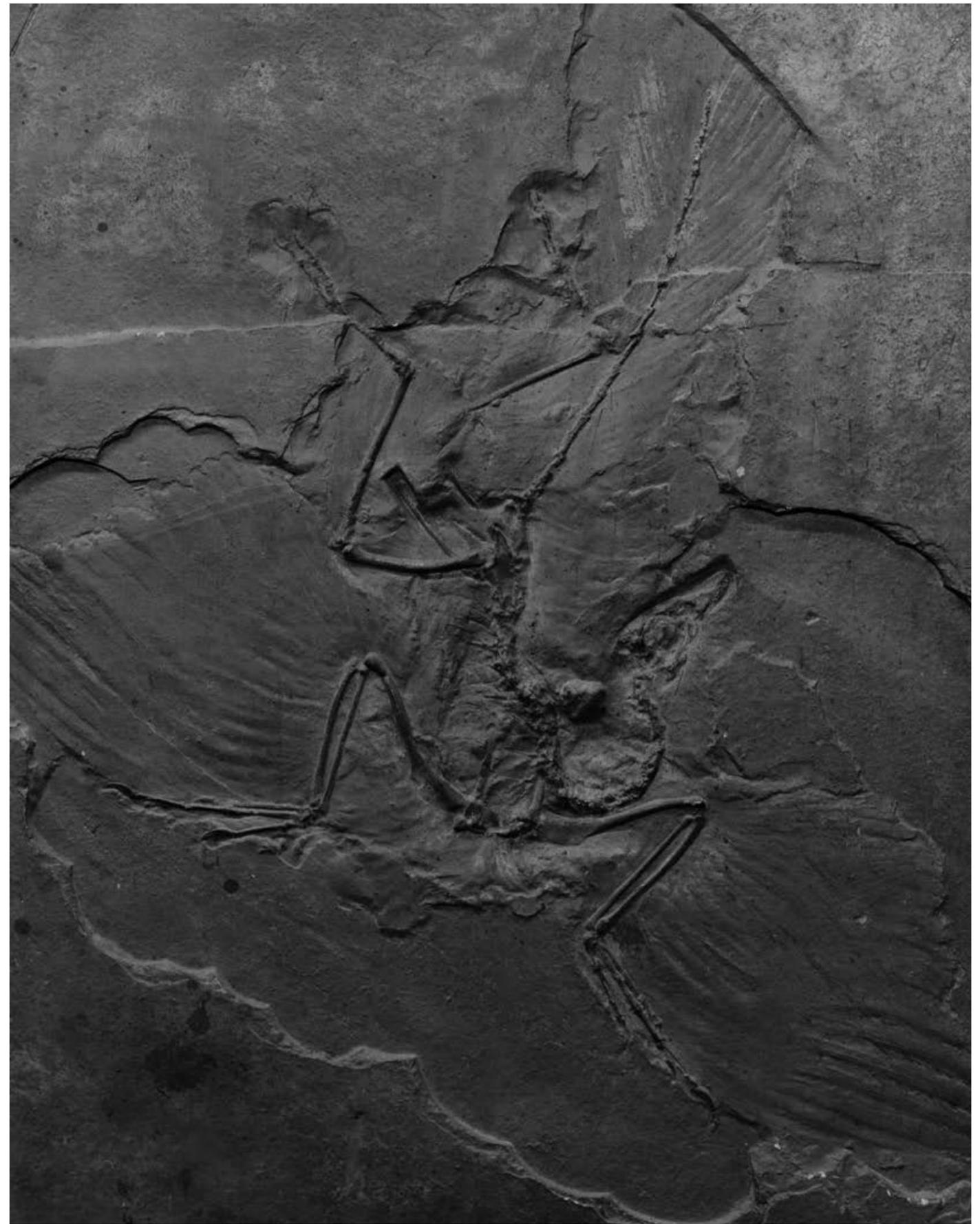
Model of helium hydride molecule,
the first type of molecule to ever form in the early universe.
2019



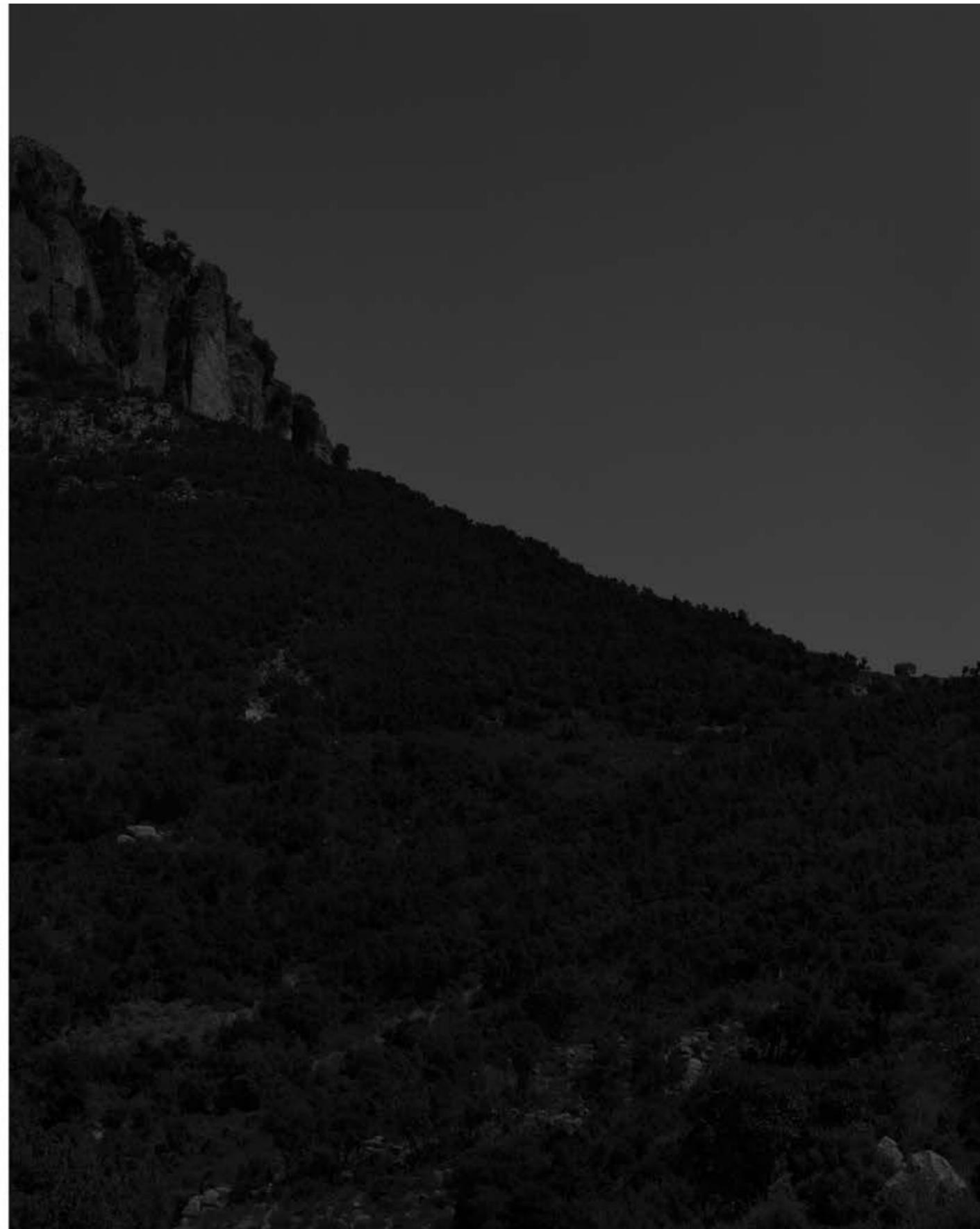
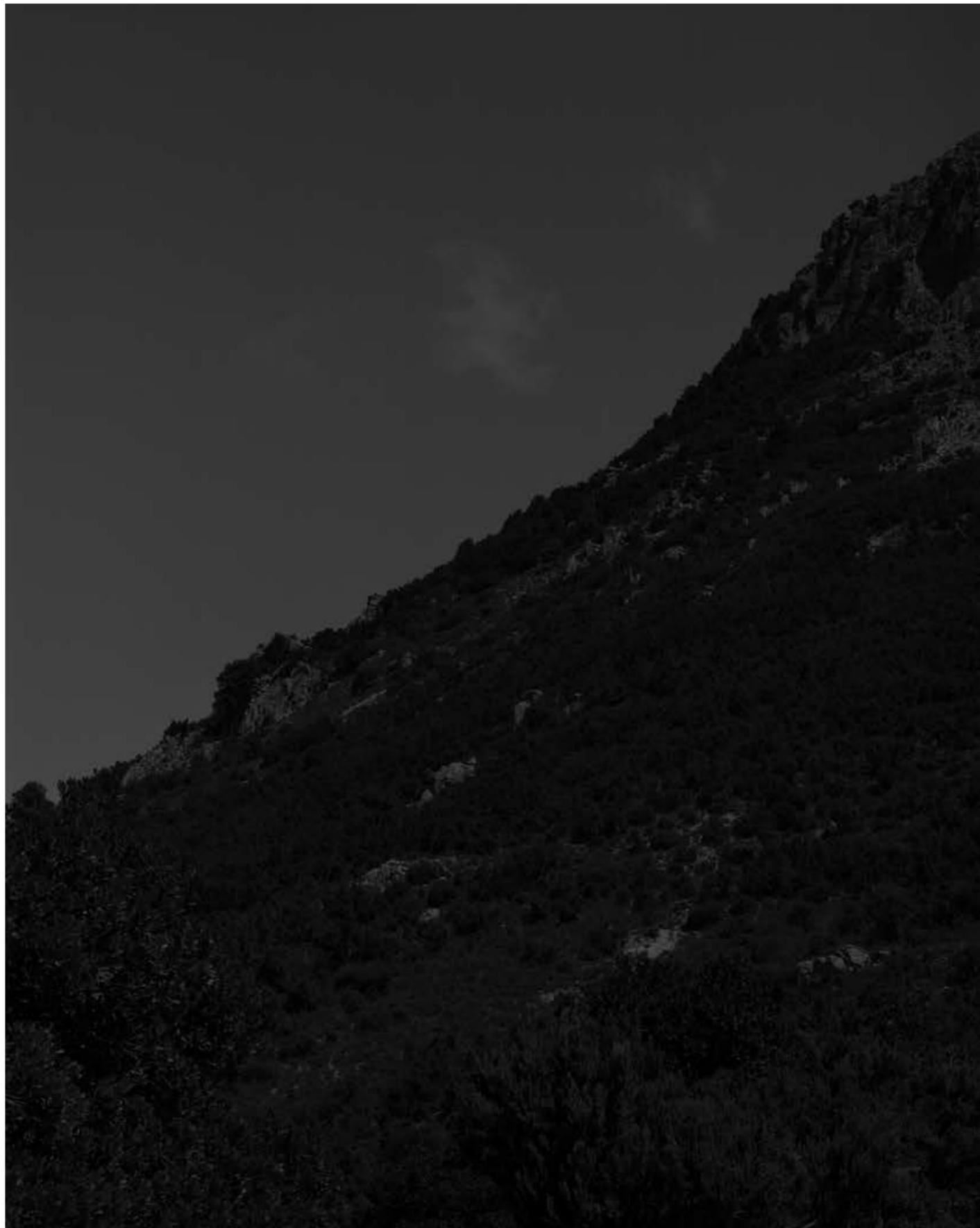
1 h of Venus #2.
2020



1 h of Venus #1.
2020









Cardium pottery like decoration n°2
made using a pyrite crystal on plasticine.
2020







Morning moon, 7:37 AM, 12-02-2020.
2020

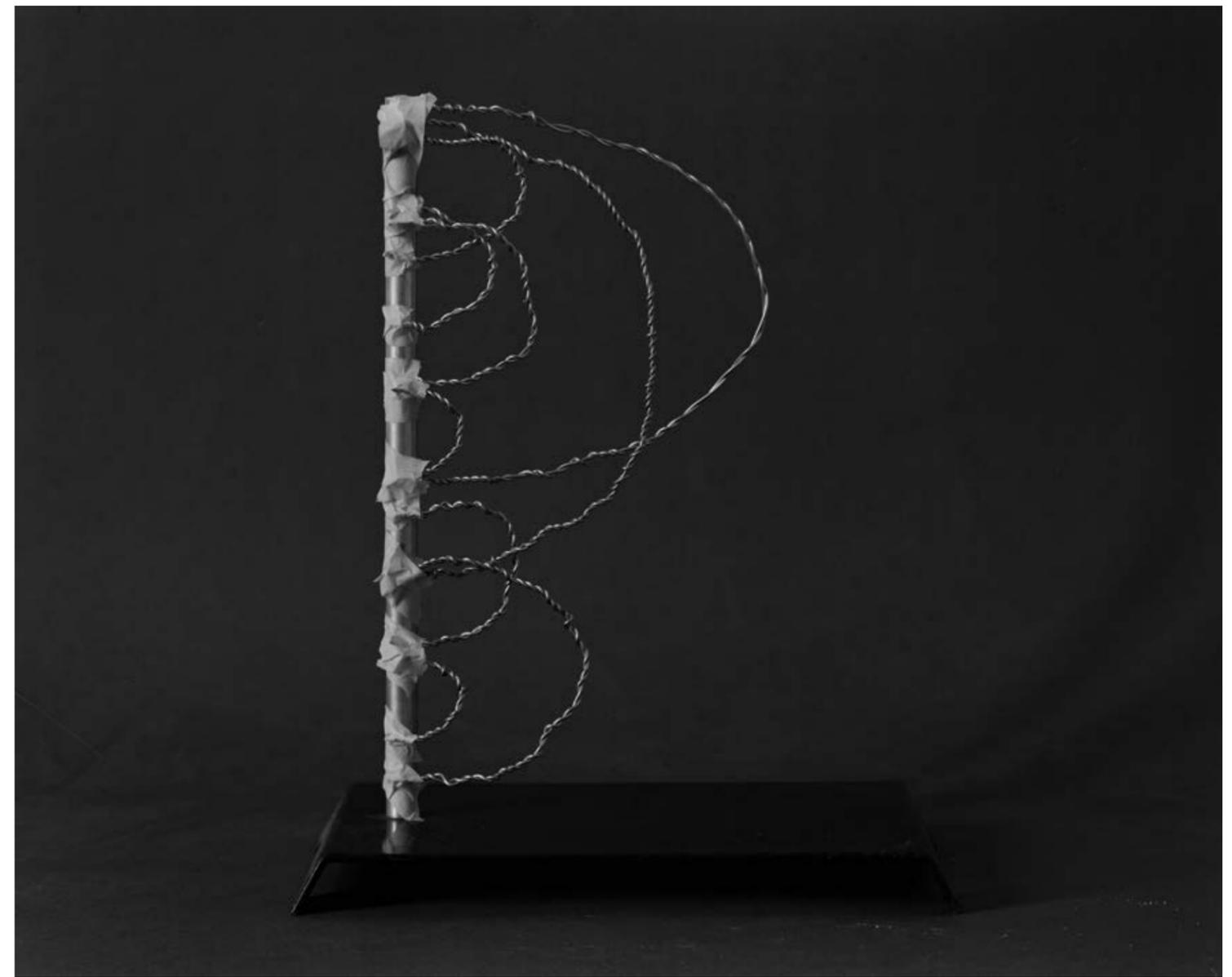


Morning moon, 7:59 AM, 12-02-2020.
2020



Night sky,
Ilford FP4 protection bag and Tolomeo lamp.
2020





Object inspired by Nietzsche's drawing of the
Dynamisches Schema der Zeit (Dynamic Pattern of Time), 1873.
2020



Fabio Barile

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Graduating from FSM in Florence with a degree in photography in 2007. He started his photographic research in 2005 with a project about coastal erosion, which affects 1500 km of Italian coastline. The resulting project, "Among" aimed to investigate natural processes of the landscape. Over the last few years Barile's work has been driven by an interest in science in relation to art - both conceived as tools for a better understanding of reality. His long-term project, "An Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution and Restoration of Land," examines the manner in which geomorphology acts upon the land, serving as testimony to the vastness of geological time. The work employs photography to stimulate a deeper understanding of the landscape and our connection with the natural environment.

"At first glance, Fabio Barile's practice could be said to follow in the long tradition of Italian landscape photography which includes practitioners such as Luigi Ghirri, Guido Guidi. On closer inspection, however, the images in An Investigation hew to a tight conceptual framework that belie their simplicity, asking deeper questions about the nature of Time, and geologic time questions whose philosophical implications underpin scientific endeavor, human perception, and the unknowable forces of creative destruction at work in Nature" I. I. Naomi Itami

Selected exhibitions

2020

Group exhibition, On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world
FOAM Museum, Amsterdam.

2019

Group exhibition, On Earth - Imaging, technology and the natural world
50th edition of the Rencontres d'Arles, in collaboration with FOAM Museum.

Fabio Barile & Domingo Milella - The shape of time
Centro Arti visive Pescheria, Pesaro, Italy

2018

Group exhibition at Villa Celimontana, MAPS|SPAM
Società Geografica Italiana, Villa Celimontana, Rome

Osservare la terra — a dialogue between contemporary photography and the historical archive of ICCD about photography as a tool for observation

ICCD — Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione, Rome, curated by Benedetta Cestelli Guidi

2017

An Investigation of the laws observable in the composition, dissolution and restoration of land,
Matèria, Rome

2015

Homage to James Hutton
Matèria, Rome

2014

Group exhibition at MAXXI, Open museum open city
MAXXI, Rome

Fabio Barile & Francesco Neri, Middle-Earth a journey inside Elica
Elica Showroom, Milan

2011

Group exhibition at Museo Pino Pascali, Giovane fotografia di ricerca in Puglia, Museo Pino Pascali
Polignano a Mare

Publications

Fabio Barile & Domingo Milella - The shape of time, Fondazione malaspina edition, 2019

Fabio Barile & Francesco Neri, Middle-Earth a journey inside Elica, 2014

Vision And Documents Box, Documentary Platform, 2010

Diary N° 0 - Things that do not happen, 3/3, 2009