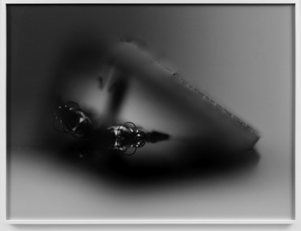
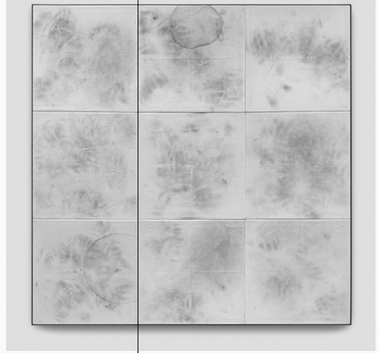


Marietta Mavrokordatou
Virgin verse II, 2025
Archival pigment paper, framed
60 × 80 cm

Kazuna Taguchi
The Eyes of Eurydice #9 (1/3), 2019
Silver gelatin print, artist's frame
44 × 37 cm

Nat Faulkner
Untitled (Mercury Way, London), 2025
Ilford black and white fibre based photographic paper, aluminum
200 × 200 × 4 cm



Paride Maria Calvia
Frotter, 2025
Feline sebum, Damask handkerchief set, frame
120 × 120 cm

Joyce Joumaa
Rue 200, 2024
Inkjet on archival vellum paper, breaker box, stainless steel, computerised timer, light
15 × 19 × 9.5 cm

Paride Maria Calvia
(b. 1990, Bologna, Italy) lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include: Galerina, London (2024), Emalin, London (2024).

Nat Faulkner
(b. 1995, Chippenham, UK) lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include: ZERO..., Milan (2025), Wschód, Warsaw (2025), Brunette Coleman, London (2024), Final Hot Desert, London (2024), Roland Ross, Margate (2024), Mackintosh Lane, London (2023).

Joyce Joumaa
(b. 1998, Lebanon, Beirut) lives and works in Amsterdam. Recent exhibitions include: Galerie Molitor, Berlin (2025), Eli Kerr, Montreal (2024), 60th Venice Biennale, Venice (2024), 2nd Sharjah Architecture Triennale, Sharjah (2023), CCA Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal (2023).

Marietta Mavrokordatou
(b. 1996, Nicosia, Cyprus) lives and works in London. Recent exhibitions include: Brunette Coleman, London (2024), Radio Athènes, Athens (2024), Akwa Ibom, Athens (2024), wicoftnoch, Karlsruhe (2024), Thkio Ppalies, Nicosia (2023), Felix Gaudlitz, Vienna (2023), Centralbanken, Oslo (2023).

Kazuna Taguchi
(b. 1979, Toyko, Japan) lives and works in Vienna. Recent exhibitions include: Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Sint-Martens-Latem (2024), Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima (2024), Longino I.A.H., Chicago (2024), Radio Athènes, Athens (2023), Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo (2022).

All images courtesy of the artists and Brunette Coleman, London
Contact: info@brunettecoleman.com
Photography: Jack Elliot Edwards
Design: George Haughton
Printing: Pureprint, UK

Brunette Coleman

IMAGE AS TRACE
Paride Maria Calvia, Nat Faulkner, Joyce Joumaa, Marietta Mavrokordatou, Kazuna Taguchi

26 April – 31 May 2025

Still Time

Michael Kurtz

We keep this love in a photograph,
we made these memories for ourselves,
where our eyes are never closing,
hearts are never broken,
time's forever frozen still.

—Ed Sheeran, 'Photograph' (2014)

They await execution, tilted to the wall
as you'd prop up a tool until you needed it.
[…]
He looks at us in the silence. He says
Save me, there is still time.

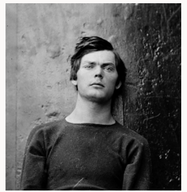
—Sharon Olds, 'Ideographs' (1984)

The most influential account of photography's relationship to time appears in the mournful pages of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, written in the wake of his mother's death in 1977 and published two months before his own untimely demise in 1980. Looking at a photo of his mum as a child, Barthes claims that photography's defining characteristic is its pastness, its depiction of 'what has been'. Our awareness of the presence of the subject before the camera when the photo was taken slips inevitably into an awareness of the pastness of that instant. The presence of the photograph implies the absence of its subject. 'Whether or not the subject is already dead,' according to the bereaved Barthes, 'every photograph is this catastrophe' – the catastrophe, in less morbid words, of the irretrievability of the past.[1]

This is a common-sense understanding of photography, as a way of fixing fleeting moments, but might its affirmation of the finality of history be stultifying? In *The Miracle of Analogy* (2015) art historian Kaja Silverman questions the emphasis on the future perfect tense. The unifying trait of all photographed subjects in Barthes's view is that they are 'going to die': 'the photograph tells me death in the future'. He understands the photograph as first-and-foremost a confirmation of loss which, Silverman suggests, fixes this loss as an unalterable, even natural truth. If the death-to-come is inevitable, change becomes impossible and action futile. This predominant way of looking at photographs 'renders the future as unchanging as the past' and so 'contributes to the political despair that afflicts so many of us today: our sense that the future is "all used up"'.[2]

Still from Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*, 1957

Searching for alternative approaches, Silverman invokes Walter Benjamin's belief that with photographs the past addresses the present. For Benjamin, in Silverman's words, some photos hold 'a disclosive rather than an evidentiary truth'. They do not offer a fixed record of the past but enter an ongoing dialogue with the present. They contain, he believes, a message destined for a future viewer. The photograph is 'propelled by a mysterious kind of intentionality toward a particular look – one that has the capacity to recognise it'. 'It travels through time and space to reach this look, and when it arrives, […] the past is realised within the present'.[3]



Detail of Alexander Gardner's portrait of Lewis Payne before his execution, 1865, appears on page 95 of *Camera Lucida*

In case this is all too abstract, the epigraphs above illustrate these different attitudes to photography and the way they often appear alongside each other. Sharon Olds's poem describes a photograph from 1905 of two men nailed to a scaffold in the hours before their execution somewhere in China. After two hundred words of utter despair – these people are about to die! these people are now dead! – the poem shifts to that strange glimmer of hope in the final line: '*Save me, there is still time*'.[4] The convict's stare 'travels through time and space to reach' our gaze, miraculously bypassing the intervening years and the tragedies they have in store. Of course, his demand for salvation cannot be met: no change in tense will bring him back to life. But a more fluid understanding of photographic time might alter our approach to historical records and the past: from a discourse of total oppression and subaltern silence to one of reclaimed agency and retroactive justice, from melancholic apathy to positive intervention.[5]

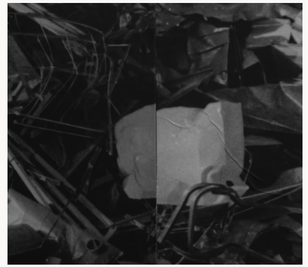
Reproduction of C.R. Leslie's *Looking at the Miniature*, 1858

Ed Sheeran's song 'Photograph', in which he speaks to an estranged partner about a photo of them together, also moves between these two temporalities. The prechorus exemplifies a standard view of photographic pastness. In the photograph, 'time's forever frozen still' and a loving memory is fixed before, it is implied, the couple's hearts were broken. Then in the chorus Sheeran jumps to a rousing falsetto and the image comes to represent a future promise: it stores their love 'inside the pocket' of her 'ripped jeans' while they wait until their 'eyes meet' again. At first the photo seemed to confirm the end of their relationship, but now it holds hope for a time to come, in which the past will be 'realised within the present'. It is surely no coincidence that the song was released just a year before Silverman published her book!

Joking aside, it's interesting that Sheeran associates the photograph's future potential with its physicality. 'You can keep me […] inside that necklace […] next to your heartbeat', he sings, as if channelling a nineteenth-century sailor. Barthes's focus on the what-has-been limits photographic creativity to the single moment an image is captured. The photograph is understood as a transparent conduit for the world as it appeared in that instant. But photographs – the opposing argument goes – are not transparent: their indexical relation to the bygone subject is mediated by extended processes of editing and printing, framing and display. And they exist as objects to be held in the hand, flicked through in albums, walked past in galleries, held on the body in wallets and phone cases, 'inside that necklace', *moving forward* through time and space to be with us now. So the tension between pastness and futurity in photography is closely related to debates (longstanding among photo-theorists) about whether the photograph is fundamentally an indexical trace or a constructed object.

The rise of digital technologies in the late twentieth century represented a decisive victory for the 'constructed object' camp. Most images are no longer fixed chemical exposures but bundles of code whizzing across networks, constantly made anew by pixels under our fingertips. Their provenance is unclear and relation to reality precarious: they are even more susceptible to manipulation than analogue photographs. Digital culture has caused a loss of faith in photographic veracity, then, associated with a wider sense that our connection to reality is weakening as we are increasingly immersed in a flow of virtual images.

This new image regime has produced a conflicted attitude toward photography, characterised on the one hand by unprecedented awareness of the medium's artificiality and on the other by intensified longing for authentic images that might ground us in reality. Above all, though, it has prompted a desire to maintain the 'photographic' as a way of thinking, with all its irreconcilable contradictions – between pastness and futurity, realism and artifice – against an online culture that works to collapse these distinctions into an endless virtual present. Emerging from this context in recent decades, there has been an explosion of experimental photographic practices which, according to photography historian Geoffrey Batchen, self-consciously investigate the tensions 'between the photograph's function as a transparent window onto another world and its opacity as an object, sitting before us in the here and now'.[6] In the most interesting of this new work, these categories seem to converse.



Detail of Nat Faulkner's *Untitled (Mercury Way, London)*, 2025

Consider, for instance, Nat Faulkner's *Untitled (Mercury Way, London)* (2025). The initial black-and-white exposure of a mound of waste in a paper and metal processing centre on the outskirts of London was taken earlier this year. After a few weeks Faulkner developed the film, cut the negative in half horizontally, and rearranged the pieces with the top skewed slightly to the right. He then printed the fragmented image across two vertical sheets of paper and mounted them on thick aluminium panels. The resulting picture decentres the moment of exposure as locus of photographic creativity by foregrounding its intricate production process, with each stage – each step away from the moment depicted – marked by a split in the photochemical illusion. This sense of ongoing creation is heightened by Faulkner's use of matte paper which is textured like a fragile graphite drawing and easily collects grease marks and fingerprints. Not sealed behind a glossy resin layer, the print is open to the everchanging world around it – its stained edges becoming an archive of continued handling.

And then there's its subject. At the very moment we 'look through' the photograph into its transparent depths, into the captured past, we are confronted again with the work's materials, paper and metal, heavier and scrappier than ever, and brought back with a thud to the tangible present. An indexical photograph usually allows us to ignore the thing in front of us and enter the world it represents, but here the world represented refers us straight back to the object in the room. We walk round the work and look between indexical sign and physical support, past and present, each pointing back to the other. In both states, matter appears unstable, poised between coalescence and collapse. A recycling plant is the work's ostensible subject, cyclicality its temporal model.

Detail of AJX advert in Oxford Circus station (2025)

Joyce Joumaa's breaker boxes stage a yet more fraught dialogue between photographic past and sculptural present. For this series, Joumaa takes snapshots on an iPhone of ordinary scenes in her native Lebanon, prints them on thick vellum paper, and frames them in fuse boxes fitted with bulbs that backlight the images. Electricity is rationed in Lebanon, switching on and off in different places according to a daily timetable, because of the nation's interminable energy crisis. The lights in the fuse boxes here – *Archive "Centre"* (2024) and *Rue 200* (2024) – are set on timers which correspond to the blackout schedules in the respective buildings where the photos were taken.

The photographic trace, in this series, is struggling to survive, behind frosted plastic and hidden in darkness half the time. The relationship between indexical image and material support comes to stand for the difficult preservation of the historical record in tumultuous times. This interpretation is suggested most explicitly by the photo, almost impossible to see within its case, of an archive centre. When the boxes switch on and off they make a distinctive clicking sound, like a clock marking the passing days or a camera, as if each time the light reappears the photograph is snapped afresh. Each time the light turns on, we are reminded of the image's treacherous journey to arrive at the present and of its continuing movement, 'propelled by a mysterious kind of intentionality toward a particular look', toward a future that can better receive it.

Click, *there is still time…*

1
Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (London, 2000), pp. 93–96.

2
Kaja Silverman, *The Miracle of Analogy, or The History of Photography, Part 1* (Stanford, 2015), pp. 1–9.

3
In these quotes Silverman (as cited above) summarises Benjamin's argument about the qualities of early, pre-industrial photographs in his 1931 article, 'Little History of Photography'. Her account is also informed, though, by Benjamin's redemptive approach to the past in the famous later essay, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', published posthumously in 1942.

4
Sharon Olds, 'Ideographs (a photograph of China, 1905)', in *Selected Poems* (London, 2005), p. 10 [italics in original].

5
This shift has occurred in some approaches to historical evidence, particularly photographic archives, in the last three decades, as outlined in Deborah Poole, 'An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34 (2005), pp. 159–79.

6
Geoffrey Batchen, 'Post-Photography', in *Each Wild Idea: Writing Photography History* (London, 2001), pp. 108–127.