

*Pamela Rosenkranz*

# *No Core*

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN GENÈVE  
KUNSTVEREIN BRAUNSCHWEIG  
SWISS INSTITUTE / CONTEMPORARY ART, NY

JRP | RINGIER



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# Introduction

This publication evolved within the scope of the first institutional solo exhibitions of works by Pamela Rosenkranz. The three exhibitions took place independently of one another in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States, and we are now delighted to be going beyond the pure documentation of the initial presentations by offering further insight into Rosenkranz's *oeuvre*. This monograph is the fruit of a collaborative effort on the part of Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Kunstverein Braunschweig, and Swiss Institute New York.

In the following pages, *No Core* features work that the artist has been developing over the past five years. As the title indicates, Rosenkranz's practice revolves around questions of meaning and meaninglessness and how they remain constitutive for art. In challenging these basic conditions, Rosenkranz's affecting body of work activates a contemporary form of nihilism. From paintings produced from the foil of emergency blankets or Ralph Lauren-brand latex paint and soft drinks, to plastic water bottles filled with skin- or urine-hued liquids, to a monitor featuring an approximation of and challenge to Yves Klein blue, Rosenkranz's artworks take aim at the empty centers of history, politics, and our contemporary culture as a whole. Her adept engagement with the homogenous surfaces of our consumerist societies reveals them to be not just objects of desire but parts of a natural order. In so doing, and by unraveling mystified notions of art that have as their core the artist's subjectivity, Rosenkranz incorporates questions about a "self" that appears to be at the absolute center of cultural attention.

"No Core," Rosenkranz's exhibition at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, which gives this publication its title, pursued a new approach to artistic subjectivity, experience,

and identity. In the show, Rosenkranz integrated findings from contemporary science and combined them with elements from contemporary culture and art-historical references. As such, the artist developed a disturbing and subversive approach to understanding the relation between body and mind, which has emerged from her interest in contemporary psychology and neuroscience. For Rosenkranz, the very notion of the centrality of the artwork and its meaning is to be subverted via conceptual work that both employs and undermines expressionist motifs. The exhibition in Geneva generated reflections on the figure of the body and the encounters between its mental perception and physical expression in space. The show brought new and specially commissioned work together into an integrally repetitive set, and included photograms of pills, human-sized-mirror arrangements, translucent hand-molded plastic sculptures, skin-colored monotypes, and the premiere of a video-animation work.

In her exhibition at Kunstverein Braunschweig, meanwhile, Rosenkranz addressed the ambivalence of the human aspiration to rectify the disturbed relationship between humankind and nature. She spun a web of references, evoked conflicting associations, and traced the contradictions that inevitably develop in the construction of a fragile bridge between science and esotericism. Tellingly, a Fiji Water advertising pitch supplied the title of the artist's show. "Untouched by Man" owes its appellation to the pure mineral water of the Fiji islands, which is famously bottled in such a way that the water is prevented from coming into contact with the atmosphere. Springing directly from earth and remaining "untouched by the compromised air of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" until opened, the



Exhibition view, "The Real Thing,"  
Tate Britain, London, 2010





1-3  
Exhibition view, "The Real Thing,"  
Tate Britain, London, 2010



2



3





Exhibition view, "Our Sun,"  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Venice, 2009

water is touted by the company as untainted and pure. Although such production—requiring enormous effort—is not compatible with modern ecology, sales of the product, which symbolizes both the pristine and the vital, has become the lifestyle attribute of an individualistic culture, nurturing an inner nature instead. In this, the Fiji brand thus unites two opposing elements: the domestication of nature in a capitalistic economy and its simultaneous disenchantment with the sciences. In Rosenkranz’s show, the images and slogans that companies like Fiji Water impose on their products by means of clever marketing strategies were unmasked to reveal their basic absurdity.

At Swiss Institute’s invitation, Rosenkranz’s exhibition “This Is Not My Color” was established in dialogue with New York artist Nikolas Gambaroff, who called his own part of the show “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” While none of the pieces presented by the two artists actually presented the human figure, the size, proportion, and posture of their works reflected a common concern for the bodily, utilizing strategies borrowed from consumer culture and its marketing of an idealized self. The core of the exhibition was the idea that the made-for-purchase person is an illusory construct that can be unpacked through scientific and philosophical analyses. Rosenkranz’s body of work on view examined the fallout from scientific experiments that have demonstrated that our perception of color is a result of evolution. At Swiss Institute, she investigated how such ideas undermine artistic production. In the New York version of her series of plastic water bottles, the Evian bottles were filled with a product normally used to apply artificial patches to actors’ skin in the very flesh colors of predominant Evian target groups. The combination of product and idea, surface and volume, and skin and water, culminated in an abstract portrait of the human body in a bottle. Anthropomorphic proportions were reiterated in the rectangular works in the show, the size of standardized queen-size blankets, or “shrouds” for slumbering human bodies. The bright background colors of the framed series were borrowed from Evian as well and translated into a bright palette of stretched spandex. Rosenkranz’s process ultimately resulted in the opening up of a distance between her and the surface of her works, thus questioning (the artist’s own) subjective expression.

We are pleased to provide with this book the opportunity for a close introduction to and reading of Rosenkranz’s unique practice. This catalogue is the result of an intimate editorial collaboration between the artist and the critic and poet Quinn Latimer, as well as an extensive exchange between the artist and the authors Alex Kitnick, Robin Mackay, and Reza Negarestani. Beautifully designed by Yvonne Quirnbach, it provides, alongside extensive visual documentation, a new theoretical, philosophical, and art-historical access to Rosenkranz’s artistic project.



Loop Revolution, 2009  
Video animation, loop, no sound,  
dimensions variable

The Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève would like to thank the Ernst Göhner Foundation, the Ernst and Olga Gubler-Hablützel Foundation, and Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, for supporting the exhibition “No Core.” Finally, many thanks to the George Foundation for supporting the production of Pamela Rosenkranz’s video animation *No One* (2010).

The Kunstverein Braunschweig would like to express its deep gratitude to the State of Lower Saxony and Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, for their generous support of the exhibition at the Remise of the Kunstverein. The director’s warm thanks also go to her former curatorial assistant Sarah Frost for her enthusiastic commitment to the show.

The Swiss Institute Contemporary Art, New York, thanks Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, and Kanton Uri for supporting Rosenkranz’s exhibition, as well as the supporters of our gallery at 18 Wooster Street: UBS, Swiss Re, and Friends of Swiss Institute (FOSI). The director would like to especially thank the entire SI team—Stephanie Krueger, Piper Marshall, and Clément Delépine—for their

great support, as well as the Board of Trustees for their ongoing commitment and trust.

As always, the realization of the three exhibitions would not have been possible without the commitment of all of the staff of the various institutions involved, so to them we extend our gratitude. All three institutions would also like to thank Kitnick, Mackay, and Negarestani for their written contributions to this publication, in which they each explore the complexity of Rosenkranz’s work. We would also like to express our appreciation to Rosenkranz’s galleries, Karma International, Zurich, and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, both of which generously assisted in the preparation and realization of the exhibitions and the publication. Above all, however, we are indebted to Rosenkranz herself for her inspiring engagement with this project and for her shows in Geneva, Braunschweig, and New York.

Katya García-Antón  
Gianni Jetzer  
Hilke Wagner





Exhibition view, "Our Sun,"  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Venice, 2009







1  
*Firm Being (Sparkling Essence)*, 2010  
 PET bottle, polyurethane resin, pigments,  
 17 x 6 x 6 cm  
 2  
*Firm Being (Content Water)*, Fiji Series, 2010  
 PET bottle, polyurethane resin,  
 17 x 6 x 6 cm  
 3  
*Firm Being (Content Water)*, Fiji Series, 2010  
 PET bottle, polyurethane resin, pigments,  
 dimensions variable



2



3







*Firm Being (Content Water)*, Fiji Series, 2010  
PET bottle, polyurethane resin, pigments,  
dimensions variable  
*My Mineral*, 2010  
Acrylic plaster, 130 x 60 x 56 cm each  
*Your Mineral*, 2010  
Sound, loop, loudspeaker,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, "Untouched By Man,"  
Kunstverein Braunschweig (Remise), 2010





*Firm Being (Content Water)*, Fiji Series, 2010  
PET bottle, polyurethane resin, pigments,  
dimensions variable  
*My Mineral*, 2010  
Acrylic plaster, 130 x 60 x 56 cm each

Exhibition view, “Untouched By Man,”  
Kunstverein Braunschweig (Remise), 2010



*Firm Being (Content Water)*,  
Fiji Series, 2010  
PET bottle, polyurethane resin,  
17 x 6 x 6 cm







*Firm Being (Content Water),*  
Fiji Series, 2010  
PET bottle, polyurethane resin,  
pigments, 17 x 6 x 6 cm





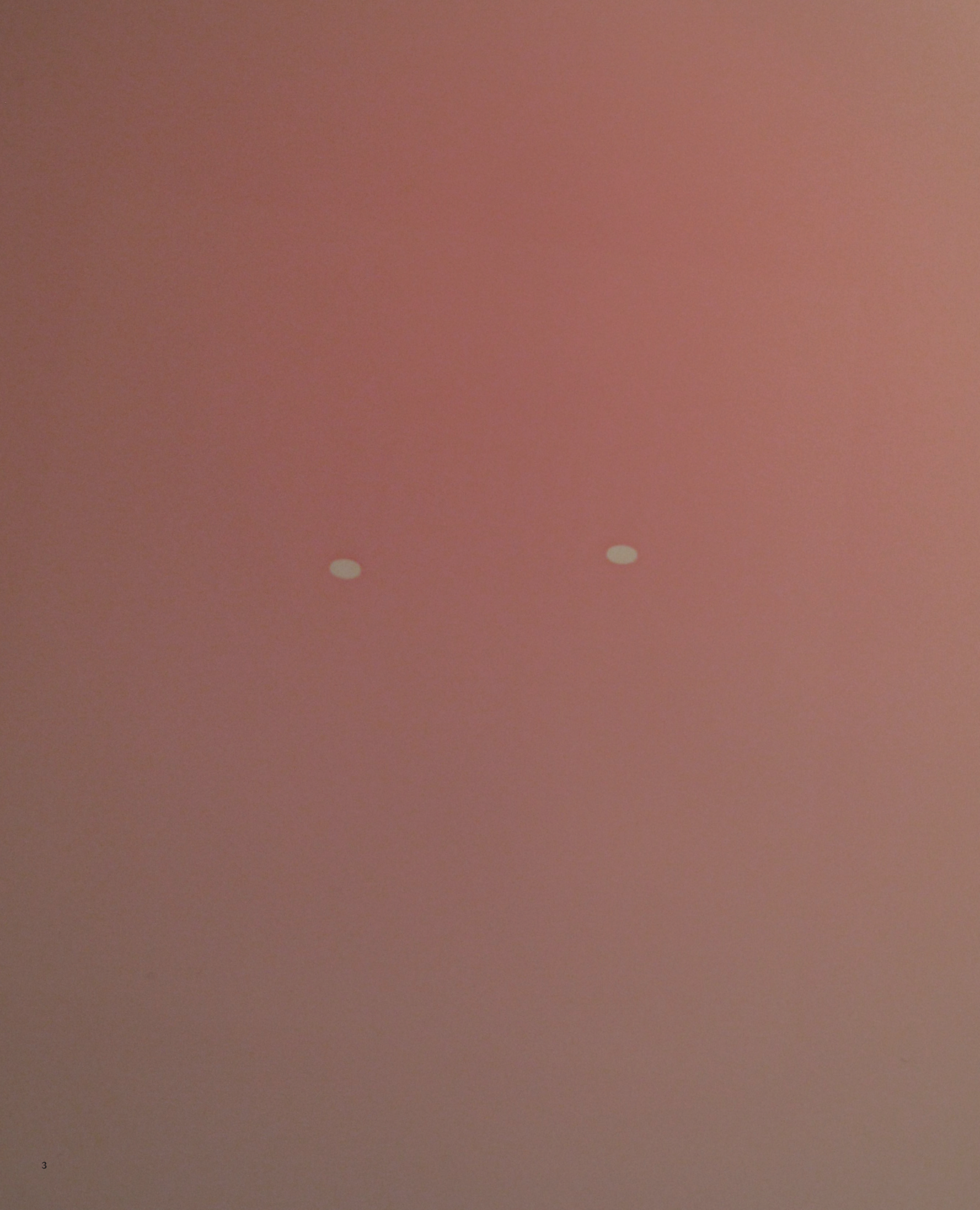


Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2010



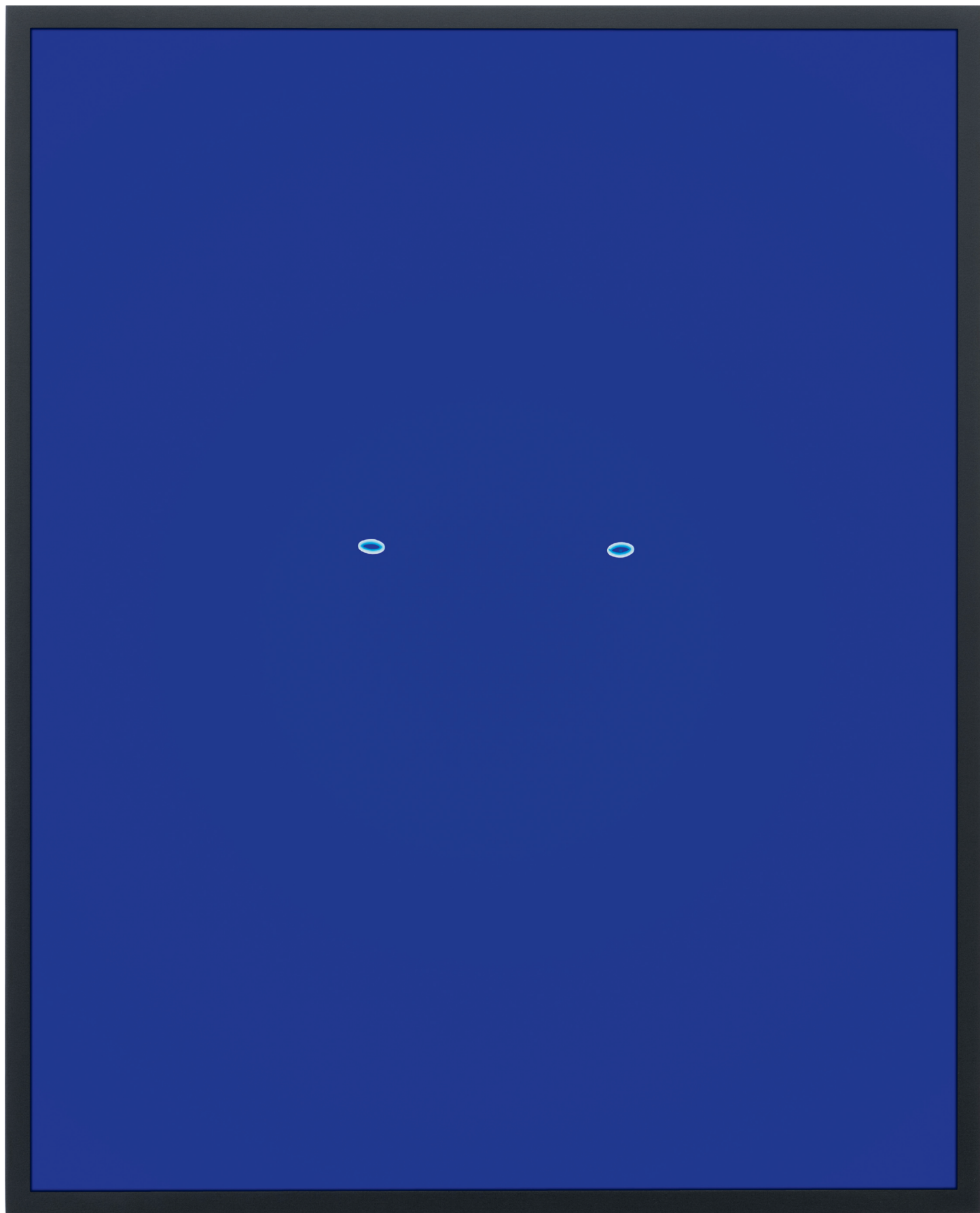
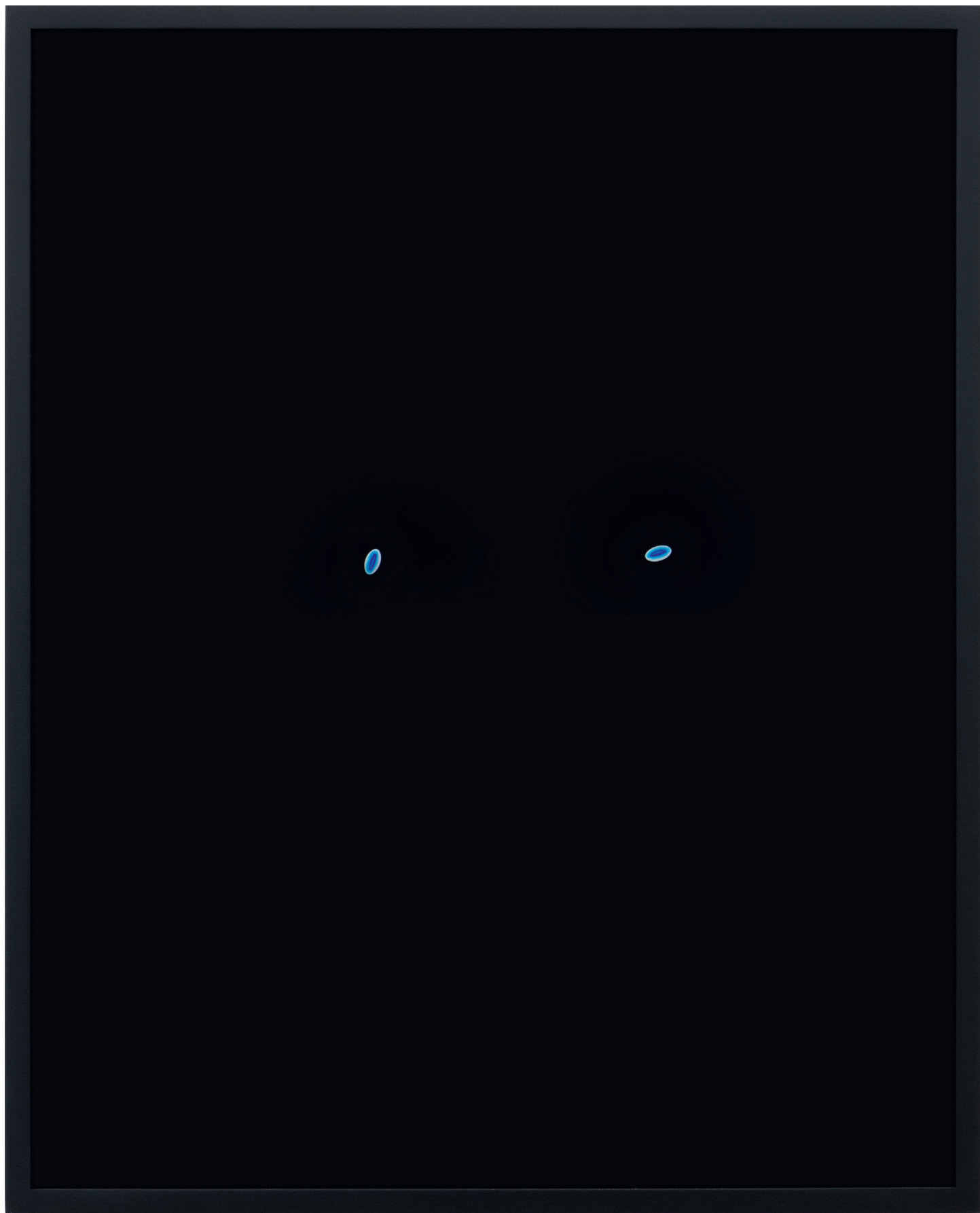






- 1  
*More Core (Render Time)* (detail), 2010  
Color photogram, 50 x 40 cm
- 2  
*More Core (Stay Alive)* (detail), 2010  
Color photogram, 50 x 40 cm
- 3  
*More Core (Away Cloud)* (detail), 2010  
Color photogram, 50 x 40 cm







## Windows

Windows crashed again. I am the Blue Screen of Death. No one hears your screams.

- \* Press any key to terminate the application.
- \* Press CTRL+ALT+DEL again to restart your computer. You will lose any unsaved data in all applications.

Press any key to continue \_





*As One (Seclusion)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded  
acrylic glass, 205 x 105 x 52 cm  
Background:  
*Bow Human*, 2009  
Acrylic plaster, Vaseline, metal,  
emergency blanket, dimensions  
variable  
Mirroring In Between:  
*More Core (Protection Maze)*, 2010  
Color photogram, 50 x 40 cm

Exhibition view, “No Core,”  
Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève,  
2010

# No Core Dump

*Opacity appears precisely when darkness is made explicit.*  
Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One*

*L’avenir est tout noir.*  
Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, April 7, 1824

Marketing speaks (to) us in an amalgam—garbled-to-order—of discursive resources adopted from any tradition whatsoever. Its promises of enhanced performance and well-being appropriate at leisure from the registers of evolutionary biology, neurochemistry, and nutritionism, as well as from those of spiritual epiphany and self-realization. The optimization of the self becomes both the object of intense research and development (“the science bit”) and the subject of aspirational identity (“because I’m worth it”). The human as absorber and reflector of symbols is coupled with the human as opaque object to be dosed, modulated, and detoxed. And yet, confronted by (and even exploiting) scientific discourses that threaten to corrode our sense of identity and agency, the product continues to demand as its mirror a self that is introspectively available, and that is the essential and ever-present center of experience.

In *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (2004), philosopher Thomas Metzinger describes how neuroscience can furnish an account of the self that diverges radically from this first-person perspective.<sup>1</sup> If a conscious, information-processing system is a model representing its environment, the “self-model” embedded within it models this very activity of representation. In so doing, however, it must occlude the mechanism of representation itself; it is experienced not as a continual process of modeling, but as a spontaneously available reality. This occlusion, notes Metzinger, is an evolutionary advantage since it prevents an excessive recursivity that would not be instrumental for the organism. As a matter of efficiency, “being there” is experienced as a given. The first-person point of view—the experience of the self as an immediate yet unfathomable phenomenon through which all experience passes—is an instrumental screening that sequesters the model from the very process of representation that generates it.<sup>2</sup>

Providing the precise logic of the necessary non-manifestation<sup>3</sup> of the mechanisms of manifestation, Metzinger’s hypothesis poses in particularly acute form the effectively nihilist philosophical vector opened up by the cumulative effects of the modern scientific image of the world. Not only are the earth and its inhabitants governed by material processes that our brains, evolved for animal survival, have little intuitive purchase on, but for the same reasons we ourselves are not as our phenomenological self-image would have us. What we experience as a transparent, unproblematic relation to self, as a realm of inner experience, consists, in fact, in an opacity that protects consciousness from an abyss of sub-personal and sub-symbolic processes. The luminous clearing in which the world comes to presence is rather a “special form of darkness,”<sup>4</sup> an “object emulator”<sup>5</sup> screening the thing that thinks from its production.

This nihilist logic of transparency and opacity lies at the heart of Pamela Rosenkranz’s work. Operating in the common space of that core self that we are invited to discover through identification with consumer objects, as well as the transcendence claimed by certain modes of artistic subjectivity, her practice brings together the symbolic resources of both. That is to say, her conceptual works exist in the space where the transparency of meaning and the transcendence of self meet in a supposed blind spot. In Rosenkranz’s *oeuvre*, materials customarily refined, purified, and smoothed out so as to render their symbolic function transparent are forced to rudely announce their contingency, appearing as so much dead matter clustered around an empty center. And the self that appears in their mirror is revealed by the artist as a generic patchwork of abstract signifiers clinging to the same void. Thus, the *con* of the concepts presented by Rosenkranz—that which holds them together—is a symbolic absence or an absence-in-symbol, just as the *con* of the concept as such, that *with which* we think, is a void for sense.

The empty core around which Rosenkranz’s readymade materials are assembled consists of elementary aesthetic cues such as color and human corporeality, often spoken of in the same philosophical breath as first-person consciousness, in terms of qualitative irreducibility.<sup>6</sup> In so



doing, the artist interrogates the way that both art and commercial visual culture propose such cues as a mirror in which the self can be recognized, cultivated, specified, or exalted, and she systematically erects an impediment to this narcissistic complicity, obstinately refusing to participate in or to compound it further. As such, the work presents us with the same dilemma that Metzinger isolates when he weighs the possibility of a neuroscientific account being “culturally integrated”; in so far as we retain our faith in the property of selfhood, it is impossible for us to be convinced of the self-model theory. On the other hand, to truly think it—to see the darkness for what it is—would mean there was no longer a self to be edified. In this alternative between a self whose constitution is foreclosed by transparency, and a thinking that voids the self, we encounter a thick darkness, an opacity. If this utter contingency from which we trust products and works to shield us cannot be exhibited in Rosenkranz’s disparate works, it certainly constitutes their vanishing point.

*E&A #0000AA, or  
the Screening of the Void*

*When we refer to introspection and try to discover what the sensation of blue is, it is very easy to suppose that we have before us only a single term. The term ‘blue’ is easy to distinguish, but the other element which I have called ‘consciousness’ is extremely difficult to fix [...] and in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us; it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there is something, but what it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognized. G. E. Moore, The Refutation of Idealism*<sup>7</sup>

The static blue screen of Rosenkranz’s video work *Death of Yves Klein* (2011) recalls a traumatic (albeit regular) experience for Microsoft Windows users throughout the 1990s. When the operating system encountered a catastrophic error, the carefully crafted and reassuring Windows interface would vanish to reveal a uniform blue screen etched, in frozen white text, with an arcane post-mortem report in which enigmatic, clotted acronyms denoted esoteric ailments. Finally, the blue screen announced the terminal act of the deceased operating system: the secretion of a physical memory dump or core dump containing all the current contents of memory, on whose basis a technician’s forensic analysis might reconstruct the etiology of the fatal error. This particular hue, which gave rise to the colloquial name “Blue Screen of Death” (especially after its unwelcome appearance at Bill Gates’s high-profile launch of Windows 98 at COMDEX), becomes in Rosenkranz’s work a testamentary double for International Klein Blue,

the specially formulated paint through which Yves Klein sought to “conduct immateriality.” Klein conceived his refinement of painterly color, in turn, as a “foothold in the visible to cross the threshold into the invisible.” Thus he presented his monochromes as the penultimate step toward an art purified, entirely unburdened of materiality, and delivered to what he would call, famously, “the void.”

Beyond the misleadingly obvious (see Klein’s episodic dedication to esoteric lore like Heindel’s Rosicrucianism, and to the martial arts of judo) but equally as a final consummation of his earnest dedication to those disciplines, the substantive operation of Klein’s “void” emerges in an encounter with a more orthodox *sensei*: “My monochrome propositions are landscapes of freedom; I am an impressionist and a disciple of Delacroix,” he noted in 1957.<sup>8</sup> It is in Delacroix’s journal, invariably cited when Klein recounts the history of the monochromes, that the artist found the resources to maintain the figure of the “great artist” while stripping it of painterly specificity. And it is Delacroix’s claim that the “merit of the painting lies in the indefinable: that which escapes exact description,”<sup>9</sup> that allows Klein to don his white gloves, redefining the artist as he who effectively extracts this indefinable from the matrix of painterly labor. The repeated citing of the following passage gives clue to Klein’s interpretation of his “indefinable”:

*I adore this little vegetable garden [...] this gentle sunlight over the whole of it infuses me with a secret joy, with a well-being comparable with what one feels when the body is in perfect health. But all that is fugitive; any number of times I have found myself in this delightful condition during the twenty days that I am spending here. It seems as if one needed a mark, a special reminder for each one of these moments.*<sup>10</sup>

Klein would henceforth dedicate himself to conducting this immaterial energy—the health, the secret joy that Delacroix strove to capture in oils—while at the same time vesting his own signature with the authority to mark it. The artist, thus, comes to be defined by an extraordinary sensitivity to moments of resplendent transparency. Exercising the “recurrent will of the painter to conserve the traces of instants he had lived intensely,”<sup>11</sup> Klein attempts to absolutize Delacroix’s proto-impressionist optical intensification and colorism,<sup>12</sup> so as to register the “spiritual mark of these momentary states in my monochromes.” Or: “I thus paint the pictorial moment that is born of an illumination by impregnation into life itself,”<sup>13</sup> for the “originality of a painter has never had need of a subject.”<sup>14</sup>

In this way, Klein will be able to claim his work to be nothing but the effect of this impregnation by the void. It is passive, like a photographic negative; it is without labor, unlike that which is handled by an artisan. His



hyper-impressionist judo demands that he become a passive medium (the sponge) absorbing the reality of these momentary states of lived experience, marking “immaterial pictorial states” so as to eventually “be able to live the ‘moment’ continually.”<sup>15</sup> But such is the Kleinian void: The “highly enriching cure of aesthetic silence” (as Pierre Restany writes in the 1956 invite to the *Propositions Monochromes*) is none other than the bourgeois rest-cure of Delacroix’s garden inflated to cosmic proportions. The monochromes herald an intense self-enjoyment experienced as an extraordinary openness and transparency, a release from both physical and mental constraints, and Klein identifies this experience with both life and the void. Rosenkranz’s re-presentation of IKB impoverishes it materially, from a chemical innovation that pays ultimate homage to and deepens the painter’s mastery of color, to the cheap, mass-produced, consumer-electronics glow of a plasma screen. At the same time, *Death of Yves Klein* impoverishes its predecessor chromatically, strong-arming the pure pigment used in IKB to maximize intensity into

the RGB-additive color model that such devices use to render the spectrum through quantized combinations of red, green, and blue. But, even more profoundly, Rosenkranz’s work proposes a confrontation between two distinct voids. Her RGB *ersatz* of IKB indexes the deflationary perspective suggested by the accompanying portrait of the great artist as a neurochemical core dump. This complementary soundtrack, “read” by an automated voice, synthesizes the terminal state of Klein’s artistic subjectivity as a stew of nicotine, amphetamine, and paint thinners with a fatal side order of cortisol to go, administered by *Mondo Cane*’s cheap sullyng of his monotone symphony: “Working with paints and thinners can be harmful [...] Amphetamines contribute to heart attacks [...] Smoking is dangerous [...] Pigments enter the skin [...] Stress hormones constrict blood vessels.” Here, the artist is not impregnated by the void *qua plenum* of nature, but voided by way of a naturalization that overturns the cosmic provenance of her inner experience, reducing the epiphany of the void to chemically induced neuropathy.





*Bow Human*, 2009  
Acrylic plaster, Vaseline,  
metal, emergency blanket,  
dimensions variable

The Blue Screen of Death (BSoD) provides further precision as to what is at stake here. The most plausible explanation for Microsoft’s choice seems to be that blue is the most calm-inducing of the colors available in EGA mode (the eight subsisting two-bit colors available to a graphics system whose higher-level systems have been shut down). In the face of disaster, the color blue continues to exude a cool, confident technocratism,<sup>16</sup> like an impeccably suited consultant come to deliver bad news. Ameliorating the user’s frustrated resignation to irretrievable data loss, and in contrast to the finely swept gradients of corporate teal in which the Windows user experience was traditionally garbed, the depthless blue of this chromatic nirvana is a glimpse of yet another void. It is the color of the last remaining emollient mask before the grand illusion of the “user experience” itself gives way to the mute and opaque meshwork of code libraries it always was. BSoD blue is not the unveiling of an infinite transparent depth but the distressed advent of the penultimate screen: It is at once a reduced form of instrumental occlusion—the interface—and an encrypted report of its malfunctioning. According to this other voiding, the phenomenological indescribable in whose immediacy Klein places his faith is a mere subroutine of an operating system that, in extremis, persists in registering its faltering state as revelation of a translucent depth.

It is Derek Jarman’s testamentary film *Blue* (1993) that realizes the transit, within Rosenkranz’s concept, between these two voids—between Klein’s dreams of the artist as conduit for the infinite, and the exposition of his terminal state as a chemical breakdown. In Jarman’s film, the blue of the damaged retina stands first for the fear of the loss of artistic vision (through the catastrophic failure of its sensory and corporeal support), and subsequently for a triumph over this fear. It heralds a “universal Blue” that is the “universal love in which man bathes,” the “terrestrial paradise” that “transcends the solemn geography of human limits” and in which all is dialectically resolved, identity indifferentiated, and the “pandemonium of image” becalmed. Rosenkranz’s own work endows this redemptive vector with a cruel reversibility, as universal Blue backs up into systems crash.

### *Methylene Blue, or Void Indicator*

In Rosenkranz’s larger body of work, the art object continues to be riddled from every quarter by the corrosive consequences of materialism. In *Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work* (2011–2012), the artisanal contingencies of artist materials (the shortcomings of online simulacra of IKB works, the printing and mounting process) return to wreak their revenge, conspiring comically to despoil the perfection of the void. It seems that the verminous irritation that bores holes in the artist’s vision can be excluded neither from the residual materiality necessary to channel the void, nor from the self that seeks absolution in its infinite embrace. Rosenkranz forces the artist, at the moment when he believes triumphantly to have secured his realm, determining and exercising authority over the channels through which he will be impregnated, to confront his parasitical relation to the contingencies of materiality and his own natural history.

Her revisiting of Klein’s “Anthropométries” operates on a similar disruption. Klein’s body prints allowed the audience to receive the energy of the void through the ramified clear channel of IKB, physical gesture, and corporeal *élan*, this immediacy being enabled, notably, by the removal of the artist from the process. But, according to Rosenkranz, the removal of the obstacle of individual expression and representation, far from overcoming the problematic of art, leaves in place a more profound facture: the indelible mark of the artist’s trust in the self-authenticating authority of the feeling of great health, and the speculative faith in its transcendental referent (Klein’s void). In series such as “The Most Important Body of Water is Yours” (2010), the materiality of the works becomes an obstacle to this aforementioned immaculate transmission of grace. As well as explicitly reintroducing the artist as a mediating element in the production (the imprint of the body is transferred as a monoprnt), reminding us

that the problematic of art is not so easy to dissolve, Rosenkranz’s works replace the translucidity of IKB with a series of flesh tones on a ground of energetically-hued spandex. Paradoxically, the irresistible symbolic charge of the flesh-color forms incapacitate the gestural potency of the prints themselves, its semiotic density preventing us from responding to their life-energy, muddying the mark of the Kleinian void and leaving us with nothing but the opaque secretion of a symbolic distillate onto an artificially fabricated ground.

In the series “Firm Being” (2009–), meanwhile, plastic water bottles—their crystalline transparency a hyperbolic extension of the purity of their contents, which in turn promise to purify the body of the consumer—are filled instead with a material, again flesh-tone, intended as a prosthetic double for human skin, in a gross reification of symbolic matter. These pieces employ their minimal palette of symbols in such a way as to strip them of their semantic transparency or their mirroring effect. Since we no longer find in them the luminous translucency corresponding to our internal depth, their promise to impregnate us with that indefinable something becomes opaque and, finally, baffling. In a later series, “Firm Being (Content Water)” (2012), the same bottles are filled with polyurethan resins simulating various shades of urine, another physical memory dump exemplifying the faith in aesthetic qualities as an indicator of well-being or sickness. The truth of this work, drawing it together with the more recent references to Klein, is found in what can now only be read retrospectively as a spectral collaboration, staged in the *pissoirs* of La Coupole following the 1958 opening of the exhibition “The Specialization of Sensitivity in the State of Prime Matter as Stabilized Pictorial Sensitivity.” During the opening of this show, Klein served a cocktail of gin, Cointreau, and methylene blue. Used in the lab as a chemical indicator because it turns blue with oxidization, as it left the body this last ingredient provided the artist’s guests with conclusive confirmation that they had indeed been impregnated by the void.

### *Chromakey Blue, or A Subject-Shaped Hole*

Recall that, in full recognition of the revolution in color initiated by Delacroix and consummated by Impressionism, Yves the Monochrome engaged with color as a materiality, freed from its associative bonds, from “our chains [...] our mortal state, our sentiment, our intellect [...] our heredity, our education [...] our psychological world.” But simultaneously, with IKB, Klein consolidates his monopoly over phenomenological production: the indefinable or “ineffable poetic moment”<sup>17</sup> becomes the product of Yves Klein, Painter. IKB is a triumph of objective colorism put into the service of an absolute subjectivist phenom-

enology. (Klein does the science bit, but only because he’s worth it.)

As Thierry de Duve has argued,<sup>18</sup> in wishing simultaneously to separate the void from the manufactured object, and to maintain authority *qua* artist over its conduction, Klein creates a parody of avant-garde utopia. Instead of identifying art with labor power, with a view to liberating it, returning to each man his generic creativity, Klein the artist becomes identified with the owner of the means of production. In other words, Klein-the-artisan-painter is exploited (and ideally, made redundant) by Klein-the-great-artist (the painter who does not paint), as the latter imparts the value-add, or the mystical element of pictorial quality whose degree of impregnation ultimately can only be verified by the sanction of experts (the critics and officials who preside over immaterial transactions), as well as by the differential prices fetched by apparently identical works.<sup>19</sup>

If Klein thus clear-sightedly anticipates that the art market will come as close as possible to a pure financial market, precisely because its prices maintain no relation to the conditions of production,<sup>20</sup> his self-mystification consists in attributing the price not to his astute manipulations but to some immaterial quality or indefinable. The immateriality of his work, in other words, is real, and its material presence is indeed but ashes. Nevertheless, the alchemical transmutation that has taken place is a financial one: in the invisible “value of the picture” lies the “hidden social relation [...] brutally revealed through its price,”<sup>21</sup> a social relation mystified by the claim that the artist’s signature marks the difference between artisanal and artistic work, between manufacture and cosmic aspiration. In short, Klein the “mystified mystifier”<sup>22</sup> buys into his own branding.

By selling the void, Klein thus astutely identifies the full (the plenum of nature, channeled by the artist) with the empty (pure exchange). From this point of view, it is but a short distance from his “leap into the void” to a commercial for basketball sneakers that promises to make us “walk on air,” as if a gel sole could cleanse the soul—a therapeutics recalled in Rosenkranz’s *I Almost Forgot that ASICS Means Anima Sana in Corpore Sano* (2007), in which a pair of sneakers reduced to leaden materiality are situated shame-faced in a corner. And Klein’s void-saturated sponge becomes an apt figure for the fact that our purchase on the ineffable—the desire to imbibe nature, to soak it up and thus re-establish our continuity with it—is conducted at the limit of its disappearance into pure exchange, through a refined palette of symbols, of which color is the so-called purest exemplar.

Here the chromatic concept at work in *Death of Yves Klein* suggests another association: the chroma-key blue before which actors interact in the void with nonexistent characters and scenery that will in post-production take the place of the precisely hued backdrop. A blue, then,





*Bow Human*, 2009  
Acrylic plaster, Vaseline,  
metal, emergency blanket,  
dimensions variable



that is not a color but an abstract general equivalent whose consistency can hold the place for any image whatsoever. Since it is the color value furthest from skin tones, blue in particular is chosen for effective chroma-key separation of the subject from the background.<sup>23</sup> Infinite exchangeability, the abstract general equivalent, or blue as the color of money implies the presence of the subject as its complement: the smear of skin tone on an otherwise arbitrarily substitutable scene that ensures our adherence to every image we inhabit. However, if we look into the detail of the chroma-key process, we find that re-photographing footage through a blue filter creates a “female matte” of the actor that will act as a cutout from the background into which, in the final stage, their form will be reinserted. This female matte, the matrix of possibility, presents us with a somber figure for capitalism’s screening of infinite fantasy—in the as-ever-inspired words of Wikipedia, a “black background with a subject-shaped hole in the middle.”

## Perkin’s Mauve, or the Void of the Ancestral

Contrary to the common belief that Klein trademarked his hue, the *propriété industrielle* of International Klein Blue in fact consists of a method for the suspension of ultramarine pigment in *polyvinyl acetate* (C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>6</sub>O<sub>2</sub>), which allows the pigment to retain its glow when dried. But we can only appreciate the full profundity of Klein’s implication in chemical history by setting it against his simultaneous chromaticism. In celebrating the “immense possibilities of colour and its affective resonances upon human sensibility,”<sup>24</sup> Klein made room for a gesture yet more magnanimous than his monochrome gifts to the world. He allowed himself to unfold the absolute void of IKB, “the big COLOR,”<sup>25</sup> into a cosmic swatch, proclaiming that “for me, each nuance of a color is in some way an individual, a being who is not only from the same race as the base color, but who definitely possesses a distinct character and personal soul.”<sup>26</sup> Thus emerges the question to which Rosenkranz’s work offers various obstructive responses: *What’s your color?*

In 1833 Friedlieb Runge, working with coal-tar—a waste product of the extraction of coal and gas that powered the industrial revolution—produced the first synthetic color: cyanol. This discovery would lead to the growth of a chemical industry that would unlock the elements to produce a cavalcade of patented synthetic hues—Perkin’s mauve, Rosaniline blue, Paris violet, Bismarck brown, Alizarin—from the compacted corpses of forgotten species in the bowels of the earth.

*A thousand different molecules waited in the preterite dung. This is the sign of revealing. Of unfolding. This is one meaning of mauve, the first new color on Earth, leaping to Earth’s light from its grave miles and aeons below.*<sup>27</sup>

The burgeoning of new forms of artificial life and lifestyle and the construction of a new synthetic earth from dead matter locked under the planet’s surface led Adorno (and, in turn, Thomas Pynchon’s Rathenau) to argue that this apparently dynamic and vivacious growth is a deadly illusion. And, furthermore, that modern man surrounds himself with dead matter, with synthetic colors in which he clothes a semblance of life, but which remain as black and dead as the tar from which they were first synthesized. Adorno’s half-forlorn hope for redemption was that modernity should acknowledge the mutual implication of history and nature, admitting that the black magic of coal is indeed still a magic, a vital process in which human experience and nature prove themselves inextricable. Recently, philosopher Ray Brassier has inverted this logic, insisting that instead, the encounter of human history with “ancestral objects” (those that existed before the advent of consciousness) forces a recognition that life was only ever merely mimed by death.<sup>28</sup> That is to say, the bountiful blackness of coal bespeaks a more fundamental void, one that is a stranger to the magic of human-historical manifestation. For the very act of the discovery and extraction of these colors is contemporary with the realization that they make manifest chemical potencies that existed before any possible manifestation. Their production is contemporaneous with the discovery of geological time, a time outside phenomenological manifestation and across whose vast span the possibility of this expression—a chance meeting of certain chemical powers with an organism evolved to be sensitive to light<sup>29</sup>—came about and will perish. The colors that, as secondary extracts, fuel the industrial explosion of social and cultural signification, are therefore also meaningless, blind configurations that existed before and without meaning, before their being color was even possible. They are substances whose employment in the service of life cannot expunge their ever unseen, lifeless essence.

These stakes can be seen clearly in the quarrel between Chernov and Engels, as adjudicated by Lenin, in which the advent of alizarin—the “colouring matter of the madder, which we no longer trouble to grow [...] in the field, but produce much more cheaply and simply from coal tar” (Engels)—serves to identify ancestrality as the necessary concomitant to industrial chemistry.

*Yesterday we did not know that coal tar contained alizarin. Today we learned that it does. The question is, did coal tar contain alizarin yesterday? Of course it did. To doubt it would be to make a mockery of modern science [...] The sole and unavoidable deduction to be made from this—a deduction which all of us make in everyday practice and which materialism deliberately places at the foundation of its epistemology—is that outside us, and independently of us, there exist objects, things, bodies and that our perceptions are images of the external world.*<sup>30</sup>

A plutonic heredity tars the bright cornucopia of the modern world, rendering it indissociable from a nihilism that is *coaleidoscopic* in the precise sense that it consists in the scopic manifestation of the *eidōs* of the ancestral harnessed as fuel for a new earth. In picking our own color from the chemical-industrial spectrum, we identify with dead matter, with the universal blackness heralded as the “colour factories [...] conjure forth miscellany from non-appearance.”<sup>31</sup> Certain of Rosenkranz’s works quietly mark this irony: see the water bottles whose pink-and-blue slogans promise us access to a product “untouched by man”; see the Day-Glo spandex upon which her interrupted anthropometries are printed.

In contemporary consumerist lifestyle culture, the promise of the absolute is spectralized into swatches, ranges, series, and collections, in the whimsical cataloguing and naming of colors, sometimes scarcely distinguishable from each other, all of which Rosenkranz references in her serial works, as in the at once potent and meaningless recombinations of their subtitles. More specifically, the works comprising her recent series “Everything is Already Dead” (2012) conjure a range of pitted geological surfaces out of an admixture of Ralph Lauren-branded interior paint—available in a wide range of whites, each with its own evocative name—and sugar-rich soft drinks. Rosenkranz thereby once more muddies the waters of pristine aspiration and the celebration of difference, confronting us with their earthly provenance, and implicitly noting that the brain that craves to define itself with these colors must also be sated by glucose synthetically produced alongside them by the same industrial complex. These works act as counterparts to an earlier video entitled *Loop Revolution* (2009), in which a mirrored view of the surface of the planet becomes an animated Rorschach inkblot, diagnosing apophenia (the seeing of meaningful patterns where there are none) as a global condition. Ramified into a massive bio-industrial complex smeared across the earth, thinking exacerbates the blind churning of the planet but changes nothing essential, becoming a “mystified mystifier” that at once reflects and screens itself from its own production.

As the blue void spreads out prismatically into a million united colors, it reveals itself to be coextensive with the tar-black void of ancestrality. Unattainable transcendence infinitely spectralized into new ranges, the infinite diversity of lifestyle choices finds its real basis in a mute, lightless substrate from which every color factory draws its potency: the universal black that is Pamela Rosenkranz’s color.

Robin Mackay

- 1: Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).
- 2: Or, in Metzinger’s words, a “structurally anchored deficit in the capacity to gain knowledge about oneself.” *Being No One*, 564.
- 3: It is important to note that this logic can effectively be separated from the (partly promissory) neuroscientific resources that Metzinger brings to bear upon it. In Deleuze’s reading of Kant, for example, one finds a startlingly similar logic in operation between the phenomenal self and the Transcendental Ego (See G. Deleuze, “Difference and Repetition,” tr. P. Patton [London: Continuum, 2004]).
- 4: Metzinger, *Being No One*, 1.69.
- 5: Ibid., 201.
- 6: For example, with Lewis’s *qualia*: discussed by Metzinger, *Being No One*, 66–83.
- 7: *Mind* 12 (1903): 433–53.
- 8: Klein, August 23, 1957, quoted in Nicolas Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein* (Paris: Luna-Park, 2005), 129. See, in general, part two of Charlet’s book, *Les lectures décisives du Théoricien de l’art*, entitled “Eugène Delacroix.”
- 9: Journal of Delacroix, quoted by Klein in “Par la couleur,” cited in Charlet, 142.
- 10: Cited by Klein in “Le Vrai devient réalité,” 1960. The passage is also cited in earlier notes by Klein, for whom Delacroix’s journal was a constant reference.
- 11: Cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 137.
- 12: See Éric Alliez and Jean-Clet Martin, *L’Oeil-cerveau. Nouvelles histoires de la peinture moderne* (Paris: Vrin, 2007). The extent to which Klein finds only what he is seeking—Delacroix’s “indefinable’ ...by which [he] means quality” (Klein, “La France rayonne sur le monde,” cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 143)—may be indicated by Alliez and Martin’s systematic reading, which locates Delacroix’s will to extricate color from its “sentimental role” (74) and to use painting to “amplify [...] to prolong [...] sensation” (Delacroix, *Journal*, October 20, 1853, cited in Alliez and Martin, 146) within a history of a “scientific aesthetics” (126, citing Signac) of the “eye-brain.” See Chapter 2 “de la + (et de la puissance de la peinture),” from which I borrow the second epigraph of the present text.
- 13: Klein, “Par la couleur,” cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 138.
- 14: Delacroix, *Journal*, January 13, 1857, quoted in Alliez and Martin, 73.
- 15: Klein, 1957, quoted in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 137.
- 16: On “cathode-ray blue” as a quintessentially contemporary color, see S. Lavin, “What Color is Now?,” in *Perspecta* Vol. 35, 98–111.
- 17: Klein, “Par la couleur,” cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 138.
- 18: T. de Duve, “Yves Klein, or the Dead Dealer,” in *October*, Vol. 49 (Summer 1989), 72–90.
- 19: See de Duve for the slippage between price, “real value” and “pictorial quality,” 78.
- 20: On this point see S. Malik and A. Philips’s “Tainted Love: Art’s Ethos and Capitalization,” in *Contemporary Art and its Commercial Markets* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).
- 21: De Duve, 79. Klein himself explicitly formulates the direct collapse of alchemical into financial transmutation: “All good businessmen are alchemists [...] all they approach and touch, all they take interest in, becomes related to silver or gold. It is a philosophical stone of sorts that they unconsciously nurture within themselves and that sometimes accords them extraordinary power [...] What is difficult is discovering this gift of the philosophical stone in each of us” (Klein, “The Monochrome Adventure”).
- 22: De Duve, 79.
- 23: *Chroma Key Tutorial*. BorisFX, at [http://www.borisfx.com/tutorials/chroma\\_key.php](http://www.borisfx.com/tutorials/chroma_key.php). Retrieved January 11, 2012.
- 24: Letter of 1958, cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 135.
- 25: Klein, “Le dépassement de la problématique de l’art,” cited in Charlet, *Les Écrits d’Yves Klein*, 143.
- 26: Klein, “Yves Peintures,” 1955.
- 27: Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Cited in E. Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds* (London: Reaktion, 2005). I draw from Leslie’s superb book

throughout this section, although to perhaps antagonistic ends.  
28: R. Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).  
29: See Reza Negarestani's text in this volume.  
30: V.I. Lenin, "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy" (1908), at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1908/mec/02.htm>. Retrieved March 1, 2012.  
31: Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds*, 12, 47.



*More Core (Protection Maze)*, 2010  
Color photogram, 50 x 40 cm



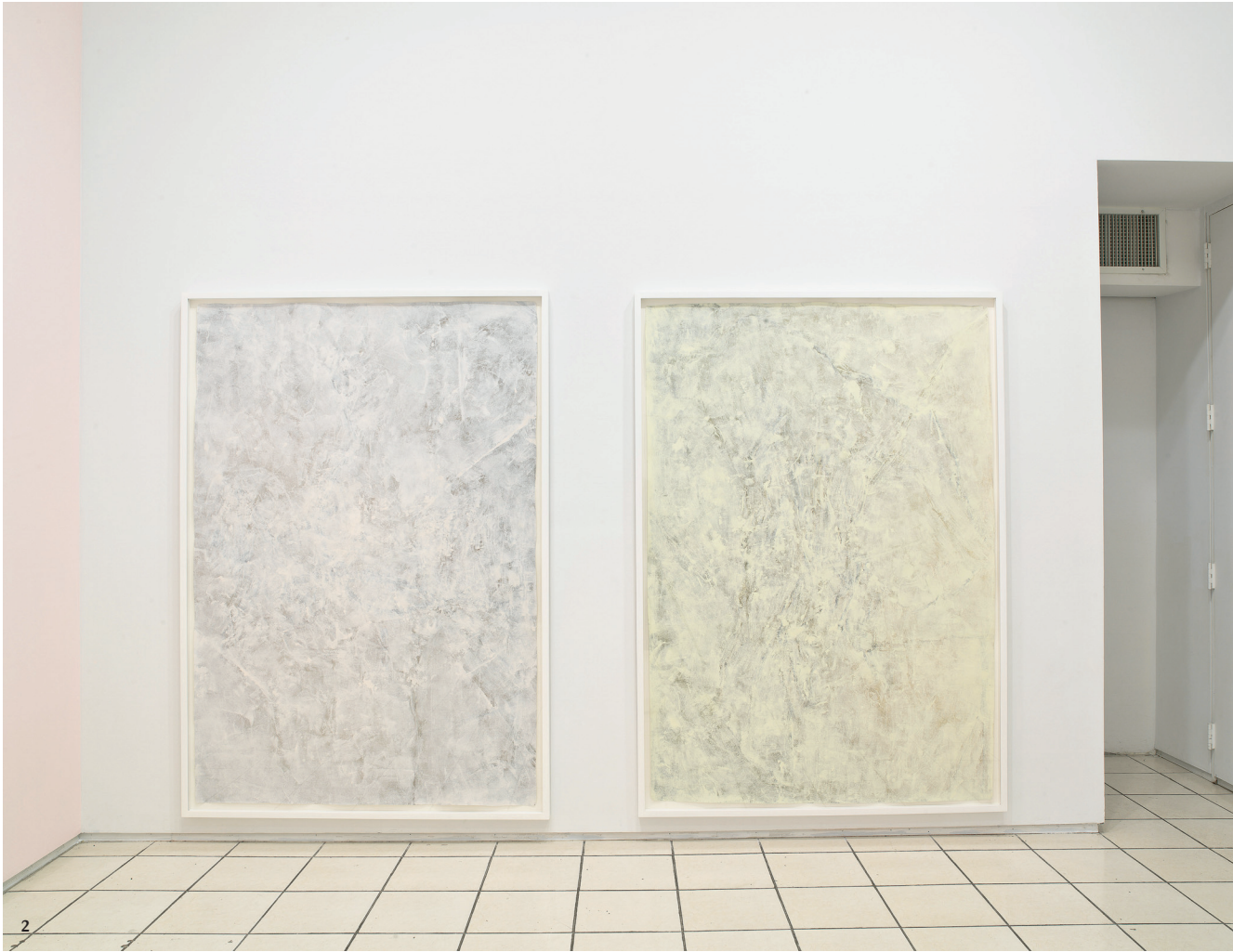


*Everything is Already Dead (Gatorade Perform 02  
Cool Blue and Cameo White)*, 2012  
Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex paint, Gatorade,  
inkjet pigment print, archival paper, 204 x 143 cm





**1+2**  
 Exhibition view, "Because They Try  
 to Bore Holes," Miguel Abreu Gallery,  
 New York, 2012  
**3**  
*Everything is Already Dead*  
*(Sprite and Pocket Watch White)*, 2012  
 Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex  
 paint, Sprite, inkjet pigment print,  
 archival paper, 204 x 142 cm







*Because They Try to Bore Holes (More Hold)*, 2012  
Adhesive mount, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
204 x 142 cm





*Because They Try to Bore Holes (Gaining Tension)*, 2012  
Adhesive mount, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
204 x 142 cm



*Because They Try to Bore Holes (Tuning Reach)*, 2012  
Adhesive mount, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
204 x 142 cm







*Ultra Smooth Content*  
(*Avalanche White*), 2012  
Ralph Lauren Home acrylic  
latex paint on cardboard,  
wrapped Ikea furniture,  
198 x 87 x 39 cm



Exhibition view, "Because They Try  
to Bore Holes," Miguel Abreu Gallery,  
New York, 2012







*Everything is Already Dead (7UP and Resort White)*, 2012  
Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex paint, 7UP,  
inkjet pigment print, archival paper, 202 x 143 cm



*My Evolution (Resort White)*, 2012  
Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex  
paint on wall, Gatorade Perform 02  
Cool Blue bottle, dimensions variable















*Firm Being (Butterscotch),*  
 Venice Series, 2009  
 PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
 23 x 5 x 5 cm

# MEAN AVERAGE

In recent years massage parlors have started filling up empty storefronts across New York, their glowing signs of neon feet appearing in windows all over town. In Los Angeles they are everywhere too. Requiring little overhead and with no need for appliances or licenses, these businesses are one of the “purest” service industries imaginable. Their interiors, too, are similarly stripped down. Set up like call centers, the parlors’ cheap partitions divide them into narrow cubicles that allow just enough room to lie down and take off one’s shirt. The merchandise on offer inside (supple hands that press deep into aching muscles) is made available by global shifts in power, which is evident from the fact that almost all of these massage parlors—in New York, at least—are run by Chinese immigrants.

There is an interesting rhyme between this current infatuation with massage and Marshall McLuhan’s 1967 claim that “the medium is the message.” A revision of his older, more famous mantra “the medium is the message,” McLuhan was trying to suggest with this new slogan that media are not only more powerful than the contents they carry, but that they also push people around and have bodily effects. Though McLuhan had previously declared that media were extensions of man, now he was suggesting that media had taken on a life of their own, poking at the individual body and linking up to create a new social body in turn. The age of massage, in other words, was a mass age, and McLuhan often caught glimpses of it in recent art. His book *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* contains pictures of Niki de Saint Phalle’s infamous installation *She: A Cathedral* (1966), which invited people into a new techno world in the shape of a prone and variegated woman, and Andy Warhol’s performance project *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (1966–67), which blended people together under extreme doses of

light and sound. Both works seemed to prove McLuhan’s point that electric communications were bringing people together in unprecedented and potentially utopian ways.

Today, as the ecstasy of communication wears thin, one begins to notice the effects that the social body prophesied by McLuhan have wrought on the individual one. Light shows have given way to “hot spots,” and the promise of an electric “global village” has made way for the pressures of iSolation. The massage of the media, in other words, has produced a desire for actual touch, which is less of an antidote to mediation than its endpoint. The patrons visiting the aforementioned massage parlors want to get rubbed down because they are stressed out and hungry for intimacy, but also because they have been reduced to things that get touched—albeit virtually—all the time, bodies stuck in a loop of 3-D films and interactive experiences. As the world submits more and more to the abstractions of capital, the interconnectivity of digital networks, and the promises of the experience economy, the body responds by lying down. The Internet is now more psychological and emotive than we are. Mined for our heat and energy, and with our likes and dislikes siphoned off, the basic physiological fact of our bodies (which now appears something like a remainder) pours forth in all its bareness.

Recently, contemporary art has begun to register this shift in our bodily structure, both in its individual and global versions. Isabelle Graw, for example, has written on the increasing turn to the human figure in contemporary visual work, noting that the widespread use of mannequins reveals the “embattled subjectivity at the heart of what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have famously called the ‘new spirit of capitalism,’ which demands the exploitation not only of labor but of personality, emotions,



social relations, and other noneconomic aspects of our individual lives.”<sup>1</sup> The mannequin is perhaps one figure for commodified subjectivity but the signs of bodily deprivation have erupted in other ways and have suggested other ends as well. Stretcherness, slightly baggy, and smeared with fleshlike acrylic, the paintings in Pamela Rosenkranz’s 2010 exhibition “The Most Important Body of Water is Yours,” at Karma International, in Zurich, look as if people had rubbed off into their spandex supports. The skin-like shades marking them give a global impression, conjuring up all the world’s people, and the hues of the supporting spandex, which are as bright and energetic as the logos of multinational brands, have a similar effect. Derived from the colors of Evian’s target audience and label, respectively, the paintings bring to mind that threatening factoid that our bodies are not so much us but 99% water, and in doing so they communicate an oceanic feeling of the corporeal and the commercial coming together, circulating fluidly without any stable form. Yet this feeling is, in turn, both evoked and blocked in these works. As residues and traces, the marks on these paintings appear more like the evaporation of circulation. As such, they capture more of the stillness of a dead sea than the surge of oceans.

Evoking a human subject in material, tone, and scale, the works make it difficult nevertheless to pin down the body at their center. Unlike Yves Klein’s 1960s-era “Anthropométries” (to which Rosenkranz’s paintings owe a great deal), “The Most Important Body of Water is Yours” works do not reveal a breast or face or hip. Where Klein often “composed” his works alongside chamber music and an audience in black tie, the athletic connotations of Rosenkranz’s materials take the idea of performance in other directions. Never coming into contact with the work’s support, Rosenkranz made these paintings by applying paint to a piece of plastic with the aid of a human body, and then laying this sheet down on the spandex as if she were making an oversized Surrealist monotype or Rorschach inkblot. Whereas Rorschach’s evocative shapes stimulate the unconscious and make us say things, however, Rosenkranz’s splotches do not have particularly psychological effects. They lay all their cards on the exterior. Perhaps this has something to do with their color. If Rorschach’s black-and-white appeals to the mind, Rosenkranz’s fleshy chroma reach out to our bodies, bringing us in and wringing us out. Like David Cronenberg’s 1983 film *Videodrome*, these *paintingdromes* are hungry for flesh.

When these spandex works were first shown, and often since then, Rosenkranz amended them with her “Firm Being” (2009–) series of water bottles, which she might place casually on the floor (in 2010, at Tate Britain, she did so beside 19<sup>th</sup>-century figurative sculptures) or position more properly in vitrines. In addition to Evian, Rosenkranz has shown water bottle brands including Fiji

and San Benedetto, which one can find in an up-market bodega in a reasonably sized city anywhere in the world.<sup>2</sup> The place names that give these products their names, however, still stand out. Each touts its locality and difference even as it is crated and shipped from one country to the next. Differing from the originals ever so slightly, Rosenkranz’s bottles are filled with Dragon Skin, a moviemaker’s product used for fleshy masks and special effects, which throws the weird bodily contours of the bottles into stark relief. If part of the allure of the original bottles is that they contain liquids siphoned out of pristine springs, breathtaking crevasses, and untouchable natural aquifers in far-off lands, the fluid identity of Dragon Skin, shape-shifting into any form, does a good job at liquidating the pseudo-distinctions between these products. The resulting sculptures speak to a new kind of global body, the rising tide of which washes all over the earth.

Rosenkranz’s frequent citing of art from the postwar period appears as part of a search for models of subjectivity that she can work with and expand. In addition to Klein, Bernd and Hilla Bechers’ influential photographs of building types—especially their water towers—seem to prefigure these works by offering a typology of industrial manufacture that similarly overrides the specificity of place. Yet in Rosenkranz’s *oeuvre* the architecture of industrial production gives way to the product design of consumption. Emphasizing their image quality, the artist hired the commercially trained photographer Gunnar Meier to shoot her “Firm Being” works so that the pictures of them look less like documentation of sculptures and more like advertisements for themselves, further facilitating their smooth circulation. Evoking a generic global body that trumps geographic specificity, these simple sculptures picture a synthetic future in which subject and object have been sutured together and self-consumption is the order of the day. Just as the Bechers once referred to their photographs of productive machinery as pictures of “anonymous sculptures,” one might imagine Rosenkranz’s just-modified consumerist products as portraits of anonymous subjects in which the local and the global have finally become one.

The materiality of these objects—and how this material is used—is crucial to their effect. In works from the 1960s, Lynda Benglis poured something like Dragon Skin on the floor, leaving it to pool and dry into rubbery blobs and colorful puddles, to which she then gave carnal titles like *Eat Meat*. Part of what was said about these works was that they took the lessons of Pollock’s painting and left them horizontal. Never elevated to the level of the eye, Benglis’s sculptures stayed down low for bodily effect. Like in many other artworks by women of her generation, such as Eva Hesse and Hannah Wilke, the glutted and viscous nature of Benglis’s materials was imagined to offer a female counterpoint to a male Minimalism—one

*Firm Being (Chocolate Milk)*,  
Venice Series, 2009  
PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
21 x 6 x 6 cm  
Background:  
*Loop Revolution*, 2009  
Video, loop, no sound,  
dimensions variable

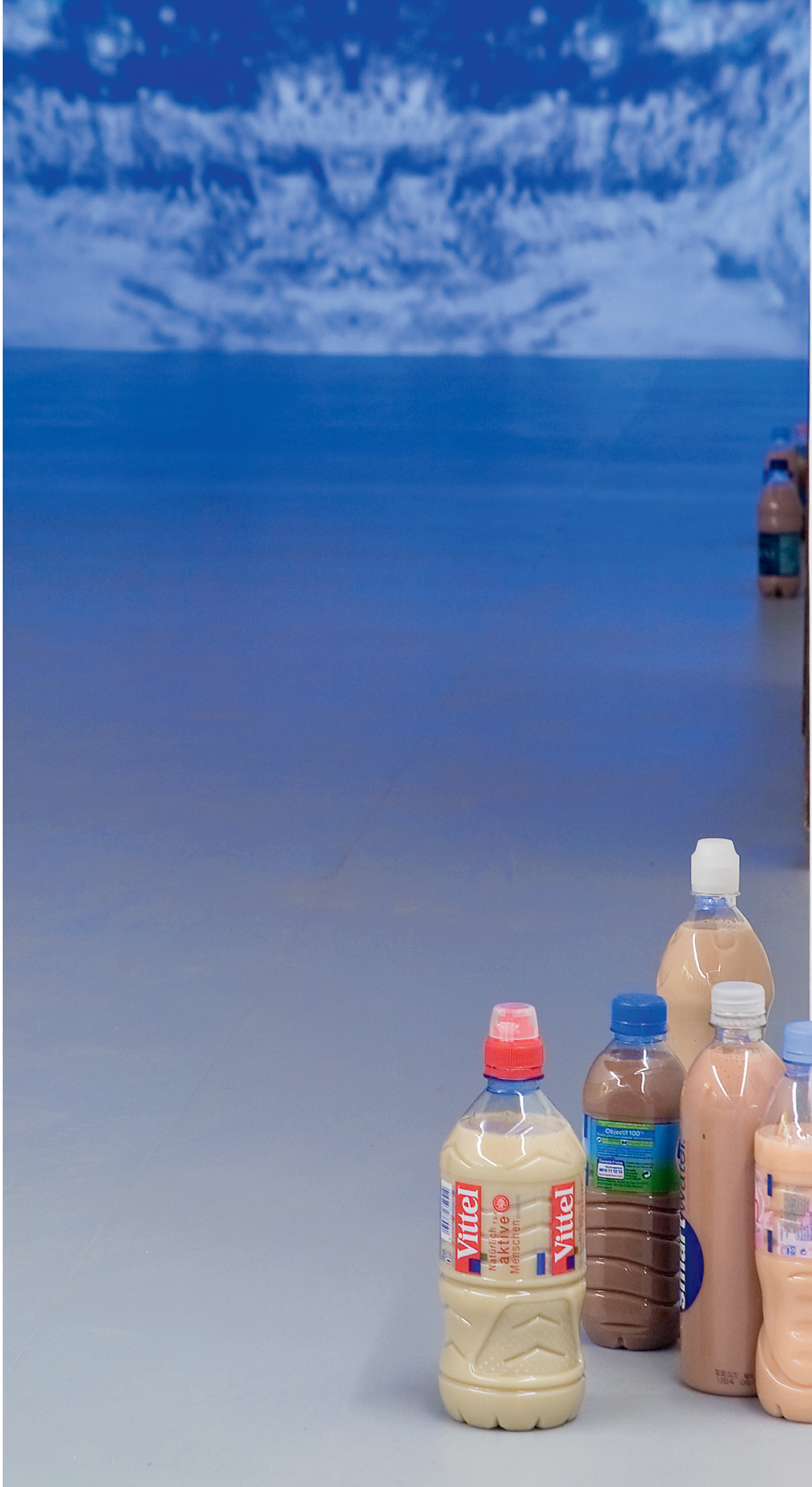
Exhibition view, “Our Sun,”  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma,  
Venice, 2009





*Firm Being*, Venice Series, 2009  
PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
dimensions variable  
Background:  
*Loop Revolution*, 2009  
Video, loop, no sound,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, "Our Sun,"  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma,  
Venice, 2009









*No One's Expression*  
(diptych, part 1), 2011  
Acrylic paint, terry cloth,  
202 x 160 cm



that did not simply point to the body around the work, but which brought the body into it. Against shiny metal boxes and fluorescent rods, here were wax, rubber, and gum that aged and somehow resembled body and flesh. As these works have gotten older, this effect has only increased, with cracks and deformations standing in for the body's surrendering to time. Resisting such a fate, Rosenkranz's bottles, still filled with goo, refuse to pour out and gush forth—or even to get old and dry. Undying, they propose a different model of the body, one contained and resistant to age, wrinkle-resistant and ready to go. The body is reduced to generic matter and kept in a state of potential. Reconfigured as an energy source, it is ready to perform when called upon—to exert and smear (as it does in the spandex paintings) when necessary.

Smooth and even, Rosenkranz's works also speak to a different model of the subject than the one proposed by Jasper Johns's *Ale Cans* (1964). Starting with a generic format, Johns attended to the cans' surfaces, mottling them up with a scrap materiality as if he were attempting to remake the world in accordance with his touch. Figuring that he could not express himself on canvas like the Abstract Expressionists, Johns clumsily marked the limits of his body with wax and then bronze and paint,

denoting the surface as the point where his subjectivity stopped. For him, this had the effect of keeping his feelings safe inside. "I have attempted to develop my thinking," Johns once said, "in such a way that the work I've done is not me—not to confuse my feelings with what I produced."<sup>3</sup> Although his process personalized his objects somewhat, Johns's technique did not divulge the artist's self. Johns harnessed painting and sculpture less as vehicles of self-expression than as mediums of privacy. His handmade touches show only signs of presence, evidencing an outer material body without indexing an inner emotional core. For Rosenkranz, however, there is no longer any core to hold onto; there is nothing, indeed, to keep private. All those kinds of feelings have been extracted and taken away. Not surprisingly, *No Core* is one of her mottoes—and the title of this book.

Rosenkranz has articulated this condition of corelessness in a variety of ways. In addition to using athletic spandex, she has also made paintings on massage towels and emergency blankets, the latter of which provide the minimum of heat and warmth to keep a body alive. Hung on walls across from each other, showing both silver and gold surfaces, these works offer their spectators the uneasy feeling that they are never quite sure on which side one is or should be. The paintings reflect and deflect at

once. The marks on these taut and crinkly foils are not motivated like the calculated notations of so much recent painting, nor are they echoes of past abstract expressions; they are simply the pathetic traces of a body moving and marking itself. In its emphasis on the bodily trace, one might say that Rosenkranz's work is neither representational nor abstract, but is rather an image of figuration under abstraction—the individual body under global pressure. Her body of work is a stand-in for the remainder of the body after information has been tapped out of it. Rather than offer an image of contemporary life like Pop art did, Rosenkranz offers its mean average, life added up and crudely divided.

The early slide projection *...NO-ONE-NO...* (2005) shows the beginning of this bodily breakdown. A woman with lines drawn on her face mouths the words of the work's title, which recall those of Odysseus when passing the Cyclops in Homer's *Odyssey*. The lines suggest both the bare bones of clown make-up and the preliminary designs for plastic surgery, exaggerating and evacuating the woman in turn. Since Rosenkranz has scrambled the slides' order, the circular hall-of-mirrors quality of the work's self-effacing title and script is rendered incomprehensible, and the subject's relation to language is taken away. Instead, the viewer is offered a random tour of facial contortions, which fail to become facial expressions. Though nominally an individual, the woman does not emote; rather, she appears as the combination of a series of mechanized movements, which is foregrounded by the forward drive of the slide carousel that projects her image.

In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault writes that "bio-power" sprang forth from a new relationship between institutions (universities, barracks, workshops) and societal controls (regulation of birthrate, public health, migration) that allowed for a new overall regulation of life. "This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled *insertion* of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes," he writes.<sup>4</sup> Capitalism had to reform the body (and capture life) in order to suit its own needs; it had to harness its energy to make the machine go. First bending the body to the needs of industry, today capitalism fits it for the contours of consumption, situating it along the long tail. Now the body does not have to move as much as it has to stay still. "If today we want to continue the genealogical work of Michel Foucault," Franco Berardi has written, "we have to shift the focus of theoretical attention towards the automatisms of mental reactivity, language and imagination, and therefore towards the new forms of alienation and precariousness of the mental work occurring in the Net."<sup>5</sup> Part of mapping this new mental work is taking the measure



*No One's Impression*  
(diptych, part 2), 2011  
Acrylic paint, terry cloth,  
202 x 160 cm





*My Marathon*, 2010  
Acrylic medium, sand, cardboard,  
300 x 30 x 30 cm  
Background:  
*The Most Important Body of Water  
is Yours (Touch My Pain)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on spandex,  
dimensions variable  
*The Most Important Body of Water  
is Yours (Sport the Game)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on spandex,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, "The Most  
Important Body of Water is Yours,"  
Karma International, Zurich, 2010





*The Most Important Body of Water is Yours (Flesh the Claim)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on spandex,  
dimensions variable  
*Firm Being (Milky Stay)*, 2011  
PET bottle, silicone, pigment,  
acrylic glass, wooden plinth,  
40 x 40 x 150 cm  
*The Most Important Body of Water is Yours (Express the Same)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on spandex,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, "The Most Important Body of Water is Yours,"  
Karma International, Zurich, 2010

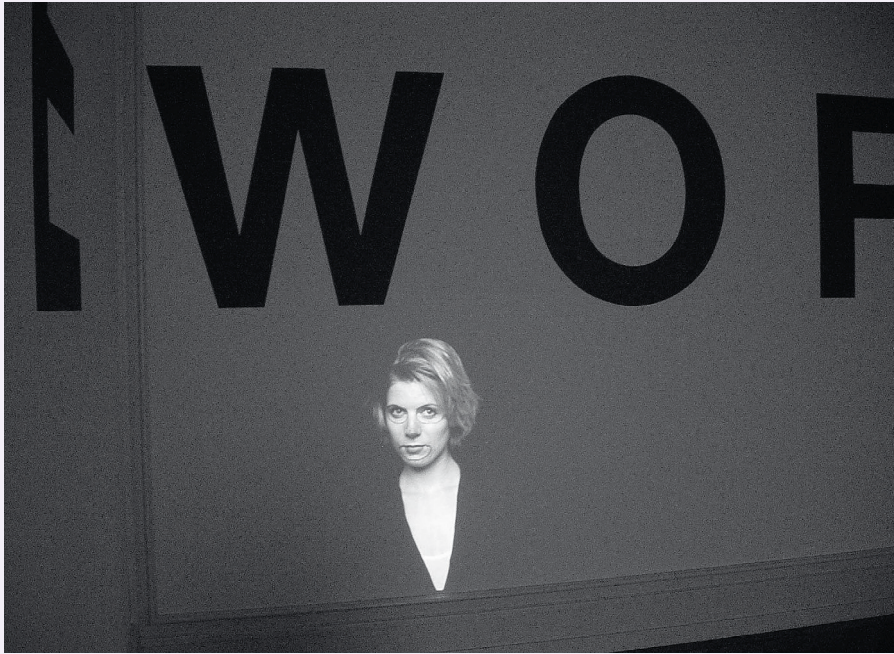


of the current state of the body, as Rosenkranz’s work so deftly does. Recently, Rosenkranz has investigated one particular formation of this body, the figure of the artist, which, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, is a prime example of the new economy’s mental worker. In *Death of Yves Klein* (2011), Rosenkranz offers a portrait of the artist as a flat screen, a swarm of flowing liquid crystals. Beginning with Klein’s International Klein Blue, Rosenkranz submitted this hue to the imaging capabilities of a contemporary television, which renders a result more evocative of frustration (a screen searching for a signal, say) than any feeling of cosmic transcendence that the French artist may have initially attached to it. An audio track playing from the monitor’s speakers lists the various factors that contributed to Klein’s early death, including painting, smoking, and amphetamines. “Pigments are dangerous. Painting is dangerous,” the automated voice intones like a public service announcement about the dangers of becoming an artist. All the warnings are directed toward the boundaries of the body. “Pigments enter skin. Avoid contact with skin. Get paint off your skin,” the voice instructs monotonously. Reminiscent of Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993), which figured itself as a bid to fuse technology and spirit in the face of the filmmaker’s imminent passing, Rosenkranz’s *Death* imagines a “living dead” body in which subject and object have already commingled and are thus able to endure into the future. In his 2006 book *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, Eric Santner tells a story from W.G. Sebald’s novel *The Emigrants* about a man who “had become a kind of photographic plate, which was apparent in the fact [...] that the man’s face and hands turned blue in strong light, or, as one might say, developed,” which Santner relates to a contemporary condition of “*skinlessness*.”<sup>6</sup> Something similar has happened in *Death of Yves Klein*, except that technology has not so much infused the body here as much as it has taken it over entirely. As in all of Rosenkranz’s work, life is once again brought down to the level of color, which can be stored in a number of different places. The TV, in other words, is just another kind of bottle. Color, now, is simply another way of capturing affect, of displaying “imagination.” That’s your color, the language of advertising tells us. *This Is Not My Color*, Rosenkranz retorts in the title of a recent exhibition. But it’s not clear if there is any other way of capturing and communicating subjectivity today. One might say that every artwork Rosenkranz has made wrestles with the problem of the contemporary body. Though taking the form of paintings and sculptures, her works do not themselves begin with these terms. The artist’s interest is not in the conventions or poverty or historical fate of certain media, per se. What she does with them, in fact, is rather brutally direct. A lot has been given up. Indeed, sometimes it seems that too

much has been lost. Being confronted with such images, one feels rather galled, which is perhaps the great strength of the *oeuvre*—that the viewer feels herself to have something over it, and may feel compelled to stand up against it.

Alex Kitnick

- 1: Isabelle Graw, “Ecce Homo: Art and Subjecthood,” *Artforum* (November 2011), 247.
- 2: Warning! In a recent New York City advertising campaign on the subway, streams of sugary liquid poured out of soda bottles, becoming repulsive agglomerations of fat when they hit the glass. Bottled water, a highly anti-ecological product, is aimed at an upper-class demographic that exercises. The subway ads, by contrast, were aimed at a lower-class audience of straphangers, which has a high rate of obesity. Like clothing, water can be used to signify class even as it is employed as a sign of life. A recent advertising campaign for Evian shows men and women wearing T-shirts with headless babies’ bodies emblazoned at the necks, suggesting that fresh water can make you young again. Water can turn back the clock and transform you into an excitable, crying, pure potential.
- 3: Vivien Raynor, “Jasper Johns: ‘I have attempted to develop my thinking in such a way that the work I’ve done is not me,’” *ARTnews* (March 1973), 22. “I didn’t want my work to be an exposure of my feelings,” Johns continued. “Abstract-Expressionism was so lively—personal identity and painting were more or less the same, and I tried to operate the same way. But I found I couldn’t do anything that would be identical with my feelings. So I worked in such a way that I could say it’s not me. That accounts for the separation.”
- 4: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 140–141. Italics mine.
- 5: Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2009), 22.
- 6: Eric L. Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 51–52. W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (New York: New Directions, 1997), 165.



*“No-One-No...”*, 2005  
Slide show, loop,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, “Off Key,”  
Kunsthalle Bern, 2005  
Background:  
Detail of collaboration between  
Stephen Prina and Gaylen Gerber,  
“We Represent Ourselves to  
the World,” 2002  
Acrylic paint on wall,  
dimension variable





1  
*The Most Important Body  
 of Water is Yours  
 (Touch My Pain)*, 2010  
 Acrylic paint on spandex,  
 dimensions variable

2  
*The Most Important Body  
 of Water is Yours  
 (Show My Way)*, 2010  
 Acrylic paint on spandex,  
 dimensions variable





*Avoid Contact (Dim Glow)*, 2011  
Acrylic paint on spandex, dimensions variable





*Firm Being (Stay Neutral),*  
Venice Series, 2009  
PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
21 x 6 x 6 cm





*Firm Being (Fresh Ebony),*  
Venice Series, 2009  
PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
23 x 7 x 7 cm



*Firm Being (Creamy Brown),*  
Venice Series, 2009  
PET bottle, silicone, pigments,  
17 x 7 x 7 cm



*As One (joy)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded  
acrylic glass,  
dimensions variable





*As One (Dander)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded  
acrylic glass,  
dimensions variable



*Firm Being (Become Neutral)*, 2011  
PET bottle, silicone, pigment,  
acrylic glass, wooden plinth,  
40 x 40 x 150 cm







1

**1**  
*Firm Being (Real Glow)*, 2011  
 PET bottle, silicone, pigment, acrylic  
 glass, wooden plinth, 38 x 38 x 147 cm

**2**  
*The Most Important Body of Water is  
 Yours (Slowly But Surely Acquiring  
 a Unique Balance)*, 2011  
 Pigments, acrylic paint on stretched  
 spandex, mounted on boards with  
 archival foam, 200 x 141 cm each  
*The Hue of One (Rage)*, 2011  
 Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester  
 strings, vinyl gloves, paper,  
 143 x 201 cm

*Firm Being (Pink Revolution)*, 2011  
 PET bottle, silicone, pigment, acrylic  
 glass, wooden plinth, 38 x 38 x 147 cm

**3**  
*The Most Important Body of Water is  
 Yours (Uniquely Balanced, Unlike Anyone  
 Else); The Most Important Body of  
 Water is Yours (The Essence of Purity);  
 The Most Important Body of Water is  
 Yours (Filled from the Heart of the Inner  
 Core); The Most Important Body of Water  
 is Yours (Slowly But Surely Acquiring  
 a Unique Balance)*, 2011  
 Pigments, acrylic paint on stretched  
 spandex, mounted on boards with  
 archival foam, 200 x 141 cm each  
*The Hue of One (Rage)*, 2011  
 Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester  
 strings, vinyl gloves, paper,  
 143 x 201 cm

Exhibition view, "This Is Not My Color,"  
 in collaboration with Nikolas  
 Gambaroff's "The Seven Habits of  
 Highly Effective People,"  
 Swiss Institute, New York, 2011



3



2







*The Hue of One (Rage)* (detail), 2011  
Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester  
strings, vinyl gloves, paper, 143 x 201 cm  
*"Because they tried to bore holes in my  
greatest and most beautiful work"*  
*(IKB\_191\_1)*, 2011  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print,  
photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
200 x 141 cm

Exhibition view, "This Is Not My Color,"  
in collaboration with Nikolas  
Gambaroff's "The Seven Habits of  
Highly Effective People,"  
Swiss Institute, New York, 2011







*The Hue of One (Sadness)*, (detail), 2011  
Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester  
strings, vinyl gloves, paper, 143 x 201 cm  
*Firm Being (Real Glow)*, 2011  
PET bottle, silicone, pigment, acrylic  
glass, wooden plinth, 38 x 38 x 147 cm  
“Because they tried to bore holes in my  
greatest and most beautiful work”  
*(IKB\_191\_3)*, 2011  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print,  
photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
200 x 141 cm

Exhibition view, “This Is Not My Color,”  
in collaboration with Nikolas  
Gambaroff’s “The Seven Habits of  
Highly Effective People,”  
Swiss Institute, New York, 2011



*Firm Being (Pink Revolution)*, 2011  
PET bottle, silicone, pigment, acrylic  
glass, wooden plinth, 38 x 38 x 147 cm  
*"Because they tried to bore holes in my  
greatest and most beautiful work"*  
*(IKB\_191\_1)*, 2011  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print,  
photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass,  
200 x 141 cm

Exhibition view, "This Is Not My Color,"  
in collaboration with Nikolas  
Gambaroff's "The Seven Habits of  
Highly Effective People,"  
Swiss Institute, New York, 2011



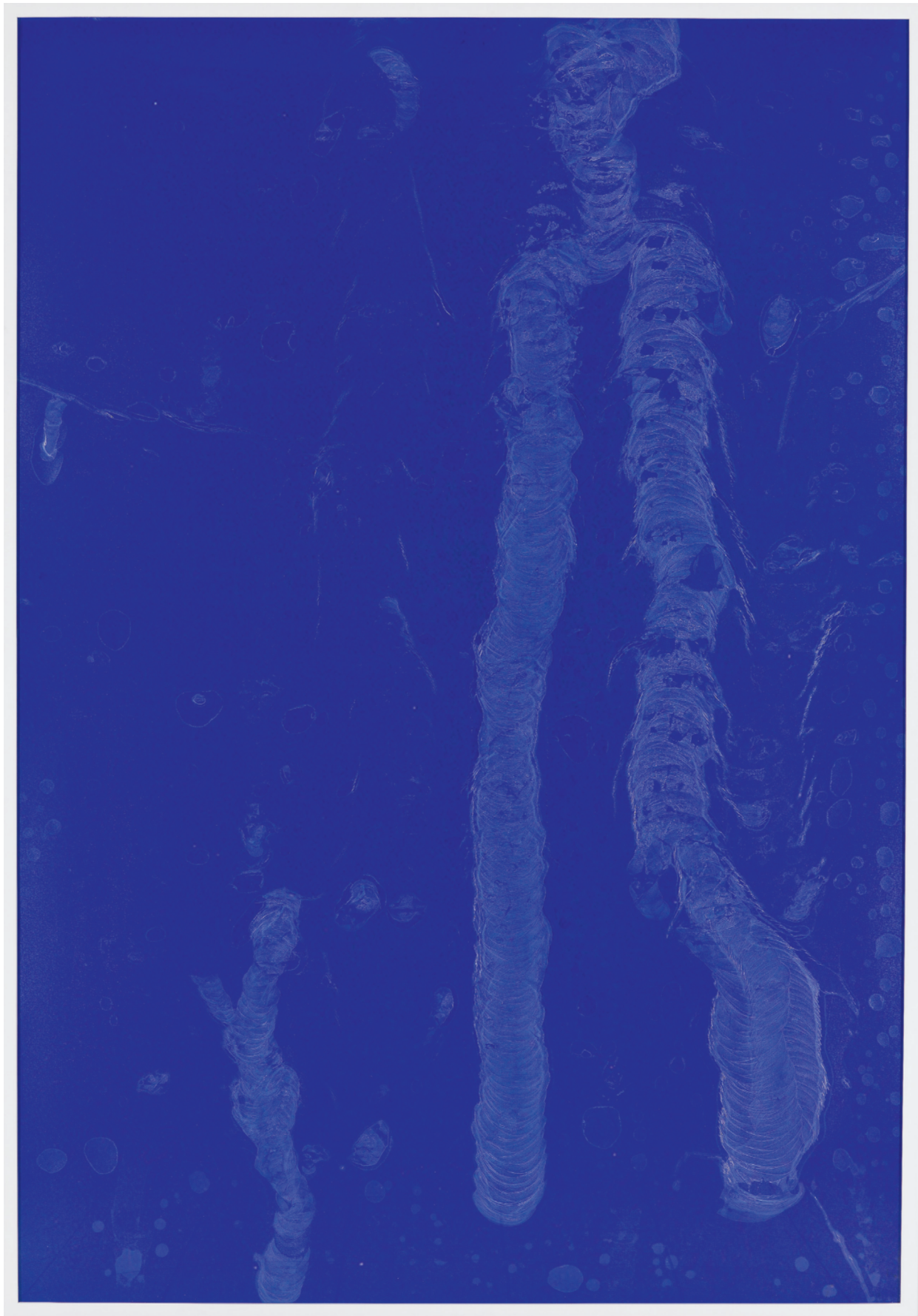
*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and  
most beautiful work"* *(IKB\_191\_2)*, 2011  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper,  
bubbles, acrylic glass, 200 x 141 cm



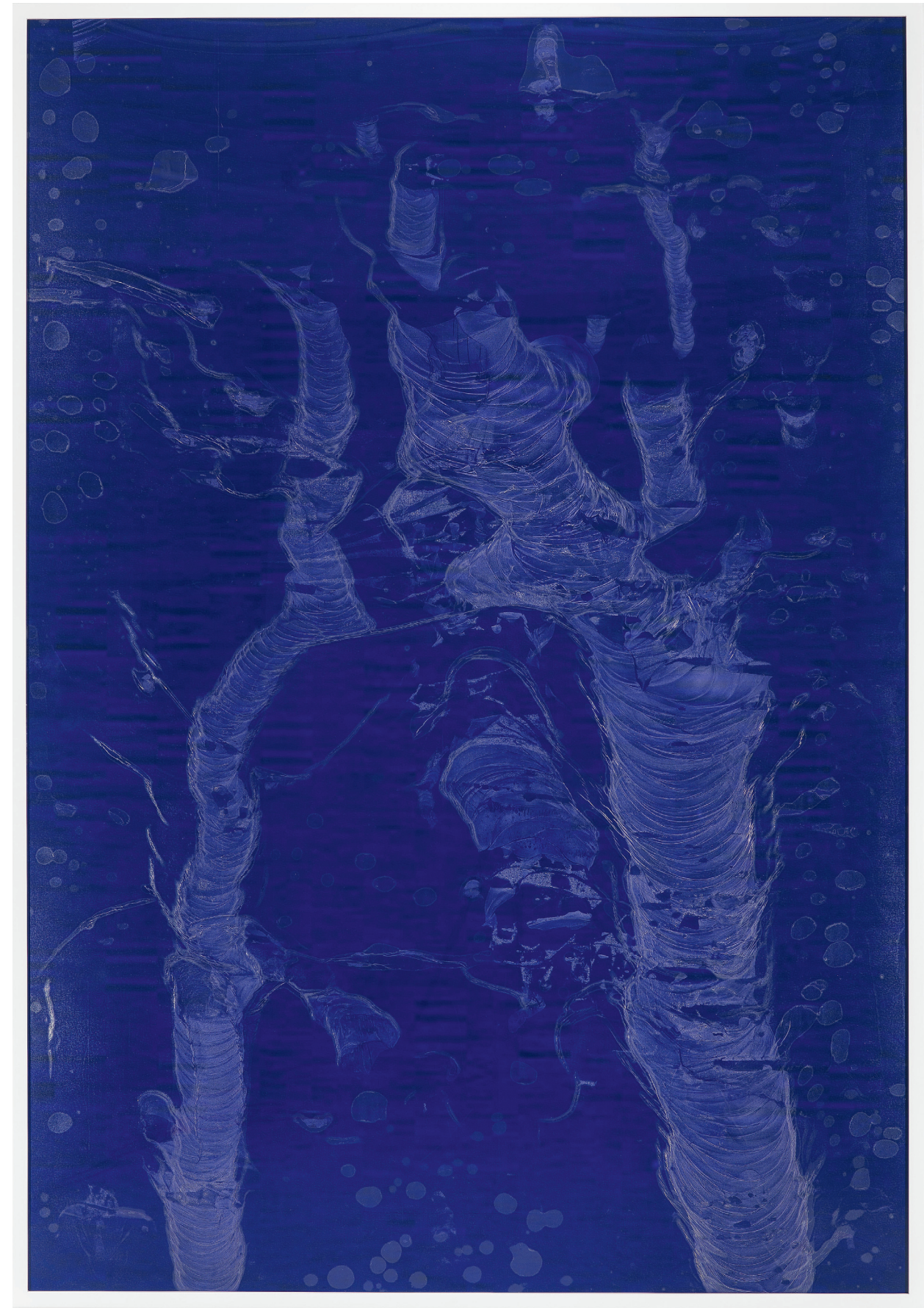


*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (Relief of Hubris), 2012*  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm





*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (Relief of Despondence), 2012*  
 Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm



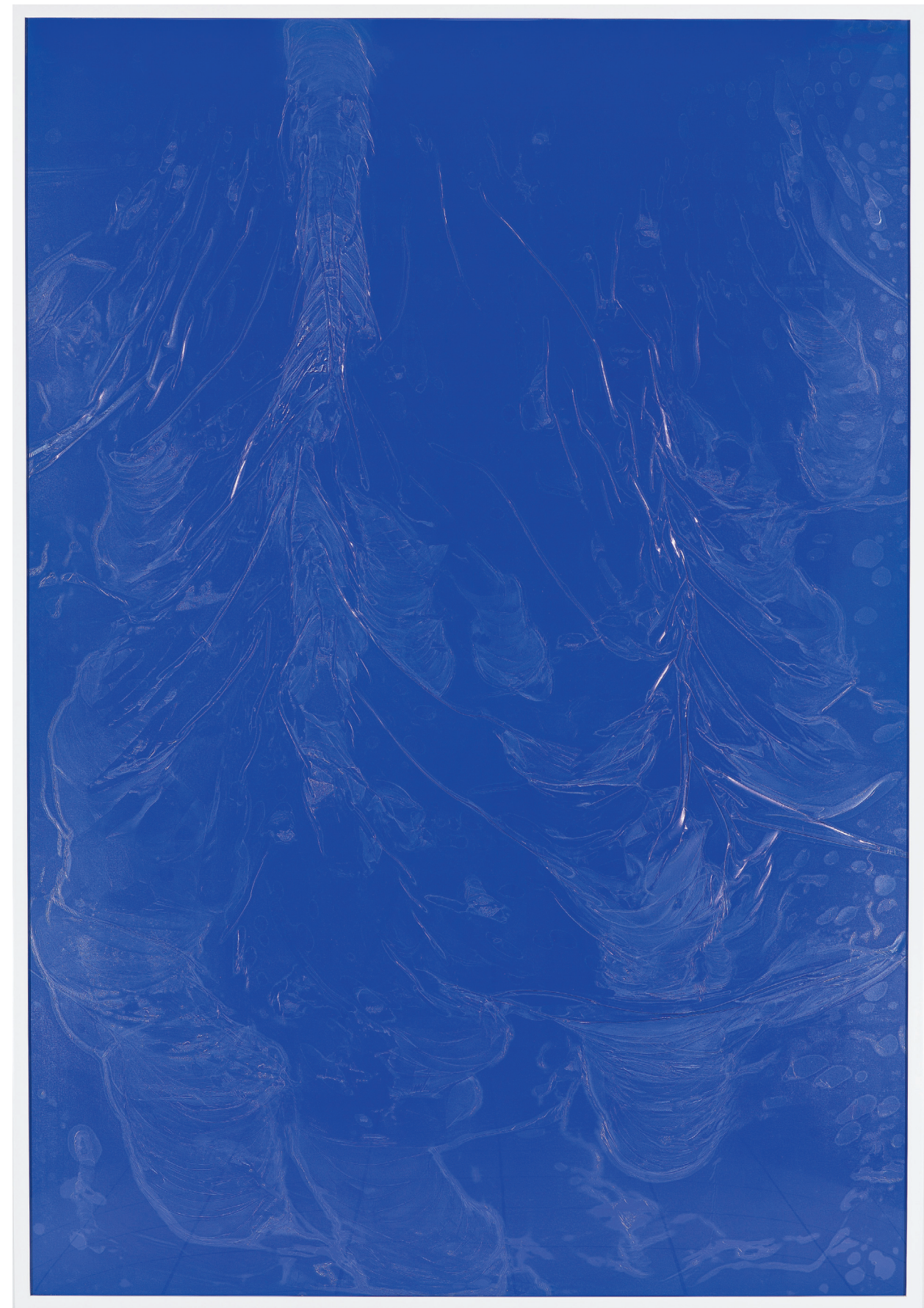
*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (Relief of Pride), 2012*  
 Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm





*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (Relief of Exaggerated Feelings), 2012*  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper,  
bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm





*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (Relief of Avarice), 2011*  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper,  
bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm





*"Because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work" (IKB\_191\_1), 2011*  
Adhesive mount, pigment inkjet print, photo paper, bubbles, acrylic glass, 204 x 142 cm



*Firm Being (Real Glow), 2011*  
PET bottle, silicone, pigment, acrylic glass, wooden plinth, 38 x 38 x 147 cm  
*The Hue of One (Sadness), 2011*  
Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester strings, vinyl gloves, paper, 143 x 201 cm  
*The Hue of One (Insecurity), 2011*  
Acrylic glass, acrylic paint, polyester strings, vinyl gloves, paper, 143 x 201 cm

Exhibition view, "This Is Not My Color," in collaboration with Nikolas Gambaroff's "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People," Swiss Institute, New York, 2011











# Darwining the Blue

## Plotting the Artist

Pamela Rosenkranz’s engagement with color and paint, particularly via Yves Klein’s conceptual instrumentalization of color, seems to create a belated yet decisive moment in the history of Conceptual art. It is belated insofar as art has been often regarded or resorted to as a safe haven away from the sweeping scientific extirpation of the manifest image of ourselves and the world we inhabit.<sup>1</sup> Faced with the scientific uprooting of all privatized spaces (thought, intuition, emotion, home, earth) through which the human can narcissistically reclaim his or her integral image at the center of the bubble-world of personal experience, there is a growing tendency to reestablish art as one of the last bastions of human narcissism. Rosenkranz’s engagement, on the other hand, marks a decisive moment, in that she moves toward a conception of contemporary art in which the synthesis of art and concept is no longer conceived in the privatized sphere of the artist or human experience, but on the ever-expansive and nested domains uncovered by modern science. Since culture cannot be fully detached from the continuum of nature, the omnipresent import of science for nature cannot be fully contained and prevented from having any bearing on culture either. The scientific renegotiation of spaces associated with artistic productivity and conceptual synthesis (such as the space of intuition, imagination, and the artist’s experience) has far-reaching consequences for art practices. These outcomes, however, are not simply limited to the theoretical reorientation of the disillusioned artist in the face of the tightening grip of modern science. The scientific renegotiation of the world leads to fundamental shifts in the approach to artistic productivity both on the level of methodology and on the level of identification and critique. If the world in its different global and

regional scopes constitutes the ultimate horizon of art, then the ambit of a world devoid of any intrinsic bounds, center, or manifest core (such as the artist’s life, intuition, and intentionality) must also be reflected in the task of the artist, previously envisioned according to a privatized conception of the world or supposedly self-evident relations between the artist and the artwork. In the same vein, for Rosenkranz a genuine commitment to the world uncovered by modern science entails a painstaking reconceptualization of the conditions of artistic production. Yet such reconceptualization is not conducted according to privatized conceptions of the artist, the artwork, and their seemingly self-evident relations to one another. It is conducted according to open vistas that condition artistic productivity, and from whose irrepressible influence the plot—the very core—of the artwork can never escape. One of the primary tasks of the contemporary artist thus becomes that of working around this supposed plot or constitutive core that is not in reality a privatized or manifest one, but a germ of contingencies, complicities, and irrepressible influences of an outside around which the artwork has taken shape. To speak of the “plot” of the artwork in general does not imply any narrative structure. The inherent association of plot with narrative and narration is but a common misunderstanding of the original definition of plot, a late-medieval concept suggesting a patch of earth or nature separated by the artist or the craftsman as the core of his work. For medieval and renaissance cultures, the separation of the plot from its matrix was, however, never considered to be full and complete. As a result, artists and craftsmen were deemed untrustworthy, for they brought with them to the human sphere the influence of an obscure plane beyond human or even earthly forces, a *Beyond* populated by anonymous materials. The plot was,

accordingly, identified as an access point to this pervasive and obscure beyond from which artifacts and artworks were extracted, and whose ineradicable traces contaminated the artist, the artwork, and anyone who came into contact with them (whence the conspiratorial and quasi-narrative connotation of the word “plot”). Far from being a vehicle of narration, the plot was considered to be an anonymous germ of this pervasive beyond, capable of bringing into focus the invisible workings of the unbound plane and unfolding its lingering influences in the human sphere.<sup>2</sup>

With respect to the above definition, if we consider the universal landscape or the continuum of nature as the matrix of all possible artistic plots—from which the artist extracts the plot of the artwork—then irreversible and radical change in the former must be reflected in the latter. This is because, with respect to its integral plot, the artwork is nothing but a modulated germ of the universal landscape whose unbound modal and relational horizon—that is, its contingency and continuity—is always unfolding within the ostensibly private horizon of the artist and the artwork as a plot twist that effectively breaks into and overturns artistic privacy in the last instance, tainting it with anonymous materials from beyond. The panorama of this intrusion into the sphere of artistic privacy—whether in regard to the life, intentionality, or experience of the artist, or to the supposed integrity of the artwork—insinuates precisely the conspiratorial dimension of the plot. For Rosenkranz the artistic plotting that encompasses the entire course of artistic creativity—from the artist’s selection and extraction of a subject to her thinking of materials, relations, and the consolidation of the work—already bears with it a plot twist, an intrusion by anonymous materials from beyond. By encroaching upon the supposedly self-evident image of the plot as something being extracted and worked out by the artist, this plot twist reinvents art beyond the celebrated domains of artistic privacy, such as the supposedly exclusive conceptual correlations between the object and the idea, the intuition and the life of the artist, emotions, the art-historical context, and, finally, the very qualities by which the work of art is perceived, evaluated, and categorized. Rosenkranz’s focus on color and paint in Conceptual art—and, in particular, Klein’s “blue epoch”—operates precisely so as to trace and bring out the trajectory of the aforementioned plot twist (or intrusion by anonymous materials) that overturns artistic privacy in the last instance, both in the artistic life of Klein and in his monochromes. Neither the private correspondence between Klein’s life and his artworks, nor the patented link between the color and the concept, can be taken as the site of the supposed creative spark or the moment of artistic conception. In Rosenkranz’s work they are instead integral plots capable of bringing into focus the workings of open vistas, in terms of plot twists that at once disturb the

*Imagine Your Color is a Ball*  
(Pure Porcelain), 2010  
Silicone, spandex,  
dimensions variable





manifest image from within, and tint or tincture the scope of the modern landscape (that is, a modally and relationally unbound universe). By reconstructing Klein’s life and art as plots through which anonymous materials and forces condition conceptual syntheses and courses of production, Rosenkranz’s body of work engages contemporary art on two levels. On the one hand, her work functions as an introspection into Conceptual art, in terms of unbound or open relations that can be privatized neither in the figure of the artist nor in the synthesis between the art and the concept. And on the other hand, her work acts as a conceptual tincturing or chromatic illumination of the open vista that—in a manner reminiscent of cell staining and tissue-dyeing techniques—traces the workings of the non-privatized world, highlights its contingencies, and brings out various levels of its complicities and twists within the work of art itself.

It is this tincturing of the open through the magnifying glass of an integral plot (here, the life and art of Klein) that conceptually reinvents Rosenkranz’s work as a counterpart to the former artist’s approach to color and paint. Whereas for Klein, the blue paint tints the private link between the idea—conceived in the inner sanctuaries of the artist—and color, for Rosenkranz both the color blue and Klein’s blue paint highlight twists and intrusions of the open into the work of art and, in doing so, illuminate unbound relations of the open. It is in this sense that Rosenkranz’s work can be seen as a culmination of con-

ceptual painting implicit to the very idea of an art whose site of activity is no longer a private or personal world.

## The True Color of the Artist

Klein’s trademarked blue paint does not subsume a unification between the life of the artist and his work through the stable medium of the concept, but indexes quite literally and indifferently the death of Yves Klein. Yet this is a death that cannot be privatized in order to bolster the figure of the artist by reinforcing the axiomatic or supposedly self-evident connection between artist and artwork. It is instead an ineradicable trace of a generic death that simultaneously ramifies in the ideated realm of the concept, in the perceptual dimension of color, and in the material domain of paint, whose chemical conspiracies against the painter Rosenkranz uncovers in her video *Death of Yves Klein* (2011). Generic death is an expression of a universe that is not only free from the necessity of all its particulars, but is also in an unbound relation to itself, and is therefore capable of traversing all possible domains and modes of being-in-the-universe *in one way or another*. In this universe, not only are all private spaces and relations (such as the concept, the color, and their axiomatized relation) already intruded upon by the open; they are also, and more importantly, unable to fully differentiate themselves from the unbound relations of the open that expropriate them in each and every instance.

In this sense, to stage the “Blue Revolution,” as Rosenkranz might suggest, is to radically turn blue in all its shades and contexts into particular expressions of generic death or *expropriation by the open*.

Far from attesting to the “authenticity of the pure idea” by preserving the paint (the volatile material work) within the stable medium of the concept, or by establishing an exclusive link between color and concept, Klein’s blue reveals the primordial precariousness of the pure idea by bringing to light the volatility of the concept, the non-privatized horizon of color, and the material contingency of the paint. The subjective experience of the chromatic properties of the paint—that is to say, the distinct quality of blue-ness—seems to be what underpins the conceptual integrity of Klein’s Blue, or the so-called *core* of the artwork. Here, the artist’s experience or perception of the color blue serves as a ground for authentication of the pure idea, and as a given space for the synthesis between concept and color. But raw qualitative characteristics such as those of color are not immediately apprehensible in conscious experience; instead, they are devoid of any essence that might guarantee their individuality beyond the extrinsic conceptual determinations and contingent relations that condition their experience. Therefore, Klein’s subjective color experience as a locus for the immaculate synthesis between the concept and the work is anything but a private experience immediately grounded in personal consciousness. By puncturing the immediate and private experience of the color blue, Rosenkranz brings about the possibility of deepening art into the open and a nontrivial engagement with color and paint—non-trivial insofar as this engagement draws upon color and paint as non-narrative plots which, beneath their assumedly manifest, immaculate, and innocent appearances, brood the non-sensible influences of a pervasive plane interwoven by webs of cosmic complicities and populated by anonymous materials that in every instance bore holes in the greatest and most beautiful works of the artist.<sup>3</sup> While for Klein, a trivial phenomenological engagement with color becomes a ground for the conception of International Klein Blue as a pure artistic idea that tints the immediate and private experience of the artist, for Rosenkranz the expropriation of private artistic experience in the name of open vistas serves as a basis for a non-trivial engagement with color. By conceiving the color blue not in terms of personal conscious experience, but in terms of the unbound relations of a modern scientific account of nature, the artist is able to tincture and distinguish the open, to illuminate its unbound relations and magnify such relations’ subtle webs of complicity. Therefore, Rosenkranz’s emphasis on a nontrivial reactivation of color indicates a commitment on the part of art to the chromatic illumination of the world.

To that end, the nontrivial conception of color in Rosenkranz’s work unfolds the “blue” of Klein’s blue

according to an impersonal trajectory on which global and local fields of nature enter into all manner of complicities, from the domain of the particulate to the domain of the galactic, the stellar, the chemical, the planetary, the biological, and the cerebral. Rather than highlighting the localized conscious experience of the subject or the sensibility of the artist, this impersonal trajectory reveals the status of the color blue, or color perception in general, within the scope of nature’s impersonal self-experience.<sup>4</sup> Once color is conceived of in terms of this impersonal trajectory rather than that of the personal experience of the artist or the subject, the slogan “This Is Not My Color” (the title of one of Rosenkranz’s 2011 exhibitions) can indeed be the base of a broader shibboleth for contemporary art and its aestheticism, which has been synchronized with, but desutured from, modern science: “This Is No One’s Color.”

## A Chromatic Humiliation

From a global perspective, light is a form of passage that connects various spatiotemporal fields by transporting information between them in the form of electromagnetic radiation. It is a connective operator that universalizes incongruent local fields of space-time. What we identify as visible light signifies a specific range between approximately 350 to 750 nanometers in wavelength. Outside of this range, the universalizing light of electromagnetic radiance is invisible to the human eye. Within the terrestrial atmosphere, shorter wavelengths of the said range scatter far more efficiently than longer wavelengths. Visible blue light travels faster than medium and long wavelengths (green, yellow, orange, and red lights) within the earth’s atmosphere. This is why the sky appears blue to the human eye. Yet the efficient scattering of the short-wavelength spectrum of sunlight in the atmosphere is itself determined by two major factors: first, the contingent positioning of the planetary body within the solar system, and its consequent exposure to direct sunlight emitted from the sun as the result of the nuclear-fusion process in the star; and second, the earth’s modest gravity, which generates an atmospheric shield around the planet, mainly consisting of the by-products of bio-organic activities on the surface of the planet, or what we call *life*.

The proportion, configuration, and shape of the terrestrial atmosphere are mainly determined by the earth’s magnetic field, generated by the presence and motion of the earth’s iron core. The massive accumulated body of iron within the planet is a residue of abundant iron isotopes in the molecular cloud from which the solar system was formed. Since stable and heavy iron isotopes are produced during the silicon-burning process of massive dying stars, the earth’s gravitational iron core is a by-product of stellar deaths predating the formation of the planet and its stellar

*Imagine Your Color is a Ball*  
(*Intense Tan*), 2010  
Silicone, spandex,  
dimensions variable







*The Wild Blue Me (Morning Walk)* (detail), 2011  
 ASICS sneakers, silicone, pigments,  
 Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex paint,  
 dimensions variable



*I almost forgot that ASICS means*  
*Anima Sana in Corpore Sano*, 2007  
 ASICS sneakers, plaster, silicone,  
 dimensions variable





*The Wild Blue Me (Morning Walk)*, 2011  
ASICS sneakers, silicone, pigments,  
Ralph Lauren Home acrylic latex paint,  
dimensions variable



hegemon, the sun. The churning motion of the iron core generates a modest gravity in which water can exist in three phases (solid, liquid, and gas)—a condition that is a prerequisite for the emergence of organic life on the planet. At the same time, the earth’s core forms an electromagnetic cocoon around the planet and stratifies the atmosphere into a multilayered filter that prevents water from evaporating into the open space and short-wavelength sunlight from reaching the earth’s surface and damaging organisms. The local conditioning of life on earth, therefore, is already constituted by a form of blindness in regard to the global scope of light. Although organic life cannot be detached from the coupling of water and light, its verity is corroborated by a deeply entrenched myopia against light.

As primal marine organisms begin to evolve in an environment dominated by the interplay of water and light set against an ambient web of global complicities, they begin to adapt to a new light horizon. The distribution of molecules within the atmosphere, under the influence of the geomagnetic field, conditions a horizon wherein shorter wavelengths of sunlight, or so-called blue light, scatter more efficiently. The efficacy of the blue light in scattering through water generates a similar environment of light in the oceans. The evolution of primitive photo-sensors takes place in response to this dominant environment of light in which one of the keys to the survival of the organism is its ability to differentiate ultra-violet from visible blue light. As the evolved marine species aspire to light and come to the surface of the ocean, they are forced to adapt to the vast new horizon of short-wavelength light surrounding them from above. From the perspective of this plot, the sky is no longer the boundary that separates the earth from the heavens, but an environment that shapes the evolution of organisms according to light, and, in doing so, forms a continuum between the global scope of light as the connective operator of anonymous materials, and the evolution of life on the planet.

Here, the atmospheric bombardment of short-wavelength light (i.e. ultraviolet and visible blue light) should be seen as a trauma, one of whose many lingering traces in organic life is the evolution of visual perception. As an adaptive response to this environment, color vision enables the aquatic species to detect regional inhomogeneities (for example, the movement of a predator or food) against a homogenous background. Accordingly, color, or, more accurately, color vision, can be understood as the organism’s traumatically fueled evolutionary adaptation whose primary task is to detect regional inhomogeneities, thereby aiding the organism to distinguish itself, its food, and its predators from one another.

Food recognition, the detection of an object against both stable and unstable backgrounds, and self-identification in an environment that reflects a dominant wavelength

(as in the case of the developed color vision of coral-reef animals or colorful birds in green, tropical environments), are among the factors that contributed to the evolutionary trajectory of color vision. But the complicity of biological evolution with the dominant light environment goes even deeper: The physics of light can lead to speciation and decisive morphogenetic changes such as the color of skin or the positioning and symmetry of eyes in aquatic species, which come to the surface waters of oceans where blue light dominates the environment. The genetic encoding of blue light in the evolved organism not only determines morphogenetic changes in the symmetry and position of the eye and its visual properties such as focal length (in order to optimize the chasing of the prey or the mate), but also the structure and properties of light-sensitive proteins known as opsins. The ability to chromatically detect blue light (common to primates endowed with trichromatic vision)<sup>5</sup> is, in fact, a footprint of the trauma of light, which the planetary interplay between water and light can neither repel nor overcome.

Life on earth has one choice only: to be shaped by light, in a web of complicities that extends from electromagnetic radiation to nucleosynthesis in stars, from stellar death to the accretion of the planet, and from the motion of earth’s core to the formation of the earth’s atmosphere and the polymorphic existence of water on the planet. Since the global web of complicities marks the unbound relations of the open into which every privatized experience or localized horizon is expropriated, the evolutionary unraveling of the human’s experience of color (in terms of global complicities) translates the primate-specific sensitivity to blue light into a particular expression of generic death or expropriation by the open.

The deepening of the evolutionary vista according to the global scope of light, which illuminates unbound relations and the scope of the open, is the first step in synchronizing imagination and thought with a contemporary landscape wherein privacy-in-the-last-instance (such as the privatized experience of blue light) is but a particular instance of “being expropriated by the open.” Within the extended evolutionary vista, the wild blue yonder does not wrap human experience inside a given and visible image of the universe, a manifestly blue firmament. It instead extends the global scope of light—invisible and not given to human vision—to evolutionary adaptations that condition human experience in the first place. Rather than being a mirror reflecting the verity of the artist’s experience as a privatized and ineffable sphere, or a serene background against which a link between the artist and the blue sky can be established (undisturbed by birds or any extraneous element or polluting agency),<sup>6</sup> the blue yonder is a nontrivial fiber that transfers global complicities to the local horizon of human experience.

It is against the nontrivial ambient space of the blue yonder that the local subject—or the artist—capable of the

conceptual rehabilitation of color comes to light. First as a subject endowed with a color vision sensitive to blue light; then as a subject that has a private experience of the color blue; and, finally, as a subject who preserves the authenticity of his private experience of the color blue in the supposedly immaculate domain of “the pure idea,” Klein becomes a designated subject of chromatic humiliation. The beholder of the blue is not simply an ape whose trichromatic vision enables him to tell the difference between the fruit and tree leaves, or a mere by-product of an ingrained planetary myopia against the global scope of light; he is, above all, an integral plot wherein unbound relations of nature or a non-private abyss unfold and their complicities come into focus. From the perspective of a privatized artistic experience, color is anchored in the axiomatic plane of immediate conscious experience. Yet from an artistic perspective modernized according to a deepened evolutionary account of experience, color is a particular local projection of nature’s impersonal, non-private and unbound self-experience, in which the private link between the artist, the concept, and color is already severed beyond repair.

## Arting Darwin

Rosenkranz’s attempt to take the artistic dimension of color beyond the private link between the artist and the work is an attempt to amplify and broaden the scope of the chromatic humiliation. As such, the *Darwining* of artistic experience lies not simply within the ambit of human evolution but rather within the gamut of a global conception of light that conditions biological evolution. Here, the verb “to Darwin” represents the kernel of Darwin’s project: To rediscover man as a seemingly integral plot where contingent biological differences come into focus within contingently posited environments, and begin to accumulate according to the environment’s (the local horizon’s) dominant characteristics. In this sense, the term “Darwining the Blue” can be understood as embracing the eliminativist vector of the Darwinian project against the privatized experience of qualities (as sanctioned by art) only to sublimate the Darwinian vector of elimination within the non-privatized and impersonal self-experience of nature.<sup>7</sup> Darwining the blue, accordingly, marks the ultimate feat of the contemporary artist in sublating the artistic experience within the self-experience of nature, and chromatically illuminating or dramatizing the unbound relations of the open.

Rather than bearing the signature of the manifest image of the artist upon the manifest image of the world, a Darwinian account of color illuminates an open or abyssal nature by tincturing and tracing its unbound relations, free global expressions, and complicities within each and every local horizon (thought, experience, biological stratum, terrestrial environment, etc.). It rediscovers the

subject as a particular or designated expression of unbound relations through which nature simultaneously broadens and coheres its impersonal self-experience. The Darwinian tincturing or tinting of nature is precisely the counterpart to applying color and painting; it is a coloring of nature in its own unrestricted terms. In the bottomless and continuous expanse of nature, color cannot be applied to any expression of privacy (the artwork, the concept, artistic experience) except as a grade or a tone that brings out its underlying continuity with the rest of the universal gradient and its webs of anonymous materials. Here, then, we can speak of a Universal Darwin Blue (blue as conceived from a Darwinian point of view) as a chromatic index of illumination that simultaneously escalates the tensions of the scientific image of the world within the manifest image conceived by International Klein Blue, and harnesses the synthetic powers implicit to such tensions as new drives of artistic creativity.

By Darwining the (artistic) experience of color as a designated expression of the contingently orchestrated interplay between water and light in terrestrial horizons (see Rosenkranz’s 2009 exhibition “Our Sun”), as well as in organic and economic-cultural horizons (or her 2010 show “The Most Important Body of Water is Yours”), the artist rehabilitates the idea of color as a “chromatic operator” whose task is to detect regional inhomogeneities. Yet this chromatic illumination is not a consequence of adopting color as a *discrete* phenomenological property of the object, or as a quality of a privatized experience (as in Klein’s blue monochromes). Conversely, it is an outcome of eliminating the manifest chromatic image of man’s experience and terminally broadening the scope of Darwin’s project as a universal system that highlights free expressions of nature’s self-experience. The Darwinian unraveling of nature’s self-experience tinctures the unbound relations of the open, and, in so doing, it brings out and reveals the inhomogeneities or local horizons (particular expressions) of nature in terms of alternative routes and modes of synthesis and complicity. Rather than aping the abyss by drawing a line between the terrestrial subject and the yonder through which the image of the universe becomes an infinitely fractalized and mutated image of man’s manifest image, Rosenkranz erases this imaginary narcissistic line by reconstructing the subject’s image of the world as a plot infinitely perforated by twists and contingent turns of a relationally and modally unbound account of nature.

## Light Thickens

The emergence of life on earth and, correspondingly, the conditions for organic adaptation to different terrestrial environments (namely, evolution) are contingent products of an ever-entangling web of contingencies and complicities





*Express Nothing (Inner Realm)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint, emergency blanket  
160 x 220 cm





*Express Nothing (Inner Mist)*, 2011  
Acrylic paint, emergency blanket,  
163 x 212 cm



Express Nothing  
(Surface Surges), 2011  
Acrylic paint, emergency  
blanket, 163 x 212 cm



whereby disparate local fields and horizons interweave. As that which highlights unbound relations of the open, this multi-modal web of complicities reflects the global scope of light as a connective operator between various regions of space-time. In other words, the global scope of light reveals the universal extent of global complicities between disparate local horizons and fields (physical, biological, chemical, and cerebral). For this reason, the terrestrial scope of light responsible for the perception of color, photosynthesis, and life on earth must be seen through the illuminating effect of a global conception of light. In line with the synchronization of art with a scientifically modern account of nature—and, respectively, culture—the interplay between water and light as the planetary archetype of aesthetics must be replaced by a new aesthetic paradigm rooted in the global scope of light and concerned with unbound relations of the open, its vast webs of complicities and nontrivial interplays between different regions of the universe. The shift to an aesthetic paradigm rooted in global illumination is traceable in Rosenkranz’s confrontations with the myopic aesthetic ambit of water and light in various cultural narratives and artistic pursuits. The planetary paradigm of aesthetics—the coupling of water and

light—is dramatically highlighted as a terrestrial crime scene in which every clue unfolds a new plot, that is, a germ of complicity with anonymous materials. The crime scene behind the terrestrial aesthetic paradigm is spotlighted as a web of complicities in which human exploitation, capitalism, planetary templates of beauty, neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and the master-slave dialectics of the sun and earth intermingle and expand to new scenarios beyond the interests of specific regions and players. In order to fully adopt the modern aesthetic paradigm, one has to go beyond CSI Earth. Yet in order to move beyond the terrestrial crime scene, one has to follow light as it thickens. The broader the range of spatiotemporal fields that light connects together, the thicker the light. *The thicker the light with anonymous materials that have hardly anything in common, the closer to the global scope of illumination:* This is the trajectory of a speculative forensics of light by which Rosenkranz examines the life and death of Yves Klein, and through which she discovers a new aesthetic paradigm behind the tensions created by the scientific image within the manifest image of man and the world he inhabits.

Reza Negarestani



As One (detail), 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded  
acrylic glass, dimensions variable

Exhibition view, “No Core,”  
Centre d’Art Contemporain Genève, 2010

- 1: Here the manifest image is the “framework in terms of which man came to be aware of himself as man-in-the-world” (Wilfrid Sellars), a commonsense framework comprised of intentions and thoughts through which man correlates the observable image of himself to the world and objects, and understands the world as a global projection of himself. According to the American philosopher Sellars, the posterior alternative to the manifest image is the scientific image in which the world consists of microphysical entities behaving according to natural laws that are no longer seen as “truncated persons.”
- 2: For more details on the history of plot, see Benedict Singleton, *On Craft and Being Crafty: Human Behaviour as the Object of Design* (PhD Thesis, Northumbria University, 2012); and Mary W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993).
- 3: See Yves Klein, “The Chelsea Hotel Manifesto” in *Yves Klein: Long Live the Immaterial*, Klein, et al. (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000), 88.
- 4: The impersonal self-experience of nature is defined by the universal relation of nature or the world itself, a self-reflexive relation that cannot be exhausted by any particular instance of experience and cannot be approached through personal experience.
- 5: Trichromatic vision is the ability to convey color information through three distinct channels or cone types in the eye.
- 6: “Once, in 1946, while still an adolescent, I was to sign my name on the other side of the sky during a fantastic ‘realistico-imaginary’ journey. That day, as I lay stretched upon the beach of Nice, I began to feel hatred for birds which flew back and forth across my blue, cloudless sky, because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and most beautiful work. Birds must be eliminated.” See Yves Klein, “The Chelsea Hotel

Manifesto” in *Yves Klein: Long Live the Immaterial*, Klein, et al. (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000), 88.

7: It was Charles Sanders Peirce who, in his pursuit to outline a universal speculative philosophy, was the first to suggest that the element of absolute chance (tychism) underpins evolution in its Darwinian sense. He proposed a speculative link between his doctrine of tychism and his doctrine of synechism or universal continuity. The broadening or diffusion of absolute chance by universal continuity results in universal contingency (or global co-constitution of possibilities). Universal contingency, or a broadened account of tychism, for Peirce, is equal to the universal reinstatement of Darwin’s evolutionary thesis on a cosmic level. The thesis presented here is that, if Darwin’s view on evolution can be universally and cosmologically expanded, so can its eliminativist operations (as detailed by Stephen Jay Gould and Daniel Dennett). But the universal broadening of eliminativist implications of Darwin’s thesis, in this scenario, should be *strictly* understood in terms of nature’s self-experience, *or the universal and continuous relation of nature to itself.*



*Express Nothing (Pink Health)*, 2011  
Acrylic paint, emergency blanket,  
163 x 212 cm











Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain  
Genève, 2010



Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain  
Genève, 2010





*Stretch Nothing*, Venice Series, 2009/2010  
Acrylic paint pressed in between emergency  
blanket and glass; 220 x 160 cm  
*As One (Surrender)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded acrylic glass,  
dimensions variable  
*As One (Joy)*, 2010  
Acrylic paint on hand-molded acrylic glass,  
dimensions variable

Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2010





*Stretch Nothing*, Venice Series, 2009/2010  
Acrylic paint pressed in between emergency  
blanket and glass, 220 x 160 cm

Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, 2010



*Stretch Nothing*, Venice Series, 2009/2010  
Acrylic paint pressed in between emergency  
blanket and glass, 220 x 160 cm

Exhibition view, "No Core," Centre d'Art  
Contemporain Genève, 2010



*Stretch Nothing*, Venice Series, 2009  
Acrylic paint pressed in between emergency  
blanket and glass, 220 x 160 cm

Exhibition view, "Our Sun,"  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma, Venice, 2009







Exhibition view, "Our Sun,"  
Istituto Svizzero di Roma,  
Venice, 2009





**1+2**  
*Nothing Unbound*, 2009  
 Mirror, glass, acrylic paint,  
 200 x 160 x 160 cm

Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
 Centre d'Art Contemporain  
 Genève, 2010





*Nothing Unbound*, 2009  
Mirror, glass, acrylic paint,  
200 x 160 x 160 cm

Exhibition view, "No Core,"  
Centre d'Art Contemporain  
Genève, 2010





*Uncontent*, 2008  
Mirror, whisky, sneakers,  
plaster, silicone, pigments,  
200 x 160 x 160 cm

Installation view, Manifesta 7,  
Rovereto, 2008





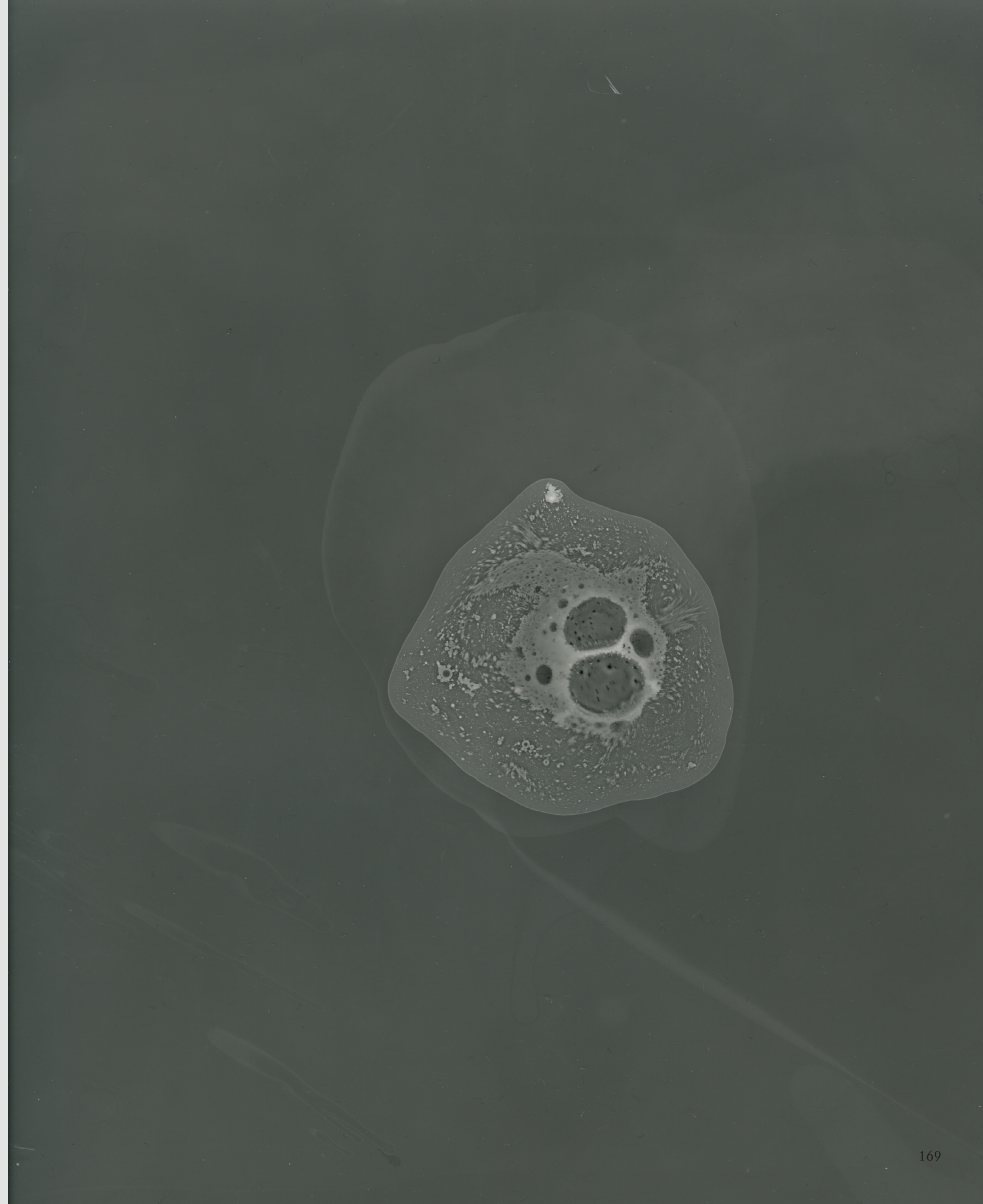




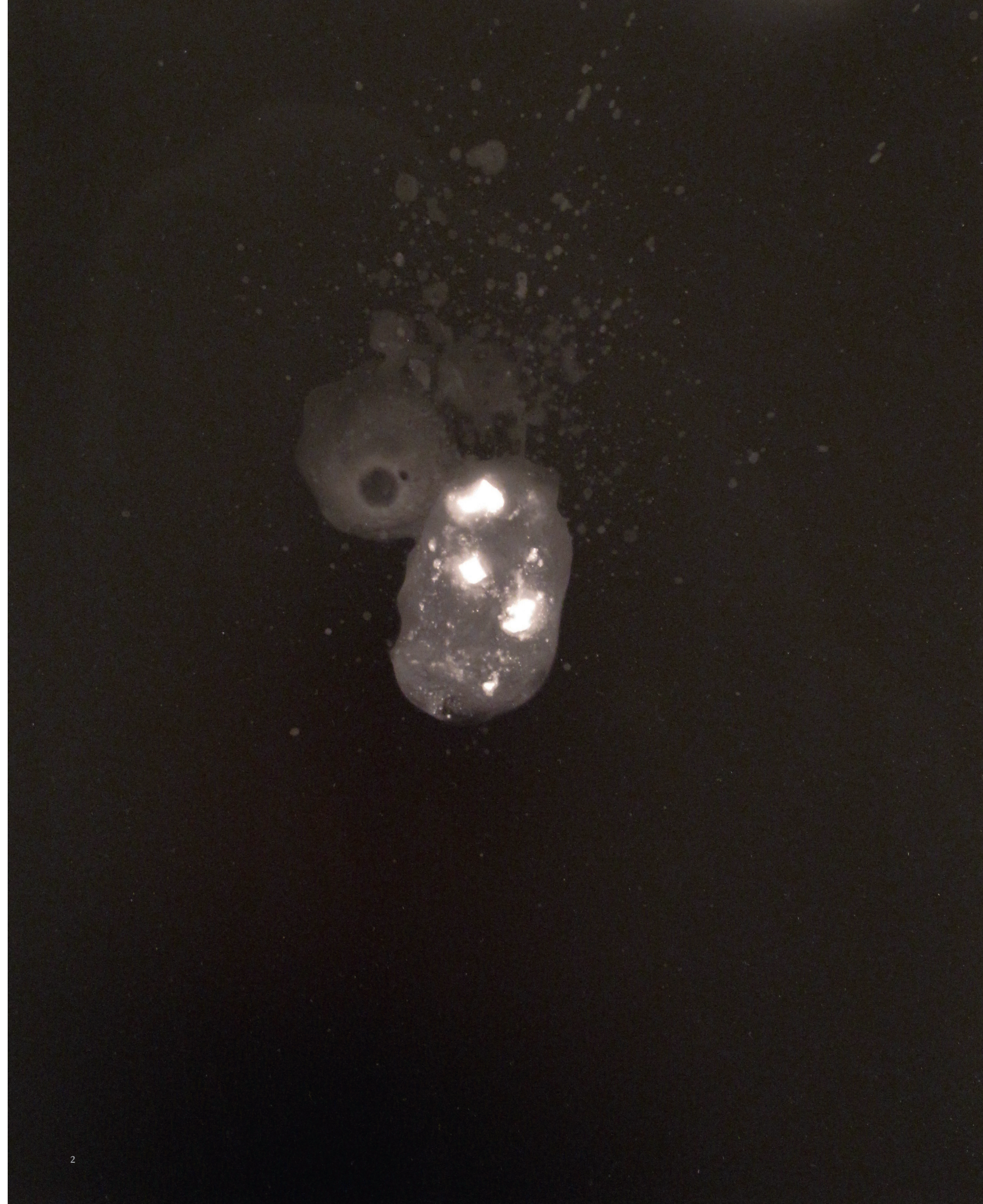
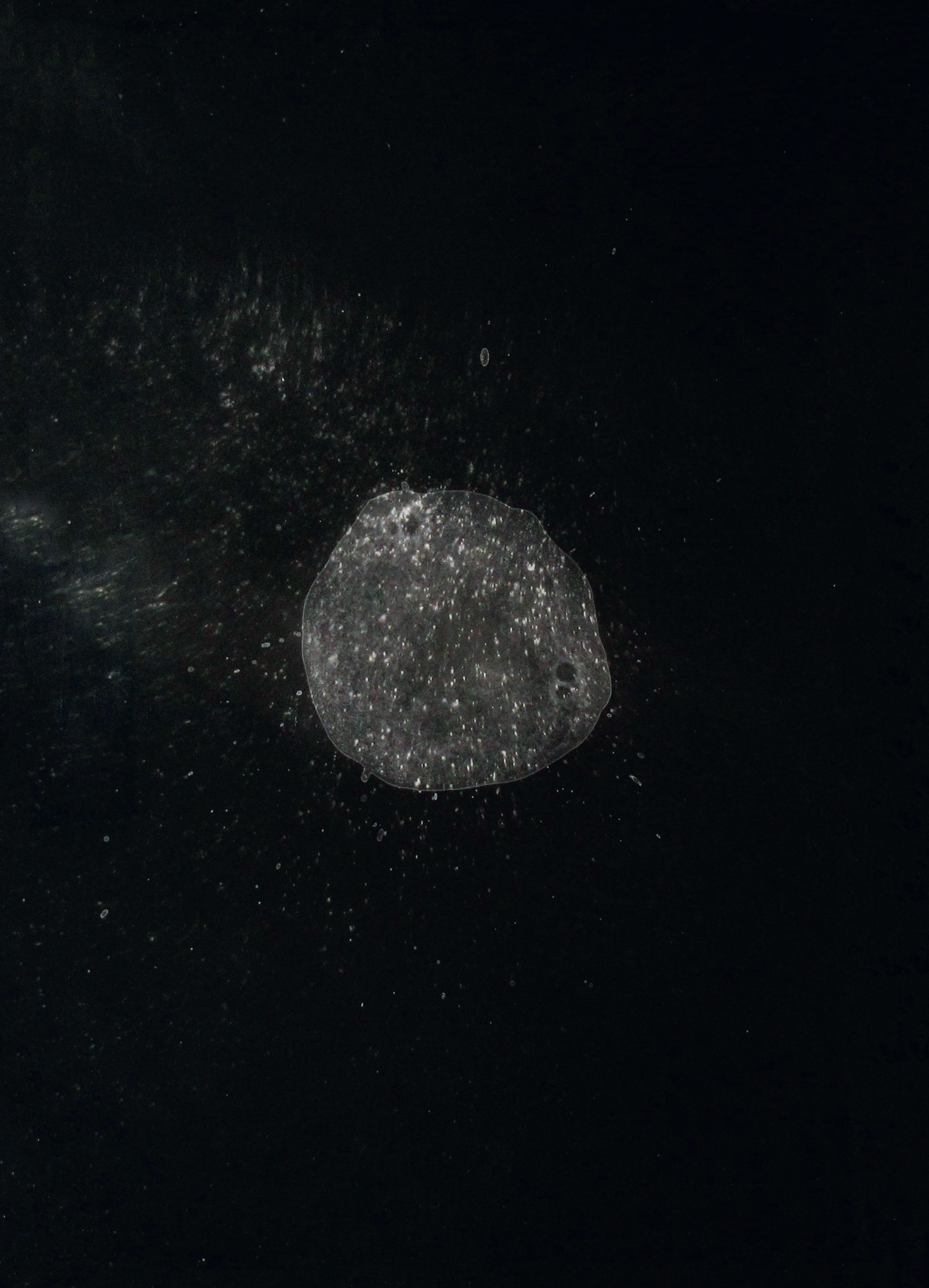
*Expression Self*, 2009  
Acrylic paint, tiles, glass, wood,  
glue, 200 x 80 x 80 cm



*Spill (Pascofeminin)*, 2009  
Photogram, 30 x 24 cm

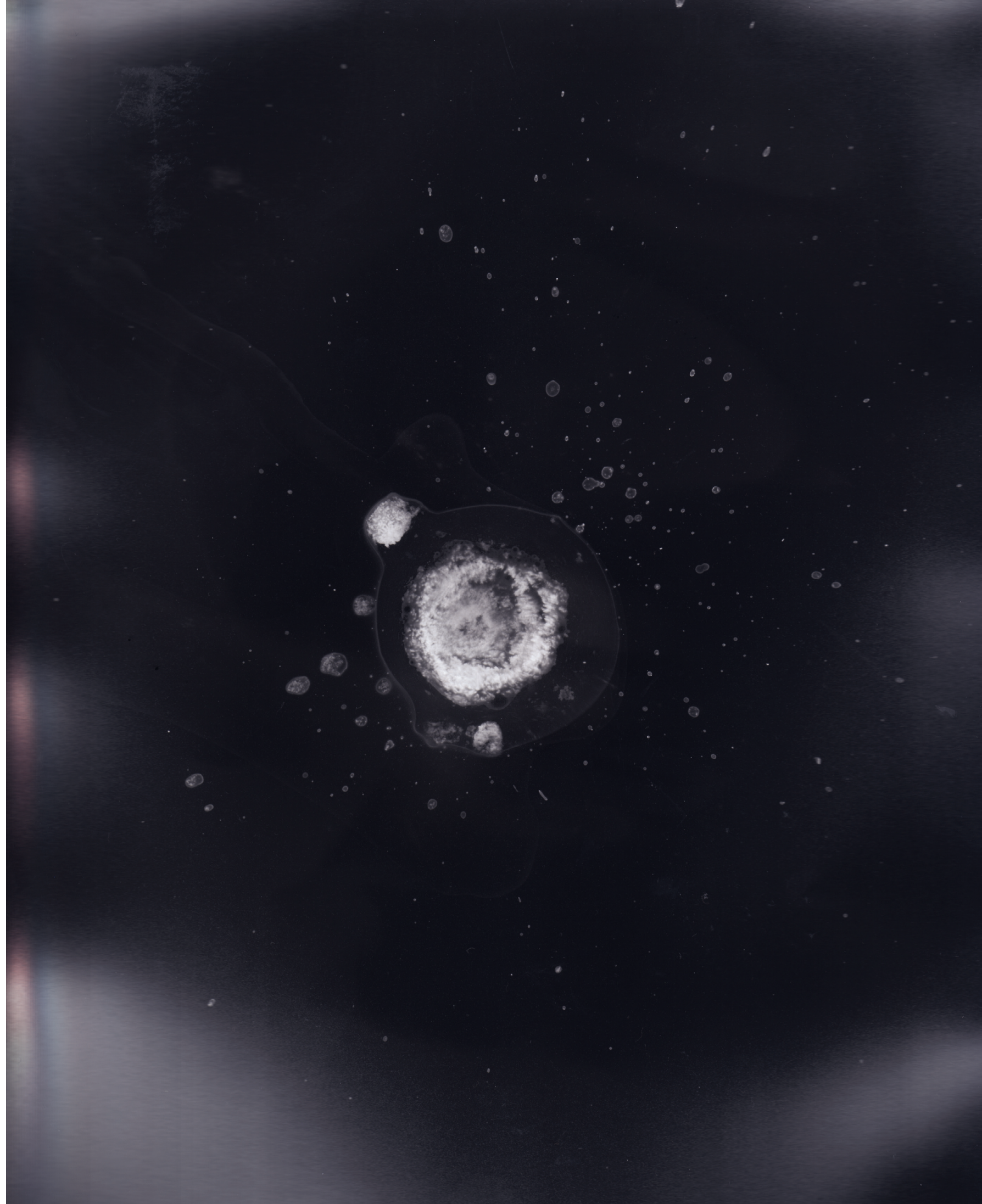








- 1**  
*Spill (Lemocin)*, 2009  
Photogram, 30 x 24 cm
- 2**  
*Spill (Temesta)*, 2009  
Photogram, 30 x 24 cm
- 3**  
*Spill (Zoloft)*, 2009  
Photogram, 30 x 24 cm





*No One*, 2010  
Video animation, loop, no sound,  
dimensions variable









*Death of Yves Klein, 2011*  
Video animation, loop, plasma screen,  
sound, dimensions variable













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Photogram, 30 x 24 cm

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*No One*, 2010  
Video animation, loop, no sound,  
dimensions variable

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*Death of Yves Klein*, 2011  
Video animation, loop, plasma screen, sound,  
dimensions variable



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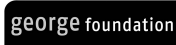
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