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REVIEW JUL 22 - WRITTEN BY EDITORIAL TEAM

Editors' Selects: July 2025

Sympathetic Lightning

Springs Projects | 20 Jay Street, Suite 311B, Brooklyn

June 5 – July 26, 2025



Laden with generative ambiguity, *Sympathetic Lightning*, a group show at Springs Projects featuring works by nine artists, offers a meditation on transformation as a mode of engagement with others and the fraught reality. The curatorial duo, Sarah Davidson and Nirvana Santos-Kuilan, brought together a community of artists from NYC and beyond, whose practices collectively redefine the concept of nature,

recasting it as a sweeping metamorphic force that upends binaries and enables connections between bodies across space and time.

Located by the gallery entrance, Erin Johnson's video *To be Sound is to be Solid* (2022) sketches out the horizon of knowability in the mercurial world of the exhibition. Johnson collapses the methodologies of history and oceanography to navigate the depths of queer memory and affection embedded in a place. The video takes as its subject the modernist home, Surf Point, located on the coast of Maine, now housing a [residency program](#) and formerly a residence of the life partners Mary-Leigh Smart and Beverly Hallam. Shot entirely inside the building, the work interweaves swirling footage of the interior with an oceanographer's account of the challenges in mapping the sea floor, which necessitates sensorial conflation between the senses of hearing and touch. As both memory and scientific investigation ultimately fail at their tasks of reconstructing their domains, the work posits an indeterminable position of queer experience, where imperfect approximations and synesthetic analogies anchor the material history.

Jacq Groves's trio of wall sculptures from the series *Embodied Infrastructure* (2025) greets the visitor from the wall across the door. All three works depict Brooklyn trees engulfing derelict, isolated architectural elements. These intimate urban scenes encased in gnarled ceramic frames capture a moment when built and living environments merge, informing each other's processes of becoming. The nearby installation of found eroded bricks, also by Groves, calls attention to the creative potential of disruptive weather forces. The work subtly invokes a geological timescale, favoring duration and ongoing change over stasis or contained form.

Similarly invested in shifts, Sarah Davidson's painting leaps between micro- and macroscales, weaving together vegetal and zoomorphic shapes caught mid-transformation. The exuberantly dynamic progression of forms, coming in and out of focus in the thicket-like composition of *Crypsis* (2025), visualizes the blurring of boundaries and deep attunement to the surroundings brought about through seeking refuge via camouflage. Sited in a cul-de-sac, Jay Pahre's ongoing *Space Blanket*, an ever-growing fabric of testosterone gel packets used up by the artist, frames survival as a need for continuity of care, projected both backwards and forward in time. In his work, the "sympathetic" from the show's title takes on a more poignant meaning, as in activating the sympathetic nervous system's response of fight or flight. In this light, the exhibition also points to the embodied knowledges of self- and mutual preservation.

— Dominika Tylcz

Arthur Jafa and Mark Leckey: *HARDCORE / LOVE*

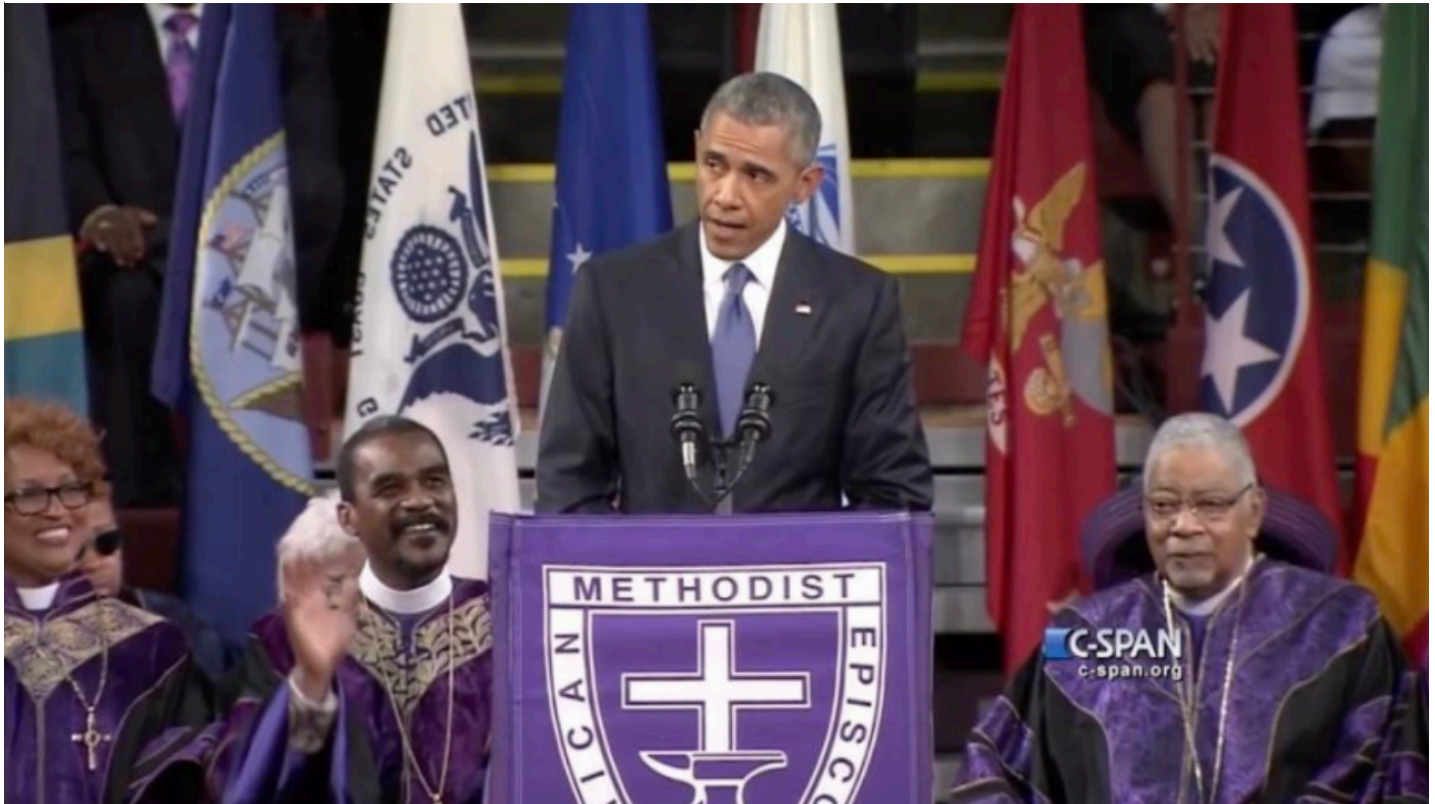
Conditions | Whitgift Centre, Croydon

June 28 – August 10, 2025



Love insists on presence: that of two people, or a community, or a time and place brought thrillingly into the now. Yet, it does so by acknowledging that everything present is doomed to become past. The instant we recognize we love something, we also register the future moment when it will be absent from us. In that sense, every love story carries its own eulogy; it is already a haunting of the loss to come. Intimacy arrives framed by the very distance it tries to abolish. The “ghost” is not simply death; it is the feeling that the present is already an after-image. One escalator down at the Whitgift Centre, just outside London, the ghost of a future collides with Arthur Jafa’s and Mark Leckey’s films.

Years after their first acclaim, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* by Arthur Jafa and *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore* by Mark Leckey take up a fresh setting at Conditions in Croydon, just outside London. Resurrected in the Whitgift Centre—an almost deserted mall—LOVE / HARDCORE gains new hauntological weight. The show makes the persistence of the past almost tangible, summoning futures that never arrived but still shadow the present. Few sites suit this better than a retail carcass whose vacant units testify to the decaying excess of late-twentieth-century consumerism.



Inside a dark former electronics shop, the two films loop like a séance. Jafa cuts a century of Black life to the swell of “Ultralight Beam,” while Leckey condenses three decades of British club footage. The artists call their proximity an “elective affinity,” and the install makes it literal: two voices trading beats across the room. A fifteen-year gap separates Leckey’s grainy VHS transfers from Jafa’s blend of archival and viral clips. Every breakthrough in technological communication has carried rumours of contact with something beyond, and in that spirit, the technical gulf between the films feels significant. Both remind us that we have always used technology to reach across time and space, chasing signals we take as signs.

The opening concluded with a club night at Ormside Projects in South Bermondsey, where Leckey and Jafa took the decks and turned the warehouse into a living extension of their films. The dance floor floated between fantasy and reality, alive and oddly undead. Ending in a club felt inevitable: both works hinge on music’s power to fuse memory and movement, and the night translated that logic into lived experience while revealing its darker edge. The true terror of loving hardcore lies in reaching for what can never be held.

— Pola Pucheta

Youngmin Park: *Holes in the City*

Make Room | Downtown Los Angeles

June 28 – August 9, 2025



Make Room's second location is a lofty high-rise apartment in Downtown LA, its access requiring an appointment and a personal escort from Zachariah Buteux, the gallery's associate director. A sterile entrance and elevator ride is soon replaced by a cozier interior: a studio apartment-turned-gallery space, complete with a kitchen, bathroom, and multicolored velvet floor sofas. An iteration of [Make Room's "In Situ"](#) series, [Youngmin Park's](#) solo exhibition [Holes in the City](#) is in true dialogue with its location. In departure from many of her previous large-scale paintings, the artist activates site specificity in a much more restricted scope than the genre's predecessors, citing its core tenets yet eschewing the sensationalist artmaking gesture.

In her current solo show, Park, who also tends toward figurative work, turns to cityscapes and the understanding of one's place within them. While each piece has its own affective color palette, Park seems not to portray urban landscapes with any

bias; rather, she exposes their potentiality for stillness. This is achieved, in part, by a precise and strategic framing, both in what is allowed to be seen and the physical spatiality of each work. *Hole in the City* (2025) is framed by six-inch-thick raw wood, which focalizes its subject: a bright crimson ceramic fly pinned to the center of a small, grey streetscape sketch. The terrain of *Wavering gaze* (2025) is eclipsed by a face staring directly at the viewer. *City eyes* (2025) foregrounds two traffic lights, the infrastructure of the surrounding city blurred into a serene dusk. Between examining each work, the viewer is confronted with floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook Downtown LA's skyscrapers, parking garages, and warehouses. The muted rush of the city is impossible to overlook; it, too, becomes part of the exhibition, its commotion noticeably silenced.



Park's quasi-three-dimensional works demand closeness—the largest piece is twelve inches across. The viewer is forced to lean in to discover a painstaking ode to material and detail: the enamel-coated ceramic fly of *Hole in the City*, the carved-out holes of *Rest* (2025), which reveal painting underneath, the sliver of vellum between paper and sage linen matting seen in *Wavering gaze* and *Looking inside the buttonhole* (2025). Some works, such as *Wavering eyes* (2025), are modular, consisting of two discrete parts which slot into each other and can be rearranged with other works. To demonstrate, Buteux took its composite pieces apart—a tactile action that felt private, physical, alive. There is an intimacy found in experiencing Park's works within

their given space, one that remains scarce and elusive in traditional white cube settings.

What Park achieves is a moment of interiority and grounding amidst the depersonalization of urban landscapes. She does not seek to conquer or essentialize the city's space; she looks outward only to look inward. In works that seem to exclude human presence, Park quietly asserts herself through the carved depressions of a pigeon's eyes, through minuscule buttonholes, through an apprehensive stare half-obscured by a fly. Our gaze is mediated by the relegated and overlooked—pigeons, flies, industrial buildings, mundane infrastructure—through which Park grants us a place of stillness and freedom. Her work requires an embodied attention, for which the viewer is rewarded with a soft yet restless glimpse into the artist's reckoning of her place within her lived environment.

— Jubilee Park

REPORT FROM NORI MOUNTAIN

S M I L E R S | 431 6th St #B, New York

May 29 – July 26, 2025



For their recently extended third exhibition, **S M I L E R S** outfits their East Village residential building basement space into the bedroom of your brother's odd friend from high school, creating an ecstatic feel and comfort in the mutual weirdness of others. It's titled after a 1967 satirical report-style essay recommending the United States maintain a permanent state of war, *Report from Iron Mountain: On the Possibility and Desirability of Peace*, which is regarded as one of the most successful literary hoaxes, as many at the time thought the report was a real leaked government report. This group exhibition takes the current political state of misinformation and mutual paranoia and flips it into something zany and joyous: a modern take on classic science fiction themes and the very real and scary political tensions that lie beneath them.

Upon entering the space, to the right is a sci-fi reading room with old and sometimes annotated editions of Ursula Le Guin, Isaac Asimov, and the likes to comb through to condition visitors to the semi-clandestine basement atmosphere. After the reading room, which one could spend hours in on its own, comes the main exhibition, where multimedia works are displayed on a simple wooden table, reading a bit like a reject science fair for the kids who got a little too creative: a cast of an alien head with

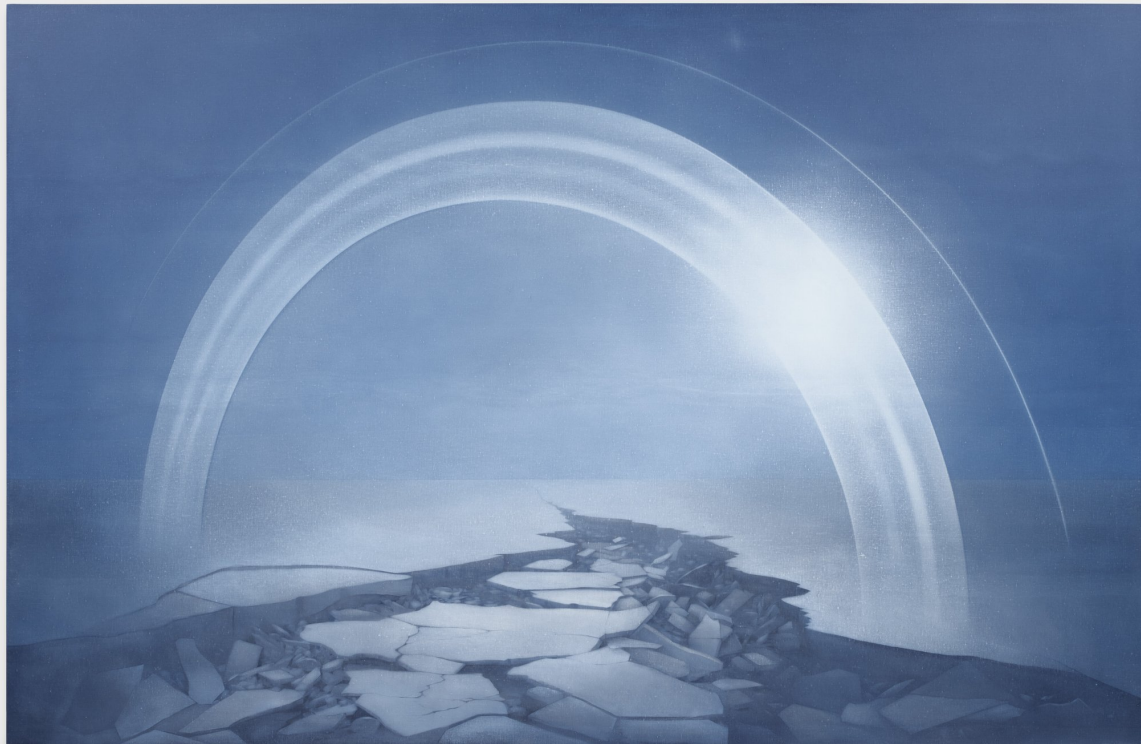
hands in the mouth (unclear if they are sprouting out or going in), a globe with an blinking red light installed which casts an ominous color over certain states and countries, a mysterious stack of boxes in the corner neatly labelled so that its owner may not confuse the untied clown shoes from the alien feti, and an installation in the bathroom, since everyone goes there anyways, of moths posed and surrounded by candles, as if in sinister insectoid ritual. But there's comfort in the insanity—this show is like a dazzling moment of solace and the shining light every little freakshow needed in high school. So step down, down, deeper, into the chasms of an East Village basement, for untold terrors and delights are always to be found in such a place.

— Zara Roy

Theodora Allen: *Oak*

Kasmin | 297 Tenth Avenue, New York

May 27 – July 25



For much of recent history, the relation between life and art has implicitly centered human life, separating a singularly constructed experience of the world from the cyclical rhythms of our collective environment. In *Oak*, Theodora Allen's third solo exhibition with Kasmin, the artist illustrates the feedback loop that exists between nature and culture, taking up life at large as her object of study.

Allen's highlights are typically polished back rather than applied: a technique that, in this show, generates a particularly revelatory effect. The exposure of a fundamental layer of underpainting imbues *Locust* (2024) with a profound inner light reminiscent of William Blake's sight and spirit; in the commercial sphere, this manifests its own tonal resonance in the work's pale brushed-gold frame. Locusts can be bringers of plague or icons of renewal; their meaning is less important than their being-there. All symbols run the risk of being deracinated from the contexts in which they were assigned. No period of time is eternal, only the fact of its passage.

Per her conceptual understanding of cycles, Allen paints in the vein of referents both old and new. *The Rising Up* series (2024–25) suggests Pieter Saenredam's austere Protestant interiors, in which the church becomes a kind of neutral sacred landscape, similarly seducing and estranging the viewer through subtle manipulations of space juxtaposed against perfect scientific perspective. Seeming technical contradictions jostle these works into a mysterious metaphysical realm by merging the human eye with then-contemporary conditions of technological viscosity. In this series, Allen veins her marble by allowing watercolors to pool organically, to varying degrees of realistic "success;" plants that emerge from cracks in the stone are scoured out in negative silhouette. Since these processes take place on the material plane of the painting, they complicate what would otherwise be a more straightforward—less interesting—exercise in *trompe l'oeil*.

Despite its timelessness, it is impossible not to view *Oak* outside of our contemporary conditions. On a screen or even at a distance, these paintings appear slick and simply photorealistic. Up close and in person, they exhibit a lossy quality—stutters where Allen erodes, at their highest points, the oils layered over the inherent weave of the linen—that more closely evokes the grainy, starry sparkle of 1980s fantasy movies. Technology is optically transformative: like systems of meaning, it has evolved alongside us, defining periods of time, shaping and coloring the lens through which we see the world.

The largest painting, *The Divide* (2025), represents a fantastic hypothetical landscape: a crack in the ambiguous ground accelerates into the distance under the architectural arch of a desaturated, blown-out rainbow. It is also an unconditional landscape. Though we stand where the rupture originates or ends, it has very little to do with us. Besides its deliberate quirks in application—which, here, establish a distant, cosmic incandescence—there are no traces of presence. *The Divide* goes farther in this direction than the other works, which evince a human hand through stylized locusts and wheat, ruins engraved with recognizable emblems. Witness can produce or reproduce a scene—even render it separately, uniquely beautiful—but Allen reminds us

that the privileges of sight and experience are only temporary. The world continues on regardless; after all, life finds a way.

— Matilda Lin Berke

Choichun Leung: *The Young Girl*

RUBY/DAKOTA | 155 E 2nd Street, New York

July 10 – August 9, 2025



Choichun Leung's solo show *The Young Girl* at [RUBY/DAKOTA](#) is raw, direct, unapologetic, and, most of all, inspiring.

This series on view has been ongoing since 2012. A Wales-born Brooklyn-based artist, Leung has a practice ranging from animation to silversmithing, but this is a deeply personal part of her life that is beyond the trappings of a career. In content, it is a treatise on the violence of sexual abuse inflicted on children. Visually, it is an epic: a

conflict between the innocent and those who would exploit them. It is an autobiographical “healing journey,” as well as a call to action.

The press release describes the works to be “seething with founded rage at a childhood and life lost,” and while that is true, there is an incredible maturity and clarity that the word “rage,” in its implications of immediacy and irrationality, does not adequately account for.

Leung’s drawings of young children—mostly girls—embody the disturbing truth of their youth, and not for a second should the audience forget that these naked bodies belong to children. Their exposure to the public’s eyes has been necessitated by the apparent inaction in the face of the perversions they have had to endure. Inaction that they themselves viciously and triumphantly rectify: vengeful liberation for stripped innocence. A large body of these images is thus depictions of children attacking and killing, as one will intuit, their aggressor.

The man who violated Leung as a child is dead. Images of the stabbing, beheading, or tearing apart of the predator then contextualize the breadth of the responsibility she has taken on. Figures of shadowy horned demons with huge mouths and no eyes are confronted with the wrath of young girls. In one of her drawings, a battle-scarred girl holds a beheaded aggressor and tells a group of young girls in a protective manner: “IT’S OK YOU’RE SAFE NOW.”

Leung’s [The Young Girl Project](#) has now developed into a social awareness program that inspires, empowers, and protects children against sexual abuse. It advocates for safer social structures for children, survivors, and protectors through drawings, paintings, films, books, activism, and collaborations.

— Abbas A. Malakar

Bayan Kiwan: *heat press fold bend*

Brief Histories | 115 Bowery, New York

June 14 – July 19, 2025



Rather than enter a scene, you enter a fold. Rather than a gallery, you hang out in a hold. And, as you wander amongst the bent clay portraits and oil-pressed bodies, faces come into focus momentarily and then blur into the surround. In *heat press fold bend*, Palestinian artist [Bayan Kiwan](#) refuses the conventions of legibility in visual art, particularly in portraiture. From the scenes depicted in a large-scale oil painting to a series of individual portraits on ceramic “folds,” we never encounter clear subjects. Kiwan offers no complete narratives and no invitation to consume what is before us. Because the gaze reproduces a visual economy of violence and exposure, Kiwan asks us to look otherwise.

The work offers us what Édouard Glissant might call a move to *opacity* [1]: faces turning away, bodies obscuring other bodies, forms collapsed into different forms, and gestures folded into the very material that carries them. Across canvas and clay, Kiwan asks us not to look at the subjects of her work but to feel their presence through a textured interiority of felt pressure, one that holds and withholds. In this sense, the show is less a representation of grief for spectators to ogle and more an act of intimacy, of kinship, and of emotional labor to dance with.

And if you do dance with it, you realize the promise of Kiwan's work: an intersubjective mode of viewing that implicates viewers, complicates viewership, and gathers people in a practice of viewing differently. What unfolds as the viewer moves around the works is the methodology of the fold. To view these dense interiors is to traverse the boundaries that separate the viewer and the work, and, as in navigating topographies of care and exhaustion, kinship and distance, and interiority and connection, the viewer performs a movement that reproduces the practice of folding, unfolding, and enfolding—the very labor these works required to create.

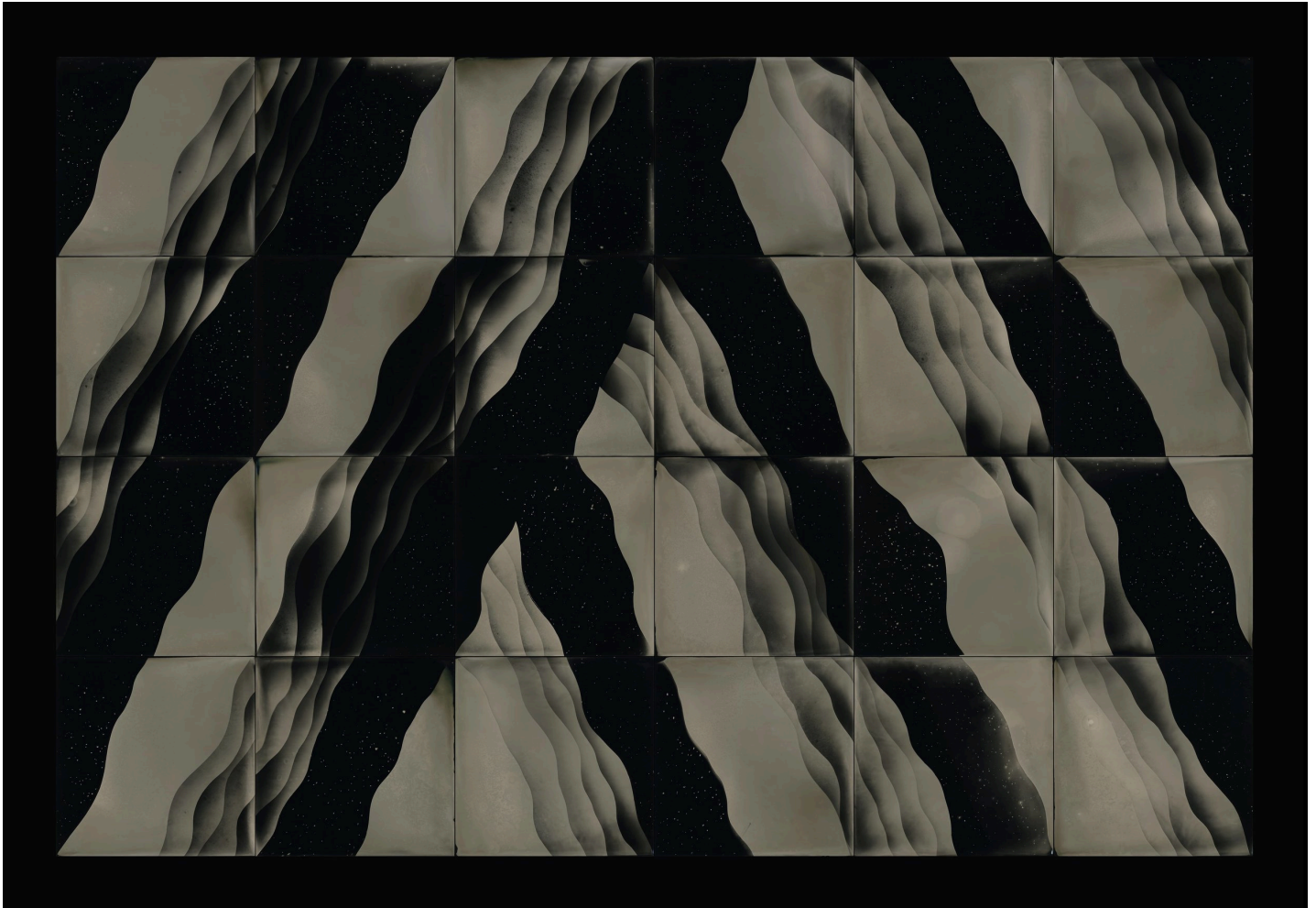
Heat press fold bend becomes a choreography of relations for intimate viewership that takes place in the interaction between bodies and materials—between flesh, canvas, oil, and clay—animating an alternate ethics of being-with. From this choreography emerges an aesthetic resistance to the politics of seeing from a distance, and in this way, Kiwan refuses detached individuation, offering instead a sensuous politics of mutual obligation. We are asked to consider what it means to register presence not through clarity but through opacity, not through visibility but through feeling. At a time when Palestinian life is subjected to relentless violence and visibility, and our screens are saturated with images of devastation, Kiwan calls us to look elsewhere, away from scenes of brutality, to glimpse what alternate possibilities for relating to each other might yet unfold.

— Joey Mauro

Katja Liebmman and Nadezda Nikolova: *Landscape and Alchemy*

HackelBury Fine Art | 4 Launceston Place, London W8 5RL

July 17 – September 27, 2025



How do we find our place in this world? For the artists [Katja Liebmann](#) and [Nadezda Nikolova](#), this has something to do with the locus of our relationship to the environment (built and natural), and how this develops through observation, memory, and the physical act of creativity. Their exhibition, [Landscape and Alchemy](#) at Hackelbury Fine Art, London, pairs a selection of experimental, analogue works that explore the genre of landscape. Both working with historical photographic techniques that tend towards the monochrome—Liebmann’s watery blue cyanotypes and Nikolova’s dusky-toned wet collodion—their work can be seen as a meditation on place and psychic space. In an era defined by the digital image, their artistic practice can be seen as an act of freedom, one that has the potential to renew our connection to the living world.

As the exhibition’s title suggests, their conversation centres on the transformative power of analogue photography, and how the physical production of an image is shaped by and revealing of the individual. Liebmann describes her searching, romantic cyanotypes made from archival negatives as “etchings of time.” Nikolova’s minimalist, abstract landscapes emerge from wet collodion and environmental chance. Whilst Liebmann’s trajectory seems to be towards a lucent waterfall of transcendent moments, briefly held in the soft, inky hue of cyanotype, by contrast, Nikolova’s images express the persistence of form, and our fundamental orientation towards the light.

For Liebmann, the medium of photography gave her the “freedom” to explore the unknown; her journeys characterised by exploration and experimentation of photographic techniques (she once brought two “camera” suitcases with pinholes to New York). In conversation with Diane Smyth, editor of *British Journal of Photography*, she described the camera as a “friend” on the many buses she took through cities, beginning with Berlin after the wall came down. Early, elongated works made in a once-divided city also chart the development of the artist. The freedom to move beyond previously fixed geographical borders is reflected in her experimental, painterly approach to the medium. Through this process, Liebmann also found the confidence to express a new romanticism: works like *Winter Journey I (after Franz Schubert's Winterreise)* (2010) remind us of landscapes glimpsed from inside a moving car and elicit a kind of dreaming.

A photograph only exists because of light in that moment—like a slice out of time. It can take us back in time, but not forever; like memory, the image is fugitive and will eventually fade. How does one reconcile what we remember with what we find? For Nikolova, this aspect of photography led her into the woods of conservation and ecology. Displaced by the wars in former Yugoslavia, she found a sense of place and belonging through her artistic practice. When she returned “home,” 30 years later, there was a reckoning; working with analogue photographic techniques, perhaps there was an opportunity for recovery, not of the past but of the self. Her minimal exposures draw quietly on archetypes, and capture something universal, transcendent even. As I look, I have the fleeting impression of seeing something final—my eyes closing around the last sliver of light. A moving and thoughtfully curated show, my exposure to Liebmann and Nikolova's work is a reminder that finding our connection to this world is an ongoing journey.

— Nico Kos Earle

[1] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 189.

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