FREEFALL
LIZ RIDEAL

FREEFALL

LIZ RIDEAL

... a leap to freedom,
And the other side of the earth — a free-fall
To strip my chrysalis off me in the slipstream.

Ted Hughes, *Visit*

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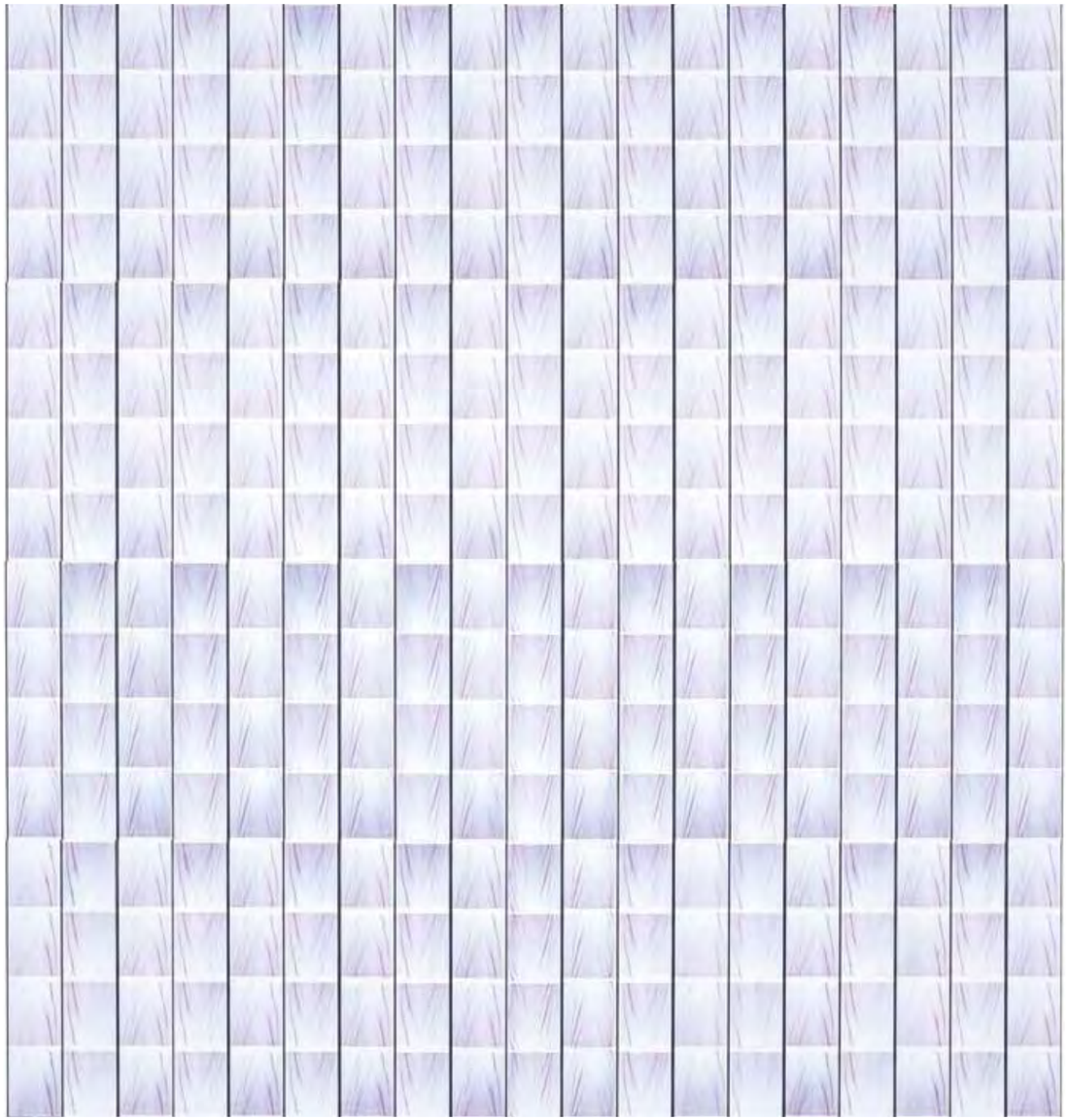
Front cover image:
FREEFALL ST.PAUL'S (check), 2013, digital print

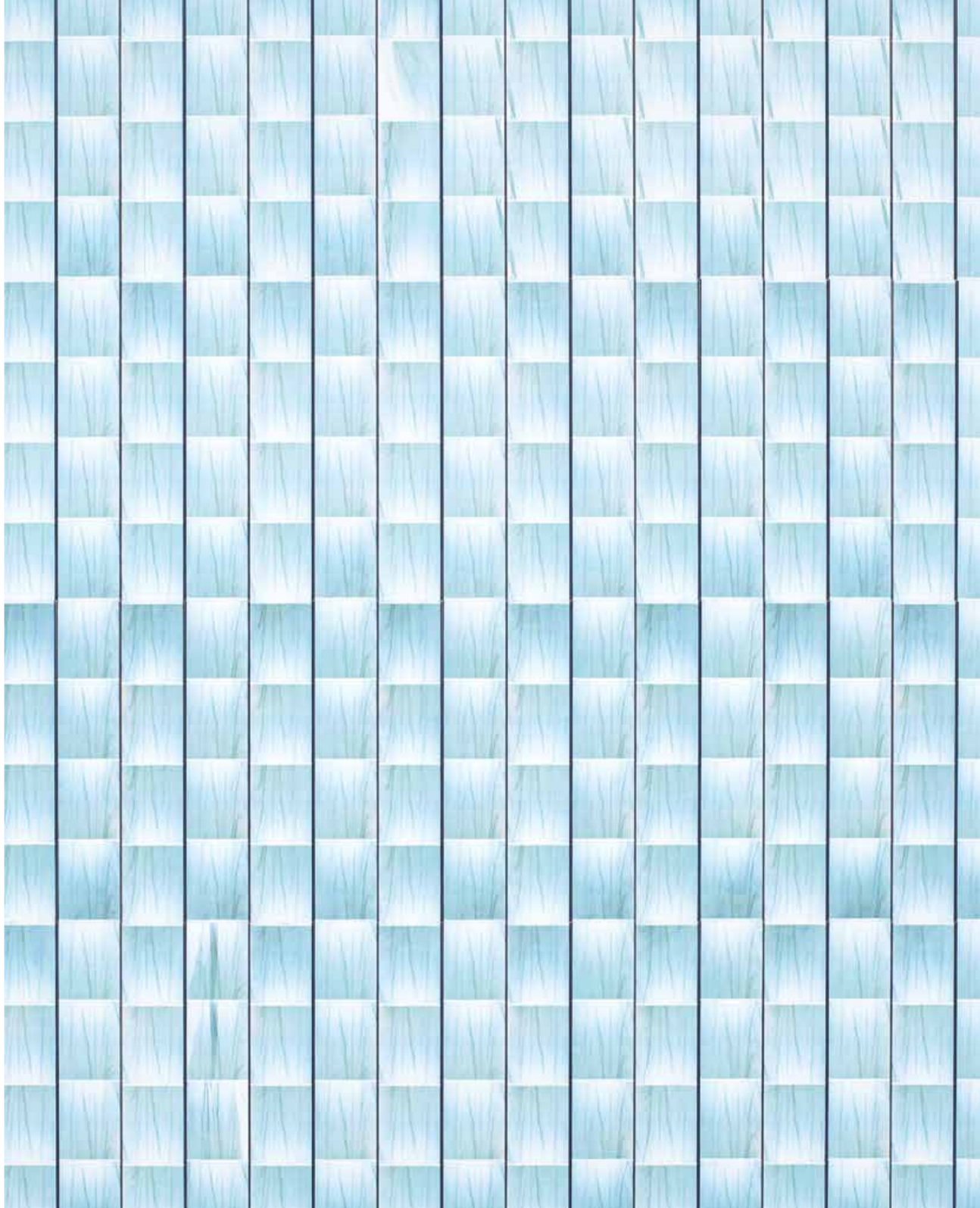
PHOTO-BOOTH COLLAGES

The face that we would expect to find in a photo-booth portrait has slipped out of the picture, and the camera flash captures instead the normally incidental details of a backdrop. Except here those details take on an elusive, even expressive, life of their own. The more elaborate twists and contortions invoke 'drapery' rather than just cloth; that is, one of those overlooked aspects of painting to which an odd sort of anxiety has often been attached.

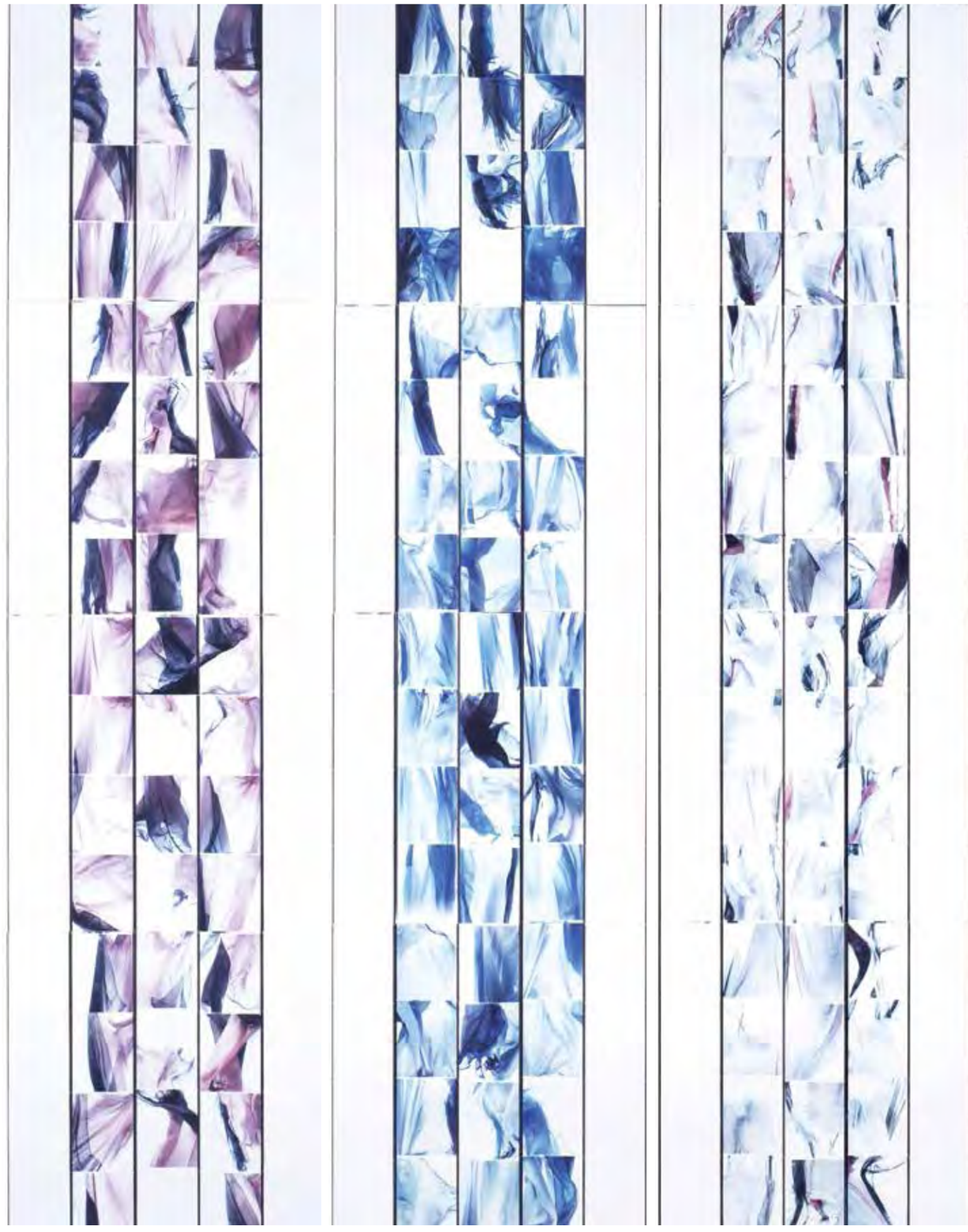
Briony Fer, *The Pleasure of Cloth*

BALLET DE PANTIN: DESOLÉ (II), 2005, photo-booth collage on museum board, 20x20cm (8x8in)
BALLET DE PANTIN: RIRE (II), 2005, photo-booth collage on museum board, 20x20cm (8x8in)

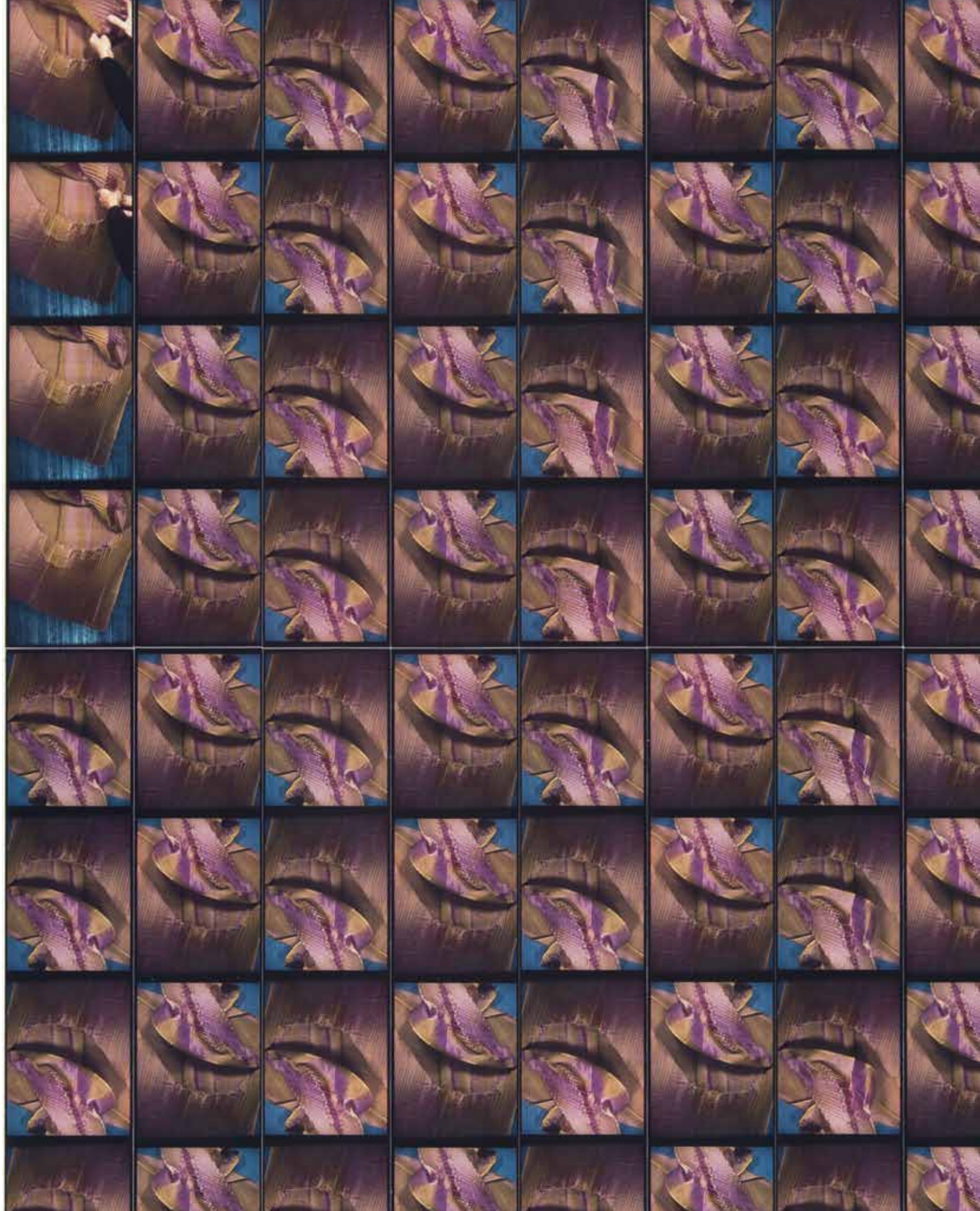




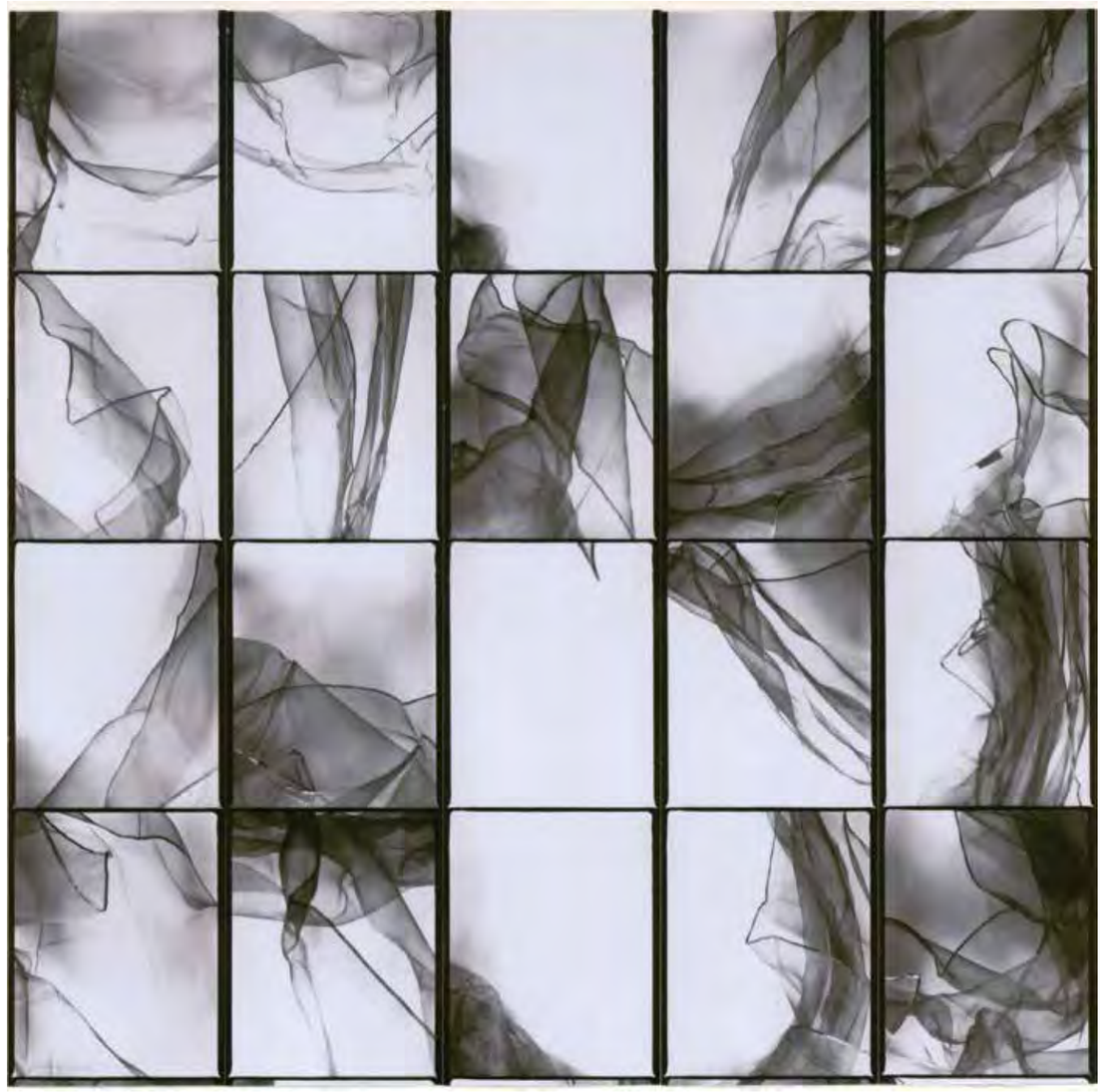
MAUVE MONO, WHISTLERIAN, 2005, photo-booth collage on museum board, 80x76cm (31.5x30in)
AQUA MONO, WHISTLERIAN (detail), 2005, photo-booth collage on museum board, 80x76cm (31.5x30in)



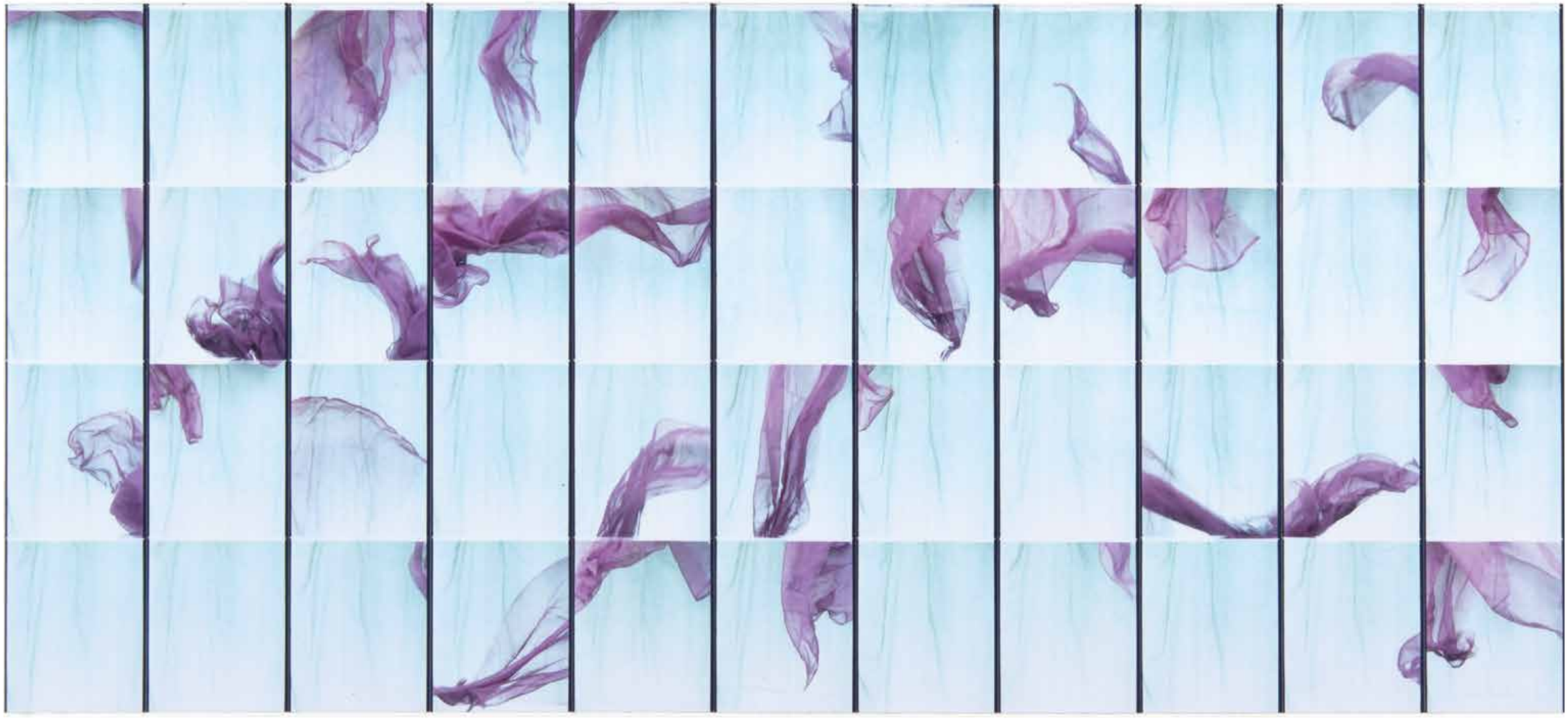
14 PANTINS DE SOIE, VERTIGO FALLS (I-VI), 2006, photo-booth collage on museum board, each 80x20cm (31.5x8in)



EMBRACE I-IV (IV), 2006, photo-booth collage on museum board, 20x20cm (approx 8x8in)
BLINK (detail), 2006, photo-booth collage on museum board, 40x44cm (15.75x17.25in)



BLACK VEIL CONTINUES, diptych, 2004, enlarged photo-booth strips on Ilford Pearl on panel, 76x76cm (30x30in)



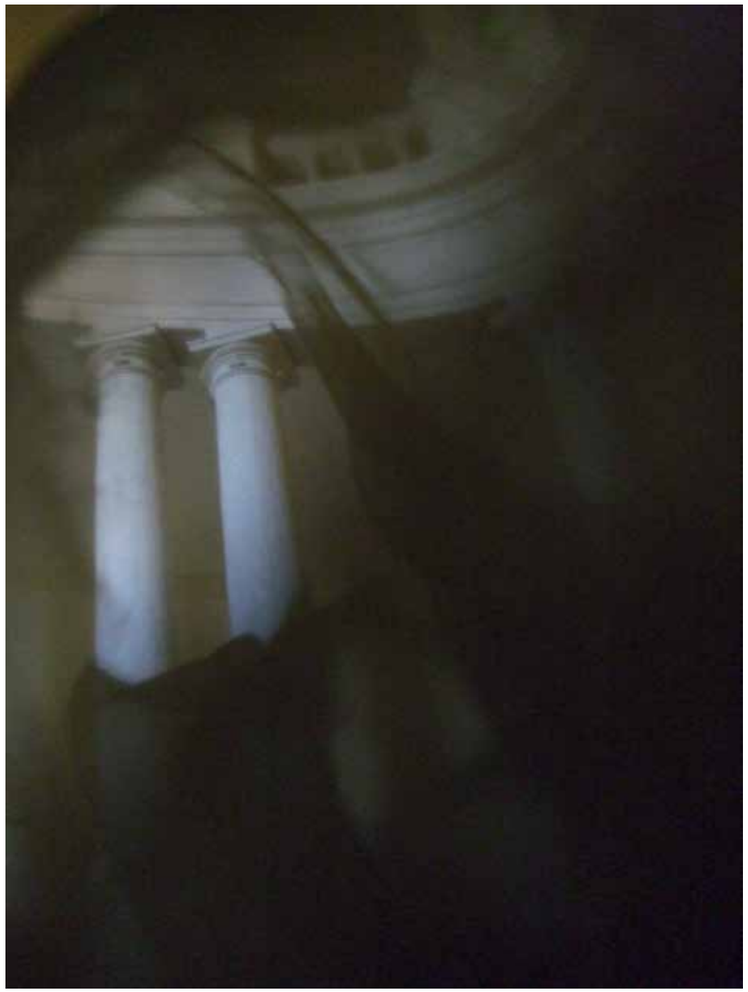
FEBRILE ARC, 2006, photo-booth collage on museum board, 20x44cm (8x17.5in)

DANCING WITH BORROMINI

DANZANDO CON BORROMINI

The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity. It is not only because the fold affects all materials that it thus becomes expressive matter, with different scales, speeds and different vectors (mountains and waters, papers, fabrics, living tissues, the brain), but especially because it determines and materializes Form.

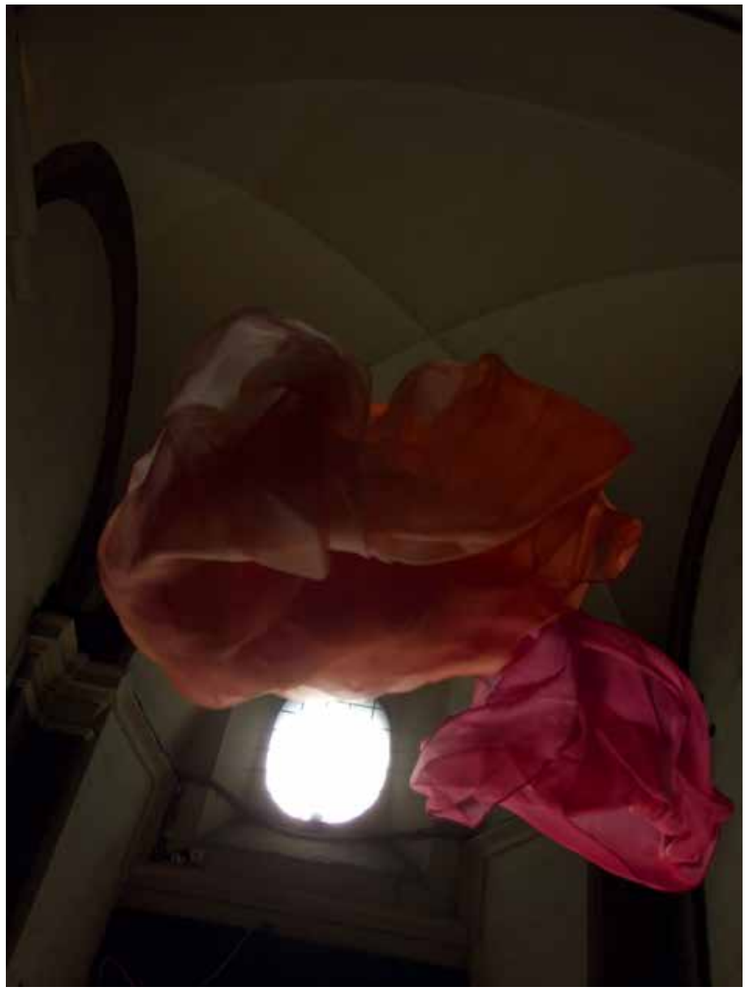
Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold, Leibniz and the Baroque*



PALAZZO CARPEGNA (entrance), 2009
PALAZZO BARBERINI (dark staircase), 2010

PALAZZO BARBERINI (double cornucopia), 2009
ORATORIO DEI FILIPPINI (light spectre), 2008

PALAZZO SPADA (ghost), 2008



ORATORIO DEI FILIPPINI (firework), 2008
ORATORIO DEI FILIPPINI (kite), 2008

PALAZZO BARBERINI (sala ovale), 2010
BIBLIOTECA VALLICELLIANA (purple swirl), 2010

p.36-37
ST.IVO (blue lantern), 2010
ST.IVO (yellow lantern), 2010

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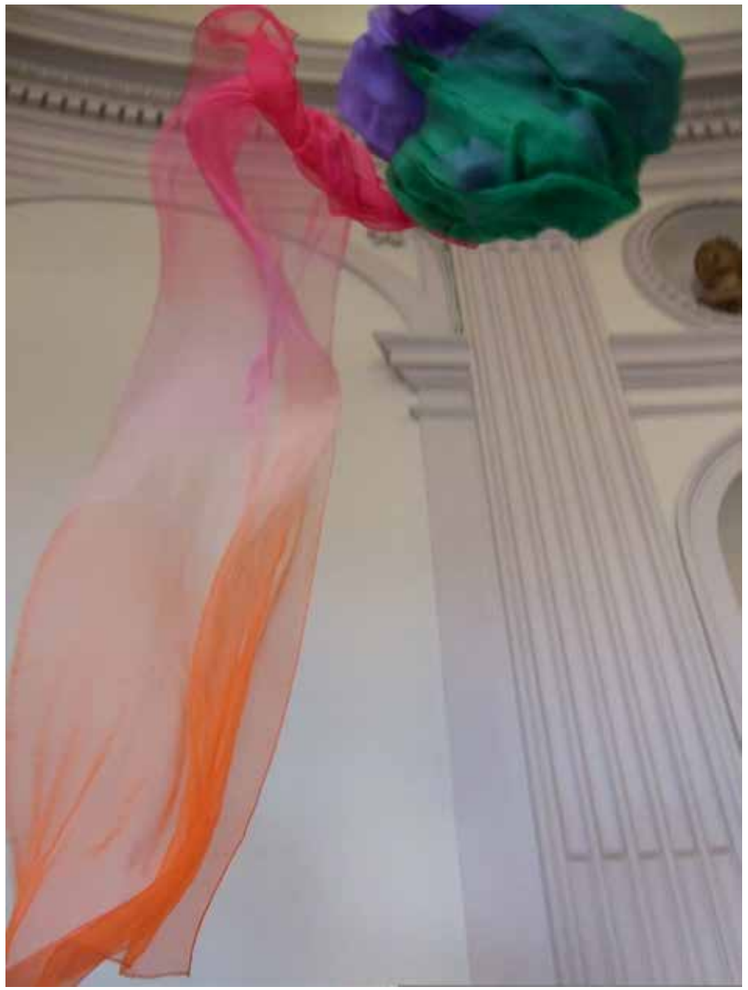
ORATORIO DEI FILIPPINI (corridor jump), 2009
ORATORIO DEI FILIPPINI (corridor jive), 2009
SAN CARLINO (cloisters), 2009



PALAZZO BARBERINI (sala ovale, horse), 2010
PALAZZO BARBERINI (sala ovale, snake), 2010

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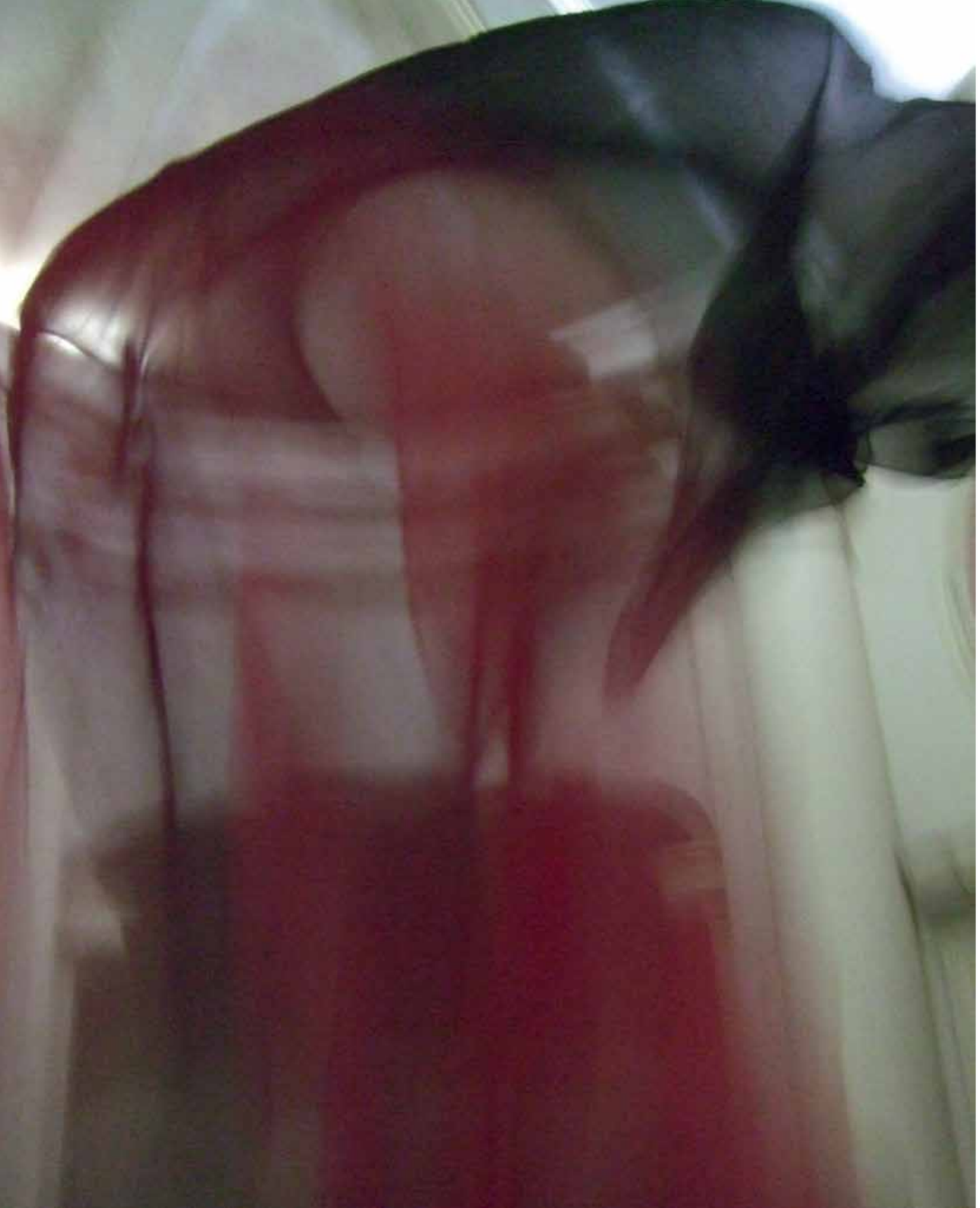
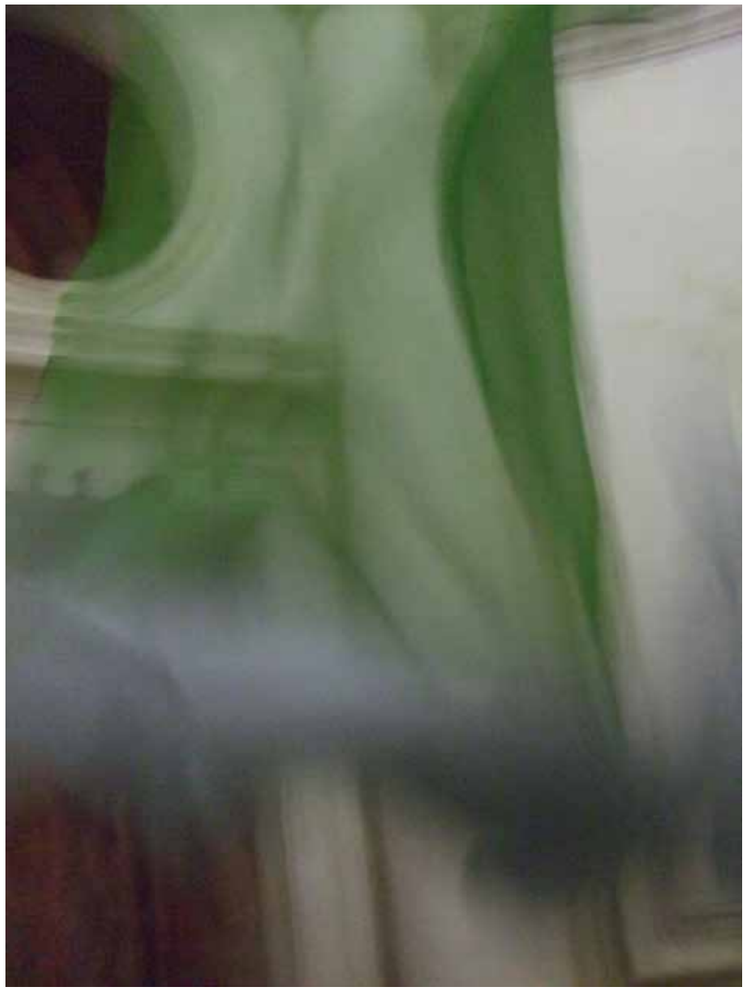
SAN CARLINO (yellow cloister), 2011
SAN CARLINO (mathematics), 2011
PALAZZO SPADA (pink puff), 2008





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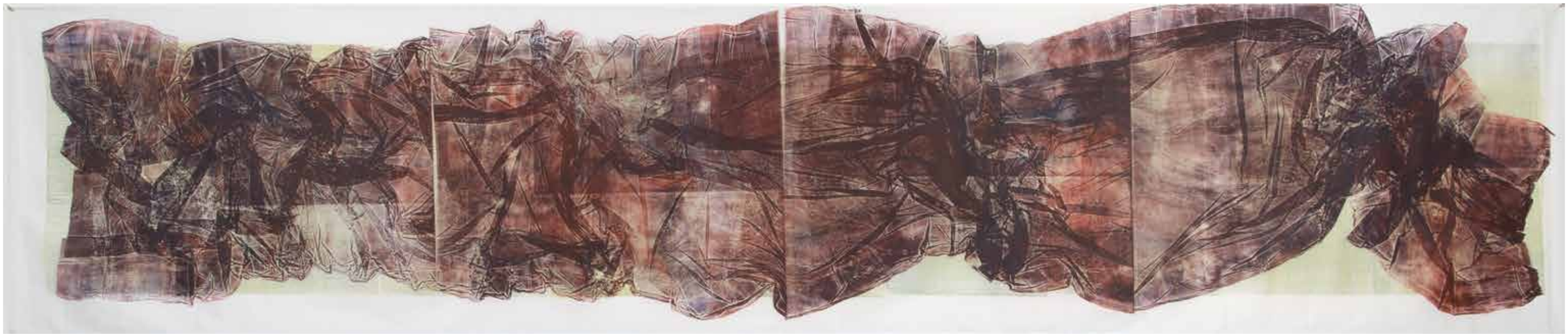
FALCONIERI CRYPT (living dead) III & IV, 2011
FALCONIERI CRYPT (living dead) V & VI, 2011

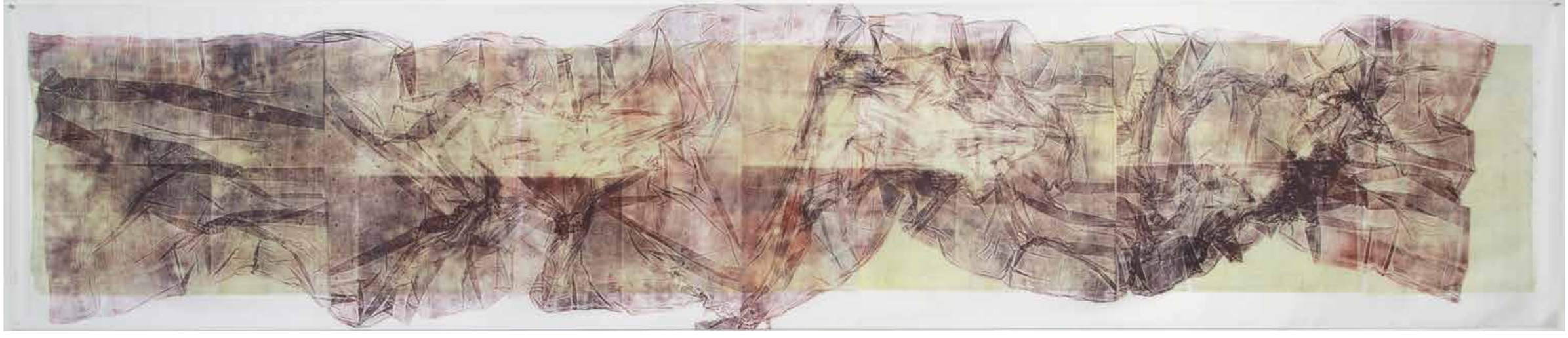
CAMERA-LESS PRINTS

Cloth takes on a life of its own. It exhibits extravagant shapes and behaviours that cannot possibly be justified by gravity or air currents or the wearer's motion.
It flies in the face of reality, and becomes a realm of exuberant hyperbole... it's an opportunity for pure painting, for fields of patterning, cascades of variegated texture, rushes of energy, passages of near chaos.

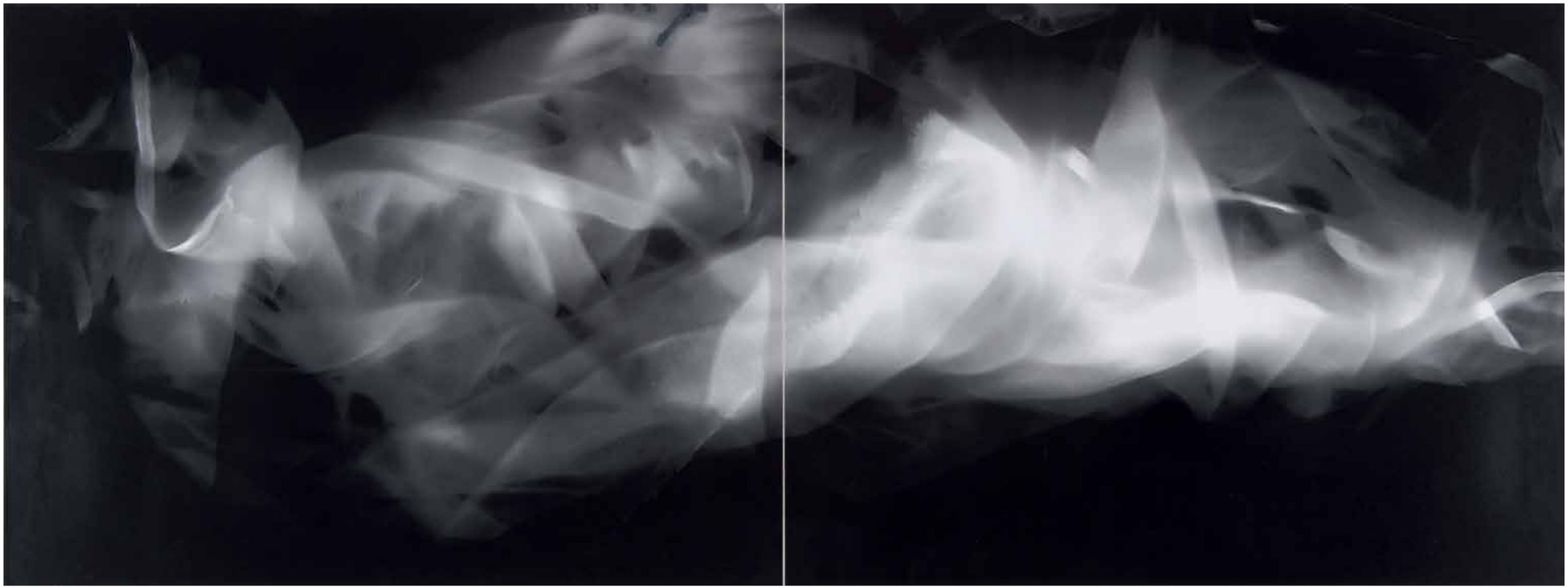
Tom Lubbock, *Fabric of Vision*

ETHER GHOST (I-IV), 2013, photograms on silk, liquid light, 89x144cm (35x55in)

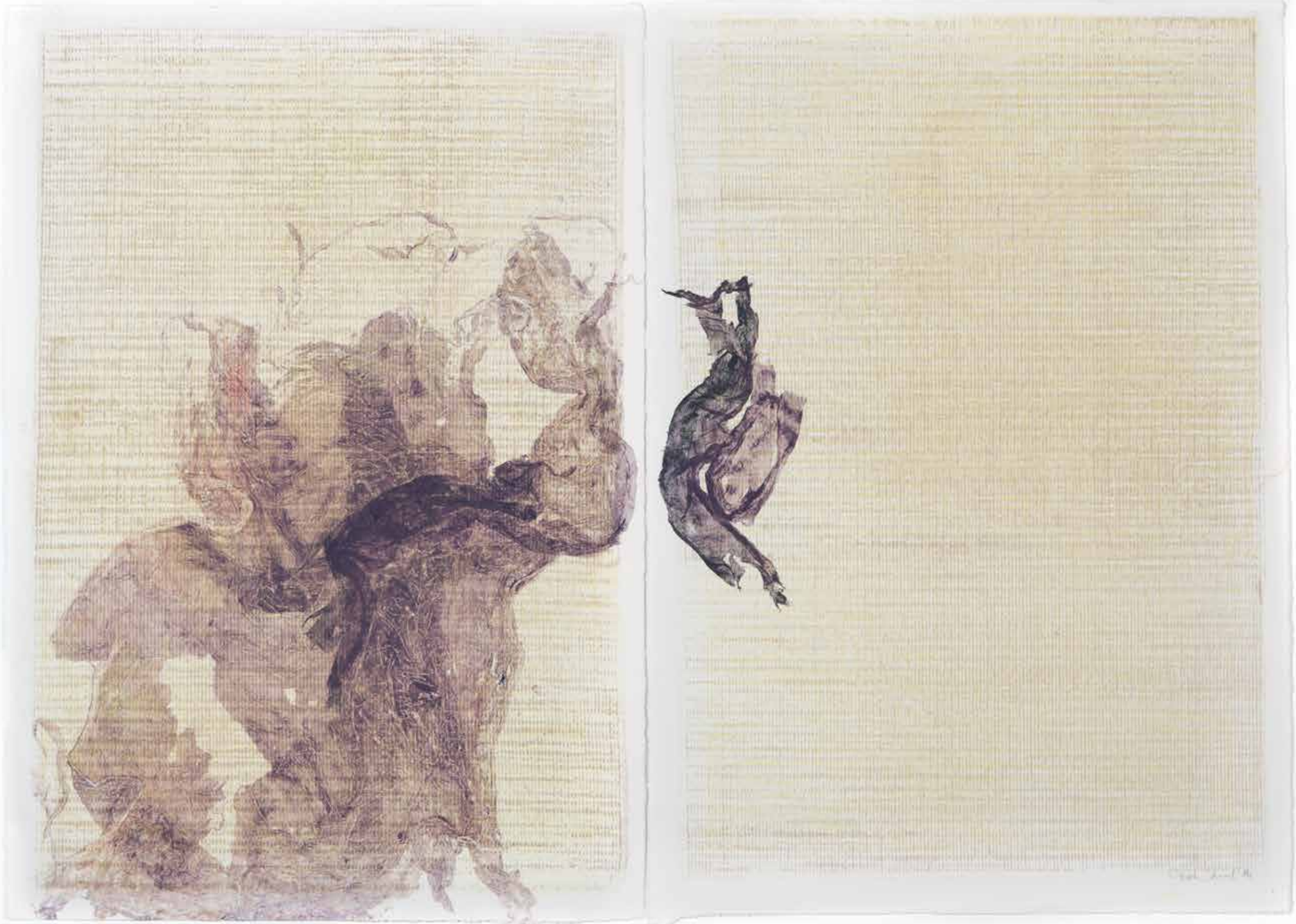




GHOST SARI (I & II), 2001, monotype on Japanese paper, 100x450cm (40x177in)



CORPSE, 2012, photogram on Ilford Pearl paper, 30.5x81cm (12x32in)



62 LIFT, 2001, monotype diptych on Japanese paper, 76x53cm (30x21in) x2

PROJECTIONS & ARCHITECTURAL WORK

... the sky has found a veil of green. The aurora borealis.
It drifts above us, gossamer and grassy. The hiss
in the air changes to a whisper, and the veil starts
shifting colour—yellow, red, green.... We are beneath an
umbrella of light, like the explosion of skyrockets at the
fairground.
There are curls of colour like rivers of molten lava, and
monstrous verticle rays sifted through with a sandstorm
of colour; colour that ripples and undulates and whistles
loudly at us....
The colours fade, and the veils are drawn away,
as if by a magician, pulling pale silk scarves through a
narrow ring... the sky is empty except for the usual stars,
cold and distant.

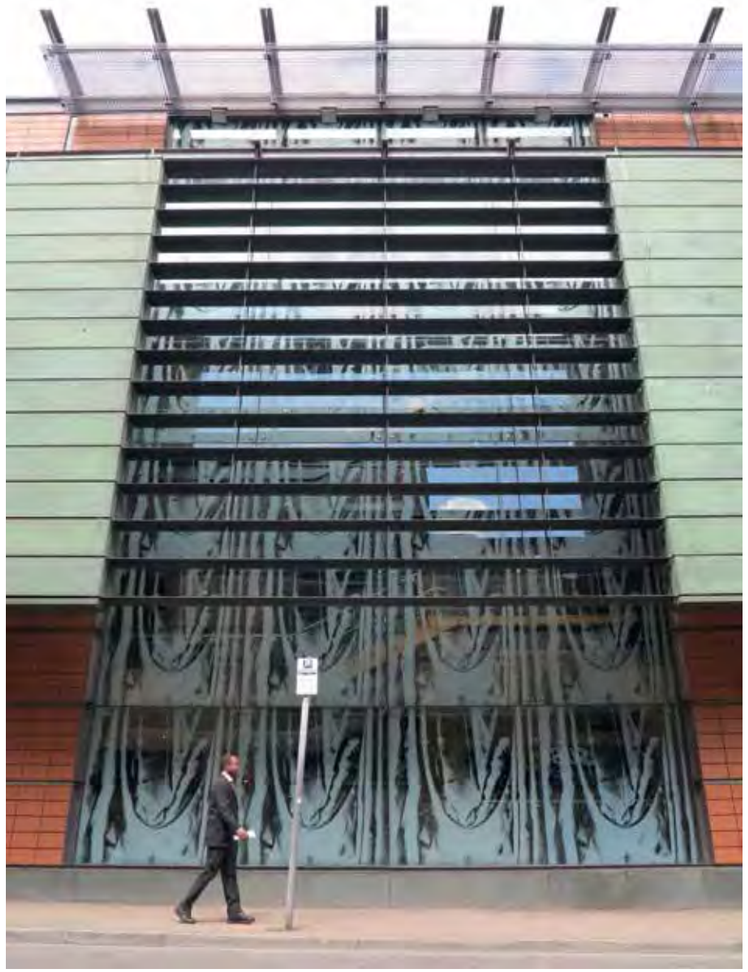
Marilyn Bowering, *Visible Worlds*

DRAPPEGGIO IN ERCOLANO, 2009, Aurelian Wall, Rome, 12 minute video projection;
one of a number of Roman sites used as backdrop to the film shot in Ercolano

CLOTH FAIR, 2007, synchronous lighting, Bart's Gatehouse, London, photo © Robert Hunter
CLOTH FAIR, 2007, photo-booth stills projection, St.Bartholomew the Less, bell tower, London

DROP SARI, 2012, film installation for exhibition; Cotton Global Threads, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

DROP SARI, 2012, film installation, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
LIGHT CURTAIN, 2012, film & LED light installation Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester



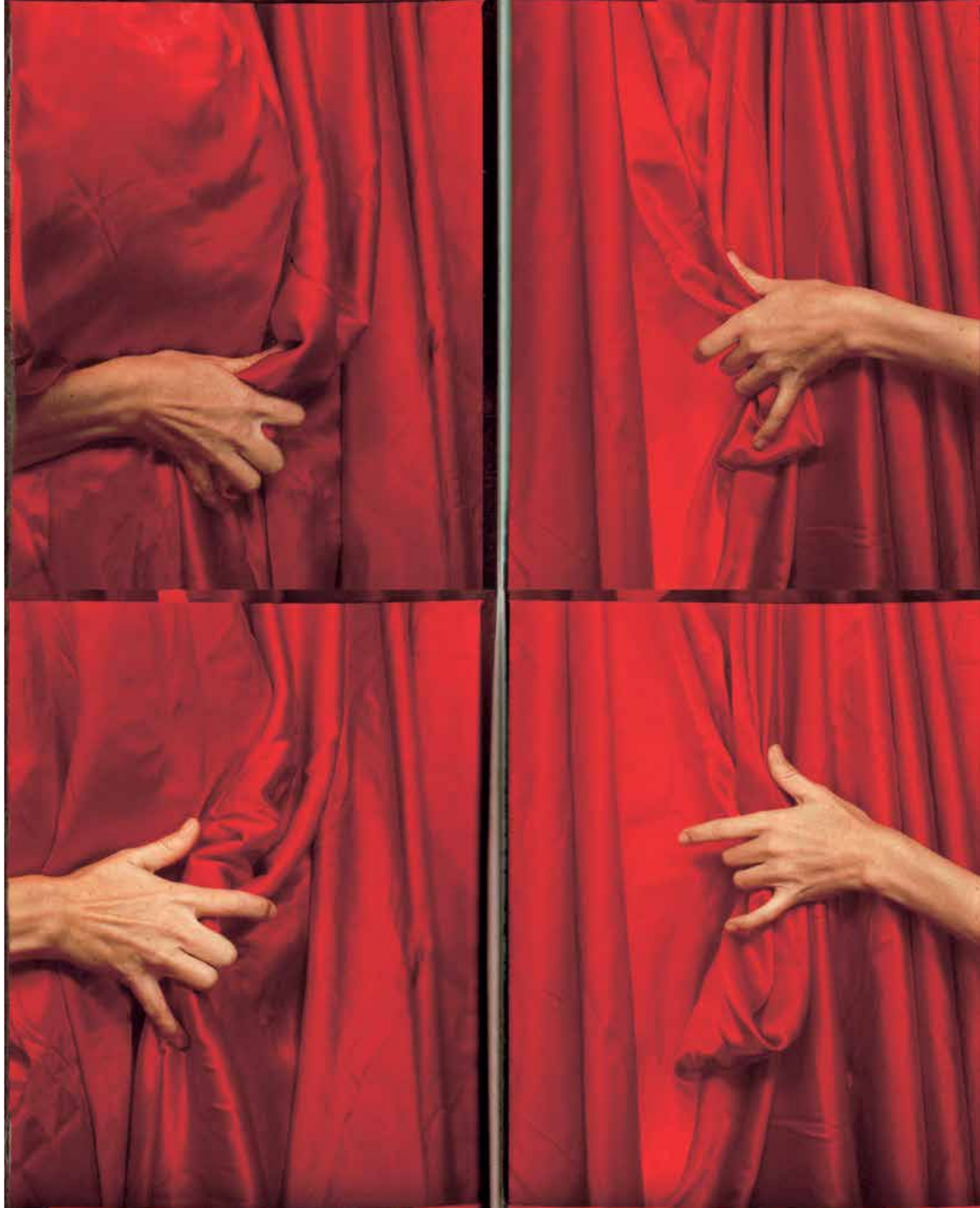
GLASS DRAPES, 2001, fritted glass outer wall, Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre, 14x8m (46x26ft)
LIGHT COLUMN, 2005, glass sculpture, Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre. Inspired by Brancusi's Endless Column, the work hangs 11m (36ft) in length. Each of the sixteen component boxes has four sides, one of which has sixteen parts, eight of which are mirrors.

LIGHT COLUMN, 2005, drapery motif reiterated on etched glass surface, Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre

GLASS DRAPES, 2001, top floor, inside looking out, Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre
GLASS DRAPES, 2001, view from Inge Street, Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre

KERFUFFLE, 2004, inkjet on vinyl, BBC Broadcasting House, installation view with John Nash's All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, 24x17m (79x56ft)

 KERFUFFLE, 2003, photo-booth collage, 12x8cm (4.75x3.25in)



NAGEANT VERS NOËL - SWIMMING TOWARDS CHRISTMAS, 2000, installation view of the projection onto Lyon Town Hall, France; part of Les sémiophores curated by Philippe Mouillon, Sculpture Urbaine, Grenoble, 24x48m (79x158ft)

UP ON DECK (deckchair), 1999, photo-booth collage, 135x72cm (53x28.5in)
UP ON DECK, 1999, installation view of enlarged photo-booth portraits hung on deckchair fabric, Ramsgate Library, Photoworks commission, each 51x41cm (20x16in)

LONDON SAILS

The veil, then, an implement of obscuring and manifesting, of covering up and laying bare, is an intrinsically ambiguous object. When the veil is placed about something, it hides what it contains, and makes it a secret... The veil at the same time hides and reveals, and therefore it is no exaggeration to see it as an embodiment of ambiguity.

Moshe Barasch, *The Veil: Representations of the Secret in the Visual Arts*

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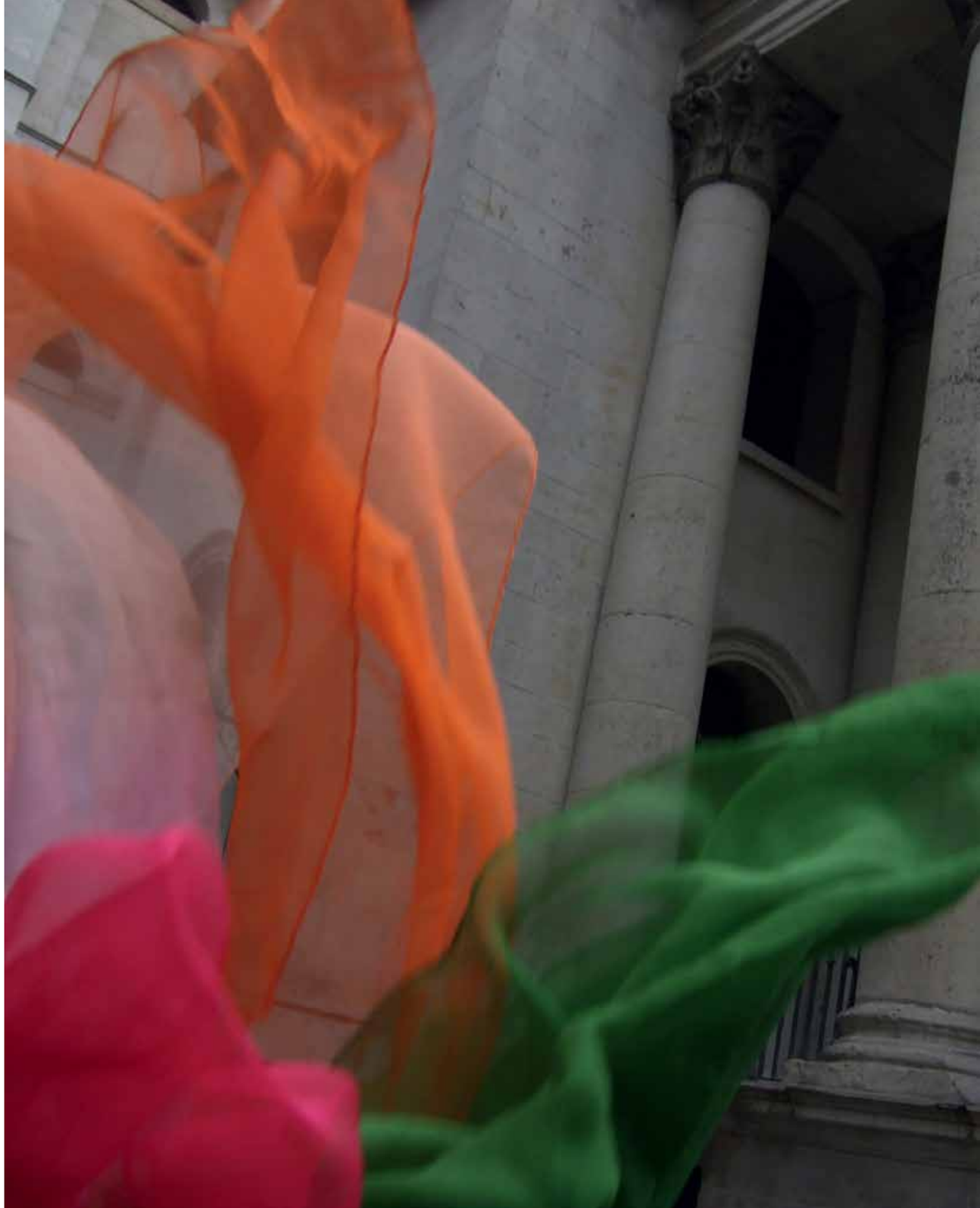
SNOW DOME (1675-1720), 2010
BLOW (111m), 2010

GEOMETRIC (staircase), 2011
EAU DE VOILETTE, 2011



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ST. PAUL'S (Pillars of Society) I & II, 2010
ST. GEORGE'S BLOOMSBURY (Hawksmoor, 1716-1731) I & II, 2011

ST. PAUL'S PORTICO (check), 2010
ST. PAUL'S PORTICO (hide), 2010

following page
ST. GEORGE IN THE EAST, (Hawksmoor, 1714-29), 2011

ESSAYS AND INTERVIEW

DANZANDO CON BORROMINI

In Renaissance and Baroque Italy just as veils commonly clothed the body, so drapes and all manner of hangings and awnings clothed streets and buildings for festivals and processions. There were even specialists who draped churches with scarlet cloths, tapestries and banners. In this way public spaces were temporarily transformed. The sway of the robes and vestments of nobles and clergy, together with the gentler movement of hangings and the fluttering of pennants, turn architecture into event. Blurring hard and fast distinctions between animate bodies and inanimate things, veils and drapes invite imaginative projection; both in sacred ritual and erotic imagination they conjure fantasy. When stirred by movement, cloths extend animate presence into a field of energy beyond the boundaries of the corporeal.

It was in seventeenth-century Rome that sculptors – most famously Bernini – realized the expressive agency and theatrical potential of drapery with unprecedented daring. But when Liz Rideal, an artist who has long engaged with cloth as material and metaphor, took up a residency in Rome, it was not these virtuoso works that she sought to emulate. Instead she infiltrated the spaces created by Baroque architects, discovering there an arena for her own performance. Rather than competing she entered into partnership and thereby renewed the event of our bodily encounter with architecture. Her favourite partner in this 'dance' was the rival of Bernini, Francesco Borromini. Celebrated and sometimes criticized by his contemporaries for his 'chimerical' structures, his buildings present a strange fusion of architecture and sculpture. 'Drama is inherent', Rudolf Wittkower observed, 'in the way that the motifs unfold, expand and contract; in the way that movement surges upwards and comes to rest'.

Today the visitor to Rome may feel exhilarated by Borromini's churches and palaces but also estranged by spaces made to stage events that no longer have meaning, spaces we enter as spectators not participants. Rideal's series of artworks entitled *Danzando con Borromini* respond to the Baroque genius by intervening in a manner that invites participation in the present moment. Her interventions are at once surreptitious and celebratory. Throwing up chiffons as light as air, she appropriates the grandeur and energy of the Baroque, undoing its rhetoric and rendering it as immediate as breath, as intimate as a veil wrapped around the body. Ritual is reinvented, opened to dreams, to memories and feelings. And by the same gesture the veil is unwrapped, released within the body that is the building to perform arias and crescendos; in gauzy violets, greens, pinks and reds, the veils suggest coloratura made visible; sound can pass through them.

Typically, the architectural vessels that Rideal prefers – whether exterior or interior – are curved and relatively contained. In spaces topped by domes, on spiraling staircases, in a narrow colonnade or tightly framed courtyards, the dance of tissue is performed within the embrace of the encircling body.

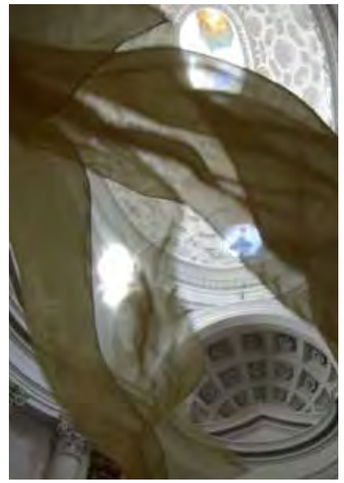
If the veil of chiffon was once wrapped around the body, here the physical body has departed leaving only the trace or chimera of its presence, or perhaps just its skin, its chrysalis of colour, a body without organs. 'The departed' is both a common euphemism for the dead and a term for someone who has just left the stage. In historic art drapery is one of the motors of narrative, signaling where a figure has come from and where it is heading towards; by contrast Rideal's chiffons hover mysteriously without destination. They suspend the movement from and towards. Like spirits released from the body they are free. Their presence is as temporal as music, yet the photographic artwork endures. Their energy brings to mind a passage by Merleau-Ponty, where he writes. 'The painter "takes his body with him," says Valéry... It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.'

In daily life this constant intertwining of vision and movement passes largely unregistered by the conscious mind. Rideal's artwork, in partnership with Borromini's buildings, realizes this intertwining, 'transubstantiating' architecture into pictorial image. Yet we may also view these pictures as sculptures occupying volumes, softly turning and folding in air, meshing light with colour, and holding time suspended in the pleats and twists of fabric. In these mobile sculptures, Rideal has invented an equivalent to the fountains of Baroque Rome, cascading and rippling not with water but with colour. Like the fountains they pulse with life. Whereas seventeenth-century Baroque proclaims power and ostentation, Rideal's restaging of the Baroque brings into being something at once more inward and more open, as close to the body as breath, as free and universal as air.

PAUL HILLS

R.Wittkower, Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp.210-12
'Eye and Mind', in The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, ed. G.A.Johnson, pp.123-4

PALAZZO SPADA (arc), 2008



SAN CARLINO (peace), 2011

THE SECRETS OF ALBION'S DAUGHTER

'The eye sees more than the heart knows'

When William Blake (whose London home was only a few hundred yards from that of Liz Rideal today) inscribed these words in his 1793 poem, *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, he might have been celebrating Rideal's art. He would certainly have approved of her exhibiting in Philadelphia since the heroine of his poem seeks freedom in America. Blake wanted to direct our attention to the way sight can reveal truths beyond the reach of our conscious minds, which is one of the things that Rideal also aims for. For Blake the key to sight's importance lies in what he calls in the same poem the 'infinite brain', and Rideal might well agree. Certainly her work draws strength and depth from its resonance with contemporary neuroscience.

Among the findings of that science is the discovery that all our visual experiences, especially our earliest, lead to the formation of neural resources on which each of us, and especially artists, for whom vision is so vital, can draw on later in life. Some of Rideal's earliest visual and mental imprints relate to cloth, as her mother comes from Picardy, a part of France long associated with textile production and also home to the fabric-loving Matisse. She has recalled that her mother, before studying fashion at St. Martin's School of Art, London, went to Paris to become a milliner, twisting and nesting fabrics to create women's hats. The gauzy materials that Rideal has used in creating her prints have the charm of great millinery, and the silks she photographed floating and twisting around the columns and pediments of Borromini and Wren can become those buildings' headdress, when they are not their masquerading costume. She is aware, too, that, depending on the viewer's interests and experiences, these fabrics can also take on a life of their own. Her own title and commentary on the photogram *Ether Ghost*, evokes four dead soldiers, and the long monotype, *Ghost Sari*, suggests a winding sheet like the Shroud of Turin. The fragment on the right of the *Lift diptych* seems to have a life of its own; literally trying to escape; a fragile, sensual strand. Blake himself, remembering the fantasies of his own adolescent bedroom, understood the neural processes involved, telling in *VISIONS of the Daughters of Albion*, how a sexually frustrated youth is likely to '*create an amorous image/In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow'*, (line 180-181). Rideal, like Blake before her, understands the creativeness of her own eyes and is cognizant of how, in viewers too, current emotions and previous visual and imaginative experiences may combine to enable them to see things in and relate to her art in ways that that she had never intended and they had never imagined.

SAN FRANCISCO DREAMING (OF MONET)
2001, monotype on Japanese paper, 53x76cm (21x30in)

In Rideal's case the most powerful example of the phenomenon of underlying neural connections relates to her use of the photo-booth. She must have sensed unconsciously the similarity between the booth that she visited to get her passport photographs (its stool shielded by a curtain) and the confessionals of her Catholic childhood. For her this meant that any person using such a booth, whether herself or one of her many subjects, might take on the role of penitent: confessing, confiding, revealing. It was this submerged awareness as much as any conscious choice, that enabled her for two decades to create the works whose subtle and powerful commentary on the human condition and on inner life, have formed the foundation of her reputation.

Neuroscience helps us to understand why this should have been so. The sight of any object activates all the neural resources with which that object is associated. Through her art Rideal has been able to communicate her heightened sense of the complexity of the booth experience both to the many people she invited to be photographed in it and to the many more who viewed the image strips it generated. Possibly, though, she only became truly conscious of the resonance between the two types of booth much later, when her 2008-09 stay in Rome confronted her with more confessionals than she had ever seen in a short period, prompting her to take portrait photographs of them each time she visited a new church. Out of these she created an artwork in which the rows of passport photographs of confessionals reprise the grids of her earlier photo-booth images.

Rideal's lifelong devotion to the grid hints that her interest in the form may have a source in neural resources shaped by a particularly strong early visual memory, and one such surfaced in our conversations. When explaining how important for her are the fundamental differences between the cultures of her French mother and English/Swedish father she recalled one particular visual and cultural shock that she had experienced as a child. Her father had informed her mother that the pattern of the uniform of the school she was going to attend in Singapore was a blue gingham print. Accordingly she designed and made a dress with the appropriate material. It was only after she arrived that she discovered that the English idea of gingham was a fussy small dark check and not the larger more fashionable pale blue pattern that her French eye had led her to purchase. I would like to think that Rideal's discomfort at being obliged to wear the 'wrong' more elegant check, informed her ability to assume the mantle of 'odd one out' and gain the confidence of artistic independence, later fuelling her passion for strong grids. The same memory may also help to explain why her passion for lengths of cloth and fabrics of many kinds is so deep rooted.

JOHN ONIANS

CONFESS!! 2009, archival pigment print, edition of 3, 80x24cm (31.5x9.5in)

IWONA BLAZWICK INTERVIEWS LIZ RIDEAL

IB Your work first came to prominence with a series of projects produced with analogue photo-booth machines. You relinquished control by having a machine take the picture, even though you're positioning yourself in front of the lens... that must have been weird, to not be behind the shutter making that controlling, defining gesture. Why did you give it up to the machine?

LR It's like print making; you can set things up and then you let them roll, you don't know the result until you get the strip back or you pull your print. The element of chance, of surprise is what I love. You give control to the machine, there is no negative.

IB It's also striking that the strips of images from your subsequent photo-booth projects are displayed in the form of a grid. I wondered if the grid and the indexicality of the process had some relationship to conceptual art? Were you influenced by that movement?

LR Yes. I'm drawn to artists like Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Agnes Martin. I've made some completely monochrome pieces using just colour, curtain and repetition, so not only making analogies with that minimal stance but also recording time, using systematic progression to produce portraits of time. Artists like Robert Morris, Lynda Benglis and Robert Smithson, are important too – their interventions and inventiveness.

IB Another element is the process of indexing faces or gestures, which has its genesis with photographers like August Sander, of documenting a society in a certain era. Rather than having a very standardised way of presenting individuals however, you invited them to act out didn't you, so it was more performative? Likewise, your work then moved towards performance and self-portraiture – you started using your own body, your hands, physical gestures...What inspired you to use your own body?

LR I was interested in masquerade, how the self is presented, constructed. How important self-image remains. How you dress and through this, how people perceive and interpret who you are, how clothes tell the story. This academic interest shifted to the back of the booth and I started focusing on drapery rather than the figure. The drapery is more ambiguous, amorphous like painting, so it's via the self-portrait that I arrived at abstraction within the booth: all cloth no portrait.

A Van Dyck show in 1984 had impressed me. He's fantastic at painting drapery, it's liquid, diaphanous, marvellous, sexy – and it moves. His father was a silk merchant which maybe had something to do with it. In the photo-booth the lights and flash are so strong that you can only suggest moving cloth – you can rarely make a photographic blur – but by butting photo-strips together in a collage you can suggest and create kinetic parallels.

IB Another element which I find really interesting in connection with the curtain is drama and the theatre. You made the machine into a stage set and really played with that curtain. Rather than being a blanking or background device, it generates a sense of anticipation and excitement. Can you say more about that?

LR I started thinking about the functions of the curtain. When the Turkish diplomat, Khalil Bey commissioned Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*, he kept it hidden behind an actual green curtain. I saw it in Paris recently displayed like that; there's the trepidation and anticipation of opening up the secret – but it also reflects seductions, hierarchies, permissions and permissiveness. Mythical qualities can be evoked by the simple curtain. And the booth has a curtain at the back and also one that blocks out the light creating a type of private mini theatre.

IB The 'audience' then is the lens. That surrender to the machine, being the performer and being on its stage, is really quite a radical step...

LR Yes, like using the machine instead of having a paintbrush and colours, machine as limited palette... it doesn't control everything because all it can do is record. It can only record what you show it, but the restrictions are a challenge and together with the element of chance, exhilarating.

IB So you displace yourself. You also reach out to very fundamental, ritualistic elements in culture – the pageant, the masque, the marking of seasons. These are fundamental metaphors and organising systems which filter through into culture. Another unexpected quality of the work is its relation to other disciplines, for example literature. There are musical notations running through the work.

LR I wanted to explore ideas of authorship in the work of the British composer Henry Purcell who makes the transition from early masques to the beginnings of opera and to concentrate on the actual script he had written..."*sweet Thames run softly*"...in the back of my head there was Kandinsky, the spiritual in art, the idea of the music of the spheres, mythical nature – Blake and Emily Dickinson.

IB You also find these beautiful analogies between say sign language, signing, choreography – and drawing, calligraphy and music. They all interrelate. You used the gestural rhythmic patterns in the flower study series. Why were you drawn to a genre which can be seen as quite decorative or kitsch?

SIR ANTHONY VAN DYCK, Self-portrait, c.1640 NPG 6987, © The National Portrait Gallery, 56x46cm (22x18in)

STUDY OF DRAPERY, Unknown, c.1855, albumen print, France, courtesy of George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, 20.5x17.6cm (8x7in)

STUDY FOR GLASS DRAPES, 2001, black and white photo-booth photograph, 5x4cm (2x1.5in)

LR Once when I went down to Bookham to the photo booth factory in Surrey, I found some pussy willow and it was just gorgeous, and that kicked off a whole series of work. I had some wonderful dark blue silk and I started thinking about willow patterns... I was also making a film in my garden of flowers, a bit like Dutch 17th century flower paintings. That series exploited different pattern rhythms. These were enhanced by the sharp automatic lighting conditions of the booth – I never tampered with this – I then exploited the fantastic rhythms and trompe l'oeil kinetic effects as different graphic elements in collage.

IB So, they become quite abstract, painterly and formalist. They also relate to a history of using floral motifs as a decorative surface. I'm thinking of Ingres for example, or later Matisse. And within architecture and interiors as well, decorative techniques drawing on nature... They also evoke the Vanitas tradition in still life, intimations of mortality.

LR The marriage of the indexical and grid like with the expressive and delicate... intertwined giving it an unexpected and beautiful quality.

IB You make a feature of exquisite studies of fabric where again, repetition creates a disjunction between the detail and what happens when it's multiplied to create a surface. You've talked about this movement in another way, that is between public and private; and between representation and abstraction. How did you structure these and why is it that we know this is fabric? What stops you from just making it pure colour? yet retaining its material quality, it is both abstract yet located in the real.

LR I started to look into the different characteristics of fabric. Sharp, starchy and crisp or flexible, soft and muted. We perceive the differences with our eyes, it's automatic; but, presented serially the different perceptions can be analysed. I also wanted to make connections with moving water, this idea of tumbling cascades and fountains. By the juxtaposition of different cloths and colours, and the formal aspect of collage, they recreate the sensation and emotion of looking at water in action.

IB So, the tactility, the sense of weight and texture becomes a sculptural experience which is purely visual – that also triggers associations.

LR Yet it remains a construct. When you look at those collages you can see that there are strips that are stuck together. It's very banal, and I like that, the transparency of what it is. It's real and it's fake.

IB They're also sensual, even erotic. I think there's a sexual quality which runs throughout all the work. How consciously are you trying to explore that?

HAWTHORN HALL OF MIRRORS, (detail) 2009, acid etched and sand blasted mirror, Radcliffe/Churchill Trust, Oxford, 2x7m (6.5x23ft)

LR I don't know how conscious it is but I know it's there. The piece that was installed on the facade of the BBC building (*Kerfuffle* 2004), I was amazed that people didn't really voice that – and yet it was like an enormous boudoir. I think that harks back to the aspect of revealing and concealing, and peeping behind the curtain, all of that intrigue. The voyeuristic element.

IB There is a division in your practice between work that pursues your own inner investigations and projects created by invitation, that are site specific, commissioned to inaugurate a theatre or a new building. How do you step out of one essentially private mode into a public one?

LR The great advantage of commissions is that you can make large, permanent artworks. I am still interested in this idea of 'public participation' – but in a new way, so that, for instance, people go into a building and confront an etched mirror and become part of the work, à la Pistoletto. So, I enjoy one, but I couldn't lose the other because it's the other working method that informs everything. My wish is to make both function in tandem and complicity.

IB I think that commissioning agencies are getting more intelligent and that audiences everywhere are more sophisticated. What's been your most successful public commission?

LR Although the BBC *Kerfuffle* piece was memorable – you could see it from a plane – the two-part work at Birmingham Hippodrome exists as a continuing dialogue between the outer glass etched walls of the building and the inner hanging sculpture.

IB With this shift in technology, how are you moving forward in your own ideas and work?

LR I have been taking the veil for a spin through Borromini's architecture. Using the digital to capture coloured fabric swirling in tune to the Baroque, played as music in tempo to the solid toned curve. Soundlessly floating febrile forms into our consciousness...suggesting memories faint and concrete, embedded within the nostalgia that is the photograph.

IB This reiterates a sense of an external structure, a framework that enables you to push the formal and conceptual limits. You also continue to range across time in terms of references, from C17th architecture through opera, poetry to something very much about the here and now, participation, the crowd – it's amazing, the fluidity you've achieved over twenty years. It's striking that in a way your work isn't about indexing now. It does seem more embedded in literary and iconographic histories.

GIRL ON A MOTORBIKE, Amedabad, India, 2011, archival digital print, 40.5x30.5cm (16x12in)

RAPHAELLE PEALE, VENUS RISING FROM THE SEA - A DECEPTION, c. 1822, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 74x63cm (29x24in)

FLAG COLOURS, 1976, oil on canvas, 76x51cm (30x20in)

LR Yes, the work acknowledges Titian, Van Dyck and early photographers, texts from Deleuse, while celebrating the historical significance of the geometry of order within architecture.

IB It's as if you're trying to find mythical narrative structures within culture?

LR Our whole culture is about making equivalences isn't it and reinterpretations in different guises, feelings about what it's like to be alive. I'm creating chaos in the form of fragments of vision, using jumping coloured cloth as subject – the interloper. Making this analogous to a beauty that questions the known order and accepted rule, augmenting it by suggesting fleeting figures, ghosts in unpopulated spaces.

IB You've also translated these photographic "equivalents" into other media?

LR Recently making photograms – unique with no negative, like the booth strips. In a sense reiterating the formal qualities of the booth collages – the imagery straddling the silks or papers that act as surface and behave as the connecting grid structure. Again there are limitations because of the medium and they are in black and white.

IB Has feminism been an influence? Do you think there's anything to do with your gender in the way that you work?

LR Using photography might be partly to do with it. I'm a collagist by nature, picking distinct elements and collapsing these together to make a statement. Also considering polarities, opposites, questioning the idea of the impenetrable being challenged by its opposite: light matter, gossamer soft and floating. Asking if one subsumes the other, does heavy mean difficult and therefore more important, substantial? Can we assume that the former represents consciousness while the latter echoes the unconscious? Are they the warp and weft of high and low – concrete density versus transparent clarity, the animus and anima? Attracting and repelling? Or merely two sides of the same coin? If feminism is situated within the boundaries of this discussion then yes, I want to address these issues using the analogy of cloth photographed in arrested movement.

IB What's terrific about your practice is that it responds to the scenario and then pulls that right back into the work. Being an artist, curator, lecturer and an educator makes your work richer, it isn't like they are separate activities, each is folded seamlessly into the other.

TITIAN (TIZIANO VECELLIO), PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL FILIPPO ARCHINTO, 1558, Philadelphia Museum of Art, 74x63cm (29x24in)

DRAPERIE (the making of cloth), Diderot's Encyclopédie, Diderot/ J.L.d'Alembert, Paris, 1751-1777, drawn by Goussier and engraved by J.A.Defehrt, 40.5x25cm (16x10in)

Liz Rideal is an artist and writer. Her practice comprises print, paint, sculpture, photography, installation and film.
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She has exhibited widely in Europe and the USA, including two major retrospectives. Her artwork is held in public collections including Arts Council England; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; Birmingham City Museum & Art Gallery; British Broadcasting Corporation, London; The British Museum, Department of Prints & Drawings, London; Edinburgh District Council; The Ferens Art Gallery, Hull; The George Eastman House, Rochester; The Government Art Collection, London; Museet for Fotokunst, Odense; The National Portrait Gallery, London; Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Tate Gallery, London; University of Massachusetts, Amherst; Vancouver Art Gallery; Victoria & Albert Museum, Photography, Book and Print Departments, London; Whitworth Art Galley, Manchester; Yale Centre for British Art, New Haven.
She is the author of Mirror/Mirror: Self-portraits by Women Artists, National Portrait Gallery, London, and Watson-Guptill, New York, 2001; Insights: Self-portraits, National Portrait Gallery, London, 2005; and How to Read Painting, Bloomsbury, London, and Rizzoli, New York, 2014, and 2015.

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(above) Photograph of Liz Rideal in San Carlino Cloister © Michael Helston, 2009
(opposite) Danzando con Borromini, PALAZZO SPADA (cat), 2008, Ilford Pearl, 146x196cm (57.5x77in)