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by

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**Off Center: Moments of Collision**

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**Off Center: Moments of Collision**

**by**

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**Report**

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## Acknowledgements

There are few things more difficult than finding the most effective<sup>1</sup> ways to express gratitude through recognition. The most difficult thing is to continuously acknowledge each moment's importance. You can only grow so much by being alone. Once realized, all potentials open.

*I acknowledge*

*Everything*

*Thank you*

*All<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> *Effective*, referring to concisely communicating, and making external, internal thoughts that have transitioned out of us

<sup>2</sup> *All* exists as a way to describe the overwhelming presence of *everything* that is present in relationship to existence. Special thanks to the members of my Graduate Committee, Nicole Awai, Eric McMaster, John Yancey, Sarah Canright, and Jack Stoney. My family: JoAnn LaGuardia, William LaGuardia, Billy LaGuardia, and all those I've met who I'd consider such. Thank you, Stephen-Bernard Derek Callender, and all my peers, as our close proximity in this brief time has helped shape me the most.

\*A footnote does not necessarily devalue importance, but more directly calls attention to the gravity of all levels of influence.

## Abstract

### Off Center: Moments of Collision

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2018

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There is something in the way the light breaks through clouds still dark with remnants of a storm. There is something in the way the wind moves through the trees. Bright light peeks through backlit cracks in a closed door, a moment missed if residing on the other side.

What does it mean to try and look beyond something that blocks our sight? Our proximity dictates our viewing experience: it guides our perception, we shift in response.

I am a permeable sieve that is trying to understand the nature of its vessel. My work does not include any images of the human form, yet it is entirely about navigating the world as a curious human being. I map the fluctuation between perceptual and psychological dips and crests along the way. The images I ingest reflect these reactions.

On Earth, our mark is everywhere. I am constantly searching for connections that exist between external things nearby, or something much more distant. To reach out for something is to long to bring it closer to you, but you will never know how far you need to travel if you cannot see clearly. I want to understand the structure of space by confronting its absence as I work my way through dimensions.

*I looked up after  
I knew you'd be there  
I don't know why*

*But I want to*

*Tell you something  
I'm trying to focus  
To look with full intention  
That swells so much  
It overwhelms periphery*

*Building on itself  
Until it bursts and begins again*

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## Deep Blue Dark

It's morning, and the light is filtering through the same shaded windows that I've photographed repeatedly. A wrinkled veil of translucent white curtains gently shrouds cheap, white plastic blinds. They're not a bright white, but more of a soft, warm cream, at least at this moment, anyways.

A window is polysemic

*A deliberate interruption*

*a simultaneous exchange*

*between external and internal*

*It is a whole*

*directly cut into the wall that supports it*

*Light's first chance*

*To break*

Rosalind Krauss articulates the nature of a window:

As a transparent vehicle, the window is that which admits light-or spirit-into the initial darkness of the room. But if glass transmits, it also reflects. And so the window is experienced by the symbolist as a mirror as well-something that freezes and locks the self into the space of its own reduplicated being. Flowing and freezing; glace in French means glass, mirror, and ice; transparency, opacity, and water. In the associative system of symbolist thought this liquidity points in two directions.<sup>3</sup>

I know Spring is coming based on how the birds sound, and when they begin calling out, penetrating the distance, not only hoping to gain a reciprocated response, but to also call attention to its very existence. Spring is an awakening, a moment of transition. It's something I've been locked in since I set out to find my Truth. The cycle of the seasons is evidence of it all. I wonder if that's why I was born in the Spring.

Now, two unfamiliar birds make themselves known in the trees surrounding my room. I cannot see them, it's not necessary.

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<sup>3</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Grids*, 58-59

*I am changing*

*Only to be guided by what comes*

*The surface surrounds*

*Cut slowly by the rising sun*

*My breathing is*

*erratic irregular*

*Points on a plane*

*Reveal sparks on the wheel*

*Caught up with falling walls*

*Eventually rising*

*In constant response*

*What dwells in distance?*



Figure 1: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018

Sometimes I am struck with instantaneous understanding. The first time I've experienced this was when I was learning about the Holy Trinity - three Persons in one - when I was no more than 8 or 9 years old. I went to Catholic School until I moved to Baltimore to attend college. I remember laying in bed at night, staring up at the flattened popcorn pattern on my ceiling, a camouflage of deep blue dark between us, thinking about what it means to live on forever in Heaven. Back then, all I had to do was imagine the universe, and I immediately understood the concept of eternity. I didn't have to keep thinking about it. That was my first active acknowledgement of things far greater than myself, and it happened in the dark.

What we "know" conceptually has far outstripped what we experience empirically. We are finally beginning to accept the fact that our senses allow us to perceive only one-millionth of what we know to be reality— the electromagnetic spectrum. Ninety-nine

percent of all vital forces affecting our life is invisible. Most of the fundamental rates of change can't be apprehended sensorially. [Buckminster] Fuller: 'Better than ninety-nine percent of modern technology occurs in the realm of physical phenomena that are sub or ultra to the range of human visibility. We can see the telephone wires but not the conversations taking place. We can see the varieties of metal parts of airplanes but there is nothing to tell us how relatively strong these metals are in comparison to other metals. None of these varieties can be told from the others by the human senses, not even by metallurgists when unaided by instruments. The differences are invisible. Yet world society has throughout its millions of years on earth made its judgments on visible, tangible, sensorially demonstrable criteria.'<sup>4 5</sup>

To “know,” is to obtain a very specific understanding. It is complete, with an overwhelming acknowledgment of the Truth, at least enough to convince us. Doubt has no room to exist comfortably. It is easy to stray away from knowing, because we don't really “know”. It is easy to become off centered, to develop a top-heavy wobble against the current of the forces that propel us.

What causes this?

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (Place of Publication Not Identified: Studio Vista, 1971), PDF, 136.

<sup>5</sup> R. Buckminster Fuller, *Ideas and Integrities*, (New York: Collier Books, 1969), p. 64.

## Interruptions

A loud, familiar voice cuts through the cracks in my doors. My room has two doors; both are an exit, both an entrance. They swell and shrink based on temperature relationships of the surrounding air. Gorged on the moisture in the hot atmosphere, the door is stuck; when the weather is cold, the thin air pushes the opposing door open due to sudden pressure shifts. This is evidence of the change.

*The birds are still going*

*Now*

*the light dim*

*but bright.*

*Again*

*You return*

I forgot about them until they broke the silence. Interruptions are an unexpected break in a current trajectory. They block the path, resulting in a recalculation in response. When things are too consistent, I turn to interruptions. It is in this state am I most myself, where uncertainty is overpowered by trust. This is when I am the most integrated.

Interruptions usually cause disruption of comfort, as comfort is homogenous with safety.



Figure 2: *Working in Reverse (Light over Dark)*, oil on wood panel, 12 x 9 inches, 2016



Interruptions are not always abrupt. They can grow and change and build. But the most memorable appear suddenly, like a volcano erupting once the pressure underneath is much too great. This surprise energy can linger indefinitely, depending on the strength of the release. What happens when you notice something so strong you can't help but stare?

One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: “drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll...In a *dérive* one or more persons during a certain period drop their usual relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there. Chance is a less important factor in this activity than one might think: from a *dérive* point of view cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones. But the *dérive* includes both this letting-go and its necessary contradiction: the domination of psychogeographical variations by the knowledge and calculation of their possibilities. In this latter regard, ecological science — despite the narrow social space to which it limits itself — provides psychogeography with abundant data<sup>6 7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Guy Debord, "Theory of the Derive," 2.

<sup>7</sup> A result of a spontaneous collaboration between MS Word, my computer, and the words of Guy Debord during formatting and editing. Please note that this is not an original representation of the cited material.

Academic paintings become more convincing when working directly from life. Photographic references represent only a portion of the information taken from the original source. Viewers are at odds with the conditions of the environment, which heavily influences, even in the highest resolution, the final result of this translation. Working from life means more information, and more opportunities to shift and respond according to what is seen. Things get complicated when our vision is impaired.

Abstraction served as a catalyst for exploring formal image relationships. Decisions became less random when edges and forms line up, or have a direct conversation that only reveals itself once they overlap. I was making connections through utilizing the benefits of compositional, formal, visual language. This way, information can't help but be interrupted and obliterated, forming a new trajectory.



Figure 3: *Hawaiian Punch*, oil on wood panel, 48 x 25 ¼ inches, 2016

Collage was the next step in this examination. It was a chance to more immediately explore 2D problems while investigating material relationships influenced by the nature of hand-made marks, against more precise, mechanical descriptions. I started combining laser-cut, paper and fabrics with found, often times discarded materials.



Figure 4: *Final Form*, collage, mixed media and found materials on wood panel, 23 5/8 x 27 1/2 inches, 2017

This way of working introduced a shift in the tone of the final work. The materials push against the plane in an attempt to integrate themselves not only to the substrate's surface, but to each other. Woven and comingling, irregularities in form function as openings, passageways to a more complex connection: sometimes they line up, and other times there is contradiction.

Unlike the quickly painted, gestural works, these works emerged much more slowly. Materials sat on a flat, horizontal surface, utilizing gravity's pull to hold them in place. Their lack of completion was magnetic, and I began to tend to them more regularly. Each day, I would make shifts and exchange materials, often times for something close and within my reach. Time allowed the work to exist in a frozen state of incompleteness, which resulted in imagery breaking apart at different speeds with every cut, overlap, and tear. The farther I strayed from the recognizable, the more inward I turned.

*To gaze at nothing*

*With the hopes to catch*

*a glint*

*reveals the thread  
that connects us*

## Shifting/Sifting

My current psychological state almost always mirrors and influences the condition of my direct environment. Materials now engulfed my studio, and every work surface was compromised. The collages became more visually inaccessible and dense, and I felt as if I couldn't breathe. As forms gained more solidity, the light began to dissipate. Black and white drawings, or limited color works, dominated my practice for a considerable amount of time. It is in drawing that I am the most comfortable, as it was my first introduction to two-dimensional based image making. I revisited this way of working as a mechanism to sift through ideas, but I still encountered the same issues.

I needed to introduce another shift.

For a number of years, my attraction to color was stronger than my understanding. I had enough of a sense of what it was, and the power it held, but I wasn't in a place to confront it. Even the most complex paintings had a more straightforward approach to color, and the rules for its nuance was often equally legible and direct.

A screen-printed image is a result of moving pigmented material through a semi-permeable membrane. It is a representation of color transitioning from one side of a plane, to the next. The setup for this systematic image-making method touches on the potential for indefinite repetition, yielding outcomes that only slightly differ with each pull. Inconsistency minimizes with experience, but even still, no two prints are exactly the same.

Serigraphy allowed me to focus solely on color and form, with no material conversation except what it's printed on. It was a chance to very quickly work through

many versions of the same idea without being precious. I decided to limit myself to a paired-down, spatially derived lexicon of visual alphabets that combined to form an image that dealt with a various ranges of dimensional clarity. Here, I could experiment with endless combinations, all while reveling in the possibilities of color. I needed to revisit certain fundamental aspects of image making that I was previously avoiding.



Figure 5: *Entrance*, acrylic screen print on paper, approx 5 x 5 inches, 2017

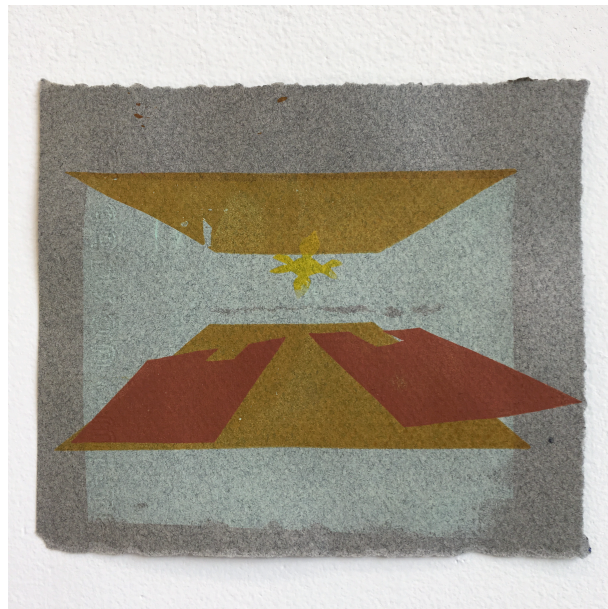


Figure 6: *E.P.*, acrylic screen print on paper, approx 5 x 5 inches, 2017



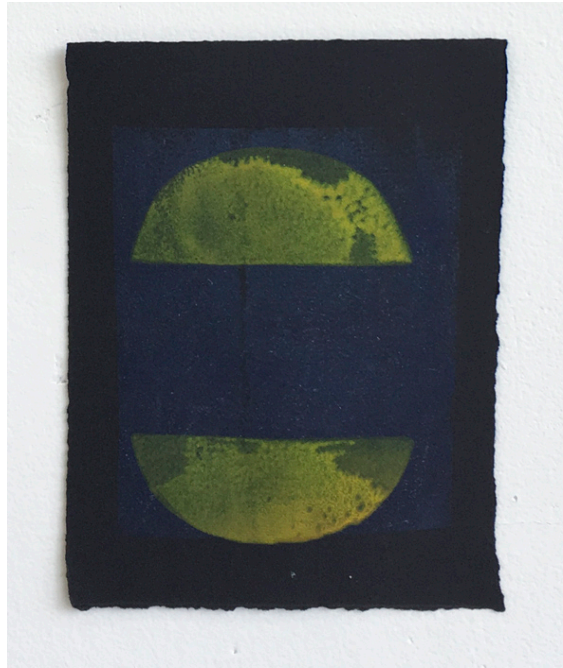


Figure 7: *Three*, acrylic screen print on paper, approx 5 x 3 inches, 2017

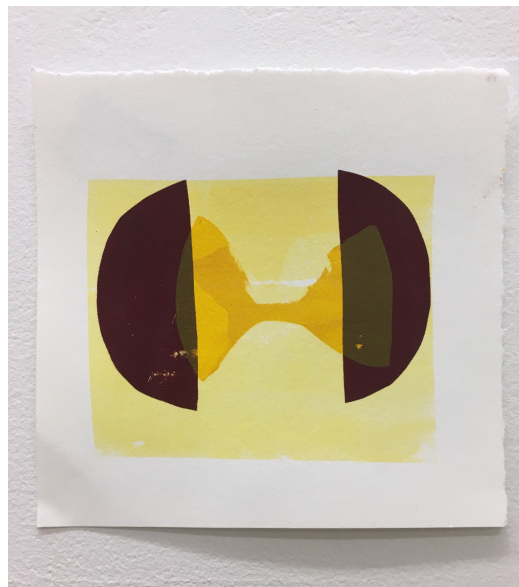


Figure 8: *The Exchange*, acrylic screen print on paper, approx 5 x 5 inches, 2017

Though the conceptual proximity shifted greatly, I couldn't escape the forward facing image that somehow always revolved around a central axis.

## Over View

A shift in thought occurred as soon as I leaned over the bridge I was standing on to get a better view of the pond that churned beneath me. This time, I moved my body to accommodate a new “forward”, hinging at an approximate 90 degrees, and tested my response to gravity’s expanse above me. Fish drift along a current created by their own movement and respond to the pull of the water. Occasionally, they broke its surface tension, opening their mouths, gasping. Leaves and organic debris glided along the top outermost boundary, sometimes dipping deeper into the dark, murky waters that appeared to go on infinitely. It was in these interactions I saw *everything*. Every so often, these bodies collided aggressively, causing the collected materials to spin out momentarily, only to be whisked away by the current again, and then continue along. Sometimes things never met, or just barely grazed past each other.

Yugen can be apprehended by the mind, but it cannot be expressed in words. Its quality may be suggested by the sight of a thin cloud veiling the moon or by autumn mist swathing the scarlet leaves on a mountainside. If one is asked where in these sights lies the yugen, one cannot say, and it is not surprising that a man who fails to understand this truth is likely to prefer the sight of a perfectly clear, cloudless sky. It is quite impossible to explain wherein lies the interest or the remarkable nature of yugen. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Keene “Japanese Aesthetics,” 298



Figure 9: Last still from *Slow Pull*, unedited video, Denver, Colorado, 2017

## Moments of Collision

While walking inside a vast, open space, you are confronted by a large orthogonal, semi-enclosed structure anchored to an even larger, structural wall, approximately 25 feet high. A pale, ceiling-less room is a substrate for projected light on its exterior. This light collects to in flashes to reveal tree branches that perpetually shake and sway. Momentarily compensating their once fixed position, they react in response to a voiceless wind. Bright rays from the centrally located sun, fixed in the distance, inhabit every negative space. As the tree moves, the light becomes truncated, and appears to flicker and shift. A hazy vignette, like an elliptical keyhole, holds this scene. A slightly unclear, pixelated grid connects and forms the image. This obliterates information in such a way that it speaks to a distant memory.

The wall is not completely impenetrable<sup>9</sup>, at least by sight, for there are multiple open, irregular apertures that allow the projection to slip through. Pulsing shapes of light emerge from the room in multiple directions, and spill out from various locations. As the projection is approached, a door-less entry becomes evident. A short corridor surrounded by even more tiny passages sets the path, guided by leaking light. The floor glimmers, and familiar, botanical-like silhouettes of light stretch as they are thrown across a long, deep blue wall. As the corner is turned, a flat, symmetrical plane composed of pulped, interlocking fibers hangs and floats from a single point in the room, slowly spinning. As you walk to inspect it, another projection appears. This time, the plane contains a cosmos of fish swimming in a void, surrounded by natural debris. The projection flows beyond the rounded, vertical hanging plane, onto the first

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<sup>9</sup> These walls are approximately 8 feet high. Thin and stable, their sheer surface area is enough to compensate for their obvious flatness.

entrance wall behind it, slipping through the precisely incised corridor walls, and into the outside space.

An image is embedded on the surface of large anchor wall, just below the lowest point of the floating figure. Its subtle color reveals itself over time as an upturned, open negative of a semicircle that is contained by a solid horizon. Led up and again by flickering shapes of light, you notice another semicircle hovering high above, keeping close watch. This shape exactly mirrors the one below, but as a solid positive. There is only emptiness that exists between.

What does it mean to have multiple points of entry? There is no “beginning”, no “end” nor “right” nor “wrong”. With this, all hierarchies vanish. As internal and external dissipate, our proximity is the only constant, an anchor as we continue onward<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> 1 and 0 in direct, oscillating reaction to each other continuously. It serves to acknowledge moments born as a result of this relationship, and exists as a connecting thread to the expressions before it.



Figure 10: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018

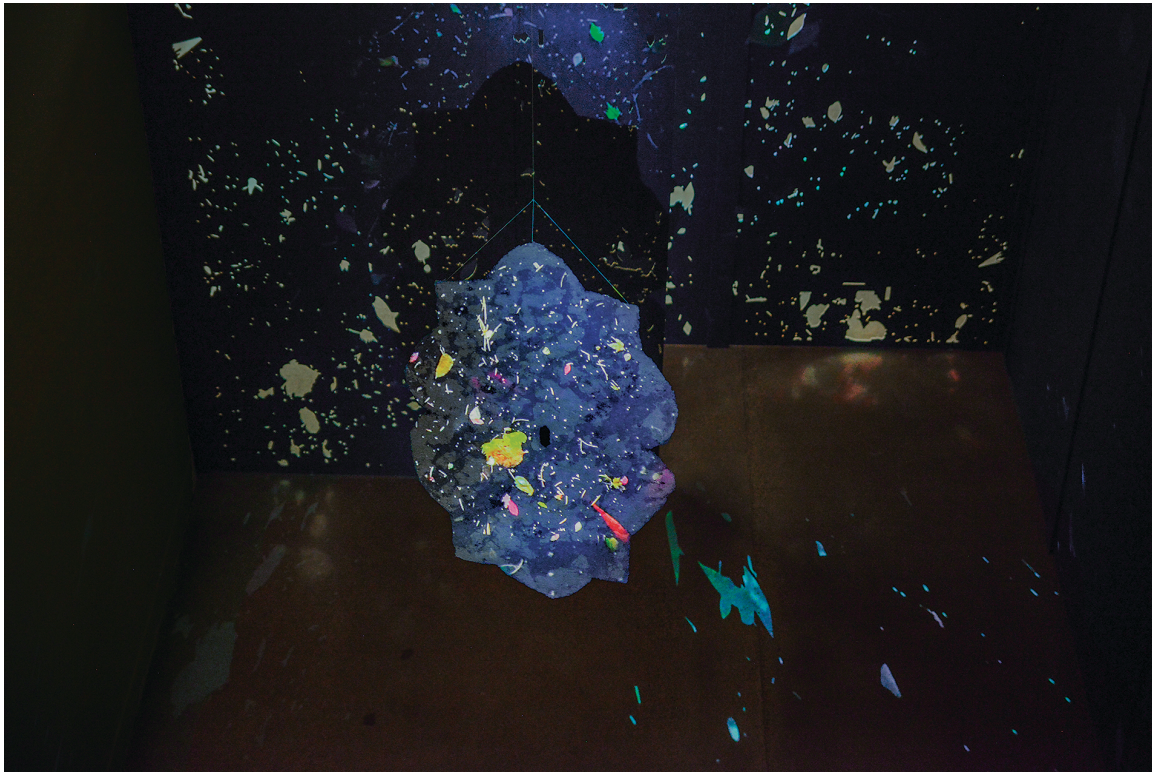


Figure 11: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018



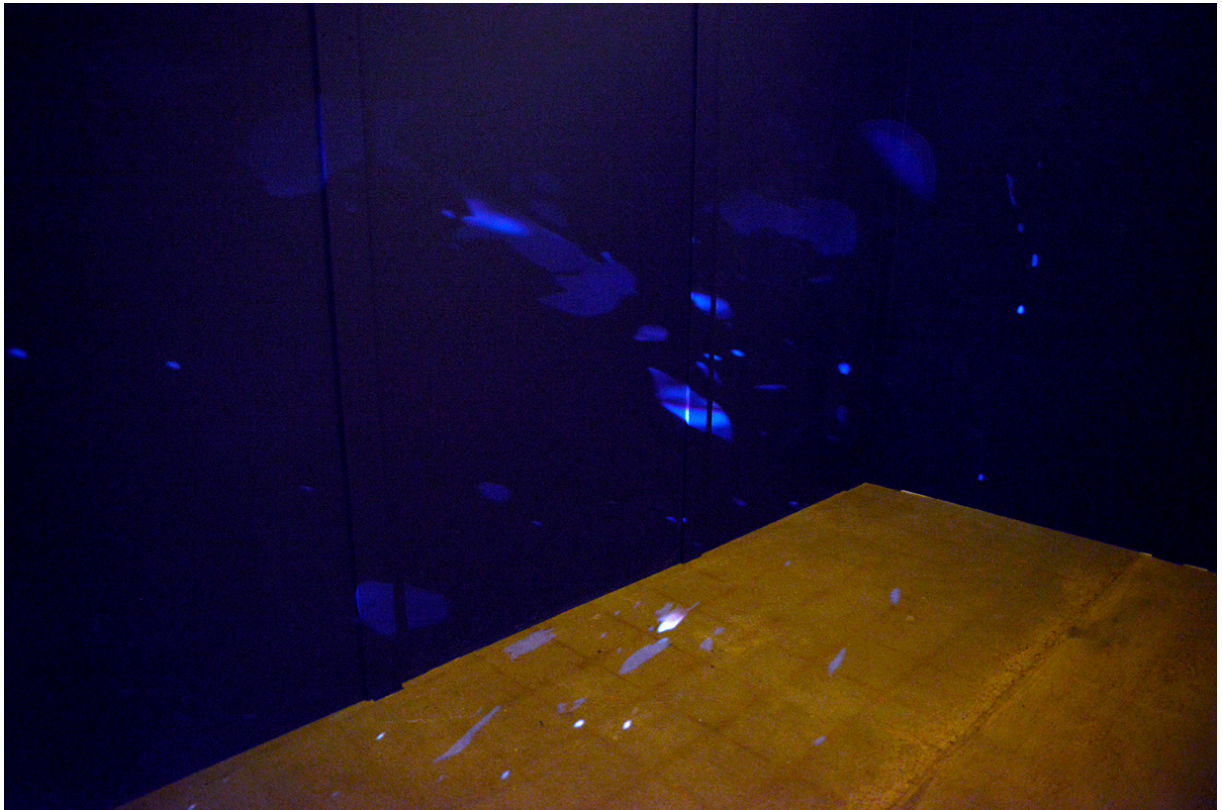


Figure 12: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018



Figure 13: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018



Figure 14: Still from *Moments of Collision*, installation documentation, 2018

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