



***“It’s  
Craigslit,  
Toots!”***

# THE TEAM

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Cynthia Karalla

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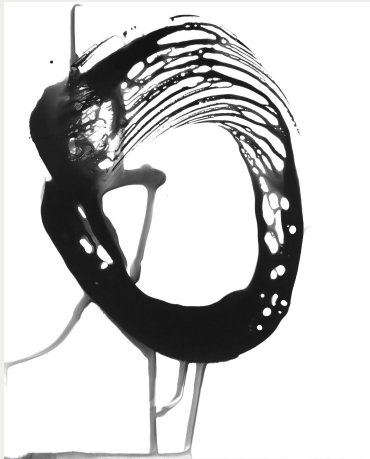
# CYNTHIA KARALLA

Selected Works - 2004 - 2024

Edition / 250

## DEVELOPER SKETCHES AKA "IT'S CRAIGSLIST, TOOTS!", 2018

This is one of my bestselling images—and it started with a Craigslist robbery! I called it Developer Sketches because that is how it came into existence, but later I added its true birth name "It's Craigslist, Toots!"



"It's Craigslist, Toots!"  
Developer Sketches #26

A seller on Craigslist was selling unopened boxes of rare Agfa darkroom paper from the 1960s. I bought all six boxes for \$200. A great deal, I thought.

A few hours later I was in my darkroom running the paper tests, when I realized the Agfa paper had already seen daylight—the robbery was exposed.

I called the seller and explained he'd sold me defective paper. His answer to me was simply: "It's Craigslist, Toots!"

I sat for a moment pondering over his words. "What is 'Craigslist, Toots'?"

I could not help myself; I sent him a text that said: "Yo, dude, my friends Tony and Sal live around the corner from you. I gave them your address. You can explain to them what 'Craigslist Toots' is, because I don't get it, I am just a Girl".

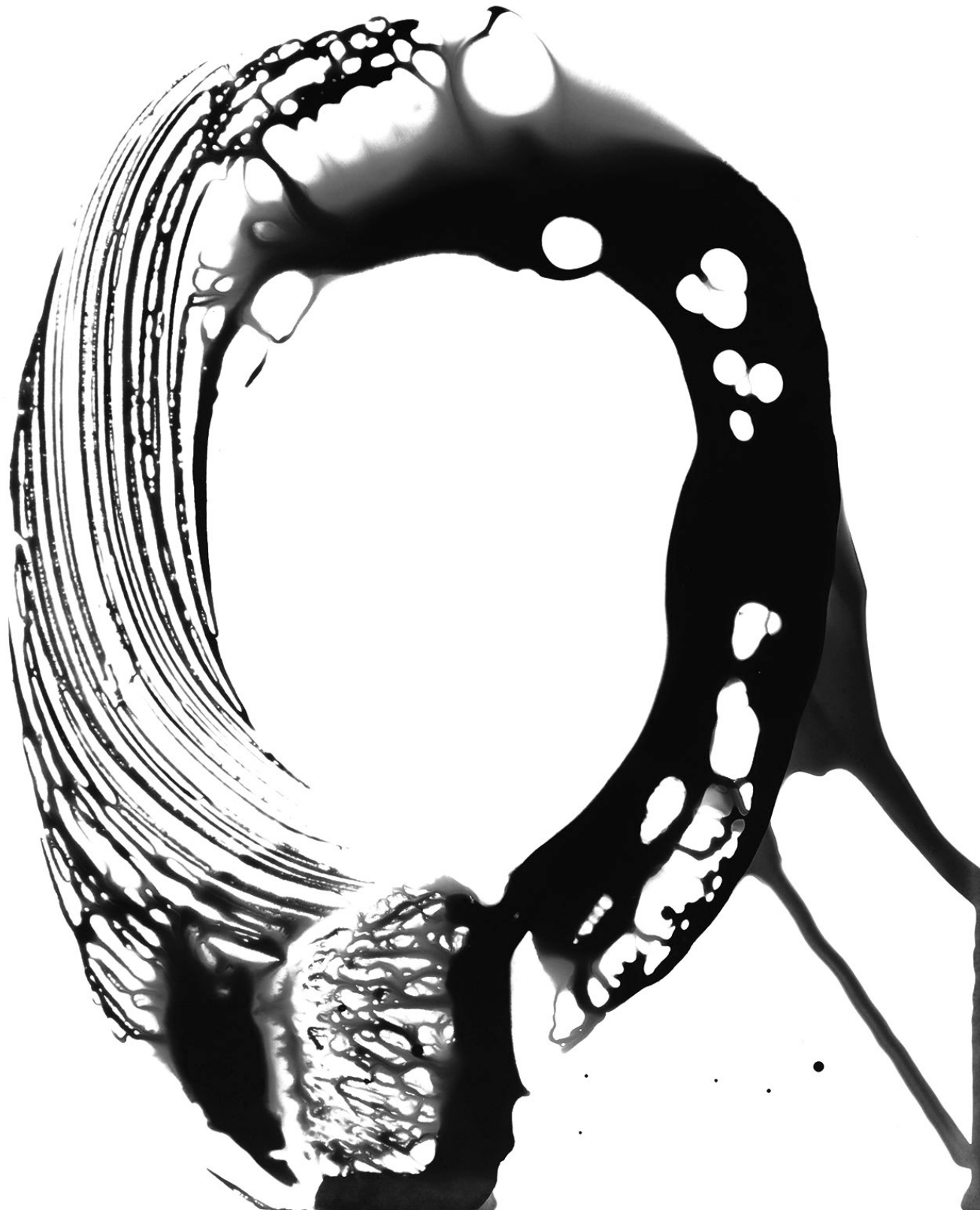
After sending this message, my mood shifted 180 degrees. From feeling like the victim of a scam, I was laughing at my image of my scammer looking over his shoulder for the next two weeks.

My next thought was "What can I do with this exposed paper?" Darkroom paper that is exposed to light turns black wherever the developer touches it, so I couldn't use it to print my own photographic images. But what if I went into the darkroom and tried sketching with the developer? To my immense delight, it worked. Now to try something bigger. I needed more room so I moved the whole darkroom into the bigger studio space. And that's where the magic happened.

As a child, I remember seeing a documentary on an Asian artist meditating with a brush full of liquid ink, waiting for the right time to make the splash of brush to paper. In this action he was capturing the speed of the drops to paper. This male artist, holding the paint brush upright with his two hands, drawing lines straight like his manhood, with confidence. Remembering this gesture, I thought of capturing my womanhood: "O."



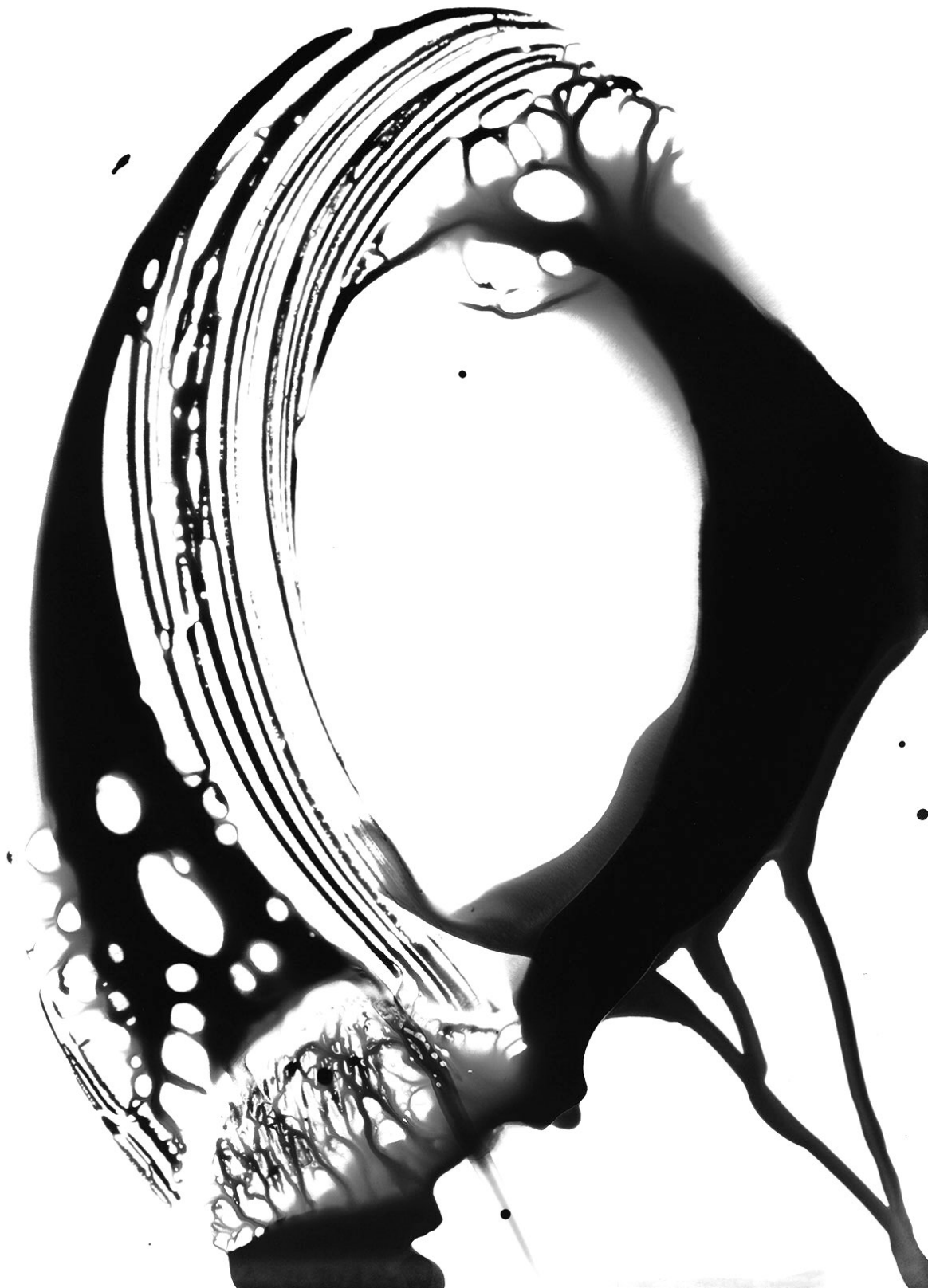




"It's Craigslist, Toots!"  
Developer Sketches #18



"It's Craigslist, Toots!"  
Developer Sketches #29



"It's Craigslist, Toots!"  
Developer Sketches #3

**T**hings we  
believed  
to have  
brought us loss,  
have not—they  
are gifts from  
the universe to  
teach us to think  
in a new way.



"It's Craigslist, Toots!"  
Developer Sketches #7

# THE WORDS THE FORWARD THE ALMOST EVERYTHING



In order to understand all outside ourselves, we must look within. - Arthur Rimbaud

**A**lchemist, activist and experimental artist, Cynthia Karalla started her career as an architect-turned-photographer and then trained in fine arts. Karalla's work is best understood as the process of turning negatives into positives, of shifting our

perception of the things that happen in life, just like when she develops film. What is photography, if not a tool to redirect vision and reframe our sight of the sensible?

In her work, the process of developing film becomes the means to navigate through relations, through the City, through her childhood, and through the bigger and smaller experiences of everyday life.

An early example is the Untitled, Mona Lisa, where Karalla transformed your everyday Joe into one of the most entrancing icons of Renaissance art history: 3,500 shots over the course of eight days proved that the mind has the power to activate inner metamorphoses and sublimate reality.

For Baby Grand Piano she investigated the discursive taboo of the penis, discovering that it can be turned into positive thinking when a mass number of men processed their insecurities through an unconventional photoshoot, encouraged

by their women partners. As a result, the icon of the penis turned into playful candy, colorful music, and everything that is whimsical in life. This provocative project demonstrated again that in life it is possible to move towards positive outcomes from a negative point of departure by shifting our way of seeing and framing reality.

In Love Story-Seconds, Karalla processed the adverse experiences of her life by shooting the reflection of LA homes fragmenting in the water: changing the perception of what she saw turned turbulence and sorrow into beautiful glossy abstractions, reminiscent of the paintbrush strokes of the great forefathers Picasso, Miro, Monet, Basquiat.

Developer Sketches is the outcome of an unfortunate Craigslist scam that made room for experimentation, becoming one of Karalla's most successful images.

Unpredictability and contingency are ever present in the processes that shape Karalla's life and work; chance infuses her practice throughout.

The pieces in the series I Ching are inspired by the ancient Chinese tradition of divination and pay homage to John Cage. They are a visual explosion of unknown negatives into incidentally harmonious chaos.

Cracked Ribs was born from a banal physical injury that constrained the artist to focus on time, breath and slow movement through a hot Italian summer.

Central Park - The Zeckendorf Project resulted from a challenging yet fortunate commission, which allowed the artist to juxtapose her own new perspective onto New York City's iconic landmark.

Indeed, Karalla's experiments illustrate that transforming from within is the necessary prerequisite to change outer reality. In her words: "The process of developing is one of the mind, to be able to take the negatives in life and to turn them into positives." Like an alchemist that turns lead into gold, Karalla applies these processes into her daily life and artistic practice, delving deep into her interiority and evolving, constantly, within and without, tracing a path for others to explore. The resulting works are not simply beautiful, moving images; they are examples of how life can be transformed through a shift in perspective.

By Pauline Joelle



Cracked Ribs -  
Four Corners

# THE EIGHT DAYS OF THE UNTITLED MONA, 2004



Day 1



**I**n the early days of September 2001, as summer drew to a close, I found myself in the ancient city of Matera, Italy, capturing the rustic charm of the Sassi di Matera through my lens. This place has long been my home away from home.

After many hours spent editing on my computer, I took a stroll through the Piazza to give my eyes a much-needed break. Despite my fame for my poor command of the Italian language, I always enjoyed these brief interactions with the locals.

On my stroll, Gianni Di Bari, an acquaintance, saw me and asked, "Dove vai?" Seizing the opportunity to practice my Italian, I confidently replied, "Casa mia." Unfortunately, my pronunciation faltered on the S, and it came out sounding like "cazzi," a term which can be quite offensive. An awkward apology followed, during which Gianni revealed he had learned English by watching the Ninja Turtles. With a smile, Gianni then asked which Ninja Turtle he reminded me of: Raphael, Michelangelo, or Leonardo.

*Without much thought,*

*I blurted out, "Da Vinci!"*

This puzzled me for days until it finally clicked. Gianni bore an uncanny resemblance to the Mona Lisa.

At that time, I was collaborating with Andres Serrano, a renowned photographer. When I shared the story of Gianni's likeness to the Mona Lisa, Serrano became intrigued by the idea of photographing Gianni in that

iconic pose. Gianni was thrilled at the prospect, and we tentatively planned the photo shoot for the following summer.

As the new year rolled around and my summer in Italy approached, the planned photo shoot had to be postponed. Serrano and I were engrossed in the project "America," leaving no room for the Mona Lisa endeavor. Feeling guilty, I concocted a plan to hire a young Italian woman I knew who had a crush on him as my assistant for the rescheduled shoot, hoping to play cupid. Gianni chimed in, "She doesn't speak English and you don't speak Italian. How does this work?" I reassured him that he could translate for us.

My background in hermetic philosophy and alchemy, disciplines that metaphorically transform the mundane into the sublime, inspired me to guide Gianni through a similar transformation.

Over the course of eight days, we embarked on a photographic journey where I aimed to reshape Gianni's self-perception into that of the Mona Lisa. We took a staggering 3,500 photos during these sessions, which spanned two weeks. Each day's session typically concluded with the final shot being the image of the day. Gradually, as we meticulously built the set and crafted his outfit, Gianni evolved into the embodiment of the Mona Lisa.



7 Days of 8



The 8th Day of The Untitled Mona

## LOVE STORY - SECONDS, 2007-2020



**A**h, you meet that perfect person, the rhyming in time is right. You know the years of waiting and not settling have just paid off. Even though you know nothing about this new love, the butterflies are all singing, singing that love song. Because what you don't know is okay, your imagination is filling in the blanks of who you want your new love to be.

Even though you just fell in love with your imagination of this person, which is of no fault of yours or theirs, they are falling too in love with their imagination of who they want you to be. It is that perfect matched love affair of meeting imaginations, even though we know that this will end in *The Mourning*.

Time is a killer. You can Memorex a moment and when young, you can defy gravity and believe that love will win the day. Not to be a pessimist, but love can simulate a long

drunken journey. From which you awaken with a major hangover.

So, in *Love* I found myself again. Everything seemed so right. BUT (never start a sentence with a but) But my father died in a boating accident, just as I turned eight, thrusting me into adulthood. By the time I was twelve I had my own checking account and an almost apartment. By the age of fourteen I was always making something that would bring in the cash. I have never sacrificed my independence for love, but I have sacrificed love when it threatened my independence.

So, there I was in California, looking over the Venice Canals at these beautiful homes across the way that I will never own. With the sorrowing hangover of my perfect imagined love, the homes, the tear that is ready to fall, I look down into the water, with that *Ophelia* reflection in my heart beating in pain.



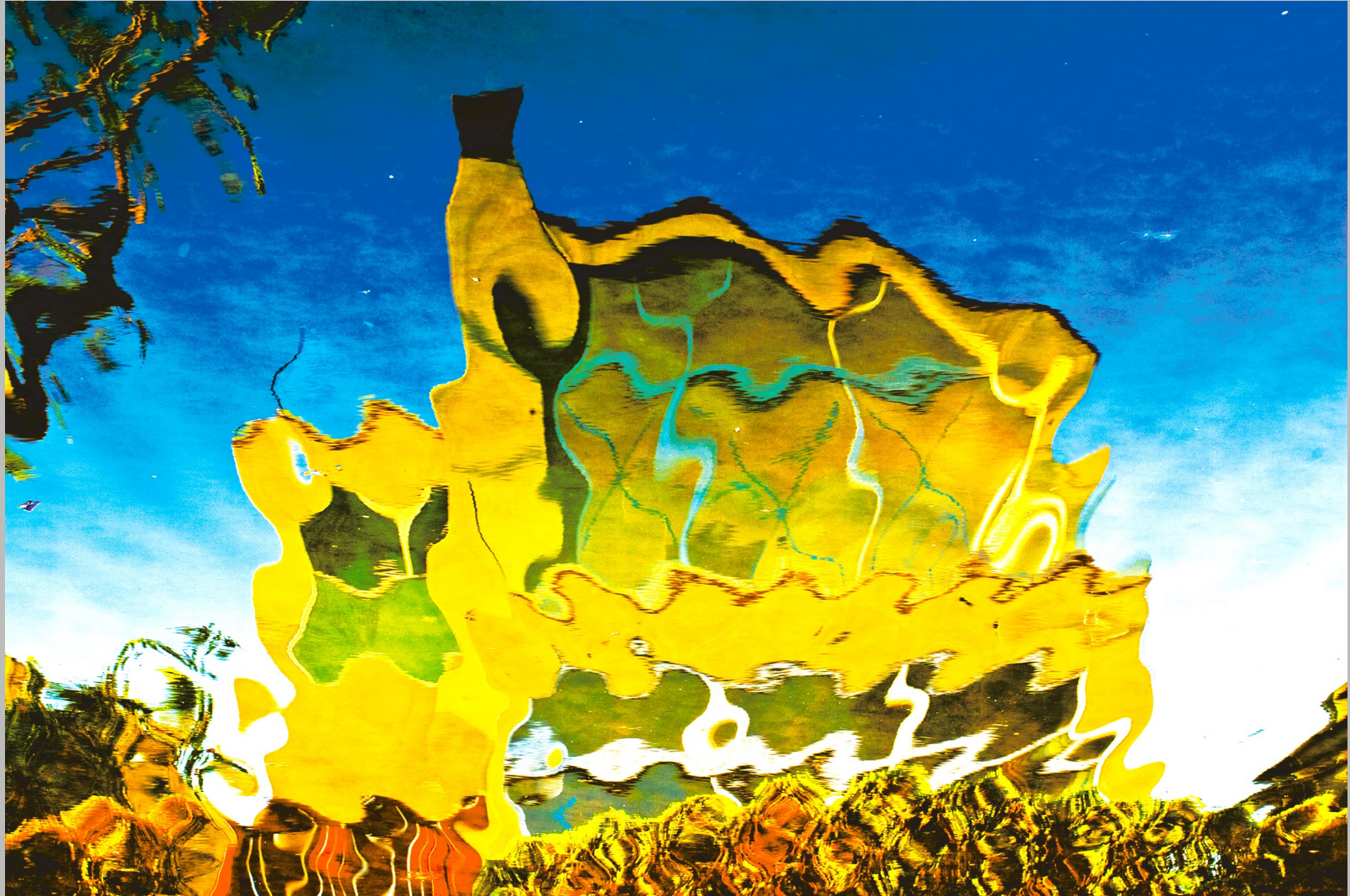
**T**hen came the ducks waddling through the canals, as if gliding through the perfect home now reflected like glossy abstractions in the water. In that moment, my perception changed. An image that

had reflected my sorrow emerged from its watery canvas a masterpiece, painted by one of my favorite artists: Miro, Klee, Picasso, Basquiat.

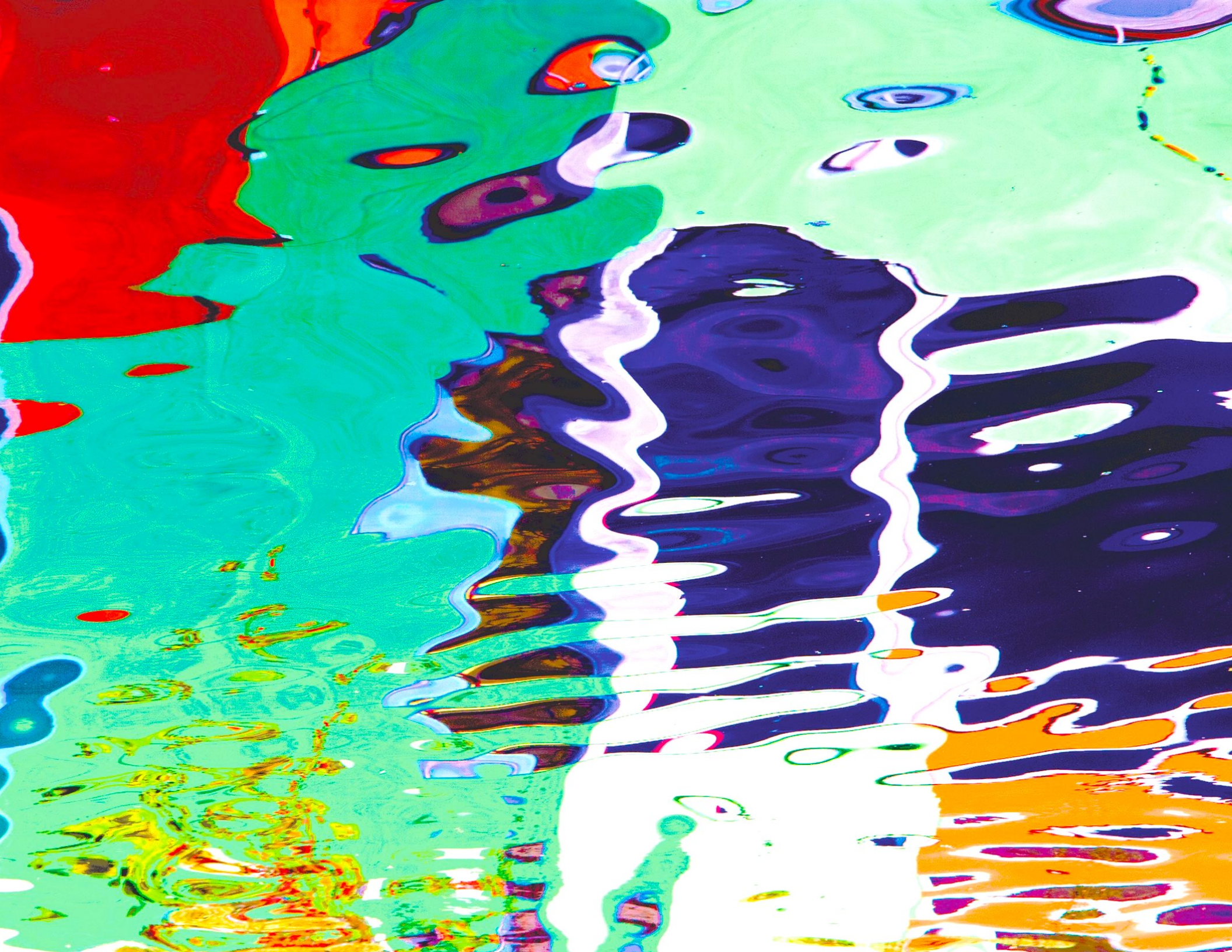
Love Story -Seconds -  
Miro Red



Love Story - Seconds - Queen



Love Story - Seconds - Klee







Love Story - Seconds  
Cezanne

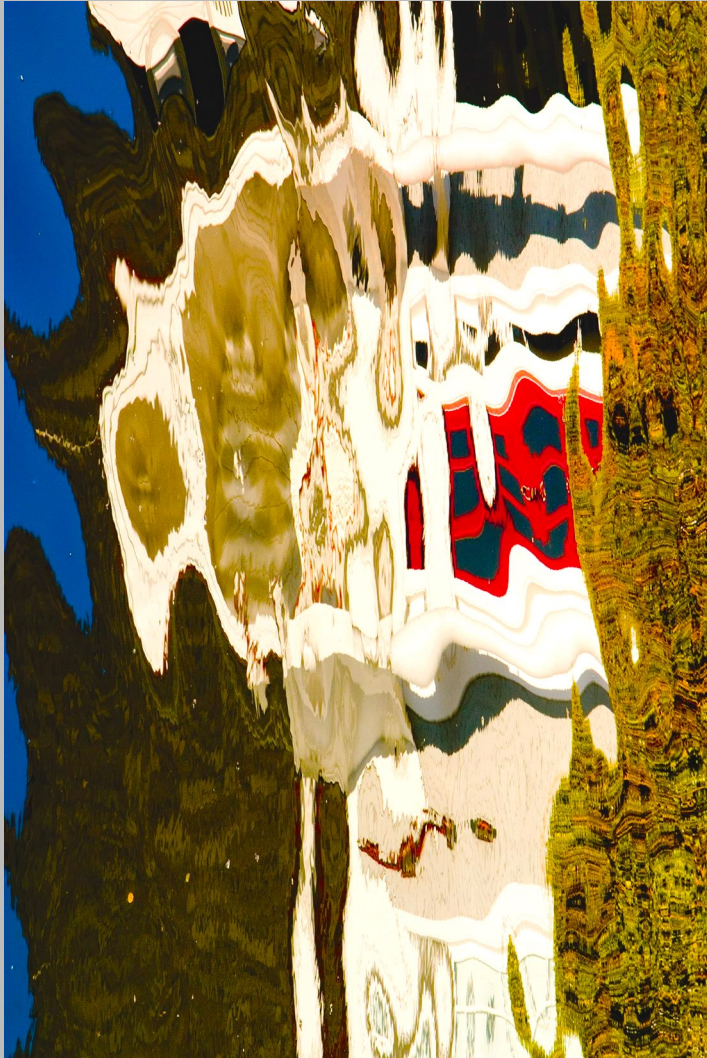


Love Story - Seconds  
de Kooning

Love Story - Seconds  
Miro



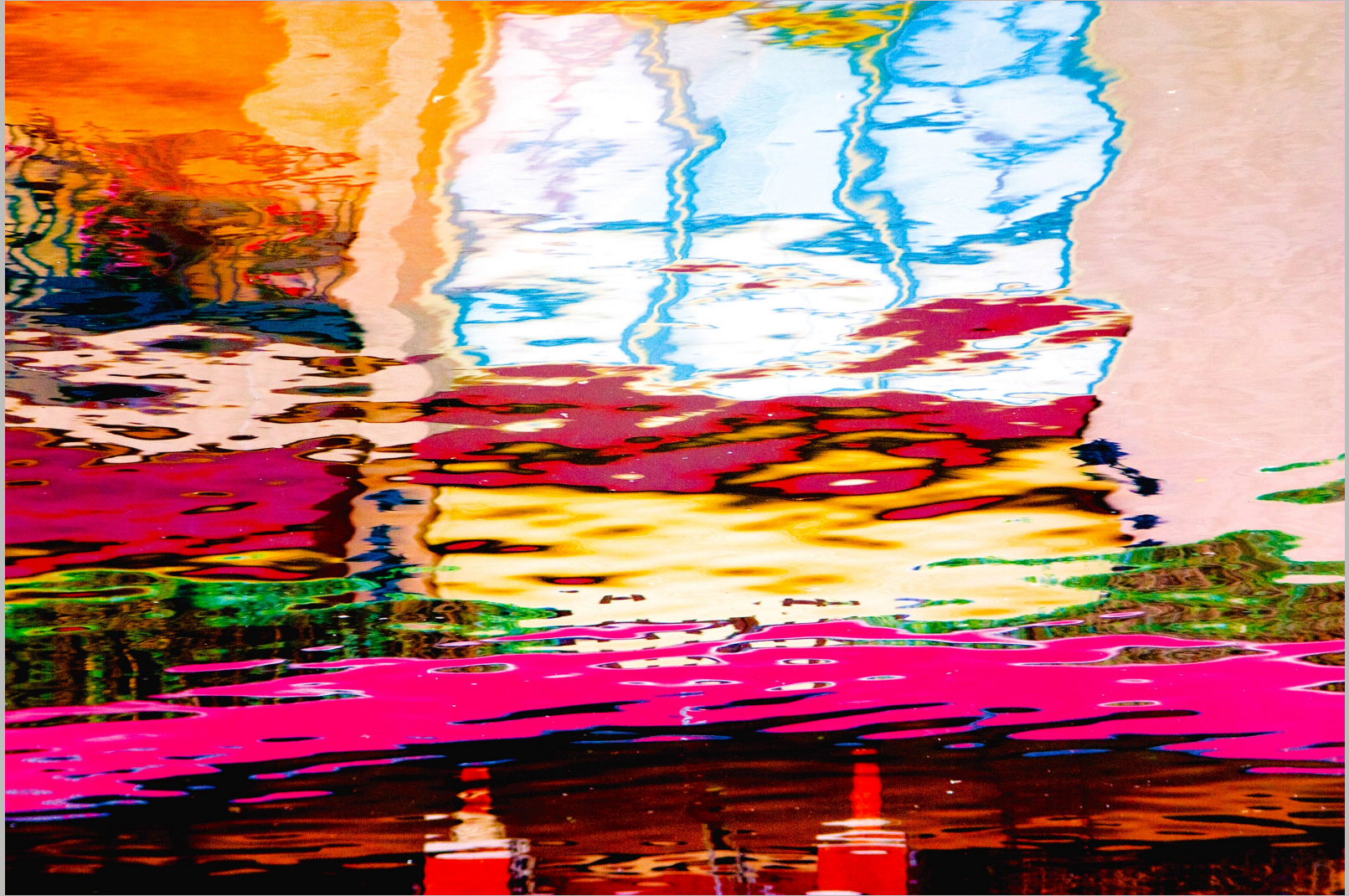
Love Story - Seconds - Starry Palms



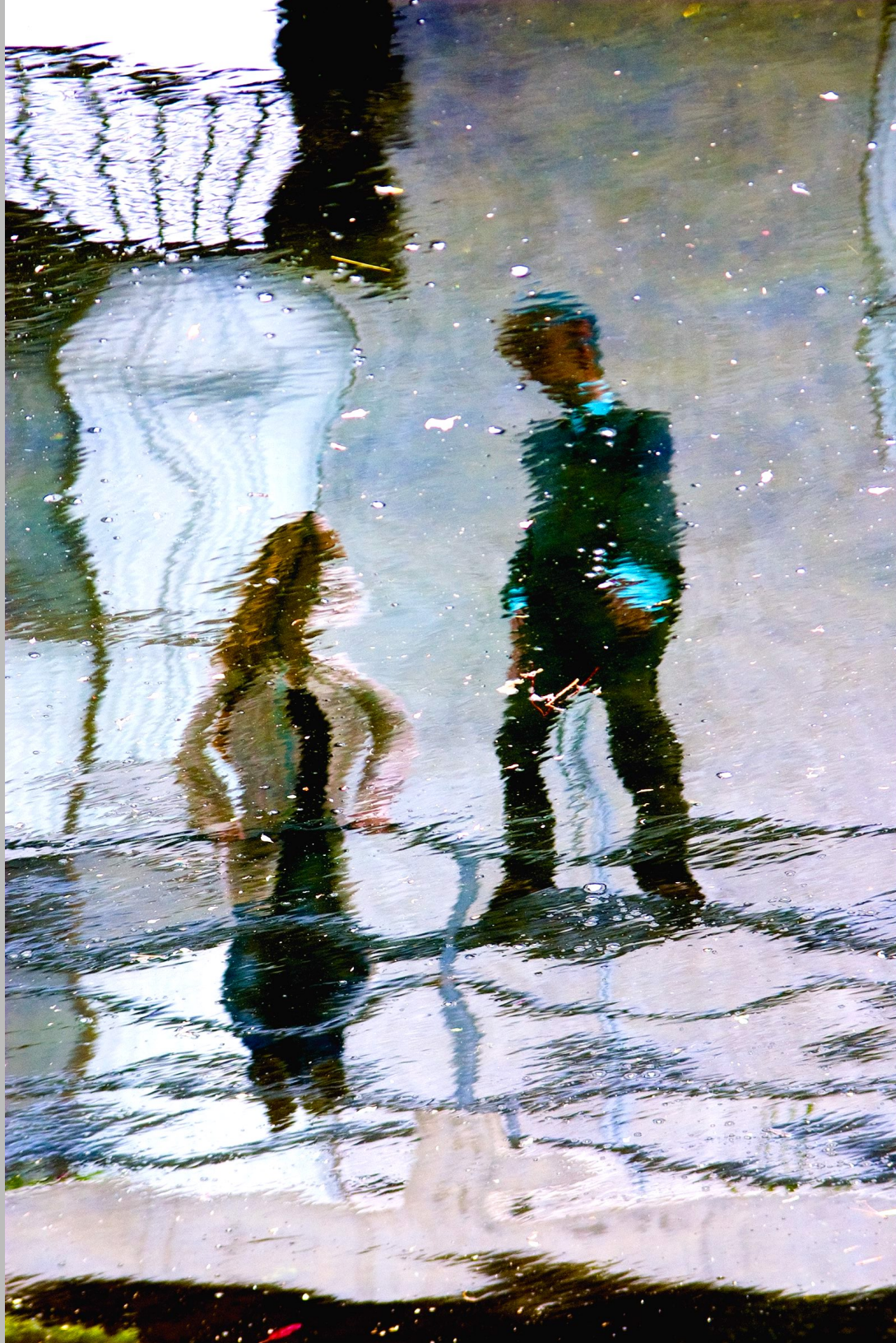
Love Story - Seconds  
Basquiat & Klimt



Love Story - Seconds  
Michael Graves  
Architect Student



Love Story - Seconds - Pink



Love Story - Seconds  
The Lovers

Love Story - Seconds  
The Lovers

## MOURNING POPPIES, 2013

**E**ach morning the dawn was grey. Not the gray with the A. It was grey with an E. The A is gentler than the E. The E weighs heavy, dark, closer to the color black.

My friend Judith was at the Bari airport in Italy, waiting for me to arrive. She looked at me with a tear and said, "I hardly recognized you!" I was heavily surrounded in the grey. It was five months ago that my friend, my mother figure, my go-to for everything that pertains to life and not, my Zelda had passed away. We had an agreement that she would live to break the record of Jeanne Calment at 122 years and 164 days. Just before her 96th birthday, without warning, it happened. She died. She had been there for me when tears fell hard and also when laughter stained my cheekbones pink. Most of the days of my life, my Zelda was there.

It is so strange when death takes a loved one. Even when it is expected, it feels impossible to accept. All the days, months, years that you spent together have exited your life, because your life with that person just died too. Alone and grey in a hole is how I arrived in Sassi di Matera, Italy.

Every summer I come to the Sassi, by way of my best friend Dorothy dragging me there—and also to find myself in a new project that somehow would manifest for me. It is an easy place for me to work. I can read all the books I want, and let my mind wander in outer space, because there are no stop signs for me; I am famous for not being able to speak Italian. This year was different, it would be my biggest challenge without my friend Zelda acting mothering me as I would give

her the details of my project and updates on tummy health. There wasn't a detail of my life too small to share with her.

It was a magical time. To arrive as the Murgia filled with poppies. I don't know why or how it came to be that, I would wake at 3 a.m., eat a bowl of cereal, and be out the door by 4 a.m., walking to the, Murgia with my camera, lenses and tripod hanging around my neck and shoulder. I had no plan in mind, which in most cases, is the best plan. The gold, the real treasures, are in the present. Art is everywhere, all at once; you just have to be alive to document it.

I laid down in the muddy fields of the Italian poppies, filming the poppies as live beings, alone like me in life. Except there were tens of thousands of them there. They weren't alone and neither was I. In my black hoodie, being one with the ground, the magic started to happen. Dragonflies, butterflies, bumble bees, and critters tinier than ants came flocking to me as if they were all welcoming me to their world.

The entire summer of 2013 I went each morning to lie within the mud and become one with this tiny world. This world of the tinies grounded me back into the present, grateful for the time I had and for the awareness that we are all one with the universe.





**T**here is a world out there of little people, delicate people, but to the common eye, they are only flowers. This unknown world, captured by Karalla before the sun shined its glorious light, was found in the Murgia of the Sassi di Matera, Italy. The red poppies hold poses, and some look like they are returning from war. Others form clusters like tight-knit families. Lying in the dirt, unlocking this visual magic.

Karalla is at their level, with them in their beauty, hearing their stories and waiting for the sun to warm them from the night's dew.

By Liza Klimko

The Mourning Poppies -  
Zelda Blue



The Mourning Poppies - Pink #3

The Mourning Poppies -  
Red Fishbowl







The Mourning Poppies - Pink #7



The Mourning Poppies - Pink #8



The Mourning Poppies - One

The Mourning Poppies -  
Gold Signal





The Mourning Poppies - Black I



The Mourning Poppies - Black II

## THE ITALIAN BATHERS, 2012

Most times in life we have a plan or an image in our mind of how we want things to be. I was on the waiting list with one hundred other photographers for the new Zeiss 135 mm f.2 Apo. I was assured the lens would arrive two days before my scheduled trip to the South of Italy. It did not go as planned. I quickly found one online and had it Fed-Exed to me a few hours before I had to leave to catch my flight at JFK Airport.

The Italian sun was hot and dry, the kind of heat that layers life into a soundless action. It reminded me of my one summer in Greece. I was sitting at a cafe, watching a bulldozer knock down a building across the street, in silence. When the heat is this strong, the brain melts down and the mind goes blank, no image to be seen.

It was life. It was hot and I didn't have a plan, but I was eager to test drive my new lens.

That day I had more than the heat to deal with. Every year I set a goal to surpass the previous year's project. This was an even greater challenge than the heat. I could fail to rise to the challenge and blame it on the heat. Or I could trust myself and just let it happen. Letting it happen without an image in my head.

Without an image in my head, I thought of the brilliant American street photographer Garry Winogrand. He died March 19, 1984, with 2,500 rolls of undeveloped film. He had this practice of developing his film two years after shooting it. This gave him enough time to create a space between the image he had in his mind and what he actually captured. The image we form in our mind is only in our mind, and if we do not succeed in finding it, we often

dismiss or delete what we have captured. Not because our shots lack beauty, but because they do not correspond to the image we had in our mind.

Back to the heat, the sweat, the blank—a love-hate relationship.

I hate the beach. I love the beach. This love-hate relationship I have with the beach is torture. The burning sun will toast my body. The sand and sun will destroy my cameras and lenses. That day on the beach, I tried to take care and not burn myself or my toys, but as always when my eye is glued on the viewfinder of the camera, I invariably hit a turning point and relinquish myself to the moment, without any care for my body, or my expensive toys. These became secondary to my need to shoot; to capture something magical, you have to be able to completely abandon yourself and your equipment in the moment of the shoot, hoping that the gem hiding inside the process will reveal itself to me, to you, to everyone.

So back to the melting sun, the heat, the sand, and a brain evaporated to the point that it couldn't even think of an image, let alone create one. Yet, there I was test driving my new Zeiss lens. Every lens has a sweet spot; a spot where all beauty comes together perfectly. Rumor has it that the sweet spot on this lens is f.5/6, but the rumor about me is true: I don't do what has been done before. Lens open wide, I made this an f.2 summer. Without a plan, without premeditation, letting it be. Not interjecting my thoughts, not telling anyone what to think about the resulting images, letting their imagination enjoy the happening. This is how this became my fabulous f.2 summer with the *Italian Bathers*.





Italian Bathers #6138



Italian Bathers #5103

The images exposed by Karalla are reflected in the consciousness of each of us. They remind us of childhood, a sultry, but pleasant day spent with the family on the beach. The focus is shifted from everyday things and switches to branches framing the image, which create a natural pattern.

In these works, everyone can notice something truly close for them, re-think and re-feel the deepest memories. These works resemble the modern incarnation of the paintings of Maurice Denis, reflecting on a summer day. Looking at these works, thoughts about shiny Hockney objects may arise in your mind and this is all due to color and light. The compositional solution and dynamism of these photos encourages a fair comparison with Alex Katz. Maurice Denis, David Hockney, Alec Katz and now Cynthia Karalla

By Liza Klimko



Italian Bathers #3726



Italian Bathers #6138



Italian Bathers #0805



Italian Bathers #0815



Italian Bathers #5436

Italian Bathers #3167



## CENTRAL PARK - THE ZECKENDORF PROJECT, 2022

It had been more than ten years since I took my photography down an unknown path. I explored the digital era in the late 1990s, bushing it into uncharted extremes. The only thing great about digital is that you can keep making tiny adjustments as if you were applying paint to a canvas. But in 2014, I was back to film, both because I love the mystery involved in transforming ideas into a new tangible reality, and because there are so many more avenues to explore with analogue photography. Digital just can't muster up that gravy.

Of course, working with film in the traditional way wouldn't satisfy my creative curiosity. I had to push the limits of film even further. First, I bleached my negatives, sometimes to the point where nothing was left. Then, I cut and chopped my negatives, a tactile representation of the angles that are at the heart of picture-taking. Finally, I rolled my prints into a three dimensional form, pushing them into sculpture.

Yes, the voices in my head were loud and clear: As David Hockney proclaimed decades earlier, photography is dead. But then again, when the camera first came into existence, the world announced that portrait painting was dead. No one stopped painting; the new medium opened new ideas and perceptions, leading too many decades of experimental abstractions. A new language that baffled the viewers.

So here I was in 2022, still in the throes of the pandemic, when I got a call requesting seventeen images of my Italian *Poppies* for a project at Zeckendorf Towers, a luxury condominium in Manhattan's Upper East Side. Although I had created the *Poppies* a decade earlier, they were still a hot number from my digital age. After viewing the images, everyone at Zeckendorf was on board; everyone except one person. The poppy flowers reminded him of opium and drugs—he wanted

a better representation for the building, a theme better suited for families.

Zeckendorf then asked if I would be interested in pivoting to a new project: a photographic series on Central Park. I have traditionally turned down commissions, because I can't read minds. Besides, Central Park has been shot by the best, those who arrive with their specialty lenses loaded on their cameras fire away. You can almost describe shooting in Central Park as a Gunslinger's Camera sport. Each photographer is trying to shoot their ego forward into the future.

Haunted by competitors, past and present, I knew I could either fail or succeed, spectacularly. There was an additional hurdle: I had not worked with a digital camera in more than ten years, nor did I own any digital equipment anymore. At the same time, I couldn't turn down this opportunity. So, off I went to the famous B&H Photo store, the Mecca of camera equipment, and bought the same Zeiss lens with which I shot the *Poppies* in Italy. The project was officially due the day they hired me, leaving me with no time to experiment. But, driven to find something new, I made time. There had to be something, even though I didn't know it existed, because it couldn't exist until I found it. That is why I overcame my insecurities and took on the challenge.

Friends kept saying; "Just give them something simple, take the money and make art later." I could not wrap my mind around this type of argument. Here I am, being paid to do something that I have no image of in my mind. But I just know that as I stay with it, as I let it all be, the magic happens.

The Old School said never to manipulate the image. So, of course, I turned my back on the Old School and went to town pushing my images to the extreme.





For some I pushed Matisse into the positive and the negatives until they sang songs. I discovered a color not known to me, a new hue of pink, and became addicted to the way it merged with the black and white notes, both rising stoically above the water and rippling like dream reflections. I felt that just as Gauguin went to Tahiti, I went to Central Park to find something new, something found.

I was hired on the last day of June 2022. By mid September we had installed seventeen 30"x 40" images. By mid-October seven extra images went up. In the end, my peers remarked that my Central Park ushered in a new photography.





Central Park -  
102 Street

Central Park -  
Van Gogh  
Sun Flowers



Central Park -  
Bethesda Fountain

Central Park -  
Conservatory Garden







Central Park -  
Belvedere Castle

Central Park -  
The Wild

Central Park -  
Reservoir







Central Park -  
Boat House



Central Park -  
Sailing Pond



Central Park -  
Guggie

## CRACKED RIBS, 2016

If you have ever cracked a rib you will relate well to this next venture. In the beginning, cracked ribs are the biggest stop sign you will ever be smacked with. Your busy days come to an abrupt halt and you realize how full your days were. The simple action of getting out of bed is like a long scene in a Bela Tarr film, or a "short" paragraph by Marcel Proust. Minutes transform into hours, hours into a day, just to take care of the simple necessities of life. There is a good and a bad to it all. At first it was a "not good" moment. But when life throws you a curveball there is not much you can do about it. The doctors gave me breathing exercises to do. It hurt when I tried to breathe. It hurt when I tried to move. It hurt just thinking about it all.

While my camera equipment sat in the corner of my place in Italy, I laid around in wait. Waiting for life to begin again. Waiting, waiting, and waiting eventually turns into boredom. Boredom is the greatest gift bestowed upon an artist, or anyone else for that matter. It gives the child space to come out to play and little problems become part of the game. In that liberating child-like frame of mind, I set up my film camera and started doing long shutter exposures of my breath.

Breath is the first and the last thing in our lives and that is a big note. In the beginning of these experiments, I was home alone. My friend Maria Teresa called me to come out to play, but I could not hang out with her. Living in Italy is like being in a Fellini film. You can't help but laugh hard, so hard your

cheeks can hurt for days. Laughing, sneezing, and coughing were at the top of my list of things to avoid. So, for the first three weeks of my boredom, I engaged in photographing my breath, alone.

It's almost impossible to disappear in the Sassi di Matera for three weeks. The people look out for one another and I felt honored to be included in this family. So, of course, the story was about the New Yorker who had cracked ribs. As luck would have it, some of my past models came by to inquire about me. Which opened the door for me to catch their breath in the long takes on film. It was amazing how much pain I was in, but it did not stop me from playing with my chemicals to develop the film, and scan, and review the daily shots. There is something about being locked in with your work; it takes the focus off the pain you are in.

I was shooting with my 500cm Hasselblad in black and white. This camera is a medium format with only twelve shots per roll of film. I told my willing subjects what outfits to wear.

One particular day we were shooting in the backyard of my friend Judith's home, located up the stairs from my place. As the girls were ascending the staircase in their black and white outfits, some random dude yelled out loud, "Is it a black and white shoot?" It was as if Fellini was there in spirit. The girls cracked up in laughter, because no one knew the dude, and I could not hold it in either. Painful, laughter, awesome memories. The cracking of the ribs was a gift.



Cracked Ribs - Mask



Cracked Ribs - Carla

**C**racked Ribs 2016, Following an accident that caused her to crack her ribs, Karalla births this series to avoid boredom. While engaging in breathing exercise, she records with an open shutter on her camera. Some images do not survive the hour long recordings; but for the ones that did, it was worth cracking her ribs.

by Pauline Joelle



Cracked Ribs - Angels



Cracked Ribs - Portrait



Cracked Ribs - Fifty





Cracked Ribs - Basil



Cracked Ribs - Four Eyes



Cracked Ribs - End

## BLEACHED, 2014-2016

**T**he negative is my beginning. To bleach, bend, cut, scrap, throw the negatives in a drawer or leave them out on any dusty surface; anything to let it collect life. Rebuilding the image is where I lose myself in time. I start with the most hopeless images, because there I have nothing to lose. Hours mesh into days, there is an alchemy of magic that comes into play.

I resume playing with my cameras to procrastinate and create a distance between shooting and the process of editing. After a 5-to-6-month period, I can return to the previous project with fresh eyes and edit my images.

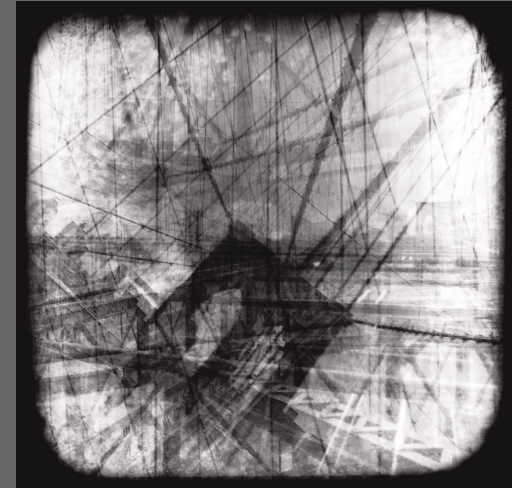
This process helps me to see what I could not see before. Because before I had a premeditated idea of what I wanted, instead of allowing myself to see the beauty that was there.

I thought about the Negative. How it was held so high with white gloves.

The dusting, cleaning, just the naked black and white film being protected from life and its elements. I thought why not let life hit it. I perused the household cleaners under my kitchen sink, looking for something that contained bleach, and found it. Rolls of film destroyed and then rebuilt again in the mesh of the rolls.

A photographer fond of the project was impressed with what he saw and asked me about the process. I told him I was bleaching my negatives. He said "Let me get this right, you are making a new negative and then bleaching it?" I said, "No, I am bleaching the original, I am trying to get it as close to life as possible, just like us, we don't make a copy of ourselves and send it out into the world". This is life, the beauty of life has hit the film. Some died in the process, yet the ones that have lived are telling the story of a new beauty.

My process was once a passion, now it is my addiction.



Bleached - Brooklyn Bridge

**K**aralla crosses the sacred ground of the holy film negatives by tossing out the white gloves and splashing the delicate filmstrips with bleach. She can't help smirking when hardcore photographers start asking her how she created this work. They instantly assume that she must be doing this to a copy of the negative. She nods NO and states: "It is the original, the original sin"

By Pauline Joelle



Bleached - Reservoir



Bleached - Self Portrait

ABRACE

100 ACROS

167 17

ABRACE

ACROS



Bleached -  
Met-1



Bleached -  
Towers





Bleached -  
Tree



M-FORD PAN F-PLUS

55

ASA

Bleached -  
Met-7



Bleached -  
Met-4



Bleached - Landscape Study 11



Bleached - Landscape Study 3

## THE EVOLUTION OF ALICE, 2016

**M**y last day in the photo-darkroom left me feeling dark and gloomy, which is exactly what my prints became.

The contact negative was made from three different cameras, over a three-year period, montaged together to make the prints.

The structure in the background ended up too dark, making the quality of the print worthless—mirroring my mood. I decided to take a grade #80 sandpaper and scrape into the fibers of the photo paper, to see if there was any hope of finding some light in and on the dark building structures in the background.

As I started sandpapering the prints, each background structure assumed a new life and then began to dissolve, and it became clear that in these photos, as in our lives, the worlds of darkness and of light were just a temporary metaphor. The building structures hadn't changed in essence, and soon they—the physical world — began to disappear.



# Alice

was indeed alone in Wonderland.



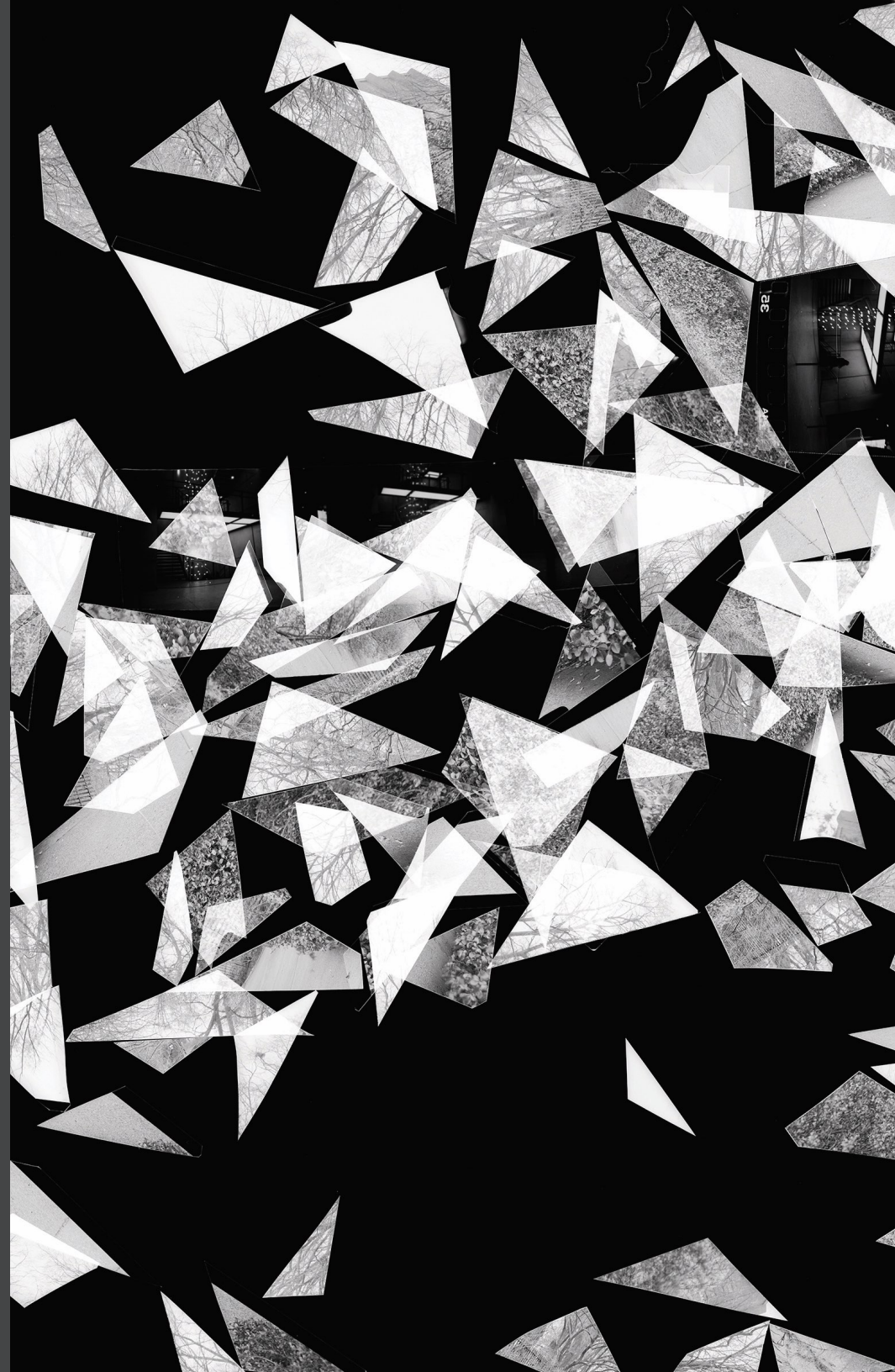
## I CHING, 2014-2019

I decided to pay homage to John Cage's I Ching within the world of photography. Step one, be sacrilegious and slice up my film negatives into long angles.

When I was a kid I loved playing pool.

Step two: throw the angled, cut negatives onto a flatbed scanner and scan those slices into gigs. There is a bit of a marriage between a game of pool and a well shot photograph; it is all about the angles and how many elements you can incorporate into the play in order to sink your ball, or make that perfect picture. The more difficult the shot, the more interesting it becomes to watch, especially if it breaks all the known rules of the game.

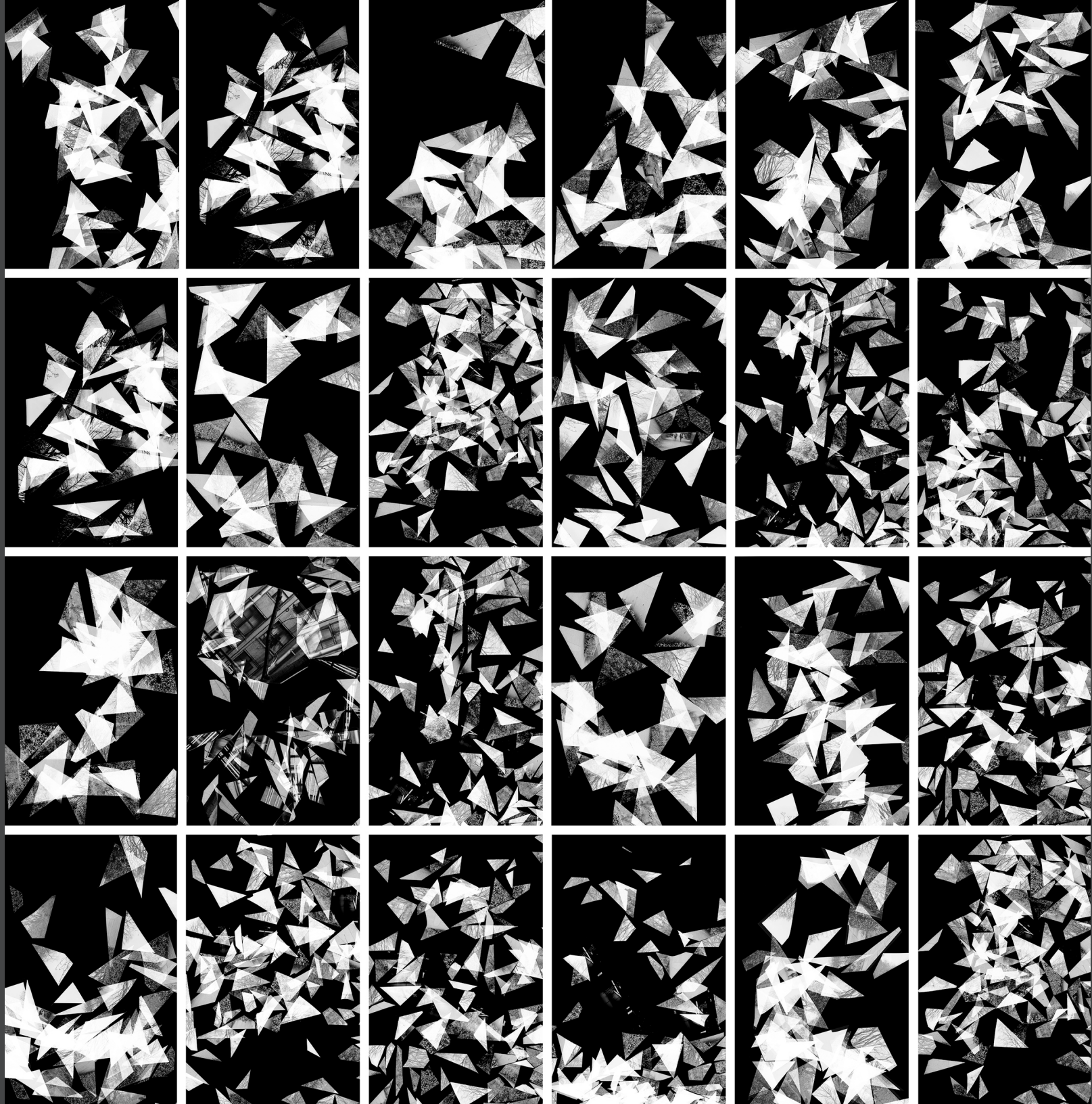
I Ching  
Study D3











## THE ROBIN HOOD ART PROJECT AT H&M, 2023

There is a spark, then a bang, life is magical. On July 26th, an exhibition of QR Codes, how much fun I thought, and then I thought it would be even more fun to be wearing the QR Codes throughout the city, while being curiositized by the unknown passersby. I love my white H&M shirts, such interesting cuts and styles.

This was it, I decorated my H&M shirts with the QR Code from my website. The front, bottom, right on the shirt, it was decorating in a discrete sort of way.

The Test in Wearing. The problem with the QR Codes on the front, you can see who is scanning you. When placing the QR codes on the back of the shirt, four inches below the neck line, right at eye level, the scanners could be undiscovered as they scanned my QR codes. Much to my surprise, so many people scanned the back of my shirt and after they viewed my website, they came over to introduce themselves to me. This was so much fun that it sparked another bang in the idea department. Green Light.

*Why not butter the fun in spreading the Art...*

The people that shop at H&M are pretty much the 9 to 5ers on a budget. More than likely, no time for the Chelsea art exhibitions, maybe some Met, damn all those museums that charge more than a pair of pants and top at H&M. So why not bring some art to H&M? As a tribute to Warhol's idea of "ART for the Masses."

The idea bloomed into buying eighteen shirts from H&M, QR Coding the clothes, then sneaking the shirts back into the stores and onto the shelves. It was rather like reverse stealing. What about the merchandise already tagged sold? Would the customer get it for free? Would I be arrested for a new crime that was not even on the books yet?

A friend said, "If they arrest you, don't worry, I will bail you out!" I bought eighteen white T-Shirts on Tuesday, August 1st, 2023.

That night the iron was running hot till 2am. All eighteen T-Shirts, signed and numbered. In the morning, Wednesday, August 2nd, 2023, I visited four H&M stores in NYC. I was a bit nervous, but my friend Carol was hanging out on the phone with me. It was strange, walking into the dressing room with six items and coming out with eleven. But no one seemed to care or notice. In the Dressing room I was trying hard to flatten out the wrinkles with my fingers.

Security was everywhere in the stores, all talking the walkie talkie talk. As I stood in the dressing room, removing clothes from the hangers to hang my art shirts on, I thought what if they came in? The only thing I could do would be to laugh!

In the stores & Hopefully free in the hands of some happy H&M customers.

H&M

HELLO, NEW MEMBERS  
Hello, new members get 10% off when they join.



## **PAINT ME BLACK, 2020**

**T**he whole objective of the Paint Me Black project was to have a racist candidate experience what it is like to be judged by the color of their skin. The day would be played out with a candidate having their skin painted black.

They would be dropped off in a known racist neighborhood to spend the day on the streets without a cell phone. After their day we would drop them back in their neighborhood, but with a twist in the game. Their skin color would take a few days to wash off. This led to them either hiding within their homes or having to explain their harrowing experiences to their neighbors, friends and family members. I believed that putting people in such an uncomfortable position, by having them walk a mile in another person's skin, would will open the door for change, a change in their beliefs.

## **PRESS RELEASE / PAINT ME BLACK, 2020**



### **PAINT ME BLACK**

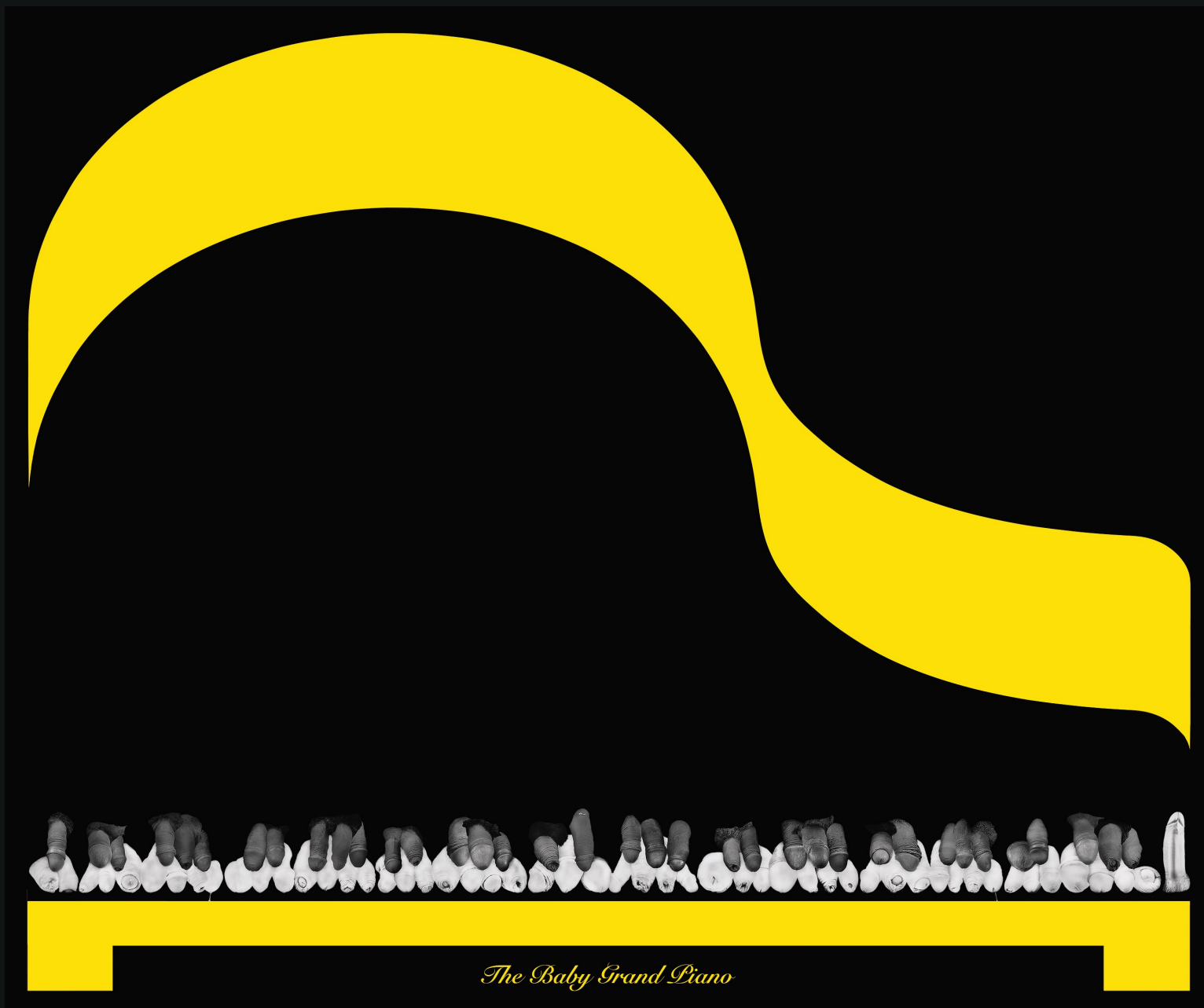
**\$2,500 FOR THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME**

**Think Racism No Longer Exists? Prove it.**

**Paint Me Black will Paint You Black "and Pay YOU \$2,500"**

**W**e are offering the experience of a lifetime; a chance to live for a day on the other side of the racial divide. If you feel there is no black/white division, now you can find out for yourself, upfront and personally. We will pay you \$2,500 to have our makeup professional make you Black for a day. Not minstrel Black or party Black, but actually Black. You will be able to go out on the streets and feel the effects of this embodied experience. Are you looked at differently? Are you spoken to in a different way? Report back your findings with a short video questionnaire at the end of the day. Maybe you will be truly changed by this experiment, or maybe not. Either way, you will be \$2,500.00 richer. Test the power of your convictions.

# THE BABY GRAND PIANO, 2004-2024



*The Baby Grand Piano*



**W**aiting for my past to catch up. In my view, the most precious jewel is the creative process. It was June 2024, 20 years ago, after completing a major project. I awoke after 10 days of sleep, to the view of Sacré Coeur the Immaculate Conception. I woke up from my dream laughing because, in the dream, I had built a piano of black and white penises. I was born into a family with a history of 500 years in the Vatican, so who better to receive such a message?

A few days later I was leaving Paris to travel to the Sassi di Matera, in Italy's Basilicata region, where my studio was located.

In the south of Italy—actually in all of Italy—Fellini is everywhere.

Pain can be felt in the cheekbones of one's face from the laughter of life. This is where it all started. The Baby Grand Piano: 88 keys, 52 white penises, 36 black penises.

Discussions with a friend about the new project were thought to be confidential. When I got back to my studio ten minutes later, I'd already gotten a slew of calls about the penis-Piano project. It became a Fellini-esque experience.

After three days in my studio, everyone was talking about the project that I did not think would be possible to make in this small city in the South. A call from my best friend warned me about the police and that my equipment could be confiscated, with a charge of pornography. I called a friend to relay the warning and he said: "Go to your studio. I will be there in 10 minutes."

Damiano arrived with the Captain of the Polizia. He was my first penis shot. From then on, it was one big party in Basilicata, where the women started bringing me their men in droves.

Who would have thought that this Catholic country would take part in this adventure. I assumed that back in the USA—"the land of the free"—I would have people lined up outside my door to participate in my project, because I am 'in the arts'. WRONG. It was harder to shoot this project in NYC than in Italy. But again, the women were the driving force bringing their men to the studio and making this project happen.

I encountered another problem: how to find 36 black men in my circles to complete the project. This is where my spiritual-90-year-young mom comes to the rescue. The queen of NYC nightlife Zelda Kaplan knew every doorman, club goer, people from every corner of the world. She introduced me as her daughter and said I needed a certain part of their body for a photo shoot. Every answer was the same, "Anything for you, Zelda." The line was out the door, the piano shooting was done. It had taken a year.

It went public in London, 2007. When I arrived there, the first words I heard were: "You're in 'Pseuds Corner!'"

"What is Pseuds Corner?" I asked. I learned it's the cultural Holy Grail of UK society. Issue: Private Eye, UK No.1195, 12th-25th October, "Baby Grand Piano?"

The filmmaker Alexandro Jodorowsky, when told of the project, said: "That is totally impossible. Everything has been done in the Arts. How could someone not have done this before?"

Then came the roller coaster ride, praise versus dissection. Since I had worked with Andres Serrano, of the infamous Piss Christ controversy, my work was similarly judged for its cheap shock value. There was a buyout offer from a French gallery for all rights. I turned it down, which did not please the London gallery. My work was locked up for six months by the gallery.

**O**n this side of the pond, another dealer had my prints and wanted to own the project, too. The war was on as I tried to get my property back, but as a typical artist without cash, I was stuck. Luckily a lawyer who admired my work stepped in and helped me regain possession of what was mine. By then I was tired of the fights, and the Piano project not being taken as a project of substance. So, I closed the lid on the penises and started working on a new body of work, mainly photographic, that allowed for my experimentation and creativity to deepen. Year 2008.

**I**n the early days, photographers would Vaseline their lens filters to create glamorous effects. I also re-fashioned the Piano penises with that Vaseline look—the modern version being Photoshop Vaseline.



BB, Paris - Silk Scarf.



Deville, NY - One of a Kind Tote



The Baby Grand Piano - Black & White - 2020



Leslie in Chelsea - Silk Scarf Piano

**W**e hit the news big, from the North to the South of Italy, everyone wanted to know the story of the Pianoforte. I did an interview with the journalist Serafino Paternoster. I asked him not to release it until I was out of the country, so I could avoid explaining the project in my special Italian. Serafino Paternoster called me after the press went public. He said in all his days of journalism he has never received so many phone calls.

He said there were three very important questions,

- 1, Is she Crazy?
- 2, Where is she?
- 3, Does she need a model?

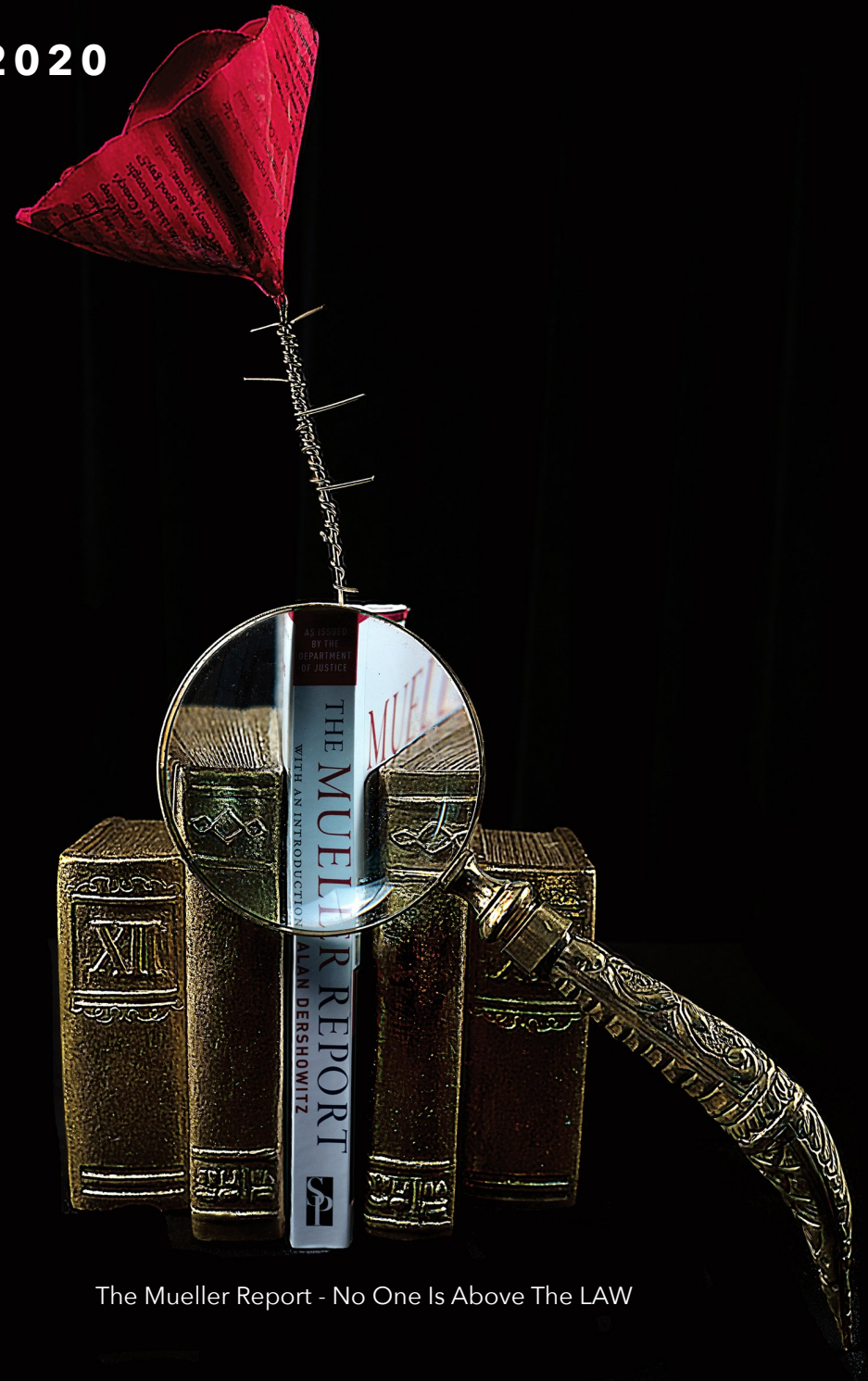
Paternoster, Serafino. "Un Pianoforte Fatto Di Sessi per Rompere Le Barriere Fra Uomo e Donna." (trans. "A Piano Made of Sexes to Break the Barrier between Man and Woman") La Gazzetta Del Mezzogiorno, 12 Oct. 2004



The Baby Grand Piano - In Living Color - 2020

# THE MUELLER REPORT, 2016-2020

I started The Mueller Report when Trump said he was going to bury the Mueller Report. I, a second generation American; I took my citizenship for granted. But when I realized what was about to happen to our America, I stopped what I was doing and started campaigning for our democracy, trying to make people aware of what was at stake. By turning the Mueller Report into a work of art, The Mueller Report would live forever, so History would not repeat this horror.



The Mueller Report - No One Is Above The LAW

# July 19th, 2016

## GOP NOMINEE HOLDS AMERICA HOSTAGE

He is bankrupt.  
Problems with the IRS,  
Trump University in court,  
Racketeering charges, etc.

**H**e has no desire to be president of the United States of America, that would require work. He is using this election as the greatest con game ever played, by holding the American Government hostage, turning it upside down through his comments and actions. "We have nukes, why can't we use them. Build a wall and make the Mexicans pay for it. Throw all Muslims out of the country. Insult everyone no matter who they are.

And let's make America White again, etc., etc."



The Mueller Report -  
Starter Gun Egg

**H**e is successful, his game is brilliant, everyone is in panic for the next Trump Gaslighting phrases.

His supporters are his weapon of choice. He rallies them into "Breaking News" headlines. He bullies them to take over, take back, march on, anything to instigate the energy to riot. He is dictating his game, his pawns are believers. He has now introduced the idea that the election is rigged to play the victim card of the Big Bad Government.

His devoted followers will avenge their leader.

America in Civil War.  
People turning against each other.

The Mueller Report -  
Welcome to America



## Spring, 2019

**W**hile Republicans were refusing to read and acknowledge the facts contained in the Mueller Report, in the context of a presidency that was threatening to bring our democracy to ruin, I engaged in a polyhedral effort to converge the attention of political discourse back to fact-based evidence. Expressing the beauty of veracity, over one hundred second-hand copies of the Mueller Report book were made into paper roses. Since 1986, the rose is the floral emblem of the United States of America. It symbolizes love, beauty and politics. I have taken it to symbolize Truth.



The Mueller Report - Read Roses

## The Pillar of Truth

Made with over 20,000 pages of The Mueller Report, The Pillar of Truth reflects the number of lies and misinformation spread by Trump at that time as reported in the Washington Post. A monument to Truth that exceeds deceit: no one is above the law.

After uploading the study version of the Pillar onto my social media accounts, I received tens of thousands of death threats from Trump supporters. Bullying Trumpers with guns and missing teeth. The threats were so threatening that friends of mine feared for their own safety too.

Everything died down when I posted the story of Incognito, from The Heckler, a satirical sports newspaper created in 2003 by Brad Zibung, where Incognito admits he has a tiny penis, just like every other bully in the world. Since Trump's followers believe fake news, they picked up on this article and stopped bullying me.

The Mueller Report - The Pillar of Truth







The Mueller Report - The Gift

**A**fter a surgery the doctor prescribed me 30 opioid tablets.

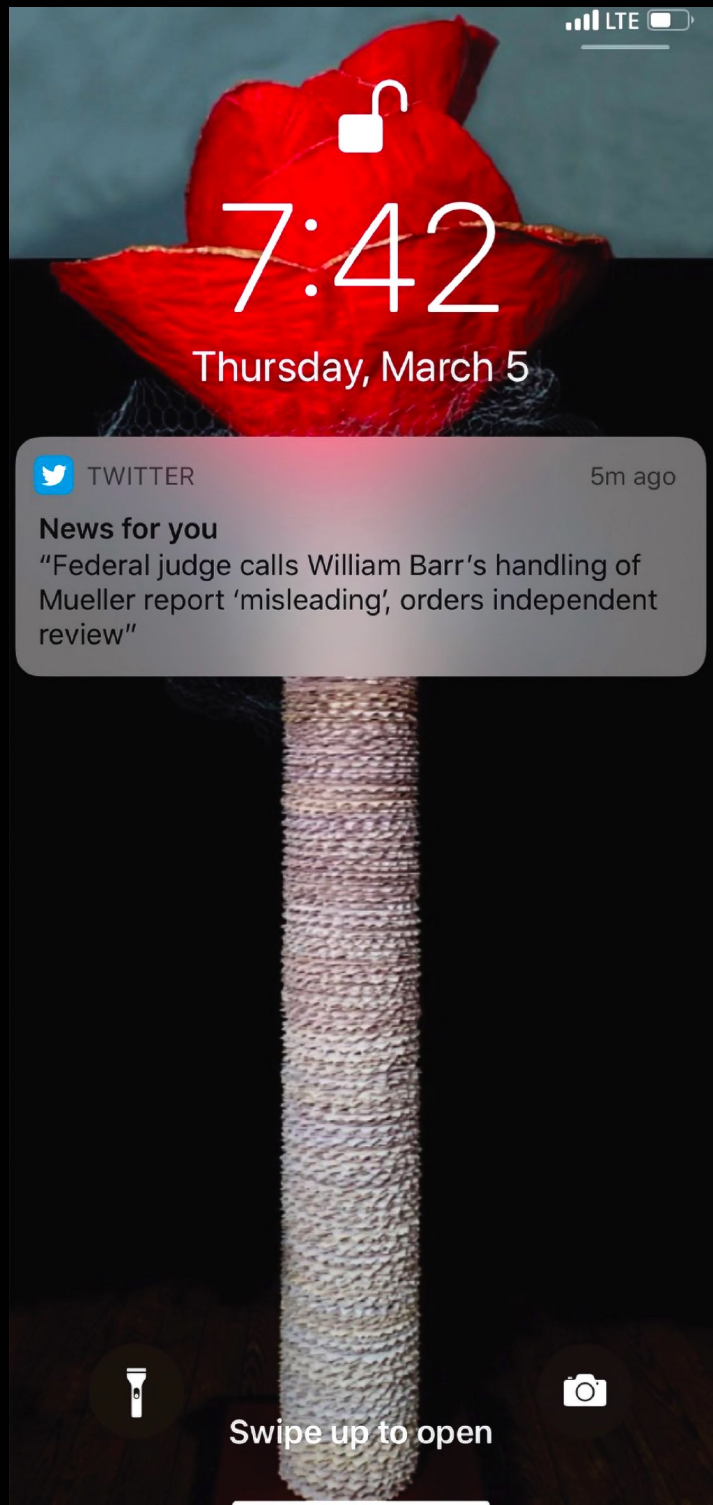
Three used, twenty-seven tablets leftover. How to get rid of them without causing death became a dilemma. Can't flush them down the toilet. Can't bury them in the soil. The workers at the disposal stores are not getting paid enough to feed their families; the temptation is too Great.

After months of stress, I placed the tablets in a piece of artwork. Set in resin, the opioids became unattainable and forever useless.





The Mueller Report - The Starter Gun



To Be Continued



Cynthia Karalla is one of the most positive and creative persons I've been lucky to know and this book is a beautiful presentation of how she interconnects and transforms her life experiences into her art. She and her work are truly inspirational!

**TRICIA ROSENKILDE**

If many of her projects are examples of Cynthia turning negative into positive, setback into fast-forward, tribulation into inspiration, misadventure into new venture, it's not by happenstance. It's who and what she is, always has been. Indomitable, hard-working, stalwart and bold. SHE JUST NEVER GIVES UP 😂

**JUDITH EDGE**

Cynthia is one of the most creative and talented people I know. Her photographs and sculptures are so inventive and sometimes just fun. She has led a very interesting life, and it's reflected in her art. Despite adversity, she's always had a very positive attitude. She is literally great at turning negatives into positives.

**KATHLEEN (Kat Woman) ROBERTS**

Karalla is a master photographer easily weaving her art through stylistic types ... from the surreal to the abstract; from the tongue-in-cheek to the meditative; from the experimental to the conventional. She is a one-of-a-kind contemporary talent.

**RICHARD RABEL**, Principal, Richard Rabel Interiors and Art

Opera preziosa da conservare gelosamente.

**DAMIANO S.**

Karalla has said that finding herself in a negative situation often precedes the making of strong work and had found herself in such a situation right before this show. She had bought a sheaf of photographic paper from a shopping site located on Craigslist only to learn in her studio that it had already been exposed to light. "It was completely useless," she said. She called the salesman who blithely told her "It's Craigslist, Toots!"

**ANTHONY HADEN-GUEST**

**A Big Thank you to The Little Garage in Huntington, NY**



Cynthia Karalla's work is more than just photography; it's a visual narrative of resilience and hope.

"It's Craig's List, Toots!" is an extraordinary journey of transformation and optimism showcasing Karalla's top 14 projects from 2004-2024, each a testament to the power of turning life's negatives into positives.

Her images capture moments of profound change and renewal, offering a beacon of light in times of darkness. This collection spreads a message of inspiration that has the potential to uplift and transform lives.

Discover the beauty of optimism, transformation, the power of art and storytelling through the lens of renowned photographer, Cynthia Karalla.

**ANDREA Q. GRUMBACH**

