



After Dark

Carli Holcomb

September 8 - November 12, 2017



FOREWORD

The Visual Arts Center of Richmond is pleased to present the exhibition, *After Dark*, in which Carli Holcomb has presented her interpretation of nature and our interaction within it. Her work is representative of the awe and inspiration she feels when she walks on natural paths, while cubic zirconias, silver, and coal slag sparkle in reference to stars that light up the night and capture our imagination. These organic experiences are countered with man-made materials such as acrylic and Plexiglas.

During a residency period of up to 20 weeks, artists have unlimited access to the full range of studios in the VisArts facility and housing and a private workspace provided by our partner Quirk Hotel and Gallery. The program provides artists at any career stage the time, space, equipment and funding to innovate and expand their creative boundaries, allowing artists to develop one or more original works for their exhibitions and/or to respond creatively to the site of our gallery with installations such as Holcomb's.

The exhibitions in our gallery allow us to explore the different ways contemporary artists are innovating the materials and processes we teach in our 15 professional teaching-studios. For this reason, it is a pleasure to present an exhibition where an artist takes chances and investigates new ways to tell her story.

We extend our gratitude to Altria Group and the Allan and Margot Blank Foundation for their generous support of our exhibition programming. Related educational programming is supported by grants from The Windgate Charitable Foundation, The Community Foundation, Wells Fargo, Dominion Foundation, The Leonore G. Tawney Foundation, and The Fan District Association. We also thank the Virginia Commission for the Arts and CultureWorks & The Arts and Cultural Funding Consortium: City of Richmond, Hanover County and Henrico County for ongoing support of our programming and operations. I also extend appreciation to Amanda Dalla Villa Adams for her thoughtful curation of this exhibition, and finally, to the artist, Carli Holcomb, for a beautiful installation of the works and for giving us all the opportunity to experience her artistic process first hand during her time in the Quirk + VisArts Residency program.

Stefanie Fedor
Executive Director
Visual Arts Center of Richmond

Cover: *Another storm named after a woman* (detail), 2017, 306-layered satellite images taken over the Amundsen Sea, Fujiflex prints, Plexiglas, 3 panels; 52" x 13" each

Inside: *Darker than day lighter than night* (detail), 2017, hand cut mulberry, James River sand, paint, acrylic rod, silver, 36" x 24"



Much of my past work has been driven by the feeling of awe that accompanies looking up into the night sky at each star while contemplating the origins of the universe. *After Dark* is instead focused on looking in rather than up as I contemplate the origins of life through such materials as clouds, rivers, and soil.ⁱ

THE REAL, THE UNEXPLORED, AND THE UNKNOWN LANDSCAPE

After Dark is a complex investigation by Carli Holcomb into the earth's natural and synthetic materials and a longing for particular landscapes: a birthplace, an adopted home, a distant unexplored site, and a non-existent place. While Holcomb's earlier work was conceptually based

on looking up at celestial bodies at night, the artist has redirected her gaze from the heavens to the earth—its clouds, rivers, and soil—that she has encountered through physical and mediated experiences or never known. To this end, *After Dark* is experiential, meant to evoke a sense of awe in each visitor and a heaviness akin to standing in the moment of totality of a solar eclipse, as Holcomb explains: "I make art for a sense of wonder." Moreover,

After Dark interrogates an archive of ephemera: maps and satellite images, found driftwood, her mother's diamond, cut paper and its shadows, and the residue of pulverized coal. By taking up what Hal Foster has coined the "archival impulse," a method that uses found objects, images, or text to elucidate connections between historical information while acknowledging a sense of loss, Holcomb uses materials to engage alternative modes of time, memory, and value structures.ⁱⁱ

In the early 1960s, many neo-avant-garde artists, ranging from performance artists to the Minimalists, negotiated the relationship between an experience and a work of art. However, in comparison to Holcomb's work, the most pivotal

are land artists from the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly Robert Smithson. In Smithson's essay, titled "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," (1968) he recalls sculptor Tony Smith's ride on the unfinished New Jersey Turnpike in 1951 or 1952. Smith recounted:

It was a dark night and there were no lights or shoulder markers, lines, railings or anything at all except the dark pavement moving through the landscape of the flats, rimmed by hills in the distance, but punctuated by stacks, towers, fumes and colored lights...The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done.ⁱⁱⁱ

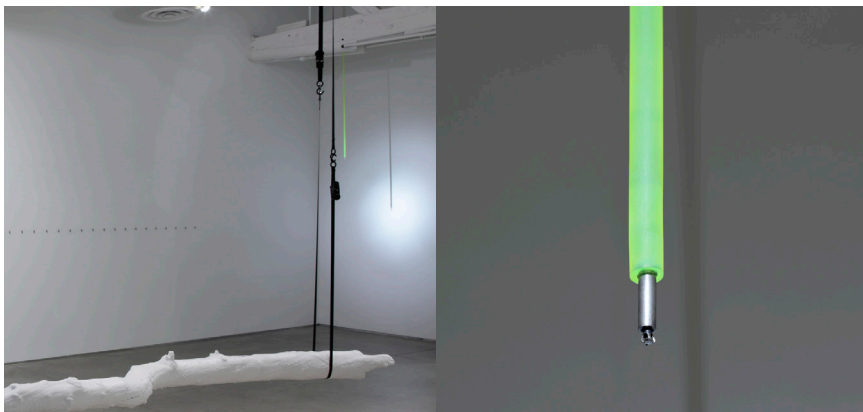
Holcomb, too, has had transformative experiences driving down a road in the dark of night:

I've driven for hours on dirt roads chasing the northern lights out west. To see it, you need to get to the darkest place you can find. It's usually at 3 a.m. and I'm there with a cup of coffee and music but I have never seen the northern lights. I have been so close but they are never there.

Smith's experience at night on the Turnpike in the early 1950s provided Smithson in 1968 an alternative framework for a new type of art that began first as a sensation.^{iv} This emphasis on sensations led Smithson to make his famous sites outside the gallery, including *Spiral Jetty*, 1970, and his non-sites of organic objects brought into the gallery. Holcomb's drive at night on the dirt roads of Wyoming similarly shifted her focus from discrete objects to sensations. Yet, unlike Smithson,

her work is unencumbered by the artifacts of east-coast industry or Smithson's other tropes of entropy, extreme masculinization, or post-industrialization.

As a nod to these pivotal moments searching for the northern lights, Holcomb has titled the exhibition *After Dark* and included snippets of lime green color throughout, including the title font, as an allusion to the aurora borealis. The green stands in contrast to the surrounding color palette of white, black, grey, and silver used for the rest of the work. In *Darker than day lighter than light*, Holcomb has draped a piece of hand-cut mulberry paper, with an all-over freehanded design of undulating lines, that she then treated with a mixture of sand and paint, over a thin rod of neon green plastic; a green thread holds the paper in place. While the rod is visually captivating, emphasis is placed on the adjacent wall and the shadow cast on the wall by the cut paper. Another rod of



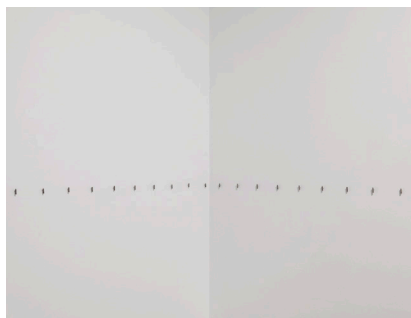
Below Time, 2017, diamond from my mother's wedding ring, acrylic rod, silver, patina, 51" mount and 1/4" diamond



Darker than day lighter than night, 2017, hand cut mulberry, James River sand, paint, acrylic rod, silver, 36" x 24"

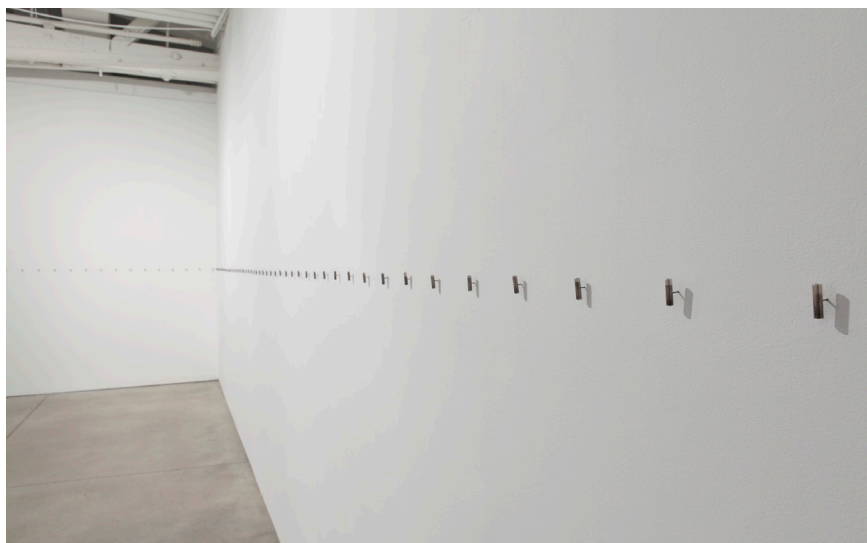
green plastic is used for *Below Time*, which features a diamond set in the synthetic material. Again, while the bright color draws attention, value is placed instead on the precious stone located at its tip. The diamond, prized as a sought-after gemstone and a family heirloom, is contrasted to the surrounding man-made simulated diamonds used in *Above*, an installation comprised of 186 one-inch metal rods, each with a pair of handset cubic zirconias.

Since both objects with a neon green rod have been installed at high levels, they force visitors to look up. This upward emphasis, though, is an exception because the rest of the works direct visitors to the ground and the space around them. For example, *Above* reinforces this ground by literally marking out a horizon line along the gallery wall—it begins as a single line in the front



room and extends to the back room in short segments. It is, however, a disorienting horizon line that flips the ground and sky back and forth as the cubic zirconias, which have been placed in the top and bottom of each rod, emit light outward in both directions. This is one indicator that *After Dark* is an exhibition built on a shifting ground of tectonic plates that contrast the real, the unexplored, and the unknown landscape.

In three unframed wall hangings, titled *Confluence*, *Eventually all things become one* and *Longing to*



Above, 2016, handset cubic zirconia silver, patina, 5 sections as installed; 49 running feet long x 1 foot high



be known, Holcomb has merged topographic maps of real places: the James, Green, and North Platte Rivers, which are located in Richmond, Virginia; Green River, Wyoming; and Casper, Wyoming respectively. Each wall hanging began as a digital image that layered maps of the rivers—bodies of water that Holcomb intimately knew after living near, swimming in, and walking around each tributary—on top of one

another. After printing the images onto canvas, Holcomb reworked the surface, painting and adding graphite to the outline of the waterway and applying a beeswax and silver coating to the entire fabric. The end result is an entirely new image that mimics the language of painting while divorcing all cartographic legibility.

Holcomb calls the wall hangings “grand maps of self.” They include, in her words, all of the “places you do not need satellite technology to navigate your way through because these are very familiar places. Each one of us has our own unique ‘grand map.’” Based on a person’s lifespan, a “grand map of self” is in a constant state of flux, but Holcomb has fixed each one in a particular moment and time. The dark color palette can be read as an allusion to the murkiness of memory when recalling these places. Moreover, the opaque surface



Eventually all things become one, 2017, merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint, 53" x 51"

Confluence, 2017, merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint, 57" x 98"

points to a person's inability to return to that same place and time, thus corroborating Proust's warning that:

The places we have known do not belong solely to the world of space in which we situate them for our greater convenience. They were only a thin slice among contiguous impressions which formed our life at that time; the memory of a certain image is but regret for a certain moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fleeting, alas, as the years.^v

Each wall hanging is embedded with a sense of longing and loss, though regret seems absent. If the northern lights beckon Holcomb, then the "grand maps of self" remind

her that the past is fleeting and the landscapes that call out to her with a siren song are irretrievable. Unlike the shifting riverbank that moves because of natural and manmade ecological changes, the "grand maps of self" are fixed under a certain time, place, and person.

In contrast to these three wall hangings, the triptych titled *Another storm named after a woman* features a place that Holcomb has only encountered through mediated experiences. It is a 306-layered satellite image of clouds over the Amundsen Sea. Holcomb grabbed each image digitally twice a day for six months from NASA's interactive weather satellite imagery viewer and then patched them together



Longing to be known, 2017, merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint, 53" x 75"



Another storm named after a woman, 2017, 306-layered satellite images taken over the Amundsen Sea, Fujiflex prints, Plexiglas, 3 panels; 52" x 13" each

Installation (next page), *After Dark*, Visual Arts Center of Richmond.



into three digital images. She then transformed the resulting quilt-like geometric patterns of clouds into a swirling kaleidoscopic of black and white organic forms that fluidly pulsate as a finished object on the printed metallic paper under Plexiglas. The title is in reference to global climate change and a theory that storms named after men elicit a more immediate response and action than those named after women. Like the clouds themselves that seamlessly meld back and forth into organic and geometric shapes, the title also alludes to the slow and monumental changes to the climate that continue to be ignored.

Finally, Holcomb investigates places that she describes as “decidedly unknown.” A “decidedly unknown” place is most evident in *The edge of nowhere*, a room-sized installation, but it also surrounds *Equal Wanting*, a black boulder suspended by a single ratchet strap, and *Adrift*, a 12-foot long piece of force-fossilized driftwood. In *The edge of nowhere*, a ceramic boulder coated in a dripping black, white, and grey glossy surface acts as an anchor in a sea of pulverized coal. Portions of *Above* are located around the installation in the dim room, which is lit by a single spotlight focused on the boulder that causes the surrounding black organic material to refract light as beads

of flickering color. Here is another example of the horizon line fluidly transposing ground and floor; *The edge of nowhere* exists in a liminal space locked between earth and sky.

Similarly, the two suspended works, *Equal Wanting* and *Adrift*, literally float in space as they distort material expectations. *Equal Wanting*, with its impression of mass and organic material, brings to mind another land artist, Michael Heizer, and his installation, *Levitated Mass*, 2012, in which he suspended a 340-ton boulder over a walkway at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. However, like everything in the shifting universe of *After Dark*, *Equal*

Wanting is nearly weightless and made from mostly synthetic materials. The boulder has the appearance of being unearthed from the black slag surrounding *The edge of nowhere* while also creating a tension between the object and the floor. *Adrift*, too, has been transported into a “decidedly unknown” place even though it began as a real object found at the riverbank of Pony Pasture along the James River. By dehydrating the wood with sodium chloride and then applying a surface of resin and salt, Holcomb preserved an exterior skin around a decomposing organic interior to reconsider value in a suspended log of organic and synthetic materials.



The edge of nowhere, 2017, mixed media, ceramic, coal slag, 7' wide x 19' long



Equal Wanting, 2017, mixed media, 118" x 29" x 25"



In addition to landscape, there are themes of stewardship and environmentalism in *After Dark*. Holcomb does not just search for a landscape, but also takes a personal investment in the care and maintenance of those landscapes, whether real, distant, or hoped for. Born in Wyoming, Holcomb spent long weekends as a child and teenager backpacking with her family in the Wind River Mountain Range. She recalls how, as a young adolescent, her mother encouraged her and her sister to adopt a piece of the nearby Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge, the public land that surrounds thirty-six miles of the Green River, and tend a spot as if it was their own. These early experiences left a lasting impression on Holcomb and taught her to think about ecosystems and history as cyclical in nature and time. Indeed, while *After Dark* has

an underlying mythology governing the relationship between earth and a landscape, the archive probed most acutely for the exhibition is really Holcomb's own epic myth of self, as evidenced by the inclusion of the diamond from her mother's wedding ring in *Below Time*, the "grand maps of self" depicted in the wall hangings, or her own longing for an unknown landscape in *The edge of nowhere*.

These mythologies as they relate to the real, unexplored, and unknown landscape are revealed and concealed by light. If chasing after the aurora borealis is one desire of Holcomb's, another is to record the totality of a solar eclipse; both have thwarted her. Her inability to capture these light-based phenomena influence *After Dark* in the form of carefully-controlled lighting: three lights sweep evenly across *Above*

Adrift, 2017, force-fossilized driftwood log collected from the James River, 12' long



from full light to gradual darkness; a filtered light over *The edge of nowhere* leaves a warm glow of light on the wall behind it; and the three wall hangings, which bulge out from the wall, each leave an uneven silhouette along the bottom edge. Certainly, the many shadows in the exhibition that, like the neon green color punctuate the space, must not be overlooked. As she highlights light, shadow, and darkness, Holcomb relates them to celestial cycles—

the orb and halo mimic the moon standing between the earth and the sun while the warm glow of light brings to mind a sunrise or sunset—thereby connecting *After Dark* to vast notions of cyclical time and a materialist history that predates the arrival of humankind.

With her exploration of particular landscapes, Holcomb and her work pay homage to the earth and its resources while nurturing sensations

The edge of nowhere (detail), 2017, mixed media, ceramic, coal slag, 7' wide x 19' long



that feel otherworldly. Visitors are encouraged to explore the gallery through sight and other senses—excluding touch. These nuanced encounters, however, require slow time, enough to notice the slight movement of a suspended object, the sound of rustling paper, or the smell of coal slag that draws from author Rachel Carson's prescription for encountering the environment:

It is learning again to use your eyes, ears, nostrils, and fingertips, opening up the disused channels of sensory impression. For most of us, knowledge of our world comes largely through sight, yet we look about with such unseeing eyes that we are partially blind.⁶

By returning to the channels of sensory impression and opening up partially blind eyes when

encountering places that are real, unexplored, or unknown, Holcomb reframes expectations about what occurs *After Dark*.

— Amanda Dalla Villa Adams

- ⁱ All quotes taken from conversations with the artist from September 2016-2017.
- ⁱⁱ Hal Foster, "The Archival Impulse," *October* Vol. 110 (Autumn 2004): 4-5.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Samuel J. Wagstaff Jr., "Talking with Tony Smith," *Artforum* (December 1966): 19.
- ^{iv} Robert Smithson, "Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," (1968) reprinted in Jack Flam, ed., *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 103.
- ^v Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, transl. by Lydia Davis (New York: Viking, 2002), 444.
- ^{vi} Rachel Carson, "Help Your Child to Wonder," *Woman's Home Companion* (July 1956): 47.

Installation, *After Dark*, Visual Arts Center of Richmond.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Above, 2016

handset cubic zirconia silver, patina
5 sections as installed; 49 running feet long x 1 foot high

Adrift, 2017

force-fossilized driftwood log collected from the James River
12' long

Another storm named after a woman, 2017

306-layered satellite images taken over the Amundsen Sea, Fujiflex prints, Plexiglas
3 panels; 52" x 13" each

Below Time, 2017

diamond from my mother's wedding ring, acrylic rod, silver, patina
51" mount and 1/4" diamond

Confluence, 2017

merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint
57" x 98"

Darker than day lighter than night, 2017

hand cut mulberry, James River sand, paint, acrylic rod, silver
36" x 24"

Equal Wanting, 2017

mixed media
118" x 29" x 25"

Eventually all things become one, 2017

merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint
53" x 51"

Longing to be known, 2017

merged satellite topographies of Wyoming and Virginia, beeswax, silver, graphite, acrylic paint
53" x 75"

The edge of nowhere, 2017

mixed media, ceramic, coal slag
7' wide x 19' long

BIOGRAPHY

Born in Green River, Wyoming in 1991, Carli Holcomb makes sculptures, installations, and production-line jewelry. She took her first metalsmithing class in 2011, shortly after meeting metalsmith Susie Ganch as a visiting artist. Holcomb holds an A.A. from Casper College in Casper, Wyoming and a B.F.A. in fine art, with a specialization in metals, from the University of Wyoming, both earned in 2013. In 2014, Holcomb relocated to Richmond, Virginia to study with Ganch and earned a M.F.A. in craft and material studies from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2016.

Following graduation, she was a Quirk+VisArts artist-in-residence. Holcomb has exhibited her work at the Quirk Hotel and Gallery in Richmond, Virginia; Light Art + Design in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; The Floyd Center for the Arts in Floyd, VA; and Mildred's Lane in Narrowsburg, New York. Her work was also included in Metalsmith magazine's Exhibition in Print in 2016. Holcomb is the recipient of an Adjunct Faculty Grant from VCU and the VCU Haystack Mountain School of Crafts Fellowship. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Quirk Hotel and Gallery; the University of Wyoming; and Coe Library of the University of Wyoming as well as private collections in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Gastonia, North Carolina; and Richmond, Virginia.

Holcomb is represented by Quirk Hotel and Gallery and recently returned to Wyoming to begin an appointment as professor of sculpture and metalsmithing at Casper College.



Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2017 *After Dark*
Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Richmond, VA
- 2016 *Black Moon*
Quirk Hotel and Gallery, Richmond, VA
- Unknowable Terrain*
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2017 *Papermakers: Art and Design In and Out of Paper*
Light Art + Design, Chapel Hill, NC
- Collector's Night*
Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Richmond, VA
- 2016 *Volume*
Quirk Hotel and Gallery, Richmond, VA; Light Art + Design, Chapel Hill, NC (2017); Eckert Art Gallery, Millersville, PA (2017)
- Exhibition in Print: Shifting Sites*
Metalsmith, Eugene, OR
- JAX
The Floyd Center for the Arts, Floyd, VA
- Unknowable Terrain*
Depot Gallery, Richmond, VA
- 2015 *Mourning Works*
Mildred's Lane, Narrowsburg, NY
- Death Complex(ity)*
Mildred's Lane, Narrowsburg, NY
- Warehouse 22*
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- Pallet Cleanser*
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2014 *Forefront*
FAB Gallery, Richmond, VA

Selected Grants and Awards

- 2017 Adjunct Faculty Grant
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- 2016 Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), Featured Maker of the Week
Eugene, OR
- 2015 Graduate Teaching Assistantship
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- Mildred's Lane Fellowship
Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA
- Haystack Mountain School of Crafts Fellowship
Richmond, VA

Public Collections

- Quirk Hotel and Gallery
Richmond, VA
- University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY
- Coe Library, University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

Selected Press

"Cover image." *Metalsmith* vol. 36, no. 4 (2016): cover.

Dawson, Gloria. "Graffiti in Residence: It's the Latest Hotel Amenity." *The New York Times Magazine* (September 19, 2016): https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/20/business/graffitist-in-residence-its-the-latest-hotel-amenity.html?_r=0

Dutt, Tanya. "Exhibition: Nature Craft." *Garland* Issue 3 (2016): <http://garlandmag.com/article/nature-craft/>

Minnisale, Greg. "An Interview with Carli Holcomb." *Drain Magazine: Dirt* Vol. 14:1 (2017): drainmag.com/interview-with-carli-holcomb/

Suri, Gunjan. *Sieve by Design*. Mumbai, 2015.



Guide photography provided by David Hunter Hale

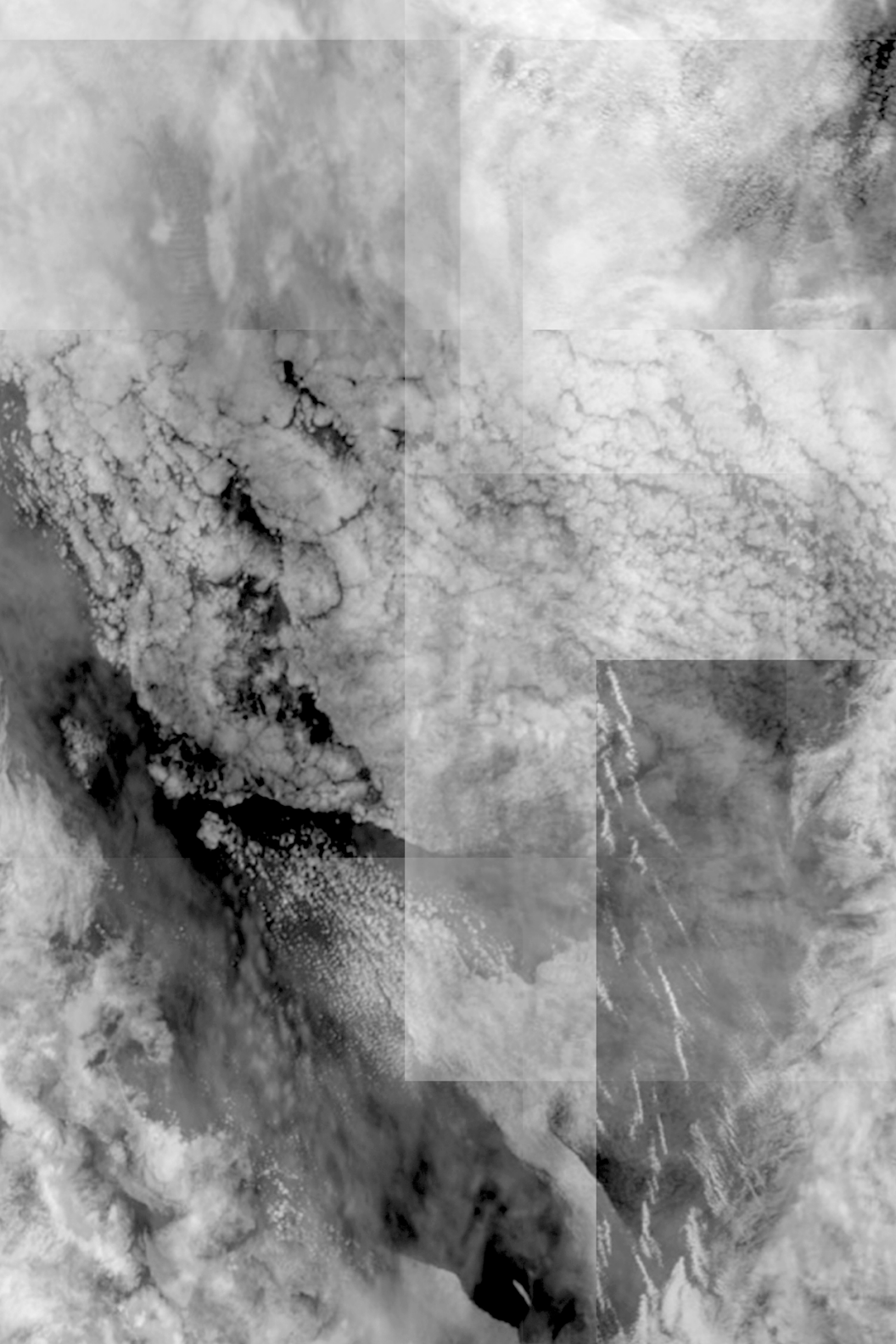
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