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Gwenneth Boelens

KLEMM'S



This Dusk Song, 2020/2021, installation view, Treignac Projet, France. Courtesy of the artist and Treignac Projet. Photo by Eloise Sweetman & Gwenneth Boelens.



This Dusk Song is sunset and mist.
This Dusk Song is auditory and lived.
This Dusk Song is river rushing and hiss.

Located in an old yarn factory in the French countryside, This Dusk Song is an exhibition of architectural, material and elemental intimacy found in the work of Dutch artist Gwenneth Boelens. Together Boelens and curator Eloise Sweetman gently bring that intimacy to the audience of Treignac Projet and its surrounds.

The location and the industrial history complement and elevate Boelens's investigation into forgotten weaving techniques and the use of striking fibres such as electro-conductive and reflective threads in her works. In particular, with an intricate site-specific installation, Boelens attunes to Treignac Projet's multiple exhibit-on sites by threading basalt, copper, and steel fibres over rollers, spindles, and pulleys reclaimed from textile machinery from the factory's heyday. The installation stretches across beams, runs down the wall, and journeys across the floor. It is a song and a growing corpus that cannot be grasped in its totality.

Boelens's new installation is set in dialogue with *The very thing we don't know is always trying to expand* (2016), a two-channel film work based on interviews with Erik Verlinde, theoretical physicist, about his yet -to-be released theory. Boelens has been intrigued by Verlinde's process of finding new ways to think about ever-challenging topics like gravity, and the 95 per cent of undefined 'matter' in the universe, and how these topics resist visibility.

Installed throughout Treignac Projet are Shields, Shells, Shh, made onsite, specifically for this exhibition, using recycled sheets of steel as well as acrylic, paper, and offset printing plates. Appearing as satellites fallen to the ground, the work transforms into a shield and a shell. Left to the elements, the light-sensitive pieces will slowly become markers of time as they are bleached by the autumn sun.

Both locations are filled by atmospheric audio works, the first created by strumming the loom from which Gwenneth has woven her textiles and the second by a theremin fed into a modular synthesizer. The exhibition soundtrack to *This Dusk Song* is accompanied by the sound of the rushing river that runs below the exhibition.



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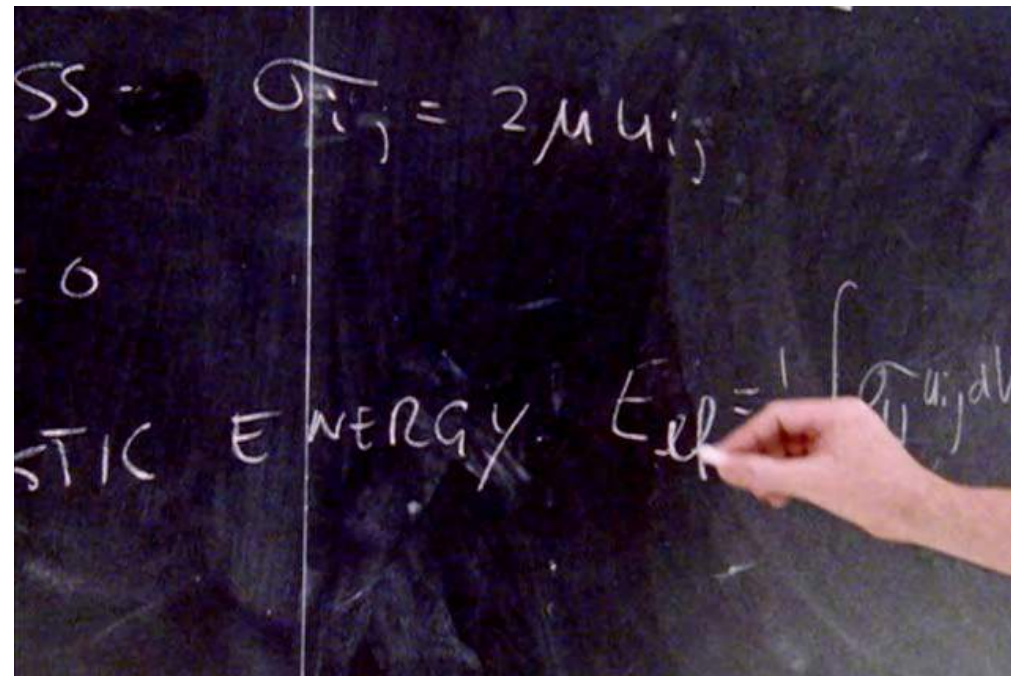
Courier 2017; international newspapers, aluminium, folding chairs



details



The very thing we don't know is always trying to expand, 2016; install-view



This short film is based on interviews with theoretical physicist Erik Verlinde, who was then on the brink of revealing a radical new theory. As Verlinde vocally runs through his equation, a dancer interprets the abstract formula in improvised motions, while a musician probingly generates sounds on a theremin – an early electronic instrument played without physical contact.

Verlinde's radicality mostly expresses itself in his rejection of a 'particle' that has yet to be discovered. One of the most remarkable aspects in his study of 'dark matter phenomena' is the utter invisibility of its subject matter, and the crucial role of imagination in coming to a scientifically sound equation.

During the six years that Verlinde worked on his theory, all of its math was done through a process of mental arithmetic. The equation was built up and challenged solely in the mind; the initial intuition, however, remained unchanged. In December 2015, Boelens asked Verlinde to write down the equation in its entirety for the first time. This resulted in a film recording of 14 minutes, in which the camera traces Verlinde's mental process through his handwriting.



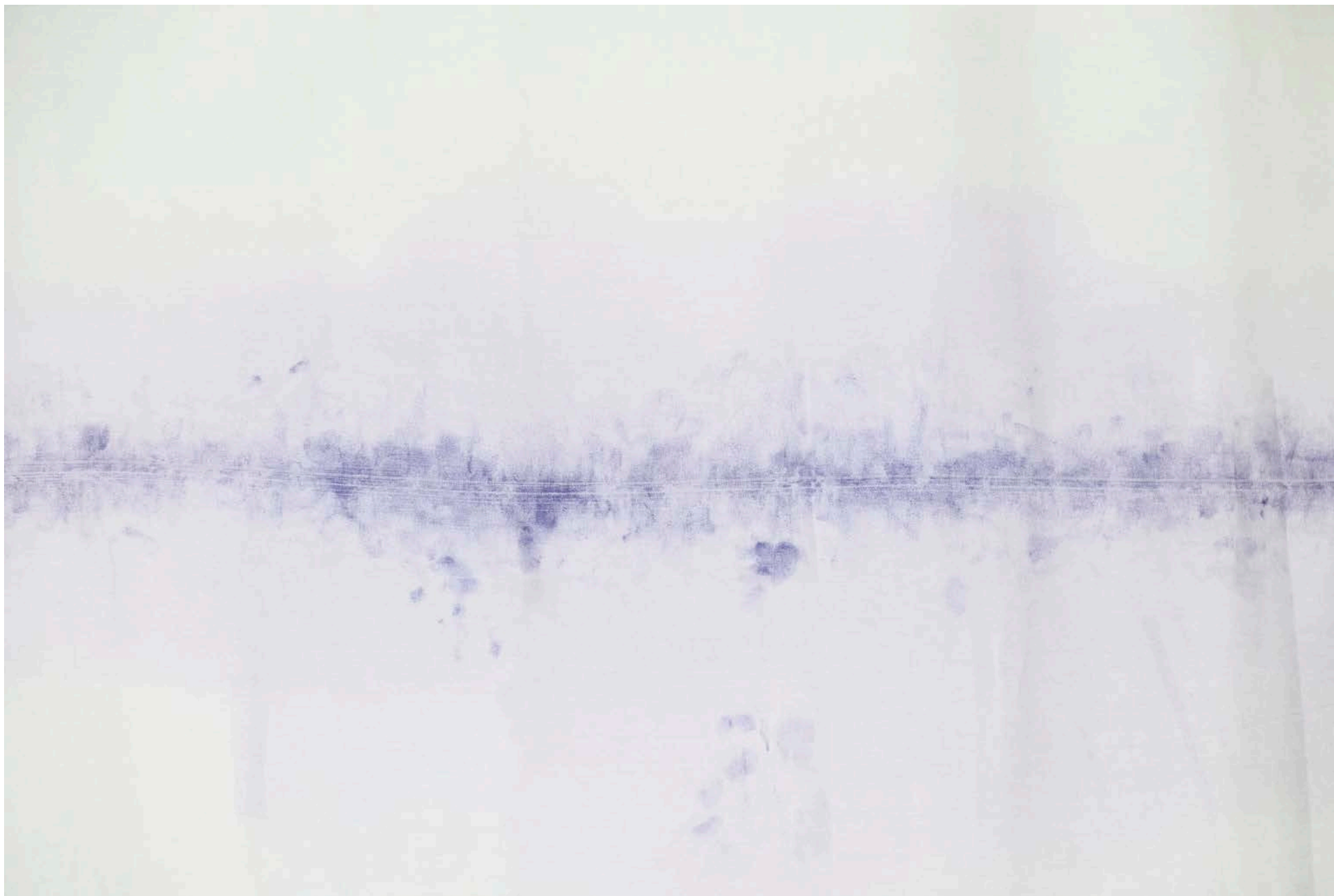
Liar's cloth (strip) 2017; reflective and conductive thread, aramide, bobbin, cardboard, tie-down straps, modified lighting installation and dimensions variable



Liar's Cloth, 2017, reflective and conductive thread, aramide, folding chair; Undo, 2017, cotton, latent fingerprints developed with fading forensic developer (ninhydrin), steel, aluminium, magnets, exhibition view 'At Odds' at MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2017



exhibition view ,At Odds' at MIT List Visual Arts Center, 2017



Undo, 2017, cotton, latent fingerprints developed with fading forensic developer (ninhydrin), steel, aluminium, magnets, detail



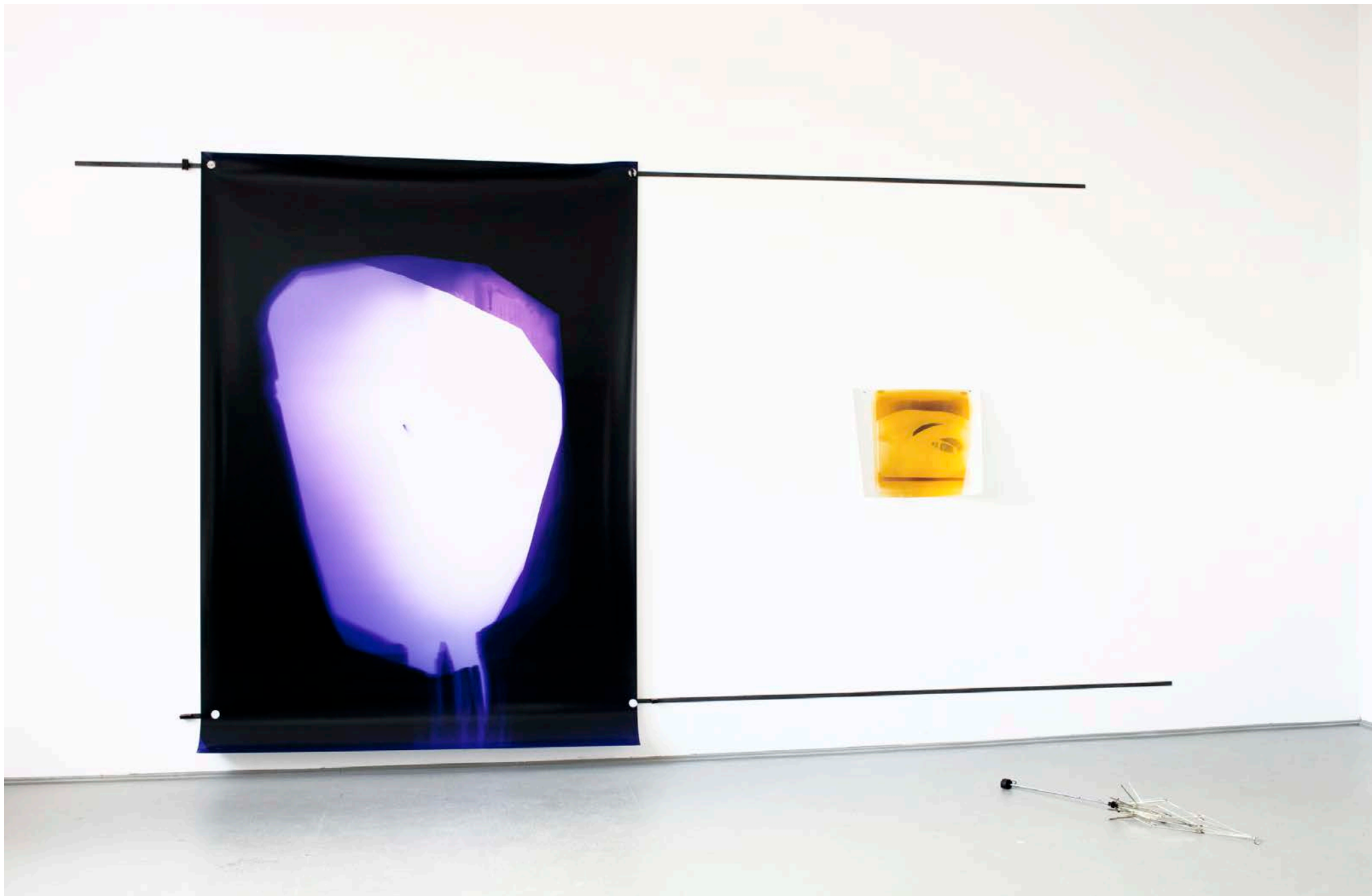
4:39 (Posteriority), 2015, chromogenic color print (photogram, opaque projection), aluminium 127 x 160 cm



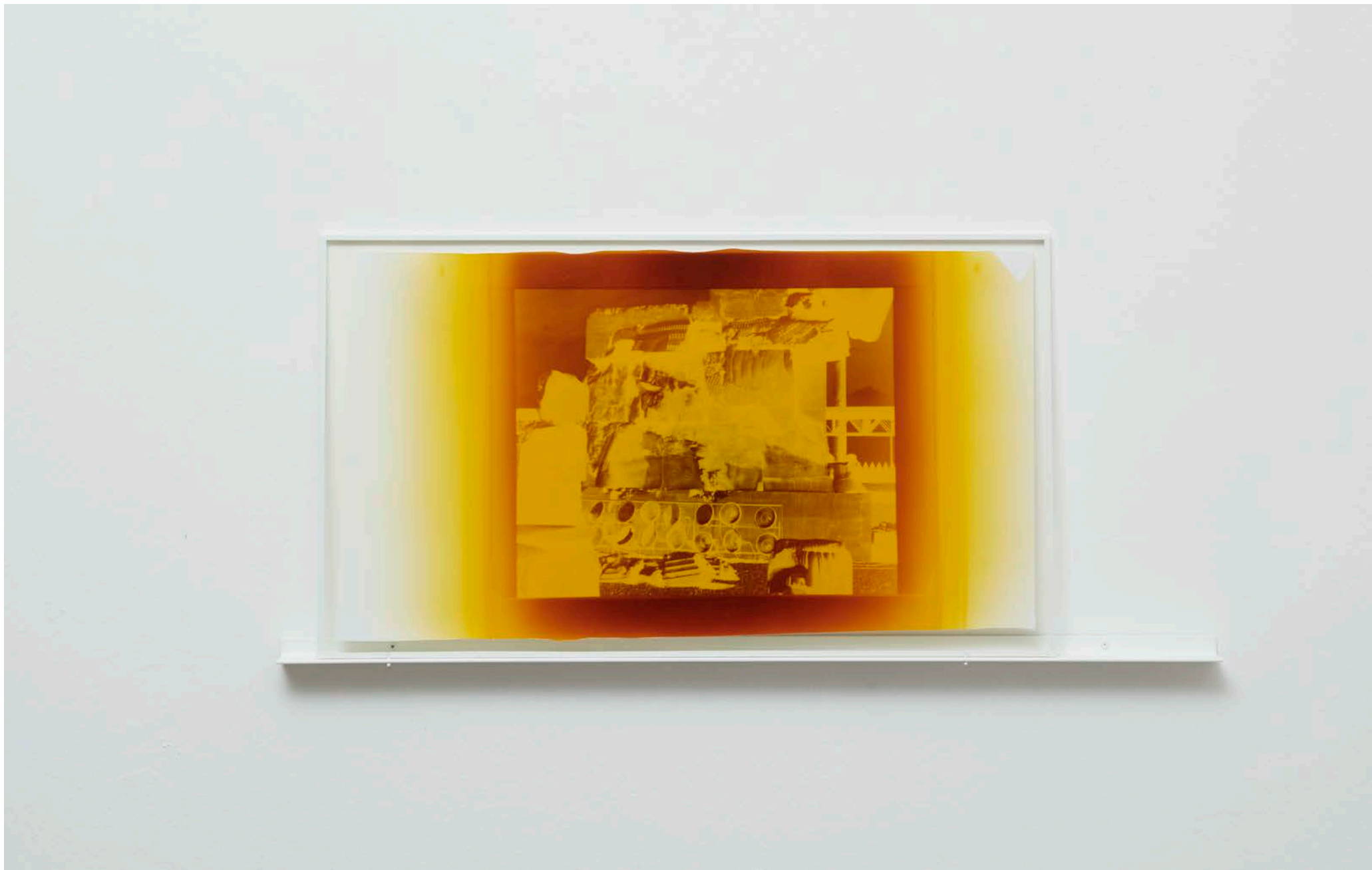
5:11 (Residual time), 2015, chromogenic color print (photogram, opaque projection), aluminium 127 x 160 cm



Liar's cloth (guileless note), 2015, diptych, c-print (photogram, opaque projection), aluminium, 183 x 235 cm each



At Odds, 2015, chromogenic color print (photogram), 183 x 255 cm; (Bathhouse ruin), 2008/15 chromogenic color print (opaque projection), 63,5 x 35,2 cm, metal, magnets, umbrella, tie-wrap



- (Floodlights at Persepolis), 2008/15, chromogenic color print (opaque projection), glass, paper, metal, 66,5 x 38,2 cm



Reply, 2015, chromogenic colour print (photogram), metal and magnets 255 x 183 cm



Liar's cloth study (adapted from 'West African Weaving' by Venice Lamb, London: Duckworth, 1975), 2015, radio- and electro-conductive thread, painted aluminium and tape, metal, cardboard, 21 x 26 cm



Riveted, exhibition view KLEMM'S, Berlin 2013



To point (or cover), 2013. Mesh, metal, 370 x 300 cm

1:1

**Short essay on Riveted by Javier Hontoria
November 2013**

The contemporary art world is a devouring merciless one. It gulps us all down with a shivering pace. There is nothing new in this. We've asked for it. We made it happen. But, worst of all, it also swallows viewers, who are not to blame for this ruthless randomness. They are dragged along into exhibitions of any sort and they end up adopting robotic gestures, mechanical behaviours that evolve into a norm: walk in, grab a press release, search for the works that best match the ideas you just read in it, and regardless if they are found or not, move on to the next show. This is the excruciating trend we are all summoned to. We somehow fall into a state of uneasiness as we feel the distance between Art and ourselves. However, the problem is not the distance. Let's face it. It's more about sharing the same space. The question is quickly prompted: Can we actually be in art? Can art be a habitable place? I once heard a man say that some recent grand exhibition had not only been visited by a large number of people, but these people had actually lived in it! He thought that this was, by far, the most flattering achievement of the project. No wonder. This was (he argued) not about what a pleasant place it had turned out to be, but a question of scale. As we know, a 1:1 scale which places viewers and art works in a similar frame of mind is not as easy to attain as it may seem.

Gwenneth Boelens' works embrace a 1:1 scale between the mental and the physical. I once saw a work of hers that made this relation utterly explicit. It was a photographic dyptich, that on the one hand represented a forehead, and on the other, an aerial view of a landscape of stones. The forehead was like a frontier, separating subjective perception from the outer world; mind from form, ideas from material. Works in Gwenneth Boelens' exhibitions often function also like a frontier. They seize the viewers, who don't have to negotiate their relation to the works. Instead, they find themselves now within them.

Riveted, the title of Gwenneth's show, is an inhabited space that is organized around an enigmatic sound. A complex rhythm sets its structure, a short and abstract composition stretches out in to a longer duration, like some germinal thought that develops in to a larger and deeper reflection. In a similar vein, a big reddish material hangs on the wall.

Gwenneth talks about tracing a "mark" and I understand it as a stepping stone. Like a solid certainty, it is pinned to it on its upper section, unfolding freely downwards, perhaps yearning for an unexpected fate. It therefore condenses its origins and all its possible outcomes.

There is a primeval climate here. In her new works, Gwenneth explores moments of inception and follows them as they spread over time. A number of clay tablets lean on to the wall. She turns to clay so as to emphasize its archaic nature (they saw the spark of language and the first attempts at exchanging ideas). Big slabs are host to patterns of images that evoke some geological event as if everything was yet to be formed. Process is underway as these abstract images of rocks seem to be guided by the organic beats that stem from the sound structure.

Viewers stand in the center of the exhibition space and feel the energies converging in them, coming from different angles. This is when the 1:1 scale functions. This is when an exhibition becomes such thing.



Tablet (c) 2013. Fired clay, 115 x 173 cm



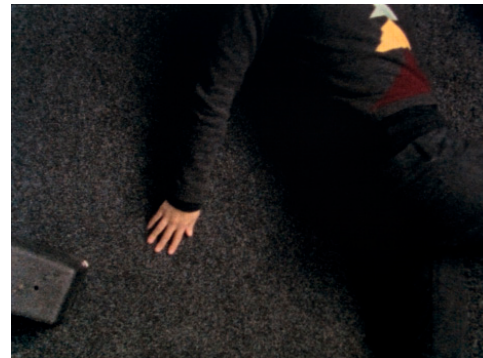
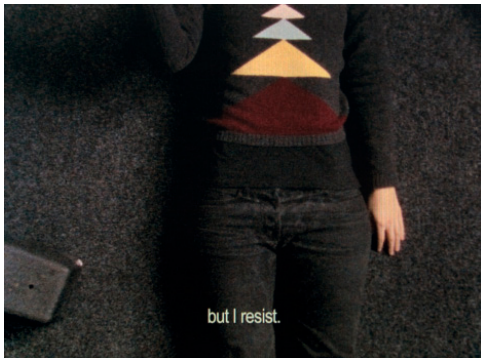
Tablet (a) 2013. Fired clay, wood, 72 x 234 cm



Peering Grasping Longing (print) 2011. Gelatin-silver contact print (from collodion glass negative) on aluminium, metal, 127 x 129 cm



Riveted 2013. Wood, metal, thread, mechanics, 2h 36 min



In *Coordination*, physical coordination is linked to thought. While the ever growing sequence of movements performed in the film become more difficult to remember and repeat, the subtitles following the rhythm of the movements speak about how doubt is intrinsic to artistic work. The movements are based on a choreography by Trisha Brown.



Tablet (left to dry), 2013 ; ink-jet print, metal, 153 x 195 cm, edition 3+1 a.p. ; Tablet (left to dry), 2013. Ink-jet print, metal, 161 x 220 cm, edition 3+1 a.p.



Exposure Piece (Sensitizing), 2010; Collodion glass negative, gelatin silver contact print on aluminium, each 169,5 x 127 cm, metal, dance vinyl, total dimensions 450 x 550 cm. Exhibition view Prix de Rome jury presentation, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

'Gwenneth Boelens focuses on the space in the image. In one installation a room becomes a huge camera. This blend of space and image is also suggested by the word 'camera', which in some languages (such as Italian) means a room but in others (such as English) means a piece of apparatus for taking pictures – the space and the instrument. The photographic technique is revived not only in its purely technical aesthetics (the lens, the negative and the final photograph), but also in the fact that developing fluid has spilled onto the floor, where it produces a developing effect. Perhaps the only way to perceive the contemporary is through feeling. You can feel what happens, but you cannot see it. Agamben states that the contemporary is located in darkness, and that this darkness becomes active and constructive.'

Lorenzo Benedetti, in: Autumn of Modernism, Roma Publications / De Vleeshal, 2012

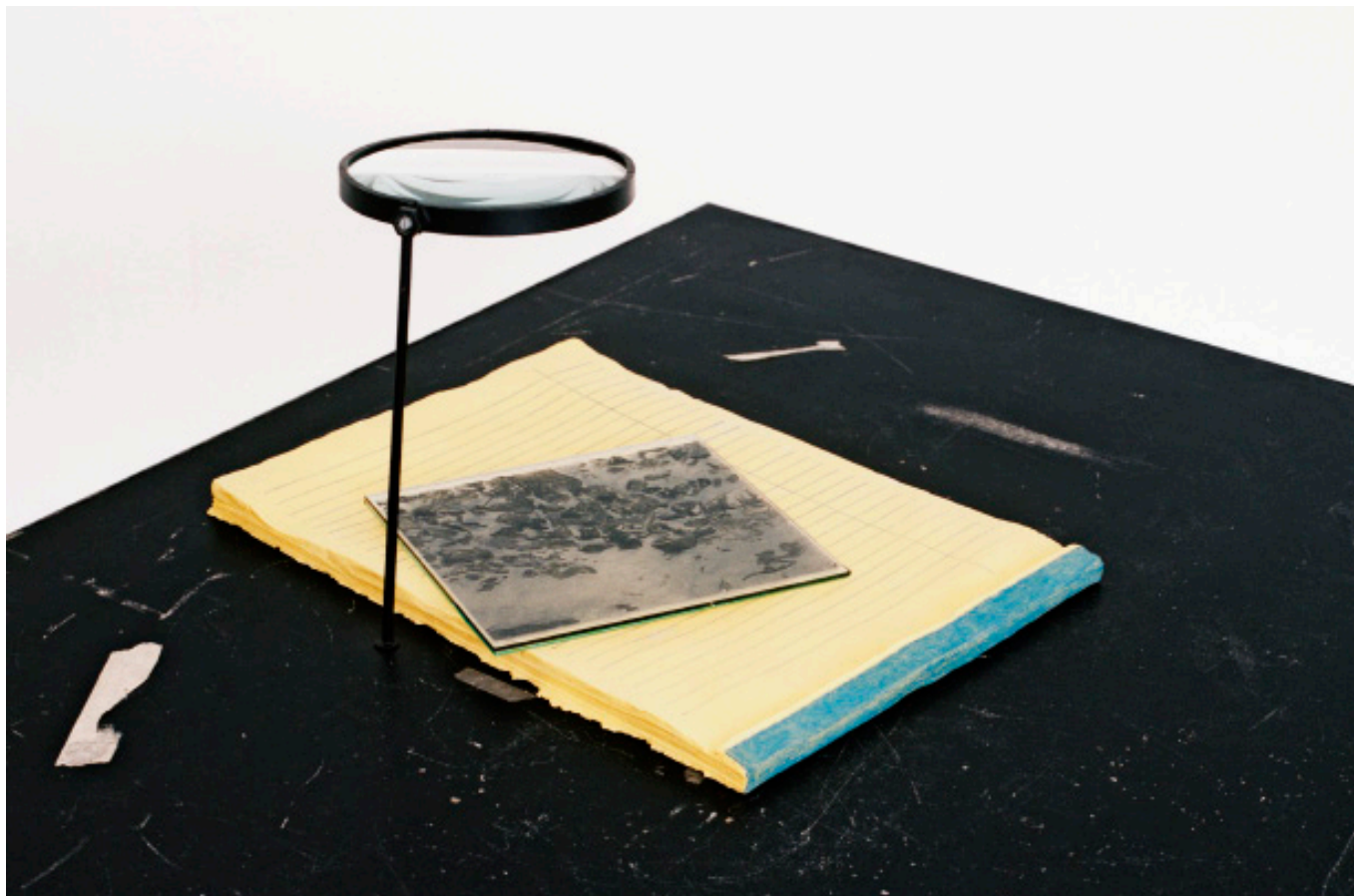


'Events Unwitnessed also centres on the confused state of a traveller, but by the indirect route of a specific mythology of exploration, that of the pioneers. Large pieces of scoria, molten lava ejected by a long-extinguished volcano, lie immobile on a barren floor of ash. The rocks are captured inescapably in the centre of a large sheet of glass suspended in front of a midnight blue background. The metal brackets holding the two layers in place give the impression that the piece itself may weigh as much as one of these rocks. The work exudes the aura of some anomalous congealment in a dimension of timelessness.

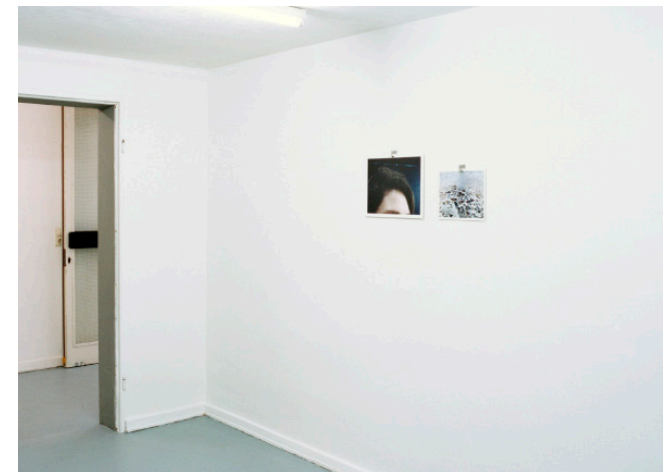


The exhibition *In Two Minds* presents a cluster of works that centre around processes at the basis of perception. As in earlier work, one can sense a balancing act between intuition and ratio, yet this time the emphasis lies on the precise articulation and evocation of personal recollections.

The works offer a closer look at these inner thoughts while retaining their inherent abstractedness – closing in and keeping distance at the same time. A shared characteristic of the five works in *In Two Minds* is that they seem to be analogies of certain histories but also of each other. They are juxtaposed in a way that accentuates implicit parallels. Essential to this is the idea of a source version.



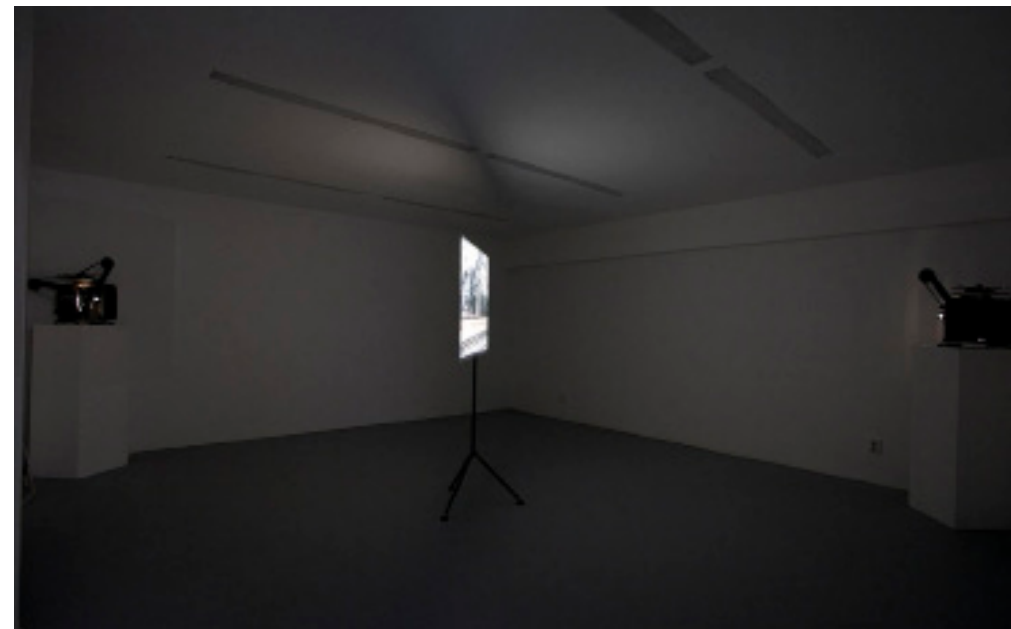
Negative. Rather than Truth alludes to the idea of a source image through a handmade negative. The title refers to its status; it is an attempt to get to a distilment of reality. It did not yet materialize as an image; it rather precedes the image.



Not often the walls of the mind become transparent focuses on a forehead, the physical boundary between the outside and the mind. The second part of this diptych is a negative in which rocks lie arbitrarily in a pit, indivisible, indefinable, but at the same time tangible and charged with the history of which they form the incoherent fragments.



Housing refers to the origin of photography. The cassette is an enlargement of the housing commonly used to retain daguerreotypes: one of the earliest photographic processes, invented by Daguerre in the 1830s. The copper plate, which would normally bear the image, is lifted from the frame and placed aside. The housing becomes a container of ideas in which these could be permanently sealed.



In the installation *There were moments* two 16-mm films are projected onto both sides of a centrally placed plane. On one side a visual journey can be followed, while subtitles give access to direct thoughts on encountering the world. On the other, functioning as a comment or footnote, a short black-and-white sequence of an approaching movement is endlessly repeated, creating a feeling of suspense.

'What is it, exactly, that she has to stay ahead of when she writes, 'We had to stay ahead of something'? Civilization? Modernity? Ourselves? And how is this getaway to be made? It is a quest that appears to go deeper than romantic escapism. The words she chooses, 'speed' and 'stay ahead', suggest both a fear of pursuit – even in an utterly deserted landscape where artifacts and vestiges are the only reminders of an earlier human presence – as well as the existence of a preceding state. It seems that what she wants to stay ahead of is reason, a too thorough understanding of the phenomena that pass before her, the 'violence' of which Heidegger accuses thought, the empiricism rejected by Merleau-Ponty. It is not only the artifacts in the landscape that remind her of that conceptual matrix, but also the extensions of ourselves with which we try to grasp that landscape: cameras, surveyors' tools, binoculars.

This makes it especially fitting that *There were moments* is a film. It is not just that the subtitles speak of movement; the film breathes movement. This may explain the mysterious addition of a very short film loop on the other side of the screen, leaving no need to speculate what might be behind the screen, as we might in an ordinary cinema. In black-and-white, we assume the point of view of a person tentatively making his way down a small trail through the bushes. The twenty-second loop has the same effect as a long-playing record, when the needle bounces off a scratch; after a few steps, we are whisked back to the beginning and then shown exactly the same sequence again – suspense without release. Each time that it seems we are about to catch a glimpse of a distant view, we instead jump back to the tangle of vegetation beside the trail. We are trapped in motion, in the middle of a quest without a start or finish, with no way of edging ahead or lagging behind. We do not know what lies outside that time span, because we are not permitted to see the horizon, nor do we have enough time to study or memorize what we do see in any detail. Each time, we see it afresh, without any means of orientation.'



Remnant, 2010. Fibre based gelatin-silver print on aluminum, metal brackets, 190 x 120 cm. Bundles of painted wood, 25 x 250 cm.

A form of emotional realization and simultaneous over-writing is taking place in Remnant, a life-size analogue print drawn from an old negative. During the exposure of the paper the artist stood in the beam of light. Her posture kept part of the image from being obscured, namely that of the depicted person with whom she partially coincides.

'The mental reconstruction of this performative procedure in the projection room suggests a space between, a moment between, or more precisely a time span or incubation period between the moment shown in the photograph and the moment of exhibition – the 'present' in which the viewer encounters the work. The uncanny image rising out of the darkness offers us a glimpse of an internal process that unfolded in a metaphorical darkness. The work's different layers meet in the arm, hand, and fingers of the artist, which mimic the gesture of the person in the photograph: her grandmother. The height at which the work is mounted seems chosen to suit the gesture; seeing the print, you feel the urge to adopt the same posture.'

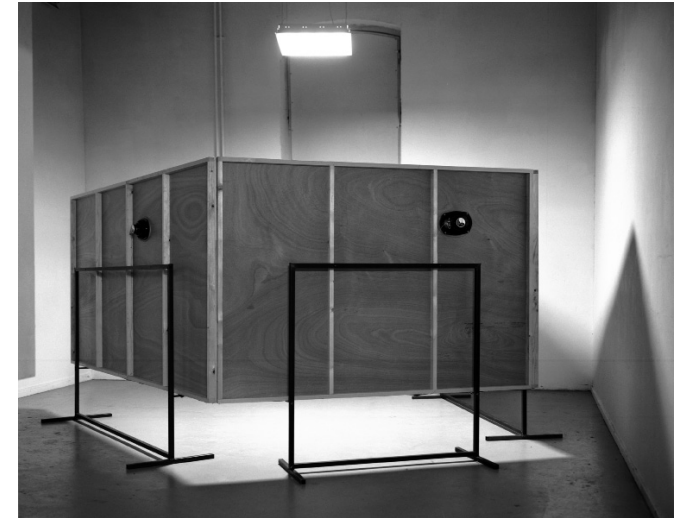
Nickel van Duijvenboden, 'Rudiments'. in: Gwenneth Boelens, In Two Minds, Roma Publications, 2014



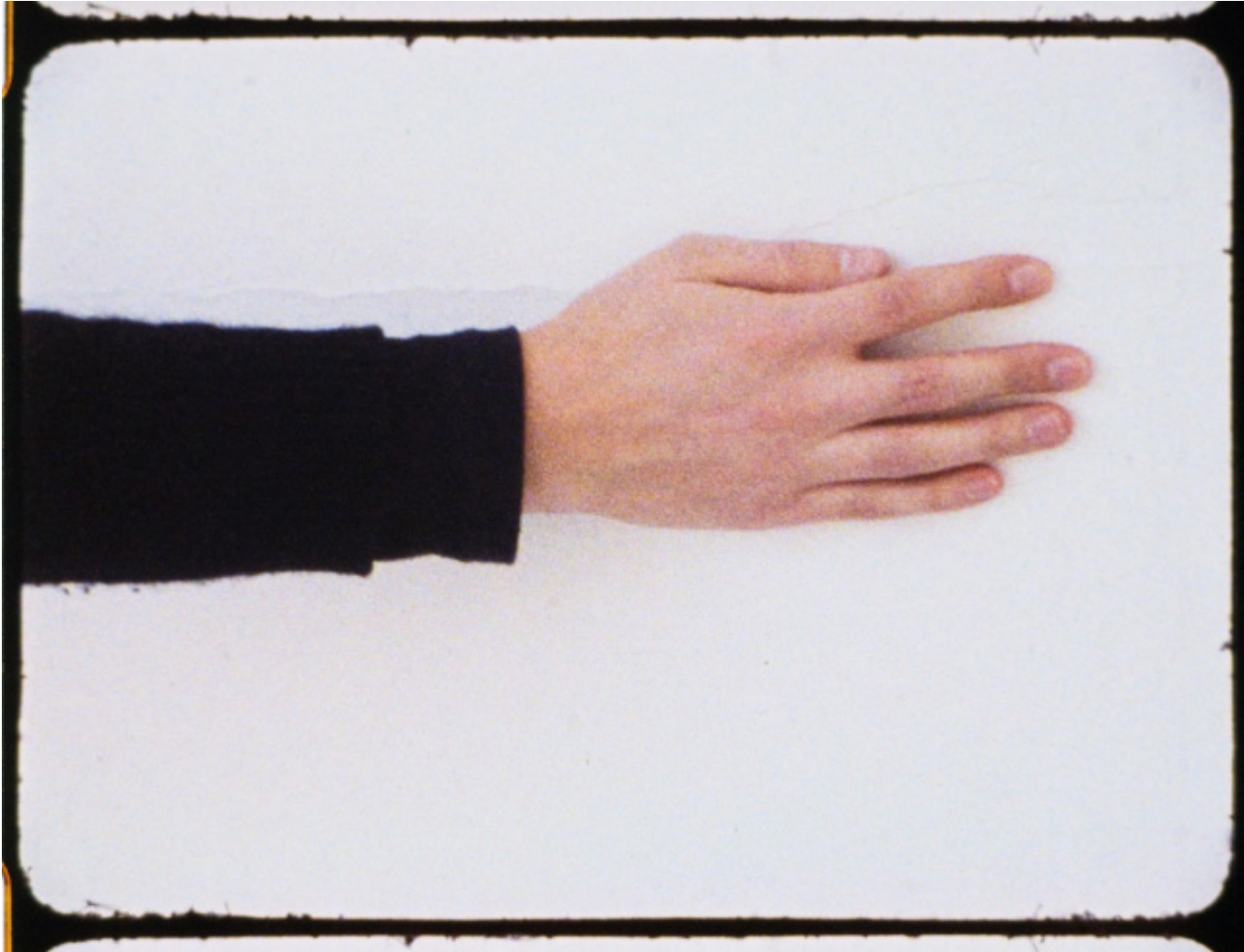
Gwenneth Boelens takes the precise observation and analysis of photography as point of departure and develops it into three-dimensional installations, collages, performances, photography and video projections. In these works different methods of scientific fields, like archeology and philosophy, mix with an artist's approach, retaining a certain openness. She illustrates, for example, the dialectic relation between culture and nature, the relationship of the human body to space or the fragmentary character of memory and recognition. With a subtle pictorial language, without big gestures or ostentatious narration, she illuminates her objective very precisely.

Assembling images, rooms and situations from memory is inevitably linked to the aspect of failure that Boelens retains in all her works. She approaches the world as if it still has to be discovered, analyzed and comprehended while being aware of the doubts and possible mistakes that might occur. Here, the human presence is either equal to objects or subordinate to them. Slightly off-centered, yet clearly perceptible, the human is observer and catalyst at the same time for Boelens' situations and arrangements.

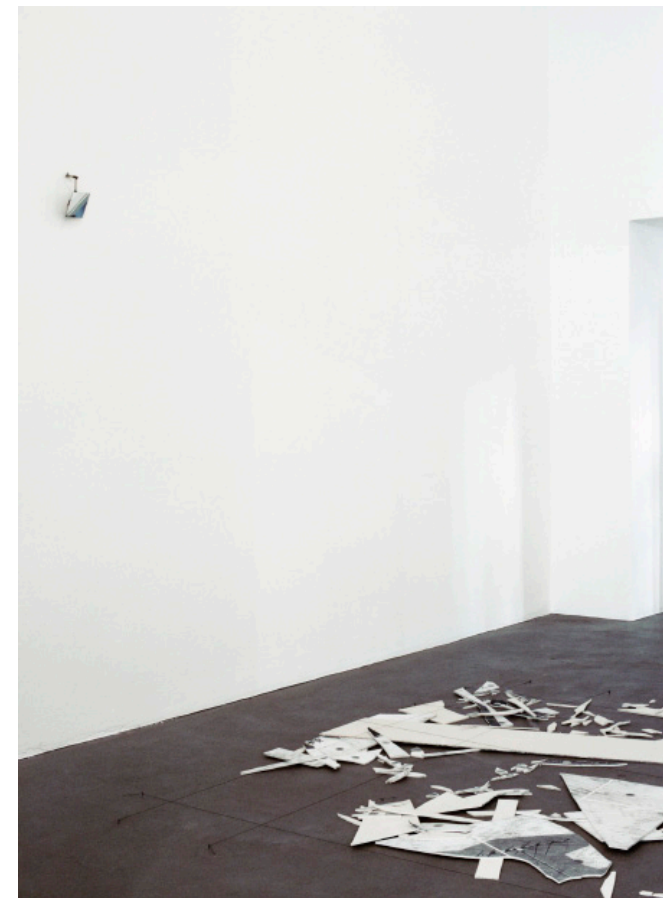
From press release ,The entire business of coming closer', Klemm's, Berlin



The spacious installation *Ramble* refers to a constructed wild garden in New York's Central Park, while the English verb 'to ramble' means erratic roaming. This situation is transferred to the exhibition space: the ostensible wilderness is re-constructed by a collage-like panorama, while a soliloquy in the background reflects on the ambiguity of its artificial lushness. It is described through the eyes of an anonymous woman whose character is loosely based on expedition members of the Biosphere 2 project. Besides referring to this source of inspiration, fragments of the monologue also seem applicable to the constructed nature of the artwork itself: large paper plants meticulously cut out and pinned loosely to the wooden support.



In the 16 mm film *Hand Wall* (2007), a hand trails over the walls of a room. It's shot in close up, as if through the eyes of the hand's owner. You can see that the fingers pick up every sensation. The hand brushes over irregularities in the walls, around corners, along heating ducts; it crosses the surface of a closed door and of a large window that gives us a glimpse of the outside world. But the camera remains focused on the hand, and the hand goes on unhesitatingly circling the room. Not for an instant are you shown its owner, or the interior of the room. You see (or feel) only the outer perimeter; everything else takes place in the mind.



At first glance A Whole Fragment is reminiscent of a jigsaw puzzle on the floor and seems to be a random accumulation of geometric forms that need to be sorted. The related wall piece reveals that it is a scaled-up derivation of a paper original. It is a conscious transfer of image fragments into the space, marking an ephemeral location that no longer exists.



In *Collage Machine* a studio is documented over a period of time. Parts of the photographs are combined to form one single image capturing time and space.

'What if one day we woke up metamorphosed like Gregor Samsa? If the objects surrounding us had suddenly started to look slightly different, although keeping a strange feeling of familiarity? The works of Gwenneth Boelens prove that there is no need for radical gestures, like that of turning into a cockroach, in order for us to acquire a new perspective on the quotidian spaces we most of the times don't question but simply inhabit. In her installations, photographs or performances, she exercises this interrogation through subtle changes in the space or in the images themselves: compressions, reversals, additions or extractions. So that when she seems to give us the recording of a quiet interior or of a plant's growing, in fact she introduces a tension meant to dislocate the pre-conceived image we might have had of that particular space or process. This tension can appear very literal, as a physical confrontation, crowding of objects/ persons or it is regarded in its temporal course, by the registering of the same space over a period of time (*Collage Machine*, 2006). In this last work the reconstitution of the space in the photographs suggests the difficult process of remembering; the play with bi- and tri-dimensionality reveals its illusionary character, while the careful selection of the juxtaposed moments reminds us of the constructed nature of memory.'

Written by Raluca Voinea