

Willem Austin Keys

Tracing motion





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Introduction

My work this year has been conducted through a research focussed lens. Much of my practice has been shaped around a desire to learn and develop understanding through drawing and making. Indeed, this interdependent relationship is something that has shaped my third-year study. Drawing has been a constant point of focus within my practice. Particularly the idea of drawing as a conceptual device. Drawing is the embodiment of mental process through active motion. In its simplest form a drawing can be defined as being a result of a motion, usually administered by the body, that through the inclusion of a material interface, leaves a trace on a surface. However, the motion, the material and the mental components that congregate to form drawings can be changed and experimented with to create more novel and interesting ideas regarding drawing.

Within my practice I have developed work that attempts to draw on information regarding these factors. From working with the body in motion. To becoming focussed on the traces it leaves behind. And going on to work that attempts to convert sensory information into drawing.

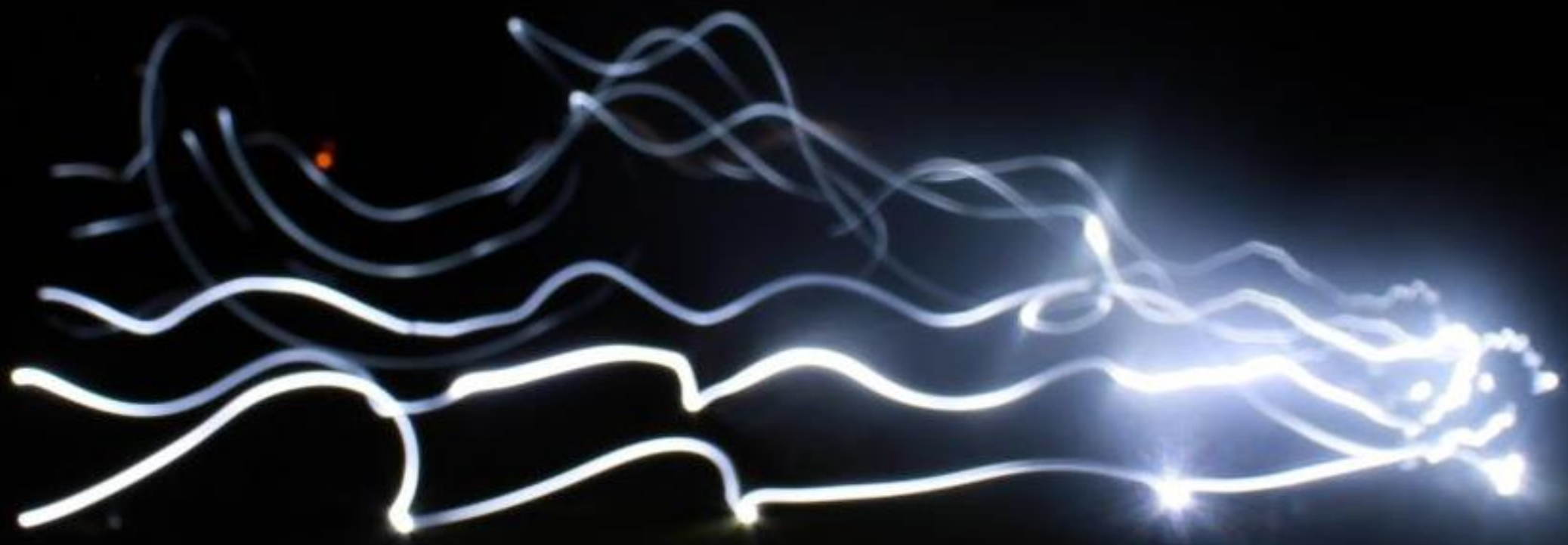
In researching the body, motion and the resulting traces left behind I have had to engage with performance and constantly reevaluate the hierarchies developing in my work. What is more important, the final drawing or the act of creating it? I hope to have created final pieces that reflect my own opinion. That both should exist in symbiosis.





Tracing motion with light.







Ephemerality

The use of fire and light to record and capture movement really inspired me towards the use of elemental phenomena in my work. These ephemeral natural forces appealed in their elegance and could be used in conjunction with technology as though they were materials. Having experimented with light as a means of tracing motion I began to consider the broader use of phenomena in order to capture or create motion. Using these elemental forces to enact interesting drawings and performances.

In doing so the use of technology, the medium through which the work is recorded, became fundamental. Film and photography became key to the capture and subsequent presentation of what would otherwise be ephemeral works of art.

Artist's photo



Olafur Eliasson



Beauty, 1993



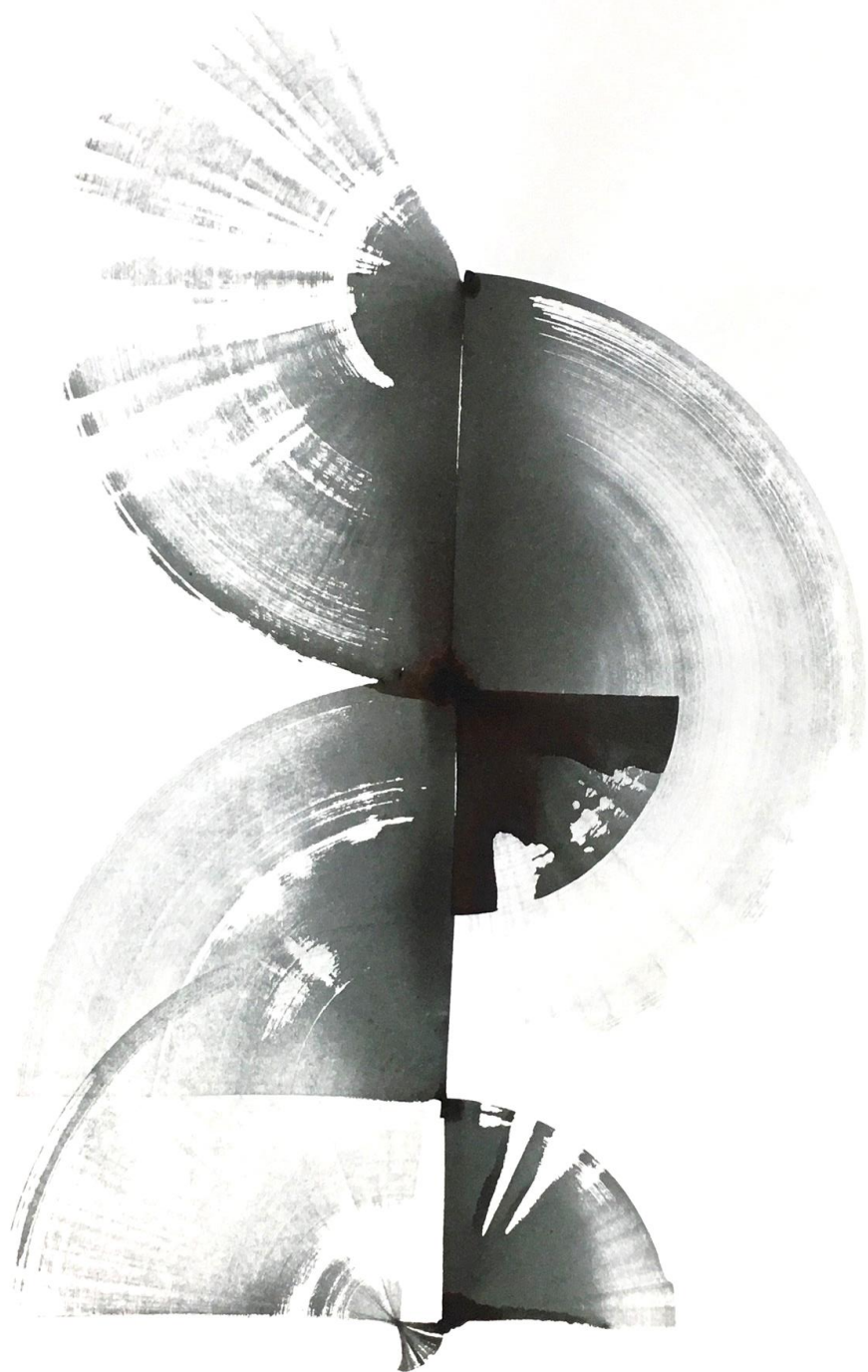
Notion Motion, 2016

Benjamin Skop



Improvisation 1 (in collaboration with Studio Olafur Elliason), 2017

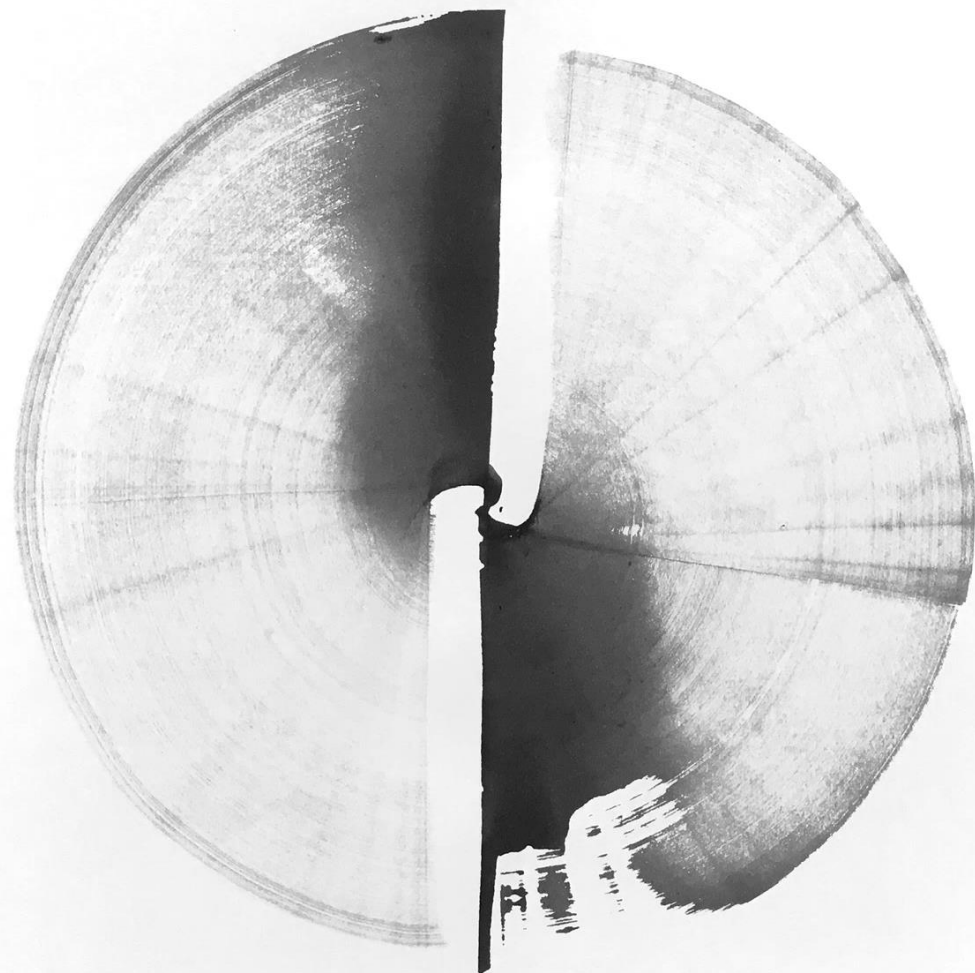
Six variations of a movement sequence, 2018



Propositions

In my work leading up to propositions I wanted to engage with the mechanisms and functions of the body in motion. Making drawings and models that highlighted and exaggerated the invisible lines and traces created by dynamic movement. At this stage I still aspired towards creating works that engaged with the body in a more adornment focussed way. As such I looked at preconceived models that sought to define the body mathematically.

Though these models and drawings worked to reinforce my visual theme and gave me valuable insight into the proportionality of human bodies, I felt them to be limited. In order to develop my research, I felt strongly that I needed to engage with motion more directly, not just merely representing it. From this point the body itself became a vessel and tool through which to conduct research instead of being a subject.



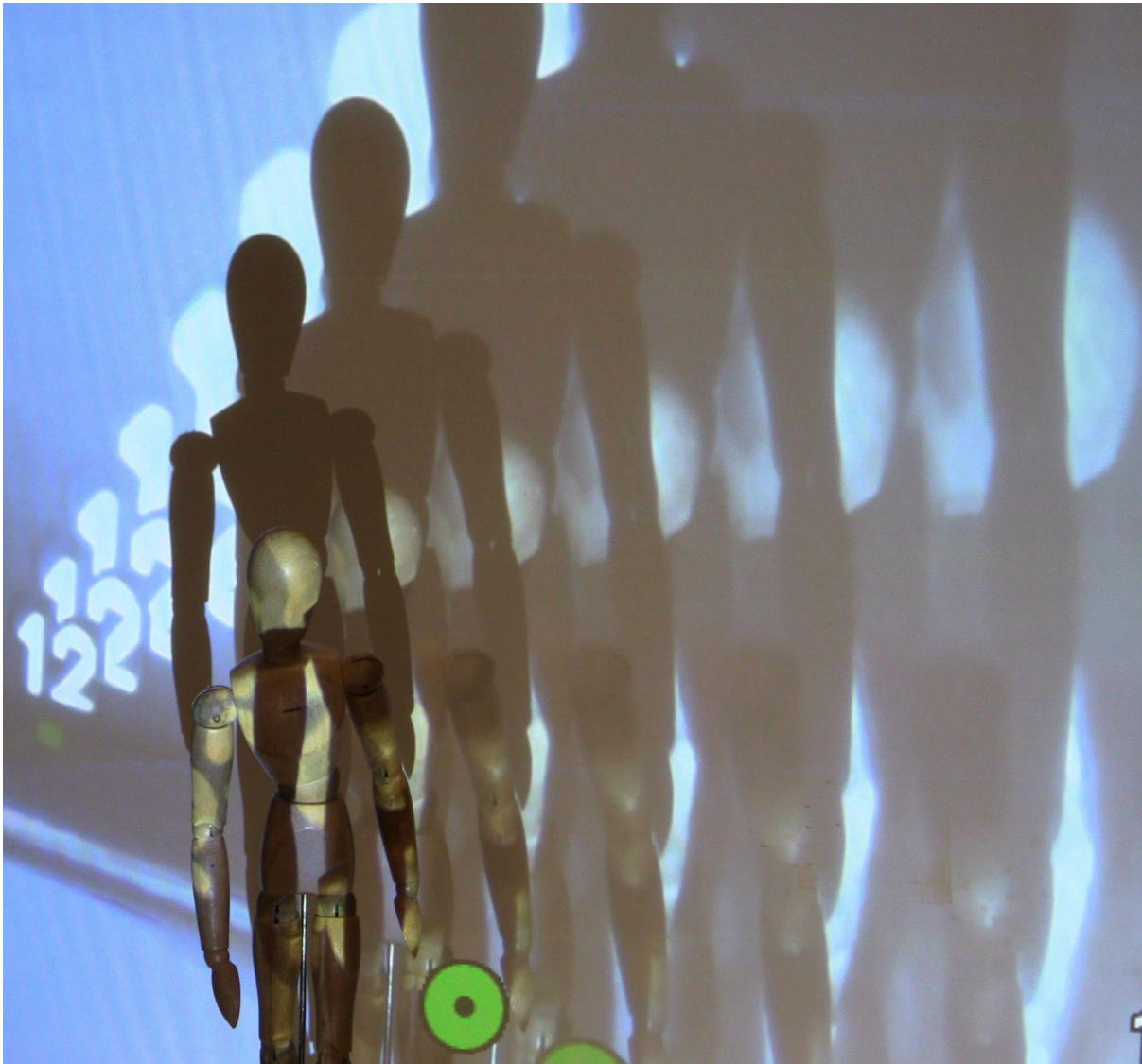


Models highlighting lines of motion created by the moving body.



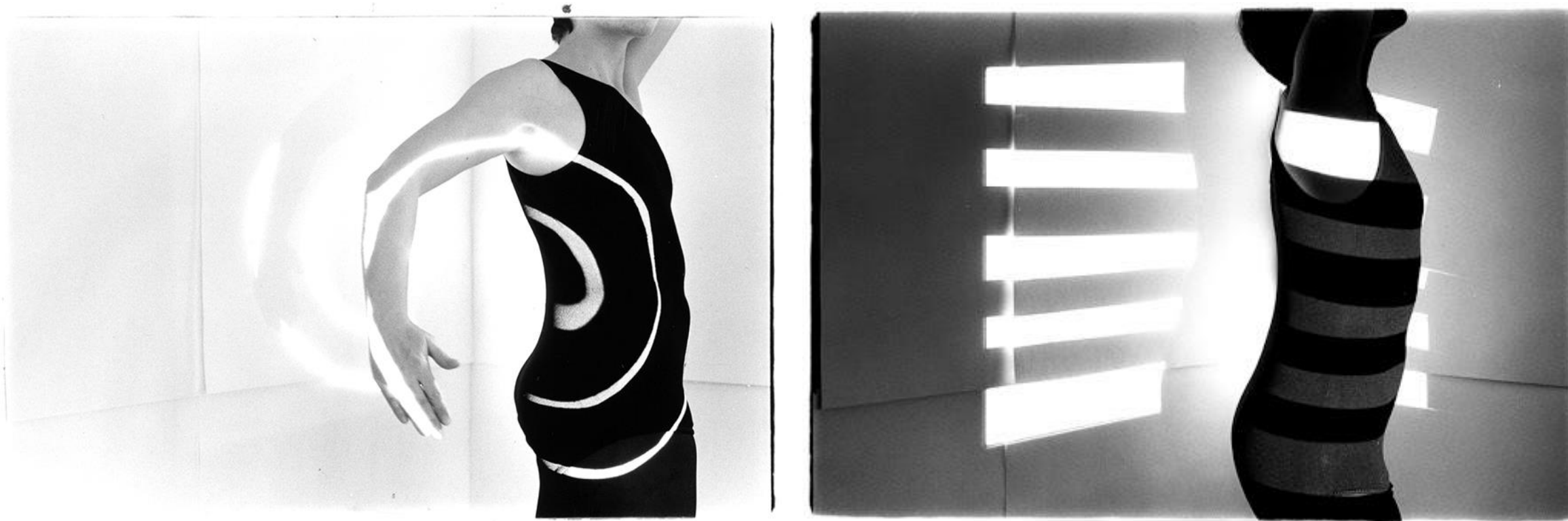
Projection

At this stage I began to explore the use of projection as a medium. I thought it relevant to explore projection as a means to bring my drawing work off the page and into three-dimensional space. The key question here was how to use it to embellish the moving body with information that would highlight or emphasise elements of its motion. I found this type of work to be exciting and was struck by the possibilities. However, I wanted to find ways of projecting the act of drawing in real time on a subject. Using projection as a means of detailing the performance of a drawing. I also aimed to use projection alongside the exploration of the line in space. Using silhouettes and the performative nature of shadow to bring these drawings to life.

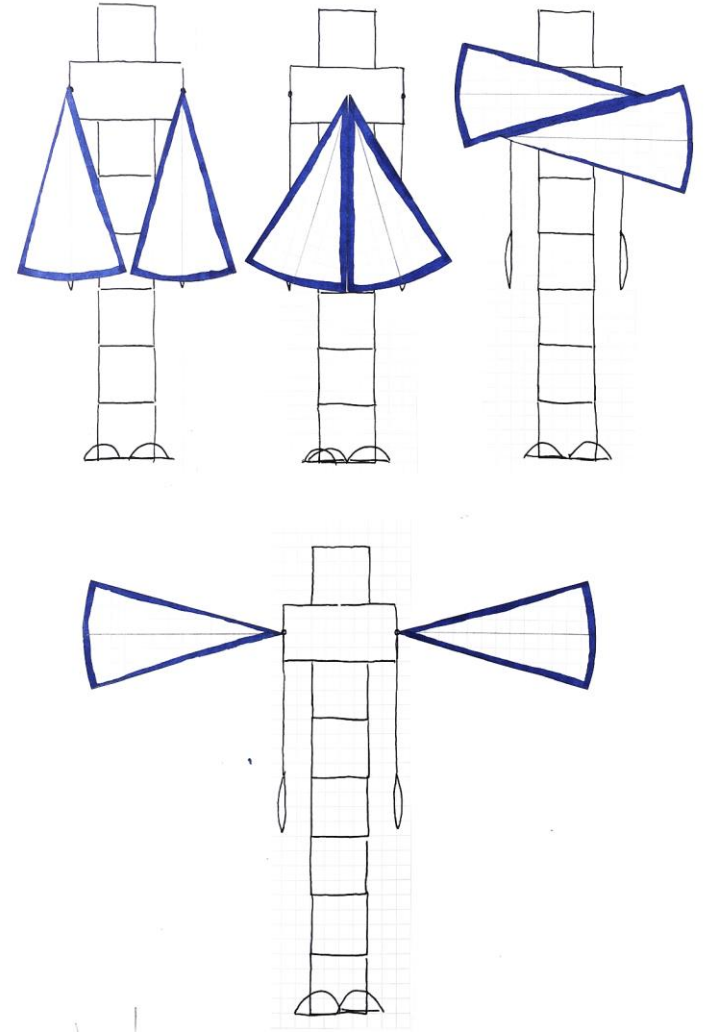
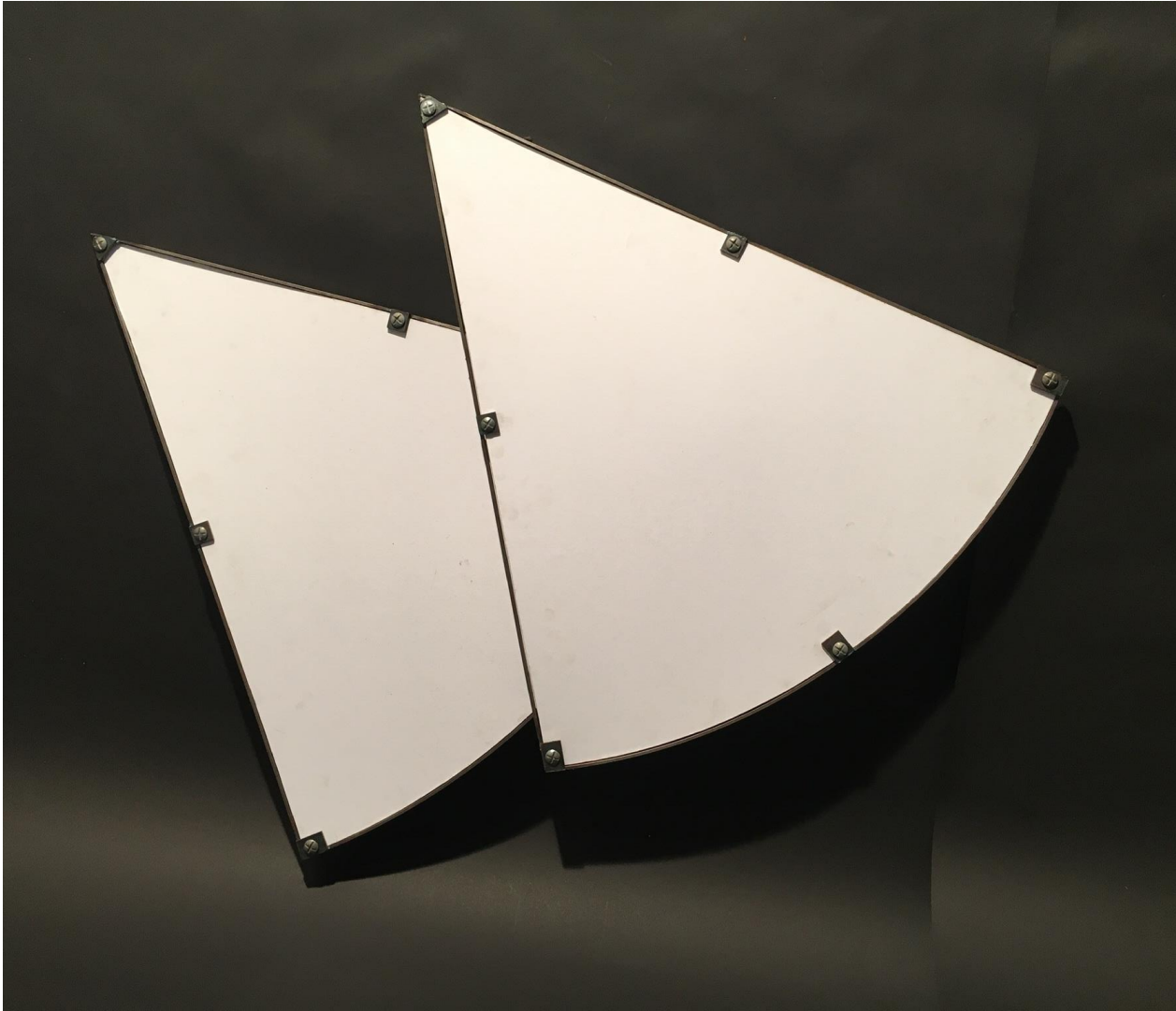


Creating a video feedback loop. Constructing the illusion of dynamic movement.

Susan Heron



The light projections, 1979



The body as the canvas. Creating body adornment to project drawings on to.



Adornment with projection.

The line

At this point in my project I really began to engage with linear work in a more focused way. I wanted to develop a linear language that expressed my ideas regarding process and performance. The works that I began to develop sought to enrich my understanding of drawing as a non-representational practice. Instead of drawing the body, the focus was shifted to using the body in interesting ways to create performative works. This kind of thinking is evident in my drawings with breath.

Alternatively, I looked at ways of creating drawings that perform the process of their own conception. Such as the fan generated drawing system which facilitates an element of randomness in the mark making. I became

interested in involuntary drawing as a means of creating work. The artist can design the parameters in which the drawing is to be created. But in the execution the artists conscious process is negated.

I also wanted to narrow the gap between my two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Having explored projection and silhouette as it related to the body, I wanted to explore how shadow can be used to emphasize and invigorate linear three-dimensional works. These works were designed exist suspended in space, where they could gently move and turn, creating a subtle performance.

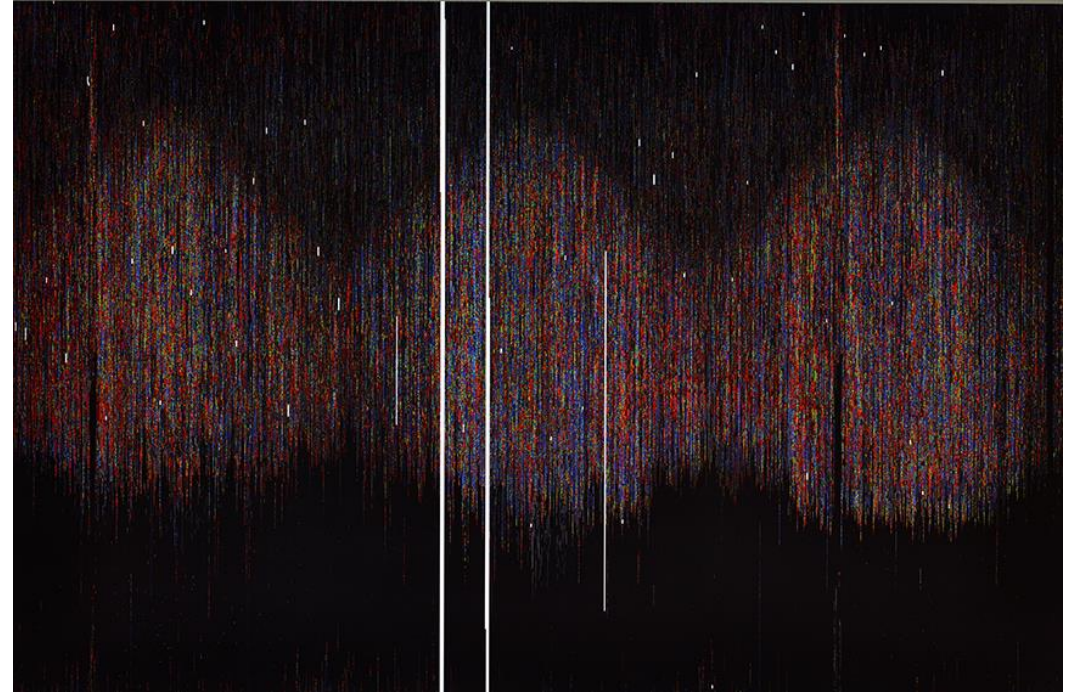
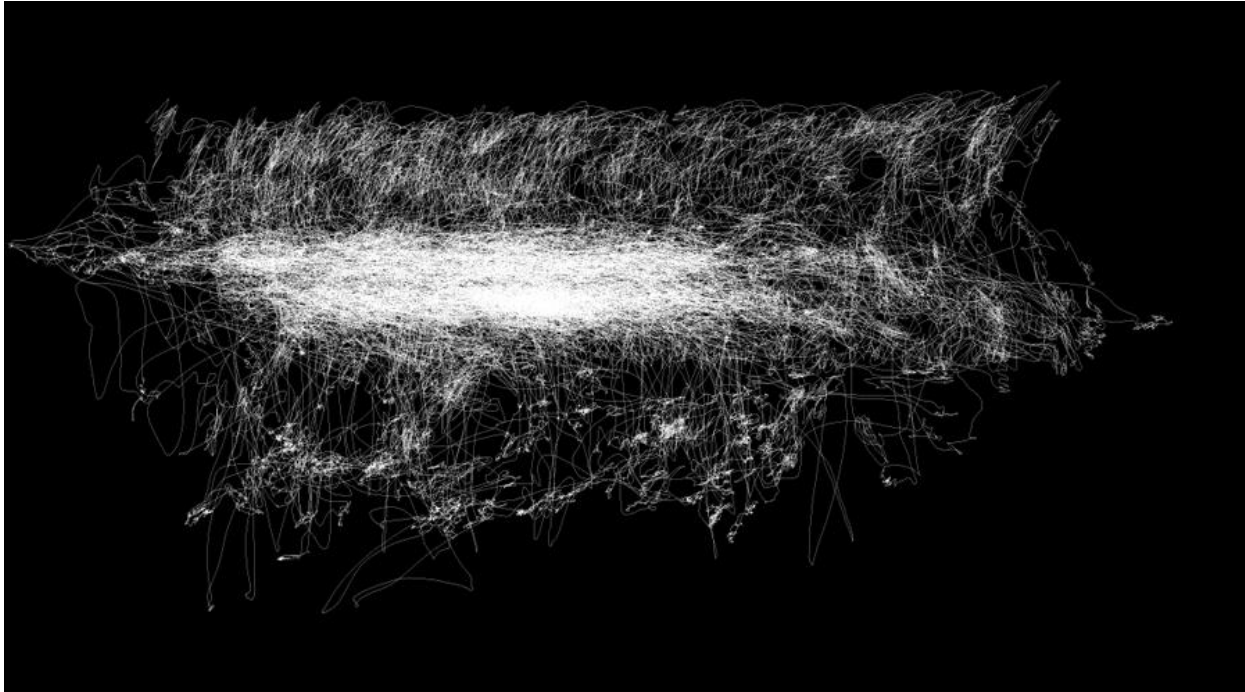
Etsuko Ichikawa



Performance at Pratt Fine Art Centre, 2019

Pyrograph trace 11612, 2013

Susan Morris



Motion capture drawing 2012

Sundial Nightwatch - Drawing for tapestry, 2015



Drawing with breath.



Involuntary drawing. Exploring drawing systems. <https://vimeo.com/417237578>



The line in space. <https://vimeo.com/417238446>

Traces of the body

Drawings are traces of a movement. In this next phase I wished to focus less on the act of drawing and more on the types of scenarios and spaces that would facilitate movement in a certain way. This movement would create a residual effect that becomes the trace of motion, the drawing. In exploring space I found there to be several ways in which residual marks or traces could be created. Firstly through engagement with kinetic elements of space. By physically affecting a space you can alter its composition as your body moves through it. Secondly, the use of light and shadow can be utilized to create a projected trace of your bodily motion. I have also explored the relationship between set and prop. Creating spaces that have within them certain materials that directly correspond to props. Through this relationship a space can be altered and affected. This material element is especially interesting to me. Body adornment can be used intelligently to interact with correlating materials and create a trace of a navigation if space.

Artist's photo

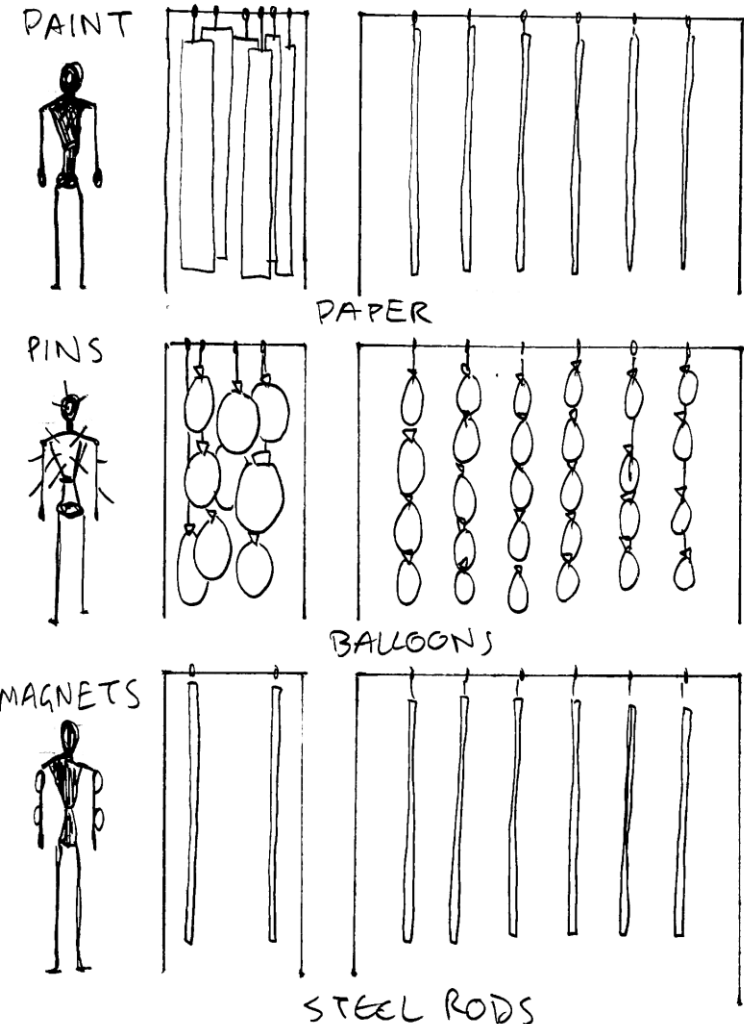
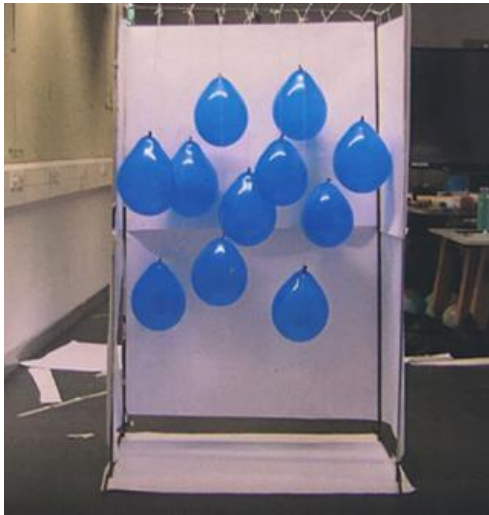




Navigating lines with the body. Altering space as you move through it.
<https://vimeo.com/417238901>



The body in space. Silhouettes creating traces of movement.



Affecting space as you move through it. Exploring the association between body adornment and material. Using this relationship to create a residual trace.





Saburo Murakami



Passing Through, 1956

Work, 1959

Ana Mendieta

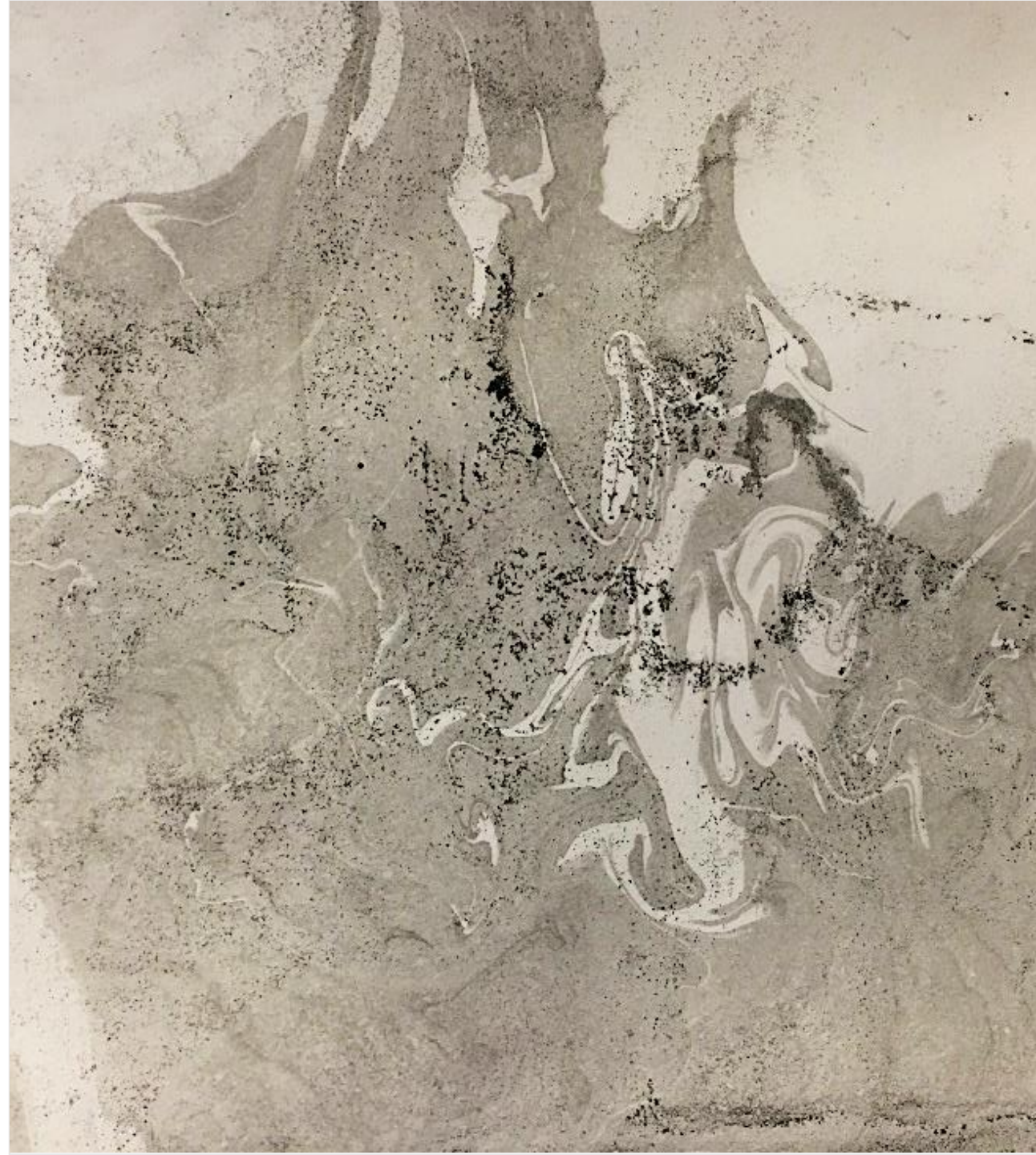


Soul Silhouette on Fire, 1973

Body Tracks, 1982

Research Project

For my research project I decided to go swimming. My research up to this point mainly involved physical traces that manifested as tangible visual information. Moving through space and affecting it in order to leave a residue. How would it feel instead to move through a body of material and leave no trace at all? This project marked an important new phase within my work and lead me towards two new experimental subplots. The first being the conversion of sensory information into visual traces. I tried to respond to this by drawing the hand from the sensation of it being submerged in water. Using the water as eyes. Feeling the form of my hand through the sensation of the liquid forming the space around it.





Drawing the hand from the feel of water.



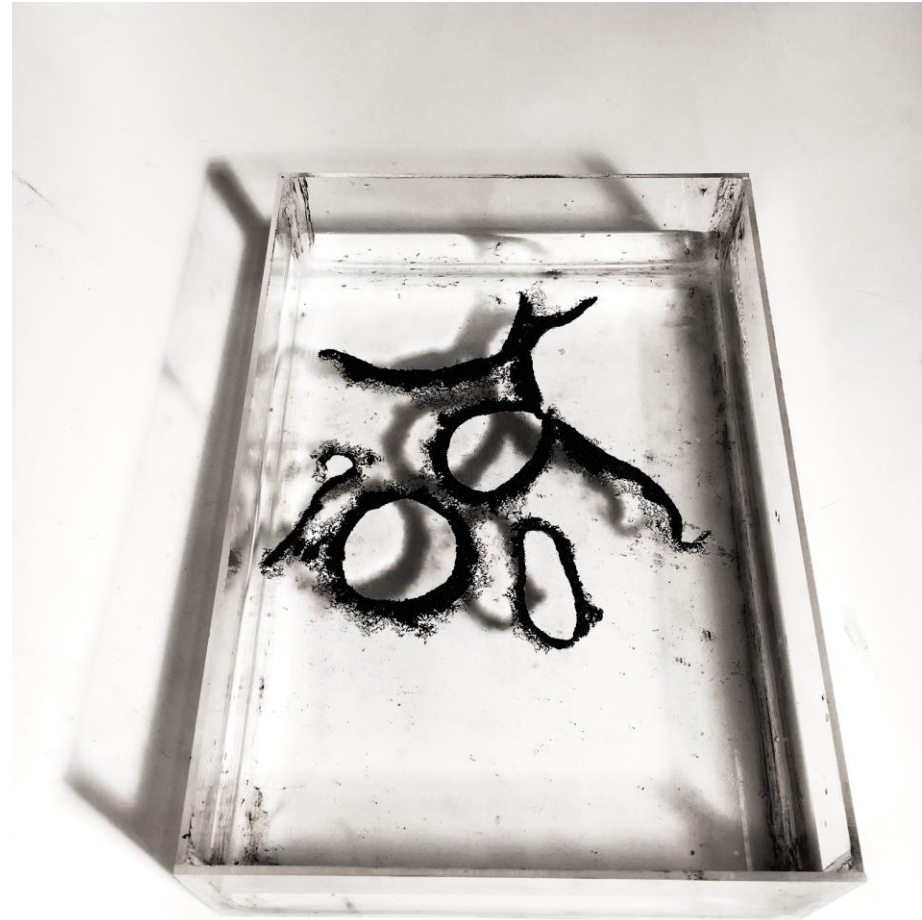
Water Traces.



Drawing in water

After a period of playful but considered experimentation with water and materiality I found there to be two materials that really connected with my ideas about body traces and drawing performances. I began to experiment with dissolving fabric, painting and printing on it with oil paints and then laying it upon the surface of water. As the fabric dissipated the paintings would contort and twist to become vastly abstracted versions of themselves whilst remaining essentially intact. This type of performance, where the drawing itself mutates was especially relevant to my aims and ambitions.

The ephemeral nature of this work again called for the deployment of technology to capture the artwork. Furthermore, I now had the ability to edit and develop the filmed performances. I greatly sped up the footage, reversed it and changed the luminance. These choices changed the perception of the work. Instead of the paint moving and flowing organically from original image to abstracted one, the videos give an uncanny almost perceptible sense of the flow of water where the abstracted forms magically coalesce to form the enduring trace.



Drawing performances in water. Dissolving fabric and oil paint.



Stills from films. <https://vimeo.com/393721674>



Stills from 'Hand trace in water'. <https://vimeo.com/394456515>

Magnetism

Throughout this project magnetism has continually been used. This phenomenon has effectively conveyed my ideas concerning bodily input affecting a material or space. In exploring how materials behave within bodies of water I realized that you could use magnets to manipulate steel fillings within water in a more controlled way than on paper. The fillings draw towards the magnets and create interesting motions that seem to swirl and revolve around the spectral hand. This is an interesting material performance.

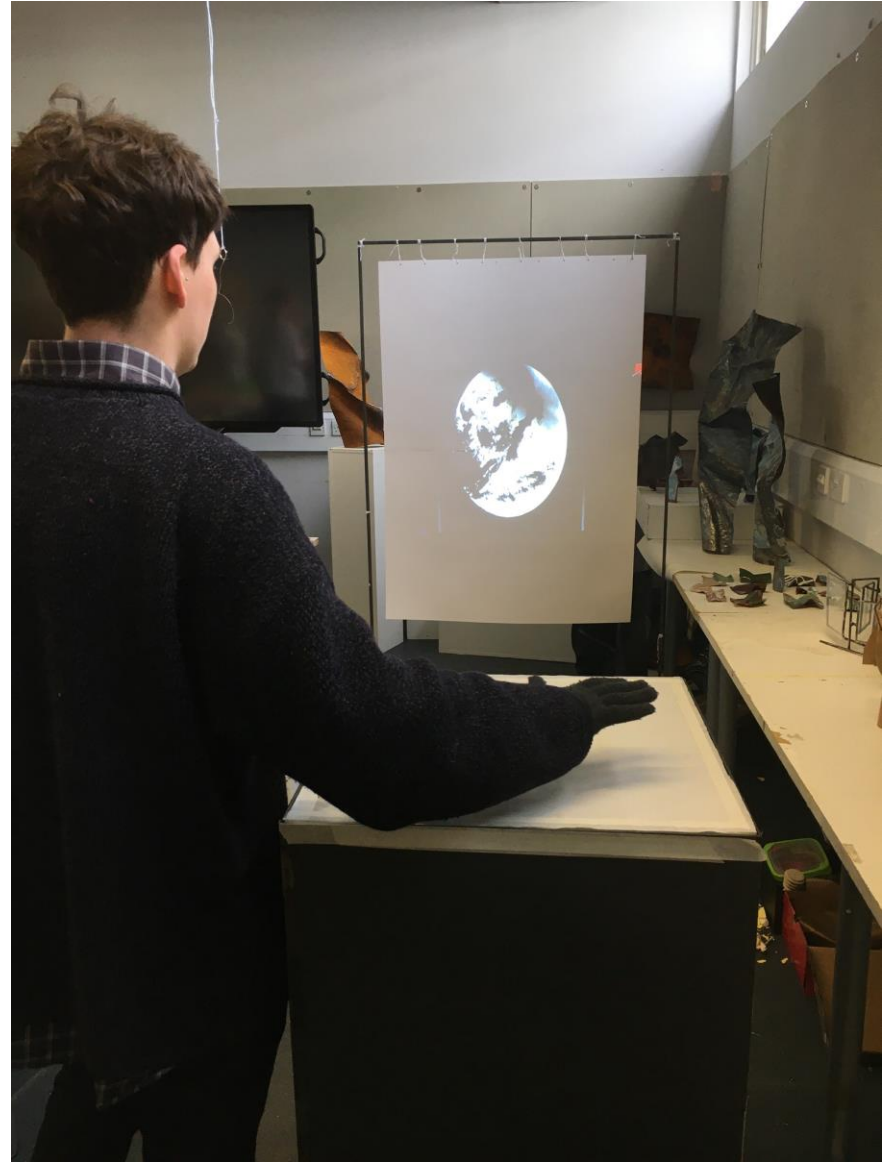
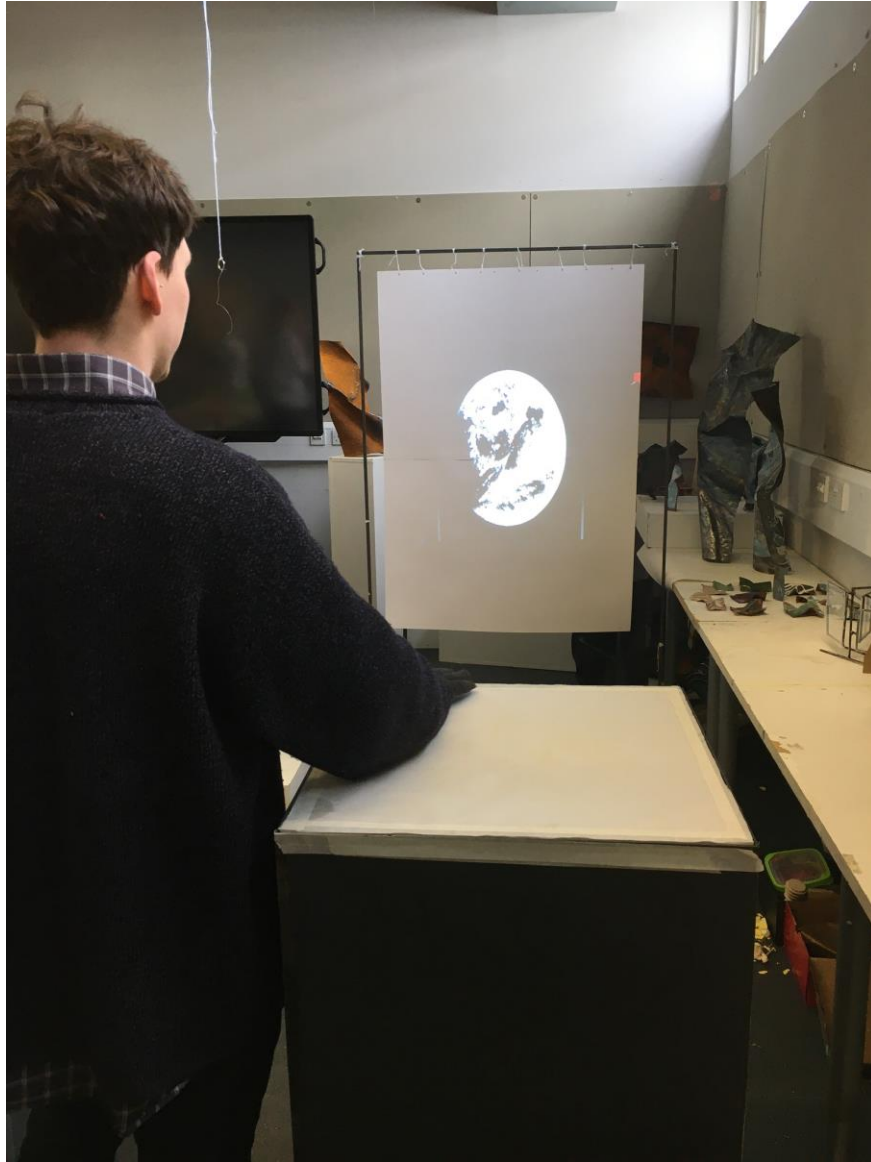
However, other than the personal act of manipulating the fillings there involved no performance element. It remained ephemeral with no captured trace. In seeking to turn this material movement into a drawing performance I needed to create a system through which this manipulation process was elevated to the level of spectacle. Where the hand, the material manipulation and the residual trace are clearly defined as separate entities. In doing so all the elements of the drawing performance would be in place



Inserting the role of the body. Body adornment can be used in tandem with movement to affect a material. Here magnets are used to manipulate the flow of iron fillings in water.



Turning material manipulation into drawing performance. By filming the material manipulation and projecting it onto a screen in real time.
<https://vimeo.com/413073237>



Tracing touch. <https://vimeo.com/417263352>



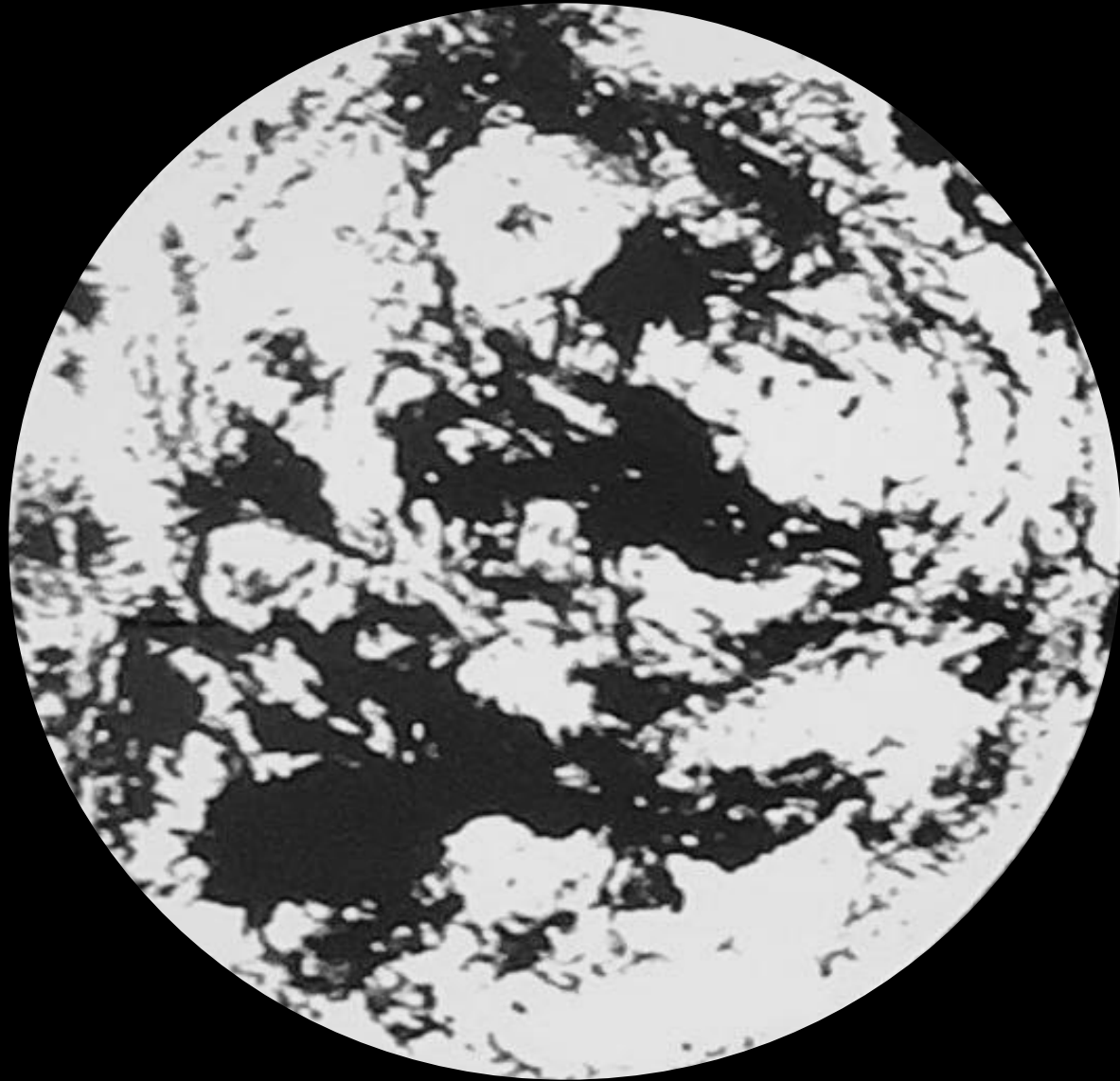


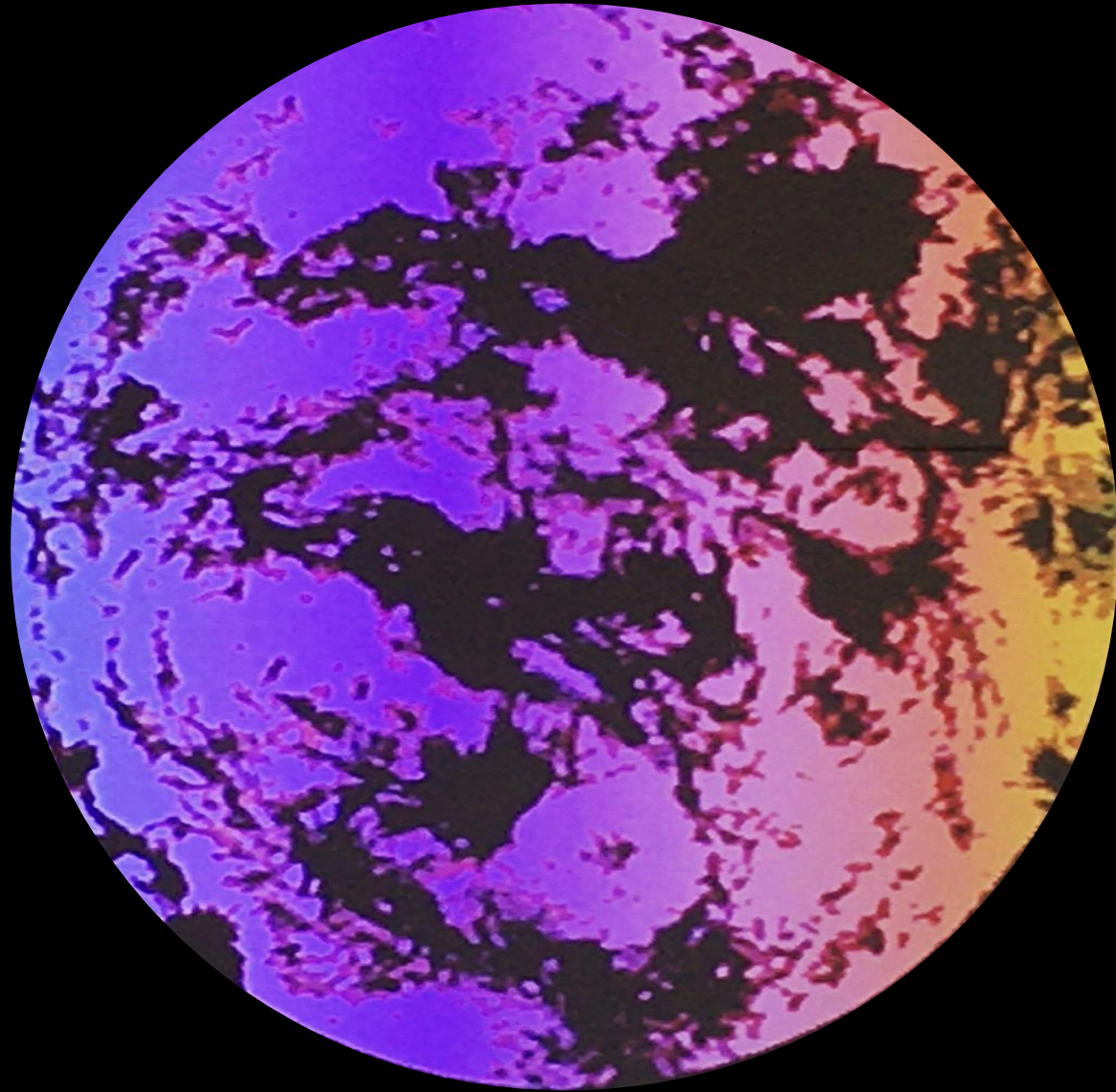
Tracing touch

By reinserting the role of projection it was possible to turn the beauty of the material manipulation into an interactive instillation. The instillation allows a person, through a piece of body adornment, to manipulate the screen as they wish. Creating an ever changing drawing that moves as the artists' hand does. Effectively creating a system in which body, motion and trace work in equilibrium. The hand is still a spectral presence in the projection, itself becoming a trace of its own physicality.

This work also has a strong interactive element. It can be used by multiple people at once, all manipulating the screen. This sense of accessible engagement is something I will explore further in other final pieces. Rather than the drawing performance being a representation of one artists' process, I would like for the performative nature of my work to engage a wider variety of people.





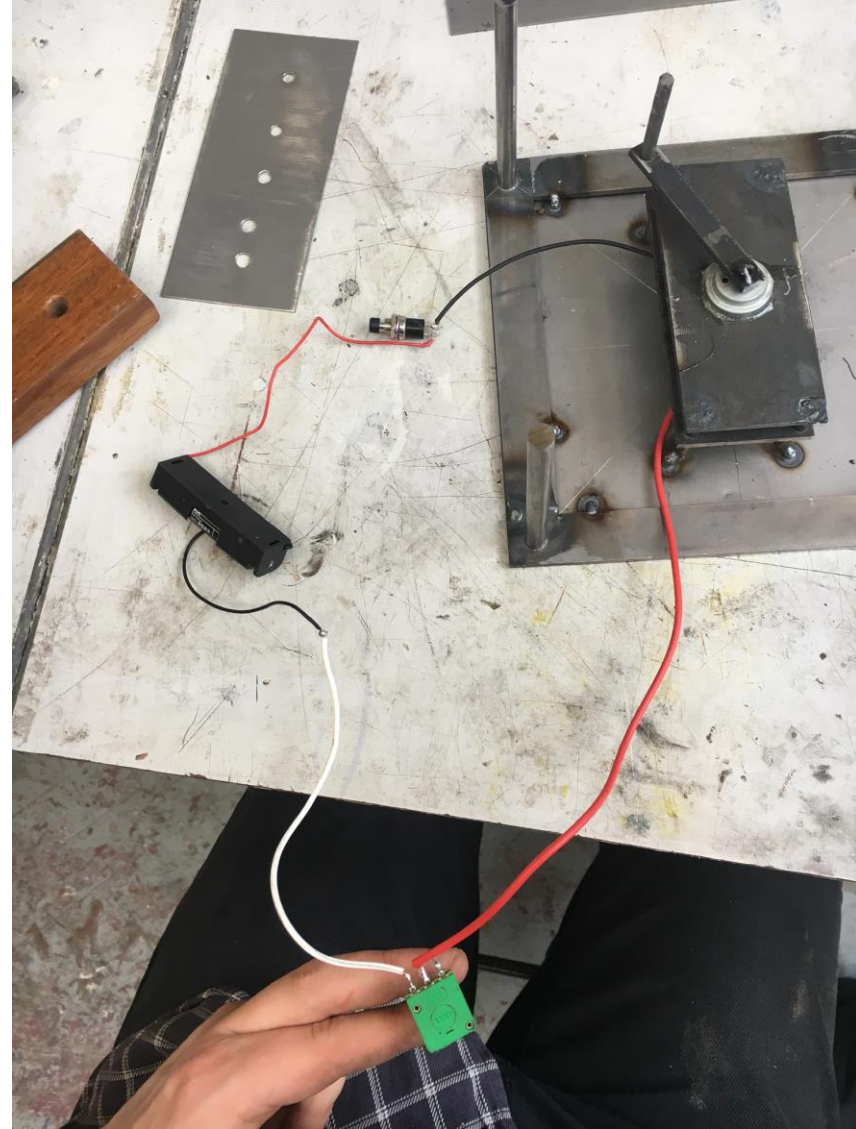
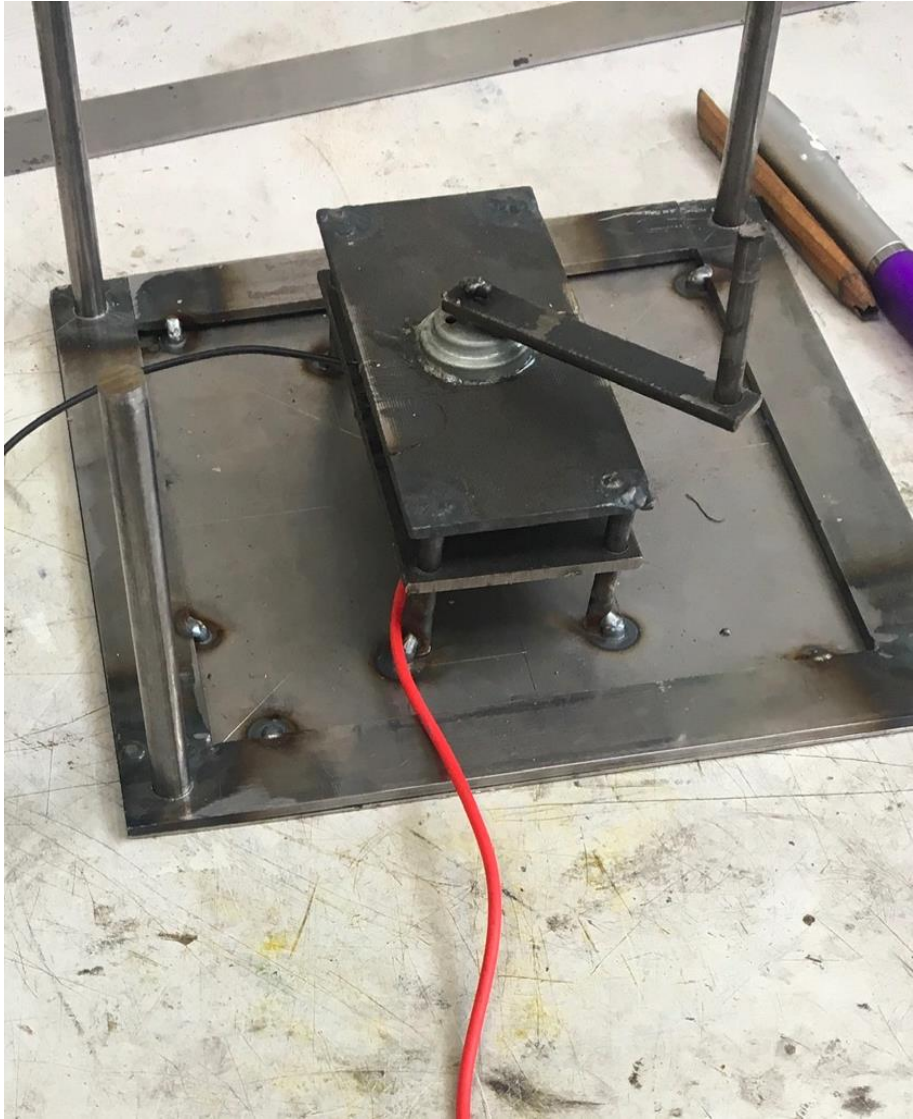


Trace box series

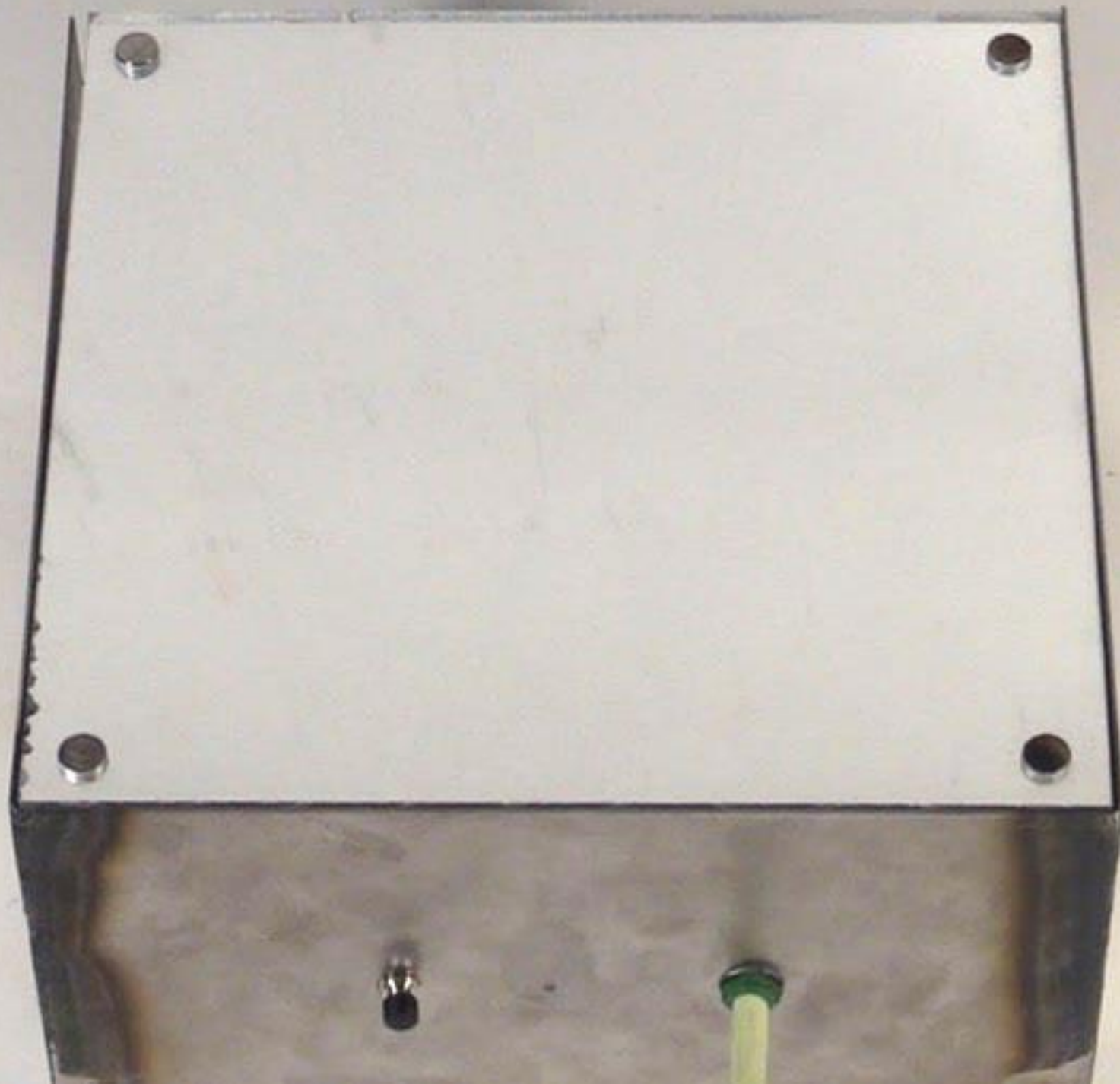
For my next series of pieces I decided again to make use of the phenomena of magnetism to create three boxes. I named these the Trace series. The magnets are attached to motors that work to drag metal fillings across a mirrored surface. Without knowledge of the inner working of the boxes the traces appear to have a will of their own flowing to create geometrically perfect circles.

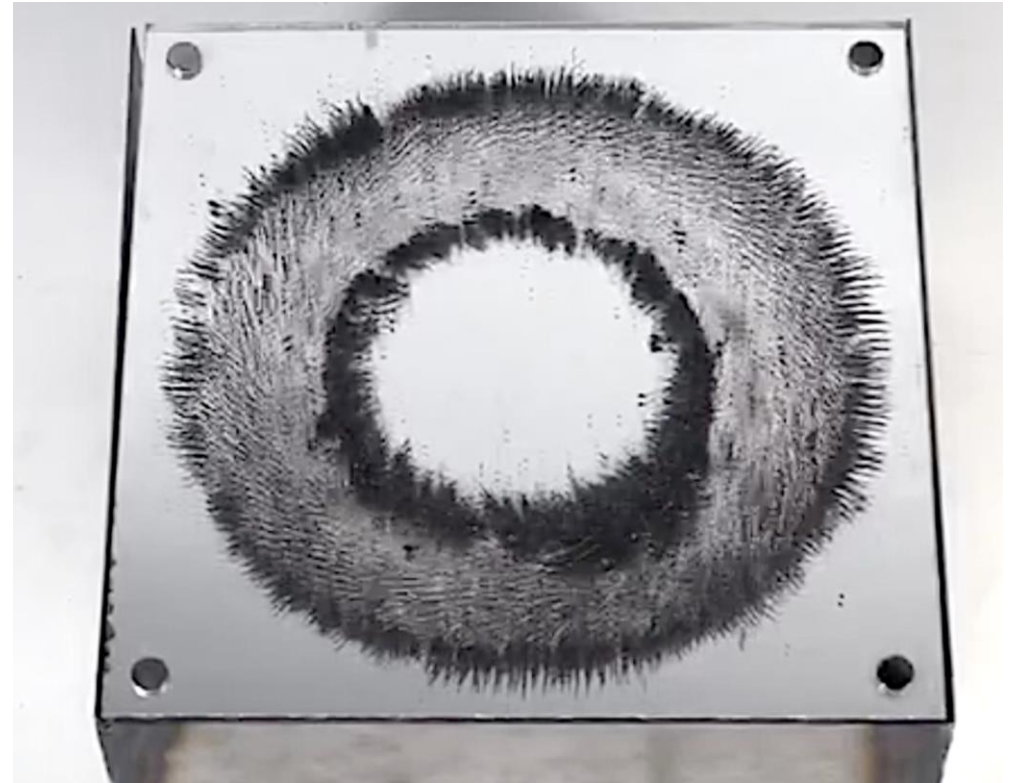
The performance they enact is mechanized. In similarity to involuntary drawing, the artists hand is not present. Whilst the traces do not reflect the involvement of the body, they do justly reflect my views into how drawings should be constructed. With the performance of the drawing being equivalent to the final residual trace. With these boxes the process of creation works in symmetry with the prints they produce. Together they coalesce to form the entirety of the work. There is no hierarchy between the printing process and the final print.





Creating the mechanism that spins the magnet.

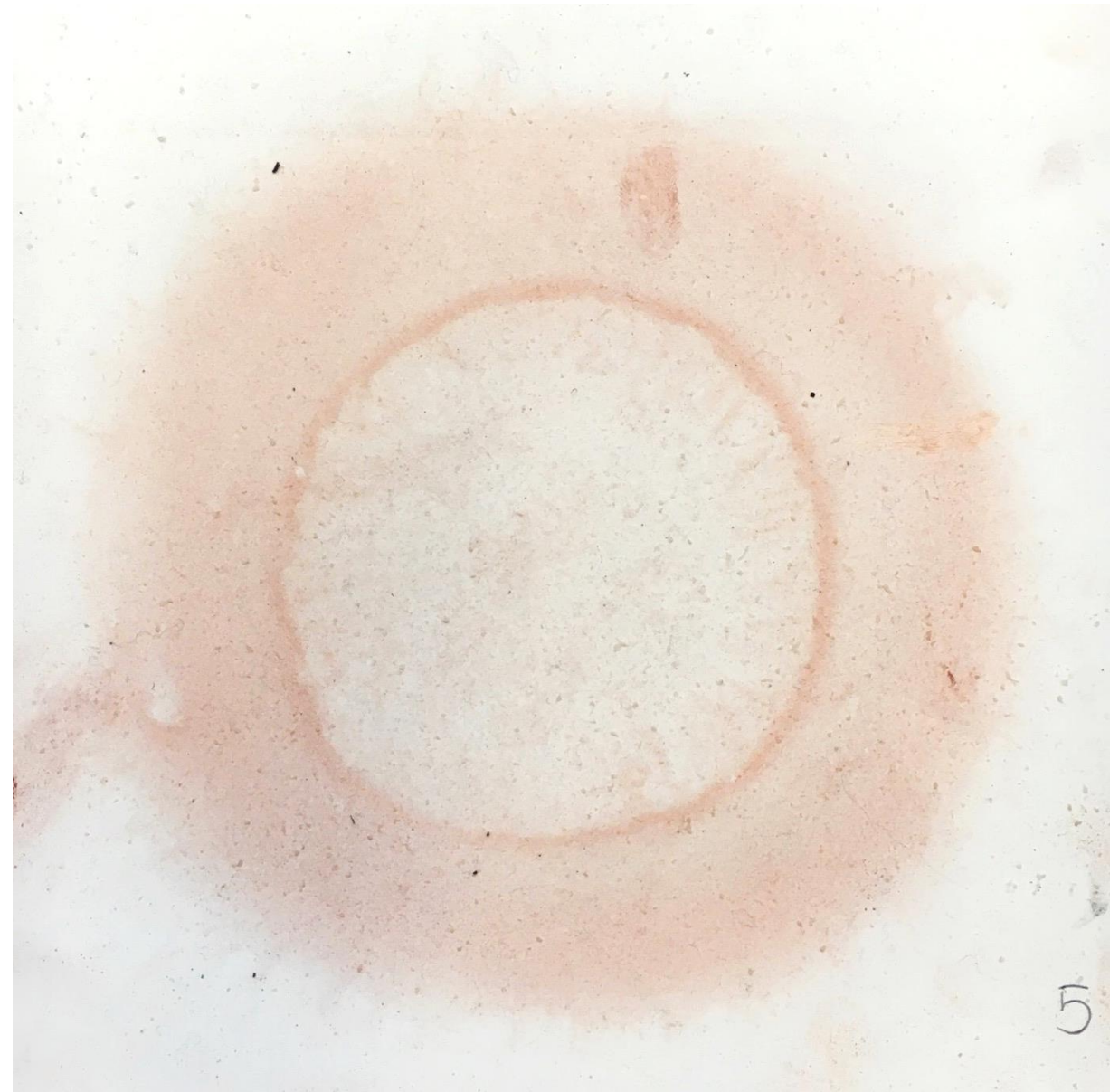
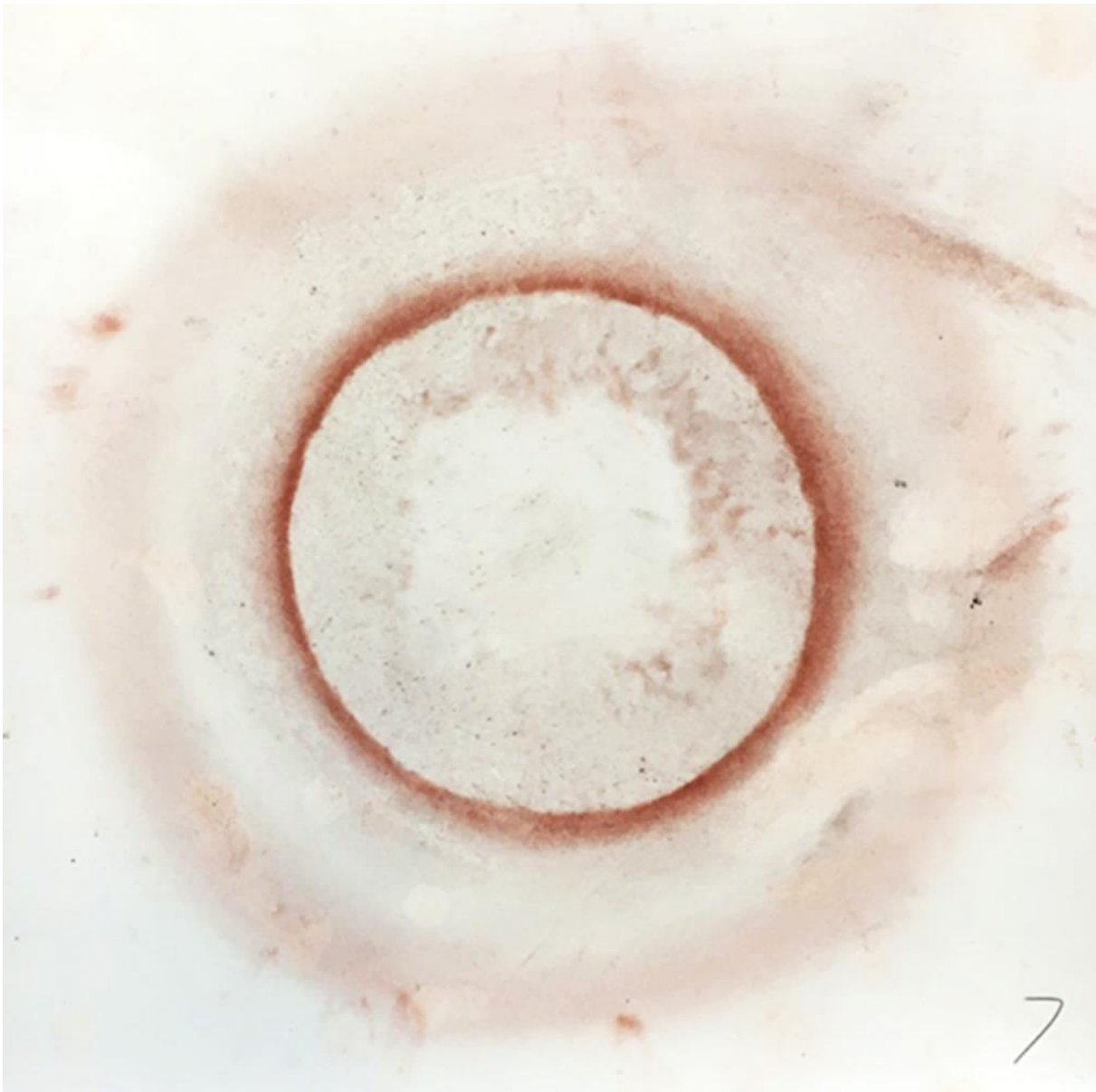




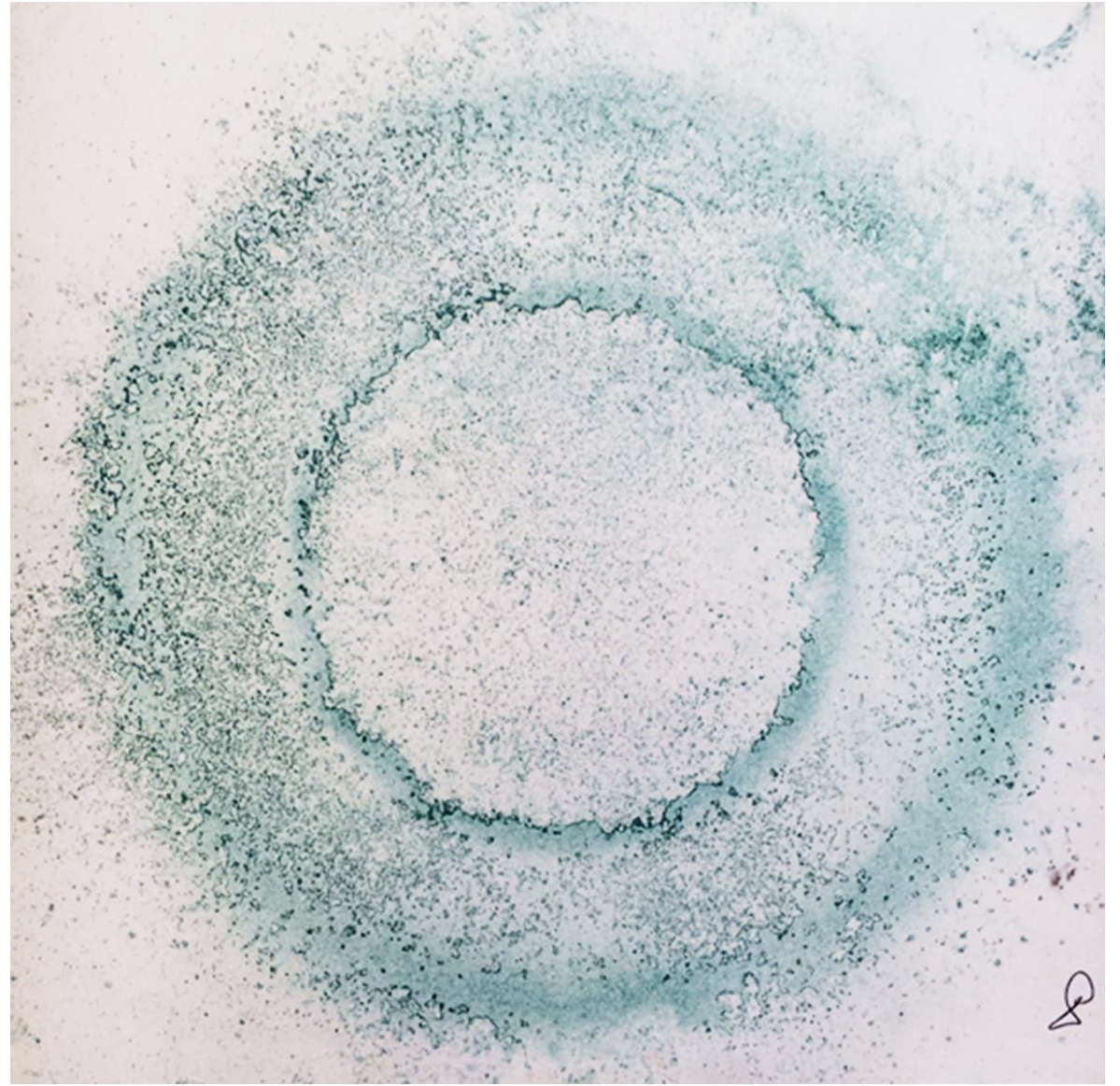
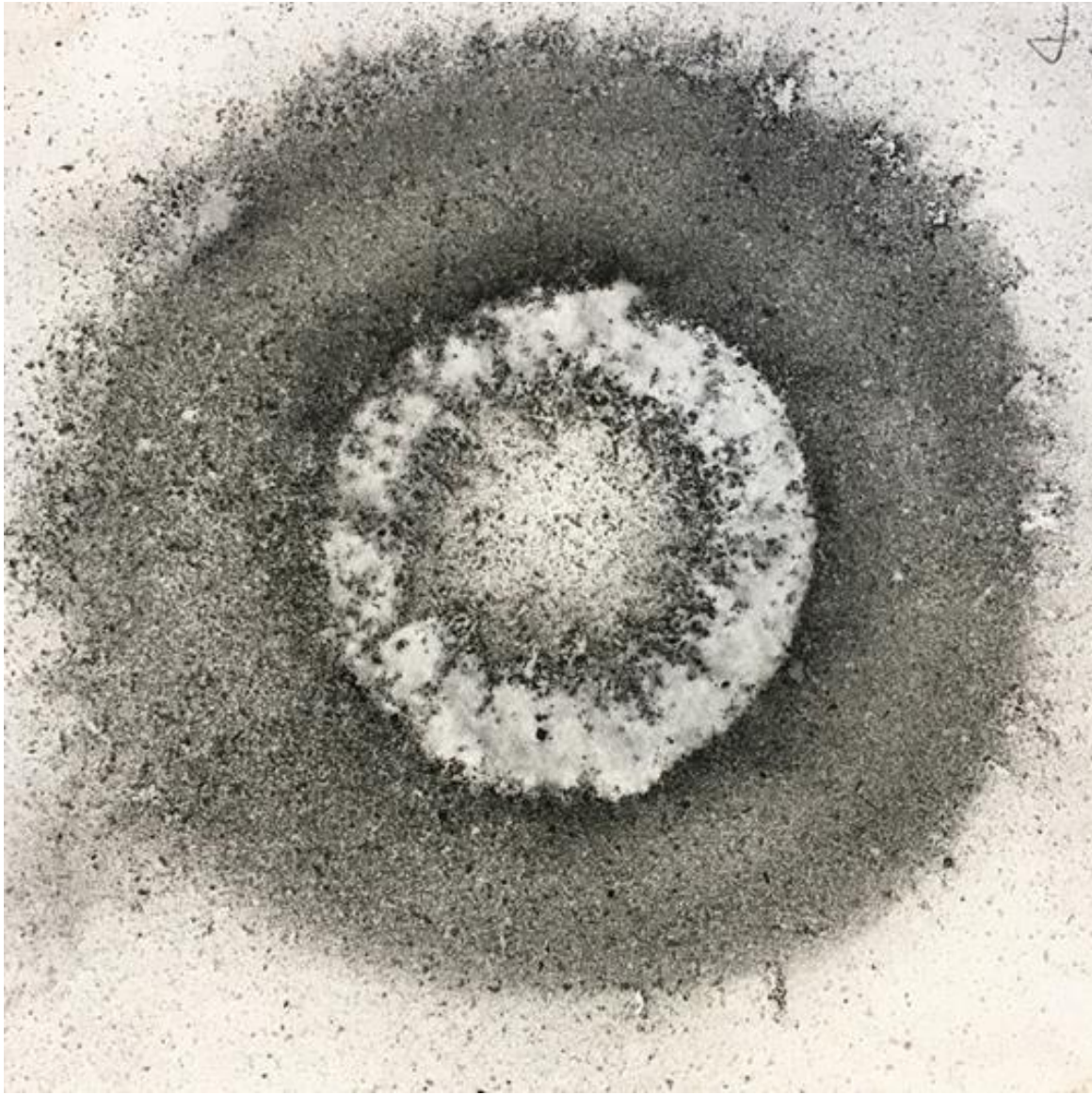
Stills from Trace box in action. <https://vimeo.com/393496905>



Printing using Trace box 1. Iron based pigments are dragged across paper by the mechanised motor. <https://vimeo.com/417231615>



Trace prints
Red iron oxide and metal fillings



Trace prints
Printer toner powder and iron fillings
Turquoise oxide and iron powder