

Anne Arden McDonald

Searching for a Sense of Wholeness

Abstract

The portfolio of the world renowned American visual artist Anne Arden McDonald presents a few of her key art projects, which are significant for her whole artwork. The presented cycle of Self Portraits, by building installations in abandoned interiors and performing privately for her camera in these spaces, opens for us largely the author's own conceptual way of thinking about the medium of photography. As the author says in her statement, the performances explore her relationship to the world around and are part ritual, part dance and part daydream, because she feels frustrated by the limitations of an earthbound body. This dilemma of living in a body with a mind that dreams serves as visual metaphors for struggles we face each day: tensions and balances, the necessity of keeping hope alive despite the obstacles, and the challenge of acknowledging our vulnerability without being crushed. Searching for this line of thought is also typical in her other project titled Cameraless Photography, in a large body of dreamy photographs shot with a Diana camera over several decades, which gives her

artwork an incredibly strong time dimension without using a camera or negative. And Anne Arden McDonald continues the thought in this context, even now, when more recently she has been using light and chemistry the way a painter or sculptor would to build images on photographic paper, thus succeeding and revisiting some historic photo processes like Man Ray's photogram, Pierre Cordier's chemigram, lumen printing, etc. Thanks to these camera-less experiments, we can be spectators of a chemical painting, where in one image, over 100 medicines, spices, and household cleaners were applied. Her imagery emerges as circles and spheres, representing planets and atoms, visualizing the macrocosm and the microcosm of life, which is strongly related to search for a sense of wholeness. Her dream structures carry a metaphor of the journey, of a sacred wandering, and also pose interesting questions about what photography is, and what it can be. It is a holistic philosophy of thought as well as an authorial process by which the author semantically searches for the primary essence of

the atoms of light and the causality of human existence. The existential level of her works is conditioned by the physical presence of the matter of the photographic medium itself, as well as by the physical presence of the author in the picture, when she visually transforms her innermost being tensions into the personified symbols of extinction and transience. The portfolio also offer a very interesting interview by Rafaelo Kazakov with Anne, where she introduces her effort to transcend the reality, her searching for inspiration in literature, song lyrics, poetry and mythology, but also how she transformed her imagination into her works mainly in the endless symbol of circle, and all this taking into account the time, faith and geopolitical background in which she grew up and formed. And through the prism of all this, the abstract work became a being of a bigger story, the story how planets were born and the universe started.

Key words

Abandoned buildings. Abstract photography. Alchemical photography. Alternative process. Atom. Cameraless photography. Chemigram. Cosmos. Dream. Experimental photography. Fine art photography. Installation art. Lumen print. Macrocosm. Microcosm. Performance. Photogram. Planets. Rayogram. Ritual. Self portrait. Staged photography. Sun.



Anne Arden McDonald, Self portrait, 2021

Statement: Cameraless Photography

While most photography employs a lens, and either film or a digital sensor, this series explores ways of generating images on photographic paper without using a camera or negative. The source of inspiration for inventing processes that inform the resulting photograph is the dialogue that occurs between painters or sculptors, and their chosen medium. Another is the scientific method, where you observe phenomena, formulate a hypothesis, test it with experiments, use careful measurements, note variables, observe results, and use this information to build an image. While still working with photo paper, light, and chemistry, I revisit some historic processes like Man Ray's photogram, Pierre Cordier's chemigram, and lumen printing, and also invent other ways of producing images without using a negative. These processes are utilizing optical situations, or chemical

reactions, or a combination of the two. Applying glue as a resist and digging down to the photo paper surface with alternating photo chemicals causes an image to emerge on the paper in the form of a chemical painting. Some of these camera-less experiments include painting bleach onto blackened photo paper, building layered piles of glass and eggshells and moving around them with a flashlight to make an exposure, and growing a self-replicating garden of mold that feeds on silver gelatin paper. In one image, over 100 medicines, spices, and household cleaners were applied to photo paper and run through darkroom chemistry to test for colours and textures. The methods are an unorthodox collection of materials and techniques from the domestic and scientific realms, brought into the darkroom, often coaxing or scrubbing an image into the photographic paper. Some images are made in the dark and some in daylight, some processes are

additive and others reductive, the result is a series of photographs. The imagery emerges as circles and spheres, representing planets and atoms, visualizing the macrocosm and the microcosm of life as we know it, but it is also related to my search for a sense of wholeness. Photography is a very young and exciting medium, and there is so much undiscovered terrain. In some ways, it stands at a precipice: digital photography is eroding the availability of some analog materials, and the study and use of silver gelatin papers. I am working to develop these processes, and to pose interesting questions about what photography is, and what it can be.

Statement: Self Portraits

I build installations in the landscape or in abandoned interiors and make private performances for my camera in these spaces. The performances explore my relationship to the world around me and are part ritual, part dance and part daydream. I have many fantasies that I cannot actualize in everyday life – flying is the most insistent of them – and I feel frustrated by the limitations of an earthbound body. This is a dilemma we all share: being both flesh and spirit, living in a body with a mind that dreams. My images serve as visual metaphors for struggles we face each day: tensions and balances, the necessity of keeping hope alive despite the obstacles, and the challenge of acknowledging our vulnerability without being crushed.

Interview of Rafaelo Kazakov with Anne Arden McDonald

Rafaelo Kazakov: I started talking about not recognizing in young people today, what I remember me and my friends to be, which was, for lack of a better phrase, “exploding into life”. But then immediately I have the caveat that we were living in a repressed culture (in Bulgaria), we spoke English, and we separated ourselves from the establishment and that internal emigrate migration was a big way that me and my friends defined ourselves. So I don’t expect this from youngsters in the world where we have internet, we live in a democracy, kind of, and information is at your fingertips. So that’s why I was very interested about what you said that you recognize some of the adjectives that I described myself, in yourself, how you describe yourself back then and you say, how you were hunting for information and digging into libraries? Can you continue that thought?

Anne Arden McDonald: Well, it’s interesting, because this is something that I’ve always thought was a connection between myself and the Central European guys whose work I resonated with, (and represented for years, including Pavel Pecha), because I also grew up in a repressed culture. I grew up born-again Christian in the South, and the range of what I was allowed to be, especially as a little girl turning into teenager turning into a woman was, the path was very narrow, it felt very small, the

possibilities that were available. And so part of what I was doing with the self portraiture was, trying to imagine. I didn’t relate to the role models that were around me. So I was looking to literature and song lyrics and poetry and mythology, and looking to these places to sort of cobble together a self. To pull little pieces of things that resonated with me, and try to pull them together and perform them into being. I’ve always really related to the Central European guys, I thought we had that in common, that we were all trying to transcend the reality that was obvious to us.

Raffy: The reason I was asking is because it’s the same thing. The system repressed you not so much overtly in common. I mean, in the 80s, communism was kind of light beer. But in terms of opportunity, a ceiling of what you could become, it resonates with me what you said, the ceiling was, you either, if you want to be true to yourself, if you want to be honest and not discredit and sell your soul, you’ll become like an engineer and you’ll work in an office as a systems manager your whole life, that will be your ceiling. If you want to grow, you’ll have to become a member of the Communist Party, and then sell your soul. With a woman in the South you couldn’t even, there wasn’t even a party, because you’re a woman. So I didn’t know that part of your background, or I forgot it. So in that sense, that sense of push and pull, like really tense reckoning of opposites, which is so amazing in your early photographs, becomes

a little more explainable, you were not only trying to find yourself as everybody does at that age, but you were also like almost trying to break, transcend that environment, you did break it, you did transcend it.

Raffy: From what you can remember, are the watches the first time the circle appears as a clear presence? Because the circle is obviously an endless symbol. End-less literally, of course. And it appears in all cultures, and it’s the interconnection of everything, and how there is no beginning and there is no end. Especially in your present work, that of course, is full force in in your process, and in the fluidity of the process, but I also remember circles in other pieces... Certain things are unconscious and then they become conscious. Like look how often I’m doing this, I’m thinking about it. Is it anywhere besides the watches, before you come to the current ones, where it’s again and again circles?

Anne: Yes, there are a number of compositions in the self portraits that are very circular, even if they’re not specific circles. The one that I call spinning, which is number 24. The one where I’m in Yellowstone Park and I’m kicking up a leg, that landscape is very circular also. That’s number 2, then number 22, which is at Cliff House in California, also has a very circular composition, but they are circles inside of rectangles, or some of them are ellipses, like they’re ovals inside of a rectangle. And then when you get to the Diana work, because the Diana camera

vignettes by nature, those are often a circle inside of a square. So there’s often a circle sort of embracing the photograph and helping your eye to move in the frame. So that rhythm has been there, even if the actual physical structure of a circle hasn’t been there, I have often enjoyed that rhythm.

Raffy: One thing you said makes me smile, because if I’m not being too simplistic – a circle inside a rectangle is such a way good way of describing the freedom you were trying to gain, while being circumscribed by the very rectangular and right-angle-y expectation, of what you’re supposed to be, and to do. So in terms of compositions, I find this especially striking, how, without me consciously thinking, certain compositions crop up again and again and again. And it’s almost like a formal structure that is partially independent, it’s like a way of organizing space. It’s like the brain has a paradigm of some sort. And sometimes I’m like, let me not do this, like I’ve done this before.

Anne: Okay, so, wait a minute, let me insert something here, because I think there is a real continuation, because the self portraits were about me searching for a sense of wholeness. And I think that this other body of work, the abstract work, when I first started it, I had the feeling that it was about the microcosm of the cell, or the macrocosm of the universe, or the planets. But I think that actually, the reason that the circle is so insistent

is because it’s about my own wholeness, and my struggle to find a sense of wholeness. Like, I think if it wasn’t inside of me, it wouldn’t be so insistent and compelling. You know, I think I would have dropped it by now if it wasn’t really me that I was talking about.

Raffy: That’s quite significant what you said, yes. In a certain way, an artist works and works and works. And you are both putting yourself into the work, and the work is putting itself into you, and changing you. Most people don’t have like a tangible physical result from their work at the end of the day. It’s quite powerful to have a piece. It’s like, wow, it’s an object, I did it. You know, if you’re a train conductor, it’s probably a gratifying job. But at the end of the day, you know that you transported so many people. So the fact that we create these objects, and then they become separate from us, we have to let go of them. It’s powerful in itself. But then they live in us, all the pieces that you have done, and you have sold, or have lost, or destroyed, or are in precious collections. They’re inside of you. They’re all pieces of you, I think. You cannot lose an art piece.

Anne: We were talking about the connections between the two bodies of work, and I think of the narrative qualities of the self portraits as being sort of a thin slice of a story, and the abstract work as being a bigger story, like, this is how planets were born and the universe started. I think there’s something to be said for connecting

the two types of stories, I get the feeling that if I get it right, with the new body of work, it's connected to a more timeless story. It's not necessarily a human story. It's something very elemental and basic. It's something very core. And very, I mean, I'm making a circle.

Anne Arden McDonald

is a Brooklyn based visual artist who grew up in Atlanta Georgia. From age 15 to 30 she made self portraits by building installations in abandoned interiors and performing privately for her camera in these spaces, publishing a book of this work in 2004. For 20 years, she was a private dealer for 13 Czech and Slovak photographers who do performances for the camera. She also has a large body of dreamy photographs shot with a Diana camera over several decades. More recently she has been using light and chemistry the way a painter or sculptor would to build images on photographic paper. McDonald's work has been exhibited widely: in the past 30 years, she has had 44 solo exhibitions in 10 countries (about 230 total shows in 14 countries) and has been published in over 215 places in 20 countries, including in Aperture, European Photography, and Eyemazing Magazines. Her work is in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum, the Worcester Art Museum, the Houston MFA, the Denver Art Museum, the Detroit Institute of Art and the Bibliothque Nationale in Paris. She was a Lapine Fellow at the Millay Colony, was given a grant of studio space from the Sharpe Foundation, and has been in residence at the Byrdcliffe colony from 2015-2017. She taught for 6 years at Parsons School of Design in New York, and has lectured about topics such as staged photography, self portraiture, Czech and Slovak photography, alternative photography, and her own work.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2020** *Particle, Rupture, Synthesis*, Center for Photography at Woodstock, Woodstock, NY, USA.
Everything Changes Everything, Lycoming College, Williamsport, PA, USA.
- 2018** *Atom, Planet*, Candela Gallery, Richmond, VA, USA.
Ebb and Flow, Carrie Haddad Gallery, Hudson, NY, USA.
- 2017** *Rise, Fall, Float*, Soho Photo Gallery, New York, NY, USA.
- 2012** *Rituals and Enactments*, Iris Bookcafe, Cincinnati Month of Photo, Cincinnati, OH, USA.
- 2011** *Atom, Planet*, Skink Ink Editions, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
Weighing the Clouds, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.
- 2010** Win Initiatives, New York, NY, USA.
- 2009** Liloveve Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
- 2006** *The Body in Transformation*, Month of Photography, Bratislava, SK.
Flying and Floating, Hartsfield International Airport, Atlanta, GA, USA.
- 2005** *Buoyancy*, Cave Space, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
From Earth to Sky, O'Artoteca, Milan, IT.
- 2003** UC Berkeley Extension Gallery, San Francisco, CA, USA.
Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, NY, USA.
Contemporary Arts Center, Abilene, TX, USA.
- 2000** *La Metamorphosis de Icaro*, Santiago, CL.
- 1999** *Traces of the Body*, Cave Space, Brooklyn, NY, USA.

- 1998** *Mise-En-Scene*, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA.
Robin Rice Gallery, New York, NY, USA.
- 1997** *Personal Rituals*, American Cultural Center, Prague, CZ.
In Focus Gallerie, Cologne, DE.
- 1996** Clement Gallery, University of Toledo, OH, USA.
Books and Company, New York, NY, USA.
Gallerie 3.14, Laon, FR.
- 1995** Month of Photography, Bratislava, SK.
- 1994** *The Will of the Wisp*, Atlanta Photography Gallery, Atlanta, GA, USA.
Autonomy and Alchemy, *Icarus and Angels*, Melkweg Gallerie, Amsterdam, NL.
Pyramid Fine Arts, Rochester, NY, USA.
Alma College, Alma, MI, USA.
Eastern Washington University, Spokane, WA, USA.
Second Street Gallery, Charlottesville, VA, USA.
- 1993** In Focus Gallerie, Cologne, DE.
Still Webbing's Whisper, Coker College, Hartsville, SC, USA.
Iisalmen Kamera Festival, Iisalmi, FI.
Nadir a Liderts (Dark Anxieties), Camera Club of New York, New York, NY, USA.
Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, PA, USA.
- 1992** *New Work from Eastern Europe*, Spazi Fine Art, Housatonic, MA, USA.
Török Fördö Malom-Tó, Budapest, HU.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022** *Rethinking Nature / Rethinking Landscape*, Fotogallerie Wien, Vienna, AT.
- 2021** *Spring Invitational*, The Halide Project, Philadelphia, PA, USA.
- 2020** *Wild Things: Disrupting the Photographic Archive*, CEPA, Buffalo, NY, USA.
Curated by Robert Hirsch.
The Qualities of Light, Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon, AZ, USA.
- 2019** *Lenless in Louisville for the PhotoBiennial*, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.
Out of the Dark, Alternative Process Photography, Cabrillo Gallery, Aptos, CA, USA.
- 2018** *Light & Metal*, Photo Eye Gallery, Santa Fe, NM, USA.
- 2017** *Nucleus-Imagining Science*, Noorderlicht Photo Festival, NL.

Selected Collections

- The Bibliothque Nationale Leo Steinberg
- The Houston Museum of Fine Art Joel- Peter Witkin
- The Detroit Institute of Art Jan Svankmajer
- The Brooklyn Museum Dr. Stanley Burns
- The Denver Museum Center for Creative Photography, Tuscon
- The Worcester Art Museum Center for Photography at Woodstock
- Rock and Roll Hall of Fame

Selected Bibliography

- 2017** Interview with Natasha Kurchanova, Candidate Journal, March.
- 2011** *Eyemazing Magazine* (Netherlands), pages 146-153, September.
A Curator (blog), by Julie Graham, April.
- 2010** *The Omen Magazine* (Portugal), pages 106-131. March.
- 2008** *Xfuns Magazine* (Taiwan), pages 72-77, February.
- 2007** *Light Leaks Magazine* (Canada), cover, pages 1, 8-11, May.
Malabar Magazine (Mexico), cover, pages 4, 7-12, 45, February.
- 2006** *Kwartalnik Magazine* (Poland), "A.A.M.'S World of Illusions", p. 22-29, Fall, by Grzegorz Przyborek.
The New York Gaho (Japan), page 2, 16-18, January.
- 2005** *Zoom Magazine* (Italy) "Anne Arden McDonald", pages 34-38, July, by Gigliola Foschi.
- 2004** *The Brooklyn Rail*, July, Book review by Ellen Pearlman.
- 2001** *Shots Magazine*, "Interview: Anne Arden McDonald", pages 4-10, March, by Russell Joslin.
- 1999** *Aperture Magazine*, "Explorations: Ten Photographers", February, Article by Peggy Roalf.
- 1997** *CV Photo Magazine* (Canada), "Dreams in Black and White" #38, pages 16-23, by Celine Mayrand.
- 1996** *Shots Magazine*, "I Am Not This Body", # 51 pages 4-8, March, Article by Anne Arden McDonald.
- 1995** *Art Life Magazine* (Slovakia), "O Anicke", pages 30-31, December,

Article by Rudo Prekop. *New York Times*, "Group Show--Tom Cugliani Gallery", January, Review by Charles Hagen.

1993 *Village Voice*, "Choices-- Disposable Generation", July, Review by Vince Aletti.

1992 *European Photography Magazine*, pages 28-31, July, Article by Wanda Strukus.

Catalogues and Books

2020 *Wild Things: Disrupting the Photographic Archive*, CEPA, Buffalo, NY, USA. Catalogue by Robert Hirsch.

Jill Enfield's Guide to Photographic Alternative Processes, page 59, edited by Jill Enfield.

2019 *Out of the Dark, Alternative Process Photography*, Cabrillo Gallery catalogue, pages 31-32.

2018 *Photographic Possibilities*, by Robert Hirsch, page 260. *Series of Dreams, 17 years of Shots Magazine*, edited by Russel Joslin, page 165.

2014 *Black Forest*, published by Candela Books, edited by Russell Joslin.

2013 *Eyemazing Anthology*, pages 294, 352-353.

2004 *Anne Arden McDonald, Installations and Self Portraits*, published in April.

Selected Awards, Honors, and Residencies

2019 Residency at Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts, Ithaca, NY, USA.

Residency at the Millay Colony, Austerlitz, NY, USA.

2018-15 Residency at Byrdcliffe, Woodstock, NY, USA.

2014 Schratzenberg Residency, June, Scheifling, AT.

2013 Critical Mass top 50, Photolucida, Portland, OR, USA.

1998 Discoveries of the Meeting Place, Fotofest, Houston, TX, USA.

1994 "The Space Program" grant from The Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation.

Selected Teaching, Lectures, Visiting Artist, Panels, Broadcast

2016 Lecture and demonstration, Bushwick Community Darkroom, Brooklyn, NY, USA.

2015 Lecture at Walker Fine Art, Denver, CO, USA.

2014 Real Art Today, lecture at Trestle Gallery, Brooklyn, NY, USA.

2013 Lafayette College, lecture and demonstration, Easton, PA, USA.

2012 Alt Photo Night, Photographic Resource Center, Boston, MA, USA. F295 Symposium lecture, Pittsburgh, PA, USA.

Leaders in Software and Art (LISA) salon group, NY, USA.

2007-12 Exploring Portraiture, Parsons School of Design, New York, NY, USA.

2005-12 International Center for Photography, New York, NY, USA.

2011 Barbara Bullitt Christian memorial lecture, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA.

Panel on Women in Photography, B&H Photo, New York, NY, USA.

F295 panel on Alternative Photography, B&H Photo, New York, NY, USA.

2010 Interviewed for the TV program *Caught in the Act: Art in Brooklyn*, by

Brooklyn Independent TV network, sponsored by BCAT, Brooklyn, NY, USA. School of Visual Arts, New York, NY, USA.

2006 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, MA, USA.

University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

2001 University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA, USA.

Education

1988 B.A. with Honors in Art from Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA.

Majors in Studio Art (photography) and English (poetry).

ANNE ARDEN MCDONALD

49 Bogart Street #21

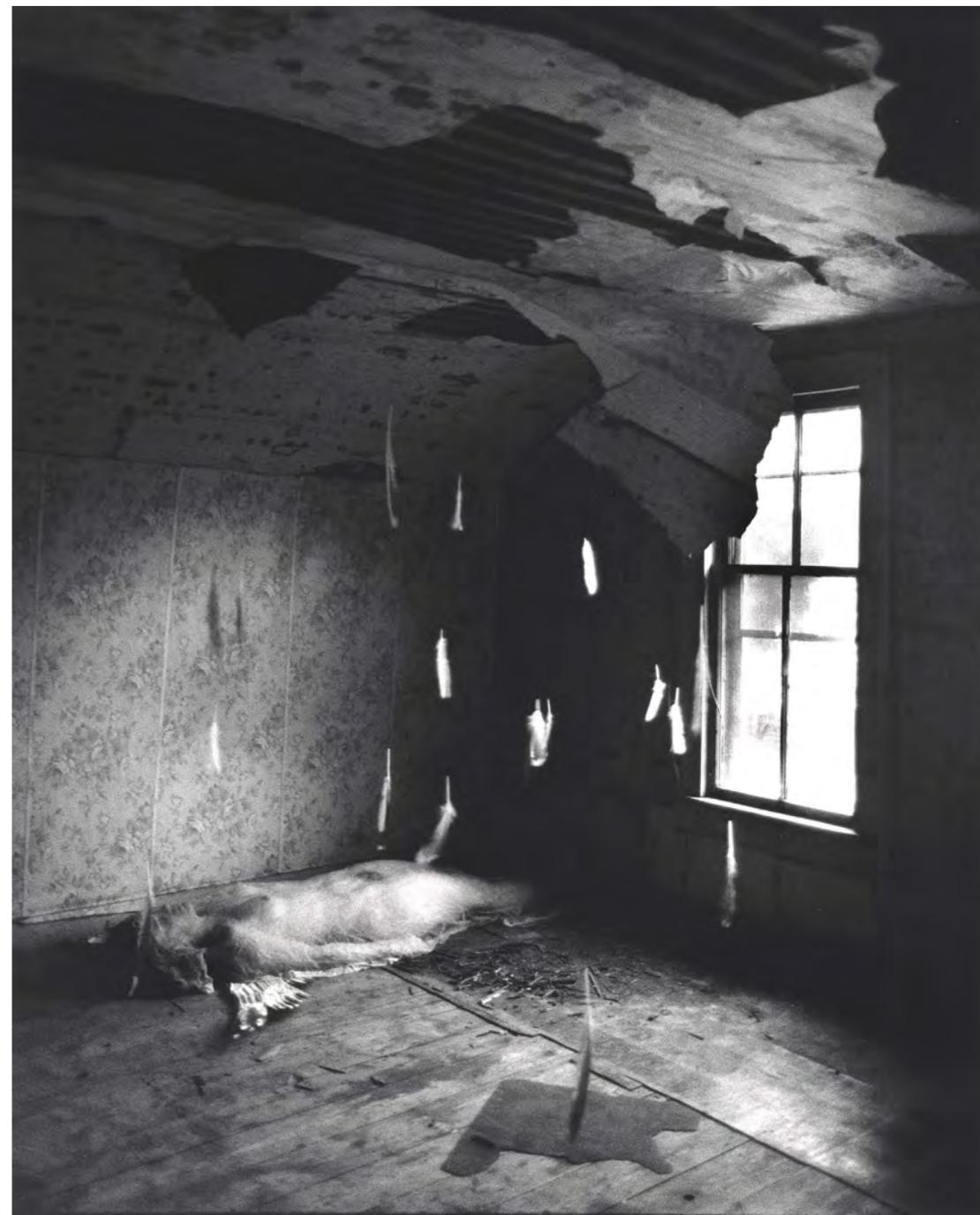
Brooklyn, NY 11206

917-821-0133

Anne@AnneArdenMcDonald.com

www.AnneArdenMcDonald.com

Self Portraits, 1987 - 1995



Untitled Self Portrait #12, Connecticut, 1989



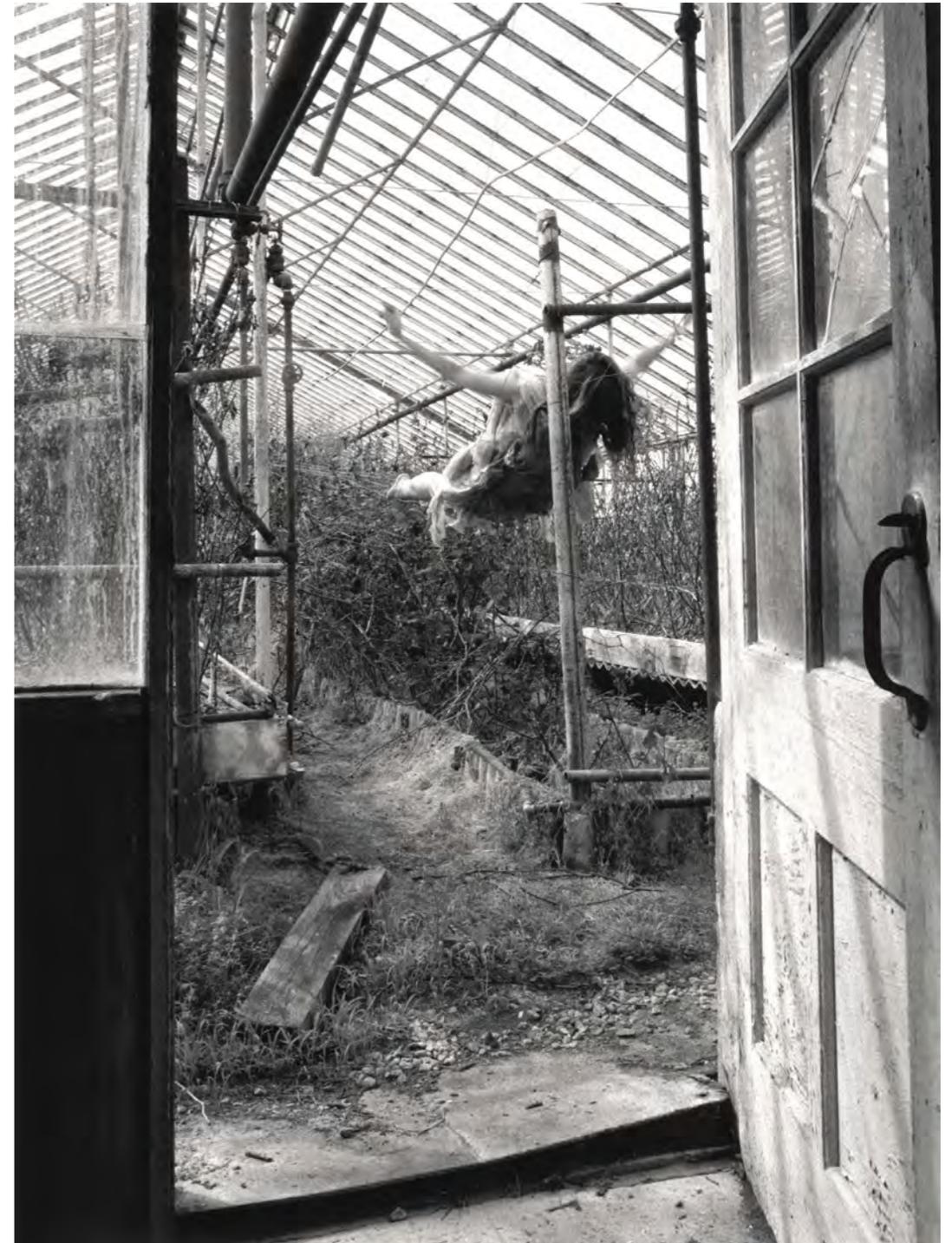
Untitled Self Portrait #3, Connecticut, 1987



Untitled Self Portrait #55, 1994



Untitled Self Portrait #38, Czech Republic, 1992



Untitled Self Portrait #25, Massachusetts, 1990



Untitled Self Portrait #22, California, 1989



Untitled Self Portrait #24, California, 1989



Untitled Self Portrait #67, New York, 1995



Untitled Self Portrait #41, Hungary, 1992



Untitled Self Portrait #61, Austria, 1994



Untitled Self Portrait #40, Hungary, 1992



Untitled Self Portrait #2, Wyoming, 1987

Cameraless Photography, 2015 - 2019



Growing Planet, 2015, 20 x 16 ins.



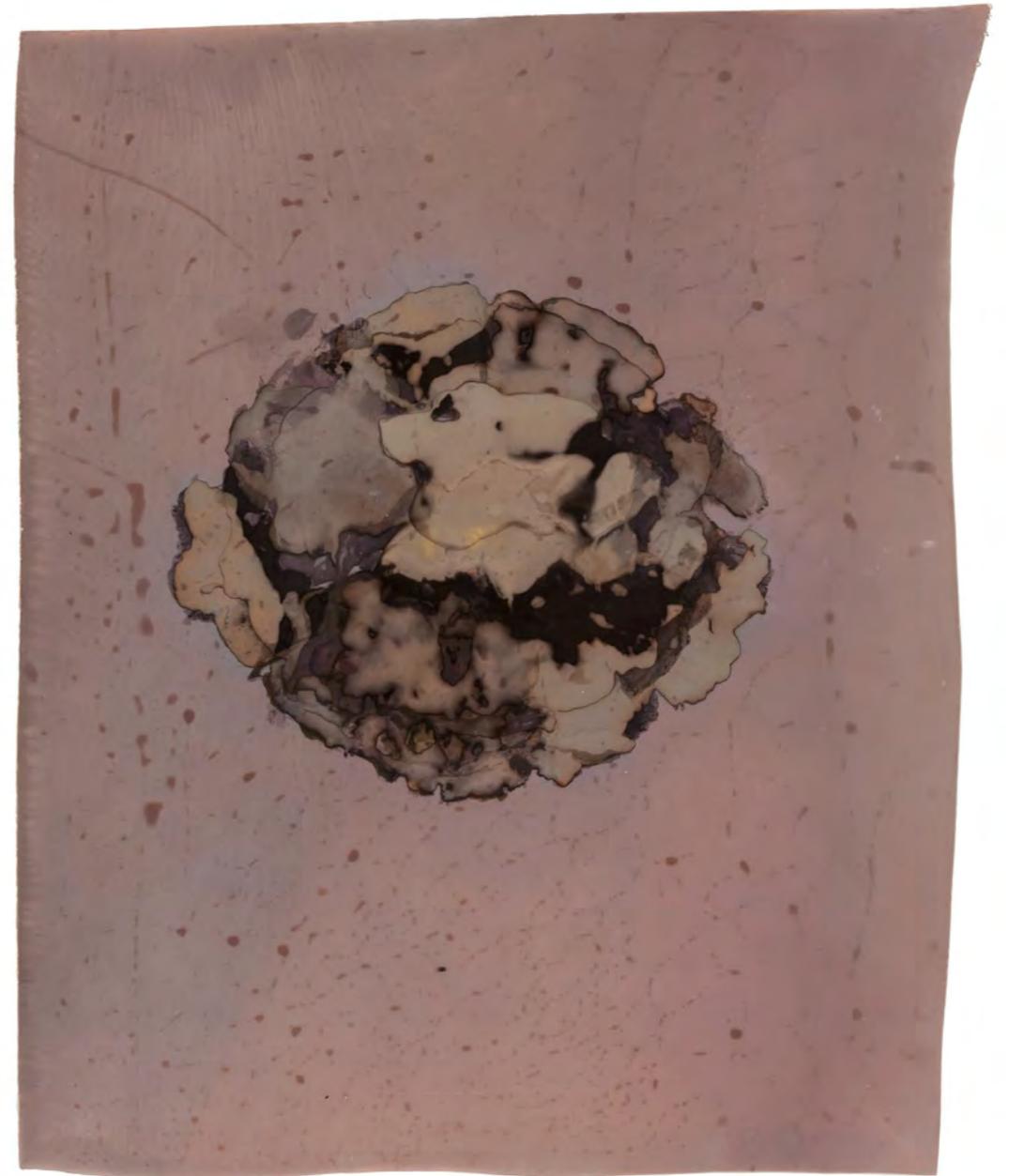
Molecule, 2017, 20 x 16 ins.



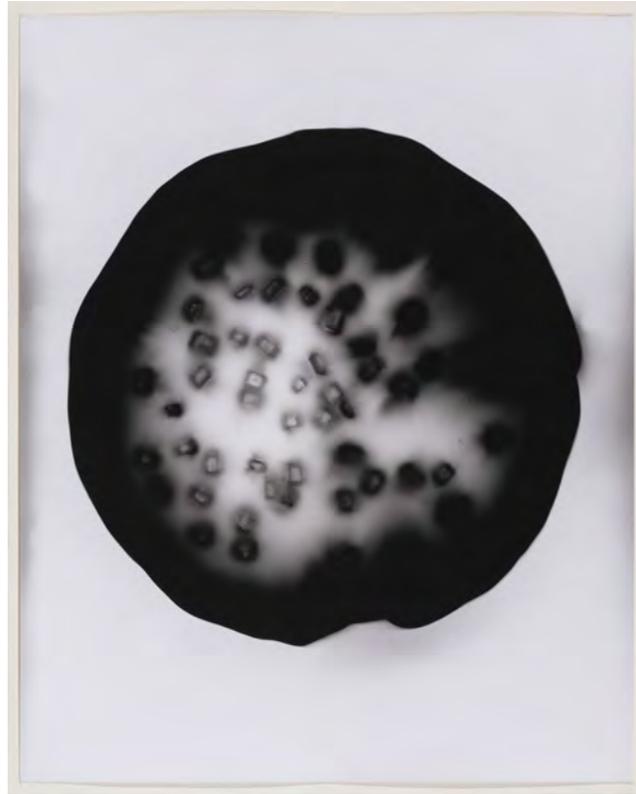
Deep Space, 2015, 20 x 16 ins.



Earth Flower, 2019, 20 x 16 ins.



Enzyme Print, 2016, 20 x 16 ins



Particle, 2018, 20 x 16 ins.



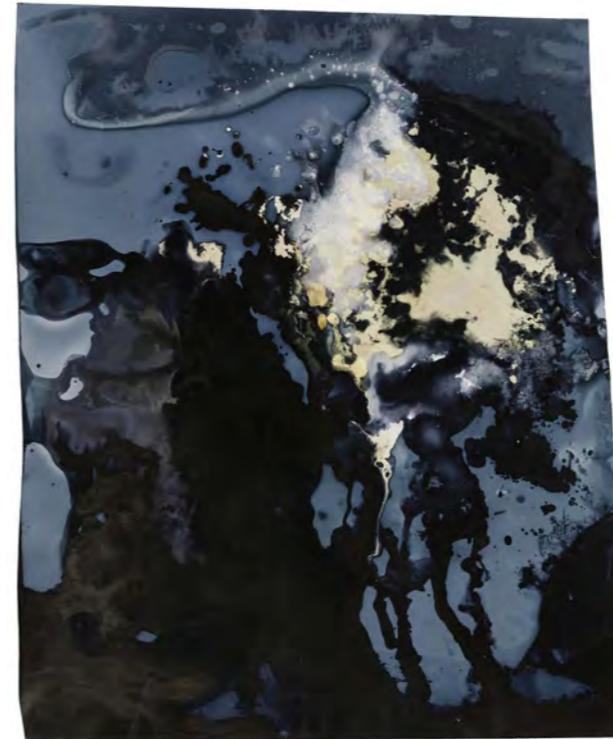
Virus, 2018, 20 x 16 ins.



Sublime, 2019, 20 x 16 ins.



Shattered, 2017, 20 x 16 ins. (n/a)



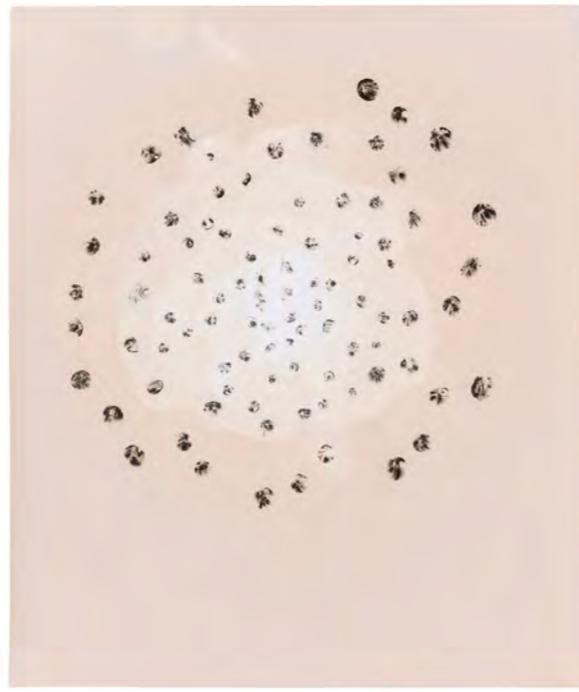
Nebula, 2017, 20 x 16 ins. (n/a)



Rust Flowers, 2019, 24 x 20 ins.



Cluster, 2016, 24 x 20 ins.



Falling, 2016, 24 x 20 ins.



Imprint, 2017, 24 x 20 ins.



Island, 2018, 24 x 20 ins.



Wet Rust, 2019, 24 x 20 ins.



Big Bang, 2016, 40 x 30 ins.



Fragility, 2018, 34 x 29 ins.



Saturn, 2016, 40 x 30 ins.



Void, 2018, 30 x 30 ins.