

STARRY NIGHTS ◦

VIJA CELMINS
JENNIFER COATES
RUSSELL CROTTY
JEN DENIKE
HALINA KLIEM
ROBERT LONGO
VIK MUNIZ
LAUREN ORCHOWSKI
THOMAS RUFF
PAT STEIR
MARC SWANSON

“THE STARRY HEAVEN,
THOUGH IT OCCURS SO VERY
FREQUENTLY TO OUR VIEW,
NEVER FAILS TO EXCITE AN
IDEA OF GRANDEUR.”

EDMUND BURKE¹

Surely no natural spectacle is more universal than a star-filled sky. Glimmering celestial bodies have awed and inspired humanity for centuries, and despite significant scientific and technological advancements, they continue to be a favorite subject for many contemporary artists. The works in the *Starry Nights* section of this exhibition include numerous representations of stars and galaxies in an array of media. For many of the artists represented here, their fascination stems from the great distances starlight must travel to reach Earth. Some cite their love of astronomy and incorporate scientific instruments and data into their artistic processes. Others use the composition and reduced palette of white dots on a black field as an exercise in abstract composition. In all cases, their representations of the night sky reveal, as the epigraph suggests, that although there is perhaps nothing more commonplace than day fading into night, the stars remain a fertile – and sometimes surprising – subject for artistic examination.

Thomas Ruff's "Stern" series (plate IX) comprises highly detailed, large-scale C-prints made from negatives Ruff purchased from the European Southern Observatory. By opting for a large format and specifying the dimensions and orientation, Ruff essentially creates an abstract black-and-white composition that is also a scientific record of the stars. Vija Celmins also refers to photographic source material when creating her starscapes, which simultaneously represent deep space and a flat surface through a pattern of white dots against a black background. *Strata* (plate I), a mezzotint print, is a portrait of cosmic infinity (Celmins locates stars that are thousands of light years away) but the image can also be appreciated as a two-dimensional abstraction. Robert Longo's *Horse Head Nebula* (plate VI) is a meticulous charcoal drawing of a cloud of indistinguishable glowing gaseous material light years away. Like Ruff and Celmins, Longo also relates the natural phenomenon of starry nights to abstract art, applying photorealist drawing technique to a nonfigurative subject with a monochromatic palette. Pat Steir's *Starry Night* (plate X) is a photogravure and aquatint whose freeform explosion of stars recalls the fluidity and motion of Jackson Pollock's drips. However, Steir maintains that abstraction and representation are one and the same in her depictions of the night sky. Russell Crotty, himself an amateur astronomer, uses a powerful telescope to observe and record the details of stars and planets. *Venus Over High Glade* (plate III) – a scrupulous rendering of the night sky transferred in ink and watercolor onto a three-dimensional spherical structure – inverts our usual view of the night sky. Crotty's globe-drawing creates a way for us to view celestial bodies from an impossible external vantage point. In his "Pictures of Air" series, Vik Muniz also challenges our perception of stars and planets. By photographing gelatin infused with air, Muniz creates a black-and-white image that looks convincingly like a series of galaxies. Based on a computerized rendering of

the sky as Columbus would have seen it on October 11, 1492, *Viewing from Guanahani, Bahamas* (plate VII) is perhaps ideally observed in context of this exhibition. When displayed alongside photographs of the actual stars, such as Ruff's *Stern 17h 51m/-22°*, Muniz's night-sky illusion is truly put to the test. The stars in Marc Swanson's *Boy in Tree* (plate XI) have personal, rather than scientific, resonance. The silhouette of a young boy in the upper branches of a tree is a nostalgic reference to childhood wonderment of the night sky, and the glitter used to represent the stars is a nod to the sparkle and dazzle of the gay nightclub and disco scene. Jen DeNike's photo installation *What Do You Believe In* (plate IV) comprises eighteen 8-by-10-inch photographs that are collaged with found imagery of stars originally captured by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope. Standing in front of the composite starry background, a female figure is shown using naval semaphore flag language to spell out the title of this work. Halina Kliem's *I Want To See Stars* (plate V) is a DVD loop in which a hand repeats the simple gesture of switching a light bulb on and off. An extended viewing of the flashing evokes twinkling stars. Lauren Orchowski's "diorama theaters" are presented in a dark room in which the only visible light appears through pinpricks on photographic paper used to represent a star-filled sky. In *Little Rocket, Starry Night* (plate VIII), Orchowski creates an idealized environment devoid of artificial light and filled with swirls of stars that recall the brush strokes in van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889). Jennifer Coates also finds inspiration in van Gogh's nocturnal landscapes. In her painting *Blackblood and Twinkle* (plate II), Coates builds upon the Dutch master's ability to represent the brilliance of stars and creates mesmerizing hyperbolic twinkles in the night sky.

– MARA HOBERMAN
CURATOR

1 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757).

I VIJA CELMINS

Strata, 1982

One-color mezzotint, from 25 individual copperplates mounted on a single aluminum plate

29 1/2 x 35 1/2 in.

Courtesy of McKee Gallery, New York



II JENNIFER COATES

Blackblood and Twinkle, 2004

Acrylic on canvas

72 x 60 in.

Courtesy of Kinz, Tillou + Feigen, New York



III RUSSELL CROTTY

Venus Over High Glade, 2006

Ink and watercolor on paper on fiberglass sphere

12 x 12 x 12 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, New York and San Francisco



IV JEN DENIKE

What Do You Believe In, 2008

Eighteen black-and-white photographs

8 x 10 in. each

Courtesy of Smith-Stewart, New York



V HALINA KLIEM

I Want To See Stars, 2004

Single-channel digital video installation

2 minutes

Courtesy of DUVE Berlin



VI ROBERT LONGO

Horse Head Nebula, 2007

Charcoal on paper

25 x 42 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Metro Pictures, New York



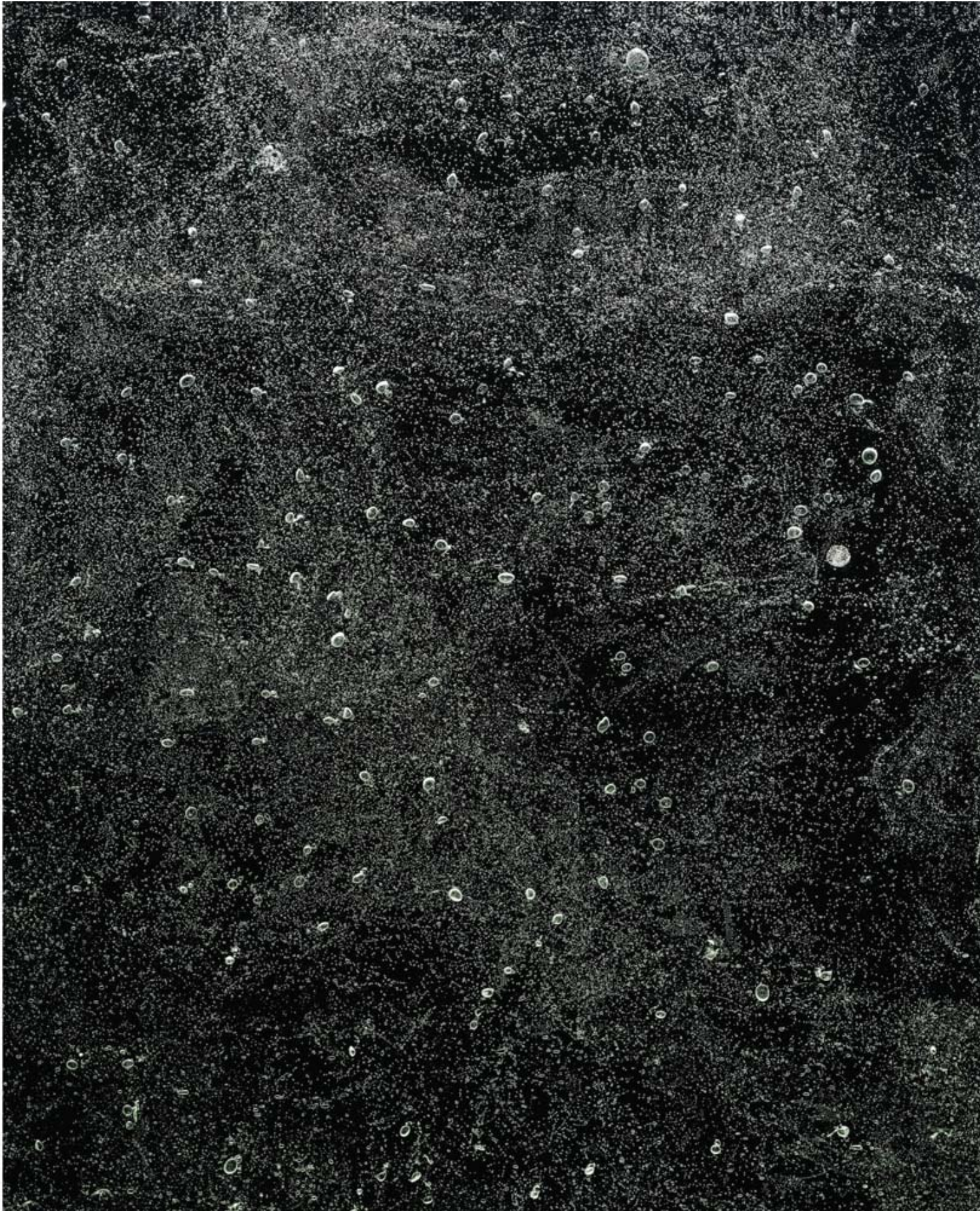
VII VIK MUNIZ

Viewing from Guanahani, Bahamas from "Pictures of Air," 2001

C-print

60 x 48 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York



VIII LAUREN ORCHOWSKI

Little Rocket, Starry Night, 2007

Wood, metal, polymer, photographic paper, and fluorescent bulb

24 1/4 x 30 x 23 in.

Courtesy of the artist



IX THOMAS RUFF

Stern 17h 51m/-22°, 1990

C-print

102 7/8 x 74 in.

Private collection, New Jersey



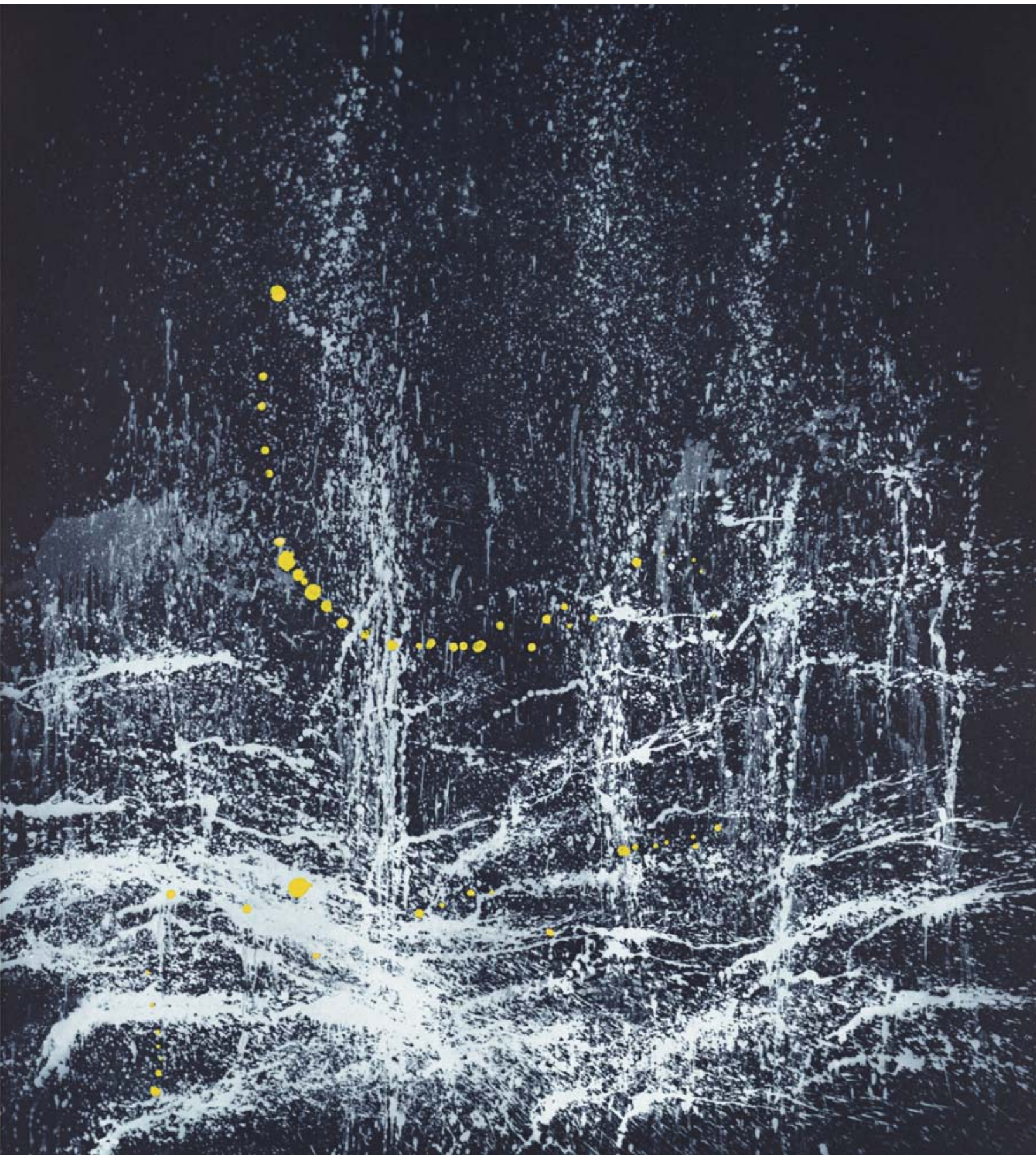
X PAT STEIR

Starry Night, 2000

Photogravure, aquatint, and pochoir

28 1/8 x 25 1/8 in.

Courtesy of Pace Prints, New York



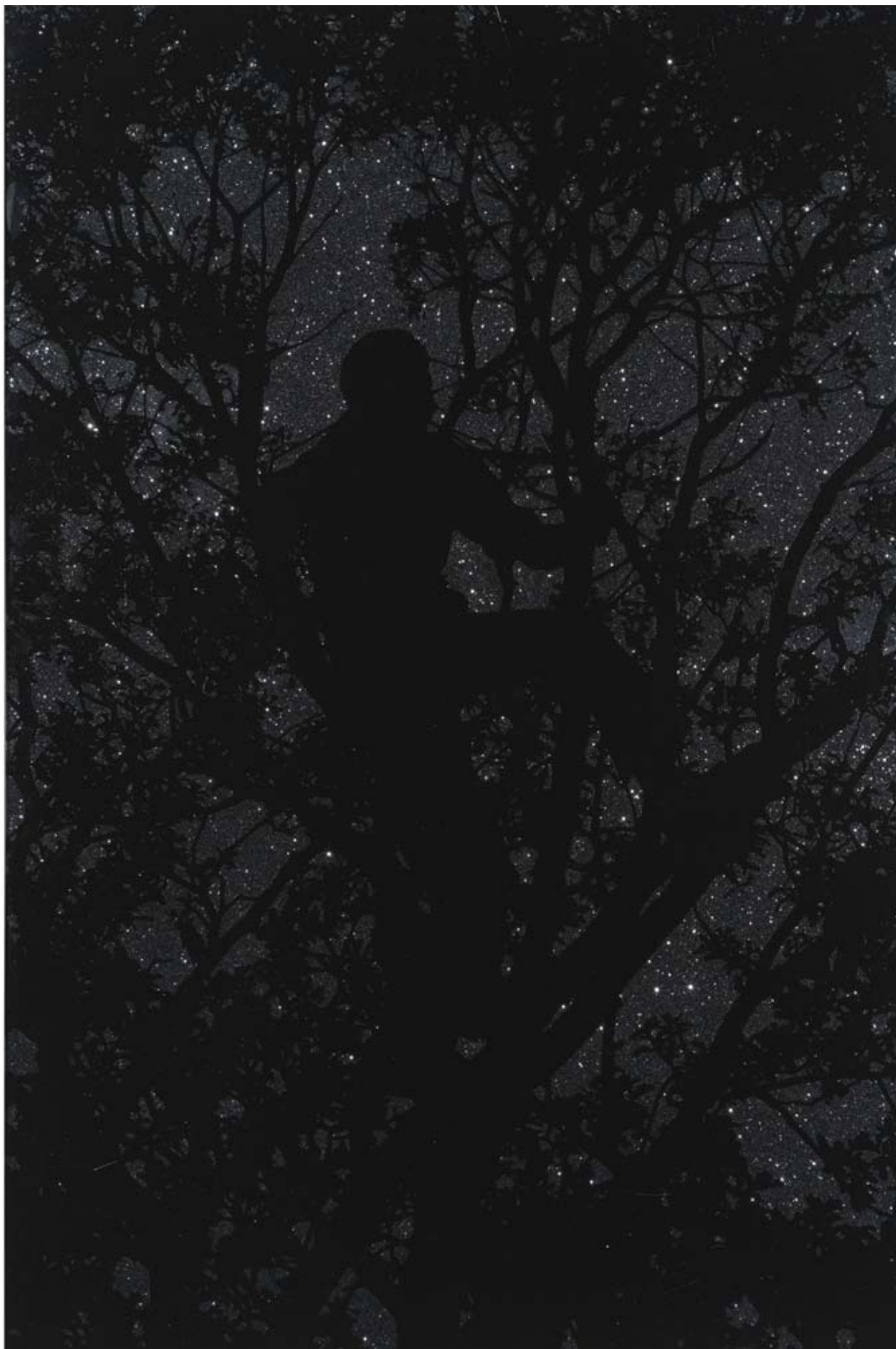
XI MARC SWANSON

Boy in Tree, 2005

Glass, enamel, and glitter

36 x 24 in.

Private collection, New Jersey



CITY NIGHTS ... ◦

STAN DOUGLAS ◦

EWAN GIBBS

DAVID HAMMONS

YVONNE JACQUETTE

BARNEY KULOK

BRITTA LUMER

VERA LUTTER

FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN

JOHN PILSON

COUNTRY NIGHTS ... ◦

DAVID CLAERBOUT ◦

TIM DAVIS

JULIANE EIRICH

TODD HIDO

DOINA KRAAL

“IN THE COUNTRY THE
DARKNESS OF NIGHT IS
FRIENDLY AND FAMILIAR,
BUT IN A CITY, WITH
ITS BLAZE OF LIGHTS,
IT IS UNNATURAL, HOSTILE
AND MENACING.”

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM¹

Nightfall affects the landscape in a variety of interesting ways, often accentuating topographical features in a manner that wholly transforms a particular environment. At night, the natural landscape tends to fade into darkness while man-made structures illuminated by artificial-light sources emerge from their surroundings – seeming almost to come alive as night falls. As Maugham’s quote suggests, the suburban and bucolic nocturnal landscapes are generally depicted as tranquil (at times hauntingly so), whereas the city by night appears energized and, in many cases, frenetic. The works in the *City Nights . . . Country Nights . . .* section of this exhibition illustrate this dichotomy through numerous examples of urban versus suburban nocturnal scenes.

The urban scenes in this section are unified by their accent on vibrant color and activity. Although they share an overarching sense of high-voltage nightlife, these works are varied both in terms of medium and perspective. In *Phat Free* (plate XIV), David Hammons focuses on the action of a man who kicks a can while roaming New York City streets. The constant activity and sound remind us that night in the city is never totally dark, quiet, or still. Choosing a totally different approach and technique for *Untitled* (plate XIX), Florian Maier-Aichen positions his camera at a great distance from his subject in order to show the preternaturally bright lights of a metropolis penetrating through miles of night sky. This manipulated, composite image is less a portrait of a specific city than a stylized impression of urban light pollution interrupting the otherwise dark sky.

Ewan Gibbs uses pencil on paper to achieve high contrast pixilated renderings of familiar urban scenes. By stripping the skyline represented in *London* (plate XIII) of hyper-real photographic detail, Gibbs creates a moody and intriguing portrait of London by night. John Pilson’s *Dark Empire* (plate XX) is a continuous 25-minute video depicting the New York City skyline during the evening of the 2003 blackout. By positioning the Empire State Building in the center of the frame, Pilson captures what is perhaps the most iconic skyline in the world as it disappears into complete blackness. *Dark Empire* is a striking, frightening vision that reminds us that the urban environment has come to be defined in direct opposition to night’s natural darkness.

Yvonne Jacquette also focuses her attention on New York City in her painting *Above Times Square* (plate XV), in this case emphasizing the buildings’ glowing presence against the night sky. Jacquette explores the variety of quality and color in the lights that make the city sparkle and shine at night. Stan Douglas’s *Every Building on 100 West Hastings* (plate XII) is a panoramic photograph of one of Vancouver’s most notorious blocks. Although the storefronts and apartment buildings lining the street appear derelict and uncared

for, the dark sky, the glow of the street lamps, and the overall stillness of the image lend a certain elegance to Douglas's ode to his native city's gritty Eastside.

Barney Kulok explores the abundant artificial light sources that pervade urban landscapes, including billboards, floodlights, and neon signage. The digital transparency lightbox *Skillman Avenue, Queens, NY* (plate XVI) shows a glowing billboard advertisement whose light reflects uncanny colors onto the bleak chain-link fence and empty parking lot below. The lightbox format accentuates Kulok's observation that the color spectrum of a city night is not dark and subdued but rather full of electrifying shades ranging from hot pink to ultramarine blue. In contrast, Britta Lumer's ink drawings are washes of gray and black that create evocative cityscapes. *Nachtstadt/City at Night III* (plate XVII) does not represent one city in particular but is an homage to the city by night as characterized by artificial light. Vera Lutter uses an enormous camera obscura to capture haunting "day-for-night" images of urban architecture. The finished photographs, such as *30th Street Station, Philadelphia, II: April 17, 2006* (plate XVIII), are negatives that situate glowing, ghostly urban landscapes against a menacing dark sky.

Even the most mundane suburban street becomes eerily enchanted when seen through Todd Hido's camera lens. Hido, who photographs predominantly lower-income suburban neighborhoods, works almost exclusively at night, using only available light. His photograph *1738* (plate XXIV) depicts a parked car illuminated through dense fog by a lone street lamp. The soft, hazy glow artfully suggests a supernatural force pervading an otherwise desolate tableau. Tim Davis also forgoes flash when photographing suburban landscapes. In his "Illuminations" series, Davis focuses on discrepancies created when artificial light is imposed upon the night environment. In *Bradford Pear* (plate XXII), Davis presents an incongruously spot-lit pear tree, whose blown-out presence appears ghost-like and dramatic in comparison to the deep muted tones of the surrounding parking lot. Juliane Eirich observes popular leisure destinations that are action-packed during the day but left vacant at night. Her panoramic photograph *Beach Chairs* (plate XXIII) depicts a dark beach lined with empty lounge chairs, revealing how commonplace man-made objects can become purely aesthetic once their functionality has been stripped away by the darkness and emptiness of night. Doina Kraal's installation *Sprookjesbos 2* (plate XXV) is a fantasy environment suggesting a forest of moonlit trees. By projecting images of foliage onto hanging aluminum tree-shaped forms, Kraal creates an enchanted forest both bewitching and beautiful – much like the dark woods described in fairytales. David Claerbout's photographs are presented here as transparencies in lightboxes – a format well

suited to emphasizing glowing light sources. Claerbout, however, reclaims the fluorescent-lit medium as an appropriate display for night photography and, ironically, as a way to draw attention to darkness. Displayed in a room without any ambient light, the distinctly suburban landscape of highway lanes, grass, and trees in *Nightscape Lightbox (second)* (plate XXI) slowly becomes visible as the viewer's eyes adjust to the nearly complete darkness.

—MARA HOBERMAN
CURATOR

1 W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook* (London: William Heinemann, 1949).



XII STAN DOUGLAS

Every Building on 100 West Hastings, 2001

C-print

23 1/2 x 96 in.

Courtesy of David Zwirner, New York



XIII EWAN GIBBS

London, 2005

Pencil on paper

16 1/2 x 23 1/8 in.

Collection of Glenn Fuhrman, New York

Courtesy of The FLAG Art Foundation, New York



XIV DAVID HAMMONS

Phat Free, 1995–1999

Videotape transferred to DVD, paper, and paperboard box

5:02 minutes

Courtesy of Zwirner & Wirth, New York





XV YVONNE JACQUETTE

Above Times Square, 2003

Oil on canvas

63 x 72 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery, New York



XVI BARNEY KULOK

Stillman Avenue, Queens NY, 2004

Digital transparency in lightbox

20 x 24 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery



VISTA MEDIA

You want it.
You can afford it.
You'll never see it.





XVII BRITTA LUMER

Nachtstadt/City at Night III, 2006

Indian ink on Ingres paper

19 3/4 x 25 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Morgen, Berlin



XVIII VERA LUTTER

30th Street Station, Philadelphia, II: April 17, 2006, 2006

Silver gelatin print

31 1/2 x 57 1/2 in.

© Vera Lutter. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York





XIX FLORIAN MAIER-AICHEN

Untitled, 2005

C-print

69 3/4 x 92 1/2 in.

Collection of David and Kim Schrader



XX JOHN PILSON

Dark Empire, 2003

Single-channel video

Approx. 25 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and

Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery, New York



XXI DAVID CLAERBOUT

Nightscape Lightbox (second), 2002–2003

Black anodized aluminum lightbox, Cibachrome mounted on Plexiglas with protection layer

49 1/4 x 57 1/2 x 7 1/8 in.

Courtesy of Rennie Collection, Vancouver, Canada



XXII TIM DAVIS

Bradford Pear from "Illuminations," 2004

C-print

48 x 60 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Greenberg Van Doren Gallery, New York







XXIII JULIANE EIRICH

Beach Chairs, 2004

C-print mounted on Alu-Dibond

36 x 96 in.

Courtesy of Peter Poby, New York



XXIV TODD HIDO

1738, 2003

Chromogenic print

24 x 20 in.

Courtesy of Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco



XXV DOINA KRAAL

Sprookjesbos 2, 2005

Painted aluminum trees cut-outs with slide projection

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Soledad Senlle Gallery, Amsterdam





**IN THE HEAT
OF THE NIGHT** ◦
◦
GREGORY CREWDSON
NEIL GUST
CHARLES LABELLE
THOMAS RUFF
DEBORAH STRATMAN
MARC SWANSON
SHIZUKA YOKOMIZO
KOHEI YOSHIYUKI

**“MOST GLORIOUS NIGHT!
THOU WERT NOT SENT FOR SLUMBER!”**

LORD BYRON¹

Natural darkness is seductive. The same dark skies that designate a time for sleep also inspire deviancy – including predatory, exhibitionist, voyeuristic, and other questionable conduct. Titillating glimpses of nighttime activity are presented in this section of the exhibition. The works included here often subvert night’s assumed role as a cloaking agent. The romantic notion of natural darkness providing cover for clandestine activity seems quaint and archaic given our round-the-clock lifestyle and highly monitored contemporary society. So much of what we do in the dark can be – and *is* – easily observed and recorded.

Kohei Yoshiyuki’s “The Park” series (plate XXXII) reveals late-night trysts using the combined technology of flash and infrared film. The photographs capture couples and groups engaging in sex acts in a public park, as well as expose a sizable population of voyeurs who watch from behind trees and bushes. Deborah Stratman also appropriates surveillance technology, depicting an arrest/escape sequence on infrared film in her video *In Order Not To Be Here* (plate XXIX). Here, as in “The Park” series, the grainy and crude effect of the infrared technology exaggerates the morbid fascination with nighttime’s more indecorous activities. It is simultaneously thrilling and shameful to bear witness to something we ought not to see and that is only visible with the assistance of technology. In his “Nacht” series, Thomas Ruff creates an ominous portrait of Dusseldorf, Germany, by using a night-vision enhancer. Ordinarily innocuous subject matter, such as the terraced apartment building in *Nacht 2 I* (plate XXVIII), takes on a sinister quality when mediated by equipment closely associated with military surveillance.

Finding true obscurity at night is increasingly challenging because of near-constant interruption by artificial light sources. Though night may not guarantee literal invisibility, the precious hours of natural darkness do provide a means for escape – at least symbolically. The video installation by Marc Swanson and Neil Gust, *Love is all Around* (plate XXX), focuses on the after-hours scene at a gay nightclub. Presented in a small room lined with black Plexiglas, the projected interspliced images of glittering curtains, a bare-chested man, and pulsating strobe lights are reflected on the mirror-like surface of the dark plastic. In this environment, the viewer/voyeur becomes totally immersed in, and by proxy complicit in, the eroticism of the subject. Charles LaBelle documents nighttime activities in his “Driftworks” series. In his collaged “compound photograph” *Driftworks-Barcelona (Gothic Quarters, Night)* (plate XVII), LaBelle creates a nocturnal portrait of Barcelona that provides evidence of a wide variety of after-dark escapades. The creative process for Shizuka Yokomizo’s “Dear Stranger” series (plate XXXI) begins when the artist leaves an anonymous letter asking the recipient to stand alone at his or her

apartment window at a specified evening hour, so that the artist can take a photo from the street. Because the photographer is in the dark and the participant bathed in light, it is impossible for the subject to view the photographer. This scenario creates a complicated voyeur/exhibitionist relationship between artist and subject. In contrast to the more reportage-style representation of after-hours activity included in this section, Gregory Crewdson’s photographs feature staged, psychologically charged nighttime scenes that accentuate the disquietude associated with people being active at night instead of tucked safely away in their beds. In *Untitled (penitent girl)* (plate XXVI), from Crewdson’s “Twilight” series, a young woman stands on a dark suburban sidewalk clad only in her underwear, bowing her head in shame as she is confronted by an older woman who has pulled her car up to the curb to unload groceries. This mysterious and disturbing scene suggests numerous possible, and likely indecent, narratives.

—MARA HOBERMAN
CURATOR

1 Lord Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812–1818).

XXVI GREGORY CREWDSON

Untitled (penitent girl), 2001–2002

Digital C-print

48 x 60 in.

Collection of Dr. Bernard and JoAnn Kruger, New York





XXVII CHARLES LABELLE

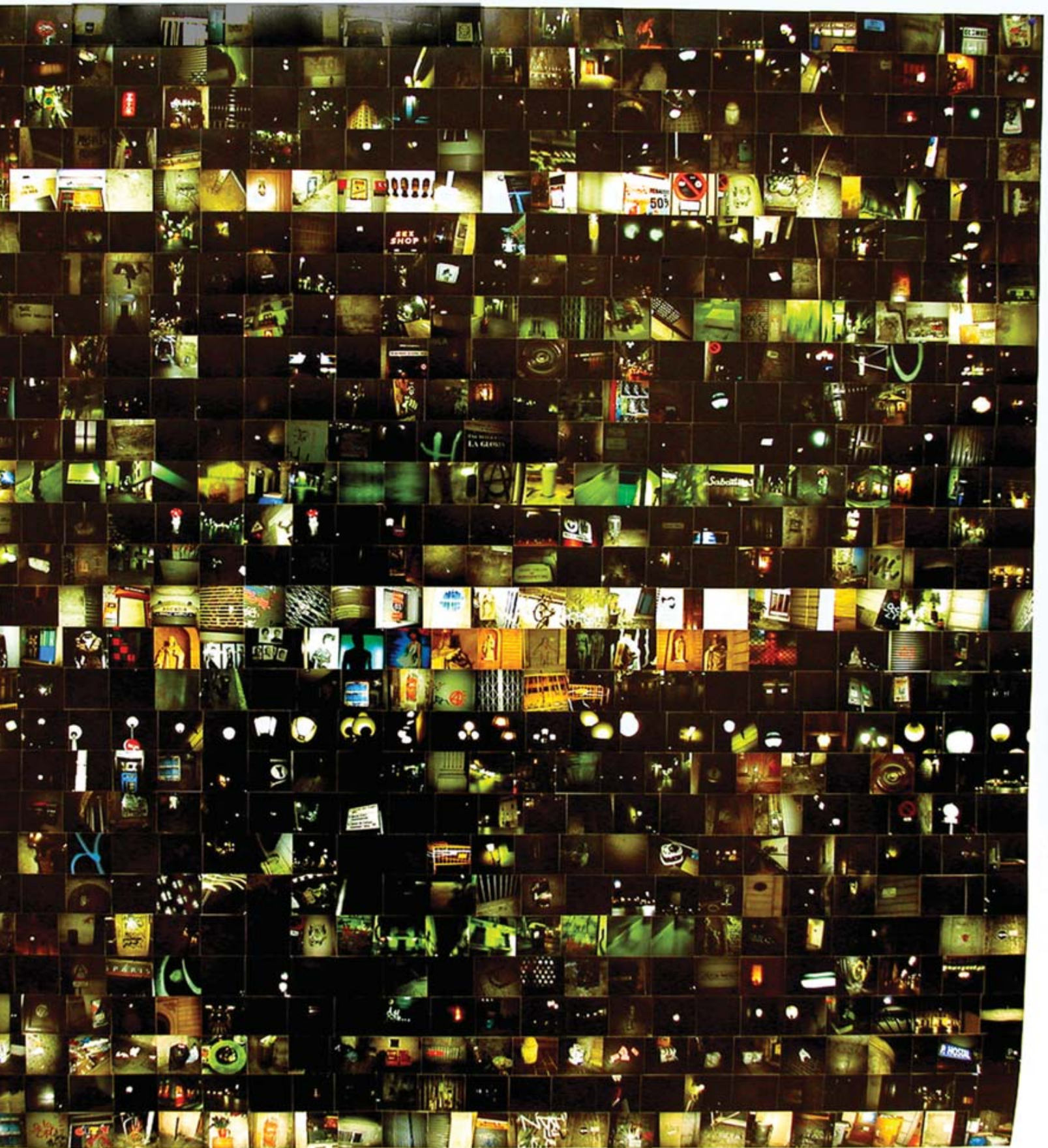
Driftworks – Barcelona (Gothic Quarters, Night), 2005

Compound photograph

27 x 33 in.

Courtesy of Anna Kustera Gallery, New York





XXVIII THOMAS RUFF

Nacht 2 I, 1992

C-print

7 7/8 x 8 1/4 in.

Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner, New York



XXIX DEBORAH STRATMAN

In Order Not To Be Here, 2002

Video transfer from 16mm film

33 minutes

Courtesy of the artist



XXX MARC SWANSON & NEIL GUST

Love is all Around, 2007

Video

3:51 minutes

Courtesy of artists and Bellwether, New York



XXXI SHIZUKA YOKOMIZO

Stranger (10), 1999

C-print

50 x 42 1/2 in.

Courtesy of the artist





XXXII KOHEI YOSHIYUKI

Untitled, 1971

Gelatin silver print

20 x 24 in.

© Kohei Yoshiyuki

Courtesy of Yossi Milo Gallery, New York

