

# CLAYTON CAMPBELL- PHOTOGRAPHS

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ARTIST FELLOW AT THE MACDOWELL RESIDENCY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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# INTRODUCTION

## Photographs: 1996-2008

*Photographs: 1996-2008* contains eight series of photographs beginning with my first experiments in digital photography. In 1995 Apple marketed the first affordable digital camera. Other companies quickly followed suit. This same year a friend and collector of my work, Jana Memel, gave me a Sony Mavica digital camera. It recorded thumbnail images, 17 in all, onto a floppy disk. I brought it with me to an artist residency I was invited to be part of at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, Ireland. Not quite knowing what my work would be during the residency, I ended up experimenting with the camera and a pre-Photoshop software program, Photo Deluxe. What emerged were the *Irish Refrigerator Tourist Magnets* photographs, and I was off and running for the next 30 years using digital cameras and computer technology to produce much of my art.

The twelve years represented in this volume are ones in which I would change cameras, computers, and learn various software repeatedly as the digital era came upon me with a rush. Its technology developed so rapidly that my Sony Mavica literally became a museum piece within five years. It now resides in the Robert Bell Collection and Archives at Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico along with my art work, papers, and other cameras from those days. I've put them there in case anyone in the future may want to open some of my old files in storage on floppy disks or Sony diskettes.

The images in *Photographs: 1996-2008* not only demonstrate my learning curve in digital techniques, but represent a new intention in my overall practice. I found digital photography to be a great tool in performative work. I used it in the series *The Artist Clayton Campbell Referees the World Heavyweight Champion the 'Real Deal' Evander Holyfield*. I began to liberally experiment in many of the series with manipulation, such as *Bullet Train Blues*, *68 Heroes*, *1 Heroine*, and *Bombmakers*. Other series evince a more digitized painterly approach, as in *The Divine Comedy* and *American Heroes (After Houdon)*. Lastly, I had a breakthrough when I discovered how to corrupt JPG files and use them as a jumping off place for further visual exploration. This led to extensive development in my work that began with the *After Abu Ghraib* series.

All of this work was made while I was living in Los Angeles, California and working as the Co-Executive Director of the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica. My studio was at the Center. My day was divided between going between my studio and my office at 18th

Street; a non-profit arts organization that had studios, galleries, and performance spaces for all kinds of artists. It was an invigorating environment to be part of that added to my art practice. I was exposed to artists already absorbed in digital art and technology and learned from them. There were photographers with digital printers with whom I shared resources, like Michael Barnard, the filmmaker, or Michael Masucci, founder of EZTV. I met Christian Knudsen, a young computer specialist who became a longtime collaborator and master printer for me. We worked on many of my images, websites, and projects together. He is an excellent digital artist in his own right. I began writing about art for *Flash Art Magazine* during this time, further opening up my thinking and practice. My openness to invention, experimentation, questioning social conditions and received histories, and looking closely at my own values represents the middle period of my career.

When I started out with digital photography I had recently learned how to use a Mac Computer, the Performa. My camera was the Sony Mavica MVC-FD7. It recorded onto floppy disks, recording no more than 17 images per disk, at either 640 x 480 or 1280 x 960 dpi resolution. I was learning to use an early version of Photoshop, called Photo Deluxe. Compared to some, I was already way behind the computer and digital curve, but since it was just beginning, I caught up fairly quickly. In 1998 the photography scene was still arguing about whether digital photography was acceptable as photography. The purity of the photograph was brought into question by the advent of the digital technology, and while the argument raged in photographic circles, it all but died out when the social media democratized the photographic image. Within a decade digital technology improved to the point that almost all photographers and artists included it in their toolbox. Soon after that anyone with a good iPhone could take a great photo and jazz it up with any number of phone applications. The world was awash in digital imagery, a lot of it inventive and engaging.

From my first camera, I graduated to a Sony Mavica CD300 3.3 megapixel that recorded onto 3-inch diskettes. It could record up to 800 images, had a Carl Zeiss lens, and telephoto capacity. For some reason I was stuck on Sony, which resisted using memory cards, and was still trying to sell its proprietary brand of disks and the cameras that utilized them. I loved the clear quality of the image, and it would be a while before I bought a hand held Leica Deluxe 10.0 megapixel camera. With that camera the possibilities of what I was doing changed exponentially. I hadn't been concerned with large-scale printing because I hadn't fully committed to photo-based art yet. My JPG photo files had been fairly small based on the equipment I was using, and this would prove to be limiting.

This began changing, as I started saving larger files and making bigger prints. There is often discussion among photographers working digitally about the files they use.



Throughout my career all of my digital files have been higher resolution JPG. I never used the RAW file format. I think of myself as a visual artist who uses photography in my practice rather than identifying myself as a photographer. I was more concerned with conceptual issues than technical issues. The precision of making the best possible photograph didn't actually interest me. Saving RAW files with large amounts of information that I probably didn't need or care that much about, and didn't look much different to me in the final output, was the factor in my decision.

Currently, I am working with a Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX100, 12.8 megapixels with a Leica lens, and a Panasonic Lumix GH5 20.5, megapixels. I process my pictures using Adobe Photoshop and print them up to 17" x 22" on an Epson Stylus Photo 3880 Printer. Anything larger I take to a commercial press to be printed. I have always used Apple computers, upgrading as they became more powerful and user friendly. I am working now with an iMac 27-inch desktop, with a 3.8 Ghz Intel Core i5 Processor, 8 GB of Memory. Its Graphics card is a Radeon Pro 580. The current operating system is Mac OS High Sierra, and it will change every six months. I back up my work onto a peripheral hard drive, the Cloud, and a 4 Terabyte Drobo storage peripheral backup. My guess is I am not done buying tech, software, and equipment. It is never ending and a far cry from my Sony Mavica with floppy disks that were the backup!

Learning digital techniques, both the camera and the computer are essential to the making of the work I have undertaken. They are the tools, as much as pencils, paint, and brushes, were for any of the handwork I have done in my career. It is a constant arc of practice, and learning the new tools and software applications that change regularly in the fast evolving digital universe. Much time was spent trying to figure out computer crashes, troubleshooting issues with images, learning how to make Photoshop effects, and simply practicing over and over again the techniques needed to make an effective work of art. It was no different than the many hours I spent drawing with Robert Beverly Hale in the life class at the Art Students League or copying still live set ups in the atelier of Ernst Fuchs in Vienna, Austria. Digital technology, being new, means the learning goes on at an incredible pace and volume. This to me was an exciting privilege, having the luck to be born at this time. In my painting, I had to contend with a long established lineage and find my authentic voice within it. It was a great challenge. When I transitioned from painting to digital art I was able to bring those artistic and pictorial traditions forward, and improvise with them in a way that opened up new visual possibilities that I hadn't considered.

This volume opens with the *Irish Tourist Refrigerator Magnets* that were made while I was Artist-in-Residence at the Irish Work Programme at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin, Ireland in 1998. Still working with the Mavica MVC-FD7, my next project was

photographed in Rome, at the hilltop park, Piazza Garibaldi. It became *68 Heroes, 1 Heroine*, a meditation on monuments and memory. Next, I produced the series *Bullet Train Blues*. These images were shot from the window of a Shinkansen (Bullet) train traveling one day between Osaka and Tokyo. I had expected the landscape to be natural and beautiful, passing Mount Fuji that would rise from the clouds. Instead it was an unrelenting industrial, polluted landscape that dashed my expectations and assumptions about Japan outside of Tokyo. The series became a visual journey seeking beauty where natural beauty did not exist in the urban landscape I was passing at 150 miles per hour on the Bullet Train.

The volume continues with the series *Bombmakers*. I was exploring the histories of women who had worked on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, New Mexico, developing the atomic bomb. I had access to the archives in the Laboratory Museum Library, and was re-photographing the Identity Cards of these women. I also began to discover what happened to some of these women after they had knowledge of their participation in the project. The *Bombmakers* project was brought to an abrupt end by the United States Homeland Security Department, in 2003, which classified the previously public information I was using in the archives.

In 2003 I created the series, *The Artist Clayton Campbell Referees the World Heavyweight Boxing Champion 'the Real Deal' Evander Holyfield*. I was involved with the video taping of a music video featuring the current world Heavyweight Boxing Champion Evander 'the Real Deal' Holyfield. In it he was going to fight for four rounds with a sparring partner, and they needed someone to be the referee. I volunteered, and this "performance" became the basis for this series of still photos that later were exhibited in Northern Ireland as a metaphor for The Troubles, or civil war.

The book continues with a fairly complex series of 45 photographs that comprise the suite, *The Divine Comedy*, from 2005. I used the Sony Mavica CD300 camera which allowed me to make larger prints. *The Divine Comedy* is divided into three sections with fifteen images for each section: the *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. Each is approached with a different style, but with a distinctly Los Angeles flavor, where I was living when the suite was created. A stanza or line from the poem accompanies each photograph. Two short commentaries written about my project are included. The first, by Laurent Devez, a French philosopher, diplomat and Director of the Institute of Art of Besançon, France. The second, by Zelimir Koscevic, Chief Curator at Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb, and Director of Foto Galerija Lang in Samobor, Croatia, where he mounted an exhibition of my work in 2004.

The book concludes with two series, the large-scale prints, *After Abu Ghraib*, the first series of corrupted images that I created which led to so many other images in the coming years



and a short suite of images, entitled *American Heroes (After Houdon)*. The *American Heroes* images are based on photographs I took of sculpted portrait busts by French neo-classical artist Jean-Antoine Houdon. They formed the basis for commentary on the assumptions we make about the mythologies around the Founding Fathers of the United States and the received histories that support them.

All of the series in *Photographs: 1996-2008* have a degree of experimentation and growth that, in looking back, I cherish. These were the early days of digital art. I can see the continuum in my work, how it was informed by my Xerox art and Photostatic printmaking made in the 1980s and early 90s. I also see how I explored the digital medium, tried to understand new computer technologies, and had to learn how to use all of it the best I could. Some of the work is dated to a specific moment in time, as the digital technology I was using has since progressed light years beyond those moments. Nevertheless, my boxing photos with Evander Holyfield were an interesting collaboration of performance and digital art that retains its freshness. *68 Heroes and 1 Heroine* came to life in a working process and methodology that was like a small durational project created over three months. I employed a random quality in shooting subjects that were in motion, coining the term for myself, 'the point of view of the passerby.' I used this methodology first with *Bullet Train Blues* and have returned to it many times since. My early digital efforts and explorations had spontaneity and energy, perhaps lots of bells, whistles and effects that contrasted with later work. They have different qualities, more restrained, more precise, more grounded and refined. Yet to get there, the photographs in this volume had to come first.

IN HIS LONGTIME STUDIO \*9, AT 18TH STREET ARTS CENTER,  
SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA



## IRISH TOURIST REFRIGERATOR MAGNETS

In 1998, I was invited to be an Artist in Residence at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. Orla Dukes was the supportive Director of the Irish Work Programme, which administered the residency, located in a wonderful setting at the old Royal Hospital in Kilmainham. The Museum had converted the old riding stables into apartments and studios for about a dozen artists where we worked and lived for our residency term. Having some Irish heritage, being in Dublin was an incredible experience for me, evoking what I can only describe as atavistic memories that seemed encoded in my DNA. I literally felt kinship with certain locations, as if I had known them intimately. There was often a sense of déjà vu when walking around the city. I would sit in St. Stephen's Cathedral listening to the music of the Sunday Mass and feel that, even though I had no connection to Catholicism, I'd heard this music a hundred times before, in this place.

It was easy for me to be around the Irish. I discovered the people and culture to be sympathetic, lively, and bright, if occasionally melancholic. I was enchanted. As an artist I was struck by the tourist industry, and the tourist knick-knacks I saw in the souvenir shops while walking on O'Connell Street. What really caught my eye were the refrigerator magnets produced for the tourist trade. I also found them in the Museum Gift Shop, which gave me an idea.

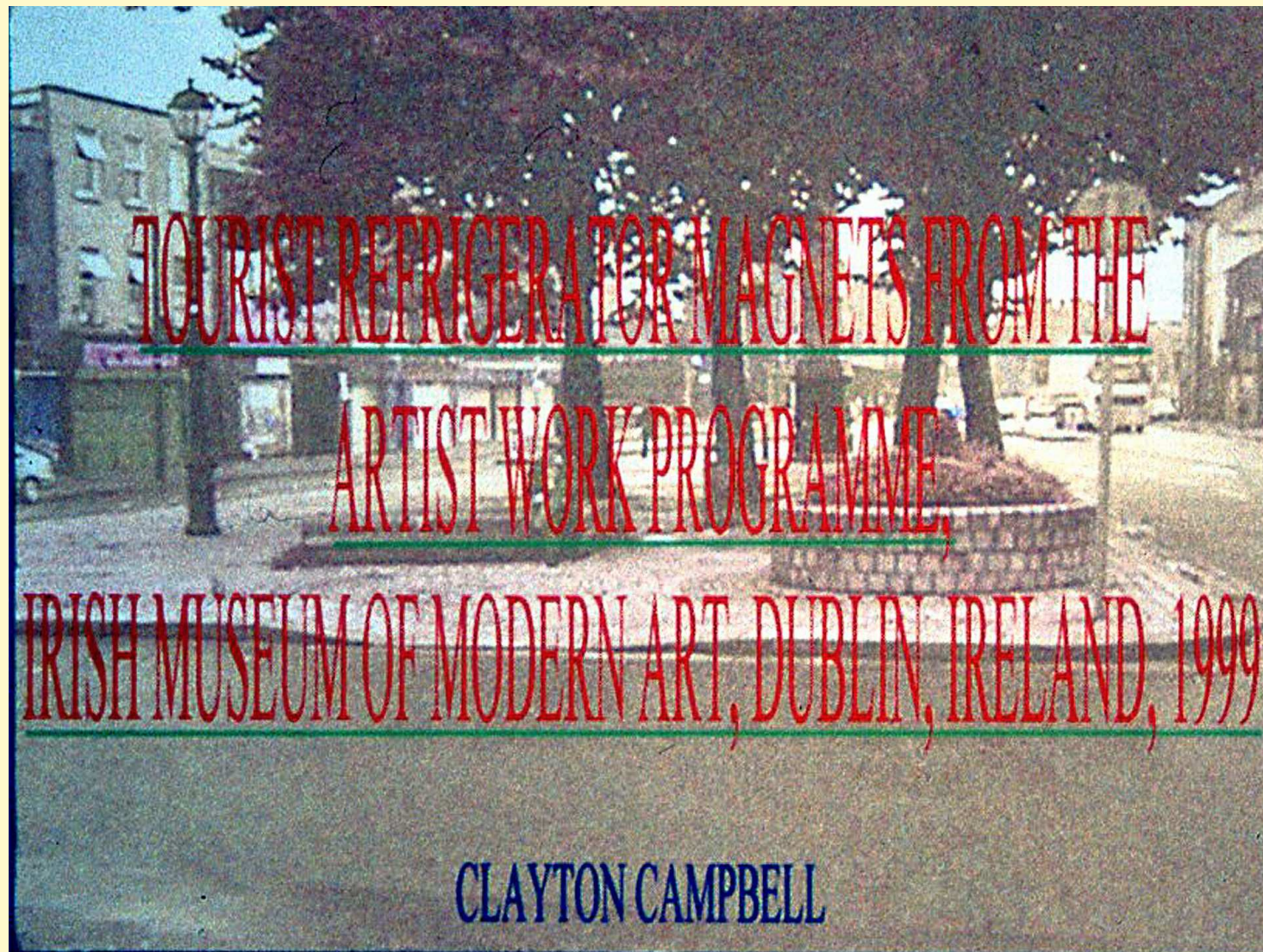
My project while in residence became to create my own tourist magnets that looked at the notion of what was truly Irish as opposed to the images on the magnets, which most often were stereotypes of the Irish. I began using my first digital camera, a Sony Mavica, taking pictures all over Dublin. The works I produced had messages and images that were the opposite of what a tourist might expect. After downloading the pictures to my computer I would colorize and add effects to them with the Photo Deluxe software. I'd glue the photo to a magnet backing, trim it up, and make it look like a real tourist item. I would go into the Museum Gift shop and slip these fake Tourist magnets into the Museum's display. I would leave them there and let tourists buy them. The experiment was to see if anyone noticed that something might be a bit off from the normal tourist item.

At the end of my residency, I recreated all of the magnets that tourists had purchased from the Gift Shop, thinking they were authentic Irish Museum Tourist Magnets, and displayed them on a refrigerator I placed on a sculpture stand in my studio. Quite a few had been sold unbeknownst to anyone,

including the Museum. This bit of performance and subtle subversion was an interesting project, and my first venture into digital art. None of the magnets I made have survived, but perhaps the people who bought them still have them on their refrigerator, who knows? The original images remain archived on floppy disks and as JPG files.



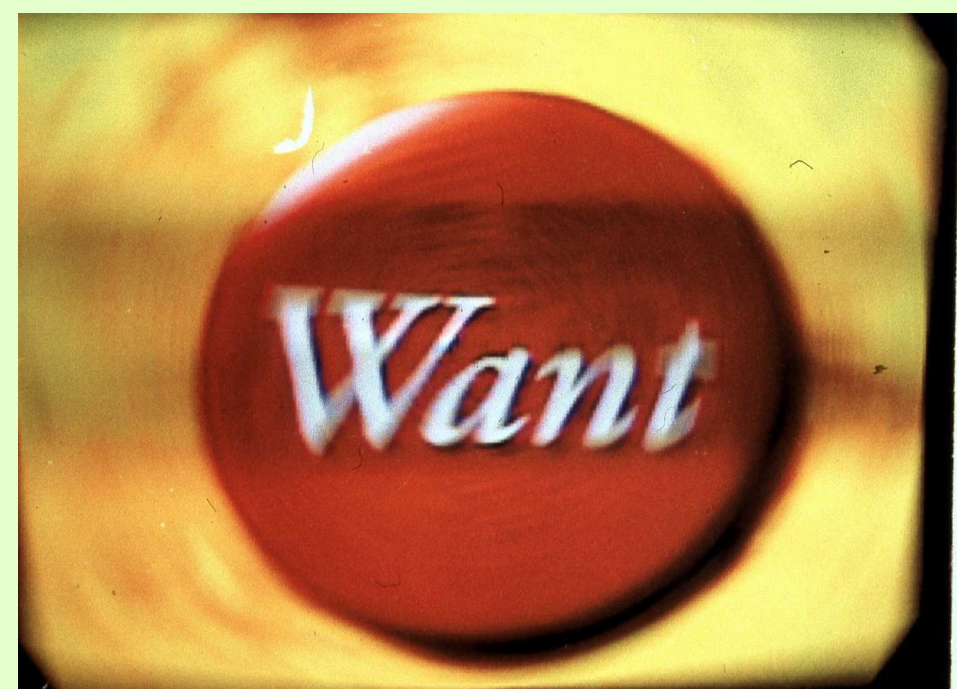
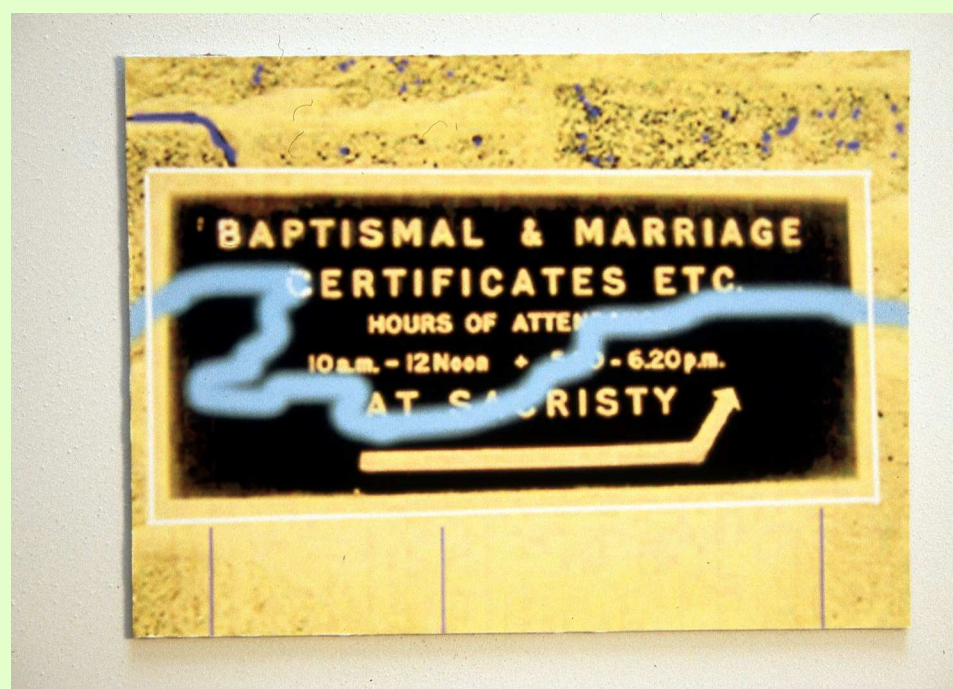




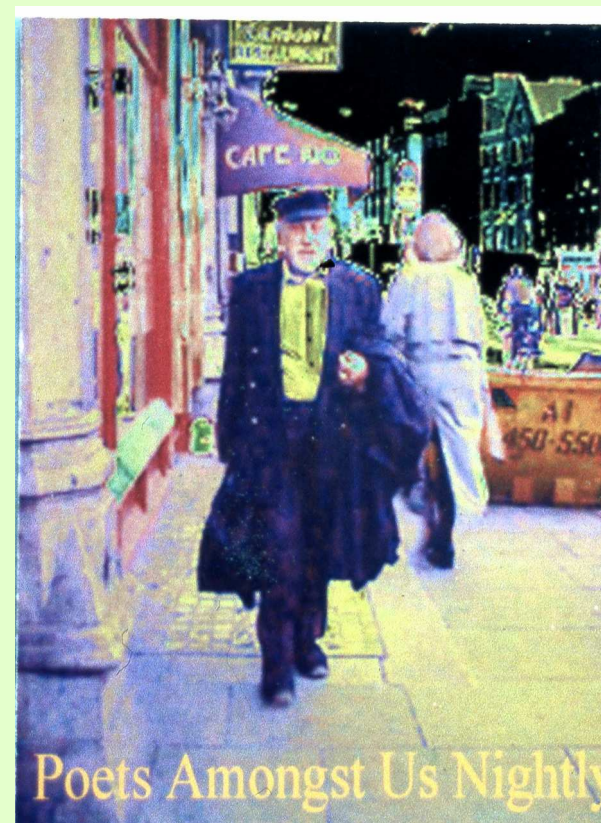
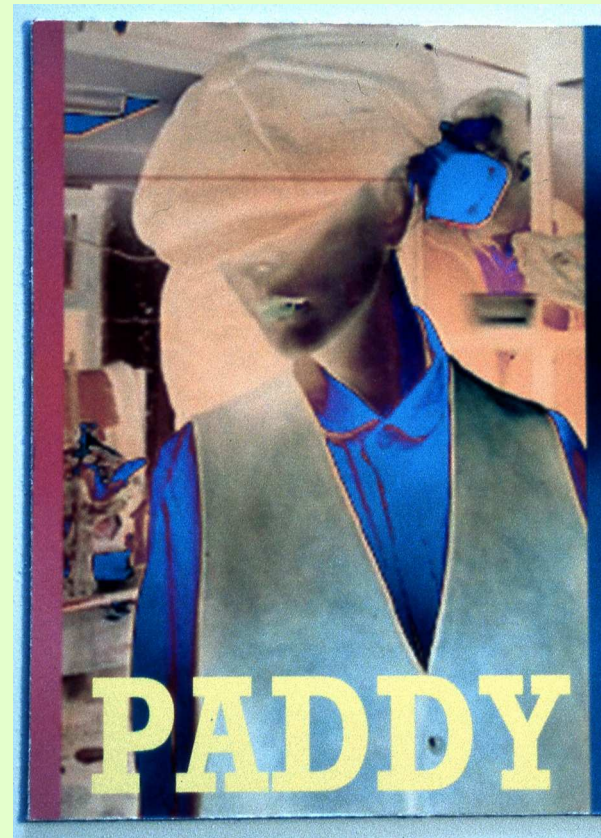
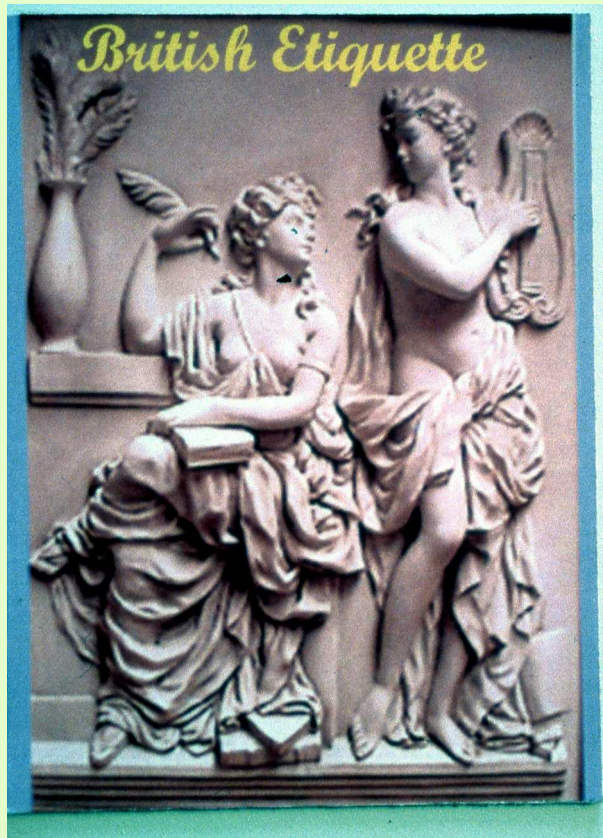




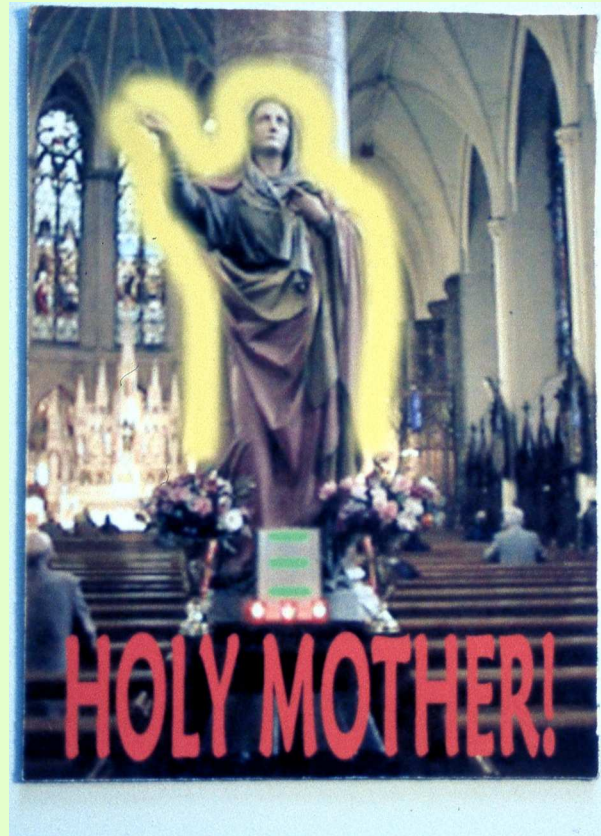












## 68 HEROES, 1 HEROINE

After the *Irish Refrigerator Tourist Magnets*, I undertook a project entitled *68 Heroes, 1 Heroine*. As a series, it consisted on 69, 4 by 3 inch photographs. The subject was the sculptural busts of Italian patriots from the 1800s found on the Janiculum Hill in Rome at the Garibaldi Monument. They originally were meant to be placed near the enormous equestrian statue of Giuseppe Garibaldi, hero and unifier of the Kingdom of Italy. But like many monuments, they have had a strange history and moved about Rome, taken up and down depending on which Pope, or Fascist, or anti-Fascist government was in power, until finally they landed where they currently reside.

Growing up in New York City, where there are hundreds of monuments honoring now forgotten people or events, I have wondered about the complexities of memorialization and memory. Early on it was apparent to me, just by observing in a multi-cultural city like New York that history had been written mainly from the perspective of White culture, and monuments negated quite a few unacknowledged histories.

I was in Rome, and like other large cities there are monuments everywhere. The histories are different, but monuments still have some of the same underlying intentions even though social and cultural conditions vary. I came upon the Garibaldi Monument on the Janiculum Hill, the highest point in Rome. Sitting in a park, the monument was encircled by the busts of people from the Italian “resurgence.” I decided to photograph them. It was a place where local Romans came to skate board, picnic, and just hang out. Many of the busts had been vandalized and graffitied.

Their style was surprisingly modern and quirky, in some cases cartoonish, and I liked them. One thing stood out in particular, and that was there was only one woman represented among the sixty-nine busts. It seemed that this was an all too common reflection where the monuments were a willful reproduction of a patriarchal society. I asked the people that day in the park what they knew about the monument and the busts. No one seemed to know, or care. Certainly no one knew who the woman was or how she came to be part of the

monument.

The project became a couple of things for me. First, it was a visual meditation on memorialization, memory, and forgetting. Second, a formal exercise where I produced one photograph a day based on a few rules. I allowed myself no more than 30 minutes to work on any one picture. I would set a timer, and with the Photo Deluxe program, begin to manipulate the photo in front of me. All the while I was listening to different jazz and rock music, and improvising with different computer effects. No two pictures could look the same. At the end of two and half months the project was finished. The completed pictures were placed in fabricated plexi-glass jewel boxes. Three editions were made.

In 2004, Croatian curator Zelimir Koscevic exhibited both *68 Heroes, 1 Heroine*, and the series *Clayton Campbell Referees the World heavy Weight Boxing Champion the ‘Real Deal’ Evander Holyfield* at his Lang Photo Gallery in Samobor outside of Dubrovnik. A selection from a review of the show, by Dina Ivan, included these comments:

“At the Lang Gallery in Samobor, photographs of 68 busts of Italian heroes and one heroine from the Roman square Garibaldi stand next to photographs of a world heavyweight boxing match. Both photo cycles by American photographer Clayton Campbell will probably raise the same question: “Who are the heroes? Because they have been altered. Normally greyish monumental busts have now been turned into colorful thumbnails by digital retouching, as if they were a pack of chewing gum or part of some big tepid graphite. A touch of humor was also Clayton Campbell's intention. “There is a great human need to remember the tragic events of the war. I wanted to bring humor so it didn't turn out morbidly, and that helps, after the memories turned literally to stone and took on a different meaning from the original, to remember that there were real people behind them, with human concerns, desires, needs and dreams, the same as we have, “explains Clayton Campbell in the introductory panel.

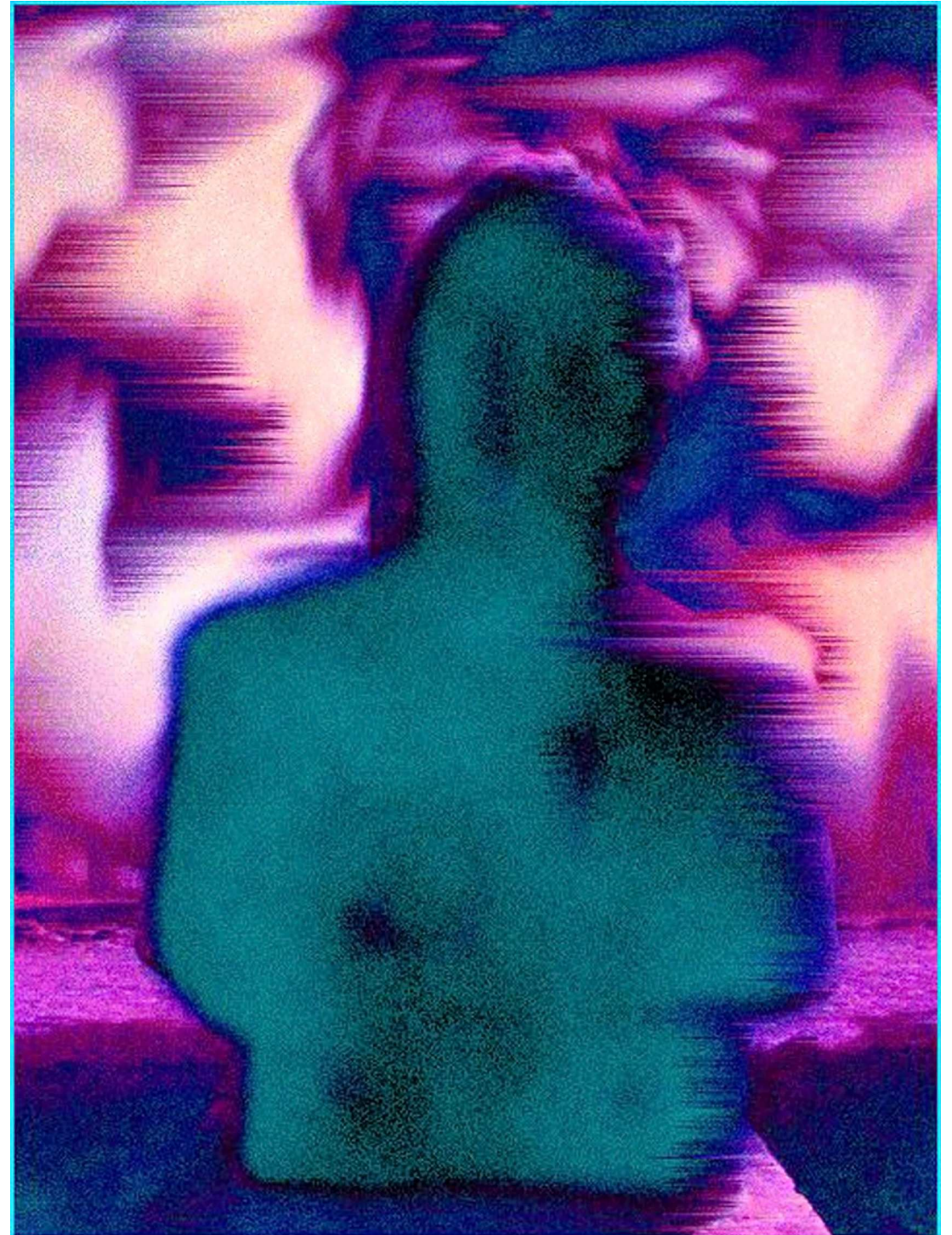
The second is an inquest whose emergence is aided by the title of *68 heroes and One Heroine*, what do these heroes mean today. They don't really mean a thing, they're just memorials in the park, until Clayton Campbell reclaims their



vibrantly colorful photography. He achieves this with a kind of visual hyperbole, not by turning the monument into a human being, but with a slight colorful humor - into a cartoon character who is always *more alive* than human thanks to the dynamics of animation. In this way, it reminds us of their humanity, which was not recognized even at the time of their heroism, because it is always impossible for heroes to see their freed functions - only as humans.

“

During the making of this series I was still using the Sony Mavica camera, getting 17 shots on a floppy disk and then having to change it out and insert another and keep going. Thinking back on having to carry around disks and large batteries that only lasted a couple of hours, I have to laugh. It seems so wildly old fashioned and out of date. But it made the work more precise and guerilla style in a way that I still appreciate. In making the final photographs I was pushing a software program like Photo Deluxe to its limits. After not finding anyone who knew who the one woman was I did some research and found out. She's Colomba Antonietta, born in Umbria, 1826 and died defending Rome from the invading French Army at the gate of Porto St. Pancrazio in 1849. Gone, but not forgotten, perhaps.







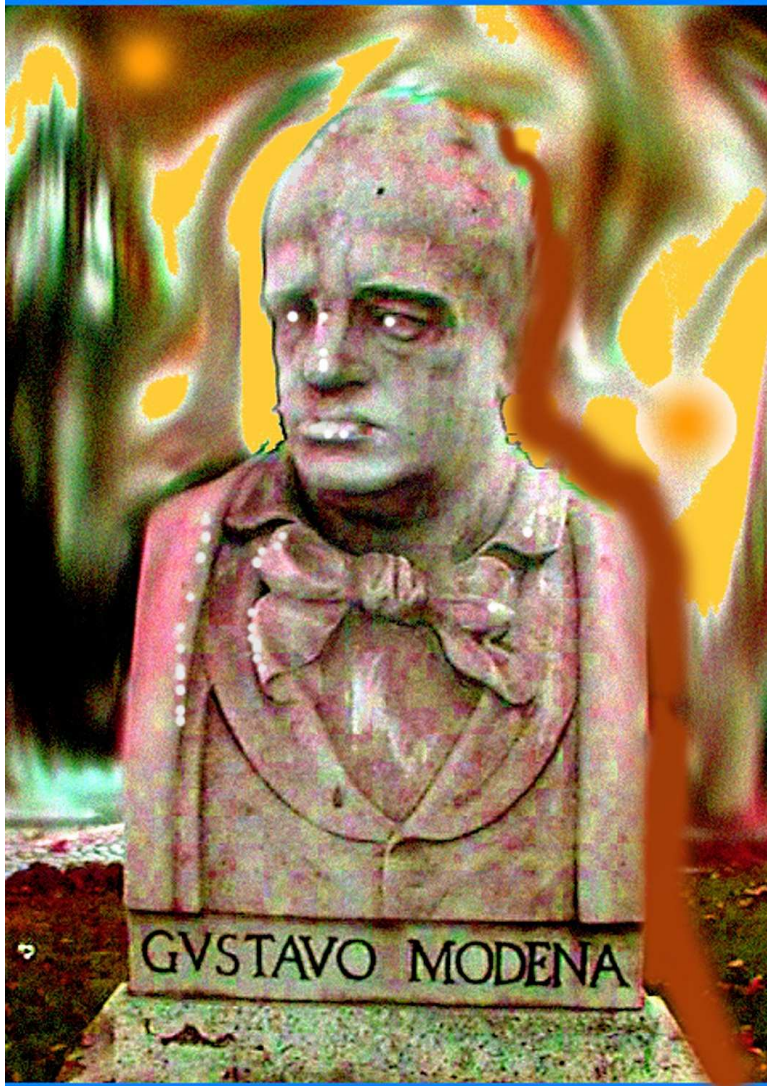




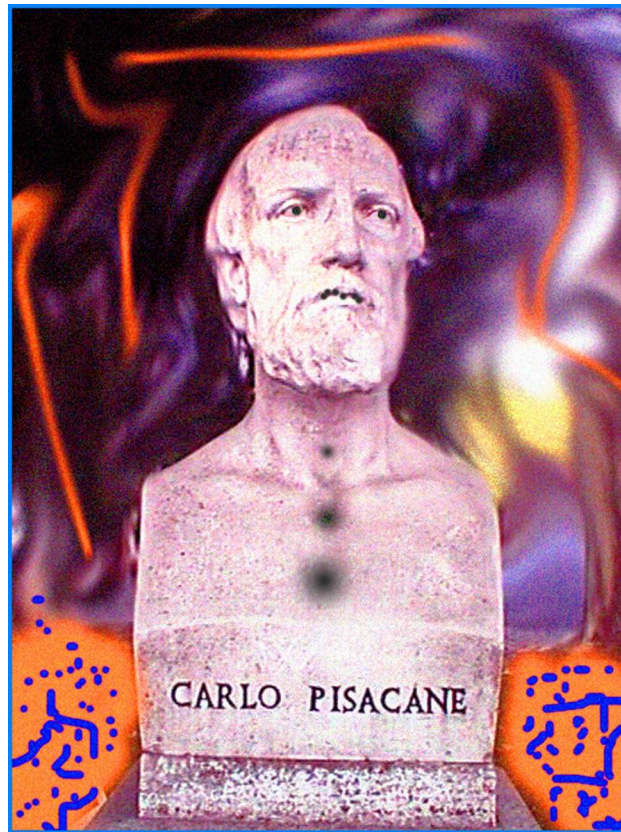




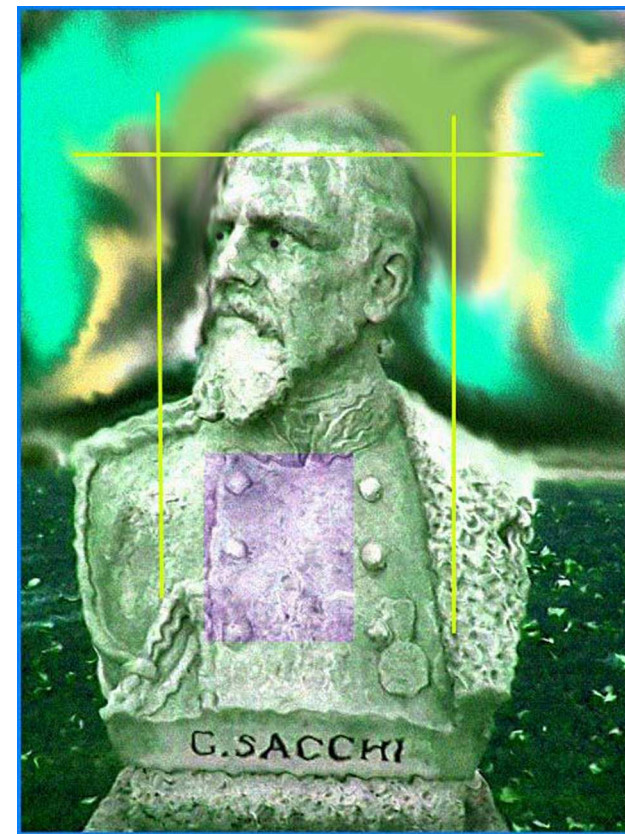
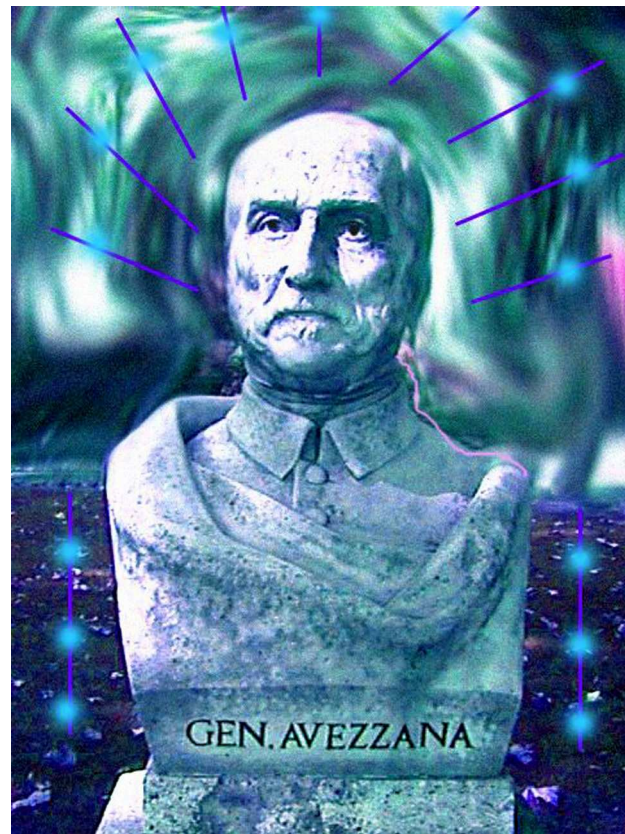




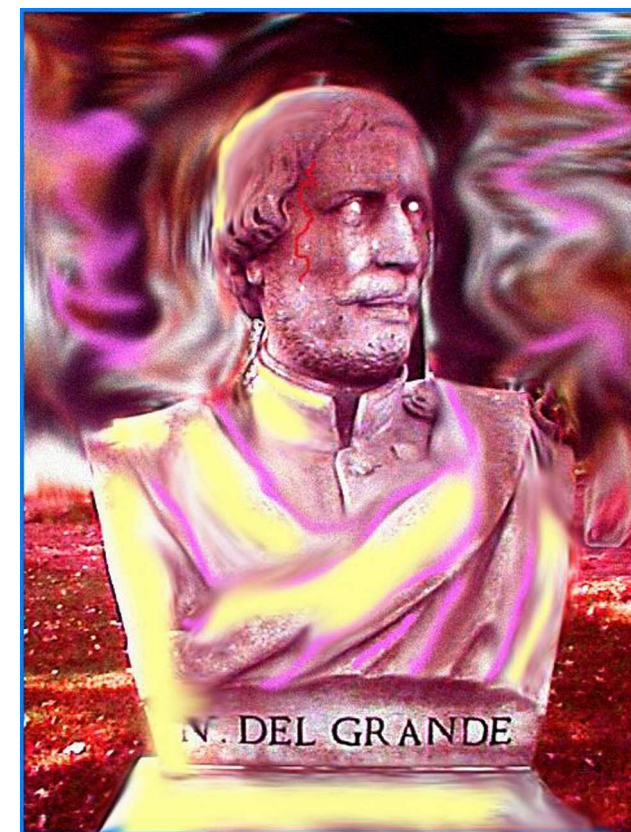
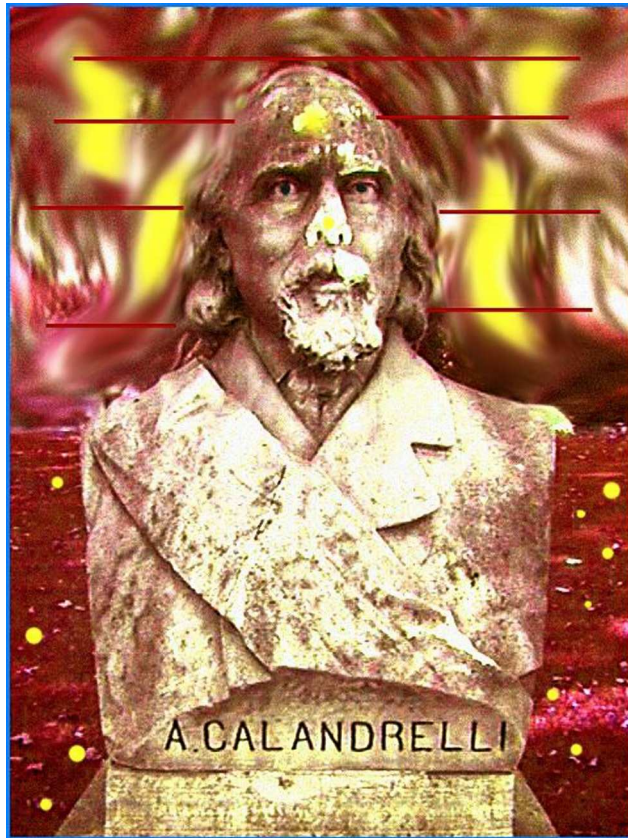




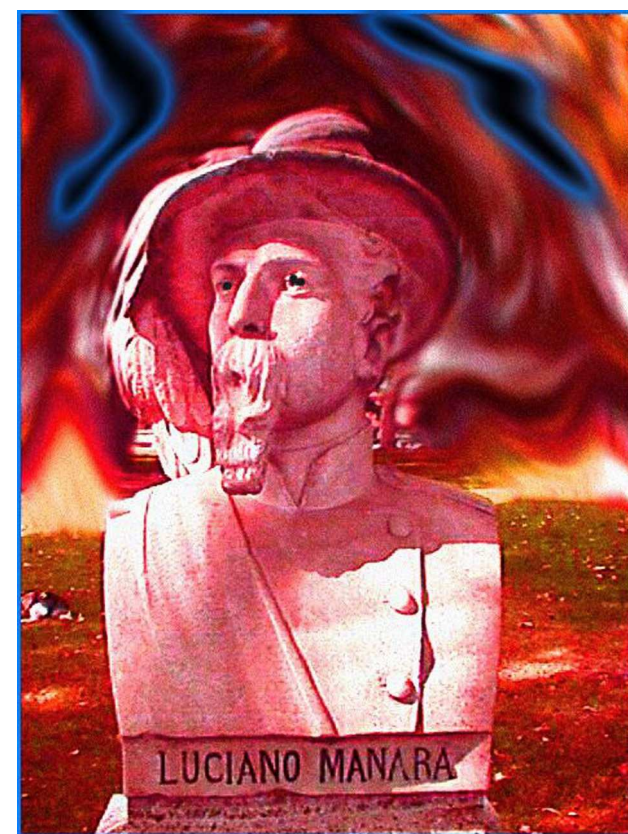
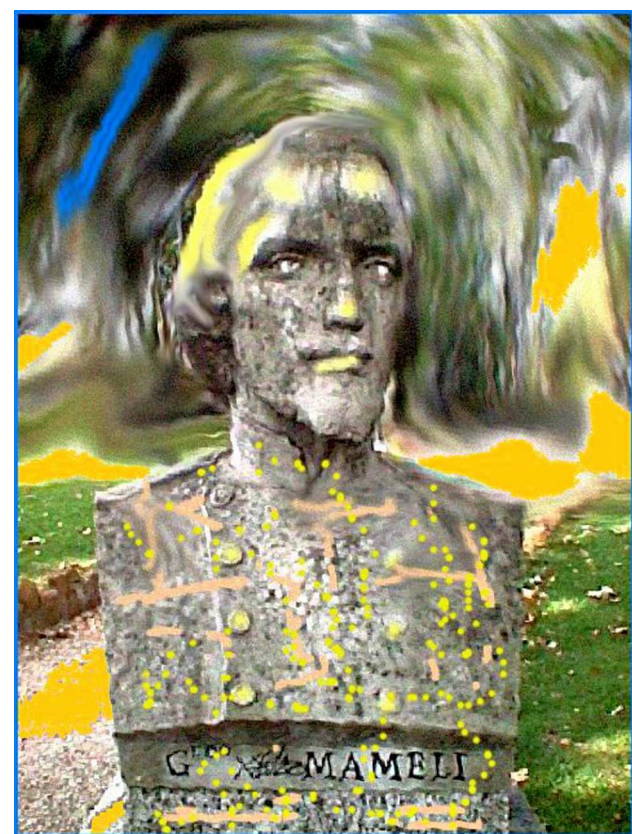




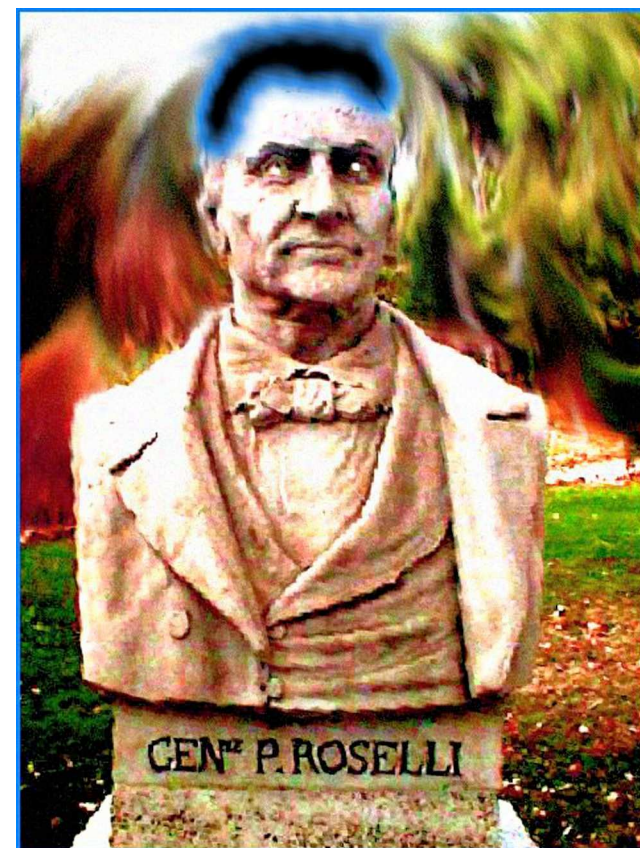
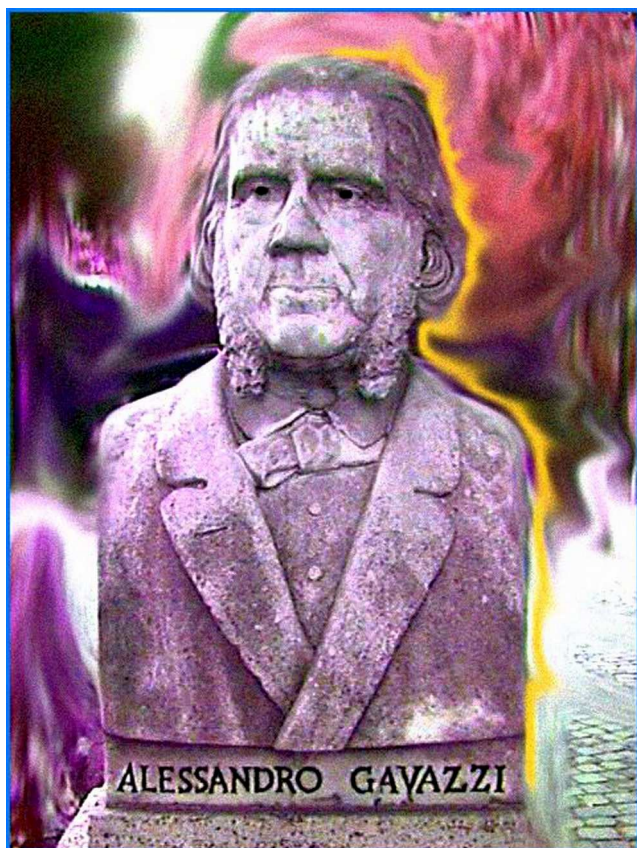
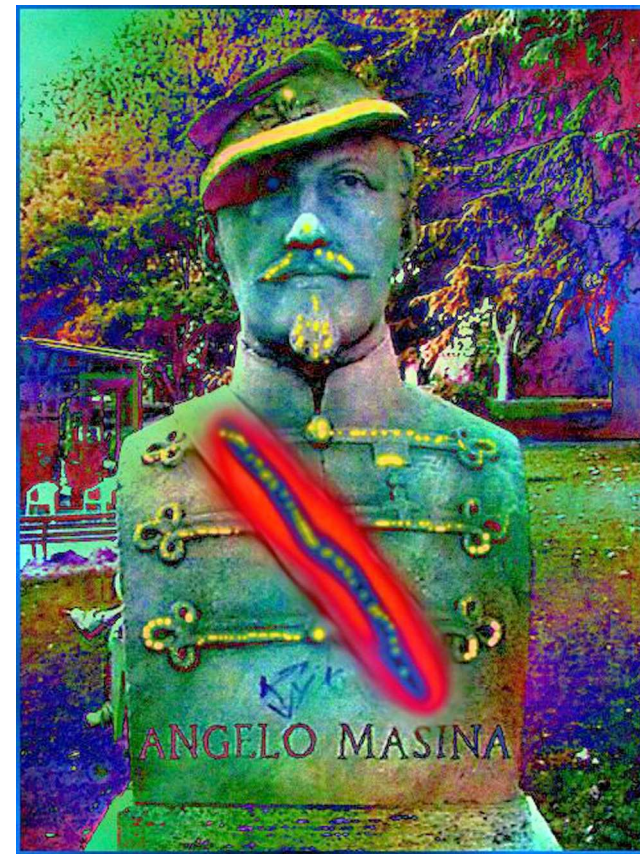




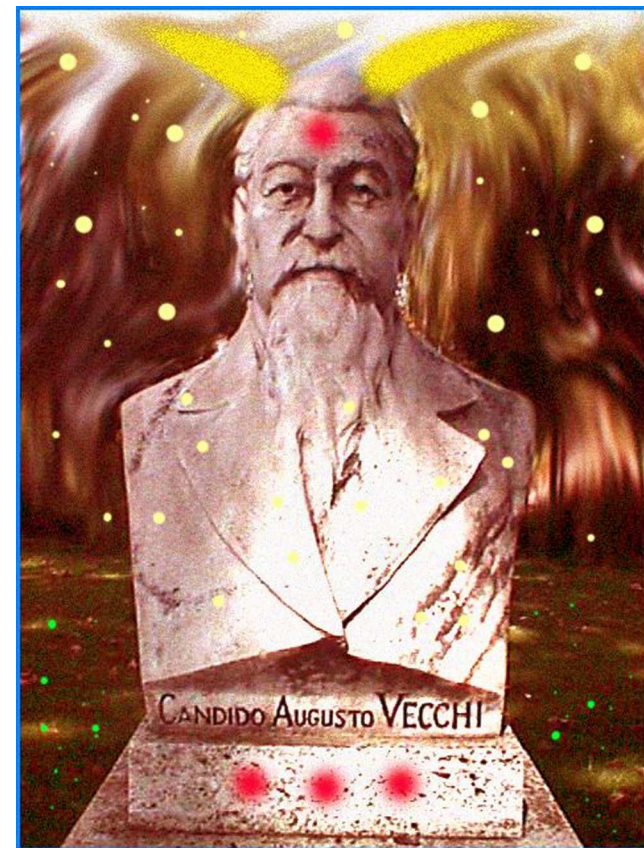




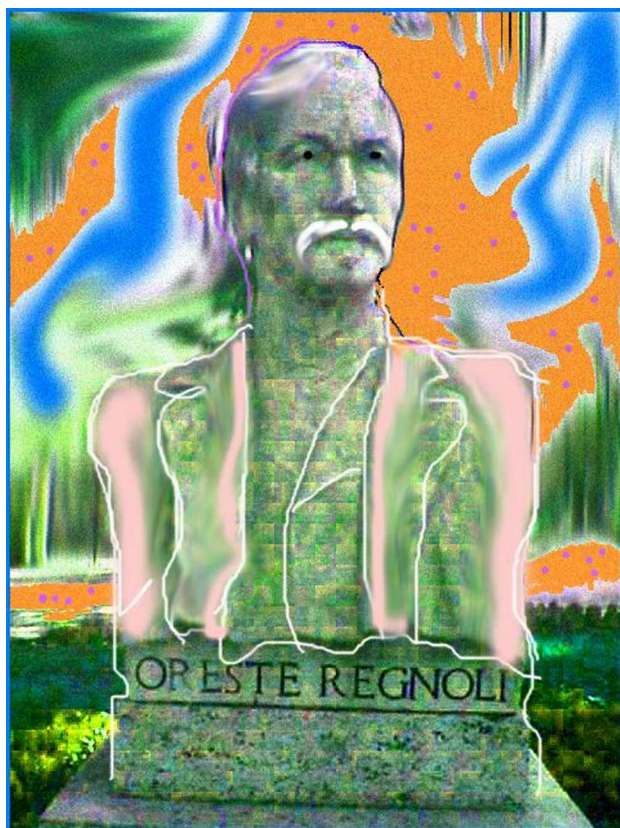
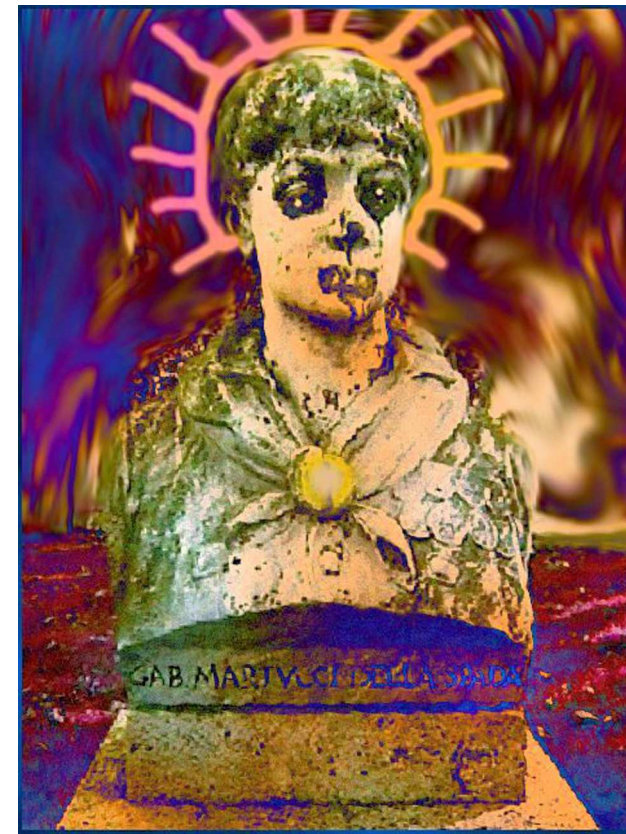




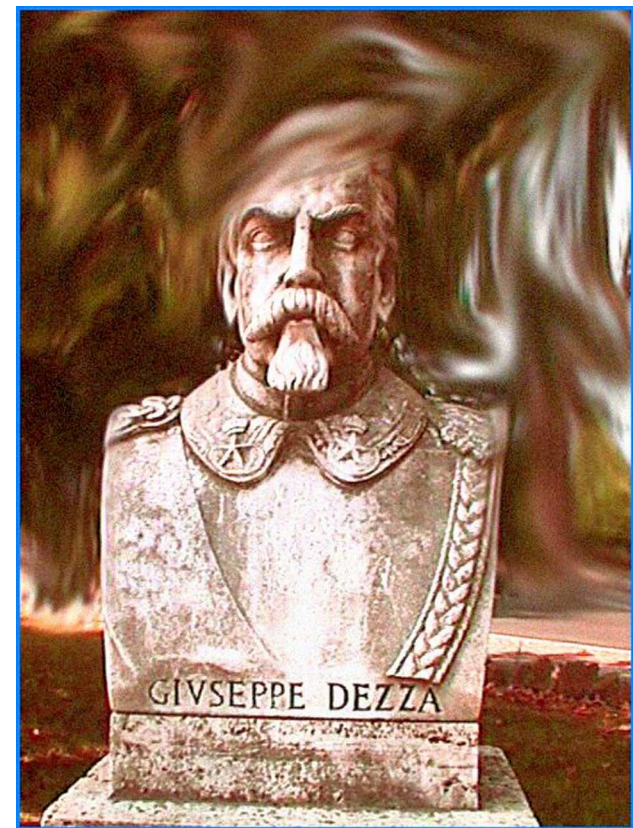
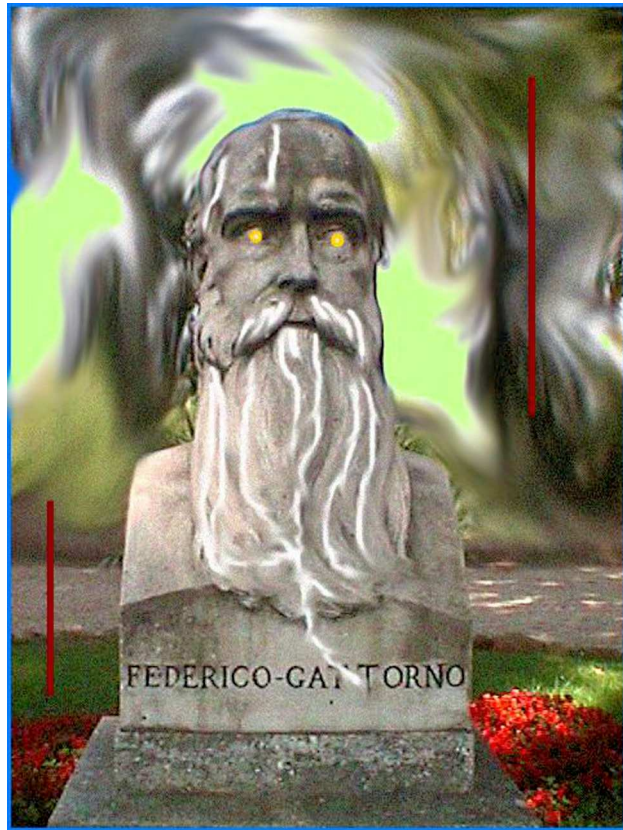




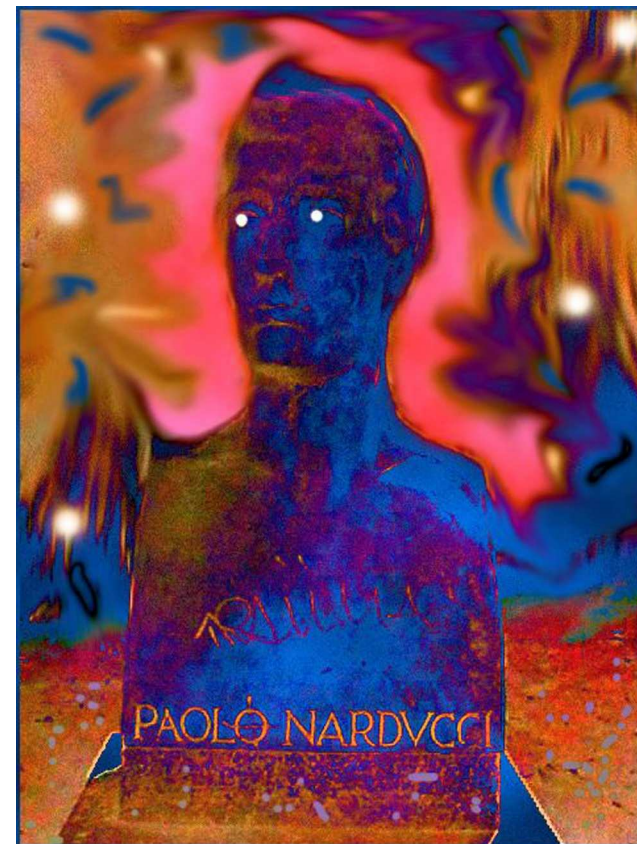
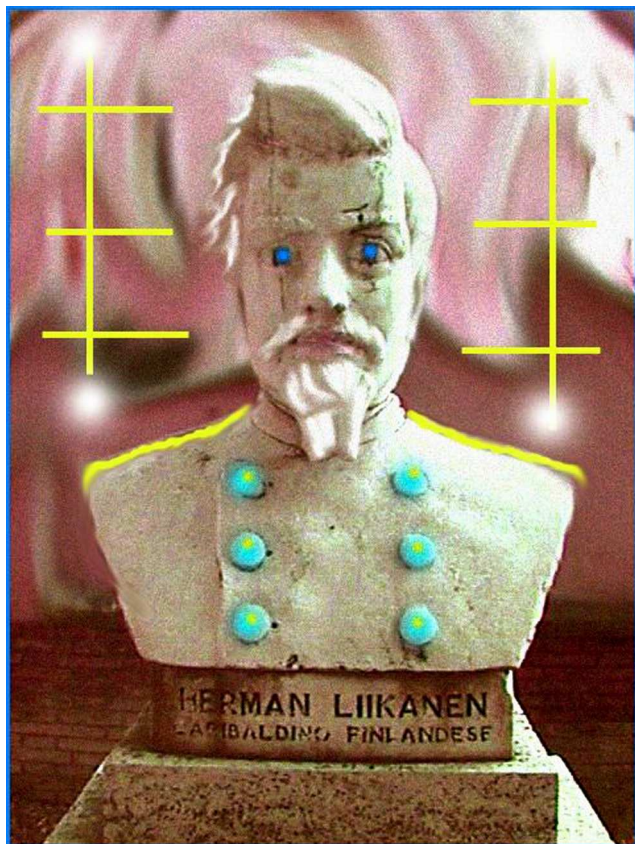
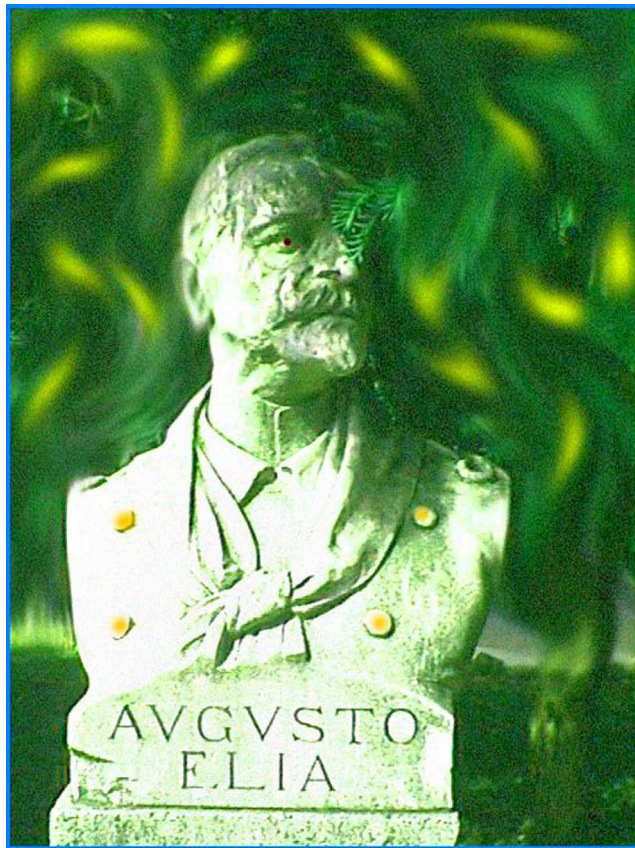








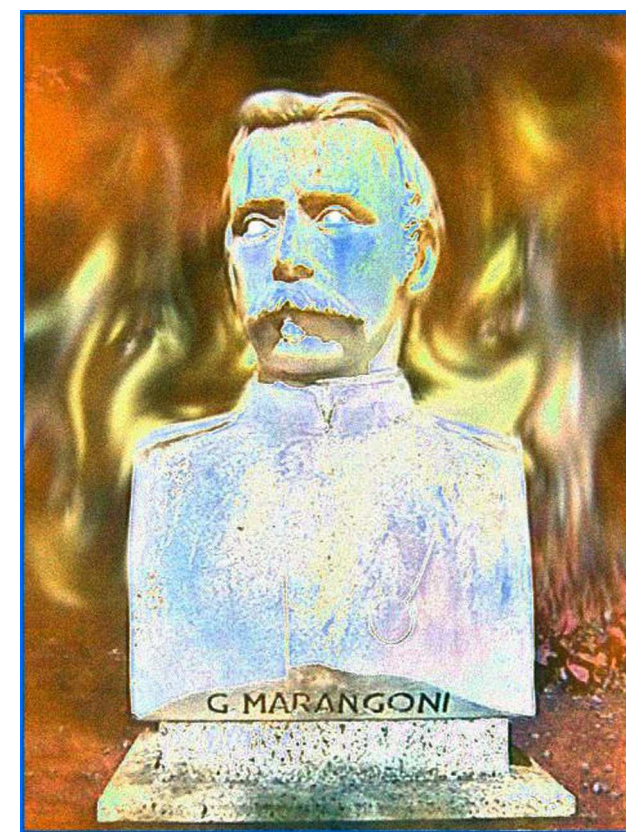
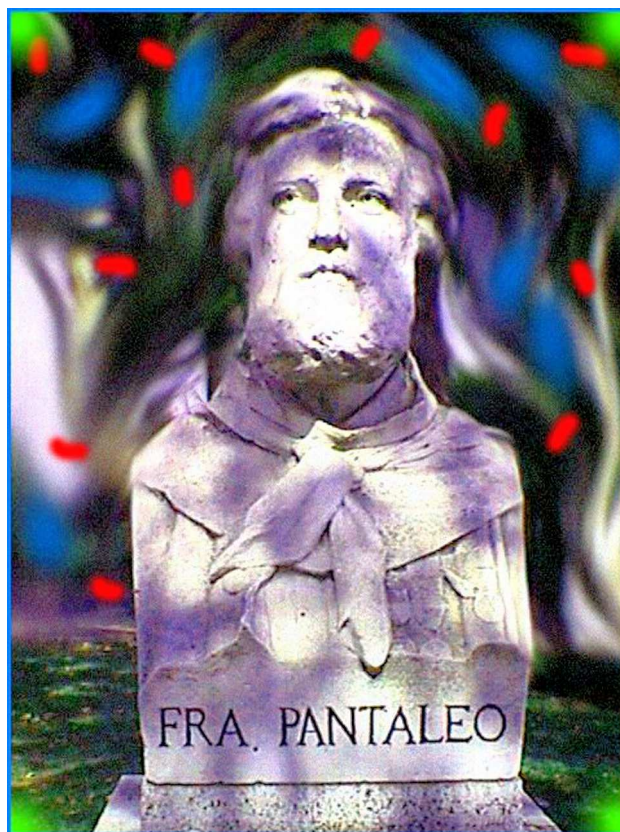
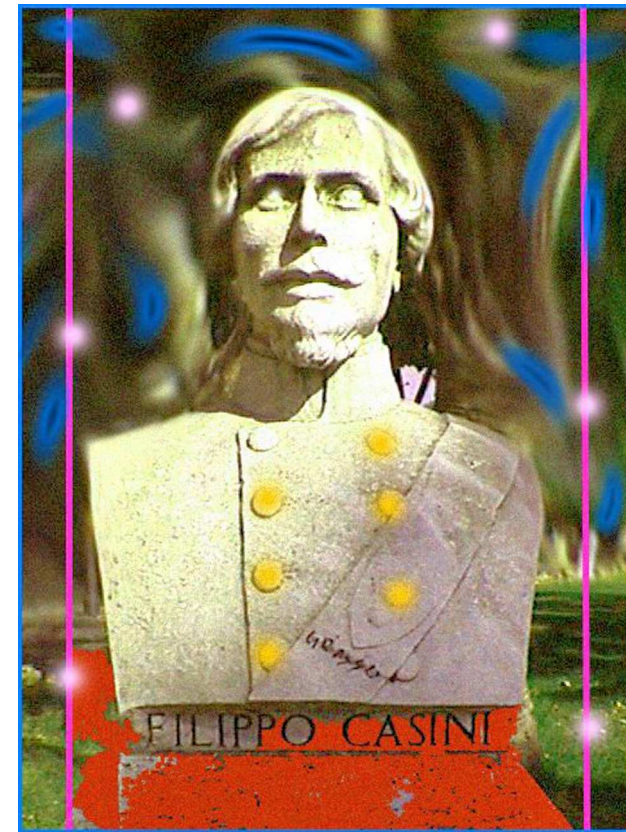
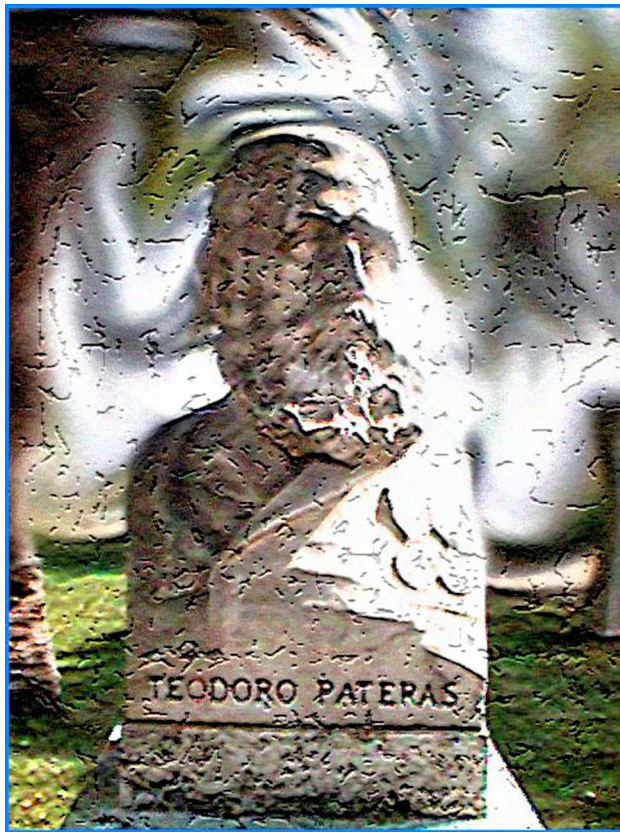




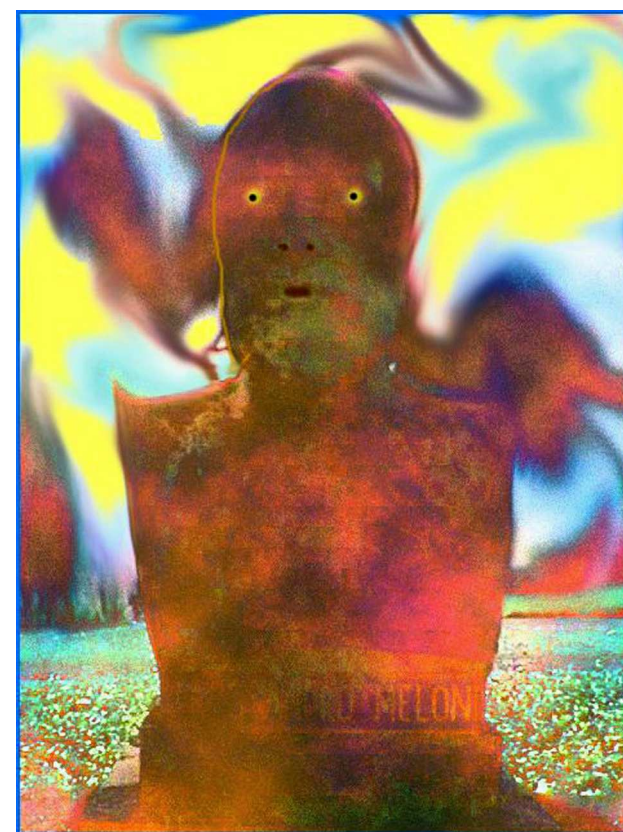




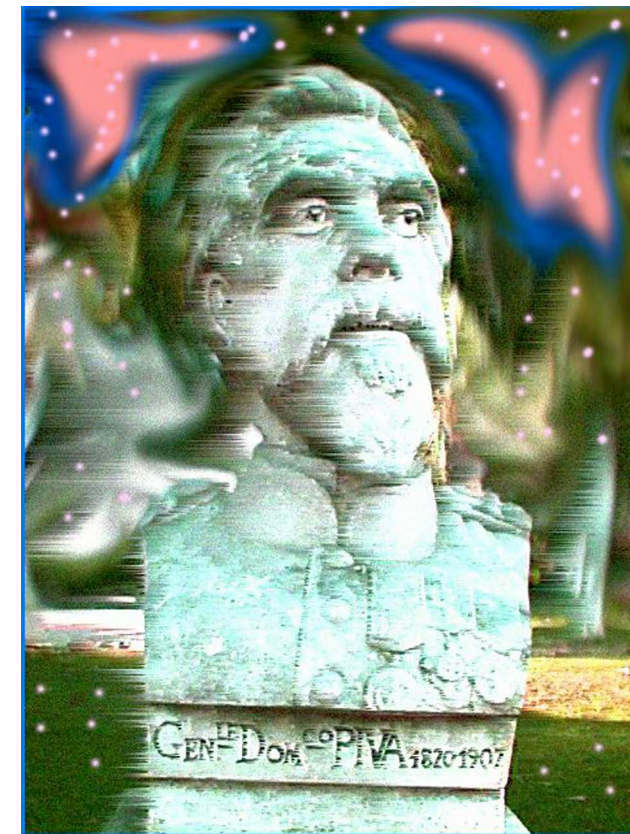
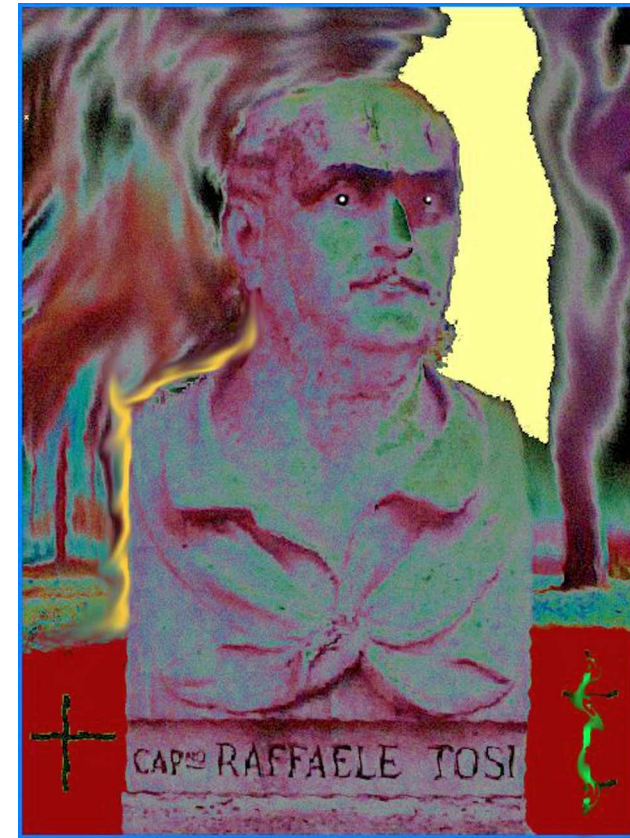
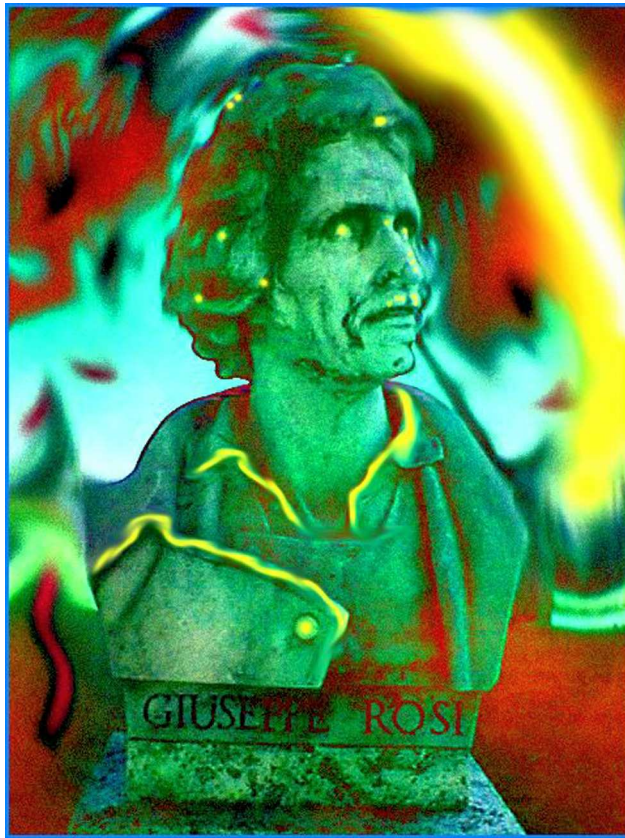




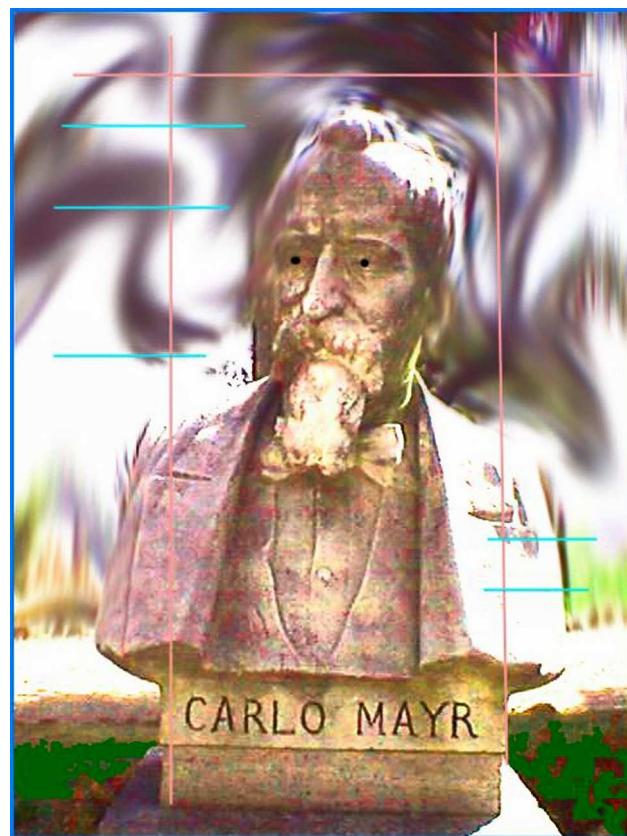
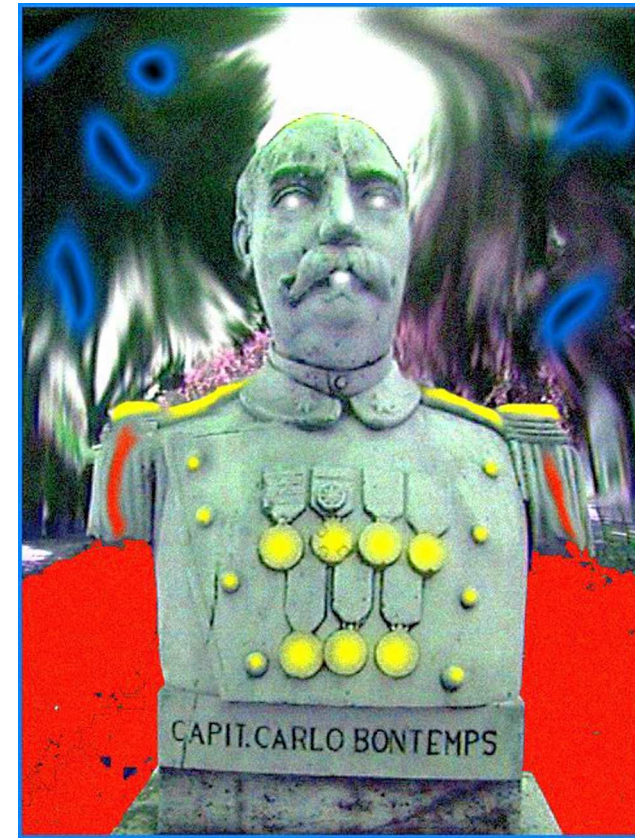
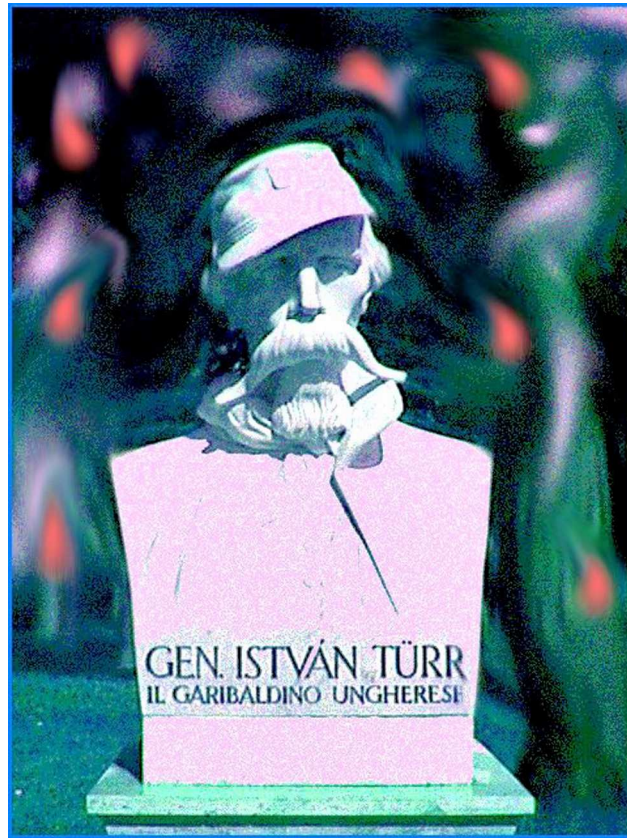














## BULLET TRAIN BLUES

My last series using the Sony Mavica was made in 1999 and is called *Bullet Train Blues*. On this occasion, I was travelling between Tokyo and Osaka, Japan, on the high-speed train, the Shinkansen. I was looking forward to this trip. I'd be visiting two young artists who I was planning to bring to the 18th Street Arts Center as artists-in-residence. They billed themselves as *Gasoline Music and Cruising*. Their art consisted of an experiential performance that took place in a car. Basically, they hooked up mini-microphones to different parts of the car (the motor, brakes, car doors, the transmission) and set up large speakers throughout the car for a full surround sound immersion environment. They put a mixing board in the passenger seat, where one of the team mixed the sounds coming through the microphones. Two or three passengers sat in the back seat as they drove around at night, and blasted the audience with a variety of mechanical sounds. It felt very much like a post-John Cage piece, but also quintessentially post-war Japanese, with an apocalyptic edge to it.

More to the point though, I was expecting the train ride to be taking me out of the urban din of Tokyo and into the pastoral countryside and past Mount Fuji, a landscape I had dreamt of, but actually knew nothing about. Along the way, I would take photos out the train window with my camera and record whatever passed me by. To my dismay, the imagined countryside did not appear. An unrelenting urban landscape stretched out for the next three hours of the ride, one industrial complex after another all the way to Osaka. Mount Fuji itself was shrouded in pollution and its majestic crest was invisible. Seeing degradation of the landscape just gave me the 'blues.'

I decided to photograph a series of images and flip my original intention of shooting the natural landscape I thought I would see that had vanished underneath asphalt, concrete, and steel. Instead, I would mitigate the effects of modern blight by making each subsequent photograph more fantastical and psychedelic. The first photo begins with a natural shot of trains pulling out of Tokyo station and after numerous stylistic transitions it ends with a completely abstracted, pixelated image as a final landscape photograph. Each of the 23 photographs in the series becomes progressively more digitized and expressive, and in this way a beauty of sorts is restored to the land, at least the one I had imagined.

The manipulation of the 23 images in the series was accomplished again with the Photo Deluxe program, and this would be the last time I used it. They were shot in a landscape

format, and because of the size of the camera and the files it produced, are relatively small in size as prints. After this I moved to Photoshop, having exhausted what its precursor offered to me. It was also time to obtain a better camera, and I stepped up with a purchase of a new Sony Mavica that recorded onto diskettes that could hold more digital information.

As for *Gasoline Music and Cruising*, I did meet them in Osaka, but their car was broken and I didn't get to experience their project at the time. So sight unseen, I brought them to Santa Monica the following year, and set them up with a car. For one month they took people out at night on a very special ride. It became quite the hot ticket and word spread of the eccentric young Japanese artists doing this crazy performance in a car. I went out the first night along with the Director of the Japan Foundation, Los Angeles, and the Director of the Asian Cultural Council, who had funded the project. Suffice it to say, it was a truly memorable art experience, one none of us will forget. It began in utter sonic pandemonium, and ended in the most exquisite and sustained silence imaginable. It was a journey that traveled the terrain with unexpected consequences, much like what I intended with the series, *Bullet Train Blues*.





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #1





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #2





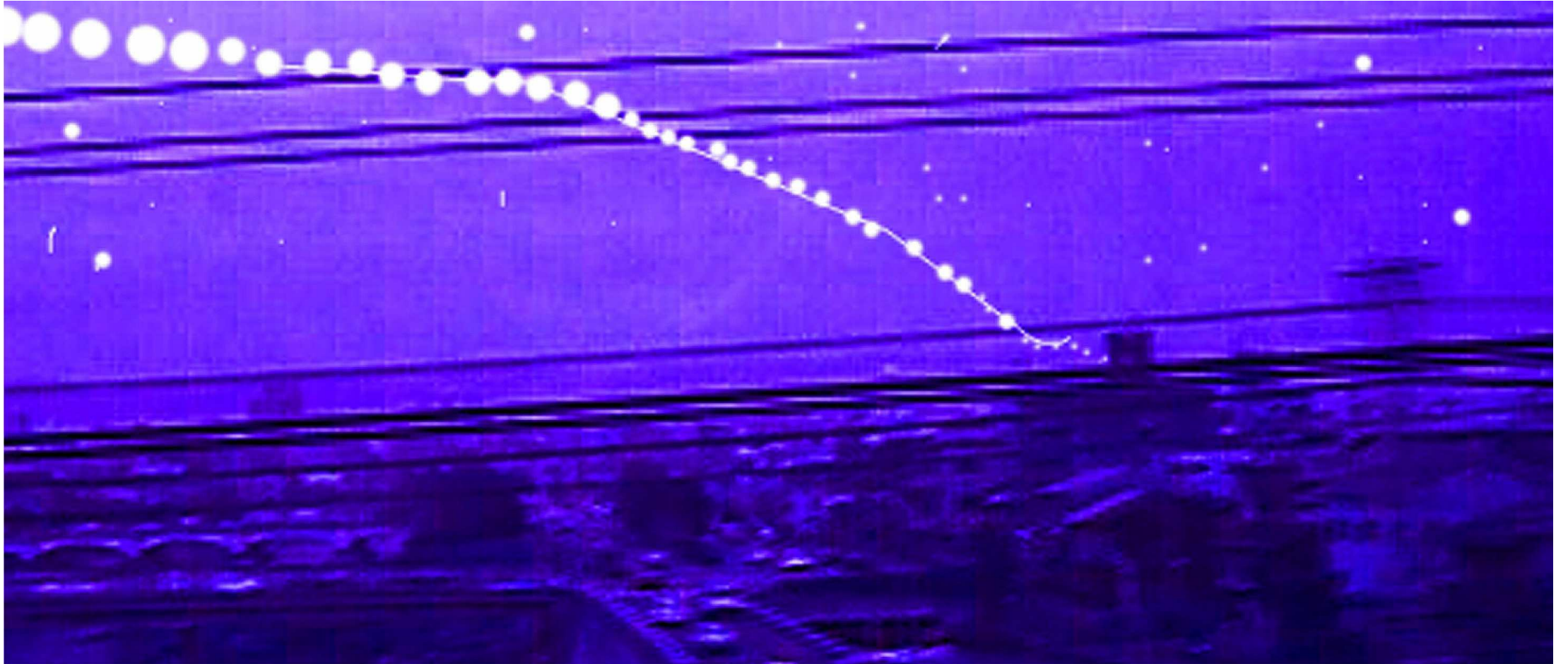
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #3





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #4





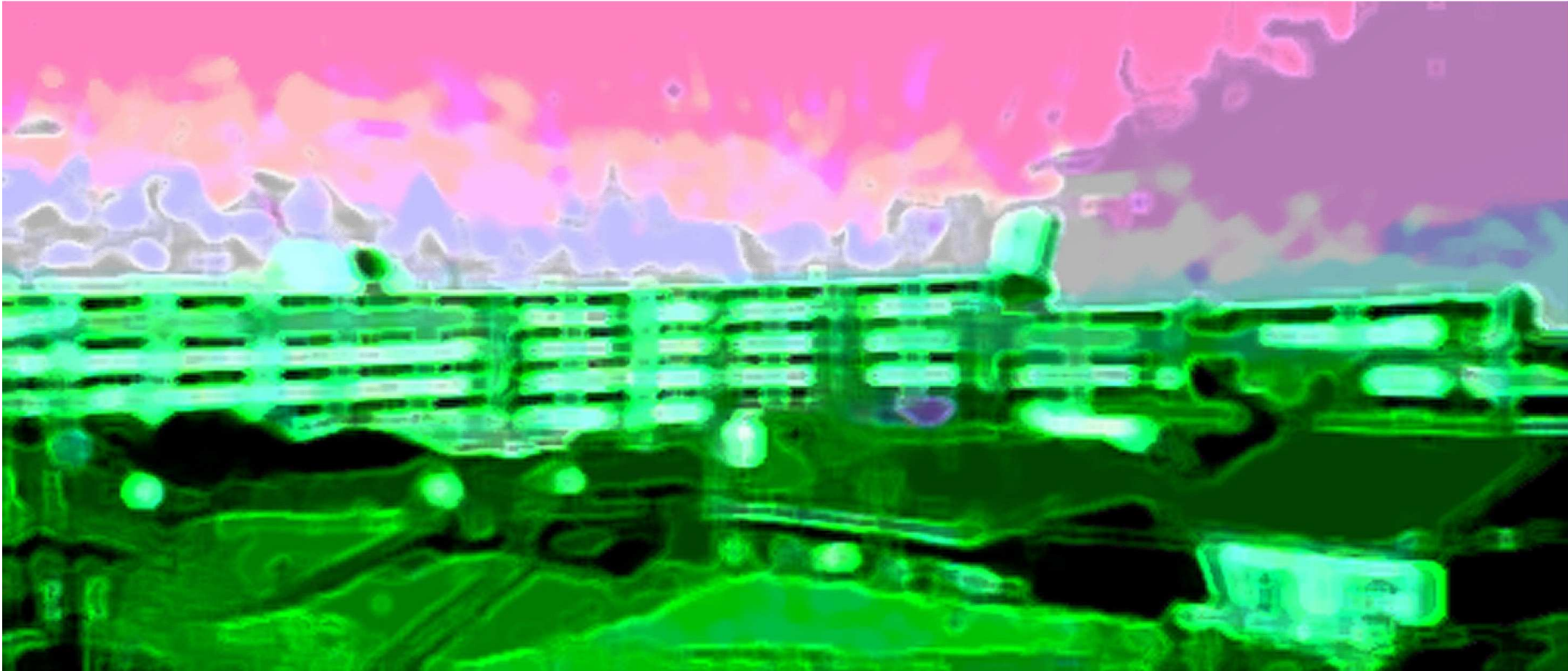
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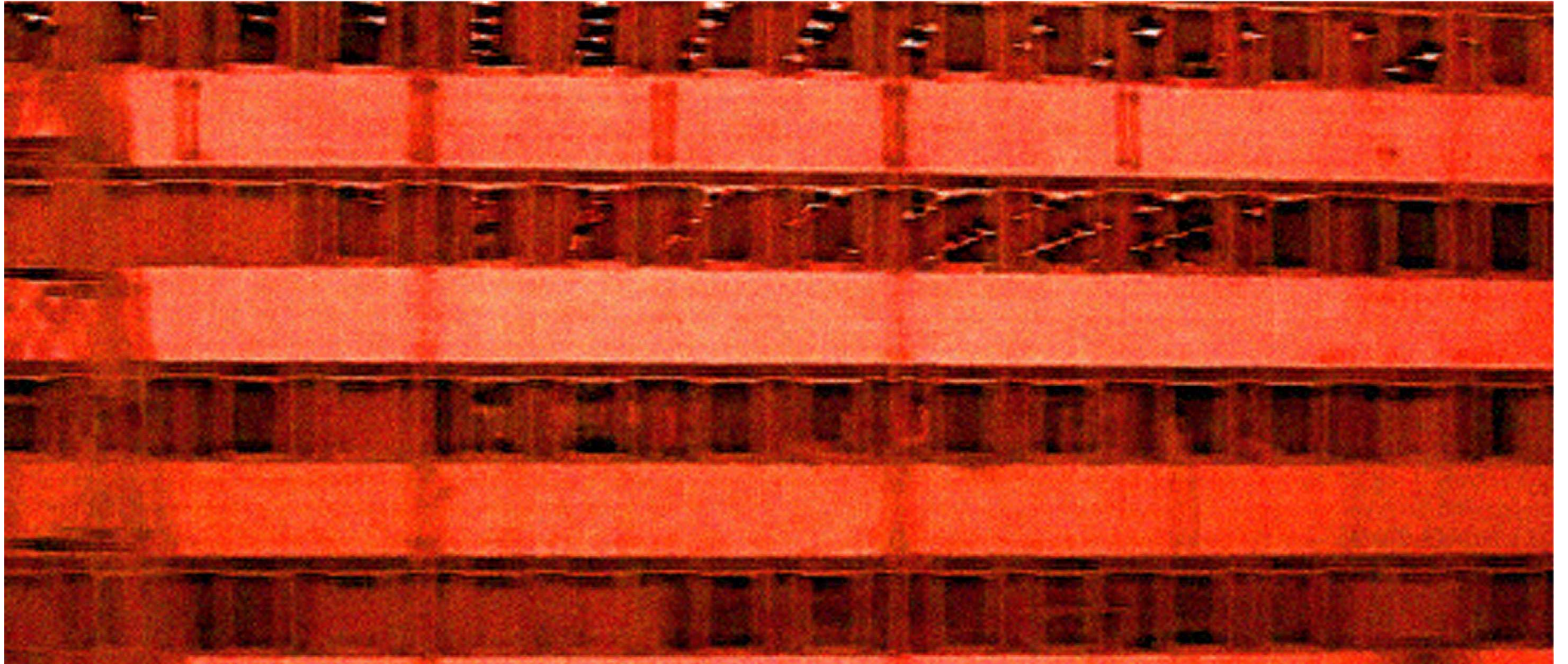
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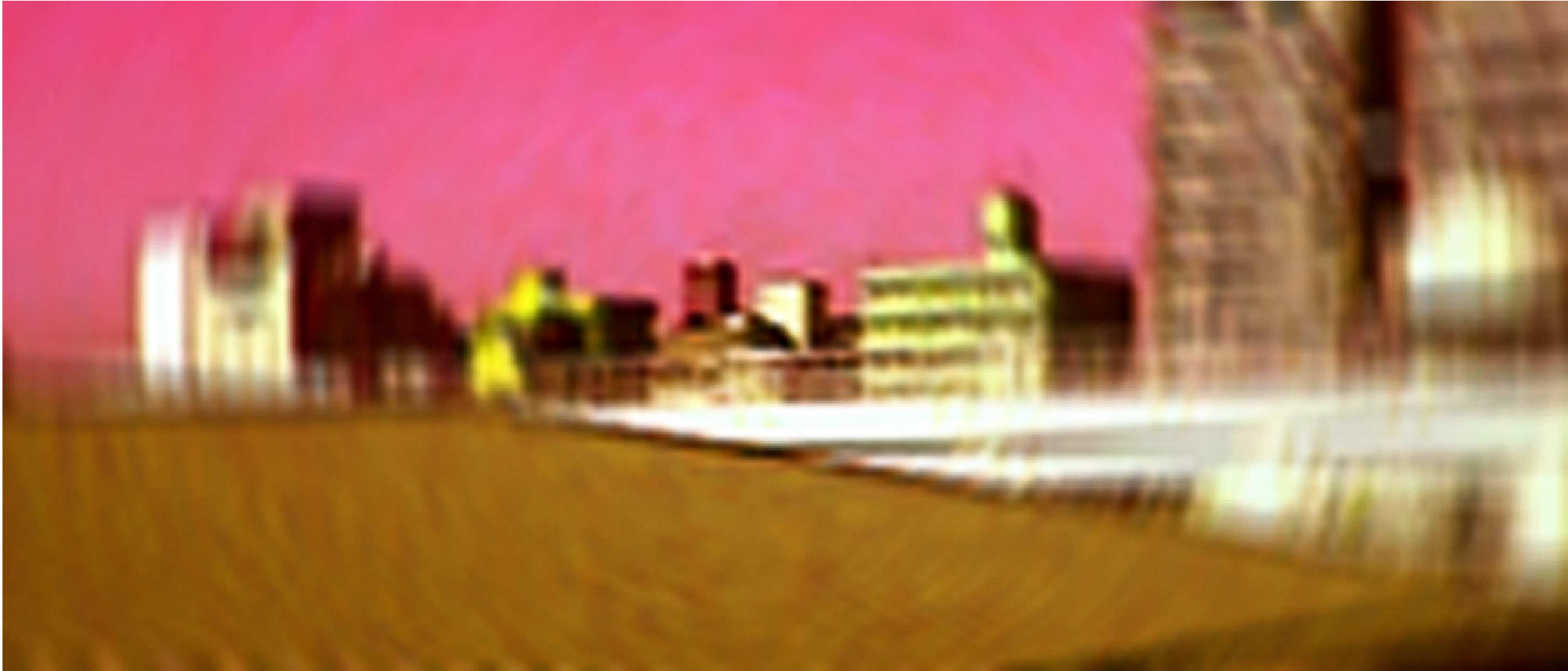
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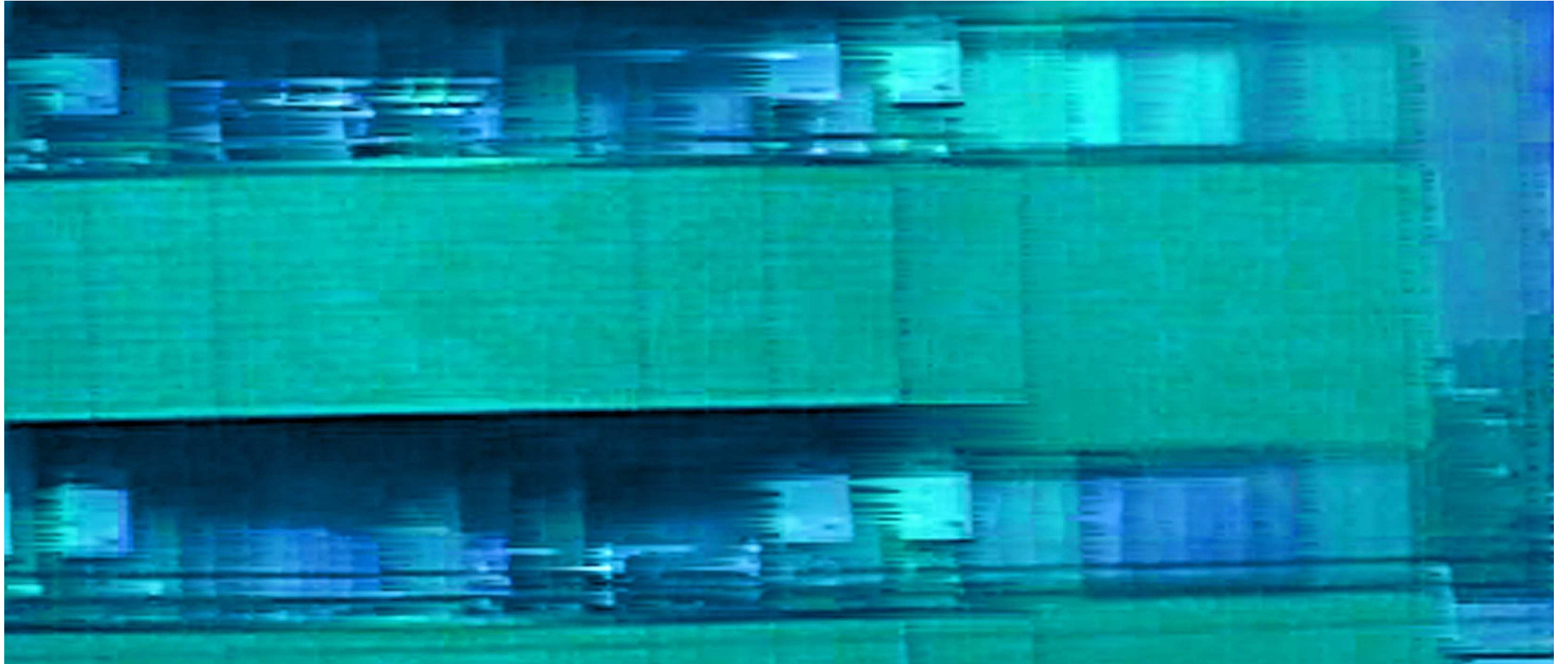
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #8





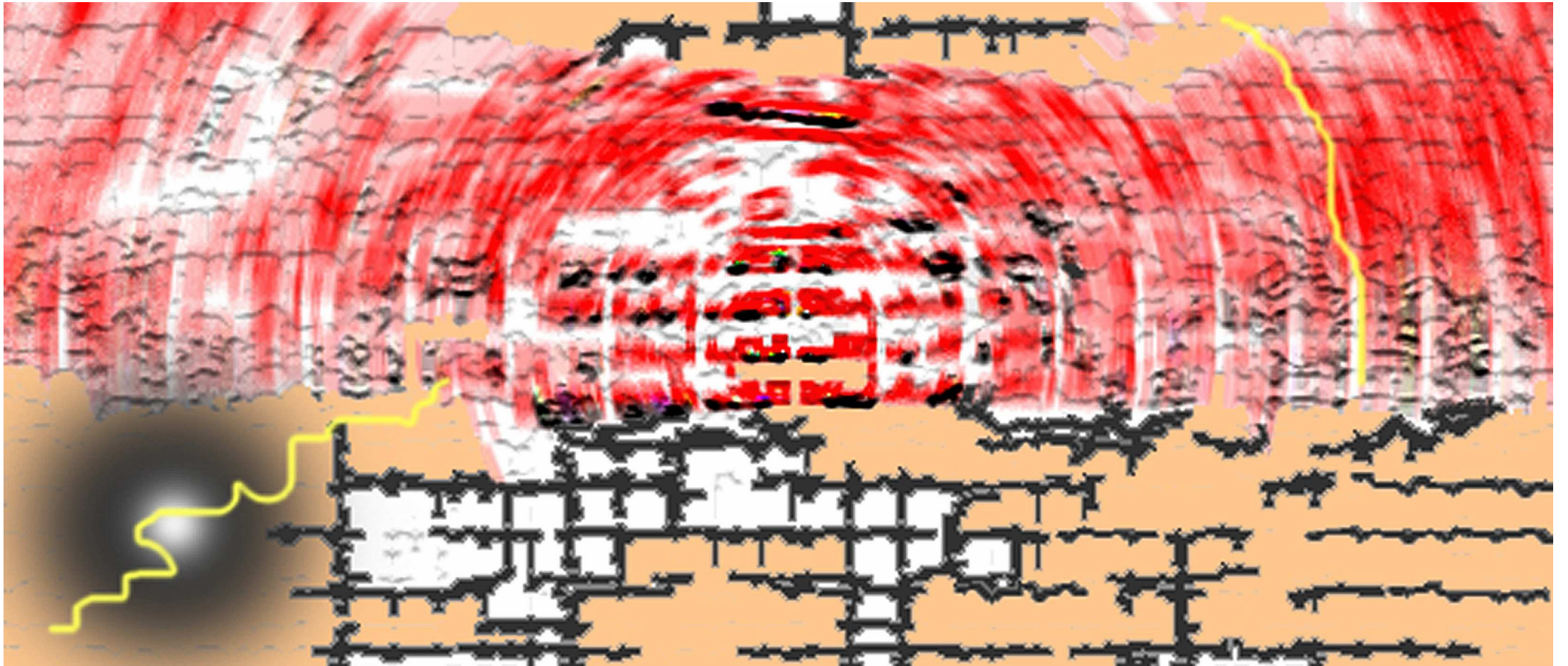
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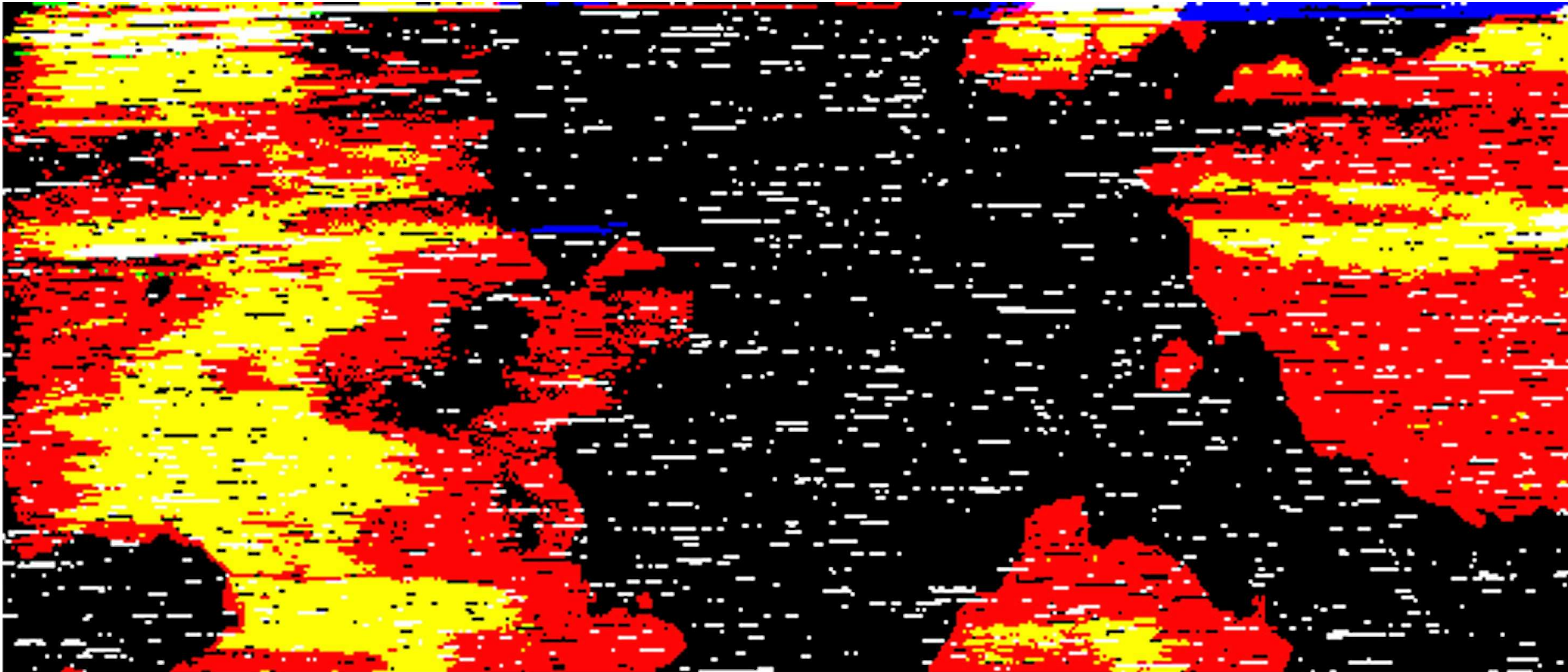
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #10





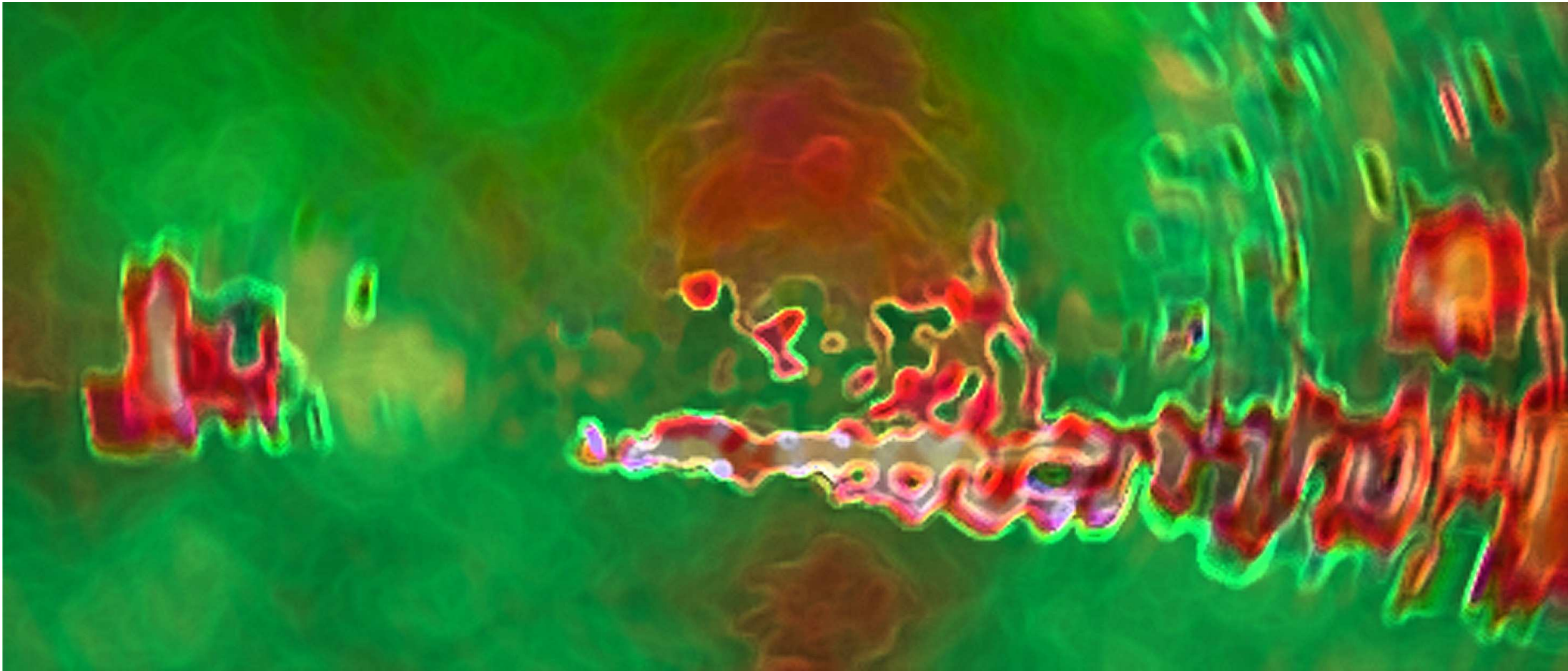
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #11





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #12





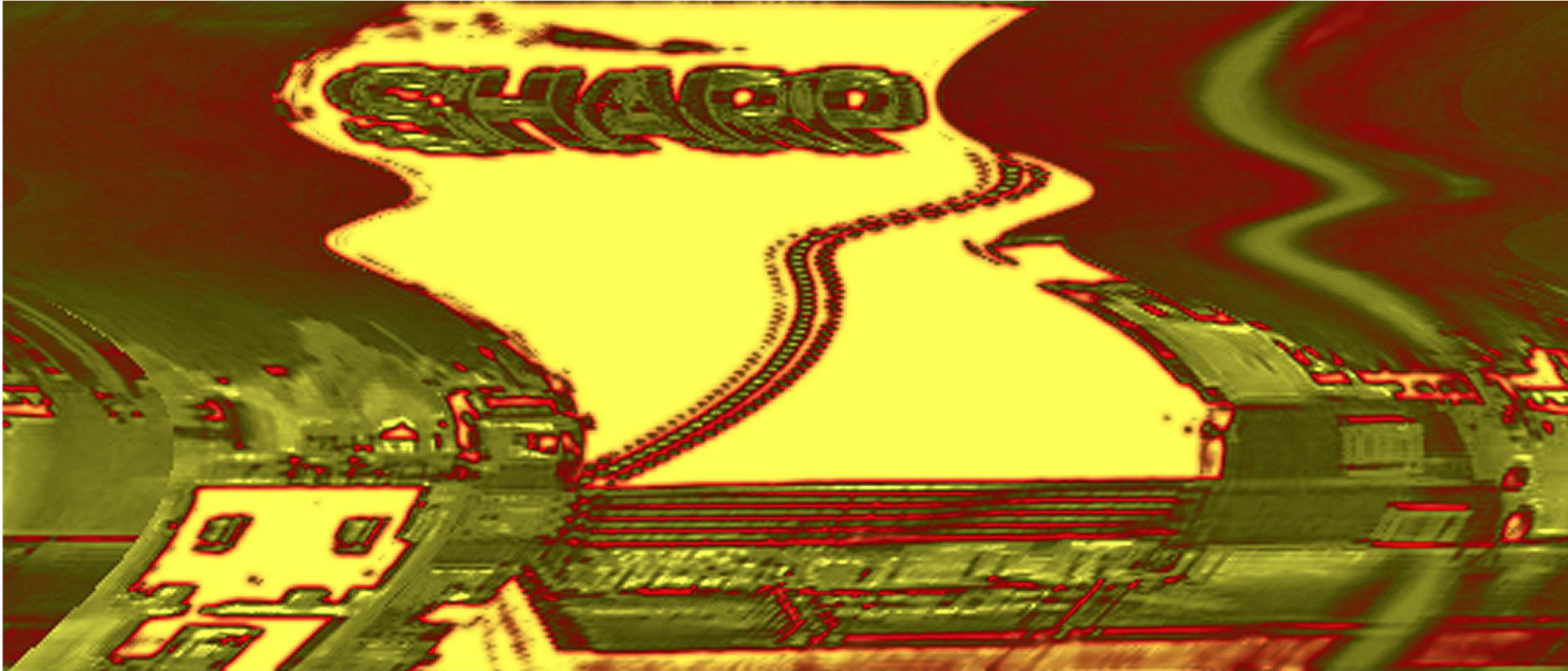
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #13





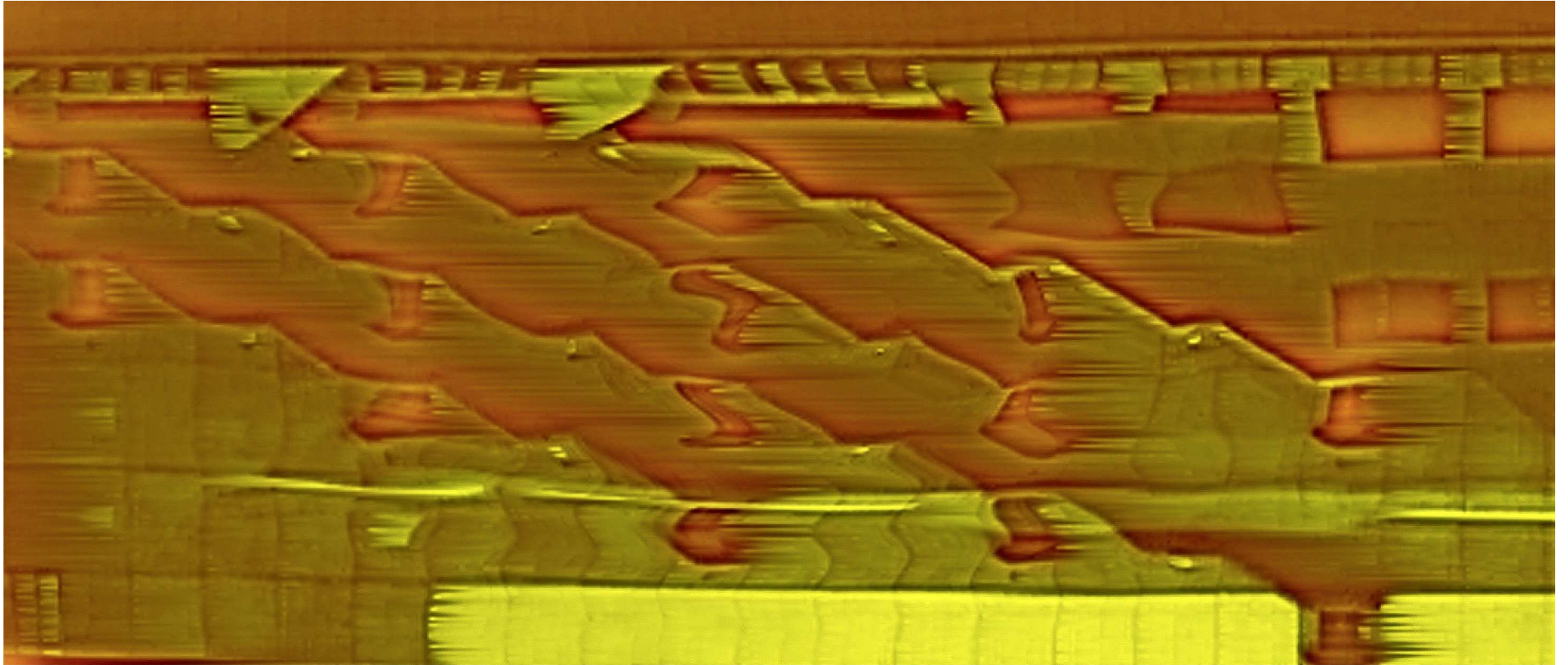
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #14





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #15





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #16





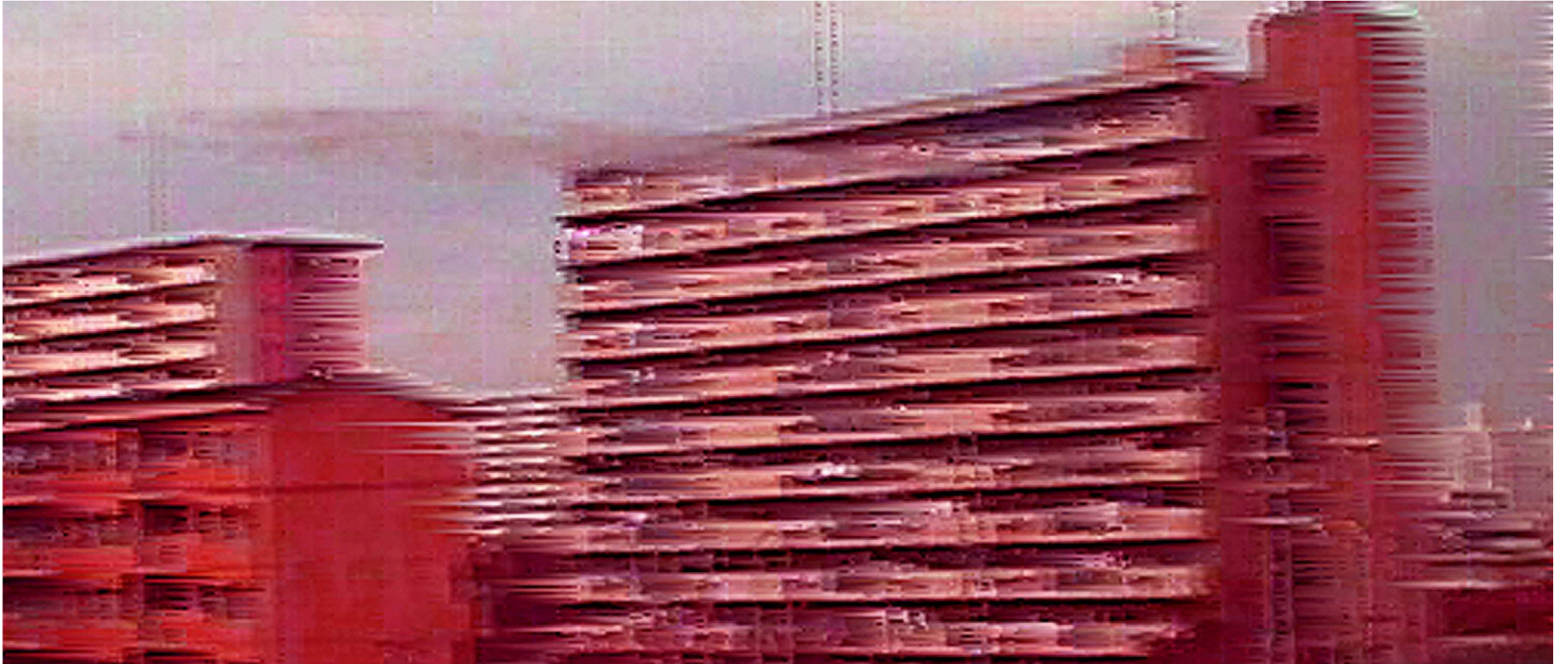
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #17





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #18





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #19





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #20





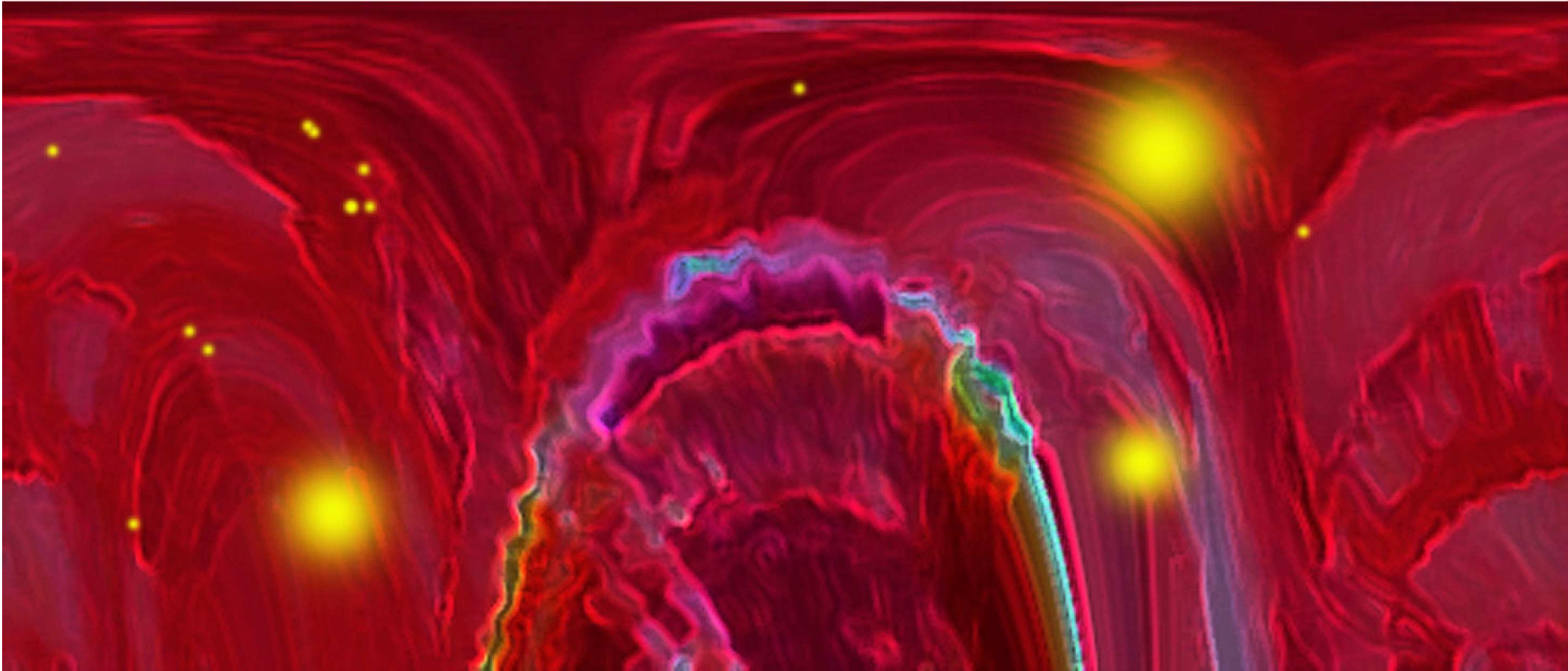
BULLET TRAIN BLUES #21





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #22





BULLET TRAIN BLUES #23



## BOMBMAKERS!

I grew up at a time when the nuclear bomb loomed as an immediate threat. During Elementary School, we would have ‘duck and cover’ drills. The school alarm would go off, we would get under our school desks, and cover up for ten minutes. This was supposed to protect us from the incoming nuclear blast. I remember the Cuban Missile Crisis, and how I was told nuclear war was imminent. It is unbelievable how gullible the entire nation was about nuclear power and weapons. The insanity of what nuclear weapons represents as a potential to destroy all living species only began to sink in after the technology was weaponized beyond any reasonable need.

The thinking of historian George Kennan has influenced me. He posited that there are two major concerns in our time that must be dealt with or we will not survive to address the many other social and humanitarian concerns in our world. They are environmental degradation of the planet, and the proliferation of nuclear technology and weaponry. In my artwork I have referenced the subject of nuclear technology numerous times, such as the *Hiroshima Suite* of Photostatic prints from the 1980s. In 1995 I organized a special group exhibition marking the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima at 18th Street Art Center’s *New Gallery* in Santa Monica, California.

Living in New Mexico, I was near the city of Los Alamos, home to the central nuclear effort. I wanted to find out more about the Manhattan Project, which was the World War II secret effort that took place in Los Alamos and invented the first atomic bombs. They were used to attack the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. The Los Alamos Laboratory had among other things a museum dedicated to nuclear energy and its uses. Replicas of the first bombs were there, and didactic panels talking about how we used these weapons to end WWII and save American lives. I had seen in the Smithsonian Museum identity cards of some of the women who had worked on the *Manhattan Project*, and this intrigued me. I photographed them, and worked them up in photoshop into new images. These are the photographs that make up the series called Bombmakers.

I found more identity cards at the archives in the Los Alamos Museum

archives. Hundreds of women worked on the project in various capacities: scientists, engineers, secretaries, assemblers, machinists, and all happened in strict secrecy. None of them knew what the project was about. They found out only after the events in Japan. In fact, Los Alamos itself was a secret city during World War II, officially not existing.

In the archives, I read a few stories of the women who worked on the project, and began to look up what had happened to them afterwards. I found some information and I realized that the nuclear attacks had intense moral and emotional consequences for these women. I began to conceive a larger project, coupling the re-photographs of the identity cards with narrative stories and research about the women involved in the Manhattan Project. I was thinking about how they had been used without much thought of the potential consequences to their personal well being, much less the larger consequences of the nuclear nightmare that would unfold as a result of the *Manhattan Project*. To title the project, I was thinking of the notion of women as homemakers, subservient to the man who went to work and was the dominant partner. While the women went to work in the Los Alamos Lab, and some of them were highly trained, they remained in secondary positions, working for men who never let them know what they were contributing to. They were unwitting but complicit in the making of weapons of mass destruction that would be used against women and children.

While I was beginning to put the larger idea into motion, September 11, 2001 occurred. The United States Government became deeply concerned with security and established the Homeland Security Department. On January 8, 2003, the Department of Energy denied me access to the archival material I was researching based on new security concerns. The project pivoted to also become an inquiry about whether citizens have the right to free access to information.



Following is the verbatim text from the last e-mail correspondence I received from the U.S Department of Energy regarding my attempts to access what had been up to January 8, 2003, public information.

Subj: Ref Request  
Date: 1/8/03 AM Pacific Standard time  
From: [cbecknell@doeal.gov](mailto:cbecknell@doeal.gov) (Becknell, Carolyn)  
To: [Arts18thst@aol.com](mailto:Arts18thst@aol.com)  
CC: [rxm@lanl.com](mailto:rxm@lanl.com), [ajrose@lanl.gov](mailto:ajrose@lanl.gov)

Carolyn A. Becknell  
U.S. Department of Energy/NNSA  
Albuquerque Operations Office  
Office of Public Affairs  
P.O. Box 5400  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87185-5400  
Telephone: 505-845-4869  
Facsimile: 505-845-5063  
E-Mail: [cbecknell@doeal.gov](mailto:cbecknell@doeal.gov)

Good Morning Mr. Campbell!

I want to acknowledge my receipt of your telephone message yesterday. I have been working on your request by talking with Department folks and I want to let you know our position after our discussions.

We are not going to be able to help you. Many things have changed since 9/11 and the Department, just like the country, looks at things in a very different way. To mention a few things so you can see our thinking, we do not allow digital cameras in our facilities unless they are owned by the government for government purposes; we have privacy concerns about such photographs; our regulations do not allow for such use as the risk to our facilities far outweighs the use as technology could possibly allow for counterfeiting, alteration, or misuse; and the President's administration has issued strict guidelines for access/release due to security concerns.

Even if you were to submit a FOIA (Freedom of Information) request, we would invoke several exemptions and not be able to provide such records.

We thank you for giving us the opportunity to talk with you. I will send a copy of this email to Ms. Judy rose Archuleta and Mr. Roger mead at our Los Alamos National laboratory for their information on the Department's position.





Ruth H. Anderson





Marion L. Arnold





Rose S. Bethe





Babette C. Chamberlain





Priscilla Duffield





Mary E. Evans





Beatrice Freeman





© 1887

Hazel R. Greenbaker





Vida B. Grissom





Etta Woodward



# THE ARTIST CLAYTON CAMPBELL REFEREES THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION THE 'REAL DEAL' EVANDER HOLYFIELD

In 1995, I was invited by the British Council of Northern Ireland to visit Northern Ireland with the intention of developing professional relationships that might result in cultural exchange opportunities between Los Angeles and Northern Ireland. Over time, I did accomplish a number of projects for the 18th Street Arts Center and for both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. My own heritage has significant Irish ancestry. Some ancestors were from Belfast and Cork, so I was especially intrigued. I developed a close relationship with the Queen Street Studios in Belfast and its Director, Colin McGookin, an accomplished artist in his own right. In 1998, he invited me to make an exhibition about the Troubles, or civil war, in Northern Ireland. It would be originate at Queen Street Studios and then travel to some other local art centers.

On my first visit to Belfast, I was struck by how small it was especially for a city filled with so much violence and sectarian hatred that it had garnered international attention and concern. It was no larger than Santa Monica, CA where I lived. On one of numerous visits I was in the pub, the King Arthur Bar, that had become well known because it had been the site of a bombing. I was sitting with a group of men, and asked the one next to me where he was from. The room became very quiet, and later, Colin took me aside and politely explained that you never asked people direct questions about who they are and where they are from. These seemingly normal distinctions determined whose side of the civil war you were on. This information could put you at great risk. While I felt I did not have the knowledge or would presume to make work that spoke directly about the issues in Northern Ireland, clearly, I needed to find a metaphor of addressing the Troubles that allowed people to speak about them, without speaking about them directly. I wondered, how could you even have such a conversation successfully in that charged an environment?

My solution came when I received an invitation from a film producer to be part of a music video that featured U.S. world heavyweight boxing champion Evander Holyfield fighting in the ring, while a rapper sang his praises. The video was a promotion for the rapper and would be used to show off the prowess of Evander Holyfield before his upcoming fight with the challenger, Lennox Lewis. I was to be the referee, mainly because I resembled a famous short, white referee of the time,

Mills Lane. I was coached by the Champion's handlers on what to do which was mainly to stay out of the way, when to get between the fighters, and how to keep up with them.

I knew that boxing was a wildly popular sport in Northern Ireland, and that the metaphor of men fighting, and the artist mediating the fighting with such a well-known figure as Holyfield, could be what I needed. Fighting, conflict, mediation, somehow I felt that this would be a vehicle for the kinds of indirect conversations that needed to take place in Northern Ireland, and how I could make authentic work, as an outsider, about the Troubles.

I received permission from Evander Holyfield to use still images from the video, and to turn them into photographs. He was intrigued by what I was doing. My project became part photography, part performance. With the video editors, I spent hours going through the tapes frame-by-frame, and selected about 50, which were saved as Photoshop files. I re-worked each file, printed them as photographs, and had my show.

*The Artist Clayton Campbell Referees the World Heavyweight Champion the 'Real Deal' Evander Holyfield* debuted in Northern Ireland and was a success. It amused the viewers when they realized that it was my actual presence in the photos that I had not been Photo-shopped in. And, as I hoped, the metaphor of boxing did present a way for people to talk with each other about the conflict in Northern Ireland without exposing themselves to danger. This series toured a number of centers through Northern Ireland, and succeeded in creating the kind of larger conversation Colin and I had hoped would happen. The level of social commentary in this work is what I try to achieve. There is consideration of the audience and I hope, a generosity in my pictures, which allows people to relax, enter the experience, and feel safe enough to look at some deadly serious stuff.

In 2004, the series was exhibited in four different cities in Croatia. This was also an interesting occasion to show the work, as Croatia had recently been through a catastrophic civil war, the Bosnian conflict between 1992-94. The reviewer Dina



Ivan wrote about my work:

“On the other wall, the heroes of the ring and the media, the global sports business, are also retouched in bright colors and under special lighting. He originally prepared the series for an exhibition in Northern Ireland, when asked to address the clutter there. Campbell took boxing metaphor as a way of looking at "man, aggression and meditation." Aggression in its pure, original form is manifested in direct contact, man to man, as the original wars looked like heroic fights in the ring, the Achilles and Hector duel. In Campbell's metaphor and our present, they have been transformed into a *show of* great professional sports business. Former wars in milder stylized form take the form of a play, just as today's heroes have other methods, but the pattern of action is the same, as the core of aggression is always the same. Heroes are ordinary people, as are ordinary people, and why people want to be heroes and why people need heroes, Campbell opens by pointing out the absurdities of the colors of his digital photographs, looking for humanity and another viewing spectrum.

Campbell As A Judge: In the super heavyweight match, Clayton Campbell is also a judge, not metaphorically but a real sports judge, recorded by a photographic apparatus in his photographs. Even Zelimir Koscevic, who set up the exhibition, could not explain how Campbell came to this match as a judge, but the symbolism is clear. It imposes the meaning of Campbell's involvement in the critical problems of society and time. He participates and judges, as closely as possible, in the middle of the ring, as he would participate and judge behind the camera. Or, as he would inevitably judge, and only as an observer. But in some ways, he himself contributes to the whole aggressive spectacle, participating in it in such a way that it is an integral part of it.

Worn by the events, he is part of a great *show* in which he found himself in the role of sports referee, only playing the role assigned to him.

By being a photographer, a behind-the-camera photographer, and a judge, though contributing to the whole process of conflict, Campbell indirectly raises the question of the possibility for other observers to participate - or, in fact, the

inevitability to participate in mass civilization and socio-political events that always they seem somehow *above us*.

Because in reality, which is no more real than artistic, Campbell is an activist, just as he is an activist in his art. He works for John Kerry's election campaign to change the direction of what he says is the policy of the United States government.”





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#1



THE ARTIST CLAYTON CAMPBELL REFEREES THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION THE "REAL DEAL" EVANDER HOLYFIELD



THE ARTIST REFEREES....#2





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#3





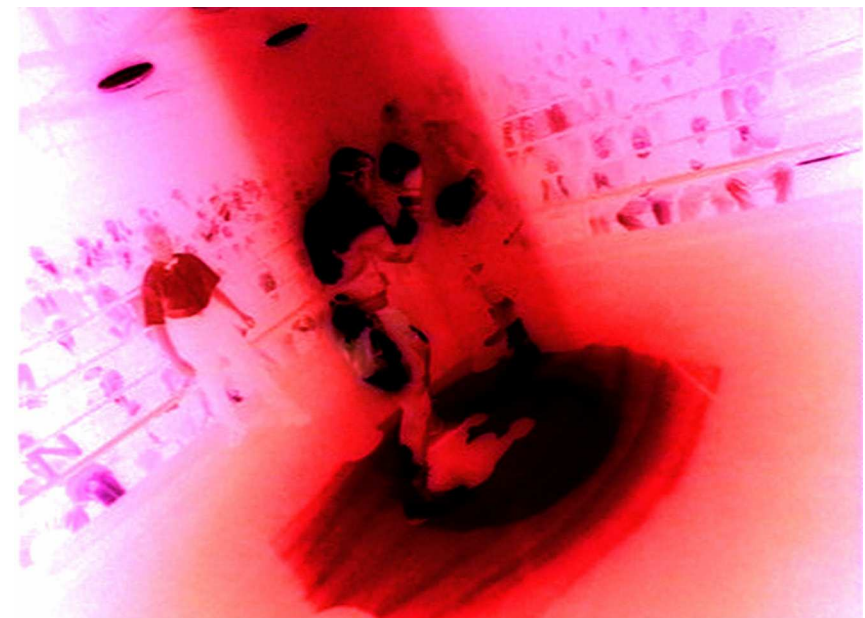
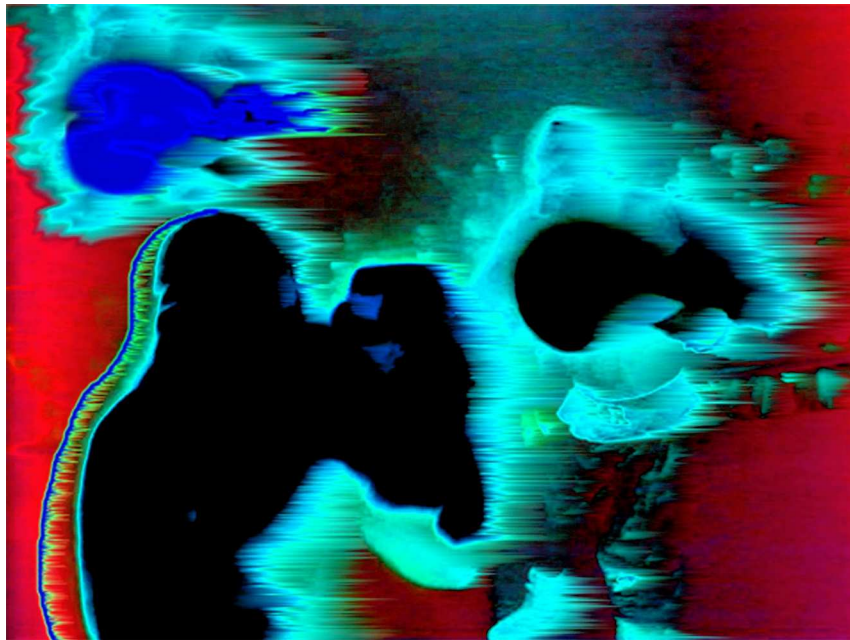
THE ARTIST REFEREES....#4





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#5









THE ARTIST REFEREES....#10-13





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#14





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#15





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#16





THE ARTIST REFEREES....#17



## THE DIVINE COMEDY





In 2005, I read Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. I came away thinking mainly about the tumultuous political era he lived through and how it informed his work, and how it had so many parallels to my time. The universality of his thinking seemed to me one important reason so many artists have illustrated or made work inspired by *The Divine Comedy*. Dante's writing is an acknowledged foundation for contemporary literature, its flexibility and richness of imagery still fascinating. Much of my artwork has some literary basis, and my *Divine Comedy* project is similar to the *Borges Suite* of 1980, where I directly refer to existing text as a starting point for conceptualizing the final image.

In my research I looked at dozens of artists who were inspired to make art about *The Divine Comedy*, including Botticelli, Gustave Dore, and Michael Mazur. Some illustrated the poems while others made an expressionistic visual response. My intention was to refer to the text yet not be literal. I made a Los Angeles-centric, real-time project that examines the contemporary social relevancy *The Divine Comedy* offers. I hope I have added something unique to the canon of artwork that has grown up around Dante's epic poem.

My *Divine Comedy* is a portfolio of 45 prints with fifteen photographs each for the sections *Inferno*, *Purgatory*, and *Paradise*. The photos were shot with a Leica Lumix 10 megapixel camera, and then worked further with Photoshop. Individual final prints are as large as 56" x 38", while there are smaller 19" x 13" editions. Taking my cue from what is around me, the *Inferno* was shot at the Los Angeles Erotic Convention. *Purgatory* is a series of self-portraits dressed in the clothing of a priest. *Paradise* was shot at Forest Lawn Cemetery where faux numerous neo-classical sculptures are installed (rather than gravestones) in an attempt to simulate an atmosphere of approaching paradise.

I found tremendous humor, passion, social commentary, and above all a descriptive evocation of the real world Dante lived in. It is utterly modern and of its place. So the *Divine Comedy* for me is not an allegorical presentation that called for literal illustrations of the scenes in the story. I did not want to illustrate the circles of hell, the levels of purgatory, and the spheres of paradise. Rather I sought to refer to the states of mind Dante presents us with. This meant finding contemporary sources which reflected my own journey, here and now in Los Angeles. It had to reflect my personal process of individuation and seeking knowledge. Like Dante, who describes himself at the outset as being in 'a dark wood' I came to this project having found myself in a time of emotional turbulence. I leave it feeling slightly redeemed. I feel this is what must

have happened for Dante in the years he wrote the political *Inferno*, the psychological *Purgatory*, and the spiritually transcendent *Paradise*. He came into consciousness as an individual and perhaps attained a peace within his lifetime, which was full of social, political and personal upheaval.

Historically, the *Inferno* seems the most popular and often illustrated section of *The Divine Comedy*. Artists love to show Dante's descent through the rungs of hell, growing ever darker and bleaker as the torments of hell visited on Dante's antagonists become more sadistic. It is very Christian, dark and punitive, stimulating the imagination. My *Inferno* is quite the opposite. It is colorful and animated, like being trapped for eternity in a Las Vegas casino, an un-ending universe of artifice and Mardi Gras erotic chaos. There is nothing in these images about the morality of what the people are doing. Rather, I am presenting a view of people who lack a core sense of themselves as they inhabit different masks, disappearing completely into these artificial personas. Doomed to never knowing oneself is the kind of true suffering that I find to be at the heart of the *Inferno*.

*Purgatory* is a place you may leave once you overcome the 'seven deadly' sins, which are pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. I present them in a series of self-portraits staged as diptychs. The left panel is natural while the right panel represents the shadow side. In the right panel the name of the sin is tattooed prison style into my forehead and the entire photo has been colorized. I flash unintelligible hand signs, like gang members who have secret languages communicated through gestures. To prepare for this self-portraiture project, I wore my homemade priest outfit around Los Angeles for a week. I stayed in character and was mistaken for a priest on a number of occasions, letting it pass. This was a kind of method acting research that warmed me up for the photo shoot. My son Nick photographed me in my studio, and I used Photoshop to finish the final works.

At the time I made this work the Catholic Church had been under siege for the terrible misbehavior of its priesthood for molestation of young boys and girls. The *Purgatory* section is referencing this. The secrecy and corruption of the Church, as evidenced through the molestation scandals, are connected to the hand signs. However, as with Dante, *Purgatory* is about the personal struggle to come to terms with the beginning of consciousness, an awareness that heaven and hell are not far away mystical places but are part of each person. My metaphor of a priest as mediator, grappling with the seven deadly sins, has numerous levels of meaning for a contemporary world. We are



suspicious of religious interlocutors yet desperately needing some kind of faith. In *The Divine Comedy* it is impossible to leave *Purgatory* without a rebirth of faith.

I photographed *Paradise* in Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, CA, where gravestones have been substituted with neo-classical sculptures. In 1912, the founder Hubert Eaton attempted to simulate paradise with this display of beautiful objects. He felt that people would feel better when visiting their deceased loved ones if he provided a bucolic, beautiful setting for contemplation and the mediation of grief, “as unlike other cemeteries as sunshine is unlike darkness.” Eaton succeeded in creating a quintessentially Californian, Disneyland-type theme park for the dead, with hundreds of sculptures and art works dotting the memorial setting. It was the perfect shooting location for my version of *Paradise*.

Dante begins *Paradise* by saying that his vision of it is so overwhelming he can only recount a memory, of a memory of it. This fits in with the physical reality of Forest Lawn, and how I have approached my *Paradise*; as a nostalgic, romantic foil to an under current of irony and cynicism I have found in much of contemporary culture, some of which certainly appears in some of my other work.

Two short essays were written about my project, *The Divine Comedy*. The first is by Laurent Deveze, a French philosopher, art critic, diplomat, and Director of the Higher Institute of Fine Arts of Besancon Franche-Comte. The second is by Zelimir Koscevic, former Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb and the Director of Foto Galerij Lang, Zagreb. They are included after the Inferno and Paradise sections.



## **The Inferno, Images 1-15**

**In the middle of the journey of our life, I came  
to myself in a dark wood where the straight  
way was lost.**

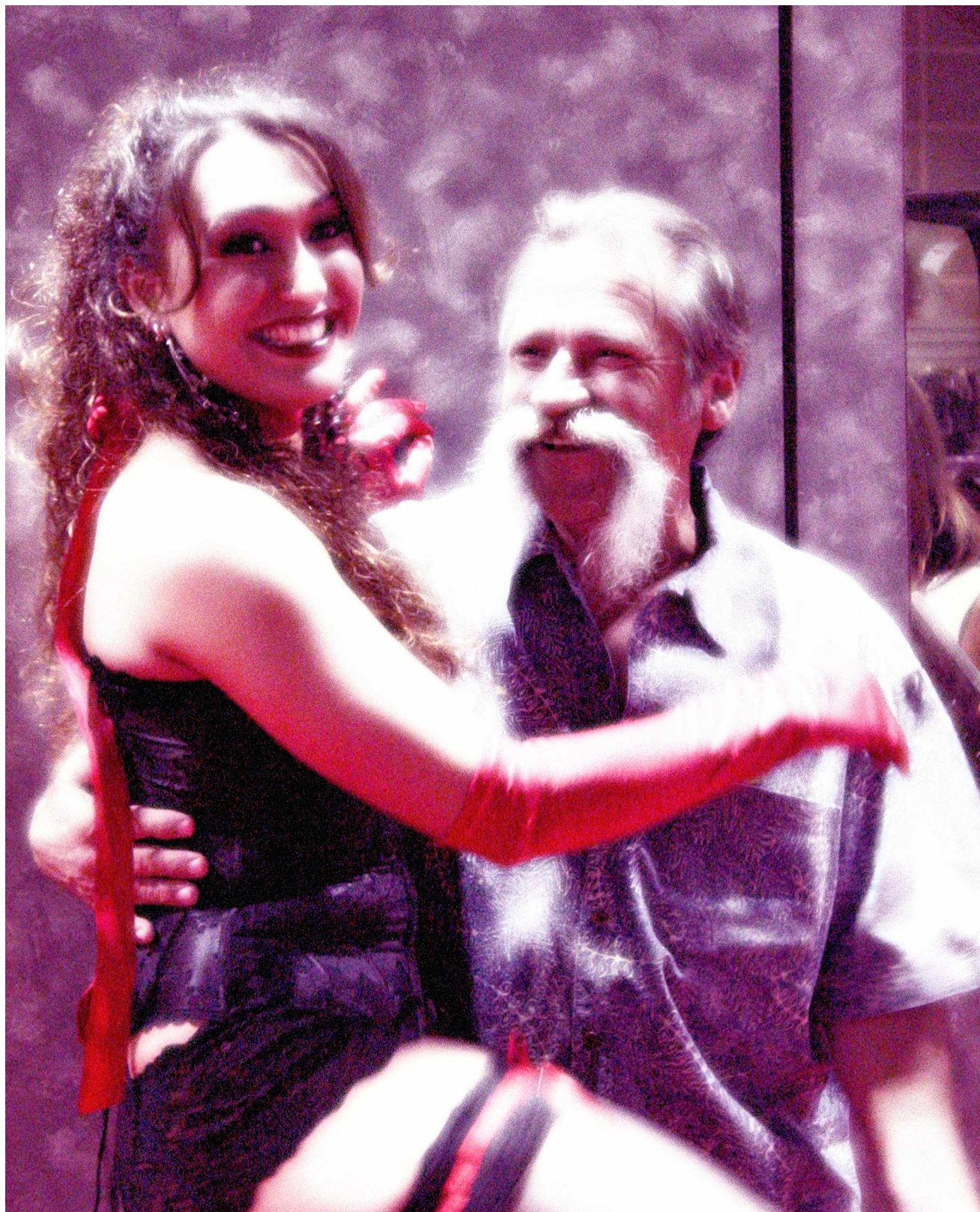
**Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell what a wild,  
and rough, and stubborn wood this was, which  
in my thought renews the fear.**

**Au milieu du voyage de notre vie,  
Je me retrouvai dans une forêt somber,  
Où le chemin tracé était effacé.  
Ah, qu'il est difficile de décrire cette forêt sauvage,  
Dure et forte,  
don't la pensée vient réveiller ma peur.**

**Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,  
ché la diritta via era smarrita.  
Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura  
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte  
che nel pensier renova la paura.**

**(Inferno 1. 1-6; trans. Wicksteed)**





Abandon hope, all you who enter here...





But who are you, come before your time? But who are you, who have become so ugly?





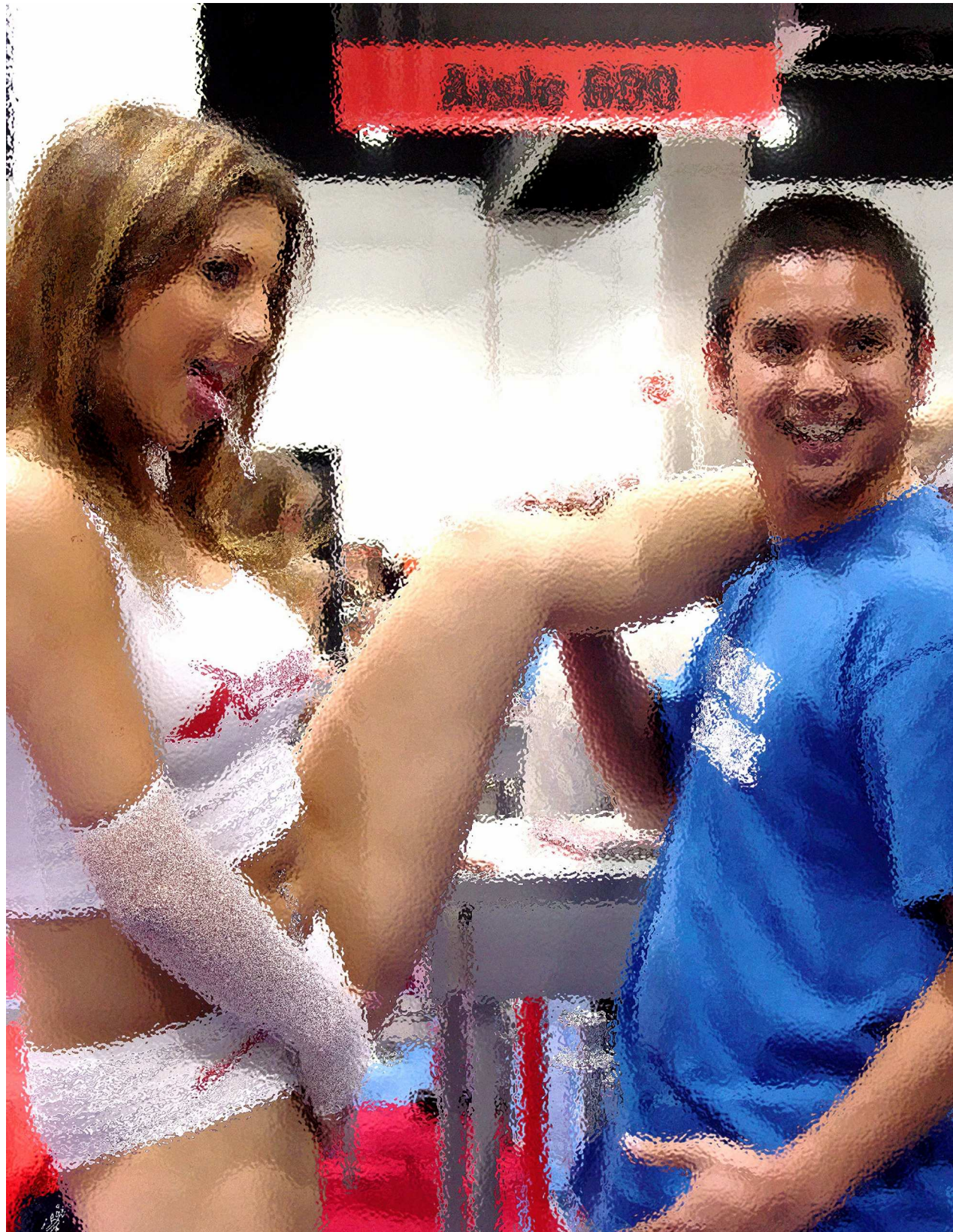
Through me is the way into the doleful city





None ever did return alive from this depth





They are envious of every other lot





Pape Satan, Pape Satan Aleppo





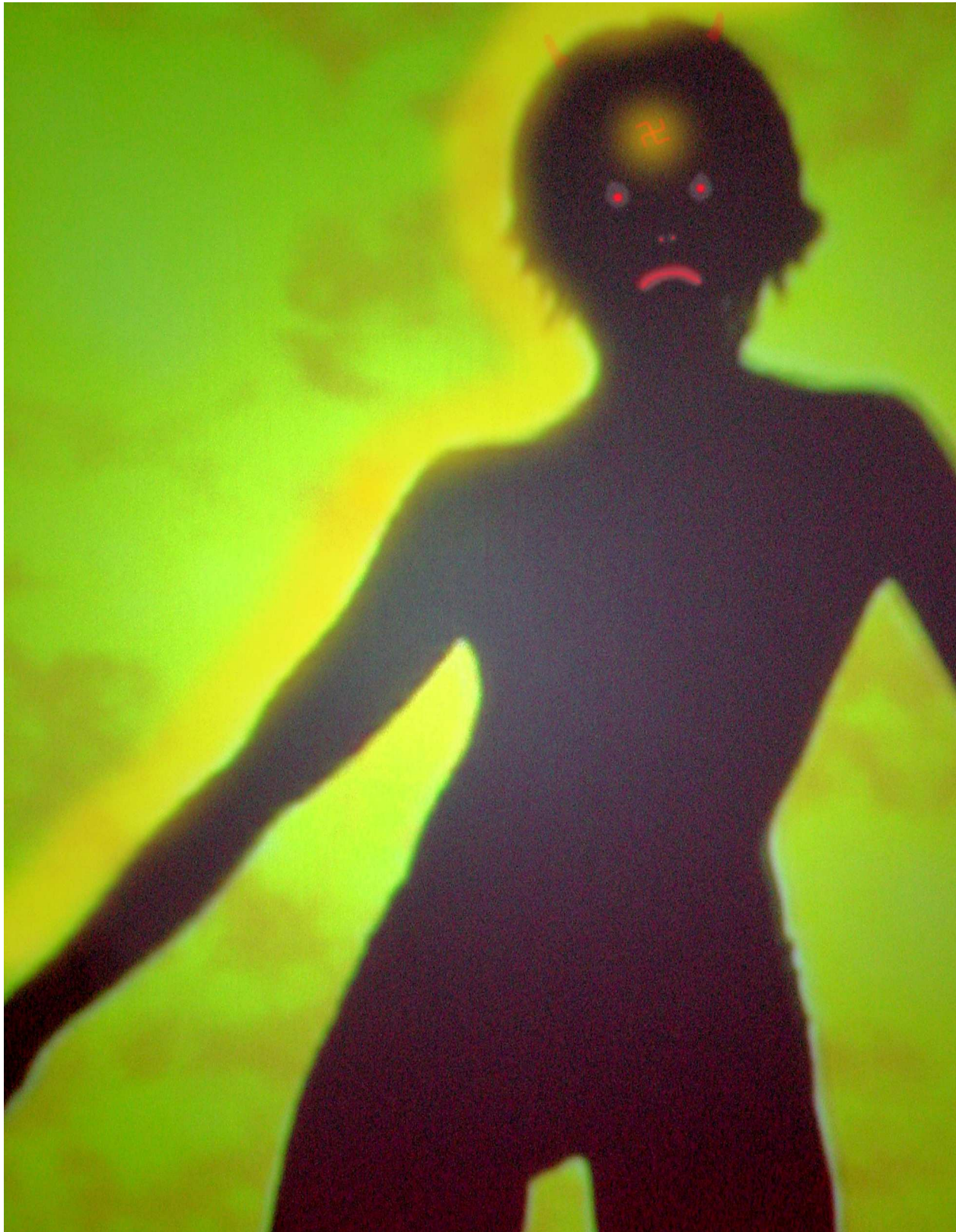
This is the law of hell observed in me





I stumbled into darkness and went down





There rose a shadow...





Not one reveals the theft and every flame steals a sinner





Covered with a festive skin...





She grows hungrier than she was





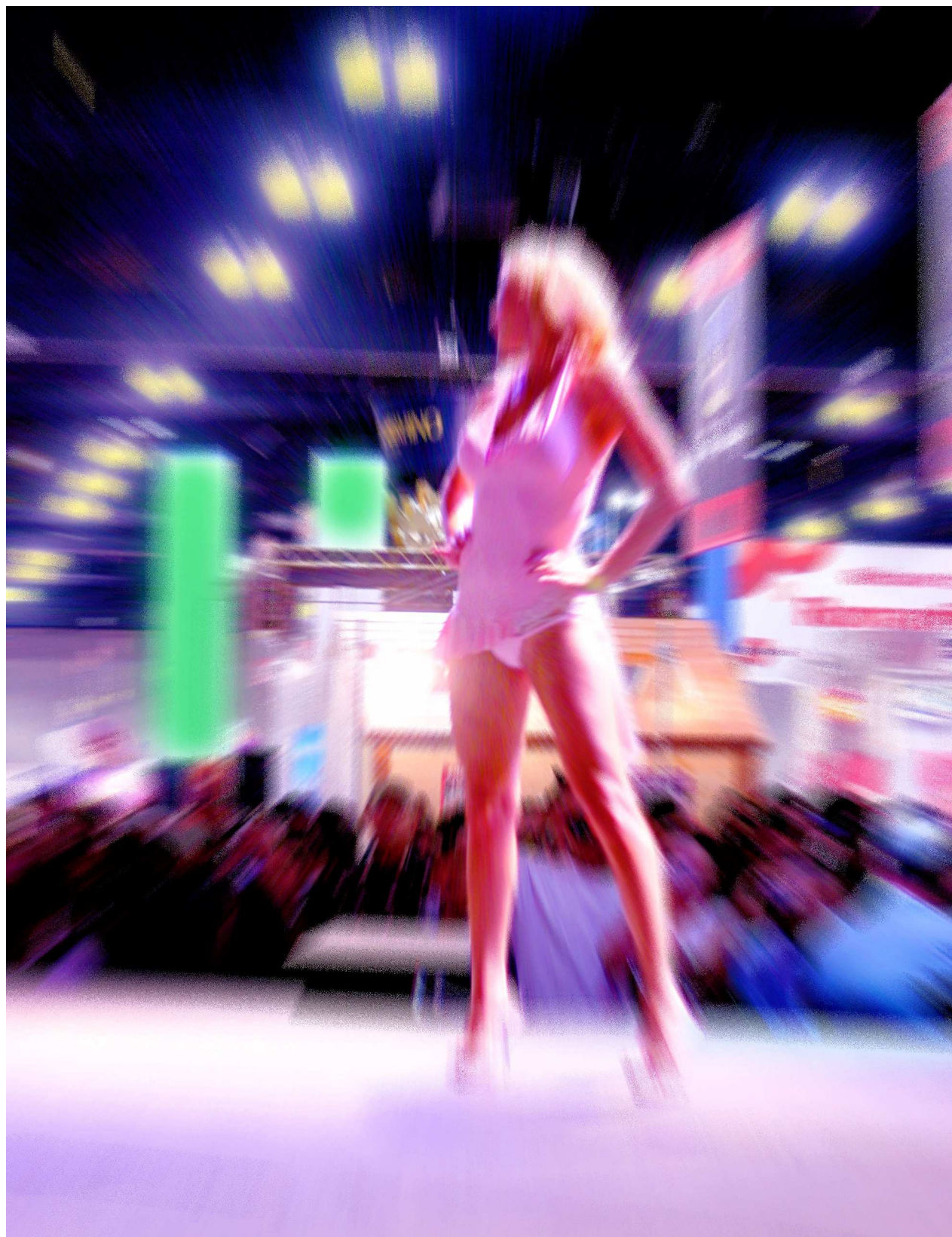
We go by a secret path along the rim of the dark city





The city of Dis, towers crimson from the fire

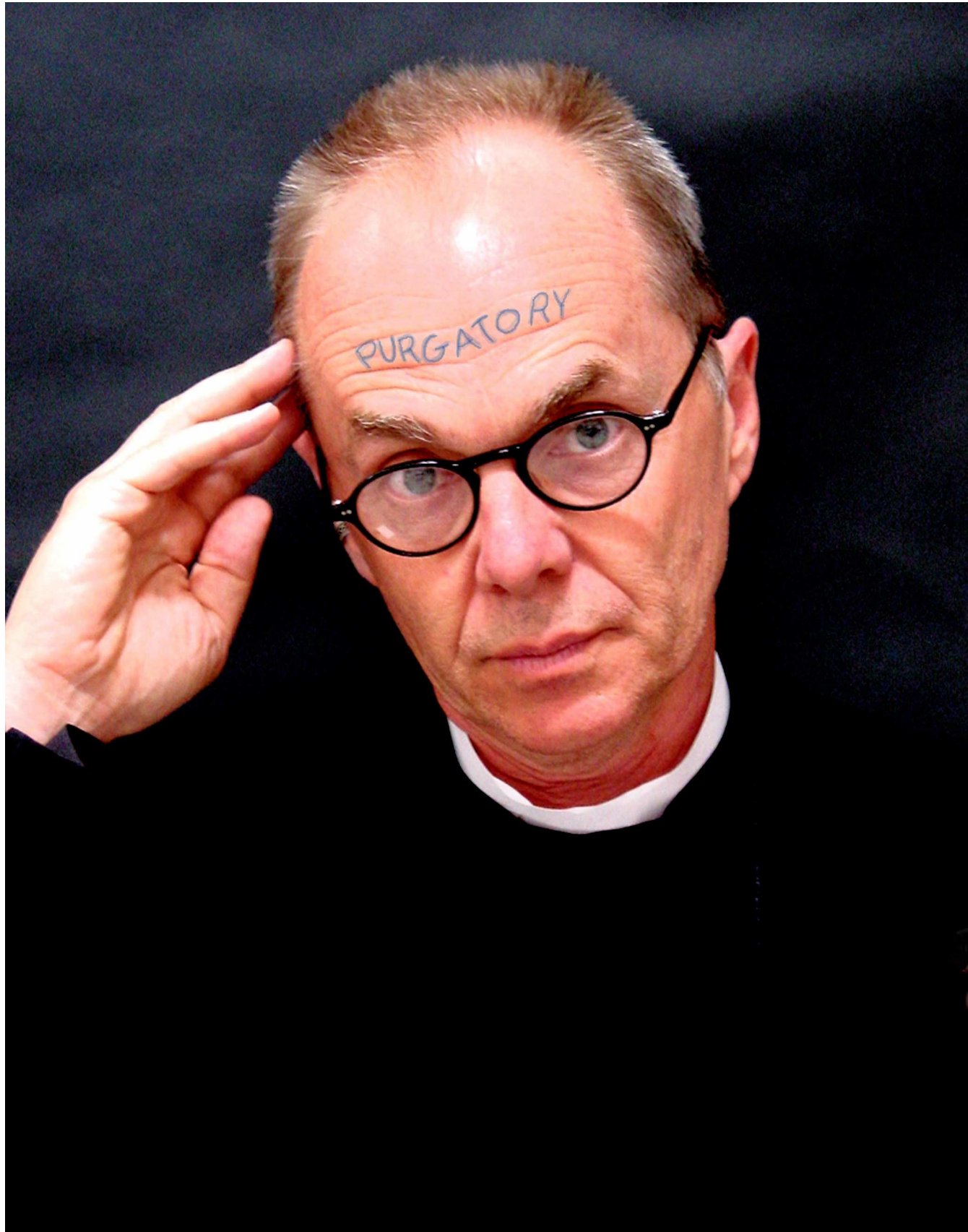




It was from there that we emerged to see, once more, the stars



# PURGATORY





## LA COMEDIA DEL ARTE BY CLAYTON CAMPBELL

Clayton Campbell's work is, homonymy obliges, say Lacanian psychoanalysts, a work on brands. Or rather on the incredible way that they arise in our landscape as if to persuade us that a thing is above all its social representation, its image, and not its bodily reality. The treatment inflicted on the heroes of antiquity summoned to fight with colorful American wrestlers obeys this same constant in denouncing the imposture. Athletes no longer fight naked on sacred grounds but strapped into the uniforms of small robots, allegorical soldiers falsely clashing on illuminated rings studded with sponsors. We have the Olympic games that we somehow deserve ... Worse, Clayton seizes here the Italian heroes of the soldiery, frozen in marble, and whose primary austerity is as if attenuated by the location in the heart of a garden. Martial values become goal of walks

Here again, everything is reviewed and corrected by the artist, not in the manner of the mustaches that Duchamp put on the Mona Lisa, but with an application that makes this work even more disturbing. The photographs of the old busts are not caricatured but underlined, reddened or yellowed as the case may be; finally, retouched like all these images that we are offered in paragons of Natural. Like this languid model who takes the sun and embodies the holidays and lazing around on our bus shelters and who should rather tell us the whole day of installation and the artificial lighting and the photographic corrections afterwards. Clayton, by applying this retouching treatment to what should be immutable, and the untouched is at the heart of this problem: nothing today is given to us to see without primer retouching or corrections: we no longer see anything because we are given to see.

In this sense the work of Clayton, who had already proposed a work which expressed the collection of a museum as a series of magnets for refrigerators, is more systematic than it seems and converges on this terrible observation: nothing today is no exception to this fraudulent image. To live in Los Angeles is obviously to grasp this very quickly, the incredible genius used to work the real so that it finally reaches the dignity of filmed object, represented Everything at L.A. seems to aspire to be modeled. The narcissistic approach of such a silhouette seems to indicate the quest for an unsuspected camera such a landscape seems to have been composed only to exist on film and the crowds themselves sometimes seem to assume themselves as extras ... Clayton had a long time ago the radical experience of virgin nature, that of terrible colds and hot summers, of nature that hides because it is reputed to be too inhospitable.

From this trapper's life the artist has undoubtedly brought back a taste for the truth; of a certain brutality of things which cannot be reduced to the image of a magazine to which our consumption system wants to reduce them in order to sell them better. Cities cannot be reduced to their simulacrum of Vegas, another place that Clayton frequented no more than beings find themselves in the polychrome precipitate of advertising campaigns. This concern for the truth which is thus manifested by retouched photographs and repainted heroes once again expresses the paradox of art which alone can show by masking because its masquerade is transparent to it. Polichinel is not a crook, he is a character. We know when we see that we are at the Italian reference theater for Italian reference Clayton Campbell invites us in his little theater of military heroes to an authentic comedia del arte.

*Laurent Deveze*



## Purgatory, Images 16-30

...I was so drawn from random thought  
to thought that, wandering in mind, I shut  
my eyes, transforming thought on thought to dream  
...and when this image shattered of itself  
just like a bubble that has lost the water  
beneath which it was formed  
...so my imagination fell away

...Mon esprit errait au hazard d'une pensée à l'autre,  
si bien que je fermai les yeux au bout  
d'un moment et les pensées se transformèrent en reve.  
...Et quand cette image se rompit en éclats, à la façon d'une bulle à laquelle il manqué  
l'eaudo n'telle est formée...  
...mon imagination s'évanouit

...che li occhi per vaghezza ricopersi,  
e'l pensamento in sogno trasmutati.  
...E come questa imagine rompeo  
sé per sé stessa, a guisa d'una bulla  
cui manca l'acqua soto qual si feo...  
...così l'imaginar mio cadde giuso...

(Purgatory, 18.143-145; 17.31-34,43; trans. Mandelbaum)





We did not lift our eyes on high  
But set our sights on earthly things instead





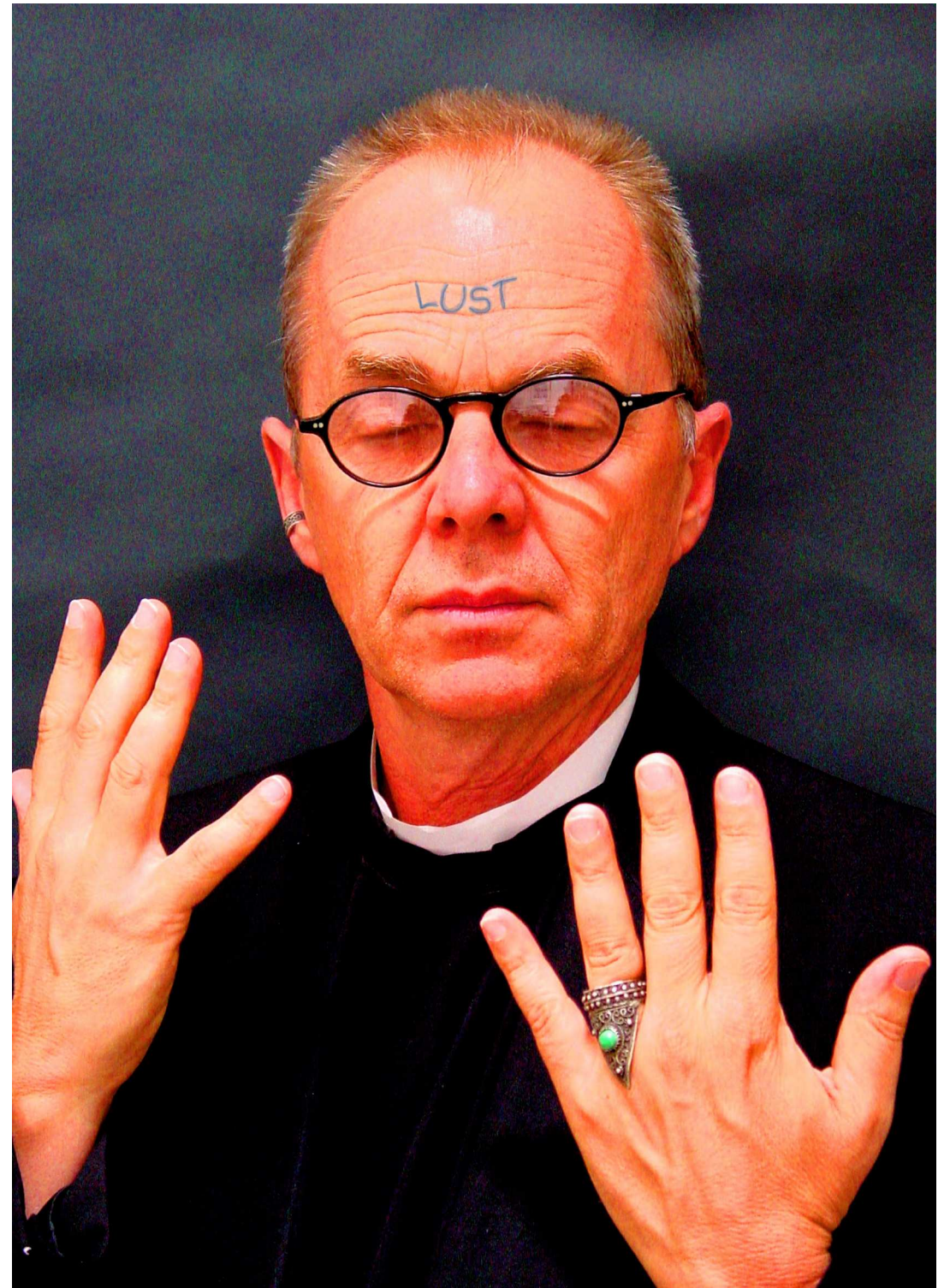
Like an ancient beast he turns to slaughter  
Depriving many of life, himself of honor





I would never have recognized him by his face  
I speak of pain but I should speak of solace





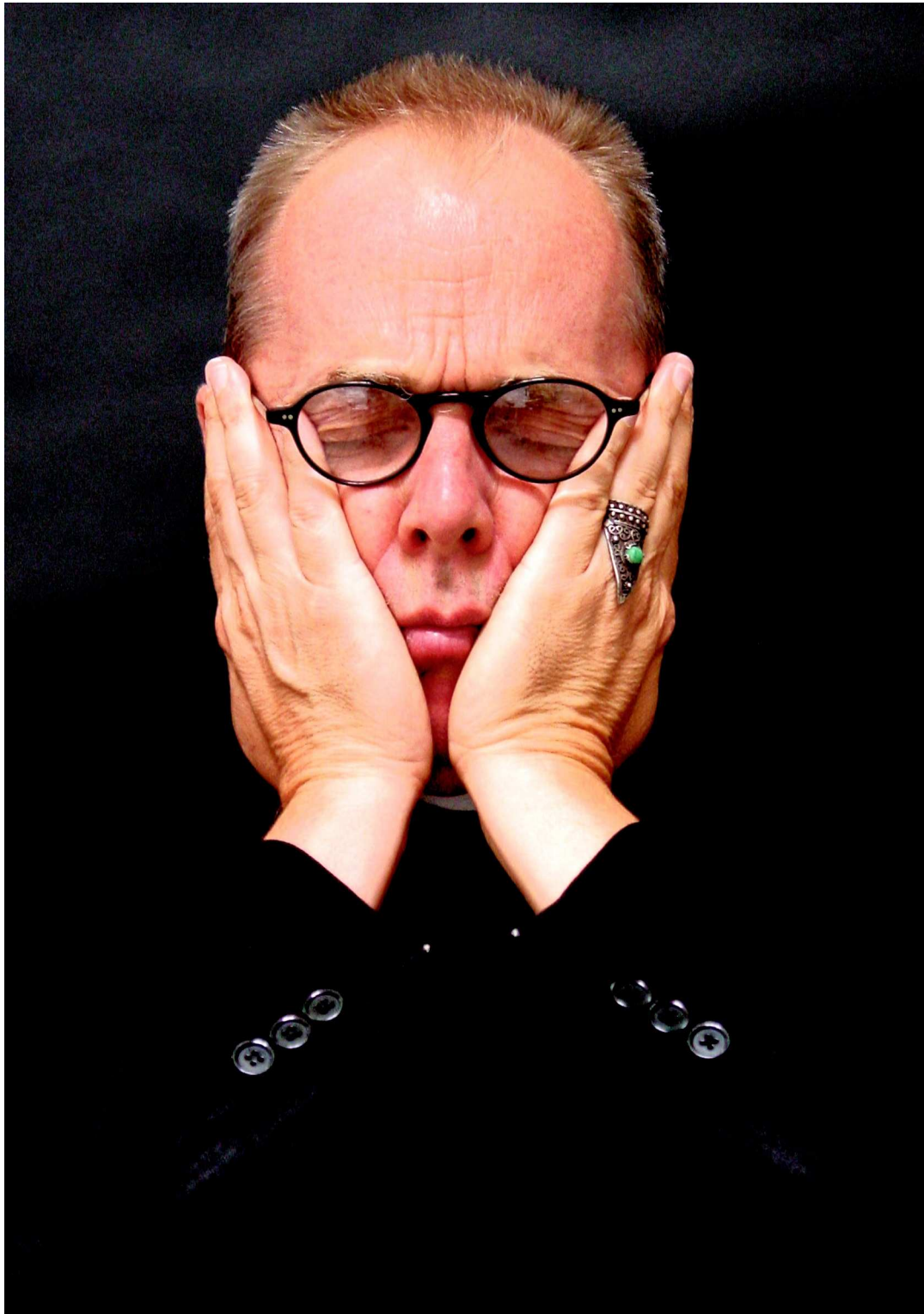
Turning away their faces, hurrying their pace because of leanness and desire  
We did not keep the bounds of human law but served our appetites like beasts





So great was that desire for eminence which drove my heart  
All acclaimed his name...now they scarcely whisper of him





Brother, the world is blind and you come from the world  
I am the pleasing siren, who in mid sea leads mariners astray





I moved through the bitter, filthy air





Why did you, in your wrath, desire to be no more?



## Paradise, Images 31-45

The glory of the One who moves all things  
Permeates the universe and glows in one part more  
And in another less.  
I was within the heaven that receives more of His light:  
And I saw things he who from that height descends,  
Forgets Or cannot speak;  
For nearing its desired end, our intellect sinks into an abyss  
So deep that memory fails to follow it.

La gloire de celui qui meut toutes choses  
Pénètre l'univers et resplendit,  
Davantage en un point et moins en un autre.  
Je suis allé dans le ciel qui prend le plus  
De sa lumière et j'ai vu des choses  
Que je ne sais ni ne puis redire qui descende de là-haut.

La Gloria di colui che tutto move  
Per l'universo penetra, e risplende  
In una parte più e meno altrove.  
Nel ciel che più de la sua luce prende  
Fu 'io, e vidi cose che redire  
Né sa né può chi di là sù discende...

(Paradise, 1. 1-6; trans. Ciardi, Wicksteed)





You wish to know, can one repair a promise unfulfilled?





From now on, the words I speak will be naked





We learn how world below is moved by world above





A new vision showed itself to me, and held me fast in its grip.





I found a sign for me to rest from war





The ravished memory swoons and falls away





A vision that sees the good and step by step moves nearer to what it sees





She again turned her gaze heavenward





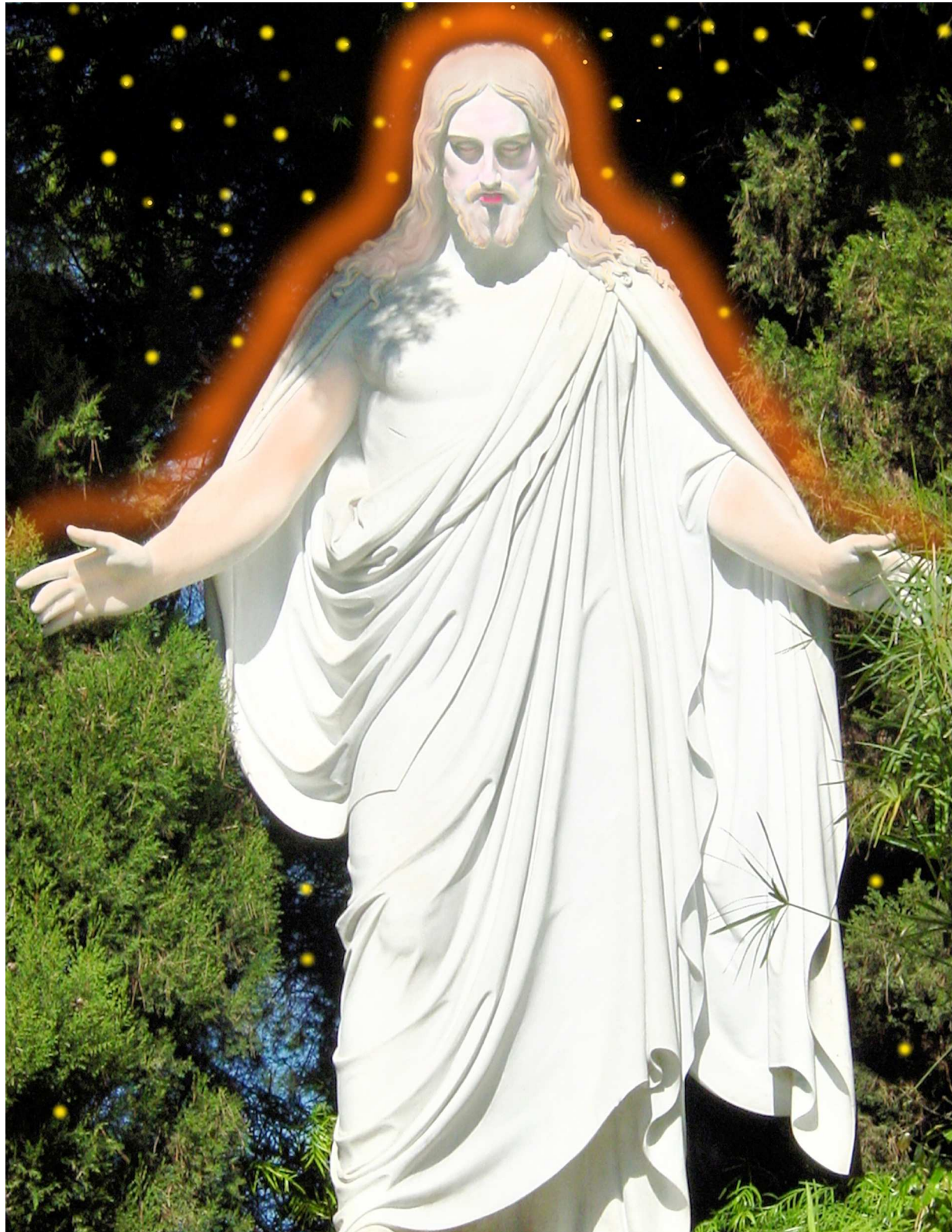
So distant is your way from the Divine





A ray of colored light returns, reflected





Let him imagine, such radiance as to undo the air





I found myself in a place where a wondrous thing drew my entire attention





Our thoughts are fixed upon the love that beautifies creation





With eyes so full of sparks of love, I almost lost my senses





I have been in that heaven



## After Paradise – Commentary

by Zelimir Koscevic

*former Chief Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb and Director, Foto Galerij Lang, Zagreb*

“The cycle of 45 photographic pictures “After Paradise” of Clayton Campbell, is definitely not a complete expression of the new post-millennial culture, but being based on Dante’s “The Divine Comedy”, this great Renaissance narrative in verses, it confirms three things: firstly, that it was entirely right to mark it as “divine” in the ancient times of the year 1555; secondly, that the Comedy is still a very stimulating reading; and thirdly, that Dante’s tercets are a superb link in the real and spiritual connection between Santa Monica and Zagreb. It is true, Dante nowhere mentions California but he does mention Croatia (Qual e colui che forse di Croatia / Viene a veder la Veronica nostra / Che per l’antica fame non sazia...), which does not imply that California didn’t exist in Dante’s time, that it was not known by then.

Since romanticism to the present time, the Comedy has put up a challenge to present with pictures the words in which Dante described his fantastic journey. Plainly enough, it has never been possible to present with pictures that which was described in words, and to be sure, words could never describe what pictures presented either. Many have been caught into the trap of colorful portrayal and descriptive paintings, even some quite good poets and painters as well. Most often the results were devastating, as for the text, so for the painting.

In his comment / textual introduction, Clayton Campbell points out that he reads the Comedy as a modern story, contemporary in its social, political and moral aspect. In that context, Dante gave impetus to Campbell to follow him in his footsteps, to see and to present with his eyes and his knowledge the fantastic world of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise of the megapolis Los Angeles is.

Well, then:

We to the place have come, where I have told thee  
Thou shalt behold the people dolorous  
Who have foregone the good of intellect.”

III/16

And after he had laid his hand on mine  
With joyful mien, whence I was comforted,  
He led me in among the secret things.

III/19

It is difficult to say, to what degree LA Erotic Convention may be regarded as Hell, but then, to some this is a truly diabolic mixture, some see in this mixture an elixir for their frustrations. One way or another, Convention is a big business which makes a lot of money. Campbell saw a travesty in this, the loss of personal consciousness, in effect, he recognized here the infernal dimension of the machinery which deprives people of the comfort of the mind. Though in the nine circles of Hell there are more than fifteen picturesque scenes, with 15 “hellish” pictures Campbell succeeded to evoke the half-crazy reality of one event – whether we want it or not – integrated into our modern world. On the pictures of Hell, as Campbell saw it, it is not people who move but their shadows, and even they are not real. It is precisely this, which is the  
the creative meeting point between “the Divine” and Campbell’s “After Paradise”.

“My portfolio of 45 photographs is of the here and now, my Los Angeles of 2005. I have made images which are “referrals”, rather than literal illustration of Dante’s work.” emphasizes Campbell. Though “the places of great miseries” have changed, and the pictures of Hell on the Day of Judgment can frighten only little children now, but the Devil’s work remains unchanged. But, hope has remained.

Therefore:

Why doth thy mind so occupy itself,  
The Master said, “that thou thy pace dost slacken?  
What matters it to thee what here is whispered?

V/13

Come after me, and let the people talk;  
Stand like a steadfast tower, that never wags  
Its top for all the blowing of the winds;



And here the artist starts contemplating. He is aware that on one side there is Hell, Paradise is still waiting for him; in the spacious waiting- room of Purgatory he imprinted all over his forehead the ideas of seven deadly sins and allowed himself a gestural comment on greed, lust, arrogance, sloth, envy, gluttony and wrath. Here Campbell is restrained. In the role of a priest, with scenes from pictures and with the gesture of his hand he gently indicates that we are all sinners and mere mortals, in other words, it is true that sin is mortal, but as we are all mortal, then death cannot be an appropriate punishment for the committed sin. Stalemate position, isn't it? But we are in Purgatory, aren't we? So, somebody falls into the infernal pit and some go to Paradise.

It is for all to see:

But ne'ertheless, all falsehood laid aside,  
Make manifest thy vision utterly,  
And let them scratch wherever is the itch;

XVII/127

Faces I saw of charity persuasive,  
Embellished by His light and their own smile,  
And attitudes adorned with every grace

XXXI/ 49

As the Erotic Convention is no Hell, nor is Forest Laws Cemetery in Los Angeles a Paradise. For reasons unknown Paradise is considered to be a place of beauty, though it is perfectly clear that this aesthetic category should be reexamined. Surely, the graceful beauty of marble sculptures cannot be ugly, so it is just surprising that they are not found in Malibu yet. They are so finely sham! But never mind that; it would take us too far from Dante, and from Campbell as well. Consequently, let us return to the cemetery as a metaphor of Paradise. Campbell leads us here on the slippery ground of an illusion , because , while above the ground marble beauties and wanton little angels speak of harmony and moral virtues, and of hope in redemption, six foot under... who knows? Is this not the Divine Comedy then?"

(Quotations from The Divine Comedy, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)





## AFTER ABU GHRAIB

My concern about human rights found expression in the series *After Abu Ghraib*. These large-scale photographs were based on the ‘trophy’ snapshots taken by American soldiers of Iraqi prisoners they were torturing and abusing at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. The photos were originally released on the *60 Minutes* television news show, April 28, 2004. The images were graphic, humiliating, and shameful and there was a public outcry. Artists like Richard Serra and Francisco Botero were moved to respond, making artwork that appropriated the gruesome images. Like these artists, I also responded, appropriating the photographs but finding my own distinct style of re-presenting them.

The media produces so much visual information that we digest hundreds of thousands of images annually. It becomes a numbing experience. Most Americans, upon seeing the Abu Ghraib photos, registered an initial distaste, but not really surprise. These reactions are a by-product of living in a violent culture surrounded by toxic images.

A few months after their April 2004 release, the Abu Ghraib story disappeared from the news. My intention in making the *After Abu Ghraib* series, between 2005 and 2007, was two fold. First, the series would be exhibited as part of a conference on torture and human rights at Pitzer College in California in 2008. Second, from a social justice stance, because of the validation of the use of torture by the Bush Administration during the war in Iraq, I wanted to participate in the public dialogue about human rights and dignity.

On a technical note, my re-presentation of the original Abu Ghraib photographs came about when I made a discovery about how I could intentionally corrupt a digital file. I had photographed the original soldiers snapshots from a computer screen, and when I attempted to download these files into my computer they became corrupted, breaking apart into pixelated abstractions. However, instead of seeing them as mistakes or ‘glitches’ to be deleted, I saw them instead as interesting visual expressions in their own right suggesting more visual possibility. They became the background layers for all the finished photographs in the *After Abu Ghraib* series, which I manipulated further in Photoshop.

Playing off the notion of moral corruption of the Abu Ghraib event and the corruption of the files themselves, I went on to further alter the corrupted digital files by programming them with different information lifted from writings by non-violent

philosophers and practitioners. I would insert these text files into the code of the picture file, save it, and then open it again as a jpg, which caused the file to corrupt even more. In this manner, I was able to further break apart the picture surface in unexpected ways. The final photographs become large and abstracted images, far removed from the original ‘trophy’ photos that people had become numb to.

My strategy in making this work is to make it approachable and encourage a conversation with the viewer concerning human rights. The *After Abu Ghraib* photographs are transformed into wall-size imagery that is striking, even beautiful. My intention is to bring the viewer initially into a relation with the picture through its abstract pictorial qualities instead of a representational message. Yet, after some reflection, it becomes apparent to the viewer that something is not right. They begin to see body parts, cut up pieces from the original image of torture, and begin to understand this is something else altogether. By then the viewer is already having an experience and the dialogue I was seeking to cultivate is hopefully under way.

When my *After Abu Ghraib* prints were coming off the Epson photo press at the Kala Workshop in Berkeley, the printers asked me why I was printing pornography? Many of the corrupted photos show piles of naked bodies, which appear very sexual in their corrupted form. The printers were surprised to hear that the source was the photos from Abu Ghraib. They assumed it was Internet pornography; so ubiquitous in our contemporary culture that it passes for the everyday. I view the Abu Ghraib photos as a form of pornography, if we consider torture beyond the pale of acceptable human behavior. In our culture, which is suffocating in imagery of sexual and physical abuse, pornography is widely accepted and tolerated. It is a small moral lapse to tacitly accept images of violence that degrade us even further in ways that are unspeakable, and suspend consideration of another person’s human rights.



“In 1928, newspaper photographer Tom Howard—acting as an official witness to an execution—strapped a miniature camera to his ankle and snapped the exact moment of Ruth Snyder’s death by electrocution. Published in the *New York Daily News* the following day this historic blurry image marked the first photographic record of death by electric chair. If Howard’s image was the benchmark for public acceptance of gruesome and lurid imagery in the late 1920s then today’s equivalent must surely be the naked, hooded and shackled Iraqi prisoners photographed by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib. Twistingly choreographed into pornographic vignettes, the blatant sadomasochistic content—prisoners piled in heaps, forced to perform degrading sexual acts amongst themselves, and in some cases with their captors—portrays a cruelty that is almost (but not quite) beyond belief. Existing as a testament to our capacity to behave egregiously they refuse to fade.

By intentionally corrupting the digital files of these insistently barbarous Abu Ghraib pictures, Los Angeles based artist Clayton Campbell has transformed them into large-scale geometric painterly works. Bands of translucent reds, blues and purples migrate across the surface shredding and obscuring as they go, allowing an indulgence in sensuous abstraction, a short-lived reprieve from the heinous acts. Resembling ancient Mesopotamian sculptural fragments—like those looted at the beginning of the US “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” the bodies detach and re-combine in surprisingly exquisite arrangements. The bands, reminiscent of those used to adjust the color image on our televisions, imply our readiness to accommodate and compromise our points of view. In a post 9-11 world are we willing to accept torture and surrender our civil liberties? What are our true colors and how far are we willing to adjust them? Campbell’s formal filter of distortion becomes a metaphor for averting our eyes—something we are only too eager to do.”

Ciara Ennis, January 2008

Director/Curator, Pitzer Art Galleries, Pitzer College





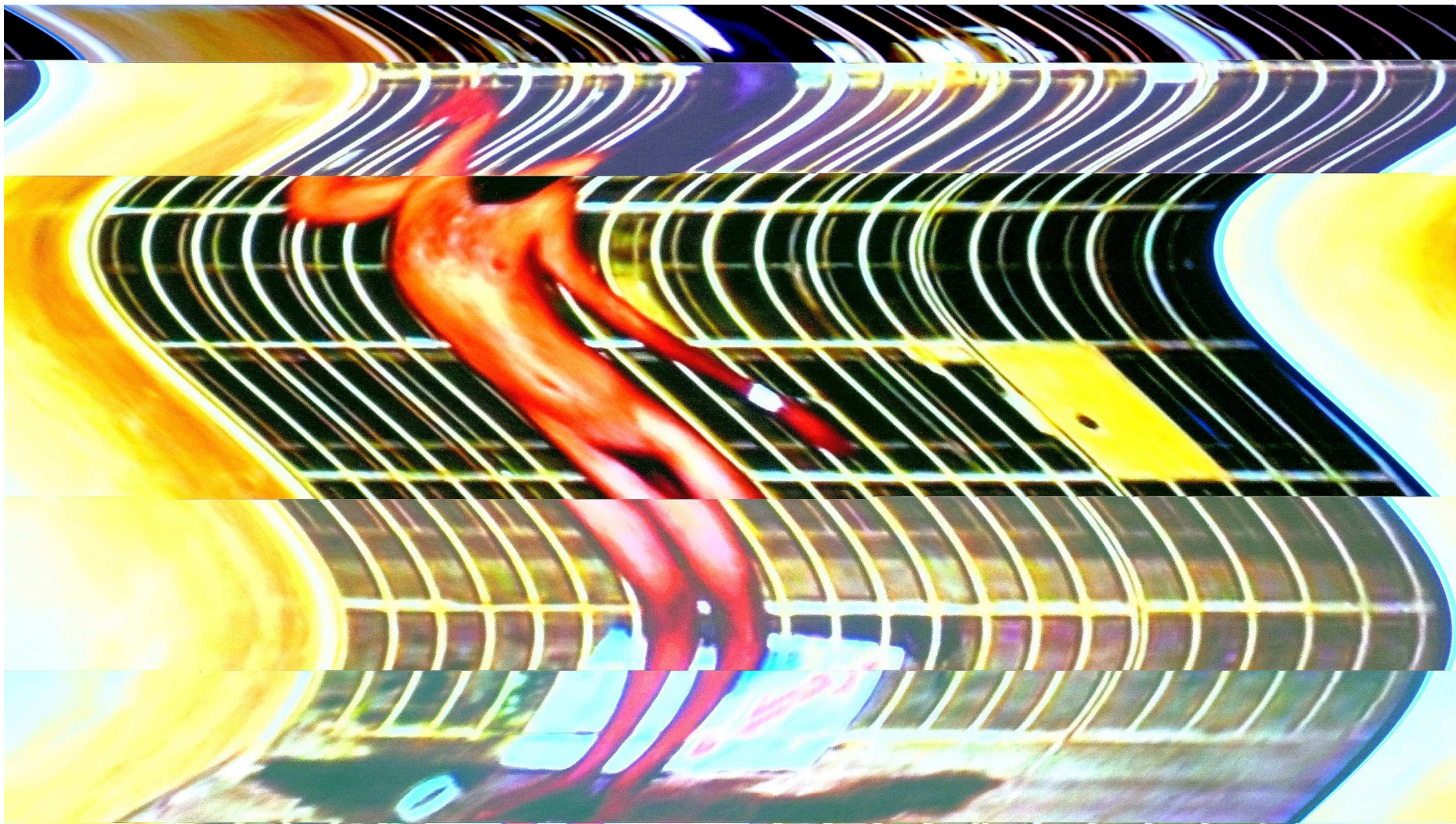
AFTER ABU GHRAIB #1





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #2





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #3





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #4





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #5





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #6





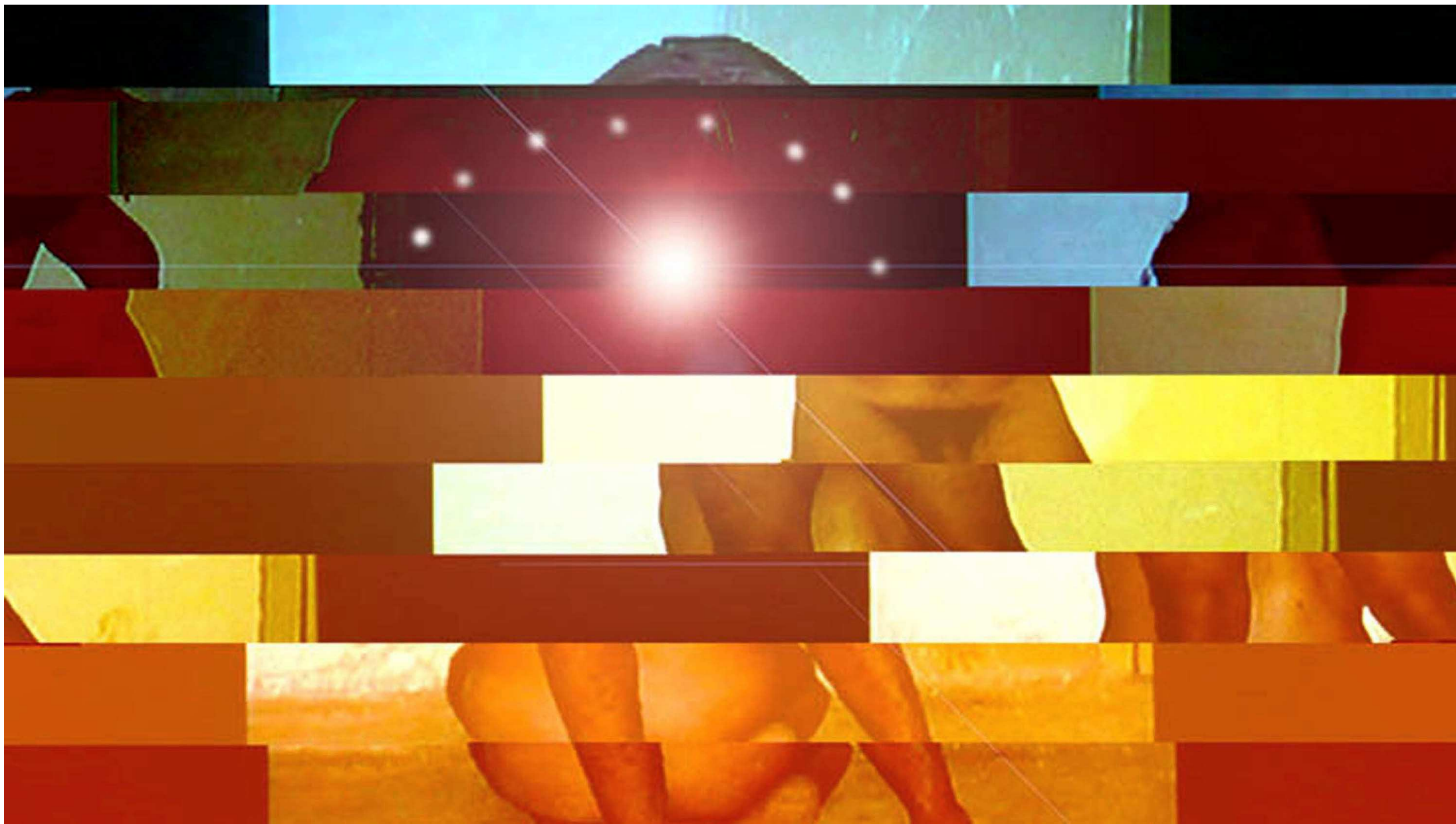
AFTER ABU GHRAIB #7





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #8





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #9





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #10





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #11





AFTER ABU GHRAIB #12





Snapshots taken by U.S. Soldiers of Iraqi Prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison



## AMERICAN HEROES (AFTER HOUDON)

A small exhibition of portrait busts of American's from the Enlightenment by French sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon was held in Los Angeles at the J. Paul Getty Museum, September 4, 2003 to January 24, 2004. At the time, I was working on the beginning of *The Divine Comedy*, photographing neo-classical sculptures at Forest Lawn Memorial in Los Angeles. I was experimenting by electronically painting my images of the sculptures and making them more life like, sort of a reference to the Pygmalion story. I decided to try this approach with the Houdon exhibition.

I was intrigued by the Houdon busts of Founding Fathers and national heroes, who constituted this nationalistic exhibition. Growing up, I had been taught a truncated history of who these men were, and how they fit into a national theme of democracy, freedom, and assumptions of cultural equity. I would later begin to unlearn these assumptions, and this is what I was wanting to question in this small series of photographs.

Houdon's sculpted portrait busts were made during the 17th Century Enlightenment, a period of immense political and social change in France and America. It was a moment when the collective view of the State shifted dramatically in Europe. Rather than being modeled on Christian ideas of society organized around the hierarchy of the Church and Monarchy, society was transitioning towards ideas of Democracy. These included clear divisions of church and state supporting the beginning of the recognition of rights of the individual. This new social contract contrasted with existing realities, and the Enlightenment became a period of critical reform and revolution.

I photographed Houdon's busts with the permission of the Getty Museum and then added color to each with Photoshop, along with a caption. George Washington became *the Humanist*; Robert Fulton, *the Industrialist*; Thomas Jefferson, *the Strategist*; John Paul Jones, *the Militarist*; and Ben Franklin, *the Technologist*. These captions have a degree of irony, as they indicate in a way, what I was not taught growing up about our American Heroes.

All of these men were products of their time, and risked their lives during the Revolutionary War for strongly held beliefs in establishing what they felt would

be a free and open society. Yet they failed to create a fully free society, to recognize women as equals, nor to give the vote to anyone who did not own property. Common among the five subjects was their involvement owning or selling slaves.

*Jefferson, the Strategist*, penned the phrase "all men are created equal" yet owned many slaves and had children with one of them. As President he pursued an expansionist policy, enacting the Louisiana Purchase, resulting in the seizure of Native American land. Yet he led the American Revolution and was a proponent of individual rights. A polymath who wrote on and was knowledgeable about science, architecture, music, agriculture, law, education, geography, and music, he is best known for drafting the Declaration of Independence.

Jefferson knew and worked with *Robert Fulton, the Industrialist*. As President, Jefferson financed some of Fulton's experiments with underwater explosives; both believed this new generation of terrifying weaponry could end war as they knew it. This was not a new idea and has reappeared over the centuries. The Nobel Peace Prize is based on this misguided conceit. Alfred Nobel's invention of dynamite was also supposed to end of war, as his generation knew it. And, in our time, so are nuclear weapons. Witness the surreally named policy of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) as a final deterrent to the unthinkable destruction of humankind. Jefferson and Fulton codified what would become the historic relationship between government and the military industrial complex. Fulton's famed invention of the steamboat became central to the transportation of slaves on the Mississippi River Delta, contributing the expansion of the Slave Trade by greatly increasing the volume of slave trafficking with an efficient means of mass transit that could carry large loads of chattel cargo long distances in short periods of time.

*John Paul Jones, the Militarist* was actually a Scotsman, and spent little time in the Americas. A career militarist, he came to the Colonies fleeing a murder charge in 1773. He quickly rose to the ranks of ships captain and led the famous sea battle with the frigate *Bonhomme Richard* (named in honor of Benjamin Franklin) against the British *Serapis*, defeating it in close battle. This one encounter ensured him lasting fame. Afterwards he departed for Russia, still a soldier of fortune. There he was accused of raping a 12-year old girl. Dishonored, he fled to Paris and died suddenly at the age of 45. He represents the amorality in militarism, and how it has

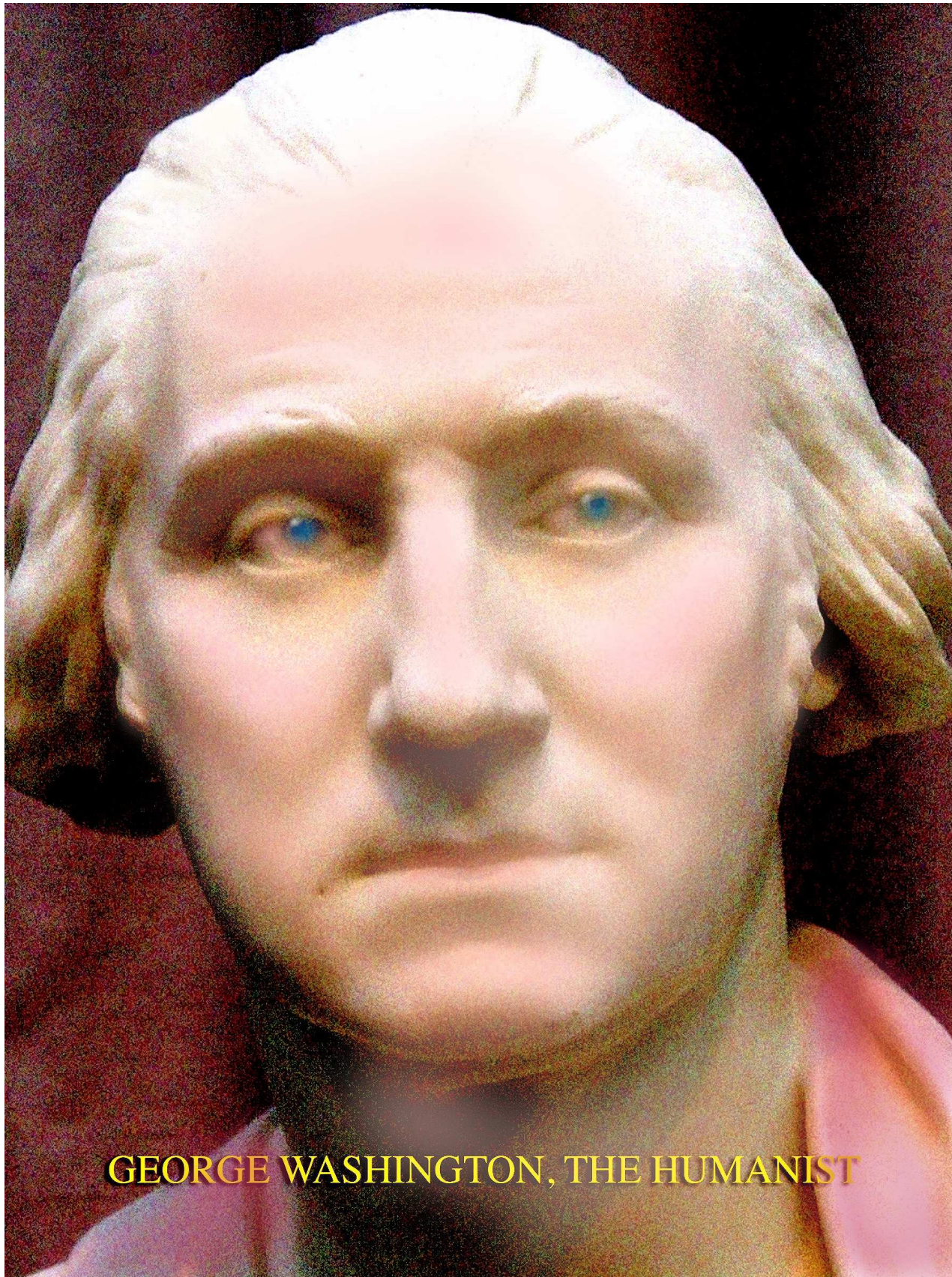


come to characterize the American postwar mindset as a world power.

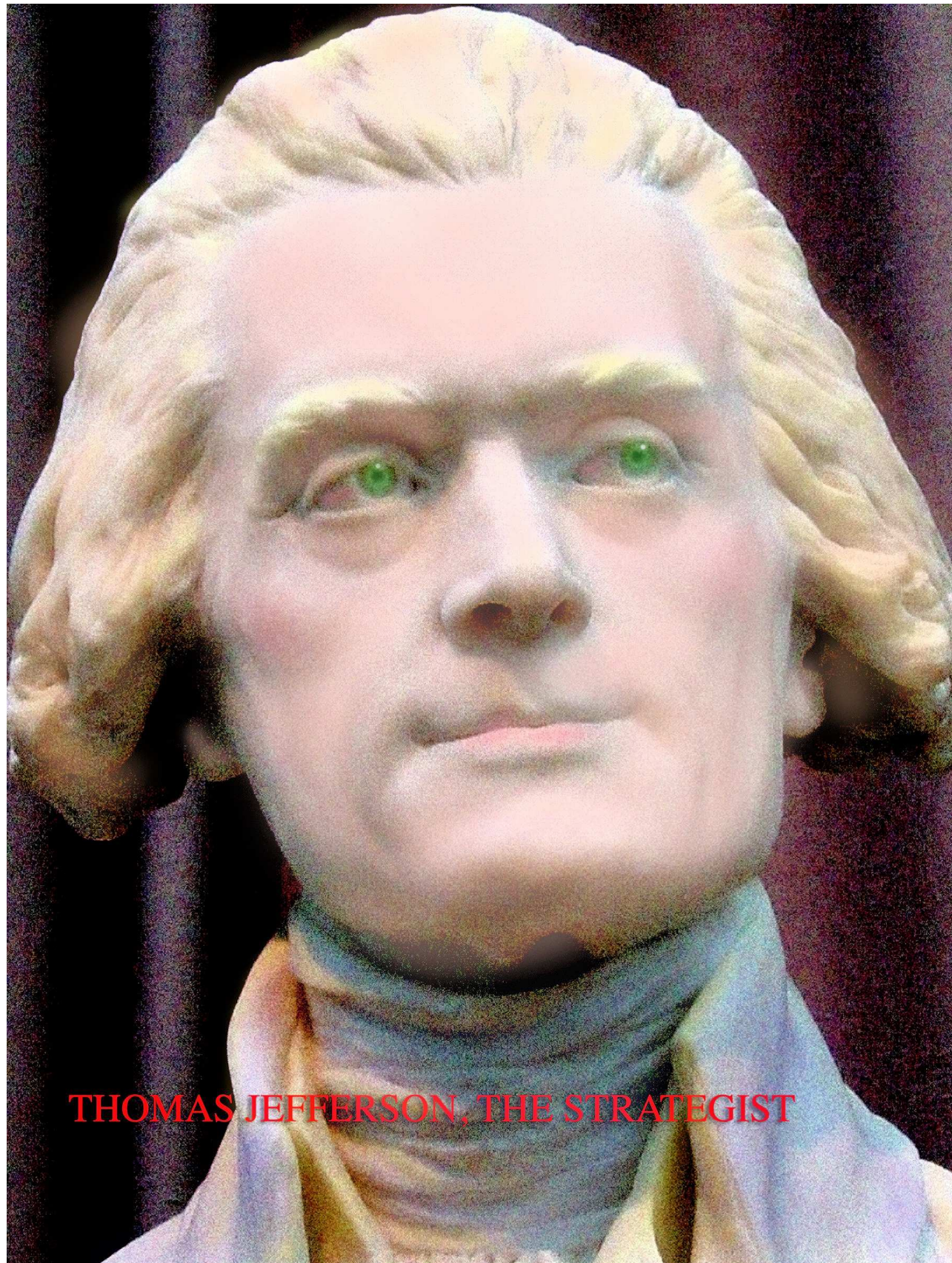
*Ben Franklin, the Technologist* is perhaps the most interesting person to me in the series. He was many things in his lifetime: a printer, a postmaster, an ambassador, an author, a scientist, and a Founding Father. Franklin is the one person to have signed the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Treaty of Alliance with France (1778), the Treaty of Paris establishing peace with Great Britain (1783) and the U.S. Constitution (1787). He seemed to embody the can-do American spirit of invention, ingenuity, and freethinking. I grew up hearing about his Poor Richards Almanac, and thinking of his witty aphorisms. Unfortunately, he could utter other opinions of a more trenchant nature. He also showed himself to be suspicious of many "Others:" disparaging "low women," Catholics, and Jews; decrying "alien" German immigrants who would "swarm into our settlements"; labeling Native Americans as "drunken savages who delight in war and take pride in murder," and should be "pursued with large, strong, and fierce dogs." African Americans he described as "sullen, malicious, revengeful" and "by nature thieves." It is a set of contradictions that are extreme and in some ways hard to reconcile.

In *American Heroes (After Houdon)* I question the received histories in our dominant cultural canon. Growing up, I was not taught in school about the contradictions and complexities of American history. Instead I learned outside the classroom, through current events, from people of color, studying my ancestral history, or by observing changing social and political conditions. Other artworks of mine such as *The Map Paintings*, *Children of Hiroshima*, and many individual photographs have investigated our national narratives and their perpetuation through a distorted lens of privilege and entitlement. Once the veil of Nationalism is pulled away, our heroes tend to fall off the pedestals they occupy to uphold a narrative supporting incumbent power. Yet *American Heroes (After Houdon)* is also a commentary suggesting that while heroes can be inconsistent and imperfect, they still contain the possibility of learning, growing, and understanding even when our reach exceeds our grasp. History, at best, is a conglomeration of many stories; flexible, malleable, constantly revised, changing, truthful, and at best wisely understood through the crucible of time.













ROBERT FULTON, THE INDUSTRIALIST





JOHN PAUL JONES, THE MILITARIST











THE ARTIST CLAYTON CAMPBELL REFEREES THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION THE "REAL DEAL" EVANDER HOLYFIELD



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