

**MICHAEL
BISHOP**







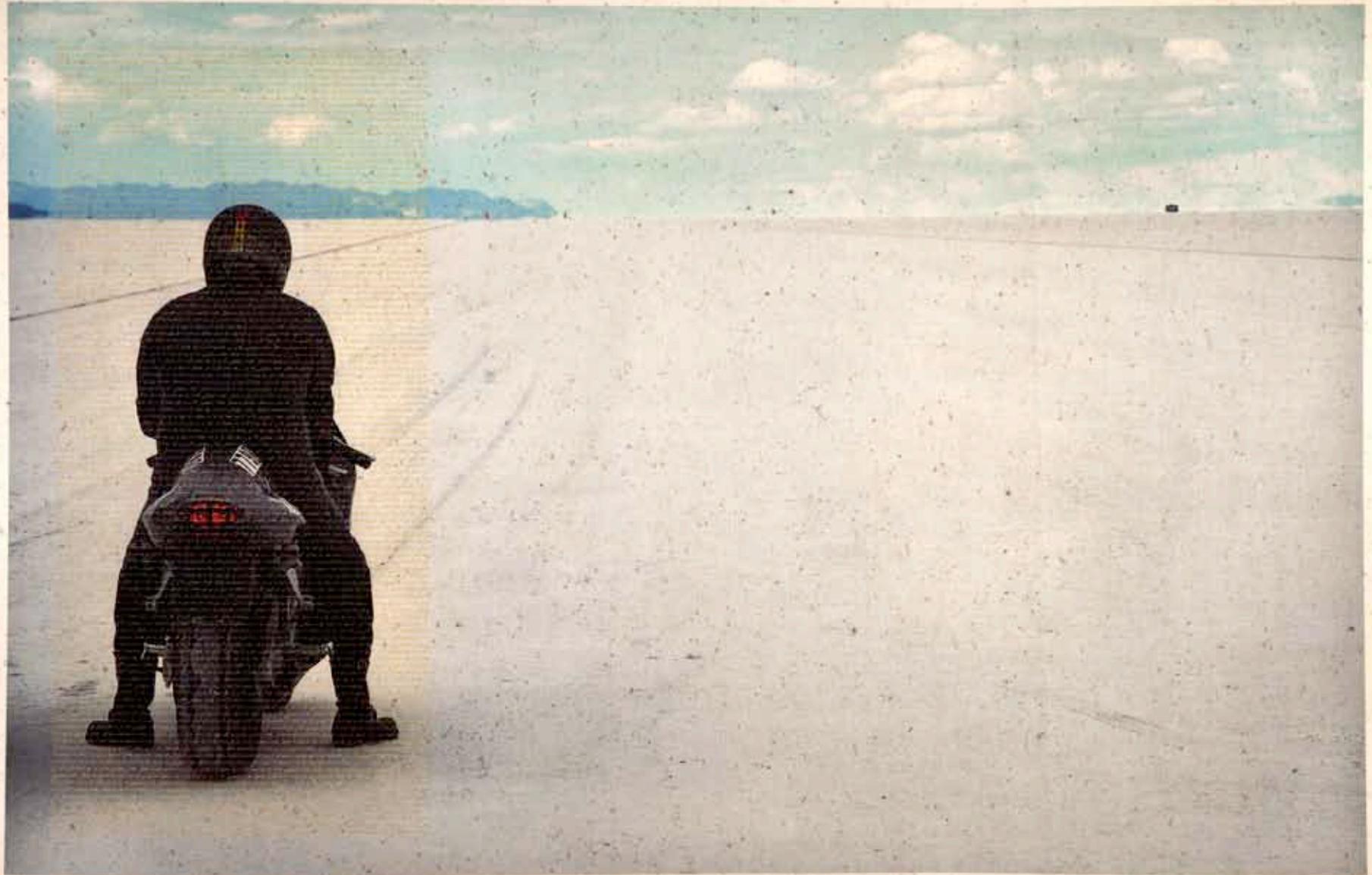
Tilt 28
2005-06,
Resurfaced
2010

TRUST

The little book you're looking at includes images of works Michael Bishop has made over the last six years, as well as one piece he made six years before that. The symmetry between these two spans of time may be accidental. Or it may be intentional. And that is the beauty of Bishop's enigmatic art: It lets us know that we do not need to know the precise differences between will and circumstance to find meaning, and that art's magic often happens when choice and chance work in concert, despite our tendency to think of them as opposites.

At once bold, direct, and loaded, as well as supple, oblique, and mysterious, Bishop's sculptural installations, which include printed images and texts in Farsi, English, and German, reveal that letting go of control often leads to more interesting discoveries, unimagined connections, and unexpected pleasures than holding on tightly does. If anything is certain in Bishop's doubt-inducing works, it's that losing one's way is often the best way to go. His conundrum-loving pieces demonstrate that our need to know everything, quickly and clearly, is what ultimately keeps us in the dark—stubbornly unaware of the myriad mysteries that make everyday life captivating, enchanting, and worth contemplating, long into the future.

Slow-brewed satisfactions, mixed with memories and fantasies, are Bishop's specialty, and he serves them up with abundance in two- and three-dimensional works whose motifs and materials echo off of one another, catching us in a web of interconnectedness that recalls the Internet, except for its physicality, sensuality, and silence. Like the sphinx, Bishop's wonderfully puzzling works are always open to further interpretations, their meanings never tidily wrapped up or conveyed by easily understood messages. At their best, experiences of his evocative, difficult-to-pin-down pieces cannot be





Oars
2004-06
Resurfaced
2011

translated into words, their slippery suggestiveness hovering just beyond the horizon of what fits into the conventional categories by which we comprehend the world and everything in it.

The multiplicity of meanings that circulate within and between and among Bishop's multi-part works give his oeuvre an anti-authoritarian ethos that is complex and subtle. Neither defiant, like standard, in-your-face activism (which subjugates aesthetics to mere message-mongering), nor decorative, like art-for-art's-sake exercises (which ignore the world and treat art as an end in itself), Bishop's curiously indeterminate arrangements of ordinary things made of unusual materials occupy a strange no-man's-land in which no single perspective, philosophy, or outlook accounts for everything that takes place within it, not to mention the diverse and distinct meanings, associations, and connections that spill out of his works, whenever a viewer engages them actively and imaginatively.

In a nutshell, Bishop's art makes a mockery of the cut-and-dried finality of certainty by making uncertainty look so much richer, more nuanced, and fascinating. Whispering, hinting, and inviting intimate intuitions, rather than shouting, screaming, and making authoritative pronouncements, his gently subversive works leave no room for the absolutism of fixed, singular meanings or the dogma of self-validating systems, whatever their shape, stripe, or color. Befuddling conundrums are his art's modus operandi. At a time when much public discourse is partisan and polarizing, driven by us-versus-them divisiveness and me-against-the-world self-righteousness, it's refreshing, even heartening, to

come across Bishop's works, whose thoughtful silence opens up, rather than shuts down, discussion. This leaves viewers with great freedom, along with responsibility.

A large part of the power of Bishop's open-ended art resides in the fact that it invites, even insists, that viewers hold at least two incompatible, if not conflicting, ideas in their heads simultaneously. Doing so is great practice for living in a world in which no single belief system explains absolutely everything—and knowledge, along with belief, are imperfect tools that we use to try to get to the truth. To entertain competing, even conflicting viewpoints in our own minds makes us more likely to recognize the value of other perspectives, worldviews, and outlooks—all of which exist in the minds of others. This basic recognition allows us to see the futility of perceiving the world and its diverse cultures through a single lens or ideology. It also suggests that not knowing what's going on is the first step in figuring out what is, and that, conversely, presuming to know it all from the start ensures ignorance, which, if complemented and reinforced by like-minded others, leads to pigheadedness and worse—demeaning behavior based in prejudice.

Modern life may be absurd, even loony, but it still makes sense to try to understand it as fully and as accurately as possible: intuitively, emotionally, and intellectually, as well as scientifically, poetically, and artistically. This is what Bishop's art is up to. Based in democratic principles that are nothing if not experiential, his works do not tell us what to think so much as they strive to get us to think for ourselves: consciously, critically, and with consequences that go well beyond the ideas we start off with, especially those that seem so obvious that we don't think twice about them.

The earliest work depicted in this little book puts misunderstanding front and center. Think of *Like Two Ships in the Night* (2000) as a sort of visual instruction manual for the 16 other pieces presented: a model of the ways they function, a metaphor for the ways they operate, a kind of emblem of the concerns that unfold in Bishop's works from 2006-2012. *Like Two Ships in the*



FOREGROUND:
**Like Two Ships
in the Night**
2000

BACKGROUND:
**Hot Code:
Stuxnet**
2011



Night takes its title from a phrase that compares people engaged in a conversation to a pair of ships sailing past each other under the cover of darkness, each steering clear of the other to prevent a collision. The phrase describes conversations in which each party talks past the other, never connecting or even coming close enough to have a meaningful exchange—in other words, a real conversation, in which the unpredictable give-and-take, back-and-forth of dialogue unfolds. By juxtaposing a ship and a horse, Bishop emphasizes the distance between words and intentions, speaking and listening, hearing and understanding. Rather than making a piece that illustrates a standard bit of folk wisdom, he uses his art to suggest that getting things wrong sometimes leads to epiphanies. The topsy-turvy incompatibility between the ocean liner and the inverted horse draws our imaginations into the action, inviting us to make small and great leaps that leave us suspended in a world of continuous possibility.

Like ships and horses, art is an old-fashioned mode of conveyance, a form of communication that implies movement between two locations, even if this transport is imaginative, and takes place entirely within the mind's eye—whether on land, sea, or more abstractly, via language or computer code. Bishop's next group of works complicates the relationship set up by *Like Two Ships in the Night*. In *Oars* (2004-06) and *Tilt 28* (2005-06), he multiplies single elements so that time seems to slow down to a snail's pace. In *Floating Beam* (2007) and *Miniatures* (2010), he creates gently surreal tableaux, uncommonly self-referential works that seem to belong to a reality too dreamy to be literal. But even in the realm of the literal, Bishop smuggles ambiguity into the picture. Vessels, after all, can be watercraft of all shapes and sizes as well as teacups and shot glasses, not to mention works of art: handmade containers artists use to convey all sorts of meaning. In all four pieces, Bishop condenses and intensifies the sense of odd, neither-this-nor-that incommensurability of *Like Two Ships in the Night*, either by cutting oars in half and casting them in iron, or by creating accessible scenarios in which ordinary items take on the weight of talismans that recall those moments when words get stuck on the tip of your tongue—when mind and body don't work in concert and it's impossible to say

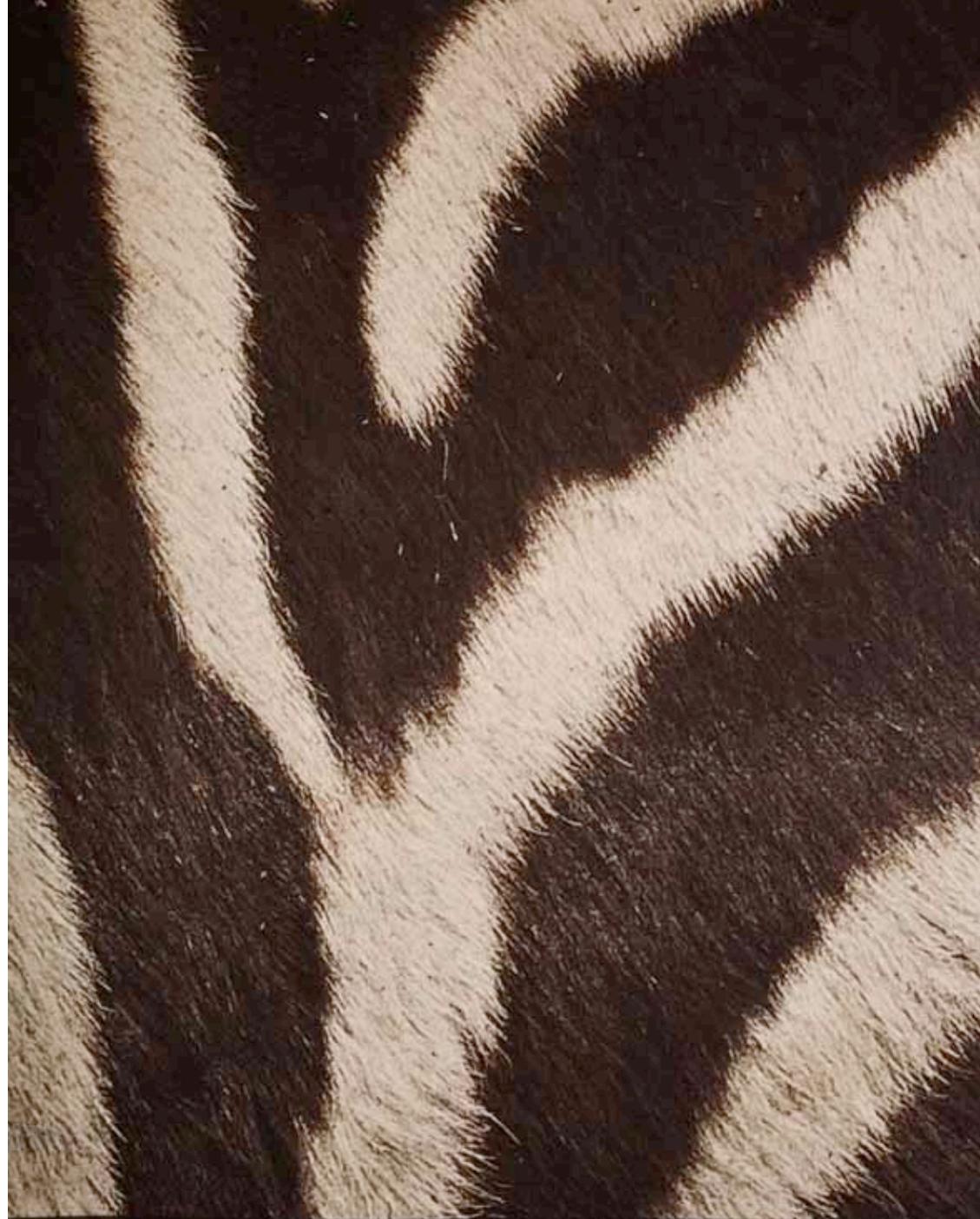
something you know you know. That maddening sense of division—of being out of synch with what you know and your ability to convey it—builds in Bishop’s most recent pieces, which move from the interior world of individual recollections to the shared space of social life.

Boats, submarines, hot rods, and motorcycles appear frequently, each highly specialized vehicle paired with words, codes, or parts of an old-fashioned gramophone. In *The Substance of Nothing* (2010), *The Substance of Nothing, Nuclear* (2011), and *Incommensurable Floating Exchange* (2011), Bishop pairs a gramophone’s detached horn with various watercraft, suggesting parallels between sound waves and those that roll across oceans or lap at lakeshores, all creating rhythms and patterns that can be ‘read’ differently, depending on knowledge, interest, and purpose. The beneath-the-surface secrecy of submarines takes visible shape in *Hot Code: Stuxnet* (2011), which depicts on a huge sheet of industrial felt, a pair of harbor-dredging boats across which Bishop has printed the malicious computer code the CIA and MOSAD purportedly used to sabotage Iran’s uranium enrichment program.

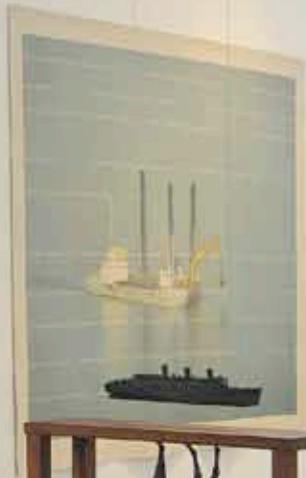
Written declarations and images of wheeled vehicles designed for speed appear in similarly large works printed on industrial felt: *Slammed English*, *Slammed Farsi*, *Salt*, and *Timing* (all 2011). Rather than treating words as captions that specify, clarify, and define an image’s meaning, Bishop uses language to prevent viewers from thinking that appearance and reality are identical, and that truth can be captured by the confluence of the two realms or, equally, by the two modes of communication. Instead, his multi-layered works put viewers in the driver’s seat, where we have to think quickly, and ponder endlessly, the mystery Bishop finds almost everywhere: between nature’s organic cycles and culture’s mechanical systems; between people at prayer and the rhythmic throb of masterfully tuned engines; and between a past filled with more mystery than we can make sense of, other than to say that the future holds even more.

Bishop’s newest pieces, including *Black & Brown, german, Snow*, *Black & Brown, english* and *Zebra* (all 2012), are among his most poetic pairings of simple pictures and simple stories. These images of funky plumbing, overlapping tire tracks, and zebra stripes are flatfooted, point-blank, and down-to-earth, nothing fancy or artsy fartsy. The stories are similar. More like parables than fully elaborated scenes from novels or movies, they are conveyed by narrators whose anonymity Bishop protects. He lets them speak plainly about escape and transcendence, entrapment and danger, so that we can experience these existential adventures as our own—with no guarantee of what they might mean and only our wits to make sense of them.

David Pagel



tall and thin with a scraggly beard, maybe from Iowa. He hung
away. He always approached from the west; you could make him
; when he was close enough he flung his body backwards and jer
as higher than the day before, then slammed to the ground. B

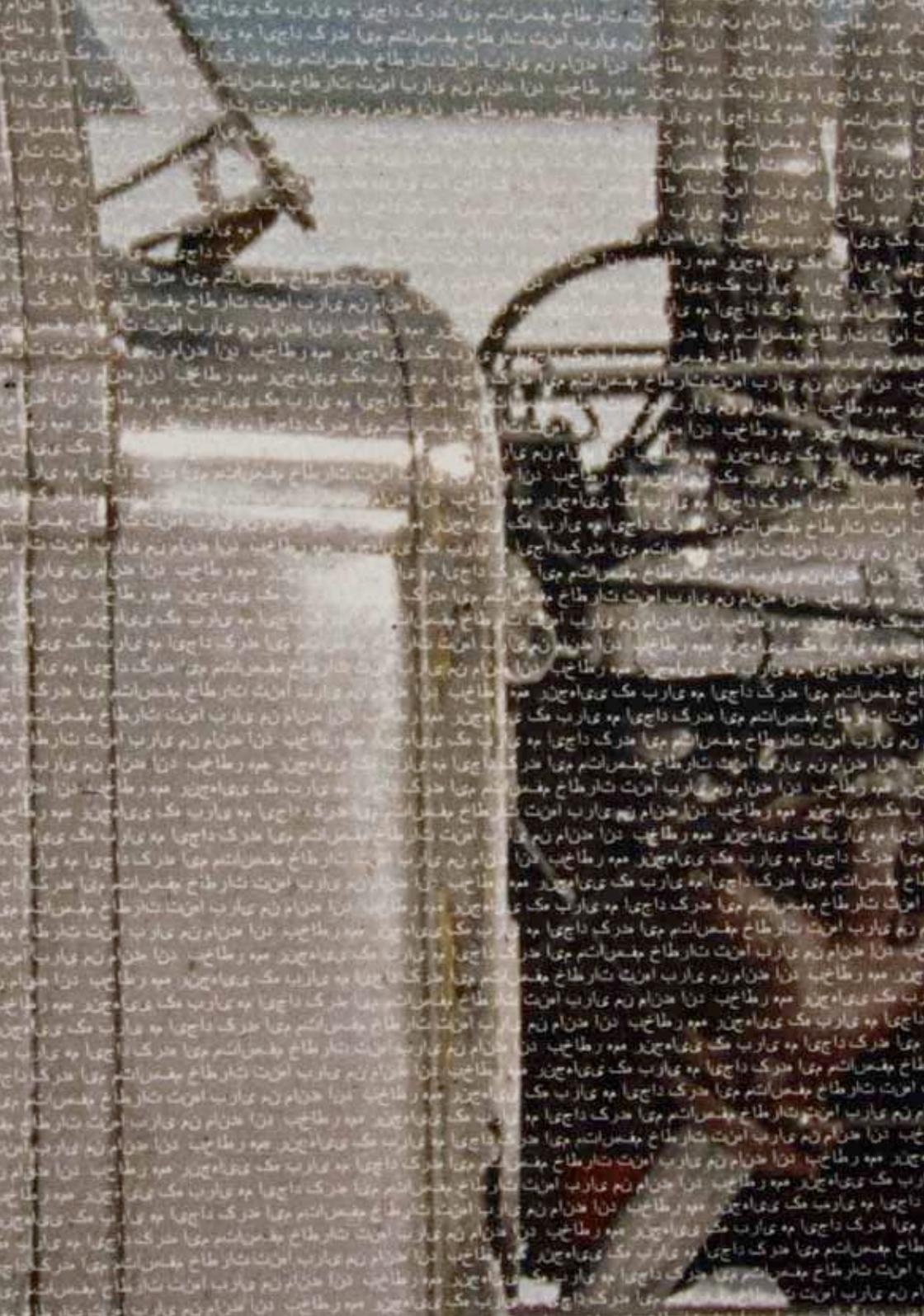


FOREGROUND:
Floating Beam (detail) 2007

CENTER:
Like Two Ships in the Night 2000

BACKGROUND,
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Slammed English 2011
Hot Code: Stuxnet 2011
The Substance of Nothing, Nuclear 2011
Tilt 28 2005-06 (Modified 2010)





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FOREGROUND:
**Incommensurable
Floating Exchange** 2011

BACKGROUND:
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
**The Substance of
Nothing, Nuclear** 2011
Timing 2011
Slammed Farsi 2011





FOREGROUND:
Floating Beam 2007
BACKGROUND,
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Salt 2011
Oars 2004-06

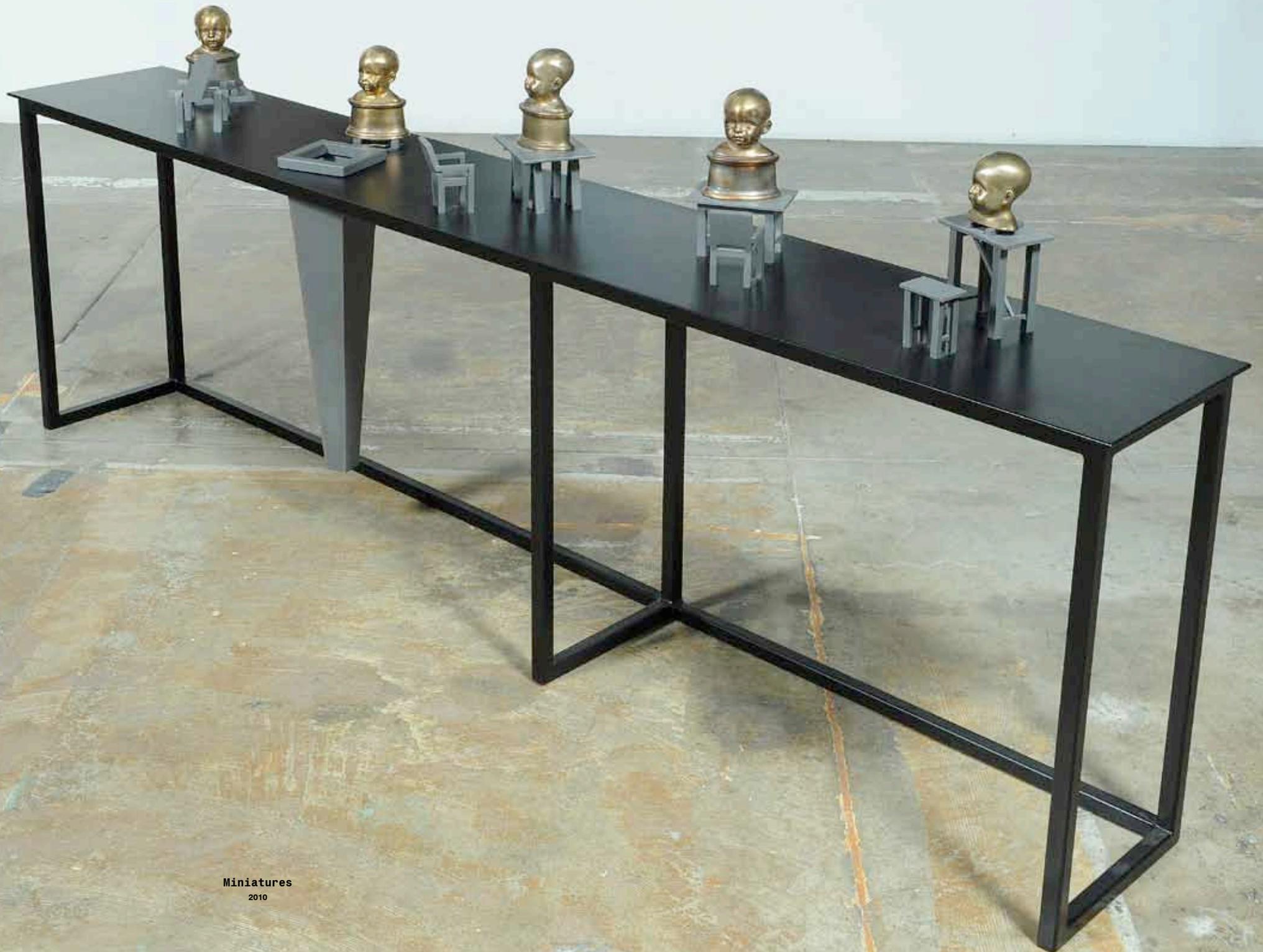




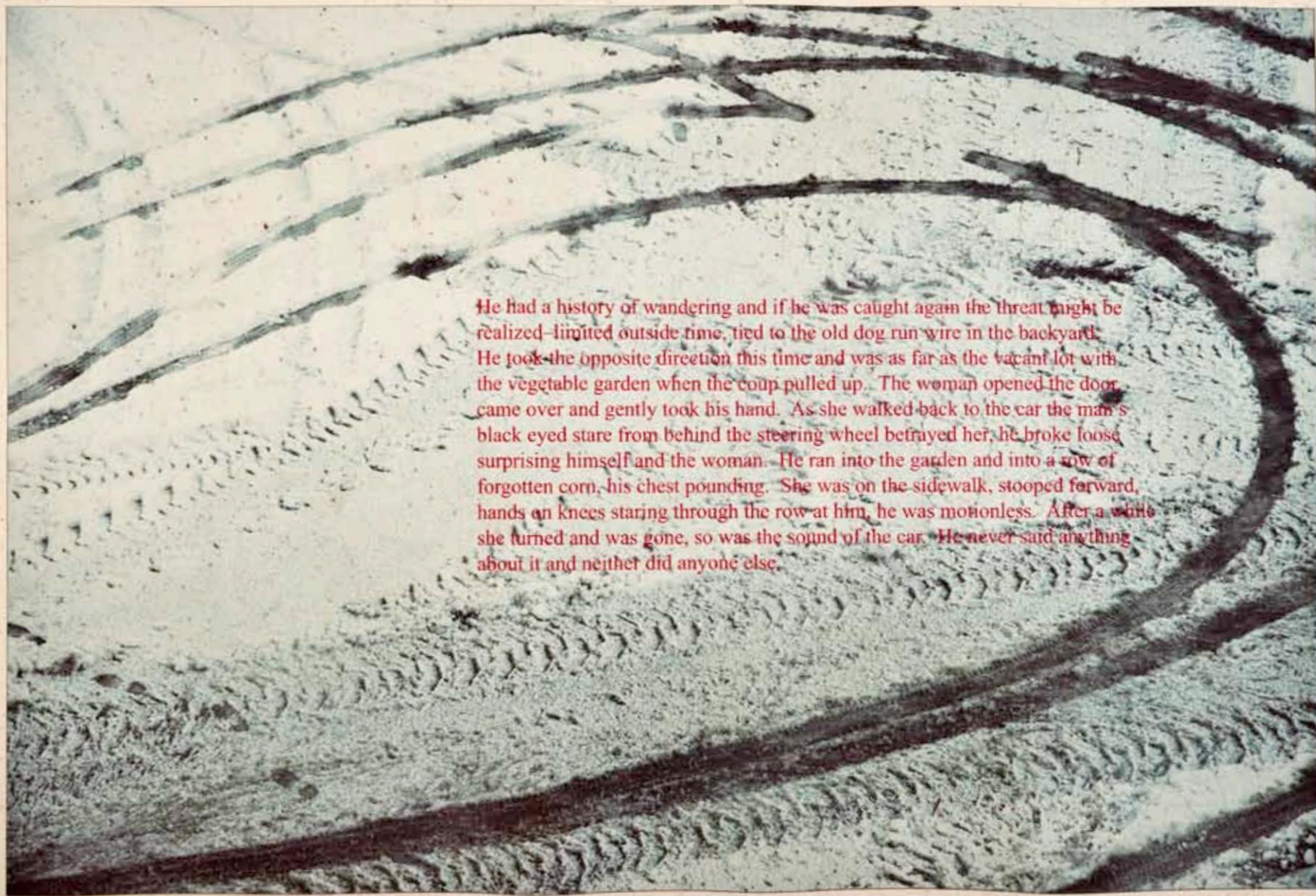
**The Substance of Nothing,
Nuclear (detail)**

2011

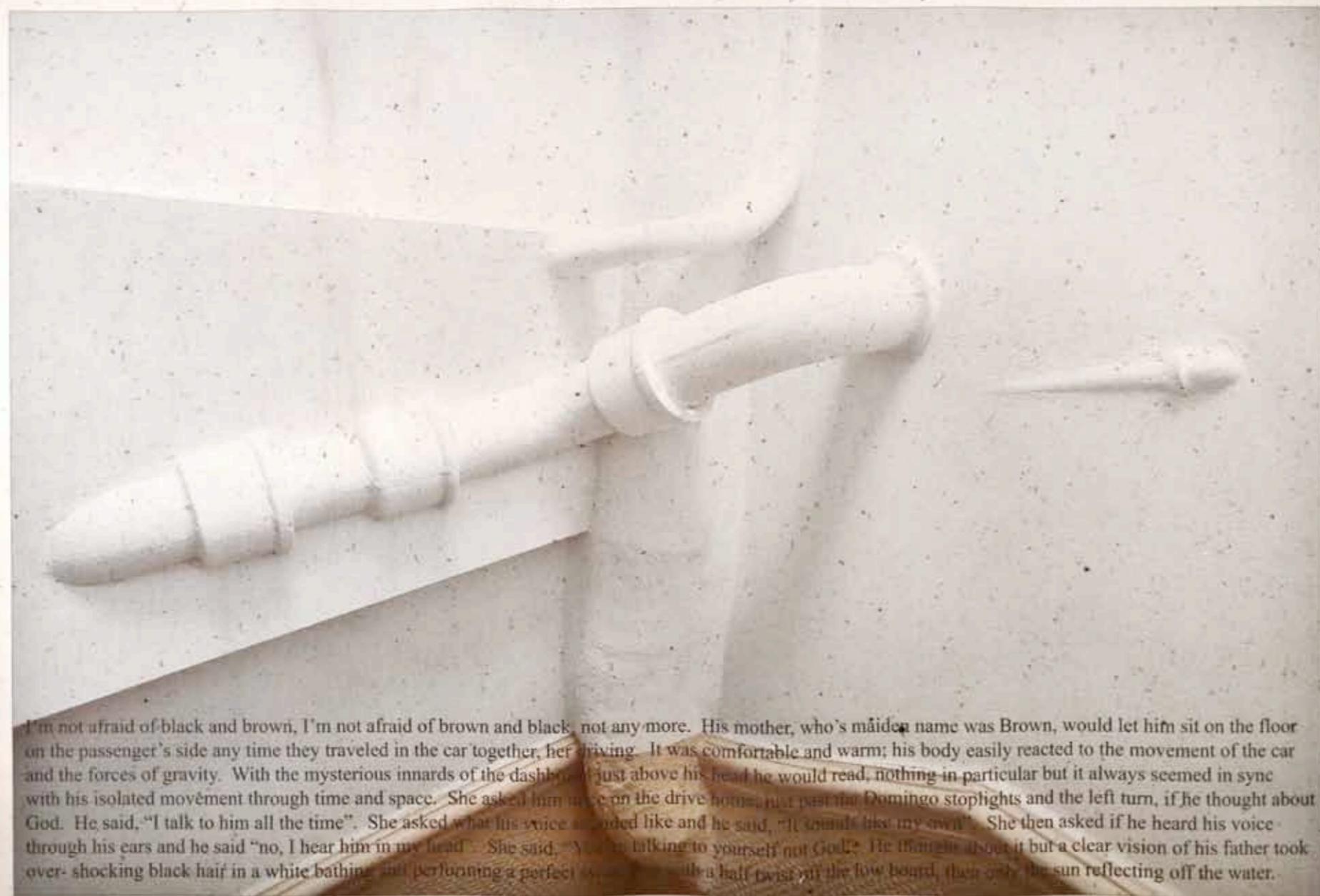




Miniatures
2010



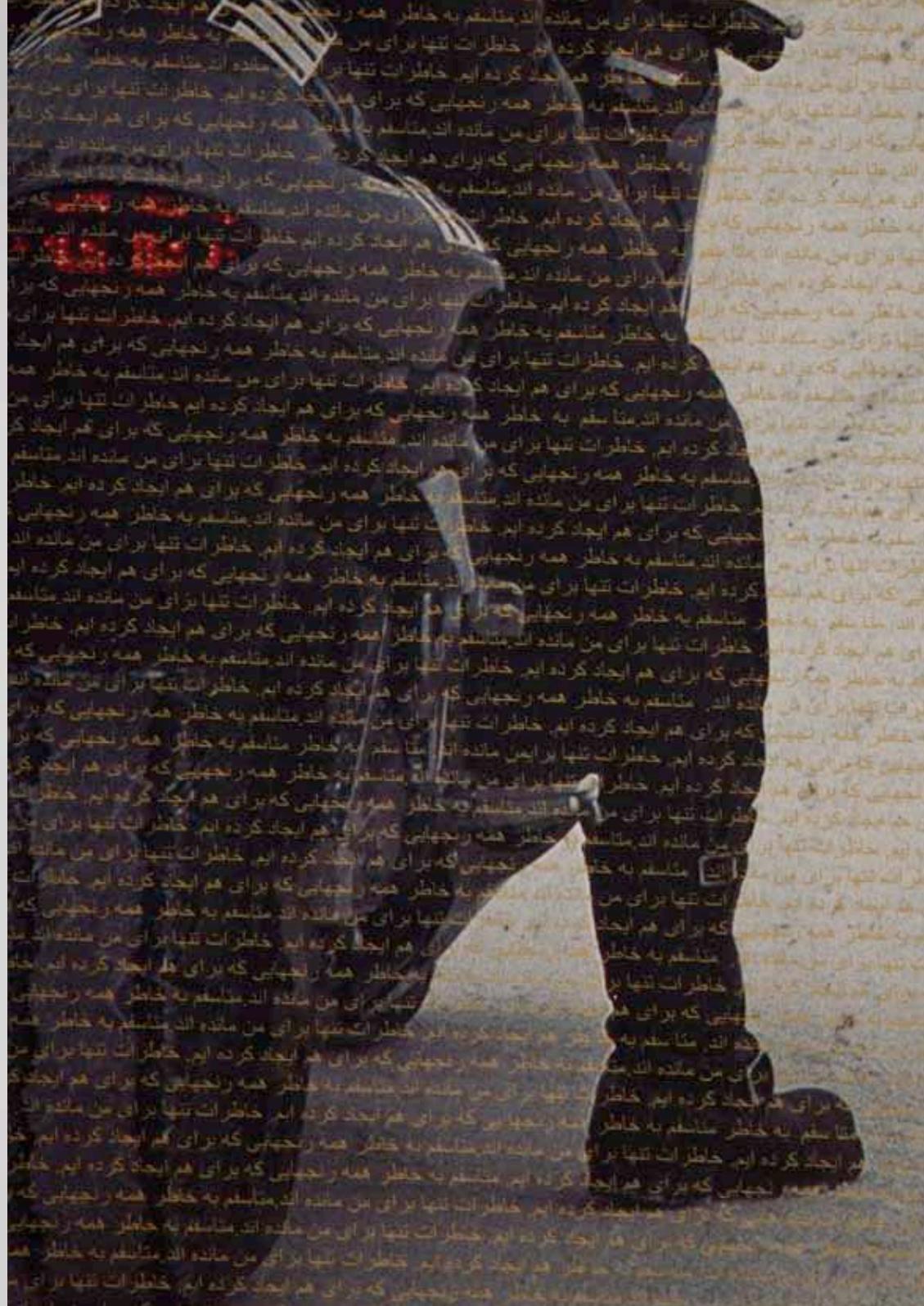
He had a history of wandering and if he was caught again the threat might be realized—limited outside time, tied to the old dog run wire in the backyard. He took the opposite direction this time and was as far as the vacant lot with the vegetable garden when the coup pulled up. The woman opened the door, came over and gently took his hand. As she walked back to the car the man's black eyed stare from behind the steering wheel betrayed her, he broke loose surprising himself and the woman. He ran into the garden and into a row of forgotten corn, his chest pounding. She was on the sidewalk, stooped forward, hands on knees staring through the row at him, he was motionless. After a while she turned and was gone, so was the sound of the car. He never said anything about it and neither did anyone else.



I'm not afraid of black and brown, I'm not afraid of brown and black, not any more. His mother, who's maiden name was Brown, would let him sit on the floor on the passenger's side any time they traveled in the car together, her driving. It was comfortable and warm; his body easily reacted to the movement of the car and the forces of gravity. With the mysterious innards of the dashboard just above his head he would read, nothing in particular but it always seemed in sync with his isolated movement through time and space. She asked him once on the drive home, just past the Domingo stoplights and the left turn, if he thought about God. He said, "I talk to him all the time". She asked what his voice sounded like and he said, "It sounds like my own". She then asked if he heard his voice through his ears and he said "no, I hear him in my head". She said, "You're talking to yourself not God." He thought about it but a clear vision of his father took over- shocking black hair in a white bathing cap performing a perfect backflip with a half twist on the low board, then only the sun reflecting off the water.



The Substance
of Nothing
2011





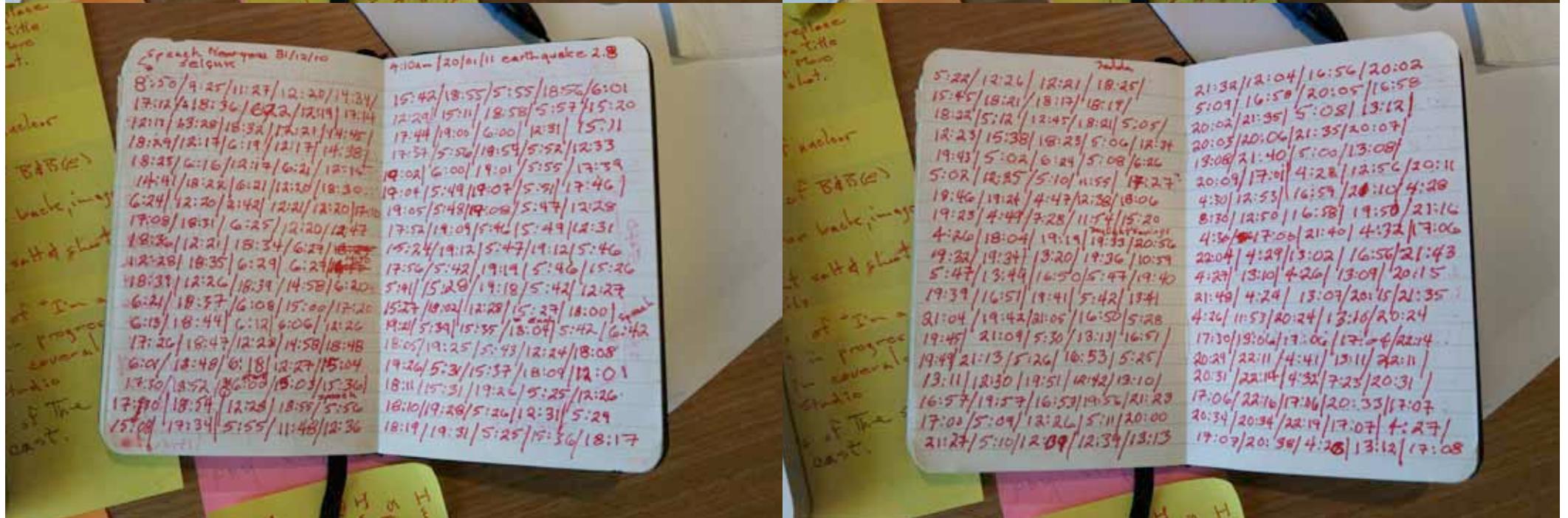
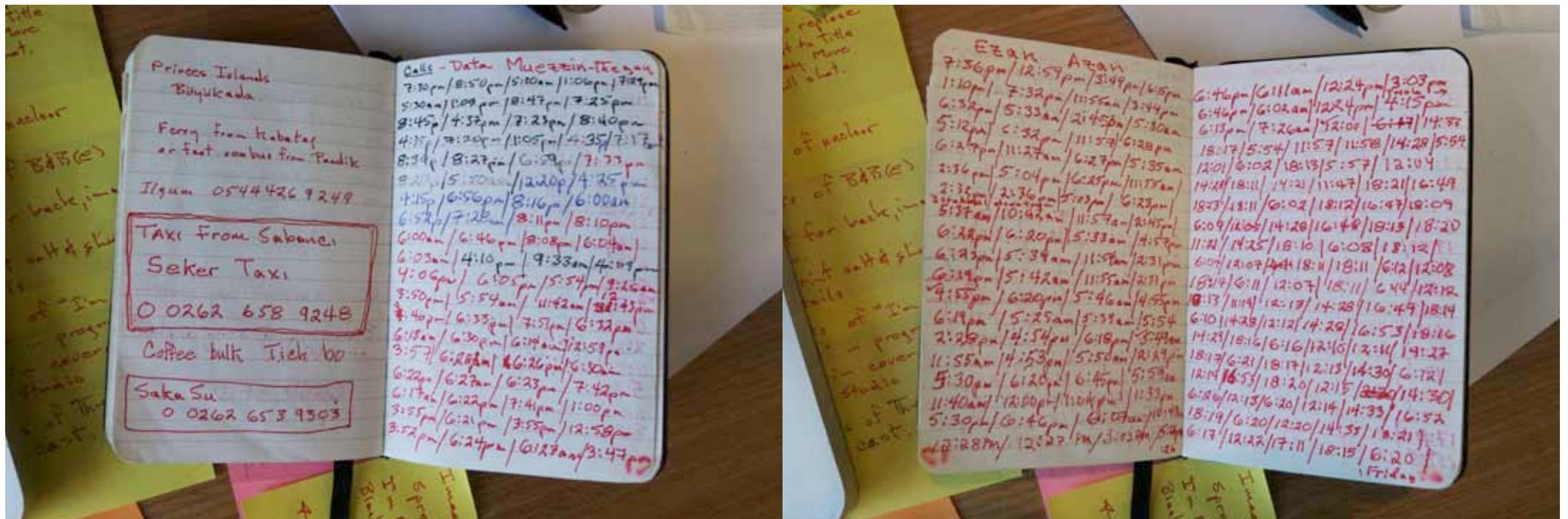
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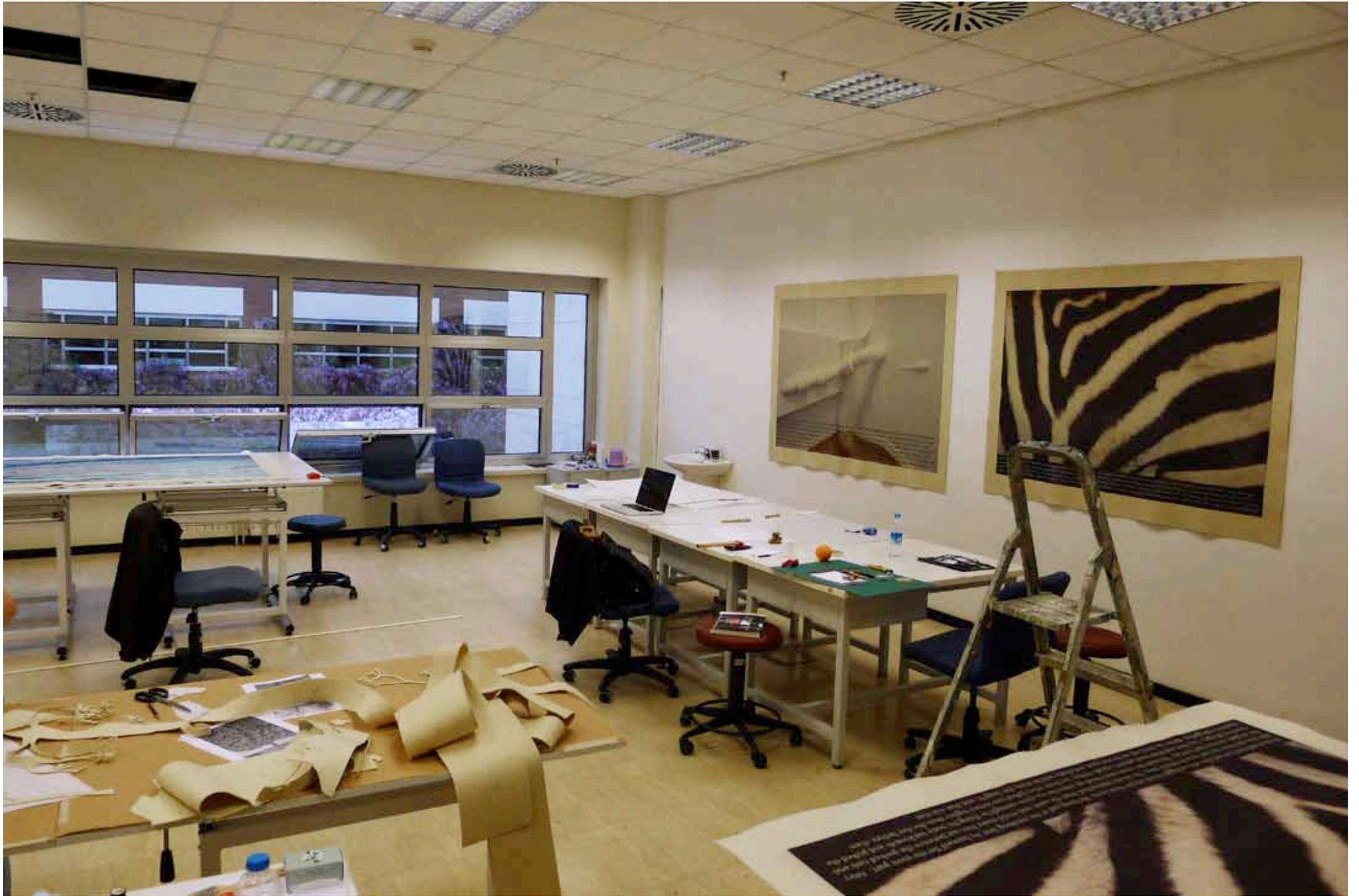
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He said, "I talk to him all the time". She ask



Istanbul 1077 Studio, 2012



Journal, data/ezan collection 2011-12; first four pages.



Istanbul 1077 Studio, 2012

LIST OF WORKS



Black & Brown, english

2012; edition of 3, 57.9"h x 82.7"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



Black & Brown, german

2012; edition of 3, 57.9"h x 82.7"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



Floating Beam

2007; 46.0"h x 36.0"w x 192.0"d,
Cast yellow brass, fabricated steel with hot
dipped galvanized finish.



Incommensurable Floating Exchange

2011; 38.0"h x 54.0"w x 72.0"d,
Cast bronze, cast and fabricated aluminum,
cast ductile iron, powder coat surface, large
boat cast during a John Michael Kohler Arts &
Industry Residency Program.



Like Two Ships in the Night

2000; 38.0"h x 9.0"w x 33.0"d,
Cast bronze, fabricated steel with patina.



Hot Code: Stuxnet

2011, modified 2012; edition of 3, 62.0"h x
89.5"w, Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



Miniatures

2010; 32.0 "h x72.0"w x 12.0"d, cast bronze,
Fabricated steel, with partial powder-coat
surface. Three of the five models have been
completed at full scale.



Oars

2006; resurfaced 2011; 48.0"h x 52.0"w x 4.0"d
Cast ductile iron, metal-flake powder-coat surface, cast during
a John Michael Kohler Arts & Industry Residency Program.



Salt

2011, modified 2012; edition of 3, 62.0"h x 89.5"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



Snow

2012; edition of 3, 52.4"h x 74.8"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



The Substance of Nothing

2011; 48.0"h x 36.0"w x 15.0"d,
Cast bronze, cast and fabricated aluminum,
powder-coat surface.



The Substance of Nothing, Nuclear

2011; 48.0"h x 36.0"w x 15.0"d,
Cast bronze, cast and fabricated aluminum,
powder-coat surface.



Tilt 28

2005-06, modified 2010; 108,0"h x48.0"w x 5.0"d,
Cast resin, fabricated steel with patina, resin cast heads
from Kurtz GmbH, Wertheim, Germany, residency.



Timing

2011; edition of 3, 62.0"h x 87.0"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.



Zebra

2012; edition of 3, 52.8"h x 66.9"w,
Pigment inkjet print on industrial felt.

EXHIBITION

Pamela Skinner / Gwenna Howard
 Contemporary Arts
 723 S Street Sacramento,
 California 95811
 T: 916 446 1786 M: 916 501 8600
 10 September to 05 November, 2011
 Sacramento, California

ADDITIONAL WORK

B & C's 1077 Studio, Istanbul
 15 February to 22 May, 2012

PUBLISHED BY

B.C. Studio

CATALOG ESSAY

David Pagel*

CATALOG DESIGN

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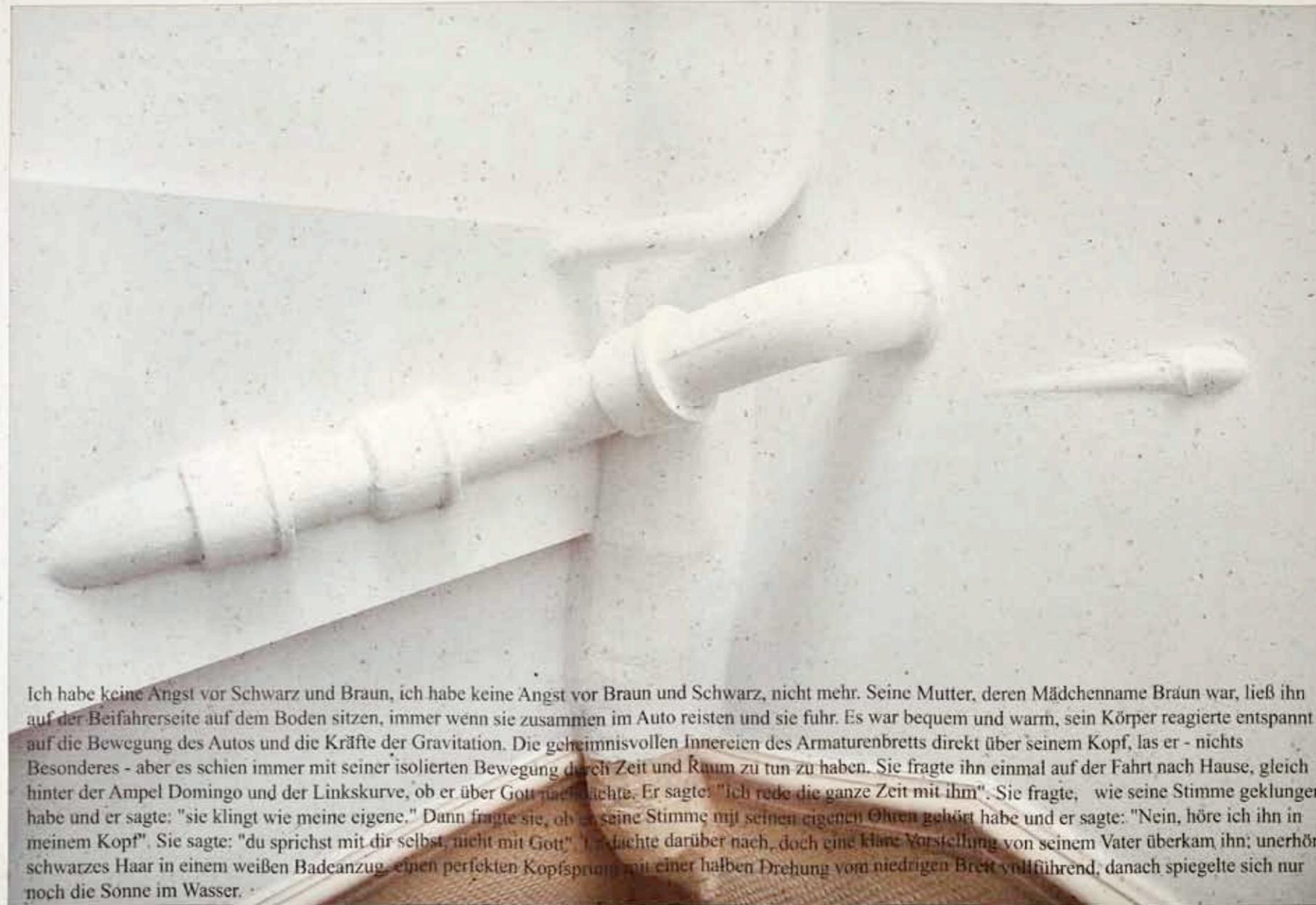
EDITION

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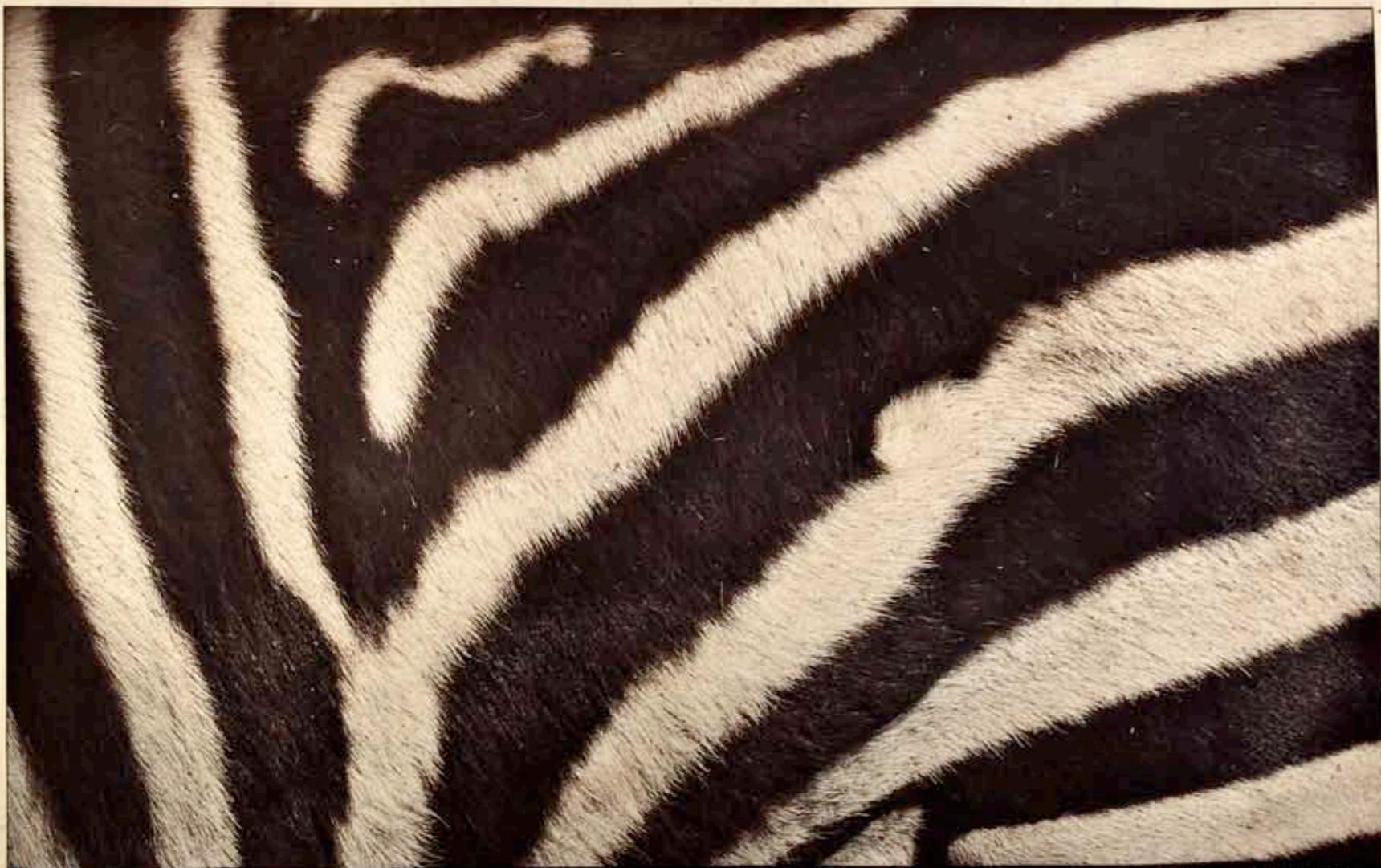
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 ISBN 978-0-615-64691-6
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Black & Brown, german 2012

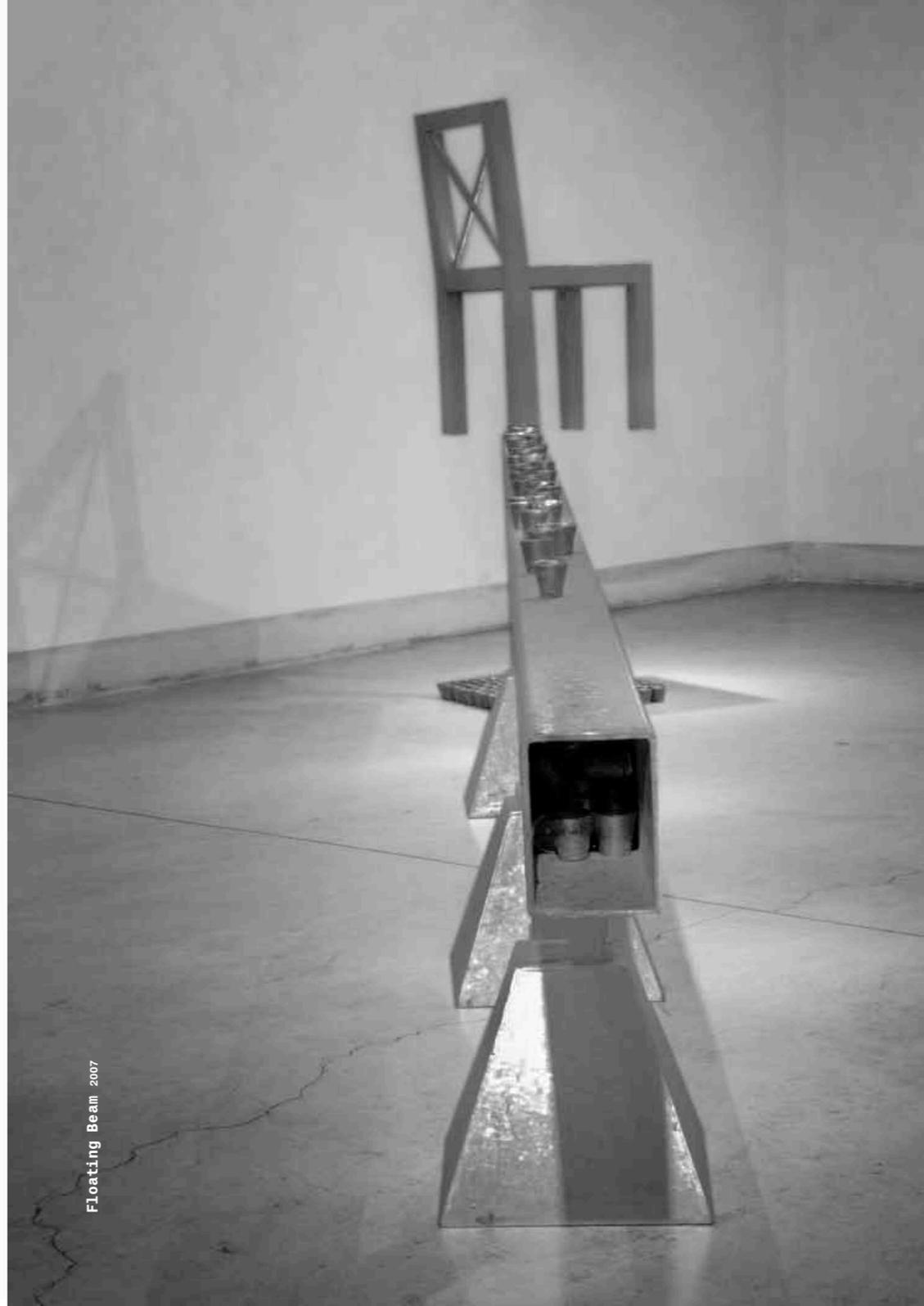


Ich habe keine Angst vor Schwarz und Braun, ich habe keine Angst vor Braun und Schwarz, nicht mehr. Seine Mutter, deren Mädchenname Braun war, ließ ihn auf der Beifahrerseite auf dem Boden sitzen, immer wenn sie zusammen im Auto reisten und sie fuhr. Es war bequem und warm, sein Körper reagierte entspannt auf die Bewegung des Autos und die Kräfte der Gravitation. Die geheimnisvollen Innereien des Armaturenbretts direkt über seinem Kopf, las er - nichts Besonderes - aber es schien immer mit seiner isolierten Bewegung durch Zeit und Raum zu tun zu haben. Sie fragte ihn einmal auf der Fahrt nach Hause, gleich hinter der Ampel Domingo und der Linkskurve, ob er über Gott nachdachte. Er sagte: "Ich rede die ganze Zeit mit ihm". Sie fragte, wie seine Stimme geklungen habe und er sagte: "sie klingt wie meine eigene." Dann fragte sie, ob er seine Stimme mit seinen eigenen Ohren gehört habe und er sagte: "Nein, höre ich ihn in meinem Kopf". Sie sagte: "du sprichst mit dir selbst, nicht mit Gott". Er dachte darüber nach, doch eine klare Vorstellung von seinem Vater überkam ihn; unerhört schwarzes Haar in einem weißen Badeanzug, einen perfekten Kopfsprung mit einer halben Drehung vom niedrigen Brett vollführend, danach spiegelte sich nur noch die Sonne im Wasser.



He never said much, tall and thin with a scraggly beard, maybe from Iowa. He hung out at the smoking line, by himself for the most part. After fifth class you'd hear him start up a few blocks away. He always approached from the west; you could make him out between the parked cars and the sun glare, stretched back and low. He made the corner then stood up; when he was close enough he flung his body backwards and jerked the throttle to full open. The black and white hand painted, suicide shifter 74's front wheel lifted two inches higher than the day before, then slammed to the ground. Before the term was out he was gone, somebody said he made the Angels, and that was that.

Zebra 2012



Floating Beam 2007

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