

when light turns to dust

photographs created from discarded negatives where the silver image has been eroded and replaced with dust



Lloyd Godman
2003

Low resolution version

When Light Turns to Dust is published in two versions

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LLOYD GODMAN

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contents

- Page 6 [discovering an archive](#)
- Page 9 [retrieving artifacts](#)
- Page 15 [the dusty subject: Cameron Bishop](#)
- Page 19 [when light turns to dust: catalogue of works](#)
- Page 42 [Lloyd Godman](#)

The developed silver grains had been reduced to no more than dust, but a dust with its own codes of intricate, abstract patterns and even more complex meaning. I was holding a new artifact, the evidence of light transcending, disintegrating but also being reborn, phoenix like as dust patterns.

when light turns to dust

discovery of an archive

I lived in the same house at 24 Queen St, Brighton, Dunedin, New Zealand for nearly 30 years, and while I had been in the cellar countless times, it was only during the summer of 2002-3, that I discovered a series of 120 negatives had been left lost, decaying on the ground, on the bare earth in the cellar by a previous owner. My shock discovery led to an instant eagerness to bring these into the light and view the mysterious images, discover something of the previous owner and the people and places that might be in the forgotten images. I figured that these abandoned negatives should hold the residue of a previous "light" encounter embedded onto the surface, should retain a history of light locked away in silver, that they would reveal moments from a Bartsian death to the discoverer.

But my expectations were soon shattered; the ravages of time had taken its toll on the delicate images. Virtually all the silver embedded gelatin had been eaten away, leaving only the faintest ghost of traces, and then only as obscure, unrecognizable blacken silver marks. The memory of the people, events and places that were once held on the negatives had effectively been eroded through time until all photographic representation had vanished. Yet, despite this complete dissolving of a past memory, a stunning new abstract image emerged from the transparency of each negative.

The developed silver grains had been reduced to no more than dust, but a dust with its own codes of intricate, abstract patterns and even more complex meaning. I was holding a new artifact, the evidence of light transcending, disintegrating but also being reborn, phoenix like as dust patterns. The original reference to light had been replaced with decades of dust, dirt and clay fragments from the bed of earth. Ironically dust is an enemy, that in the enlarging process can frustrate the photographer, and yet these images were now made almost entirely from generations of dust build up. The tiny silver grains that encode photographs via light into the modulations we recognize as elements of the real world had been vanquished by time and dust. Too busy at the time of discovery on a building project to rescue or discard them, I simply left the negatives where they were (like one might leave the corpse of an animal discovered in the wilderness to return to nature).

Later in 2003 I was invited by Peter Fitzpatrick to submit work for an exhibition at the ACU Gallery in Canberra based on Zero – Light. Scientists, led by Dr Lane Vaestergaard Hau of Harvard University and the Rowland Institute for Science in Cambridge, Mass., and another team lead by Dr Lukin of the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics, also in Cambridge, had discovered that light could not only be slowed down, but stopped, and it was this discovery

that inspired Fitzpatrick to curate the show.

Light has been central to my work for some time, and late in 2002 I had completed a work at the Blue Oyster Gallery in Dunedin, New Zealand, titled @ the Speed of Light, and from this work Peter was interested in my interpretation of Zero Light.

From the invitation, the chance discovery of the discarded negatives surfaced once more, and with the connection that there was no reference to light left on the negatives, I decided to work with the artifacts and make enlargements directly from the "dust" negatives for the exhibition. To use extended exposure times in the darkroom to push light through the heavy layers of dust replicate the dust textures.

At this time the negatives gained a new importance: they were retrieved from their dark damp place of rest and decay and placed into archival storage. While there was coincidence in someone leaving a series of negatives in the cellar of a house that a photographer would later own, and that they should lie undiscovered for years until a point when there was a conceptual collision, there was also coincidence that the transformation of the photographic to the photogramic reflected a similar change in my photographic practice. Equally strange was that I had slept over this spot for about 18 years and that during the year of this discovery I was also invited to contribute to a mailart exhibition titled The dirt you sleep on where artists sent soil samples to an exhibition at Santa Fe in the USA.

When Light Turns to Dust is a project based on enlargements from these forgotten photographic artifacts, where the silver image, the memory of light, was exchanged with layers of dust, grime and dirt, where the alchemy of decay embedded different abstract marks over a period of years.

As the duality paradox of light as both a wave and particle which has intrigued science for decades, it begs the question that if the particles exist and fall to earth do they remain as "light dust"?

In the following year, it was interesting how the discovery of these negatives and what they might mean acted as a metaphor for my own personal circumstance. The finding of the artifact and adaptation to the project When Light Turns to Dust coincided with the breakup of my marriage where the light of love disintegrated into dust and resulted in my eventual move from the house to my new home at the Baldessin Press, in Melbourne Australia.



The site of discovery, where the negatives lay on the ground for 30 years.

when light turns to dust

retrieving artifacts

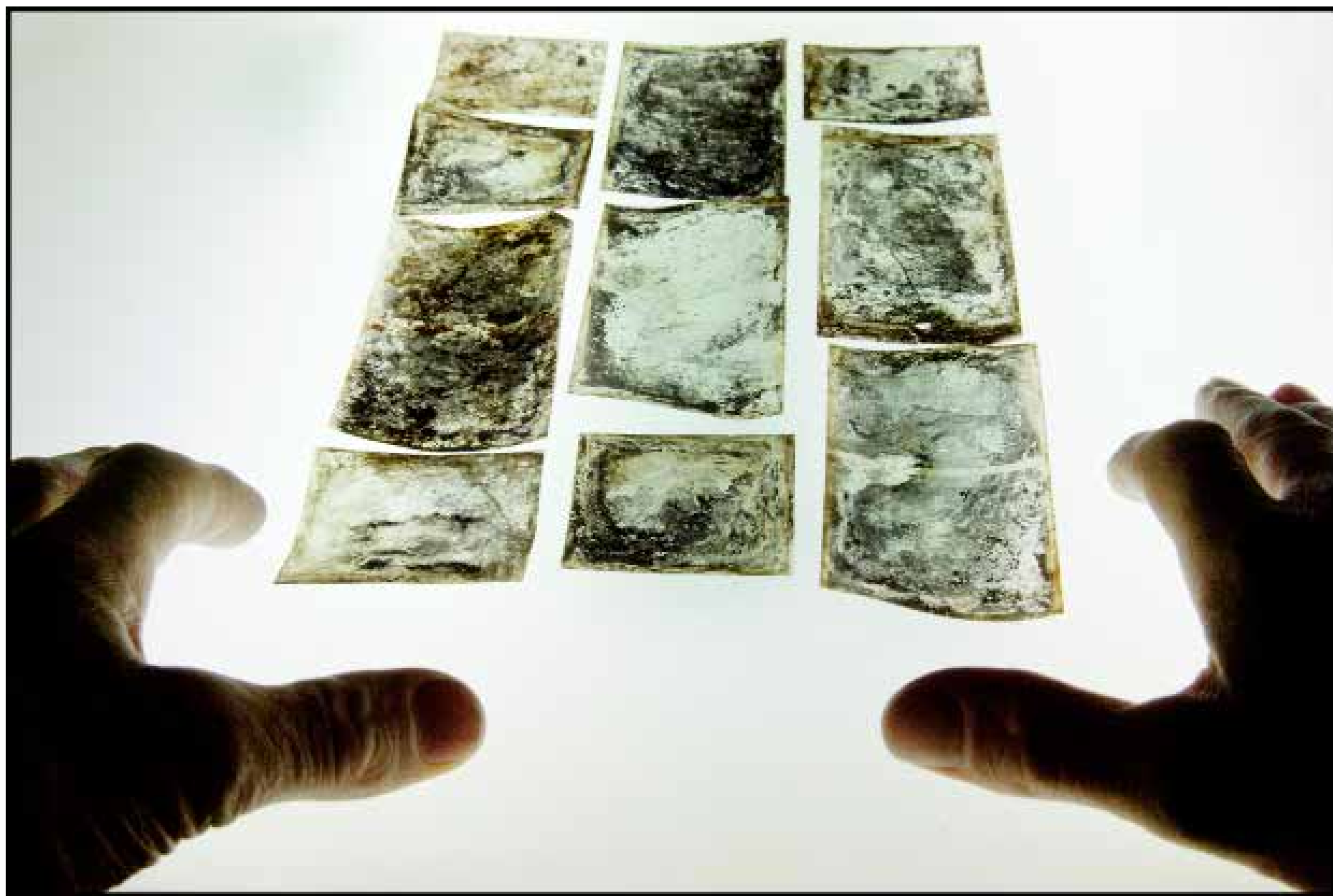
Once retrieved, the negatives were treated as artefacts that might have been painstakingly unearthed from an ancient archaeological site. Each negative was catalogued with a number and archived as any precious artefact or photographic negative might be in a similar manner that I would treat any negative I had shot with a camera.

Once removed from the "site", the dust on the surface of the negatives became dry and delicate demanding extreme care. It tended to flake off the support base in the process of arranging the negatives for cataloguing and making the photographic enlargements. The dust was stabilized to some extent with an art fixative spray normally used to fix charcoal and pastel drawings.

A magnified examination of the negatives on a light table revealed faint traces to the reference of the original photographic representation like the lines of each frame where the camera had exposed an image onto the film (as in Artefact 15 #). However, overwhelmingly any recognizable image had been replaced with an abstract image from the layers of dust; the photographic representation had been totally replaced with a wonderfully tonally rich transparency of dust and grime that had the potential to enlarge through the normal photographic process.

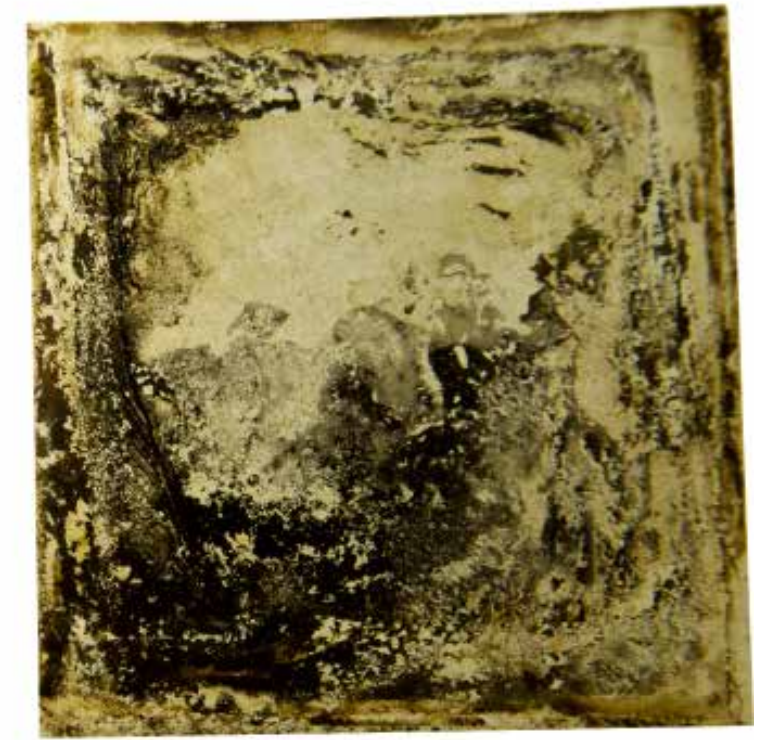
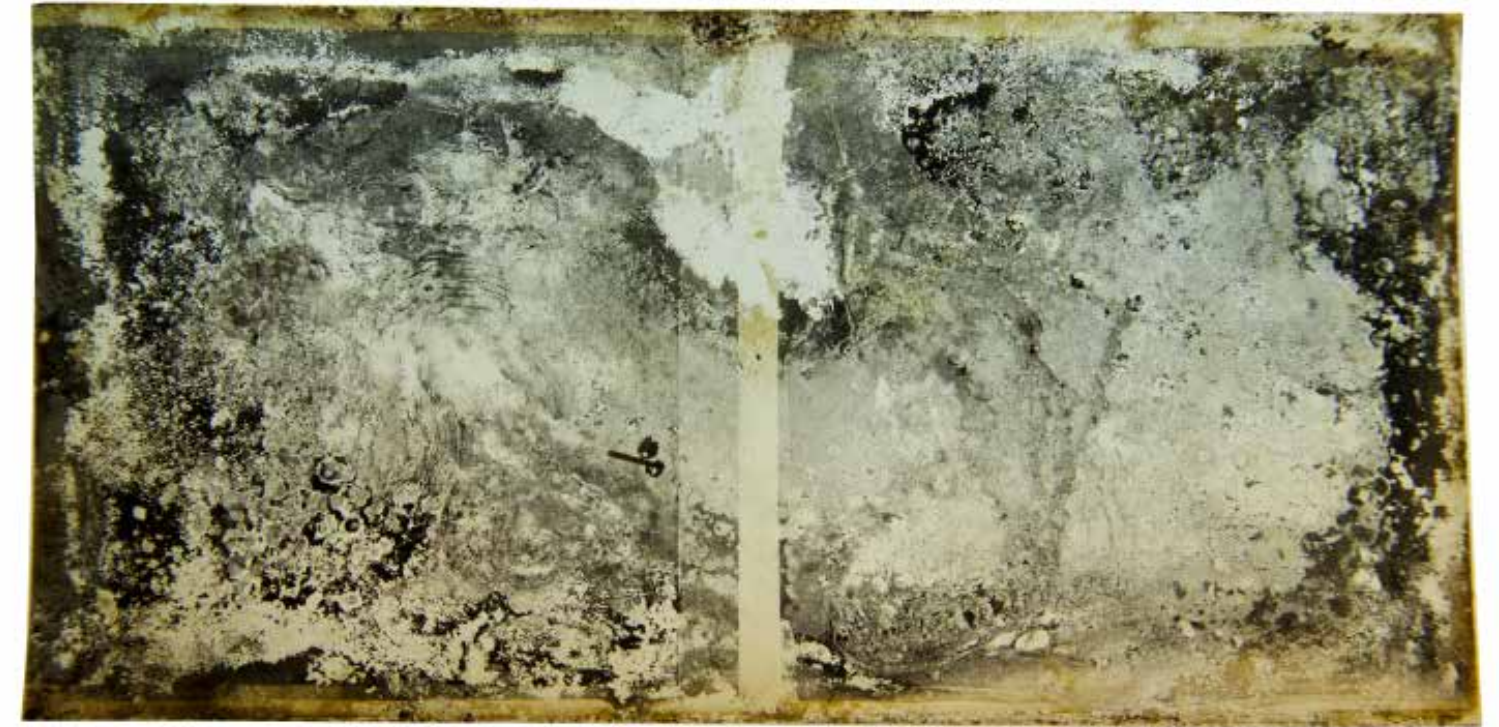
The abandoned negatives had metamorphosed into a new abstract image without realistic representation, there had been a metamorphic shift from a camera based image to a camerless image a shift that symbolized the shift in my art practice from the traditional photograph to the photogram.

The fragile negatives were placed between two large sheets of glass and enlarged via a 4x5 enlarger.



A selection of retrieved artefacts laid on a light table for assessment and cataloguing, where colour illustrates the mix of blackened silver, dust and clay.





when light turns to dust

the dusty subject

Cameron Bishop

The Dusty Subject -

I've seen maps. I've seen figures. I've seen Foucault. I've seen enemies. However, the image that coagulates, with a gathering strength, each morning I look through our bedroom door - into the hall where Lloyd Godman's artifact #9 hangs - is that of a mad koala. Perhaps this gestalt is becoming stronger because I've been living away from Australia for almost two years now. I've lived beyond its borders, watched and read of its retreat – its cowering foetal position getting tighter and tighter - even as that privileged term light gains momentum behind the resurrection (in hyperbole only) of the nation state.

I think I might be Lloyd's mad koala. This is what I see as the image continually stamps itself into my existence. I have to see something, don't I? I cannot see the dust.

The damp environment in which the negatives sat for thirty years simultaneously destroyed and liberated the images that sit in this exhibition. Like Foucault's man in the sand analogy, the moisture washed away any trace of idealised memory as it attacked the negatives. But, ironically, you need liquid to drive the photographic process: alkalines and acids from the soil under the Godmans' house combined to destroy and resurrect - in concert with time, dust and the artist – the images in the artifact series.

When Lloyd discovered the negatives under his house, what could we hope to see: family snaps, smiles, and sun and light? This is an expectation. Perhaps if the negatives had been given the right eco-system for survival we may have seen something more sinister.

We could dust off the psychoanalyst's couch and really get into some fragmentation. We might be able to remember some of our own conflicting, disjoint-

ed thoughts that we were having when a particular photograph was taken. We can sense/remember our fragmentation as we look at these moments, because we've been shot.

They often bear, for me anyway, the Barthesian death sentence. But if it hasn't been shot, how can it be dead? The camera/shotgun (in Lloyd's photograms there is not a weapon) has not killed anyone, so how is something born? Our memories are pregnant. The dust has settled on the negatives in such a way over a period of thirty years that the objects move beyond mere enlargements of settled dust. They move beyond abstraction and punch me with their punctum. I'm forced to invest the image with my collected experience, just as I do with an object like a shotgun as I take a picture. I am Lloyd's shotgun. 3 Before I use my shotgun, I must realise that there is always a lag between the object and our perception of it, so that what we actually see is the past. In order to move through space safely I literally create wholes: stereotypes that sit in the middle of my vision to counter the hole that, literally, sits in the middle of my vision. This is the optic disk effect: it causes a blind spot where the nerve receptors leave the retina to form the optic nerve. There is no light here.

When I look out at Lloyd's artifact #9 from the warmth of my bed the impressions I get from the contrasts in the indiscriminate image of the photogram are conditioned by 'an ensemble of relations.'⁵ Just like the objects formation, in its site of abjection, in the heterotopia of Lloyd Godman's basement. ⁶ For thirty years, maybe more, people slept above these artifacts in this space. There is no light here, ⁷ in this space that is 'linked with all the others (the used, necessary space of the home) and yet somehow at variance' with them. ⁸ The space, the basement, the home's heterotopia, reflects the movements made in the home it supports. The dust on the negatives realises the movements of the occupants in the home, in the bedroom. Probably, they have more accurately recorded time spent in the domicile than the original images that inhabited the negatives to begin with.

To look in the mirror, or into Lloyd's dusty negative, is to see a heterotopia:

My self is reconstituted when I look at the dust that collected in the Godmans' heterotopia, and yet I am absent at the point where I focus, so too is the centre of my vision, which, because of the optic disk effect is a hole: there is no light there. I will lap up anything you give me. I am Lloyd Godman's blind, fragmented puppy.

I like to chew on my own tail, much like the scientists' that have discovered a way to stop light. They've created their own heterotopia, their absent selves are inside that glass chamber they stop light in. Perhaps they are pre-empting the end of our sun. This is okay, seeing as though in quantum mechanics, according to the strange rules of light, matter can be in two places at once. My matter is in Lloyd's artifact; the Godmans' movements over the last thirty years have mattered in the creation and discovery of the artifacts. I'm moved to ask: what does it matter?

I desire' to witness my own matter in other matter. I want to fix that matter, ¹² stabilise myself, and I don't care how I do it, but I do it all the time. I am the corpse proper that fabricates itself inside the promised utopia of the sitcom. These are my given stage co-ordinates, and this is how I read when confronted by Lloyd Godman's maps: ¹³ I imbibe the controlled light (in analogue or digital) of the television (or computer, or gallery, or home, or nature), take my cue, suspend my disbelief, and author a mad koala. I am Lloyd Godman's mad koala. ¹⁴ ¹⁵

End Notes

1. This is general speculation, and it comes from anxious observation, but happy snaps, sun and light always have a flip side. They are often one big smile at an event that might be considered heterotopic. These heterotopic situations can be birthdays, holidays, and commercial festivals like Christmas Day etc... Everyone in family photographs smiles (at least they're meant to). But if we could, somehow, rearrange the grains (or pixels) of a group/family/posed-subject snapshot to represent the dusty thoughts that are frozen behind the fixed smile, some of the subjects might be in for some serious couch time.

2. See Bill Henson and his couch potatoes.

3. Jean Baudrillard states in his book *The Perfect Crime*. Trans. Chris Turner, London, Verso, 1996, p.52: 'The fact that when I perceive this star it has perhaps already disappeared – a relationship that can be extended, relatively speaking, to any physical object or living being – this is the ultimate foundation, the material definition...of illusion'

4. Anne Marie Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, State University of New York, 1997, p.26. Barry adds 'to see in whole images is not to see at all.'

5. Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces," in *Aesthetics Method and Epistemology*, Ed. James D., Faubion, Trans. Robert Hurley and Others, New Press, New York, 1998, p.178.

6. Or maybe cellar or vault or subterranean vault, I use the American terminology with regret.

7. Or in other .(according to Foucault) like the cemetery, rest home, psychiatric hospital, library, museum etc...

8. Ibid. no. 4.

9. Ibid. no .4. p.179.

10 Which is scheduled, in about four billion years, to turn whatever organisms are left on our tiny planet into space dust.

11. But it doesn't matter: now the object is no longer anything but that immense and anguished desire for the other desire. Of course, the object is first known by the subject as other, as different from it, but at the moment it reduces itself to desire, the object (the artifact, the mad koala or, Lloyd's art of fiction), in a tremor that is no less anguished, is not

distinct from it: the two desires meet, intermingle and merge into one.' From Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, Eds. F.Botting & S.Wilson, Blackwell Publishers, USA, 1997. p.265.

12. Much like Lloyd stabilised the dust on the negatives with fixative.

13. Which of course, as Baudrillard (*Simulacrum and Simulations*, Selected Writings, ed. Mark Poster, Stanford University Press, 1988, p.186) pointed out: the 'territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.' Or to put it another way, the dust coagulates to form the image of the object and it is the dust that precedes the territory. I am sensitive to dust (I'm allergic to a whole host of things): it always obscures my view so I have to believe in it. The dust is the pixelated map, and I stumble through it.

14. Actually, maybe I'm John Howard's mad koala.

15. In his short story, *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbus Tertius*, (in "Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings," Eds. Donald. A.Yates & James E.Irby , Penguin, UK p.29.) Jorge Luis Borge writes: 'We discovered (such a discovery is inevitable in the late hours of the night) that mirrors have something monstrous about them. Then Bios Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they both increase the number of men.'

when light turns to dust

catalogue of works



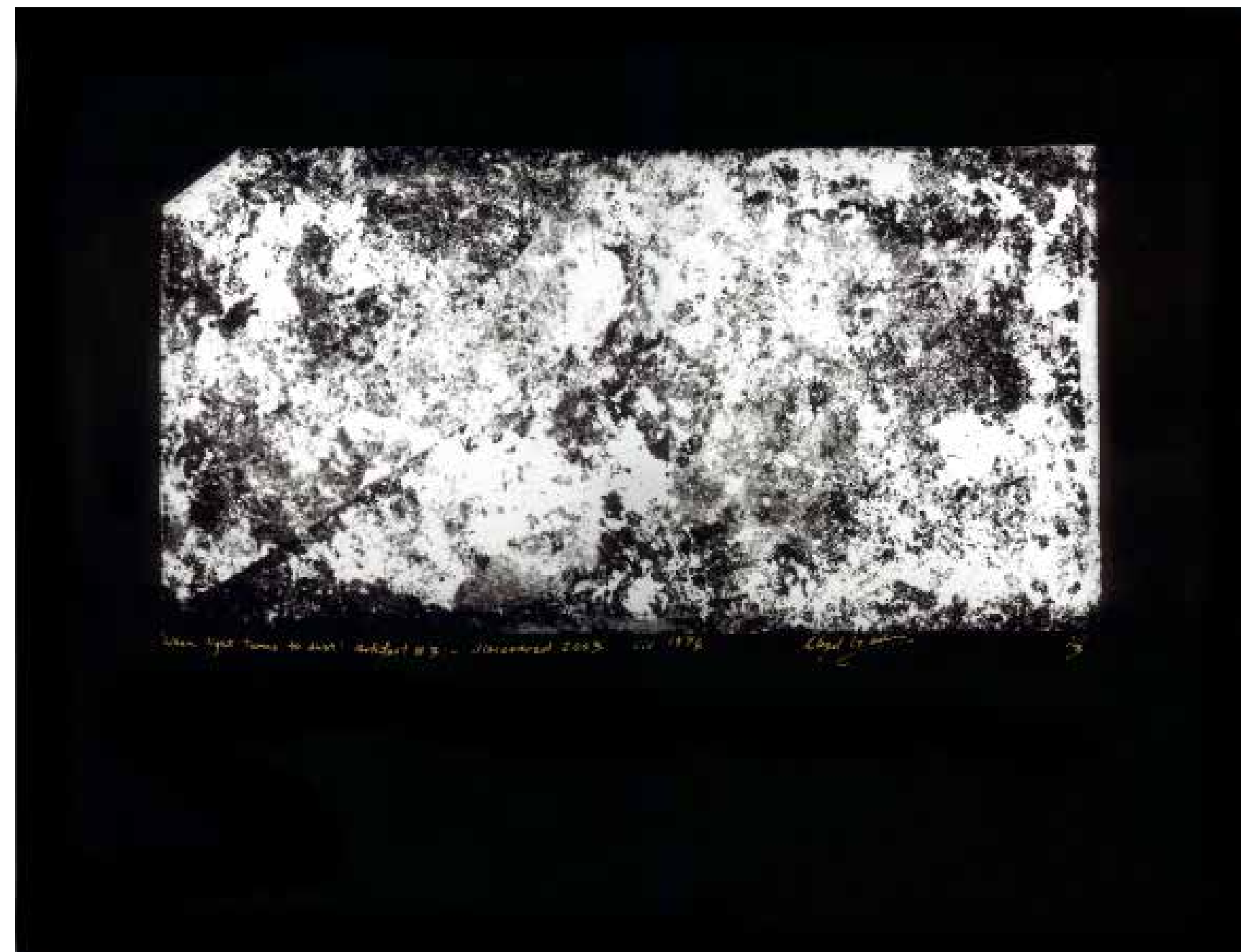
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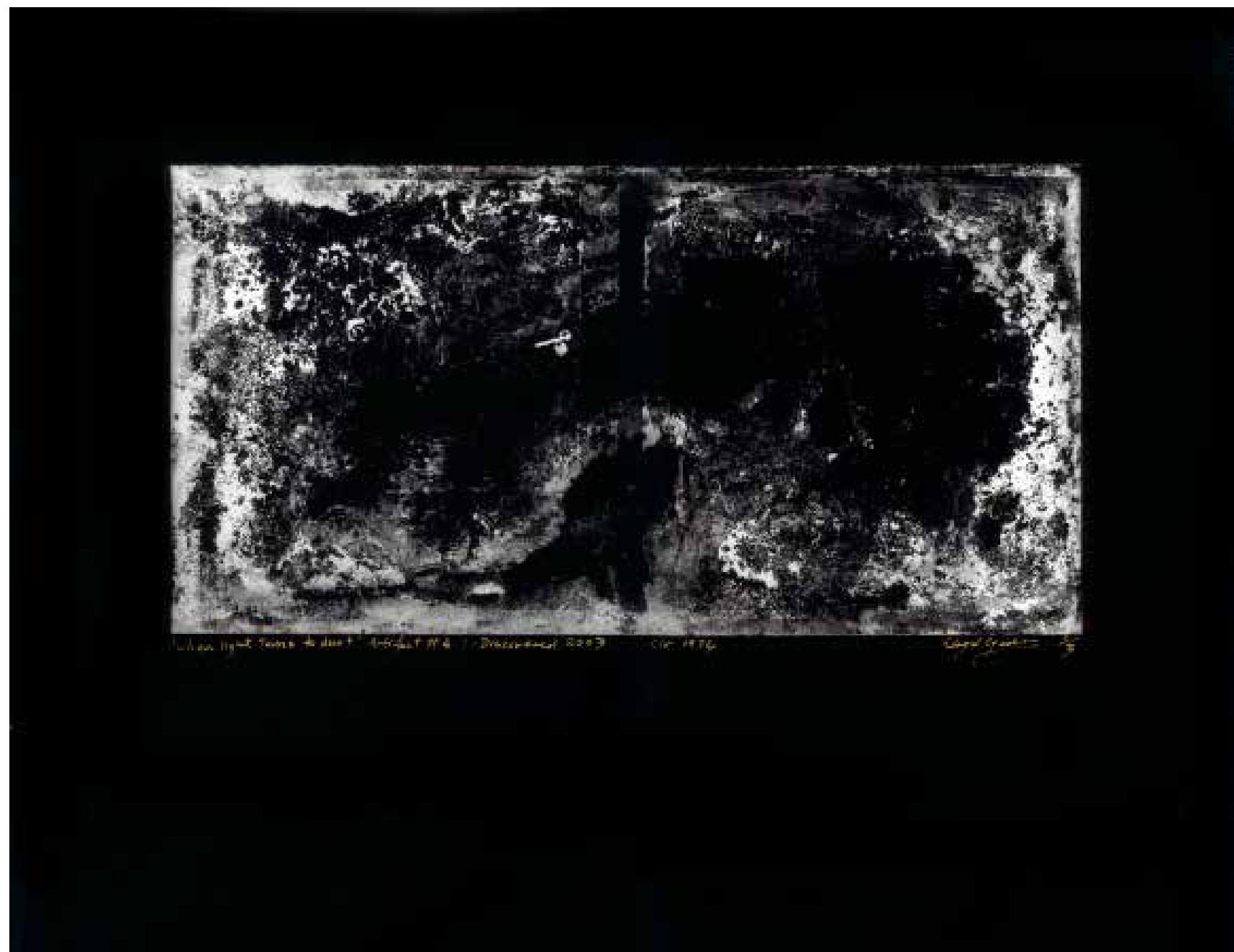
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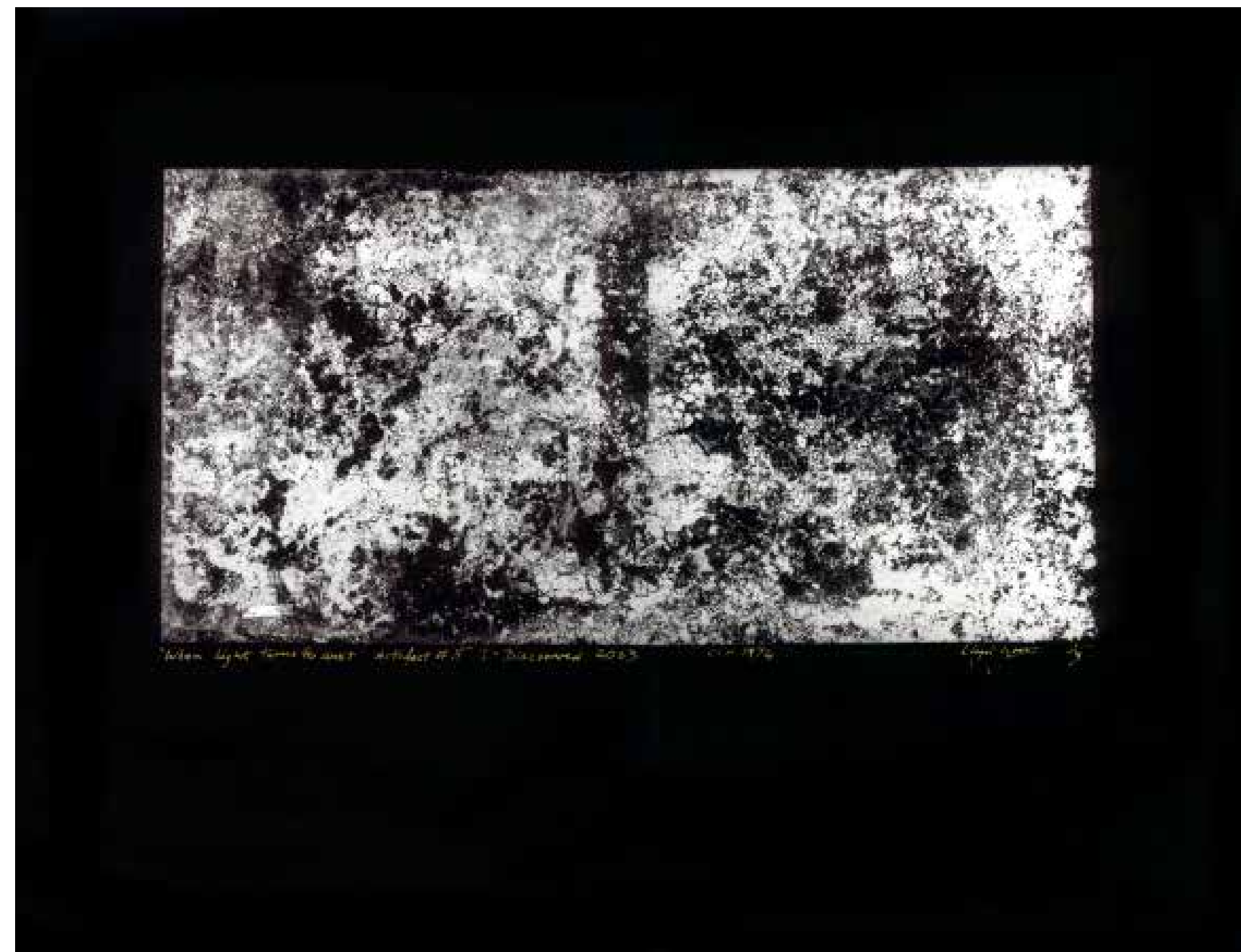
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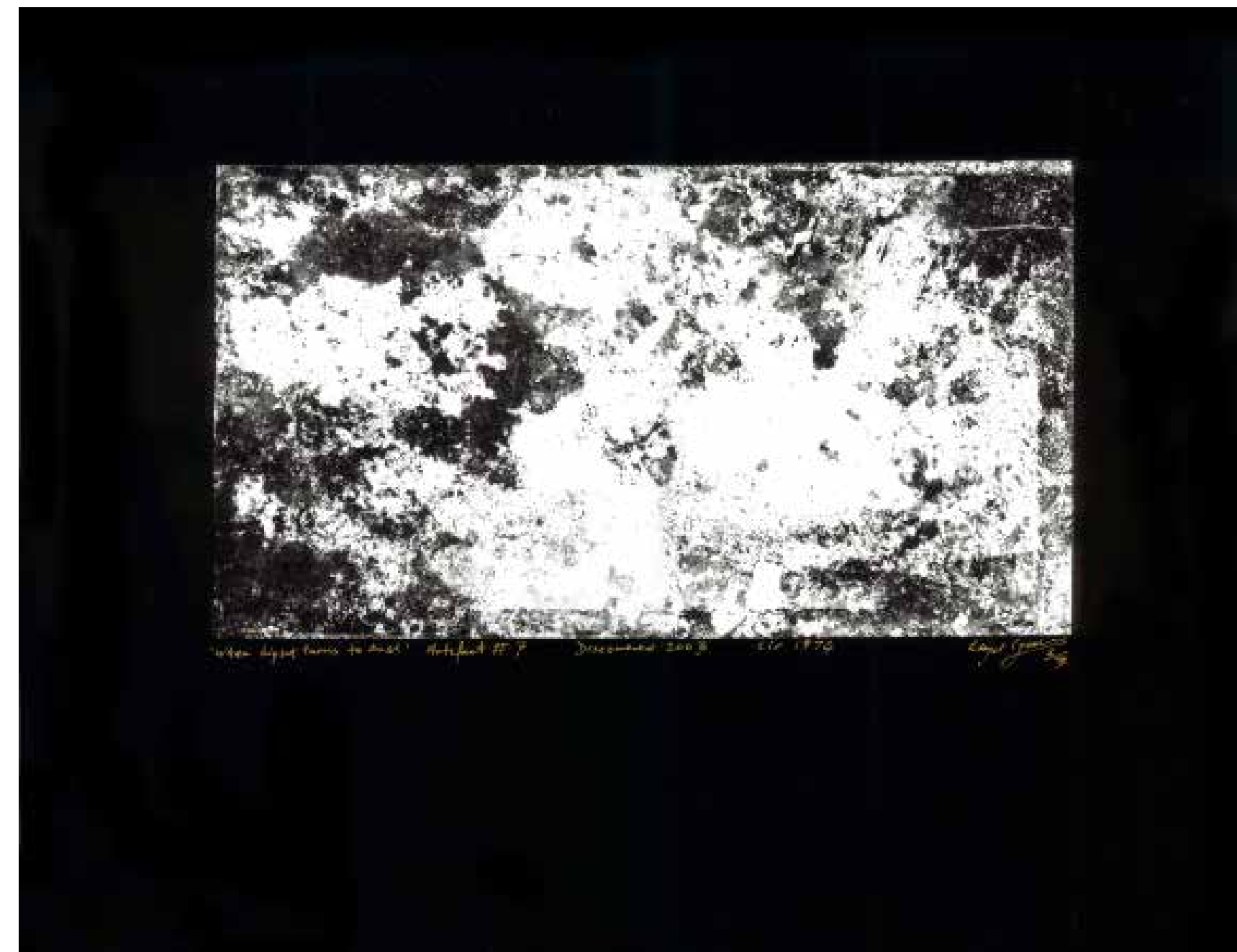
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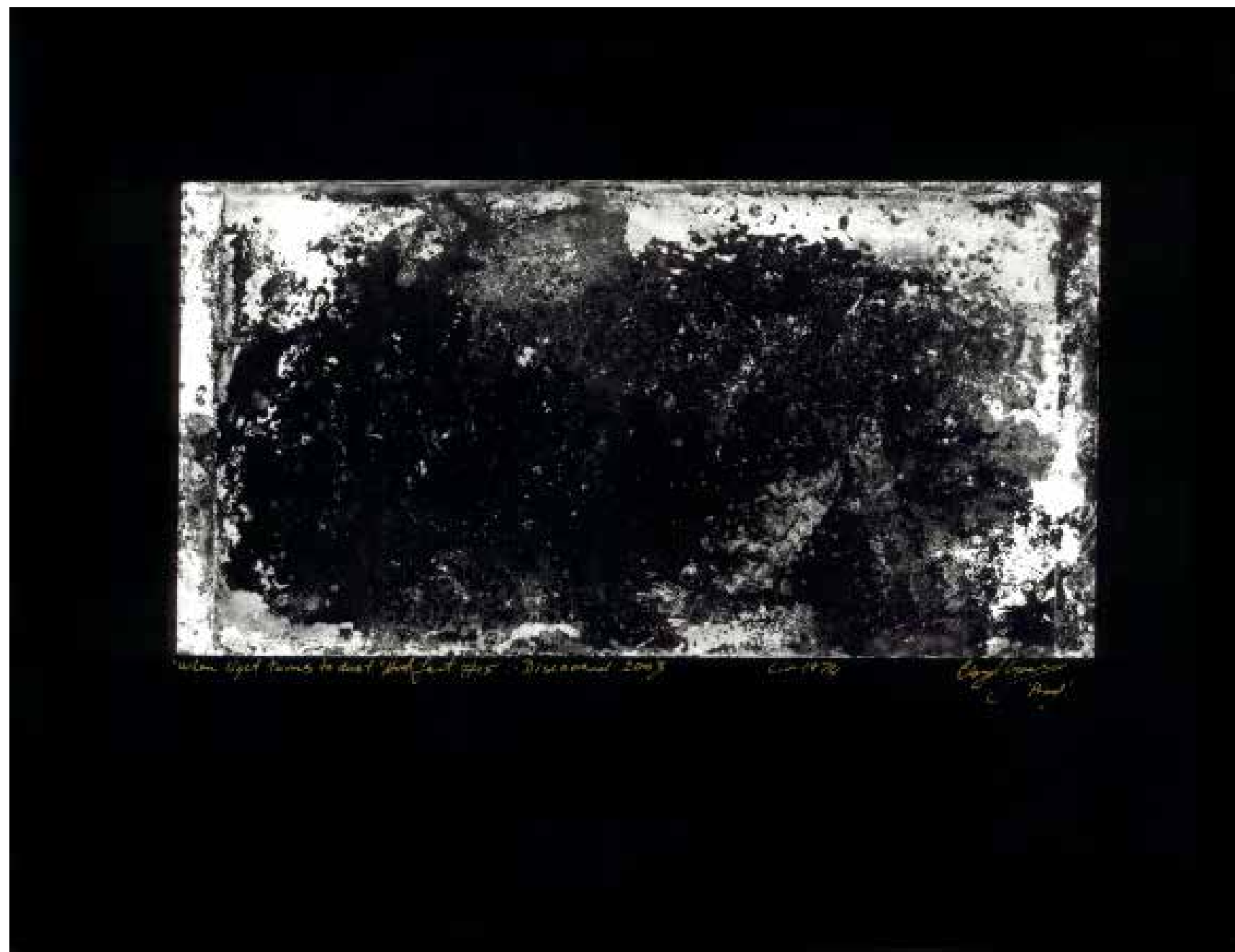
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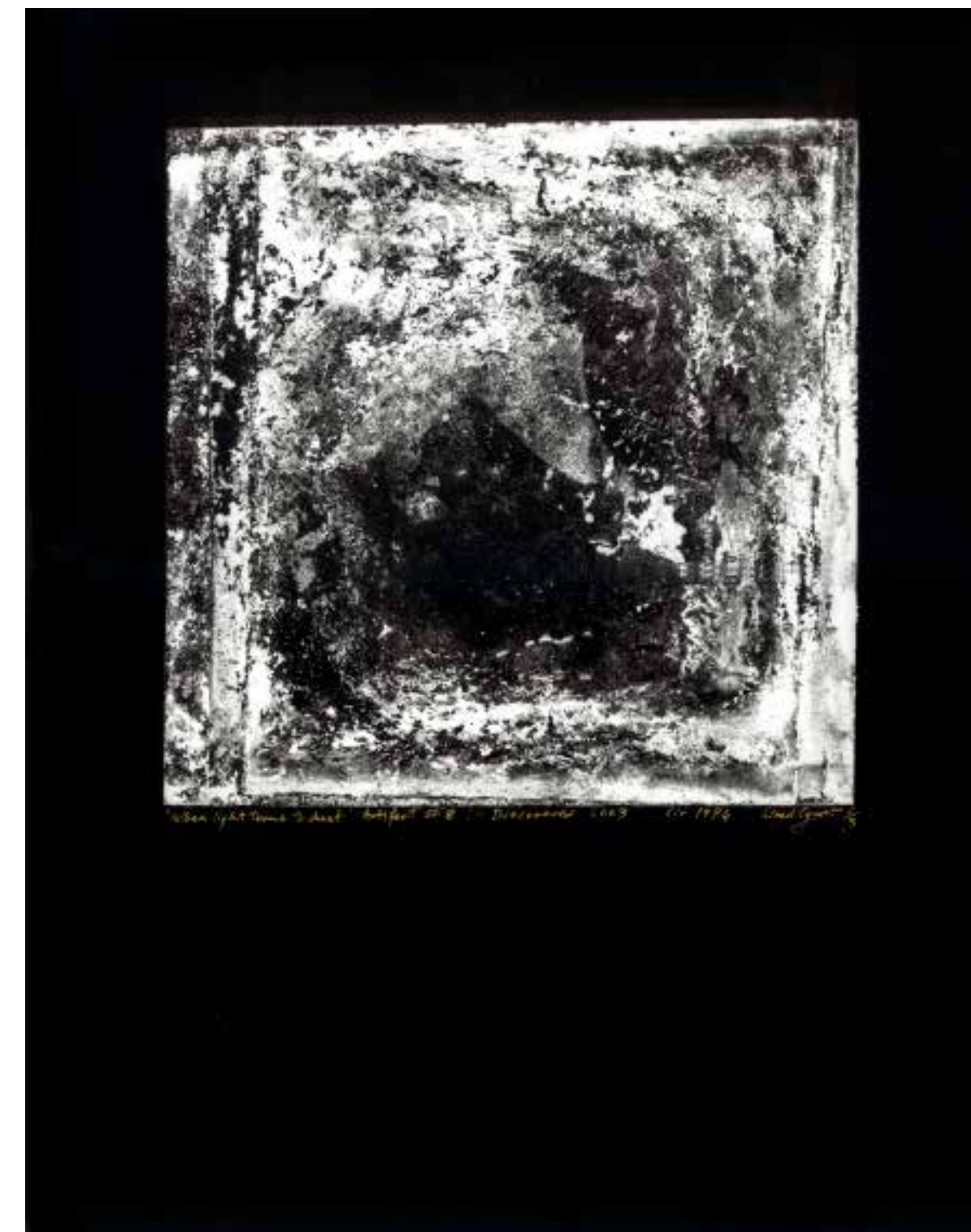
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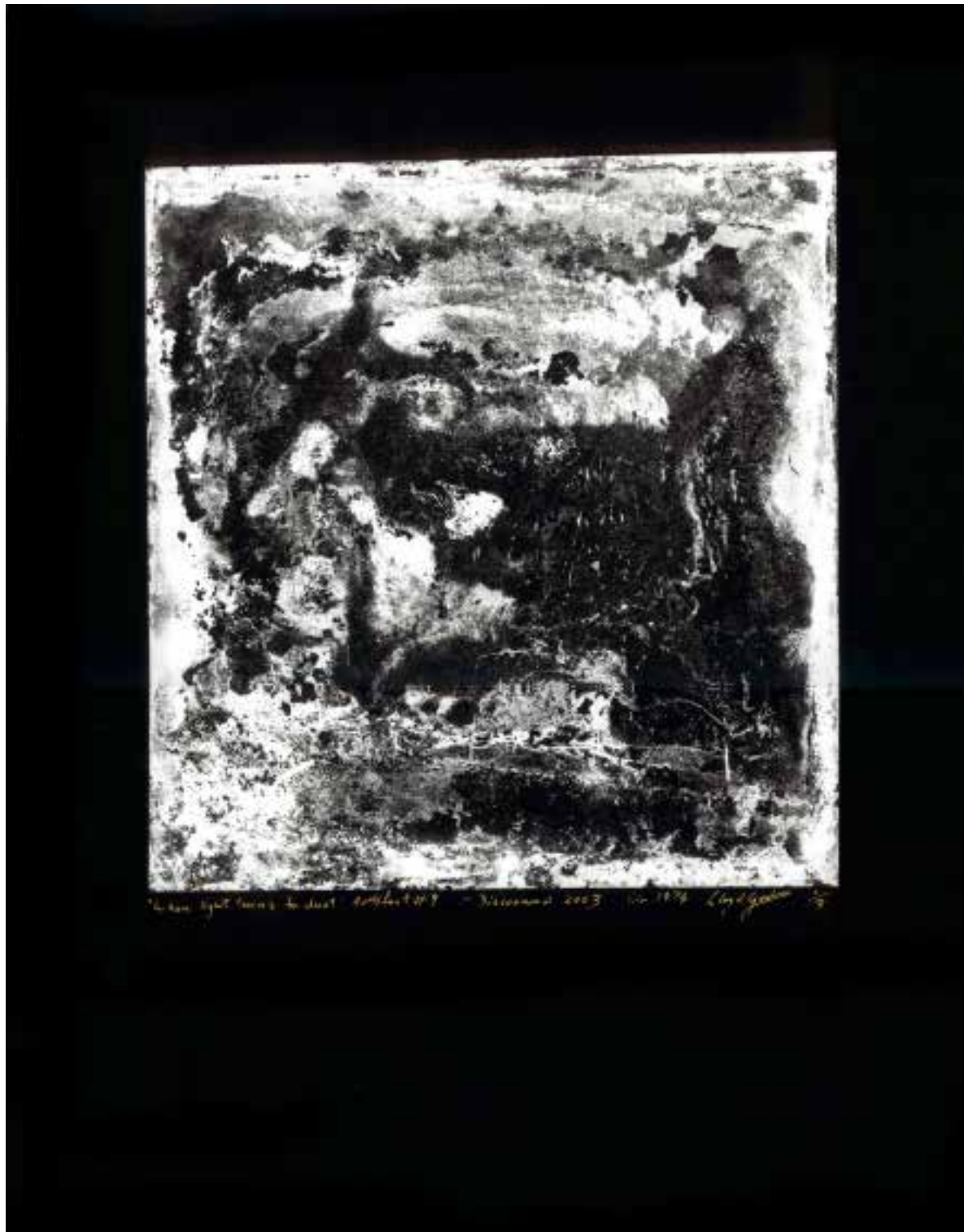
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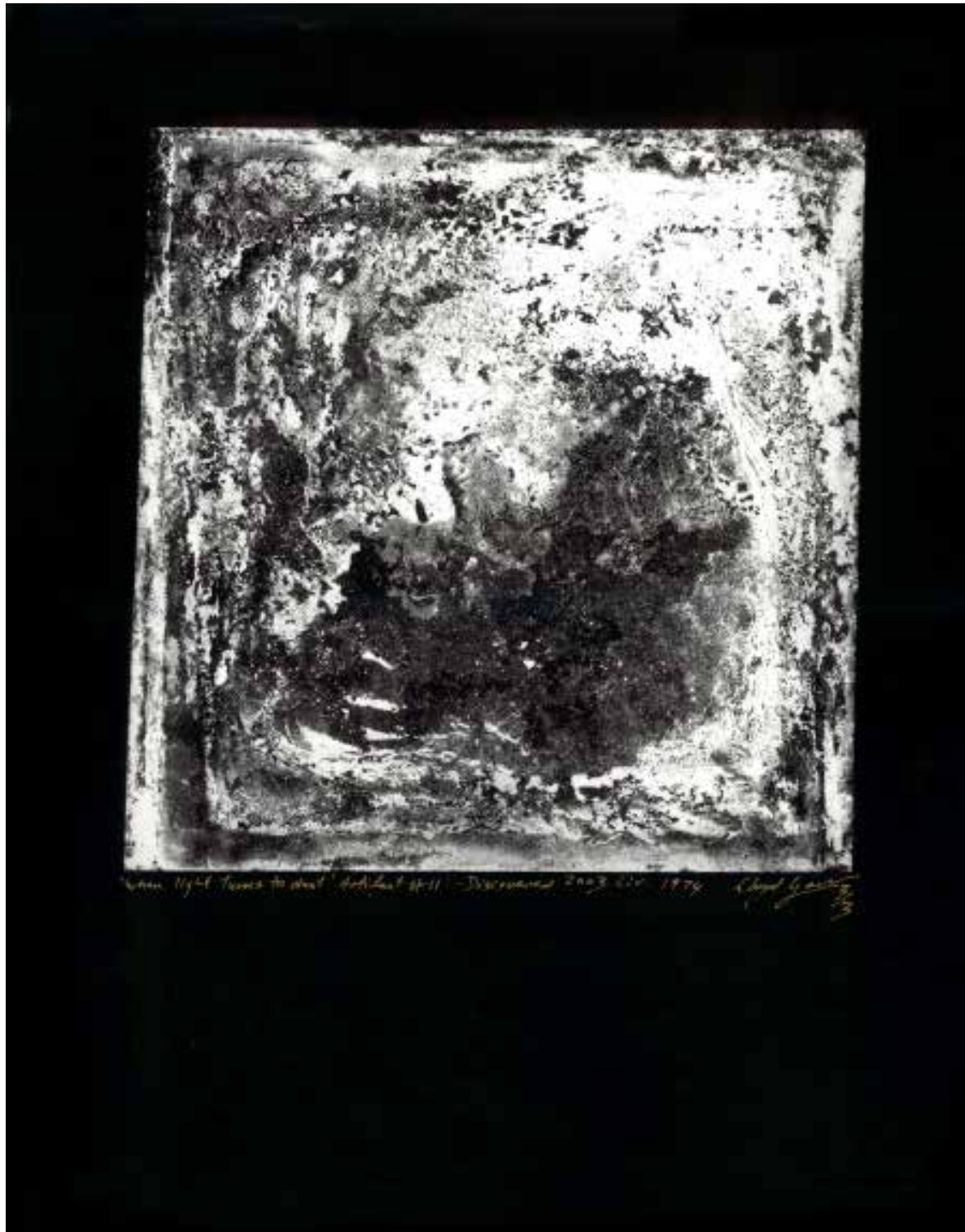
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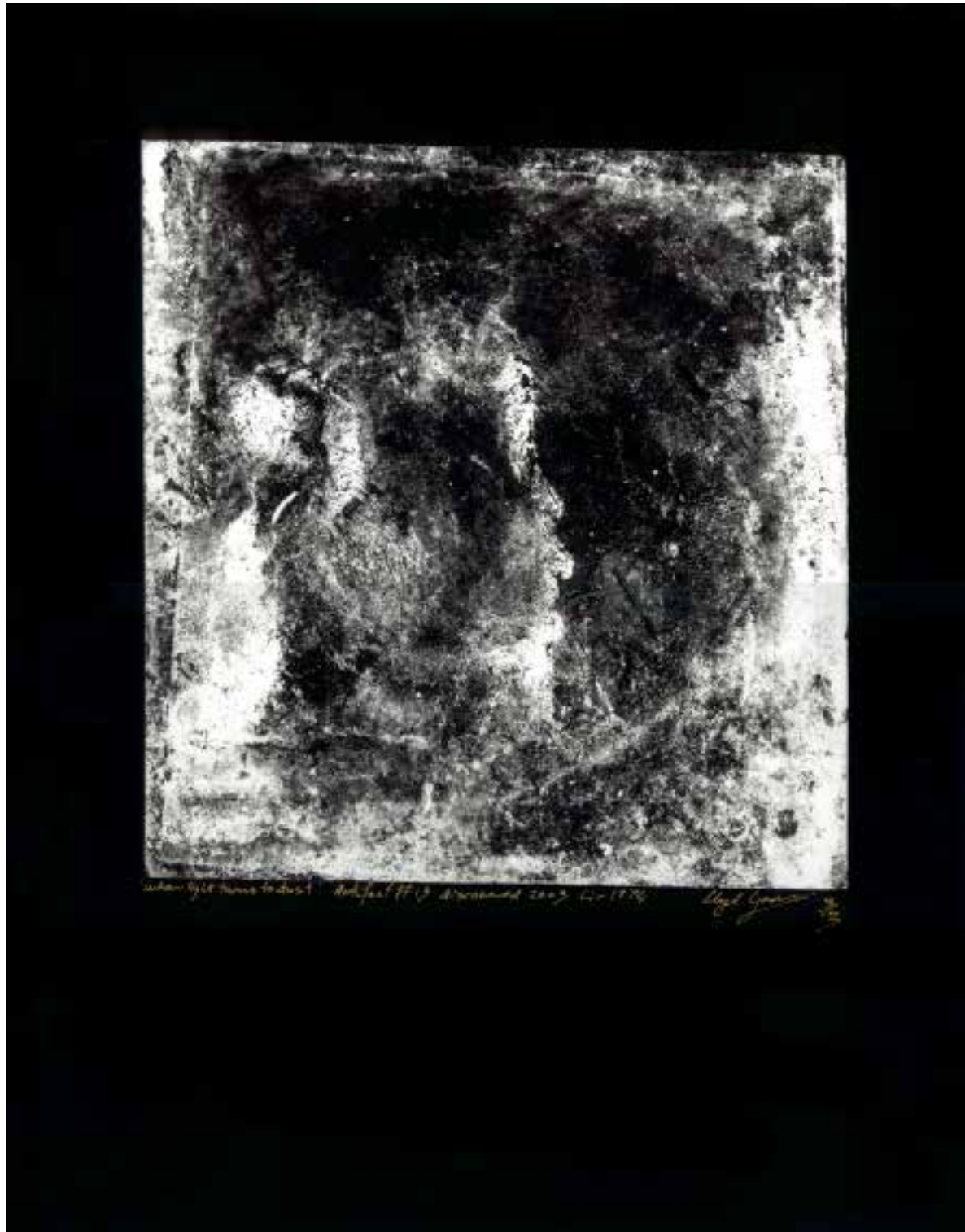
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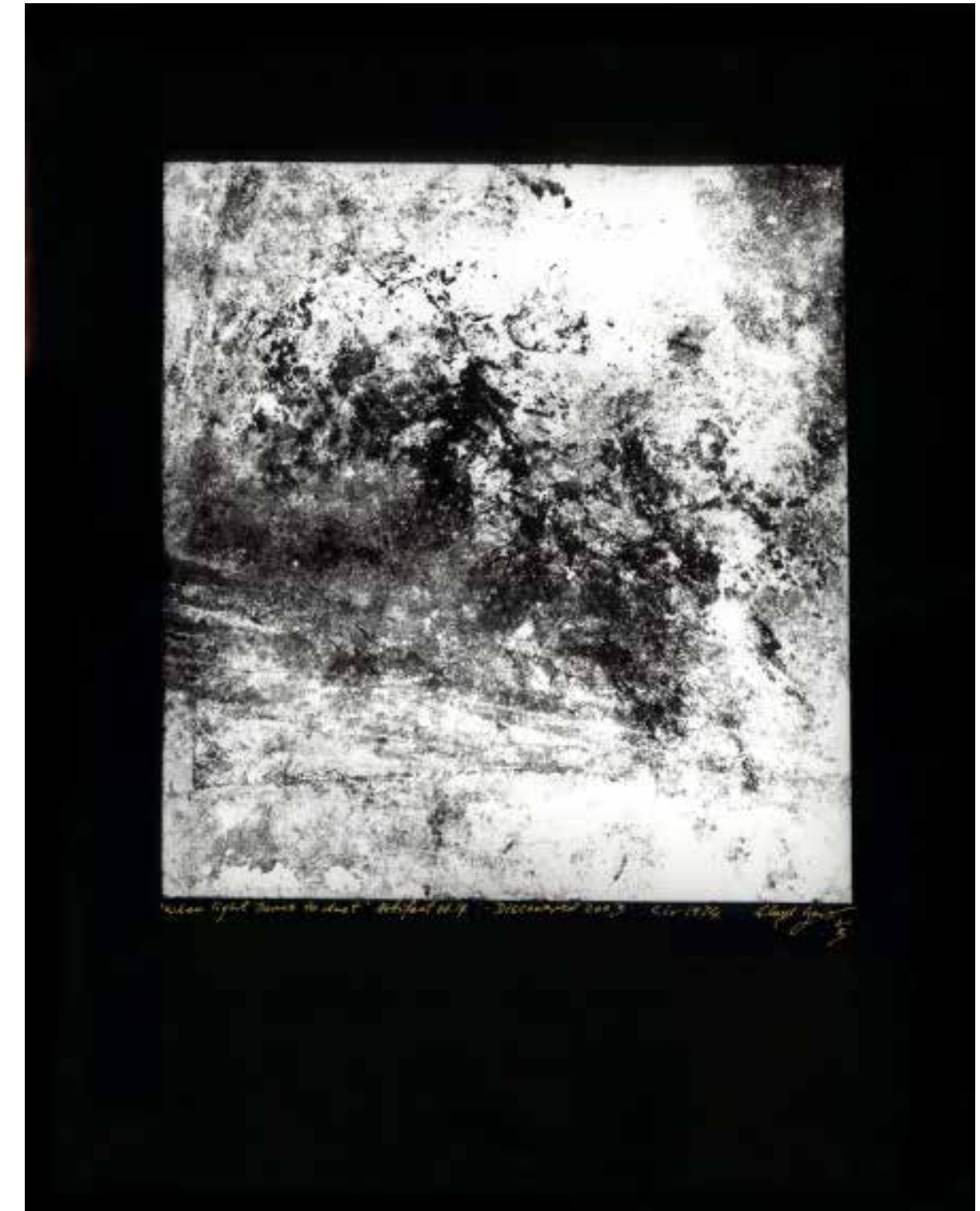
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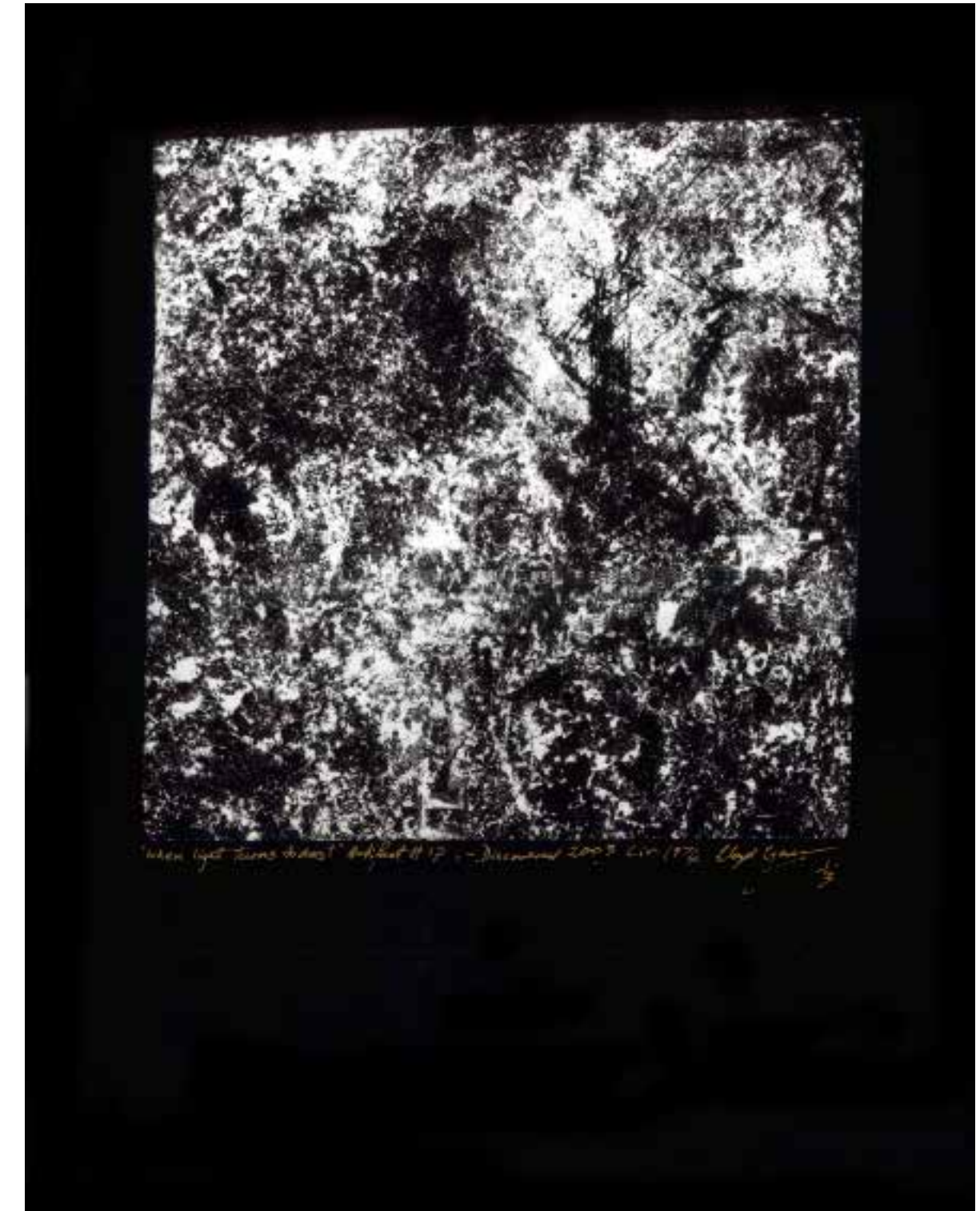
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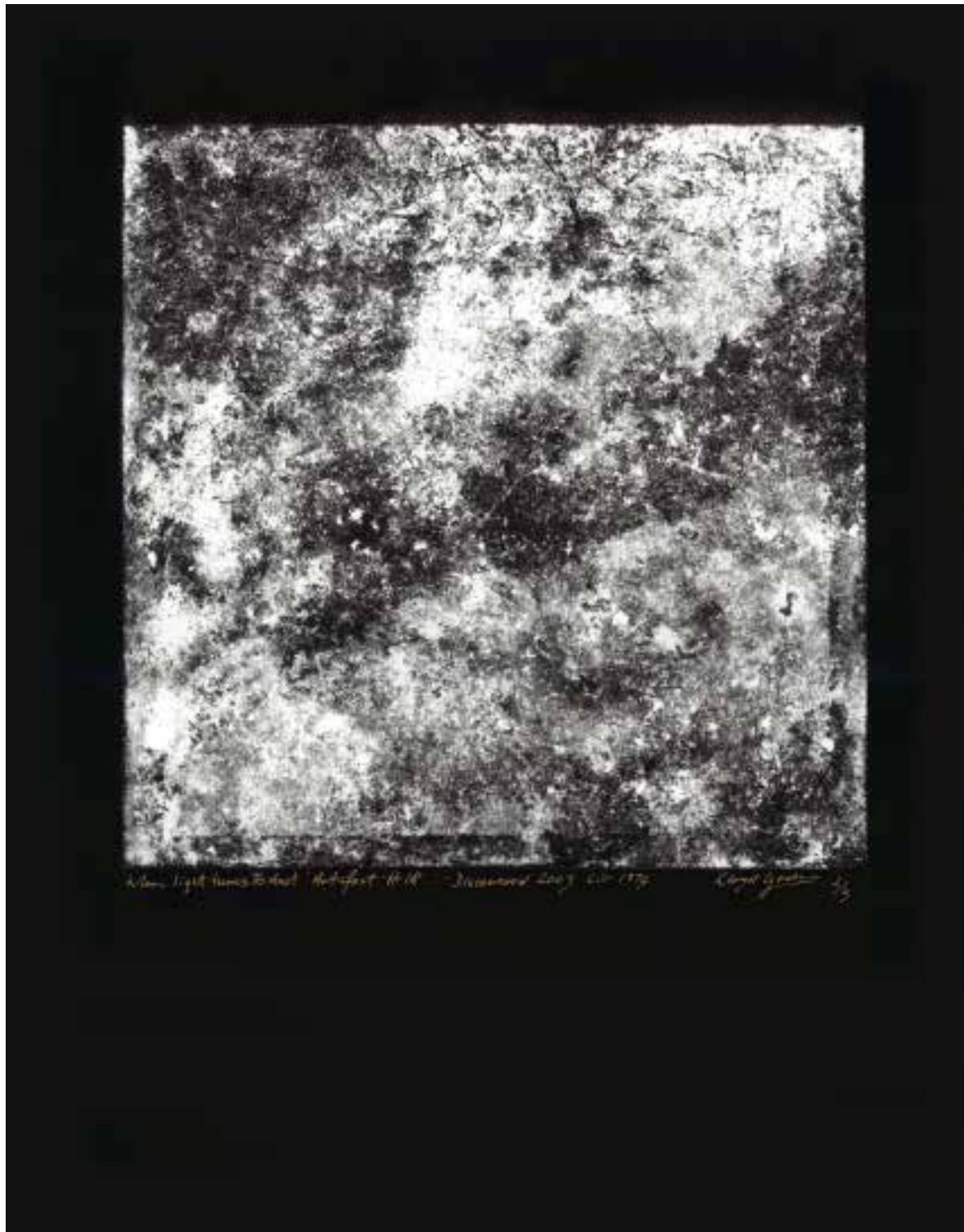
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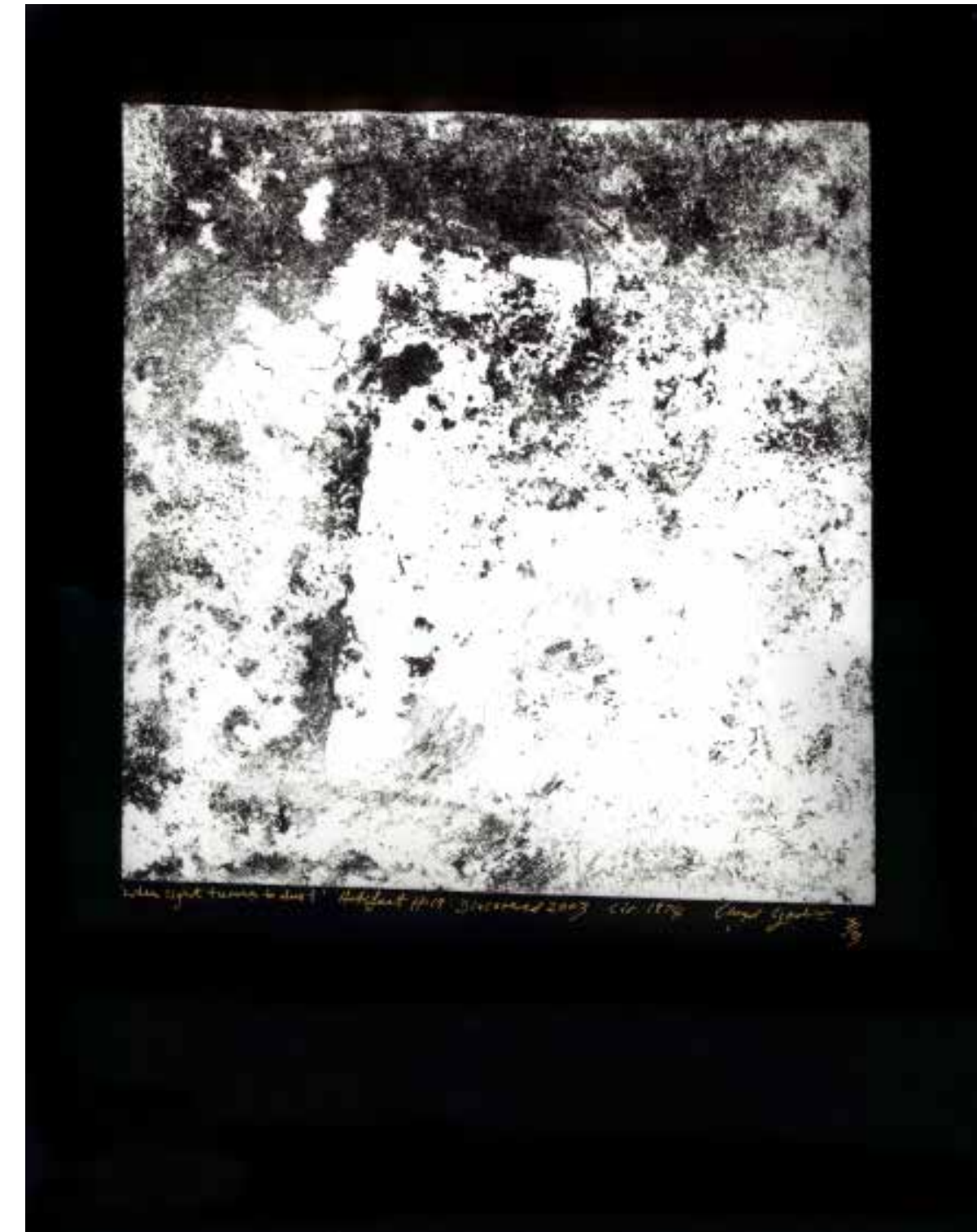
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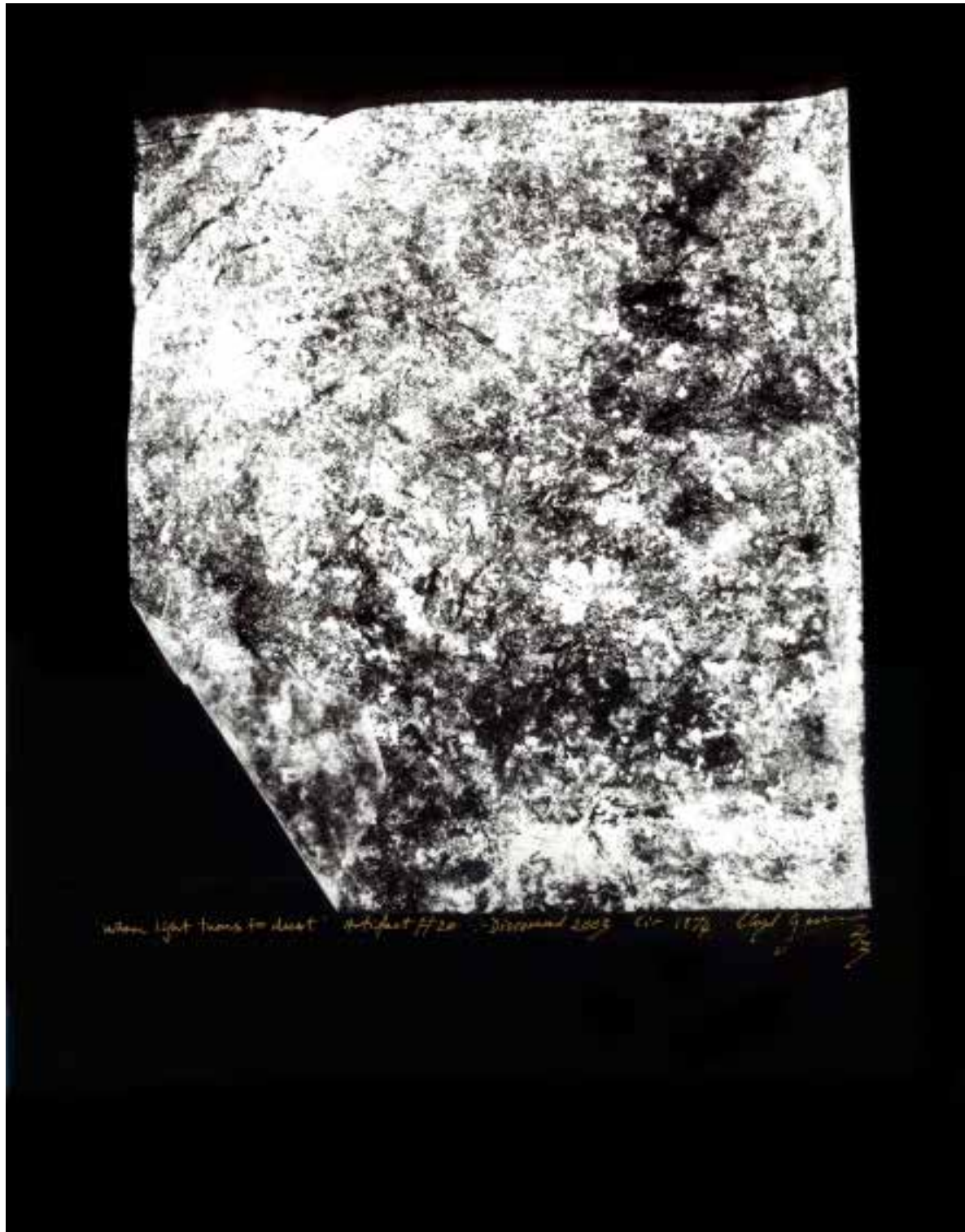
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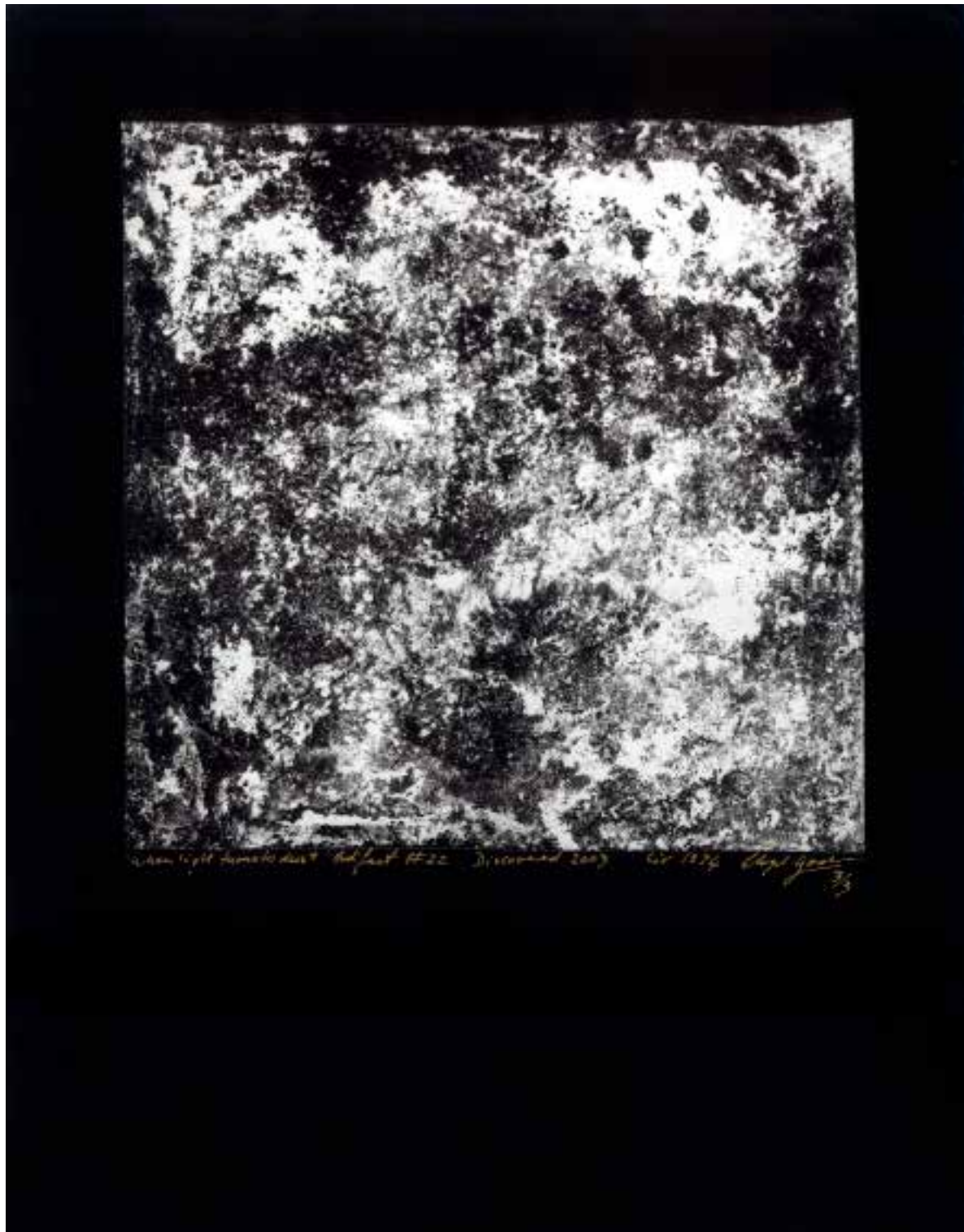
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Title: When Light Turns to Dust Artefact # 22 : - Discovered 2003 Cir - 1974

Medium: Original selenium toned, gelatin silver print

Dimension: 12"X 16" (30.5 X 40.6 cm)



Top: a film negative as found on the site
 Bottom: a positive image from the same film negative, here the tonal values are reversed



Lloyd Godman has an MFA from RMIT University Melbourne (1999), has had over 40 solo exhibitions and been included in more than 250 group exhibitions. He established and was head of the photo section at the School of Art Otago Polytechnic New Zealand for 20 years before moving to Melbourne. He instigated and helped organize several major arts events including:

- Photographs 86: 30 exhibitions of photography, 3 workshops and 7 lectures on photography in Dunedin during a 4 week period.
- Art in the Subantarctic: an expedition of 11 artists to the Subantarctic Islands of New Zealand. Which included such artists as Bill Hammond, Lawrence Aberhart. At the time the touring exhibition from this exhibition toured more venues than any previous exhibition organized by the Art Gallery directors Council

It is doubtful if Australasia has a more protean, visionary and ecologically committed artist than Lloyd Godman. Born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1952, and now living in Melbourne, Australia, he has been exploring environmental issues through photography (in combination with sculpture, painting and installations) since the early 1980s. He began taking more or less traditional landscape pictures in the late 1960s, but exposure to iconoclastic artists like Man Ray, Kurt Schwitters, and Joseph Beuys inspired him to begin chipping at the edges of photography in the interest of breaking down boundaries.

Black and White magazine USA issue 57 2008

Lloyd Godman had lived in the same house for nearly 30 years, but it was only during the summer of 2002-3, that he discovered a series of old negatives on the ground in the cellar left by a previous owner. The silver images that might hold a reference to past lives and events had however decayed and been replaced largely by dust and dirt so Godman took the fragmented artefacts and printed the abstract patterns as one would for a normal b&w photographic negative.

The results are an enigmatic series of photographic prints that seem part photograph, part photogram or Cliché verre. Rich patterns and intricate textures created by the process of decay in nature during the passing of time are given a new life and obscure meanings that only each viewer can invent are suggested in the gestalt