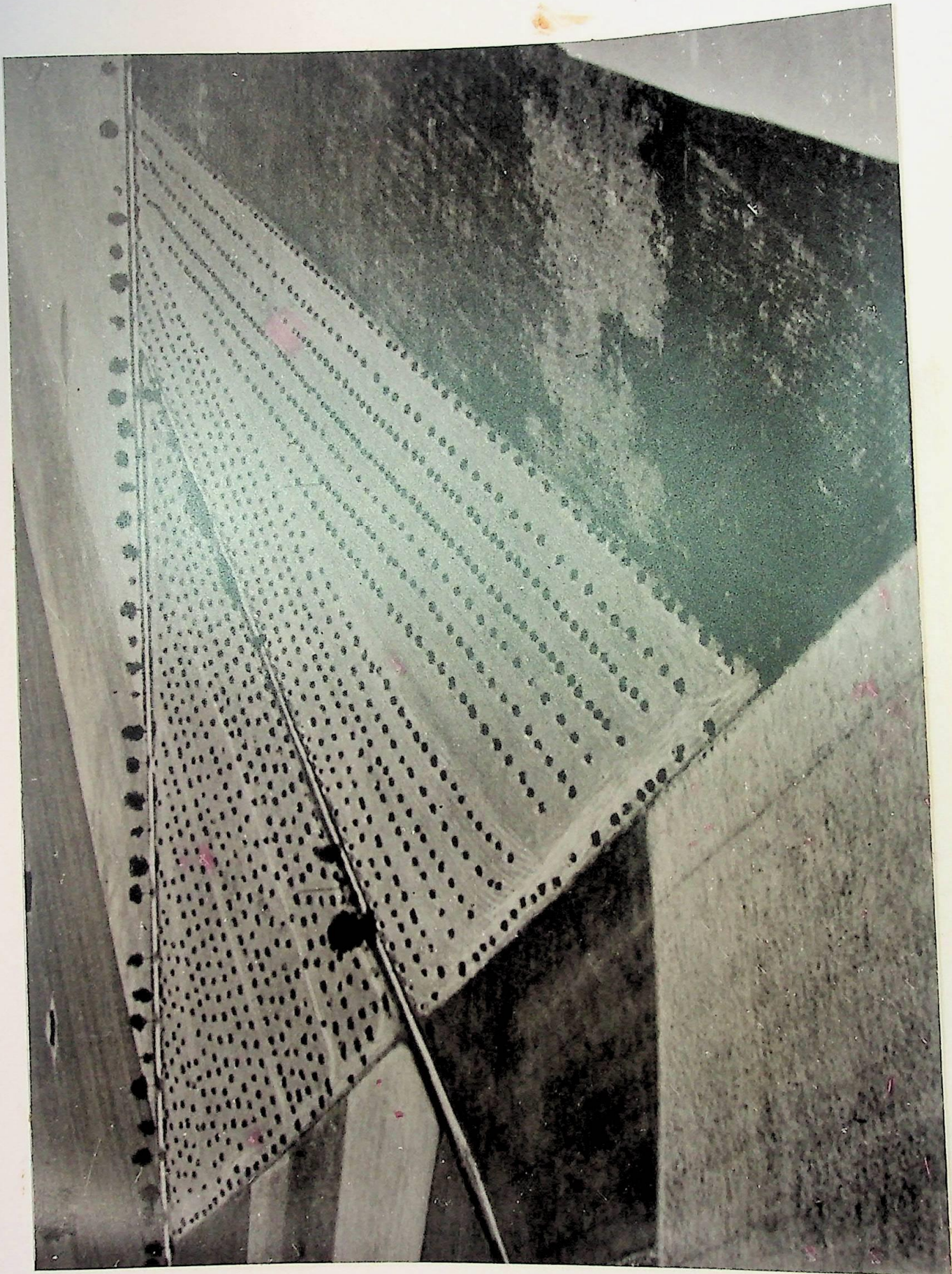


Sheila Naughton: Thesis  
Photographs & Illustrations









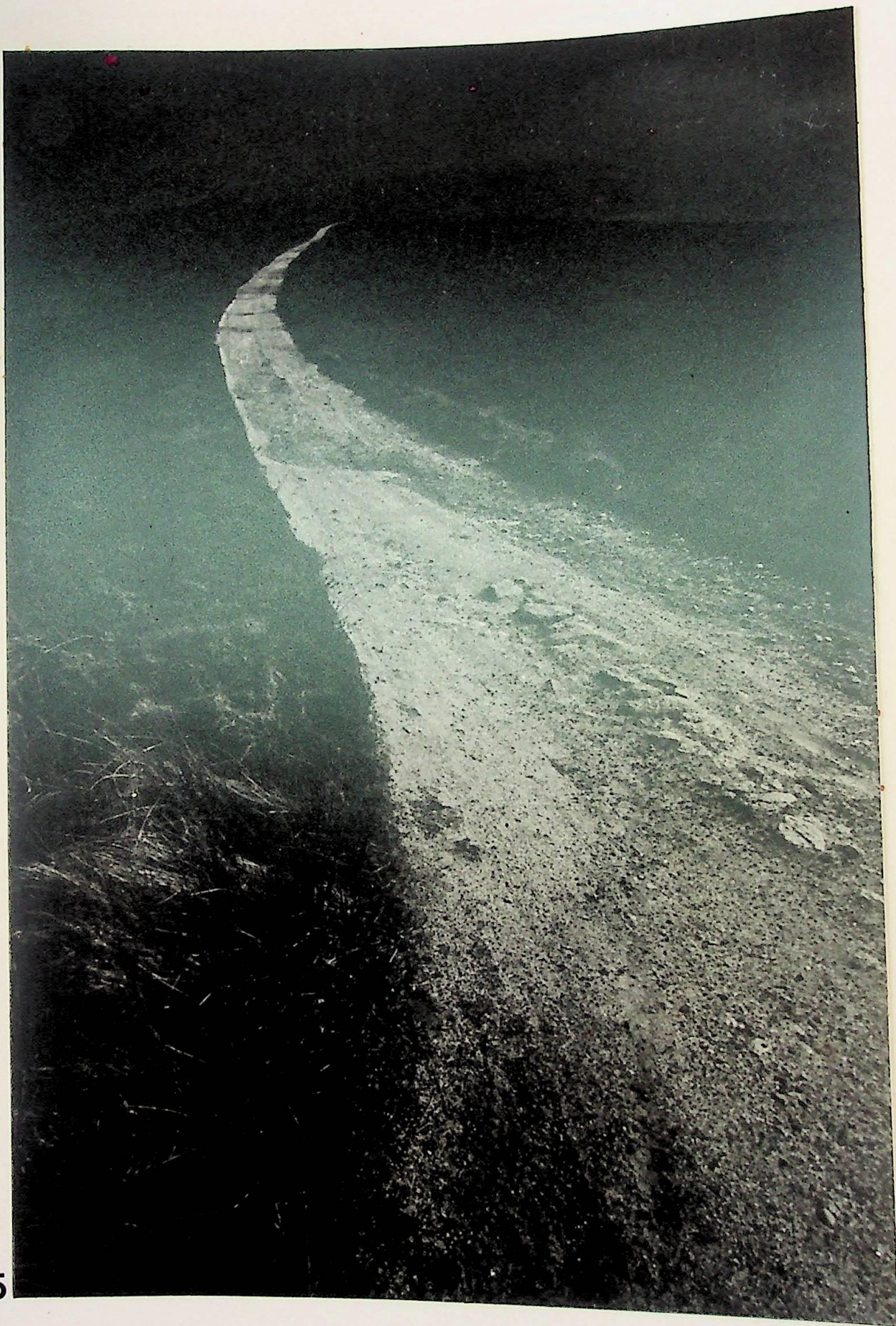






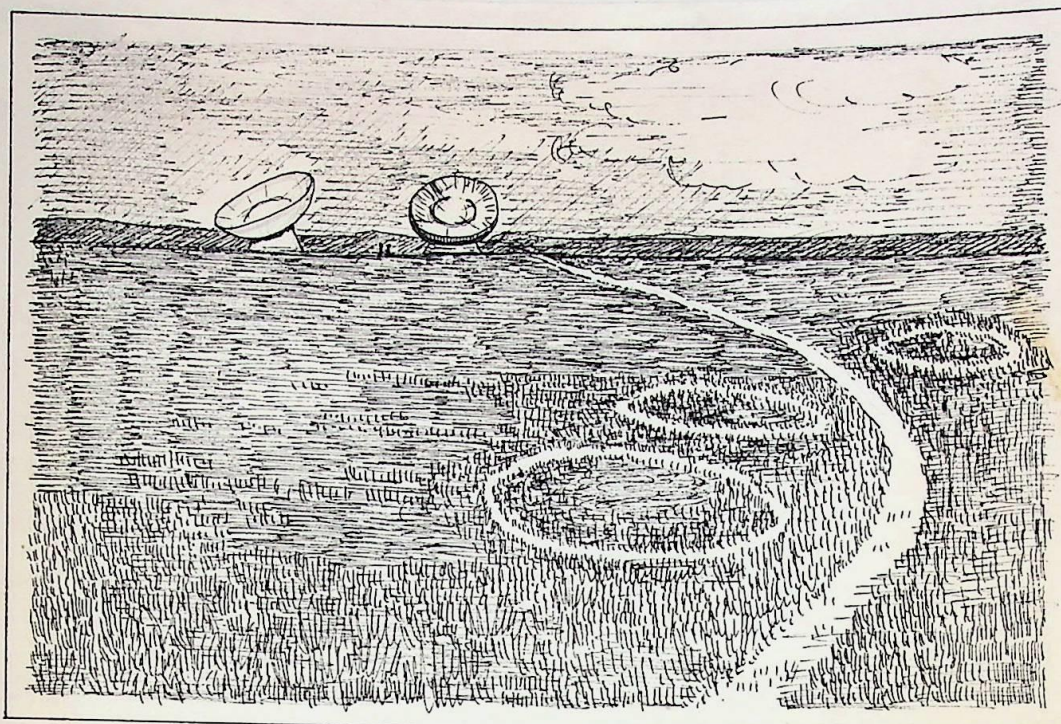




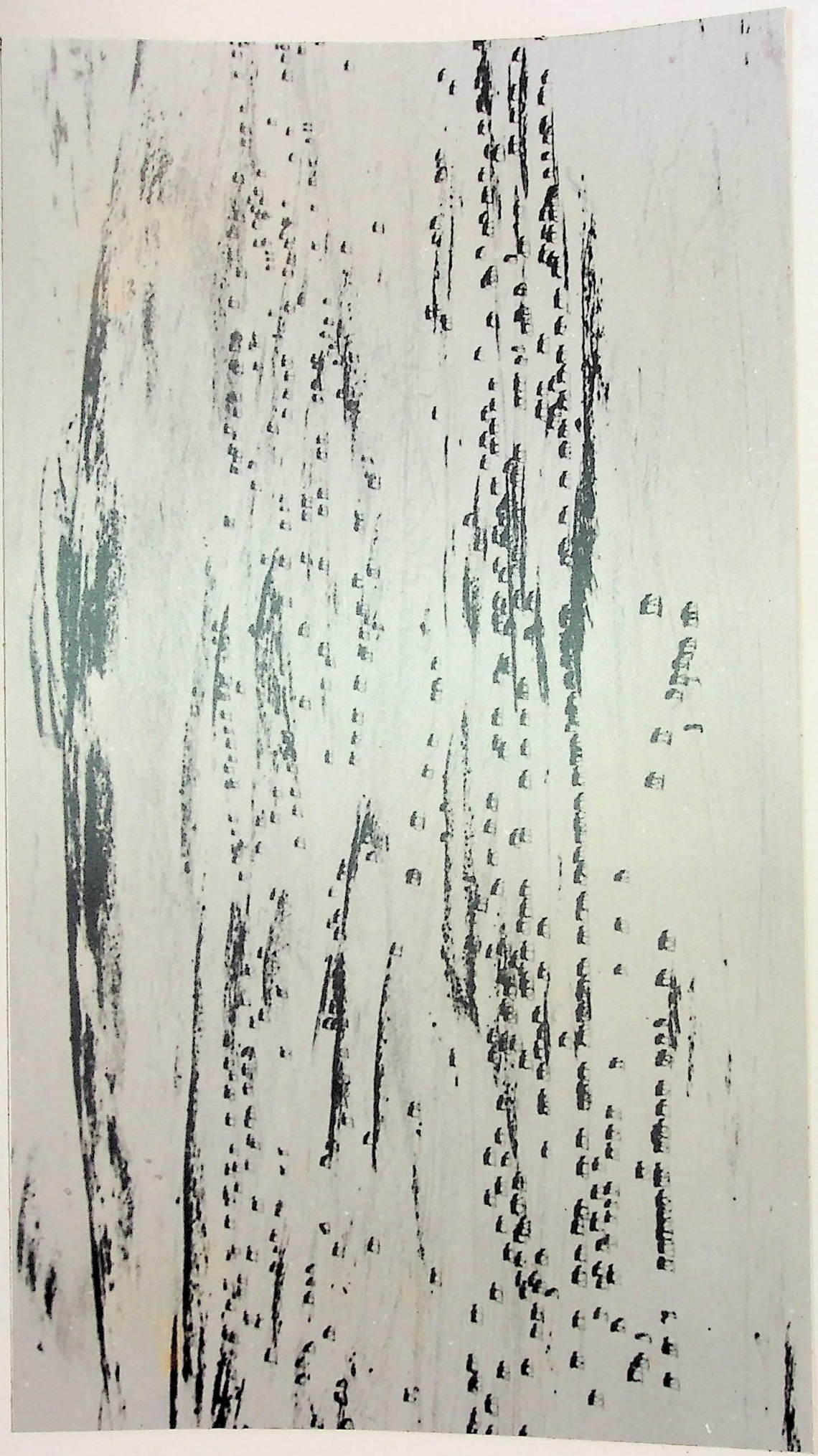




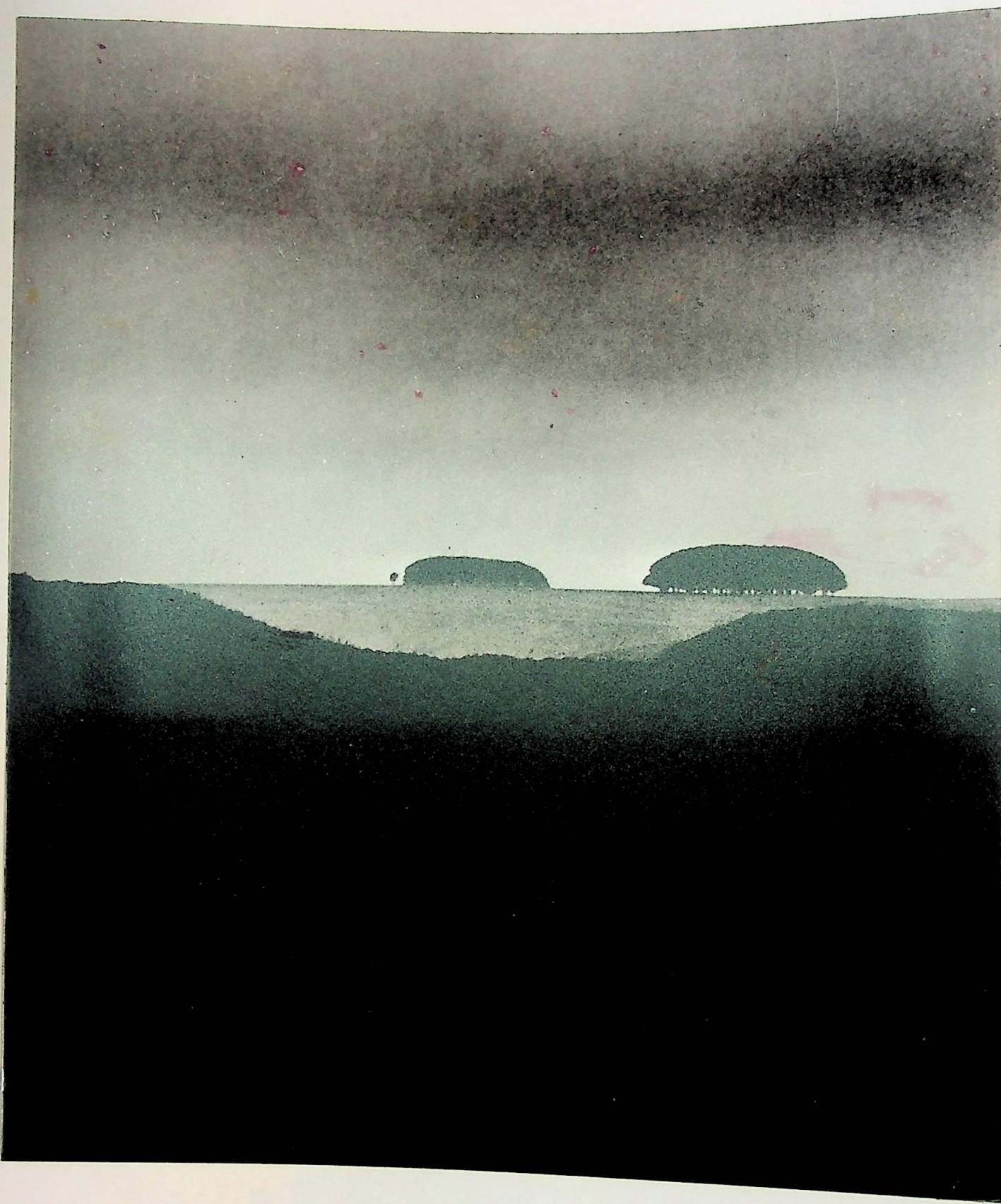
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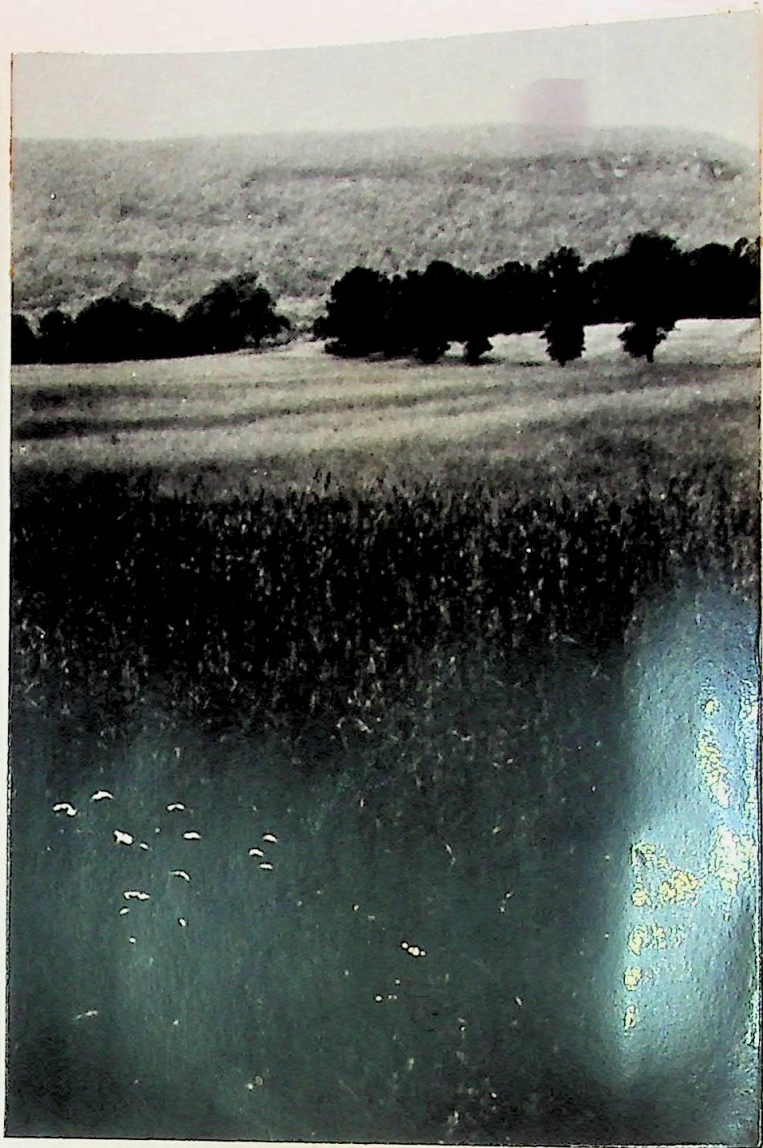
















without filter



yellow filter



red filter



red filter and polarizer

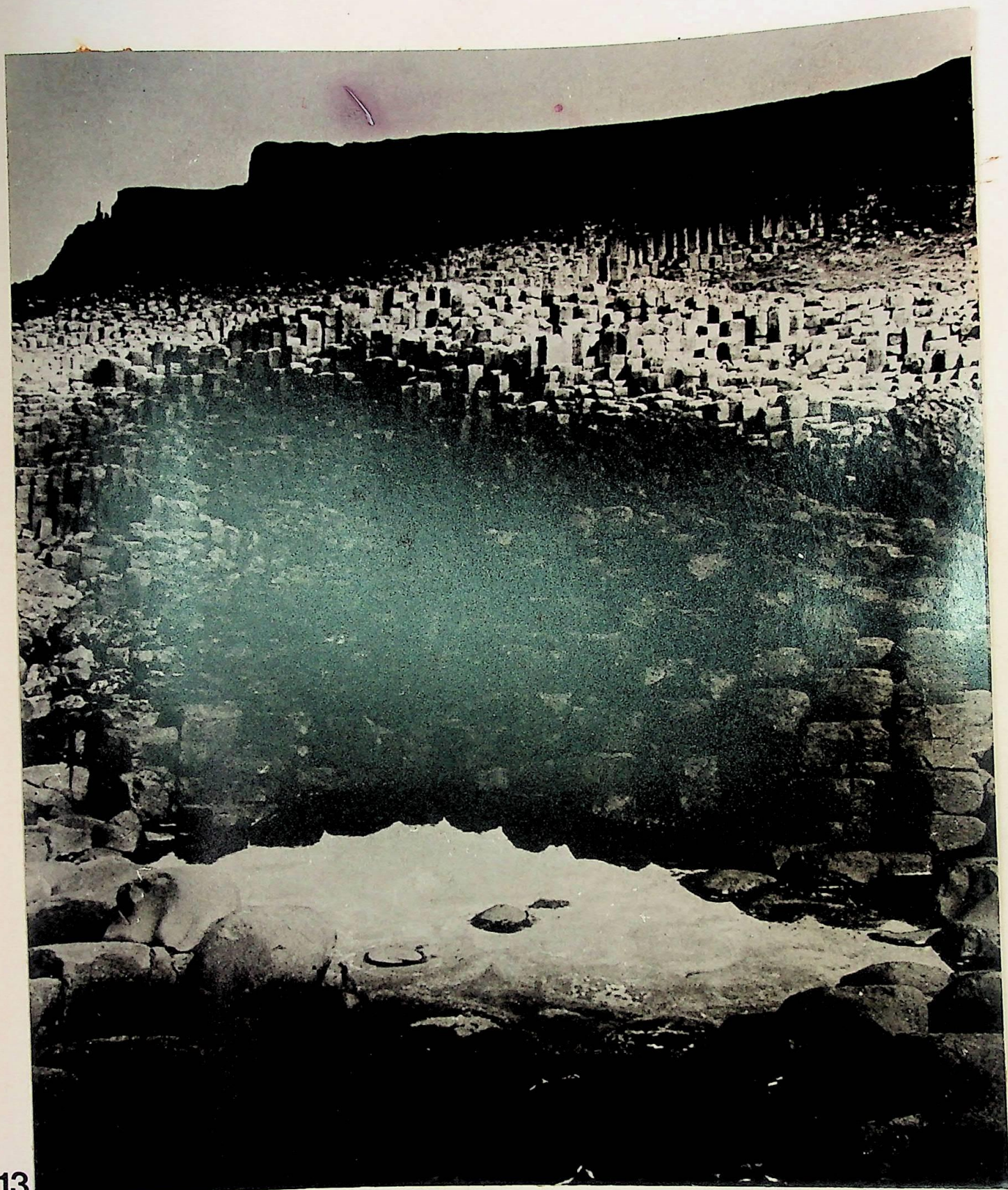




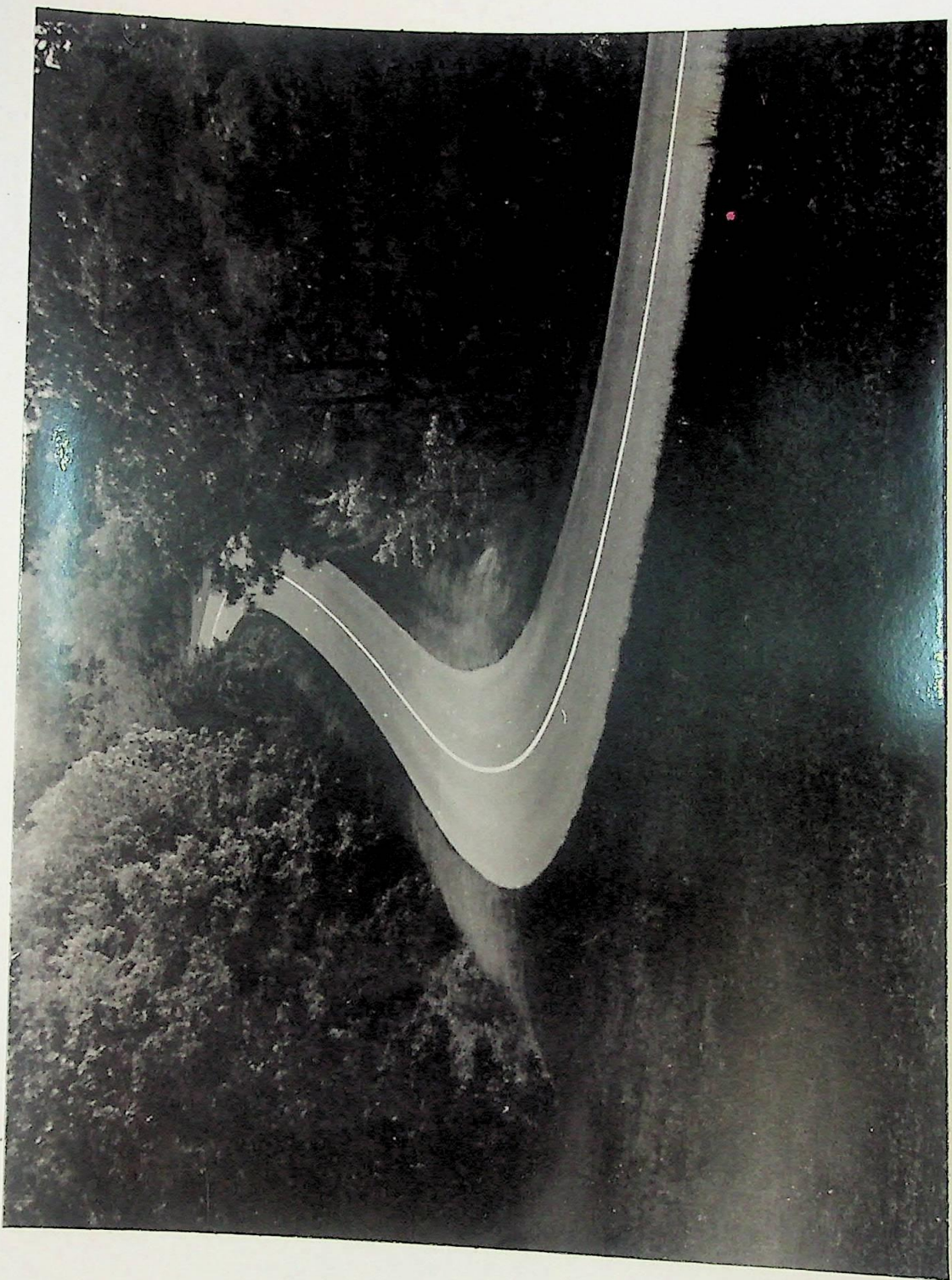




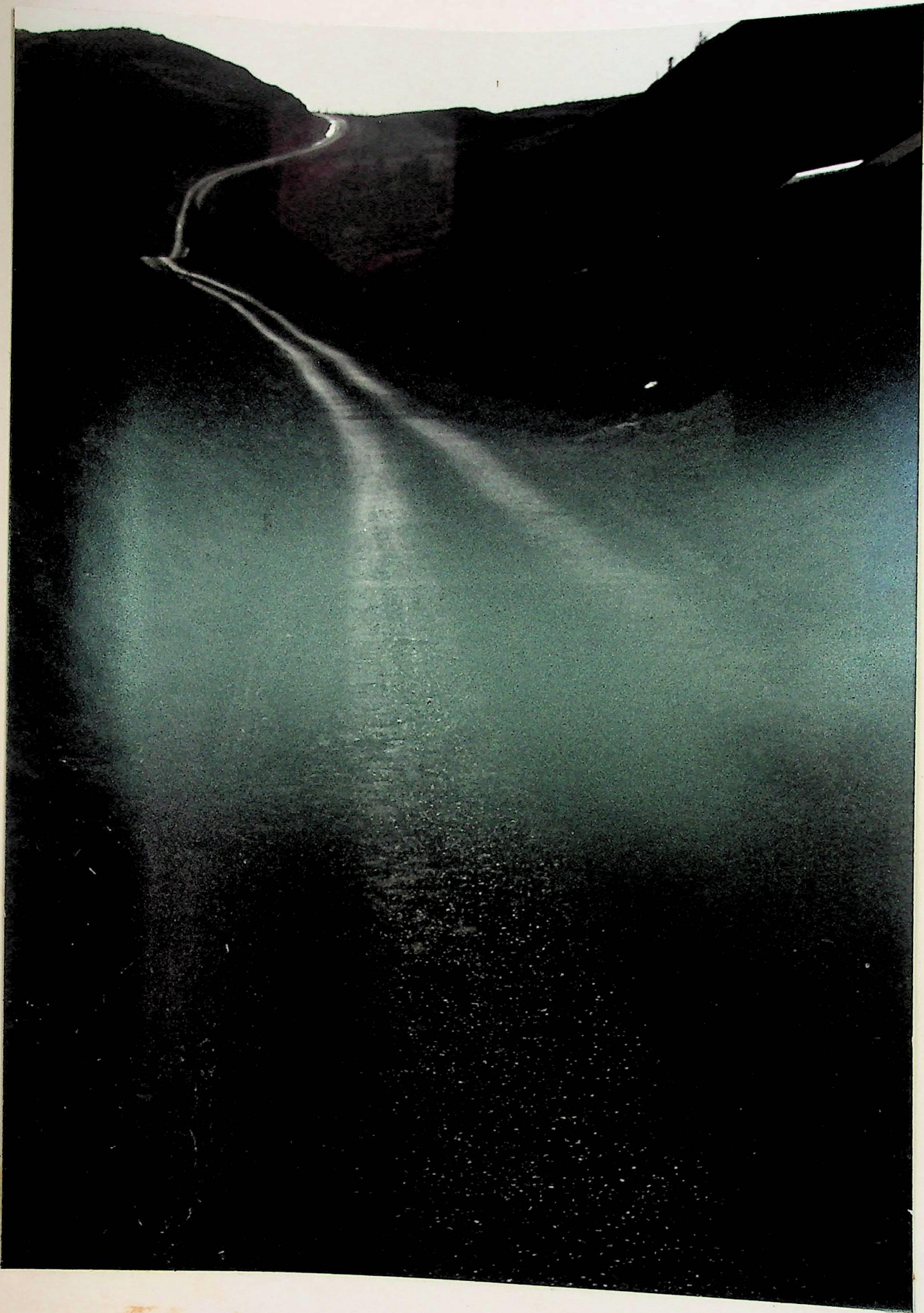












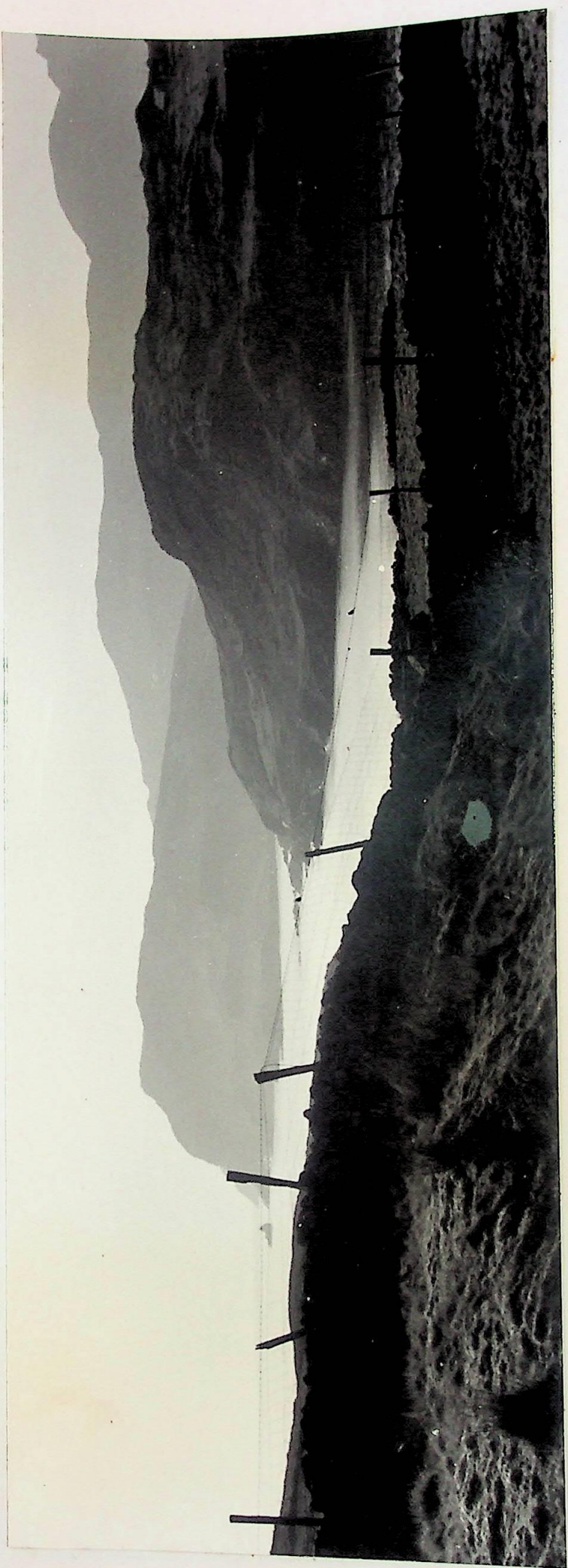












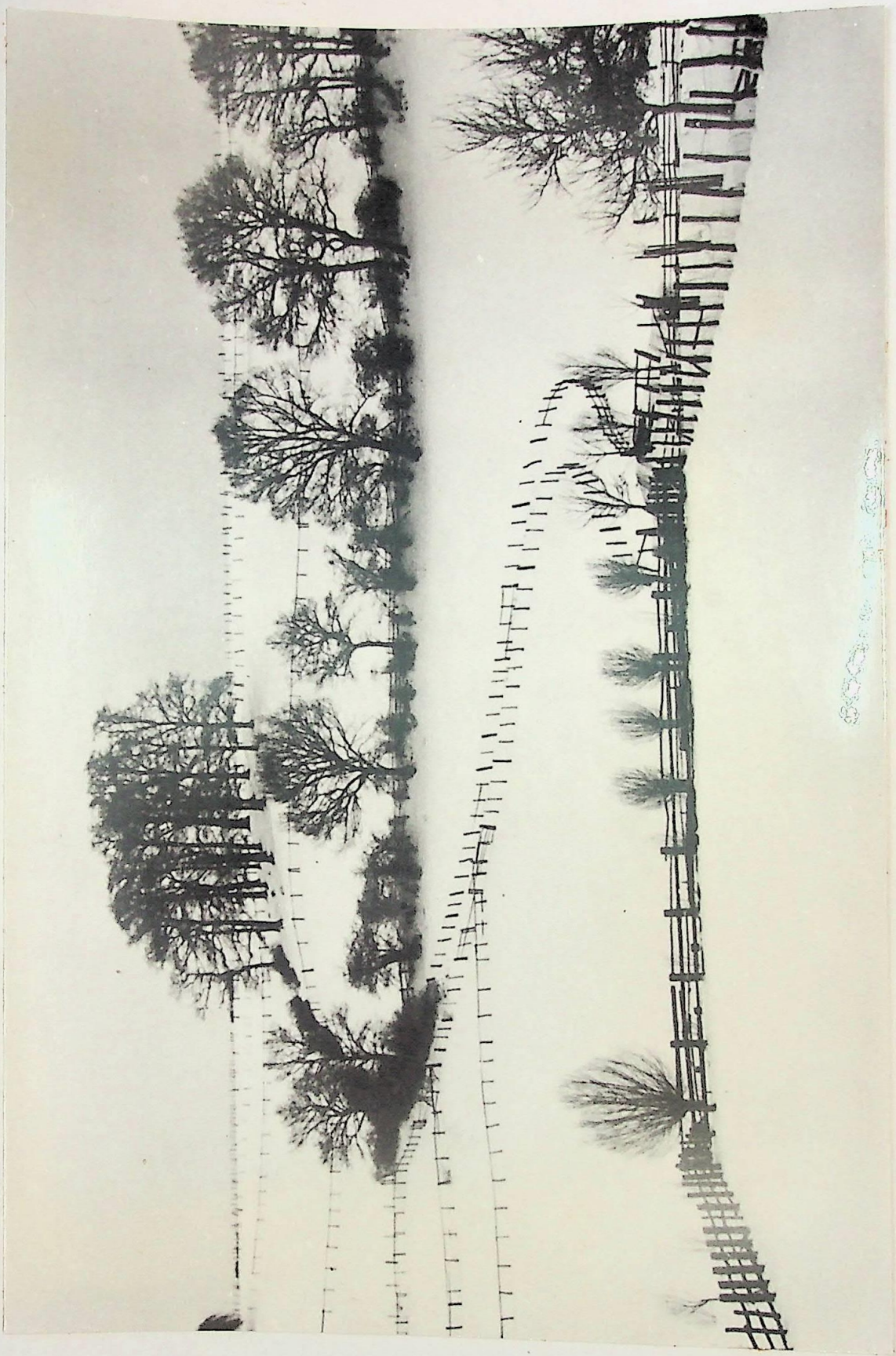












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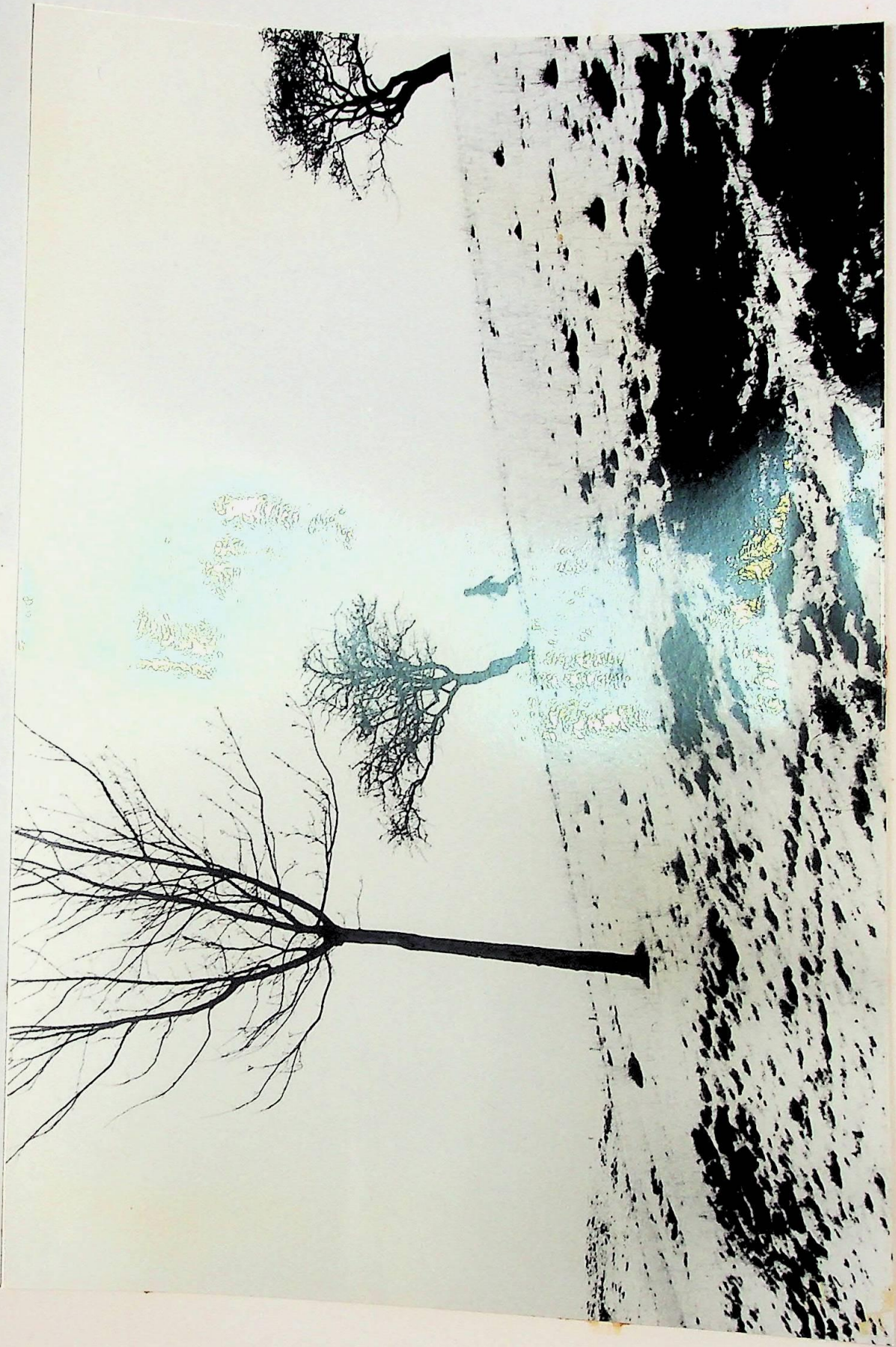






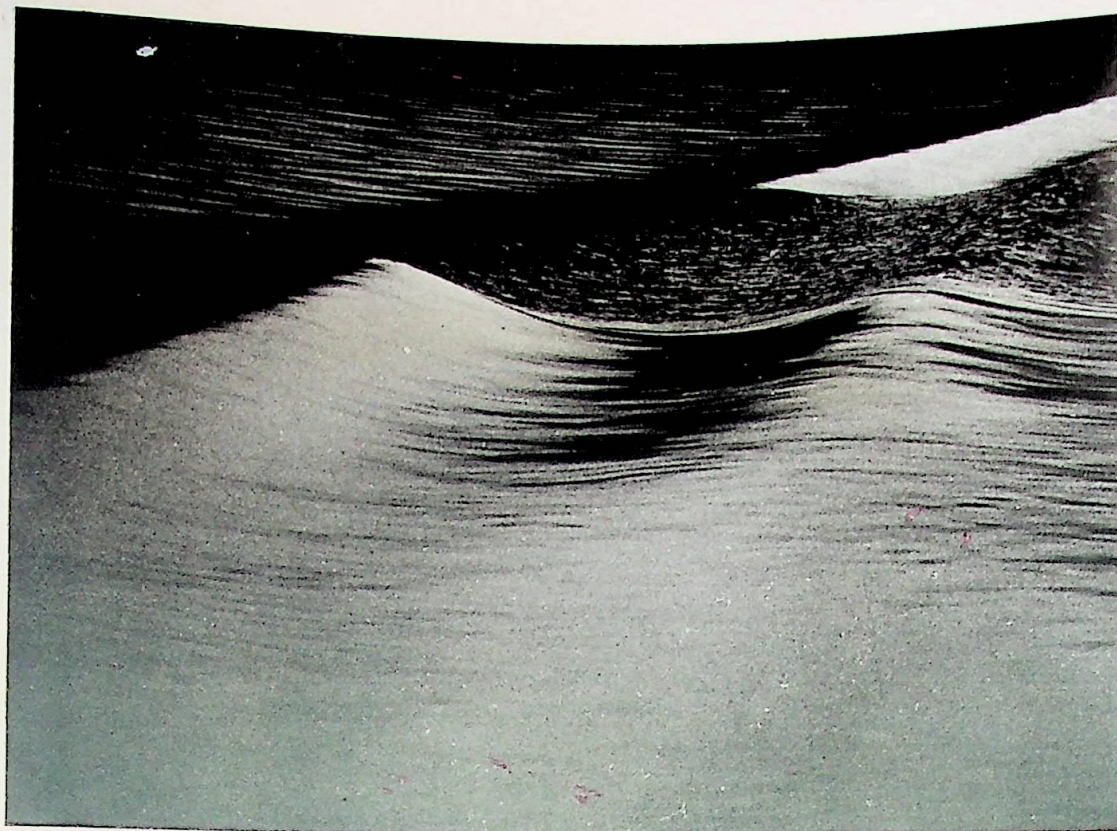
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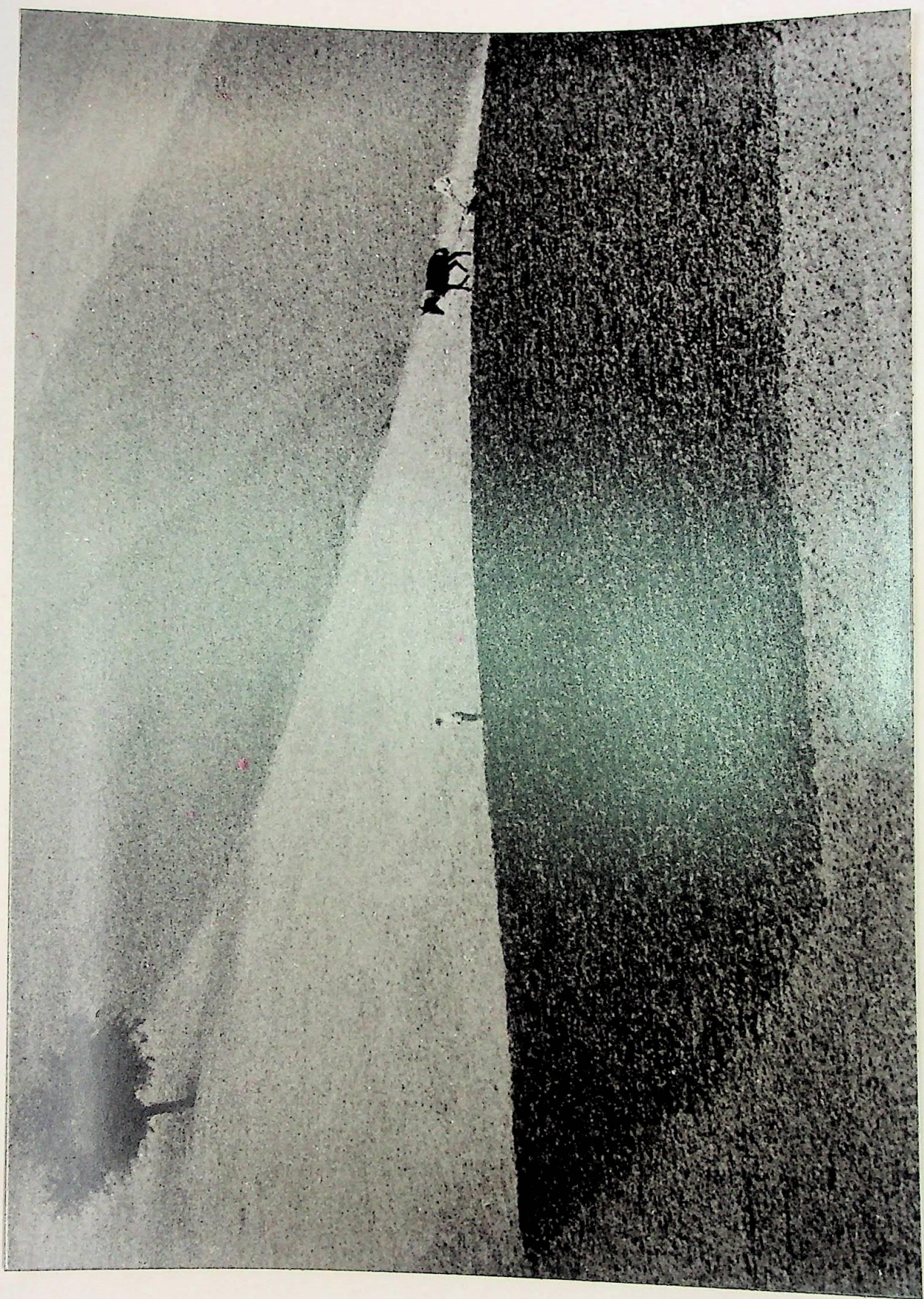












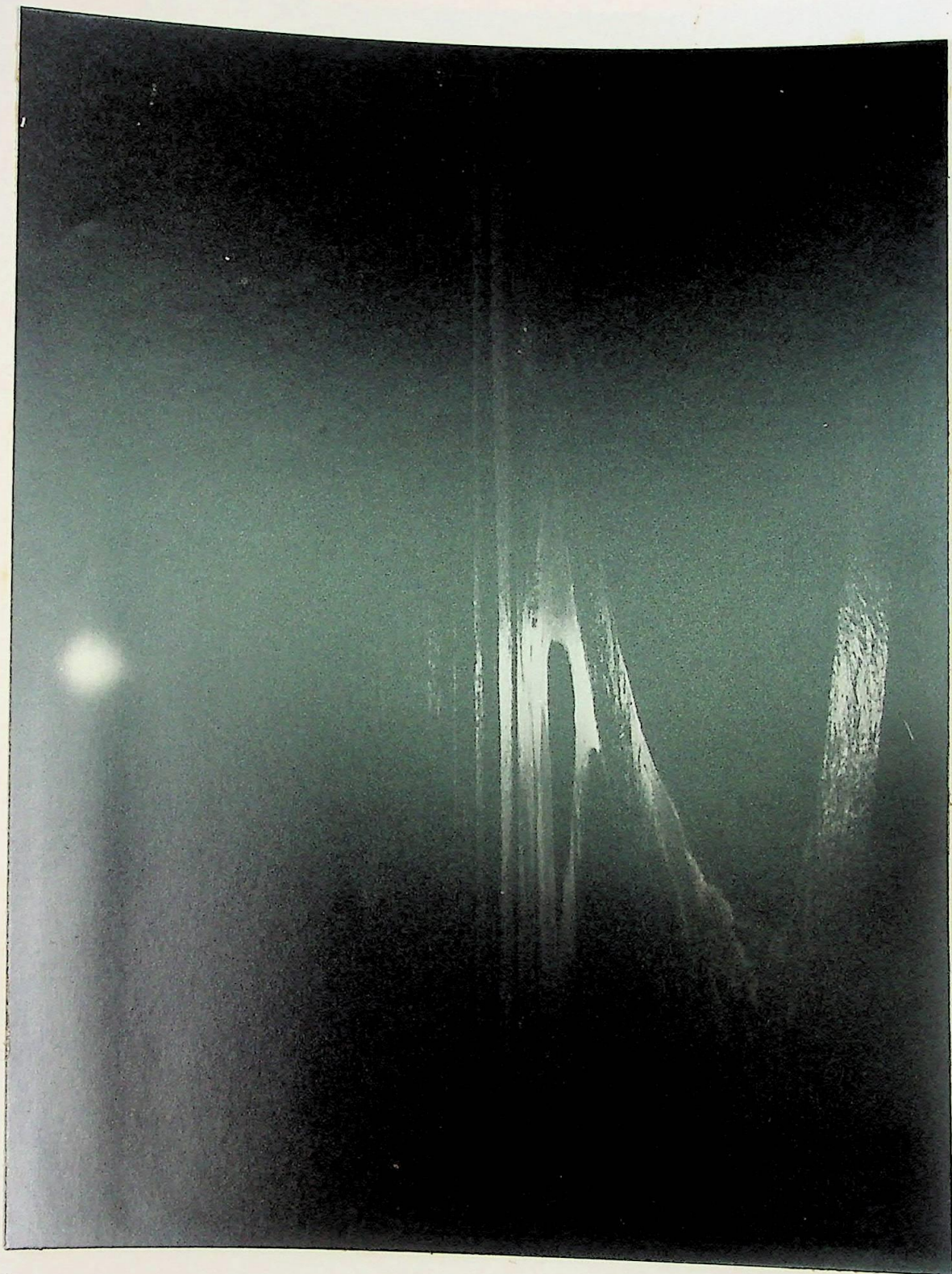
















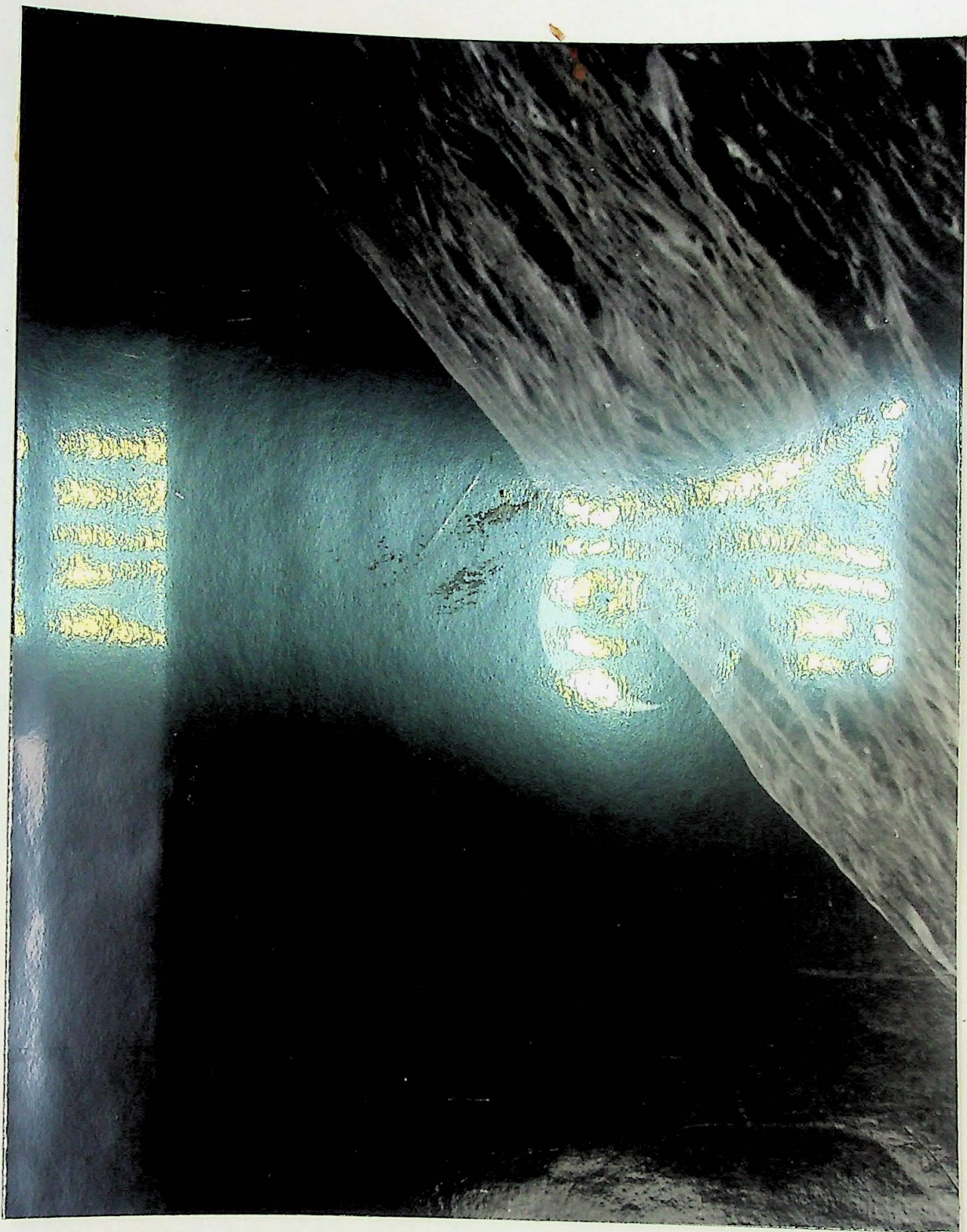




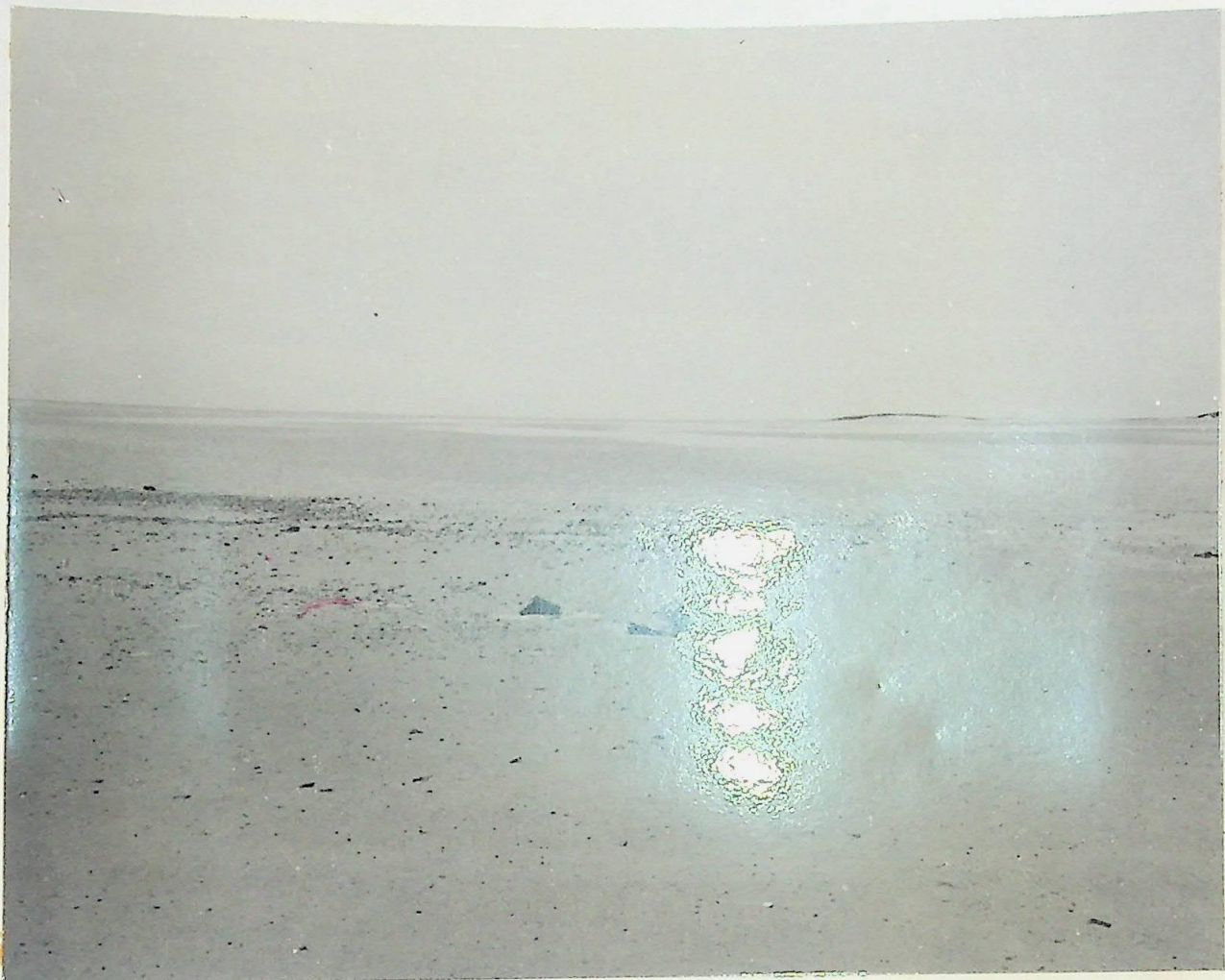














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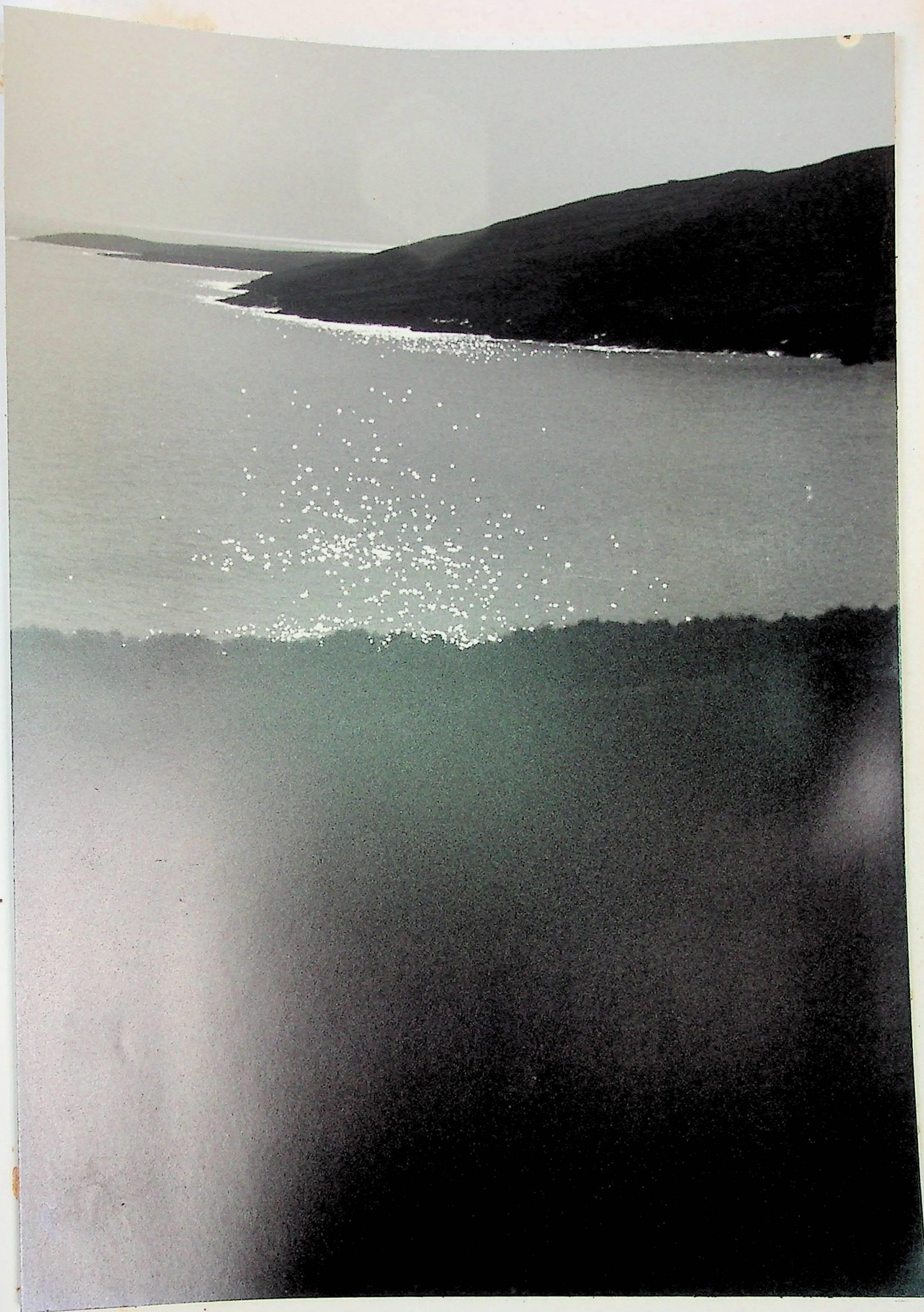
























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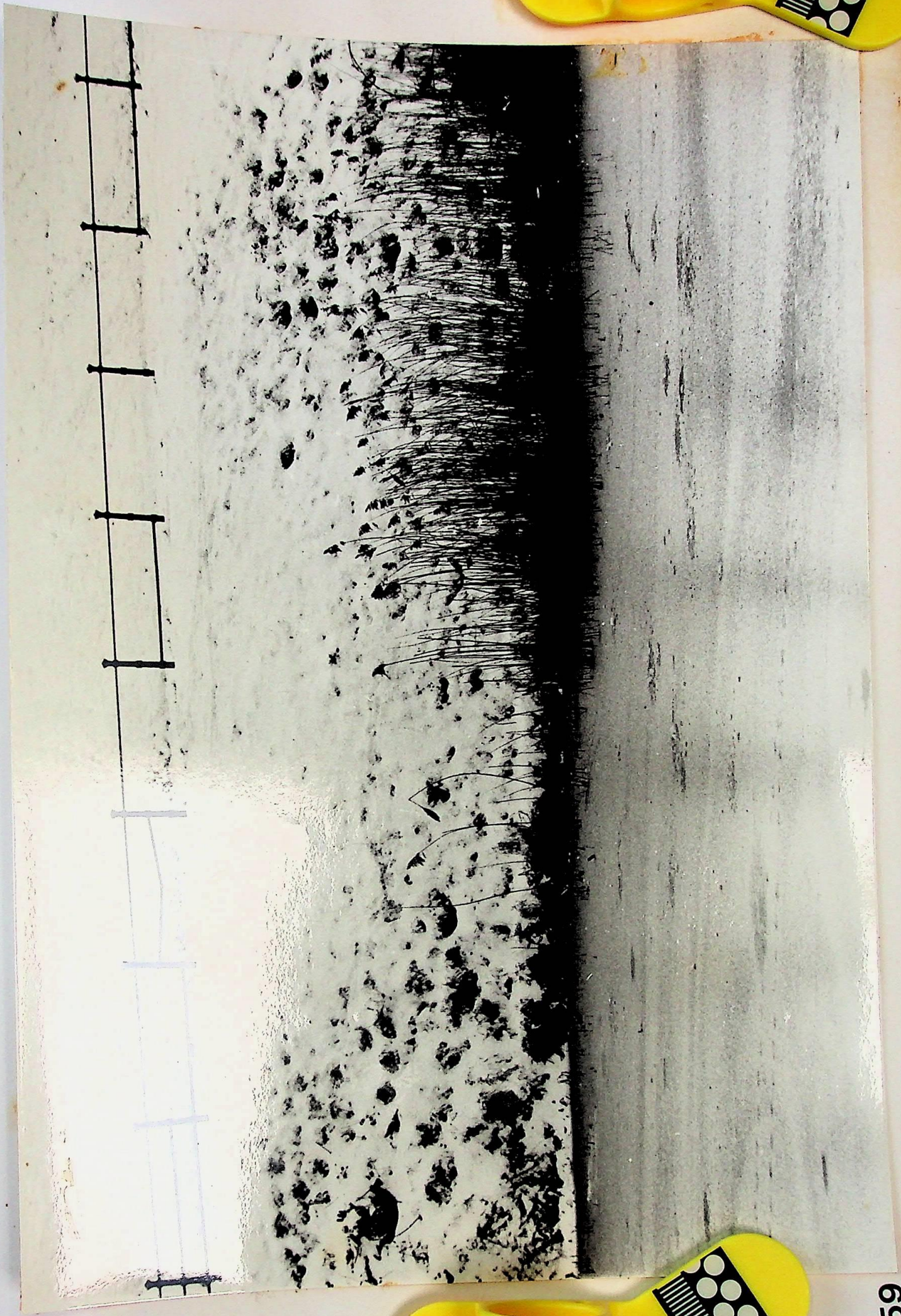










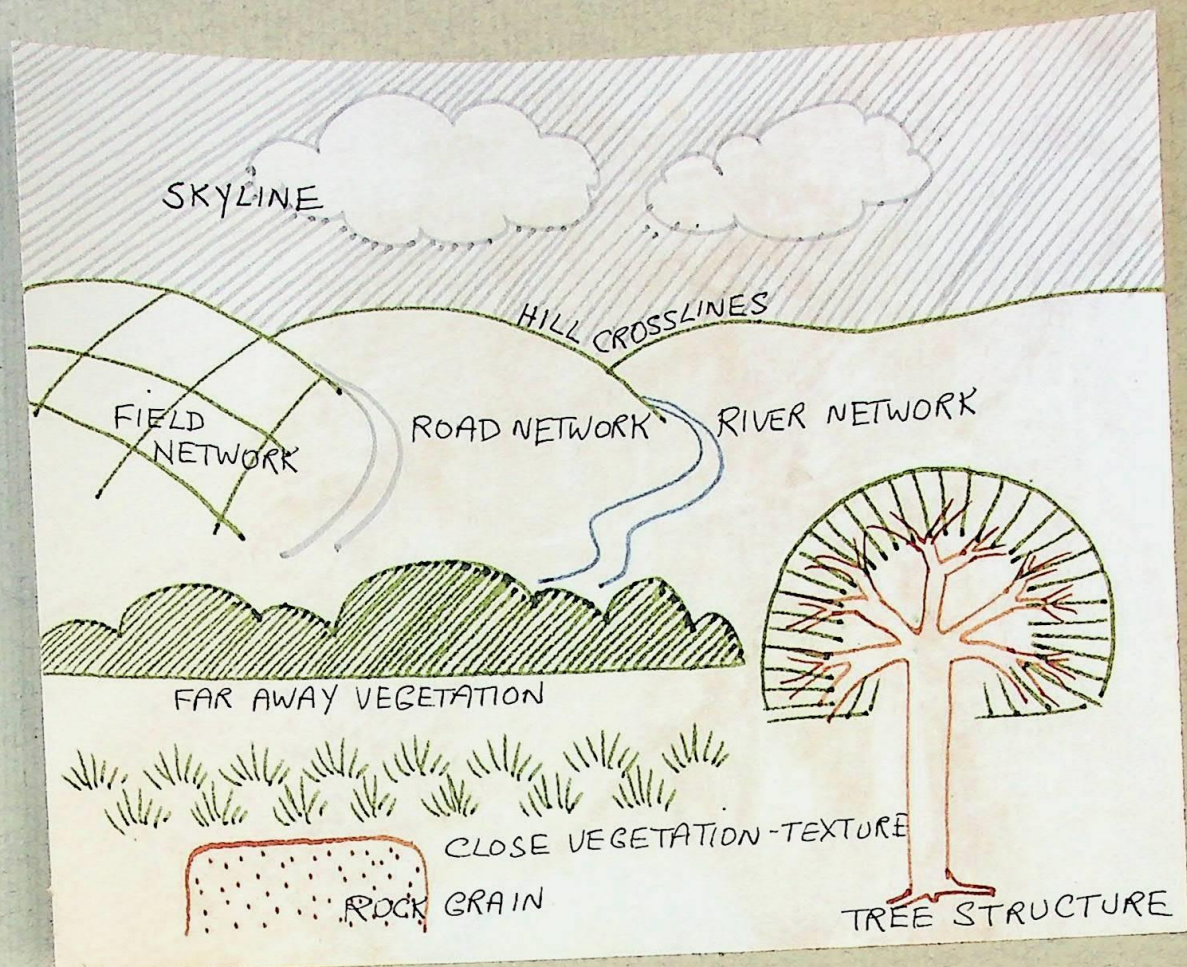




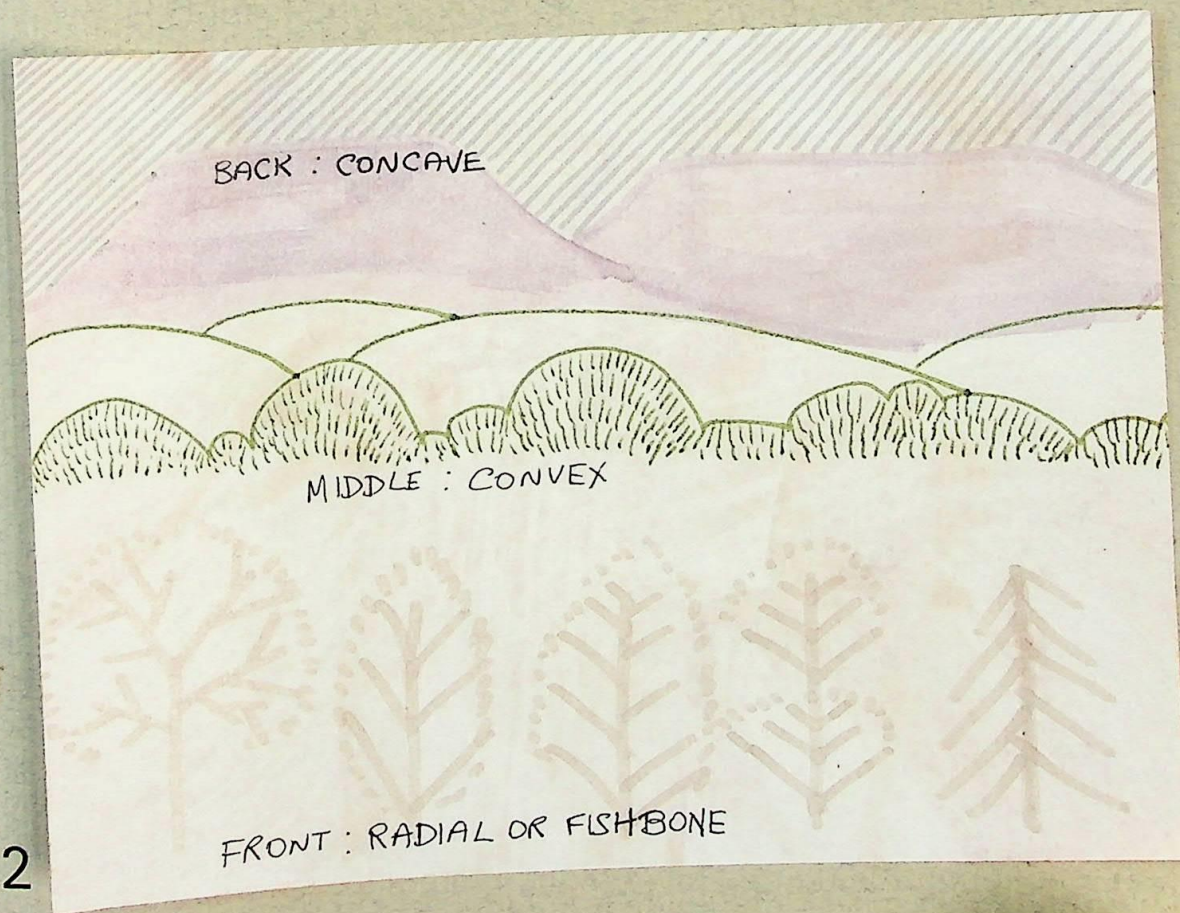


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Diag.1







3



4



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## INTRODUCTION

"Landscape" - the very word implies land that has been changed in some way. If you look up the word in a dictionary, it will define landscape as a piece of scenery. Then it defines "landscaping" as beautifying land by modifying or enhancing the natural scenery. So landscape has come to mean scenery with a plus factor. This factor is 'change'. Change is most obvious when it is man-made, e.g. cultivated fields; however natural factors are constantly changing and reshaping the land too - so mere land scenery becomes landscape.

Today, landscape means different things to different people - to the tourist who is looking for an undeveloped landscape, to the farmer or agricultural worker who is keen to develop his land, to the geologist who is concerned with its structure, and to the artist who is concerned with its visual interpretation. Since landscape has become a valid theme in itself - the earliest landscape photographers (calotypes) were taken by Fox Talbot about 1842, and not just a background for other subject matter, several people have concerned themselves with its portrayal and interpretation. Not least of these is the photographer.

Landscape photography seems to be a category unto itself - until you begin to look at landscape photographs. Then you discover that there are many different classes within that general category.

There is:-

- Ill. 1 Pure Landscape (i.e. landscape untouched by man)
- Ill. 2 Man-made landscape (e.g. cultivated fields)
- Ill. 3 Architectural Landscape (not City-scape, just nature with perhaps a solitary house)

Cntd.....



- 6
- Ill. 4 Landscape with people or animals
  - Ill. 5 Landscape which does not include people  
or animals but shows signs of them  
(e.g. a road or stone wall)

These divisions are arbitrary, a way of sorting out the large amount of photographs I have looked at which come under the general heading of "landscape". Many people would disagree with this classification, especially as to what constitutes "pure" landscape.

In a series of programmes on television called "Landscapes of England" - the first of which explored Cornwall, Professor W.G. Hoskins referred to Cornwall as "scenery" rather than landscape. He used the metaphor "a pretty woman that has no intelligence" to describe it. In order for a place to qualify as landscape for him, something must lie behind the external appearance. Why something looks as it does, concerns him more than the way it looks. His approach is perhaps more that of a geologist than an artist. His definition of pure landscape is Guenhilly, an area on Lizard Head in Cornwall. Guenhilly (Ill. 6) is a vast flat area which is devoid of human habitation except for two giant saucers which receive signals from satellites 20,000 miles out in space. Although it is a desolate area now, Guenhilly was once the site of a Bronze Age settlement. Traces of Bronze Age burial mounds remain, and it is this link between the Bronze Age and the 20th Century with its futuristic space capsules, that makes him see Guenhilly as "not just scenery but pure landscape". However, pure landscape for me remains landscape that has been changed by natural forces but untouched by man as regards development of any kind.



Another disputable area is the landscape photograph with people or animals. When looking at one of these, an arbitrary decision has to be made as to whether it is really a landscape photograph or a photograph of people or animals in natural surroundings. I have decided that it is a 'portrait' when the expressive power of the person or animal is the most powerful element in the photograph. If the person or animal is inseparable from the land, then it is a landscape (e.g. a man to show the scale of a mountain).



Similarly, with a building as in Bill Brandt's picture (Ill. 3) of the Brontes House. The house seems to grow from the land, is inseparable from it. Brandt is concerned not so much in showing us what the house looks like as what it FEELS like. The atmosphere of an isolated house on a wind-blown heath is powerfully evoked.

Generally, if the photograph contains only one person or animal or building, it may still qualify as a landscape; but if there are more objects, the grouping of figures or the pattern of buildings become more important than the landscape, even though it may remain an integral part of the picture (Ill. 7).

My thesis is concerned mainly with "pure" and some "man-made" landscape photographs, although here and there a few borderline cases creep in. But these are so outstanding that it would be wrong to exclude them merely because they do not fit into a particular category.



LANDSCAPE: - THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Where did it all begin, this fascination with our natural surroundings? Kenneth Clarke, in his book "Civilization" (chapter on 'Worship of Nature') writes:- "For over a thousand years the chief creative force in western civilization was Christianity. Then in about the year 1725, it suddenly declined, and an intellectual society practically disappeared. Of course it left a vacuum. People couldn't get on without a belief in something outside themselves, and during the next hundred years they concocted a new belief, which however irrational it may seem to us, has added a good deal to our civilization, a belief in the divinity of nature"

Such a belief doesn't seem all that irrational to me. People always lived off the land practically - it is hard to believe that they were indifferent to it aesthetically as Kenneth Clarke suggests. If they were, perhaps it was because it was never threatened. Today, more than anything else, the landscape photograph is a cry for conservation.

Kenneth Clark goes on to say that "For over 2,000 years mountains had been considered simply a nuisance - unproductive, obstacles to communication, the refuge of bandits and heretics. The thought of climbing a mountain for pleasure would have seemed ridiculous. The earliest recorded event of this kind occurred about 1340 when Petarch climbed one and enjoyed the view from the top. Apparently he was then put to shame by a passage from St. Augustine.... "And men go forth, and admire lofty mountains and broad seas, and roaring torrents, and the ocean, and the course of stars, and forget themselves."



Some great artists did show an interest in landscape however. Paintings earlier than 1725 suggest a love of or at least reverence of nature, e.g. Breughal, early illuminated manuscripts, Altdorfer etc. Similarly the psalms, and early Irish poetry express a love of nature.

The emotional response to nature first appeared in minor poets and provincial painters. Then in about the year 1760 Jean Jacques Rousseau became totally absorbed with his love of nature (lakes and Alpine valleys of Switzerland) until, for him, it became a sort of mystical experience. In 1765 Rousseau took refuge (from persecution, because of his outspokenness) on an island in the lake of Bienne, and there (Clarke tells us): - "In listening to the flux and reflux of the waters, he became completely at one with nature, lost all consciousness of an independent self, all painful memories of the past or anxieties about the future."

The most recent enquiry into the meaning of landscape is by Jay Appleton in his book "The Experience of Landscape" published in 1975. He traces the earliest reference of an aesthetic or emotional response to nature to the first major enquiry, which came about in 1757. This was by Edmund Burke, who published his thesis called "A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful". Burke realised that certain types of landscape evoked certain emotions. Those which showed a landscape subjugated by man induced a sense of peace and tranquility. These he referred to as "beautiful". Those which showed the wild untamed forces of nature induced fear, because they were regarded as being a threat to the well-being of man. These he called "sublime". This differentiation doesn't exist today. While some people prefer homely rural landscapes, others are equally attracted to wild lonely places which they consider "beautiful".



LANDSCAPE IN LITERATURE

Wordsworth, like Rousseau, recognised that only total absorption in nature could heal and restore the spirit. Wordsworth was described as being a Pantheist, and when one reaches the following passage taken from "Lines composed a few miles from Tintern Abbey" which was written in 1798, it is easy to understand why.

"And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And moves through all things. Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows, and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye and ear, - both what they half create,  
And what perceive, well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul  
Of all my moral being."

Both Rousseau and Wordsworth exerted a powerful influence on literature, and Therby on painting. If a landscape image (either a painting or photograph) were to be translated into a piece of writing, it would have to be a poem, not prose. Nothing rhymes in a landscape, i.e. nothing is symmetrical, but everything has a definite rhythm, everything has an echo of its shape in some smaller thing (e.g. Ill. 8) and rhythm is the essence of poetry. Landscape then is the poetry of the Universe, the visual language of nature.



//

## LANDSCAPE IN PAINTING

Landscape has been the inspiration for much art, at first literal, later visual. The earliest landscape paintings derived their imagery from poetry. The paintings of Poussin, Claude and Corot, for example, all have a poetic quality about them. They depict an idealized landscape, restful, charming, their purpose being to induce tranquility of spirit. They are 'beautiful' rather than 'sublime'. Most of the early landscape paintings were Italian. They took their inspiration from nature but they didn't depict the real landscape; all the elements there were composed according to a preconceived ideal.

The 18th Century early Irish landscapes in the National Gallery such as those of Barrett, Ashford and Mullins all look as if they were painted at the same time of the evening (sunset), because they all have a peculiar gold light illuminating the sky. They look unreal to me because the earthy blues and greens and browns are missing. The influence is Italian, not Irish. One exception was Thomas Sautella Roberts, who had a feeling for light.

Kenneth Clarke explores the subject of landscape interpretation much more fully in "Landscape into Art". However as this book deals specifically with painting and only mentions photography insofar as it relates to realism in painting (pg. 89), I hesitate to quote as it is outside the subject matter of my thesis.



PAINTING VERSUS PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography is the most recent means by which landscape is represented. Initially, photography was regarded with the utmost suspicion by painters, and indeed with the advent of the photographic image painting was regarded as "dead" by some - superceded by photography. Insofar as the objective of painting was the exact reproduction of reality, then photography was undisputedly superior. We now know that painting didn't "die". But it couldn't remain unchanged. Photography greatly influenced painting - more in the way we see and perceive things than anything else. However it did exert a direct influence on some painters such as Corot and the Impressionists. In his book "Art and Photography" Aaron Scharf attributes halation (a blurred photographic effect) to a new impressionistic style which appeared in the work of Camille Corot in the late 1840's. It is possible that Millet and other painters of the Barbizon school were also influenced by photographic landscape.

With the impact of modern art and the realization that the interpretation of an image rather than its realistic reproduction was important, photography became a medium in its own right. Painting and photography have much in common; both are two-dimensional forms of image making; both have certain compositional elements in common - shape/form, texture, contrast, pattern and mood. While painting can never match the naturalistic images of the camera, it has its own abilities to depict realism. The camera is equally limited in its ability to depict certain things because of focusing limitations. The camera lens is not a substitute for a brush, but another, different way of seeing and thus expressing an image.



# LANDSCAPE - THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE



Landscape photography does not always present us with a realistic image (Ill. 8 again). The image is real but exaggerated. Just as abstract painting attempts to make us see beyond the reality that is, so the photographic image can be manipulated to do more than just record a scene. Everyone can take a photograph but not everyone has the ability to make us experience vision. I don't think it is enough merely to record the landscape, something of the experience should permeate the image and impart itself to the beholder. Like real life experiences and fiction, more truth can often be presented through the use of fiction. This is probably supposing that art is a search for truth. Art can be anything from making a functional object decorative and beautiful to making a comment on society. But people who commit their entire lives to, for example, painting, are hardly working themselves to death just to make things "pretty". They are pursuing a vision. Art is essentially a search of some kind - a search for God, for an understanding of life, and thence a meaning for our existence - man always needs reasons, an answer to the eternal question "why".

"Every time we look at a photograph we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights". (Berger - "Ways of Seeing"). This is true of the landscape photograph also. The photographer must choose the particular image he wishes to portray and the way in which he will portray or interpret it. He may have a number of different lenses from which he will choose according to whatever he wants to emphasize. Different lenses will give different pictures of the same scene (Ill. 9). Again, by using a filter on his lens, he will achieve different effects, particularly with the sky (Ill. 10).



He may choose to take a "straight" photograph - i.e. reproduce the scene that is in front of him as accurately as possible. There is a strong argument in favour of the "straight" landscape photograph. Such photographers feel that it is not possible to improve on the real landscape, and that it is dishonest to try to. However, it is frequently found that photographers who specialize in "straight" photographs usually wait for a particular moment before they click the shutter and commit the scene to film forever - for instance, a special effect of light and shadow. Ansel Adams - an American photographer who specialises in scenes of the Rocky Mountains and Grand Canyon, is one of the greatest (some would say THE greatest) landscape photographer of all time (Ill. 11). He certainly has very preconceived ideas about what he wants to shoot and how, and will wait for hours or get up before dawn just to capture a particular scene at a particular moment. But because he waits for a special time to shoot, he is not showing us the scene as it looks for most of the day, but only for a fleeting moment. In this way he is still interpreting the image according to what he personally wishes to convey, although he is not manipulating the real image in any way.



# THE INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE

"A photograph is a reflection of the personality of the maker" (Phil Brodatz - "Land, Sea and Sky"). I think this is true insofar as every professional landscape photographer brings his own way of seeing to a landscape, and somehow, by his particular interpretation, seems to make it his own. It is often said that if ten photographers were taken to the same spot and asked to photograph it, none of the resulting images would be identical. This is because, in the hands of an artist, the camera is no fast, short-cut, mechanical device, or a substitute for painting, but an instrument in its own right with which he feels he can best express himself. A good photographer, when he has chosen his image, will process it to completion according to how he has visualized its interpretation.



One of my favourite photographers is Bill Brandt. In his introduction to "Shadow of Light" - a book collection of Bill Brandt's photographs, Cyril Connolly refers to Brandt's "remarkable romantic landscapes - certainly the most imaginatively constructed landscapes made by a photographer in Britain". The most notable word in this assessment of Brandt's work is the word 'constructed', by its implication that his photographs do not depict actual landscapes (Ill. 3, 8, 12 13). Certainly Brandt has very definite ideas about landscape and uses all the devices at his disposal to achieve the effect he wants. He uses very hard grade paper to print his images, which fades out most of the intermediate greys, leaving only stark blacks and brilliant whites and a few grey tones in between. This is probably why his images appeal to me so much; I love the effects created by light and shadow and the startling contrast achieved in this way. Again, to quote Phil Brodatz - "The strength in a black and white photograph lies in its ability to emphasize form by tonality and contrast". While some photographers work in terms of shape or line or texture, Brandt works in terms of tonal contrast. Johannes Itten would classify everyone into a particular category according to the methods he uses to express himself. Thus he speaks of light/dark types etc., ("Shape and Form" by



Johannes Itten). Bill Brandt is obviously one of these and so are his admirers, including myself.

But apart from the methods he uses, what are the effects he achieves? Firstly, he is one of those people who makes me want to go and see the actual places he depicts. I can't wait to go to Skye, the South Uist, Stonehenge and the Giant's Causeway and see how the real-life experience compares with what I experienced when I saw these photographs for the first time.

There is a sense of stillness in his landscapes. Mood predominates. The strength of his forms lie in their power of suggestion. In Skye and South Uist, nothing is clearly defined; because of this the forms are hypnotic, drawing you into their vague contours to seek out the essential image. Such is the power of imagination. Apart from his ability to use tonal range and contrast, I love his sense of composition.

In order to look at the subject matter and composition of landscape photographs, it is necessary to look at a broad selection and analyse and compare them accordingly.

Two years ago, in 1976, a major exhibition took place in London. It was called "The Land" and was a collection of the greatest landscape photographs in the world. I have reproduced a selection of these photographs, (taken from a catalogue of the exhibition, also called "The Land") along with others from different sources. These represent as comprehensive a selection of landscape photographs as possible, and by looking at and analysing them in terms of subject matter and composition, it will be easier to see why they appeal so much, and more important, what they have to say.



THEMES IN LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

The same themes recur again and again in landscape photography, eg. sea, sky, mountains, roads, trees. Their beauty lies not in their repetition, but in the endless ways they manifest themselves and the variety of their interpretation. The same mountains present different images at different times of the day, in sunshine and shadow, in rain and snow.

Continuous interest is maintained by continuous change. We use these changes to identify our own changing moods with too. Pathetic fallacy - when nature seems to be in sympathy with us - was a popular concept in the literary world of the 18th century. While few of us would seriously consider the idea of a landscape that responds to our moods, we do nevertheless, identify certain climatic conditions with certain emotional responses. Sunshine cheers us up, especially sunshine after rain; grey skies with overhanging clouds do depress if they remain for a long time.

A sky filled with stars makes us realise the vastness of the Universe; it is hard not to be filled with awe and exhilaration at the idea of a concept such as infinity.

This is one of the reasons why landscape is more than just scenery to be admired from afar. We are an integral part of it, or at least of planet Earth, and some kind of bond is bound to develop from our dependence on the land.



THE ROAD

To begin with themes, let us look at something as simple as a road, and how different people portray and interpret it in different ways. I have used some of my own photographs beside the more famous ones - they are in no way comparable but they share the same subject matter as I saw and perceived it, and so support my thesis.

In Bill Brandt's photograph, the man and road share equally as subject matter. The fact that the man is walking with his bicycle gives some information about his burden and states visually that the road goes uphill. The isolation of the single figure on the road gives a feeling of loneliness. Without seeing a title or being told anything, we note the blackened man and assume from both his appearance and the landscape that he is a miner on his way home from work.



Paul Caponigro's image is much more modern. Snake-like, the white striped road gives an incredible sense of movement and speed. This is a road made for cars that are going somewhere fast. You almost get the feeling that a car has just careered around the corner before this photo was taken.



This photograph of Fergus Bourkes' is my favourite photograph of the road and also my favourite photograph of his. I love the feel of the upward-climbing road, which is hardly more than a boreen. It seems to lead you into the very heart of the mountains, to somewhere very peaceful and far removed from civilization. (A road leading to nowhere when nowhere is just the place you want to go). Fergus Bourke doesn't need a figure in his photograph, the road itself is sign enough of man. And the simple nature of this road says a lot about a fairly primitive and unintrusive type of man.





- 15 In my own photograph, I was concerned more with how the road described the mountain - the incredible dips where it rose and fell described visually what you were about to experience when you travelled the road. The different angles described the sharp changes of direction necessary to negotiate such a mountain. Lastly, the fact that man built a road there at all said as much about man as I wanted to say.





THE MOUNTAIN

11. 16 Bradford Washburn's photograph looks at first like some interesting snow patterns - until you realise that the six black dots are actually men. Then, the sheer mass of the mountain becomes overwhelming. This photograph is definitely one which would appeal to one's sense of the sublime rather than the beautiful.
11. 12 Bill Brandt's photograph appeals to me much more. The mountain shapes seem much more human in scale, although their blackness seems daunting and mysterious.
11. 17 The rockface by Raymond Moore is a different type of landscape photograph - a close up. No indication is given of scale, yet we sense something large and boldly structured. It's appeal lies in its strong geometric shapes as well as its contrast.
11. 18 The wooden fence with its random posts standing obliquely appealed to me here just as much as the different tones of the mountains. I liked the sense of interaction and contrast of these linear elements with the mountain masses.
11. 19 A definite Bill Brandt influence at work here! The descending mist and hazy day made an otherwise ordinary mountain seem elusive and mysterious. I printed this photograph on grade 4 paper to enhance this effect.





THE TREE

11. 20 Wynn Bullock's tree has an extraordinary human quality about it. Black and sinister looking, it seems to be no mere inanimate thing, but a living, thinking entity, which seems to be reaching out and fingering the sky. The heavy mist adds to the sinister feeling of the place. It reminds me of all the Dracula or Frankenstein films I ever saw - very impressive but disquieting.



11. 21 Albert Renger - Patzsch's trees have a different feeling about them altogether. They are not entities in themselves but form an overall pattern, their soft organic outlines balancing the hard linear shapes of the fences.



11. 22 This photograph by Henri Cartier - Bresson comes under the heading of "cultivated landscape", but everytime I look at it I think "What extraordinary trees"!



1. 23 This is a photograph of a tree despite the fact that only it's shadow appears on the house. Anyone who looks at the photograph notices the tree image rather than the house. I liked it because of the way the tree became part of the gable-end - architecture and nature enhanced each other.



1. 24a A winter tree, taken in the Phoenix Park during the last snowfall. Bare branches seem to have much more character than trees covered in leaves. The sun behind it emphasizes its structure.



1. 24b More trees in the Phoenix Park. The angles they form with the ground create a triangle of action in which the solitary running child is caught. I would like this photograph better if I hadn't cropped off the top of the tree on the left. However it was one of those moments when something happened suddenly to create a picture - the trees on their own are interesting but not outstanding. Then the child appeared suddenly





and made the picture which I tried to capture. The whole centre of interest is in the interaction of shapes between the slanting trees and the opposing slanting figure. I purposely used a slow shutter speed to streak the figure, in order to enhance the effect of movement.



THE SEA

- Ill. 25 Giorgio Lotti's and Minor White's photographs are comparable.  
 & 26 Both are close-ups, where the part represents the whole.  
 The rhythm of a single wave becomes a symbol for the movement of the ocean. Both photographs rely on the effect of light and surface texture - the smoothness of Lotti's wave - the agitated ripples of Minor White's where it comes into contact with the edge of some ice.
- Ill. 27 Steve Crouche's wave breaking in the face of the sun is a very strong expressive image. It almost blocks out the light from the sun, giving a greater sense of strength to the sea. Here, the sea is shown to be the most powerful force of nature.
- Ill. 28 I chose this sunset sea because of the incredible play of sparkling light on the water. It was just terribly impressive and beautiful - there isn't much more I could say about it.





THE LAKE OR POOL

Ill. 29 Another of my favourite photographs of all time is this one of a rain puddle by Wynn Bullock. The reason it appeals to me so much is because it is such a small thing to see so much in. People go off with cameras to photograph large panoramic views; not too many will see something in a puddle at their feet. Yet this small pool reflects the sky like any large lake; even makes you remember how you went out of your way to splash in them when you were a child, and now how we go out of our way to avoid them. Somewhere in the inbetween years I'd forgotten what delightful things rain puddles were - thanks to Wynn Bullock I've seen them afresh.



Ill. 30 Eugene Atgets' photograph has a sense of stillness about it - inland water is still and peaceful compared to open seas. It appealed to me very much the first time I saw it, but I've seen so many photographs of reflections at this stage that the subject matter seems cliched. However it is finer than most and does evoke a sense of peace.





THE CULTIVATED LANDSCAPE

Ill. 2,  
22, 32

I think these three photographs are three of the most beautiful and evokative images I have ever seen.

They have a much stronger appeal than any "pure" landscape. Indeed, they are "pure landscape" not in the sense that the land is untouched by man but because of the opposite reason.

Man and land are independent. The land is enhanced rather than developed resulting in subtle variations of pattern, texture and colour (or rather tone, as it's in black and white). They are the sort of images that you come back to again and again, and although I love wild and remote places, these pictures seem to be the essence of what landscape photography is about.





THE SKY

Sky in a black and white photograph invariably means cloud formations.

Ill. 33



Alfred Stieglitz did a series on clouds in 1923. He tells us that through clouds he wanted to put down his philosophy of life - "to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter - not to special trees, or faces or interiors, to special privileges - clouds were there for everyone - no tax on them as yet - free. (Jonathan Williams in his introduction to "The Land" catalogue, discussing Alfred Stieglitz "How I came to photograph Clouds") He goes on to say that "I had told Miss O'Keefe I wanted a series of photographs which seen by Ernest Bloch (The great composer) he would exclaim: "Music! Music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? And when finally I had my series of ten photographs printed, and Bloch saw them - what I said I wanted to happen, happened verbatim."

Apparently some 'pictorial photographers' came to the exhibition and didn't see anything in Stieglitz's photographs. Because his photographs looked like photographs, they felt they didn't quite qualify to be called "art".

Ill. 34



I always considered clouds as delicate, beautiful things, until I saw this photograph by Sergio Lorrain. Never have I seen such black, menacing clouds - they evoked long-forgotten childhood memories of the end of the world.

I can picture these black clouds moving silently across the sky, blocking the sun and casting the earth into darkness. When I discovered that this picture was taken during an earthquake in Chile, I can fully realize the horror of such an experience. These clouds seem to be much more than a mere collection of vapour - some living force seems to be impelling them forward.





27

The composition of the photograph enhances this effect by having the clouds enter at the upper right hand side. The path of their movement is apparent. They are bringing unnatural darkness, which is terrifying, to an already terrifying event.

I haven't taken photographs of clouds yet, although they've long been a source of fascination to me, but when I do, I know just the place - Connemara.



# PICTORIAL COMPOSITION - AN OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS

The particular appeal of any photograph lies not only in its subject matter, which, depending on whether it is realistic or abstract, may not be immediately apparent.

The initial impression may be made <sup>by</sup> various factors such as contrast, form, shape, pattern and texture. For example, in the use of contrast, the ratio of light to shadow in the picture will determine its ability to present its subject matter either subtly or dramatically. (Ill. 35)



Similarly in the case of form/shape, the effect of hard geometric shapes will be quite different to the effect produced by soft curving shapes (Ill. 17, 36).



Frequently a photograph does not consist of just one of these elements, but of a combination of them. The effect of the image on the observer depends on how the elements are composed. Thus composition can make or break a photograph; how something is presented as well as what is presented is important.

The elements of photographic composition are similar to those of graphics. However, the photographer does not have quite the same scope as the artist - he must select his composition from the scene before him. He can't move a mountain a bit to the left just to comply with certain rules of composition - and if he could, it would probably result in a monotonous photograph.

Most, if not all photographers select their compositions intuitively. They may be aware that a horizon which divides their image in half is not quite as interesting as one which is less symmetrical, or that a diagonal is more dynamic than a horizontal or vertical. Certain rules of composition do exist, but, to quote Harold Mante from his book "Camera Composition", - 'even if the basic rules are followed they can never be an automatic means to artistic



production. At most, they may assist in imparting to the work a rhythmic and logical construction".

If a photograph is analysed in terms of its composition, it will be found to have at least two, and usually more, of the following elements.

- a) A FOCAL POINT OR POINTS
- b) LINES
- c) SHAPES
- d) CONTRAST
- e) PATTERN AND DETAIL

In order to analyse the compositional elements of a photograph, it is best to take a selection of different types which have a combination of different elements in their composition. Formal composition will be immediately apparent in some of them, but it will be found that a certain composition exists in all of them, even the most arbitrary ones.

Before looking at the structure of a photograph let us take a look at their format - either square or rectangular.

The square is the format of absolute symmetry - a 1:1 side relationship. As a format, the square imposes strict limits - few subjects work well in such a format.

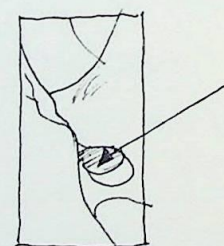
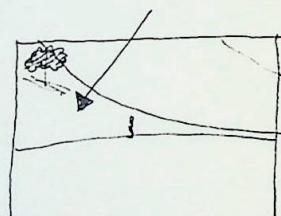
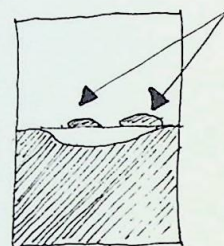
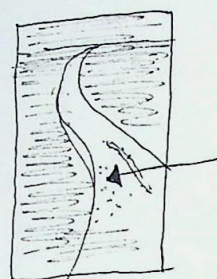
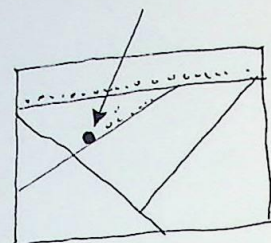
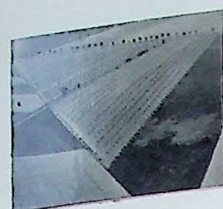
The rectangle, with its infinitely variable side relationship, is the most favoured shape for pictorial compositions. It offers the choice of a horizontal or vertical picture - it thus provides the best medium for making the format suit the subject.

#### THE FOCAL POINT

The focal point is the centre of interest in a composition, and the point on which our eyes come to rest naturally.



## THE FOCAL POINT



31

In Ill. 2 the eye scans the linear elements of the image, but rests on the large black dot as indicated. It's larger size and blackness make it the focal point.

In Ill. 5 the eye tends to follow the road to the horizon, but invariably comes back to rest on the slightly brighter textured area in the middle of the road. When the road gets too small and narrow it becomes difficult to keep ones eyes on it, despite its directional lead, and so we come back to a spot on which it is easier to rest our eyes.

Ill. 8 has two focal points. The eyes alternate from one black spot to the other. For this reason it is a very dynamic composition.

In Ill. 32 the focal point exists somewhere between man and tree. This photograph is one of the most unusual and striking compositions I have seen. Not many people would place such a strong element as that solitary tree in the upper left hand corner.

In Ill. 36 the focal point is the dark central area highlighted by the lighter curving plane. The photograph has quite a rhythmic quality about it - almost fluid, as if it were water instead of rock.

### LINE

Lines may be vertical, horizontal, diagonal or oblique. They may be straight or curved, regular or irregular, broken or unbroken (Fig. f).

An upper horizontal line and two strong oblique lines are the main compositional elements of Ill. 2. The point at which they cross is particularly dynamic. Oblique and diagonal lines bring instability to the composition. This calls for the balancing effect of some horizontal - such as the horizon.



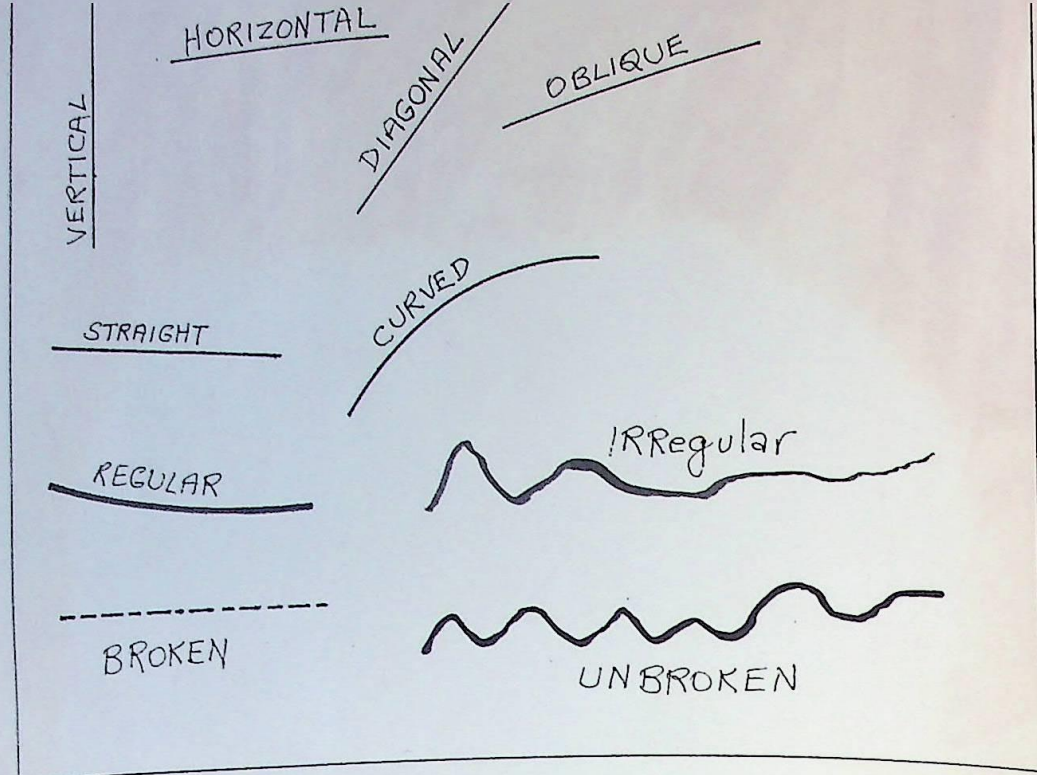
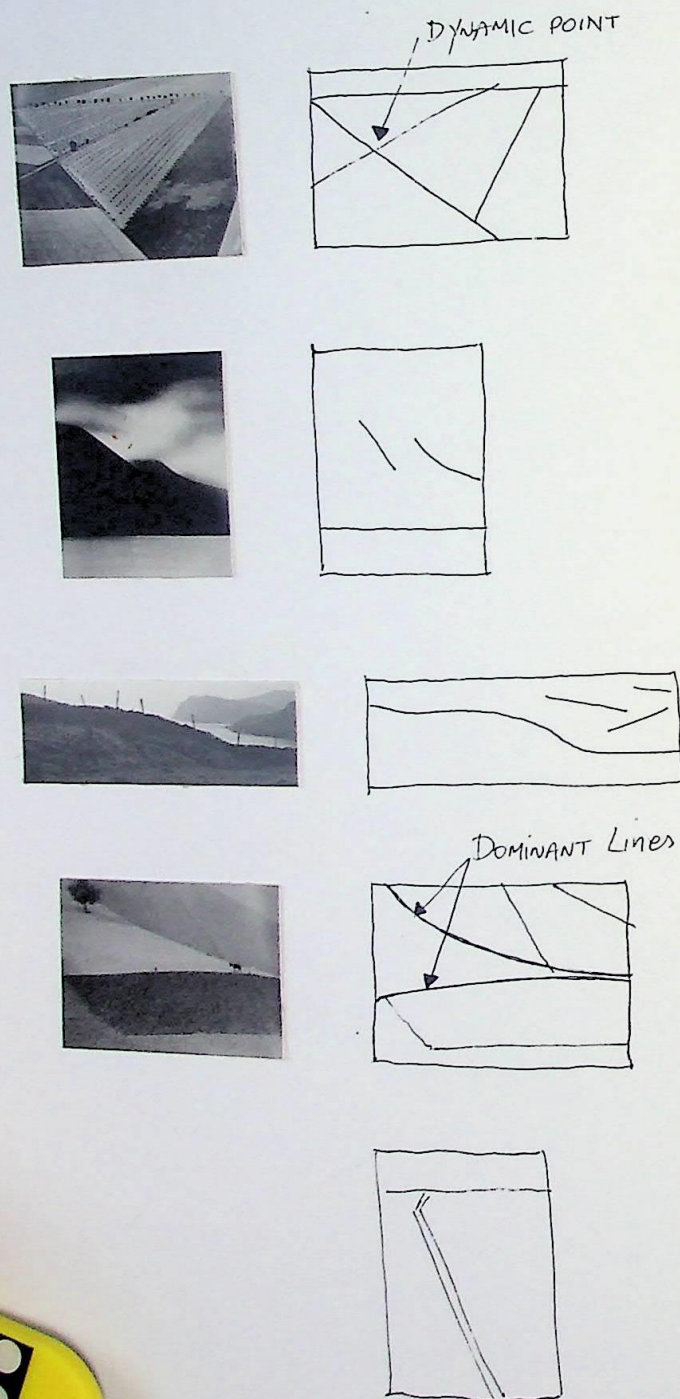


Fig. F



Bill Brandt's photograph (Ill. 12) is a much gentler composition. His low horizon has a balancing effect, especially because the lines of the mountain seem to flow towards it at a point beyond the edge of the photograph. This gives a more interesting feel to what might otherwise be a fairly normal composition.

In my own photograph (Ill. 18), the interest lies in the shape of the line; curving, it describes the slope of the mountain. This curving line is contrasted by the straighter, more direct lines of the mountain.

Oblique, slightly curving lines are the secret of success in Ill. 32. The composition would be far less interesting if the lines were straight.

A straight diagonal line is a very bold graphic statement to make - but in the case of Ill. 37 it works. A slight change in direction at the top stops your eye from entering the photograph at one corner and shooting out of it at the other.

#### SHAPE

Shapes (fig. g) may be large or small, regular or irregular, solid or outline. They generally exist in themselves or they may be formed by lines. Such a shape is complete when the line describes it completely.

In Ill. 2 for example, two of the shapes are completed while the third shape is not. However, when this happens the eye usually completes the shape.



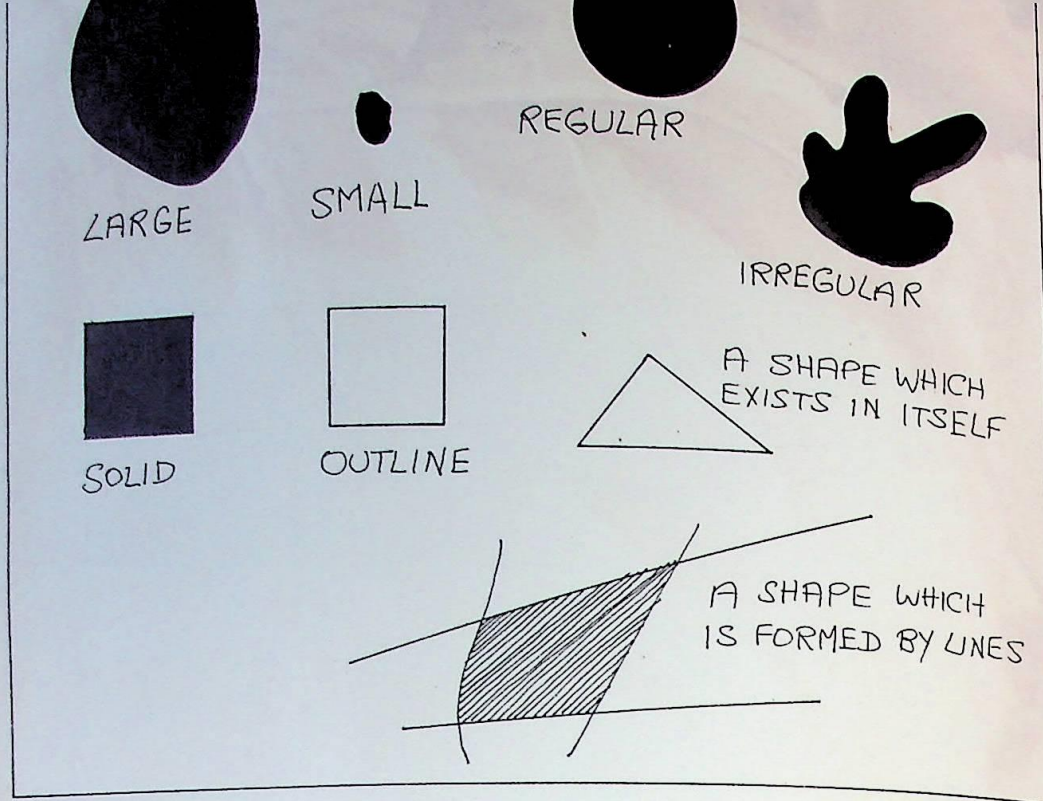
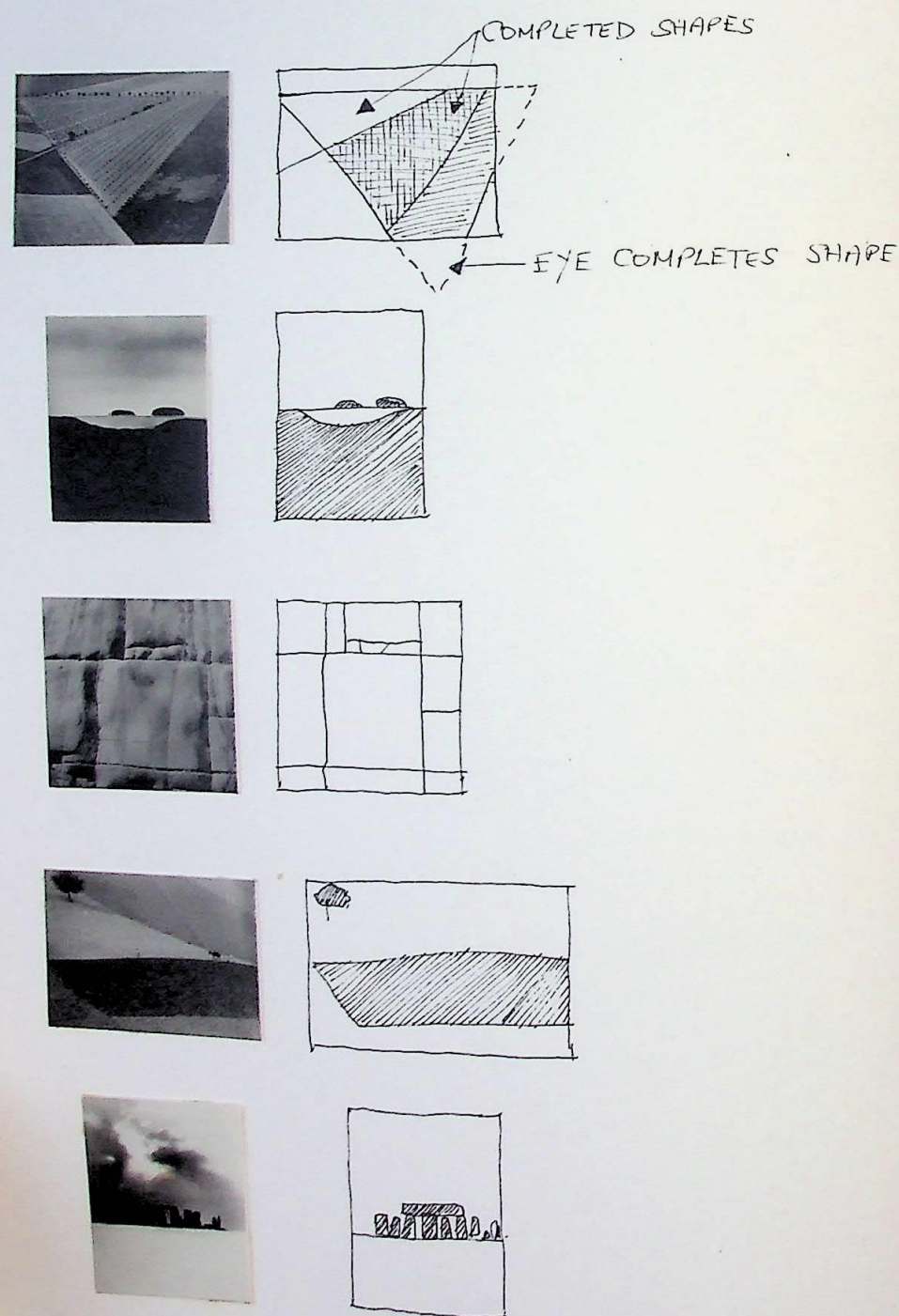


Fig. 6



In Ill. 8 the shapes are very definite - they exist in themselves, they do not rely on their formation by lines.

In Ill. 17 the shapes are formed by lines and describe strong geometric shapes - the square being the most perfect of all. The square is a restful shape compared to the circle, triangle or rectangle. The triangle is particularly dynamic because of its pointed end which suggests direction as well as shape.

In Ill. 32 there are two major shapes - the dark rectangular field which is formed by indefinite lines and the solid shape of the tree. The horse and men, although they are shapes in themselves, are not terribly significant because of their small size.

The shapes of Stonehenge (ill. 38) are very distinctive; irregular rectangles pointing upwards, they are balanced by the narrow horizontal rectangle sitting on top. Visually they are a very interesting combination of shapes.

#### CONTRAST

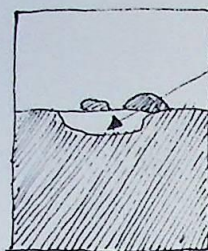
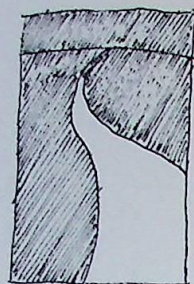
Contrast is usually thought of in terms of tonality, - light/dark. However it also occurs in terms of shapes - big/small, regular/irregular; texture - smooth/rugged; and line - thick/thin, straight/curving etc.

Ill. 5 is an example of contrast by using light and dark values to both contrast and compliment each other.

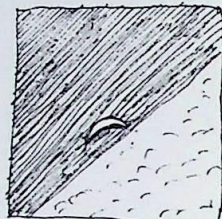
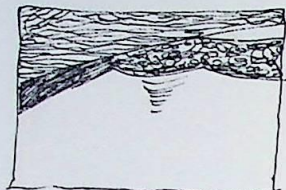
Ill. 8 shows contrast by shape in terms of size. Two small shapes contrast a great big one, and in the process form a fourth shape in between.

Ill. 25 is an example of contrast by both light and texture - smooth and bright as against dark and rippled.

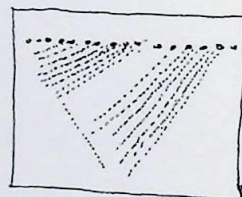
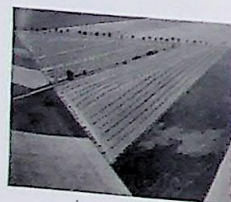




new shape formed by  
original three shapes



## PATTERN AND DETAIL



Ill. 39 is another example of this - a very extreme example of a brilliant white crescent earth (This is a photograph of planet earth taken by Gemini Satellite) silhouetted by the blackness of space. The texture of the planet in the foreground also contrasts the smoothness of the background.

## PATTERN AND DETAIL

Pattern and detail are often the least obvious elements in a photograph, yet they can serve a very important function - to unify a composition.

The two most outstanding examples of this are illustrations 2 and 22. In the former, the dots which are the Trees form an overall pattern, and as well as that seem to join together to form directional lines. The larger black dots on the horizon add variation and enhance the pattern.

The pattern and detail in Ill. 22 is much more irregular. The trees form short wavy irregular lines; the background ceases to become mere detail but takes on the quality of a single fluid mass. The foreground trees are solid shapes rather than pattern, although they are a connecting point between the two.

## THE UNCONVENTIONAL COMPOSITION

I include this photograph (Ill. 40) because it defies existing forms of composition. At first glance it seems to be the kind of photograph an amateur on holidays by the sea would take - without the usual family group stuck in the centre.



The rocks are the only objects in the picture, yet they are too far away to be called the subject of the photograph. Even the spatial composition defies the norm - not the recommended one third or three quarters, but the symmetrical dividing into two



equal parts by the horizon line.

All this picture really says is space, but even the space isn't clearly defined. The rocks could be any size.

We do not know because we have nothing to compare them to in scale. We must assume that the photographer is standing at the distance we imagine and looking through a normal lens.

Because of its utter lack of composition, this photograph succeeds entirely in expressing a feeling of wide-open spaciousness.

Thus successful composition in a photograph can lie in the exception rather than the rule.



LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

Part 11 - The Irish Landscape

INTRODUCTION

Having looked at these world famous photographs of many lands, I found I could not end by thesis on landscape photography there. I felt I had to look afresh at the Irish landscape and at how it has been portrayed, mainly because it is a subject of increasing interest to me and as such will be a major source of inspiration for my work.

The Irish landscape has inspired many people - writers such as Padraig Pearse (short descriptive stories of Connemara), Patricia Lynch (children's stories based on Irish way of life in the west), Edna O'Brien (her latest book "Mother Ireland" is illustrated with photographs by Fergus Bourke); painters such as Paul Henry, Nathaniel Hone and Norah McGuinness; musicians such as Sean O'Riada; photographers such as Dick Deegan, Fergus Bourke, and Pat Langan of "The Irish Times".

The Irish landscape is unique. It has a character all its own. Subtle variations in lighting quality, form, texture and colour differentiate it from anywhere else. Climate is the major factor in determining its appearance, which in turn influences the way of life and the appearance of the man-made landscape.

The landscape with its prevailing weather conditions influences the way of life of the people, emotionally as well as physically. Ireland is probably the only country in the world where the weather is a daily topic of conversation, where the traditional music is so sad, and where we attribute an overall lackadaisical attitude to many things to our climate. Certain typically Irish characteristics in people must come from something which exerts a direct influence on us, and the Irish landscape is a very strong influence indeed.



### REPRESENTATION OF THE IRISH LANDSCAPE

The landscape of Ireland has always been very romanticized, both in painting and photography. Soft blue/grey skies, purple mountains and thatched cottages must be the image of Ireland many people have, who have never been here. And yet it would be hard not to romanticize a landscape that is, essentially, romantic. There is something about the quality of the light and atmosphere that softens colours and gives subtle harmonies of blues, greens, yellows, mauves and browns. The atmosphere is generally damp, and mist is very common especially along the west coast, and misty effects tend to look very romantic.

Paul Henry (1876 - 1958) is probably the best known Irish landscape painter (Ill. 41 and 42). His views of the west of Ireland, particularly Achill and Connemara, have been reproduced in poster form by both Bord Failte and the Great Western Railways for their tourist campaigns. Because of this, many people must have an image of the Irish landscape as soft and romantic, full of sky and mountains, with either sea or lake separating the two in a vague horizon line. And thatched cottages of course!

Despite this romantic imagery - or maybe because of it, I love Paul Henry's landscapes, especially those which are smooth rather than textured, as I think they show a tremendous feeling for the particular qualities of Irish light. It is an interesting fact that Paul Henry was born in Belfast, and never saw the west of Ireland until he was 36 years old. In his autobiography "An Irish Portrait" he writes about Achill where he had remained for 7 years after his first visit - "The intensity of the emotion I got from a purely Irish landscape always puzzled and disturbed me." It was his constant source of inspiration for the rest of his life, even when he was far removed from it.



The Irish landscape must have something special when it can evoke that kind of emotion in people.

Irish landscape photography tends to look equally romantic. "Ireland of the Welcomes" magazine, which is exported to many countries throughout the world, publishes many "Characteristically Irish" landscape photographs (Ill. 43, 44, 45).

Ill. 43 lays particular emphasis on the quality of Irish light by its varying tones of colour on the mountains.

Ill. 44 shows a harsher landscape with a solitary tree, which by its isolation, lends a sense of magic to it. Such solitary trees often become the haunts of "fairies" in Irish folklore.

Ill 45 is geared to the tourist who is attracted by the sea. It purposely shows an almost deserted beach with just two figures on it. If this were a holiday brochure for Spain, for example, many tanned, happy looking holiday-makers would be shown thronging the beach. But this is Ireland, undeveloped, peaceful and quietly beautiful. Where else would you have a beach to yourself? This is the image of Ireland they want to portray, and this is the image that SELLS.



### ANALYSIS OF THE IRISH LANDSCAPE

For such a small country, the landscape is remarkably varied. It differs greatly from area to area; different types of soil require different methods of cultivation, and as Ireland is predominantly an agricultural country, the types and methods of cultivation influence its appearance. Despite all this variation there are certain elements which are constant, and which, on their own, or in combination with others, are characteristically Irish.

ICSID - The International Council of Societies of Industrial Design, held its congress in Ireland this year. One of the major topics discussed at this congress was the industrial and architectural development of Ireland.

Many people feel that the landscape is being torn up in the interests of development and tourism, and if certain areas must be developed then they should be developed with regard to the natural landscape. The outcome of this was a project brief given to a team of designers, which required an examination of the more intangible qualities of the Irish landscape, and the presentation of these in a form which could guide designers working in Ireland.

It was found that the distinctive aesthetic quality of the Irish landscape is due to the constants and not to the exceptional elements, to the life as a whole, to changes of light and atmosphere. These constants were grouped and distinguished as follows:

- Atmosphere - Wind, light, weather
- Geology and natural features (rivers, beaches etc.)
- Colour - mountains, sea, sky; cultivated fields
- Botany. Plant life at different levels - wild and planted.
- Human elements. Roads, paths, gates, stiles, bridges; Canals and harbours
- Farming. Crops - size, type and situation of fields, animals, hedges, fences, haystacks etc.



Architecture. Walls, cottages, farms and barns.  
 Colour on buildings. Building materials  
 External, non-constant elements such as Industrial buildings,  
 mining, electric poles, signs, litter etc.  
 The following series of diagrammic drawings (taken from the  
 book "ICSID - Design for Tourism" try to convey in graphic  
 terms the essence of the Irish landscape.

#### Diagram 1 Structural Lines of Landscape

Certain structural lines occur in the Irish landscape and the  
 observer distinguishes different structures at different  
 distances.

#### Diagram 2 Constants in Structural Lines

Some aspects of the landscape are found to be a general rule;  
 eg. mountains on the skyline usually have concave lines, smaller  
 hills, wood and tree profiles are usually convex, the inner tree  
 structure will be more apparent in the foreground as a fishbone  
 or radial structure. Buildings are also a constant.

#### Diagram 3 Broken Lines

The structural lines of the land are usually softened by  
 vegetation, by the profile of irregular hedgerows, and of  
 woods with mixed kinds of trees. We note the broken lines  
 of roofs, chimneys, the jagged topping of walls, creepers on  
 walls and angles.

#### Diagram 4 Isolated Trees: A Constant

Isolated trees are a very striking feature of the Irish landscape.

#### Diagram 5 Mixed kinds of Trees: A Constant

In woods and hedges many different kinds of trees mingle to



give different values of green and different qualities of transparency.

The above is what the Irish landscape means in objective terms. But these elements are the source of inspiration for the artist. In part 1, I discussed the interpretation of landscape. The Irish landscape has to be interpreted slightly differently to that of any other landscape. The photographer is faced with the challenge of capturing mood in a landscape, but he will also wish to retain the particular character of the landscape which expresses "Ireland".





# LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN IRELAND

Photography as an artistic medium is only recognised by a tiny minority of people in Ireland - there is only one, small photographic gallery here in Dublin compared to a very large number of painting and graphics places. A proper structured course for people interested in this medium as an art form doesn't exist in Ireland, even in the Art Colleges. However this sad state of affairs is changing slowly, due to influence from other countries.

The few people in Ireland who take landscape photographs are professional photographers who also freelance commercially. One of these is Fergus Bourke, who is the theatre photographer for the Abbey. As I wanted to talk to somebody working in this field, and he proved to be the most accessible, I arranged an interview with him last December. While he doesn't consider himself a landscape photographer, his many landscape photographs have been reproduced in various books and papers. And giant blow-ups of rocks which he took in the Burren were recently used as part of a stage set for the production of Edna O'Brien's "A Pagan Place". This shows some of the scope for landscape photography in Ireland.



Ill. 5 which I have already discussed, is probably the best known example of Fergus Bourke's landscapes, as it has been reproduced in quite a few books and magazines.

All his photographs show some sign of man, but never directly. For him, a road or stone wall is such a symbol; he doesn't see the point of overstating things. The three following illustrations thus speak for themselves (Ill. 46, 47, 48).





Landscape to him means the man-made changes that are evidence of a certain way of life - the very basic things like working the land.

His photographs are very true to life. He shoots them directly according to the scene before him. Afterwards he prints them "straight" and doesn't manipulate the image in any way - "If a sky isn't there, it's not put in." On the other hand, he sees no objection to other photographers manipulating a print. He thinks it is valid to construct an image if it works. One of his favourite photographers is a friend of his - the American, Paul Caponigro. I was only able to include one of his photographs (Ill. 14) although he specializes in landscapes.



One thing I couldn't help noticing in some of his photographs was a certain lack of sharpness. Great emphasis is put on crystal clear images by many photographers - Ansel Adams uses a 10" x 12" plate, so no enlargement and consequent loss of sharpness is possible. However many people are limited to 35 mm cameras, which, while they are very versatile, are not particularly suitable for landscape which demands a larger format camera. So it is very encouraging to find someone who sees the subject matter as more important than the means used to convey it. Obviously the New York Gallery of Modern Art must feel the same way, as they have bought a few of his prints for their world famous collection.

Finally, I asked him about the future for people interested in photography as an artistic medium in Ireland. Having been a commercial photographer himself for many years, before his present job as theatre photographer which he loves, he didn't see much hope outside the commercial field. A bit discouraging but no cause for despair I felt.



MY OWN PHOTOGRAPHS

When I decided to take some "Irish Landscape" photographs I originally wanted to photograph Connemara, because it is the area so often used to represent Ireland. Connemara is also my own favourite part of Ireland - I have only been there four times, and each time it has appeared radically different to me.

The first time I saw it, at the height of summer, I was dazzled by brilliant colours everywhere - some quite incredible for Ireland, such as a turquoise sea. The second time it rained, and through the soft continuous downpour I saw what Paul Henry had seen and painted. The next time was one Christmas when it was covered in snow and ice. The sun had come out, a thaw had set in, and it was the most exciting landscape I had ever experienced. I say EXPERIENCED rather than SEEN, because you felt it and heard it as well. The incredible patterns of ice on the lakes, the patches of colour where the mountains showed through the snow, the freshness of the air and the sounds of breaking ice all added up to something exciting - a feeling of being very alive and living in the present only.

However, the last time I visited Connemara I went to Carraroe - one of the most developed areas. Despite the many new bungalows it was the most bleak and depressing place I have ever seen. Among all the new developments, the remains of miserably small holdings and plots of land that were little more than bare stone, were evidence of a not too distant past.

This was the Connemara to which Cromwell banished so many people to eke out a miserable existence or starve; most of them starved eventually. Small consolation colours on a mountain or soft blue skies would have been to them.

This was landscape in the real sense of the word... and I hated what it represented.



So I questioned all my values on "scenery" again. I came to the conclusion that a photographer is really only an observer of a particular fleeting aspect of his subject - only someone who has lived and existed in a place through all times and seasons can have any real understanding of the word 'landscape'. That is why we can often admire scenery but don't feel part of it.

A curious thing I found also is that it is really only the tourists who say "Isn't it beautiful"? It is not that the inhabitants are not visually aware of their surroundings, it is just that most of them have no other option but to lead the kind of existence they do. Tourists come in summer, admire the scenery, and return to their centrally heated homes in the winter. To the natives landscape represents crops and animals, and putting enough work into the land to enable them to earn their living from it.

The photographer takes away impressions of a place. As images, they may give an insight into a certain way of life and state something of the human condition. But in the end, impressions are just impressions.

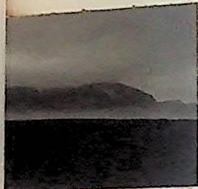
So any photographs I would take would be just that, not that they would be invalid for that reason. But you need to be in a place for a certain time to get to know it and even begin to understand the way of life there. It is difficult to photograph people or animals because they are not relaxed in front of strangers. And I'd rather not photograph them than come away with stilted poses and uncomfortable expressions. For this reason I concentrated mainly on scenery. I only touched on a subject which I would like to go back and explore much more fully. It is only possible to make the best of what you see now in front of you without knowing what is around the corner.




One thing that struck me was that outside Connemara, there didn't seem to be any 'typical' Irish landscape. Sligo is as different from Wicklow as the midlands are from Donegal.

Due to a set of circumstances I ended up, not in Connemara but in Donegal. At first it didn't seem particularly Irish, but then certain things which are common to other parts of the country became apparent.


During the day the weather was hazy and everything was veiled in mist. By evening time the mist lifted and the sun would break through just in time for sunset. I found that it was the effects of shadow and light which most interested me.



Ill. 49 is a slightly different view of the mountain in Ill. 19 which has already been discussed.




In Ill. 50 I wanted to capture the attempt by the sun to break through the layers of hanging cloud. All attention is focussed on this bright area which is contrasted by the dark land. A small amount of detail is visible in the forms of the houses which lie just over the horizon line.



Ill. 51 and 52 are again concerned with contrast - the brilliant sparks of sunlight of the water against the dark masses in the foreground. I particularly liked the way the sun outlined the edges of the mountain in silver.

Ill. 53 is as much concerned with texture as contrast. The texture of the grass, the fine branches of the hedge, and the calm sea with island and mountain beyond.



Ill. 54 is a detail of the wind blown clumps of grass which are found only in costal regions. I think these are typically Irish as I haven't seen quite the same anywhere else.







Ill. 55 is something else that is typically Irish - our telegraph poles. Many people think them ugly, and that electric cables should have been run underground instead. They are quite a noticeable feature of the Irish landscape, but in places I think they actually enhance it rather than destroy the view. Possibly because they are made from wood they do not stand out drastically and often emphasize the path of the road like a great wooden fence. The oblique lines of the poles at different angles to each other and the trailing lines of wire appealed to me here; some people who have also seen it read a symbolism for Calvary into it. I was aware of this image when I took the photograph, although I didn't set out to use any such symbolism.



The final photograph taken in Donegal which I've selected in Ill. 56 - a small, marshy pool in a field lit by the sun. One of the small but very attractive features of the wet Irish landscape are these small pools which are filled with blue sky in the daytime, and, mirror-like, reflect the evening sun at sunset.



The last four photographs are included because of their linear forms and contrast.



Ill. 57 and 58 were taken near Phibsboro during the last snowfall. They are variations on the same theme - the tracks of man and cars in the snow are contrasted with the untouched (almost) snow beyond the railings. The oblique lines of the iron railings gives a certain rhythm to the pictures.



Ill. 59 was also taken during the recent snowfall, this time in the Phoenix Park. The horizontal edge of the ice-covered pond with its delicate reeds, is offset by the sharply defined railing which runs diagonally and adds interest to the composition.





Ill. 60 was taken in the Phoenix Park. I liked the emerging patterns of grass as the thaw set in. The grouping of the trees on the hilltops also appealed to me. They have a light airy feeling about them - the tree on the right looks like it's about to take off!

#### CONCLUSION

I could write more about photographs I took. But I believe that an image (with the possible exception of a title or explanatory note) must, in the end, stand by itself. Some of the prints are of good quality, some are not. But considering that the average photographer who takes a roll of 36 shots will consider himself lucky if he gets one worthwhile image, then I'm probably pushing my luck, as I didn't have either as much time or film as I would have liked.

All I know is that through writing this thesis I have learned a lot about landscape photography in general, and have an increasing awareness of the possibilities of the Irish landscape in particular. My photographs are only the beginning of something I want to pursue. I'm not at all sure if, or how, things will work out, but now that I've learned this much I want to learn more.

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