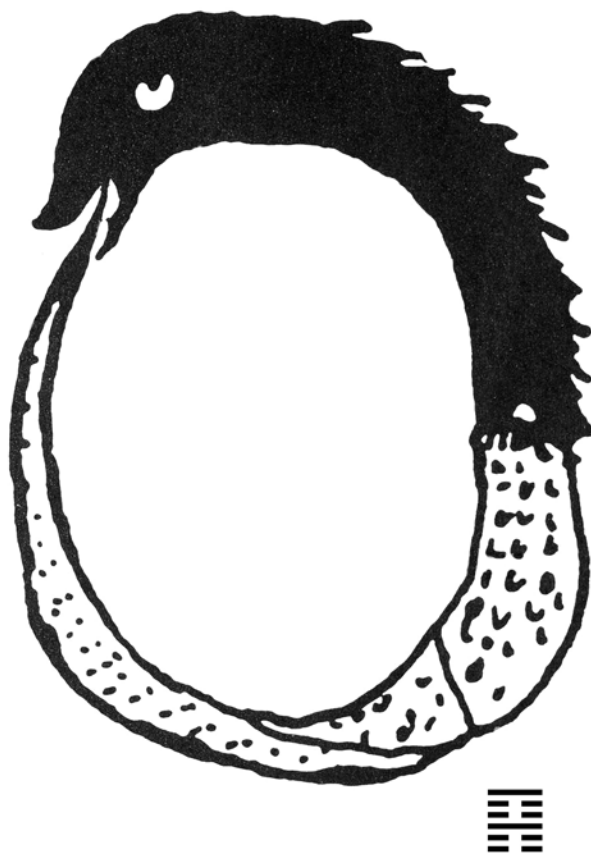




TERRY SUPREAN



FRAGMENTS FROM THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT
A T E X T

PREFACE 1

Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it.
- Tao Te Ching: Verse 78

Water--the ace of elements. Water dives from the clouds without parachute, wings or safety net. Water runs over the steepest precipice and blinks not a lash. Water is buried and rises again; water walks on fire and fire gets the blisters.
Stylishly composed in any situation--solid, gas or liquid--speaking in penetrating dialects understood by all things--animal, vegetable or mineral-- water travels intrepidly through four dimensions, sustaining (Kick a lettuce in the field and it will yell "Water!"), destroying (The Dutch boy's finger remembered the view from Ararat) and creating (It has even been said that human beings were invented by water as a device for transporting itself from one place to another, but that's another story). Always in motion, ever-flowing (whether at steam rate or glacier speed), rhythmic, dynamic, ubiquitous, changing and working its changes, a mathematics turned wrong side out, a philosophy in reverse, the ongoing odyssey of water is virtually irresistible."
- Tom Robbins, Even Cowgirls Get the Blues

There is something that contains everything.
Before heaven and earth it is.
Oh, it is still, unbodied, all on its own, unchanging,
all-pervading, ever-moving.
So it can act as the mother of all things.
Not knowing its real name, we only call it the Way.
If it must be named, let its name be Great.
Greatness means going on, going on means going far, and going far means turning back...
...People follow earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Way, the Way follows what is.
- Tao Te Ching: Verse 25

7/16/25:
A purple,
now mahogany,
now dust colored spine,
Cut through by the grasping spindles of the Ocotillo,
The sun rises over the edge of the Chihuahuan Desert mountains

10/3/25:
You must go to the desert,
Let it hold you by the throat,
Let it hold you like a mother,
In the dry air it chants, hisses, and sings,
"Forever you have come from me,
Forever you have come to me,
Searching,
Searching,
Always searching..."



There is a pull to the desert, a drawing in, it calls to searchers, wonders, zealots, prophets, criminals, and those from running from and those running towards; literally or metaphorically, in how many stories does the hero wind up lost there, rummaging the self until ultimately finding the miracle of revelation. The desert is both life and death, the creator destroyer god's lap, a great wheel and its turning--Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Now more than ever we need it, to go and get lost in it away from our buzzing lives inside modern technocracies where a humming note of thinly veiled dread is seemingly always rising in volume--the apocalypse chanting back-notes in the hum drum of everyday life. As if societal collapse were an ever-present after taste of the glut of information we are hopelessly wired into...

In contrast the desert imposes humility, gifts quietness and the memory of deep geological time--of the smallness of our project called human history--the stupidity and brilliance of our suffering on this planet brought down to the fine sharp point of a cactus quill. The desert is a kind of truth, I believe that is why it is so great, there is a naked truth to it, the earth laid bare, nothing to hide behind there, a precise ecology of survival. You need to be mastered by nature, maybe not all the time because it is hard, hard to feel the truth of your smallness, but it is an integral part of understanding your own humanity--understanding that the universe has a voice and that its voice is inside you, and that when you become quiet enough to hear it only then do you know your place in it...

And the desert is just about as good a place as you'll ever find to let nature in that way. You can go there and empty yourself, it is so much easier there, and in so doing find yourself...

Maybe if enough of us do that we may one day stop burning our ecologies to the ground out of carelessness and greed.



This book is the product of a number of trips taken to the Chihuahuan Desert in 2025 and 2026 as a site of research for a body of paintings and works on paper. Though this project began at the Willow House residency program, which I attended in the summer of 2025, it originates in a relationship to the West Texas landscape that goes back nearly as far as I can remember--a fascination of and love for it that perhaps started with fossil hunting trips my father took me on as a young boy.

Although I do not consider myself a writer of prose or poetry, during this time both acts became a necessary response to my experiences within that landscape and an important part of the painting process. The journaling in these pages was a private exercise and I didn't foresee publishing it at first, however at some point in this journey it became necessary to see this writing as an integral part of the body of work it surrounded--not that paintings need a text to be understood or felt, but rather I began to see this text as a set of map keys useful to navigating the mental states and ecological locations that engendered my painting at the time. I still do not think of myself as a writer or poet, and it is probably best the reader does not see this text as the product of one, but rather as a window into the private world of an artist's work at a particular point in time and place.

Although there are many references and quotes from the Tao Te Ching in this book, a text that became very important to my journey through this body of work and time in the desert over the last two years, I am not a Buddhist. In fact, I would have until I started this project called myself the opposite of a person interested in anything that one might call a spiritual journey. However, I seem to have found myself on one without knowing it, and I am grateful for that, whatever one may call it. I was raised in American southern evangelical churches, that is the only form of "spirituality" I knew for the first 15 years or so of my life, and as soon as I was old enough to get away from it I ran. Most people I know raised that way in the 80's and 90's did run from it, but unlike some I knew who ran from it towards other forms of spirituality, I did not go on to search for some other form of religion or spirituality to replace it. Instead, I wanted nothing to do with anything of the sort and saw most all forms of religion as the worst kind of snake oil, and those that sold it the worst kind of charlatans. This was of course my subjective experience at the time, more than mostly due to my encounters with the men that stood on church stages and spoke such hateful childish nonsense over my young head--men who were the brutes of a new kind of American spirituality that was sick with a particularly American kind of sickness--a greedy, politically ruthless, biophobic (whatever is nature is sin), cynical fundamentalism lead by the kind of men that often find themselves at the center of places and times where fascism is born. And so, I have found it difficult to want anything to do with the spiritual since, I still don't much even like the word, but I am now at a loss for what word to use for the journey the desert has gifted me and my work over the last two years.

The desert is the holiest place I know, the holiest place I have ever been anyway--I'm sure there are many other holy places for many other people, but mine is the desert. I hope that everyone gets the chance to find their holy place in their lifetime, their Temenos (Greek--land cut off and dedicated to the gods), their Tirtha (Sanskrit--"crossing place", land where the sacred and physical world meet), their Dongtian fudi (Taoist Chinese--a whole category of sacred mountains and grottoes that are portals to other realms)... Finding and knowing (in the relational since of the word) your holy place has a profound impact on the turning and opening of your heart to the earth--an act we as a species are currently so desperately in need of...

During my time in the desert I found the words in the Tao Te Ching to be particularly relevant to the "spiritual journey" I experienced out there, and as thus I have included a number of its verses her--as that they are far more illuminating than my own words could ever be.

Translation Note: The verses from the Tao Te Ching in this book primarily come from the translation by Ursula K. Le Guin, a copy of which my wife turned me onto from her library--it is a good one and I have a personal fondness for it for this reason. Another translation that has been essential to this book is the beautifully annotated version very recently authored by Ken Liu. His addition of ancient parables, proverbs, stories, and historical context are a gift to anyone studying the text.



“...Water comes nearest to Tao”
- Tao Te Ching, Chapter 8 (Excerpt, Ken Liu Translation)

“Nearly all of Lao Tzu’s examples of the manifestations of Tao are drawn from the behavior of water.”
- Alan Watts

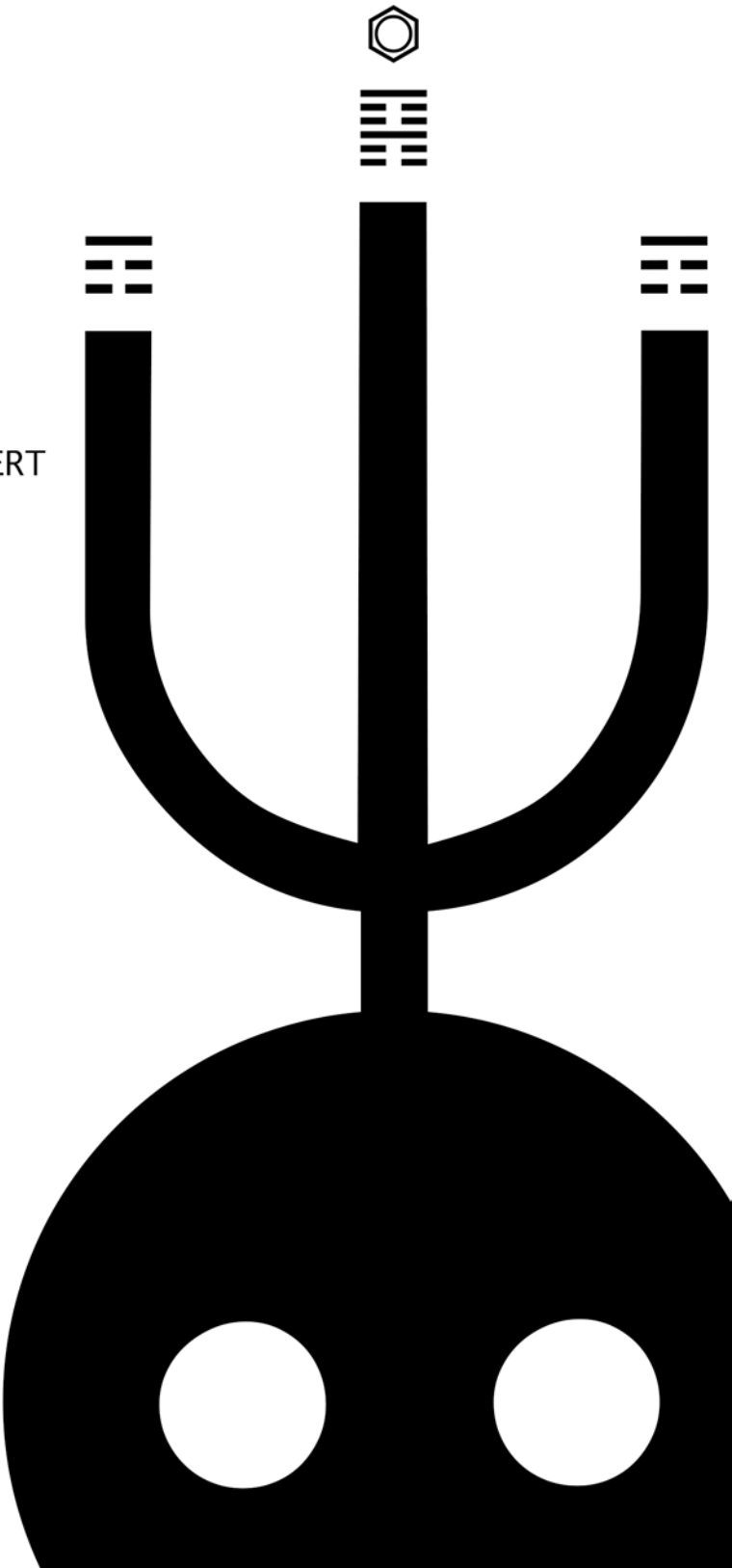
Water has always played a central roll in my painting practice--the experimental binders I use in the paints I manufacture for my work are water-based and the processes I derive from them are highly sensitive to viscosity. As thus the amount of water added to each layer of paint can play a drastic roll in the various effects the paints produce. Painted flat, the surfaces grow like sedimentary landscapes as numerous layers of fluid paint build up over time. The viscosity and order of each layer, the addition of water, and how I act on these elements, allows for the paints to mimic geological forces such as plate tectonics, erosion, glaciation, and sedimentation/deposition. This materialist symbolic structure is furthered by the mixing of mineral dust and other earth-based pigments into the paint. In the paintings I started in the Chihuahuan Desert in the summer of 2025 (the body of work that this book accompanies) water takes on an even more crucial role in the process, or rather it is the evaporation of water (the process of its presence becoming absence over time) that marks the painting’s surface in ways that both evade my control and connects the work deeply to the desert landscape.

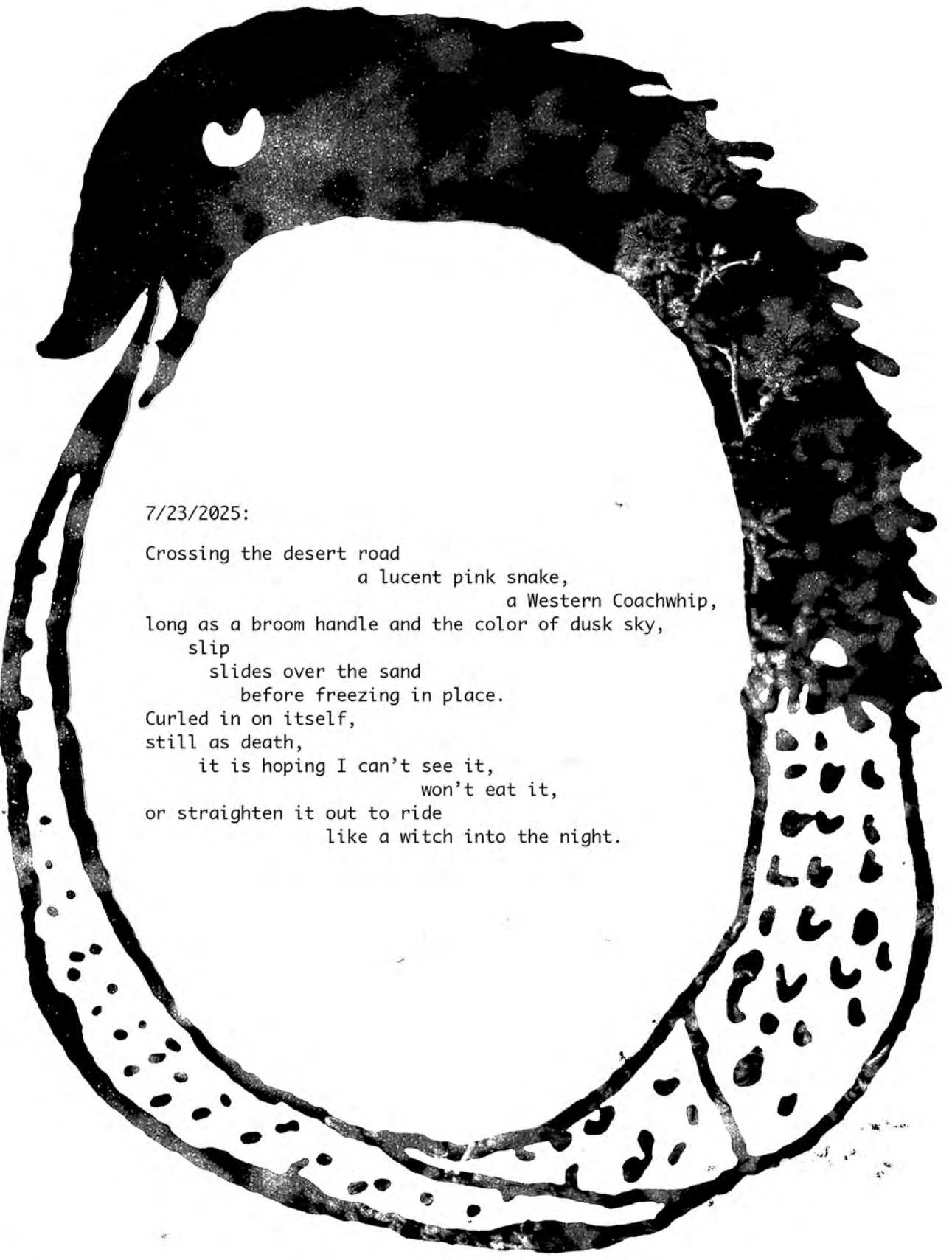
Water in the desert is both ever-present and ever-absent, and the little that comes is channeled into precise survival rituals by its flora and fauna. In the Chihuahuan Desert, which was once millions of years ago a shallow sea, the presence of water is seen everywhere in its geology in its absence--its soft ways carving the hardest most massive of rock faces. When the rare storm rolls in over the mountains the water falls (sometimes as heavily as it does during the storms I’ve weathered living on the Gulf Coast) but rarely for long--brief downpours are followed by quick evaporation cycles that change the texture of everything everywhere. With these elements of the landscape in mind, I developed a painting process while working on site in the Chihuahuan Desert that uses the evaporation of water as a stand in for the ever-present absence of water in that landscape--a layer of paint is allowed to dry on its surface but remains wet underneath, then a layer of water is poured across the painting’s surface about 1/8 inch deep and allowed to evaporate over time (in the desert this process of evaporation only takes a few hours, in the Gulf Coast it requires a dehumidifier and up to 24 hours). The evaporation of the water buckles the paint and pulls strange organic textures out of the painting’s surface that mirror the effects of water on desert geology--and that test the limits of my control and desire. This process, amongst others, is repeated and layered over and over until the painting resolves itself. As thus, like the desert, these paintings also embody an ever-present absence of water and its transforming power.

Though I have always been aware of the importance of water to my painting processes--a physical truth about the material nature of my painting practice--as well as to its symbolic quality within the matrix of geological forces my painting processes mirror--it was not until starting these new paintings on site in the Chihuahuan Desert that the fact of this reached a deeper resonance. Through my experiences in that landscape and with the text of the Tao Te Ching I began to see what the last ten years of my work had been about in a more fully realized way. I had always been looking for a way of painting that required an emptying of myself, of my will, a way of painting that came nearest to the behavior of water--flowing first through my body, then on through the paint into the reservoir of the canvas. I did not know why this was important, or even how to articulate any of this until I began to better understand how the way of Tao and the desert landscape stills and empties the soul. I only at first saw the importance of water as material and symbol, and process-based painting as an extension of art history and a way of painting, of finding an image in the paint, that I was taught by a previous generation of artist mentors. All well and all good, but what I did not see was this deeper way of water, what Lau Tzu calls Tao but has no real name, and can only be known by the processes and practices that brings one’s inner self into alignment with its flow... That is how I wish to paint, and now understand I had always been searching for--a way of painting like water moves, a way of painting that empties my will and desire.



FRAGMENTS FROM THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT





7/23/2025:

Crossing the desert road
a lucent pink snake,
a Western Coachwhip,
long as a broom handle and the color of dusk sky,
slip
slides over the sand
before freezing in place.
Curled in on itself,
still as death,
it is hoping I can't see it,
won't eat it,
or straighten it out to ride
like a witch into the night.

7/15/25: Willow House Residency - Terlingua, TX

I just arrived at the Willow House residency, a little travel sick, reading Tarkovsky's book on filmmaking while waiting for a resident's intro dinner.

I'm excited to work in this landscape, to make work from it, to be as present in it as I can. It is an environment that envelops you, holds you in a perpetual state of awe, and quiets that human part of you that is always screaming "Me".

Something paraphrased from Abbey's "Desert Solitaire", which I read on the way here "...Not until you can follow the path of your own blood across it can you know the desert landscape..." and something about needing to "crawl across it" to know it...

Most landscapes humans make their homes in are shaped--hedges cut into rows, square lots with edged lawns... But you can't shape the desert, things grow where and how they grow--subject to the precise will of this strange ecosystem. All a human inhabitant can do is arrange what is there, a little... I like that because it is reminiscent of how I wish to paint...

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Hiking out here in the Chihuahuan Desert something Werner Herzog said in the documentary "Burden of Dreams" comes to mind--I don't know the quote by heart, but he is commenting on how the ever present sounds of animals and insects in the jungle sound like cries of suffering to him, as if all of life in that extreme place (or this one I am currently in) is crying out in pain over the burden of survival. ...Maybe, or maybe pain and suffering are not an abomination in this world to be disgusted by--that ancient pain that carries each species forward towards survival or extinction. Perhaps the abomination is instead the feeling (or human wish) that all this pain is somehow unjust, and not just the grease upon which the universe slides slowly towards its end--because to say forward is in itself too human a construct--which is in itself the source of an altogether harder more robust kind of throbbing--what the Germans call Weltschmerz...

But none of these desert fauna or flora (expertly coded by evolution for survival) speak German, and yet better know than I the nature of the grease that keeps this tight horror show of spilling beauty, this precise and naked ecosystem, moving towards its end--which is not an end at all, just a new beginning--a shallow sea into a blooming desert basin...

7/16/2025: Willow House Residency - Terlingua, TX

An early drink at the end of the day at a small bar in Terlingua. It is off season, so there are mostly locals here. I asked the bartender what it's like living here, and if he was from here--to which he replied, "very few people are actually from here, nearly all have come here looking for something, searching for something, running from something." He himself ran here for the not so noble reason of escaping alimony payments to an ex-wife. The desert collects people, it is a great collector of types and species of all things cast out of polite society, all things willing to live close to the survival line to gain space, sky, and a greater connection to whatever it is in these basins and mountains that haunt the spirit with such clarity, stillness, and perspective. Later a few local musicians played, interchanging members every 30 minutes or so. I needed to get an early night in order to start painting before sun up, but just before I did an elderly woman took the stage and mic dressed somewhere between a crust-punk, Janis Joplin, and something distinctly West Texas. She opened her mouth and the band was off into a furious outlaw country cover of a Dead Kennedys song that she pulled from somewhere deep down in her gut absolutely slaughtering the song in the best way. I hope I'm so free and so alive when I'm that age in however many years--I'm glad it is music and art that keeps you young and not money, what a shitty world it'd be if it weren't so...



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7/24/25: Willow House Residency
From Robert Haas's "Human Wishes"
"...Longing we say, because desire is full of endless distances..."





Tao Te Ching: Verse 8
True goodness
is like water.
Water's good
for everything.
It doesn't compete.

It goes right
to the low loathsome places,
and so finds the way...

7/22/25: Willow House Residency - Terlingua, TX

I stopped writing a couple days ago, painting outside in this place became hard and consuming--the heat cycles, the insects, and pushing too hard to finish these four paintings had begun to grind down my appreciation for this landscape's beauty, and I lost contact with the stillness and quiet.

And then came a storm... Making white beans for a communal dinner we watched it roll in over the mountains--a little giddy at its beauty until it came down on us as hard as any hurricane I have weathered at home--a massive deluge, windstorm, and hail unlike anything I've ever seen... Giddiness turned into concern, and then into a kind of hysterical awe. The locals said it was unlike anything they had ever seen.

Many of the residency's buildings took on water from leaks and flooding, and my outdoor patio studio was flooded, my paintings nearly ruined before a rescue when the storm let up a little...

A ritual cleansing with water... Sleep... And when I awoke a reset, clarity, perspective... I had lost my way... I took down my patio studio, cleaned it, set up a paint making station, and set up a small indoor space to work on one painting at a time--instead of trying to force all four out by the end of the residency... Slow stillness, letting back in the speed and quietness of this landscape...

7/27/2025: Willow House Residency - Terlingua, TX

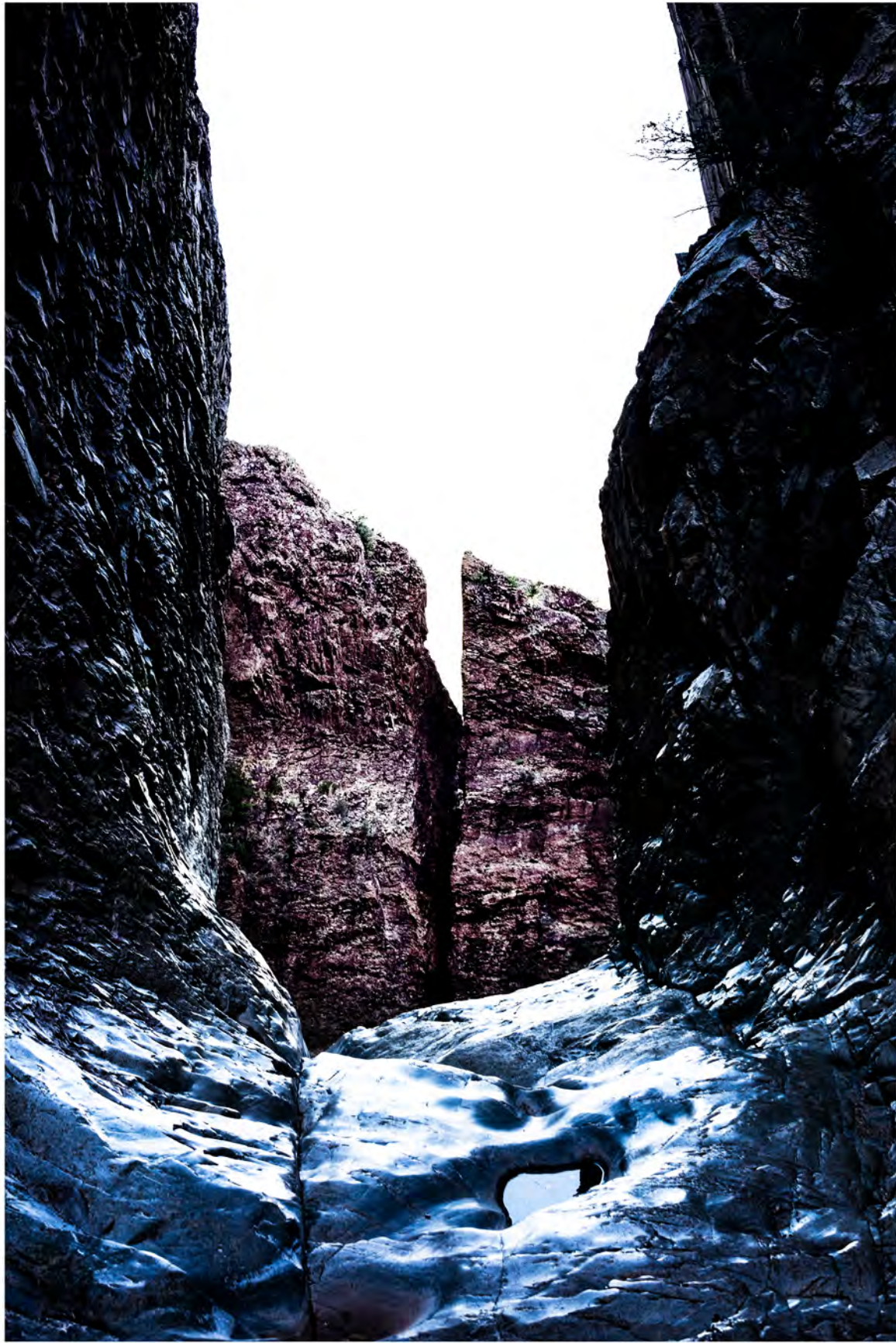
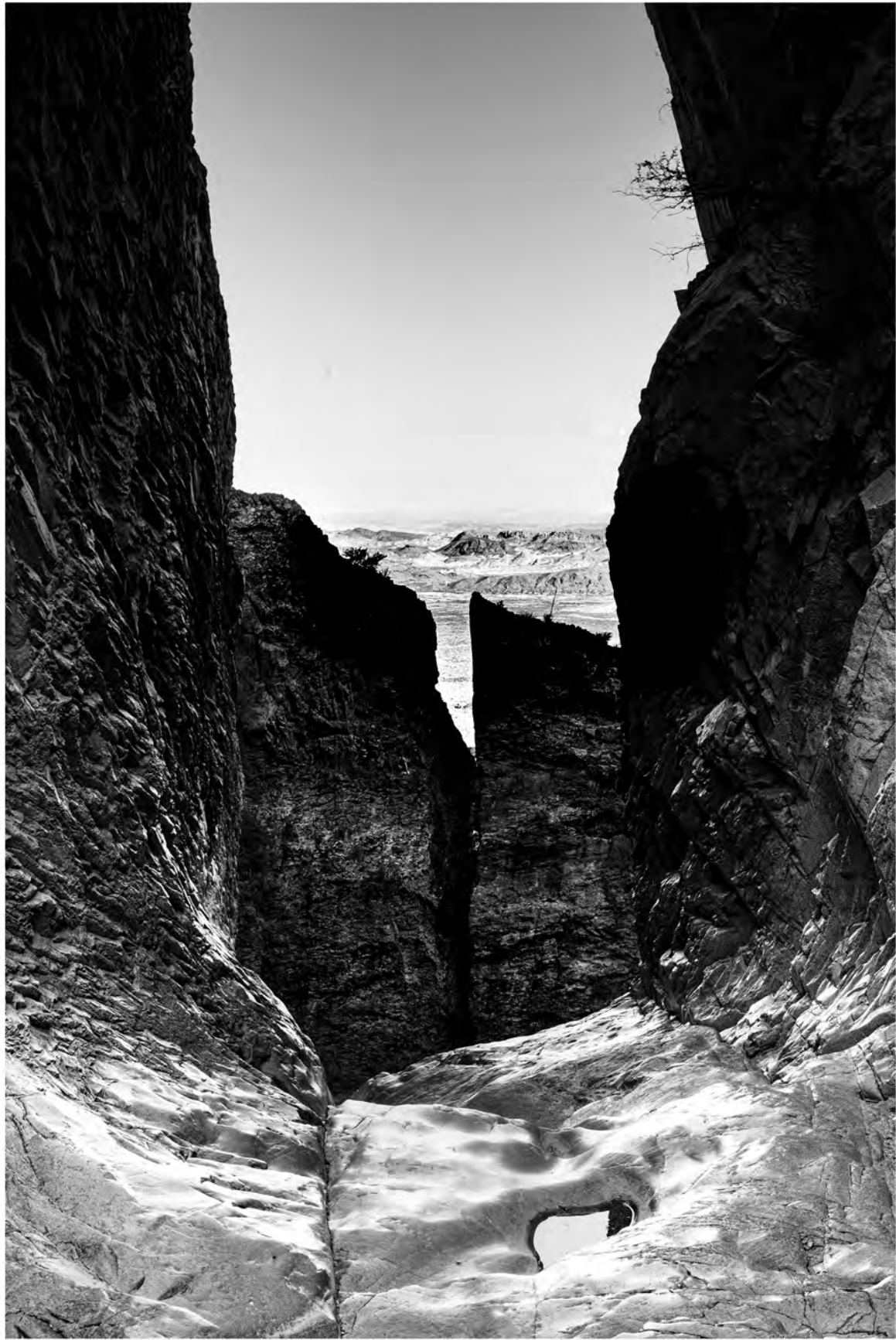
Hiking the Windows Trail in Big Bend today, near the end of the residency, it starts high up in the mountains and cuts through a pass between them--the "Window" itself at the end of the hike is created by two towering walls that frame the desert valley below from a high altitude--a damn near wonder of the world quality sight. A short rock upcropping with a promiscuous crack down the middle frames the bottom of the "Window" and looks like a giant rock monster's labia thrust upward to the sky. The floor of the cavern is a Payne's Grey slicked rock, while the walls and outcropping are a particularly pungent iron red. Ocotillo grasp and clamber in what cracks and corners they can.

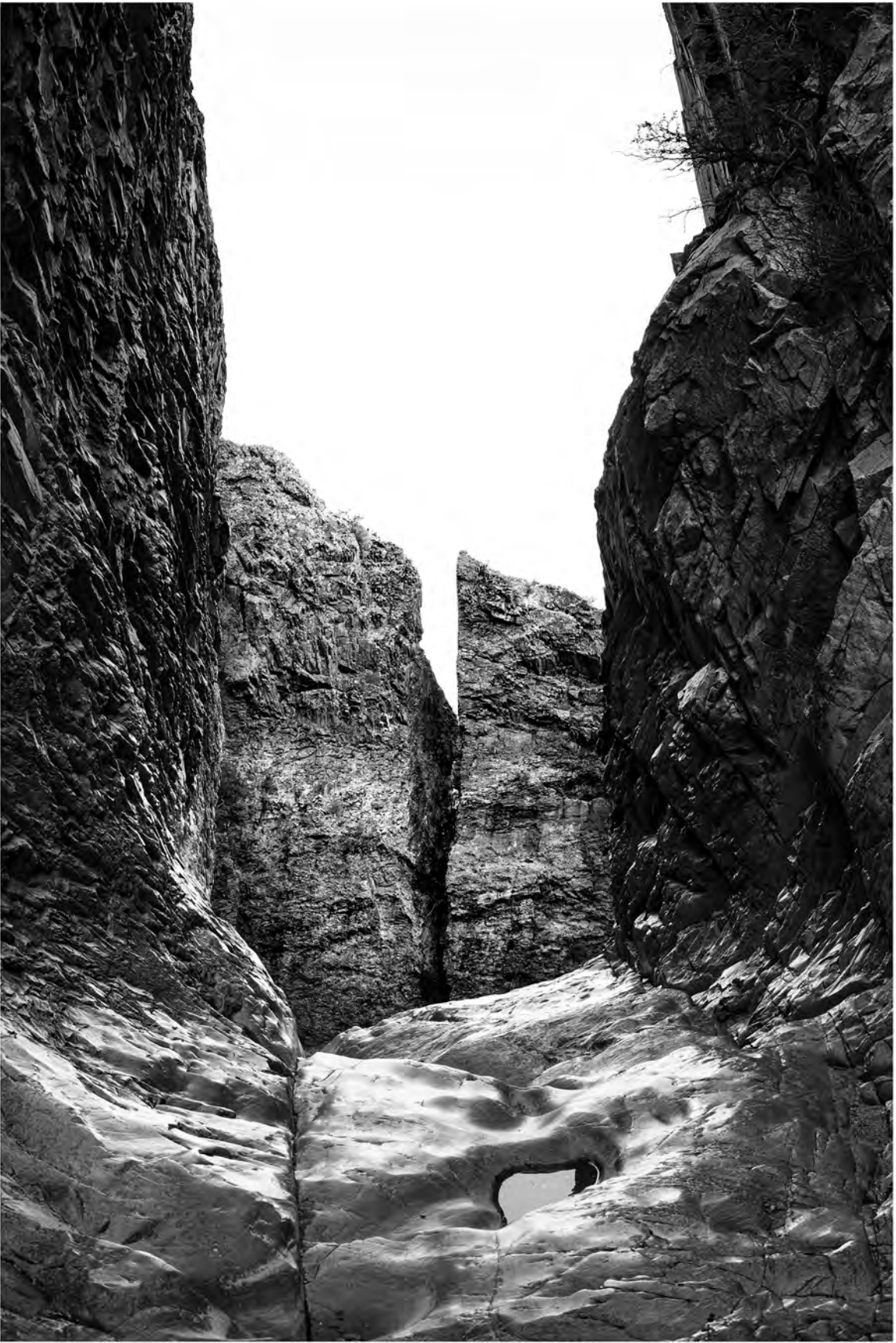
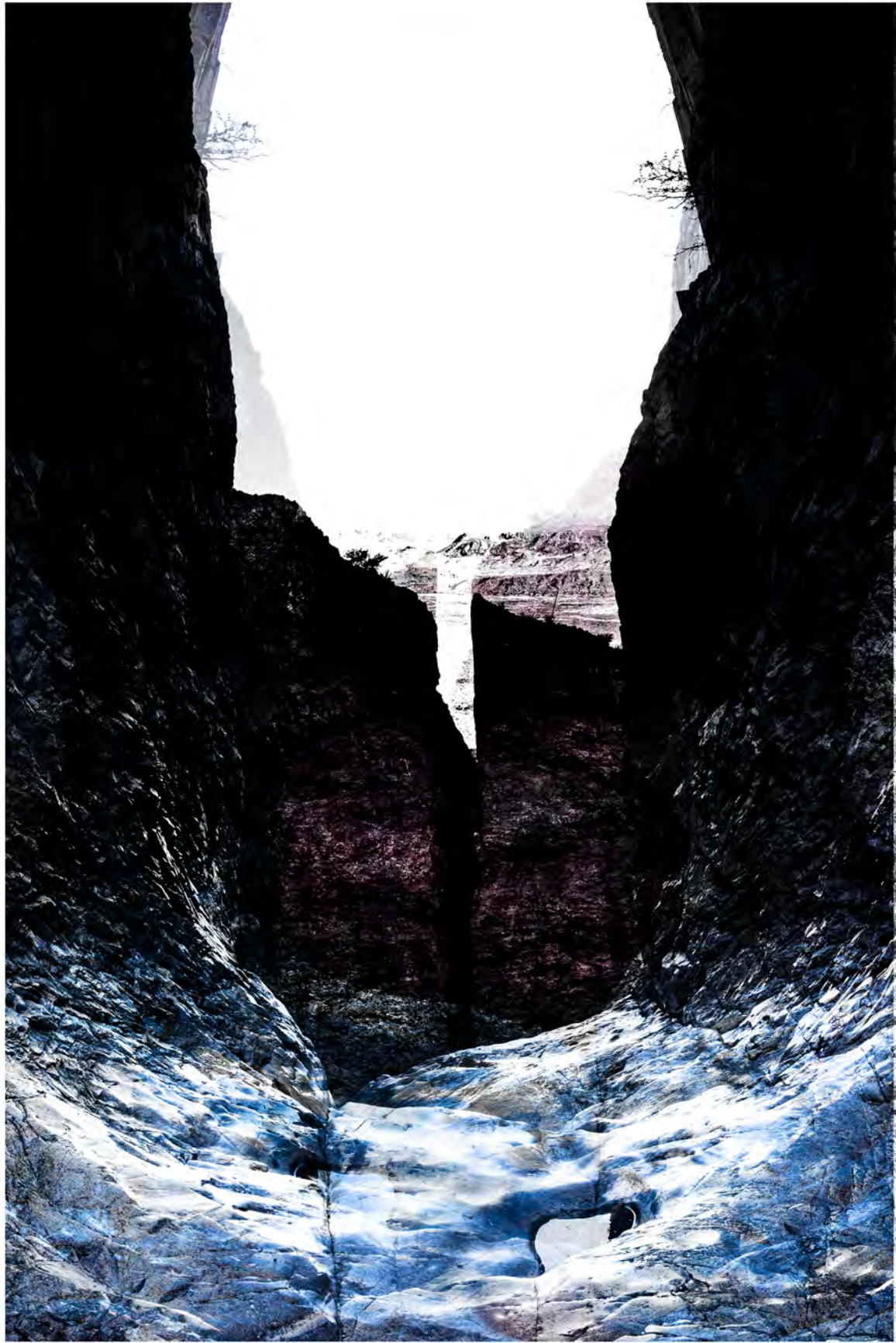
The presence of water is ironically everywhere in the desert, a landscape who's flora and fauna are so marked by the absence of water is in itself a landscape that nakedly reveals the impact of water over eons of time. The arid desert basins were once shallow seas, the rock mountains are carved by it, and water evaporation cycles mark everything everywhere all around. This evidence of water's absent presence is so visible because there is so little flora to cover it all--because of course there is so little water for these hardy varieties of cacti, succulents, and various shrubs to consume.

The absent-ever-presence of water haunts everything like a ghost--you catch it out the corner of your eye, you find a little pool of it here, and a little mountain stream running there around, under, and through the rock. It pervades your thinking and planning--how long will I be out, how much water do I need to bring. Water's phantasm doesn't hide, but you might miss it if you're not really looking.

I am using an experimental water evaporation process I created to use in junction with one of the paints I manufacture on the paintings I started here. A thin layer of water is evaporated off the surface of a nearly dry layer of paint which buckles, shifts, and texturizes the surface to great effect--creating textures familiar to this landscape. This is repeated many times. As thus, in these paintings water is also a kind of apparition, it's absent-ever-presence creates nearly everything visible in the painting's surface. It has been an interesting process to follow, I can control it somewhat, but so much of what happens is outside the limits of my control--which is another element of fascination for me in this work--what are the limits, how can they be tested, pushed to the edge in such a way that I offer the material as little of my controlling moves as possible while rendering an organic result I am still happy with aesthetically. In that game there is so much fertile territory to explore, just as there is in this landscape. I feel deeply grateful to be here and will return soon.







Tao Te Ching: Verse 16
Be completely Empty.
Be perfectly serene.
The ten thousand things arise together;
in their arising is their return.
Now they flower,
and flowering
sink homeward,
returning to the root.

The return to the root
is peace.
Peace: to accept what must be,
to know what endures...



Tao Te Ching: Verse 7
Heaven will last,
earth will endure.
How can they last so long?
They don't exist for themselves
and so can go on and on.

So wise souls
leaving self behind
move forward,
and setting self aside
stay centered.
Why let the self go?
To keep what the soul needs.



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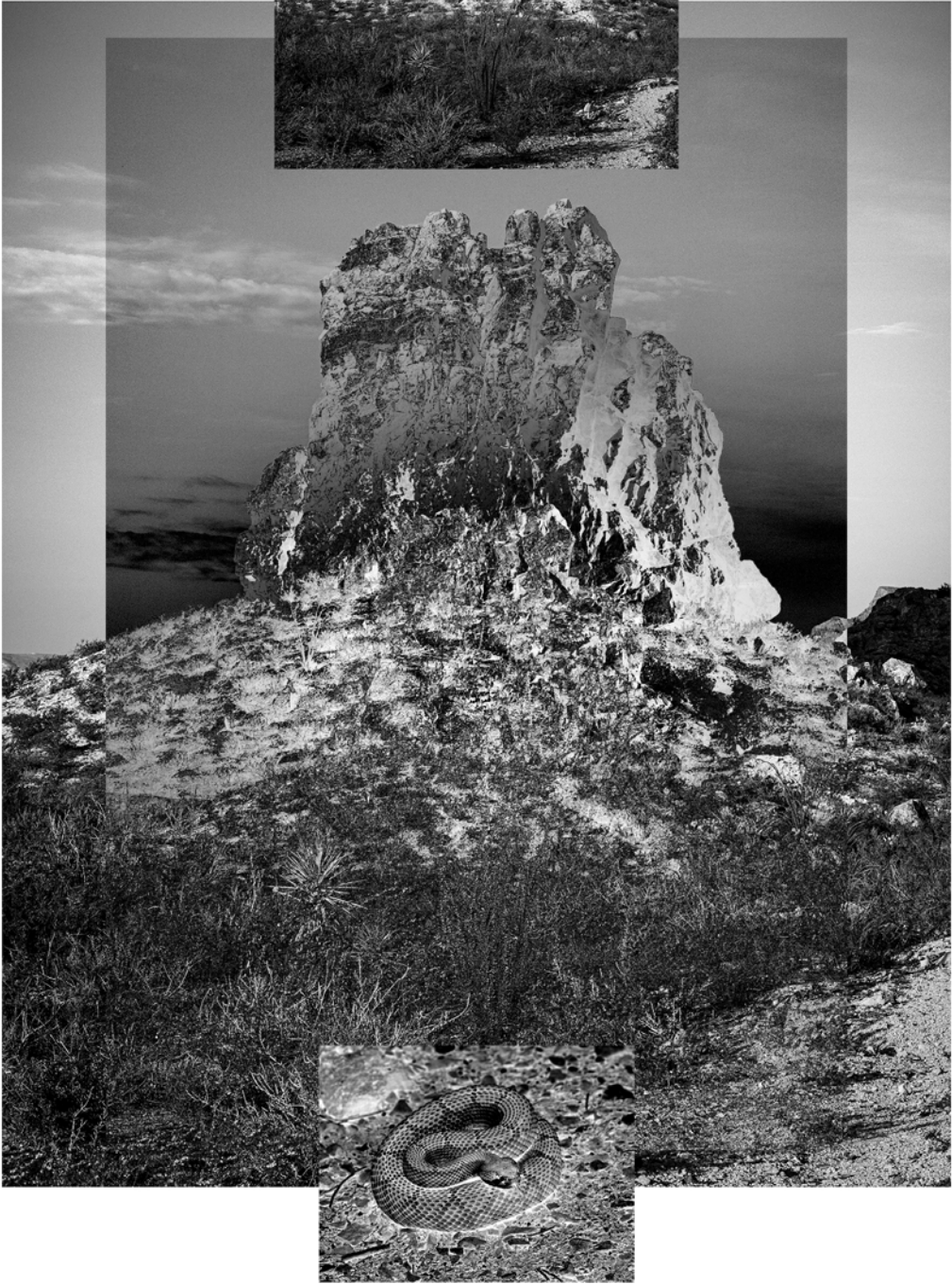
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7/20/25: Morning Hike

chimney-like rock forms puffing petite clouds into a perfectly pale morning sky
the Chisos Mountains an ancient spine winding round and round and back in on itself
then, a last-minute leap over a swirl of sunning satan—
“that ratler coulda put an end to all this beauty!”
purple prickly pear
toe biter
redheaded centipede
sotol
an entire landscape of spiny dermas — el rigor del desierto
toothy barriers to entry — pokey tickets to a grand carnival of the sublime



Earth to



Tao Te Ching: Verse 14
Look at it: nothing to see.
Call it colorless.
Listen to it: nothing to hear.
Call it soundless.
Reach for it: nothing to hold.
Call it intangible.

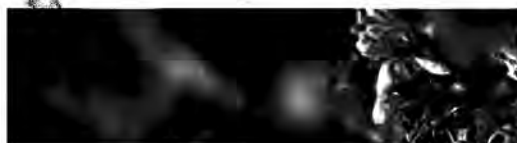
Triply undifferentiated,
it merges into oneness,
not bright above,
not dark below.

Never, oh! never
can it be named.
It reverts, it returns
to unbeing.
Call it the form of the
unformed,
the image of no image.

Call it unthinkable thought.
Face it: no face.
Follow it: no end.

Holding fast to the old Way,
we can live in the present.
Mindful of the ancient
beginnings,
we hold the thread of the
Tao.





† Study Notes: 11/7/25

Hexagram 52:  Keeping Still Mountain

 Two Mountains Stacked = Total Stillness

The Mountain does not move, yet all things come to rest in its presence.
Gen - To Stop / Wu Wei - Effortless Action

"Keeping Still. Keeping his back still so that he no longer feels his body.
He goes into his courtyard and does not see his people.
No blame."

- I Ching, Hexagram 52

The Back (the Spine) = The Axis of Self

In the Fertile Void:

Soft > Hard

Receptive = Powerful

Emptiness > Fullness

Energy gathering inward

Keeping Still Mountain becomes more than symbol, it becomes practice ...

"...Returning to stillness, one returns to life..."

- Tao Te Ching, Verse 16



SPINES - THE AXIS OF SELF















1/1/2026: Vertigo

“The Dust Bowl of the 1930s provides us with a striking analogy for our contemporary situation. As a giant cloud of dust rising from the ground and infiltrating all dimensions of human life, the emergence of Earth formations into thought processes constitutes the irrespirable atmosphere of the Anthropocene. This is as much a material process as a mental one; the Great Plains of North America seem to fuse with our cognitive landscapes. In this “cognitive dust bowl,” the horizon line dividing the ground from the sky is blurred as the human figure seems to slowly melt into the background. The landscape becomes a massive, opaque, and grounded sky, an all-over horizon of earth-infused thoughts or a thought-infused Earth.

Looking for an escape route from this epochal panic leads to fierce confusion: routes seem to have disappeared, observation tools are no longer efficient, and vehicles are inadequate. But the difference between the Dust Bowl of the 1930s and our present “cognitive dust bowl” is that there isn't even any “California” to flee to anymore.

What kind of orientation is required by such a situation?”

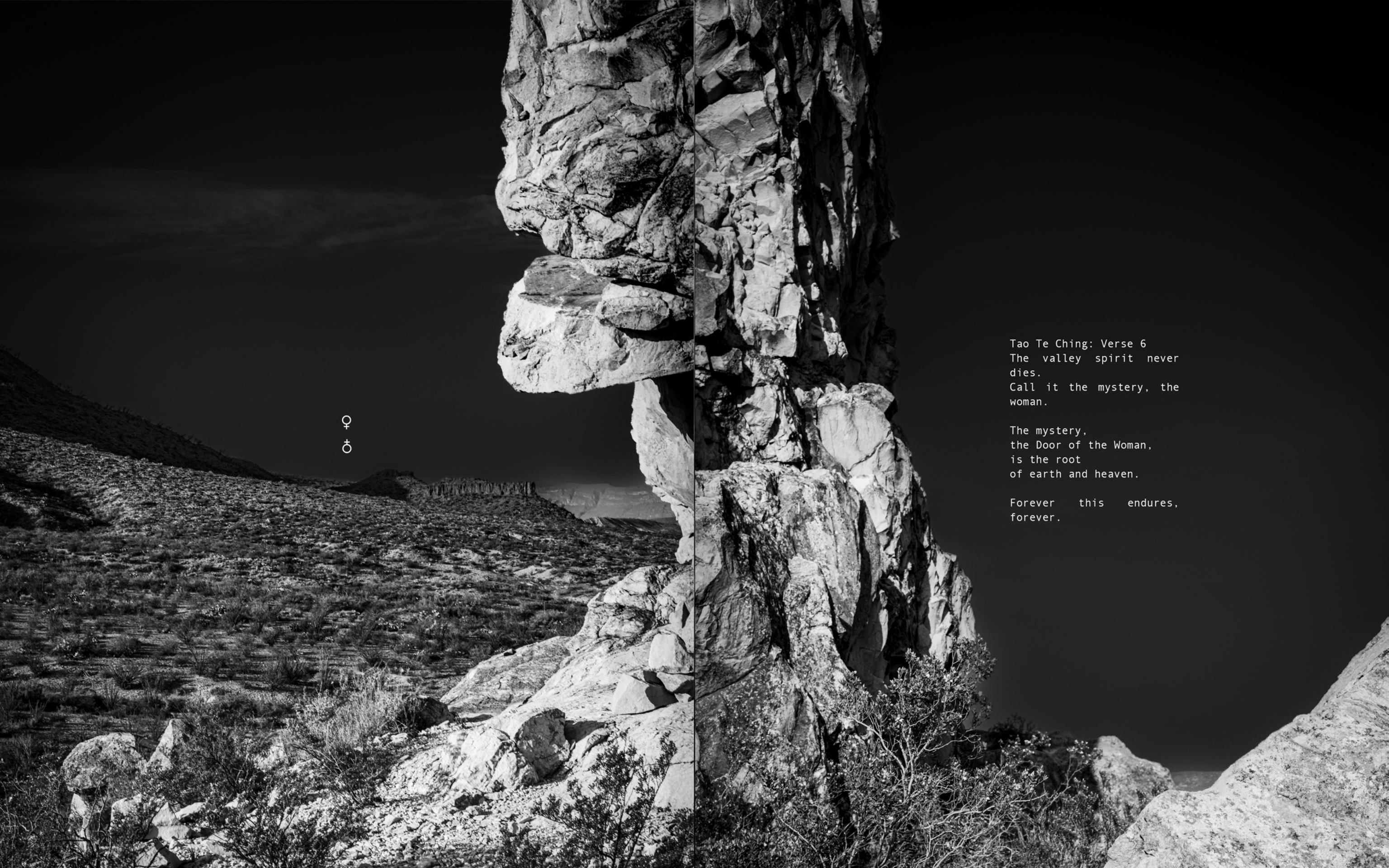
- Fabien Giraud & Ida Soulard, “The Marfa Stratum: Contribution to a Theory of Sites”, collected in “Manual for a Future Desert”, edited by Ida Soulard, Abinadi Meza, & Bassam El Baroni

As far back as I can remember I have had an intense fear of heights (acrophobia). However, phrasing it that way posits my reaction to heights as a mental one--perhaps based on past trauma or in a quasi-logical concern over what happens if one were to actually fall--but that isn't really it at all. Logically I am not afraid of heights, that is my brain isn't afraid of heights and I do not really think fearful thoughts about falling, it is instead something that originates in my body; and is one of the first intense bodily reactions I can remember having--long before puberty directed the emotional reactions of my body in other directions. What I am describing of course is the sensation of vertigo. When I am near a ledge, or even swimming in deep clear water, the distance between myself and what lies below causes an intense physical reaction in my body--one that I have never been able to conquer, though I have tried through exposure and various other means. When I am near a ledge it is like a Second Self is born somewhere just outside my own skin but remains attached to my gut by an umbilical-like cord. Though I am stationary and logically perfectly safe, it is the Second Self that is teetering unbalanced on the ledge--it is that sensation that causes the vertigo, the falling of the Second Self and the pit in my stomach caused by the stretching of its tether to my gut.

On my second research trip to the Chihuahuan Desert my wife and I hiked several areas with steep inclines, one in particular that took us all the way up the summit of the Chisos mountain range. There at that peak, with an enormity of the range and basins below in view, I hit a point in our journey from which my body would not physically allow me to go further. Logically I was not afraid of falling, the area we were in was not dangerous or treacherous by any means, but I was surrounded by ledges on all sides and without any conscious control my Second Self leaped into being and began tugging away at its ropy funiculus. Knowing the biological causation of the kind of vertigo I experienced in that situation didn't exactly help to ease the experience, but some dialogue about that will allow me to discuss a series of realizations that came to me there on that peak while I sat with my back against a boulder as far from the visible ledges as I could get.

What is happening in the body during vertigo is interesting, and the second-self analogy I have always used to describe the feeling to myself is actually remarkably accurate--though I didn't know it until much later. During a vertigo experience my visual system is detecting the distance to the ground but because I'm stationary my vestibular system (inner ear) sends conflicting signals saying I'm stable, it is this sensory mismatch that creates the nauseating disconnect. In more recent research of acrophobia, it has been found that the postural control system overcompensates--my body detects the potential for falling and floods me with corrective signals (muscle tension and shifts in weight distribution) even though I'm not actually unstable. It's my body imagining the fall and trying to prevent it before it happens. The Second Self I described teetering on the edge is my proprioceptive system projecting my body into the space beyond the ledge, running a simulation of falling. The pit in my stomach is the vagus nerve responding to the perceived threat, triggering the visceral, gut-level panic that bypasses rational thought entirely. It's a very ancient, pre-cognitive thing--the body knowing something the mind can't talk it out of. Simone de Beauvoir, climbing in the mountains, described the feeling of this conflicted body state as “a certain anguish at feeling myself suspended in nothingness.”

Ultimately vertigo is about a collapse of scale, a failure of the mechanisms we use to locate ourselves, and the body's inability to reconcile where it is in space. It is a crisis of boundary--on the ledge the boundary between the body and the fatal space beyond becomes terrifyingly permeable--the ego faces its erasure. Sitting with my back to that boulder created enough distance from the ledges to allow me to look out again at the sublime miracle of earth all around me--the Chihuahuan Desert's geologically diverse mountains stretching out infinitely--and in that moment an awareness of another kind of vertigo struck me; a spiritual vertigo that I have experienced most profoundly in the desert. In that vast landscape the eye can wonder miles ahead of the self, and the self is set up against the ledge of deep geological time. In that space the mind can't reconcile where you are in time; all the human structures we surround ourselves with that center the human being as the point of history are vaporized--forcing you to confront the significance of your life and ego. This forces a kind of ego death and in so doing the birthing of a Second Self--a self detached from the ego, a self teetering on the edge of falling into transcendental revelation. The boundary between the self and landscape dissolves ecstatically, a landscape laid bare and the self laid bare--in both physical and spiritual vertigo the self and landscape merge viscerally. There is a wisdom to the body's experience with vertigo, it is after all a kind of ancient warning mechanism. Mirroring this, there is a kind of ecological wisdom to spiritual vertigo, perhaps it is a warning system to remind us of our fragility and the falsity of the patriarchal narratives that center humans as masters of the earth--a healthy shock at our smallness, a physical response to a healing of the spirit through contact with the earth, and a confrontation with the absolute terror we should rightfully own at what our neglect of it has wrought. There is a deep need in all of us for this kind of spiritual vertigo, it isn't exactly easy to fully embrace at first, a slight to the ego is never completely comfortable, but it is necessary, especially now, and once embraced it is a potent reminder of how generous a mother the earth can be when we let her in.



♀
♂

Tao Te Ching: Verse 6
The valley spirit never
dies.
Call it the mystery, the
woman.

The mystery,
the Door of the Woman,
is the root
of earth and heaven.

Forever this endures,
forever.



Petroglyphs at The Chimneys - Big Bend

1/13/26

"Art is born and takes hold wherever there is a timeless and insatiable longing for the spiritual, for the ideal: that longing which draws people to art. Modern art has taken a wrong turn in abandoning the search for the meaning of existence in order to affirm the value of the individual for its own sake. What purports to be art begins to look like an eccentric occupation for suspect characters who maintain that any personalized action is of intrinsic value simply as a display of self-will. But in artistic creation the personality does not assert itself, it serves another, higher and communal idea. The artist is always a servant, and is perpetually trying to pay for the gift that has been given to him as if by a miracle. Modern man however, does not want to make any sacrifice, even though true affirmation of self can only be expressed in sacrifice. We are gradually forgetting about this, and at the same time inevitably losing all sense of our human calling. . ."

- Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting In Time*

I read this for the first time in the desert, a place where the self dissolves like salt in water--easily into a balm, but not without the need for agitation. I don't know if Tarkovsky is correct in this statement, and now in 2026 what he calls "modern art" is in fact quite an old thing--though now anything over a decade past seems quite old, which is in itself a great sadness; I do not think humans were meant to exist in a time where a mere 10 years feels like a great divide, that is so isolating... But that is a digression, and whether or not he is correct I believe him, but not because of his words, which would be flat and pretentious on their own, but because of the seven films he made--works of art of such intense spiritual truth and beauty they can be returned to over and over as food for the soul. Works of art so powerful that even if he would have stated an outright absurdity along the lines of "great art is the product of sentient javelinas streaming inspiration into our third eye" one would have to take him seriously...

...but honestly, who is to say that is not the case, those overgrown stinky desert rats do have a uncanny sense of magic about them--what else can chomp down a cactus pad spines and all and live to tell the tale...

There is a small, roughly 36" squared section of the chimneys rock formation in Big Bend that has several rough petroglyphs dated somewhere between 2000 and 3000 years old. No one knows exactly which tribe or group of people made them--perhaps they were made by one individual at a specific moment in time, or perhaps by many over the course of many years. Maybe the symbols had a specific practical purpose like street signs for desert wonderers or were perhaps the scribbles of a shaman's euphoric spiritual ecstasy--or maybe it was just a bunch of kids leaving their marks the way kids have always and still do on school desks, trees, and walls to assert their existence in the world. Either way, those petroglyphs are symbols of a kind of great magic and the kind of longing for something outside the self Tarkovsky speaks about. One has to imagine that leaving such marks in hard stone required that same kind of sacrifice too--bruised and cut fingers, precious energy exerted in the dry desert where the resources to replenish are rare. The effort to reach through time by leaving these marks is in itself such a beautifully purposeful act of the human will to connect it can make you cry. It is an awe that barely recognizable lines, squiggles, and slashes can resonate and vibrate the truth of the human condition over thousands of years.







† Study Notes: 12/5/25

Yucca moths are one of the oldest moth species--tiny, white, ubiquitous (in the West Texas desert), and outwardly unimpressive to the shallow glance, these little fluttering sprites are perhaps one of the most powerful examples of the precise and interdependent nature of desert ecosystems. Yucca plants have only one pollinator, yucca moths, and yucca moths have only one marriage bed, nursery, and food source--yucca plants. It is an example of obligate mutualism, a type of mutualism where two species are so interdependent that neither can live without the other. Yucca moths emerge from their underground cocoons attracted to the smell of blooming yucca. This floral infatuation leads them down into the blooms where mates find each other and do what mates do--after which the female moth, laden with eggs and yucca pollen, departs to find another yucca plant's blossom where she lays her eggs inside the flower's ovary--depositing with it the pollen she has carried. That fertilized flower then starts forming fruit, and within a few days when the yucca moths hatch they start feeding on the developing seeds. These little hungry buggers keep on chewing through the fruit until they eventually pop out the other side, fall to the ground, burrow down into it, create a cocoon, and then eventually emerge as moths just in time for the yucca's to bloom again--and the process starts all over.

This survival cycle of interdependence is played out across the desert in many forms--tight loops of death and rebirth, a whole ecosystem living on the edge and yet in perfect mutual harmony wound round and round and back again on itself again. A giant wheel and its turning--Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva--and yucca moths.

On returning home from the Chihuahuan Desert last summer I must have brought back a number of these little moths packed somewhere in the boxes of studio equipment I had lugged out there. Due to this, for nearly a month after I had the treat of having a number of little yucca moths as studio pets--little gauzy spirits that seemed to pop up every time a new painting was going well as if to say "there is fertility here". There is still months later the perfectly preserved carcass of one in the back corner of my studio--I haven't dared move it, every time I pass it I get the feeling there is something greater than all the stuff we make in this world, and so I'm grateful for its presence even in such an impermanent and lifeless form.

12/31/25

Mirages like asphalt buddhas pool down the highway

Sitting in on themselves--

Water everywhere in its absence,

its specter the absorption of light, heat,
and their weight refracted.

What is the weight of light and heat?

The Desert?

Then again at night

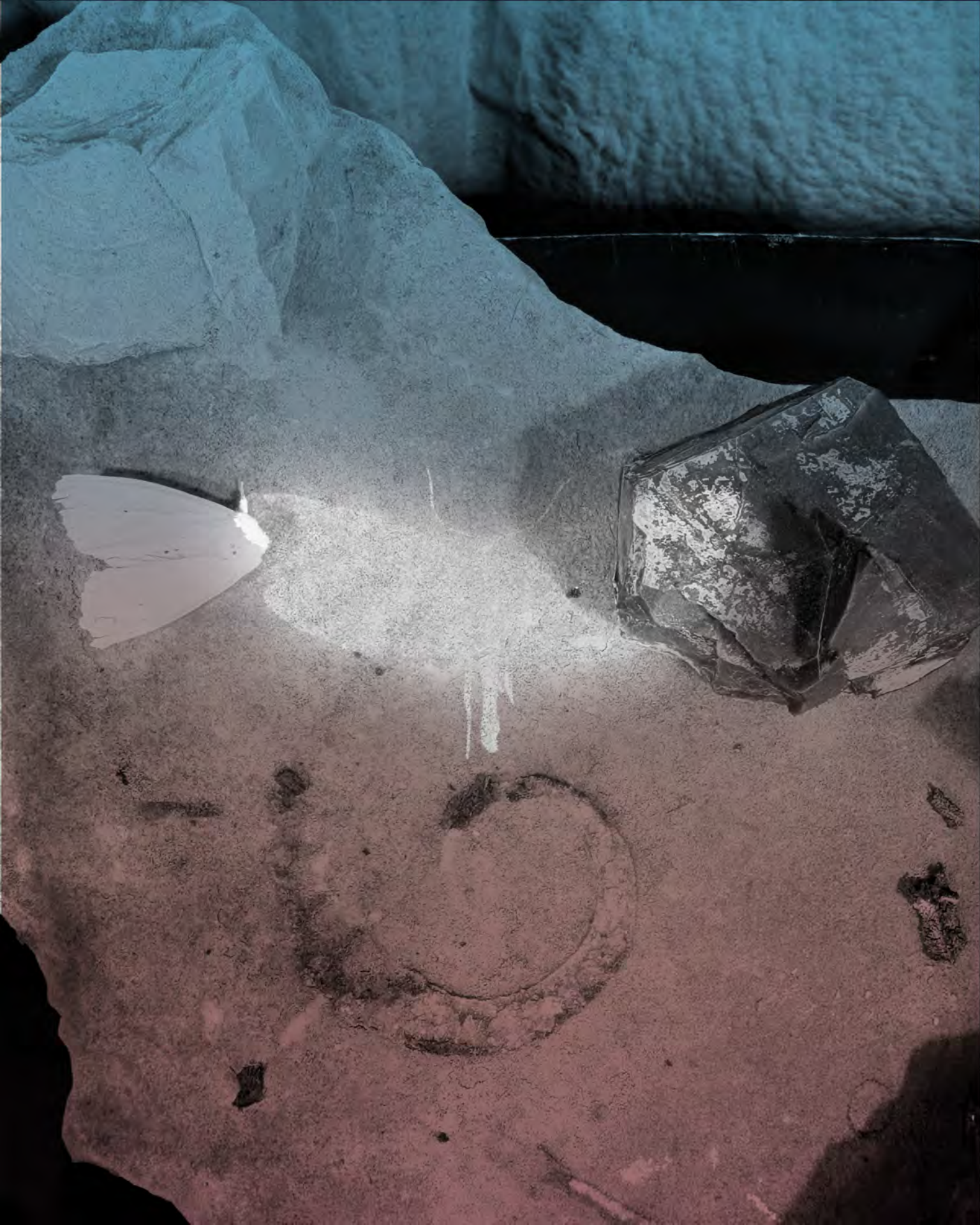
the trickster nature of the universe dances through its basins and spines,
where nothing is what it seems and so is exactly what it is

--ocotillo scarecrows

swatting at bleach-white yucca moths

on missions to bring the dead back to life.





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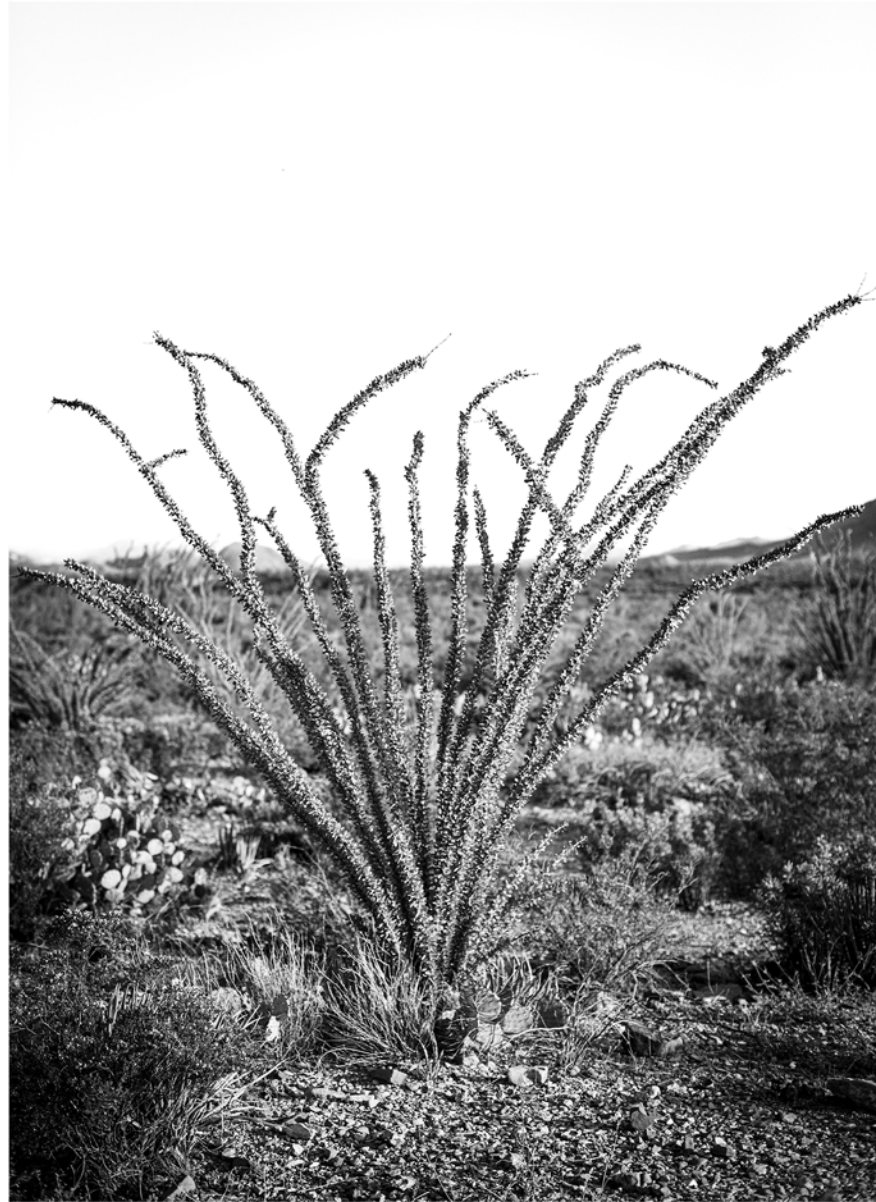
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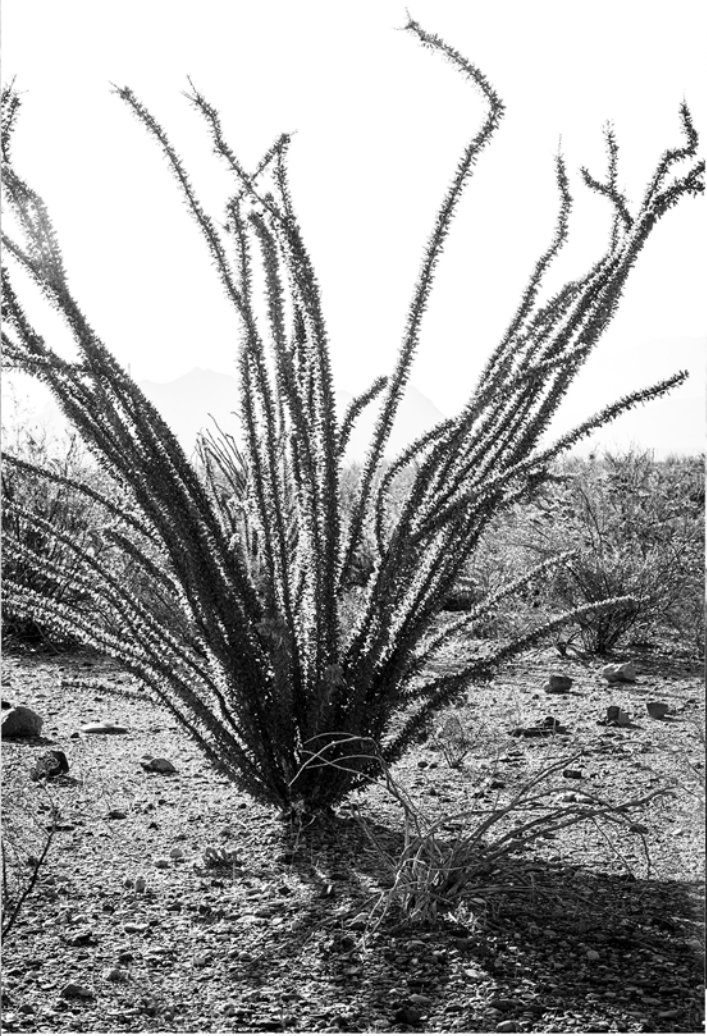
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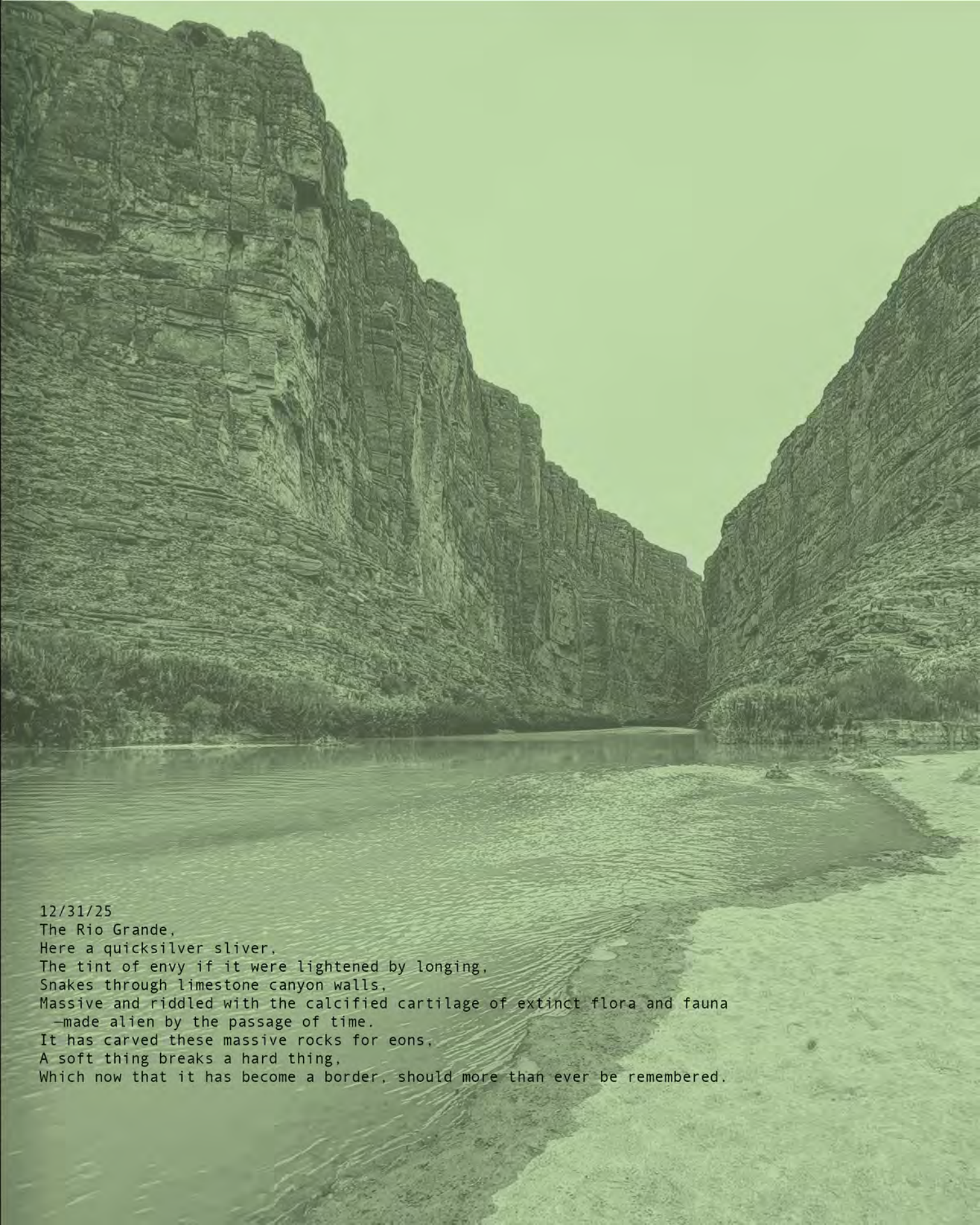
on missions to bring the dead back to life.











12/31/25
The Rio Grande,
Here a quicksilver sliver,
The tint of envy if it were lightened by longing,
Snakes through limestone canyon walls,
Massive and riddled with the calcified cartilage of extinct flora and fauna
—made alien by the passage of time.
It has carved these massive rocks for eons,
A soft thing breaks a hard thing,
Which now that it has become a border, should more than ever be remembered.



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Here a quicksilver sliver.
The Rio Grande.
12\31\25







1/3/26:

“If you wish for sublime realization, offer hundreds of lights”
- Cakrasamvara Tantra

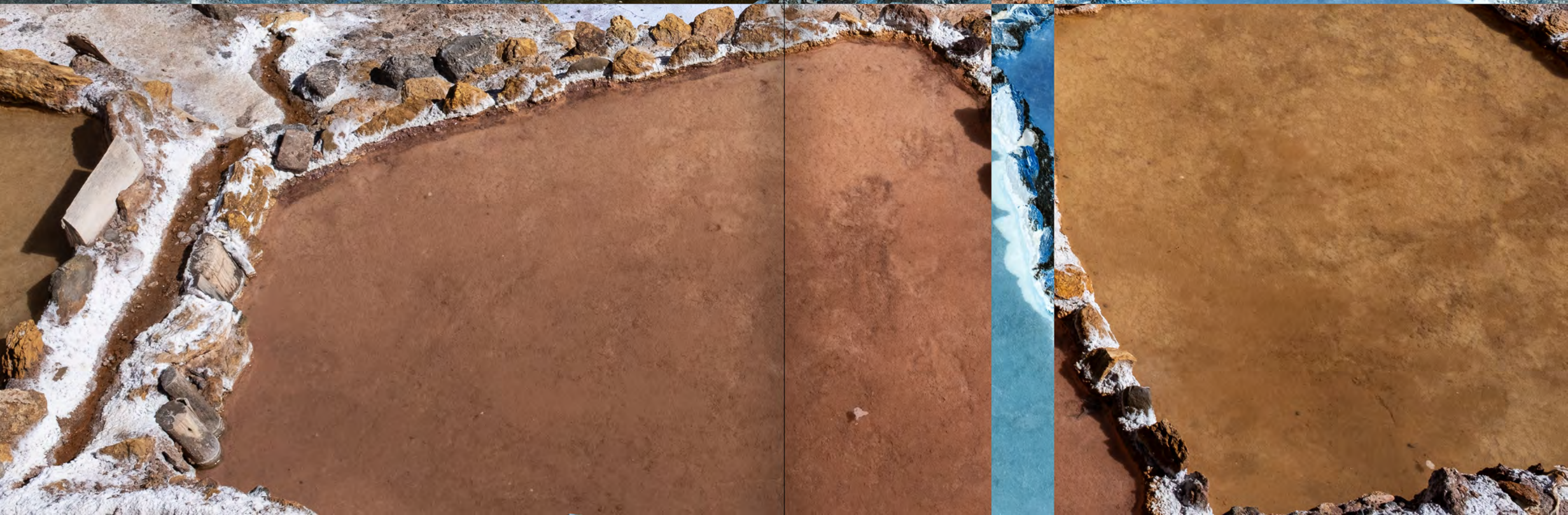
The Wolf Moon,
defiant of the Sun’s rise
-cupped between Dawn’s blushing chest,
and the Winter Day’s icy clarity-
hangs heavy,
as bright and luminous as a butter lamp,
over the Chihuahuan Desert’s rusty hills.





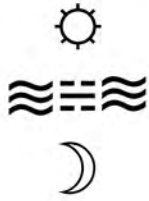
DESERT

GARDEN



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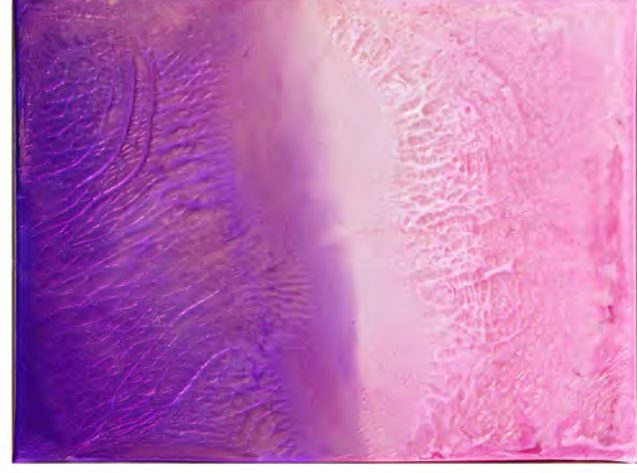
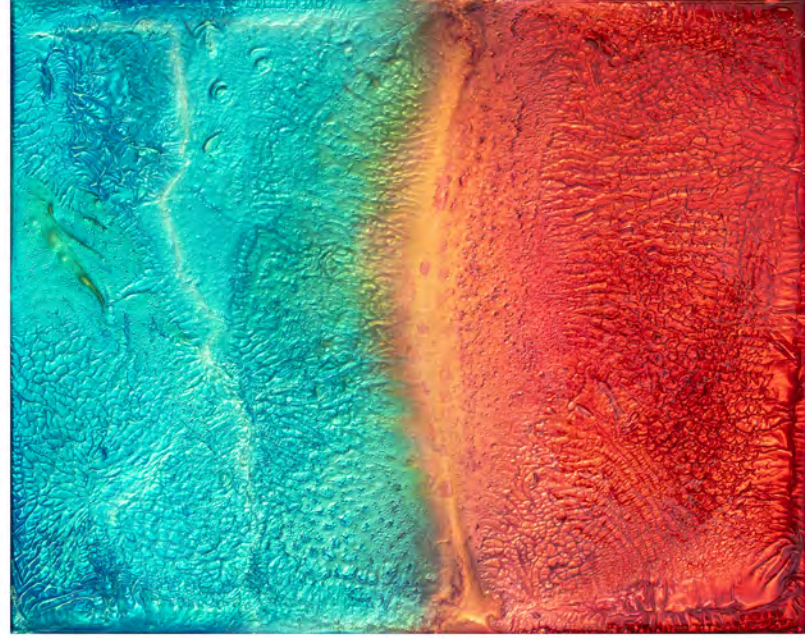
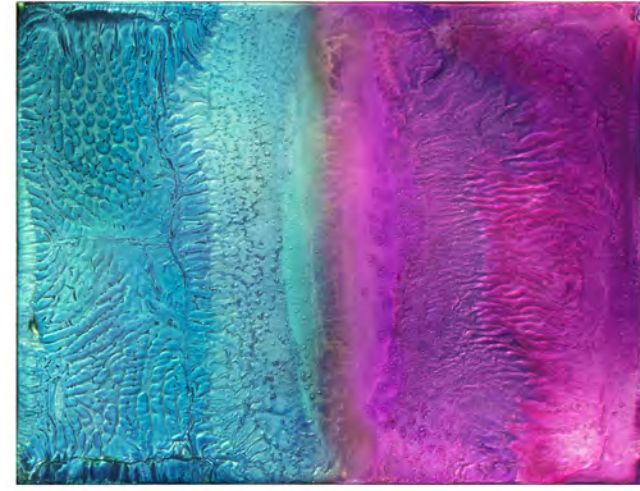
FLIP TO FRONT COVER



TERRY SUPREAN



FRAGMENTS FROM THE CHIHUAHUAN DESERT
I M A G E S



Vortex Triptych 11.28.25 (Chihuahuan Desert)
Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders, natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol, Tattooing, and Copper Leaf on Panel.
30"X60" (Middle Panel 30"X24, Side Panels 24"18") / 2025

INTRODUCTION:

On the Occassion of the Exhibtion

Fragments from the Chihuahuan Desert

Foltz Fine Art

September 26th - October 31st, 2026

Written by: Sarah Foltz, Owner / Director Foltz Fine Art

There are certain landscapes that resist being captured. The Chihuahuan Desert is one of them. Its vastness, geological complexity, shifting light, and extraordinary sense of time make it difficult to reduce to a single image or experience. The longer one spends there, the more apparent it becomes that the landscape is not static at all, but continually changing, shaped by water, wind, erosion, accumulation, and forces operating across spans of time far beyond our own.

It is this understanding of landscape that lies at the heart of Terry Suprean: *Fragments from the Chihuahuan Desert*. Suprean began this body of work during a residency at Willow House near Big Bend in the summer of 2025. What began there continued to unfold over the following year as he returned repeatedly to the Chihuahuan Desert—observing, photographing, journaling, collecting minerals, and immersing himself in a place that has become deeply important to him. Suprean has described the desert as his “holy place,” and that sense of reverence is essential to understanding these works. This is not a landscape he has approached from a distance. It is one he has spent time within, studied closely, and allowed to fundamentally influence the way the paintings themselves are made.

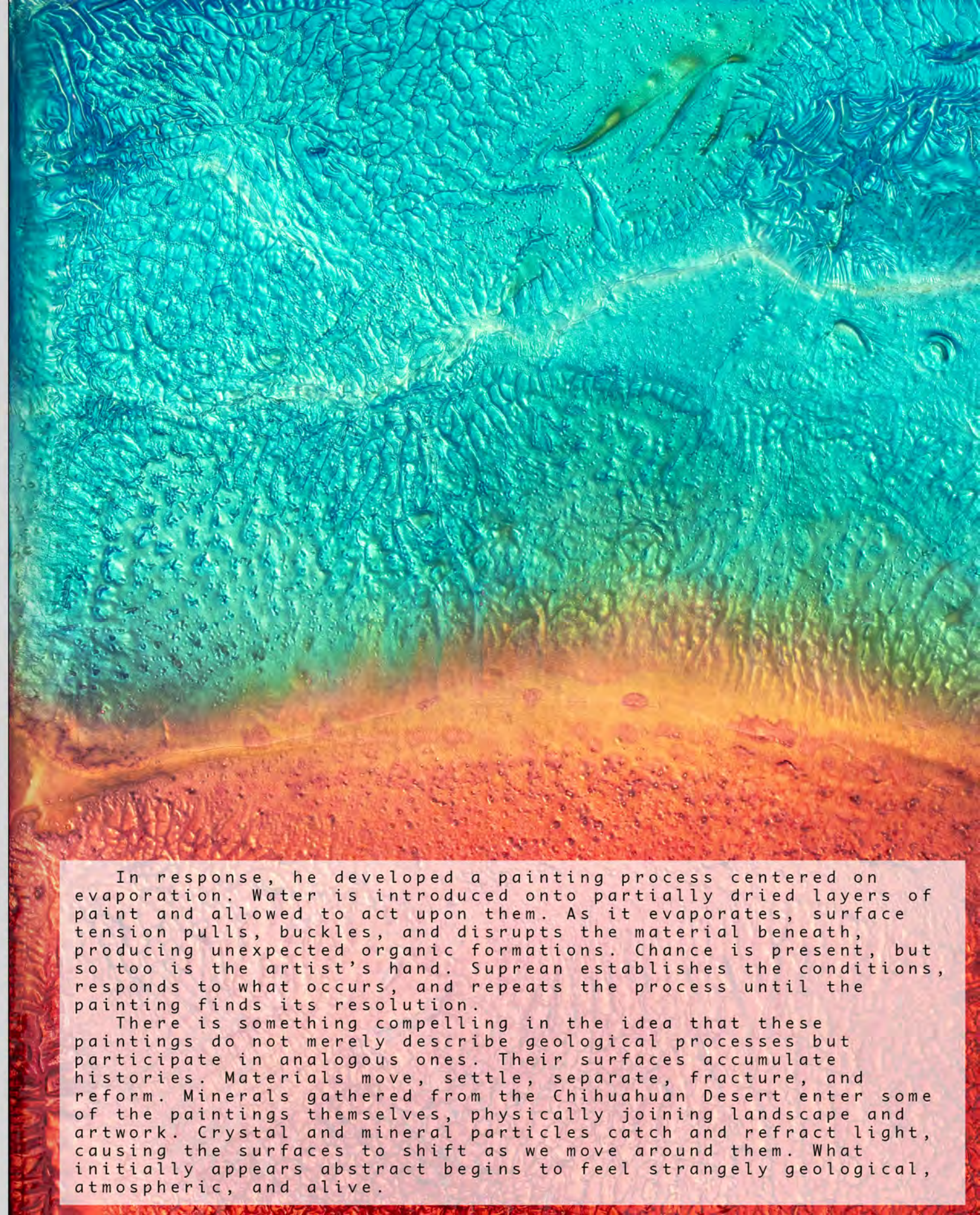
This distinction is important. Suprean’s paintings are not traditional representations of the Chihuahuan Desert. We do not encounter recognizable mountains, canyons, or horizons. Instead, he asks whether the physical processes that created the landscape might become processes of painting. Suprean has long experimented with self-manufactured paints made from unconventional binders, pigments, and mineral and crystal dust. His paintings develop horizontally through successive layers of fluid material that are poured, manipulated, dried, fractured, and transformed. Sedimentation, erosion, tectonic movement, and other geological forces become not simply subjects of the work, but analogues for the act of making it.

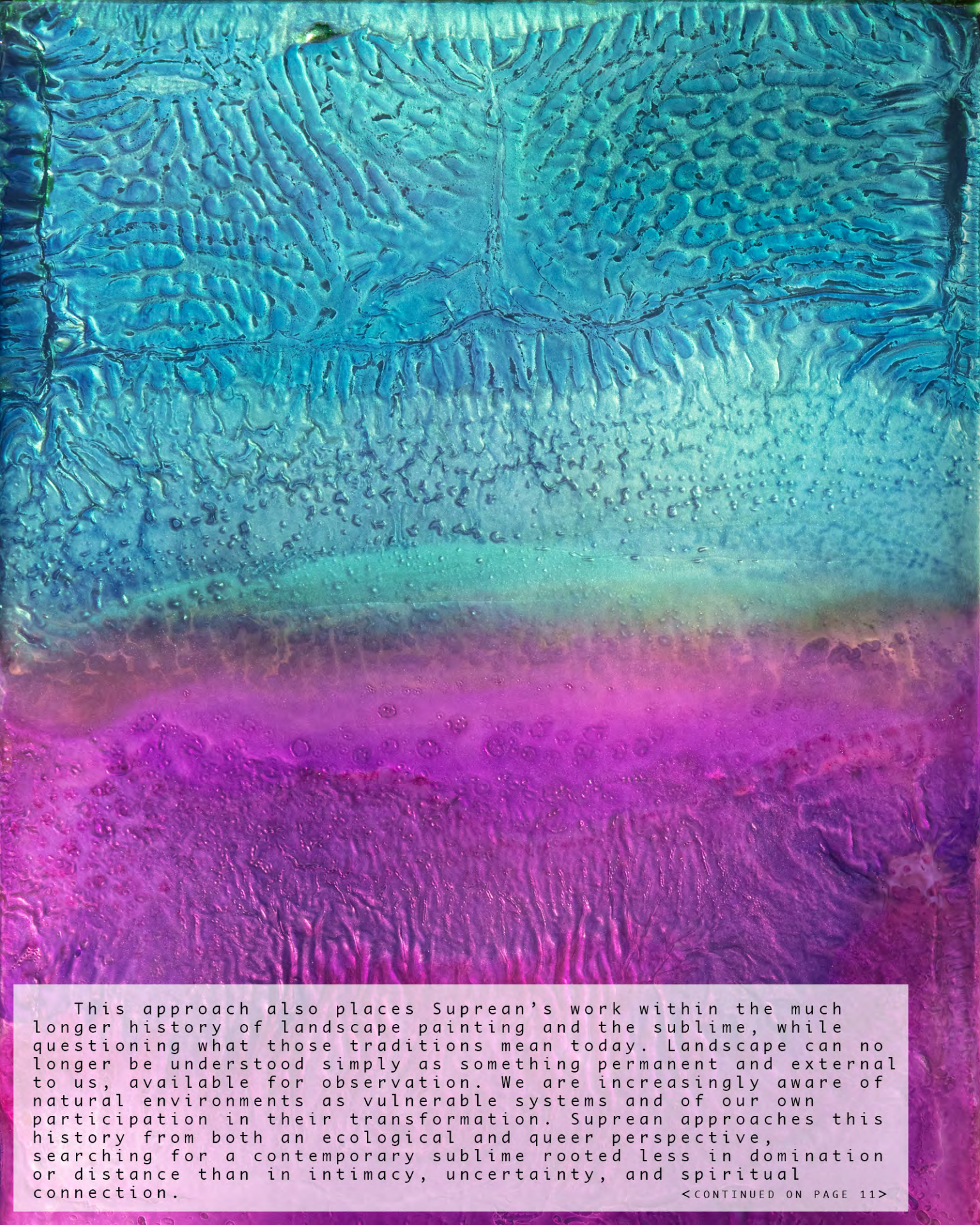
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For this exhibition, water became particularly significant. It is one of the great paradoxes of the Chihuahuan Desert: a place defined in our imagination by aridity yet profoundly shaped by water. An ancient shallow sea once covered this region, and the evidence of water remains everywhere—in exposed strata, canyons, dry washes, sedimentary formations, and mountain faces carved slowly over geological time. Suprean refers to this as the desert’s “ever-present-absence of water.”

In response, he developed a painting process centered on evaporation. Water is introduced onto partially dried layers of paint and allowed to act upon them. As it evaporates, surface tension pulls, buckles, and disrupts the material beneath, producing unexpected organic formations. Chance is present, but so too is the artist’s hand. Suprean establishes the conditions, responds to what occurs, and repeats the process until the painting finds its resolution.

There is something compelling in the idea that these paintings do not merely describe geological processes but participate in analogous ones. Their surfaces accumulate histories. Materials move, settle, separate, fracture, and reform. Minerals gathered from the Chihuahuan Desert enter some of the paintings themselves, physically joining landscape and artwork. Crystal and mineral particles catch and refract light, causing the surfaces to shift as we move around them. What initially appears abstract begins to feel strangely geological, atmospheric, and alive.

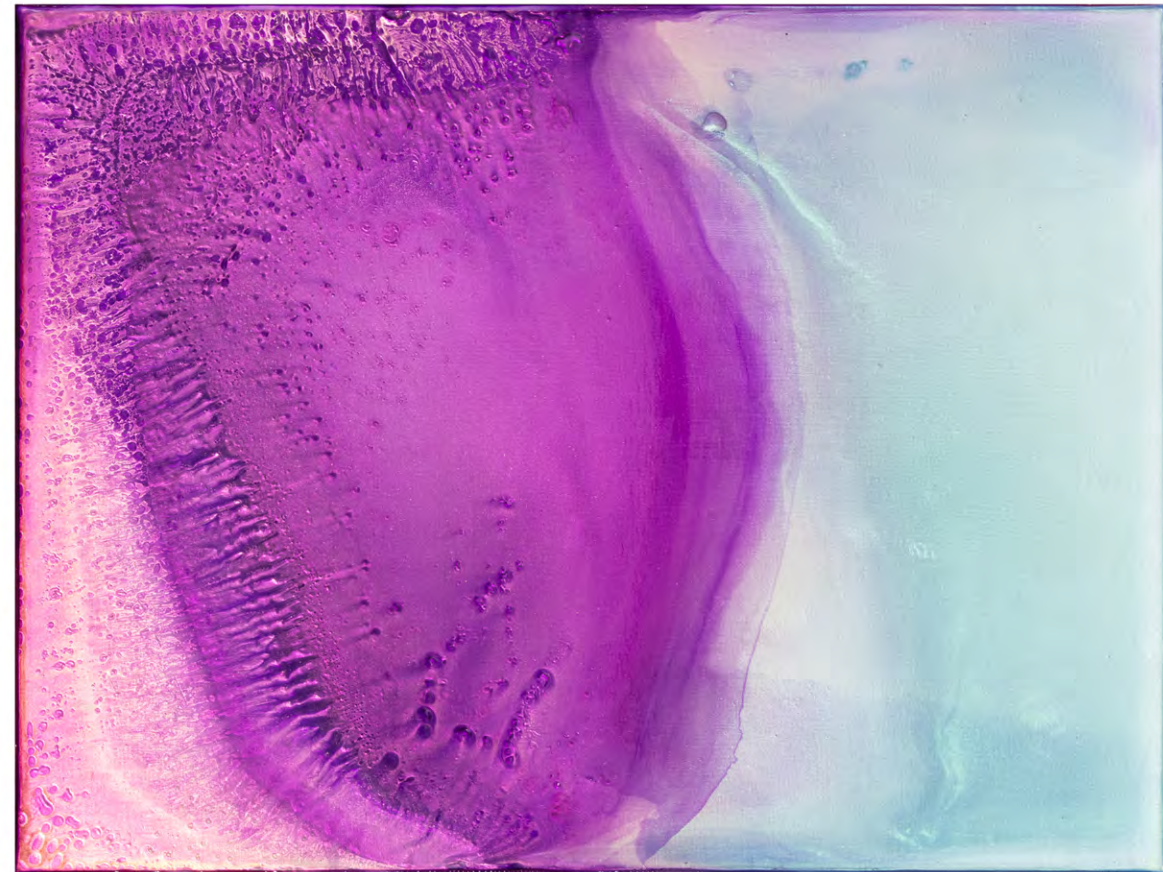
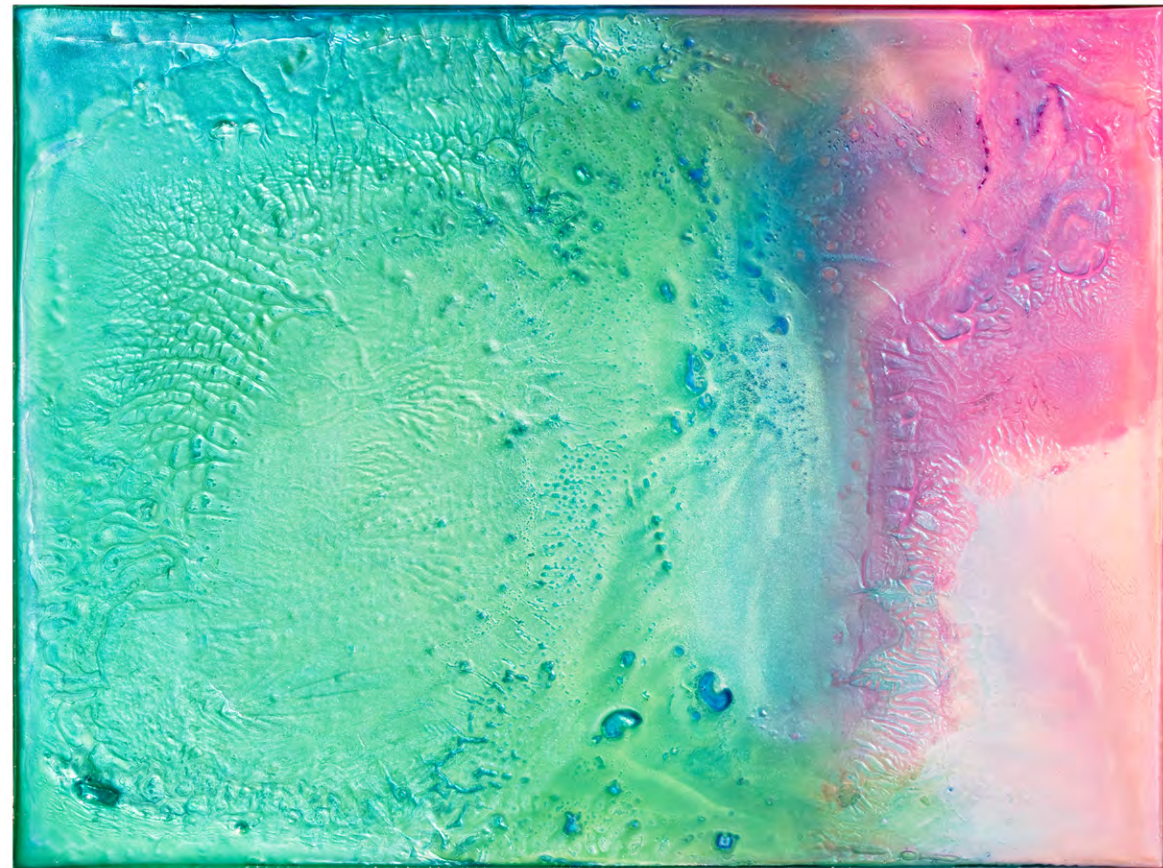




This approach also places Suprean's work within the much longer history of landscape painting and the sublime, while questioning what those traditions mean today. Landscape can no longer be understood simply as something permanent and external to us, available for observation. We are increasingly aware of natural environments as vulnerable systems and of our own participation in their transformation. Suprean approaches this history from both an ecological and queer perspective, searching for a contemporary sublime rooted less in domination or distance than in intimacy, uncertainty, and spiritual connection.

<CONTINUED ON PAGE 11>

LEFT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 9.10.26 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2026
 RIGHT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 9.7.26 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2026
 Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders, natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol, Tattooing, and Copper Leaf on Panel.





Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 9.15.26 (Horizon)
 Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders, natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol, Tattooing, and Copper Leaf on Panel.
 24"X18" / 2026



Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 10.1.25 (Horizon)
 Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders, natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol, Tattooing, and Copper Leaf on Panel.
 60"X30" / 2025



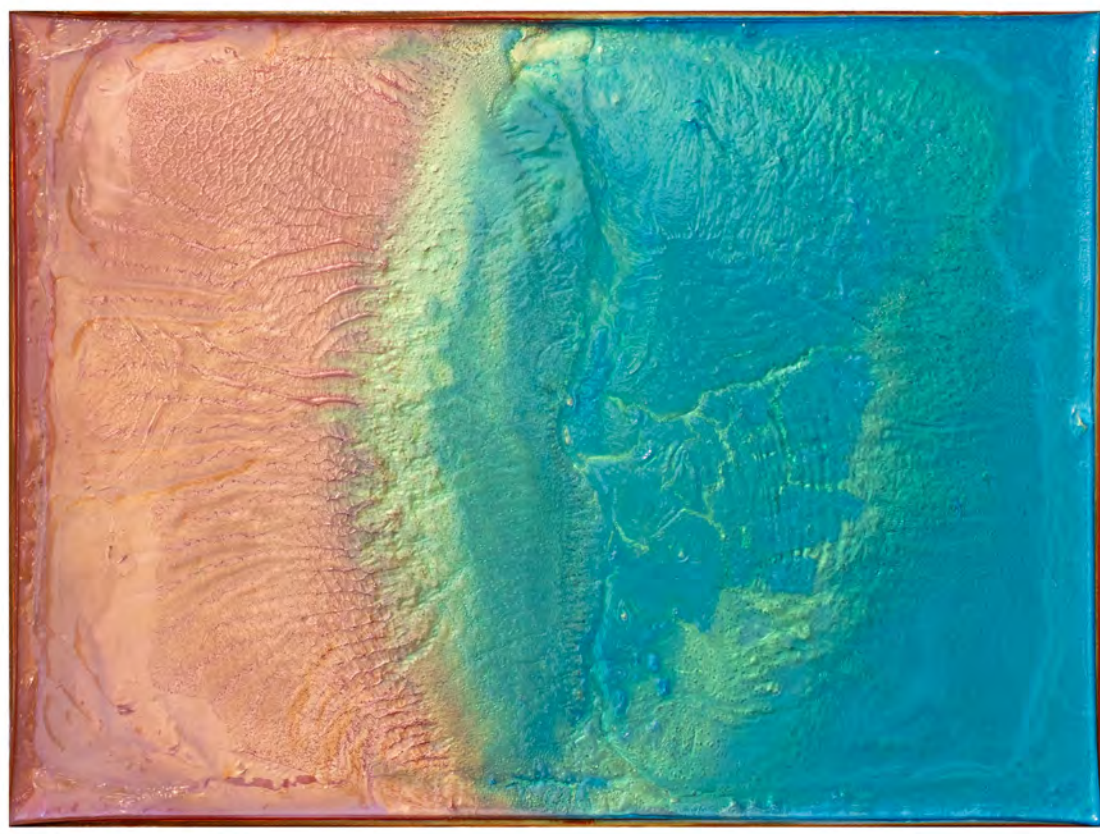
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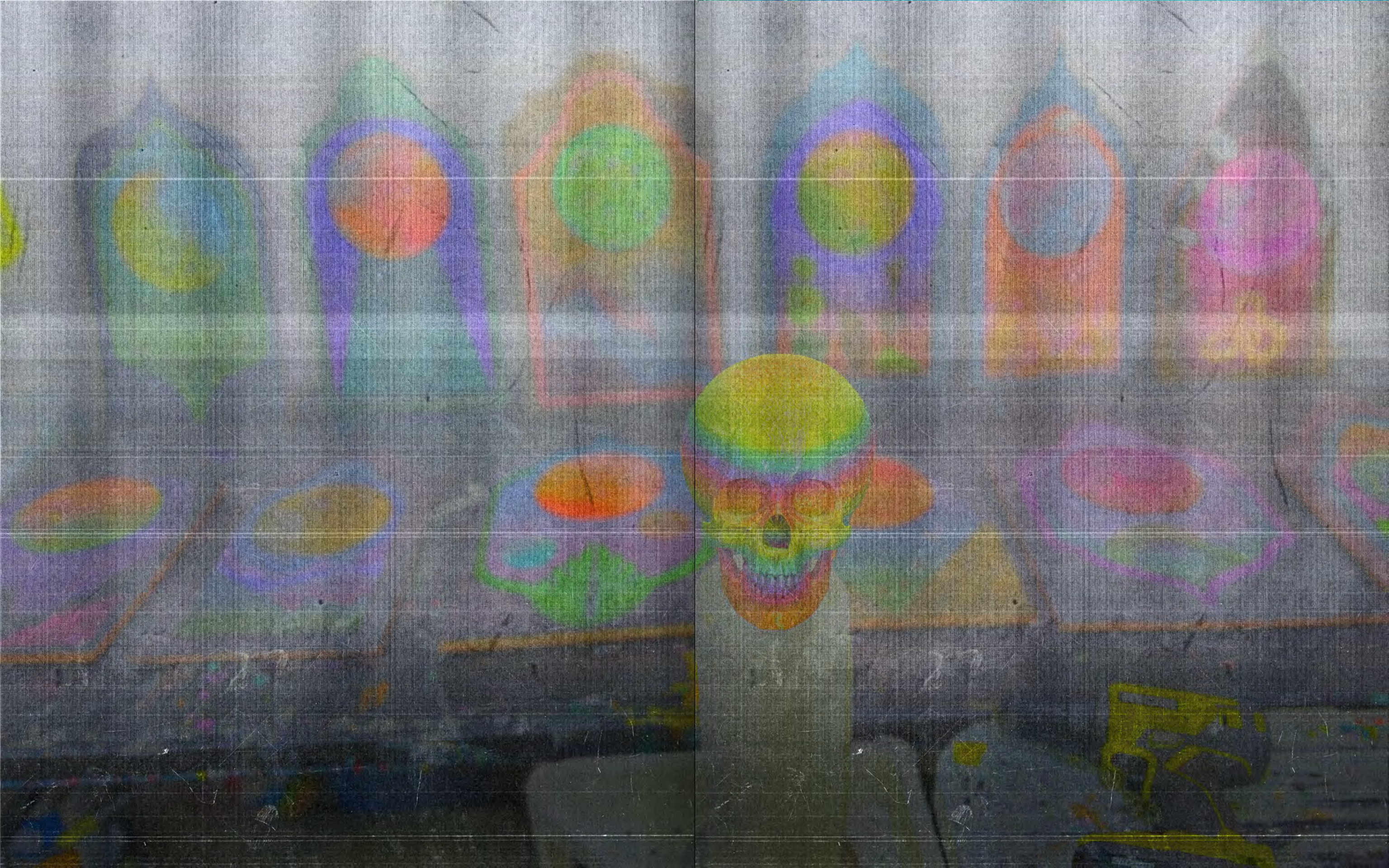
LEFT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 11.1.25 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2025
 RIGHT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 7.25.25 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2025

PREVIOUS PAGE:

TOP LEFT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 7.20.25 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2025
 TOP RIGHT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 7.23.25 (Horizon)* 24"x18" / 2025
 BOTTOM LEFT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 11.3.25 (Horizon)* 16"x12" / 2025
 BOTTOM RIGHT: *Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 12.6.25 (Horizon)* 16"x12" / 2025

Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders, natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol, Tattooing, and Copper Leaf on Panel.





THIS PAGE:
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 6-15-26 (Night Drawing with Serpens Constellation)

NEXT PAGE:
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 3-17-26 (Night Drawing with Yucca Moth)

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 3-28-26 (Night Drawing with Yucca)

Paint Mixing Bucket Residue "Moon", Colored Pencil, Acrylic, Artist Manufactured Paints, Epoxy Resin, and Copper Leaf on Paper mounted to Board.
2026 / 18"X10"

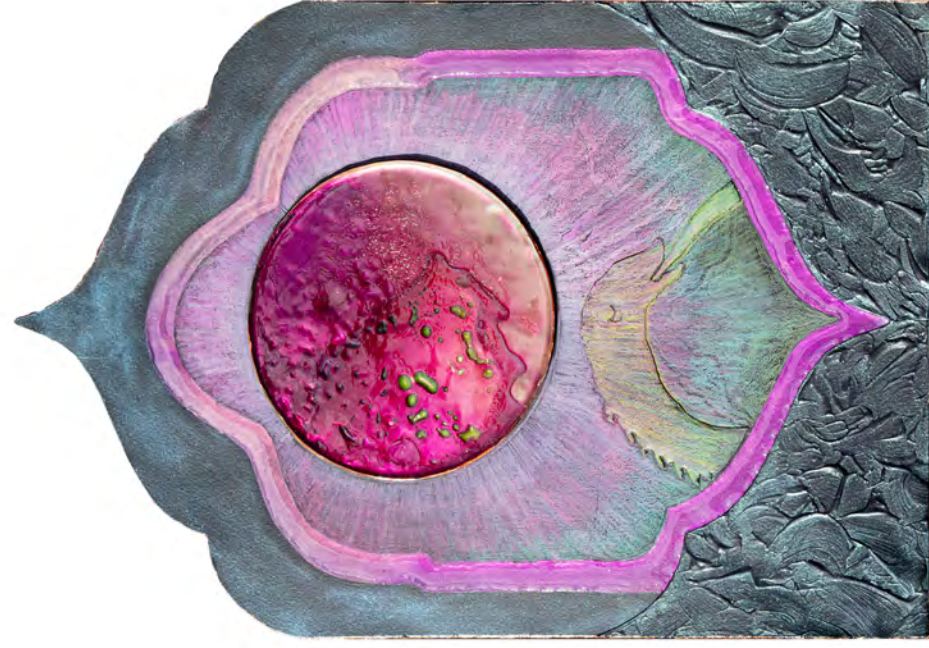
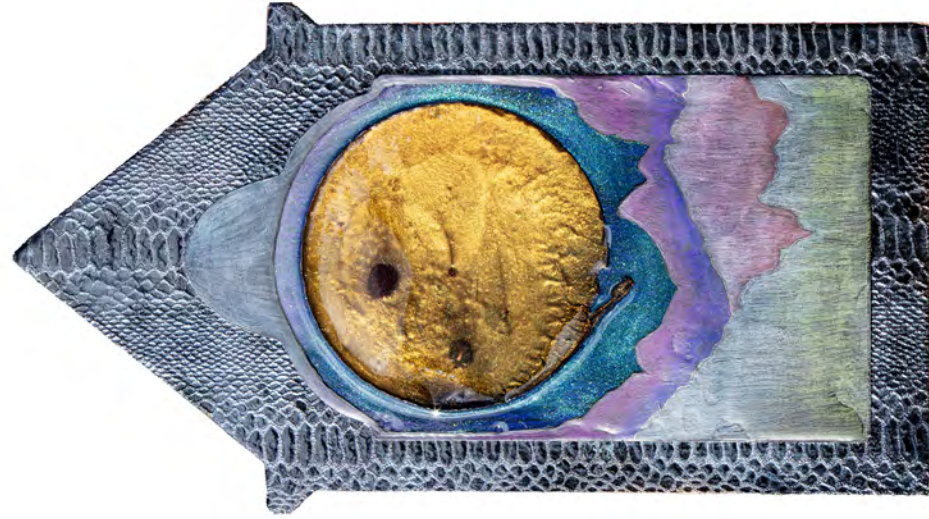


The Night Drawings included in the exhibition offer another way into this landscape. Made from observations of the desert after dark, they are quieter, more elusive, and perhaps more openly poetic. Together with Suprean's photographs and journal writings, which he compiled into an artist-made book accompanying the exhibition, they reveal the extent to which this project grew from sustained looking and repeated encounters with place.

The title Fragments from the Chihuahuan Desert feels especially appropriate. No painting, photograph, drawing, or written account can contain a landscape of this magnitude. What Suprean gives us instead are fragments: traces of geological processes, collected minerals, observations made in darkness, memories of water, experiences recorded and transformed through material.

At Foltz Fine Art, our engagement with Texas art has always included an interest in the many ways artists have interpreted this state's landscapes and, particularly, the enduring pull of Far West Texas. Suprean's work expands that conversation in an exciting direction. Rather than asking us simply to look again at the Chihuahuan Desert, these works ask us to reconsider what a landscape is—something ancient yet continually becoming, seemingly permanent yet profoundly vulnerable, and something from which we are not separate.





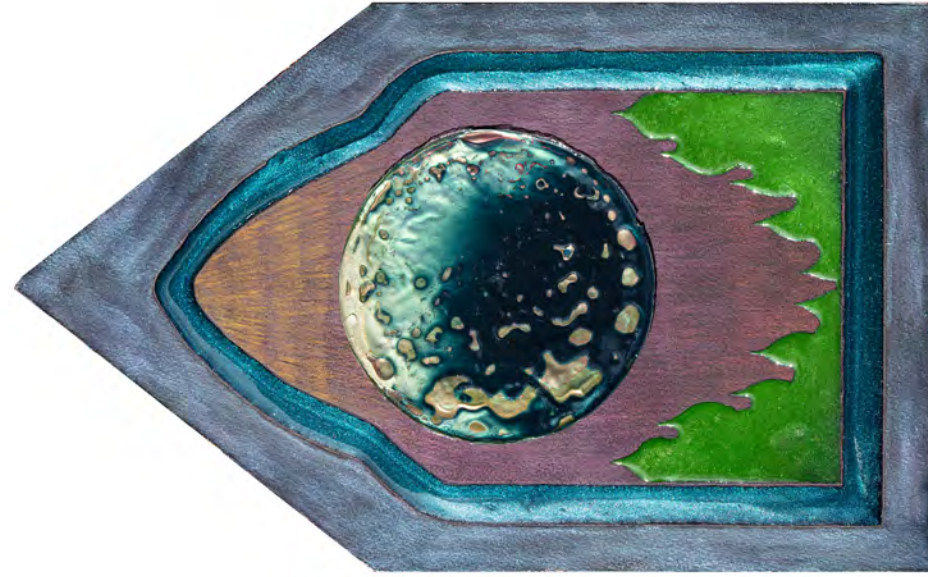
LEFT TO RIGHT:

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 5-20-26 (Night Drawing with Chisos Mountains) 18"X10"

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 4-12-26 (Night Drawing with Western Coachwhip) 18"X9"

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 6-22-26 (Night Drawing with Ouroboros) 18"X12"

Paint Mixing Bucket Residue "Moon", Colored Pencil, Acrylic, Artist Manufactured Paints, Epoxy Resin, and Copper Leaf on Paper mounted to Board. 2026



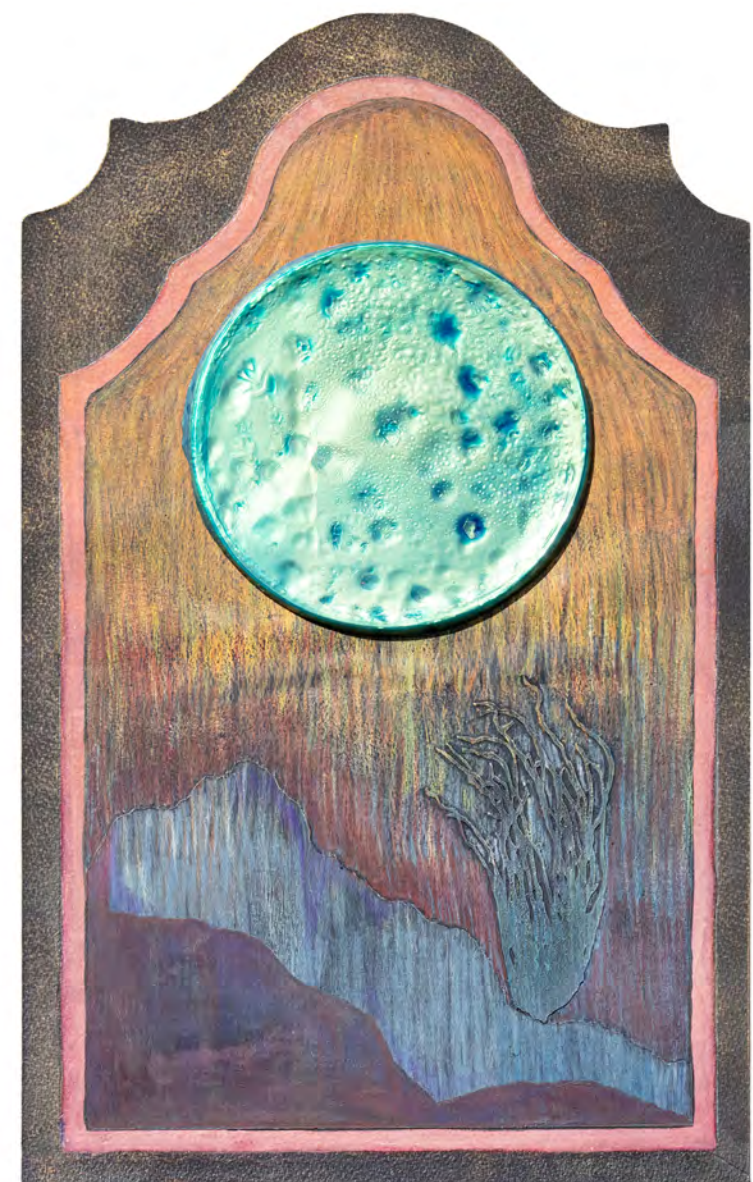
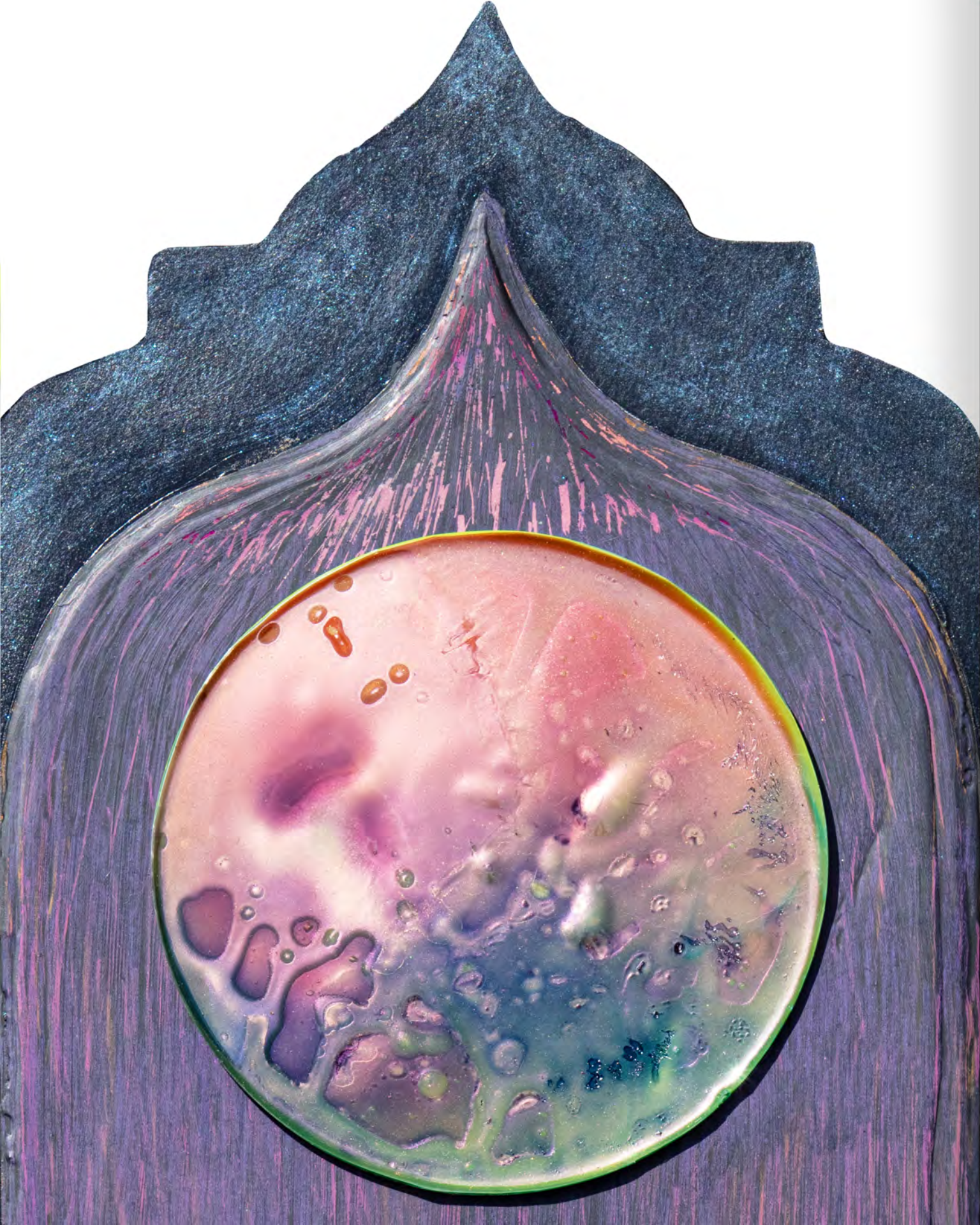
LEFT TO RIGHT:

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 6-4-26 (Night Drawing with Cactus) 18"X11"

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 6-10-26 (Night Drawing with Cactus) 18"X11"

Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 4-2-26 (Night Drawing with Rock Formations) 18"X10"

Paint Mixing Bucket Residue "Moon", Colored Pencil, Acrylic, Artist Manufactured Paints, Epoxy Resin, and Copper Leaf on Paper mounted to Board. 2026

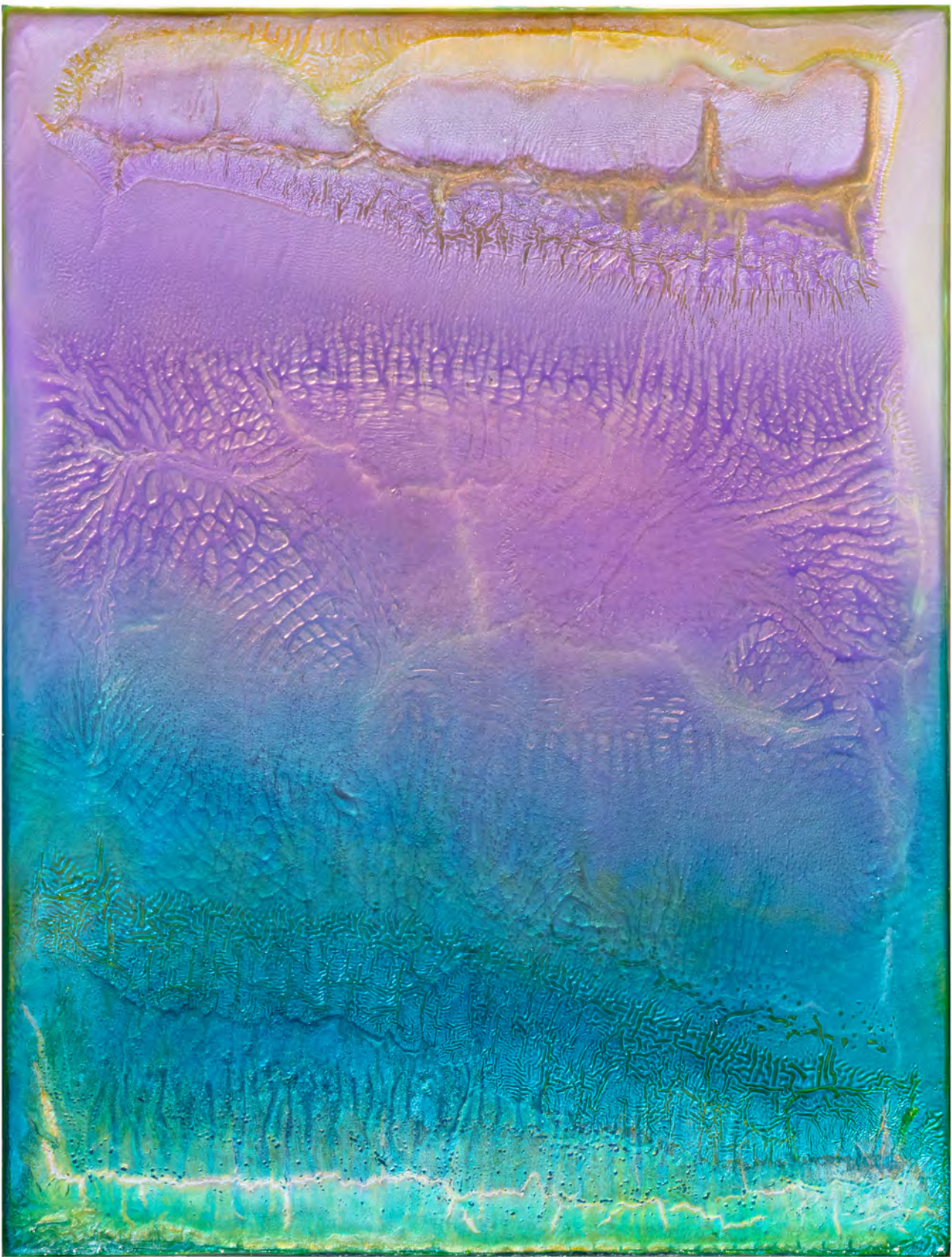


LEFT TO RIGHT:
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 4-25-26 (Night Drawing with Chisos Mountains) 18"X10"
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 5-5-26 (Night Drawing with Ocotillo) 18"X11"
 Paint Mixing Bucket Residue "Moon", Colored Pencil, Acrylic, Artist
 Manufactured Paints, Epoxy Resin, and Copper Leaf on Paper mounted to Board.
 2026

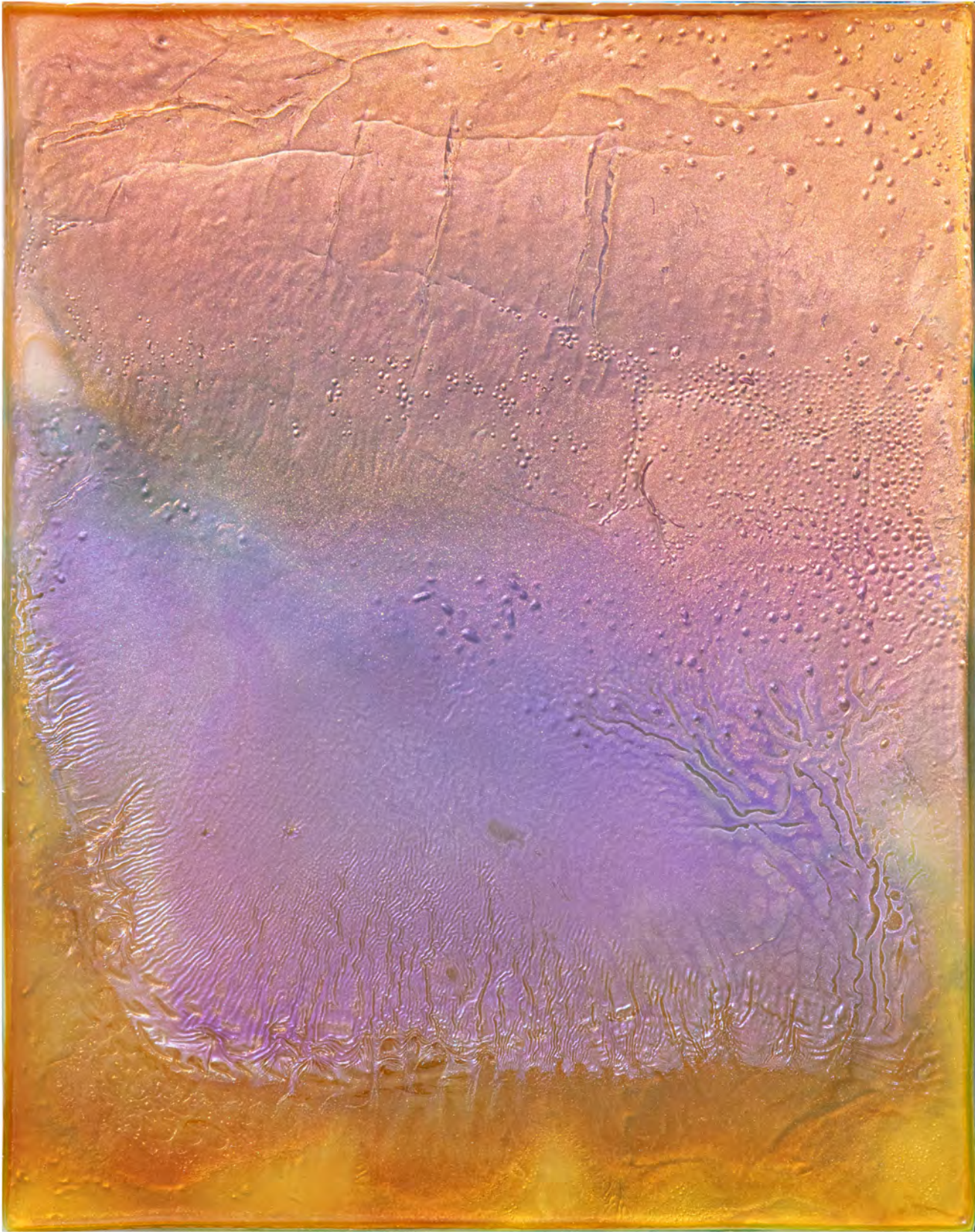
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 3-7-26 (Night Drawing with Rock Formations) 18"x9.5"
Paint Mixing Bucket Residue "Moon", Colored Pencil, Acrylic, Artist
Manufactured Paints, Epoxy Resin, and Copper Leaf on Paper mounted to Board.
2026 / 18"x11"



A DESERT INSIDE A GARDEN



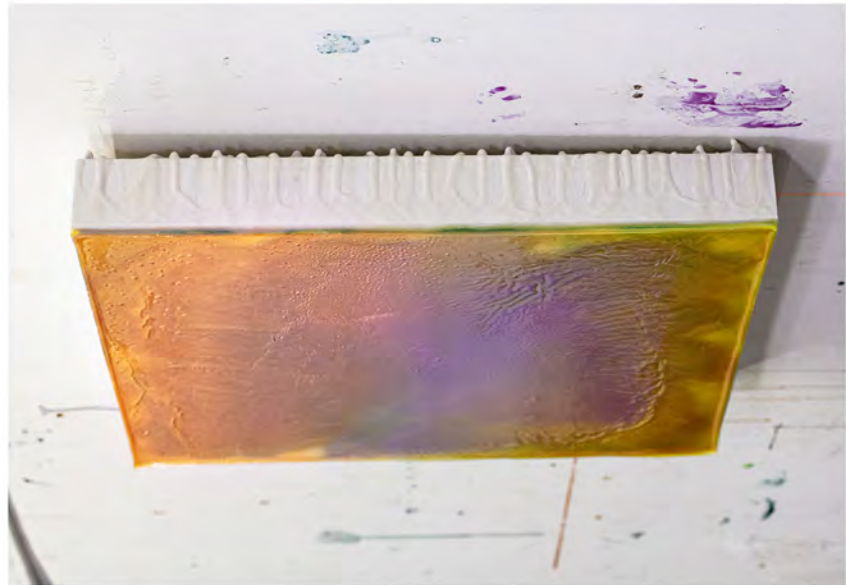
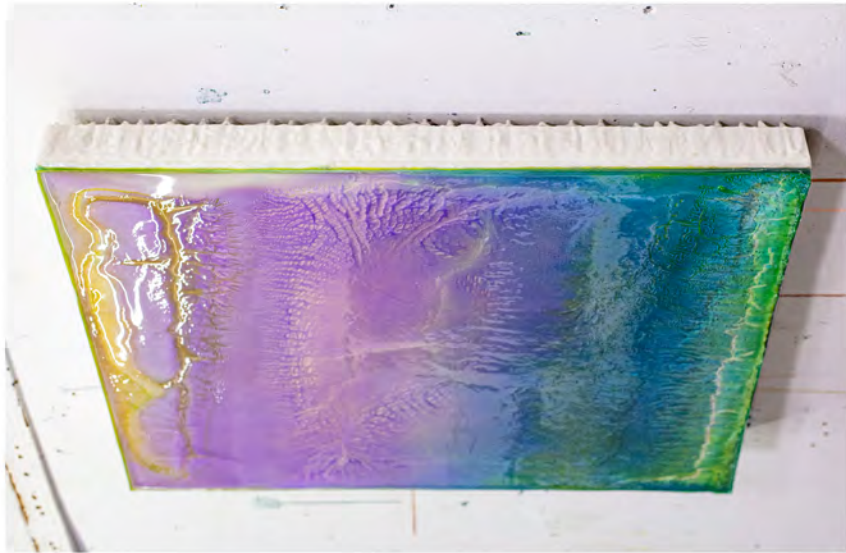
Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 7.25.26 (Garden)
 Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders,
 natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol,
 Tattooing, and Resin on Panel.
 24"X18" / 2026



Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 7.30.26 (Garden)
 Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders,
 natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol,
 Tattooing, and Resin on Panel.
 16"X12" / 2026



Chihuahuan Desert Fragment 8.4.26 (Garden)
Artist Manufactured Paints & Paint Systems (polymer & acrylic binders,
natural & manufactured pigments, mineral and crystal dust), Aerosol,
Tattooing, and Resin on Panel.
16"X12" / 2026



FLIP TO BACK COVER

FLIP TO FRONT COVER