





Corrie van der Wath

MAN AND GOD AND MAN AS GOD
Post-human identity through hybrid media

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA (UNISA)
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Becoming

Echoes of becoming, 2024.
Oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm

Echoes of becoming explores the liminal space between existence and transformation, where identity is in constant flux. The cascading layering and vertical streaks of light represent the reverberations of change, symbolising the ongoing process of human evolution and the merging of organic and artificial forms. The ethereal figure emerging from the abstract layers hints at a future of blurred boundaries.

INTRODUCTION

"In the 21st century, the most pressing question may well be, 'What do we want to become?' This query, posed by Yuval Noah Harari in *Homo Deus: a brief history of tomorrow* (2017), deeply resonates with my artistic exploration of the human condition² and evolution³ within the framework of posthumanism⁴. My project – entitled *Post-human identity through hybrid media* – delves into the future of human identity as shaped by escalating technological advancements. Drawing inspiration from Harari's visionary outlook, I examine the intricate interplay of human motives, ethics and the increasing influence of technologies that could surpass human capabilities.

Central to my inquiry is the question: Where are we heading? My sculptures and mixed media works probe the complexities of human thought and desire; particularly our drive to survive, dominate and control, which may come at the expense of others. From a Freudian perspective, I view humans as survival specialists, propelled by the need for power

1. The concept of Homo Deus, as articulated by Yuval Noah Harari, envisions a future where humans evolve beyond their current biological limitations through advanced technologies like biotechnology and artificial intelligence (AI). This transformation aspires for enhanced cognitive and physical abilities in pursuit of immortality and sustained happiness. Philosophers such as Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti contribute to this discourse by exploring posthumanism, emphasising the integration of organic and technological elements and the reconfiguring human identity.

2. The human condition involves the essential experiences and challenges that define human life, such as birth, growth, emotionality, conflict and mortality. It encompasses the universal aspects of existence, including the search for meaning, individual and collective struggles, and the ethical dilemmas of living within a societal framework.

3. The concept of human evolution, as articulated by the Human Origins Program of the Smithsonian Institution, is the process through which Homo Sapiens developed from early hominins, which started around 6 million years ago in Africa. Key stages in the process of evolution include the emergence of the genus Homo about 2.8 million years ago, the development and use of tools, the expansion of brain size, and the migration out of Africa. Evolutionary changes were driven by genetic mutations, natural selection and environmental adaptations.

4. Posthumanism is a philosophical framework that critiques traditional human-centred views, while exploring how technology, science and ecological concerns reshape human identity and agency. Posthumanism challenges the boundaries between human and non-human, and the biological and artificial, and emphasises the interconnectedness of all life forms, proposing a shift beyond anthropocentrism toward a more pluralistic, post-human future.

and dominance. This project navigates the tension between humanity's aspiration to do good and the temptation to misuse powerful tools like artificial intelligence (AI), which not only has the potential to exceed human capacities, but also to abet our darker instincts. My scepticism about the moral compass of humanity is echoed in the works of the Dada and Surrealism movements, which have significantly influenced my approach to art.



*In flesh and code:
evolution of identity*

*Veil of the mind, 2024.
Anatomy, 2024.
Digital phantasm, 2024.
Primal surge, 2024.*



In this body of work, the boundaries between organic life and digital reality are blurred, thereby capturing the complexities of post-human existence. Through a visceral combination of mixed media, the series reflects the tension between the primal and the technological, evoking the internal struggle of self-preservation amidst an era of artificial augmentation. Each piece probes into themes of transformation, survival, and the fragmentation of identity, drawing from the fluidity between biological existence and artificial enhancement.

Yuval Noah Harari's contemplation in *Homo Deus* (2017:74) aptly reflects this tension: "In pursuit of health, happiness, and power, humans will gradually change first one of their features and then another, and another, until they will no longer be human". We possess immense capacity for growth and innovation; yet we also face the risk of self-destruction – a stark reality captured by Viktor Frankl (2004:134), when he remarks: "Man is that being which invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips".



Navigating the post-human environment

Undercurrents, 2024.
Resonating II, 2024.
Spirals, 2024. (Page 10-11)



These artworks, reinterpreted with the influence of the *Optophone*, delve into the spirals of human thought, the circular nature of evolution, and the cyclic impacts of technological interventions, encouraging a deep contemplation of our future trajectory as a species intertwined with technology.

My artworks are designed to provoke thoughtful reflection of the consequences of our ambitions and to question how we navigate our relationship with technology – both as a catalyst for progress and a potential accomplice in ethical compromise. Ultimately, my work invites viewers to ponder the ethical dilemmas posed by the rapid integration of technology into our lives and what it means to redefine human identity in the age of the posthuman.







*Echoes of the digital soul:
faces of a transcendent future*

The digital soul, 2024.
Perspex Print, 59 x 42 cm - Copy

Echoes of the digital soul: faces of a transcendent future is a mixed media collage that explores the evolving boundaries of human identity amidst technological advancements. Inspired by Yuval Noah Harari's insights in *Homo Deus*, this project visually interrogates the future of humanity as it merges with technology. Utilising logarithmic tables juxtaposed with presentations of human skulls, the artwork symbolises the fusion of data and organic essence, prompting a deep reflection on the ethical implications and transformative potential of human enhancement and artificial intelligence.

Through my art, I explore post-human identity by hybridising traditional art mediums with digital techniques. The theme "Post-human identity through hybrid media" addresses the moral, ethical and philosophical questions surrounding human enhancement, balancing the positive potential of advancements like transhumanism⁵ and the quest for immortality⁶ against the risks of superhuman⁷ dominance and unchecked greed. These concerns necessitate a nuanced, ethical consideration. The project also

5. Transhumanism is a movement that advocates for the enhancement of the physical and cognitive abilities of humans through advanced technologies. It seeks to transcend the limitations of the human body and mind, aiming for improvements such as increased lifespan, intelligence and well-being.

6. Immortality involves the concept of eternal life; the idea of an individual living indefinitely without succumbing to death. In philosophical and scientific contexts, immortality is often associated with the aspiration to overcome biological ageing and death through technological, medical, or spiritual means.

7. A superhuman refers to an individual with abilities or traits that surpass those of an ordinary human, often attributed to advanced technology, genetic modification, or other forms of enhancement. In the context of transhumanism, a superhuman may possess superior strength, intelligence, or longevity.

contemplates how technological interventions may reshape human identity, potentially reducing diversity, and reflects on the coexistence of evolution and creation⁸, suggesting that both perspectives can inform our understanding of the future.

Ethical issues regarding access to enhancements, equality and the essence of humanity emerge – particularly as power dynamics threaten to deepen existing inequalities. While exploring these broader issues, the project remains deeply personal, drawing on my experiences and observations of the human condition and survival in the work and business environment. This project challenges viewers to reflect on the nature of humanity (“the obscured facets of human nature and kindness”), the evolution of human identity, and its implications for our future and that of our children.



Obscured, 2024.
Mixed media, 50 cm diameter.

8. Creation, which involves the act of bringing something into existence, is often associated with religious or philosophical accounts of the origin of the universe. In theological contexts, it typically refers to the divine act of God creating the world and all living beings. Creation is central to several belief systems, positing that life and life forms in the universe are products of an intentional design, rather than random processes. This contrasts with scientific theories like evolution, although some perspectives seek to harmonise the two views.

INFLUENCES

My work is influenced by artists like Frikkie Eksteen and Marlene Dumas, who explore themes of human identity and transformation. Philosophically, my work aligns with the post-humanist theories proposed by Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, who address the fluidity of human identity and the impact of technology on human evolution. Culturally, my work reflects the ongoing dialogue about human enhancement and the potential future of the human species.

Frikkie Eksteen (1973 –)

Characterised by a fusion of traditional techniques and contemporary digital elements, Frikkie Eksteen's works closely align with my artistic endeavours. Eksteen's approach to combining painting, drawing and digital manipulation mirrors my exploration of human evolution by using the mediums of water, ink, paint and glue before digitisation.

Conceptually, Eksteen's art often delves into the themes of identity, transformation and the human condition, paralleling my focus on Homo Deus, human evolution and the grand design. Eksteen's ability to blur boundaries between mediums and his innovative use of hybridity resonate with my objective of exploring the human condition, human creation and evolution through art (Eksteen 2020).



Frikkie Eksteen, *Shrapnel Triptych*, 2015

Marlene Dumas (1953 –)

Marked by her expressive use of ink and watercolour, Marlene Dumas's art process closely relates to my technical approach. Dumas's method involves fluid, gestural brush strokes and a keen emphasis on the materiality of her mediums, which echoes my use of water, ink, paint and glue to explore the medium of flow.

While her conceptual focus on identity and emotion differs from my thematic exploration of human evolution and Homo Deus, Dumas's technique of layering and manipulating traditional mediums offers valuable insight for my practice. I am inspired by her innovative use of fluidity and form, which emphasises the transformative potential of traditional mediums in a contemporary context (Horlock 1997).



Marlene Dumas. *Blindfolded*, 2002

Rosi Braidotti (1954 –)

Rosi Braidotti's theories on the fluidity of boundaries between human, animal and machine profoundly resonate with my exploration of hybridity in art, as both challenge fixed notions of identity and categorisation. In my work, this hybridity is manifested through the combination of traditional and digital mediums, reflecting the blurred lines between organic and synthetic, natural and artificial. Just as Braidotti's concept of the posthuman encourages a reconceptualisation of the human subject in a world of technological integration, my art reflects this fluidity by transforming traditional materials like paint, water and ink through digital processes. This transformation symbolises the evolving human identity as it becomes intertwined with technology, thereby reflecting Braidotti's idea of the distinctions between species and machines becoming increasingly permeable (Braidotti 2013). Her emphasis on these shifting boundaries enriches the conceptual depth of my project, inviting viewers to rethink the very nature of what it means to be human in a posthuman world.



Odyssey, 2024.
Cold cast aluminium, stainless steel and
steel, 70 x 35 x 40 cm

This sculpture integrates human and mechanical elements, illustrating the merging of biology with technology. Inspired by Rosi Braidotti's posthuman theories, it challenges traditional identity boundaries by combining rugged industrial textures with organic forms. The artwork, blending traditional media with digital techniques, reflects a hybrid existence where biological and technological realms are intertwined.

Donna Haraway (1944 –)

By exploring the intersections of human, animal and machine, Donna Haraway's work significantly influences my theme and the concept of Homo Deus; particularly her *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991a). Haraway's concept of the cyborg – a hybrid entity transcending traditional boundaries – parallels my exploration of human evolution through the fusion of traditional and digital art media.

Haraway's critique of rigid identities and support of fluid, interconnected beings align with my artistic depiction of technological hybridity. Haraway's ideas invite viewers to reconsider the nature of humanity in a posthuman era, thereby deepening the philosophical and ethical dimensions of my project (Haraway 1991b).



"Touch" the Cyborg,
2024. Cold cast
aluminium, stainless
steel and steel,
75 x 40 x 40 cm

This sculpture marries mechanical elements with a human silhouette, showcasing an analogue vinyl record integrated as part of the cranial structure, symbolising auditory enhancements and human memory. The turning "brain" mechanism of the vinyl, delicate yet crucial, stands in stark contrast to the robust steel framework that represents the mechanical body. This juxtaposition highlights the brain's vulnerability within the human body, akin to the fragile yet essential aspects of our identity in the face of technological augmentation. Drawing inspiration from Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, the artwork challenges the boundaries of human and machine, emphasising a future where human experiences are not only extended but also deeply interconnected with technology. The interaction is activated by touch, underscoring the personal and direct influence humans have on this cyborg reality.

Influence of Dadaism and Surrealism

In crafting visual narratives, my artistic practice also draws on the anti-establishment ethos of Dadaism and the enigmatic juxtapositions typical of Surrealism. These movements inspire me to subvert traditional artistic norms and to delve into the surreal dimensions of human identity and evolution. By incorporating techniques such as collage and the unexpected combination of disparate elements, I challenge viewers to question and rethink the established perceptions of reality.

METHODOLOGY

My artistic process embodies the concept of evolution as “controlled chance”, utilising traditional materials that symbolise key aspects of life and transformation. Water represents the origin of life; ink signifies communication; paint denotes transformation; and glue symbolises cohesion. These elements are combined to create fluid forms that reflect the unpredictability inherent in human evolution.

Inspired by Marlene Dumas, the initial phase of my work is characterised by expressive, organic creations captured through sketches, prints and photographs. This approach allows the raw and intuitive exploration of form and concept. In the subsequent phase, these physical pieces are digitised and artistically manipulated by using tools like Adobe Photoshop and Procreate, representing the merging of biology with technology. This digitisation not only preserves the original spontaneity of the artworks, but also transforms them, while introducing a layer of controlled precision that parallels technological influence on biological evolution.



Visions of homo deus: Meditations on future selves presents a series of mixed media artworks created with traditional mediums and the blurring lines between organic and engineered life. The aim of the artworks is to evoke a visceral response, using rich textures and evocative forms to visualise the emotional and ethical complexities of evolving into a post-human era.

Visions of homo deus, 2024.
Mixed media, 42 x 30 cm

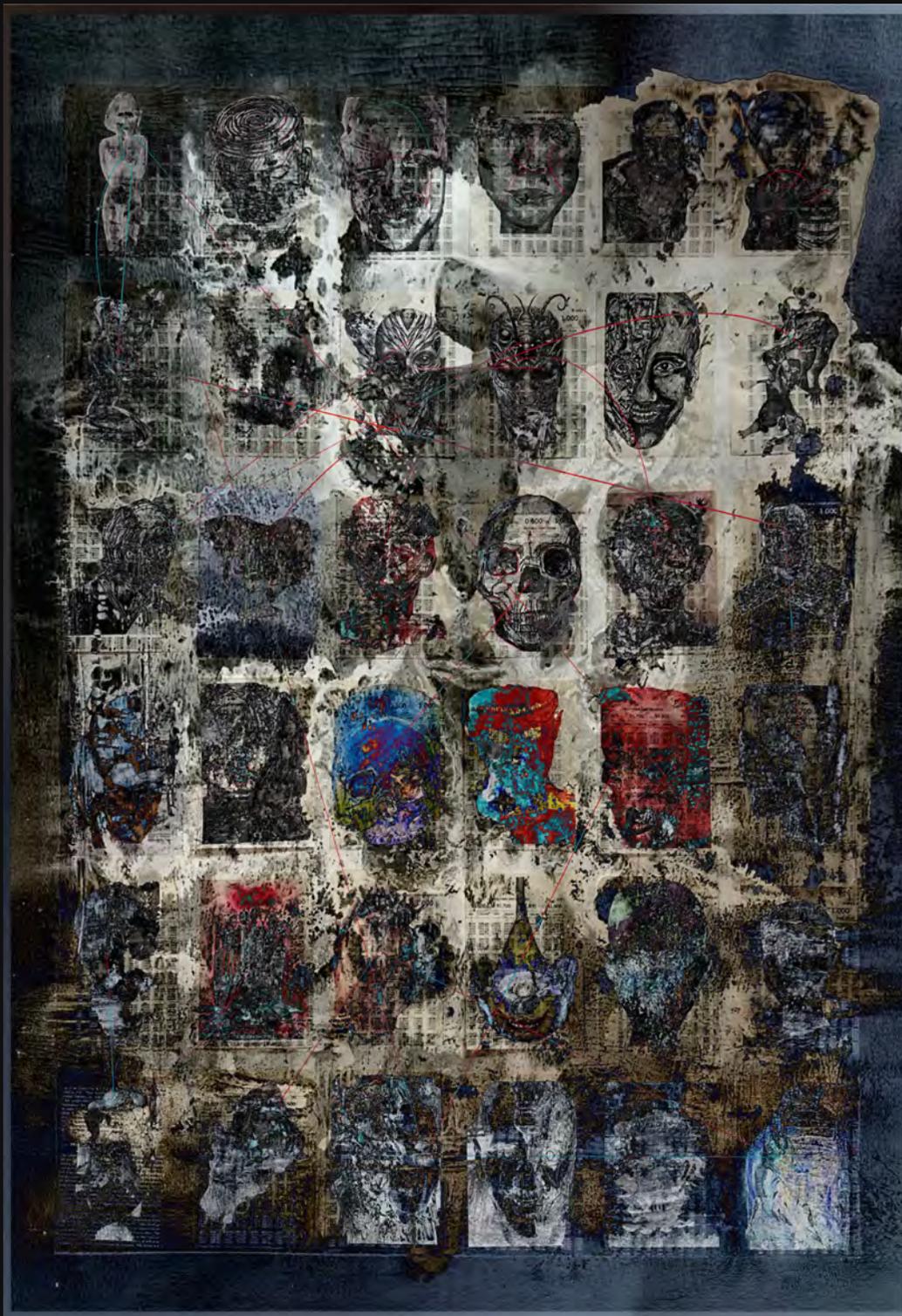
This hybrid artistic method enables the production of works that range from the deeply spiritual to the cerebral, aiming at reflecting the complexities of life and the broad spectrum of viewer interpretations. By presenting these themes through sculpting and mixed media, my artistic process not only aims to showcase the fluidity and evolving nature of identity, but aims to reflect on the uncertain future of humanity as we integrate more closely with advanced technological tools.

Transmutations: chronicles of the altered visage

Portraits of transformation, 2024.
Digital Print, Edition 5, 124 x 84 cm

Transmutations: chronicles of the altered visage offers a vivid exploration of identity and transformation in the digital age. This mixed media series integrates elements of ancient symbolism with modern digital art techniques, creating a tapestry of faces that challenge the viewer's perception of humanity. Against a backdrop of soft, warm hues and overlaid with complex geometric patterns, the series juxtaposes the transient nature of digital alterations with the timeless human search for meaning. Each face, whether distorted, serene, or haunting, invites contemplation on our evolving digital selves and the possible futures shaped by our integration with technology.
(Works illustrated page 21 and 22)





Echoes of the new era, 2024. Digital print, Edition of 5, 124 x 84 cm

CONCLUSION

Using mixed media, my art critically explores humanity, human evolution and posthuman identity through the theme *Post-human identity through hybrid media*. By blending traditional and digital methods, the work mirrors the merging of biological and artificial forms. Influenced by Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism, it challenges the boundaries of human identity, provoking reflection on transhumanism, ethical dilemmas and the future trajectory of human evolution in a hybrid world. Ultimately, my work encourages dialogue about the future trajectory of human evolution and our place within it, offering a space for introspection on how we navigate the complex convergence of survival, technology, humanity and identity.



Cerebral, 2024. Mixed media, 100 x 150 cm

Cerebral explores the evolution of human identity through the lens of technological and cognitive transformation. The artwork presents a dynamic contrast between organic textures and digital fragmentation, symbolising the merging of nature and technology



Echoes of homo deus, 2024.
Digital print on canvas, 59.4 x 84 cm



This triptych captures the conceptual journey of humanity as envisioned in Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus*. Each digital artwork investigates a layered facet of human evolution and identity in a future where technology redefines existence.

CORRIE VAN DER WATH
VISUAL ARTIST | MULTIDICIPLINARY CREATOR

Biography

Corrie van der Wath is a multidisciplinary artist based in Johannesburg, South Africa, whose work explores the intersections of human identity, creation, evolution and existential themes. Initially trained as an electrical engineer, Corrie transitioned into the art world in 2005, merging structured technical knowledge with a fluid, innovative artistic approach. Characterised by a blend of abstract and figurative elements with complex colour palettes, his art probes the notion of plurality.

Corrie, whose work draws inspiration from thinkers such as Carl Sagan and Yuval Noah Harari, often examines the future of humanity and the role of AI in shaping human evolution. He has exhibited locally and internationally in several prestigious galleries and has received several art awards.

Education

Bachelor of Visual Arts: University of South Africa, Pretoria, current (3rd year)
Bachelor of Arts: Honours (Psychology): University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2012

Website: corrievanderwath.com

Location: Johannesburg/Cape Town, South Africa

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Corrie van der Wath is a Johannesburg-based artist whose work explores the intricate interplay between humanity and technology, with a particular focus on the theme of post-human identity. Grounded in both natural sciences and psychoanalytical theory, Van der Wath's practice reflects a unique merging of traditional art mediums with digital techniques, thereby symbolising the fusion of biological humanity and the evolving influence of technology.

Exploring the theme *Post-human identity through hybrid media*, the exhibition is strongly inspired by Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus* and the concept of evolution. Van der Wath's sculptures and mixed-media works, which feature water, ink, paint and glue, symbolise the unpredictability of life and the forces of controlled evolution. Once digitised, the works transform into metaphors for the merging of human and technological futures, reflecting the ethical and philosophical questions of our time.

Through the lens of Freudian psychology and post-humanist theory, Van der Wath's works question humanity's impulses toward survival, dominance and control. The tension between the desire for progress and the darker temptation of power is central to his exploration. In this light, the works invite viewers' critical engagement with the themes of transhumanism, the ethical boundaries of AI advancements and the potential impact of these advancements on human identity.

Drawing inspiration from artists like Frikkie Eksteen and Marlene Dumas, Van der Wath's art confronts identity, mortality and the human condition with a raw intensity. By embracing both the romantic and melancholic sides of existence, the artist's work offers a profound reflection on humanity's quest to transcend its limitations, while pushing the boundaries of what it means to be human in the post-human age.

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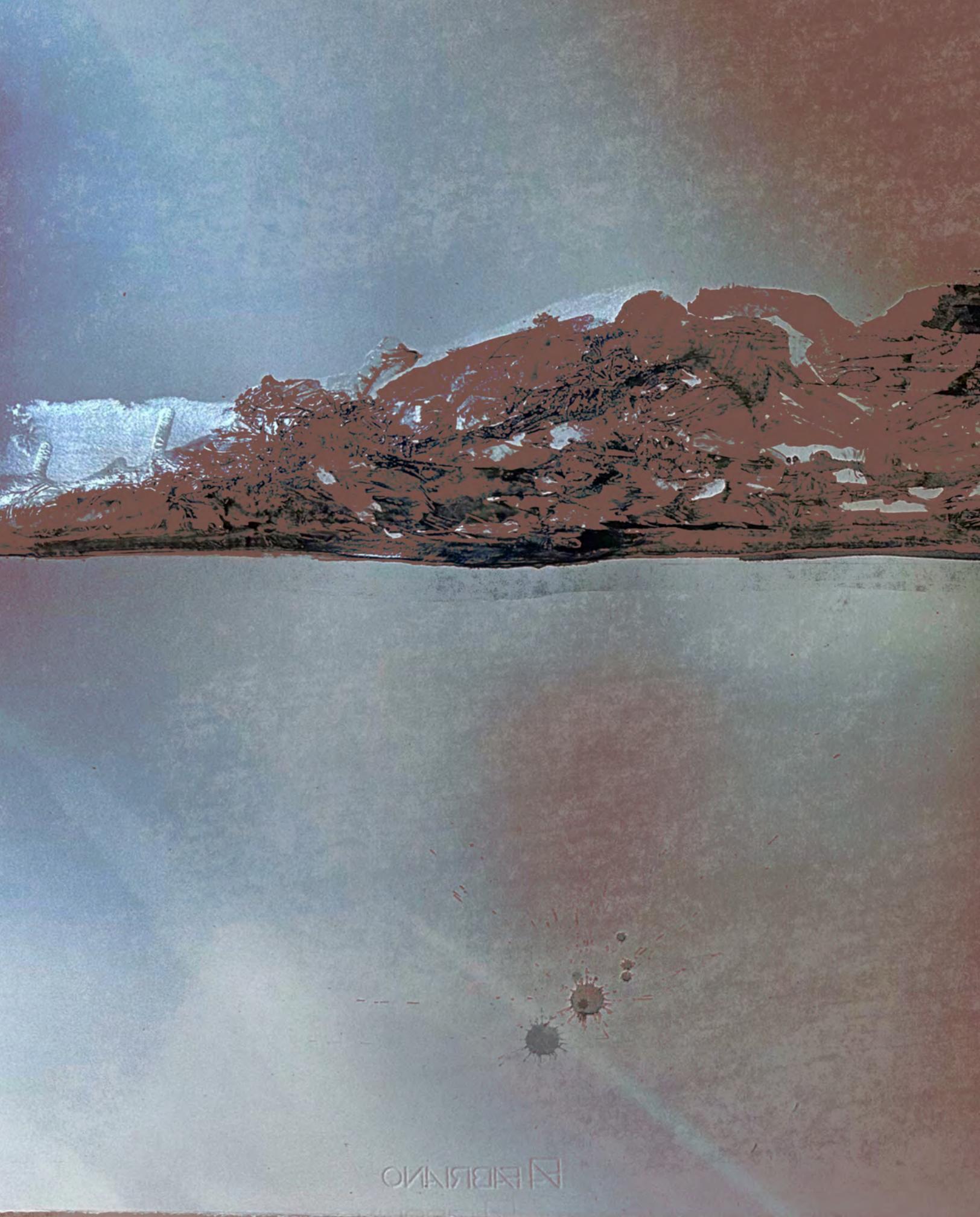
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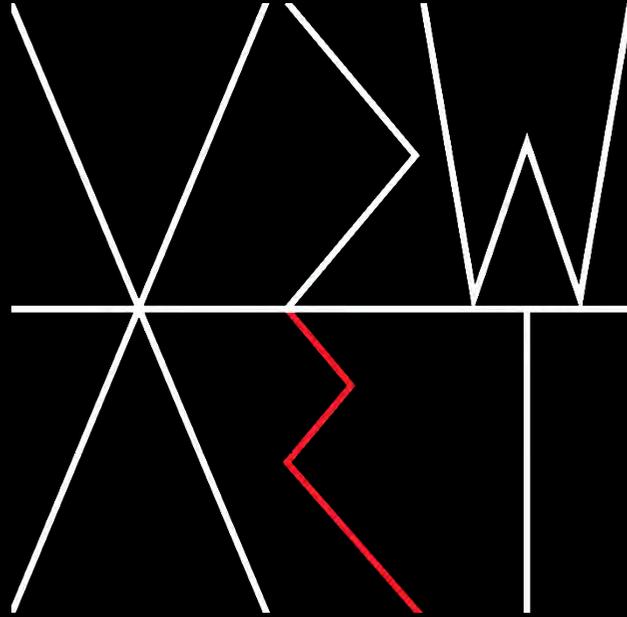
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