

AVLA

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Photographs by James Thomas Mackison
curated by Paul Williamson

When I received the photographs which are the contents of this book from their author he told me that he preferred to remain anonymous, and that this was because he wasn't sure whether he had photographed what he had found, or what he had lost. He was a romantic young man, caught-up in the grip of something. I call him young, but of course he was almost middle-aged by then, really.

He had been sent out by one of the cultural franchises funded by the European Union, with money I raised just before I retired. I had asked to meet him after his job had come to a premature end, and whether I might see some of the pictures? He brought everything.

The brief he had been given was to photograph evidence of “the end of The Dance”, in and around the areas he had grown up, and on the basis of some not-very-good photos he had made of the area previously. And so, as he found himself at the still point of the turning world, a great shock came to him, more so than I could ever have predicted when I suggested the project.

We were then in the years when the Union was beset on all sides, under fire from nationalists and separatists alike, the great black carnival of the new far right and concurrent pathetic last squeaks of the old left... the whole sad spectacle was like living in a computer graphic combination rendering of Heidegger's mountain cottage and Walden 2.0. All not-smoking next to a lake made half from hard drive cooling fluid and half from the crude oil drained out of decommissioned “political” art installations.

We were coming to realise the situation was quite post-posting. And the young man was brought in at the very apex. Or nadir. A virtual peak, or a real world trough. He wouldn't have recognised his own mother or father if they approached him in the bistro where we met. One could see in his eyes the terror of having come to... something. The structures we had were utterly inadequate for the world in which he, and the rest of us, now found ourselves.

I remember being his age, the end of the age of reason. When one worries, after all, that there is nothing one knows and nothing that can usefully be known. It is a type of vertigo which some people could find some delight in, if they had the right metabolism. It is a period of my own life I remember with no affection whatsoever. Now, gratefully older and much less concerned by what things “mean”, and happy with a lack of qualification so absolute that the young academics would positively expire - I approached making the work you now hold in your hands. My approach was that of a care-taker, a custodian or librarian of something which I could see very clearly, but our poor author was utterly blind to.

And I do believe that what my young friend produced is truly wonderful, despite of (or perhaps because of) his having no conception at all of what he was doing for some, if not all, of the months he worked on the project. I didn't think it fair to ask him to try to understand in his condition, he could not possibly have understood the beauty there. I must say, at this point, that neither do I claim to understand what he has done or how. Let me say, rather, that somewhere between resignation and retirement, between the notion and the act, fall such shadows as we see reproduced here. Something changes which lets somethings seem somewhat more present-able. Or, at least, worth the risk of failing in doing so.

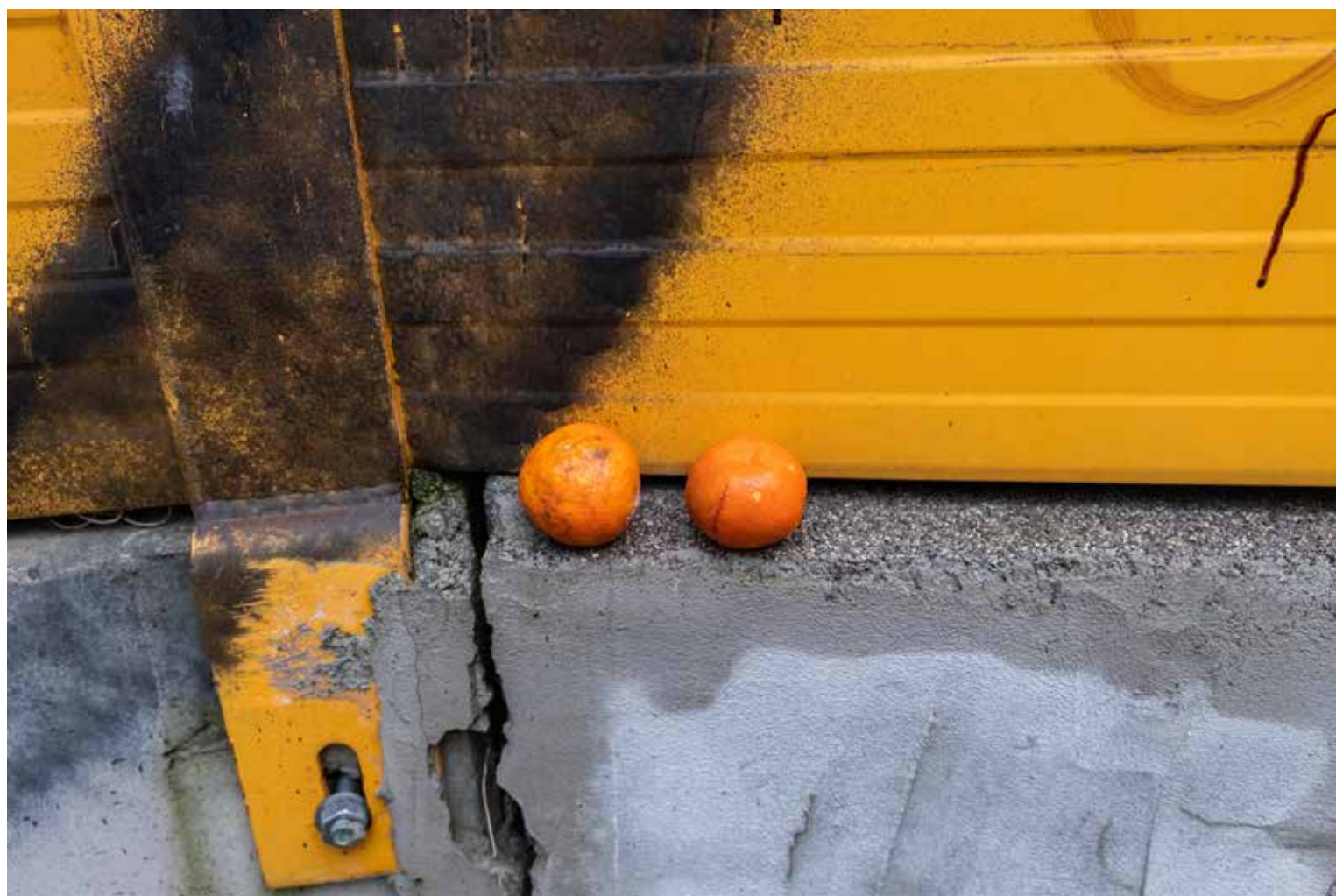
I would like to be more explicit about what prompted me to arrange these things in this order, and what they mean to me, meant to him and should mean to you, and so on and so on. But it wouldn't be fair on any of us. No one needs or wants the type of trite and platitudinous illustrative essays that spoiled every trip to art galleries and museums for decades, and I am sure facilitated their rather pathetic decline.

I will only admit that my greatest influence in arrangement was taken from an animation showing, in coloured linear blocks proceeding in a locomotive line, the construction and composition of a little fugue. You may make of that whatever you wish, but I do hope that you will bring with you something of your own Dance to what follows...

Paul Williamson
202X

1.







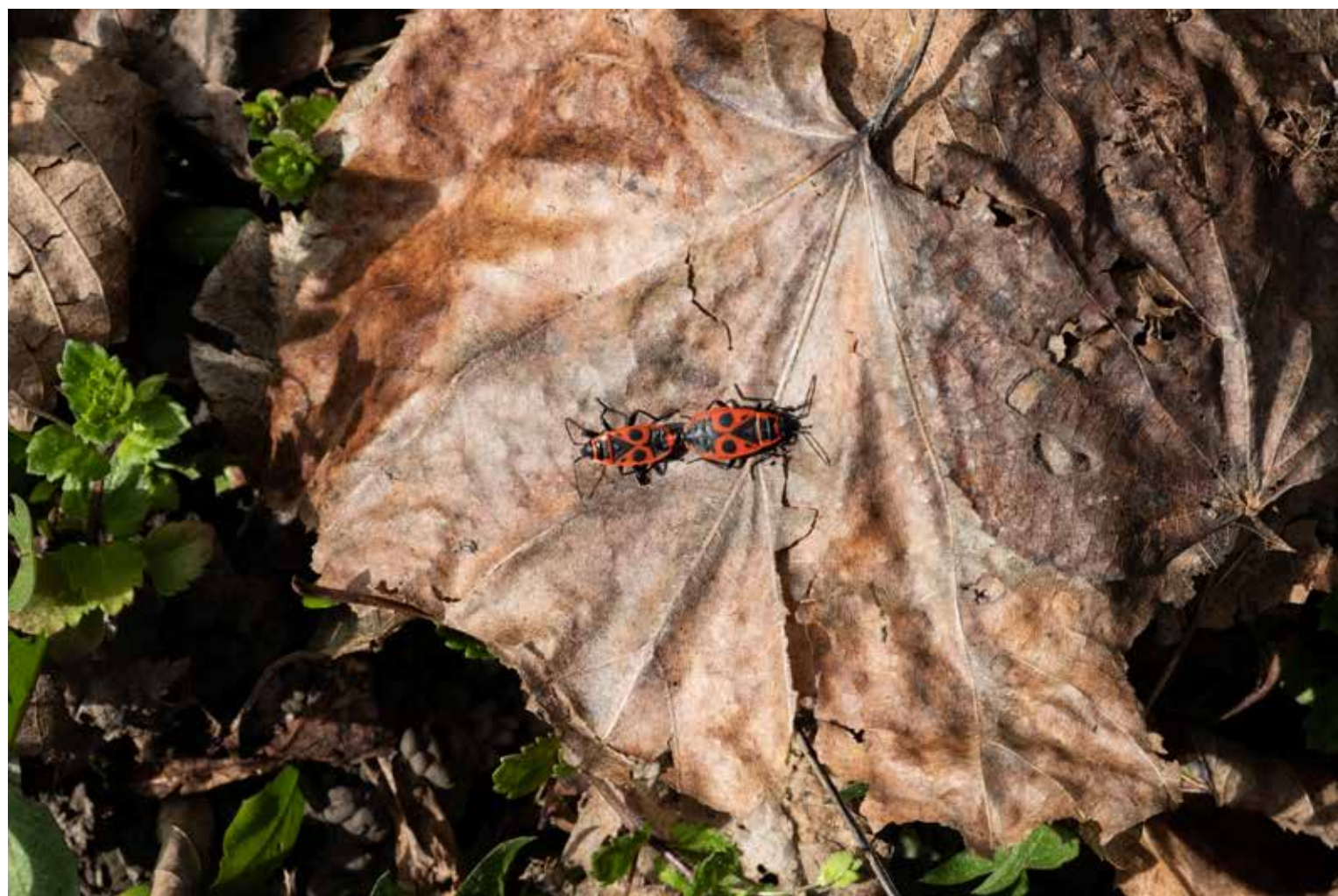


















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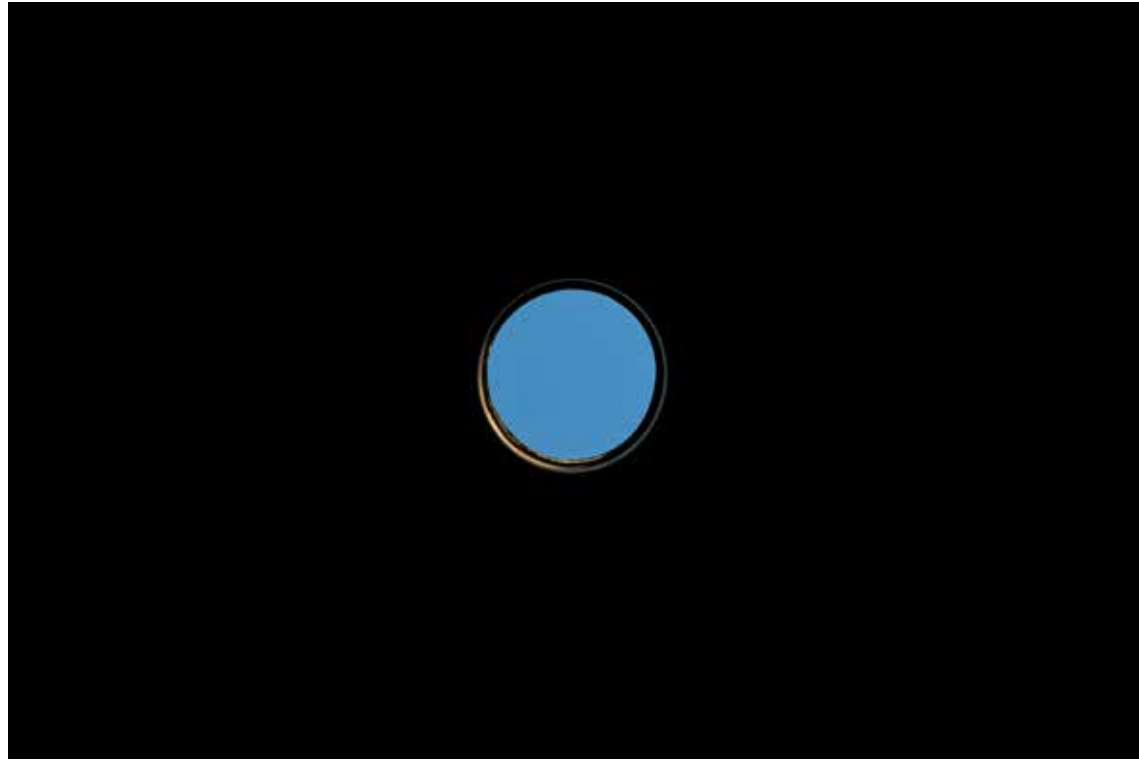
















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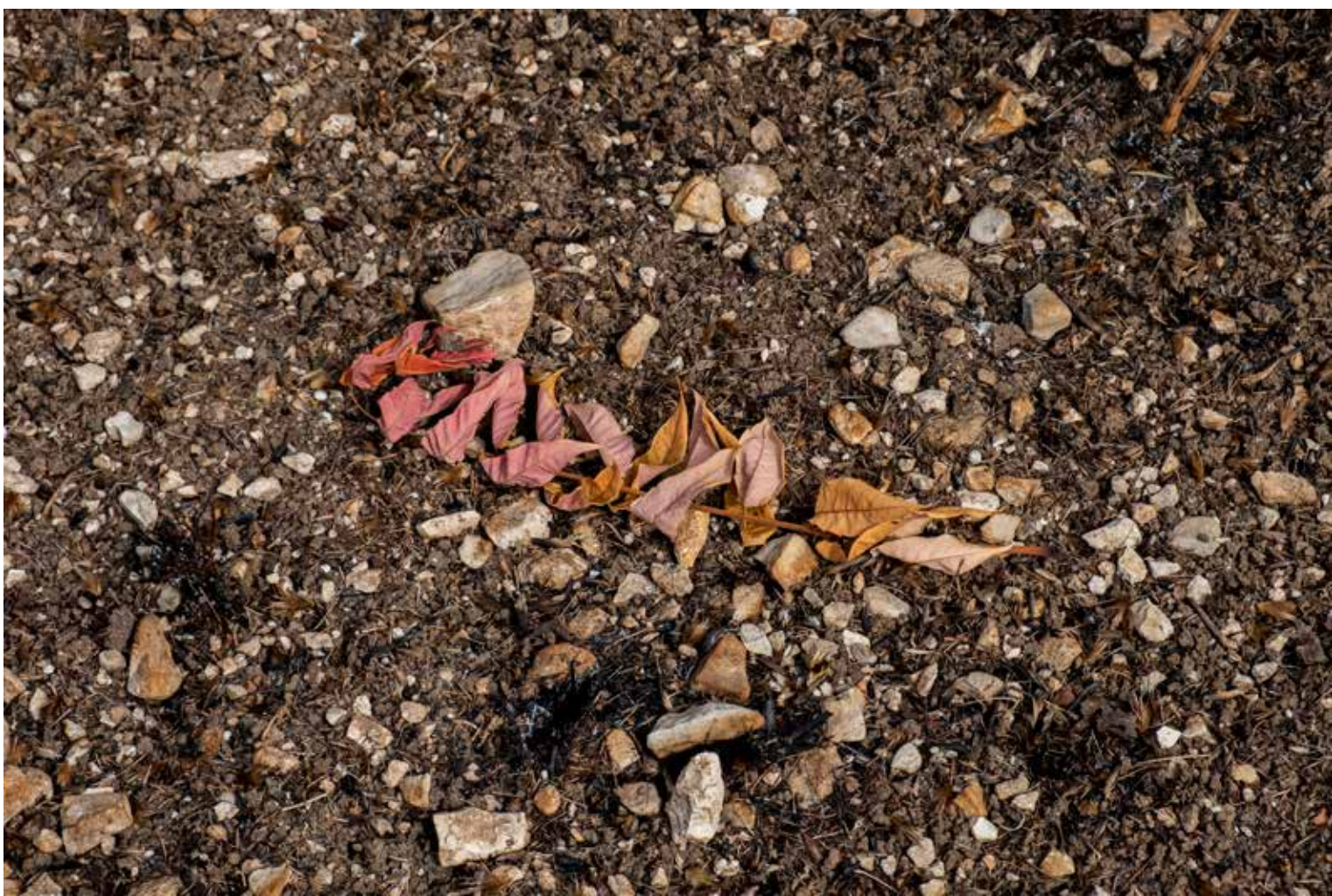






















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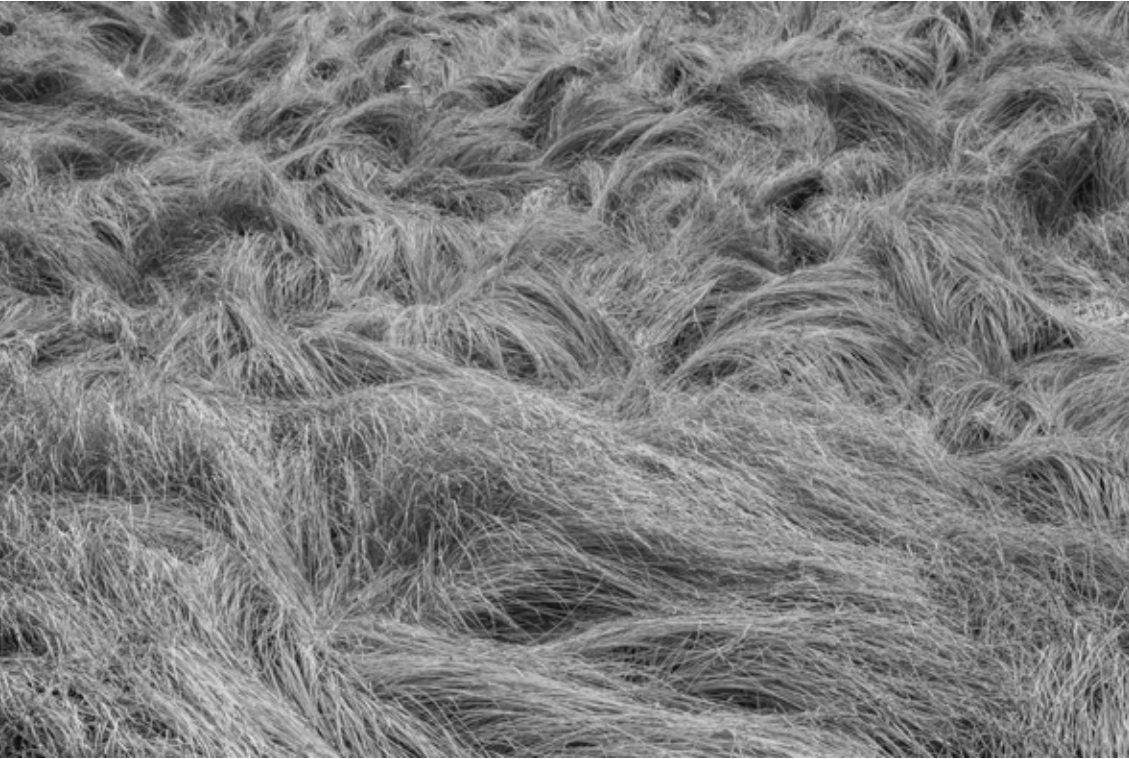


















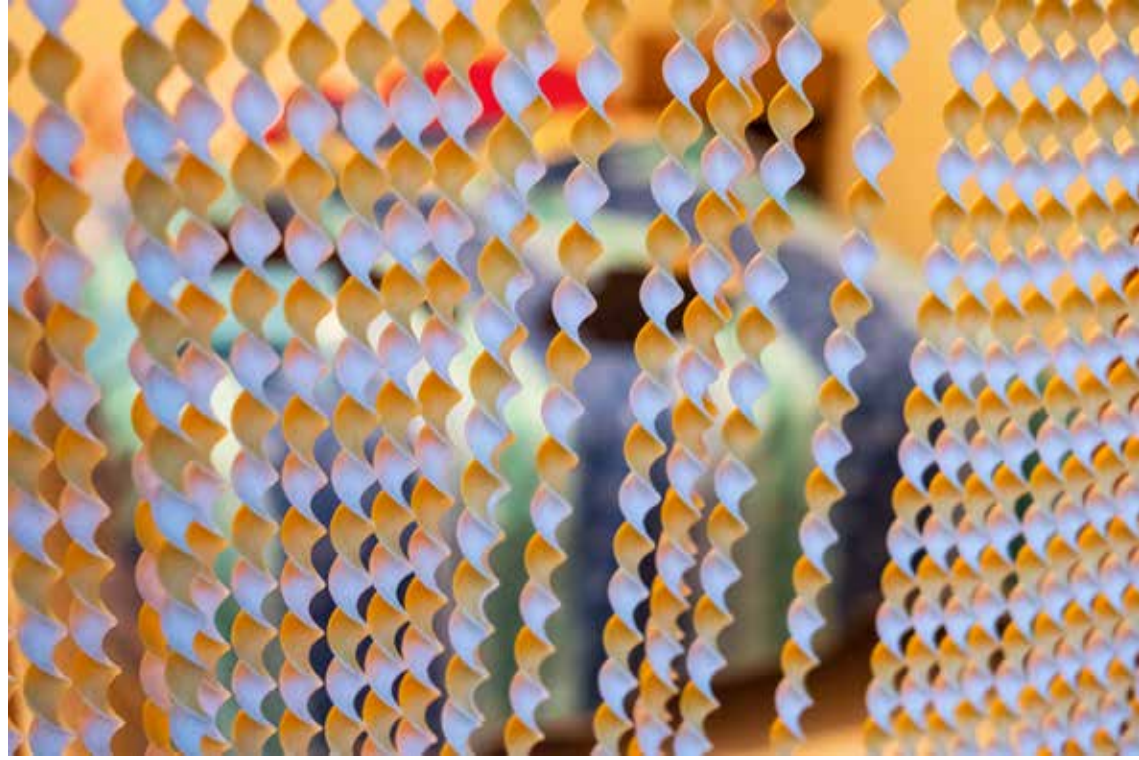






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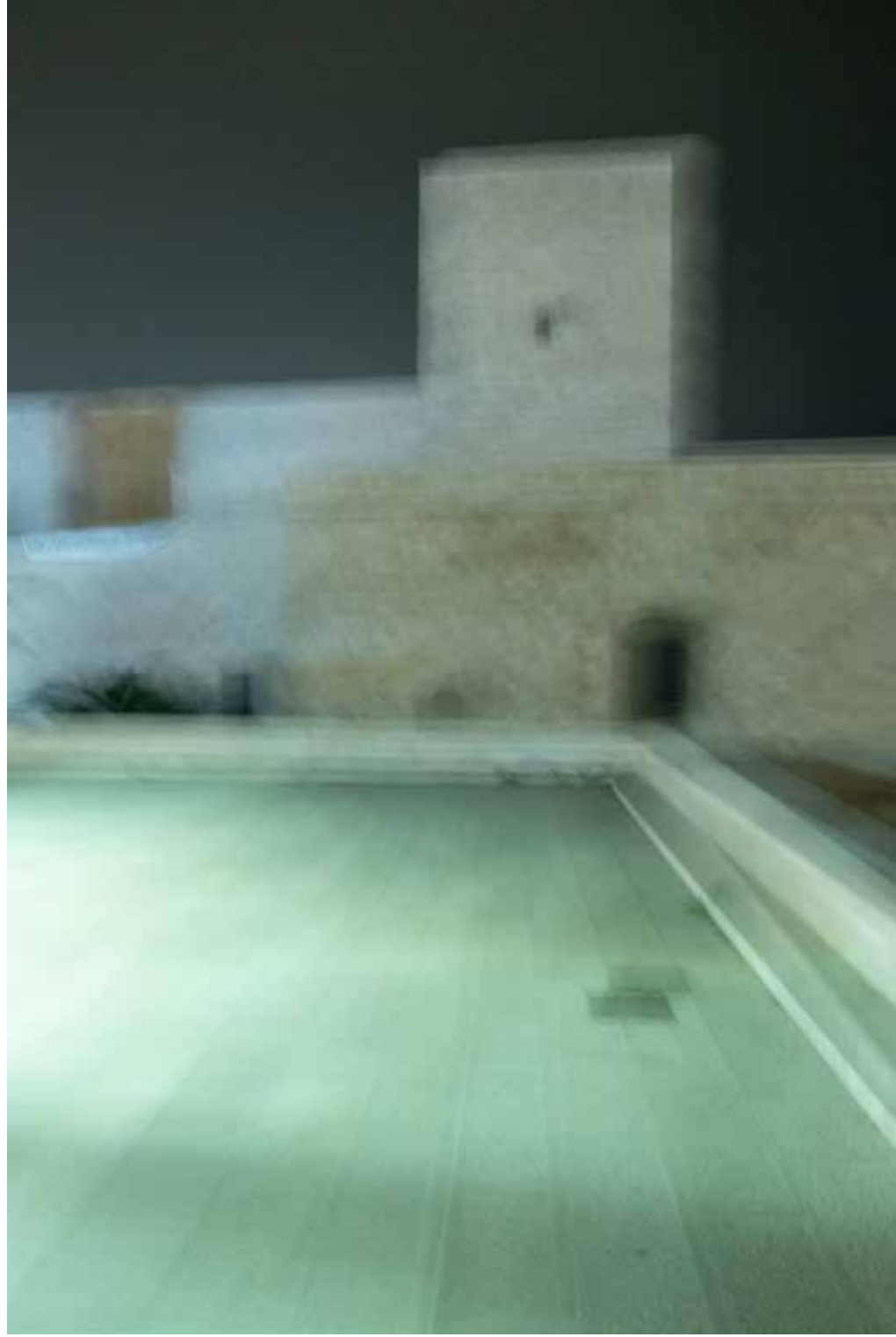




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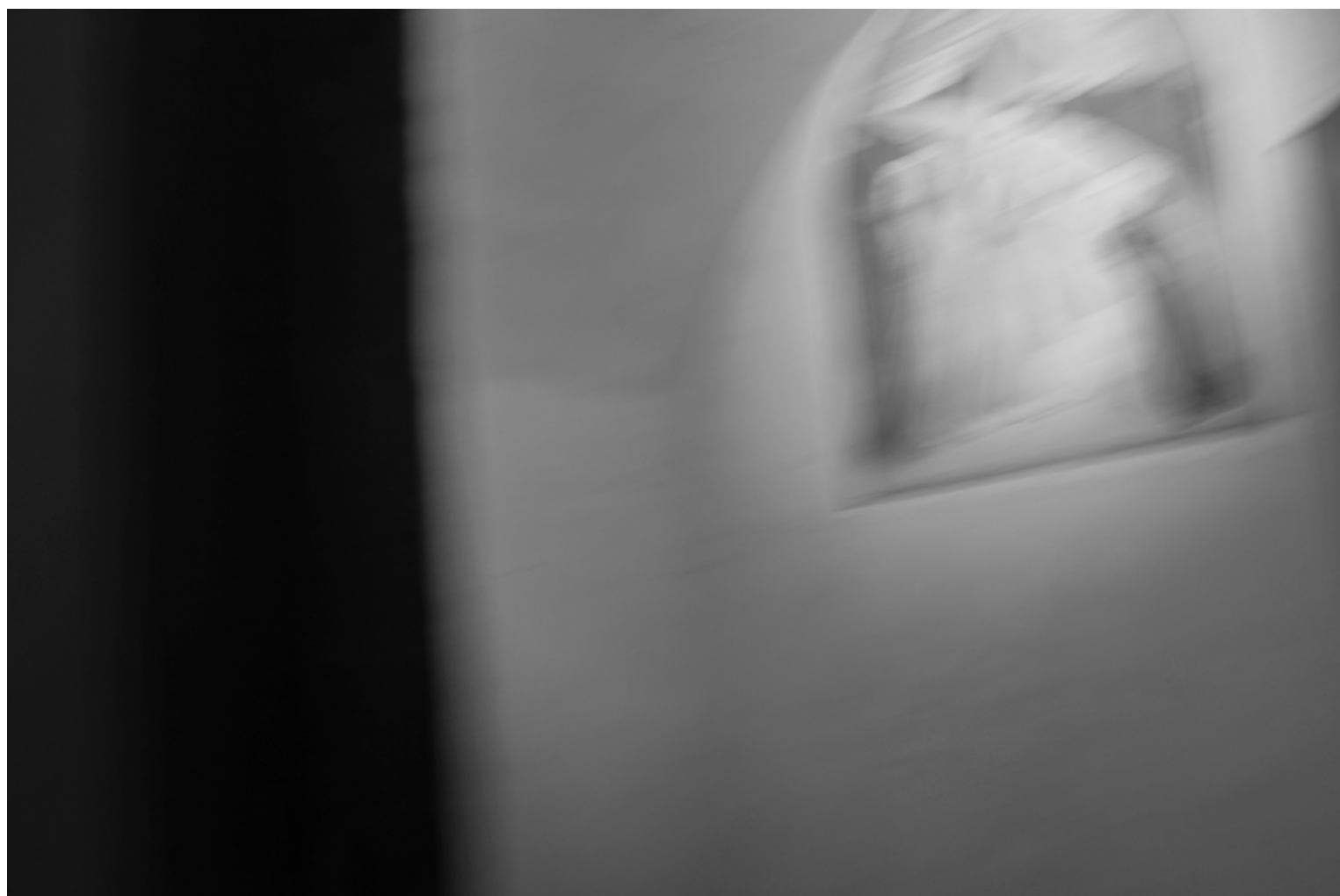










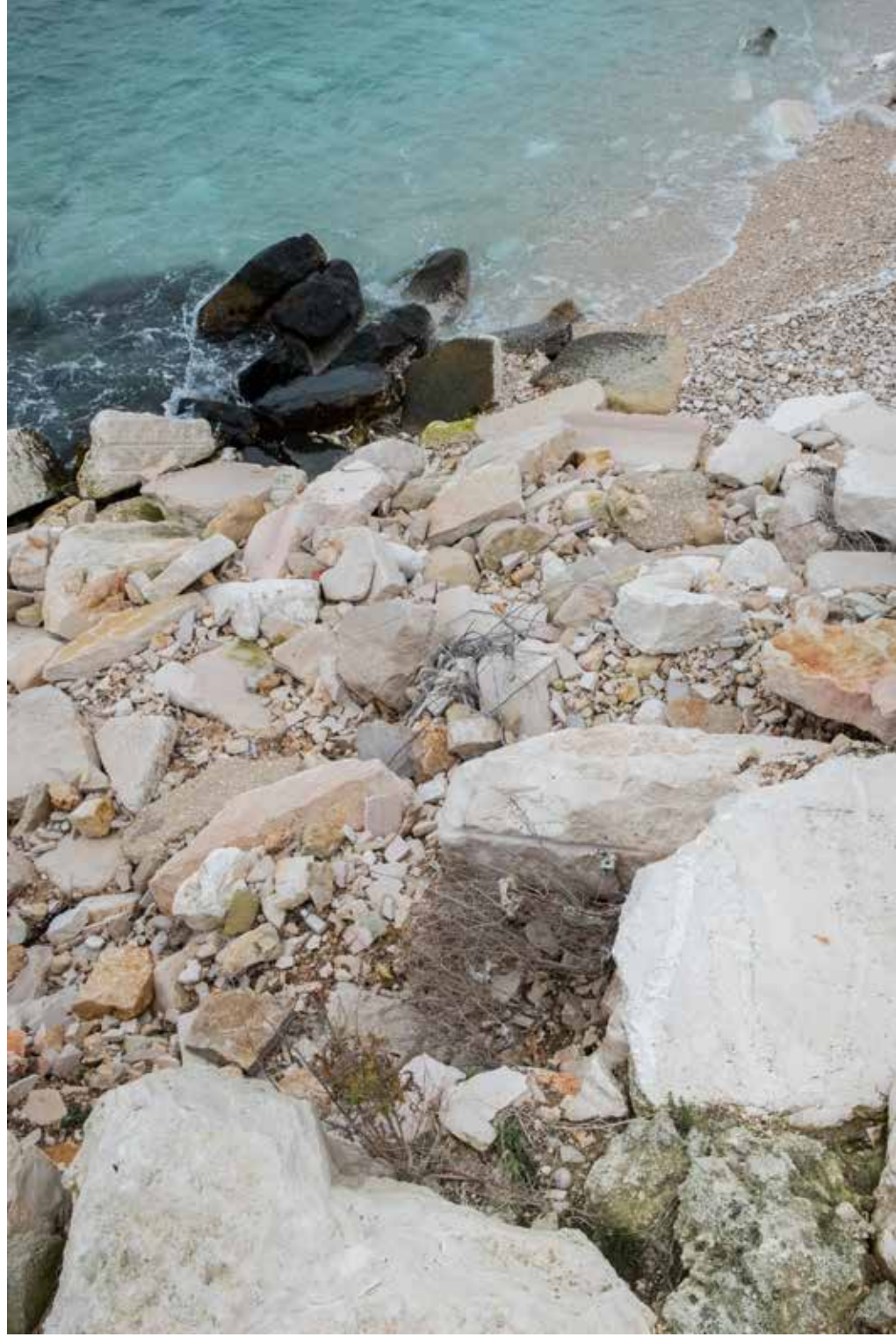








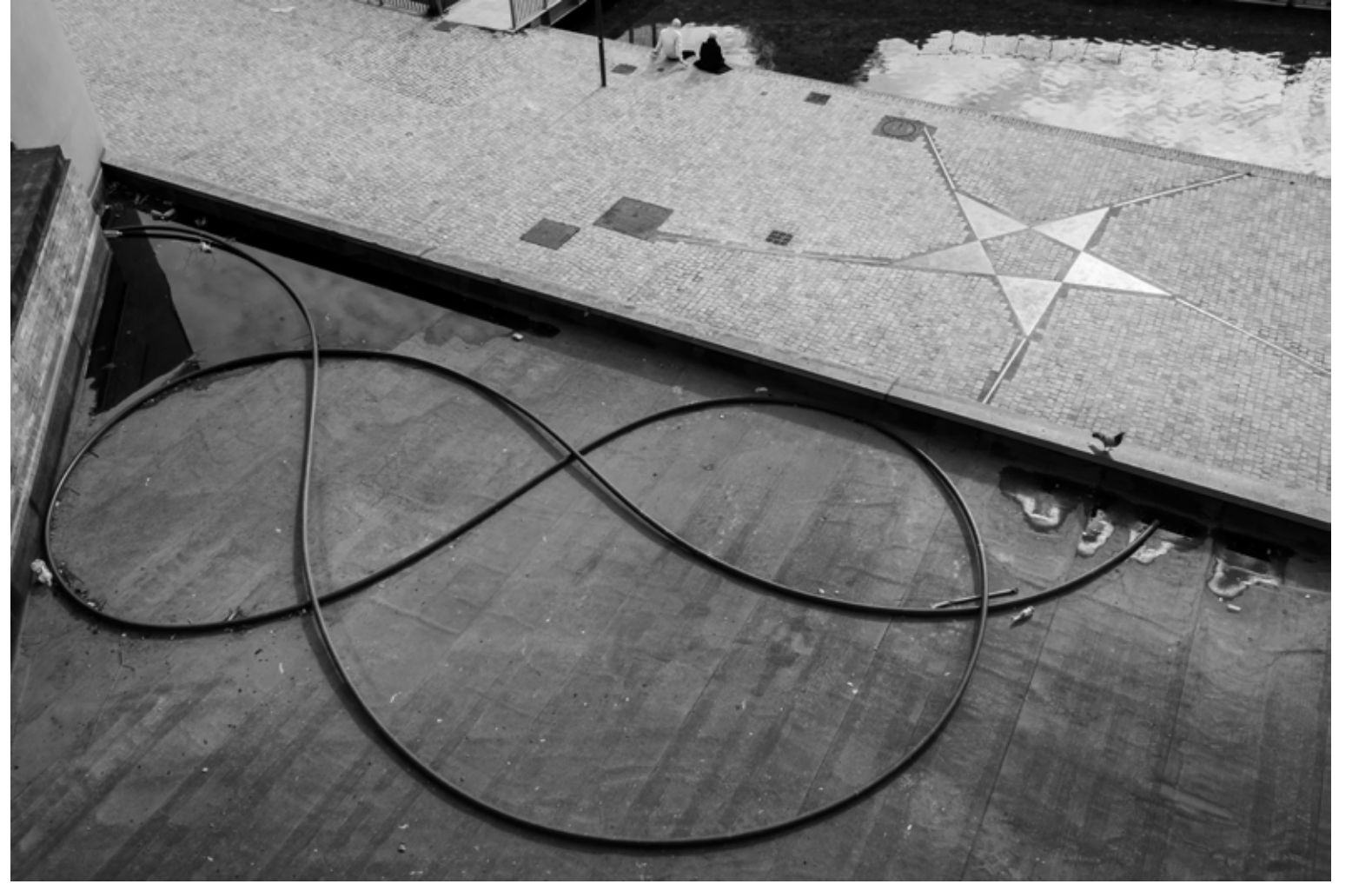
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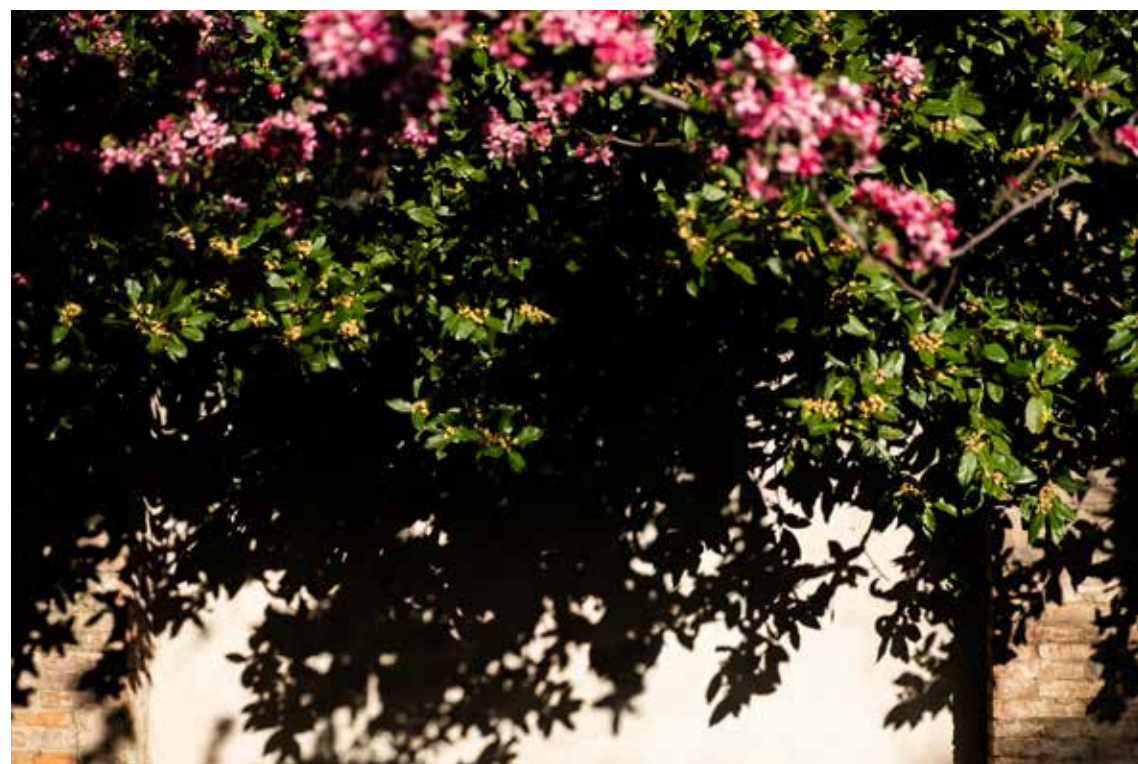
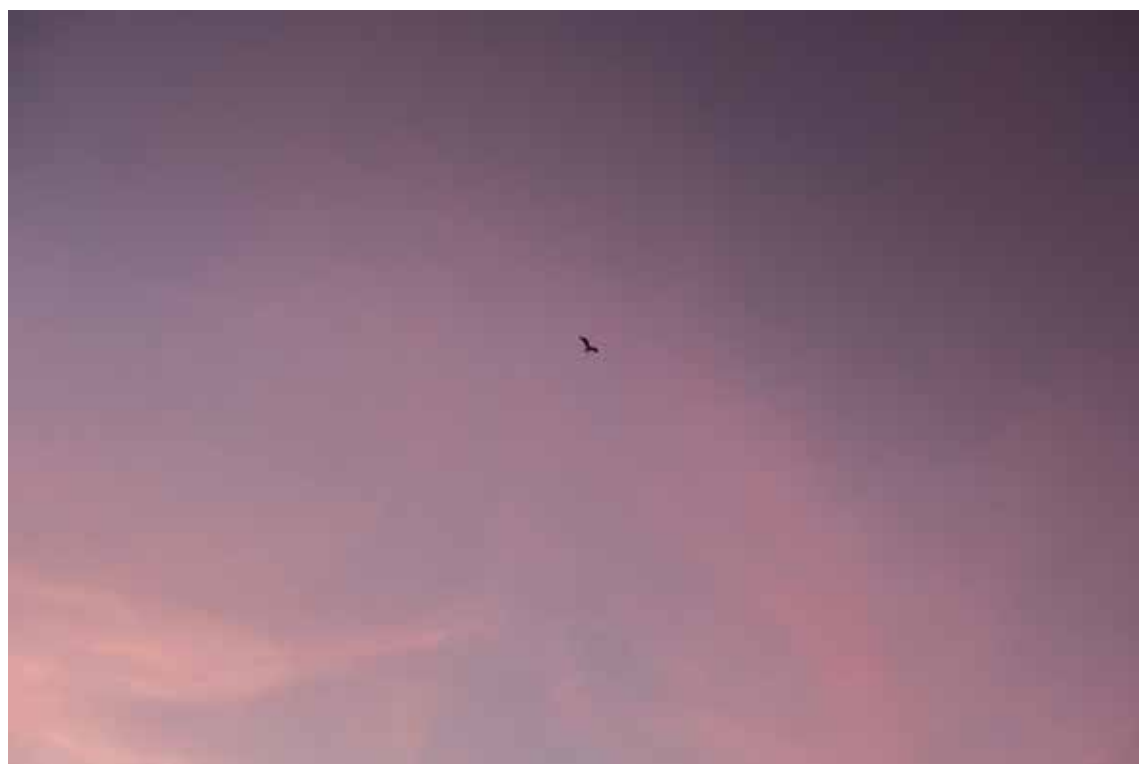


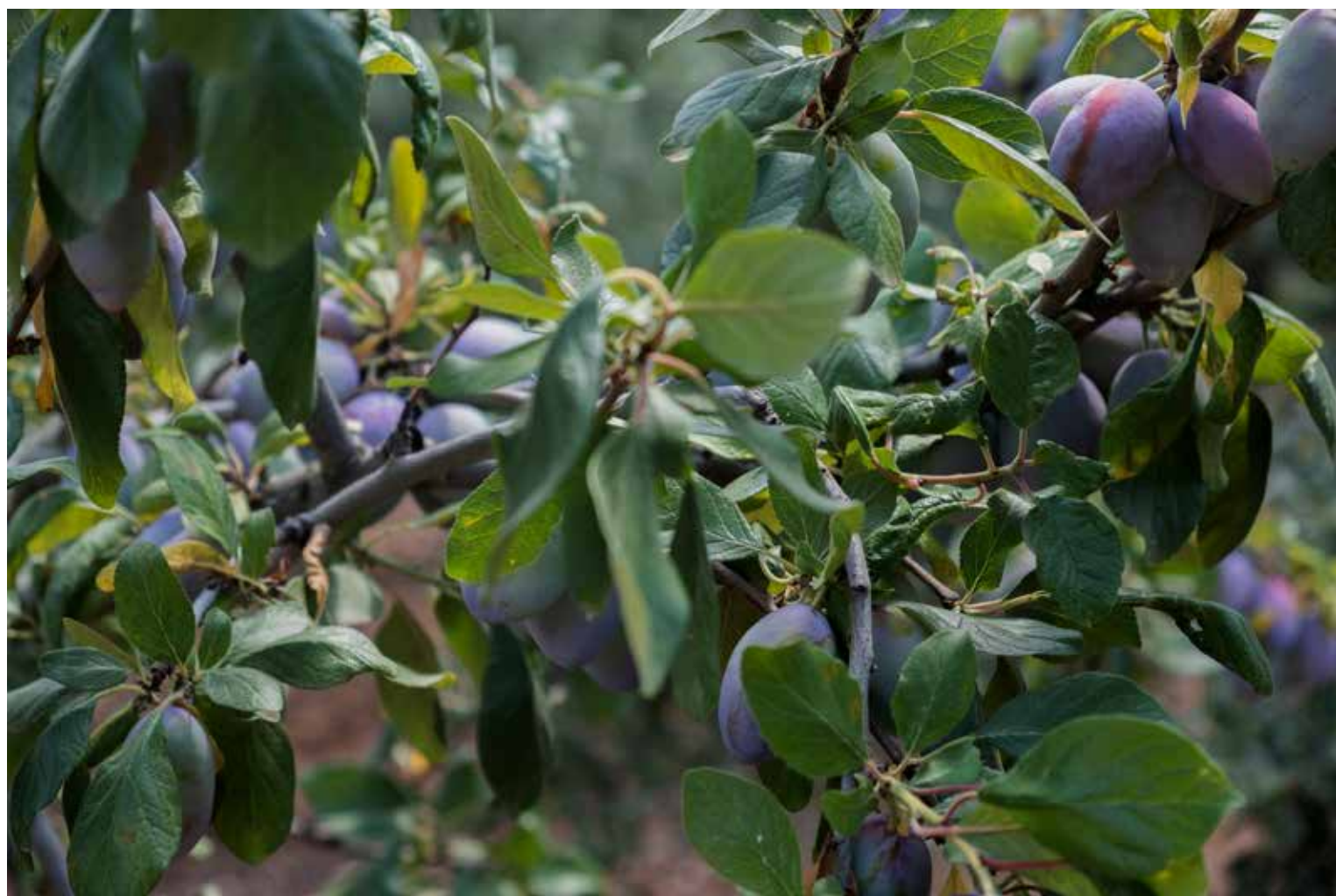












8.















