

Dust from dust: microorganisms and other tales. an artist's diary



Bev de Lange

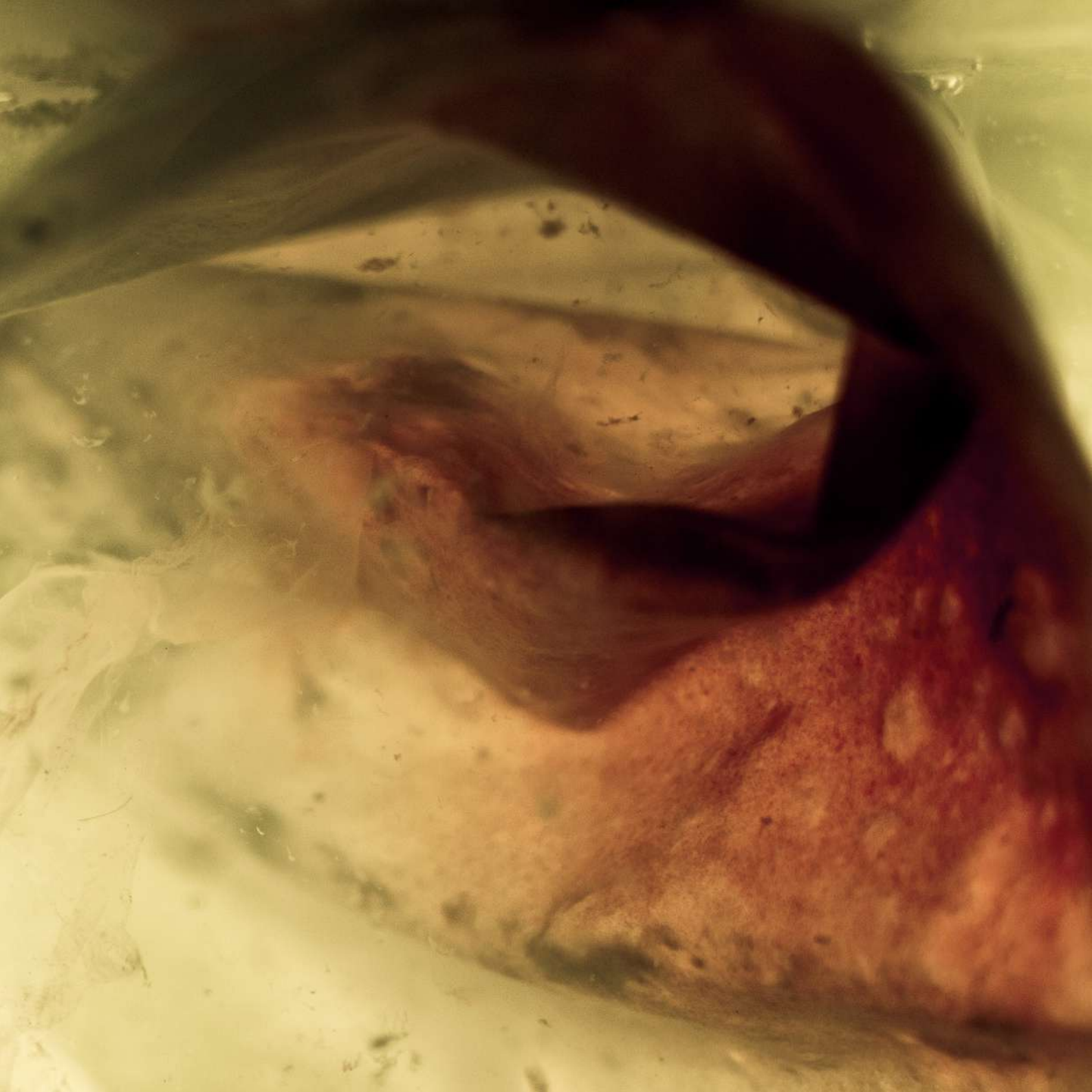




Table of Contents

Thank you	7
An artist's diary	11
Early experimentations with bacterial yeast cell symbiosis (kombucha).	19
Early experimentations with alchemical image making processes.	25
Early experimentations with organic roots and root-like imagery using bacterial yeast cell symbiosis and vegetable colourants.	33
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Nigredo phase.	39
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Veriditas phase.	43
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Rubedo phase.	47
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Albedo phase.	51
Performing the exhibition Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. The Unisa gallery.	57
Still photographs exhibited at Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artists diary.	61
Imagery captured by photographing and re-projecting footage of bacterial yeast cell symbiosis into my immediate environent and landscape.	85
Handmade notes as visual aids for future projects.	93
Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae: Bev de Lange.	99

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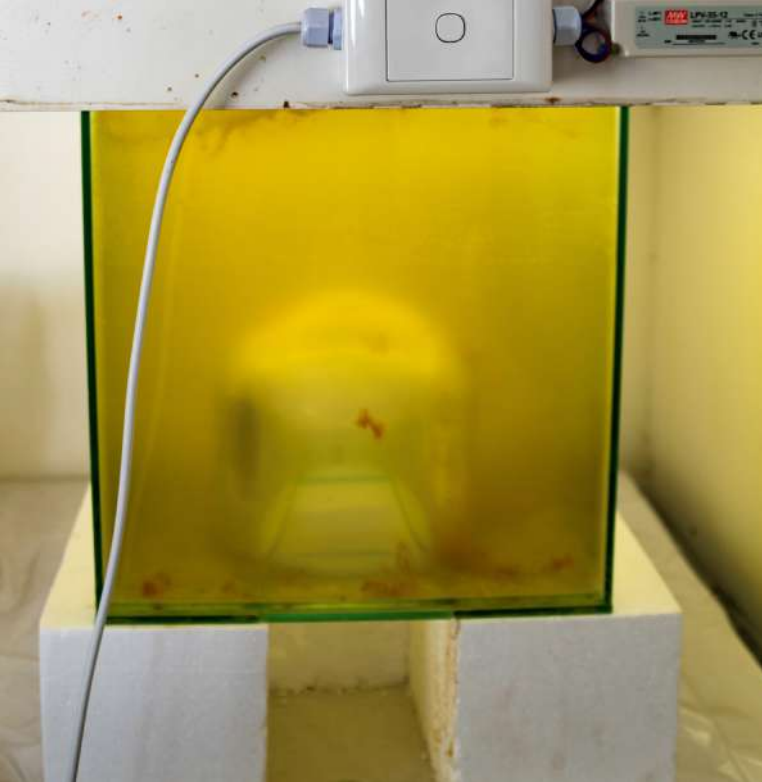
With sincere thanks.

To the photographer and digital artist Monique Rorke for her advice and help with the photographic requirements of the project as well as her patience and expertise when editing the final narrative of the video *Dust from dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artist's diary.*

The photographer Christian Fry for documenting the performance of *Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artist's diary.*

The digital artist Micaela Scholtz for the technical layout of the catalogue for *Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artist's diary.*





An Artists Diary

'If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence'
- George Eliot: Middlemarch.

Introduction

Once upon a time in a Masters project ...

... I grew simulations of skin from bacterial yeast cell symbiosis in a subjective attempt at conceptualizing individuation as a paradoxical process. I have continued growing and experimenting with the same symbiont for over ten years now, remaining entirely fascinated by their subliminal evocations or, as the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2018: 243) suggests, their unwitting tales of 'yore'. A visual arts exhibition evolving from creative practice-as-research processes does not represent a focused project resulting in a finite product. Rather, it is a physical extract from a much longer intertwined process of making, researching and revisiting. The stop-frame video *Dust from dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An Artist's diary* - represents such an extract, and in this catalogue I offer something of where it came from, while hinting to where it may lead.

Inspired by the female poet George Eliot's introductory verse, which, according to the posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti (2013: 55), refers to the raw cosmic energy that lies just beyond the realm of our genteel and seemingly cultured veneers, this ongoing project positions the developing root-like formations the growing symbiont produces, as metaphors for cognition and/or consciousness as a living, feeling continuum.

Prospero, Shakespeare's fictional character in *The Tempest* declares 'we are such stuff as dreams are made of' and while this may be true, the contemporary philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris' (2015: 62) suggests rather that 'we are such stuff as yeasts are made of' - a somewhat banal contention that confirms our undeniable continuity with organic life as an evolutionary continuum.

Ideas of process, continuity, 'dust from dust' and 'microorganisms', play a pivotal role in my studio practice, which involves active participation and introspective and/or self-reflexive contemplation. Encouraged by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans George Gadamer, which champions this approach; I subjectively explore notions of sentience and bodily feelings, and have come to consider them entirely inseparable from conscious self-development.

In this creative practice-as-research project, I built a glass vitrine and once again grew bacterial yeast cell symbiosis (kombucha). The vitrine enabled me to take both individual and time-lapsed photographs of the cells microscopic, comfort-seeking, self-organizing behaviour over a three-year period as they self-organized themselves into various aggregations of embodiment. During this time, through experimentation, manipulation and research, I began to recognise how much the symbiont's root-like formations, like the structure of the biological cell, are dyadic, that is, I recognized how much they are inseparable from the bacterial yeast cells symbiosis as an integrated process.

I then used the myriad photographs taken of the symbiotic processes, to create a narrative, which was edited and looped into the stop-frame video *'Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artist's diary'*. Many of the still photographs were duplicated numerous times to achieve the video animation, but when choreographing the video, I listened intently for the silence to which Eliot's introductory verse refers, in my attempts to experience the bodily sentience that feelings of growth, self-organization and conscious self-development subjectively provoke. My own understanding is that such sensations, if nurtured in a creative process, inspire differing expressions from different life world contexts that we experience as music, dance, literature and art, among a myriad other inspired expressions².

I have positioned the stop-frame video *Dust from dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An Artist's diary*, together with the vitrine used to grow the yeast cell symbiosis, as a performance capable of visually rendering notions of growth, continuity, evolution and conscious self-development, notions I consider relevant to any experience of immersion as a living 'in life' process.

¹ The word dyadic refers to two facets of an inseparably entangled entity.

² As Damasio writes (2018: 243), "early evolutionary analogue-form representations permitted the rise of images based on varied sensory modalities and these processes have made way for feeling and consciousness".

Performing 'Dust from dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An Artist's diary' - as immersive experience

Two opposing three-walled enclosures are constructed at opposite ends of the exhibiting space, one white and one black. The video is set at different phases on a loop that macroscopically projects the video onto three walls within the illuminated, white enclosure. Optical clarity is deliberately compromised by the decision to project macroscopically. The resulting visual simulation surrounds the viewer on three sides so that they become aware, indeed conscious, of their dwarfed presence by the shadows cast onto the videoed walls.

Simultaneously, the original, non-macroscopic video production is viewed inside the blackened, darkened enclosure via two flat-screened televisions. The darkness creates a sense of mysteriousness tending to draw in the viewer. This space also houses the glass vitrine, lit from below by a small flicker bulb inside a glass dome within the vitrine itself. The tiny flicker of light gently illuminates the vitrine and bacterial yeast cell symbiosis.

A selection of still photographs, are also displayed on the white walls adjoining the two enclosures.

Throughout my time of photographing and manipulating the cellular symbiosis, I researched cell theory, quantum biology, bio art, ancient alchemy, psychology, and philosophy - including posthuman and bio-philosophy. However, this exhibition catalogue focuses primarily on my visual practice, to show not only its primacy in the project as a whole, but also conscious development of understandings gained during the project. In this way, the catalogue is also 'my artist's diary, a documented record of a far more ephemeral process, yet a means of giving the viewer momentary insights into the pertinent stages of my creative practice.

Being here - being there

The existential philosopher Martin Heidegger devised the term 'being-in-the-world', proposing that it simultaneously refers to being-with-others, as we are always already immersed within the world with others. In other words, being and/or existence is

irreducibly situated and inter-subjective, we are both 'here' and 'there' with only death itself representing the 'ownmost' possibility of being (Joan Staumbaugh, 2010: 252). Likewise, contemporary science contends that all notions of a separate self are illusory, since we always develop, individually and collectively, through other-beings-in-the-world.

The imagery of the cellular symbiosis in the video projections and photographs echo this thinking, and give visual expression to subjective feelings of consciousness of self, however imagined and illusory these may be; yet while examining them, I uncovered subjective associations embedded in their visual reality. My intention is that the video narrative created, reflects this increased understanding of contemporary research into mind or psyche³ as a process that should always be about being-in-the-world-with-others; and that the video's method of installation simulates a subjective idea of immersion as a living experience.

... in the beginning -roots ...

Like many creative-practice-as-research projects, my studio processes were initially confused and convoluted while I attempted to establish connections between the growing symbiotic root-like formations as objects of intense fascination and myself as an engaged subject. Nevertheless, once recognized, the primordial, root-like structures growing and developing beneath the symbiont's skin, captivated me. When I previously grew the cellular symbiosis, I used opaque plastic containers, but this time, because the vitrine was glass, I saw the root-like formations for the first time and digressed to photograph plant roots in an attempt to develop visual associations, before embarking on manipulating and photographing the imagery so that it subjectively provoked ideas on self-organization and self-development as processes of consciousness. While these provocations give visual form to both real and imagined worlds, they also underpin the research of the gallery performance.

Associations embodied by any object are subjective and almost infinite, so once the viewer realizes how I used the root-like structures of the cellular symbiosis as visually analogous of my conscious self-organization and self-development, their implicit,

primordial evocations became evident. This recognition, in the first instance, prompted my research into consciousness as a self-organizing, self-developmental process of embodiment inherent in the structure of nature as an endlessly creative enterprise.

The research conducted inspired the manipulations, choreography and editing of the myriad photographs, into a narrative intended to suggest to the viewer that the emotional responses we feel are the evolutionary outcome of self-organizing comfort-seeking behaviour already present at our primordial origins. While comfort-seeking probably kick-started the dynamic of life itself, Damasio (2018: 100) contends that '[t]here is no being ... without a spontaneous mental experience of life, a [subjective] feeling of existence'.

From this perspective, self-organizing, comfort-seeking behaviour in early cellular life, established a means to differentiate between comfort or discomfort, pleasure or pain and provided not only a survival strategy, but a structure for being that has evolved to the feeling experiences that we, as individual subjects, grapple with today. Because according to Damasio (2010: 59), the survival intentions of the first eukaryotic cell and the survival intentions implicit in human consciousness appear to be the same.

The microbiologist Franklin Harold (2014: 225) supports this, stating that 'the conspicuous advances during life's history, the flowering of autonomy, agency and complexity, are all associated with eukaryotic cells and their descendants'. He adds also that biologists are just beginning to work out the evolutionary implications of heredity that happens both vertically and horizontally, a suggestion that infers that the living world is simultaneously tree-like and web-like (Harold, 2014: 34).

Zoogleal mat to ancient alchemy

Zoogleal is a biological reference to 'living glue', the slimy biofilm or pellicle that forms in any group of microorganisms where cells adhere to each other and embed themselves within a self-produced matrix. Here, the zoogleal mat or pellicle that grows and develops symbiotically from the yeast cells, provided visual, primordial-like associations necessary to creating an artist's 'tale'

that tells of consciousness as a self-organizing, self-developmental process of embodiment, and became my prima materia, the terminology that ancient alchemists used when referring to the contents of their crucibles.

The alchemists used enigmatic substances - quicksilver, salt, vinegar and so on - as their prima materia, assigning them names such as spiritual blood, venus, and lapis. These names reflect the extent to which they projected themselves into the substances with which they worked - and contemporary psychology now suggests that ancient alchemy provided some of the earliest insights into the development of self-awareness, whether the alchemists were conscious of it or not.

In the stop-frame video, I take the viewer/reader through four visual phases delineated by the alchemical terms of nigredo, viriditas, rubedo and albedo. While these phases, or sequences of photographs are evident in the catalogue they are less distinct in the video projections, since the phases were created from the sequences photographed and run continuously on a loop to emphasise the simultaneity of being-in-the-world-with-others processes.

As the project came together, I realised how much my studio practice related to what the physiologist Gerald Edelman calls 'conscious of consciousness', or the psychologist Susan Blakemore refers to as 'seeing myself' and it is in this sense that I elected to configure the exhibition as a performance and reify the understandings gained throughout the project.

Projecting onwards into the landscape

Because the project was a creative practice-as-research undertaking, it facilitated my attempts to explore contemporary ideas on psyche as a life-long process of growth and development. Once the performance was complete, I continued with the creative practice by re-projecting some of the photographic images that made up the video onto my studio walls and immediate exterior environment, also photographically documenting the results. The images of the landscape projections especially have an ethereal quality to them and evoke moonscapes or a darkened universe.

³ I use the term psyche to reference body, mind and spirit.

I used the photographs to inspire the hand-made notes created while writing up my thesis. The notes extend the concept of an artist's diary, and I intend to use them as inspiration for future projects because they hold captive memories awakened while working in my studio. They will also perpetuate my practice as a continuous creative process because they symbolise the continuity of life, whether we are conscious of it or not. Additionally they will serve to reify notions of how we weave our ideas and fantasies into the fabric of our bodies as self-organizing life worlds, and how being conscious of this process should influence our actions and responses in the world. Through continuously reworking the notes, I came to realize them as multi-layered palimpsests momentarily capturing some of the magical bodily feelings that awaken during any immersive-like experience. The notes, presented as the final entries in the catalogue, embody the sense of continuity I sought to achieve when making them.

According to Harold (2014: 229) 'the beginning of wisdom is to stay tuned ... keep listening ... relish uncertainty', because as he puts it, such experiences drew scientists to science in the first place. However science, as with most research disciplines, remains meaningless to the humanities unless the insights gained are embodied and lived by the researchers and the beneficiaries of the research processes.

As Peter London concludes

"First mind, final mind,

Art, we call these ways art.

We can learn - again - to art/live this way.

We can learn to art and to speak and to be the way Nature does in all that it does.

Nature: where everything counts, nothing is left out, nothing is left over, where everything is closely fitted, draws, erases, then moves on" (2003, xi).

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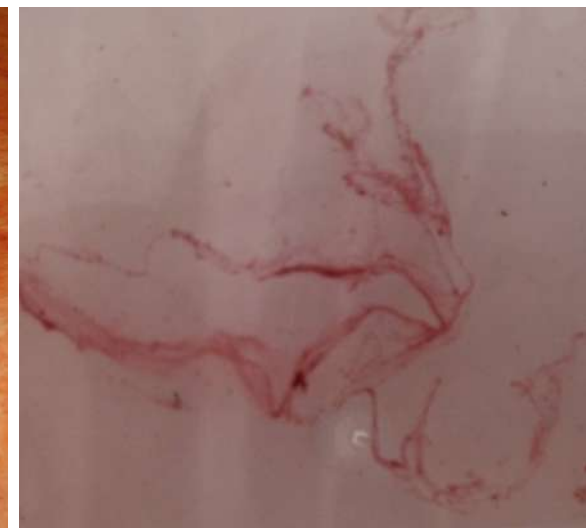
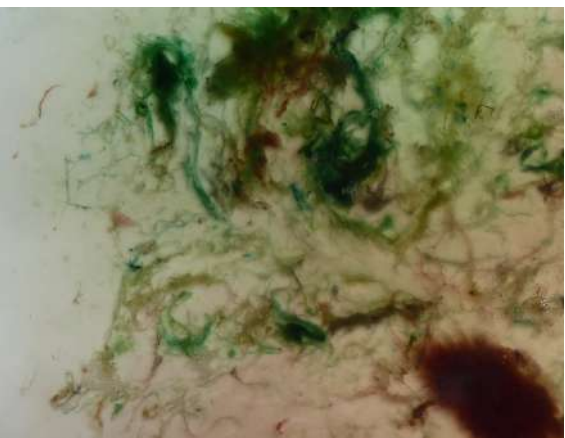
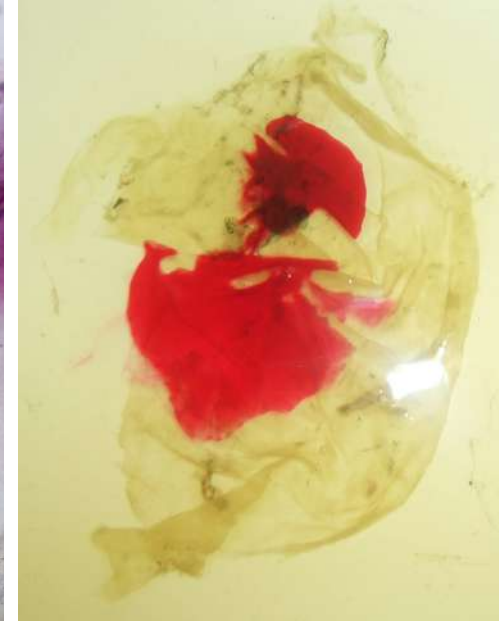
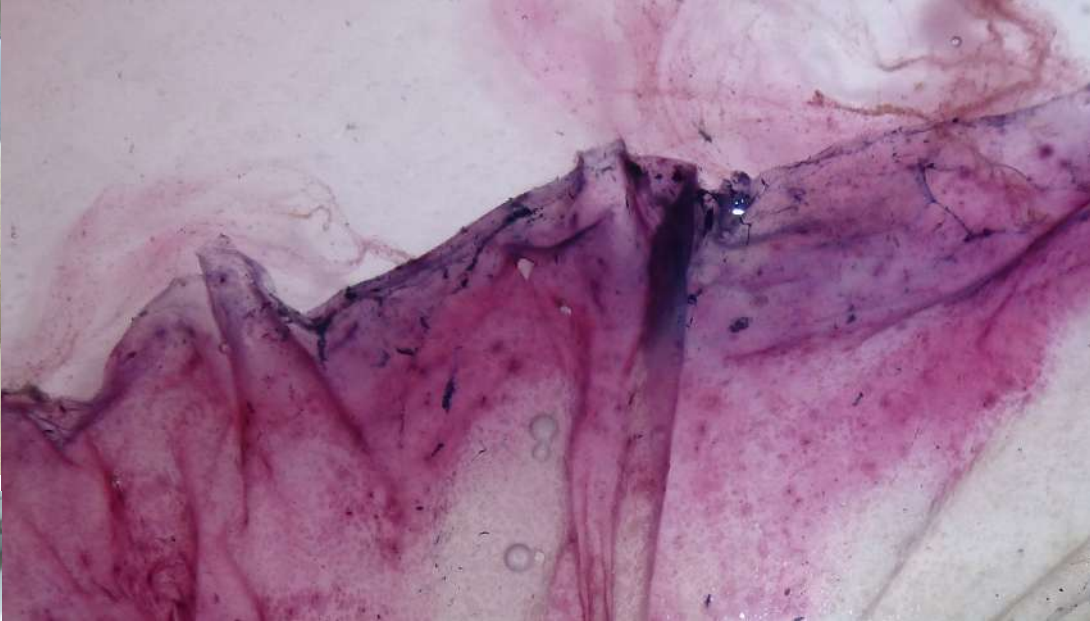






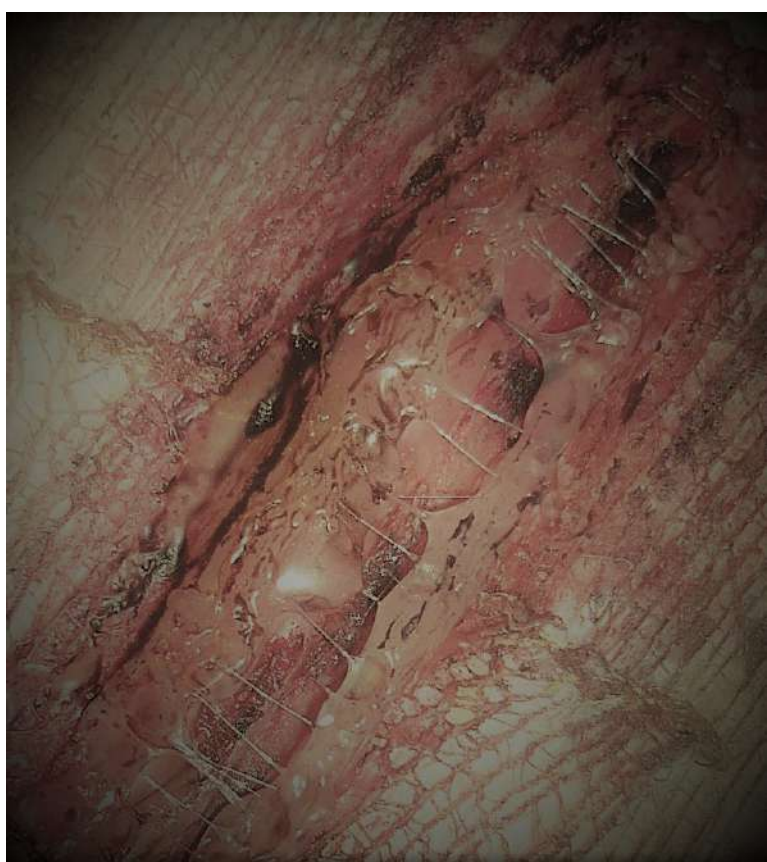
Early experimentations with bacterial yeast cell symbiosis (kombucha).







Early experimentations with alchemical image-making processes.



May/June 2016

- can the idea of skin articulate the idea of communion between 'self' + 'other'?
- Proton - transdermal (mirror neurons)
 - their paper argued that attended perception of the objects share automatically activates neural representations, and that this activation the associated autonomic + somatic responses (idea of perception - action coupling) unless inhibited
- look at Idea of Perception - action - coupling
- Empathia - a conscious communion between 'self' and 'other'.
- the Emotional brain - Joseph Ledoux
 - Empathizing - 'feeling into'
 - projecting human 'feelings' on to art/objects
 - an exploration of the object as agent of consciousness.
 - Meaning is internally created / constructed

Epistemological realism as internal realism and its relationship to the construction of meaning
Cognition is a biological phenomenon.

- he would think everyone sees what the world is, but a world we bring forth with ideas. Pg 245
- everything we do is a structured dance in the choreography of existence [and that] we have only the world that we bring forth with ideas, and only love helps us bring it forth

- Cognition - acc. to Maharana + Varela is not the representation of the world 'out there' but rather an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the processes of being itself.
- all cognitive experience involves the knower in a personal way - rooted in his biological structure.
- knowing is an action by a knower.
- organization (self-organization) characterizes living beings
- what is perceived by the senses is intelligible to the mind.

Two PB theses grounded in the idea that changes in the environment trigger changes in his organism, and that these changes come about ~~as a~~ through what RC refers to as mirror neurons in the brain.

- ~~no unique capacity of vertebrates to imitate~~
Varela states the 'splendour of the human system' lies not in its production of 'imprints' or representations of things in the outside world, but rather in the continuous transformation in the way transformations in the environment as a result of how each transformation affects it.

The world was always filled with God - a projection that would eventually be consciously realized - as not out there but an aspect of my own being - an act of knowledge

the zero
intensity linked

and the responses or actions to these changes

Passion for the Latin verb patere which means to suffer.

Passion is the intense emotion (compassion) (W. Sullivan)

opposites red / green

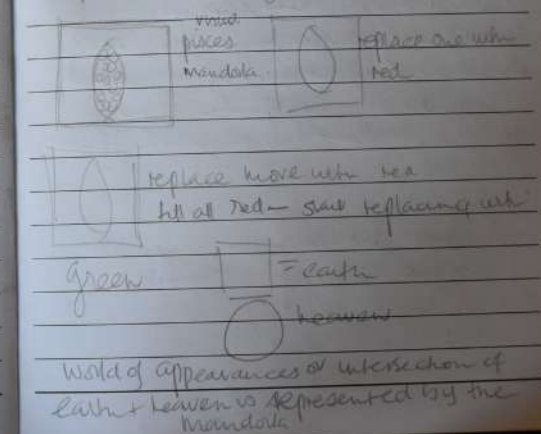


Figure 1 consists of eight histological micrographs arranged in a 4x2 grid. The left column shows placental sections with varying degrees of trophoblastic proliferation and invasion. The right column shows corresponding sections with more advanced disease, including extensive trophoblastic invasion and necrosis. Labels on the left indicate different stages or types of disease, and labels on the right indicate the corresponding sections.

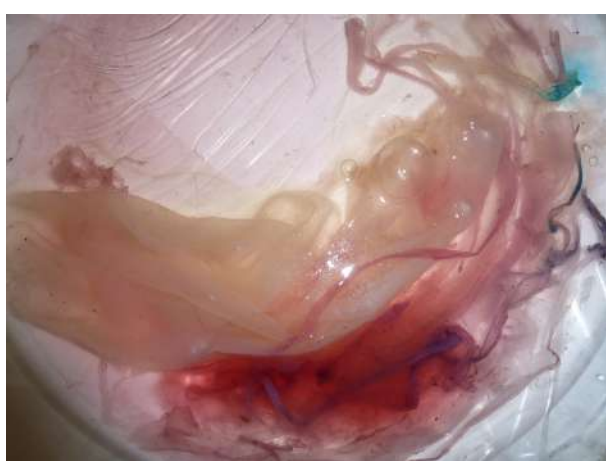
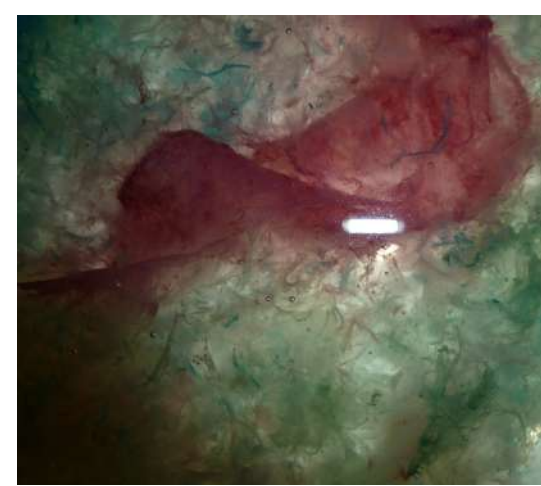
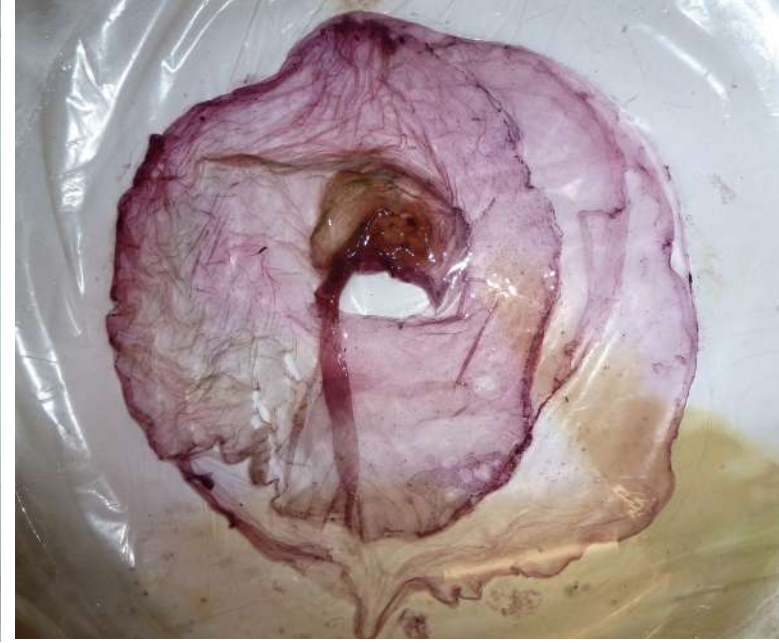


1. What is a function?
 A function is a relation between a set of inputs and a set of outputs, where each input is related to exactly one output.

[illegible]



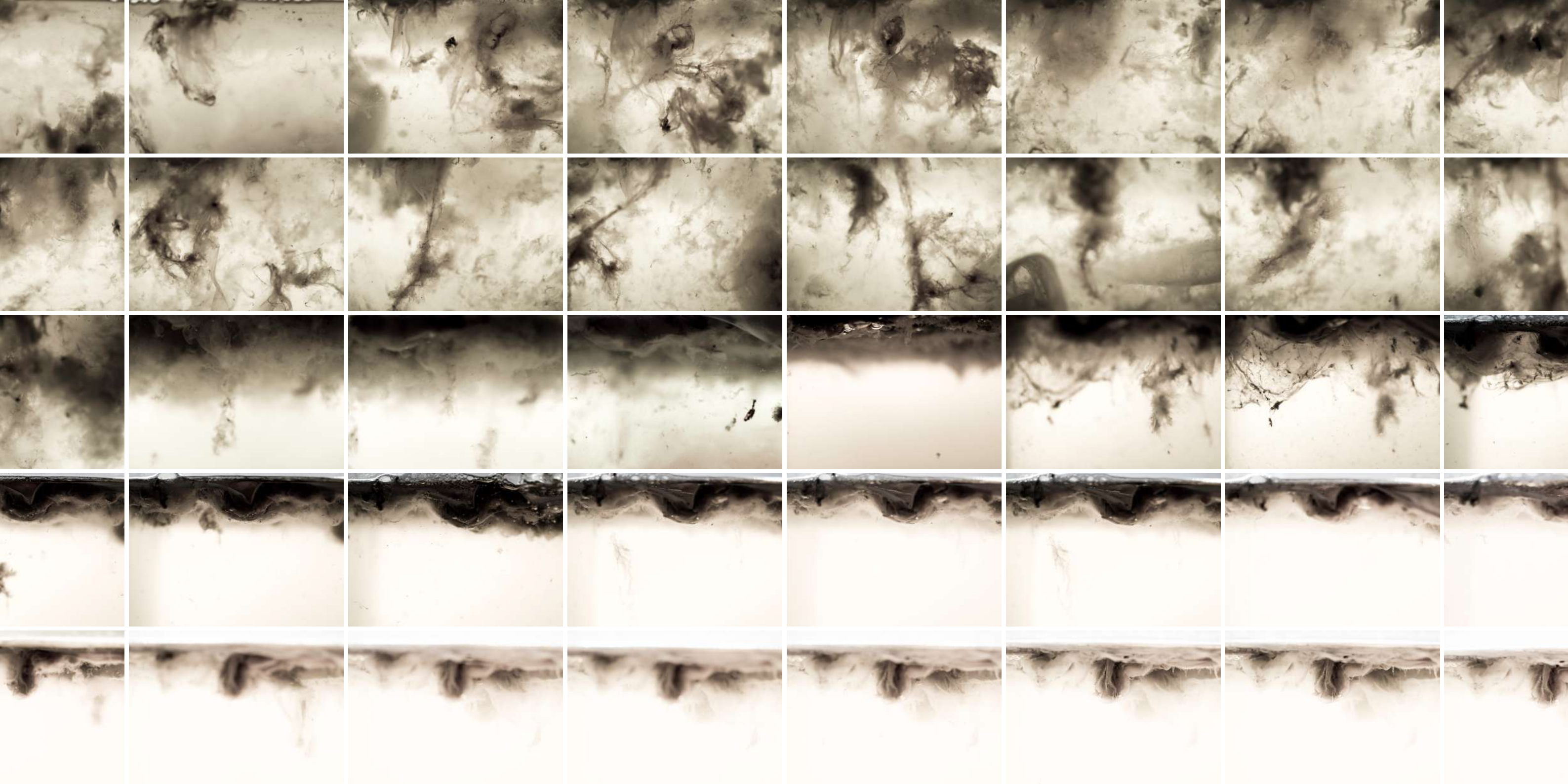
Early experimentations with organic roots and root-like imagery using bacterial yeast cell symbiosis and vegetable colourants.

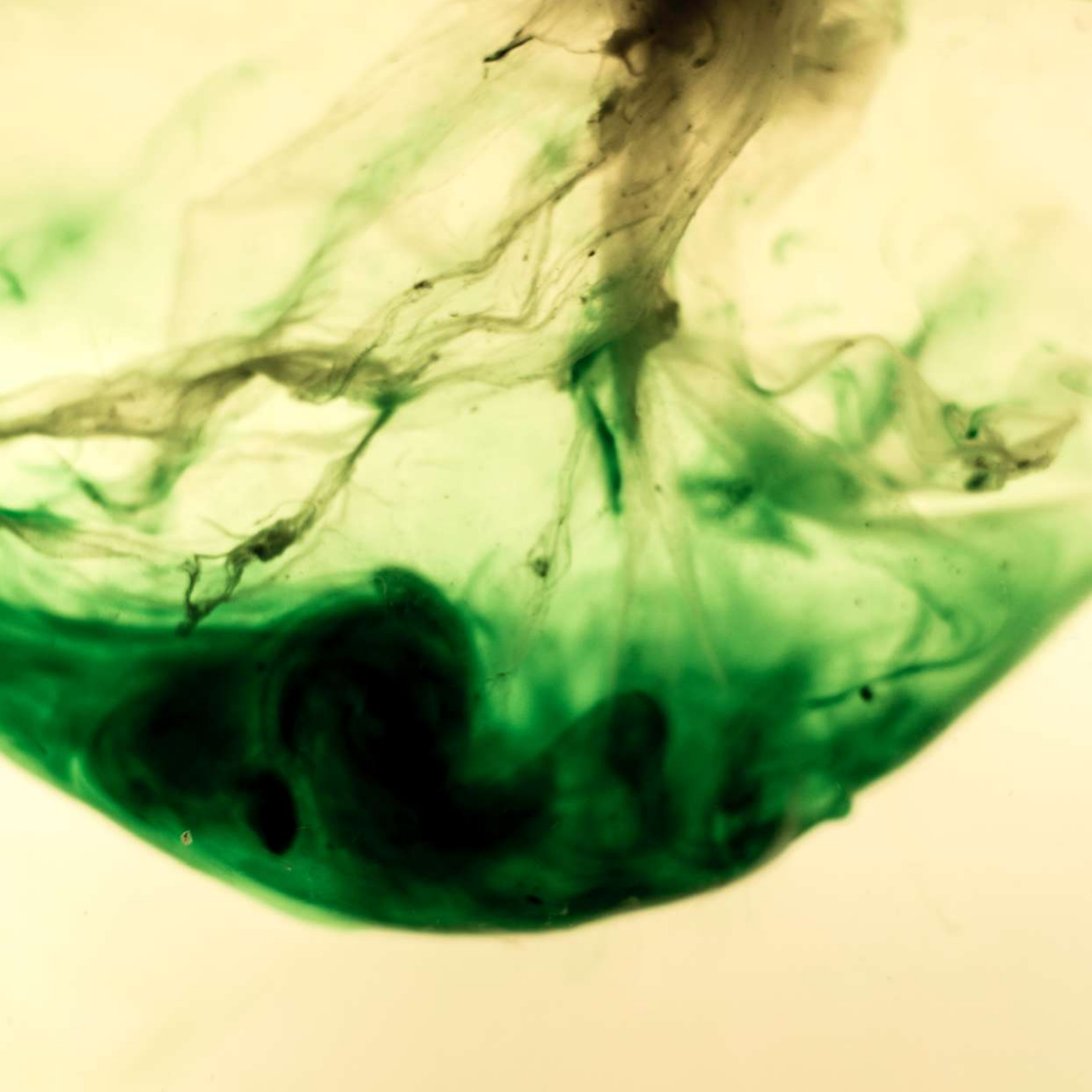




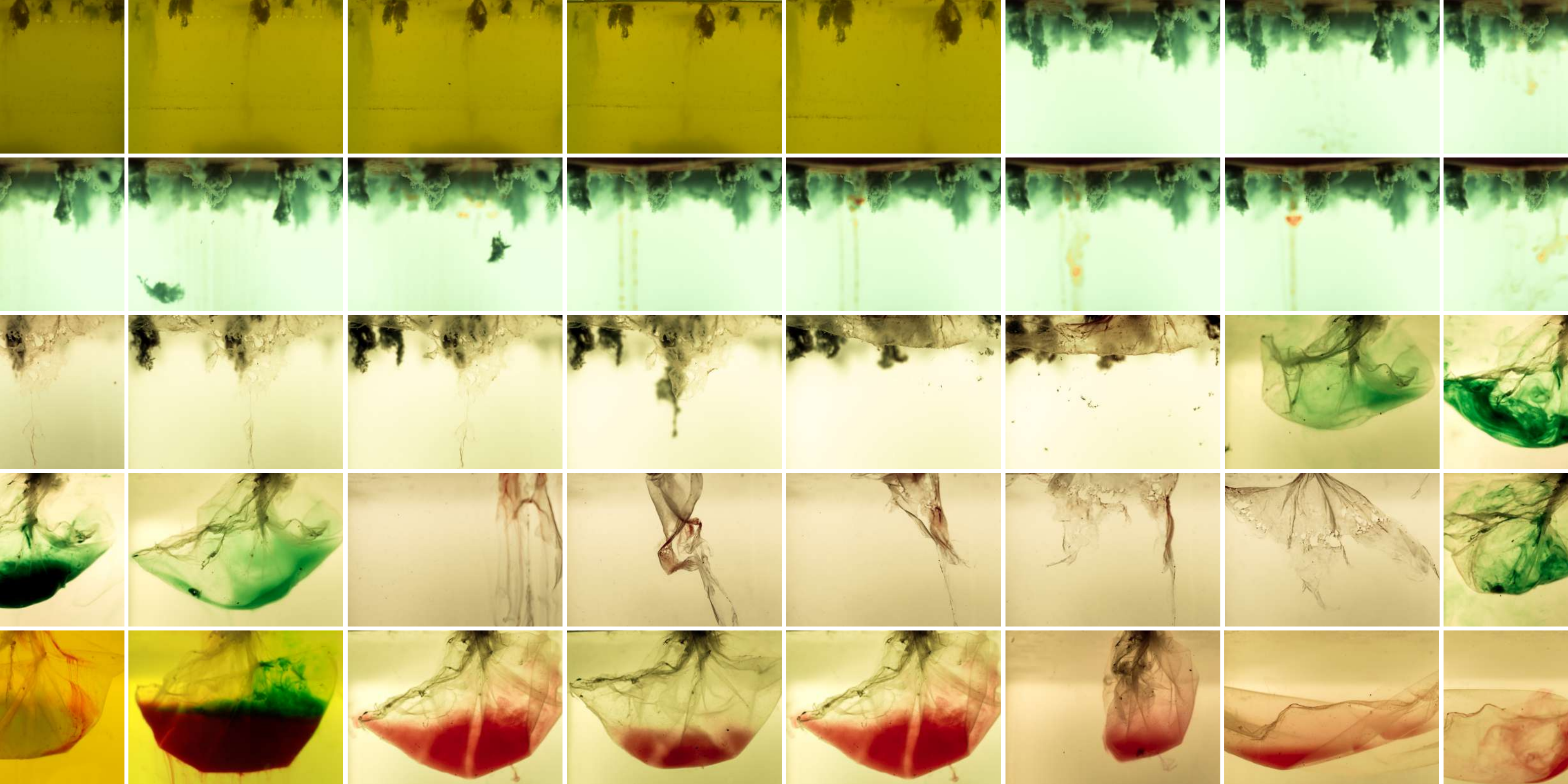


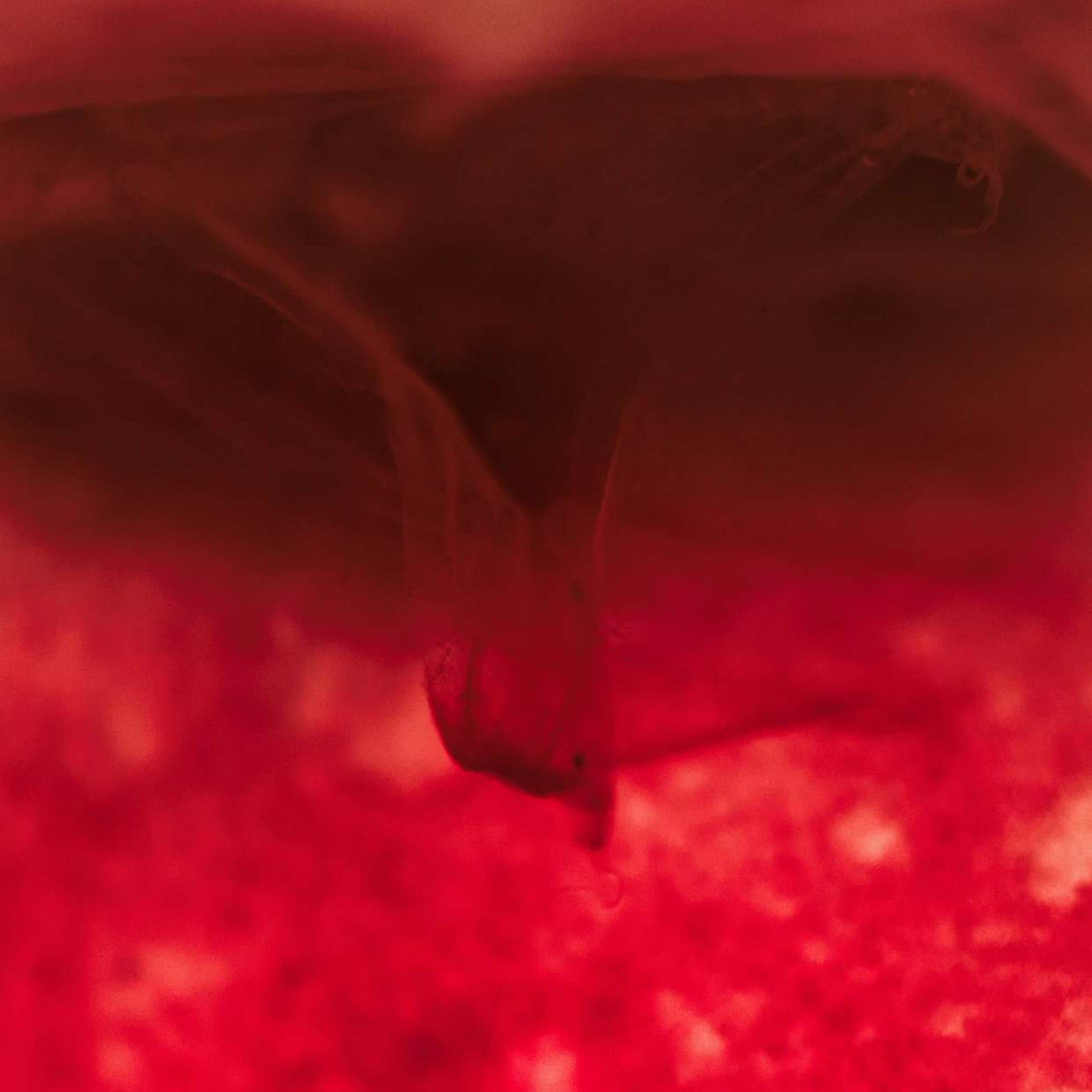
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Nigredo phase.



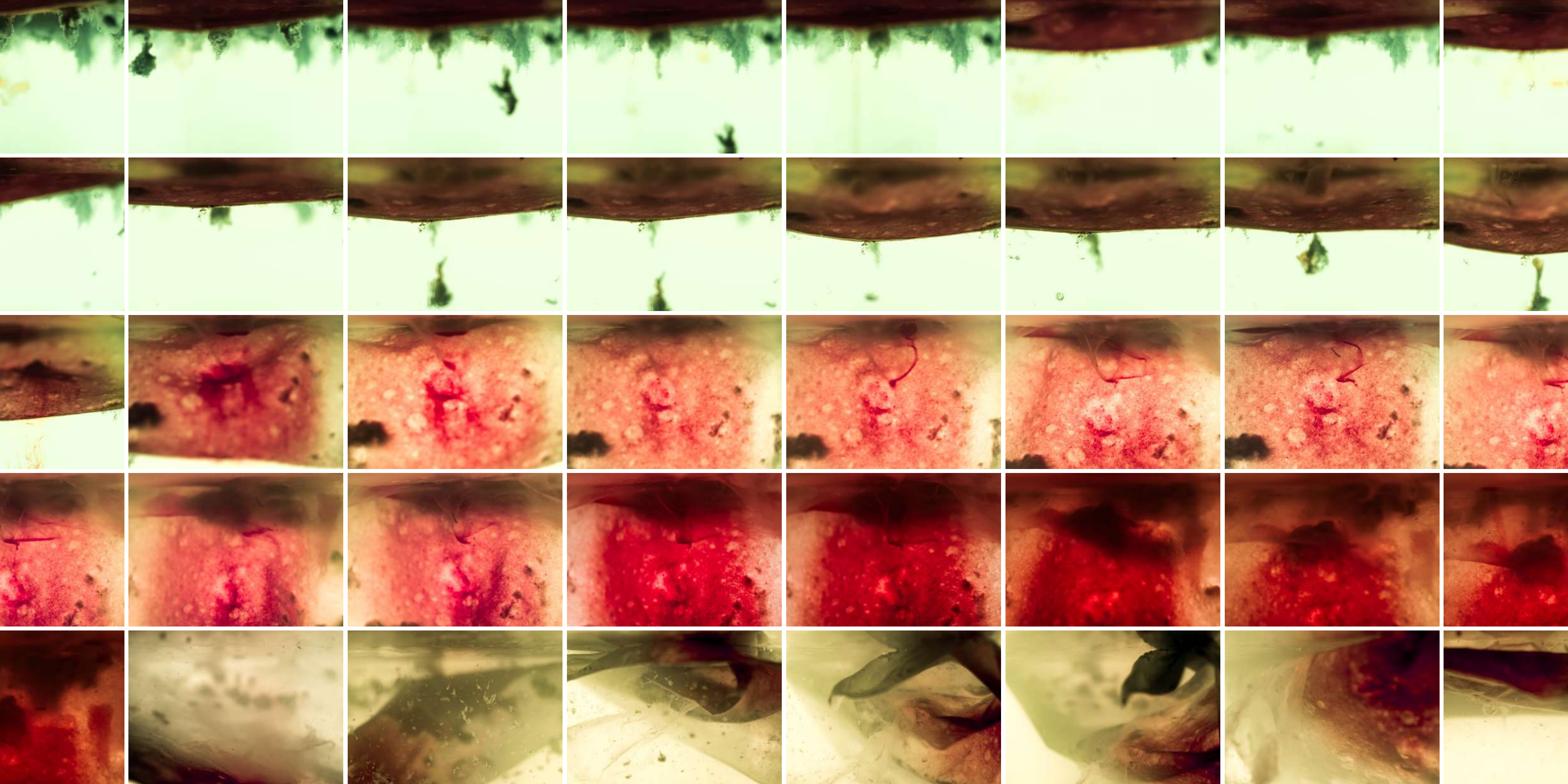


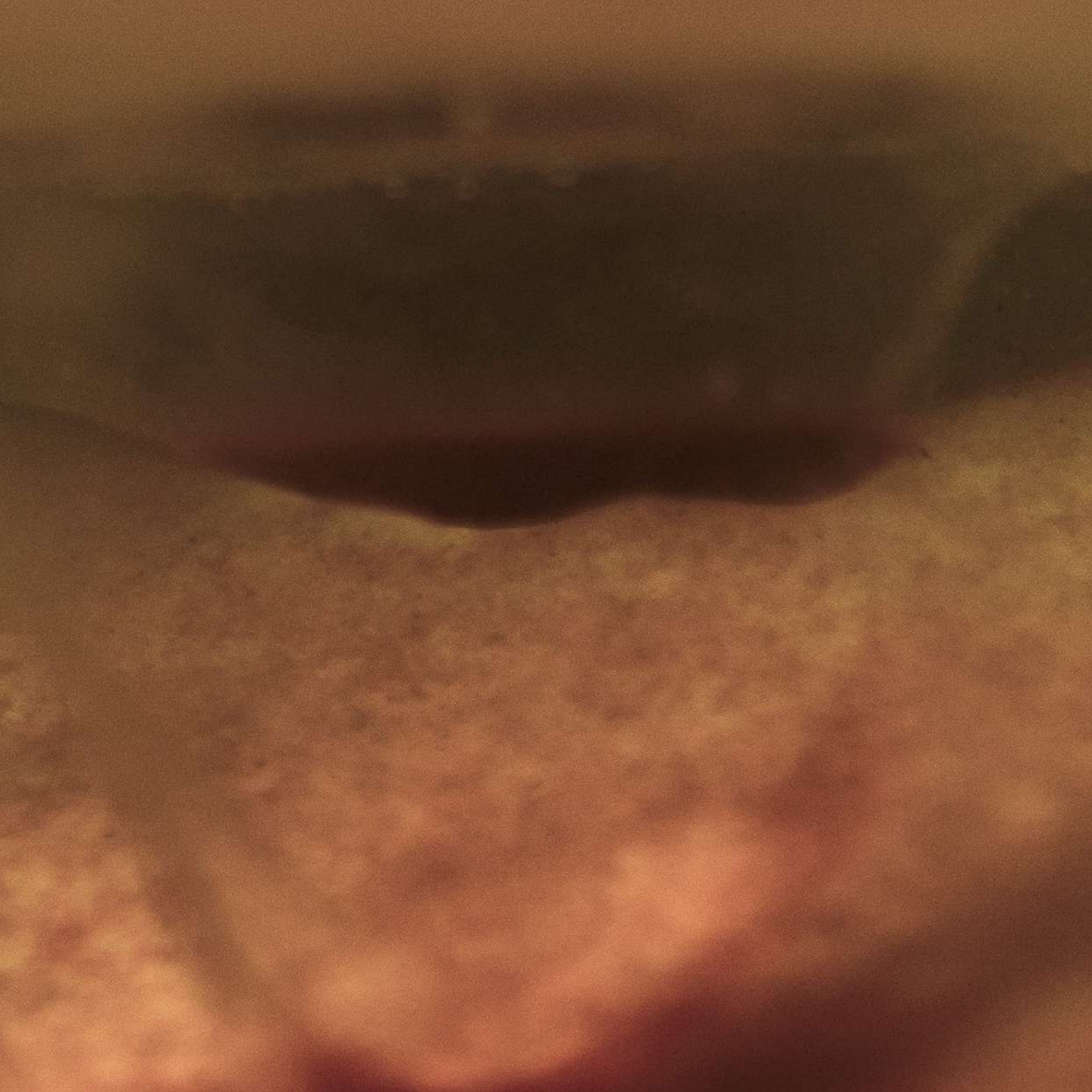
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Veriditas phase.



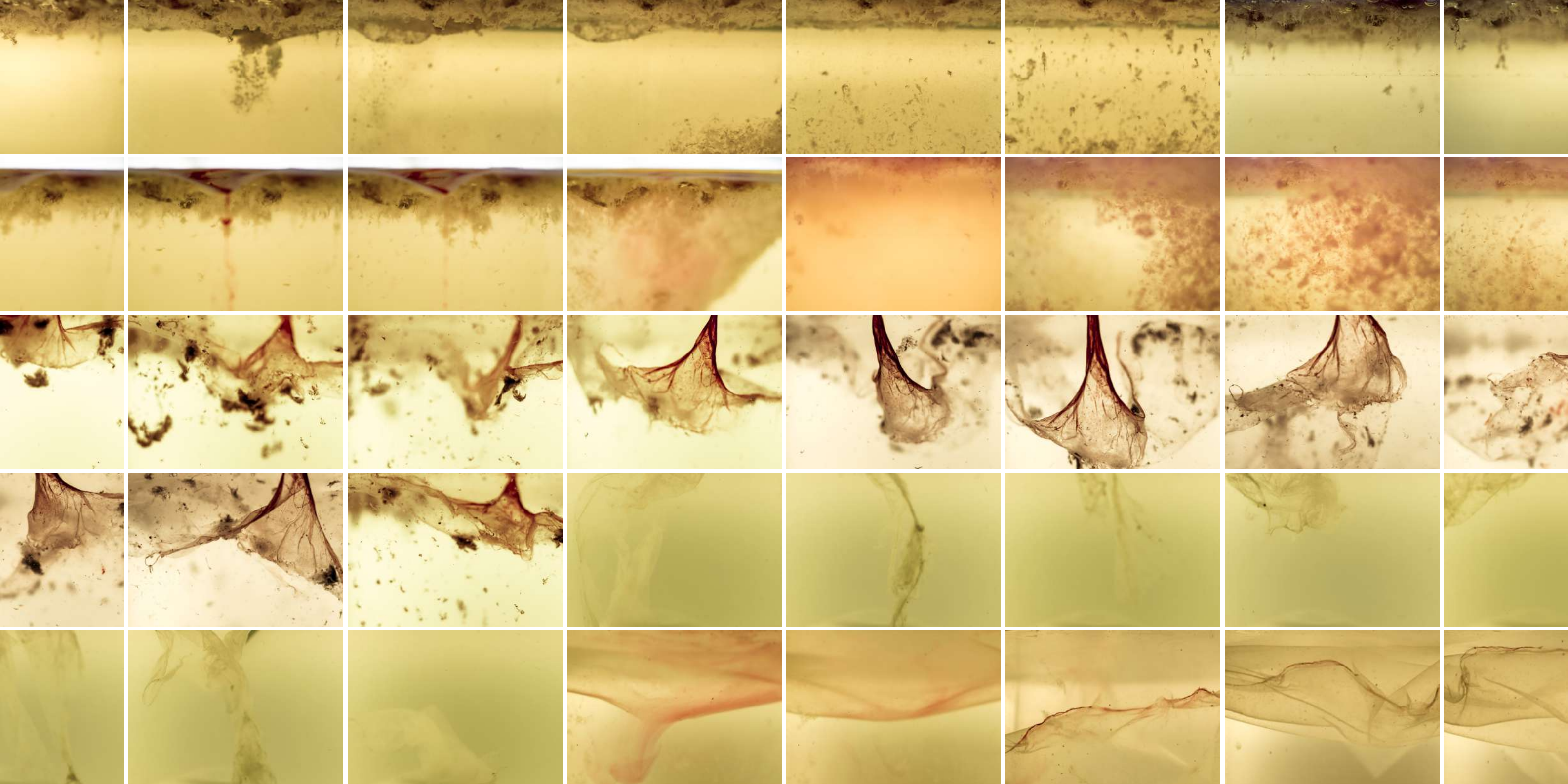


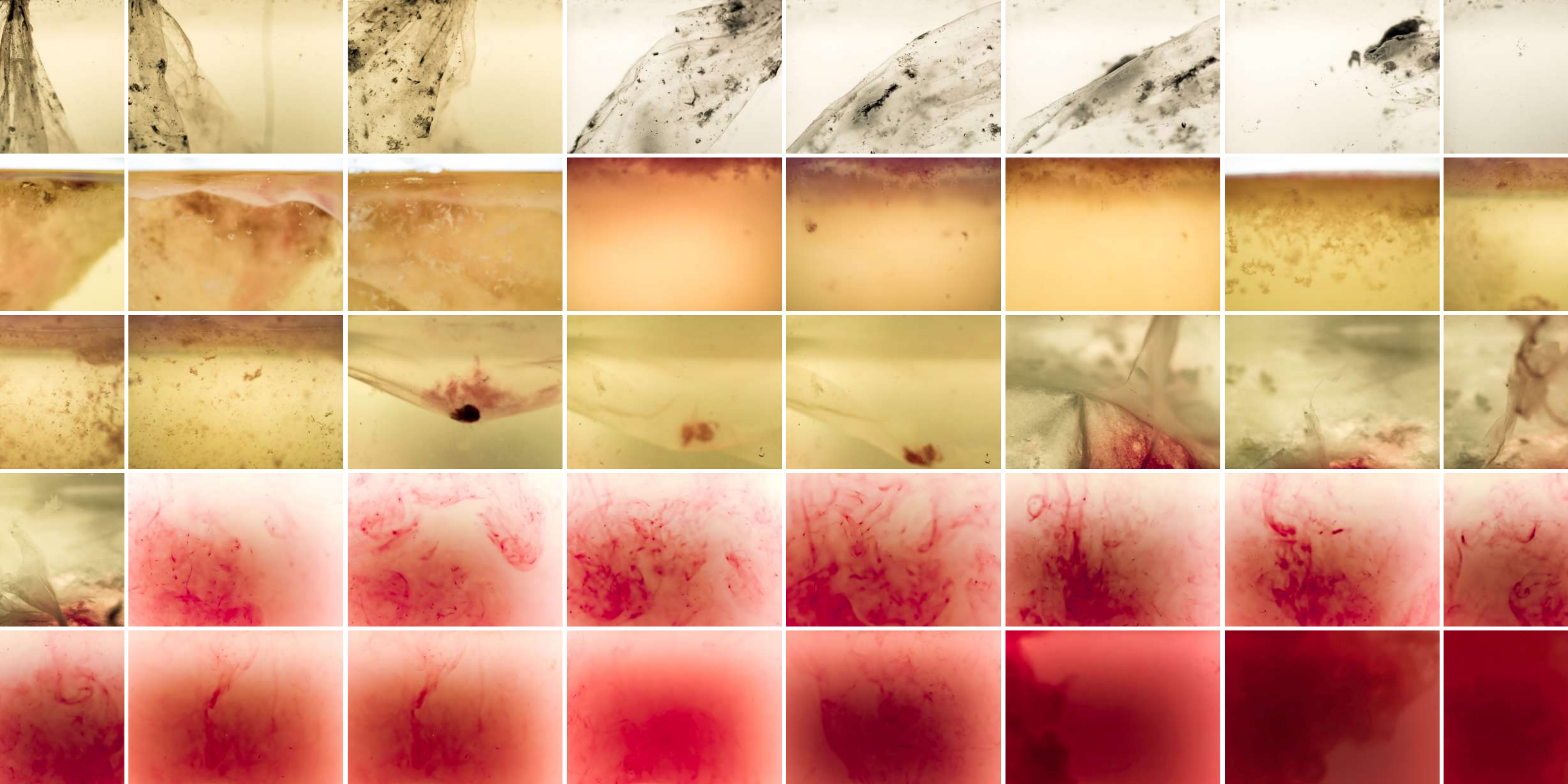
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Rubedo phase.





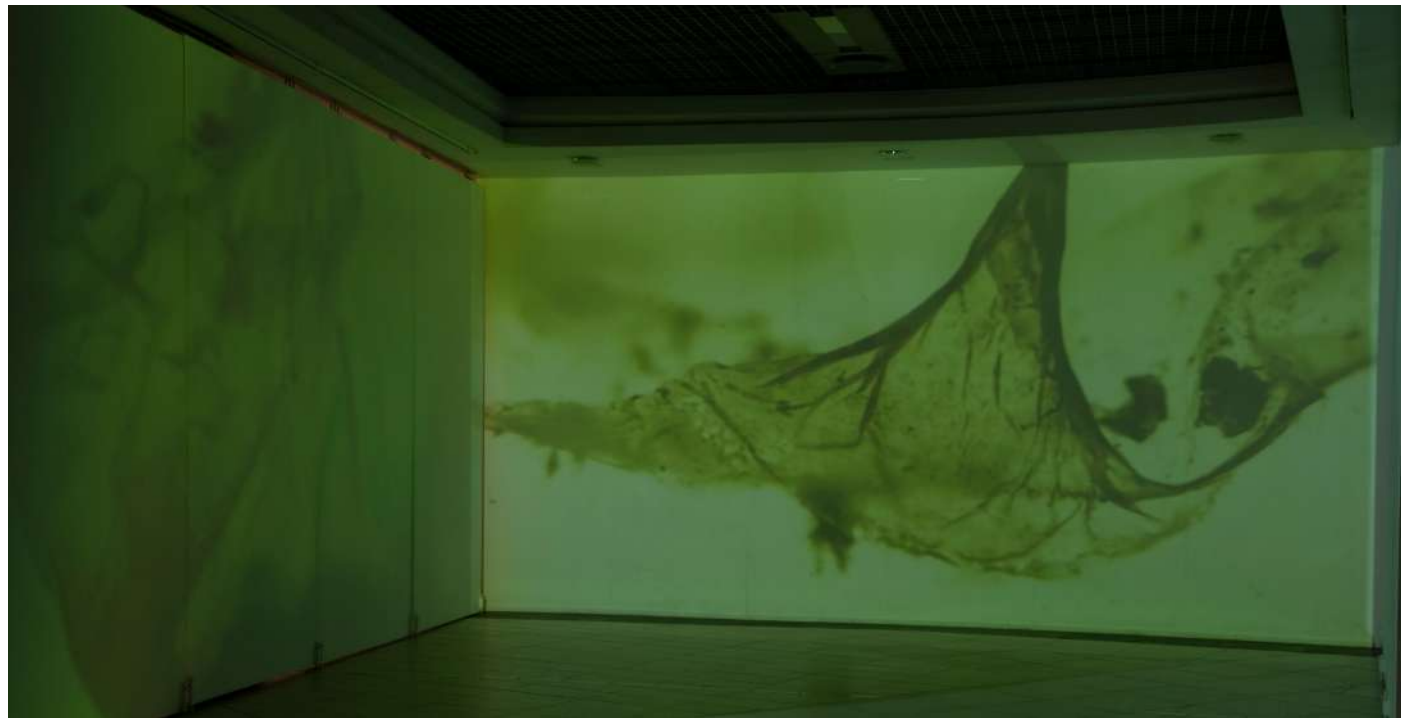
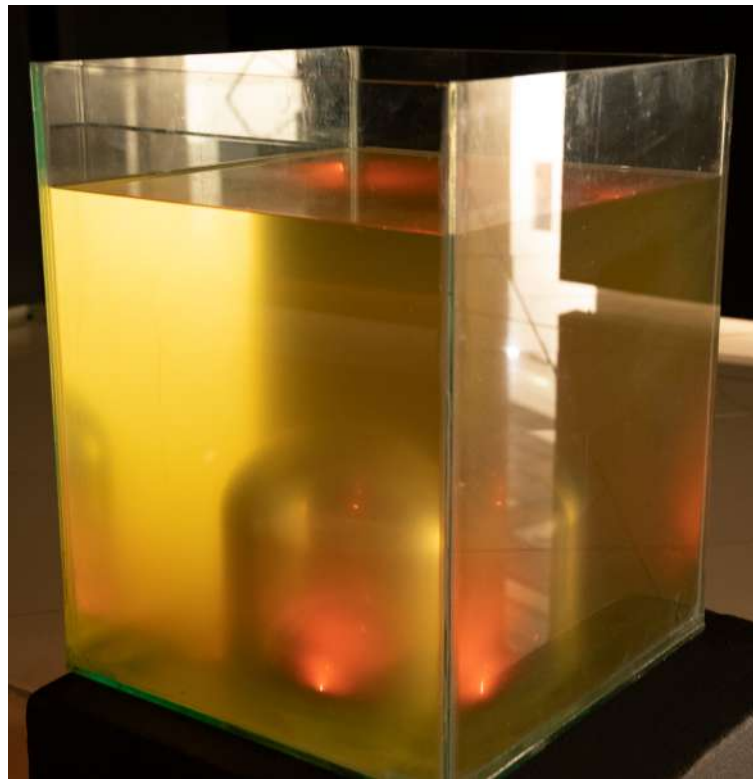
Selection of sequences manipulated and photographed for the Albedo phase.







Performing the exhibition *Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales*.
The Unisa gallery.





Still photographs exhibited at Dust from Dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artists diary.







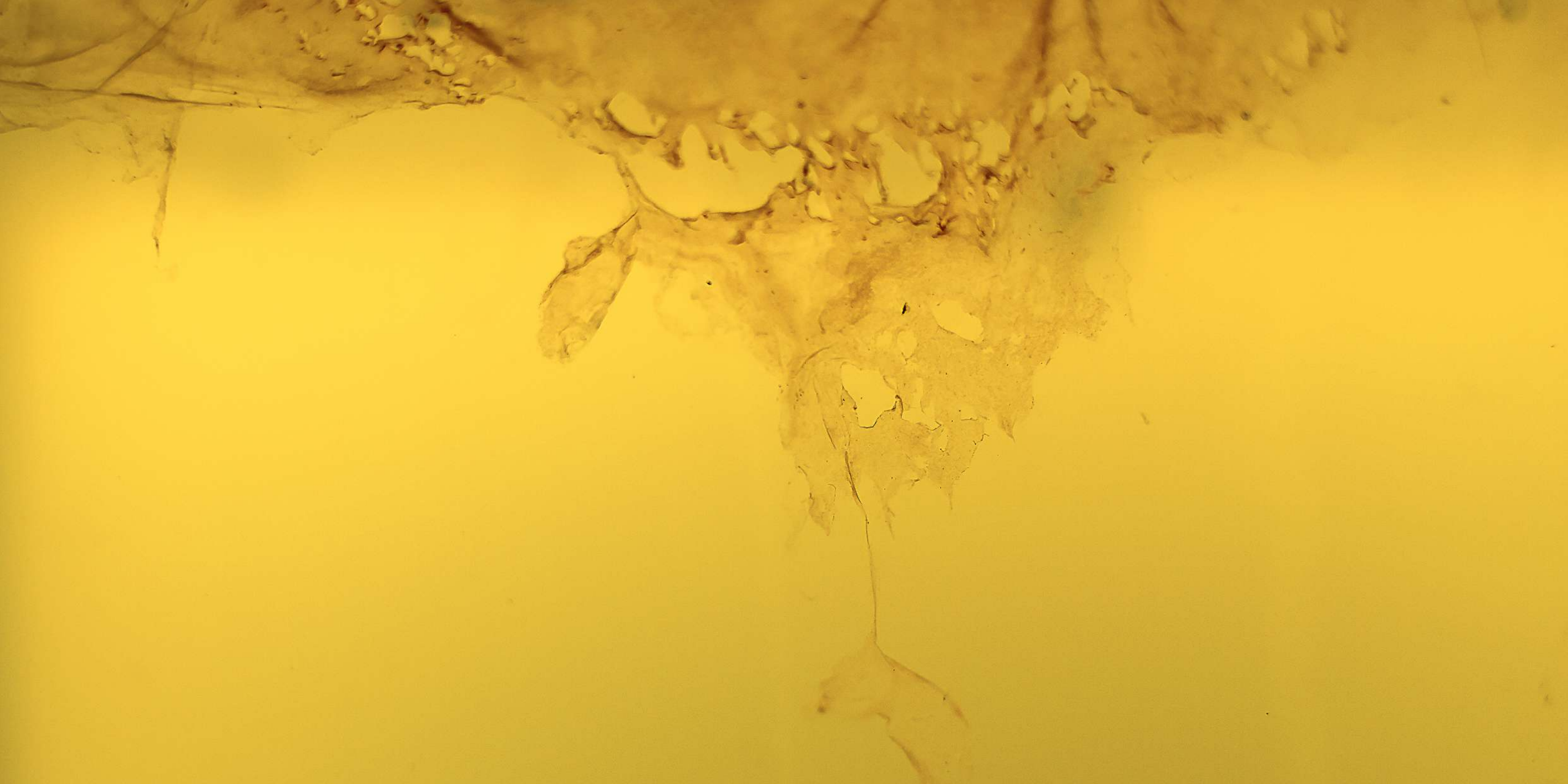




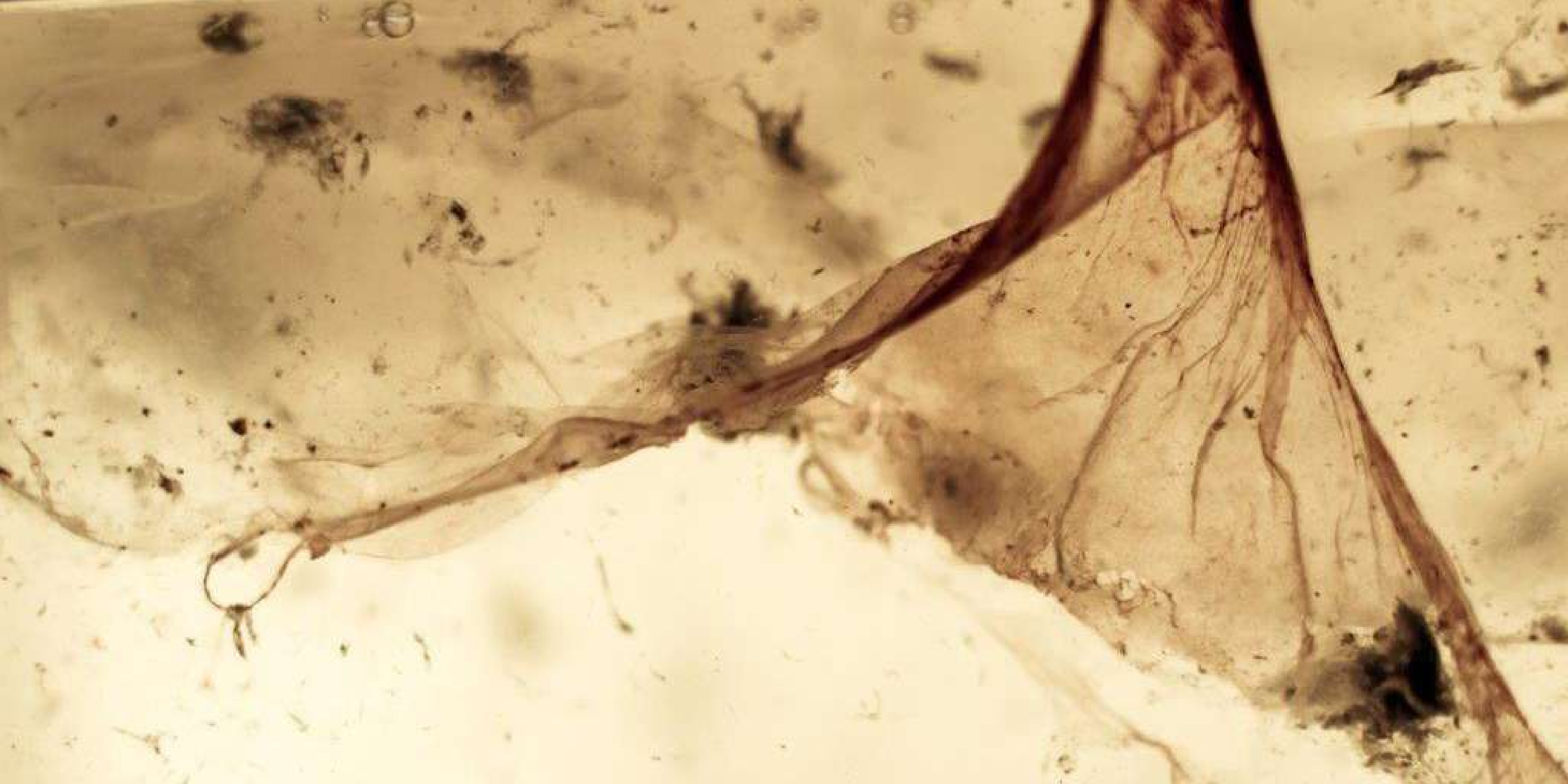








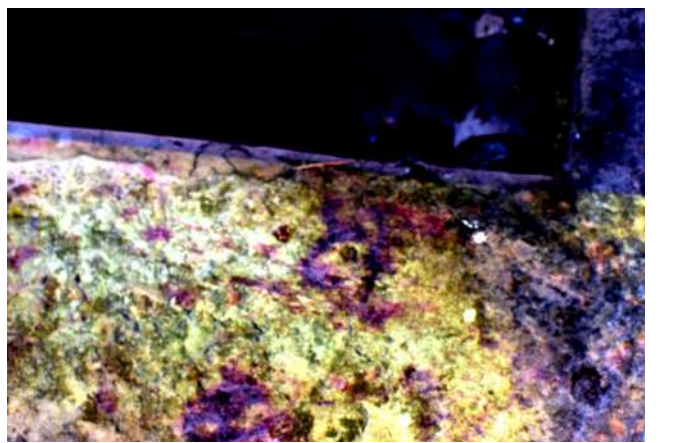
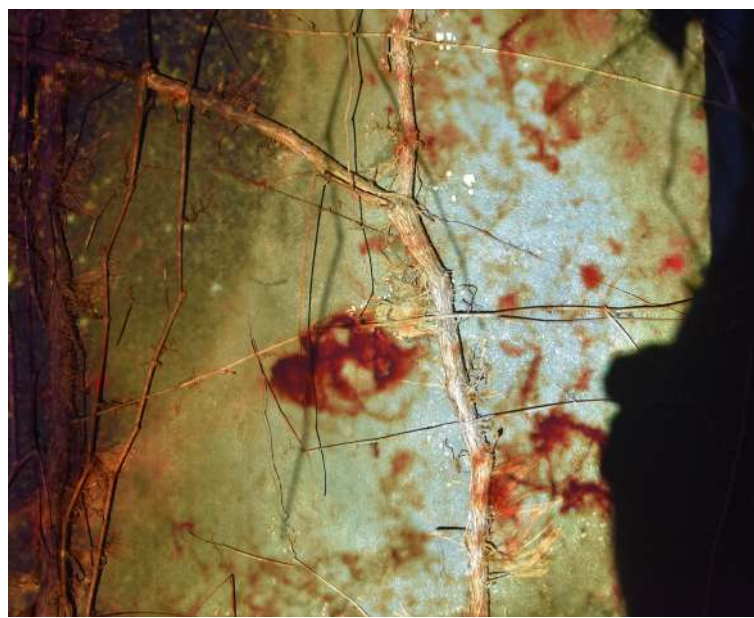
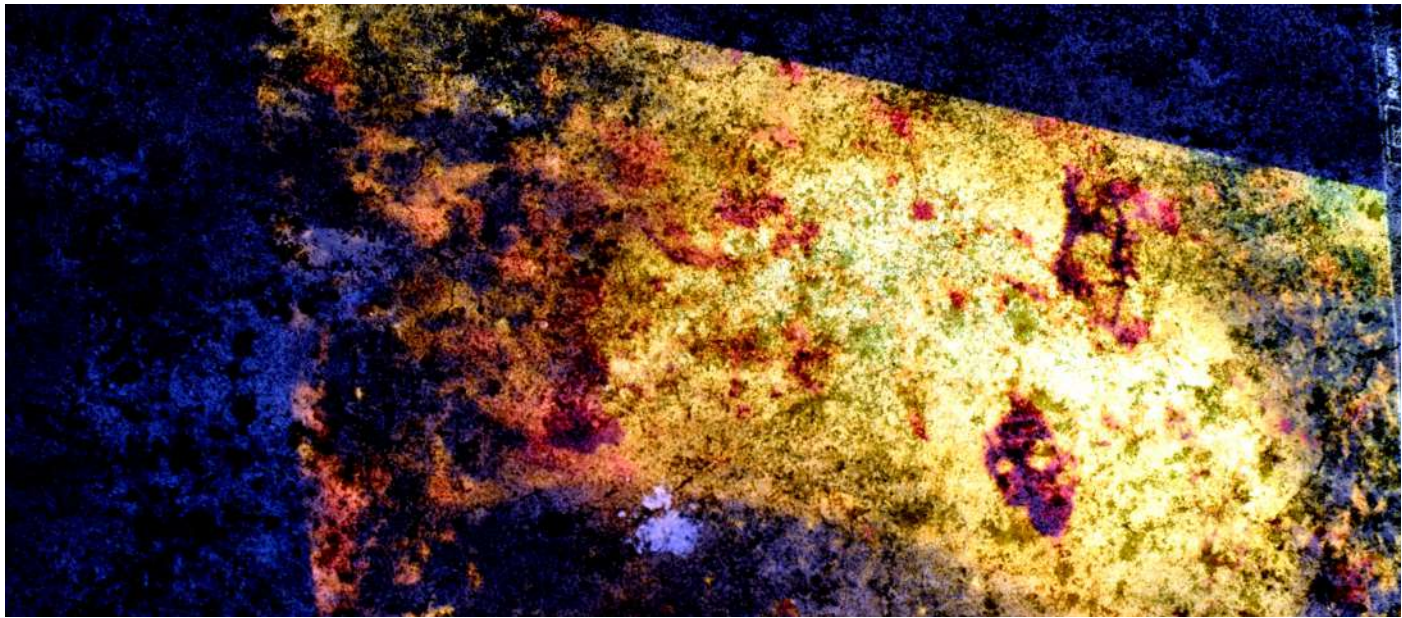
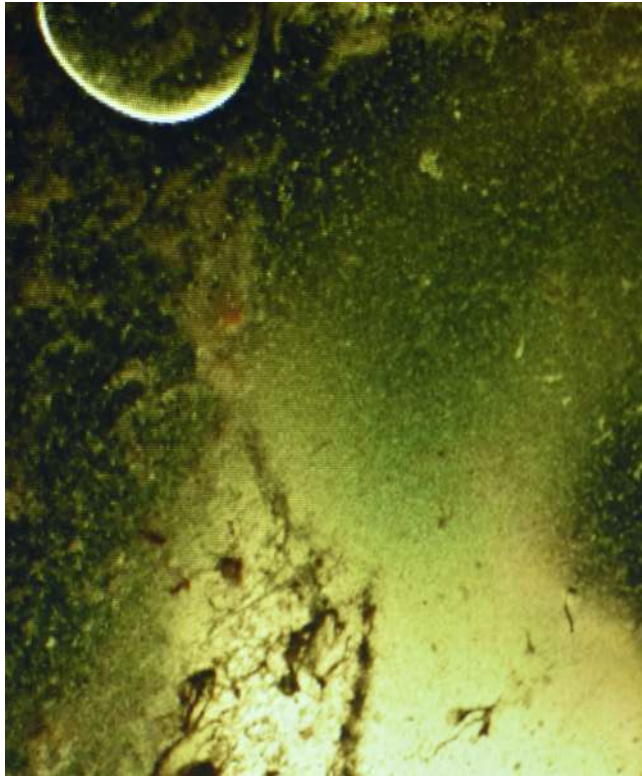


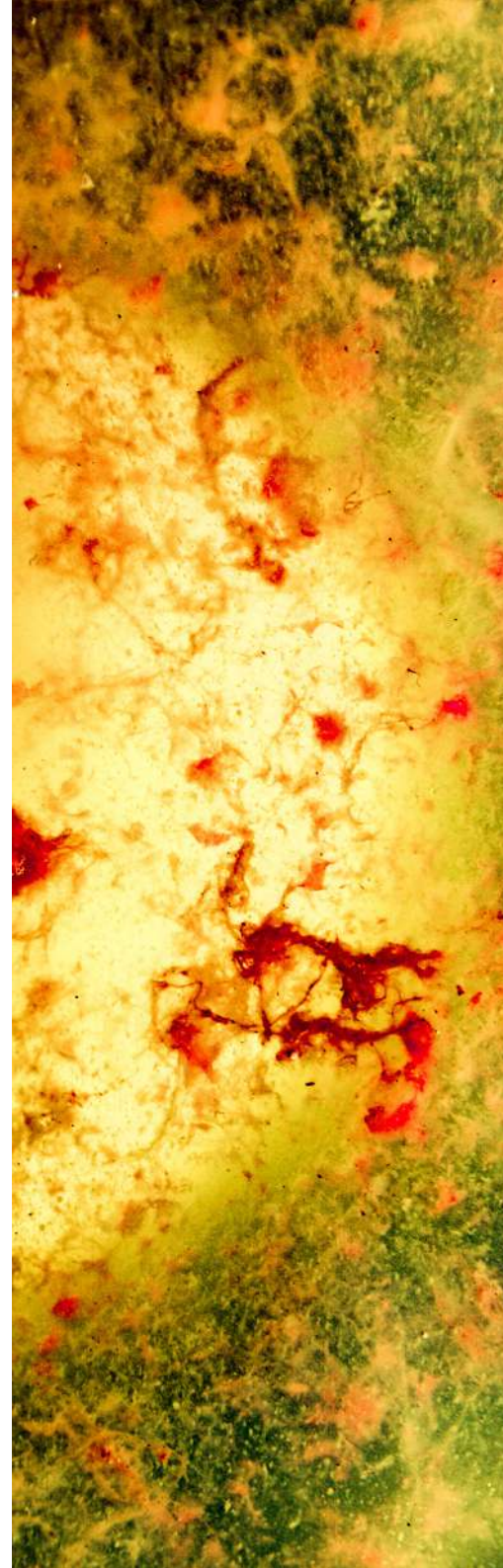
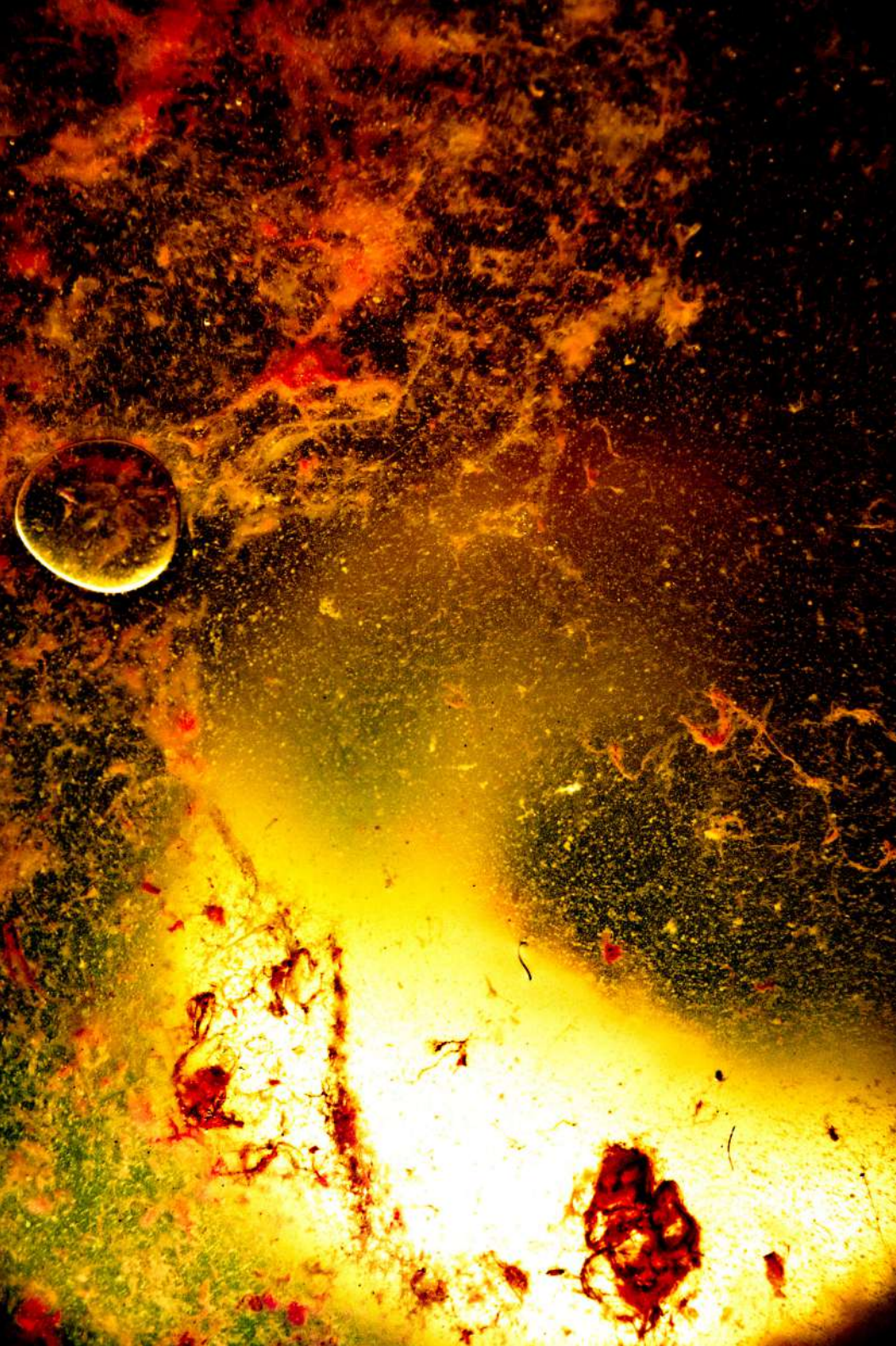


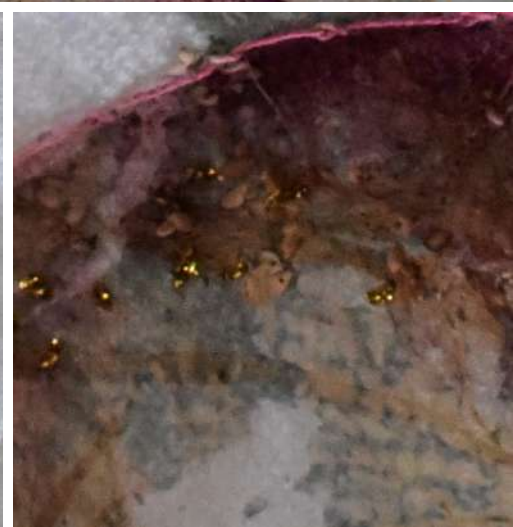


Imagery captured by re-projecting and photographing footage of yeast cell symbiosis into the landscape.



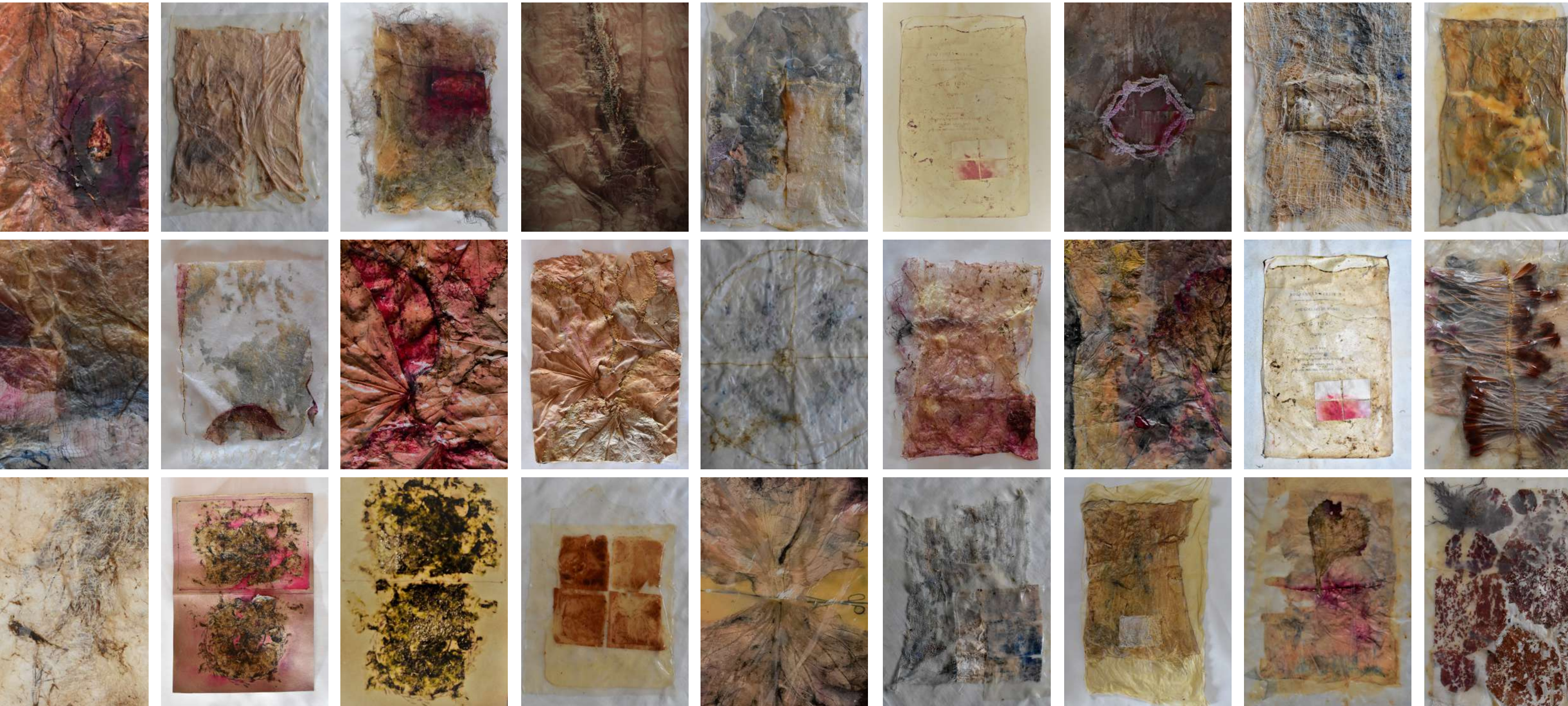


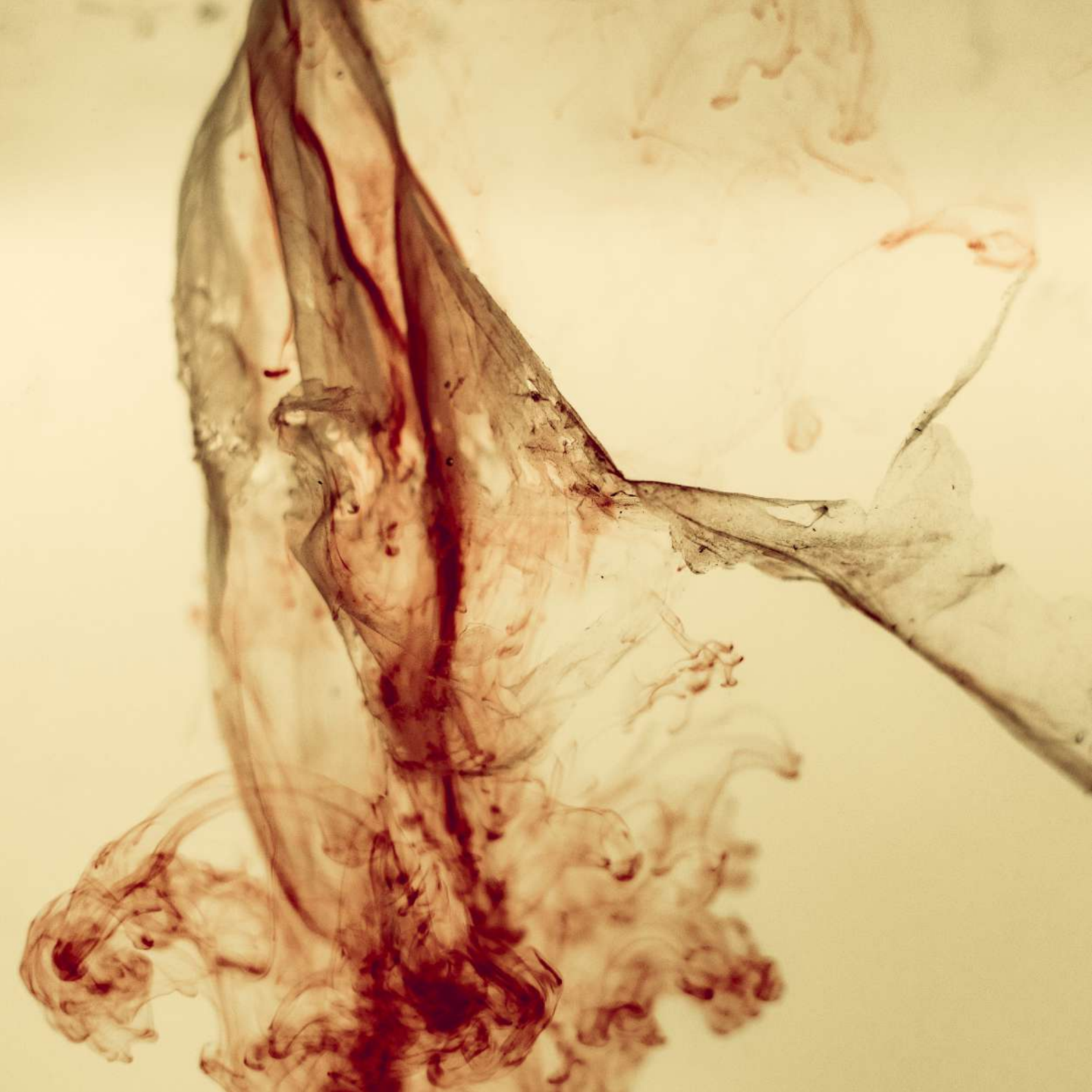




Handmade notes as visual aids for future projects.







Abbreviated Curriculum Vitae: Bev de Lange

Trained initially as registered nurse, midwife and operating theatre sister, a career that impacts on my work as an artist.

Has exhibited extensively since 1993.

2002	- Poetry published in the book entitled, 'Weaving the fabric', for the Goteberg/Port Elizabeth partnership.	2011	- Sojourned for two months to the Cite Internationale des Arts in Paris, France.
2004	- Awarded the Presidents cup for, 'most promising artist', EPSAC annual Exhibition. - Work formed part of a group exhibition at the William Humphrey Gallery, Kimberley.	2012	- Invited to participate in the 'Easter Cathedral 'exhibition at ARTEC.
2005	- Completed B.A. Visual Art Degree, U.N.I.S.A.	2012	- Participated in the 'Large Works' exhibition at the Athenaeum.
2006	- Solo exhibition of new works at Cuyler Street Gallery, Port Elizabeth.	2012	- Work selected for both the 'Treasures' as well as 'Vessels' exhibitions at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum.
2006	- Participated in the HIV/Aids exhibition at the Red Location Museum New Brighton, Port Elizabeth.	2013	- Work exhibited on 'Who's Who and What's New' exhibition at the NMMM and various other exhibitions.
2009	- Invited to assist on the selection panel for the EPSAC/ ARTEC annual.	2012/14	- Registered for D.Litt. et Phil (Art History) UNISA.
2010	- Completed a Masters in Fine Art at the Nelson Mandela University. Graduated Cum Laude.	2014	- Participated in the 'Sead Collective' group exhibition at the Grahamstown festival.
2010	- Work formed part of the exhibition entitled "Land: Unity and Diversity" initiated between Hyberabad in India, the Pretoria Arts Association and SANAA to commemorate 150 years of cultural exchange between India and South Africa.	2014	- Participated in the 'Sead Collective' group exhibition at ARTEC.
2010/11	- Three dimensional artwork entitled 'Earthborne' selected for the NMMM Biennale.	2014	- Work selected for the 'Wish you were here' exhibition an MDA project.
2011	- Work formed part of the NMMU exhibition at the GFI Gallery.	2014	- Selected to participate in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum Biennale in October 2014.
2011	- Artwork and artist's CV included in the book '208 Eastern Cape artists'.	2018	- Digital version of Dust from dust: Microorganisms and other tales. An artist's diary - selected as part of the 'Mixed Realities' exhibition at the Albert van Abbehuis Art and Science Salon in Eindhoven, The Netherlands.

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