

GREY CRAWFORD



INTRODUCTION

by Hubertus von Amelnunxen

In an essay on photography in America in the 1970s, Max Kozloff asked: "Where have all the people gone?" (1) He was referring, among others, to the images by Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz and Bernd and Hilla Becher. He was not familiar with the equally uninhabited art of Grey Crawford, as scarcely anyone else was at the time, or even today. Crawford's photographs of installations of glass and metal plates in the Mojave Desert in Southern California between 1975 and 1977 were published in a small print-run entitled *El Mirage* and are collectors' items today. (2) Although influenced by Land Art artists and the so-called Minimalists, like Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Carl André, these black-and-white and colour photographs are experimental sightings determined and choreographed solely by the camera and thus singular, like the minimalist prototypes by Lewis Baltz of around the same time, or Bernd and Hilla Becher's water and gas reservoirs. In the mid-1970s he also photographed the extensive, astonishing and unusual *Umbra* series of black-and-white photographs taken in Southern California, unique both in their genesis and in the 'logic of the dispositive'. (3) Furthermore, the particular light, the wastelands of suburban architectural fragments, and the strong, sharp shadow falloff in this series are turned into irritating alienations of urban landscapes by being supplemented with geometrical elements by means of masking. Precise deep black rectangles, beams, lines as if

drawn by Fred Sandback were added to the images in the dark room in an orchestration that both heightens and at the same time hollows out the visual composition.

Grey Crawford grew up on the West Coast, in Southern California, and had classical training in photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology and then at the Claremont Graduate School, only to then set out on his very own path in that art. From the early 1970s to today, i.e., for almost half a century, Grey Crawford has produced an extensive and genuinely experimental oeuvre irrespective of the art market and commissions, solely out of artistic curiosity. And that oeuvre is extraordinary. The art of photography is not as young as video art or the analogue-numerical arts. Although photography was invented almost two centuries ago, it was only granted recognition as art a few decades ago; in 1966, the artist Mel Bochner was not permitted to present his final thesis on photography at the School of Visual Arts in New York. This refusal of any genuinely aesthetic significance promoted an experimental handling of photography, above and beyond its commercial determination and utility character. Where no canon channels – let us recall Walter Benjamin's saying that photography had already overturned the judgement seat that intended to artistically assess it – it is up to curiosity to use the medium of photography as an

experimental arrangement, to explore the dispositive of the photographic. After the avant-garde new beginnings in Europe, from Pictorialism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Bauhaus to Surrealism and later Fluxus, straight photography still dominated in the USA in the 1970s. Be it that of Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, Richard Avedon or Diane Arbus, Stephen Shore or William Eggleston, American photography remained bound to a strict formalism. Opposed to this, without being truly perceived at the time, was the playful treatment, the experiment, of the 'fried photographs' of Gordon Matta-Clark, his perspectival photomontages, the "documenting" slides of Land Art by Robert Smithson and others, the narrative interventions of Vito Acconci, Hollis Frampton's analytical-aesthetic use of the medium between film and photography, and finally in 1975 the unhappy labelling by William Jenkins, at the Georges Eastman House in Rochester, of the extremely heterogeneous photographs of Lewis Baltz, Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Stephen Shore and Harry Wessel as the New Topographic Movement. In this narrow canonisation, any form of school-formation, be it subjective photography, auteur photography, New Topographics or the so-called Dusseldorf School, primarily established an economic basis for the photography art market emerging at the time, at the expense of the singularity of experimental pictorial invention.

If the works of Grey Crawford are to be situated historically, then in this time context. The uniqueness of this art, however, lies in its coherence and continuity, without it ever complying with any objectification in the mercantile sector. From the California Contact Sheets (1971) to today's large-format colour diptychs, Grey Crawford's photographs preserve their experimental aesthetic, be that with filmic references, performative installations and actions, or abstract compositions. Added to this is the particular spatiality determined by the 'light and space' of Southern California, in which the art of Ed Ruscha, Lewis Baltz, James Turrell, Robert Irwin, Karl Benjamin und John McLaughlin was also born. Links could be found to all of them. McLaughlin's meditative, strictly symmetrical paintings ('sharp edge painting') and the 'ironic' fragmentation of Lewis Baltz are important references that do not diminish the singularity of Grey Crawford's art. It is described appropriately in the statement by John McLaughlin that art arises from a "collage in the mind".

1 Max Kozloff, "Where Have All The People Gone? Contemporary American Photography" (1980), in idem. *The Privileged Eye. Essays on Photography*, University of New Mexico Press Albuquerque, 1987, pp. 197-204.

2 Grey Crawford, *El Mirage*, August 9th Press Claremont, 1978. See the new expanded edition: Grey Crawford, *El Mirage*, Hatje Cantz Berlin, 2018.

3 First published by Timothy Persons (ed.), Grey Crawford, *Finding Bones*, Kehrer Verlag Heidelberg Berlin, 2017.

GREY CRAWFORD

Chroma



INTRODUCTION

by Timothy Persons

Once again, Grey Crawford has pleasantly surprised the art world with his introduction of his color photographic works from his Chroma series from the late 1970's. Following in the same line as in his previous black and white publications *Finding Bones* (*Umbra* series) 2017 and *El Mirage* 2018, Crawford takes us on another unexpected journey into his earlier thinking, with his experimental use of color photography as his new syntax for deepening the depth of his darkroom experiments to find his own visual language. Unlike his earlier works, Chroma represented a new departure, as it opened up different possibilities that b/w photography couldn't. By still using his process of combining images with abstract shapes, the addition of color expanded that reality by how it was associated with another context. In this series of photographs, Crawford reinforces his influences from the Mexican architect Luis Barragán, with his use of color as a means to define space, to the Chicano movements murals that decorated the LA freeways of the 1970's. Crawford states "I was telling a story with a new language. Piecing it together from a contemporary world, the world that I lived in and not a historical pastiche of form and content. The density of the story could be anything I wanted, varying horizontally across the picture plane, creating depth into the image, adding

or subtracting time and it's various horizons, or creating a recourse of circular time." Conceptual color photography in the 1970's was in its infancy. Crawford used it as a means to propel the image and shapes into a fuller meaning. This deepened synesthesia that color provides, helped Crawford to weave within the image a place for pause and reflection, a simple shift that his previous b&w tones could only hint at.



Chroma, 2020, exhibition view, Persons Projects



Chroma, 2020, exhibition view, Persons Projects



Chroma, 2020, exhibition view, Persons Projects

GREY CRAWFORD

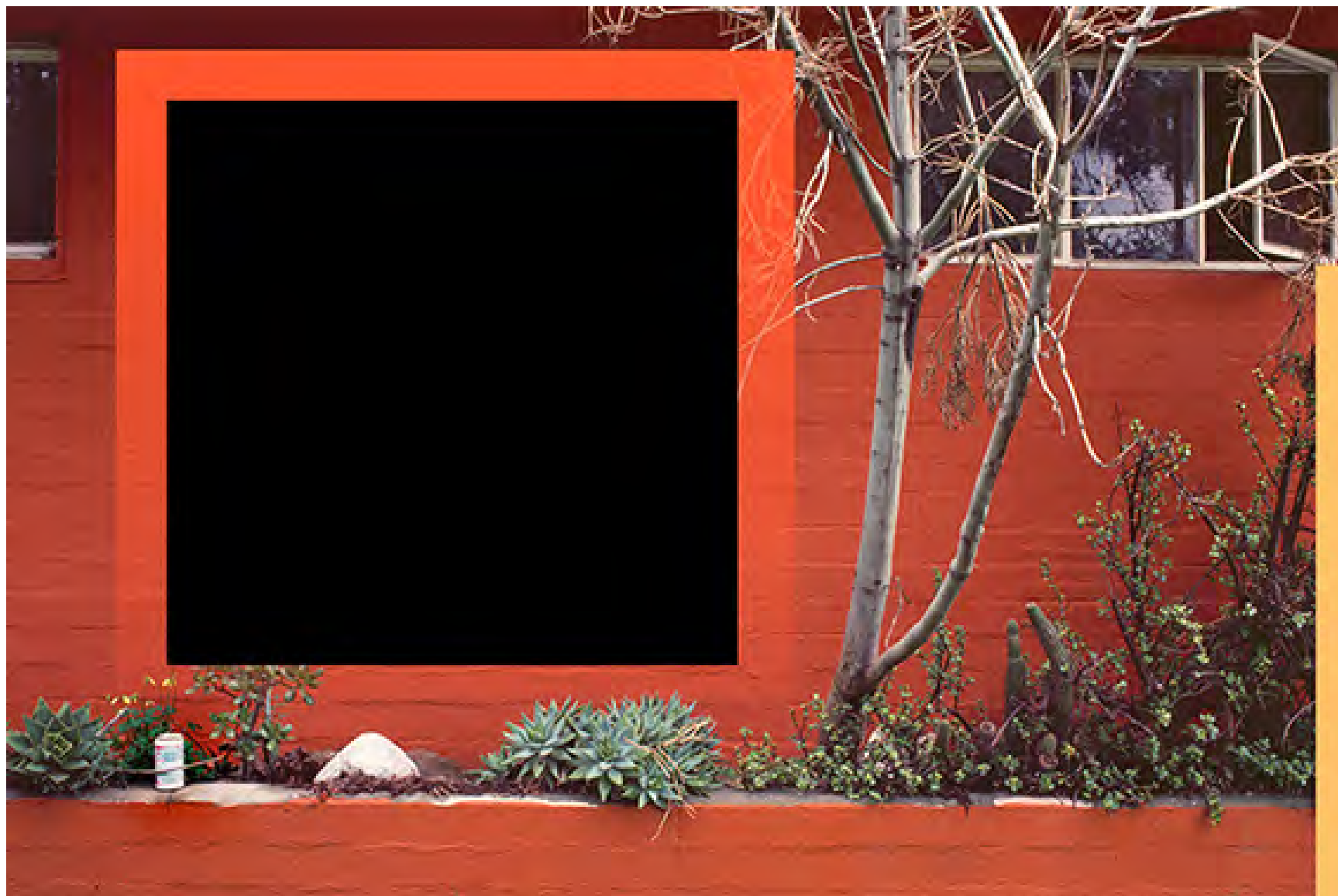
Chroma
selected works



Chroma #16, 1978, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



Chroma #70, 1979, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



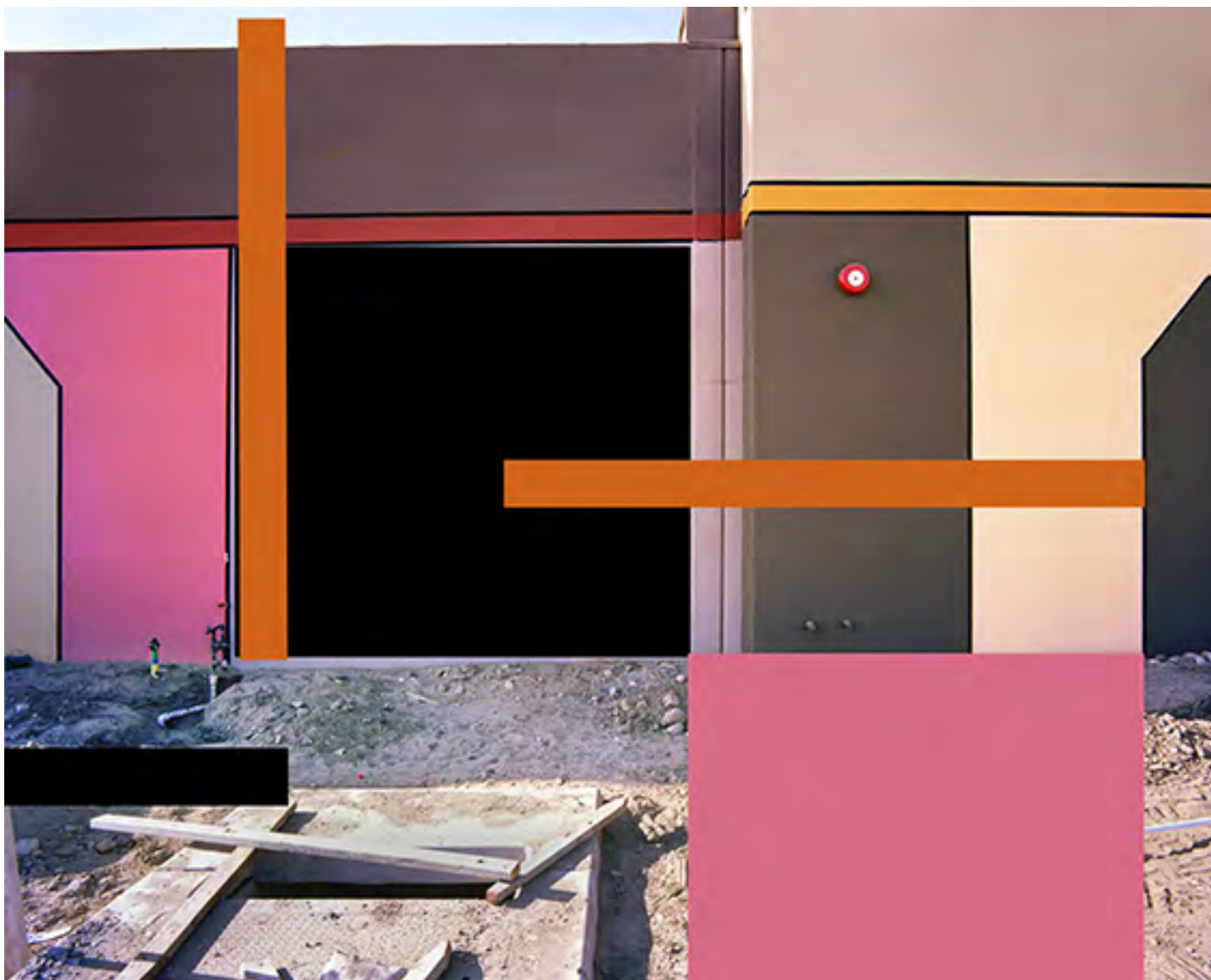
Chroma #119, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



Chroma #142, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



Chroma #166, 1980, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



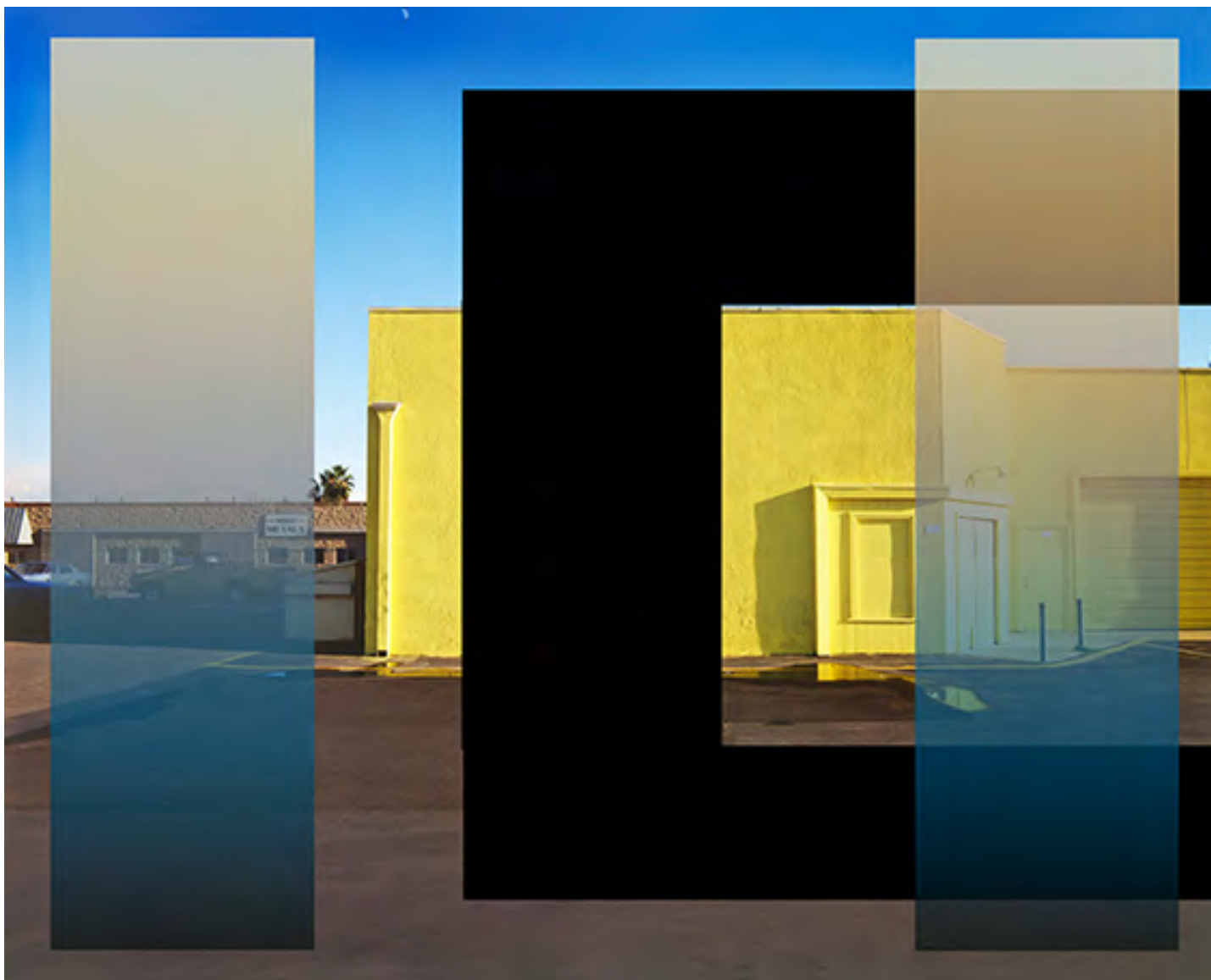
Chroma #199, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #231, 1982, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #121, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



Chroma #141, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #144, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 87 cm



Chroma #167, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #180, 1981, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #233, 1982, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #258, 1980, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm



Chroma #275, 1983, Archival pigment print, 62 x 74,5 cm

GREY CRAWFORD

Umbra



INTRODUCTION

"I am a visual bilingual, I see in Abstract, and Image. Combining the language of painting and the language of photography one has left the territory of clear distinctions. I want to dissolve the everyday in the river of forgetfulness and arrive on the opposite bank, far from the center; landing at a new place. In looking at our visual landscape I choose elements that add up to a new whole, a visual harmony of "rhyming" shapes creating a visual syntax to view our times. This recombination of diverse elements gives me a place to see our world in a new way. My experience of growing up in Southern California with the work of Karl Benjamin, and John McLaughlin among others was a rich introduction to the abstract painting of this time."

Grey Crawford

Grey Crawford's *Umbra* series are black and white silver gelatin prints—photographed throughout the early 1970's in Southern California and just recently rediscovered after being archived for the past 40 years. Drawing upon his classical training from his studies at the Rochester Institution of Technology, Crawford stands out as a unique figure from that time period.

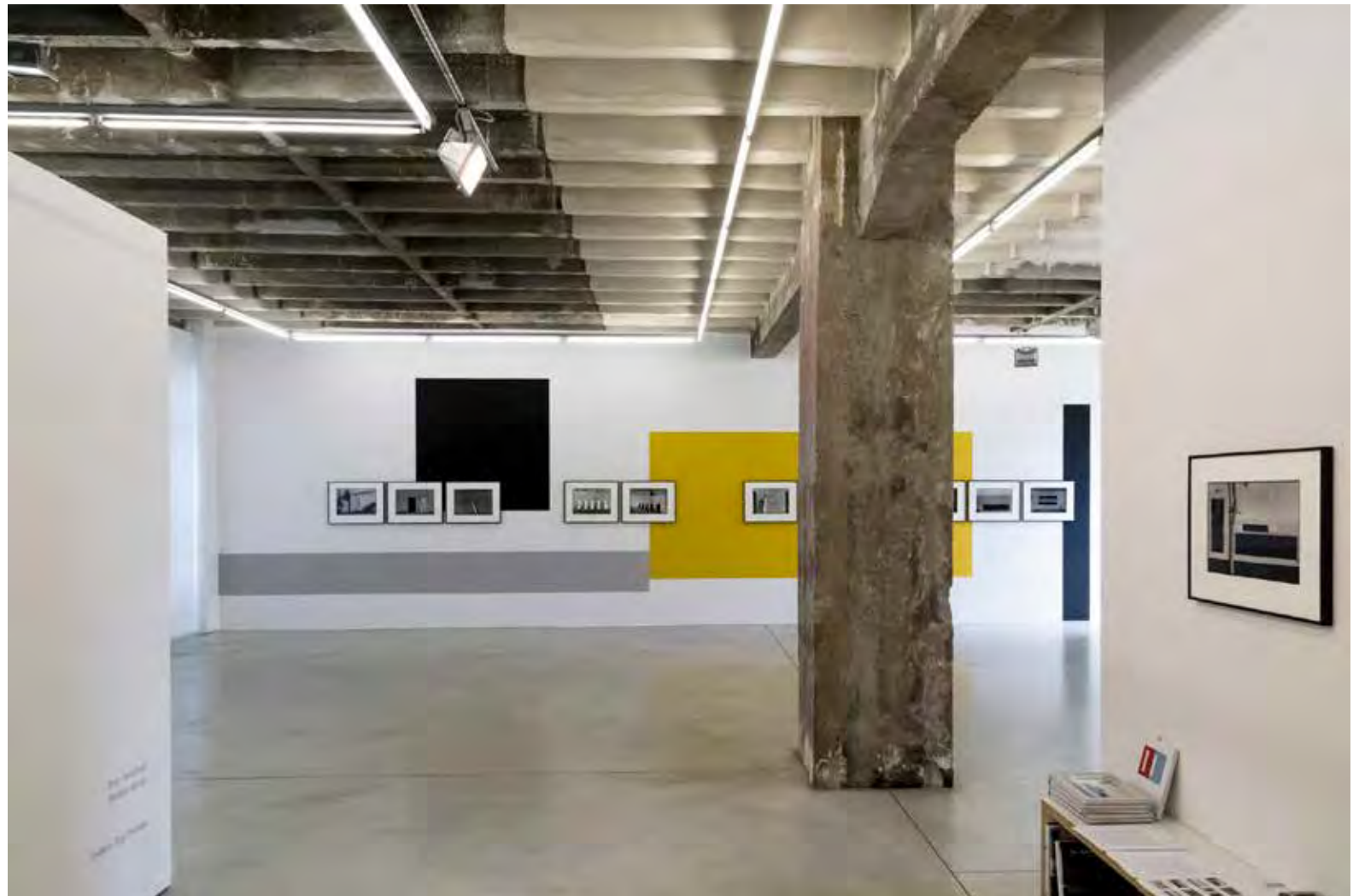
This is most evident in Crawford's early black and white photographs, which combine Benjamin's sense of construction with McLaughlin's zen-like capacity for reduction. By using the darkroom as his palette, Crawford chooses his selected backgrounds

with a Lewis Baltz-like sense of austerity as a means for introducing these hard-edge shapes and using them as the building blocks for his own language.

His darkroom experiments with paper masks, cut specific to each image and shape, differ him from the day's topographers such as Lewis Baltz. These masks are used to allow separate exposures in any area he selects, going from white, through grey tones to solid black. Grey Crawford incorporates these basic geometric shapes and lines into his photographs, creating his own landscapes, almost like a stage for an undefined play.

PERSONS PROJECTS BERLIN 2017

Grey Crawford *Umbra*





PARIS PHOTO 2017

Grey Crawford *Umbra*



PHOTO LONDON 2018

Grey Crawford *Umbra*



ARTISSIMA
TORINO 2018

Grey Crawford *Umbra*



ARCO MADRID 2018

Grey Crawford *Umbra*



PRIVATE HOUSE BERLIN 2019

Grey Crawford *Umbra*



GREY CRAWFORD

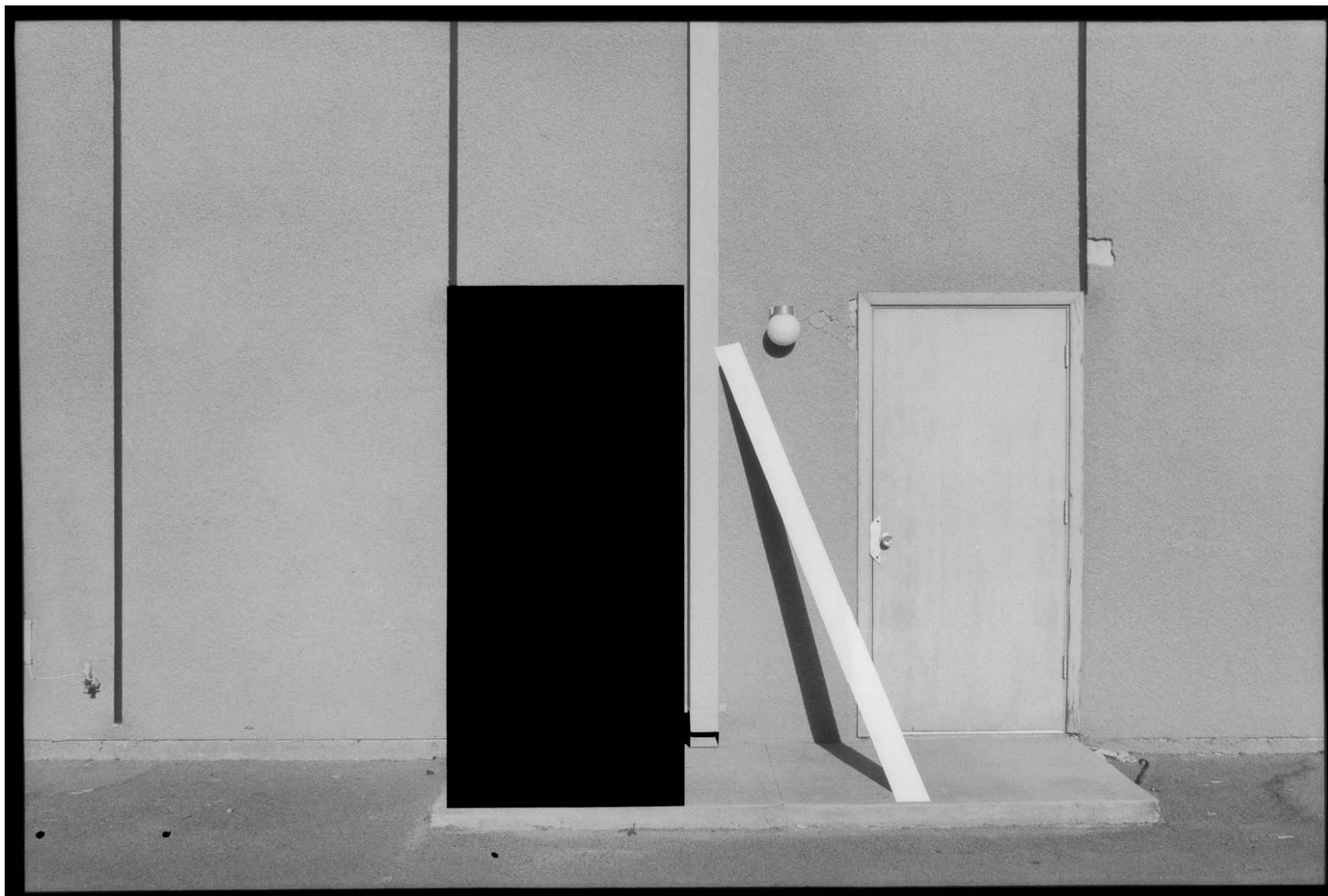
Umbra
selected photos



Umbra #02, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



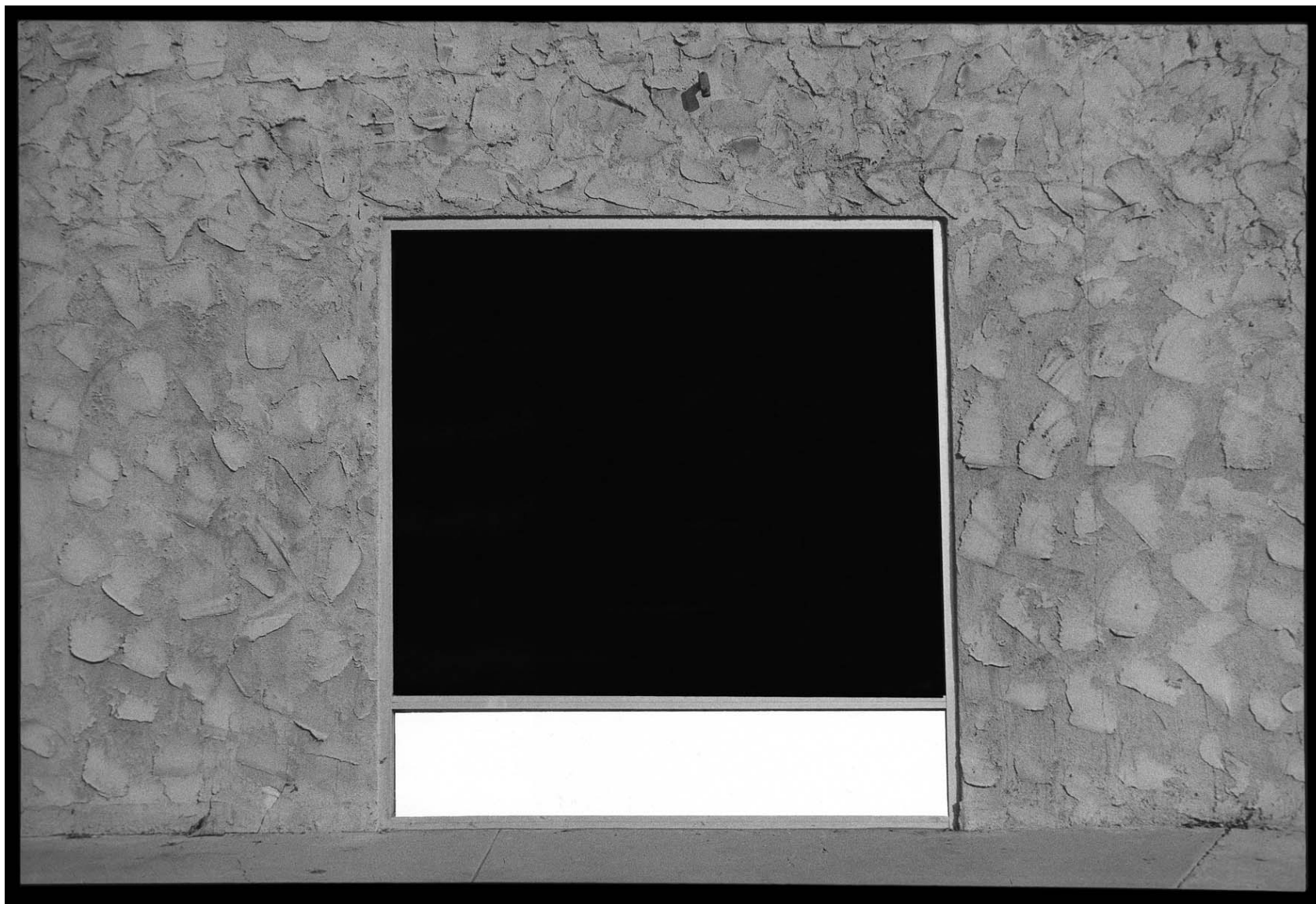
Umbra #30, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #33, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



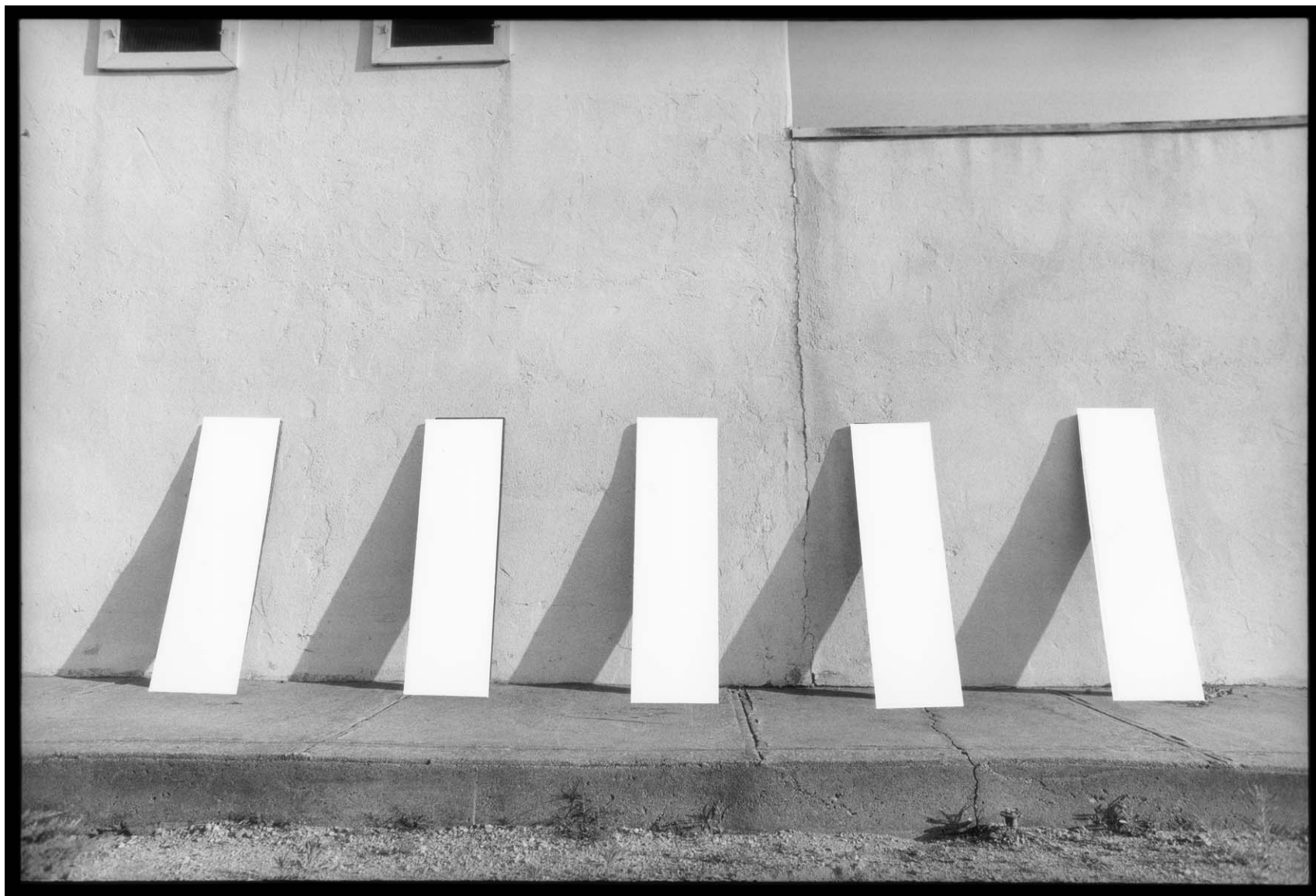
Umbra #16, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #03, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #31, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



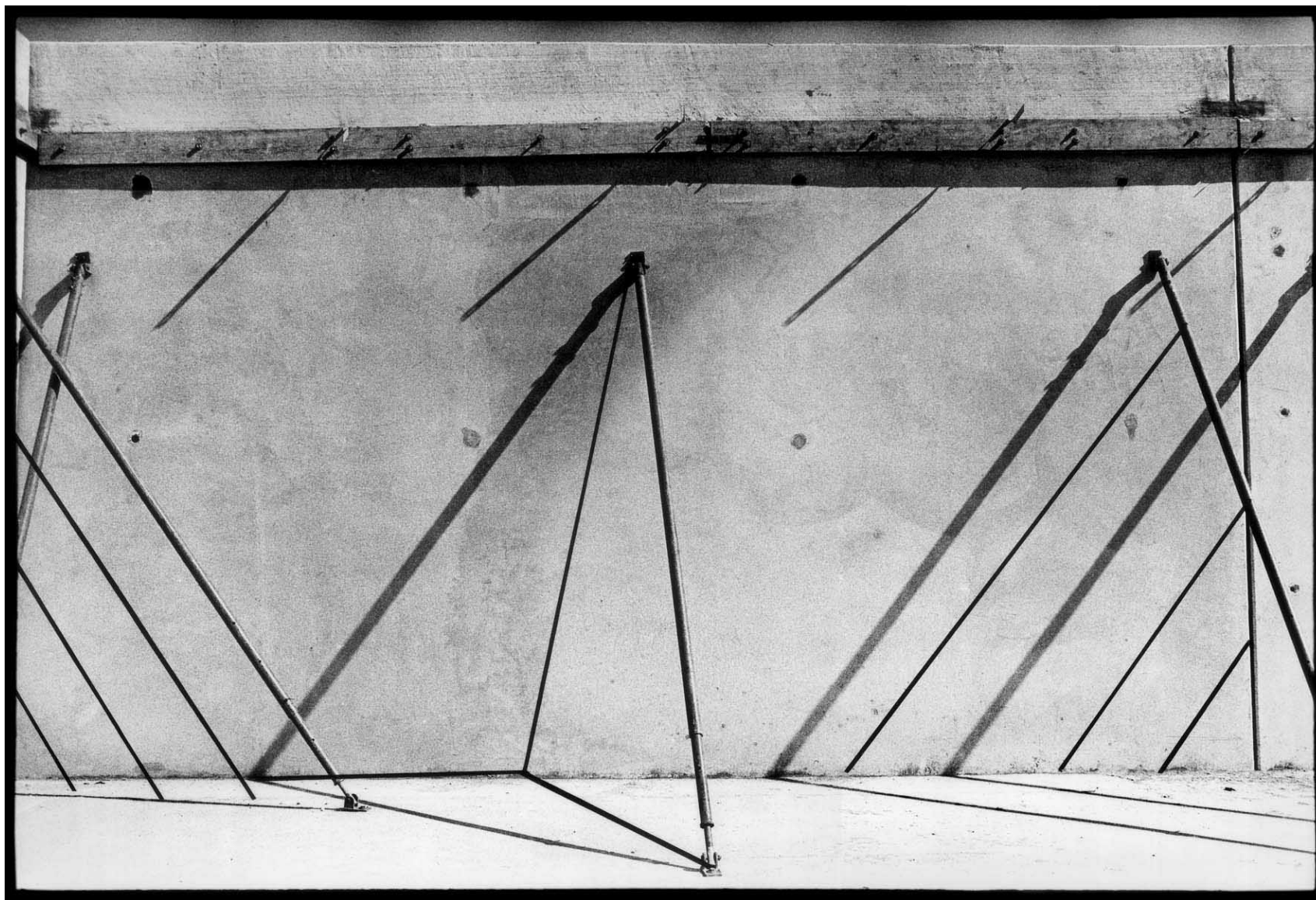
Umbra #20, 1976, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #38, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #07, 1975, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



Umbra #48, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm

GREY CRAWFORD

El Mirage



INTRODUCTION

by Timothy Persons

Grey Crawford's *El Mirage* photographic series from 1975–78 represents his very unique experimental play through the use of minimalistic special constructions on a dry lake bed in the southern Mojave Desert. These glass and steel plate configurations feel more like performance-enhanced sketches that combine the vastness of the chosen site with a hazy horizon that seemingly has no end. Yet, to fully appreciate the content of these early photographs, we first must understand the cultural climate that they evolved from. The Claremont colleges of the 1960s and 70s were considered to be the Ivy League of the West. The community was a liberal island in a sea of Southern California conservatism. The art scene was dominated by the earlier innovations of Millard Sheets and John McLaughlin, with a new flux of creative energy stemming from Roland Reese's directorship of the Claremont Graduate School. At the time, CalArts and the Claremont Graduate School were the two leading art centers in the Los Angeles area. CalArts was led by the teachings of John Baldessari, while Reese employed a diversity of talents that included James Turrell, Michael Brewster, Paul Soldner, and Karl Benjamin. Performance and sound art were flourishing, and ceramics was at its highest point in decades. Both schools encouraged a Post-Studio class mentality, where the focus was on no one specific medium—rather, it was on an accumulation of many disciplines with no parameters. Experimentation was the mantra of the 1970s, and Claremont was a perfect setting for this mentality to grow its roots. Crawford, who had done his BFA studies in photography at the Rochester Institute of Technology, was a fine blend of East Coast technical prowess and West Coast playfulness. Inspired by the art works of Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, and Hamish Fulton, Crawford embarked on his own interpretation, mixing various conceptual disciplines to find the flavor he could call his own. The Southern California landscape

became the palette for him to draw from—he used his local knowledge of the area as the backdrop for his sculptures. His configurations were created from a contrast of materials—glass, steel, and aluminum sheets—combined together to pull upon their sheer weight and balance to expose their natural vulnerabilities.

These unseen photographs from forty years ago, now arranged together, feel far more like a contemporary performance. The question that arises is, why were these photographs never published or exhibited? The answer has a double edge. It lies in the same spirit Crawford used to create his installations, as they reflect an openness that doesn't pertain to any one medium. With that said, when looking back to what the commercial realities were in the Los Angeles art world of the 1970s, galleries would have had a hard time defining what these photographs were. The West Coast may have appeared to be far less contentious than the East Coast, but rest assured, it was fiscally conservative when it came to purchasing art. Labels defined value, and without them, regardless of the concept or material, especially with photography, it was impossible to sell. The Western United States rendered its image of what photography was from the reality-based works of Ansel Adams and Edward Weston. In other words, reality was the currency for photography, and it wasn't considered on equal terms with painting and sculpture. Crawford wanted to expand this dialogue by mixing it up from a conceptual point of view, by manifesting reality through the medium of photography, not the other way around. His was a quest to build new architectural realities. He used his camera to capture these time-sequenced moments. His performances of throwing glass and steel plates into a specified area were meant to manifest his own plane of action, where hard meets sharp, breaking the silence on an infinite desert background.

PERSONS PROJECTS BERLIN 2019

Grey Crawford *El Mirage*



PERSONS PROJECTS
BERLIN 2019

Grey Crawford *El Mirage*





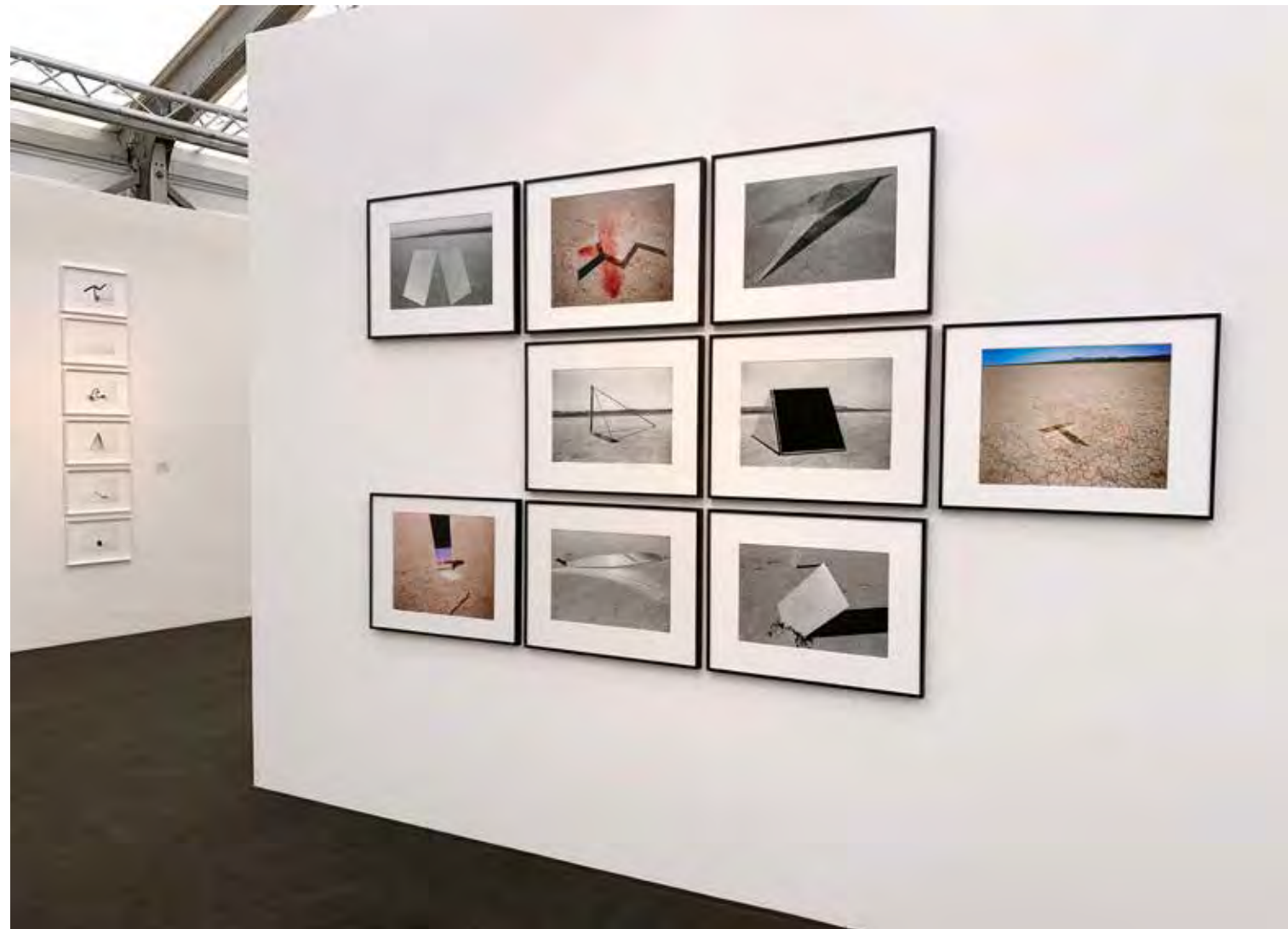
ARCO MADRID 2019

Grey Crawford *El Mirage*



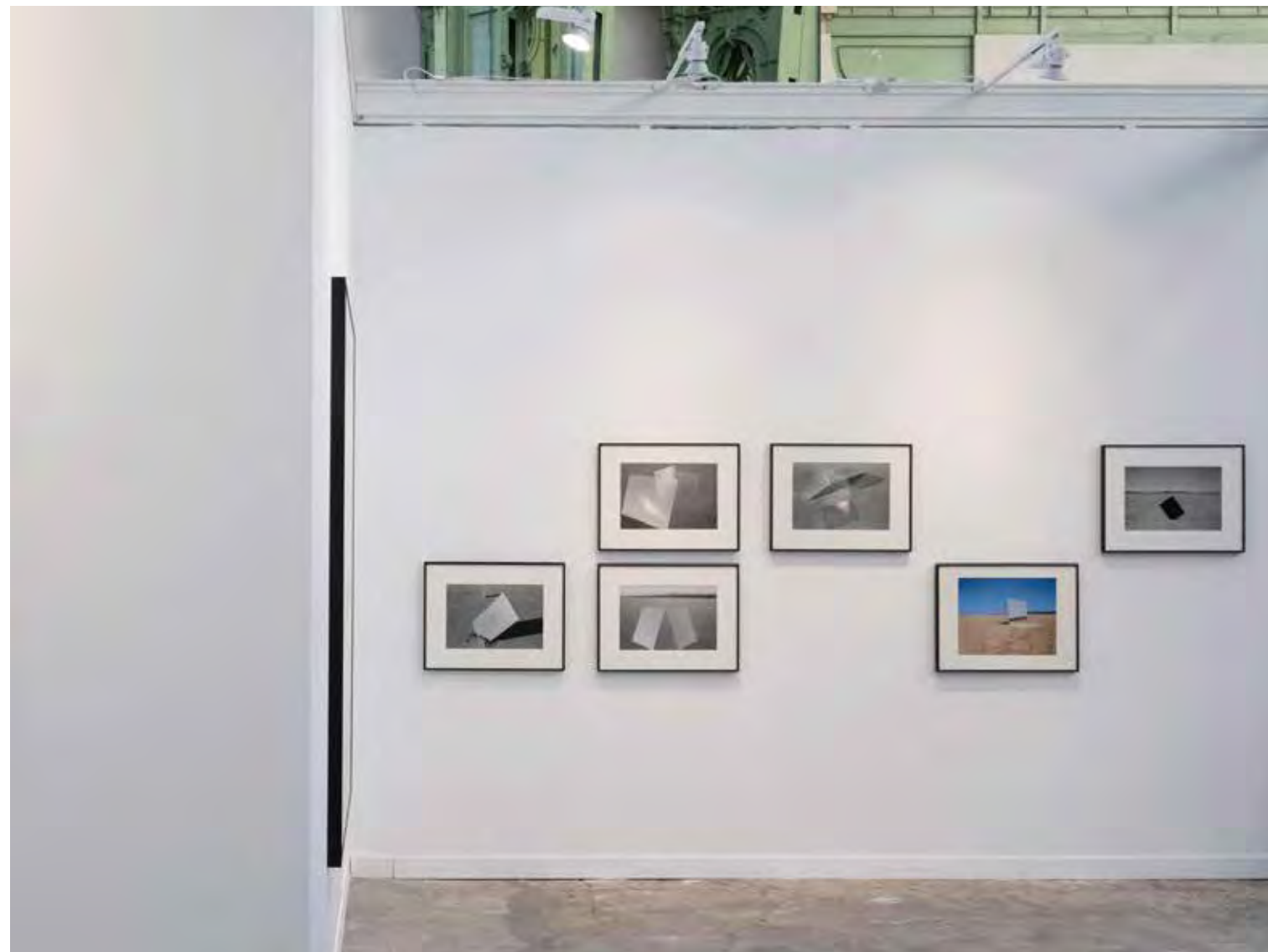
PHOTO LONDON 2019

Grey Crawford *El Mirage*



PARIS PHOTO 2018

Grey Crawford *El Mirage*

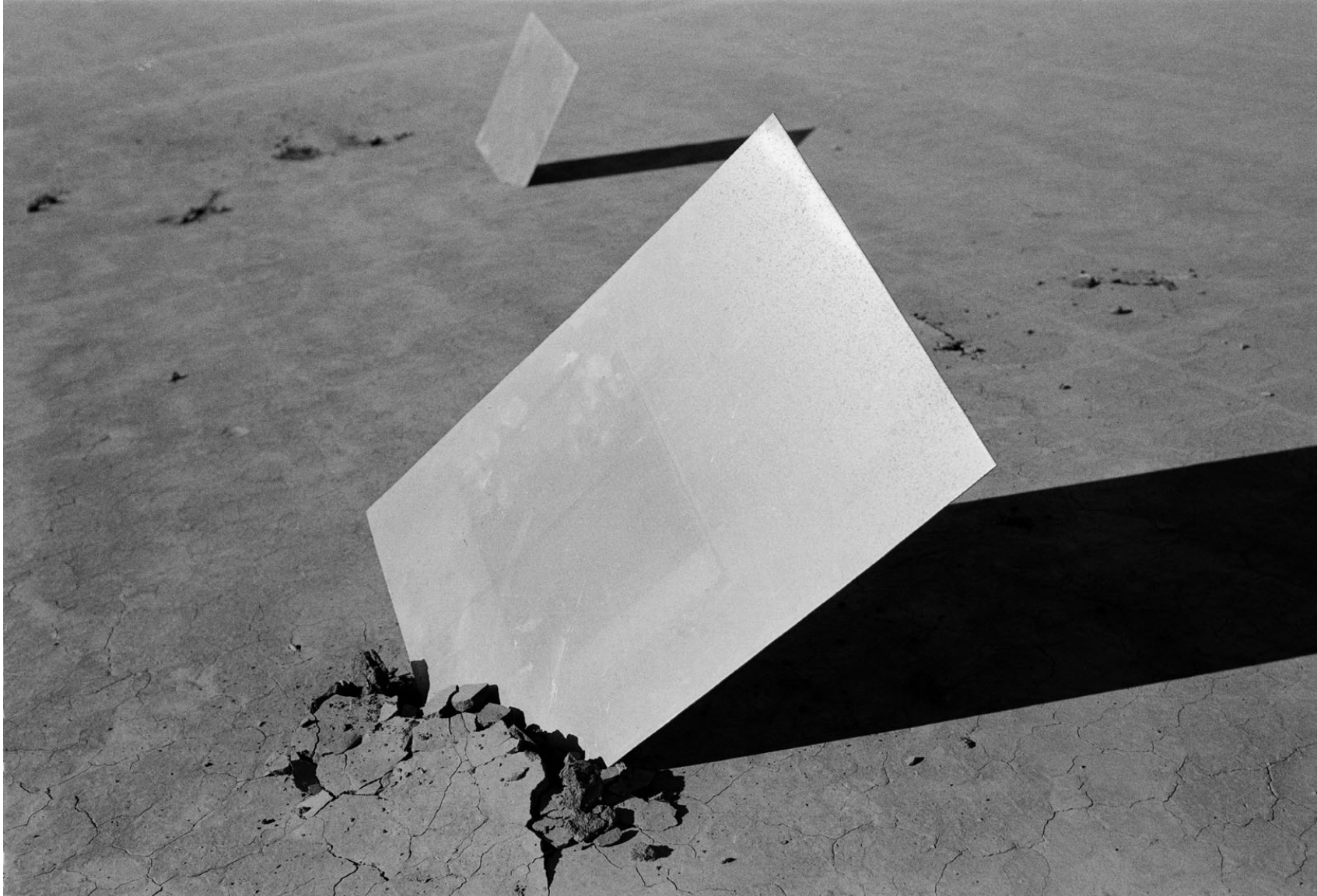


GREY CRAWFORD

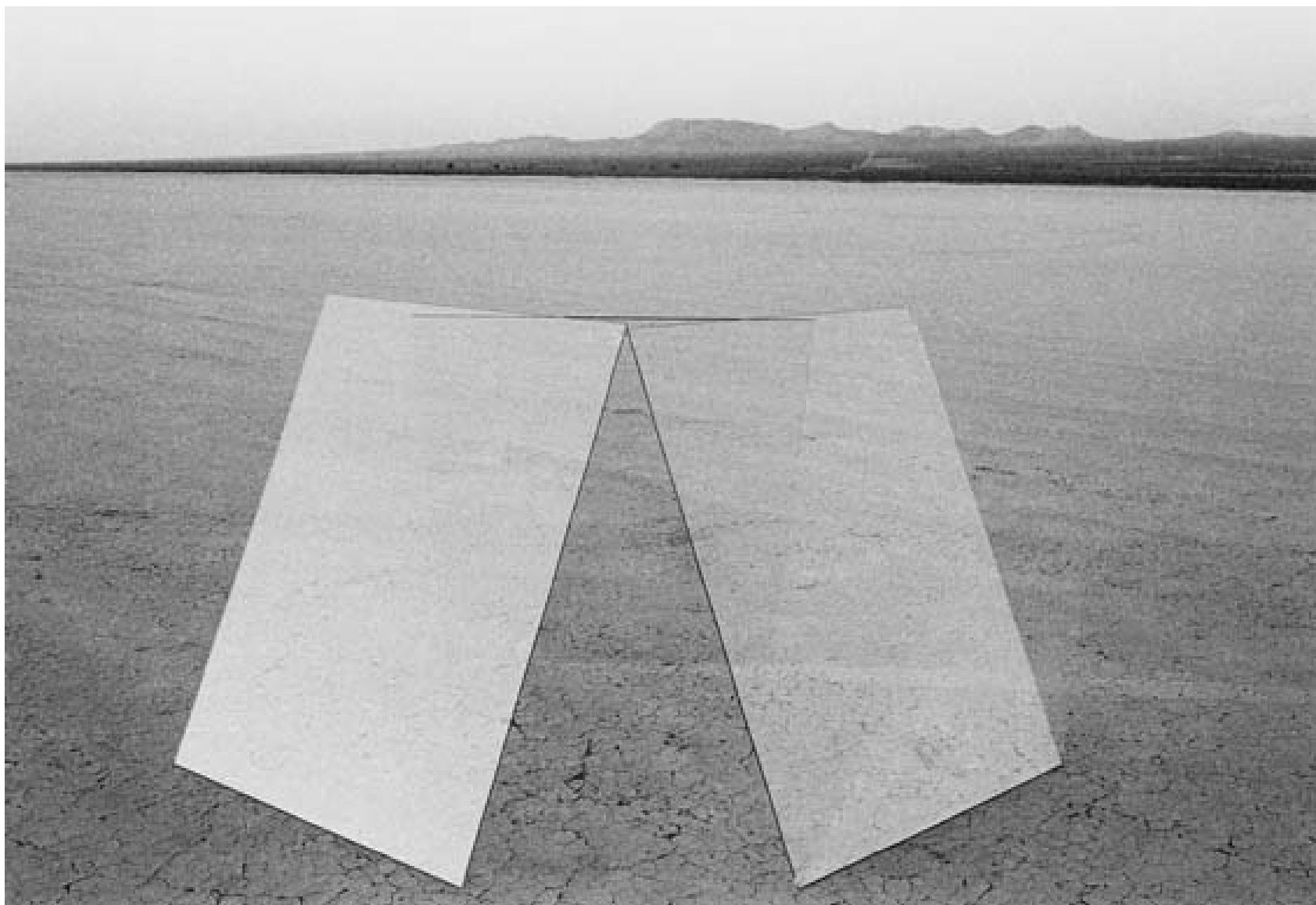
El Mirage
selected photos



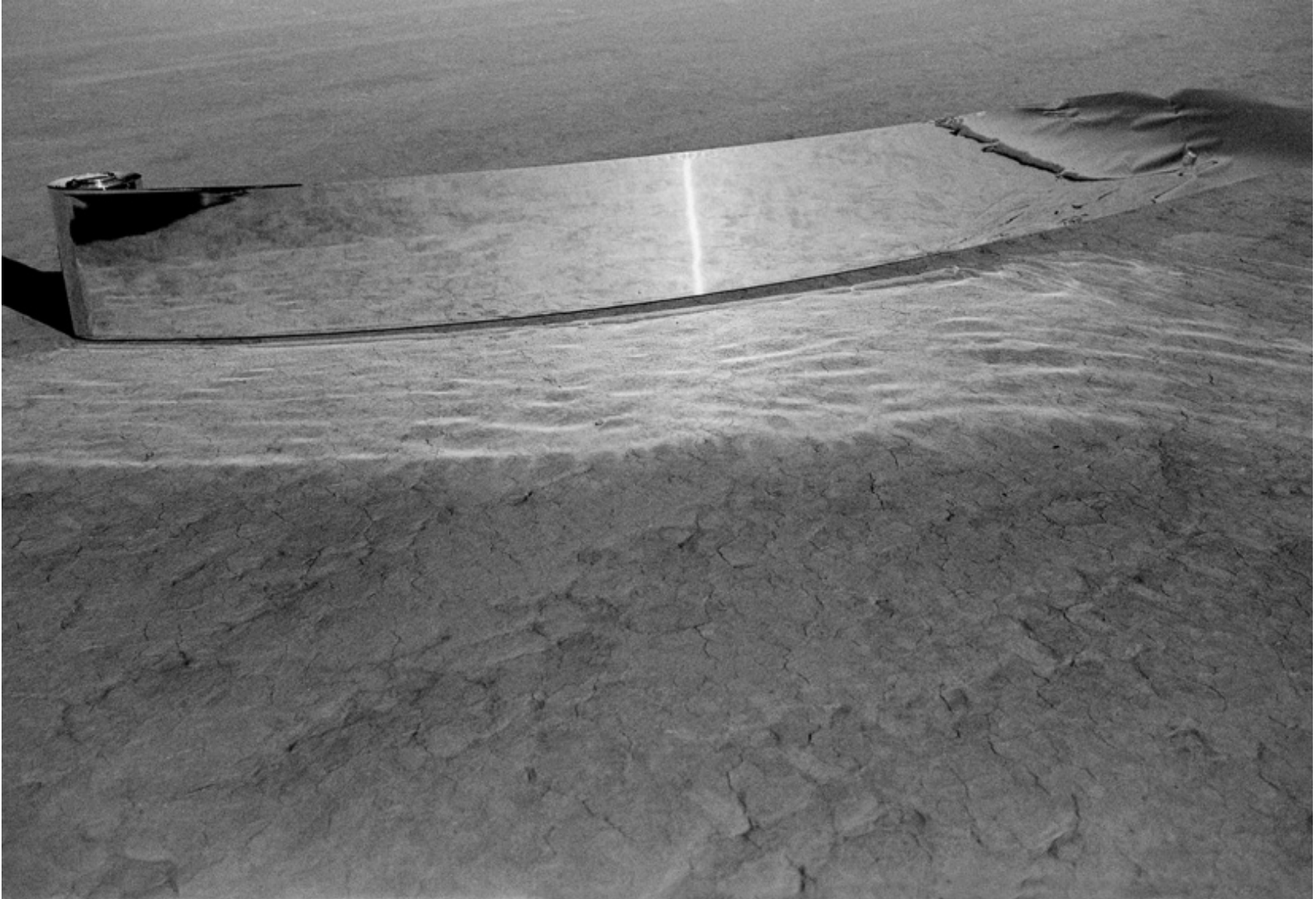
El Mirage #01, 1976, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



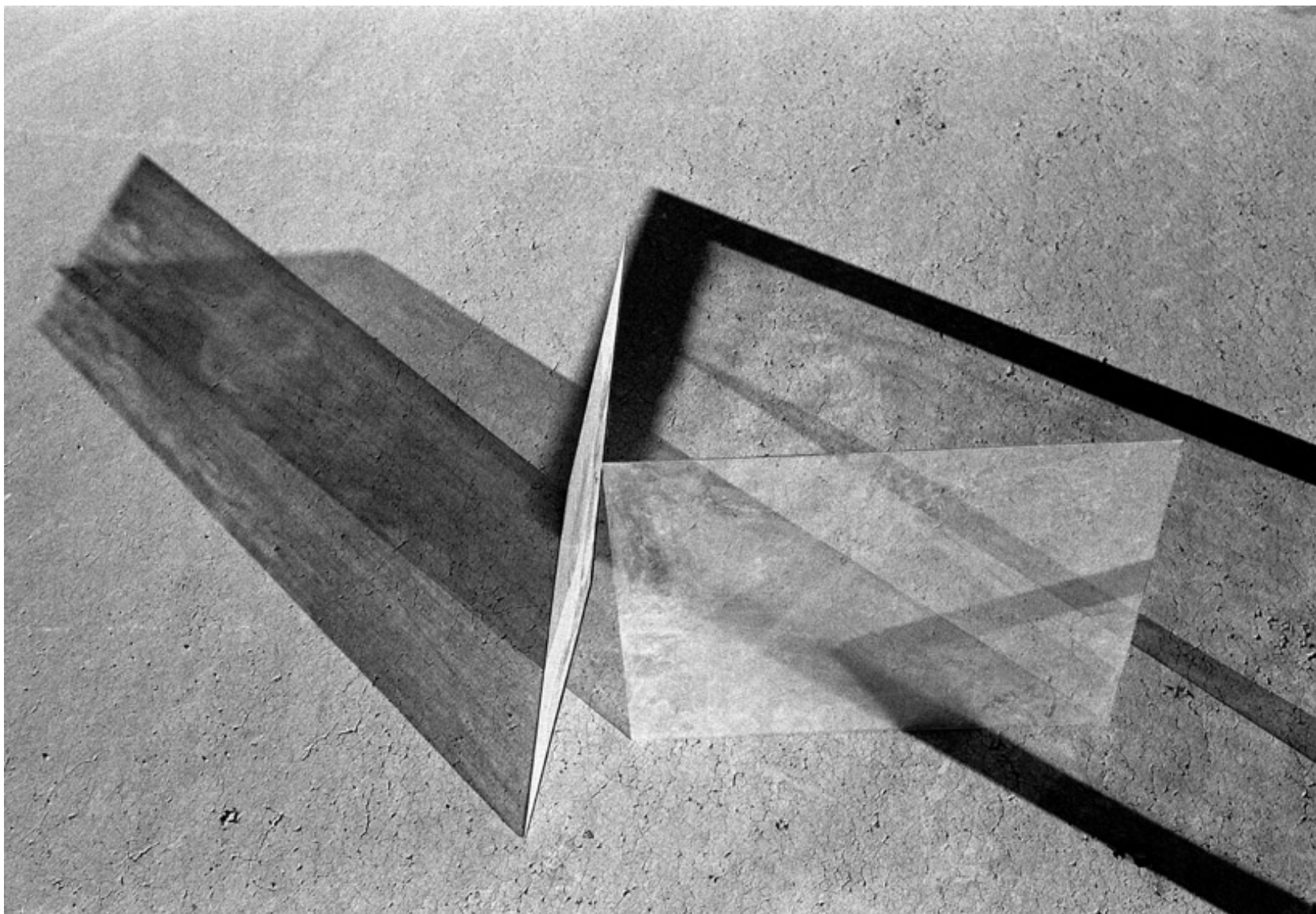
El Mirage #02, 1976, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #10, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #32, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #12, 1976, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #78, 1978, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #33, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #35, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #36, 1977, Silver gelatin print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #48, 1978, Archival pigment print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #49, 1978, Archival pigment print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm



El Mirage #58, 1978, Archival pigment print, framed, 50,5 x 66 cm

Lindenstr. 34-35, 10969 Berlin | +49 177 5018190 | berlin@personsprojects.com

Persons
Projects