



*when light
turns to dust*

Lloyd Godman

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when light turns to dust

retrieving an archive

I lived in the same house at Brighton, Dunedin, New Zealand for nearly 30 years, but it was only during the summer of 2002-3, that I discovered a series of negatives had been left lying on the ground in the cellar by a previous owner. My shock discovery led to an instant eagerness to bring these into the light and view the mysterious images, discover something of the previous owner and the people and places that might be in the forgotten images. I figured that these abandoned negatives should hold the residue of a previous light encounter embedded onto the surface, should retain a history of light locked away in silver, that they would reveal moments from a Bartsian death to the discoverer.

But my expectations were shattered; the ravages of time had taken its toll on the delicate images. Virtually all the silver embedded gelatin had been eaten away, leaving only the faintest of traces, and then only as obscure, unrecognisable marks. The memory of the people, events and places that were once held on the negatives had effectively been eroded through time until all photographic representation had vanished. Yet, despite this complete dissolving of a past memory, a stunning new image emerged from the transparency of each negative.

The developed silver had been reduced to no more than dust, but a dust with its own codes of intricate, abstract patterns. I was holding a new artifact, the evidence of light transcending, disintegrating but being reborn, phoenix like as dust patterns. The original reference to light had been replaced with decades of dust, dirt and clay fragments. Ironically dust is an enemy that can frustrate the photographer, and yet these images were now made almost entirely from generations of dust build up. Too busy at the time on a building project to rescue or discard them, I simply left the negatives where they were (like one might leave the corpse of an animal discovered in the wilderness).



Later in 2003 I was invited by Peter Fitzpatrick to submit work for an exhibition at the ACU Gallery in Canberra based on Zero –Light. Scientists, (led by Dr Lane Vaestergaard Hau of Harvard University and the Rowland Institute for Science in Cambridge, Mass., and another team lead by Dr Lukin of the Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics, also in Cambridge, had discovered that light could not only be slowed down, but stopped, and it was this discovery that inspired Fitzpatrick to Curate the show. Light has been central to my work for sometime, and late in 2002 I had completed a work at the Blue Oyster Gallery in Dunedin, New Zealand, titled “@ the Speed of Light”, and from this work Peter was interested in my interpretation of “Zero Light”.



From the invitation, the chance discovery of the discarded negatives surfaced once more, and with the connection that there was no reference to light left on the negatives, I decided to make enlargements directly from the “dust” negatives for the exhibition. At this time the negatives gained a new importance: they were retrieved from their dark damp home and placed into archival storage. While there was coincidence in someone leaving a series of negatives in the cellar of a house that a photographer would later own, and that they should lie undiscovered for years until a point when there was a conceptual collision, there was also coincidence that the transformation of the photographic to the photogramic reflected a similar change in my photographic practice. Equally strange was that I had slept over this spot for about 18 years and that during the year of this discovery I was also invited to contribute to a mailart exhibition titled “The dirt you sleep on” where artists sent soil samples to an exhibition at Santa Fe in the USA.

“When Light Turns to Dust” is a project based on enlargements from these forgotten photographic artifacts, where the silver image, the memory of light, was exchanged with layers of dust, grime and dirt. Where the alchemy of decay embedded different abstract marks over a period of years.

It was interesting how the discovery of these negatives coincided with the break up of my marriage and eventual move from the house to my new home at the Baldessin press in Australia.

Lloyd Godman 2003

The Dusty Subject

Cameron Bishop 2003

I've seen maps. I've seen figures. I've seen Foucault. I've seen enemies. However, the image that coagulates, with a gathering strength, each morning I look through our bedroom door - into the hall where Lloyd Godman's artifact #9 hangs - is that of a mad koala. Perhaps this gestalt is becoming stronger because I've been living away from Australia for almost two years now. I've lived beyond its borders, watched and read of its retreat - its cowering foetal position getting tighter and tighter - even as that privileged term light gains momentum behind the resurrection (in hyperbole only) of the nation state.

I think I might be Lloyd's mad koala. This is what I see as the image continually stamps itself into my existence. I have to see something, don't I? I cannot see the dust.

The damp environment in which the negatives sat for thirty years simultaneously destroyed and liberated the images that sit in this exhibition. Like Foucault's man in the sand analogy, the moisture washed away any trace of idealised memory as it attacked the negatives. But, ironically, you need liquid to drive the photographic process: alkalines and acids from the soil under the Godmans' house combined to destroy and resurrect - in concert with time, dust and the artist - the images in the artifact series.

When Lloyd discovered the negatives under his house, what could we hope to see: family snaps, smiles, and sun and light? This is an expectation. Perhaps if the negatives had been given the right eco-system for survival we may have seen something more sinister.

We could dust off the psychoanalyst's couch and really get into some fragmentation. We might be able to remember some of our own conflicting, disjointed thoughts that we were having when a particular photograph was taken. We can sense/remember our fragmentation as we look at these moments, because we've been shot.

They often bear, for me anyway, the Barthesian death sentence. But if it hasn't been shot, how can it be dead? The camera/shotgun (in Lloyd's photograms there is not a weapon) has not killed anyone, so how is something born? Our memories are pregnant. The dust has settled on the negatives in such a way over a period of thirty years that the objects move beyond mere enlargements of settled dust. They move beyond abstraction and punch me with their punctum. I'm forced to invest the image with my collected experience, just as I do with an object like a shotgun as I take a picture. I am Lloyd's shotgun. ³ Before I use my shotgun, I must realise that there is always a lag between the object and our perception of it, so that what we actually see is the past. In order to move through space safely I literally create wholes: stereotypes that sit in the middle of my vision to counter the hole that, literally, sits in the middle of my vision. This is the optic disk effect: it causes a blind spot where the nerve receptors leave the retina to form the optic nerve. There is no light here.

When I look out at Lloyd's artifact #9 from the warmth of my bed the impressions I get from the contrasts in the indiscriminate image of the photogram are conditioned by 'an ensemble of relations.'⁵ Just like the objects formation, in its site of abjection, in the heterotopia of Lloyd Godman's basement. ⁶ For thirty years, maybe more, people slept above these artifacts in this space. There is no light here, ⁷ in this space that is 'linked with all the others (the used, necessary space of the home) and yet somehow at variance' with them. ⁸The space, the basement, the home's heterotopia, reflects the movements made in the home it supports. The dust on the negatives realises the movements of the occupants in the home, in the bedroom. Probably, they have more accurately recorded time spent in the domicile than the original images that inhabited the negatives to begin with.

To look in the mirror, or into Lloyd's dusty negative, is to see a heterotopia:

My self is reconstituted when I look at the dust that collected in the Godmans' heterotopia, and yet I am absent at the point where I focus, so too is the centre of my vision, which, because of the optic disk effect is a hole: there is no light there. I will lap up anything you give me. I am Lloyd Godman's blind, fragmented puppy.

I like to chew on my own tail, much like the scientists' that have discovered a way to stop light. They've created their own heterotopia, their absent selves are inside that glass chamber they stop light in. Perhaps they are pre-empting the end of our sun. This is okay, seeing as though in quantum mechanics, according to the strange rules of light, matter can be in two places at once. My matter is in Lloyd's artifact; the Godmans' movements over the last thirty years have mattered in the creation and discovery of the artifacts. I'm moved to ask: what does id matter?

I desire' to witness my own matter in other matter. I want to fix that matter, ¹² stabilise myself, and I don't care how I do it, but I do it all the time. I am the corpse proper that fabricates itself inside the promised utopia of the sitcom. These are my given stage co-ordinates, and this is how I read when confronted by Lloyd Godman's maps: ¹³ I imbibe the controlled light (in analogue or digital) of the television (or computer, or gallery, or home, or nature), take my cue, suspend my disbelief, and author a mad koala. I am Lloyd Godman's mad koala.
14 15

End Notes

1 This is general speculation, and it comes from anxious observation, but happy snaps, sun and light always have a flip side. They are often one big smile at an event that might be considered heterotopic. These heterotopic situations can be birthdays, holidays, and commercial festivals like Christmas Day etc... Everyone in family photographs smiles (at least they're meant to). But if we could, somehow, rearrange the grains (or pixels) of a group/family/posed-subject snapshot to represent the dusty thoughts that are frozen behind the fixed smile, some of the subjects might be in for some serious couch time.

2 See Bill Henson and his couch potatoes.

3 Jean Baudrillard states in his book *The Perfect Crime*. Trans. Chris Turner, London, Verso, 1996, p.52: 'The fact that when I perceive this star it has perhaps already disappeared – a relationship that can be extended, relatively speaking, to any physical object or living being – this is the ultimate foundation, the material definition...of illusion'

4 Anne Marie Seward Barry, *Visual Intelligence*, State University of New York, 1997, p.26. Barry adds 'to see in whole images is not to see at all.'

5 Michel Foucault, "Different Spaces," in *Aesthetics Method and Epistemology*, Ed. James D. Faubion, Trans. Robert Hurley and Others, New Press, New York, 1998, p.178.

6 Or maybe cellar or vault or subterranean vault, I use the American terminology with regret.

7 Or in other heterotopias (according to Foucault) like the cemetery, rest home, psychiatric hospital, library, museum etc...

8 Ibid. no. 4.

9 Ibid. no .4. p.179.

10 Which is scheduled, in about four billion years, to turn whatever organisms are left on our tiny planet into space dust.

11 But it doesn't matter: now the object is no longer anything but that immense and anguished desire for the other desire. Of course, the object is first known by the subject as other, as different from it, but at the moment it reduces itself to desire, the object (the artifact, the mad koala or, Lloyd's art of fiction), in a tremor that is no less anguished, is not distinct from it: the two desires meet, intermingle and merge into one.' From Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, Eds. F.Botting & S.Wilson, Blackwell Publishers, USA, 1997. p.265.

12 Much like Lloyd stabilised the dust on the negatives with fixative.

13 Which of course, as Baudrillard (*Simulacrum and Simulations*, Selected Writings, ed. Mark Poster, Stanford University Press, 1988, p.186) pointed out: the 'territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.' Or to put it another way, the dust coagulates to form the image of the object and it is the dust that precedes the territory. I am sensitive to dust (I'm allergic to a whole host of things): it always obscures my view so I have to believe in it. The dust is the pixelated map, and I stumble through it.

14 Actually, maybe I'm John Howard's mad koala.

15 In his short story, *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, (in "Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings," Eds. Donald A.Yates & James E.Irby, Penguin, UK p.29.) Jorge Luis Borge writes: 'We discovered (such a discovery is inevitable in the late hours of the night) that mirrors have something monstrous about them. Then Bios Casares recalled that one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar had declared that mirrors and copulation are abominable, because they both increase the number of men.'

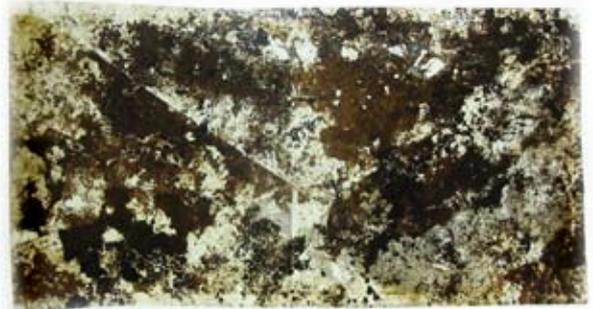
a selection of retrieved artifacts

Once retrieved, the negatives were treated as artefacts that might have been painstakingly unearthed from an ancient archaeological site. Each negative was catalogued with a number and archived as any precious artefact or photographic negative might be in a similar manner that I would treat any negative I had shot with a camera.

Once removed from the site, the dust on the surface of the negatives became dry and tended to flake off the support base in the process of arranging the negatives for cataloguing and making the photographic enlargements. The dust was stabilised to some extent with an art fixative spray normally used to fix charcoal and pastel drawings.

A magnified examination of the negatives on a light table revealed the reference to the original photographic representation had been totally replaced with a wonderfully tonally rich transparency of dust and grime that had the potential to enlarge through the normal photographic process.

The abandoned negatives had metamorphosed into a new image without realistic representation that symbolised the shift in my art practice from the traditional photograph to the photogram.



when light turns to dust

photographic works by Lloyd Godman

catalogue of works

each photogram/negative was enlarged and printed onto Agfa Multicontrast Classic 12" x 16" fibre based photographic paper via a 5" x 7" enlarger with a glass negative carrier, which afforded an blackboarder around the negative area and then the prints were selenium toned.





when light turns to dust artifact #1 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #2 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #3 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



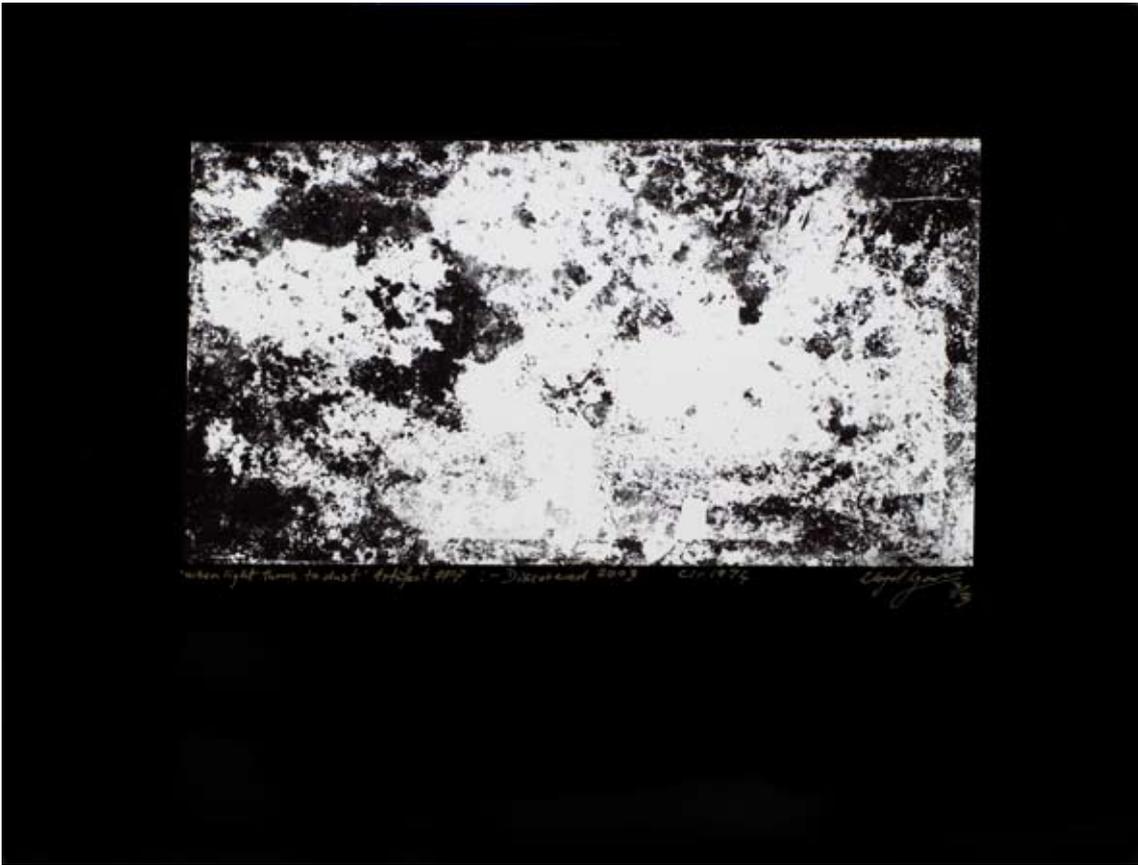
when light turns to dust artifact #4 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #5 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #6 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #7 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #15 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #8 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #9 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

when light turns to dust artifact #9 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #10 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #11 - Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003
Clayton G. ...
3

when light turns to dust artifact #11 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

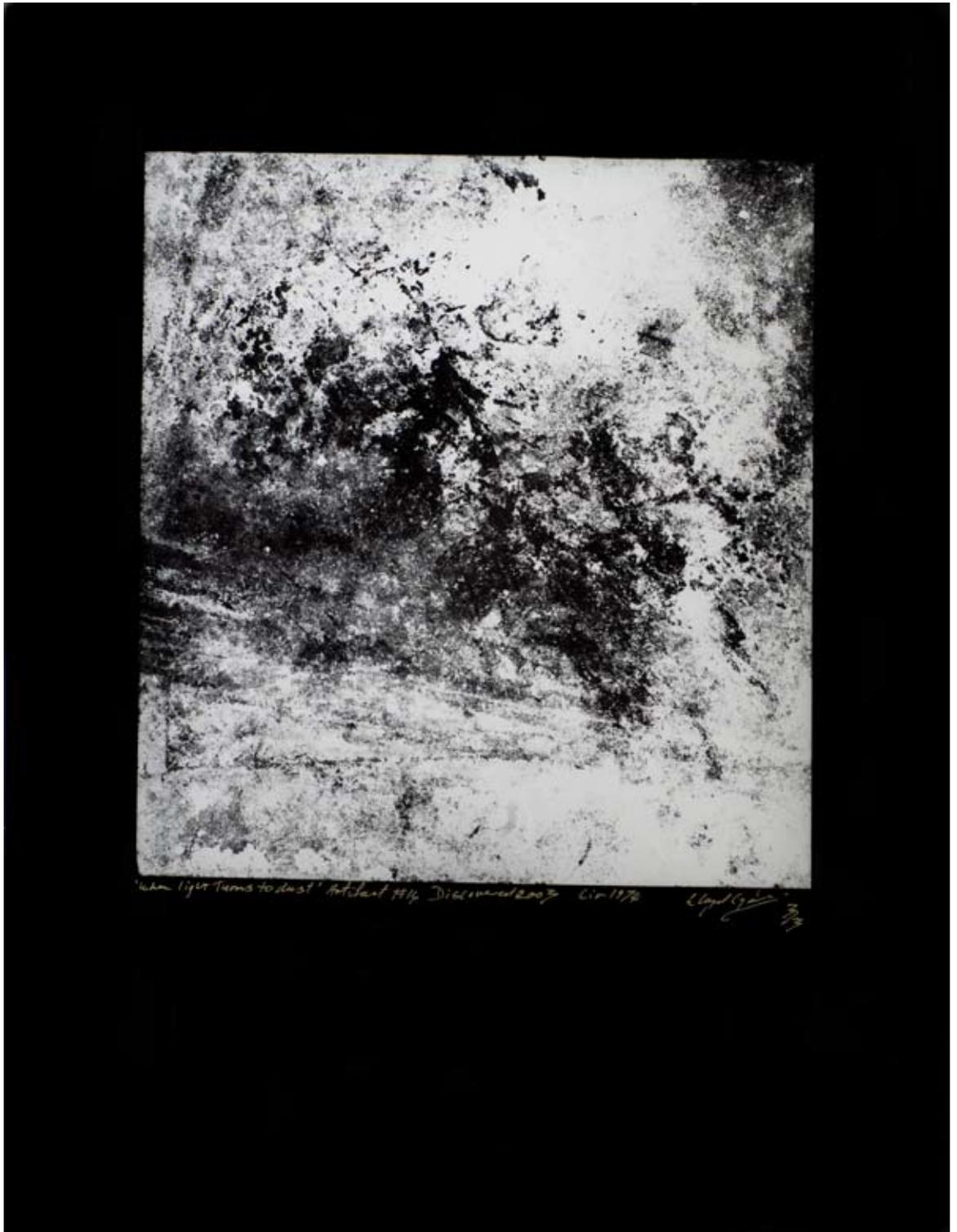


when light turns to dust artifact #12 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

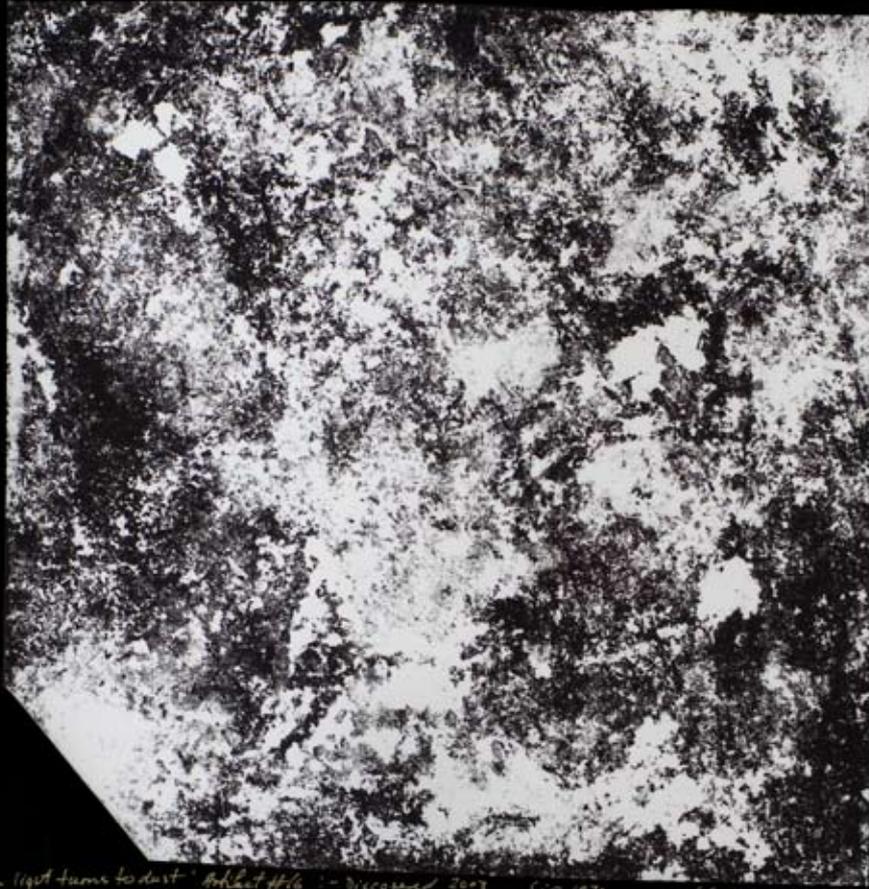


when light turns to dust artifact #13 - Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003
Clayton

when light turns to dust artifact #13 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

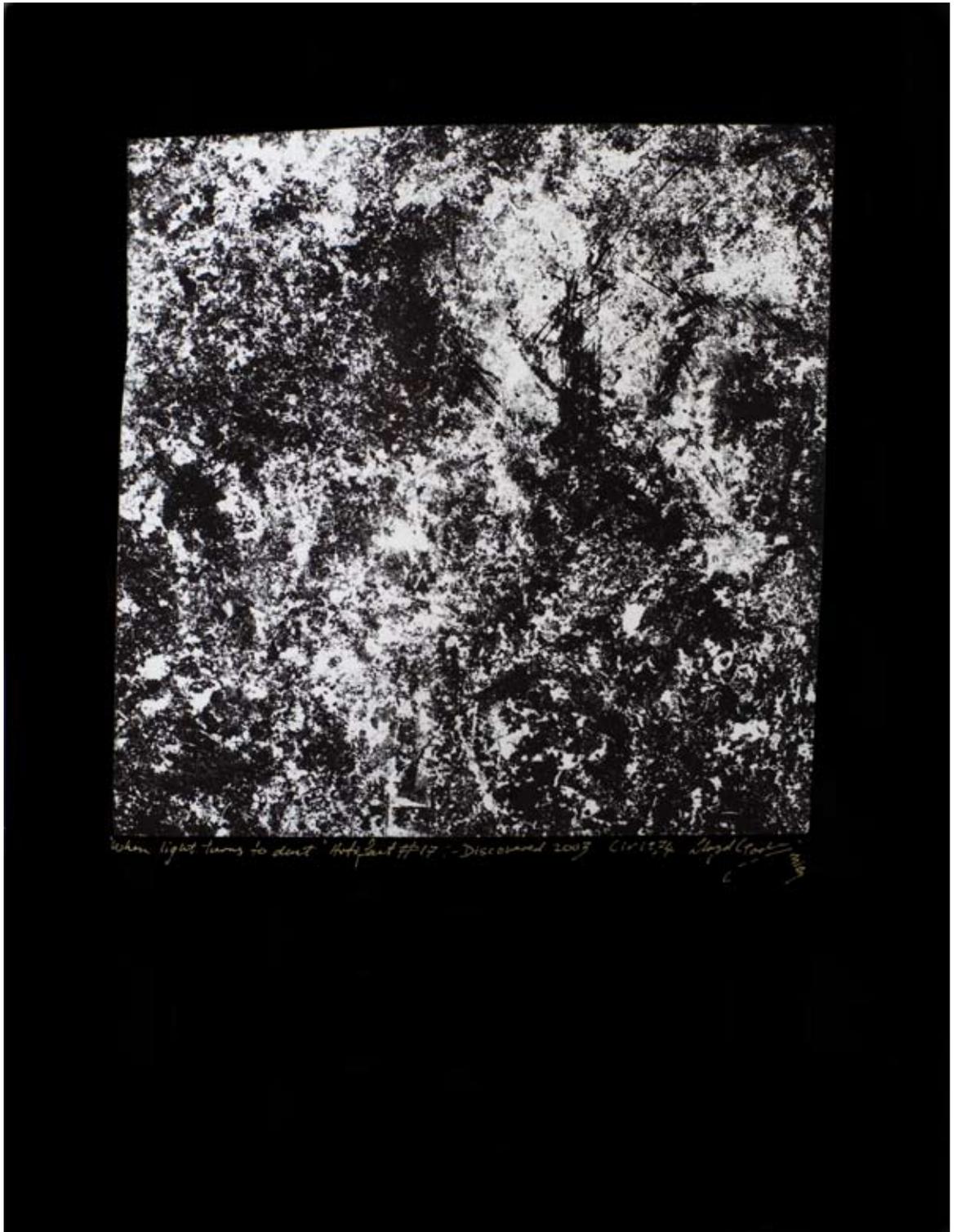


when light turns to dust artifact #14 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

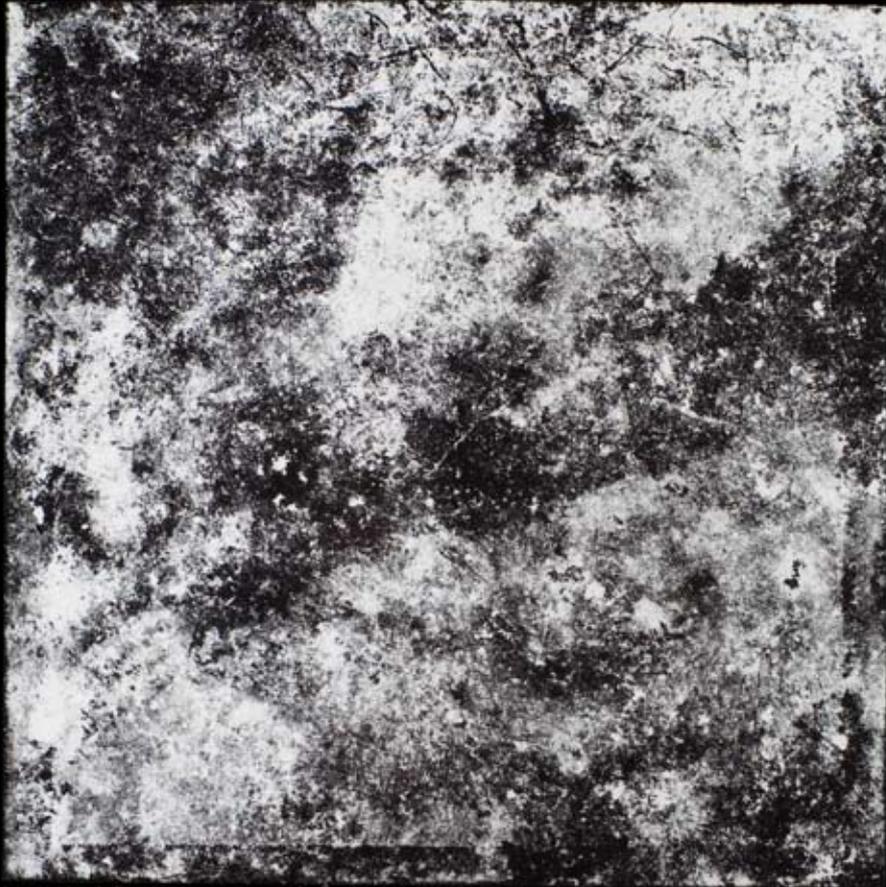


when light turns to dust artifact #16 - Discovered 2003 Cir 1974

when light turns to dust artifact #16 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #17 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust · artifact #18 · Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003 *Cloud G*

when light turns to dust artifact #18 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #19 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #20 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #21 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003



when light turns to dust artifact #22 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 *Greg Gann* 1/3

when light turns to dust artifact #22 Discovered 2003 Cir 1974 - 2003

