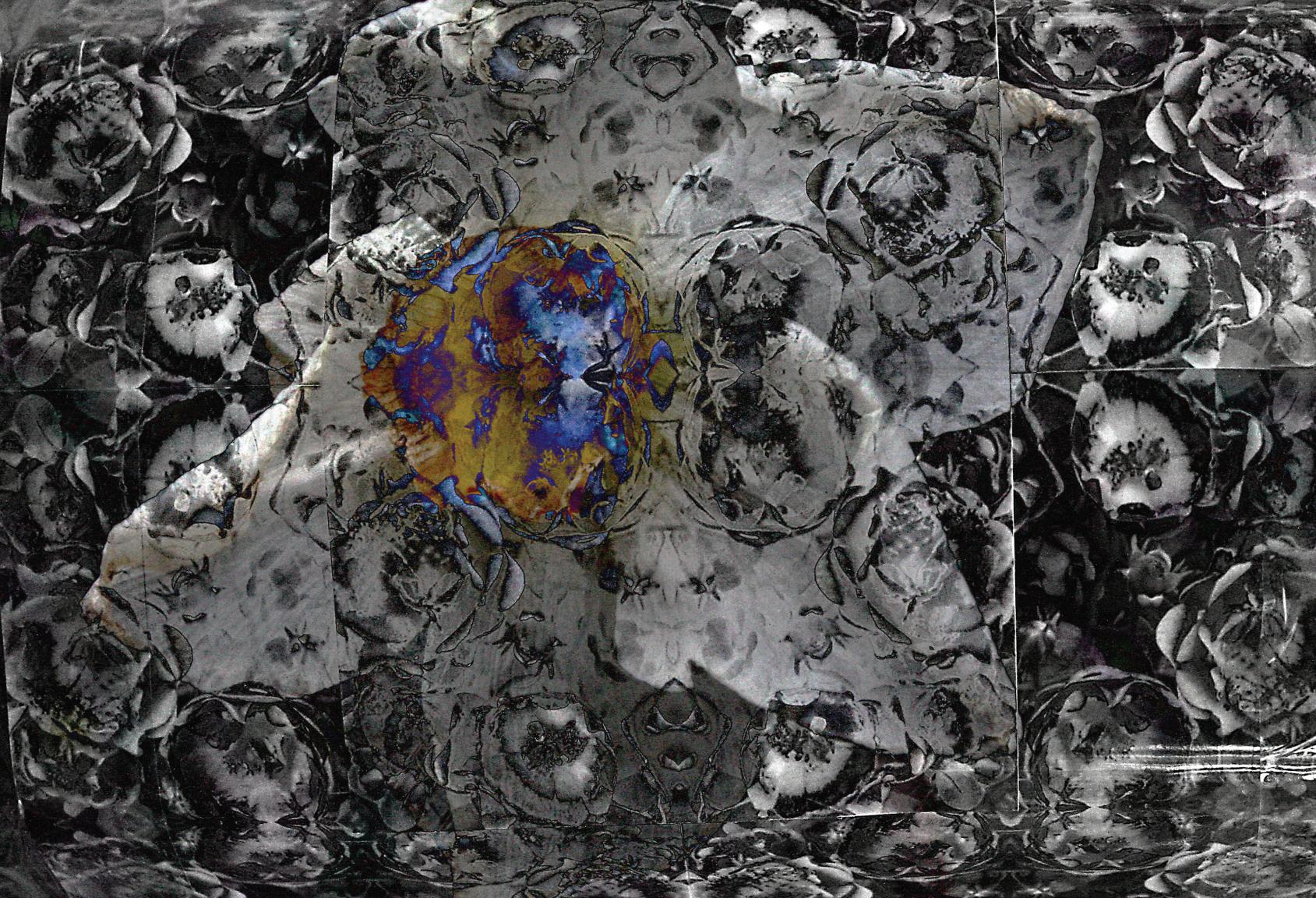




análekta

Photography by Merle Addison

grunt



front cover: análekta
inside cover: again

análekta

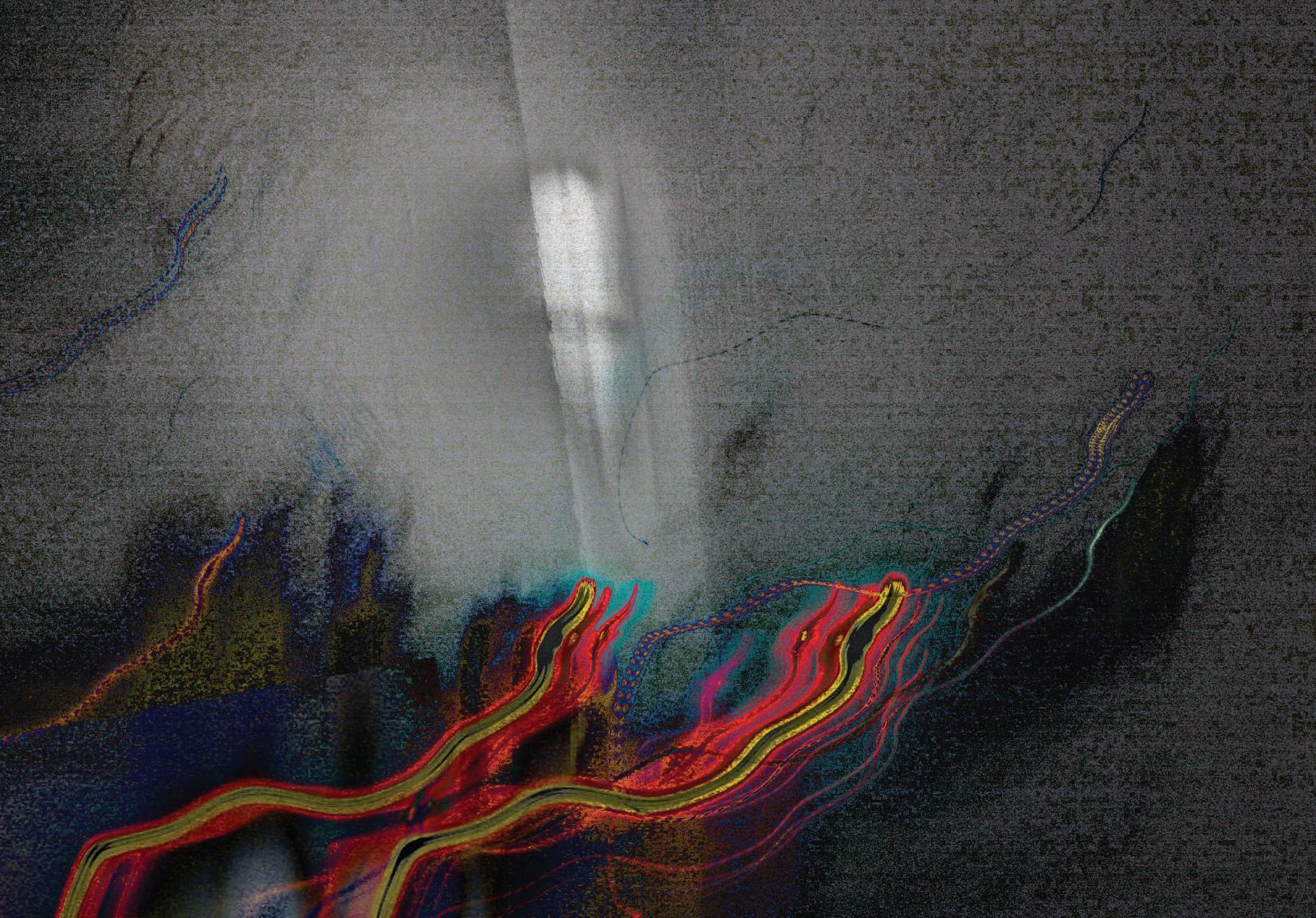
Photography by Merle Addison

Foreward by Glenn Alteen

Essay by Dana Claxton

An exhibition at grunt gallery in Vancouver, BC
April 7 to May 7, 2016

All images are dye pigment archival, 2016.



Curator's Foreward

Merle Addison's photographs have a sense of magic to them. The way he captures movement has often taken my breath away both in his own personal work and the performance photography he has done at grunt for almost three decades. Addison's ability to capture a fleeting moment seems impossible. Watching a performance and then viewing his subsequent photographs, you can see how he highlights moments you might have missed in real time, but which he didn't!

These new works marry the analogue and the digital almost seamlessly; it's hard to know what you are taking in right away. Their manipulation in Photoshop is complete but the details belie their analogue roots, creating rich and dense images that resonate and dance. There is a celebratory sense in Addison's works even though they have somber moments. There is a joy embedded in them one cannot help but respond to.

On behalf of grunt I would like to thank Merle for his work here and at grunt over the past 30 years. Also thanks to Dana Claxton for her thoughtful essay, to Communications Director Kari O'Donovan for her design, and Operations Director Meagan Kus for her administration.

grunt gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, the Province of BC through the British Columbia Arts Council and BC Gaming, the City of Vancouver, the Audain Foundation, and all of our donors and volunteers.

Glenn Alteen
Program Director
grunt gallery



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donna's eyes, no lies



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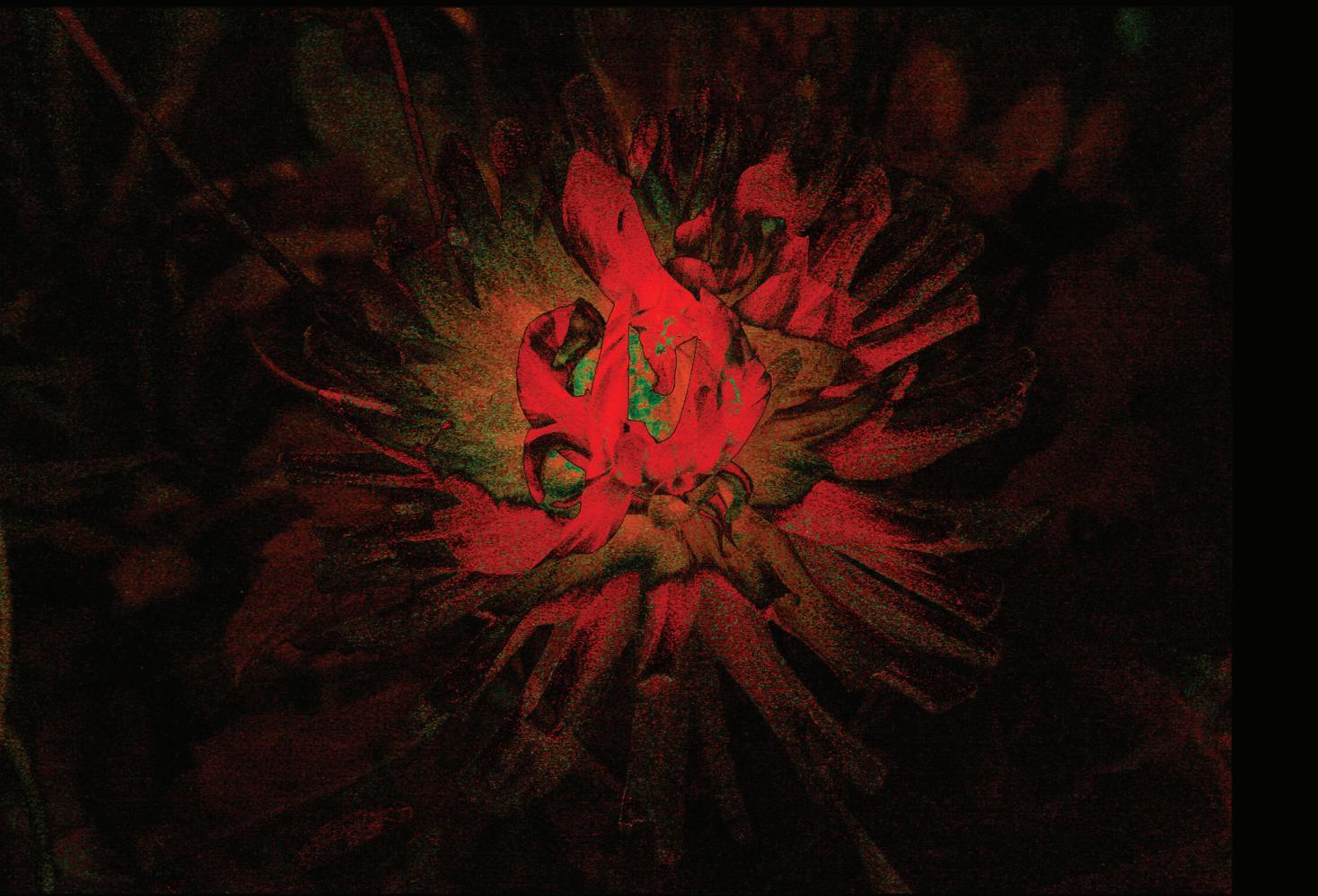
Sharing Apophenia

- Getting Lost in Merle Addison's Beauty

For over four decades Merle Addison has worked in black and white photography and by doing so, has mastered grain and film emulsion. In this new series, *análektá*, he has returned to his early artistic ideas of the hand-drawn line, darkroom techniques and melding these techniques with the digital to form a type of expanded photography. Through this reworking and marrying of images of nature, place and form, Merle has created photos that can be read as spiritual within the realm of the work's own materiality. Specifically in *Ruby's Light*, Merle's long tradition of photographing flowers mixed with painterly gestures of a laser light rendering and the additional layers of interior and exterior space create an ephemeral image of the "concrete". The collapse becomes solid, the solidity becomes liquefied, the images become a sort of cosmic goo that is identifiable and knowable, yet strange and alien. With hints of interior space, overlaid with negative surfaces of daisy type flowers and then splashed with a hand-drawn line, the red liquid of life shifts in colour and contour. In many of the works there is a combination of circularity and rectangularity — fusing, collapsing, becoming...

The entire body of work maintains elements of filmic grain, collapsing and becoming digital form, and then fusing further into one as a new form of the graital or the digiaint. In addition, there is a painterly abstract element overlaid with architectural b/w properties, making the works' readability and accessibility available from various points of view or reference.

There is the suggestion of containment, which at the same time creates a strange fluidity inside the frame — the image can push through at any moment and free itself from the rectangle. Perhaps this can be attributed to his history as a performance art document/ary photographer. Merle has photograph-documented dozens of live performances with artists such as Laurie Anderson, The Black Market Collective, Rodney Graham, Gathie Falk, Rebecca Belmore and even myself. And it's this experience of movement, action and the performed body that is also visible in his use of space within the photographic rectangle. As he follows the performed body with stealthy expertise, he glides with the actions of the artist seamlessly. And that way of "seeing" the subjects and moving with them are clear in this body of work. The images expand from this seeming containment of the photographic boxed image and flow beyond the static borders.



An aliveness is apparent in this work, and I am suggesting that this type of livingness and embodiment of life and universes make the work jump out of the rectangle and the photographic paper. Is this the aura? The life of the work that transcends the actual artwork? Is this the place where art truly belongs, outside of itself as a lived experience of the viewer?

Other works appear as archeological digs through the artist's own vast archive of image production. His image bank exposes layers of form and creates a new context that brings together a 40-year practice pulling, unearthing and placing his oeuvre into the digital realm, while maintaining true to the analogue, the emulsion and the grain. There is seepage out of the frame; the analogue is revealed and has survived.

Layers of archival goo, film emulsions and digi-colour centres of the universe are visible in some of the images, with a falling off the edge of the apparent frame. Scratched lines and various forms extend the image outward as if to suggest there is no end. In most of the works a centre exists—whether in the heart of the flower or position of the bird in flight, or how image groups swirl or are placed to create a type of centre. And this is where viewers can get lost in the beauty of Merle's work—he creates a universe through colour and texture and an entry point to the soul of the work.

As a black and white expert, Merle has developed thousands of photographs in dozens of makeshift dark rooms from the grunt's bathroom, to closets, basements and sometimes—real darkrooms. What he likes most about this new body of work is “how I can trace the line of thought from throughout my life that brought me here. Finding the patterns. Just simply the making.” And it's in his forty years of “just simply the making” that he has clicked his shutter thousands and thousands of times, and developed hundreds of rolls of film and photo-documented over a hundred live performances, and it's his movement between, around and through the digital and analog that shapes, influences and sustains the depth of this work. If you have had the privilege of seeing his black and white performance documentations you will know his trained, skilled eye is like that of an expert tracker or hunter. And his larger body of black and white photos of flowers also represent his darkroom wizardry. On using colour in this new work he comments, “Using colour with digital imaging is like painting, only not as messy. Colour adds another emotional complexity to the piece that is not definable.”

The marriage of technologies creates textures that are otherworldly and as the title of the exhibition suggests, collects up and gathers from: the artist has shared an apophenia of endless images. The works are ghostly and alive, infinite and generous.

In terms of creative process, the layered images, texture and movement in this particular body work invokes Merce Cunningham's method of "chance choreography" and Stan Brakhage's theory of "closed eye vision," which is a multiple layering of superimposed images and painting applied to the film surface.

In an email interview with Merle I asked about works that have greatly influenced his practice and he replied, "[The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even] The Large Glass, by Duchamp is a beautiful visual in its own right. The glass adds another dimension to what is basically a 2D object. Both in the reflection and in the seeing-through. The way it came to its present form also is an influence. Duchamp had it in the corner of his studio where it collected dust. He fixed some of that to the surface. Patina. Then when he was moving it, it fell over and cracked the glass. He said, "Now it's finished." I wonder if the gallery where it is now has its restorers touch it up once in a while? I think that would sort of miss the point somehow. Some of my best work is when the media doesn't work the way I expected."¹

And it's this indeterminacy of the unexpected that shapes this new body of work.

Dana Claxton

¹ Email interview March 2, 2016. Vancouver.



