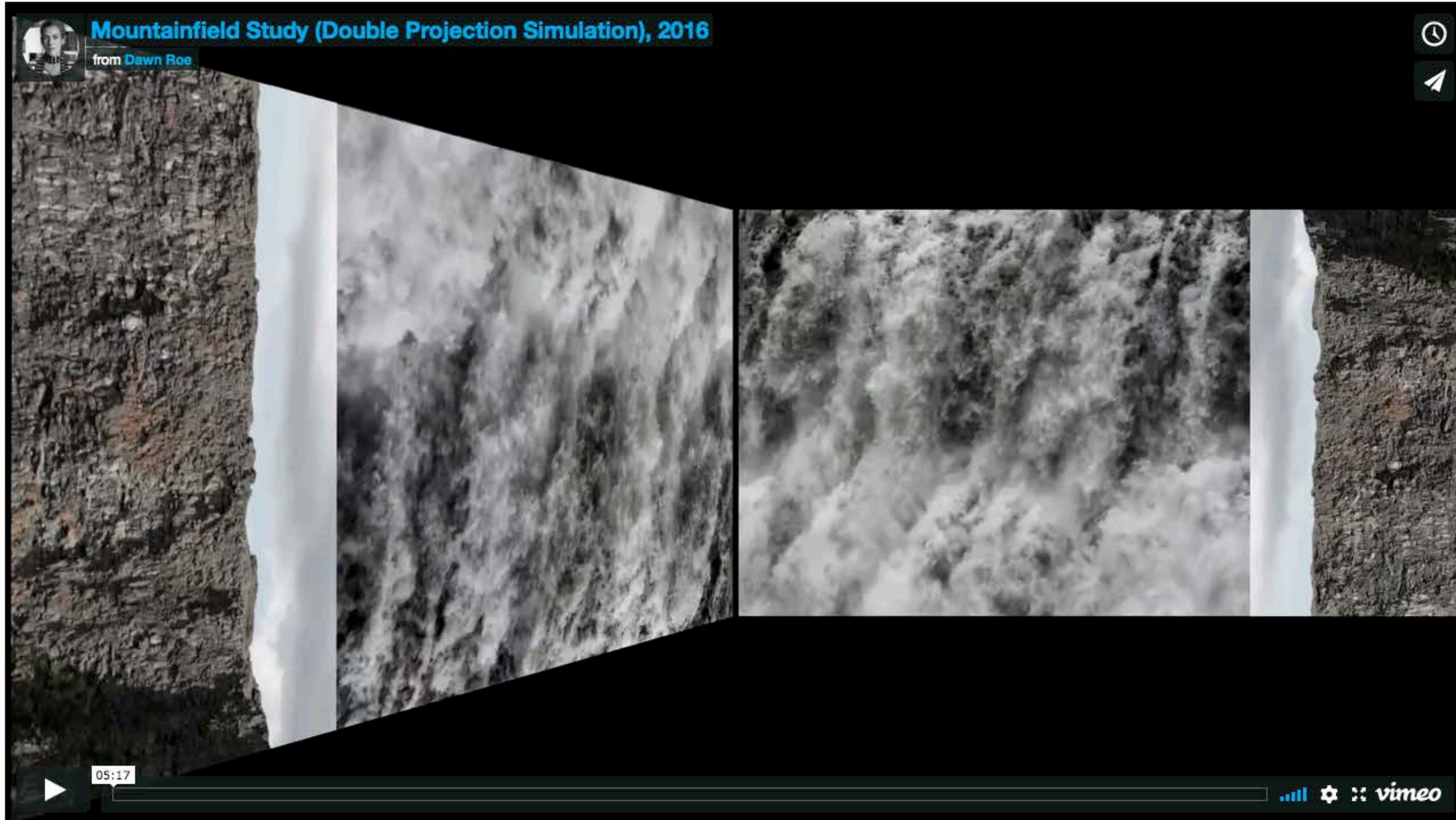




DAWN ROE // MOUNTAINFIELD STUDY



Mountainfield Study (Double Projection Simulation), 2016

KG: In Mountainfield Study, there is a clear exploration of spatial disorientation. I'm curious to learn of your thoughts on the experiential aspects of viewing the work online. Does the online viewing serve as another layer of abstraction for you?

DR: I hadn't consciously considered that when making the work. I had a particular exhibition space in mind as I sorted through what choices I'd make in terms of how the video would function in a particular corner of the gallery space in relation to the still photographs on an adjacent wall. But, since initially corresponding with you about how the imagery might function online, I've been thinking about this aspect a bit, especially in terms of a sort of tertiary flattening – which would, indeed, add another layer of abstraction. In both the video and the still photographs, slices and chunks of imagery are purposefully butted up against one another, resulting in somewhat incoherent compositions which only rarely offer up a full "picture" of a distinct place. And, it's one sort of perceptual experience to stand inside the moving image, or to walk along a wall of still photographs—the disorientation can be, at times, dizzying as you're simultaneously viewing while working to steady your physical body. I think this experience shifts a bit when the work is viewed online as, for the most part, viewers are positioned in a stationary stance with their gaze directed toward the computer screen, head immobile. Additionally, the scale is decidedly reduced in this format rather than the somewhat grand display of the floor to ceiling projection. So yeah, this mode of reception pushes the image even further from its referent, and from its expected representation. Although, it's hard to say precisely how we expect to encounter images of landscape anymore, and maybe computer-based analogs are now actually the norm, as opposed to the expectations attached to large-scale paintings, and the like). Clearly, you've got me thinking here!

KG: Having not had the opportunity to see the work in person, I appreciate hearing you talk about the dizzying effect of viewing the still images and the video (perhaps peripherally) at the same time. Were you looking for a dissonance between the two or do they work together toward the same disruption?



DR: Both and neither, really. That ambiguity is just to say that I'm thinking about how still and moving images work together in terms of their shared vocabulary, but also how they are clearly distinct – which is obviously a given, but at times taken for granted in terms of what we expect from this media, and how we are conditioned to respond. Almost all of my projects from the last ten years include both still images and video— always depicting the same space/object/material. Although, I sometimes show the still and video works separately, I'm most interested in allowing them to share the same general space so that one mode can function in relation to the other. There is an inherent difference between a perpetually immobile surface that can be gleaned for detailed information for as long as desired, and a shimmering façade that can vanish in an instant (even a lingering shot of an immobile space in a moving image is not immune to the subtle unease provoked by a lack of awareness of the shot's ultimate duration).

This has a lot to do with where the cuts in the video are, and where the breaks in the still photographic composites are situated.

We are now very accustomed to a photographic type or way of seeing, and many of us realize this does not necessarily attach itself solely to one view of a subject from a fixed vantage point for a predetermined fraction (or sometimes longer) of a second. I choose to emphasize the fragmentary nature of photographic depiction by replicating and reiterating, thereby emphasizing the gaps within perception in general. Each shift of our body prompts our vision to respond by focusing on a new point, no matter how close or far together, and it's quick, this shift, we don't generally notice. But with each shift in focus, a new frame(work) follows. A frame of reference, a frame of pattern, of space, of self as well.

KG: Definitely. We often forget that the body has so much to do with visual work. The shift of the photographer, for example, creates a wake that ripples through the images to the viewer. The viewer, too, has control through position, state of mind, and frame of vision to alter the way the work is experienced in a gallery space.

Then, on the other hand, the obstruction of native sensorial experience is intrinsic to lens-based work. Here, though, you add another layer of disconnect that plays with gestures akin to those of Frankenthaler, Rothko, and other's working with colorfield abstraction at that time. In Mountainfield Study (double projection simulation), one is first drawn into an identification game—the image content allows the viewer the illusion of familiarity while that recognition slowly dissolves into abstraction. It is as if you take Mountains and Sea by Frankenthaler and invert the viewer experience. Is this a lineage you feel yourself working in?



DR: It's so interesting that you bring that up, as I'm not consciously responding to the Frankenthaler work, but can appreciate (and have to acknowledge the subconscious influence, at least) the incongruity and deliberate clunkiness of the shapes, gestures, and the resulting forms in *Mountains and Sea*—manifesting as a scene that is potentially familiar yet entirely foreign. So yes, you mention these aspects and I appreciate your suggestion that “the image content allows the viewer the illusion of familiarity” as that is precisely what is occurring, an absolute illusion— one that relies upon an assumed response to the recognizable. Yet, the images placed upon, between, and underneath other images disallow complete absorption.

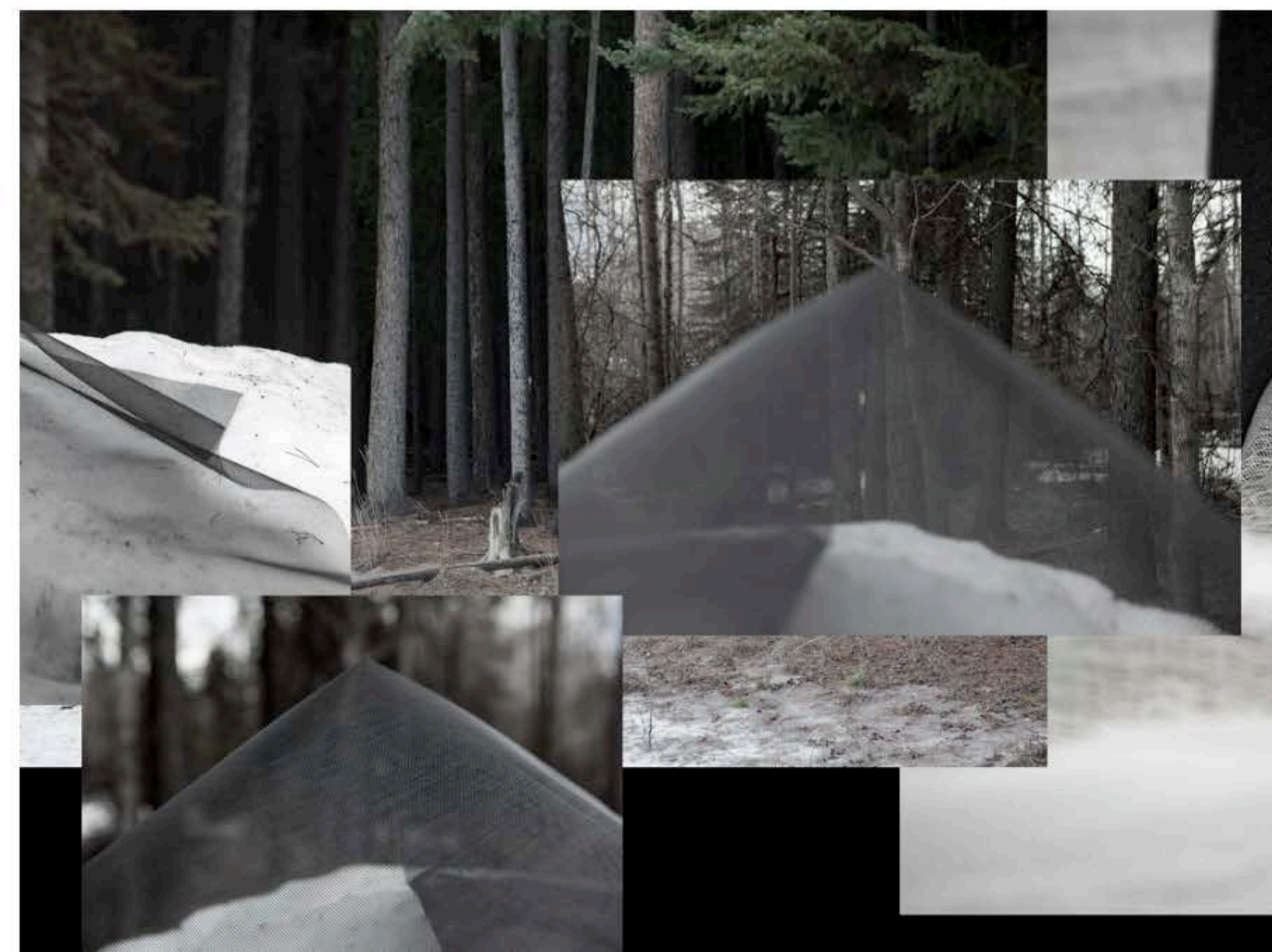
And, being open to recognizing this type of correspondence is really key to any viewing experience, or any sustained reflection on lens-based media in general. My thinking around this has been helped along, quite a bit, by some of the passages in François Laruelle's book, *The Concept of Non Photography*. In one section, he writes:

“..a photographic apparatus does not transform one into the other the real and the Image, but produces images from other images.

For the photographer, there are only ever photographic images, an unlimited flux of photos certain of which are virtual, framed without being shot, and others that are technologically effectuated or produced and that now have explicitly as their support the representations of perception, etc.

This is why we shall maintain that the photo is an emergent, novel representation, a discovery, and it precedes photography, that it is given before the operation that manifests it in relation to experience.”

KG: Could you speak to the incorporation of non natural materials? I notice that this kind of intervention is also a recurring theme in your work.

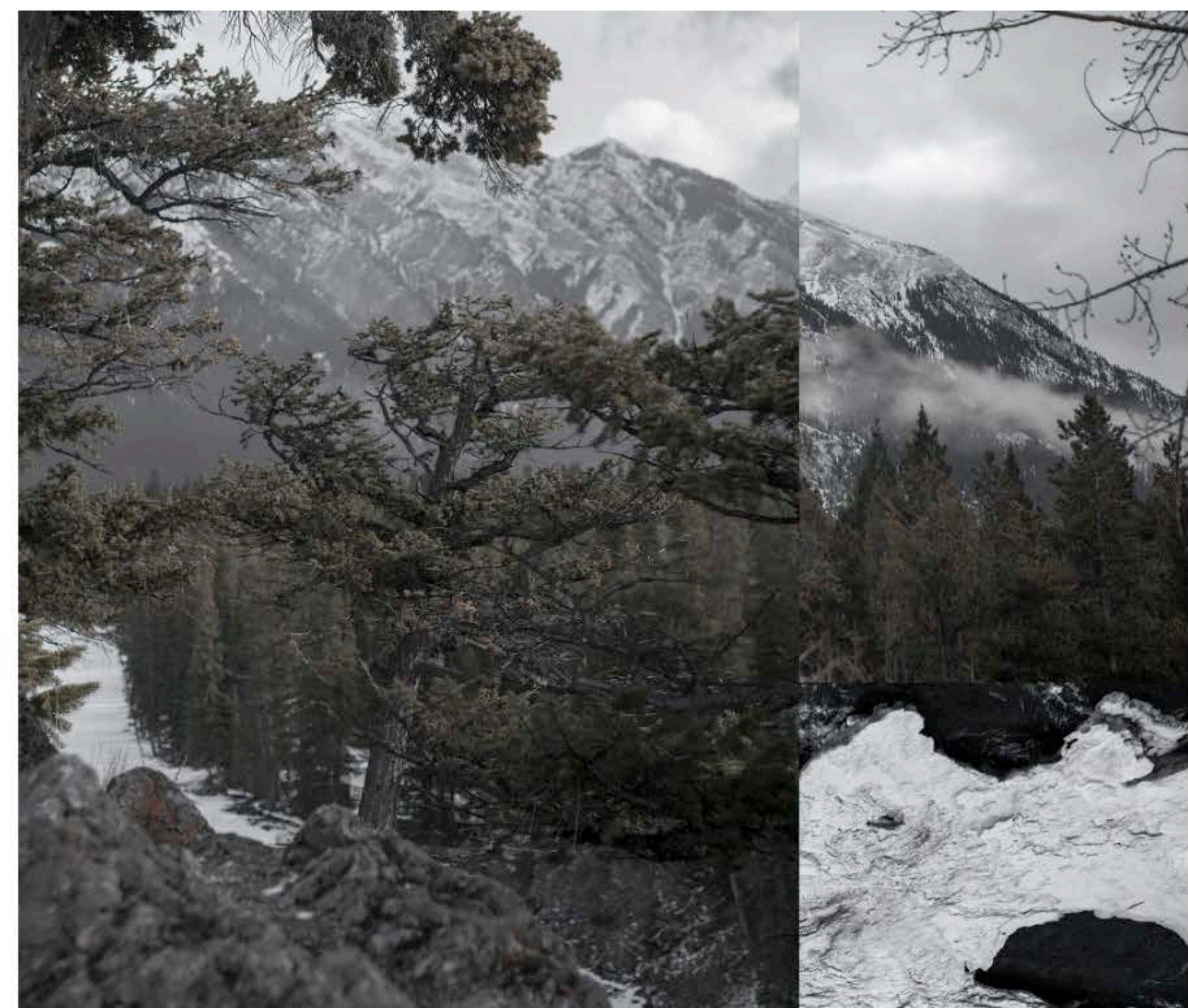


DR: It is, yes, and this really began during a project I started in the Goldfields region of Australia a few years back. I was at a loss of how to begin thinking about the space until I considered the overlapping histories of the region in direct relation to its varying/competing mythologies, most of which stem from the complex narratives around gold mining. While working on that project, I began what would become a process I would often return to—a purposefully clumsy incorporation of man-made/processed materials or substances. In the Goldfields project, I fabricated scenes in the sites I was photographing using things like fake gold leaf, glitter, fabric, and paper. This strategy emerged again when I began a residency in Iceland where the Mountainfield Studies project started. I'll quote a small section from my research blog that offers a sense of my thought process as this work began:

Anyway, here in Ólafsfjörður, I'm looking a lot to the ground and sky, and thinking about reflection and refraction as well as diffraction, I suppose – there is something really intense about the hot, white of the snow coating the mountain tops and how its appearance can shift so drastically depending on what's hitting it (the really close by sun ball) or what's covering it (various layers of cloud, mist, ocean air). And, sometimes the streams that run down from the mountain gush so quickly they turn white too, at least from afar. And then the larger pools of water (the lake, the pond, the ocean) serve as mirrors, or secondary skies.

Noticing this led me to think about incorporating common, man-made materials that share these visual qualities into some of the images. So far, I'm fiddling around with tin foil, bits of sheer, semi-translucent plastic and crystals of sugar.

Ultimately, I find myself captivated by the correspondence between certain materials and naturally occurring phenomena, or how one visual occurrence might be reminiscent of another.



KG: The introduction of the materials, the muslin in particular, function, at times, as a jolt back to the tactile. This reminds the viewer to call into question the ways in which space and landscape are absorbed. This symmetry, too, is so disorienting, and yet—there are moments, when things calm down, and the images settle into a calm float back into themselves.

DR: Right, and I think this is in keeping with how we experience the world at times—especially when we become aware of ourselves in the midst of perceiving. That’s one of the things I love about pressing stasis and movement together— the space right between the two produces this kind of dizzying abruption that jogs your brain awake. I was having a lot of these kinds of embodied experiences when I first got to Iceland. Another blog excerpt describes it, in part:

...but more so the disconcerting feeling of simply being out in the space. Part of it has to do with the otherworldly qualities of particularly barren spaces or those dotted with anthropomorphic forms – but as well, there is something about the intense presence of geologic time surrounding you at every glance— up/down/forward/back. And, for someone as clumsy and uncoordinated as myself, wandering around and within these hills—and much further up into mountains than I’ve ever been inclined to go before— produces a bit of vertigo and, in some instances, outright fear.

And, lastly, in terms of my use of materials in the project, that relates back to what I was mentioning earlier, about things being reminiscent to one another, and the, at times, uncanny correspondences. This recognition is what led me to use specific materials like muslin, screen, and foil. As you say, there is a sense of tactility for sure, and this is coupled with the undulating quality that can emerge when moiré patterns are hinted at in the muslin or screen, or the tingly unnerve of crumpled tinfoil—these everyday materials compete for space amongst massive glaciers and snowcapped mountain peaks that have been stood for centuries.

And, this is still the kind of thinking that keeps me excited about continuing to work on projects that are situated (in one way or another) in the landscape.

