Eamon O'Kane

And Time Begins Again

University of Bergen
Faculty of Fine Art,
Music and Design

The focus on artistic research and development is a key aim of the Faculty of Art, Music and Design at Bergen University. Through a series of internationally peer reviewed publications KMD contributes to the debate and development related to contemporary visual art and arts education.

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Contents

Introduction Page 5

And Time Begins Again Page 27
Eamon O'Kane

Between Plants & Ghosts Page 73
Matt Packer

Eamon O'Kane in conversation with Martin Clark Page 107

The Nursery Page 135
Sadie Plant

Biographies Page 186

Introduction

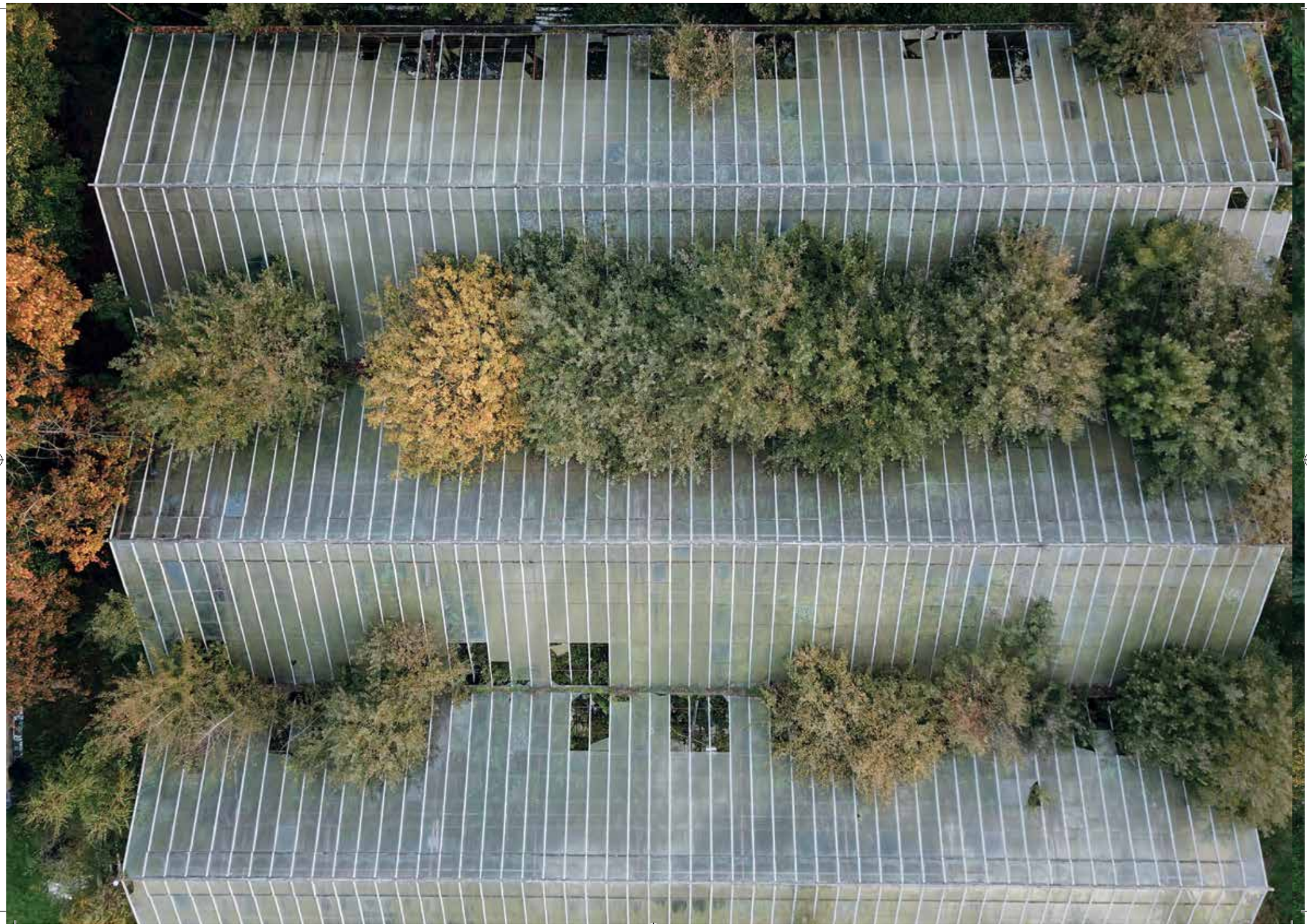
This publication presents a body of work that I began in 2009. It explores humankind's fragile relationship with and dependence on the natural world. The title of the work and this publication, 'And time begins again', is taken from Samuel Beckett's 'Text for nothing (1958)'.

The works relate to a derelict plant nursery in Denmark and when displayed in exhibitions has consisted of a series of panoramic photographs of the interior of the greenhouses which are displayed on light boxes made from recycled and adapted light components used in the nursery installed on sculptural structures echoing the spaces in the nursery as well as video installation detailing specific aspects of this very particular place.

The photographic and video works are taken on a series of walks which I have taken in and around the greenhouses over the last nine years. Through these walks I have traced and retraced my steps around the complex reflecting on the changes through time.

The location could be seen as a place in decay but also as the beginning of a transformation back to nature. Meditations on life and death are echoed in the trays of dead plants and rusting architecture and the weeds and stray seeds, which have taken root and are growing up. It is my intention to slowly let the whole site return to nature and to eventually become a forest.

Eamon O'Kane



Aerial views of site 1945-1988
From left to right
1945, 1954, 1968, 1977, 1982, 1988

Aerial views of site 1992-2019
From left to right opposite and two following pages
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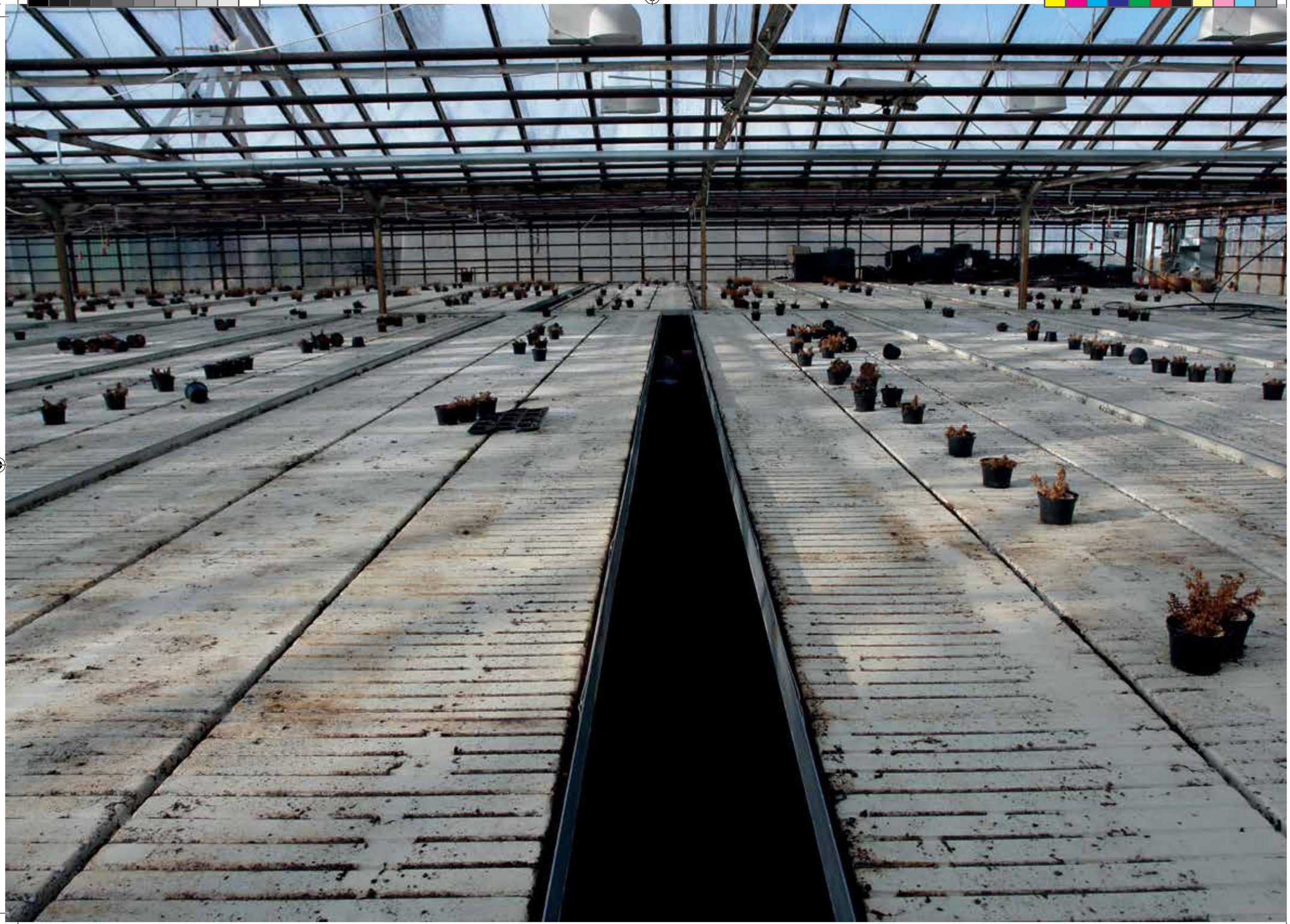

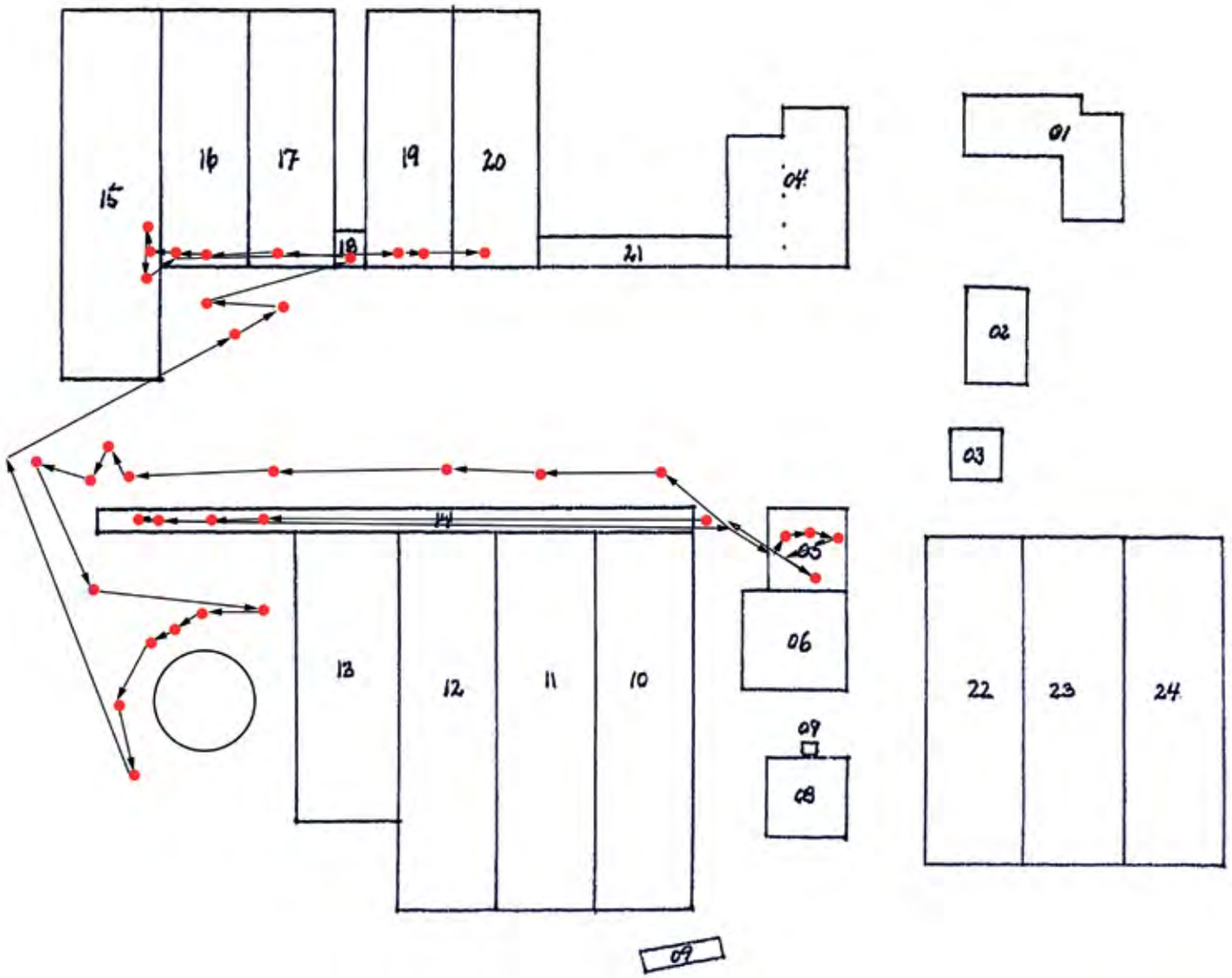
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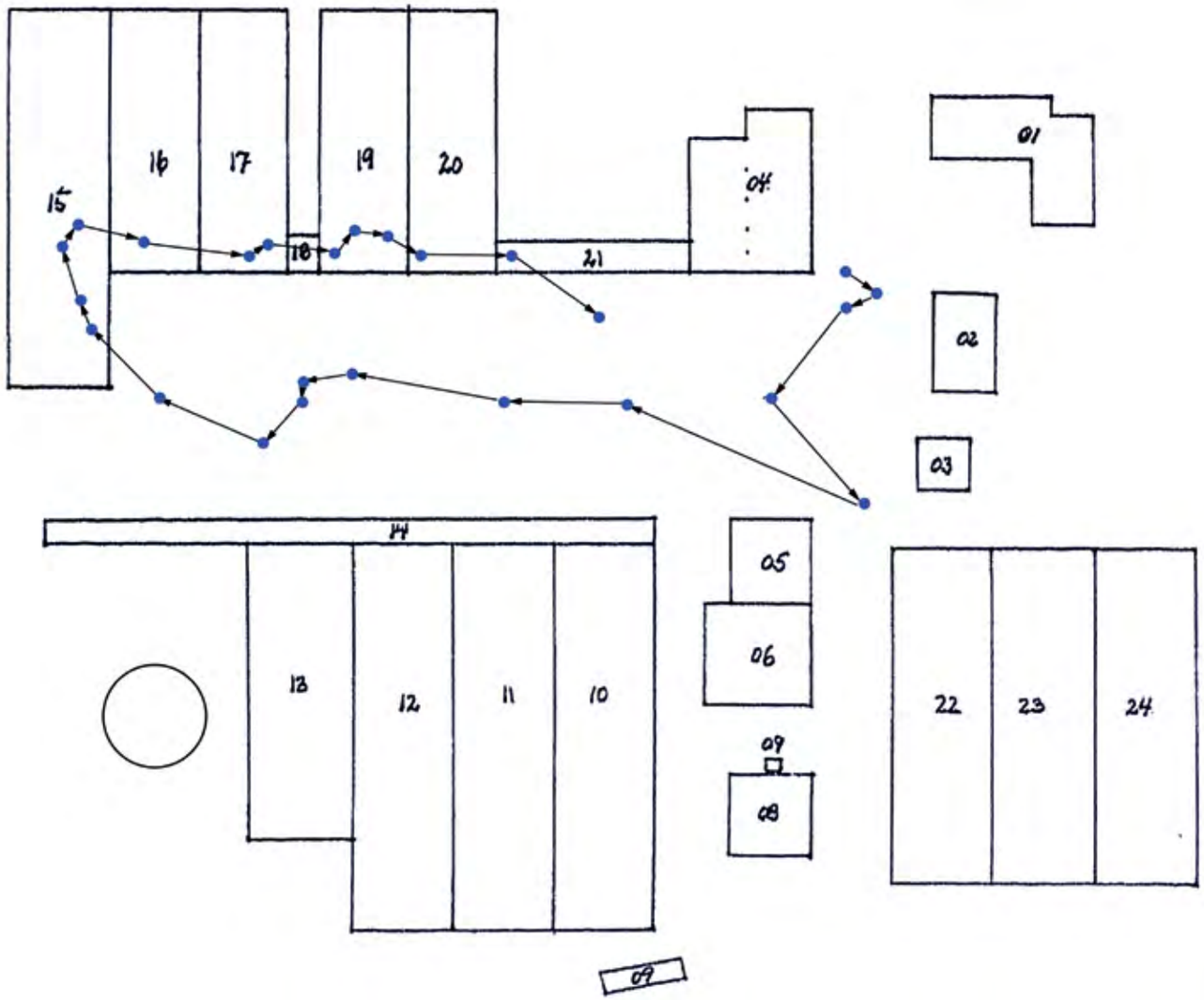
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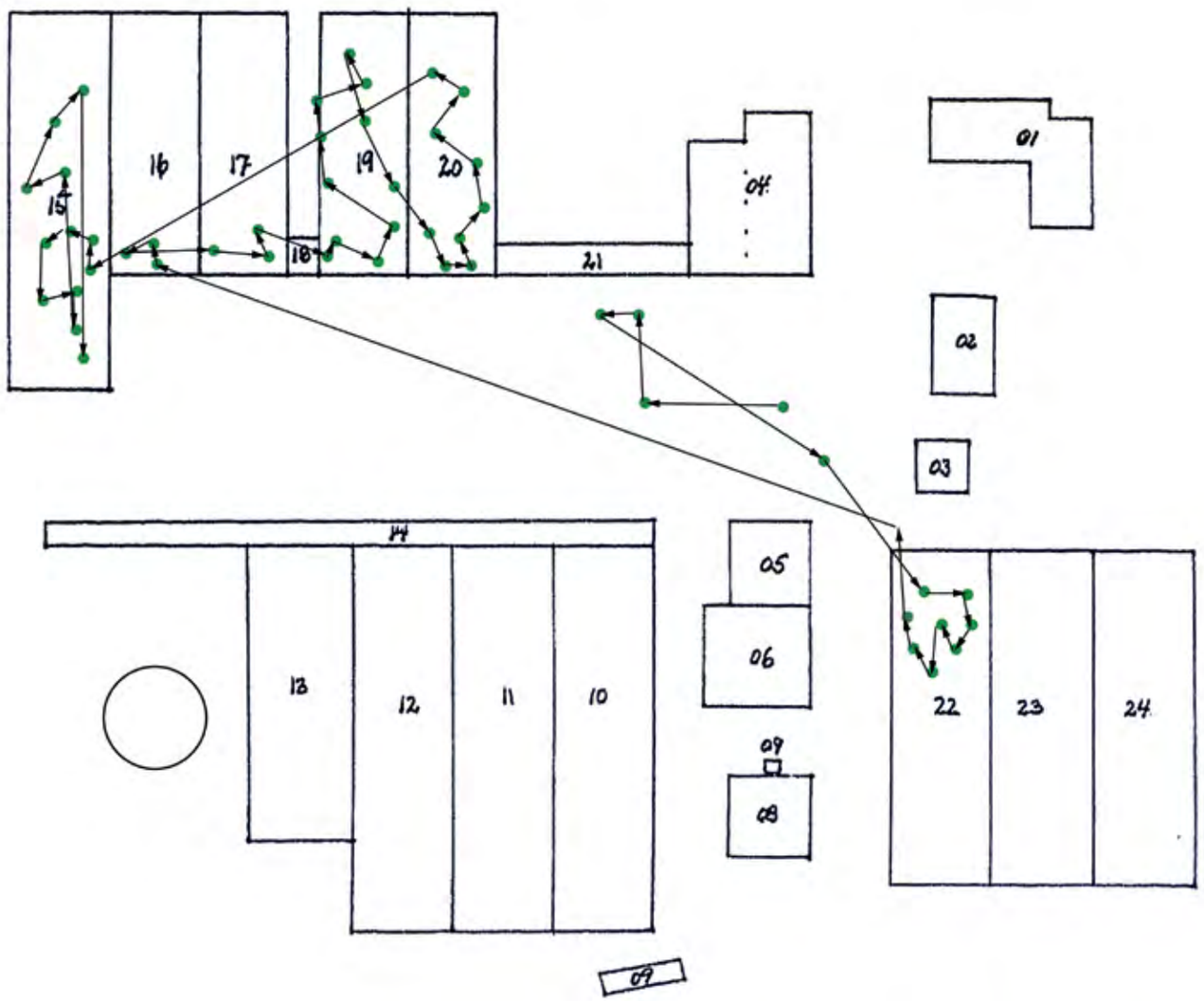
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Aerial view of Stige, Odense 1976
Kirkegyden, Stige - 1976-04-19
The site is in the bottom right corner
Image courtesy of Royal Danish Library

And Time Begins Again

Eamon O'Kane

"A wall is in effect an opaque window"

Robert Smithson, *Monuments of Passaic*[1]

In August 2009, I became the owner of a plant nursery complex in Denmark and have been documenting its steady decay ever since. The 6000m2 of greenhouses were in use up until the day we took it over and as the running of these types of businesses is incredibly sapping on natural resources, the act of turning off the electricity, water and 'fjernvarme' heating supply seemed to hold a particular significance. Surveying the buildings in those first weeks, I became very aware of the various work processes involved in maintaining and running a so-called 'controlled horticultural environment'. The architecture and design was conceived to enable the most efficient use of the space for plant growing with the most minimal of staff resources. Every inch of space was used and an elaborate system of huge rolling tables enabled access to all the plants within these enormous greenhouses. The tables themselves were built ingeniously with various off-the-shelf components from a standard building supply warehouse: concrete drainage pipes used as support pillars, steel piping for the rolling mechanism and then the large plastic tables with aluminum frames. The predominant logic around the assembly of these spaces and their running was efficiency. Long concrete paths connected all of the spaces: from the greenhouses themselves to the potting room with its soil-spitting monster of a machine, to the canteen, packing room and loading bays. Large trolleys were used to transfer plants from space to space and the elaborate watering system consisted of thousands of plastic pipes supplying water from the main public water supply as well as from a ground water well and a huge rainwater reservoir.

The process of adapting this complex to a working artist studio/s began the day we took it over, as I needed a place to store and continue working on artworks for upcoming exhibitions. The setup was curiously compatible with the needs of a studio: spacious buildings with good access to one another and of various sizes and heights. The logic of the running of the plant nursery fitted the logic of my art production and many of the tools and materials used also found a new life: plastic for packing artworks, plant pots for mixing paints, extension cables and lighting, pallet trucks…etc. Half of the roof of the packing house studio was a flat roof, which was in poor condition and leaked all over, so we set about building a new sloping roof over it. I then removed the flat roof, keeping the wood from it to heat the studio using a wood-burning stove in winter. Smashed up concrete pipes were used to fill in an unwanted pond, the metal transport trolleys were used to build moveable walls and a large stainless steel table was used in setting up an etching workshop. All decisions followed a particular logic and felt like a series of Chinese whispers from the buildings themselves. Throughout this process I felt the ghostly presence of those who had worked in and built the buildings in the first place. There was evidence of work everywhere, both recent and past: abandoned rusting machines in the forest, attics stuffed with obsolete and broken material, and thirty years' worth of accounts.

One morning whilst I was working in the packing house studio, I heard a noise from the road outside. When I went out to look, I found a man in his early sixties taking photographs of our house. I asked him why he was taking the photos and we began a two-hour conversation in Danish. He had spent his early childhood living in half of the house and had shared a bedroom with his brother – the same bedroom as our sons now slept in. We walked around the property and he explained that at that time there was no hot running water in the house so they would have hot showers in the greenhouses. A coal-fired furnace had heated the complex then and he pointed out the system by which the coal would be delivered by lorry with the ash taken away at the same time. This involved an underground cellar now sealed and full of water, a network of small rail carts, an elevator with a pulley system and a chute that delivered the ash into the waiting truck. I imagined this submerged, rusting world below us with its Marie Celeste atmosphere. He explained that before and during the Second World War the people grew

bananas and tobacco in the greenhouses.

A few weeks after this, I had the chance to meet a man who had worked as a teenager on the property and had also helped build the greenhouses. He was a recently retired scrap merchant and he explained that the apartment above the packing house building was where the stoker and his family lived and that the coal furnace needed to be kept running all through the night. He had worked as the back up stoker as a young teenager, staying up through the night and keeping the coal fire burning. We soon figured out a system together by which he could help me dismantle the greenhouses and get the scrap metal in return. The monotonous processes of breaking up the huge plastic table and removing the thousands of cement pipes and sheets of glass have to be done in a systematic fashion, otherwise it quickly descends into chaos.

Amid these processes, I found myself returning to the work of Gordon Matta-Clark and also the writings of Robert Morris. However, in contemplating the array of discarded and broken industrial materials, Robert Smithson's seminal photo essay "*A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey (1967)*"[2] became somewhat of a touchstone for my work on the site, as it is expansive enough to encompass many of the issues arising out of my interrogation of the site's particular resonances and how to analyze them and document them.

"As part of a society that increasingly sees everything solely as a series of images, even the real becomes unreal and is, therefore, open to re-imagination."[3]

The more I explore and document the property, and the more I work on the demolition process, the more entropic the whole endeavor has felt. The work has also felt increasingly self-referential, referring back to itself but also to inconsistencies and inadequacies of process. Gordon Matta-Clark had the same problem in documenting his work and often over-compensated for the inadequacies of the documentary process by embellishing the photographs with aesthetic visual tropes. Les Levine, a fellow artist, comments on talks he had with Matta-Clark:

"We had a lot of discussions about his photographs. My position was that he was making them too much artsy - he didn't have to do the Rauschenbergian effects. He thought they had to be beautiful to survive as art."[4]

It is sadly ironic that none of Matta-Clark's most seminal works are still in existence and that he is only represented by works/documentation which Levine and others consider lesser works.

The art critic Christian Kravagna has observed that:

"The photographic works of Matta-Clark's last years look more and more like works of art, geared toward the distribution networks of the conventional art market, as both the experimental quality and the conceptual rigor of the early works give way to skilled production of collages with clear aesthetic aspirations."[5]

Like Matta-Clark, I have found that video documentation has more scope in documenting the processes I am engaged in, but I recognize as he did that it is also vastly inadequate at rendering a translatable rendition of the varied experiences of space and the passing of time. According to Christian Kravagna, Matta-Clark's documentation can be divided into

"… three different reference systems. The simplest mode relates to objects and actions captured on film such that the photographic medium is not reflected in any form. The implicit frame of reference here is the traditional conception of photography as a means of representing reality. In the case of the conceptual documentary style, which combines narrative (pseudo-) logic and the documentary aesthetic of the conceptual photo essay with the documentation of architectural projects, the reference system is an artistic praxis that no longer regards documentation as a transparent illustration of reality but as a genre with its own particular conventions. Lastly, the atmospheric, dramatic photo collages address the experiences on site of the visitor and question how far this can be represented in photographic images. Here the reference system is the problem of documentation itself, that is to say, the extent to which different media have their own laws and are compatible or otherwise."[6]

Of course, it is impossible to fully relay the real experience of space via a two dimensional representation of the space, whether still or moving. I decided to augment the experience of the photographic and video works with a three-dimensional spatial construction echoing the spaces represented whilst making it clear that it was not an attempt to replicate the spaces in a gallery environment. The resulting artwork continues my ongoing interest in architecture and specifically considers architecture's relationships to the human, organic, and symbolic forces that act against its

original design.
The artwork has been exhibited as installations of photographs of the nursery interior displayed on light-boxes made from recycled light components that were once used in the greenhouses to help plant growth. The photographs, taken over a period of many years, depict details of the place in a state of abandonment. We see signs of the changing seasons and the slow take-over of weeds. We also see subtle signs of human interference. The photographs represent these different and overlapping rhythms of change.

The light-box photographs have been presented on a large, modular, wooden display structure with an accompanying series of video-monitor works on the surrounding walls. The structure functions architecturally in its own right, extending in three directions across the exhibition space and referencing ideas of transparency and modularity that were common to the architectural modernism of the mid-twentieth century.

The title of the artwork is taken from Samuel Beckett's "Texts for Nothing #8"[7]. This text, as read by actor Jack MacGowran, forms part of a video projection and reinforces a sense of the human as a strange and disembodied voice in this landscape of gradual entropic disintegration. Robert Smithson describes an experiment in entropy which proves this irreversibility of eternity:

"Picture in your mind's eye the sand box divided in half with black sand on one side and white sand on the other. We take a child and have him run hundreds of times clockwise in the box until the sand gets mixed and begins to turn grey; after that we have him run anti-clockwise, but the result will not be the restoration of the original division but a greater degree of grayness and an increase of entropy. Of course, if we filmed such an experiment we could prove the reversibility of eternity by showing the film backwards, but then sooner or later the film itself would crumble or get lost and enter the state of irreversibility."[8]

Throughout the last five years of working at the site, I have developed different approaches to a variety of activities and slowly begun trying to trace a logic over this period of time. An interesting by-product of this process is that although there are iterations of artworks, the work is never finished, or, at least, its completion is perhaps suspended until the site has fully returned to nature or I have expired, whichever comes first. Each new direction is a reaction to something on the site or from an outside related/unrelated reference.

I find that the framework of the site forms the limits within which to act, but also the resistance to my acting, which I feel is mostly positive. Some of improvisations I am engaged in bear some similarity to those that I am used to in the studio, but others are more related to other process and alien to the vocation of an artist. For example, it takes a certain skill to balance high up on the roof of a greenhouse and remove large sheets of glass with suction cups, a knife, a drill and a screwdriver, and through practice and repetition develop better effective processes for a more expedient deconstruction of the structures. I am not suggesting that this is art, or at least this is not where the art practice is located at the moment, but it does feed into a way of thinking about difference and repetition in the way I relate to the physical space – I somehow enter a type of Zen space in these repetitive processes. Perhaps it is something akin to the coexistence of rationality and Zen-like 'being in the moment' that Robert M. Pirsig writes about in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*[9]. A space in which through a rational repetitive process one can drift into a space of intuition and improvisation. This means that one can enter a level of emancipation from that process through a honing and developing of a facility within a particular process.

In his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* Vilém Flusser argues that "apparatuses were invented in order to function automatically, in other words independent of future human involvement. This is the intention with which they were created, the notion of the photographer as a 'passive' interloper in the photographic experience, secondary to what is made possible by the technology at hand. The machine controls the processes, and even though the photographer makes a choice in relation to how the photograph is taken and processed, he or she is secondary to an outcome predetermined by the existing technologies."[10]

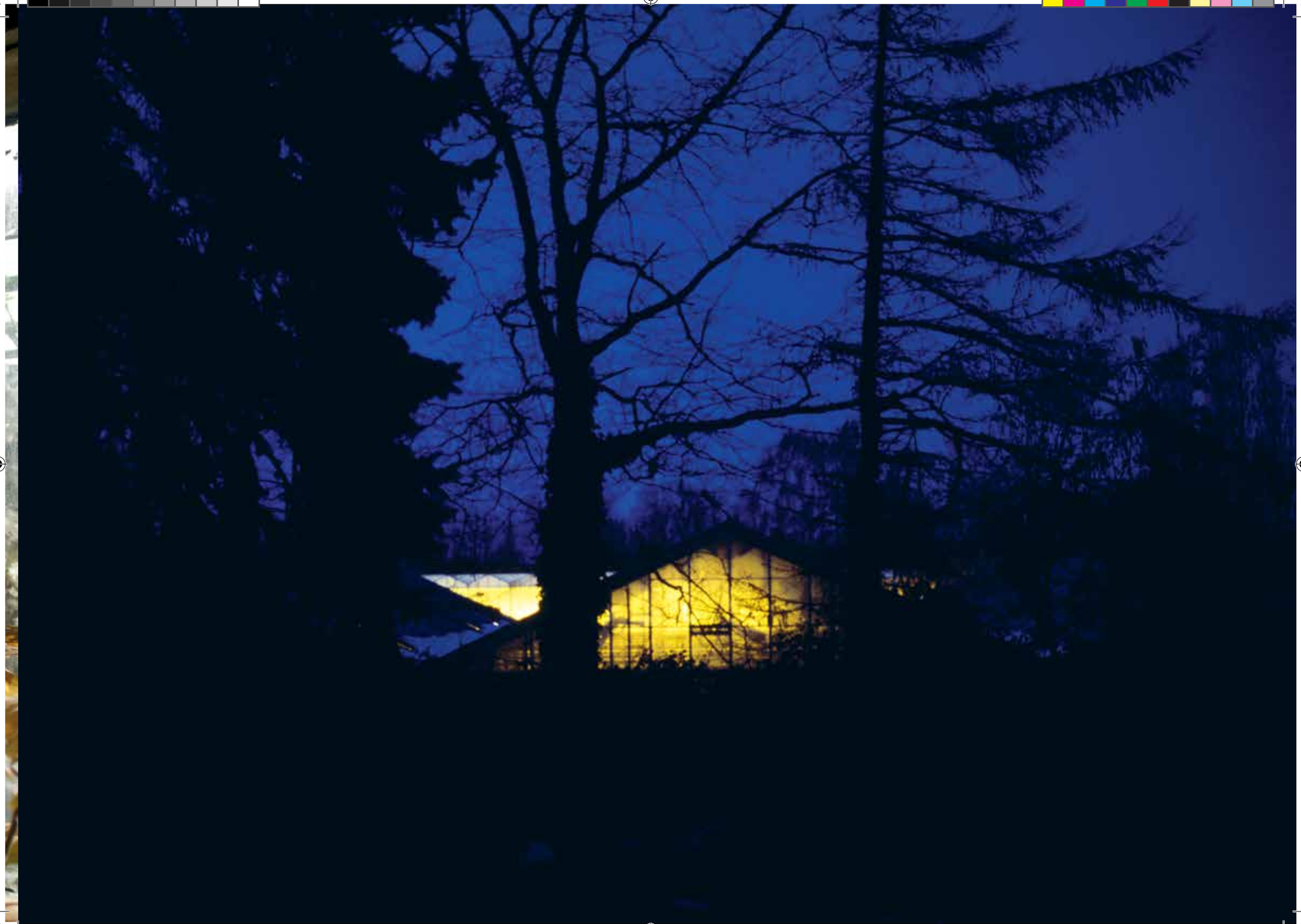
I am taking this idea a step further in that I am allowing the context of the production of the lens-based imagery to dictate and control the process. The post-industrial site becomes an extension of the apparatus of the camera in that its architecture and structure clearly defines how I engage with it as a subject through photography and video. Since 2015 I have installed then relocated automatic time lapse cameras in the greenhouses and in 2016 I chose to begin to interpret Flusser's idea of the apparatus even more directly through using the vast archive that I have built up since 2009 as a reference in composing and constructing the next works. I have set up permanently installed tripods throughout

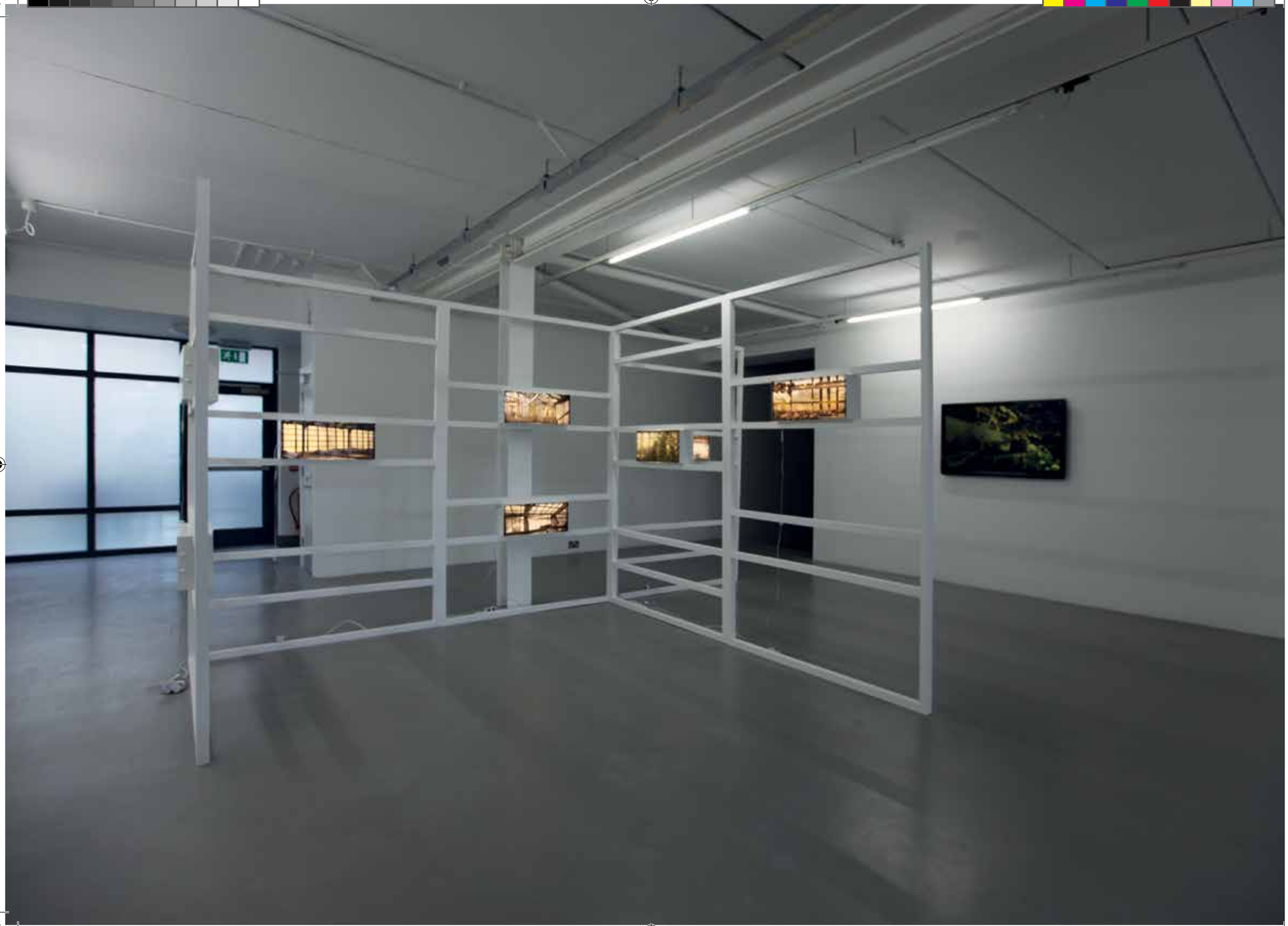
the site and begun reenacting photographs and videos as exactly as possible in order to create a type of 'control' and to incorporate my archive into the apparatus as well. In one half of the site I have made no interventions other than regularly going for walks and documenting the spaces. I see these spaces as the most entropic in the complex. In the other half I have made quite deliberate changes, removing large tables, structural elements and the glass. In certain areas of the complex I have completely removed the structures and trees have begun growing up in these areas. I plan to eventually dismantle and remove the structures there so that the forest that has begun to grow up will cover the area. So in one half of my industrial complex I am examining time as a concept and a process and attempting to use re-enactment and repetition as a way of engaging with the entropy without disrupting it physically, whilst in the other half I am removing as much of the architectural elements as possible and documenting the same passage of time but in this case I am more implicated in the apparatus of change.

But what should be done if there is no actual artwork in the end; if everything ends up as an archive of loose ends and improvised play-things? I find this idea liberating and also find myself trying to embrace it further and avoid any sort of monumentality as an end product. I am more interested in a sort of entropy in the gradual return of the site to its 'original' natural state. The site itself has always reminded me of the post-industrial and post-capitalist aura of Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker*[11]. It is interesting for me to explore the empty spaces of this bankrupt nursery and to think of what it means in a wider sense. Somehow there was logic to growing non-indigenous and indigenous plants in artificial environments for a local market but there were negative impacts on the environments from these controlled horticultural environments. In both looking into the site and outward from it, my investigations are engaging with the three ecologies of environmental, mental and social worlds that Felix Guattari describes in his book *The Three Ecologies*[12]. Somehow, I am attempting in an improvised and intuitive way to amalgamate these ecologies into a methodological art practice where the social, cultural and natural can coexist in a state of flux. A type of anarchic garden of the mind (and of reality) where, at the end, all that is left is some random remnants of a forgotten industry disappearing into a forest of trees and weeds.

Notes

1) Robert Smithson, "Unpublished Writings" from *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam (University of California Press, 1996)
2) ibid
3) ibid
4) Les Levine in conversation with Joan Simon in M. J. Jacob, *Gordon Matta-Clark: A Retrospective*, 1985
5) Christian Kravagna, "It's nothing worth documenting if it's not difficult to get: On the documentary nature of photography and film in the work of Gordon Matta-Clark", from *Gordon Matta-Clark,* edited by Corinne Diserens (Phaidon 2006)
6) ibid
7) Samuel Beckett "Text for nothing #8" from *Texts for Nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950-1976* (Faber & Faber, 2010)
8) Robert Smithson, "Unpublished Writings" from *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam (University of California Press, 1996)
9) Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,* 1974
10) Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography,* trans. Anthony Mathews (Reaktion Books, 2000)
11) Andrei Tarkovsky, *Stalker*, 1979
12) Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, (first published in France in 1989, Continuum Impacts, 2008)





Between Plants & Ghosts

Matt Packer

2009 was the year that Eamon O'Kane took ownership of a former plant nursery in Odense, Denmark, and began slowly, approximately, to make the place a home, a studio, and the subject of works of photography, video, and installation. At 6000 square metres and sprawling, organised into various greenhouse enclosures, storage spaces, and former offices, the nursery is more than a sensible house, more than a sensible studio, and more than can be sensibly accommodated within any single frame of a camera. Any comprehension of its scale requires a circuitous and layered approach. It requires that we take one door that leads to the next, which leads to another, then another, only to bring us back (some time later) to the first. Through those doors we might encounter reams of broken glass, or the delapidated architecture of seeding, hydration, and other aspects of organic cultivation. We might encounter some plants that have survived their abandonment or weeds that have newly established themselves in the detritus, living in the nursery's afterlife like zombies. Through those doors we might also pass the promisory evidence of an artists' studio; piles of salvaged and reclaimed materials, some of it on the way out, some of it on the way in; old office hardware and camera equipment; the glowing pulse of a MacBook or the carcass of a yellowing computer.

Since 2009, Eamon O'Kane has produced a vast archive of documentary material that consists of photographs and videos of the plant-nursery, throughout all stages of his co-existence with the place. Among the photographs, there's a close-up detail of snow that seems to have drifted into one of the greenhouse enclosures. There's another that shows a small field of grassy crops, browned by the sun. There's another of a collapsed roof that looks like it was taken on the coldest day in December. There are photographs and videos of every space, in every corner, in all weathers of a Scandinavian climate, and many times over. Yet, O'Kane's approach to documenting the nursery (and its slowly encroaching occurances) has been remarkably consistent; using the camera with the similar sense of detachment that 19th century topographic photographers such as Carleton E. Watkins applied to the American frontier. Except here, of course, the report from the frontier is more like a postscript to a Modern civilization that has already been and gone, leaving behind a puzzle of symbolic environmental instruments.

O'Kane's approach to documentating the spaces of the nursery also acknowledges the various ecologies of the place. It's an ecological compound that includes the nursery's former processes of natural and artificial cultivation, the downward economic spiral that eventually led to the closure of the business in 2009, and of course his own (almost indetectable) interventions as an artist and inhabitant. Although none of this is ever really reconcilable in the split second of a camera shutter or in 20 minutes of HD footage, his repetitious and near-objective approach allows for the vacancy of these processes to become apparent. So apparent, in fact, that O'Kane himself seems to willfully disappear behind these images. We'll find no inflections of the hands behind the camera, no body reflected in any mirrored surfaces, and rarely even an object in close focus that simulates the interest of his eye. It's as though each photograph and each video were an attempt to de-centre himself (and the human body in general) from the ecology of the place; negating both his subjectivity and the subjectification of the nursery entirely. It evokes Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's fantasy notion of a 'probe-head' that – in escaping the regime of his or her own subjectivity – has the potential to 'dismantle the strata in their wake, break through walls of significance … fell trees in favour of vertical rhizomes, and steer the flows down lines of positive deterritorialization'.

Although the archive of photographs and videos is never put forward as the artwork as such, it continues to be the 'field of reference' for installation and video works that have been exhibited in various iterations over recent years. These works add a further circuitry to O'Kane's relationship to the nursery as a place that is essentially both interior and exterior to his own artistic practice; a place that is also a model of broken relationships between

Where There Are People There Are Things
CCA, Centre of Contemporary Art, Derry, N. Ireland, 2014
Installation views
Above, previous and following pages

natural and human-constructed worlds, the pre-Modern and the Modernist, the ecological and the economic.

In his solo exhibition at CCA Derry~Londonderry, O'Kane presented a number of photographs from the archive that had been printed as transparencies and mounted into illuminated lightboxes. These lightboxes were reclaimed and repurposed from the nursery's greenhouse enclosures, where they once hung from the ceilings to enchance the growth speed of plants. In these works, it's O'Kane's photographs (and by extension, us viewers) that become the new recepticles to this climatic adjustment; the lightboxes providing a kind of transport from one world to another with their heightened sense of illusory space in the depth of the image. The use of lightboxes from the nursery meant more than just an economy of materials, of course. Their use implicated the site of the nursery as part of each photograph's delivery mechanism, short-circuiting the relationship that usually seperates the 'subject' of the enviroment from the environment itself.

The lightboxes were installed on a self-standing framework that extended across the exhibition space, providing them with a provisional architecture of their own. Some of the lightboxes were mounted at eye-level, with others at alternating heights and facing different directions. Like one of Herbert Bayer's exhibition designs for the early 20th century, the arrangement made certain demands upon the movement of viewers in engaging with these photographs. Their arrangement meant that it was never possible to see all images at the same time and from the same place, and neither was it possible to see just one without the fragment of another creeping into view. The arrangement reproduced the layered and polyphonic sensation of the nursery itself, requiring a body that could move around the installation and navigate attention between different planes, surfaces, and temporalities; a body that needed to be responsive to the demands of physical displacement and perceptual self-assembly.

Although we never see anyone appear in front of the lens of O'Kane's photographs and videos, the works are still haunted by the bodies (or the ghosts) that are implicit in the works' production and presentation, including his own. These are bodies at risk, however. They are constantly deferred and in a state of further disappearing, being overlapped and outnavigated by the ecology of the plant nursery and the technology of its descripton. A clear example of this happening occurs in O'Kane's video works, where photographic images of the nursery have been set before a motional video camera that panoramically tracks the surfaces of these images. The camera moves left to right across the photograph in a silent and drone-like movement that carries no register of human control at all. It scans within the limits of this other, pre-given, photographic frame, asthough its task was to verify the illusion of the first image. Yet, if the first image represents an establishing relationship between the environment and the camera, then the second image suggests the scrutiny of that relationship entirely. Encapsulating both the original image and also the photographic act, these works subsume and disempower the photographic gaze in the process. It seems that time has run out on the powers of seeing the world without the implication of being drawn into it and held to account.

Given the various deferences of the human body in these examples of Eamon O'Kane's work, it would be mistaken to suggest that his work is figurative in the artistic tradition of the term. His work is better understood as an environmental practice, that finds an alignment somewhere between Gordon Matta Clark and Robert Smithson of the 60s generation, Lothar Baumgarten and Renee Green in the 80s, and contemporaries such as Andrea Zittel and Pierre Huyghe in the present day. Like O'Kane, these artists have each sought to build their practice into relationship with an unstable environmental ecology that includes the human body (whether as producer or participant) as one among many other activating forces. The only bodies in O'Kane's work are the voices that accompany his video works. There's the distinctive voice of Jack MacGowran reading a short text by Samuel Beckett in "And





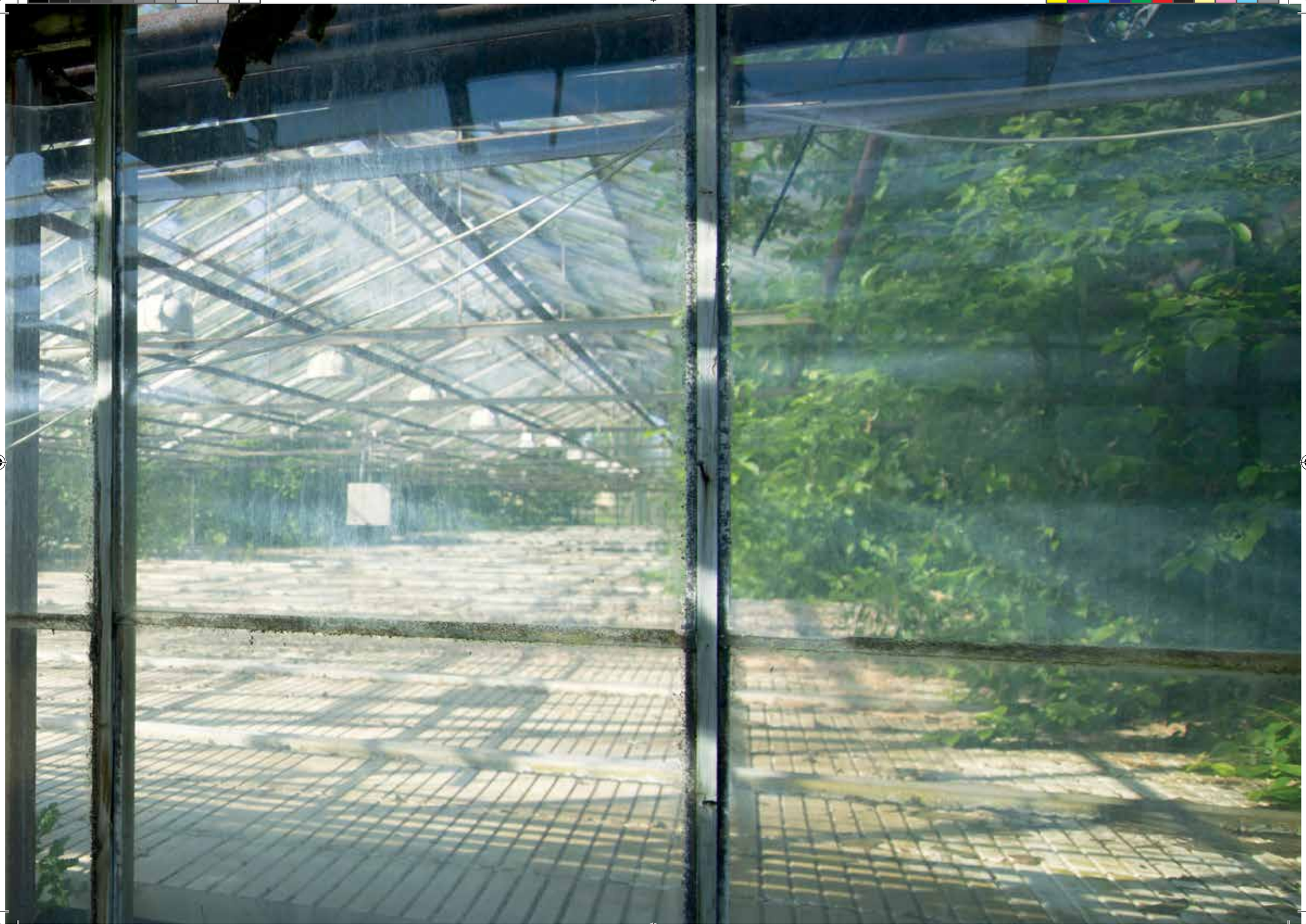


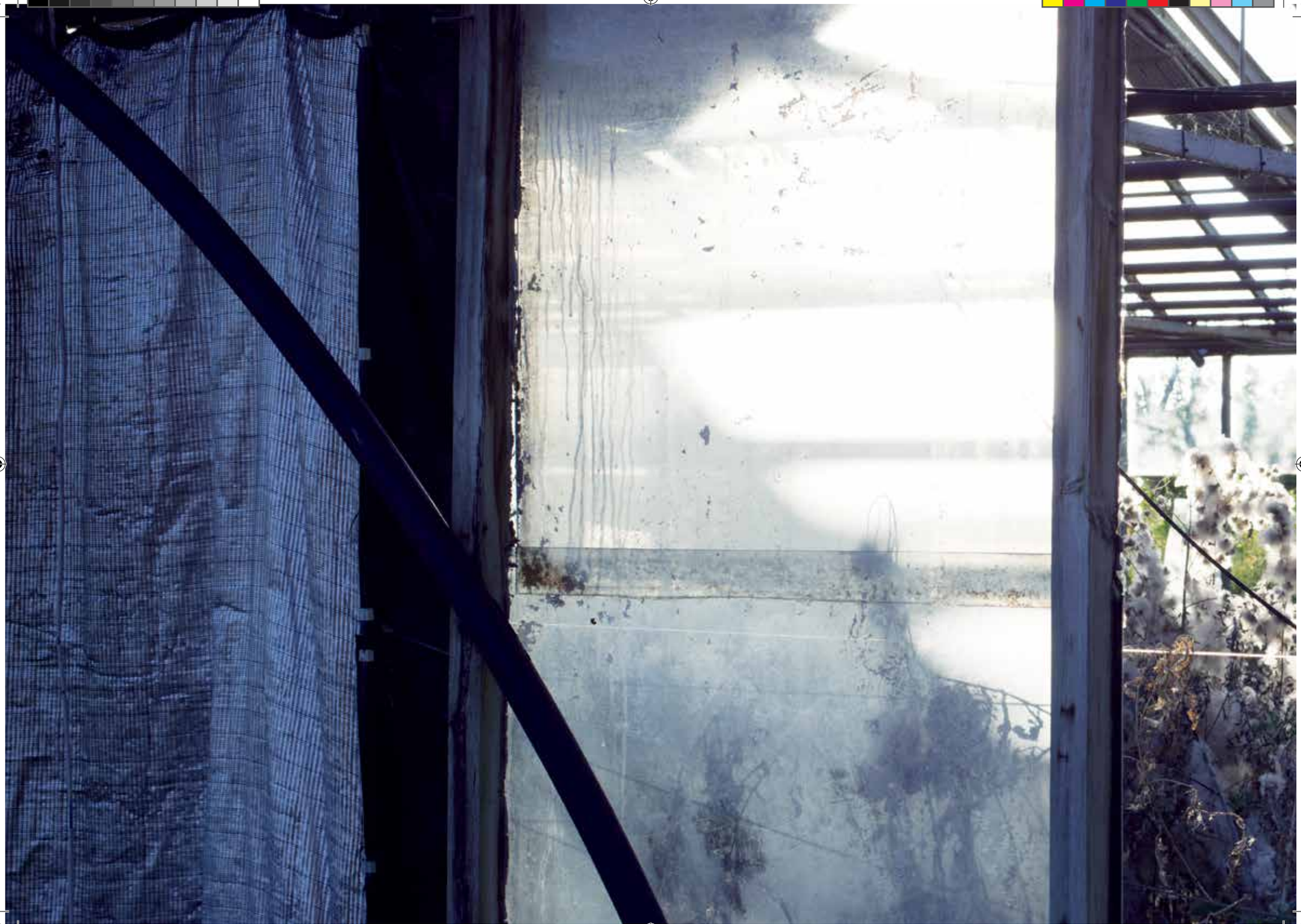


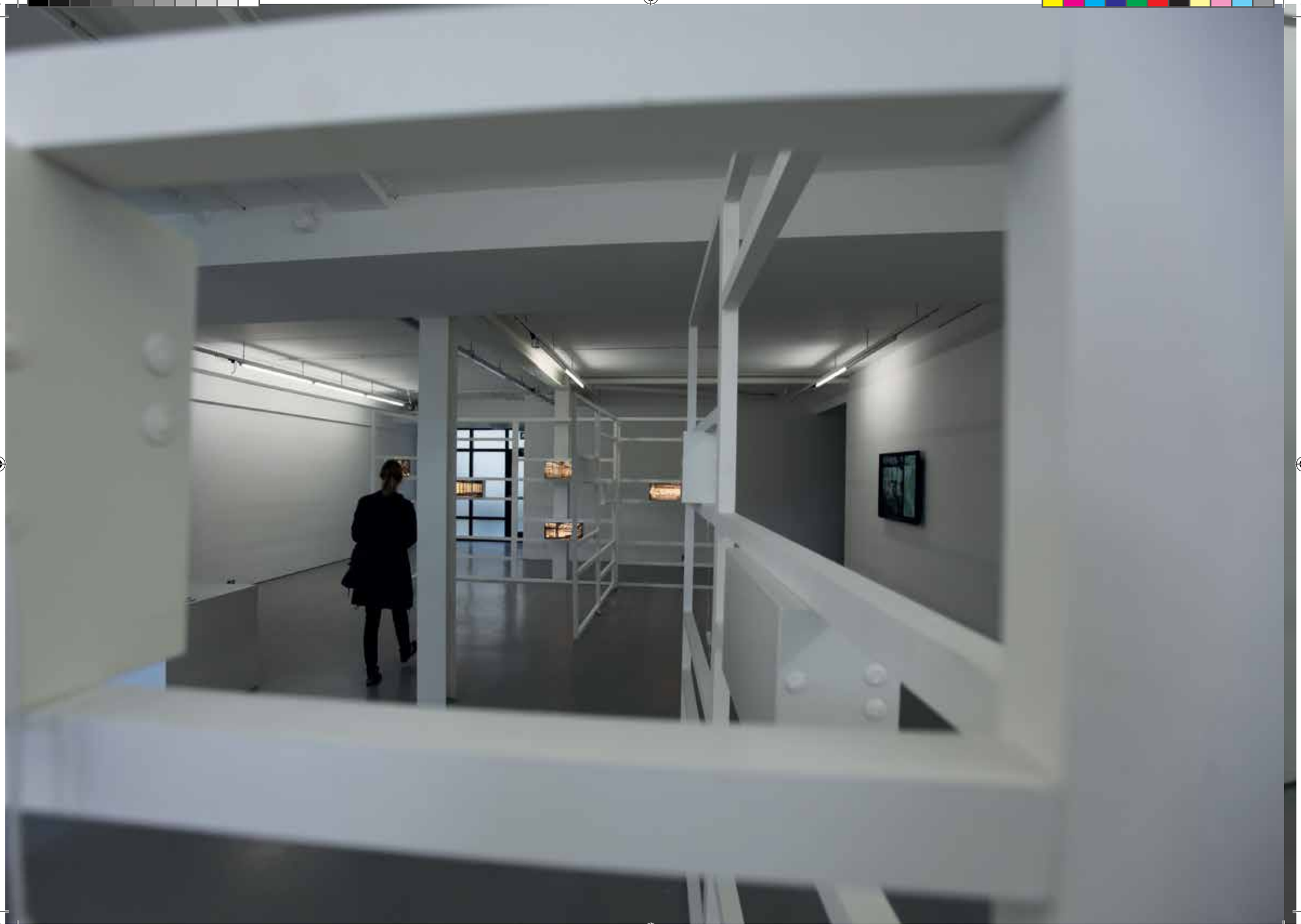
Time Begins Again". There's also the voices of artists Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt in O'Kane's re-enactment of their video work *Swamp* from 1971. The choice of these particular vocal excerpts is significant. Samuel Beckett's "Text for Nothing #8" is a text that represents the paradoxical stuggle of escape through enunciation (I begin to have no very clear recollection of how things were before (I was!), and by before I mean elsewhere, time has turned into space and there will be no more time, till I get out of here); while the vocal narrative provided by Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt is also one that struggles with the perceptual limits of engaging with a place through the instruments of language and a camera. The original video was a collaborative attempt to walk through a New Jersey swamp with a Bolex camera, with Holt guided only by what she can see through the lens and by Smithson's verbal instructions. In O'Kane's re-enactment, those same instructions are applied to his own navigation of the nursery, with his own camera similarly routing through a hinterland of grassy weeds, guided by Smithson's words spoken over 25 years earlier.

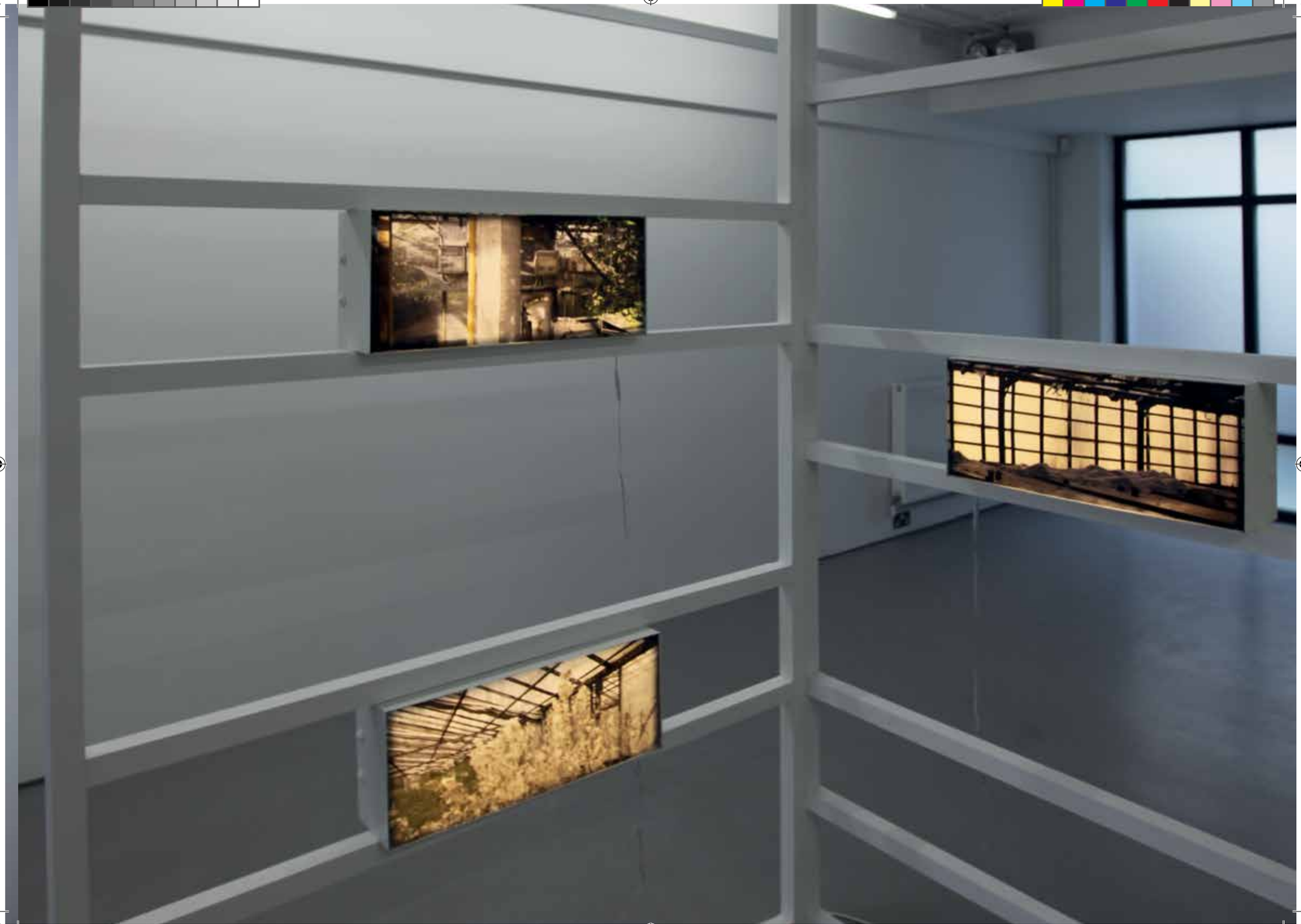
In O'Kane's work, we'll find no prophecy of environmental ruin or restitution. There are no Hollywood scale tidal waves or metropolitan volcanoes. There is however a quiet and restless questioning of what it means to be present in an environment without the assumed separations of nature and culture, and without the assumed priviledges of human action. If we're going to reconsider all this, then a former plant-nursery in Odense, Denmark, seems like the perfect place to start.

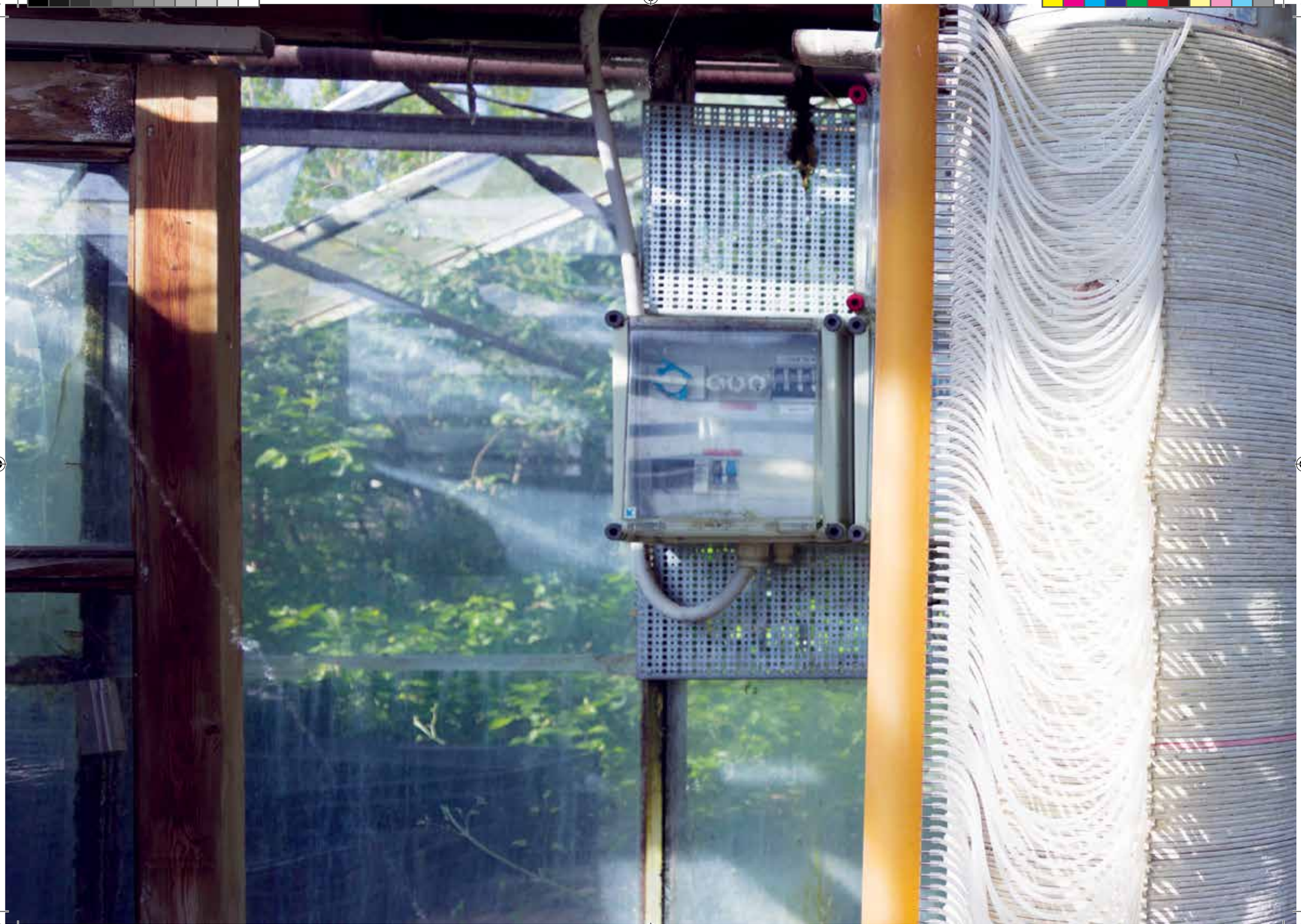
Opposite page:
Swamp reenactment
(after Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt)
3 mins, HD Video, 2014
Video stills











And Time Begins Again
ROM 8, Bergen, Norway, 2014
Installation views
Above, opposite and following pages

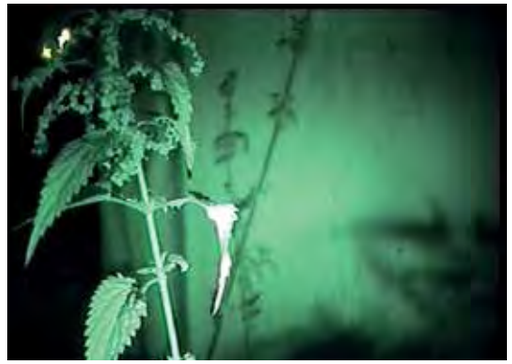
And Time Begins Again
KCCC, Klaipėda Culture Communication Center, Klaipėda, Lithuania, 2014
Installation view, video installation

Above:
And Time Begins Again
Butler Gallery, Kilkenny Castle, Kilkenny, Ireland, 2017
Installation view

Opposite:
And Time Begins Again
Sandnes, Norway, 2011
Installation view














Eamon O'Kane In Conversation with Martin Clark

Martin Clark: Lets start at the beginning. How did you begin this project?

Eamon O'Kane: Well, I would have to go back to 2009. Although in fact this project grew out of many years of work I had been engaged with around my family home in Ireland. But in 2009 I was doing a project with ArtSway in the New Forest, staging a reenactment with the English Civil War Society of a meal that had taken place at my family home in the late 1600's which involved King James II dining under a particular sycamore tree which I grew up with as a child. I had been fascinated with these histories and with the house for many years, but that work really culminated with the reenactment and exhibition in 2009. It was almost 300 years to the day that the actual event took place, on the 20th of April 1689.

MC: This was an historic reenactment as artwork?

EOK: Yes, I organised it and directed it. It was produced with some of the same people that had worked on the *Battle of Orgreave* for Jeremy Deller and Mike Figgis. They were an amateur reenactment society. We filmed for just one day. In the morning they reenacted a hunt, because King James II was the last King to hunt in the New Forest, and then in the afternoon they reenacted the meal which had taken place at my parents home. The hunt was partially based on an Uccello painting in the Ashmolean museum called *Hunt in the Forest*. The painting focuses so strongly on the formal composition and colours, and similarly the film is basically redcoat soldiers moving across the screen and shooting off gunpowder, which is one of the things the reenactors love doing! On the day before travelling to shoot the film I had been in Denmark, where I moved from the UK in 2007 with my family. At that time we were looking to buy somewhere and move out of our rented accommodation. We'd been looking without success for over a year and then we stumbled across the details of an old plant nursery online. I had to fly to England for the shoot, so my wife Anja visited. When I got back I went there and we made an offer, we were the first and the last people to view it. For me finding and acquiring this property for my family is inextricably linked to the work I made around my old family home in Ireland.

MC: Tell me about the property.

EOK: It's a fairly standard Danish farmhouse from the beginning of the 1900s, a garden, an orchard, but it came with several outbuildings and 6000m2 of greenhouses. Up until we bought it it had been a fully functioning plant nursery. As soon as we moved in we very quickly had to make a decision whether to keep it as some sort of business, or to let it fall into disrepair and eventually demolish the greenhouses. I think that I had an inkling right from the start that I wanted to do something with this very particular place, and I knew that it was going to be very different from my previous work.

MC: In what way?

EOK: Well, the undertone of the ArtSway project is in a sense a decoding of my understanding of various different histories and an attempt to deal, in an oblique way, with the political situation in Northern Ireland. Not by tackling it head on but by examining its roots.

MC: So your own family history becomes a way to deal with these other histories, evoked through this place, your family home in Ireland?

EOK: My mother was born in England and brought up a Protestant. My father grew up as a Catholic boy on the Falls Road in Belfast. So there has always been that duality in my family history. It's very personal but it's not just the reenactment work itself, but the fact that I was making that as I was also finding this new family home, our family home, in Denmark. That became another kind of reenactment, of the moment my parents found my childhood home in Co. Donegal. Like us, they had stumbled upon that place all those years before, it wasn't a home at that time, they bought it at auction a few months after I was born. As you know I have made numerous artworks exploring that place and my relation to it. And whilst they operate as

artworks they also have another kind of operation, a very direct and specific relation to the place, the site, the buildings, the architecture, the histories. They are ongoing interventions if you like. But it's interesting because where the home in Ireland and my work there explores and enacts a restoration or a reconnecting - of those buildings and that site, like a kind of reverse Gordon Matta Clark – I realized immediately that the project in Denmark would work in the opposite direction. That it would become a kind of carefully managed deconstruction.

MC: It's very personal and in a way pragmatic of course, but it also feels quite deliberate - this need to inhabit or create a similar situation to the one you were leaving back in Ireland. To take on a responsibility and a relationship with a site like that again.

EOK: When I was growing up I was involved in a lot of the maintenance of my parents' house, such as the repairs, looking after the garden, cutting the grass and restoring the buildings. When I was a child a lot of the outbuildings in our grounds were roofless, with trees growing up amongst them. So I think I've always had this feeling of restoration and preservation being a very present thing. My grandfather was the head of the National Trust, and later of Christies in Northern Ireland. So that was instilled through him as well, through his love of historic houses as well as my parents' interest in history and its preservation. But as I say, in a way this project in Denmark is almost its antithesis, because yes that place has a history, and I'm deeply interested in that history, but there is nothing that singles it out from other properties in the area, nothing special. This whole part of Odense has been associated with nurseries for over a century and for me there is a tremendous freedom in it being so generic. But at the same time this type of horticultural industry is on the wane - mainly due to the increase of fuel prices and the relative flat-lining in the cost of the produce. Changes in the global capitalist structure have also meant that this type of industry is becoming increasingly unsustainable, especially at this medium scale, and is moving more towards huge automated greenhouses that don't require anything like as much human labour. So this place embodies many of my own interests and a very personal set of circumstances and ideas, but also a lot of concerns and worries around a more universal relationship we have as human beings to the natural world and how these different things reconcile themselves.

MC: I think that's interesting because, as you say, although the house you grew up in is of genuine and perhaps broad historic interest, it seems like for you and your work that's the least important aspect in a way. That it's your relationship to the family history it holds and produces that you are more involved in – with these other more universal histories operating as a backdrop somehow? And the new property in Denmark becomes a way to re-involve yourself and re-invest in those processes again.

EOK: Absolutely, and I think that some parts of how the project in Ireland developed were connected to an awakening of an understanding of history through a very gradual discovery of particular histories. Growing up there were significant gaps in the way I was taught history at school, in terms of gaining an understanding of my own identity and my own history growing up in Ireland, especially with that 'duality' in my family that I mentioned earlier. Through the study of the history of the house, which began as a sociological study into the planation of Ulster and its consequences - the fact that the Battle of the Boyne was really just a battle between an English Catholic King and a Dutch Protestant King, with Ireland chosen as a convenient battleground for James because he had more sympathisers there - I became aware of these constant paradoxes through history, where both sides contradict themselves. You know, the colour Orange comes from the Dutch national colour, and the Unionists pledge themselves to the Queen celebrating and fighting for the right to celebrate the anniversary of the defeat of an English King. As a student I began to realize that this doesn't make sense somehow. Of course it is about histories of mapping and power, and the idiosyncracies and paradoxes that develop though the chopping up of space and the displacement and killing of people that are required to accomplish it. But I wanted to somehow encode all of that into the work by starting with something very simple, a childhood home, a tree in the garden where I used to play, things that anyone might relate to in some way.

With the project in Denmark there is an even broader series of political questions, which are also about the mapping of space - both real and virtual – as well as the implications on the future of the earth regarding humankind's consumption of natural resources. Things that we are all grappling with in contemporary society: the exponential energy cost of internet searches, constantly charging computers and iPhones, flying around the world, and so on. Recently I was installing a work at the sculpture biennale in Oslo and I was talking to the artist Toril Johannssen, and she said she had asked her students what the art of the future would be, and someone said that it would be an

attempt to restore or rejuvinate nature before it is completely obliterated. I think that there is an aspect of that in what I am doing with the project in Denmark, but I don´t see nature as a seperate 'thing' to be restored. Humankind is also part of the natural world and it has been one of our collective mistakes to see ourselves as separate and superior to other species and our environment. This work in Denmark is about a dismantling of both conceptual and physical structures, a slow race against time, and the management of a forest which is growing and evolving. The trees are self-sowing and slowly growing, as I am slowly removing the glass and metal from the greenhouse structures. And at the same time I am trying to come to terms with the former uses and histories of the place.

MC: What was grown there?

EOK: Before and during the Second World War they were growing tobacco and banana plants, and then it developed into tomatoes and cucumbers, and then decorative plants like the succulents that were there when we took it over. It has been fulfilling various needs but they are fluctuating needs, and in a way artificial needs that are totally unsustainable. This type of industry requires a vast amount of resources: metal, glass, wood as well as a tremendous amount of water and energy (electricity, oil and 'fjernvarme') and then the products may even end up being exported. For all those reasons one feels that it must be an industry on the wane, but at the same time the only way for these industries to be cost effective is to increase in size and become increasingly automated, so paradoxically perhaps we are not looking at an industry on the wane but actually a vision of the future. It is quite a frightening thought that this type of controlled horticultural environment is precisely the type of industry that humankind may have to resort to in order to counteract effects of global warming and other human made negative phenomena.

MC: These structures and systems make very explicit the construction and production of 'nature'. It feels very appropriate that everything you are talking about is very explicitly amplified through this industry, and yet nature is constructed and manufactured and managed in much more subtle and pervasive ways, and has been for many thousands of years. From the prehistoric field systems that shaped the landscape I used to walk through when I lived in Cornwall, to the Pine forests of Scotland that are entirely imported at the expense of the ancient Caledonian forests which are native. I'm interested in how you are thinking about these questions? About what kind of nature you are reintroducing and how constructed that is? Whether, in this process of dismantling the greenhouse in order to restore the woodland, you are simply replacing one kind of construction for another?

EOK: I think it is a bit of both. I often reflect on how I treat the art side of things at the site, because it is all very entangled with my own life. This is a home where my kids are growing up, we are building treehouses in the garden, and a lot of the activity is done with the children. Actually a lot of the time there we are just a family with children growing up in a particular place, which is very much in parallel to my own experience of the house I grew up in. But I think we all have some sort of need or desire for control when involved in creative production, and I have been trying to somehow subdue that, because of course this thing is out of my control, I can't possibly deal with it as just one person, you know, it's a huge site. I also don't want to be able to deal with it all either. I am super interested in how these various micro-environments are developing, and in cataloging what is happening. But I do want to somehow engage with the process and I know that by dismantling some of the structures and having some sort of a methodology to that deconstruction, and perhaps a lack of a methodology can be a methodology in itself in terms of taking down the site, I am having an effect anyway. But I am approaching it in a very spontaneuous way. A local nursery owner was telling me that I should cut down the trees that had self-seeded and started growing inside the greenhouse structures, that it would be much more difficult to do the work if they were left. But somehow I felt it was ok that these trees grow up in this way. You know I find it quite interesting that the architecture that was meant to hold and nurture a certain type of plant is now determining where another type of plant is actually growing, and if and when the structures are removed the trees will have an echo of that, in how they are warped and distorted.

MC: You could argue that that process is much more natural than any of the interventions you are making.

EOK: Exactly.

MC: I want to ask you now to talk a bit about the way you are producing your works from these spaces and processes – if your relationship with this site and the practical work you are doing can be seen as one kind of practice, albeit more complex and perhaps less easily determinable - there are also artworks you are producing through a more









deliberate or perhaps just more legible artistic practice.

EOK: I began taking photographs right from the start, but that is something that I do anyway. So to begin with I wasn't sure if I was taking them as artworks, or if they were source material for other works, or if they would be just a kind of personal record. I wasn't sure what category these photographs fell into.

MC: But you were documenting it, both the site and your interventions?

EOK: Yes I was documenting it for myself. It was slightly haphazard and I think it still is. I think the variety of the documentation is broadening. From the beginning I was using analogue and digital photography in different formats, as well as different types of video documentation. I recently began using a camera which is meant for documenting wildlife and one can set it up to take images with sensors or timelapse, both with still and moving image. It has been an experiment. A similar experiment was when I returned to my old Hi 8 camera in order to use the infrared mode to shoot images at night time, much in the same way as Bruce Nauman did for his work *Mapping the Studio*. And then at a certain point I began taking down the grow lamps and realised that these were the perfect size and shape, and had a kind of readymade minimalist aesthetic, which I could turn into light boxes to display the panoramic images I was taking. This is quite often the way it works for me, materials available on the site are being recycled into the artworks themselves. It's not disconnected from other parts of my practice, so other approaches to installation creep into the work where and when they become relevant. And then in terms of references, I think it is often down to serendipity.

Bruce Nauman, *Mapping the Studio (Fat Chance John Cage)*, 2001

Recently I was doing a show just outside Dublin and I was in a bookshop and came across a publication by Gerard Byrne and I discovered he had been involved with a project a number of years back where he used photography to archive a number of greenhouse structures on the outskirts of Dublin. Although the work is very different it has a certain resonance given the subject matter. He was focusing on the overlooked in a way, on a particular type of architecture which would not get documented or preserved because of the fact that they are industrial structures that could be said to be connected to modernism, but are not in any way unique.

MC: I don't know that work but it sounds more like it comes from a kind of conceptual or post-conceptual photographic tendency. I think of Bernd and Hilla Becher for instance, this methodical, very formal practice which involves a classification or exploration of typologies. But with your work it feels quite a different starting point or imperative.

To begin with you said that you were just making photographs like anyone would who had bought that house and site, documenting it for yourself. But it has clearly developed into something else. You mentioned to me that you have been thinking about the greenhouses as 'studios' (and you mentioned Nauman's *Mapping the Studio* a moment ago). How is the idea of these spaces as 'studios' informing this work?

EOK: Well, in a literal sense there are the outbuildings that are connected to the complex, which were built for the workers and other functions associated with the running of the plant nursery like the heating system, canteen, packing room and so on. And I am gradually turning these buildings into studios and workshops. They are in various states of renovation and disrepair. But some of the processes that I have employed in this work feel like art processes. They are entirely pragmatic in one way but I cannot help but be reminded of certain kinds of works by other artists. For instance I had to take down and then replace a huge flat roof that was leaking, then install a wood burning stove to heat the space which I fired using wood from the old roof. It could be a work by Michael Sailstorfer or Simon Starling. In fact many of the spaces and my working with them trigger memories of other works, be that Tarkofsky's film *Stalker* or installations by Mike Nelson or Gregor Schneider. There are ghosts of processes, but also art historical ghosts. This practical work is really making me question and examine my own approach to process in art making, and in a strange way it is slowing things down.

MC: That's very interesting, but what about the greenhouses themselves, operating as a studio in

their current state?

EOK: Well the way that I am currently responding to those spaces with the photographs is a long way from any kind of documentary process that I might have started out with. There is a much more reflexive process now, a kind of searching, whereby I am continually responding to the images themselves and trying to build up an open methodology which relates as much to ideas around time as it does to the site itself. For example, I might take an image of snow breaking through the roof of a greenhouse, something that happened through an entirely natural processes. But weeks later, when the tables beneath are now gone, along with all the debris, when the snow comes this time it produces an entirely different result, a kind of shape in the space is formed in relation to the hole in the roof. And I'm not adverse to setting up some of these things artificially, so I might simulate or set up a process to achieve similar images which will be different iterations of an initial chance occurence, but constructed under very different circumstances.

MC: I guess if you think about the studio and how it operates practically, conceptually, intellectually or even imaginatively for an artist, then it's an interesting analogy. A studio is usually a place of experimentation, of risk, a place where things can be tried and tested, as well as a place of making and production, of contrivance and construction. But it is also a place to look, to think, to reflect, to imagine and to dream. It seems to me that at the moment, the way you are using these spaces is very much like that. It allows for contradictions and it allows for paradoxes. What you are making in there isn't following a pre-determined methodology – like the Gerard Byrne work you mentioned for example. It is much more about play and experiment, seeing what happens when you do certain kinds of things, as well as what happens when you don't. And then thinking about it, picturing it, following it, reflecting on it, replicating it - in a sense it is a classic studio practice.

EOK: Yes I feel that I am using the site as a vehicle for an extension of my studio practice enabling it to be both expansive and reductive at the same time.

MC: And these photographs, in their excess and their banality, make me think of Fishchli and Weiss, this almost passive documentation of the world which is at the same time very specific – at the same time too much and not enough.

EOK: Fischli and Weiss are important for me, I have an original photograph of theirs which is kind of a touchstone for me.

Fischli and Weiss, *Untitled (Mushroom)* (2006) C-type photograph, 50 x 60 cm

It is one of their double exposure mushroom photographs and I think that probably them more that any other practitioners have influenced my approach to artistic practice, perhaps also Bruce Nauman in relation to the site and his mapping the studio. Again it's this almost Beckett-like aspect of not necessarily making anything but at the same time making a lot. At the end of the day this idea of playing with the material and the process I'm engaged in is what's driving the work forward. And I have built a set of rules into these methodologies, and I am both sticking to these and breaking them, or creating resistance to them as well. So for example using the lamps as lightboxes can be seen to be a convienient thing to do but it also has a quality that means that conceptually I can reconcile the use of these objects without it being too heavy handed. They take on another function but are also a necessary part of a deconstruction process, similar to me taking down a sheet of glass and taking it to the recycling station. And then there are all the metres and metres of cabling from the site that I clean up and will also use in the installations. It's not hidden and it becomes a fundamental part of the work. There are a lot of things that I'm trying to reconcile which may relate to entropy - there often seems to be an order and chaos - but somehow I'm trying to distill all of these things down to one thing and everything at the same time. And that takes me back to the photographs again. The way I will use my archive and certain images to reengage with and revisit the site, to critically reflect through the image on what I'm actually doing in the space. Perhaps there is a paradox in even using the term archive as I don't always seem to be approaching it in that sense. I am not constructing an archive of images of greenhouses, instead it is an archive of moments in time, of comparison and difference.

MC: It feels like it almost fictionalises the space, presents it as a kind of stage. But again it's like

the studio becomes a space of fictions as well as of documentation. You talked about entropy and I know Robert Smithson is another artist who has been a hugely important influence, as well as someone whos work you have engaged with very directly.

EOK: Yes that's right, Smithson's texts such as "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic" or "Entropy and New Monuments" have been very influential on my way of thinking about the site. I have also performed a reenactment of Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt's *Swamp* film where I take the role of Nancy Holt with the film camera and I follow Smithson's direction via headphones and it to map the space in one of the greenhouses. The film has some of the feeling of the original where large thistles replace the reeds in the swamp.

MC: Do you think there's an end point to the project? You mentioned Beckett earlier, and there is something blackly comic about this image of one man trying to dismantle or maintain or control these structures and this site. But it also has the feel of a never-ending task, a futility or folly - that the process could never be completed, or should never be completed, because it's precisely this process that is constantly generative.

EOK: That's definitely something I am interested in, but I also think that it's about the place being bigger than any individual and that it is ultimately outside of my control and will take on its own life. Maybe the end point is when somehow this site becomes a forest again. I see this happening in more controlled horticultural situations, where I see other nurseries demolished and a field of grass is planted, or line after line of Christmas trees. But I'm also interested in postponing the normative processes, if you could call them that, and letting it happen in this entropic way, to engage with this process on a different level to what would have occurred otherwise. And it is happening outside as well of course. I have noticed changes in the environment within my lifetime, for example there being less bees and wasps, certain plant cycles being disrupted. So somehow to upset or disrupt the widespread monocultures in farming within the perimeter of the property - even though it is only 5 acres and even though this type of plant nurseries is also part of the industrialisation of farming - can operate in quite an extreme way, especially if the production of the plants involves a lot of artificial environments and chemicals. For example there is a field next door to the property that is sprayed every year with various pesticides and other chemicals, and those substances drift huge distances. But the greenhouses block out most of them and as a consequence become micro- environments themselves, with their own set of rules and possibilities for insects, plants and animals to have a different existence. So there are all these different processes happening within and without my control, but as you say I am attempting to consider them in terms of an idea of an expanded studio practice. It is as if after all these years where I have had a relatively normative studio practice, one which has been expanded into social spaces in different contexts, such as the Container Studio in Bristol in 2009 or my Froebel Studios from that time onwards, somehow this particular project is a way to manifest the studio space in the site of the actual subject. So I don't have this toing and froing now between the subject and the means of mediating that subject. There is the possibility to work directly from the site, and also maintain this comparative reflective space within the practice. Allowing me to engage with all the different facets of the work 'being there' or 'being present' in the subject and in the artwork derived from that subject.

MC: So how does that practice gets pulled out of that site? You have talked about some examples of that already of course, the photographs and the installations and the lightboxes. They are still documentary, they are of the site and they represent the site. But I'm wondering where the 'work' is? Where it can be located? Or whether it is itinerant, still shifting around across these objects and ideas and spaces and images, still mobile and unstable. You gave me that black and white book you had made, just simple print outs of these hundereds of photographs. And what struck me again was this idea of excess, of proliferation. In contrast to the large individual images you have singled out and printed in colour and at a certain scale, this little homemade A4 book somehow reflected exactly the excess and proliferation of the site, both in terms of it´s architecture and the extraordinary, overwhelming seriality and scale of that architecture, but also in terms of the fact that things, materials, both natural and man-made, are constantly growing and changing, shifting and mutating, transforming and evolving. It feels like somehow that's where the work is - in terms of your relationship to that and those processes.

EOK: You've hit on it exactly, because the four iterations of the work so far have all been quite different. It is as if I am searching for ways for the work to articulate the site, as well as not allow the modes of representation to become fixed. Three of the iterations so far have involved mainly video works (that have also included video projections of still images). The one exhibition so far has

involved the lightboxes I salvaged displayed within painted wooden structures. Somehow I feel most comfortable with the video based representation of the work, because there is the possibility - a bit like there is in the book you mentioned - of having so much packed in that it is impossible to see everything. And then there is a possibility of me re-representing the work every time I show it. So even though there are some videos that are static, there are others that I add to and change every time they are shown. It's the temporality of the medium that allows for that and somehow conceptually fits with the project. It doesn't always conform to the idea of documentation, or at least shifts between different ideas and modes of documentation in a playful way. And as we said earlier there isn't necessarily an apparent or clear methodology that one can grab onto. But I am interested in the idea that somehow, after the event, one could analyse the material that has been collected over an extended period and find some sort of logic and order to the processes. Similar to the recent studies by scientists of books such a James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* where they have found mathematical structures across the entire book. From this deep and extended engagement, and the myriad relationships it engenders with me, the work somehow irrepressibly emerges.

The nursery

Sadie Plant

The nursery: a garden for children, a house for the plants, rhythms and rhymes, seasons and times. A place of culture and encouragement, nurture and nourishment, guidance and cultivation, the source of endless openings and countless ends, more than once upon a time. Leaf through the books: there's a storyteller too. Hans Christian Andersen was born in the nearby city of Odense, and generations of children have been raised on his eventyr, tales which are far more down to earth than their English designation "fairy tales" suggests and are often centred on the qualities of plants: the innocence of the daisy, the impatience of the fir, the arrogance of the buckwheat, the pride of the oak, the wisdom of the rose, and the naivety of the snowdrop, who understood things "in its own way, just as we understand things in ours." The stories are read, the lessons are learnt. The flowers of the flax become linen, then paper, and finally sparks as the pages are burnt. The soil breaks down, the children grow old, the site is abandoned, the land is sold. The leaves leave the trees, no judgement, no blame. Everything leaves, time and again.

*

In the middle of the garden was a rose, and under it always sat a snail who had a lot inside his shell - namely, himself. "You may think I'm not doing anything," he said to the rosebush, who had in fact barely noticed he was there. "But my time will come, just you wait and see. I am wise and clever. I'll do a great deal more than grow roses; more than bear nuts; or give milk, like cows and the sheep!"

Next year the snail lay in almost the same spot, in the sunshine beneath the rose tree, which was budding and bearing roses as fresh and as new as ever. And the snail crept halfway out of its shell, stretched out its horns and drew them in again. "Everything looks just as it did last year. No progress at all; the rosebush sticks to its roses, and that's as far as it gets."

The summer passed; the autumn came. The bush still bore buds and roses till the snow began to fall. The weather became raw and wet, the bush bent down, the snail crept deep into the ground.

Then a new year began, and the roses came out again, and the snail did, too, and said: "You're an old rosebush now. You must hurry up and die, because you've given the world all that's in you. Whether it has meant anything is a question that I haven't had time to think about, but this much is clear enough - you've learnt nothing; you've done nothing new. Your life has been pointless, and soon you'll be just a stick. Can you understand what I'm saying?"
"You frighten me!" said the rosebush. "I never thought about that at all."

*

The little fir tree was curious and keen. It had sunshine and the freshest forest air, but longed for this present to become its past. "Oh, to grow, grow! To get older and taller," it thought to itself. "That is the most wonderful thing in this world."
When the swallows and storks came back in the spring, the tree asked: "Do you know where the other trees went? Have you met them?"
The swallows knew nothing about it, but the stork looked thoughtful and nodded his head. "Yes, I think I met them," he said. "On my way from Egypt I met many new ships, and some had tall, stately masts. They may well have been the trees you mean, for I remember the smell of fir. They wanted to be remembered to you."

"Oh," said the little fir, "I wish I could go to sea." But then he saw that smaller trees were cut down too: perhaps he could travel with them instead? "We know where they go," the sparrows told the fir. "The greatest splendour and glory you can imagine awaits them. We've peeped through windows. We've seen them planted right in the middle of a warm room, and decked out with the most splendid things- gold apples, good gingerbread, gay toys, and many hundreds of candles."

"And then?" asked the fir tree, trembling in every

twig. “And then? What happens then?”

*

The year turned. The rose tree bloomed again. The snail continued to grumble and fume. “I spit at the world. It’s no good! It has nothing to do with me. Keep giving your roses; that’s all you can do! Let the hazel bush bear nuts, let the cows and sheep give milk. They each have their public; but I have mine inside myself. I retire within myself, and there I shall stay. The world means nothing to me.” And so the snail withdrew into his house and closed up the entrance behind him.

“But I can’t hide inside myself,” said the rose, “even if I wanted to; I must go on bearing roses. Their petals fall off and are blown away by the wind, although once I saw one of the roses laid in a mother’s hymn book, and one of my own roses was placed on the breast of a lovely young girl, and another was kissed by a child in the first happiness of life. It did me good; it was a true blessing. Those are my recollections - my life!”

So the rose tree bloomed on in innocence, and the snail loafed in his house - the world meant nothing to him.

*

And a great oak watched the generations pass, and said, with pity, to the mayfly: “I shall live for thousands of your days, and a day for me lasts a whole year. That is something so long you can’t even figure it out.”

“No”, said the mayfly. “I don’t understand you at all.”

*

“You see? You have never taken the trouble to think of anything. Have you ever considered yourself, why you bloomed, and how it happens, why just in that way and in no other?”

“No,” said the rose. “I have never wondered why. I’ve just been happy to blossom because I couldn’t do anything else. The sun has been warm and the air so fresh. I drank of the clear dew and the strong rain; I breathed, I lived. A power rose in me from out of the earth; a strength came down from up above; I felt an increasing happiness, always new, always great, so I had to blossom over and over again. That was my life; I couldn’t do anything else.”

*

“Does all the beauty of the world stop when you die?”

“No,” said the oak; “it will last much longer - longer than I can even think of.”

“Well, then,” said the little mayfly, “we have the same time to live; only we reckon differently.”

*

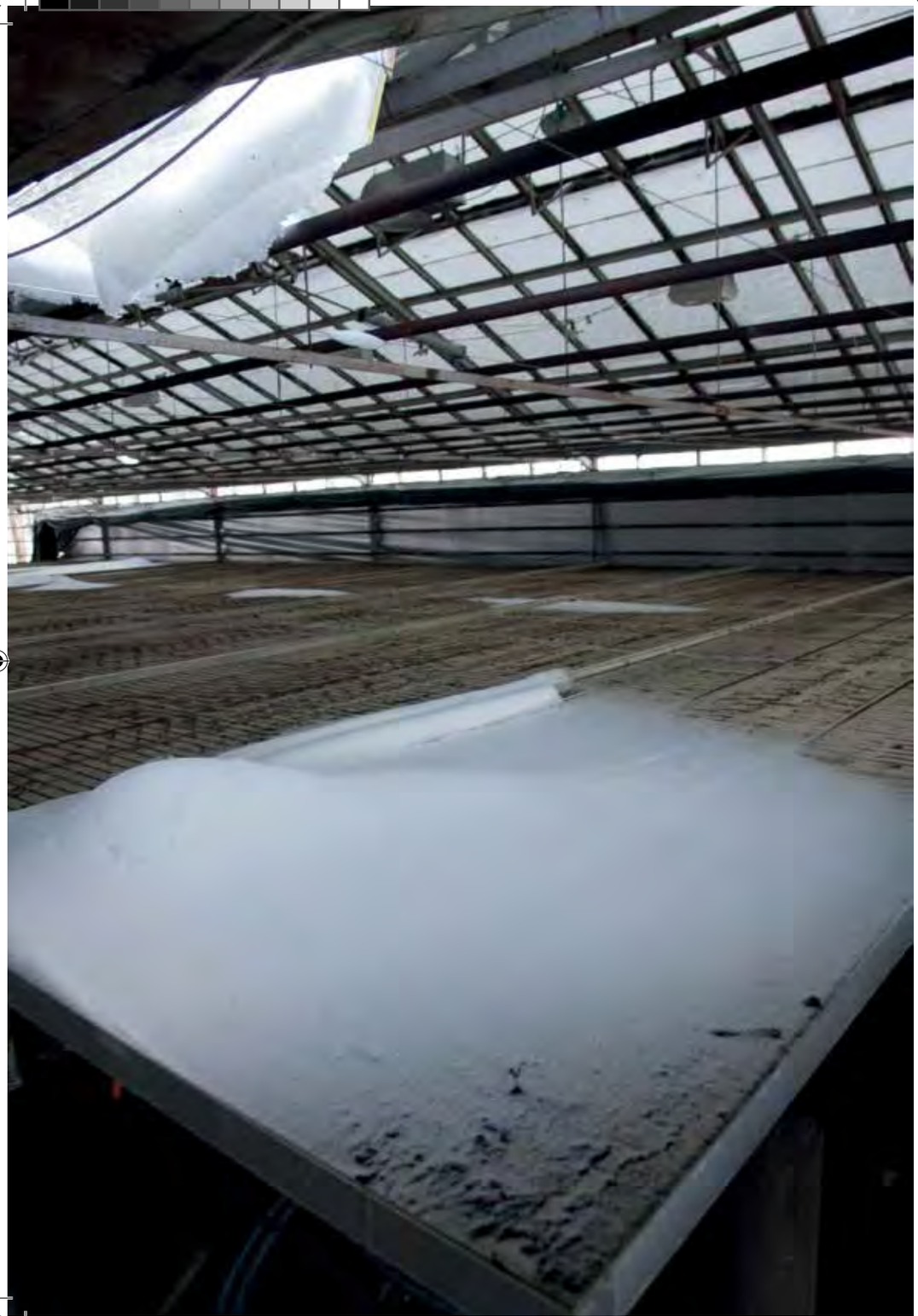
And every summer day is repeated the same dance, the same questions, the same answers, and the same peaceful falling asleep. It happens through many generations. The rose bush withers, the fir tree burns, the oak comes down in a mighty storm. Of snails, mayflies, swallows, sparrows, and storks there is no more to be said.

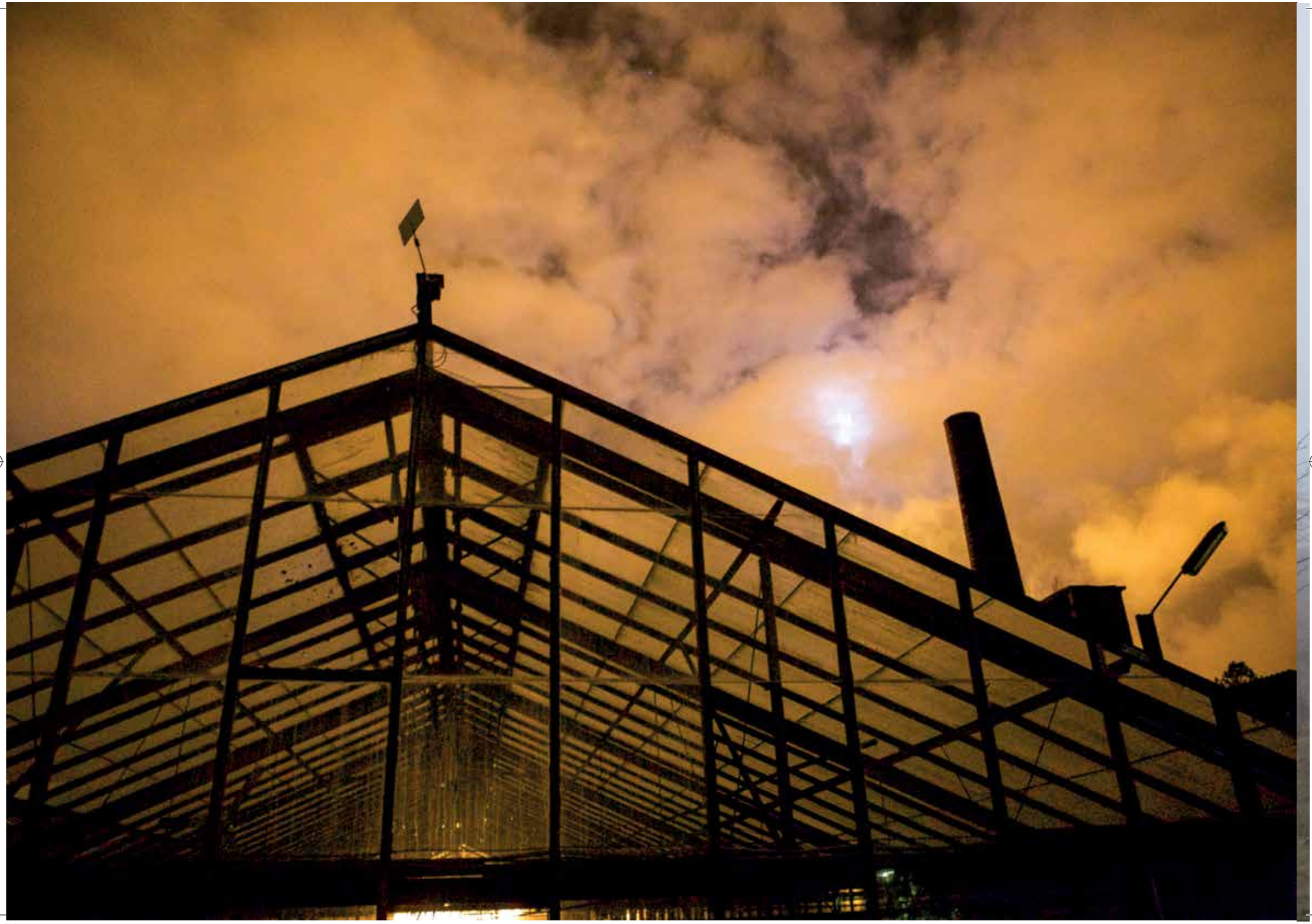
Snip, snap, snurre,
Basse lurre!
The ballad is over!

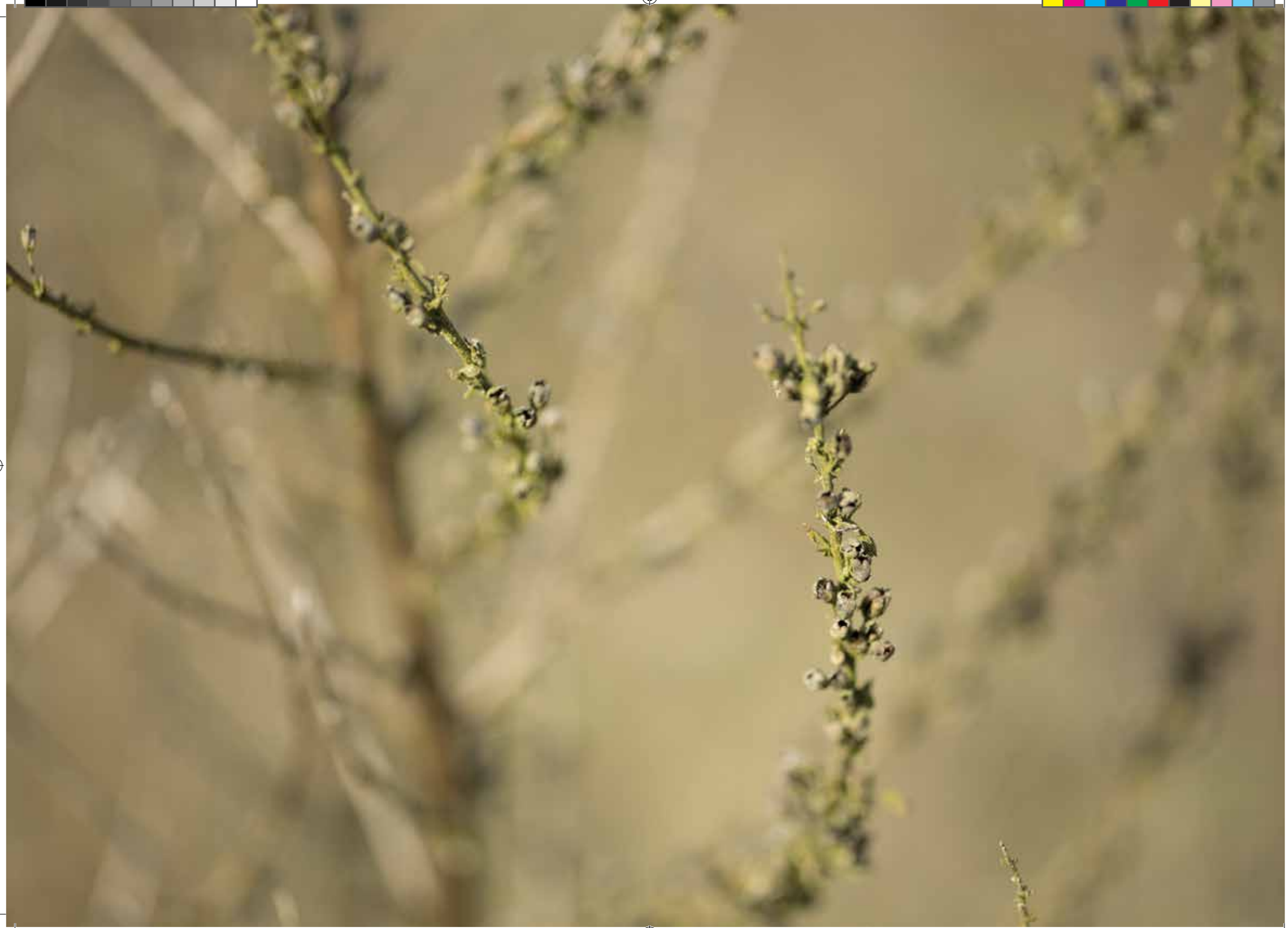
But it’s never over. The nursery rhymes are all that remain, but they are sung over and over again.

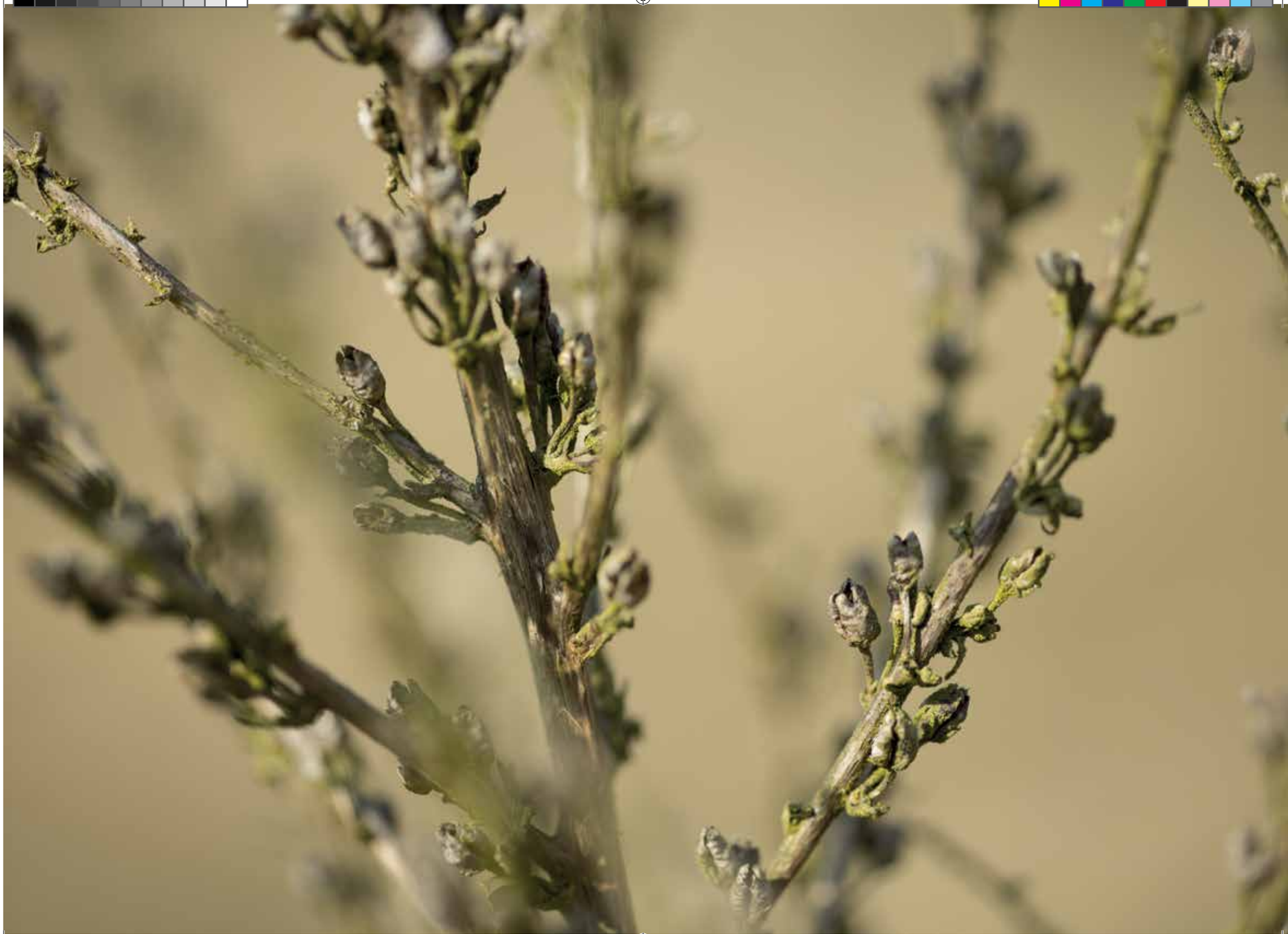
The text stems from The Daisy, The Fir Tree, The Buckwheat, The Old Oak Tree’s Last Dream, The Snail and the Rosebush, The Snow Drop, and The Flax, all stories by Hans Christian Andersen.

Sadie Plant









Biographies

Eamon O'Kane's multi-disciplinary practice has consistently been drawn to architectural contexts, whether in his 'Froebel' installation works that explore environments of play, or else in works such as Glass House that presented a scaled model of Philip Johnson's iconic 'Glass House' which was exhibited at California 101 in San Francisco and then at his first museum solo exhibtion to mark the 50th anniversary of the Sheldon Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska. O'Kane has exhibited widely in exhibitions curated by Dan Cameron, Lynne Cooke, Klaus Ottman, Salah M.Hassan, Jeremy Millar, Angelike Nollert, Yilmaz Dziewior, and others. He has been recipient of The Taylor Art Award, The Tony O'Malley Award, a Fulbright Award, an EV+A open award (Dan Cameron), IMMA residency in Dublin, BSR Scholarship in Rome, CCI residency in Paris, and a Pollock Krasner foundation grant. He has been short-listed for the AIB Prize, PS1 studio fellowship in NYC and the Jerwood Drawing Prize in London. He has had over 80 solo exhibitions internationally, including in New York, London, Berlin, Frankfurt, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Paris, Copenhagen, Oslo, Bergen, Dublin, Belfast and Cork. He has praticapated in numerous Biennals including EVA, Limerick, Luleå Biennal, Norwegian Sculpture Biennal. Since 2011, Dublin Contemporary. Since 2011, he has been professor of Visual Art and Painting The Art Academy, Department of Contemporary Art, Faculty of Art, Music and Design, University of Bergen.

Sadie Plant studied philosophy at the University of Manchester where she gained her PhD in 1989. She taught Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham for five years prior to setting up the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit as a Research Fellow at the University of Warwick in 1995. She has worked freelance since 1997, writing, learning, travelling, and teaching part-time, for example on the Fine Arts MA at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design. She published three books in the 1990s: The Most Radical Gesture, which grew out of her doctoral research about the situationists; Zeros and Ones, which offers an alternative, feminist account of the history and nature of digital technology; and Writing on Drugs, which argues that the enormous influence of psychoactive substances on mainstream Western culture makes a nonsense of the so-called 'war on drugs'. Over She has written for English language newspapers and magazines as varied as the Independent, the Financial Times, Wired, Adbusters, and the New Statesman, as well as more specialised journals, books, and catalogues in the fields of architecture, the arts, and new technology. She has also made many appearances on radio and TV, including BBC programmes such as Newsnight, The Late Show, and In Our Time.

Matt Packer is a curator and writer currently based in Ireland. He is director of EVA Biennial, Limerick, Ireland. He was Director of CCA (Centre for Contemporary Art) in Derry, N.Ireland and is an Associate Director of Treignac Projet in France. he co-curated the Lofoten International Art Festival – a biennial exhibition in Norway; he curated the 15th edition of Tulca Festival of Visual Arts in Galway and was part of the selection committee for the British representation at the Venice Biennale 2017. He was Curator of Exhibitions & Projects at the Lewis Glucksman Gallery at University College Cork in Ireland from 2008 to 2013. He has curated numerous exhibitions in institutional and independent capacities including group exhibitions O Chair O Flesh (Treignac Projet, 2013), FWA: Freeing Welsh Architecture (Treignac Projet, 2012), School Days (Lewis Glucksman Gallery, 2011), When Flanders Failed (Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2011), Getting Even (Lewis Glucksman Gallery / Kunstverein Hannover, 2009. His writings have been published in magazines and journals including Kaleidoscope, Frieze, Source Photographic Review, Concreta, Photography & Culture, and Camera Austria.

Martin Clark has been Director of Camden Arts Centre since 2017. Previously he was Director of Bergen Kunsthall, Norway, 2013-2017, and Artistic Director of Tate St Ives, 2007–13. In 2016 he was Artistic Director for Art Sheffield. Over the past 17 years he has curated and organised over 70 exhibitions, including solo shows by Simon Starling, Alex Katz, Steven Claydon, Black Audio Film Collective, The Otolith Group, Adam Chodzko, Deimantas Narkevicius, Michael Stevenson, Brian Griffiths and Lucy McKenzie; as well as group exhibitions including The Noing Uv It, Bergen Kunsthall (2015), The Dark Monarch: Magic and Modernity in British Art, Tate St Ives (2009), and Pale Carnage, Arnolfini, Bristol and DCA, Dundee (2007). He programmed and curated the first UK solo exhibitions of Albert Oehlen, Heimo Zobernig, Simon Fujiwara and Hans Peter Feldmann, and the first institutional exhibitions in the UK by Carol Bove, Lily van der Stokker, Bojan Sarcevic and Eileen Quinlan. The exhibitions he curated of Mark Titchner (2006) and Dexter Dalwood (2010) were both nominated for the Turner Prize. He has also programmed and curated exhibitions of important British modernist artists, including Barbara Hepworth, William Scott, Ben Nicholson, Peter Lanyon, Marlow Moss and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska.

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