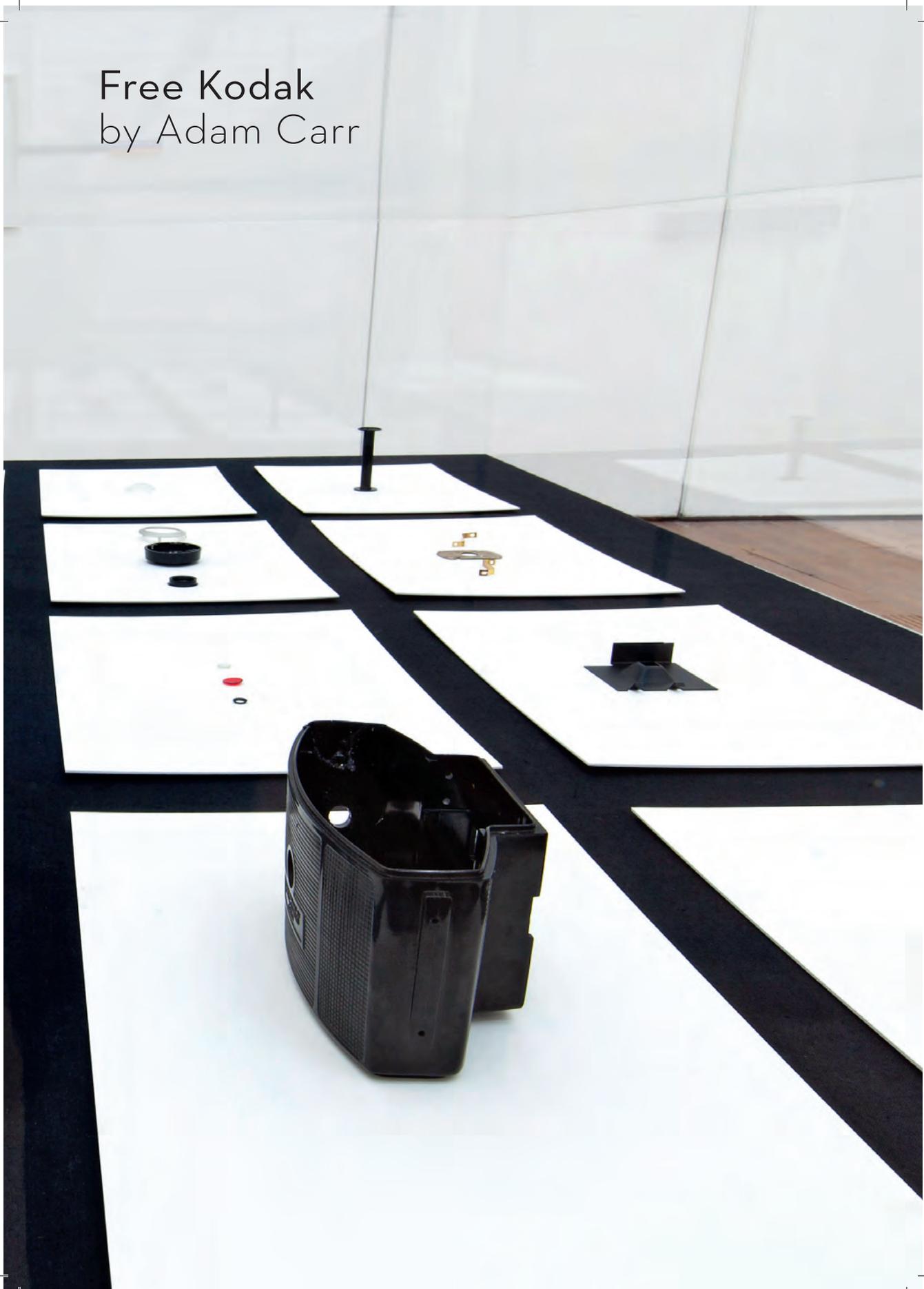


Free Kodak  
by Adam Carr





Michael Asher, no title, 1973  
Installation view, Galleria Franco Toselli, Milan  
Photo: Giorgio Colombo



Hans Haacke, MoMA Poll, 1970  
Installation view, The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
Photo: © Hans Haacke/VG Bild-Kunst

Free Kodak, or #FreeKodak as it is announced on social media, is a present-day call to the musician Kodak Black. Florida-born Dieuson Octave, or Kodak Black (his stage name), has warranted the status of freedom since an early age and, as a law offender from his early years, is no stranger to a youth detention center. Kodak has also wanted to free himself in a number of other ways. Following a long history of rappers who made hip hop a form of freedom of expression, Kodak Black articulates the suppression and aggression of living in a disadvantaged area of the US in a way that has allowed relevance that extends far beyond the confines of their neighborhoods, reaching a global audience. His rise to fame has facilitated much prosperity, namely personal wealth that has connected his dreams with reality. Yet, while this more advantaged position suggests liberty—a liberation from the elements that constitute and define many of the US's poverty stricken areas—it seems that Black has not been able to attain or even pursue it. His pattern is circular, progressing only to fall back to his initial trappings: jail.

What does a rapper from Florida have to do with New Zealand-raised, Austrian-based artist Mladen Bizumic anyway? Among results yielded by #FreeKodak are those of the company Kodak, which has been one of Bizumic's main points of investigation in his work. Similarly, a Google search for Kodak reveals as much about the rapper as it does about the once famed business for producing film: the rise of social media and its consequences being another of Bizumic's interests. Kodak Black and Kodak share a similar tale insofar as pilfering from their own downfall, or rather encouraging it. They also share a desire for liberating their own image. On opposite ends, Kodak Black has gained popularity through social media, (particularly Instagram) while Kodak's demise

was primarily because of it. Similarities extend beyond this, aside from Bizumic's adoration for hip-hop. Bizumic's own artistic approach gleans seemingly unconnected materials to draw out other issues beyond their apparent subject matter, connecting social and political issues with the language of art-making and its history, much like this seemingly disjointed introduction.

Since early 2013, Bizumic's work has been dedicated to an examination of the Kodak Company. This in-depth focus and attention given to one subject (as it seemingly appears) could have its roots in the research-based practices of artists synonymous with the birth and golden age of conceptual art, and in particular Institutional Critique. Uniqueness is perhaps found in the manner in which they focused on the process of making and producing art, pointing to and using everyday systems, including both social and political issues. The work of Michael Asher, who often looked and reflected "within," could provide an inlet to the understanding of Bizumic's rigorist attitude. Asher's work honed in entirely on the site, place, and exhibition space of the actual material for his work, making interventions by way of making subtractions or additions to the museum or gallery space environment—sandblasting walls at Galleria Franco Toselli, in Milan in 1973 or removing a partition wall the following year at Claire Copley Gallery, Inc. in Los Angeles. Both focused on and made apparent the mechanisms of art and exhibition presentation, as well as its workings: at Toselli the idea of the white cube and the apparent autonomy of the white support surface, and the business of art unveiled at Claire Copley, exposed via the deduction of the office wall as it brought the office into the exhibition for public scrutiny. Another artist offering likeminded artistic measures in regard to the study of art making

and more precisely its exhibition and associated aspects—usually those not tangible yet intrinsic to its presentation—is Hans Haacke. His work *MoMA Poll* (1970) exposed his cynicism for Nelson Rockefeller, who at the time was not only the Governor of New York but also a trustee for where the work was produced and presented, The Museum of Modern Art. For the piece, the audience was asked “Would the fact that Governor Rockefeller has not denounced President Nixon’s Indochina policy be a reason for you not to vote for him in November?” Each visitor was given a voting paper that they could place in one of two Plexiglas boxes: one for “yes” and the other for “no.” Both Asher and Haacke are some of Institutional Critique’s most famous proponents who researched the inner workings of artistic production and exposed much deeper content to reveal and reflect on society and our way of living, with insight driven by a vision that is more thorough, yet its output appearing simple and minimal.

These two artists, and many others around that time with similar critical and context based practices, have indeed inspired Bizumic’s work. While his pre-2013 pieces touched on the subject of photography, his investigation with Kodak honed the study of the medium into greater detail, making photography become one of his practice’s primary facets. If Bizumic’s work sits in the lineage of Institutional Critique it could equally share a likeness with the lens-based practices of his counterparts, particularly those who examine photography as a medium and social phenomena, and photography’s inability to be entirely objective. For example: the lens-based practices of Wolfgang Tillmans, with his portraits of contemporary living and attention paid to the sculptural possibilities of photography paper, the mixing between form and content of Annette Kelm, and the

self-reflexive investigations of Christopher Williams that are as much a question of photography as they are the subjects his images document.

While Bizumic’s works prior to 2013 might seem at odds with those he produces today, they are connected despite the apparent topics they are seemingly associated with. They are aligned by a conceptual impulse that runs throughout: displacement and the examination of what happens when the thing displaced is out of its natural confines. The newly formed context that the artwork finds itself in, as well as its contextual elements—including institution, duration, and presentation—are taken into account and become very much part of it.

Bizumic has had a long relationship with Kodak, in later years realizing its potential to have rich and layered connections that fan out far beyond the picture. He always shot on Kodak 160 VC and 400 VC until it became unavailable. And the question of why it became extinct is precisely what his work began to study. Take *United States Patent* (1977-2014) for example, which consists of a copy of the patent for the world’s first digital camera, invented by then-Kodak engineer Steve Sasson in 1977. Wanting to glean a further understanding of the invention and its underpinnings, Bizumic traveled to NY to visit Sasson. The engineer told him of the pitch he made to Kodak executives about the invention, eager to have it put into production. While they found it interesting as an invention, many grappled with its ability to shun film altogether—the overall mood perhaps best compounded by one of the executives leaving a meeting and commenting that he hoped Sasson’s invention would not succeed. A case of shortsightedness, or ignorance perhaps, it became Kodak’s



United States Patent <sup>[10]</sup> [11] 4,131,919  
 Lloyd et al. [45] Dec. 26, 1978

[34] ELECTRONIC STILL CAMERA  
 [75] Invention: Garth A. Lloyd, Steven J. Sams,  
 both of Rochester, N.Y.

[73] Assignee: Eastman Kodak Company,  
 Rochester, N.Y.

[21] Appl. No.: 798,886

[22] Filed: May 28, 1977

[51] Int. Cl. <sup>3</sup> H04N 5/79

[52] U.S. Cl. 386/79; 380/356;

358/137; 358/134; 358/213

[58] Field of Search 386/79; 35, 33, 32;

179/2 TV; 358/137; 358, 213, 85, 133, 78

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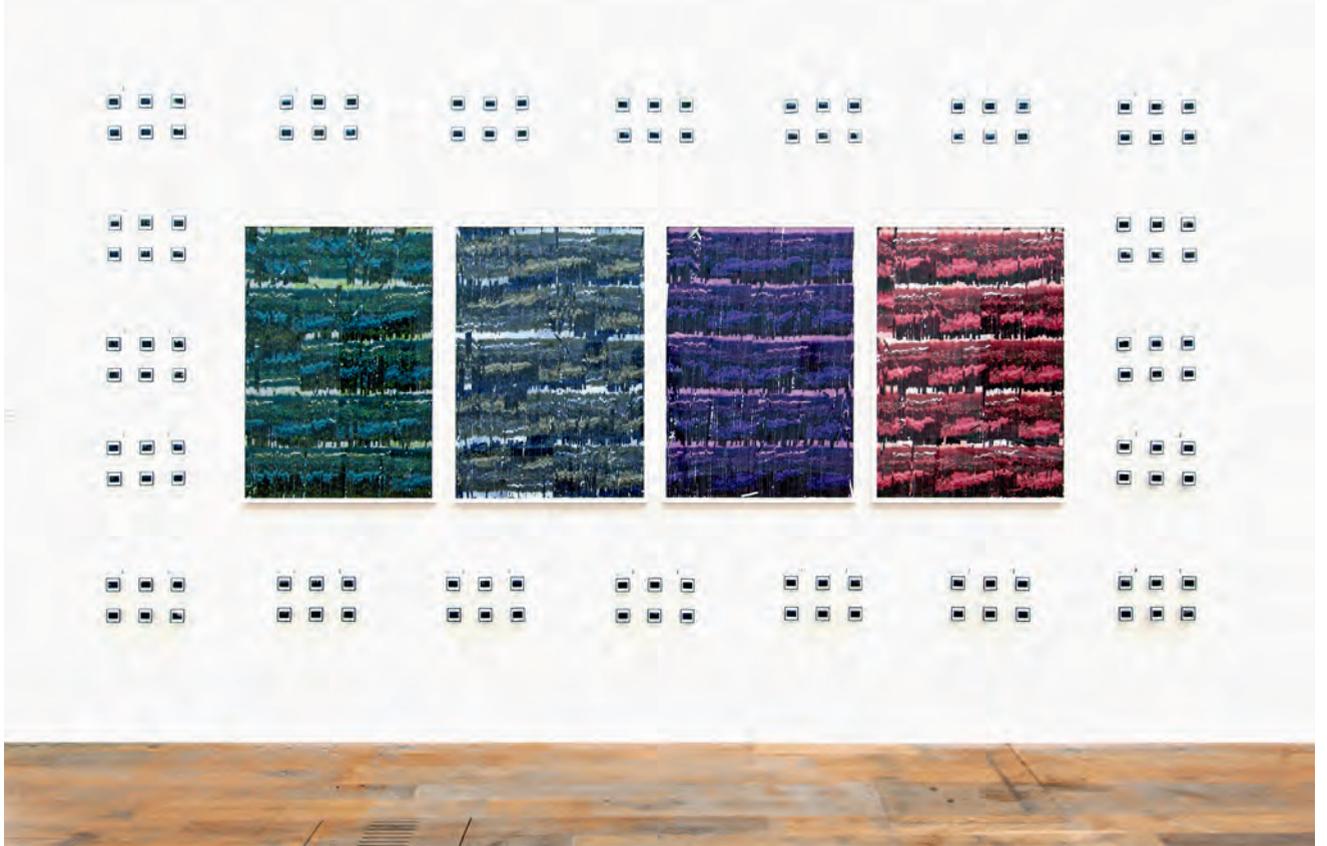
[57] ABSTRACT

Electronic imaging apparatus, preferably an electronic still camera, employs an insensitive information-recording medium such as audio-grade magnetic tape for "capturing" scene images. The camera includes a charge coupled device composed of an array of photo-sensitive elements which form a charge pattern corresponding to an optical image projected onto the elements during an exposure interval. A charge transfer circuit converts the charge pattern into a high frequency pulsed electrical signal immediately following the exposure interval to remove the charge from the device in a short period of time to maintain an assumed "dark current" at a low level. Each pulse represents the image-forming light projected onto a particular photo-sensitive element. A high speed analog-to-digital converter converts these pulses to multi-bit digital words in real time. A digital buffer memory temporarily stores these words, then transmits them at a rate that is compatible for recording on the audio-grade tape. The image can be displayed on a conventional television receiver by reading the recorded words from the tape and converting them to a format compatible with the signal-receiving circuitry of the television.

8 Claims, 4 Drawing Figures



United States Patent, 1978-2014  
 Chromogenic print on Fuji Archival Paper  
 42 x 32 x 3.5 cm



Where Instagram Lives, 2016  
Shredded chromogenic prints  
4 parts, each 102 x 72 x 3.5 cm

Where Kodak Lives, 2016  
35 mm slides  
20 parts, each 20 x 30 cm

missed and fatal opportunity: Sasson, a Kodak employee, had invented Kodak's own death. From its founding in 1880 by George Eastman to its subsequent global rise and dominance that saw the securing of a ninety-percent photographic film market share in 1976, Kodak's subsequent downfall was due to the rise of digital technology, putting film out of the picture.

One of Kodak's replacements, Instagram, is captured by one of Bizumic's recent pieces, *Where Instagram Lives*. A series of four parts, each containing hundreds of shredded photographs that contain the same image of the Luleå Data Centre, Sweden, based just seventy miles south of the Arctic Circle and one of Facebook's many holdings (the company that acquired Instagram in 2012 for one billion dollars). While Instagram found success in the digital sphere with the exchange of images as data, it is the ease of which that Bizumic finds inspiration and leads right back to Kodak. Prior to filing for bankruptcy in 2012, Kodak employed over 140,000 people, with production sites and headquarters distributed the world over—as a startup and when purchased by Facebook, Instagram employed just thirteen. The imbalance is staggering and does best to underline the ever-pressing rate and efficiency of data-based technology and the manner in which it has rendered that which is analog obsolete on the brink of complete extinction. Yet, *Where Instagram Lives* offers a reminder that data itself, as much as it may seem ephemeral, requires a host—a base that is physical and material—wherever it might be. If the data center in Sweden dies, Instagram does with it, along with all of our “like” and “share” preferences, and online personalities: the real invaluable assets to such companies. The work's conceptual complexity and tone that borders on the enigmatic, is exemplary of Bizumic's work.

*Where Instagram Lives* also points to the artist's interest in photography as a medium and the deliberate use of, and playing with, the language of art-making and its formal qualities. The work follows a process that sees the shredded photographs enter a frame that is packed until full, the photos squashed against the glass, giving the viewer a partial view of the numerous layers of photographic paper. We may think of painterly abstraction, of color process—especially when knowing the treatment of the images, which bear CMYK with one color removed—but perhaps most of all we are left with the thought of the decay and death of analog photography and a foreboding sense that the future might find a way of replacing Instagram, just as it did with Kodak.

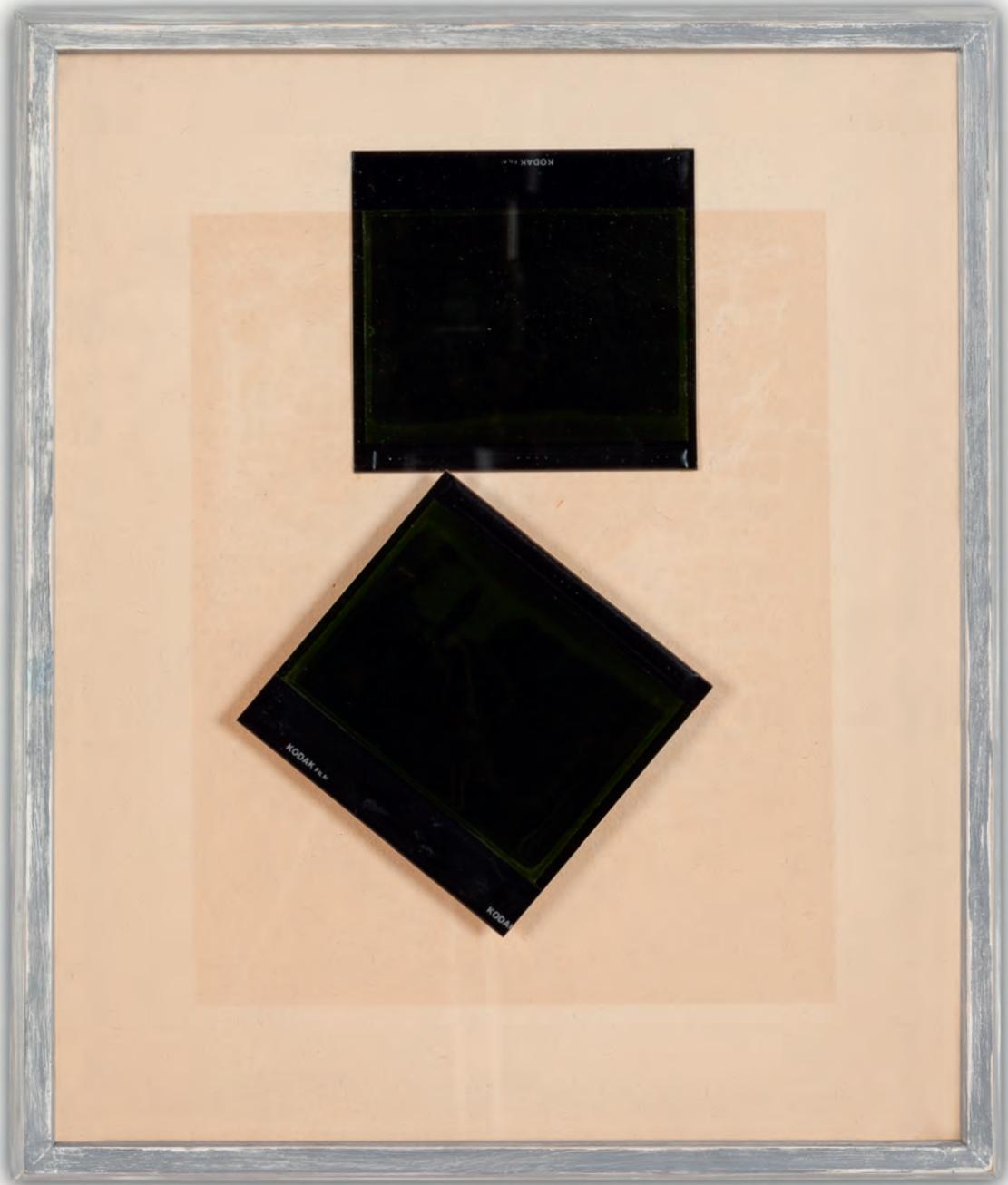
Death and mortality, and a certain outmodedness in regard to both Kodak and the language of art, is signaled elsewhere in Bizumic's work. *Kodak(Presence)* contains a sun-stained paper and two Polaroid photographs. The Polaroids and their arrangement stand as a clear reference to a moment in art history that was much concerned about painting's reduction, particularly Malevich's suprematist paintings, while their backdrop plays further with shape and form, as well as the idea of the frame. The sun-stained status of the paper might well invoke a history of performative actions, the foregrounding of process, by artists in the production of work, yet it also plays with an expanded notion of photography that runs right to the heart of the medium. The paper illustrates, and is, the capturing of light, what film does and what an image is essentially is. The removal of the photograph, which once sat in the same frame, lives on as a kind of ghostly presence and a further denial, or trace, comes by way of Polaroids that are both turned over, one positioned

inside the frame and the other on top of the glass, denying the viewer the possibility of seeing the image they once took.

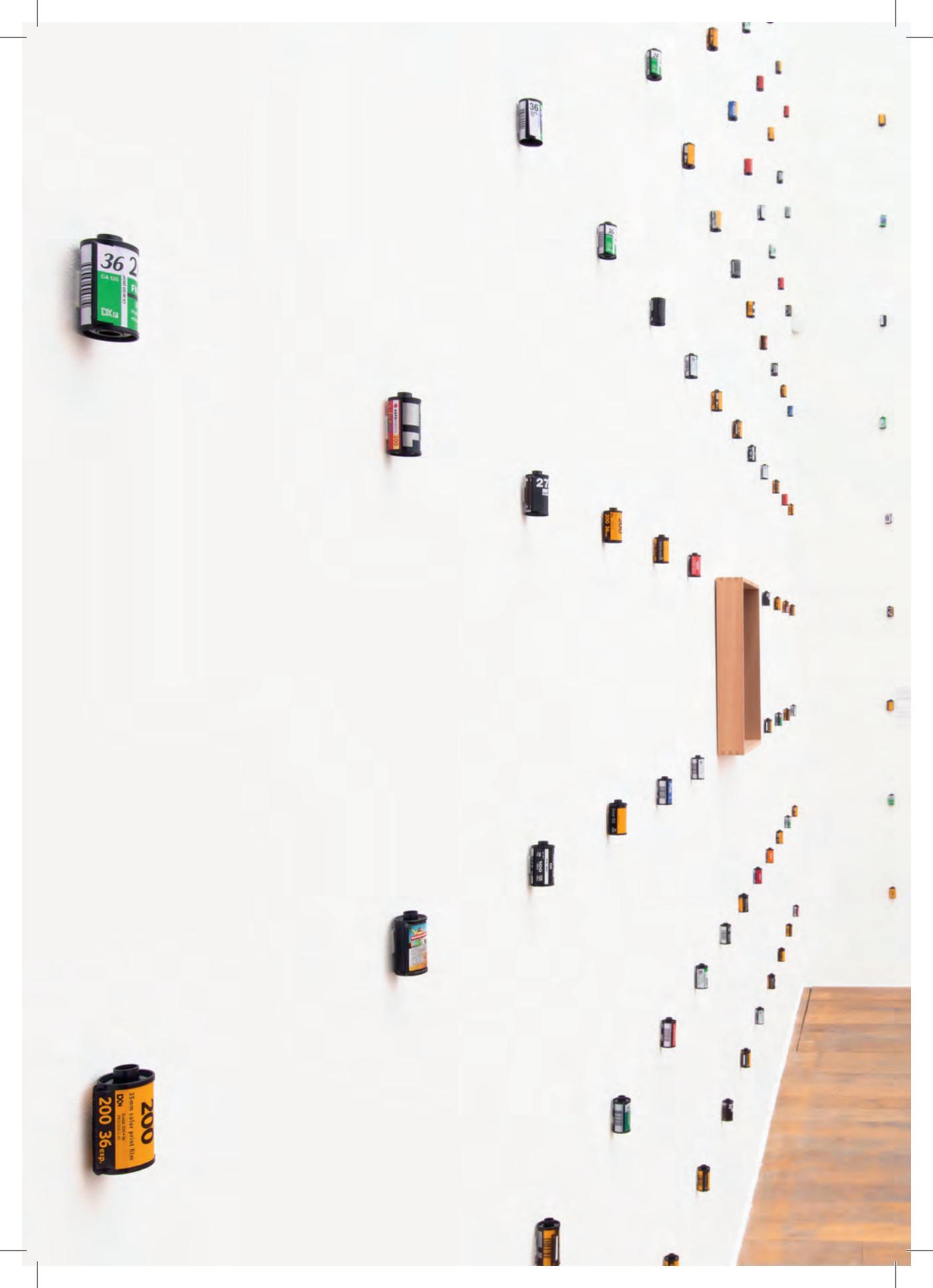
Kodak: One Second After the Digital Turn is another work by Bizumic that similarly plays with life and death, with memory and potential. For this piece, Bizumic had the same image printed in three sizes and with three different photographic papers, each framed behind separate panes of glass in order to allow the materiality of the photographic paper to be visible. (On a side note, the framing of works is of particular important to the artist, as with the aforementioned work where the frame had personal significance, or in the case of the shredded piece where a framer was instructed to pack the frame with the splices of images.) Kodak: One Second After the Digital Turn turns the idea of frame as a conservation device and action to preserve into a kind of death-giving notice. Within the frame an original film negative is included, a Kodak 100T, 6 x 7 inches, and placed in the center of the work, like a nail in the coffin. Here, Bizumic negates any possibility of further editions of the work being made, since to do so one would need the image's original source, the negative, which has been isolated together with its reproductions—thereby also playing with the notion of fine art photography as the printing of images by multiple edition numbers. The parallel that the artist draws between form and idea does not end there however. The images in the picture depict a shot taken from Hauturu (Little Barrier Island) in New Zealand, and resemble a stock image that might be used by Kodak to advertise its products. Beyond its attractiveness as an image, the island pictured is significant for containing rare and endangered species; much like the film used to takes its snapshot.

While the majority of Bizumic's work casts a critical eye on the capitalist movements of Kodak and the sequential downfall they caused, Kodak: Box displays the companies charming side in its golden era. The piece features an image of Kodak's first commercially successful camera on the mass market, launched in 1888. It's successes were mainly down to the practicality of the camera: it was light and easy to use. It also contained pre-loaded film and a door-to-door developing service was offered. "You press the button - we do the rest" was the advertising slogan. On finishing the film, customers were able to return the camera to Kodak for the film's processing and they would load the camera with a fresh film. The box camera foresaw many eventual technological happenings elsewhere, as it broke new ground. Kodak: Box also picks up on the product's design features: the box, made out of wood, having dovetailing joints which the frame of the work mimics.

Kodak's once innovative lead in design is also reflected by Bizumic elsewhere, providing another kind of antidote to the factual melancholy of its demise. Made in the UK (Body and Its Organs) (2016), consists of the parts of dissembled Kodak cameras: The Brownie Cresta, and Baby Brownie displayed over a number of vitrines, the parts of each camera are carefully arranged by the artist and placed on white backing. While the work lay bare the design details of each camera, the surprisingly large amount of parts and the efficiency of its build that enables all parts to fit into each camera body neatly, what is most powerful and captivating is how, through Bizumic's specific arrangements, the pieces take on a transformative effect where they oscillate between a sculptural action and gestural drawing.



Kodak (Presence), 2014  
Sun-stained paper, Kodak Polaroid photograph  
35.5 x 25.5 x 2.5 cm





All of the cameras are adjoined by their place of production, the UK, which was home to one of Kodak's most important sites of production: a plant in Harrow controlled the global manufacturing of Kodak's color negative paper. It employed 6,000 and had a 125-year reign. The employees became a community and housing was built nearby. Bizumic visited the site two weeks before its closure and documented the site and nearby areas. The piece, *Where Kodak Used to Live*, is displayed via a number of slides—that would have been produced at the site itself—housed in a number of slide holders and placed casually in a grid arrangement on hooks, allowing natural light to hit the slides and give the viewer a partial account of Bizumic's findings.

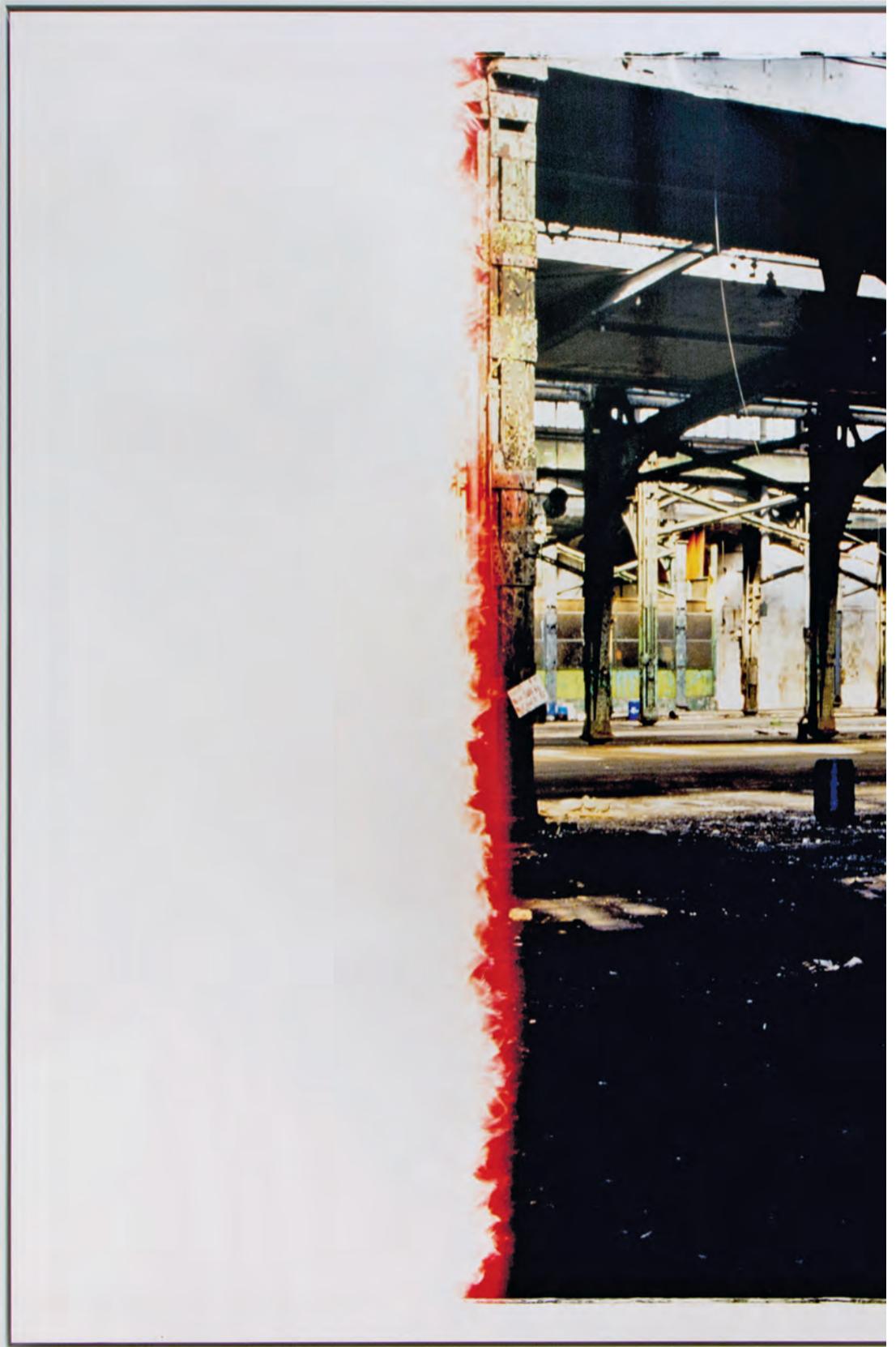
Another new piece that mixes formal innovation and conceptual rigor, pushing forward a new display device that meddles background with foreground and vice versa is *Kodak employed 140,000 people, Instagram 13*. The piece contains hundreds of 35mm film canisters, collected by artist's local film developers in Vienna, one of the last surviving labs in Austria. They are arranged in a grid formation around exhibition walls, each positioned with equal spacing and together forming a sprawling display which functions as a frame for other works by way of sections that are left blank. For a younger generation, the film canisters might seem strange and unfamiliar. For others, the canisters might trigger memories of a distant but not forgotten past, a past that might seem more joyous, more connective and more affecting, even in the face of technology and its acceleration that purports ease of use and claims to make our lives "better."

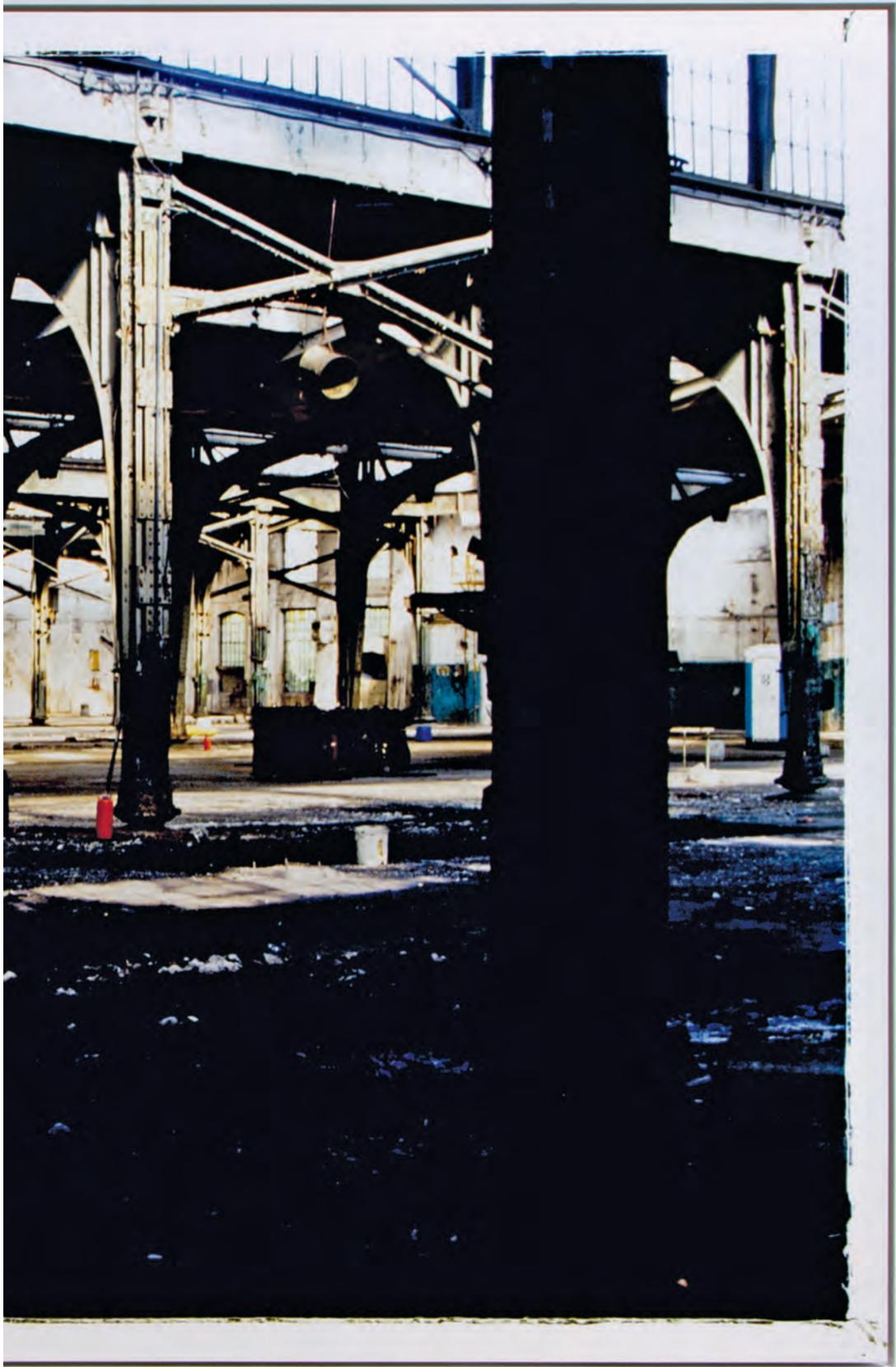
Bizumic's exploration of Kodak, which is in equal parts poetic and precise, indeed pictures the transition from film-

based photography to digital imaging as it developed. While it zooms in on one of photography's most iconic contacts, Kodak, and the fissures of industry production, both photography and Kodak as company is deployed to function as a lens through which to consider a larger picture and directed as such. Yet Bizumic's project tangles with much larger issues deliberately, uncovering how images and the technology that enables them influence not only aesthetic, social, and economic relations, but also the result when they are replaced and taken out of the picture.



Kodak (Box), 2014  
Chromogenic development prints  
40 x 40 x 6 cm









**1950s**  
A series of photographs documenting the early years of the artist's career, including a portrait of the artist and a scene from a film set.

**1960s**  
A series of photographs documenting the artist's work during the 1960s, including a portrait of the artist and a scene from a film set.

**1970s**  
A series of photographs documenting the artist's work during the 1970s, including a portrait of the artist and a scene from a film set.





PORTRA 160

