

Eleventh Avenue

Oto Gillen

April 11, 2025

The Power Station
3816 Commerce Street
Dallas, Texas

Halfway through my night flight to Dallas, periodic flashes of light began entering my peripheral vision. Looking across the aisle through a window, I caught a glimpse of intra-cloud lightning arcing across a swollen thundercloud, backlighting it several thousand feet below the aircraft. Vivid strands of electricity exploded at a high tempo, but inside the pressurized cabin, no thunderclap could be heard. While most passengers on the flight seemed to prefer keeping their window shades down, the only other person who seemed to notice was the mildly interested teenager sitting next to me, who quickly returned his attention to an in-flight snack. For a few minutes, I expected the aircraft to encounter turbulence, but no disturbances from the storm followed. As the white flashes grew dimmer and the aircraft continued southward, it occurred to me how strange it was to be physically transporting a decade's worth of digital photographs in my backpack across the country. Stored as electrical charges within nanoscale structures etched into silicon chips, this data has been kept alive for years through a continual process of migration from one hard drive to another.

Eleventh Avenue traces a ten-year progression of my observations within a tangible and abstract cityscape. Motivated by a desire to reflect on the shifting texture of the present, I documented an array of objects that mapped a dissonant, emotionally charged field. Guided by the belief that, over time, photographs undergo a kind of fermentation and yield latent information initially concealed, I accumulated photographs that, in aggregate, could delineate a mnemonic architecture—supported by intertwining chronologies capable of articulating a historical narrative while simultaneously evoking an imagined geography.

Upon entering the building, one encounters an interior insulated from daylight. Two modified OLED (organic light-emitting diode) digital displays—one vertically oriented, the other horizontal—alternately illuminate the room with a steady pulse of photographs. The displays hug two of the eight I-beam columns that help support the second-floor mezzanine level of the building. Because they face in opposite directions, the two channels cannot be seen simultaneously; however, together they imply a spatial volume between them. The vertically oriented channel plays a chronological sequence of 1,256 photographs spanning the years 2015 to early 2025 over the course of six hours and forty-eight minutes. The horizontal channel alternately runs another chronological sequence of 1,172 photographs spanning late 2016 to early 2025 for six hours and twelve minutes. A photograph is displayed for fourteen seconds and followed by six seconds of black video before the next image appears. Together, both channels have a total duration of thirteen hours and loop independently of each other. Given the scale of images contained within these two channels, the documentation of this installation can only convey a fraction of the photographs originally exhibited. In documenting this installation myself, I sought to faithfully represent how I intended the photographs to be experienced within the space while deliberately rejecting the use of composite photography techniques.

The utilitarian history of the site directly motivated the material choice of digital displays over projection to display my photographs. Built in 1920 by the Dallas Power and Light Company as a substation in an expanding municipal electrical network, the building was originally designed to step down high voltage levels coming from a central power plant to facilitate the distribution of electricity to the surrounding area. As of 2025, there are still three identically designed, repurposed substations distributed across central Dallas.

Potentially constructing walls in materials like wood, plasterboard and paint to accomodate projection felt incongruous with the character of a space defined by riveted steel I-beam columns, brick walls, and a concrete floor designed to support heavy electrical equipment. When I first visited the site, I found the interior columns to be reminiscent of those in New York City subway stations built in the early twentieth-century. This observation led me to contemplate how those spaces have been retrofitted with digital signage in recent years and specifically how this new infrastructure is installed.

Mounting the displays directly onto the columns in the space simplified the arrangement of the installation by dissociating it from a potentially theater-like configuration. While smaller in scale than what projection can accommodate, the displays could function as terminals the viewer could move between, rather than being held captive by a single channel.

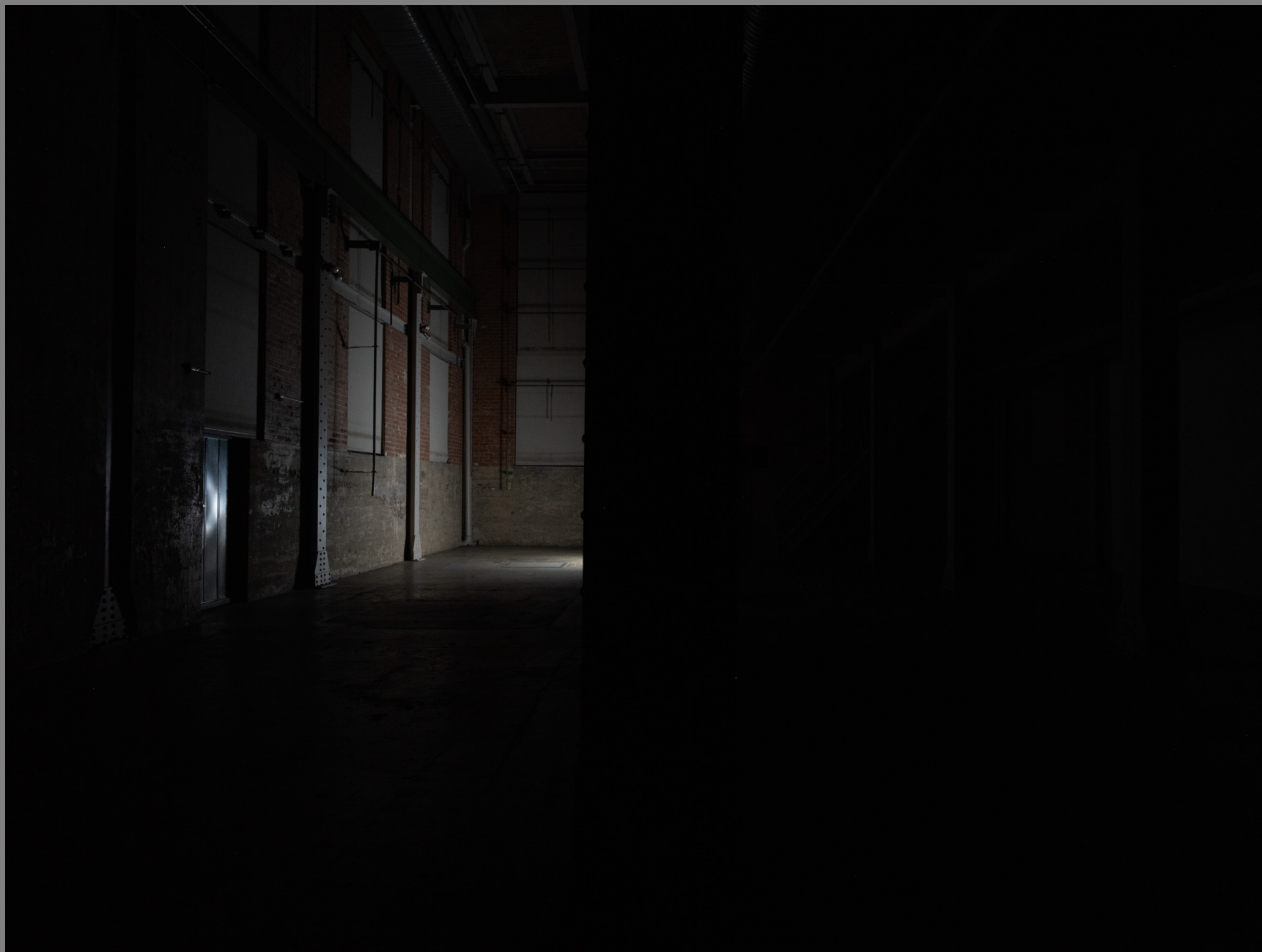
By dimming or turning off individual pixels, OLED displays achieve a higher contrast ratio than other display technologies. This ratio refers to the luminance difference between the brightest and darkest points a display can produce. As a result, OLEDs can serve as variable light sources that emit no illumination when black frames are shown, allowing the display to recede—nearly disappearing into a dark room—in contrast to the constant gray glow of traditional backlit LCD (liquid crystal display) televisions displaying the same information. The decision to punctuate the sequences with intervals of black video was also influenced by the persistence of an afterimage that could remain on the viewer's retina after sustained exposure to an illuminated image in a dark environment. The duration of these intervals allows the viewer's eye to rest momentarily, so that the retinal afterimage can dissipate before the next image in the sequence appears on-screen.

The capabilities of these displays allow a broader range of exposure information to be rendered, more accurately approximating the quality of light present in the depicted scenes. Perceptually, the experience is more akin to viewing large, backlit color film transparencies than to watching images on a screen. The wide contrast ratio enables the representation of objects and space with a heightened sense of dimensionality, implicating the photograph's perspective within the surrounding environment.

These consumer-grade displays are fitted into custom aluminum frames that support an aluminum window mat, which crops the viewable area of the screen to the narrower 3:2 aspect ratio in which the photographs were initially captured. These modifications prevent the unused portions of the wide display's glass surface (i.e., the black bars) from reflecting details of the room on either side of the image. The window mat itself consists of four bolted, CNC-cut aluminum sheets, which have received photographic black ink on their matte surfaces through the process of dye-sublimation.







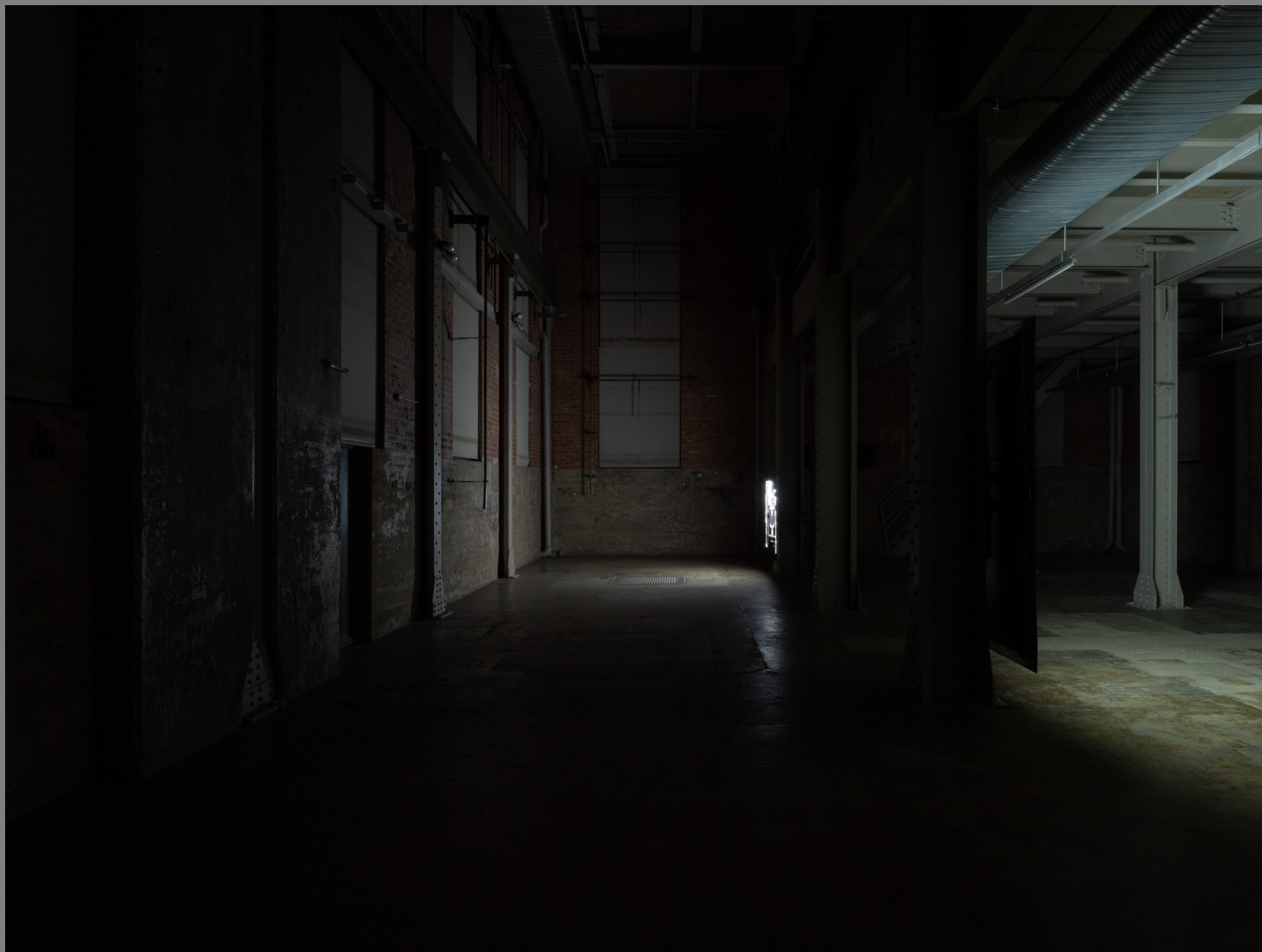


















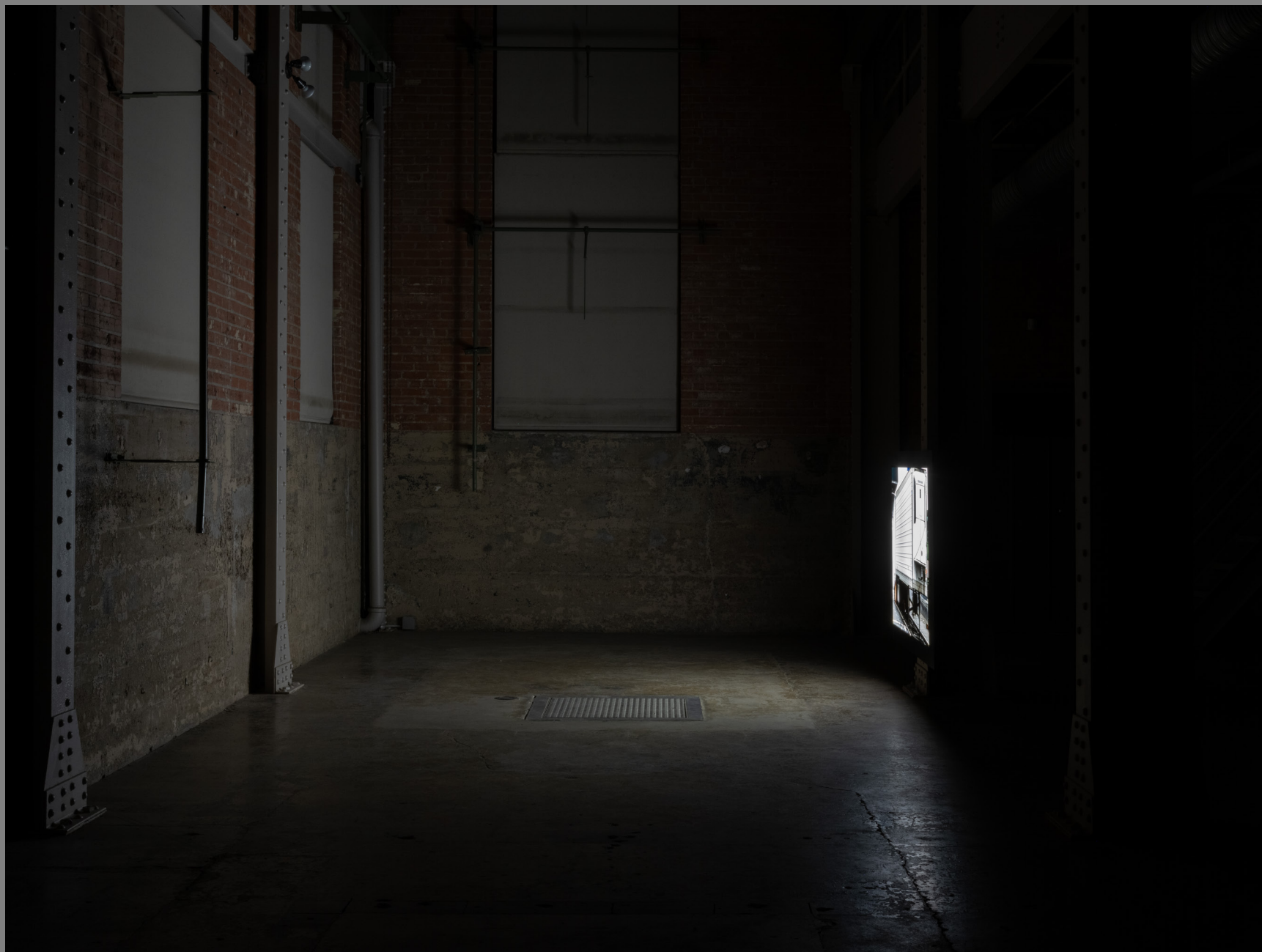
































































































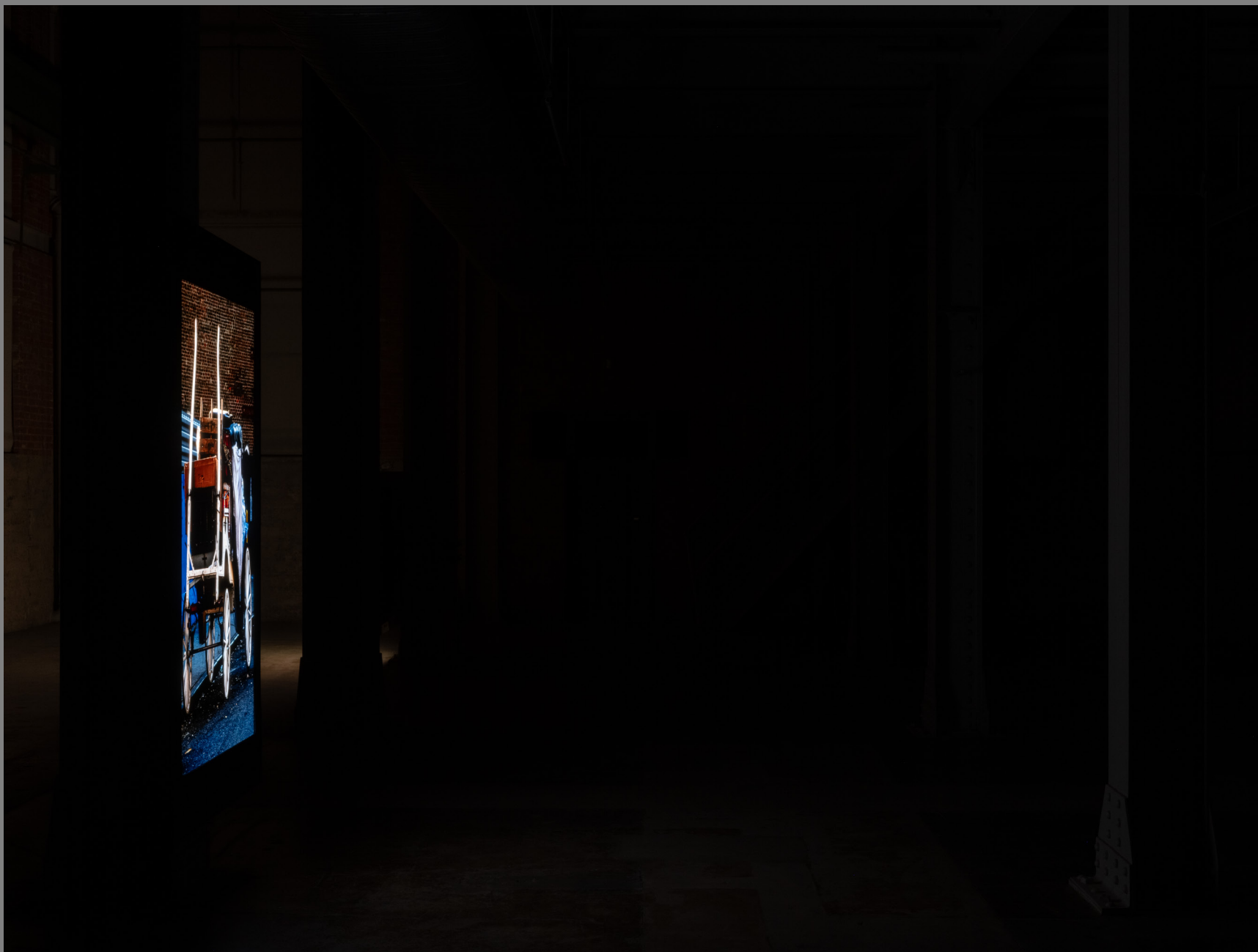




















































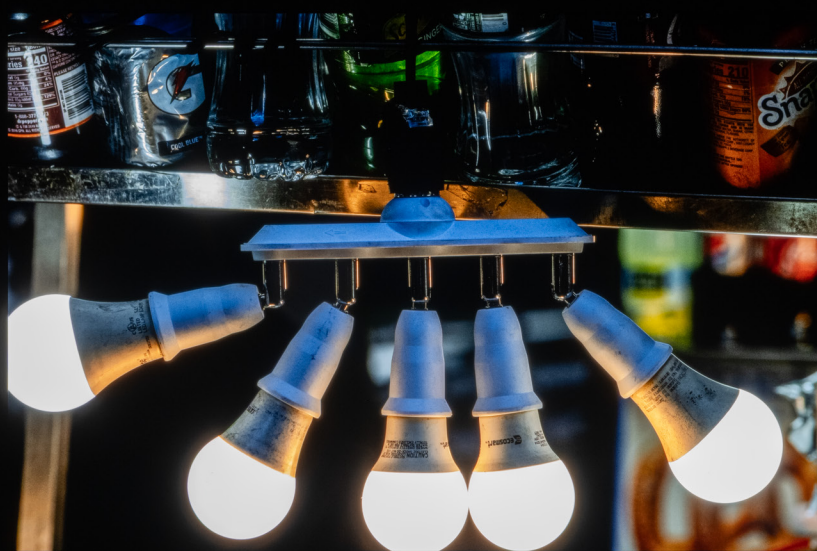






























































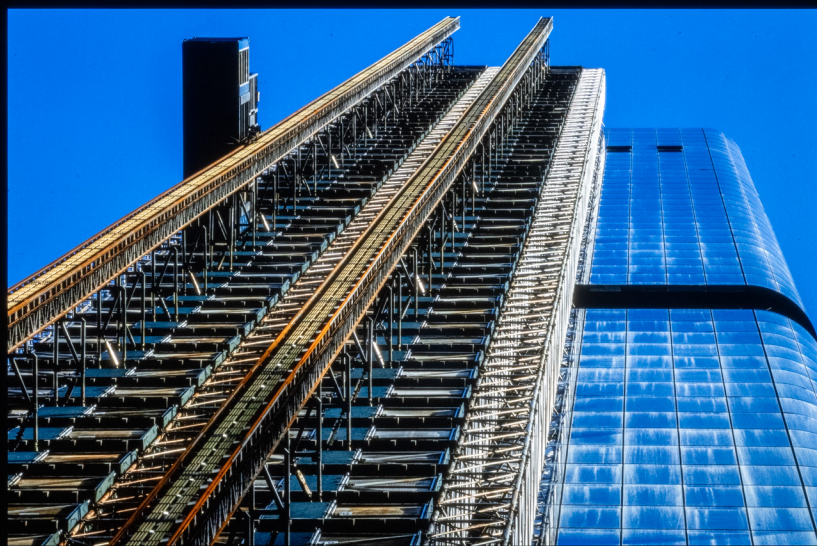










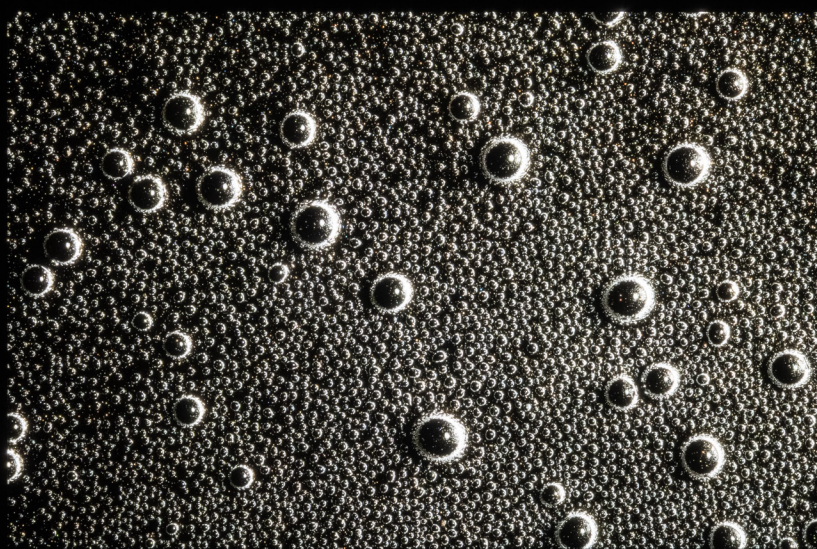








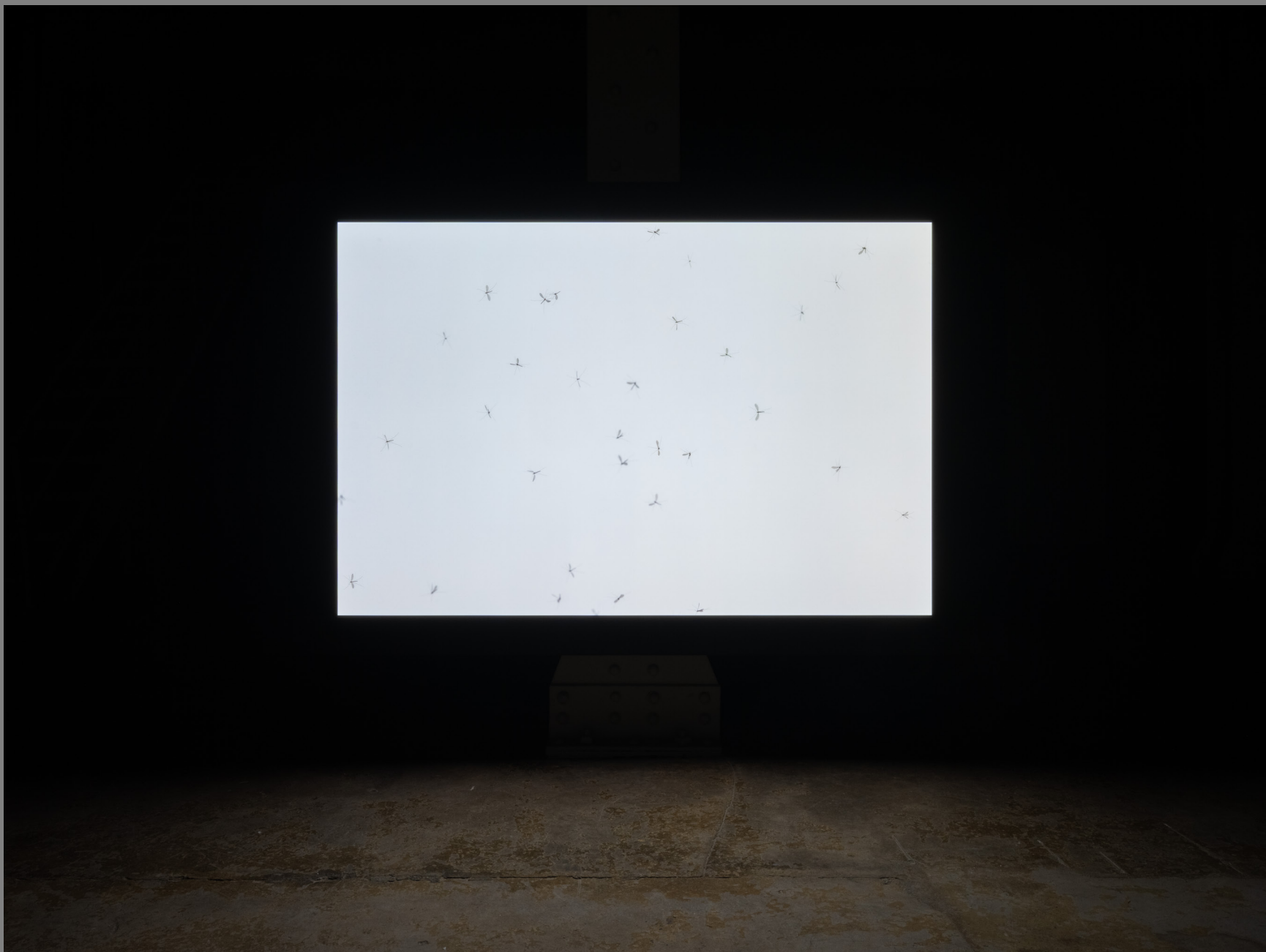


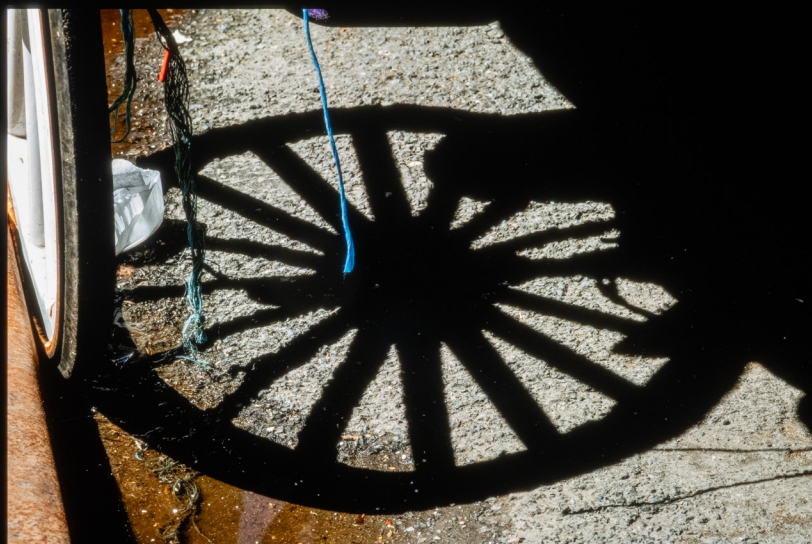






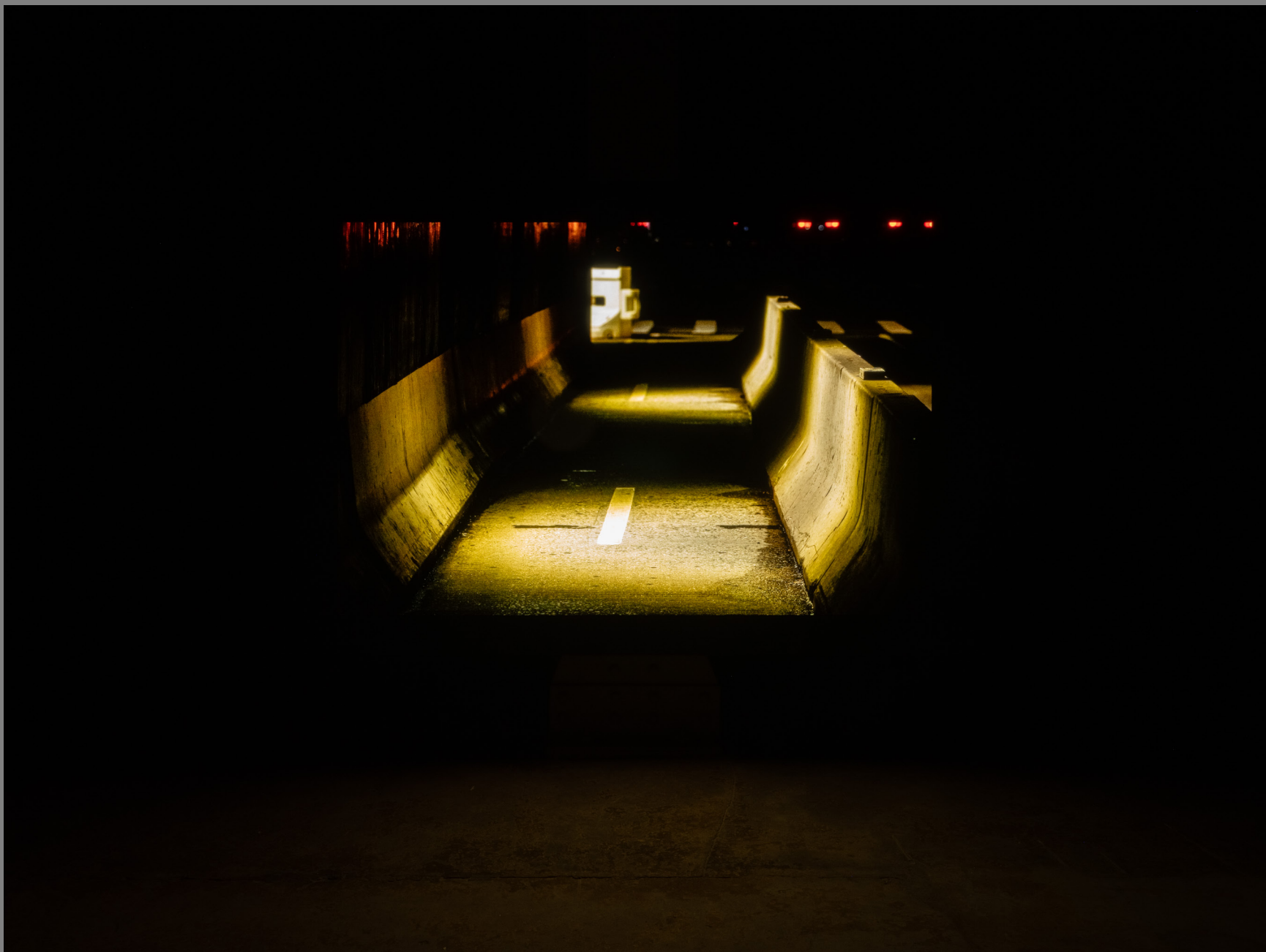




















































































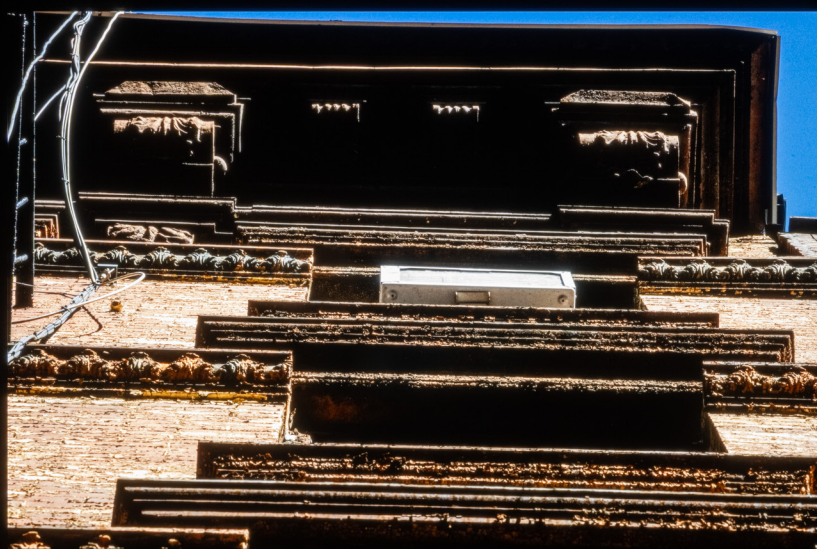






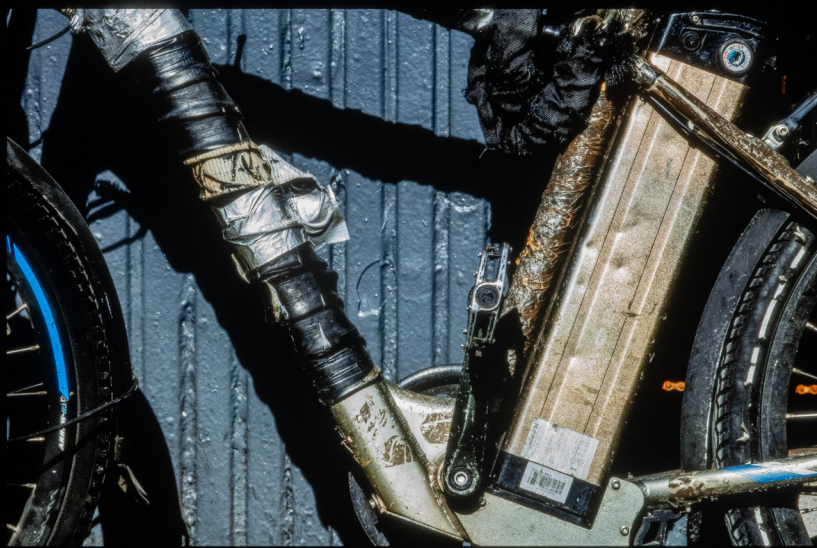












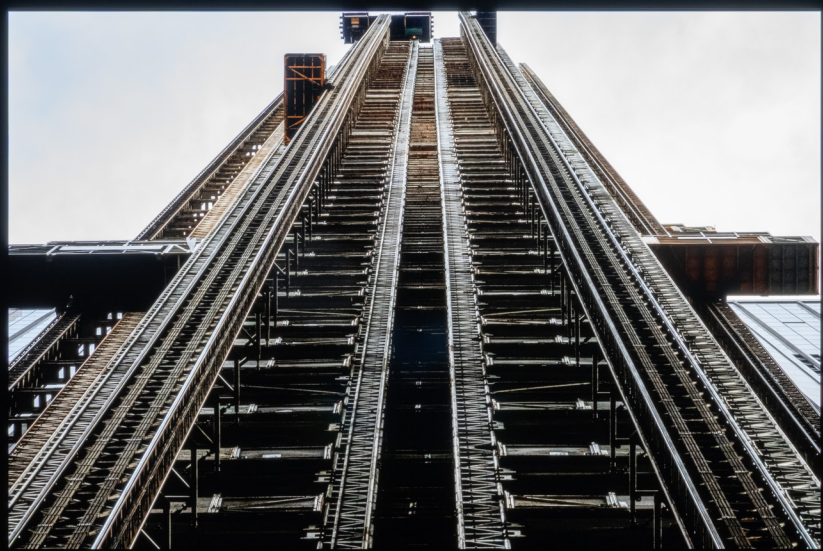














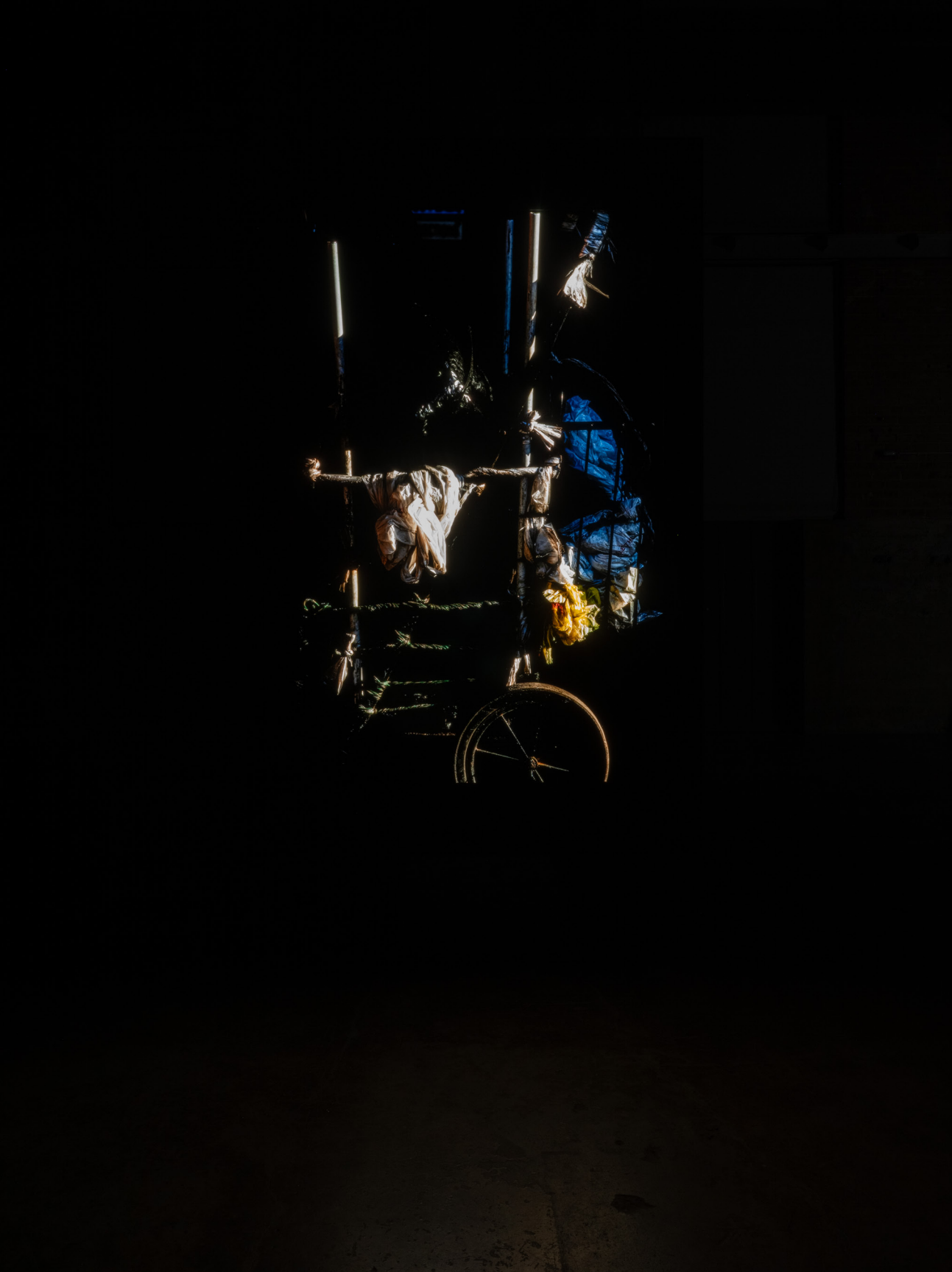


























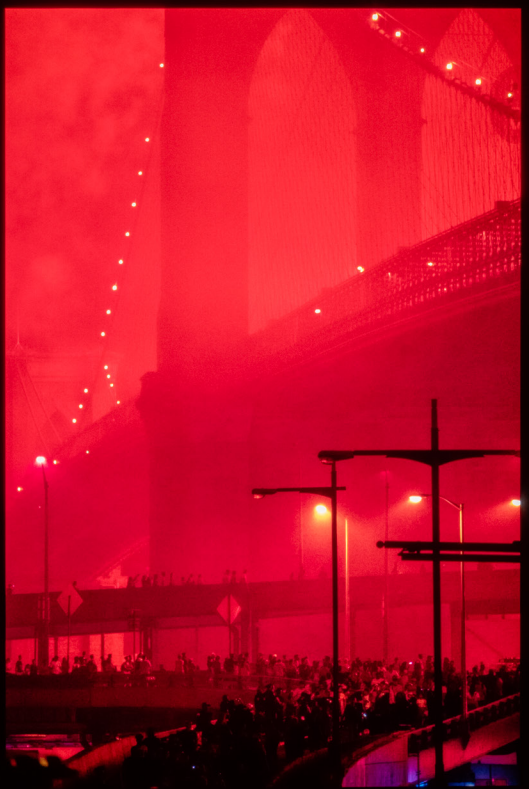




















































































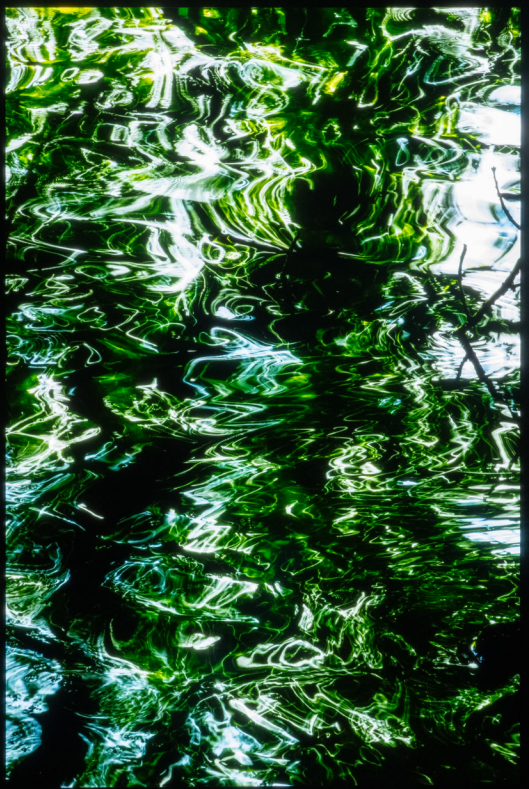




































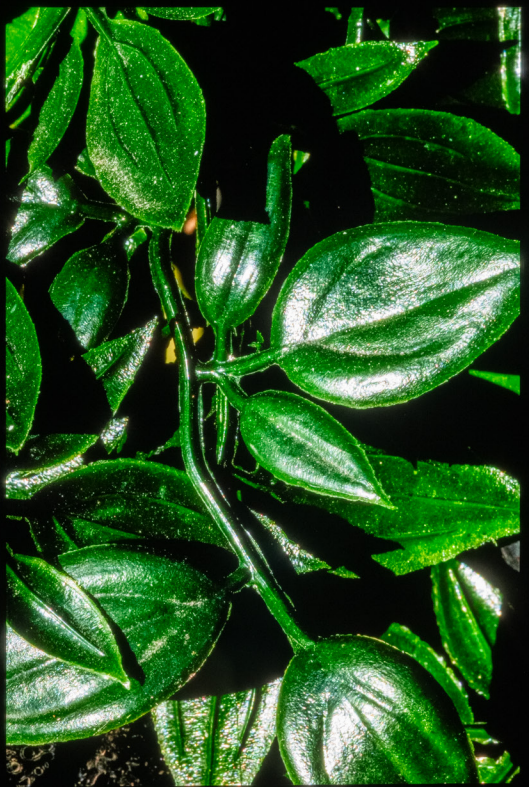




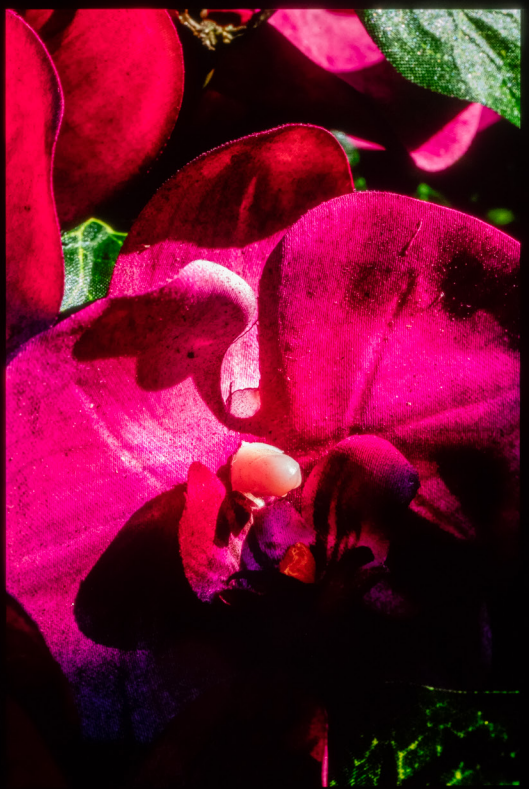








































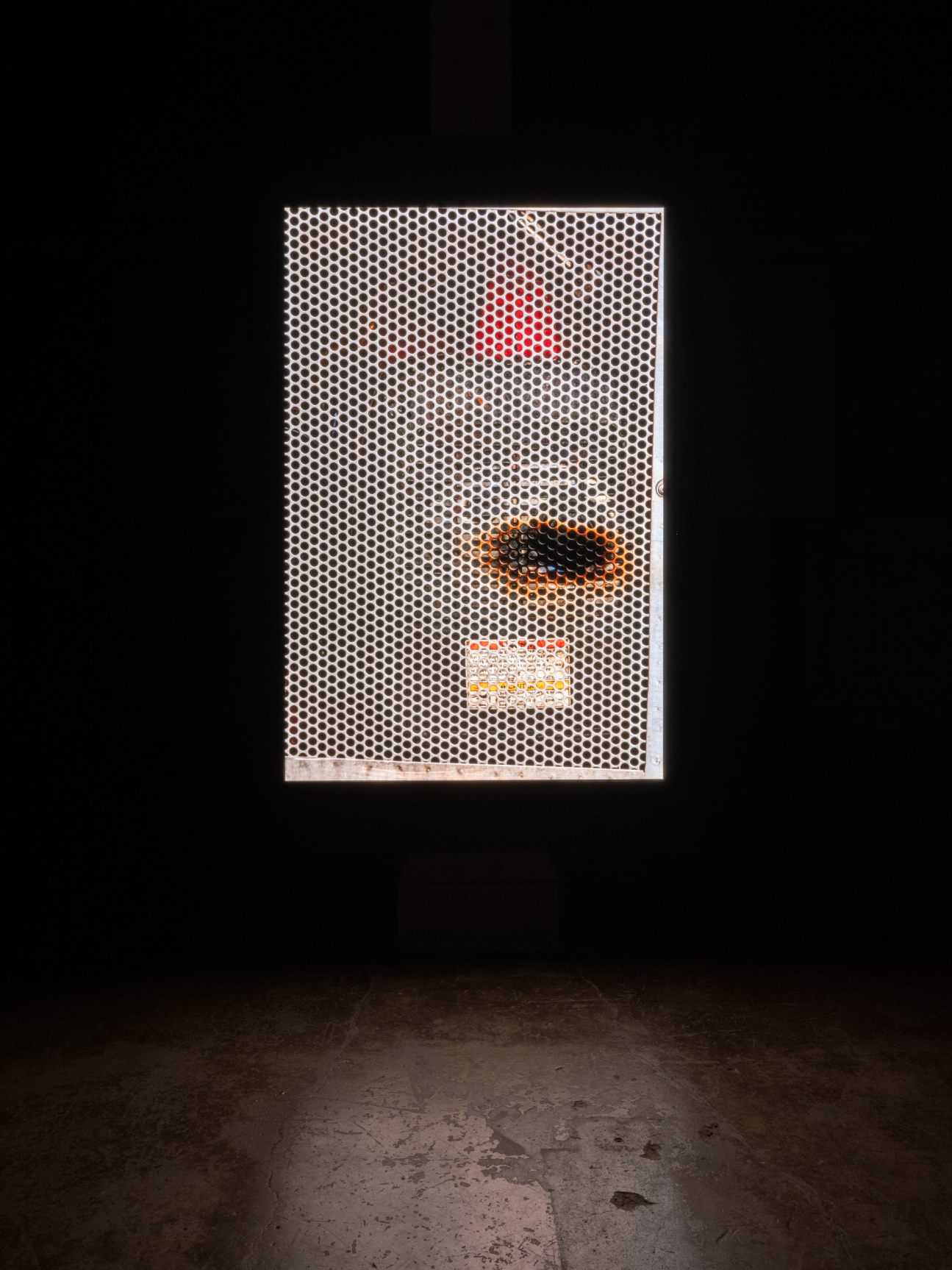
















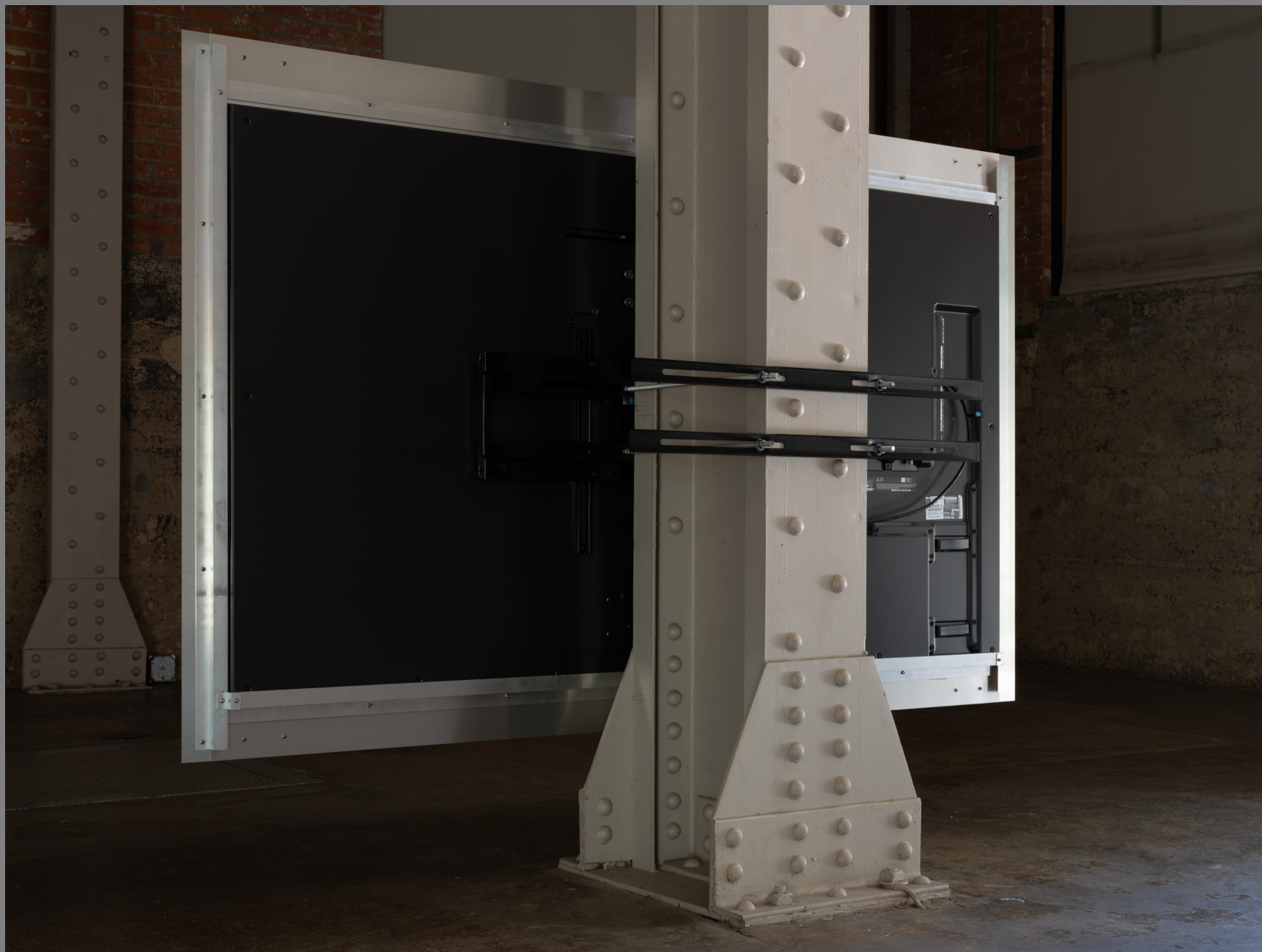


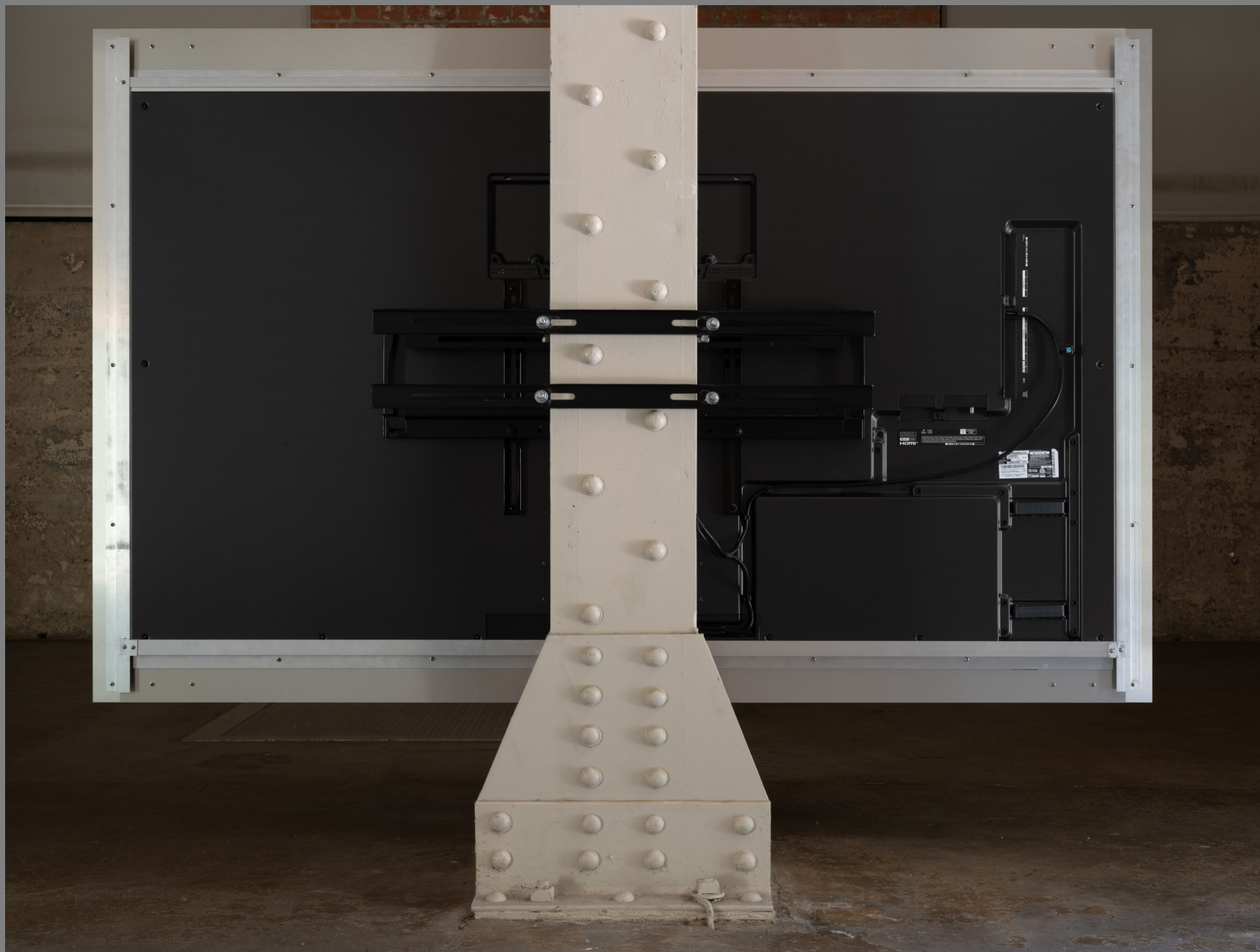






















photography and design by Oto Gillen