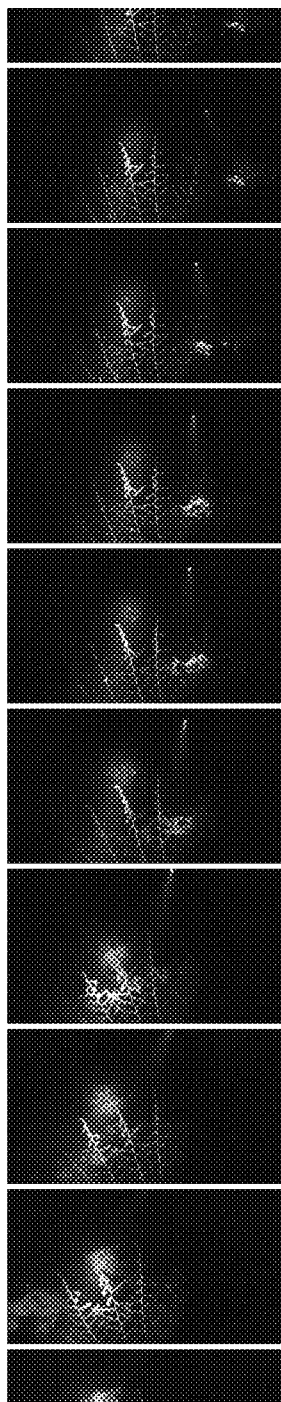
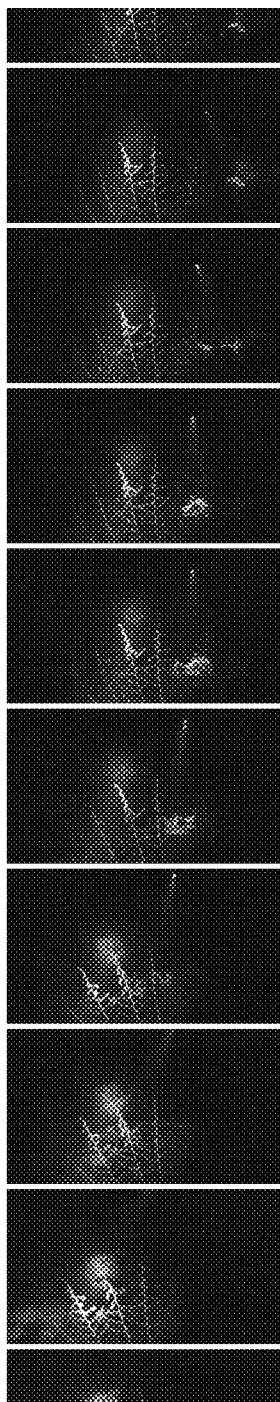
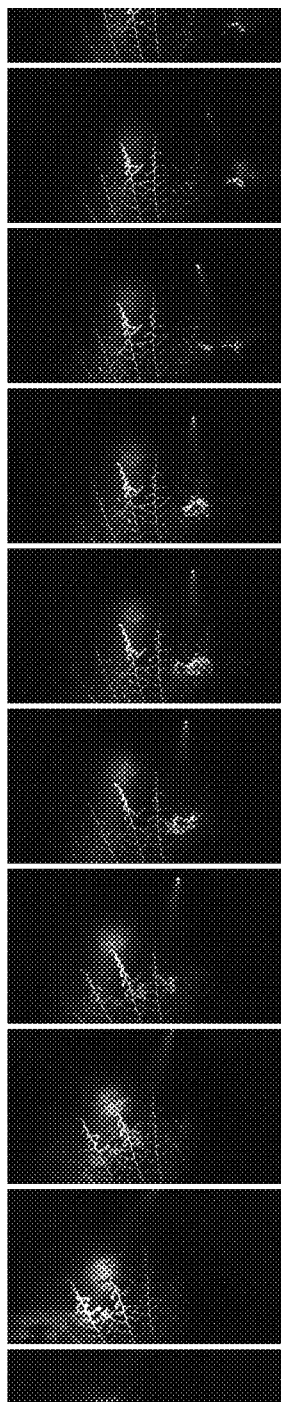


on breathing underwater

sara h, hammami

سارة هـ حمامي



“His eyes glimmered, and I saw Monstrilio staring back at me, wild and confused. His question was not an accusation but rather a plea.”

- Gerardo Sámano Córdova, *Monstrillo*

“It is not easy to invent a new language, to invent all the terms of a new grammar. It is a vast, collective task. But however insignificant a single life might seem, no-one would dare say that the effort was not worthwhile.”

- Paul B. Precardio, *Can the Monster Speak?*

“Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that it created and the moment into which it is recieved, to be born again.”

- Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*

THE HORROR IS THE ROMANCE

our progeny came
slick-gilled & crying, already
the room too loud to announce the shahada
your hands thumbing their necks, holding them underwater
tenderly, did they take their first inhalations
bent-kneed and ten-toed, fish eyes cloudy, sightless
we, both devastated
the corners of our mind running out of room
the limits to my imagination found, my children
gasping on a cold medical table, autopsied open
soft dorsal slid open, pinned and splayed down
your hands, sweeping my knuckles.
we, already strange
have retreated into silence. our lungs, wrapped
in chives, delivered to the gaping maws
dripping with fresh baked bread
sop up all your tears. the first time
we both kissed
i felt it, fear. it licked the bottom of my feet,
bringing tears to my eyes. oh,
my love. you hold my heart so tenderly.
we, perfect family
only come together in my dreams,
glazing that* sea, face to the sky
the atlantic blooming red,
blessing us.





the center of all man, of course.
the place my nose rests in mid-sleep
the pillowed lip & dream
every jaw agape
gentle.

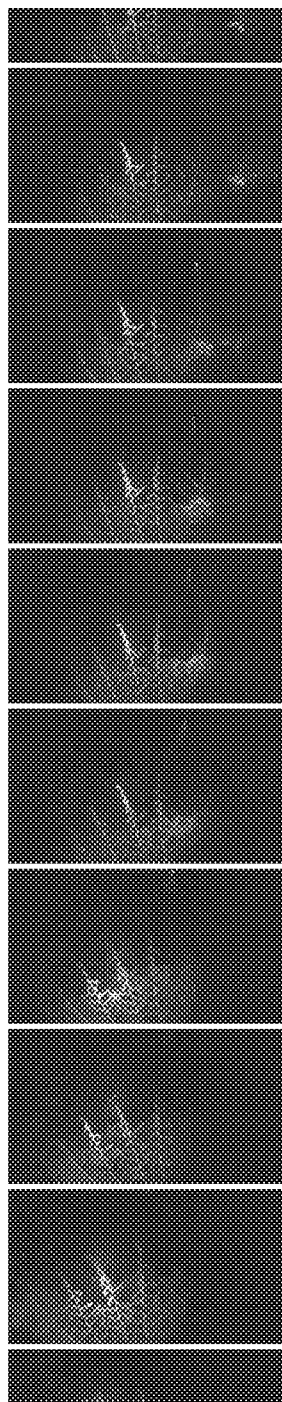
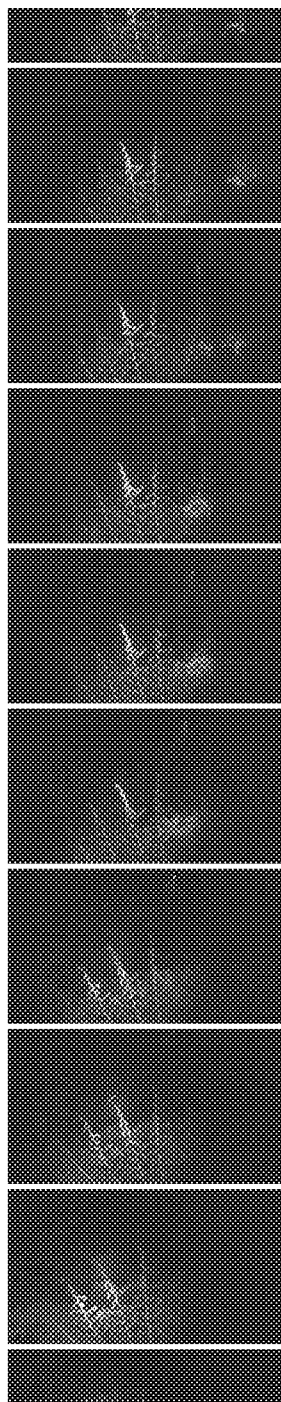
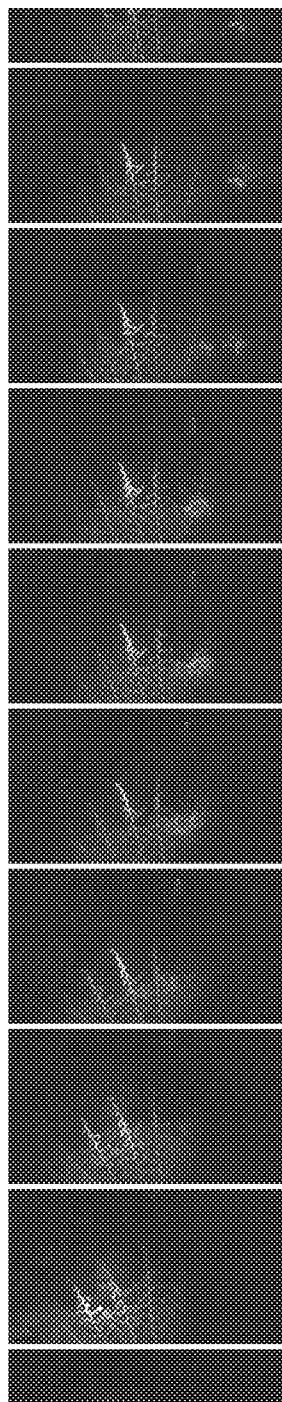
self portrait, 2022.

someone must have wondered once how to go back & oh,
the years spent dreaming truly the want hangs off the tongue like a tea in wait i
think mostly that oh i wanted cowards cannot wish
for anything softer than a date pit the hole of a person is a heavy thing to gorge on i
gag on the remainder every day i fill a little more of my skull with sand that had
lined my windows they pile pathetic attempts to recreate the dunes out of trash we have all died
the small death there will never be moving past it what else can one say on horror before
we could have been anything in a life too far from this one i feel nothing not a blip nothing like this
is ever affixed to my spine it is a painless rendering and
really ache is a holy thing was
it not enough to be in
suspension forever it is always oblivion,
forgotten.

TWO DAYS AFTER I TAKE MY EYES OUT

a golden lorikeet flits by my head
i almost crash the car, lost in the silhouette of the camel far above me
she cranes her head down to meet me
i don't notice the wail of horns behind me, entranced with the constellations in her
waterline speckled with fish gliding in and out of the sky, clouds nebulous, winking
i see: a turtle, her head slow sighing to the side. my fingers burn upon contact, lungs
aflake, red-tipped butterflies dipping into the sun, delicate until fossilized, outlasting us all
the world tilts, and a purple-tipped fish cradles my face
a moray eel slithers into my socket and makes itself at home
it's a beautiful, beautiful day, i am told
i've never seen a bird like that here before
i've never seen a silhouette like that before

the edges of preserved & scalloped ribs
filigree litters the shore. phantom fingers
coming to bead the tips of bone. the day heaves,
humid dreams passing through off-measure beats.
i wake and the pillow is dry. i rushed our morning,
knowing it would be our last joint sleep. i have an animal
body, sewn carefully into my left leg. it leads me
towards inexplicable dampness. my eyes are gooey
yellowed & laughing. a cunning fox has made devils
out of my good intentions. my jaw yawns with horror.
already, the day is passing.





i am mostly interested in
when things are alive
& breathing
damp-air & moving

for a moment
i imagined us suspended
in mid-lung. smooth-water-led
meandering. i wanted to lean
over the open cavern of body
gazing at the sea i wanted to
hold myself tip over &
fall in

i beckon \ half crazed \ mostly loved \ still a monster \ i am making
a mess of myself \ i sang to myself \ before the sea had boiled \ o, yearn me
slowly \ savor it \ this is the easiest kind of loss \ [] \ if we are \
not reunited in this life \ will we meet in the next \ when i lean into you \ will you
cradle me still \ i wish \ for a voice that dips \ & mourns \ better than mine \
one emphatic in resonance \ & vowel \ who cannot \ sing \ nor
speak \ nor
[] \
what of history / keeps you / passionate \ in a tongue \ so far outside
my own \ lips harken \ only under water
belly oblong with air \ already []

ألوح إليك / دون كامل قواي العقلية / لا زلت محبوبًا / لكني لا أزال وحشًا / أدمر نفسي بيدي / أغني لنفسي
/ قبل أن يغلي البحر / آه، كم أتمنى أن تتوق إلي
/ على مهل / تذوق بحرص / فهذا أهون الفقد / [] / إن لم /
نجتمع في هذه الحياة / هل سنلتقي بالتي تليها / حينما أميل نحوك / هل
ستحضني كما احتضنتني سابقًا / أتمنى / أن يغوص صوتي / وينوح / صوت أجمل من صوتي /
صوت عامر بالمنطق / وحرف العلة / صوت لا يجيد / الغناء / ولا حتى
الكلام / ولا
[] /
أي شيء في التاريخ / يبقيك \ مولعًا / بلغة / لا تلمسها
لغتي \ لا تفهمها شفتاي \ إلا تحت الماء
وبطني يملؤه الهواء / فقد كنت في الماضي []

THE HEARTBREAK IS THE HORROR

you, who has
loved me so dearly
tenderly sewing my flesh
back together, we embrace
i slept at daybreak, under colossal pressure
water turning the sun grey. you, who
stayed by the sea, waiting
i watch you
the distance sudden,
untenable.

***** LOVE!
IMAGINED

i lay my baby down to sleep in the center of a pink-fitted bed
the glass of my windows shattered last night. the wind pulled
out of us the final ghost in the house. there should have been
a fire, alas! there is a perfect semicircle of untouched tile! oh,
pristine with unmarked clarity. my baby gums up at me, eyes
crinkling, already. i wake up every twenty minutes, panicked.
are we still breathing? i must check, pinky brushing soft skin.
i spoke it about once:

the center of all man, of course
the place my nose rests in mid-sleep
the pillowed lip & dream
every jaw agape
gentle



VISIONS AFFLICTED ON THE ROAD

my long estranged friend picks me up in a neon pink low-ride
songs from a weakening sunset make the air watery and prepubescent
her nails tap the metal steering wheel, and i, a little in love, open
my mouth to gaze at the clouds. she parks and tells me she lined up

three kittens under the wheel. when i go to move them, they appear to be un-
breathing, heat-addled and fucked-already. the cicadas grow in sound
the highway waiting for the noise of omnipresent silence, shuts every light off
in the dark, my friend is beautiful. the car is beautiful. the road is beautiful.

we are fleeing a hurricane. the rain beat us here. mami parks the rental
we cry over tostones and spilling oil. mami, i say to no one. i swear,
i say to no one that, i love you. i say to no one. the rain swallows us whole,
my voice too loud. unforgiving. lamenting, always. stuck somewhere, hidden
in the treeline, a python drops. it swallows me in entirety. the hurricane
arrived ten minutes after we make it to the hotel. having driven for 5 hours,
mami asks me if we will eat together. i stand in the rain and watch the neon
pink light stops my throat. i gulp for air. eyes bulging, ugly.

the rain fell, and fell. i watched
the tires peel and screech. i watched
mami eat in the car, alone. i watched
three cars turn in on each other. a man
wobbles out, crying. he says, i was watching the road
i didn't see anybody coming, road watching, i was
holding air and waiting for impact,

i ran them over, unknowing. i leave them there,
not knowing that when i get home,
the blood will have stained the flooring. i stare, uncomprehending.
my long estranged friend shrugs, says,
you did all of this. she has cherry gloss, says
clean up. it was all you.

after *to be asked for a kiss* by jericho brown

i am a showcase of lingering
i dismantle the joints of your body. you,
i keep time to. when you exhale, i put my
ear to your cheek. i am interested in winning.
small notations of pillow on skin. here:
i saw two fireflies blink on the eve of may 26th, 2026.
the sight shocked me so much i started to cry. here:
the wind blew my kite right into the tree-line. i am
building a multi-storied fantasy

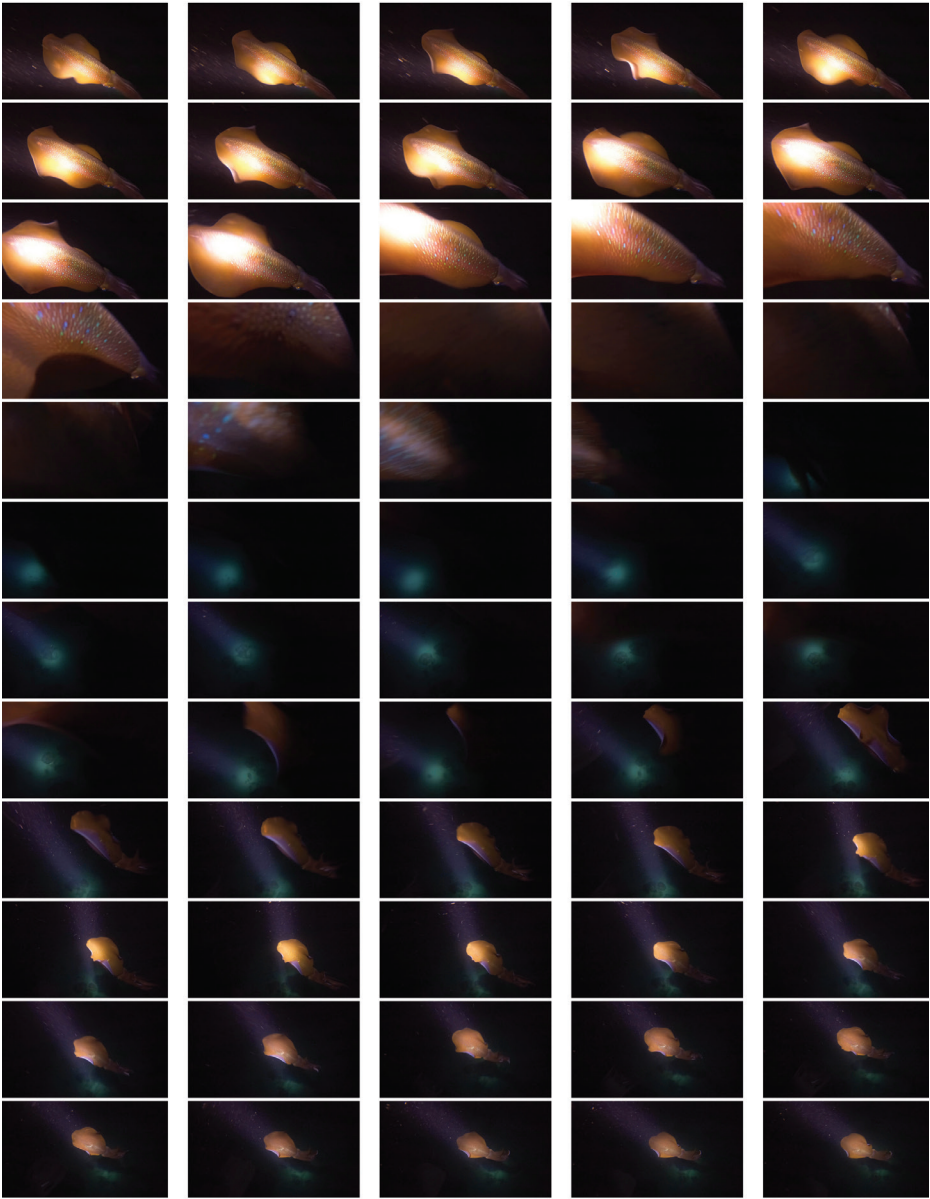
here: mama asked me, night
into night, to rub cream into her skin. here: you ask me,
shy, in the dark, to rub cream into your skin. here: i lay
small tadpoles to sleep. here: the image is becoming
the same again again. here: it's true, we all hear sirens
this summer. my heart breaks me awake at mid-night. a tornado touches, just briefly, the trees
that papi planted. here: they died long before this instance. here: i looked for the bugs. the
lightning. once & again. i didn't see any. i need to know that they're there. that i was not the
only one who saw them. that you also let your eyes linger,
that the future was blinking at us.

self portrait, 2024.
after *Surah Mariam, 19:23*

i fantasize in slow horror, immaculate collapse, oh
base of my skull snapping against the slick corner. bleeding us, i
fall into a vague tunnel of un-speak, magical wish
bodies blown into ask, faceless and named. i
cannot speak of anything else had
when recited, the blessings at my feet died
sprinkling the ground in heartbreak. once, before
i lurched forward, dancing at midnight, imagining us married. in this
i have been a delusional fool. we watch murder day in & out and
still, no one speaks. was
it only in the Qur'an that wrong had been righted? in
wake from oblivion,
interrogated, finally forgotten.

small confessionals:

i only listen to the playlist made for me after we stop talking
the weight of consideration is what bows my neck
let's get married
there are fish minnowing in my lower lungs
distantly, love harkens obstruction
abstraction. i have a child's softened & malleable vocabulary.
me da miedo. me arrancar de llorar. ¿me extrañas? the children
i throw up into the sink. i debate waking you, the door between us
a portal—just approachable. mira, mira. our children in the bowl.
gasping & choking. i fill the sink with water. my stomach bile turns
them rancid and slick. help me. ay, porfa. es demasiado de hablar.
my love, wake. come to me. help me save our little ones. in the morning
you smell the sour grief in the air. you ask me, what did you lose, this time?
i smile a gummy smile. i wail an unspoken request. we have parted ways.
imagine. años próximos y tenemos niños soñando debajo de la casita.
cantando para ellos sin saber. ¿y yo? i have long gone. i pray every night for reunion.
the desire feels so pathetic, more often than not, las palabras corren antes de hablar.



i spent the last 4 days in dreams: that papi and i became a many fished-school,
glimmering & unburdened in the water. that i was at your wedding, kissing your cheeks
as you descended the aisle. what i dislike the most about the quality of the night
is one of nauseous slippage
in the middle left center region of my lung there is a growing
hole of viscous gasping. i try to suck enough air like that of a
greedy eel on the slippery counter. ice pebbling right under our feet.
oh, to invert myself some more. i feel this will be my final cure.

it's true. i spent spring dilated & looking for & into your eyes. your voice curling over my shells.
we sit by the shoreline & dot the map. i want your hands on my neck. thumbs resting on my collarbone.
as if searching for gills or a body you met only in imagination

i told papi about my dream. papi said if we had been turned into fish,
we would have become easily tinned, shiny, delicious.
other fish would come and gobble us up with ease.
i think i would like to be something small and nourishing,
in the belly of some other beast.

MY ROLE IN THE CITY

is centrally located. all the kids know
my roof is green. lily-underside & living
there is always something to be picked up still
disabled. in the dark my joints glow firelight
similar to that of the treeline in summer. create anew,
rhymes are coming slow. did you hear? they are losing words
about the outside: [the glimmer of the streetlight on the grass]
[early autumn evening picnic cold] [winter haze & time warping]
[restful sleep] [brain haze clearing] [repetition paradox i.e. nothing
change is coming is nothing again, again] [a soft verdant doe sips water]
[the kids skipping in slow rhyme] [they stop by my house
on the way home]



iram of the pillars

ENTER:

LIMINAL SPACE:

we all become

other. sudden. everything i do,

we did. before.

clay

tap these pillars

up there

on that slant.

ENTER:

SINKHOLE:

I WOKE UP IN
AGONIZING ANHELO.

I SAW,

THE TWO OF US
A FAR OFF PLACE
A HOST

LIMINAL SPACE:

every desire,

of

the most tangible

that i whisper, then
dissolve

y además,

lo coloqué en encounter

chance & entangled
sweating y lo prometo

SINKHOLE:

YOU'LL FIND ME HERE AGAIN.
CAVERN CRACK MY JAW
REMOVE MY RIGHT HIP
IN THE CURVES OF COCCYX A CITY IS
HOME,

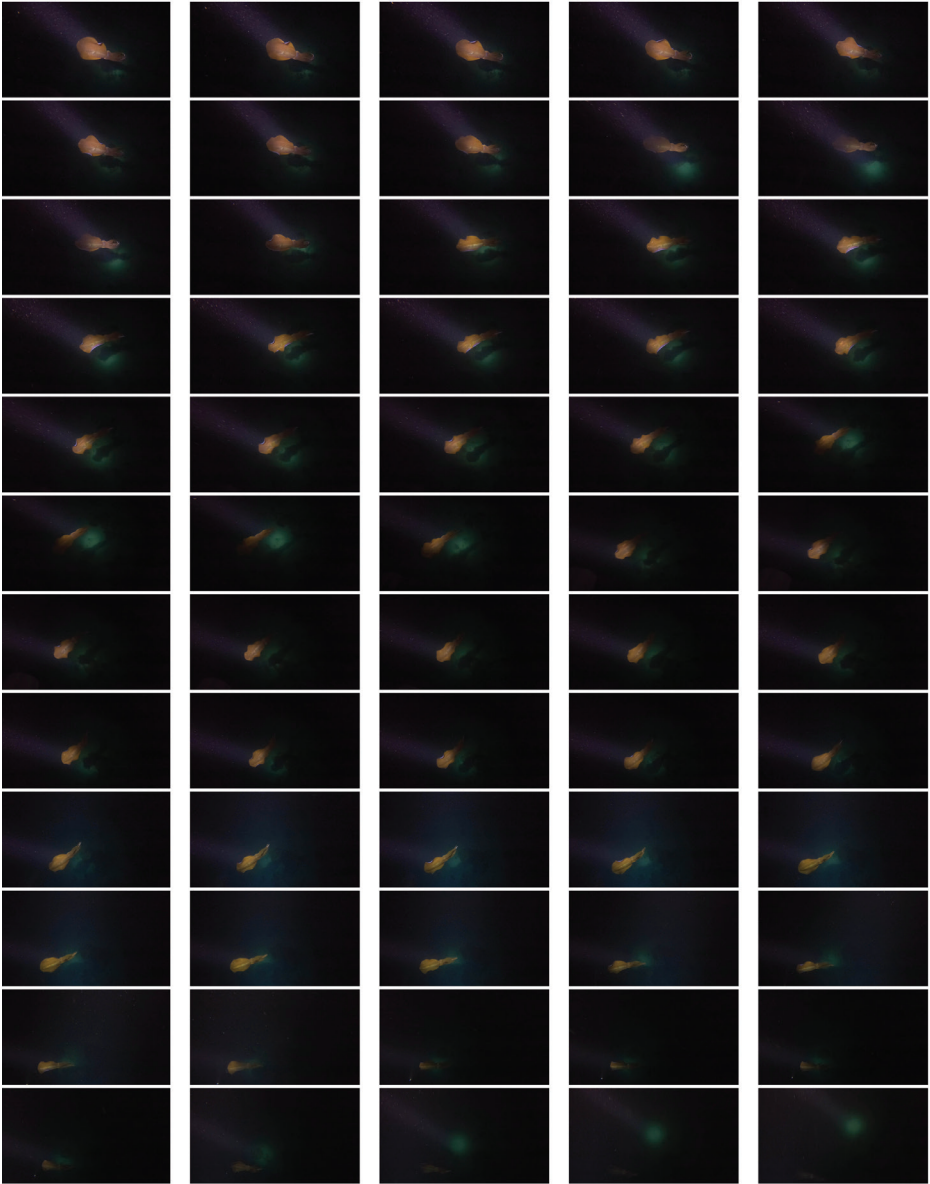
A DNA PRINT

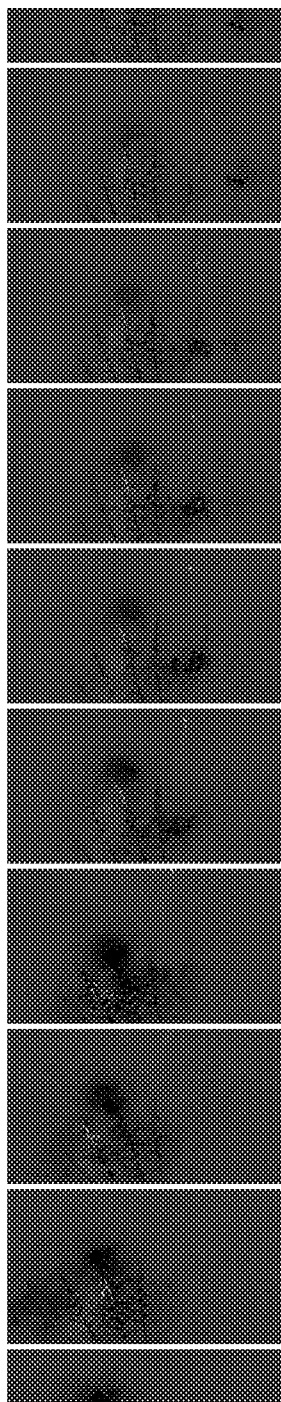
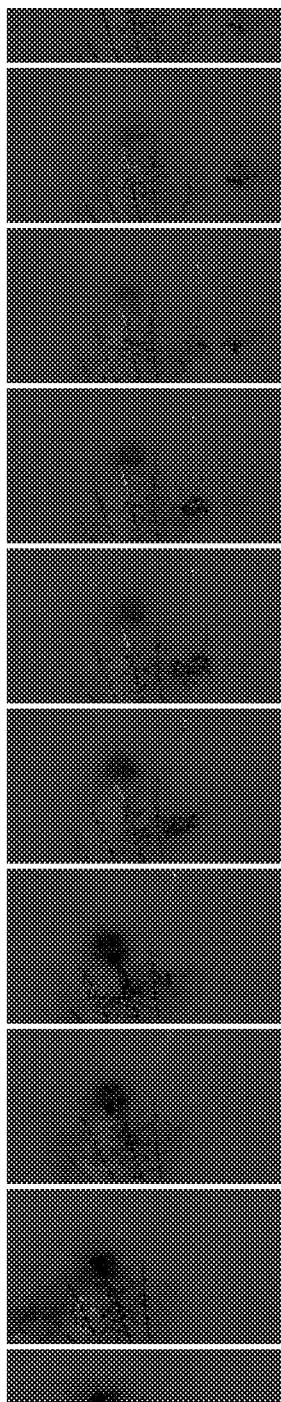
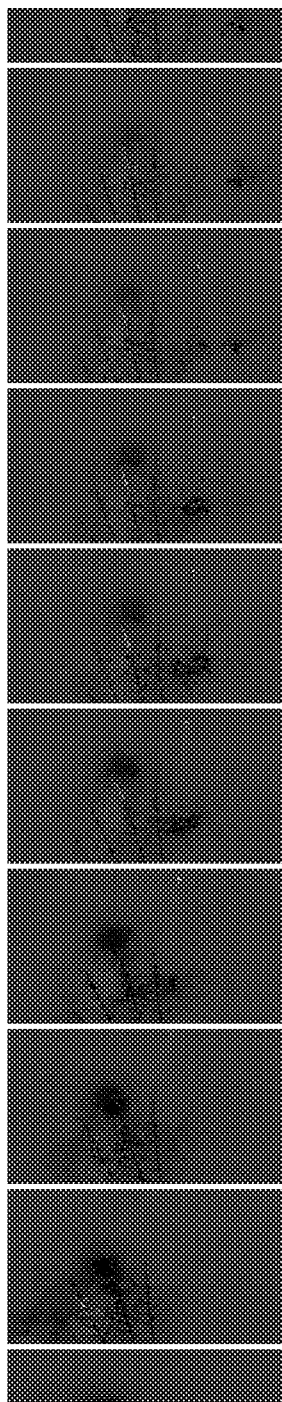
A DUST DANCE

OH, WE WERE HERE ONCE,
ONCE,

LIMINAL SPACE:

HERE IS THE TRUTH — THE STORY LONG SUBMERGED +
UNDISCOVERED — NO — ERASED — WE REVELED
IN SOFT UNDERBELLY — CITY SUNK LIKE AN ANCHOR THROUGH
DIM LIT SUN — FINGERS ENGULFED DEEP IN FLESH
FLOOD — SMELLING OF SWEAT + SOAP —
UNDER EONS OF SAND I UNCOVER A WATER
BREATHING — LIFE — UNHOLY — I COWER — BURY
THE GLASS SHARDS — WHEN THE WORLD FLIPS
SOMEONE TURNS MY REFLECTION INTO JEWELRY —
SOFTENED — ENMESHED — IN LOVE — PALATABLE
SCORCHED DAYS GONE, GONE, GONE! UNIFORM, FINALLY!
FINALLY! FINALLY! FINALLY!





MY LOVE DID TELL ME THE OTHER DAY

I GET SAD TO THINK OF THE REALITIES OF WHICH I KNOW OF
WHICH YOU KNOW NOT

OF WHICH I RECALL AND WHICH YOU CANNOT

I KNOW THE VERSIONS OF YOU OF WHICH YOU KNOW OF
WHICH YOU KNOW NOT

I SEE A SPLITTING DOWN THE ROOTS & INTO THE CAVERN OF BODY OF
WHICH YOU HAVE DETAILED

KNOWING NOT THE VOCABULARY OF IMPORTANCE OF BEES IN FACT

YOU WILL WAKE UP ONE DAY MID-STING & KNOW OF ME

HOW I HAVE LOVED YOU BEYOND

COMING TO YOU IN MANY FORMS ON MANY DAYS WITH SHINY ABDOMEN

GLISTENING & GLINTING IN BARE LIGHT, ON BRILLIANT TILE. YOU TOOK

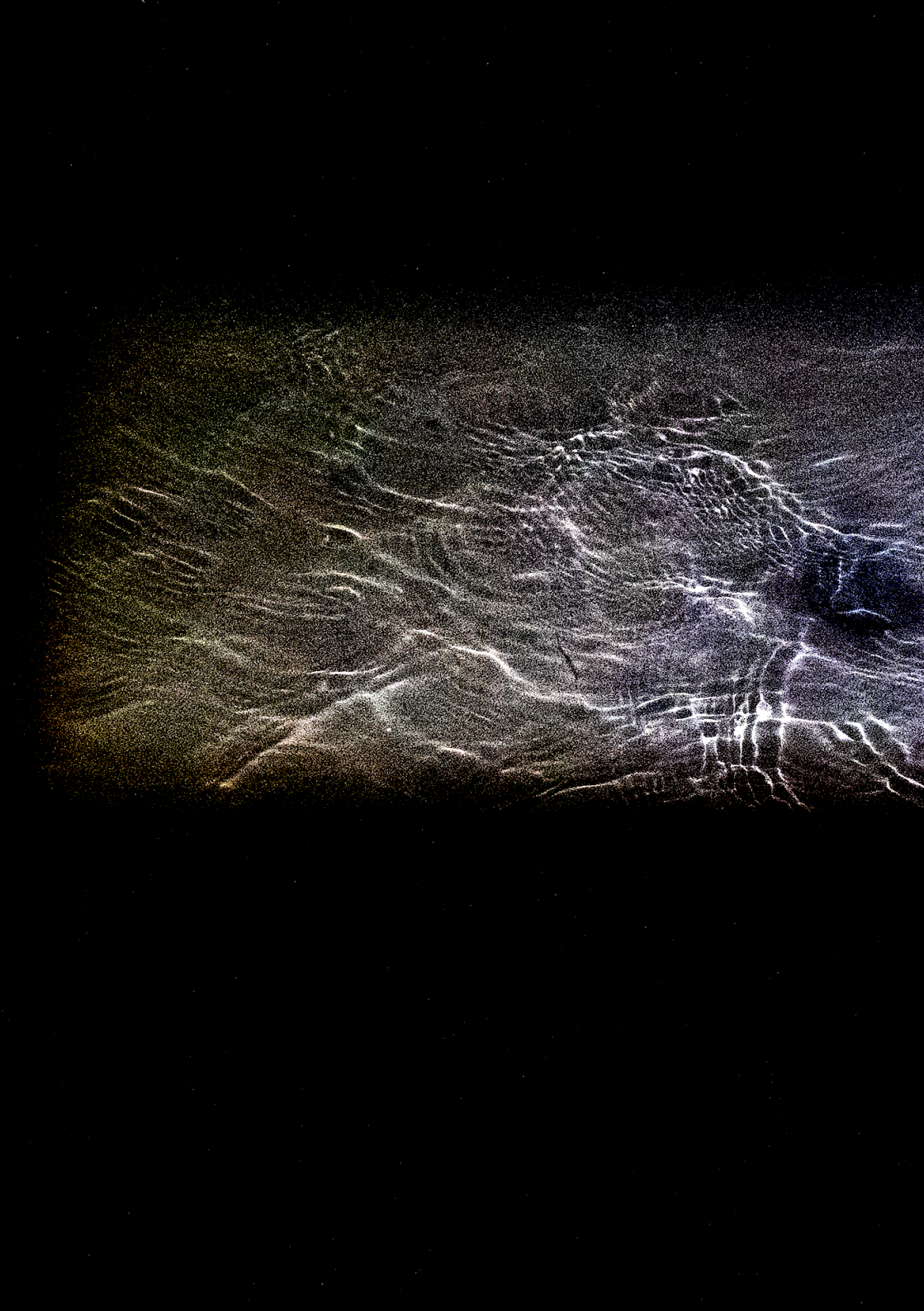
LITTLE NOTICE OF ME, AS IF I WAS AN ANT ON THE ROAD AS IF I WAS NOT

THE AIR IN YOUR LUNGS OF WHICH YOU KNEW AND I NOT & IT WAS

NAUGHT FOR LACK OF TRYING OF WHICH I WATCHED YOU BEND INTO

NEW SHAPE CONTORTING INTO BRILLIANCE & NOW YOU ARE WITHOUT YOU,

WHICH YOU KNOW OF NAUGHT





this project is one that has taken many years to assemble. i always find talking about my internal poetry difficult, if only because how it once started is not always where we end up. for this project, there are many texts i spent time with before attempting to assemble my own text. you can find them below, and i would encourage you to spend time with them as well.

lack of intimacy — Benny Candie

Monster Culture — Jeffrey Jerome Cohen

Deluge — Leila Chatti

Monstrillo — Gerardo Sámano Córdova

Our Share of Night — Mariana Enriquez

Lost Islamic History — Firas Alkhateeb

Borderlands/La Frontera — Gloria Anzaldua

Teaching To Transgress — bell hooks

Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn — Amira El-Zein

Inclusive Transporation — Veronica Davis

Living Disability — Emily Macrae

Dark Laboratory — Tao Leigh Goffe

On Breathing — Jamieson Webster

Can the Monster Speak? — Paul B. Preciado

Improvised Explosive Device — Arji Manuelpillai

E-mails from Schehrazad — Mohja Kahf

Dear Enheduanna — Erin Honeycutt

The Unworthy — Agustina Bazterrica

Desiring Arabs — Joseph A. Massad

Undrowned — Alexis Pauline Gumbs

i wonder often about what makes a monster, what makes a city, and what makes an ecosystem. i often think the differences between monster and other are not that large, and that in fact, things get more fascinating when we are keen to explore how to live beautifully together, wholly.

in no structured order, my thanks and love to:

the Masaha Residency at Misk, of which this body of work has been printed from. to jeeda, jude, dana, valle, weiran, rahaf, shatha, sara, anastasia, dina, badr & everyone else on the misk team: you held me so kindly & i'm glad we met each other with so much grace, curiosity, and joy.

to muhannad, saydul, saydul islam, refat: thank you so much for your company & space!!!! it's been so lovely & inshallah to many more printing adventures.....!!!

to the many people i have been able to learn from & spend time with: mr. erwin, ms. britlinger, ms. clark, ms. amy, mr. ganz, mr. ewing, dr. le, dr. jay hopler, christian hawkey, dr. fatin abbas, dr. maria damon, mimi schaefer, siddhartha —thank you, thank you, thank you.

to my many loves & friends who i have discussed at length with over our many years together language & love & poetry — haley, sarah, serafina, maria, eiman, ebony, erin, loulwah, nouf, nesrien sophie, aziz — inshallah to many more poems & much more time together, inshallah!!

jaejoon - thank you for reading monstrillo & being so excited with me. let's meet again & read together soon, inshallah.

to my dears who helped me with this project & with so much care & attention:

benny - thank for the composition, animation, all things RISO & for talking me through these ideas. you've always been one of my favorite artists & as always, it's a dream to spend time with you.

khaled - thank you for translating, editing & spending so much time with my poems. you're a marvel of a poet & i've been in awe of you since day one. alhamdulillah i'm so glad we were put on this earth at the same time.

abeer - thank you for your friendship & care & for laughing with me so much, as well as your sharp eye on layout & for coming to install with me.

i love you all sooo much. i hope next i get to spend the coming months in your world, with your work, inshallah.

to omar & susan: you have always made this world more interesting & exciting. i'm glad that we have each other for company. i love you. i hope we all end up neighbors soon!! i miss you!!!

to mami & papi: i love you. thank you for everything. thank you for blessing me with the kindest of any & all languages & for always welcoming me home.

inshallah we are always reunited, again in this life, and every life after, inshallah. thank you for reading this. i love you, i love you, i love you.