

foreign & domestic

# Ittah Yoda

*ALTER*

September 7 – October 30, 2022



























## ITTAH YODA

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*ALTER* is Ittah Yoda's first exhibition in New York. The exhibition includes new painting, sculpture and a sound installation, accruing on the duo's extensive collaborations, research and archive of past works. These works were produced alongside Ittah Yoda's concurrent residency at ISCP in Brooklyn.

Plankton err, drift, float, wander, feed, photosynthesize, bloom, glow, tint, filter, nourish, daily migrate in vertical synchrony. Plankton elude our attempts to classify them by taxonomy, morphology or phylogeny; systems based on genetic codes, physical appearance or evolutionary hierarchy. Plankton are only loosely defined according to what stirs them and in which niche they choose to linger. Plankton can be bacteria, plants, protozoa, algae, animals, viruses, mixotrophs. They are largely invisible to the naked eye, yet their blooms are seen from space. For some organisms, being planktonic is merely a phase in the life cycle. Like their megascopic cousins, the planets, plankton are cosmic *flâneurs* journeying through out-of-scale worlds that we can only reach with instrument or imagination, art and science.

Visitors first encounter *Echo*, a human-scale sculpture supported on brass legs and carved out of maple-wood by a robotic arm instructed to reproduce a virtual form. Ittah Yoda 'breed' this form by digitally merging models of their previous sculpture to date with models of phytoplankton and zooplankton, obtained with confocal laser scanning microscopy during their collaboration with the Oceanographic Observatory in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France. The sculpture's surface shows up subtle glitches and lesions, marking the mistranslations between the virtual model and the mechanical process, as virtual polygons, meshes and vectors come into contact with the grain of the wood.

*Echo* holds two glass vials, in the form of plankton-sculpture hybrids, which contain live cultures of *Dunaliella Salina*. These phytoplankton, or micro-algae, are common in salt flats, where they turn from green to pink-orange to protect themselves from damaging ultraviolet radiation. *Dunaliella* confounds taxonomic definitions, since it lacks a cell wall, conducts photosynthesis, has two *flagella* for motion and mating, and can reproduce either sexually or asexually depending on environmental stressors.

Flakes of mica crystals, mined by the artists in Connecticut, accumulate around *Echo*'s feet. Mica is a naturally occurring silicate which separates into nanometer-thin, atomically flat flakes or scales. There is a theory that the first molecular reactions necessary to all life processes first occurred in the nanoscopic gaps between mica flakes. The mechanical energy produced by the sheets of mica rubbing against each other may have powered molecular machines to carry out primitive metabolic reactions, a key stage between inanimate and animate processes, and a precursor to the formation of the first RNA strands and cellules.

Two pairs of triptychs comprise the six paintings exhibited in *ALTER*: *Alejandro I-III* and *Rouben I-III*. Each triptych depicts the same scene of a digital world composed of evocatively biomorphic alien shapes. Ittah Yoda populate this landscape with hundreds of plankton-sculpture hybrid forms. A 'generative adversarial network' artificial intelligence model is trained to familiarize itself with these hybrid digital shapes, in order to produce new three-dimensional forms evolved algorithmically from Ittah Yoda's co-creations. These AI-generated forms mingle with the artist-generated forms in their virtual world. The two-dimensional scene into this alien space chosen by the artists, finally passes through a 'deep dream' filter, a process which sees another AI hallucinating and exaggerating certain features of the image. The resulting images are lithographically printed onto canvas, each canvas consisting of two impressions separated by a fine and irregular seam. Similar to the monotype cognates of Degas, the triptych *Rouben I-III* is further hand painted by Ittah Yoda in the gallery space to evoke half-recalled phantom images produced by the AI.

There is no gravity in Ittah Yoda's virtual world. No up nor down, no latitude or longitude, east or west, neither beginning nor end. Crisp resolutions and blurry polygons combine with the materiality of the lithographic print, its scratches, lines, ink density and canvas' weave. Relative proportions between the hybrid shapes are in perpetual flux. The gigantic keeps company with the miniscule. There is no center to anchor our perception. Is this what planktons' dreams are made of? An amniotic ocean of organs, strands, corpuscles and membranes. Haptic allegories of plankton's unconscious desires, fears, loves and hopes? The primeval soup from which life emerged, a deep time long before and long after *homo sapiens*.

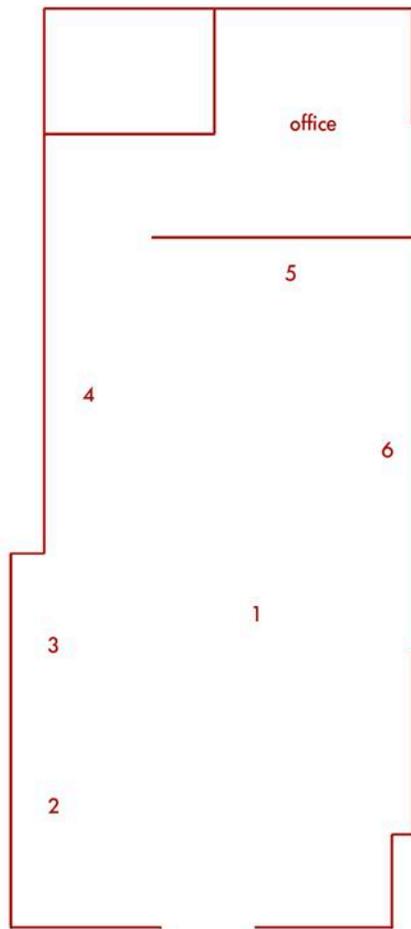
Anthropocentric cosmologies employ constant scale to hold things in place, to classify, to control and to measure; to distinguish the human subject in a strict relation of distance from the natural world. With *Alejandro I-III* and *Rouben I-III*, Ittah Yoda unmoor scale and perspective, hoping that this sense of vertigo between the microscopic and the macroscopic can de-center the anthropic, and re-center our world towards horizontal and symbiotic relations with other biological, machinic, and even inanimate being. Recognizing and representing this symbiosis is a sacred gesture, akin to ancient cave paintings depicting the natural world with a mixture of fear and awe.

The art of Ittah Yoda emerges from contact and friction. Friction between the artists themselves, and friction with their collaborators, materials, technologies and exhibition contexts. Each new contact leaves its trace in their work, forming part of the context for future contacts. Ittah Yoda's process is porous to outside influences, and operates by mutation, iteration and accretion much like learning algorithms or evolutionary processes in the natural world. This method seeds a perpetual flux of interpretation and re-interpretation, and liberates identities (of the artist, artwork, viewer) from past narratives. Paradoxically, it is each contact's interaction with the entire history of the artists' work, that holds hope for writing new narratives, for mutating the code. Through their work, Ittah Yoda address the urgent call for symbiotic relations between beings, for new experiences of the sacred and therapeutic modalities that accommodate neuro-diverse individuals.

*Protoschemos*, a chthonic sound piece composed and produced by Nick Zhu, and inspired by the sounds of plankton, resonates through the gallery.

Ittah Yoda is a duo composed of Virgile Ittah (b. 1984) and Kai Yoda (b. 1985), based between Paris, Berlin and Tokyo. Their partnership grew out of mutually-assisting collaborations during their studies at the Royal College of Art between 2009 and 2013. They subsume their diverse cultural experiences into a combination of virtual world-building and extensive material research to produce multi-sensorial installations. Ittah Yoda's work is self-generating, quoting itself while continuously growing new branches with each successive collaboration, be it with artificial intelligence, fabricator, technician, writer, glitch, environmental conditions or non-human life. Ittah Yoda seeks to engender aesthetic and therapeutic experiences that reframe ways of communicating between human and non-human beings, privileging symbiotic over hierarchical models.

We are infinitely grateful for all the help from: Erin Morris, Alfred Meshcom, L'Institut de la mer de Villefranche (IMEV), Societies, Arcana Metals Inc., Conrad Schmidt and Ezra Ardolino (Timbur LLC), Institut Français (Villa Albertine), Lorenzo Wolff, Evan Tyor, Nick Zhu / bod [包家巷], Michael Woolworth, Firas Safieddine, Meredith Thomas, Louise Marchand, Inria Saclay Centre, Rick Cernak, ISCP, Centre national des arts plastiques, Livia Parmentier, Hiroshi Yoda.



1. *Echo*, 2022, brass, maple wood, blown glass, mica, *Dunalellia Salina*, 47 x 72 x 18 ½ in / 120 x 183 x 47 cm
2. *Racou*, 2022, cast glass, pigments and brass, 12 x 16 x 14 in / 30.5 x 40.5 x 35.5 cm
3. *Alejandro I*, 2022, lithograph on canvas, 61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 117 cm, unique
4. *Alejandro II*, 2022, lithograph on canvas, 61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 116.7 cm, unique
5. *Alejandro III*, 2022, lithograph on canvas, 61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 116.7 cm, unique
6. *Rouben I-III*, 2022, lithograph, spray paint and oil stick on canvas, triptych, 61 ¾ x 141 in, 157 x 350 cm

# catalogue of works



**Ittah Yoda**

*Rouben I-III*

2022

lithographic print and oil on canvas

61 ¾ x 141 in / 157 x 350 cm

triptych

unique













**Ittiah Yoda**

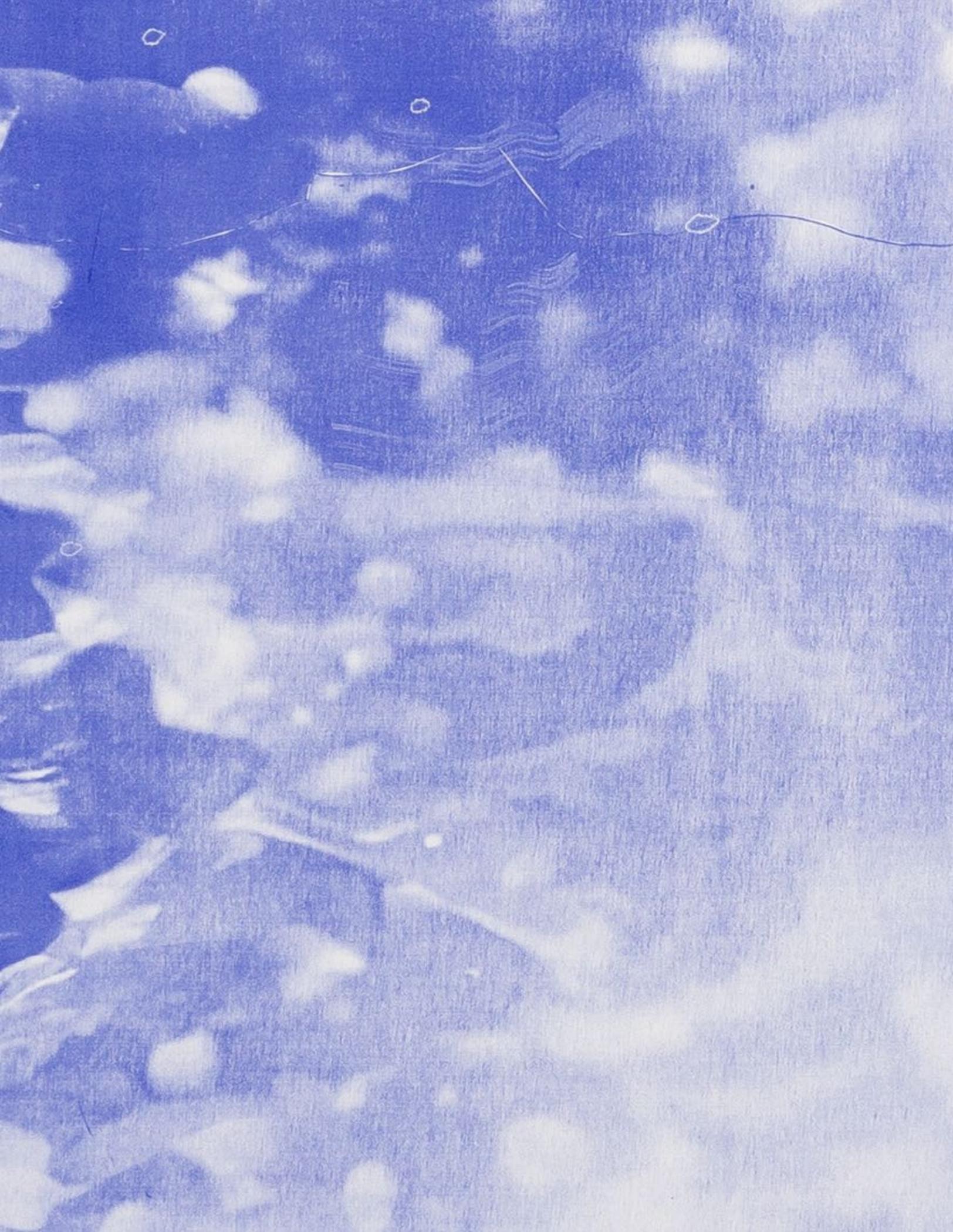
*Alejandro I*

2022

lithographic print on canvas

61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 117 cm

unique





**Ittiah Yoda**

*Alejandro II*

2022

lithographic print on canvas

61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 117 cm

unique





**Ittiah Yoda**

*Alejandro III*

2022

lithographic print on canvas

61 ¾ x 46 in / 157 x 117 cm

unique









**Ittah Yoda**

*Echo*

2022

brass, maple wood, blown glass, mica, *Dunalellia Salina*

47 x 72 x 18 ½ in / 120 x 183 x 47 cm

unique





**Ittiah Yoda**

*Racou*

2022

cast glass, pigments, brass

12 x 16 x 14 in / 30.5 x 40.5 x 35.5 cm

unique





**Ittah Yoda**

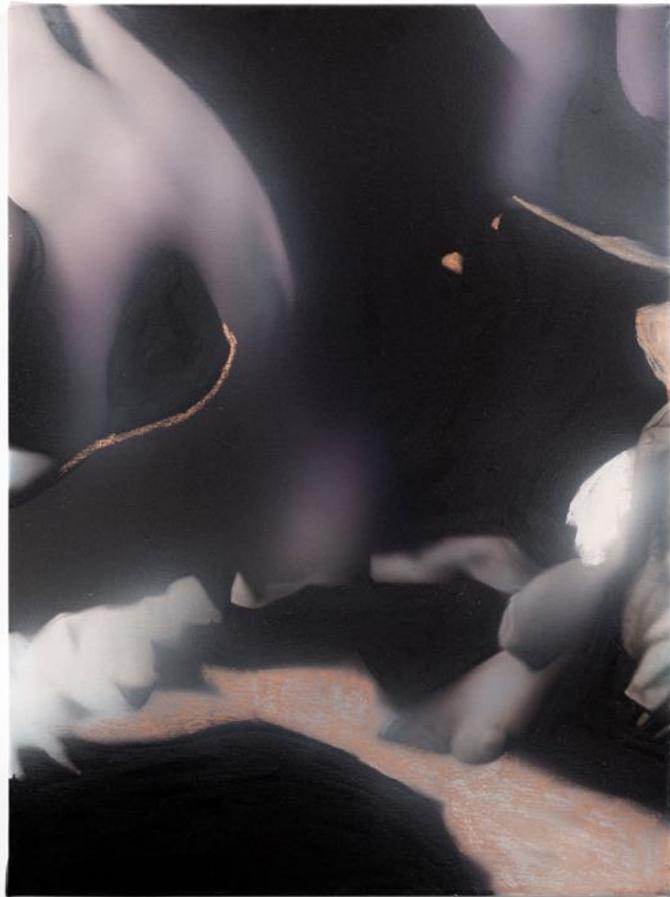
*Ip*

2022

UV print, spray paint and oil stick on canvas

21 ¾ x 16 in / 55 x 40.5 cm

unique



**Ittah Yoda**

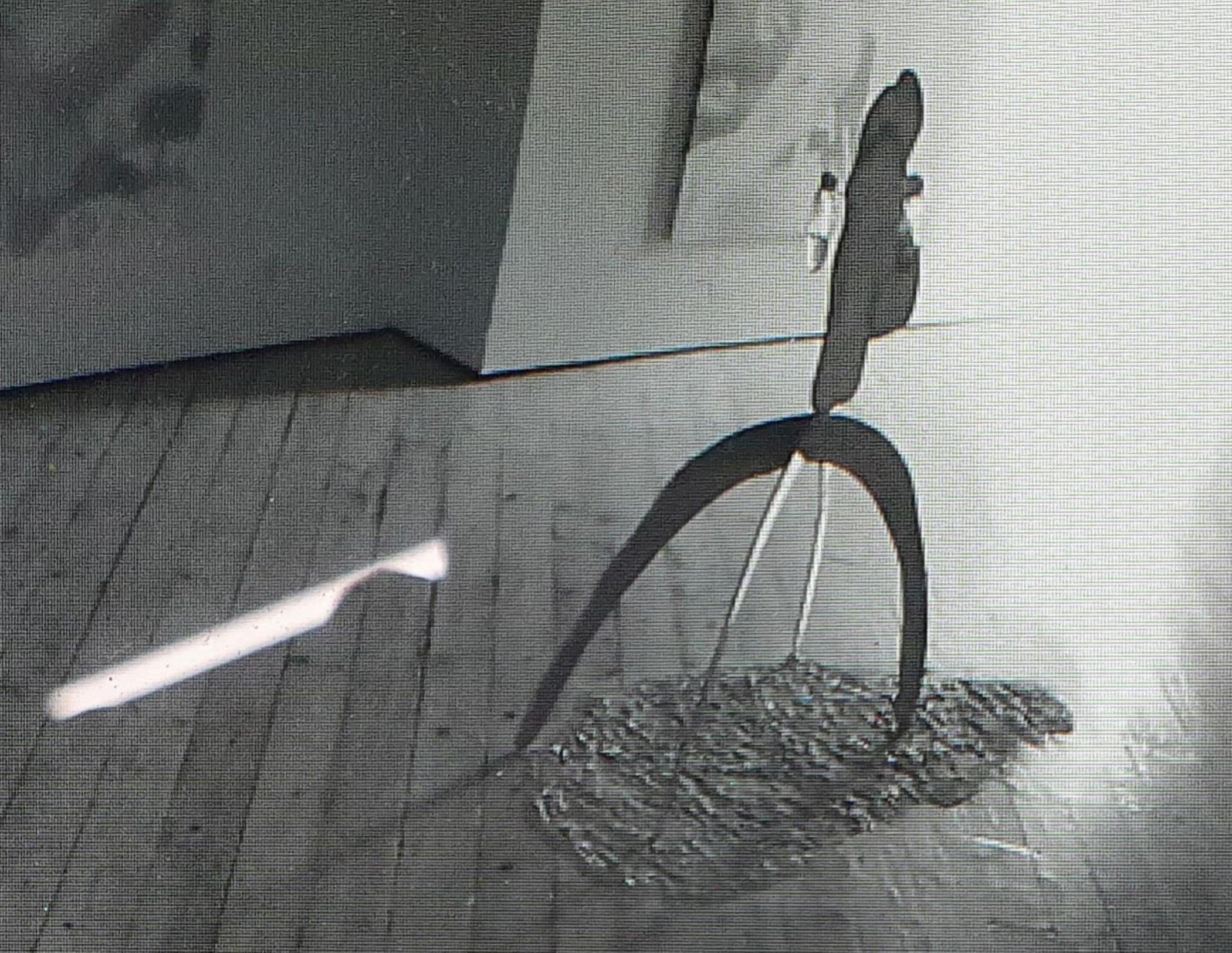
*Mui*

2022

UV print, spray paint and oil stick on canvas

21 ¾ x 16 in / 55 x 40.5 cm

unique





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