

foreign & domestic

Joel Wyllie

Aerial the Projectionist

October 9 – November 9, 2025



















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24 Rutgers Street, New York

opens Thursday October 9, 6-8pm

Joel Wyllie's drawings express the pleasure of being haunted. They linger with a gentle unsettlement that pleasantly rubs against the human mystery center. These images cannot be possessed by viewers' eyes; they float past our chiasma like a grey fog. From a distance, they appear to hold form, but they are not, it appears, solid; just a fine particulate dust suspended in the air. These are nebular apparitions slipping in and out of our reality and Wyllie, like some documentarian of the liminal, offers us a chance to see them before they are gone. - *Ross Simonini*

Ross Simonini: What is the reality of your drawings?

Joel Wyllie: I have found this quite difficult to answer. I use sketchbooks and see them as a kind of ground level where ideas can flutter, jump, and accumulate. I draw in my books at any time; whilst in bed, on the bus, or with half an eye whilst eating. I also visualize my work mentally by imagining my drawings on things such as doors or billboards. The drawings tangle and grow along with my life, as part of my life.

These all sounds like exercises in perceiving reality in fresh ways. Another way of putting that question is: do you see your work as a form of world building? Do the things you present in your work exist in relationship to each other?

I don't see it as a fully-formed world with fixed laws, but there is definitely a sense of things coexisting. I have been thinking of it more as a kind of symbiotic culture; something living, layered, and continuously shifting, where every part evolves in relation to the others and needs care and maintenance to grow and survive. I'm reluctant to use the word world, though, as it implies a kind of detachment from this one, whereas I see the work more as a product of it.

What does visualizing your work on a door do for the work?

I enjoy imagining different compositions and scales - elements that I think are important to my work. I think I also like the constraint of a readymade format.

Do you ever execute these drawings on objects?

No. I used to make a lot of sculptures, but haven't for some time now.

If your drawings are part of your life, as you say, do they also depict your life?

I don't illustrate my life experiences, and I rarely use source imagery, but inevitably, every form I depict has some root in memory. I think of the drawings more as collages; fragments that surface and accumulate over time, rather than coming from direct observation. I often only recognize an influence after the work is made. For example, I watched some spaghetti westerns over the winter before last, and then again more recently. I noticed that the eyes in some of my recent drawings strongly resembled those intense close-up shots; anxious eyes shifting left, then right.

There are also elements I can trace back to childhood. I have a particular memory of rain illuminated by the streetlight outside my bedroom window at night; that image seems to echo through some of my pictures.

It sounds like your work is informed by many art forms.

I think it can be *strongly* informed by other art forms; it depends where I am with my work, and where I want to be going. I have spent a lot of time driving since I moved to Suffolk five years ago, and have become increasingly interested in the branding on trucks and lorries. I love some of the minimal designs, the typography, the flat bold colors and the riveted surfaces. I saw a 'Europa Logistics' lorry recently driving down to London- its logo was a beautifully simple portrait of a woman in the wind, just red and white, painted huge on the side. It's also the nature in which they're usually seen- fleeting and at multiple angles. This interest has coincided with what feels like a simplifying of the forms in my work, and potentially navigating towards some much larger pictures.

How do logos affect you, visually?

As I mentioned, I have paid some attention to logos recently, but on the whole I have little real interest in them. Thinking more specifically about large scale livery though, I think it's the combination between the speed at which they're often read, the flat color, and the scale which can sometimes feel oddly heady.

When you talk about simplifying your forms, what do you mean by that?

My work had been getting increasingly ridden with pattern and detail, and I was starting to feel desensitized to it. One of the drawings in this show - *Cynthia* - initially had patterns growing out from the head; it took a while, but eventually all of the pattern disappeared, leaving just a smooth edge. I think it cleared the way for less reliance on ornamentation, and more confidence in pared back form being able to hold a picture. The discovery of using coloring pencils also helped with this; a flat plane somehow became more energized. Maybe simplification was the wrong word; maybe it's more of a change of state.

How does this change of state affect the work?

What feels like a shift, or at least a new strand developing, feels healthy.

What (or who) is *Aerial*?

A couple of years ago I made a drawing that began in one of my sketchbooks; it had the appearance of a side profile of a human head, like a bust. It felt quite static and contained though, so I decided to grow the head upwards. This long head became a kind of motif, and it has since mutated and distorted across several drawings. In a small, very quick sketch, I drew a sphere in front of the face; this became the prototype for the drawing *Aerial the Projectionist*, the title work for the show.

For a long time now, I have been interested in, and at times overwhelmed by, the idea that free will is an illusion; that everything is pre-determined. That idea seems to surface in different ways, and in this drawing I think it appears more symbolically: a character who is weighed down, completely lacking control, with its life experience conjoined to its face, spinning in front of its eyes.

Does this fatalistic or deterministic view change the way you live? Does it darken or lighten your perspective on your life?

The idea of determinism became the center of a particularly challenging period when I was younger; life felt rigid, mechanical, and claustrophobic. Over time though those feelings faded, and I became almost numb to the idea. These days I don't often think about it directly, and I at least feel like I have some sort of agency, but I don't consciously alter the way I live. Maybe it doesn't darken or lighten my perspective on life anymore so much as create a kind of distance.

Does this kind of philosophy make it easier to (not) make choices around your art?

Maybe with that distance there's a sense of things unfolding on their own, and sometimes things do flow more easily. But I do also have frustrating spells where things feel more resistant and forms, materials, or compositions can become monotonous.

How does your work make you feel? How do you want it to make you feel?

It depends what I'm working on and at what stage, but when ideas come together there can be a feeling of correlation and alignment, which can be very satisfying.

Over the last few years I have been making a type of drawing in my sketchbook which develops without an obvious plan and often over long periods. When I come close to some sort of resolution with these I feel alert, as though I have caught something.

But it can evoke a wide range of feelings. It can feel uncomfortable and empty at times but I can also find it funny and feel excited and hopeful; I think that's how I want it to make me feel.

Do you enjoy the sensation of being haunted?

I'm often drawn to culture that could be described as haunted. I like things that are fragmented and feel like they're disintegrating or not quite there.

In my own work I think the way memories echo and distort through the pictures could relate to a kind of haunting. And when some pictures emerge they can feel unfamiliar and sometimes unsettling, and there's something in that which maybe I enjoy.

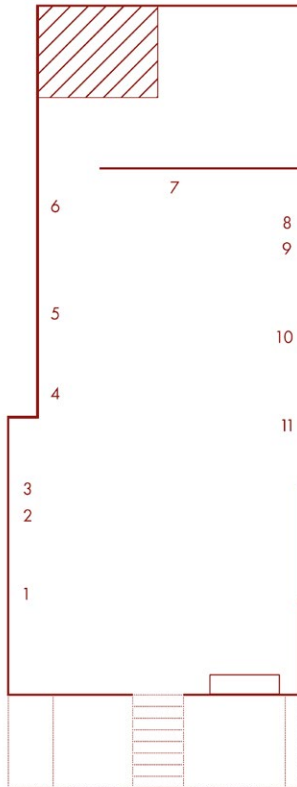
Joel Wyllie (b. 1986, London, UK) lives and works in Suffolk, England. He graduated from the Royal Academy Schools in 2015. Recent exhibitions include The Drawing Room, London (2024, 2021); The Artist Room, London (2024); Jack's House, London (2024); and Kunsthau Kule, Berlin (2024). Joel Wyllie participated in the inaugural exhibition of the Averard Hotel, London (2016) with a site-specific mural painting. *Aerial the Projectionist* is Joel Wyllie's first solo exhibition in New York.

The familiar feeling of trying, but failing, to remember a name or a face. The half life of visions and shower thoughts. *Lethologica*, or Greek for the forgotten word, its mystical namesake is a river in Hades. The mind grasps for its object in a darkened space, just barely out of reach. Forms that reveal themselves like dark matter bending light, given shape through model and metaphor. Emotions powerful enough to be personified, given agency, named and recognized. The black dog, the incubus, *Cynthia*, or *Aerial*. The gravitational pull of a psychic mass. Centrifugal forces around a wordless singularity, pulling and stretching meaning like some many noodles of graphite and meaning. Determinism and the absence of free will. Feelings that can crush, twist, spin, blind, buoy, lift or overwhelm.

Wyllie's drawings try to touch what we cannot see, tracing contours like a pair of blind hands. The manual research, the trial and error, the unhurried gesture implied in the untranslatable tâtonnement. True to the ontology of drawing, channeling information in a fluid and holistic process that combines the hand, the eye and the mind. Slipping from the tip of the tongue to the tip of the fingers, Wyllie excavates a latent space haunted by spectral faces that look back into ours. A space that feels as private as it is public, subjective as it is objective. A collective unconscious informed by a shared diet of memes and movies, archetypes and art history, emotions, memory, the neural architecture of homo sapiens sapiens, even.

These drawings have evoked a rich range of references in visitors to the exhibition. We are happy to share some of these here: the major and minor works of Hans Holbein the Younger, science-fiction films *Brazil* (1985) or *Quest* (1984), the architectural fantasies of Etienne-Louis Boullée (1784), Aldo Rossi (1977), Massimo Scolari (c.1970s) or Lebbeus Woods (1986), the tense closeups of Spaghetti Western films, the drawings of Odilon Redon (1878) or Tatsuo Ikeda (1956), the painted personality traits of video game *Disco Elysium* (2019), Richard Scarry's illustrations, a passing lorry...

text by Alexander Meurice

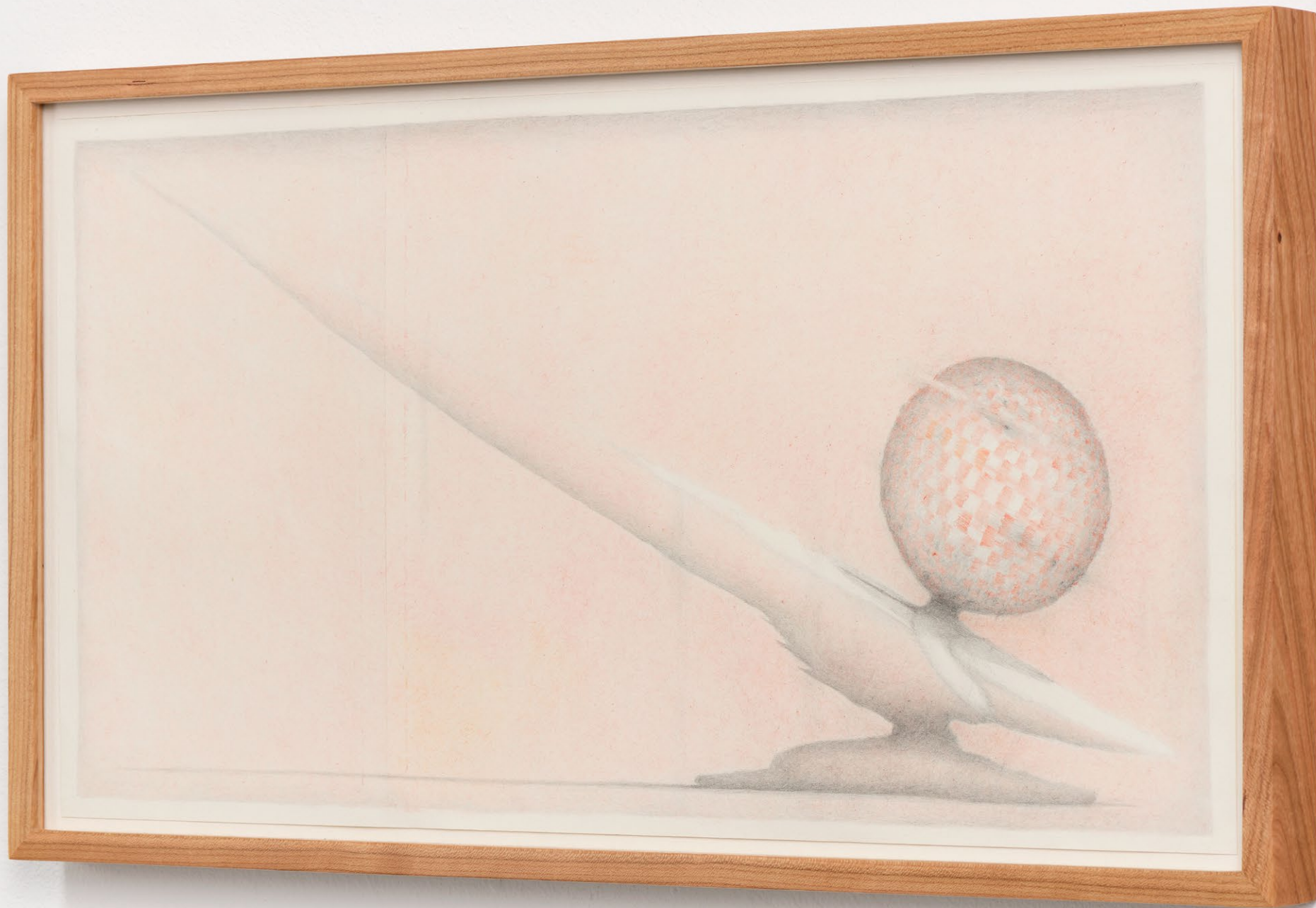


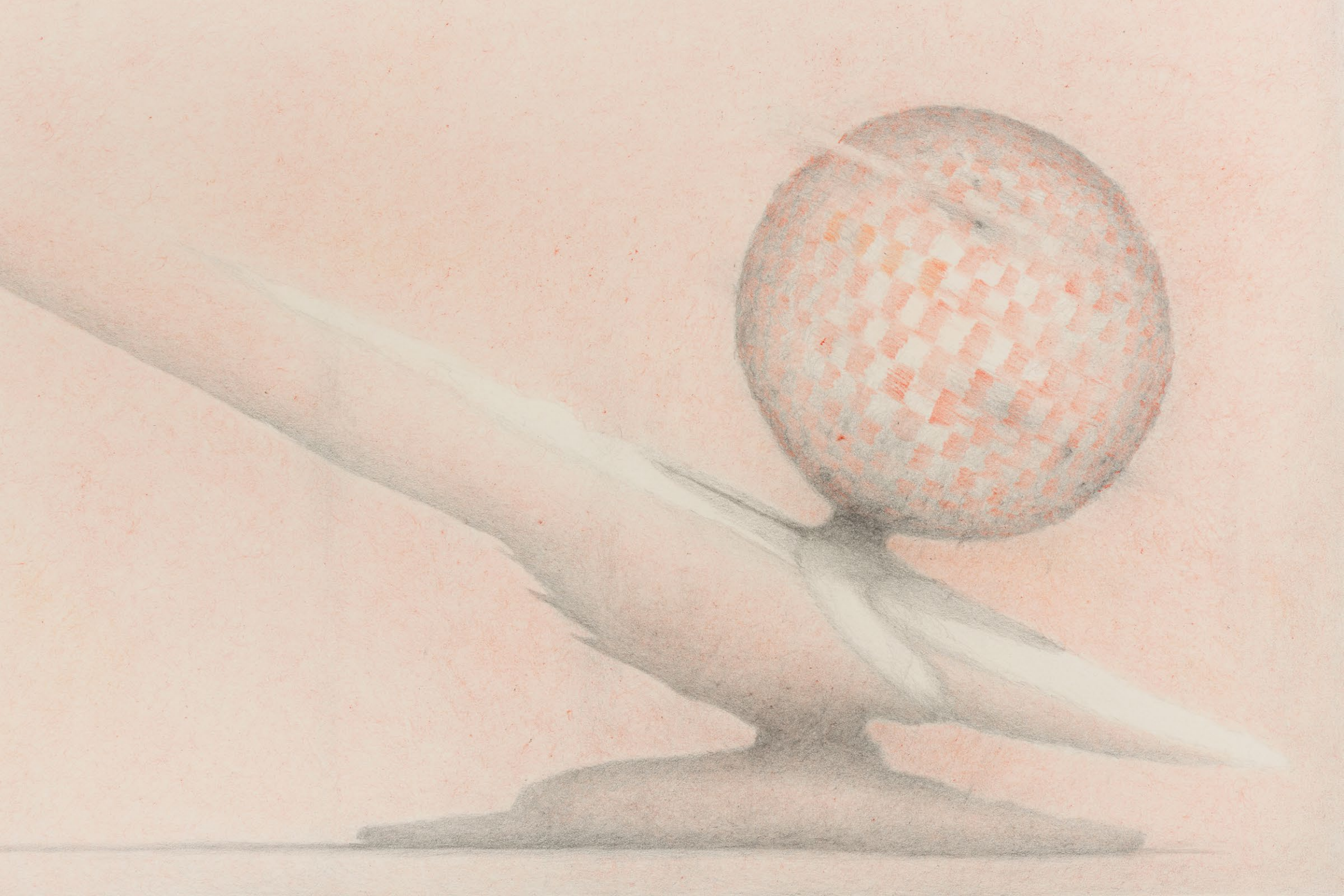
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|----|---|-----|---|
| 1. | <i>Aerial The Projectionist pt.1</i> , 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ in
30.3 x 54.3 cm | 7. | <i>Silo</i> , 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
7 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 6 in
18.5 x 15.4 cm |
| 2. | <i>Shedding Pictures no.6</i> , 2025
graphite on paper; artist frame
13 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ in
34.3 x 27.7 cm | 8. | <i>Shedding Pictures no.5</i> , 2025
graphite on paper; artist frame
12 x 10 $\frac{3}{4}$ in
30.6 x 27.4 cm |
| 3. | <i>Shedding Pictures no.7</i> , 2025
graphite on paper; artist frame
13 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{5}{8}$ in
35.3 x 26.9 cm | 9. | <i>Shedding Pictures no.4</i> , 2025
graphite on paper; artist frame
12 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in
30.9 x 24.7 cm |
| 4. | <i>Aerial The Projectionist pt.3</i> , 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
33 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ in
84.6 x 33.6 cm | 10. | <i>Cosmetics</i> , 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
9 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{5}{8}$ in
25.2 x 44.7 cm |
| 5. | <i>Archeology</i> , 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
12 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 12 in
31.5 x 30.6 cm | 11. | <i>Aerial The Projectionist pt.2</i> , 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
17 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 23 in
44.7 x 58.4 cm |
| 6. | <i>Cynthia</i> , 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
6 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ in
17.4 x 19.4 cm | | |

catalogue of works



Aerial The Projectionist pt.1, 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
11 7/8 x 21 3/8 in / 30.3 x 54.3 cm







Shedding Pictures no.6, 2025
graphite on paper, artist frame
13 ½ x 10 ⅞ in / 34.3 x 27.7 cm



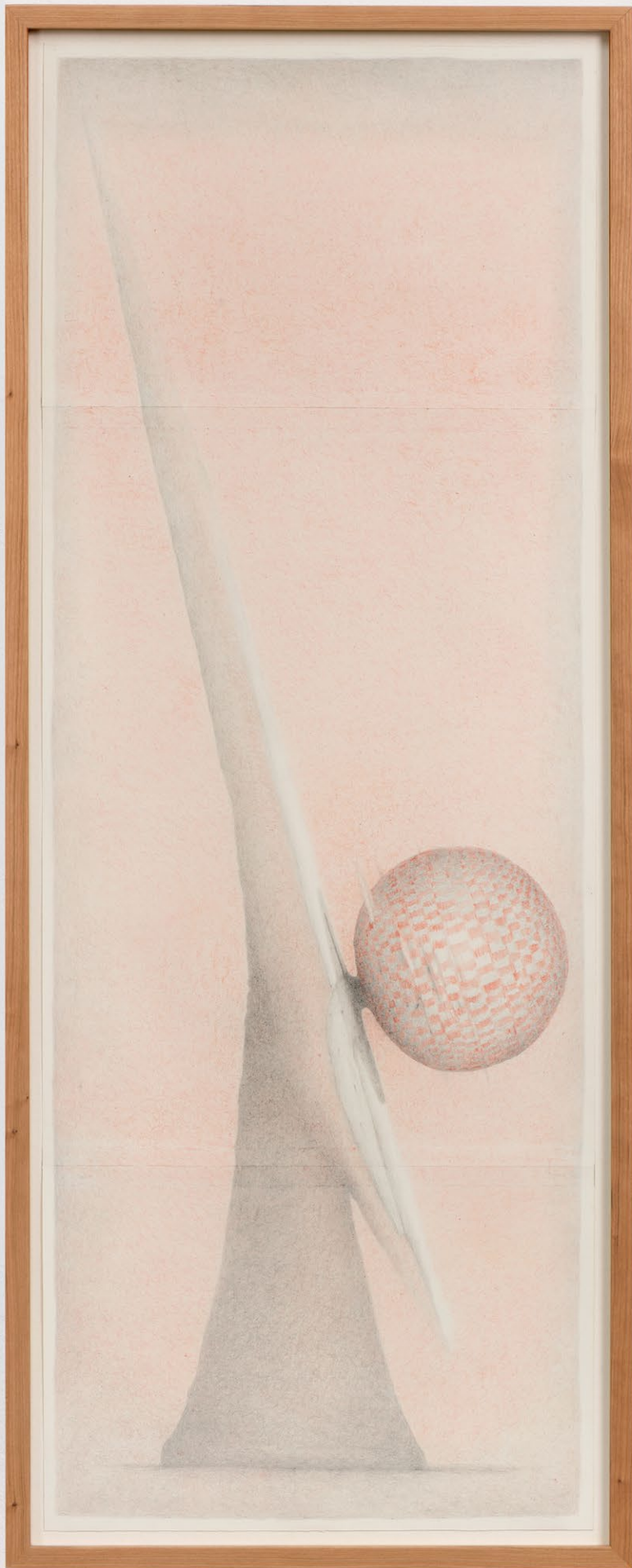




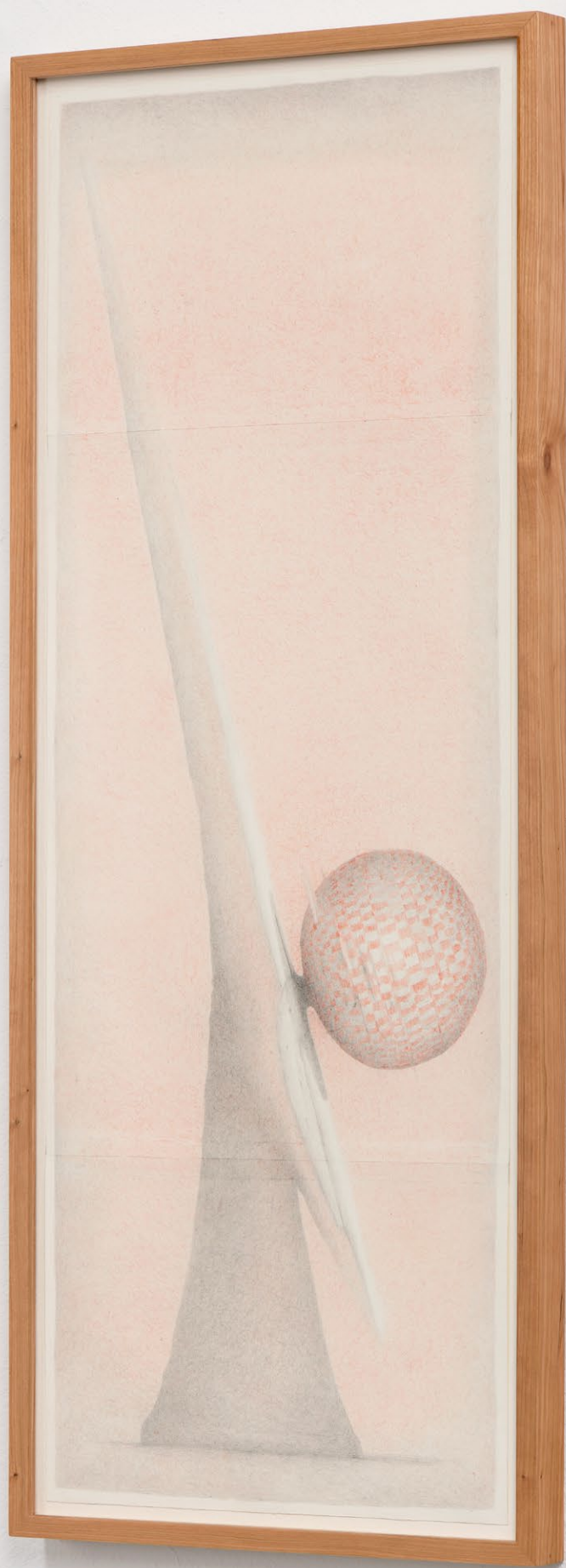
Shedding Pictures no.7, 2025
graphite on paper, artist frame
13 7/8 x 10 5/8 in / 35.3 x 26.9 cm

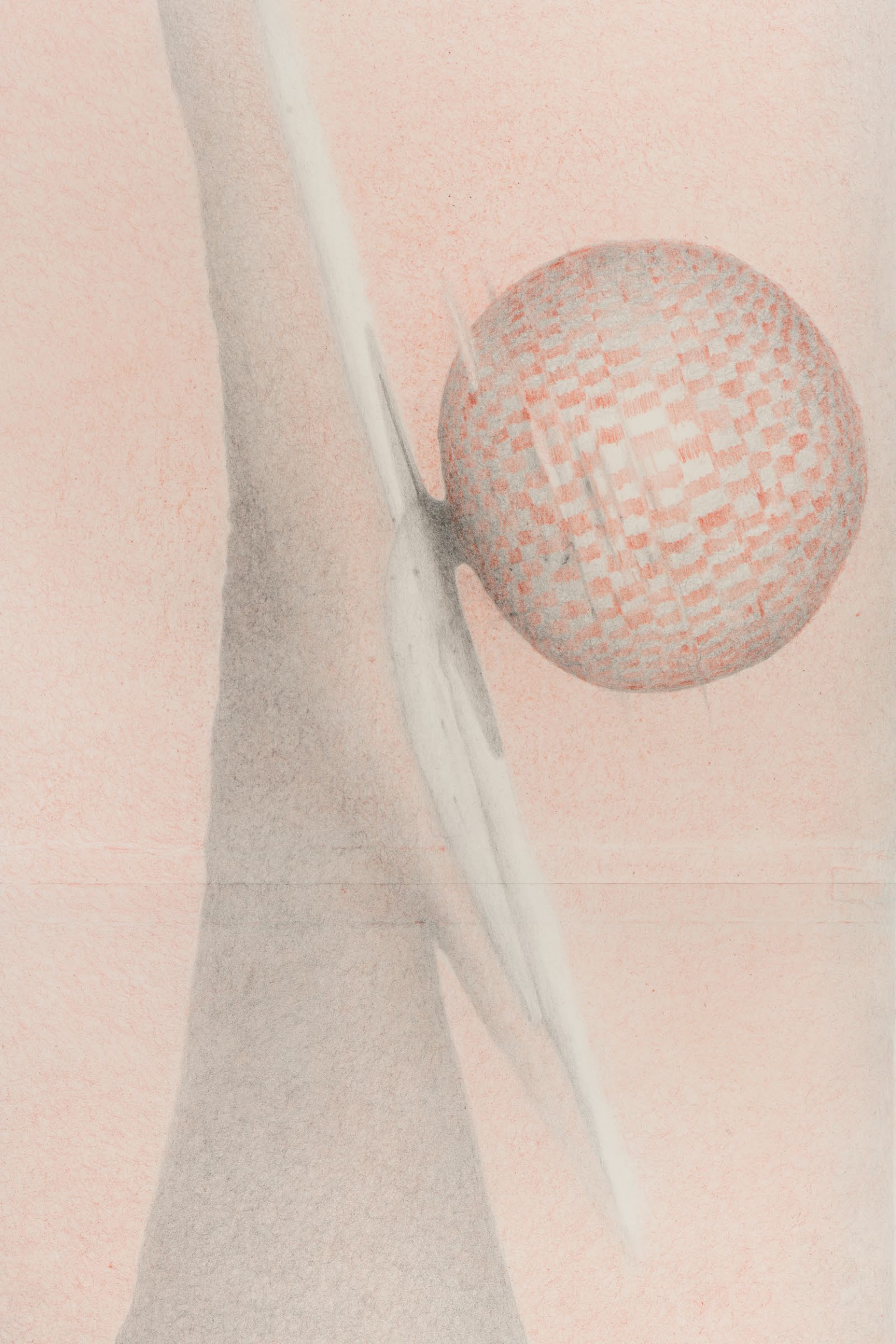


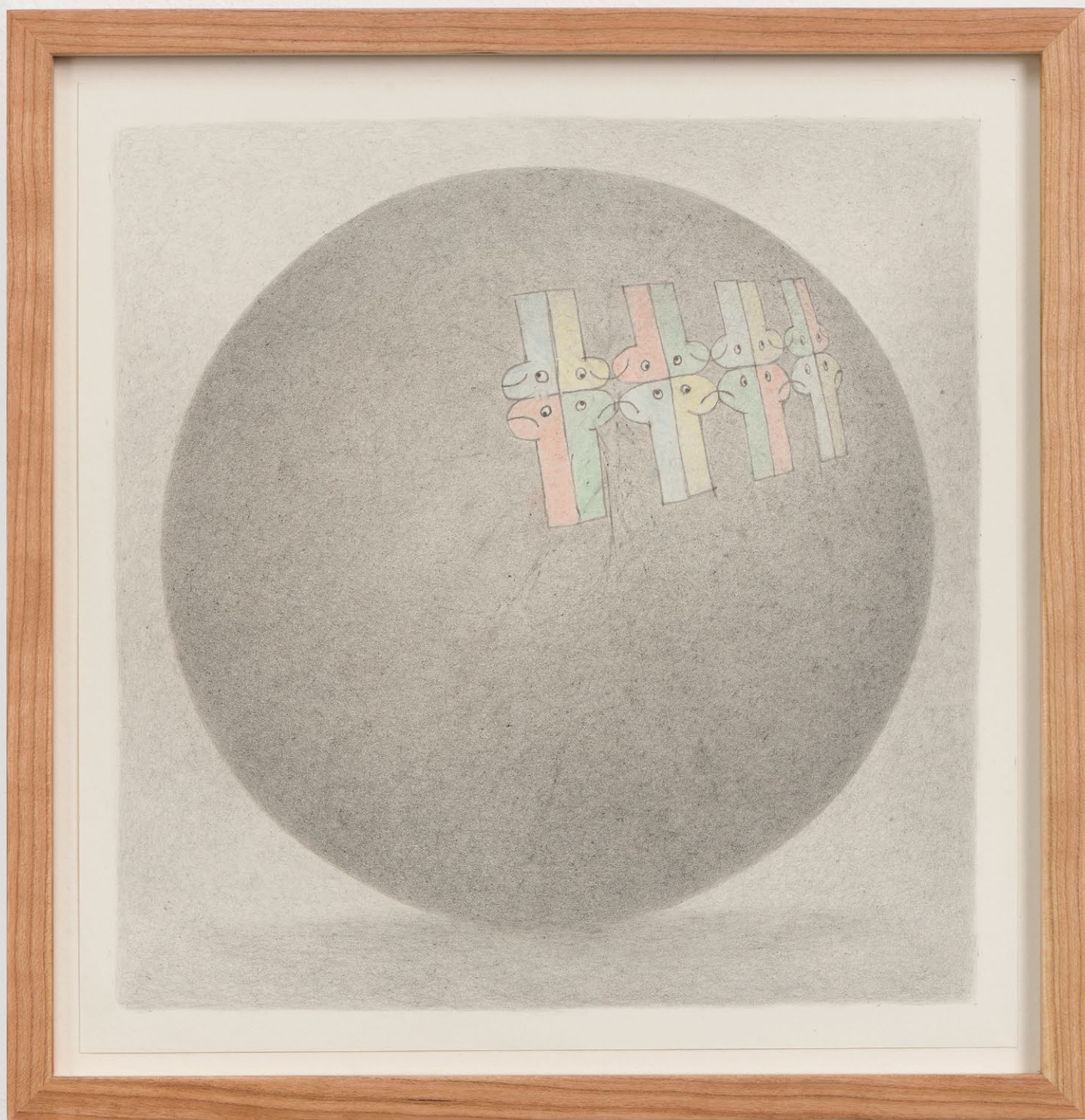




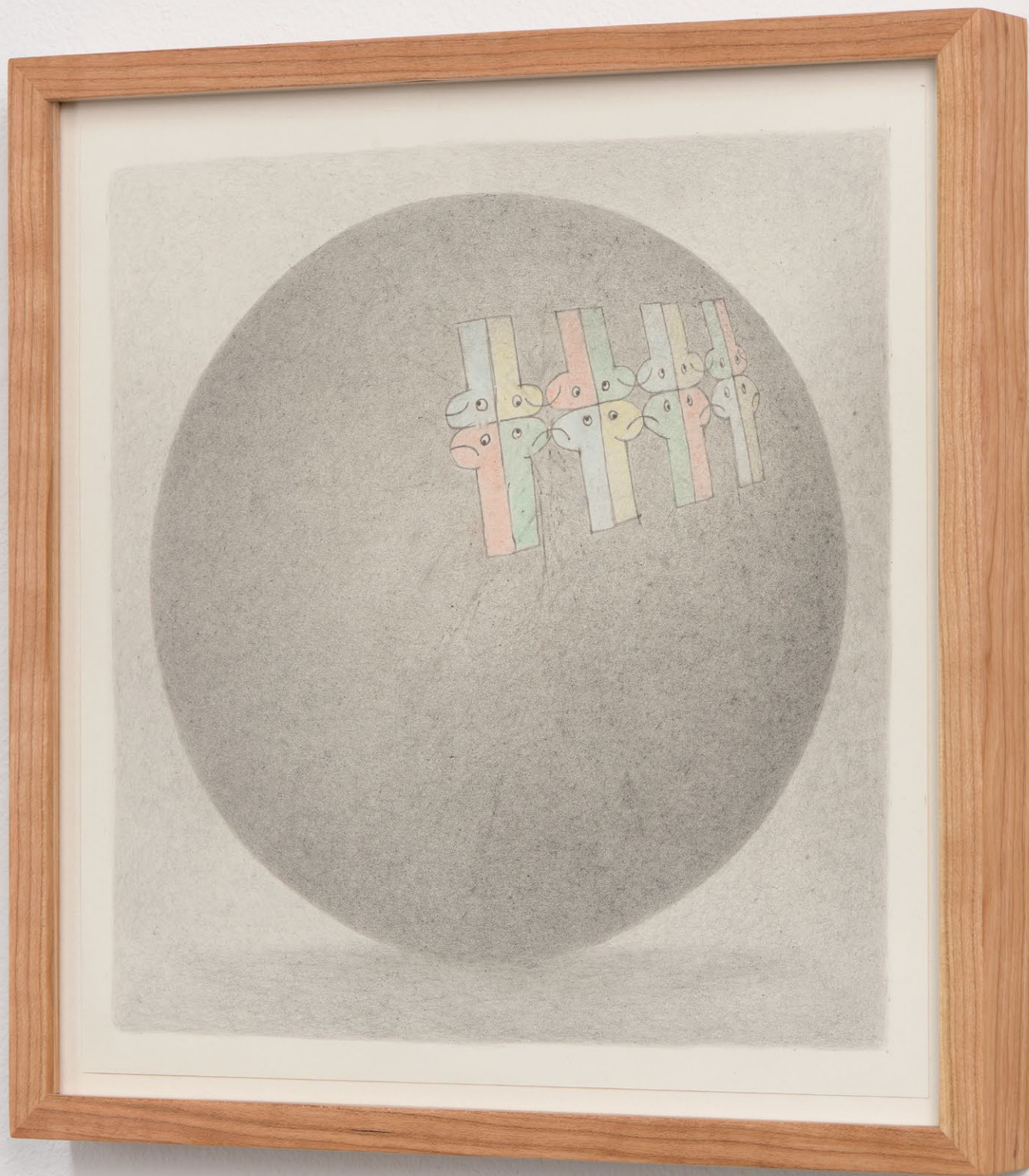
Aerial The Projectionist pt.3, 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
33 ¼ x 13 ¼ in / 84.6 x 33.6 cm



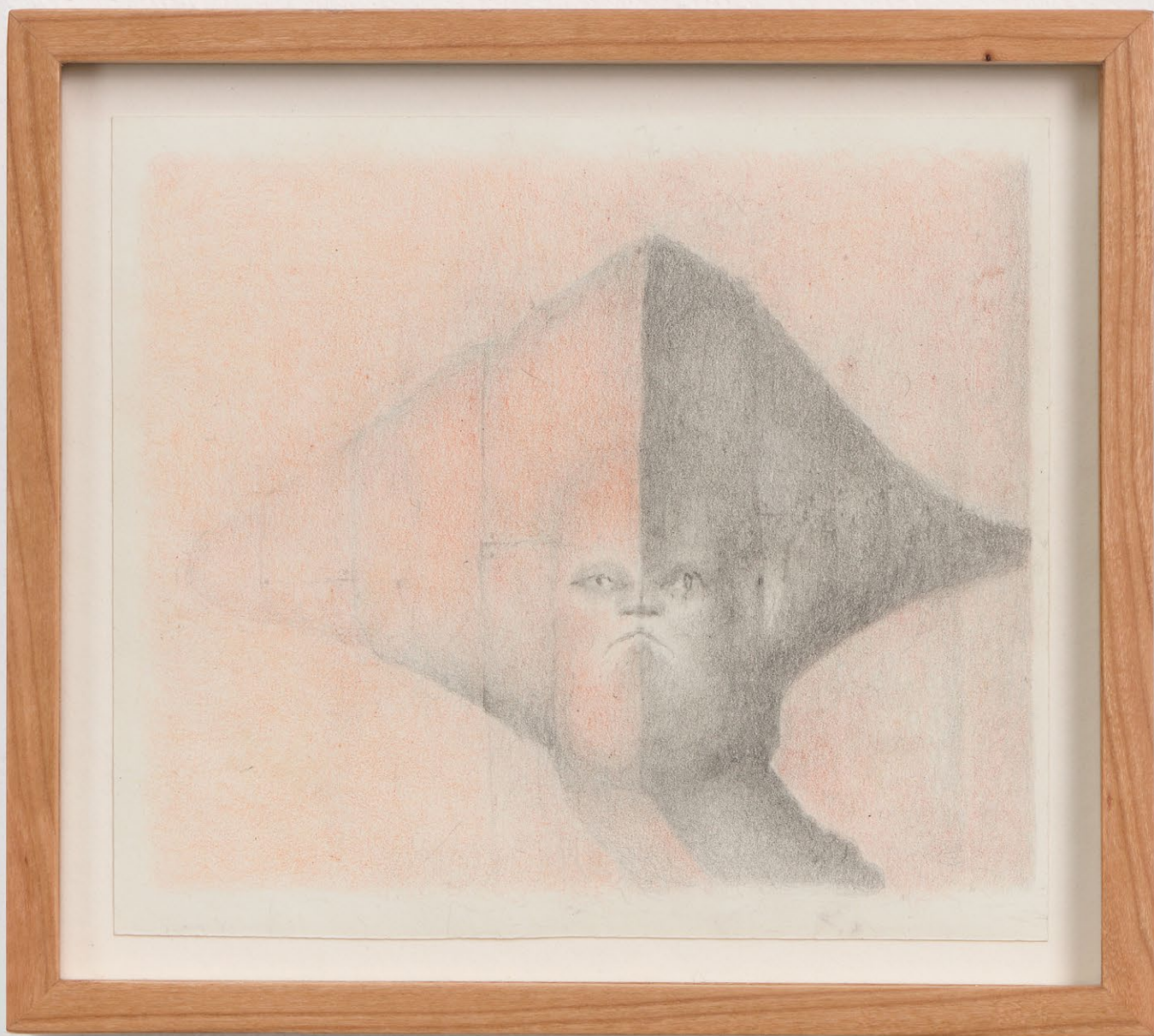




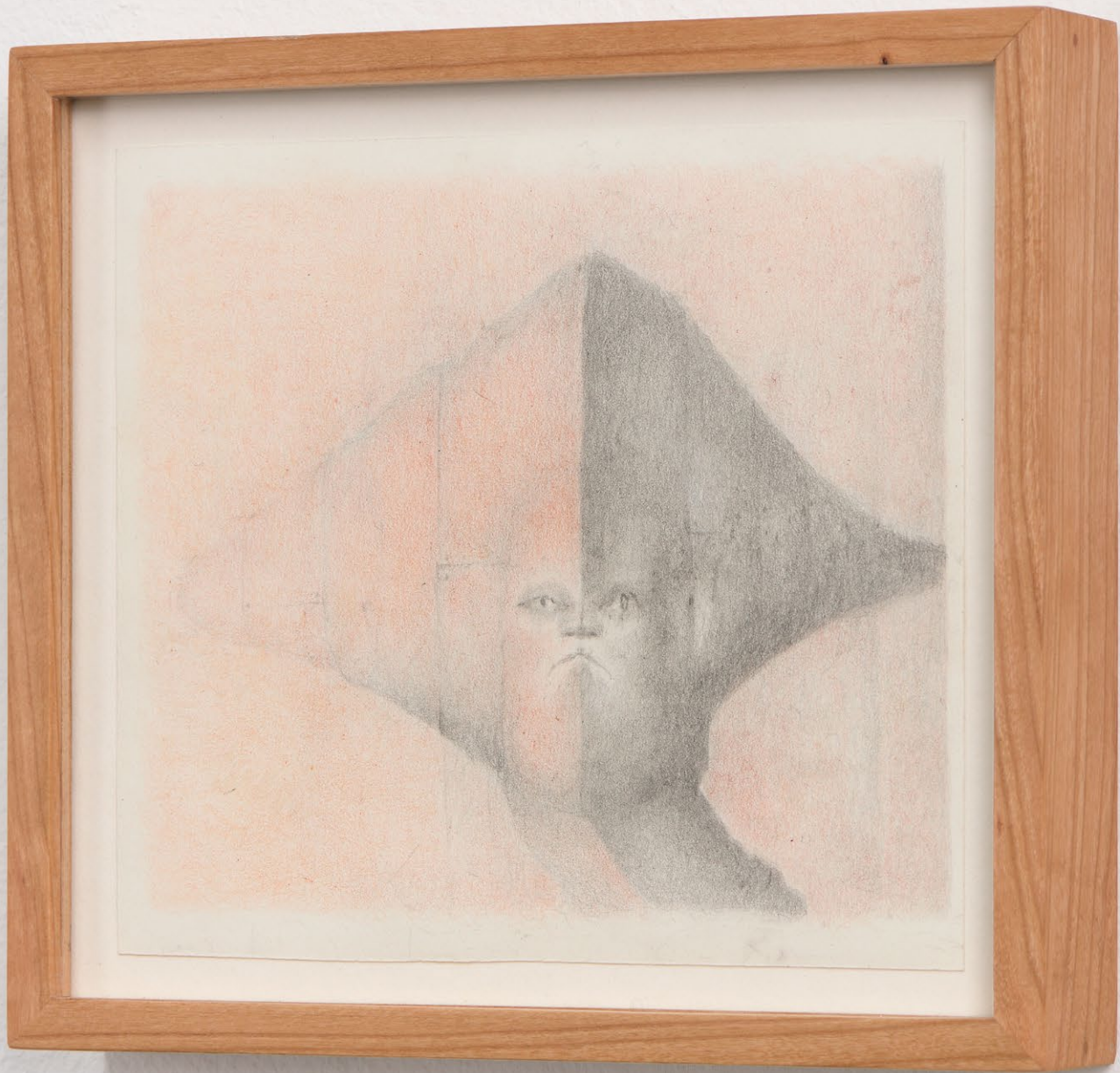
Archeology, 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
12 3/8 x 12 in / 31.5 x 30.6 cm







Cynthia, 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
6 ⁷/₈ x 7 ⁵/₈ in / 17.4 x 19.4 cm



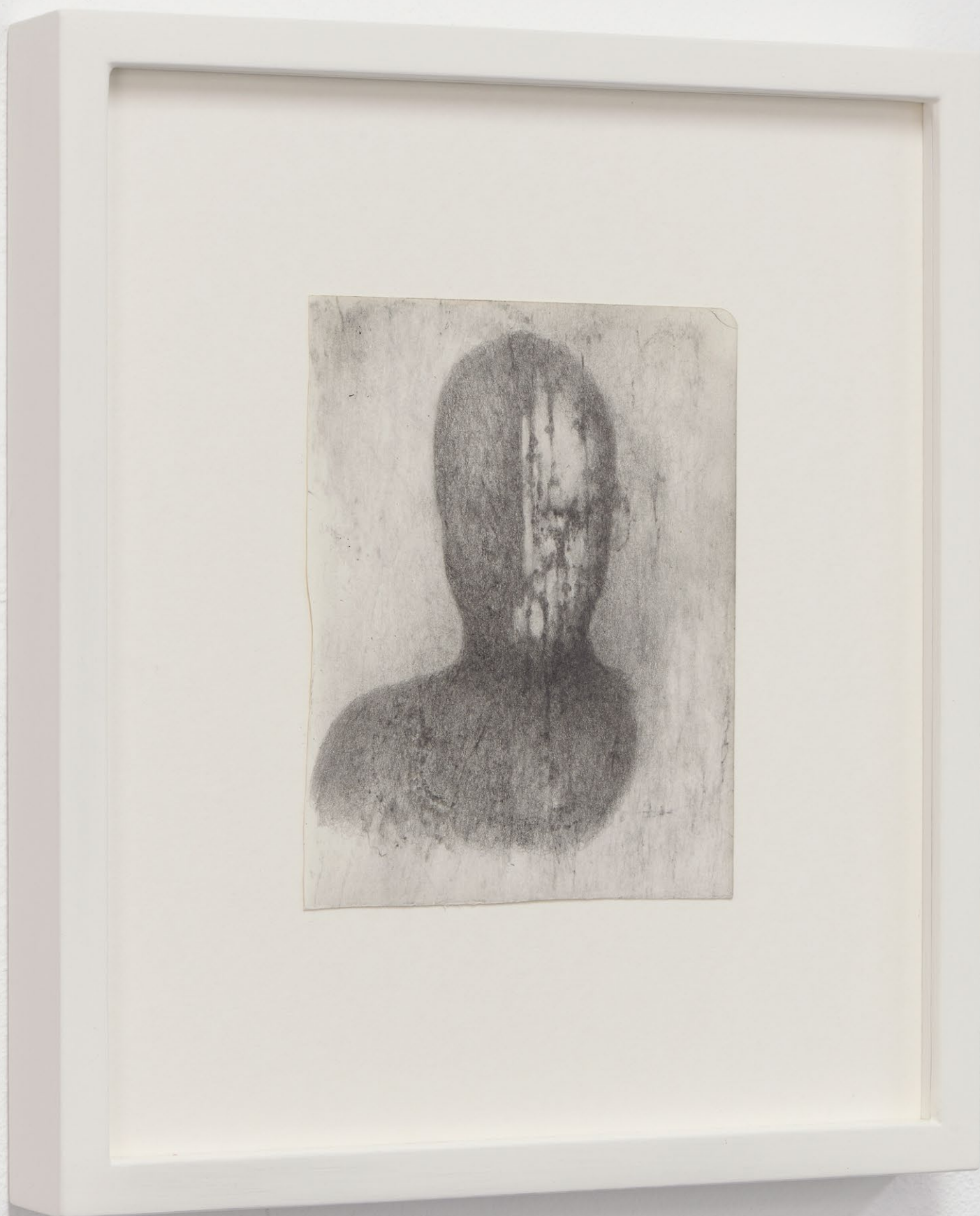


Silo, 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
7 ¼ x 6 in / 18.5 x 15.4 cm





Shedding Pictures no.5, 2025
graphite on paper, artist frame
12 x 10 ¾ in / 30.6 x 27.4 cm



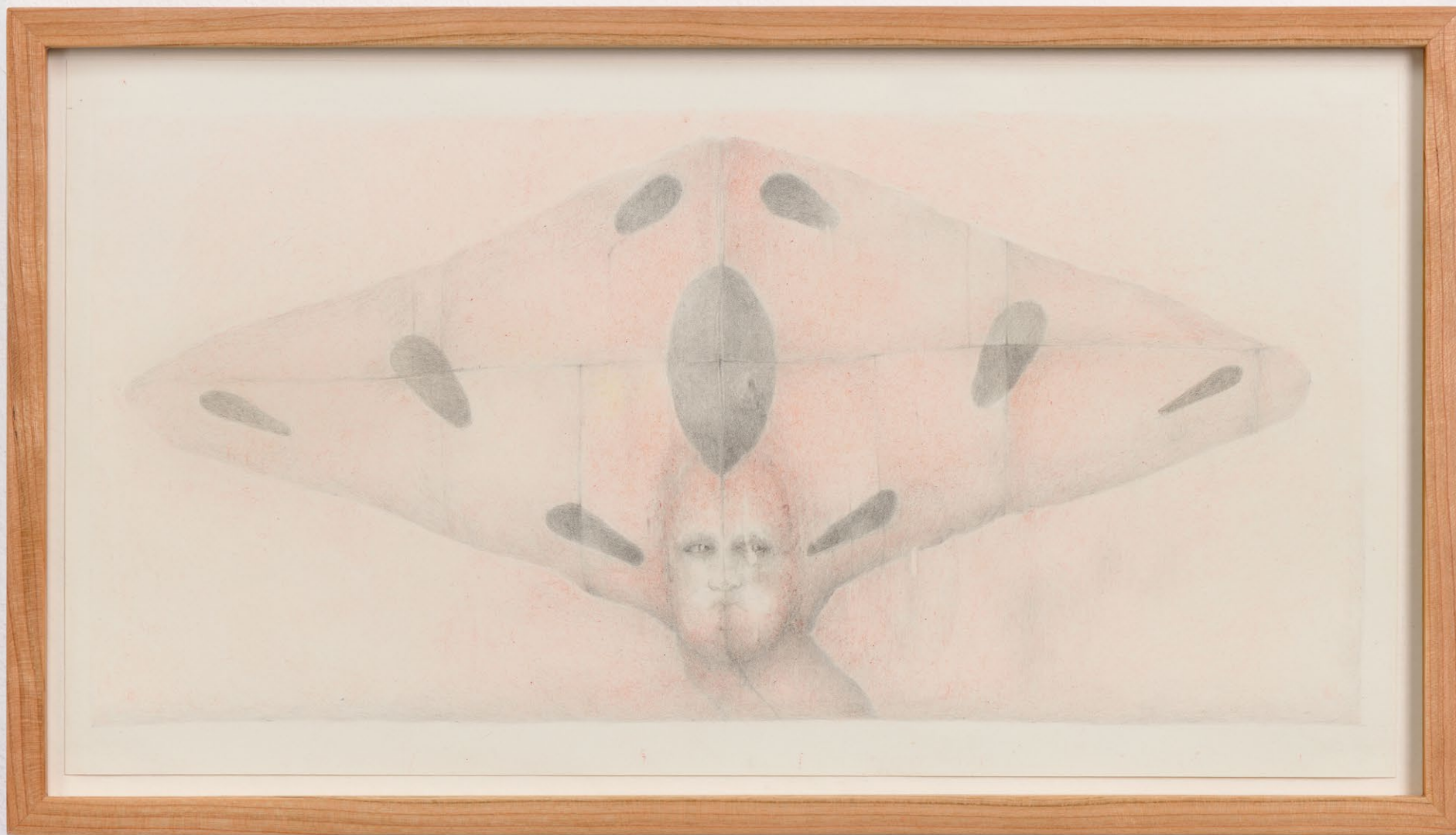




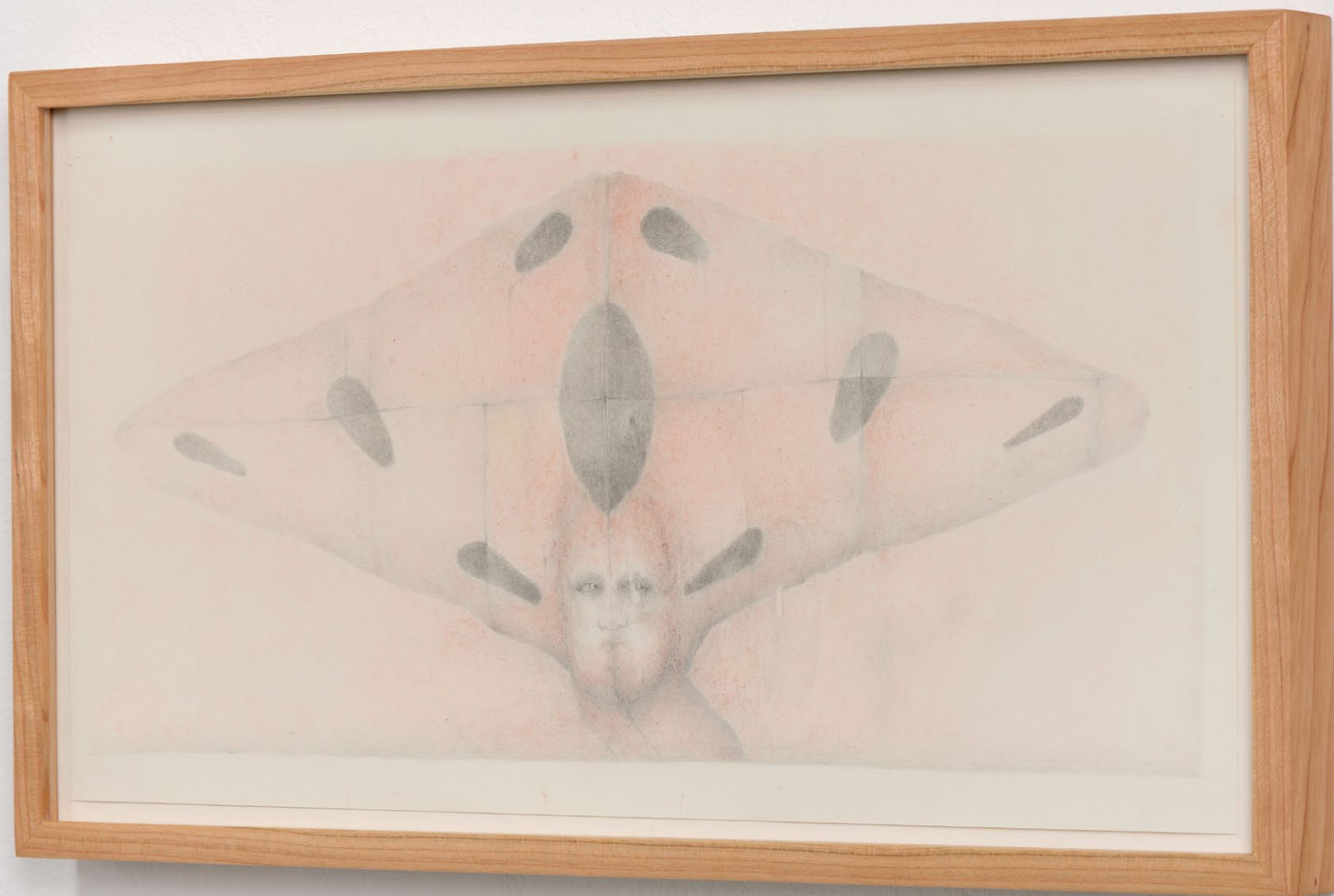
Shedding Pictures no.4, 2025
graphite on paper, artist frame
12 1/8 x 9 3/4 in / 30.9 x 24.7 cm



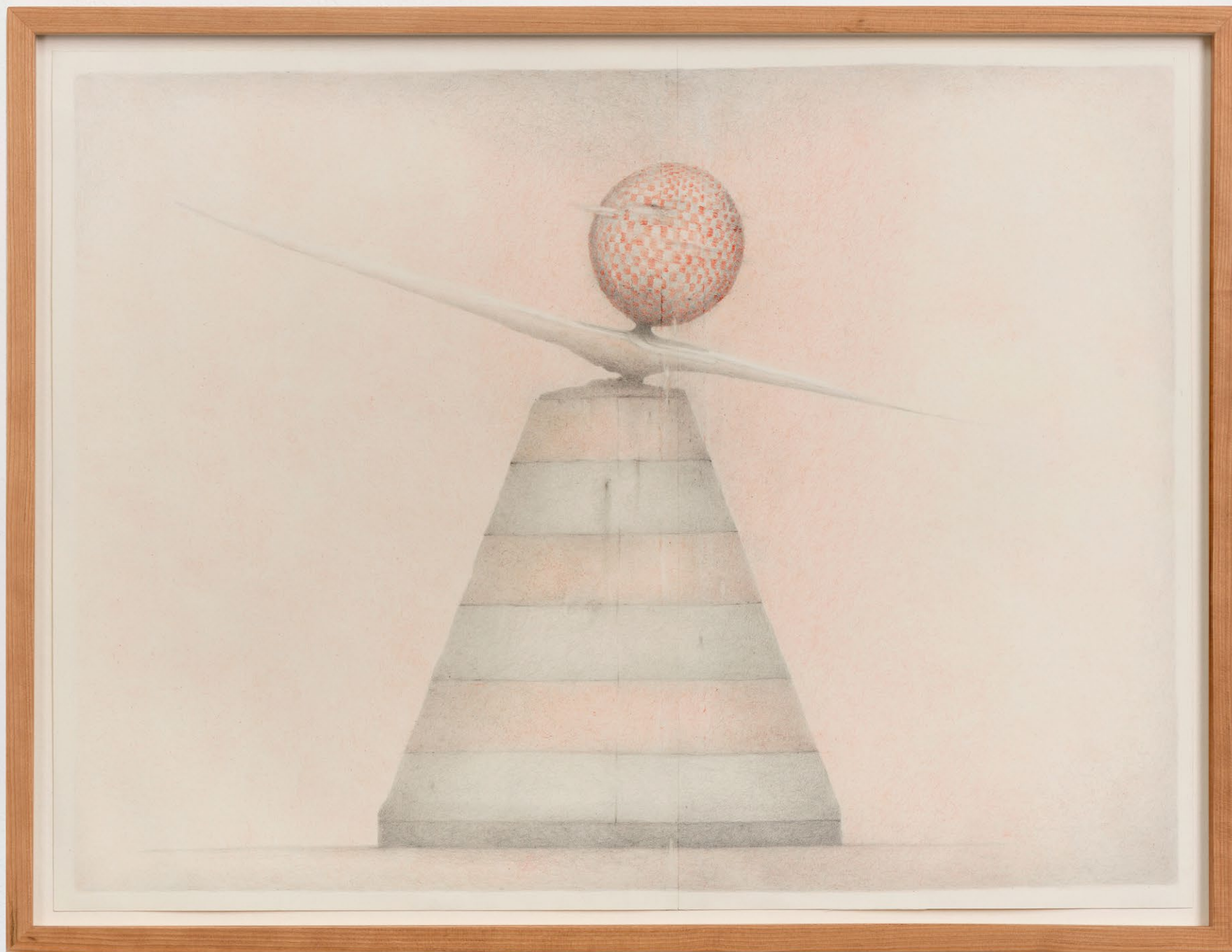




Cosmetics, 2024
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
9 7/8 x 17 3/8 in / 25.2 x 44.7 cm

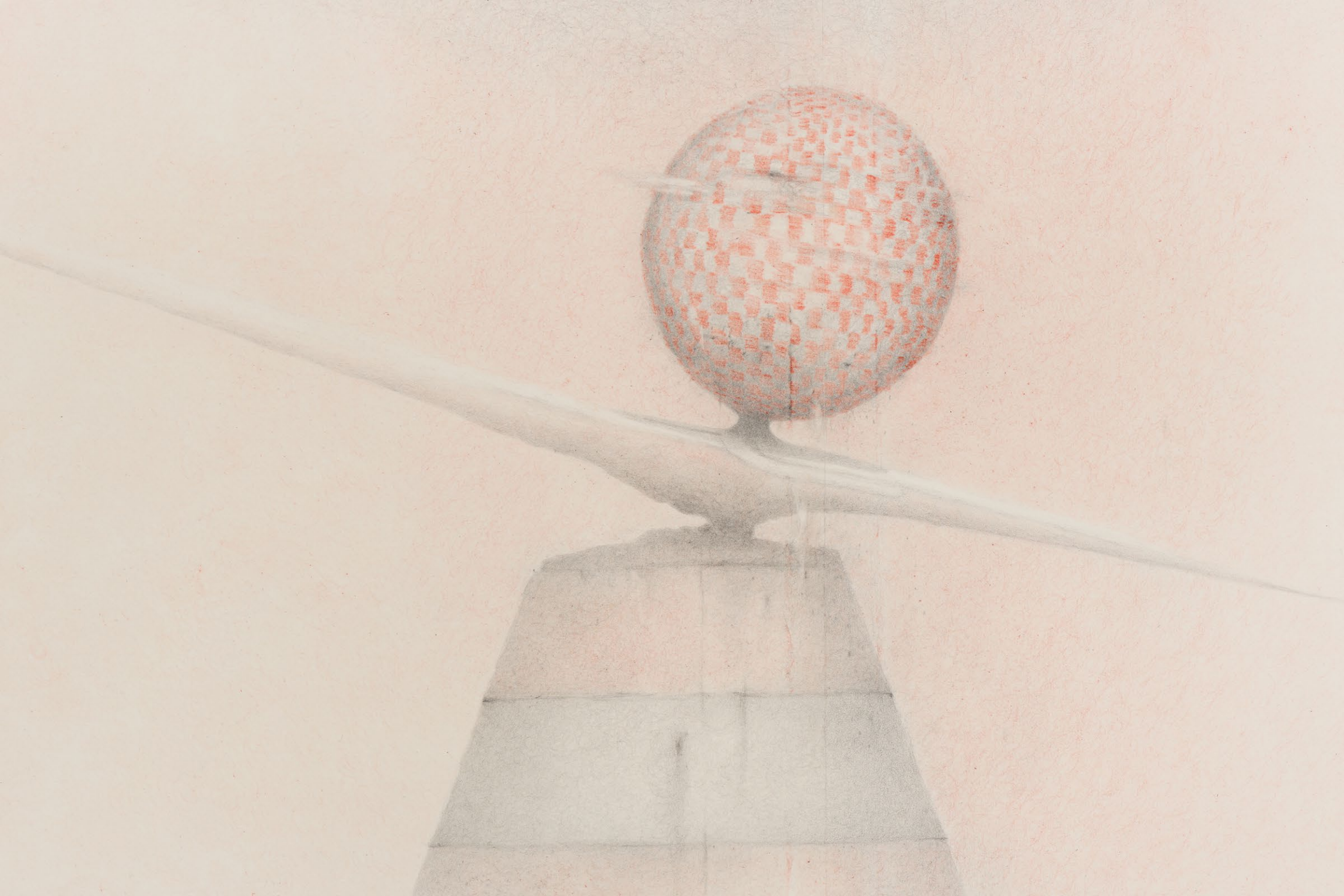






Aerial The Projectionist pt.2, 2025
graphite and color pencil on paper; artist frame
17 5/8 x 23 in / 44.7 x 58.4 cm







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installation photography by Adam Reich

artwork photography by Doug Atfield

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