

**"Epileptograph:  
The Internal Journey".**

**Isabelle Delmotte**

# **"Epileptograph: The Internal Journey".**

**A Work In Progress.**

**Isabelle Delmotte**

**23rd November - 22nd December 1995**

**Artspace  
43-51 Cowper Wharf Rd Woolloomooloo Sydney  
Australia**





# Fit #5, April 1994

She was exhausted that night, but tense, and by 4.00a.m. she still couldn't sleep. She felt ill but wouldn't allow me to make tea for her. Had to do it herself. Buttering toast, her back to me, she said she was fed up with feeling paranoid. I wondered why she was so angry. I was afraid - it was infectious, her sense of foreboding. I heard the knife drop and looked up to see her slowly turning, rising onto her toes, shoulders and head lifting, her eyes widening in surprise, her mouth as well. From the other side of the room I saw fear come into her eyes and colour leave her face, she emitted a loud choked moan and I was across the room and behind her. Her body was totally stiff - I prepared to catch her but her body was too stiff to fall. Her face strained, deadly pale, eyes fixed in horror. Convulsions, each with the force of a punch, began to course down her rigid limbs. I kicked a chair out of the way and hugging her from behind tried to steer her to the bed. She wasn't walking, she was staggering like a wind-up doll whose batteries were about to run out. Then we were falling awkwardly, her convulsing and me beneath her, placing my arm between her head and the floor. I extricated myself, turned her on her side. I crouched over her on elbows and knees, framing her jolting limbs to protect them from the furniture. Now her entire body was electrified, uncontrollable, racked with rapid spasms, whites of her eyes flicking. Panicky breathing, saliva rattling, through clenched teeth she gasped and growled, maybe she was biting her tongue. I cradled her head in my arms. I controlled nothing. Her jerking head centimetres from the legs of a flimsy table on which balanced a huge ghetto blaster. Little by little, the convulsions grew further apart, her muscles began to relax, her face softened. Her body weight slowly came to rest on the floor. Suddenly more spasms, isolated, erratic, vigorous, the last flashes leaving her body. Then she was still, eyes rolled back under half closed lids.

I touched her face, cold, pale. She lay inert. I tried to lift her. She was so heavy, so lifeless. I had to put my ear right up to her mouth to be sure she was breathing.

I got her onto the bed and her eyes flew open, registering shock. She had great difficulty speaking. She tried to lift a hand towards me, it dropped limply onto the bed. Who ... ? What ...?

She tried to get up, she tried to form sentences. But her body ignored her, her mouth wouldn't work properly, her tongue was swollen. Her eyes were dazed and loose, pupils dilated. She slurred questions over and over. I comforted her, explained she'd had a fit, she looked confused. I told her this several times, then she understood. She began to whimper, weakly she punched the bedclothes. Then she hugged me tightly. Suddenly she lunged forward, crippled with pain. I half-carried her to the toilet. Nothing came out, but her body was stricken with the sensation. I tried to persuade her to rest on the bed. But three or four times we went to the toilet then back to the bed and to the toilet again, her crying out in pain. She began to panic about the toast and the tea. Wanted to clean up the toast, go back to the toilet, make the tea, do all of this on her own. So I let go of her. She fell against something, knocking it over, and we laughed. She realised she was incapacitated. She said she ached all over, her head as well as her body. She trusted me to put her into bed and bring her sweet tea. Soon after she fell into a deep sleep.

What I remember after each fit - the only image that stays clear - is the expression in her eyes. Fear.

# ***I know I used to know.***

**Based on the Original Text  
"Epileptograph: The Internal Journey"  
written in February 1992.**

- **Stage one: building up of a tonic-clonic epileptic seizure.**

It can take a different amount of time,  
depending on the element triggering the fit,  
for the seizure to actually happen.

The aura  
can be anterior to a day, an hour, a minute or just a few seconds.

Alternatively,  
there can be a total lack of aura.  
The actual seizure can seem, for a witness, instantaneous.

- **Stage two: the fit in itself.**

Electrical implosion or explosion leading to nothing:  
from consciousness to sudden total emptiness.

This is the black hole  
where all energy is swallowed and lost.  
There is absolutely no memory of this moment.

- **Stage three: the unknown state.**

## • Stage four: the slow rebuilding of consciousness.

### First sensation:

A low bass sound is associated to an intermittent heart beat.  
Total bodiless sensation.

### Second sensation:

Visualisation of a space, the mind space,  
without edges but enclosed  
and very smooth.  
Its colours change  
according to the morphing organic shapes flying in it.  
They are almost transparent  
and are pulsing, jellyfish like motion.  
A slow heart beat echoes  
and  
a grinding noise add onto the low bass sound.  
Total bodiless sensations.

### Third sensation: *FEAR*.

The pulsating morphing shapes change colours,  
their movements in space are slow and smooth.  
A feeling of deep fear appears, the guts are tightening.  
Shapes and sounds  
are travelling in opposite directions,  
this discordant asynchronicity amplifies the absence of time.  
There is no time.  
The mind space is expending, contracting, breathing.  
Its colours keep changing.  
The grinding noise in the temples is increasing  
and its high pitches  
generate



the first sensations of physical pain.  
The sensation  
of reverberating sounds coming from outside the body is emerging.

**Fourth sensation: *PHYSICAL PAINS.***

External sounds are filtered  
and decayed  
but  
high pitches are stabbing the brain.  
There is a definite perception of an outside environment  
but  
without any understanding of it.  
An awareness of total isolation is suddenly emerging  
and  
turning to extreme fear.  
Shapes and sounds are travelling in opposite directions.  
Visually,  
the mind space is still breathing.  
Inside it, more and more objects are flying around,  
choreographing different patterns.  
Bright flashes of colours are associated with high pitched sounds  
and provoke very deep lines of burning pain.

**Fifth sensation: *THE RE-ACCUMULATION OF THE SELF.***

The reconstruction stage  
only  
really starts  
when  
sounds and shapes are adequately linked.  
The internal vision follows the metamorphosing shapes  
establishing connections with others  
and eventually creating visual patterns synchronised with sounds.



When shapes misconnect,  
sounds lose their guides and physical pains occur.  
Sounds and shapes travel  
and must merge to form a recognisable entity.  
There is no dominant sense, sounds and vision are one and create a  
code.

There are no words yet.  
Recognition of any internal or external physical signal  
depends on  
the audio-visual patterns generated by this data.  
The reconstruction of the meaning of all information  
is based on a visual vocabulary.

Physical pain  
is less acute when sounds and shapes are correctly linked.  
Everything is very slowly filtered and starts to be named.

But  
there was no language  
and to find words is physically painful.  
There is no time still.  
The recovery of the use and meaning of language  
is  
slow and fearful.

This timeless process has a stepped structure  
which is uncontrollable and has its own chronology.

There is  
an instinctive knowledge  
of the existence of a step ahead but  
there is no control  
of the process' pace.  
Fear grows, the guts are linked to the skull by a burning line.  
Will-power is non-existent.  
There is an instinctive knowledge of being no one.

There is also an awareness of all procedures undertaken  
and an obsessive questioning,  
still without words,  
of the whole process: does this lead  
to sanity  
or  
to madness?

**Sixth sensation: *REGAINING CONSCIOUSNESS  
AND BODY SENSATIONS.***

There is a progressive visual disappearance of the mind space.  
Opening the eyes  
provides almost a spheric perception,  
the four corners are very dark.  
Bright lights, colours and high pitched sounds are extremely  
aggressive  
and are irritating the flesh of the brain.  
The chronological gap  
between perception and analysis of information  
is slowly erasing.  
But full comprehension of any signals is far from complete.  
No time, no words.  
Knowledge is gone, memories are lost.  
There is an instinctive awareness of being incapacitated.  
Will-power starts to act  
but  
the keys to comprehension have to be found.  
The physical resources to do so are meagre.  
The feeling of having had a fit appears.  
The jaws and neck are very stiff,  
the tongue is swollen as it has been bitten,  
the whole body is contracted, painful, heavy, exhausted.  
The back of the skull is burning.

The blood pressure has dropped.  
Thirst is boundless.  
The head is buzzing.  
A heavy blood pulsation rhythm in the temples paces time.  
Bubbles of electrical sensations explode at the base of the skull.  
Lines of pain climb the neck.  
Physical balance is extremely precarious.  
The legs are very weak.  
The whole body is pulsing, searching for energy.  
Fear is muting to anger and despair.  
The mind tries hard to concentrate  
but  
often gives up as all perceptions are chaotic and painful.  
Total isolation is real as senses shut down to avoid the pain.  
In the mind, a chaotic reconstruction  
of words and memories is visually taking place.  
Everything seems meaningless:  
words, sounds and images are just flying around  
with  
no base on which to anchor.  
Anxiety and despair tear the guts  
when suddenly  
the eyes open and things can only be identified  
and named  
after a deep mental search.  
Burning lines of pain travel in the brain during this process.  
An obsessive quest for a memory,  
any memory,  
preceding the seizure starts.  
A feeling of powerless obedience to the body generates  
deep anger:  
the mind has no power in reconstructing itself.  
Only sleep could erase the frustration.



## • Stage five: reaching sleep.

It is sometimes difficult  
to go to sleep after this experience.  
Time is still unclear.  
The journey is not over  
as the mind keeps searching for its previous abilities.  
The process of this quest is so chaotic  
that, again,  
madness seems close.  
But instead of being triggered by an absence of language,  
insanity is now activated by  
an overflow of disordered information that  
the brain  
cannot physically absorb.  
The head is still buzzing,  
the loud blood pulsation is grinding,  
the ears are painful and spin at any high pitched sound.  
The body, head included, resonates.  
Mind power is required to move any limb  
but gradually  
the tense and aching body recovers its functions to perform.  
Falling asleep seems impossible.  
Anger and quest for memory are obsessive.  
Speech is coming back  
but physical resonance through the whole skull,  
and thirst,  
make it very uncomfortable.  
Concentration and one,  
only one,  
single line of thought  
are impossible to achieve.  
Eventually, and very suddenly, Morpheus arrives...

**I**t is difficult to conceive of epilepsy. For a person who does not have this surprisingly common condition, the closest analogy might be a storm at sea. Now think of that storm occurring in someone's brain. Regularly. The Encyclopaedia Britannica tells that in an average thunderstorm, the energy released amounts to 10 7 Kilowatt hours, which is roughly equivalent to a 20 kiloton atomic bomb. The generation and passage of that charge is fascinating.

Not so random as a storm, the imperative of the charge and pulse within the brain is the subject of Isabelle Delmotte's continuing project "Epileptograph: The Internal Journey". This is at present a complex digitalised media installation featuring video, slides and light boxes. Delmotte combines sophisticated abstract principles and direct experience to image what goes on in the minute gaps between nerve cells. Called synapses, these spaces between, carry, translate and insulate the energy that must be transmitted to maintain cognition. When there is an overload of energy the brain cuts out. So begins a seizure. Consciousness is lost. Chaos ensues. Everyone is dissembled by epilepsy.

As Louis XIV discovered, to maintain decorum one must have and know the power of *éclat*. In his time the word had meanings ranging from a "flash" of lightening, to a "clap" of thunder, but always referred to something unexpected and impressive.<sup>1</sup> Delmotte's work images *éclat*, a radiant return to the "I".

Once epilepsy was called the "holy disease" referring to this magical return. But imagine what it is to re-live again and again. What is a return to consciousness but an autonomous birth of sensation and all that entails. It is easy to forget the monolith of language and the epic struggle to acquire it. -"As I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified: and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires".<sup>2</sup>

Sensation, information, language and memory are inextricably linked. In an epileptic seizure parts of this equation are dislocated, misplaced or even lost. Danger and fear are omnipresent in this pulsating landscape of the mind. Hélène Cixous might say "we've come back from always", but this coming back, this return can be painful. Like the famous dragging the piano etc, scene from "Le Chien Andalou", to regain consciousness is also an inexorable recognition of selfhood. What is it to "dislocate this "within", to explode it, turn it around and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth, to invent for herself a language to get inside of"?<sup>3</sup>

Delmotte highlights these considerations with the grindingly hideous and hypnotic noises of the sound-track. This tends to promote a visceral heaving effect. However what Delmotte presents is process towards activation. "Epileptograph..." is about intense re-enchantment in the face of possible closure or shut-down. However unpleasant, to make visible, is a way to understand and possibly control this condition.

Who would have imagined the silicon chip zing of the late twentieth century? There has been an exponential expansion in the delineation of the processes of vision because of software (or in Delmotte's case "SoftImage" software). The ideas of the magic numbers has been at the core of culture since Palaeolithic times. From numbers to letters, from letters to words and so on. However, searching for a divine composure they (artists, scientists, philosophers) have found the order of infinitesimal to be as unstable and fluid as the phenomena that promoted their initial enquiries. Cyberspace is a transparent montage of mathematical coordinates illuminated by electric charges. Celso Maffei was strangely prescient when he wrote in 1504 "on the sensible delights in heaven", "vision will be so keen that the slightest differences in colour and variations in form will be discernable and it will not be impeded by distance or by the interposition of solid bodies".<sup>4</sup>



Delmotte's biomorphic world is a highly detailed vortex with shifting, sometimes oscillating focal points and unstable borders. Mysterious shimmering gaps and globules emanate then disappear. There is a shocking clarity to this progress through, to these extraordinary "luminous torrents".<sup>5</sup>

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1. Peter Burke "The Fabrication of Louis XIV" Yale U.P New Haven, London 1992 Pg5.
2. St Augustine "Confessions" I,8. Quoted in (Gem Anscombe & R Rhees eds) Ludwig Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations. 3rd Edition Oxford Blackwell '78.
3. Hélène Cixous "Utopias" New French Feminisms: an Antology Pg 257 The Harvester Press Brighton U.K. 1982.
4. Michael Bixandall "Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy" Oxford U.P 1992 Pg 104.
5. Hélène Cixous *ibid*.

**A PRESCIENT RUMINATION ON THE WORK OF  
ISABELLE DELMOTTE,  
AN EXHIBITION IN ARTSPACE SYDNEY,  
DURING NOVEMBER 1995.**

BY ADRIAN HALL.

*" 'Who are YOU?'  
said the caterpillar."*



**Isabelle Delmotte with fanning trumpet vision, strides forward and takes all-in, in a *one hundred and eighty degree* wide view:**

- A QUADRANT, OF THE HEMISPHERE DEFINED BY THE OXYGEN BOWL ABOUT US, IS FLIPPED AT RANDOM AND SHE IS LEFT TO RECONSTRUCT THE VISTA. LYING ALONE ON THE FLOOR OF AN EMPTY PUBLIC-TRANSPORT BUS, PARKED CATTY-CORNER ACROSS THE INTERSECTION, SHE RECOGNISES THE OTHER EVACUATED PASSENGERS, PREVIOUSLY HER COLLEAGUES IN DISCOMFIT, STANDING ACROSS THE ROAD. THEY MARK THEIR NERVOUS FRUSTRATION IN FEAR AND DERISION, AND ATTEMPT TO ORDER THEIR CONFUSION IN ANGRY COMPLAINT. OUTSIDE THE BUS - *THEM* . INSIDE THE BUS - *SHE* .

SHE SLOWLY RECONSTRUCTS A LANGUAGE AND A REALITY TO FIT. SHE FEELS PAIN BUT SENSES IT THOUGH WITHIN THE GREY BRAWN THAT WE FROM CIRCLE ONE UNFEELINGLY CALL PAIN-FREE. AND THOSE OF CIRCLE TWO CALL NO THING:

- Taking two circles: one representing the ordered Crescent of Pragmatism, which might, for argument, contain both medicine and science; the other the Moon of Ontology. Let the two circles overlap by a half, by a third, by a sliver.
- Where these circles overlap - let us decide that *there* is space for art, an arena for speculative engagement... place for a pause for thought.

## How do we *know* what we know?

art space

For one sure moment the name means what it says. Though we can differ on the fine points, we reach a shaky stasis.

C.P. Snow ill-decided, chose to separate and thus by inference to striate, the separation into *fields*, of science and art. He betted hedges. At that time too we were stuck with an unfortunate, inopportune reification of the Bohemian attitude through Joyce Cary and his hero Gully Jimson from "the Horses Mouth." The film version modelled the hero's oeuvre upon the work of real live bohemian, previous Royal College of Art student John Bratby. The scars of the fallacy born of those issues snare and inhibit even the lightest of whimsy-in-science, or pragmatism-in-art to this day. And the inevitable implied hegemony argues angel feet on pin-heads, while it constructs hyperbolic bridges across flat planes, in order to save *time* in misunderstood geometrids of political geographies. Or it mutely castigates inhuman misunderstandings immutably forged through vain ignorance. Thus conferences and careers are born again-again. And another plural-reification blocks the potential of a *vision*, and discredits the vision of even Einstein.



Unhappily he looms, unhappily large over the mushroomed industry of science-for-war. Mushroomed to obliterate even a glimpse of any other Science. *Science-for-war-for-peace*, As they would have it. The only science. *'To Prepare for Peace - Prepare for War.'* Remember the bumper sticker? *'There is many a grain of truism in a good bumper sticker.'* But - Science - now, means *science-for-war*. Just as the *recession* means another label to disguise the *extermination* of slower-returning public sectors which especially begin to empower lesser-scale interest groups.

Isabelle Delmotte flies by the seat. She forces her vision. The match-sticks under her eye-lids keep her from blinking, as the micro-world of neurological engagement winces and burns across an un-anæsthetised tissue of recognition. Electronic discharge and chemical ooze spatters across synapses and leaps crazily across chasms of *mu* space.  $\mu$ . Her *brain* hurts. Her own virtual reality - VR - has her bleeding at the knees.

- The first circle of *our confusion* argues against all these sensations. Denies the pain. Denies the aching split. The merciful fade-to-dark. Becomes the *body-articulate*. Preserves its prime function of protection for its electro-chemically galvanised meat-mass. From Aristophanes to Galvan in one frog-twitch. *Not a bridge. Not the momma*, but a froggy-leap of faith. A convenient hide in that common fade-to-dark wherein a painless lie is laid. Truth seers much more. Truth hurts while it illuminates. A blue *acetylene* glare. Moves through the space too. Fly-through. Lots of memory storage required. A *reservoir* of experience-into-knowledge.



“ ‘Besides, if *I’m* only a sort of thing  
in his dream, what are *you*,  
I should like to know?’

‘Ditto,’ said Tweedledum.  
‘Ditto, ditto!’ cried Tweedledee.”

The *particular* highly subjective forays on which Isabelle Delmotte sets out, with graphic athleticism - with athletic graphics, like Tenniel on roller-blades, serve more than those afflicted or blessed, who identify through family recognitions. For *all* children are served by the sceptical wisdom of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Not just the *FatBoys* of Bomber-command being sole mid-wife of destruction. But also the rest of us thin-lizzies, straight-arrows, and absent-minded / sans-cœurs professors. minus-space. Buoyed up by the flatulence of decrepitude. The bloated corpses float upon the flood plain of corruption. Roll me over, Jack London clover. Showy bridges are no more than show, when it is revealed through subtle truths that tunnels already permeate, breathe-through the sensate striate and subsume the clockwork cant. Quite sublimely.

Isabelle makes cliches happen and then self-destruct. The personal is ineluctably political. The selfish worlds of *maladie*, which carve out distinctions between *them and us*, are hewn back toward new revelations of sublime felicity. There was Jennifer Hall, there was Char Davis and Soft-Image: the way and the means, and support, there was an *other* to be addressed, there was all-ways Isabelle Delmotte.

*Round-a-bout,*

it says on the highway sign.

Welcome to *Art Space*, and the *manifest* worlds of all our unconscious vision, *petits-mals*, little-deaths, and Strengths in Life. These we by *definition* share, and the outsider in each of us which is the outsider in all *tribes* of meaning, inevitably *becomes* each another of us.

In that: each *other* must discover that aggravating *other fragment* which instantly mirrors our comfy habituated perspective, defines and stays that shared pain, in which we each, individually persist in believing, with unanimity: that we each may be unique. The paradox contained in the relationship of two words: individual and community.

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### **Acknowledgments:**

To Charles Lutwidge Dodgson the reknowned mathematician as Lewis Carroll: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*, London, Oxford University Press, London and Toronto, 1971.



**E**pileptograph: The Internal Journey" is a work in progress. The use of these words is a deliberate choice by the artist - not to indicate an unfinished project, but rather to position the work as an ongoing and continual process - for Isabelle Delmotte, her work is constantly 'in progress'. The work itself will probably have no end point, for as the title implies, "Epileptograph" is a journey.

The internal journey for Isabelle Delmotte began in 1982 when she was diagnosed with epilepsy. This diagnosis began a desire to explore and represent the visual and aural sensations experienced in regaining consciousness after a seizure. "Epileptograph" is concerned with the loss of identity experienced through a seizure, and how in the process of recovery a sense of self has to be reconstructed and almost relearned. The work is a highly personal project, to journey inside the territory of the mind and uncover the mysterious workings of the epileptic process. It is a journey to not only study the impact of a seizure, but to come to terms with the after effects and the day to day existence of living with epilepsy.

For the artist though, "Epileptograph" has a greater impact than the process of personal exploration. By exhibiting in public, she hopes to create in the viewer a sense of her experiences - to immerse the viewer in the journey, and to recreate the vivid imagery and sounds which resonate within her. "Epileptograph" sits well within the art gallery forum, however the audience is much wider than this, for a coincidental impact of the work has been to create a dialogue with members of the medical profession.

"...this project was fuelled by 3 different factors which were interlaced at all times: anger, incommunicability, self isolation. Anger was the outcome of the lack of communication I was able to achieve with the medical profession..."<sup>1</sup>



"Epileptograph" has created a space for communication with medical practitioners who are also interested in exploring epilepsy. Practitioners who engage with a more fluid understanding of epilepsy and engage with it as a creative behaviour rather than as a disorder.

For the art gallery, it is a journey into a driven aesthetic and creative imagination. Delmotte's work is both an astute exploration of a medium and a representation of a personal mission - she does not separate her work from her life, and in this respect she is an uncompromising artist. Her daily existence is fuelled by the desire to create this work, to incessantly probe and investigate internal experiences. It is an obsessive undertaking, to continually extend and manipulate the medium until the appropriate images or sounds are created to express those experiences - creating a body of work which is at times uncomfortable in its intensity, but captivating in its purpose.

The practical process of realising the journey is as important as the product, for the medium Softimage, is a sophisticated 3D computer software requiring both skill and patience. The journey for Delmotte has been the exploration of the potential of the software, and customising a ready made product to suit her own vision. A tool such as Softimage is appropriate for this work, as it's translucent depth and range of palette gives it an almost ethereal quality. Through deliberation, discovery and accident the medium has enabled the artist to explore the mysterious terrain of regaining consciousness, to articulate the inarticulate and to give expression to an experience often too difficult to describe in words. The computer is almost metaphorical, it is an integral part of the project - a complex machine emulating and representing the internal journey. As an artist working with digital media, Isabelle Delmotte embraces the possibilities of the computer - the interior of the machine is manipulated and interrogated to reflect the interiority of experience.

"...3D softwares allow me to output the layers of the inside. As if I could express internal and organic sensations that the screen will mirror back to me."<sup>2</sup>

Through the sophistication of Softimage, Delmotte has developed a multi layered visual language. As images, the works depict movement and progression, mimicing the flashes experienced during a seizure. This fluidity however, is at the same time disturbing, the harsh metallics and blood reds juxtapose to give an angry and painful resonance, emanating a sense of confusion and chaos. In tandem with the soundtrack, the work creates the internal pounding sensations of the experience of regaining consciousness. Through these images and sounds a sense of pain and fear is articulated - for this is the most real experience of the recovery. To lose control and be immersed in an uncontrollable situation is a part of Isabelle Delmotte's life. In its exploration of articulation and communication, "Epileptograph: The Internal Journey" is powerful work....perhaps its greatest power though is in the personal journey. It is a body of work which through its creation offers the artist a vehicle to visualise the intense experiences of losing yourself, your language, your memory and returning again and again from that long and lonely journey.

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1. Isabelle Delmotte, "Epileptograph: The Internal Journey", 1995
2. Isabelle Delmotte, "Epileptograph: The Internal Journey", 1995

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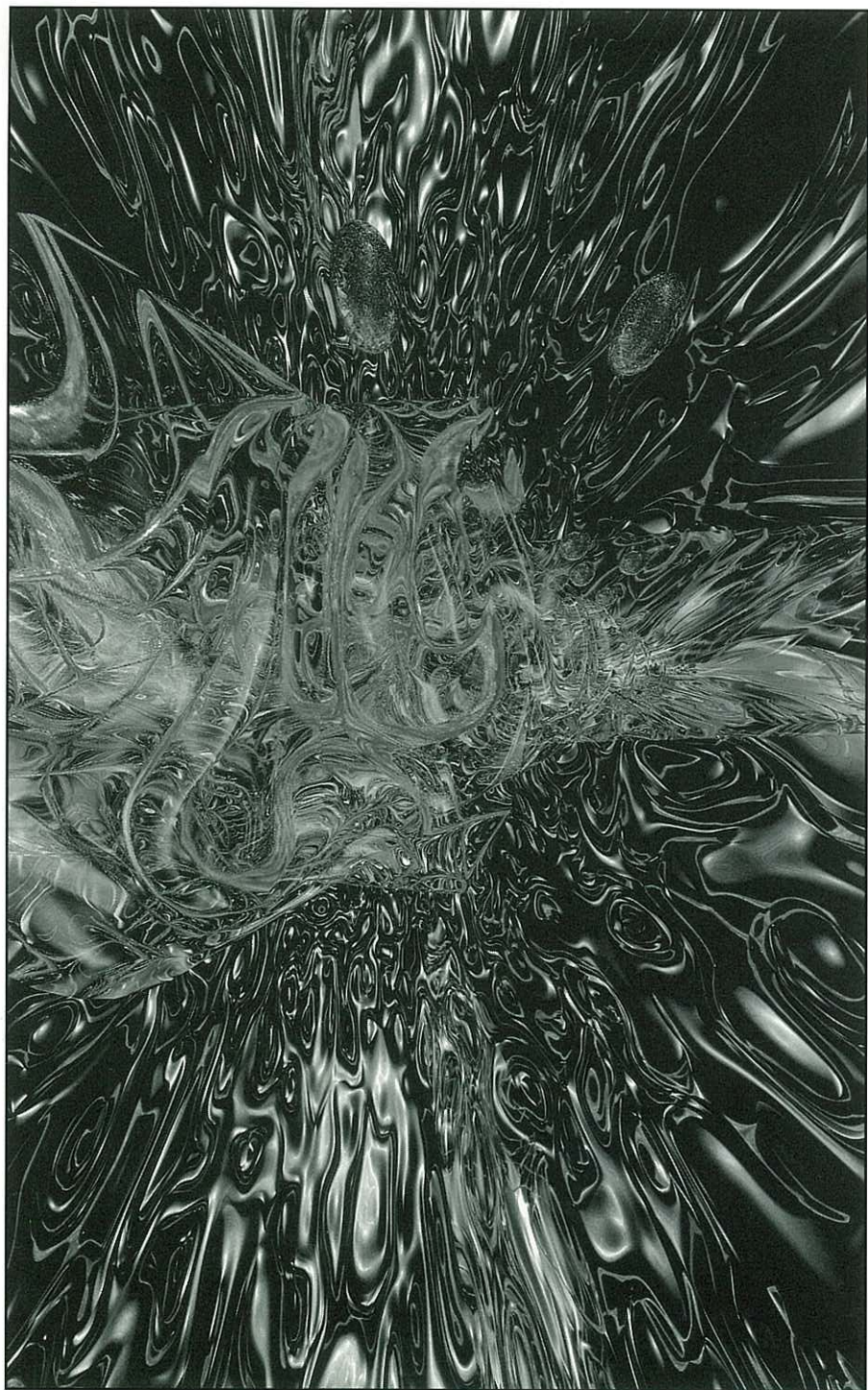
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