

UNFOLDING PERIPHERAL ACTS

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INTRODUCTION

peripheral acts (2023-ongoing) comprises thirty-five monoprints [1] on Japanese tosa washi paper. Made by taking multiple impressions from scrim fabric [2] using cyan, magenta, yellow, and black (CMYK) layered relief inks, each printed 'module' shimmers with the changeable formations, colours, and textures of moiré patterns. [3]

No two works are the same – from print to print, hue and pattern shift and murmur, undulating on the paper's surface. Colours fluctuate, corresponding to the build and ebb of ink levels throughout the printing process. These are not bold or dramatic visual transitions. Rather, they move softly, the moiré seeming to disperse each colour at intervals, opening out the layers of ink so that patches of cyan, magenta, and yellow become visible, before combining again to produce shades of green, red, and purple. At a distance, the moiré appears in turn as woodgrain, watery ripples, and herringbone patterns. Up close, the varying structure of the printed scrim is more distinct – each snagged thread, warped patch, and misaligned layer complementing the moiré pattern produced. These optical and material shifts reflect inconsistencies in the actions of the printmaker too – another variable in the printing process who pushes, presses, and persuades her chosen media into coalescence, while the solid form of the printing press resists, pushes back, and makes its own mark on the emergent prints.

OBDURATE MATTER?

This body of work was created as part of my practice-based doctoral research project at Edinburgh College of Art (ECA). The project, titled, *Obdurate matter? Unfolding potential within materials, apparatuses, and procedures of printmaking through speculative practice*, traces my experimental and material-led investigation of scrim through a series of monoprinting techniques. [4] The research questions how print 'matter' –

that is, the core materials, tools, and machinery of printmaking, and their related processes of application – can impact the general artistic approach one adopts within the discipline, as well as the resultant forms of printed artefacts. Further, the project considers how the 'mis'-use [5] of such print matter can offer alternative procedural and conceptual approaches within contemporary print practices.



Figure 1

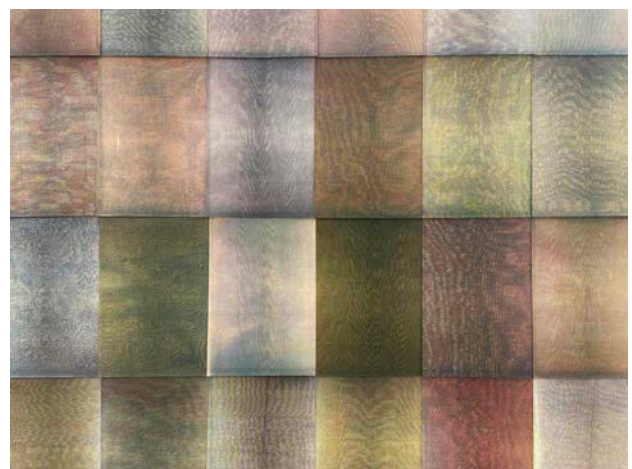


Figure 2

Figure Titles and Information

Fig 1. *peripheral acts* (full installation view), (2023). Sculpture Court, Edinburgh College of Art. 350x400cm approx.
 Fig 2. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail), (2023).

This research subject diverges from the literature of printmaking, where the media and procedural applications of the field are frequently discussed in relation to their pragmatic technical purposes and capabilities. Seeking to address a gap in knowledge regarding the critical discussion of print apparatuses and their related functions, my research interrogates them as material elements with the ability to shape methods of both print thinking and print making. Within this context, my creative practice attends to and emphasises how the making of prints 'generates meaning at the level of fundamental, physical operations' (Roberts, 2024, p.3). Through my practice and research, I propose that 'technical matters are not "merely" technical' (ibid) and apply them to look specifically at the print discipline itself from within the workshop setting – exploring the implications this approach may have in the context of print's position within the contemporary arts. As such, within my research scrim is appropriated and used beyond its designated role as a 'mere' tool for the removal of excess ink and gum arabic in etching and lithographic printing processes. Instead, it is elevated to an artistic material in its own right and, through monoprinting techniques, activated as a means of unfolding material and conceptual potential within the print field.

To aid this shift in perspective, my reconceptualisation of print matter within the research project is furthered via an engagement with key concepts in the field of new materialism. A central belief in new materialism is that matter is 'fundamentally...dynamic and inventive' (Coleman, Page, and Palmer, 2019, np.). It rejects 'a distinction between the physical world and social constructs of human thoughts, meanings and desires' and 'opens up...the possibility to explore how each affects the other, and how things other than humans (e.g., a tool, a technology, a building) can be social "agents," making things happen.' (Alldred & Fox, 2022, np.) Consequently, print matter is presented as lively here – a collection of vibrant, entangled components of practice which hold the potential or agency to produce effects and affects beyond their usual perception and use. [6]

In particular, the concepts of 'becoming' (Marks, 2014; Kontturi, 2018) and 'following' (Kontturi, 2018; Coleman, 2019) – which together attend to material sensations, behaviours and vitalities in ongoing states of transformation, to 'the fluxes and flows of materials' (Ingold, 2013, p.6) – emphasise the 'emergent vitality' (Bennett, 2010) of print matter here. Applied within my repositioning of scrim, these concepts mark a departure from the perception of printing as a means of only creating printed images, where the tools and materials are used within the boundaries of their role and the making process ends with the completion of the print – where 'processes of making appear swallowed up in objects made; processes of seeing in images seen.' (Ingold, 2013, p.7). Here scrim opens out that perspective, unfolds it, and presents the practice of printmaking as an un-hierarchical assemblage of materials and tools etc. that have the potential to do more, for both my aesthetic practice and the wider print discipline than their current positioning suggests.

REPETITIVE DISTURBANCE

In the context of my described doctoral research project, *peripheral acts* explores the potential for and of variation in the making of prints. When making printed multiples, any deviation between artworks, caused by inconsistencies in ink or pressure, for example, may generally be considered undesirable – as errors that mark a failure of the editioning process. Here, however, visual, processual, and material differences are positioned as generative, as means of unfolding printmakerly potential.

Having worked with monoprinting techniques for over a decade, in the latter stages of my PhD research I reflected that I had rarely attempted to go beyond their capacity to produce single, unique prints. I had never tried to produce a multiple, to repeat the same process of making an image more than once in my practice. After dedicating much of my research period to an extensive material exploration of scrim, printing on, with, and through it, I noted that these experiments had produced small bodies of unique, image-based prints that pictorialised my actions. [7] As such, I was curious to investigate to what extent the repeated application of the same materials and apparatuses (i.e. ink, scrim, paper, and printing press) in the same sequence, and in the same manner, could capture the material variation and minute procedural deviations that had become commonplace features of my research practice.

Consequently, in *peripheral acts* scrim was employed as a means of deliberately producing abstract and unpredictable moiré patterning. As each layer of cyan, magenta, yellow, and black ink-coated scrim was transferred to the washi paper, the impressions of the fabric's open weave gradually combined to form a varied range of interference patterns. While moiré had appeared subtly and unexpectedly in my work in the first year of my PhD, at the time I was unsure what to make of the phenomena – appropriate to their designation as interference patterns, they 'disturbed' the images I was trying to produce, adding an unwanted texture that was at first reminiscent of digital interference sometimes seen on television or computer screens. However, within *peripheral acts*, moiré presented as an aesthetic means of emphasising the variation and disturbances at the heart of printmaking processes – bringing them to the surface of the prints, where conventionally such 'errors' may go unseen.

In *The Moiré Effect in Architecture* (2009), academic and architect Christopher Hight discusses the technical application of moiré as a device for the measurement of variation – an 'interferometer' – in architectural practice. Through moiré, the shifting flow of forces and subsequent deformation of load-bearing materials can be tested and mapped (p.19). Hight's positioning of moiré as a pattern for demonstrating the shift and flow of forces through a material, and the measurement of the emergent variation, echoes the purpose of its repeated application across the prints that make up *peripheral acts*. The difference observed in the works, in their varying colours

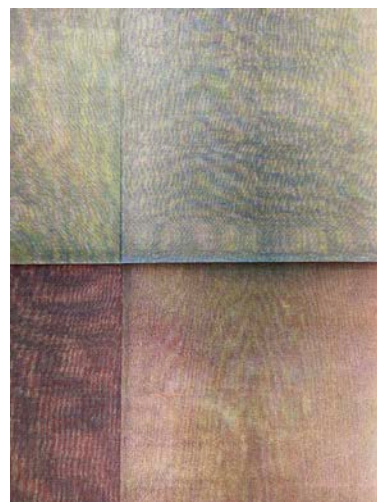


Figure 3



Figure 4

Fig 3. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 2), (2023).

Fig 4. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 3), (2025).

and surface patterns, as mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this article, would not be possible without a significant material and processual variation existing at the heart of the making process. For each layer of ink applied I ensured that I had a range of pieces of scrim to choose from in order for the printed weave of the fabric to change as much as possible. I varied not only the type of scrim, working with both medium and fine varieties, but also included multiple pieces of each scrim, striving for a broad assortment of weave patterns. For example, some sections of the fabric showed faults in the form of creases, pulled threads and slightly unravelled sections (faults made during manufacture, not deliberately altered by me) – all of which contributed to the creation of fluctuating moiré patterns.

In addition, while my decision to not weigh [8] the ink for each layer of each print was deliberate, I could not predict that slight changes in the amount of ink applied would produce such different hues throughout the works. The material transformation of the scrim throughout the printing process certainly impacted this. A fresh piece of scrim will absorb much more ink into its fibres, for example, than one that has been used three or four times and has become heavily saturated in ink. As such, a print taken from new scrim is pale and crisp, and the weave pattern clearly distinguished, whereas an older scrim will produce a stronger colour, however the fibres become gradually clogged over time, generating an untidier impression. Overall, the presence of moiré in these works serves to draw these subtle aspects of print practice and material knowledge out and into the surface of each print – each shift and difference in the ‘image’ measuring the levels of variation occurring at the hand of the printmaker.

A SUPPLE THRESHOLD

The themes introduced so far in this article – interference, disturbance, material misbehaviour and liveliness – in the context of the aesthetic, procedural, and conceptual aspects of this body of work are extended by the materiality of the prints too, by their lightweight paper substrate and how they have behaved in situ. Across the various settings in which peripheral acts has been exhibited since 2023, each printed module displayed an unanticipated capacity for movement.

When installing the works, each print is attached by its topmost edge to a strip of magnetic tape, secured by discreet magnets which become hidden as another module is added and overlaps. There is no hierarchical order to the prints, my only aim being to accentuate the shift in colour and moiré from piece to piece as much as possible, with each print and pattern remaining distinct. This sense of movement, perceived within the fluid moiré and hues in the surface of each print, extends out from the installation and into reality via the passage of the viewer. Due to the lightweight nature of the washi paper that these works are printed onto, as well as their minimal fixings, should someone walk by them, the prints lift away from the wall, reaching in the light breeze that follows.

Like the aesthetic qualities of the prints, these unexpected movements varied too – responding to the different installation compositions and settings. In the first iteration of this work in ECA’s Sculpture Court (2023) these stirrings were gentle – like long slow inhales and exhales of the paper, affording a swelling volume to the installation. Movement could be seen more intensely at the lower rows of prints, where people and drafts from the building’s main entrance moved more closely. The modules nearest to these disturbances of air would lift at almost 45-degree angles, before the air rippled outwards and caused the corners and bottom edges of others to gently flick and flutter. Further installations as part of ECA’s PhD Showcase exhibitions in 2024 and 2025 demonstrated a more dramatic capacity for movement. Hung in single (2024) or double (2025) rows, and placed along a well-traversed corridor on the outer edge of the Sculpture Court, the close passage of ECA’s staff and students put the strength of both the tosa washi paper and the magnets that held it in place to the test. The quick movements of a late-running student at close proximity were enough to send the prints billowing away from the wall in such a way that I feared they would be damaged, but generally they soon settled back into position.

That being said, across these three exhibitions, the prints’ coming to rest was not always smooth. As the works returned to their original position against the wall, their edges would occasionally catch awkwardly against one another, buckling the paper and creating angles and dips in the otherwise smooth surface of the installation (see fig. 7) When first observing this papery snagging, my immediate reaction was one of discomfort. I wanted to (and often did) realign the works, to settle them comfortably back to their intended formation and avoid undue damage to the paper. Seeing this occur repeatedly within the various installation iterations confronted patterns of thought surrounding the form and stability of the printed artwork. Where prints may normally be displayed in frames – fixed securely in place and protected from their surroundings – in *peripheral acts* they are relatively free to move and be affected by their environment, demonstrating a material liveliness. Consequently, the moments of snagging described here can be understood as an unfolding of not only the installation’s composition, but also of how we conceive of printed artworks within the exhibition setting. Rather than thinking of the exhibiting of prints as an act of fixing, of completing, the mobility of peripheral acts reflects the vibrancy of the printing process and presents the printed artefact as something which can be de- and re-composed in their display, which can become unfixed. Here, this body of work is positioned as a supple threshold, one which shifts and moves in response to its setting, and which in turn, engenders a shift in perception within the broader print field.

In September 2025, I exhibited *peripheral acts* in a solo show at Mote102 gallery in Leith, Edinburgh, titled *a tarlatan net*. This exhibition showcased a selection of work made throughout my PhD, and through the show’s title, highlighted the net-like open weave of tarlatan (scrim) as a material which has become entangled with other print matter in its appropriation. Here, the printed modules that comprise peripheral



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

Fig 5. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 4), (2023).
 Fig 6. *peripheral acts* (horizontal installation view 1), (2024). The Sculpture Court at ECA. 500x90cm approx.
 Fig 7. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 4), (2023).

acts were split across three installations – one of fifteen pieces, one of four, and one of two – as a means of exploring how they behaved at different scales, how attention to certain colours, patterns, and textures could be emphasised depending on certain combinations.

Across the three installations, the thinness of the washi paper allowed the works to take on qualities of their surroundings – something I had not truly appreciated in previous settings, such as in the print workshop or the Sculpture Court of ECA, where they had been viewed against a white background. In a tarlatan net, the largest of the three installations drew out the tones of wall behind it, where historic layers of paint hinted at the gallery's previous life as a pharmacy. The aged yellow, brown, and white paint complemented the muted colours of my prints, drawing out some of the hues and moiré patterns that were less obvious against a plain white wall (see, for example, the brownish moiré against the brown paint here in fig.8) In addition, the two smaller installations were fixed to natural plaster walls at the back of the gallery. These prints enhanced the pinkish tone of the plaster, and, correspondingly, emphasised the warm tones in the ink – occasionally blurring where the surface of the wall ended and the print began.

As well as contributing a sense of atmospheric reciprocity, the lightness of the tosa washi paper affords *peripheral acts* a material ambiguity too. In the process of making the prints, as each scrim impression was transferred to the paper surface, some of the printed scrim texture passed through to the paper's reverse. In conjunction with the highly textured, interwoven appearance of the front of each print, this inadvertent transferral allows the paper to take on a fabric-like appearance. Indeed, many visitors to the exhibition thought the works were made from fabric entirely, and not prints taken from fabric – reaching out and handling the paper edges expecting to feel a textile surface.

In the context of my broader research and practice, this sense of ambiguity poses questions about the broader perception of prints within the contemporary arts – how they are expected to look, behave, and be installed in exhibition. While I feel it is important that these works are recognised and named as the prints that they are, their capacity to be seen as something else, something less clear cut, unfolds the potential for them to inhabit exhibition spaces beyond conventional display techniques. To refer back to core tenets of new materialism, as mentioned earlier in this article, such ambiguity emphasises the continued 'becoming' of print matter, where new perceptions and vibrancies can continue to be discovered.

CONCLUSION

In reflecting on the research, processes, materials, and tools that have contributed to the making of *peripheral acts*, this article has explored how print matter can exceed their conventional pragmatic uses to produce unexpected and generative effects and affects. By focusing on the inherent variability and liveliness of materials, particularly through



Figure 8



Figure 9

Fig 8. *peripheral acts*, as exhibited in a tarlatan net (2025). Mote102, Edinburgh. 300x270cm approx.

Fig 9. *peripheral acts*, as exhibited in a tarlatan net (2025). Mote102, Edinburgh. 180x120cm approx. Fig 7. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 4), (2023).

the exploration of scrim and the creation of moiré patterns, the work emphasises the fluidity and unpredictability embedded in processes of making. As a series of monoprints, they compel both artist and viewer to reconsider the boundaries of what printed matter can achieve, not only visually but conceptually.

Particular emphasis has been placed on the paper used in the making of *peripheral acts* – the lightweight Japanese tosa washi paper. Earlier in this article I referred to the paper as a substrate, a base for the prints. However, in the context of new materialist theory, and the sense of material vibrancy and agency that my practice and research draw from, I cannot truly name it as a mere support as I consider the surface and base of the print as one in the same. As reflected in my discussion of various iterations of the work in recent years, the materiality of the prints – their papery-ness – has allowed them to unfix from conventional printmakerly display methods via kinetic qualities and material ambiguities. In their supple movements, both aesthetically and physically, the works present productive disturbances that provide points from which one can reconsider the established customs and habits of printmaking – questioning approaches to practice, as well as one’s understanding of what the field of print is, what it means, and what it can do.

FOOTNOTES

1. Traditionally, monotypes and monoprints are considered different processes. A monotype is a completely unique print that features no repeatable visual elements – they are not editionable, unlike other techniques such as etching or screenprinting. The term monoprint usually refers to a printed image that has a reproducible element in combination with one that is unique – for example, an etching (reproducible) may be printed over a monotype, with the monotype providing a unique painterly background and therefore producing a varied edition. In my practice and research, I use ‘monoprint’ as a broad term that encompasses both of these approaches, reflecting the manner in which these terms are often used interchangeably in contemporary practice.
 2. A lightweight, open weave cotton fabric that is generally used for the removal of excess ink from a metal plate in etching processes, or gum arabic from the surface of limestone lithography stones.
 3. The term moiré refers to the type of interference pattern which commonly occurs through the misaligned overlapping of at least two regular and structured patterns, for example a grid, or other consistent linear formations.
 4. This article draws from and extends excerpts from my unpublished doctoral thesis.
 5. By this I refer to the use of any such print matter beyond prescribed or conventional purposes.
 6. The language I have used here reflects the well-known phrasing of Karen Barad (2007) in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, and Jane Bennett (2010)
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in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, which are key texts in the field of new materialism.

7. Examples of these works can be seen on my website via the following links – <https://miriamhancill.co.uk/graining-sequence-series> ; <https://miriamhancill.co.uk/tweezing-warping>.

8. In some of the print workshops I have worked in, when producing a printed edition it is usual for printing ink to be weighed out so that each printed layer contains exactly the same amount of ink. This ensures that the colours of the image are consistent throughout the body of work, and also allows for the printmaker to calculate how much ink will be needed to complete the prints.

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IMAGE GALLERY

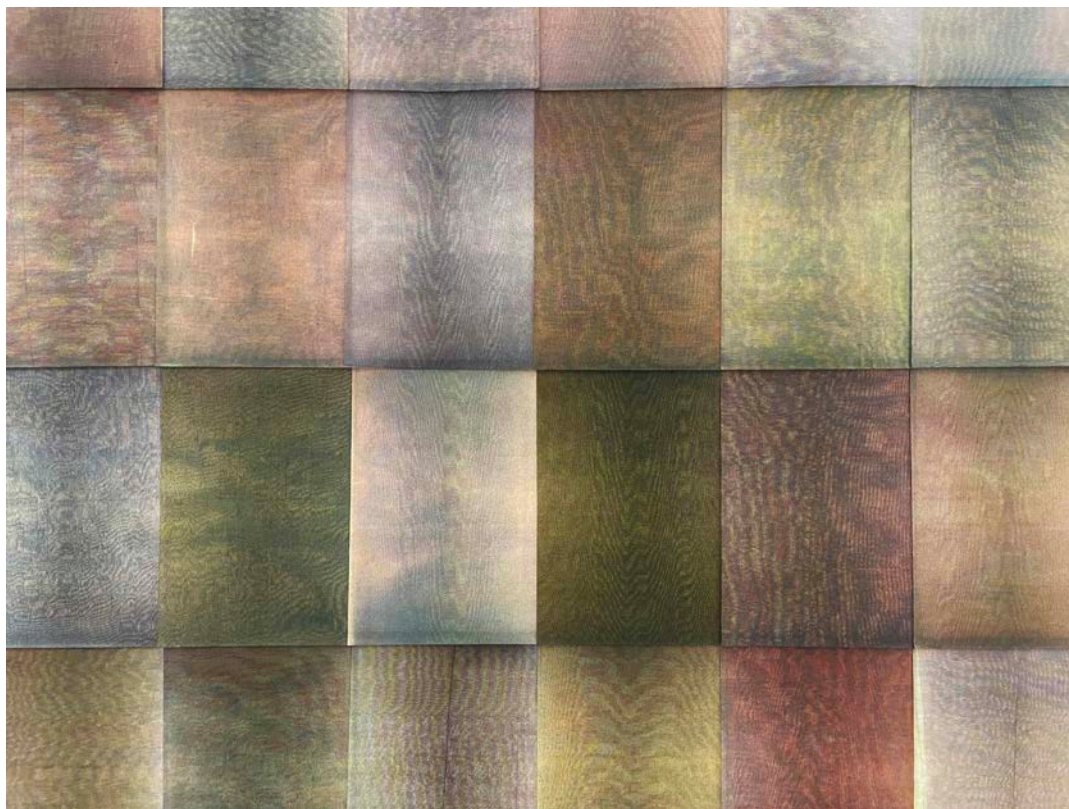


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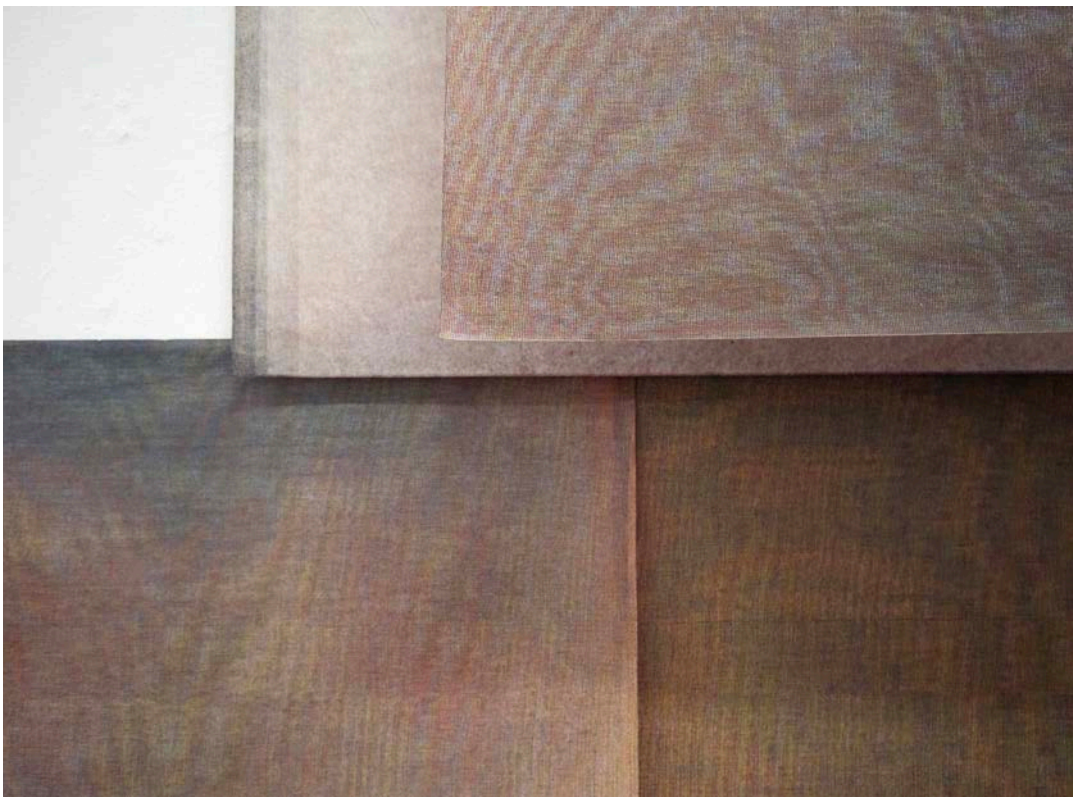
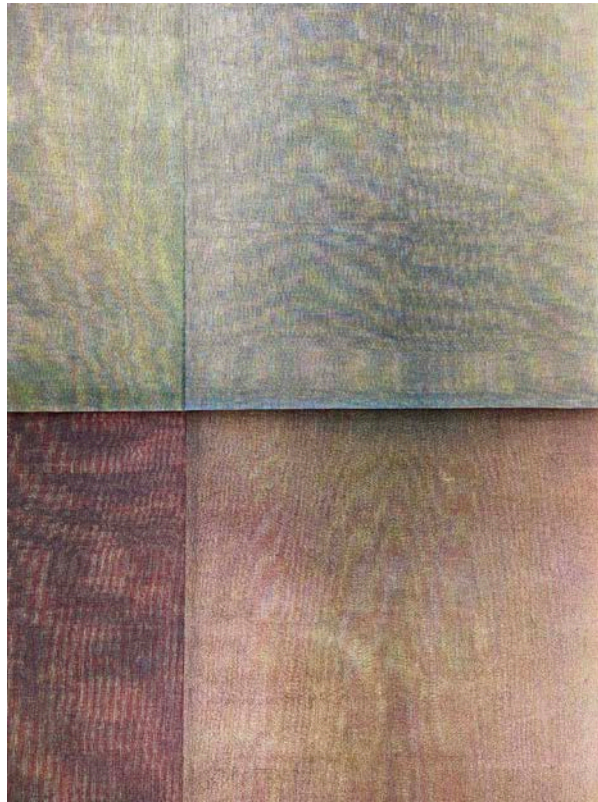


Figure 3. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 2), (2023).
Figure 4. *peripheral acts* (installation view detail 3), (2025).

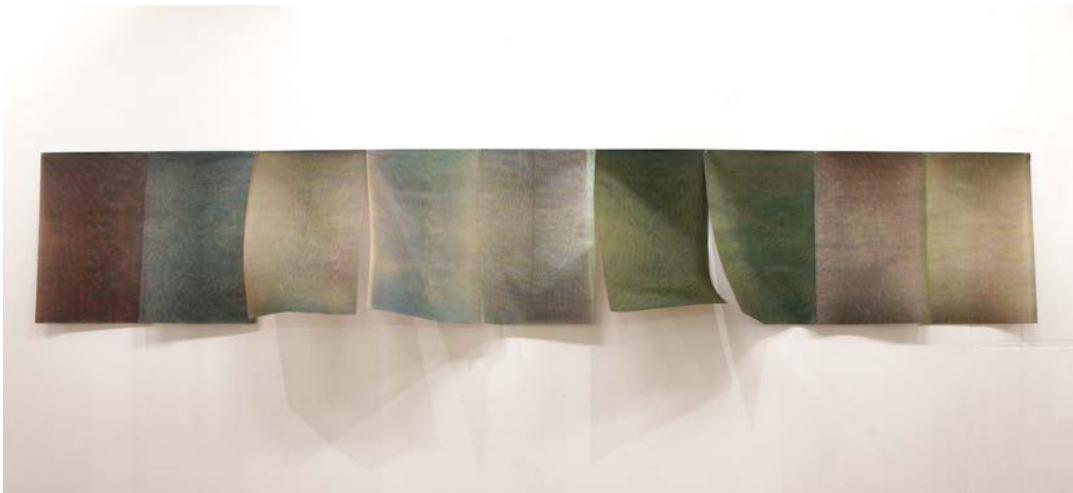


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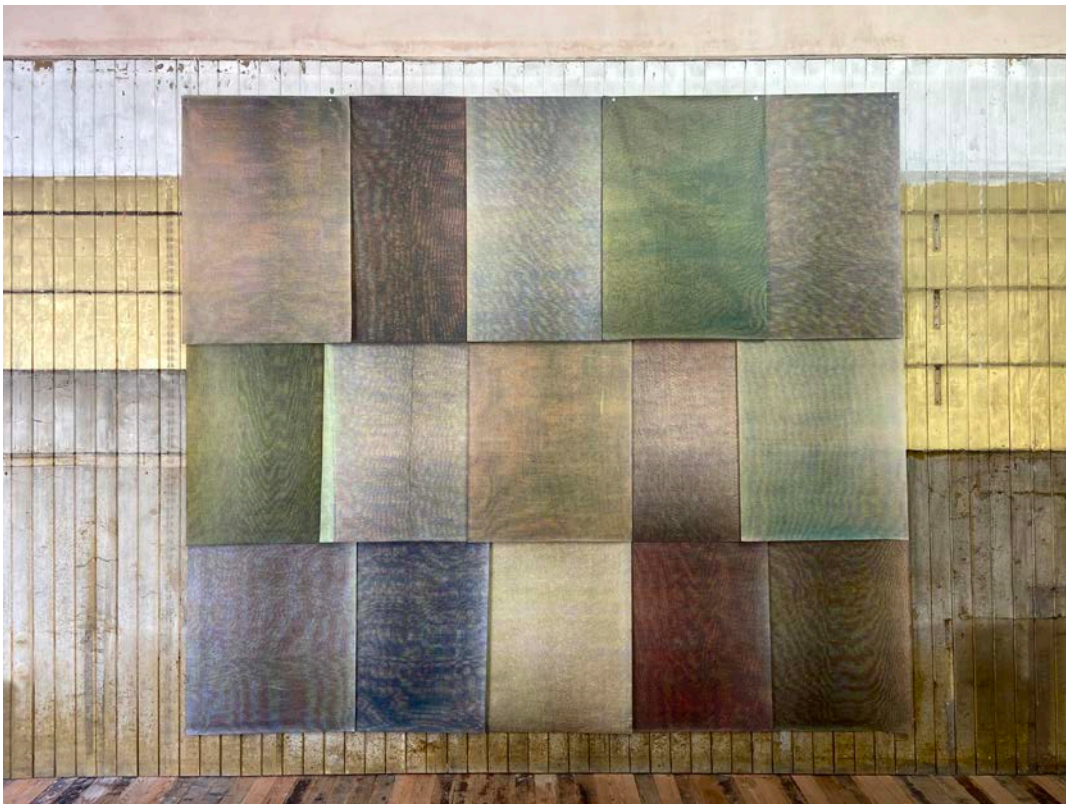
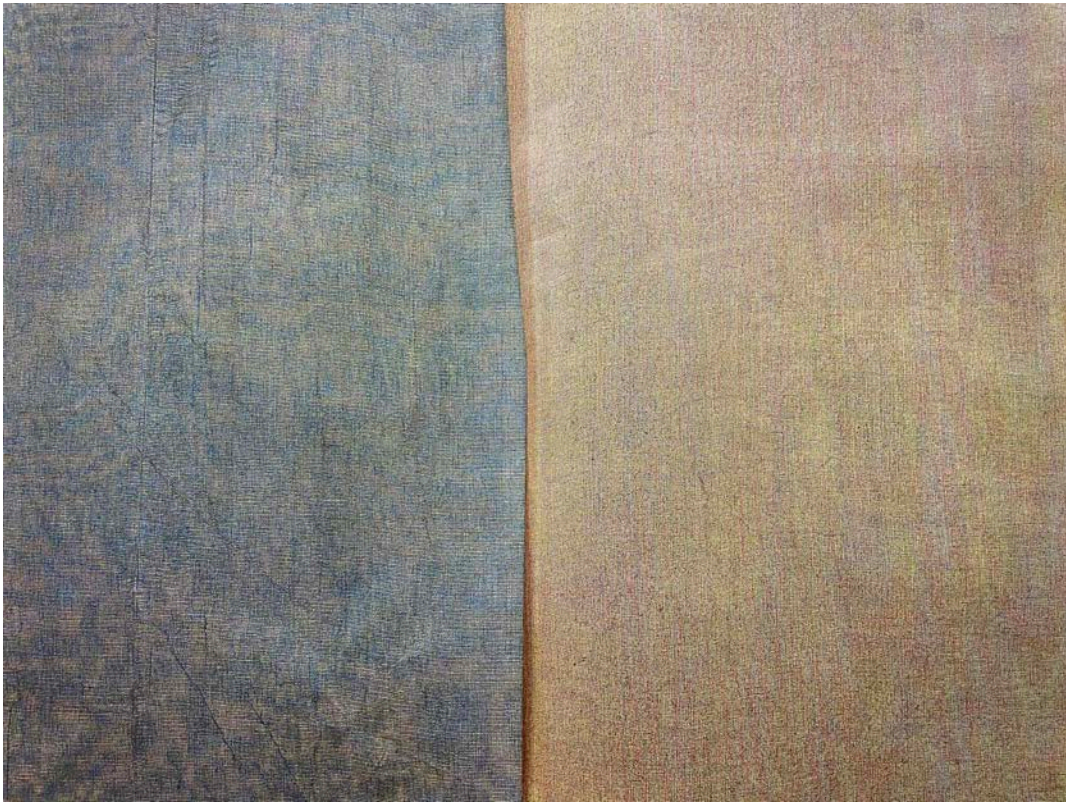


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