B A C K T R A C K

Presented by Two Rooms Gallery (San Diego, CA)

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www.tworoomsgallery.com/exhibitions/backtrack

A B O U T

The works in this show index the digital ruins of a former friendship. Their starting point is a personal collection of cellphone videos depicting a single subject across ten years. Stills from the videos are collaged into recycled printer parts and encased in resin. Modest in scale but highly detailed, the works are built around readymade compositions provided by the industrially-produced printer components. Each piece is titled after the original file name of the video it contains, paired with parenthetical memories associated with each clip.

These works aim to make visible the personal within the machine, exploring how tool and user continually shape one another. The substrate of these works is the printer: a site of mediation between the digital and physical. This device transforms light and pixel into something tangible.

One of the works in this series, titled *IMG-2183.m4v (see-saw)*, incorporates the scanner mechanism from a printer. In this case the viewers' reflection is subsumed into the sculpture via the original lens and network of mirrors hidden within the device.

Every piece in this series contains fragments of an Apple iPhone. The most ubiquitous smartphone in the world, it is arguably the primary technology responsible for the cyborg state of our daily lives. What percentage of the media you encounter every day are created and consumed through this one tool? The games and apps we partake in through these devices are largely banal in content, and yet the data they provide to tech companies and government agencies is anything but. Their functions of control are disguised behind a sleek, "friendly" shell.

I see digital devices as a site where self and state intersect. Resisting the increasingly minimalist aesthetic conventions of advancing technology, my work embraces the materiality of our machines. I am interested not only in the human trace – i.e. the smudge of a fingerprint on the screen of a phone – but also in the labor and environmental extraction their creation necessitates.

Modest in scale but highly detailed, the works function as reliquaries for cyber remains, containing the spirits of trapped (and distorted) digital memories.

W O R K S



IMG-4548.m4v (I want you)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
16 ¼ x 9 ¾ x 2 ¾ inches





IMG-0769.m4v (winter beach)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin
13 ½ x 1 ¼ x 2 inches

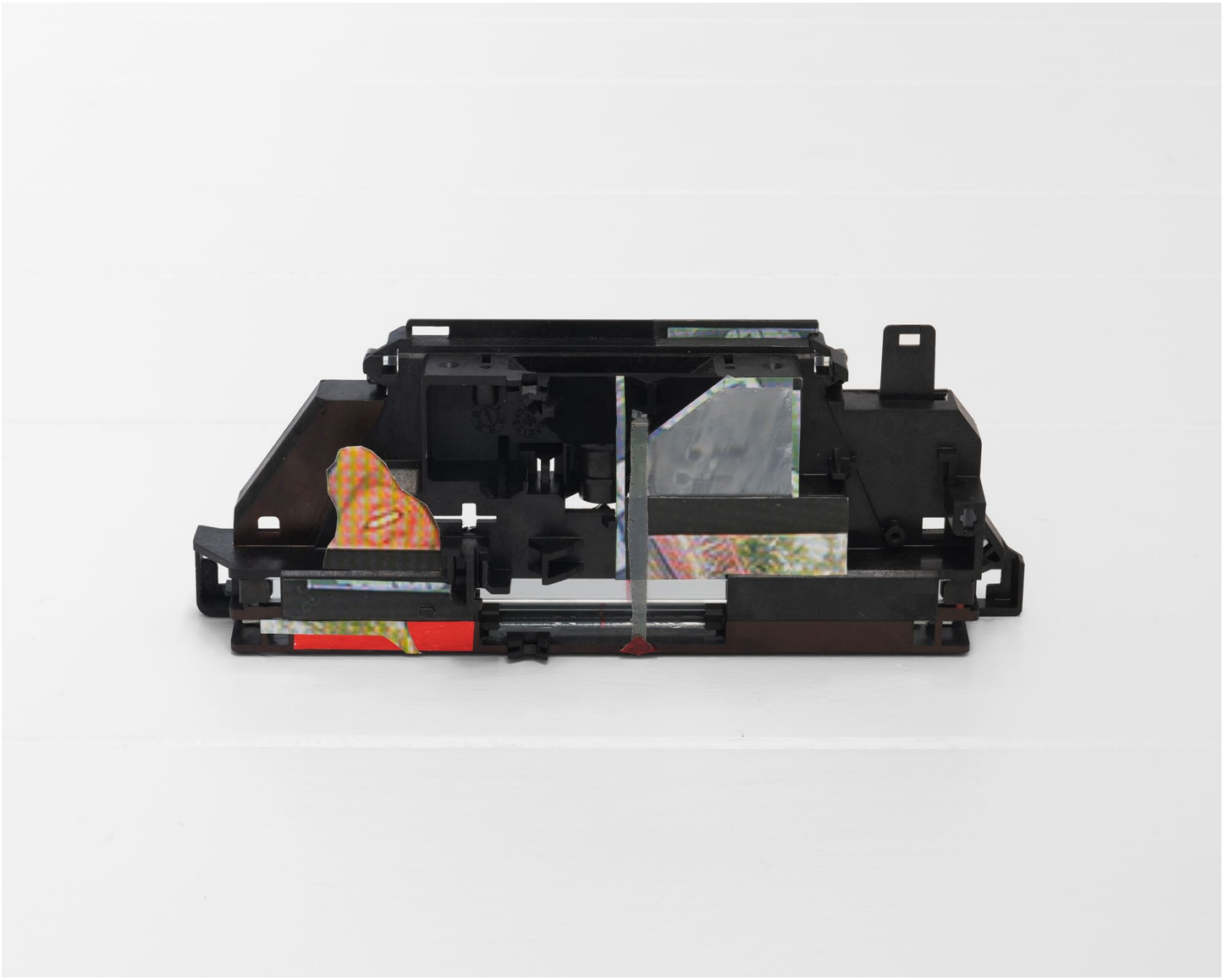




IMG-01400.m4v (blizzard cigarette)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
7 ¾ x 2 ¼ x 12 inches

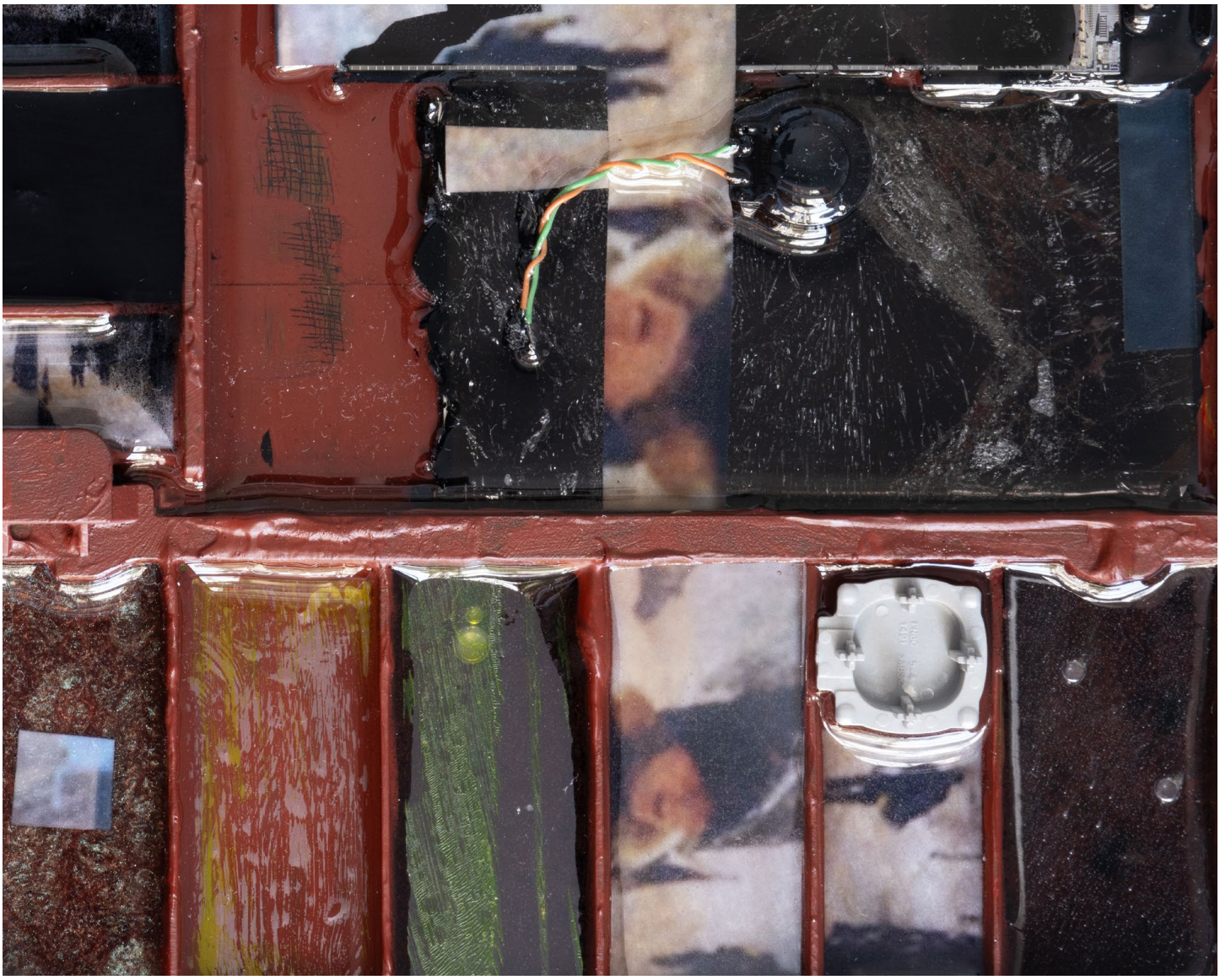


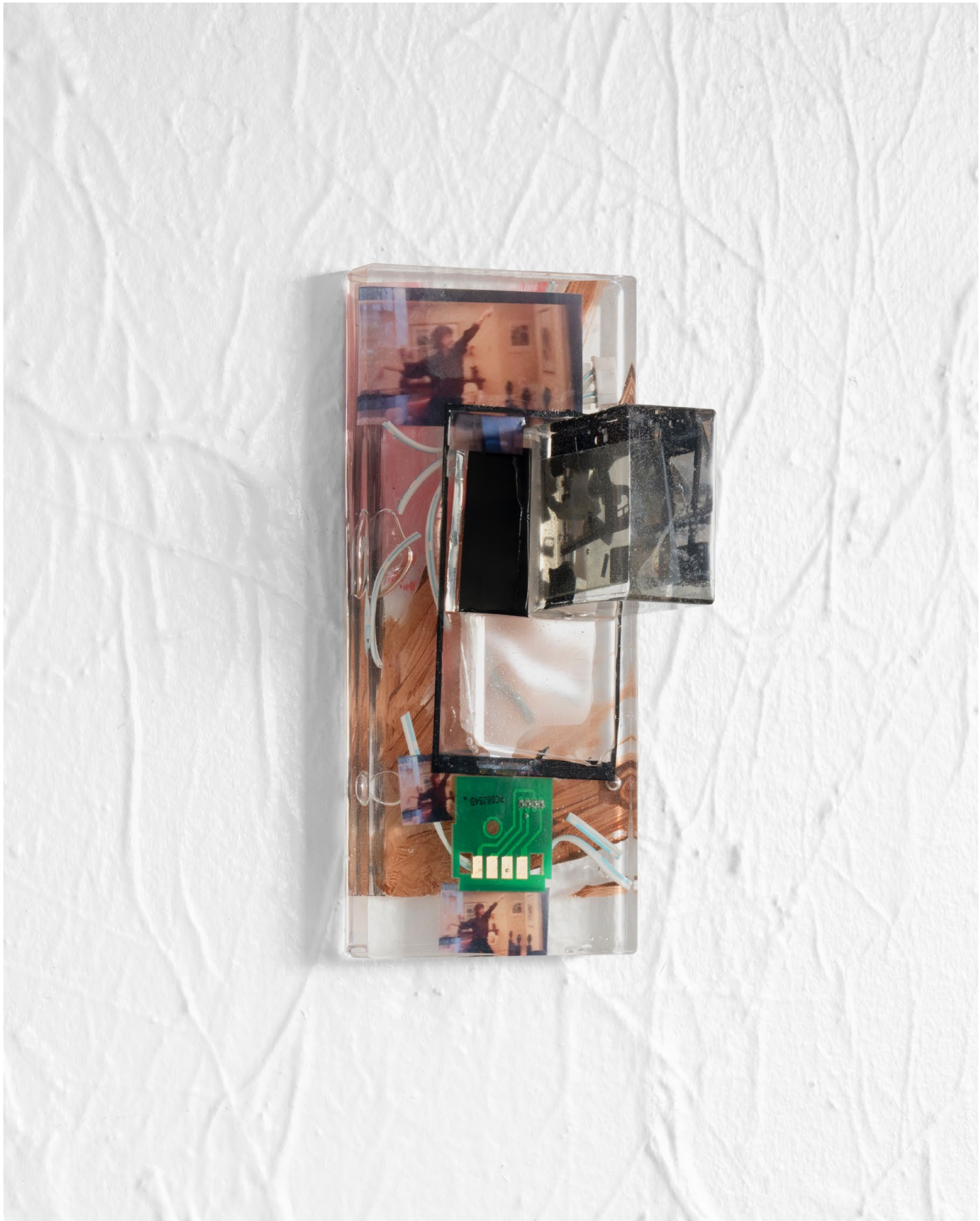
IMG-2183.m4v (see-saw)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, paint, marker
12 x 2 ¼ x 3 ¾ inches



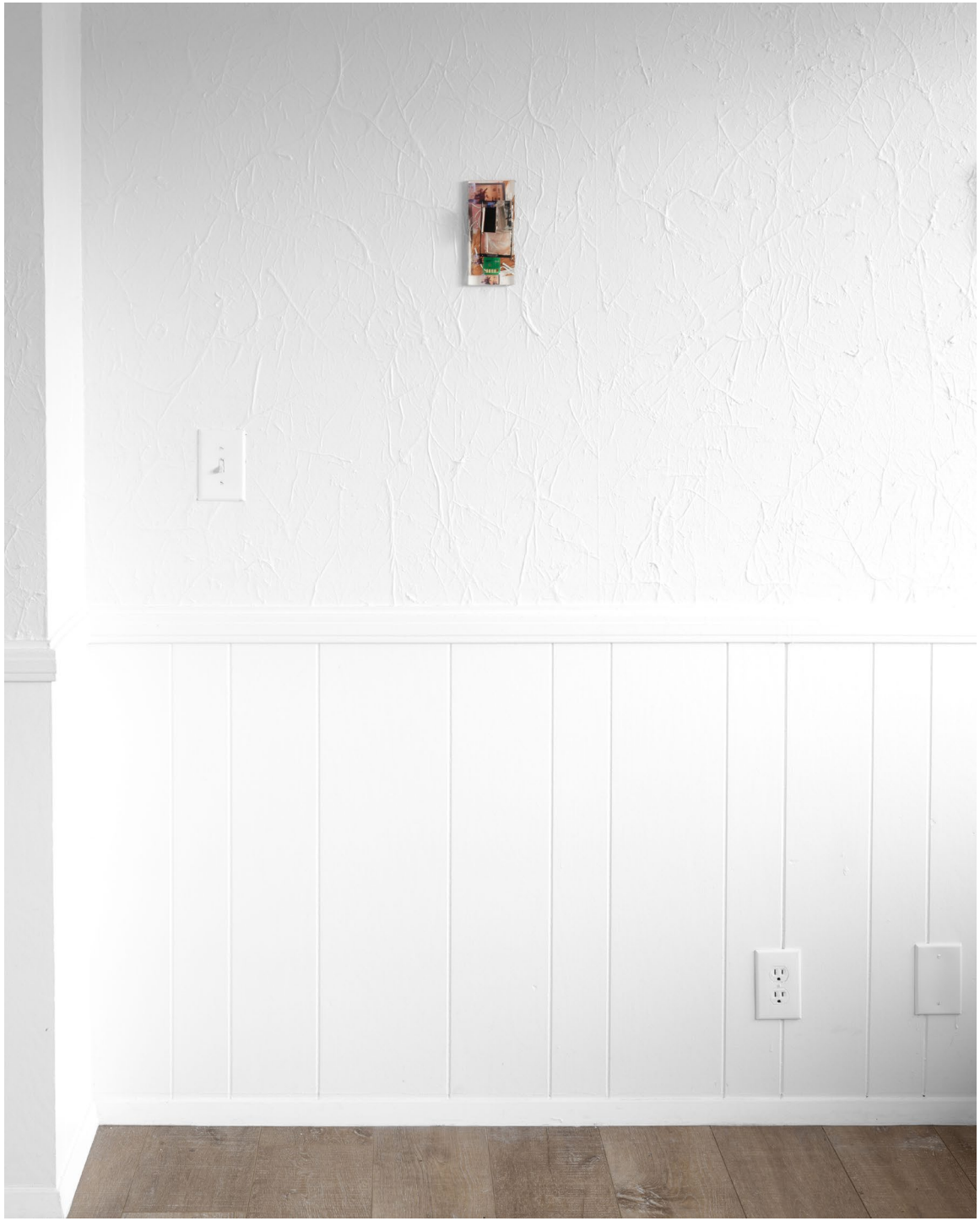


IMG-1255.m4v (first snow)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
13 x 9 ½ x 1 ½ inches





IMG-2925.m4v (wild horses brown)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
7 x 3 x 3 ¼ inches





IMG-2933.m4v (side mirror)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
5 ¼ x 7 ½ x 2 ¼ inches



IMG-2925.m4v (wild horses blue)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
5 x 9 x ¾ inches



IMG-1798.m4v (water bottle)
2025
E-waste, inkjet prints, resin, paint
4 ¼ x 3 x 1 inches

SHOW NOTES

Thoughts on cinema, painting, abstraction, memory. . .

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Historically, we associated the camera with representation and truth. Film had a material, indexical relationship to the world. Obviously this has become less and less true as technology advances – images are no longer trusted, the general population understands that extensive editing, grafting, and fabrication are part of their creation now (Photoshop, CGI, AI all available to anyone with a computer). These constructed images are closer to painting or collage than traditional film – they are not "taken" but constructed. The latest Marvel movie was not made with a camera but with a battalion of technologies layered on top of one another.

Theorist and artist Lev Manovich equates this with early animation processes:

The manual construction of images in digital cinema represents a return to nineteenth century pre-cinematic practices, when images were hand-painted and hand-animated. At the turn of the twentieth century, the cinema was to delegate these techniques to animation and define itself as a recording medium. As cinema enters the digital age, these techniques are again becoming commonplace in the film making process. Consequently, cinema can no longer be distinguished from animation. It is no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a sub-genre of painting.

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I am interested in the way abstraction functions in the realm of lens-based media. Not abstraction in terms of narrative but in a formal sense, images that are concerned with color, shape and light. Moving image is such a medium of representation, it makes me wonder when, how and why abstraction has been deployed in its history? What comes to mind for me are the colorful animations of Mary Ellen Bute, the material experiments of Stan Brakhage, or the vid-eo manipulations of Nan June Paik. All of these artists were concerned with pushing the limits of new imaging technology. They used abstract forms to get at questions about the history, materiality and possibilities of the moving image device.

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Can the distance that abstraction opens up create room for empathy, projection, communion (between viewer and work)? Doing this show gave me permission to push my own materials further from their representational source, doubling down on my impulse to obscure.

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The images in this show were created through a process of hyper-mediation –a video is re-shot and re-framed through multiple devices, translated over and over again. I see this as mirroring the process of remembering, how a memory is degraded the more you try to recall it.

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Maddie Butler, 2025

