



Trickster in Flatland

Linda Lindroth



# Trickster in Flatland

photographs by Linda Lindroth



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## Introduction

You never know with Trickster. She plays by her own rules, but she's also paradoxical. So just when you're certain she's being contrarian, she fools you by playing it straight.

Trickster teaches by challenging norms, creating a dissonance between your expectations and what you see.

Having a field day in Flatland, the two-dimensional world of Abbott's novella, she says, "Why not?" Instead of making her photographed objects appear three-dimensional, she renders them as dimension-deprived as she can.

Being Trickster, she also makes what might be disingenuous references to 20th-century art and artists. Or perhaps they're the real deal. You'll have to puzzle that part out for yourself.

Maureen Gaffney



Drawing by Alaina Cuglietto, 2005

## Trickster in Flatland

I first discovered my Trickster in front of the St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans at the age of ten. There, with my Brownie camera I photographed *The Goose with Two Bodies*. From where I was standing it appeared as if there was a goose with one very long neck. Instead it was actually two geese whose necks and heads were behind each other, eating breadcrumbs off of the ground, their bodies positioned in opposite directions from each other like Siamese twins. My camera caught this in 2-dimensions and preserved this trick, launching me on what Garry Winogrand described as a journey to discover “what things look like photographed.”

It is only recently that I am intentionally revisiting with Trickster. I share the view with my fellow travelers, Ellsworth Kelly who used a camera, Mark Rothko, who would have resonated with a time-worn Schiaparelli pink shoebox and Howard Hodgkin would have been drawn to the proscenium arch rendered by a mustardy smear of mucilage. Malevich might nod and look at the black hole cast by a conical fruit bowl and El Lissitzky would surely have shared a second glance at the Constructivist markings on an old box. Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Dan Flavin and Yves Klein seem to look over my shoulder, conspiring with me and hanging around. The outlines of windows and portals are filled with colors and textures that tease the viewer to physically touch this surface—something they must not do. Is it flat? Is it smooth?

Growing up, my mother was the ultimate Trickster. My father was a traveling salesman, often on the road. Raised by a paranoid and delusional mother who suffered from bipolar disorder, I was forced at a young age to question reality and to try to discern the



difference between what was true and what she said was true. Living with such an untrustworthy person probably equipped me to accept and even seek out those visual anomalies. It was with Mother that I first came upon the Goose described above in a city where I learned that the Mississippi was indeed muddy. Living surrounded by water in my native Florida I began to appreciate the island-like isolation of the silhouetted object. So many of these new images seem to me territorial: Elsa looks like the outlined state of Wyoming or Kansas, a piece in a children's map puzzle.

When Mother, in a moment of mania, tore into so many pieces that childhood image, I mourned the loss of the Goose photograph that captured and bore witness to the early encounter with Trickster and the Geese, as evidence that I had been there and I had seen it. Just as I was seduced by the Geese so many years ago, I am beguiled by the super-sized, abstracted and flattened objects you see before you. The details and colors invigorate my senses and I am dizzy viewing them on the screen before me. The objects I have collected, hoarded because they had a strange visual hold on me, resided in so many corners of my life before they came out encountered Trickster—and now take the stage.

Linda Lindroth  
2012

*In 1884, the year that Edward Abbott wrote his romance called Flatland, Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Boy joined P.T. Barnum's circus, Mohandas Gandhi entered adolescence, a series of 50 tornados known as the Enigma tornados broke out in the southern United States, Mark Twain published Huckleberry Finn, and the Washington Monument was completed. At the time, it was the world's tallest building but its completion was delayed until some 30 years after the architect's death because of the complaints of The Know Nothing Party, an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant group, over the use of a block of stone from the Pope. It was also in 1884 that George Eastman patented the first practicable film in roll form. By 1888 he had perfected the Kodak camera, the first camera designed specifically for roll film. It was this camera that gave an amateur photographer a way to capture images in faraway places like my own in New Orleans.*

## Refusing to be boxed in

Surface and not surface. Depth and depthlessness. Reality and illusion.  
-Historicity and timelessness. Representation and abstraction.

Photographer Linda Lindroth is engaged in serious play with her Trickster in Flatland series. With the 22 images collected in this book—all but a half dozen of which were made in the last two years—Lindroth disassembles a material reality to reassemble her own aesthetic vision.

In the most literal sense, most of these photographs are of old cardboard boxes used to hold commercial products. Mundane, no? The corners of the boxes have either come part on their own—as is wont to happen with these types of objects over time—or been torn open by Lindroth herself. Stripped of their three-dimensionality, they are splayed open like mounted butterflies, a geometricity of flat processed color, torn edges, striking diagonals, worn surfaces, yellowed tape and brittle glue.

So the answer to the question "Mundane, no?" is "No." Somehow, these images are compelling rather than mundane. They are compelling because Lindroth observes in these objects all sorts of allusions—mostly but not only of an art historical nature—and has the photographic chops to convey her excitement about them and interpretation of them.

I noted before that they are "stripped of their three-dimensionality." That's true in the sense that the boxes have been deconstructed to lie flat. And, by the nature of being a photographic print, that flatness is—in a physical sense—absolute. But Lindroth's photography captures the not-flatness of that flatness—the layering of the different planes of folded cardboard, the sense of the material's thickness, the flare of shadows around the edges where the mounted object curls up from its white background.

This illusion of tactile presence particularly invited the touch—but don't touch!—in "Howard 2," which depicts the inside of a shallow square box with aquamarine flaps. There is a wealth of visual information to process in this deceptively simple image. The ink is peeling off the flaps like bark on a birch tree. The inner square is smeared with a thick framing of dried, cracked mucilage glue, the color of which morphs from a pale mustard yellow to a dark caramel. It is one of the few images that hint at actual human touch rather than mechanical creation. The swirl of glue is a gestural brush mark communicating the brisk movement of a human hand.

There is sly humor in "Automatic Drawing," which pairs the inside top and bottom pieces of an old box of pastels. The long-term jostling of the colored sticks created two complementary abstract "drawings"—the one on the left spare and subtle, the one on the right a profusion of layered marks. What is noticeable in do many of the images are the details—the mottled discoloration of the cardboard, the scruffy grit of time, the frayed fibers around the tears, the kinked edges. There are some interesting found color juxtapositions—a bold vertical of blue amid surroundings of beige, yellow and washed-out orange in "Le Contact"; the industrial gray hidden beneath the neon pink in "Elsa (Pink Schiaparelli Box)."

Lindroth sees in many of these images evocations of the work of prominent Modernist painters—Ellsworth Kelly, Robert Motherwell, among others. (Some of these allusions are suggested by their titles; "Howard 2," for example, refers to the British painter Howard Hodgkin.)

For my part, I see not just allusion but also meta-commentary—that the boundaries between abstraction and representation, between the throwaway object and the objet d'art, between surface and depth, between the past and the present are not fixed. The boxes into which we pack our preconceptions can be broken open and that is what Lindroth has done.

Hank Hoffman



Trickster in Flatland









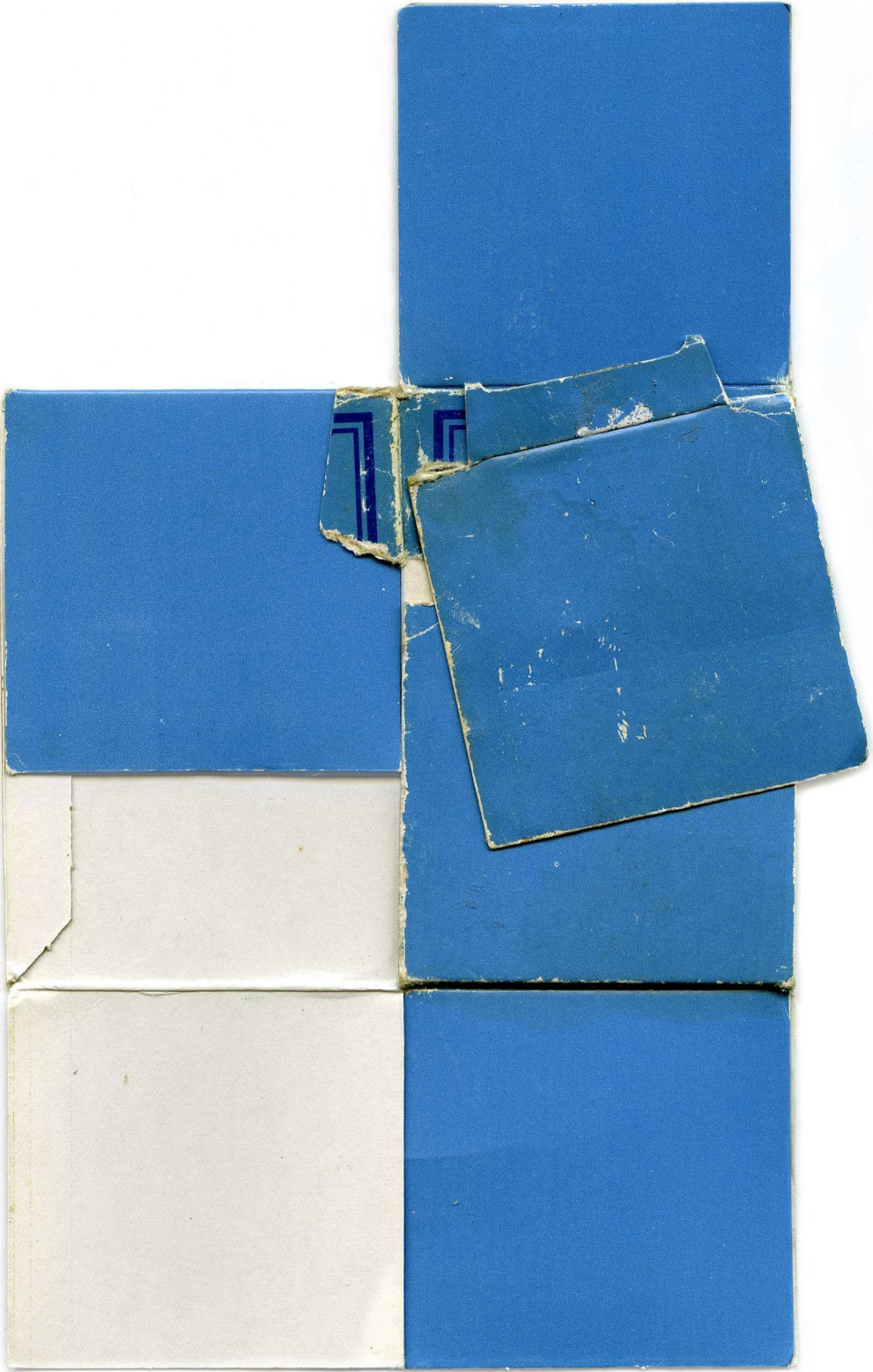






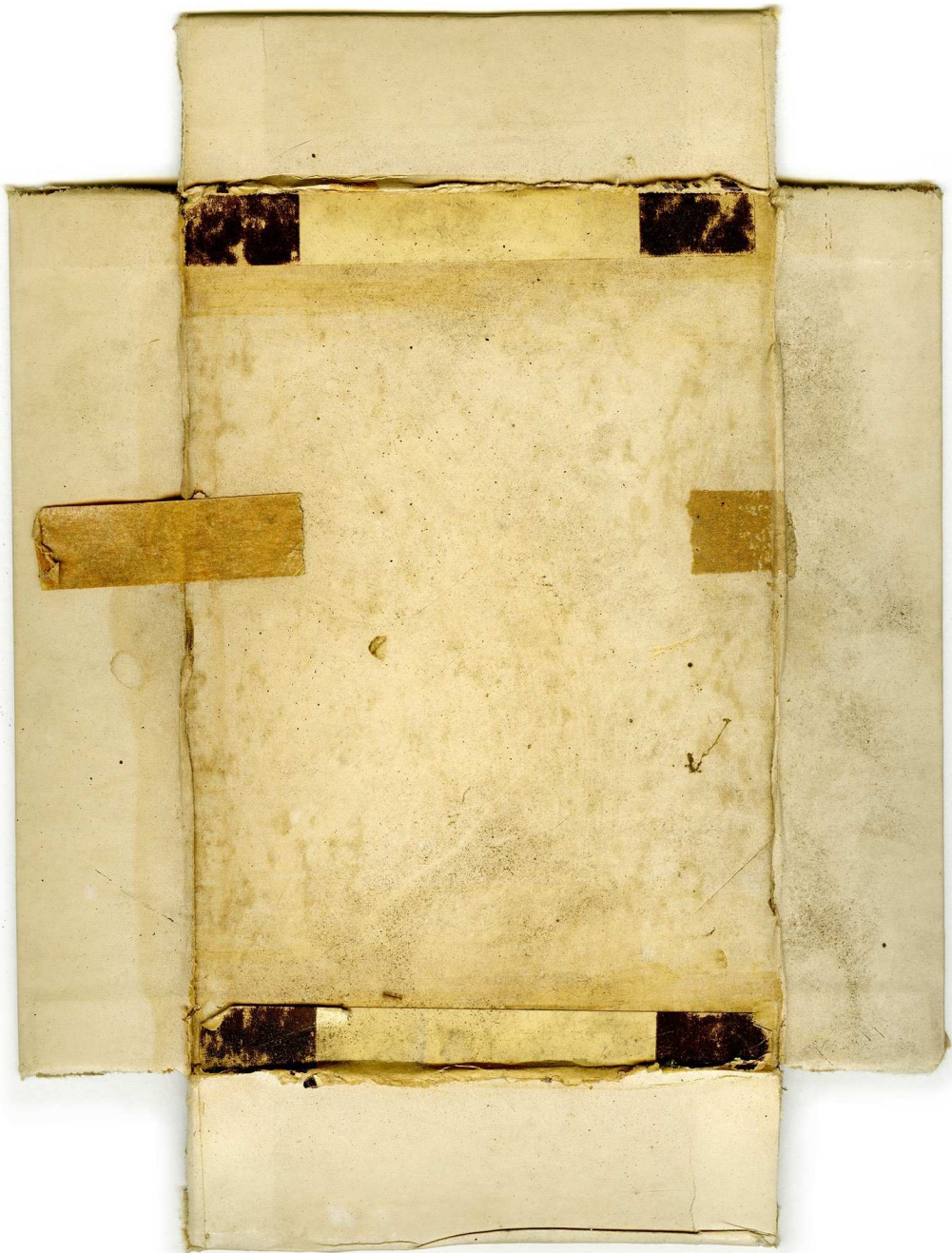






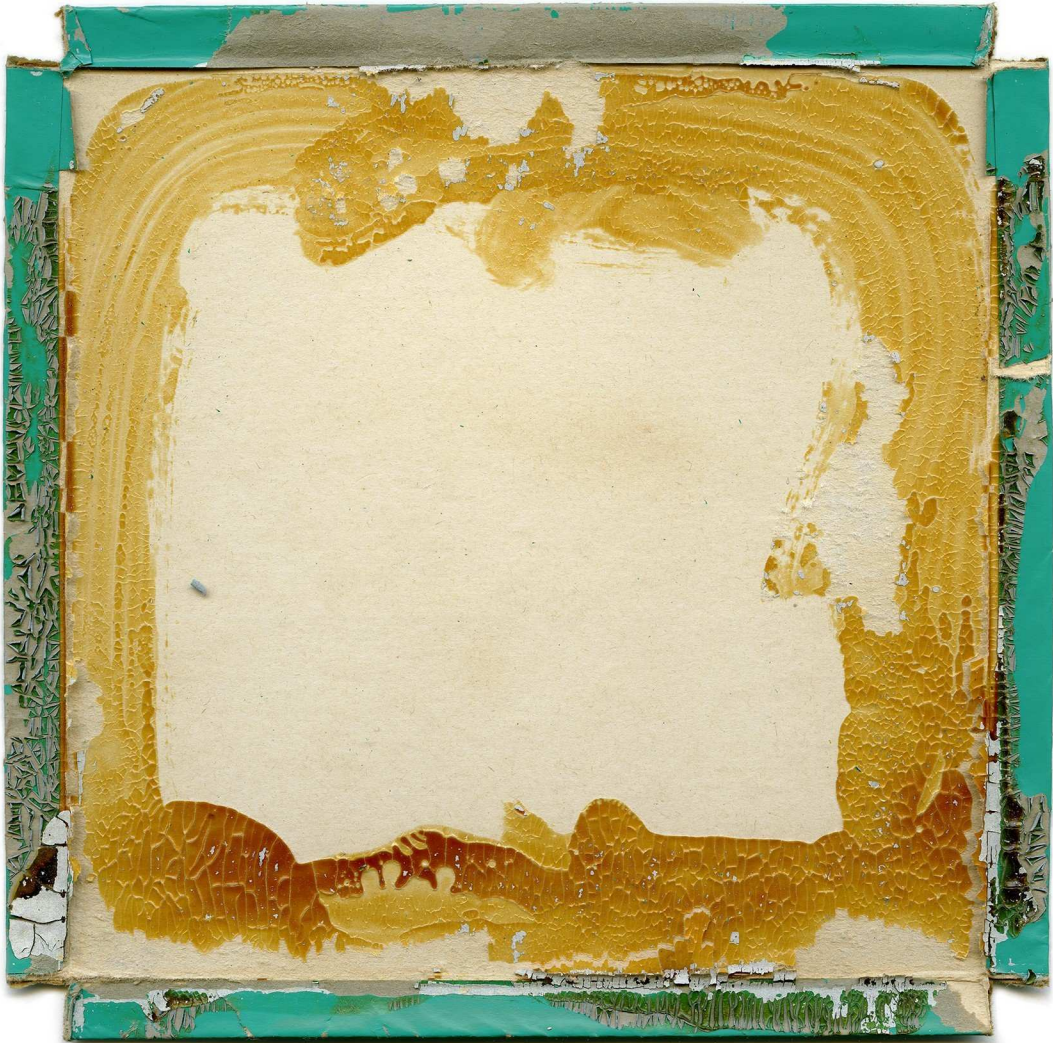












Previous pages, *Howard 1 + 2*, 2011 Archival Pigment Print 44" x 55"

*Totem*, 2012 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches

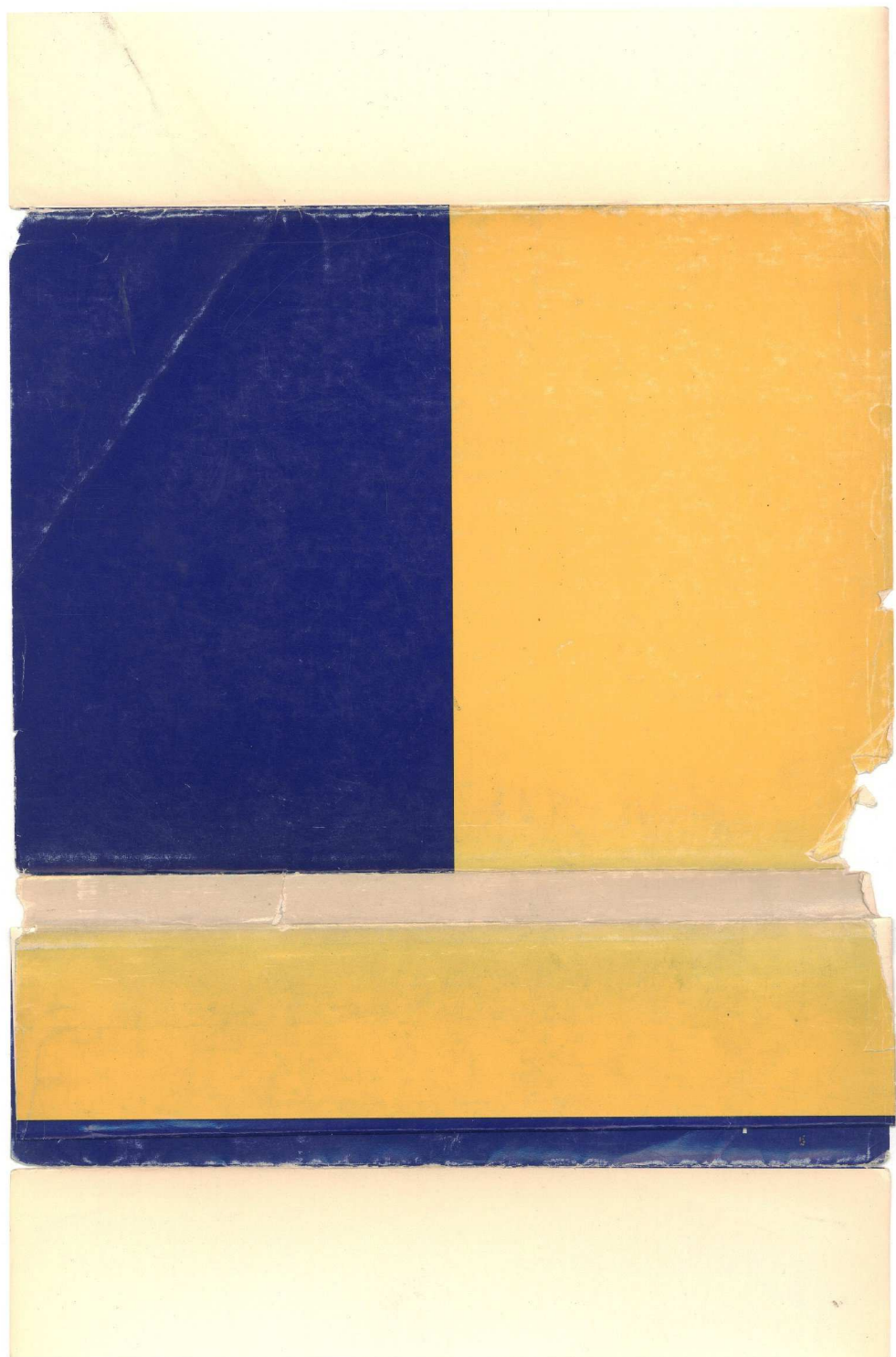




Previous pages, Howard 1 + 2, 2011 Archival Pigment Print 44" x 55"

*Piet*, 2012 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches





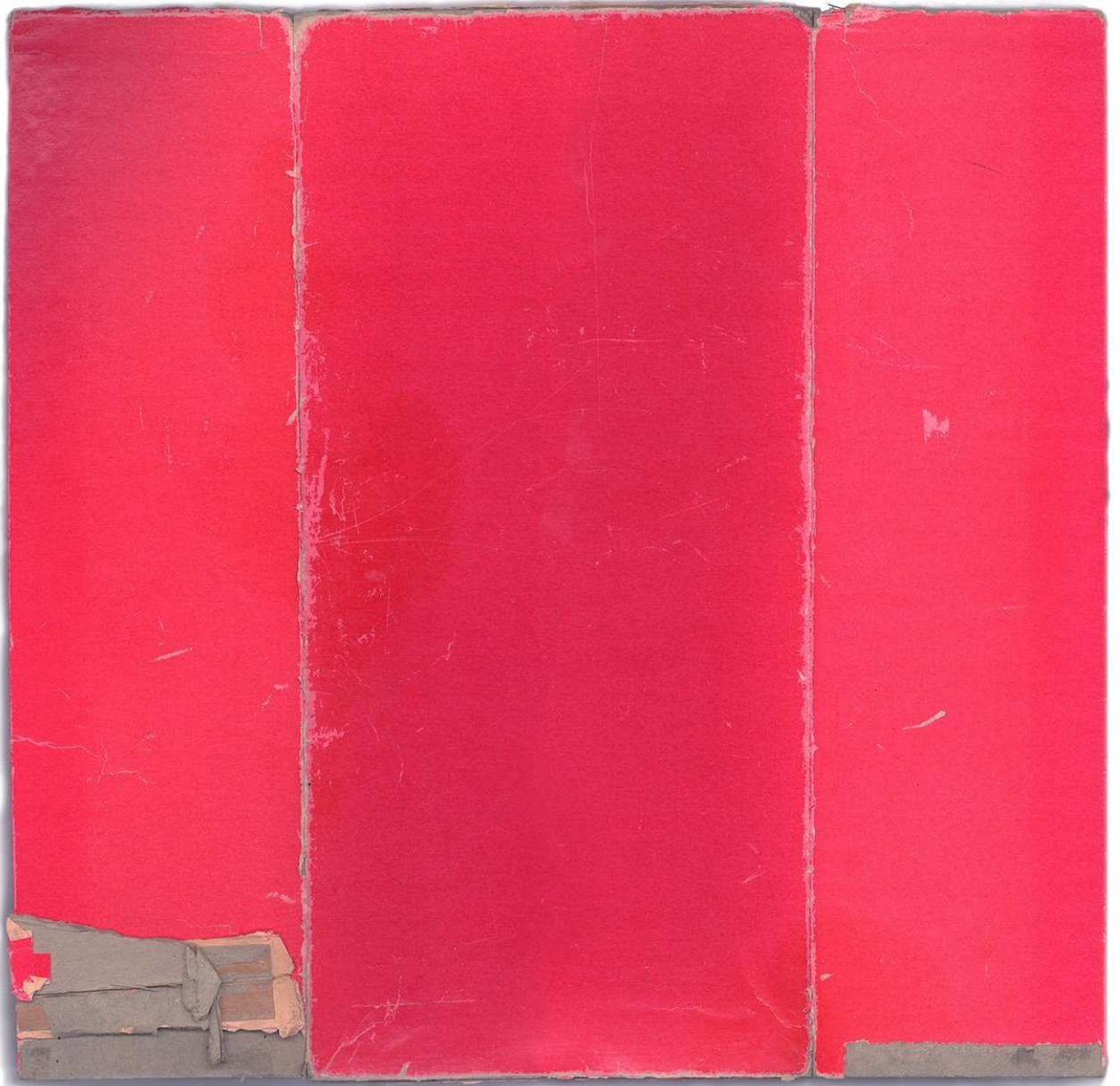






Previous page. *Yellow Crepe*, 2015 (left) *IKB*, 2012 (right) Archival Pigment Print 44x55 inches.

*Elsa*, 2012 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches









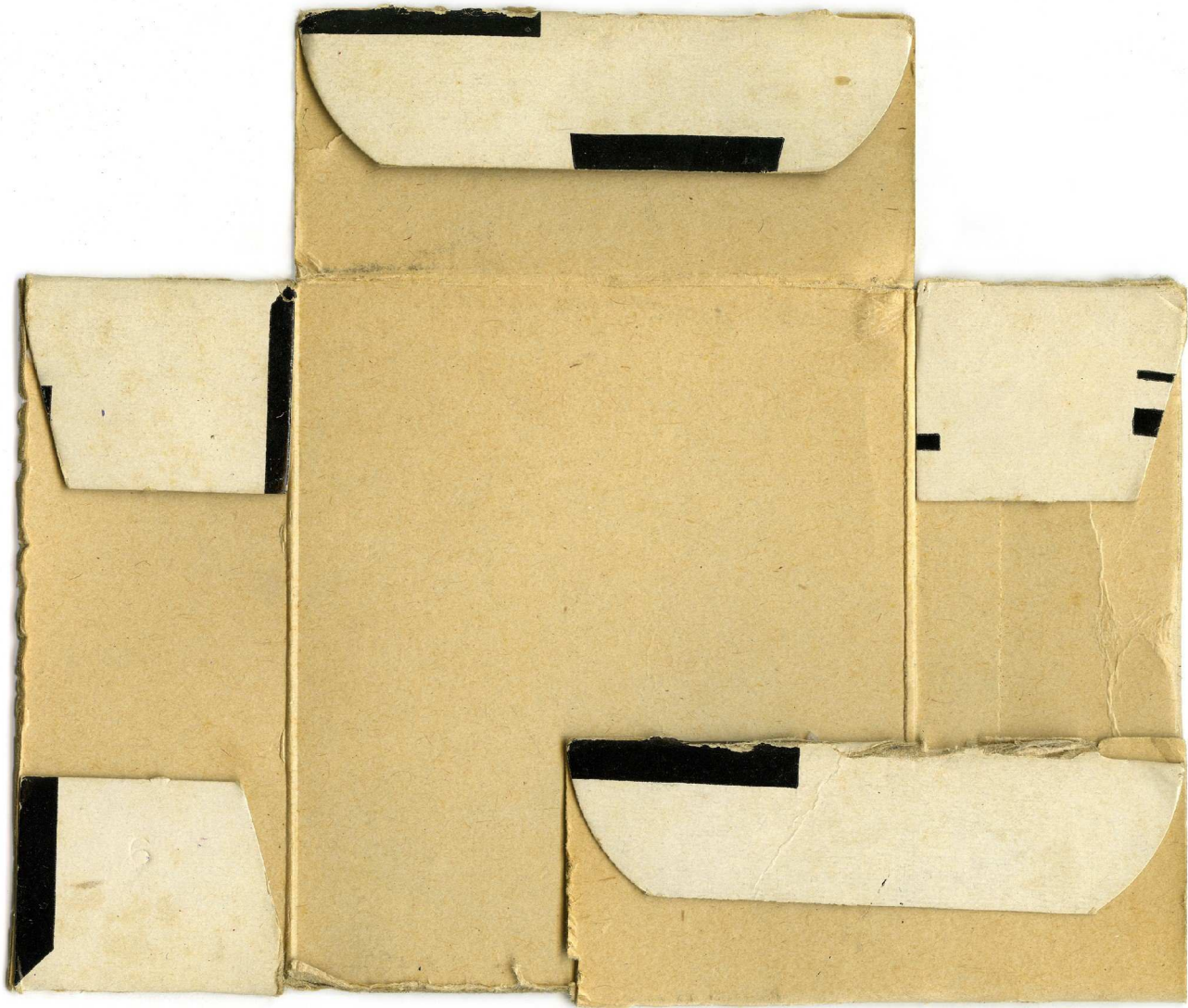






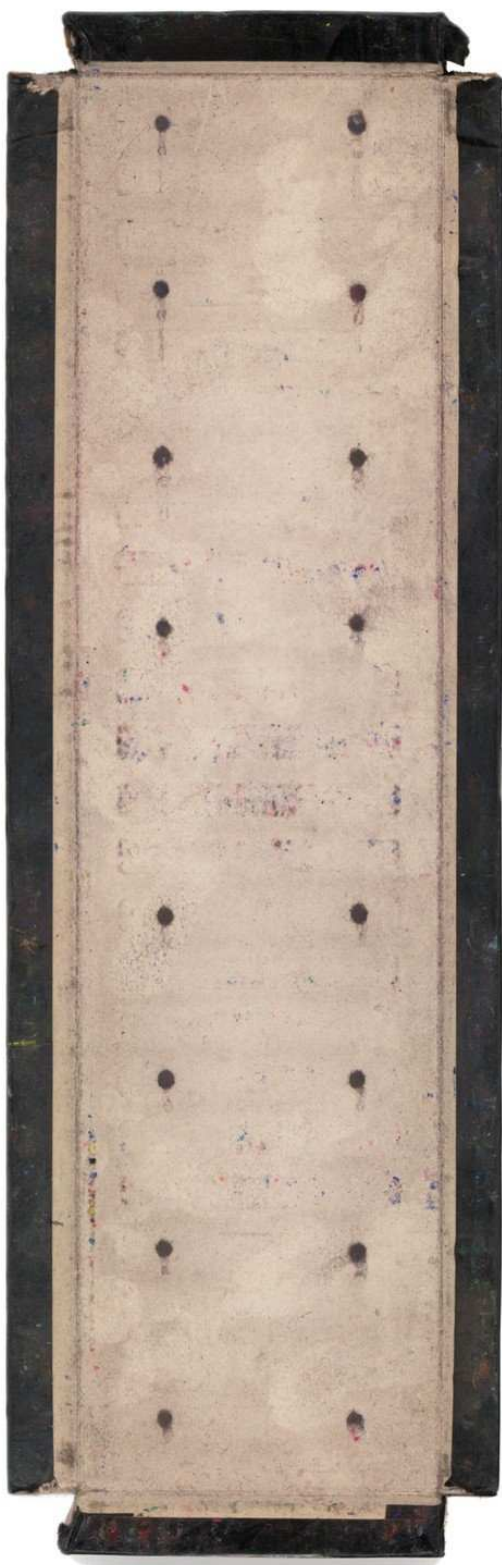




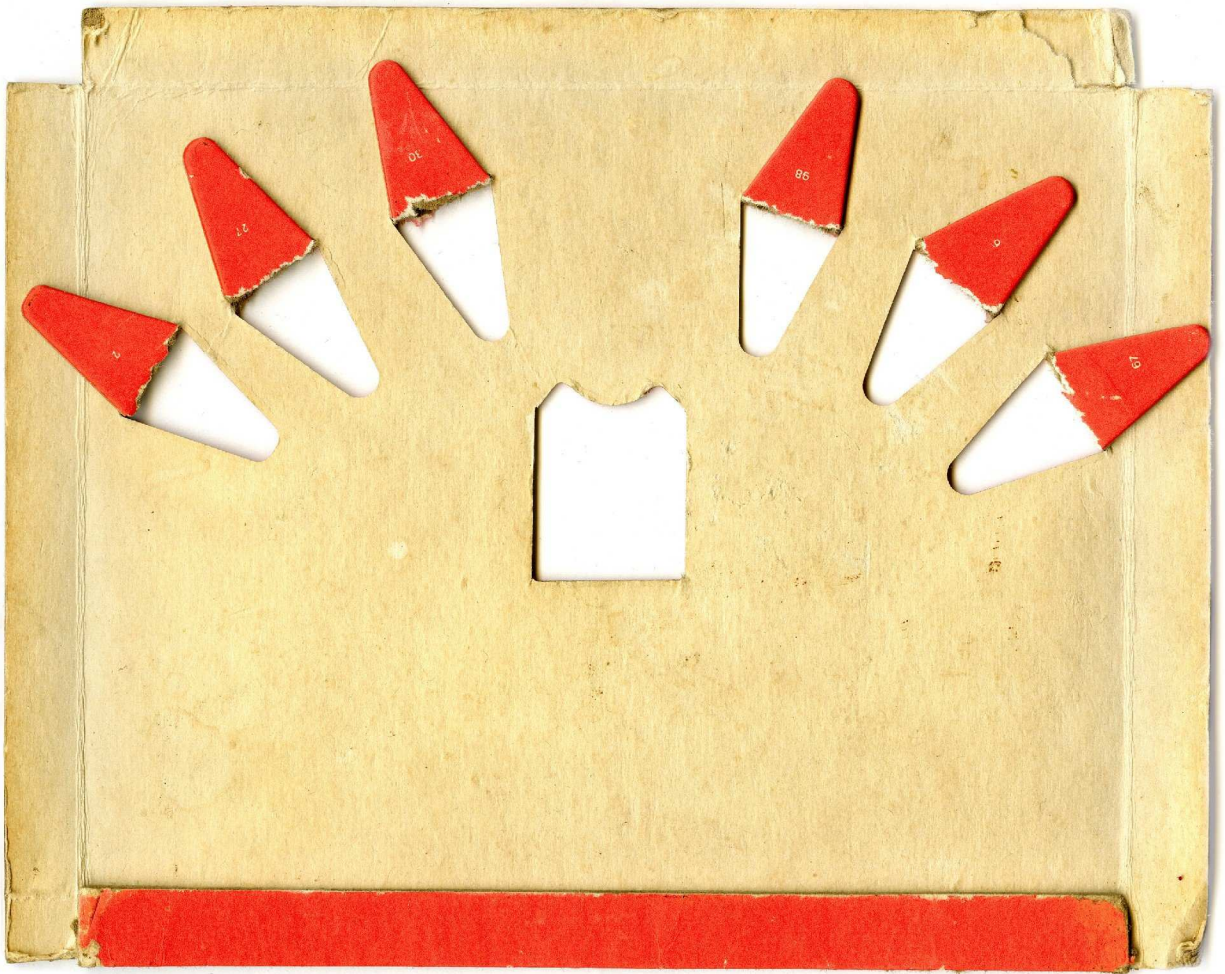






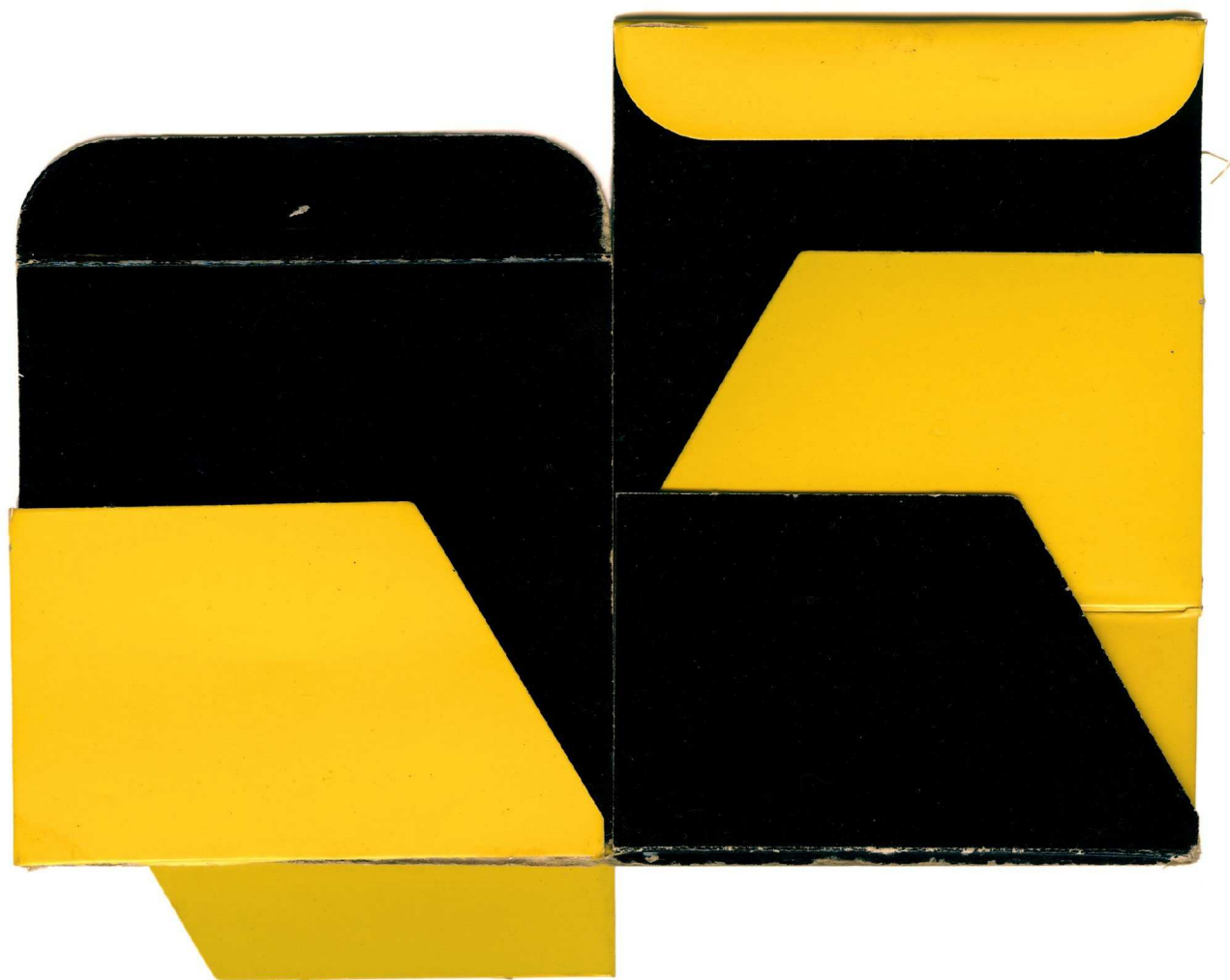




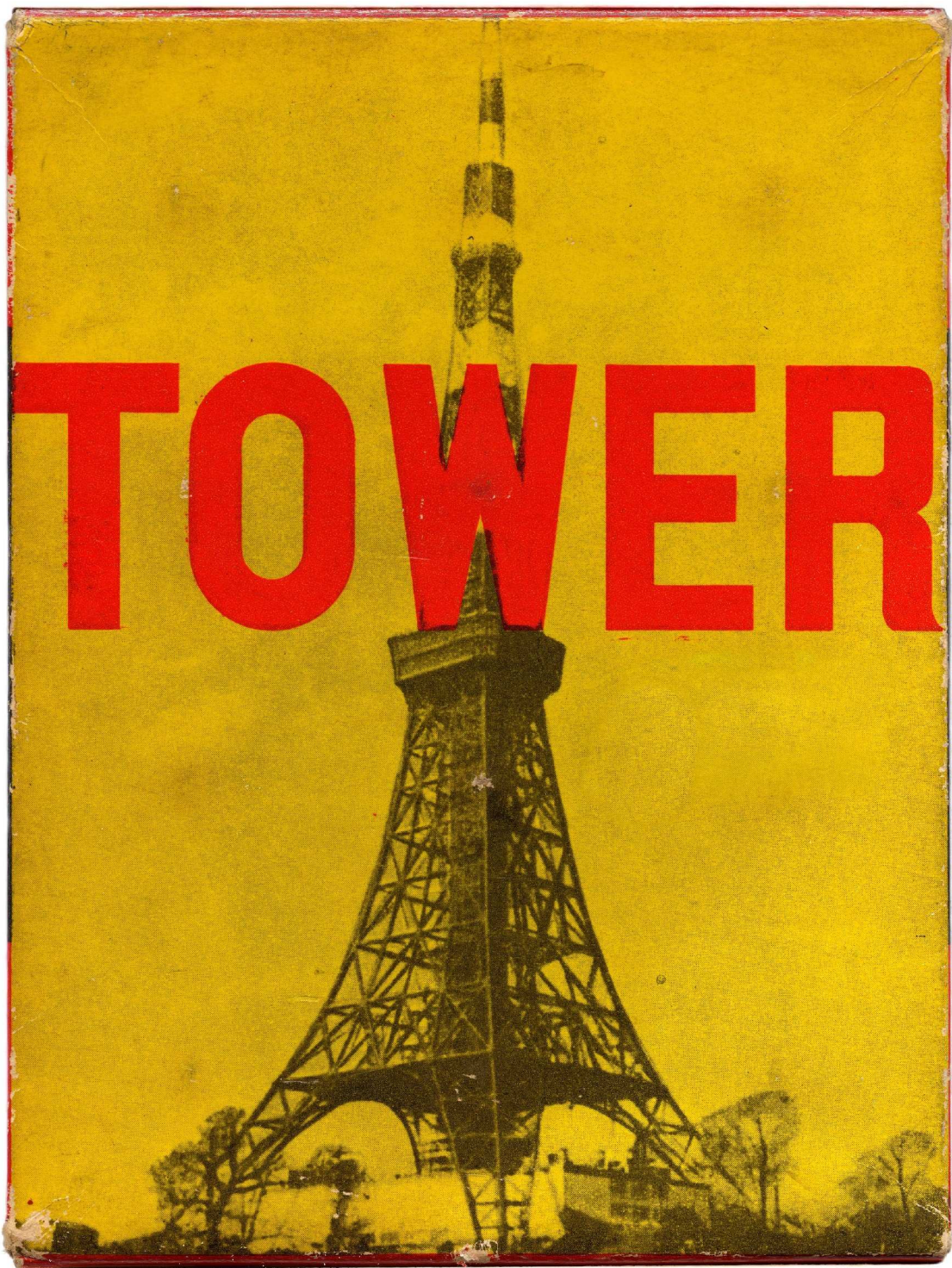






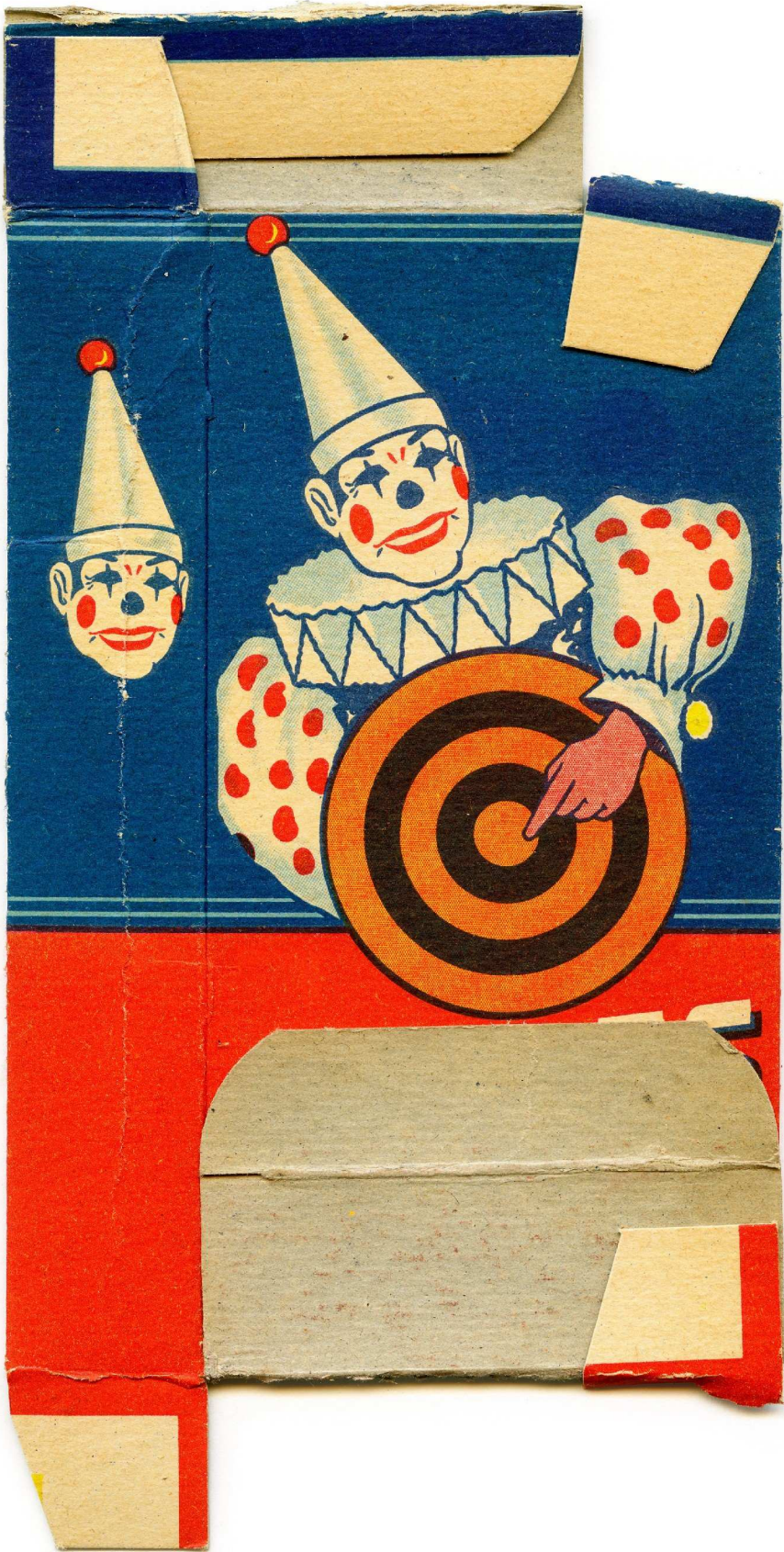




















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21

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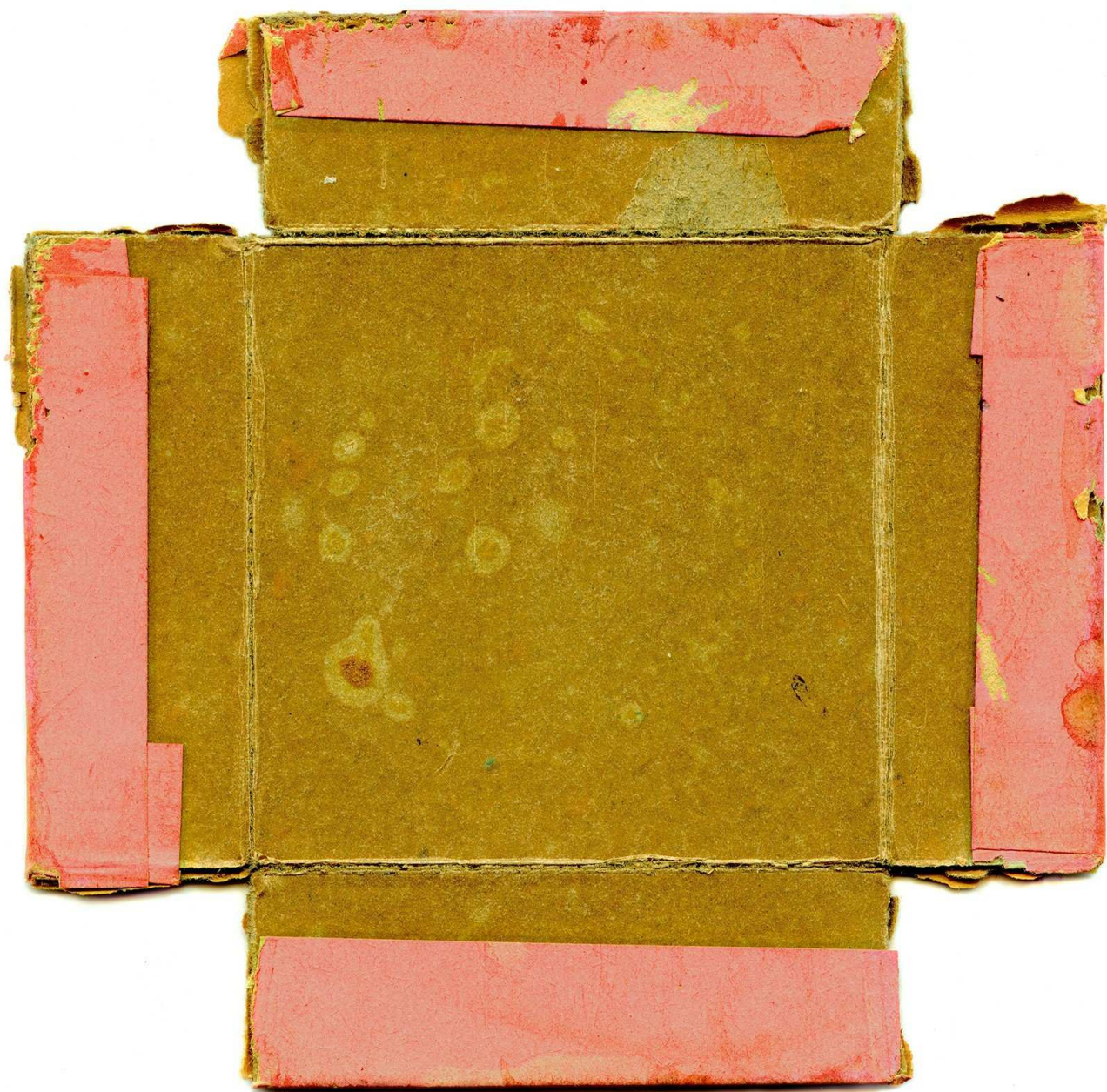
**NATURAL GLUE**

NOT INTENDED FOR SALE TO MINORS









Previous page: Mrs. Hammelli + 2, 2014 Archival Pigment Prints 44 x 55 inches,

Bue Paper, 2013 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches





















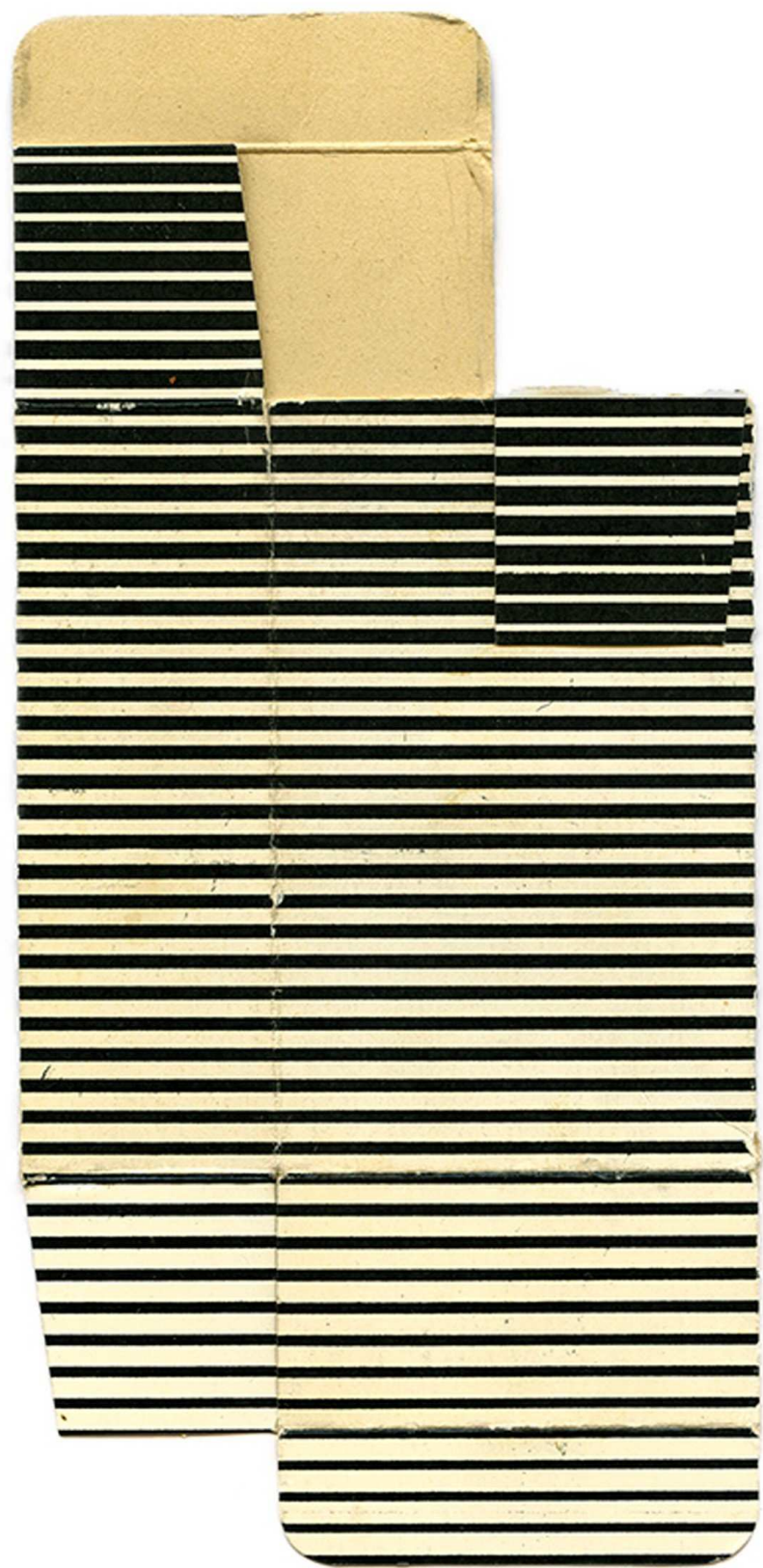


*Man (The Lovers)*, 2013 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches  
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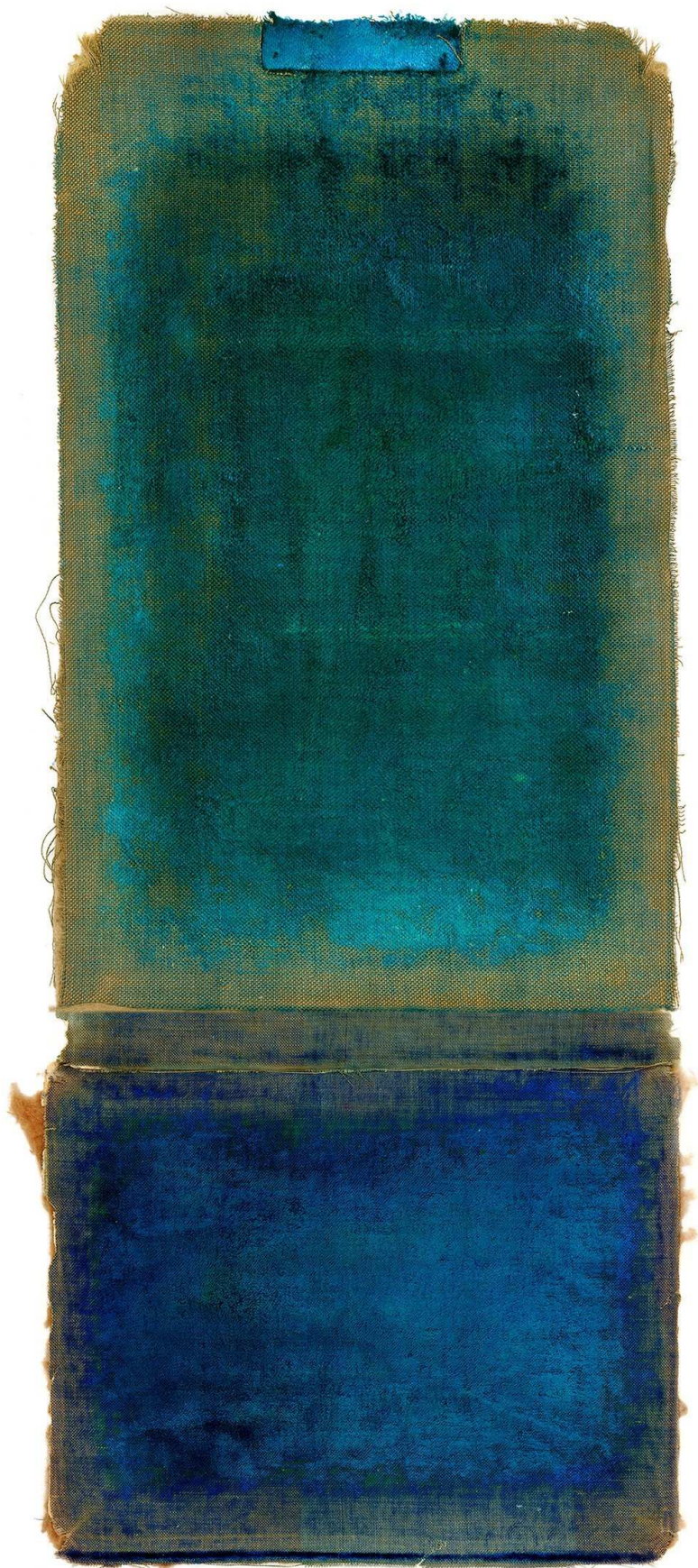




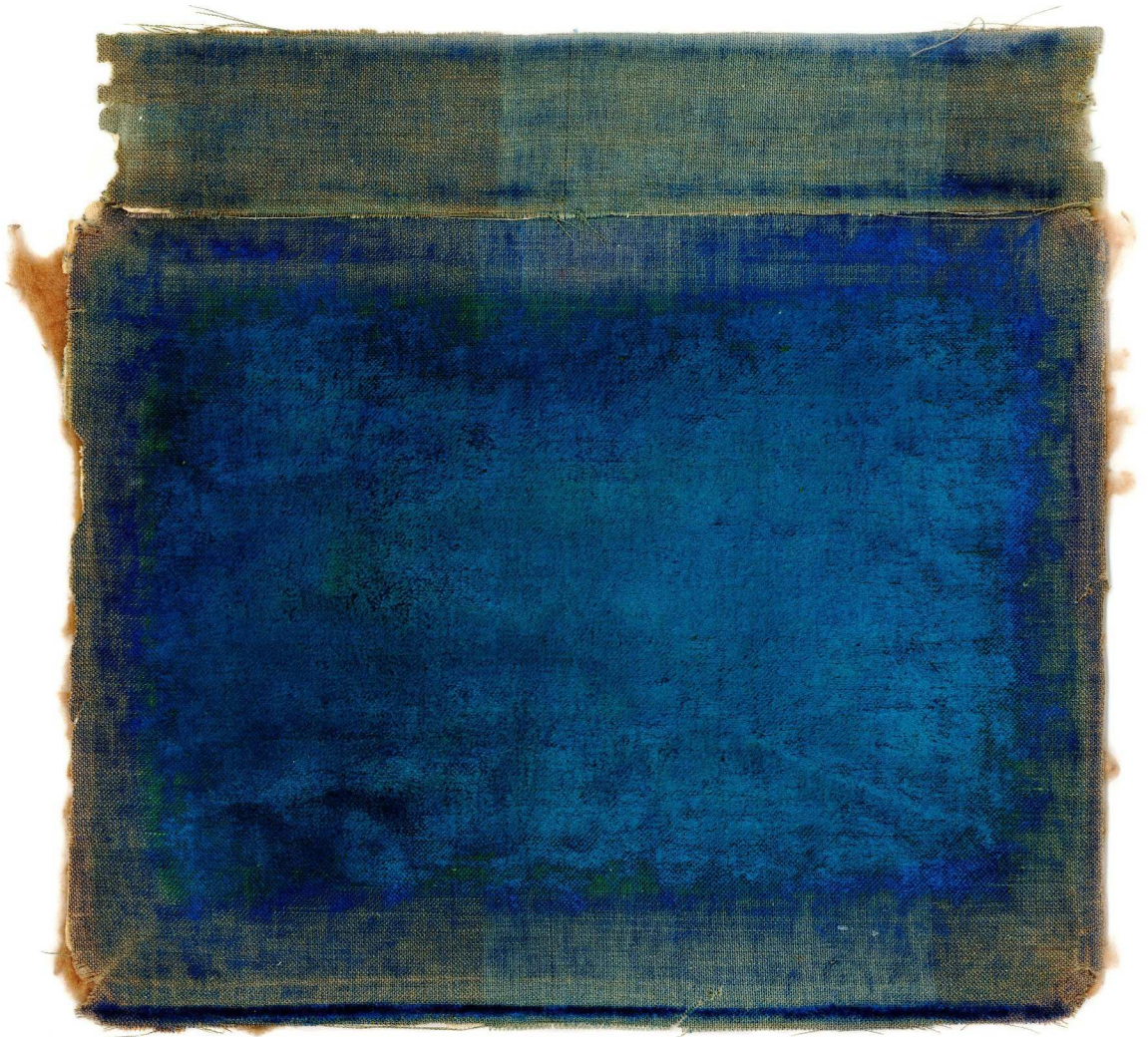














Previous page Giverny 2 and Giverny. 2014. Archival Pigment Prints.44x72" and 44x55"

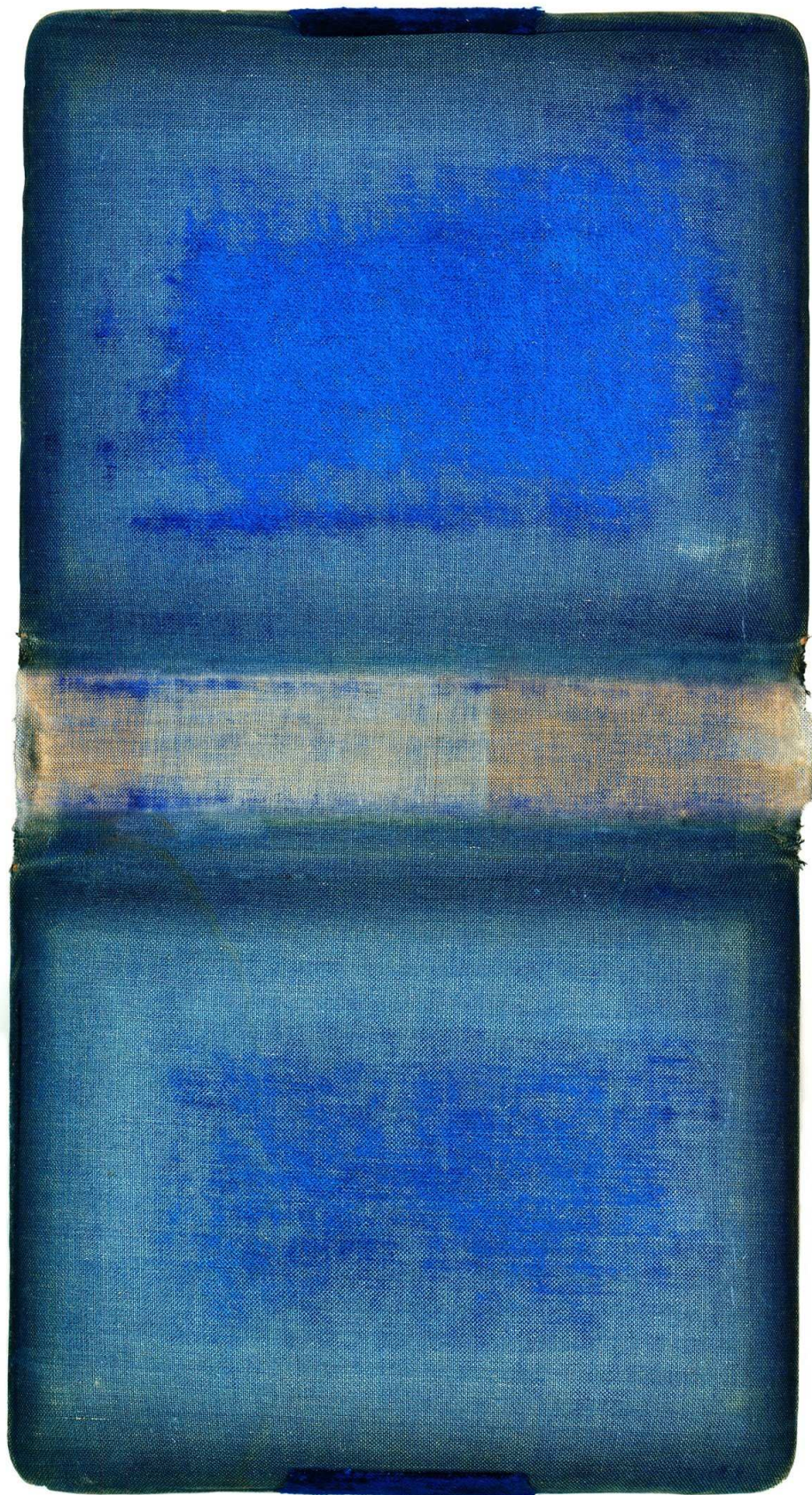
*Curry*, 2013 Archival Pigment Print 44 x55 inches







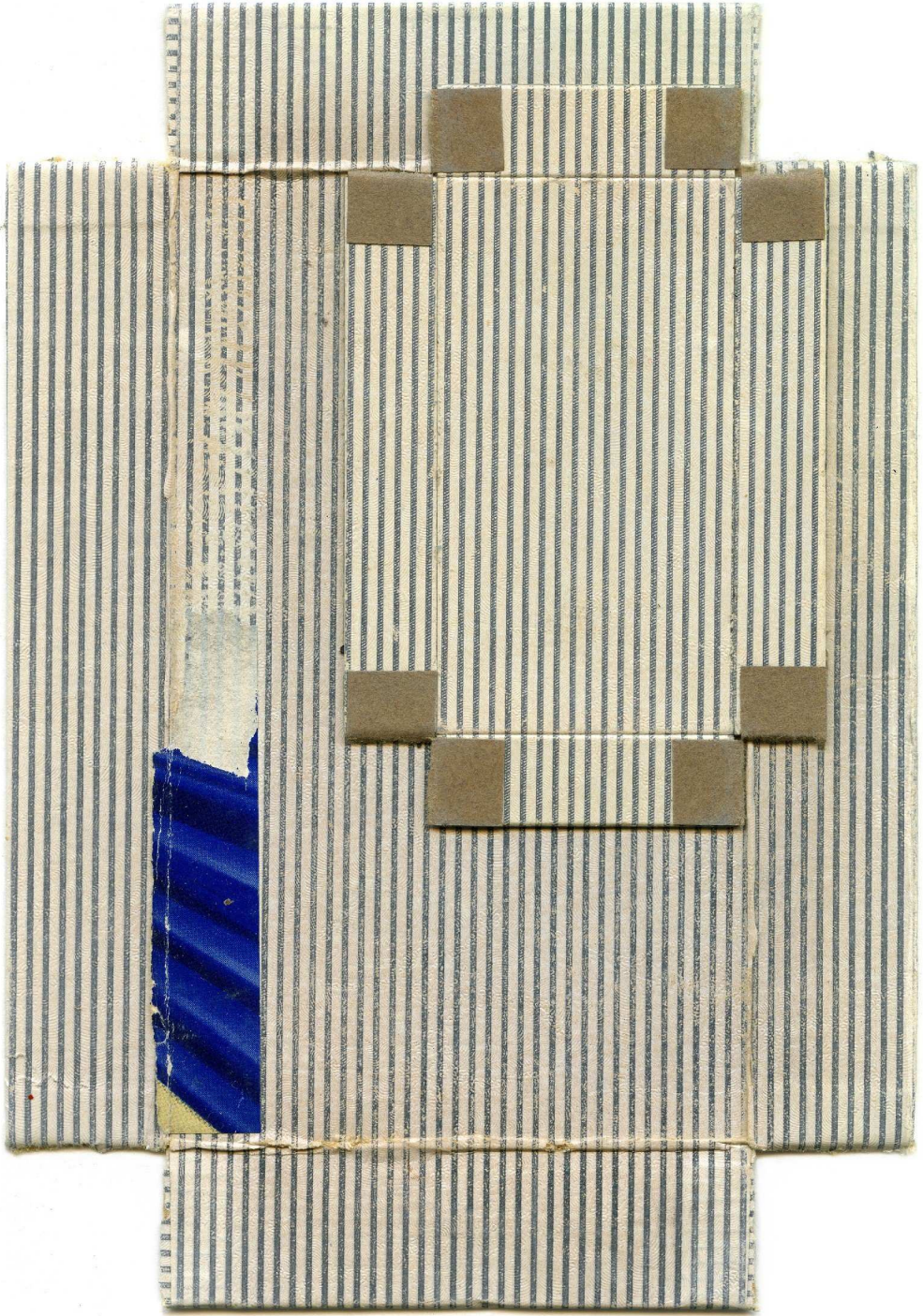




Previous page left *Redmond*, 2014. Right, *Atlanta*, 2014 44x71 inches. Archival Pigment print.

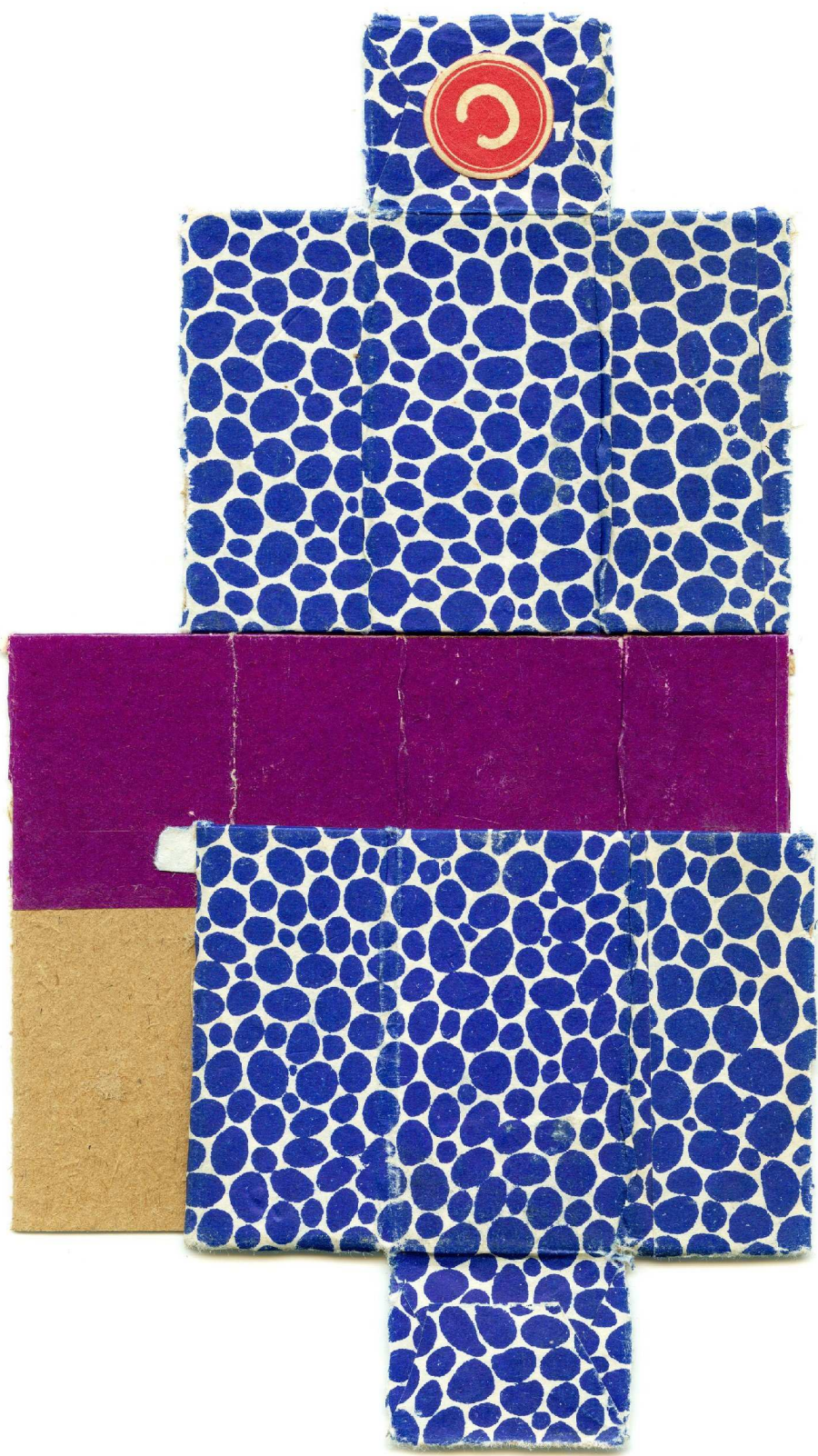
*Blue Stripe Gray Squares*, 2014 55 x 44 inches. Archival Pigment print.









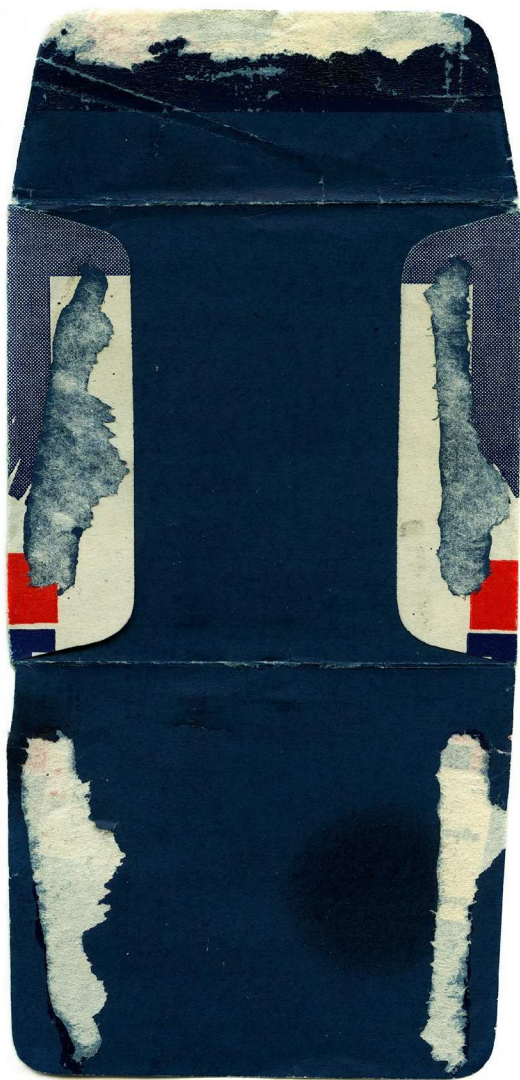
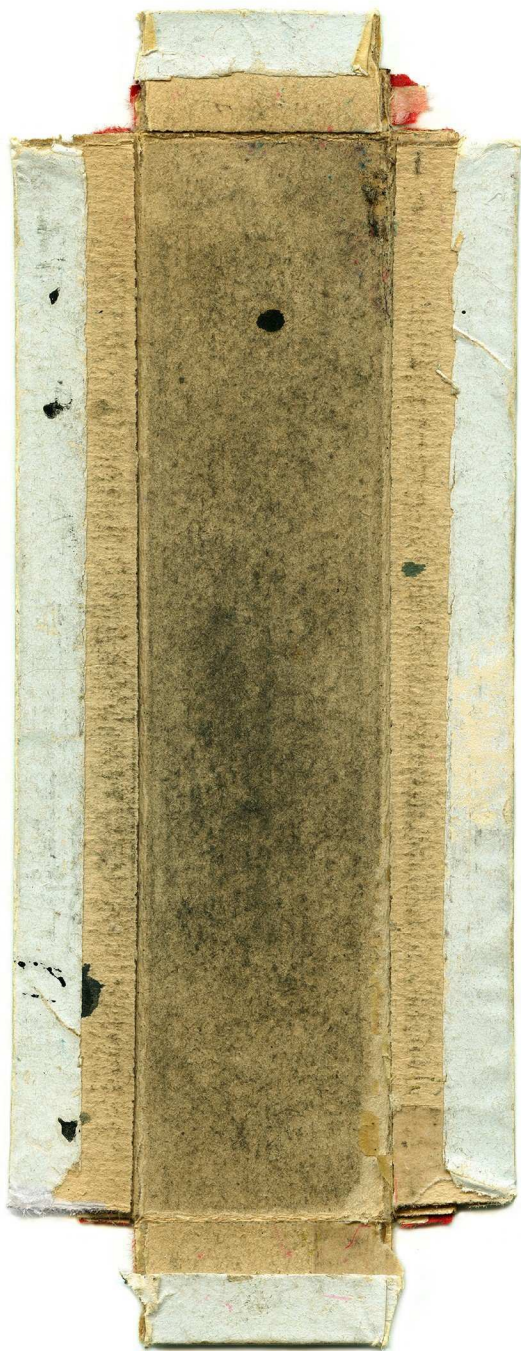








*Blue Howdy*, 2015. Archival Pigment Print. 44 x55 inches.













BEWARE OF IMITATIONS

Lee Sen Kee

正老牌



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製造廠在  
九龍深水  
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五百三十  
號 電話  
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MANUFACTURERS PHOTO

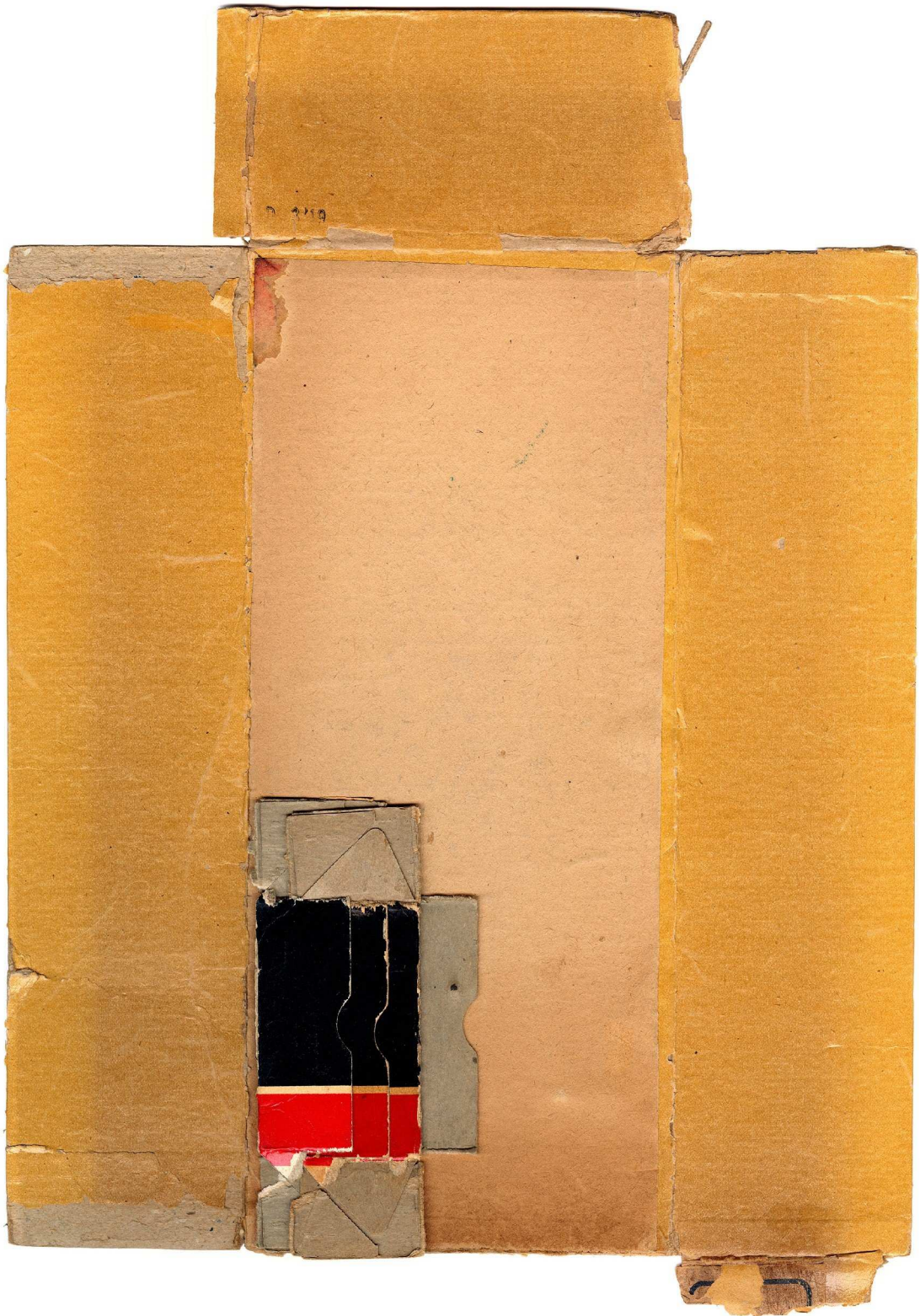








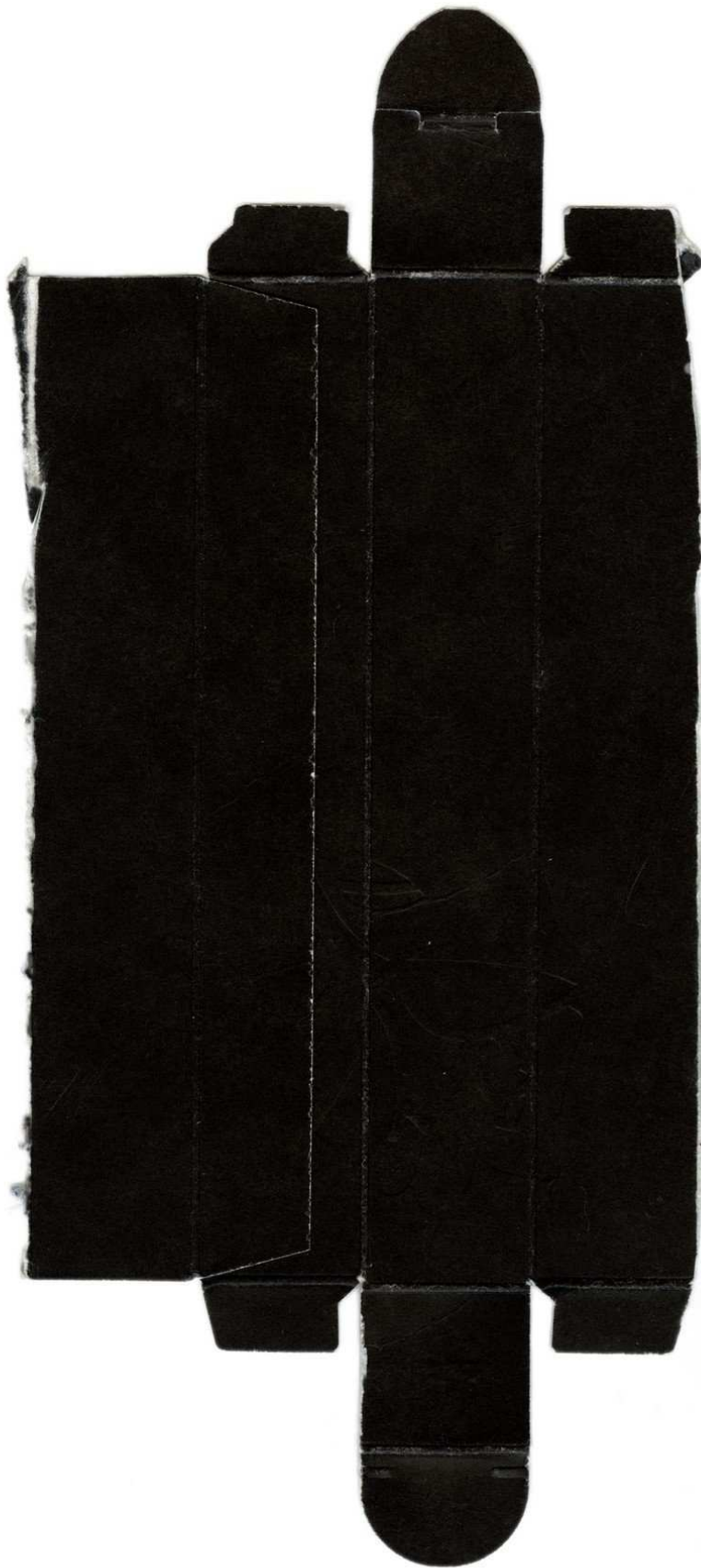




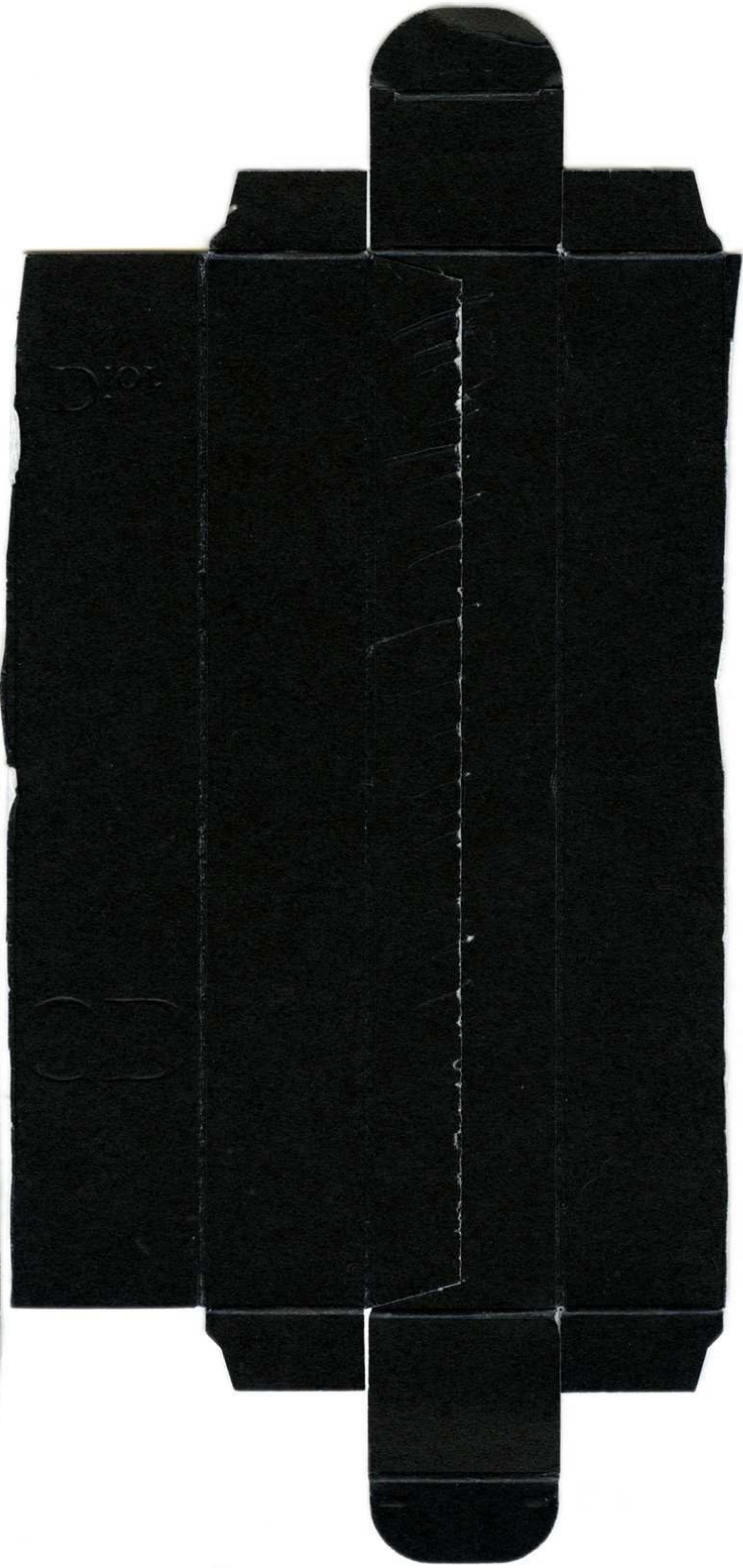














Previous page *Elegy, Robert* 2012 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches



*Marcel 2*, 2011 Archival Pigment Print 44 x 55 inches

**Linda Lindroth** received her Master of Fine Arts degree in Art from Rutgers University Mason Gross School of the Arts in 1979 where she studied with Leon Golub, Geoff Hendricks and John Goodyear. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the High Museum in Atlanta, the Newark Museum, the New Jersey State Museum and Yale University. She has been a book editor, copywriter, curator, gallerist, author, and teacher.

Lindroth has worked collaboratively with her husband, architect Craig Newick, and received grants from the NJ State Council on the Arts, the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, and the New England Foundation for the Arts. She was included in *Emerging Voices* of the New York Architecture League, won three design awards from *I.D.* International Design magazine and is the co-author of *Virtual Vintage* (Random House, 2002)

Visit: <http://www.lindalindroth.com>

Linda Lindroth would like to acknowledge the considerable assistance and support of John T. Hill, Harvey M. Schwartz and Craig D. Newick with thanks to Maureen Gaffney and Becky Conekin.



*Tailored*, 2013 Archival Pigment Print. 44x55 inches.



## The Painting

Once, Hershele was selling antiques and trinkets in the market. Among his wares was a large canvas, that was entirely blank. A customer asked Hershele what it was, and Hershele replied:

*"For a silver shekel, I will tell you about this painting."  
[The man, overwhelmed by curiosity, gives him a shekel].  
Well, this painting is a famous painting, depicting the Jews  
crossing the Red Sea, with the Egyptians in pursuit."*

*"Well, where are the Jews?"*

*"They've crossed."*

*"And the Egyptians?"*

*"Haven't come yet."*

*[Getting frustrated at having been duped]*

*"And where's the Red Sea?!"*

*"It's parted, dummkopf!"*

Hershele Ostropolier was born in Balta in Ukraine during the second half of the 18th century. He was the "wise fool" in Jewish literature.

## Colophon

This book was designed by John T. Hill from files created by Linda Lindroth and John T. Hill in 2011 and 2012. The typeface is The Mix and Georgia. These works were exhibited at the Giampietro Gallery in New Haven, CT from September 7 to October 3, 2012. This work was supported in part by a 2012 Artist's Fellowship Grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.



