

SEQUENCE

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by

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SEQUENCE (36PP.)

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Sequence: Meta-Noir Narratives is a series of ink drawings and specialty prints that reflect the tone and mood of film noir. This tone and mood is obtained by implementation of a 'noir filter.' The filter is applied to appropriated images from contemporary motion pictures. The selection of these appropriated images is based on the cinematic conventions of camera angles, lighting and/or mise-en-scene theory. Visually, the filter is the conversion of a digital still into an expressive monochromatic ink drawing that features a low key lighting effect. This rendering hinders immediate recognition of the image, thereby introducing a sense of déjà vu. The conversion also enables the manipulation of characters and settings of the digital stills. These drawings are sequenced into freely formed non-linear splintered chronologies. The free form method utilizes the juxtaposition of camera shots, subject matter, psychological effect and value. The images are rendered at various scales. The small ink drawings are sequenced in order to emphasize the splintered chronology of film noir and non-linear filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard. The large drawings serve to magnify and direct attention to certain film conventions such as oblique angles and lateral visual focus, which effects are lost when rendering images at a small scale.

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I. Introduction

Sequence: Meta-Noir Narratives is a series of juxtaposed drawn images based on digital film stills. These still images are appropriated from motion picture DVD's and combined in order to form new poetic narratives. This appropriation allows me to reference characters and scenes of a given film to suggest a sense of déjà vu.

As I render these images on various scales I apply what I call a 'noir filter.' This filter is created by expressive application of ink onto paper while incorporating aesthetic conventions of film noir. According to Alain Silver and James Ursini authors of *Film Noir*, the film noir movement lasted from 1941 to 1958. The term film noir was originally used by French critiques to describe the darkening of mood and subject matter in American cinema during that time. The visual iconography of the film noir movement includes chiaroscuro lighting, odd angles, moving cameras, urban landscapes, flashbacks and subjective camera. This visual vocabulary is inserted into two major themes of film noir. One of these themes is "the haunted past," in which a character is escaping a past burden and seeks to conceal it in the dark world of film noir. The second major theme is the "fatalistic nightmare," where the noir world revolves around causality (9-19.)

Using this filter I am able to extract or change the essence of the image to remove it from its original source and incorporate a sense of déjà vu. In order to achieve this déjà vu effect I try to promote the recollection of a viewer's past film experiences. I am attempting to recall specific film memory with out full recognition of a given film. The preferred result is for the viewer to have a new experience with indiscernible familiarity. The monochromatic noir filter also allows this image to be transported from its original

source to the tone and mood into of film noir. After the filter has been applied, images are placed into sequence to create a non-linear poetic narrative.

II. Candidacy Review

Prior to my candidacy review I frequently used a low key lighting method in my photographs that then became the basis for a series of charcoal drawings. In preparation for my candidacy, I began to use appropriated digital images from modern cinema in order to create narrative sequences. I wanted these sequences of images to emulate film noir. The sequences of images were poetically and intuitively constructed by placing one image next to another to form a visual narrative. In these visual narratives I utilized my 'noir filter,' which is essentially a conversion of a color image to a high contrast monochromatic image, using a loosely drawn application of ink with black and white digital prints.

The first series of hand drawn frames was composed of approximately 20 images, each 4.25" x 10", as a way to emulate the ratio of a wide screen format. I then began to investigate digital printing processes in order to achieve images that resembled my hand drawn frames. Through trial and error I discovered that if I printed a digital still image onto wet paper through an inkjet printer, I could create images similar to what I was drawing. In addition to these 'wet prints,' I experimented with various transfer processes. In one process, I would print a digital still onto a piece of dry acetate and apply the inked image to a sheet of moistened paper. This resulted in an abstracted image, far removed from the initial representation of the original image. The abstracted images resulting from

this process allowed for dynamic juxtapositions as I linked them to more representational ones. By sequencing the abstract transfers, 'wet prints' with hand drawn images I began to play with visual rhythms.

The poetic narrative sequences were formed by placing one image next to another, not predetermined but freely arranged based on the formal and aesthetic outcome of each particular drawing. For example, to explore different visual rhythms I placed lighter drawings next to darker drawings or abstract transfer prints next to clear 'wet prints.' Dispersed through these visual rhythms or purposeful lack of rhythm I then interjected the linking of subject matter and camera work. In such an instance I may have placed a drawing that contains characters in two-shot (a camera shot framing two characters) next to a character held at gun point, which might be placed next to a character in one-shot. The established link might infer an act of violence, or determine positions of power among the characters.

III. Process: Manipulation of Materials

The production of all my images begins in the same manner. I first search for potential stills from motion picture DVD's and capture them using computer software. The digital film stills are then converted from a raster based, RGB color, digital image to a grayscale format. I then increase the brightness and contrast of each converted image to replicate a low key lighting effect. Before the image is printed and/or drawn, I convert the image to a vector graphic containing approximately 20 levels of grey tones. This step provides a visual preview of what a final image might look like. If needed, I readjust the

contrast and brightness for the desired low key lighting effect. Once the digital image is adjusted, it is printed for reference or for the purposes of a 'wet print.' I originally used the 'wet print' to simulate matching film stock, but then began to use it as a way to mimic the appearance of ink drawn works. Using a black inkjet printer cartridge, the converted digital images are printed onto water saturated, Arches brand, hot pressed watercolor paper (figure 1.1 and 1.2). (This method is exclusive to the 4.25" x 10" and 3" x 6.5" scaled images.)

Prior to my candidacy review I was accustomed to working in a larger scale with greater manipulation of media so I decided to increase the scale and play of material. The 24" x 55" works require a different set of steps in their creation. I lightly and loosely hand draw the images with non-waterproof drawing ink. Multiple values and bleeds are achieved by allowing the ink to excessively pool and dry. Water and more ink is then applied several times to mimic the unpredictability of 'wet prints' (figure 1.1). The images not using varying bleed techniques are hand drawn using the same non-waterproof drawing ink.

IV. Thesis Development: Method and Sequence

These methods of production are the essence of what I have termed a 'noir filter.' This filter is an emulation of the visual conventions of film noir and its predecessor German Expressionism cinema. The utilization of these conventions is not only a homage to film noir but an attempt to seamlessly combine captured stills that serve as visual language. The filter enables the manipulation of setting and character. I can make one

actor look like another or one setting look similar to another. By applying this filter onto selected images I inhibit their immediate recognition to promote a sense of *déjà vu*. The desired effect is achieved if the viewer feels they have seen such an image before, but can not recall the film or the character.

The 'noir filter' is also present in the framing of the drawings. In film noir, the oblique camera angles establish an imbalance or a character's obscure thoughts. In this particular method of framing, the camera is tilted, no longer horizontal to the floor. I implement this element of the filter during the digital manipulation process by digitally turning and cropping the image. For this same effect, in the drawing process I tilt the image plane. Another convention used in the filter is camera tracking. To establish a tracking effect using still images, I crop the reference image during the contrast adjustment process or by gathering sequential images during the capture process. This tracking effect enables me to dynamically represent time and control rhythm. The intended result is to hold the viewer's attention for a longer duration, showing the importance of these images in the sequence.

At my candidacy presentation I displayed 20 printed and hand drawn stills side by side in a single line. In order to introduce a non-linear narrative, I decided to increase the number of drawings. In addition to providing the viewer with more information to interpret, the creation of more drawings allows me to increase the number of lines within the sequences. This type of display consists of approximately 45 drawings arranged in three parallel lines connected by a single drawing. It contains one large line and two smaller lines (figure 2.1). As in film noir, this approach suggests the convention of a

splintered chronology, flashbacks, and complex story lines. In addition, it contributes to non-linear reading, comparable to the Billy Wilder noir films *Sunset Boulevard* or *Double Indemnity* or the non-linear narratives further developed during the 1960's with the film works of Jean-Luc Godard. Godard sequenced narrative that challenged the order of beginning, middle and end by placing them in a selected order. To promote such non-linear readings in my sequencing format I commonly use the same drawing more than once. While a viewer is interpreting the narrative sequence he or she determines how and where these flashbacks are happening or whether the reoccurring image is present to suggest the same location or moment in time. This reoccurring image can provide an entry back into the main sequence line or other tributary lines. The application of multiples reinforces the non-linear viewing of the narrative sequence, while also representing the film noir convention of character duplicity: the perception of a character versus the character's intent.

In the preproduction phase of the film making process, film makers utilize a storyboarding process to block out each scene. Comparatively, as I began the process of making these narrative sequences, I assume the roles of director of photography, lighting design and editing. These first two roles are most present in the initial steps of my process which include the searching of particular stills and the manipulation of lighting. Assuming these roles, I apply my 'noir filter' and concern myself with what is called *mise-en-scene*. Film theorist Graeme Turner, author of *Film as Social Practice*, defines *mise-en-scene* as the arrangements of elements within a shot (42.) These elements often foreshadow events or provide additional information about characters. With the use of

this filter I am able to remove elements, obscure identifiable characters and manipulate settings, thus determining what is important or significant. As editor, with completed shot and lighting established, I determine image placement in each sequence by linking subject matter, camera shots and value schemes.

Sequencing is the arrangement of drawings in a line to indicate place, setting, and/or state of affairs within the narrative. It is achieved through the pairing or juxtaposition of each frame and the implementation of the 'noir filter.' This is similar to Noel Carroll's explanation of sequencing in *The Philosophy of Motion Picture*. Carroll suggests that one can not think of film making as "grammatical." Although still frames serve as a vocabulary, my methods of sequencing are not a language containing clear rules. The sequences are not created as sentences, but as free formed poetic combinations that utilize common guidelines of editing. These guidelines include the exclusion of like angled or framed shots, or the utilization of entry and exit. As any film theorist would agree, guidelines are not rules and therefore they can be discarded in order to achieve the desired narrative sequence.

As I made hundreds of smaller drawings, their creation became increasingly mechanical. Reading of the sequences became perfunctory and the essence of the gestural stroke became depleted. In contrast, my most recent 24" x 55" drawings personally restored the quality of the smaller drawings as I continued to explore the nature of gesture. The large scale is comparable to how one might view a motion picture. The smaller drawing and sequences are similar to viewing a motion picture on either a portable media device or small television. By viewing a movie at a smaller scale, an

essential element of the cinematic experience is lost. For example, if one views the opening tracking shot of Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* on an ipod or small television the immensity of the dark night in that particular film is lost (Figure 3.1). The vastness depicted in that film can only remain by viewing it on a large display. This not only pertains to the scale of the setting but also to the viewer's overall field of vision. For instance, if one is viewing the hall of mirror scene in *Lady from Shanghai* on a small display, one would lose the power of duplicity of the mirrors and the lateral visual focus shift that occurs (figure 3.2).

In *The Simple Art of Murder* Raymond Chandler wrote "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid." This quote is for some the ultimate definition of film noir. The image appropriated for figure 4.1 was obtained because it embodies this definition and furthers the viewers understanding of film noir. In order to amplify the solitary figure walking "these mean streets" I chose to draw this image larger. Measuring 24" x 55" the gestural strokes and bleeds exemplify this dark world of noir. The appropriated image for figure 5.1 was chosen for a similar reason. Appropriated from the film *The Usual Suspects* the original image depicts the character of Dean Keaton thrown back into the criminal underworld. Filmed in high angle, which shows Keaton's lack of control of his situation, he walks unafraid to his impending death.

The captured image for the drawing in figure 6.1 was chosen for its *mise-en-scene* characteristics. Appropriated from *Mr. Brooks*, the image contains a reflection showing the duality of Mr. Brooks as both a respected business man and serial killer. In order to

view this image as initially intended a lateral visual shift on behalf of the viewer is required. If this image were drawn as a 4.25" x 10" frame, lateral eye movement would be minimal and the viewer would only see the second Mr. Brooks in frame as a reflection not as a separate entity. Lateral eye movement is also intended in two-shots, as represented in figure 7.1. In a smaller drawing one sees the conversation taking place wholly and not back and forth between each character.

V. Influences

The influences of my noir filtered drawings extend through cinema. The films I am appropriating from, serve as the most influential element in the creation of the narrative drawings. Each image captured retains some element necessary to my own narrative. I utilize images from films because of the fiction it portrays, its pictorial essence or lighting captured in a given still. They are a pastiche through imitation of not only film noir but of the film.

As I formed these narrative sequences I began to examine the major influence of film noir to better understand the psychological impact of lighting and camera angles. During World War II German Expressionist filmmakers fled to the United States bringing with them film aesthetics and techniques that would comprise film noir. One of these conventions is the use of low key lighting which creates a harsh environment for the characters and in some instances melodrama. The lighting represents the conflict between good and evil, light and dark, and personal struggle. Further examination into German Expressionist film would yield the origins of other film conventions. While

studying such films I paid particular note to the pinnacle of German Expressionist film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

According to John D. Barlow, author of *German Expressionist Film*, the film's lighting effect in combination with the angular set designs intensifies the uneasiness of the distorted world of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. Barlow also notes that these elements distort the viewer's perspective and three-dimensionality depriving them of spatial relations (38-39.) The set design for this film is angular in nature, lacking horizontal and vertical lines which enhance the disorder. This was the precursor technique to oblique camera angles later used in classic film noir. The sets of this film were painted in manner of expressionist artists, incorporating broad gestural lines. In the film, Dr. Caligari goes to the city office to obtain a carnival booth permit. The worker in the office is sitting on an elevated stool to demonstrate a position of power over the Doctor. Similarly, the police officers in the film are depicted in the same position to demonstrate authority or domination. Prior to modern effects, the film makers consciously designed the set and props in this manner in order to achieve what was later accomplished by tilting the camera. These elements founded the high, low, and oblique angled camera shots which were used in order to achieve a subliminal psychological impact on the viewer.

Understanding the psychological approaches of German Expressionists aided in the expansion of the sequencing process. I began to deliberately use these conventions as I developed the narrative by juxtaposing camera angles. By including this in my 'noir filter,' I linked opposing forces or positions of power in a given sequence. In order to use this knowledge to full effect it has become part of how and or why I choose the

appropriated image, thus expanding the ‘noir filter’ to now include every part of the process of making noir narrative sequences.

I am also influenced by the work of contemporary artist Zak Smith. Smith’s work interjects elements of abstraction into an illustrative sensibility. He created a series of drawings entitled, *One Picture for Every Page of Thomas Pynchon’s Novel “Gravity’s Rainbow.”* In his interpretation of the text, Smith chose to simplify portions of the fiction and reduce the writing of page to a single representative image. The images are not literary illustrations of the text but are personal interpretations. While making each drawing, Smith introduces abstract qualities by distorting surface planes and figures using hatched line and ink washes. This in turn hinders the images’ objective reception and at times borders on total abstraction. Comparably, just as Smith compresses a text into drawings, I am simplifying a cinematic experience. Smith distorts using hatched lines, and I apply the ‘noir filter’ using gesture and washes. Both Smith’s work and my own employ prior knowledge of a narrative by the viewer, Smith is referencing Pynchon’s text while I am recalling movies the viewer may have seen.

VI. Conclusion

Sequence: Meta-Noir Narratives reflects the tone and mood of film noir by implementation of my ‘noir filter.’ Appropriating images from contemporary motion pictures, I apply this filter in order to hinder immediate recognition of the image, thereby introducing a sense of déjà vu. Visually, the filter is the conversion of a digital still into an expressive monochromatic ink drawing that features a low key lighting effect. The

less apparent characteristic of this filter is the selection of the appropriated image based on cinematic convention of camera angles and/or *mise-en-scene*. By expanding the filter to include these conventions I am able to better articulate a sequenced narrative. These sequences are freely formed into non-linear splintered chronology. The free form method utilizes the juxtaposition of camera shots, subject matter, and value. The images are rendered at various scales. The small ink drawings are sequenced in order to emphasize the splintered chronology of the film noir while the large drawing serve to magnify film conventions that may have been lost at a smaller scale.



Figure 1.1 *Untitled Frame from "Revenge"*, inkjet wet print on paper, 4.25"x 10" 2007

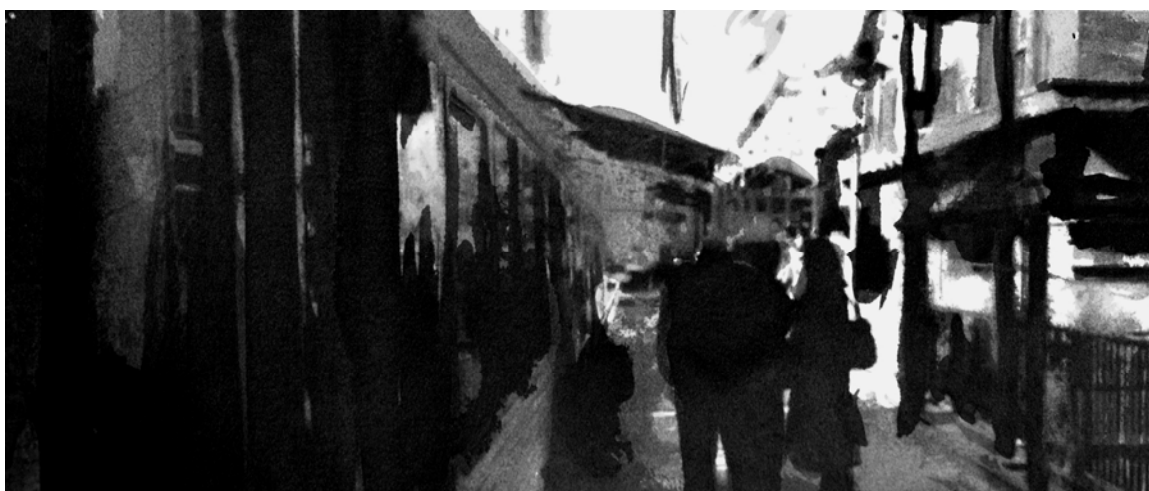


Figure 1.2 *Untitled Frame from "Revenge"*, inkjet wet print on paper, 4.25"x10" 2007



Figure 2.1 *Remember (instillation)*, ink on paper, 22.25"x 204.75" 2008



Figure 3.1 *Touch of Evil*, 1958



Figure 3.2 *The Lady from Shanghai* 1948



Figure 4.1 *Untitled (long shot)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2007



Figure 5.1 *Untitled (High-long)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2007



Figure 6.1 *Untitled (mise-en-scene)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2008



Figure 7.1 *Untitled (two-shot)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2008



Figure 8.1 *Untitled (shoot-thru)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2008



Figure 9.1 *Untitled (oblique)*, ink on paper, 24"x55" 2008

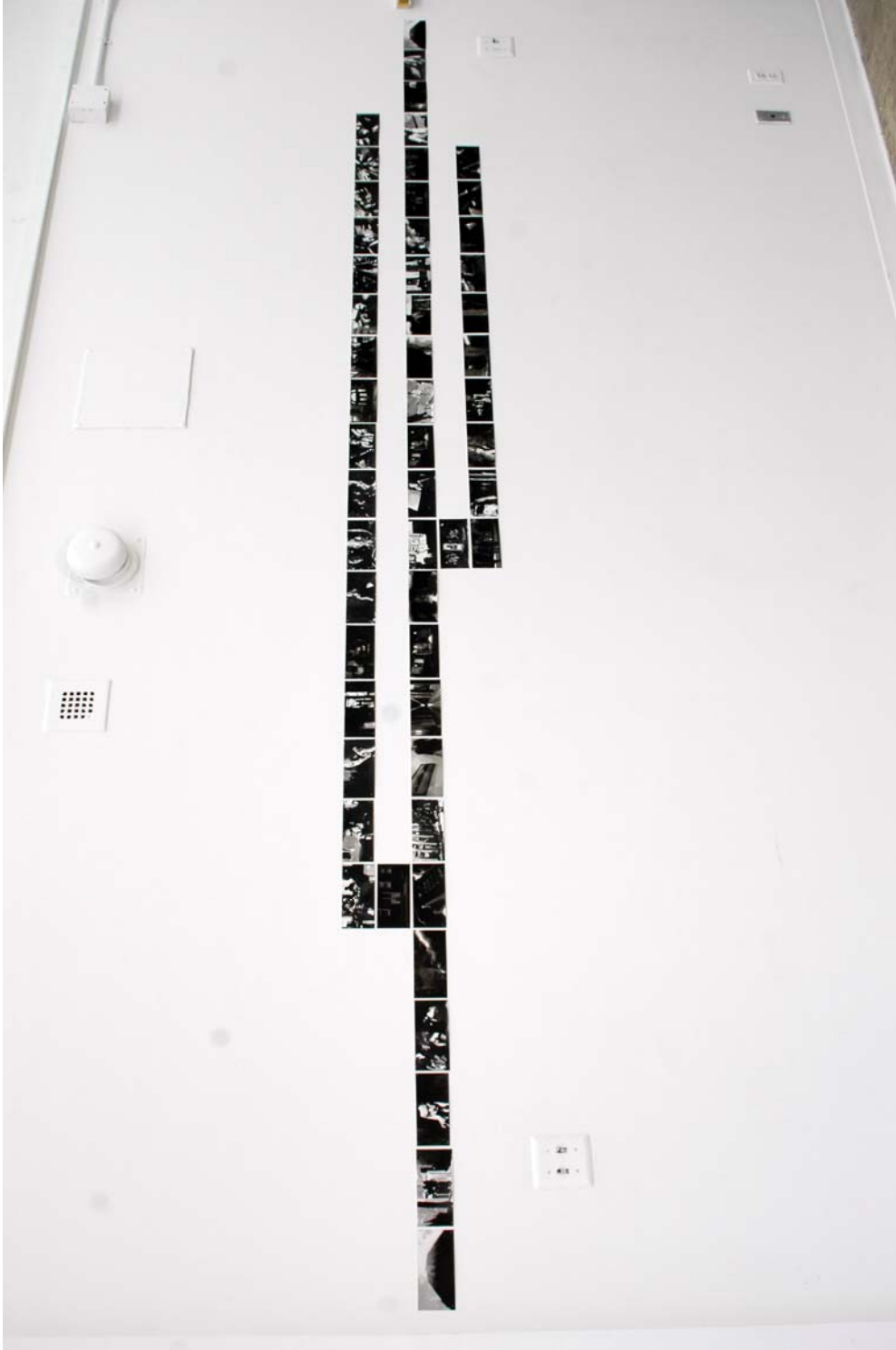


Figure 10.1 *Businessmen for Murder (installation), ink on paper, 16" x 167" 2008*



Figure 11.1 *Businessmen for Murder* (detail 1)



Figure 12.1 *Businessmen for Murder* (detail 2)

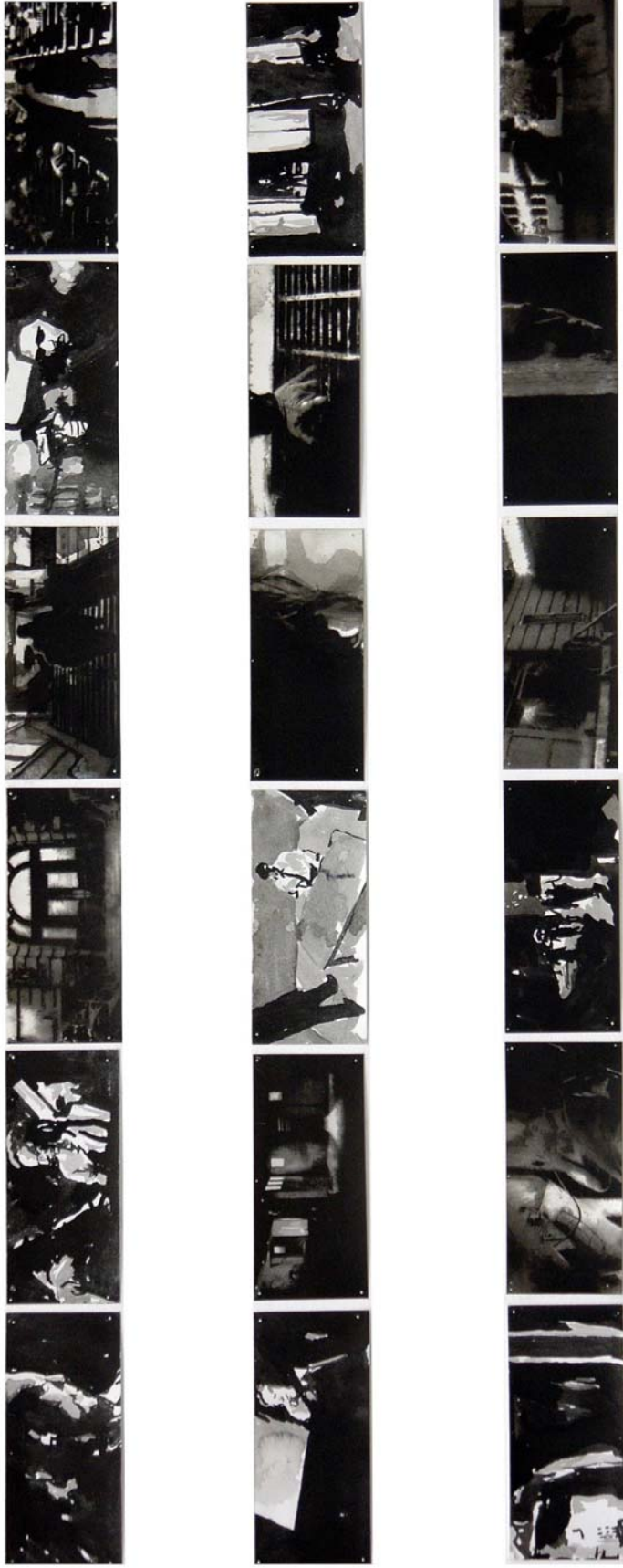


Figure 13.1 *Businessmen for Murder* (detail 3)



Figure 14.1 *Businessmen for Murder* (detail 4)

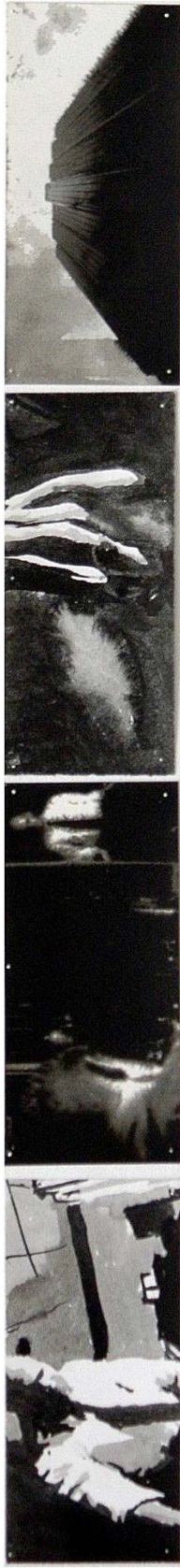


Figure 15.1 *Businessmen for Murder* (detail 5)



Figure 16.1 *Remember* (detail 1)



Figure 17.1 *Remember* (detail 2)

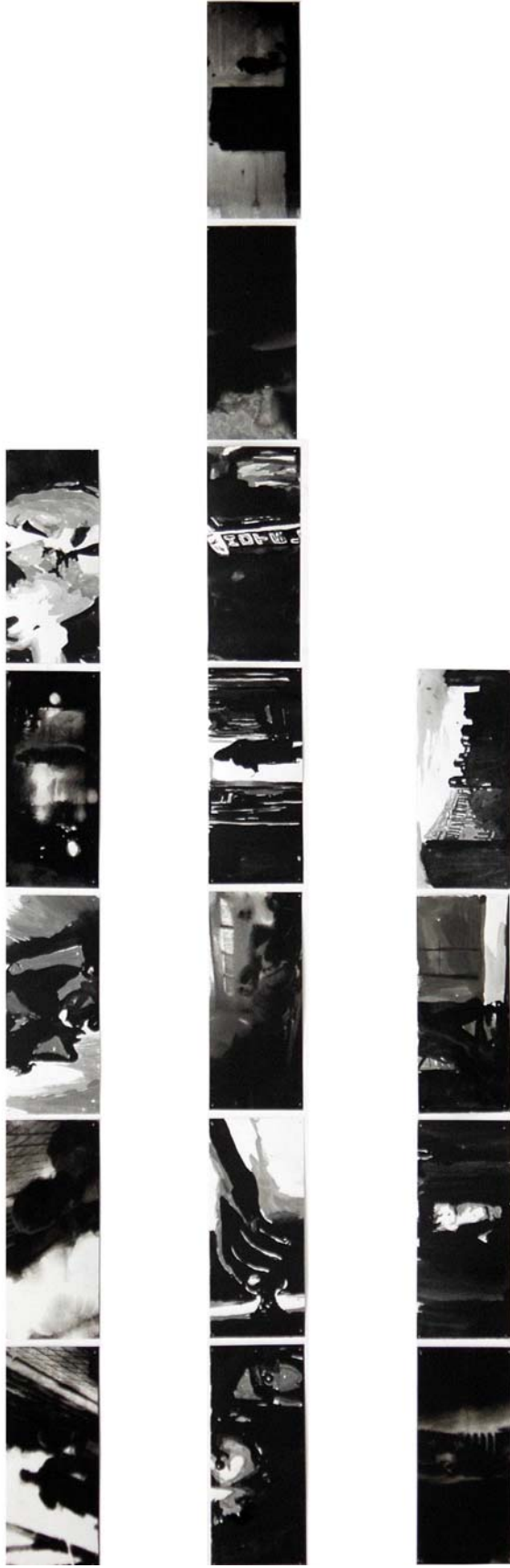


Figure 18.1 *Remember* (detail 3)

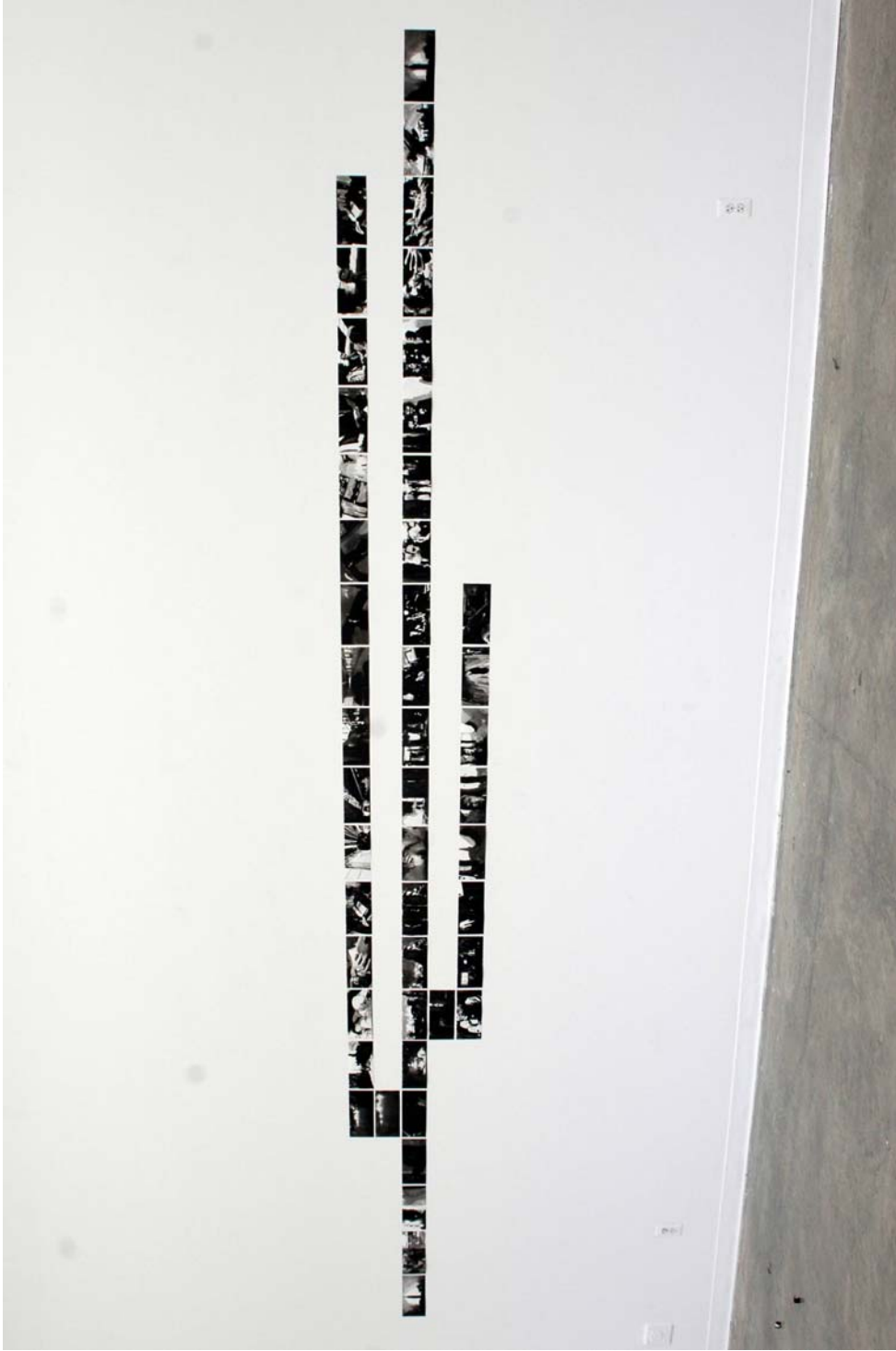


Figure 19.1 *Revenge* (installation), ink on paper, 22.5" x 225.25" 2007



Figure 20.1 *Revenge* (detail 1)



Figure 21.1 *Revenge* (detail 2)



Figure 22.1 *Revenge* (detail 3)



Figure 23.1 *Revenge* (detail 4)

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