



BREITENBACH

RESONANCE



A Woman and Her Conscience, New York, c. 1945

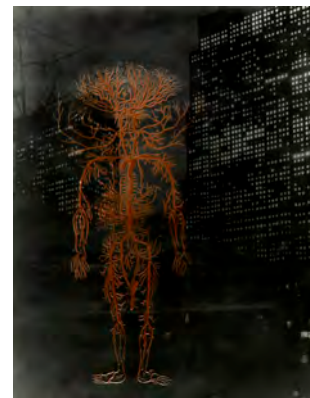
JOSEF BREITENBACH
RESONANCE

Temple Rock Company

Josef Breitenbach (1896–1984) created a unique visual vocabulary by incorporating both traditional and experimental processes within a variety of genres throughout his career. Raised with a profound respect for the history of art and culture, he worked with a conscious understanding and appreciation for many different styles of artistic expression, including Modernism, Surrealism and even Pictorialism. Breitenbach explored form and abstraction as well as the sensual and psychological side of his subjects. His photographs exist as aesthetic objects that are also artifacts of a highly innovative period of our history.

Breitenbach was most interested in using photography and color for their transformative and expressive potential. Though he made exquisite gelatin silver prints, he was not bound by the traditional notions of what a photograph should be. He often employed a variety of techniques, sometimes combining them; they included: camera-less photography, montage, toning, bleaching and hand-coloring.

Josef Breitenbach was born in Munich to a wine merchant family in 1896. He studied philosophy and art history at Ludwig-Maximilian University and was a left wing political activist early in his career. Breitenbach was self-taught and made his first pictures in 1927 while traveling for the wine business. He opened his first photography studio in 1930 in Munich where he ran a successful business photographing prominent actors, cabaret performers, writers and political figures. Mark Holborn points out in his essay in *Josef Breitenbach: Photographer*: “His subjects form a cast of characters, many of whom would die in the Nazi purges. The photographs are reminders of a lost generation.” Holborn also explains that when Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, it was Breitenbach’s “socialist connections from his youth in Munich, not just his Jewish Identity” that attracted the attention of the Nazis. Larisa Dryansky, in her essay *Josef Breitenbach: Manifest Beauty*, relates:



We New Yorkers, 1942

In August 1933, a bank of SA troopers banged on the door of his studio. Thrusting under their noses a portrait of Von Papen he’d taken the year before, and a letter of thanks he’d received in exchange, Breitenbach convinced the gullible bullies that he was under the former chancellor’s protection. With his passport about to expire, Breitenbach made his way to France a few days later, joining the cohort of German exiles seeking refuge in Paris.

Paris in the 1930s was a center for the avant-garde. It was energized by artists from different countries with diverse cultural perspectives, working in every medium. By the 1930s color film was commercialized, but Breitenbach chose a more innovative approach. He added color in the darkroom, sometimes toning or “painting” with chemicals that would turn certain colors when exposed to light. He, along with Hans Bellmer, was one of the few artists to use color in photography in an expressive, rather than realist, manner.

Soon after his arrival, Breitenbach was included in the 1933 Salon international de la photographie at the Société française de la photographie in Paris. In 1934 Galerie de La Pléiade gave Breitenbach his first one-person exhibition. He continued making portraits, photographing artistic luminaries, including Bertolt Brecht, Max Ernst, James Joyce, Aristide Maillo and Wassily Kandinsky. Max Ernst introduced him to the Surrealist milieu, but Breitenbach rejected much of the dogma. Nevertheless, his work was included in important Surrealist photography exhibitions alongside photographs by Man Ray, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Eli Lotar and Roger Parry. By 1938 Breitenbach was elected a member of the Société française de la photographie and in 1939 he joined the Royal Photographic Society.

Breitenbach was interned in 1939, escaped via Marseille in 1941, and arrived in New York City in 1942. It is

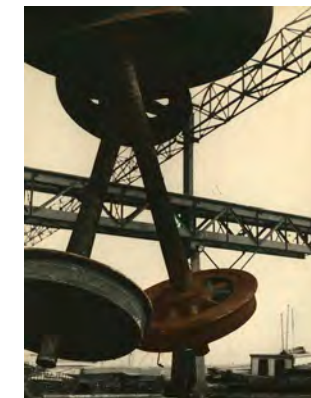
difficult to speculate how much the turmoil of World War II affected Breitenbach’s psyche, but there is evidence that he found a sense of solace in being a New Yorker as seen in his piece, *We New Yorkers*, 1942.

This picture was made by photographing a medical illustration of the nervous system and printing it on a film/translucent material that presents the positive image in red; Breitenbach then adhered the film to the surface of a gelatin silver print of Rockefeller Center. With John D. Rockefeller Jr. continuing to build during the depression, providing thousands of jobs, the construction of Rockefeller Center was a huge morale boost to the city and thus became a symbol of perseverance, hope and community.

In New York Breitenbach resumed his career as a portraitist, photographing prestigious figures such as: Josef Albers, John Dewey, his friend Max Ernst, Lyonel Feininger, Stanley William Hayter and John Steinbeck. Breitenbach came to the attention of Walker Evans, who published his work in *Fortune* in 1942 in “a series on the recycling of scrap metal in the context of the War effort entitled, “What About Steel?””

More work in *Fortune* followed as well as contributions to *Time* and *Town and Country*. In the summer of 1944, at the invitation of Josef Albers, Breitenbach taught photography at Black Mountain College. In 1946 he became a United States citizen and joined the faculty at Cooper Union and later The New School. Breitenbach continued to create distinctive and innovative work, including a striking group of camera-less photographs. These works hover in the liminal space between Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism.

A photography assignment for the United Nations led Breitenbach to Korea and Japan in 1952. His discovery of the deep cultural heritage was the catalyst for his summer explorations of Asia through the 1960s.



Wheels, 1942

During his lifetime Breitenbach was included in many exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and was also exhibited at The Brooklyn Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. His work is represented in many institutional collections and The Josef Breitenbach Archive is located at the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson.

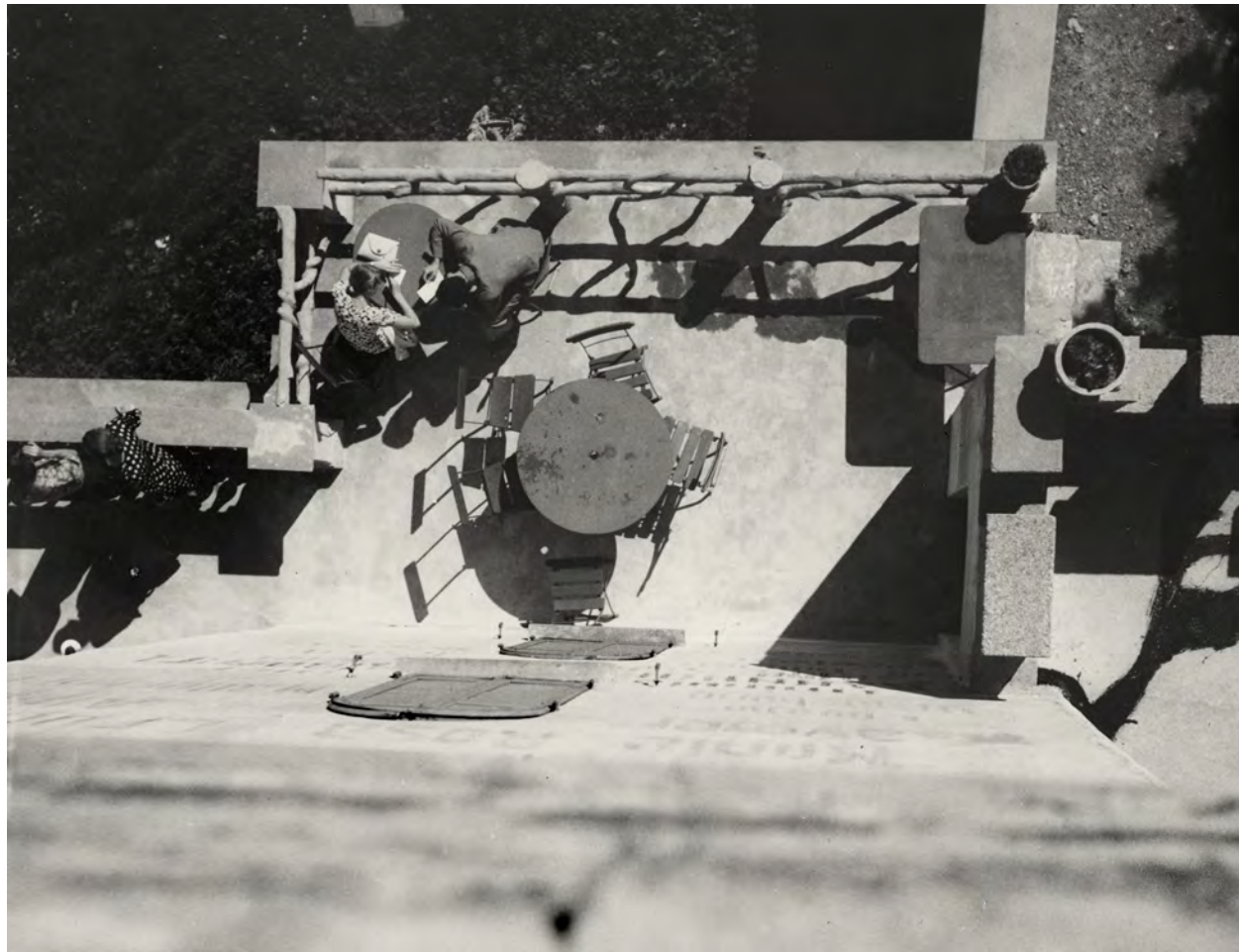
This is the tenth monograph on Josef Breitenbach. Previous books include: *Josef Breitenbach: Manifesto* (Nazraeli Press, 2008); *Breitenbach* (Galerie Camera Work, 2004); *Josef Breitenbach: James Joyce 9 Portraits* (Jurys Doyle, 2004); *Josef Breitenbach: Munich, Paris, New York* (Stephen Daiter Gallery, 2003); *Josef Breitenbach* (Les Editions de l’Amateur, 2001); *Im Auge des Exils, Josef Breitenbach und die Freie Deutsche Kulture in Paris 1933-1941* (Aufbau-Verlag, 2001); *Josef Breitenbach: Akt-photographien* (Galerie Bodo Niemann, 1998); *Josef Breitenbach, Photographien* (Schirmer/Mosel, 1996); and *Josef Breitenbach, Photographer* (Temple Rock Company 1986).

We would like to acknowledge the diligent research and scholarship of Peter C. Jones that resulted in the discovery of the photographs in this book, the excellence and importance of which he was the first to recognize. We are honored to follow our distinguished colleagues Stephen Daiter, Edwynn Houk, Barry Friedman, Hirschl and Adler Modern, and Peter MacGill in the representation of the Breitenbach Foundation. This exhibition is a testament to the extraordinary quality and breadth of Josef Breitenbach’s work, which resonates today as fresh, vital and often ahead of its time.

Tom Gitterman
Elena Toce



EI (Hochbahn), New York, 1942



Vertical View, Germany, c. 1932



Carnival, Germany, c. 1930



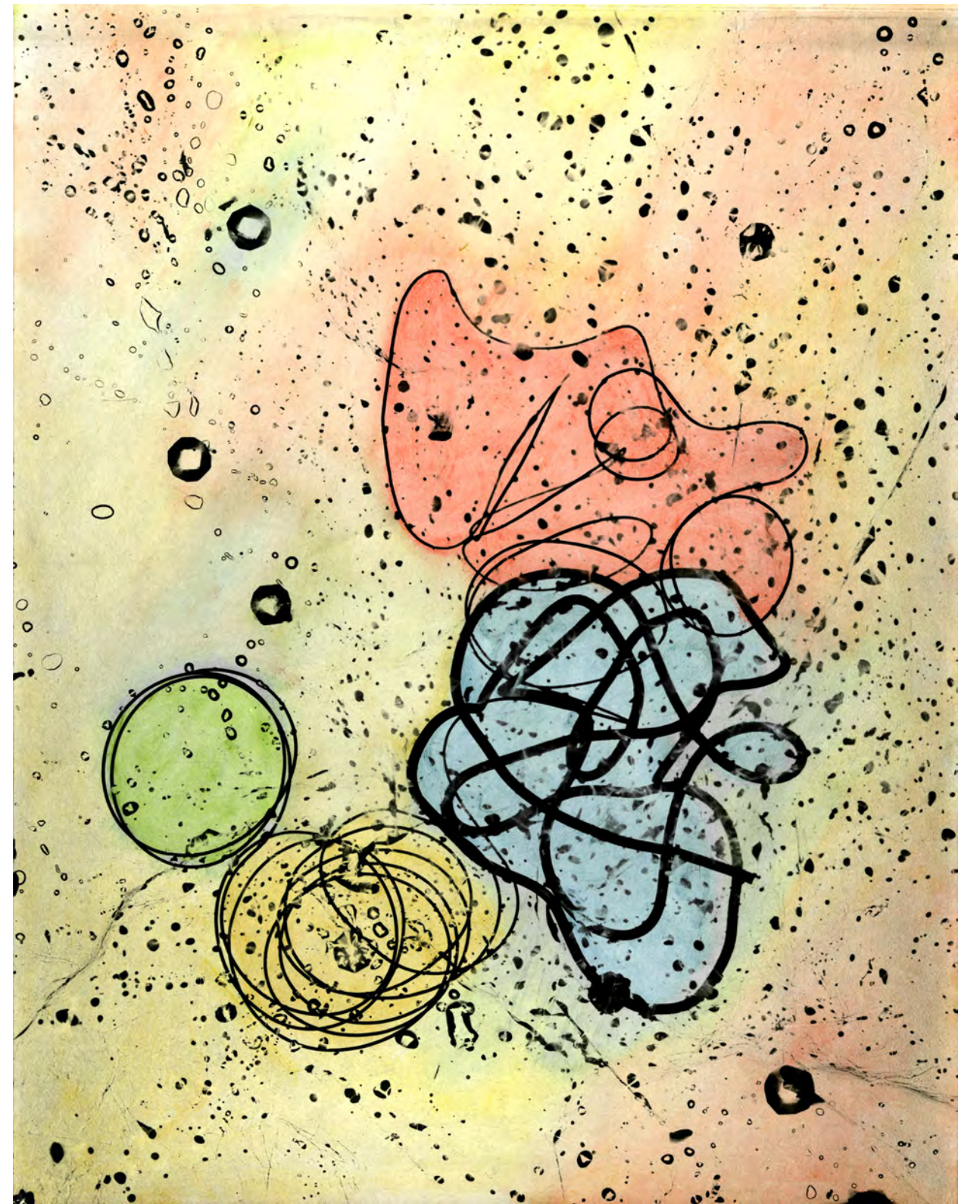
Patricia, New York, 1942



Patricia, New York, 1942



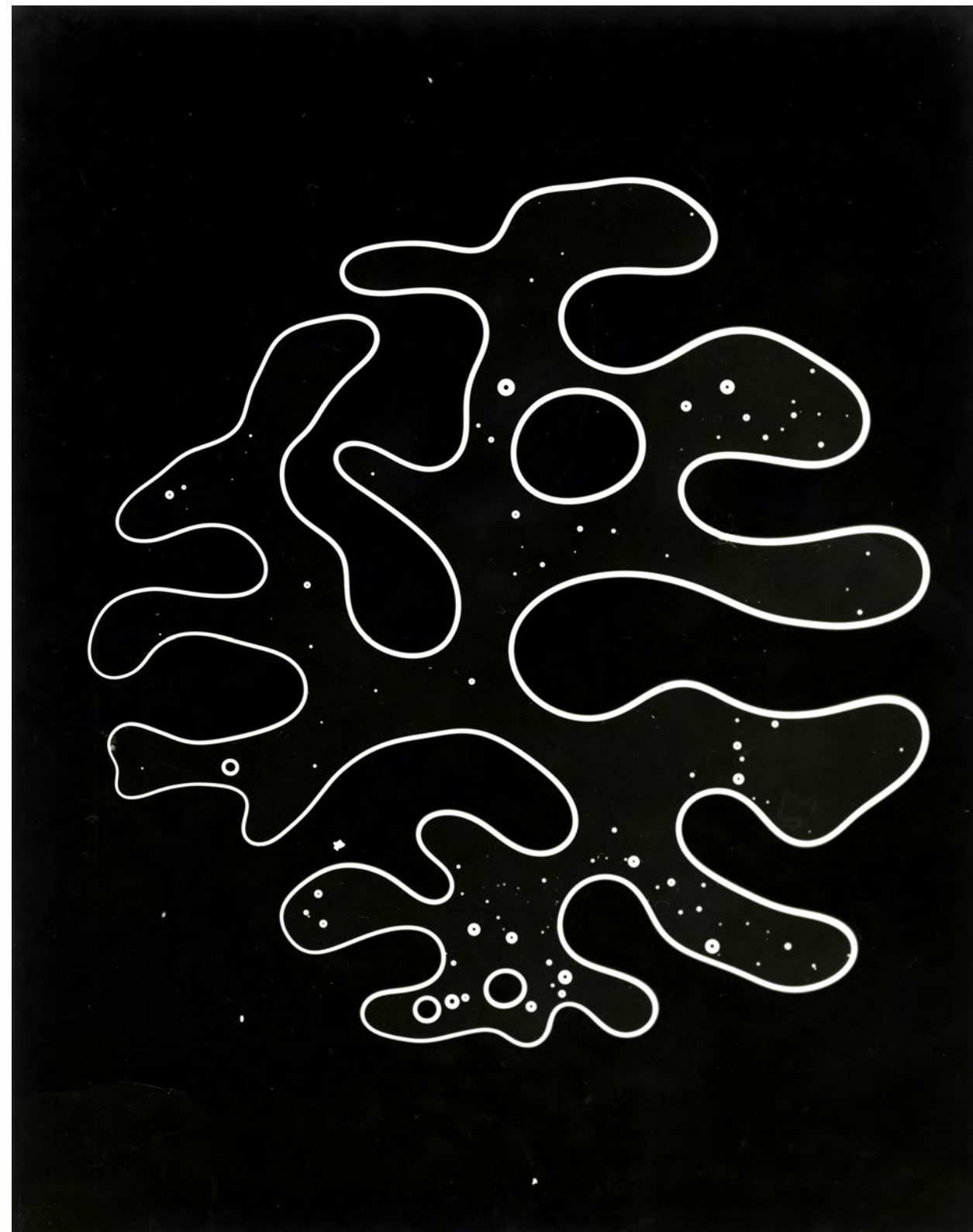
Patricia, New York, 1942



The Mechanic, New York, c. 1946-49



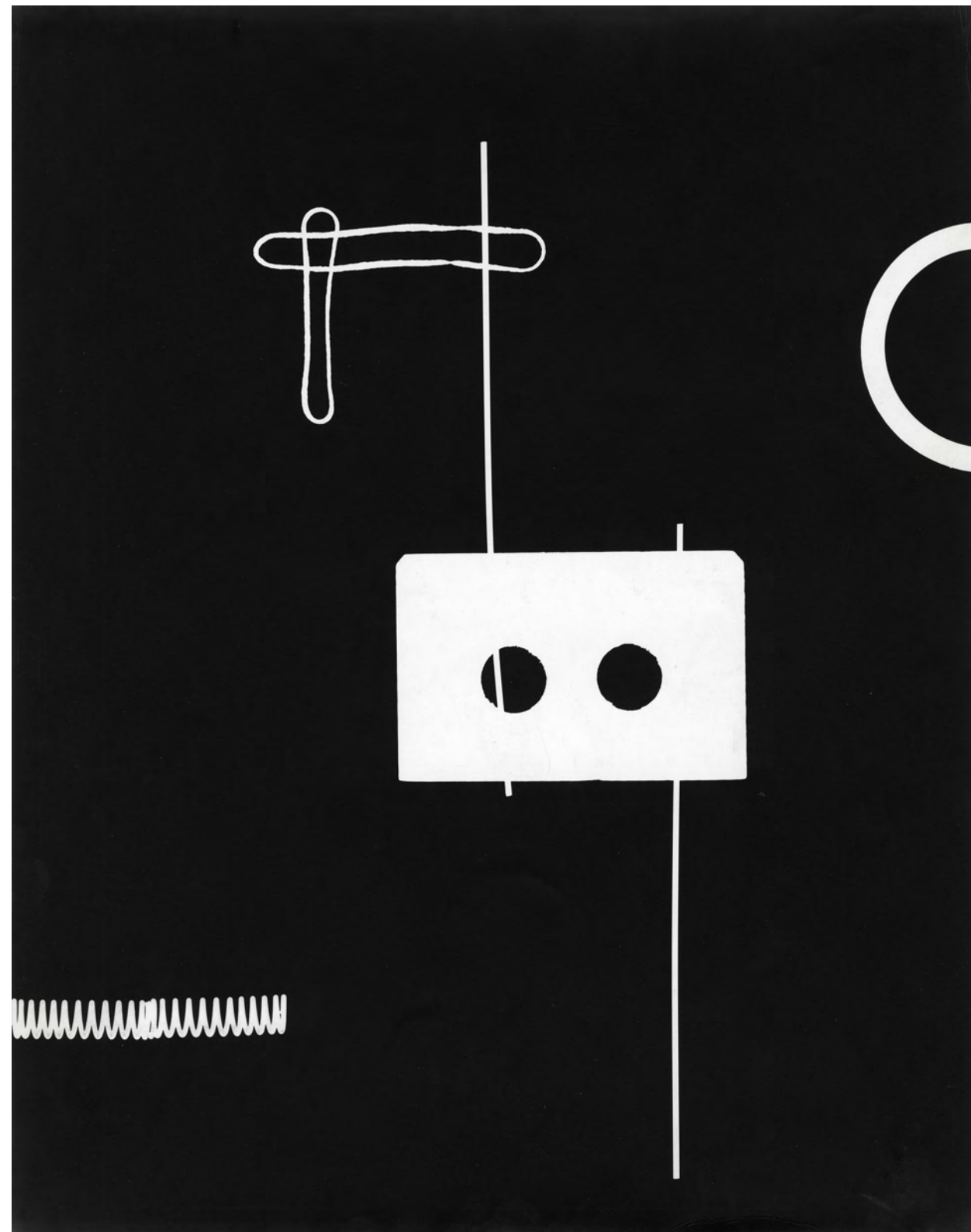
Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



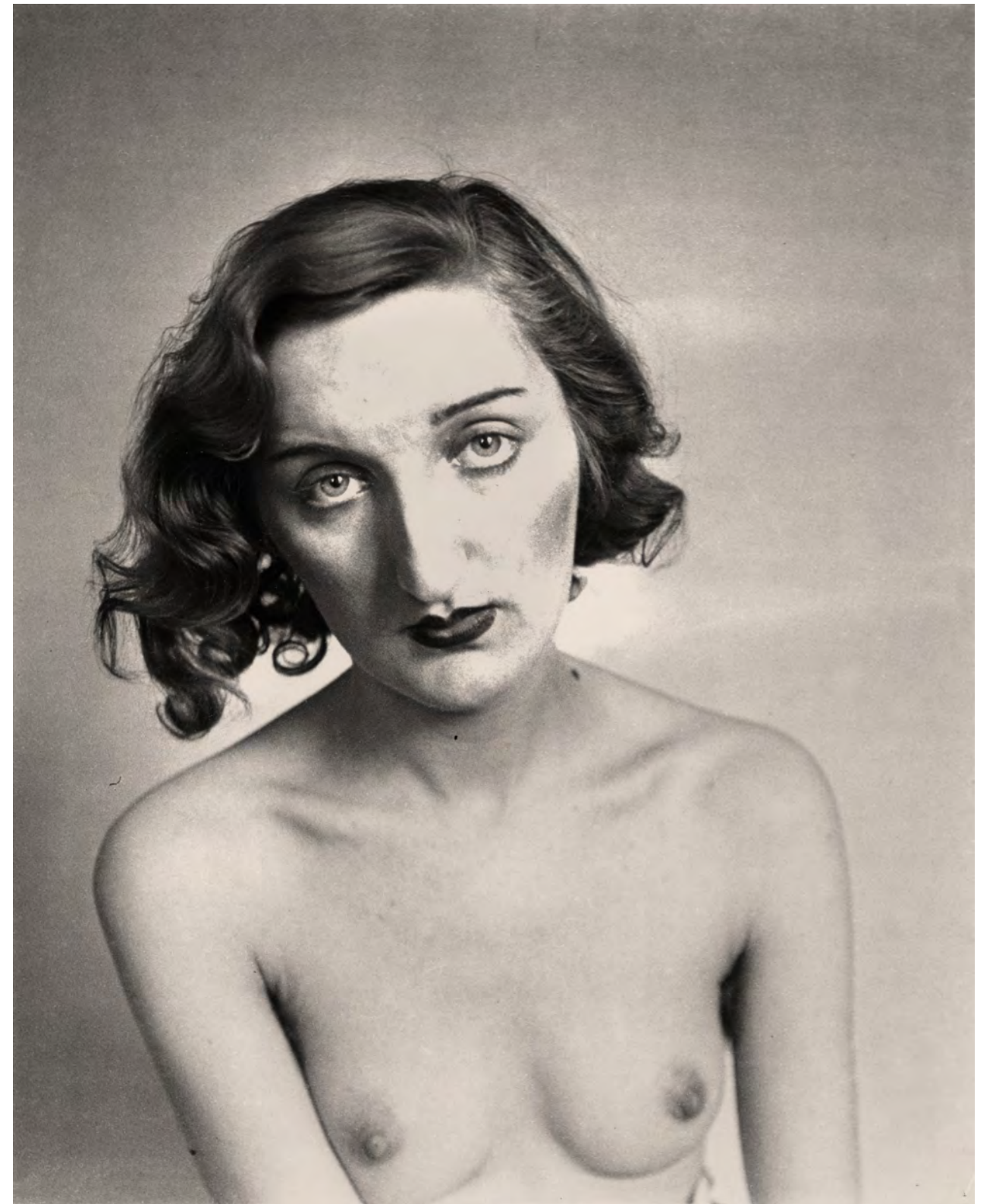
Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



Portrait, Paris, 1933-39



Portraits with Make Up, New York, c. 1945



Sheila, New York, c. 1942



Max Ernst and his wife, Marie-Berthe Aurenche, Paris, 1936



Solarized Nude, Paris, 1933



Sculpture Academy, Paris, c. 1935



Sculpture Academy, Paris, c. 1935



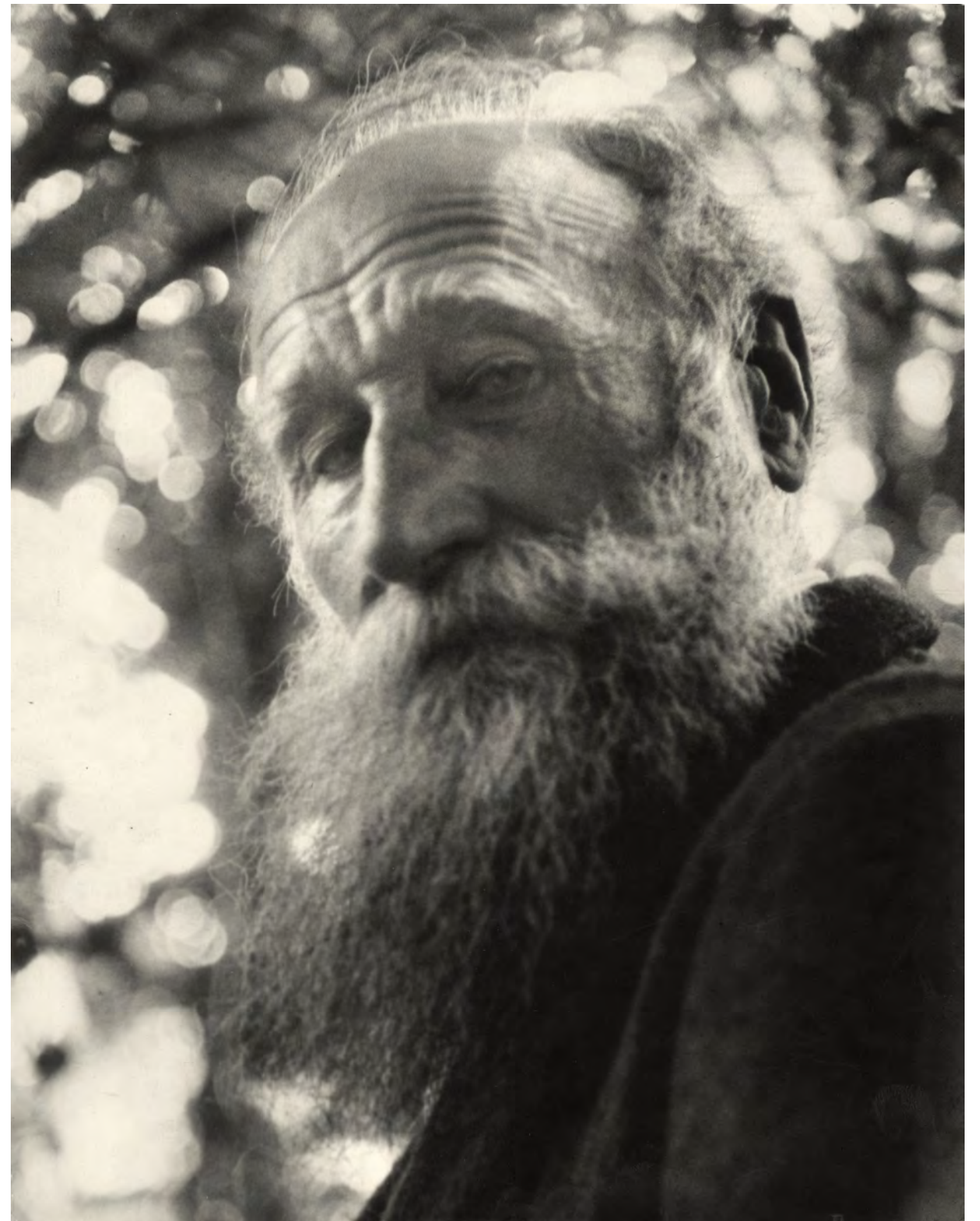
Sculpture Academy, Paris, c. 1935



Light in the Woods, c. 1930



6e Rue de la Grande Chaumiere, Paris, 1938



Aristide Maillol, Marly-Le-Roy, 1934



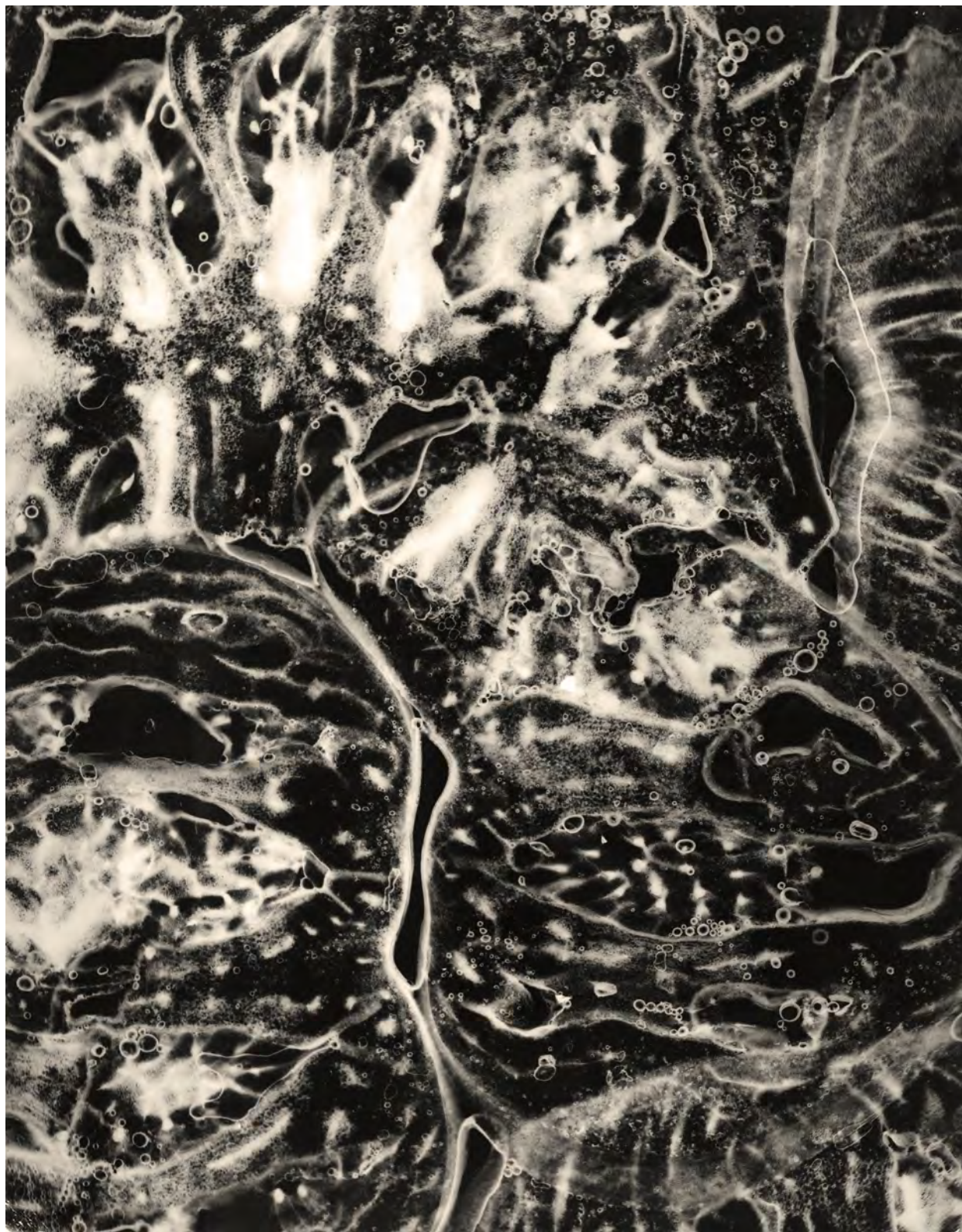
Annabella, 1933-39



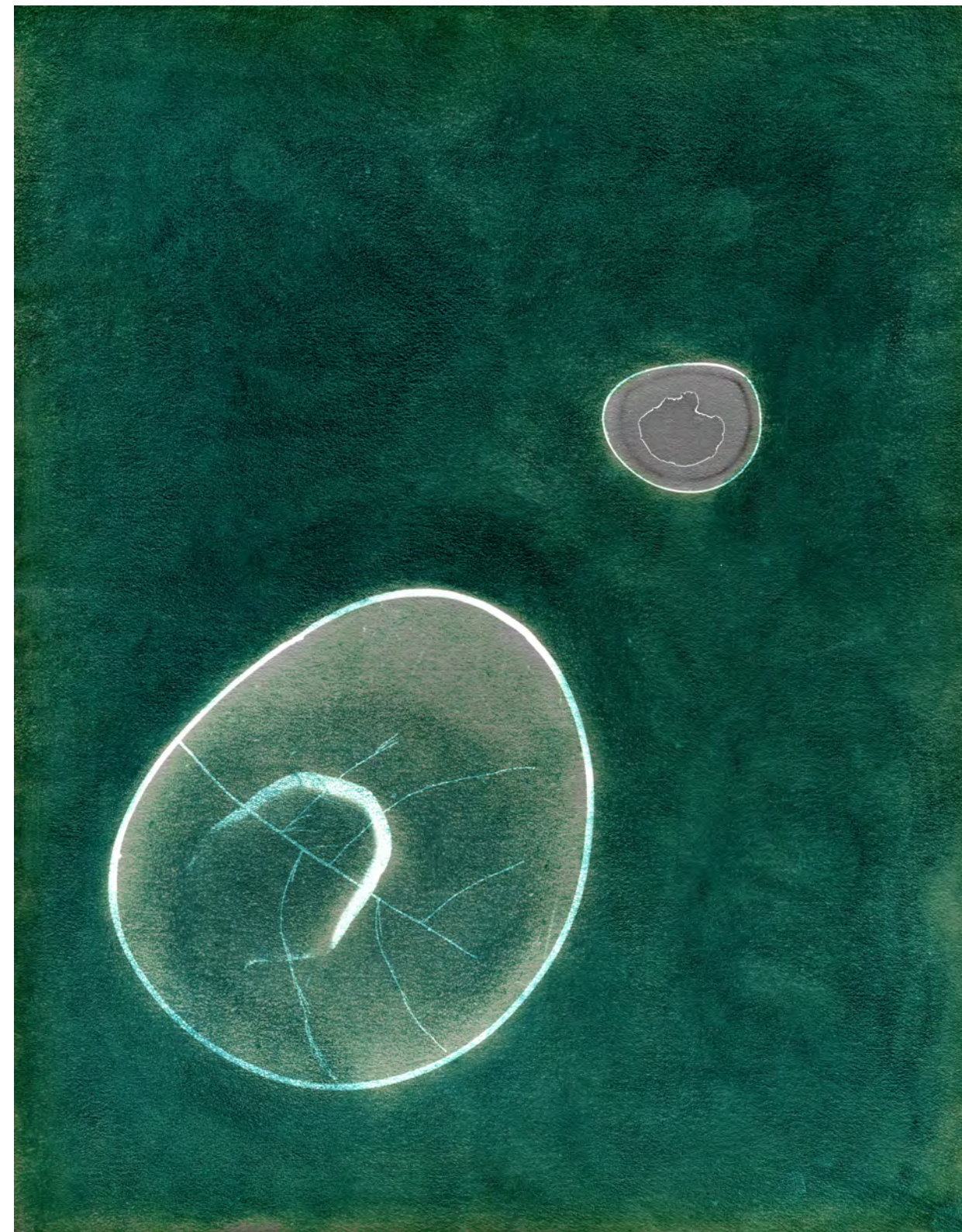
Huntsman's Luck, New York, c. 1946-49



Abstraction (Thin Ice In The Woods), 1946



Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



Untitled, New York, c. 1946-49



Ghost, VE Day, Trinity Churchyard, New York, 1945

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September 18 to November 2, 2013

Gitterman Gallery

41 East 57th Street

New York, NY 10022

www.gittermangallery.com

Josef and Yaye Breitenbach Charitable Foundation

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The Josef Breitenbach Archive

is located at the

Center for Creative Photography

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