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A Colossal Waste of Time

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Abstract

The output is a response to the research question "how can photography and the photobook function as tools for critical enquiry, enabling alternative narratives about work and the workplace that move beyond documentary representation?"

Research Process: Research was conducted into a wide range of vernacular, everyday photographs shared on Instagram by office workers revealing creative approaches to everyday life through office pranks. Photographs for the project were taken within existing work spaces, staging improvised scenes with the materials available. The ideas within the work were influenced by Michel De Certeau's notion of 'tactics' outlined within 'The Practice of Everyday Life' (1984), the concept of 'vernacular creativity' developed by Jean Burgess (2010) and a sense of 'spectacular alienation' as proposed by Jean Baudrillard (2005).

Research Insights: By constructing an imagined office environment where boredom, play, distraction and creative subversion become central activities, this research reveals overlooked forms of resistance and self-expression within contemporary labour cultures. The research explores how workers negotiate systems of productivity and surveillance in an era shaped by remote working, social media and Artificial Intelligence; generating new knowledge by critically reimagining contemporary workplace culture at a moment of profound transformation in the nature of work.

Dissemination: this photobook was shortlisted for the Dummy Award 25 and was exhibited in 17 countries as part of the award's touring global exhibition. This included a range of key photographic institutions in Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, Poland, Spain, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Brazil, United States, Thailand, China, Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, Venezuela, and Indonesia from April 2025 – February 2026.

Takedown
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Philip Welding

A Colossal Waste of Time
Leeds Arts University



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Project Statement

This project is a colossal waste of time. It features skiving, goofing off, faffing around, playing, slacking, shirking, dossing, messing about, bunking off and procrastination.

‘A Colossal Waste of Time’ is a photographic project exploring contemporary workplace culture through an imagined office environment. Developed during a period of significant transformation in the nature of work, the project reflects on shifting attitudes towards labour, productivity, and the workplace itself. The rise of remote and hybrid working through video calls, a rise in ‘quiet quitting’ promoted by Gen Z content creators and fears over the anticipated impact of AI have all contributed to a moment in which traditional understandings of work are increasingly unstable. As working cultures shift, the shared physical workplace is no longer the dominant site of employment it once was.

Against this backdrop, the project reimagines a version of office culture that exists as a kind of fantasy or myth, an imagined physical space where little work gets done. A space defined by boredom, distraction and spontaneous creativity. It is populated by employees who navigate institutional expectations through subversive and playful acts. Workers build temporary structures, stage practical jokes, doodle, attempt to balance sheets of paper whilst bored in meetings and search for holidays in private browsers. While seemingly inconsequential, these actions reveal ways in which individuals negotiate and resist systems organised around productivity and efficiency.

Central to the project is a sculptural impulse: a desire to make, alter, and transform one's surroundings in the manner of an artist. Everyday office materials become the basis for improvised artworks and temporary interventions, turning the workplace into a site of experimentation. This considers the workplace as a physical space with playful potential, at odds with the digital labour often found in spreadsheets and emails.

It may be that this fantasy of a physical workplace as a playground of creativity has never existed, except in pockets of activity. However, social media and networked image culture is influencing a new kind of creative action that is staged, exaggerated, documented, and shared for an online audience in the hope of likes. In this networked space, office pranks are epic, planking is enacted for the camera only, goofing off is performative.

The dummy book output

A photobook dummy was produced of the project called ‘A Colossal Waste of Time’.

PRINT: Soft Cover Book 152mm (W) x 228mm (H) 4pp

Cover printed one pass black only and print one pass white only on 270gsm Colorplan Bright Red

104pp inners printed four colour process throughout on 150gsm Max Matt White

Section sewn with black or red thread, swiss bound, trimmed to size



Example of photobook dummy

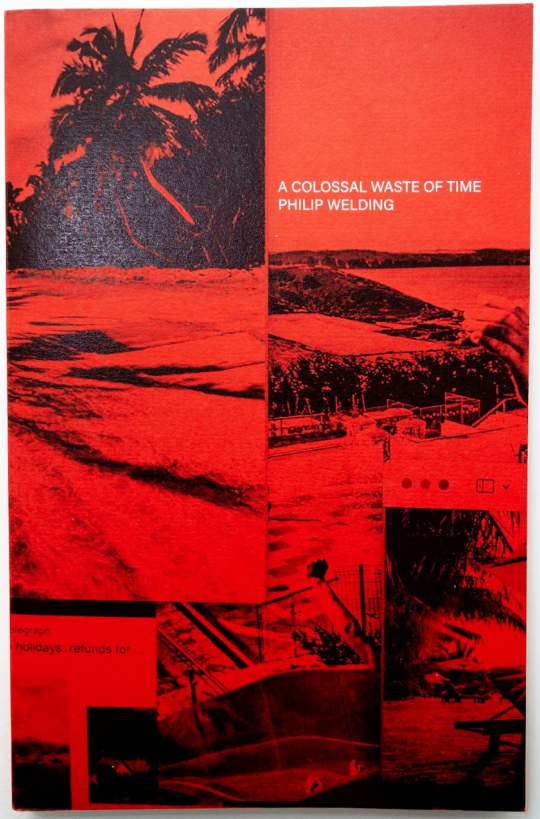



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Shortlisted for the Dummy Award 2025

It was shortlisted for the Dummy Award 2025. 395 books from 48 countries were submitted for the 2025 Dummy Award. The shortlist selection resulted in 50 photobooks. For the last year the shortlisted books have been on tour, being shown at the following locations:

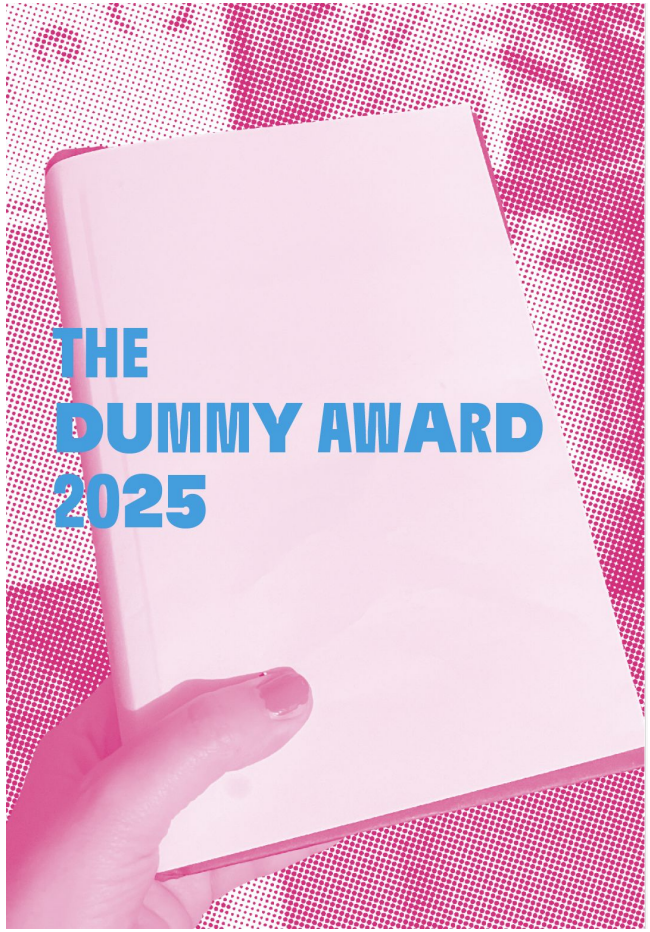
April 2025: SOFIA, Bulgaria Goethe Institute Sofia/ PUK!
May 2025: MILANO, Italy Istituto Italiano di Fotografia
May. June 2025: COLOGNE, Germany Rautenstrauch-
Joest Museum / Photoszene Festival
June 2025: Ł.DŹ, Poland Fotofestiwal
June 2025: DORTMUND, Germany f2 Festival
July 2025: BARCELONA, Spain Grisart LAB
July 2025. September: PRAGUE, Czech Republic Galerie Fotografic
July 2025: ARLES, France Rencontres Pop-Up
September/October 2025: DUBLIN, Irland PhotoIreland / The Library Project
August 2025: S.O PAULO, Brazil Imaginária Festival / Lovely House
September 2025: NEW YORK, United States Penumbra Foundation
November 2025: BANGKOK, Thailand Goethe Institute Bangkok
December 2025: HONG KONG Lumen Vision
November / December 2025: BUENOS AIRES, Argentina FELIFA, Dias de Maquetas
January 2026: DHAKA, Bangladesch Goethe Institute / Muntaka Proje
November / December 2025 : SANTIAGO, Chile Universidad Diego
Portales / Goethe Institute Santiago
January / February 2026: CARACAS, Venezuela Venue to come
February 2026: JAKARTA, Indonesia Pentas Buku / Matawaktu Foundation



Dummy Award 2025 Catalogue

Distributed for free at all exhibiting events and venues, to design & photography faculties and at Rencontres d’Arles and Paris Photo events.

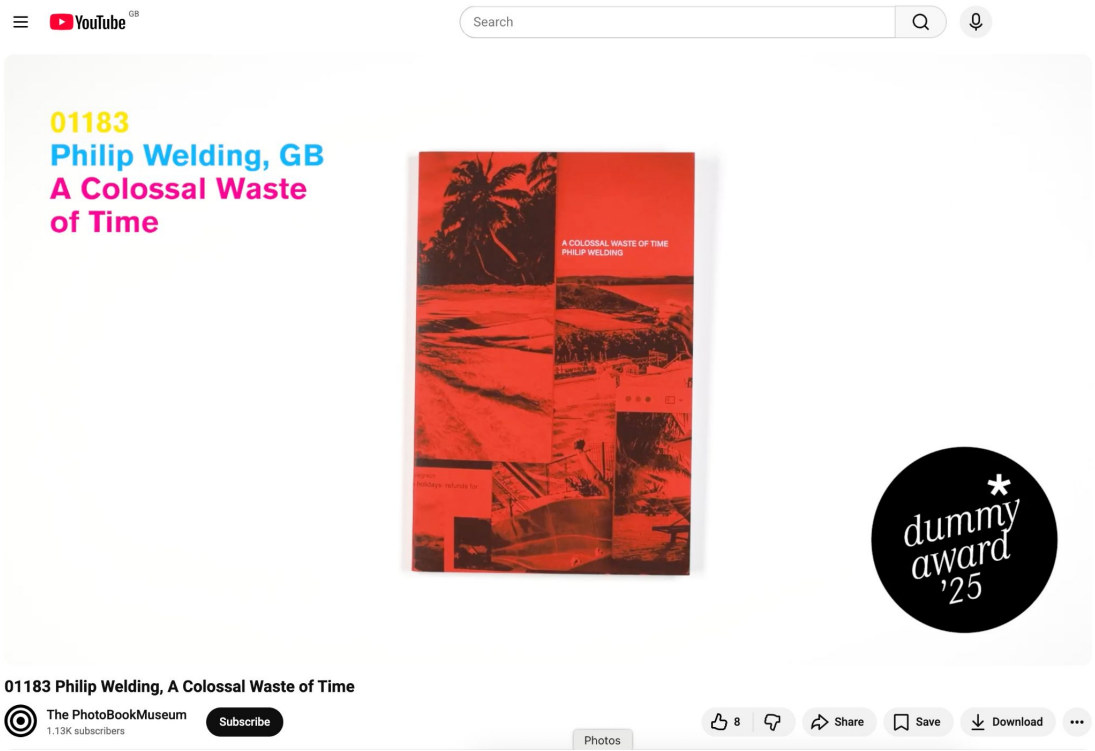


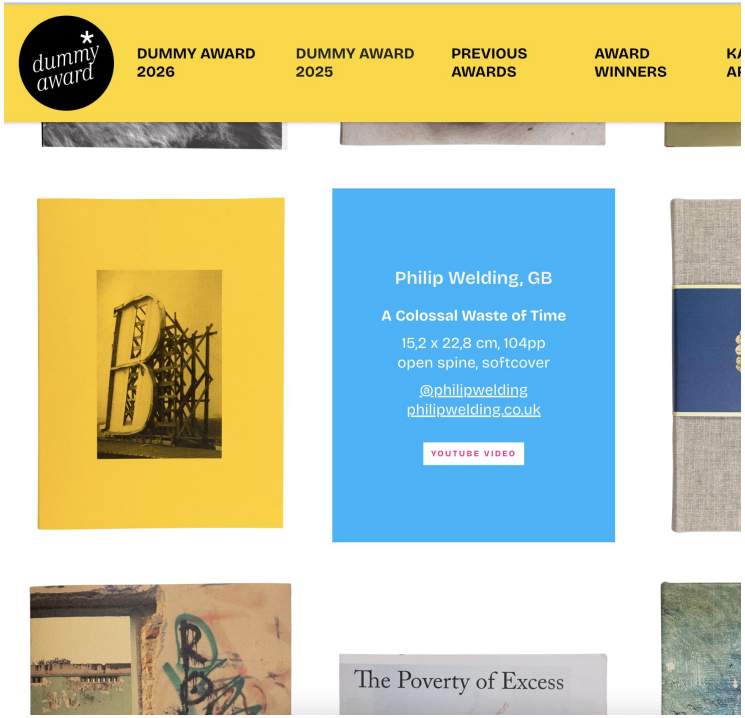




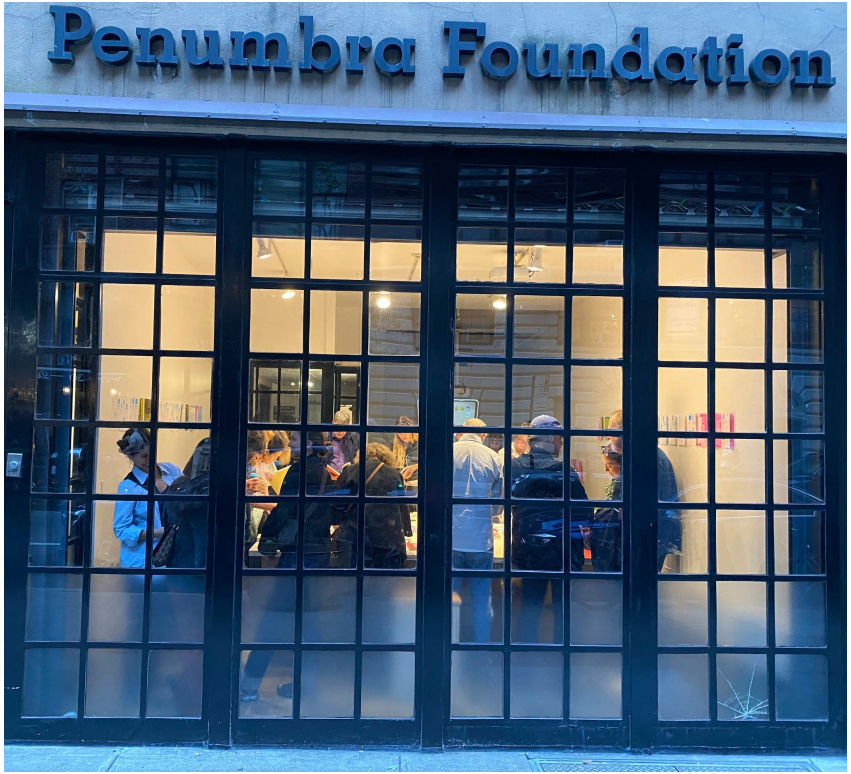
YouTube distribution

The dummy book was filmed by the book award and presented on YouTube. This is shared on the ‘Dummy Award’ website https://youtu.be/dL-XUiw_jWQ?si=N-m868c8s_tMKVIr





Documentation examples of photobook tour: Penumbra Foundation, New York





Documentation examples of photobook tour: Les Rencontres D’Arles, France





Documentation examples of photobook tour: F2 Festival, Dortmund





Documentation examples of photobook tour: Cologne, Germany Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum / Photoszene Festival



Documentation examples of photobook tour: Istituto Italiano di Fotografia, Italy



Documentation examples of photobook tour: PRAGUE, Czech Republic Galerie Fotografic





Documentation examples of photobook tour: SOFIA, Bulgaria Goethe Institute Sofia/ PUK!



Documentation examples of photobook tour: Bogota



Documentation examples of photobook tour: Hong Kong



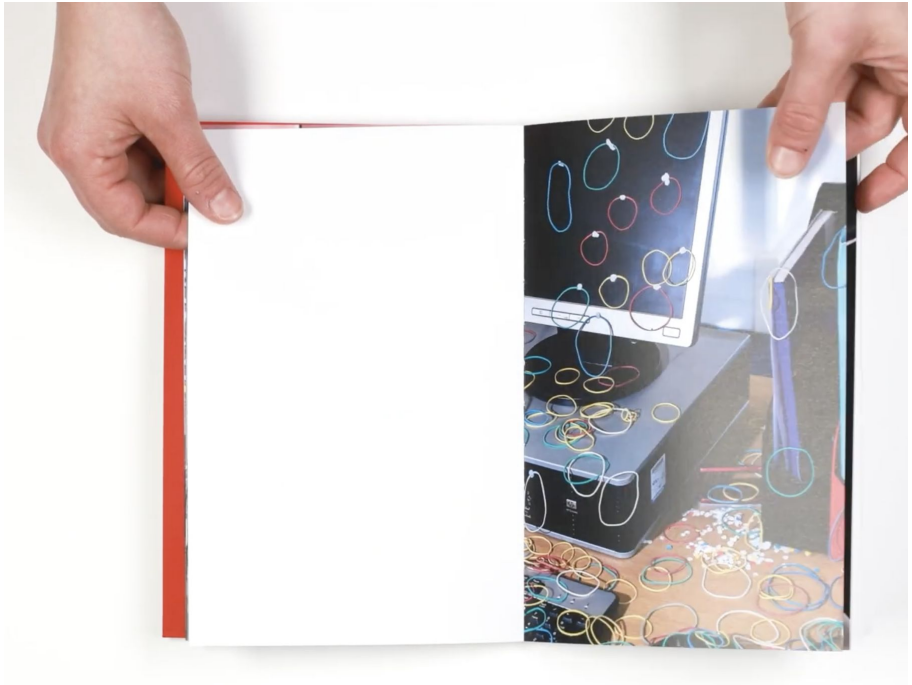


Spreads from the photobook





Spreads from the photobook



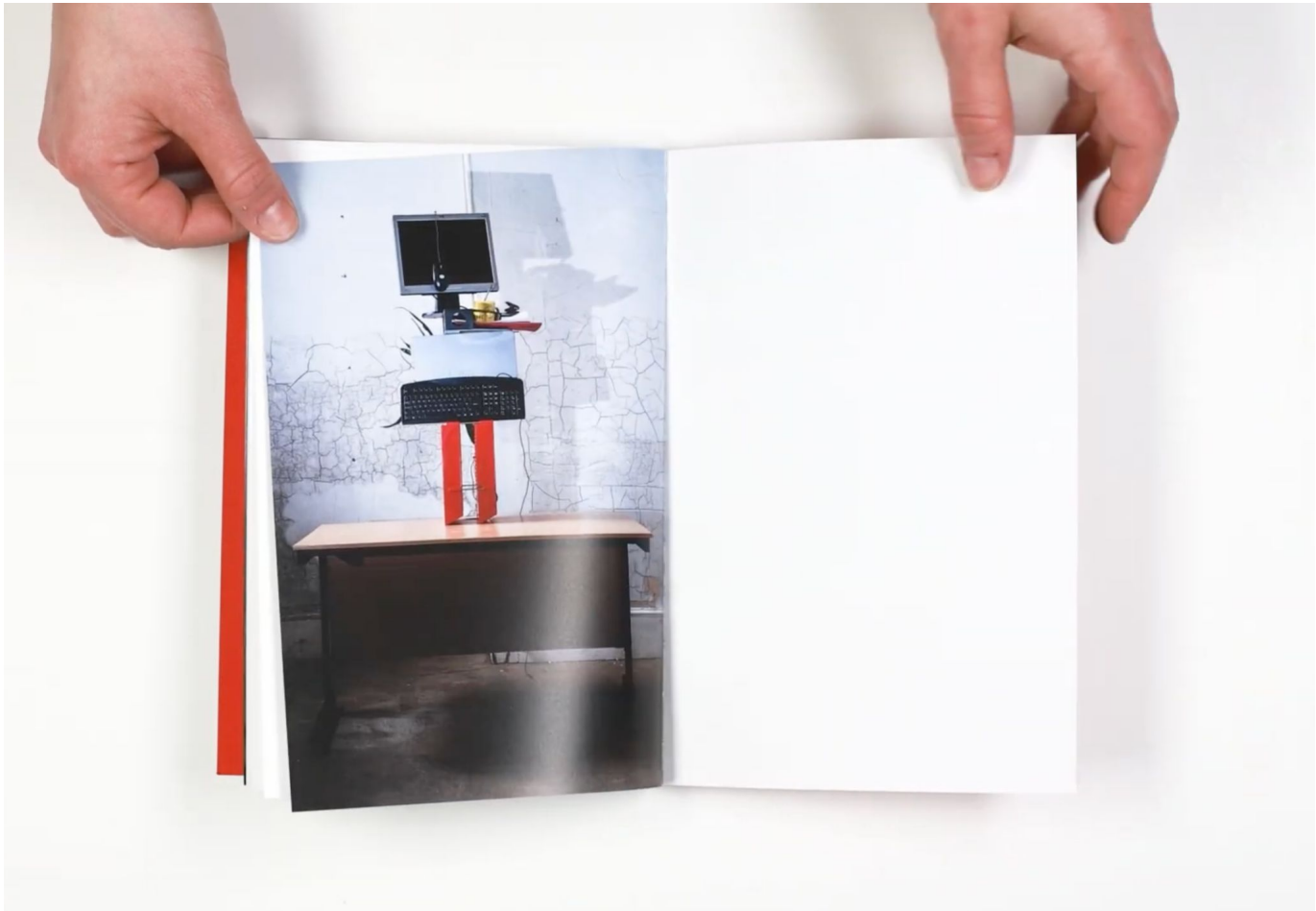


Spreads from the photobook





Spreads from the photobook







Photographs from the project



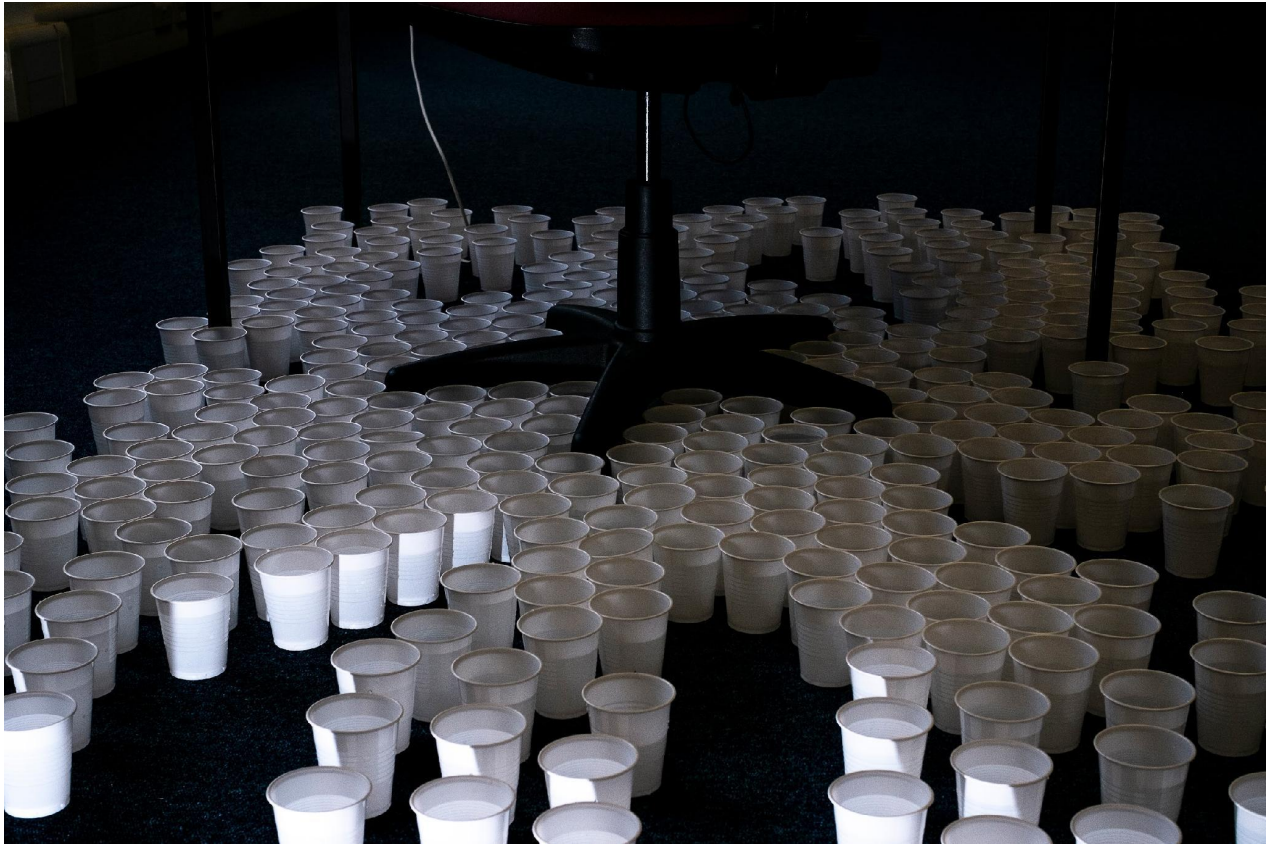


Photographs from the project





Photographs from the project





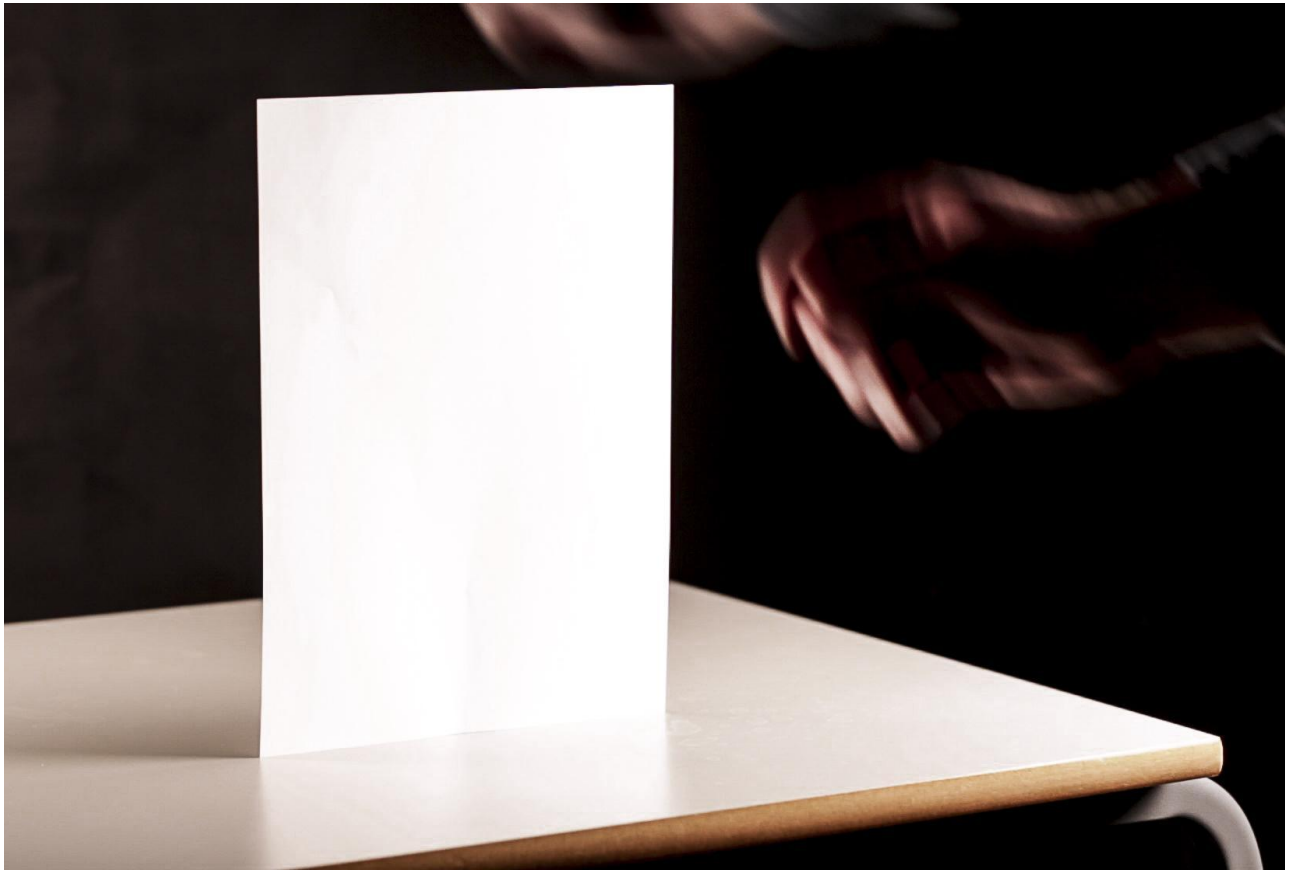
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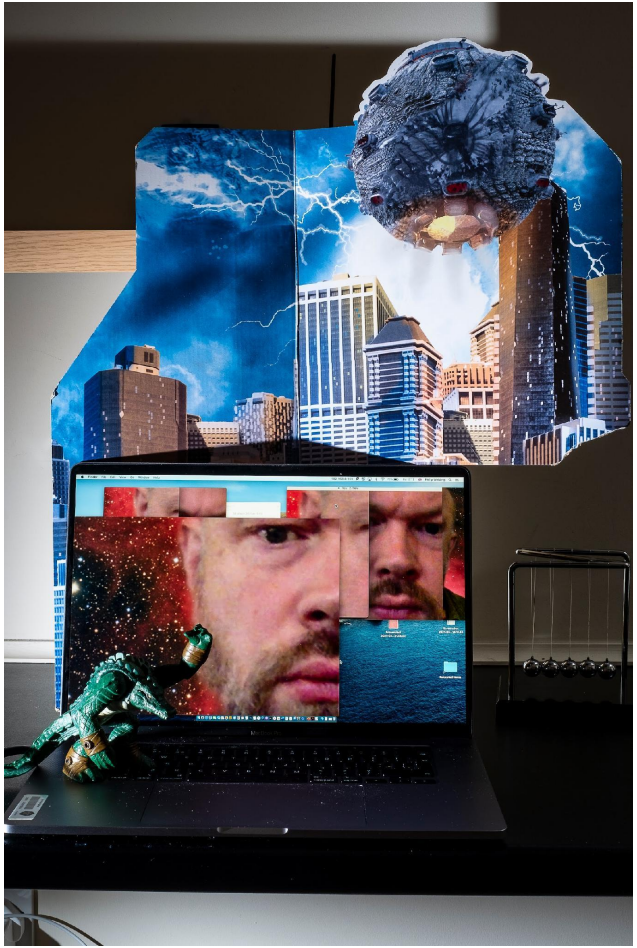


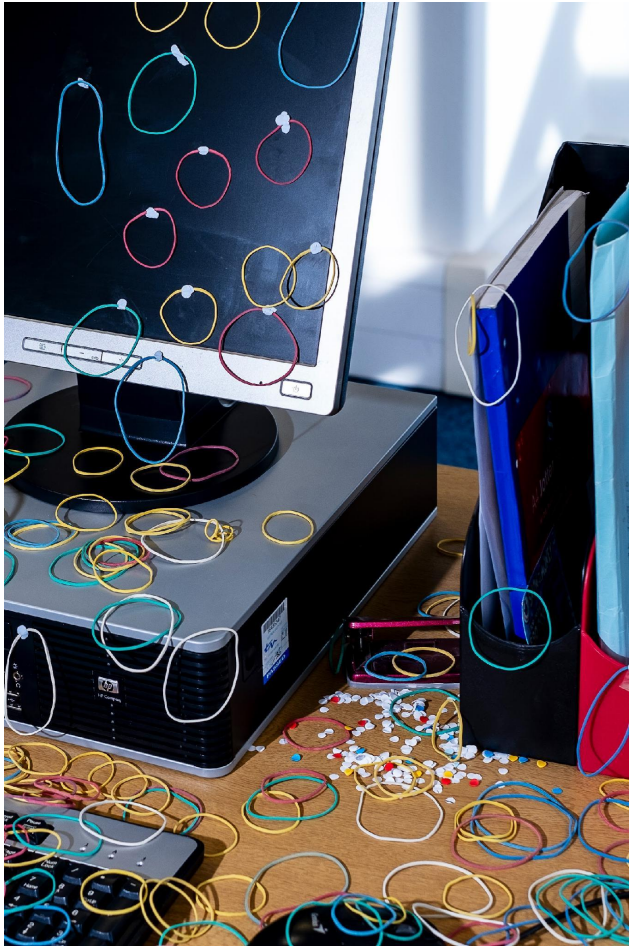
Photographs from the project





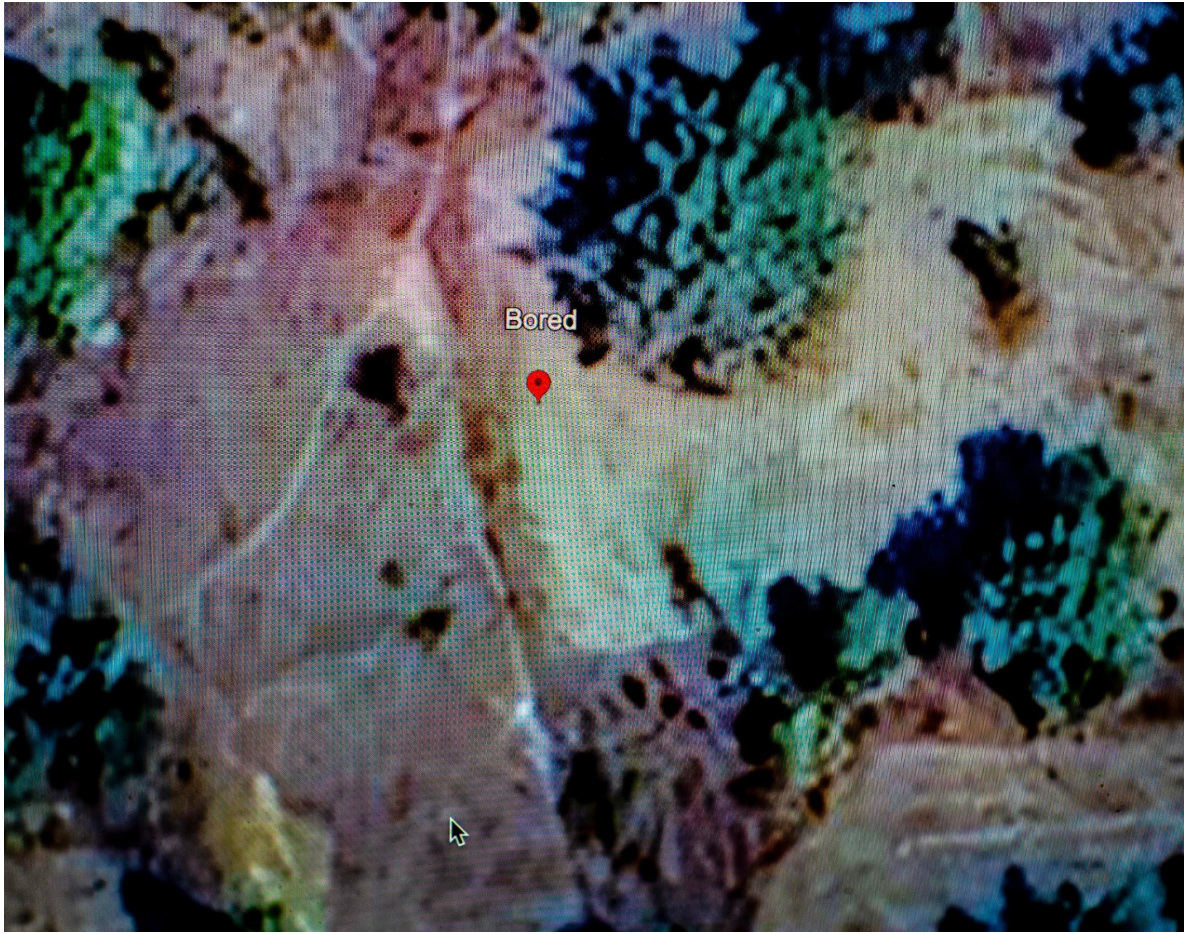
Photographs from the project





Photographs from the project





Photographs from the project





Photographs from the project



