

Moving Away

Documenting Acme studio sites 1 & 3A Rowse
Close.



1 and 3A Rowse Close Studio buildings were operated as Acme studio buildings for nearly 25 years. Covering 38 studios across both sites, by August 2025, 54 artists populated the buildings. Since 2001, over 100 artists rented a studio in a Rowse Close building. A profusion of practices resided down this quiet cul-de-sac; painting, prop fabrication, glass blowing, ceramics, photography, sculpting, performance, to name a few.

Acme secured these buildings as studio replacements amidst the closure of the Carpenters Road site, which was once the largest studio building in the world. Acme was forced to vacate the building to make way for demolition under the Stratford City Regeneration Project, a plan put in place prior to the London 2012 Olympics.

Found near Carpenters road, the Rowse Close buildings were luckily dismissed from renovation for the Stratford City project and were instead temporarily rented to Acme as short life properties, an arrangement which ended up lasting for a quarter of a century.

Arriving at the studio

Feelings of calm anticipation bubbled when entering 1 or 3A Rowse Close for a studio day. The general area and the buildings were oddly serene; it was easy to enter into a type of meditative state when working there.

Moving through the buildings, down the corridors at the time of their use, conjured mixed feelings. It felt eerie sometimes when traversing corridors and spaces of varying expanses, with assortments of migrating objects held in place. Still, it was comforting to know others were coming and going when all sorts of sounds would echo from corners of the buildings.

At times I had an underlying sense of curiosity around what would go on behind the many closed doors. The same curiosity you might get if there was a locked door in your childhood home, which you were forbidden to enter.

Some studios were used frequently, facilitating both lively and cumbersome studio days, others may have been unvisited for many months, leaving dust to build up around the tools and forgotten works in situ.

Brief interactions in passing with residing artists led to exchanges of menial speculations about occurrences and uses of the studios. Histories and anecdotes of fellow artists were carried through the grape vine, painting a colourful picture of all the goings on that took place under the studio roofs.

A frequent point of conversation between artists was the impending building closure. Since the early years of the Rowse Close studios, warnings that the sites would be relinquished by the Council loomed over Acme and residing artists. In fact, it was not expected that the buildings would be in use for as long as they were- extensions to continue renting them were frequently renewed whilst regeneration plans were pushed back or cancelled.

Due to the imminent, yet delayed closure, both buildings had little refurbishment over the years. Whilst being functional and safe, they maintained unique vintage characteristics; blue marble tiling, mint green walls, mother-in-law doors on first floors of the building, which Acme and all artists tenants came to delight in. It is unclear what the purpose of the buildings was prior to being art studios, however, it is thought that 3A Rowse Close was once an Evangelical church while 1 Rowse Close used to be an office block.

The buildings' obsolescence accommodated a variety of manual processes (when in use) that modern studio buildings would struggle to allow, which tenants found to be helpful for facilitating process experimentation.

Moving out of 1 & 3A Rowse Close

By the start of 2026, 1 and 3A Rowse Close were emptied of possessions and all exhibits of happenings. The buildings were left gutted, only the noise and reverberations of the trains running past filled the buildings.

Feelings of apathy and awkwardness brewed when walking through the site, now derelict. I was reminded of the peculiar mix of emotions that come with the loss of some place, something, or someone.

The odd reminder of various creative experiments was left on the concrete floors and MDF walls, testaments that confirm the significance of the building to many creative practices. 1 & 3A Rowse Close buildings were beyond integral, without access to the site so many practices would have not been able to grow into what they are today.

It is bittersweet to know that no one will fully understand or experience all the artworks, practices and interactions that took place in both studio buildings. It would be impossible to bring together all the stories that took place at Rowse Close. Rather than all of the voices being brought together, one can be assured that scattered around London and beyond are the people and creatives who hold these memories.

The Carpenters Estate

Rowse Close sits in The Carpenters Estate, one of London's biggest community estates. The estate houses residential properties and establishments like Carpenters Arms (a local pub next to Rowse Close), The Building Crafts College, Doran Walk Newsagent and P. A Finlay & Company Limited. This area of Stratford feels disarming, pleasantly quiet in comparison to other areas like the train station and shopping centres.

Acme artists have been able to rely on the longstanding relationships with companies in Carpenters, notably the Doran Walk Newsagents and BMA Construction Design, the Taxi Garage next door to 3A Rowse Close.

In the 2000s, multiple regeneration plans to rebuild the Carpenters Estate and wider area have fallen through, conjuring uncertainty within the community. Housing in the estate's three main tower blocks have become increasingly inhabitable. Currently 27 flats out of a total of 430 across the three tower blocks are occupied.

Only within the last 5 years has a regeneration plan for the area been approved by the Council. According to the masterplan, this regeneration programme is resident-led, with nearly three quarters of residents voting in favour of the regeneration project in a 2022 borough referendum. Carpenters Estate will be under construction for over a decade to fulfil ambitious plans.

The second phase of the regeneration project will take place in 2026 as Lund Point Residential Tower (the residential tower that faces the entrances of 1 & 3A Rowse Close studio) will be refurbished. The commercial buildings on Rowse Close are said to be demolished and turned into residential and commercial developments.

Residents of Newham and the artists leaving Rowse Close buildings are hopeful about what the regeneration programme has to offer for the area. There is hope that Acme will be able to return to this area of Stratford in the future, to continue the longstanding history the charity has in the estate and the wider community. Until then, we pay homage to the buildings that facilitated many artists' practices, and the ubiquitous relationship Acme has formed with the community.



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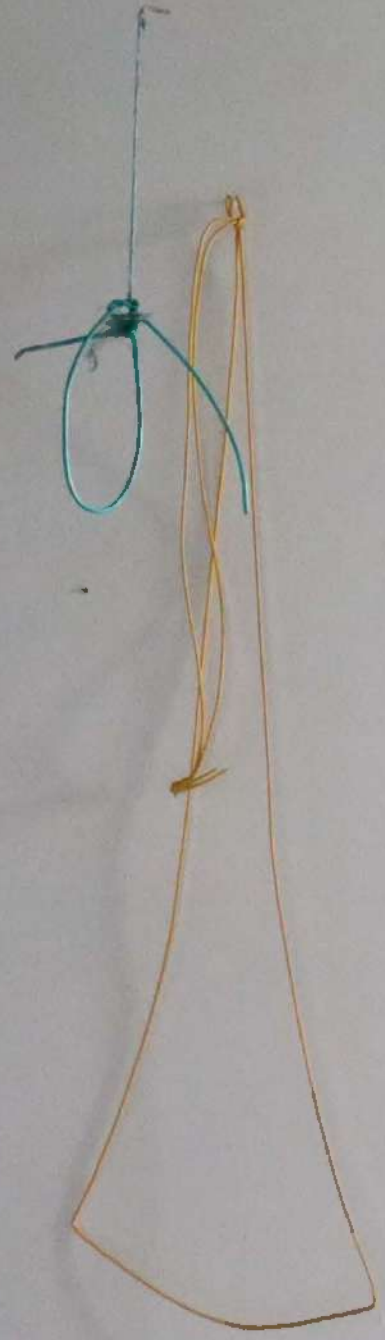
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Fire exit
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STUDIO 18

















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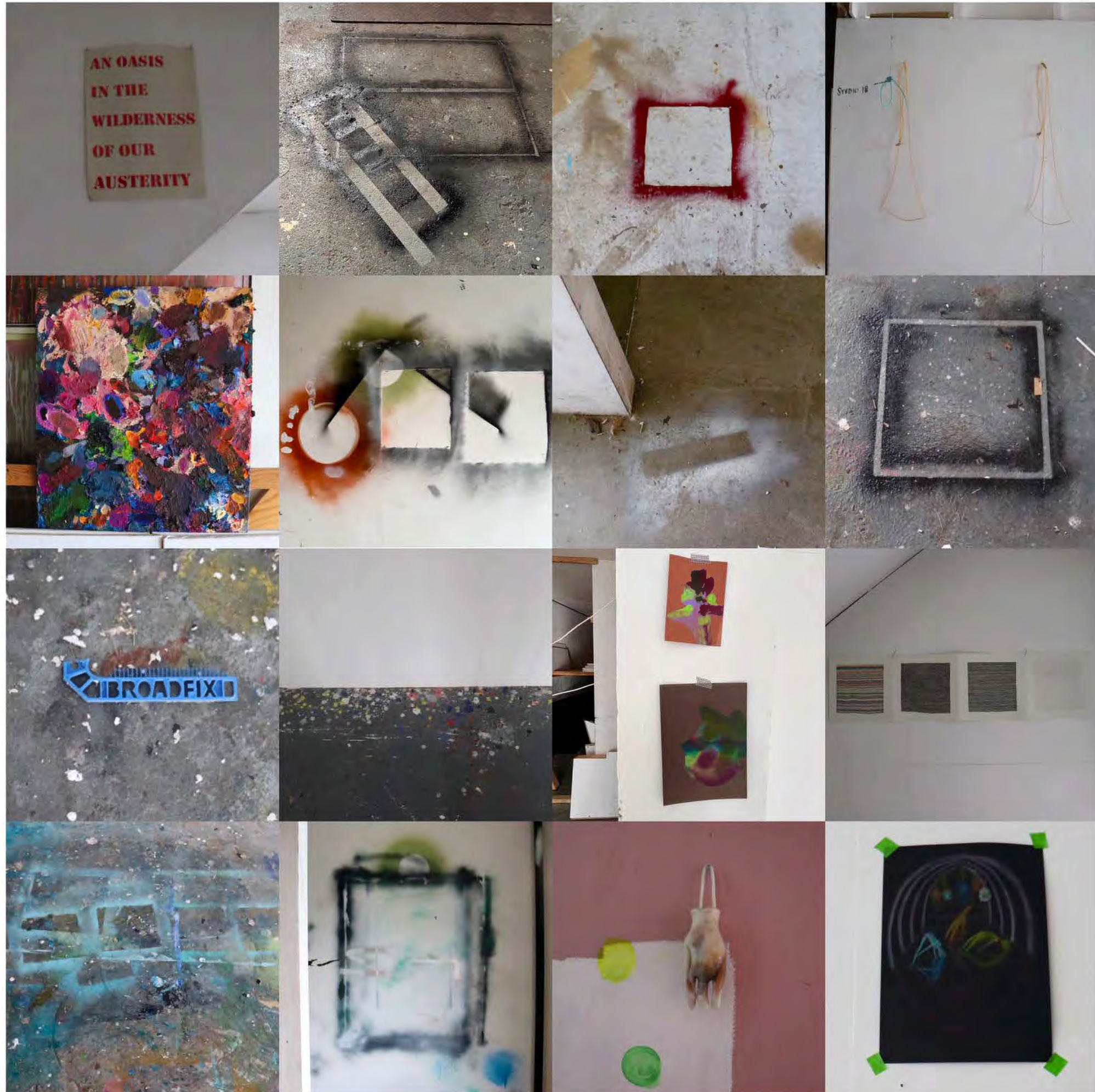
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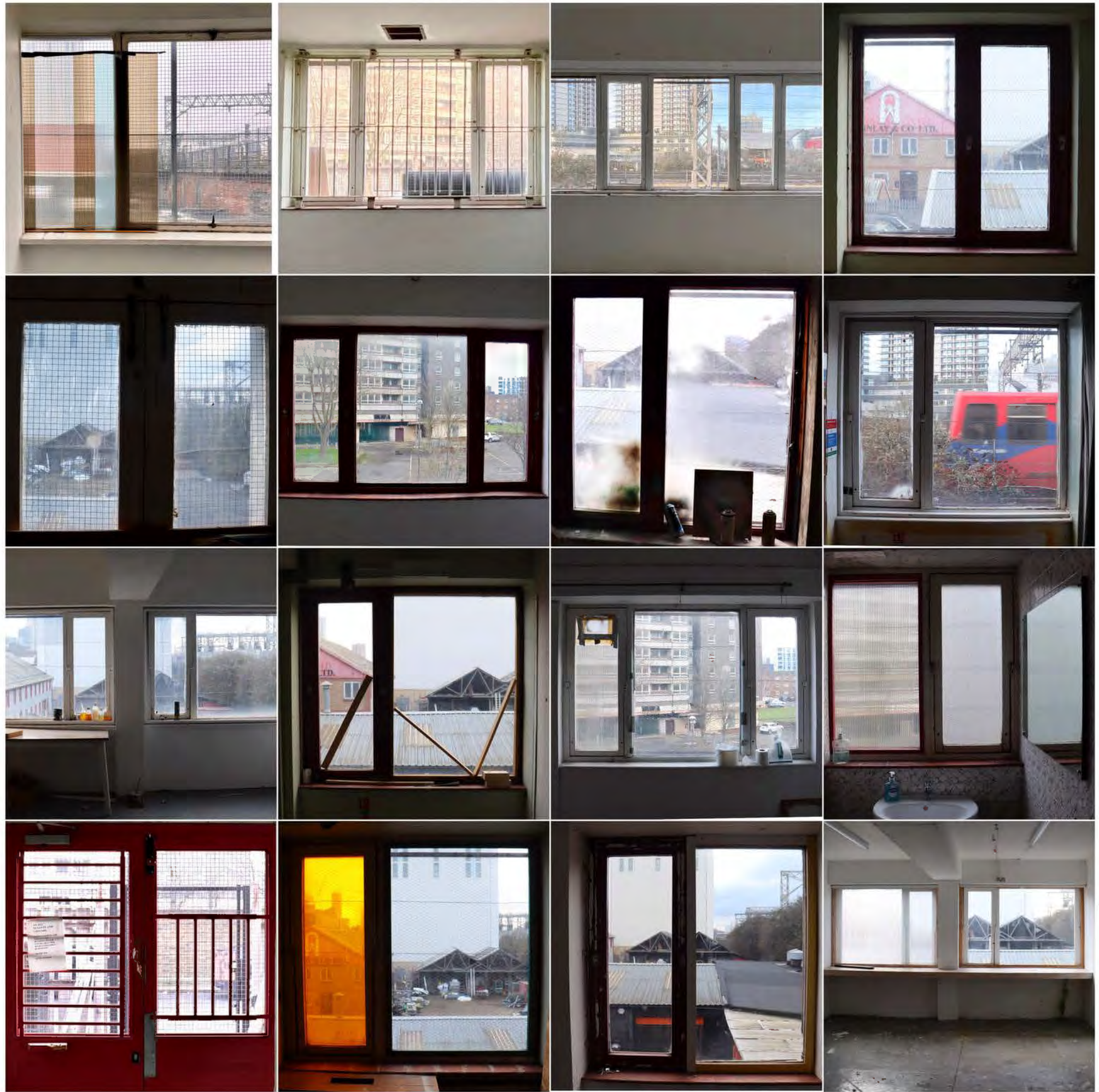






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CARPENTERS ROAD

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London Borough of Haringey
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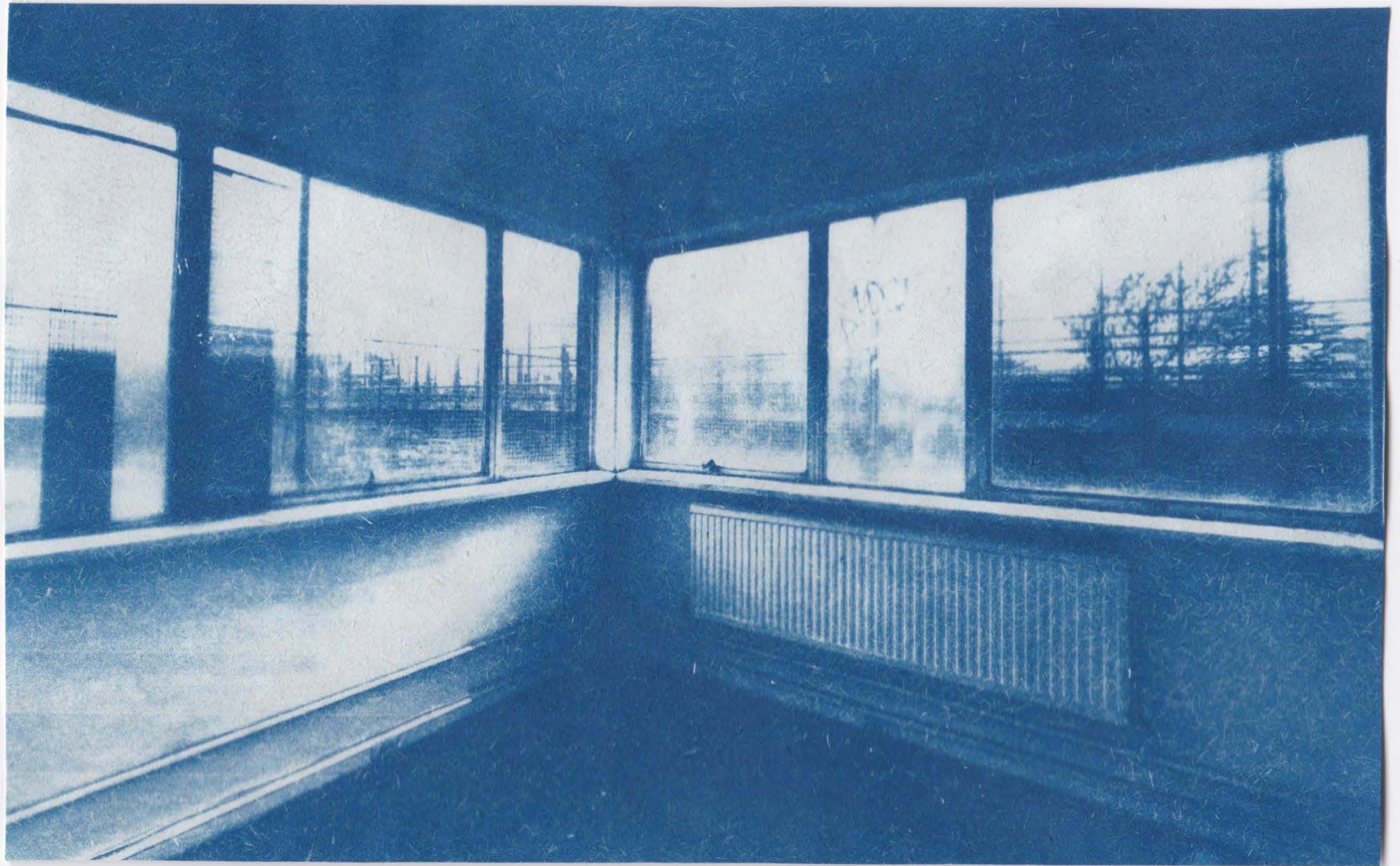
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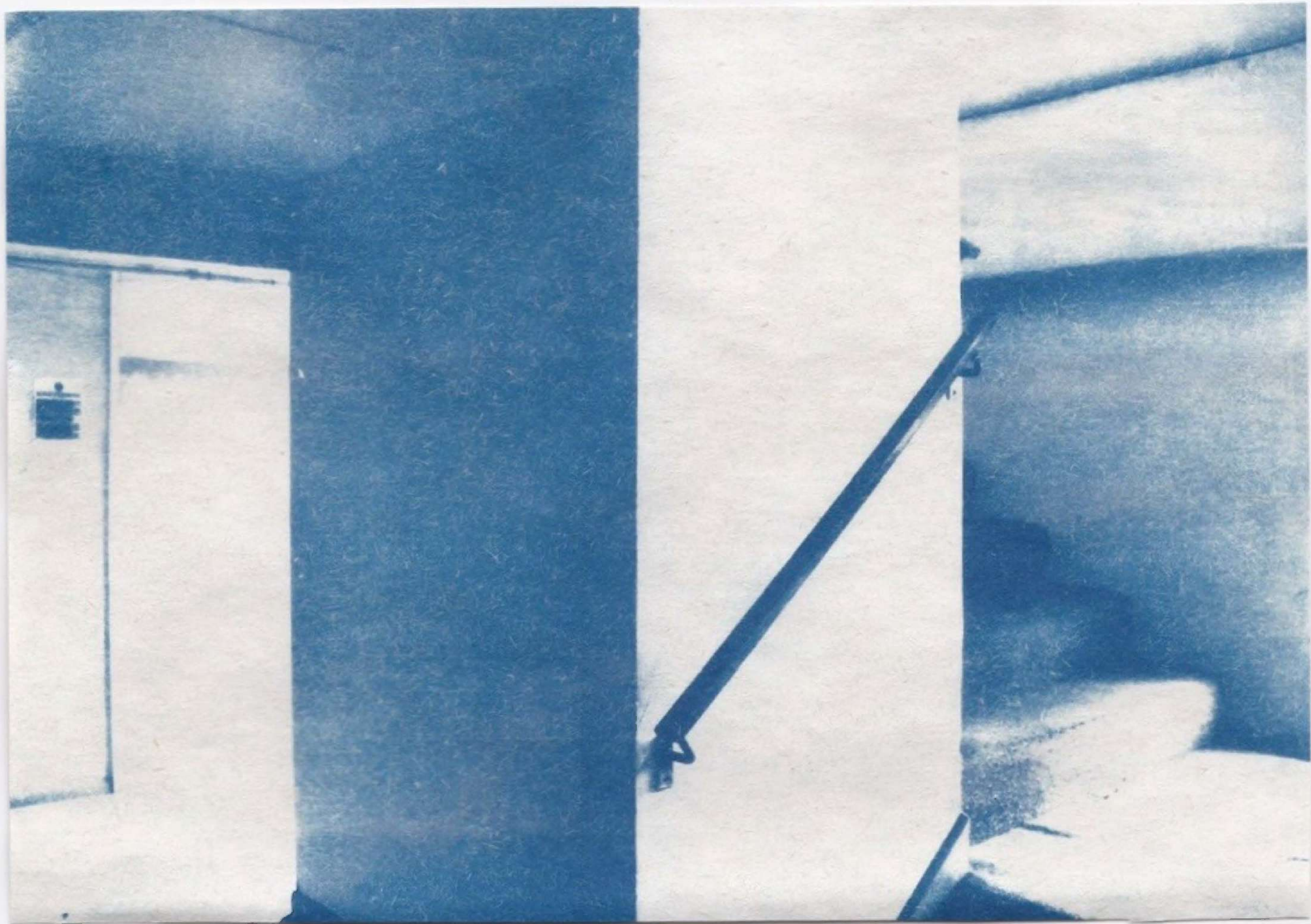
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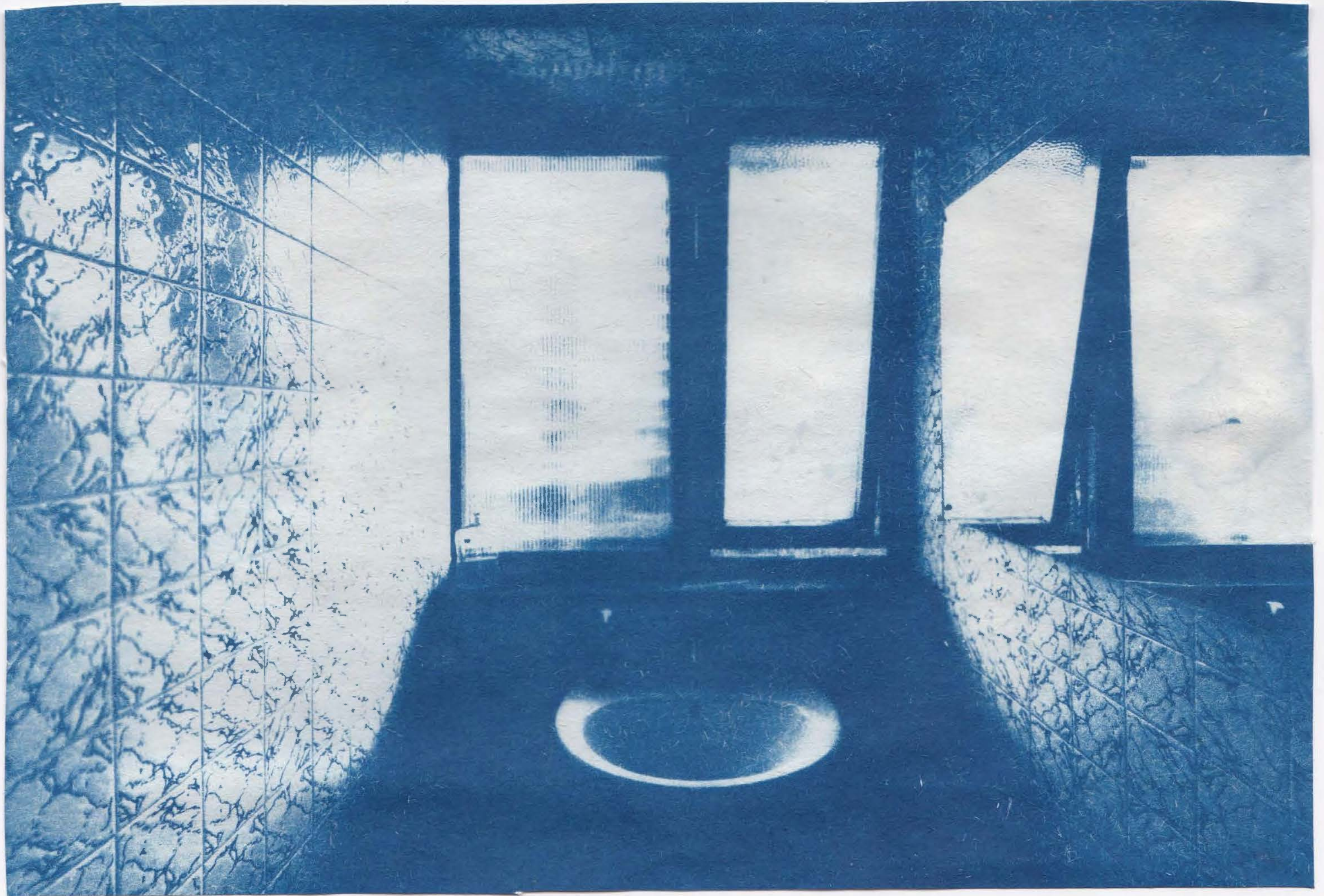




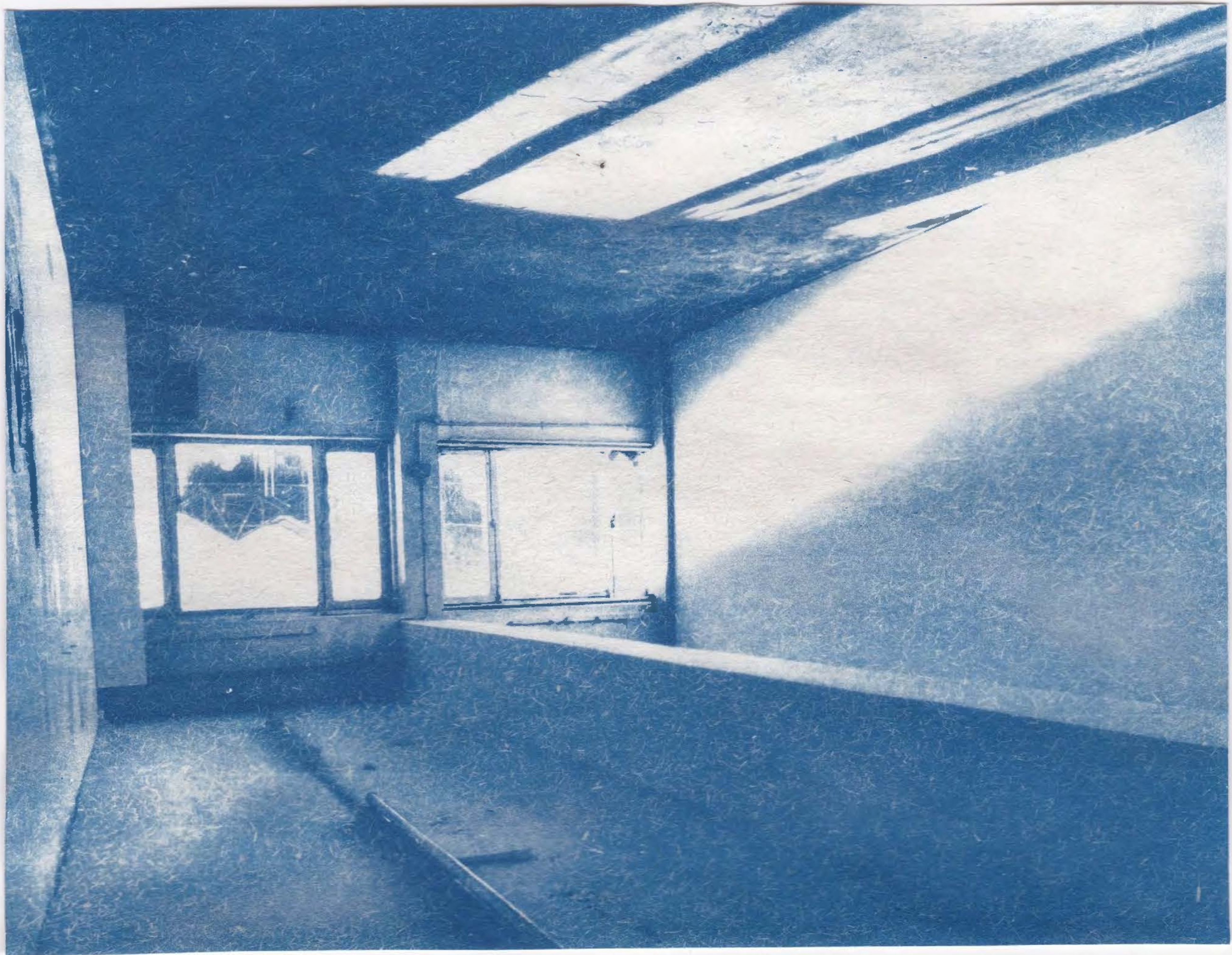
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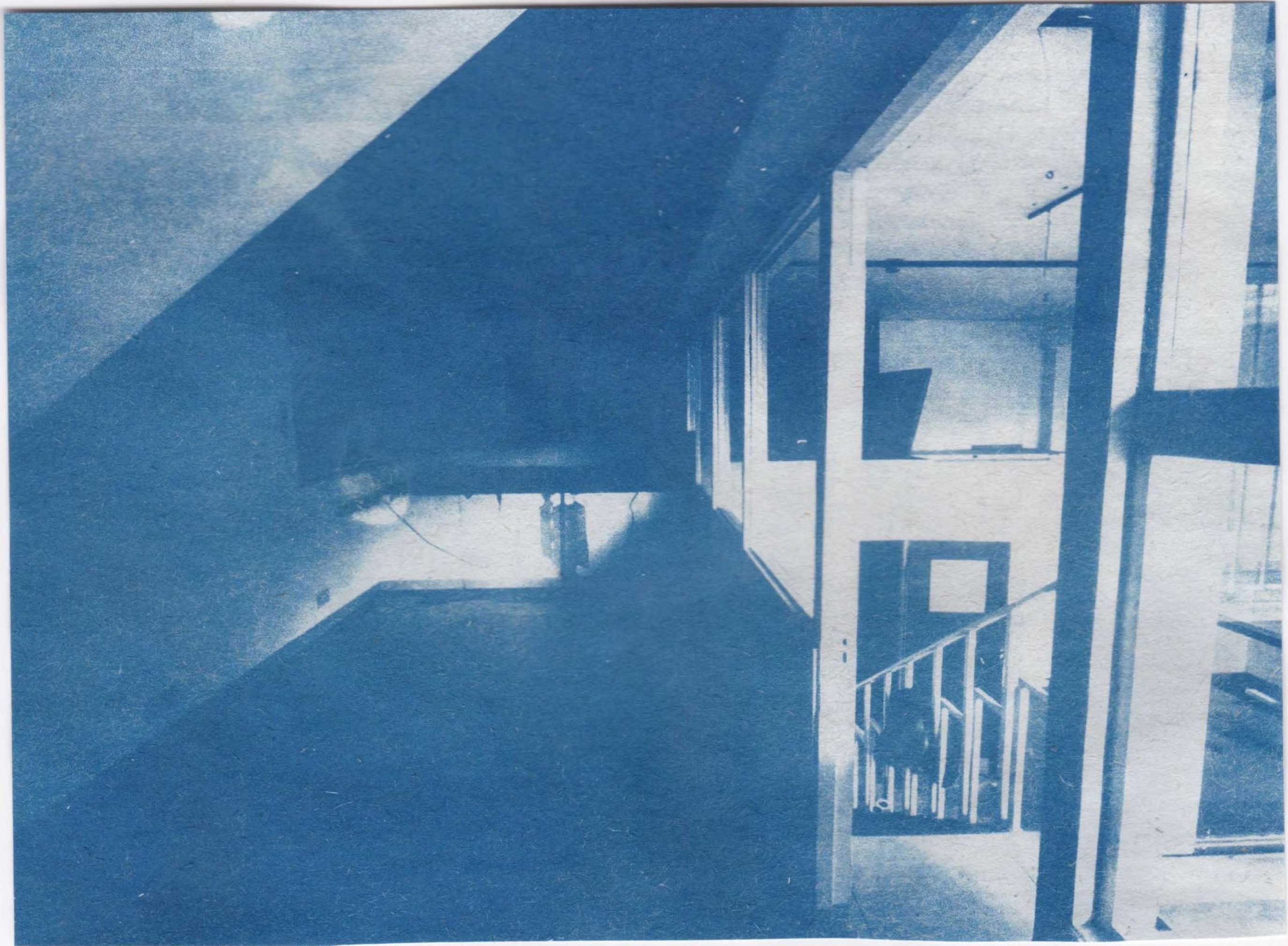


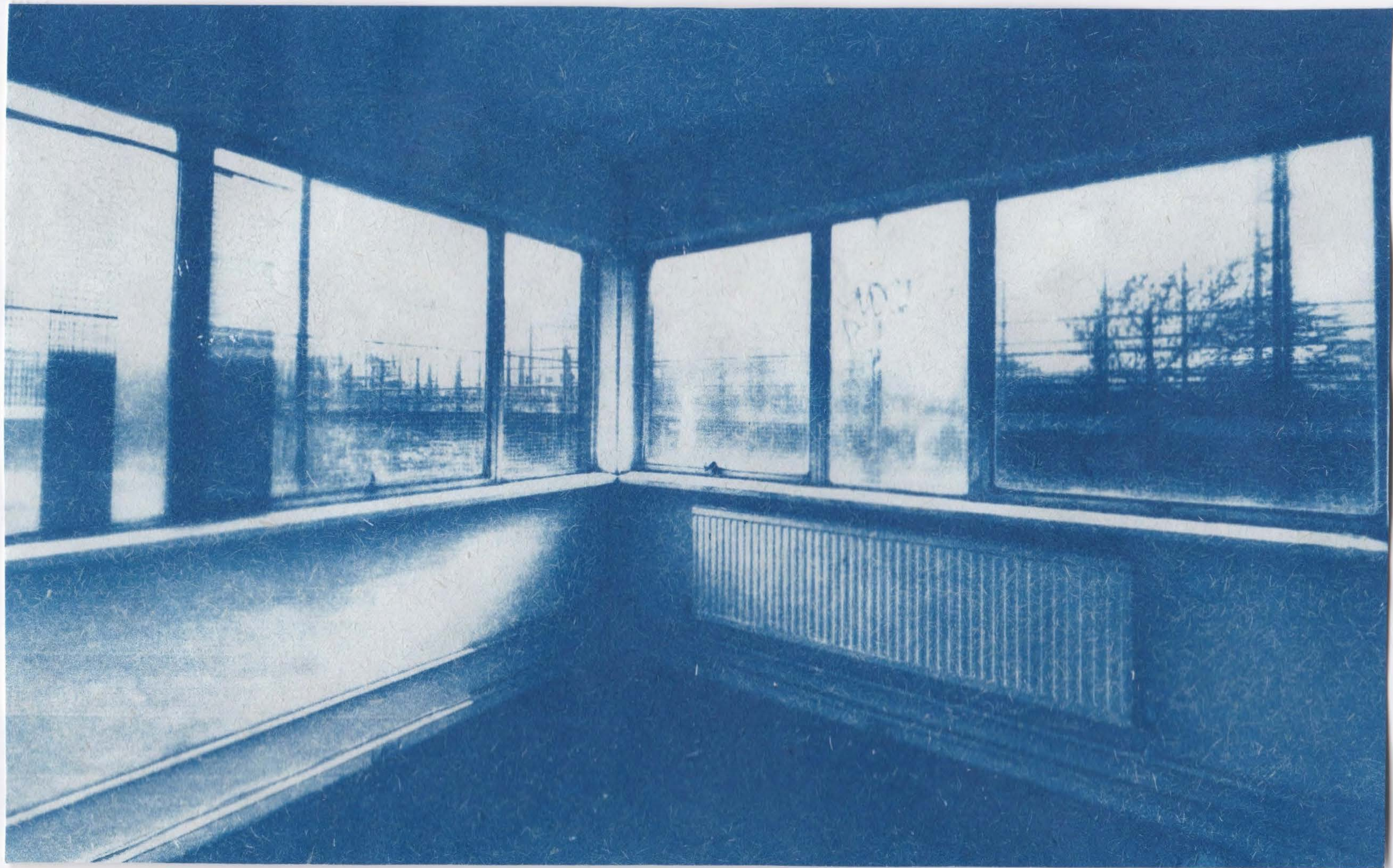






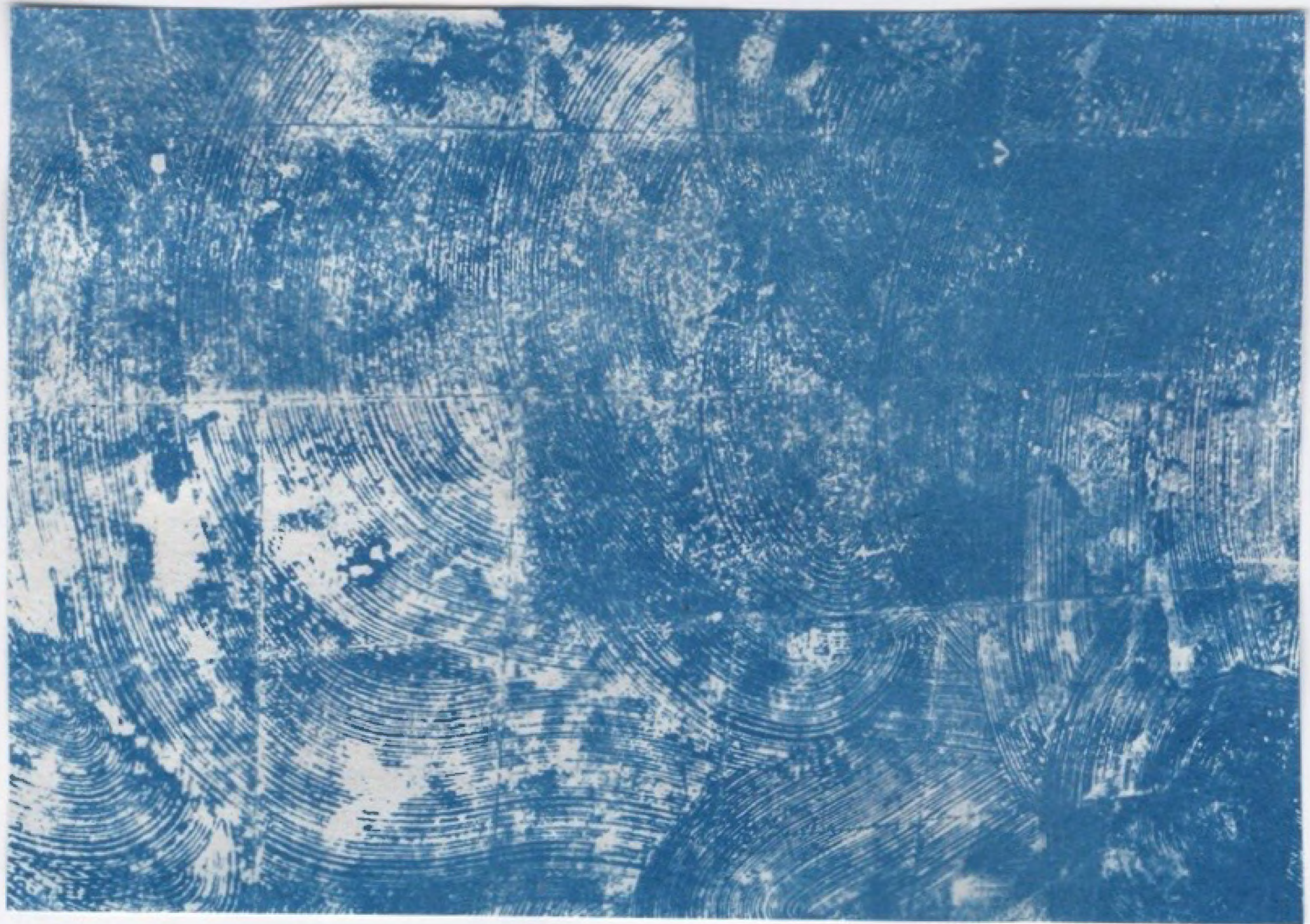


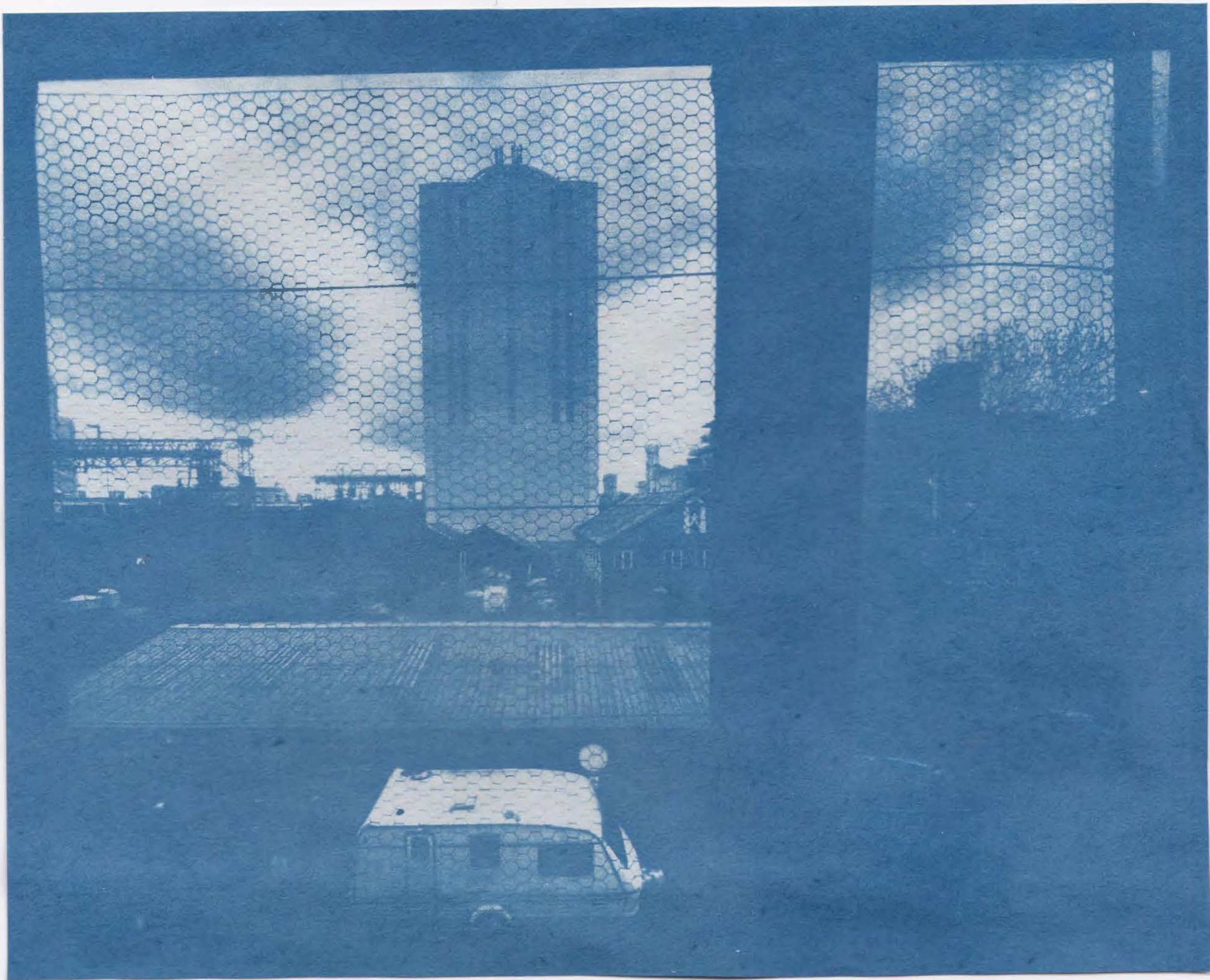


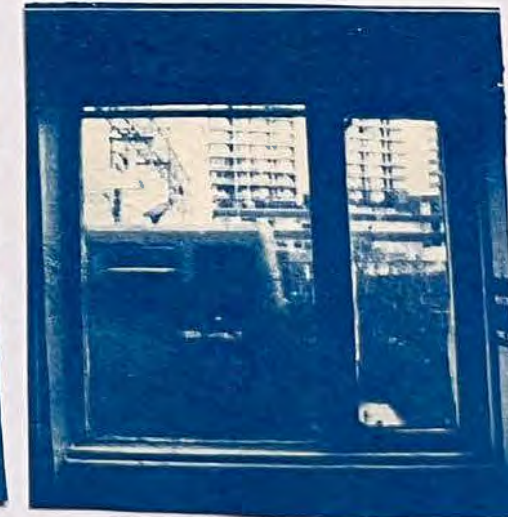
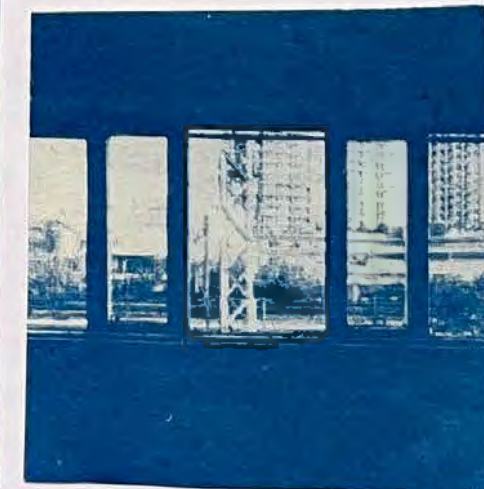
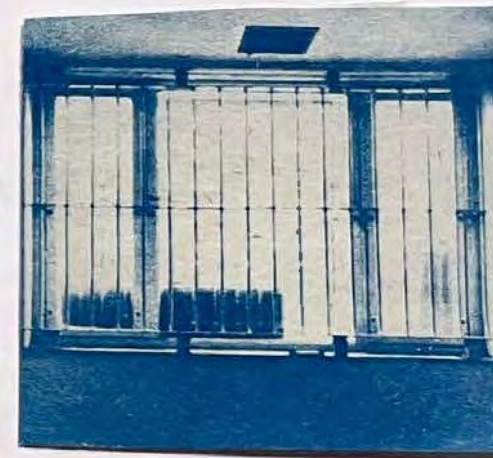
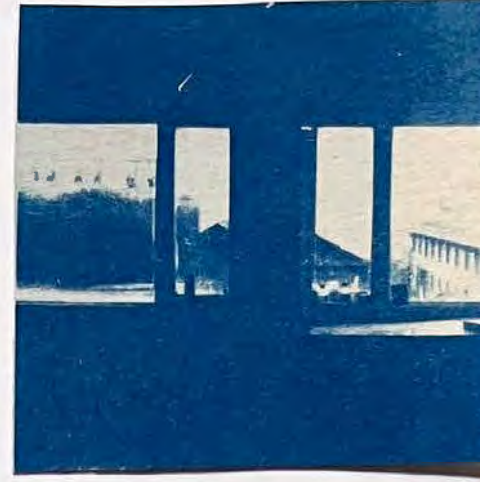














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