



# MIRAGE

Robyn Williams



## **MIRAGE**

Navigating the deeper histories of a generational trauma connected to swimming  
and (drowning) in the Cape.

In November 2021, I lost a close friend to an accidental drowning at the Silvermine dam, Cape Town. I was left on one side of the dam watching him swim across to the other side. That day the heat from the sun hitting the surface of the dark water in the dam created a mirage, an optical illusion making the other side of the dam look closer than it was. It gave a false sense of confidence that the opposite side could be easily reached. It was a traumatic experience and the memory of the day continued to replay itself in my head.

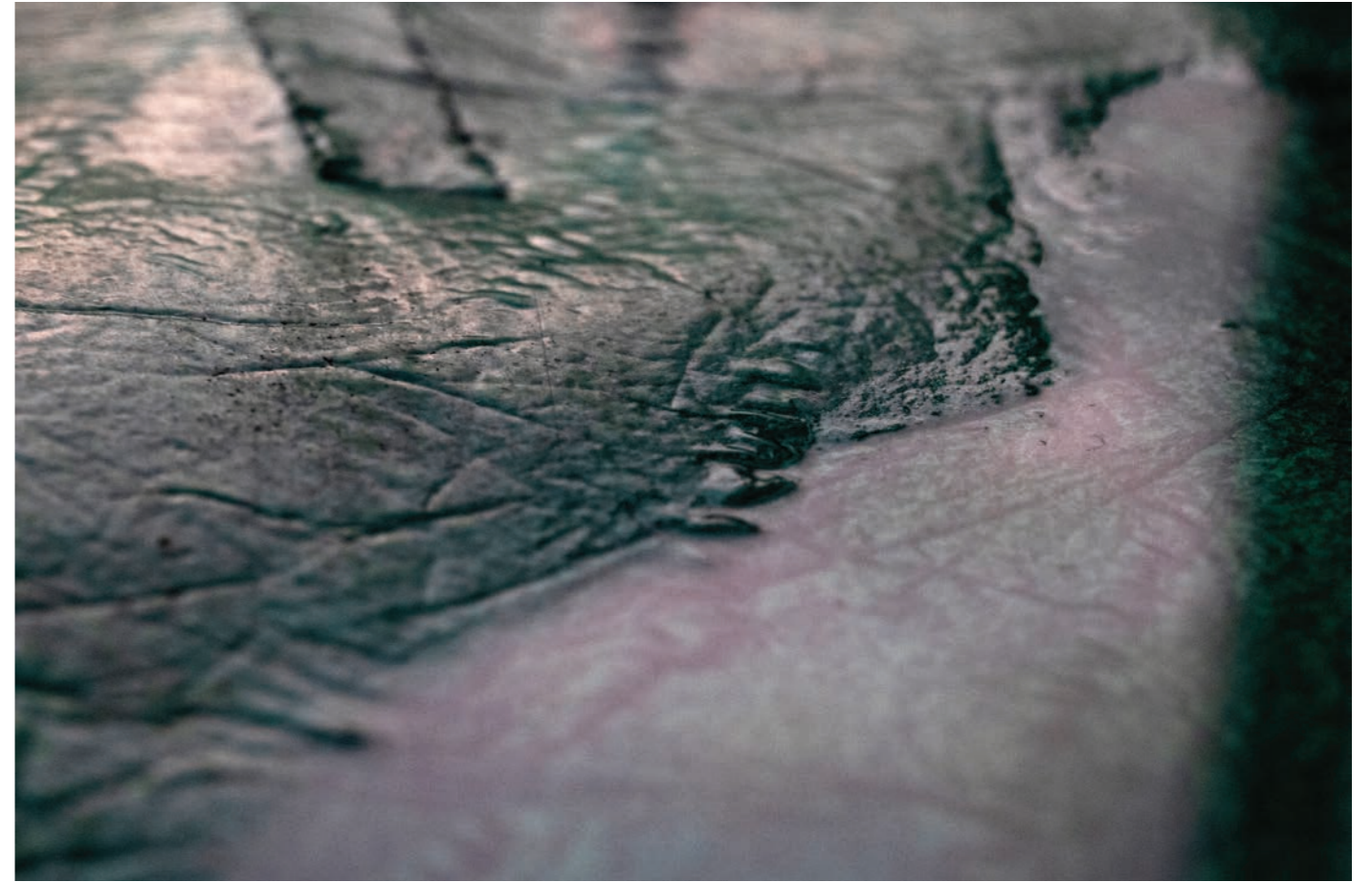
To deal with the trauma and loss I began working with water and memory in my photographs. The images represent how blurred reality seemed while grappling with the loss.

This led me to create abstracted imagery focusing on bodies of water. I created surreal waterscapes that offer a way for me to navigate my connection with water again. In turn creating these waterscapes helped me to escape the negative emotions I had with the bodies of water I was once familiar with.

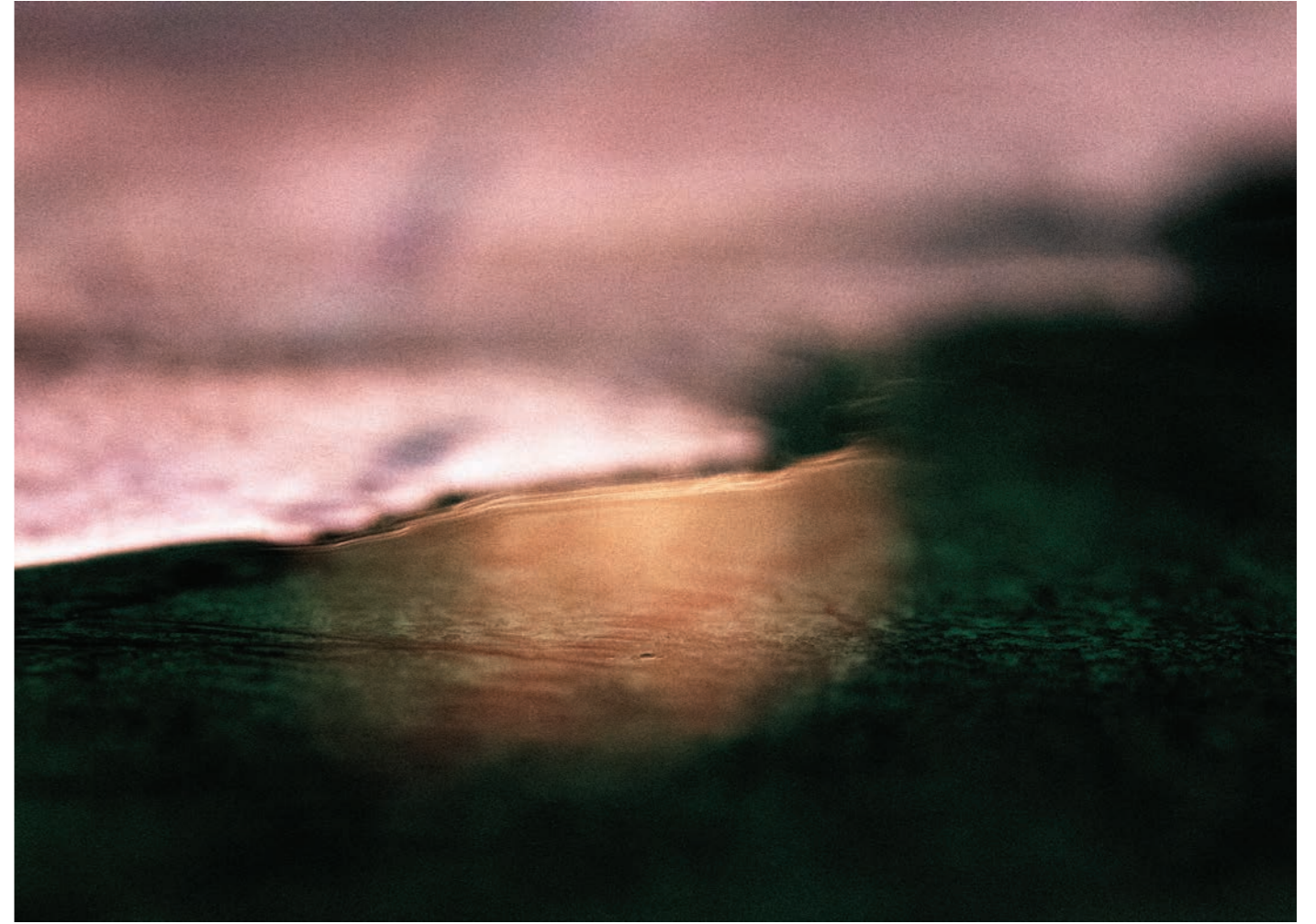




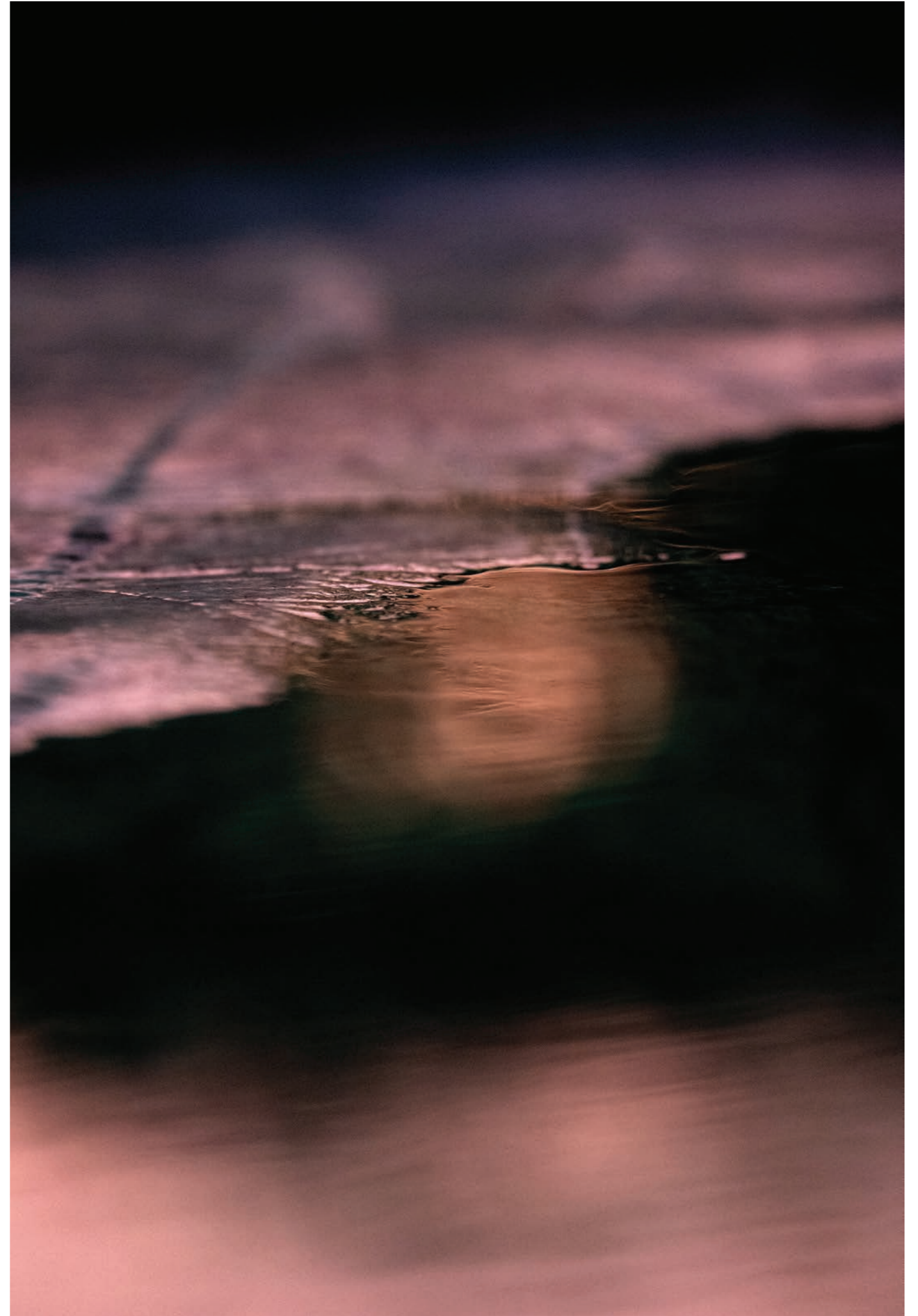




















*It Ebb's and Flow's*



## ZINES

As I dealt with my own experience of loss it prompted me to think about whether there were more people that experienced the loss of a loved one due to drowning in the Cape. I began looking into my families' experiences and found there was an unspoken generational trauma.

There seemed to be a common experience of a loss of loved ones, to drowning and swimming during Apartheid in which recreational spaces allocated to people who were not white, were often dangerous or unsafe. There is a politics to swimming in South Africa.

I was interested in the memories and emotions one has when looking back at the leisure act of swimming or enjoying the beach along the coast during Apartheid.

My families' experiences and my own narrative are recorded in the form of zines. The zines record intimate information of their experiences of swimming recreationally in Cape Town and highlights the unspoken pain caused by Apartheid laws, such as the Separate Amenities Act of 1953, and how this affected my family's life and the lives of others that still need to be heard.



Robyn Williams, *Marion Williams at Bluewaters Resort*, 2023, digital photograph.

*"Nobody asked us if we were okay..."*



Robyn Williams, *Waves at Bluewaters Beach*, 2023, digital photograph.





Robyn Williams, Steven Williams at Sunrise Beach, 2023, digital photograph.

*"I felt, we felt, there was a strangeness in the air."*



Robyn Williams, Spring Tide, 2023, digital photograph.



Robyn Williams, Andrew May at Kalk Bay Beach, 2023, digital photograph.

*"This was my first encounter, with the water, with the beach, with swimming"*









## VIDEO PIECE

Another way I had dealt with the trauma and loss was to recreate the surreal dreams I had. Recurring dreams which lead to the video piece "*There is life after death*".

"*There is life after death*" is based on a dream where water streams down on me from an unknown source. However, the water is not violent and heavy but gentle. The video allowed me to speak of the overwhelming emotions and associations I had with water and dealing with the loss. But the dream also represents the idea of water's connection to rebirth and life.





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