

liminal embrace

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2025

Between presence and absence, I exist.
My image fractures and reforms.
Light bends and my identity blurs.
The self becomes a shifting reflection.



Praxis

Throughout my journey as an artist, I have grown and learnt valuable lessons about the process of creation. Upon each new project, I have utilised them to creatively express my personal story. I can look back over the past few years and reflect on my work, and the key themes that flow throughout, revolve around identity and the self. My practice thus far has been focused on identity, mine and others', and a sense of connectedness. I explore different forms of identity, and the self, expressing how identity is ever-changing, distorted, lost and transformed.

Growing up mixed-race, I have had to face the battle of belonging and understanding the hybridity of my identity. The internal battle I face is the sense of belonging; to others, a sense of community, or to myself. The continual internal conflict and journey with myself as to who I really am. Throughout my life, I have changed and morphed into different versions, characters, roles and ways of being, having to code-switch in the different realms of my life. An actor playing different roles, each fighting for center stage to be seen and to belong. As I have changed, it has become easier to lose sight of who I am at the core. I have lost myself, and at times become an unrecognisable being in my own eyes.

My praxis at Michaelis has been a deeply personal one, taking aspects of my identity and materialising the feelings and states that I have been in. Transforming my emotions, inner fears and battles into visual extensions of myself.

My work is about how I perceive the distortion of identity. This is a photographic and videographic exploration of the fragmented self, exploring the ways in which my identity changes, is obscured, lost and transformed. I focus on finding a visual language to express the internal conflict between the different versions of myself. My lived experience is that I find myself lost at times, not knowing who the real me is. I represent this visually as my portrait is glitching, shedding, drowning, shifting and emerging. An unrecognisable being, constantly flowing into her next embodiment.

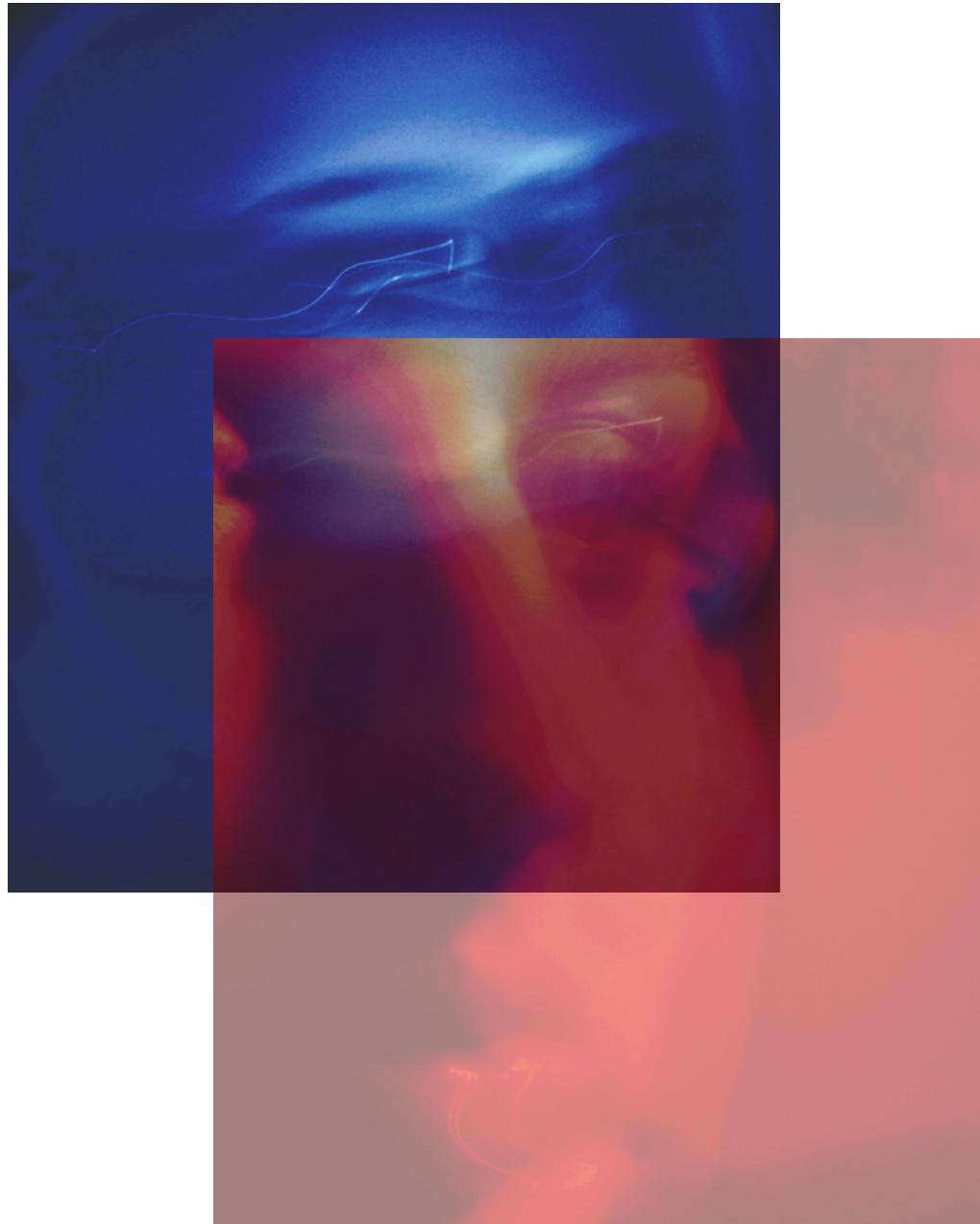
I investigate the birth and death of the different versions of myself, the mourning and the regeneration. My distortion is both wound and evolution.

Identity is a process and is not a fixed essence. As a framework, I shall be using Stuart Hall's essay, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990). Hall rejects the idea that identity is a stable, authentic essence we are born with. Instead, he argues that identity is constructed, as it is made through history, culture, and representation. Hall argues that it is fluid, as it is always changing, depending on time, place and context. Identity is relational, as it is formed in relation to others and never in isolation (Hall, 1990).

Hall insists that identity is not singular, but fragmented, as we all have multiple identities; race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality; and how these sometimes conflict. Hall expresses how identity can be distorted, layered, or re-constructed. He provides a theoretical structure for representing identity as distorted, fragmented, and shaped by representation.

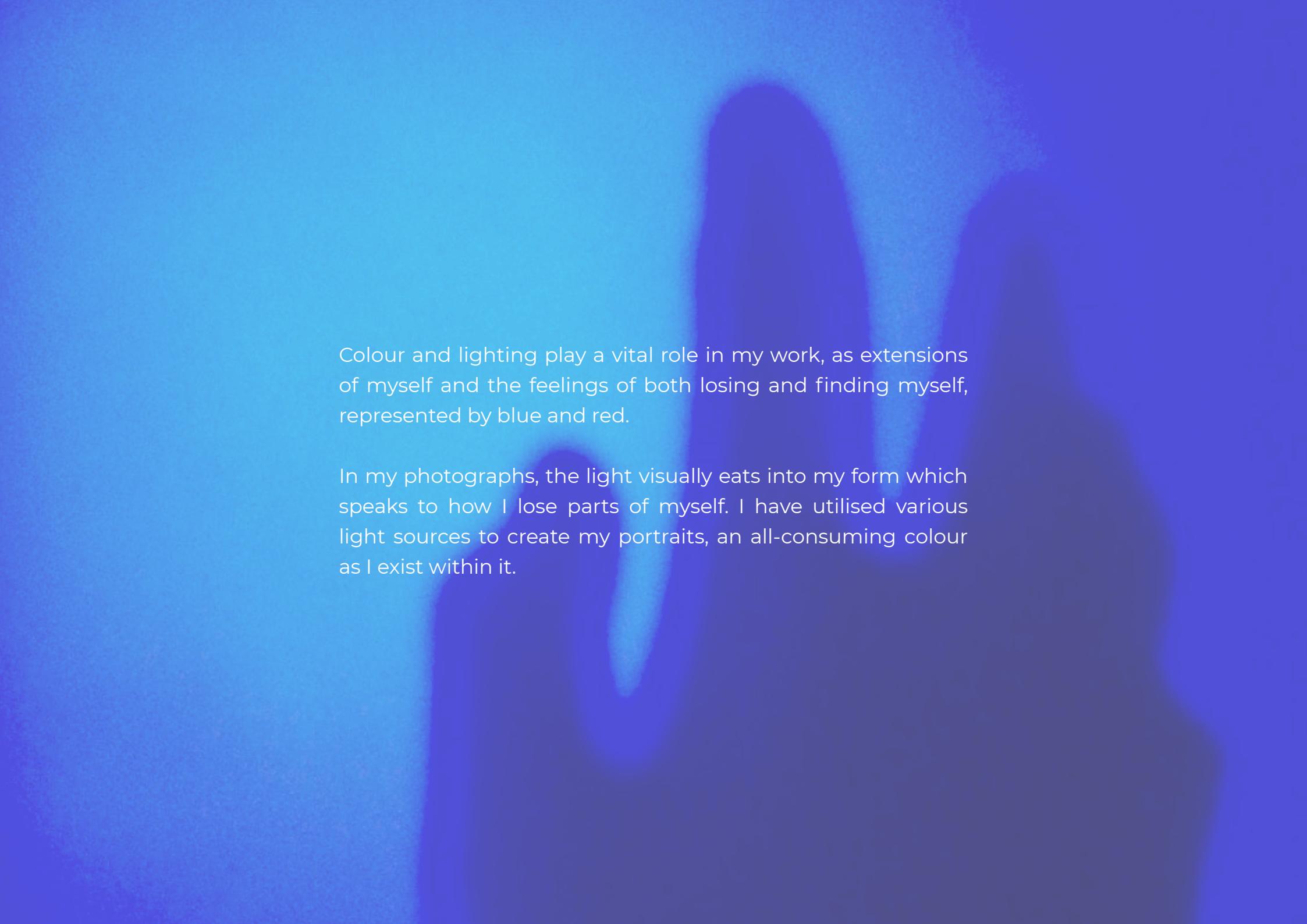
My body of work is focused on capturing the various states of distortion of my self-portrait and the hybridity of my identity. Identity is fluid, unsettled and transformative, and I explore this in my portraits. As my face changes, melts, is molded and glitches, my portrait becomes unclear and undefinable.

Embarking on the journey of my process and production, began with my concept and themes of identity. This evolved into exploring and finding ways to express myself and my feelings visually. Within my portraits, my performance plays a vital role in the emotions I wanted to convey to the viewer, and to myself. Throughout the process, it was easy to tap into and access the various emotional states, as my work is centered around my identity and my feelings. My body of work and the process of production was a deeply cathartic experience, forcing myself to be vulnerable with my emotions and in front of the lens. This allowed myself to creatively address and express my identity in how it is fluid and hybrid.



I have visually achieved the distortion of my portrait through movement, lighting and colour. Movement and motion are key in my visuals and concept, as identity is ever-changing and in motion, never fixed or confined (Hall, 1990).

I wanted to explore the notion of the birth and emergence of different versions of myself, as well as the death and the letting go of my past selves and the roles I used to play. Which Shae I choose to be, and which one I choose to be swallowed by the darkness..



Colour and lighting play a vital role in my work, as extensions of myself and the feelings of both losing and finding myself, represented by blue and red.

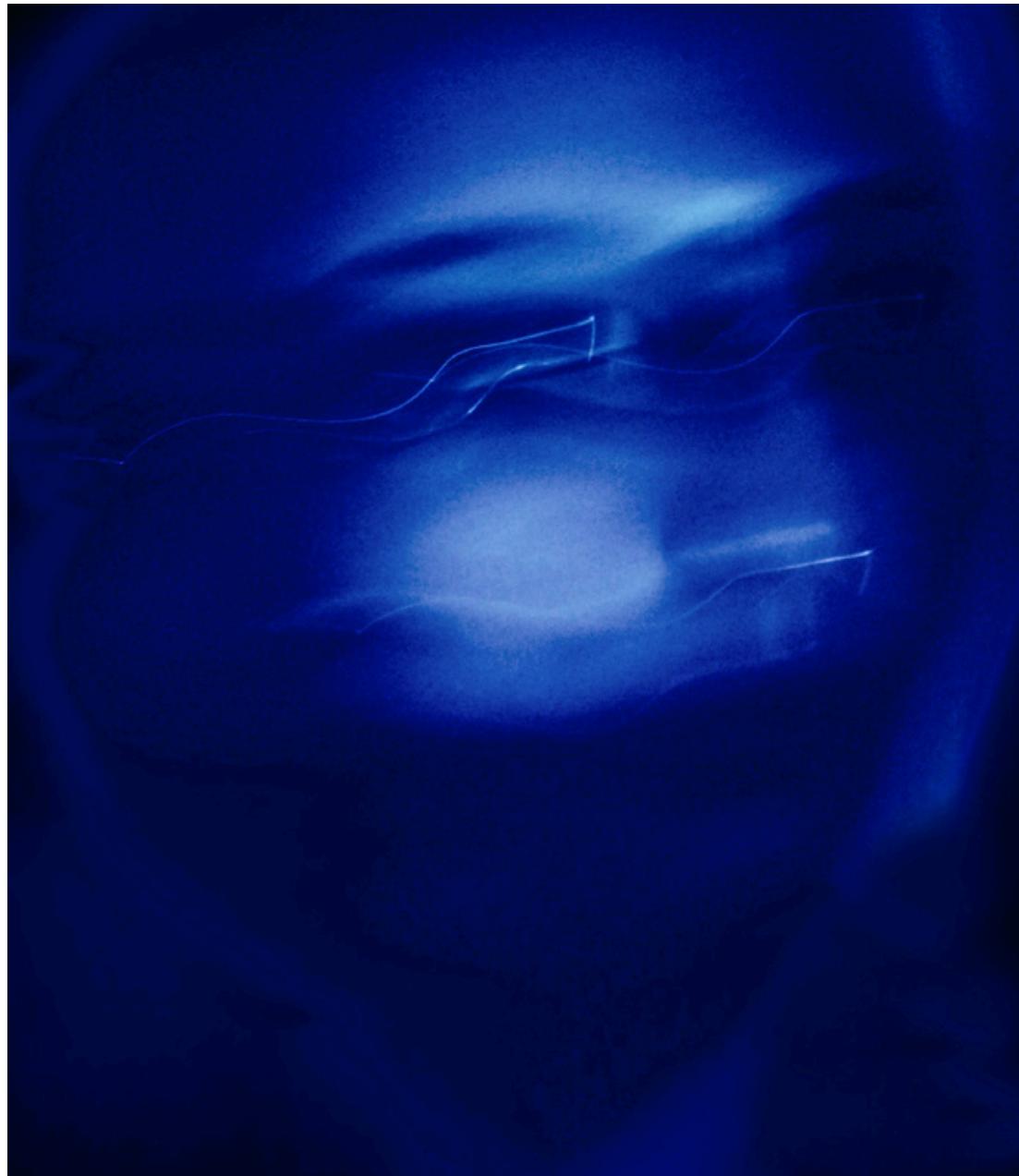
In my photographs, the light visually eats into my form which speaks to how I lose parts of myself. I have utilised various light sources to create my portraits, an all-consuming colour as I exist within it.



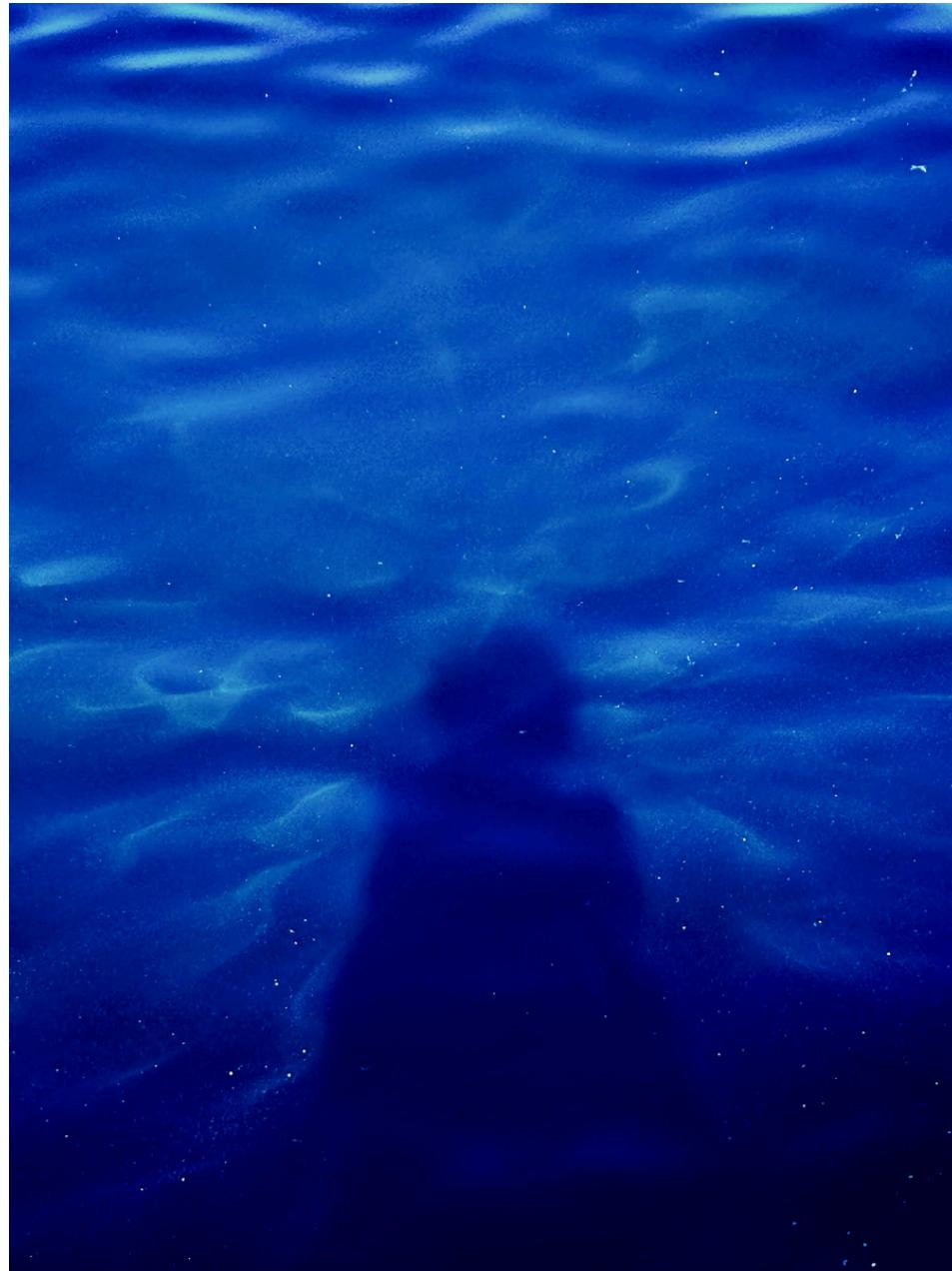
Unbecoming

The blue portraits in the series symbolise and express the states and feelings of being lost. The contemplation and sorrow I feel in my existence of who I am and where I belong, both physically and emotionally, feeling out of place.

My blue portraits co-exist with darkness, a darkness that creeps up and swallows my existence. The electric hue within the blue also notions to the sense of my lost self trying to be found, as the blue is not muted, but very much alive in the darkness, trying to pull me back into a lost and forgotten space. My blue portraits capture the feelings I have of being lost and in the unknown of my existence, as my face is distorted, bleeding into the black. I have tried to capture a sense of grief in my blue portraits, mourning myself.

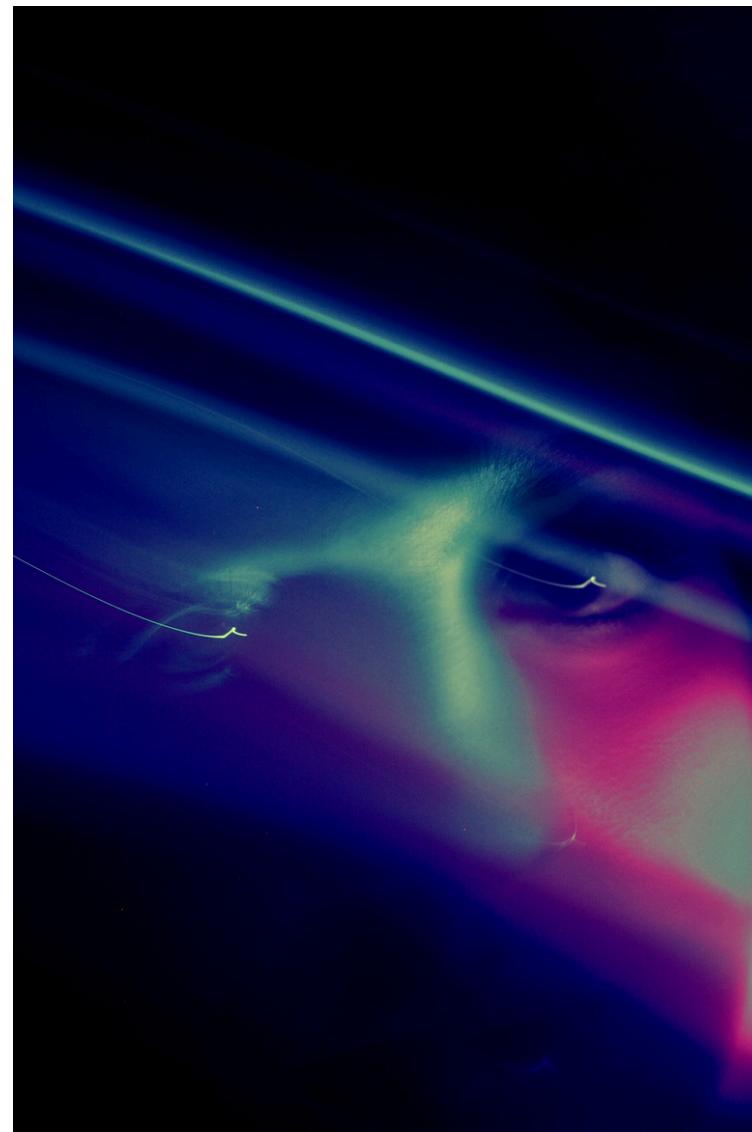










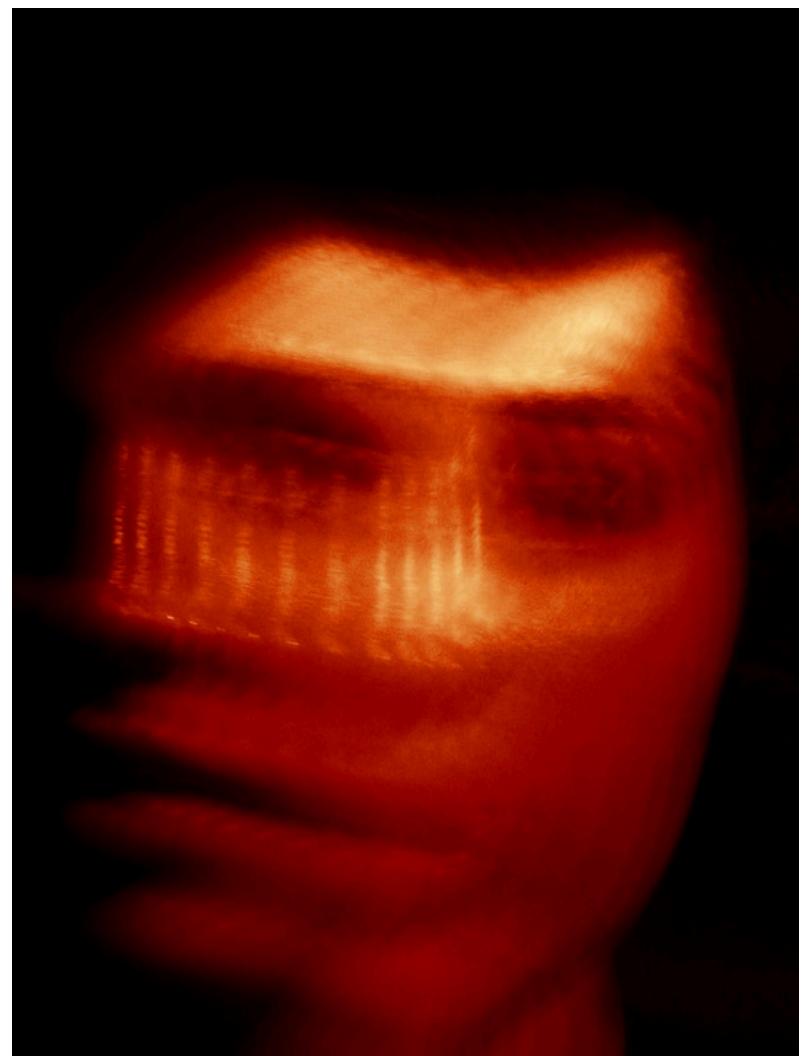
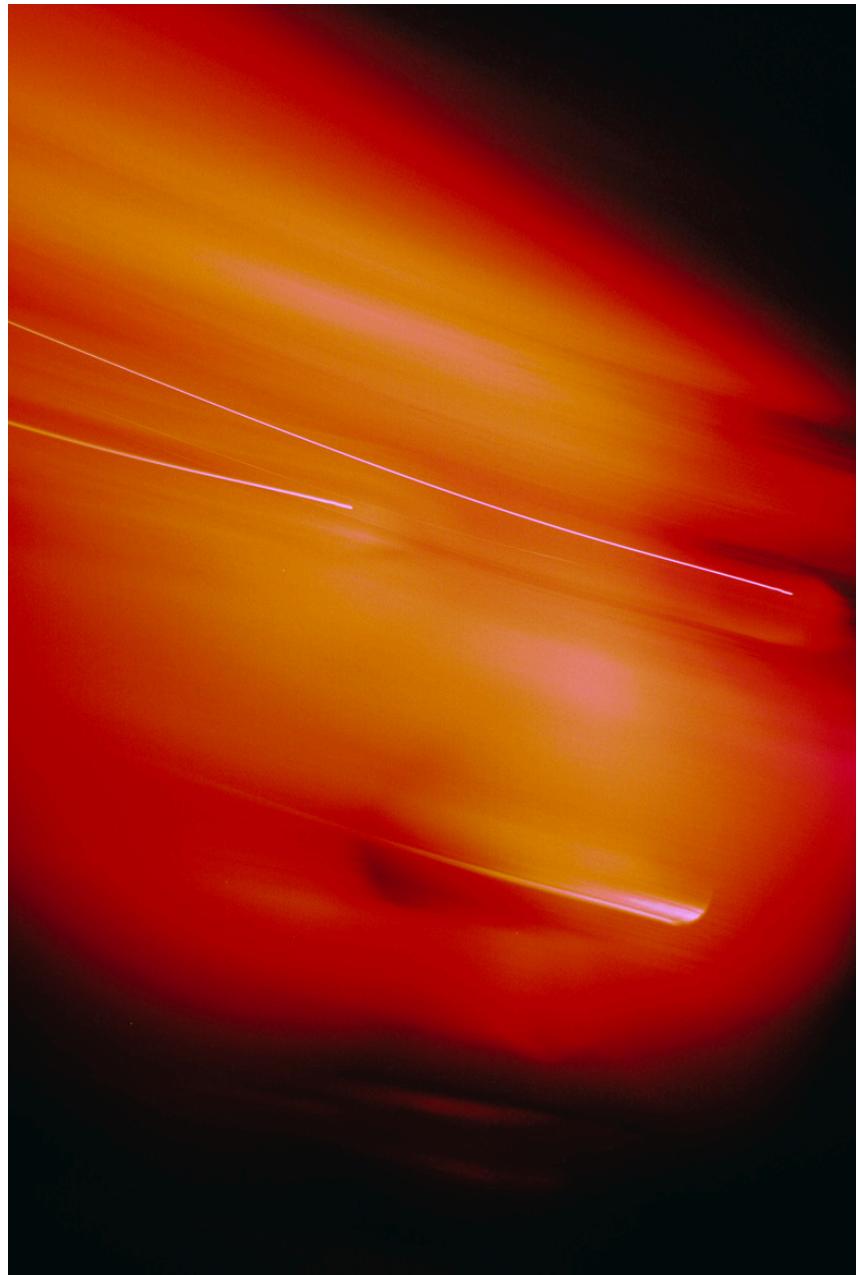


Becoming

The colour red, in my work, has taken on the persona and metaphor for the emergence and birth of myself. Its bright hue alludes to fire, a burning sensation within myself to find who I am. The red portraits in my series are made up of self-portraits; glitching, shifting, changing, emerging to the surface of bodies of water as representations of being alive, and the process of being re-born. The red glows amongst the darkness. My red portraits are connected through colour and through meaning, as they represent the parts of myself that are being awoken, in their fluidity and motion



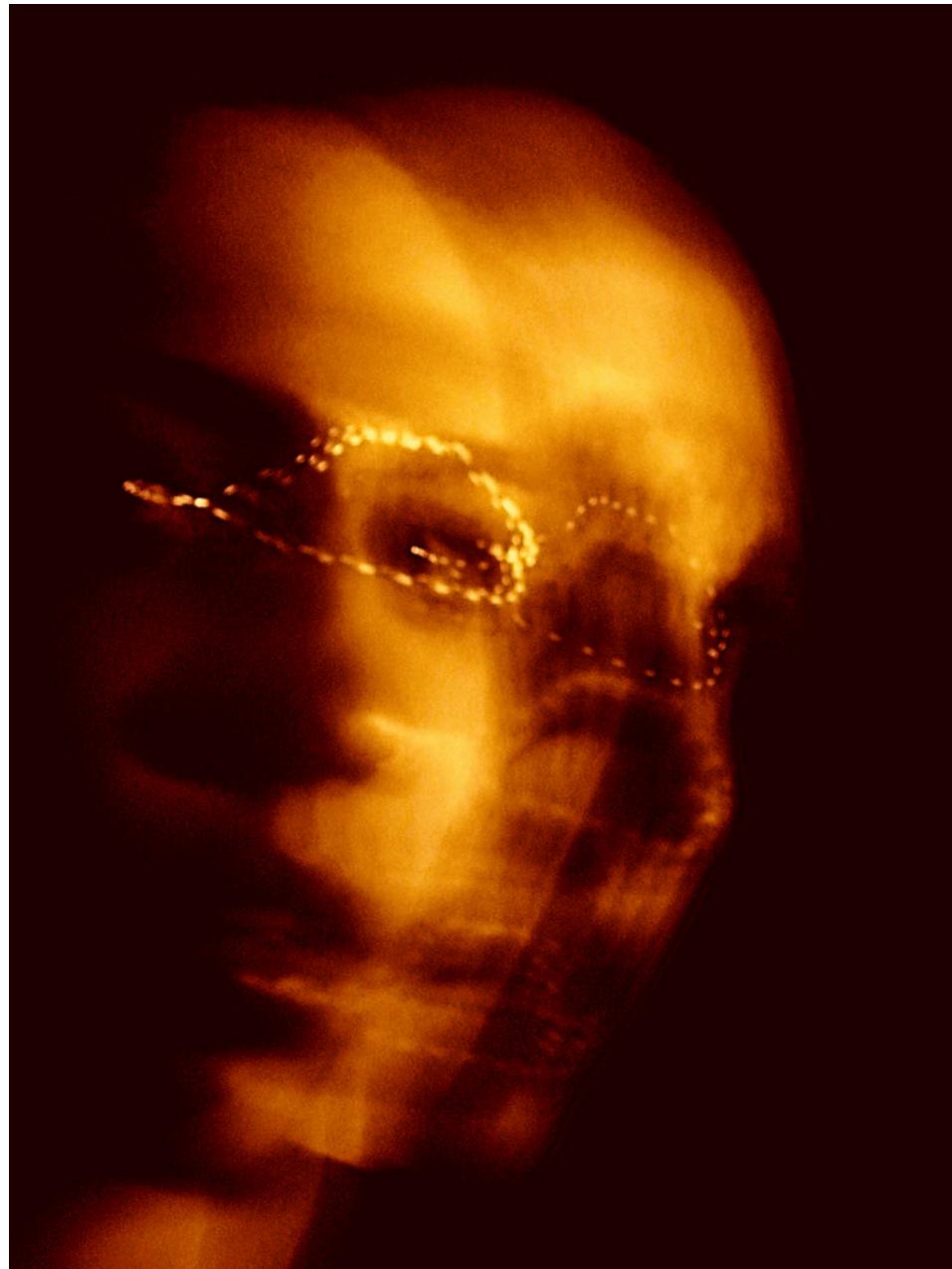




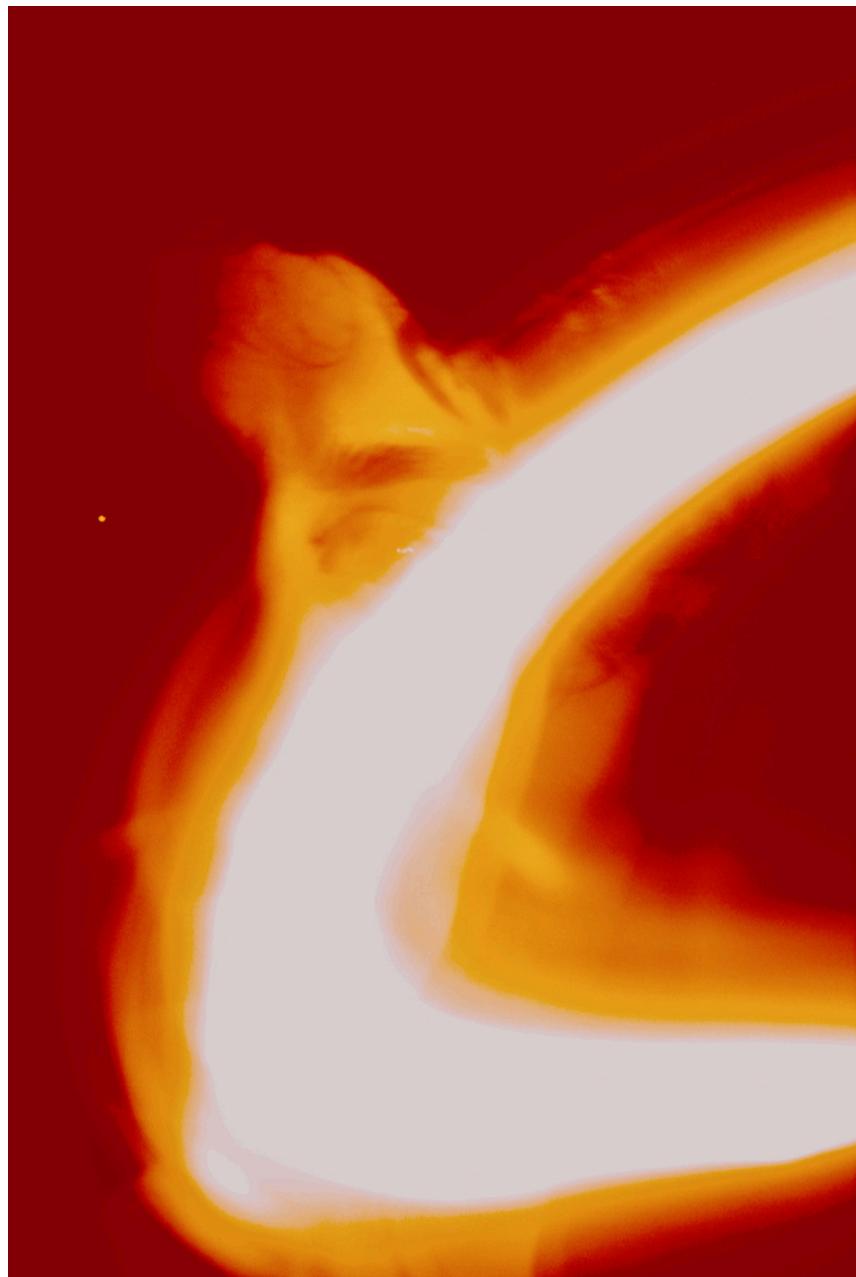










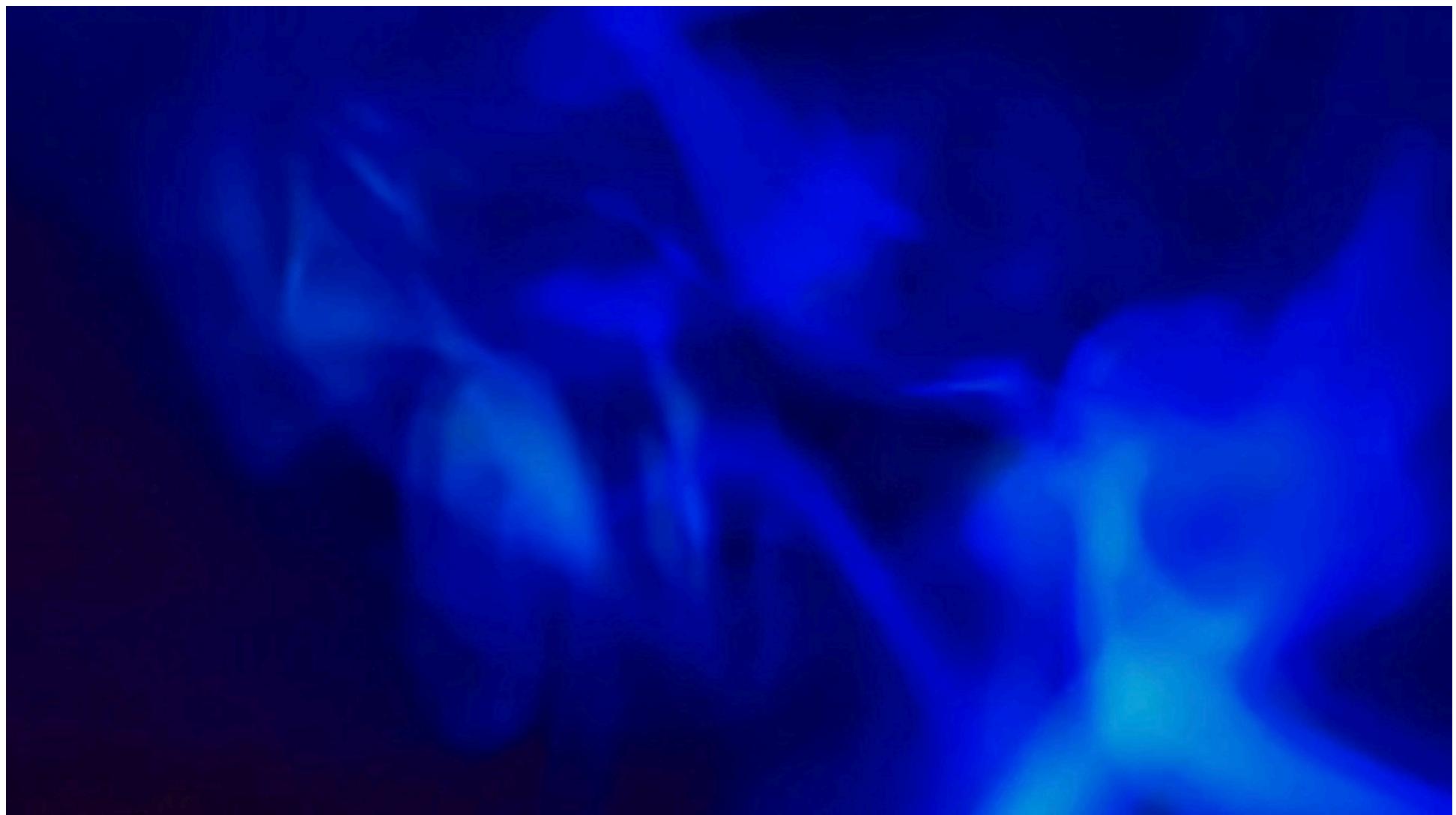


Videography

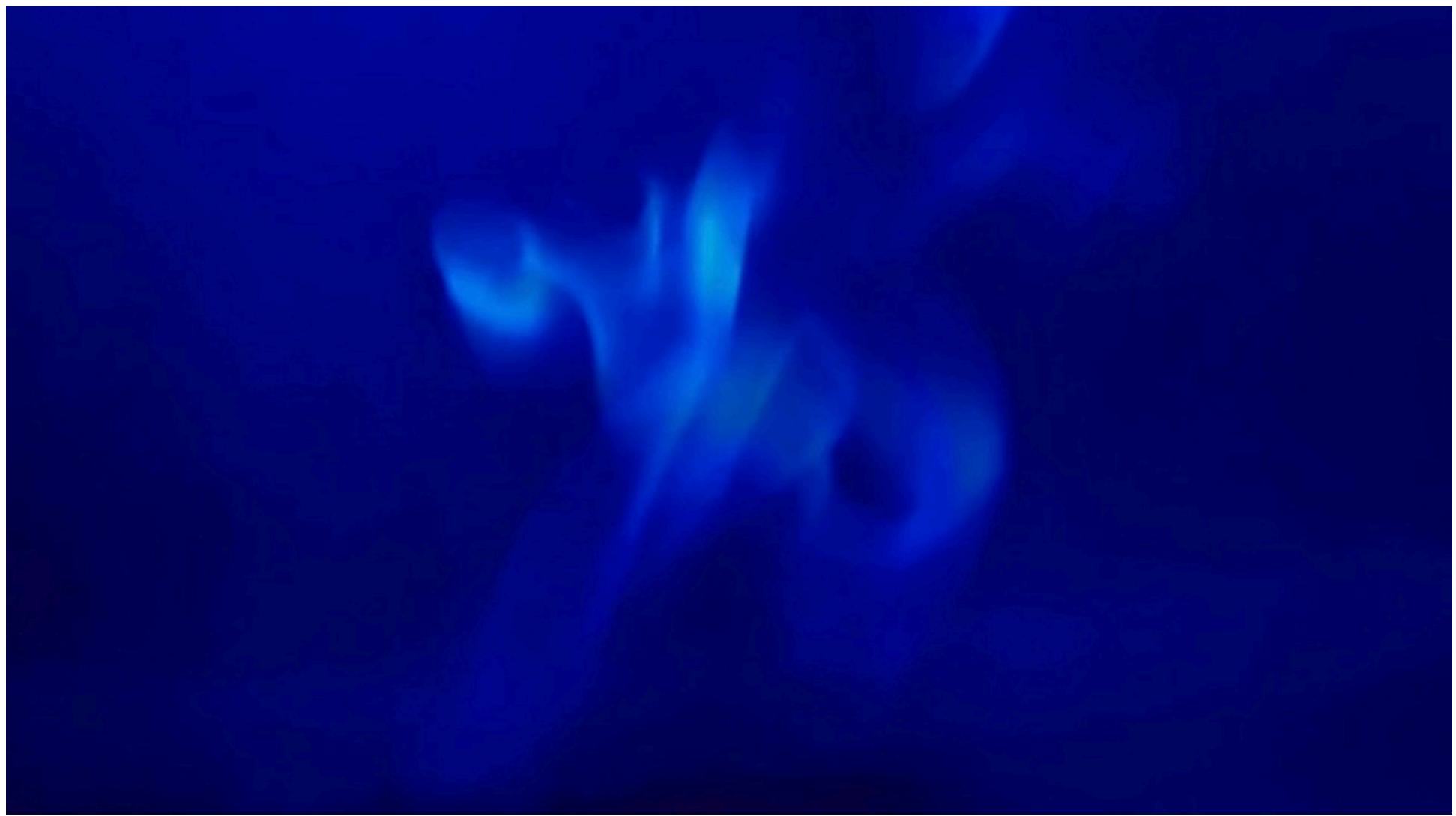
As a complimentary body of work, I have created video pieces capturing colourful fluid light, as it moves and changes, interacting with my portrait photographs. I have done this by experimenting with various light sources, in red and blue, to allow each light to take on their own life through motion and smoke. The videos capturing blue move at a slower, contemplative pace, whereas the red videos are more energised in their movement, ready to burst out of the frame. In some, my shadow can be seen, a remanence of my form amongst the colour and light. The next few pages are stills from my videos.

Here is the link to watch my videos: <https://l1nk.dev/Z03RB>

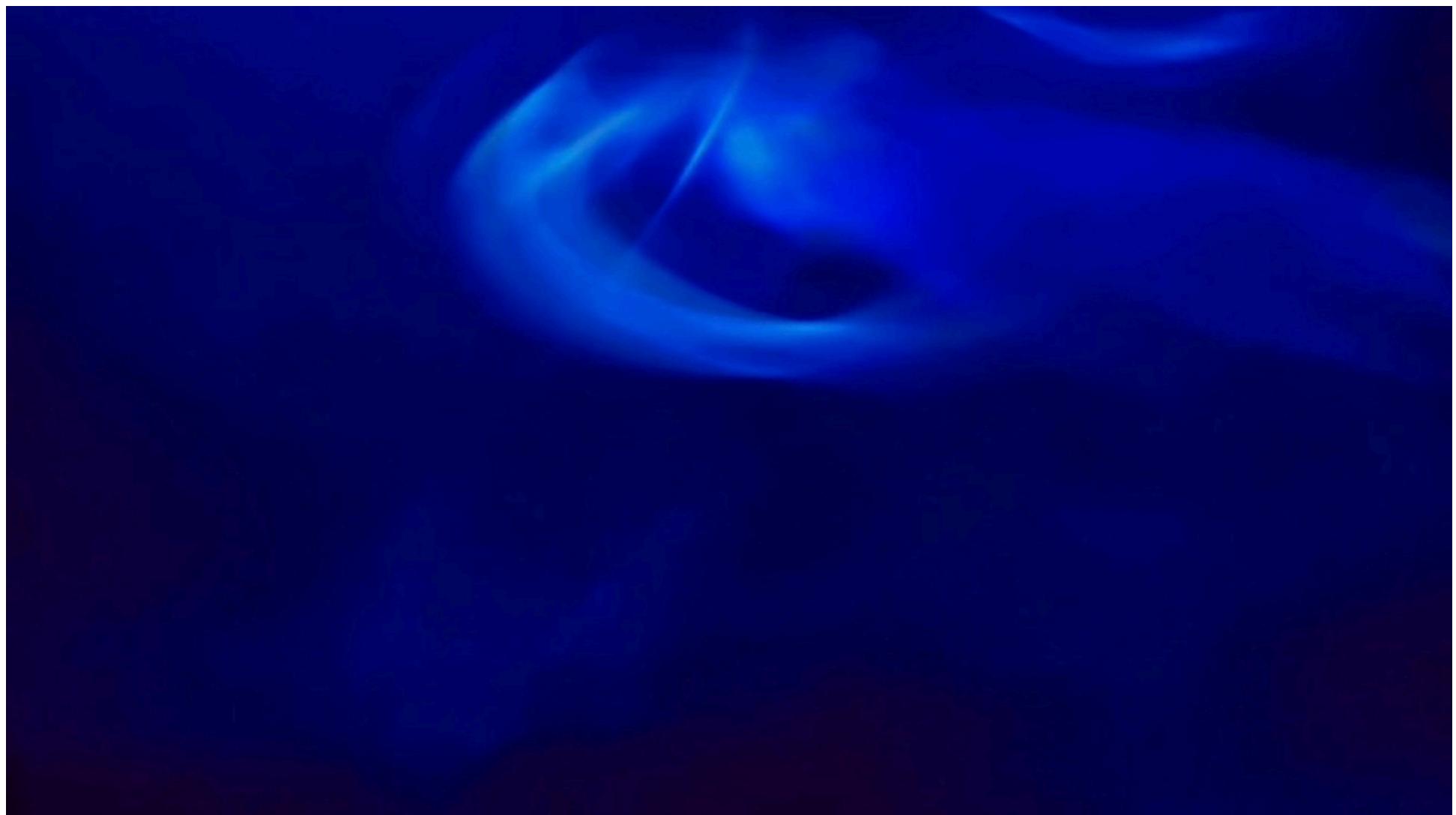




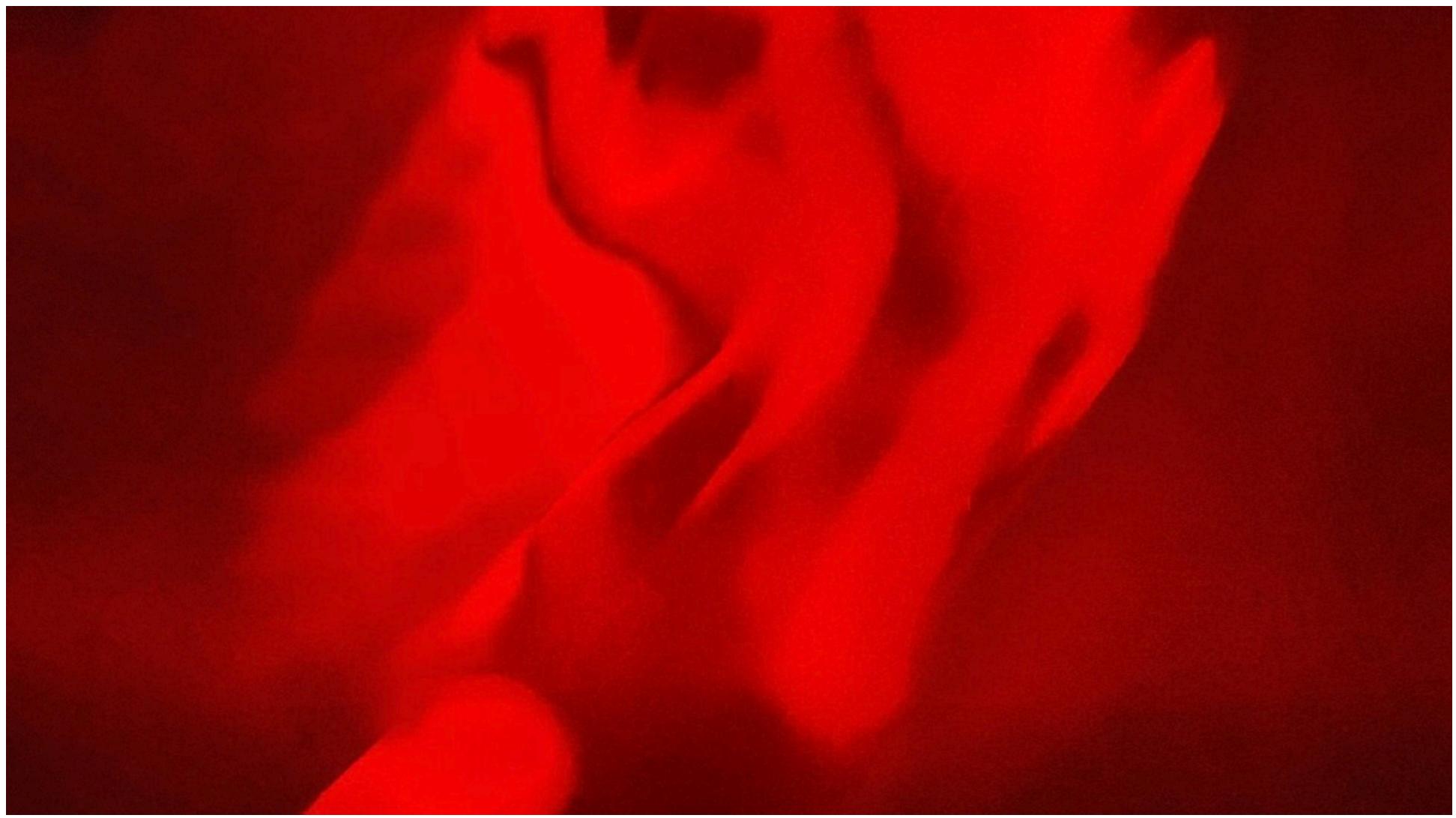




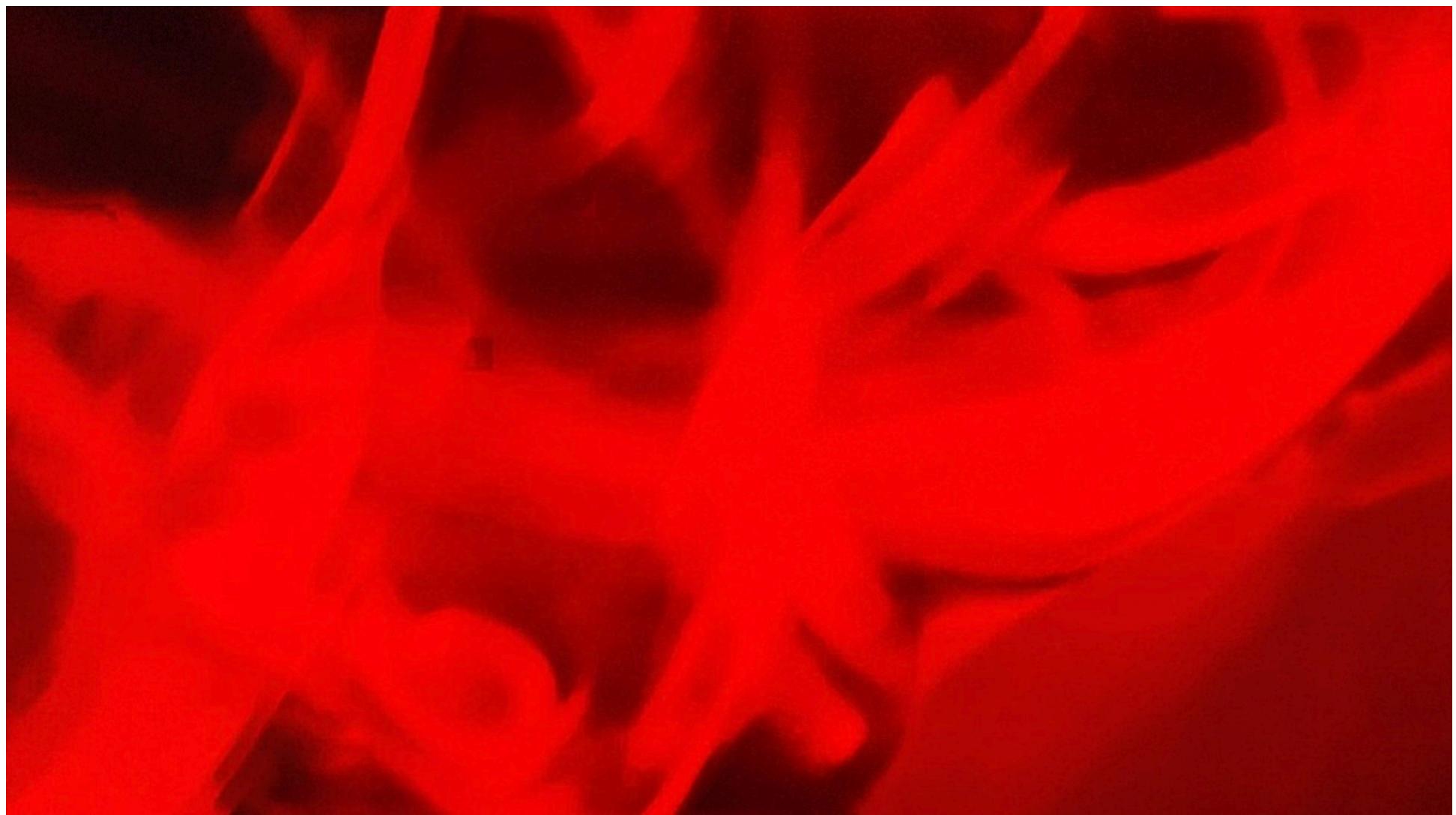


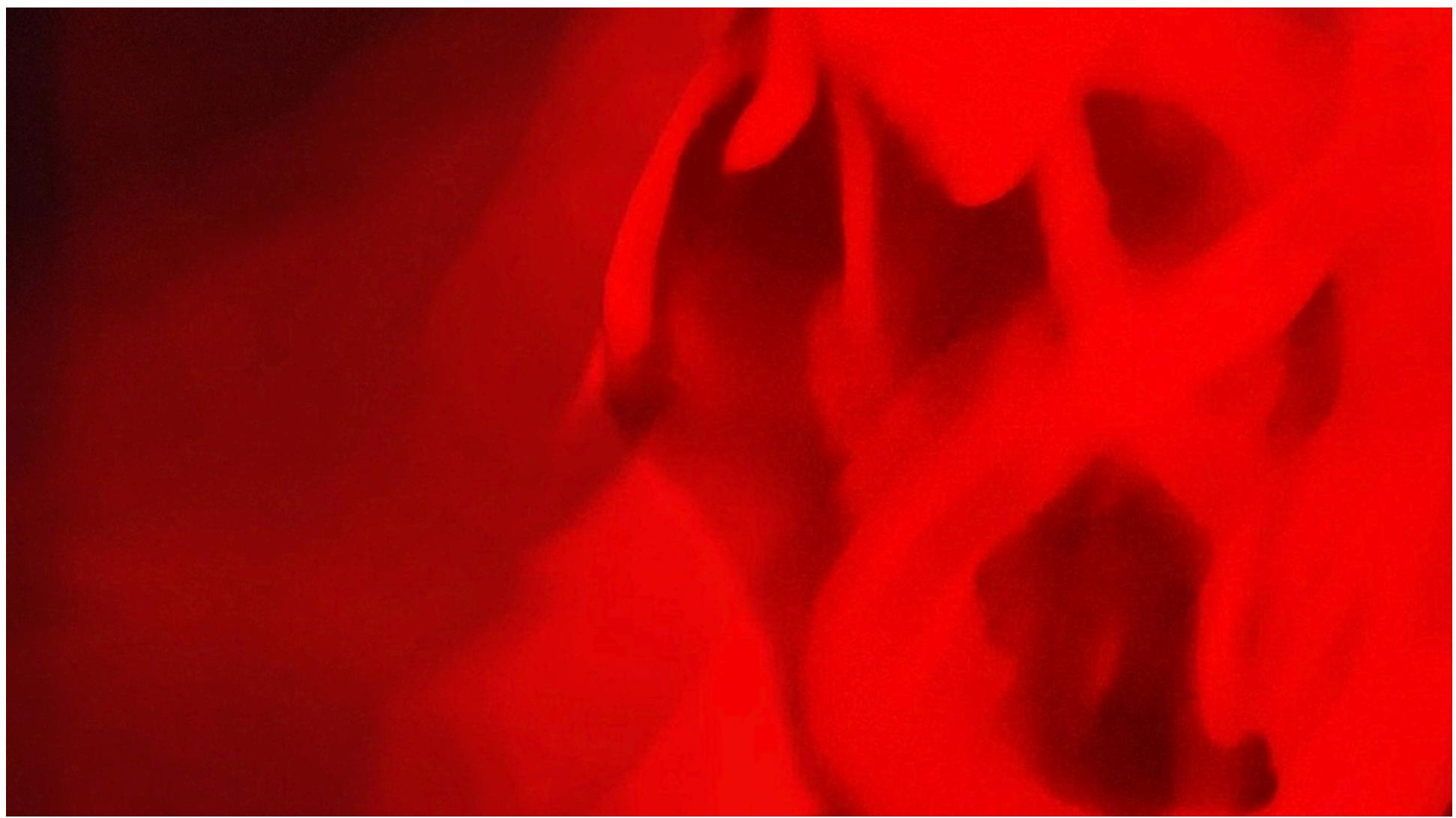


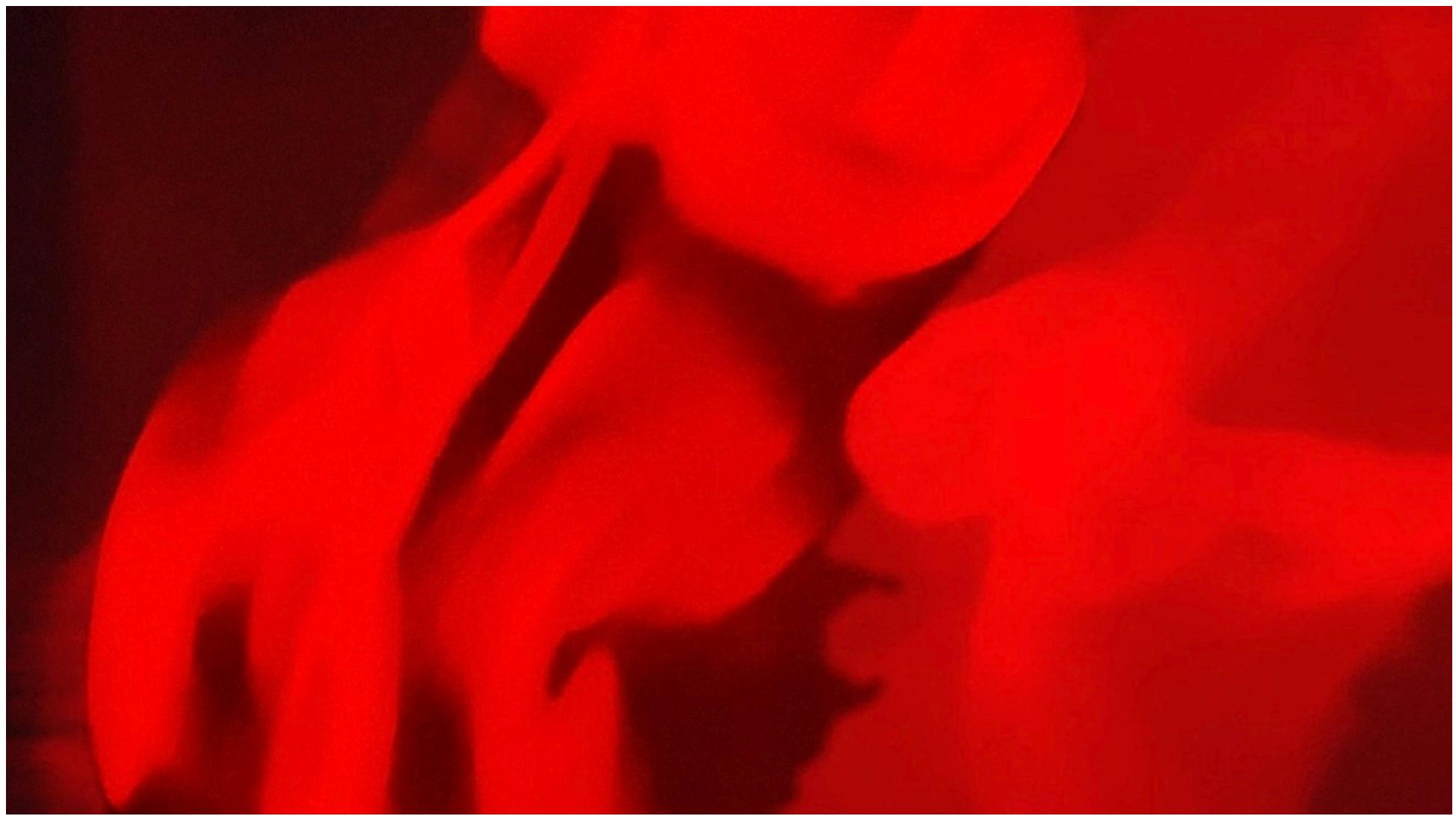


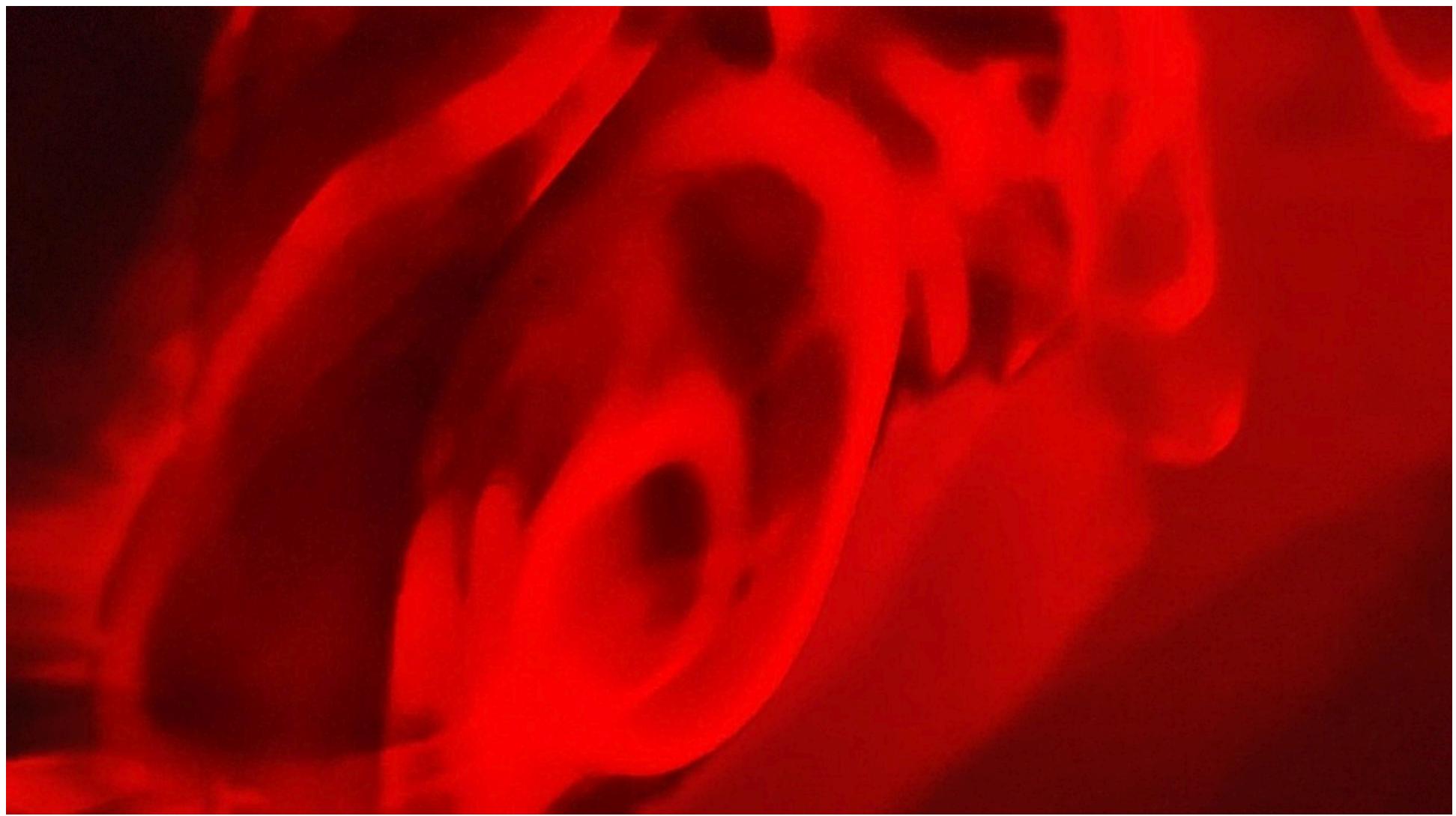


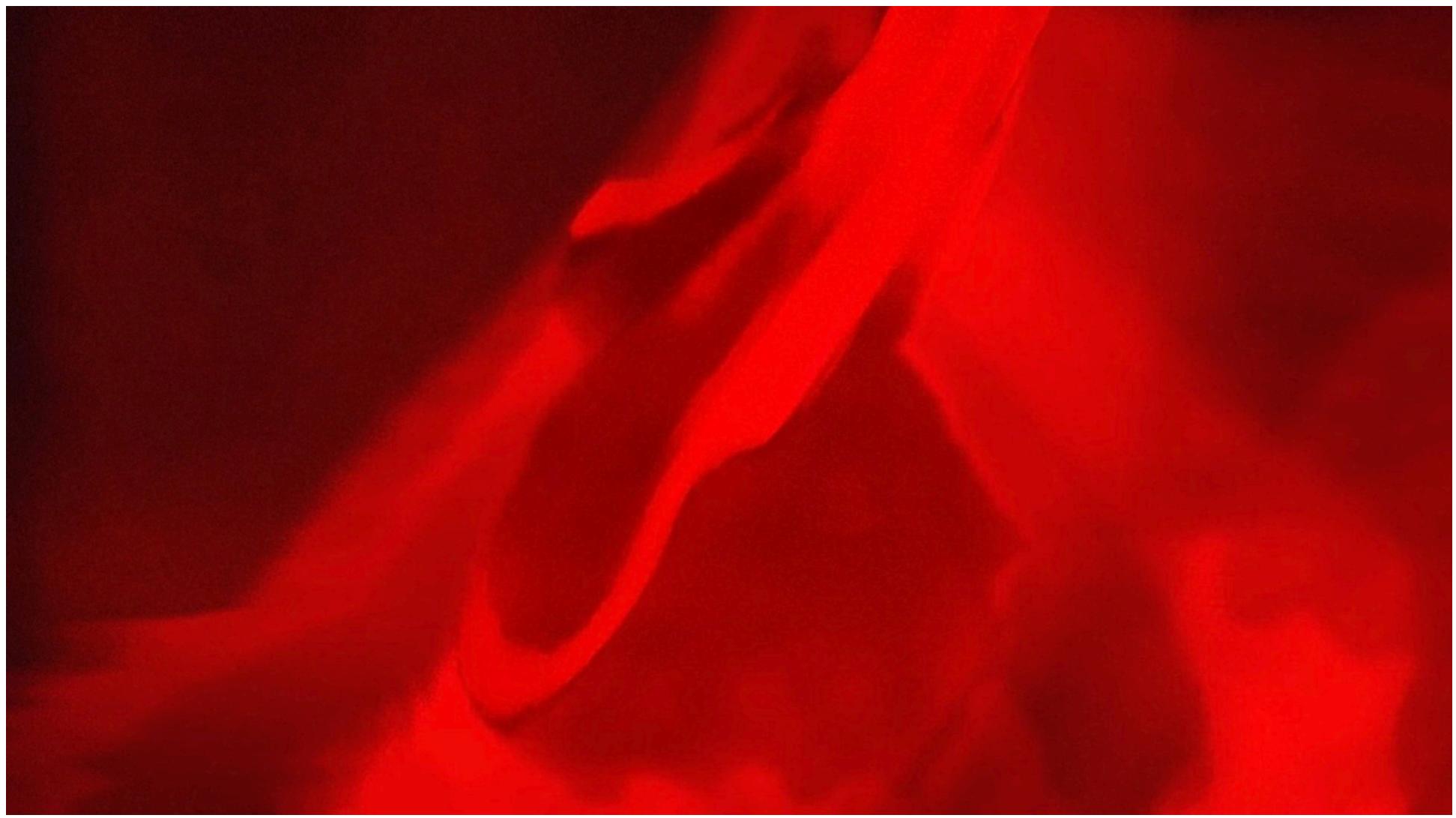












I have created a video with my portrait and shadow, where blue and red interact, mixing and blending into their own purple/magenta hue. This colour mix can evoke the sense of mystery, hybridity, fluidity and transformation. This cross-over, motion and blend of colours represents the dynamics of my identity, as each state, emergence and death, being found and lost, belong together in its own beautiful, harmonious way.













As a theoretical framework for my exploration of my hybridity, I have derived inspiration from Nina Mangalanayagam. Themes in her work include belonging, multiple heritages and hybridity. Mangalanayagam's concept of hybridity is grounded in visual art, identity and personal experience. She considers hybridity not just as mixing forces or superficial aesthetic crossing, but as an entanglement of personal and collective histories, such as racialised identity. (Mangalanayagam, 2018). Underlying much of her work is the notion of what it really means to belong culturally, socially, racially and physically.

Liminal Embrace

The relationship between the red and the blue conceptually symbolises how growth and change of identity is hybrid and always in motion, and that being lost is all part of finding oneself again. Separate entities fusing together. When they mix into the purple/magenta, this represents a collision of identities as well as an unresolved tension within myself.

Visually, the distortion with these colours is able to embody my inner conflict and fragmented identity, coming together as one, as a fusion. Their mix creates a third colour, and a third space. Homi Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space" suggests that cultural identity is formed in an in-between, hybrid space where different cultural meanings intersect and transform (Bhabha, 1994).

A liminal space, one of emergence, blending and a space of creation. The interaction between the reds and the blues, in creating the purple/magenta, symbolises a becoming. I accept and embrace being in the in-between, both losing and finding myself together. This echoes Stuart Hall's idea that identity is "a production...always in process." (Hall, 1990). Through this, the purple/magenta acts as a metaphor for an identity that is layered, hybrid and constantly shifting in motion, representing my identity.

Sound Piece

I have created a sound piece to encapsulate my body of work. It is comprised of my voice; singing, humming, and blowing onto the microphone, as well as the sound of a lighter striking and igniting.

I wanted my sound piece to generate a sense of motion and flow, sonically narrating my concept, portraits, and video pieces.

Throughout my life, have always used singing as a mode of expression, and wanted to incorporate this part of me, in connection with my photographic and videographic expression.

Here is the link to my sound piece: <https://l1nk.dev/t4Xpo>

My work is rooted in feeling and centered around my sense of identity. The concept of identity takes on a different meaning to different people, as we each take on our own personal journeys through life. I believe that what connects each of us is a sense of identity and figuring out who we are. I have always had the hope that the work that I create, would have an emotional impact on people. I want my work to move people in a way unique to their own story, evoke intrigue and emotions out of my audience, and a sense of connectedness.

My praxis at Michaelis has developed throughout the years, with the key themes of identity and the self, connecting my work together. I use my production as a means of expressing and visualising what I am going through, my feelings, and my inner conflicts of my hybrid identity and belonging. Identity is fluid, ever-changing and in motion. My practice explores identity and distortion, through colour and motion. My practice is deeply personal, forcing myself to be vulnerable with my emotions as well as my art.

Acknowledgements

My family for their love, support and encouragement

My supervisor for their guidance and advice

My peers for their empathy and understanding

My loved ones for believing in me and pushing me forward to do my best

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