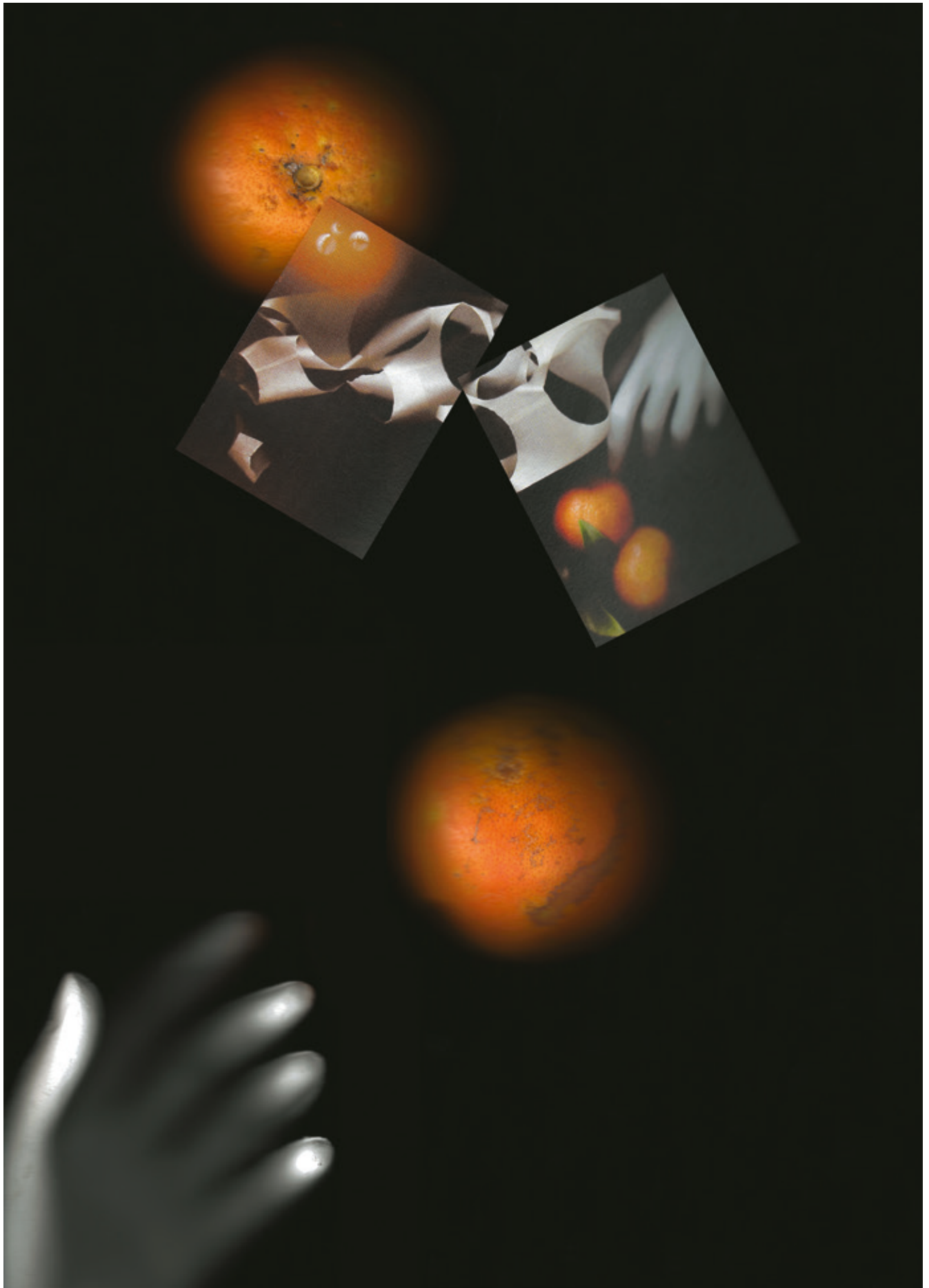


When regarding the medium of photography, we are often tempted to investigate the conditions under which a picture was created. This suggests that we might be able to explain what is extraordinary about a particular picture by examining its technical background. Without doubt, a few questions regarding what is visible in the picture can be answered by referring to the artist's personal skills and/or the photographic techniques used to make the picture, provided these are an explicit theme of the respective artwork. In most cases, however, the focus is primarily on the question of what we can see in the artistic image.

It is just as much a truism that there is a deluge of photographic images in our digital day and age as is that photography also exists without cameras. Ria Patricia Röder reacts to this situation with two parallel strategies: She not only refers to traditional methods of experimental photography, like the photograph; she also updates these with the help of contemporary technology. A darkroom is (still, or again) just as exotic today as scanners are ubiquitous. Virtually every printer on the market has an integrated scanner these days, and even if they are not as practical to handle as a camera, it is not so unusual per se to generate photographic pictures with a scanner. Only traditionalists still adhere to the dogma that photography requires a camera.

With this knowledge of how Röder creates her works in the *Scanograms* series in mind, we can explore their visual and semantic potential—in other words, what makes these photographs *artistic*. One of her photographs from 2017 that measures 55 x 40 cm bears the title *Cosecha*. In contrast to *Untitled*, which is ever popular with other artists, this title promises a reference. But is it intended as an aid? Does it have a descriptive function, or is it perhaps meant to be misleading? What does *cosecha*, the Spanish word for “harvest,” refer to?

Taking a closer look at the dark picture, we see round orange shapes—two large and two small—accompanied by white elements, all of which stand out against a black background that makes it impossible to identify the spatial situation. Two of these white elements can be identified as hands. Another two white objects are more difficult to identify but appear to be pieces of packaging material, its circular holes implying that it is causally related to the brightly colored shapes, which can be clearly identified as oranges (or perhaps tangerines?) on closer inspection. We also notice the blurry hand rendered in the style of an X-ray image emerging from the lower left corner, reaching for one of the oranges. Above the hand are two images within the larger image, tilted at different angles. In the one on the right, we see another hand with two oranges and packaging material; on the left, we see more packaging material and an orange on the edge of the picture. This orange in the smaller image could be seen as overlapping with the orange behind or above it, or we could interpret the orange in the larger image as shining through from beneath the smaller image. Through these overlapping sections, our attention also turns to the relationship between the two smaller images, and we realize that they meet at a point where the pattern in the packaging material blends together.



Although this description may seem convoluted, it is actually precise, albeit not as complex as it should be, considering what *Cosecha* demonstrates. This is especially true for the curious spatial situation of the visible elements within the image. As with her pictures *Grip* and *Menina II* from the same series, in *Cosecha* there seems to be a kind of vortex that pulls our gaze inward into unfathomable depths. We may think we understand the technical origins of the picture, but they will always retain a sense of mystery.

Art historians would be inclined to point to the theme of internal pictorial reflection that the motif of the picture within the picture evokes. But what does this mean?

With this exploration of our perception in mind, let us return to the title of the picture, *Cosecha*, which refers to the activity of harvesting. While it is not a still life in a stricter sense, the pictorial analogy to harvesting can be seen in the visually dynamic space and the motif of the hand reaching for the fruit. It is worth noting that the two images of hands are also shown from different perspectives. We see the palm of one hand in the larger image, and the back of another in one of the

smaller images. Because both are left hands, the question arises of whether we are looking at a single hand from two different, simultaneous angles, or whether the smaller hand in the picture within the picture refers to the past. The two hands also interact differently with the oranges, which leads us to notice that the two large orbs, like the hands, are shown from different angles. In analogy, we therefore wonder if this is also the same fruit from different perspectives.

While the search for a logical explanation again leads us into a labyrinth, this contrasts sharply with the technical origins of the picture. As we have established, it was created with the help of a scanner—a device that we would expect to emphasize the documentary function of the picture. However, the visual result contradicts our factual expectations. In *Cosecha*, the documentary reality of what we see becomes ultimately irrelevant, for although we may be able to identify the objects represented, the pictorial reality rather appears more like a construct of a vitalized way of seeing.