



RENATA BUZIAK

Me and the microbes

Biochrome No 3 - from Biochromes My Garden series, 2004

BRISBANE ARTIST
RENATA BUZIAK WORKS
IN A FIELD OF VISUAL
WONDER CREATED
BY ENCOURAGING
PHOTOGRAPHIC
MATERIAL TO DECAY.

By Steve Packer

Renata Buziak says her passion for photography as 'something of a laboratory' started when she was a child in Poland. Her sister Iwona was studying fine art and set up a darkroom in the family bathroom. Young Renata got to mix the chemicals and, when her sister was away, develop negatives and print photos 'more by guesswork than skill'.

Around the same time, her other sister, Dorota, accidentally damaged Renata's school portrait with an apple

core, creating a multicoloured blob which obscured half her face. Most children would have thrown the photo away, but Renata kept it as an odd but prescient treasure.

In 1991 Renata migrated to Australia and focused on her family. In 2002 she decided to follow her passion again by studying for a Bachelor of Photography at Queensland College of Art, at Brisbane's Griffith University.

'While I was studying, we were trying different photographic techniques, learning about the things we shouldn't do — going against the rules, ignoring the fact that we have to keep everything clean and away from bacteria and the like,' she says. 'We were discussing that if we did it on purpose, there might be something interesting happening. So I started experimenting and I haven't stopped since.'

LITTLE ENVIRONMENTS

Buziak's techniques involve putting analogue photographic material — various types of film and printing paper — with plant material and letting them decay over time. 'I create little environments for the bacteria to develop in,' she says. 'It's a collaboration with the microbes and natural processes.'

At art school, 'decay was not glamorous at first, and there was the smell', so Buziak set up a special area at home for her experiments. The lecturers were excited by the results and one of them came up with a name for what she was creating: 'biochromes'.

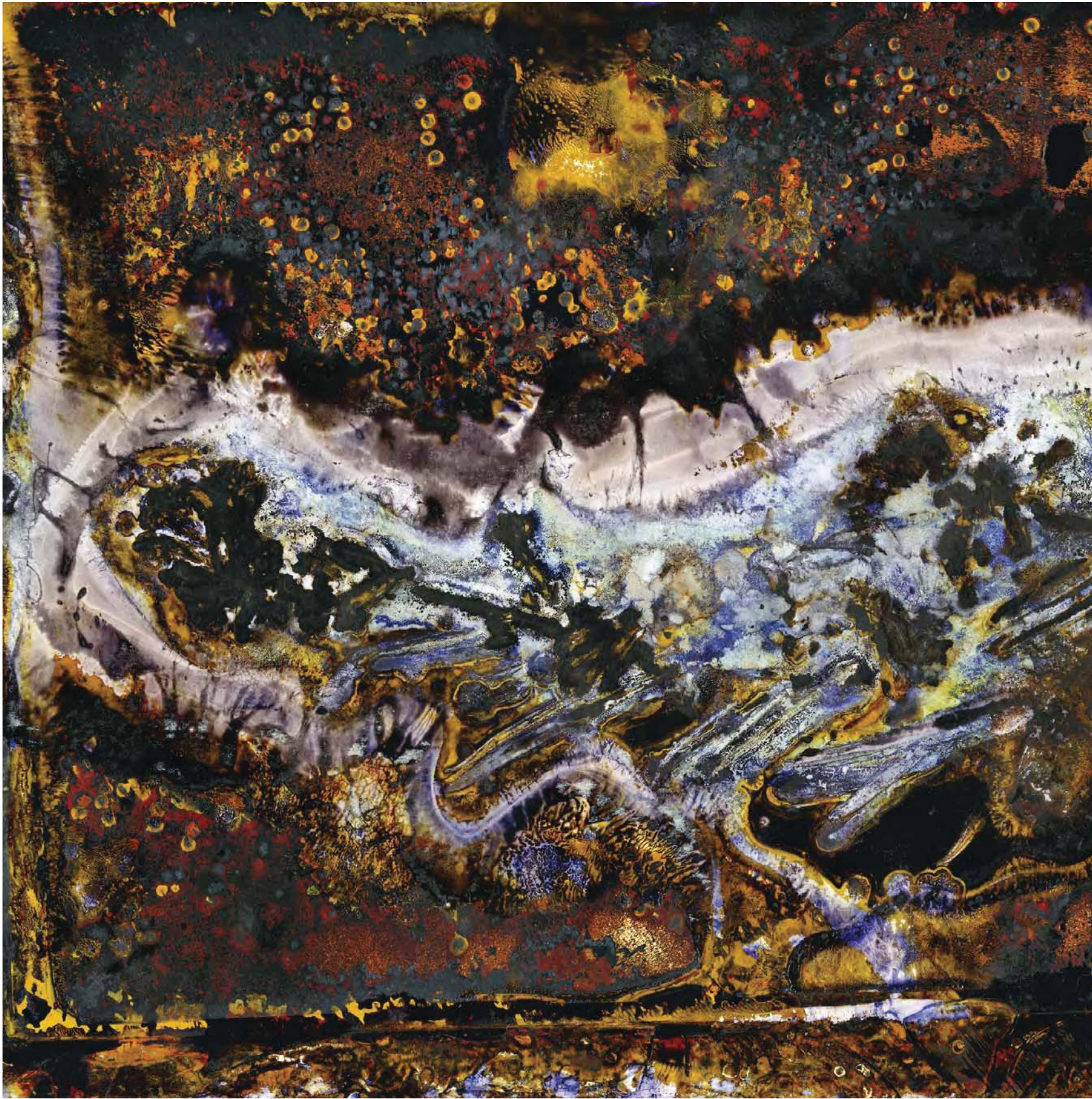
She was able to learn about the scientific side of what she was doing from Dorota, who also lives in Australia and was studying microbiology at the time.

'The projects take quite a lot of time to develop and I have a lot of pieces of work at different stages of development, so I have to be mindful of the health and safety element,' says Buziak.

She has been able to create an extraordinary range of colours, effects and textures depending on the conditions she provides. Nothing is enhanced by Photoshop or other unnatural means.

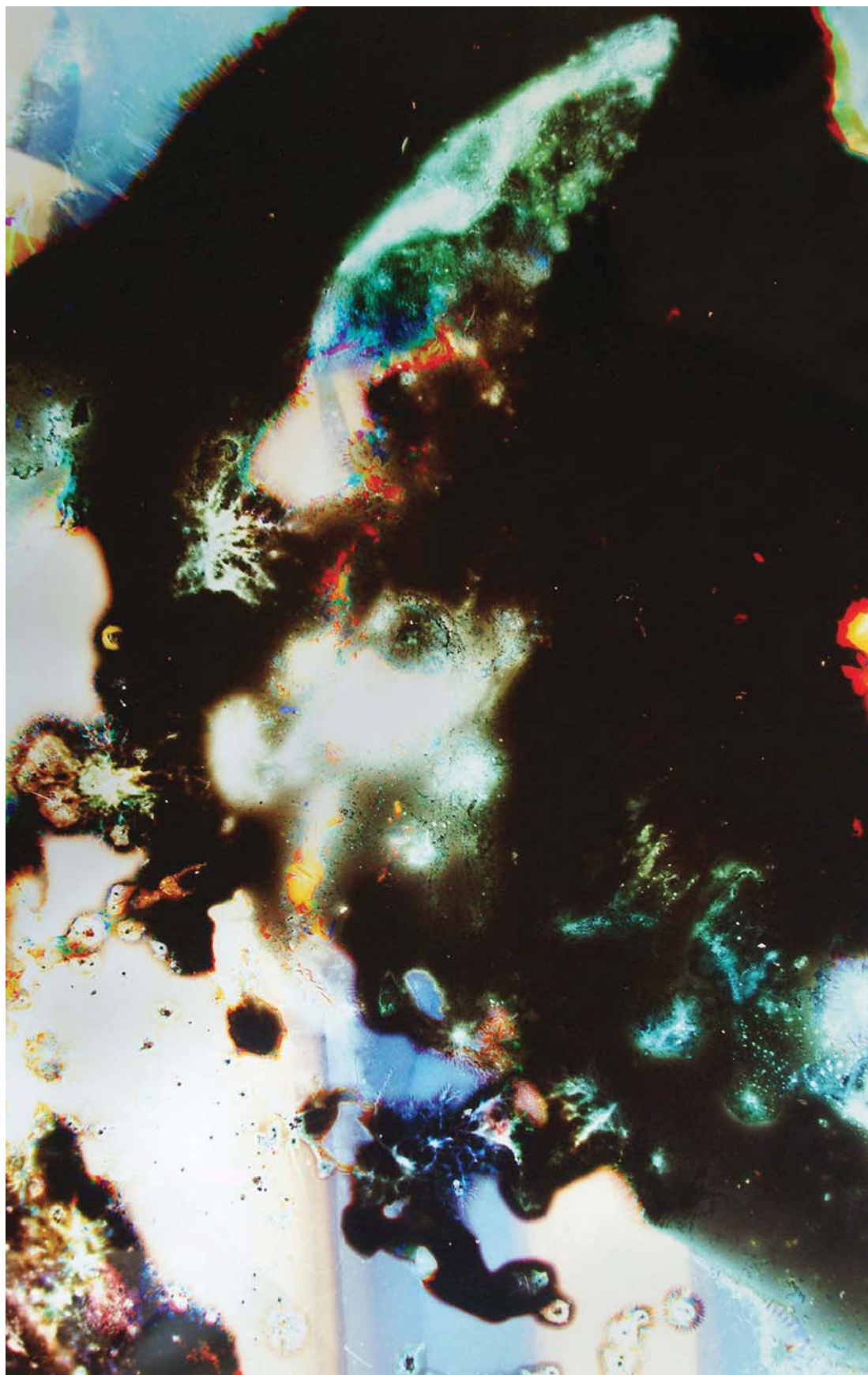
'It's a combination of a lot of things such as time, density and humidity. I create environments that include a combination of light and lack of it, oxygen and lack of it. If I use the same materials and conditions, I can expect similar results. But I'm still experimenting, creating my own rules to see what eventuates.'

By carefully selecting what she prints or scans, and relating the images to personal themes — such as her Afterimage series, based on memories from



Grevillea bronwenae 3 (Aug-Sept) - from Landscapes series, 2006

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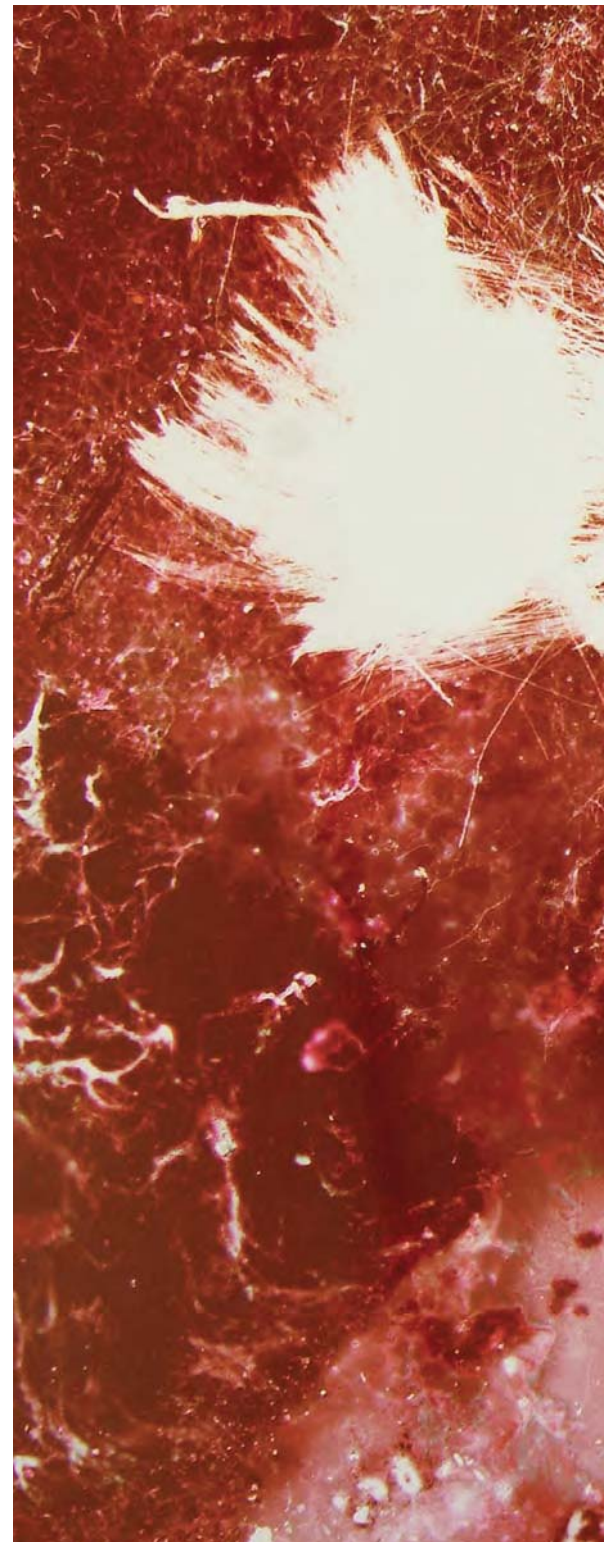


Cosmic Jewel Box - from Micro-Cosmic Series, 2005

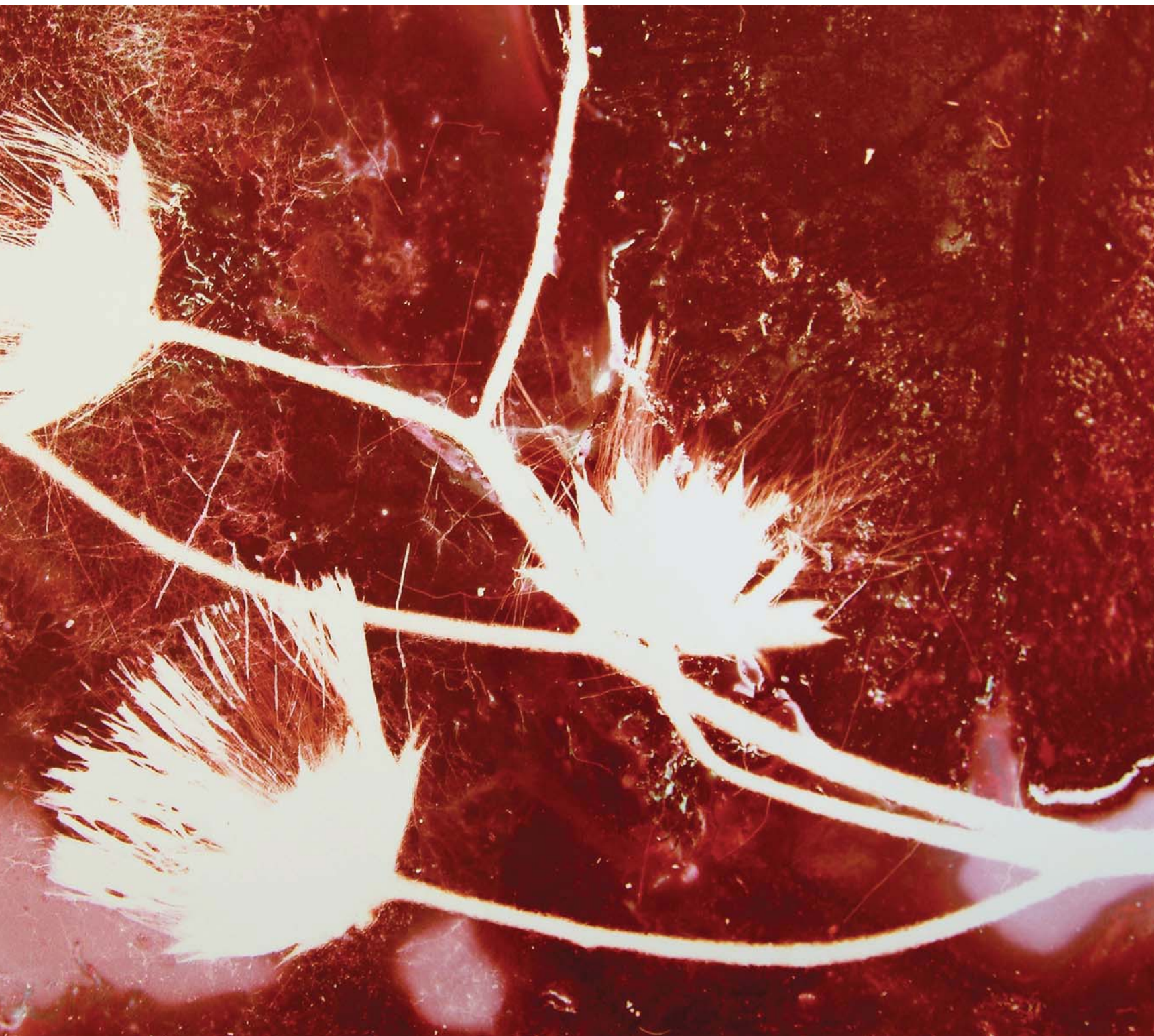


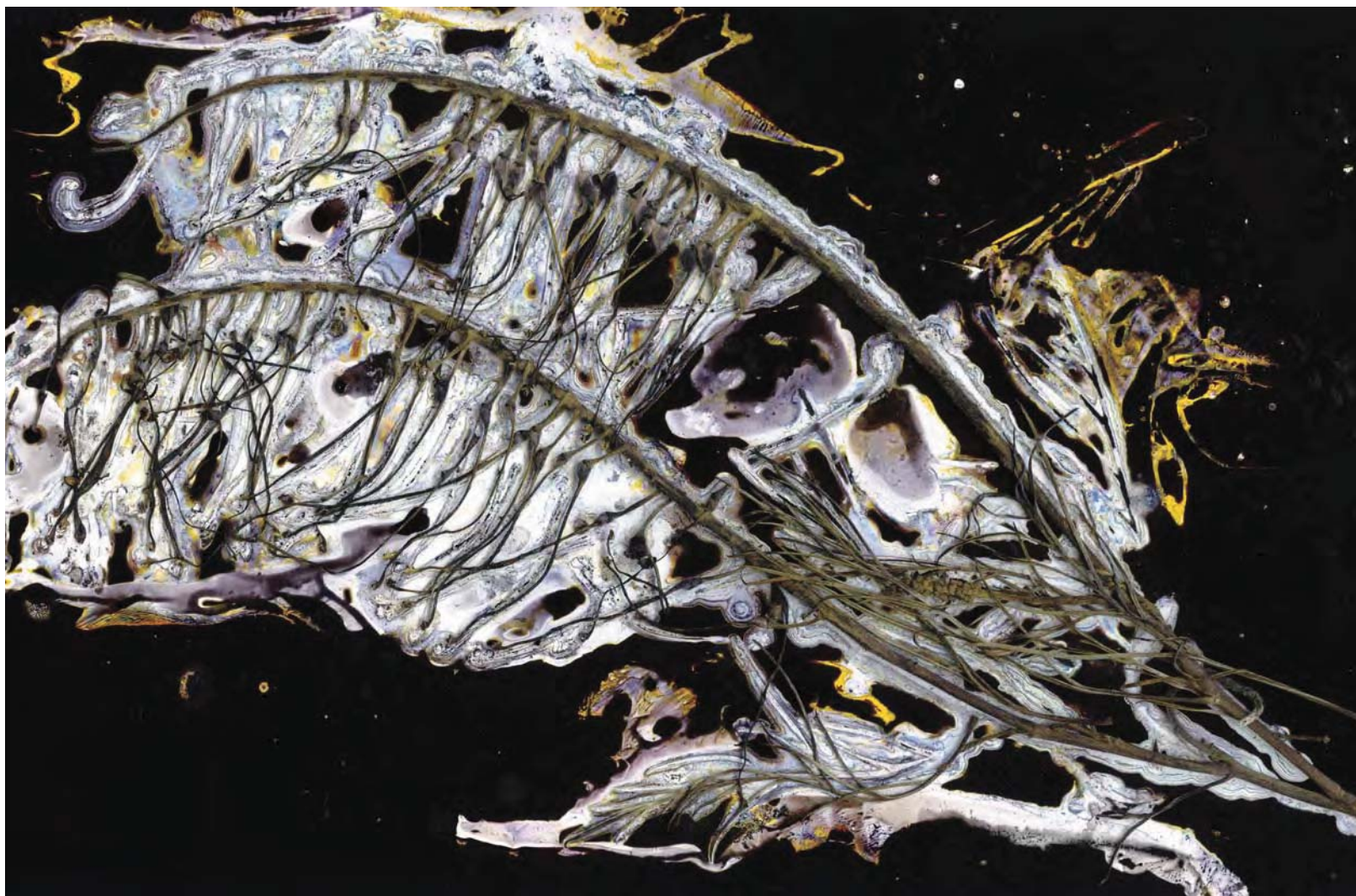
Cornflower Wine - from Afterimage series, 2009

Grass I - from Nanobiota Grass series, 2007



'... I'm still experimenting, creating my own rules to see what eventuates.'





Grevillea formosa Mt. Brockman Grevillea 2 (Mar-Apr) - from Botanica Australian Native plants series, 2006

her Polish childhood — Buziak has raised what she does from trial-and-error experimentalism to the level of art. Her work reflects her lifelong interest in nature and can be interpreted in terms of the profound effects of the passing of time and the self-similarity theory of patterns in ecology.

'Nature repeats itself on so many scales,' she says. 'As a simple example, there's the similarity between moss on a rock and an aerial view of mountains with trees. Then it goes further, to the macro and microscopic and satellite imaging. The very small and the very large can be remarkably alike.'

Scale is also a factor in the way she reproduces her work. With a series of images based on decomposed leaves, grass and the like on photographic paper, enlargement is generally about eight times. On the more microbial level, where she's printing from sections of 35mm film frames, enlargement could be up to 50 times.

'It's very fragile. I have to make sure everything stays together. Once the original work dries, it doesn't change much, so I try to keep it as dry as possible. But it still changes. Just about the only way to fix it is by freezing.'

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

For her first series of biochromes, Buziak used the plants available in her garden. She was excited to work with what she thought was Australian flora, then discovered that most of it wasn't Australian at all. That concern was remedied when she

became the 2006 Artist in Residence at Brisbane's Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens.

Her work has been exhibited in galleries including the Queensland Centre for Photography (QCP), Perth Institute for Contemporary Art and Blender Gallery in Sydney, and it is in various public and private collections. In 2005 she won the Thiess Art Prize and Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital Art Award.

In April this year QCP published her first book, *Renata Buziak: Afterimage*, with a text in both English and Polish. It includes an essay by Dr Victoria Garnons-Williams, a lecturer in the creative industries faculty at Queensland University of Technology, and a foreword by Lyle Rexer, a critic, teacher at the School of Visual Arts in New York, and author whose books include *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography*.

Rexer notes that Buziak's roots lie partly in an experimental photographic tradition that begins with William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877). He likens her to contemporary English photographer Susan Derges, who makes photograms in rivers and tidal shores by placing paper under the surface of the water, and writes that he places their work 'with the more mystical observers of nature, whose conviction has been that the chance patterns displayed by natural events were not chance at all but evidence of a more coherent reality just beyond the visible, a reality in which all things participate'.

↳ To see more of Buziak's work, visit www.renata-buziak.com