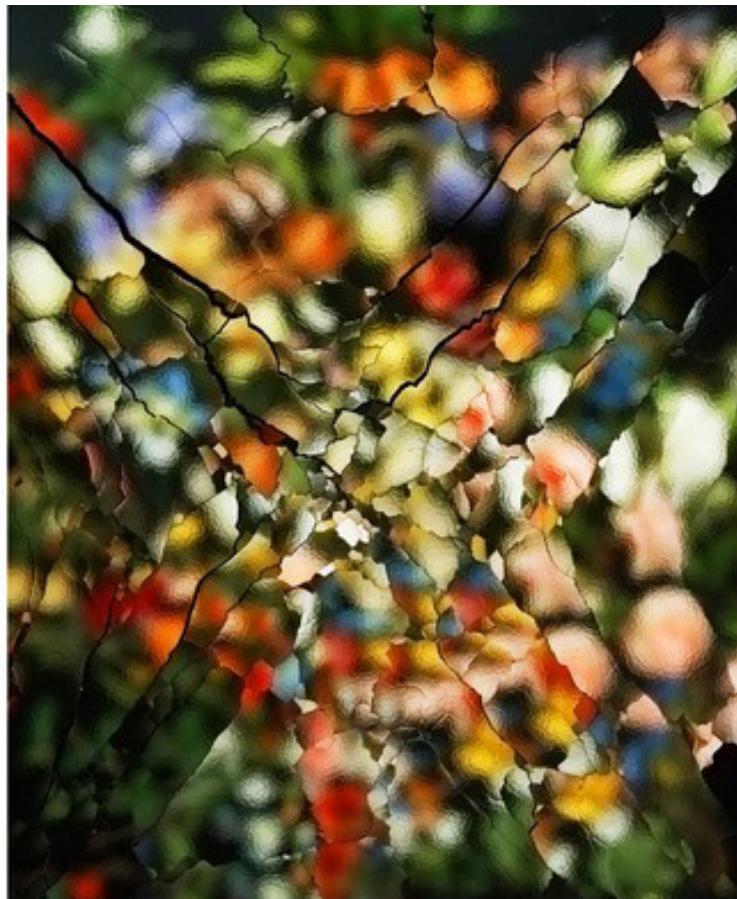


University for the Creative Arts  
Research Project Portfolios

# On Reflection

by Ori Gersht



# Project Details

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Name of Researcher: Professor Ori Gersht

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Name of Output: *On Reflection*

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Links: *On Reflection* video triptych:  
<https://vimeo.com/111638584>

Artist website (all works in the series available here):  
<https://www.origersht.com/copy-of-floating-world-2016-1>

UCARO:  
<https://research.uca.ac.uk/4692/>

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Output Type: M – Exhibition; photographic series and video artwork exhibited in multiple solo and group exhibitions with accompanying publications

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Year and mode of dissemination: SOLO EXHIBITIONS: PUBLIC GALLERIES

*Slivers*

Tel Aviv Museum of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel,  
30th December 2014 – 30th May 2015

**Monograph:** Ori Gersht (2014) *Slivers* (Tel Aviv Museum of Contemporary Art), ISBN-10 : 9655391051

*NaturGewalten: Filme und Fotografien*

Sinclair-Haus Museum, Bad Homburg, Germany, 15th March -  
14th June 2015

**Monograph:** Ori Gersht (2015) *Forces of Nature*, Hirmer (ALTANA Kulturstiftung/Museum Sinclair-Haus), ISBN 9783777424408

SOLO EXHIBITIONS: PRIVATE GALLERIES

*On Reflection*, CRG Gallery, New York, 29th January - 14th March 2015

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# Project Details (continued)

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*On Reflection*, Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong, 16th May - 16th July 2015

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

*This Is Now*, Talley Dunn Gallery, Dallas, 26th August - 7th October 2017

*Phytopia*, Glynn Vivian Museum and Art Gallery, Swansea, 16th February – 26th May 2019

*Unearthed: photography's roots*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, opened November 2020 (ongoing, dates interrupted by COVID-19)

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**Key Words:** Still life, Brueghel, reflection, perception, photographic 'truth'

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**Funding:** Nata Dushnitsky-Kaplan Foundation Prize (Tel Aviv Museum) funded the *Slivers* catalogue/publication, \$10,000



*On Reflection Virtual E02 (2014)*

194 × 180 cm

# Synopsis

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*On Reflection* is a series of photographs and a three-screen video installation. The 48 photographs fall into three series—Virtual, Fusion and Material. Ori Gersht created the work in 2014 and it has since been exhibited in a number of solo exhibitions, including in two major public galleries. In *Slivers* (Tel Aviv Museum of Contemporary Art) it was exhibited alongside a number of Gersht's earlier works and old master paintings from the museum's collection. In *NaturGewalten* (*Forces of Nature*) (Bad Homburg Sinclair-Haus Museum) it was part of a major retrospective of Gersht's work.

In addition to these solo exhibitions, works from *On Reflection* have been exhibited in group shows in a number of museums and galleries in the UK, USA and beyond. The latest of these is *Unearthed: Photography's Roots* (Dulwich Picture Gallery, London). Gersht's work occupied Dulwich's

Mausoleum, where the three-screen video installation from the series was juxtaposed with a still life by Breughel (on loan from St John's College Oxford) which is similar to the Breughel works that initially inspired Gersht to undertake the research in *On Reflection*. The series continues Gersht's longstanding investigation into the still-life form in an exploration of the relationship between painting and photography, and between virtual and material worlds, through still and moving images.

Supporting information presented here provides explanation of research methods, processes and insights and includes works from the series, a link to the whole series, images of the work in progress, and images of the series as it appeared in museums and galleries. The three-screen video work is submitted separately, as is *NaturGewalten*, the publication that accompanied Gersht's exhibition at Bad Homburg.

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*On Reflection Virtual B02 2014*  
100 × 80 cm

# Context

Ori Gersht employs photography and film as his chosen media, but his work has always exhibited a fascination with painting and art history. He is very interested in the differences and connections between the ways in which a painting and a camera create and record reality. He has worked to expand and interrogate the still life tradition since *Pomegranate* (2006) and *Blow Up* (2007), in which he recreated objects from Spanish and Dutch still-life paintings of the seventeenth century—and then exploded them. The results were captured, moment by moment, on camera in film and still photographs, as described in the BBC documentary *Apples, Pairs and Paint: how to make a still life painting* (2014), or in *the Guardian* in the ‘my best shot’ series (11th May 2016).

In *On Reflection*, Gersht uses cameras and mirrors as devices with which to explore questions of reflection, representation and perception. The series had two starting points. The first was a visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 2013 where Gersht became fascinated by three early seventeenth-century paintings by Jan Brueghel the Elder depicting vases of flowers. The second was when Gersht started focusing his attention—and camera—onto the flat surface of a mirror that is reflecting what appears to be one of Brueghel’s paintings. However, this image is an illusion, not only because it is seen in a mirror, but also because what is being reflected is not the painting, but a replica of the bouquet it depicts, meticulously crafted from artificial flowers. This replica is a comment upon the nature

of the original painting in which Brueghel chose not to depict wild flowers but cultivated ones, all shown in their most perfect form. The image of the simultaneous perfection of so many species that bloom in different seasons and in far-flung geographical locations is a fantasy of a desirable, but never attainable, reality. It is an assertion of the power of art and craft, alongside science and technology, to remake the world of objects. It also undermines traditional notions of time and place.

## Key Texts:

Alpers, S. (1984) *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

Bryson, N. (1990) *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion)

Schama, S. (2002) *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, (London: HarperCollins)

Snyder, L. J. (2016) *Eye Of The Beholder: Johannes Vermeer, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, and the Reinvention of Seeing* (London: W.W. Norton)

Steadman, P. (2002) *Vermeer’s Camera: Uncovering the Truth behind the Masterpieces* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)



*Shooting On  
Reflection*



*Shooting On Reflection*

# Aims, Questions and Insights

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Research aim:

To explore the relationship between the material and virtual worlds, the haptic and the visual in the context of the long history of still life in painting and photography, and of scientific and cultural concepts of time.

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Research questions:

How can the relationship between the material and virtual worlds be explored in photography and moving image?

What happens to images when they cross this threshold and are no longer just images, but material objects to be further represented?

What are the aesthetic and creative possibilities of exploring the interplay of multiple cameras, multiple reflective surfaces and multiple points of focus?

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Research insights and contribution:

Gersht's work in *On Reflection* demonstrates the achievement of multiple tensions: there is visual tension between the material and representational, as the images capture simultaneously both the bouquets and their multiple reflections in the mirrors, which may be in focus or out of focus. There is tension between the still-life form with its long history, and newer technologies of representation. These tensions are located in the state of flux captured in the image, when the delicacy of the still-life object is made apparent in a shattering moment that can be captured by the camera but not by the eye alone. Critic David Chandler describes Gersht's insight as being located in 'a poetics of fragility, a reminder that all images are transitional. They show us nothing more – for certain – than the absence of the object of representation.'

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# Research Methods and Process

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Having placed the replica of Brueghel's floral bouquet in front of a mirror, Gersht positioned two hi-definition digital cameras, focusing them onto two different optical planes: one close up on the glass surface of the mirror, the other, from a distance of three metres, on the reflection of the vase of flowers. A series of mirrors was then broken, using either hammers or small explosive charges, shattering them into maelstroms of flying fragments of reflective glass, each one captured on camera resulting in many different representations of the 'still life' of the flowers.

In contrast to the laborious and meticulous processes of recreating the bouquets in Brueghel's paintings, the compositions that were captured by the camera at the instant of the shattering of the mirrors were rapid and unpredictable, with the use of the two cameras allowing Gersht to capture simultaneously two contrasting views of the same fleeting event, locating the images in the history of thinking about the precise nature of time.

Because of the different focusing points and the limited depth of field, each camera captured an alternative reality, questioning the relationship between photography and

a single objective truth. The final photographic prints simultaneously embrace rigorous and painstaking craft and the mechanical instantaneousness of the digital camera. Gersht raises the question of whether the camera records, or creates, reality. What appears to be real here is merely a reflection and its shattering is so instantaneous that the eye, without the aid of the camera and the flash, cannot properly see it. It is only made available to us through the mediation of optical technology.

## Key Texts:

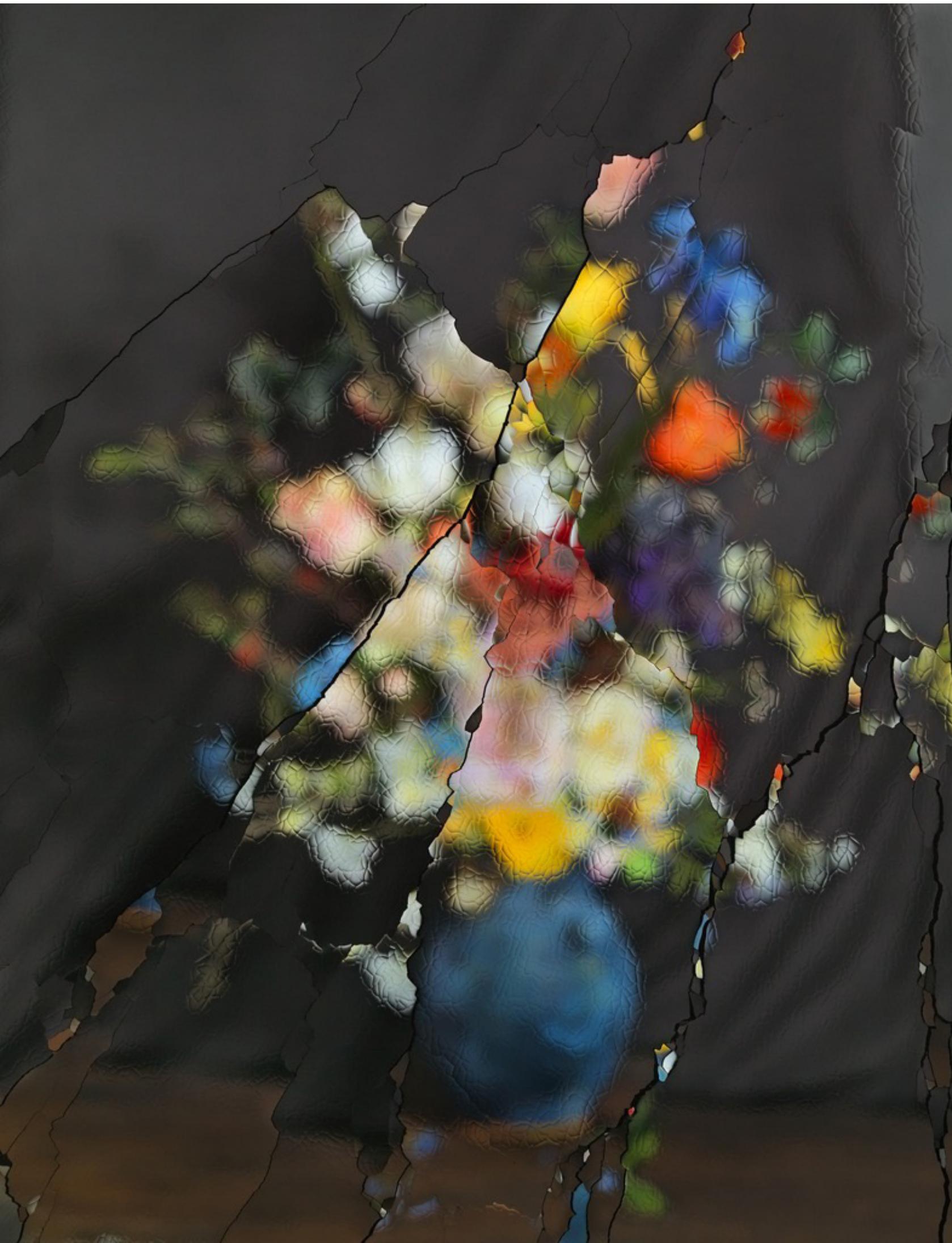
Hoffman, E. (2009) *Time* (London: Profile)

Koestler, A. (1968 (1959)) *The Sleepwalkers: a history of man's changing vision of the universe* (London: Penguin Classics)

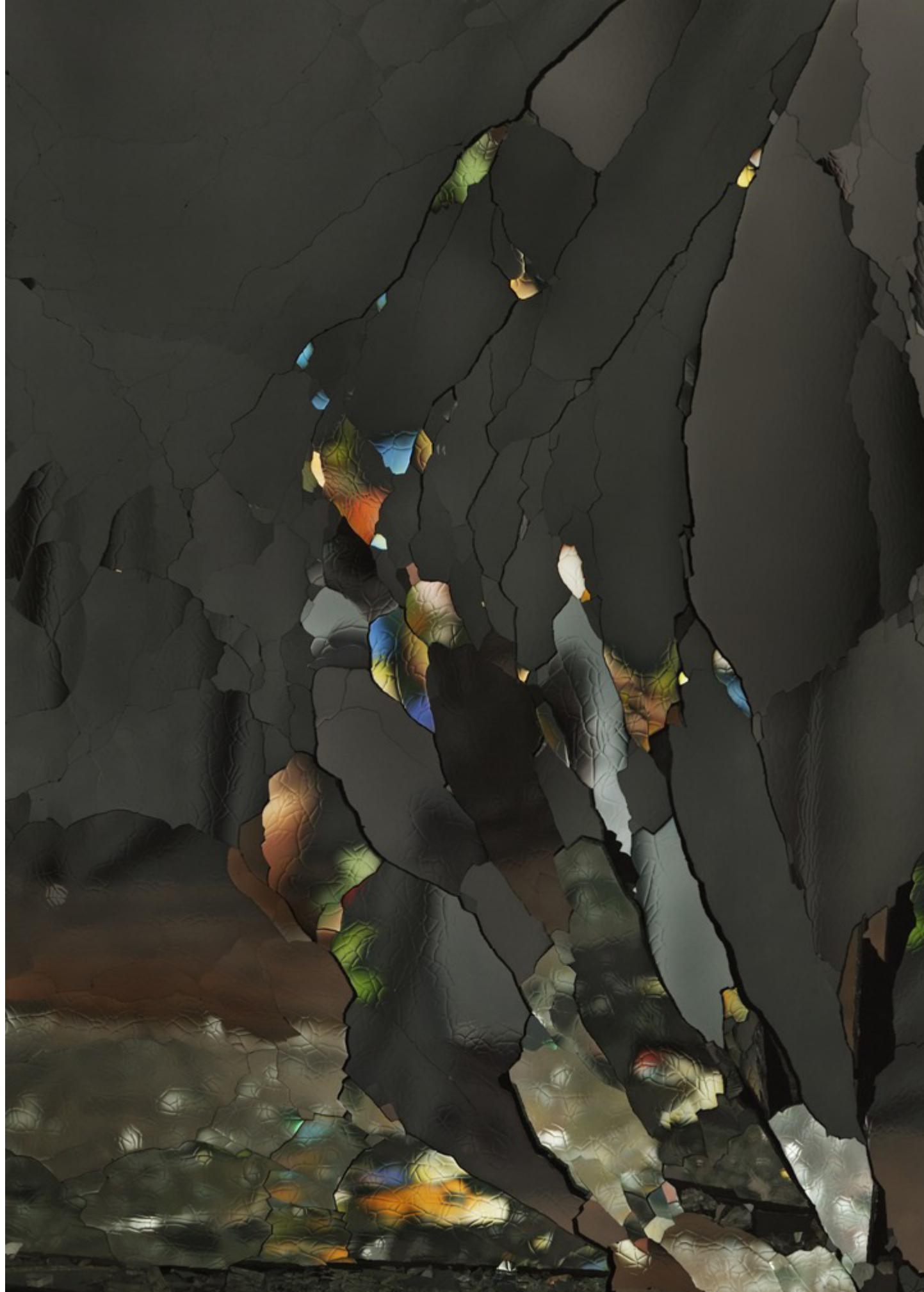
Rovelli, C. (2016) *Reality Is Not What it Seems* (London: Allen Lane)

Rovelli, C. (2018) *The Order of Time* (London: Penguin)

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*On Reflection Material E07, 2014*  
170 × 130 cm



*On Reflection Material E18, 2014*  
170 × 130 cm

# Research Dissemination and Recognition

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## Further dissemination

In addition to the exhibitions listed under Project Details, works from *On Reflection* have been shown in multiple venues/exhibitions, including:

*Driving Forces: Contemporary Art from the Collection of Ann and Ron Pizzuti*, Columbus Museum, Ohio, 2019

Linde Family Wing for Contemporary Art, Museum Of Fine Art, Boston, Massachusetts, 2019 (permanent installation alongside other still life works by Georges Braque, Henri Fantin Latour, Alfred Sisley and Sam Taylor-Wood)

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## Influence of the research

*Ori Gersht, History Reflecting*, ebook, Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2015).

This book explores how Gersht intertwines the latest digital technology and diverse historical sources, and includes discussion of *On Reflection*. It contains 85 illustrations and 14 video clips of Gersht's art, as well as original footage of Gersht discussing his work, and essays by academics and curators.

Calbi M., Aldouby H., Gersht O., Langiulli N., Gallese V., Umiltà M.A., 'Haptic Aesthetics and Bodily Properties of Ori Gersht's Digital Art: A Behavioral and Eye-Tracking Study', *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol.10 (2019), DOI 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02520

In this peer-reviewed research paper, Gersht collaborated with cognitive neuroscientists and art theorists to research haptic aesthetics. The research team used four of Gersht's bodies of work, including *On Reflection*, and Gersht worked with the other researchers in selecting and manipulating the images according to experimental requirements. The researchers were able, for the first time, to use an empirical scientific approach to assess viewer engagement with digital artworks.

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Influence of the research  
(continued):

Other academic writings about Gersht's *On Reflection* include:

Aldouby, H., 'Balancing on shifting ground: Migratory aesthetics and recuperation of presence in Ori Gersht's video installation *On Reflection*', *Home / Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2019), pp.161-181

Montero Sanchez de Corral, P., 'The Incarnated Landscape: Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of wildness, memory and selfhood in nature through the work of Justine Kurland, Ori Gersht and Luisa Lambri', published conference proceedings, *IDA (Advance Doctoral Research in Architecture)*, 2017, ISBN: 978-84-16784-99-8

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Selected press coverage:

'Ori Gersht: Die Auslösung Des Bildes Im Bild', by Von Gunnar Schmidt, *Kunstforum International*, pp. 87-94 BD 232, April-May 2015 (<https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/ori-gersht/>)

'Time, Violence and Reality Through Ori Gersht's Camera Lens', by Jeremy Howell, *Art & Object*, 5th April 2019 (<https://www.artandobject.com/news/time-violence-and-reality-through-ori-gershts-camera-lens>)

'Unearthed: Photography's Roots' reviewed by Laura Cumming, *The Guardian*, 29th November 2020 (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/nov/29/unearthed-photographys-roots-review-dulwich-picture-gallery-charles-jones>)

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*On Reflection, three-screen video installation*

On Reflection



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Graphic Design:

Studio Mothership

*Back cover: On Reflection, CRG  
Gallery, New York, 2015*



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ON REFLECTION