

Waiting for the sheep

Photography

Lau Kaker

laukaker@gmail.com

Abstract In summer, farmers bring their sheep to the green areas of Helsinki. While waiting for the sheep to arrive, I started writing fictional stories and imagining what they could tell me about the sheep-human relationship. I listened to them, followed them, and learned from them, seeing them move as one and look back at me together.

Résumé En été, les fermiers font pâturer leurs moutons dans les espaces verts d'Helsinki. En attendant leur arrivée, j'ai commencé à écrire des fictions en imaginant ce qu'elles pourraient m'apprendre sur la relation entre les moutons et les humains. Je les ai écoutés, les ai suivis et ai appris du troupeau, les regardant se déplacer à l'unisson, puis me dévisager ensemble en retour.

Keywords ecology; perception; sheep; domestication; more-than-human; stories



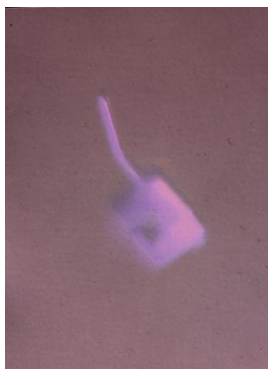
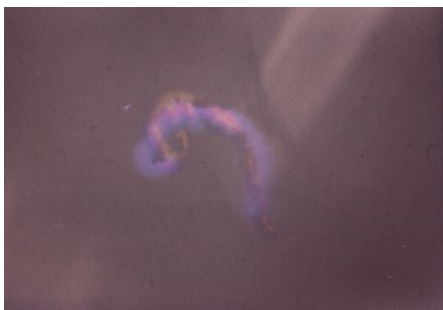
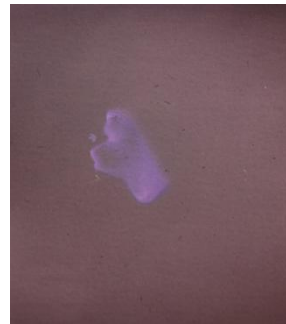
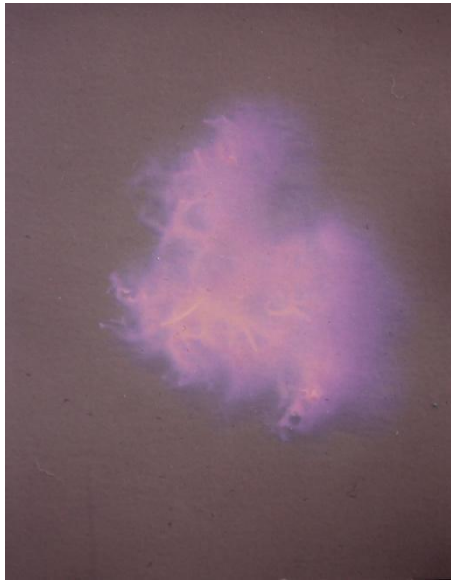
My first collaboration with sheep was during a project in Uutela (Helsinki) as part of a wider research on interspecies communication.

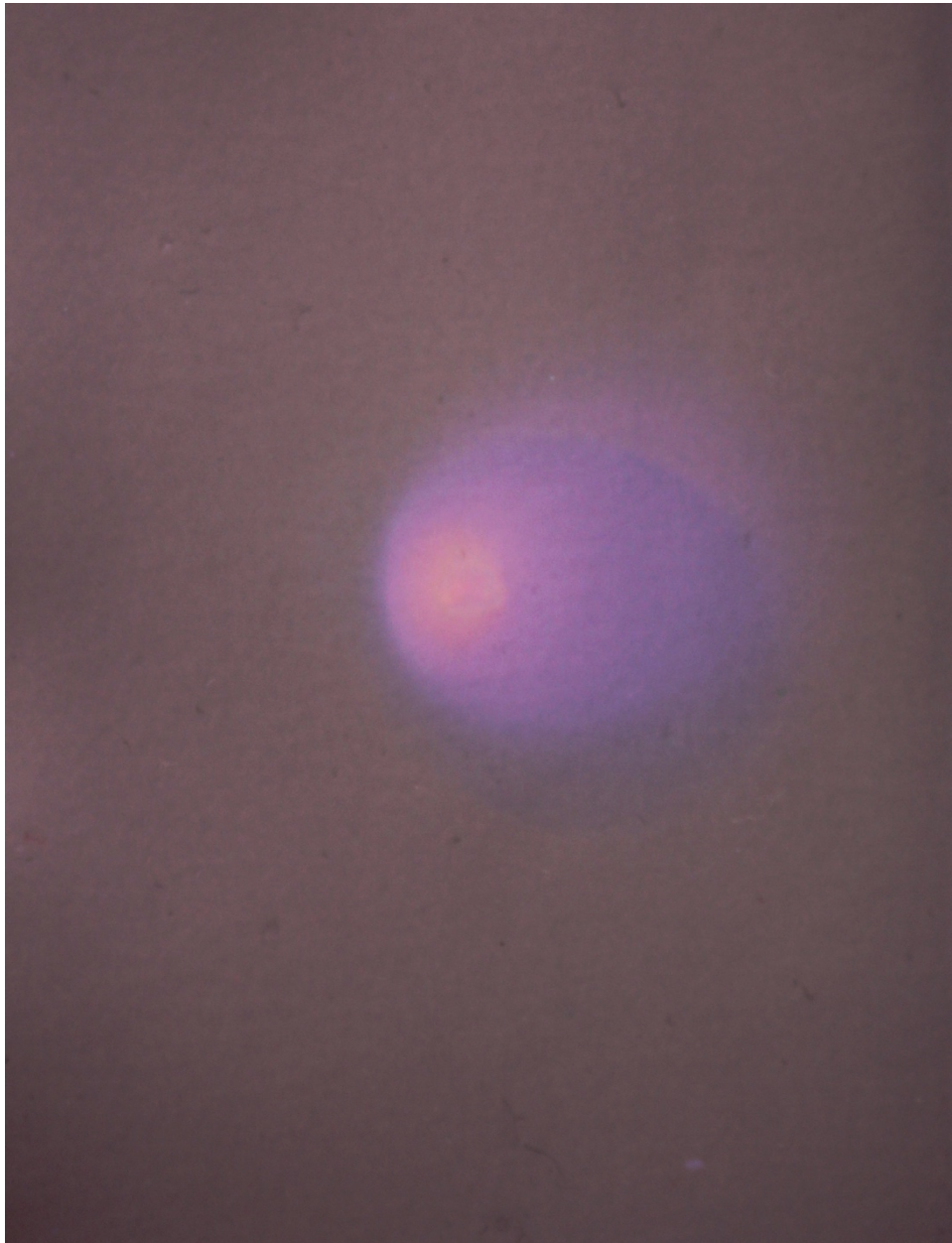
During that project, I was following the seasonality and movements of sheep. I knew that, in the summer, farmers would bring their sheep to the green areas of Helsinki. There, they would spend the summer grassing before returning to the farm for the winter. In June, while I was waiting for the sheep to arrive, I wondered what the place and its more-than-human inhabitants could tell me (plants, objects, animals about themselves, and about sheep). I found beings, voices, and fragments of more-than-humans, and started a correspondence with them. While I walked around the fence, waiting for the sheep, I attempted to connect with the place and its stories. Along with those voices, I started writing fictional stories and imagining what they could tell me about the sheep-human relationship. Each of these collaborative stories made me dive deeper into the concepts of domestication, belonging, collectivity, place-making, and interspecies relationships.

Sitting inside the empty pens, I felt at home. When the sheep finally arrived, I had familiarized myself with their space and could hear the songs of the birds, the sound of a snake on the dead leaves, and the trees changing their bark. During this encounter with sheep, I came closer to what belonging means through observing their collective and empathetic ways of being. I was learning from them, seeing them move as one and look back at me together while releasing bleats. Sheep have “become” with us through herding, domestication, farming, and breeding. I was interested in our proximity, their wool, and its waste in Finland. Working with them came from a need to restore this connection with sheep, to grasp something about humans, more than humans, and the world. With wool continues my current research of interspecies relationships and the aliveness of matter. At the end of the summer the sheep disappeared again and it got me thinking: what if they wouldn’t come back?

These beings, materials and objects of Uutela made their way into my print with the sunshine, leaving their traces behind. They are alive, vibrating and moving towards their next encounter. Stepping outside the divide between humans and non-humans, in this project, I attempted to connect beyond what I can define, articulate and understand.

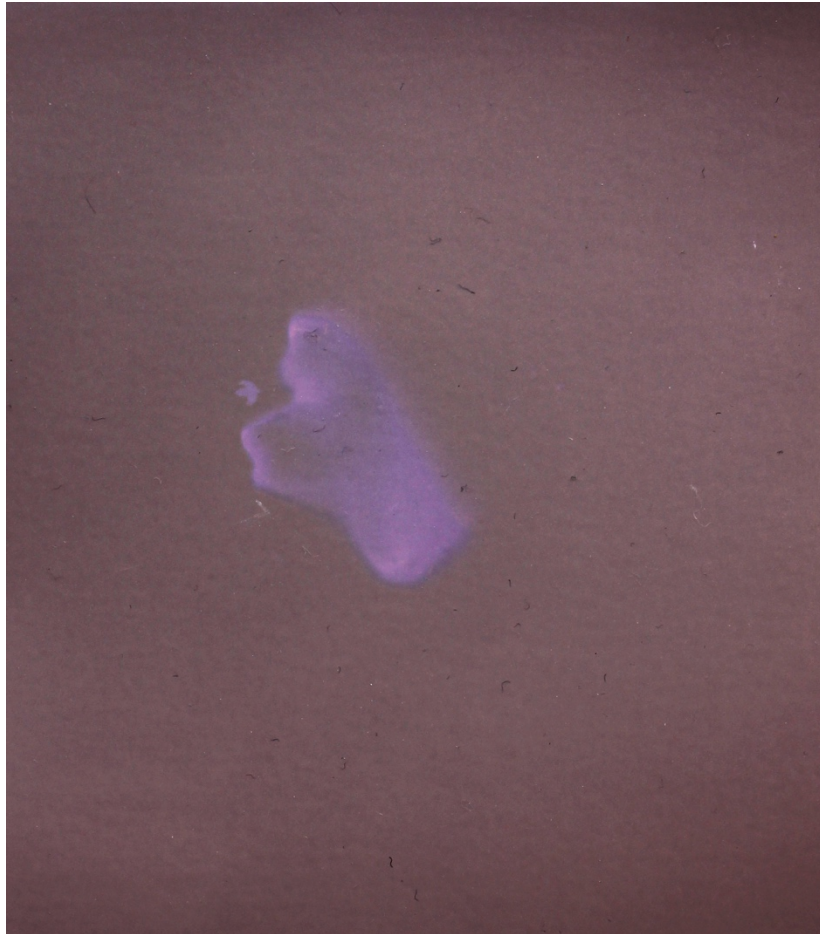
Waiting for the sheep series of photographs with short descriptions.





The bed of a lost golf ball

In this game, a golf ball had been forgotten. No one came to pick it up. It was lying on the grass, in the middle of the empty pen, while the vegetation was growing.



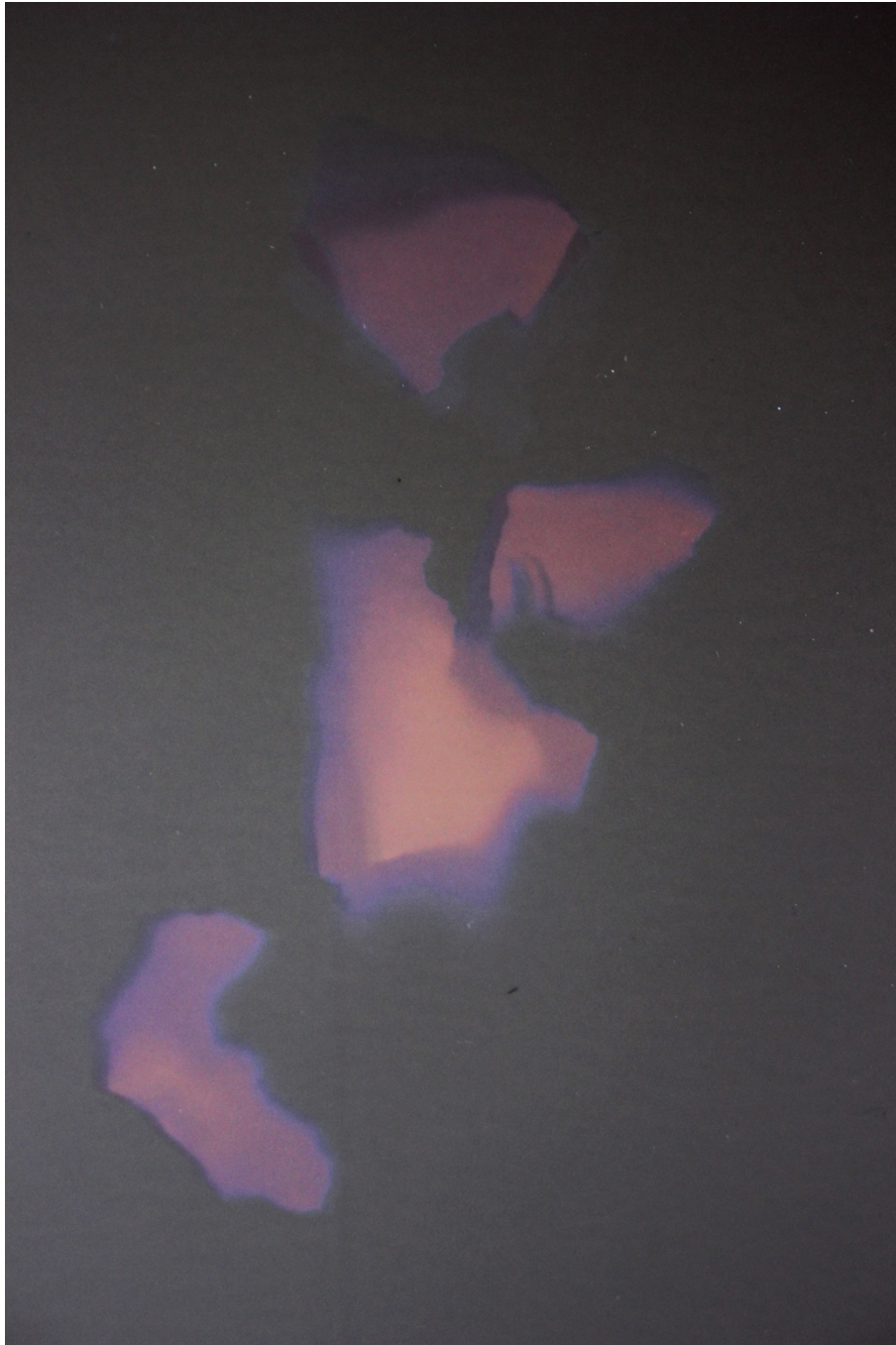
Glass polished from the sea

The edges of the individual piece call out for its other parts, longing to find them.

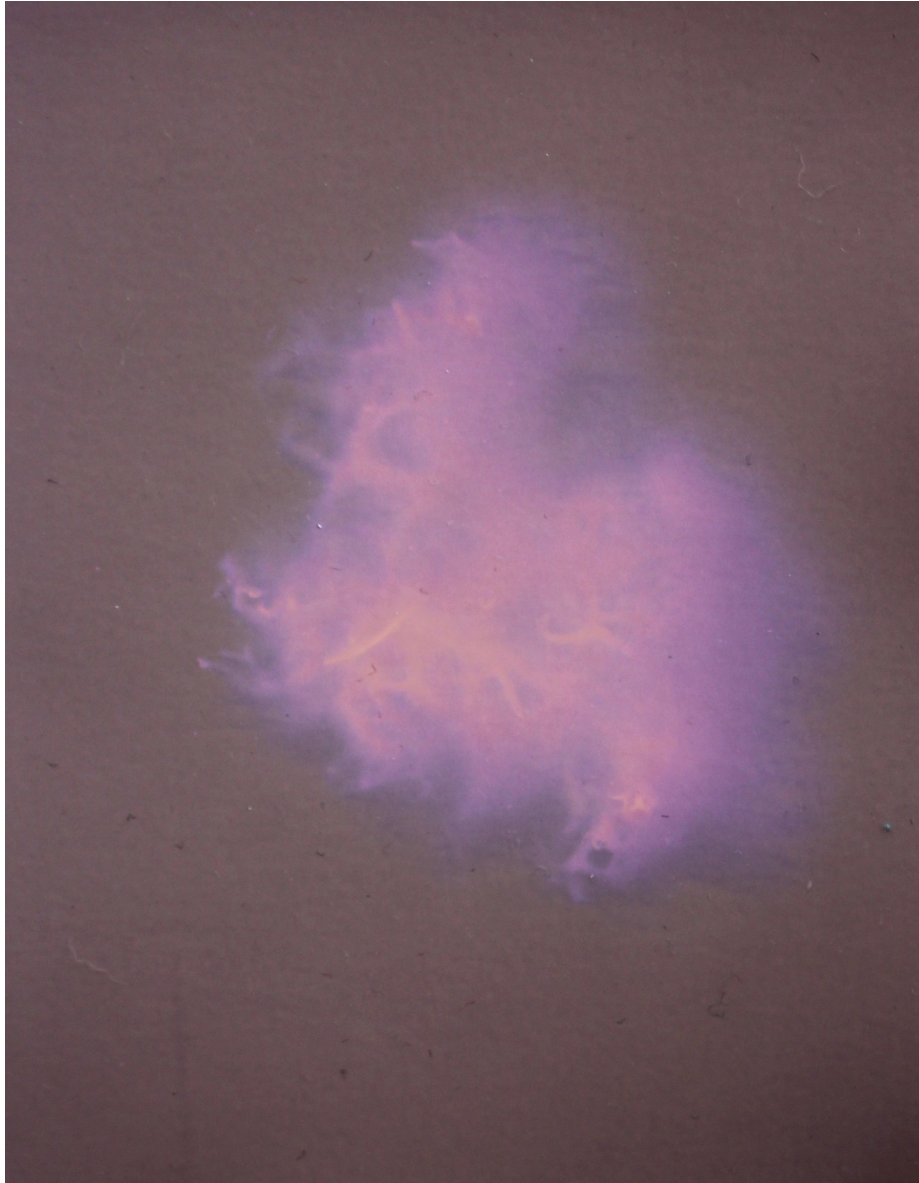


A broken eggshell

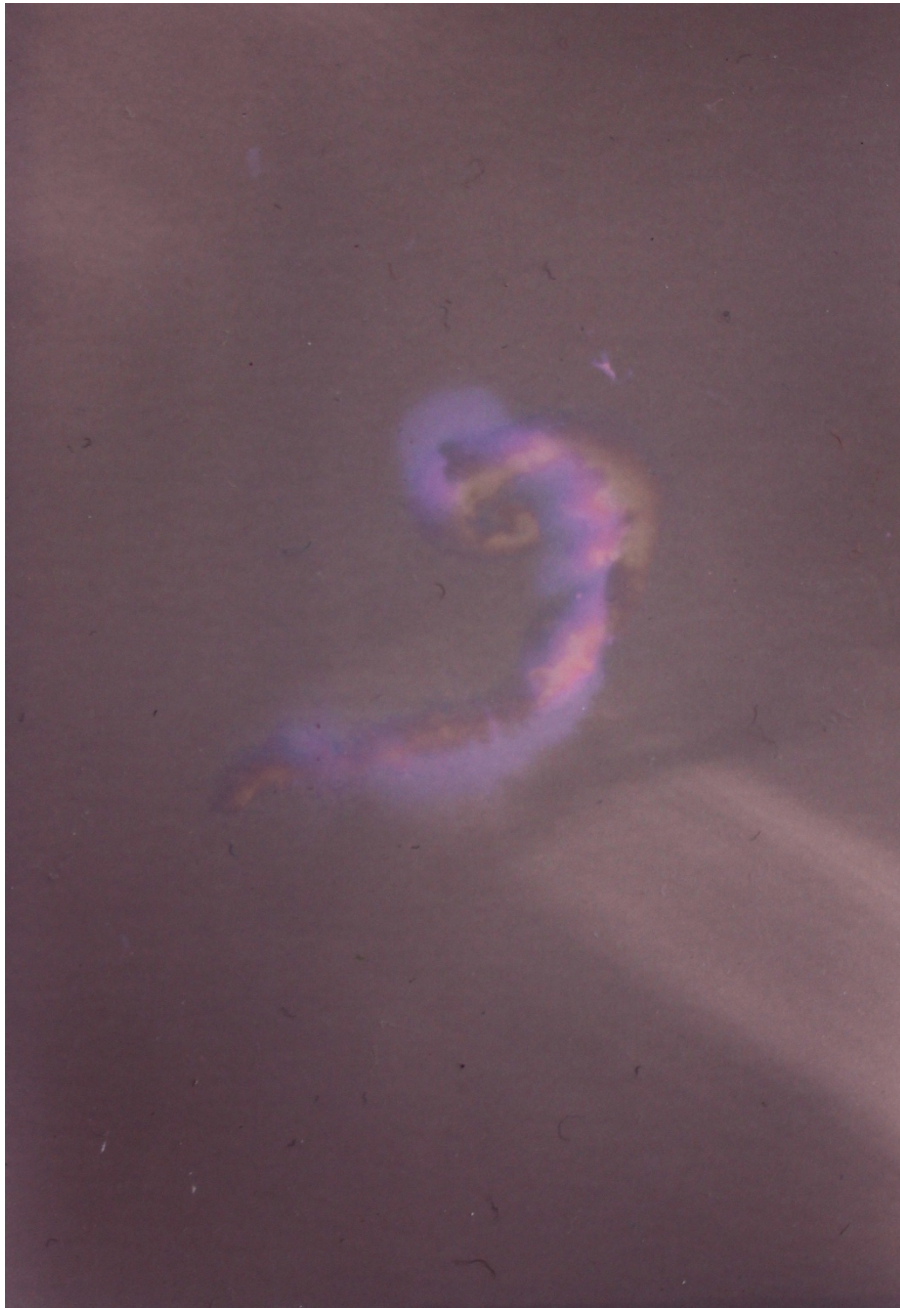
The broken pieces of eggshell hold the wind, carrying the songs of birds singing to their territory.

**Birch skin**

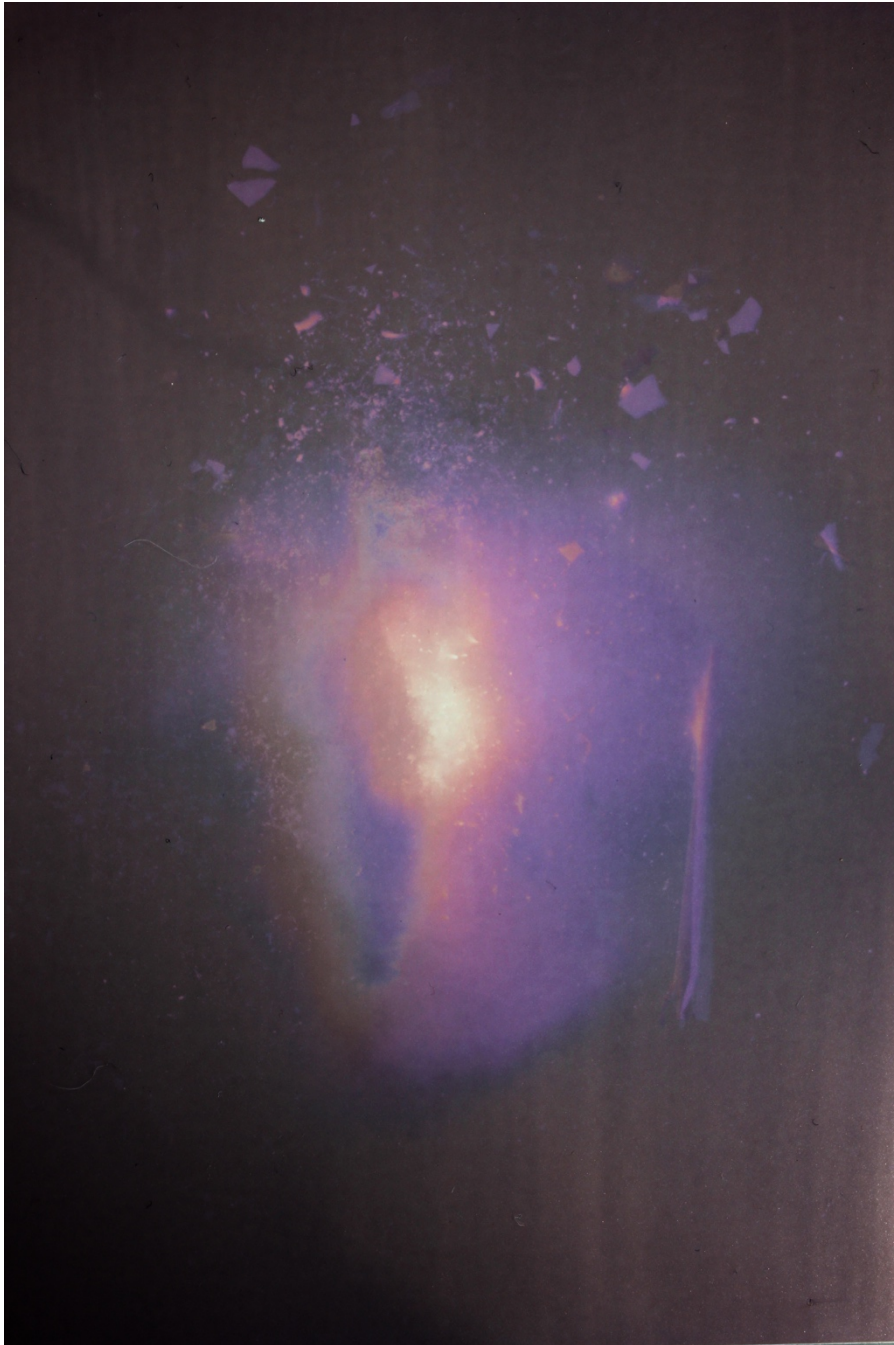
It indicates the changes of seasons; the tree releases a layer of its skin.

**A patch of moss**

The moss reminds me of the sheep's wool, harshness and softness together, a contact.

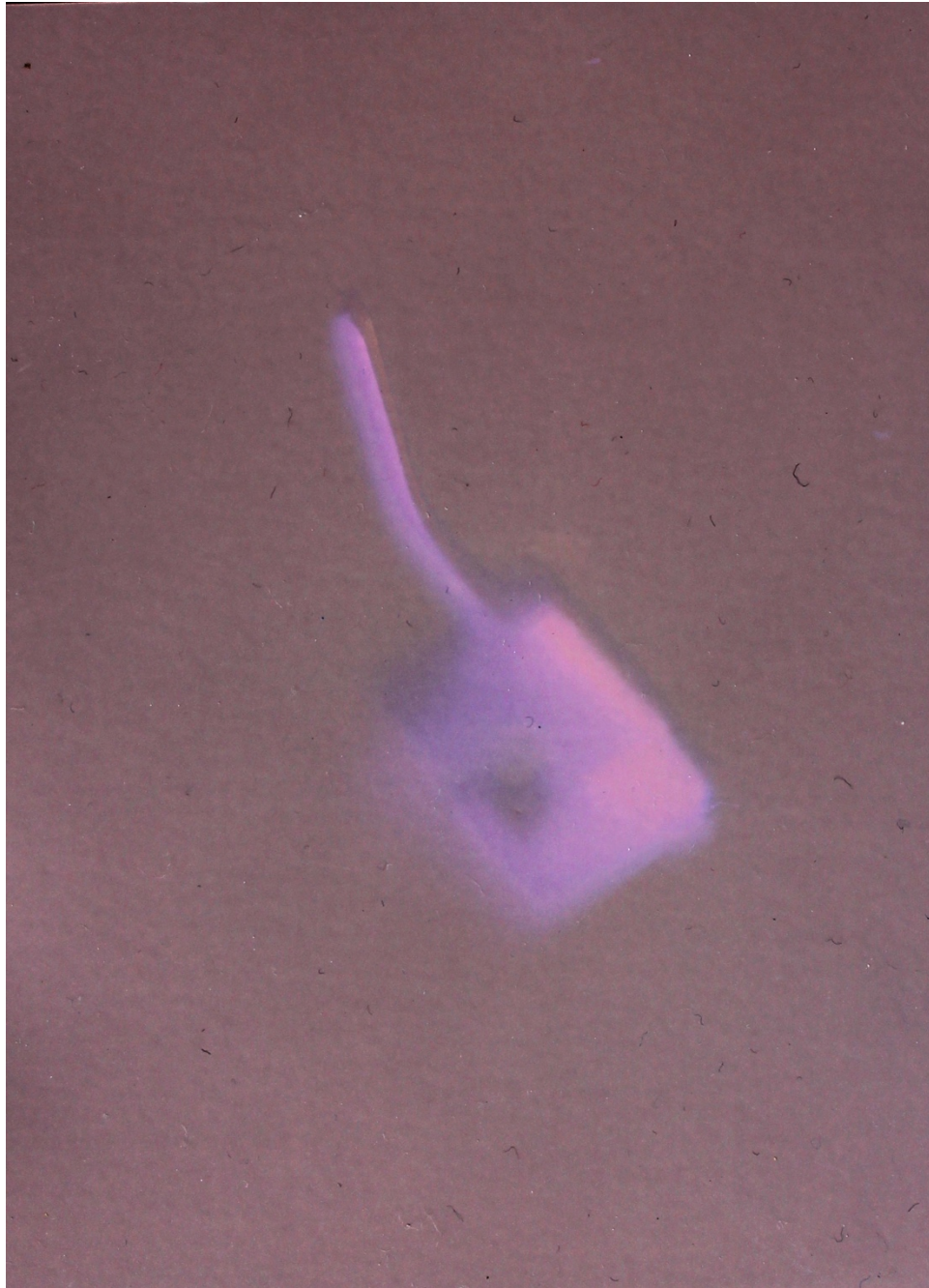
**A fern leaf**

I found the leaf after the glass and moss pieces, before the eggshell. It was curled to protect itself from my touch.



A lichen piece

The lichen piece was dry, in between death and new life, it kept company to the reindeers visiting the fence.



A screw with its plastic end

The screw with its plastic end was the last object I found. It told me about the fence, growing old and dusty, it was about to fade.