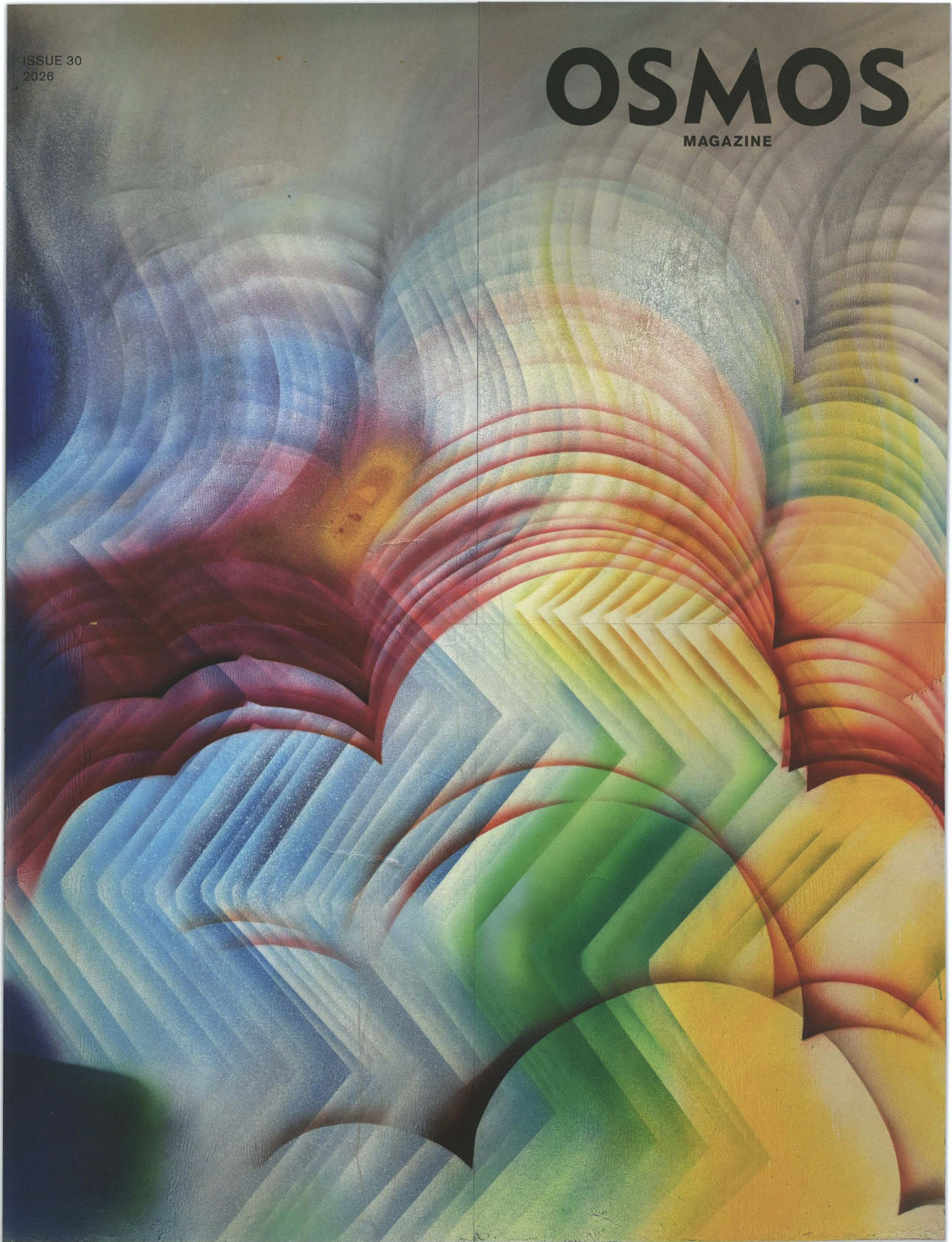


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TACITA DEAN BETWEEN THE YEARS

BY CHRISTIAN RATTEMAYER

How, after over three decades of working, do you return to the purity of play, of simple invention, of innocence? For English artist Tacita Dean, who lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles, this is not a question but a method of working. Dean has created a boundlessly inventive oeuvre across film, photography, and drawing by allowing herself to respond to the tangents, surfaces, detours, and mysteries of her subjects. Often elegiac in tone, her works are marked by obsolescence, delay, blindness, failure, elusiveness, deception, and old age. She has captured giants of contemporary culture toward the very end of their lives, including the Italian artist Mario Merz, the American choreographer Merce Cunningham, the English poet, critic, and translator Michael Hamburger, and most recently the American print publisher Sydney Felsen. In her earlier works, Dean filmed a total solar eclipse and the elusive green ray on 16mm film and created works engaged with the search for (presumed) missing objects and artworks such as Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" and the wreckage of the abandoned boat of adventurer Donald Crowhurst. More recently, she has been working on salvaged school blackboards and 19th century steam locomotive windows she inherited from her father. She is an ardent advocate for the analog and chemical traditions of film and is actively involved in the preservation of the laboratories, materials, working methods, machineries, and craftsmanship needed for 16mm and 35mm film processing.

Dean's works are, in subject matter, materials, working methods, and sensibilities, decidedly slow, a bit old-fashioned perhaps, as if fallen out of time. She is, in the words of New Yorker writer Emily Eakin, "an anatomist of passing time."

Her recent series of Polaroids, grouped into arrangements of five images per frame, is collectively titled *Between the Years*, a literal translation of a German expression for the time between Christmas and New Year's. The start of the series was Dean's purchase of a Polaroid I-2 camera, a new product that allows multiple exposures and comes with a triple-lens auto focus and several other features more commonly found in higher-end equipment. Using both black-and-white and color Polaroid film (in both square and round aperture formats), the artist began to experiment with multiple exposures and encountered an extremely high rate of exposure failure and misalignment between view finder and picture frame, making her process of working almost blind (an aspect of working Dean naturally delights in). To rescue some of the photographs, Dean began painting and marking onto them, for instance in "Between the Years (Concordat)," where she applied a fingerprint of her own finger onto the tip of the index finger pictured in the photograph. Each work is framed by pictures of the artist's left and right ear, so that each sequence of Polaroids unfolds, literally, between the ears, playing further with the suggestive capacities of puns on the series title and illustrating the associative and improvisational nature of the works as products of the artist's mind. Another common element of the series are images of the artist's growing collection of fragments of ancient Roman statues—mostly fingers, some toes, and a foot—which she repeatedly photographs against the ground of Berlin snow. The works touch on many of Dean's recurring major subjects—history, old age, the human figure, fragmentation, blindness, temporal dislocation—with the lightest of touches and a delight of pure artistic play. They allow us to follow the artist in her process of searching for new images, new ways of engaging with the elements of her surroundings and her craft, undertaken at a time of stillness and liberation from obligation that perhaps only the quiet days between the years can offer.



Between the Years (A Tragic Gesture), 2025-26



Between the Years (Dendriform), 2025-26



Between the Years (Mouse Hole), 2025-26



Between the Years (Concordat), 2025-26

TACITA DEAN PICTURE PERFECT



Between the Years (Pollex), 2025-26



Between the Years (SPLAT, 2,3), 2025-26