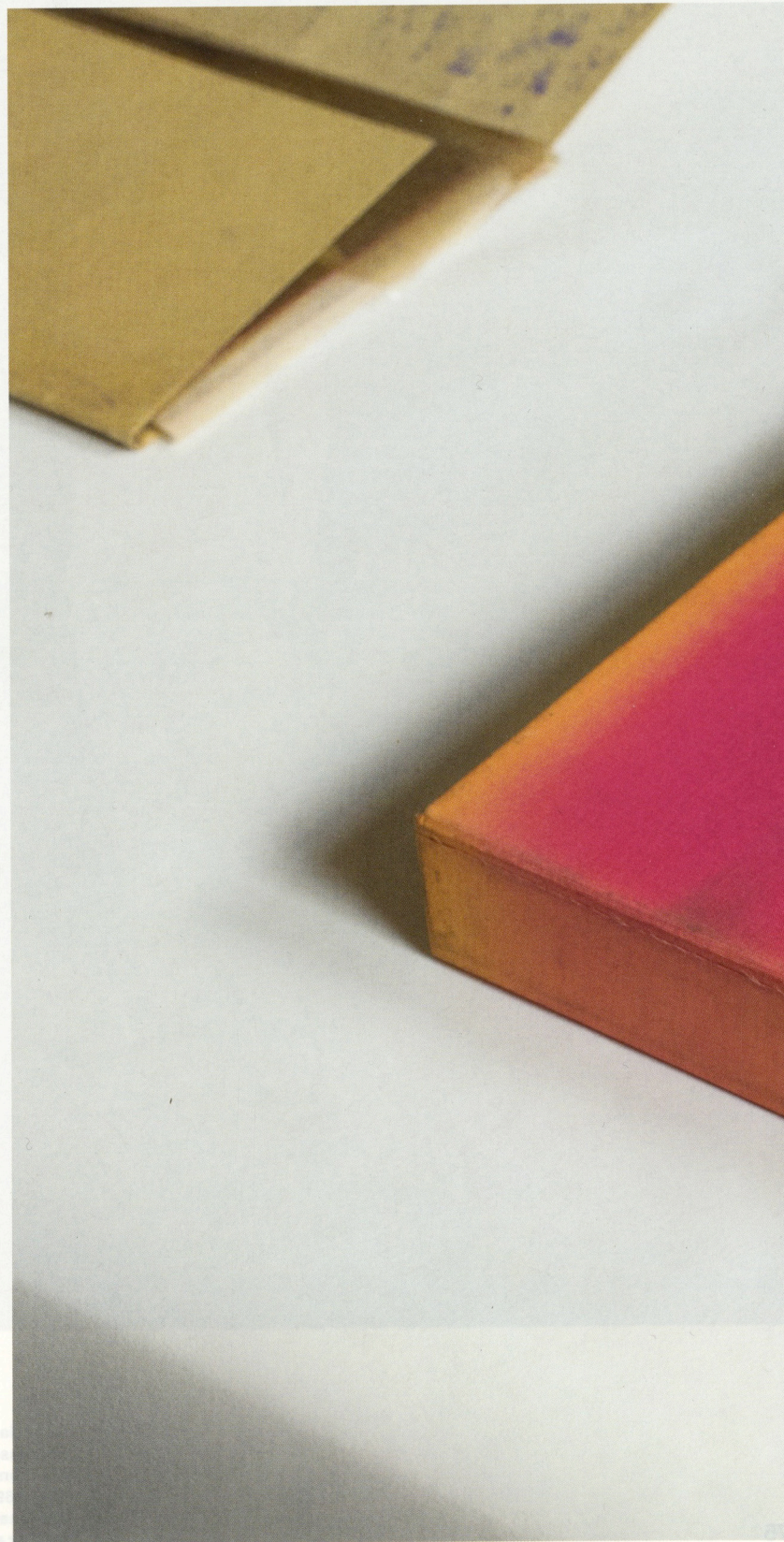


COS magazine
Spring & Summer 2017



IMMATERIALITY with Amie Dicke

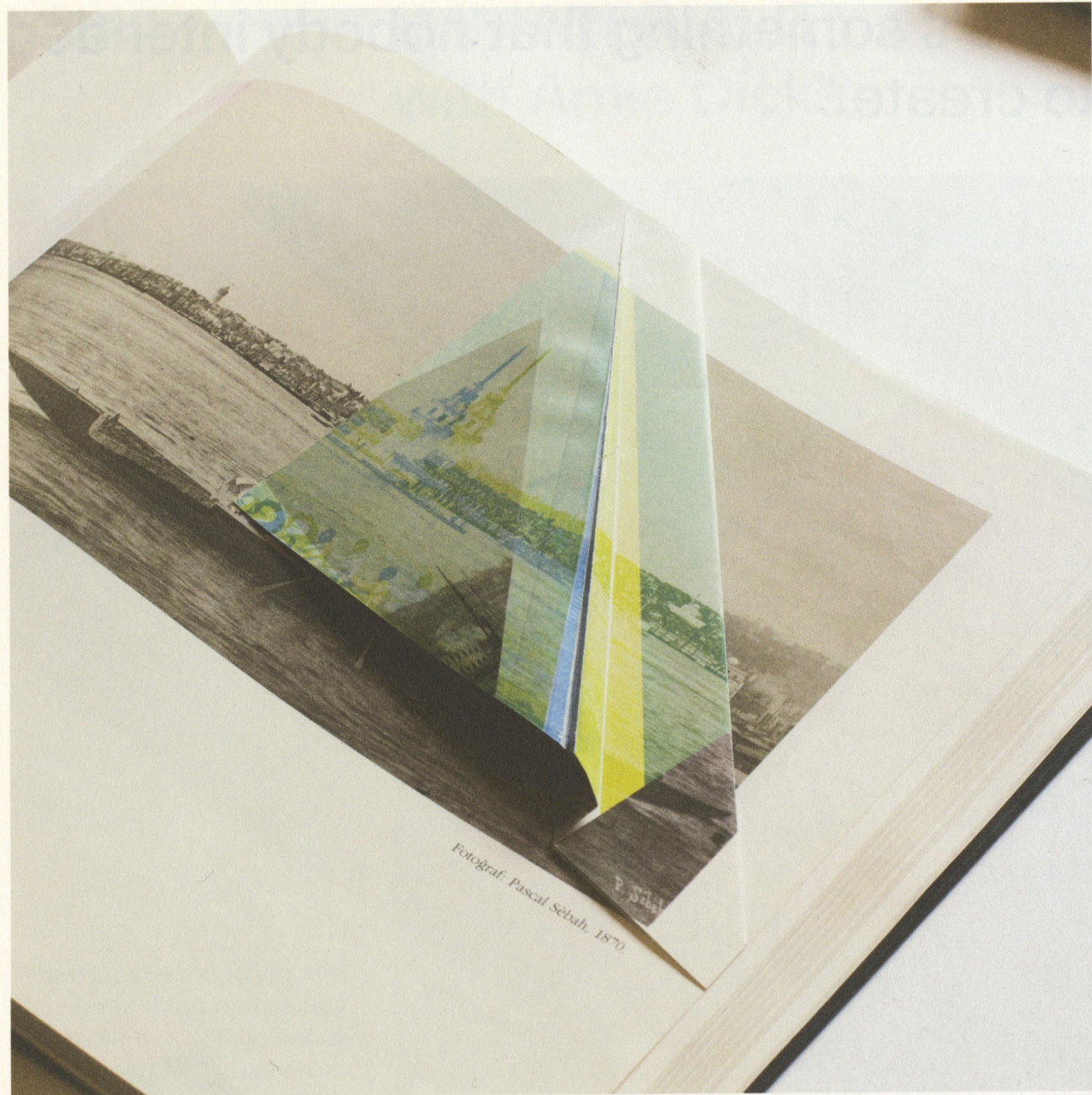
Whether she's cutting and altering fashion magazines or powdering vintage books with layers of make-up, Amie Dicke says her role as an artist is to "point" at the magic that's hiding in plain sight, revealing associations and resonances that might otherwise go unnoticed. As the following collection of objects from her studio demonstrates, Dicke finds herself increasingly captivated by the peculiar effects that intangible forces, such as light, chance, time and error, can exercise on our material world.



"Here's something that nobody intended to create."



Her accidental encounter with this faded pasteboard book sheath was a turning point in Amie Dicke's career. The artist, whose practice is based on the notion that events and memories stick to objects and places, has referred to the chance discovery of the book sheath as "a revelation."



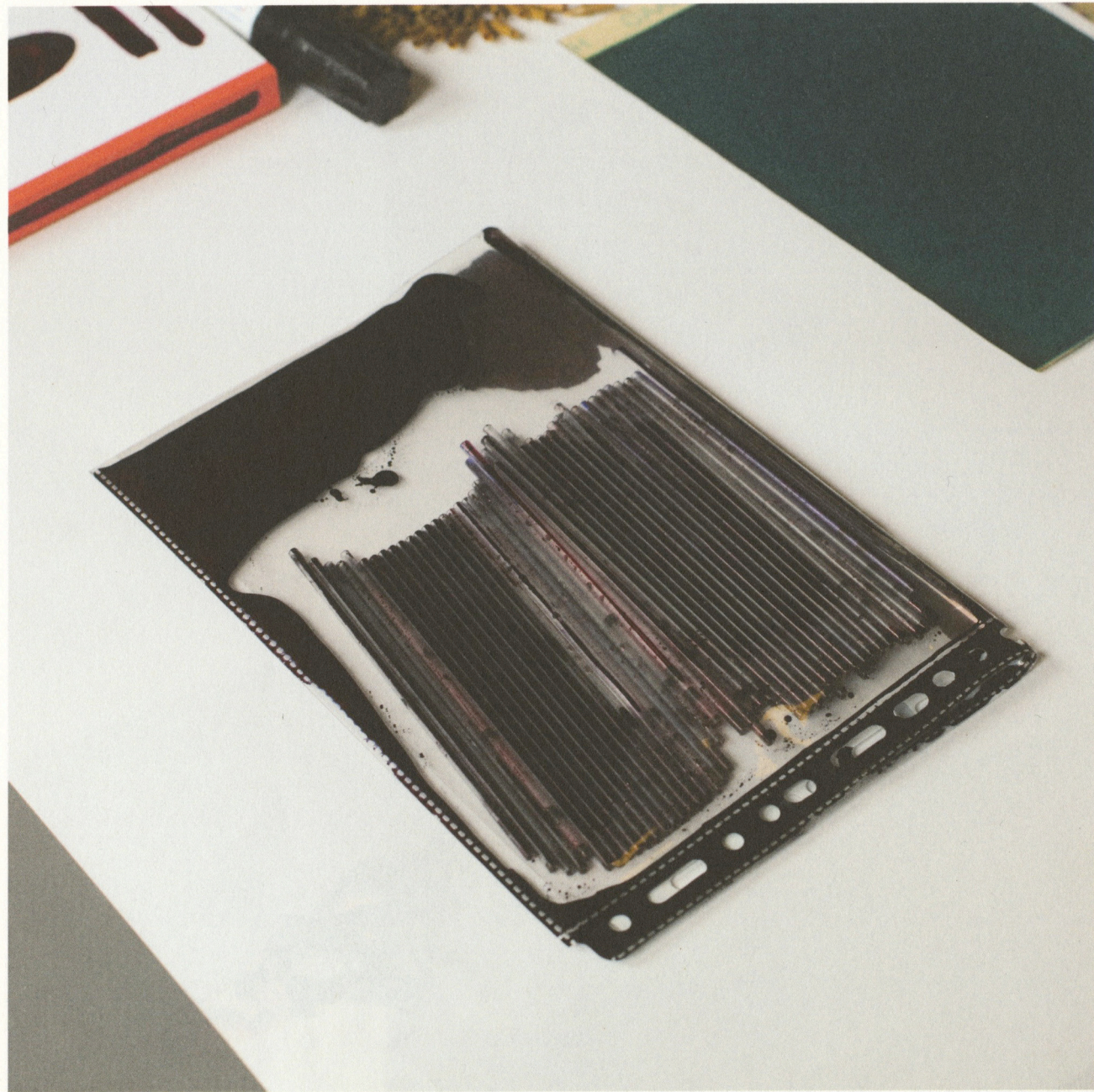
While on holiday in Turkey, Dicke acquired this coffee-table book of black-and-white images of Istanbul without knowing that it contained an intriguing printing error. A common thread in Dicke's work has been inviting the viewer to reconsider so-called mistakes, with a particular view to the image-making machinery (both literal and metaphorical) of the fashion and photography industries.



Dicke exhibited neat rows of highlights from this, her vast array of second-hand soaps, in glass vitrines for a 2016 group show in Amsterdam's Oude Kerk, which invited artists to consider the transience of life. Dicke started to amass her soap collection after a long-treasured bar of Nina Ricci l'Air du Temps soap outlived her grandmother.



Though not a painting in the conventional sense, this object consists largely of paint. It represents the life's work of a Dutchman whose job was to test the output of a well-known paint brand. At the end of each shift, he would wipe his brush on the same plank of wood, leading to a gradual build-up of layers over the years. When he retired from the paint factory, colleagues presented the man with a cross-section as a memento. Dicke adopted it in 2013 after the closure of a museum that used to house it.



For a series titled *Exit*, Dicke has repeatedly worked with rollerball pens, from which she removes the reservoirs and then blows out the ink, sometimes onto old artworks. The contents of this plastic folder represent Dicke's early mishaps with the medium, which does not tend to travel well.



Dicke has created multiple series of work whereby she repeatedly prints the same image with her desktop printer until the ink cartridges expire. Towards the end of the process, four "primary" colours in printer ink (namely cyan, magenta, yellow and black) run out at different speeds, causing surprising variations as the image fades. This series has the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church as its subject.

The eye has to travel upon entering the studio of Amie Dicke, the Dutch artist who rose to prominence by literally defacing fashion magazines, taking sandpaper and nails to their glossy versions of perfection. The question is, where exactly should the eye go first?

Her studio, set over two floors in the sacristy of De Duif, a neo-classical Catholic church in central Amsterdam, is a perfumed Wunderkammer of sign and symbol. It starts at street level, with a handwritten note, taped to the window, that reads MEET ME AT THE ALTAR. "The WiFi is really strong there," she whispers by way of explanation, opening the door of her kitchen so that we can peer reverentially at the altar table, with its gilded replica of the tomb of St Willibrord.

Dicke, it seems, is drawn towards historical spaces, where the present intrudes on the past, and vice versa. In 2012 she was invited to stage an artistic intervention at Castrum Peregrini – a canalside building that had served as secret safe house* for Jewish youths and others fleeing persecution during the Second World War.

*) Each of the safe houses of wartime Amsterdam was known to the Dutch Resistance by a different code name, to avoid inadvertently exposing the address. The code for Herengracht 401 means "fortress of the pilgrims" in Latin. Nowadays the building is run as a cultural centre, and groups of up to twelve can visit for an hour-long guided tour.

After much contemplation, Dicke decided to make a feature of the building's fractures and holes by meticulously inlaying them with shiny gold fabric hewn from emergency blankets of the kind given to the survivors of floods and refugees. The painstaking act pointed not only to the effects of time on a structure; in using a material that's typically used to preserve life, Dicke was referencing the building's fragile legacy of shelter.

To Dicke's delight, Castrum Peregrini – with its enormous collection of books left there by its former occupant, the late aristocratic artist Gisèle d'Ailly van Waterschoot van der Gracht – also enabled her to reprise an idea that had first presented itself back in 2008. "I'd moved to Berlin to prepare for a show there," she recalls. "One day, rifling through books at a flea market I found the

linen-covered case for a missing book. It had been bleached by sunlight after years of being kept on a shelf. It was like a mini Rothko." Dicke was captivated by the object's colourful, coincidental beauty. "Here was something that nobody intended to create. No one person could claim authorship of it. I hadn't made it, but I was the one who had recognised it."

The tomes at Castrum Peregrini, having been packed together under extraordinary circumstances, were especially exciting to Dicke. "What I saw in their colours was a two-way vision of time," she says. "In the part of a book that's been hidden, you're looking at a vision of the past, yet it's fresh and vibrant because of the relationship that it had with another book, one that's now the missing element." Dicke displayed the books as part of her project *Important Souvenirs*, which took its title from a misspelt handwritten note that Gisèle had left on a pile of unsorted matter: "do not touch, I'm searching for important souvenirs."

Liaisons, associations and coincidences have a way of stacking up in Dicke's presence. She giggles as I scabble around in my bag looking for a pen with which to make notes. In my disarray I haven't noticed that I'm standing in front of a large Curver box full to the brim with BIC rollerballs. For some years, Dicke has been emptying the pens' reservoirs and letting the ink bleed down the surface of enormous Perspex sheets. "Messing about," she calls it. But the result – an oleaginous slick that glistens like a blue-bottle – is tremendously beautiful.

Let's say Dicke sits down next to a chatty passenger on an aeroplane who asks what it is that she does for a living. Beyond "I'm an artist," how does she categorise her practice for the uninitiated? "I try to explain that I work with objects and images," says Dicke, "and that often those objects and images will only reveal their meaning, or their interconnectedness, once I've given them my full attention. I kind of believe that it's all just there for me, waiting to be discovered."



Text
MARK SMITH
Photography
JOS KRAAIJEVELD
Portrait
LIBERTO FILLO