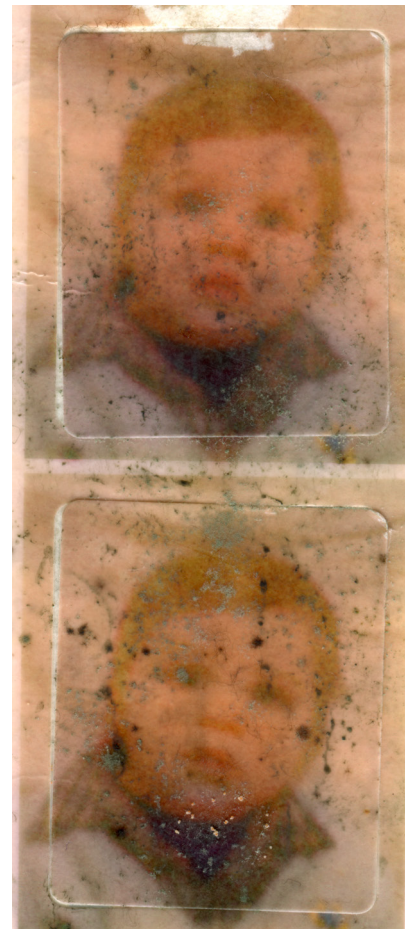




The Living Image

Luke Stoten

I have long been attuned to the (in)visible energies of my environment, from moments of deep connection to total dissonance. My surroundings cling to me, their presence tangible yet intangible, like trying to stay dry underwater. Just as the currents of the ocean, the resonance of my environment builds and erodes me.

Exploring the intimate fusion of self and environment, 'The Living Image' invites reflection on our interconnectedness with the landscape of existence. I have utilised bacteria as a central medium in the realisation of the project. Through meticulous cultivation techniques, I extracted bacteria from locations of great personal significance. By fostering their growth in controlled settings, each bacterial culture becomes a living embodiment of the experiences and emotions intertwined with these places.

The project builds from the foundations of place attachment theory- a concept that delves into the emotional and psychological bonds individuals form with specific environments. Environmental psychologist and phenomenologist David Seamon's research underscores the role of memory, emotion, and embodiment in shaping attachment to places. Drawing inspiration from Seamon's work, I sought to deepen my understanding of the human experience within the context of our surroundings.

'An Autobiography in Bacteria' marks the project's birth, following my journey revisiting intimate landmarks of my past from my hometown in Cornwall to my current residence in London. I sit with each petri dish as it collects the bacteria of the area while I reflect on my experience of each site in writing.

The process became a cathartic ritual. Culturing the bacteria offered me a visible representation of atmospheres that typically remain unseen, allowing me to preserve a small part of the environment while simultaneously continuing its legacy.

Within the conceptual framework of 'The Living Image', the deliberate labelling of bacterial exposures as 'images' initiates a dialogue between the traditional realm of photography and this unconventional medium. While these living representations may diverge from the stereotypical conventions of a photograph, they share a commonality with photography through process. At the heart of this connection lies the fundamental concept of 'exposure' - the pivotal moment when light interacts with a camera's sensor, freezing a transient moment in time. Similarly, within the controlled confines of the petri dish, exposure takes on a transformative significance as the bacteria are cultivated and encouraged to thrive in response to their environment. In essence, these microbial compositions are not mere snapshots but dynamic embodiments of the passage of time itself.

The project's maturation 'Home/Away from Home' refines my initial observations. I noticed a clear distinction between how I wrote about my current residence in London and my hometown in Cornwall. My reflections on Cornwall felt slower, they had a higher level of clarity and an element of closure that my writing in London did not possess. To explore this visually, I experimented with two larger Petri dishes. One was exposed to various locations in Cornwall, and the other to London. I added a portrait of my younger self to the Cornwall dish and one of my current self to the London dish, symbolically embodying the ecologies I pledged to nurture. Upon reflection, I decided to separate these portraits from the dishes as I wanted the bacterial exposures to remain 'images' without the aid of traditional photography.

During the process, it became apparent both pieces adopted a visual language reminiscent of the abstract impressionist movement of the second half of the 20th century. Abstract art is a piece of work that assumes an unrecognisable form. 'The Living Image' adopts the conventions of abstract impressionism by capturing a distorted depiction of my inner world, understood in totality by only the artist. The Petri dish serves as a frame, with bacteria interacting like paint on a canvas, dancing in a performance of eternity. By harnessing the power of bacteria, my project reimagines traditional artistic mediums within the conventions of an established art movement, inviting viewers to reconsider their predetermined notions of a material that rarely exists in creative spaces.

I've chosen the Copeland Gallery in Peckham as the venue for my exhibition. It is a space I've frequented during my time in London, offering familiarity and connection to my artistic journey. The gallery's sleek, minimalist design resembles a laboratory, complementing the scientific aspect of my work; while subtle signs of ageing add depth and character, echoing themes of memory and experience explored conceptually in my project. I want the work to be exhibited for an extended time so the physical changes in the outcomes are notable.

The opening room showcases the large petri dishes from 'Home/Away from Home'. Placing these more 'overviewing' pieces at the beginning of the exhibition confronts viewers with the medium, encouraging them to subconsciously establish the lens through which they will be viewing the work.

The main space exhibits 'An Autobiography in Bacteria'. Surrounding the room are larger prints of each dish accompanied by the reflections taken from my writings alongside each exposure. Inspired by the composition of Wolfgang Tillman's exhibition 'To Look Without Fear', the size of the wall prints varies drastically according to the personal impact of where each exposure was captured.

In the next room stands a glass-sealed table displaying the smaller dishes. Displaying the prints initially disarms viewers who may be deterred by the alternative medium, allowing them to view without prejudice. Putting the physical dishes in a separate room allows for a more intimate viewing experience once preconceptions are softened.

The final room showcases a new piece 'Microbial Legacy'. Four A1 petri dishes are mounted centrally on each wall of the space. Over time, bacteria will grow from those who interact with the exhibition. This acts as a closing statement, grounding viewers in the understanding that they too play a role in the ecologies that 'The Living Image' embodies.

At its core, 'The Living Image' represents a departure from conventional artistic practice by bridging the worlds of art and science. Drawing inspiration from place attachment theory and environmental psychology, the project vividly demonstrates how context shapes our sense of identity. By creating these visible entities that neutralise the hierarchy between self and surrounding, 'The Living Image' fosters empathy and connection, inviting viewers to reconsider their relationship to the spaces they inhabit. Amongst rapid developments in urbanisation and digital connectivity, this project serves as a reminder of the importance of maintaining connections to our roots and the places that sustain us.

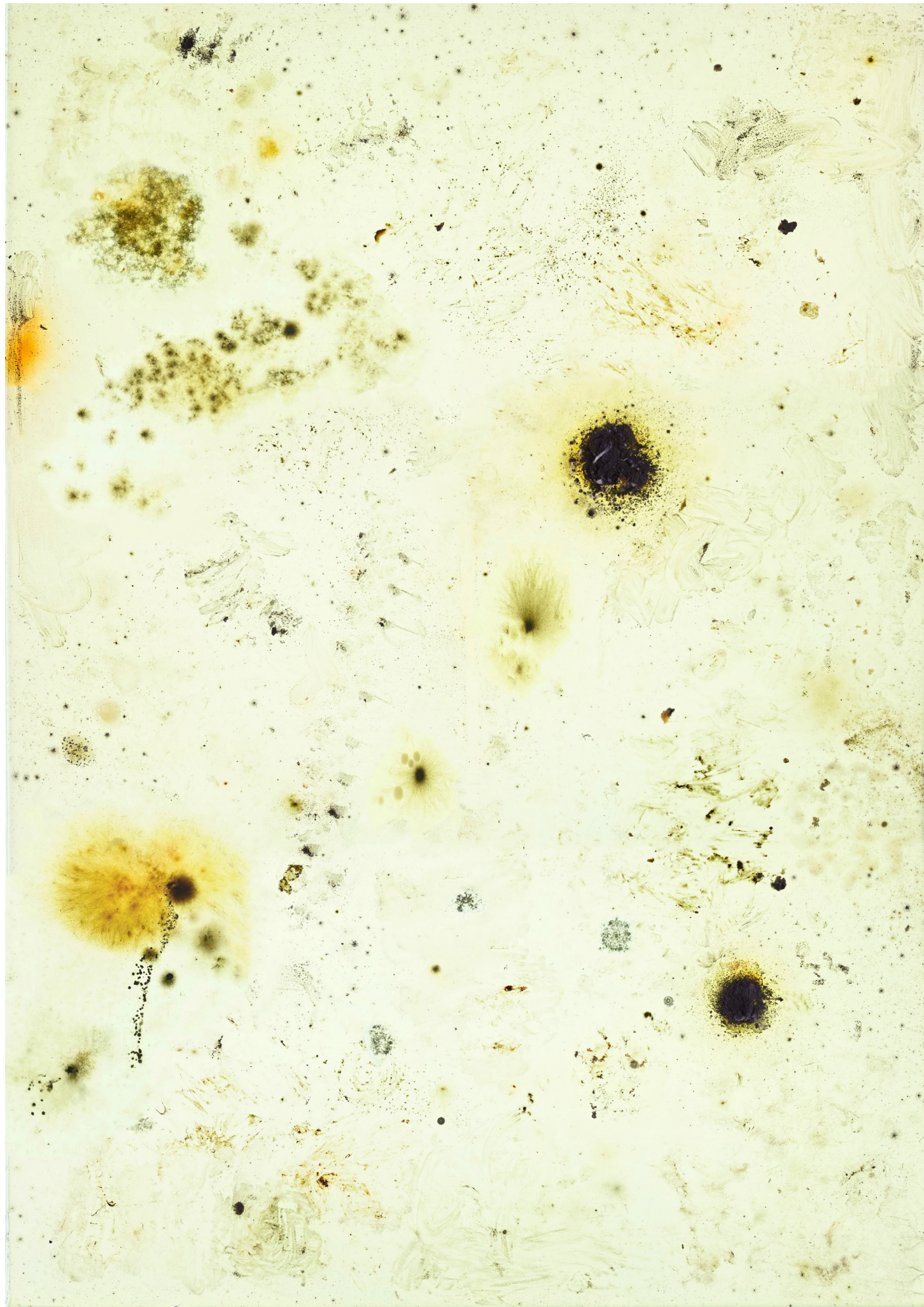






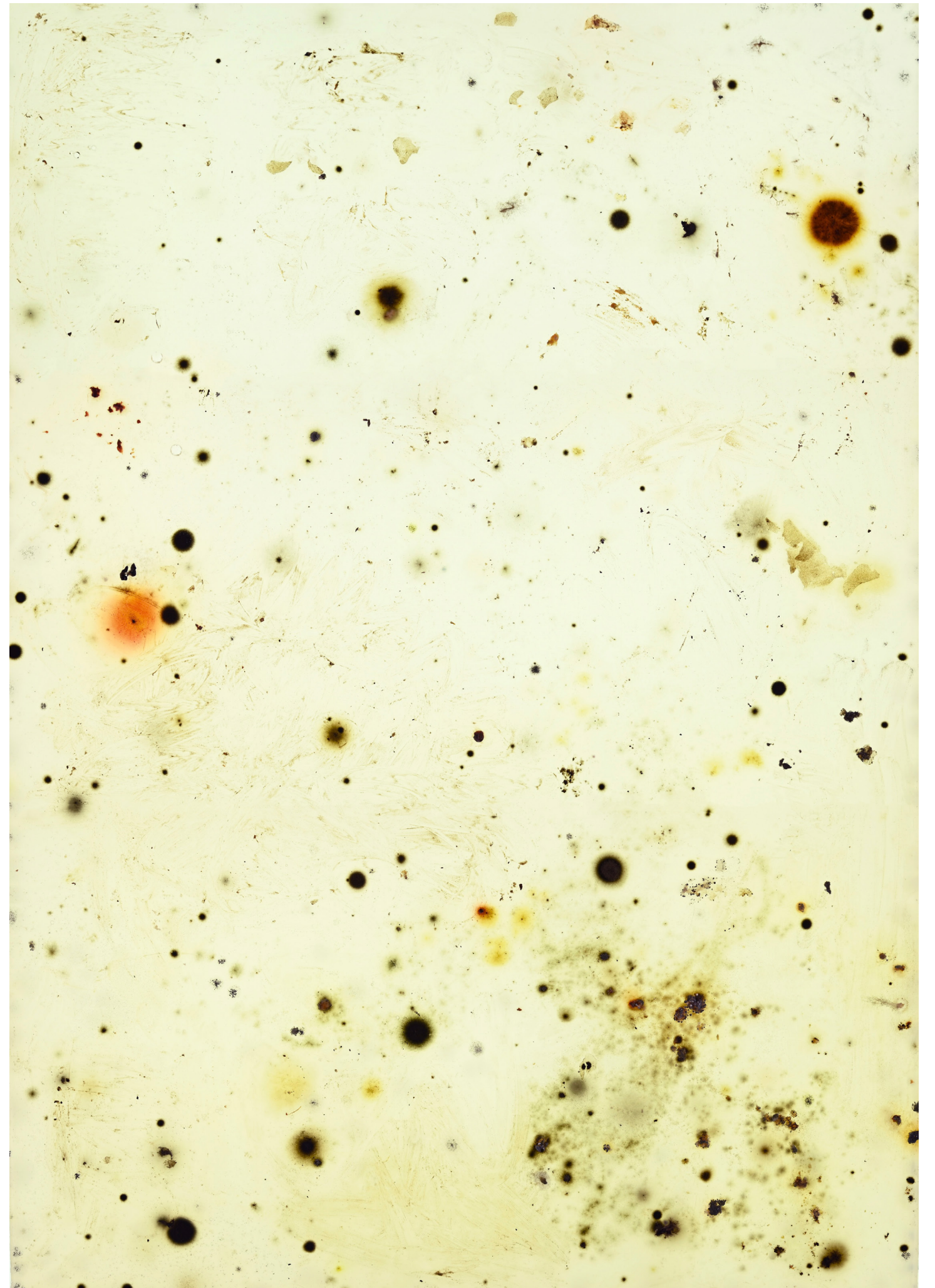


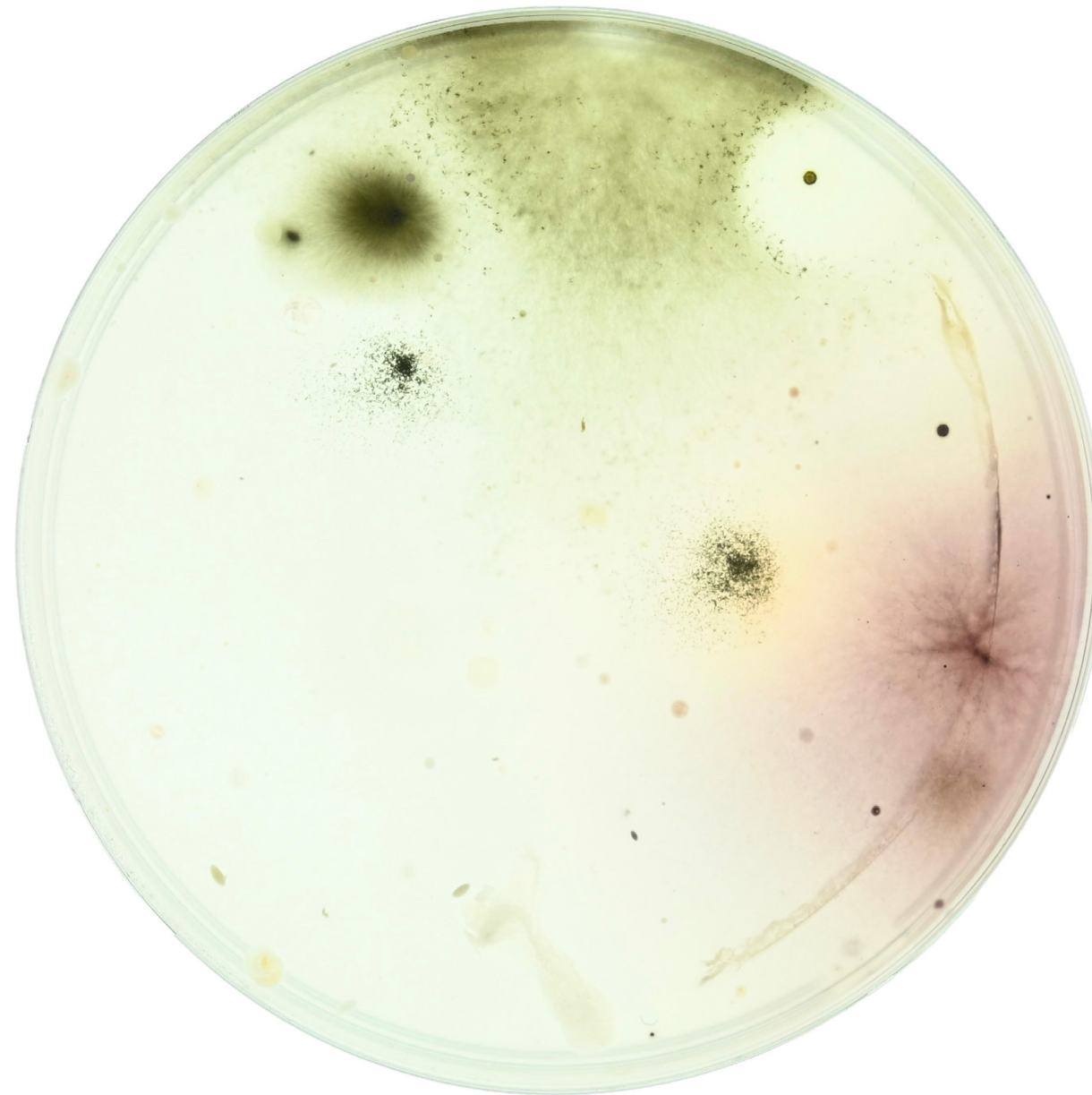




'Home'
594x841mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

‘Away From Home’
594x841mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

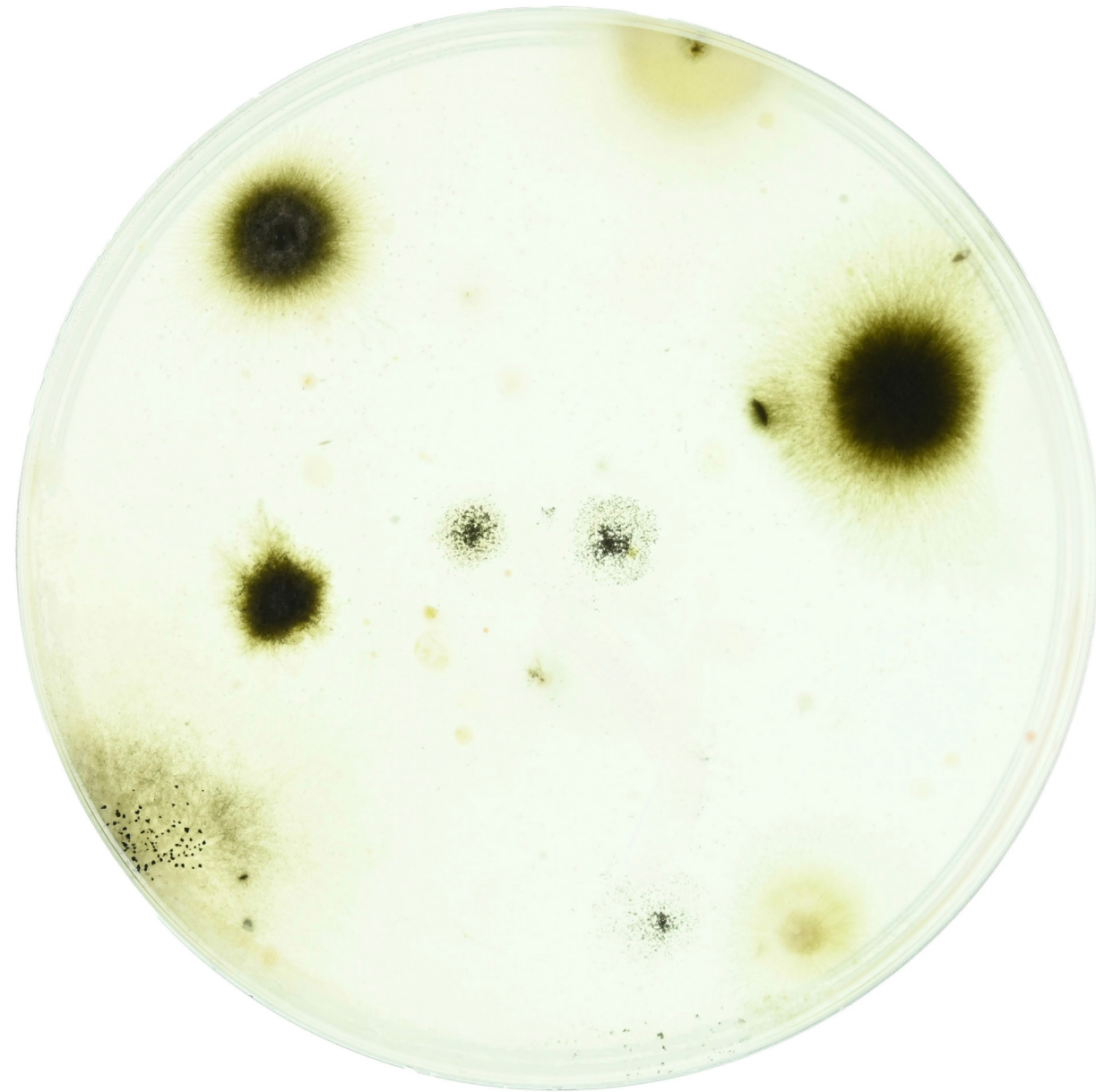




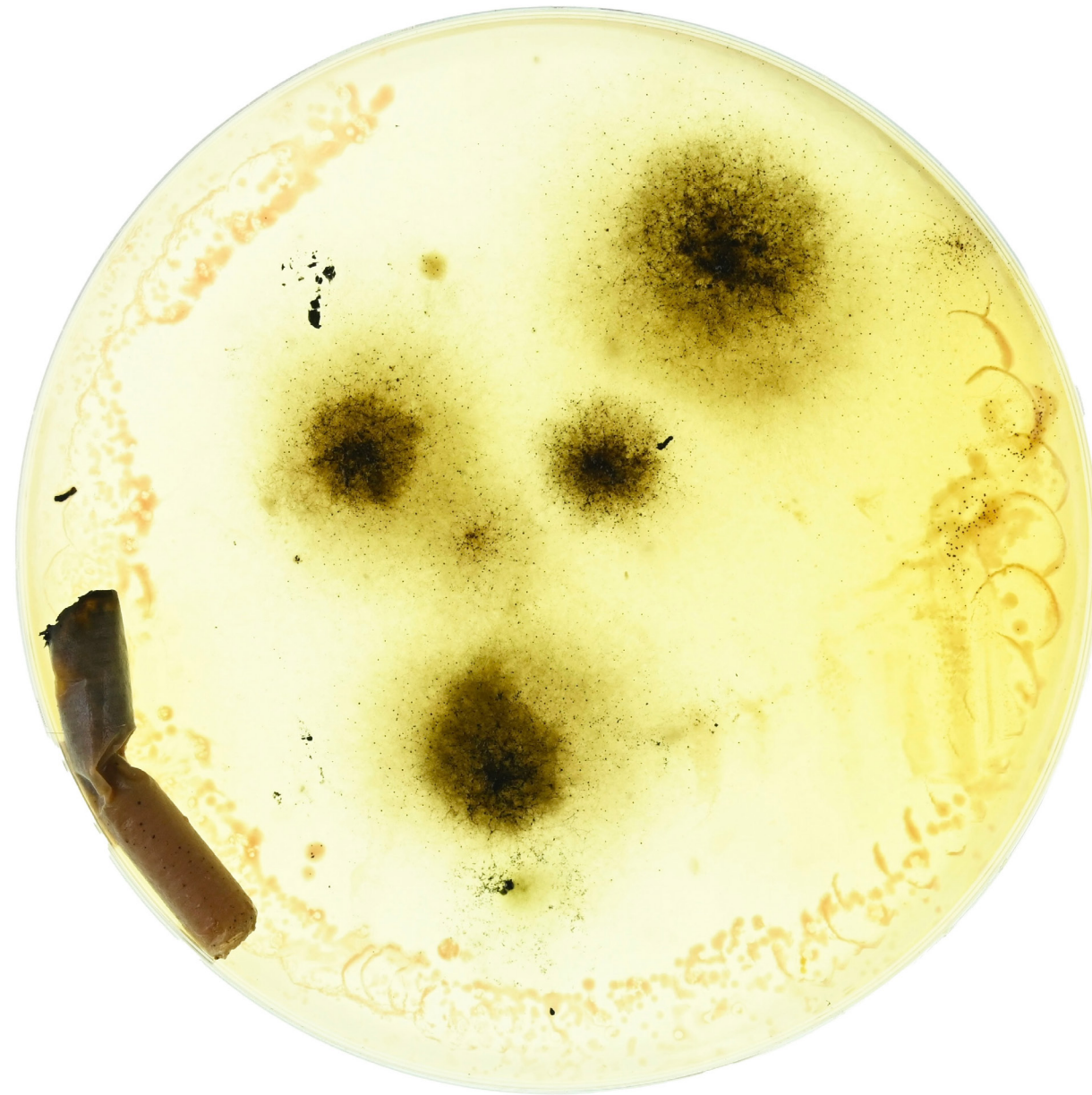
‘Brockwell Park 043’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

The park is where I come to feel connected to home. Doing a lap of Brockwell has become routine. I used to come here when we would visit Great Auntie Jean. She used to [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] she didn't remember me the last time I saw her but I still think of her when I go to the park. It's the space I leave for myself between everyone asking everything of me. I remember coming here when I was fifteen. I fantasised about living here one day. Perhaps I wasn't aware of everything that existed outside the park. Now my imagination takes me home. Perhaps I'll never be content in one place. I'll be more content here now that you're gone. If you're gone, I wish I knew for good so I could [REDACTED] again [REDACTED]



‘Marazion Harbour 033’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



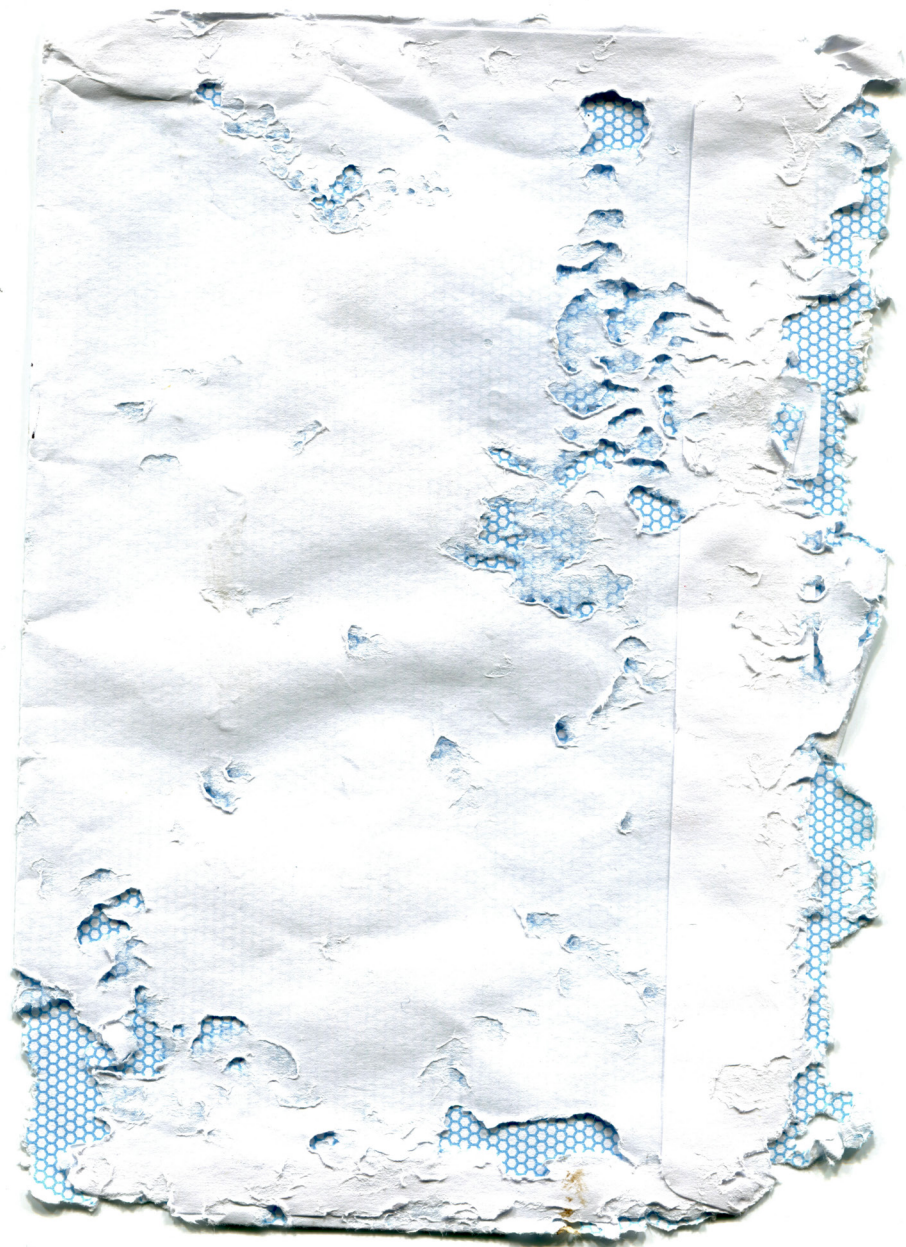
‘Ferndale Road Windowsil 074’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘Peckham High Street 048’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



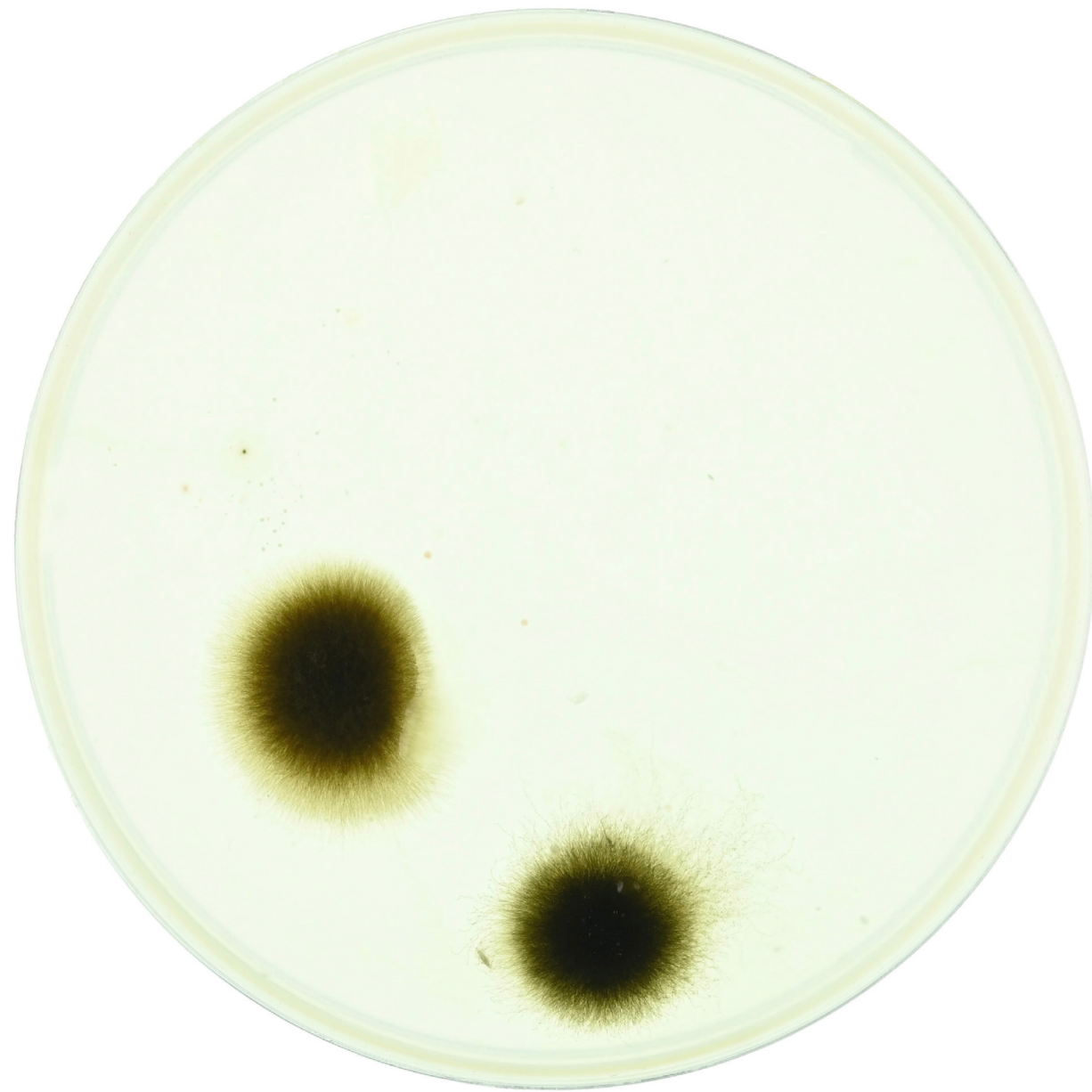
‘40 Coleman Road 017’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



Last night I had a dream that I ~~was~~ rotted from the inside out. I lay as mould filled my organs, not in a progressive [redacted] sort of way, more like when you turn the light on in a dark room and suddenly everything is exposed. I looked perfectly normal on the outside but inside me consisted of damp, suffocating nauseating mould. Then, starting from my thumb, my skin began to peel away, revealing what I already knew to be below the surface.

waking up here gave me no sense of relief
I feel your energy from my room
downstair stronger than I do my own.

I think I need to get [redacted]
out of this house.



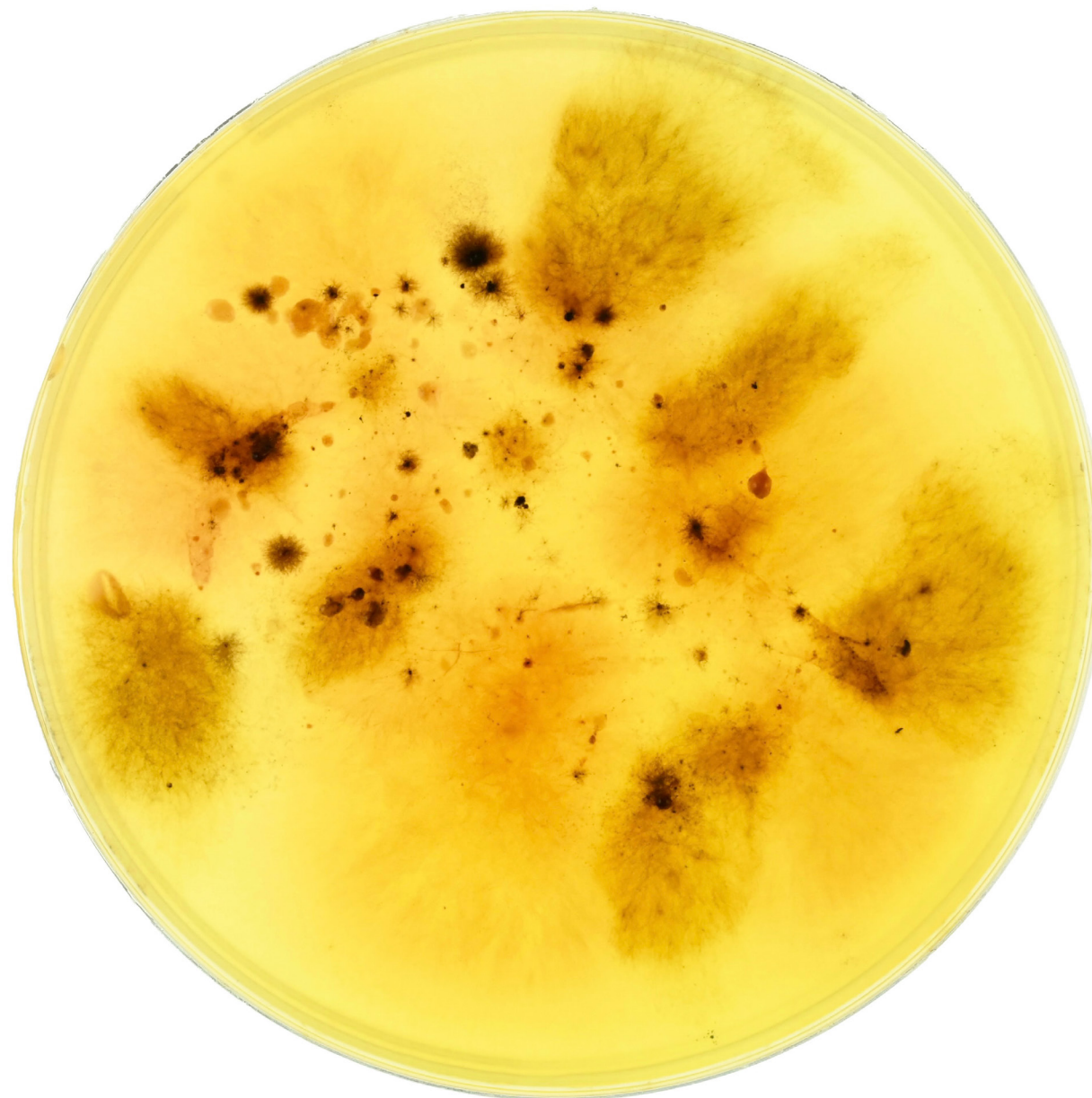
‘Hawk’s Point, Carbis Bay 035’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘Wishwood Campsite, Sturry 011’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



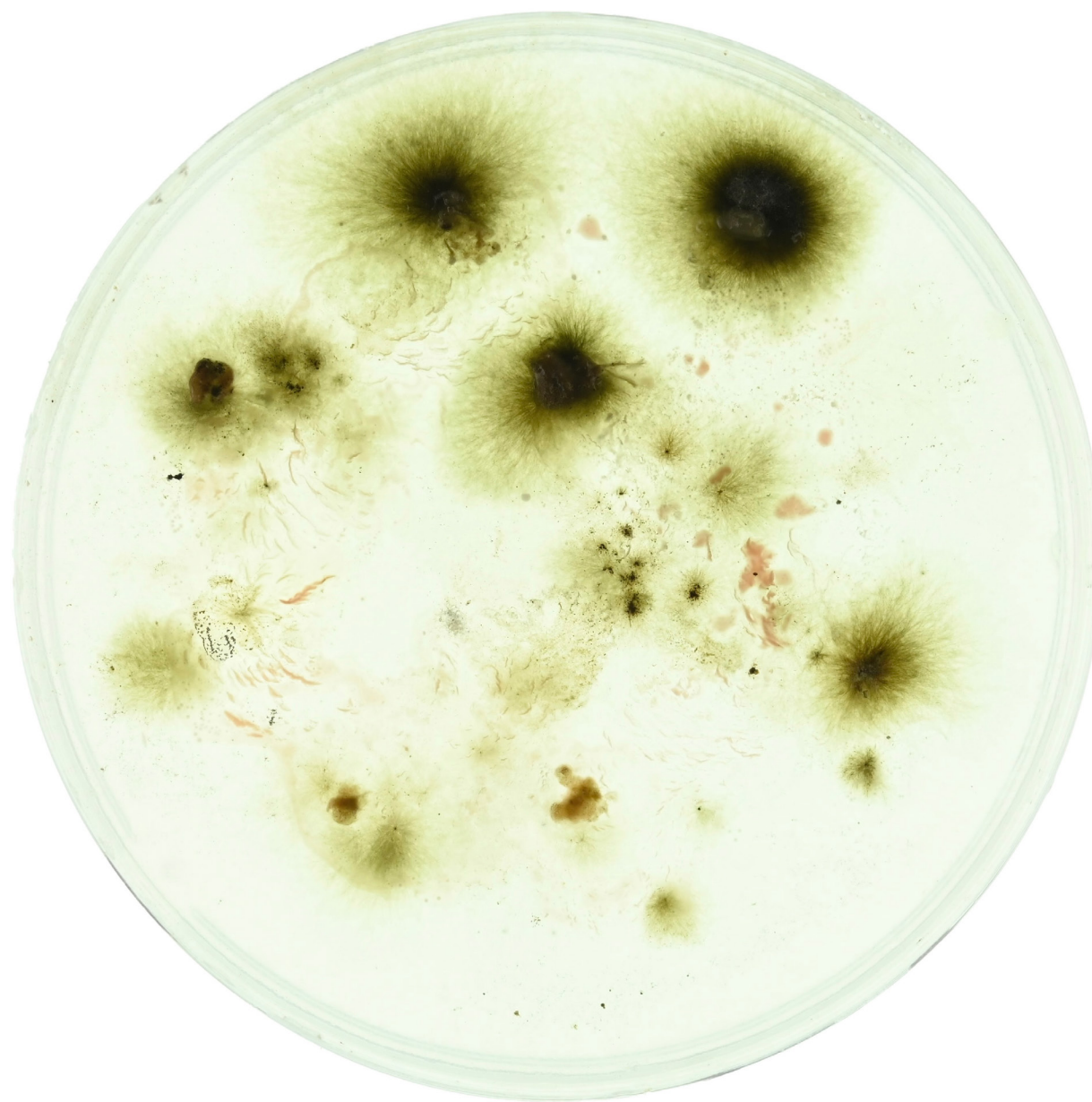
‘Lotte’s Car 005’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



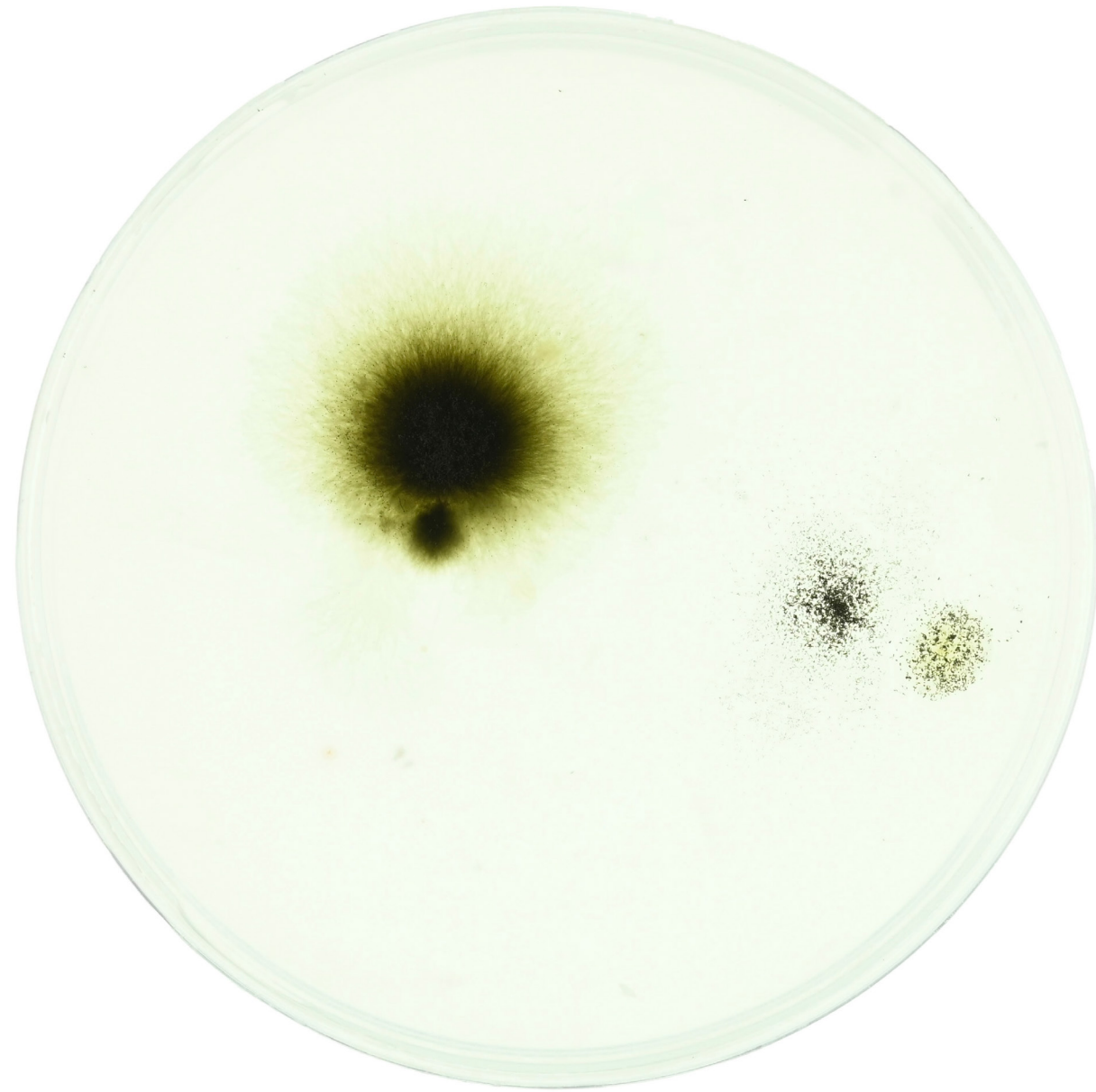
‘Greenwich Park 067’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

'the most beautiful thoughts are always inside the darkest'

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful to [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful to be close to Greenwich park
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful for [REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
I'm thankful [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



‘Northern Line, Northbound 022’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘1 Rose Hill 001’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘Tintagel 027’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘The Rock Spot 015’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

ST. SENARA'S ██████████, ZENNOR

I'm at the rocks we used to go to. The rocks that now feel more like a graveyard. I think back to going there every night in summer, a ritual I could follow forever. Talking about stupid shit like it mattered and ignoring everything that actually did. Being here alone feels different. Haven't heard from you in a while.

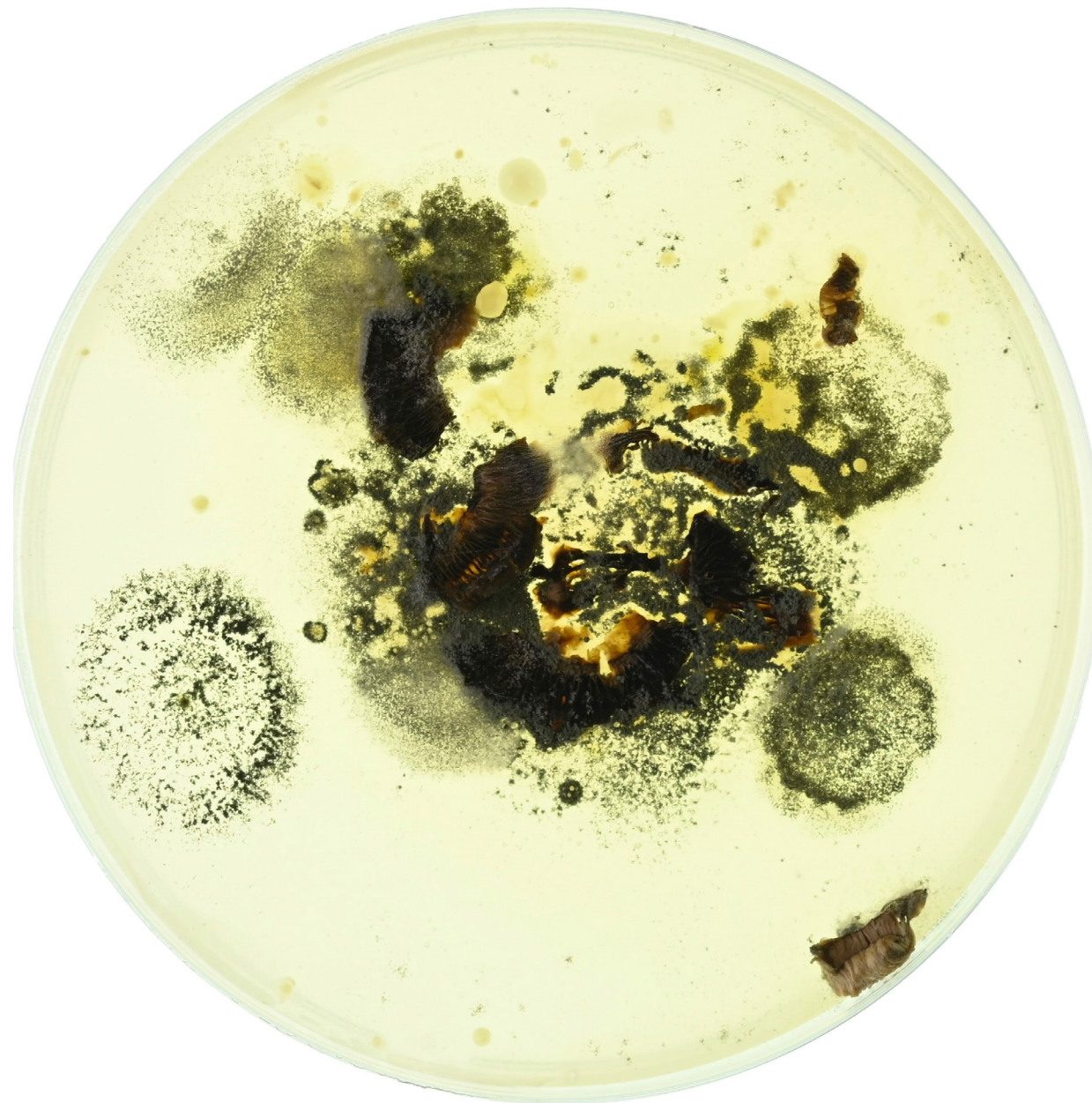
██████████ Zennor ██████████ Photo - David Giles



‘The Wishing Tree 012’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘The View, Brighton 068’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate



‘The Memorial Gardens 008’
Ø 90mm
Bacterial Exposure on Agar Plate

To view all dishes visit:

<https://lukestoten.com/the-living-image:-an-autobiography-in-bacteria>

