

Skyglow: A Starlight Journey Against AI, Ongoing

At the intersection of photography, astronomy, and ecology, Skyglow: A Starlight Documentation Against AI is a practice-based research project that aims to question the notions of authorship and representation in today's algorithmic society and challenge the ability of the photographic medium to deliver reliable visual information. I will engage these topics by addressing the globally underrated issue of light pollution and its effects on night sky observation. By performing a series of photographic studies - organized in collaboration with environmental and astronomical European institutions - that will document the light pollution conditions of some selected areas of our continent, I will address these questions:

Can photography be used analytically and objectively?

Can we produce images that carry reliable information? And how important is it today? Would it be possible to link the intricate relationship photography always had with reality representation to the new challenges brought by TTI (text-to-image) generator software?

Would it be possible to produce visual documents with the support of AI image generators?

Light pollution has been defined as "globally one of the most widely distributed forms of anthropogenic pollution." In addition to obscuring our view of natural starlight, artificial light at night has downsides for many creatures, including amphibians, birds, mammals, insects, and plants. In 2016, the percentage of the world's population affected by light pollution had increased to 83%. In the last two years of training with astrophotography equipment, I've conceived a methodology that allows me to depict how human-made light hides the natural one coming from the cosmos.

The system involves shooting photographs of the same stars from several locations with different levels of light pollution - from rural areas to urban centers. The settings of the large format camera employed remain the same in each place: lens, film, aperture, point of focus, exposure time, and also atmospheric conditions. Following these rules, the only factor influencing the density of the photographic emulsion is the amount of artificial light recorded through the lens. Photography is no longer a tool for exploring the concepts of narrative, space, and composition but a tool that can generate information independent of the author's interpretations and narcissistic view of the world. Through this change of paradigm, I will challenge the standard documentary practices. The first successful attempts are visible in my portfolio. The research will start in Belgium - one of the most light-polluted countries in Europe - and will continue throughout our continent.

By considering the photographic apparatus a light-recorder, and exploiting its foundational ability to distinguish light values of different intensities, I will deliver reliable information in the form of unmanipulated photographs. As my research aims to preserve the integrity of the photographic document, paradoxically I am interested in understanding whether AI's limitless potential can be used not only to generate new visions but as a collaborator that can enhance the credibility of the photograph as a contemporary witness. Through a critical and experimental methodology, I will engage with image generators softwares to refine the concepts of documentary and representation within the photographic universe.

Fig.1 Installation view, 10 A.M. ART gallery, Milan, 2022

In this radical version of the project, Del Conte has exposed several 4x5 films to light pollution for 1 hour. He did not use the equatorial mount and he did not focus the lens. Instead, the photographs show circles of different gradations according to the amount of artificial light recorded.

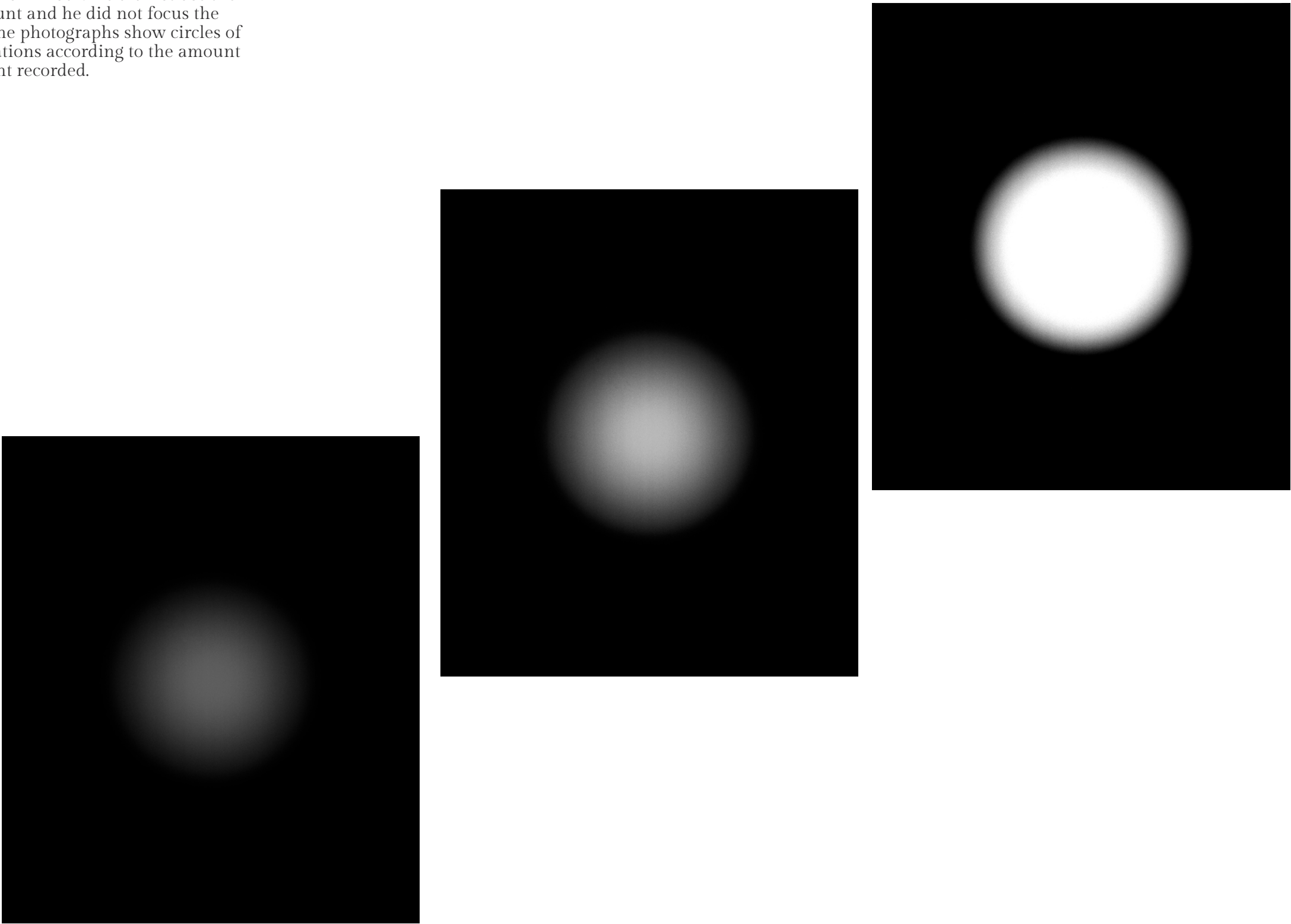


Fig. 2 three gelatin silver prints, 100x80 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2023

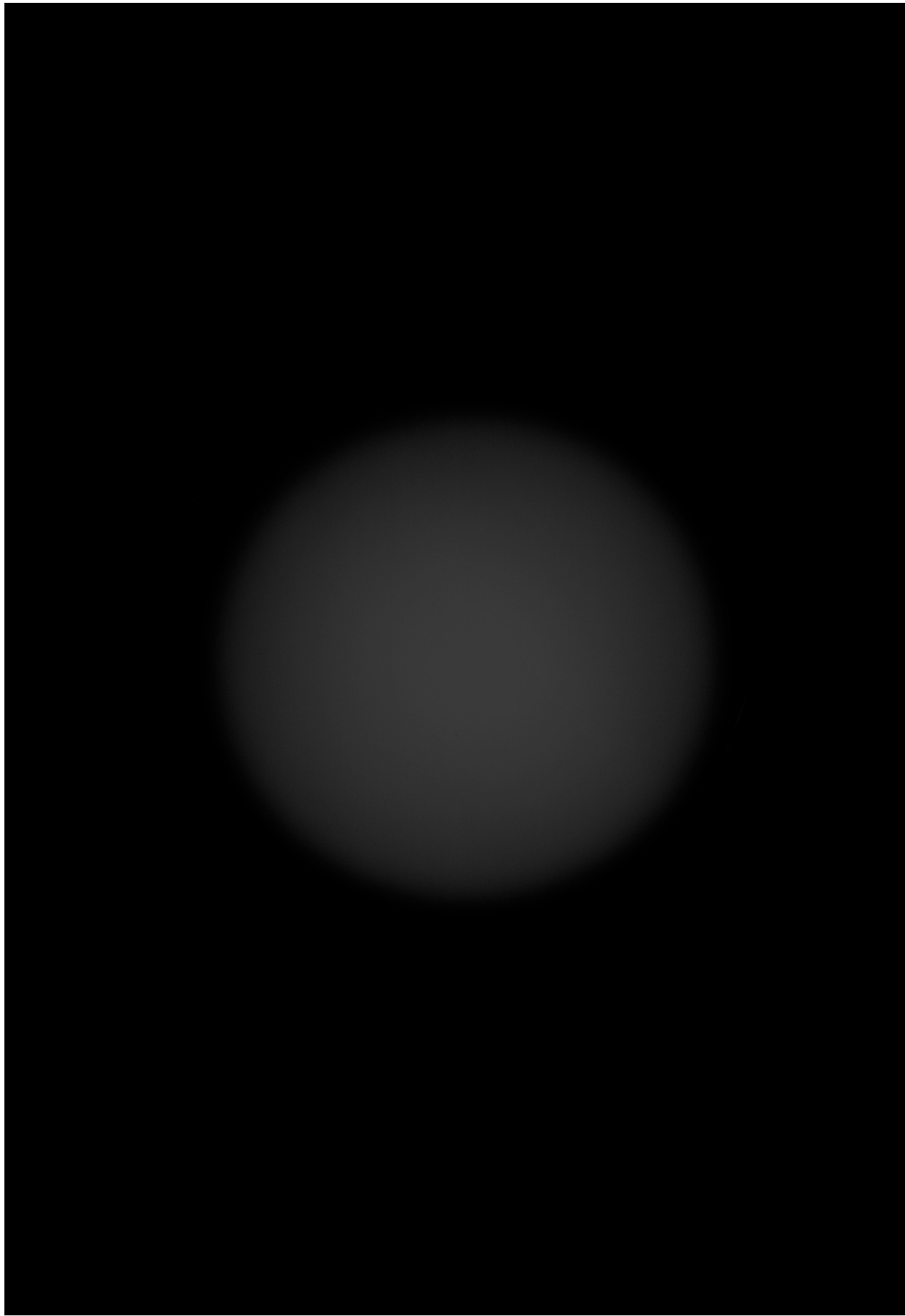
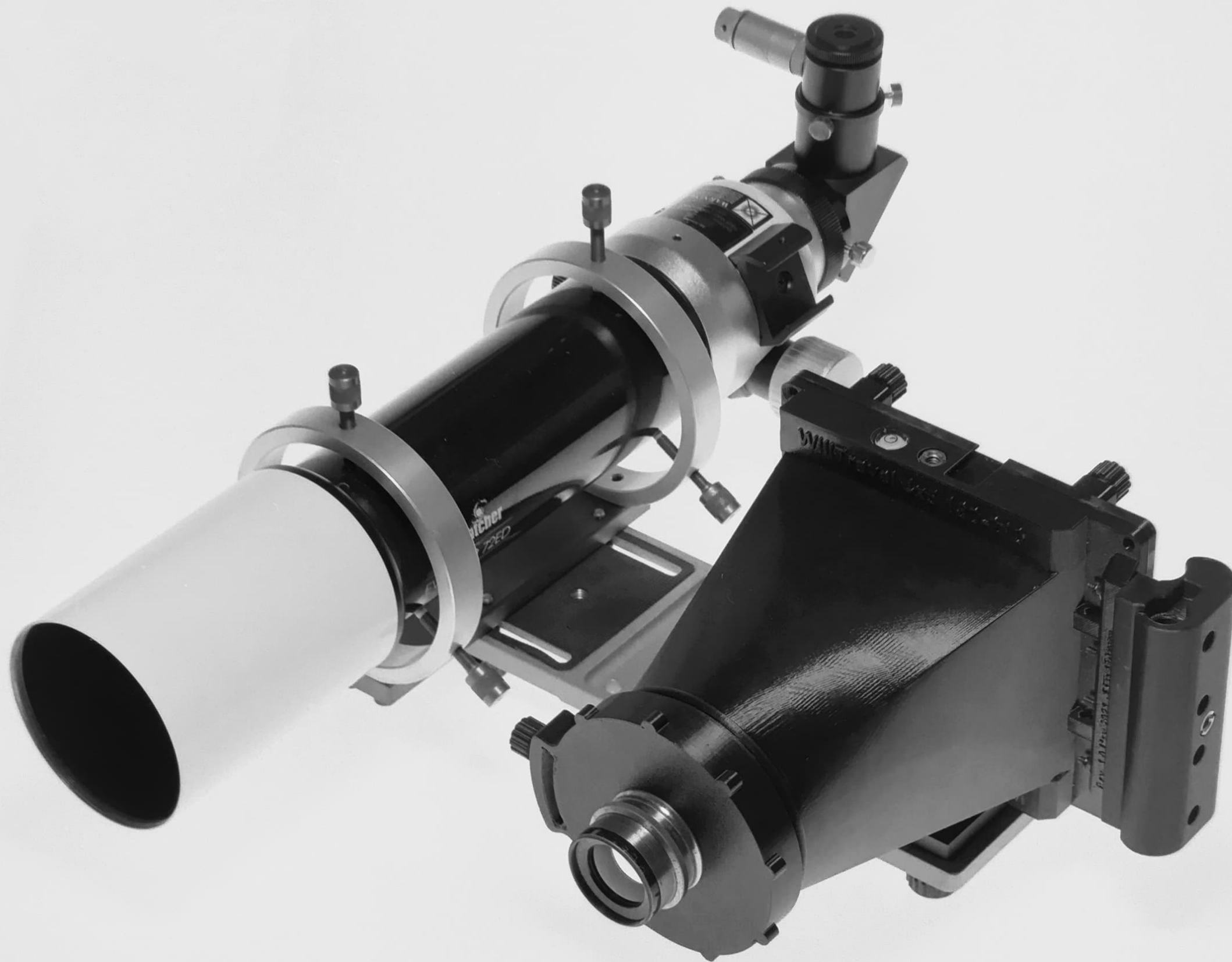


Fig. 3,5 Rural and inner-city sky, details, gelatin silver prints, 100x80 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2023

Fig. 4 Val Veny



With the aid of an equatorial mount, a sophisticated device used for astronomical observations, each photograph was the result of a 30-minute exposure. Three different locations were selected for this composition: the Tabernas Desert in Andalusia, the Italian Apennines in Emilia-Romagna and the city of Turin.

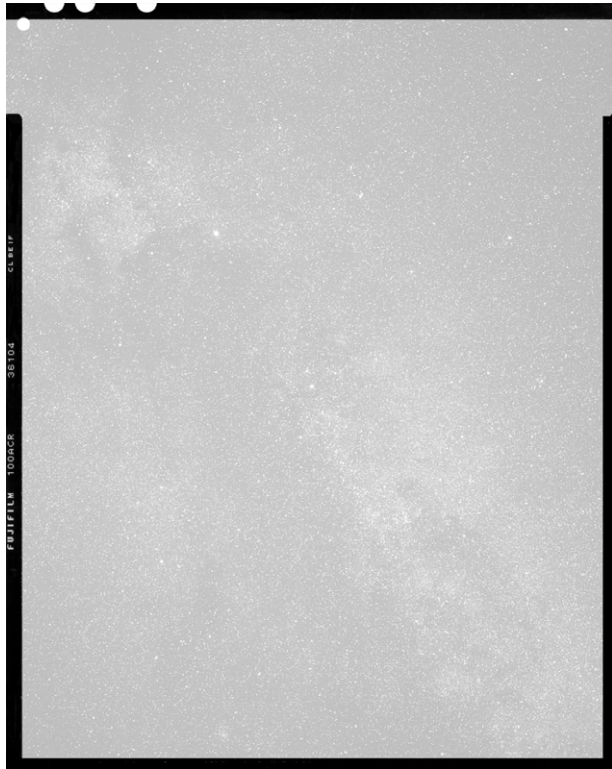
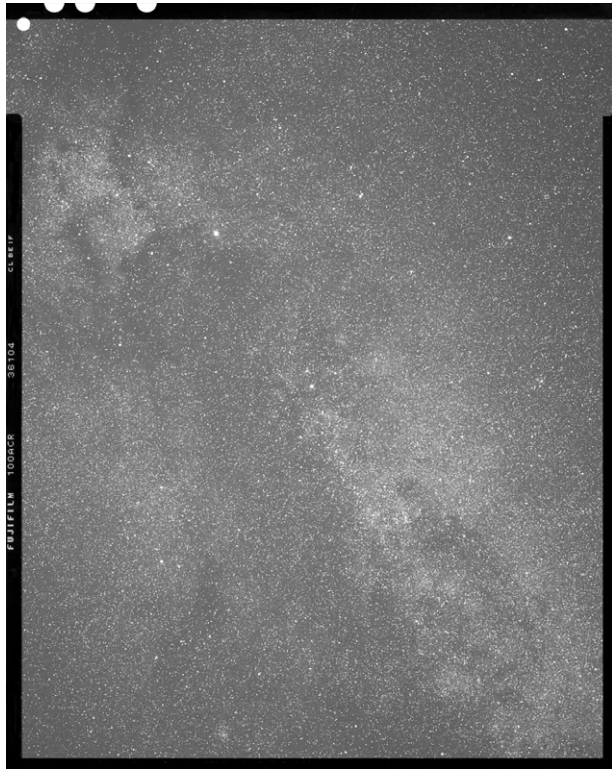
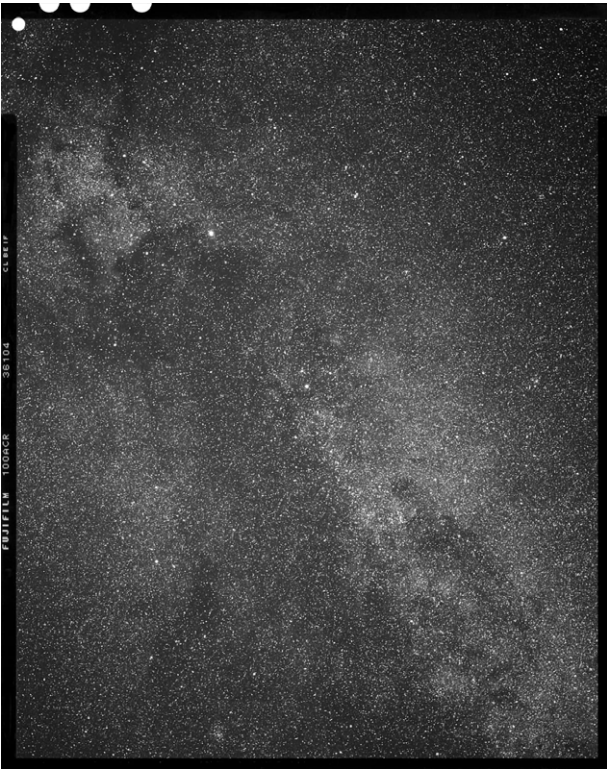
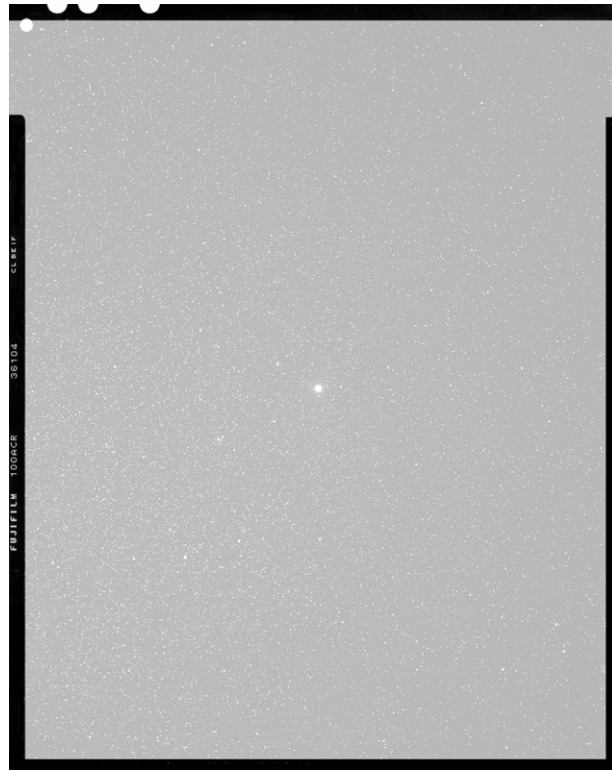
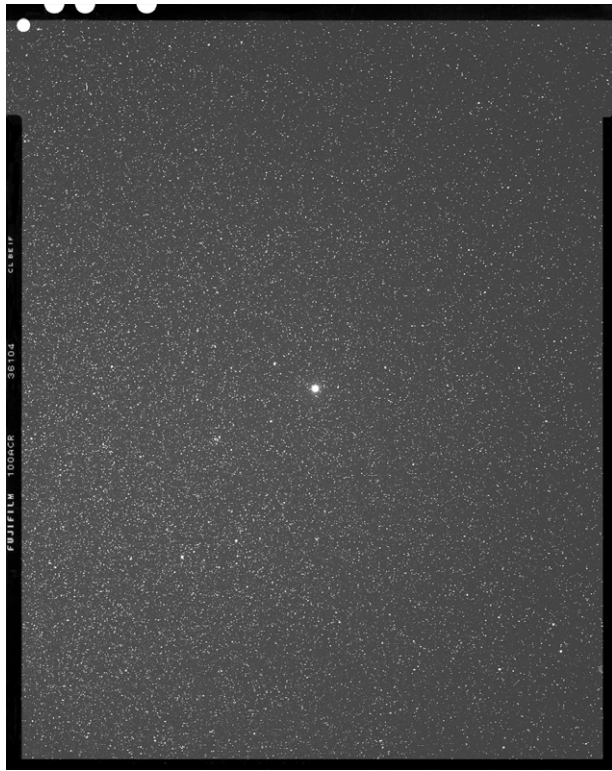


Fig. 6 Equipment, gelatin silver print, 50x60 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2021
Fig. 7 Vega and Deneb, six gelatin silver prints, 30x40 cm each, ED 3+2 AP, 2022

In the next pages:
Fig. 8 Schedar from Colle dell'Agnello, detail
Fig. 9 Schedar from Turin, detail



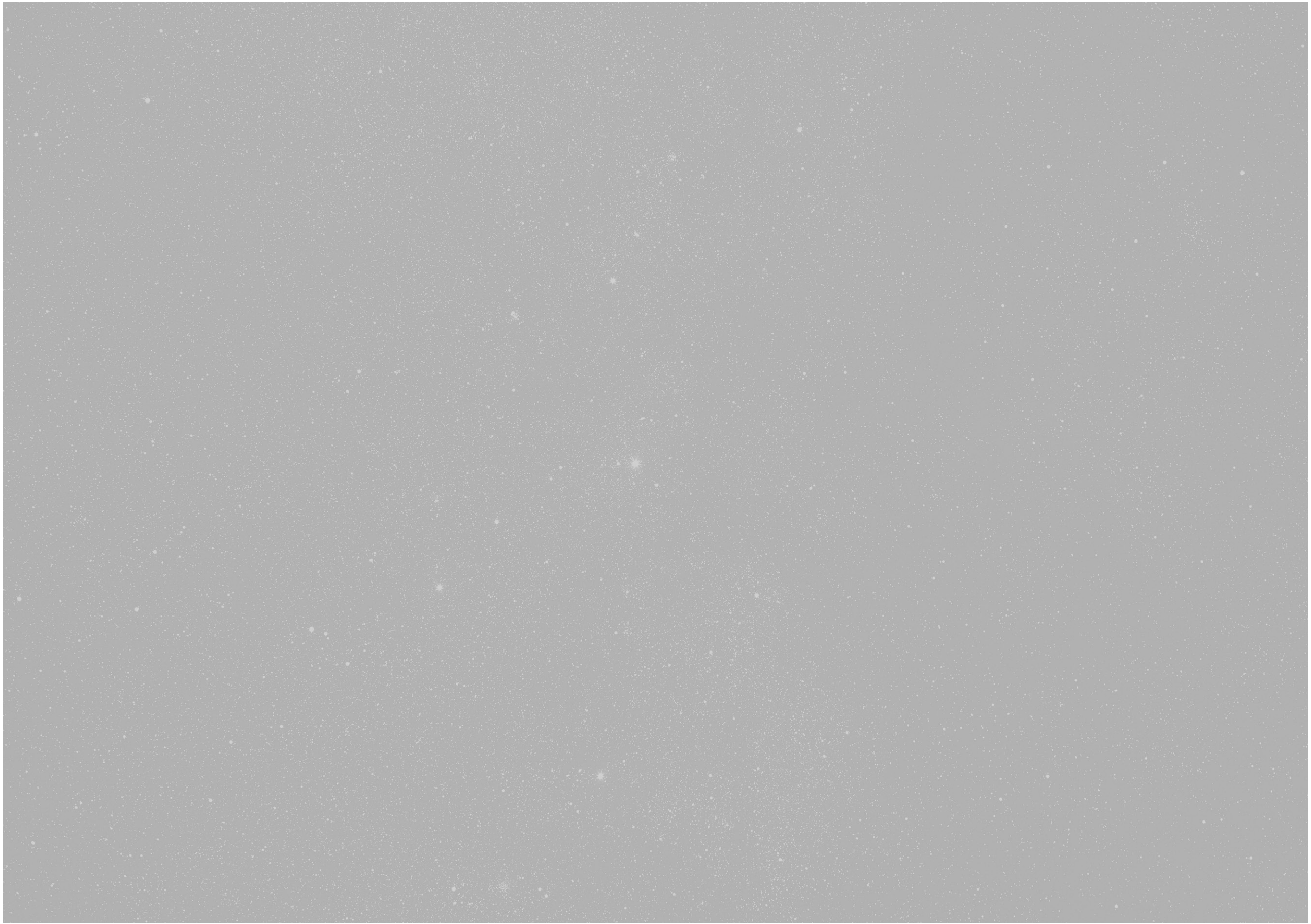




Fig. 10 Turin, 2022
Fig. 11 Vega, detail, gelatin silver print, 30x40 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2022

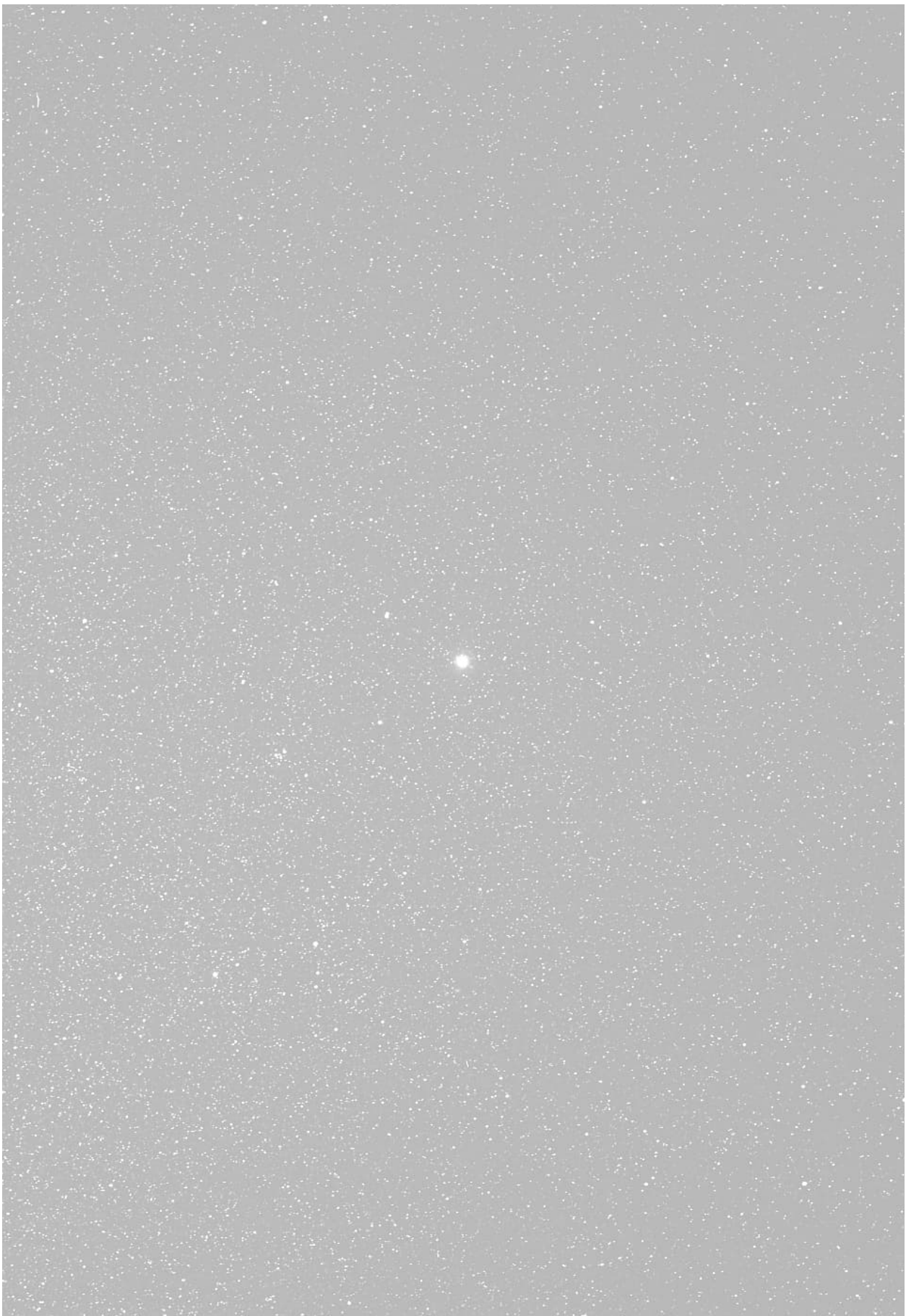




Fig. 12 Tabernas Desert, 2022

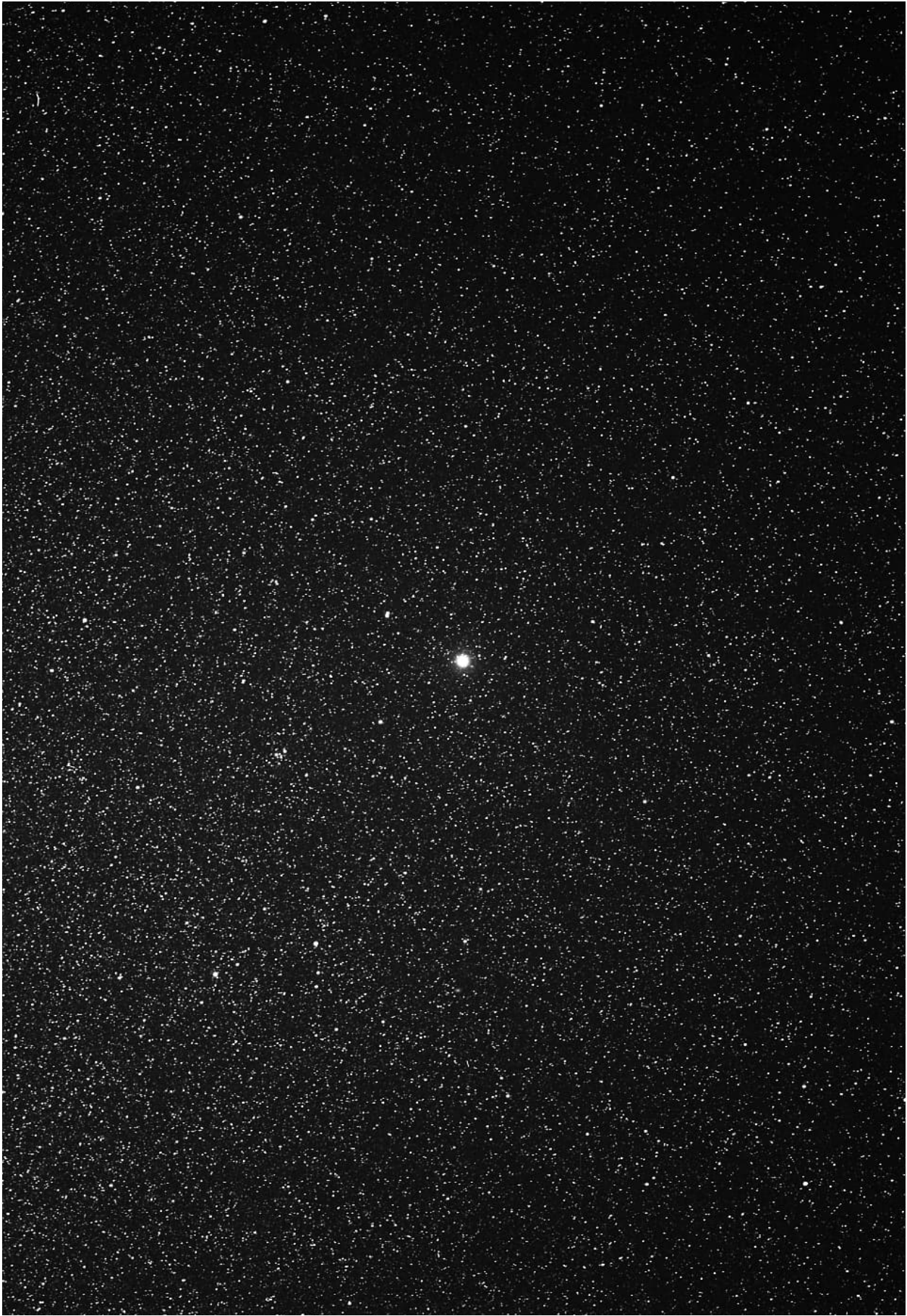


Fig. 13 Vega, detail, gelatin silver print, 30x40 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2022







In the previous pages:

Fig. 14 Large Format Lens, gelatin silver print, 50x60 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2021

Fig. 15 Equatorial Mount, gelatin silver print, 50x60 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2021

Fig. 16, 17 Installation view, 10 A.M. ART gallery, Milan, 2022



Fig. 18 Altair, detail, gelatin silver print, 30x40 cm, ED 3+2 AP, 2022