



Virtual Landscapes, Ongoing

Chapter One

Virtual Landscapes is a research project that explores online image-sharing platforms, seeks alternative approaches to photographic creation, and engages with the history of the light-sensitive medium.

While reflecting on image circulation and the topic of landscape representation, the first chapter *After Carleton Watkins* stems from a dialogue with the work and legacy of the great American photographer. His views of the nineteenth-century West—renowned for their sharpness, composition, and technical ambition—not only contributed to the development of scientific disciplines such as botany and geology, but also profoundly shaped the perception of the American landscape. Produced with large-format cameras specially designed for the purpose, and presented through exhibition methods that were innovative at the time, Watkins's photographs had a lasting impact on several generations of photographers (and painters), and played an essential role in the establishment of Yosemite as a national park by Congress in 1864.

Starting from this historical context, the work does not rely on the direct capture of reality but rather on the reappropriation and re-mediation of existing anonymous images that, since the early 2000s, have populated online platforms such as Flickr, Tumblr, and Wikimedia Commons—lost ruins scattered across the digital landscape. The image files are also sourced from stock photography websites, archives where billions of images are accumulated, shared, and sold on a global scale. The photographs downloaded for this series bear a geographical correspondence to some of the places Watkins photographed around 150 years ago, such as the Yosemite Valley and the Columbia River.

This digital material is translated into analog prints through an experimental camera-less process designed especially for this work. The initial phase entails finding copyright-free images on the web through a laborious and arduous research process aimed at detecting the right features in photographs created not necessarily with aesthetic intentions. Subsequently, in the darkroom, a 13×18 cm black-and-white negative is placed directly in contact with a computer monitor and exposed to the digital image for a fraction of a second. In a process that recalls contact printing, the silver emulsion records the light emitted by the screen. The film is then developed and printed using traditional techniques. The result consists of hybrid images, characterized by a rich tonal range but also by a loss of sharpness caused by the thickness of the screen, the physical distance between the film and the pixels. The native digital data are thus brought to a chemical state, reversing the photographic archival paradigm that entails the digitization of analog supports.

This operation transforms the pixels into new photographic material that appears suspended, familiar views devoid of a clear temporal placement. The silver gelatin prints are framed and displayed within the exhibition space in a fashion that evokes early photography while simultaneously calling into question their authenticity and dating. The blur softens the details and introduces a sense of estrangement into scenes in which, while recalling the tradition of the sublime, the representation of nature takes the form of an archaeology of the present.

Within this tension between past and present, the material and the immaterial, *Virtual Landscapes* analyzes how the legacy of early photographers resonates within today's imaging flow while reflecting on the future of the archives of our digital age.

Fig. 1 Three Brothers, gelatin silver print, 18x24 cm, 2026

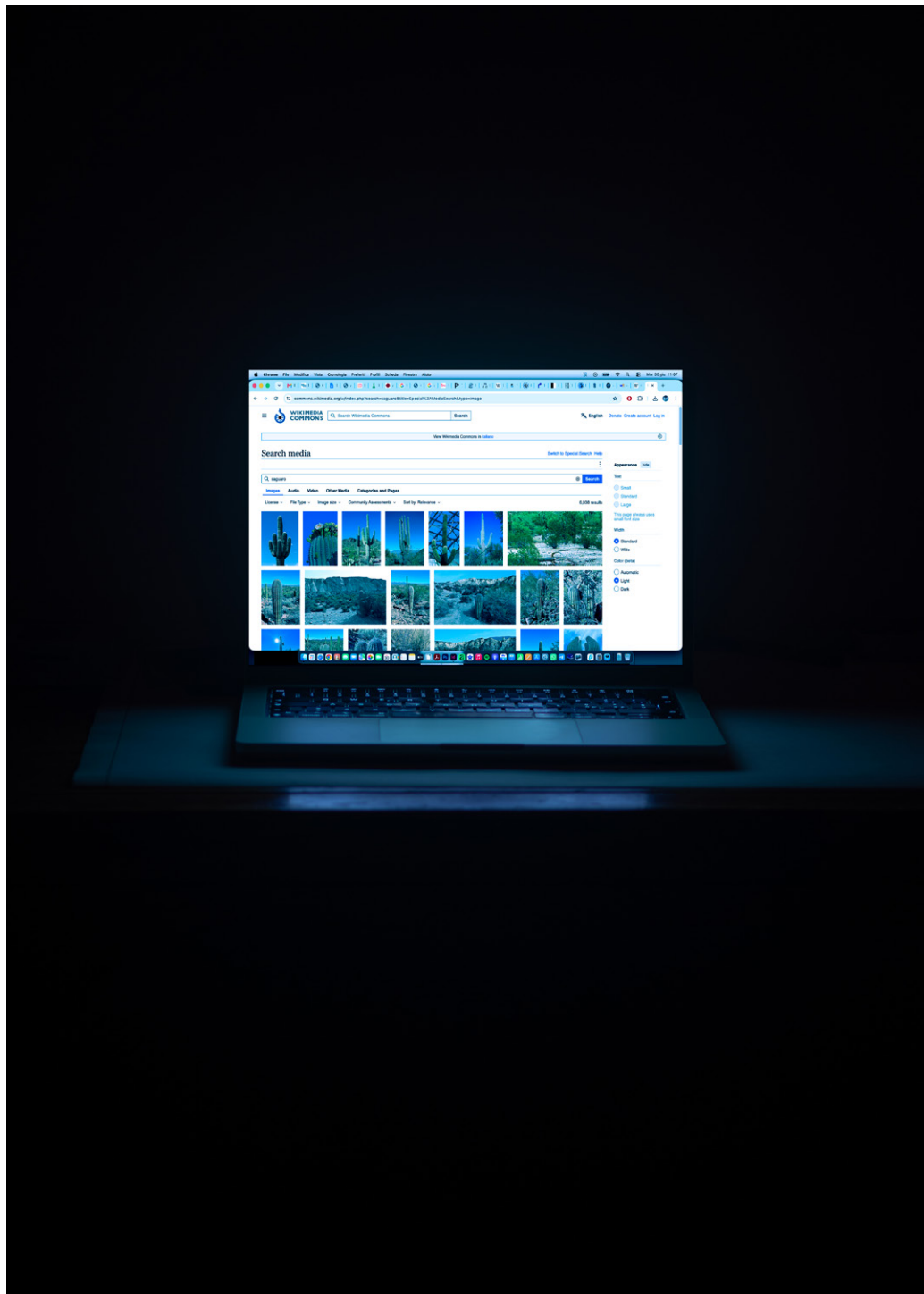


Fig. 2 Searching images of a Saguaro tree on Wimedia Commons

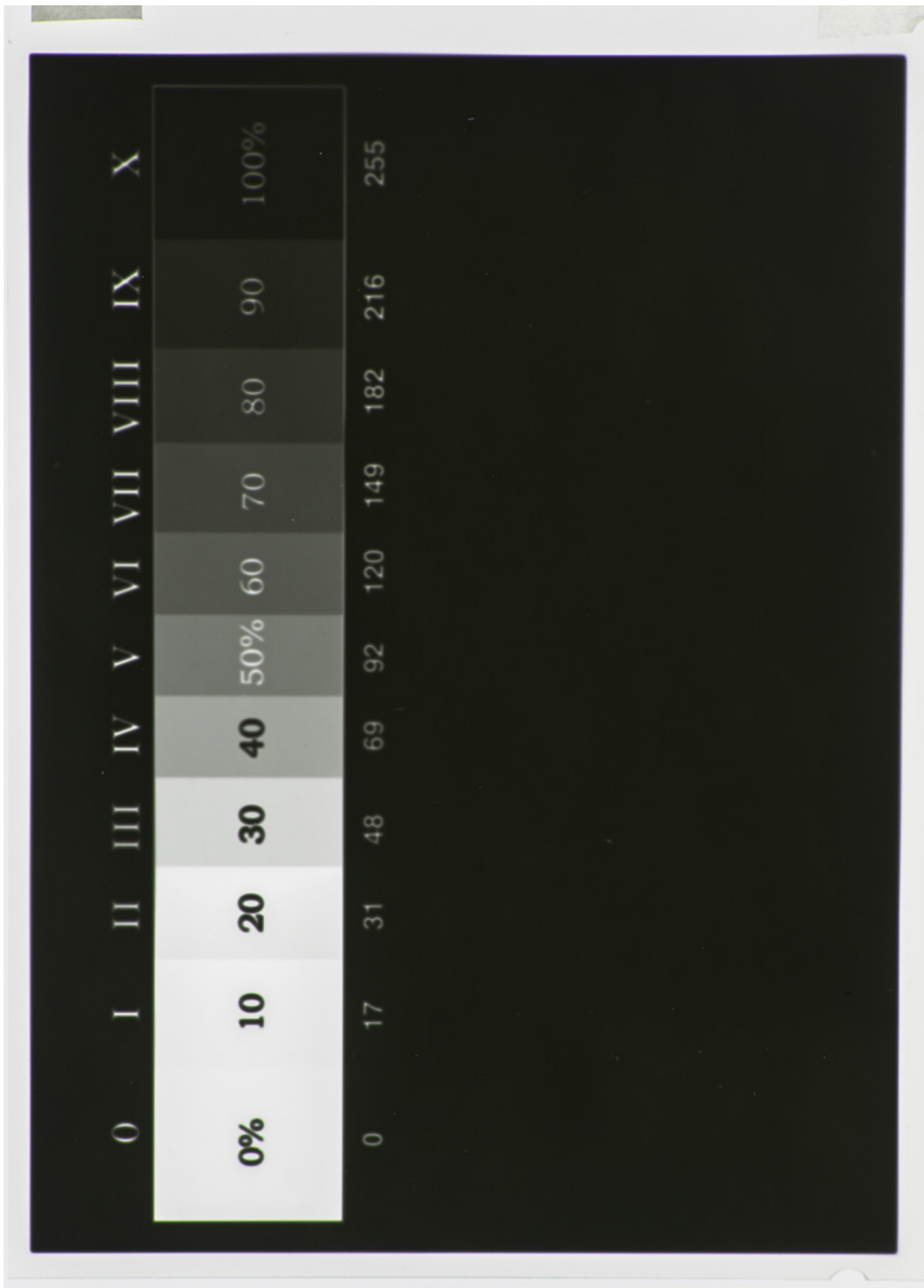


Fig. 3 Self-made digital/analog step wedge used to determine exposure and contrast

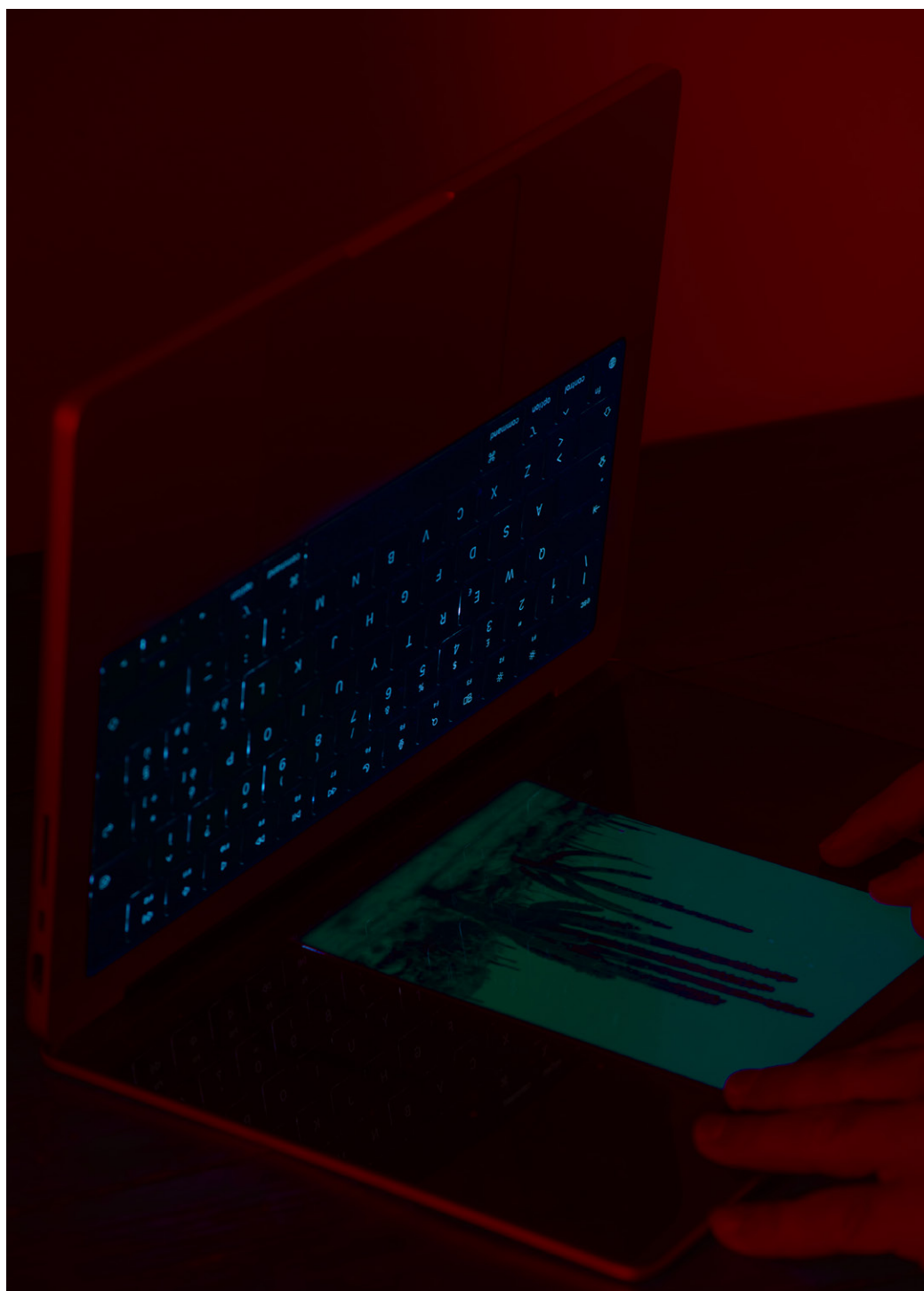


Fig. 4 Large format film on the computer screen during exposure
 Fig. 5 Processed negative



In the next page:
 Fig. 6 The Dalles, gelatin silver print, 120x100 cm, 2026
 Fig. 7 Columbia River, gelatin silver print, 120x100 cm, 2025













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Fig. 8,9 Installation view, Gris Gallery,
Ghent, 2026

Fig. 10 Cathedral Rock, gelatin silver print,
18x24 cm, 2026

Fig. 11 Interference Landscape, view of
the exhibition, Gris Gallery, 2026



On the right:

Fig. 12 Installation view, detail, Gris Gallery,
Ghent, 2026



Fig. 13 Oak, gelatin silver print, 50x60 cm, 2026



Fig. 14 Sequoiadendron Giganteum, gelatin silver print, 50x60 cm, 2026



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Fig. 15 Eliot Glacier, two gelatin silver prints, 80x60 cm each, 2026



On the right:

Fig. 16 Frames, table, and prints, Gris Gallery, Ghent, 2026