

# EEW Art

# 4

Sjoerd  
Knibbeler



**eew**

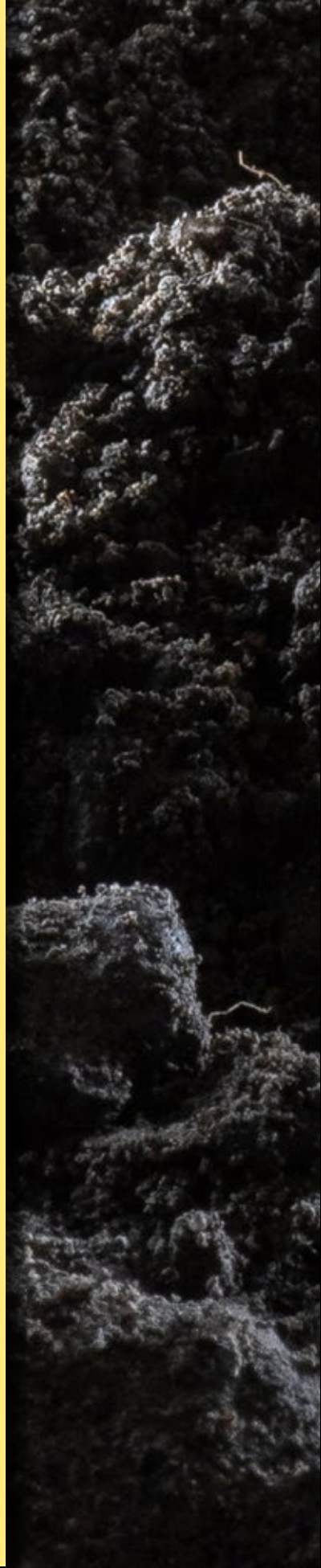
Energy from Waste

# EEW Art

With a focus on sustainability, EEW launched an art program in 2020 that offers photographers the opportunity to explore a freely chosen aspect of the company each year. By commissioning works, EEW supports artists in creating a new series of work, which is subsequently included in the sustainability reporting and permanently exhibited at selected sites as part of the company collection. The programme is accompanied by a publication.

Sjoerd Knibbeler

4



# EEW

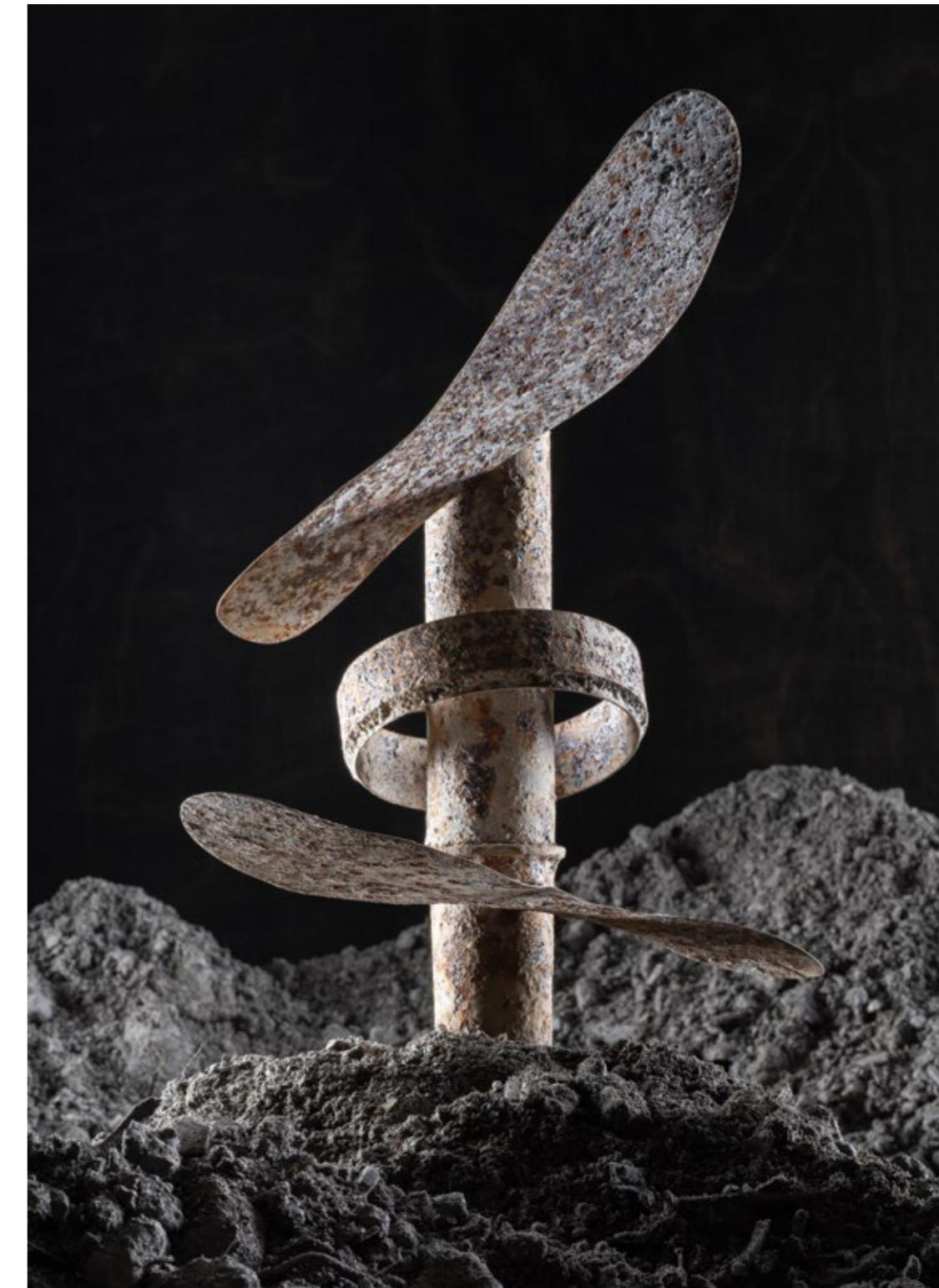
EEW Energy from Waste (EEW) is one of the leading companies in Europe in the field of thermal treatment of waste and sewage sludge. EEW is already making an important contribution towards protecting the climate and resources and is a key player in the circular economy. Our corporate group currently operates 17 sites that can process around 5 million tons of waste per year. About 1,450 employees at our plants ensure that the energy stored in waste is utilized, the volume of waste is reduced, the hazards caused by waste are eliminated safely and without negative impact, and that scrap metals and compound materials are recycled. Moreover, we efficiently utilize the energy contained in waste to generate process steam for industrial plants, district heating for residential areas and environmentally sustainable electricity. In line with our vision for the future, we have set ourselves the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2030 and climate positive by 2040. A key measure in addition to carbon reduction will be carbon capture at our facilities. The captured carbon will be partly stored underground or utilized as a valuable feedstock for chemical products in a carbon-neutral economy of the future.

[www.eew-energyfromwaste.com](http://www.eew-energyfromwaste.com)



Sjoerd Knibbeler

4





## Foreword from the EEW Board Management

Timo Poppe (CEO), Dr. Joachim Manns (COO), Stefan Schmidt (CFO)

How do we look at a world, in which the new becomes the old at such rapid speed? Companies are interconnected with the world. They are more than just efficient economical forms of organization. They bring people together, they are founded on a large variety of cooperative forms, they put creative processes into motion, and they create values.

In August of 2022, our EEW Art team first met the Dutch artist Sjoerd Knibbeler in his studio in Amsterdam. When we invited him to be the fourth artist in the EEW Art program series to artistically explore our company shortly afterwards, we had expected him to set his eye on elements like fire or air in the process of thermal waste treatment. We had those expectations, because in his previous projects he had photographically portrayed wind, had retained water waves on paper, and experimented with solar geoengineering.

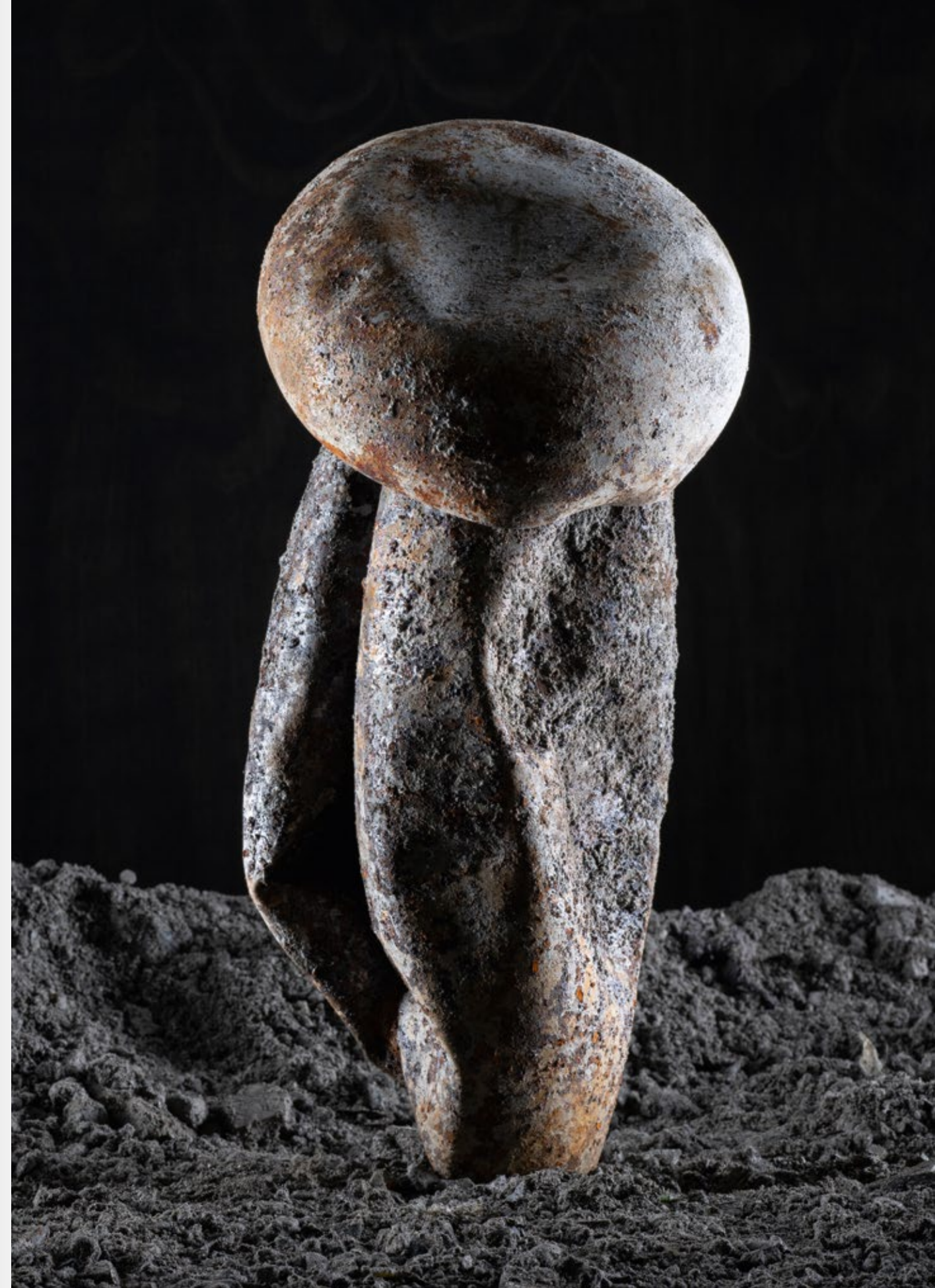
So it wasn't a surprise at first, when he – unlike Friederike von Rauch, Jessica Backhaus, and Lukas Hoffmann who had been his predecessors in the EEW Art program series – didn't expose himself to the unsteady weather, temperature, and light conditions while photographing directly on-site, but instead turned his attention towards the bottom ash, the so-called slag, as a material. He was particularly fascinated by the separate metal objects who withstood the process of incineration and could be found among the ashes like memories of the things we

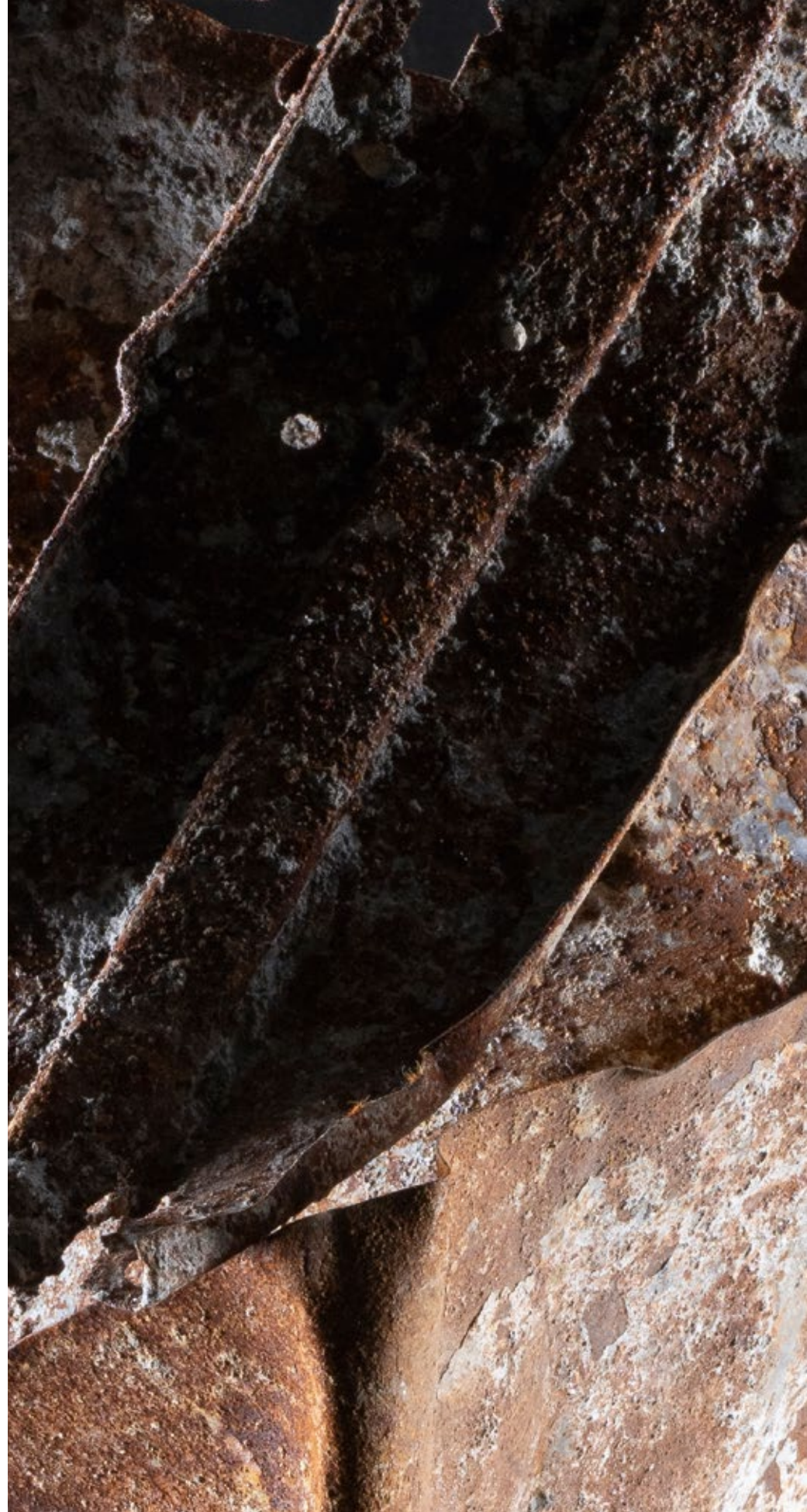
used in our daily life. To collect these pieces, Knibbeler emphasized, “felt like collecting flotsam.” As the first artist in the series, he took materials from our plant in Delfzijl to his studio in Amsterdam in big containers. On a “stage” he himself had built, he then assembled new objects out of the “flotsam”, he recycled and improvised at the same time. How can these separate pieces “cooperate” with each other? How can they find a state of balance? The old became the new – his “Passants” were born.

Unlike what we had expected, Sjoerd Knibbeler has visualized something for EEW that is part of our work after all – like fire and air – but that receives much less attention in our daily routine. And the photographer thereby made possible what is the driving force and passion behind our art program: To see our company and its operation with different eyes, to be curious, to ask questions, and to find new answers to them. In that way, art and sustainability can touch people on many different levels: they can stimulate the intellect, evoke emotions, and communicate with us and thus put us in relation to the world that surrounds us.

Enjoy the art!







## Past / Present / Present

Raphaëlle Stopin  
Art historian and curator

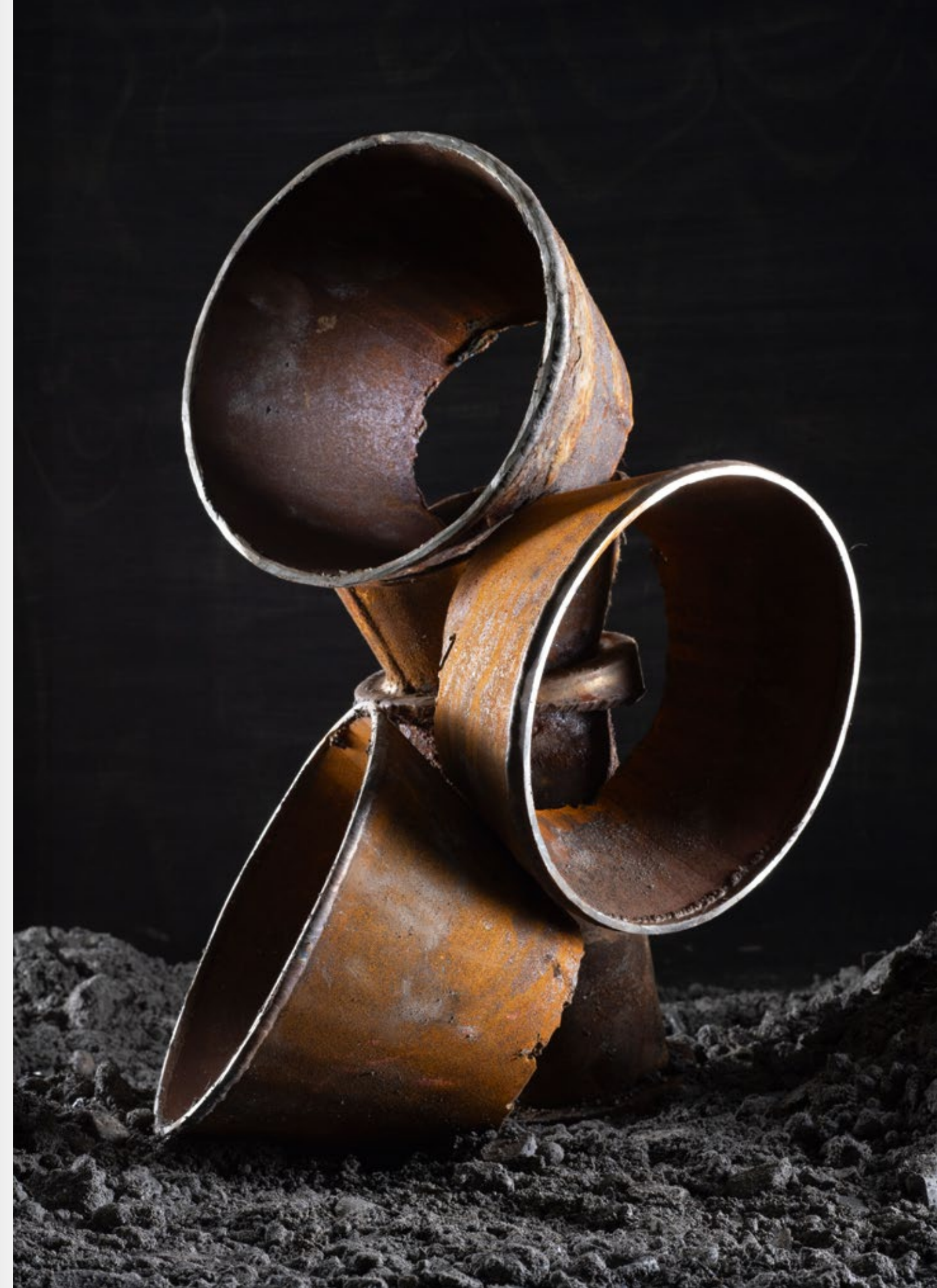
First, there is this soil of a deep, muted grey; a powerful side-lighting, coming from off-camera, reveals the material: certainly ashes. We weigh it, even smell it with a look, it is hardy, heavy, maybe even a bit greasy, and undoubtedly very bitter. Its composition is heterogeneous: Concretions are mixed within the fine dust, small heaps of pockmarked reliefs, as if in a perpetual state of collapse.

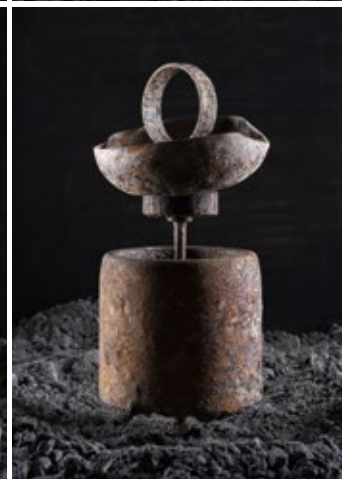
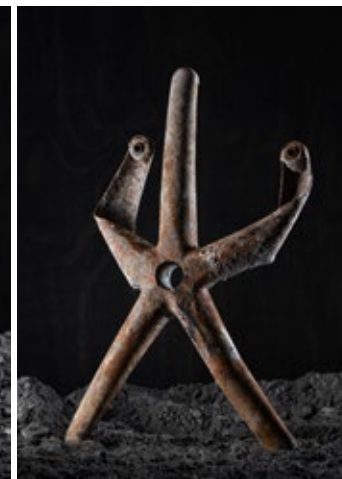
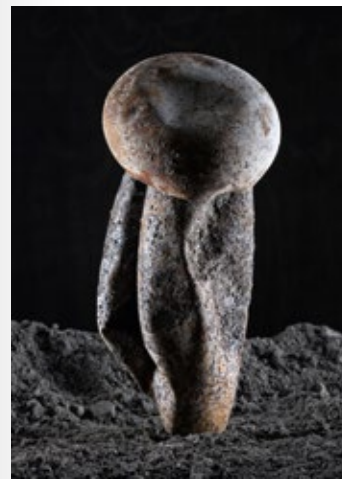
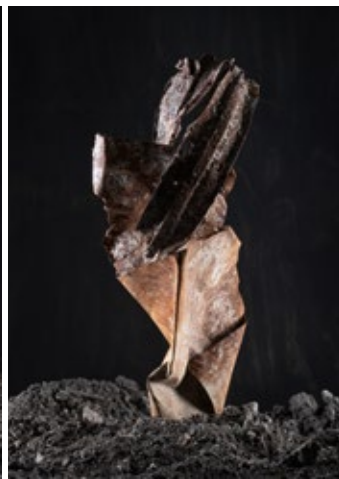
Spread out in a fine layer, it discretely covers the lower part of the image and yet it is the base for everything. Is the earth beneath these moon extracts even our own? We should fear that it is.

Firmly planted, solitary forms emerge from it. Each of these accumulated silhouettes is without equal and looking more closely at their different limbs doesn't reveal anything more about them. No usage, no identifiable past: pure presence. Each covers the quasi-totality of the visual field. They all rise up. How could we, when observing their confident verticality, not anthropomorphise them and acknowledge their attitude, or even grant them a strange determination.

The shapes are baleful, twisted, they tell tales of the powers they have gone through: an extreme heat and pressure, which alone are capable of bending their steel skeleton. Their corroded patina invites time itself into the picture: because who else but time could wear out their skin like that?

Their current functionality is unknown, improbable; their past functionality lost.





They were, we can guess, technical objects. Of their perfection, their ergonomics, their utility and the performance that was asked of them nothing remains. Nothing but their maimed bodies and their used skin. In a strangely empathetic movement, our hands remember them. There was a time when they passed through our fingers, which moved their buttons or springs. Before that time, they were modelled, constructed, and even before that, designed, imagined. In 1958 the philosopher Gilbert Simondon dedicated a groundbreaking text to the technical object: *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. He invited us to rethink our relationship with technology, to overcome our strictly utilitarian view of the technical object and proposed to not view it for its results and the human needs it responded to, but as an outcome. He therefore described the machine as “a fixed, deposed human gesture that has become stereotypy and a possibility for renewal.”<sup>1</sup> It’s the sediment of a human action that crystallizes in the object. So, in these glowing red silhouettes of objects, whatever they might have been, we look at our own humanity and its gestures.

It is that chain of gestures in which the work by Dutch artist Sjoerd Knibbeler, creator of this series photo portraits entitled *Les Passants*, inscribes itself. After he had been invited by EEW to create a work of art inspired by the work realised in their plants, he visited the one in Delfzijl, in the province of Groningen, in the northeast of the Netherlands. Residual waste from households and industrial companies is

unloaded there every day. It is mixed in the bunker, then incinerated; the rising steam activates a turbine that is connected to a generator through which it is transformed into energy, the amount of which is sufficient to supply the surrounding industry. On site, the architecture and infrastructure impose their monumental presence; but instead of being interested in the respective work steps, Sjoerd Knibbeler would prefer focusing on the waste itself or, to be more precise, the waste of the waste – the ashes that remain after the combustion. As the last stage in the process of recycling, these bottom ashes themselves are the object of a sorting and cleaning process before they become part of the raw material that is used for road surfaces. They form giant, black mountains that Sjoerd Knibbeler would be climbing and measuring.

He makes a broad selection at first, extracting objects that have resisted the combustion. In the course of his expeditions, he becomes more selective and thus completes his collection of shapes. Placed in hermetically sealed tons, he brings the objects to his workshop to take portraits of them. It’s a mini studio he has set-up on site: a space is defined, a kind of small theatre with a black background and lighting from both sides. The artist chooses a minimalistic staging, relying exclusively on lighting effects without any other accessories or artifice. His approach is a simple visual syntax for objects that are themselves shown in their simplest form. Through these few determined elements – light, shades of grey, solid shapes – he

creates chiselled images. In these almost monochrome landscapes, the rust contrasts. Ochre, red, orange, pale, intense... alive... it unfolds the effect of nuanced carnations on these shapes.

The gestures of extracting and then photographing by Sjoerd Knibbeler continue this chain of gestures through which the technical object emerges. And they put into motion the social relationship that the philosopher Simondon desired and which is, in his view, hindered by two contradictory attitudes. The first one is to only consider the object for the sole human desire that it can satisfy; the second is to fantasize the machine as something which has been given powers (the mythical robot, too clever to not quickly become a threat). Here, they are photographed in a way that prevents them from revealing the original use that had been assigned to them. They are, as the philosopher would say, freed from their “enslavement”, and are equally unable to play the role of the idolized and feared android; they seem to be vague and vulnerable. “Therefore”, wrote the philosopher, “the first prerequisite for the incorporation of the technical objects into culture is that man is neither inferior nor superior to technical objects, that he can approach them and get to know them by entering into a relationship of equality, of reciprocal exchange: a social relationship in every sense.”<sup>2</sup> And so the artist that has chosen the medium of photography naturally proposes a portrait session to his *Passants*.

However mysterious they might appear at first glance, these objects are what they

are: waste, our waste, even worse, the waste of waste. They will not fall any lower. And as fallen objects, they occupy what Bruno Latour has called “ghost hectares”. In *Critical Zones, The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth*<sup>3</sup>, he exposes the fact that “we don’t live where we are”. By continuing Georg Borgströms concept of “ghost acreage”<sup>4</sup>, meaning the far-off lands from which a country lives (the colonies in the past, nowadays the countries that work as factories for palm oil, the textile industry, the famous *Made in*), he extends it to that “Critical Zone” that our whole planet has become. The critical zone lies in this thin layer, miniscule in relation to the mass of the earth, which includes soil, ores, minerals, air, and water. It is living through critical times, and we are only partially perceiving it because of that orchestrated distance. We are not living in the places on which we leave our footprint. How then can we represent these ghost spaces, these places whose soil has been scarred by us from afar? Sjoerd Knibbeler has dedicated previous works to the representation of elements as changing and elusive as water and wind. Here he is, engaging in the creation of a different kind of iconography: this time, the absent image that he seeks to bring into the world is that of a present that leaves its mark everywhere, but hides from our eyes. These totems will make us remember it, they aren’t the ruins of past cataclysms, but companions of a shared present that must be faced head-on.

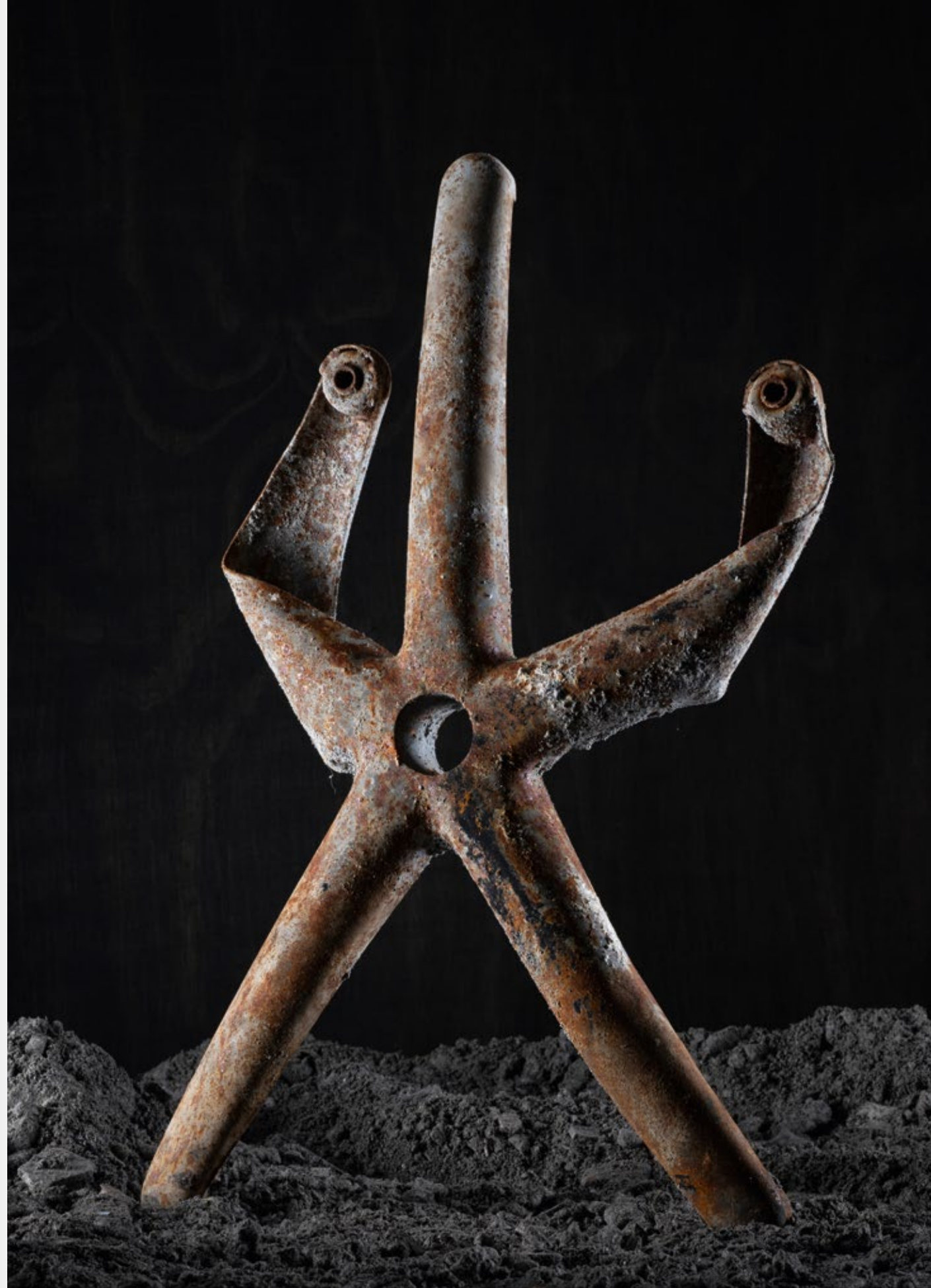
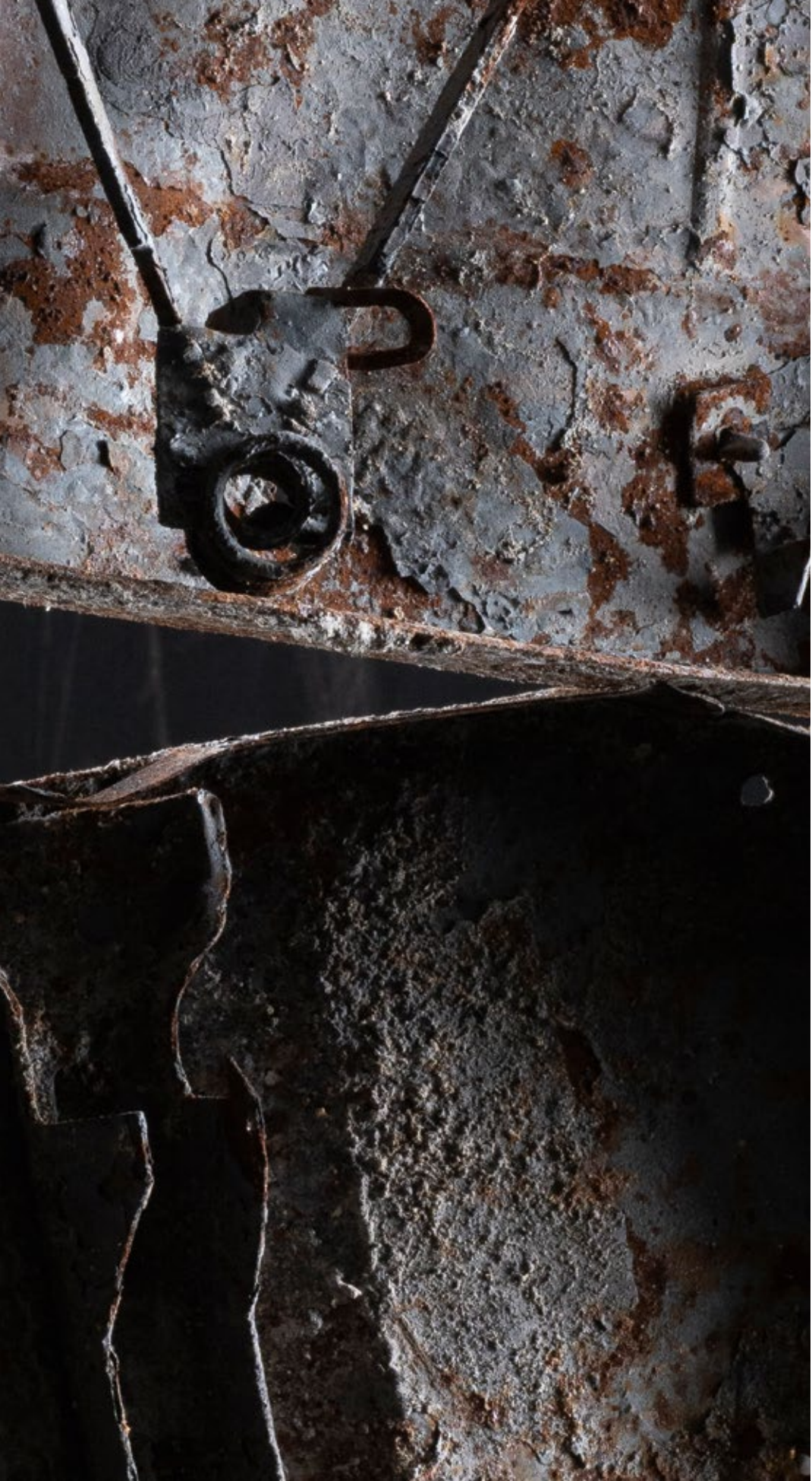
1 On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects, Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2016.

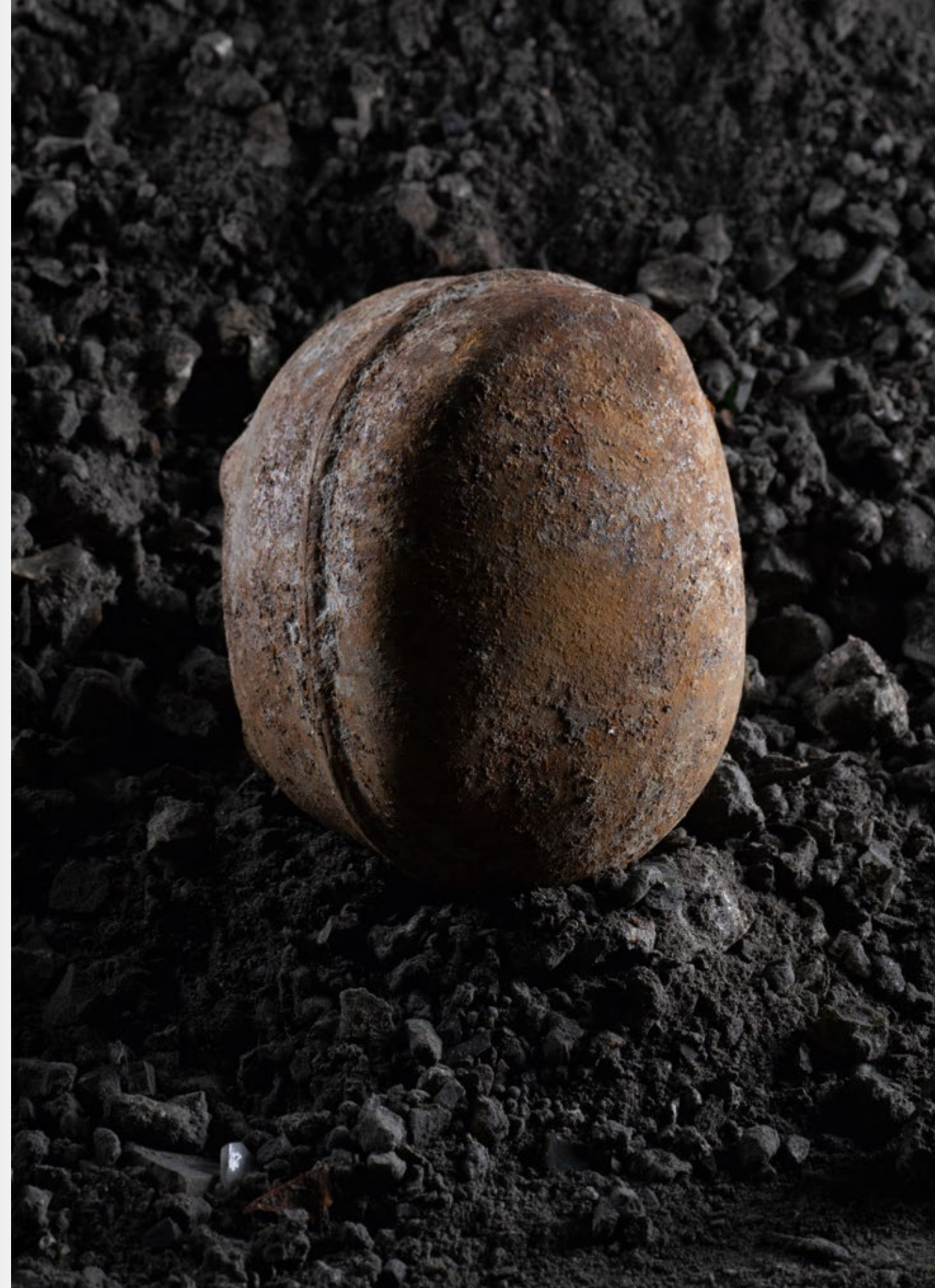
2 *ibidem*.

3 *Critical Zones, The Science and Politics of Landing on Earth*, Edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, ZKM – MIT Press, 2020.

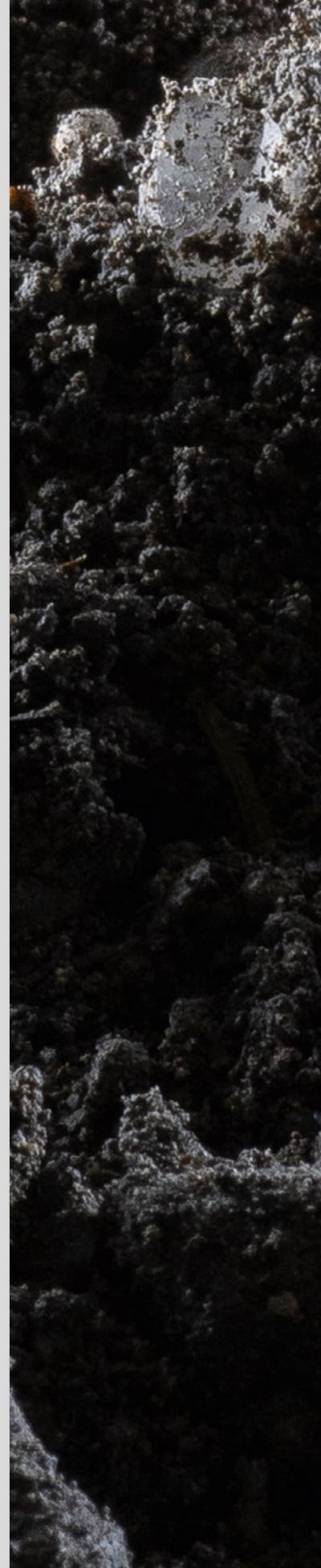
4 Georg Borgström: Ghost Acreage, in: Libby Robin, Sverker Sörlin, Paul Warde (Hrsg.): *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*, Yale University Press 2013.



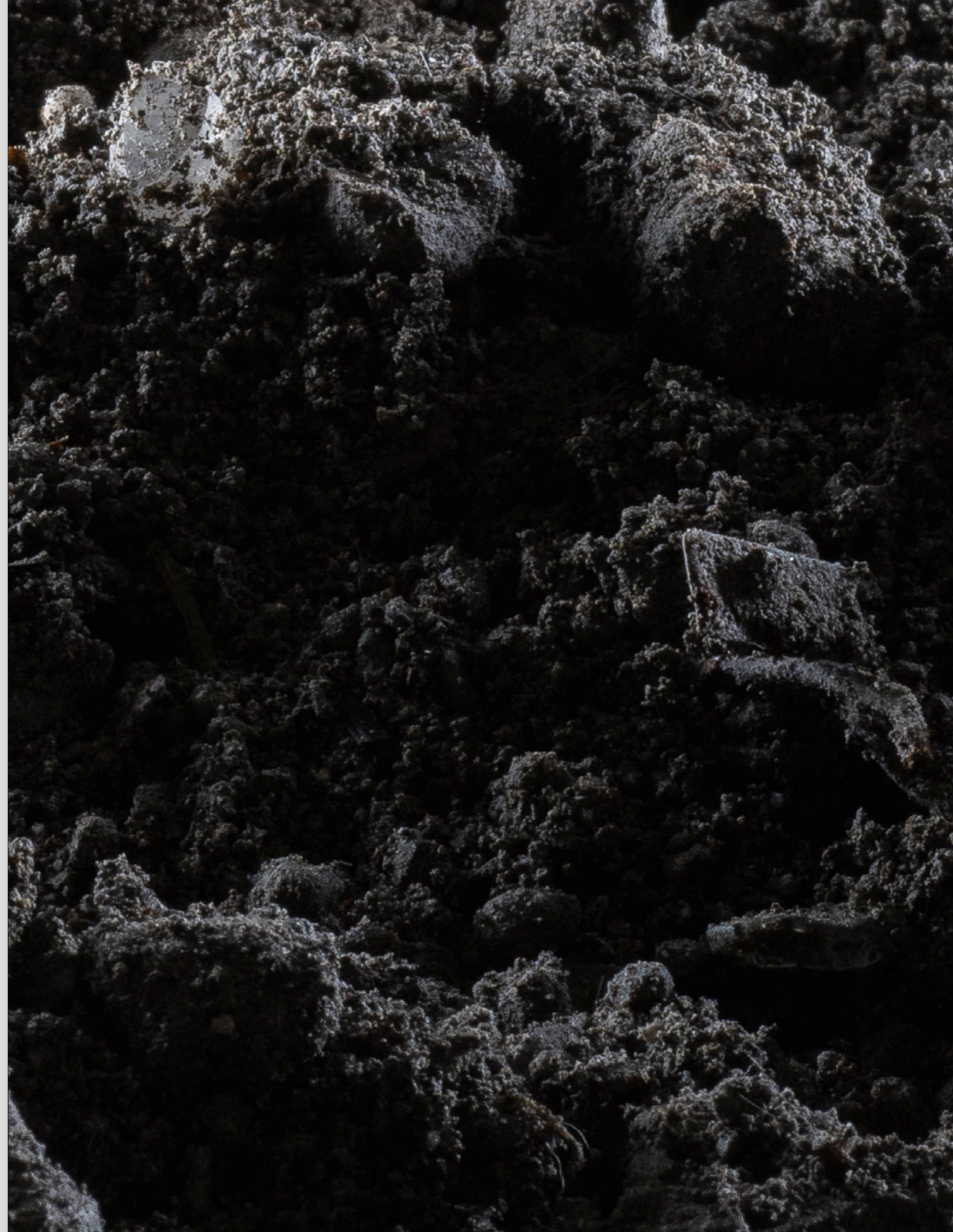








Sjoerd Knibbeler (\*1981 in Weert, Netherlands) studied photography at the Royal Academy of Arts in The Haag. His works were shown in exhibitions internationally and are represented in numerous corporate collections as well as public and private collections. Knibbeler received many prizes and scholarships. He teaches photography at the Utrecht School of Arts. Knibbeler lives and works in Amsterdam, Netherlands.



## Imprint

This publication appears on the occasion of the fourth commission within the framework of EEW Art.

Edited by  
EEW Energy from Waste GmbH, Helmstedt 2024

Design: StudioKrimm

Translation: Hannes Köhler

Project management:  
Julia Rosenbaum, Helena Wassermann

Production:  
H. Heenemann GmbH & Co. KG

With special thanks to:  
Sjoerd Knibbeler, Raphaëlle Stopin

Photo Credits:  
Passant #16, #15, #17, #6, #14, #11, #1, #9, #8, #10, #2, #13, #18, #3, #5,  
#19, #12, 2023, EEW Art Collection  
© Sjoerd Knibbeler



