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Traces of Becoming: From Surface Memory to Ferric Flow

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Traces of Becoming: From Surface Memory to Ferric Flow

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"Every surface carries a memory, every mark leaves a trace, and every trace has a story to tell."

First Edition, 2026



Foreword

Much of my work begins before I consciously realise I am working. Over time, that process has become shaped by a belief that surfaces remember.

I grew up in London, a city of shifting weather, worn surfaces and quiet architectural rhythms. Its streets taught me to notice colour, texture and the subtle tensions held within a surface. That way of seeing continues to inform my practice today, where digital tools combine with traditional fine art principles to create atmospheric abstract images rooted in observation, memory and place.

The work often begins while walking, waiting or passing through a familiar location. A shift of light across a weathered wall. A rust stain spreading through stone. The collapse of paint on an abandoned surface. A mark left behind by water, time or human presence. These are the moments that encourage me to slow down and look again.

For many years I have carried an iPhone not simply as a camera but as a sketchbook. It allows me to collect fragments of the world as they appear, often unexpectedly. I photograph surfaces, traces and atmospheres rather than subjects in the conventional sense. I am rarely searching for a finished image. Instead, I gather visual clues that suggest deeper stories waiting to be uncovered.

Over time I realised that many of these fragments shared a common thread. They were records of change. Weathered surfaces, oxide stains, residues of light and accidental marks revealed the gradual passage of time through material. They spoke of erosion, accumulation, memory and transformation. What fascinated me was not simply how these surfaces looked, but what they had endured.

Gradually, I began to think of these observations in terms of **surface memory**. Just as human memory leaves traces of experience, surfaces seem to retain evidence of the events that have shaped them. Weather, water, light, touch, oxidation and time all leave their mark. Layers accumulate, histories overlap and residues remain. A surface becomes more than a physical boundary. It becomes an archive of change, carrying visible records of processes that have unfolded over days, years or centuries.

The idea of surface memory has become a central framework within my practice, informing the way I observe the world, the images I collect and the works I create.

Whether I am looking at a weathered harbour wall, an abandoned industrial structure or a ferric stain emerging through stone, I am drawn to the traces that reveal hidden histories. Much of my work begins with the belief that surfaces remember.

This publication brings together several reflections that have shaped my practice over recent years. Together, they trace a path through ideas that continue to occupy

me: noticing, memory, weathering, surface archaeology, mark making, colour, oxide and the relationship between visible traces and hidden processes.

Although the works discussed here emerge through photography, collage and digital processes, they remain rooted in physical encounters with the world. Every image begins with observation. Every mark begins with attention. The digital space simply becomes a place where these observations can be extended, layered and reimagined.

Looking back, I can see that each body of work has led naturally to the next. *Weathered Silence*, *Oxide and Shade* explored the language of weathering, atmosphere and material transformation. *Ferric Flow* follows those investigations further, tracing the mark back towards its source and exploring the geological processes from which many of these visual forms emerge.

What connects all this work is a fascination with traces.

A trace points beyond itself. It suggests an event, a presence or a movement that can no longer be directly seen. Much of my practice involves paying attention to these quiet records and asking what they might reveal.

These reflections are not intended as explanations so much as observations gathered along the way. They document an ongoing conversation with surfaces, places, materials and time itself.

Ultimately, this is an essay about looking closely.

It is about the belief that every surface carries a memory, every mark leaves a trace, and every trace has a story to tell.

Learning to Notice

I have never consciously gone looking for grand subjects. What repeatedly captures my attention are the small things most people pass without noticing. A rust stain spreading across stone. Water darkening a wall after rain. A weathered surface carrying the slow effects of years of exposure to light, wind and touch. A patch of peeling paint revealing hidden layers beneath.

Looking back, I can see that much of my practice has grown from this habit of noticing.

The work rarely begins in the studio. More often it begins while walking, waiting, travelling or simply moving through everyday life. Something catches my eye. A surface reveals an unexpected complexity. A fragment seems more significant than the object that contains it. A particular combination of colour, texture and light creates a moment of recognition.

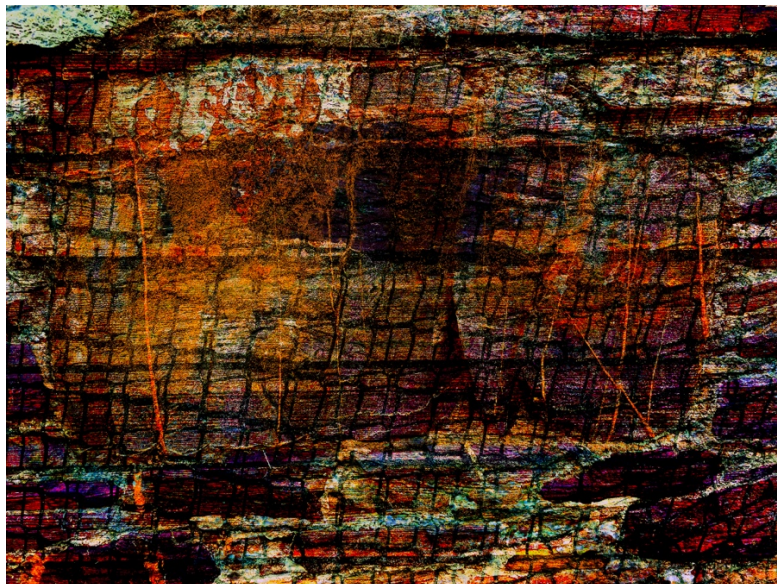


Figure 1 'Incidental Marks Series' - 2025

These experiences cannot be planned. They arrive quietly and often disappear just as quickly.

Over time I have learned to trust them.

What has sustained my practice is a fascination with traces. With evidence. With the marks left behind when something has happened.

A rust stain is not simply colour.

A crack is not simply damage.

A weathered surface is not simply old.

Each records pressure, duration, movement or transformation. The object itself becomes less important than the history embedded within it.

This fascination has remained constant throughout my work. Whether drawing, photographing, collecting, layering digital imagery or creating finished prints, I return to the same questions.

How does time become visible?

How do surfaces hold memory?

What remains after an event has passed?

How can a trace carry more meaning than the thing that created it?

The answers continue to evolve, but the impulse remains unchanged.

It begins with paying attention.

The Roots of Mark Making

My background in Fine Art continues to influence the way I see the world.

Long before digital processes became central to my practice, I was interested in drawing, printmaking and the physical act of making marks. I became fascinated by how a surface could build meaning through repetition, pressure, accumulation and gesture.



Figure 2 'Misty One' Etching - 1998

What interested me was not simply the image being created but the evidence of its making.

A drawn line recorded movement.

A print recorded contact.

A scratch revealed force.

A layer suggested time.

Even then I was interested in archaeology, not as a discipline, but as a way of understanding images. Marks felt like fragments of evidence. They hinted at actions that had already taken place.

Over the years I realised I was searching for similar qualities beyond the studio. Weathered walls, rusted metal, abandoned structures and eroded surfaces carried the same sense of accumulated history. They seemed marked by experience.

Gradually the distinction between observed marks and created marks began to dissolve.

The landscape was already drawing.

Water was already drawing.

Oxide was already drawing.

Time was already drawing.

My role became less about inventing marks and more about recognising them.

This attention to traces eventually led me to what I came to think of as incidental marks. These are stains, interruptions, fractures, drifts and residues that emerge through process rather than intention. They occupy a space between control and chance, shaped by gravity, material behaviour, timing and circumstance.

Rather than correcting or concealing these occurrences, I became interested in what they revealed. A smear or residue often carries a greater sense of lived experience than a deliberate gesture. Such marks become evidence of the work's own becoming.

In this sense, authorship becomes a dialogue rather than a singular act. The artist works alongside materials, processes and forces that continuously shape the outcome.

The iPhone as a Sketchbook

The iPhone has become one of the most important tools within my practice, not because of the technology itself, but because of what it allows me to do.

I think of it as a sketchbook.

The intention is no different from carrying charcoal, graphite or a notebook. It allows me to preserve a moment before it disappears.

Many of the images I collect are not intended to become artworks. They are observations. Fragments. Visual notes left for future exploration.

When I photograph a weathered surface, I am rarely thinking about photography. I am thinking about attention.

A ferric stain running across stone.

A patch of erosion exposing older layers.

A subtle transition from light into shade.

A fragment of colour concealed within darkness.

These observations accumulate over time and form an archive that continues to shape the work.

Most images never become finished pieces. Yet all contribute something.

They train the eye.

They deepen observation.

They remind me of the value of looking.

The sketchbook has changed shape, but its purpose remains the same.

To notice.

To collect.

To remember.

Walking as Research

Walking has become a fundamental part of my process.

It creates the conditions in which observation can occur.

Without a fixed destination, attention begins to move differently. Small details emerge. Surfaces reveal themselves gradually. What might otherwise pass unnoticed begins to demand attention.

I allow the environment to guide me.

Many of the places that influence my work are not spectacular landscapes or recognised landmarks. They are harbour walls, pathways, fragments of infrastructure, industrial remnants and overlooked corners of the built environment.

Yet these places often hold the richest traces.

Their surfaces reveal the effects of weather, use and time.

Walking slows perception. It creates opportunities for observation that a faster pace would miss.

In many ways, walking is where the work begins.

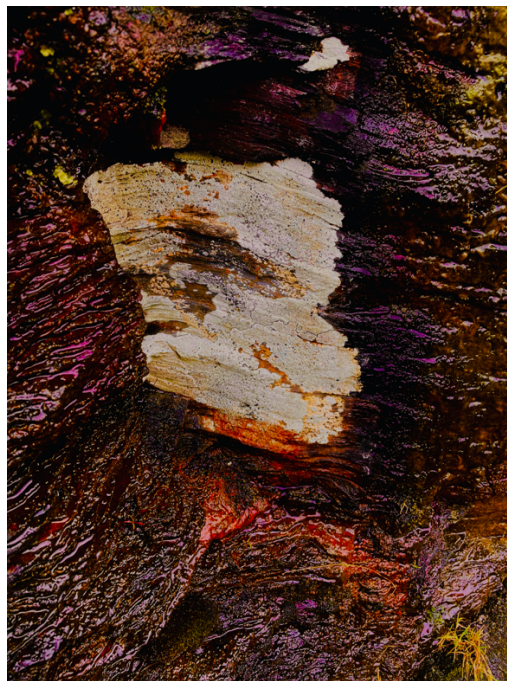


Figure 3 'Incidental Marks Series' - 2025

Memory, Place and Surface Archaeology

Memory occupies a central position within my practice.

I do not think of memory as a fixed record of experience. Instead, I see it as a process of transformation.

A coastline survives through the memory of light.

A weathered wall remains through texture rather than form.

A landscape returns years later as a mood rather than a location.

Observation provides the starting point, but memory reshapes what follows.

Many of my works occupy a space between direct experience and recollection.

What fascinates me is how surfaces appear to remember in a similar way.

Layers accumulate.

Histories overlap.

Residues remain.

Older traces survive beneath newer ones.

Nothing disappears entirely.

The phrase surface memory emerged through years of looking. Surfaces seem to hold evidence of their own histories. Weather, use, erosion and exposure leave marks that accumulate over time.

The process often feels archaeological.

Not because I am uncovering artefacts, but because I am uncovering relationships.

Looking closely reveals layers of information that can easily be overlooked. The surface becomes an archive.

Over time I began thinking of my practice as a form of surface archaeology.

Images emerge through uncovering rather than invention.

The more closely I look, the more surfaces reveal.

Light plays an essential role in this process.

It reveals.

It conceals.

It changes our understanding of a surface from one moment to the next.

Without light, many of these discoveries would remain hidden.

This relationship between concealment and revelation extends beyond texture and form. It also shapes the way I understand colour.



Figure 4 'Incidental Marks Series' - 2025

Colour: Art & Science

Colour as an Unearthed Surface

Colour in my practice is not something I add. It is not painted onto a surface, layered over a drawing or digitally imposed after the event. Every chromatic presence begins within the iPhone sketches themselves. The marks carry their own quiet temperatures, atmospheres and subtle shifts of tone from the moment they are made.

At first glance, many of the sketches appear restrained, even monochromatic. Yet beneath the visible surface lies a complex terrain of micro-tones, compressed gradients, digital noise and accidental chromatic fragments.

Digital processes allow me to excavate these concealed surfaces. They help me draw forward what the eye might otherwise overlook: warmth buried beneath a graphite-like line, cool blues held within a shadow, traces of rust, ochre or mineral tones flickering at the edge of a stroke.

These colours were always present.

The technology simply provides a means of noticing them.

Just as weathered walls, ferric stains and eroded structures reveal traces of hidden histories, digital sketches contain information that only becomes visible through sustained attention.

The image becomes a site of discovery rather than invention.

Colour as Evidence

Because colour originates within the sketch, it carries the same authenticity as the mark from which it emerges. It is evidence of a moment rather than an act of post-production.

In this sense, colour functions as a form of residue, holding traces of light, atmosphere and experience. It records something of the conditions in which the drawing was made.

This is why colour often feels atmospheric rather than descriptive.

It behaves more like weather than representation.

More like temperature, humidity or memory than illustration.

It does not explain the image.

It deepens it.

Like ferric traces and weathered surfaces, colour points beyond itself. What we encounter is not merely a visual effect but evidence of a process that has already occurred.

Colour as Variation

When I develop multiple versions of a work, I am not inventing new palettes. I am shifting attention among colours that already exist within the original sketch.

A variation may feel more muted, more luminous, more metallic or more mineral in character, yet the chromatic structure remains constant. The DNA of the image does not change.

This relationship has much in common with printmaking. Each pull from a plate reveals subtle differences while remaining connected to a common source.

My digital variations operate in a similar way.

They are siblings rather than copies.

Each reveals a different aspect of the image's underlying character.

The Science of Colour

Underlying this artistic process is a scientific reality.

Colour is not simply visual. It is physical.

It exists through the interaction of light, matter and perception.

Digital images contain vast amounts of chromatic information. Every pixel carries subtle shifts in red, green and blue values. Even seemingly neutral greys contain hidden tendencies toward warmth or coolness.

The science of colour explains why these concealed tones exist and why they can be revealed.

Yet scientific explanation alone is not enough.

The process remains equally dependent on intuition, observation and sensitivity.

It is a dialogue between perception and data, revelation and discovery, instinct and material evidence.

Colour as a Hidden Landscape

Seen in this way, colour is neither decorative nor symbolic.

It is a landscape concealed within the drawing from its inception.

Digital tools provide access to this hidden terrain, allowing subtle relationships to emerge from beneath the visible surface.

Like memory, weathering and oxide staining, colour reveals traces of hidden processes.

It forms part of the image's internal archaeology.

Ultimately, colour serves as an invitation to look more slowly.

Beneath every mark lies a field of delicate shifts and relationships waiting to be discovered.

Colour does not sit on the surface of the work.

It emerges from within it.

What appears to be discovered has, in many ways, been there all along, waiting to be seen.

Mark Making and Memory

Mark making has remained a constant thread running through everything I do.

Every mark records an action.

Whether made intentionally by an artist or unintentionally through natural processes, a mark records something that has happened.

A ferric stain can resemble a drawing.

A weathered fragment can resemble a gesture.

Patterns of erosion can appear calligraphic.

The landscape often seems engaged in a form of mark making entirely its own.

This recognition influenced the development of my visual language.

I began thinking about certain forms as weathered glyphs. They were not letters and carried no readable meaning, yet they possessed the visual authority of language.

They suggest stories without fully explaining them.

The viewer is invited to participate in the act of interpretation.

Weathered Silence, Oxide and Shade

These ideas found fuller expression in Weathered Silence, Oxide and Shade.

The series emerged through a sustained engagement with atmosphere, erosion, memory and transformation.

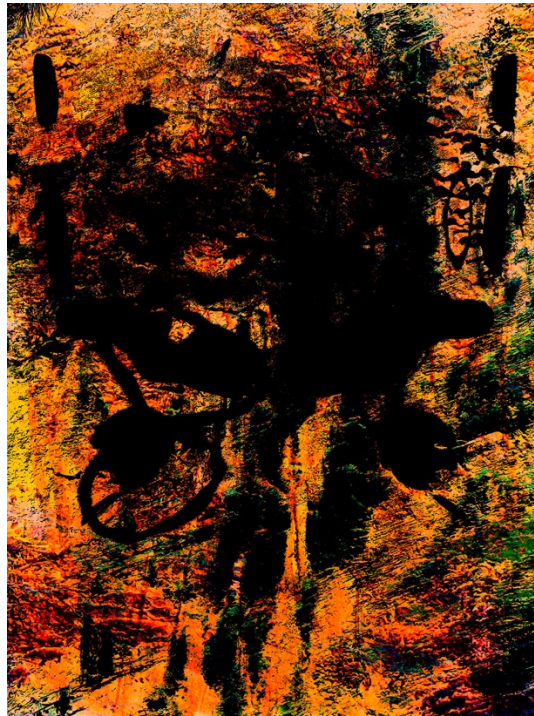


Figure 5 'Weathered Silence, Oxide and Shade' #92 - 2026

During its development I became fascinated by silence.

Not silence as emptiness, but silence as presence.

The work slowed down.

Marks became quieter.

Spaces became more important.

Shade became architecture.

Residual light. Oxide drift. Weathered glyphs. Excavated layers. Quiet ruins.

Together they formed a visual language shaped by memory, atmosphere and transformation.

Oxide as Evidence

The more deeply I worked with oxide, the more my understanding changed.

Initially I was attracted to colour.

Ferric reds.

Weathered ochres.

Rusted oranges.

Eventually I realised colour itself was not what fascinated me.

I was interested in origin.

Water had moved.

Metal had changed.

Minerals had reacted.

Time had passed.

The stain became evidence.

The surface was no longer the destination.

It was a clue.

Following the Oxide

Once this curiosity emerged, it became impossible to ignore.

The traces I was photographing seemed to point beyond themselves toward hidden systems working within the landscape.

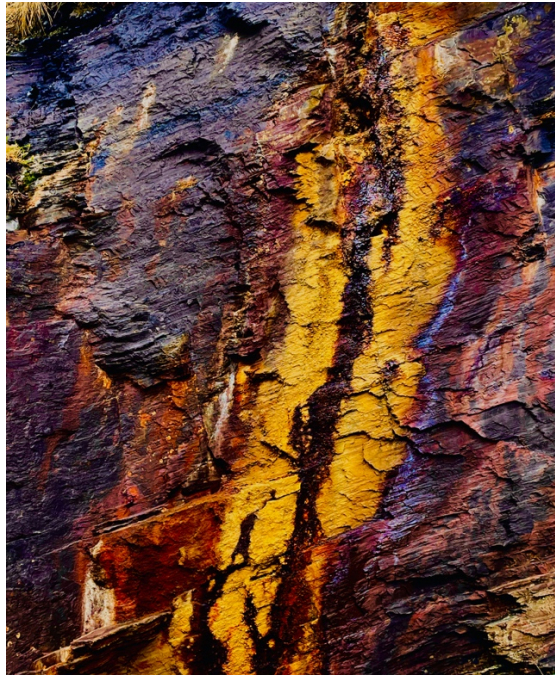


Figure 6 'Incidental Marks Series' - 2025

Where had the stain come from?

What created the deposit?

What hidden journey had taken place before the mark appeared?

Gradually my attention shifted from evidence toward origin.

The landscape itself became the subject.

North Devon and Geological Time

Living in North Devon has deepened this investigation.

The coastline carries an extraordinary sense of geological duration. Cliffs and rock faces reveal histories measured not in years but in epochs.

Ferric staining appears in unexpected places.

Mineral deposits emerge through seams in rock.

Water reveals hidden pathways.

The landscape seems engaged in a continual process of rewriting itself.

Geological time encourages patience.

It reminds us that transformation does not need drama to be significant.

Ferric Flow

Looking back, I can see that Ferric Flow was present long before I recognised it as a distinct body of work.

The questions already existed.

Surface memory.

Weathering.

Oxide.

Trace.

Transformation.

What changed was the focus of my attention.

For years I had been looking at traces.

Now I was beginning to follow them back towards their source.

Living in North Devon has made that shift impossible to ignore. The coastline reveals geological processes with remarkable clarity. Cliffs fractured by time, exposed rock formations, mineral seams and weathered outcrops create a landscape where underlying structures are continually brought to the surface.

Walking these environments, I became increasingly aware that many of the marks that fascinated me were not simply surface phenomena. They were the visible outcomes of much larger systems operating beneath the ground.

Water moves silently through fractured rock.

Minerals dissolve.

Iron-rich deposits are carried through hidden channels.

Pressure, chemistry and time interact beyond the limits of human perception.

Eventually these unseen processes emerge into view.

A rust-red stain appears across stone.

An ochre deposit gathers along a rock face.

A ferric bloom spreads across the surface after rainfall.

What we encounter is only the final stage of a much longer journey.

This fascinated me.

The marks themselves carried a visual language that felt deeply familiar. As I continued photographing and studying these formations, I began to notice recurring patterns.

They branched like rivers seen from above.

They divided and rejoined.

They spread through surfaces in delicate networks.

Some resembled calligraphic gestures.

Some appeared almost vegetal.

Others recalled mapmaking, root systems, arteries or weather systems viewed from a distance.

Again, I found myself returning to the same observation.

The landscape was drawing.

Not metaphorically, but materially.

Water, mineral and time worked together to create marks that possessed many of the characteristics traditionally associated with drawing. Flow produced line. Deposition produced tone. Accumulation produced texture. Duration produced complexity.

The resulting forms appeared both intentional and accidental.

They occupied the same territory that has long interested me within my own work, the space between control and emergence.

This recognition altered the way I understood mark making.

For many years I had considered the drawn mark as evidence of human action. A gesture recorded movement. A line documented a decision. A surface preserved an encounter.

Ferric formations suggested a broader understanding.

The landscape itself creates marks.

Rock records pressure.

Water records movement.

Minerals record transformation.

The earth continually writes its own history across the surfaces we encounter.

What I had previously interpreted as stains became something more complex.

They became records.

Evidence of invisible events.

Material memories brought briefly into view.

This idea connects closely with my ongoing interest in traces. A trace always points beyond itself. It suggests something that cannot be fully seen. What remains visible is only a fragment of a larger story.

Ferric deposits operate in precisely this way.

They reveal movement without showing the journey.

They reveal transformation without revealing the entire process.

They offer evidence without certainty.

The stain becomes a form of geological testimony.

What interests me most is the tension between visibility and concealment. The vivid ferric marks that attract our attention represent only a tiny fraction of the activity taking place within the landscape. The greater part of the process remains hidden beneath the surface.

In this sense, ferric flow becomes a powerful metaphor for memory itself.

Memories rarely exist as complete records. They emerge as fragments, impressions and residues. Certain details remain visible while others disappear. We reconstruct meaning from traces rather than from total knowledge.

The landscape appears to remember in a similar way.

It offers clues.

Deposits.

Residual marks.

Evidence left behind by events too large, too slow or too distant to witness directly.

As these ideas developed, I began to see ferric flow not merely as a geological process but as a visual model for understanding transformation. Flow suggests movement rather than stasis. It describes a continual state of becoming.

Nothing is fixed.

Water moves.

Minerals migrate.

Surfaces change.

Deposits accumulate.

Landscapes evolve.

The marks I photograph represent only temporary moments within ongoing processes that began long before their appearance and will continue long after they have disappeared.

This awareness has gradually shaped my approach to image making.

Rather than creating static compositions, I became increasingly interested in constructing images that retain a sense of movement, emergence and transition. Layers interact. Forms drift. Structures appear and dissolve. Marks gather and disperse. The image becomes less an object and more a record of continuous transformation.

In this way Ferric Flow extends many of the concerns present in Weathered Silence, Oxide and Shade while moving beyond them. The earlier work focused on atmosphere, weathering and the visible language of traces. Ferric Flow follows those traces further, beyond the surface and into the hidden processes from which they emerge.

It asks not only what the mark records, but how the mark came to be.

It asks what lies beneath appearance.

What flows beneath the visible world.

What histories remain hidden within stone, water and time.

Ultimately, Ferric Flow is not simply about iron, geology or landscape. It is about becoming.

It is about recognising that every surface exists within larger systems of transformation.

Every stain records a journey.

Every deposit carries a history.

Every trace reveals only part of a much deeper process.

The more closely I look, the more I realise that the landscape is not a static backdrop but an active participant in its own continual making.

Its surfaces are not fixed.

They are still unfolding.

And within those unfolding processes I continue to find new questions, new connections and the beginnings of future work.



Figure 7 'Ferric Flow' #11 - 2026

Towards a Continuing Practice

Looking back across the journey from surface memory to Ferric Flow, I can see a continuous thread connecting everything.

Observation led to collection.

Collection led to surfaces.

Surfaces led to colour.

Colour led to marks.

Marks led to oxide.

Oxide led to geology.

Geology led to flow.

The subject matter evolved, but the underlying curiosity remained unchanged.

I still find myself asking the same questions.

How does time become visible?

How do surfaces remember?

What traces are left behind by transformation?

How do hidden processes reveal themselves?

The answers continue to shift, just as the world itself continues to shift.

Yet the impulse remains constant.

To notice.

To collect.

To follow traces.

To remain curious about what surfaces remember.

Because every mark carries evidence of becoming.

Every surface records a history of change.

Every trace points towards something beyond itself.

It is within these quiet acts of accumulation, erosion, memory and transformation that I continue to find meaning and wonder.

Each trace invites another question.

Each surface offers another encounter.

And within those ongoing processes of becoming, I find the beginning of the next work.