

# *Half-Light: Materialising the Emotional*

Nick Fox



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## STATEMENT

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### ***Half-Light: Materialising the Emotional Register through Visual Codes 2014-16).***

*Half-Light* is a multidisciplinary body of work which examined how symbolic subcultural languages have operated historically and in queer communities in the present as strategies of circumventing and resisting mainstream cultural codes which have alienated LGBTQ+ people. *Half-Light* investigates, appropriates and repurposes coded language and imagery from sources including neo-Romantic and Symbolist painting, psychoanalysis, Greek mythology, floriography (the language of flowers), *fin de siècle* literature, alchemy, illuminated manuscripts, and coded queer modes of communication, such as those used in cruising and club cultures.

In the works that make up *Half-Light*, Fox worked with painting, gilded *objet d'art*, and cyanotype photograms to explore the complex ways in which coded queer language is deployed through visual art and craft practices, proposing the body itself as a site of resistance. Drawing upon historic artistic and literary precedents who have employed

encoding, such as Kate Greenaway, Marsden Hartley, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Jasper Johns, and Oscar Wilde, *Half-Light* reflects on the contribution of these key figures from the past to queer aesthetics and LGBTQ+ communities in the present. The works which make up *Half-Light* develop a language of queer encoding which draws on historic examples and exists in a contemporary context. In some of the works, the audience was intentionally included in its authorship, invited to move cyanotype prints of the artist's body around the gallery space. Rather than illustrating the themes of experiences of intimacy, the artworks are reliant on the audience engaging with them directly through touch to create an effect of experience and inclusion over individual contemplation.

*Half-Light* was disseminated through solo exhibitions at Angus-Hughes (London, 2015), Vane (Newcastle, 2016) and a major survey of Fox's practice in the context of LGBTQ+ art and heritage at Sutton House (National Trust, London, 2015).

## OUTPUTS

The Half-Light project consists of the following works:

- ***All of Me, Some of Me***, cyanotype photograms, 2014-16
- ***Half-Light***, series of twelve paintings, 2015-16
- ***Wonderland***, a series of five sculptures, 2015 - 16
- ***Other Conclusion***, series of sixteen sculptures, 2016
- ***Murmuring***, paint skin with gold dust, 2015
- ***Lure***, sculpture, 2014
- ***From One Full Moon till the Next*** artist's book, 2014

*All of Me Some of Me*, cyanotype photogram, installed at Nick Fox, Bad Seed, Sutton House, National Trust, London, 2015

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## DISSEMINATION

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### **Half-Light was disseminated through the following solo exhibitions:**

- *Nick Fox*, Angus-Hughes Gallery, London, 2015
- *Nick Fox: Bad Seed*, Sutton House, London, 2015
- *Nick Fox: Half-Light*, Vane, Newcastle, 2016

### **Works which are part of the Half-Light project were included in group exhibitions including:**

- *Sex Shop*, Folkstone Triennial Fringe, 2014
- *Sex Shop*, Transition Gallery, London, 2015
- *A Union of Voices*, Horatio Junior, London, 2014-15
- *Vacuum with a sparse covering of probability waves*, Studio M\_23, Berlin, 2015
- *A Foreign Encounter*, Galerie Foe, Munich, 2015
- *Vicentennial*, VANE, Newcastle, 2017

### **These public presentations of the research were supported by the following public events:**

- Artist talk, Angus-Hughes Gallery, London, 2015
- Artist talk, promenade and workshops, Sutton House, London, part of 'Curating LGBTQ Histories: Queer Season at Sutton House, 2015
- Nick Fox in-conversation with art historian Dr. Fiona Anderson, Vane, Newcastle, 2016
- Nature Morte Curators Talk, Nick Fox, The Four Domes Pavilpn, National Musuems, Wrocklaw, Poland, 2017
- Nick Fox, research presentation, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 2017
- Sunderland University, Sunderland, 2018
- St Helens College, Merseyside, 2018

## Floriography + Coded Communication

*Half-Light* began as an enquiry into floriography, the Victorian cultural phenomenon that used flowers as tokens in courtship rituals to communicate hidden or forbidden pleasures. The broader *Half-Light* project explores how historic symbolism and more recent LGBTQ+ cultural coding might be reclaimed and redeployed in the present by queer artists. Historically, symbolic language and was adapted to symbolize and communicate romantic or erotic interest at times when same-sex relationships were illegal, even in private, or socially prohibited in public spaces.

Close readings of *Language of flowers* (1884) by Kate Greenaway, a dictionary of floriographic codes, and the symbolic *fin de siècle* literature of Joris-Karl Huysmans, Oscar Wilde, and Charles Baudelaire, in particular the alchemical potential of its symbolism, led to the series of works ***Wonderland*** (2015 -16). Fox was interested in examining the value and meaning assigned to everyday objects in a queer context, how the meaning of objects can be manipulated through material experimentation, and how this relates to changes in the way we communicate in the digital age.

Fox produced a set of gilded sculptural forms that blur the boundaries between fine art practice and craft in order to question the established hierarchies of value between them. The endlessly looping Möbius strips evoke continuity and connection, but their gilding elevates them. The objects were made with plaster and Sculpey, a low-cost crafters sculpting resin, then baked and gilded with different grades and values of gold leaf finishes.



Installation view: *Wonderland* (2015-16)  
Sculpey & 24ct gold leaf, dimensions vary. Photo from  
Nick Fox, *Half-Light*, Vane, Newcastle 2016.

## Coded Communication

This idea is expanded upon in *Other Conclusion* (2016), a series of imagined love letters gilded in 24ct gold. They represent four years of digital correspondence between Fox and his recent lover. They draw on Fox's reading of Roland Barthes' *A Lovers Discourse* (1977) and his interest in longing and the complex struggle to communicate across the emotional spectrum. The love letter is both an everyday object and a powerful symbol of love and connection.

These works are autobiographical and, through the gilding of low-cost materials like polymer clay, explore the potential of gold as both an expressive material – as it is a medium-conductor - and one that is elite and decorative. The letters cannot be read, but their value is evoked through the practice of gilding. This relates to Fox's broader interest in the *Half-Light* project in alchemy and codified or secret modes of communication.

Each object was hand gilded in different purities and colours of precious gold leaf, including pure 24ct gold, moon gold, lemon gold, and white gold, arrived at by blending pure gold with other precious metals. Each letter was elevated from the floor by a ream of paper which functioned as a plinth.



Installation view: *Other Conclusion* (2016)  
Sculpey, gold leaf, ream of paper, series of 8, dimensions vary  
Photo from: Nick Fox, *Half-Light*, Vane, Newcastle 2016



*Other Conclusion* (2016) [installation view, and detail (right) Vane, Newcastle 2016  
Sculpey, gold leaf, ream of paper, dimensions vary

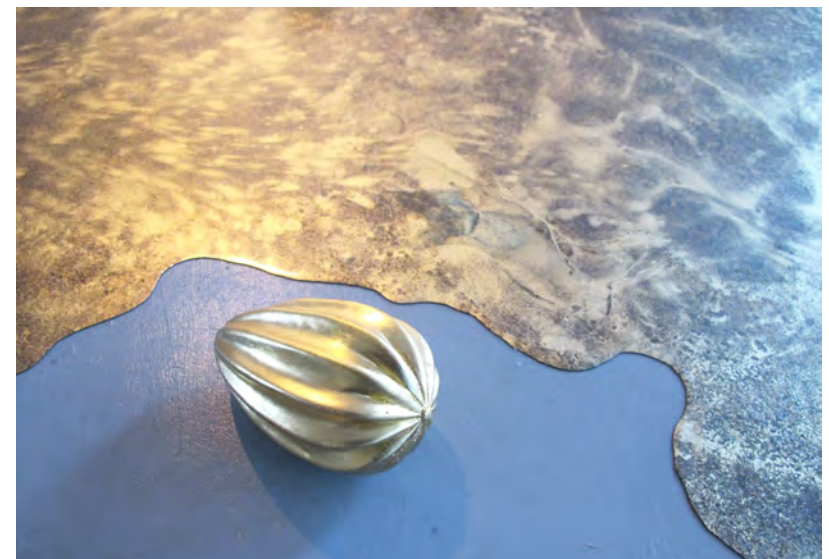
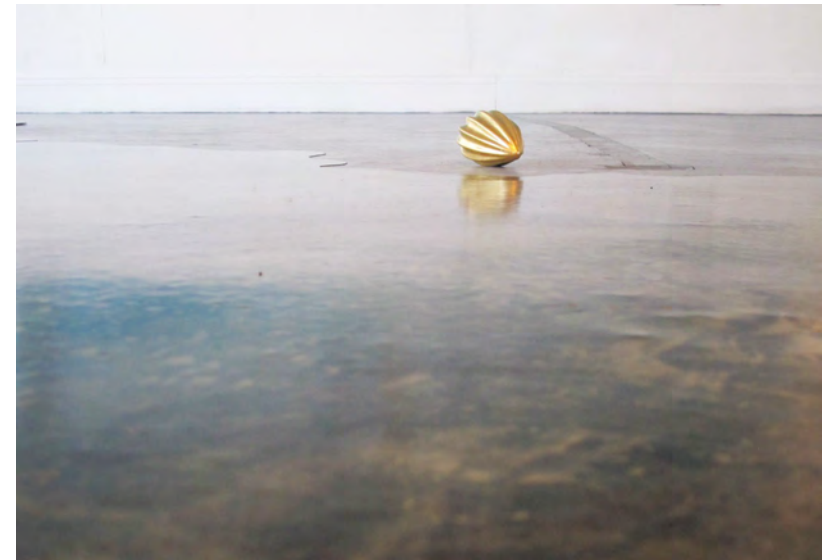


## Gold and Gilding

Fox applied multiple layers of gold paint directly onto a large glass sheet. Over an extended period of up to eighteen months, this process produces both an image and an object. The resulting work consists of a malleable skin of paint emphasizing spatial depth and surface.

*Murmuring* (2015, right) was developed for Angus Hughes Gallery, London. It was exhibited with the gilded object *Lure* (2014), an earlier work which references bodily pleasures and the Greek mythological story of Midas, whose ability to transform any material into gold, ultimately brought tragedy and death.

*Murmuring*, (2015). Skin of gold acrylic paint, 550 x 150 x 0.1cm  
and *Lure* (2014) , plaster and gold leaf, 12 x 7 x 7cm  
Photo from: *Nick Fox*, Angus-Hughes London 2015



## Context and Methodology

The *Half-Light* project includes a series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium, measuring 20 x 30cm. This continues Fox's research into symbolism and florigraphic coded language. It relates to Fox's work with gilding and found objects, translating this into the language of symbolism and the realm of painting.

The paintings are intended as spaces for contemplation, informed by Fox's archive of collected images and objects from the everyday urban environment. The recurrence of fragments of rope, folds, loops, knots provoke associations of relationships, and some appear disquietingly out of place. ***In Tribute*** (2015) a glowing 'True Lover's Knot', formed out of dead grass, lies discarded in a dreamy underwater scene, and in ***Fool's Gold*** (2016), a twisted strip of lead lies flattened on a bejewelled bed of stones.

## Process

Fox began the process of making these paintings by taking a series of walks in which he looked for objects in his environment which resonated with his emotional state or with which he felt a connection or affinity. This self-reflective forensic process generated an extensive body of material, an archive of photographic images and found objects. Fox used this archive of found objects and images to develop the subject matter for the paintings. The paintings were produced using acrylic paint on aluminium, creating a luminous effect.



*Fool's Gold* (2015), from the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, each 20x30cm

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*Tribute* (2015), from the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)

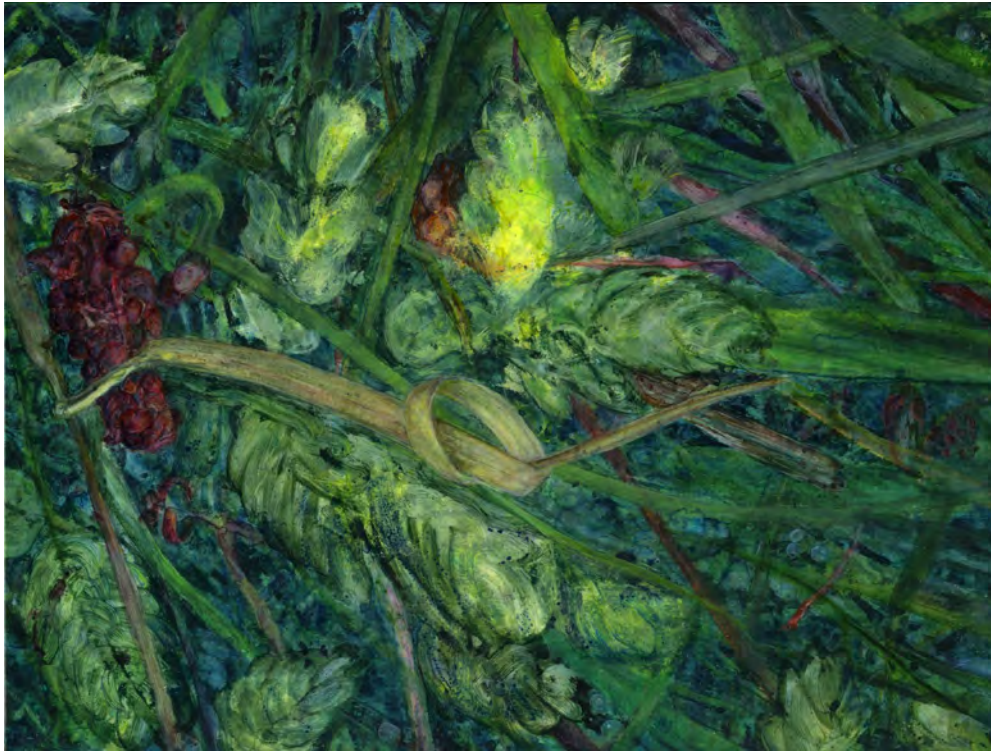


*Excavating the Half-Light* (2016) part of the series *Half-light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, h 20x30cm.

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*Against the Grain of Half-Light* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, 20x30cm.



*Regarding remembrance* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16) Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, 20x30cm

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*Memory Twine* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16) Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, 20x30cm



*Chasing Breath* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, 20x30cm

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*Doubling* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, 30x40cm



*Exquisite Corpse* (2016) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, each 20x30cm

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*Expectancy* (2015) part of the series *Half-Light* (2015-16)  
Series of 12 paintings, acrylic on aluminium panel, each 20x30cm

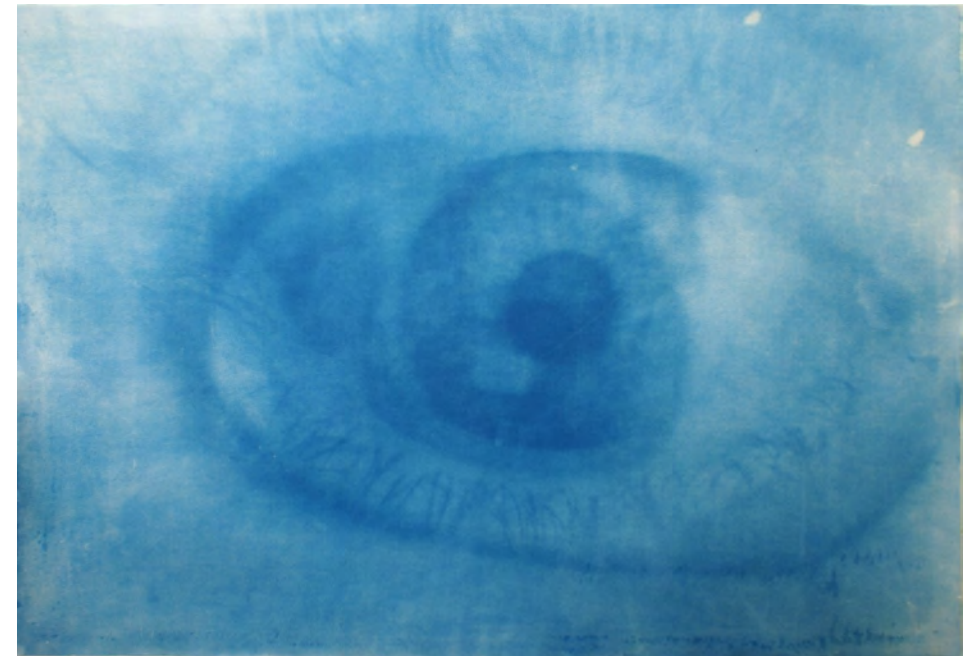
## Context and Methodology

### Intimacy and disclosure through photograms

*All of Me – Some of Me* (2014-16) is a series of cyanotype prints. The series consists of 100 close-up images of the artist's body produced using the photogram printing method. The prints were made for the exhibition *Nick Fox, Half-Light*, Vane, Newcastle 2016.

The photograms enable a moment of disclosure from the artist to the audience. They chart Fox's personal relationships - the birth of his second daughter, the end of a romantic relationship - and different concepts of time: the lasting and the fleeting. These shifting temporal experiences are alluded to in the use of long-exposure blueprints, which capture bodily residue. Blown up beyond life size, Fox created a 'blueprint' code of bodily symbols which chart a personal journey but invite a viewer in through their intimacy and scale.

Fox examined the material challenges involved in transforming the invisible emotional register into visible forms, drawing on Sherri Turkle's notion of emotional 'authenticity' as 'taboo' in a culture of simulation (2011).



*All of Me, Some of Me* (2014-16) [detail]  
series of cyanotype self-portrait photograms,  
arranged by the audience, various dimensions



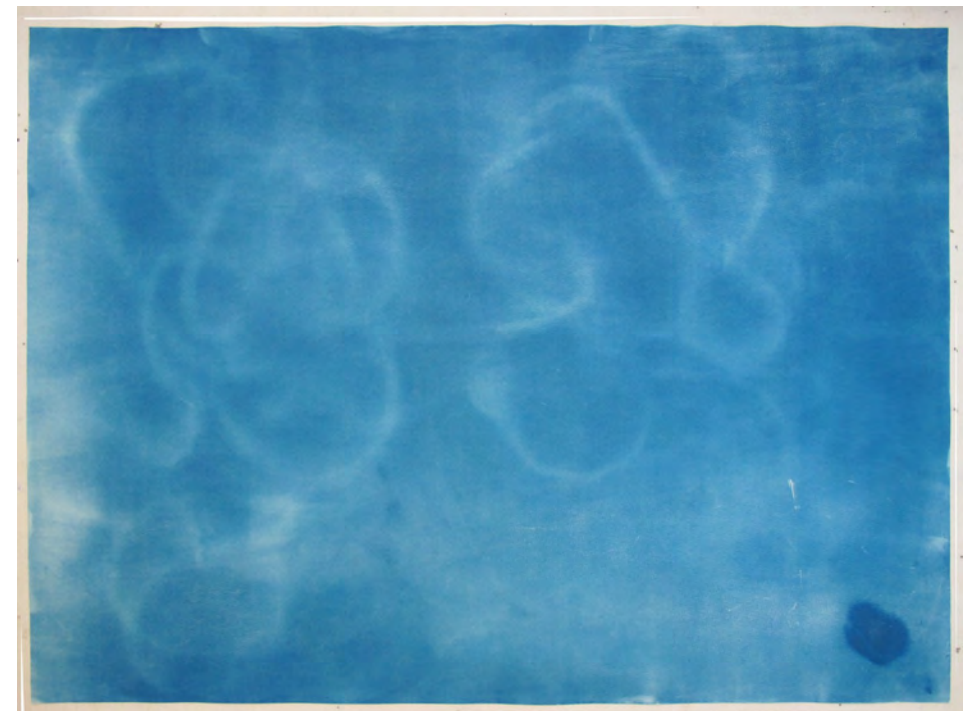
## Process

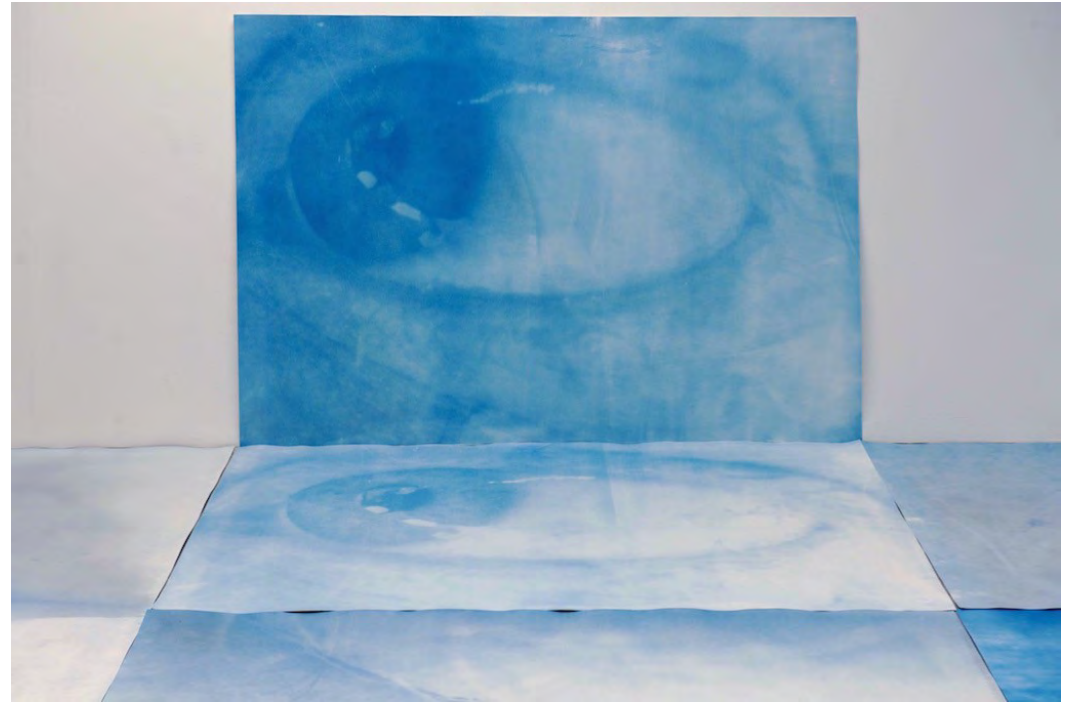
### Intimacy and disclosure through photograms

Fox undertook a series of closed photographic sessions in his studio, using a camera to record close-up images of his body. The resulting images were developed as large negatives which Fox used to project inverse images onto prepared cyanotype paper in his studio over an 8-hour exposure period.

Fox then used his body as a printing-tool directly onto the paper. This extends the monotype process where pigment is used to translate information to include also bodily secretions (sweat, spit, breath, semen) as experimental 'ink'. Fox intervened in the traditional cyanotype chemical process in order to produce an embodied imprint. The exposed images were then taken to Fox's home where he washed the paper in his bath, a process which developed the image by activating embedded chemicals. Fox laid the works on his bed to dry, introducing this intimate space into the process and inviting reflection on intimacy, touch, and desire as an element within the process.

Responding to material challenges in performing, developing and fixing the cyanotype images, Fox identified new strategies for 'materialising' intimacy and emotion into visible forms. The work explored physical and emotional availability as the subject matter.





*All of Me, Some of Me* (2014-16) [Installation view, Vane, Newcastle, 2016]  
Series of cyanotype self-portrait photograms, arranged by the audience, various dimensions.

## Dissemination

### Exhibitions

*All of Me – Some of Me* (2014-16) was exhibited at Sutton House (NT, London, 2015), Galerie M\_23 (Berlin 2015) *Nick Fox, Half-Light*, Vane Gallery, (Newcastle 2016) and *Vicentennial*, Vane Gallery, Newcastle (2017) with further works added for each exhibition. The series was shown as *All of Me – Some of Me (from one full moon, 'til the next)*, in the form of an artist's book at other exhibitions.

Each display was an immersive and site-responsive configuration of the cyanotypes which make up the work.

At Vane, for example, some works were hung on the walls with the remainder installed in piles on the floor from which the audience could select, move around, and display as they wished, including laying prints on top of each other.

This aspect of the work brought Fox's ideas about intimacy and connection to the core of the audience's encounter with the work. Rather than illustrating experiences of intimacy, the artworks invite the audience to engage with ideas about intimacy directly through touch, creating a sense of physical experience and inclusion within the artwork.



*All of Me, Some of Me* (2014-16) [Installation view, Vane, Newcastle, 2016]  
Series of cyanotype self-portrait photograms,  
arranged by the audience, various dimensions  
Photo from Nick Fox, *Half-Light*, Vane, Newcastle 2016.



*All of Me, Some of Me* (2014-16) [Installation view, Vane, Newcastle, 2016]  
Series of 100 cyanotype self-portrait photographs, arranged by the audience, various dimensions.

## Output and further dissemination

### Artist's book

Earlier work *From One Full Moon to the Next* (2014) began to establish the methodology for *All of Me Some of Me*. For the group exhibition *A Union of Voices* (2014-15) at Horatio Jr, London, Fox produced an A4 book of cyanotype prints featuring a sequence of 31 images of Fox's body produced sequentially over one lunar cycle, using the unstable light of the moon in the production process to expose the image. This method emphasised Fox's interest in lunar mythologies and symbolism.

The book was also shown as part of a solo presentation of Fox's work at Code Art Fair, Copenhagen (2017).

*Half-Light* continues to be shown, for example at *C'est de la Peinture*, Bankley Studios, Manchester (2018); *Volta*, Basel (2018); *Pretty Ugly* curated by Andrew Ekins at Thameside Studios (2021)



*From One Full Moon to the Next* (2014)  
Artist's book, 31 cyanotype photogram prints