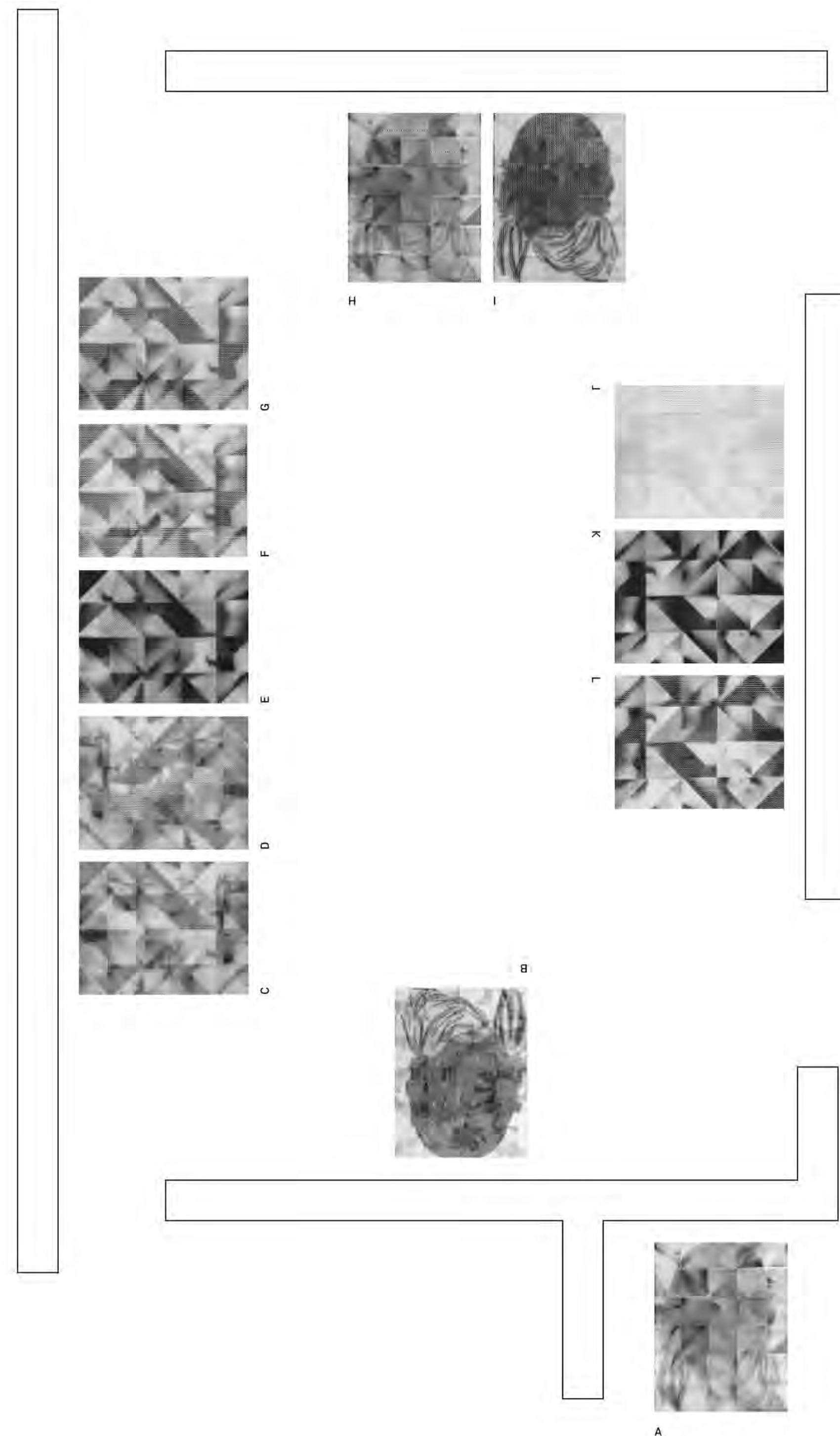


Jon Spangana, *Self Portrait in Dub*, #2, 2019. Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 52 x 40 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)

John Sparagna Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work) January 20 to March 3, 2022

Sicardi
Ayers
Bacino



A *Self Portrait in Dub*, #11, 2019, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 89 1/2 x 70 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
B *Self Portrait in Dub*, #12, 2019, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 95 1/2 x 71 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
C *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #21*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)

D *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #22*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
E *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #23*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
F *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #24*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)

G *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #25*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
H *Self Portrait in Dub*, #2, 2019, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 52 x 40 3/4 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
I *Self Portrait in Dub*, #1, 2019, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 52 1/2 x 40 1/8 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)

J *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #26*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
K *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #27*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)
L *Splendid Isolation (Forces at Work): Summer/Fall/Winter 2020 #28*, 2020, Archival inkjet prints, sliced and mixed on paper 58 x 46 x 1 1/2 inches (framed)

Pick a Dub

“OK, OK, let’s take it from here...”¹

An ultimate recursive machine, dub eats its own likeness. Dub processes and reprocesses. It adds to or deletes from an “original,” whatever that used to mean. Where is the original in this framework? A starting point, you could say, but an origin whose “authenticity” is eventually lost — sloughed off — in the rough jostle of alternate identities. Dub it down, dub it up. Put the concept of the original onto the mixing desk. Open it up. Play with it mercilessly, break it, ruin it, reinvent it, rejuvenate it, shade and burn it, mess with the original until it’s no longer recognizable, until the face in the reflection is no longer the same one staring back.

Put a reel-to-reel tape with a tight groove into the hands of King Tubby or Lee Perry, allow them to dub it, and it becomes something altogether else. A ghost of itself, a duplicate, an altered dupe, a double-crossed double, a duppy conqueror, the original emperor, an emperor of mirrors. Shake the bottle and find the cap, open and let it spray over the scene, invoke a nyabinghi spirit of images, a playful version depicted, a picture dub, extramusical echoplex, a Filofax of fragments, the future reorganized into Brownian bits, a tunnel with no preferential direction of flow to or from before (original) and after (version), all this as expressed visually, on a flat plane, in tens of thousands of shards of image.

“Stick in a hand and draw back a nub.”²

Version/Aversion

Versioning is the transport of one identity into another. A kind of transformation-transportation. Consider the contents of the Steve Barrow compilation *Now This Is What I & I Call Version* — Everybody Needs Love (Slim Smith), Quick and Slick (Winston Scott), One Thousand Tons of Megaton (Roland Alphonso), One Thousand Tons of Version (Jeff Barnes), Ten Thousand Tons of Dollar Bills (Family Man & Tubby), Two of a Kind (Dennis Alcapone), One Million Tons of TNT (Lester Sterling), Everybody Needs Love (Lloyd Charmers), Run Bald Head (Time Unlimited), Heavy Heavy Version (Success Allstars), Every Goodie Needs Love (Shorty The President), Every Goodie Needs Rhythm (Success Allstars), Everybody Needs Love (Lloyd Parkes), Everybody Needs Version (Aggravators).

Everyone’s starting place is the last ending place. Or a couple back. Dig all the versions, the revisions, the templates and the adjustments. Theme and variation and obliteration. The T-square and the A-bomb.

John Sparagna’s version of versioning involves just this invocation of adjustment. His version. A version. Aversion. Averse to reversion. No reversal. Forward ever, backward never. However. Non-directional, so not really aligned with the arrow of progress, more of a diffusion. Again, the Brownian metaphor appears, a random play of particles in motion, the explosion of an existing image, again and again, the explosion exploded, and again, until all sense of identity is called out, diffused into an allover state, the interiority of a self-portrait evacuated, the “original” self — a young man, precursor to the artist, a stoner perhaps, a questing stoner admiring himself and attempting a drawing in order to make a self-portrait, “raw, untutored expressionism” in his retrospective terms — is obliterated. The self, shredded. Lovingly aerated. And abandoned almost altogether in the ether, the obdurate eyes barely visible in a cloud of stochastically organized atoms.

All this in the aftermath of a personal tragedy, the death of Sparagna’s sister, and discovery of his early attempts at self-depiction, a tremendous influx of latent 1970s-era emotions, a sense of immense loss and commensurate discovery. What is the self from then and now? The one before her death and the one after? How are they related, if so? Personhood, selfdom, subjected to ten thousand tons of TNT. And a new self, rising out of the smoke, nearly unidentifiable. Hey, friend, everybody needs version.

Picture Dub

When Sparagna makes one of these works, he calls his action “cutting and mixing.” It is hauntingly evocative of magnetic tape. He works in strips, splicing them together, NEVER EVER WEAVING THEM, always laying them flat on the substrate, like a swath of audiotape about to be butt-spliced, one piece conjoined to another, taking discontinuity and extracting a new continuity. Sparagna’s intricate process systematically disassembles an image and then reassembles it, conjoining it with other iterations of the same image, sometimes very similar, sometimes altered. Out of this fusion comes a new image based on the old one(s). His method is inherently violent. It involves a slicing and mounting, but it’s not done like conventional collage, because he uses an implicit grid, which undergirds his entire enterprise. The grid can be wonky — indeed, the wonk is part of its wonder — but that isn’t a goal. The wonk is a byproduct of the process. This is important, because it shows the way Sparagna is thinking about these works. There is an oblique relationship between what he thinks he’s going to do and what actually happens. His actions produce something unexpected. They can fail or they can flourish. But in their blind violence, they are true. There is no ulterior motive to these works. They eat themselves in order to see what they shit out.

Fold-In Dub

An echo. Dub is awash in echoes. They compete with the natural rhythms of the music, sometimes disrupting the flow, challenging the listener to listen to one or another of the periodicities. So, too, with Sparagna’s *Splendid Isolation* works. These resolute abstractions, a sister series to the earlier *Industry White In Dub* works, which also took fashion industry images as their base material, result in a hall-of-mirrors as their structuring image, a kind of diagonal mirroring or near-mirroring, a folding in on itself of the image field, executed in increments, the field dog-eared, origami-ed, and paper-airplaned, a series of creases (slits, crevices, holes) creating a grid of potential volumes, implied volumes, spaces, rooms along an empty hallway.

All created during the pandemic, *Splendid Isolation*’s dub iterations arguably convey something of the combination of intimacy and alienation particular to their time, that uncomfortable mix of openness and claustrophobia that the virus imposed on virtually everyone. With their insistent 45% angles and black and whiteness with occasional bold color insertions, they’re less fleshy rooms, strangely impersonal and yet still uncannily corporal, distant body containers. Sparagna says he sees them as “systems for drawing out/manifesting my state of mind via a formal aesthetic.” In that, he captures the dub concept perfectly. Using a plate reverb (such a cold sound) to evince an emotion (such a warm feeling). “Mirror of my mind along a very particular time period and set of larger circumstances, these works feel, in a certain manner, like siblings to the *Self-Portrait in Dub* pieces.” Siblings, you might say, to a one-time sibling. A warm-cold room transforming-transporting one Sparagna into another.

One mind, two of a kind.

— John Corbett

Notes
1 Lee Scratch Perry, “Kentucky Skank.”
2 Chester Himes, *A Rage in Harlem* (New York: Vintage/Black Lizard, 1991), p. 93.