FRAME / ABLATE

"the solidity, the obscurity, the density of things closed in upon themselves have powers of truth that they owe not to light, but to the gaze that passes over them, around them, and gradually into them" – *Michael Focault, Birth of the Clinic*

FRAME / ABLATE is a ten-minute video projection in which Whetstone examines edible plants and human tissue through a Scanning Electron Microscope, an instrument made for scientific analysis. Instead of using light to make the objects visible, the electron microscope showers the object with electrons. The resulting image is precise, yet grainy, flickering, and monochromatic like early cinematic experiments. Whetstone scans across these samples, sometimes at a magnification of 10,000x, moving the sensor at a few microns per minute, transforming tissue into surreal landscapes that writhe and mutate, continually being destroyed and reformed.

At these extreme magnifications, the electron beam bombards these delicate landscapes with radiation and eventually dematerializes them. The greater the power of magnification, the more completely the matter transforms. Scientists use the term *Ablation*to describe the process when electrons from the beam displace the electrons from the sample and transfigure its essential structure. Even though this instrument is immensely precise, the way it records a sample is anything but objective. Scientific images are generally regarded as naturalistic. They are intended to depict reality with unadulterated accuracy. Whetstone's work questions that notion, examines how the human gaze, even when intended to analyze, is a narrative filter.

In FRAME / ABLATE the matter seen is transformed by the act of seeing. The scientific tool that facilitates such an exact point of view becomes dislodged from its analytic function. Time and matter likewise become unhinged from objectivity and meld with the artist's internal narratives. The object of our gaze is continually in flux and forever linked to our desires to find elusive truths.

Credits:

Stephen Vitiello, Musical Score

Wallace Ambrose, CHANL Lab, microscopy supervisor

Carrie Donnelly, CHANL Lab, training

Georgia Titcomb, Assistant