# Katrin von Lehmann

# Holes in Knowledge

**German artist meets Norwegian climate researchers.**

Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research in Bergen, spring 2014.
A researcher draws swirly patterns on a blackboard with chalk: high and low pressure. The researcher wants to explain. Alongside stands a woman with short hair and a curious glance – the German artist Katrin von Lehmann. But von Lehmann's eyes see more than the researcher's patterns. She sees the researcher.

## Holes, made by a sponge

"Researchers have something in mind and translate their thoughts into a drawing. It is an attempt, a sketch. It is not perfect. It comes spontaneously. I'm interested in this process", says von Lehmann to forskning.no. We are in the venerable old building of "Geofysen" at Nygårdshøyden in Bergen, October 2015. The results of the researchers' educational endeavours hang in the corridor – but now they have holes. Both, the physical holes in the photographs of the blackboard, as well as the holes in the photographed chalk lines, made with sponge on the board by von Lehmann, can be seen. As the dark sponge stains dried out gradually von Lehmann made new ones. "It is a kind of reaction to the topic. A researcher told me about how high and low pressure appears and disappears", says von Lehmann.

## Started with meteorology

She has liked to see how nature is changing, how the seasons come and go for a long time. – "I like to go and watch clouds", she says. Perhaps not surprising then, that her first encounter with the world of science was as an artist in residence at a meteorological museum outside Berlin in 2009. – "I was fascinated by the fact that the clouds were observed with the naked eye, not with instruments. Even with our high technology, the human gaze is better able to classify, to distinguish irregular from regular shapes", says von Lehmann.

## Holes in illusions

"But there is a big difference between scientific research and artistic research", says von Lehmann. "For me, these chalkboard drawings have more possibilities than to explain science. The researchers made drawings that are aesthetically interesting", she says. But why all the holes in the photo paper? "Before I started, I made a framework of rules. One of these rules was that I would punch holes", says von Lehmann. "My interest in photography lies in the tension between illusion – photography is always an illusion – and reality. The gaps are real, they are not an illusion. I like working like this with photographs", she continues.

## Holes in lines

The artworks thus contain both illusions of holes – the photographed sponge holes – and real holes. The pattern they form is also a result of strict rules. “The rule was about punching holes in horizontal lines. For me, it is like telling a story. I think that science has a lot to do with storytelling”, says von Lehmann. In the last image, the holes are so dense that they open larger, irregular fields. The system is broken. “Yes, and this happens because of the rules. Something happens unexpectedly. I had not planned it, and this is what´s most intensive and interesting. – I think that what happens beyond the system you are looking at, is important. Sometimes it can be the key to a solution, just as I have read about in research”, says von Lehmann.

## Holes run riot

Further down the corridor, the holes run riot. The photo paper is frayed up in a rough circle. “The researcher used the word ‘approximation’ and tried to explain phenomena where something was lacking”, says von Lehmann. In this work, she did not use fixed rules, but let the forms and the aesthetic sense decide. “Here, the approximations of the circle are bigger. It has become diffuse”, she says.

## Holes in understanding

One of the researchers at the Bjerknes Centre gave her own interpretation of von Lehmann’s works. “I interpret holes in the pictures as my own lack of understanding of the research presented here. (...) If there are too many holes, the story is unclear to you”, writes Friederike Urbassek Hoffmann in an article about the exhibition on the website of the Bjerknes Centre.

## Anti-holes in bowl

But as information theory and cosmology confirms: Knowledge is never really gone. No information can be lost. Neither in von Lehmann’s universe – so she gathered all the holes. “What was left from punching the circles – why is it supposed to be garbage? I do not think it‘s rubbish. I collected them in this glass bowl made by a glassblower”, she says. Like some kind of antiparticles, the paper circles and loose fragments in the bowl are securely placed on the windowsill on a stack of blank paper – scientific papers yet to be written?

## Inside out

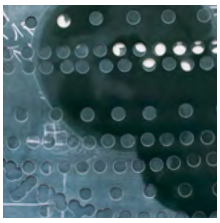
This is not the first time von Lehmann turns her own artistic production inside out. “I once worked with concentration and intensity with a paper collage. So, I turned it around. Then, I saw that what was on the back side, actually was the front side of the artwork. – The front side, which I had worked on so much, shone through. The back was a consequence of what I had done at the front,” says von Lehmann.

*Arnfinn Christensen, journalist, February 2016*

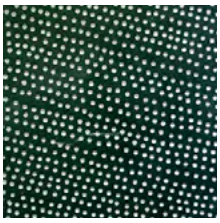
## Links

Original version in Norwegian:
http://forskning.no/2016/02/lager-hull-i-kunnskapen
About the exhibition Shifting sites to Bjerknes Centre for Climate Research:
http://www.bjerknes.uib.no/en/article/news/searching-knowledge-unseen

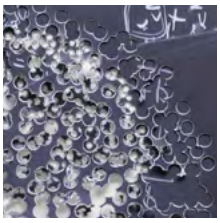
*Blackboard Drawing 1*



*Blackboard Drawing 2*



*Blackboard Drawing 3*



*Blackboard Drawing 4-01 bis 4-04*

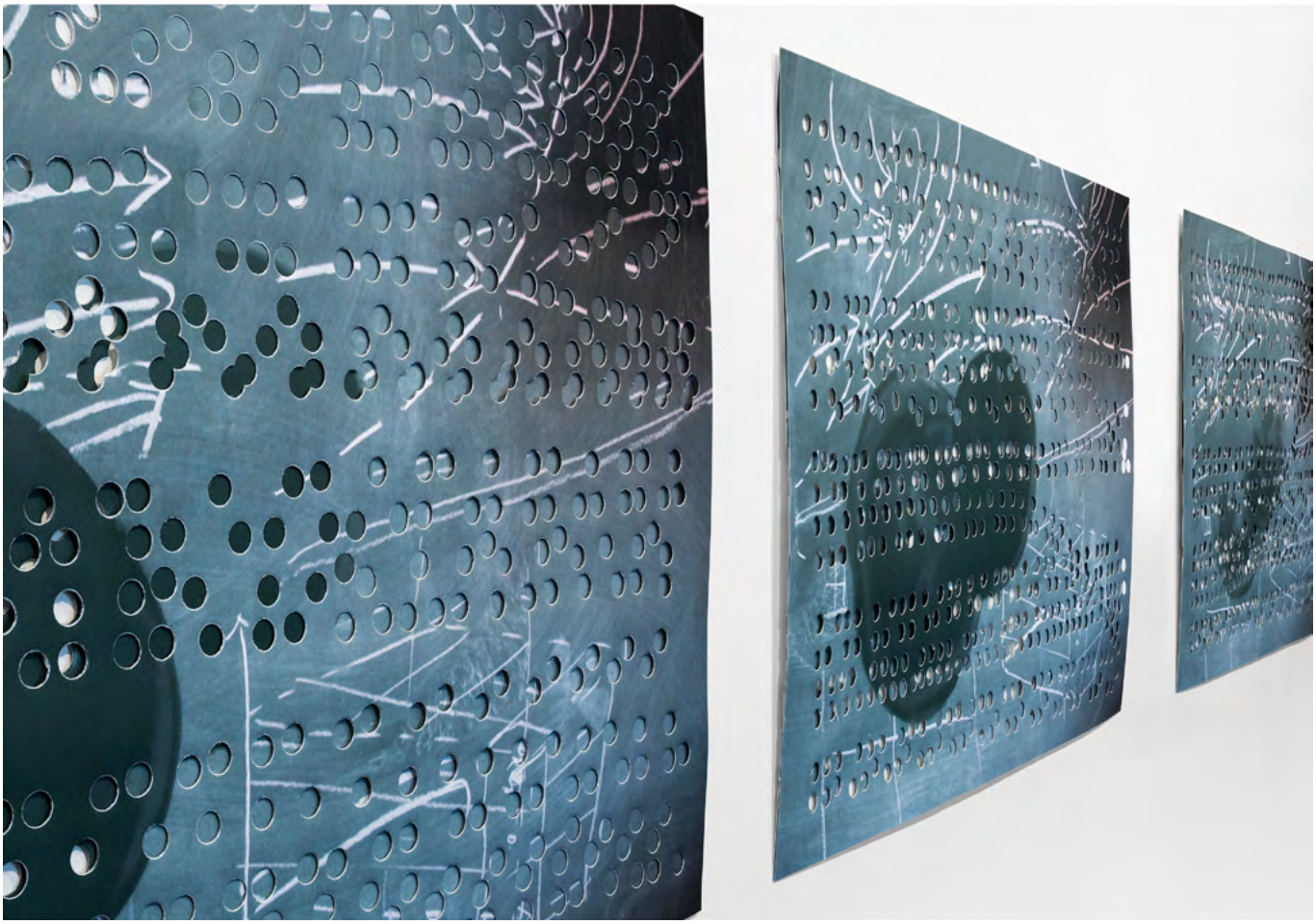
*Photographs: Bernd Hiepe*

## *Blackboard Drawing 1 and 2*

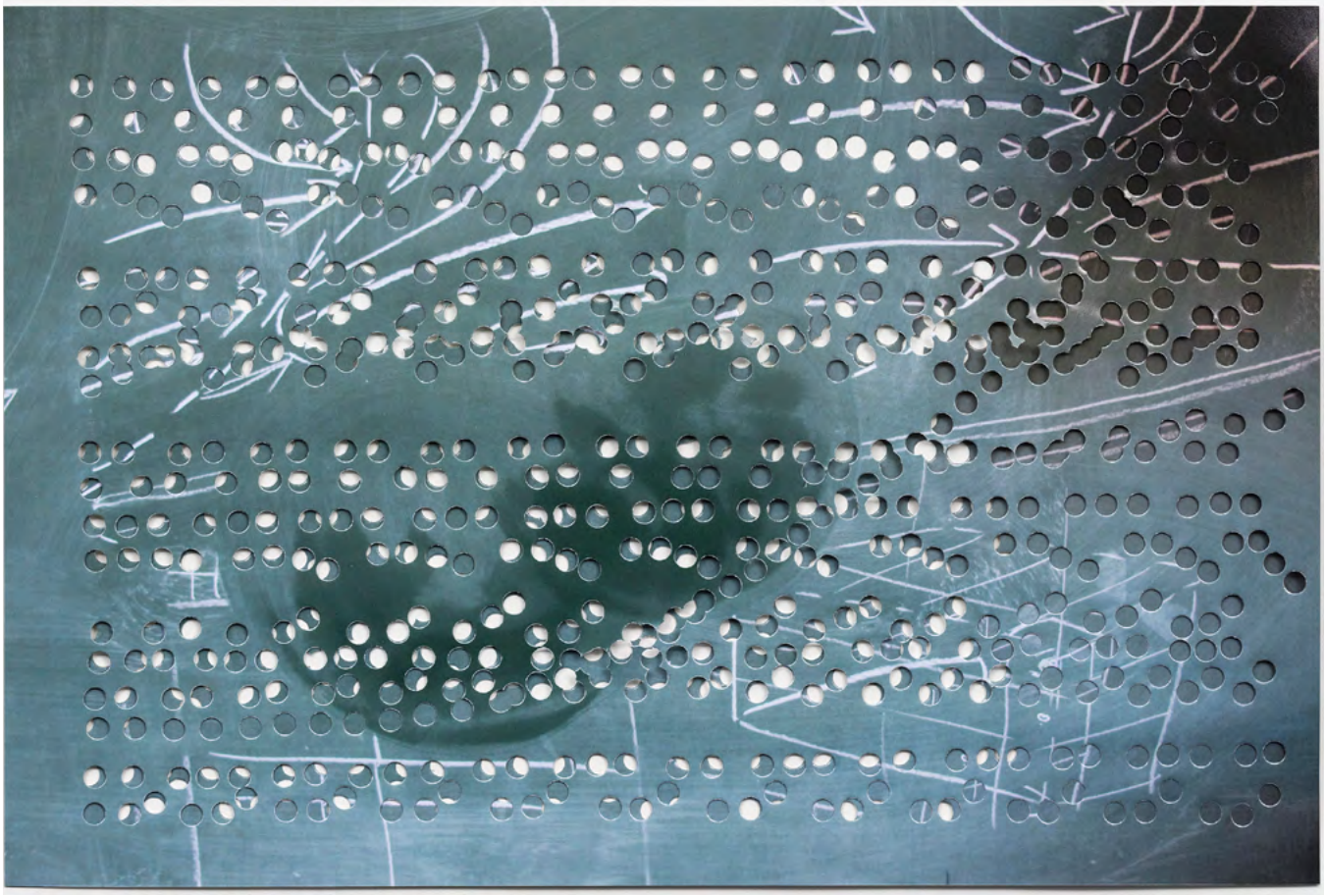
During the interview, the scientist explains the complex physical phenomena of interaction between atmosphere and ocean to me. He chooses the blackboard to make a drawing for me. After the interview I plan to take a picture of the blackboard drawing.

Before I take it, I wipe off parts of the drawing. I repeat wiping off parts, taking pictures several times.

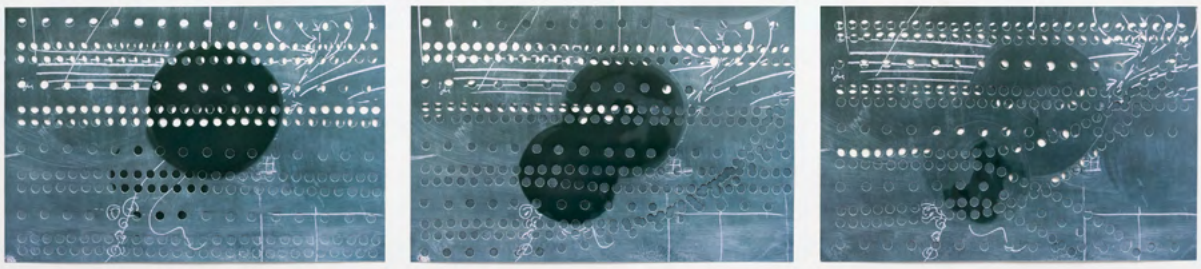
I combine two printed photographs, layer them, but do not match them perfectly. In this position I perforate the photographs in horizontal rows. The last step is to layer the photographs exactly one upon the other.



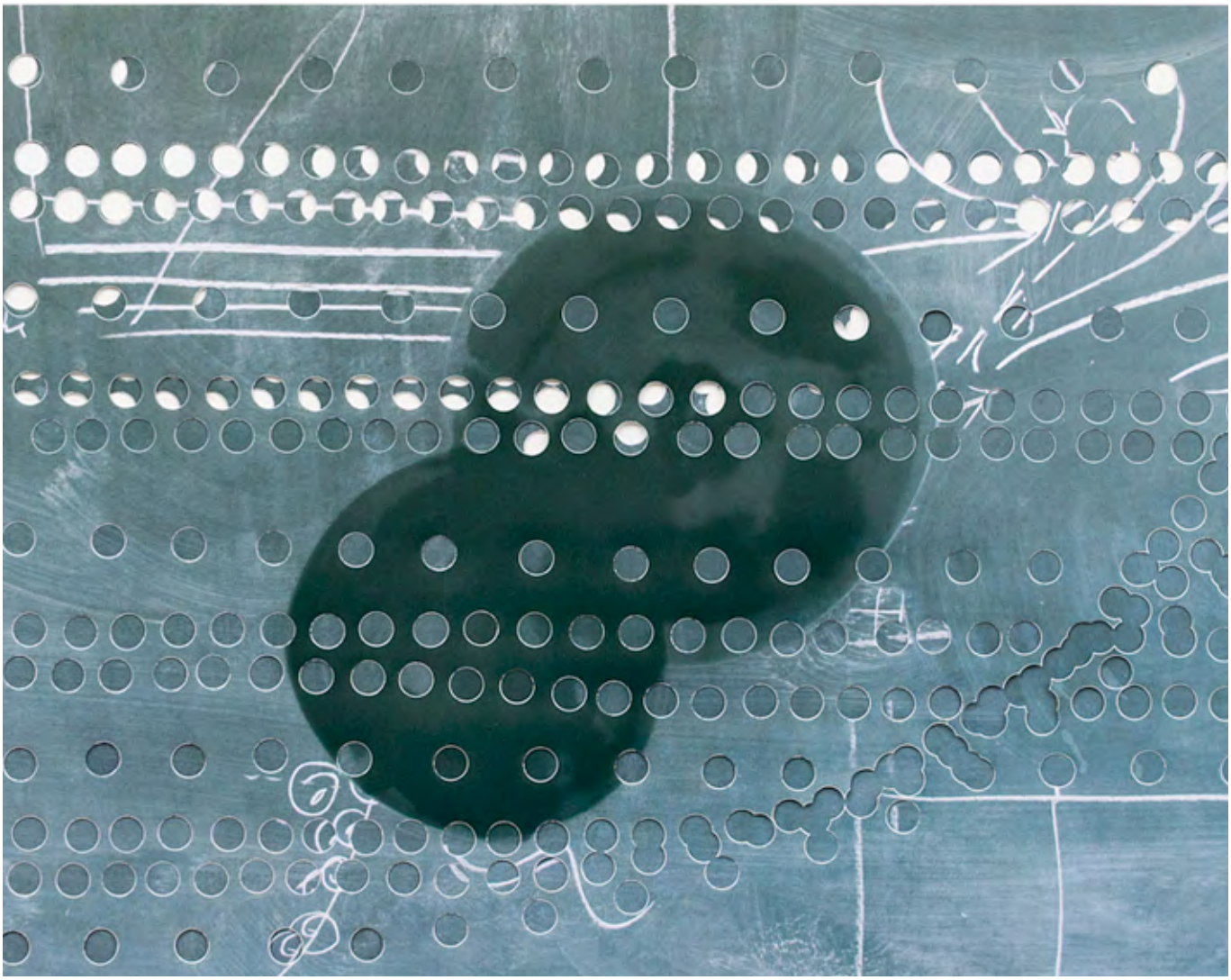
***Blackboard Drawing 1***
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015



***Blackboard Drawing 1-03***
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015



***Blackboard Drawing 2***
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015

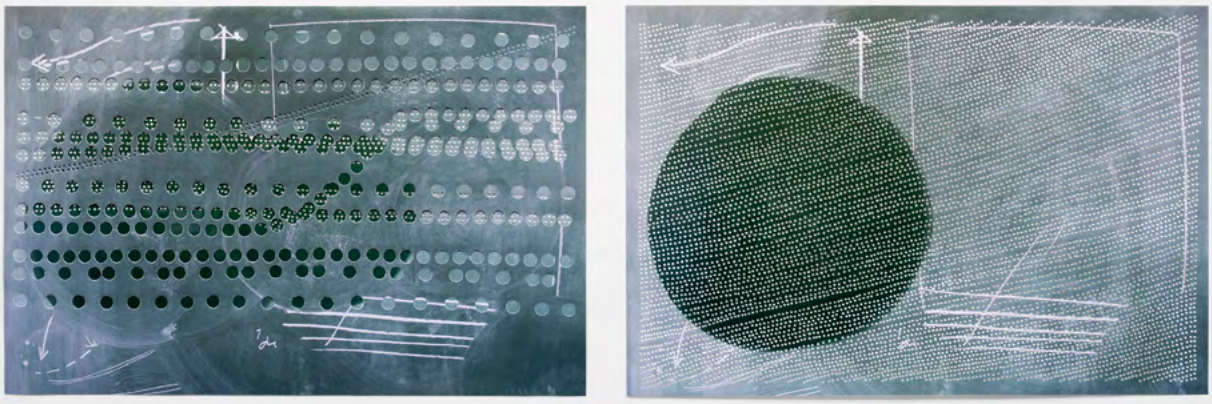


***Blackboard Drawing 2,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015

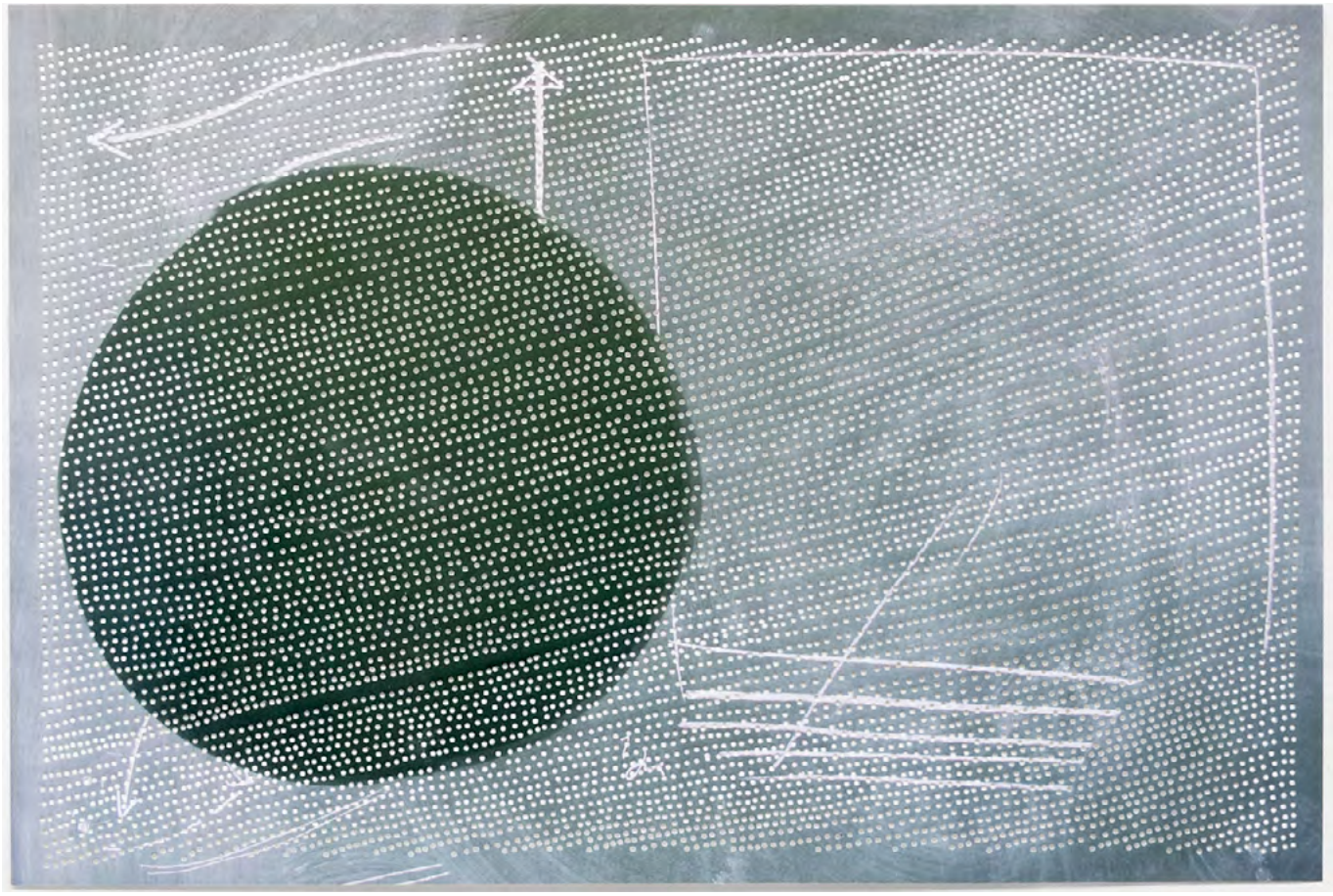
## *Blackboard Drawing 3*

I leave the system of the process used in Blackboard Drawing 1 and 2:

Combining different sizes of holes for perforation, the row of holes are diagonal in one layer.



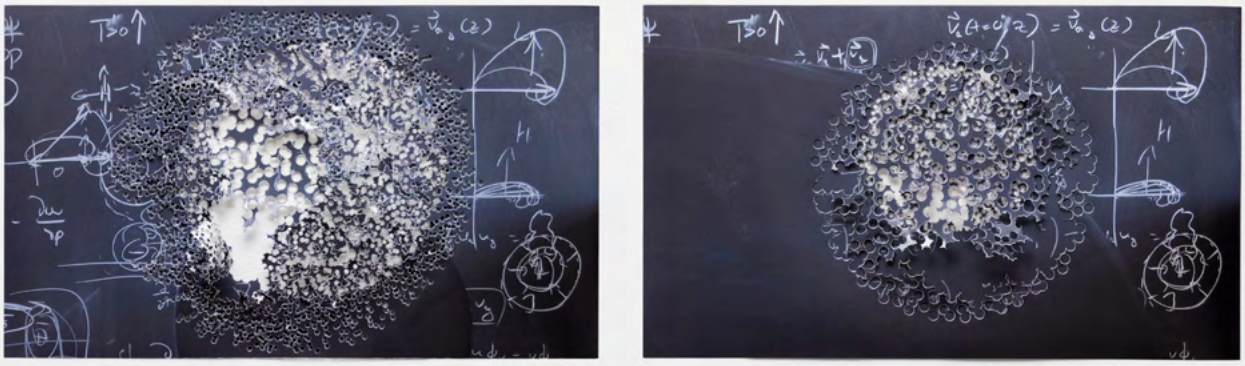
***Blackboard Drawing 3***
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015



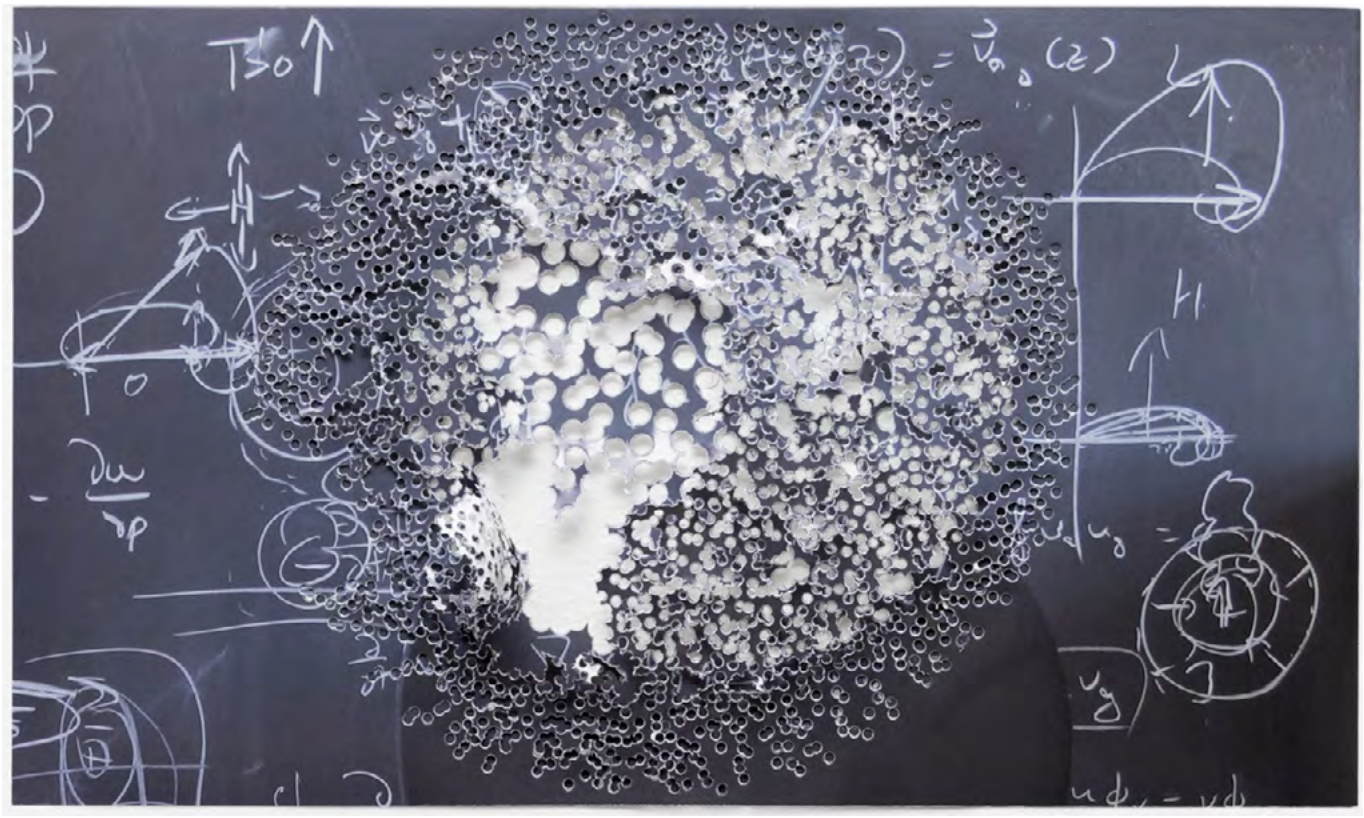
***Blackboard Drawing 3,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 60 x 90 cm, 2015

## *Blackboard Drawing 4*

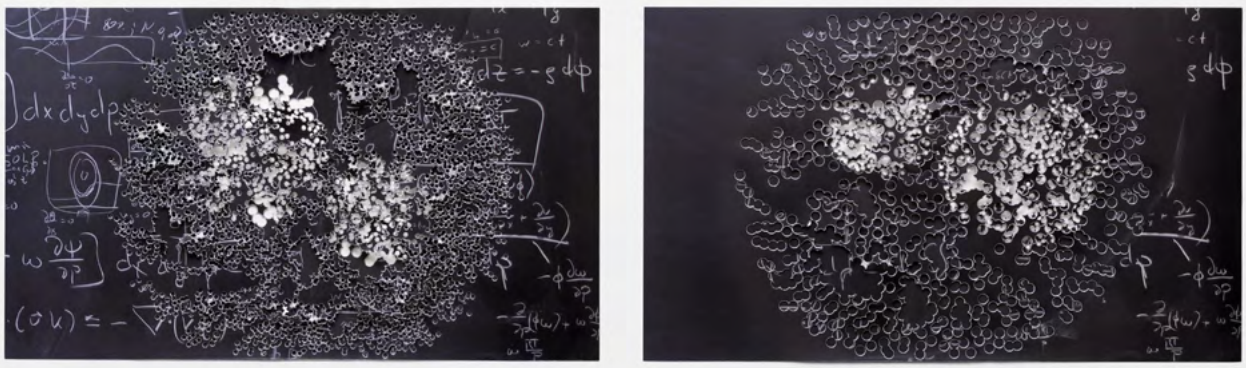
I punch fields in the shape of a circle into the photographs and layer two photographs with different sized holes.



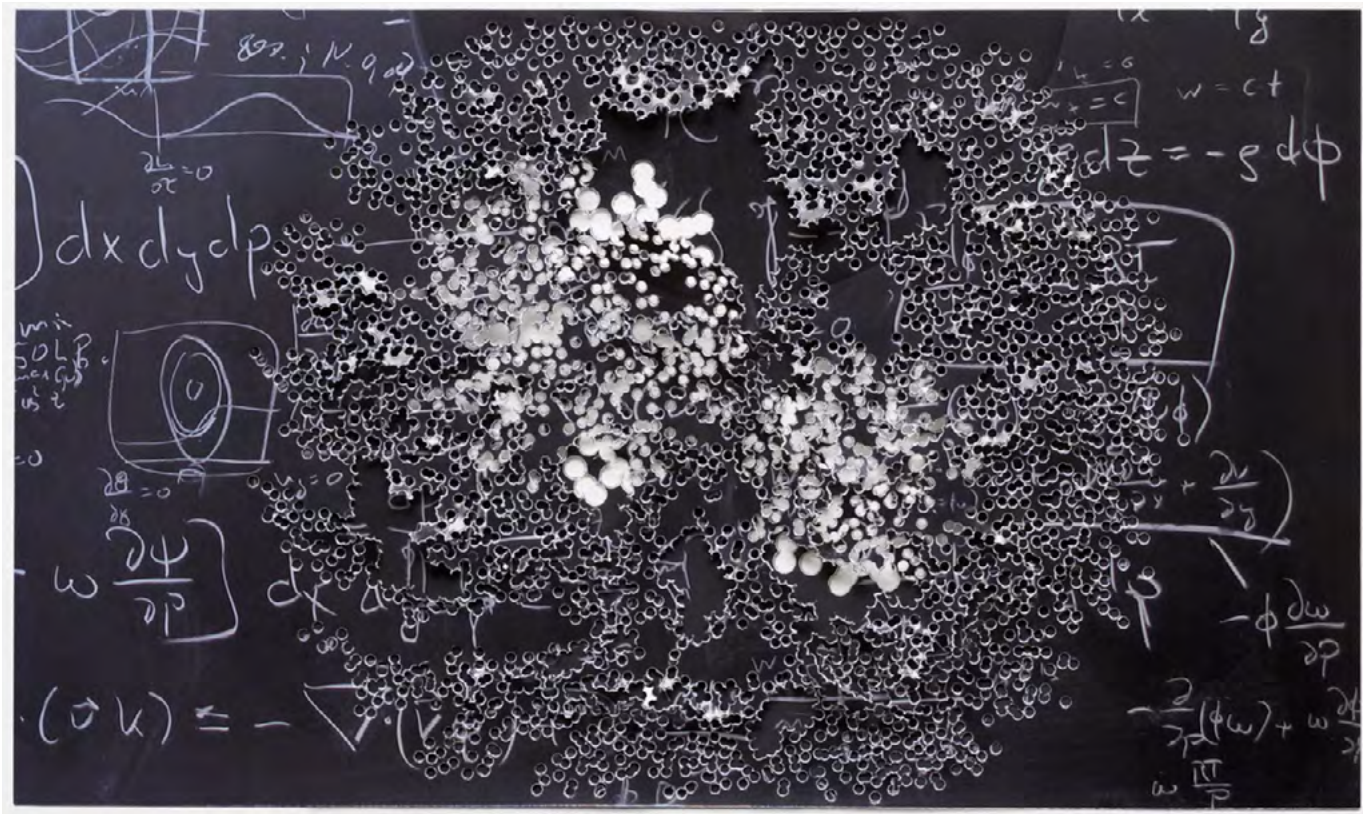
***Blackboard Drawing 4-01***
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



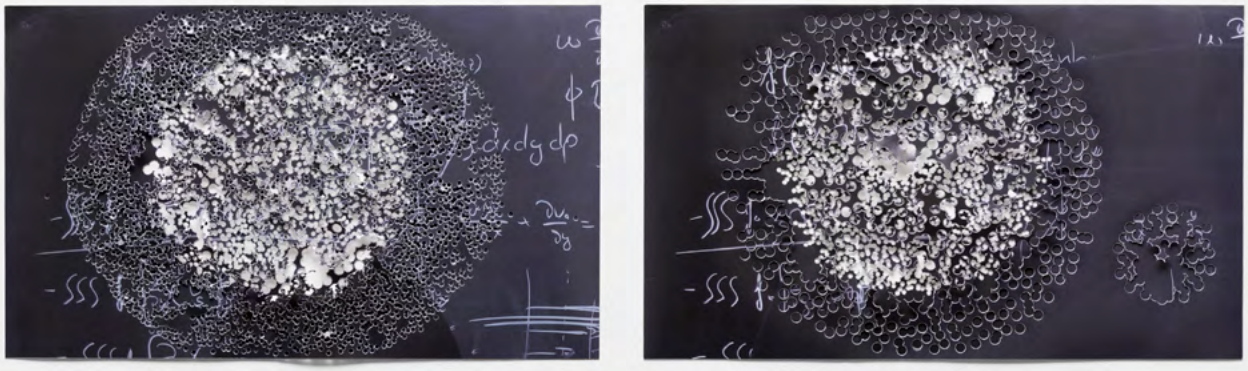
***Blackboard Drawing 4-01,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



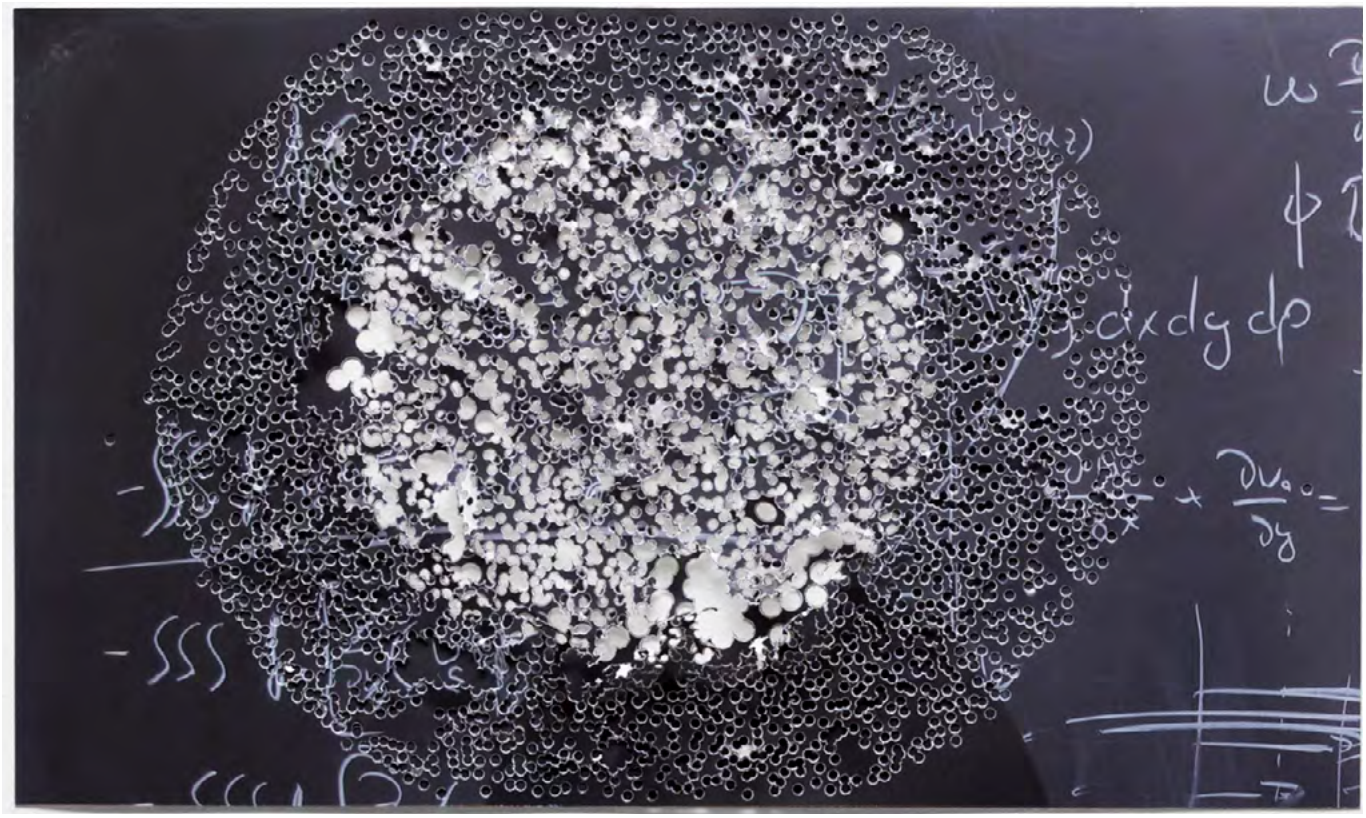
***Blackboard Drawing 4-02***
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



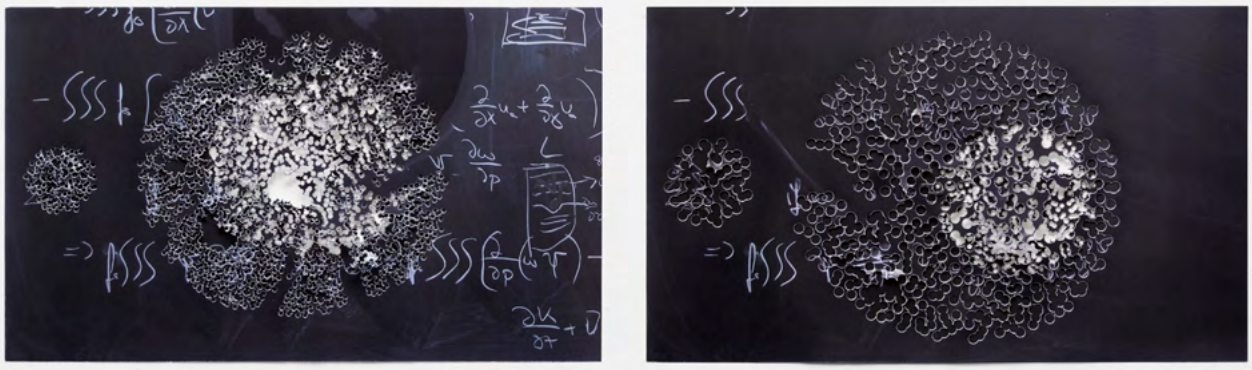
***Blackboard Drawing 4-02,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



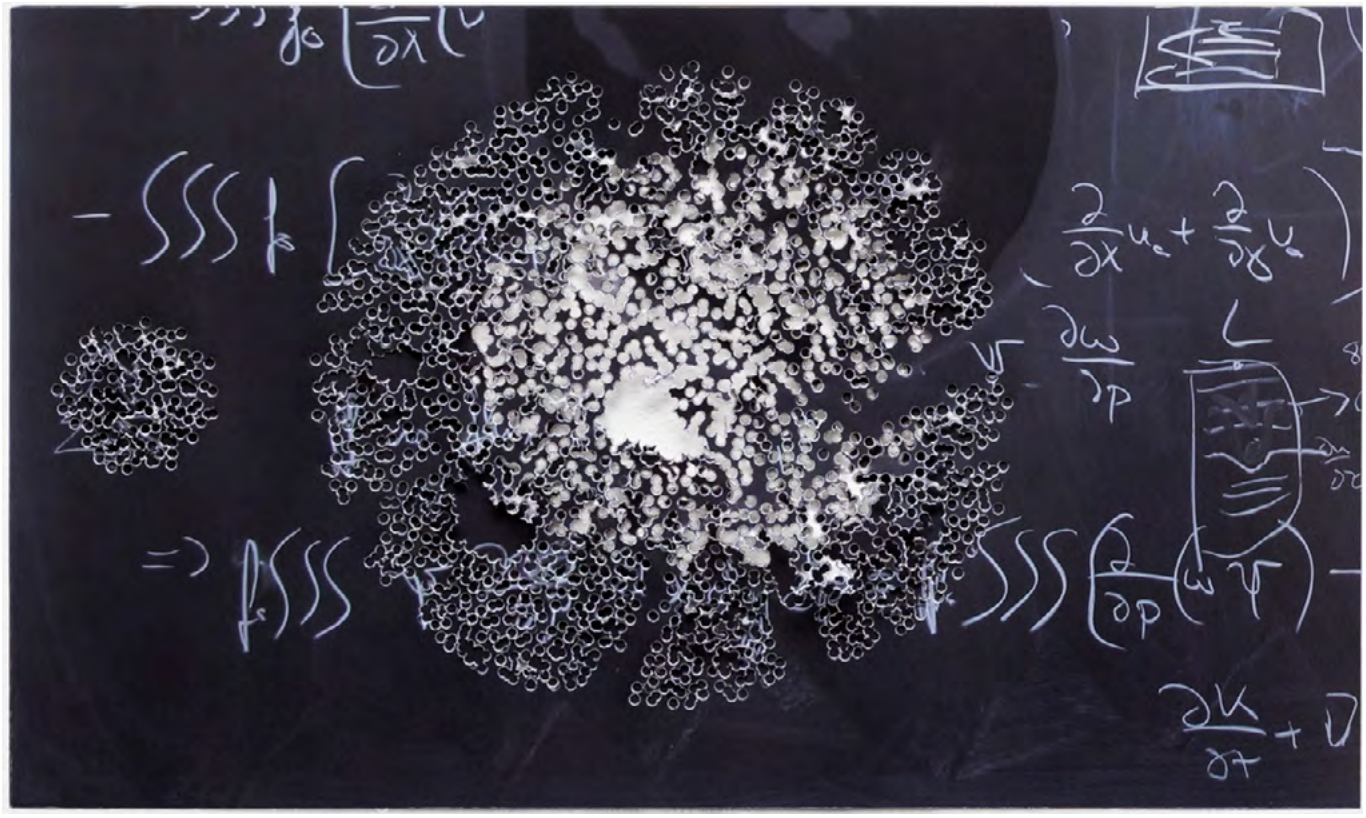
***Blackboard Drawing 4-03***
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



***Blackboard Drawing 4-03,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



***Blackboard Drawing 4-04***
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015



***Blackboard Drawing 4-04,*** *Detail*
Photography, Perforation, each 45 x 30 cm, 2015