



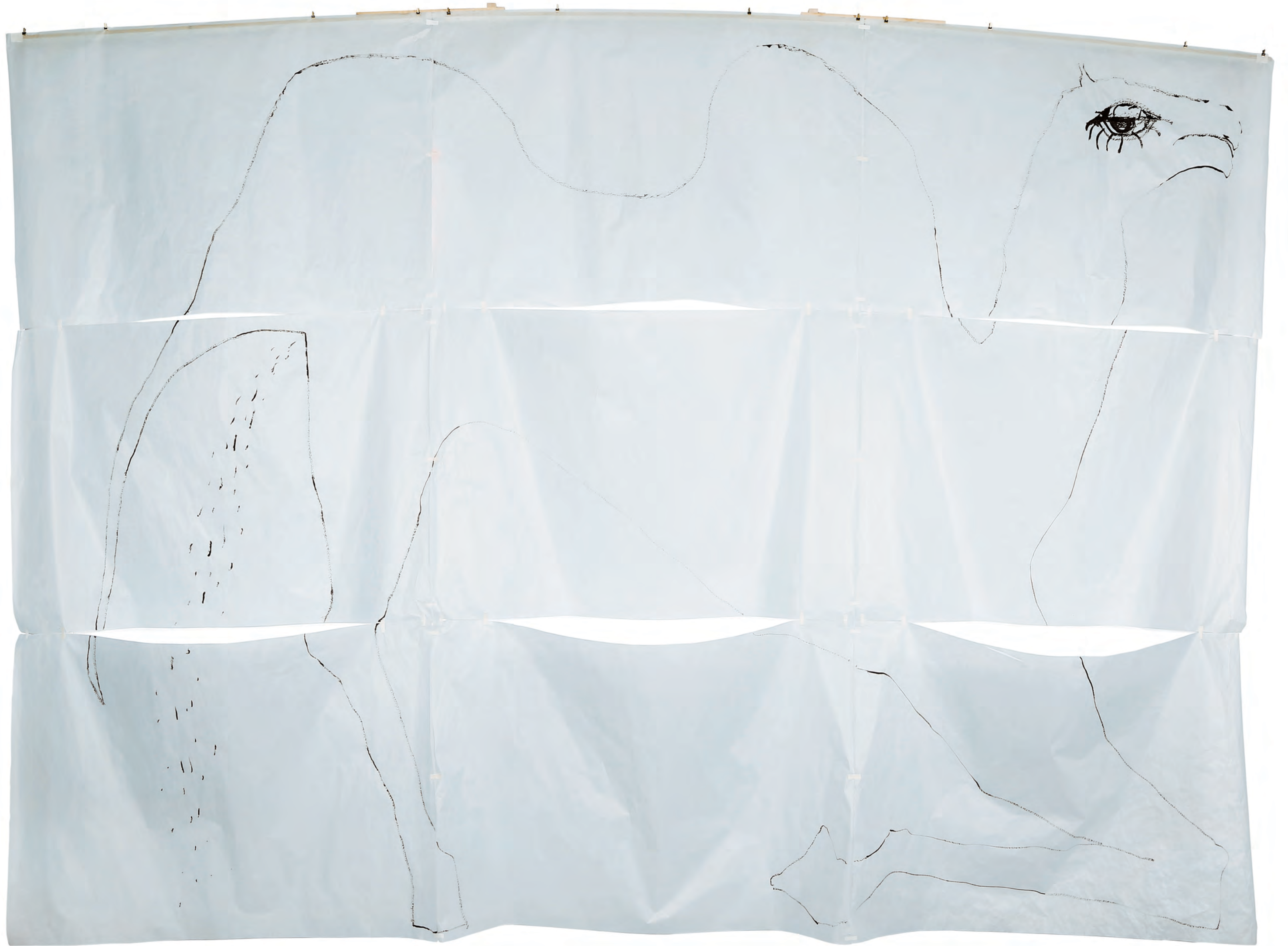
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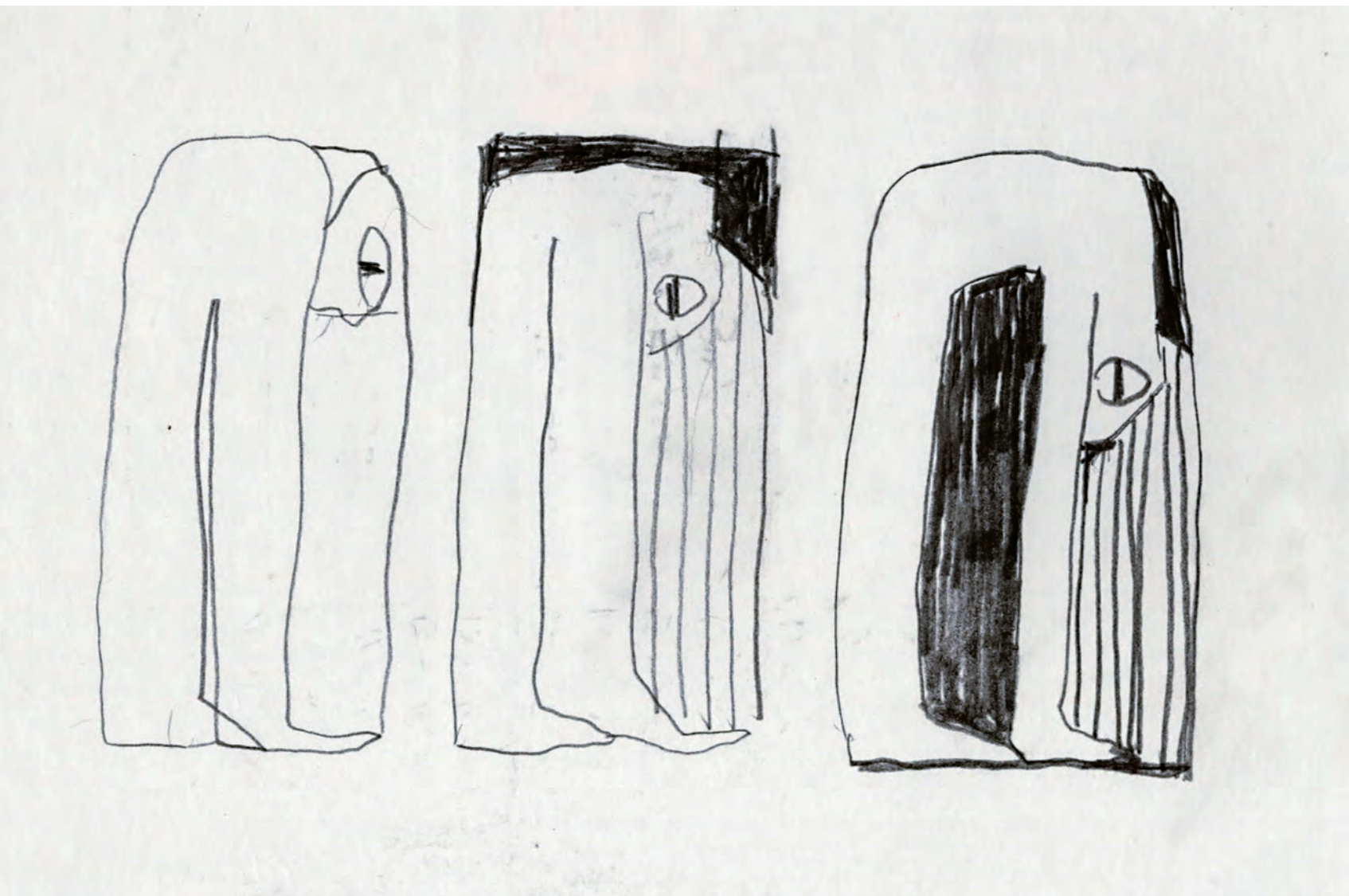
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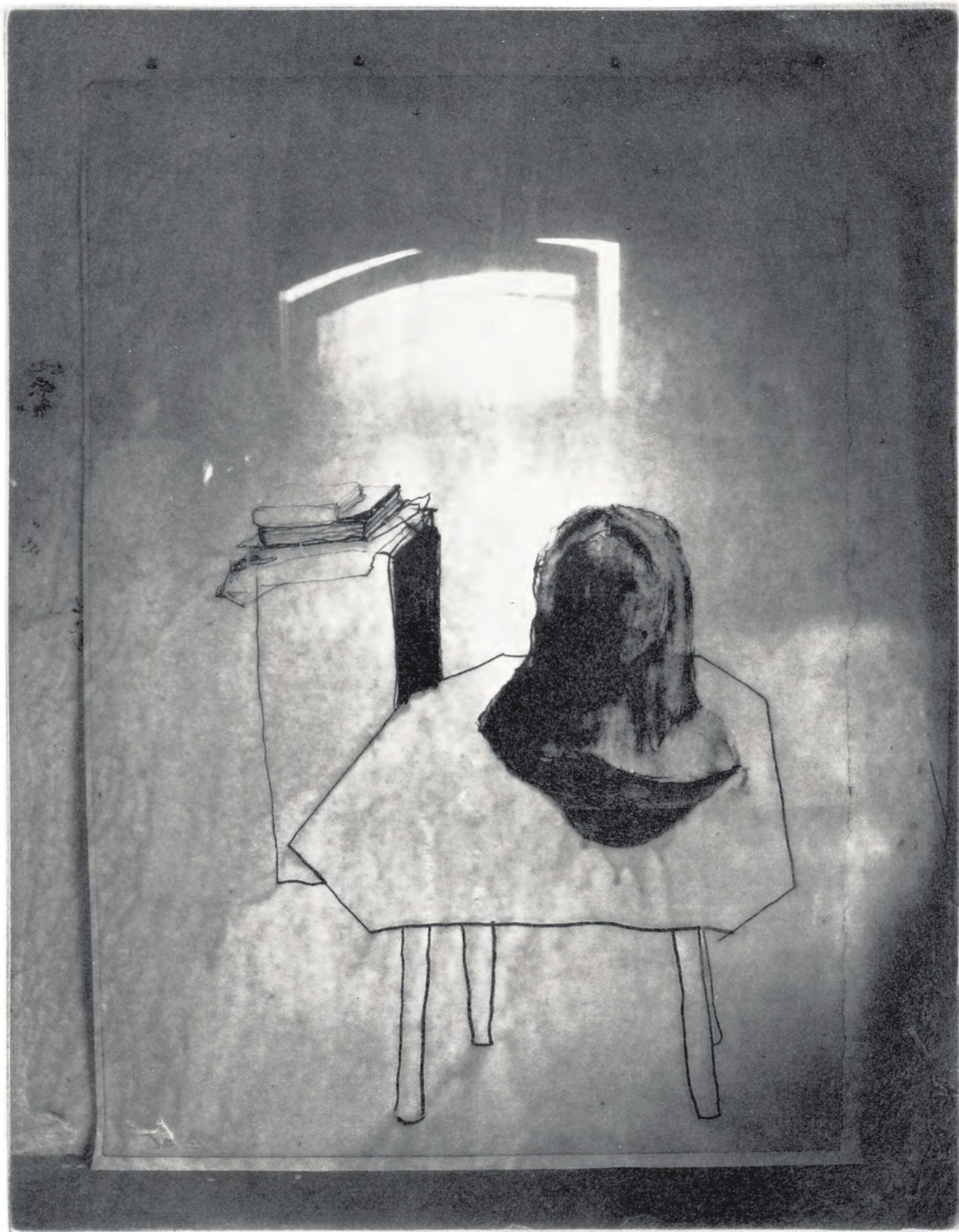


BLUNT LIVER

SHAHAR YAHALOM









BLUNT LIVER

WORKS (before 2019)

TOMBS (2019–2022)

NOTES ON DECAPITATION

Frank Heath

THE BIG SLEEP, THE LITTLE DEATH or HI, SHAHAR

Tchelet Ram

HEADS (2019–2022)

BLUNT LIVER

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TOMBS

This series contains 9 tombs made of plaster.

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Each tomb originated from a sculpture made by another sculptor. They are constructed according to the logic of a multi-part mold: after the original sculpture is removed, the mold is sealed. The resulting tomb is a non-detailed shape that follows the contours of its origin in the form of a three centimeter thick shell.





RAVENS SCULPTOR: ALON GIL







JACKAL SCULPTOR: ALON GIL



LEGS





WOMAN AND CHILD SCULPTOR: YACHIEL SHEMI
GUARDIANS: ATELIER SHEMI AND THE FAMILY







NOTES ON DECAPITATION

⚡ Late one Christmas Eve in the 1950s my great aunt and uncle were killed in a horrific car crash. Throughout my childhood in the 80s I noticed that anytime the accident came up in conversation it was still very difficult for my grandma to acknowledge. It was understandable considering the tragic loss, but I sensed there was something dark and secretive about this event for her. Clearly it wasn't something we should talk or ask about. It wasn't until I was an adult, late one night, very reticent, my mother revealed that in the crash they were both decapitated.

⚡ The separation of a head from its body cannot be survived. Fingers, toes, an arm, or even multiple limbs can be successfully amputated, but never a complete head.

⚡ Decapitations may occur for a number of reasons: execution (French Revolution), sacrifice (ancient Maya), ritual murder (Jeffrey Dahmer), posthumously for preservation or study (Mütter Museum), as trophy (heads on pikes, taxidermied animals), terrorism (hostage beheading videos), or by accident (my great aunt and uncle [allegedly]).

⚡ Ancient statues are often missing their heads or limbs. Some were made with detachable or swappable heads. Others lost their crown during a raid, uprising, or hostile take-over. Most statues that glorified an overthrown leader were defiled in this manner. In other cases, the neck or limb joints, points of structural weakness, are where a break would naturally occur.

⚡ Shortly before my grandma died, she revealed more specifics: The heads of my great aunt and uncle became detached and were thrown from the vehicle. Apparently, they smashed through the windshield, launched into the freezing air, transformed into a hot molten glass, and rolled across the pavement fusing into one. The volume of one head, made of glass, mirrored black volcanic rock. Their two distorted, yet recognizable, faces twisted across its craggy surface. None of the organic tissues or bone from their human heads could be found or accounted for, and no one could explain it.

⚡ During the process of making cast sculptures, the head is sometimes severed from the model, breaking the shape into parts that will easily release from the mold. The head of say, the statue of an owl might be unceremoniously cut off to be cast separately. This can be a simple way to eliminate an undercut and prevent the statue from getting stuck inside its mother shell. The original copy must be destroyed for the purpose of making it reproducible.

⚡ One pervasive urban legend claims that the body of Walt Disney (or possibly only his severed head) was cryogenically frozen after his death in 1966. Walt’s head remains (allegedly) on ice until the day when technology may exist to reanimate him back to life. Frozen, in hope that humans will eventually be able to reattach the head to a new healthy body or crack the code of our brains, transforming them into accessible and transferable hard drives which contain our memories and consciousness.

⚡ In New York City, heads (or other loose body parts) found in the wild are sent to Hart Island. The small uninhabited island in the East River serves as the city’s potter’s field where the bodies and detached parts of approx. one million unidentified and poor are interred. The cemetery is operated by inmates from a nearby prison who bury the dead in simple pine box coffins stacked in mass graves.

⚡ The rest of the family simply didn’t believe it. They elected to believe that the heads were somehow missing or destroyed. So, the police gave the glass object to my grandparents in an evidence bag and advised them to keep quiet. They wrapped it in a quilt and kept it in a trunk in the basement. Grandma said that she would go downstairs and take it out, unfold its blanket on the floor, and sit next to it sometimes. She was afraid, but nothing ever happened. It never spoke to her and there seemed to be no curse, no mysterious incidents, no further decapitations. It was calming for her to stare into the glass eyes, but silently, it haunted the house. What could they do with it? They couldn’t just throw it away, it was her sister’s head. Her brother-in-law’s as well. Grandpa tried to pay a groundskeeper to bury it in the cemetery plot with its bodies, but that backfired, he went all over town talking about it. Eventually, they decided to bury it near the cement birdbath in the backyard, and promised to never speak of it again.

⚡ In a televised interview from prison (*Dateline* NBC, 1994) the serial killer Jeffrey Dhamer and his father discussed the murders for the first time together. In the most chilling anecdote from the broadcast, they recall an incident where, in the living room of his apartment Jeffrey refused to show the contents of a suspicious box to his father. Tense and agitated,

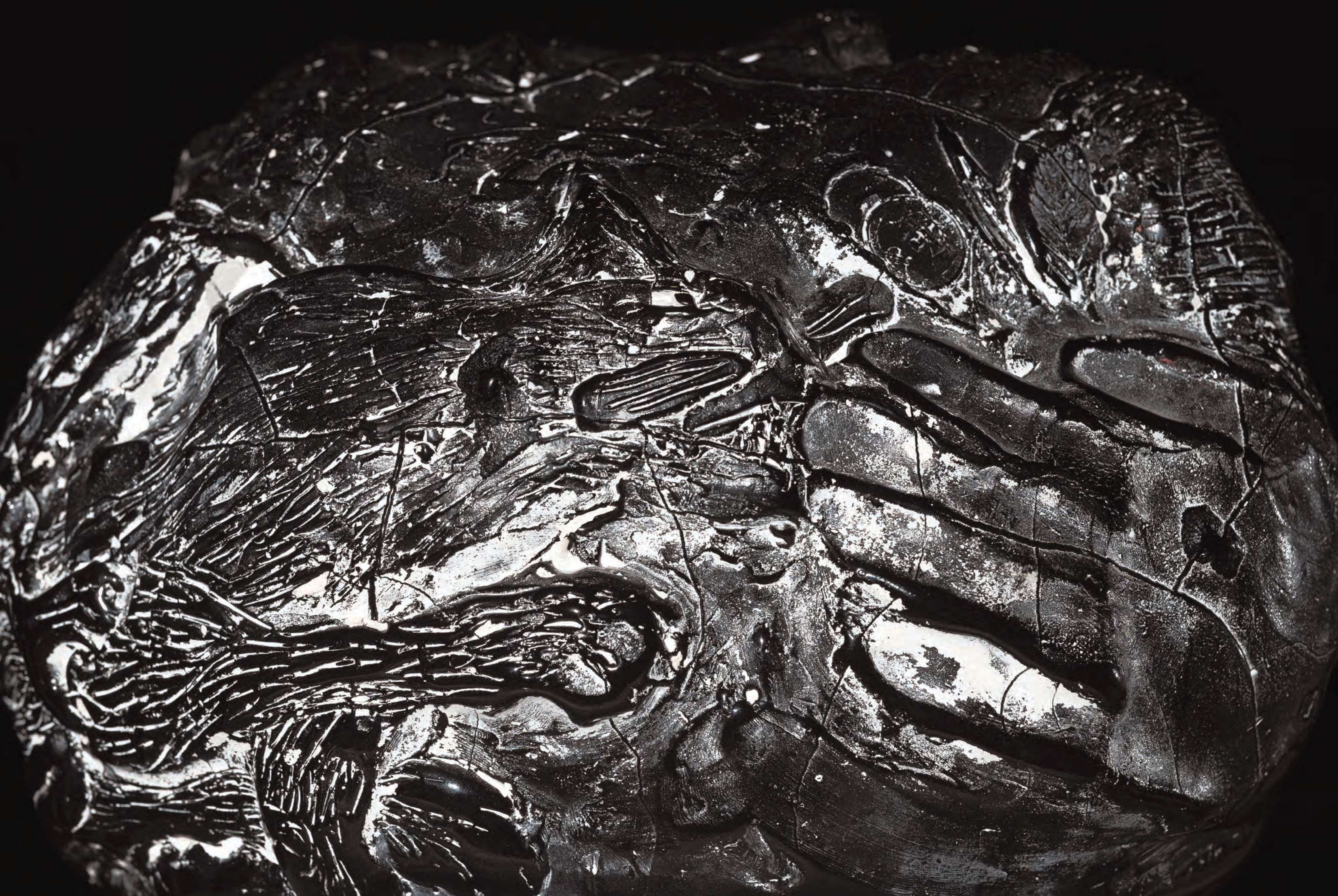
Jeffrey wouldn’t back down. After a brief argument, his father gave in and left without finding out what was inside. Had its contents (the mummified head and genitals of one of his victims) been revealed at that time it may have saved the lives of numerous subsequent victims.

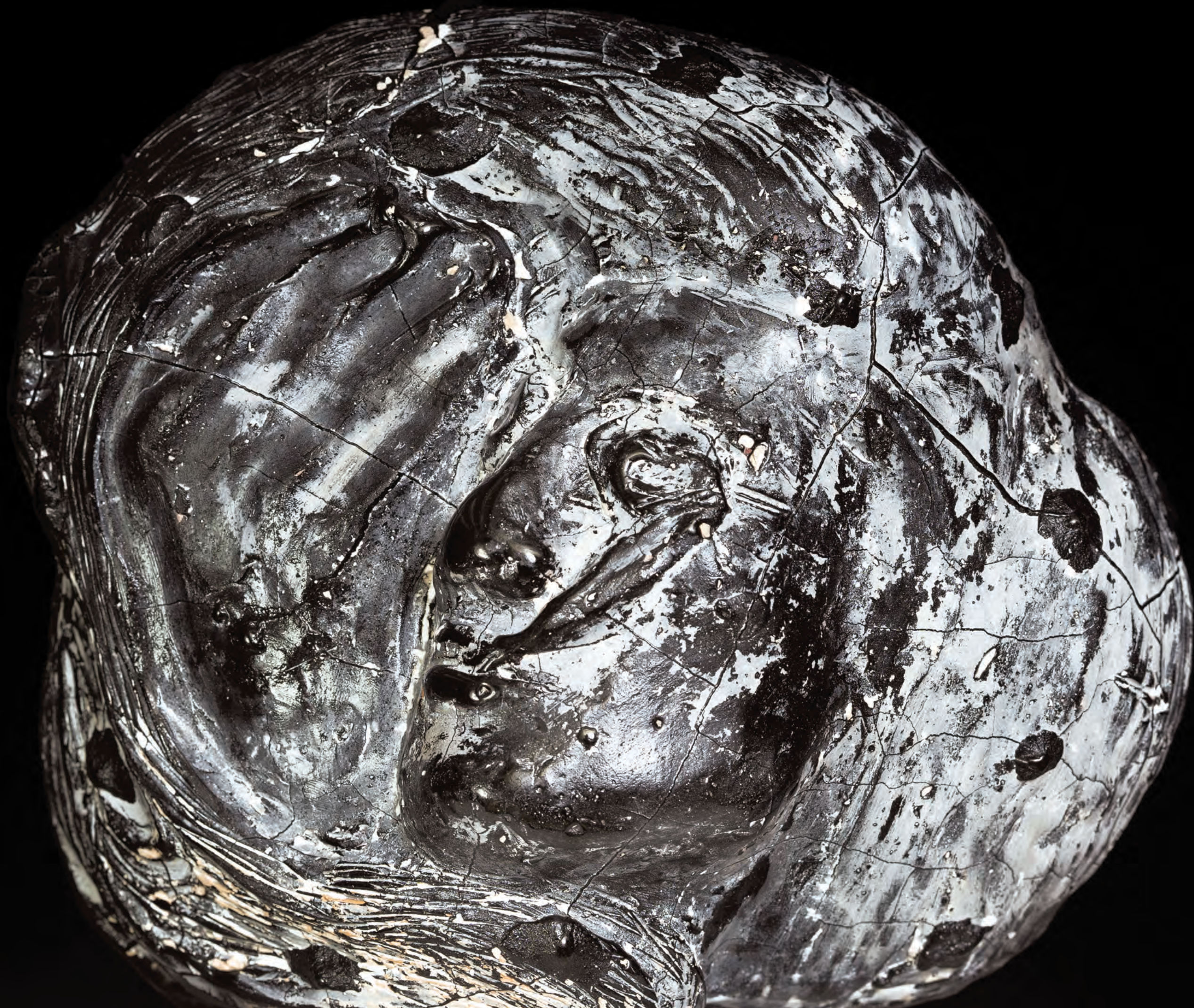
⚡ Every few years when I make a trip home, my parents like to drive us around town and show me what has changed. Mostly it’s more empty storefronts and fast-food chains. We usually make a stop at my grandparents’ old house to have a look. The people who live in it now don’t take care of it. Paint is peeling everywhere, screens around the porch are shredded, and my grandpa’s once immaculate lawn is completely dead and brown, except for a small patch near the birdbath.

⚡ France staged its final execution using the guillotine in 1977.

Frank Heath
01/22
NYC









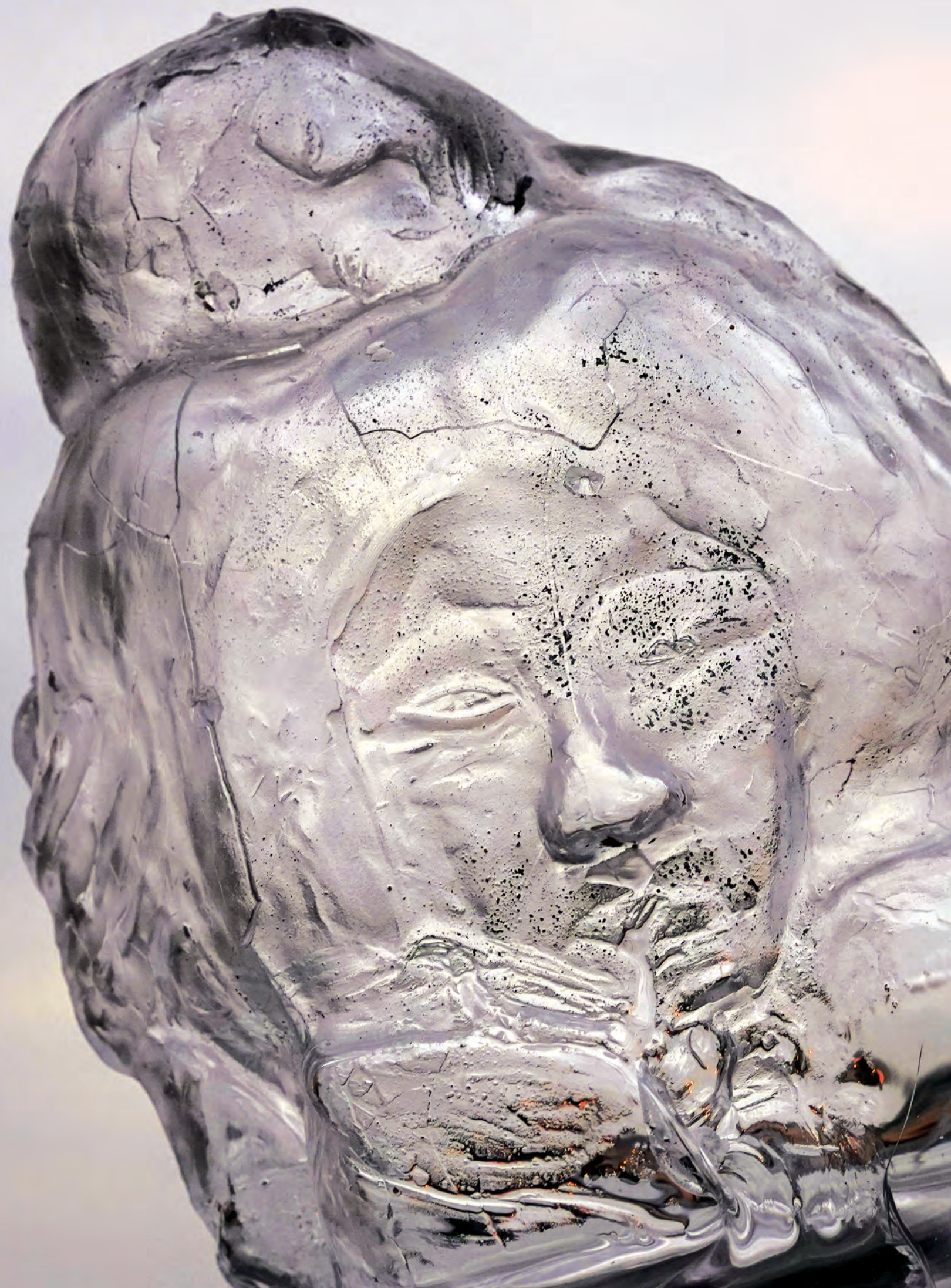
















BLUNT LIVER

Adam and his helpmate were sitting and weeping and mourning for him, and they did not know what to do (with Abel), for they were unaccustomed to burial. A raven (came), one of its fellow birds was dead (at its side). (The raven) said: I will teach this man what to do. It took its fellow and dug in the earth, hid it and buried it before them. Adam said: Like this raven will I act. He took the corpse of Abel and dug in the earth and buried it. The Holy One, blessed be He, gave a good reward to the ravens in this world.¹

(Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 21)

I tried to write about Shahar Yahalom's sculptures during the day. I failed. I wrote of them at night. I am using the word "sculptures," even though there are also drawings and monotypes, since the sculptural logic pulsates through these as well, forming a condensed space where the images are compressed together as in a dream, manifested in and through the material. The sculptures are drawn and the drawings are sculptured. Images and figures embedded in the material, subject to its inner boundaries, their heads bowed before the law imposed on them. Yahalom is the ruler of the maze while simultaneously trying to find her way through it; the legislator and the one who follows the law, enumerated into pedantic actions whose logic remains obscure, internal and at the same time completely visible to the beholder.

In Yahalom's works, the line is not used only to convey a state of mind or capture an image on paper, but goes on to pierce through the material, making room for the image inside it. In the glass works, for instance, the line becomes inextricable from the glass itself. Line and matter become one to the point that sometimes the line is invisible and only reveals itself when the light hits the sculpture, exposing the surface and salvaging the image from its depths. Light infiltrates the sculpture, penetrating the transparent armor and trapped in it, like a moon that reflects the light of the sun. Indeed, in Yahalom's works it is difficult to distinguish the inside from the outside, mother from son, the fragmented from the whole,

¹ Translated by Rabbi Gerald Friedlander, 1916, London. <https://www.sefaria.org.il/> (accessed January 31st, 2021).

wakefulness from slumber, and life from death. The child's head is placed on the mother's head, as if it were another organ of her body, and the glass fragments are fused together. Looking at them, one can see the inner space that remains empty, trapping the air inside.

Yahalom's works are observation spaces for the delicate and deceptive transitions between movement and stillness, between the living and the dead. For her, death is not a static and absolute thing, it is not one dimensional or one directional, but an essence that one must approach in the most physical way, by following the procedures of the undertaker: the one who is with the deceased, washes the dead body, shrouding it, building a box and a mold that trace its outline or places it in the ground. At times it seems that Yahalom is a descendant from a long line of undertakers. But while ancient burial practices (mummification, burial with grave goods, preservation of internal organs and so on) were devised to allow the dead to continue the passage to the afterlife, with the act of molding Yahalom engages in the manifestation of the departed as a sculpture. One might say that she is more interested in the tomb than in whatever is entombed – be it a wreath, shoes, a donkey, or a white owl, her fascination lies with the sculptural space. Building a mold is an act of taking care, a thoughtful caring action based on profound respect and careful observation of the object, whose distinctive shape can be learned and internalized by encasing it. Through the shaping of a mold, the body or object is removed from the equation, and the entombed becomes a negative space – a material memory, a home for the space of the absent body. The tomb-mold is a material and a silent representative of everything that remains inaccessible to us.

Yahalom's tombs are built around sculptures that represent nature – a jackal, a headless white owl, flowers, a rock; they capture the anima of the inanimate as spirit embedded, accumulated, or trapped in matter. However, Yahalom is not a “spiritual” artist, but an artist “of-spirit.” She does not see the world of spirit as a higher realm that overshadows the physical and material life, but rather puts the inanimate matter at the core of her actions. An artist of spirit – or an artist in-spirit if you will – lives within the laws of nature, as part of nature – with the gust of wind, animals, trees, rocks, tombstones – all of which have a soul. The tomb, like the sculpture, concerns eternity, which requires a perspective distance from the now. One might say that unlike contemporary art, which relinquished the possibility of eternity in favor of contact with the present, Yahalom looks for ancient values of action and approaches them from the present.

Yahalom has a relationship with the dead, but no less so with the living. Her sculptures are the outcome of collaborations with artists who work in disciplines that lie beyond her expertise. In many respects, even before she decides what she wants to sculpt, she chooses whom she wants to work with

– usually joining forces with artists who operate in very esoteric areas or specialize in a highly specific activity. For her, this is as an opportunity to expand her sculptural language, and to feed the actions of her collaborators, so that a space of mutual learning takes shape, a tangle of interactions. The glass heads, for instance, started from her desire to work with glassblowers. Accordingly, each glass head encapsulates an internal relationship between at least two figures, drawn together in one head. And so, beyond informing and establishing the circumstances of their making, the relationship also imbues the sculptures themselves. The same is also true of the tombs: First Yahalom will choose the person whose work she wants to entomb, and only then she will choose the sculpture. She then buries the sculpture with plaster, and once it has dried, opens the tomb, exhumes the object, returns it to its owner, seals the tomb, and takes it for herself. For this exhibition, she has collaborated with the sculptor Gil Alon, the artist Eti Levi, the family of the artist Yechiel Shemi, photographer Goni Riskin, musician Aviv Ezra and others.

THE THRESHOLD OF LANGUAGE

The exhibition title, *Blunt Liver*, carries Yahalom's fascination into the audial realm. “Blunt” and “liver” are the two images that activate Yahalom in this body of work. Here too, the juxtaposition holds an oxymoronic verbal space: Blunt means straightforward or brusque, as well as rough and dull. But pronounced differently, it could also be read as an indication of life, as the “one who lives.” Furthermore, in Hebrew, the word for liver (כֶּבֶד) doubles as “heavy,” introducing associations of mass and gravitation, the dissonance between the weight of the sculptures and their ethereal appearance. Yahalom does not need the exhibition's name to act as an elucidating title; all it has to do is place us in the conceptual and mental field from which she operated. The title conjures an experience of a numb individual who lives in a dull stupor and connects to a raw, pulsating organ. It unites the darkest organ in the human body, entrusted with the removal of toxins and the dullness, with the rounded movement that attests that the weapon has lost its sharp edge. A raw, exposed, and blunt existence.

In language, Yahalom is in search for the places where the same sound carries almost opposing meanings – a contronym, which is sometimes referred to as a Janus word or auto-antonym. Like positive and negative, horizontal and vertical, in the attempt to fuse them together, they intersect with one another, creating a foothold from which one can expand ad infinitum and grasp the entire universe. The core of the logic converges into the word's sound and phonetics – into the movement of the lips that utter the word. For her, the linguistic sense that changes from one language to another is secondary in this system, a mere side effect.

The nucleus from which everything emerges is the sound – blunt liver, *kehe kaved* in Hebrew, the movement of air through the lungs and the oral cavity. Yahalom’s focus is on internal organs. If through her burial practices we conceive the museum as a mausoleum – a sumptuous burial hall for the works of art, in this case, we can also think of it as a “mesenterium” – a sac in the abdominal cavity that carries the internal organs crowded together, pressing against one another while maintaining the body’s essential functions. The shift between inside and outside is also reflected in the relationship between molds and casts: in order to see the cast, you have to remove the mold. They always co-exist but must be separated to be witnessed. To be able to see the inside, one must eliminate the outside. The perspective is in constant flux, unable to choose a side. The attempt to hold on to both ends generated a split into two bodies of work, distinct yet intertwined.

Hila Cohen-Schneiderman

Mother and Child
2021
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm
Private collection

Mother and Child
2021
Oil on paper (monotype)
45x45 cm
Private collection

Mother and Child
2021
Oil on paper (monotype)
45x45 cm

Dance
2021
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm

Mother and Child
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
100x70 cm

Eyes
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
60x50 cm



Mother and Child
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
100x70 cm
Private collection

Flowers
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
45x30 cm

Night
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
45x30 cm

Bitch-boy
2016
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Tongues and Fingers
2020
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Headstone
2017
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Mother and Child
2019
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Mother and Child
2019
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Home
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
60x50 cm

Animals
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm
Collection of Anat Green and
Moshe Pinchas

Thorn
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm
Collection of Anat Green and
Moshe Pinchas

Cat-hat
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm
Collection of Anat Green and
Moshe Pinchas

Yoni and Madjul
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm
Collection of Anat Green and
Moshe Pinchas

Stoned
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm

Urn
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
50x35 cm
Private collection

Dead Boy
2016
Oil on paper (monotype)
70x100 cm

Wind
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm
Private collection

Swamp
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm
Private collection

Man On a Woman in a Swamp
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm
Private collection

Wild Boy
2016
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm

Sculpted City
2015
Oil on paper (monotype)
65x65 cm
Collection of Anat Green and
Moshe Pinchas

Breathing Portrait
2019
Oil on paper (monotype)
45x45 cm

BLUNT LIVER

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