









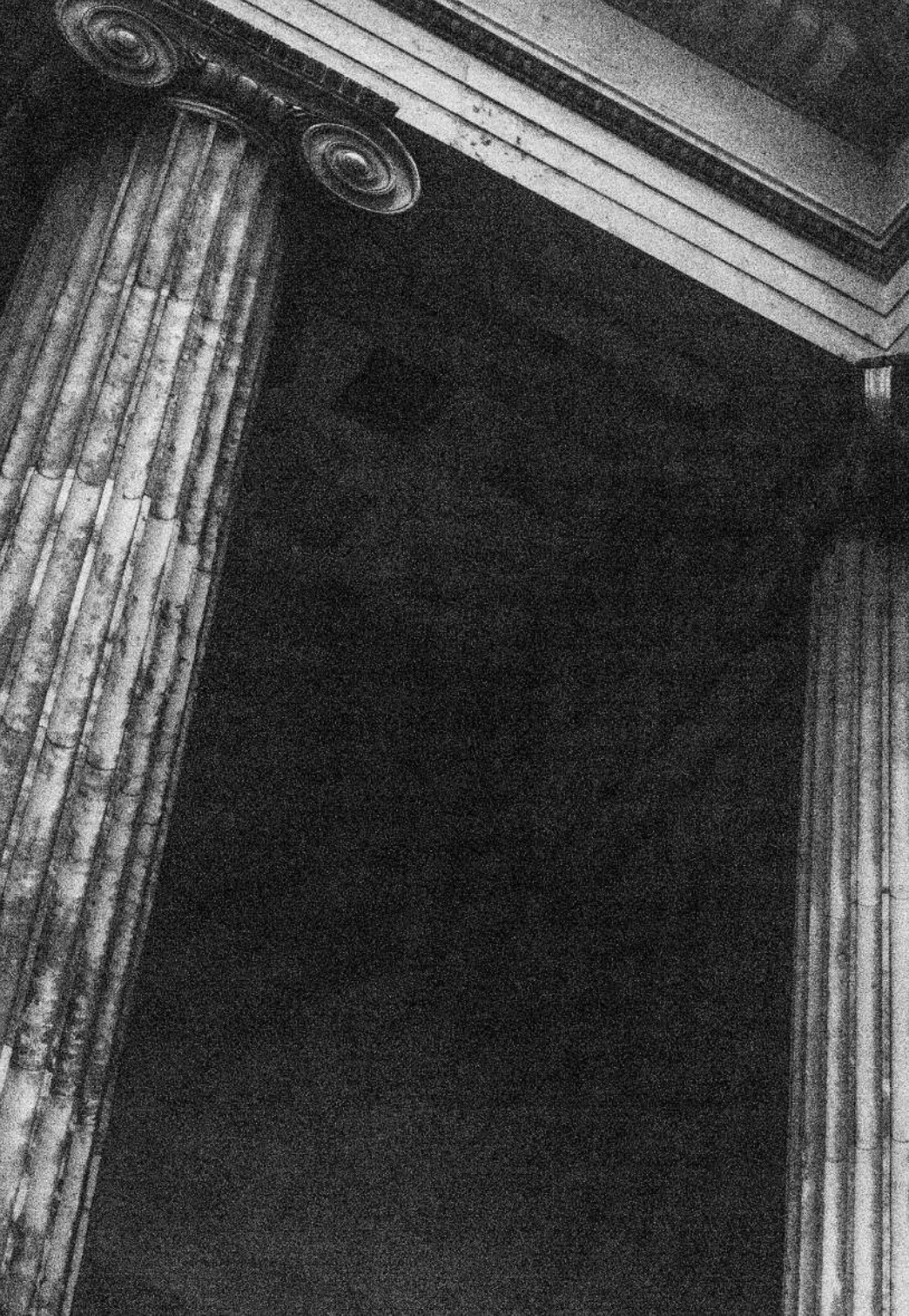
*All the images in this book were taken on
the 31st of January 2020 in London, United Kingdom.*







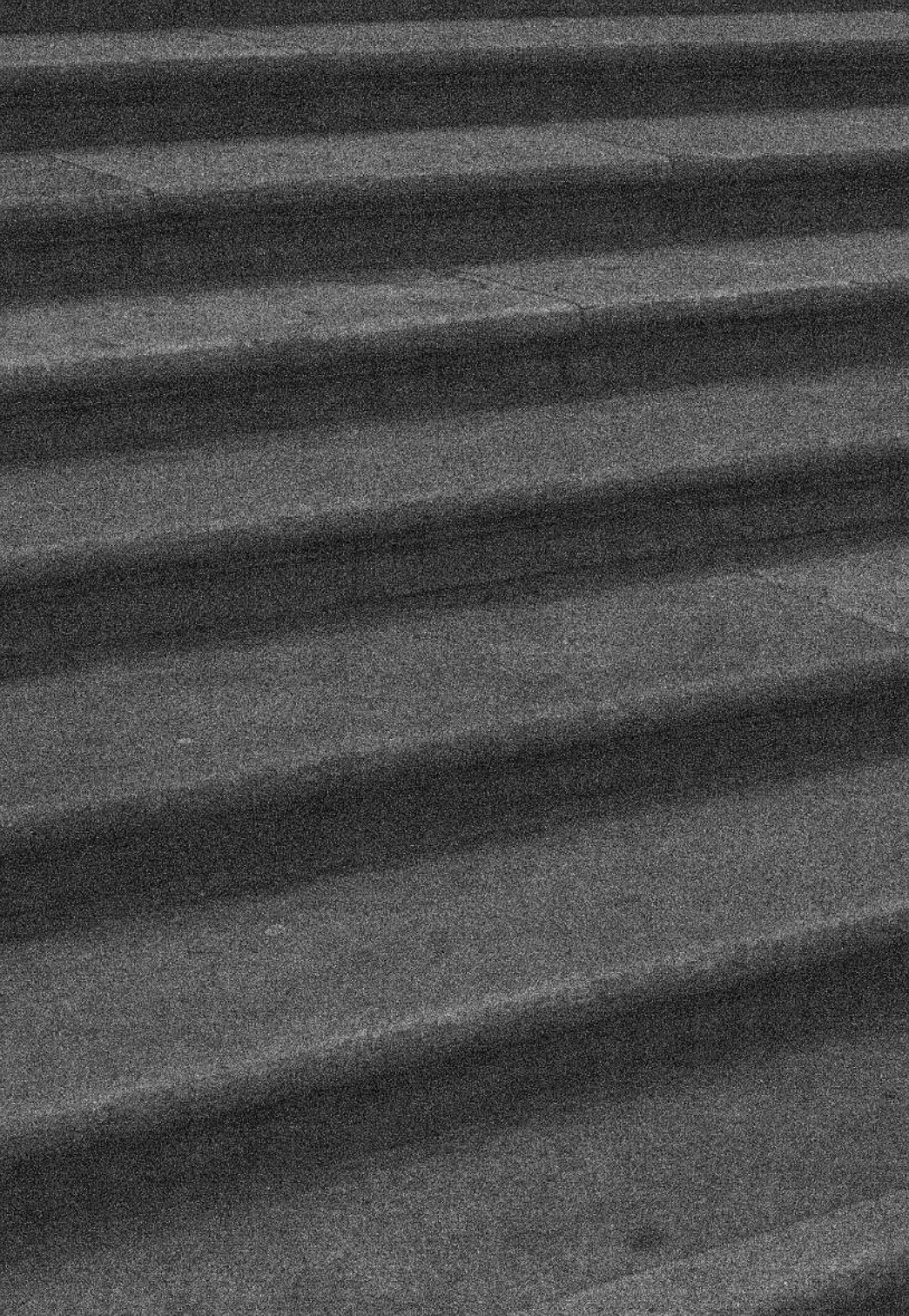
















ОУАСОУАИ
ХОВЕИОУ
ЛОЕ ОУАЕ
МАТОНЕА
ХОУТОНЕА
ЛИКЕОН.Е
АЕХОНКЕ
ИИФЕРНО
ИРВАНСТ
МІКЕНІА
ТІНЕМІ
КАРІСЕР

INSIDE

This is not
an end, but
a beginning

ALEJANDRO

ICVL STUDIO



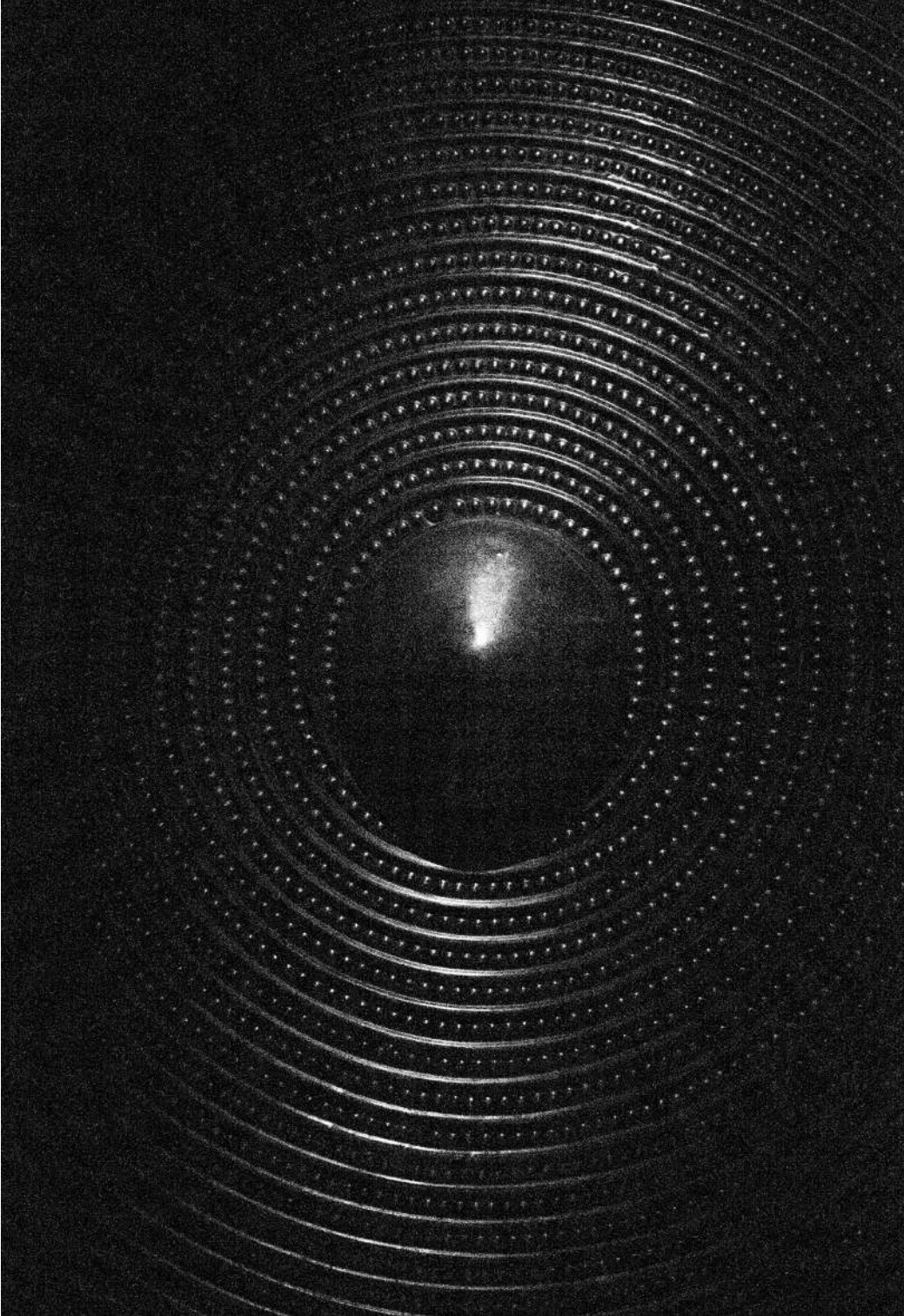
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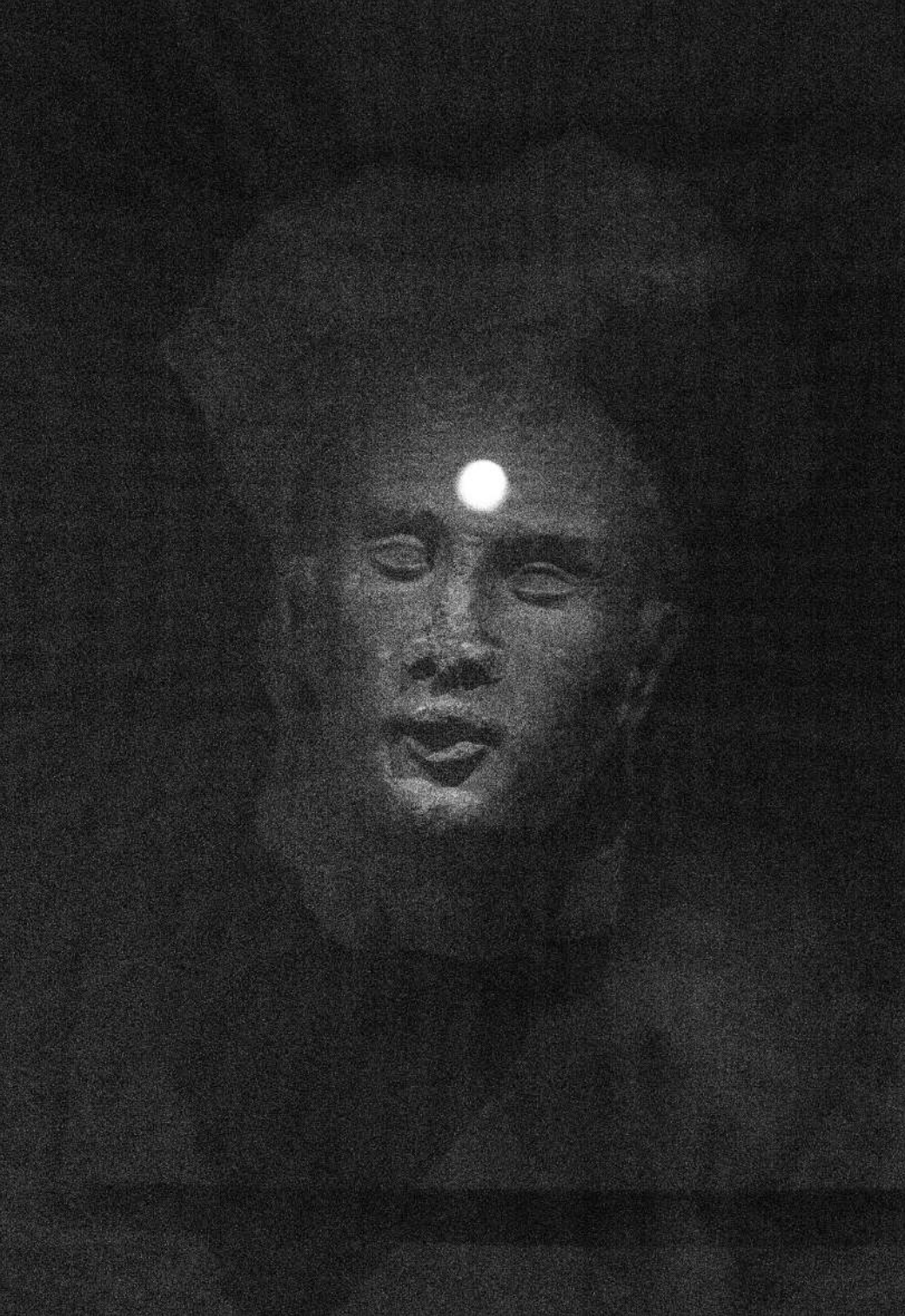
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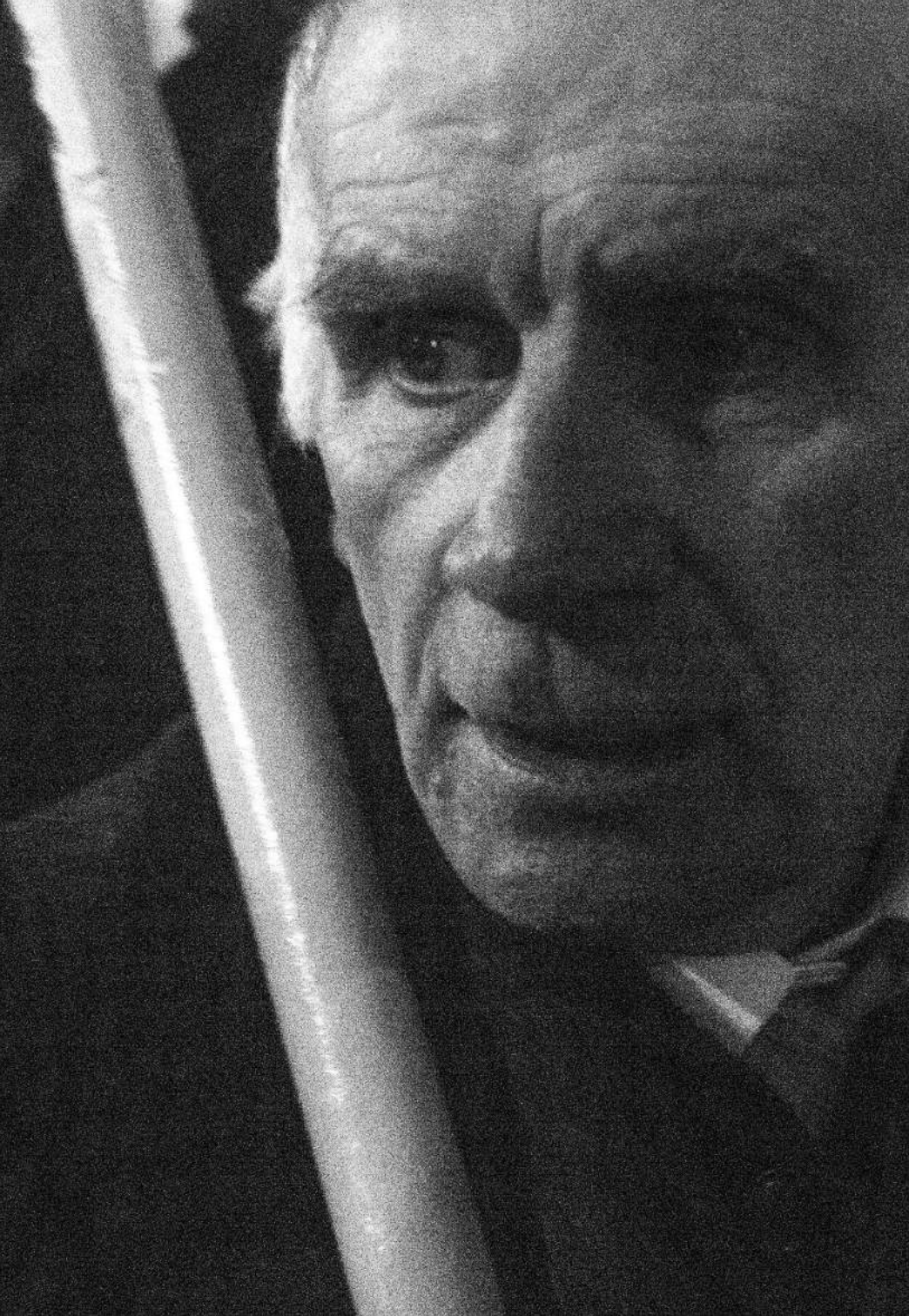






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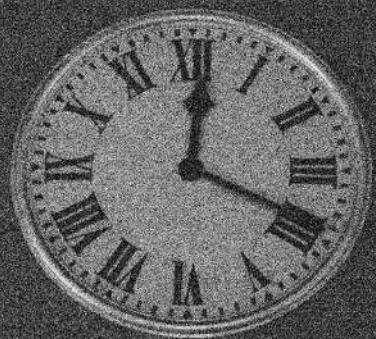




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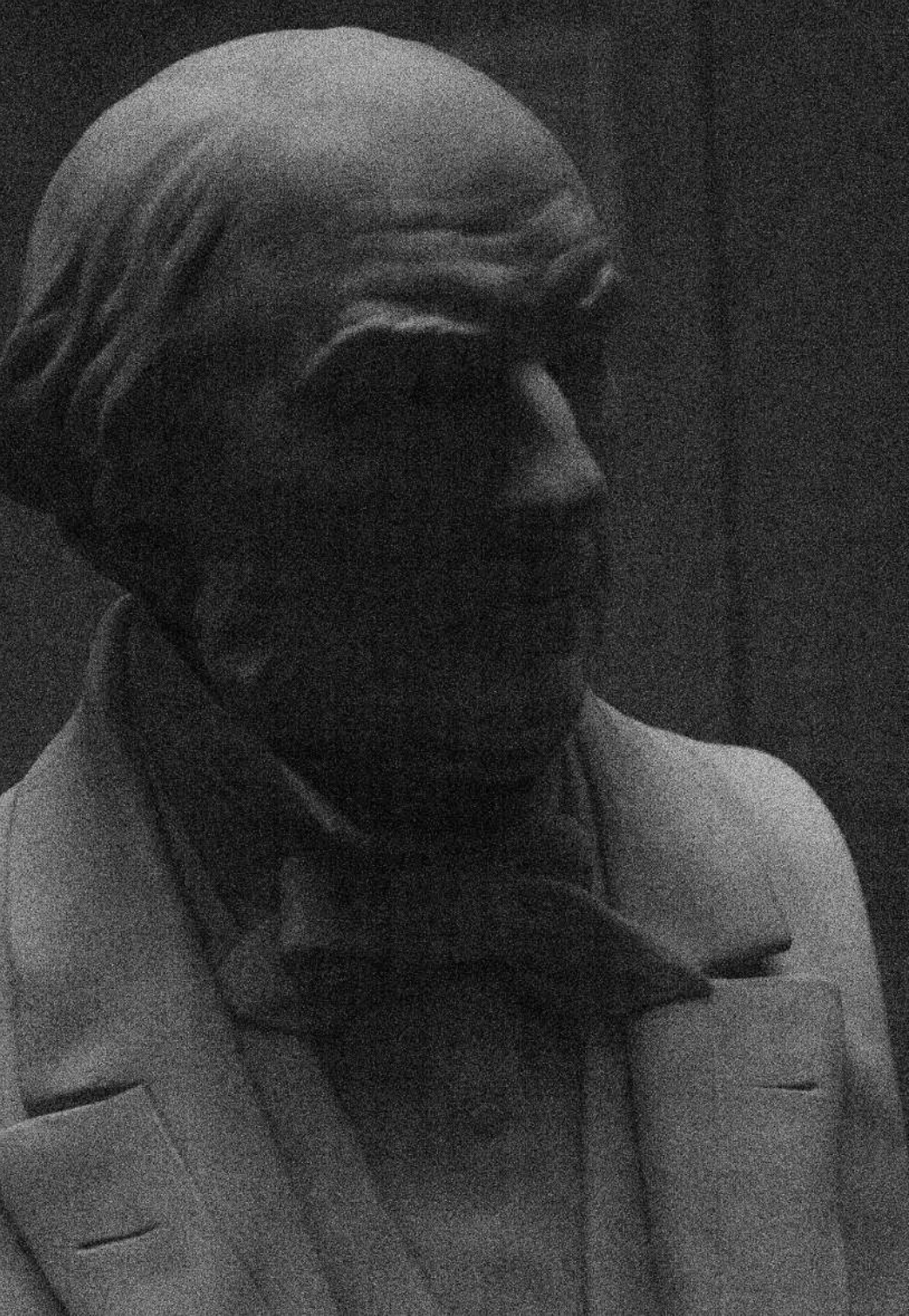




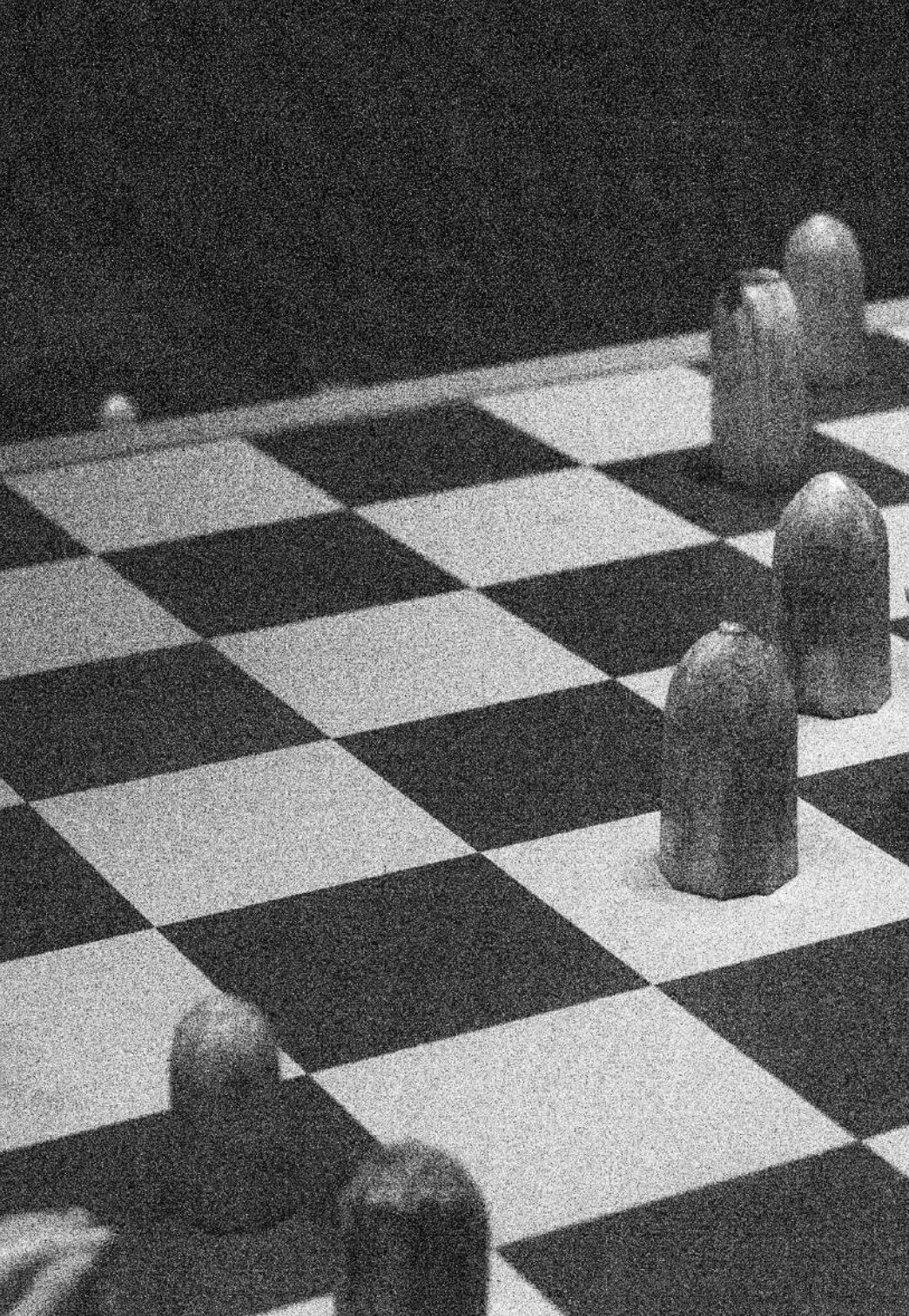
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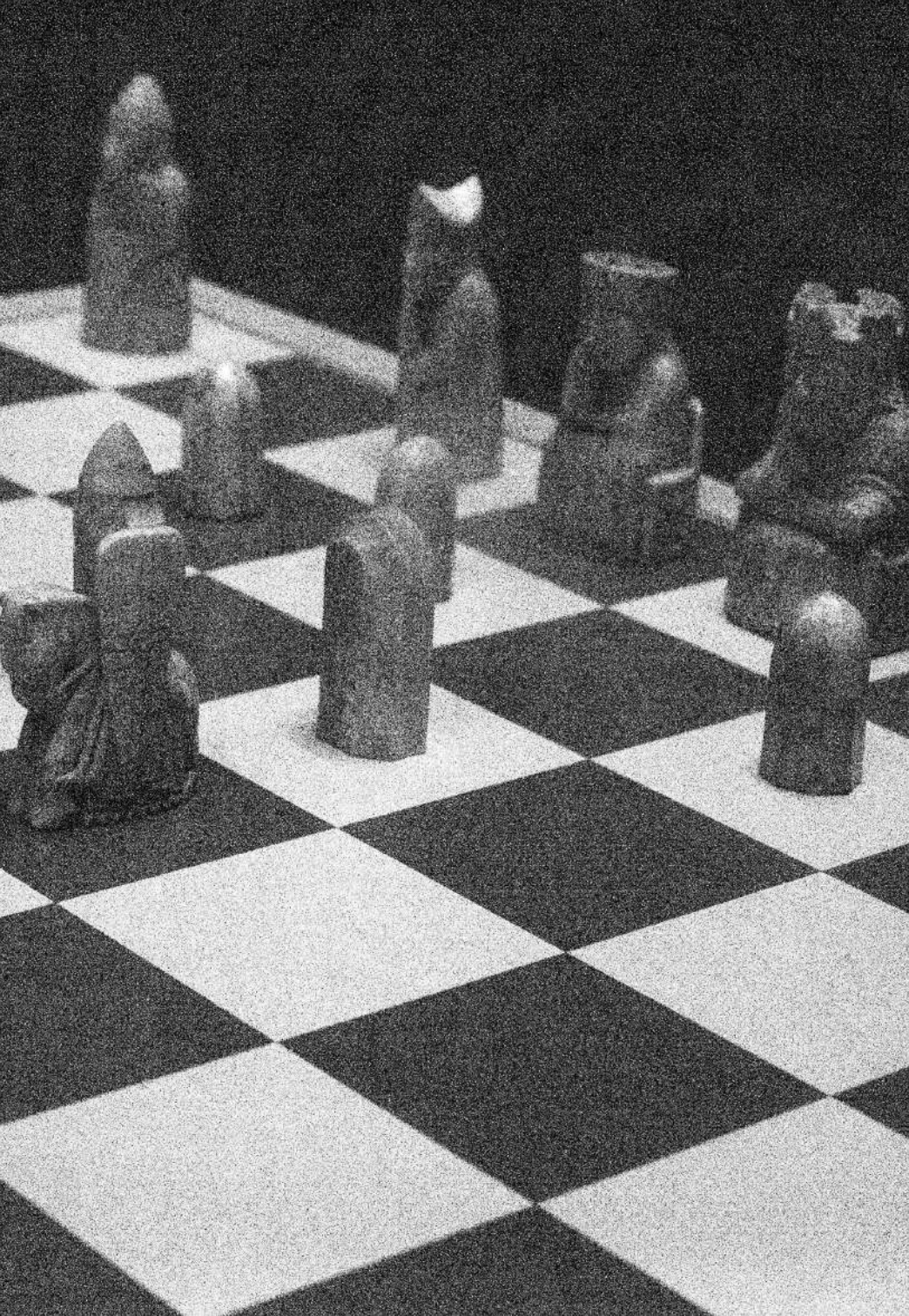
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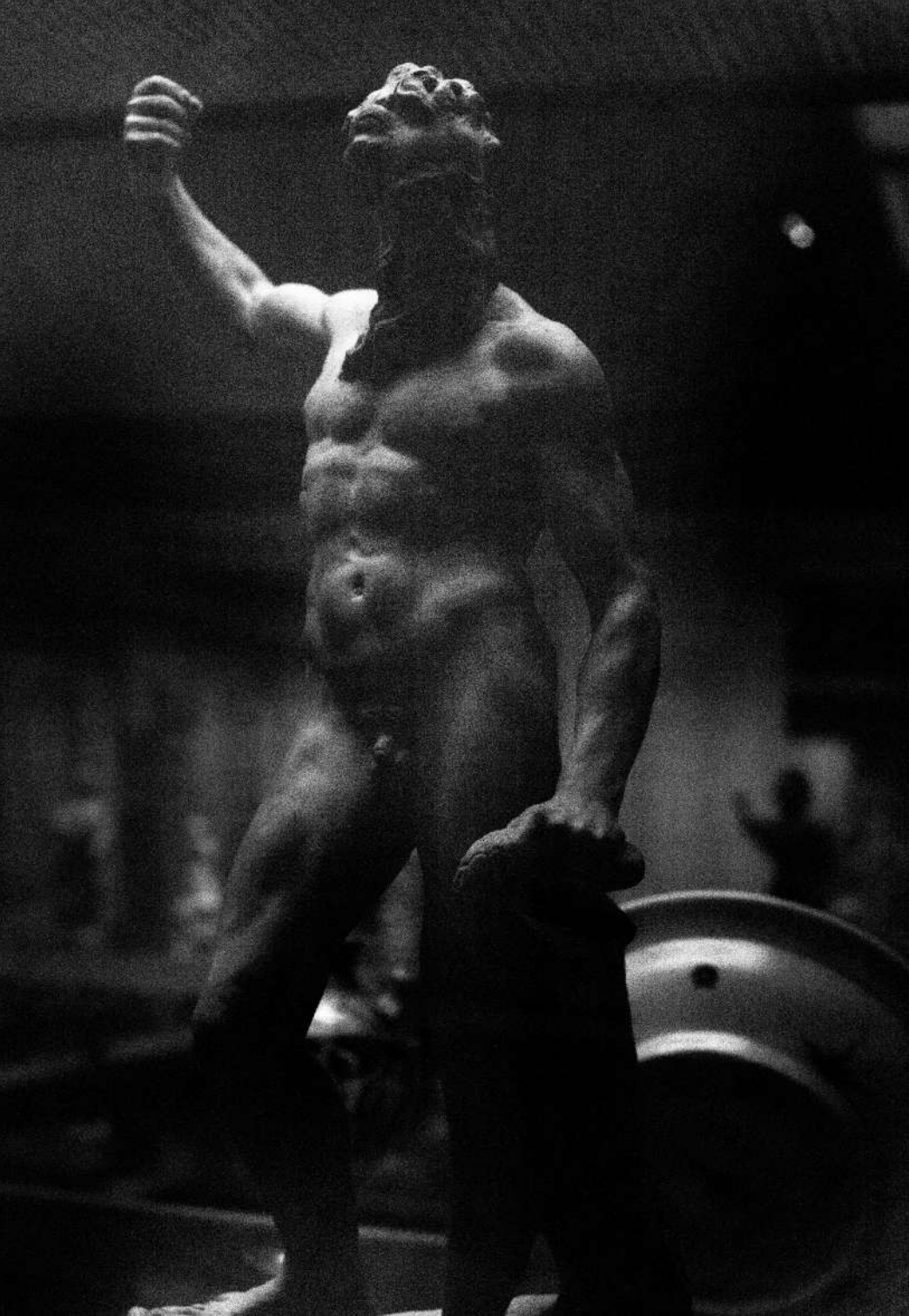
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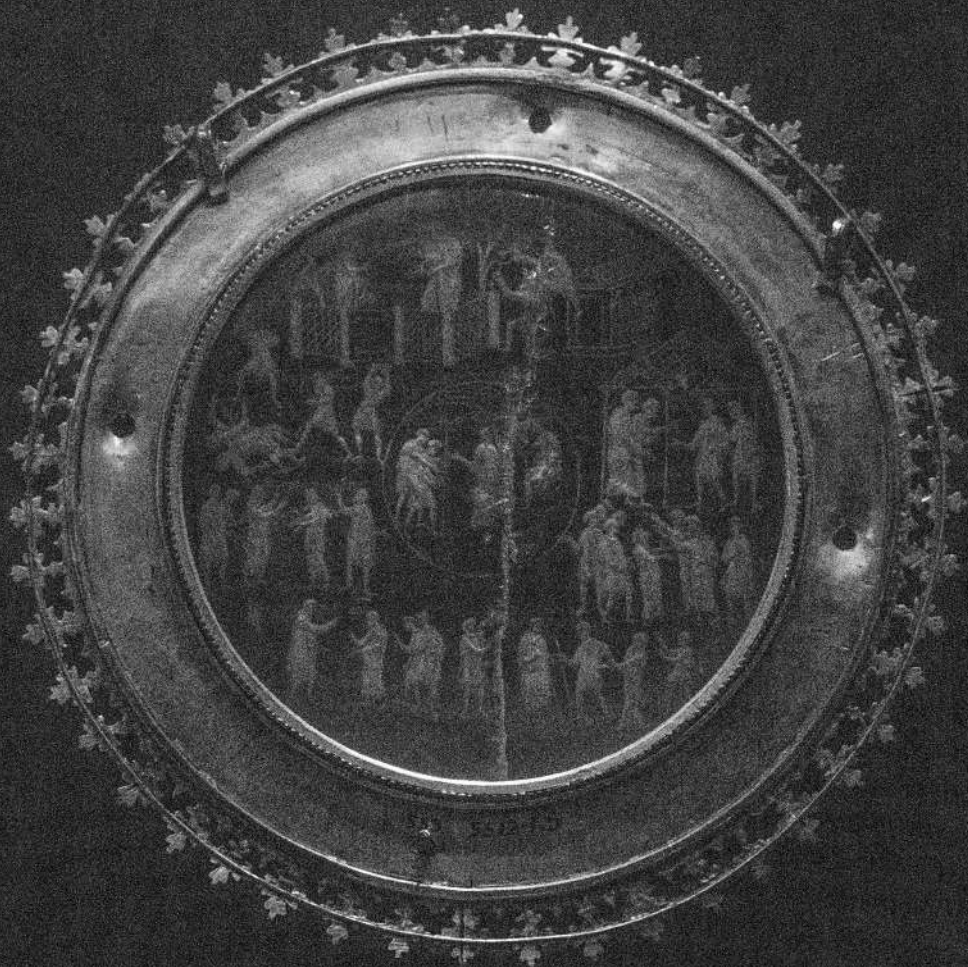




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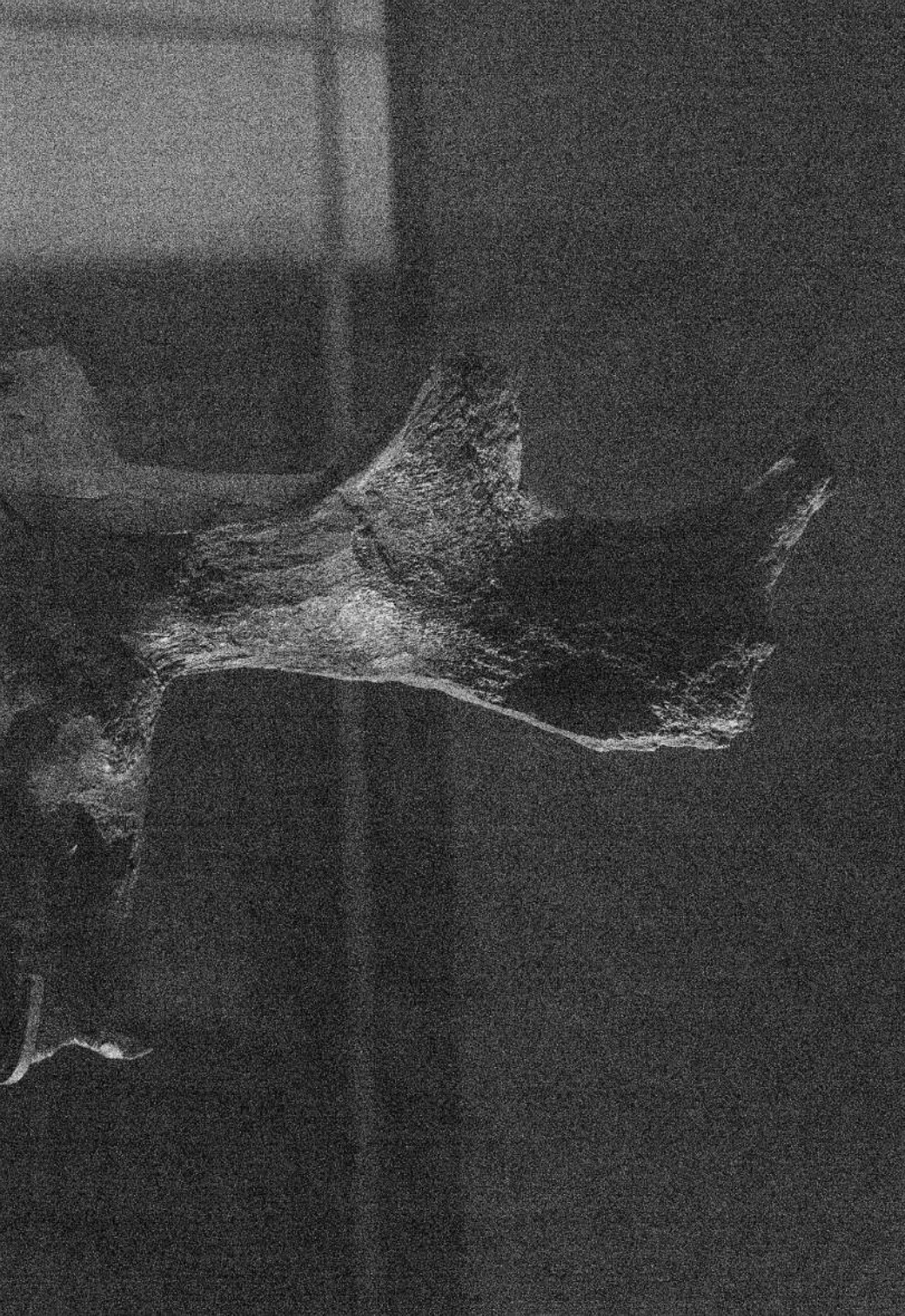














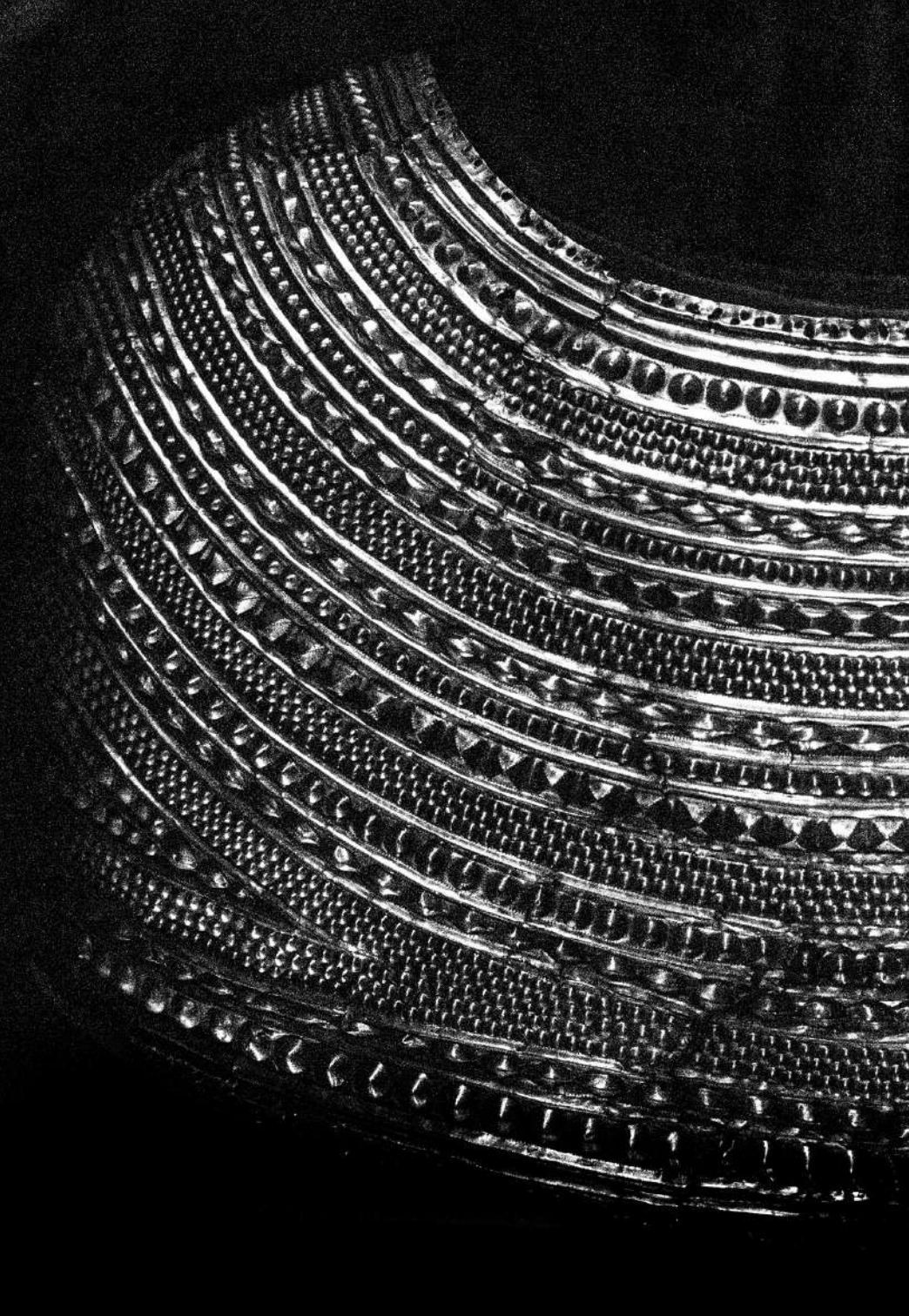


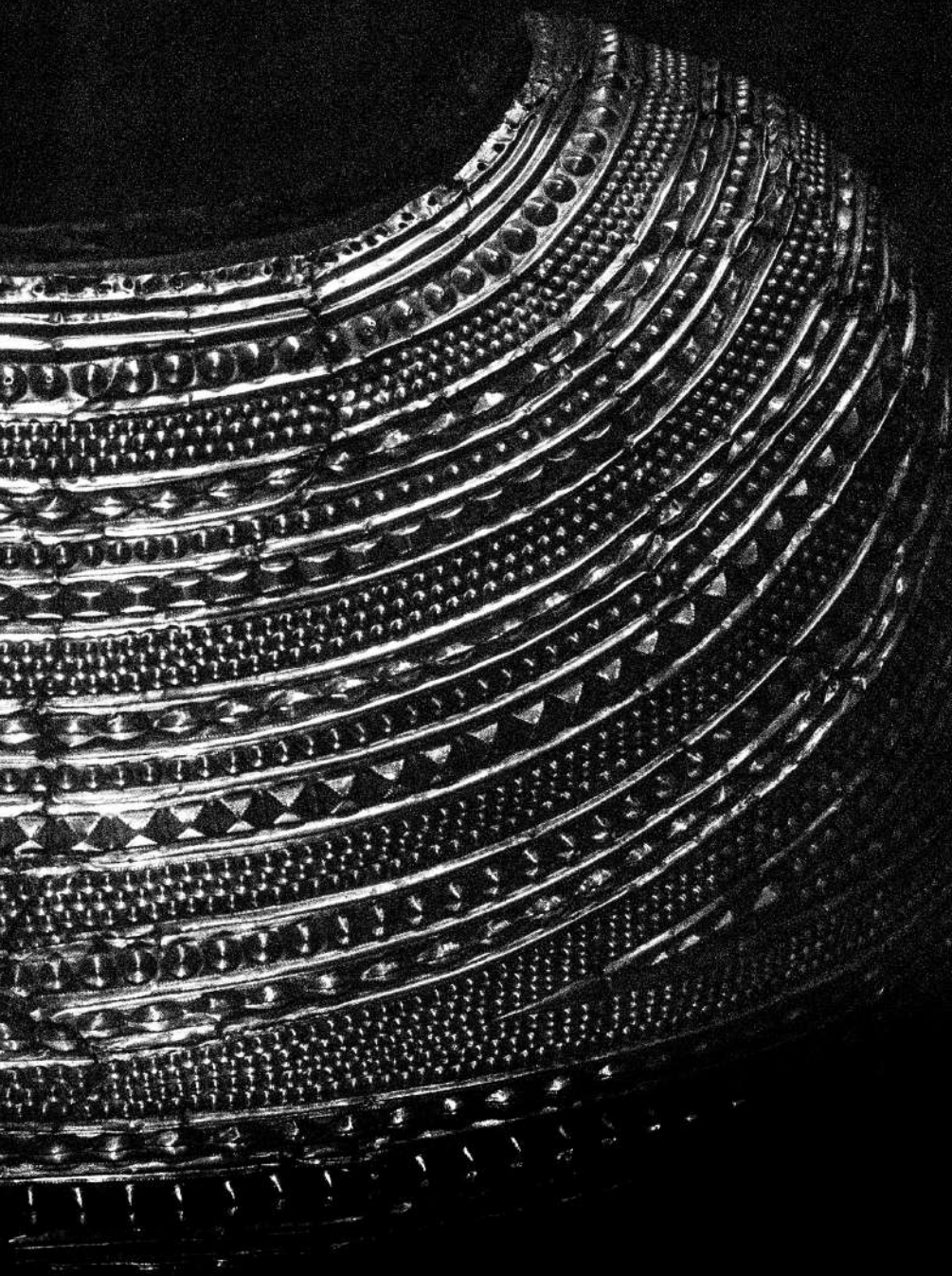
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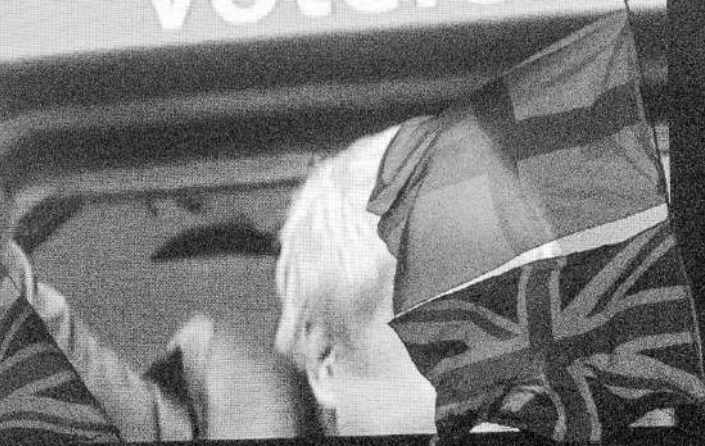








voteleav



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Little respite

January 31st 2020 marked the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. In practical terms it meant the beginning of a 'transition period' until a longer-term relationship could be agreed. However, symbolically, it was already known as Brexit Day. Three years had passed since the referendum in 2017 and inertia had turned sections of the British public into rash pragmatists - now was the time to observe the country's exit from a 47 year political arrangement, no matter how unprepared or unagreed upon that exit would be.

Revellers began making their inroads to Parliament Square. Incoming and criss-crossing lines through the map resembling that of the Union Jack; Aberavon, Dudley, Gateshead, Westminster, Plymouth, Grimsby, Cheddar. Some on foot, and many by the means of the British transport system, £102 returns for rail or a more reasonable £12.20 on the National Express. The opposing teams, levelled by a common need for locomotion, were ferried into the capital's political arena, as many have throughout history before them: The Suffragettes, The Chartists, The Miners. Today it is The Leavers vs The Remainers; one side overjoyed and jubilant, the other depressed and outnumbered. Along for the ride too are those in between sides and merely drawn by the potential of a crowd, the photographer amongst them. Aiming to condense this lengthy political debacle into a day's work, Alejandro Acín began photographing the two main components of this book; the 'Brexit Day' event at Parliament Square and secondly the British Museum, amalgamating these factors into the resulting work now published, three years later.

'London was like a machine. We were all being shot backwards and forwards on this plain foundation to make some pattern. The British Museum was another department of the factory. The swing doors swung open, and there one stood under the vast dome, as if one were a thought in the huge bald forehead which is so splendidly encircled by a band of famous names'

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*)¹

¹ Virginia Woolf and Shiach Morag. *A Room of One's Own; Three Guineas*. Harpercollins publishers, 2014.

Virginia Woolf described the disdain one felt when entering the British Museum long ago. The colossal building, propped up by bulky pillars bearing the burden of a nation's past, its enclosed items reaching into the millions, espouse a sense of infinity; yet remain firmly defined by a dominant culture's ideas. Although spoken from the perspective of a woman agitating for a place within a world where men would not allow institutional space, Woolf's words also bring forth a rebellious response to sites of grandeur and institutional importance - a space in need of intervention, agitation, to force against the status quo. The endless stream of imagery espoused from the materials lifted from various countries and epochs reflect back an image-construct of the world told through the historical, natural, political, and social; illustrated by the public idols and villains, all symbols from the times being depicted. 'Brexit Day' is no doubt pencilled in for the same treatment, waiting to be inventoried by the historicising machine. The key players; Cameron, Corbyn, Farage, May, Boris - all soon to be typecast into the Brexit chronicle.

Acín began to photograph the interior space of the museum, but also the items set within. Putting to order the impossibly vast strata that forms the museum's collection is a constant battle - one which the artist seemingly looks to hijack momentarily. Individual items are plucked from their display cabinets with the whetted intent of dropping them alongside images from the 'Brexit Day' event, aiming to play the past against present to initiate a fraught and uneasy ensemble. This device of image juxtaposing was illustrated in the British monthly magazine *Lilliput* founded in 1937 by the pioneering Hungarian editor Stefan Lorant who came to Britain as a political-exile after being imprisoned by the Nazis - he later had to move to the United States after failing to obtain British Citizenship in 1940. Each issue of *Lilliput* included a popular feature entitled 'Picture Comparisons' sharing image pairings often with an ulterior motive of humour, politics, or formal observations. Some of the juxtapositions make clear political distinctions such as the Dead Taxpayer paired with the Live Chancellor ². The image combinations made by Acín of statues matched with the alive and idiosyncratic humans photographed at the Brexit Day party in some way harks back to this tradition. However, pairings in *The Rest Is History* feel more accidental, open, and inconclusive. For example midway through, we come face to face with a 'Towncrier' (p.61) in full getup roaming parliament

² 101 Best Picture Comparisons from *Lilliput* or *Chamberlain and the Beautiful Llama* by Stefan Lorant published by Hulton Press Ltd, 1940.

square. This antiquated, yet still active service of council pomp, is followed by the figurine of a mediaeval nobleman (p.64) from the British Museum. This haphazard character collision somehow develops a visual association to the more modern symbol of Ronald McDonald for me; in this context he seems frightened and possibly fearing for his safety while attempting to flee from the rowdy crowd.

Perhaps it is the work's formal qualities that enable this somewhat nihilist view to develop. Rushed, urgent, and direct, on first appearance they seem like newspaper photographs. However, the gravelly black and white imagery scratches away and as we continue going through the amalgamated crowd and museum spaces, the scenes continually lose context - through which an eerie atmosphere is conjured. Acín recorded the Brexit Day event impulsively like other photographers in attendance, and in the process, amassed hundreds of images that in some ways documented the moment as it transpired. But it is in the aftermath when the process fully begins, as he delves into this newly formed archive proactively, using the material almost as a public collection from which to make selections, crops, copies, and to formulate them into a reactive image sequence. Within the parameters of an 'historical event' the photographer created these images indiscriminately - seemingly everything became relevant that day with the political event occurring just out-of-frame. Making work during these intense periods is something Acín has done before through workshops run by IC Visual Lab the organisation he co-founded, or alongside regular collaborator Julian Barón. These projects have included work made in Nepal, Spain and the UK - covering topics such as housing, homelessness, political identities, gender and sexuality. Each project is formed by a 'cage' designated by the artists, be it time, materials, location, and within these parameters work is made collaboratively to be disseminated through fast turn-around publications and installations. It is in this spirit of working that *The Rest is History* feeds from and continues to develop.

The arbitrary route the artist takes through the political crowd becomes a struggle. We are subconsciously aware of how these events are usually disseminated, and without the clear commands usually accompanying images from political events it feels like the artist is dragging us up-river against a current. The human mass swirling around parliament square, a rough body of water unable to agree on a unified motion - the movement contradicts and violently rejects a way out which leaves us in a state of helplessness. Little respite is afforded in the image sequence until the latter section after we see the Brexit

countdown hitting its end onto Number 10 Downing Street (p.154) , this is where the information of the photographs begins to steadily bleed out into white. What we find in this void, could be described as relief. The shouting has stopped. The exhaustive bickering has worn out to the white-noise of radio silence. But perhaps instead of comfort this is more like the relief of succumbing to a panic attack, finally fainting from an internal battle. All the while the museum items continue to appear nightmarishly out of context - haunting us still with supposed information that turn out to be red-herrings. This constant search for meaning feels symbolic of the times we live in where apathy has taken hold, particularly after ten years of austerity policies under consecutive conservative governments.

I rather believe with Faulkner, "The past is never dead, it is not even past," and this for the simple reason that the world we live in at any moment is the world of the past; it consists of the monuments and the relics of what has been done by men for better or worse; its facts are always what has become (as the Latin origin of the word: fieri—factum est suggests). In other words, it is quite true that the past haunts us; it is the past's function to haunt us who are present and wish to live in the world as it really is, that is, has become what it is now.

(Hannah Arendt - Home to Roost: A Bicentennial Address)³

Where does this leave us then? In an image-saturated world, where each protest or event will have a million photographs made of it - why do we continue with these endeavours? I don't know and I'm not sure it's important. To want to be there, to see it, doesn't have to come with a position or a clear outcome. It is a spectacle to watch large groups congregate, and even more so to see people unquestionably jubilant about their country's dislocation with a certain set of shared geo-political rules, laws, and agreements. But passion is what characterised the campaigning, the referendum, the results, and now the party. The homogenising effects in this country resulting from trends in urban regeneration, the dismantling of the high-street, mass consumerism directed by large-scale corporations, and the way our lives are largely spent on screens might be why joining a loud, live crowd is still so appealing. Furthermore, despite the analogous effects of capitalist living, tribalism has spread to become

³ Hannah Arendt, *Home to Roost: A Bicentennial Address*.
The New York Review, June 26, 1975

another highly pervasive factor in today's society - a factor heavily utilised by the Leave camp. Constant reference to 'glory days' and ideas of nationhood were the fodder sprayed from the Brexit canon during the years leading up to the event photographed here. The symbolic museum items such as swords & shields, cultural ornaments, tapestries from past eras are strangely familiar, imprinted as a collective psyche that perpetuates ideas relating to Nationhood or a common culture. They appear here in a similar way that the resurrected jingoist sayings were used during the referendum campaign; *Rule Britannia*, *Take back control*, *Britannia rule the waves...* always confidently displayed, but if read a little closer one will often find a more unpleasant sub-text. Smallpox, sewage, stale-bread, scurvy, murder, establishment, outrageous wealth, and unbelievable poverty might be underlying contextual facts of the day omitted from the script. But no, Victorian or better post-war Britain, still seemed to be our desired period, lustfully looked back upon through rose tinted glasses. It was in this manner that the intricacies of international law, immigration, trade, export/imports, all became subject to change by a referendum now characterised by headlines such as; 'Brexit triumph as Crown Stamp returns to pint glasses'.

History and how it is made recurs as a major preoccupation throughout this work and is even imprinted in the title. A consequential event such as 'Brexit Day' is the perfect carcass for the artist to dissect the ways fact and fiction can converge in the chronicling of a moment in time. How the past is constructed and functionally distorted to be remembered in a particular way, it could be suggested, is not all that far from how the artist deploys his own subjectivity in this book. Instead of trying to make sense of this political moment or to reinforce any binary position; Acín instead chooses to wallow in a state of volatility. Since 'Brexit Day' there has been a pandemic, a war in Europe, several elections, a migration crisis, a cost of living crisis, a housing crisis, and all of which are still ongoing at the time of writing. It seems that the rest did not become history on the 31st of January 2020, but maybe that is what the artist was suggesting all along.

Isaac Blease, 2022

Cuadernos Fotográficos de la Kursala # 91

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