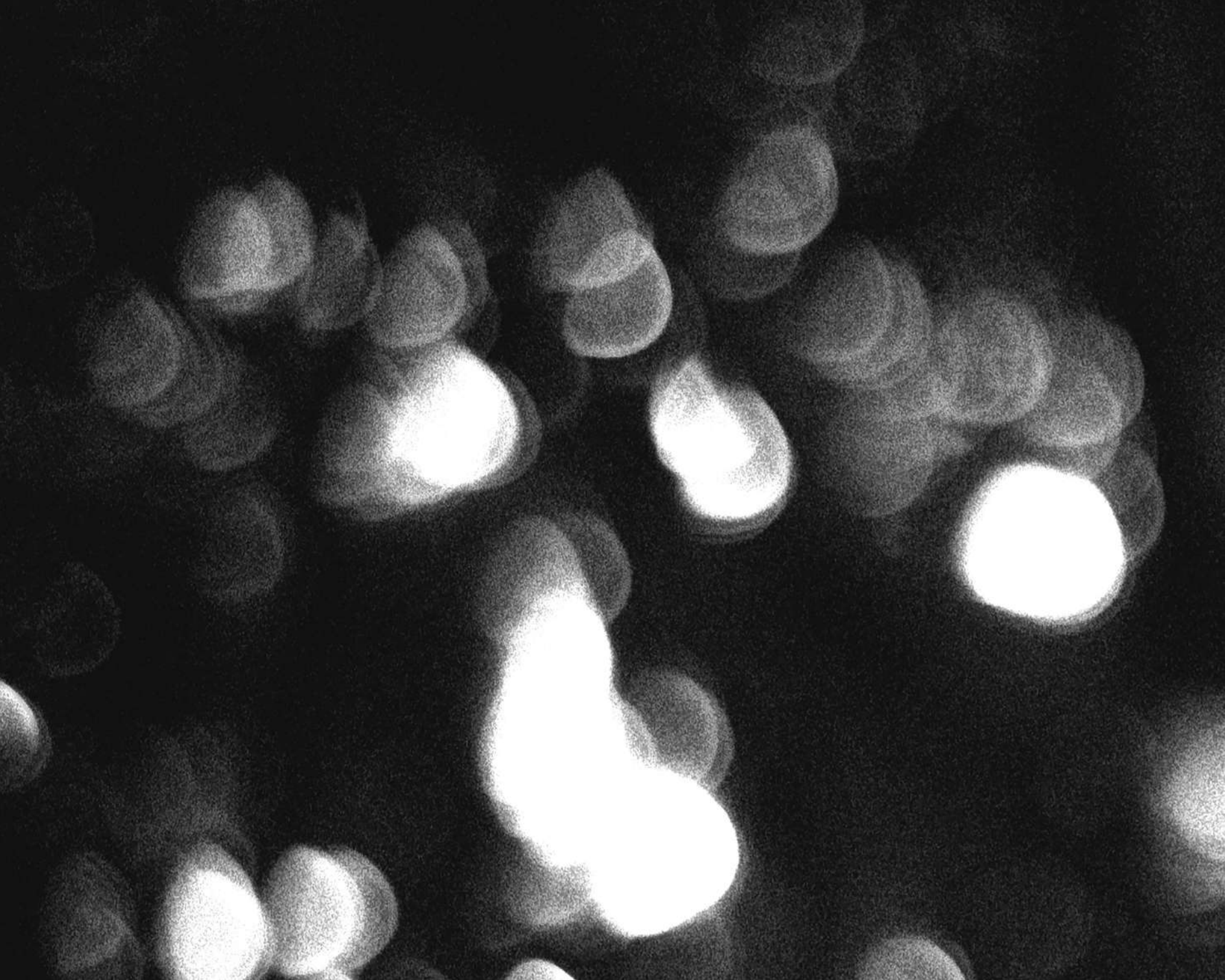


Self published in South Africa by:
Sinead Natalie Byrne Mason

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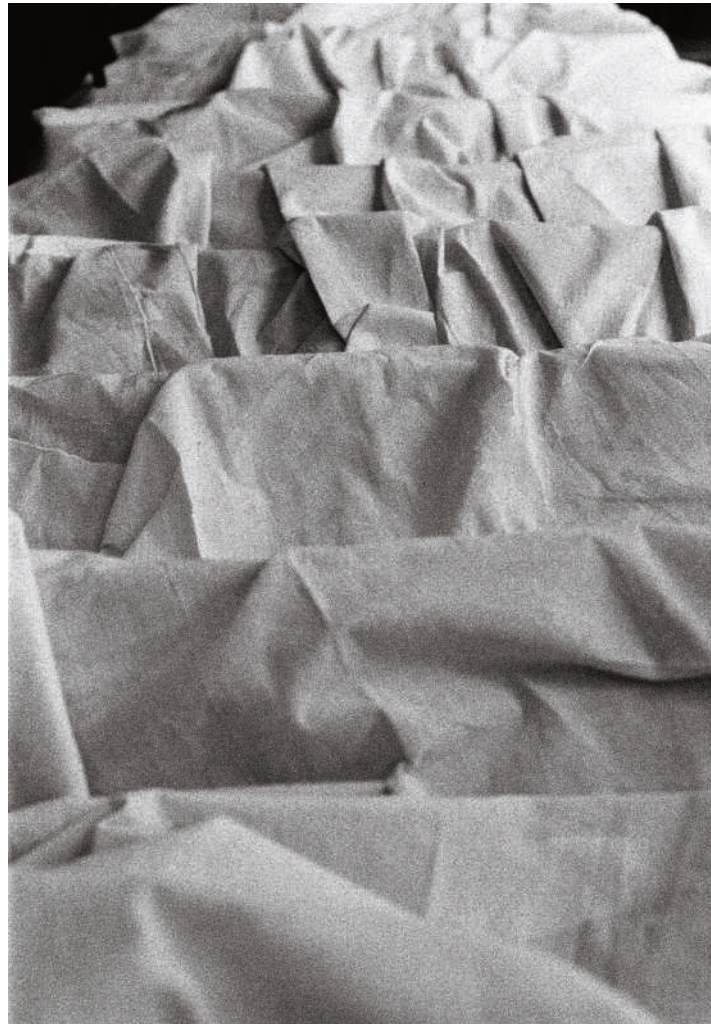
Blindfolded

SINEAD NATALIE BYRNE MASON

The nature of identity has been repeatedly thrown into question throughout human history. Due to its multi-faceted character, no one exploration could provide a definitive definition. The Modernists were captivated by the form (rather than the subject) of their work and experimented with different styles of writing, painting, sculpting and composing. Literary artists such as Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot turned away from observational studies and centred their work in subjective perception. The stream-of-consciousness style of writing that they developed disrupted linear structure and instead mimicked the mind wandering from thought to thought. Another important facet of Modernism was the Surrealist movement which was preoccupied with removing all restraints on the unconscious. Painters would emphasise experimenting on the canvas in order to discover hidden facets of their psyche. The movement is widely recognized by its absurd imagery and free form.

Blindfolded is strongly influenced by the Modernist school of thought, particularly the

literary and Surrealist movements. It explores our elusive, often inconclusive interiority through a series of portraits, still lifes and abstract photographs. Identity is a slippery subject with ill-defined borders, but I have limited my project to exploring two facets: the environment, which affects how a person defines her/himself, and the portrait, which showcases the performance of the self. Around the same time as Modernism was emerging out of the rubble of World War One, the offset lithography press was invented. It incorporated elements of photographic technique into printmaking. The combination of lithographic and photographic prints in *Blindfolded* pays homage to the relationship between these two disciplines. Both processes rely on set techniques and mechanics to create a series of identical images. These images are traditionally two-dimensional and smooth on the substrate. The more conventional image form of *Blindfolded* lends itself to an uncluttered and clean curation. The orderly methodology and curation employed provides breathing space for an otherwise porous conceptual project.

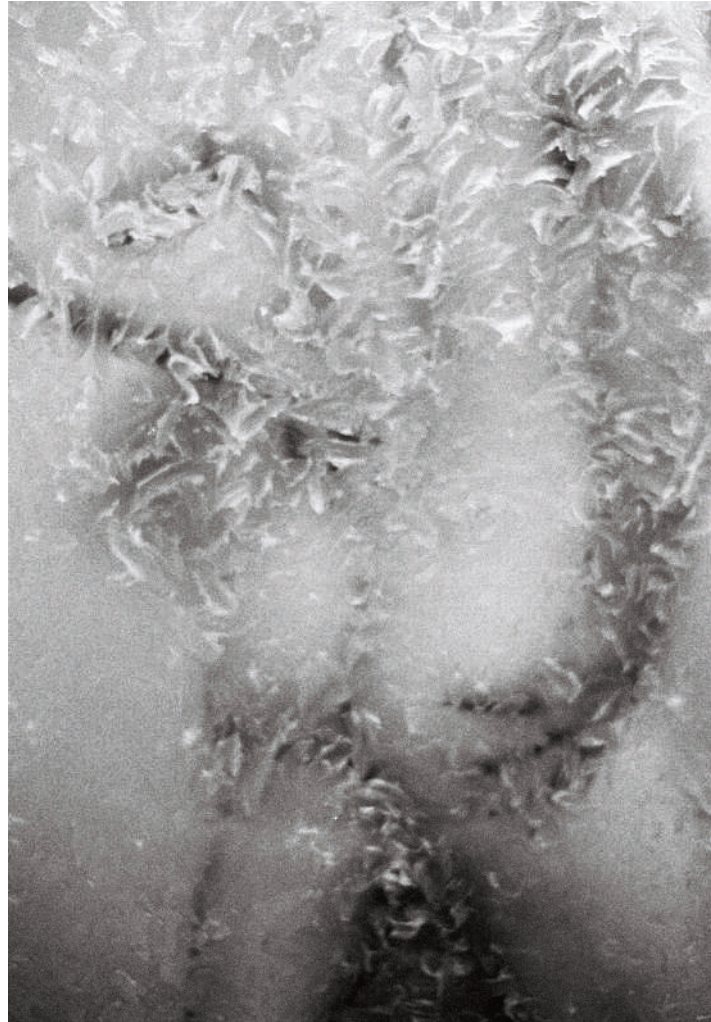


THIS PAGE: A PICTURE CONTAINING INDOOR, CLOTHING (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
142 MM X 210 MM

PREVIOUS SPREAD: DETAIL OF *CIRCLES OF CONFUSION* (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
420 MM X 564 MM



A CLOSE UP OF A LOGO I (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM



A PICTURE CONTAINING SITTING (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM



A CLOSE UP OF A WINDOW (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
297 MM X 200 MM

I began what is now entitled *Blindfolded* with a series of portraits shot through various semi-transparent filters. The obscured scenes were a formal development from a previous photographic endeavour, in which I used dreaming as a medium through which to observe the world. The frosted glass, Vaseline and tracing paper of *Blindfolded* builds on this earlier investigation. The filters metaphorically blurred the boundaries between conscious and unconscious

realities, placing these images in a thought experiment that was influenced by the Surrealists. The title, 'blindfolded', evokes a similar sense of reaching beyond what is visible to what can be perceived with the remaining faculties, including intuition and emotions. The title of this project privileges these undervalued impressionable sensibilities. The viewer is invited to trace the curves, crevices and varying textures of the images intuitively. It will not do to stand



AN OLD PHOTO OF A TREE (2020)
 LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
 297 MM X 200 MM

back and regard them coolly, as a scientist would her experiments. *Circles of Confusion*, in particular, calls for an intimate immersion. It is not supposed to make sense as a whole. The fragments highlight the tonalities of the image as opposed to the subject matter. The image forces the viewer to realize

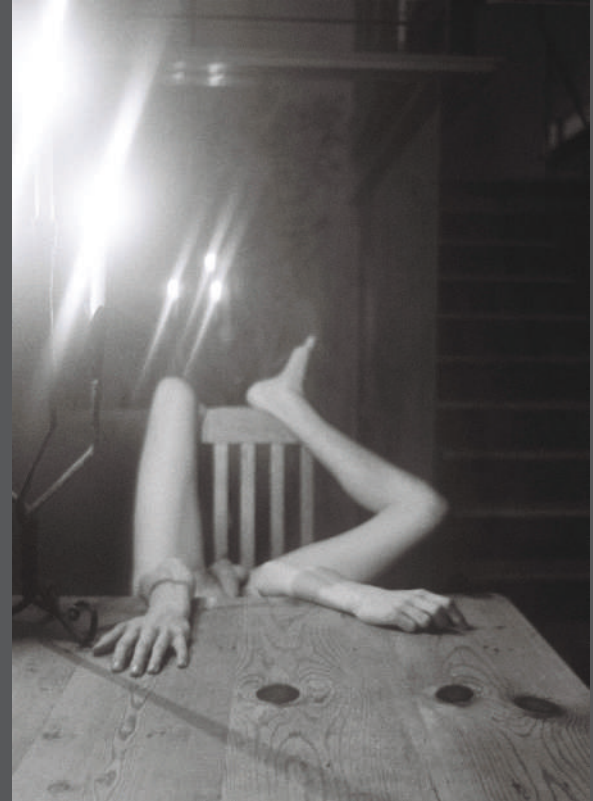
that the essence of identity can only be accessed in fleeting moments and stolen glances out of the corner of one's eye. This is enhanced by the darker ink of the lithographic prints, which makes the details murky, seemingly embedded deeper in the image, than the lighter photographic prints.



AN IMAGE CONTAINING RAIN (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
297 MM X 200 MM



A CLOSE UP OF A MAN'S FACE I (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
142 MM X 210 MM



A PICTURE CONTAINING INDOOR, YOUNG
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
284 MM X 420 MM

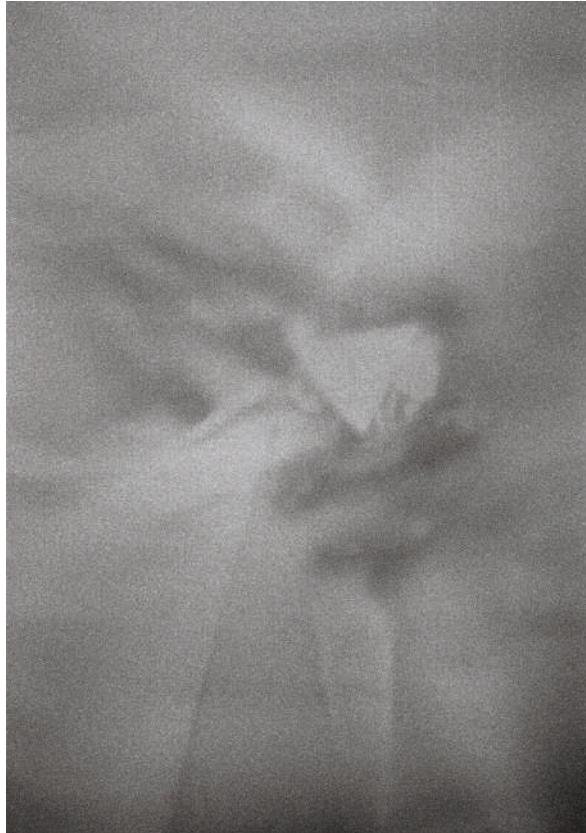
Blindfolded aims to bring photography and printmaking into conversation. Some images have been printed using offset lithography while some have been enlarged in a darkroom. I have brought together two different methods of producing images that historically have been intertwined. Photography originally was an element of printmaking and the two disciplines share the same foundational concepts. As Stephen Ingg points out, both disciplines begin with a substrate “on which the image is made – the plate or negative – is not the work of art” (2011: 9). Negatives from analogue photography and plates from lithography must endure a series of processes which change the chemical constitution of the image before it can be transferred onto paper. Printing is a process of negotiating with the plate or negative. These negotiations often result in elements being lost and found. This mimics the ever-changing nature of identity. It is a fleeting impression that must find channels of expression, but these expressions can only ever be expressions of a whole that is infinitely more complex than the image could ever hope to contain. Ingg also mentions the tension between the original and the copy, which is subverted by both photography and printmaking. Instead of there being one original artwork and other copies

that are not valued as highly, photography and printmaking operate with multiplicity (Ingg, 2011). Series of originals become possible, each with its own minute divergence from the one before it. These series have no starting point: all their iterations are expressions of the same image, which is not the ‘original’ but a negative or plate. It is even possible to imagine these as performances of the negative or the plate, which *Blindfolded* (like most other photographic and printmaking exhibitions) does not make available. Lithographic prints, however, feel distinctly different from photographs. This is due to a fundamental methodological difference between them. I imaginatively zoomed into the images until I was at a microscopic level. The difference between photography and printmaking lies in the building blocks upon which the image is constructed. Analogue photography relies on grains of film that consist of geometric silver halide crystals, while offset lithography is comprised of Ben-day dots in varying densities to create the illusion of tone. The sharp-edged photography creates a formal and distant quality which resonates with the process of making images in a darkroom. Light is shone through the negative and is focused on light-sensitive paper. The sheet of paper is then bathed in

an assortment of chemicals, which induce and then alternatively prohibit the reactions in the paper that cause the silver halide crystals to darken. It is a fine balance between coercing and coaxing the image to appear in the way the photographer wants. Adjustments are made to the process, which alter and perfect the final product. This differs from lithography, which is much more organic. To me, prints feel softer and more intimate because the negative image is converted into a matrix of microscopic dots that differ in concentration. This is transferred onto a plate with rubber, a hydrophobic substance. Water is applied to the plate and is attracted to the negative image. Hydrophobic ink is then applied to the plate and is repelled from the wet area. The ink on the rubber areas is then printed onto paper. The ratio of water and ink is adjusted until the image on paper most accurately portrays the image on the plate. Unlike photography, adjustments to the print can be made after it is printed with ink. This provides an organic feel of flowing from one stage to the next as opposed to starting from the beginning several times in a series of short bursts.



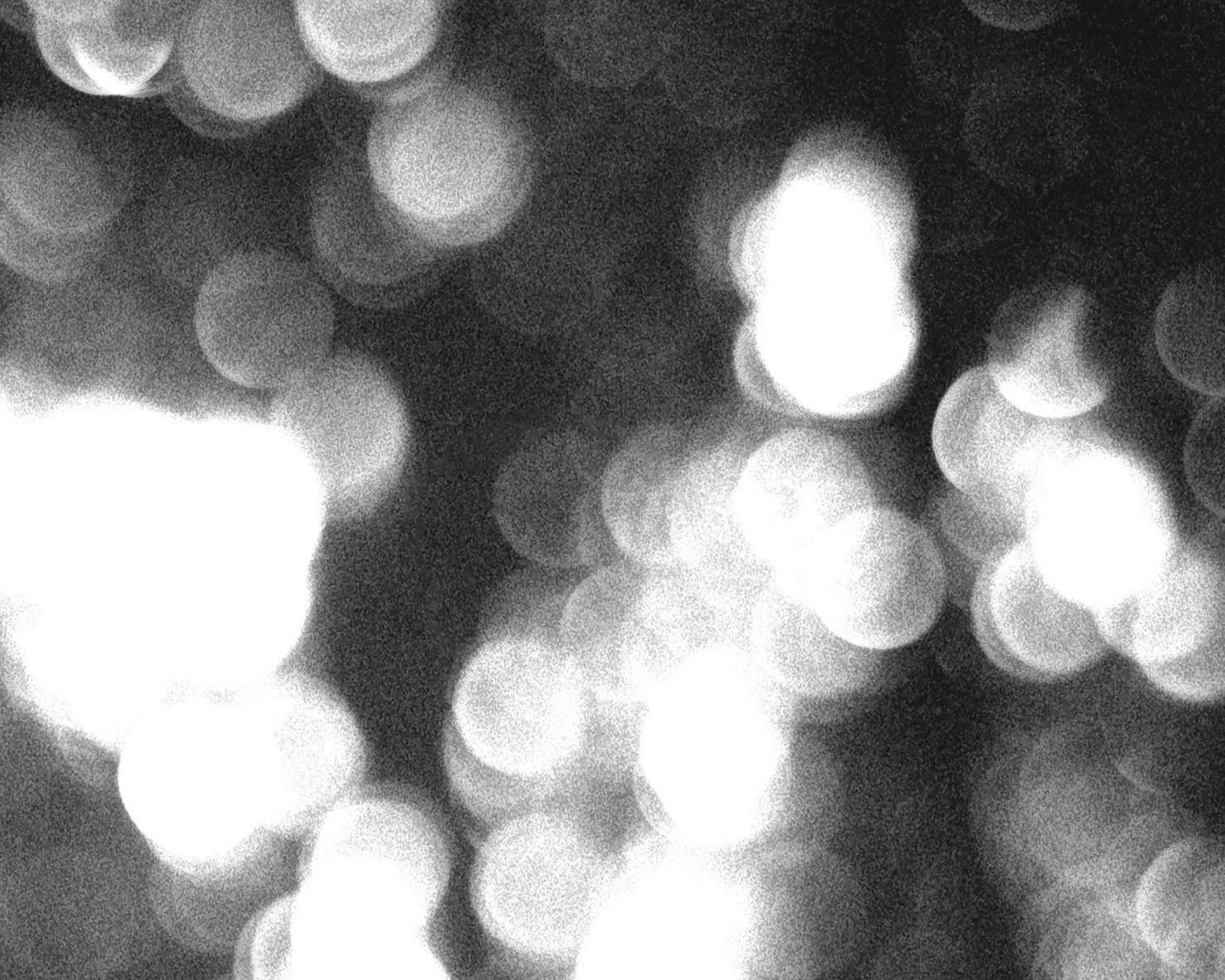
A TREE IN THE SKY (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
200 MM X 297 MM

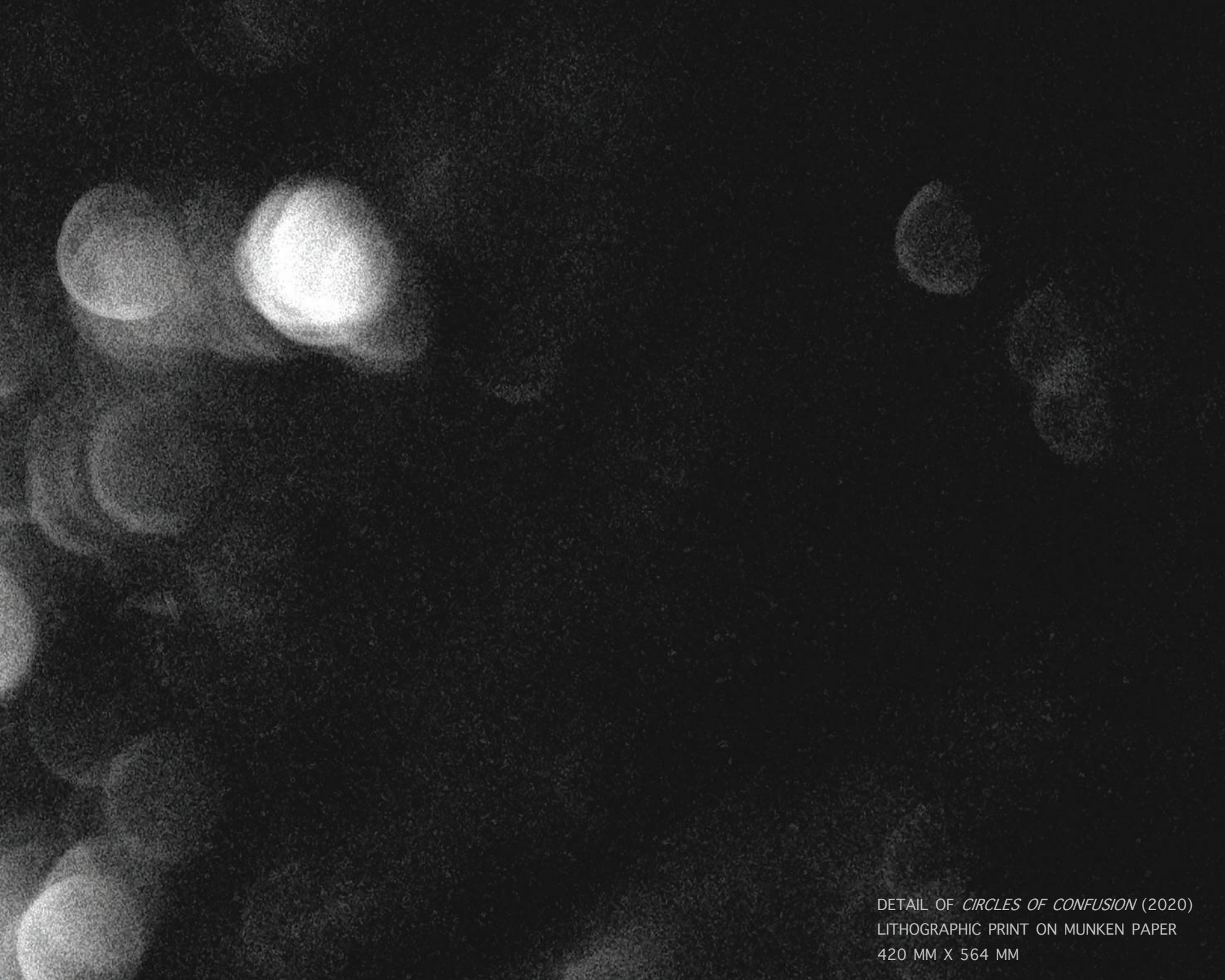


A CLOSE UP OF A BLUR I (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
200 MM X 297 MM

To maintain a sense of cohesion between these two elements, I have combined elements of each discipline. I printed photographic images using offset lithography and I used a silver-black ink colour, which references the silver gelatin

photographic prints. I weighted the space of the bottom borders of my darkroom prints in line with the printmaking tradition and I have created editions of images to reinforce the idea of multiplicity, which is apparent in lithography and printmaking as a whole.





DETAIL OF *CIRCLES OF CONFUSION* (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
420 MM X 564 MM

Another dichotomy at play in *Blindfolded* is the tension between the content of the images and the manner in which they are presented. The images are elusive, nuanced and, at times, disorientating. Yet the space is calm and ordered. Any chaos is contained within the borders of the work. Each wall of the space functions as a whole, comprised of smaller parts which find form in the images. The wall upon which *Circles of Confusion* is placed is divided into eight equal sections fragmented in an orderly grid. The borders around each fragment emphasise this decision. They draw the viewer into the blurred and abstracted world within each image, rather than overwhelming them with a chaotic presentation which would perhaps even obscure this subtlety. The two walls facing each other in a salon-style formation represent the grid that appears in *Circles of Confusion* exploded. In the same way as a mind map, these walls allow for more freedom of play. Images bounce off each other like thoughts and a third meaning is formed

in their conversation. Like identity, this meaning is fleeting, emotional and disappears as the viewers' eyes trace a path between the works. The varying sizes foreground the material presence of the images. These are not only concepts with visual form: they are bodies interacting with one another, forever locked in a dance that cannot be reduced to a thought I once had about a year ago at the beginning of this project. The fourth and final wall explores the possibilities of linear narration within the conceptual borders. I was inspired by Daniel Blaufuks's work, *collected short stories* (2003), that presents pairs of images with titles in a photobook that replicates the form of a book of fiction. Blaufuks's and my own smaller collections of images are representative of short stories and snippets of thoughts that co-exist. At once linear and multiplicitous, this wall is more intimate. It invites the viewer to follow these flirtations with curation and the experiments that were undertaken in a darkroom.



AN IMAGE CONTAINING LIGHT (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
210 MM X 142 MM



A CLOSE UP A MAN'S FACE II (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM



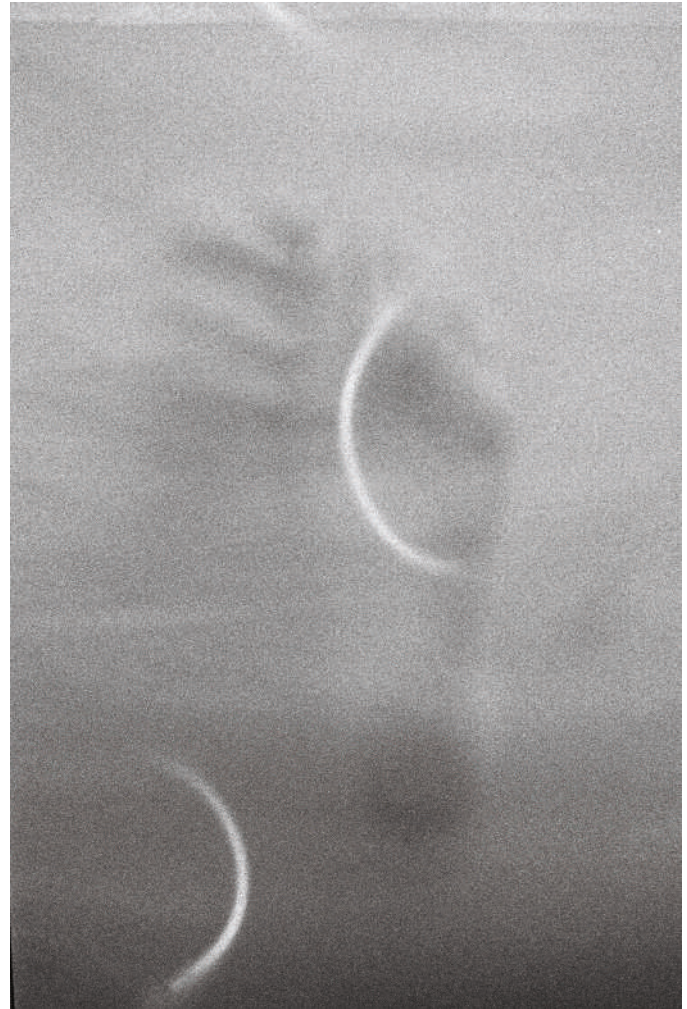
A PICTURE CONTAINING OUTDOOR (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM

The tension between content and form is heightened by the monochrome palette. The nuances of greyscale do not scream for attention as colour images are prone to do. Subtle shifts in tone mimic our identity, as it changes imperceptibly. The palette of *Blindfolded* is an allusion to early photography, when all photos were in black and white. This tradition of photography was defined by formality. Taking a photo was not instantaneous, as it is in the twenty-first century: the subjects had to hold still for a long time in order to achieve a sharp and focused image. This resulted in many portraits where the subjects have serious expressions, standing or sitting in positions that were easy to hold. Photos were rare and came to be a mark of class and wealth. They were special artifacts of a constructed identity. *Blindfolded* is not as formal as these early portraits, but retains the element of rarity and wonder that those early photographs

exude. The choice to work in black and white was also an attempt to distance the images from material reality. We perceive the world in full colour, which highlights the saturation and hue of objects, while monochrome highlights the tonality of a scene. Monochrome photography disrupts the notion that photography is an exact representation of the world because, although it accurately depicts what is framed in front of the lens, it is without colour. It occupies the space of being forever just out of reach of the material object. In this, black and white photography links to the unconscious and identity. In the same way as we can only attain an approximate grasp of the workings of our minds, black and white photography portrays a concept of the real thing. It is like a word that signifies a concrete object but has no tangible link to it. Why is a table called so and not by some other name?



A CLOSE UP OF A BLUR II (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM



A BLURRY PICTURE (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
200 MM X 250 MM



A CLOSE UP OF A TREE (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT OF MUNKEN PAPER
284 MM X 420 MM

Thoughts around the indeterminate nature of objects, people and phenomena formed the beginnings of *Blindfolded*. It was a Modernist preoccupation with the shifting nature of human identity that sprang from an exploration of what influences identity and its fluctuating nature. Virginia Woolf's writing was particularly illuminating in understanding the Modernist intellectual project. Her essay, 'Modern Fiction', poetically and famously claims "life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf, 1921). She posits that writers should explore what interests and inspires them. They should turn their attention inwards and ignore society's expectations about what literature should be (Woolf 1921). Woolf advocates for a privileging of the wonderings of the mind as it passes over some things and latches onto others. She harshly criticises writers such as Arnold Bennett, who focus on the plot of the novel and the appearances of its characters and settings. According to Woolf, the writer

should instead write about "every feeling, every thought; every quality of the mind" and, in general, the experience of living rather than living itself (Woolf 1921). In a similar vein, *Blindfolded* aims to display not what life is but rather how life feels. Mimicking Woolf's stream-of-conscious writing style across disciplines, this project is not linear like some photojournalism or art activism. There is no singular 'plot' to *Blindfolded*, as Woolf recommends, it is "vague and inconclusive" (Woolf 1921). The viewer is left feeling something, but can never quite grasp the feeling, which evaporates as soon as one tries to identify it. The subject matter, like much of Virginia Woolf's fiction, is banal without any grandiose scenes. They may appear entirely unrelated but "as the eyes accustom themselves to twilight and discern the shapes of things in a room", the emphasis is illuminated (Woolf 1921). This involves reaching into one's psyche and finding nothing more substantial than some cloud-like impressions.



A CLOSE UP OFA LOGO II (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
297 MM X 200 MM



A PICTURE CONTAINING BUILDING (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
210 MM X 142 MM

It is almost impossible to represent something that is constantly just beyond reach. Identity can be felt on the periphery, but it dissipates when one focuses on it. The body perceives the outside world, so when attention is flipped inwards towards the self, it crumples into nothingness; the clothes it was wearing drop to the floor. I started exploring from what I perceived to be the two most defining aspects of identity: the environment and the performance of self. While these are perhaps more concrete than identity, they

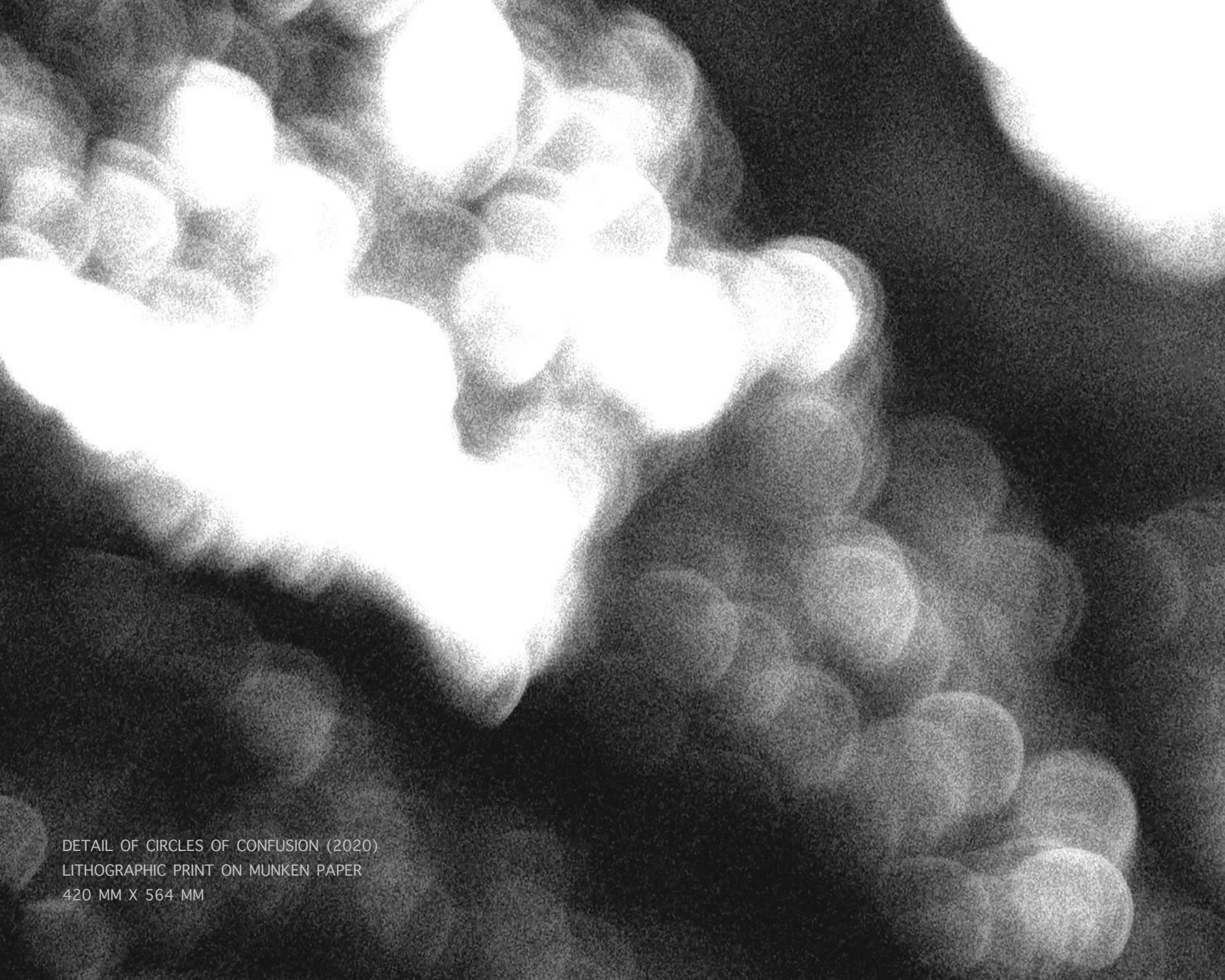
share its shape-shifting qualities. Human environment is ever-changing as each of us moves through space and time. It is a platform shared and moved by millions of others as they go about their daily lives, akin to acting on a stage that is in constant flux. The stage tilts and the actor tilts with it. Our performance on this stage is the other element which affects (and is often the result of) our identity. Judith Butler claims that gender and sexuality are both “modes of being dispossessed, ways of being for another, or, indeed, by



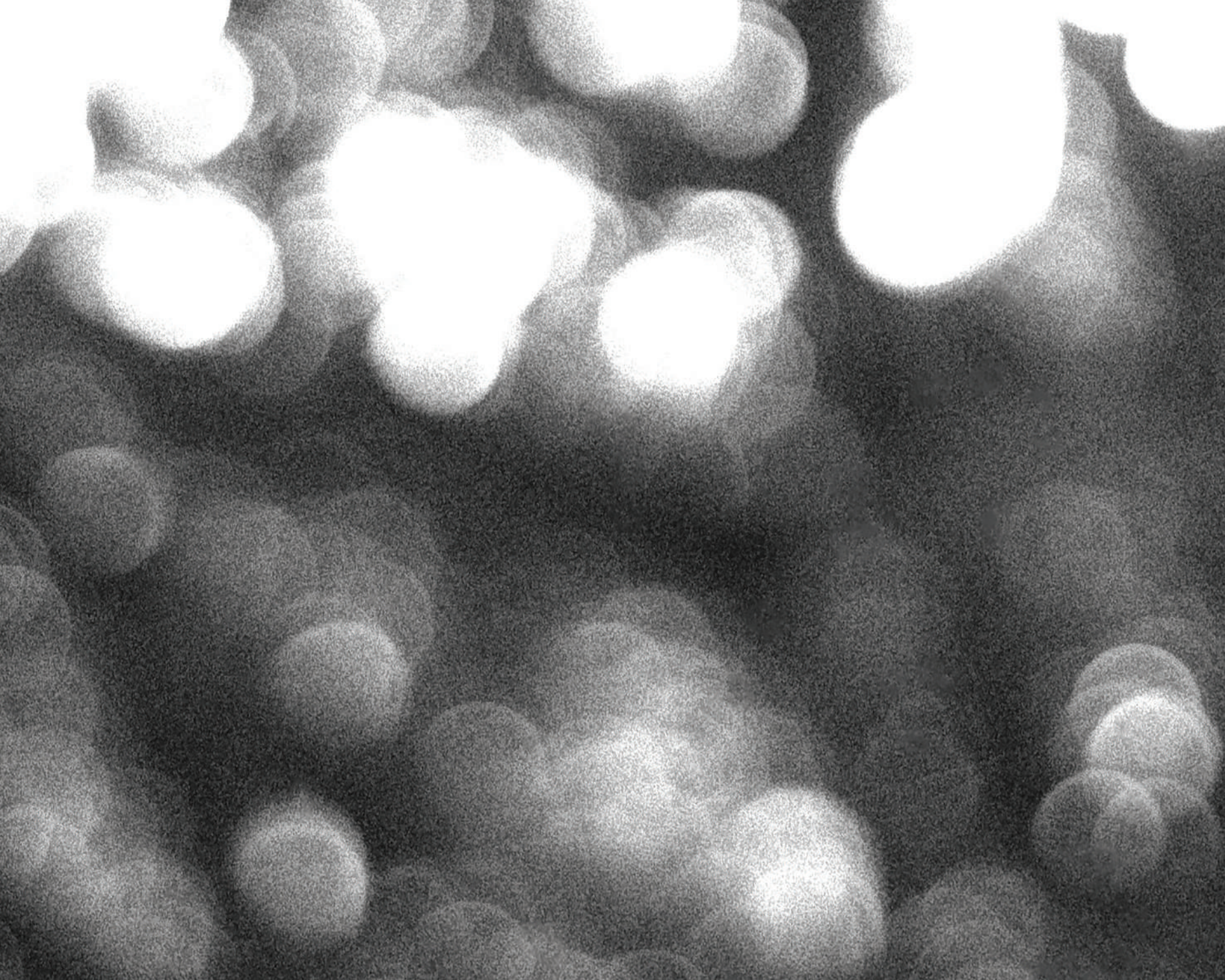
A PERSON WEARING A HAT (2020)
 LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
 297 MM X 200 MM

virtue of another” (2004: 19). She points out that the individual’s environment and performance of identity are linked. Performativity is not a direct representation of identity because there can never be only one identity. Aspects can be performed however, because performance works with a different knowledge system from writing and reading. It differs from these more fixed methods of producing knowledge in its impermanence and dynamic character. A

performance can bounce between opposite ends of a binary in an instant. It is not fixed in linear arrangements on a page: it is transient and ever-changing as the body moves. Some elements remain the same for longer than others: the clothes one wears on a specific day remain on for the duration of that day; the colour of one’s hair or the size of one’s feet last for most of one’s adult life. Body language and attire can be stylized to portray a particular image.



DETAIL OF CIRCLES OF CONFUSION (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
420 MM X 564 MM



The photographic portrait has a strong link to performance. Humans cannot help but perform themselves when faced with the lens of a camera. 'Borrowed Dogs' by Richard Avedon explains that, in portraits, the surface is all there is with which to work (2002). Attire attracts particular attention, together with stance and surroundings. Having a portrait taken provides the opportunity to create a self: one that the person may wish to be or the image that the photographer wishes to project to the world. Both the environment and our performance in it are temporary, although portraits are more long-

lasting. I photographed myself and the people I live with behind an array of filters in different areas in my house and neighbourhood. The photos of my surroundings can be read as an unconscious autobiographical portrait because, without trying, I photographed things that caught my attention from the angle that I thought best represented my idea of each scene. If I thought of a subject as large and imposing, I shot at a low angle to enhance its gravitas; if my idea of a scene was on par with the idea I had of my identity, I shot it at eye level and so on.



A PICTURE CONTAINING SECURITY (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
250 MM X 200 MM



A PILLOW ON A BED (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
250 MM X 200 MM



A CLOSE UP OF A FSH (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
250 MM X 200 MM



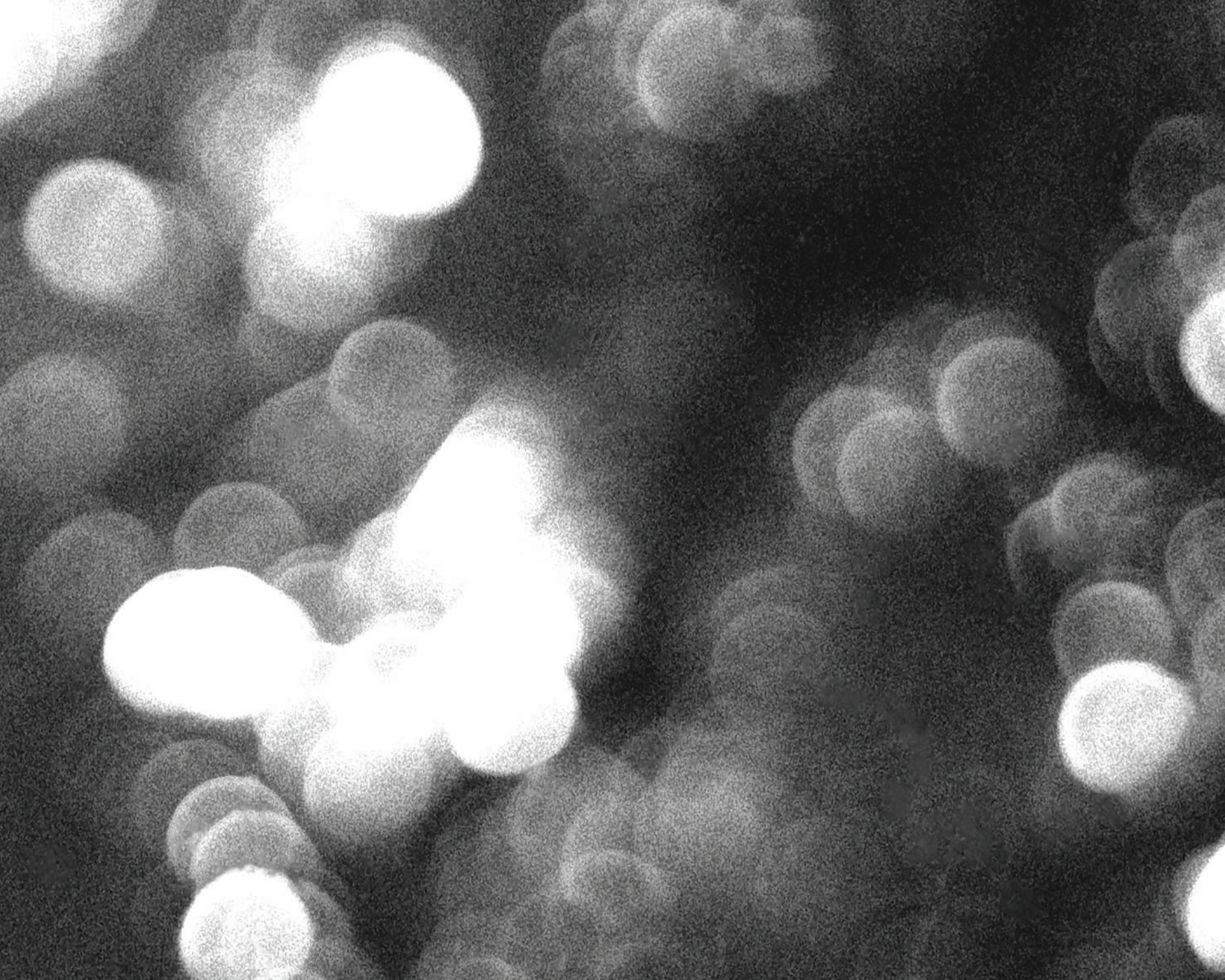
A HOUSE WITH TREES IN THE BACKGROUND (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
250 MM X 200 MM

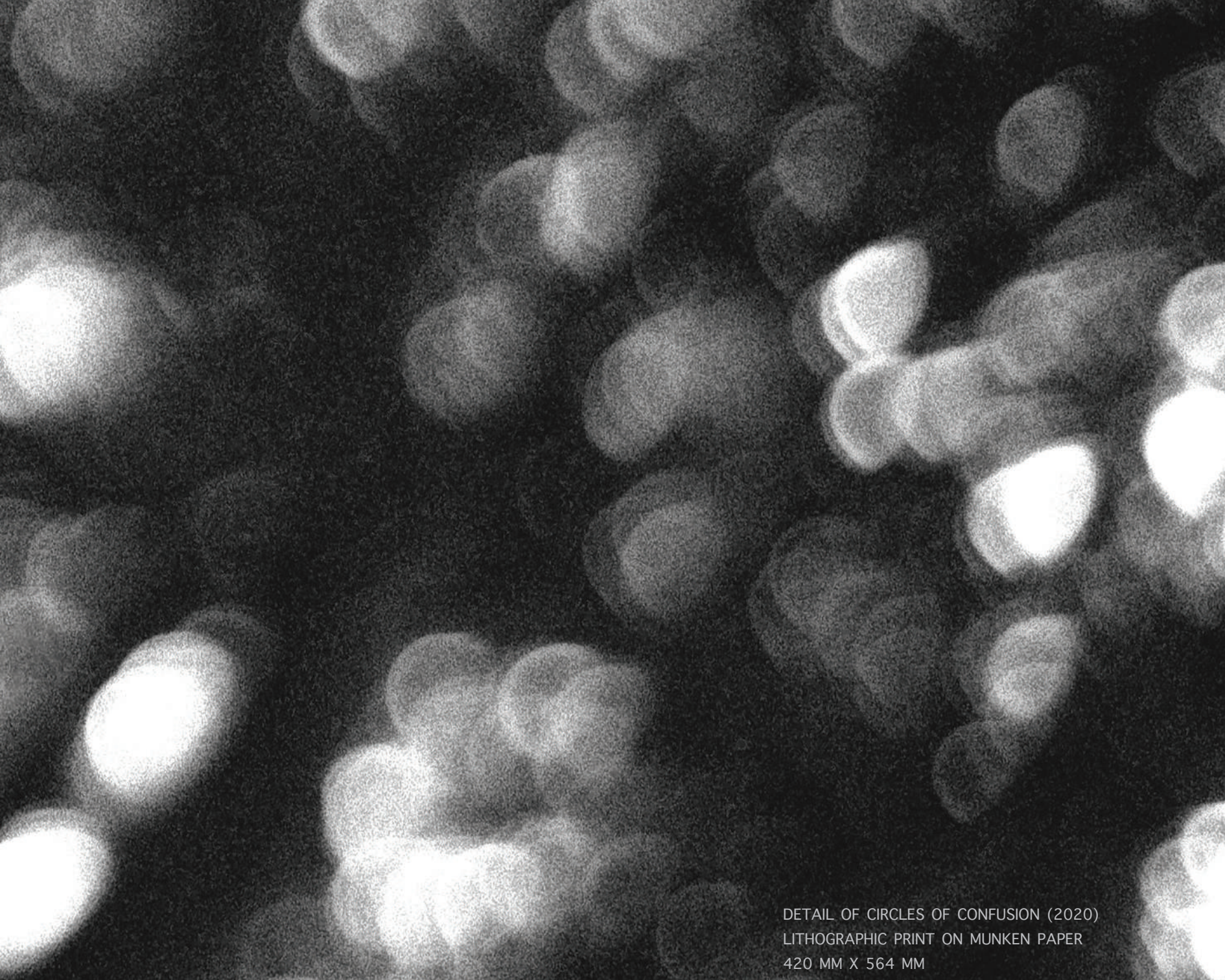
Blindfolded began as a thought experiment around the shifting nature of identity and its porous influences. It was a preoccupation with that which can be strongly sensed; but when attention is turned upon it, it dissolves. In that sense, it was a focus on nothing and the differing shells it wears. But the work, as it is often wont to do, took on a life of its own once set in motion. I followed my intuition as it led me into systems of alternative knowledge that were not as fixed as Western epistemology. In a similar fashion, *Blindfolded's* methodology

is interdisciplinary, between photography and printmaking and breaking perceived boundaries between both by adding elements of each to the other. The conceptual project was only made more complex and nuanced by the display of the work and the monochrome palette. It introduced a multiplicity of pathways, exploring how identity can be cosmic or it can be minute. The unconscious is sometimes linear, but more often than not it is circular, anarchic or ephemeral. *Blindfolded* is an attempt to bring visual form to the intuitive, invisible world of the unconscious.



A PERSON IN A DARK ROOM (2020)
SILVER GELATIN PRINT ON RESIN-COATED PAPER
400 MM X 250 MM





DETAIL OF CIRCLES OF CONFUSION (2020)
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINT ON MUNKEN PAPER
420 MM X 564 MM

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Blindfolded would not have been possible without the patience of Jean Brundrit, my supervisor. Her thoughtful guidance and support gave me the space to grow with the project.

These images co-exist within my heart alongside my mother, father, step-brother and close friends. Their unconditional love has made my heart grow large enough to encompass the minuted of *Blindfolded*.

Finally, my partner - the person I see as my co-author - has weaved his way into my thoughts and methodologies. He has elevated me to reach unimaginable heights. His essence has permeated this project from conception to completion.

