



GHOSTS

French Holocaust Children

An exhibition by Robert Hirsch
www.lightresearch.net

***Ghosts: French Holocaust Children* by Robert Hirsch**

Project Description and Objectives

During World War II, over 11,000 Jewish children were deported from France to Auschwitz and other Nazi death camps in convoys that continued rolling until August 18, 1944, the day Paris was liberated. As the ultimate consequence of anti-Semitism, these children were among more than 75,000 French Jews deported under the Nazi plan for the “Final Solution to the Jewish question.” Only 2,564 French Jews survived the Shoah. Most of the youths were arrested by the French gendarmes on orders of the Vichy government and turned over to the Germans for deportation. At most 300 of these Jewish children survived.

Ghosts: French Holocaust Children is an ethereal memorial to the children’s abbreviated lives. This project is based on documents and photographs collected by author, lawyer, and Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld, which I have reinterpreted through two- and three-dimensional photographic representations, to convey a haunting sense of lost human possibilities. The resulting image anthology generates a composite of an archive database, historical reference, and media narrative. This creates a new post-documentary approach that blends fact and fiction, which constructs meaning, tells stories about the past, and serves as metaphors for the boundaries of memory.

The premeditated actions of the Nazi’s and their willing collaborators were designed to humiliate, rob, and eradicate the Jewish people. The Nazi’s wrapped their murderous plans in pseudo scientific ideas, which labeled Jews as diseased and impure vermin who had to be exterminated in order to make a perfect National Socialist regime. The commemorative nature of *Ghosts* overrides Heinrich Himmler’s declaration to Schutzstaffel (SS) leaders about the Final Solution: “It is a glorious page that will never be written.” The project prevails over the death camp machinery that stripped these children of everything they were and might have become by symbolically giving face to the lost lives these depraved executioners attempted to send into oblivion.

What we think and do is grounded in historical creation. Therefore, difficult and sacred subjects, such as the Holocaust, which seems immeasurable, incommunicable, and unnamable, need to be artistically examined for them to live on in people’s minds. Failure to allow others to render such subjects make them taboo, limiting access to only those with direct experience will cause such events to vanish from living history.

This installation is an extension of my investigations into the nature of evil over the last decade, which includes *World in a Jar: War & Trauma, Manifest Destiny & the American West, Shining Brow: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Burning of Taliesin, Unseen Terror: The Bomb, Other Bogeymen, and a Culture of Fear* and *The Sixties Cubed* (see enclosed brochures in binder’s back pocket). All these works explore the interrelationship of historical images with empathy, memory, and time along with the precariousness of existence. These projects can be viewed at my website:

www.lighresearch.net

Presentation

Individual grids, each consisting of 200 children's portraits, are presented inside of three, approximately 2.5 x 6 x 1.5 x feet, handmade models of a World War II era 40/8 railroad boxcar (designed to carry 40 soldiers or 8 horses), which are electrically illuminated from within and hung on a wall for viewing. Audiences can peer into the boxcar's doors and windows to see the 600 portraits on the back and sidewalls of the boxcars.

The 1/5-scale boxcars, created by model makers Bob Collignon and Richard Schulenberg, are representations of those used to by the French authorities to transport the children to the extermination camps. They provide a psychological reference that physically frames the brutal conditions people were subjected too and as a memory chamber about how purposeful wickedness was cultivated to destroy European Jewish culture.

Additionally, a series of easy-to-hang 30 x 40-inch children's portraits and grids of 100s of 4 x 6-inch individual portraits are displayed on the walls around the boxcars. The number of these prints can be adjusted to accommodate each exhibition space. Names addresses, and date and place of birth of the deported children are available for display. Steve Reich's *Different Trains, Europe- During the War*, performed by the Israel Contemporary String Quartet, offers a minimalist soundtrack.

The project is ready for exhibition. It ships in three, sturdy, reusable wooden crates, each weighing about 75 pounds, via any commercial carrier, such as FEDEX or UPS. The boxcars are lightweight, can be lifted by one person, and hung with a wall mount and a few screws, which are supplied. The large prints utilize simple two-point, wall hanging gear (supplied) and ship in cardboard containers, as do the small grid prints that are hung with ¾ inch Velcro fasteners (supplied).

I am available to give a PowerPoint presentation about the project covering a variety of artistic and ethical issues including: how my family was affected by the Holocaust, why it is important for the "Hinge Generation" to keep these events in living memory, and the nature of evil. My presentation explores the space between art and history from the position that all accounts of historic events are personal constructions. It makes a case that creative picturemaking can imagine the unimaginable. This can foster different ways of understanding the Holocaust (genocide) that cannot be achieved through traditional documentary photography and encourage the act of imagination to generate empathy.

References

Dr. Patricia Briggs, Director, Weeks Gallery, Jamestown, NY

Sean Donaher, Executive Director, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Ted Pietrzak, Principle, Ted Pietrzak and Associates
Director (retired), Burchfield Penney Art Center, Buffalo, NY

Robert Hirsch is an artist, curator, educator, historian and author of *Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography*, *Light and Lens: Photography in the Digital Age*, *Exploring Color Photography: From Film to Pixels*, and *Photographic Possibilities: The Expressive Use of Equipment, Ideas, Materials, and Processes*. Chinese and German editions of *Light and Lens* have been published. His latest book, *Transformational Imaging: Handmade Photography Since 1960*, was published this spring.

Hirsch has been the Associate Editor of *Photovision* and *Digital Camera* (UK) as well as a contributing writer for *Afterimage*, *CEPA Journal*, *Contact Sheet*, *Digital Camera*, *exposure*, *The Encyclopedia of 19th Photography*, *The Focal Encyclopedia of Photography*, *Fotophile*, *The Handmade Photograph*, *History of Photography*, *Photo Ed* (Canada), *The Photo Review*, *Photovision*, *Photo Technique*, *World Book Encyclopedia* and numerous regional publications including *Buffalo Spree* and *FY*.

Since 2000 Hirsch has lead Light Research, a consulting firm providing professional services to the photographic arts field. He is the former Executive Director and Chief Curator of CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY, and has curated numerous solo and group exhibitions. His contact information and visual and written projects are available at: www.lightresearch.net

Over the past decade, Hirsch's projects have been shown at: The Weeks Gallery, Jamestown Community College; Jamestown, NY; Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, NY; Indigo Art & CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Bruce Gallery, Edinboro University; Rockefeller Fine Arts Center, SUNY Fredonia; The Noorderlicht Photo Festival, Groningen; The Netherlands, Penn Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA; Camera Club of New York; Burchfield-Penney Art Center, Buffalo; Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Pittsburgh, PA; 9th Annual Sociology Conference at Buffalo State College; the Gallery at the Creative Center for Photography, Los Angeles, CA; The Light Factory, Charlotte, NC; Center for Photography at Woodstock; the Thompson Art Gallery at San Jose State University; Brooklyn Arts Council; Parsons School of Design, New York, NY; Big Orbit Gallery, Buffalo, NY; University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM; Vermont Center for Photography, Brattleboro, VT; Artspace, New Haven, CT; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; George Eastman House, Rochester, NY; Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, NY; University of the Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Contemporary Museum, Baltimore, MD; and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, NY, among others.



Each car is about 6 feet long, 2.5 feet tall and 1.5 feet deep.



Boxcar # 1



Boxcar # 2



Boxcar # 3



Boxcar detail showing depth of the car at 1.5 feet.



Boxcar detail of barbed wire covering the windows.



Boxcar detail showing depth of the car interior at 6 inches.



Boxcar detail showing the Star of David that marked each train.



Holocaust Children's Grid #1
21 x 68 inches



Holocaust Children's Grid #2
21 x 68 inches



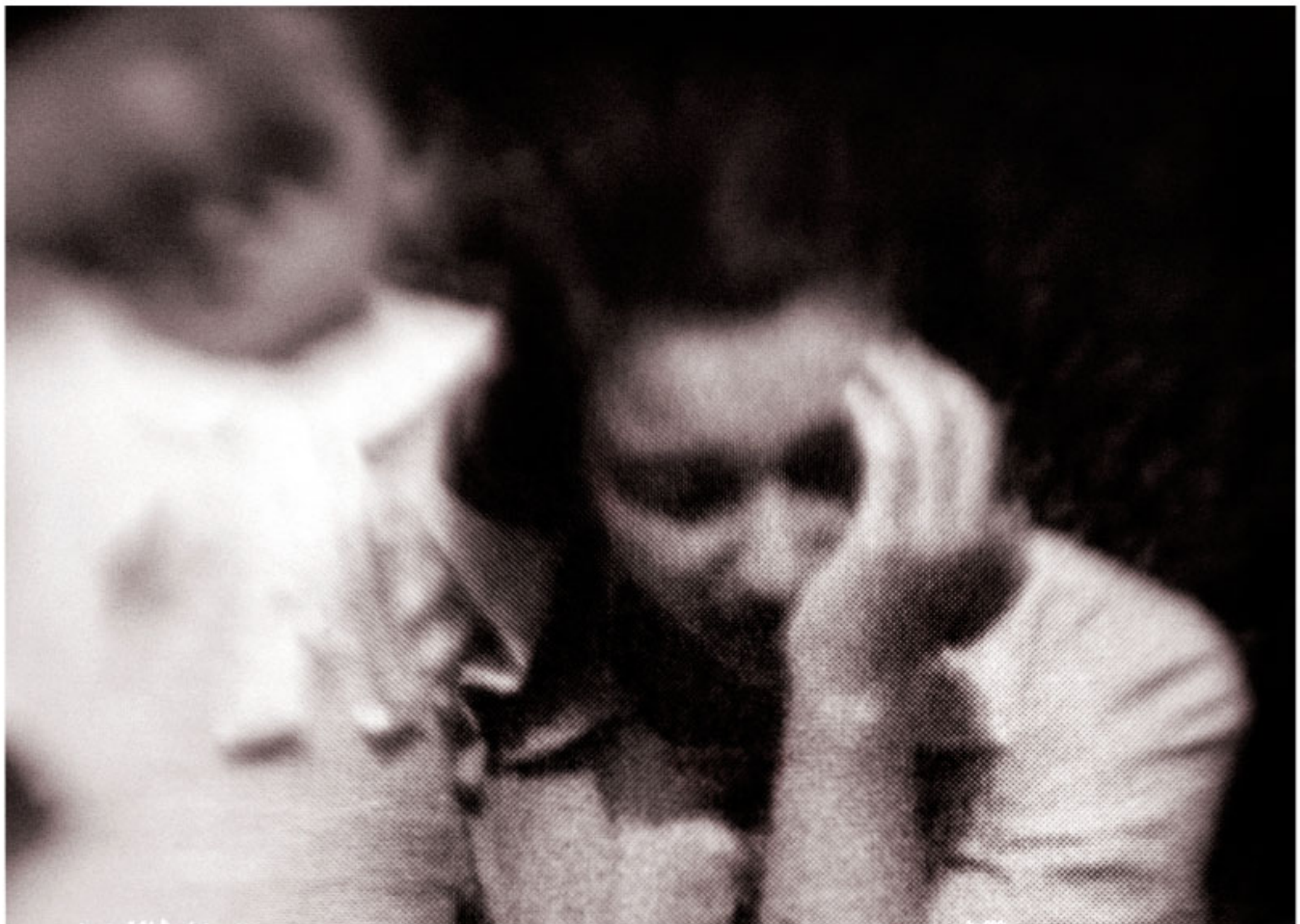
Holocaust Children's Grid #3
21 x 68 inches



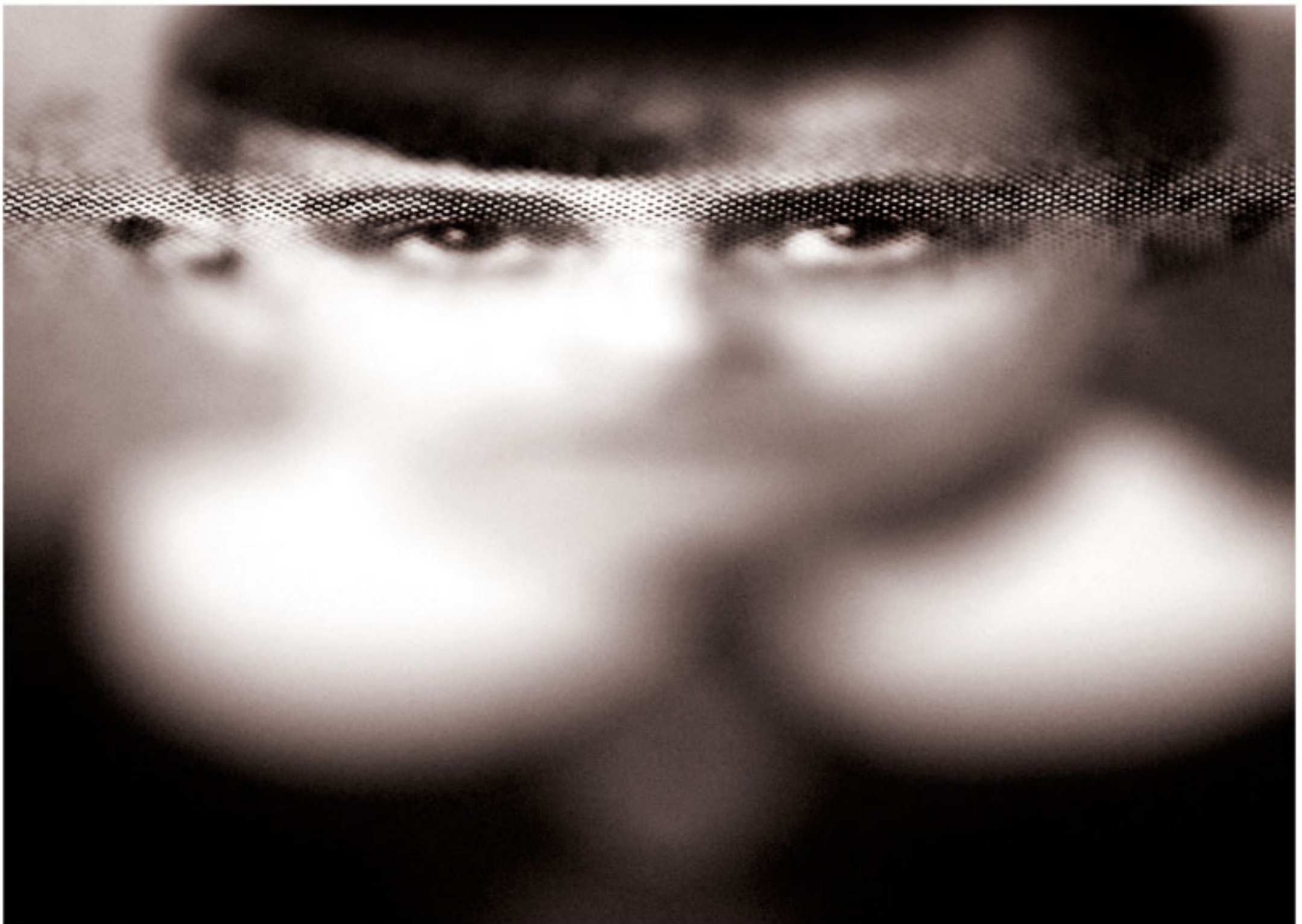
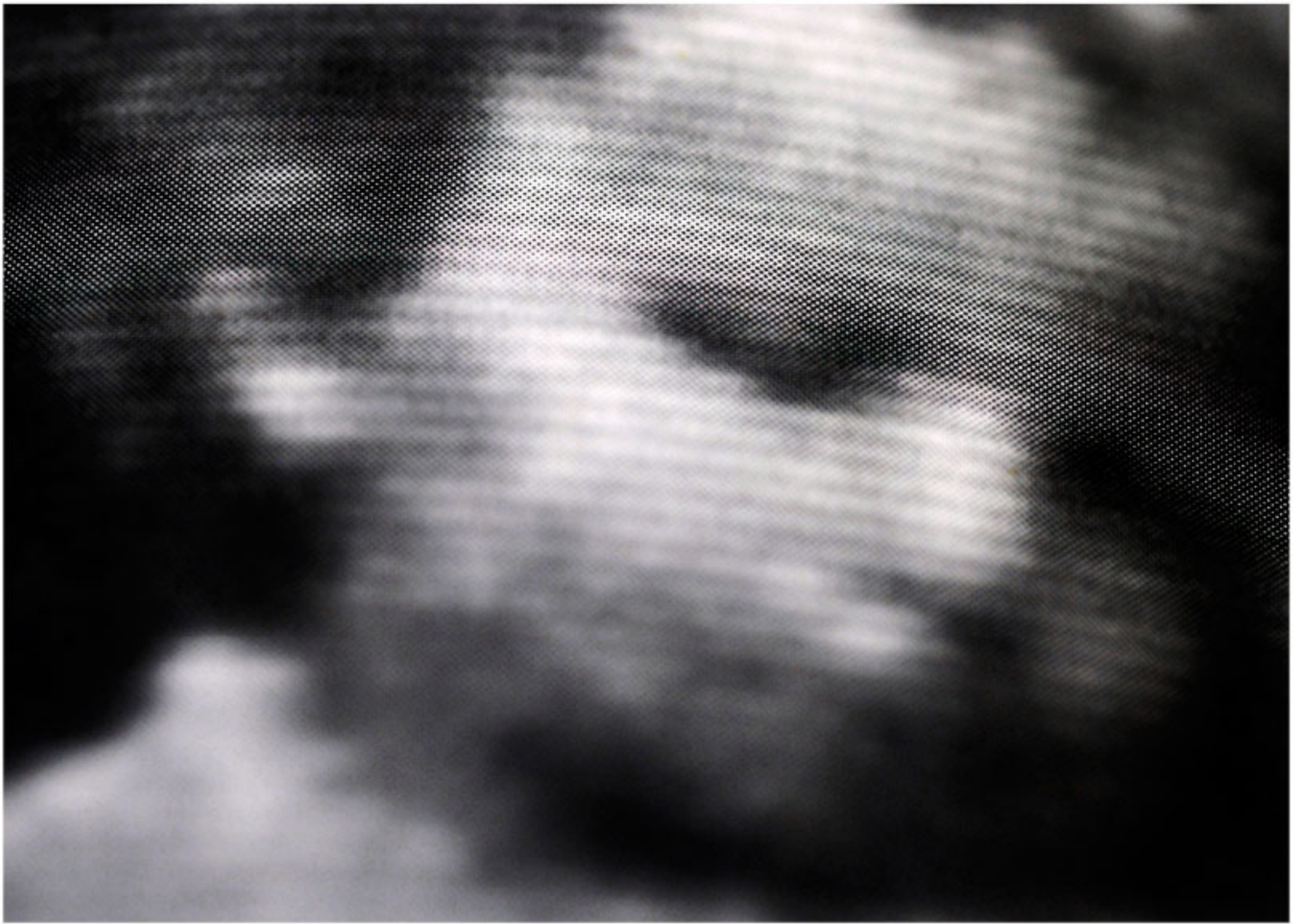
Sample of 4 x 6 - inch grid portraits
variable dimensions



Detail of 4 x 6 - inch grid portraits



Individual Images from the Grid
30 x 40 inches, Inkjet Prints



Individual Images from the Grid
30 x 40 inches, Inkjet Prints



Individual Images from the Grid
30 x 40 inches, Inkjet Prints



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