

Bieke Depoorter

Blinked Myself Awake

HANNIBAL





For my sister

1990s, Ingooigem, Belgium

It's hot, loud and windy. I think I'm seven. A helicopter is circling above me and a dozen other children. Some of them are screaming because they are so excited. Some are quiet and nervous. We are impatiently waiting in a disorganized line for our turn to board the aircraft. Each time a child steps off the helicopter, they look so happy that the rest of us feel sure we're about to have an incredible, life-changing experience.

I smell dry grass baked by the sun and see sloppy, drunk fathers playing soccer while their children wait to fly. We are in a field behind the tavern. I feel both excited and afraid, worried I will forget this special moment. I know that, after my flight, life will continue and I will likely forget this day entirely.

I decide that I have to figure out a way to make this moment a memory and make sure that memory lasts forever. I see my uncle—my godfather—in his blue soccer shorts winking at me. He organized this special day. I watch the fathers running between the gray barricades that form their makeshift field. I look at my sister, my friends, the line of my frenzied classmates, the grass, the helicopter.

Beyond the field, across the street, I see _____ pausing to watch us from a distance while he walks his big brown dog. The dog pulls at the leash, wanting to resume his walk. I wave a small wave and turn back to the fathers chasing the ball, the spectating mothers watching with glasses full of white wine, cheering for their husbands. I see my proud uncle, blowing his referee's whistle at the drunk fathers. I look back to the helicopter; it's going to be my turn soon. I try to look better, to see better, to notice everything possible as clearly as possible. I take a breath and promise myself I will never forget this unforgettable moment.





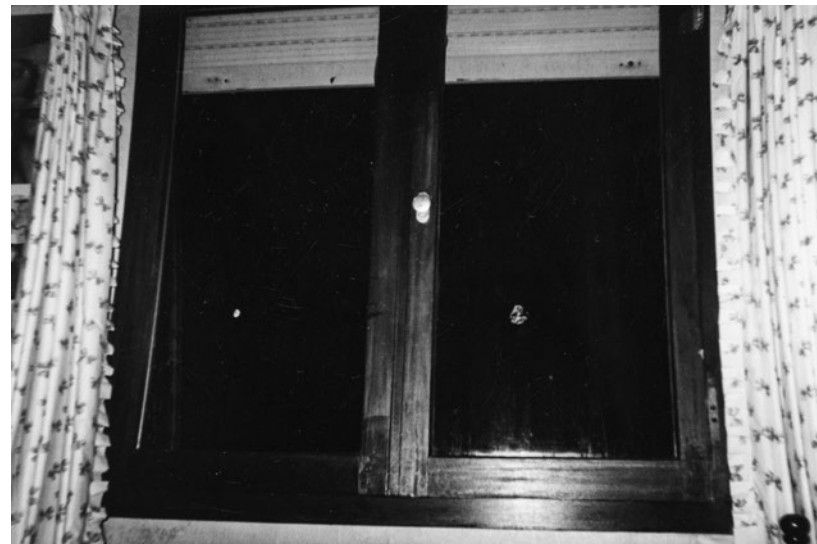
2000, Ingooigem, Belgium

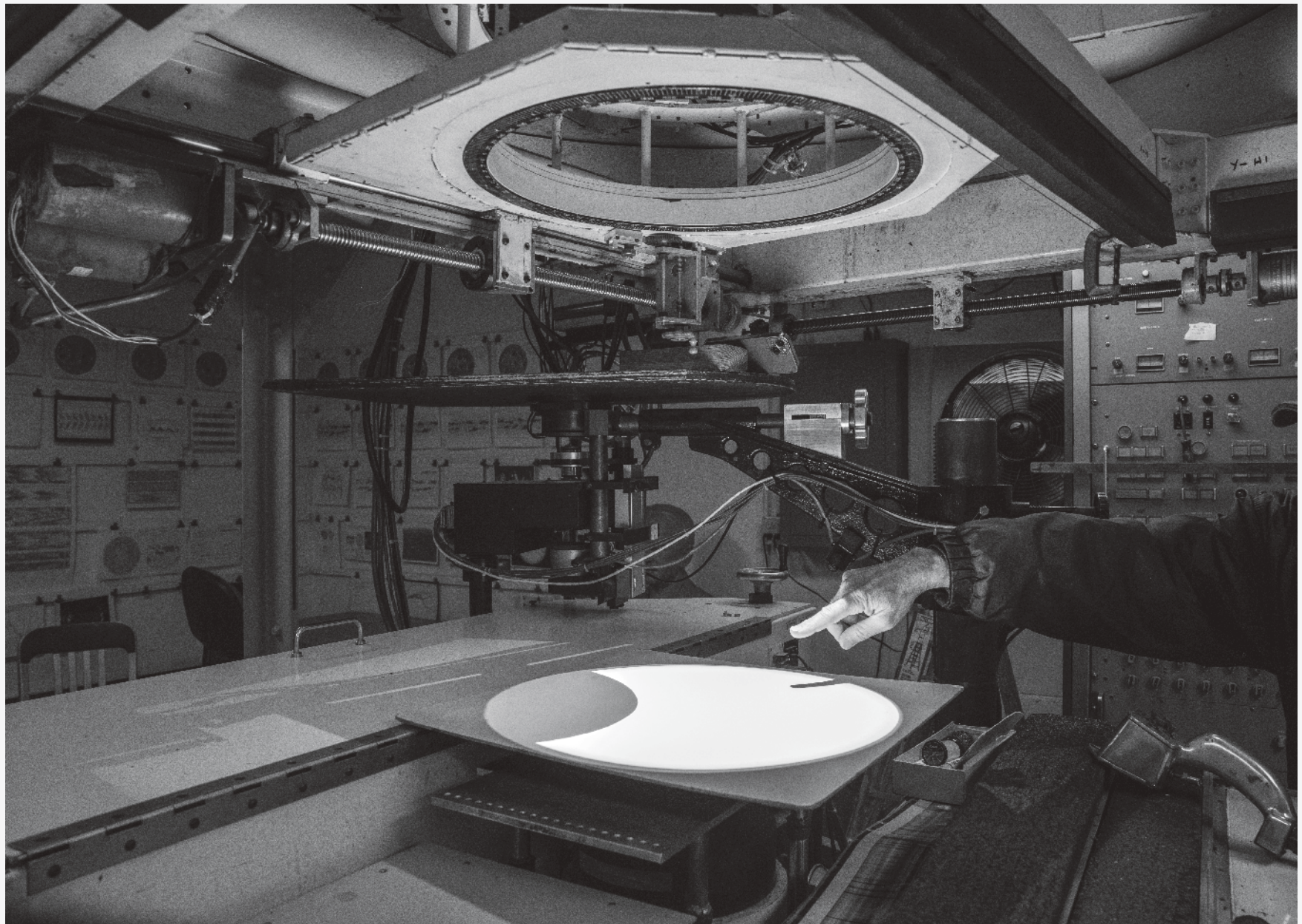
I am counting down the days until Christmas Eve. Two more weeks. I am 14. I recently moved my bed next to the window so I can look outside while lying down. There will be a full moon soon.

I take out my diary, the one started in 1997, or maybe earlier, with many pages torn out. I write about people looking at the Moon throughout history, having different ideas about the exact same object. I write about wanting to die in space, how, if I ever get diagnosed with a terminal illness, I will jump out of a spacecraft. I will float around a bit, until finally I see everything that no one alive knows exists. I will understand everything, knowing there is no going back because “No one here on Earth can know what goes on there. If they did, that would be the death of nature.”

I write about my admiration for the Moon. Then I go downstairs to grab my first camera, a gift from my father, and I take my first-ever photo of the Moon. In my diary, I explain that I want to try to frame the picture so that the window is visible, including my handprints on the glass, the Moon in the background.

I conclude the diary entry by writing that I hope if someone ever secretly reads it, they will need to see this picture too. Otherwise they will never understand how I felt tonight.









1609, Padua, Italy

A man sits on a stool in his garden, drawing. He sketches a circle with charcoal, shading the left half darker than the right, adding in smaller, textured circles. It's fall. The sky is clear, and Galileo Galilei may have just become one of the first people in history to see sharp, fine details of the Moon, its craters and mountains. A few months earlier, a Dutch lens grinder and spectacle maker filed a patent for glass that "serves to see things far away as if they were nearby." When Galileo heard of this discovery, he built his own telescope in a matter of days by putting two of these eyeglass lenses at opposite ends of a long tube.

Refining his new device over the next months, he will see stars never seen before. He will grasp, with firsthand knowledge, that the universe is far bigger than humanity imagines. Soon, he will publicly begin to side with Copernicus, questioning the fundamental cosmic fact that the Earth is the center of the universe.

In 1610, he will point his telescope at Jupiter and confirm that the planet has moons and that these moons orbit their planet just as our Moon orbits ours, just as we orbit the Sun. He will publish his findings in a 14-page pamphlet titled, "The Starry Messenger." The Church will pressure him to call his conclusions on heliocentrism opinions, ideas, or hypotheses rather than facts. He will spend the rest of his life observing the night sky under house arrest until, eventually, his eyesight fails completely and he goes blind.

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Colophon

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