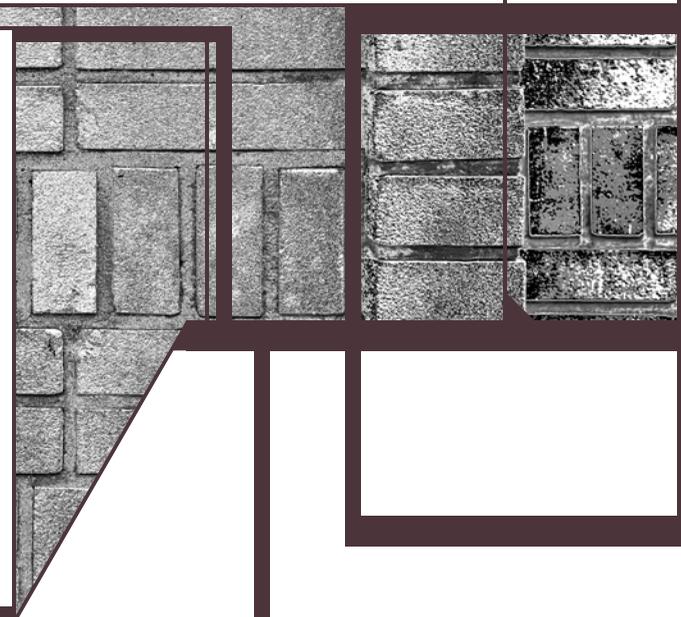






Can
Love
Be
a
Photo-
graph

40
Years
of
Inez
&
Vinoodh



HANNIBAL

I first met Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin in 1993, when I was an intern at Bureau Amsterdam, then a newly established branch of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. I assisted the curatorial team on one of the duo's first museum exhibitions (at the time still presented under the name Van Lamsweerde). Encountering their work for the first time, I vividly recall asking myself: *What exactly am I looking at—and what layers are hidden within these images?*

On view were works from the *Thank You Thighmaster* series—in which photographs of imaginary models named Pam, Joan, Kim, and Britt were brought into existence by digitally manipulating multiple shots of an actress and four mannequin dolls using a Quantel Paintbox computer—alongside *Final Fantasy*—where young children were given eerily adult smiles through a similar technique. The accompanying newsletter framed the work in relation to Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), a text that articulated the emergence of a world increasingly shaped by digital technology. In the text, the subtlety of Inez & Vinoodh's interventions was contrasted with the overt montage techniques of avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism, where ruptures and seams remained visible. As Leontine Coelewijn, curator of the exhibition, observed at the time: "The way in which Van Lamsweerde modifies her photos with the computer recalls biotechnological interventions in genetic material—the result is so thoroughly manipulated that it is no longer experienced as a montage or composite."

This seamless artificial reality—shiny and new, seductive and disturbing—stayed

with me. Over the decades, it has functioned as a kind of Cassandra: a prophetic vision of a future that had already arrived, at once more unreal and more real than anything I could then have imagined. This sense of prescience holds equally true for the extraordinarily rich oeuvre that Inez & Vinoodh have produced in the years since, both within and beyond the conventional art world. Like many others, I followed their work through leading fashion magazines, was astonished by their music videos for avant-garde artists such as Björk, and marveled at their portraits of influential figures on the global stage. Their practice has remained consistently surprising, driven by pioneering uses of photography and a radical rethinking of classical identities and stereotypes.

To invite Inez & Vinoodh to reflect on four decades of artistic collaboration at the Kunstmuseum Den Haag was therefore deeply compelling. What happens when their photographs, including those extracted from their original editorial or commercial contexts, fill the walls of our "classical" museum—an architectural icon designed by H.P. Berlage and opened in 1935 and widely regarded as one of the most beautiful museum buildings in the Netherlands? The result is a layered and experimental retrospective that couldn't be more about the now, yet at the same time offers an overly rich media archeology and a poignant flux of vistas into the future.

Beginnings

After meeting at art school, the duo's collaboration began in 1986 when Vinoodh invited Inez to work on his first fashion collection after college. The late 1980s

was a time when photography had not yet become all-encompassing. Cameras were widely available, but they had not achieved the ubiquity that would come later with smartphones. The two further developed their practice in 1992, when Vinoodh joined Inez on her projects, and they moved to New York for her residency at MoMA PS1. In hindsight, we can discern the development of a striking parallel: The evolution of Inez & Vinoodh's practice mirrors the technological development of photography itself.

Earlier than most, they recognized that the accelerating circulation of images—and the rapid advancement of digital manipulation—would fundamentally alter how people perceive themselves. In response, they began creating new beings within their images: the digitally modified figures of *Thank You Thighmaster* (1993) and *Final Fantasy* (1993), followed by *The Forest* (1995). Rather than framing these figures as alien, they called them “the family.” These figures with their composite bodies were not outsiders, but inhabitants of the same surreal photographic realm in which the artists themselves operated—exposing a superficial world where psychological conditions boil over from beneath a perfect facade. Inez & Vinoodh call these family members “psychomorphic meta-beings,” who co-exist with the artists in a growingly online world in which fact and fiction collide, and news has become entertainment.

These early series are foundational to the Inez & Vinoodh canon because they crystallize an enduring interrogation of the body as a constructed, mediated, and politically charged surface. The works of the *Thank You Thighmaster* series critique 1990s beauty culture, exposing the

commodification and optimization of the female body through fitness, advertising, and glamour—an absurdity underscored by the reference to Suzanne Somers' ThighMaster commercial.

Through early digital manipulation, photographic realism is destabilized, giving rise to hyper-stylized, almost grotesque corporealities that collapse distinctions between documentation and fabrication. The androgynous, alien bodies dismantle normative gender representations, revealing femininity and masculinity as performative effects rather than inherent truths. In this convergence of digital distortion, fashion imagery, and bodily critique, the work anticipates contemporary debates around retouching, avatars, and self-modification.

Becoming One

The emotional and relational dimensions of Inez & Vinoodh's work extends beyond their constructed imagery into method. They are remarkable for maintaining long-term relationships with collaborators: Members of their core team have worked with them for more than thirty-five years. Their subjects, too, often become part of their social fabric—among them iconic artists such as Cindy Sherman and Lady Gaga—underscoring the central role of co-creation and trust in their artistic process. Equally significant are the moments when Inez & Vinoodh insert themselves into their own work, challenging conventions and expanding the dialogue between photography, fashion, and art.

The *Me* series (1998) are Polaroids characterized by Inez & Vinoodh as “self-portraits by means of other people's features and bodies.” This series is, significantly, positioned as the starting

point of the exhibition. The group of close friends and family were shot on 4x5 Polaroid instant film to heighten the immediacy of the process of choosing the final work, without the interference of computers or time. The artists and their subjects were positioned on a bed specially constructed to restrict movement and allow for direct eye-contact while lying down. This immobility invites a pure exchange of self through the lens by, in the words of the artists, “eliminating ego” while preserving the relationship between artists and subjects in the moment. Here the distinction between subject and artist collapses, identity is not revealed but created in collaboration. Selfhood appears through the dialogical act of seeing the other.

This exploration reaches a critical point in the *Me Kissing* series (1999). These works occupy a singular position in late twentieth-century art history by radicalizing self-portraiture into a form of relational ontology. By photographing Inez kissing Vinoodh, the artists collapse the roles of artist, subject, lover, and witness into a single image. Moreover, what is depicted is not intimacy as a unique sentiment of the autonomous individual, but a multifaceted reference to the many ways in which intimacy and self-portraiture are visual structures that lie beneath our perception. However, despite this dissociative and “meta” character, the *Me Kissing* series is the expression of the self and love for the other. These subjects remain the primary sites of inquiry, asserting again that the self is irreducibly relational and that the photographic picture is a core part of this lovemaking.

Think Love

This inquiry culminates in the present exhibition, which poses its title not as a question but as a statement:

Can Love Be a Photograph.

At the end of their retrospective, Inez & Vinoodh present *Think Love*, their most recent series depicting the love between their son Charles and his partner Natalie Brumley, echoing their own relationship forty years earlier. Beneath a red transparent cloth, which here functions as a glowing membrane, Charles and Natalie halt the flow of movement and time. The images stage devotion alongside repetition, appropriation, and copying—qualities inherent to photography itself. A love story endlessly regenerated, captured with the latest iPhone.

Think Love occupies a distinctive position in contemporary art by reframing a corporate commission as a conceptual continuation of a decades-long artistic inquiry. The iPhone is not treated as a neutral tool or technological upgrade, but as an active agent within the ontology of the image. Here, consumer technology becomes inseparable from the construction of intimacy.

Art-historically, the project aligns with post-photographic practices that understand the camera not as an index of reality, but as a mediator of experience. Since the 1990s, Inez & Vinoodh have examined how bodies, identities, and emotions are shaped through technological intervention—from digital distortion to relational selfhood. *Think Love* extends this trajectory by asking whether love can remain legible when produced through ubiquitous, networked devices designed for speed, circulation, and consumption.

For Inez & Vinoodh the red fabric functions as an obstruction that, paradoxically, enables visibility. Love appears not as spectacle or narrative climax, but as a fragile, contingent state sustained through touch, proximity, and shared presence. Refusing technological triumphalism, the project embraces softness, blur, and emotional ambiguity. It reiterates the position that appeared foundational for Inez & Vinoodh's own life and work: Contemporary intimacy is not threatened by mediation, but constituted through it.

Ultimately, *Think Love* therefore affirms Inez & Vinoodh's core thesis: Photography's most profound task is not to show the world as it is, but to visualize how we are shaped—emotionally, bodily, and relationally—by the technologies through which we see and connect with one another.

Common Threads

Looking back at the works that Inez & Vinoodh have co-created over the past forty years, love indeed appears as a surprising red thread, hiding in plain sight. Yet there is more at stake. For the exhibition and this book, Inez & Vinoodh selected sixteen themes through which they trace transhistorical connections within the vast body of images they have produced. A central focal point is the stubborn status of photography as a herald of unquestioned truth. The documentary function of the photograph has long been considered the medium's primary virtue. To reduce photography, however, to a mere objective window onto the world does a disservice to both artist and viewer—particularly in the case of Inez & Vinoodh. Walking through the exhibition and turning the pages of

this book, we encounter images stretched to the very edge of believability. Time and again, the artists challenge photography's claim to truth, prompting us to reconsider not only the image itself but also our own willingness to believe it.

Drawing on the visual language of advertising, mass media, and fashion photography, Inez & Vinoodh often subvert the very mechanisms of seduction and manipulation those systems employ. In this sense, their work resonates with Pop Art—not as quotation, but as critical appropriation. This excavation of photography's influence on how we perceive the world moves through multiple territories. Gender, and the performance of gender, returns insistently. In *Post Pin-Up*, objectification, domesticity, and womanhood are enlarged and reworked; their subjects are pushed into the uncanny, their beauty exaggerated to the point of estrangement. Masculinity, by contrast, is repeatedly destabilized. In *Post Power*, men appear soft, vulnerable, and ornamental—Brad Pitt at his prettiest, a melancholic Bill Murray with flowers woven into his beard—while women assume traditionally “masculine” attributes; for example, Lady Gaga's embodiment of her alter ego Joe Calderone. Most compelling, perhaps, are those figures who inhabit the in-between: Subjects who resist the established gender binary altogether. These individuals are portrayed by Inez & Vinoodh with tenderness, dignity, and care—neither spectacle nor statement, but presence.

The overarching surrealist strain in Inez & Vinoodh's work can be described as conceptual rather than decorative—less about dream imagery for its own sake, more about destabilizing how we read beauty, identity, and the body. Their work treats

the human body the way classic Surrealists treated objects: stretchable, rearrangeable, and emotionally charged. Mannerisms and gestures, size changes and repetition lead to startling imagery that seems to be oscillating between the sublime and the grotesque to end up in the category of post-human surrealism—a world in which the body is no longer fixed, but exists only for the present, and could quite possibly be changed later.

The camera's power—its capacity to elevate, sanctify, and mythologize—is another axis of inquiry. In portraiture, Inez & Vinoodh resist documentary reduction. Their subjects are not humanized through demystification, but transformed through amplification. In portrait series grouped under titles such as *Still Life*, *Worship*, and *New Gods*, cultural figures as well as exquisite flowers are captured as larger-than-life icons, deities, or specters—figures suspended between individuality and projection. To be photographed is not to be revealed, but to be reconstituted. Photography here functions as a technology of transformation rather than representation.

While Inez & Vinoodh are widely known for their pioneering use of digital manipulation, more traditional modernist techniques—photomontage and collage—have played an increasingly crucial role in their practice. In the *In Print* section, these strategies are celebrated by the transformation of the museum space itself into a large-scale collage, overlaid with iconic imagery that foregrounds the dynamic relationship between image, text, and layout. Often, this explicit and multimedia layering is the result of collaboration. First and foremost with each other, but also with a wide

constellation of artists and makers. Their work unfolds within complex ecosystems—editorials, magazine covers, advertising campaigns—where photographers, stylists, makeup artists, hairdressers, lighting technicians, graphic designers, editors, and clients converge to create a unified vision. Inez & Vinoodh offer their images as a canvas, or even as a *cadavre exquis*, inviting others to intervene.

About Ambiguity

In this publication, Inez & Vinoodh return to their early series such as *Thank You Thighmaster* and *The Forest* in conversation with artist-actress and friend Tilda Swinton. However, the earlier reference to Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (as mentioned above) is questioned. As Inez explains: "Looking back, we see they were never really about cyborgs; about ambiguity, yes. They were about something more than human: showing what's inside on the outside; emotions surfacing physically. It shows humans being ravaged by feelings."

Francesco Bonami arrives at a similar conclusion in his essay *Inner Invisible Artificiality*, which asserts that the work of Inez & Vinoodh depicts an invisible reality that looks artificial but is not. A reality that speaks of our ungraspable inner world and its relation with our perceptions and imagination. A world in which love and passion, once they encounter each other, cannot separate any longer. Blessed and doomed at the same time.

In a close reading of the three portraits of Chelsea Manning taken by Inez & Vinoodh in 2017 for an interview with Manning in *The New York Times*, Guus Beumer explores the relationship between the news cycle and the fashion

editorial and the malleability of identity. This essay serves as an example of how portraits taken by Inez & Vinoodh can operate as an exploration of both subject and environment. Beumer illustrates how their portraits hover between documentary and fiction, and the subtle clues that are given through the language of clothes.

Pamela Chen traces a history of photography through the artists' practice, from the near-instant Polaroids used as test proofs during the first decades of their career to the contemporary use of the iPhone camera in a recent campaign for Apple. What emerges is a continuous inquiry into memory, speed, intimacy, and technological mediation.

Delivering a philological inquiry into the various artistic strategies and signifiers in four decades of photographic production by Inez & Vinoodh, Donatien Grau arrives at the conclusion that the artists transform the medium into a dynamic affirmation of life, hence mirroring love.

Willemijn van der Zwaan, too, examines this entanglement, noting that it is rarely seamless. Instead, it manifests through cracks, ruptures, and sutures. Rather than pursuing perfection, she argues, Inez & Vinoodh seek constant renewal through disruption. Their distortions of the image become a reaffirmation of partnership: with each other, with their subjects, and with their collaborators

Among the most significant of these collaborators are graphic designers Mathias Augustyniak and Michaël Amzalag, known as M/M (Paris). Since the beginning of their partnership, they have layered hand-drawn imagery, collage, and digital interventions onto Inez & Vinoodh's photographs, responding to the images as a *cadavre exquis*. They have also designed this publication,

transforming it into a playful, experimental sourcebook that documents not only an exhibition, but a shared zeitgeist—one born of collaboration and mutual trust.

Ultimately, what is on offer are multiple perspectives that both celebrate and deepen our understanding of Inez & Vinoodh's artistic co-creations over the past four decades. This project is indebted to the generosity of the artists, their team, friends, and family. Gratitude extends to Jasper Bode of The Ravestijn Gallery in Amsterdam, and to all those portrayed—who embody the humanity and love at the core of this work. Thanks to the Erik Bos Fonds for their generosity in realizing this publication.

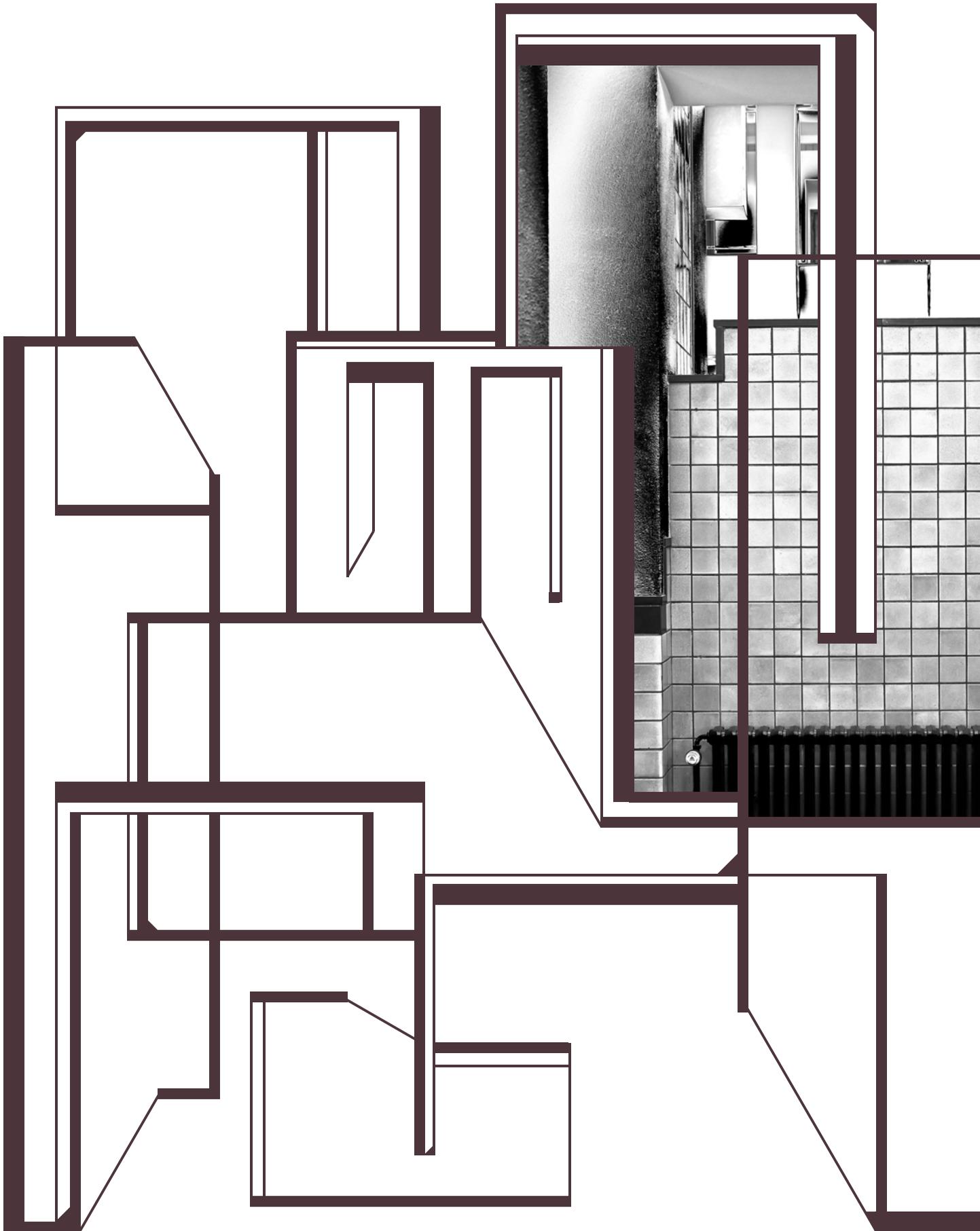
This exhibition and publication do not resolve photography's ambiguities; they inhabit them. They propose that love—like photography—is not a stable object but a practice: relational, risky, and transformative. The question “Can love be a photograph?” is not answered through representation, but through persistence. Through four decades of collaboration, experimentation, and shared authorship, Inez & Vinoodh demonstrate that love does not merely appear in photographs—it animates them.

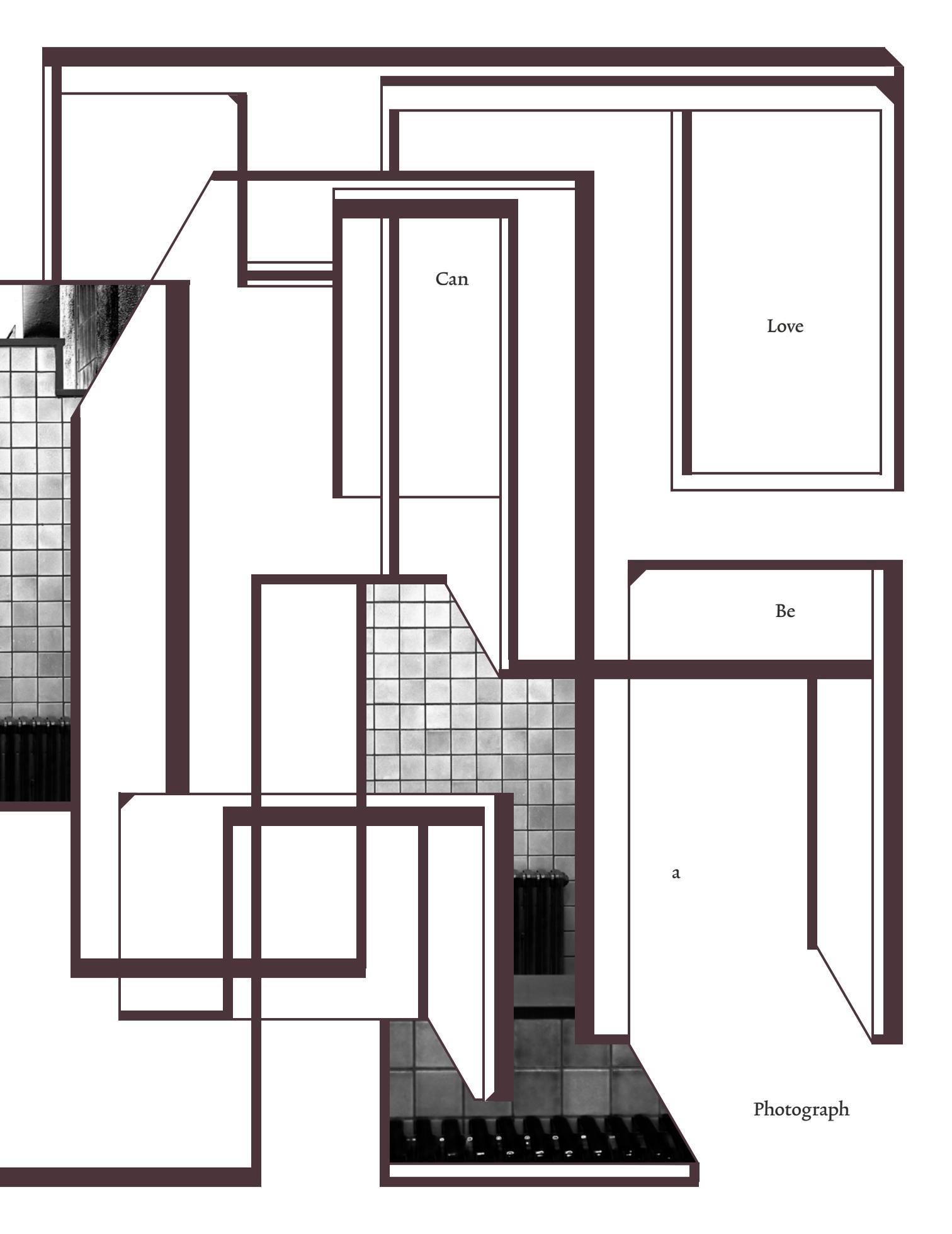
The question, then, is no longer whether love can be photographed.

It is love.

Can Love be a Photograph.

Period.





Can

Love

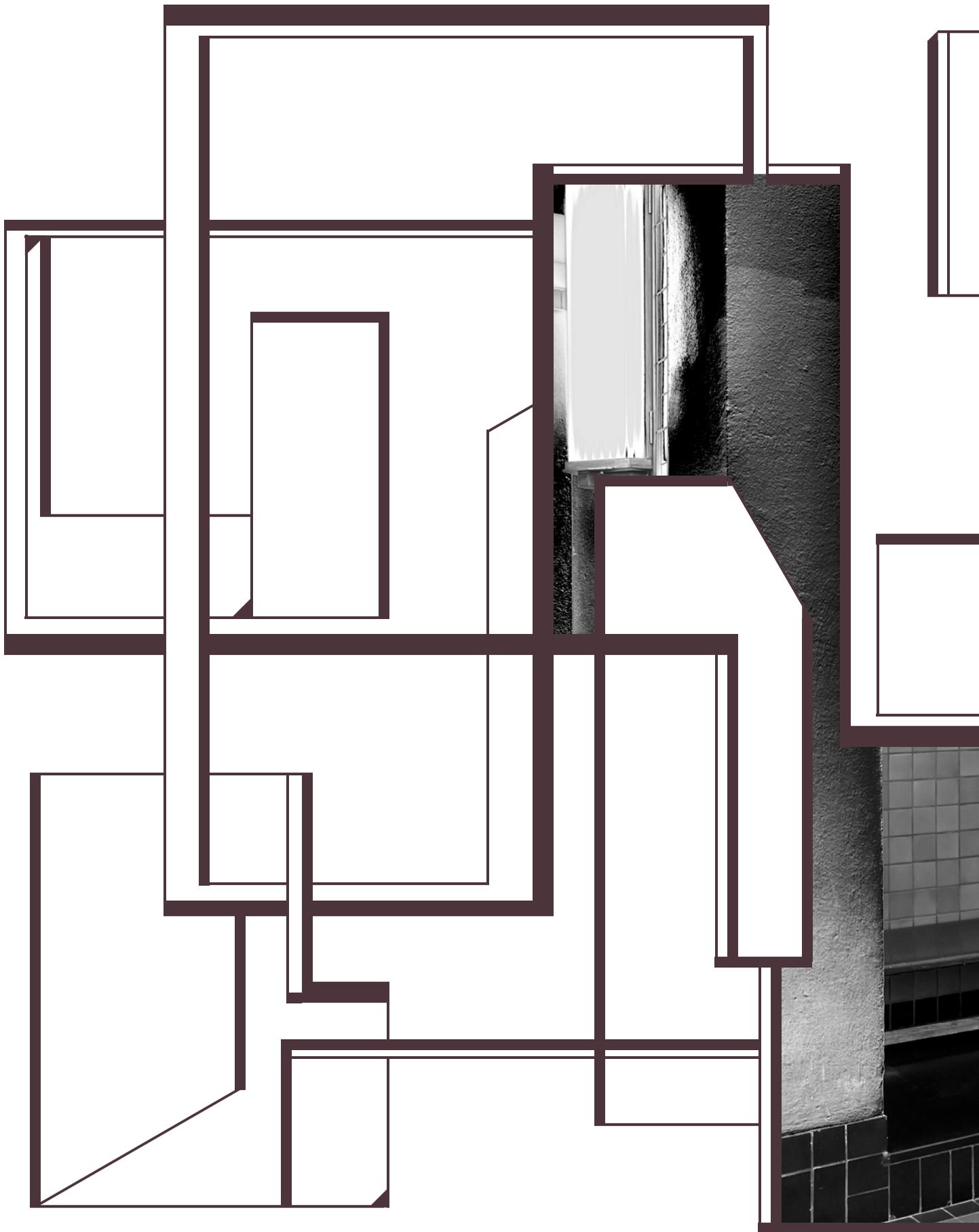
Be

a

Photograph













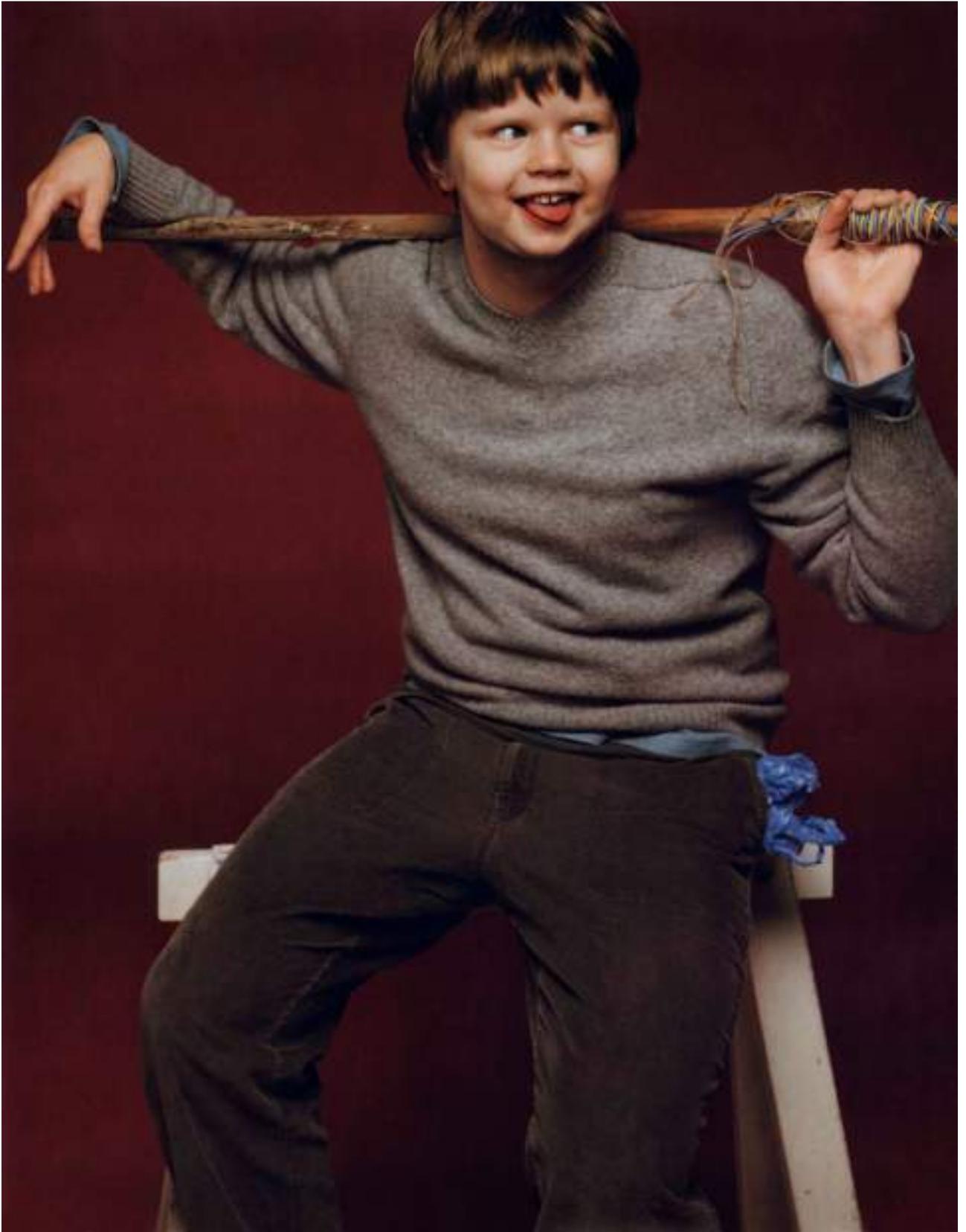


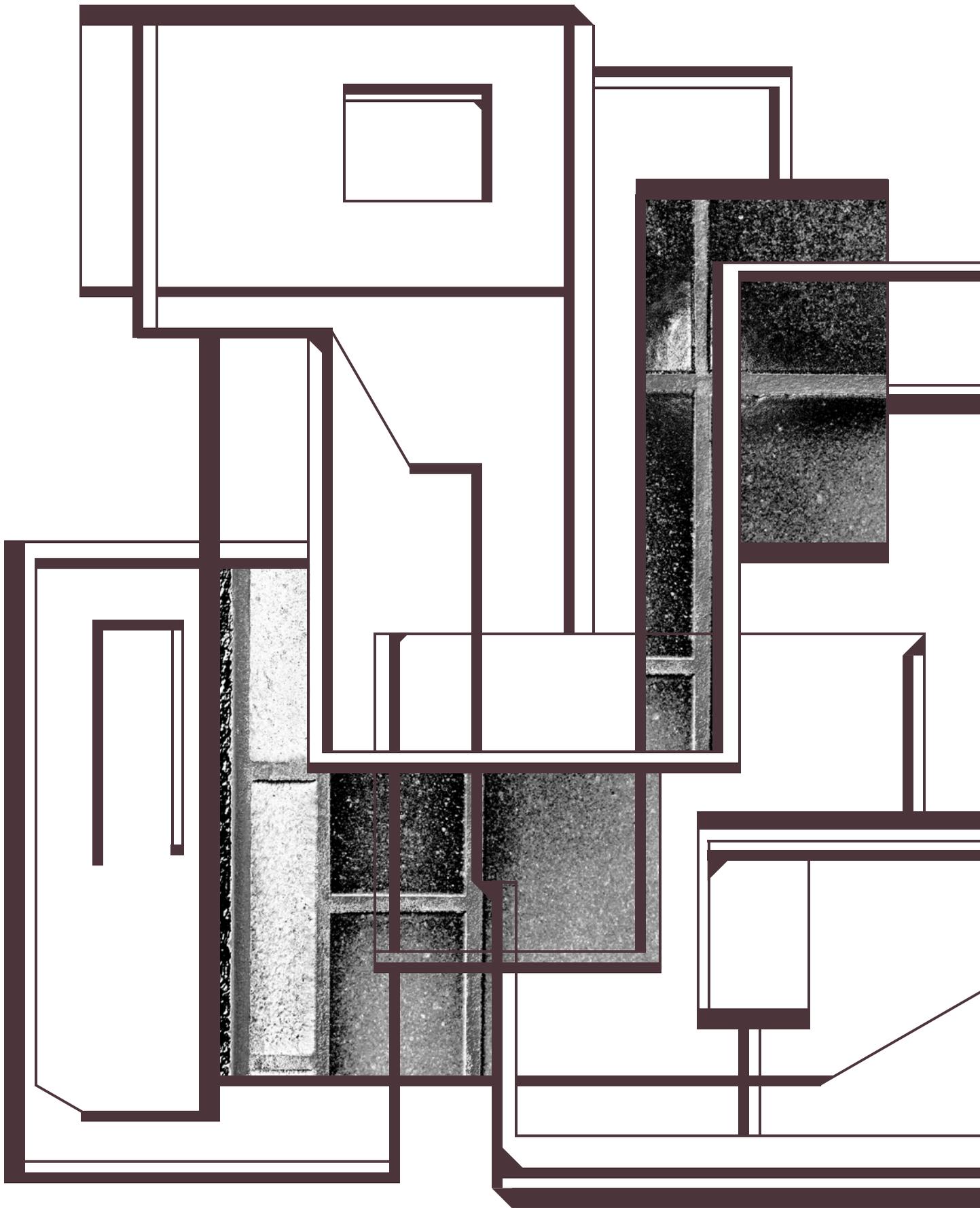
PHI





Christy Turlington – Balenciaga with M/M (Paris), 2001

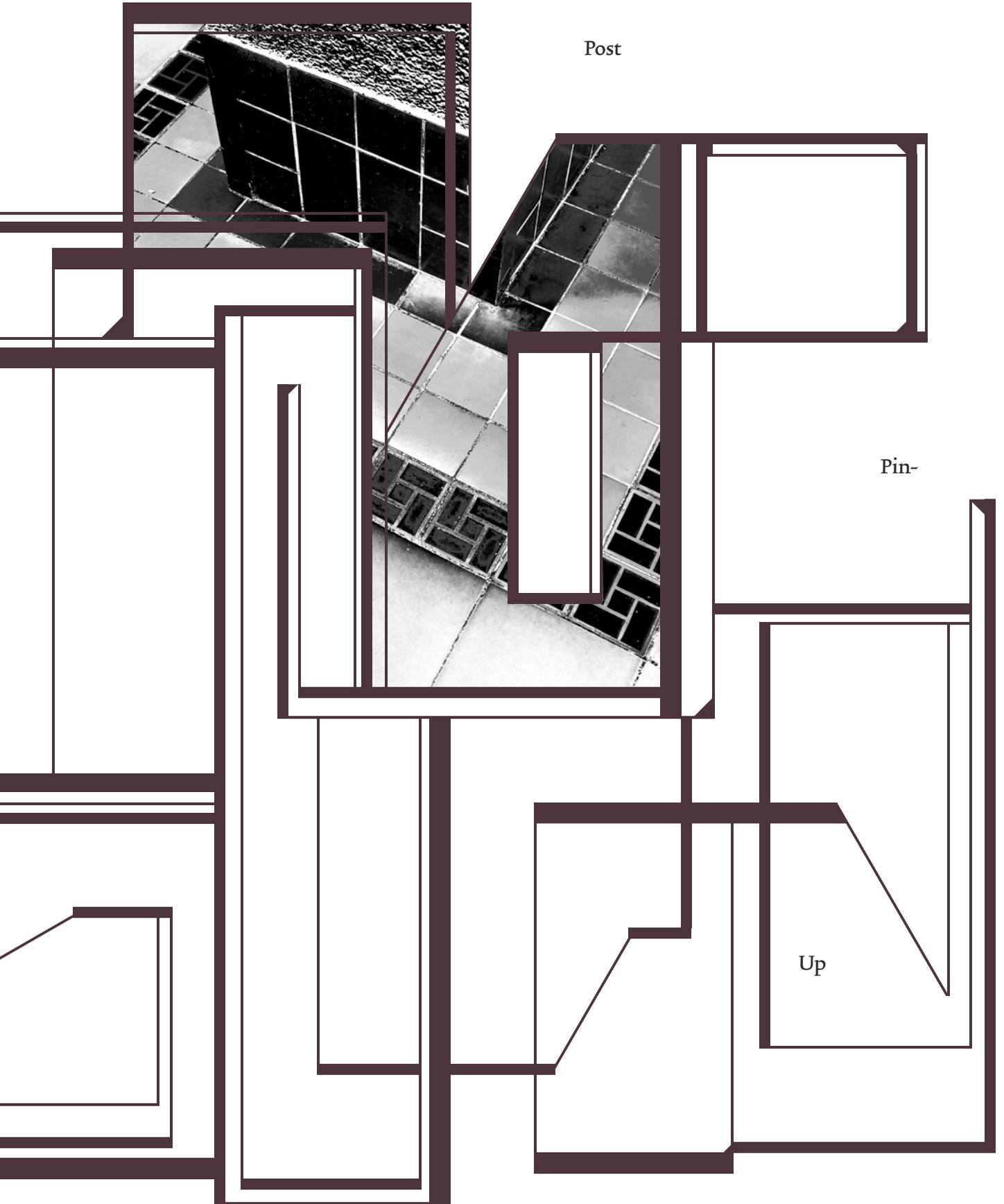




Post

Pin-

Up







Kate -
New York,
1999



Kate -
New York,
1999





Jessica

NY 2002

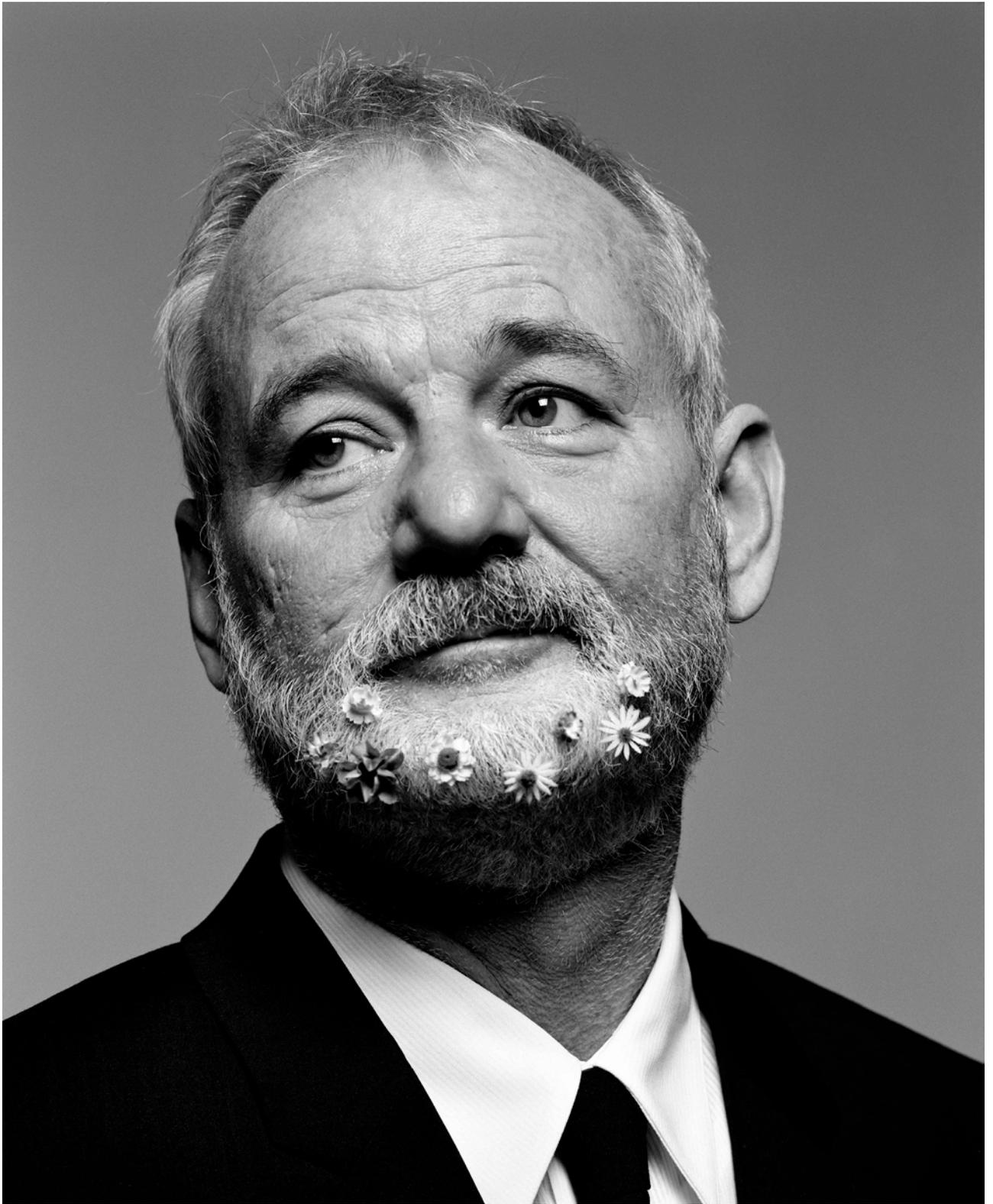
Jessica –
New York,
2002



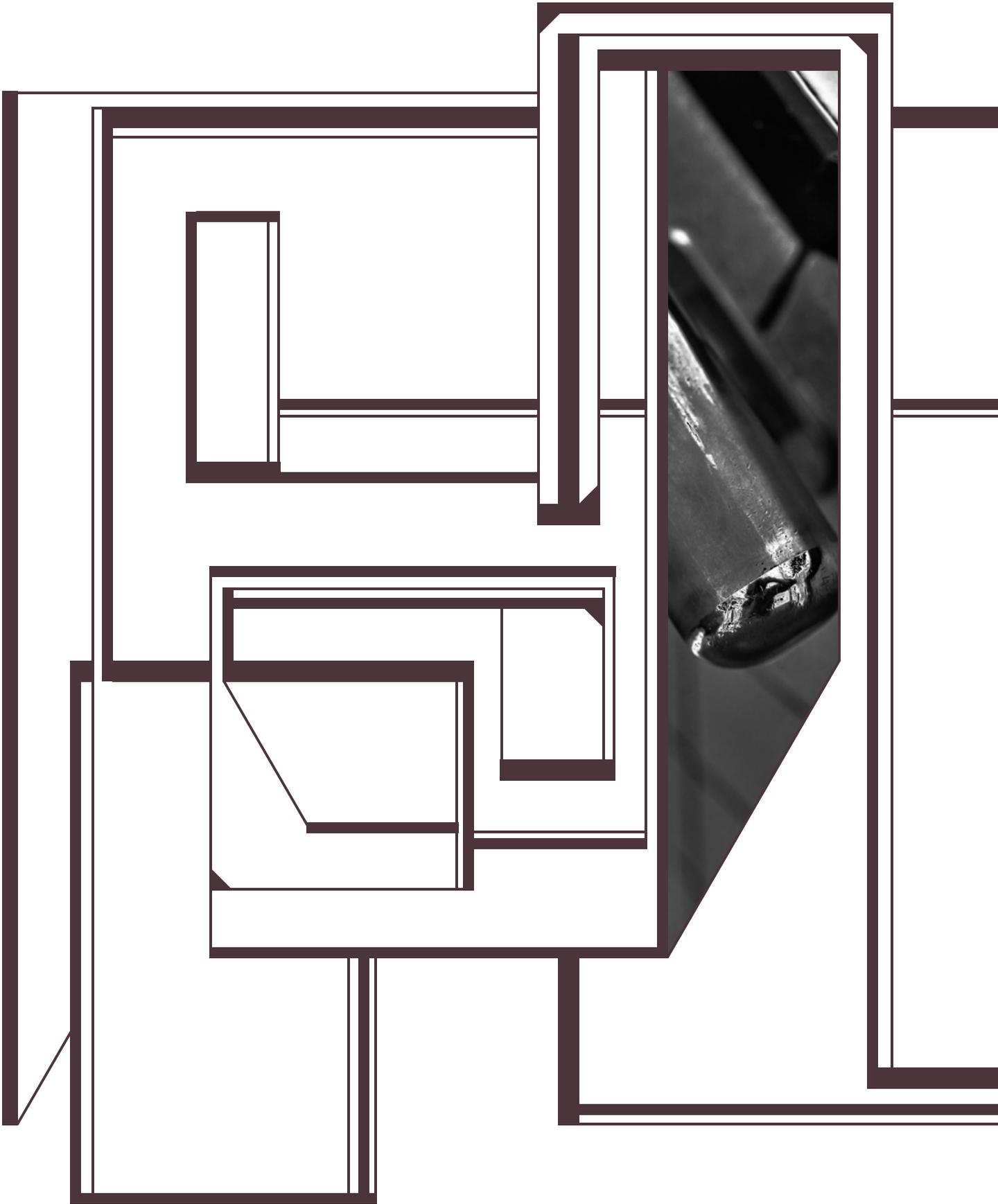
HEDI + BOYD

NY 2000

Hedi & Boyd –
New York,
2000







Still



Life



Tilda Swinton
in Conversation with
Inez & Vinoodh

Tilda Swinton
Hello, my darlings—can you see me?

Inez & Vinoodh
Hold on... yes, yes, we've got you.

I want, if possible, to make this conversation a place where you can introduce some very simple, fundamental ideas. Because when I think about how I approach your work—the way I feel I interact with it—it's really all about experience.

There will be so many people talking to you about the more material, technical, practical aspects of what you do. But it occurs to me that what I might be useful for is to go up onto what I call the "objectivity cloud" and look down at the entire experience of your work—on you. Not so much the work in the world, because there's only so much you can know about that—but what it is for you.

And I thought we could start with love. Because your title, *Can Love Be a Photograph*, is such a beautiful question without a question mark. But still, it's a question—which I love so much more than any possible answer. This idea of putting love even before photography feels really important.

Can you tease that out?

Love Before Photography

For us, it's not even a question anymore—it's reality. It's the way we live.

We love people. And we love collecting them—"collecting" in quotation marks—through the lens.

Photography is a way of holding onto everything we love. It's a collection of things we admire, things that inspire us: It might be a single shoe someone is wearing, or someone's face, or their entire history, which somehow everyone can feel just by looking at the picture.

So, the question for us is often: How do we hold everything we love close? That's one of the foundations of our work.

Then there is the whole process of working and making things—which is also an act of love. Meeting new people, feeding ourselves with their ideas and knowledge. That exchange between people is the heart of everything for us. The pictures are really a record of that exchange.

Sometimes the final image isn't even the most important part. It's the process—the being together, the energy passing back and forth through the camera.

That really makes sense, because one of the things I value in your work is that it never looks quite finished. It always feels like a portal.

Partly that's about the codes you're working with, twisting, embellishing, disrupting. You give the eye and the heart new shapes. Your images call the spirit into curiosity—rather than simply meeting the viewer where they are. They summon wonder.

So, when you say the making is so important, it fits: There's something molten about your world. It's as though the person standing in front of your work is invited to join the dots, or to continue the journey somehow for themselves.

Silence, Stillness, and Inner Life

Yes. And it's very much about a certain silence.

People often think "aliveness" in an image is about obvious action or dynamism. And, of course, we've made images that are very active. But for us, true aliveness is often in the silence—in the action of the emotion rather than the body.

That's where human dignity lives. A photograph is a frozen moment, and in that quiet, everything that belongs to that person is heightened. That's why we choose *this* image and not that one.

I think what you're really talking about is inner life. Not just the inner life of the subject, but the inner life of the atmosphere you create.

And this comes back to love—to the idea of love as witness. Love as witnessing someone in their

own dignity, their own sense of incompleteness, whatever they are... and not messing with it. Just being present for it.

What we see in the image is that inner life playing. In a way, they're never "still lifes" at all. A great still life, I would propose, has movement inside it—a life force.

Exactly. A still life is also a portrait—sometimes even a self-portrait. We open up and give something of ourselves back to you.

When everything aligns, the images become very emotionally strong—but in ways that are very small, very subtle. That subtlety is key.

Movement, Film, and the Threshold of 'Too Much'

I want to talk more about silence and movement, because this brings us to your relationship to film. I'm curious how film lives in you as artists, compared with the still frame.

There's something interesting there, because we've noticed that when we're shooting film, we get bored very quickly if nothing is really happening.

But movement doesn't have to be big. It can be tiny: the smallest shift of a shoulder, a finger, an eye, even a thought. When we worked with you—with Haider Ackermann, with Tom Ford—it was all about that tiny movement.

CAN



BE

A



About the Authors

Mathias Augustyniak is the co-founder, with Michaël Amzalag, of the art and design partnership M/M (Paris).

Guus Beumer is the co-founder of House Belsito and wool project Bruin.

Francesco Bonami is an art curator and writer.

Pamela Chen is Chief Aesthetics Scientist, Apple Camera and Photos.

Donatien Grau is a philologist. He is Head of Contemporary Programs at the Musée du Louvre, and also Artistic Director and Editor-in-Chief of *Alphabet*.

Margriet Schavemaker is General Director of Kunstmuseum Den Haag, and also Professor of Media and Art in Museum Practice at the University of Amsterdam.

Tilda Swinton is an actor and artist.

Willemijn van der Zwaan is Curator of Photography at Fotomuseum Den Haag.

Dearest all,

This catalogue is dedicated to all of the amazing human beings we have photographed over the past forty years. It is your trust and inspiration that drives both our work and our lives.

Enormous thanks go to all of the incredibly talented people that have worked with us on these pictures: Assistants, Stylists, Editors, Creative Directors, Art Directors, Hair Stylists, Makeup Artists, Manicurists, Publicists, Casting Directors, Set Designers, Producers, Choreographers, Caterers, Retouchers, Digital Artists, Printers, Agents, Equipment Houses, Studios, Nannies, Drivers, Gallerists and, above all, our fantastic families.

Endless thanks to our loyal and talented lighting technician, Jodokus Driessen, without whom no photo has been or will be taken; and to our VLM team, Marc Kroop and Brian Anderson, who have been by our side the entire time. Thank you to Michelle Lueking and the Stereohorse team for their digital expertise; and to Jasper Bode and Narda van't Veer for their artistic vision.

Immense gratitude to the authors featured in this book. Michaël Amzalag and Mathias Augustyniak, Guus Beumer, Francesco Bonami, Pamela Chen, Donatien Grau, Margriet Schavemaker, Tilda Swinton and Willemijn van der Zwaan—your writing is what completes this circle of images.

Much love goes out to the dear M/M (Paris) team for their talent in turning this catalogue into an exhibition in book form. And lastly, we are grateful to Margriet Schavemaker, Willemijn van der Zwaan and the entire Kunstmuseum Den Haag team. Your openness, enthusiasm, and dedication has been life-changing for us.

Kisses,
Inez & Vinoodh

Captions for the 16 artworks printed on PVC:



Fashion Plate no.3,
2020



Eniko Smoking –
Self Service,
2008



Chappell Roan –
Rolling Stone,
2024



Melia Marden –
Balenciaga Invitation
with M/M (Paris),
2011



Delfine –
Balenciaga Invitation
with M/M (Paris),
2001



Kate Moss –
YSL Campaign,
2008



Fashion Plate no. 7,
2020



Roos & Anne-Catherine –
Balenciaga (Vertical)
with M/M (Paris),
1999



Addison Rae –
Rolling Stone Magazine,
2025



LG 3000,
2016



Fashion Plate no.8,
2020



Jeremy Allen White –
Interview Magazine,
2025



Björk –
Interview Magazine
with M/M (Paris),
2009



Christy Turlington –
Balenciaga
with M/M (Paris),
2001



Björk –
Vespertine
with M/M (Paris),
2001



Butterfly,
Balenciaga
with M/M (Paris),
2002

This book was published on the occasion of the exhibition *Can Love Be a Photograph – 40 Years of Inez & Vinoodh*, at Kunstmuseum Den Haag from March 21 to September 6, 2026.

Curator
Willemijn van der Zwaan,
Kunstmuseum Den Haag

Project manager, exhibition
Lot van de Putte, Kunstmuseum Den Haag

Project manager, publications
Imogen Mills, Kunstmuseum Den Haag

Texts
Margriet Schavemaker, Donatien Grau,
Francesco Bonami, Guus Beumer,
Pamela Chen, Willemijn van der Zwaan,
Tilda Swinton, Mathias Augustyniak

Copy-editing and proofreading
Cath Phillips

Project management
Hadewych Van den Bossche

Graphic design
M/M (Paris)

Image editing
Brian Anderson, Marc Kroop,
Michelle Lueking

Printing and binding
Graphicom, Italy

Publisher
Gautier Platteau

ISBN 978 94 9341 657 4
D/2026/11922/09
NUR 653

Hannibal Books, 2026
www.hannibalbooks.be



HANNIBAL

Hannibal Books team:
Laura Bijnens, Sara Colson, Pieter De Meyere,
Natacha Hofman, Séverine Lacante, Sofie
Meert, Gautier Platteau, Hedwig Scheltjens,
Stephanie Van den Bosch and Hadewych
Van den Bossche

All rights reserved.
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover image
Inez & Vinoodh, *Think Love*, 2025

KUNSTMUSEUM
DEN HAAG

The publication has been made possible through the generous support of the Erik Bos Fonds.

ERIK BOS FONDS



