
VAVILON

Project C | Solovki Islands

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INTRODUCTION

My personal and artistic experience over the years has allowed me to develop independent projects in different countries. The completion times and contents of these are defined through series of accidental events that arise during the research process.

The working method that these projects share is based on the process of researching, cataloging and organizing heterogeneous elements, that are later meticulously assembled through grammatical codes with the aim to interweave narrative structures that work as a base and support for the works development.

After the previous works created in China and Argentina, the protagonist of the current project is a constellation of islands in the Russian White Sea, about 160 kilometers south of the Arctic Circle, the Solovki Islands.

The idea of starting my next project in those remote islands in the north of Russia originated from the deep respect I have for the thoughts and life of the Russian mystic, mathematician and philosopher Father Pavel Florenskij, who was shot in Leningrad in 1937 after being detained for three years in a forced-labor camp in Solovki.

The account of his detention reaches us thanks to the corpus of letters Florenskij sent to his family from the camp. This collection is a priceless document, since it includes philosophical reflections, analysis of musical and literary compositions, passions and tensions of his soul, scientific experiments on the extraction of iodine and perpetual frost conducted under extreme conditions; it's the deep contemplation of the world's mystery by a human being who, despite the clear awareness of his fate, never abandoned a metaphysical vision that emerges in pure intimate places to transcend earthly contingencies.

In Russia there is a well-known slogan: "Today in Solovki, tomorrow all over Russia". These remote islands scattered in the White Sea have been the geographic witnesses of events that have led to radical transformations in the whole country.

It's here that the first forced-labor camp was tested, the so-called GULAG system, which, after being optimized through the imprisonment of 850,000 victims, spread like wildfire throughout Russia, to be subsequently taken as a model for the Nazi concentration camps.

The Solovki have also witnessed the birth and development of Russia's largest monastic and mystical centre, which became the symbol of religious persecution during the Orthodox Church Reform in the seventeenth century.

This group of islands is a real enigma even from an archaeological point of view: in addition to the numerous menhirs and pictographs found locally dating back as far as 7600 BC, one of the small islands inexplicably houses the world's largest labyrinth complex.

During the first investigations on the island I came across the captivating and elaborate research of the engineer Marco Bulloni. Starting from Plato's writings he has elaborated an articulated theory to show evidence that the Solovki islands were the capital of the Atlantean empire. The research material, reflexions and contacts that the author of these studies kindly shared with me where of great inspiration for the project's vision and of fundamental help for the investigations that took place on the island, between the months of August and September of 2013.



“The beauty of the world is the mouth of a labyrinth. The unwary individual who on entering takes a few steps is soon unable to find the opening. Worn out, with nothing to eat or drink, in the dark, separated from his dear ones, and from everything he loves and is accustomed to, he walks on without knowing anything or hoping anything, incapable even of discovering whether he is really going forward or merely turning round on the same spot.

But this affliction is as nothing compared with the danger threatening him. For if he does not lose courage, if he goes on walking, it is absolutely certain that he will finally arrive at the center of the labyrinth. And there God is waiting to eat him. Later he will go out again, but he will be changed, he will have become different, after being eaten and digested by God. Afterward he will stay near the entrance so that he can gently push all those who come near into the opening.”

Simone Weil

“Earth is the cradle of humanity, but one cannot remain in the cradle forever, in the pursuit of light and space mankind will first timidly emerge from the bounds of the atmosphere, and then advance until he has conquered the whole of circumsolar space”

Konstantin Tsiolkovskij



VAVILON

VAVILON project develops from the studies and suggestions that arise from the research conducted on the Solovki Islands, as well as from the contemplation of the events that these enigmatic territories in the White Sea have attracted through the ages. This captivating land with a history of such strength that it has rooted an energy so profound that it can be perceived to this day.

An island that has become sanctuary and prison, a place of worship and initiation for the ancient nomad sea populations, silent theater of human brutality, witness of the totalitarian utopias and dystopias, home of mysticism and spiritual asceticism, land of ideological battles and temple for redemption. This small land emerged from the sea over time has become the symbol of an immense Country, the real heart of the Russian soul.

The multiplicity of events sedimented in this territory is contemplated within the project as a whole generated by the power of the island's character, a force that transcends the contingent facts and their temporal distances - different forms manifested by the same tension and meaning, like reflections of a unique prism.

Through the contemplation of the Solovki "spirit", the works of VAVILON aim to reconstruct the island's morphology on an imaginary plane, in order to reveal the most intimate, profound and authentic map, manifesting in a psycho-geographic dimension the energy that has shaped the events that have taken place over time.

The outlines of the coasts, lakes, forests, glades and channels are reshaped in a mental territory, that, through concentric paths reveal a labyrinthic nature. The island, in its deepest essence, is the labyrinth itself, a multifunctional symbolic object, a passage zone, bor-

der between dimensions and geometrical synthesis of the redemptive journey of the soul willing to transcend the limits of its human condition.

In this new configuration, the stone labyrinths found on the Zaiatsky Island¹, represent a symbolic cartography of the Solovki, whose channels are the waterway to reach its center, the point in which the exit of the maze is celebrated, the island inside the island, the temple that holds The Vision and allows the escape from the human prison through a celestial, aerial, vertical gateway, aimed to cosmic regions, the place where the fixed stars shine permanently on the edge of the world.²

The fixed stars, according to Marco Bulloni's theory, represented to the ancient people of the North those souls who, after a complex path in the dead realm, could crystallize in the highest celestial spheres, shining forever as immortal souls.

Within the VAVILON project this quest for immortality through the cosmic escape from the labyrinth of mortality by the colonization of space, find a further inspiration in what has been called the posterior Cosmist thought, whose "spiritual father" is recognized in the figure of Nikolai Fëdorov, an enigmatic Russian librarian. Fëdorov's legendary knowledge, way of life and thought deeply influenced the work of people like Dostoevsky, V. Solovyov, L. Tolstoy, S. Bulgakov, Bogdanov and Vernadsky, providing the ideological premises underlined in the scientific and technical research of Soviet scientists.

The faith of the Cosmist thought in the "omnipotence of science and technology rooted in the idea of the magical power of knowledge"³ weaves an occult sub-

plot of the first totalitarian Soviet system and penetrates the entire history of Russian cosmonautics. The esoteric doctrines relating to universal redemption by the famous Tsiolkovskij⁴, father of the Soviet aeronautic and astronautic, are the eschatological and mystical motive of the Sovietic space program activities, so that the cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin, during the first human space "flight in history, transmitted a symbolic salute to Nikolai Roerich, the well known theosophist and Russian Cosmist.

Starting from the labyrinthic transfiguration of the Solovki as a device for redemption, the works that compose the VAVILON project are developed through the suggestions of a mystical scientific research devoted to an interior "flight toward sidereal space.

This seeking to "raise to heaven the weight of the stone that rests in the earth"⁵, finds its main symbol in the Byzantine cupola, the heavenly vehicle, "the cosmic cathedral"⁶, which holds within the assonance of the cosmos and which form refers to the ardent and perpetual "flame of a candle, to remind us that: "they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." Is 9:1

VAVILON Project is currently formalized into videowork presented in 2015 at the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo on occasion of the exhibition "The man who sat on himself" - curated by: Kate Strain, Angelica Sule e Zsuzsanna Stanitz - as well as into the "visual compendium" which, composed by heterogeneous elements, constitutes the core of the monographic exhibition in Viafarini, Milan 2015. The milanese exhibition hosted a series of interventions by researchers and experts about the topics that generated the theoretical base and the visual imaginary of the whole project. This platform is curated by Matteo Bertelè, professor at Center for Russian Art studies at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, in collaboration with Giulia Airoldi, independent curator and researcher and involved: Matteo Bertelè, Marco Bulloni, Giorgio Galli, Matteo Guarnaccia, Massimiliano Judica Cordiglia, Gian Piero Piretto.

1) 35 mazes were found in the Solovki archipelago, a substantial part of them concentrated in Big Zaiatski, an island located south west of the archipelago with a surface of 1.5 km². The presence of these mazes, the thousands of mounds of stone and the large symbolic boulders, show that this island was considered sacred and a place chosen for the initiation cults of the ancient nomadic populations in the White Sea.

2) The polar regions, for many ancient cultures, have always been considered the boundary between the terrestrial world and the dwelling of the celestial Gods. At these latitudes the circumpolar stars can be better observed, which, having as center the celestial pole, are in perpetual visibility and never fade.

3) Walter Catalano

4) "Tsiolkovsky representation of a part of humanity stretched out to a technological development of auto evolution and destined to become a light radiation, constitutes a central motif in the Gnostic myth, a myth dating back to antiquity and widely circulated in the Russian culture through the "secret doctrines of Theosophists and Anthroposophists". The purpose of the universal process would be the liberation of the divine light of the human soul from the dark and suffering earthly body and guide it towards the heavenly kingdom of light."

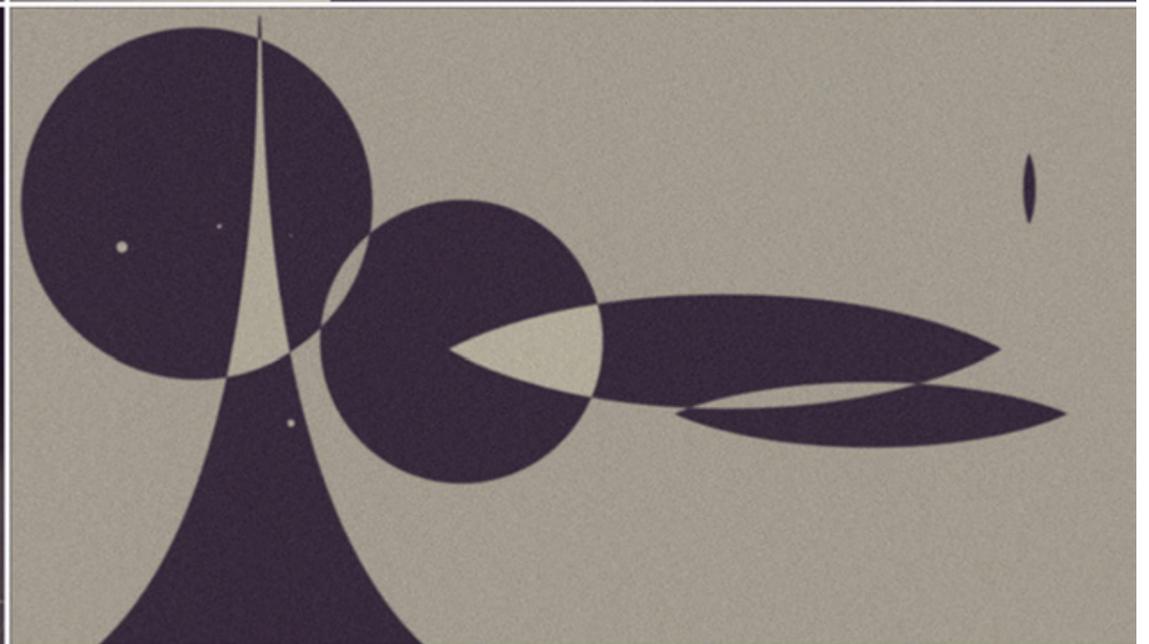
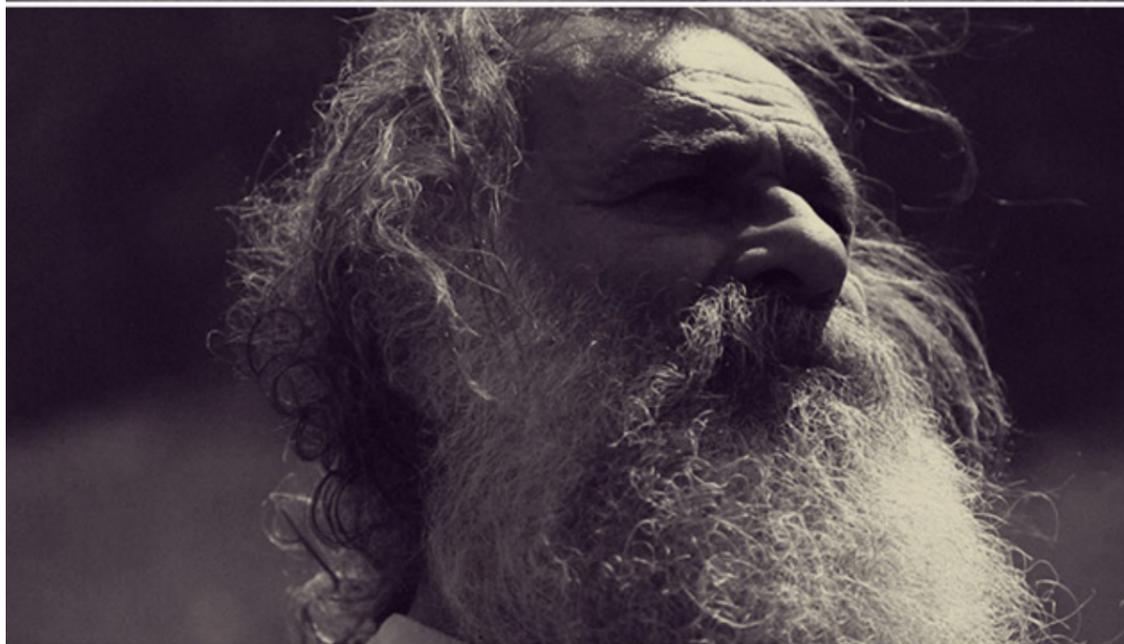
Michael Hagemeister

5) Sergei Nikolaevich Trubetskoy

6) Nikolai Fyodorovich Fyodorov



VAVILON | installation view | Viafarini, Milan | 2015





VAVILON | installation view | Viafarini, Milan | 2015





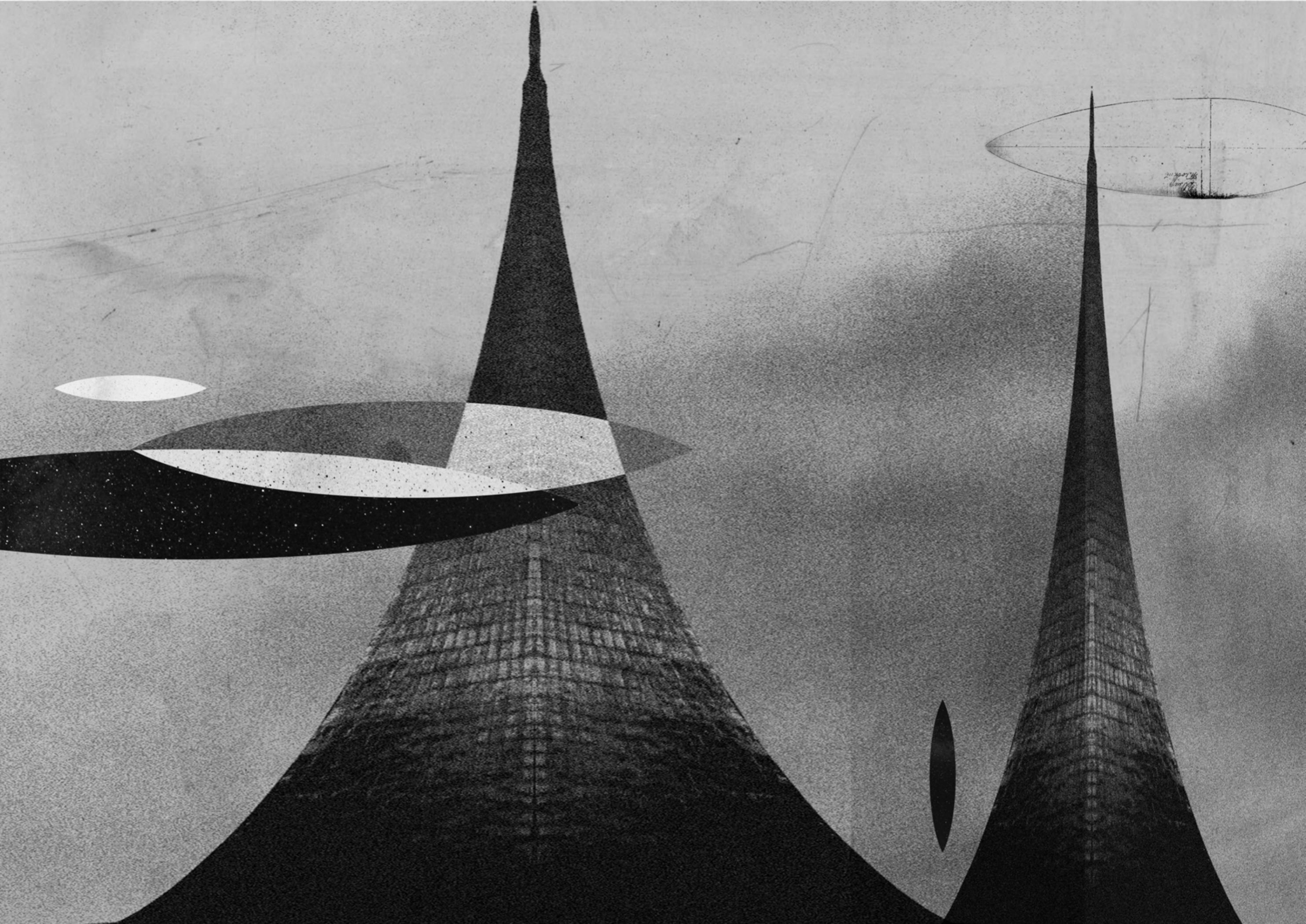


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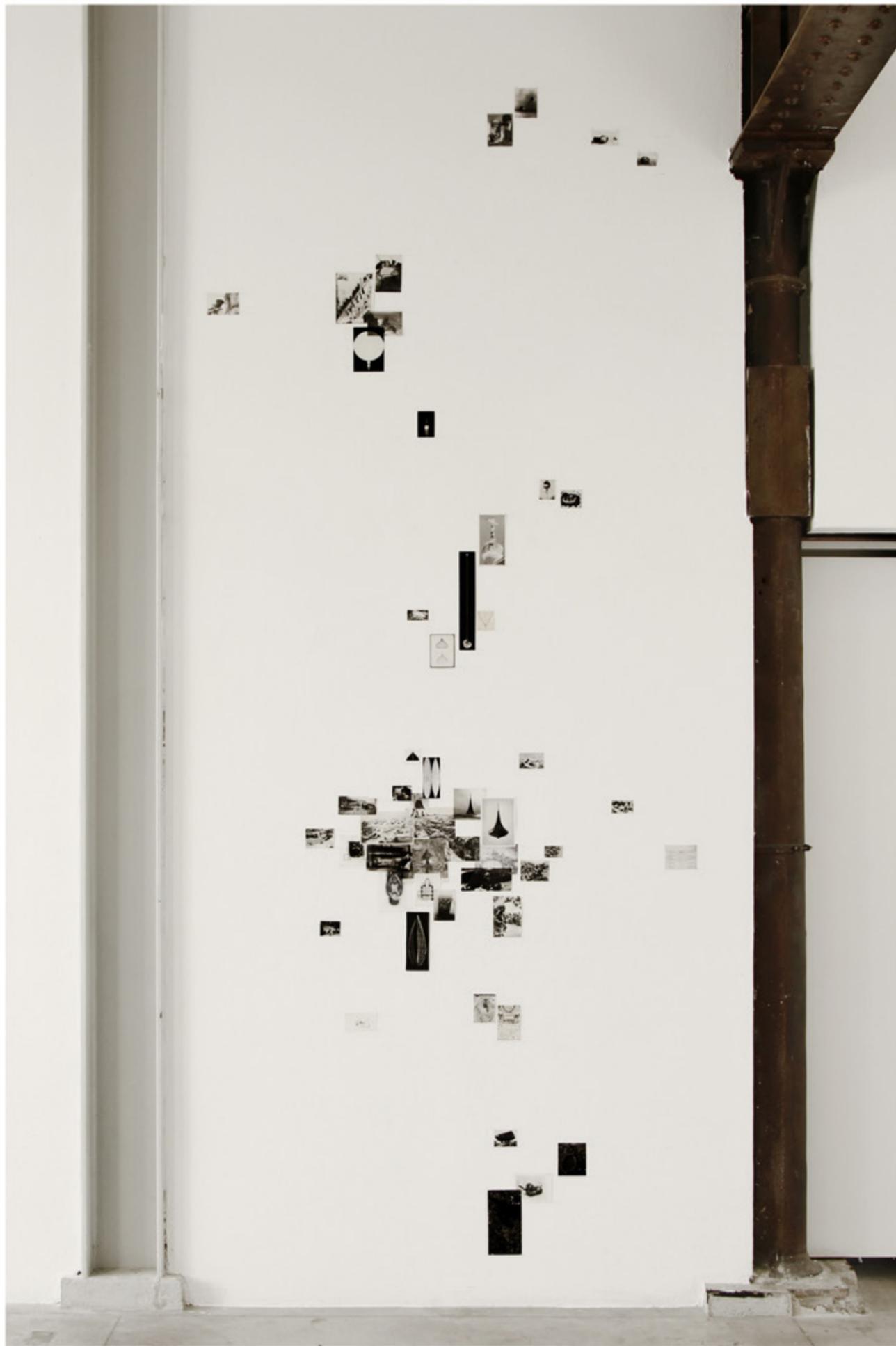




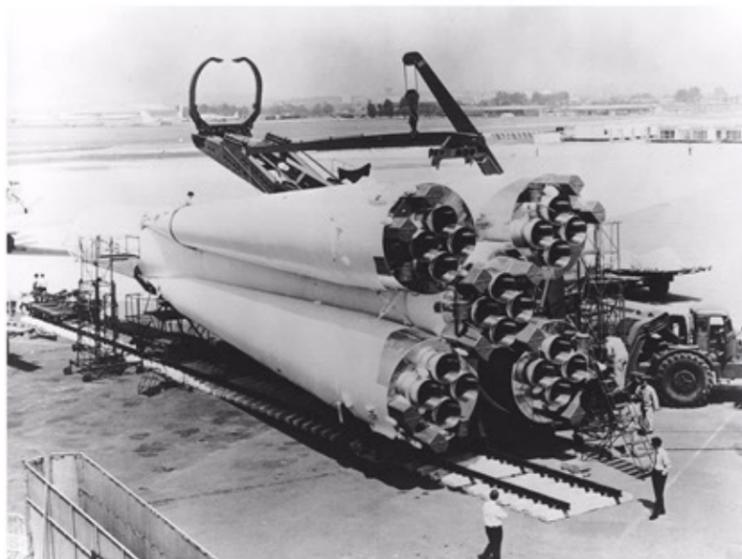


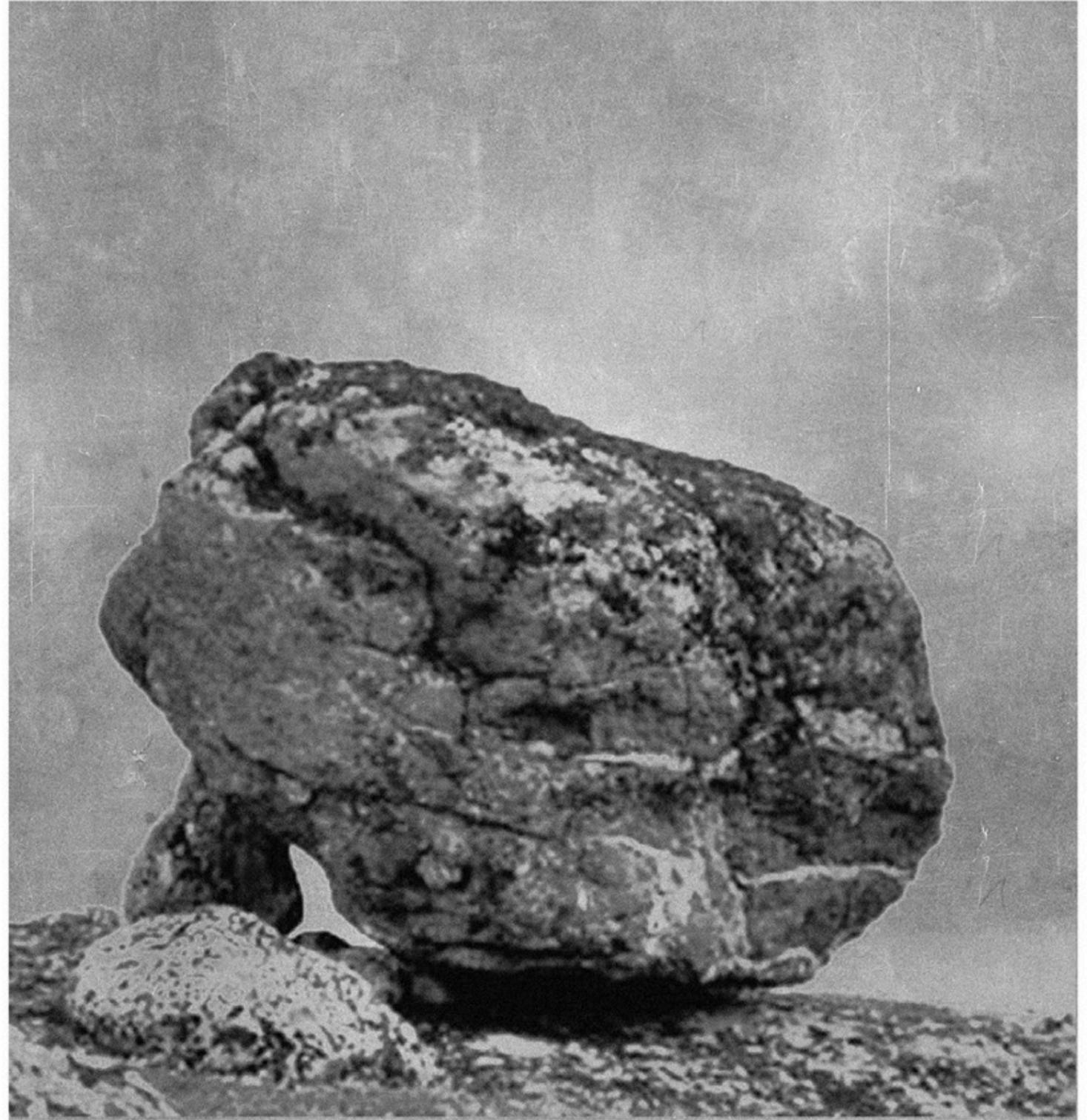






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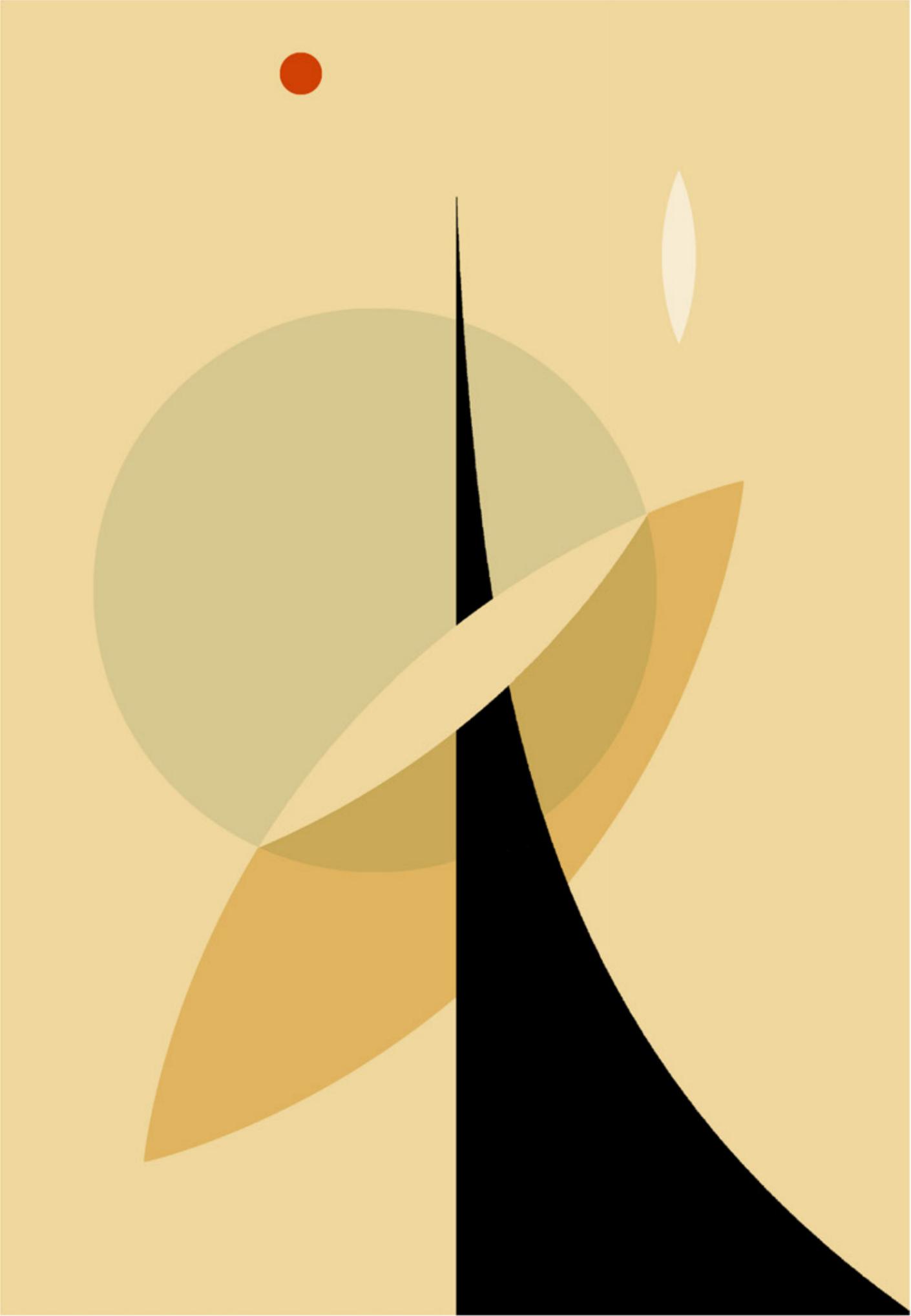


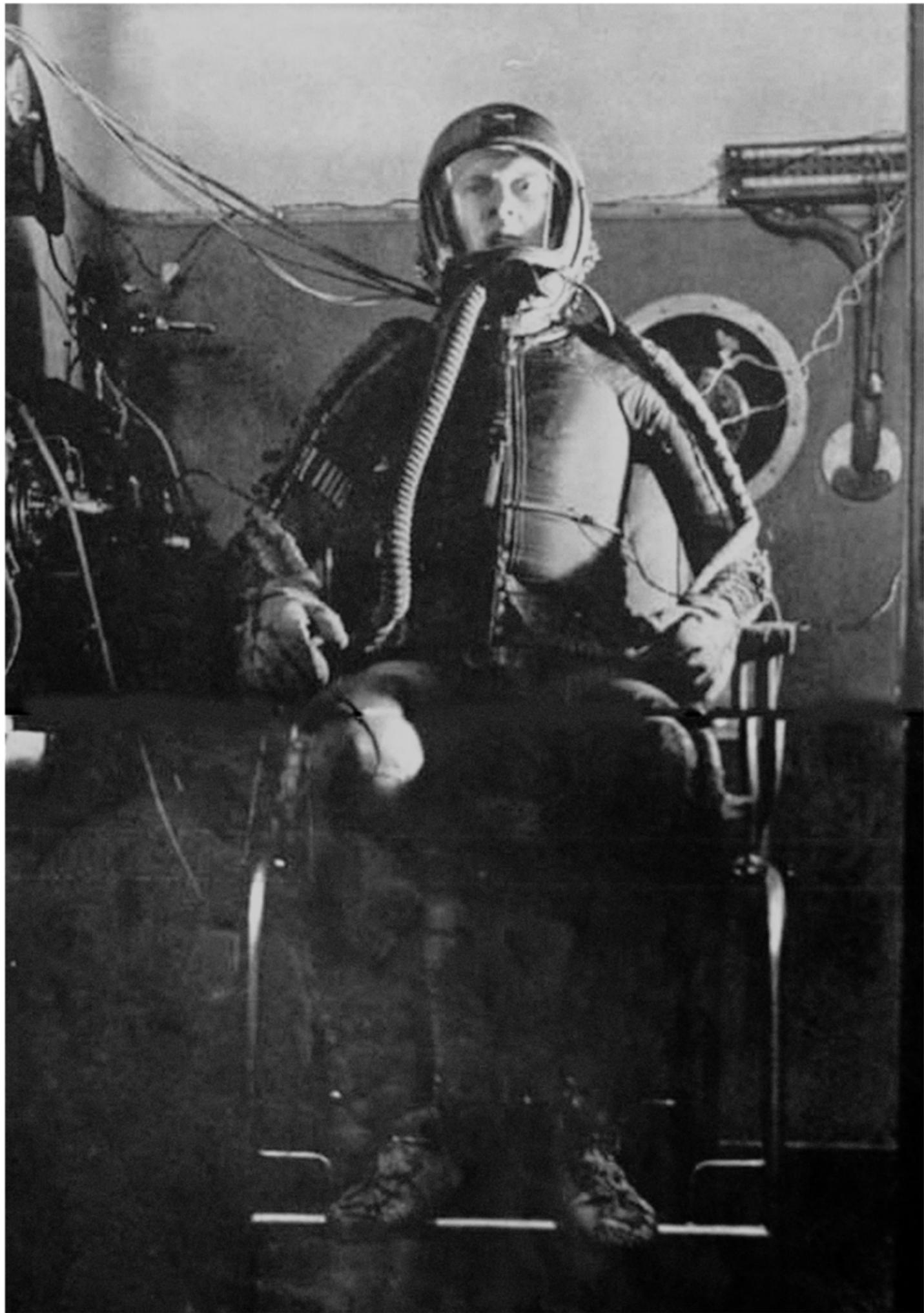


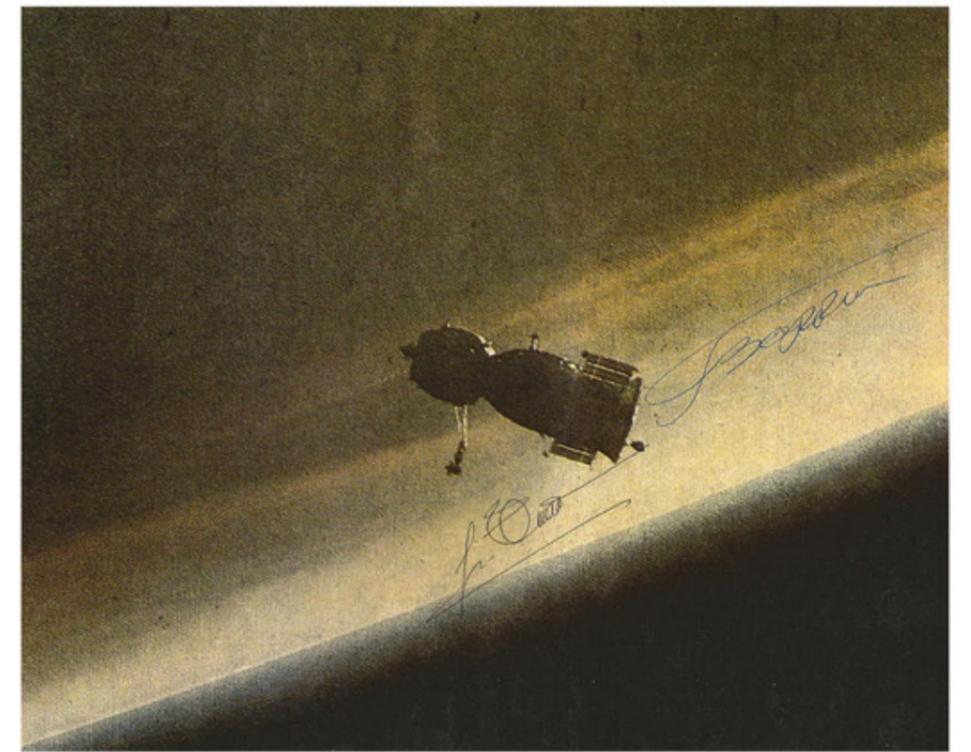




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The man "E".

