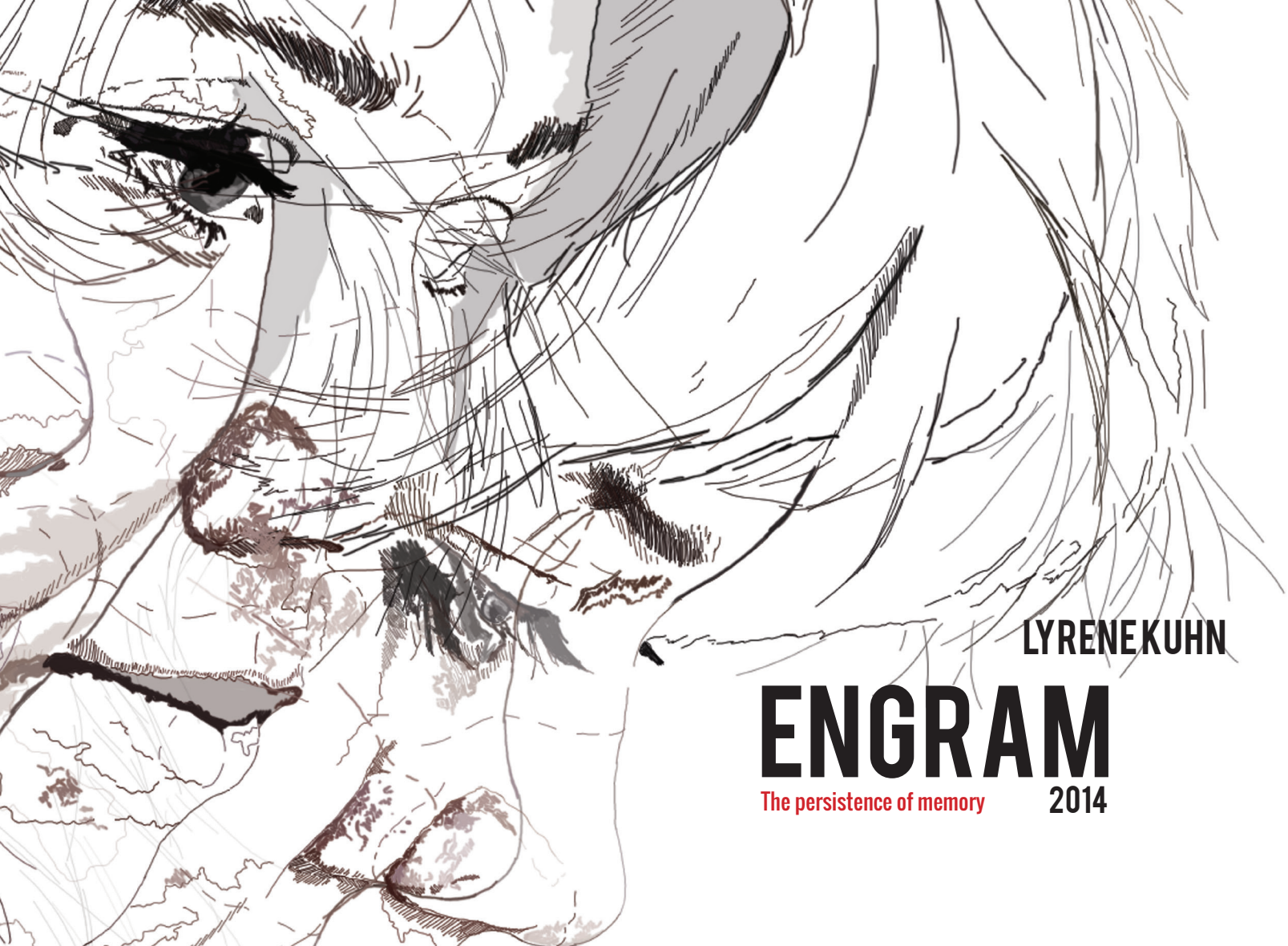


LYRENE KUHN

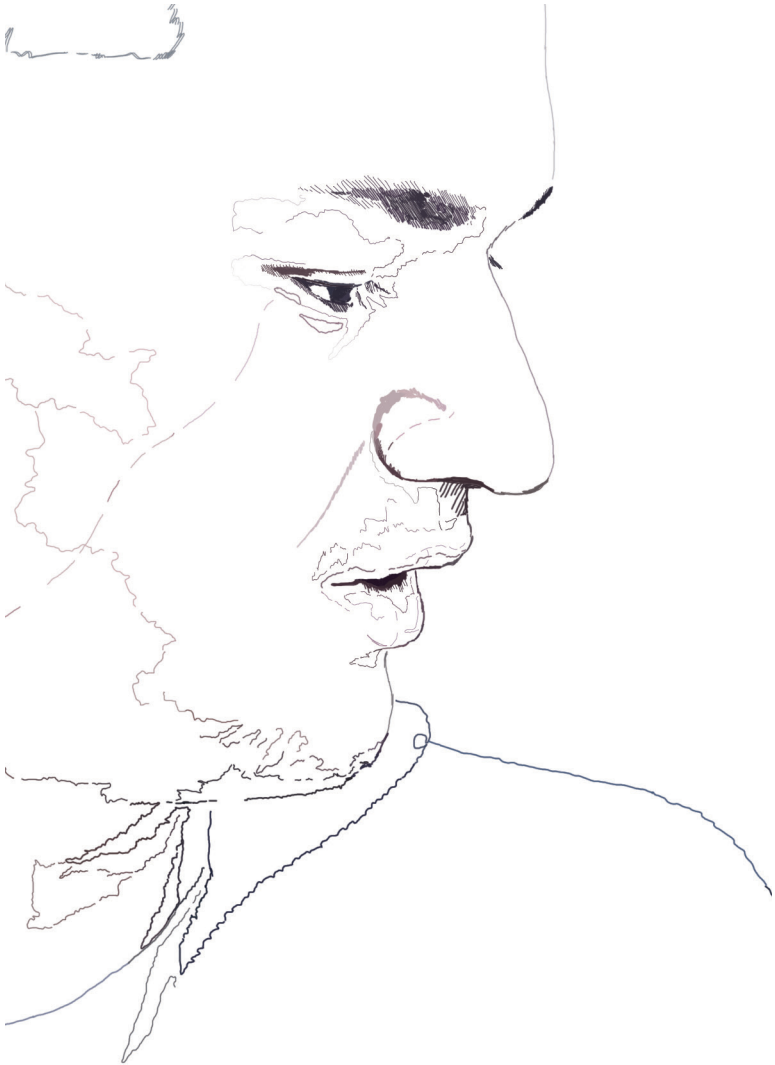
ENGRAM

The persistence of memory

2014

The idea that an artwork dealing with trauma can act upon a spectator so that one feels or experiences the work before one reads or recognizes its content has led theorists to equate the structure of such imagery with the operations of traumatic memory itself .

Bennett, J. 2005. Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.



This exhibition is a product of an overarching, interpretive and reflective process of personal mourning after the loss of my brother in June 2013. Thematically, my project focuses on memory and recollection; the desire to obsessively recreate the lost sibling, to retain the memory I have of him and to experiment with the concept of the traumatic experience and ultimately 'presence'. This results in traces of his image, or those of myself and those around me. During the course of grief and trauma I have become obsessive. I would obsessively try to revive the fading memory image of my brother through depictions but only end up with traces of his presence.

Memories are such fragile and ultimately inaccessible moments. A once vivid memory decays over time, withering piece by piece. The once clear memory becomes hazy and unidentifiable. In bereavement, the recollection of the lost object is not as narrative, but is substituted rather by a sense of the person's presence. In my obsessive search for this lost brother I find myself discovering his constant presence in his absence.

I use digital drawings as a platform to induce the viewer's experience in distance and loss. The procedure allows me to create without physically touching the final product, by means of which I am able to distance myself from the work, reiterating a sense of absence.

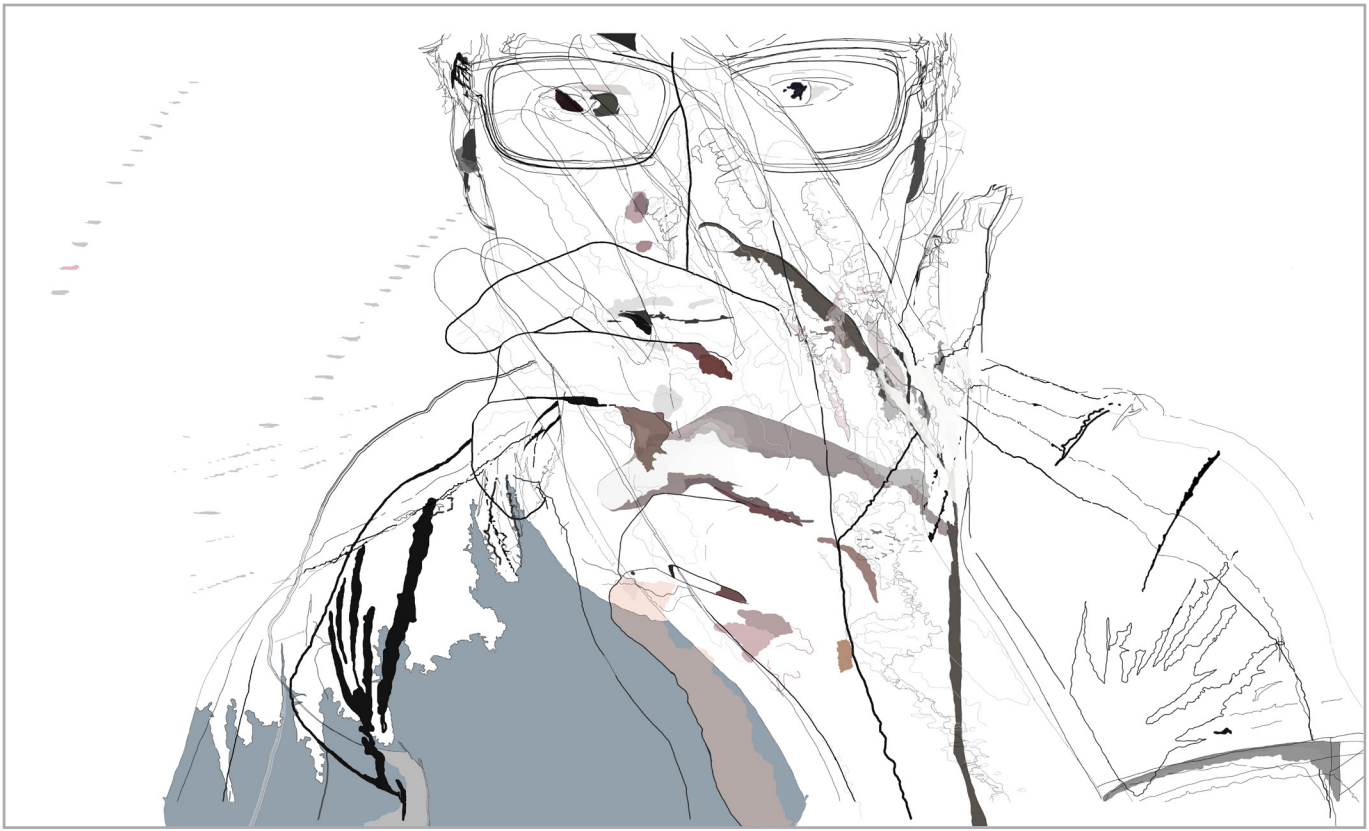
In *Tokyo Room 2012 (1)* my brother takes a photograph of himself where he covers his face while taking a photo of both his hotel room in Tokyo as well as the window, revealing hints of the massive city outside.
He covers his own face in taking the photograph with the camera. There is a flow in space; the deceased only becomes another layer in the number of layers in the photograph. It is as if he disappears into the space, into the unknown city. He immortalizes himself in that room.

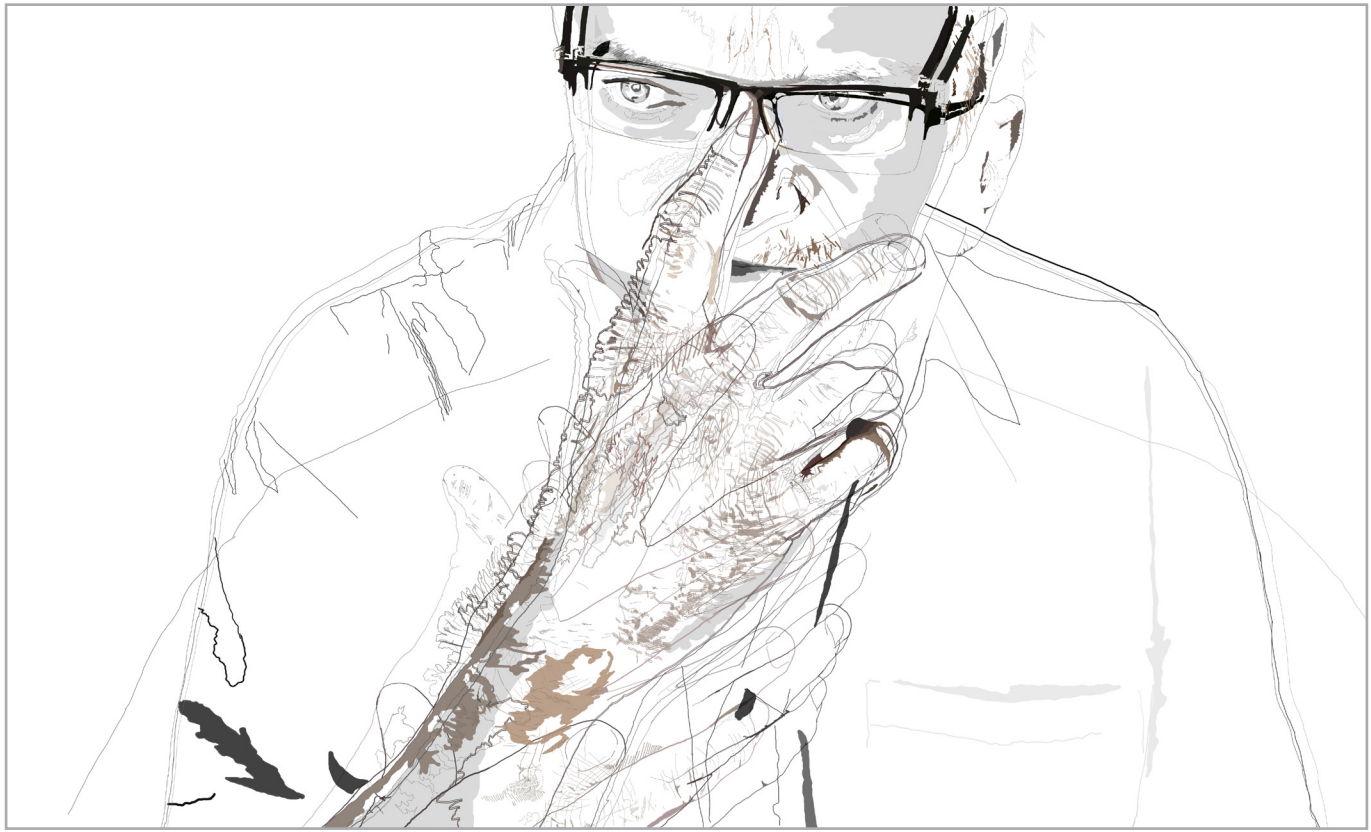
Tokyo Room 2012 (1), 2014, Photograph, 60.5 x 41 cm

Tokyo Room 2012 (2), 2014, Photograph, 60.5 x 39.5 cm

In *Tear* my brother's face is shrouded in darkness almost bowing before myself, while I mimic a gesture close to that of blessing the bowing man. That, for me, is a small detail in the photograph which not only wounds or pricks me, it tears and rips. The gesture of this blessing hand, so close to the head of the deceased; so naturally close yet now ripped far away from it.
Of the mimicking gesture of blessing the deceased while he will be traumatically and very suddenly ripped from this world. One is reminded of traumatic experience, of mortality, and the two qualities it posseses. On the one hand there is the shock of the initial realisation of a death, on the other hand there is the recurring realization of one's own mortality which comes and goes.

Tear, 2014, Photograph, 60 x 35 cm

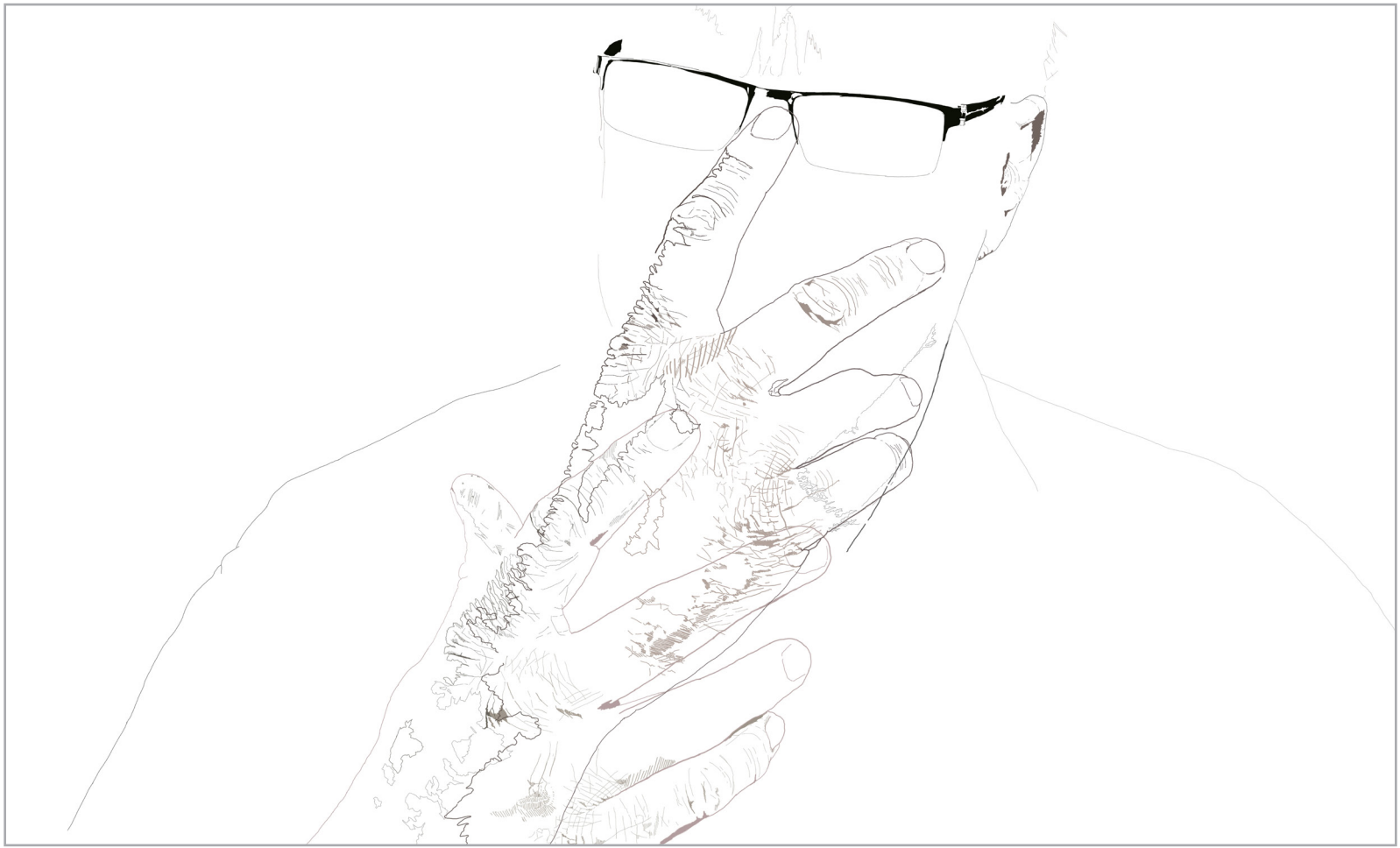


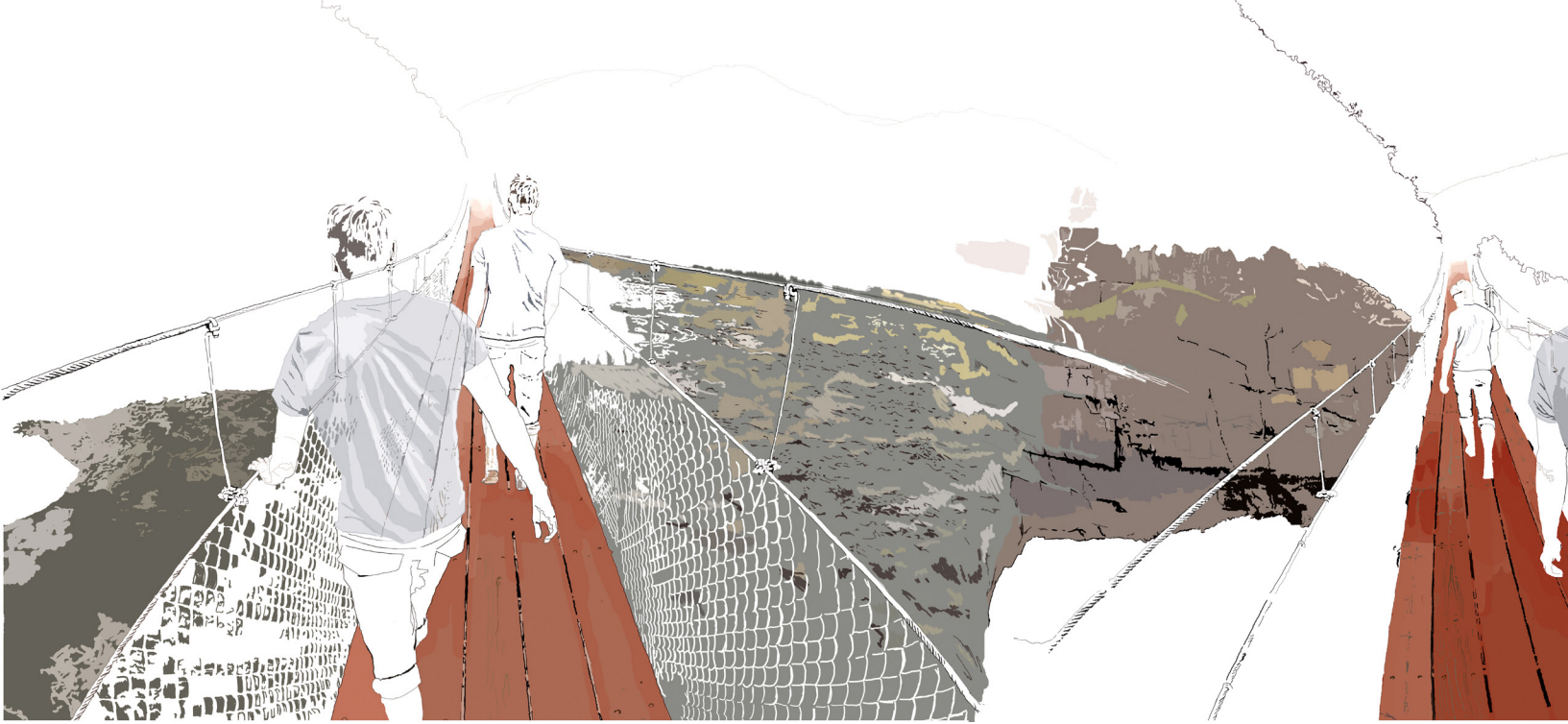


Sister/Daughter, 2014, Digital drawing (series of three), 100 x 70 cm (each).

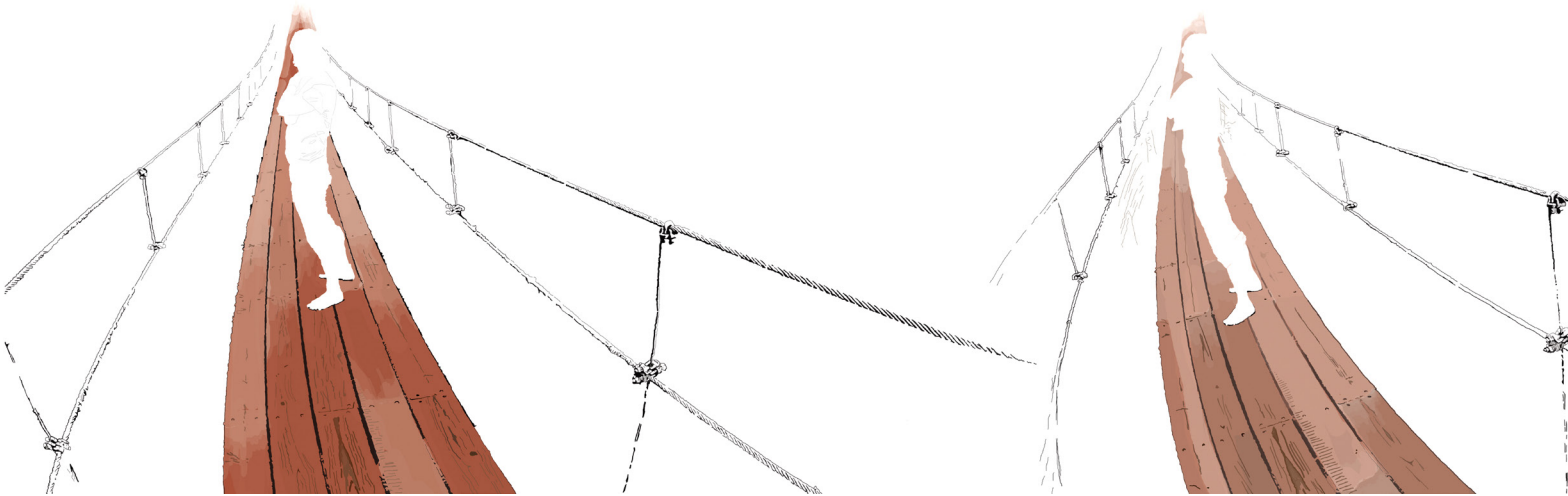
In *Sister/Daughter* a gesture is compared which both the father and the son produce identically. I discovered only after my brother's death by looking at footage of him and photographs of my father that both of them push their glasses up in the same manner.

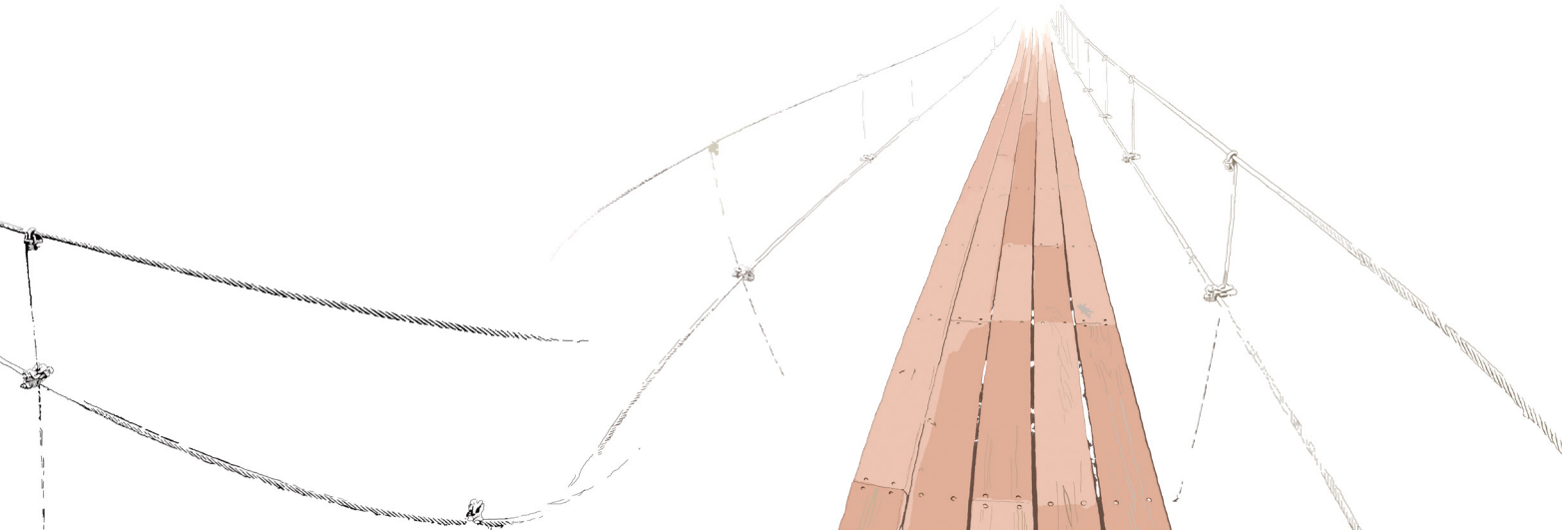
This gesture now only remains with the father and no longer the son. In this manner I discovered that in bereavement my family, friends and myself find ourselves obsessively looking for certain mannerisms, characteristics and traits of my brother within those around us.



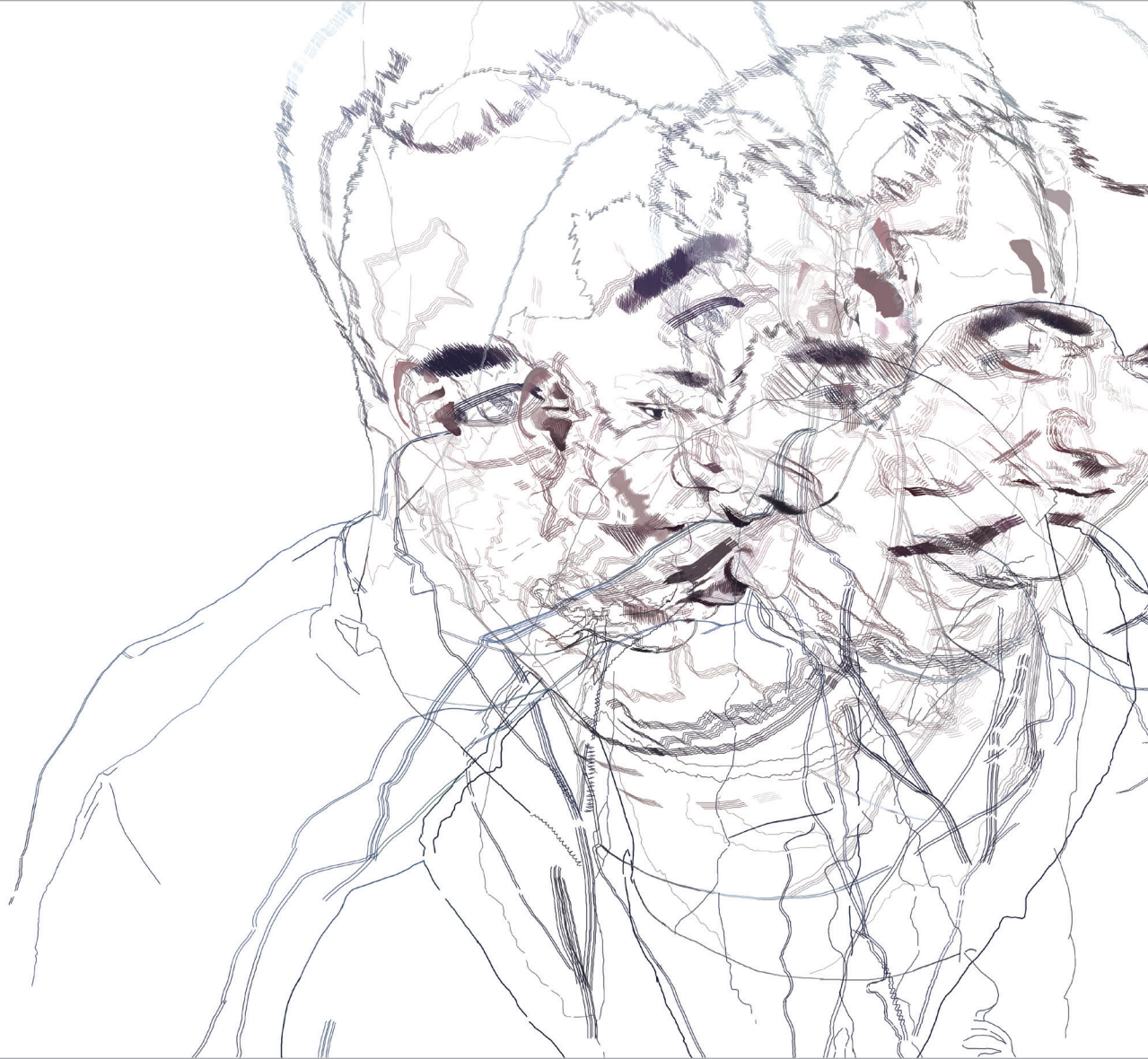


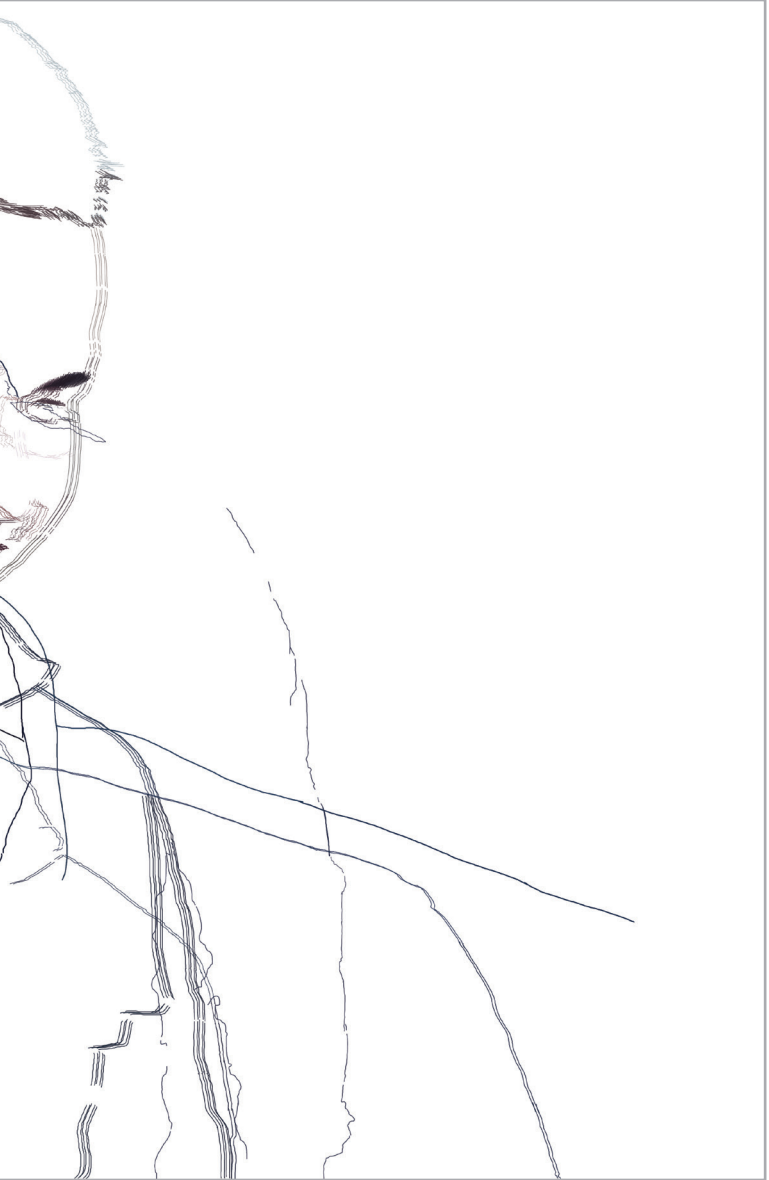
Bridge Passing (1), 2014, Digital Drawing, 1500 x 35 cm





Bridge Passing (2), 2014, Digital Drawing, 1500 x 35 cm

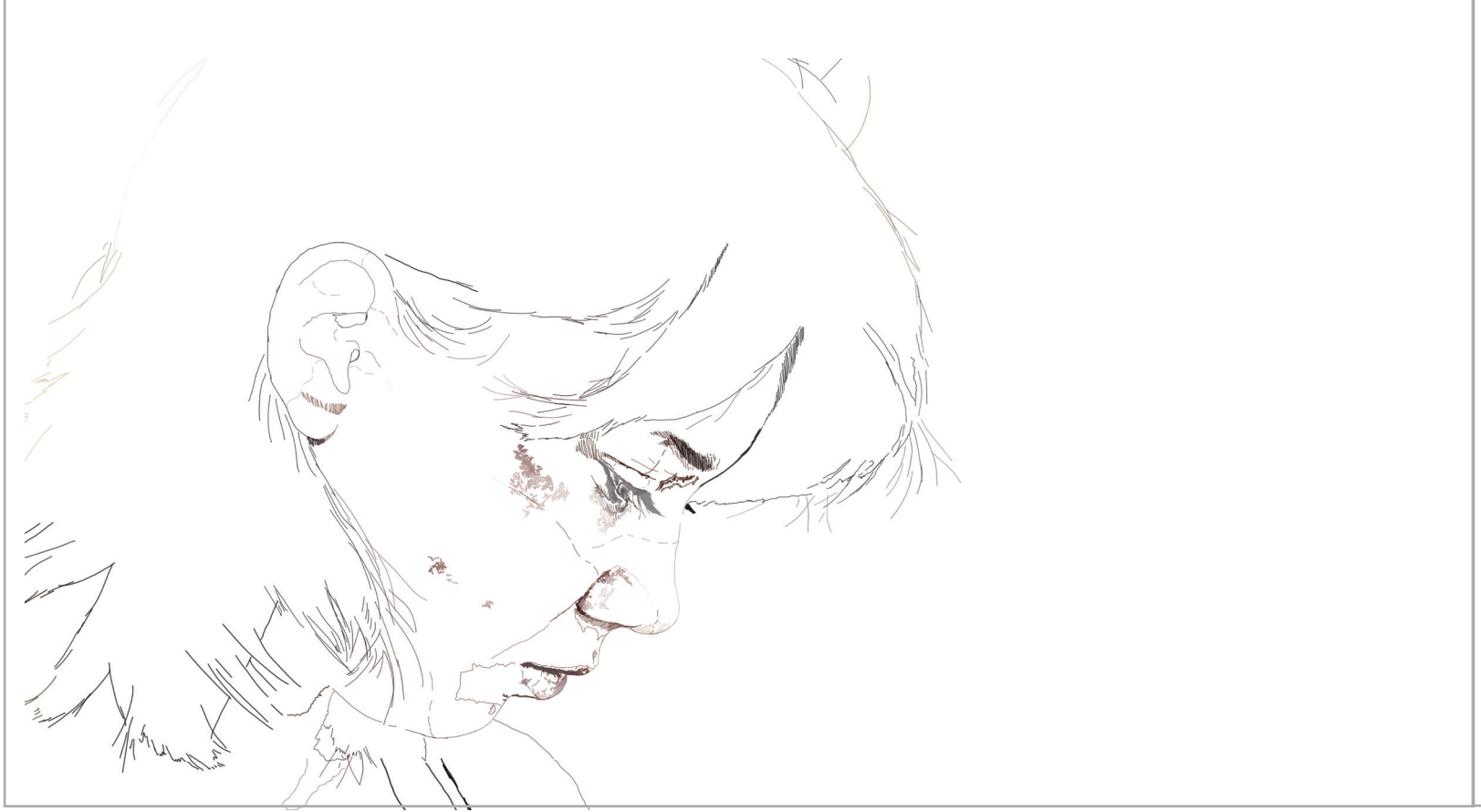




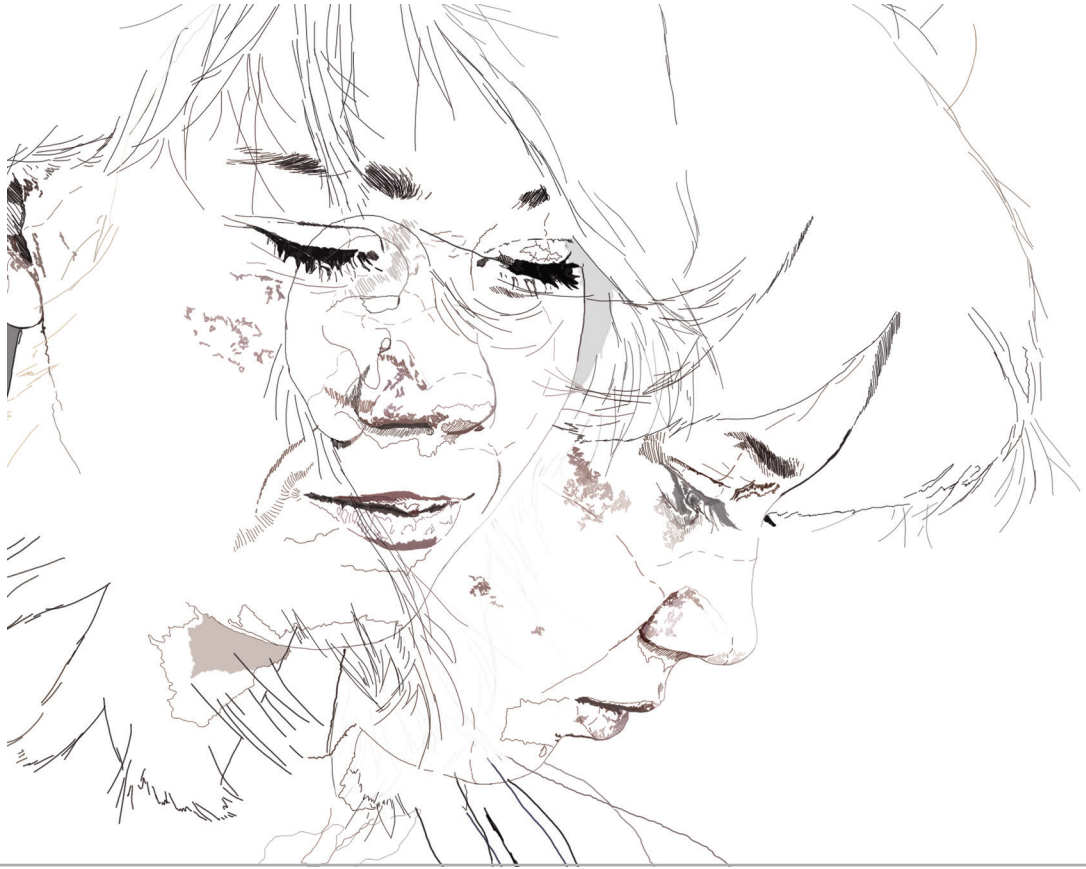
During my mourning process and consequently my visual research, I started looking at the fading image of my sibling. The title *Engram* refers to a trace left behind in memory; the word engram has many definitions in various disciplines but it primarily revolves around a hypothetical idea that a permanent change occurs in the physiology of the brain, accounting for the existence of memory.

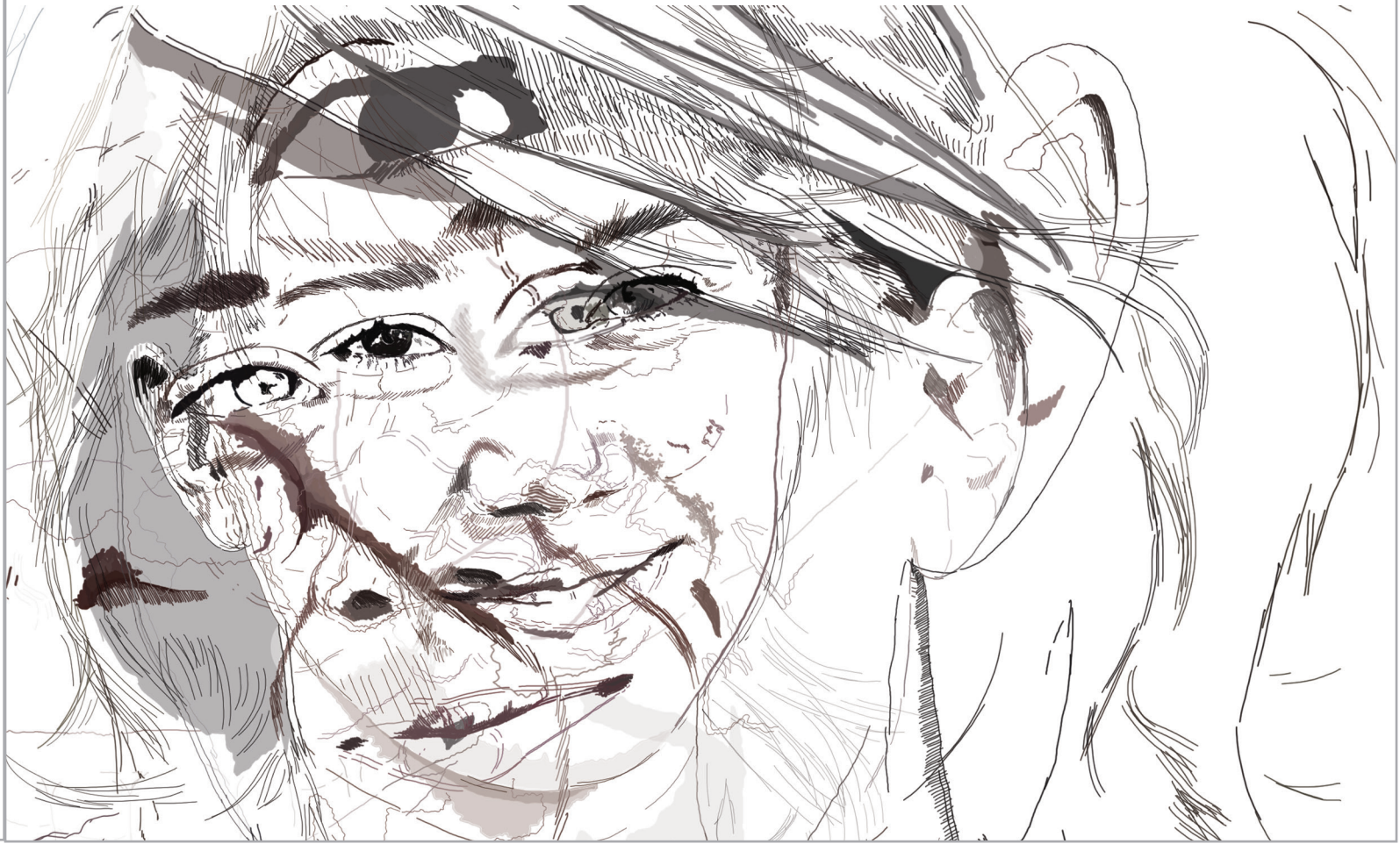
I deliberately did not draw his face completely and started to erase certain areas. This erasure recreates an idea that erasure itself is a part of memory; memories erase over time and only deteriorates. I began to blur the traces I made of his face, leaving only hints and certain characteristics to be found by the wondering eye. One feels somewhat disorientated at the sight of the attempted con-fusion at first, but when this still moment is found, a reaction takes place. Through tracing my brother in still moments of paused video and compiling them together I have seemingly created a barrier. The image forces one to take its presence into consideration

Engram, 2014, Video,



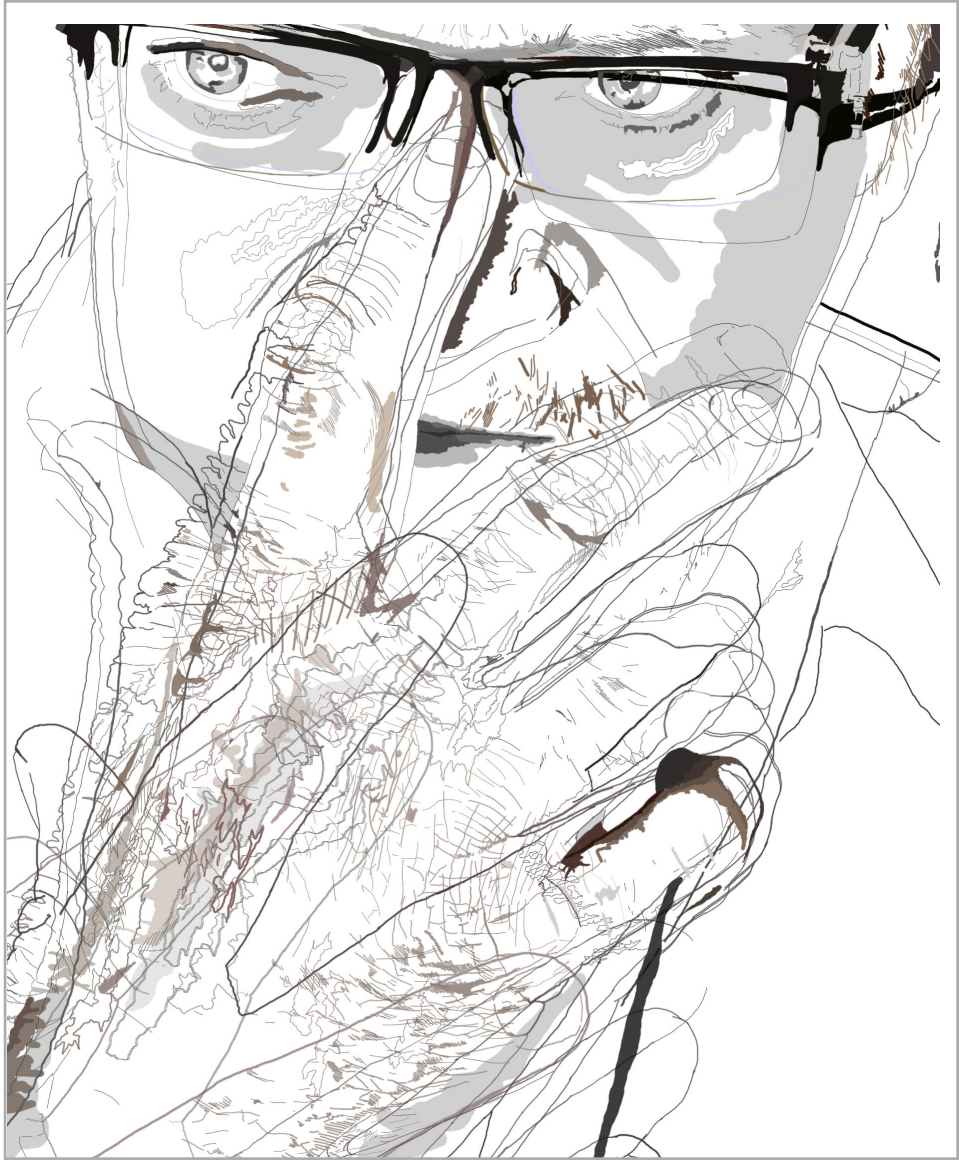
Mimicry, 2014, Digital drawing (series of four), 100 x 70 cm (each)



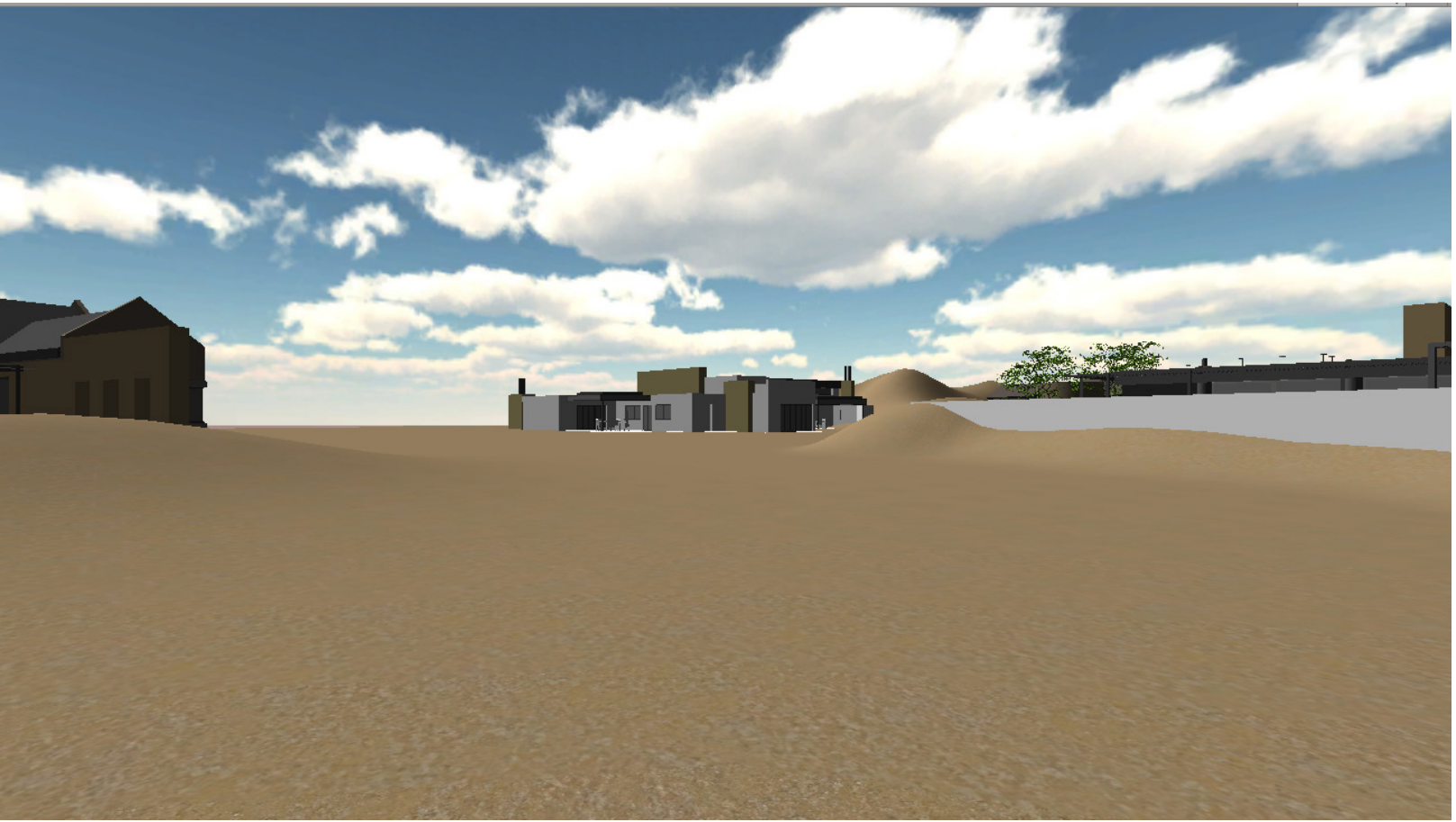


Mimicry

I realised that mourning becomes a self-portrait; I look towards myself to recognise the process of loss. I continued to study myself in this process I am experiencing. In the digital drawing I have drawn myself from photographs. I initially photographed myself trying to mimic my brother from video stills. The digital drawing shows how futile it is indeed to perfectly copy a deceased, especially if one can only work from photographs and videos. I try to re-present my sibling, but I cannot recreate him completely, I can only come so close in my mimicry. Through copying my sibling I try to make it a lived experience, I try to get closer to him in copying and trying to be him.

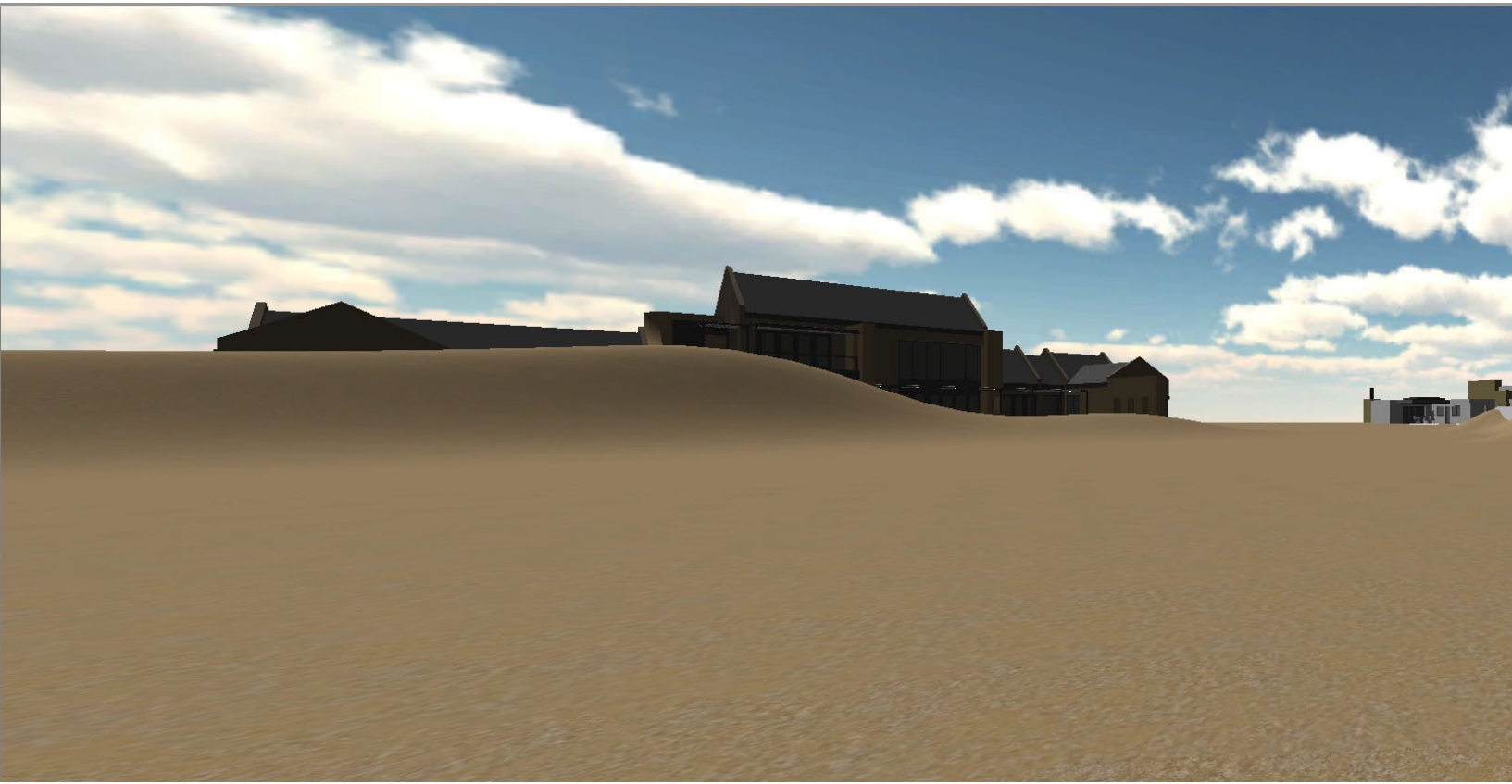


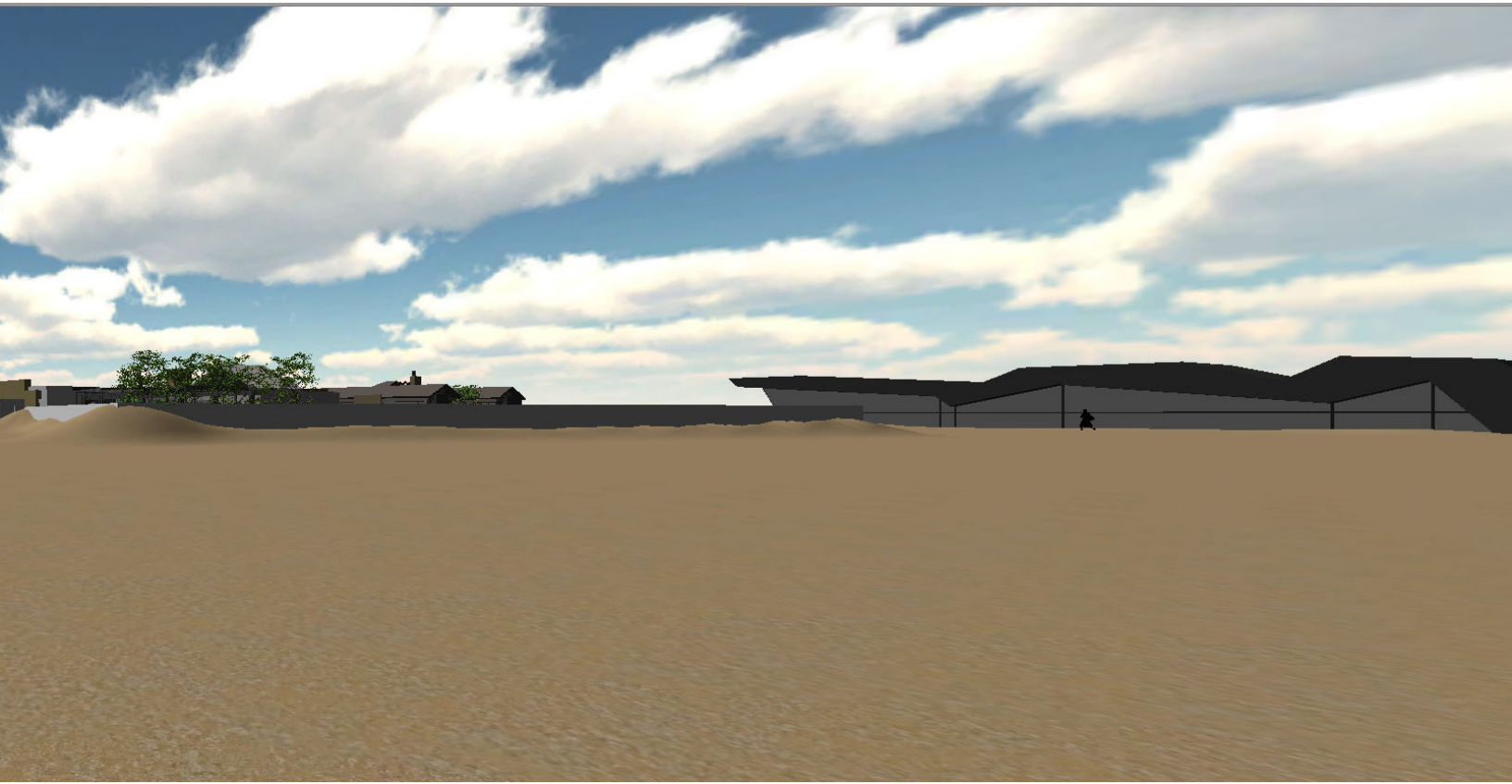
Mimicking the Son, 2014, Digital drawing,
70 x 100 cm



Requiem, 2014, Interactive video game

Requiem is an interactive video game. The viewer can wander aimlessly in a desert containing empty shells of buildings. The desert is to recreate where my brother's accident happened, on a dirt road in Namibië, the buildings however were created by him and not me. My brother was an architect and started a practice in the end of 2012 with a fellow architect; the buildings are all projects he was busy working on before he died. The viewer can walk through the buildings, walk through walls, which to me is fitting for the buildings do not exist in real life, they are as much an apparition as my brother is now.





I AM A
DUST
NOMAD
NOT ALL THOSE
WHO WANDER
ARE LOST