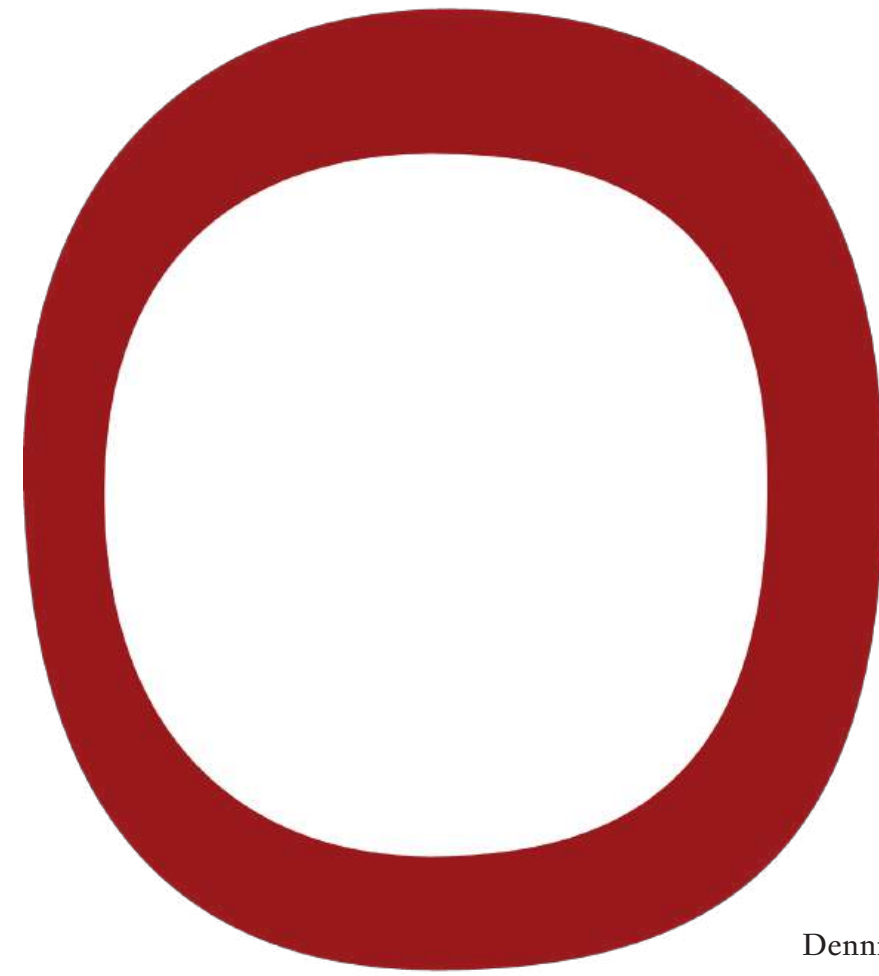


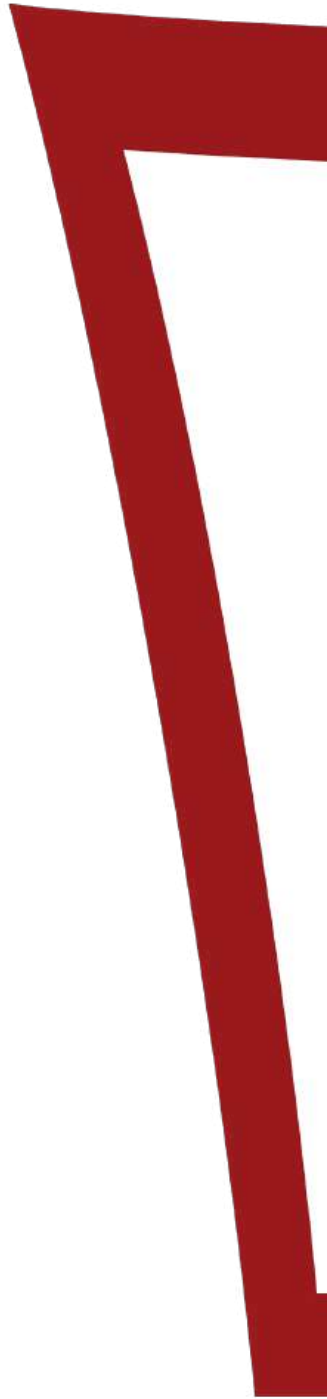
“Away, away,” says hate. “Closer, closer,” says love.  
*Jean-Luc Godard*

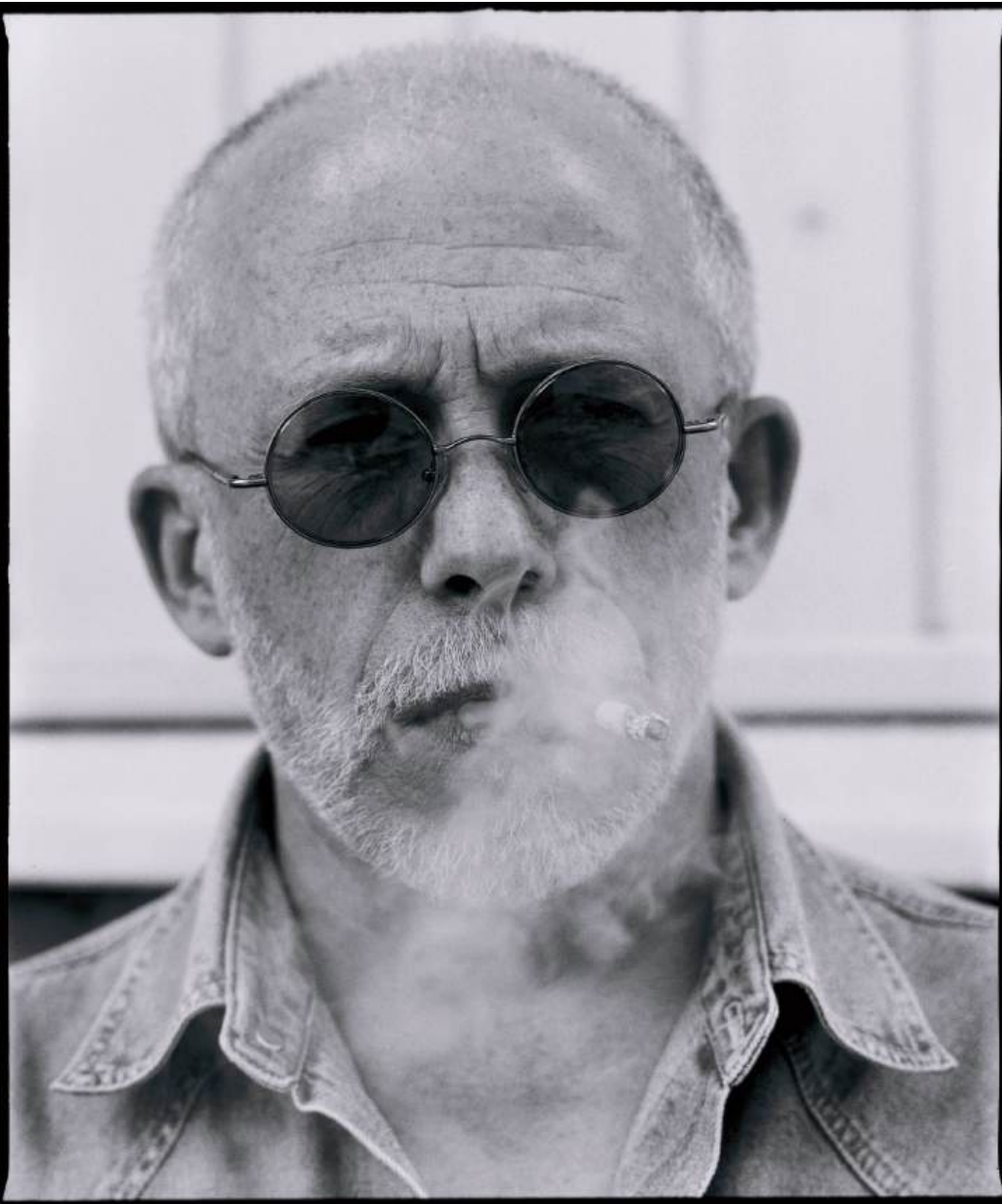


for Douglas Anderson

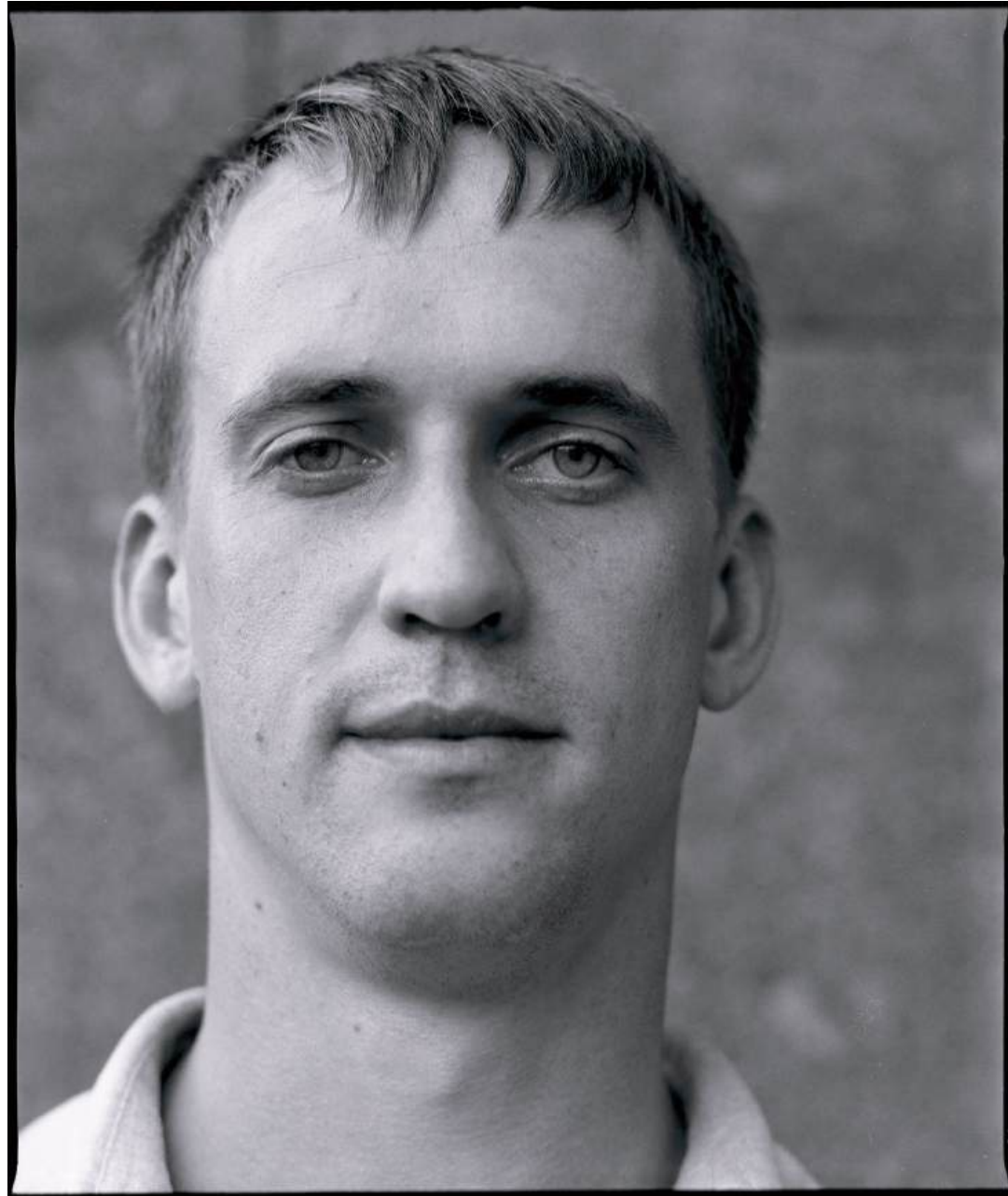


Dennis Letbetter







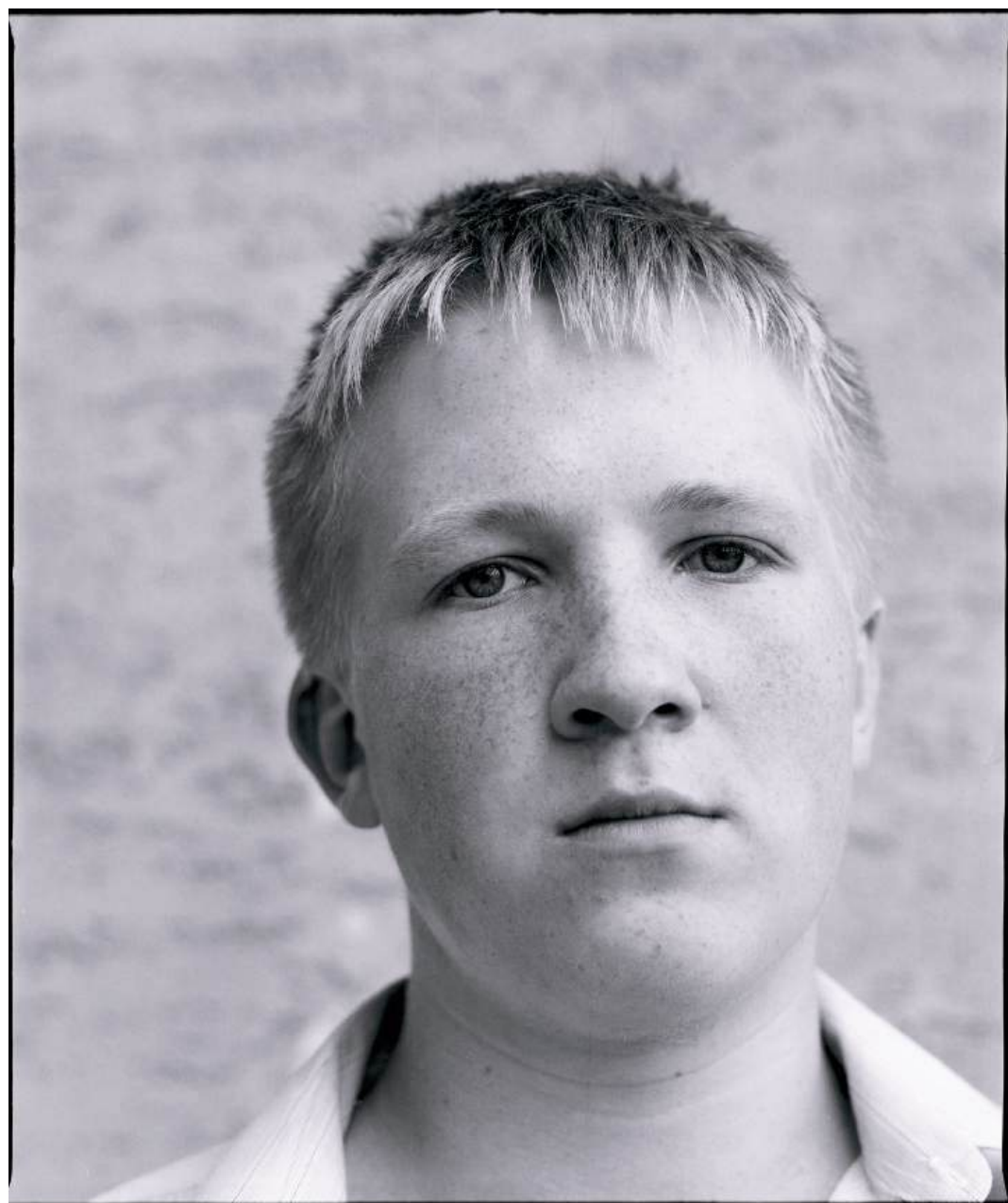


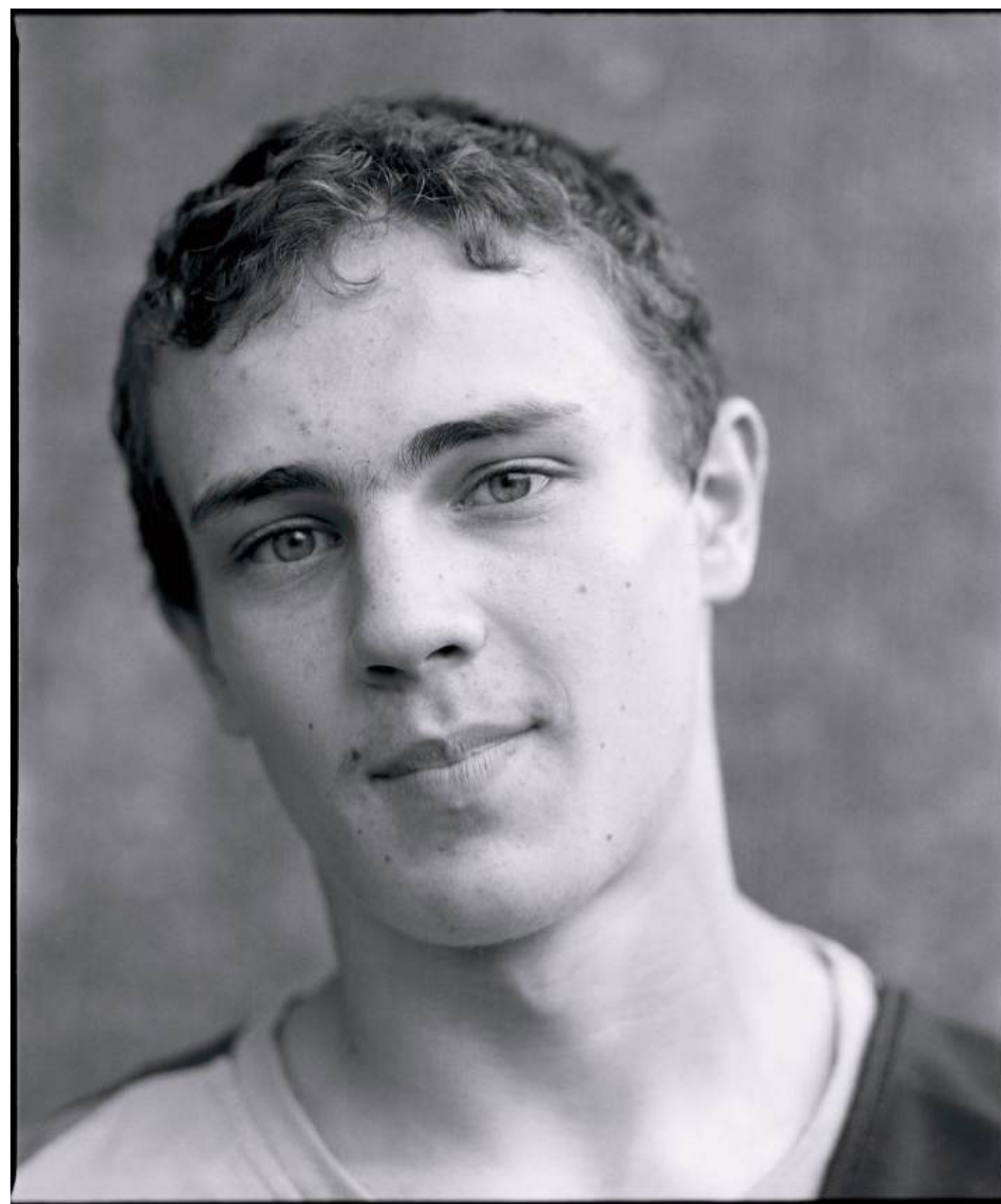


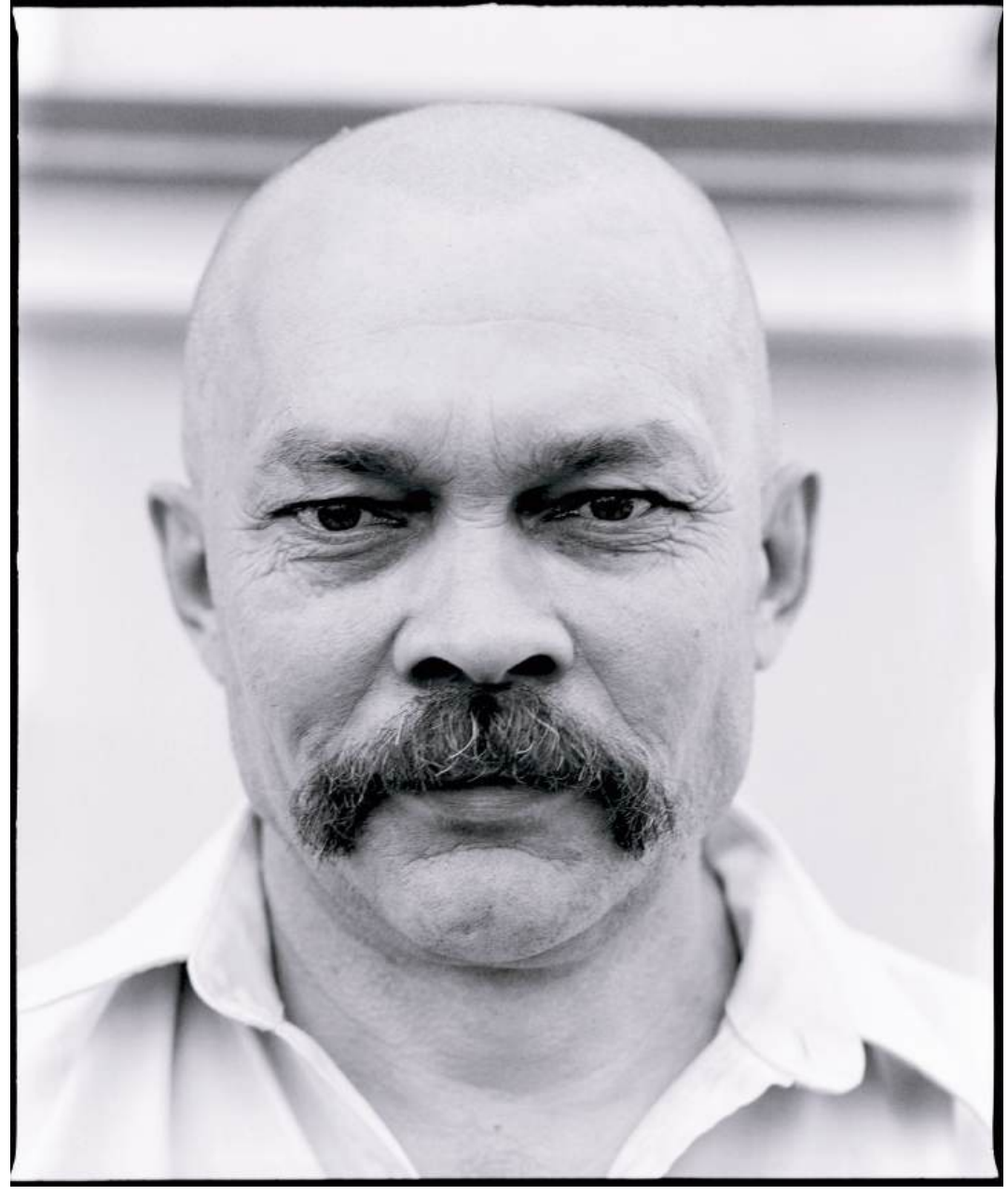


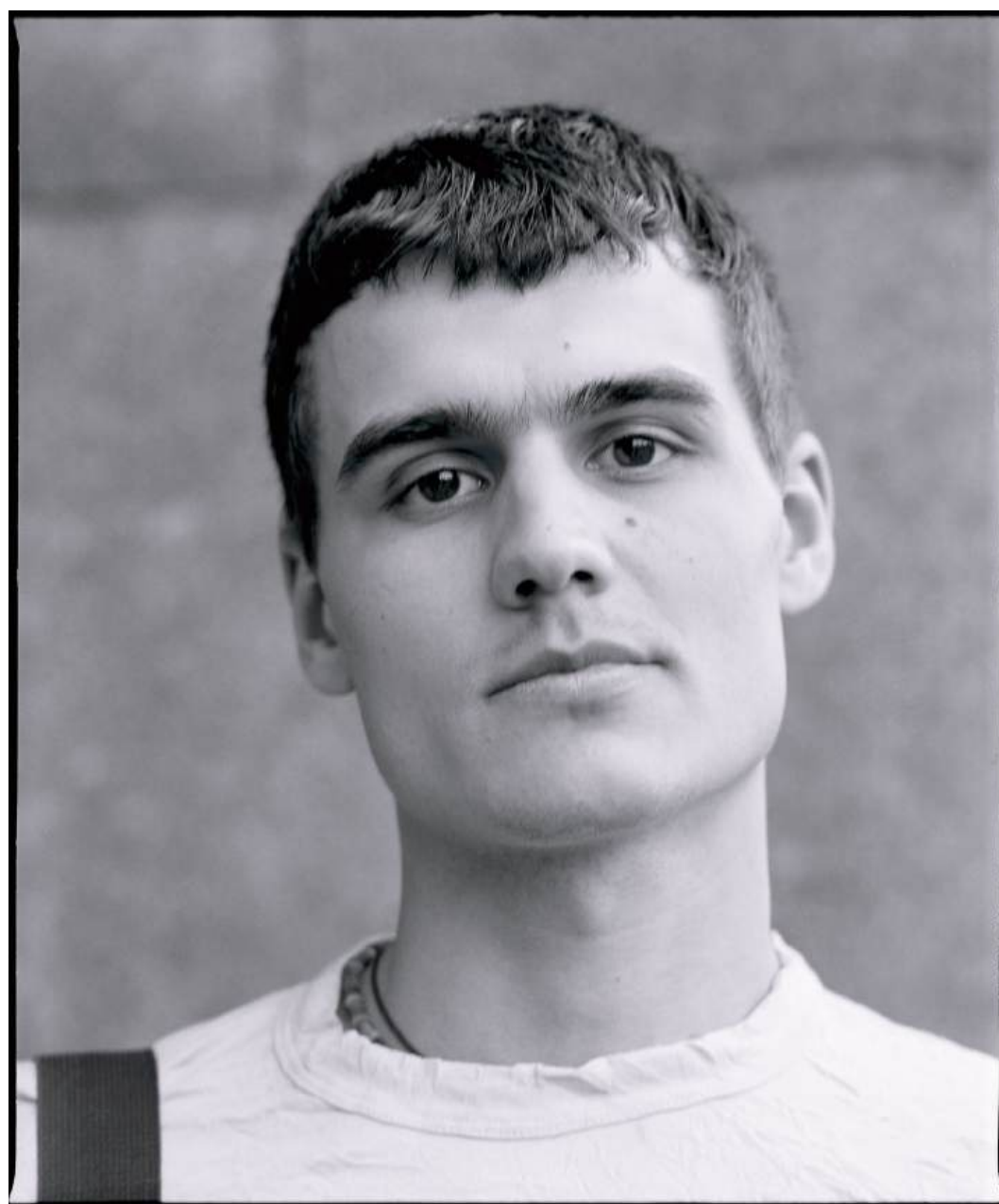


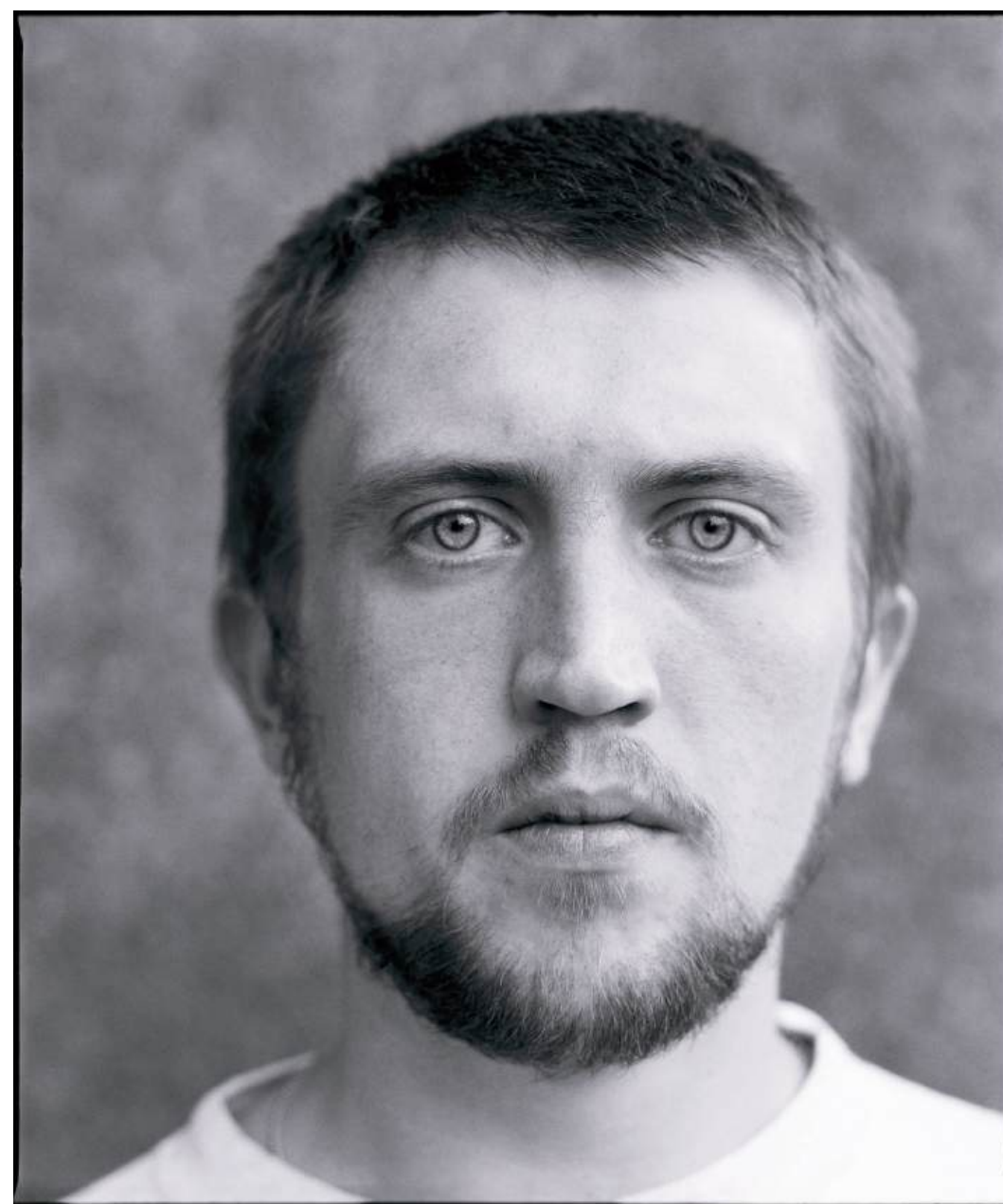








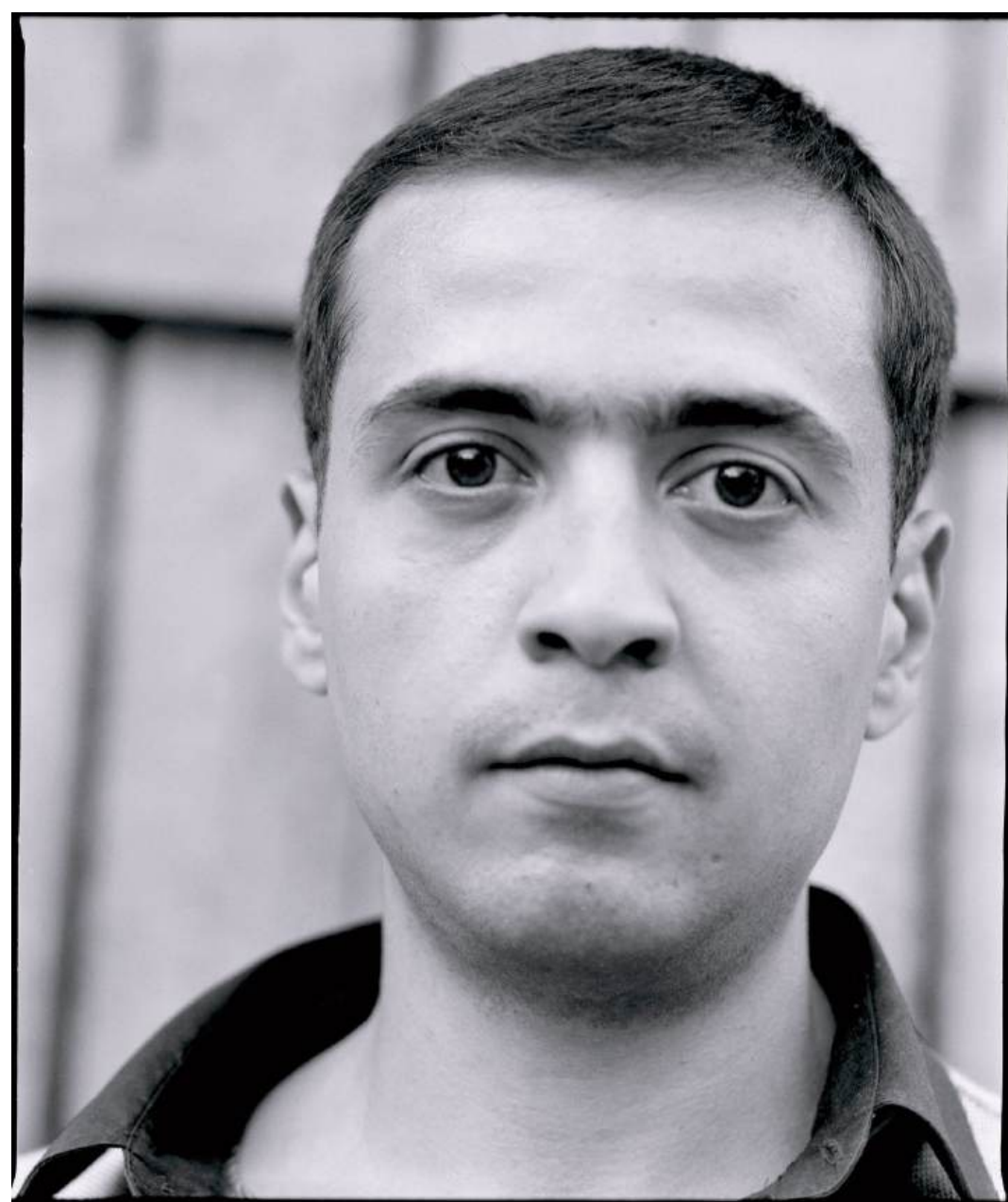




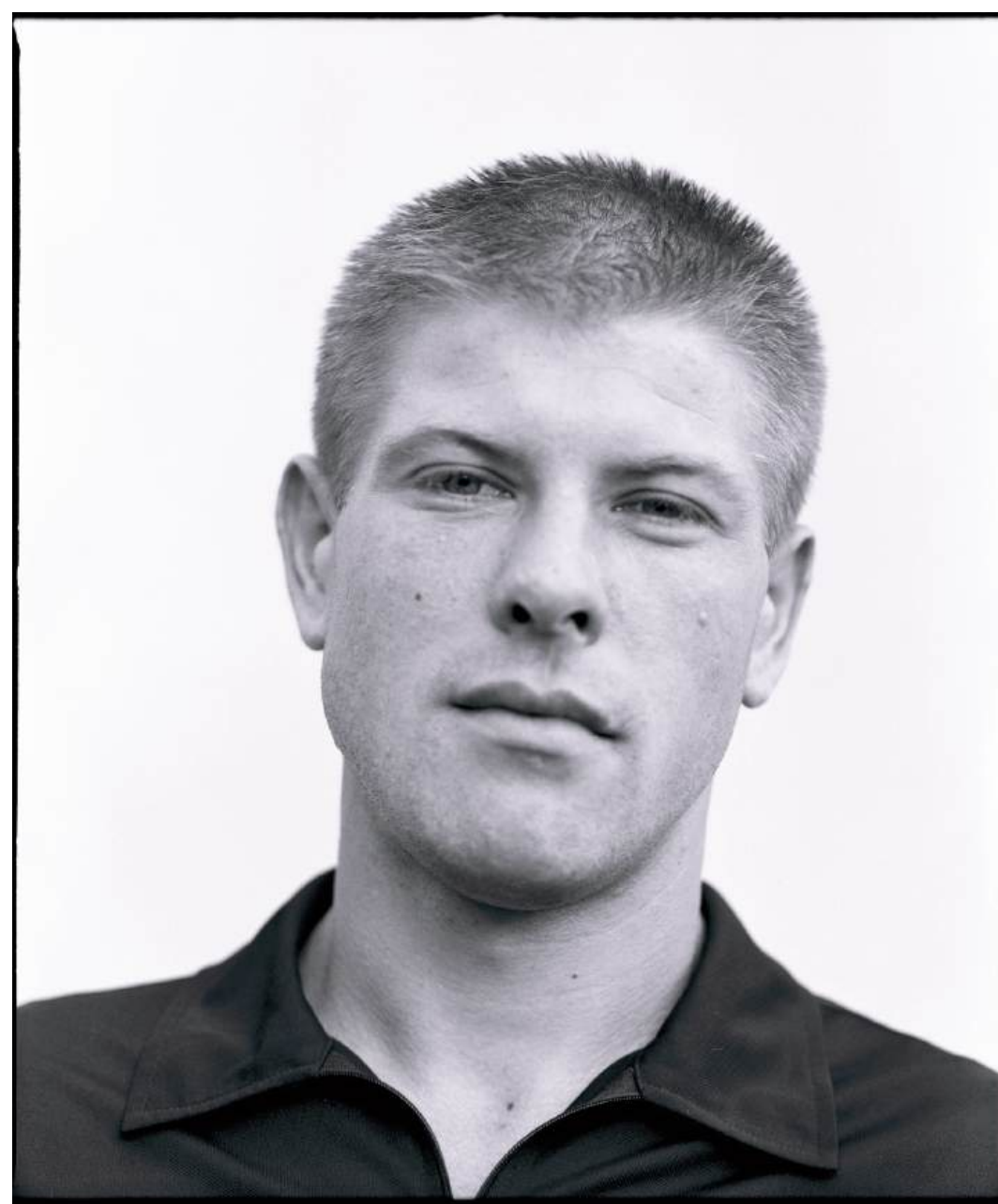


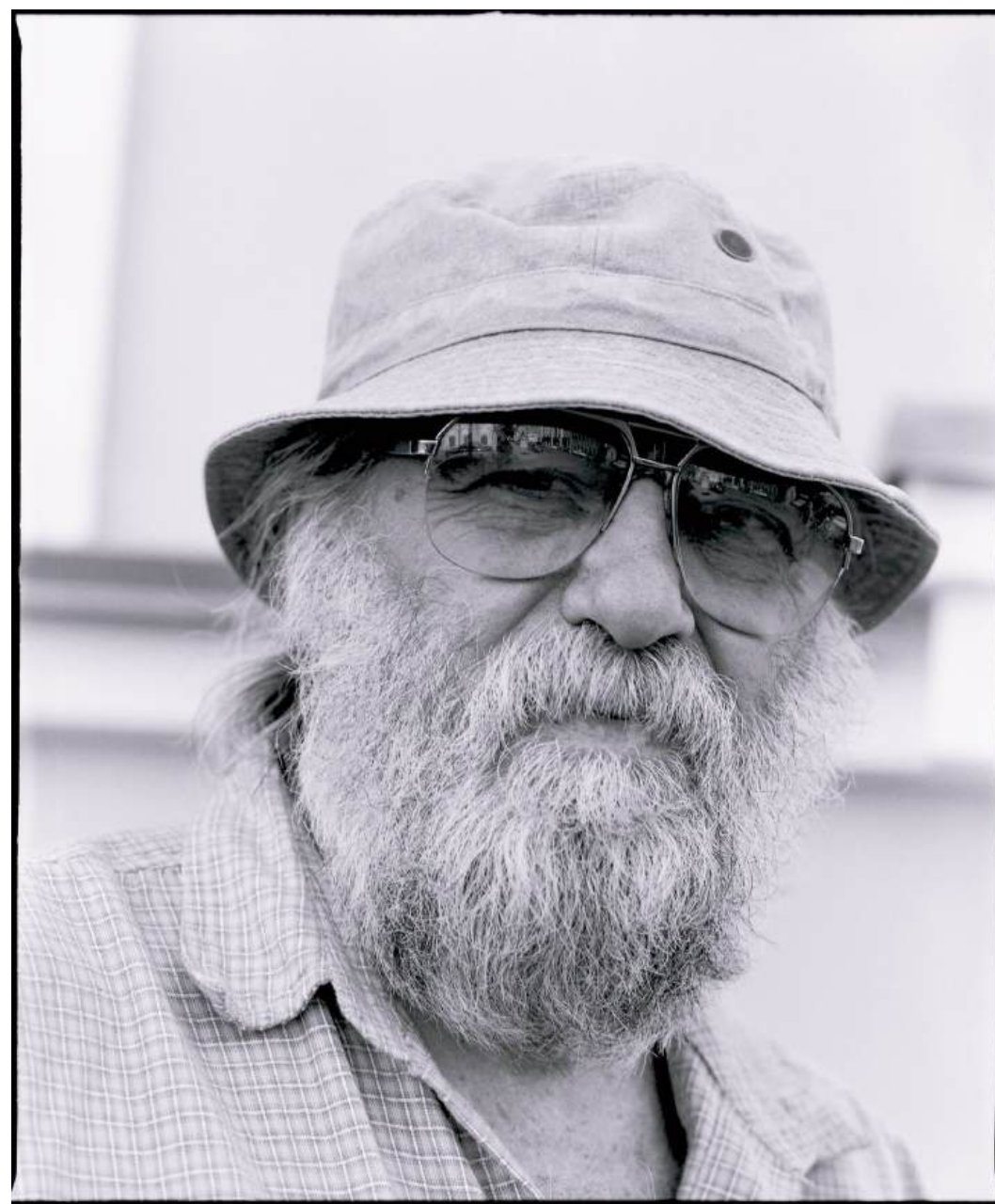




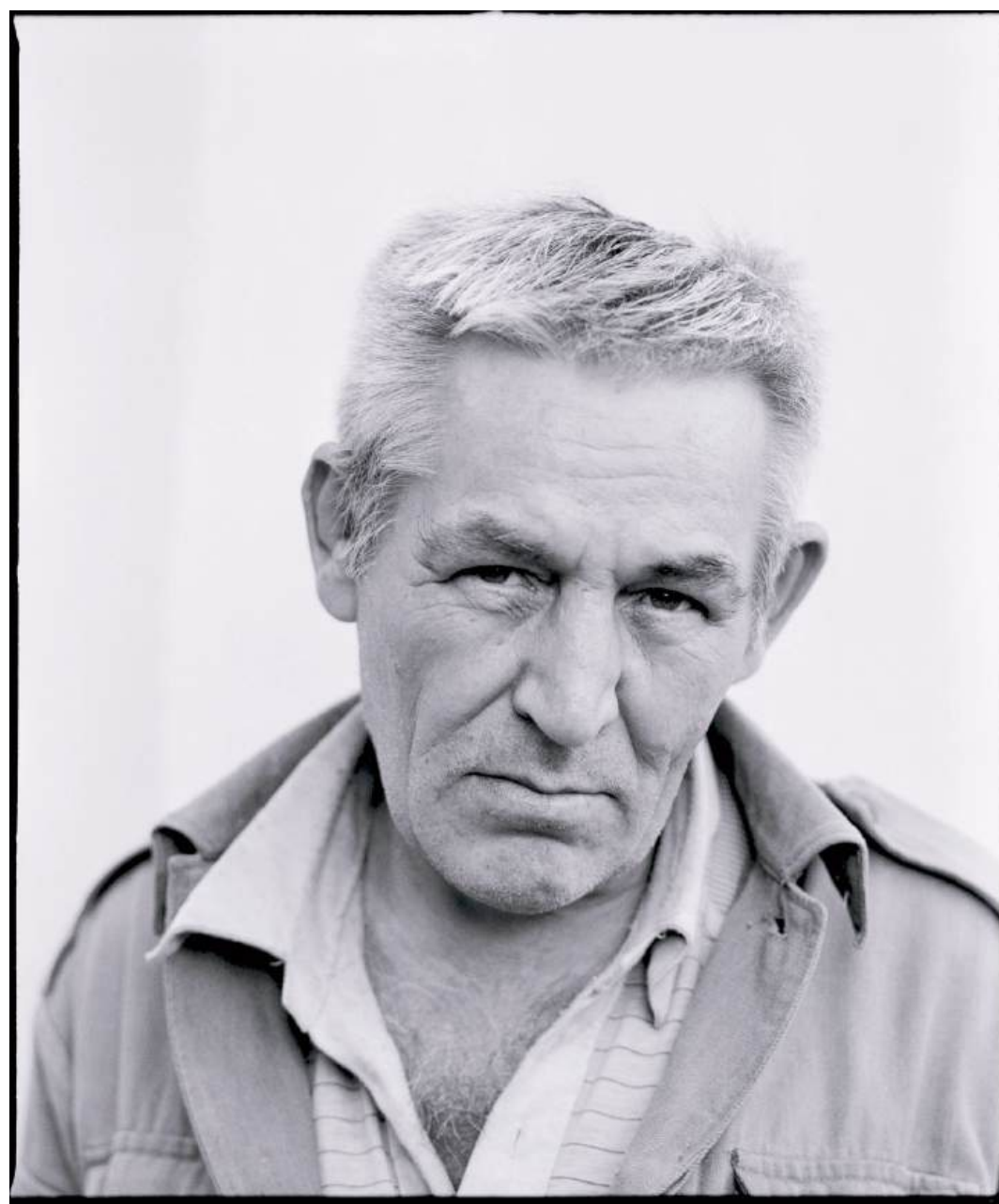


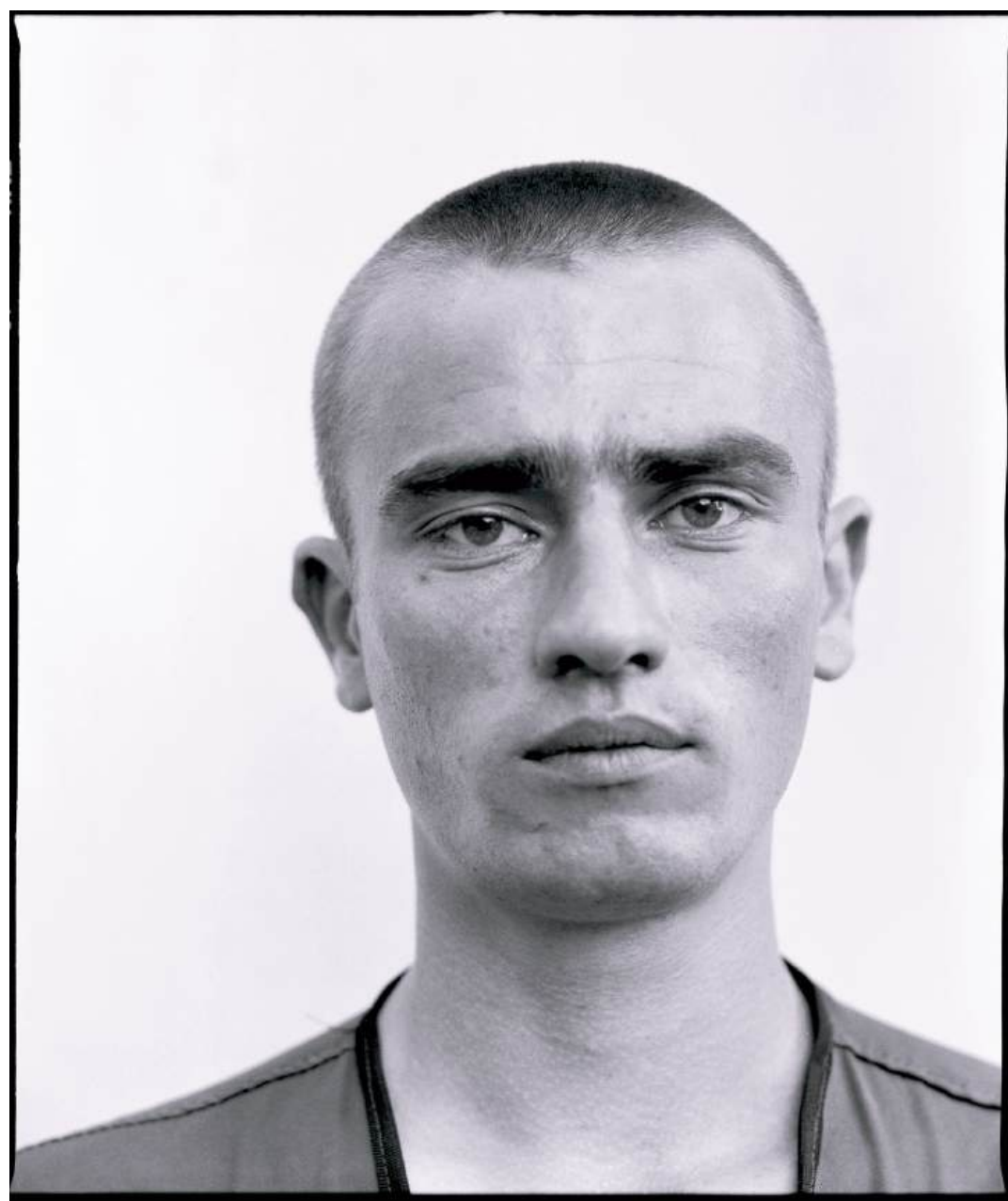
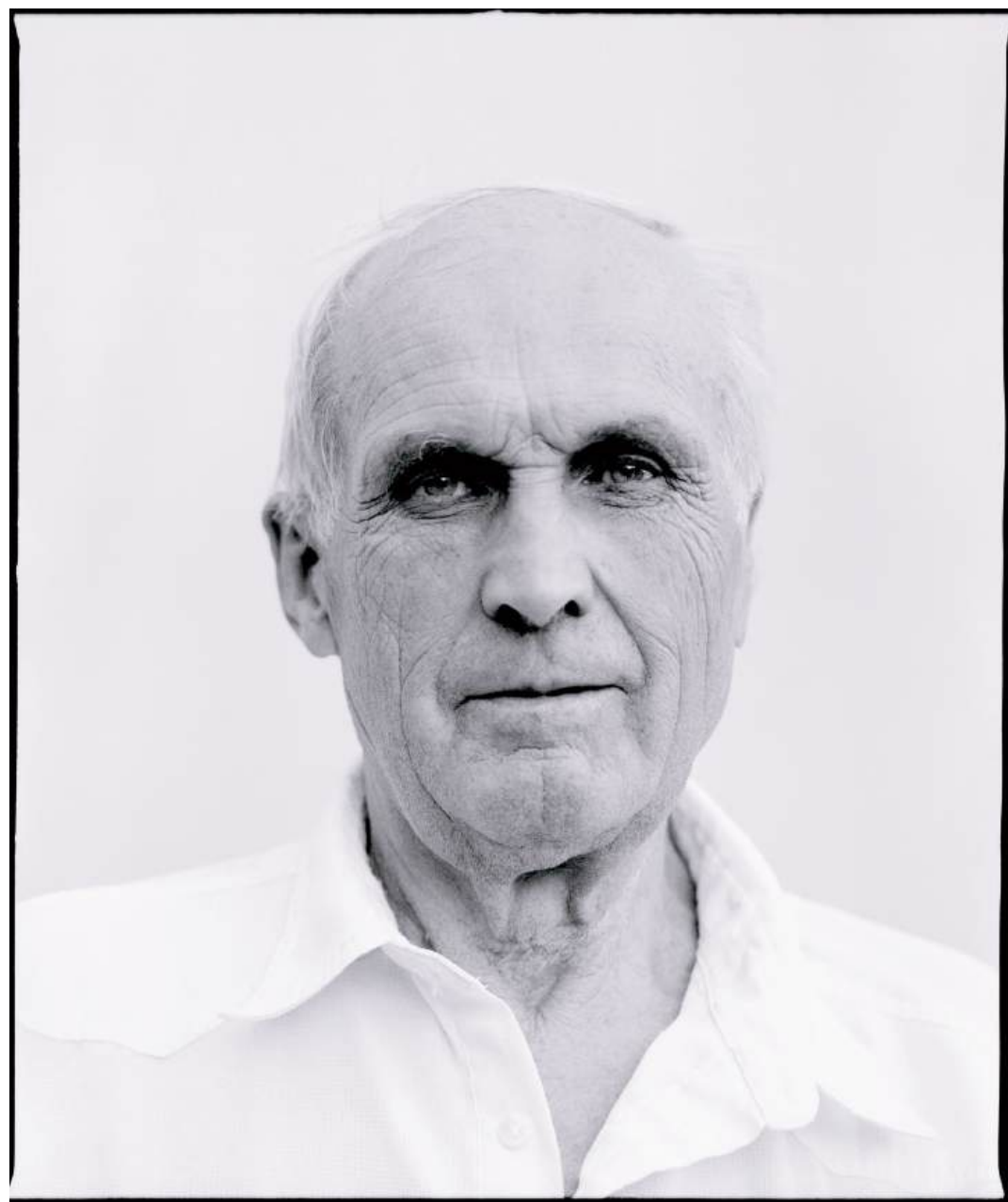






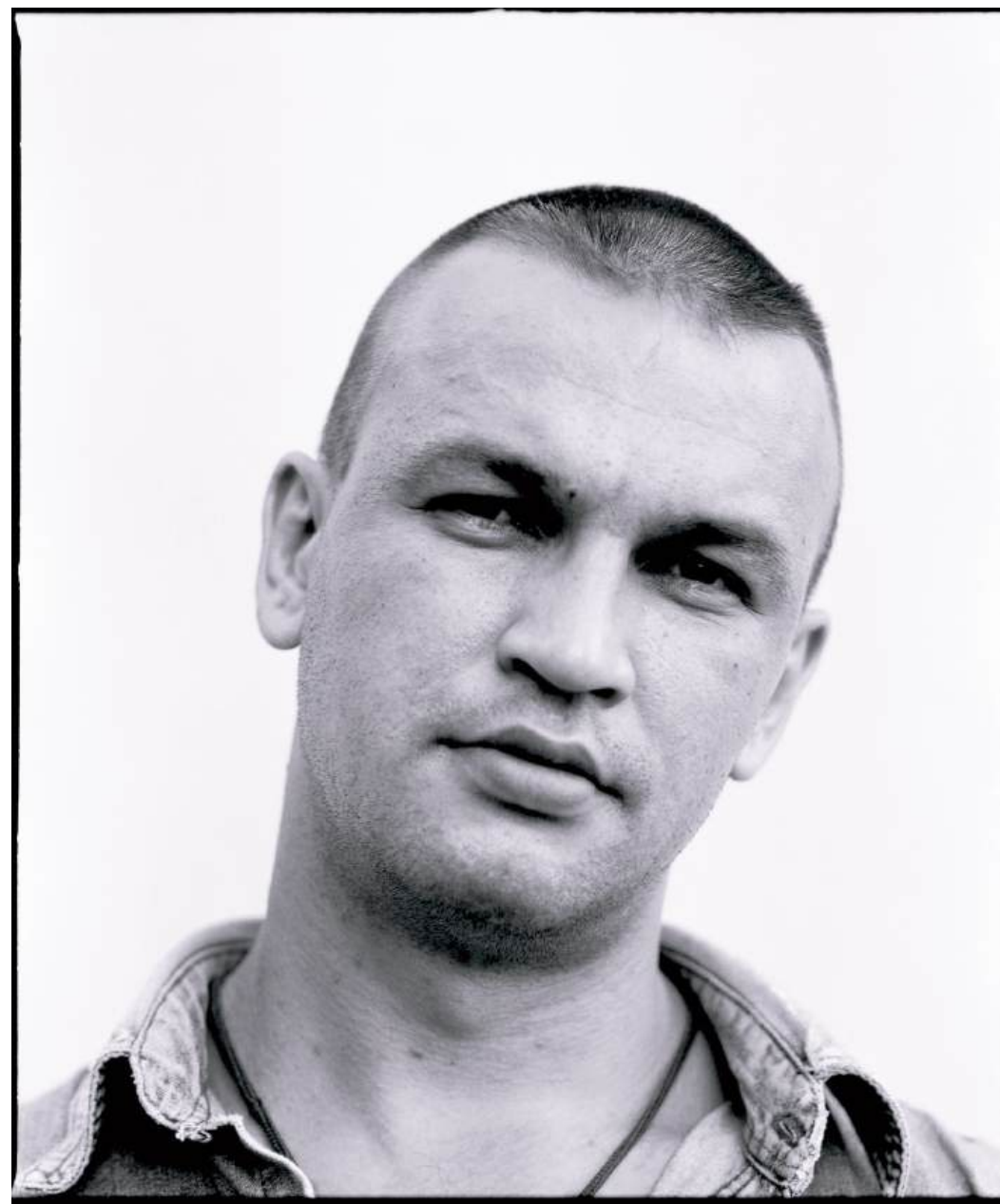


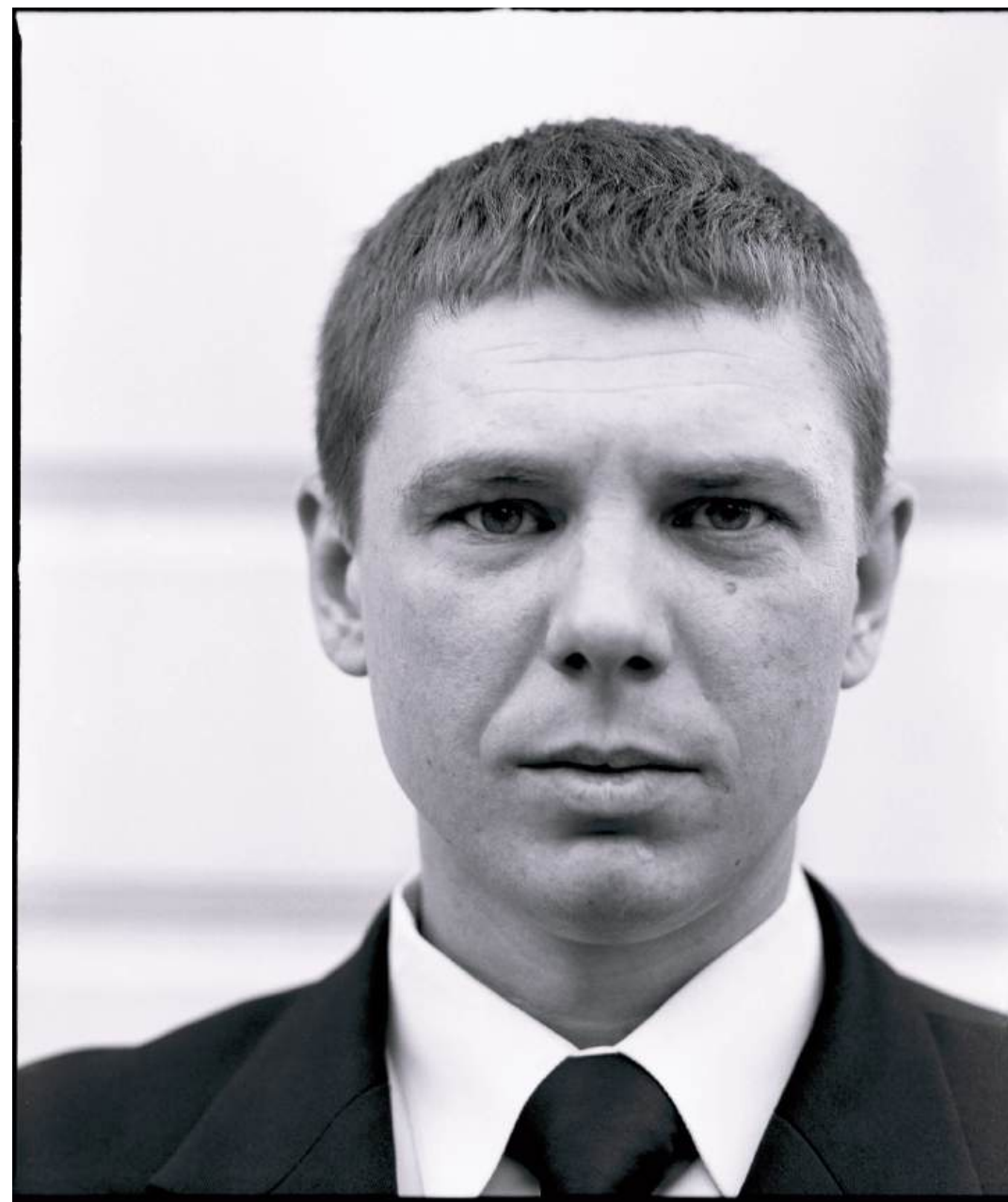


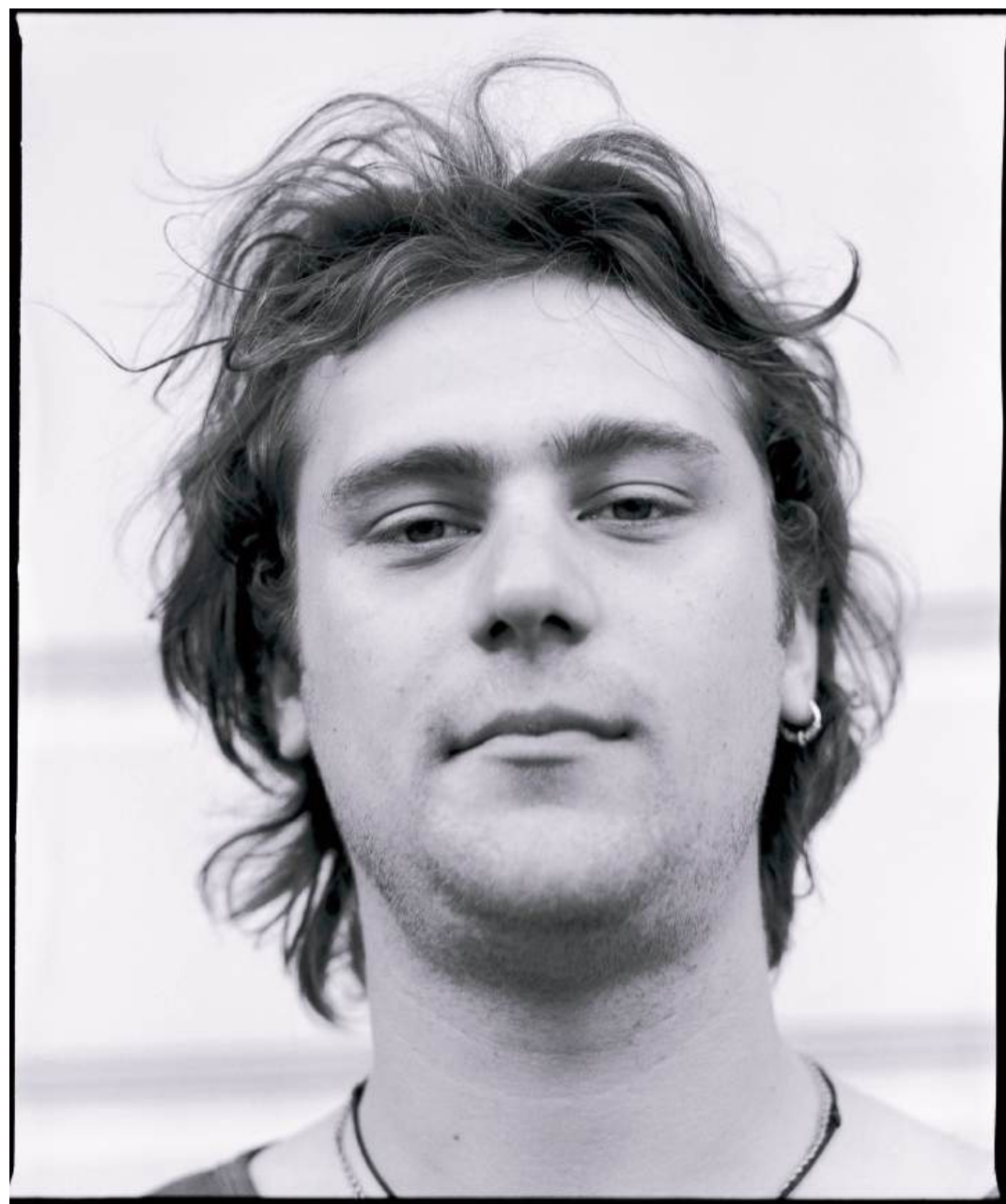








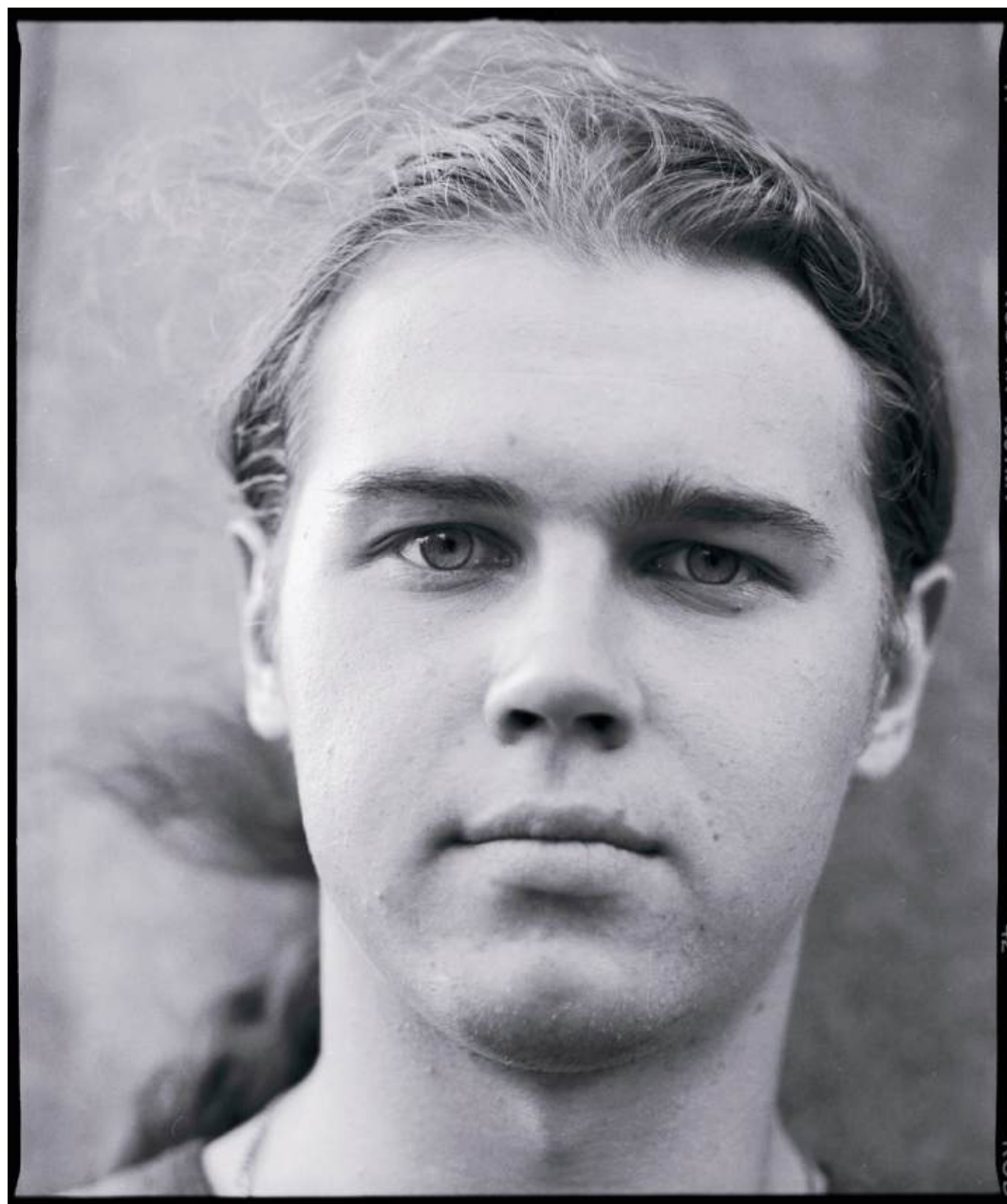


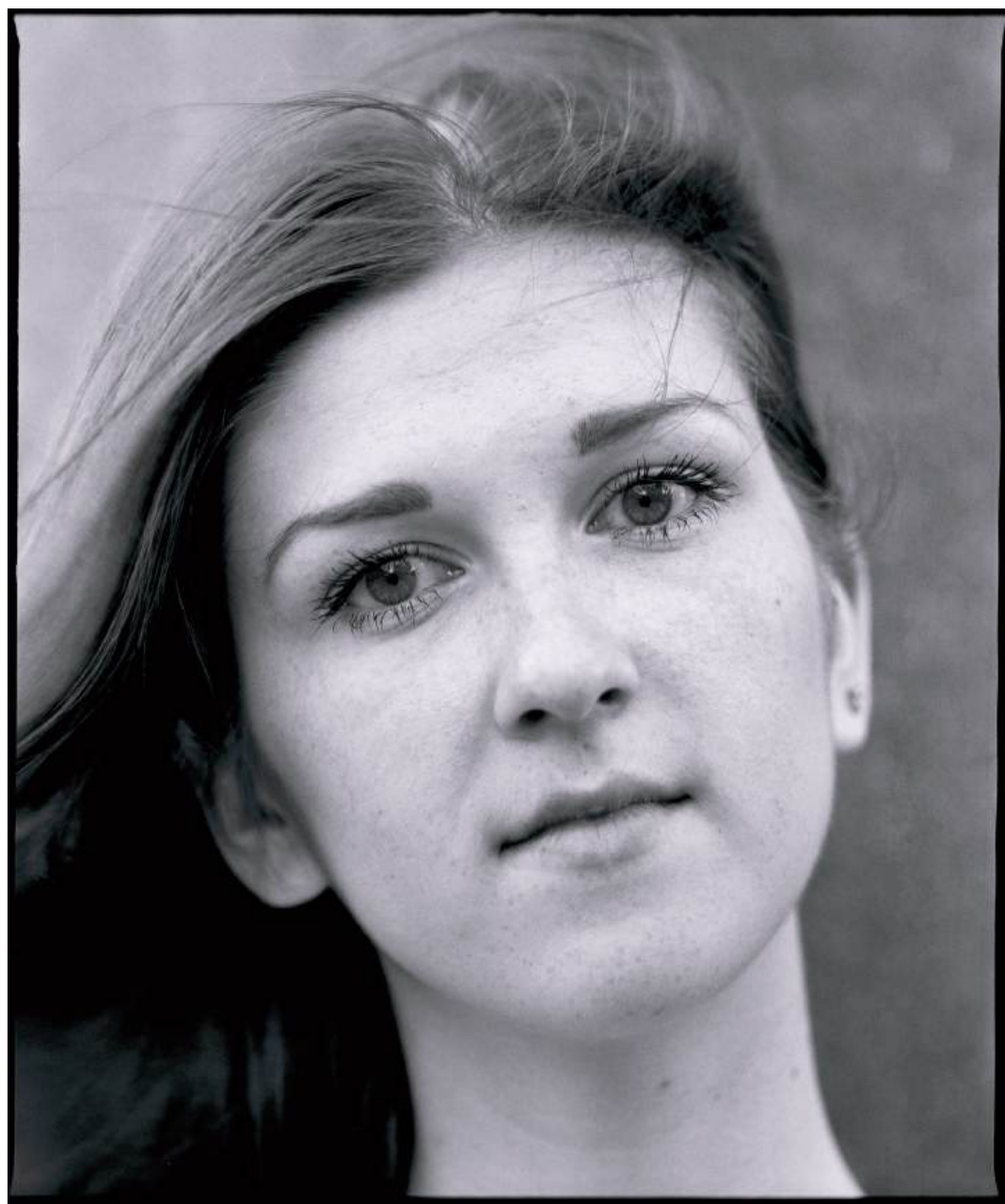




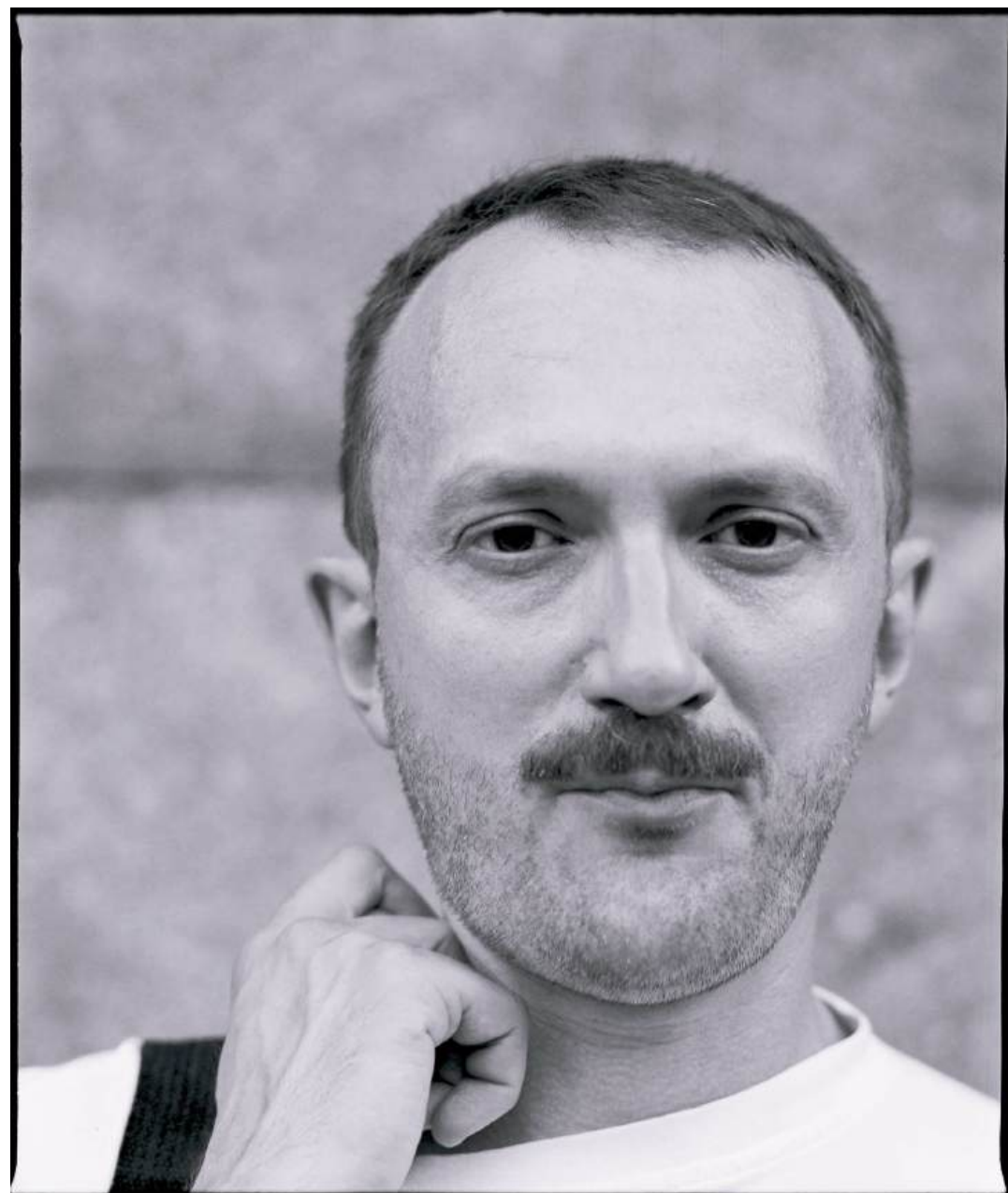


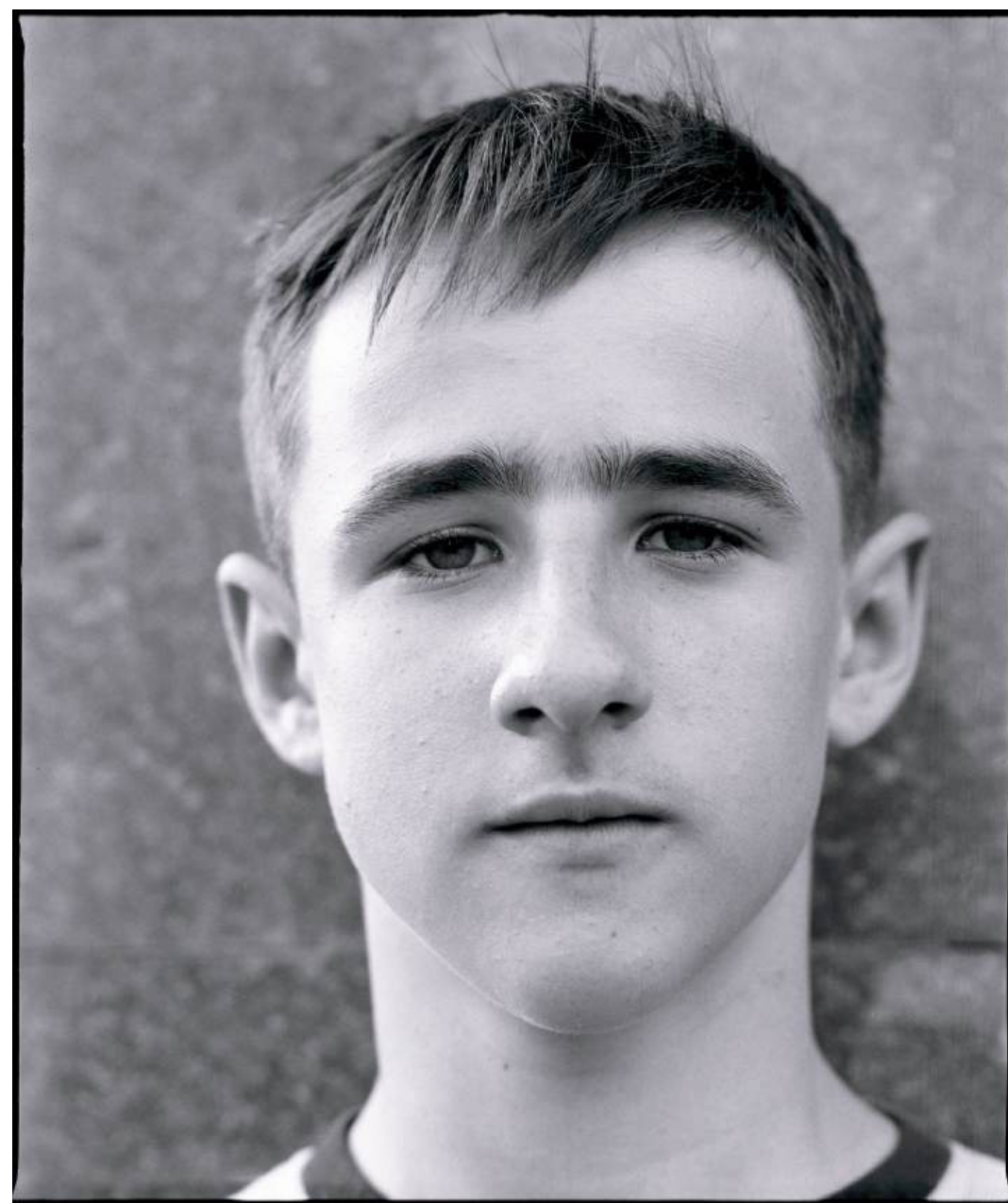












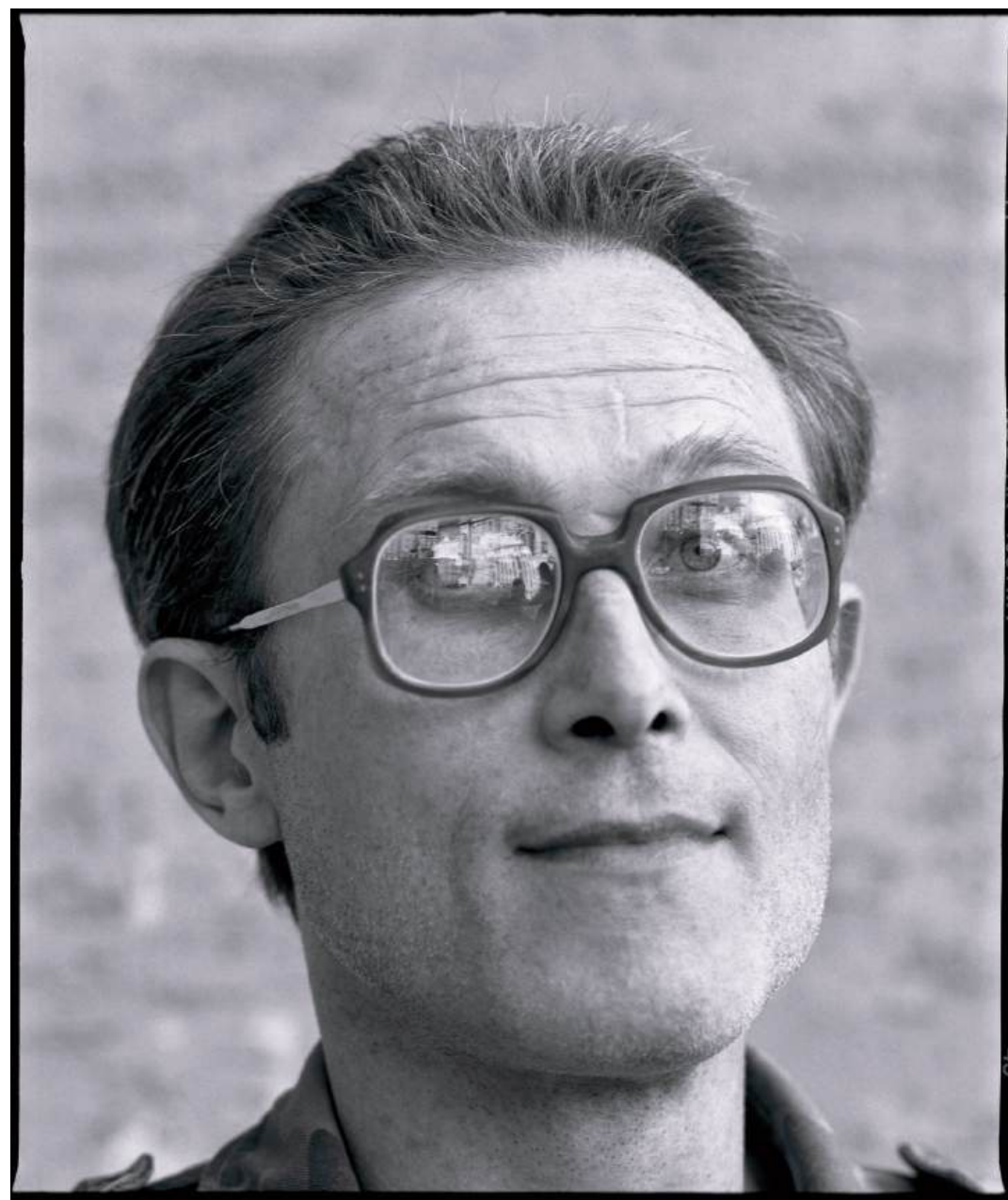
















Юрий Аввакумов / Yuri Avvakumov

## Римский Портрет, XXI Век

### ***На свете счастья нет, но есть покой и воля***

Александр Пушкин

В 1524 году некий псковский старец по имени Филафей отправил московскому князю Василию III Ивановичу письмо, в котором объявил князя наследником императора Константина Великого, а его княжество третьим Римом после Рима античного - Рима номер один, и Константинополя, его наследника - Рима номер два. Москва, таким образом, объявлялась единственным преемником духовного наследия Византии. Между прочим в письме старца в основном говорилось о крестном знамении и проблеме мужеложства.

Но с тех пор концепция Москва - Третий Рим захватила многие умы, и хотя эта имперская идея богоизбранности русского народа и государства принадлежит целиком религии и политике, некоторые переносят ее на город и его устройство - на Москву.

В советское время концепция была у власти непопулярна, хотя с содомией советская власть активно боролась, а крестное знамение было практически запрещено. Однако в новую российскую эпоху идея вернулась, причем с Византией, вторым Римом, у растущей империи развернулась нешуточная борьба на религиозном поле.

Рим номер один известен римским скульптурным портретом - точным, подробным, реалистичным слепком живого конкретного человека. Римский портрет, к счастью, немало сохранившийся, в массе дает нам представление о Риме населенном. Его горожане - люди в основном волевые, героического склада, который у современников можно наблюдать в лицах игроков футбольной Squadra Azzurra, выигрывающей чемпионат мира по футболу. В начале чемпионата это просто случайная шайка гопников, собранных под итальянским флагом, а в финале непобедимые римские легионеры.

В портрете римляне оказались больше демократами, чем учредители демократии греки, которых частные черты лица не волновали вовсе, вернее, греческие художники сплавляли эти черты в единый "собираемый" образ.

Воля, проявленная в римском скульптурном портрете, остается в нем как ДНК, несмотря на периоды позерства, разврата, порочности, старости и т.д. Когда приходит время, всё это собрание, вся эта толпа, весь этот сброд Августов, Юлиев, Клавдиев, Флавиев, Андрианов и Северов, сконцентрированный в галерее бюстов музея Ватикана, может построиться в когорту и завоевать полмира.

Теперь, минуя иконоборческий Рим номер два, перенесемся в Рим номер три. 2003й год - начало века и тысячелетия. Москва - город-империя. Позади "лихие" 1990е. Во власти новый президент, и никто еще предполагает, что он будет править 19 лет, как император Траян, а может быть и дольше - 31 год, как Константин Великий.

В Москве 8 православных монастырей, 680 храмов и часовен. Заканчиваются чеченские войны. Ходорковский еще на свободе. Москва пасет тучных коров углеводородной экономики. Через пять лет они будут съедены общемировым кризисом. А пока в городе открываются бутики и гольф-клубы, устраиваются роскошные вечеринки, растут пенсии, на стройках десятиmillionного города, как сообщает мэрия, работает миллион строителей...

Вообразить в Москве первых римлян невозможно - здесь для них холодно и никто не говорит на латыни. У Третьего Рима своя физиономия. Если отметить ее одним словом, то словом-состоянием будет в отличие от воли - покой. Лица москвичей в фотопортретах Дениса Летбеттера спокойны и не суетливы, как лица людей на уличном переходе, ожидающих, когда зажжется зеленый свет - даже если спешишь, нужно ждать пока проедут машины. Они не собираются на демонстрацию против власти, не похожи на футбольных фанатов, эти "русские не хотят войны", они не стяжатели и не миссионеры. Они верят, что у них чудесным образом все впереди - где-то там, в туннеле черного объектива американского фотографа.

В случайной выборке из 90 уличных портретов по статистике должно быть 5 гастарбайтеров, 9 строителей и столько же геев - но как их найти, Филафей? Есть по крайней мере один архитектор - это я. Мы все ждем, когда загорится зеленый свет, и еще не знаем, что светофоры в этом Риме вышли из строя.

Юрий Аввакумов 2018

## A Roman Portrait, 21st Century

*There is no happiness on earth, but there is peace and free will*  
Alexander Pushkin

In 1524, a monk from Pskov by the name of Filofey sent a letter to Moscow's Grand Prince Vasily the Third, proclaiming him the heir to Emperor Constantine the Great, and naming his principality Rome the Third, (preceded by Ancient Rome – the first Rome, and by Constantinople – the second Rome). Moscow thus became the one and only successor to Byzantium's spiritual heritage. Of note, is that the letter was devoted primarily to the topics of sodomy and the sign of the cross.

From then on, the idea of Moscow being the third Rome, captivated many minds. And while the imperialistic belief that Russians and the Russian state are the chosen people, without a doubt comes from religion and politics, some lay it at the feet of the city of Moscow itself and its inner workings.

During the Soviet era, the notion was frowned upon by authorities, although sodomy was rigorously persecuted, and anything to do with the sign of the cross, all but forbidden. But in the new Russian era, the idea that Moscow is Rome the Third has once again gained favor. What's more, the growing empire has begun to wage a serious war against Byzantium – the second Rome, based on religious principles.

Rome the First is known for its sculptural portraiture – its precise, detailed, realistic interpretations of a concrete, living person. These fortunately fairly well preserved Roman portraits, collectively give us a good guess at what ancient Rome's inhabitants might have been like – mostly strong-willed and of a heroic build, characteristics that can still be observed today in the faces of Squadra Azzurra, the Italian soccer team, as they win the World Cup. This team, which at the beginning of a championship resembles a mob of misfits with an Italian flag, in the finale undergoes a metamorphosis and becomes a squadron of invincible seeming Roman legionnaires.

When it comes to portraiture, the Romans turned out to be more democratic than the founders of democracy, the Greeks, who were entirely unconcerned with individual facial features. To be precise, Greek artists simply melded various distinctive features into one collective image.

The will of the Romans, as evidenced by their sculptural portraits, is part of their DNA, despite the periods of posturing, debauchery, viciousness, aging etc. When the time comes, this entire gathering, this crowd, this brood of Augustuses, Juliuses, Claudiuses, Flaviuses, Adrians, and Severuses, now on display in the Vatican's gallery of sculptures, will bring itself into formation and conquer half the world.

And now, skipping over the iconoclastic Rome number two, let's fast-forward to Rome number three, at the beginning of the new century, the new millennium, the year 2003, Moscow, the empire-city. Behind us are the reckless 1990s. A new president is in power, and no one can yet guess that he's going to rule for 19 years, like emperor Trojan, and perhaps even longer, for 31 years, like Constantine the Great.

Moscow has eight functioning Russian Orthodox Monasteries and 680 churches and chapels. The Chechen wars are coming to an end. Khodorkovsky is still a free man. Moscow is prime pasture for the fat bulls of the hydrocarbon economy. In five years, they will be slaughtered by the world economic crisis. But in the meantime, high-end boutiques and golf clubs are opening up everywhere, lavish parties are being thrown, pensions are increasing, and City Hall informs us that there are a million construction workers laboring on construction sites in this tens of millions city...

Imagining the first Romans in Moscow is impossible. It's too cold and no one speaks Latin. Rome the Third has its own physiognomy. It can be described in one word, quite the opposite of free will – peace.

The faces of Moscovites in Dennis Letbetter's photo portraits are tranquil and unhurried, the faces of people waiting for a green light at a crosswalk – even if you're in a hurry, you have to wait for the cars to pass. These people aren't going to an anti-government demonstration, they don't look like soccer fans, these Russians don't want a war, they're neither money-grubbers, nor missionaries. They believe that everything is still magically ahead of them, somewhere in the black tunnel of an American photographer's camera lens.

Statistically speaking, in a group of 90 random street portraits, there should be five migrant workers, nine construction workers, and as many homosexuals. But how do you spot them, Filofey? There is at least one architect – me. We're all waiting for a green light, and don't yet know that all the traffic lights in this

Yuri Avvakumov 2018

*translation* Irina Gutkin



Man, Five Points Manhattan

Paul Strand 1916

## Lineaments of Light

*I would wish my portraits to be of the people, not like them*  
Lucian Freud

Though I am an inveterate voyeur, faces are my main fascination. Each of us is captivated by them from the freshest age. Babies are drawn to their mother's eyes. Lovers are transfixed by the look of their beloved. Our survival depends upon our ability to read faces. As with many people, I love looking at strangers in cafes. As much as my eyes might like to linger, I memorize faces from a glance. This helps avoid being caught with a stare and inducement of the comment, "If you like it so much, why don't you take a picture?" The portraits here exist in partial to surfeit myself with the visage of others. It is a privilege to look into all of these eyes at leisure. This is not, as in cinema, a breaking of the fourth wall. Here the gaze is the intention.

These are portraits taken on the streets of Moscow in 2003. Unfortunately, they only include the willing. Most people declined to have their photograph taken when approached, as I believe I might. Generally older people refused, and women more often than men. Encountering subjects on the street broaches the near predatory, in the sense of wanting something from the subject that they neither need nor expectation of offering. It requires a gentle treatment. Being examined by a foreigner through a camera lens could well be unpleasant – I could be perceived as being in an ascendant position.

The unemotive expressions of city dwellers is an aloofness they have developed in order to remain anonymous. The distracting experience of being pulled from the flow of their trajectories results in a temporary vulnerability, in which the subject softens for just a moment to reveal an inimitable individuality. Connecting on the street with strangers helped deepen my understanding of Muscovites beyond my circle of friends.

There are several kinds of official portrait galleries: the FBI's Most Wanted displays in government buildings, executive portraits in corporate lobbies, high school yearbooks, the victim records of the Khmer Rouge regime, images of those missing from 9/11 pinned to cyclone fences, or the mug shots of the women of the Montgomery bus boycott. Too many of these galleries are tragic. My portraits are gentle quotidian images of people getting on with their lives, with no evidence of either fortune or misfortune.

I am forever left wondering about the lives of those whom I have photographed, not only about their jobs and passions but their inner selves. Each portrait is a story: some offer a melancholy, a few approach the edge of revealing a profound gentleness. Which one is an engineer, which is an architect? The students seem obvious, but what are they studying, and how do they apply themselves? Which ones are confident, which are timid? A couple of them I suspect have been imprisoned. One has sacrificed an affective relationship to take care of an ailing mother. Two of them seem like ballet dancers. There are abusers and the abused. I imagine their relationships, their loves, their loves lost. Do they live for music, their family, games, physics, television, whisky, food, sculpting, painting, reading, a lazy Sunday, a good joke, a hot meal?

It is impossible to avoid such speculation. We constantly make suppositions about others, knowing they are likely wrong. How many are still alive? I could rarely if ever again encounter these people in this city of 12 million inhabitants.

Our faces, in 33 milliseconds, intuitively mirror the expression of those we encounter, a survival instinct that informs us of their attitude and intent. There is so much learned from a face. We cannot read botoxed faces. Sadly, those with altered faces deprive themselves of both the signals, and the responses, that their facial muscles send to their brains.

Can we accurately take measure of a person from a single image?

Richard Avedon expressed a lack of interest in photographing the smooth faces of the young, preferring a complex, lived-in face. There is a notion that people, over time, develop the faces they have earned or deserve.

Are we shaped by how others react to the faces we were innocently born with? I can be surprised by the reflection of my face in a mirror. My natural, relaxed expression can seem to me severe and unkind when in fact, I fancy myself as warm and welcoming. We are naturally attracted to domed brows in other animals. How could we possibly discern amongst a pod of smiling dolphins which one of them might be a gossiping, philandering, troublemaker? The most sinister, wrinkled face of a bat might harbor the gentlest, most magnanimous of souls.

I remain transfixed by the idea that portraits are created by focusing the light waves reflected from the subject's faces directly onto film. The physics of light draws the image. There is a direct physical connection between these people, as they appeared one day in 2003, and our eyes today. Looking at the reproductions on these pages we engage in time travel at the speed of light.

“Sergei Eisenstein solution to the lack of any real evidence of communal spirit,” wrote essayist David Trotter, “was to imagine solidarity as something that happens in the flesh, but at a remove, telegraphically.”

Maybe these portraits offer that spirit.

Dennis Letbetter 2018

# **i** mag no. 19

Dennis Letbetter

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