



Hearts & Thumbs

Uncovering the crave for virtual attention

Anni Laukka

Examensarbete för bildkonst (YH)-examen
Bildkonst, YH Novia
Jakobstad 2020

BACHELOR'S THESIS

Author: Anni Laukka

Degree Programme: Fine Art, Pictarsaari

Supervisors: Anneli Holmström, Göran Torrkulla

Title: Hearts and thumbs – Uncovering the crave for virtual attention

Date: 17.4.2020 Number of pages: 35 Appendices:

Abstract

What is it that people share with the world?
And what is left out, hidden or blurred?

I write in rhymes about aspects of social media use,
about my artistic process and some researched news.

We upload and blindly yearn for acceptance,
and for something to confirm our existence.

In a world of profiles, individuals that need to get seen,
maybe the day can be saved by a thumbs up in between.

For a moment the attention feels good, for sure,
but the dopamin dose is small, you'll start craving more.

Hearts and thumbs, everyone wants a lot of those,
where everyone watches, but what they see no-one knows.

Symbolic icons, a great tool to use for comparison,
a measure of the popularity of each and every person.

They get a physical form in a sculpture, the work for my degree,
enlightened with two lamps two different shadows you will see.

Social media doesn't represent the reality, keep that in mind.
Filters, make-up and staging, very often lies behind.

I've captured in photography the untold crave for attention.
But freedom to interpret the art and rhymes I leave by intention.

Language: english

Key words: social media, sculpture, photography, fine art

EXAMENSARBETE

Författare: Anni Laukka

Utbildning och ort: Bildkonst, Jakobstad

Handledare: Anneli Holmström, Göran Torrkulla

Titel: Hjärtan och tummar – En blottning av längtan efter virtuell uppmärksamhet

Datum: 17.4.2020 Sidantal: 35 Bilagor:

Abstrakt

Vad är det som vi frivilligt åt hela världen dela väljer,
vad blir i skuggan, undangömt, sådant vi aldrig förtäljer?

I rim lyfter jag fram aspekter av social media att beakta,
min konstnärliga process och även vetenskaplig fakta.

Vi laddar upp och blint törstar efter bevis,
på att vi finns och att vi duger på något vis.

I en värld av profiler, individer som vill bli sedda,
kanske en "tumme up" kan tillfälligt dagen rädda.

En stund kan den virtuella uppmärksamheten så gott smaka.
Men dopamindosen är liten, snart är längtan efter mer tillbaka.

Hjärtan och tummar, något som vi vill ha mer,
i en värld där alla tittar, men få egentligen ser.

Symboliska iconer, dagens virtuella mårtenhet,
för mätning av var persons individuella popularitet.

De får en fysisk form i mitt konstverk för examen,
i en skulptur där två lampor blottar skuggorna av dem.

Allt är inte som det på social media ser ut att vara,
verklighetsförvrängningar är inte alltid så uppenbara.

Uppmärksamhetstörsten visualiseras jag genom fotografi.
Åskådarnas tolkning av mina rim och verk förblir ändå fri.

Språk: engelska Nyckelord: social media, skulptur, fotografi, bildkonst

OPINNÄYTETYÖ

Tekijä: Anni Laukka

Koulutus ja paikkakunta: Kuvataide, Pietarsaari

Ohjaaja(t): Anneli Holmström, Göran Torrkulla

Nimike: Sydämiä ja peukkuja – Virtuaalisen huomion kaipuu paljastettuna

Päivämäärä: 17.4.2020 Sivumäärä: 35 Liitteet:

Tiivistelmä

Mitä valitsemme vapaaehtoisesti jakaa koko maailmalle,
entä mitä jää kertomatta, huomaamatta, piiloon varjon alle?

Kerron runoin sosiaalisen median käytön näkökohdista,
taiteellisesta prosessistani sekä tieteen tutkimustuloksista.

Lataamme nettiin henkilökohtaista sisältöä sokeasti,
odottaen vahvistusta, todistusta, että olemme olemassa oikeasti.

Nettiprofiilien maailmassa, kaikki nähyksi tulemista janoaa,
ehkä yhden peukun saaminen voi hetkellisesti päivän pelastaa.

Virtuaalinen huomio voi hetken niin hyvää tuntua tekevän,
mutta dopamiini -annos on pieni, syntyy kaipuu saada enemmän.

Sydämiä ja peukkuja, niiden saaminen mieltä hyväilee,
maailmassa, jossa kaikki katsovat mutta harva todella näkee.

Nämä symboliset kuvakkeet toimivat nykyajan mittayksikköinä,
joilla helposti verrata kuinka suosittuja olemme henkilöinä.

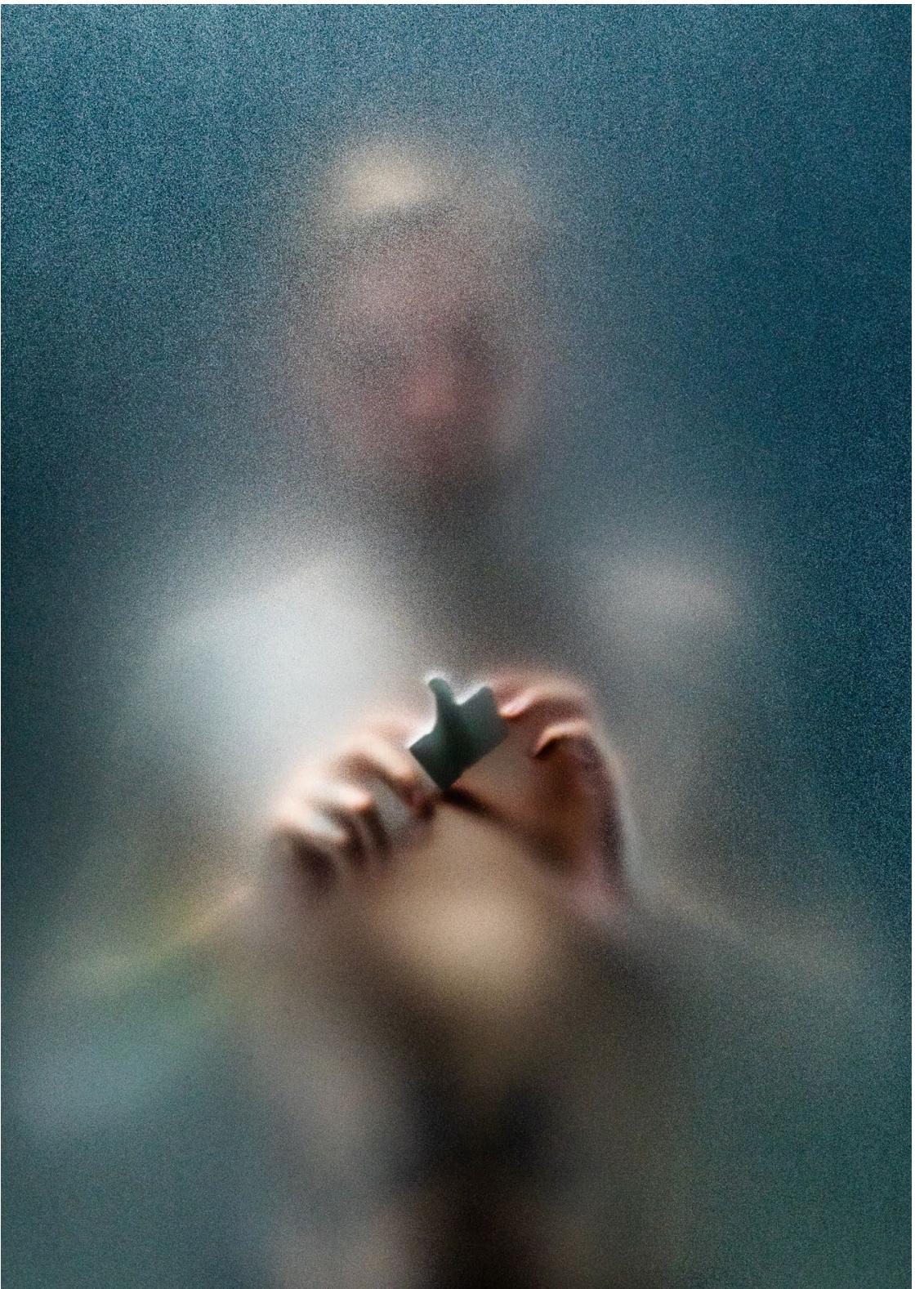
Ne saavat fyysisen muodon päättööni taideteoksessa,
kahdella lampulla eri varjokuvat muodostavassa veistoksessa.

Kaikki ei ole sitä, miltä se sosiaalisessa mediassa näyttää,
todellisuuden väärityksiä voi huomaamattomasti käyttää.

Huomionjanoa visualisoin unenomaiseen valokuvaan,
mutta teoksilla ja runoilla kannustan vapaaseen tulkintaan.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Hearts and thumbs	3
3	What is in the spotlight	5
4	What is in the shadows	9
5	The "Hearts and Thumbs" -project	17
5.1	A pile of hearts and thumbs	19
5.2	The crave for attention captured in photography	23
5.3	Virtual act translated to reality	27
6	Art interpretations and discussion	29



1. Introduction

It was just the other day,
I heard my youngest daughter say:

"Mom I need followers and likes,
My sister has fourteen more, Yikes!"

I guess you are never too young to know
when your popularity grows too slow.

"You shouldn't care about likes" I said
whilst slightly shaking my head.

In the other hand I still held my phone,
with a new record of followers of my own.

"Yeah, this is different, it is for business,
About followers I couldn't care less".

Well, maybe it is not just that simple,
I thought while photoshopping a dimple.

What's my standpoint, what's my part?
Can it be explored by the means of art?

How would I point the various sides of being online?
Shine a light, give it an honest inspection of mine.

What is it that people share with the world?
And what is left out, hidden or blurred?

Yep, my final work kind of is about social media,
something I can't find in my parents encyklopedia.

Swedish or Finnish? No I have to write in English instead,
after all it is the international language of the internet.

But why write my thesis with rhymes one might ask.
Simply because that way it is a much more fun task.

Maybe it even makes the text more amusing to read.
Can you make it to the last page or will your brain bleed?



2. Hearts and Thumbs

What do we have here?
Digital icons in virtual reality,
Signs and numbers
on a social media gallery.

Something untouchable,
seen only on every screen,
Hearts and thumbs,
tell me what do they mean?

These countable indications
of your individual popularity,
mirroring your success
in a new different reality.

A fast and easy way
to address support to a person.
Or a great measure,
a tool to use for comparison?

A human pressing a button,
a touch of a finger, one quick keystroke,
An instant digital reaction
to a video, story, photo or a joke.

Or could it be an implied call,
to like them back, to get noticed?
Or to give the unnoticed
the attention that they've so missed?

Join us, get lost in the game,
or are you already part of the play?
Hearts and thumbs, tell me,
how many did you get today?

Make them love the online you.
Win the game, make a plan.
Followers, likes and comments,
get as many as you can.

And while you're at it,
look me up, find me on instagram.
Give me a like or a follow.
There's time for that during traffic jam.

Sign in on your facebook,
you know, you find me also there.
Hit me with one of those icons,
show that you really do care.

Be a good friend, spread the love,
give everyone a heart or a thumb.
And go ahead, leave a comment,
to be sure that you'll get back some.

Spreading as much love in the real world,
it is just not something you could do.
Giving hearts and thumbs to people,
you couldn't do that. Or could you?

3. What is in the spotlight?

Stand up, get on the stage.
Shine a light on the best sides of you,
Perfect selfies, stories of success
or something fake, no-one knows it isn't true.

Show them what you want,
whatever you want them to see.
Introduce the version of you
you only wish you could be.

A work-out is only half done,
unless there is proof of it online.
And what's the point of fine dining
if everyone doesn't see what you dine?

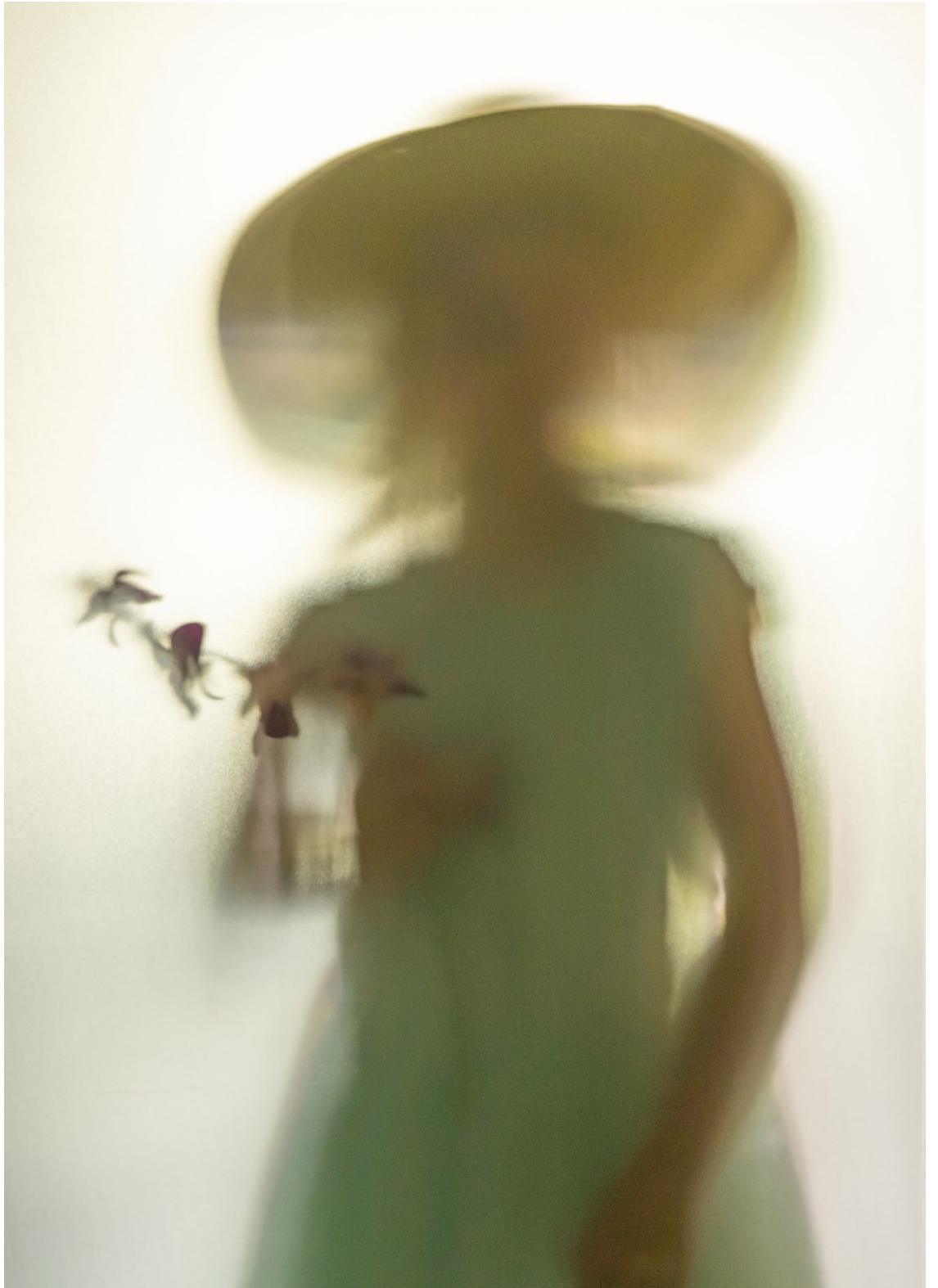
Upload a perfect holiday selfie,
don't go and waste that fabulous tan.
You know it doesn't last that long,
Show off that body while you still can.

You'll find a perfectly deceiving filter,
so don't worry about dimples and spots.
Just easily erase all your faults,
you know everyone else also photoshops.

Finally a really good hair -day!
Get your phone, take a photo, quick!
Want to look even hotter?
Maybe a duckface would do the trick?

Is there a recipe for a perfect selfie?
Google will find some on the internet.
Actually I can look it up for you,
if you haven't found one yourself yet.

Wanna hear the Cosmopolitans* tips?:
Look up towards the camera for a starter.
Raise your eyebrows, just a little,
it should make your eyes appear larger.



*5 flawless tips to taking your best selfie, Krystyna Chávez and Carly Cardellino, june 29 2017, Cosmopolitan online magazine
<https://www.cosmopolitan.com/style-beauty/a12378/take-the-best-selfie/> (15.1.2020)

Think of something that makes you smile,
to fake a genuine look of happiness.
Instead of holding the phone in front of you,
move it, find the angle that is most flawless.

Extend your head, push shoulders down,
to fake a sharper jawline and a longer neck.
Relax your mouth, blow softly through your lips,
make the mouth more plump and hot as heck.

When you finally get that perfect pose,
keep it and spin to find the best light.
Take at least about forty snaps,
to be sure that one hits everything right.

There you have it, the cosmopolitan way.
Go ahead, try it, make everyone impressed.
No more bad selfies, taking all of your time.
Now you can only be seen at your best.

I know that not nearly everyone
posts only beauty, style and success.
But the content is consciously sifted,
every post closely chosen nevertheless.

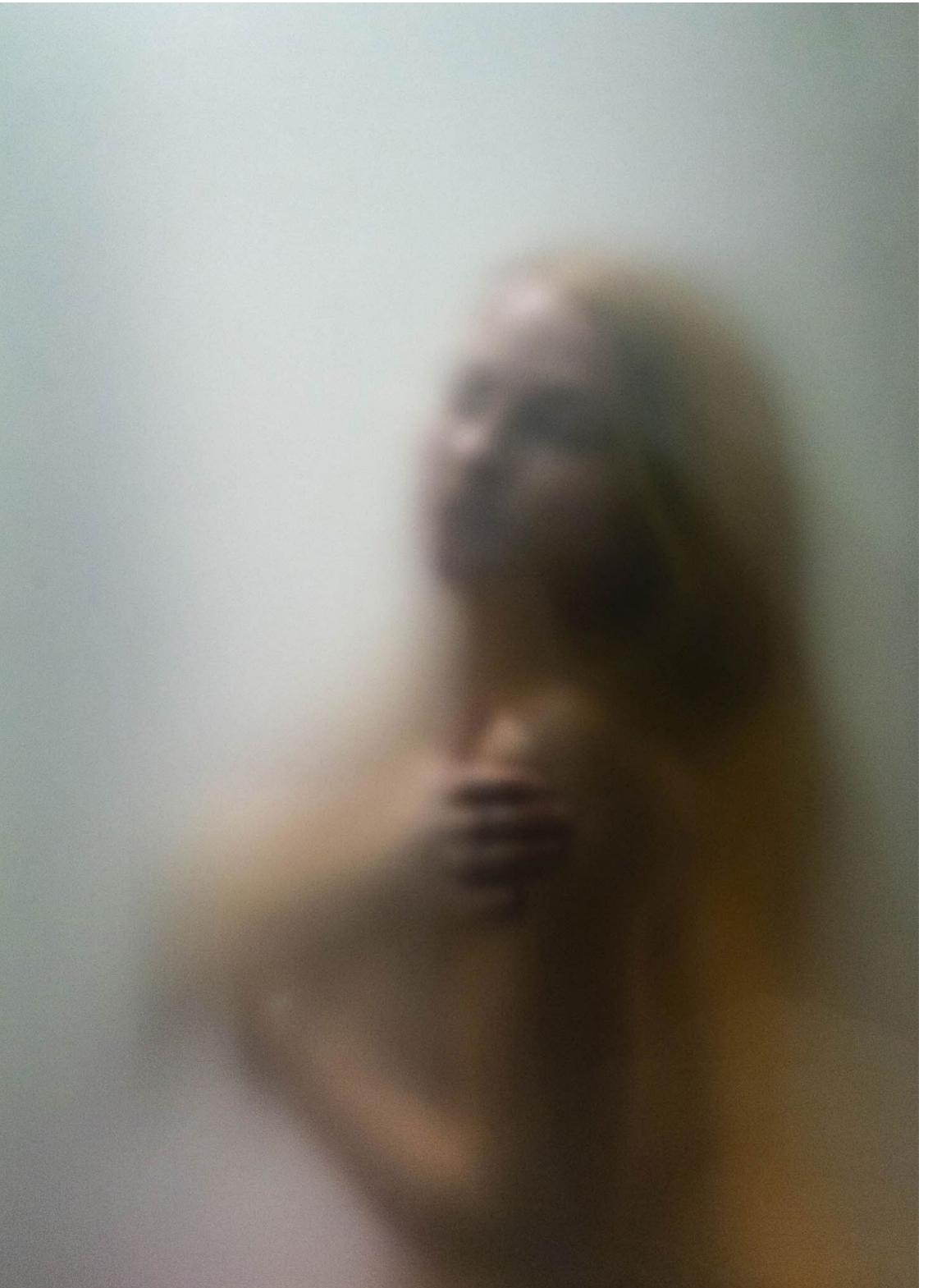
What do you want to shine the light on,
your looks, skills, lifestyle or gym progress?
How do you want that everyone sees you?
A saviour of the planet, an innocent temptress?

Everybody sure is looking for something.
Some people just need the feeling of being pretty.
Other seem to crave for attention in any way,
and there is a lot of people just looking for pity.

Me? I want to look like an established artist.
I post photoart, wanting to show versatility.
Adding the maximum amount of hashtags,
hoping for a great attention and visibility.

I want more followers, but I don't know why.
Maybe just to seem like an artist with prosperity.
Or maybe I hope that a curator will find me,
and offer my career an incredible opportunity.

I get a lot of nice comments, I must say.
It feels pretty good, to be totally honest.
All the encouraging words help me on the way,
as I try to build myself up, stop being too modest.



4. What is in the shadows

Seven billion people,
most of them reachable with phone.

An overpopulated world
and still so many feel so alone.

Hundreds of followers,
maybe a few more would ease the pain.

A compliment, a nice comment,
like giving sweet candy for the brain.

A drug to conceal the ache,
it feels so good, covers up the deep void.

You know it won't last,
as fast as the tower was built it's destroyed.

That familiar empty feeling,
streams back fast and will take over.

Bit by bit it brakes you
and leaves you feeling even lower.

It's an online theater we play,
and some might play it too hard.

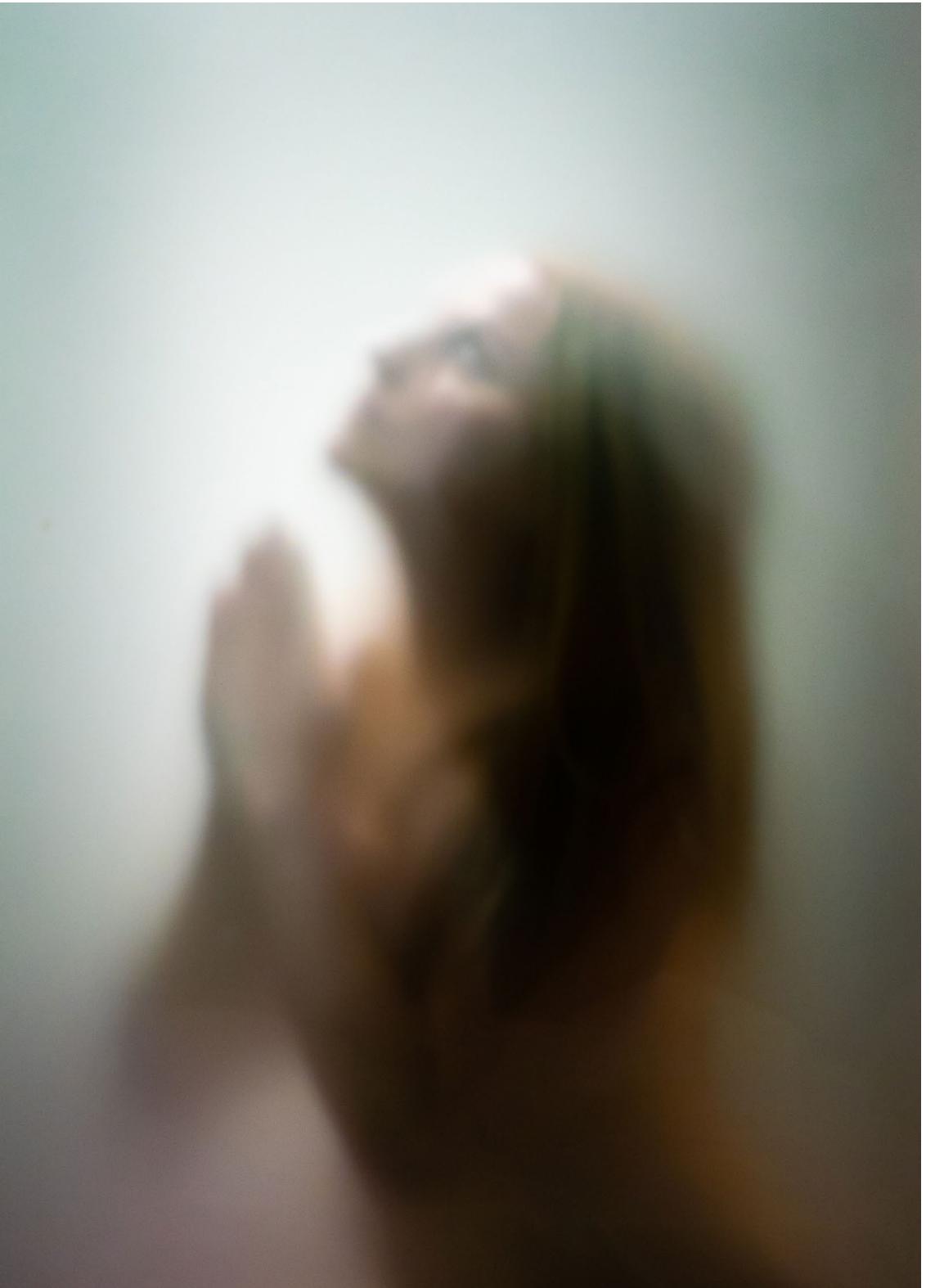
They end up fooling themselves,
nasty damage will be left in the dark.

Nice long legs, great big smile,
inviting smooth flawless skin.
Perfect holidays and success
they all seem to have everything.

No body hair, no flaws at all,
only natural pure beauty.
Make up, work out,
yeah, it is the womans duty.

Hide all the defects, disguise,
travel, shop, get in style.
Squeeze in, hold back, pretend,
be a good woman, force a smile.

Perky breasts, small waist,
yeah, they really got it all.
Dear God turn me too
into a perfect Barbie doll.



About others looks and success,
why should you even bother to care?

But seeing all the perfect lives,
it is not easy at all not to compare.

Who says you are not good enough,
that you can't just be as you are?
Who is it that points out all your flaws
and tells you that you won't get far?

A voice saying you will never measure up,
just put your hopes back on the shelf.
That you should be different somehow.
Can you see, it is you abusing yourself?

The mean monster in your head
speaks with the voice of your own.
That is why it is so hard to recognize
the insidious discouraging nasty tone.

You might have got some bad comments,
but it's you who's repeating them in your head.

Why keep on putting yourself down,
when you could be encouraging yourself instead?

I am not the only one asking;
can social media have a negative impact?
Several scientists share the interest
and they've delivered us researched fact.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania
made a scientific study in 2018.
In the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology
the whole study with results can be seen.*

The study indicates that after three weeks,
limiting social media use to 30 minutes or less,
made people feel significantly better,
reporting reduced depression and loneliness.

It is the first study to establish a clear causal link,
between decreasing of social media use,
and improvements in psychological well-being.
The results were expected, still interesting news.

So you feel better when you spend less time
on these applications for virtual interaction.

But what about those positive sides?
Getting noticed sure gives a sense of satisfaction.

An article on NOW, written by Kelly McSweeney*
tells about what neuroscientists discovered researching.
They found that positive interactions on social media
trigger the same chemical reaction as drugs and gambling.

You might have heard about this chemical before,
the hormone that makes you feel good, called dopamine.
It is a wonderful chemical produced by our brains,
the key to find euphoria, the reason why we sin.

Dopamine is released when we eat tasty food,
when we have sex and after we exercise.
Also when we have successful social interactions,
it rewards our behaviors with a chemical prize.

I bet that in the past dopamine enhanced evolution,
leading our species to reproduce, eat and thrive.
Scientists say it plays a big role in addictions,
motivating even behaviour that isn't needed to survive.

So basically it is small dopamine stimulators,
that we are carrying in our pockets with us,
giving immediate rewards with minimal effort,
it isn't hard to see why we get addicted to that rush.

Our brain is trained to repeat the behaviour
that gives us fast and easy pleasure.
That's why we're constantly peeking at our phones,
hoping to find a notification, a small treasure.

Actually, you know, I am on dopamine right now,
eating my favorite chocolate as I write.
It feels very sweet and good somehow,
although I know I'll feel bad about it tonight.

Like my fingers sneaking to the chocolate,
without me even thinking about it.
I bet you sometimes fiddle your smartphone too,
automatically, even when you've decided to quit.

* No more FOMO: Limiting social media decreases loneliness and depression, Melissa G. Hunt, Rachel Marx, Courtney Lipson and Jordyn Young,
University of Pennsylvania, Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, Vol. 37, No. 10, 2018, pp. 751-768
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328838624_No_More_FOMO_Limiting_Social_Media_Decreases_Loneliness_and_Depression (17.1.2020)

* This is Your Brain on Instagram: Effects of Social Media on the Brain, McSweeney Kelley
Published Mar 17th 2019 on NOW, <https://now.northropgrumman.com/this-is-your-brain-on-instagram-effects-of-social-media-on-the-brain> (10.3.2020)

What is a hundred emojis
if no-one looked you in the eyes today?

What is a thousand followers
if no-one is really hearing what you say?

What is a heart or a thumbs up
if not a single person touched you in days?

What is a popular profile
If in the real life you are alone always?

5. The "Hearts and Thumbs" -project

Do you want to hear about my art?
I'll try to grasp where does it all start.

A feeling, an experience or a thought,
that needs into daylight be brought.

Slowly turning into its right form,
getting ready for its moment on a platform.

Encountering with a set of challenges,
pushing forward, working harder nevertheless.

Proceeding with the work until I get it right.
Painting, photo, or only a shape of light.

Installation, sculpture, or just a shadow,
it is the matter that says which way to go.

Whatever the form that transmit the cause best,
I transform it to and leave it for you to digest.

This time hearts and thumbs were an obvious choice,
turned into a sculpture they gave my case a voice.



5.1. A pile of hearts and thumbs

I wanted to give these virtual symbols a physical form, to deal with them and take them out from their norm.

I decided to unveil at least two sides of being online. Asking, can you through social media someone define?

Ironically, as much as I get likes on the internet, none of them were usable for this particular project.

I drew the shapes and ordered them cut in plywood. It would take forever to make them myself I understood.

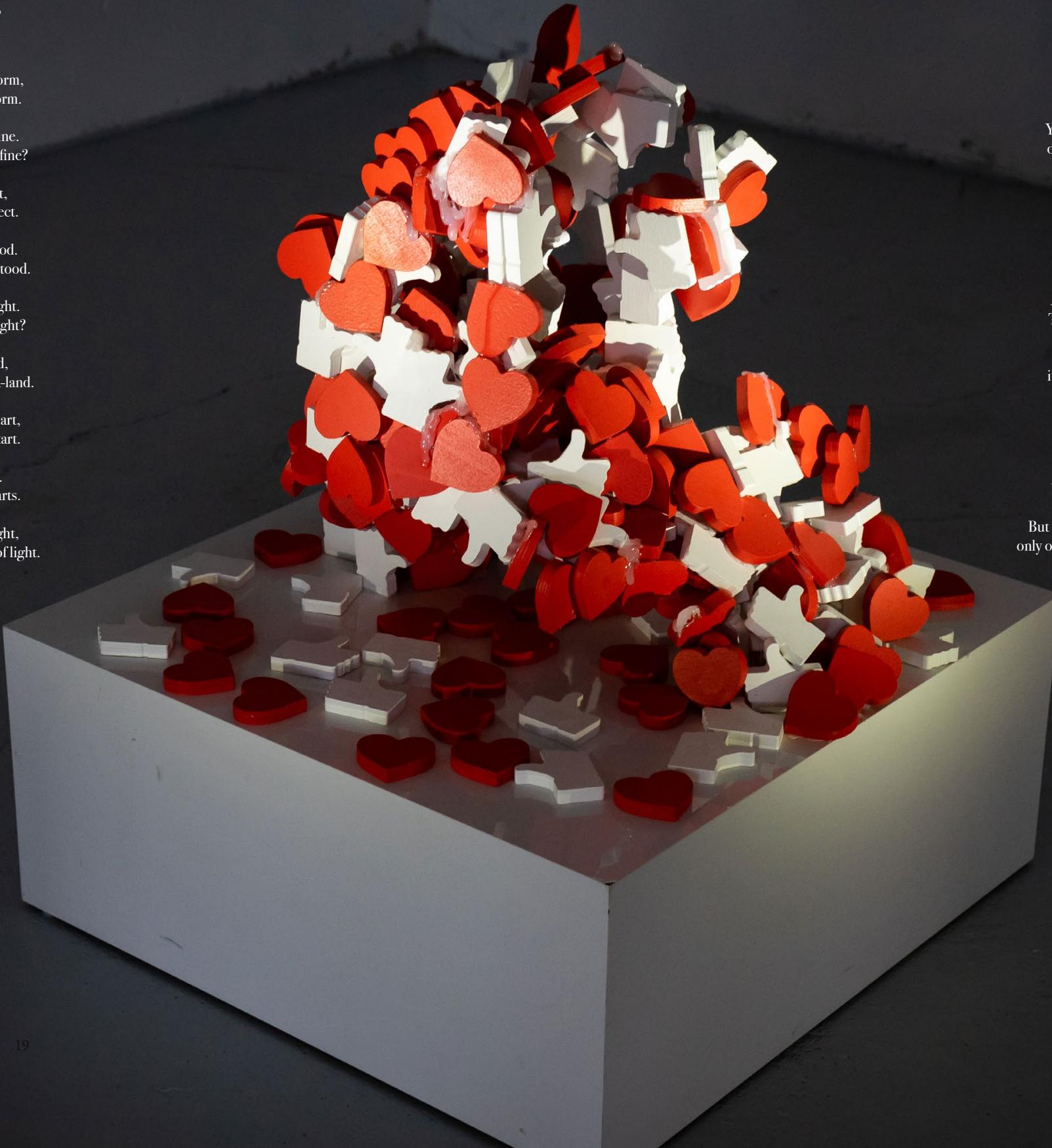
I happily paid, the parts became exactly as I thought. Do you know that a lot of likes online are also bought?

To hold a five centimeter big heart in your hand, feels different than the ones you get in social-media-land.

Finally I got to begin with the most challenging part, glueing the first pieces on my white pedestal to start.

Working bit by bit, adding thumbs and hearts. Filling up two shadow images with completing parts.

Twisting and turning the pieces to place them right, while trying not to get in the way of my two sources of light.



It wasn't too easy, quite challenging at the end. Things fell apart, Oh how much glue I had to spend.

Thick hot glue all over the place, if you look closely. Some I added just to emphasize the sliminess, obviously.

You know, a lot of content on social media too is quite slimy, oozing sex and attention, or being unnaturally neat and tidy.

In the end it became a big pile of hearts and thumbs up. Alltogether a bit more than four hundred if you sum up.

Shining a light on the pile from different directions creates shadows that reveal two opposite affections.

A happy woman taking a selfie is drawn by the first shadow. The other one resembles a woman crouching sad and alone.

It is one thing how things look on photos and instastories, it can be completely different in reality with real life worries.

Photos don't represent the reality, keep that in mind. Filters, make-up and staging, very often lies behind.

When I started I had a few back-up-plans and a big doubt, but I am quite happy now with how the artwork turned out.

But when I shared a video of the work on instagram I got confused, only one hundred and twelve likes, three hundred and forty-five views.



5.2 The crave for attention captured in photography

I guess most of us have the need
to get noticed, to be seen.
Or at least it feels pretty good,
wouldn't you also agree?

I decided to capture in photography
the untold dream of getting attention.
A secret prayer or an unconscious wish,
a private desire you wouldn't mention.

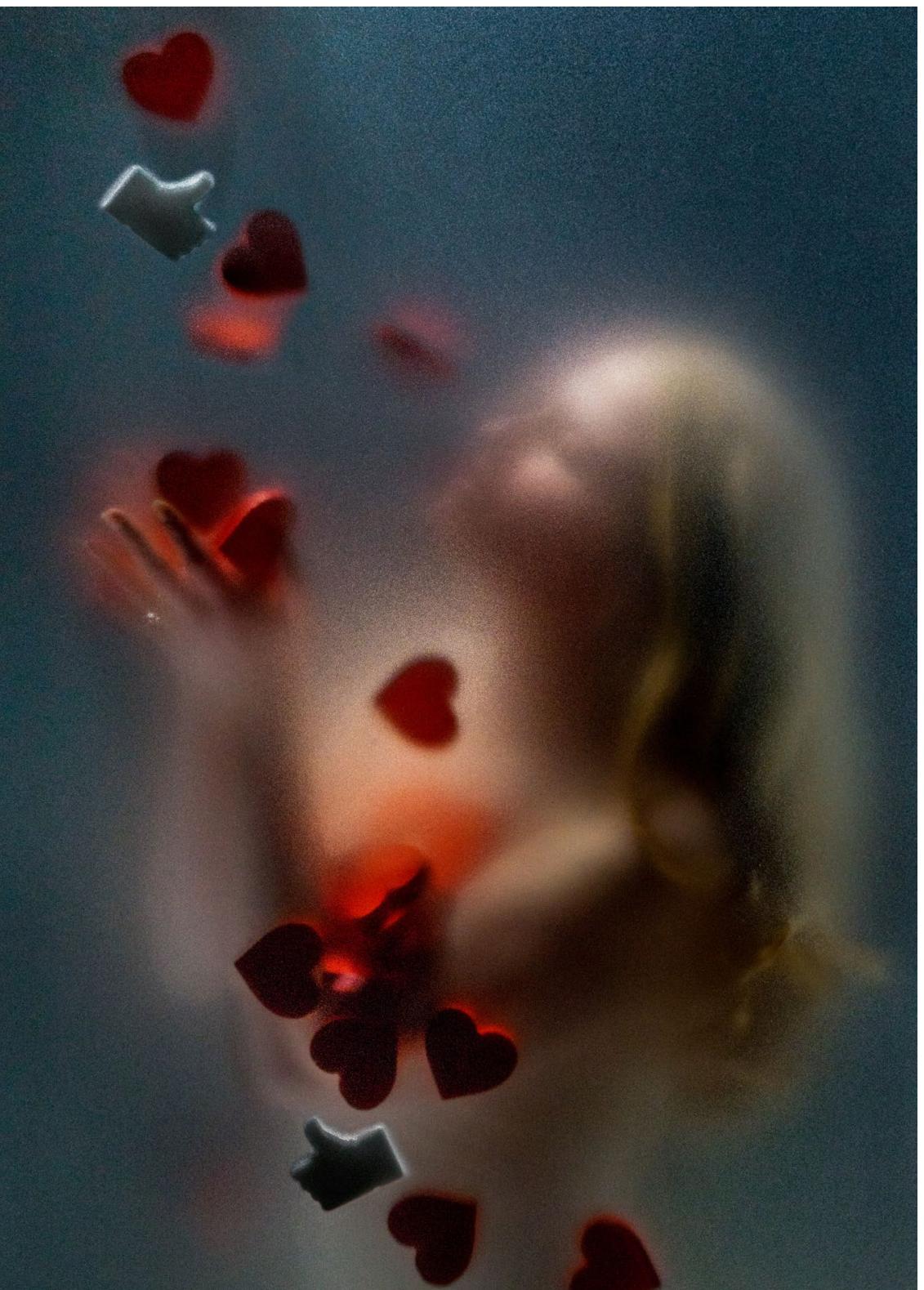
I installed the lights and placed the camera
and had an assistant pour hearts and thumbs on me.
It took some hits in the face and quite many shots
until the objects were caught in a photo perfectly.

The other photoshoot was rather spontaneous,
I think that's why I am so happy with the content.
With a few guidelines I asked two lovers to participate
and kept shooting as they shared an intimate moment.

I used a glass covered with a plastic film
in front of the models, on the photos I took,
in order to give them an unconscious feeling,
and to create a moist and dreamy look.

The rush from getting virtual recognition,
is what you'll see the first photo express.
The other photo also involves dopamin,
but with real intimacy when lovers undress.

I bet some people get these two confused,
no, not the photos, I mean what they think they need.
While they are looking for an online connection,
a smile, a touch, is what they are craving, indeed.



I do not think it is possible to virtually satisfy
a mental or physical need that you have within.
But for sure you can keep deceiving yourself
with those easy and fast small doses of dopamin.

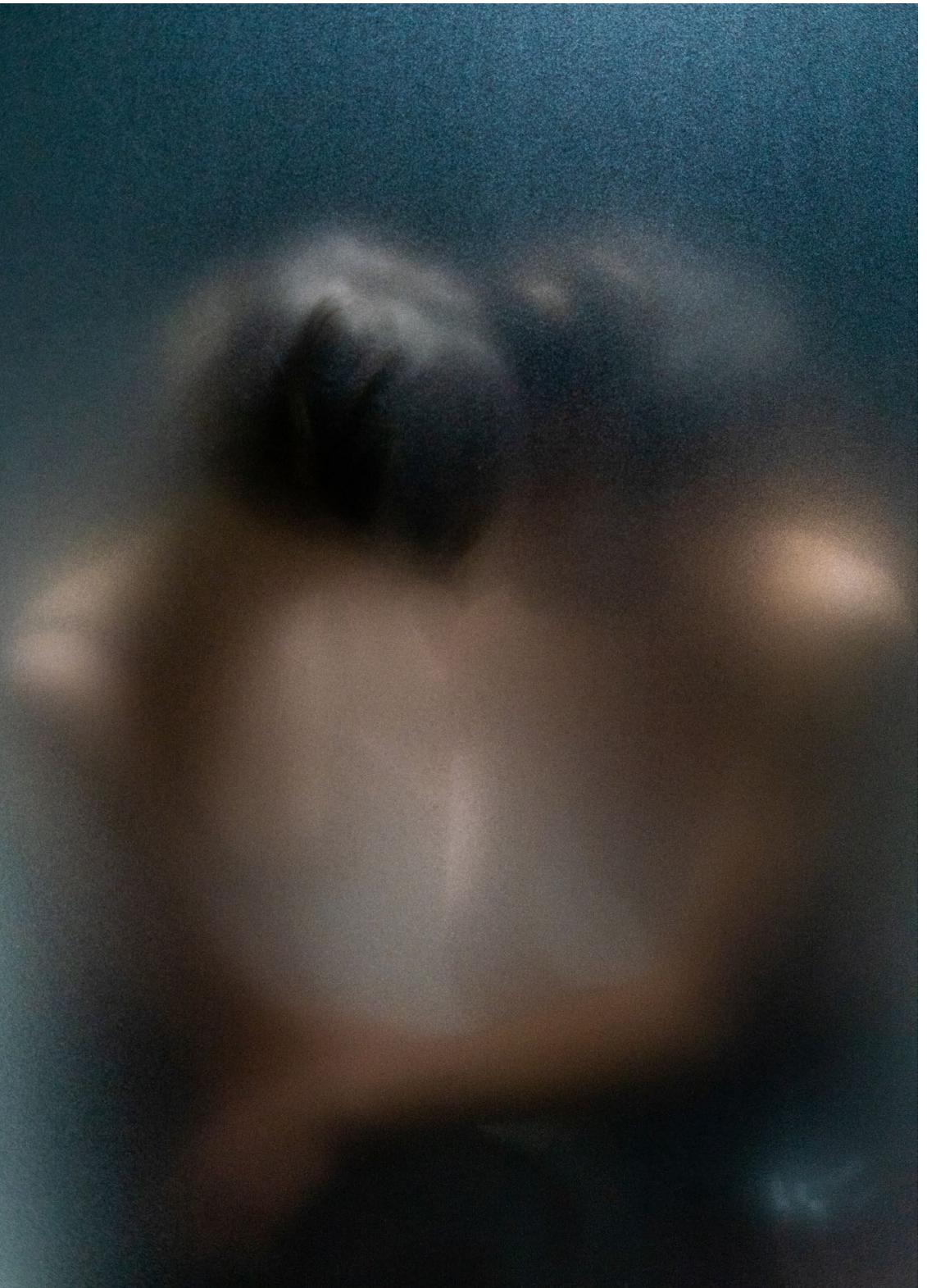
I know a real connection requires more work,
and you'd need to take your focus off the phone.

It is something you will not be able to find,
from your couch moving simply your thumb alone.

Can you imagine couples lying in the same bed,
evening after evening as the evenings before,
just staring at their respective smartphones,
getting their dopamin doses and looking for more.

It seems as they have totally forgotten
the pleasure of just a touch or eyecontact
The engagement required feels just too tiring
and that is why they are skipping all that.

Even if I too secretly dream of virtual fame,
and getting likes gives my confidence a spin,
in my opinion, there is nothing better,
than the feeling of warm skin against skin!



5.3. Virtual act translated to reality

Did you know that on the internet,
I tend nice comments and "likes" to spread?

Double clicking almost every single post,
not just the ones I really like the most.

And maybe, although I wouldn't admit,
I secretly wish that they'd like me back, a bit.

I challenge myself to find out in reality,
to give hearts and thumbs, how would it be.

I bet it differs, getting "likes" face to face,
with real eye contact, rather than in a virtual place.

A smile and a few nice words to come along,
should be nice to get, shouldn't do no wrong.

If it's considered as a succesful social interaction,
we should both get longer lasting positive reaction.

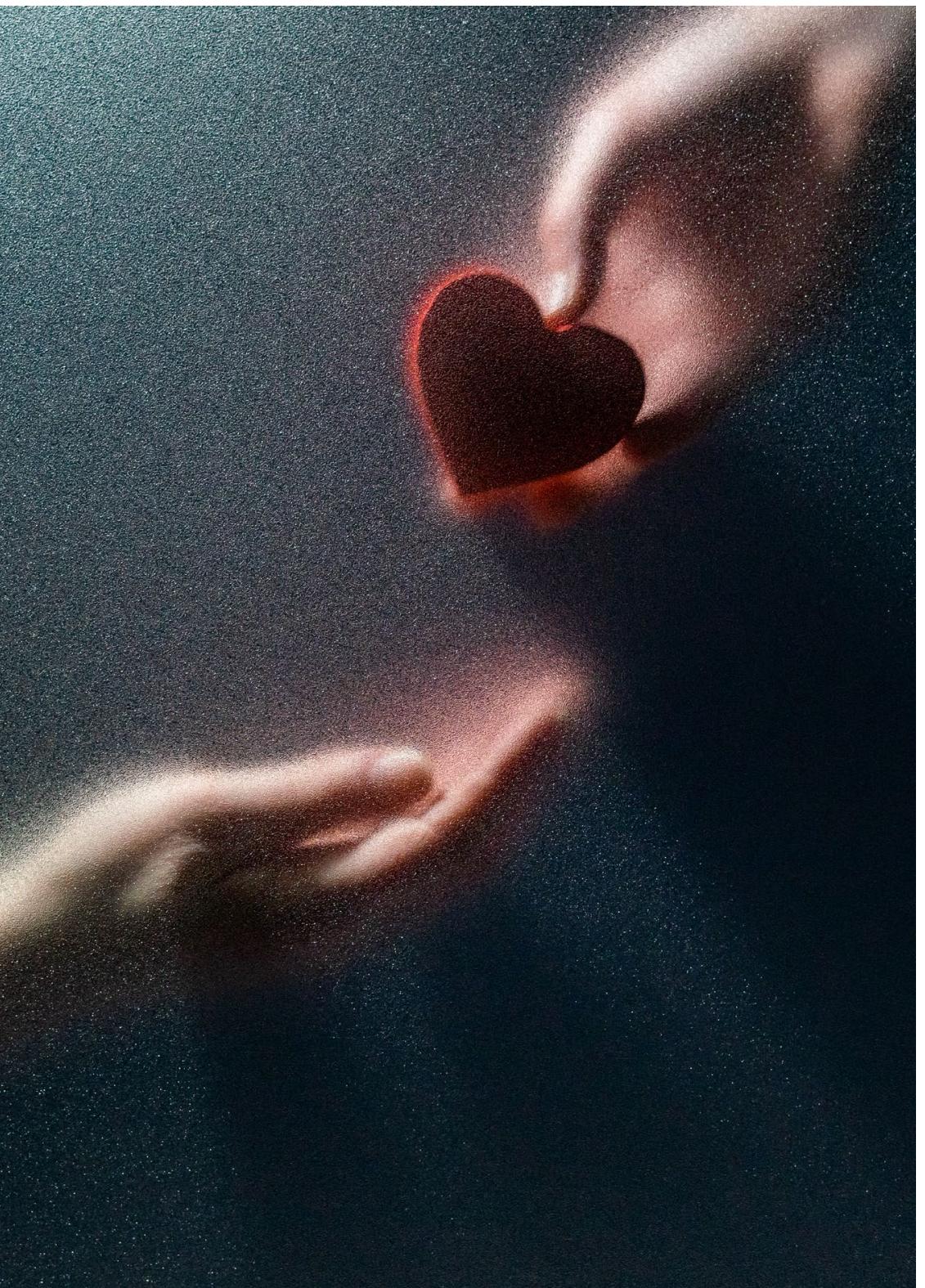
And at least people will get a piece to keep,
something to hold in their hands, nothing too deep.

So at the opening night for our exhibition,
you'll find me blushing, executing my mission.

It might sound like a performance to some extent,
but I'd rather call it just a human experiment.

Maybe it is just an excuse at the end of the day,
for me to say things I otherwise wouldn't dare to say.

And to talk to people I normally wouldn't talk to.
Hey, if you come there, maybe I'll chat with you too.



6. Art interpretation

What is it that I am trying to say?
Get what I mean, or see it your own way?

Exactly where other people stand,
one can never come to truly understand.

No matter how long you study their art,
you can not see into the artists heart.

Even when you think you got it at last,
you can't avoid seeing it through your past.

Others' inner world will stay unknown,
but you can see a glimpse of your own.

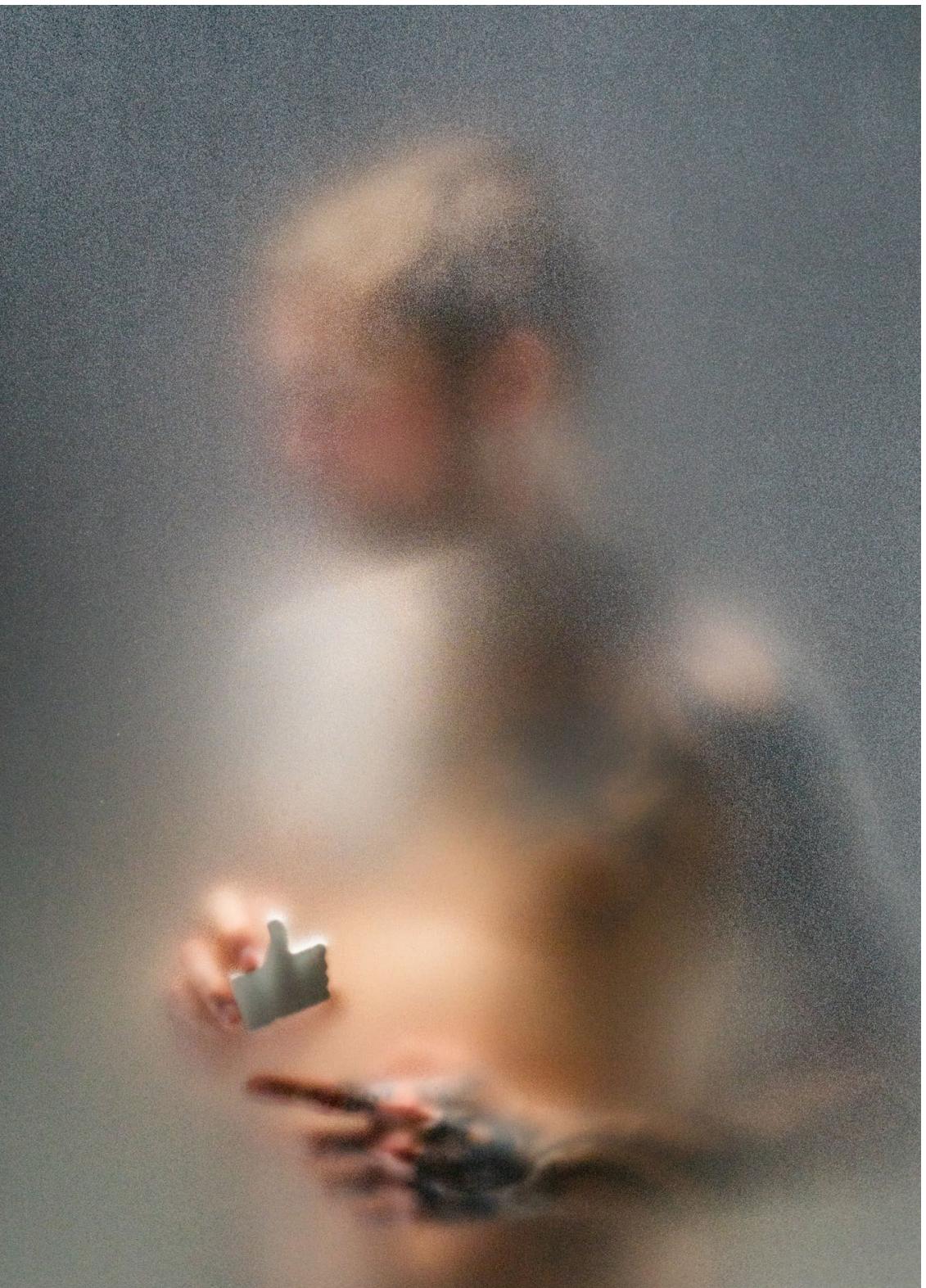
While studying a piece of art on the wall
a thought might just into the right place fall.

An opinion, a memory, a feeling to resemble.
Some artworks will just make you tremble.

New thoughts that are arised within,
thoughts that have been growing under your skin.

There is no right or wrong interpretation.
Everyone can have their own art translation.

So go ahead, give the interpretation a try,
and take a look at what you have inside.



To me the work represents my own perceptions,
about social media use, self-esteem, and their connections.

Social media can be really entertaining at times,
as long as we do not let it take over our lives.

Being online has its positive and negative sides.
Which ones you prefer is up to you to decide.

Amount of followers and likes are distinctively comparable.
For some people the comparing can get unbearable.

I feel that quite many seek from a virtual place
the attention they would badly need face to face.

I know that the likes and nice comments flatter,
but pay attention to the things that really matter.

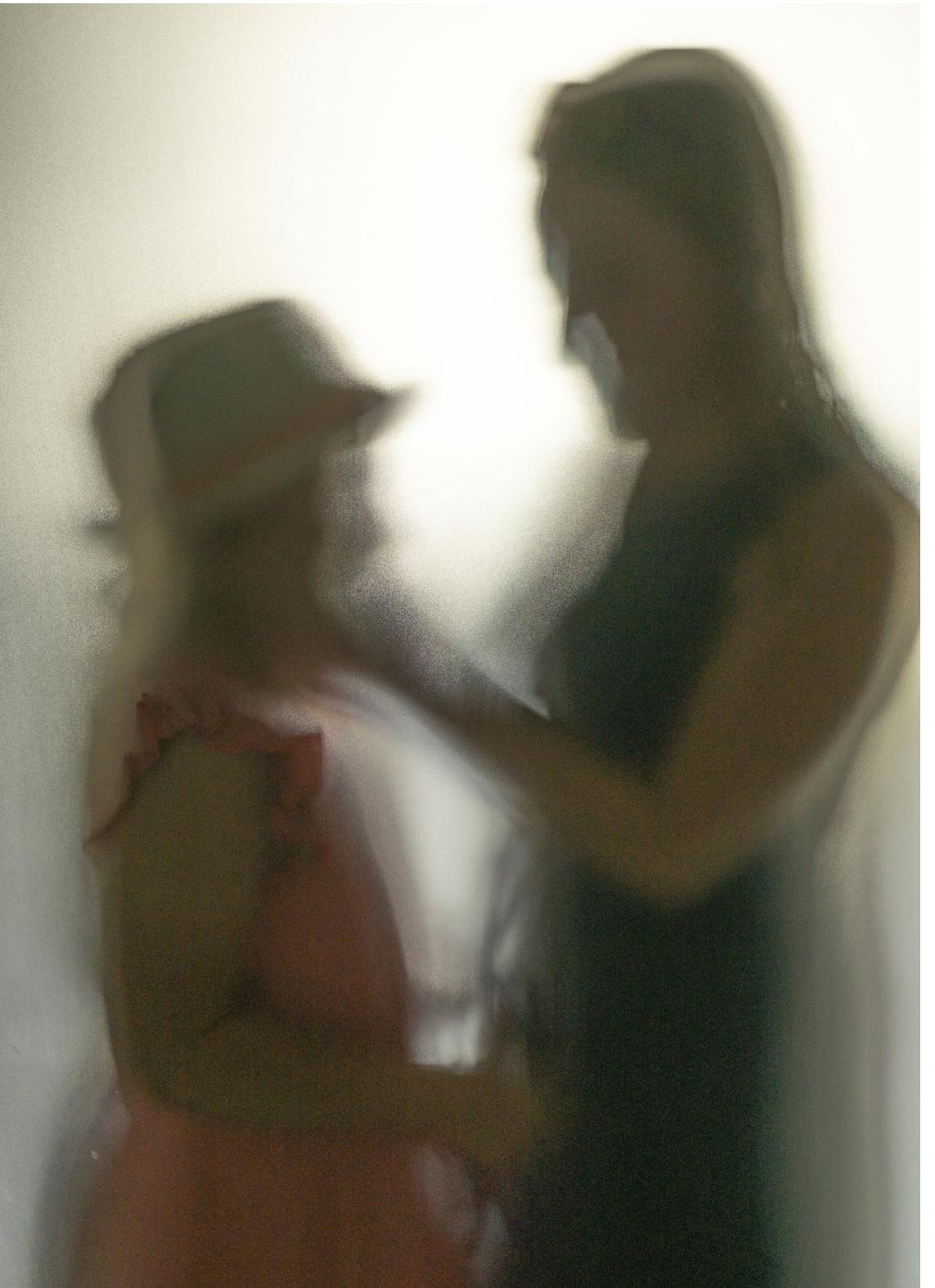
It is as if these platforms, created for being connected,
are instead making us feel more sad and neglected.

And what is more frustrating than being in the company
of someone that eyes on their phone constantly.

The worst part of being online, I feel,
is that it can estrange us from what is real.

Limit the time with your phone and be aware,
so that you won't miss out the real life out there.

And to my two sweet daughters I will say:
-Let's put the phones away and go out and play.



This is the part where I will discuss and analyze,
what I have learned, and did I get more wise.

I did learn a lot, about building shadow work especially,
and that determination and hard work is rewarded eventually.

I have done a couple of shadow works before,
this time I wanted to challenge myself a bit more.

To build shadow images, not just one but two,
at the same time was not that impossible to do.

I learned that not limiting myself to my own abilities,
will take me further and open a lot more possibilities.

With getting the shapes made by a professional one,
I saved a lot of time and got a lot more done.

The number of hearts and thumbs in the pile,
is the same that my posts get at max once in a while.

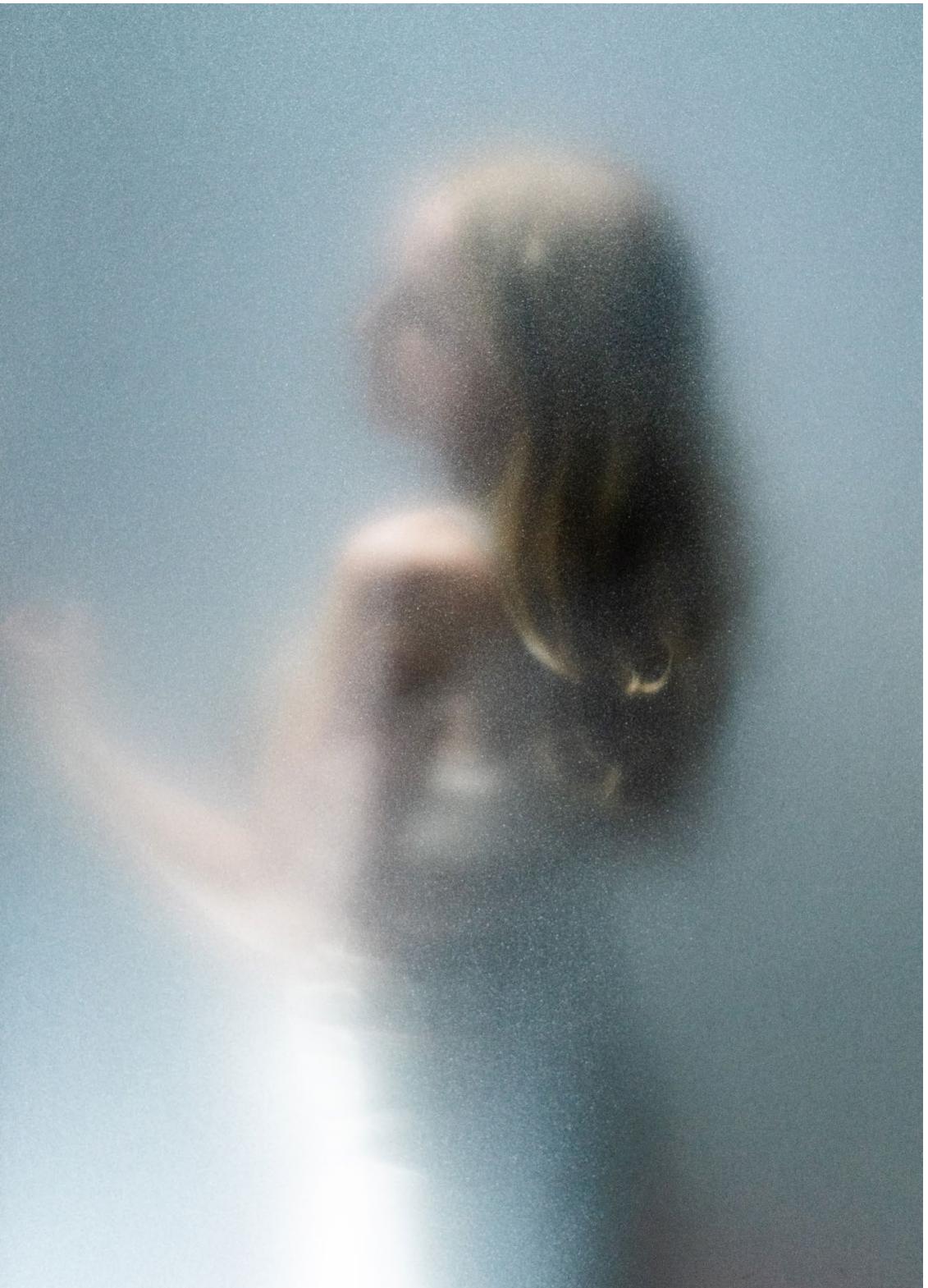
Quite interesting to see that amount in a physical form,
feels more concrete than signs on a screen, I can inform.

Shadow works, you are going to see more of those,
I've got a whole exhibition planned, so quite many I suppose.

There would be a lot more in social media as a theme,
one could really dig in more and go to extreme.

But doing art about social media could be an eternal race.
I am satisfied with this work, for now I will rest my case.

Writing in rhymes worked out just fine.
And see, you did make it to the last line!



BILDFÖRTECKNING/KUVALUETTELO/IMAGE INDEX

<i>Likes</i> , 2020, photography	cover
<i>One Like</i> , 2020, photography	next to Table of Contents
<i>Fading Childhood</i> , 2019, photography	page 2
A photo of a heart and two thumbs.....	pages 3 - 4
<i>Fading Childhood</i> , 2019, photography	page 6
<i>About Beauty Ideals</i> , 2019, photography	page 8
<i>Inadequay</i> , 2019, photography	pages 9 - 10
<i>Last Prayer</i> , 2019, photography	page 12
<i>Can You See Me?</i> 2019, photography	pages 15 - 16
A photo of the hearts & thumbs project	pages 17 - 18
<i>Hearts & Thumbs</i> , 2020, sculpture	pages 19-20
<i>Hearts & Thumbs</i> , 2020, sculpture	pages 21-22
<i>The Crave for Virtual Attention</i> , 2020, photography	page 24
<i>Real Connection</i> , 2020, photography	page 26
<i>Act of like</i> , 2020, photography	page 28
<i>Just one like?</i> 2020, photography	page 30
<i>Parental Advice</i> , 2019, photography	page 32
<i>Looking Back</i> , 2020, photography	page 34
<i>Skin to Skin</i> , 2020, photography	back cover

