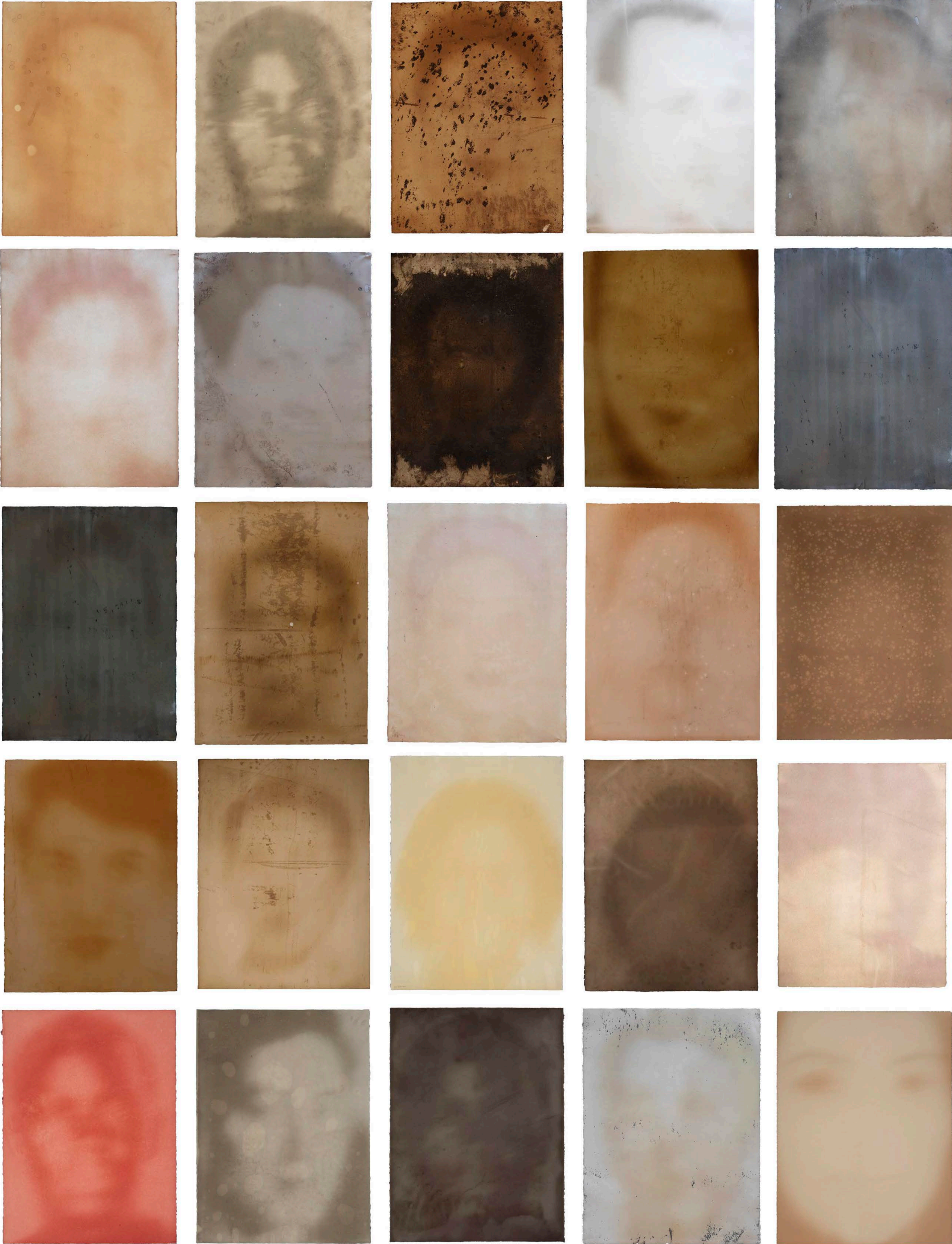


Evidence of Disappearance

Leonardo da Vinci observed that, ‘by throwing a sponge impregnated with various colours against a wall, it leaves some spots upon it, which may appear like a landscape...a variety of compositions may be seen in such spots, according to the disposition of mind with which they are considered’. While Leonardo noted that such spots ‘may furnish hints for compositions’ and thereby inspire the process of creation, 400 years were to pass before the radical employment of contingency Leonardo amused himself with passed muster as a viable strategy for artmaking in its own right. The contemporary sensibility is no stranger to radically playful ways of recruiting contingency into a work process that is shaped as much by chance and unruly organic processes as by the singular will of a controlling artist. Adam Jeppesen has long chosen vibrancy over perfection, electing to use gifts harvested from living processes to enrich, and even to co-produce, his work. This is perhaps even more evident in his recent anthotype series, which reinvigorates a medium invented in the early nineteenth century, shortly before the invention of photography proper. Jeppesen extracts light-sensitive colour pigments from plant materials and soaks paper in dilutions of these. Portraits, in the form of large negatives, are then mounted in a protective glass-covered frame above the resulting light-sensitive paper, and placed in sunlight over different exposure times. This allows the negatives to filter the bleaching effects of direct sunlight, causing a vague form of the image to be transposed onto the light sensitive paper. In time, unique, strangely organic, monochrome images appear. They vary according to numerous parameters that are not tightly controlled, such as when and how the plant materials were extracted, the plants from which they were derived, the path of the sun according to the time of the year, the weather conditions during the process and so on. Much like an observant instinctive winemaker, Jeppesen works in concert with all these organic processes, allowing them to unfold with only modest interventions and, at the end of fruition, deciding which of the pre-photographic pictures to keep and which to let go. The anthotypes in this particular series are not merely pre-photographic, by virtue of being created using a medium invented before photography. They are equally post-photographic. The portraits used to filter the sunlight are photographic only because they perceptually appear to be photographic. They are not produced with a camera. The people portrayed never existed, and so could never have been photographed: they are generated by means of artificial intelligence (AI), an innovation that has not only brought the photographic medium to an impasse but has also reinvigorated talk of its death and the emergence of post-photography. Ironically, refracted in Jeppesen’s anthotypes, these post-photographic portraits are themselves subject to a medial mortality that is foreign to AI. They are subject to the organic decay of the light-sensitive paper within which they are shrouded, as they inevitably fade and wither over time. Thus, through offering them medial mortality, the people portrayed are implicitly also offered life, which the intelligent machine that produced them could not really endow them with. If this seems disturbing, even uncanny, that is also by design. The ghostly appearances in Jeppesen’s anthotypes do not merely hint at how photography as a medium has reached an impasse but also how humans, largely unaware of how ubiquitous the ghostly presence of AI in our lives has become, may need to become more aware.



▲
ANTHOTYPE SERIES

by Adam Jeppesen, Anthotype on cotton archival paper, 2022.



▲
METAMORPHOSIS OF NARCISSUS
 by Salvador Dalí, oil on canvas, 1937.
 Courtesy of Tate Modern, London.



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METAMORPHOSIS OF NARCISSUS
 by Salvador Dalí, oil on canvas, 1937.
 Courtesy of Tate Modern, London.



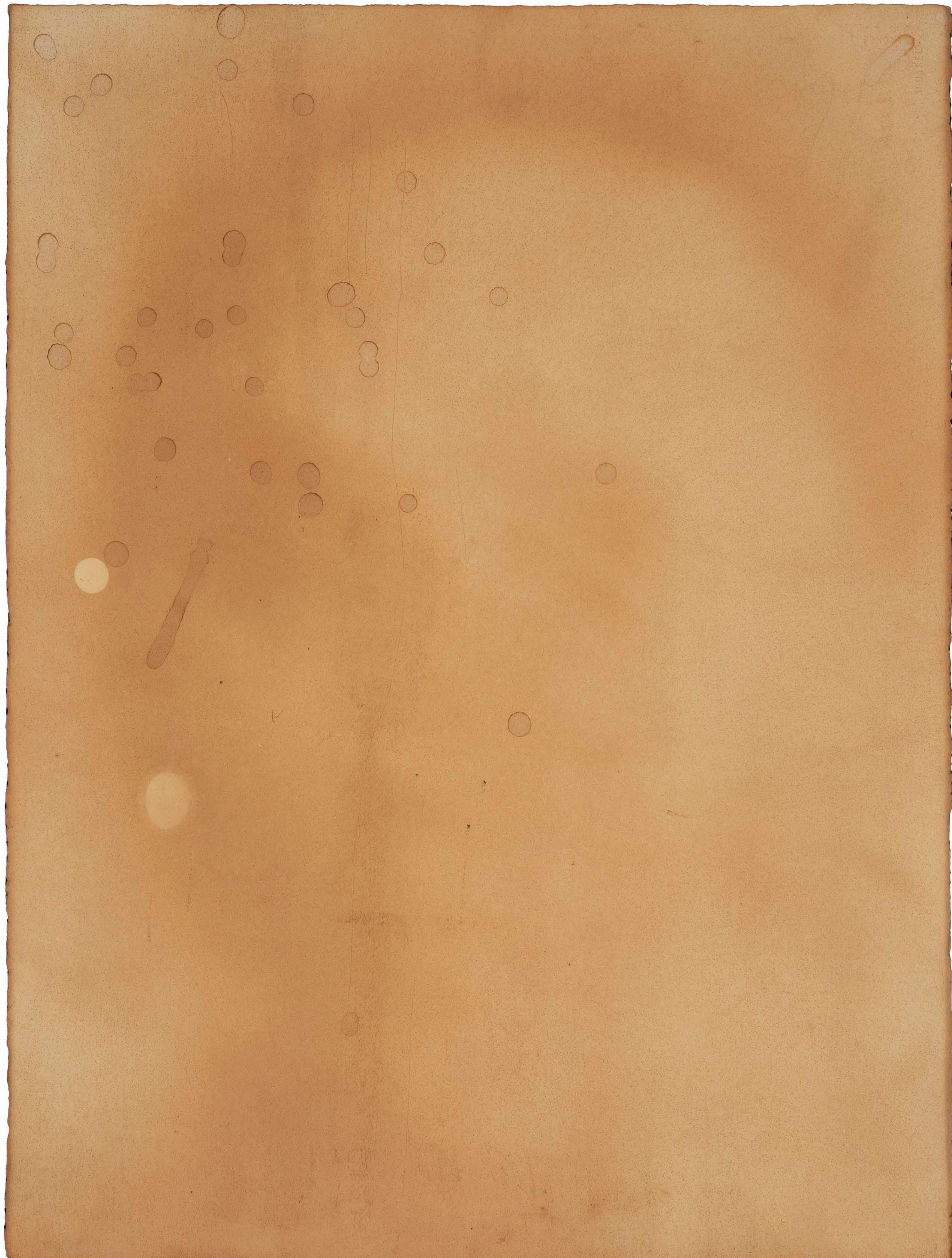
▲
ANTHOTYPE 2
by Adam Jeppesen, 2022.



▲
IRIS G.
by Adam Jeppesen, 2022.



▲
THE BALANCE BEAM GYMNAST
 by Gunther von Hagen's BODY WORLDS, 2008.
 Institute for Plastination, Heidelberg.



▲
METAMORPHOSIS OF NARCISSUS
 by Salvador Dalí, oil on canvas, 1937.
 Courtesy of Tate Modern, London.