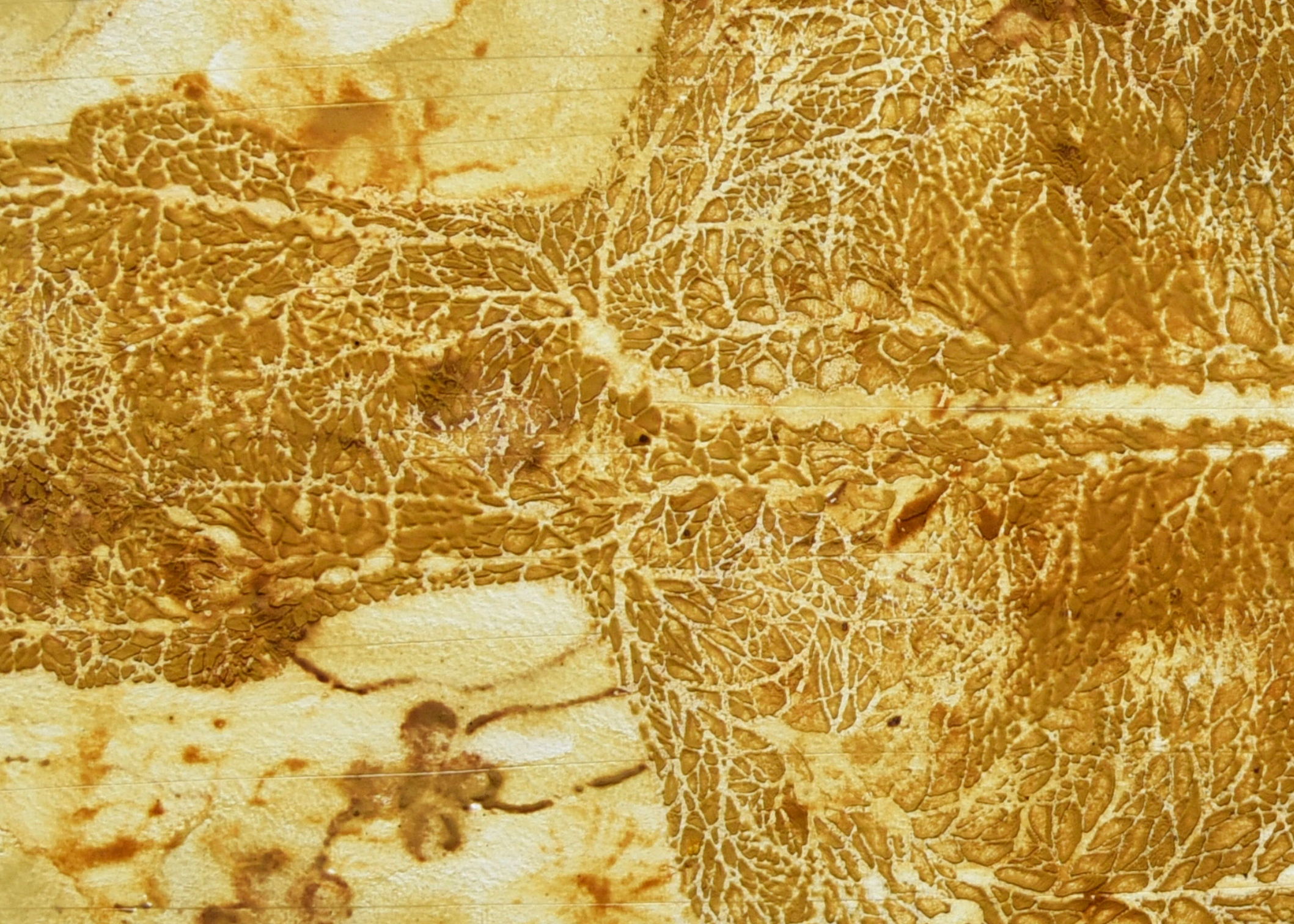
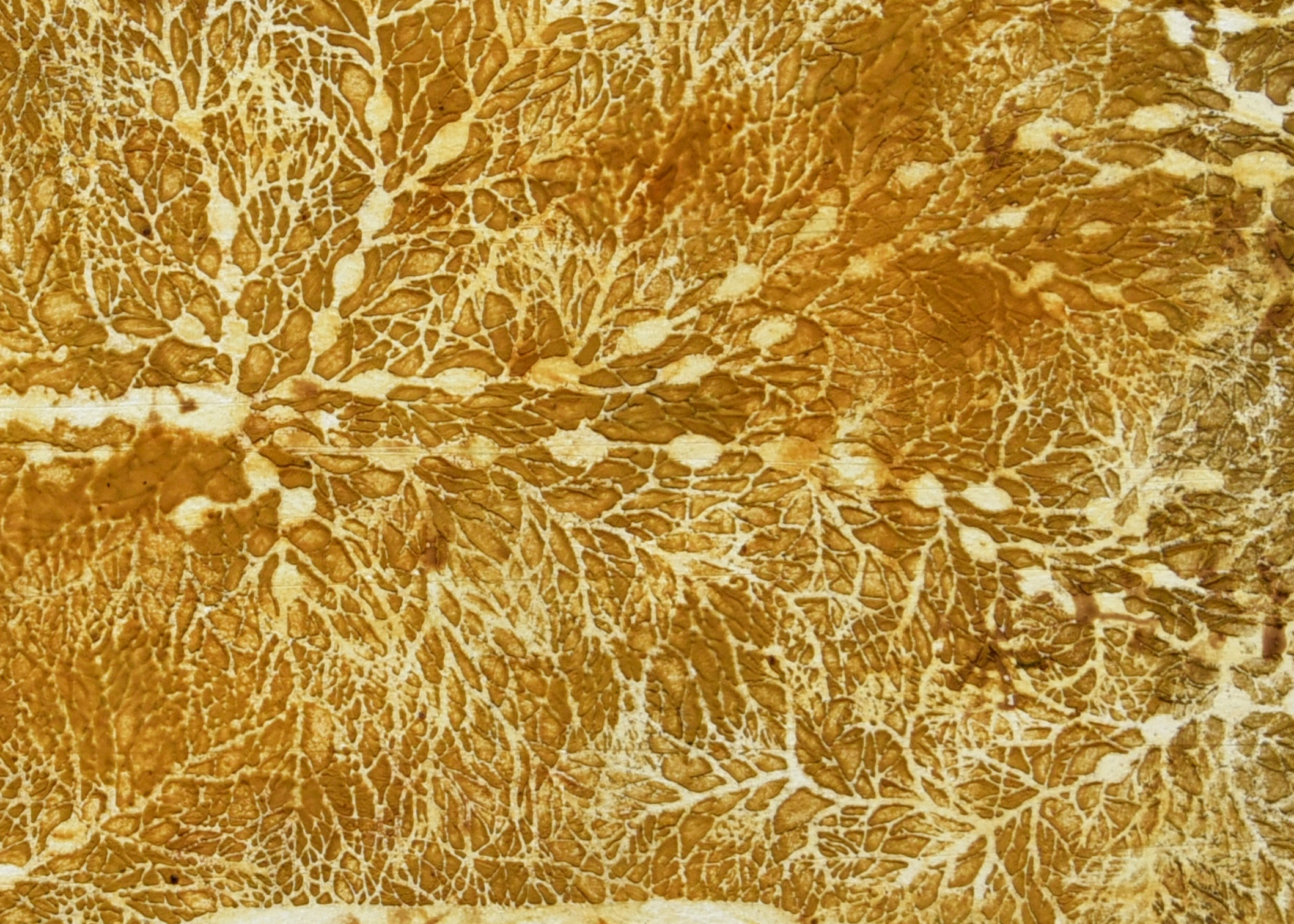


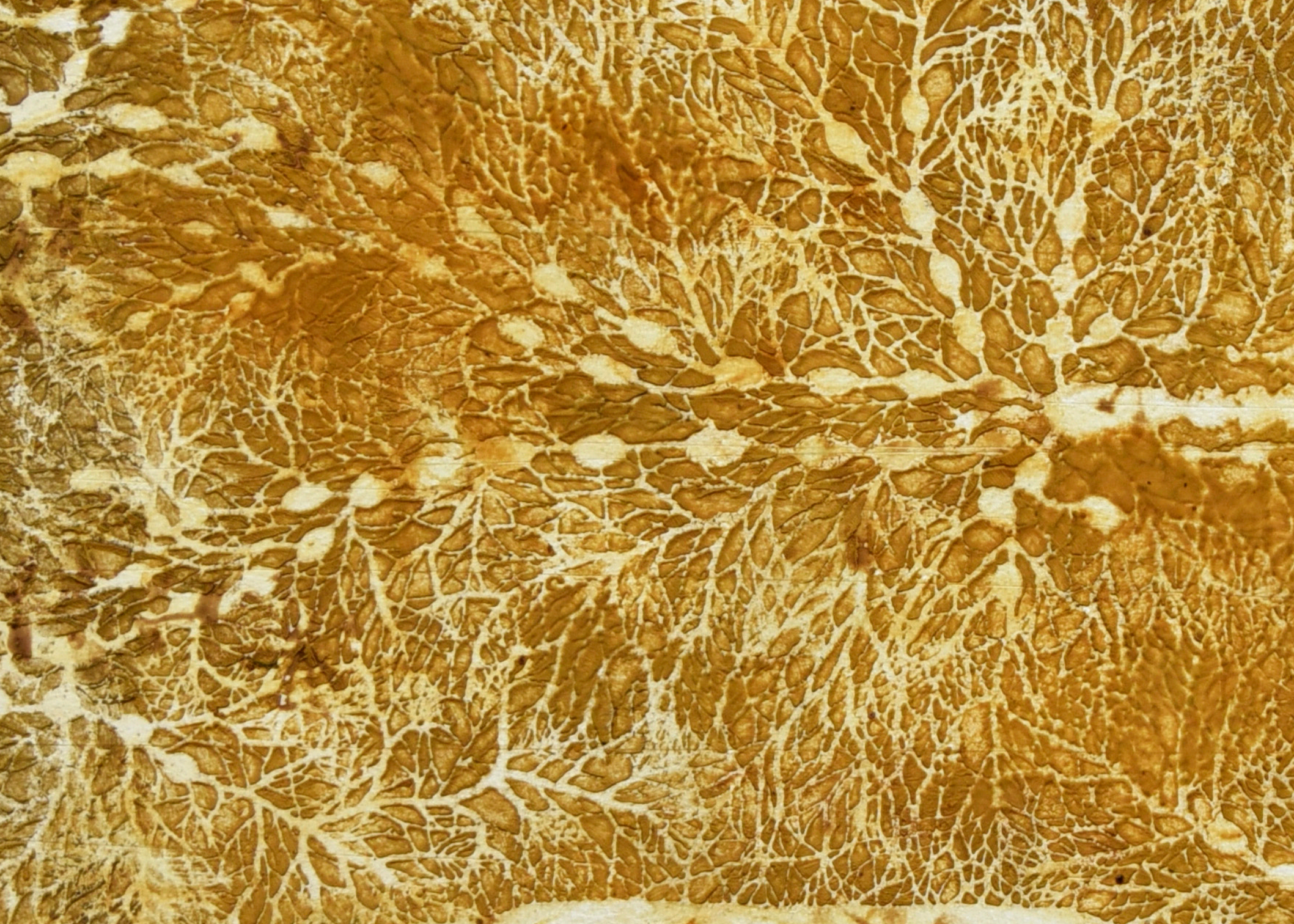
SPREADING ARBOUR



ANDREW CARNIE







SPREADING ARBOUR

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ANDREW CARNIE

Notes from a Dendritic Underworld

Mark Hudson

Dendritic isn't a word that tends to cross most of our lips very often. But it's impossible to consider the work of Andrew Carnegie without it coming frequently into play. Meaning simply "treelike", dendritic refers in its medical context to protoplasmic nerve cells that develop branching structures which carry critical signals throughout the body. It can also be used to describe any system that extends from a central trunk or canal into ever smaller capillary off-shoots: rivers, roads, root and drainage systems, the human blood supply and nervous system and, of course, trees themselves. In Carnegie's work these varied conceptions of the dendritic, ranging from the dauntingly abstruse to the almost childishly simple, overlay each other – both literally and figuratively – and inter-fertilise in fascinating ways.

Carnegie is known for his work at the juncture of art and science, for complex, immersive multimedia installations that are informed by his conversations with neurologists, cardiologists and psychologists working at the furthest frontiers of scientific and medical research.

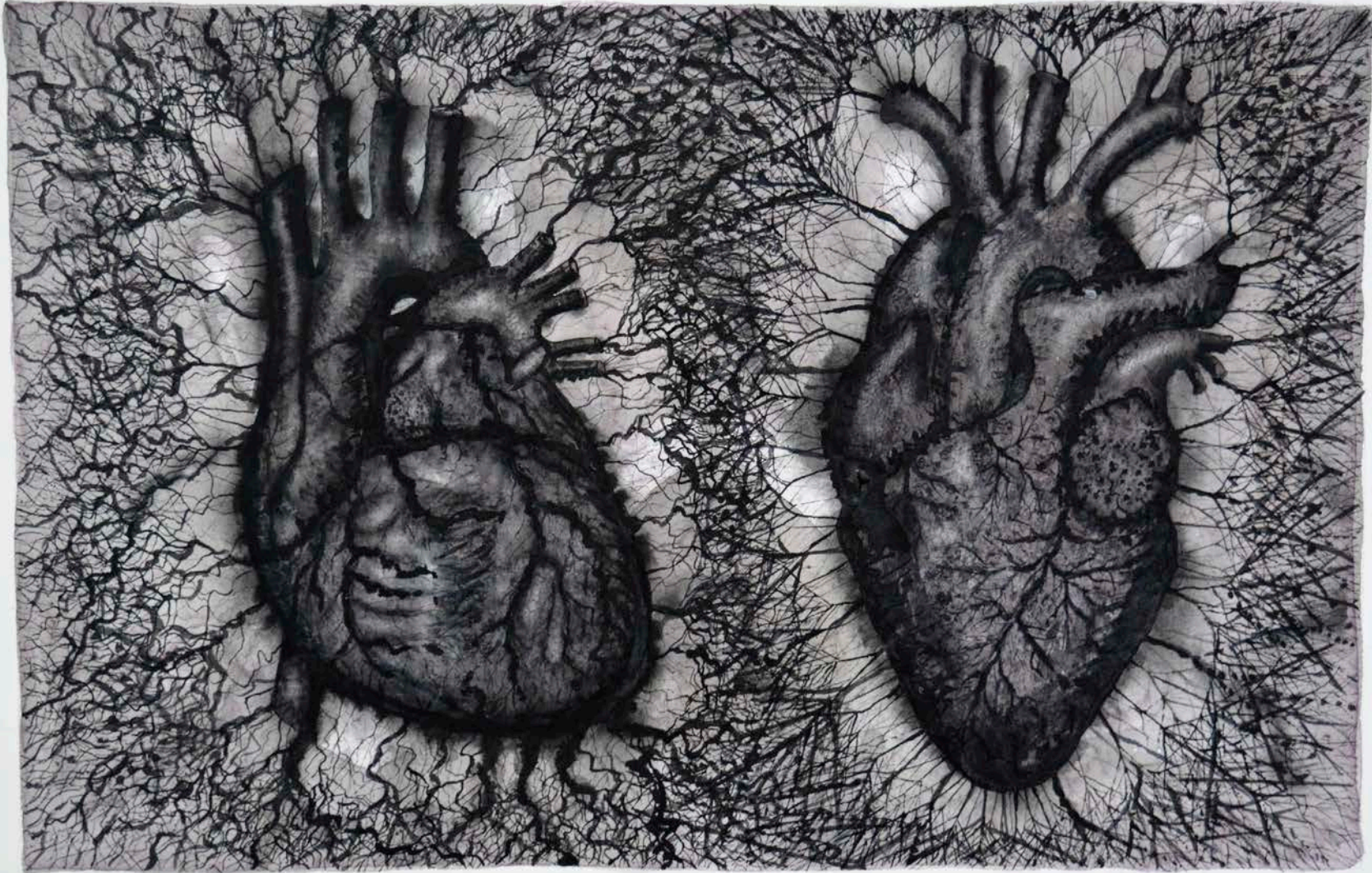
Yet many of his art's underlying precepts relate to things that most of us just "get" on a completely intuitive level. You don't need specialist scientific knowledge to glimpse a bare tree on a winter's day and get a toe-tingling sense that something in that extending pattern of growth, from trunk to outermost shoots, is "echoing" (a very unscientific notion in this context) some fundamental structure in your own body.

Winchester, the ancient capital of Britain, where Carnegie has lived for many years, feels an appropriate place to study and respond to dendritic form, with its abundant willow trees overhanging the River Itchen and its tributary streams that run around and through and beneath the city.

Carnegie's office during his time teaching at Winchester School of Art, was located in an octagonal rotunda, the college's former library, that overhung the wooded marshland on the north side of the city, a "dendritic underworld", as Carnegie describes it, of channels and pathways with a whole lake hidden among the willows. It's a landscape that evoked for him something elemental about "being human" – a term that recurs in his work.

A Beached Sensation, 2021, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 58 cm





Heart to Heart, 2015, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 58 cm

“There’s the surface of that world, the things you can see, the exposed roots of the trees extending into the water and the riverbank. And, as with humans, there’s all the other stuff that’s going on out of view: the way the roots of those reeds and trees connect to each other under the water. We, as humans, know this world here, the one we can see. But that world back there, the world of the brain itself, we don’t know: the ways the various dendritic systems of the body connect the mind to the processes of seeing and touching and apprehending the world. We understand all that very little.”

Carnie’s first conscious encounter with dendritic form – though he didn’t then know the term – came when he was still at primary school, and was asked to do a drawing of a tree for homework. He produced a very careful image of a bare sycamore tree, seen through his family’s dining room window. “I did a reasonably good job, but realised the complexity of the structure and the difficulty of capturing it.”

He was dismayed then that his drawing wasn’t included in the rows of pictures by his classmates, of “lollipop trees” – circles of green foliage, with stick-like trunks – that were pinned on the classroom wall.

While Carnie only recalled this incident many years later, it represents in tiny microcosm, some of the themes that are played out in his art: between the urge to capture nature as it actually exists and nature as we apprehend it through our subjective responses; between art that comes as close as it can to embodying scientific understanding of the way things are and art that presents a vision of reality that is strongly modified by culture.

Born in London in 1957, the son of a botanist mother and a geographer father, Carnie had a peripatetic childhood, following his father’s teaching work, living in various parts of Britain and spending much of his time outdoors. He developed the habit of drawing intensively from an early age and a facility for “looking at things, working out how they function and reproducing them.”

He followed his scientific and technical bent at university level, studying animal behaviour at Durham; though he switched to psychology and left after two years with a “reasonable comprehension of science”, but having struggled. “I’m moderately dyslexic and not good at being examined.”

Turning to his other great interest, he began a fine-art degree at London’s Goldsmiths College, where he found the cohort split between followers of older abstract painters such as Basil Beattie and Albert Irvin and a more conceptual tendency led by Michael Craig-Martin and Richard Wentworth, that was to nurture the so-called YBA artists a few years later.

Carnie, who found emotional solace in painting, but had the rigour of a scientific background, was one of the few students able to interact constructively with both camps. His work during and immediately post-Goldsmiths veered towards a conceptually-based sculpture that had much in common with the New British Sculpture then being developed by the likes of Richard Deacon and Bill Woodrow. Yet he found himself drawn, almost involuntarily, back towards biological form. Asked to produce work for an exhibition on the subject of twins, he photographed slices of bacon on a lightbox. The pairs of illuminated rashers, which appeared almost perfectly symmetrical, but far from identical, formed an unlikely starting point for a journey back into dendritic form.

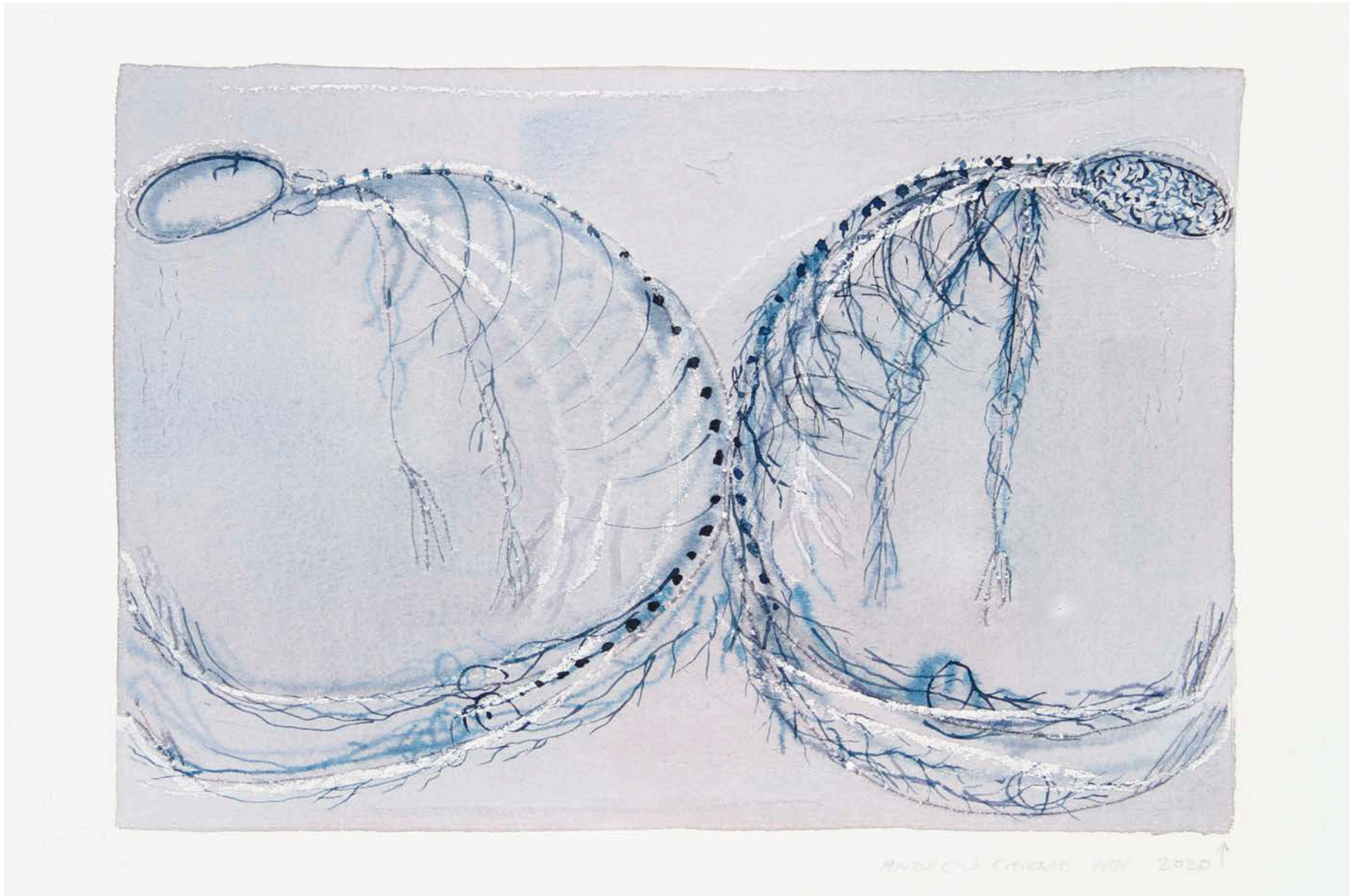
Seeing these works in Carnie's studio, the curator Marina Wallace, who was looking for artists to take part in an exhibition at the Science Museum on the brain, thought he might be able to talk to scientists on their own terms – a relative rarity among artists in our world of early academic specialisation. He was soon conversing with biologists and neural specialists at a level far higher – ironically – than he would have easily achieved had he continued studying science. He found himself probing a world of infinitely complex micro-dendritic form as he was given access to videos showing the “incredible magic of the ways networks of treelike forms grow in our brains” and “cutting edge films taken through a confocal microscope of nerves forming through the brain matter of a chicken.” These experiences took him back to his former studies in animal behaviour, with the understanding now that the brain isn't static, as he'd been led to understand, but infinitely fluid.

His childhood fascination with trees found an outlet in photography, as he drove to Norfolk to capture the stark “neural” patterns of winter trees on the flatness of the fens. While nothing came of these photographic endeavours in the short term, the various strands of Carnie's artistic interests gradually cohered, like so many dendritic tendrils, in large-scale, immersive installations involving multiple digitally-manipulated photographic projections. In *Magic Forest*, shown at the Science Museum in 2002, a pivotal work from which all Carnie's subsequent work has developed, he took the viewer into an ever-transforming world of incandescent dendritic form: the magic forest of the human brain itself.

This immersive journey has continued up to date, as Carnie delves into the complexities of the human immune system, autism, epilepsy, organ transplant and brain implants, taking the viewer to lands at the furthest fringes of scientific possibility.

Touched, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 58 cm





Face It, 2020, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm

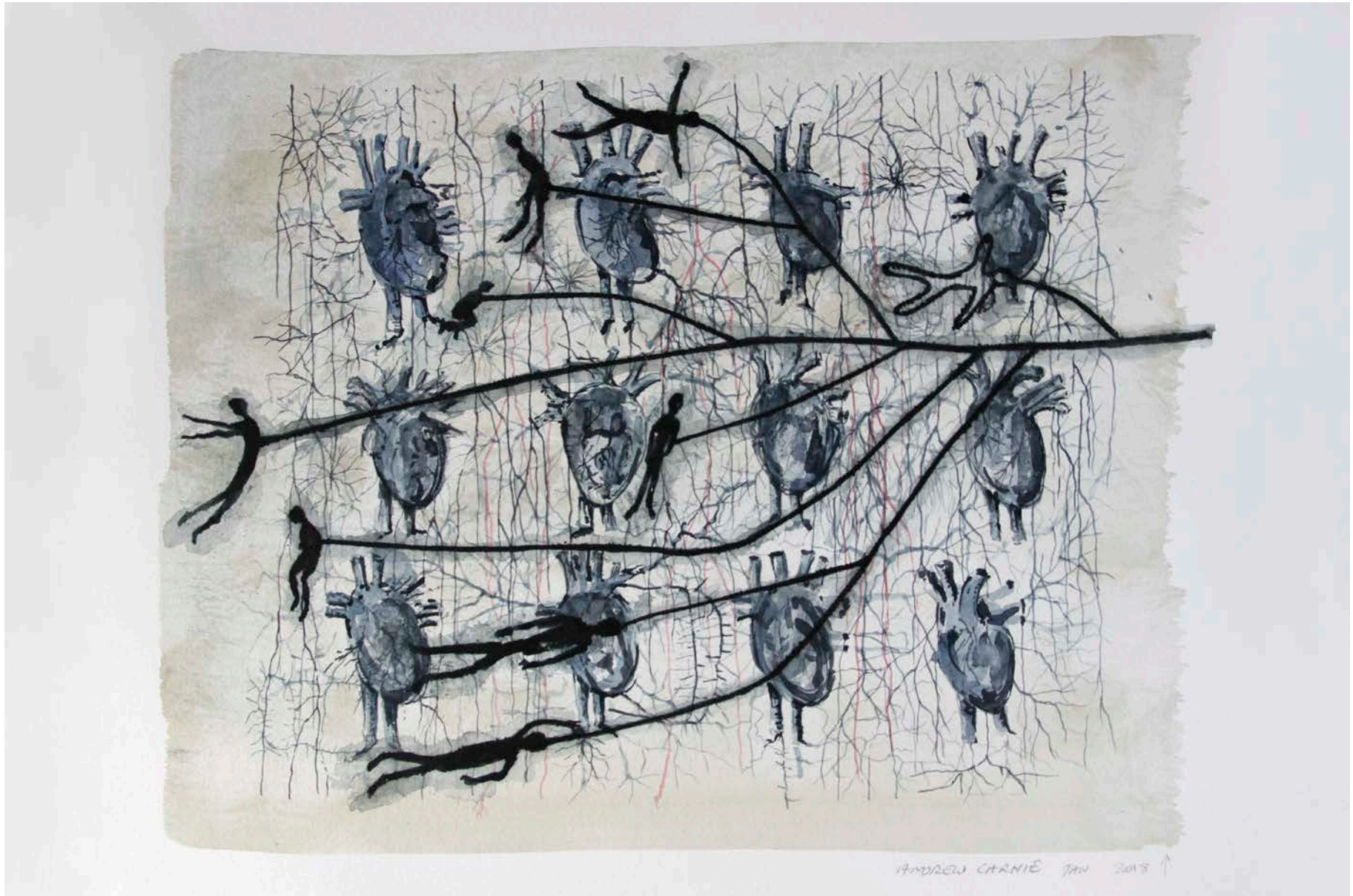




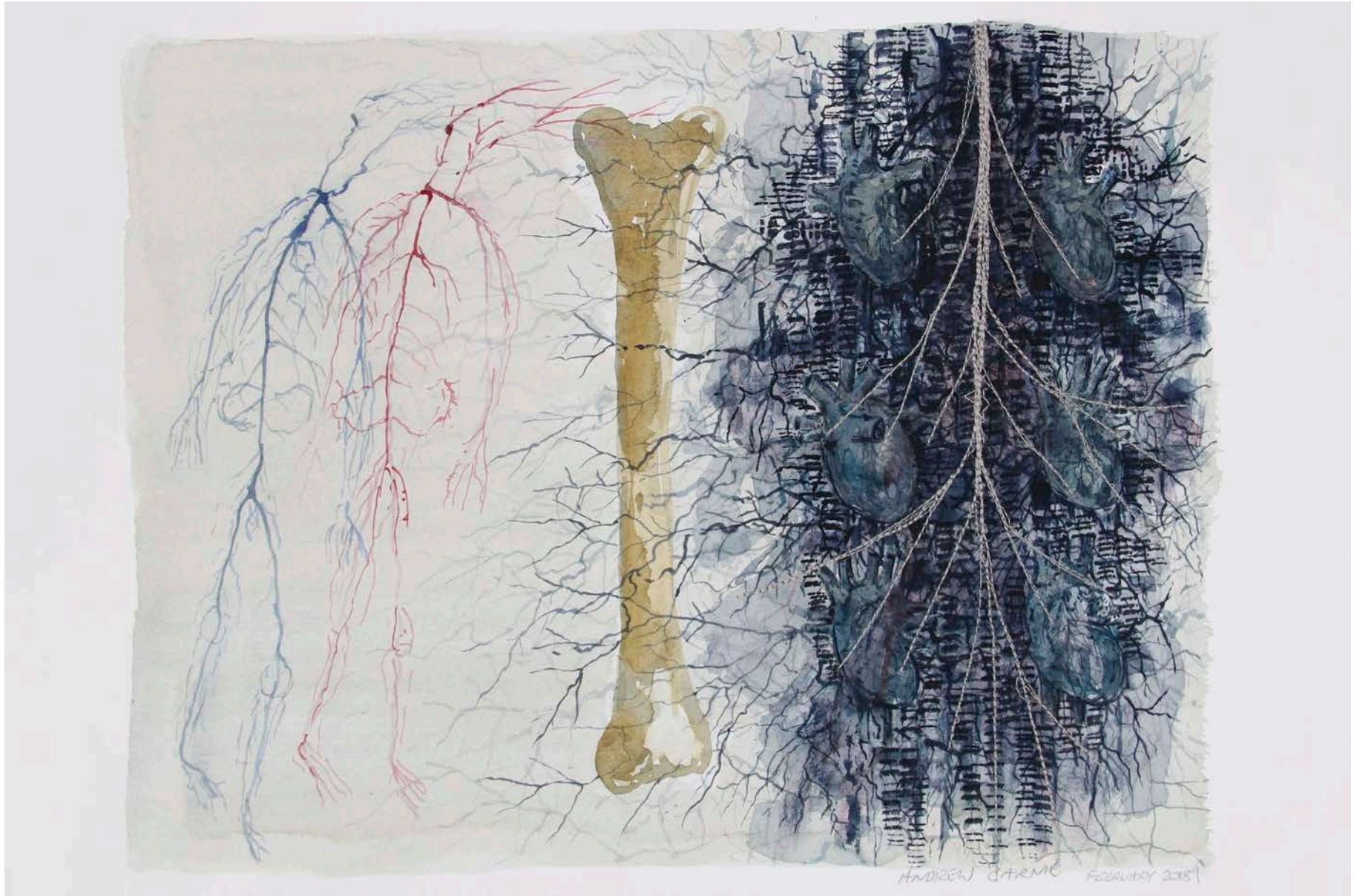
A Soft Touch, 2015, moulded soap, 25 x 30 x 25 cm



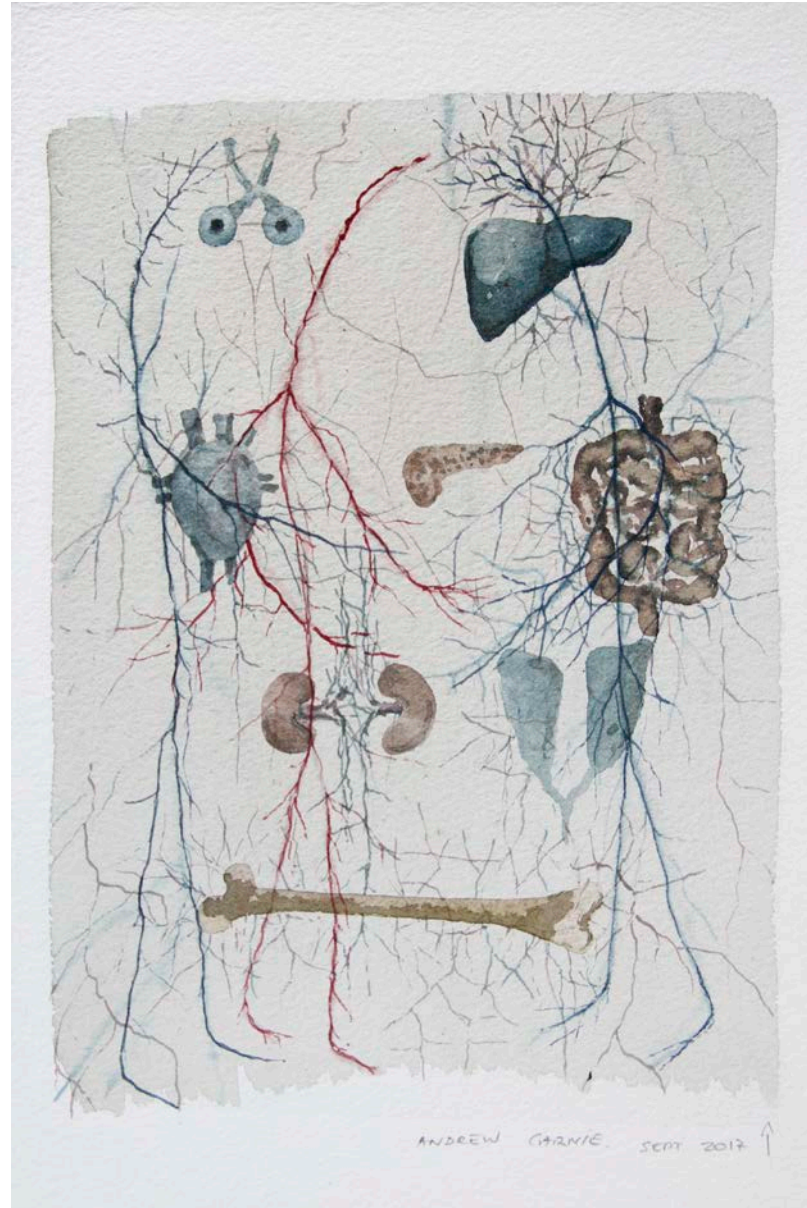




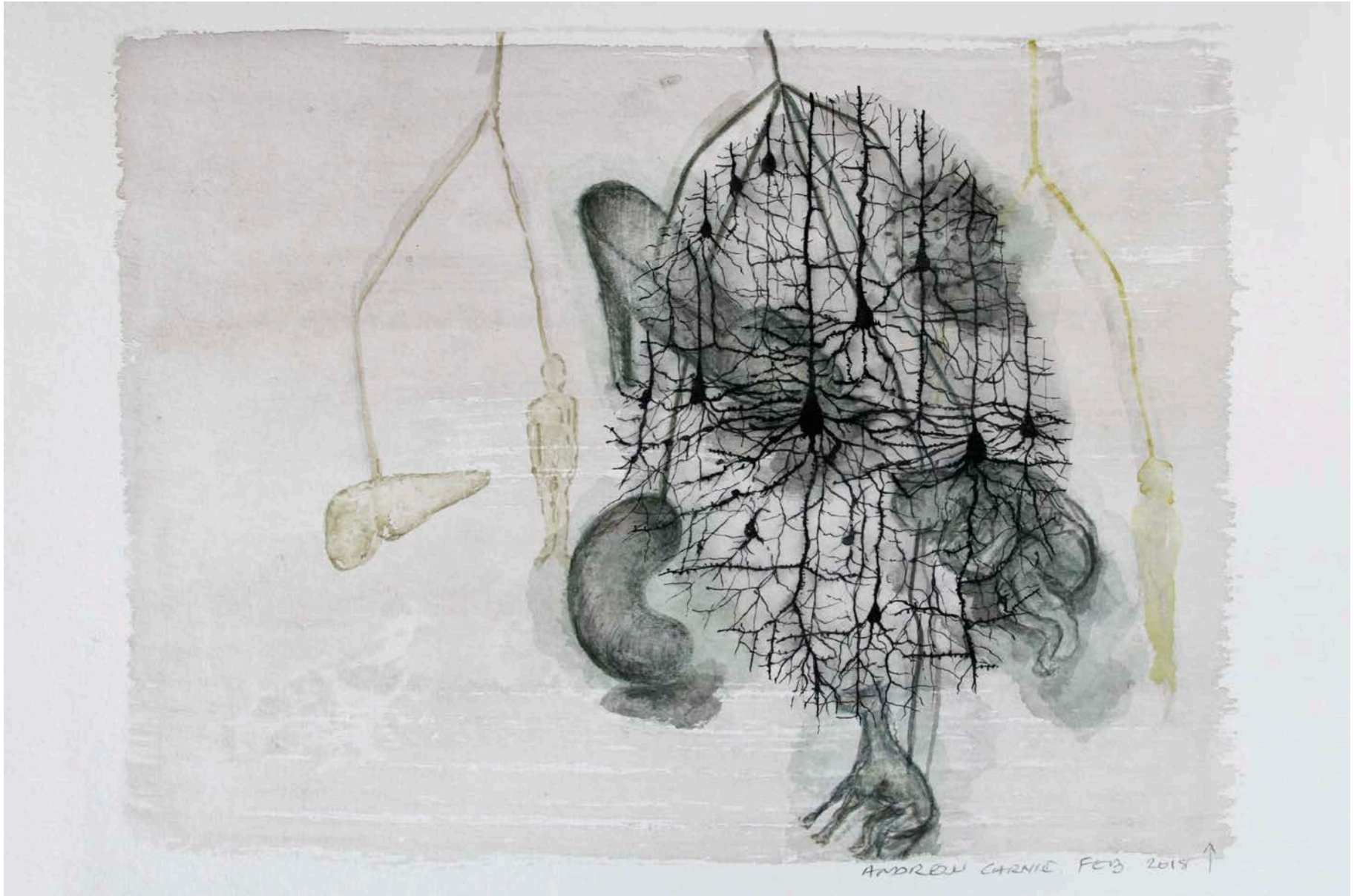
Strong Tide, 2018, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm



In the Bone, 2018, watercolour and stitch on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm



To You, 2018, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 28 x 19 cm



In a Journey, 2018, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm



Sneeze: *Sternutation Circumstances*, 2016, pollen watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 140 cm





I See This (detail), 2015, watercolour on Hahnemühle Leonardo paper, 28 x 38 cm



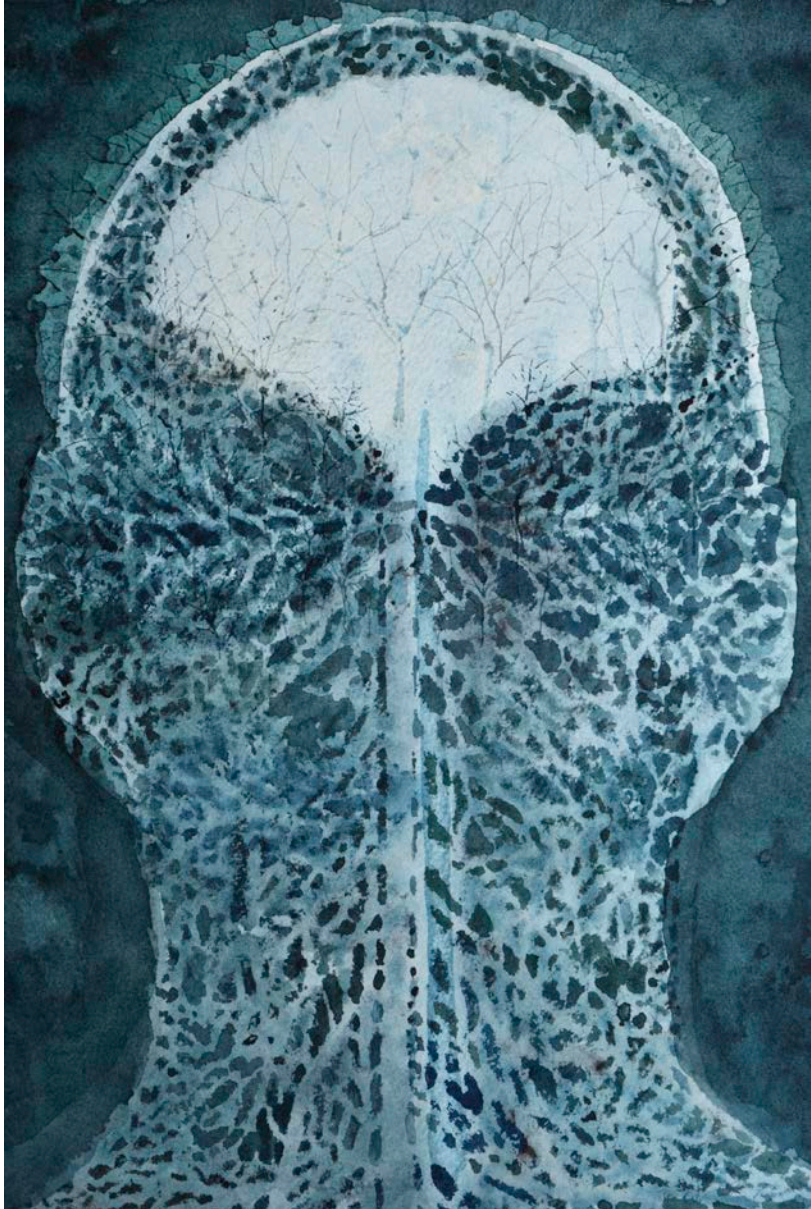


From All Sides, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 40 x 54 cm

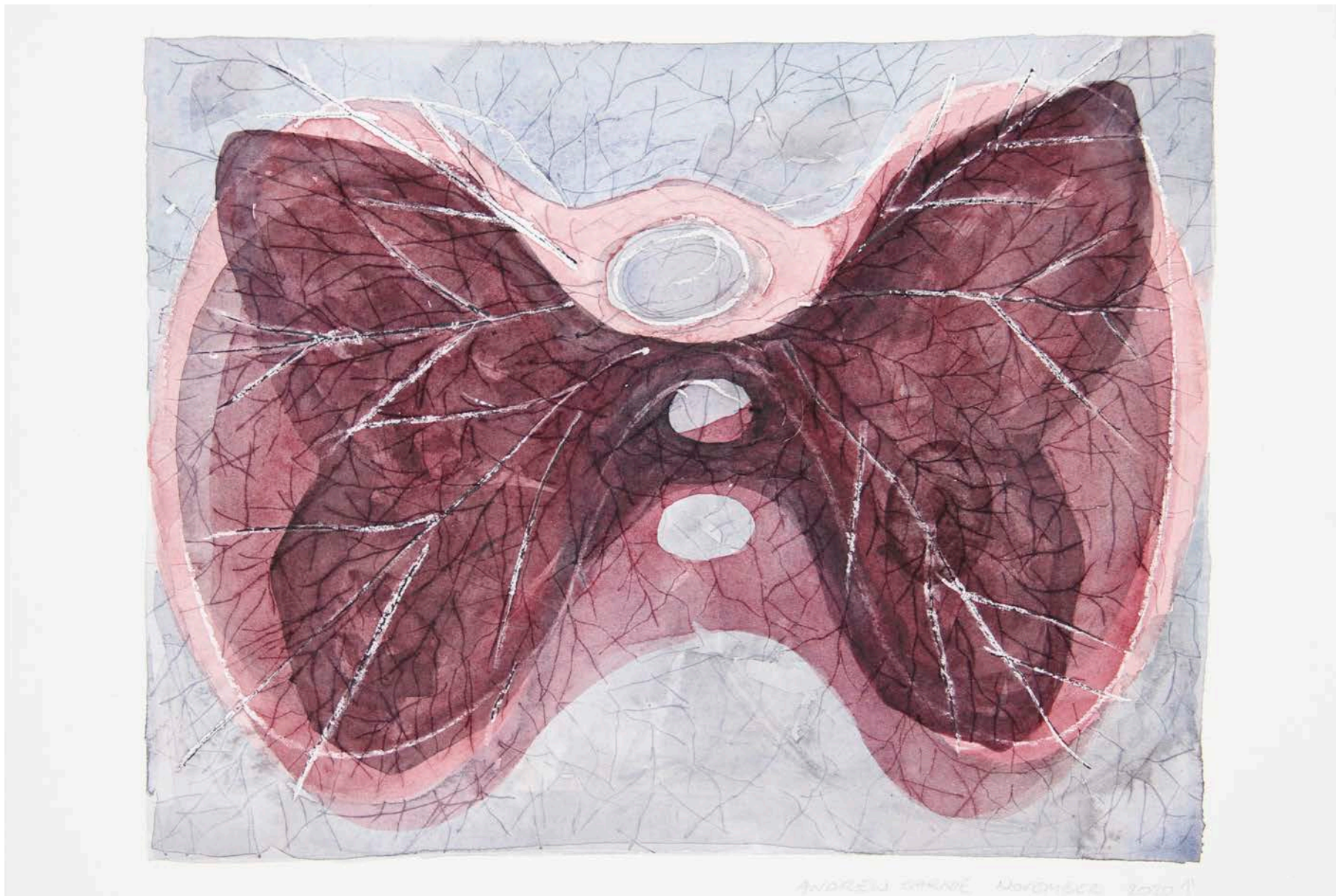












Have Spine, 2020, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm

Previous Pages:

Spark, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

This Universe, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Night Sky Brain, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Hmm, That's How It Is, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

A Vague Link, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

It's a Worry, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Yes, It Is, 2016, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Cold and Cruel, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm



Incubator, 2014, ink drawing on plastic, 245 x 143 x 73 cm



My Network (detail), 2014, ink drawing on plastic, 240 x 260 x 5 cm





Self and Other Irritant, 2017, mosquito watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 143 cm





From Life: Antwerp Dissection, 2015, watercolour and salt on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

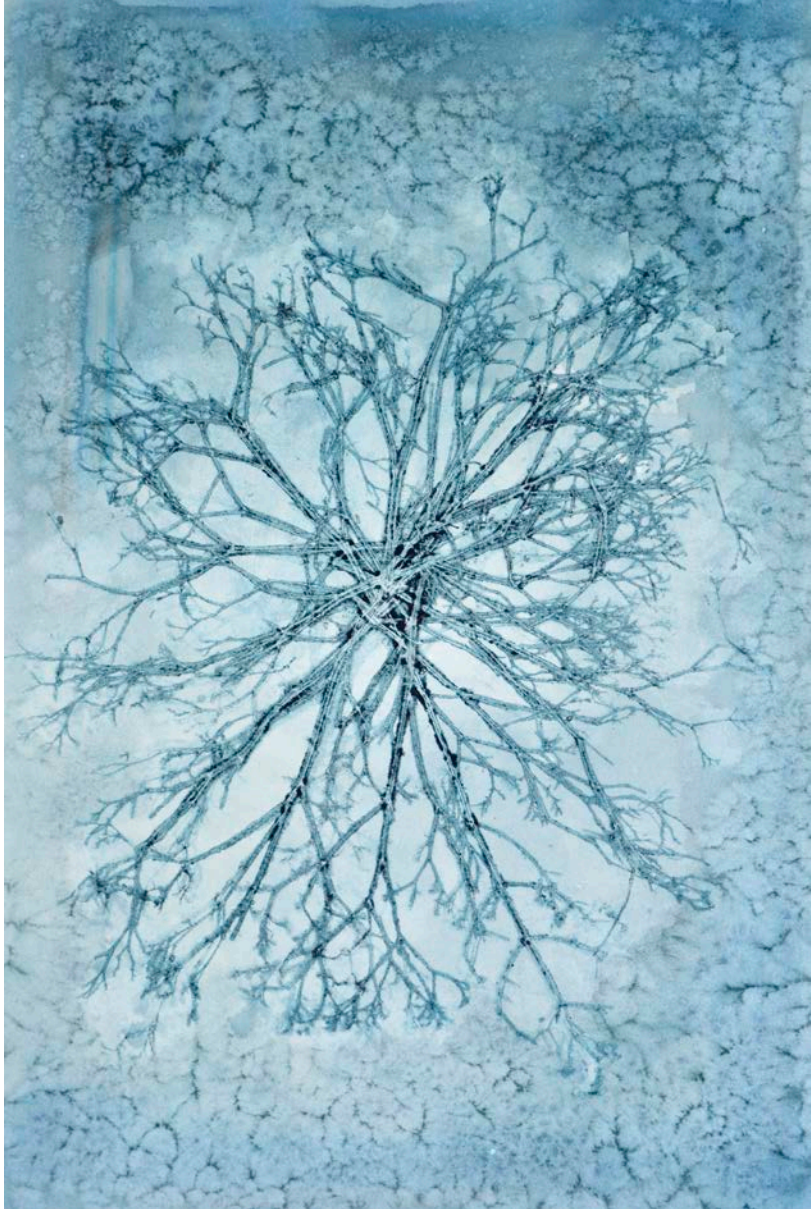


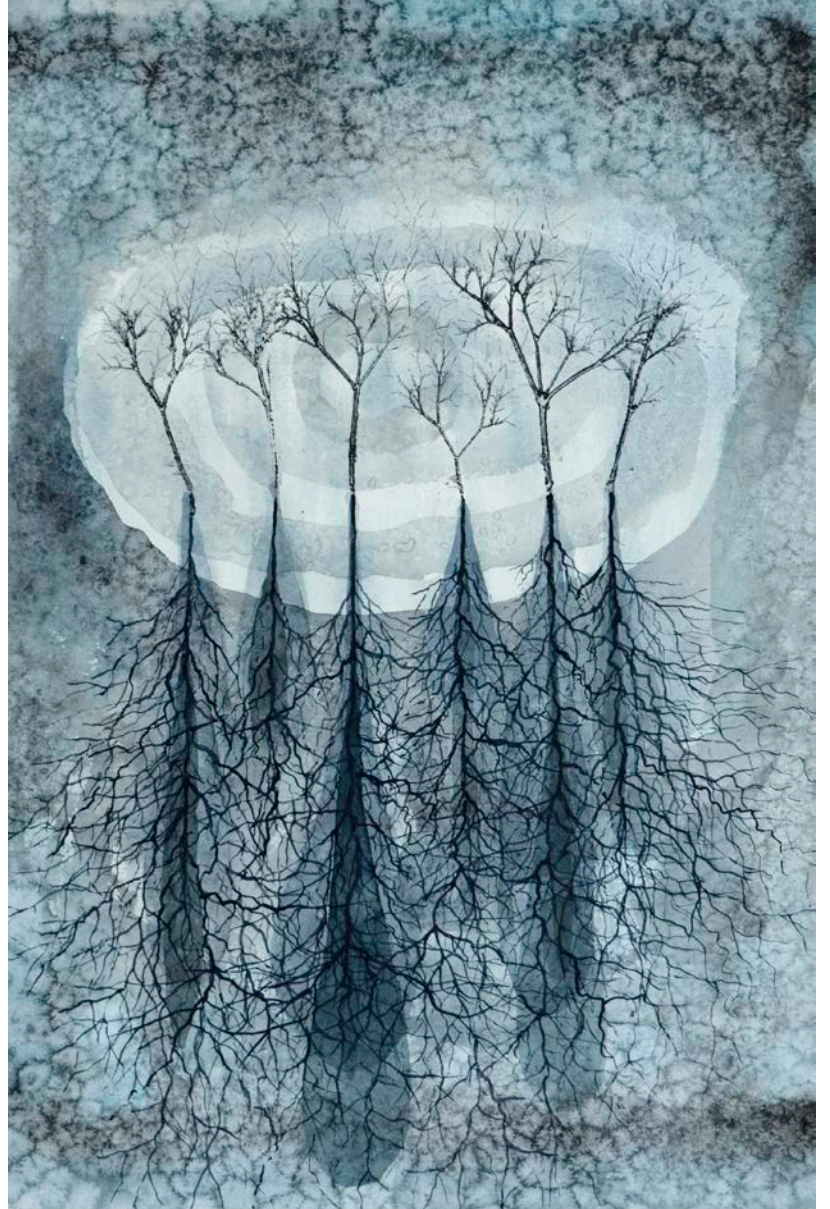




That Time, 2017, pollen watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 67 x 49 cm

Betwixt and Between, 2017, fungi spore watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 67 x 49 cm





Previous Pages:

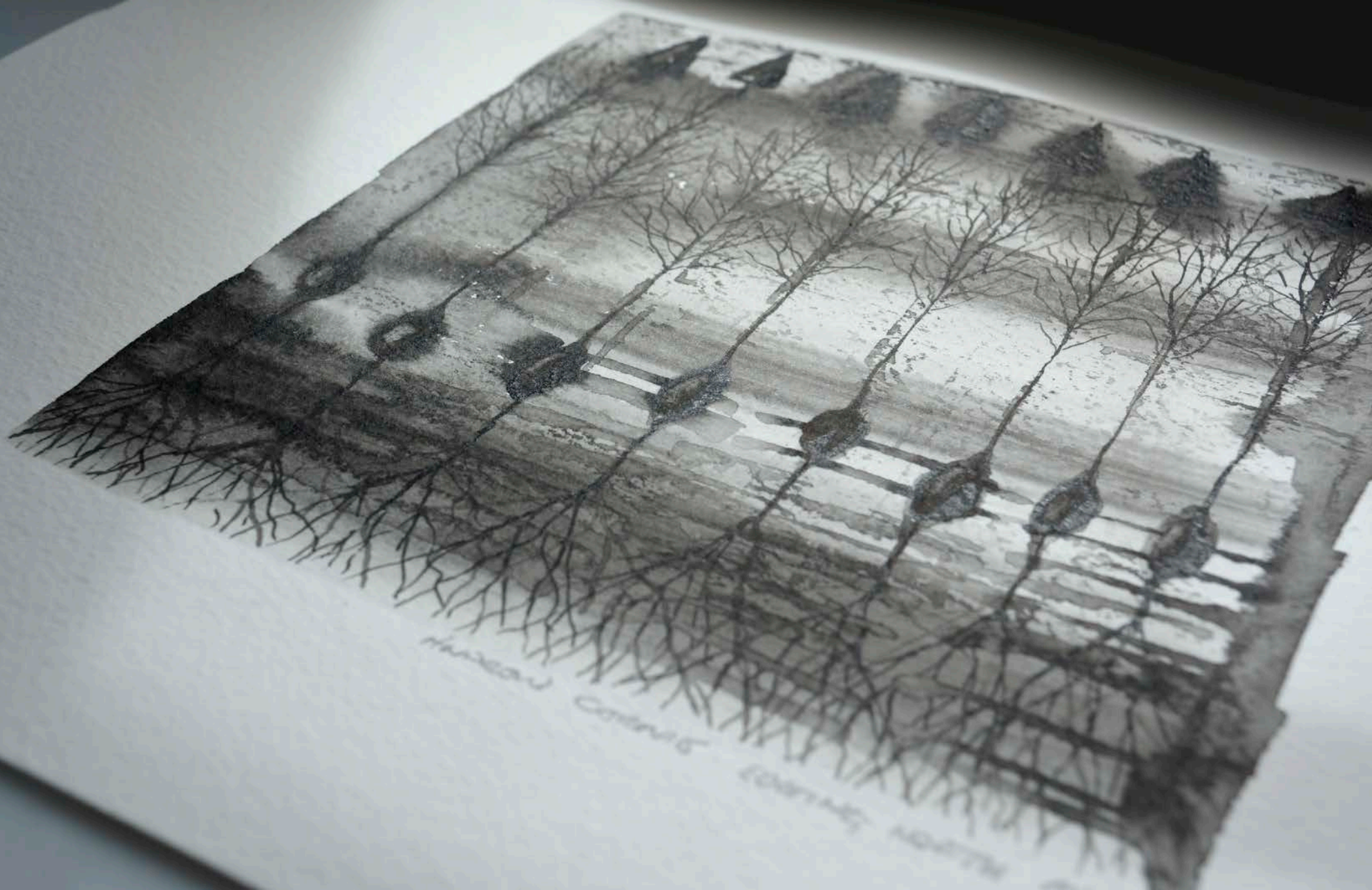
Entangle, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 38 cm

Vessel, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 38 cm

A Quiet Growth, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 38 cm

Tear, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 38 cm

Trondheim, 2014, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 30 x 23 cm



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A New Light, 2012, watercolour, 50 x 40 cm



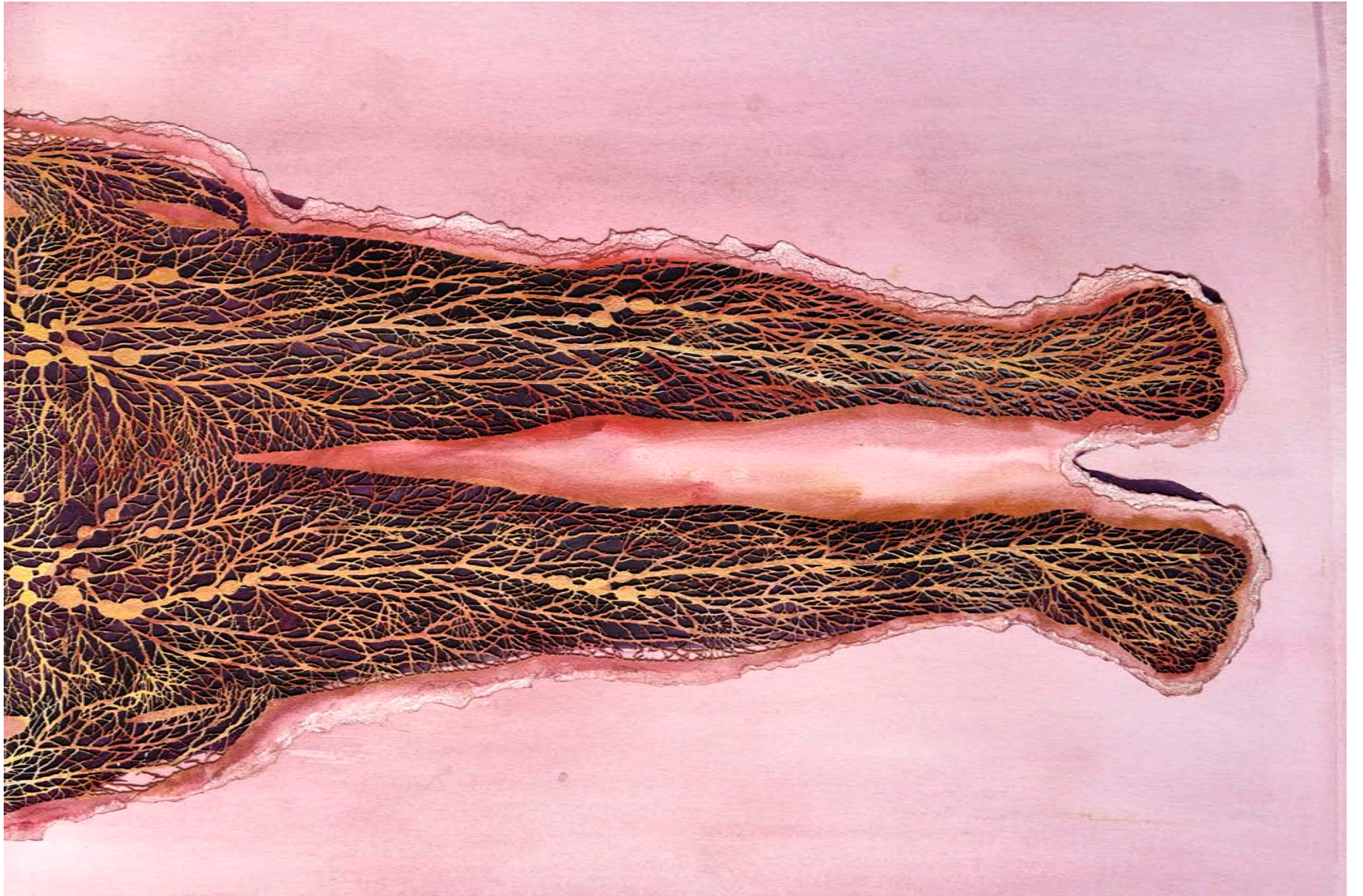


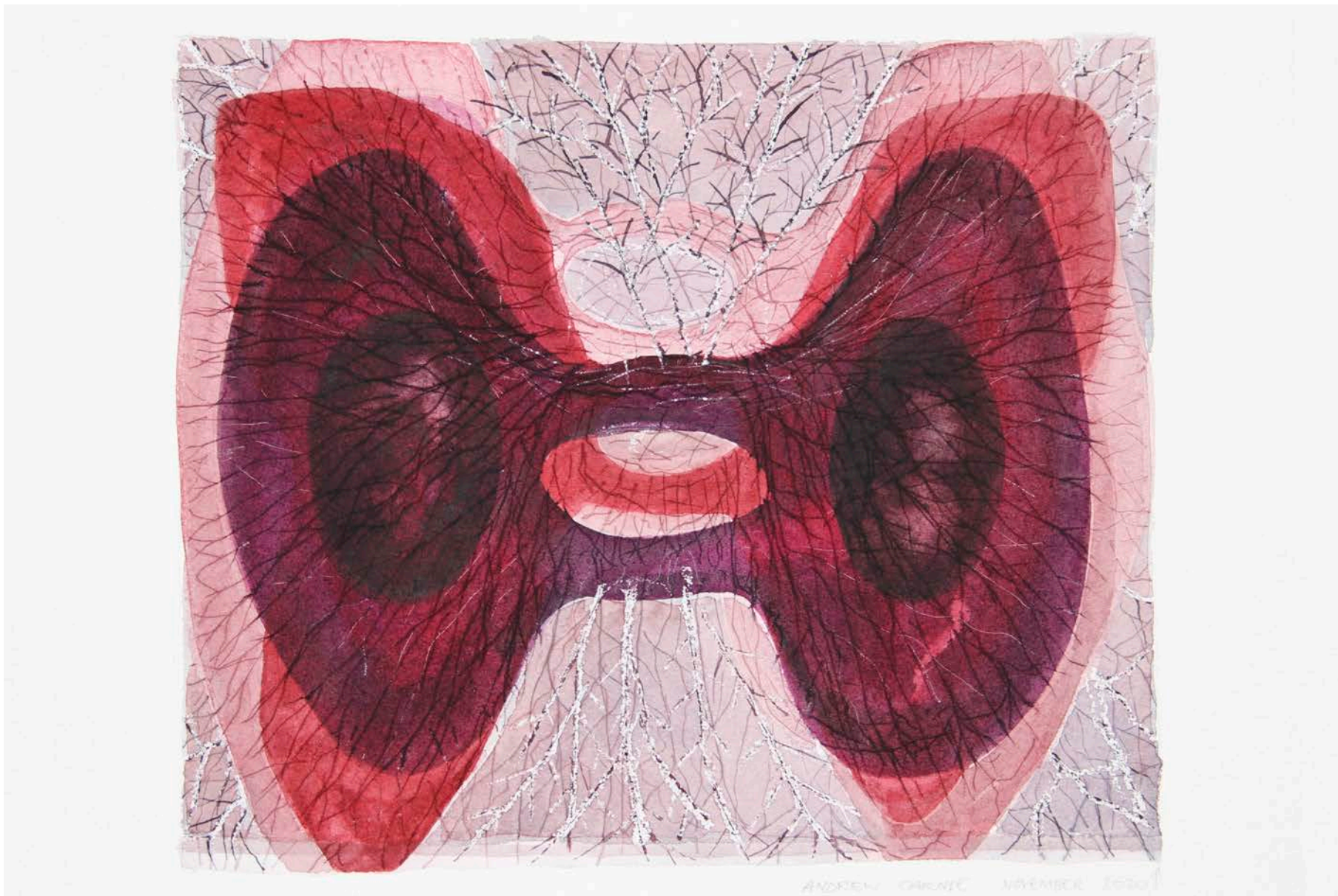
Ways of Seeing, 2009, oil on canvas, 122 x 86 cm



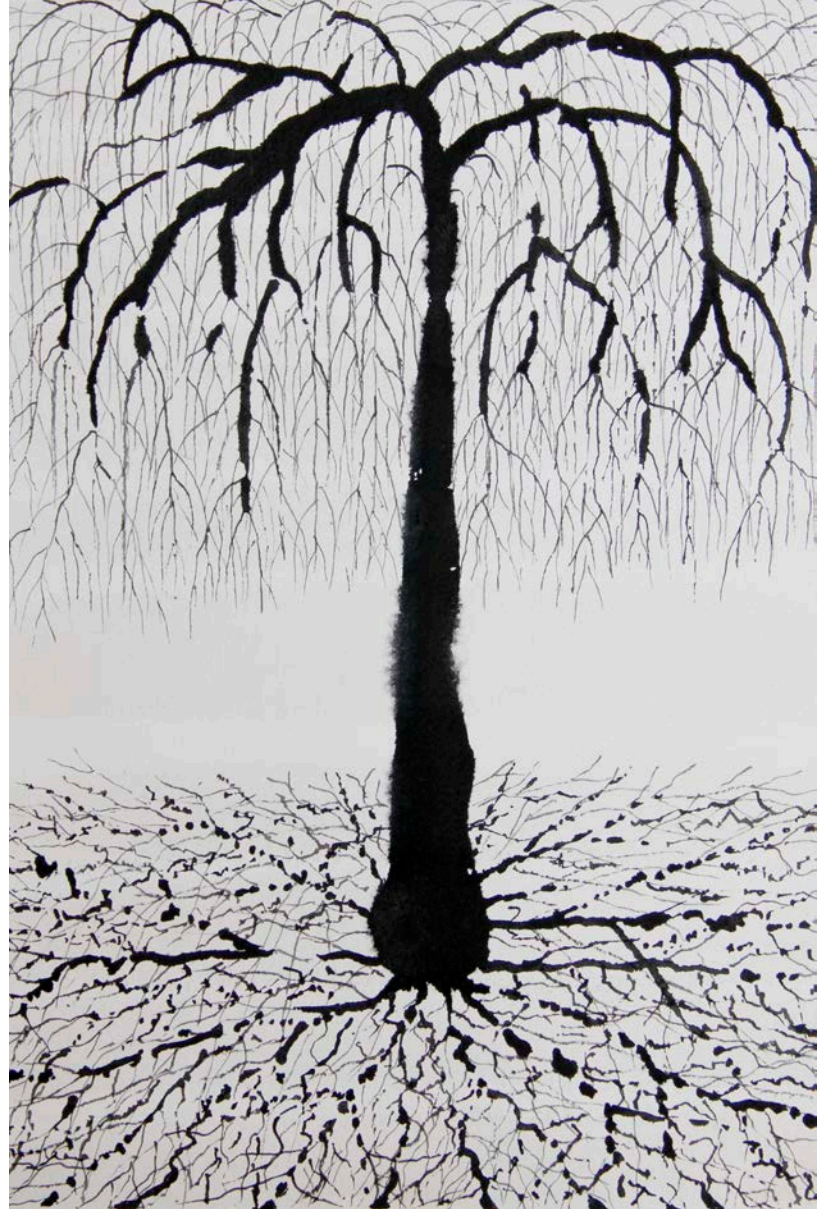
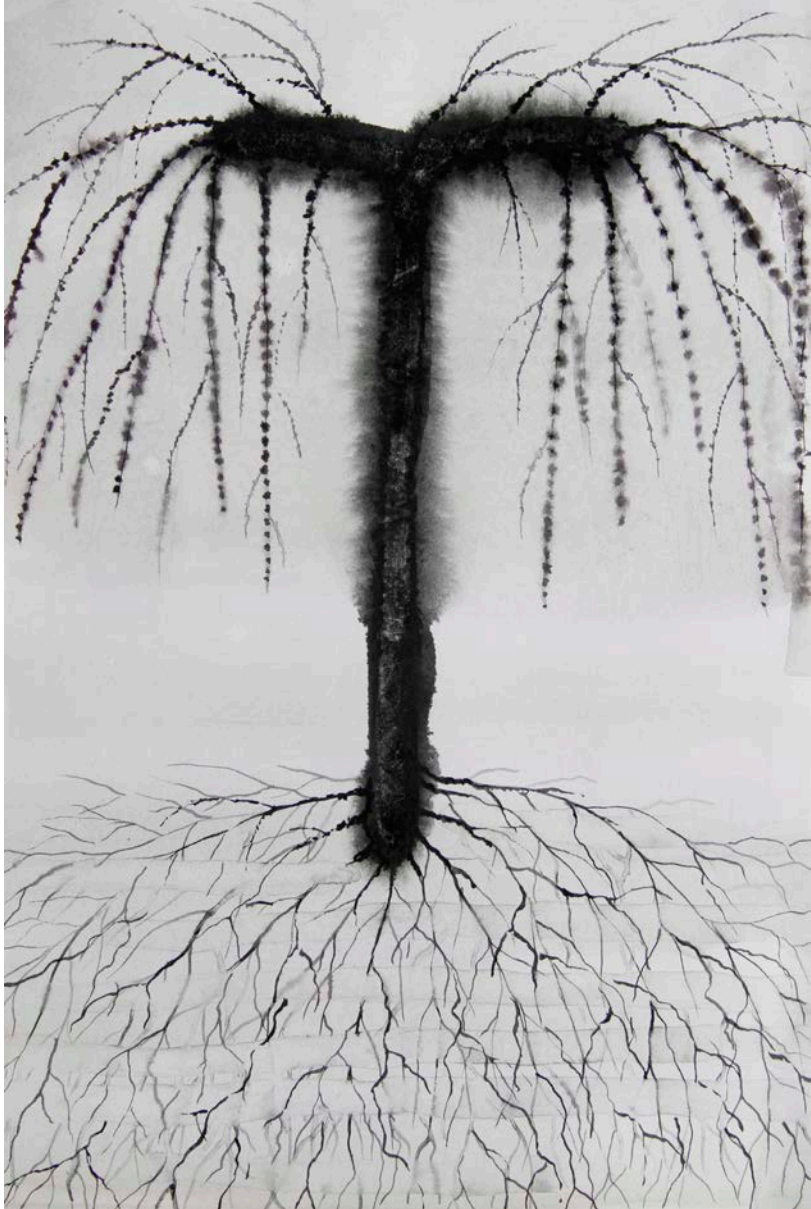


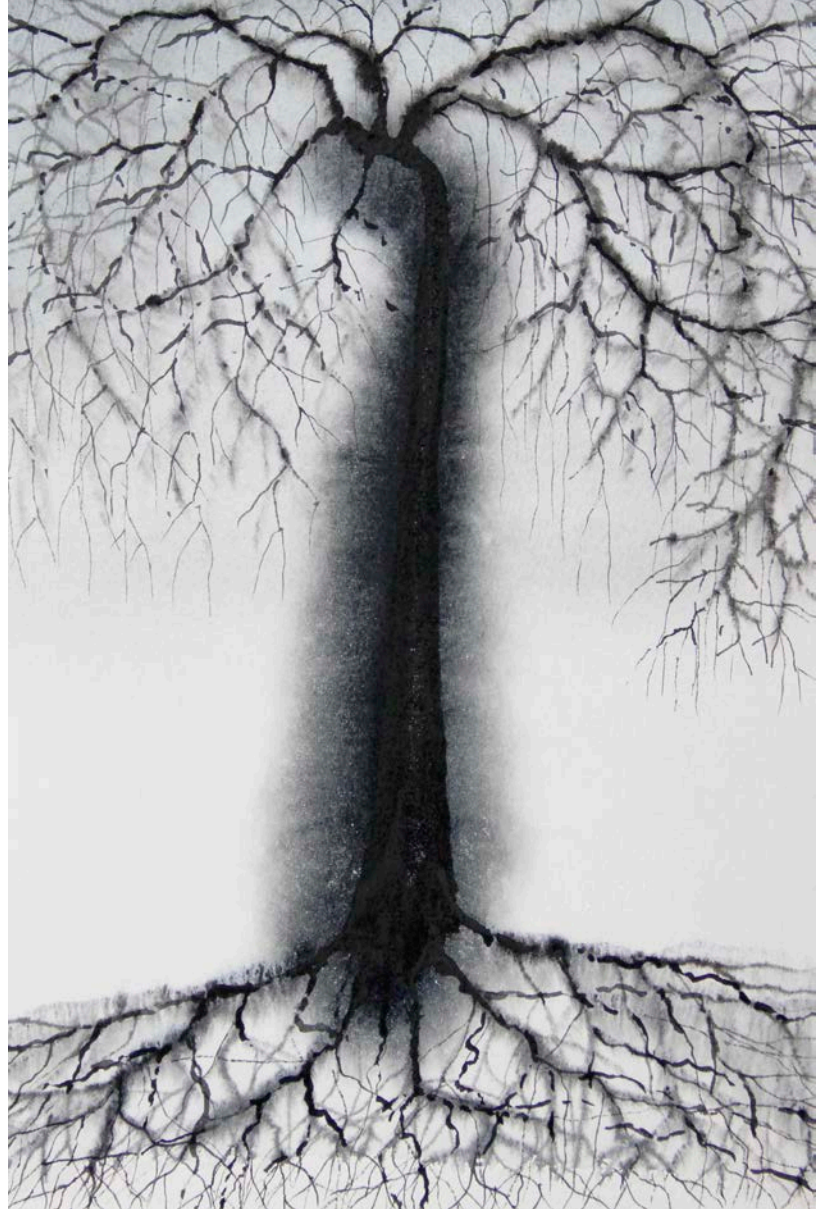
Revere, 2017, gold paint and watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 140 cm





Split Brain, 2020, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 29 x 38 cm







Previous Pages:

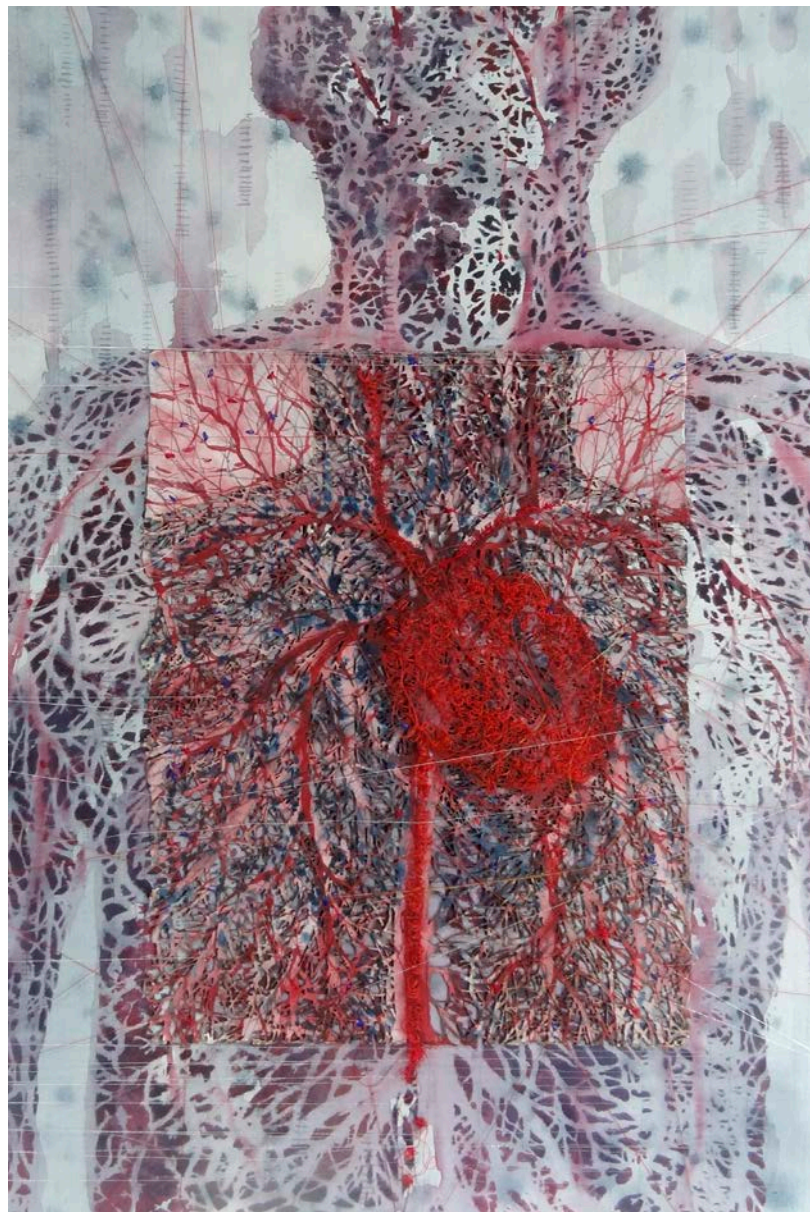
Sensation, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Spreading Arbour, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Mood, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

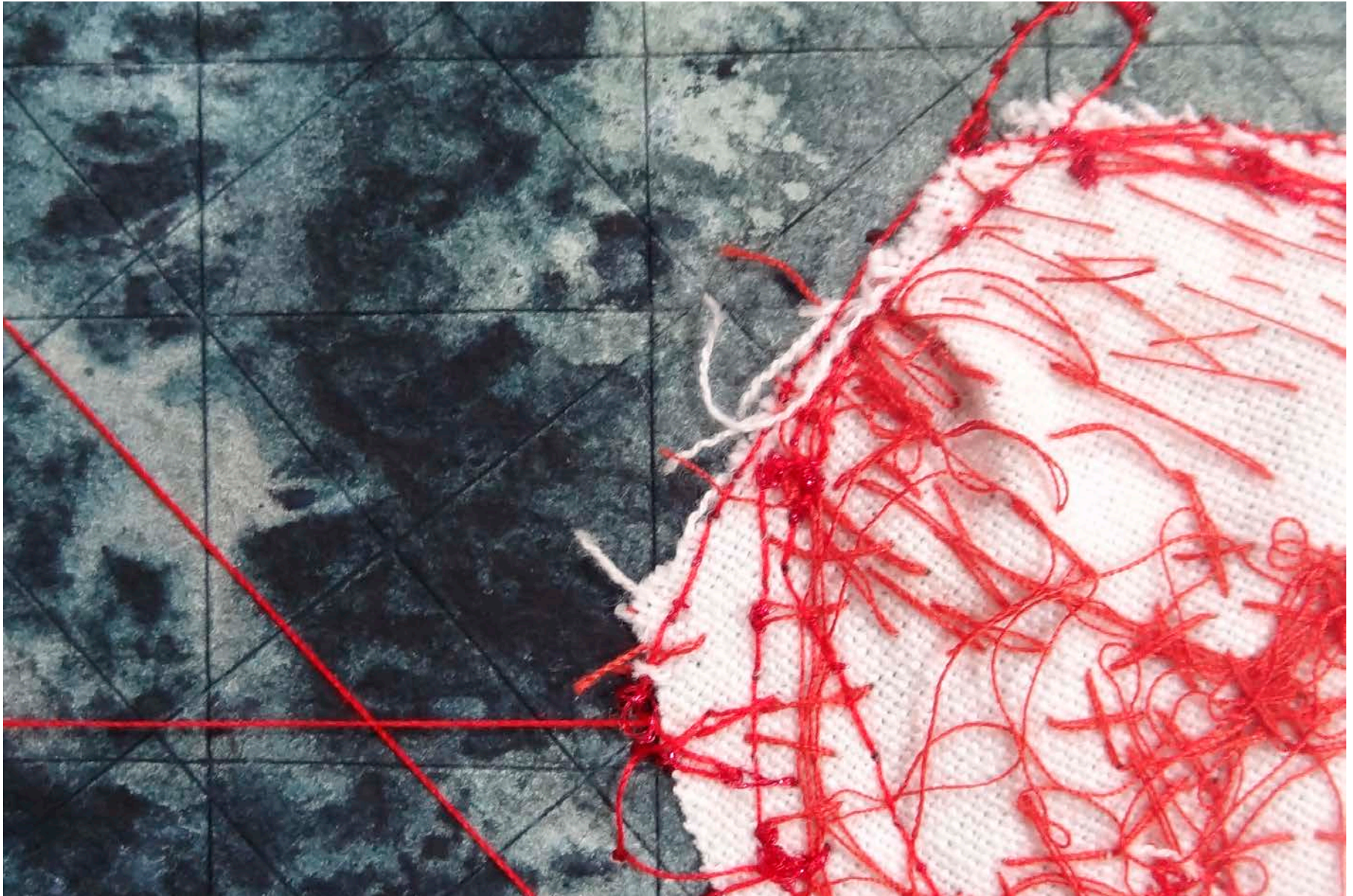
Dark Times, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 29 cm

Count, 2017, laser-cut lambskin, 300 x 100 cm



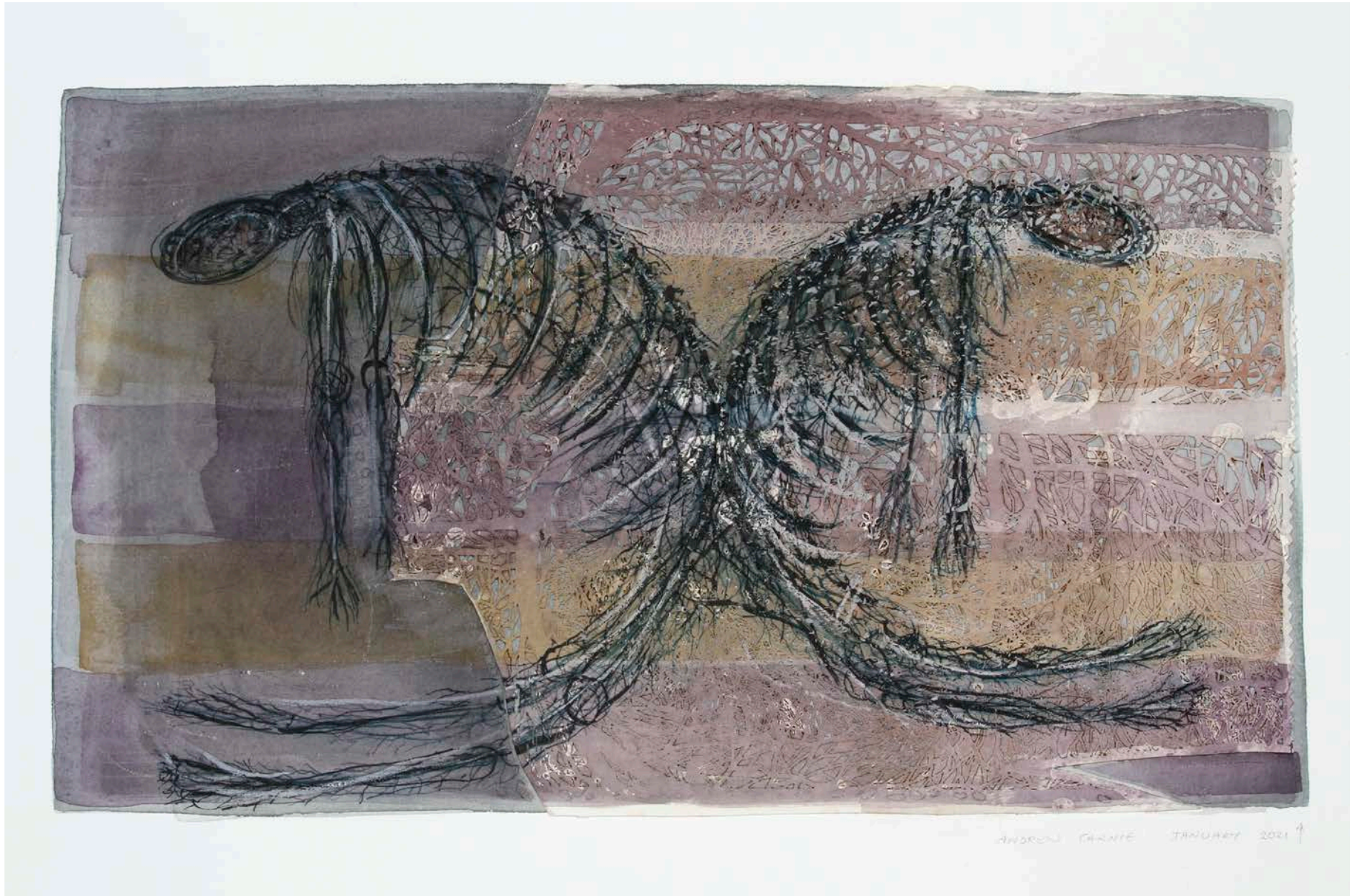
Joined to You, 2017, watercolour and stitch with Alice Kettle on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 56 x 38 cm







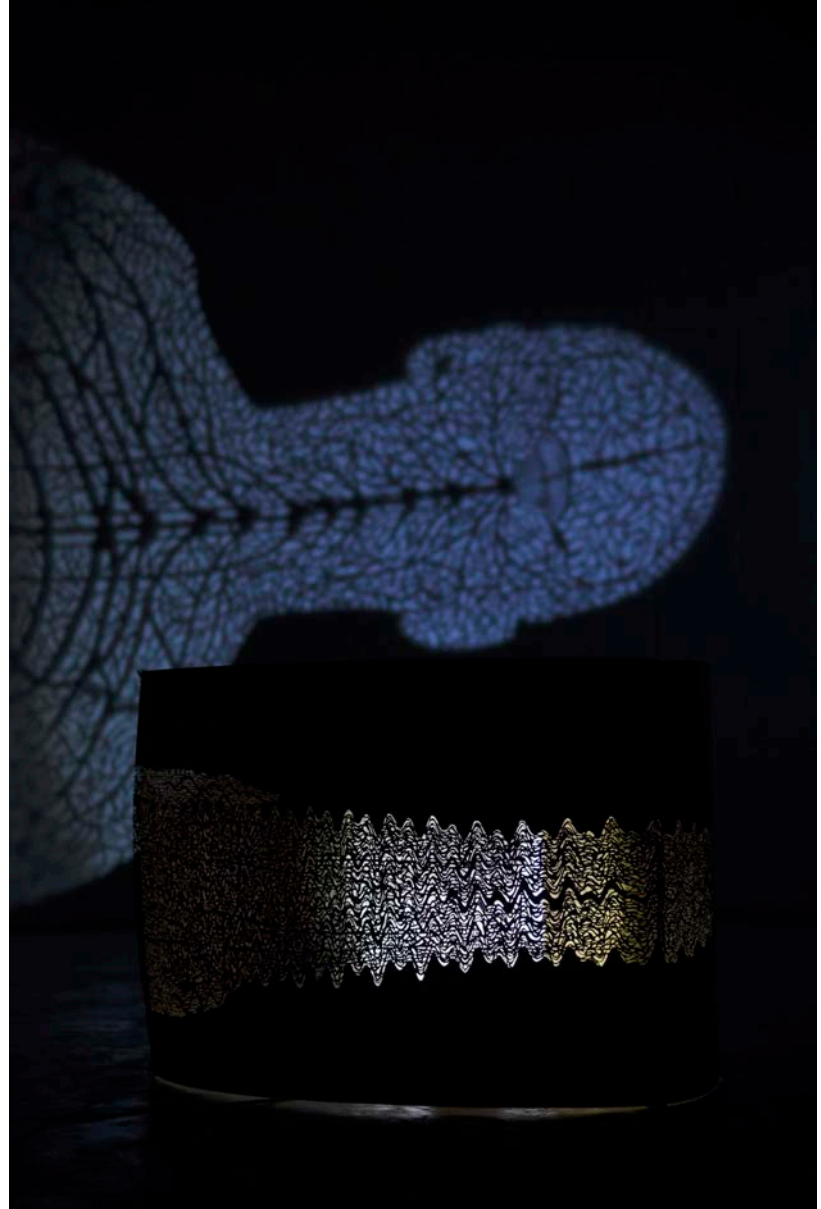
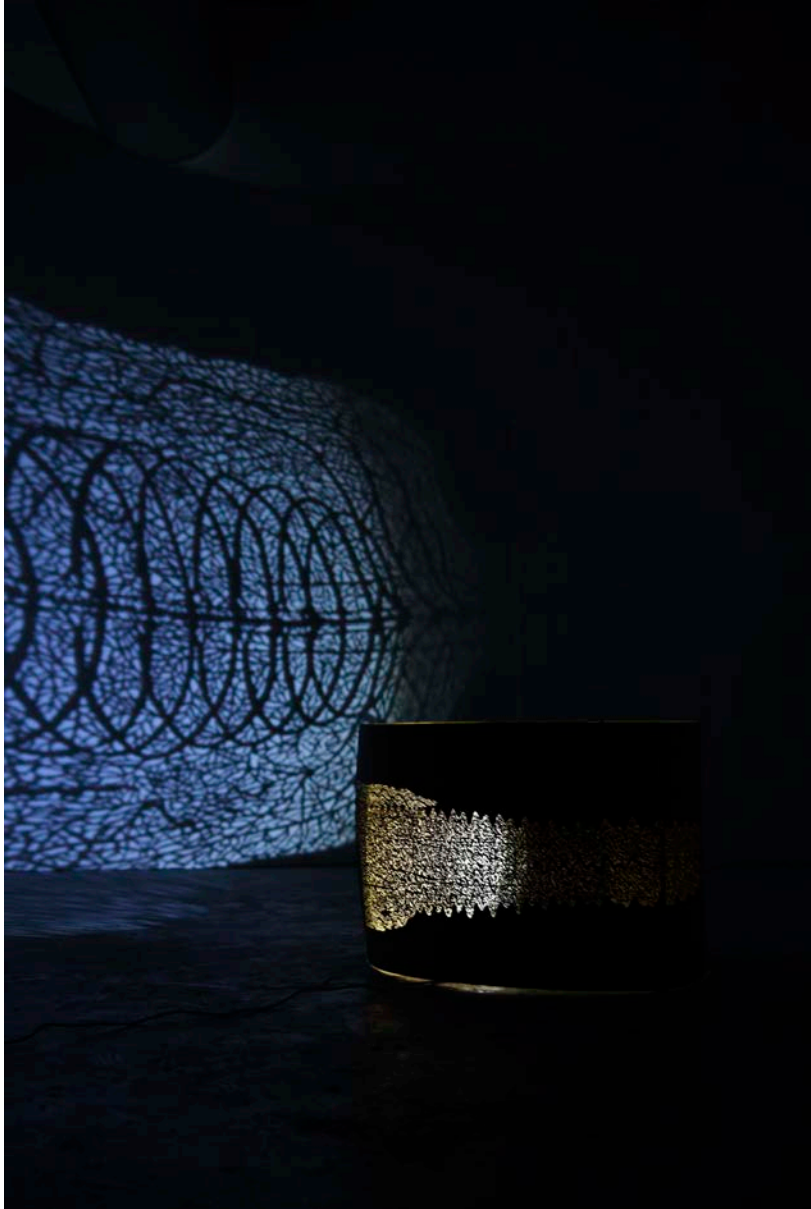
A Little Hope, 2017, watercolour and stitch with Alice Kettle on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 56 x 38 cm



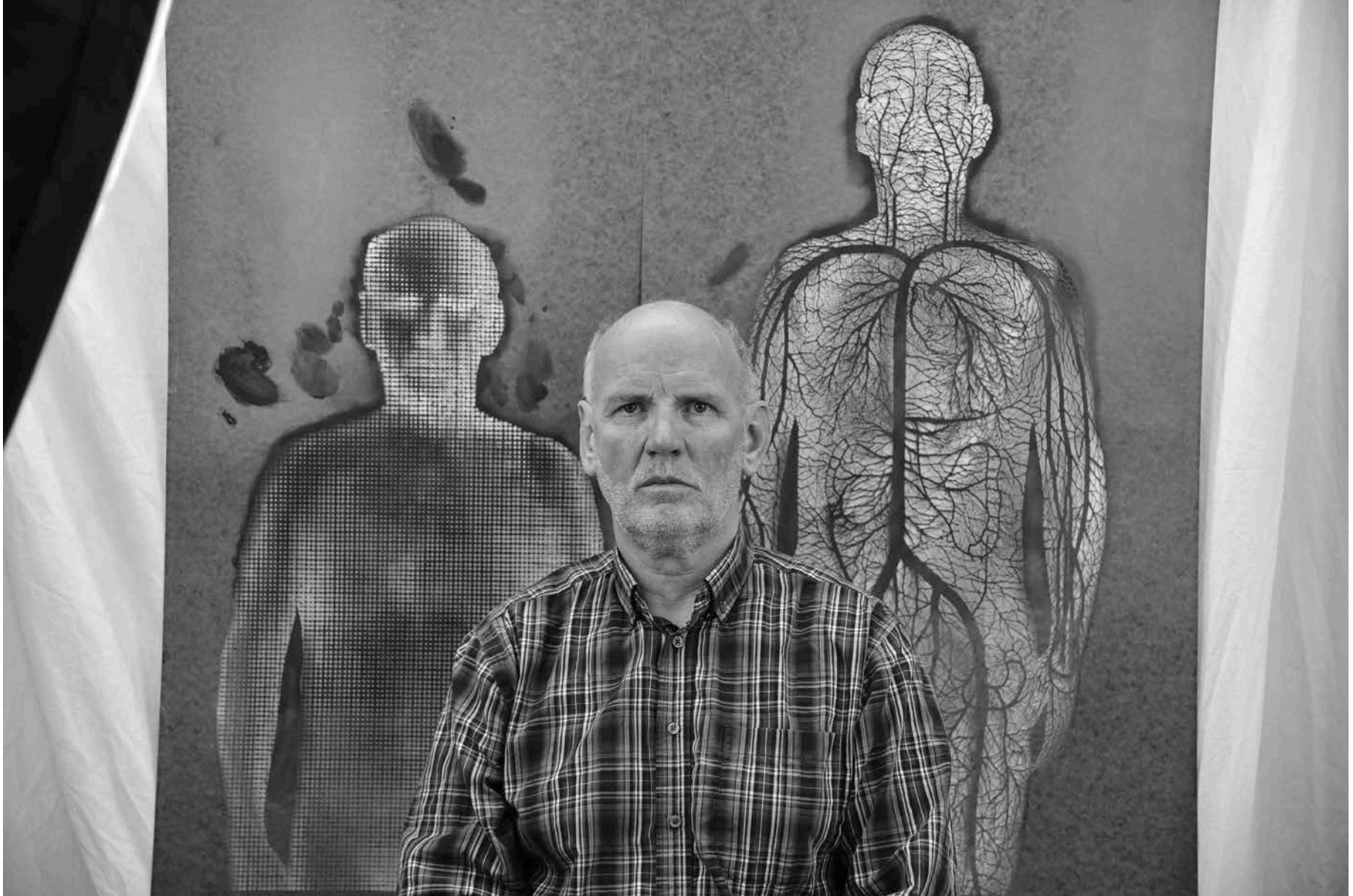
Lean Too, 2021, mosquito watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 38 x 58 cm



Rhythm, Somnotium, 2017, laser-cut stencil card, rotating motor and torches, dimensions variable







Andrew Carnie portrait, 2017, by Alexander J Carnie

Cover Image: *From All Sides*, 2016, watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 40 x 54 cm

Endpapers: *Sneeze: Sternutation Circumstances* (detail), 2016, pollen watercolour on Hahnemuhle Leonardo paper, 58 x 140 cm

Spreading Arbour - Andrew Carnie

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