

# TOWARD AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE IMAGE: FROM THE ORIGINAL IMAGE AND ITS AURA TO THE CONDITIONS FOR EMERGENCE

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The passage from analog to digital began in the 1990s, during which the programmed renunciation of film photography incited artists to question the history of photography, to explore its origins, its essence, and its matter. From these investigations comes an almost archeological vision which—according to historians Héloïse Conésa<sup>1</sup> and Kathrin Schöneegg<sup>2</sup>—far from being nostalgic, leads to the emergence of a singular iconography. This exploration, though focused on old forms of representation, manifests itself most often in processes and approaches that involve a form of abstraction (or a potential for abstraction) in order to concentrate on the systems of production. Through work on light, time, film, and its development, the artists investigate the conditions for the emergence of photography, examining its origins and endeavoring to push its boundaries. In addition to the ontological approach, certain artists invoke notions that are closely related to the history of the medium, such as the aura, which they seem to want to redevelop. The forms flatten out, dissolve, or even disappear; the subject is no longer recognizable except in the title, which becomes a decisive element. Setting aside or eliminating forms and

figures, these photographs, for the most part, tend toward a minimal aesthetic, approaching an essentialism not unrelated to the history of the monochrome in its quest for autonomy, auto-reflexivity, and non-objectivity. Unlike paintings that often suggest a search for the absolute, these photographs give rise, above all, to new types of images and “photographic matters.”<sup>3</sup>

## IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGINAL IMAGE

The archeological vision examined in this first section is expressed through various works whose nature or subject matter involve photographic procedures, from the most ancient to the most recent. All of them touch on techniques, processes, and materials that probe the history of photography. They prompt reflection on the origins of the photographic image that causes us to take a wider view of its sources, its materiality, as well as its mode of direct representation. Photography as trace, indication, or imprint of what exists therefore involves other types of relationship with reality that work, in particular, through analyzing its essence.<sup>4</sup>

This is true of **Hanako Murakami**'s series *The Immaculate*, (2019; p. 28) which explores the silver process materials of old daguerreotypes. With a methodological and scientific rigor, apparent in the frontal viewpoint, the artist (b. 1984, Japan) photographs these silver plates, untouched for 160 years, and captures the immanence of these reflective surfaces aged by time. The traces of oxidation and other marks of wear are visible in their brutality, without further emphasis. Murakami's photographic precision, lamination onto aluminum, and table format, restore their substance visually as well as physically. Thus magnified by the lens, these plates, called “immaculate,” function as a sort of memory, but, above all, as a mirror of time.

Temporality, which is intrinsically tied to the photographic medium, also guides the work of **Alison Rossiter** (b. 1953, US). This artist is interested in and collects expired photographic papers (p. 29). The archive she has created, of almost 2,000 lots, constitutes a sampling of the history of photographic printing material over nearly a century. Without using a camera, but making use of the flow of the liquids that she uses in the chemical baths, she produces prints that she believes evoke the abstract approaches of the Constructivist, Expressionist, or Minimalist movements. As with Murakami, beyond the potential for abstraction that these materials represent, the materiality of these papers—sometimes infiltrated by light, oxidation, and physical