

The background of the entire page is a black and white abstract drawing. It consists of numerous small, dark, irregular shapes scattered across the white space. These shapes resemble leaves, stems, or small plants, some with thin, curved lines extending from them, suggesting movement or growth. The overall effect is that of a dense field of tiny, dark botanical elements.

A U R O R E M I L L E T

TRACES AND MOVEMENT

SUMMER DRAWINGS 09

Traces and Movement 2009

W . E . N E W M A N

Every heartbeat captured with a fine thin line is-, every nerve impulse scratched across graph paper is-, every rumble of the earth recorded on a silver drum is-, a mark on the page that points to something else. These marks of life, sensation, and liquid fire, are an index of impulses revealing hidden forces to us. The philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce famously called this kind of writing or language a relationship of indices (indications) or markers that show something about things on account of their being physically connected with them. Signs, which are the general category to which all marks pertain, can also be likenesses or icons which serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them, or symbols, which have become associated with their meanings not because they are like that to which they refer, but because they have become associated with their meanings by usage over time. To the latter category we ascribe language, phrases, speeches and things that do not point-to or resemble that which they represent. The word for dog is not the same in every language nor does the word ‘dog’ identify a four-legged, furry creature: it merely associates to the idea over time. We could say art is a system of signs that can all of these: icon, index or symbol, but maybe that is not such a significant thing to say. No system of signs art or otherwise is pure; they are always mixed.

This can be more confusing in art than in the sciences. From my example of the heart-pulse above, it seems clear to a scientist that the thump-thump of the heart is akin or like the marks made on the graph paper (or now, on the screen) and that the one—the movement of the heart, points to the other—the graphical inscription. The earliest instrument to record the invisible pulse of the heart-life was the creation of nineteenth century French scientist Jules-Etienne Marey. His sphygmograph or pulse-writer was the positivist counter to the anti-mechanistic almost mystical science of vitalism that was a belief in the spark of animating ‘vital forces’ popular in early nineteenth century science. The sphygmograph records the movement of the pulse of the living organism in real time. This specialized mark making or writing is the body writing itself so that we can read the bodily processes. The

mechanism is simple. A lever with one end resting on the pulse point at the wrist is connected to a stylus that writes or inscribes a fluid mark on a smoke-blackened sheet of paper attached to a clockwork mechanism. The outward pressure of blood against the arterial wall moves the needle upward and the relaxation releases it downward. The sphygmograph makes what is an invisible process visible. It transforms the temporal movement of body ebbing and flowing to an inscription that is read by a trained interpreter. But it is not as simple as reading a text in language or speech. These inscriptions of Marey’s *méthode graphique* are not a conventional writing—they defy any conventional symbol system. Their legibility is constructed between the movements of a bodily rhythm and the interpretive capacity of the reader’s human brain. The body writes itself to itself. But of what does it speak?

Ernst Haeckel famed German zoologist and philosopher proposed one answer in the *Riddle of the Universe* (1899) All organic matter is in a psychological unity which is expressed by the pulse of ‘reflex action’ (*reflectorische Leistung*) as sensation and movement. In the deepest history of our cells the reaction to the world is movement in response to stimuli. At the lowest level this is the simple release that is the action of ‘growing’ common to all organisms. At the highest level it becomes the conscious presentation of an idea that we would call thought and reflection. The embedded motion of the psyche is also connected to the evolutionary scale of memory which is the reproduction of presentations—that is the latent potential energy of the psychoplasm is transferred into kinetic energy—the mark, the gesture, the trace of our primordial selves as it surfaces through the generations and onto the paper.

The ‘graphic trace’ of art is the drawing—the unadorned line scratched into the surface of paper. I would say then that the marks of Aurore Millet’s drawings index the language of the psychical body. This is the writing of the reflex action that is the movement of the psyche. Like the graphical index of the pulse pointing to the beating of our hearts, the swirling, tapping, swift marks on the page point to the first

marks scratched on caves and traced in the sand. They are also the document of the primordial urge to growth and transformation. Who is to say these marks are not the beat of the heart as it quickens or the protean writing of archetypal dreams? Or the writing of the world as form and matter, psyche and body? Millet’s drawings prefigure the traces of her photographs. They are the psychoplasm, the ‘soul-substance’ of experiences to be found in the world, and languages to be spoken.

Marey’s universal language of that ‘which, in all epochs and among all peoples, has represented objects in the same manner’ is the universal language of the body as it speaks through us and to us of its history, its inscribing of a life onto the skin and the many dreams it writes to itself, through itself. Here we should remember that any particular set of traces, any language, are also iconic or symbolic because they resemble other graphic traces or processes. In the final analysis it is to say that symbol, icon and index are not discrete categories in either the science of bodies or the art of embodied experience. Aurore Millet’s drawings remind us how fragile these distinctions are.

i Charles Sanders Peirce, “What is a Sign?” (1894)

ii Ernst Haeckel, *Die Welträthsel: Gemeinverständliche Studien über monistische Philosophie* (1899)

iii “Die elementare Seelenthätigkeit, welche durch die Verknüpfung von Empfindung und Bewegung entsteht, nennen wir (im weitesten Sinne!) Reflex oder reflective Function (*reflectorische Leistung*), besser Reflex that.”, *Die Welträthsel*, VII: 48.

iv Haeckel call this the ‘conscious presentation in the cerebral cells’ and explains it thus: “As the presentations are conscious, and as special parts of the brain arise for the association of these conscious presentations, the organism is qualified for those highest psychic functions which we call thought and reflection, intellect and reason.”

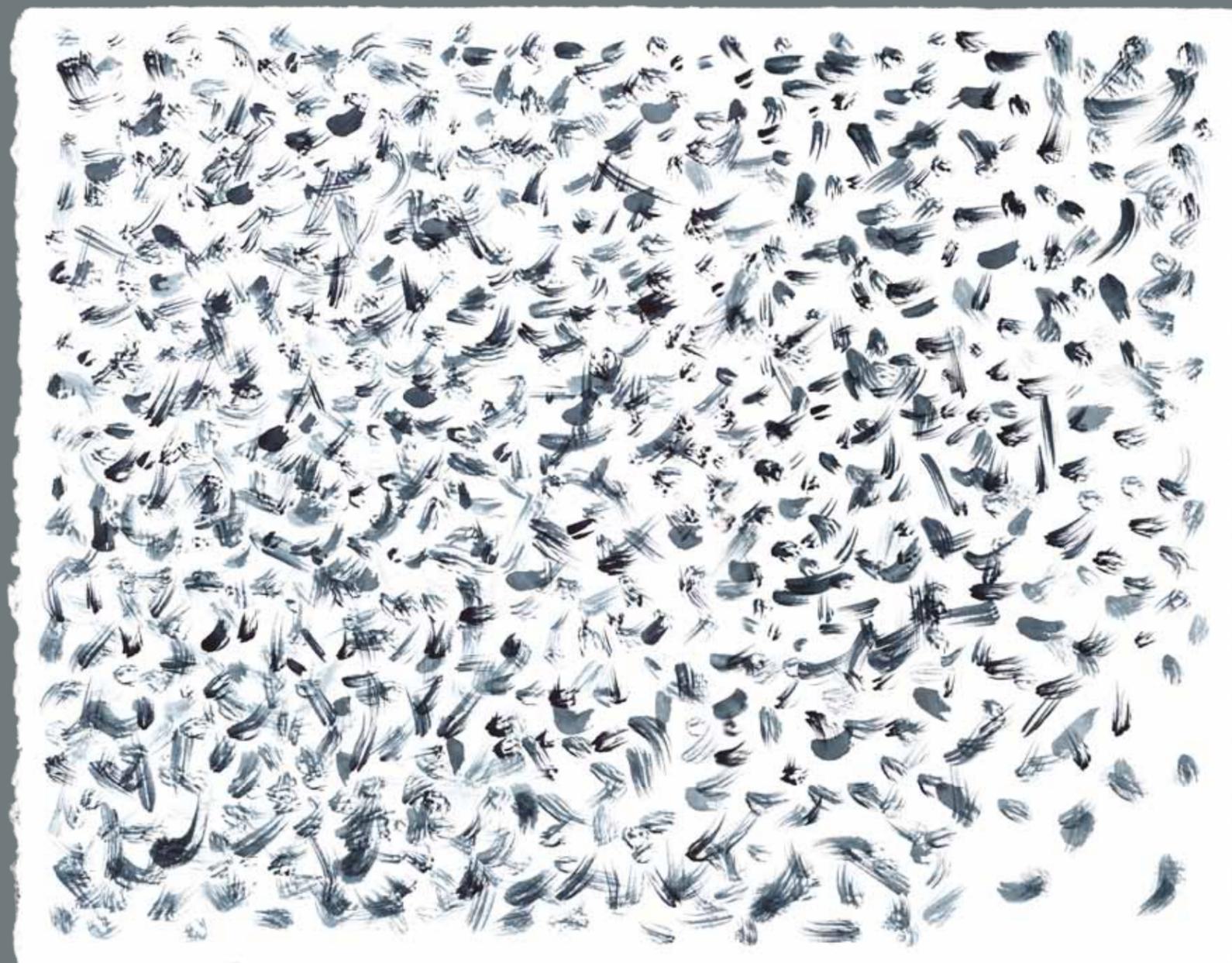
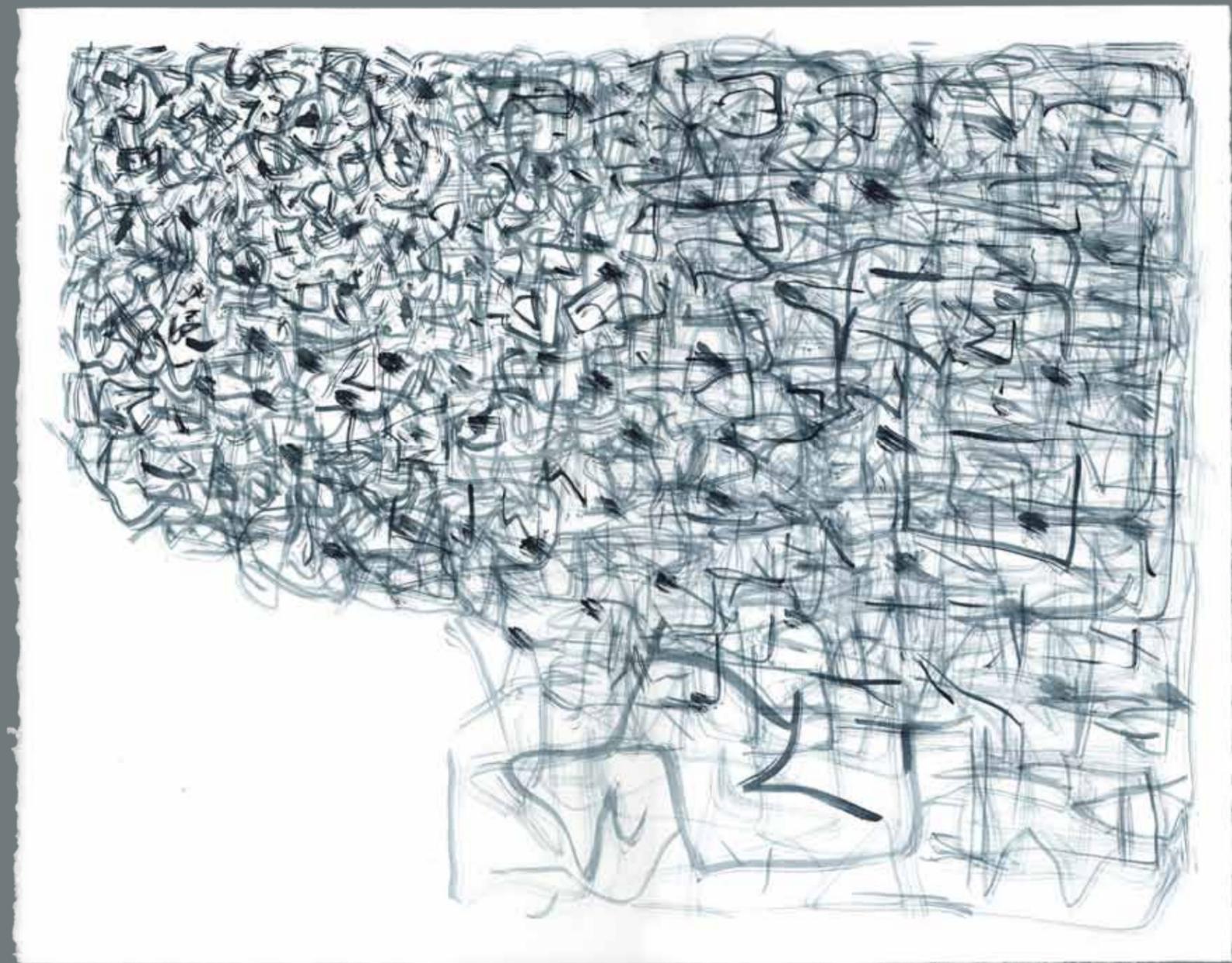
“Indem die Vorstellungen bewusst werden, und indem bedondere Gehirntheile sich zur Association der bewussten Vorstellungen reich entfalten, wird der Organismus zu jenen höchsten psychischen Functionen befähigt, welche wir als Denken and Ueberlegen, als Verstand und Vernunft bezeichnen.” *Die Welträthsel*, VII: 51

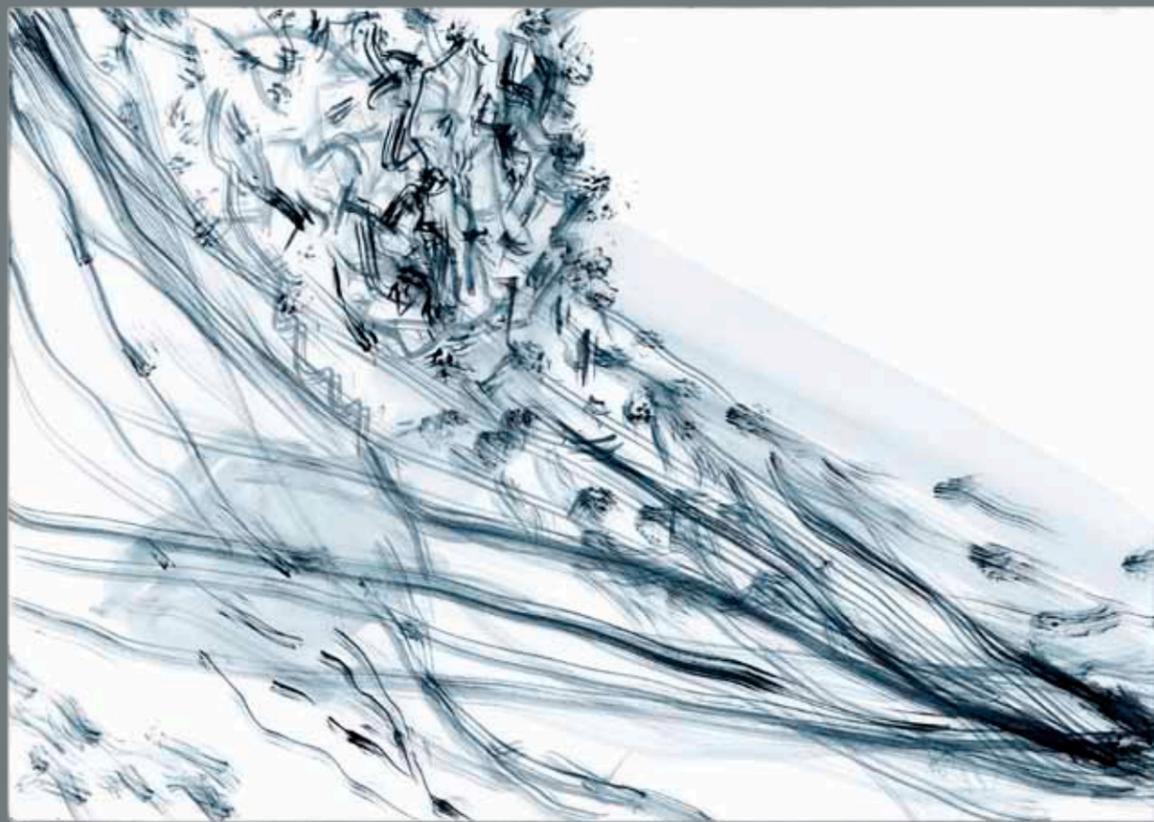
v Haeckel term is “Seelensubstanz” in the monistic sense.

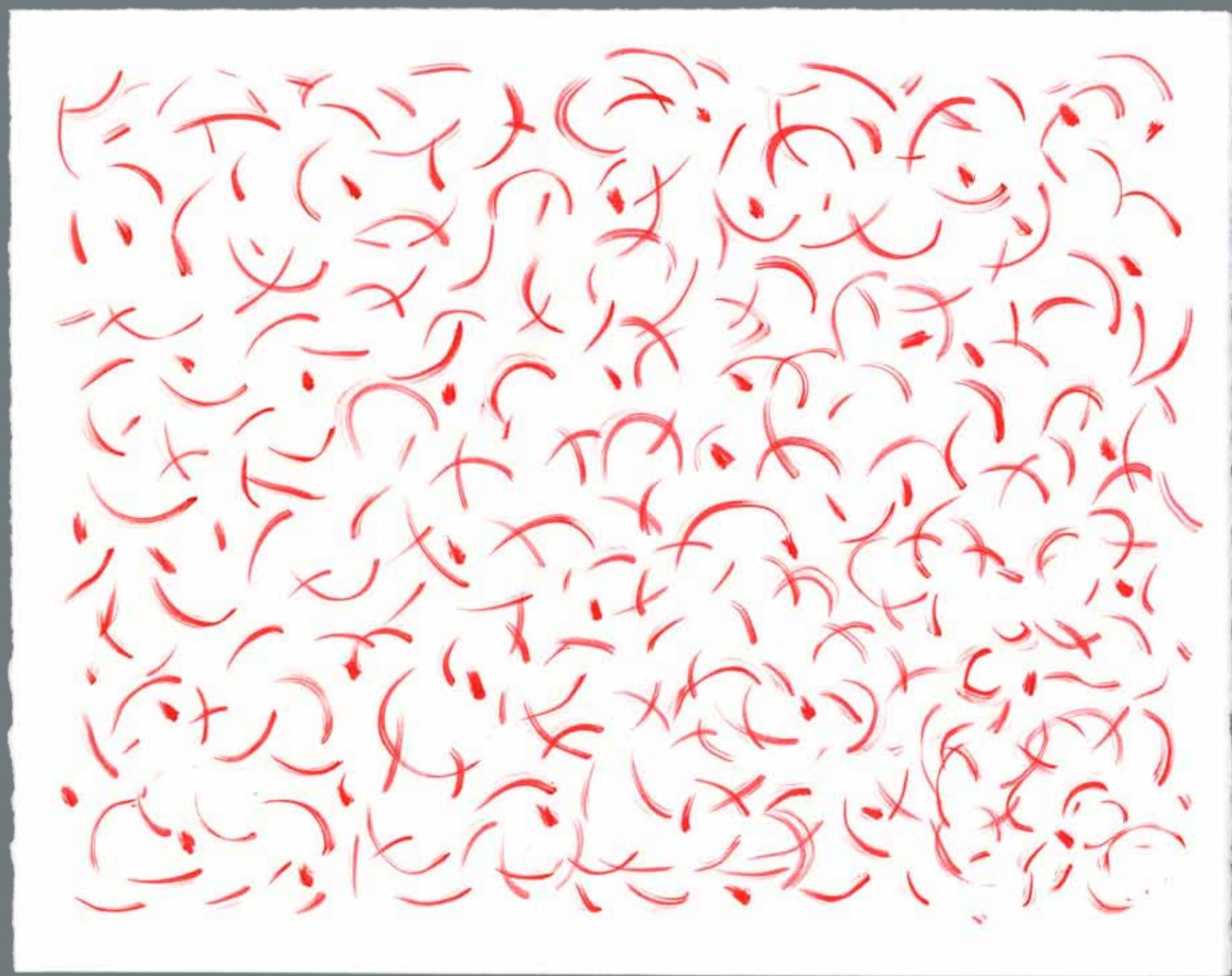
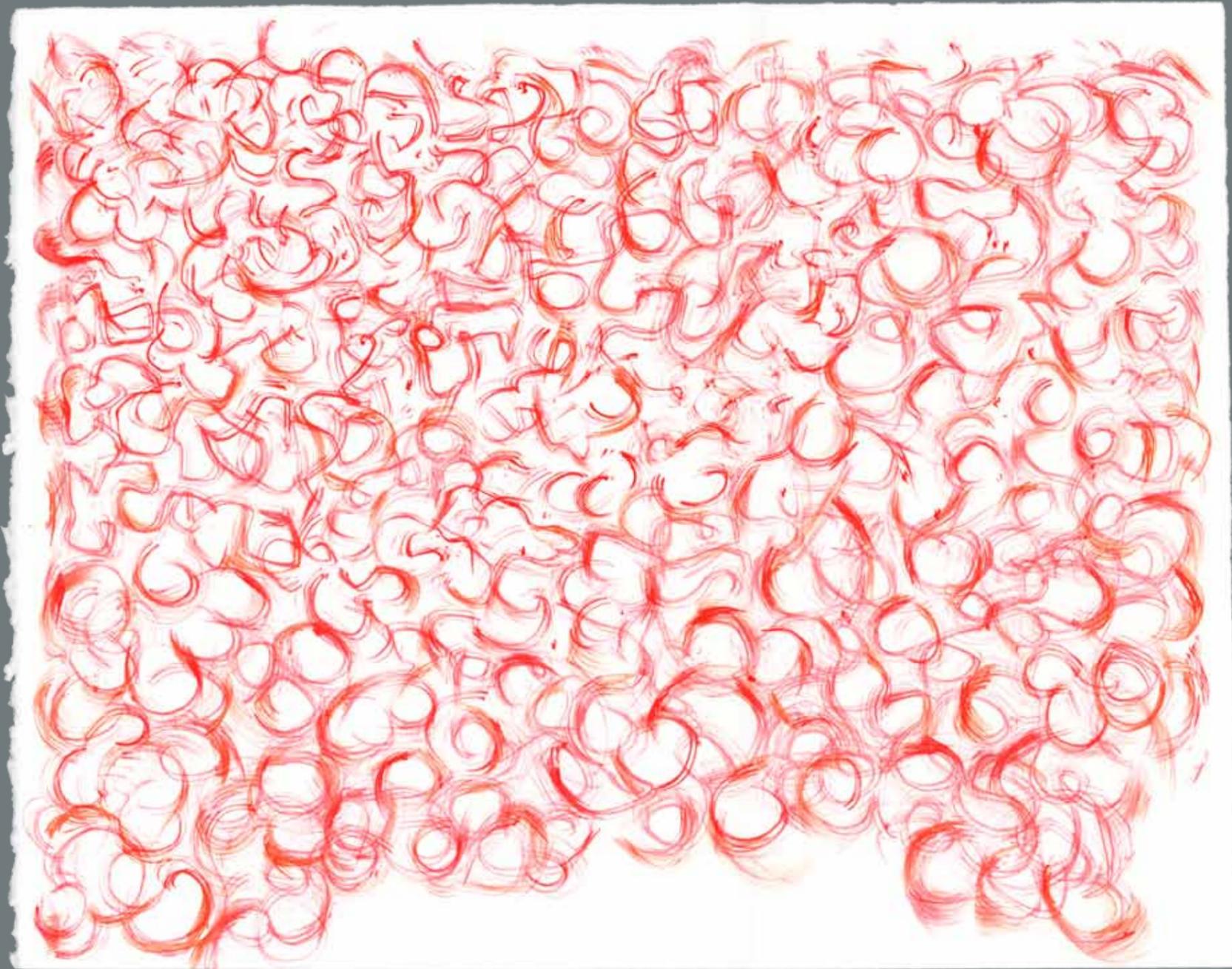


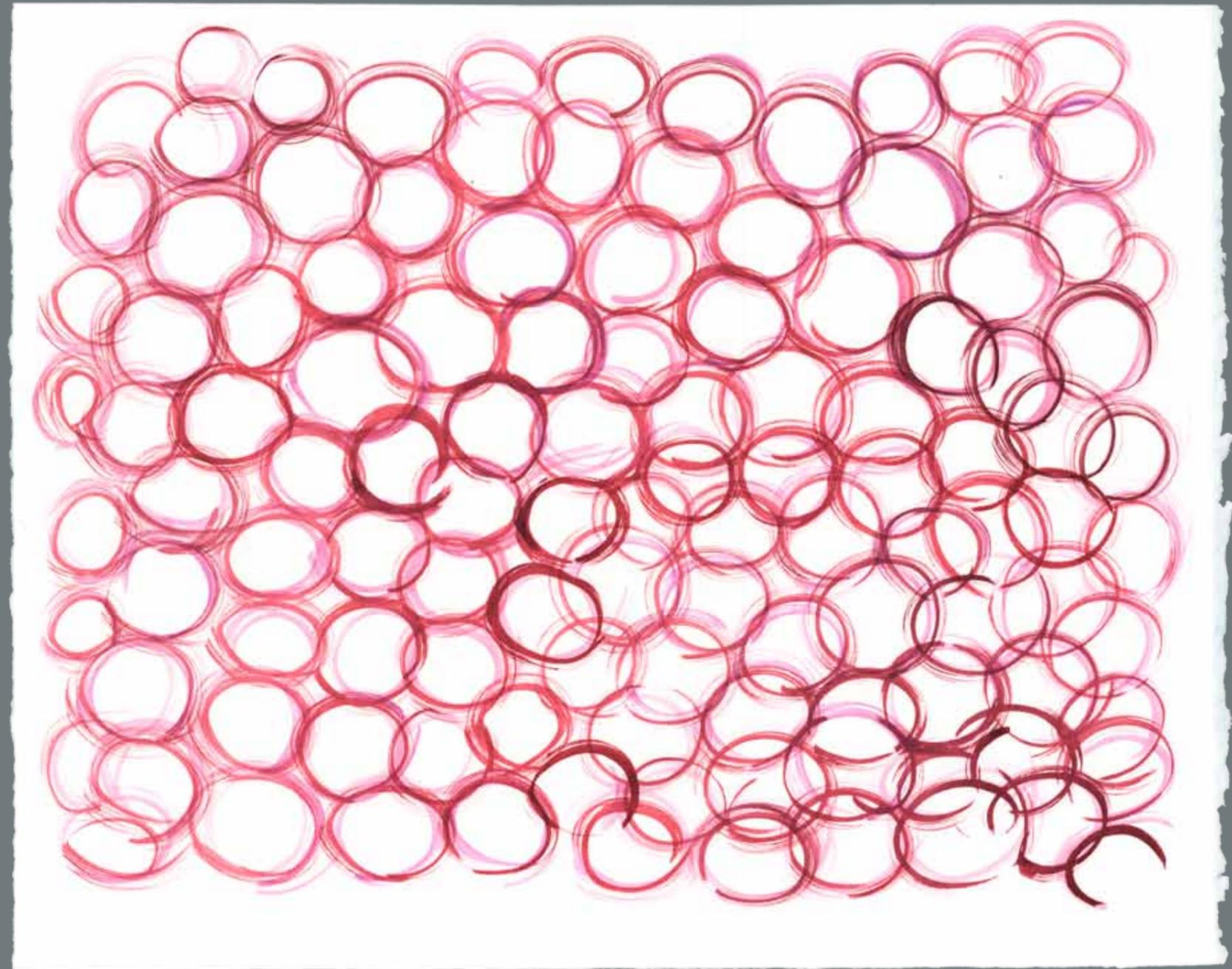
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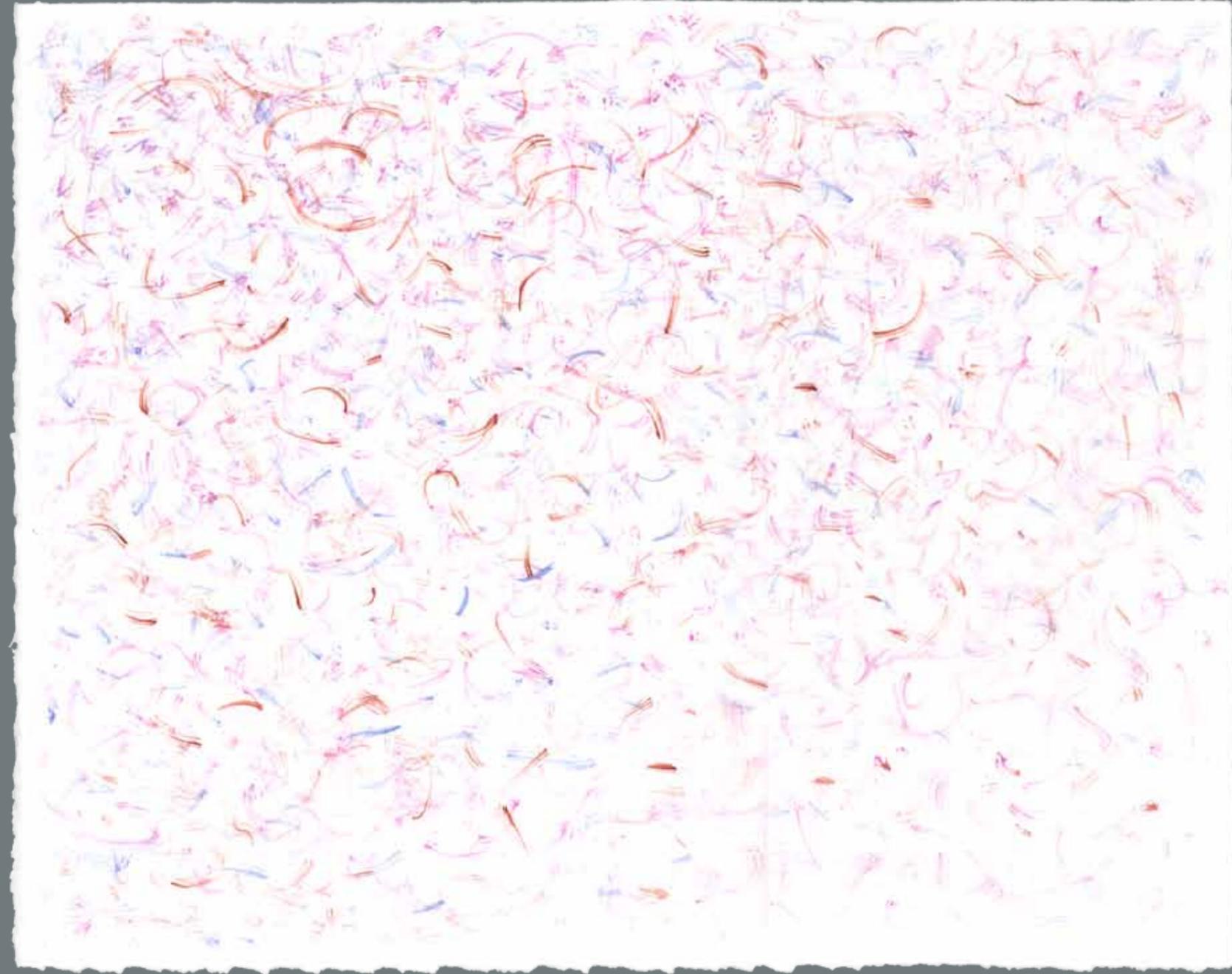
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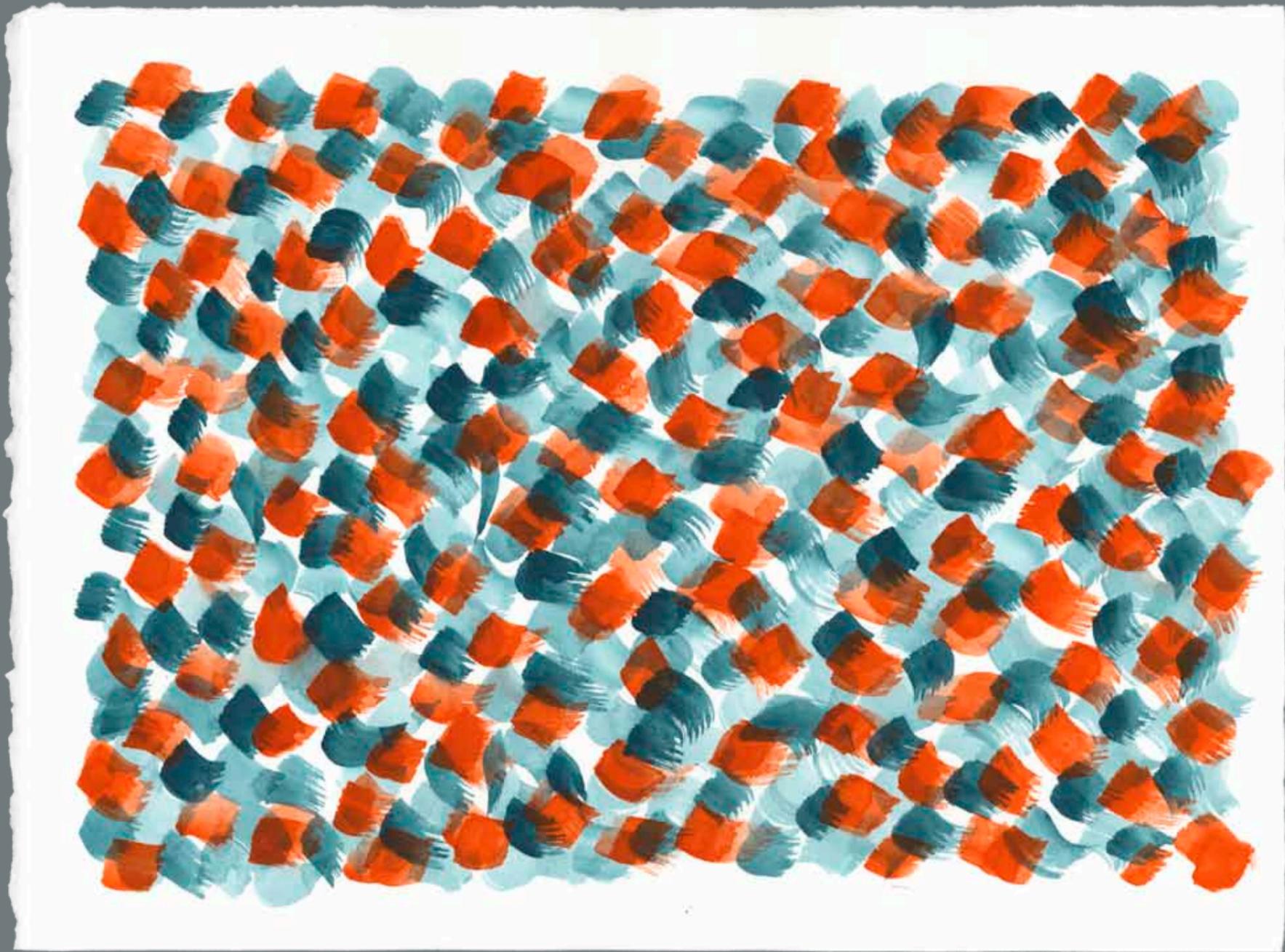


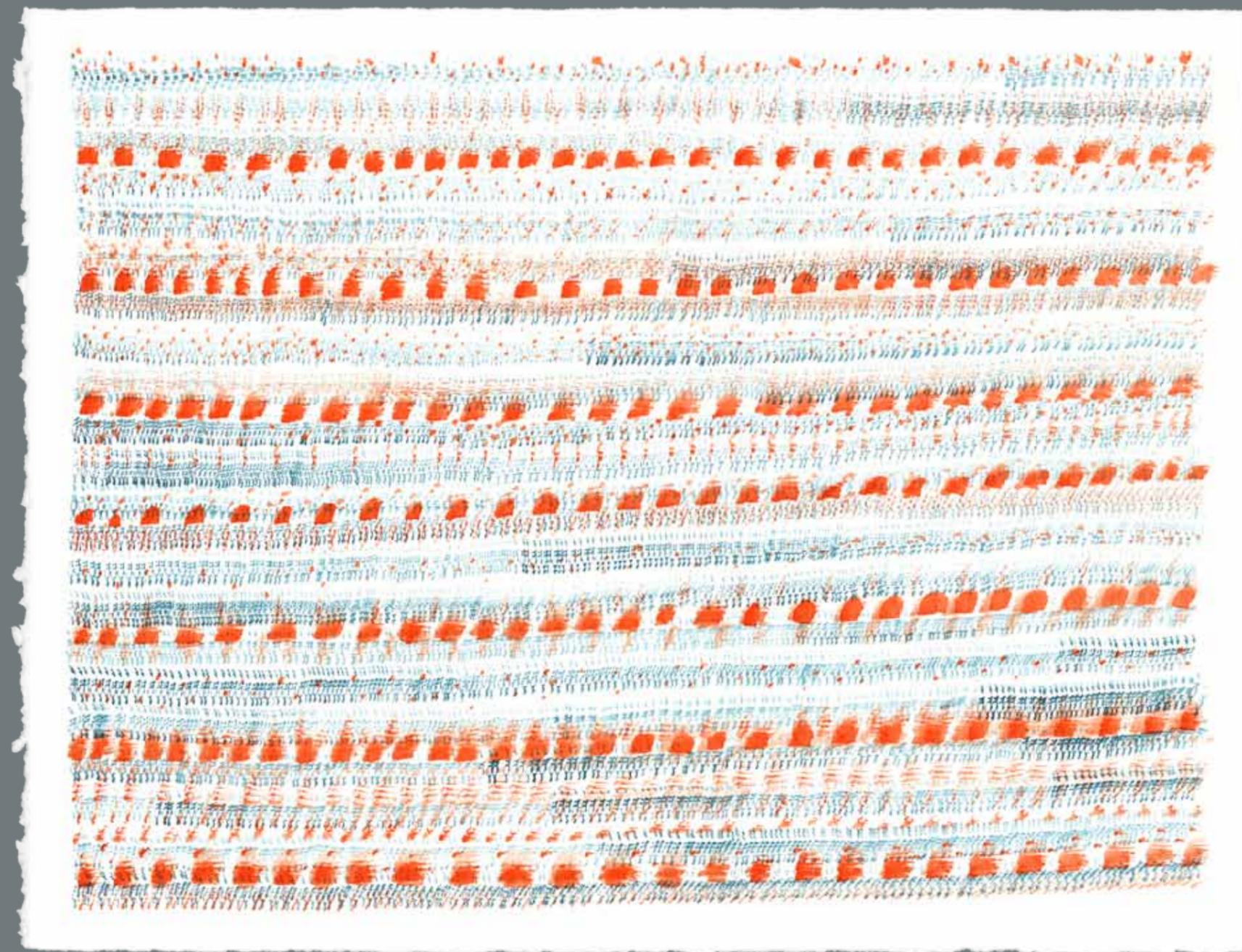
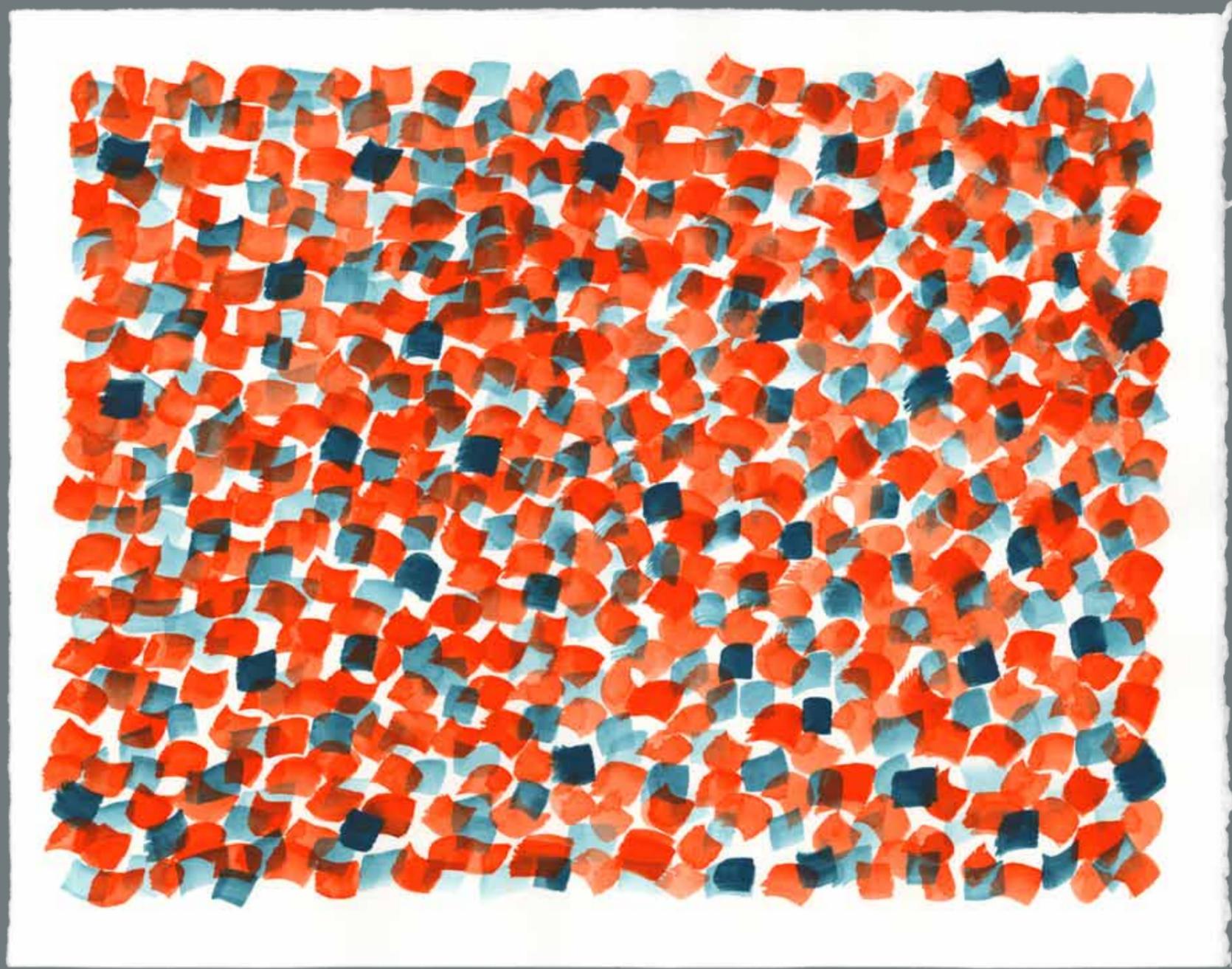


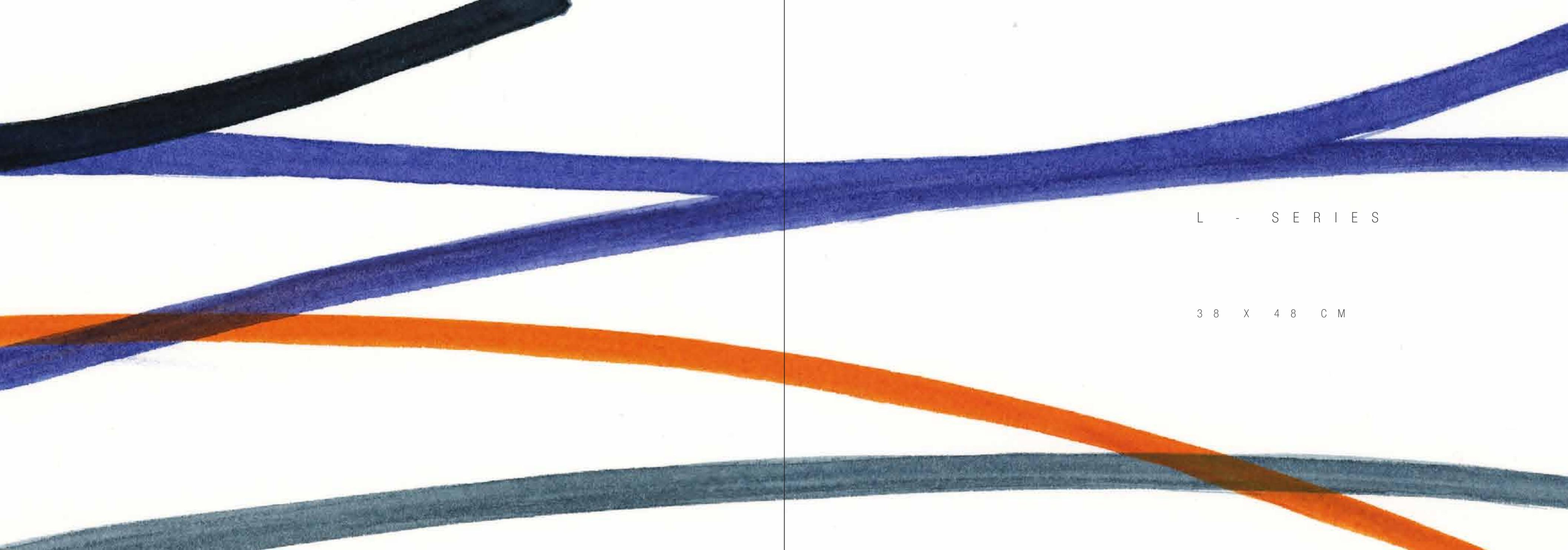






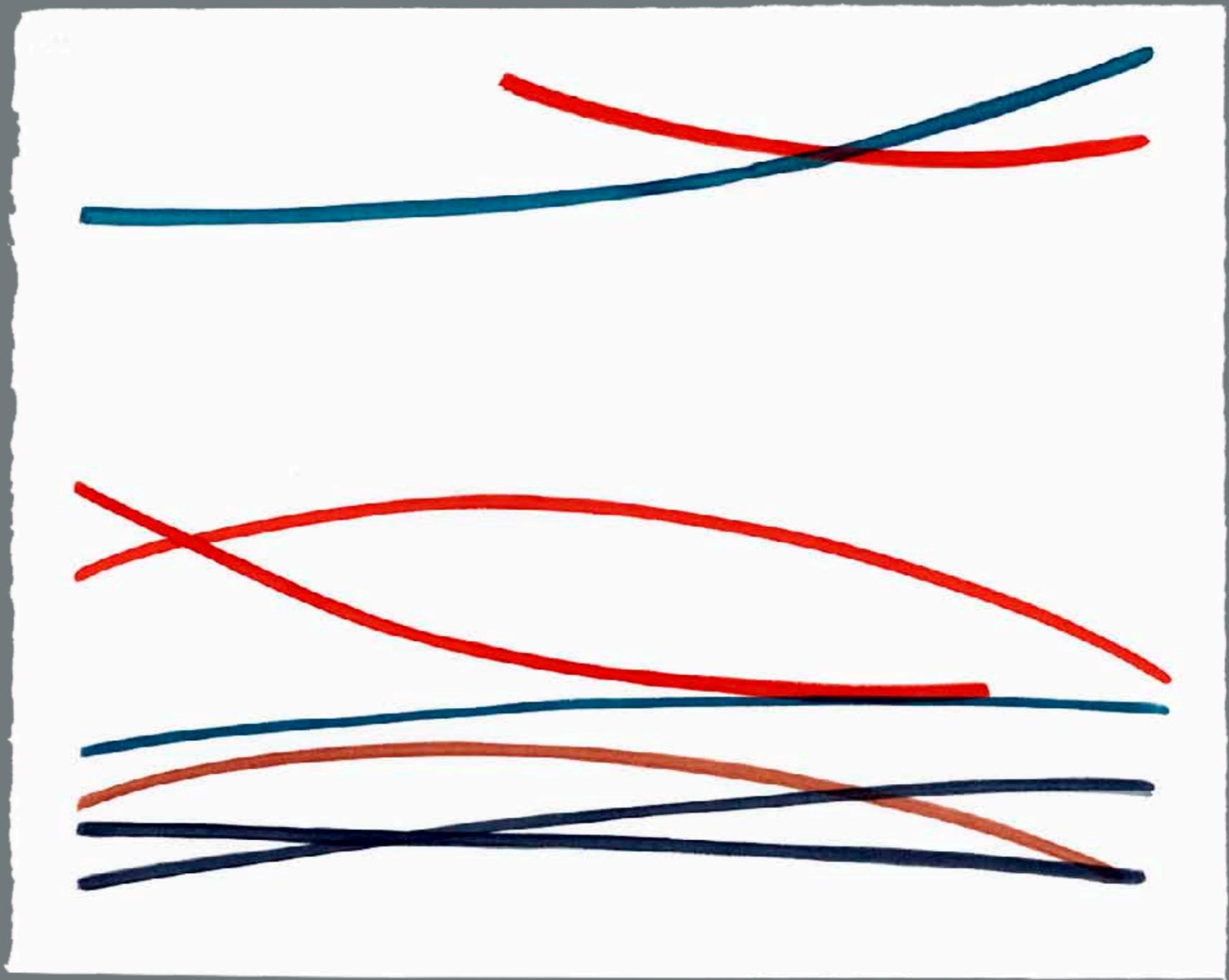
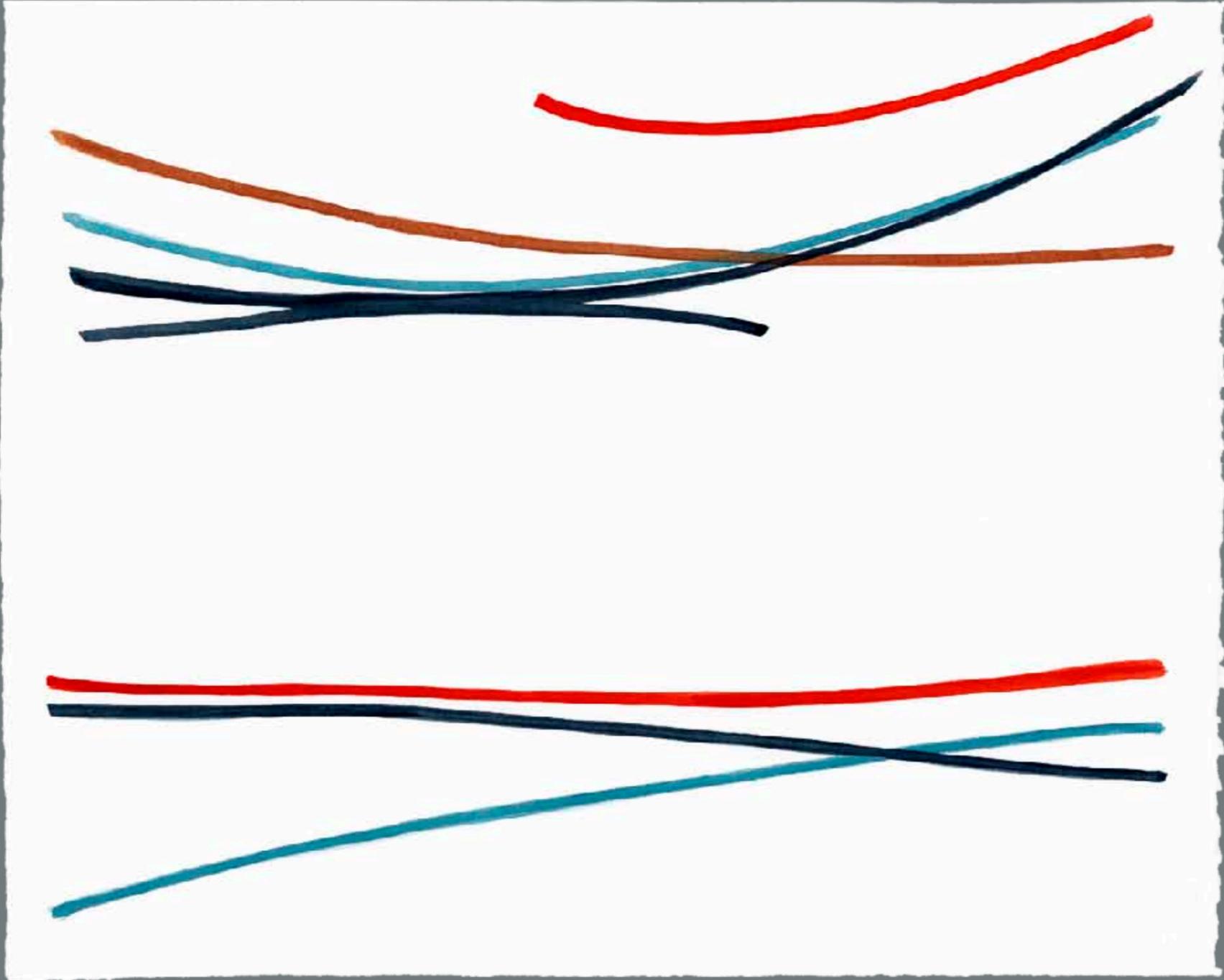


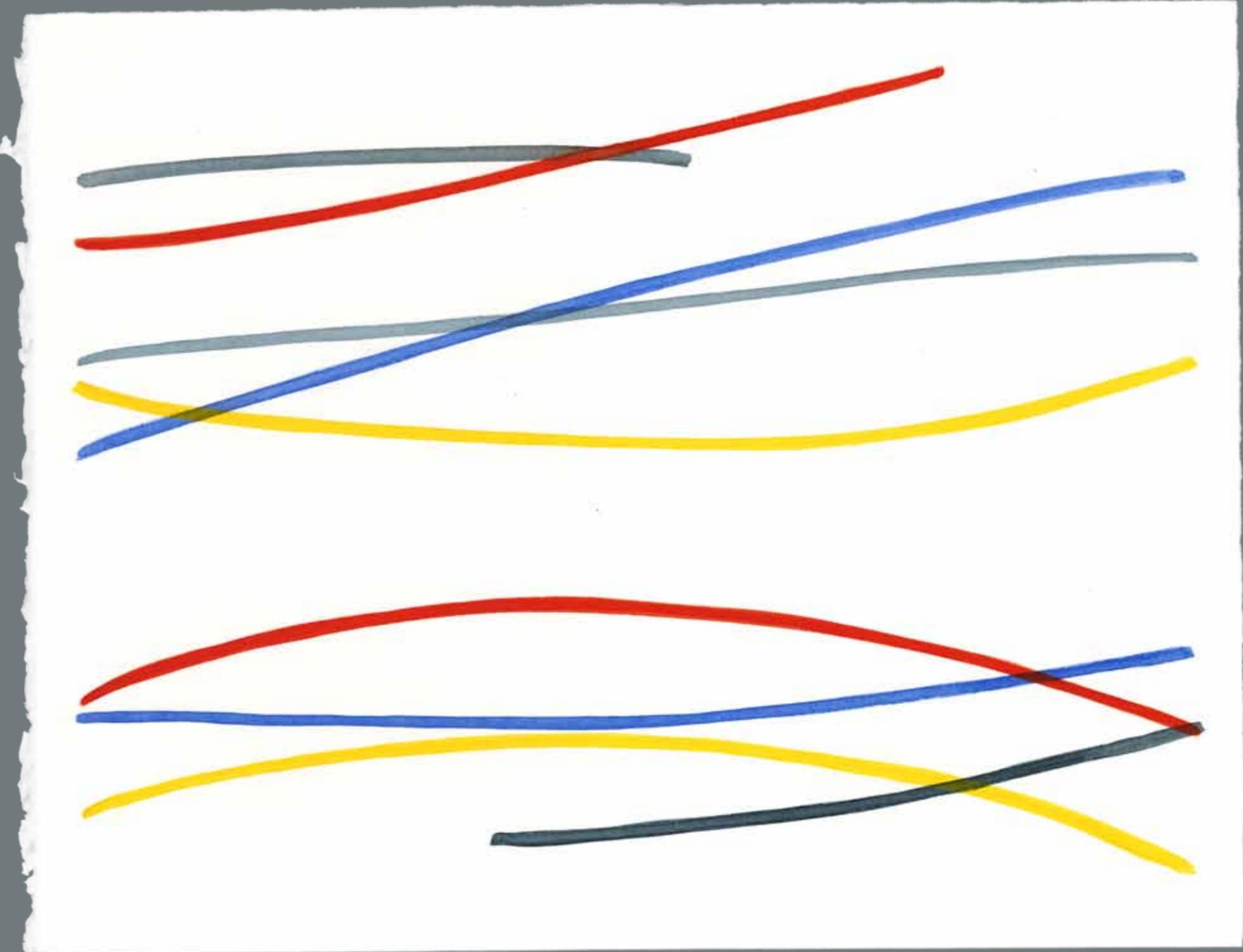
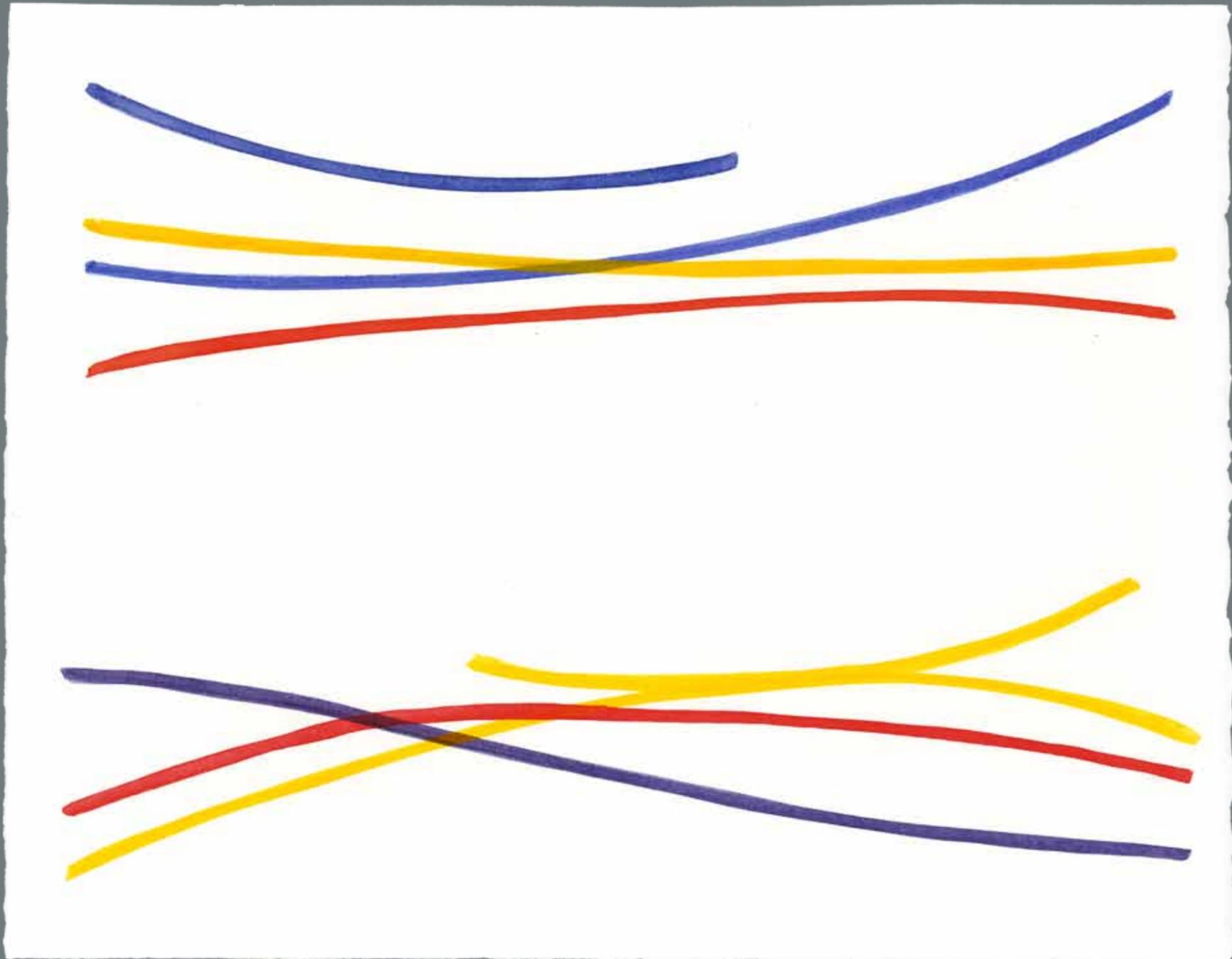


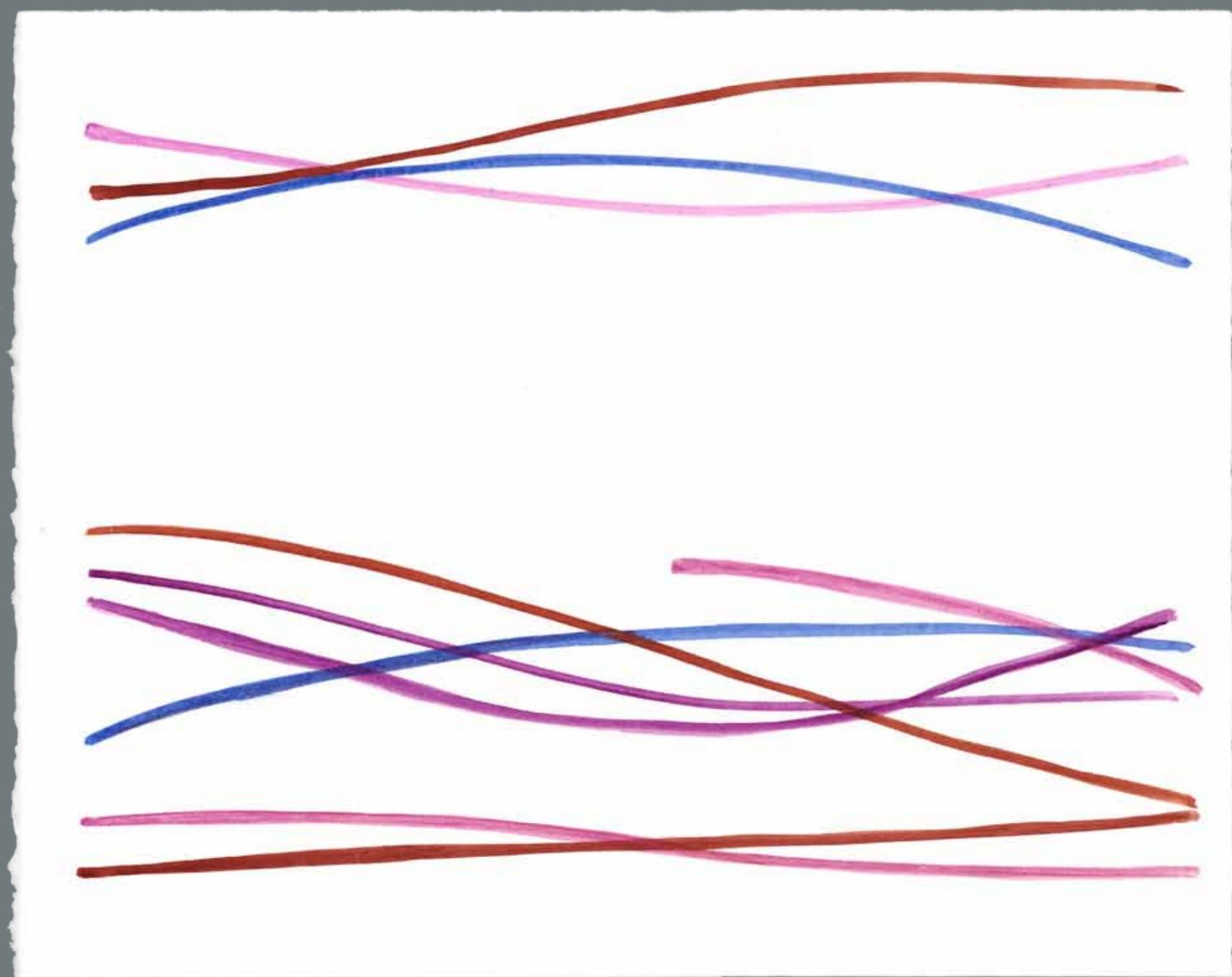
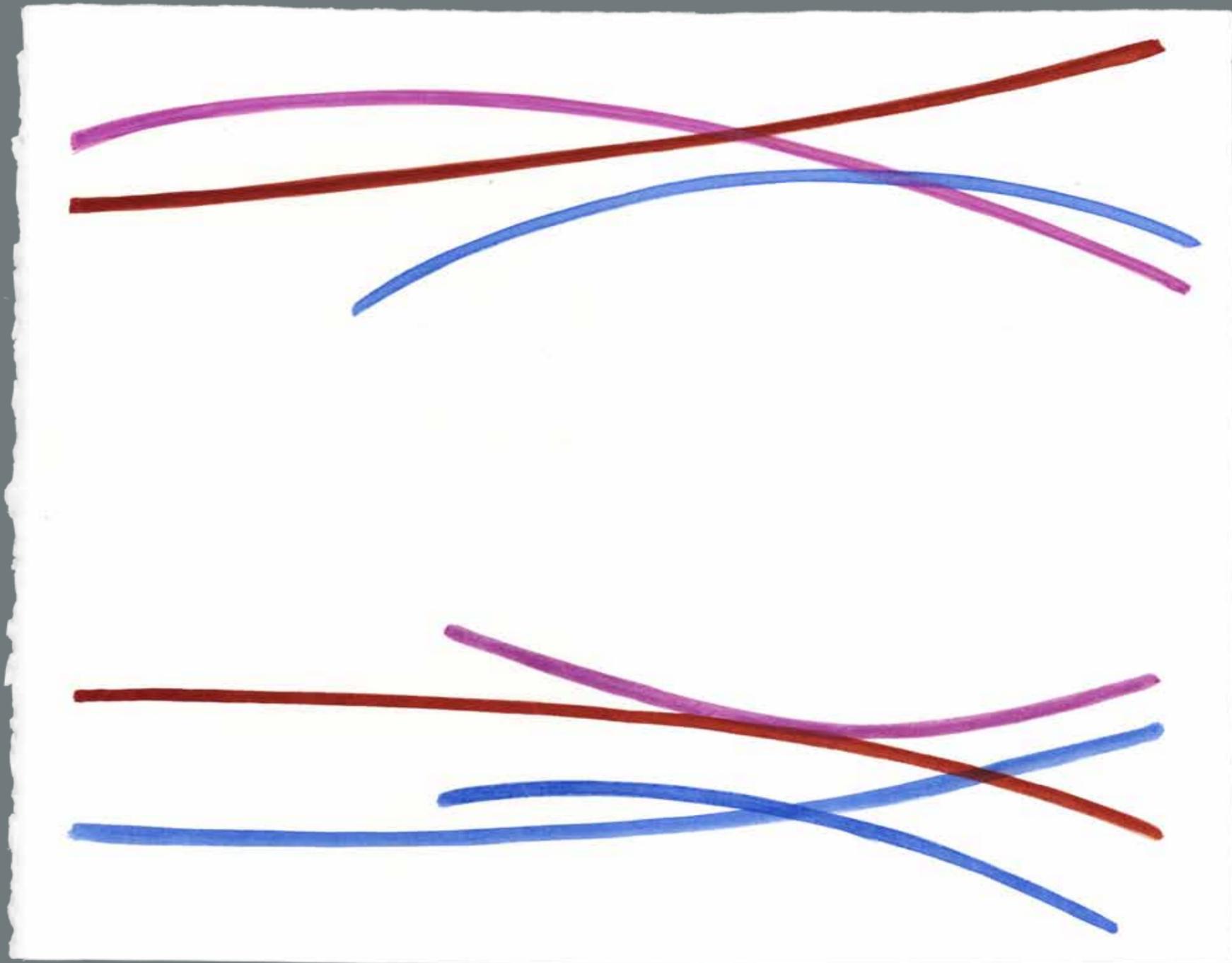


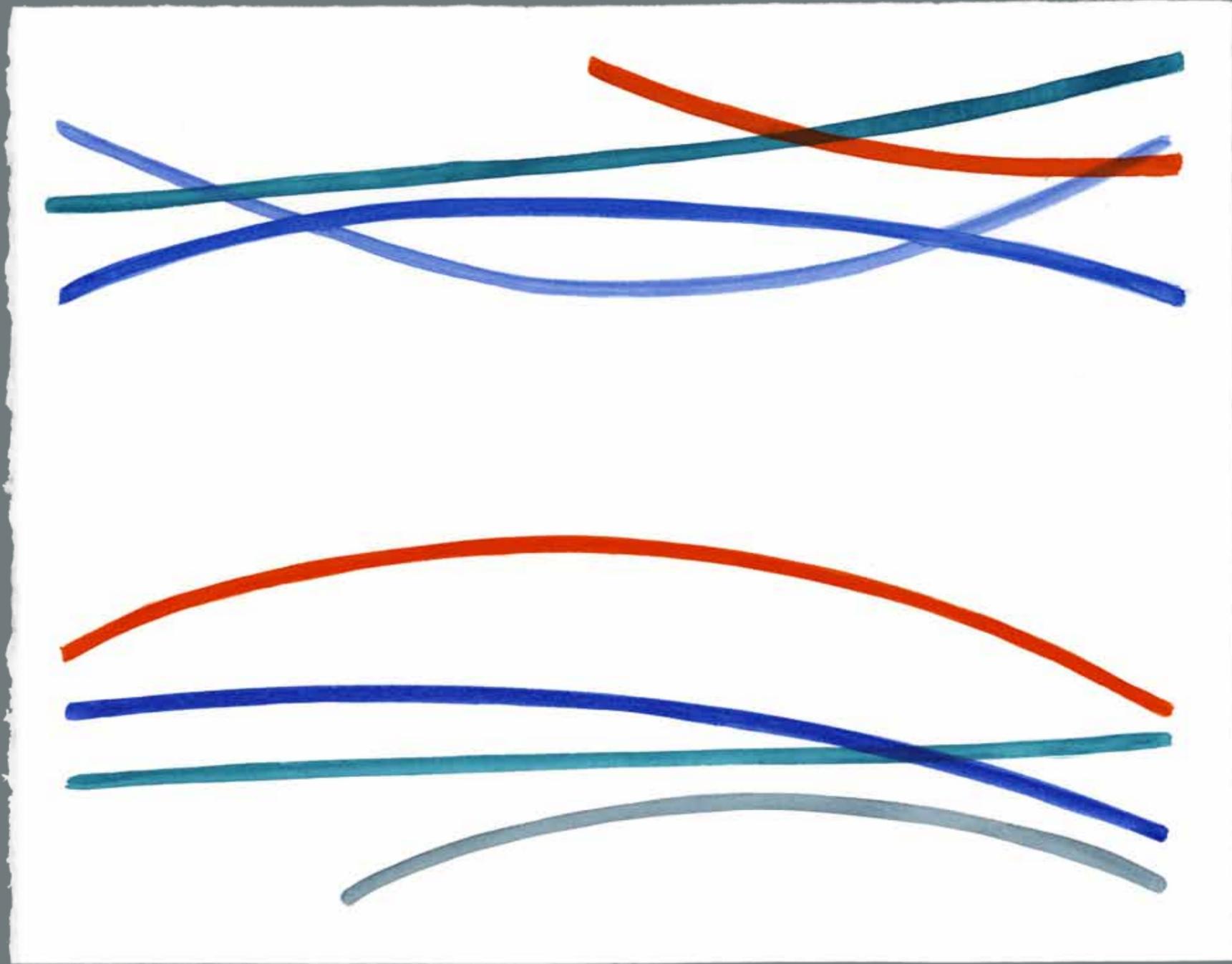
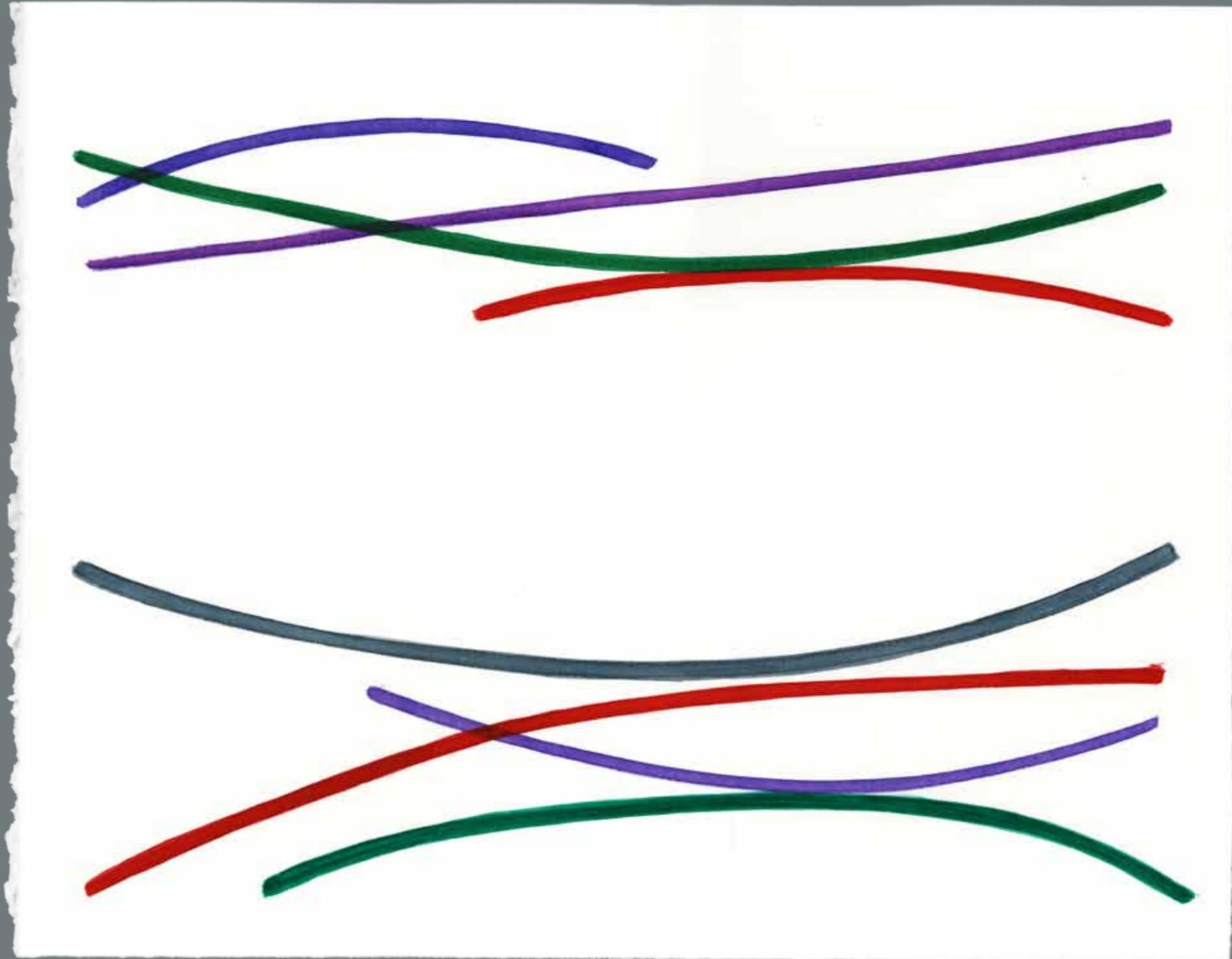
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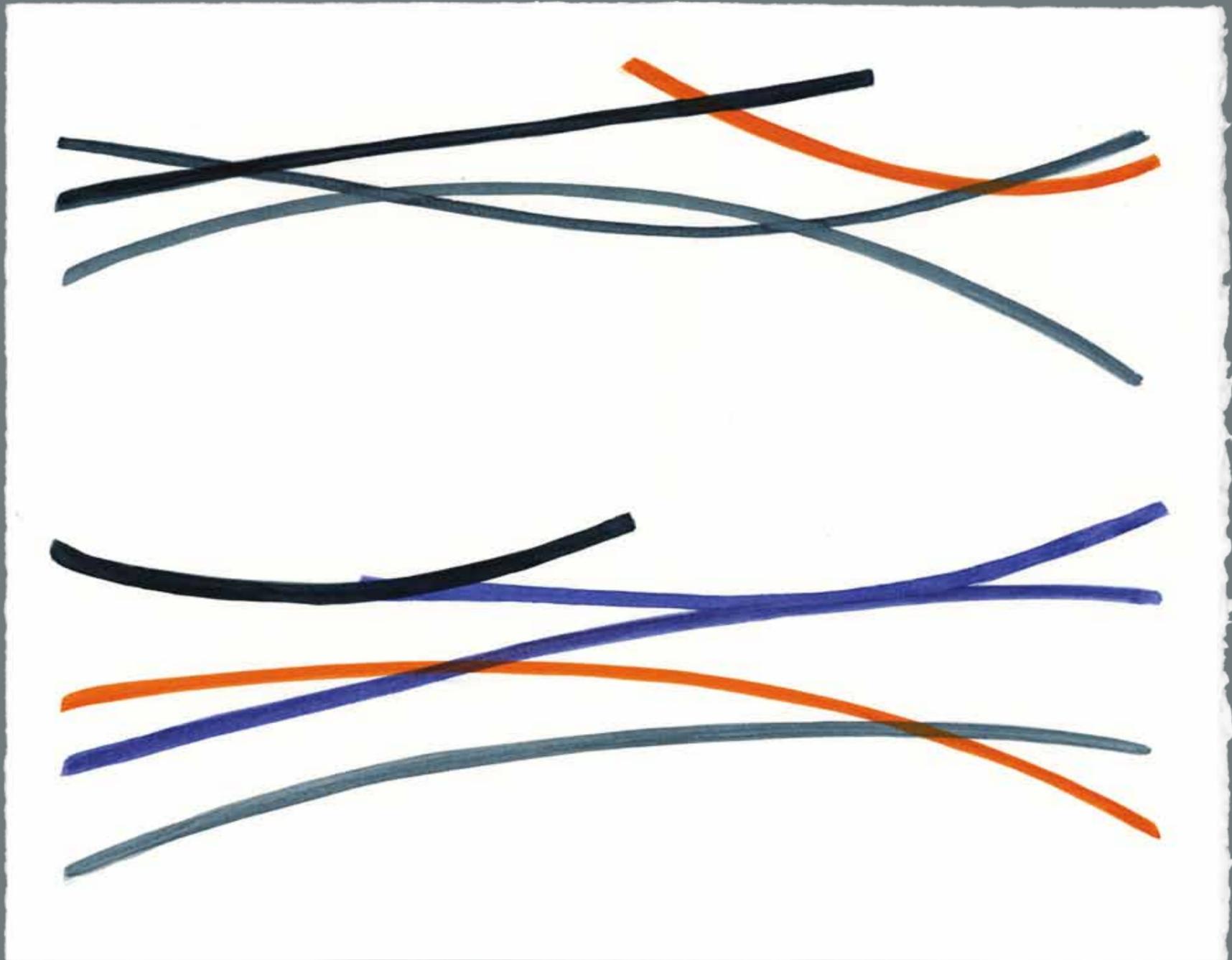
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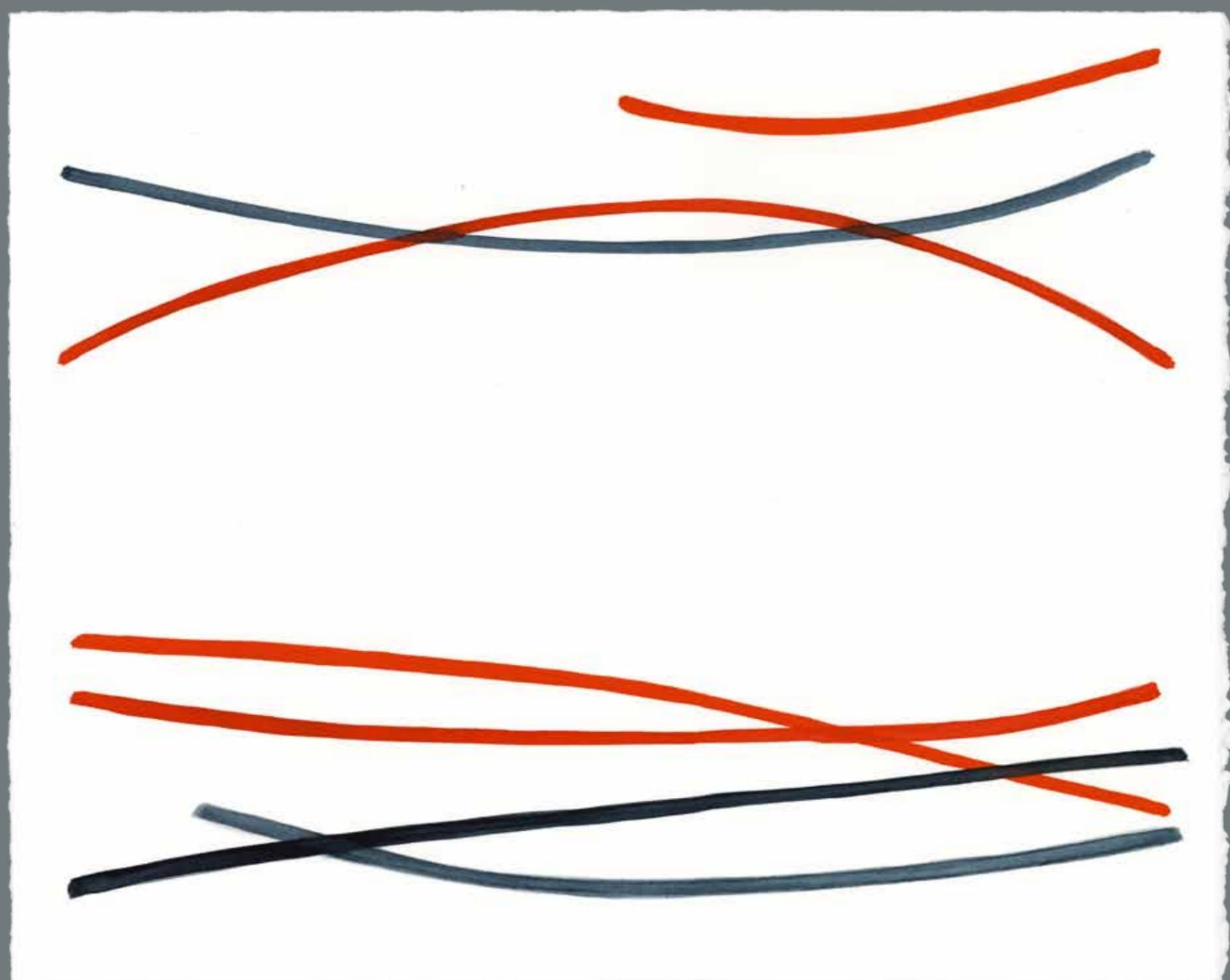
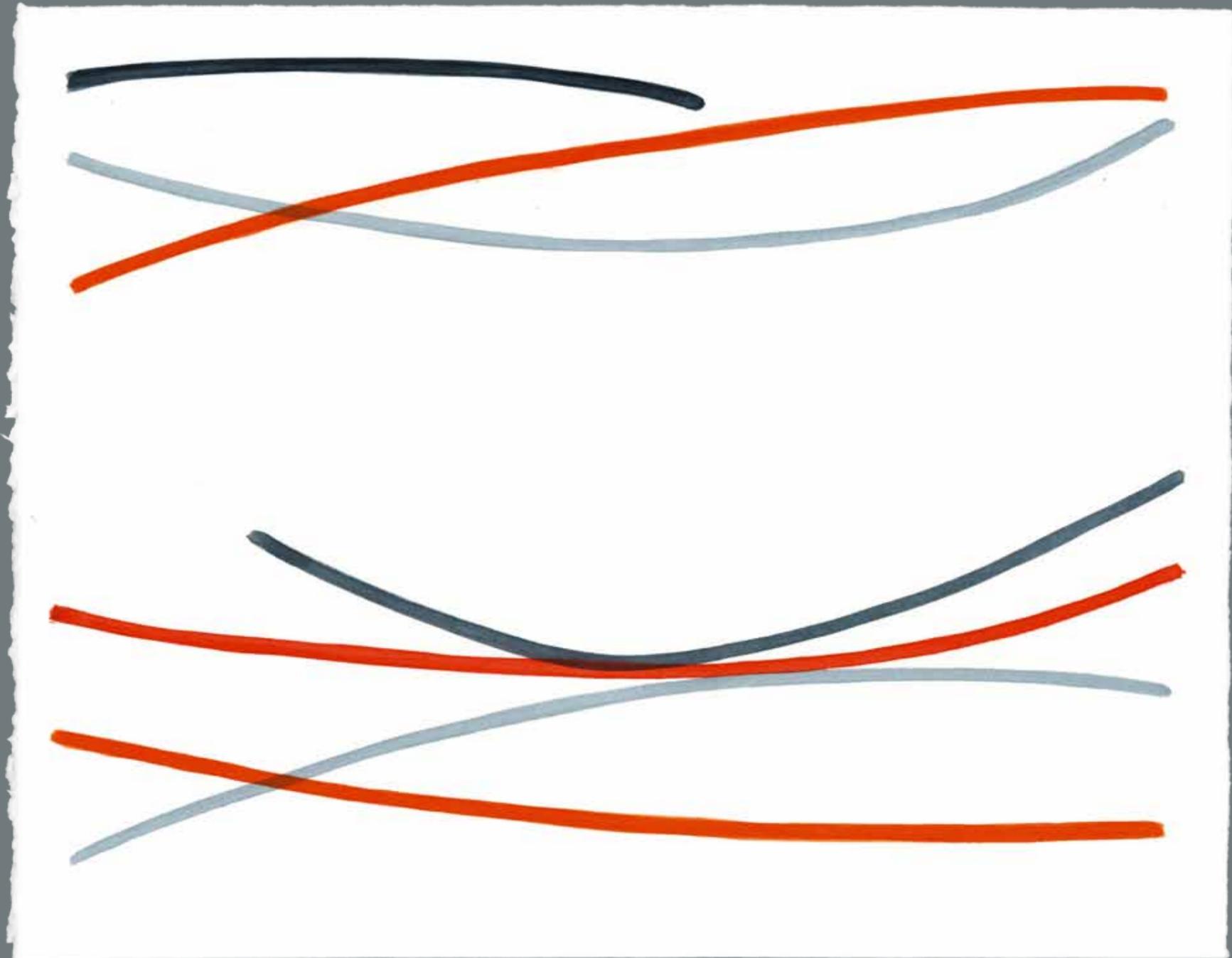


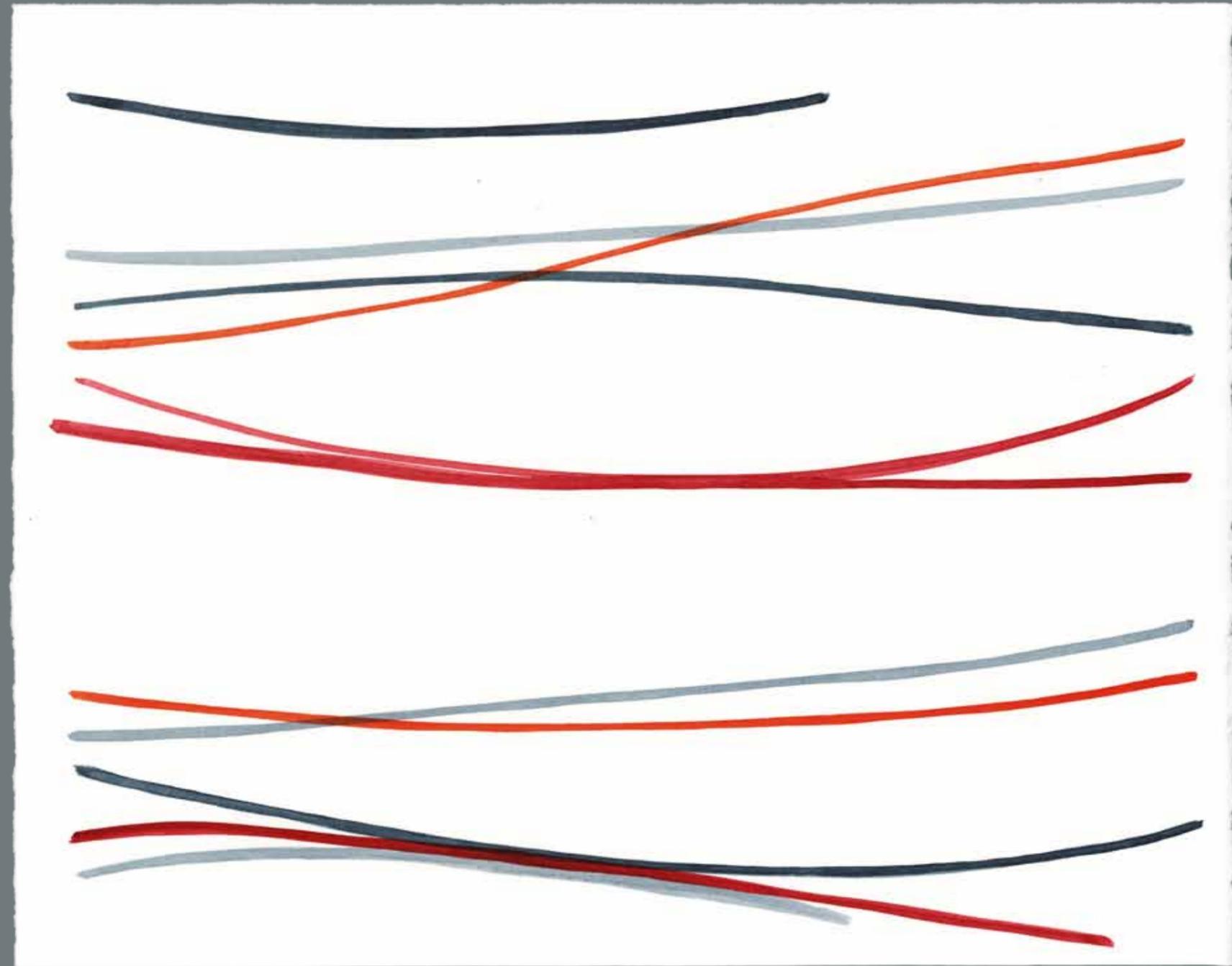


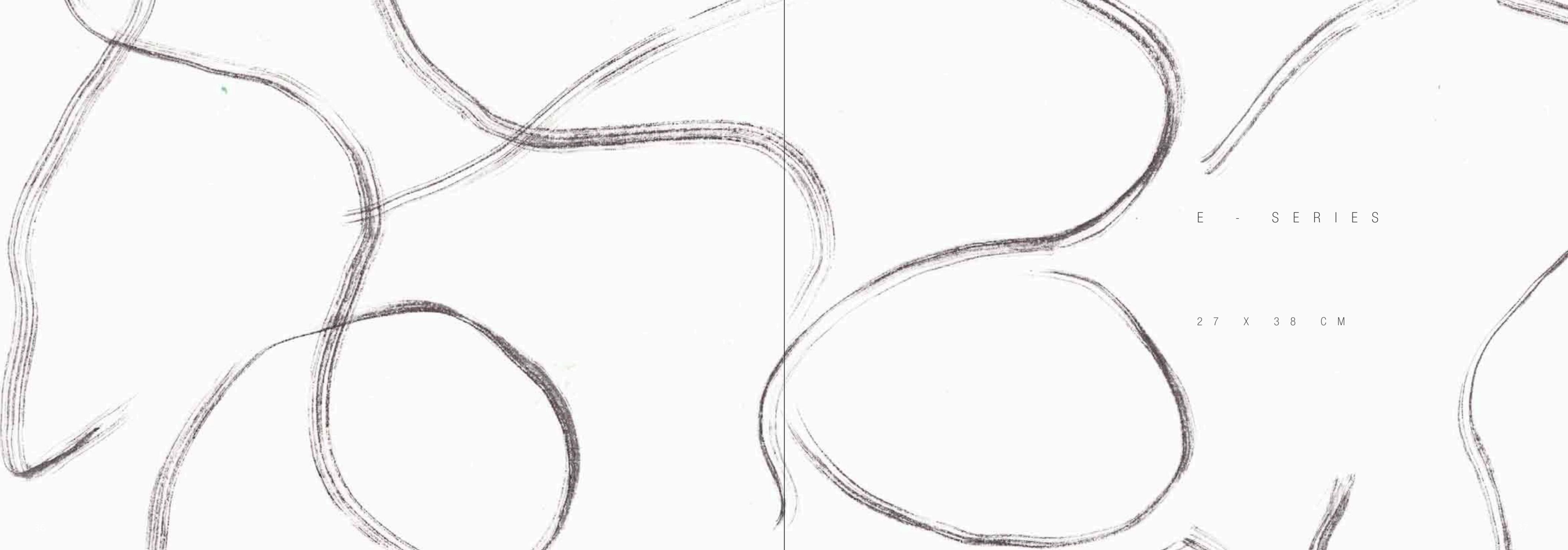








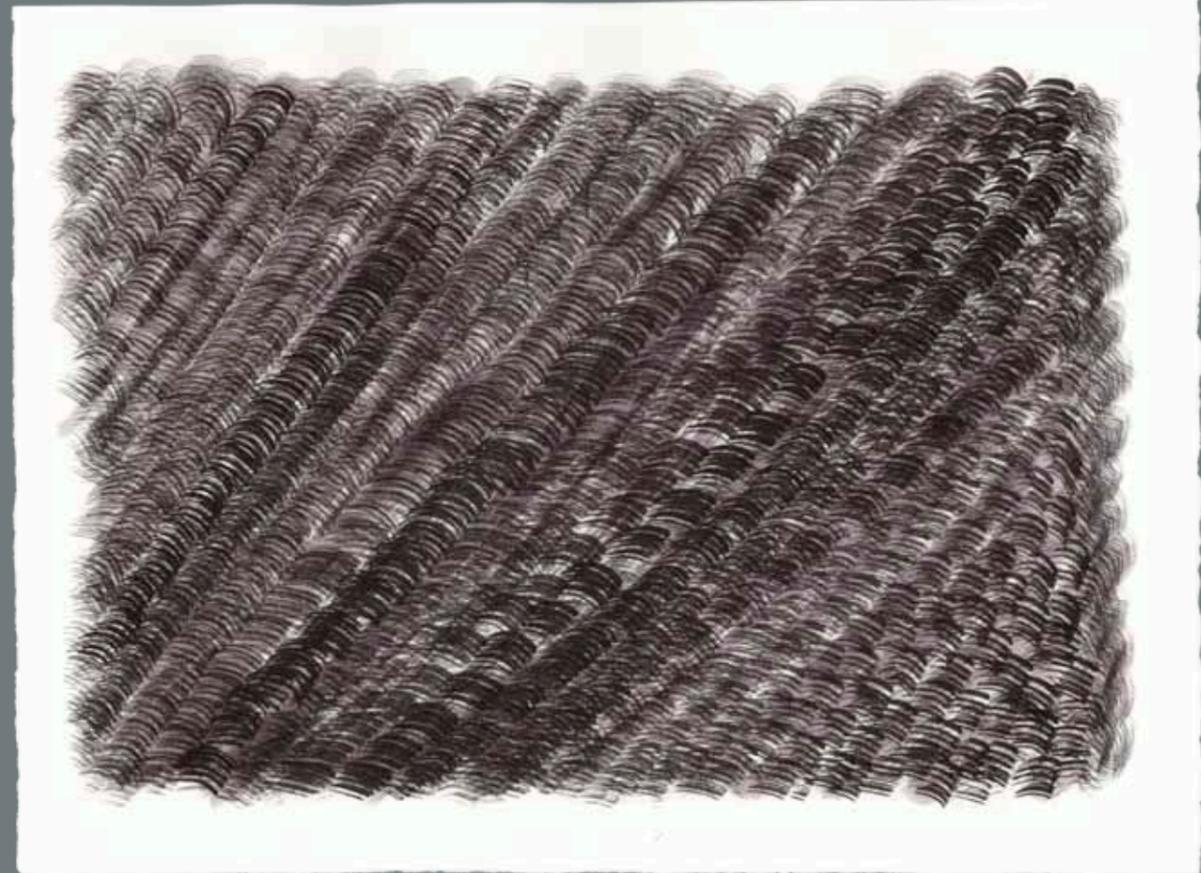
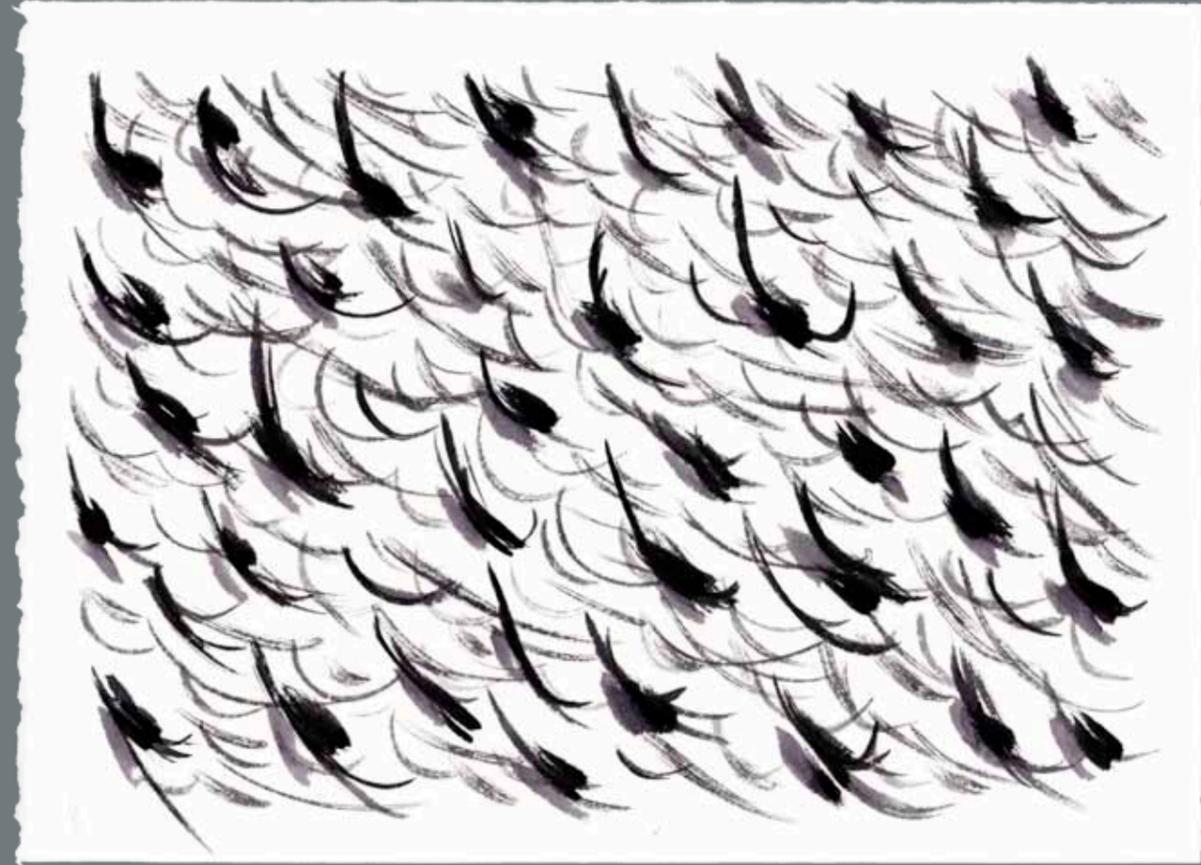


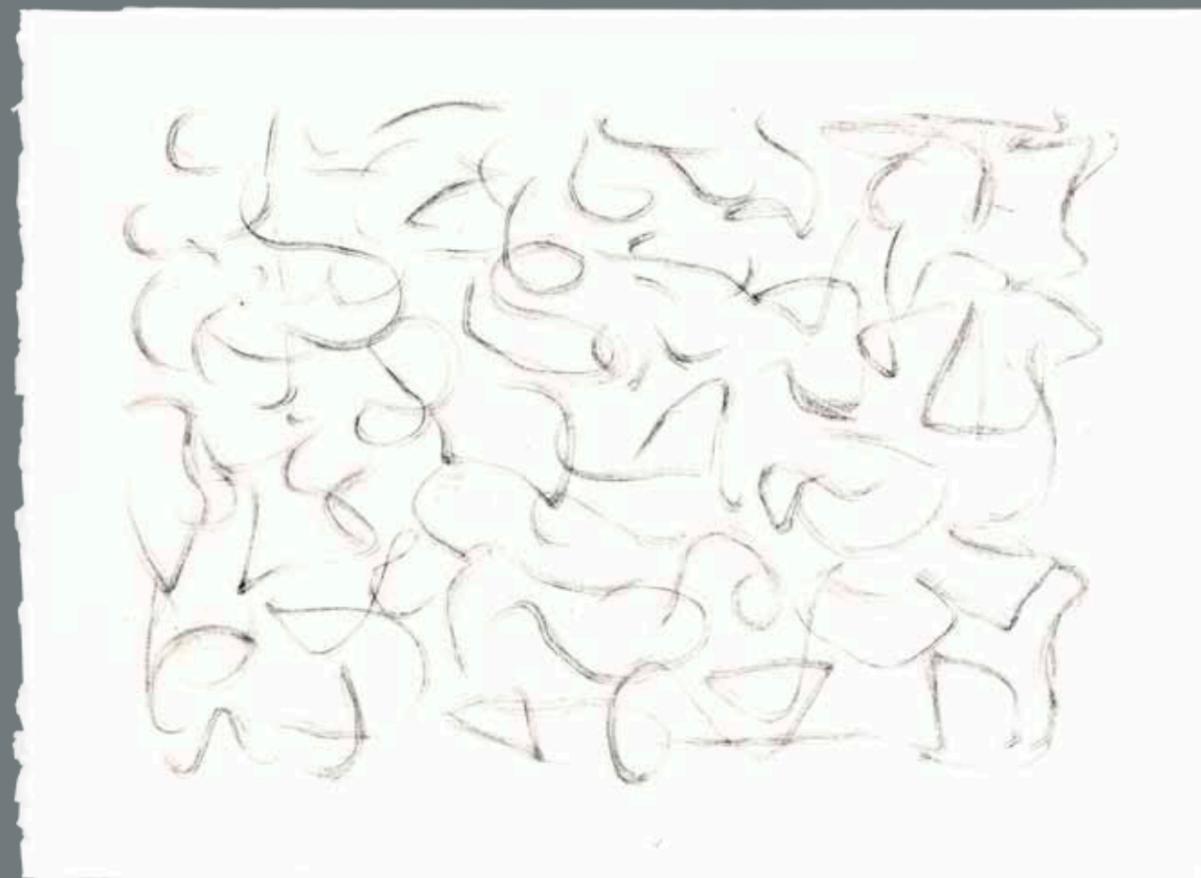
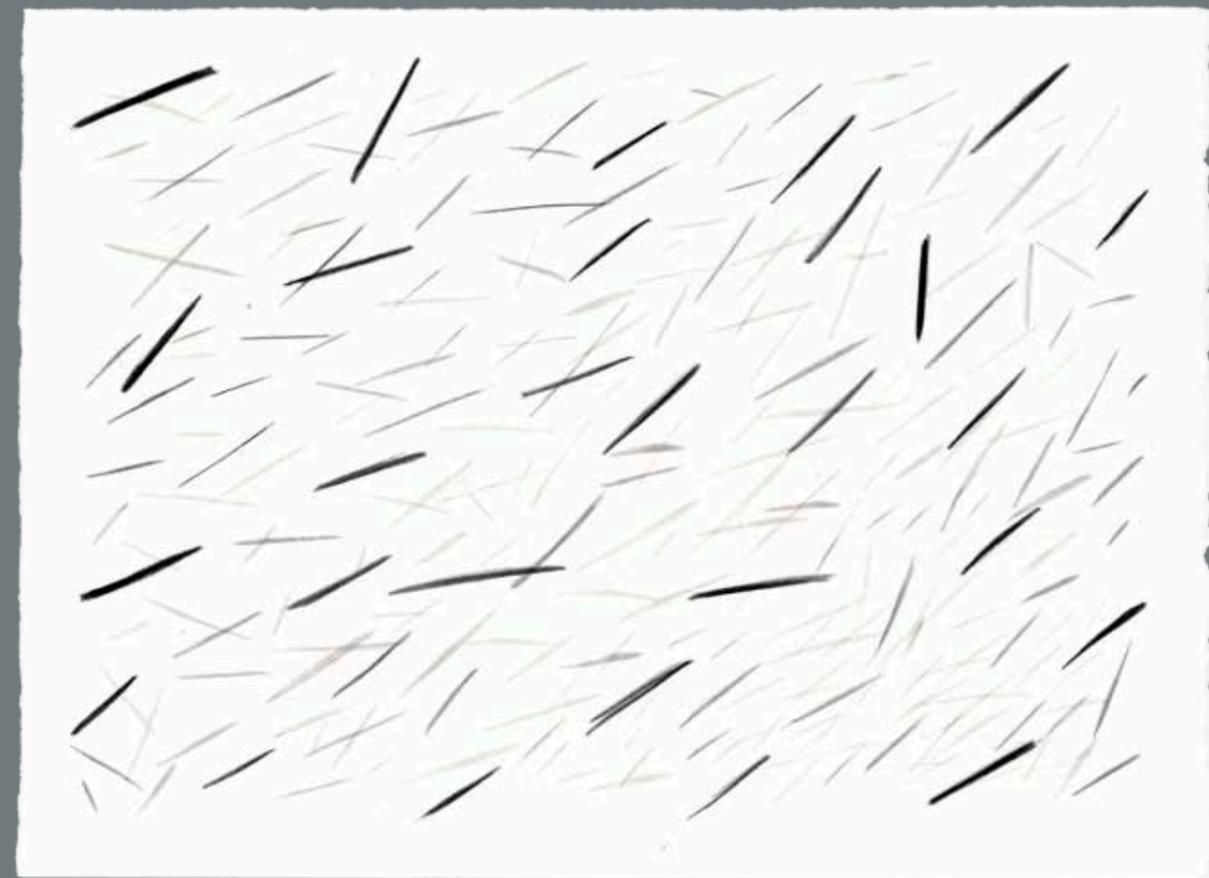


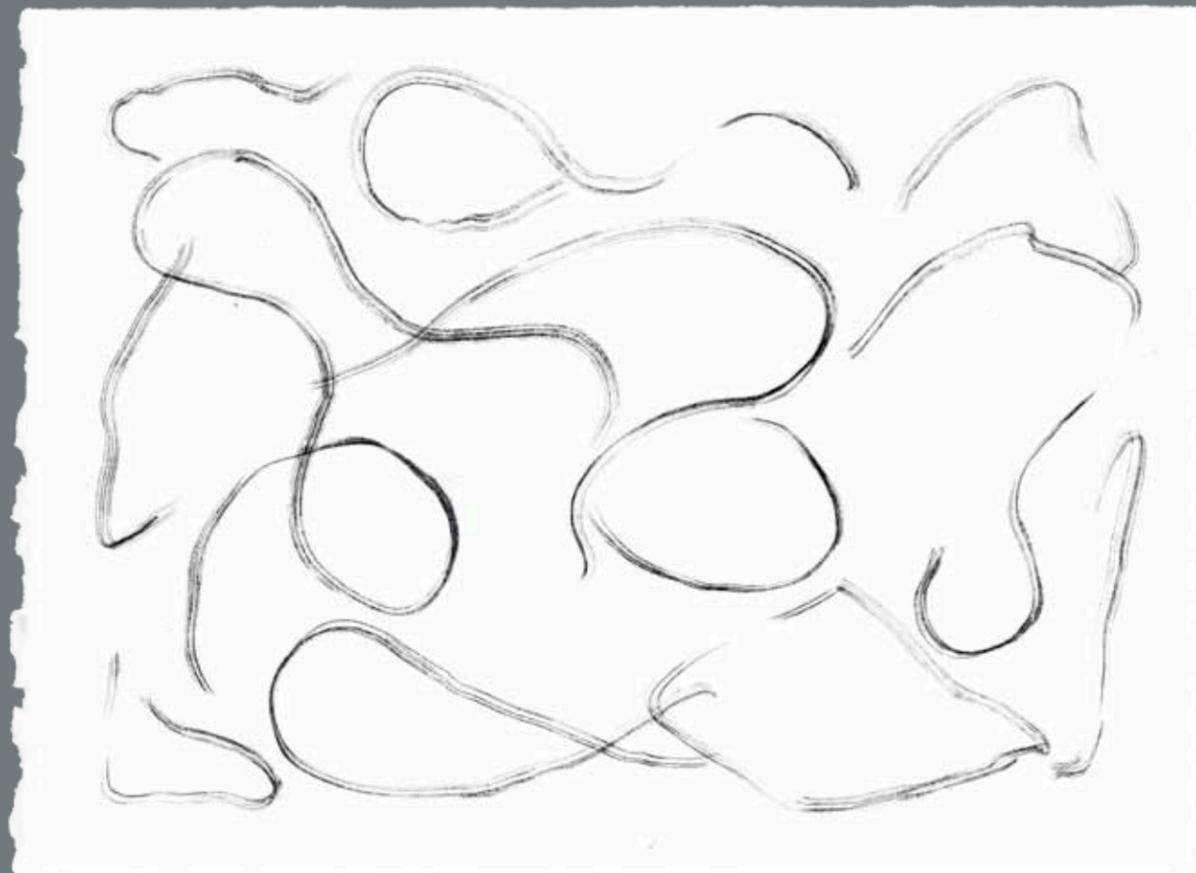
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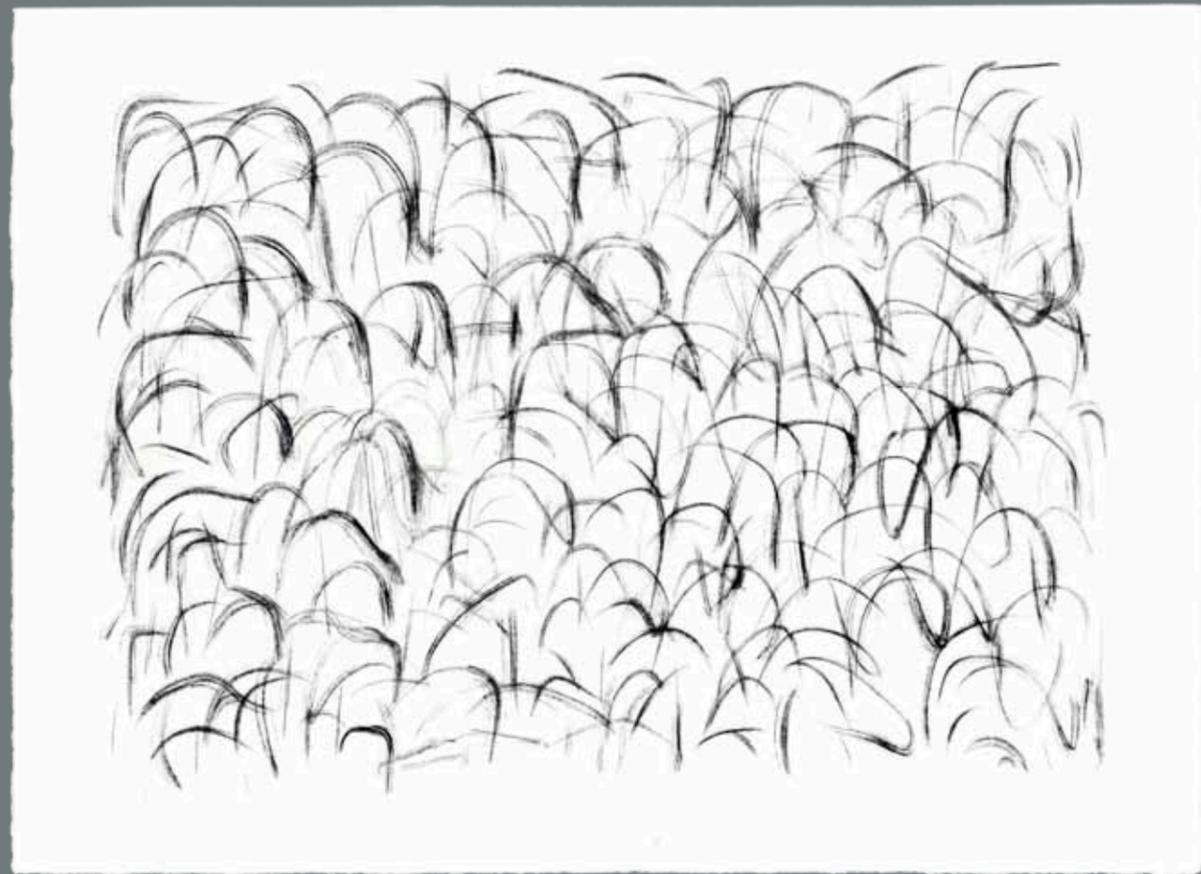
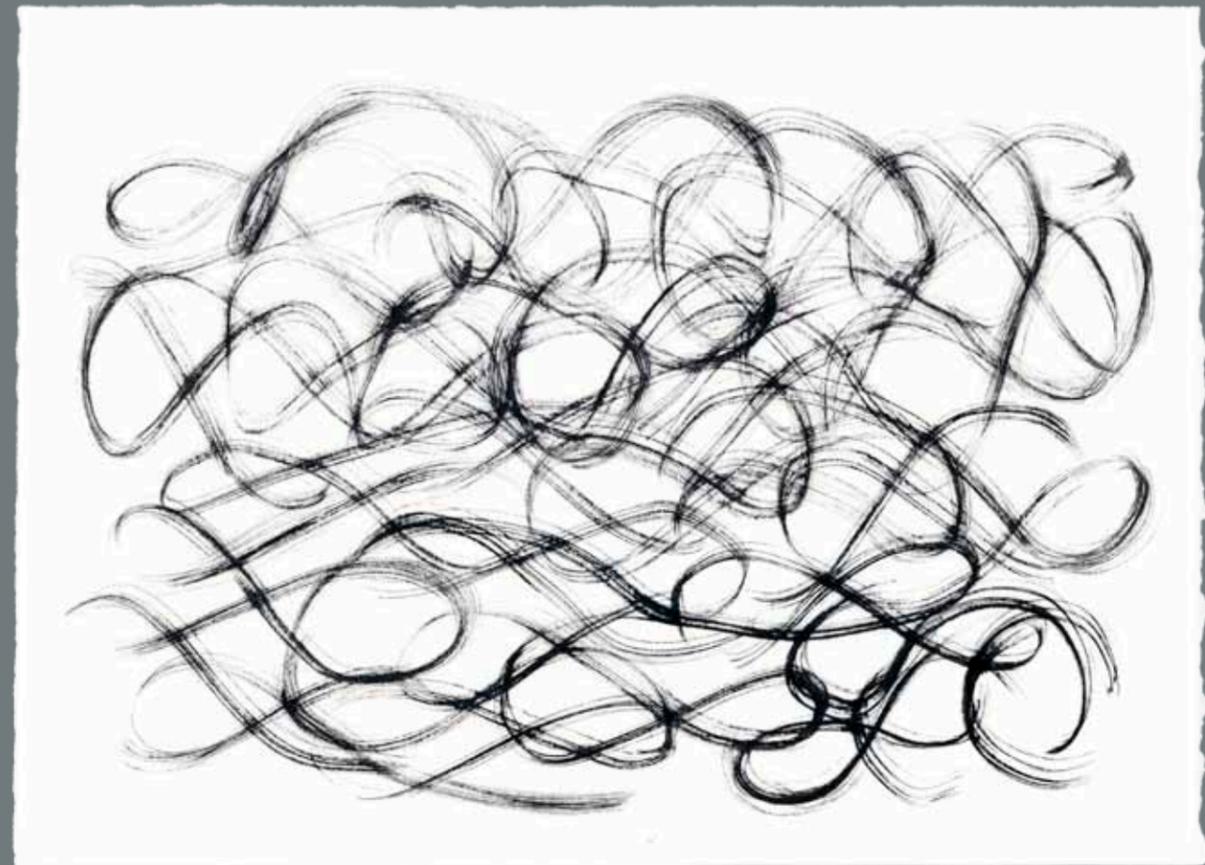
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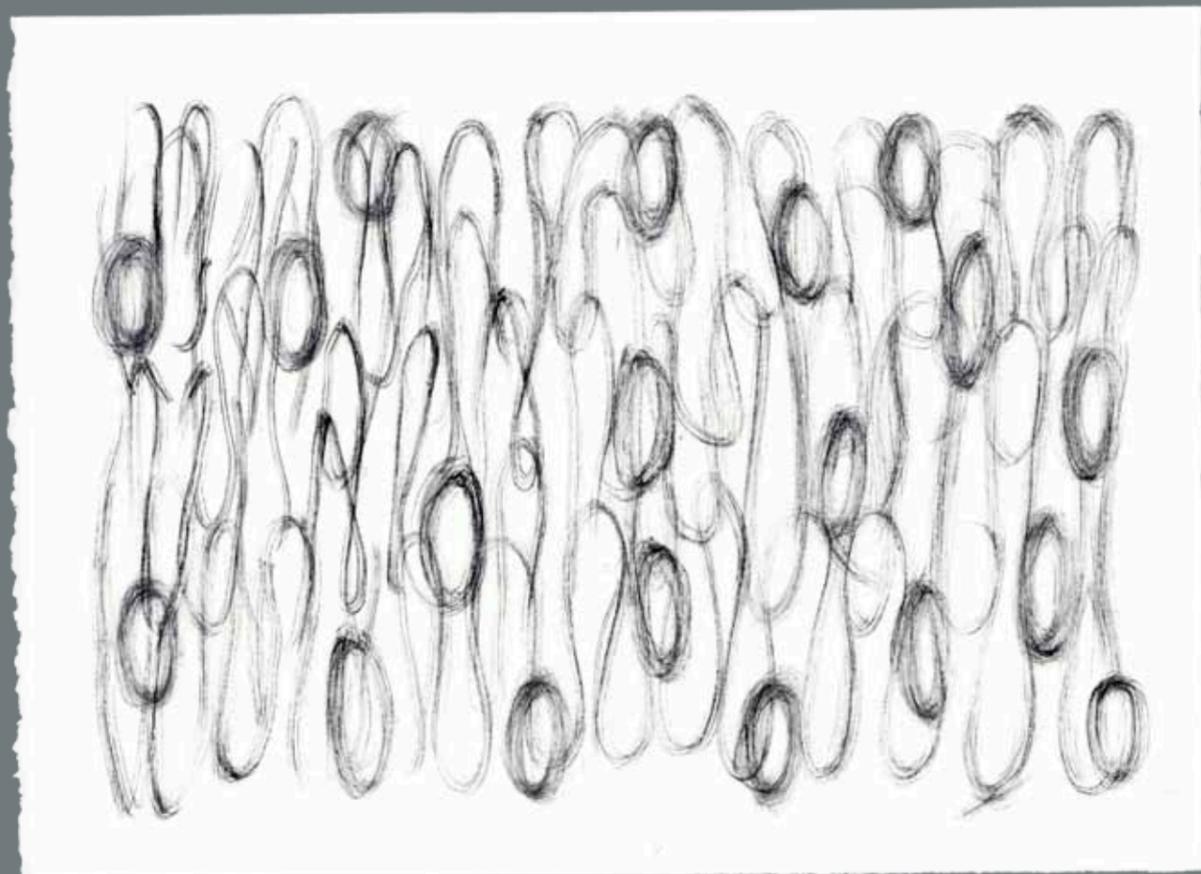
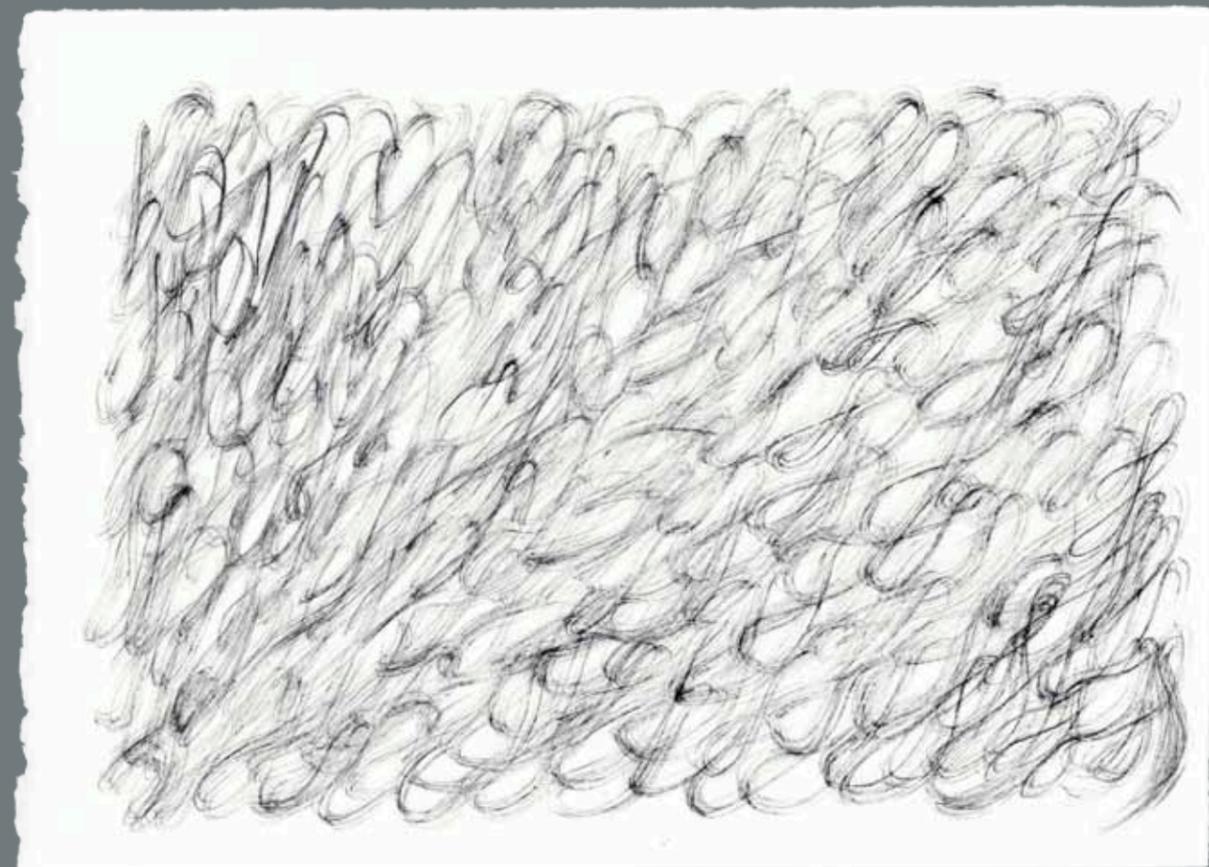


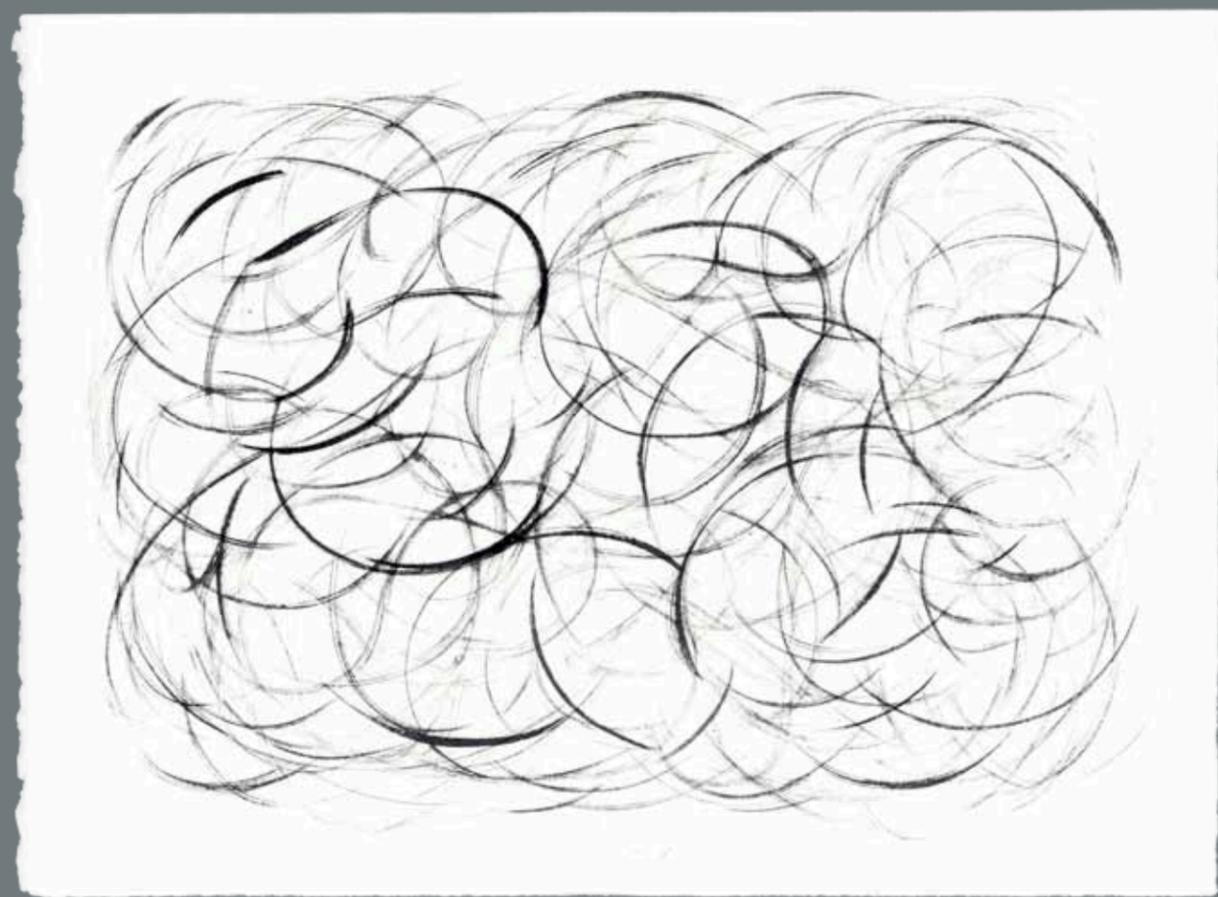
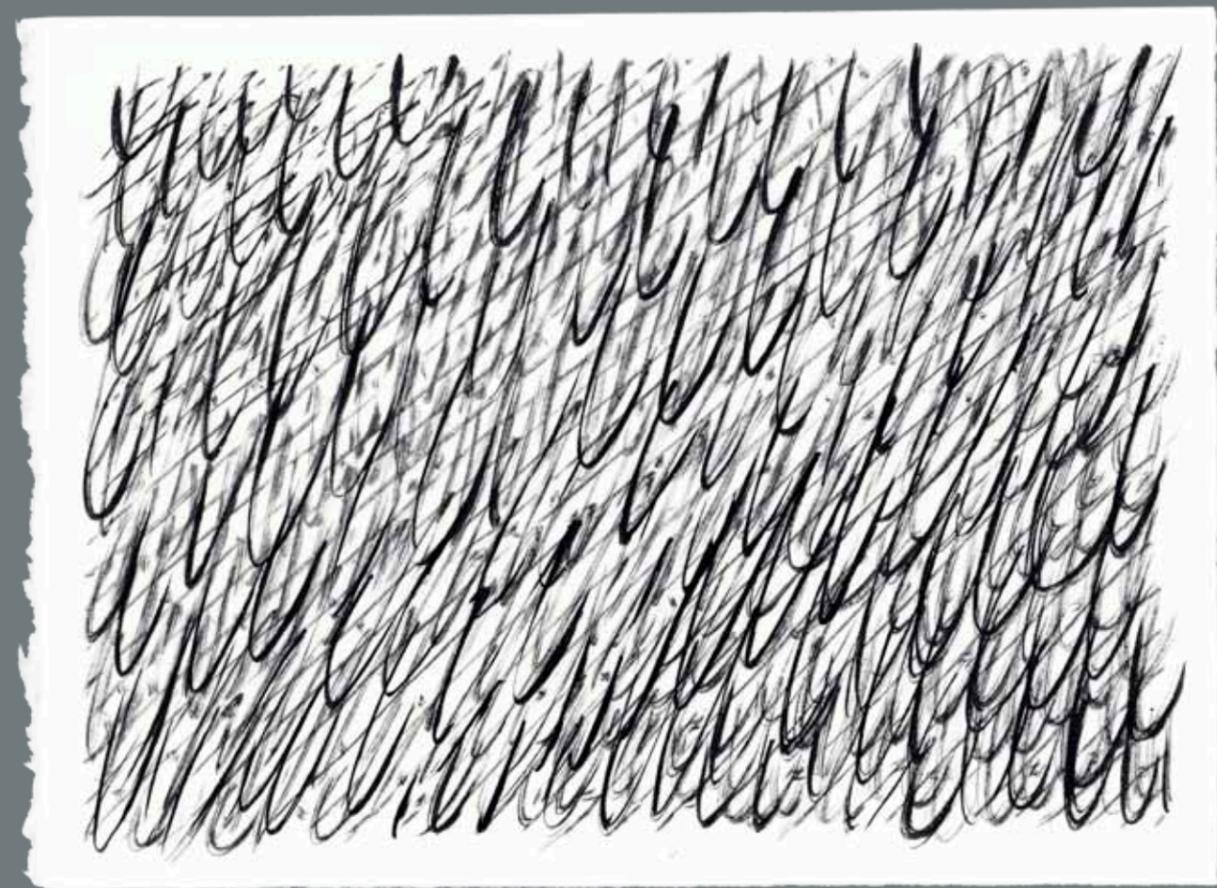


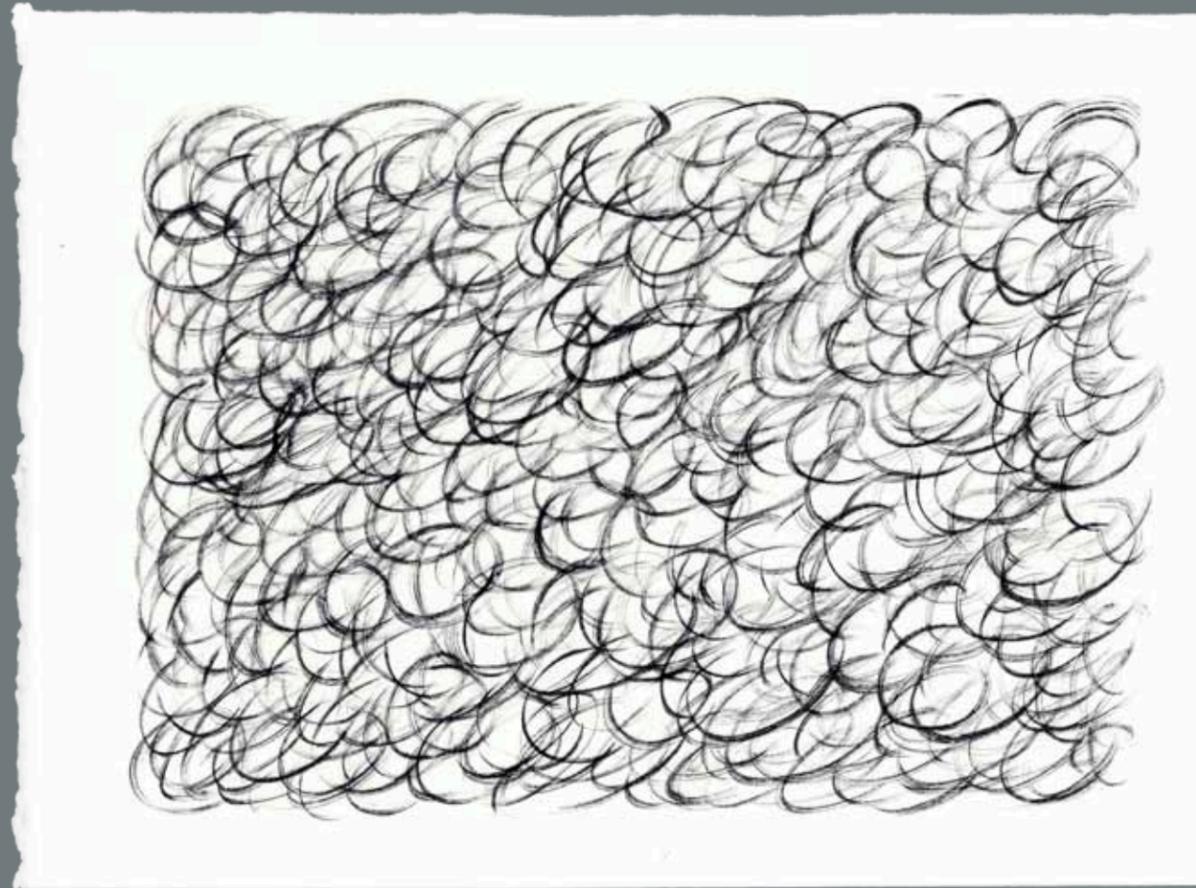
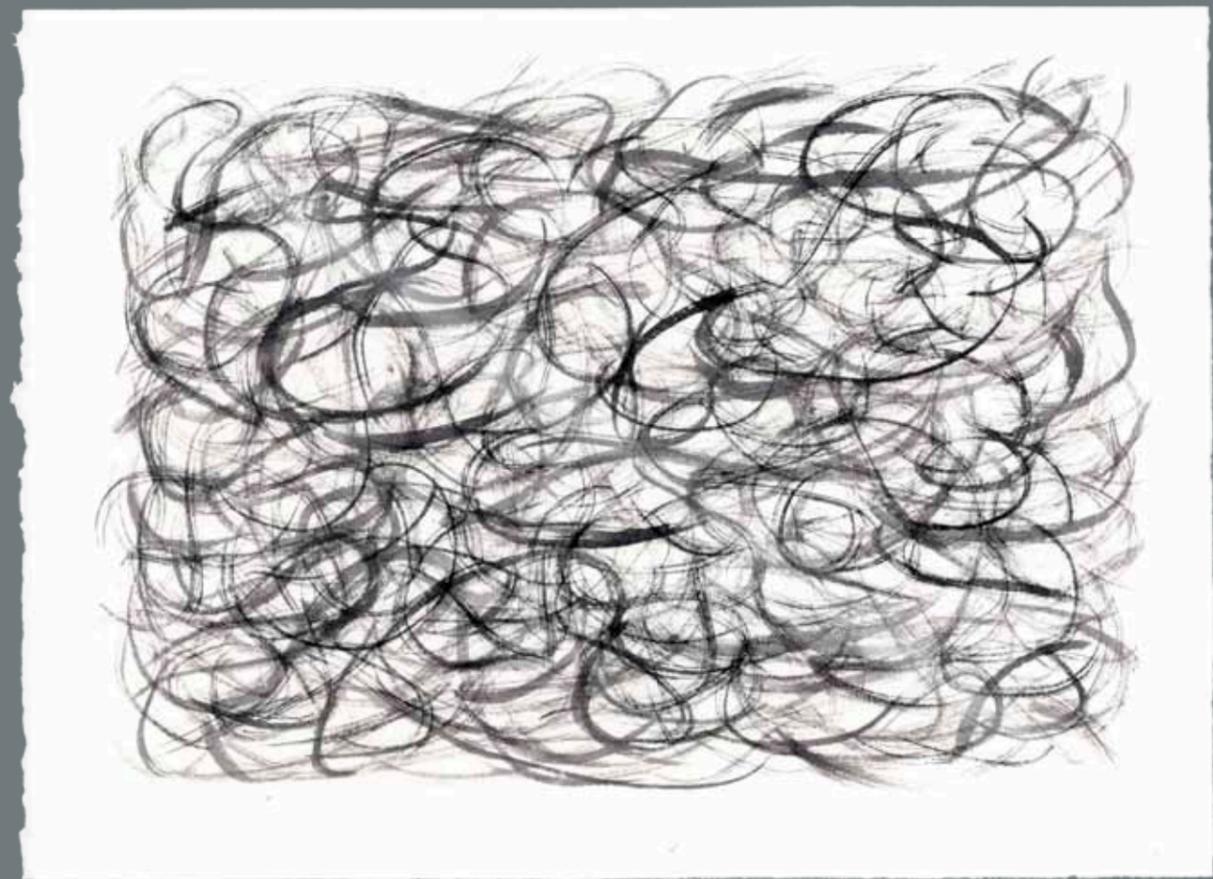


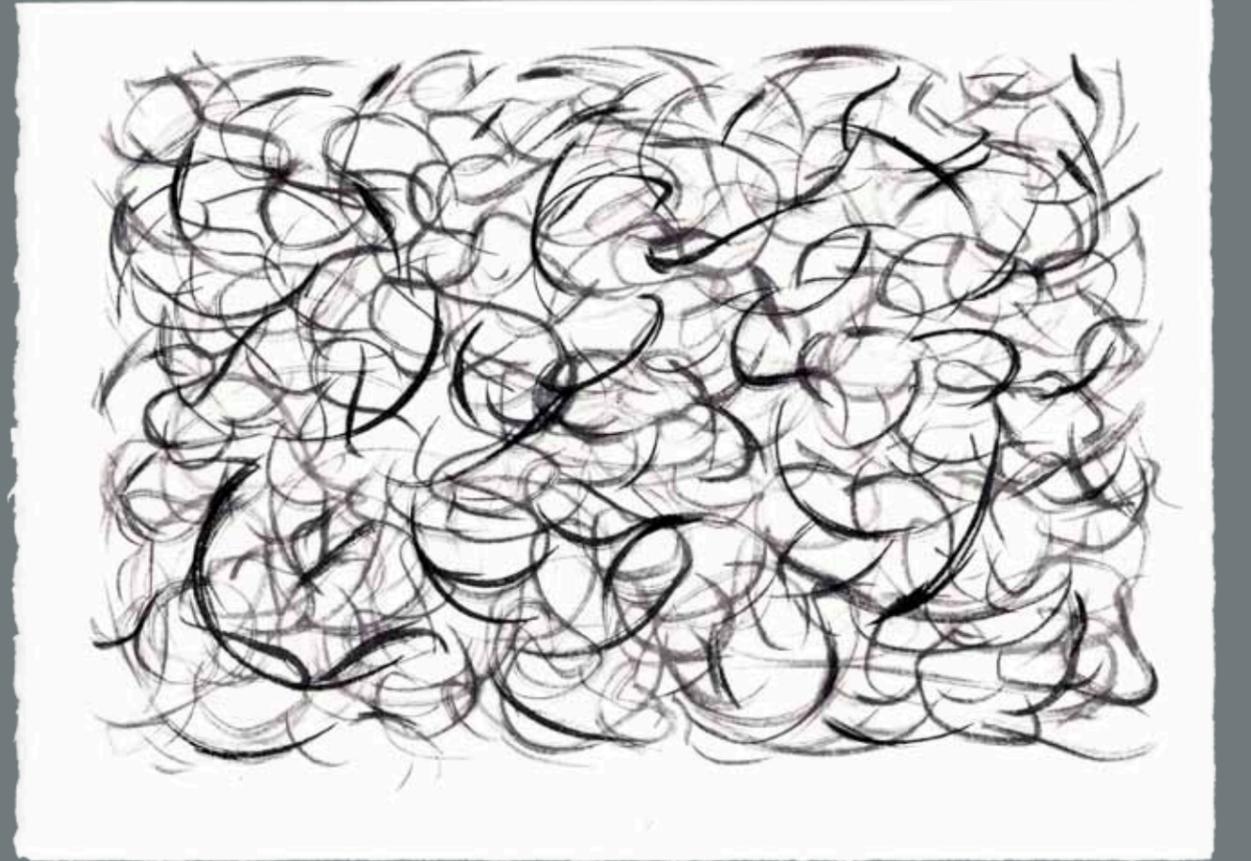
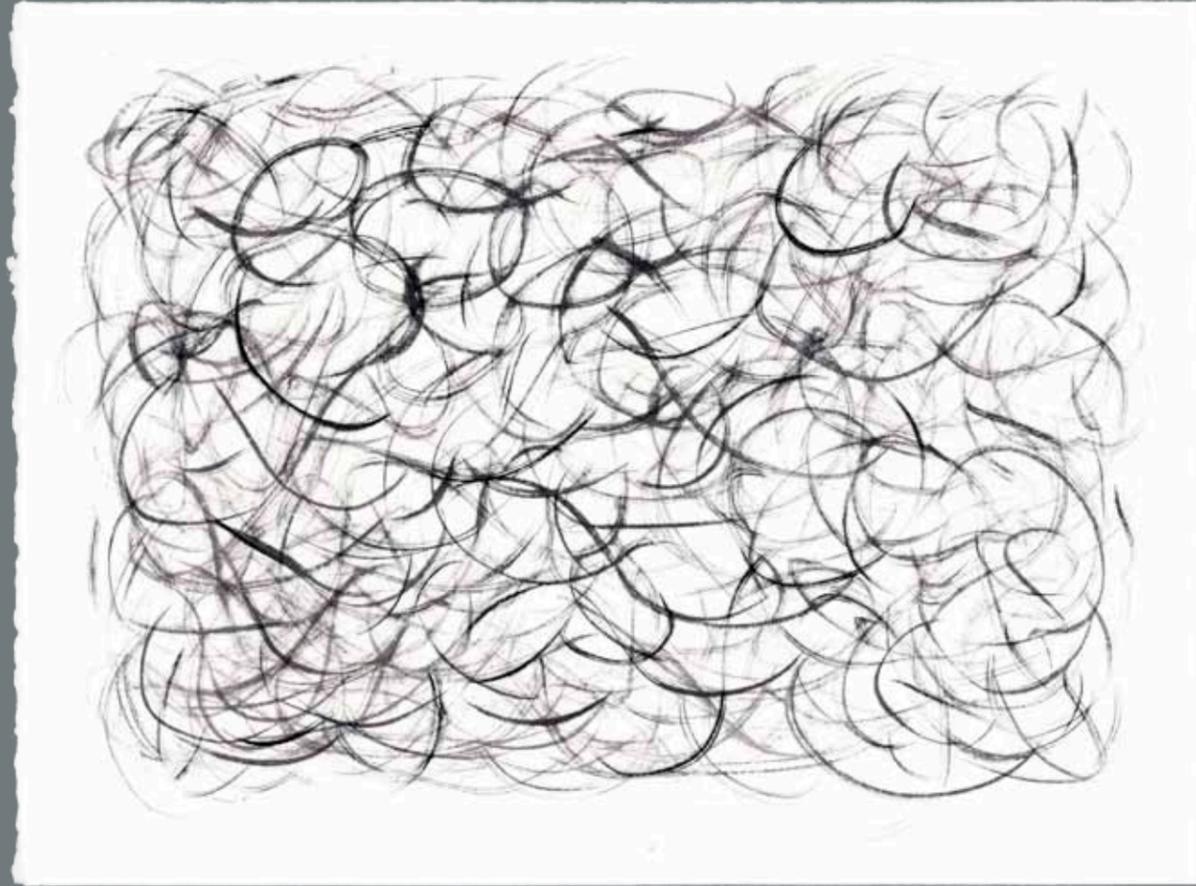


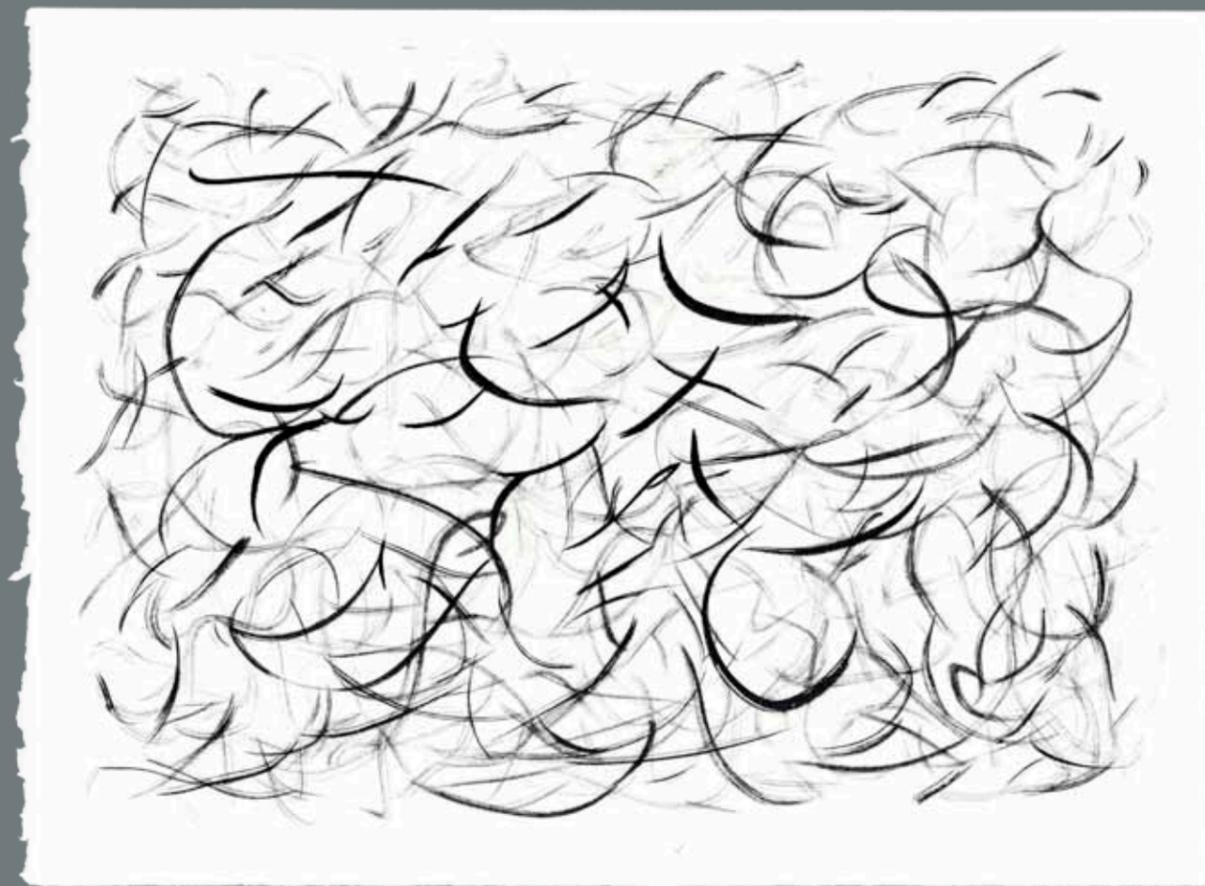


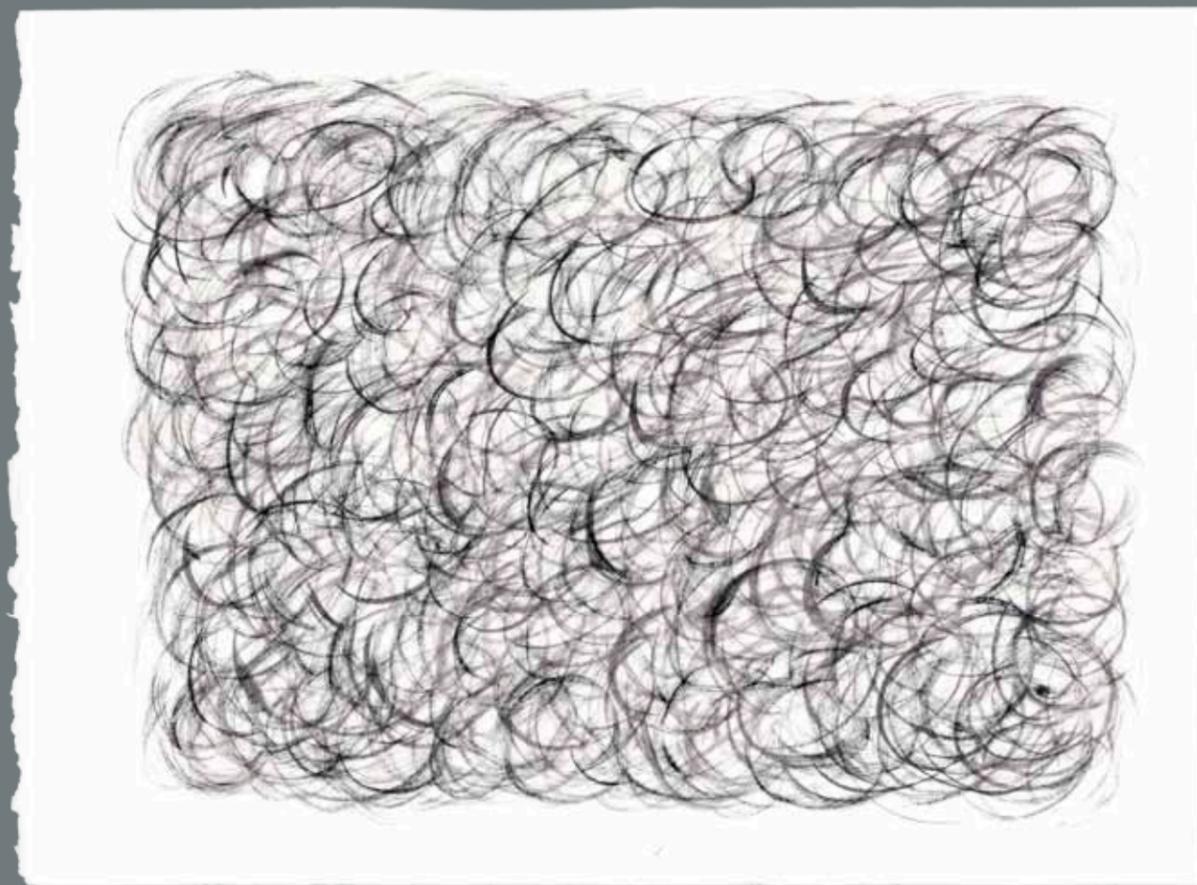
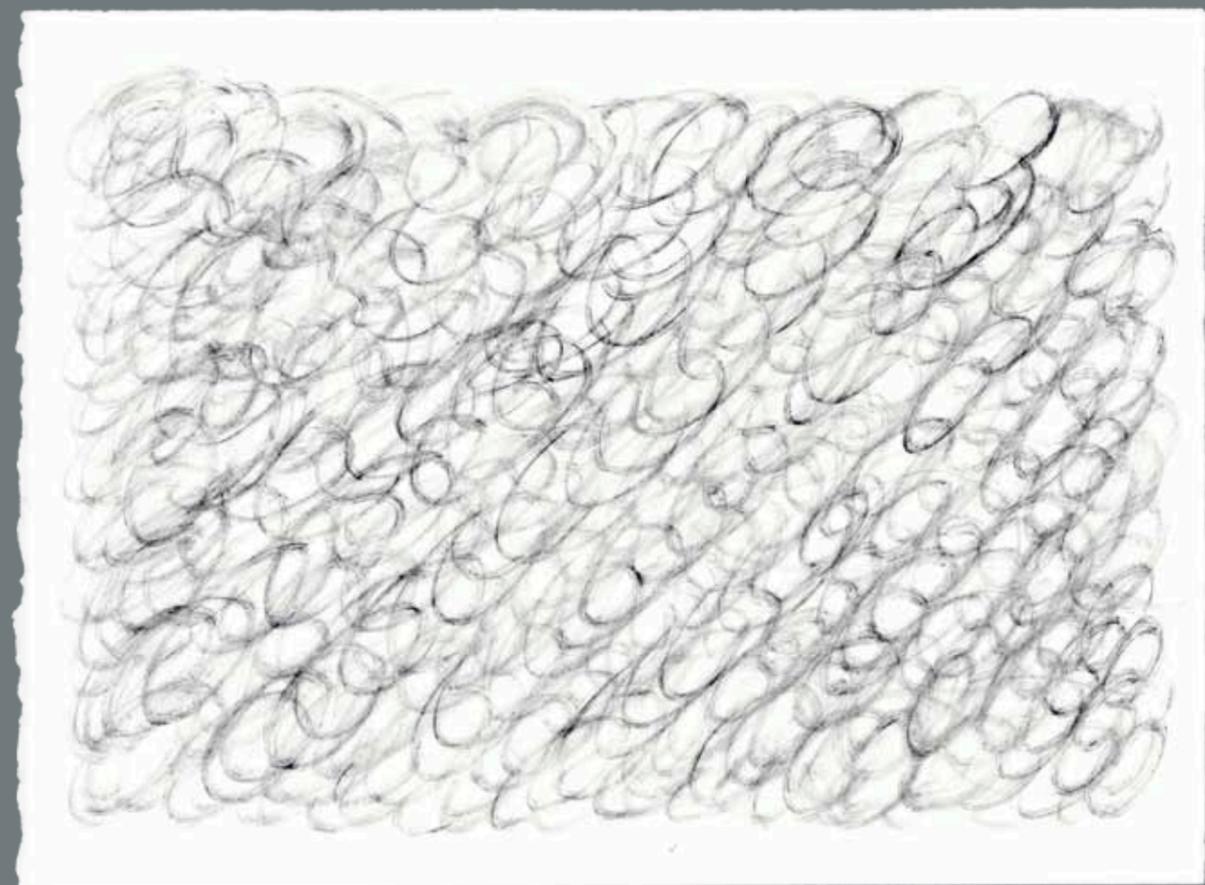


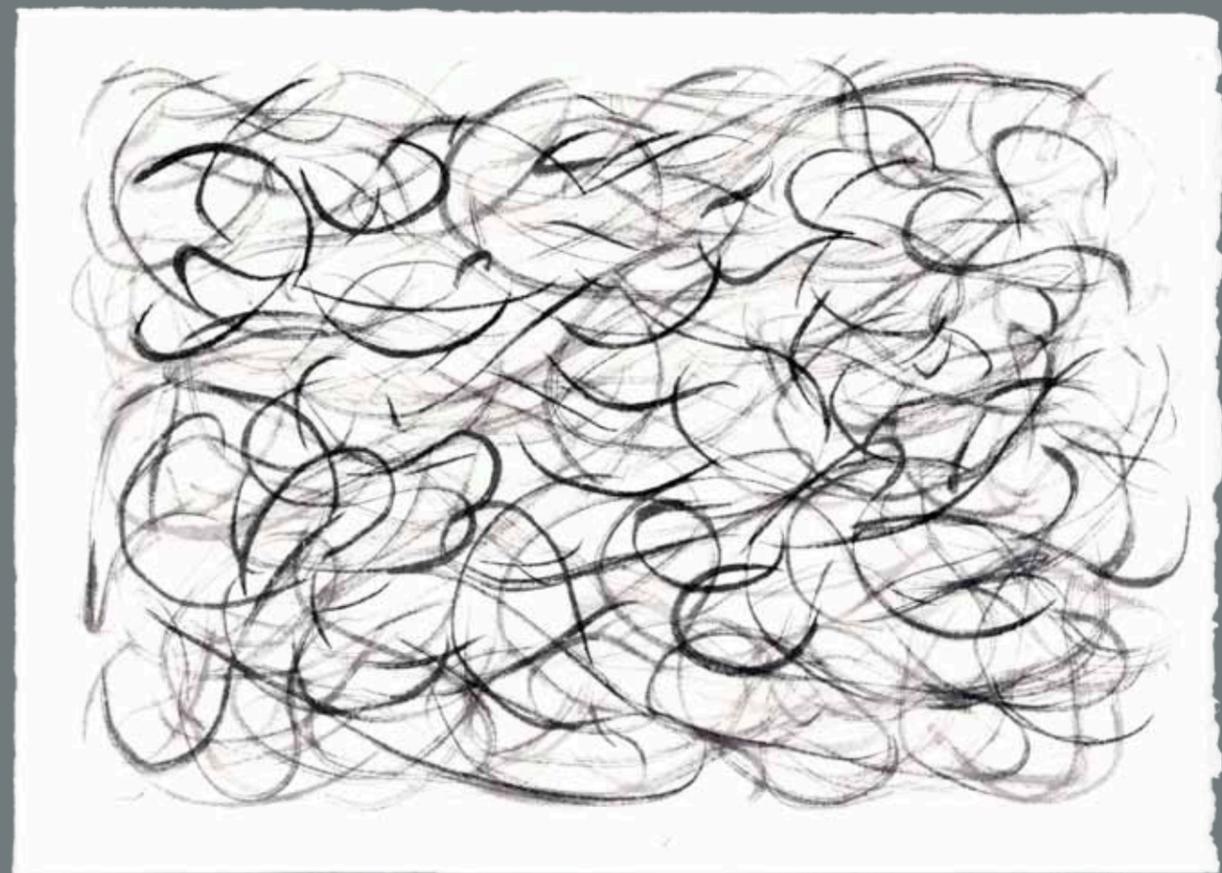
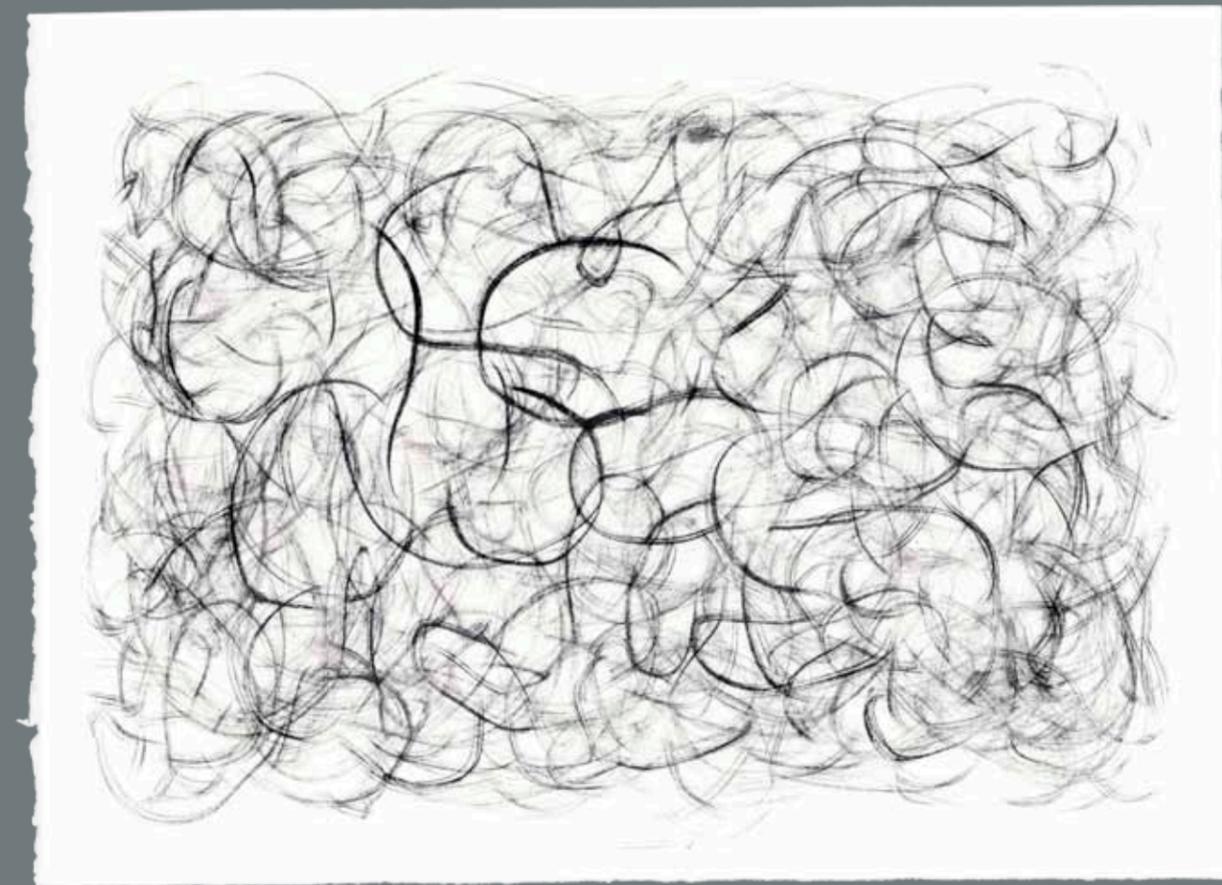


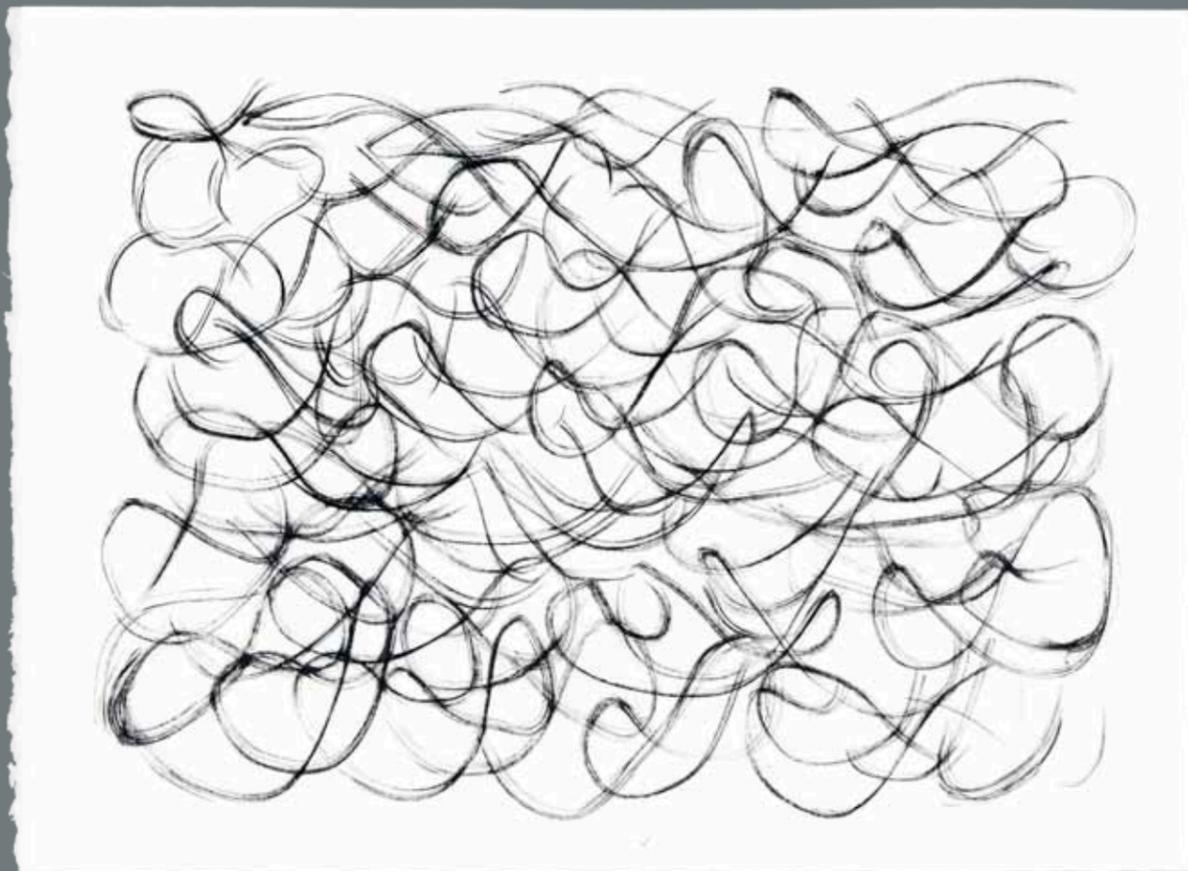
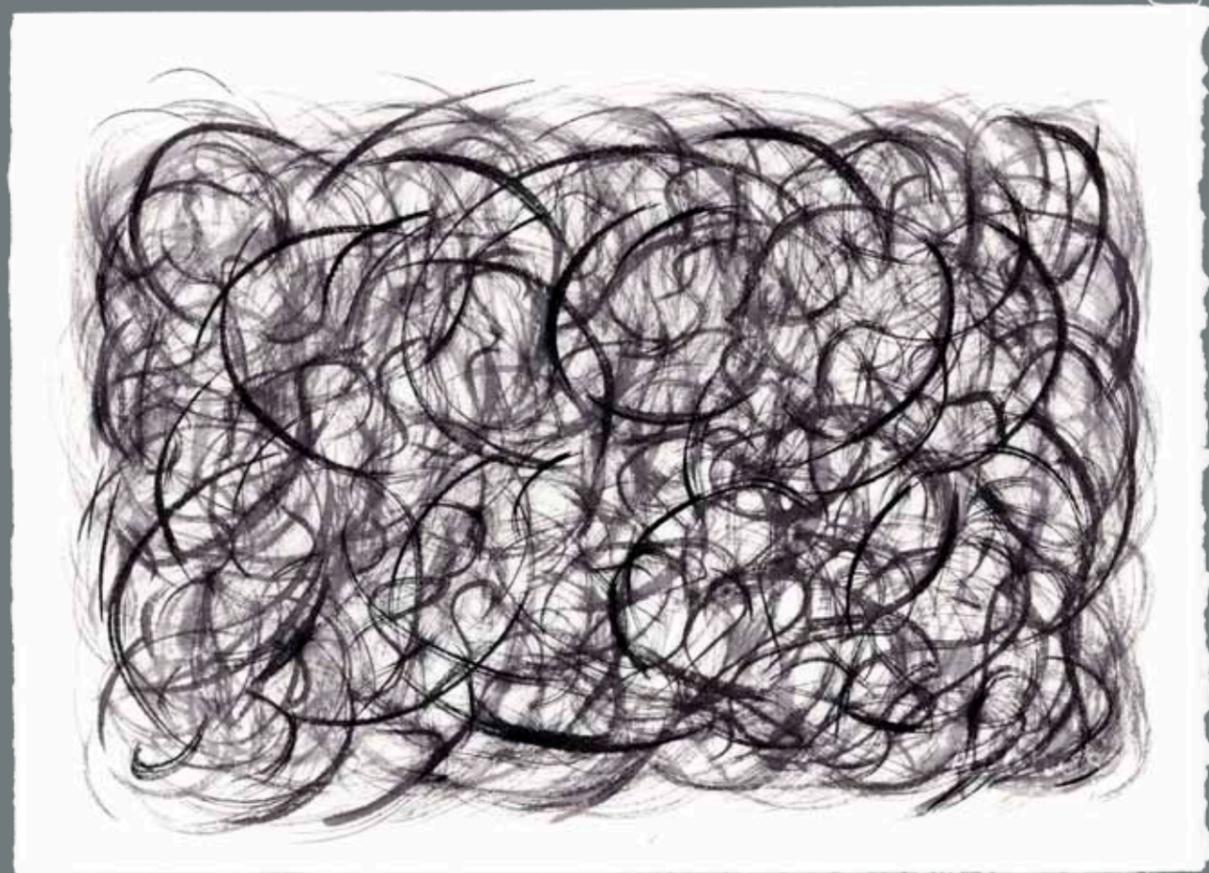


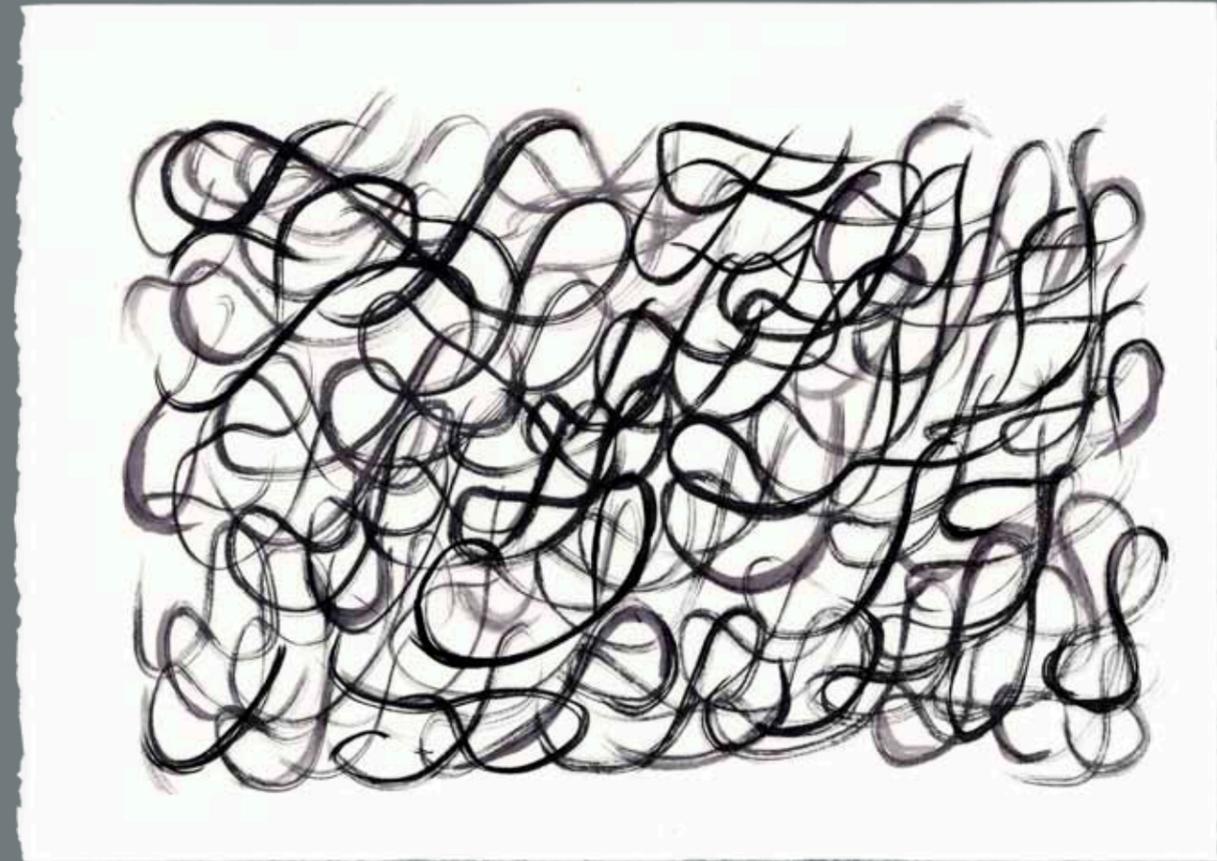


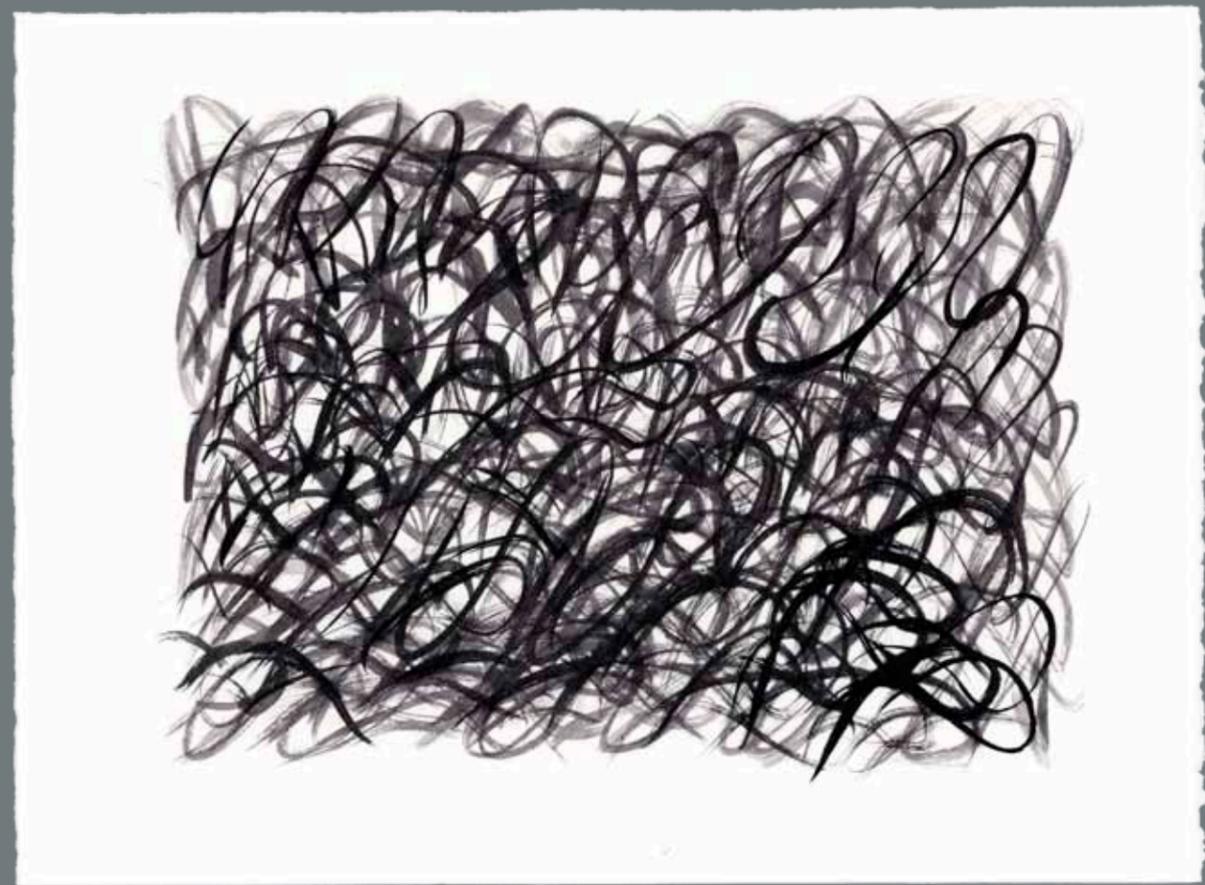
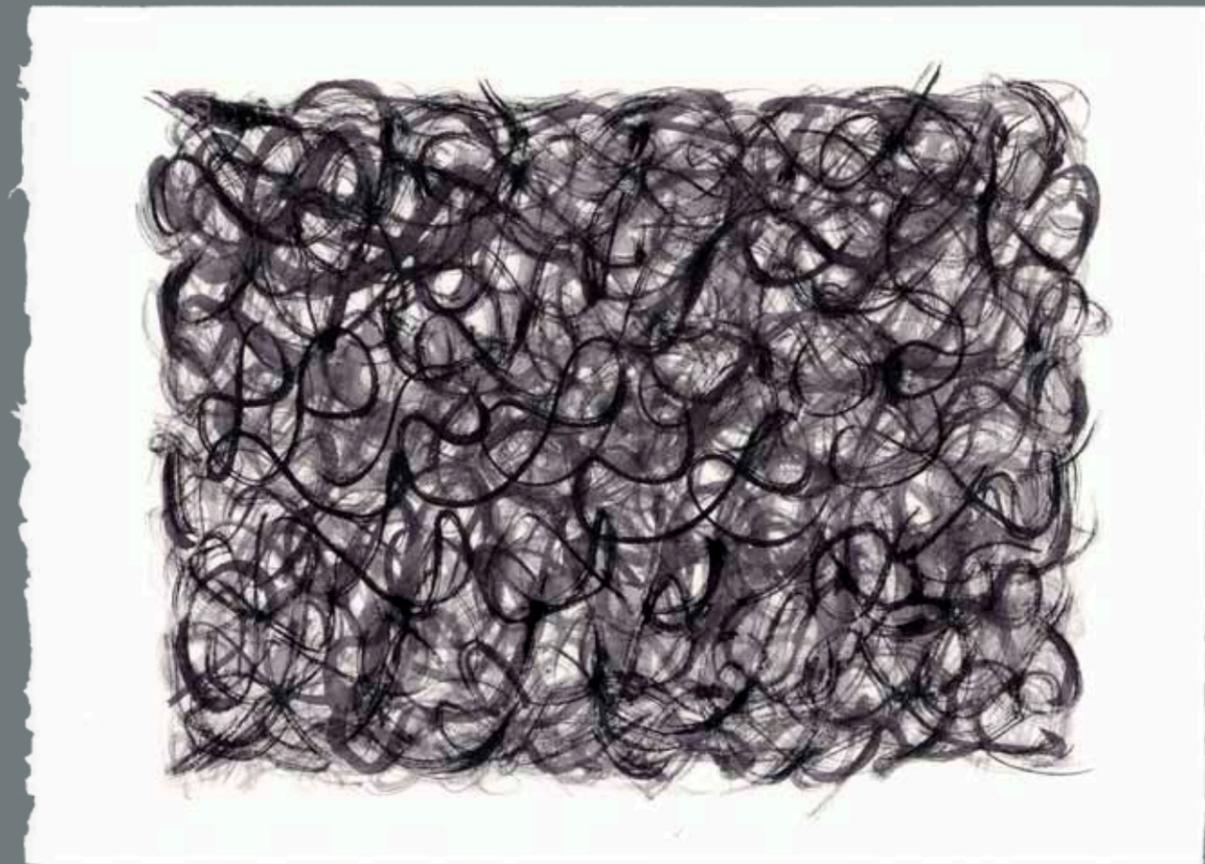


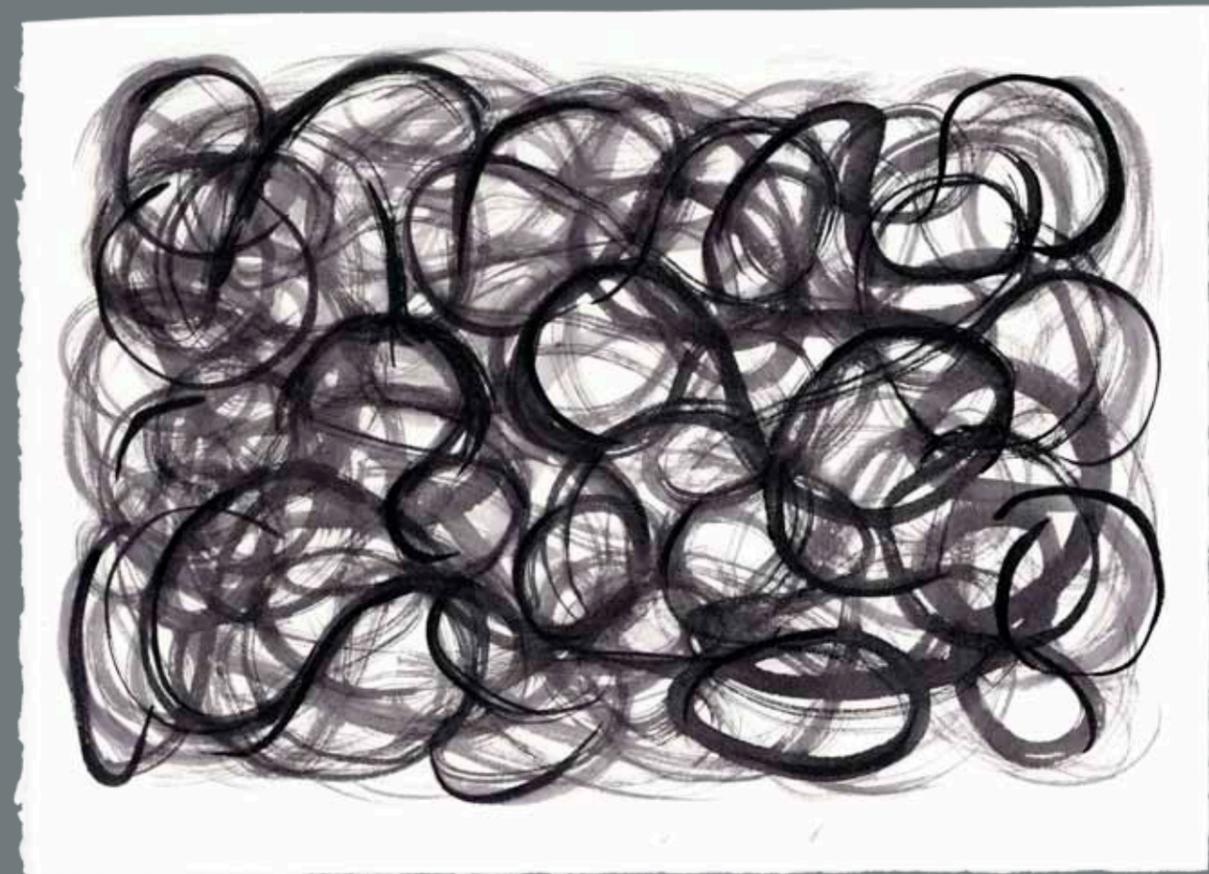


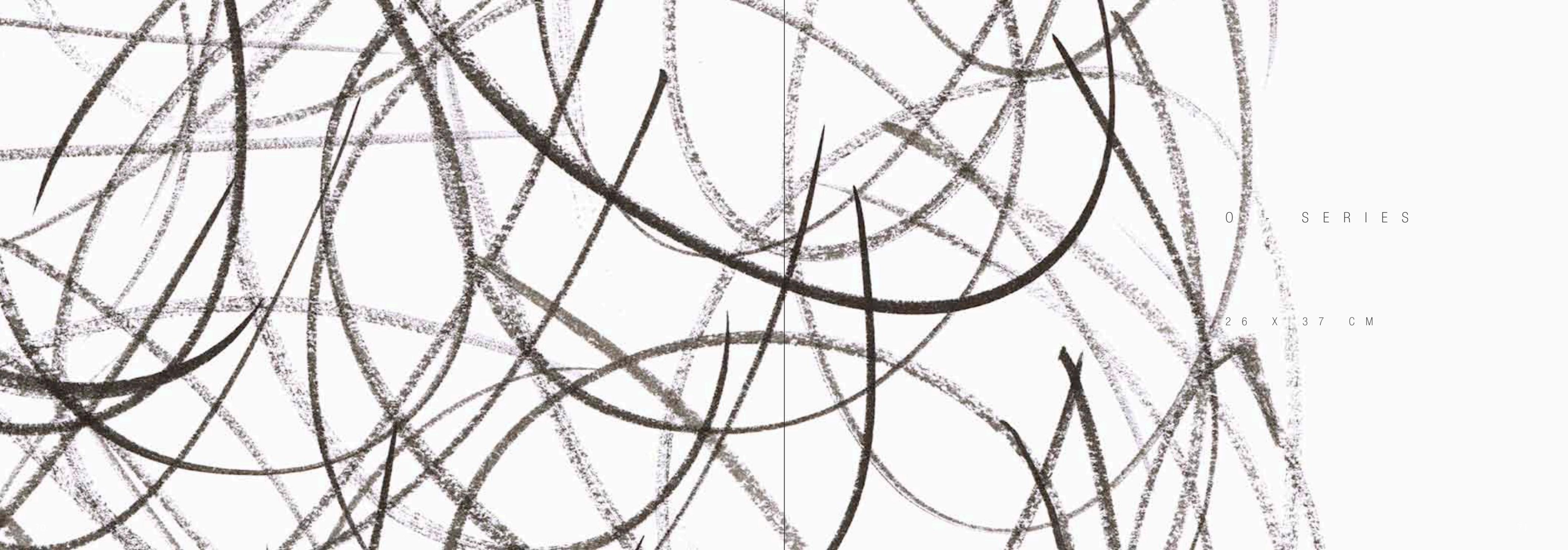






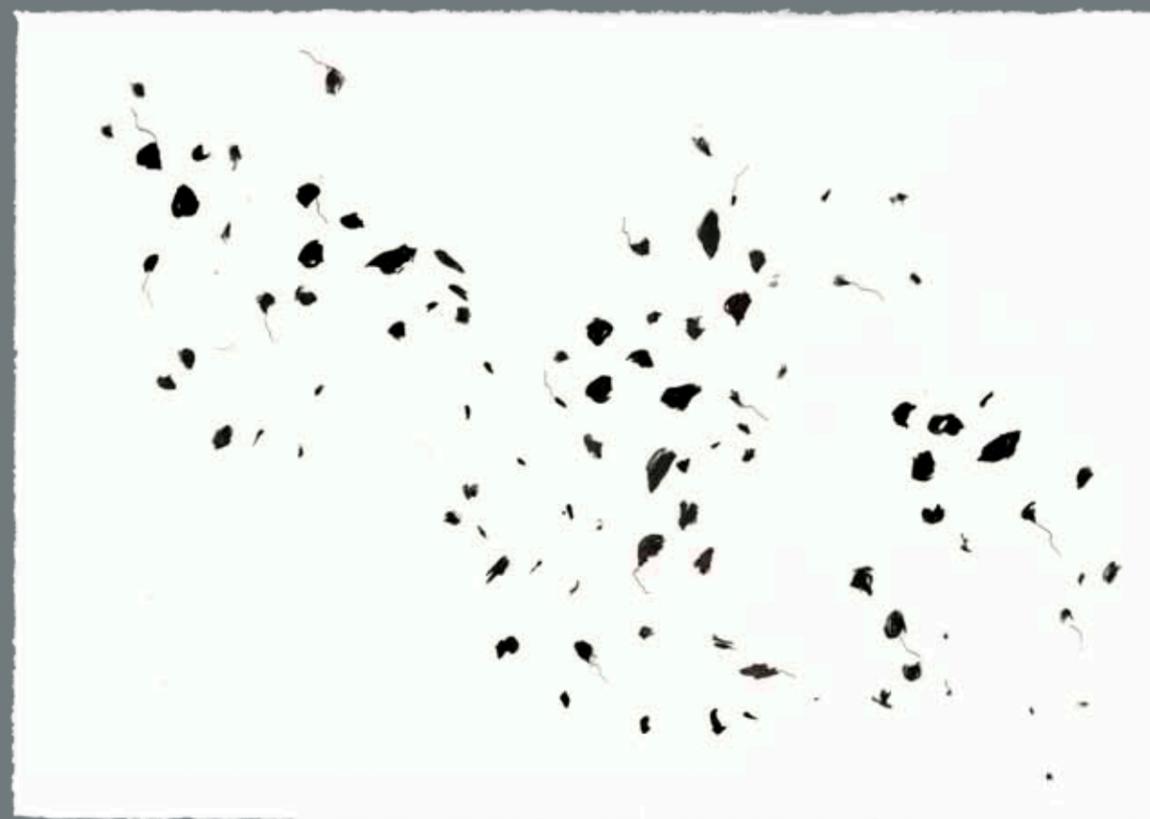


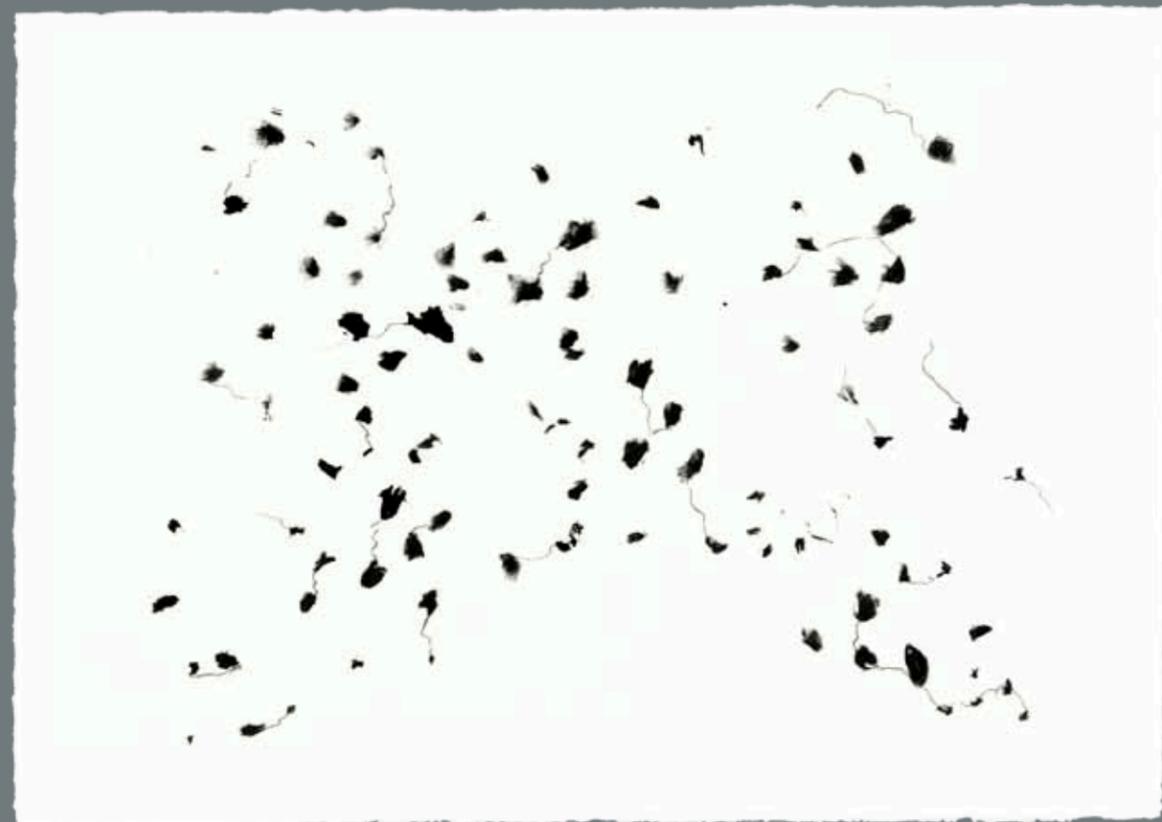
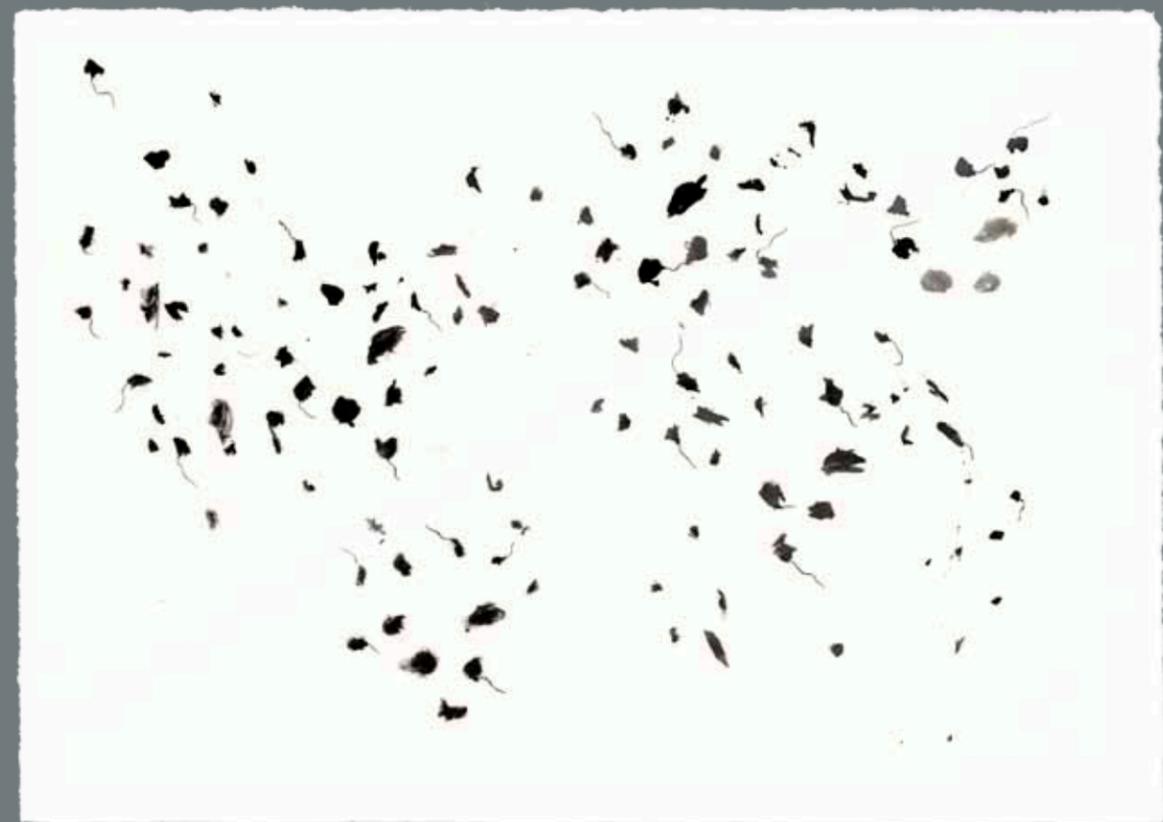


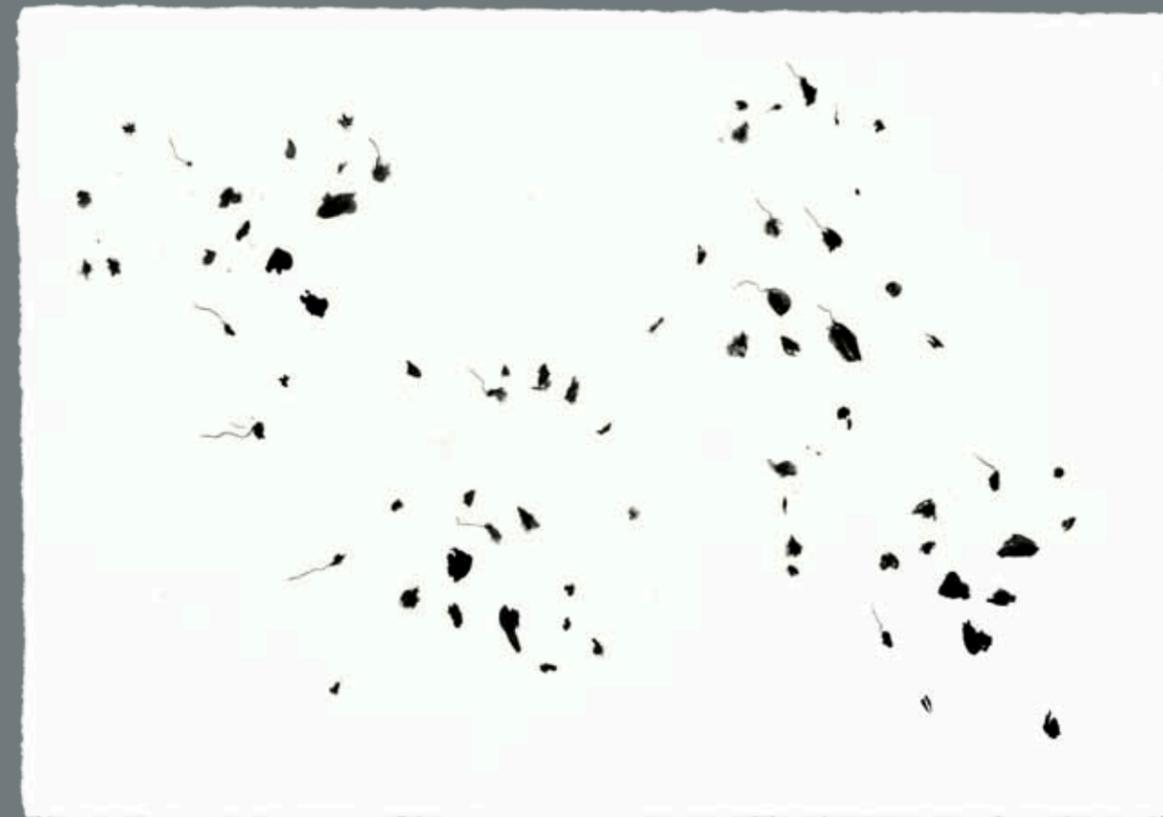


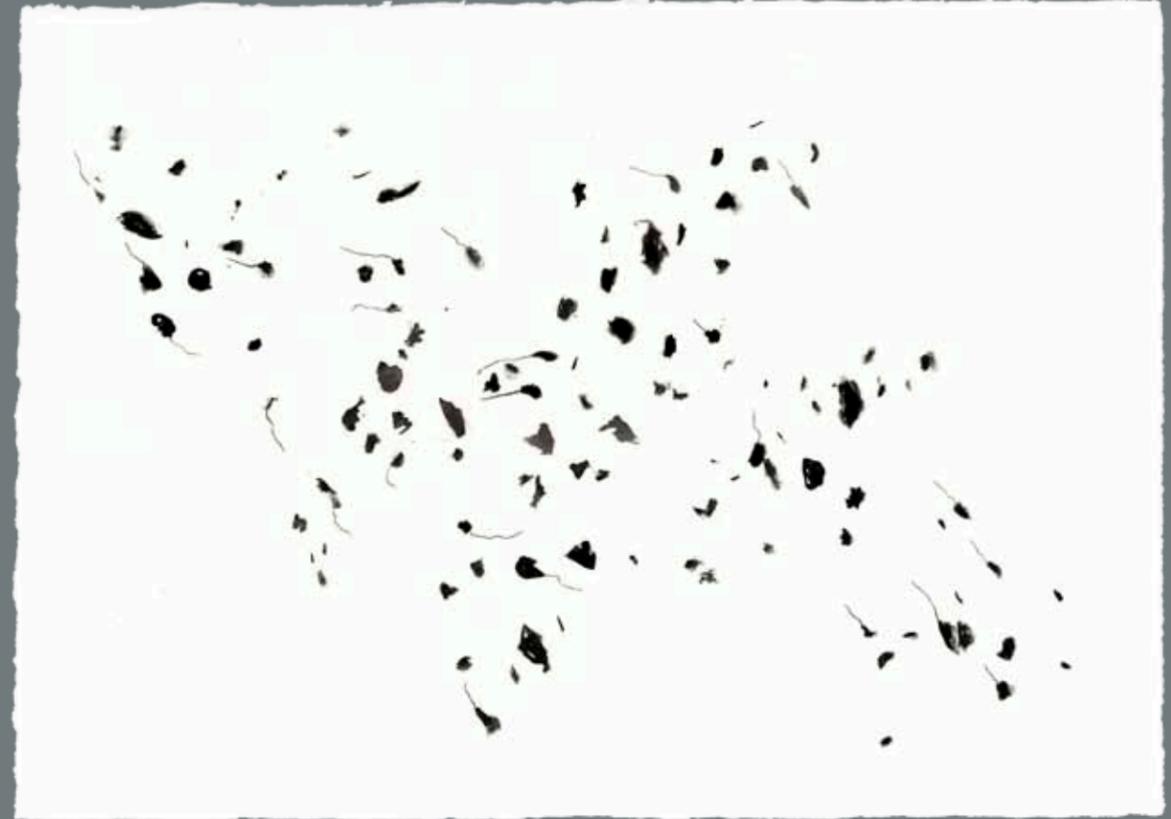
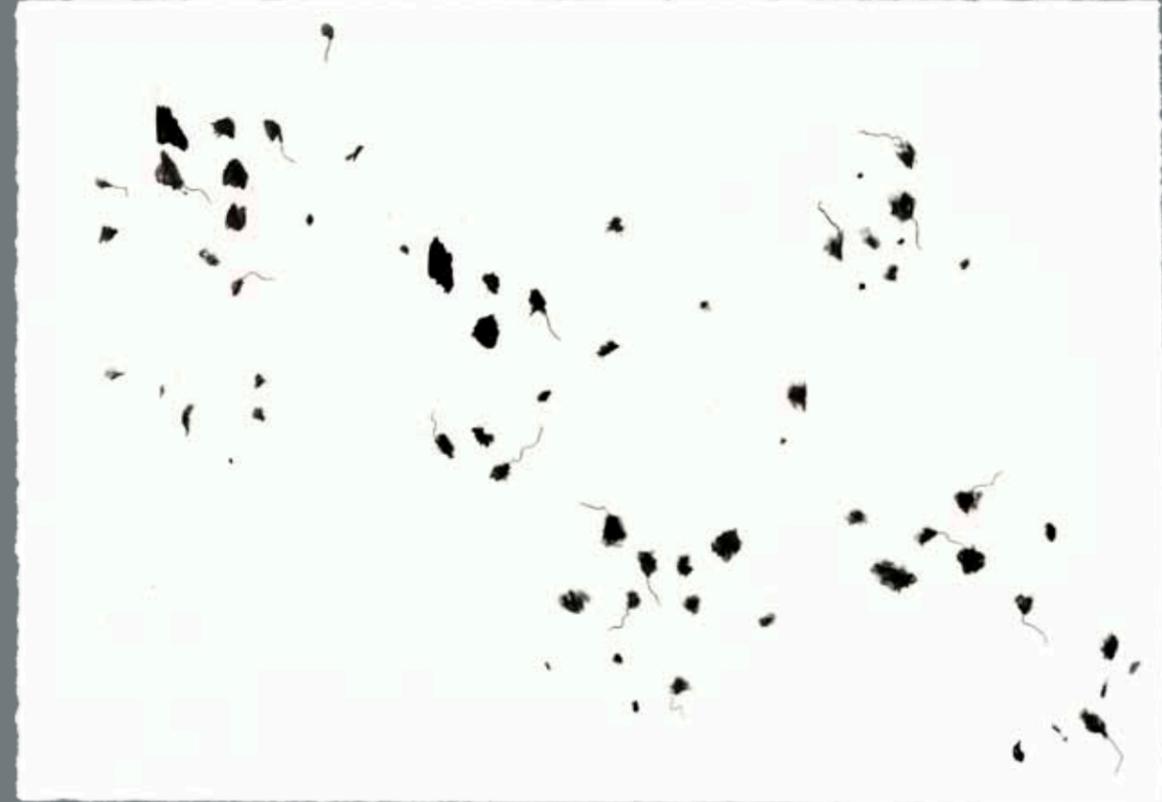
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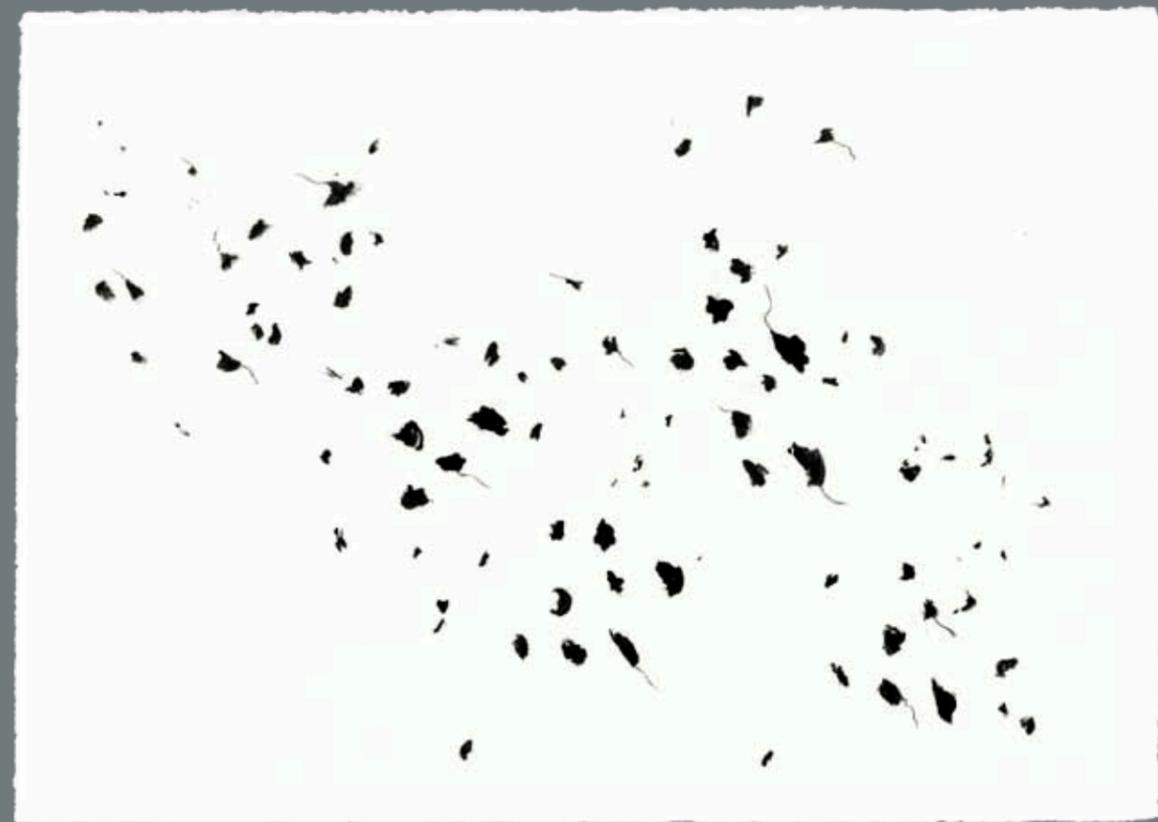
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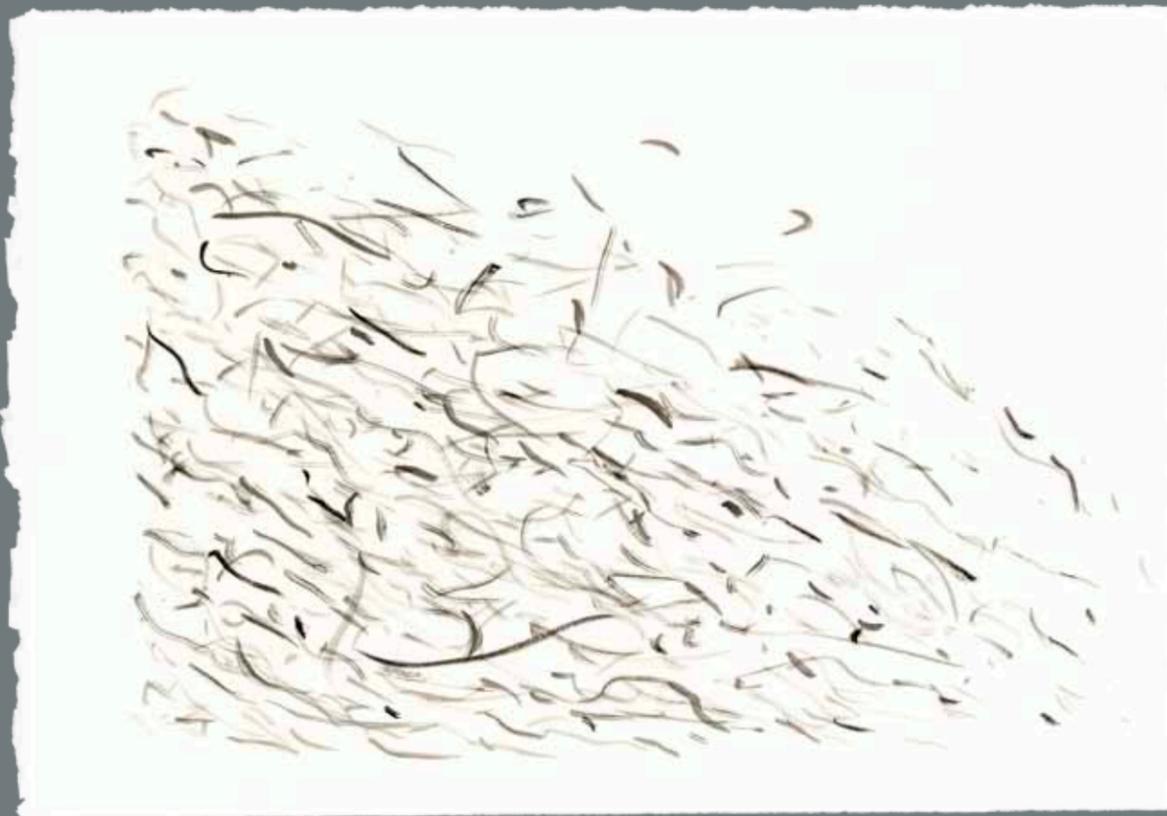


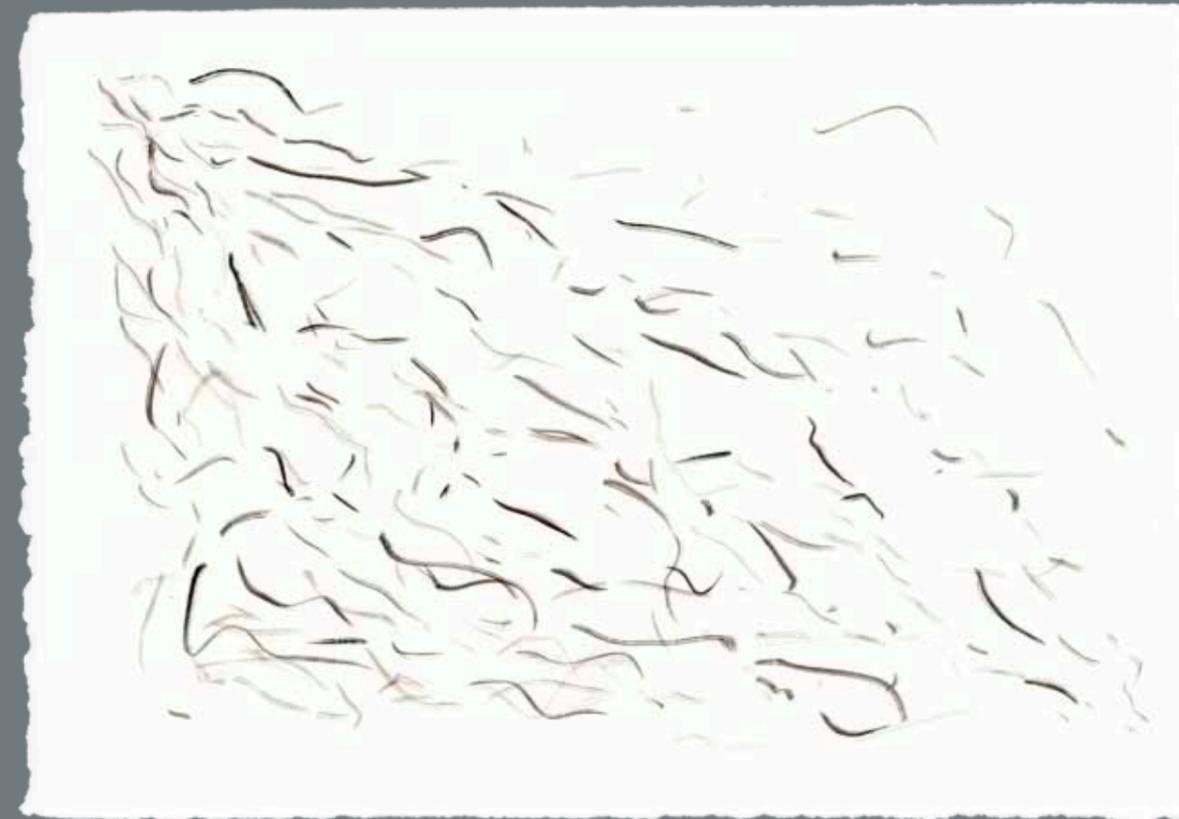


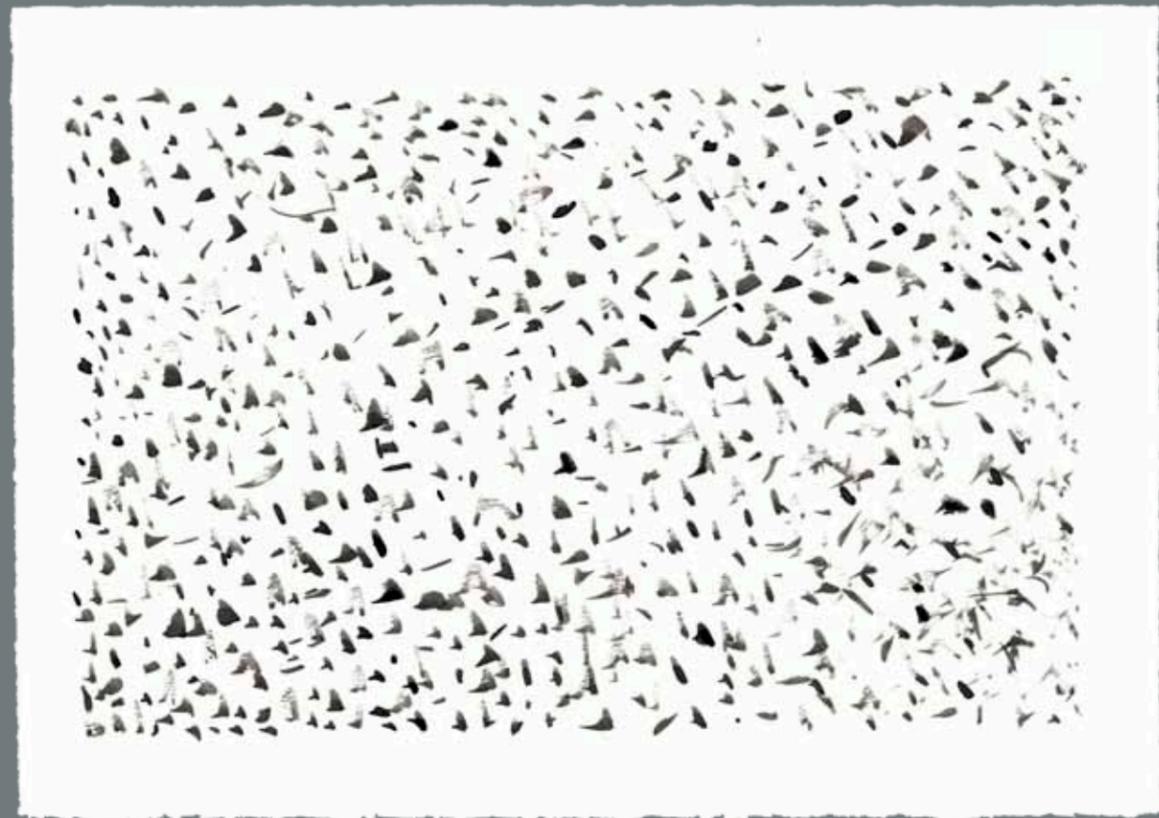
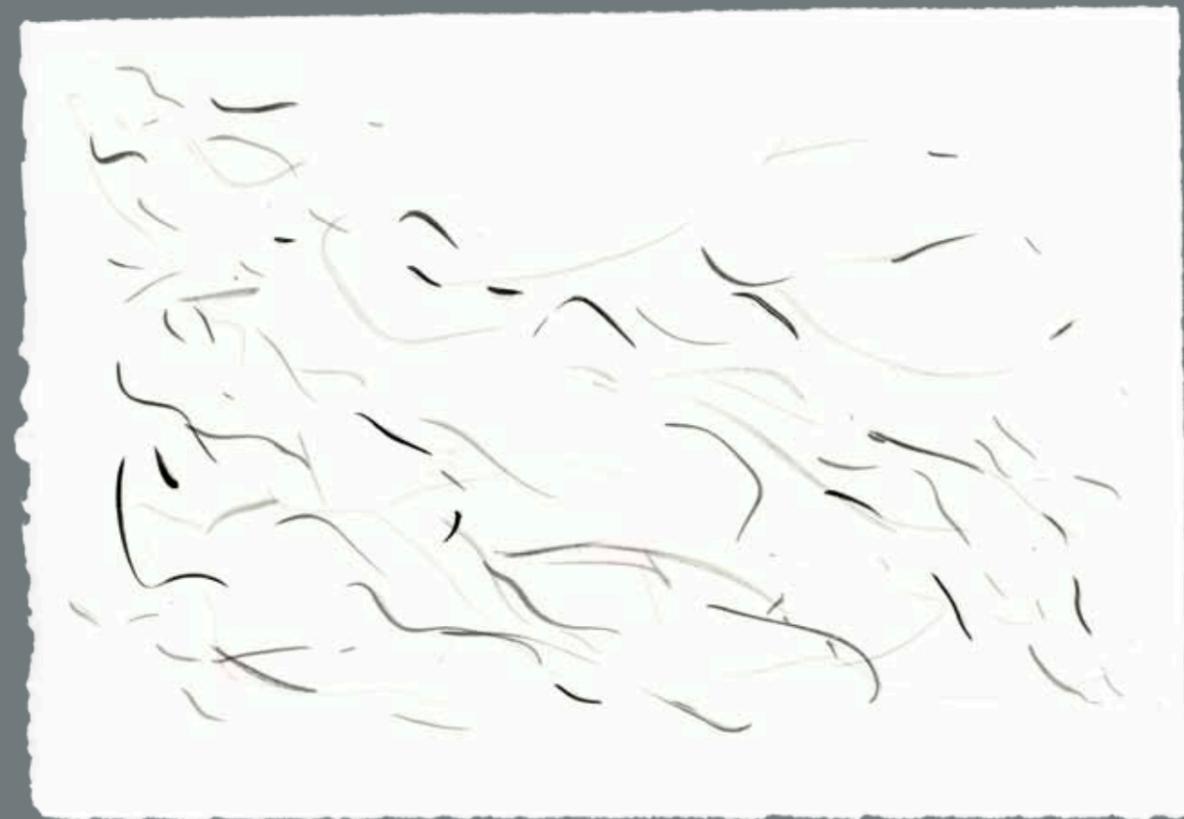


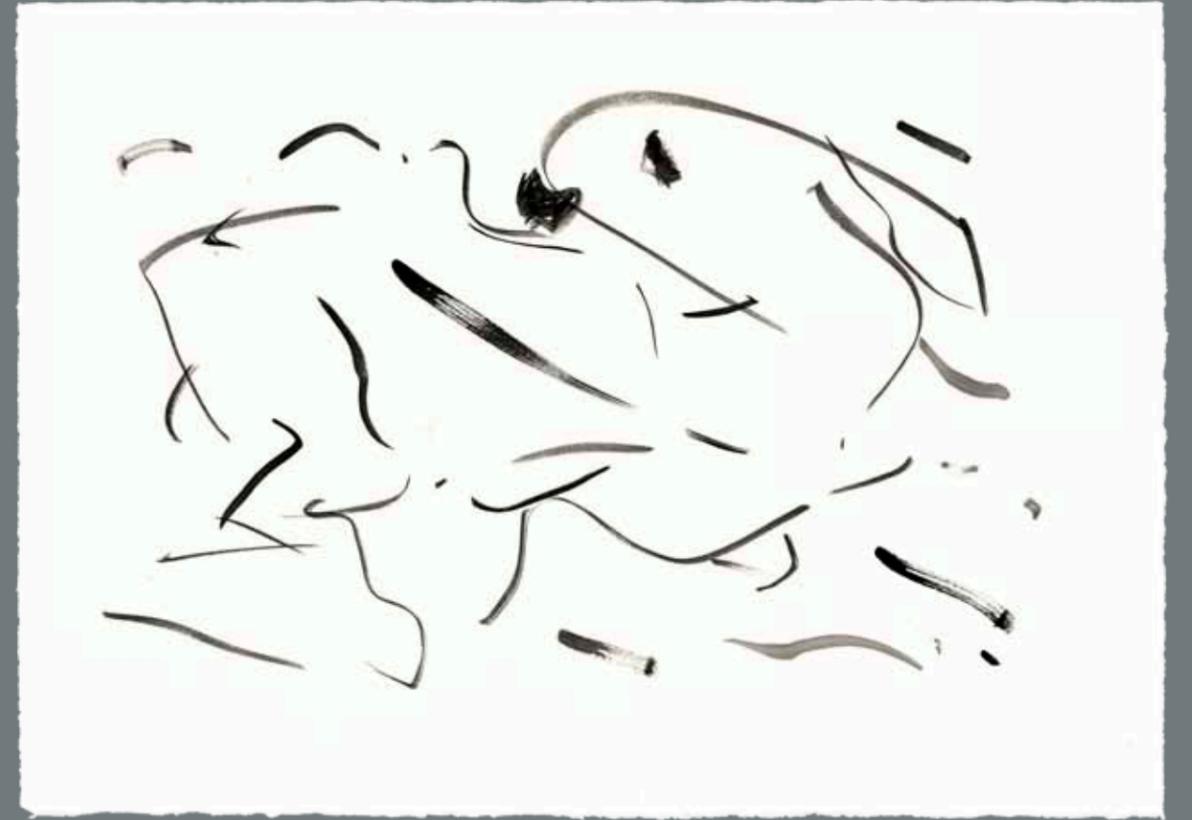
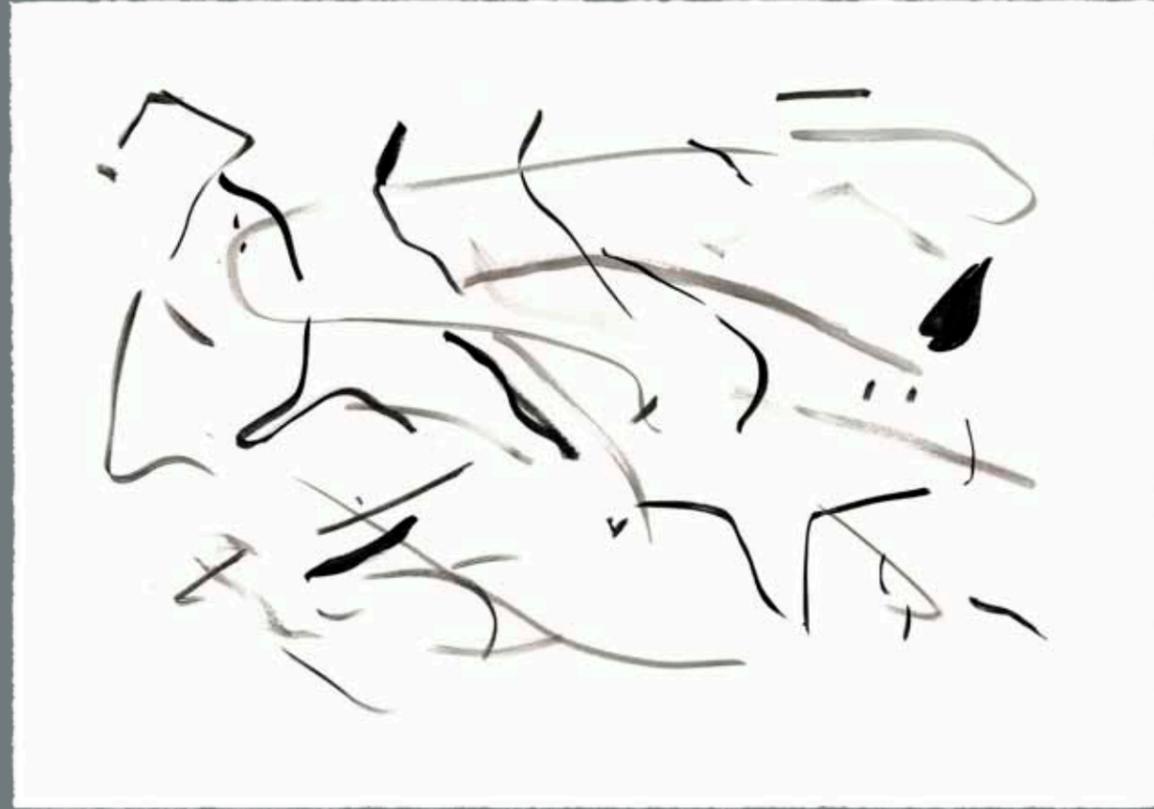




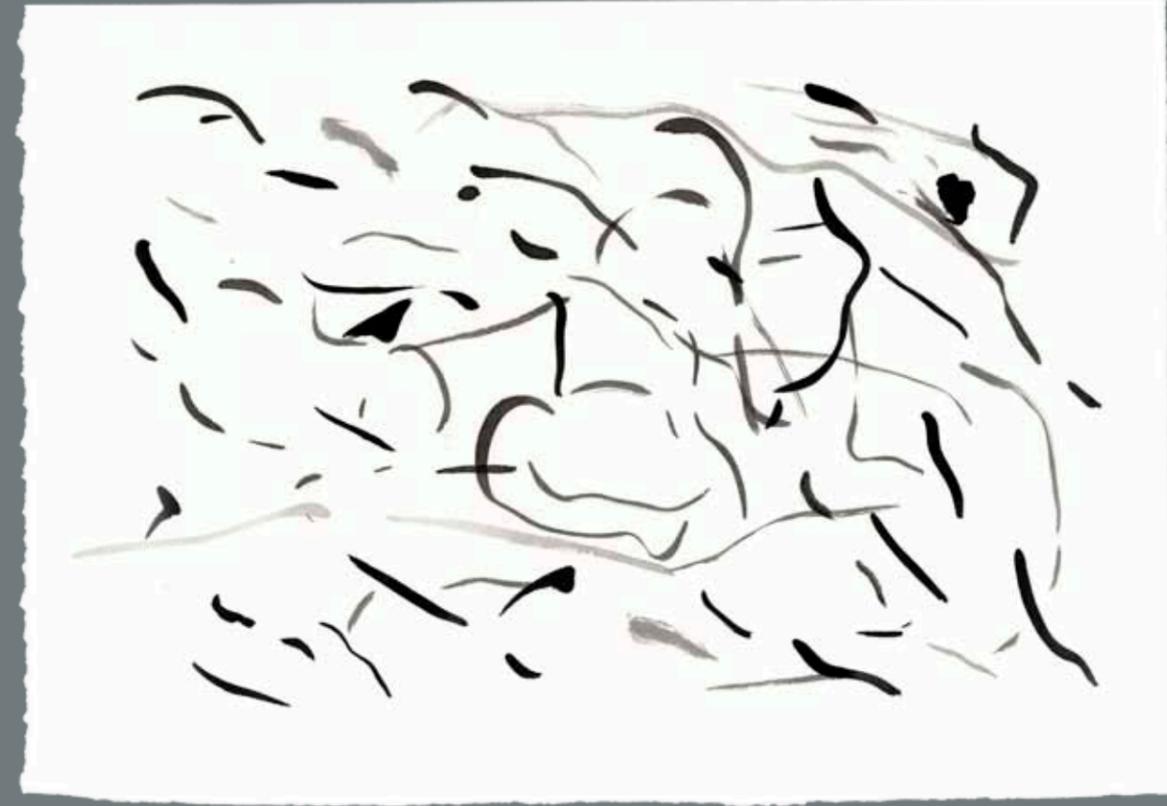


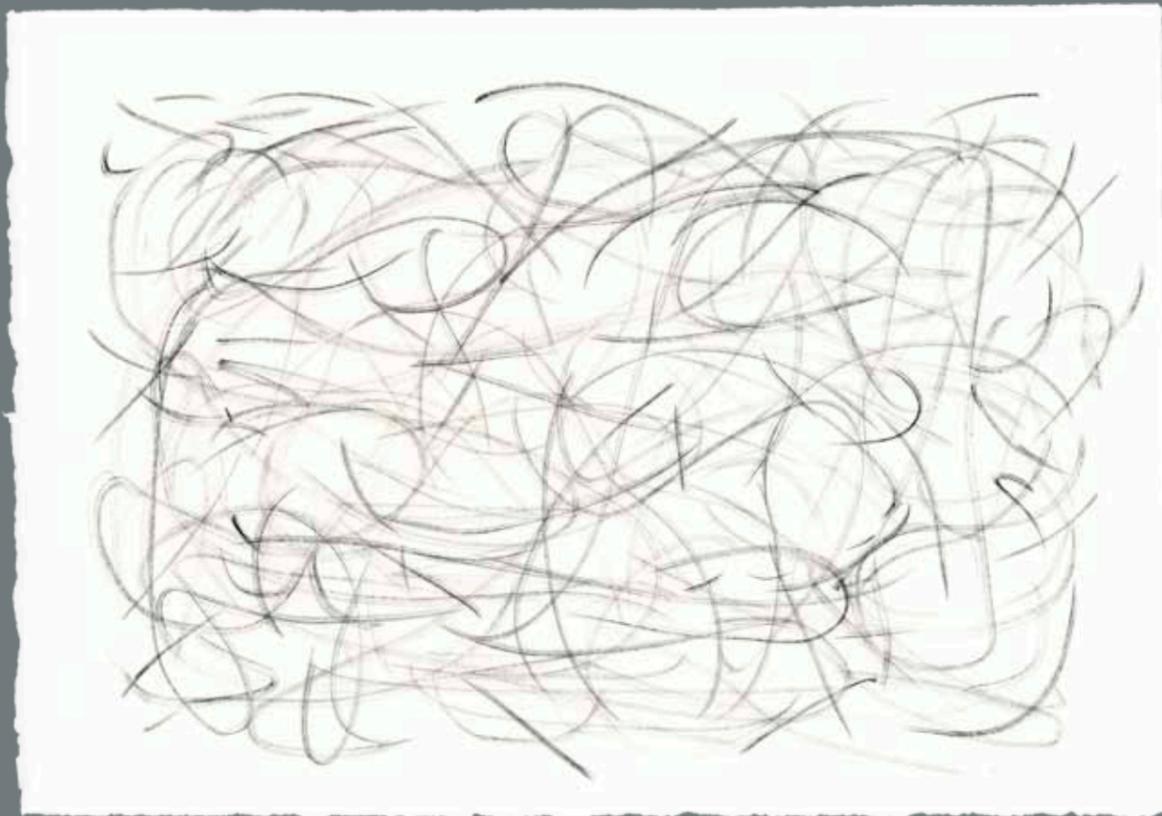


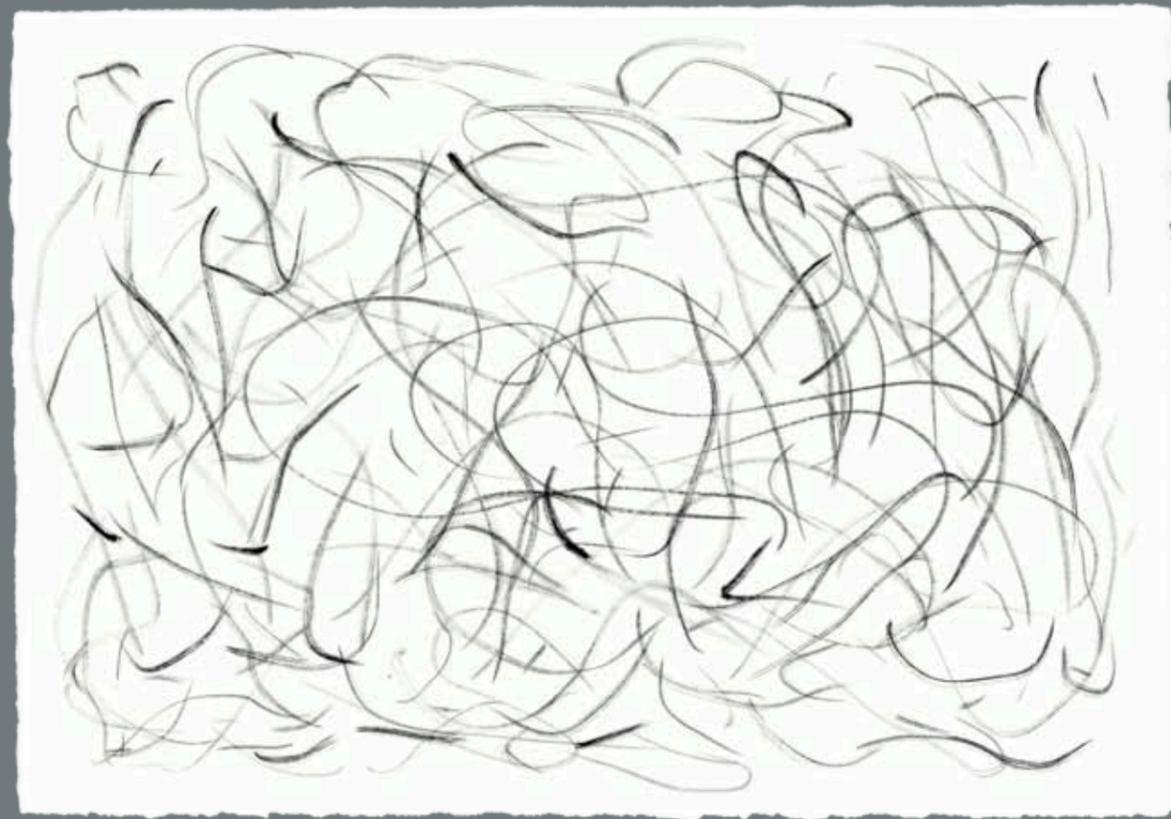
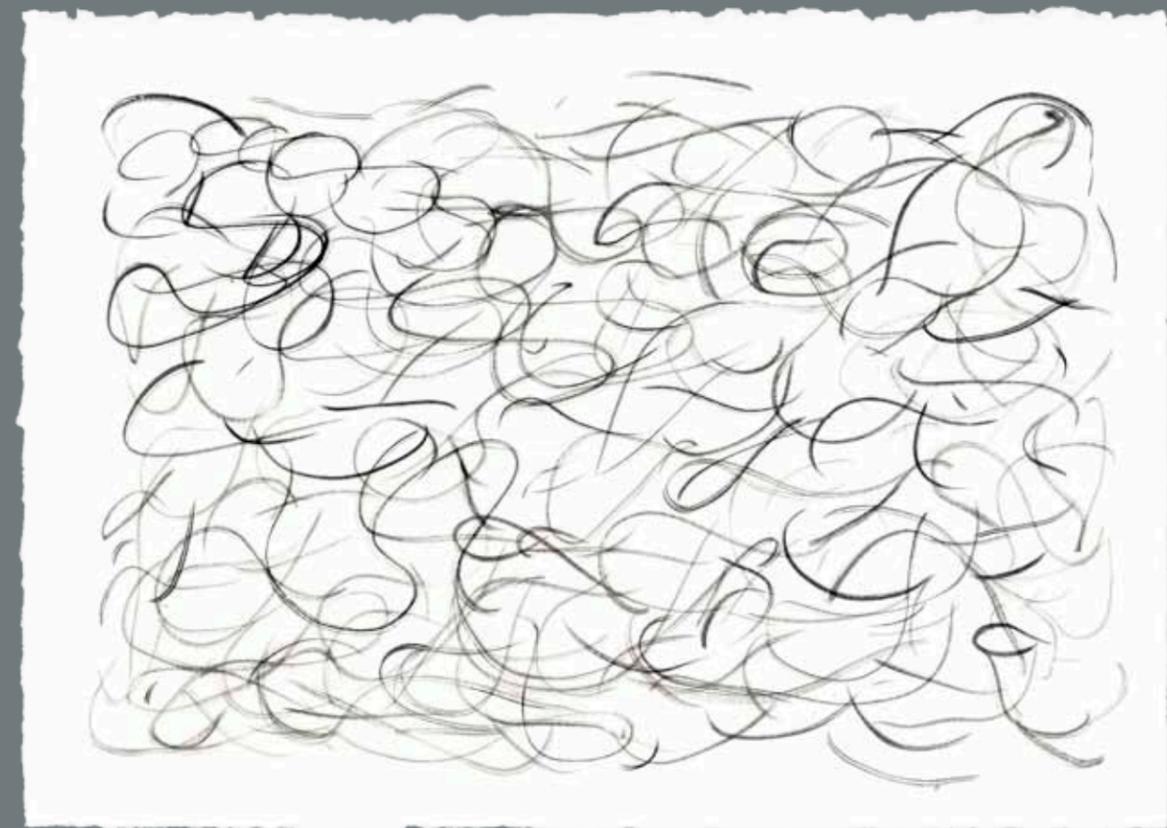


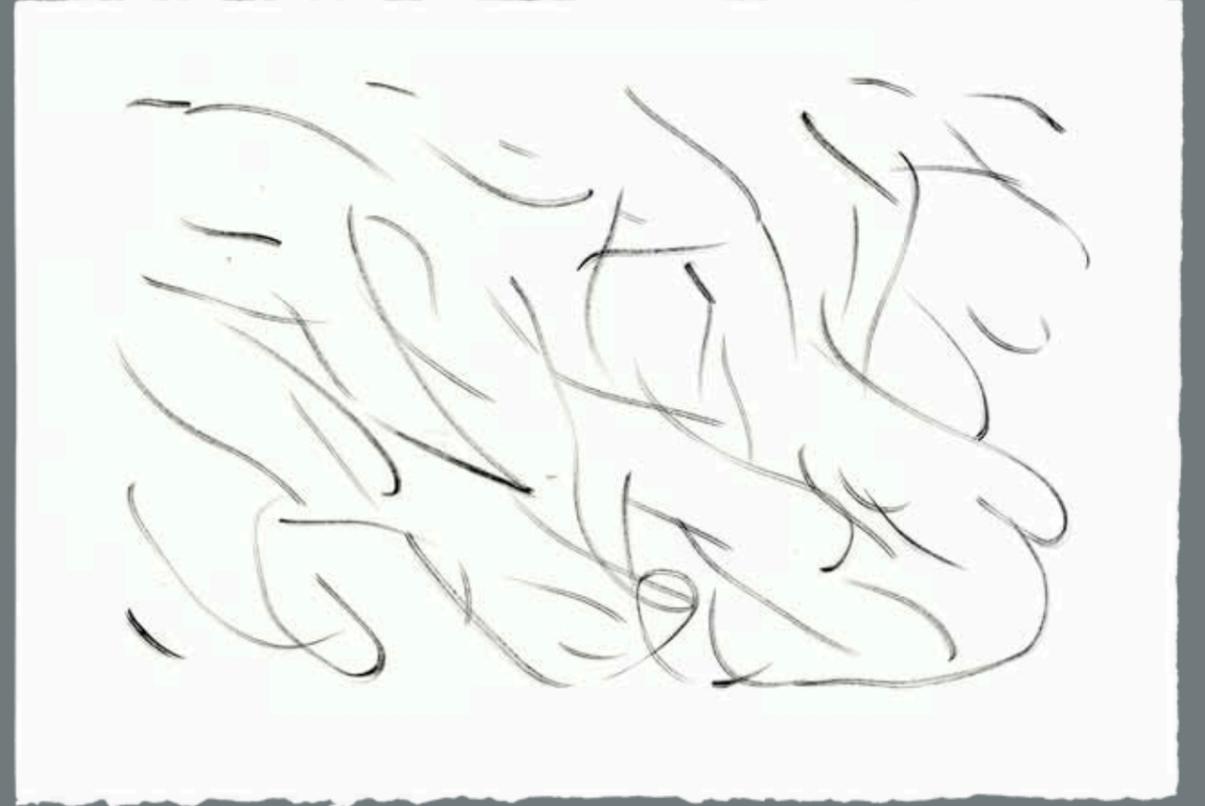


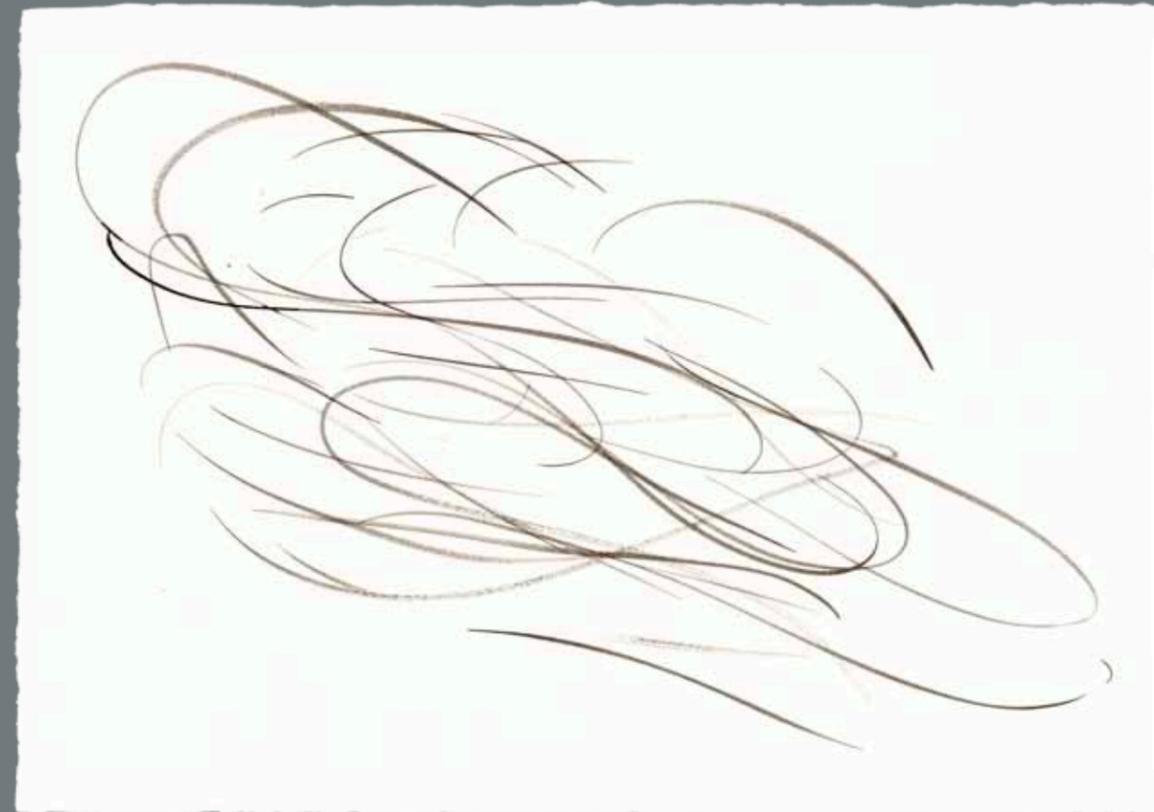


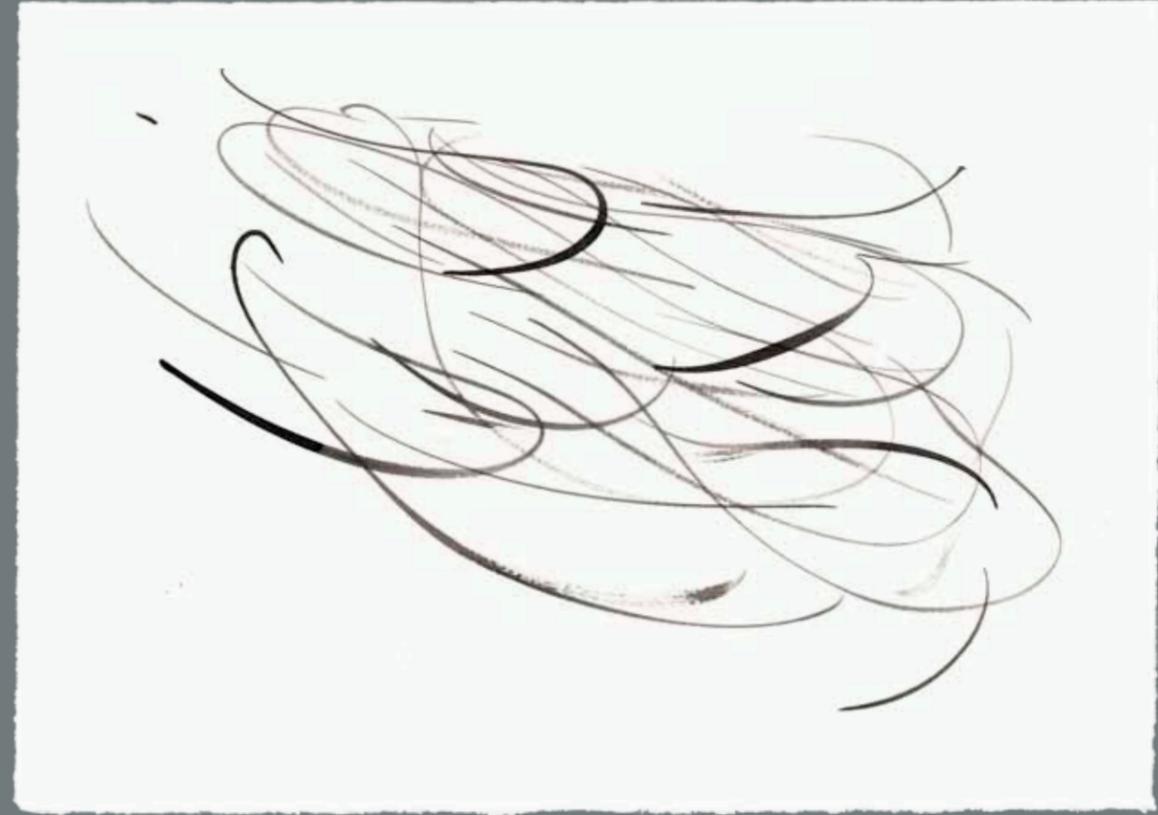


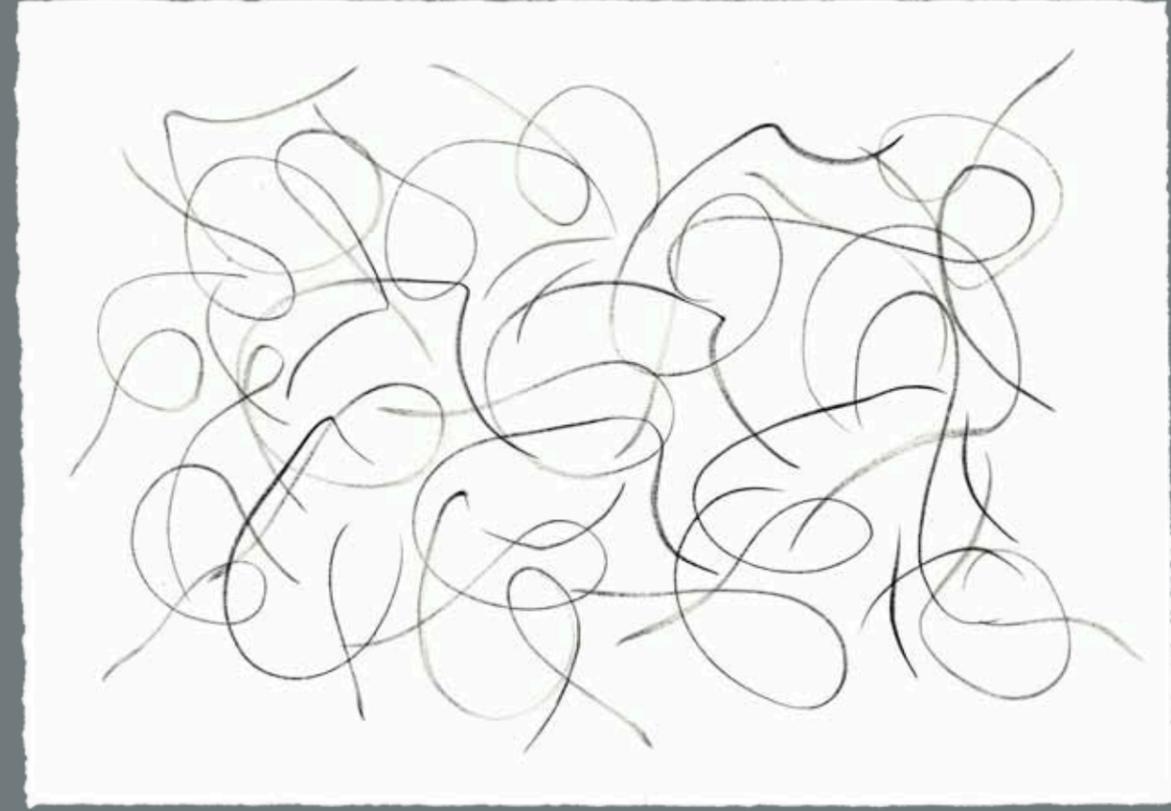
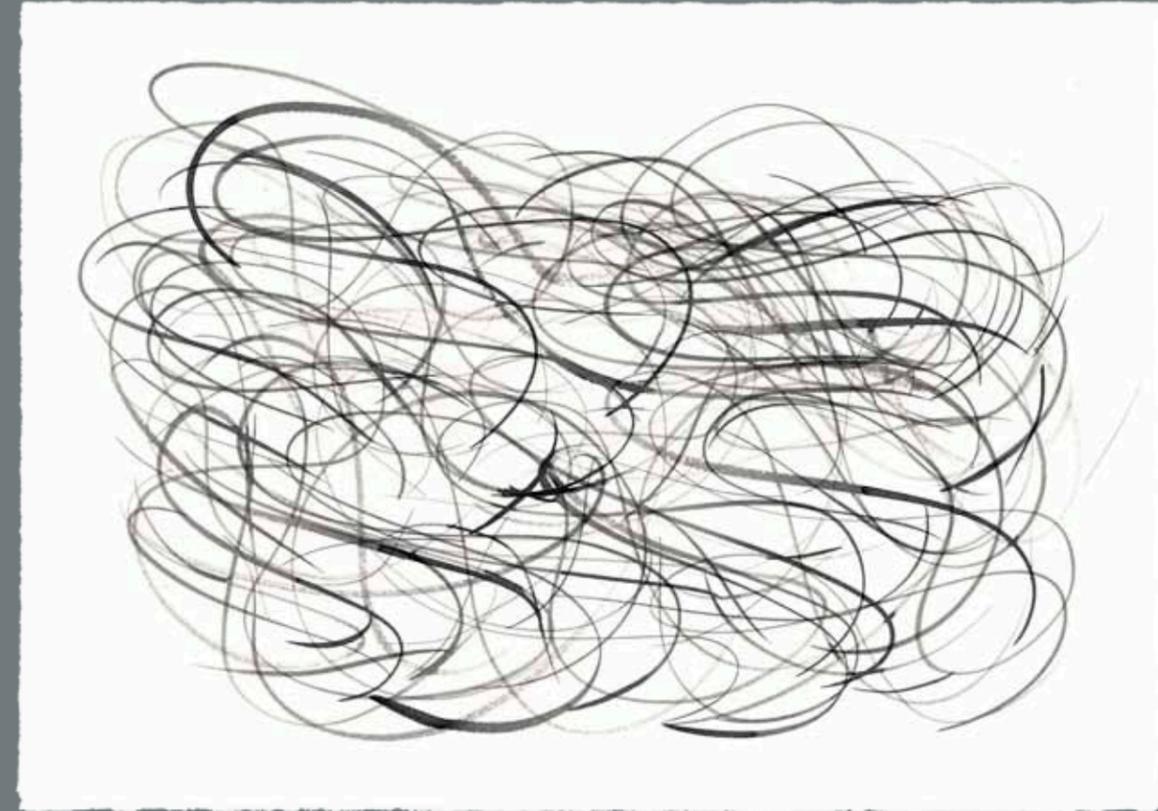


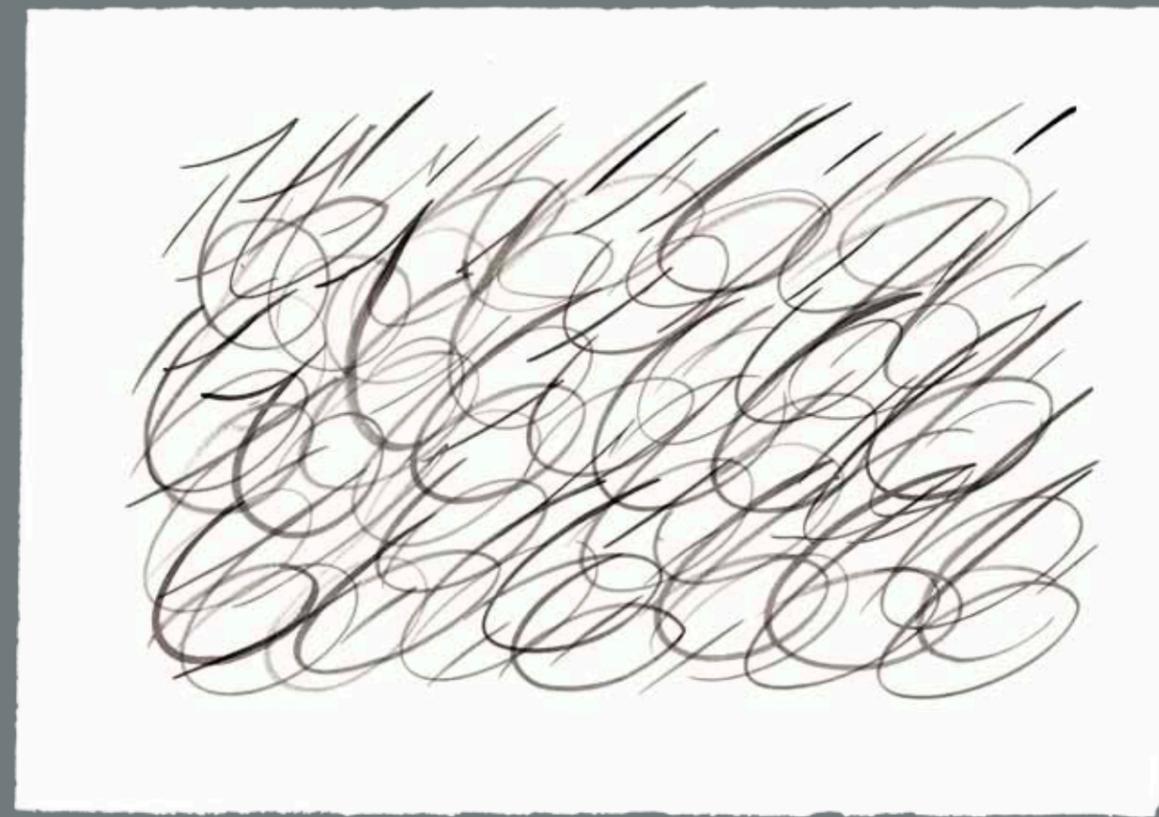
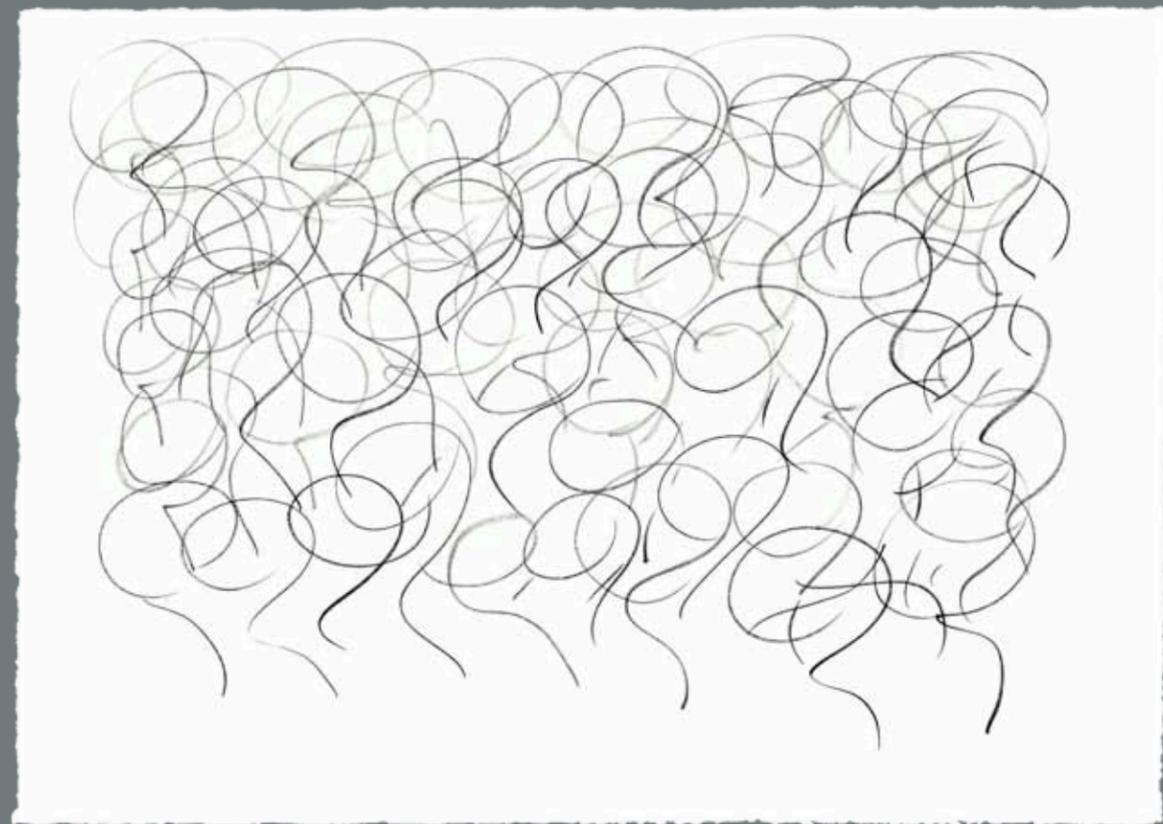


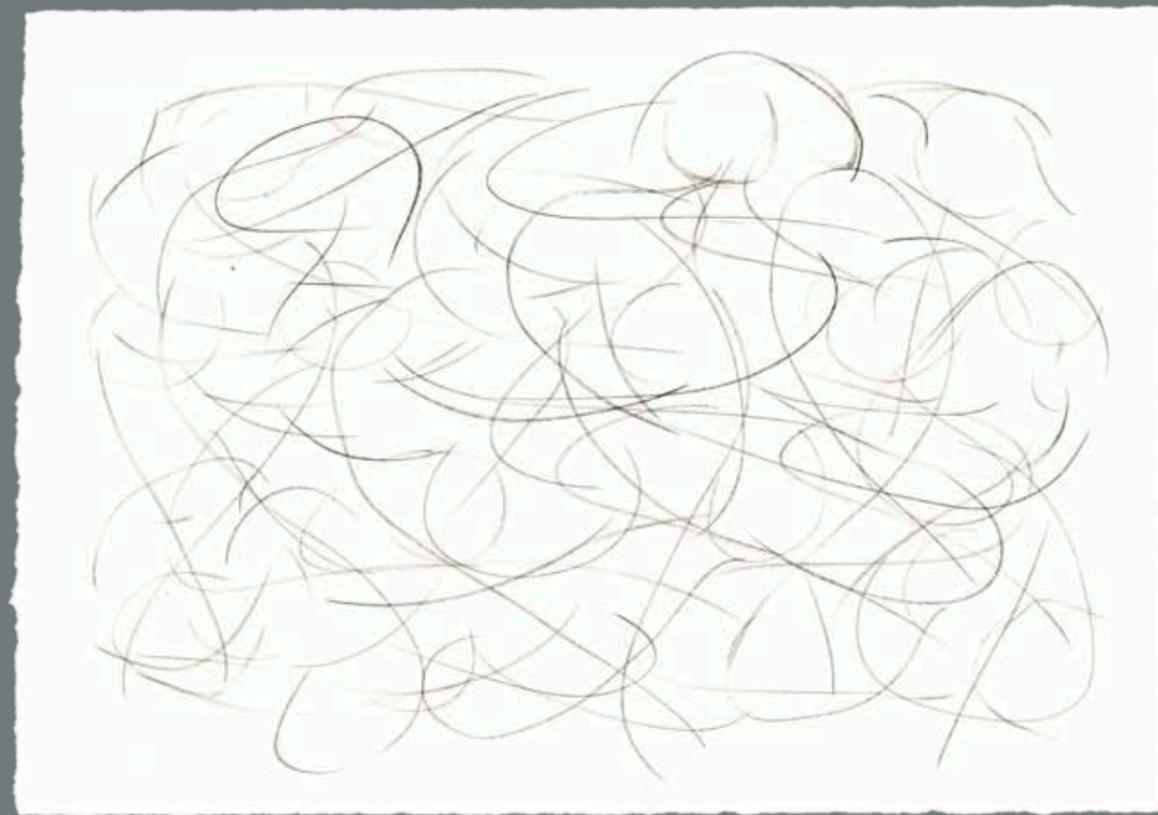
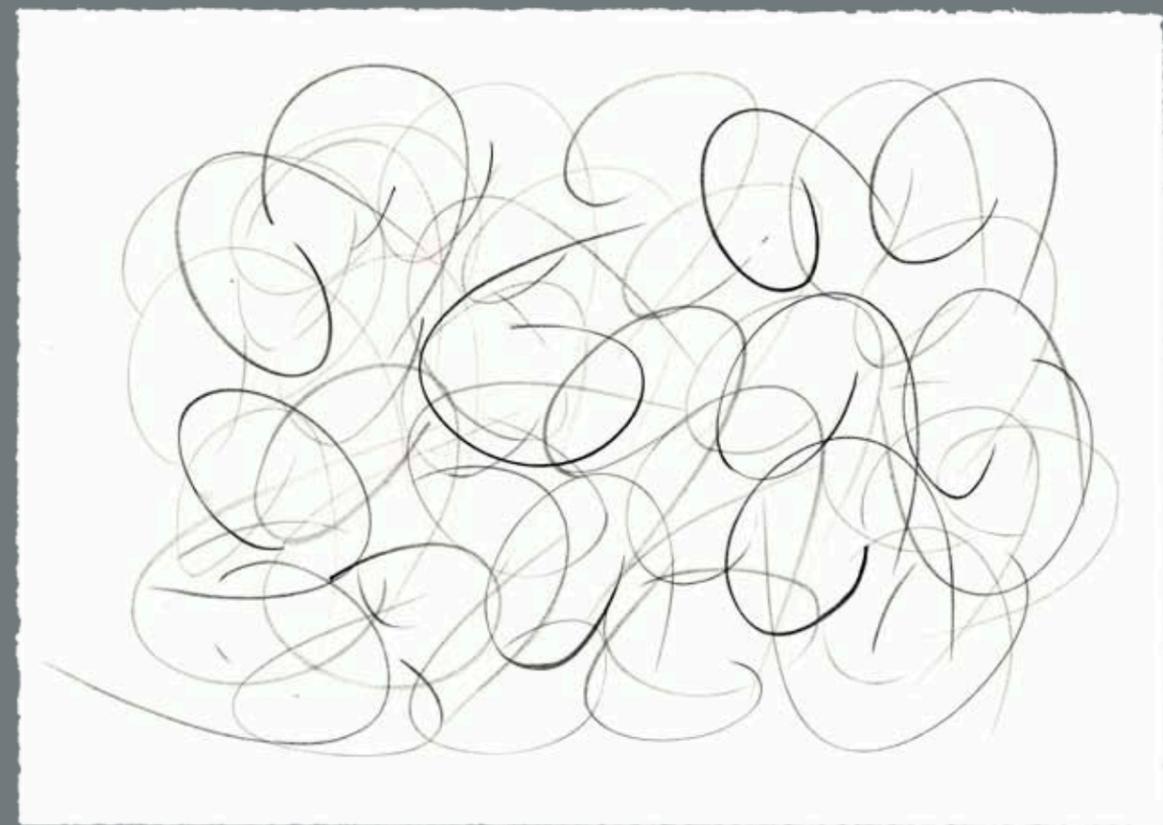


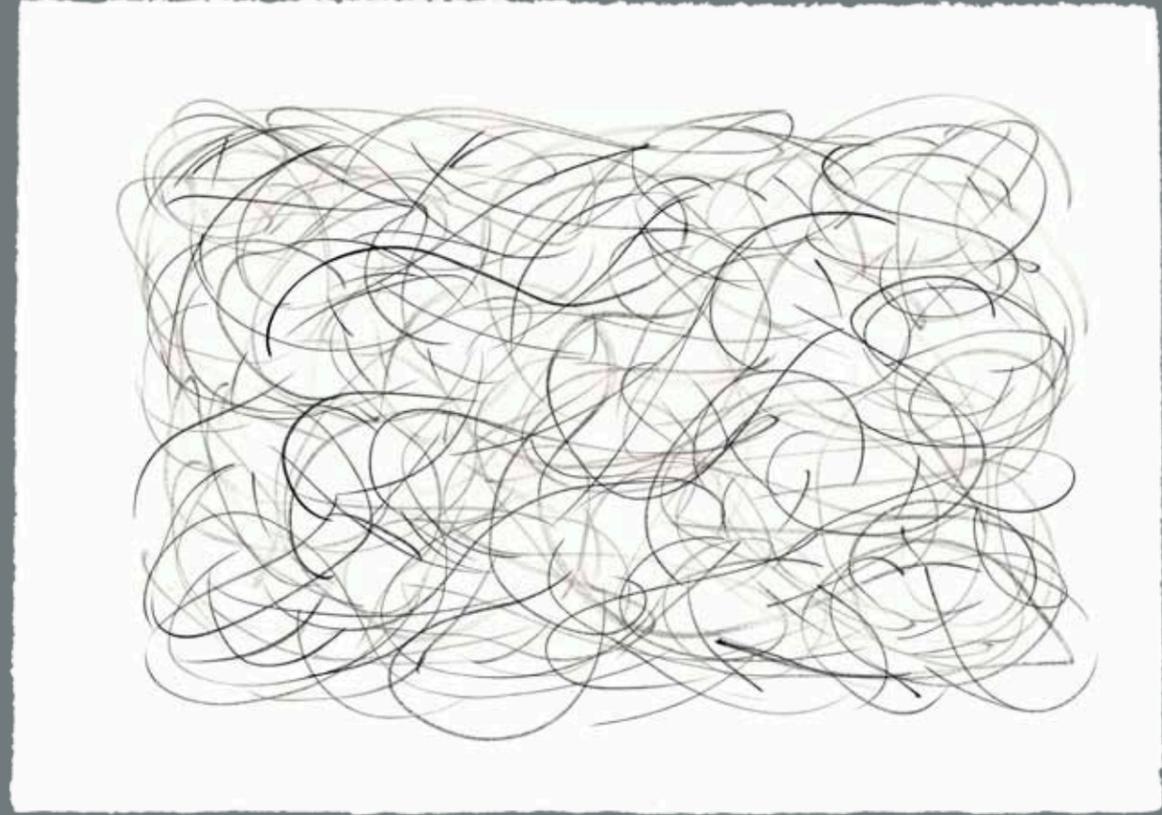
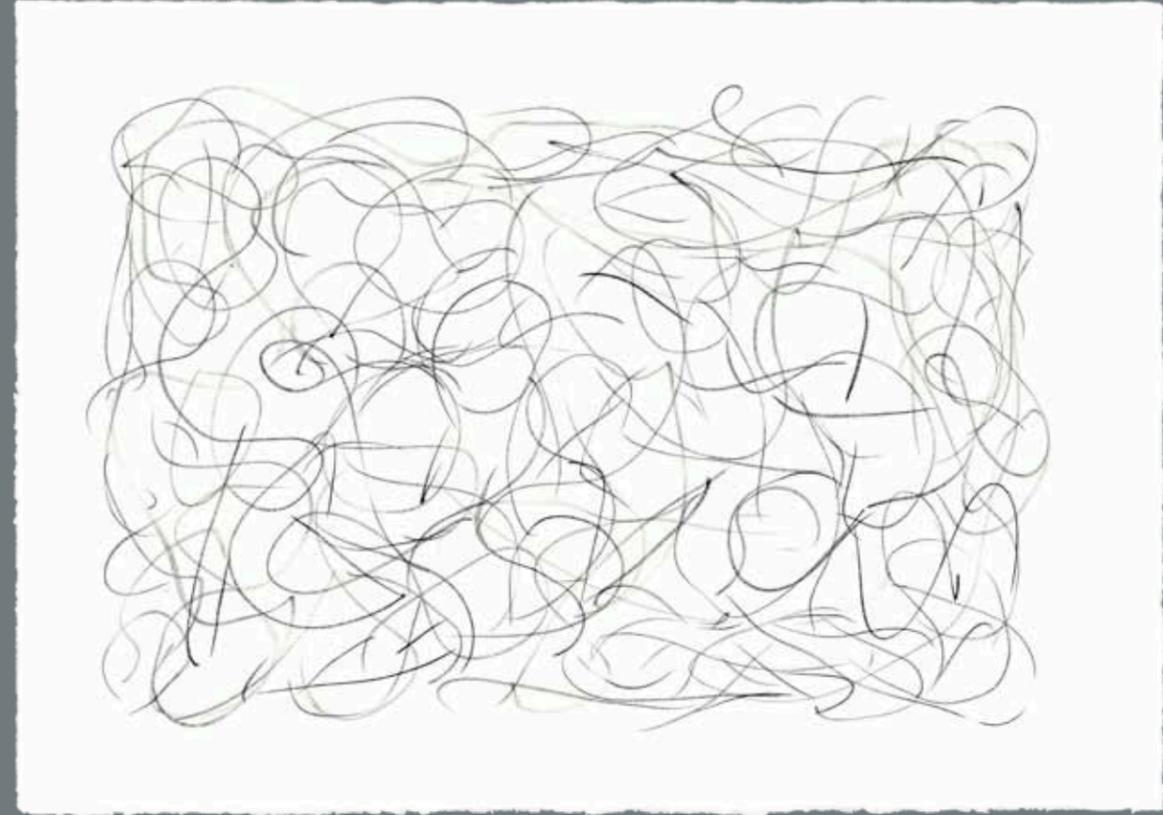


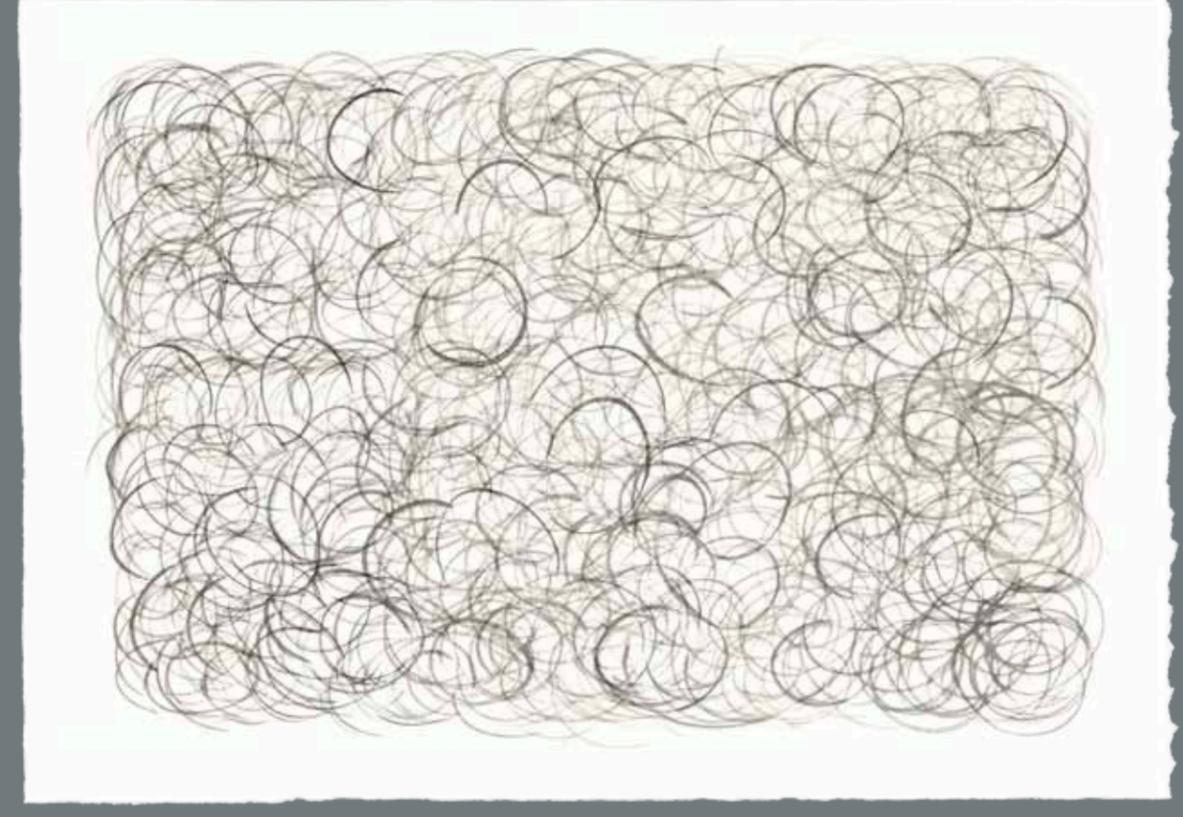
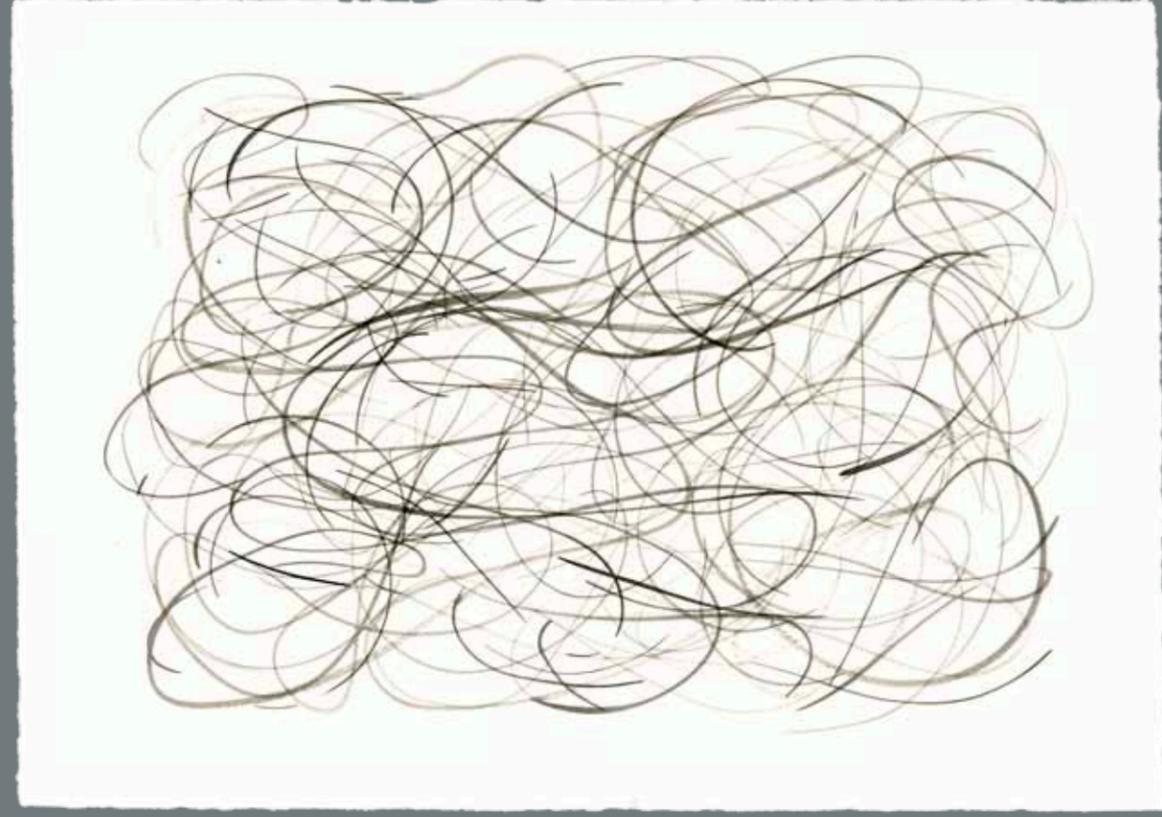


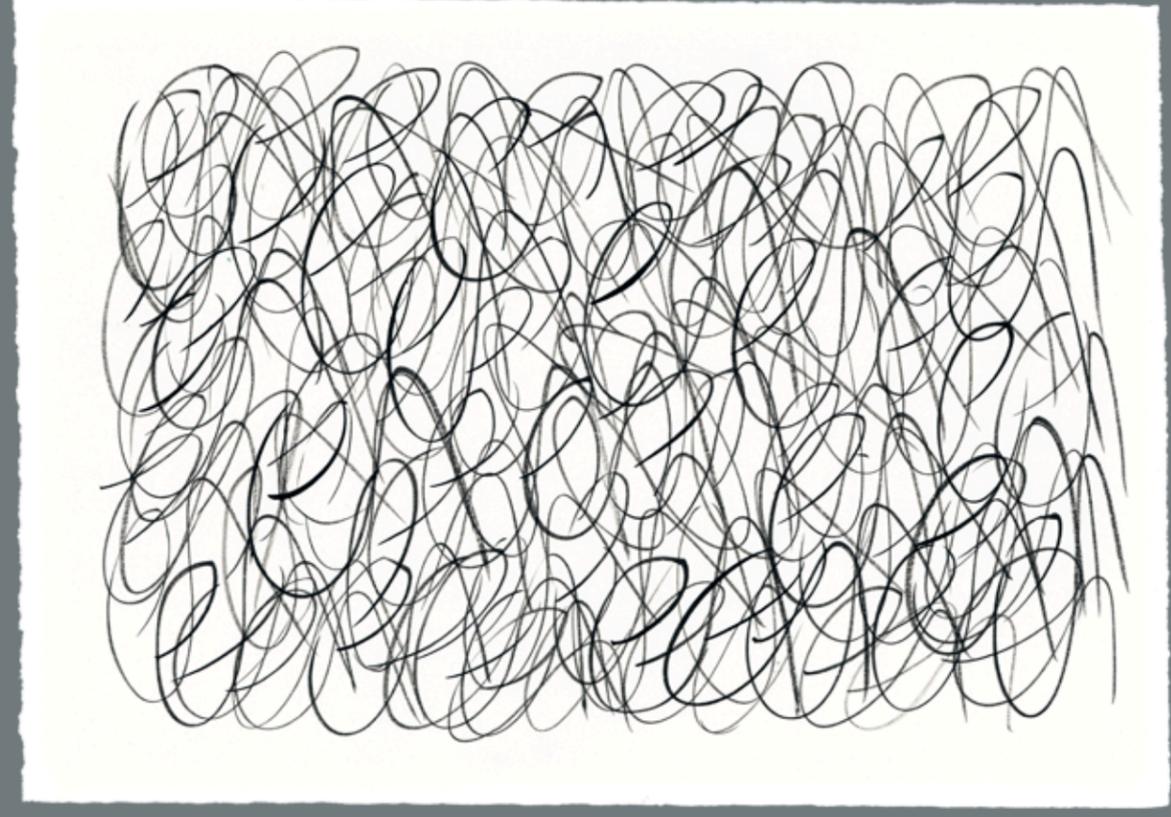
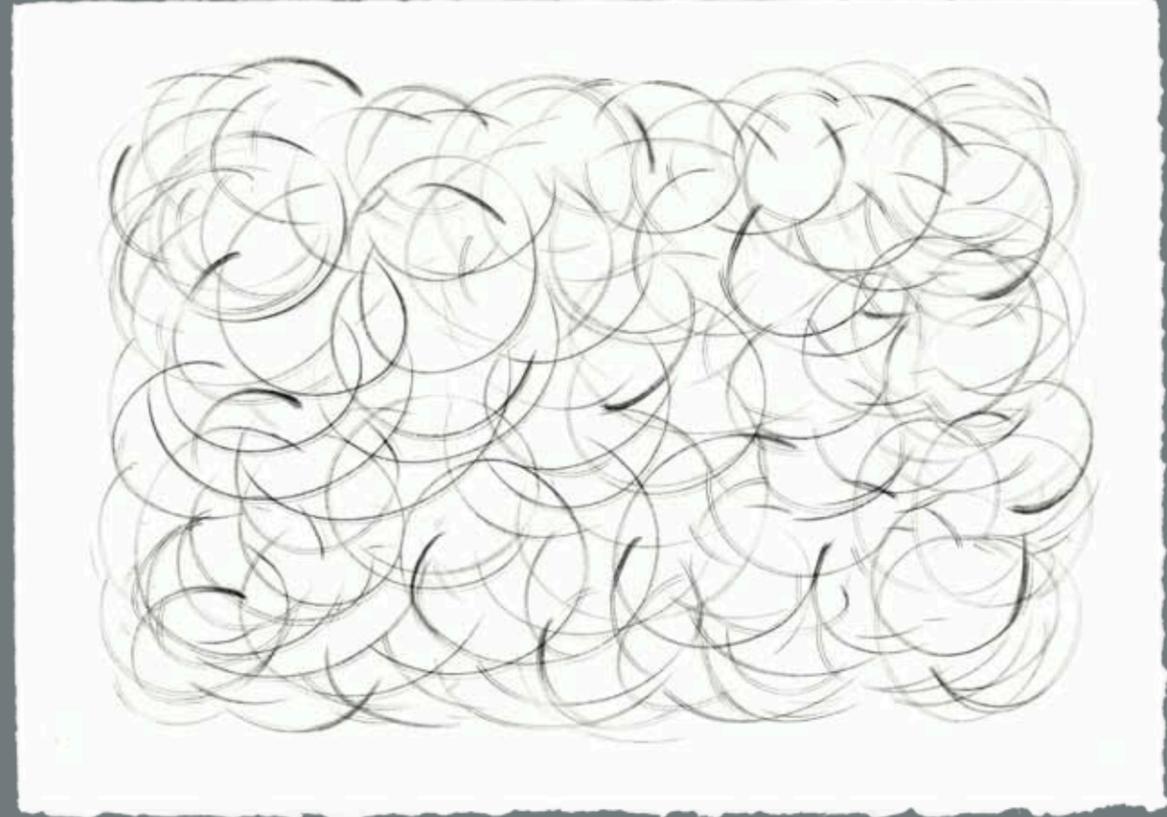


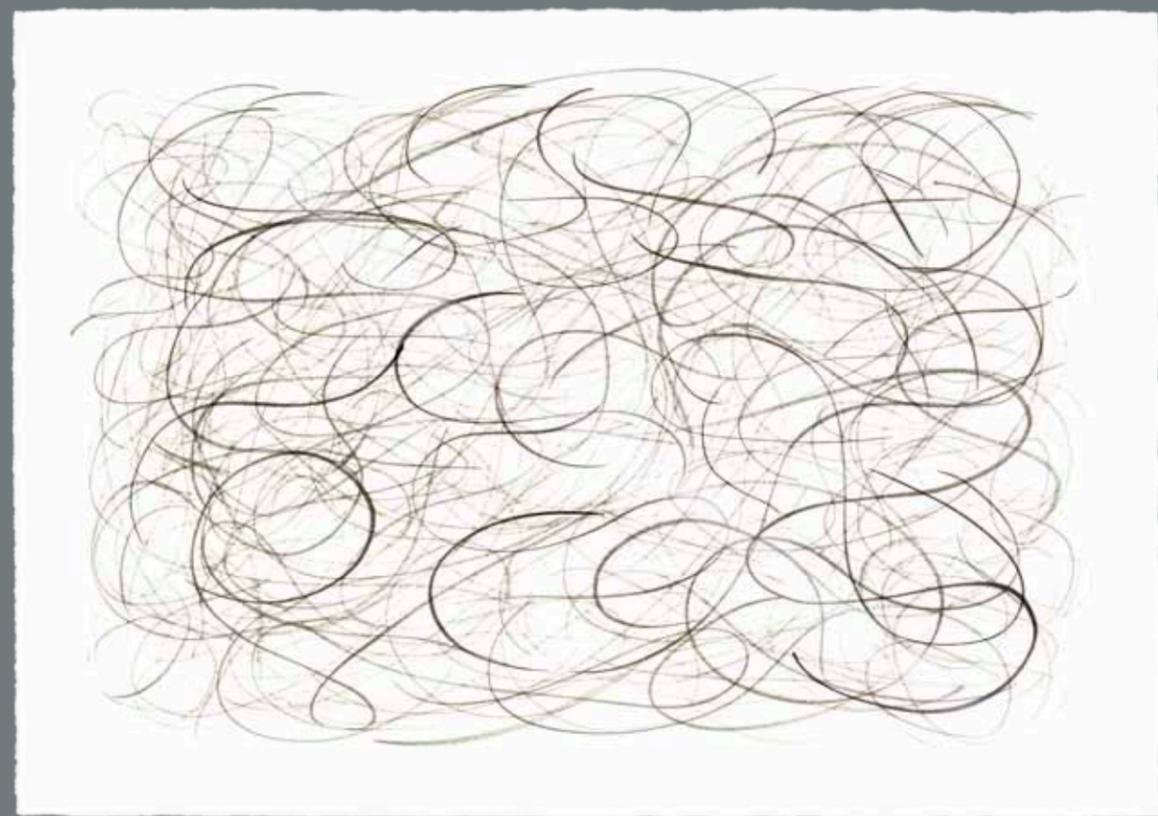
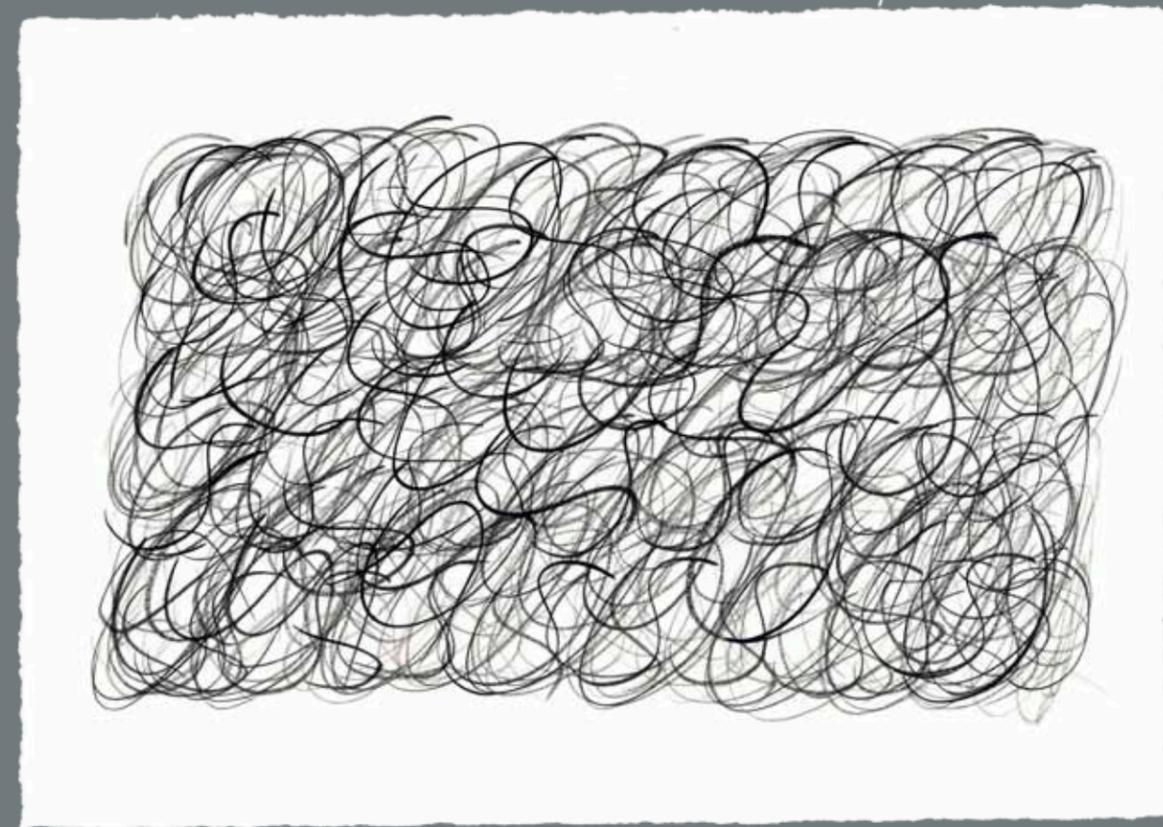


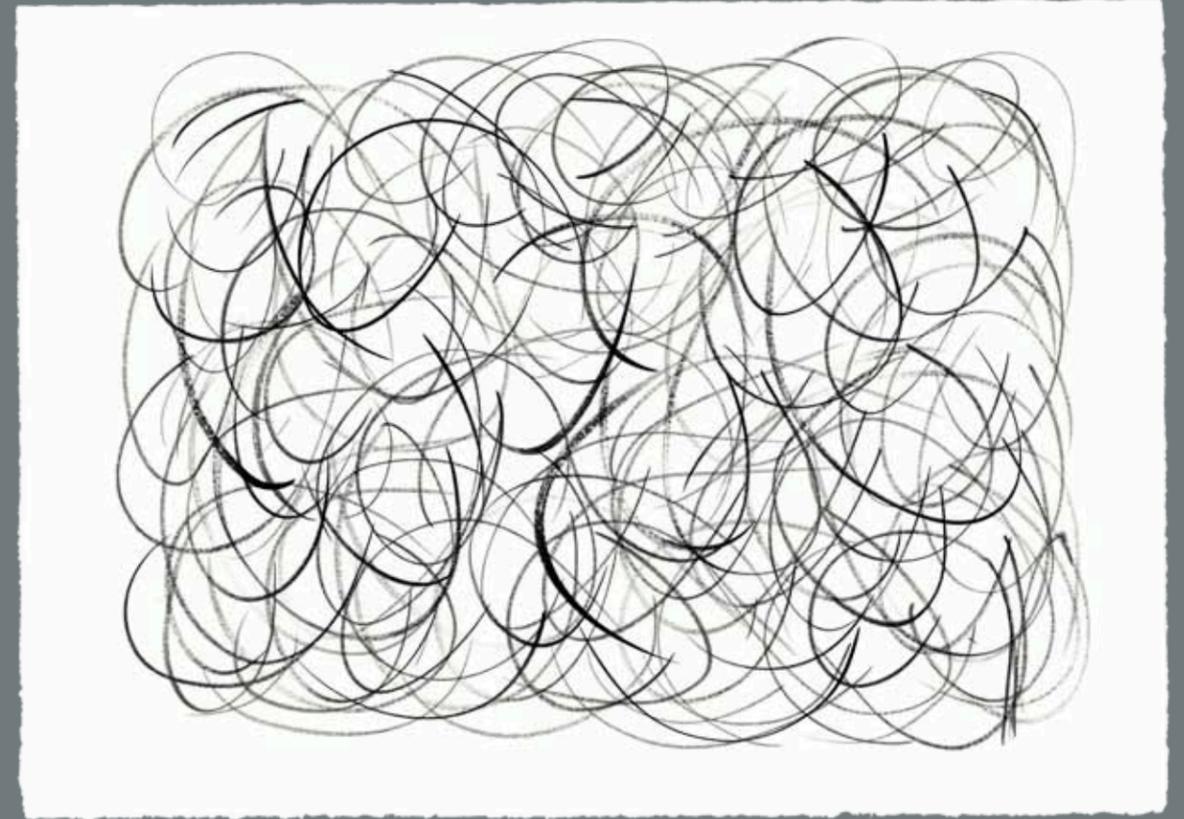
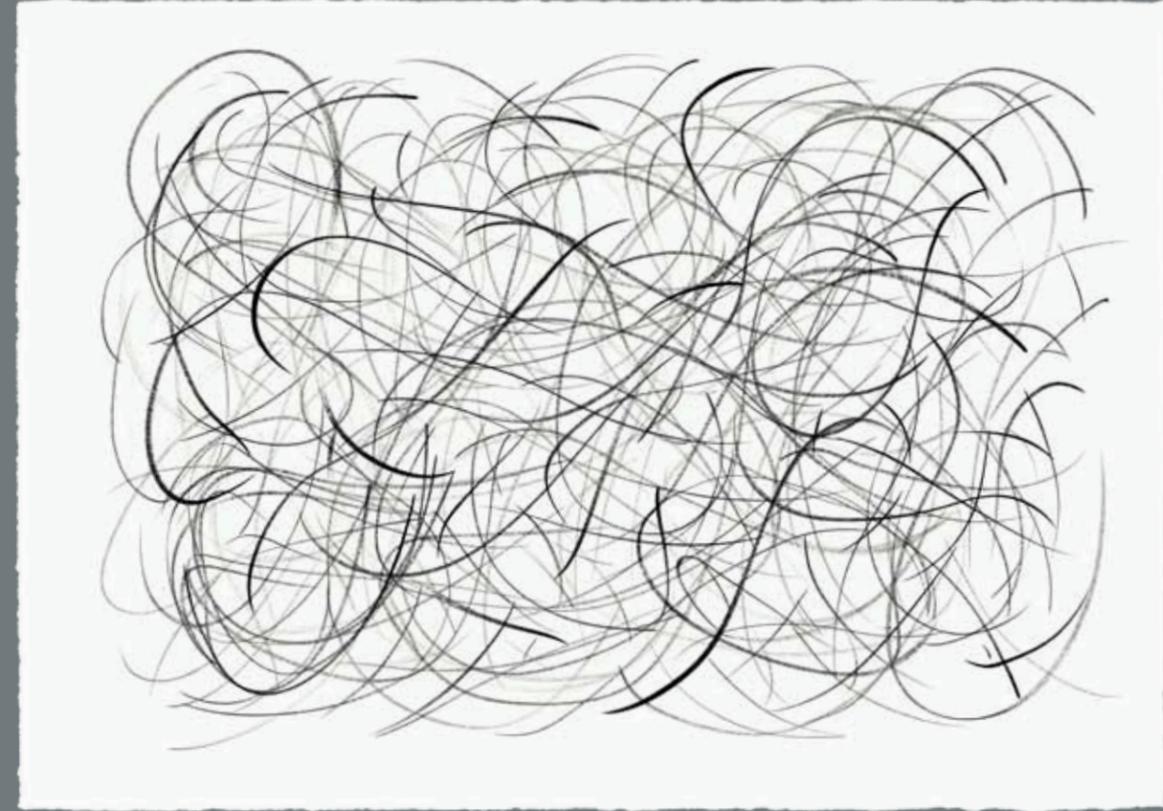


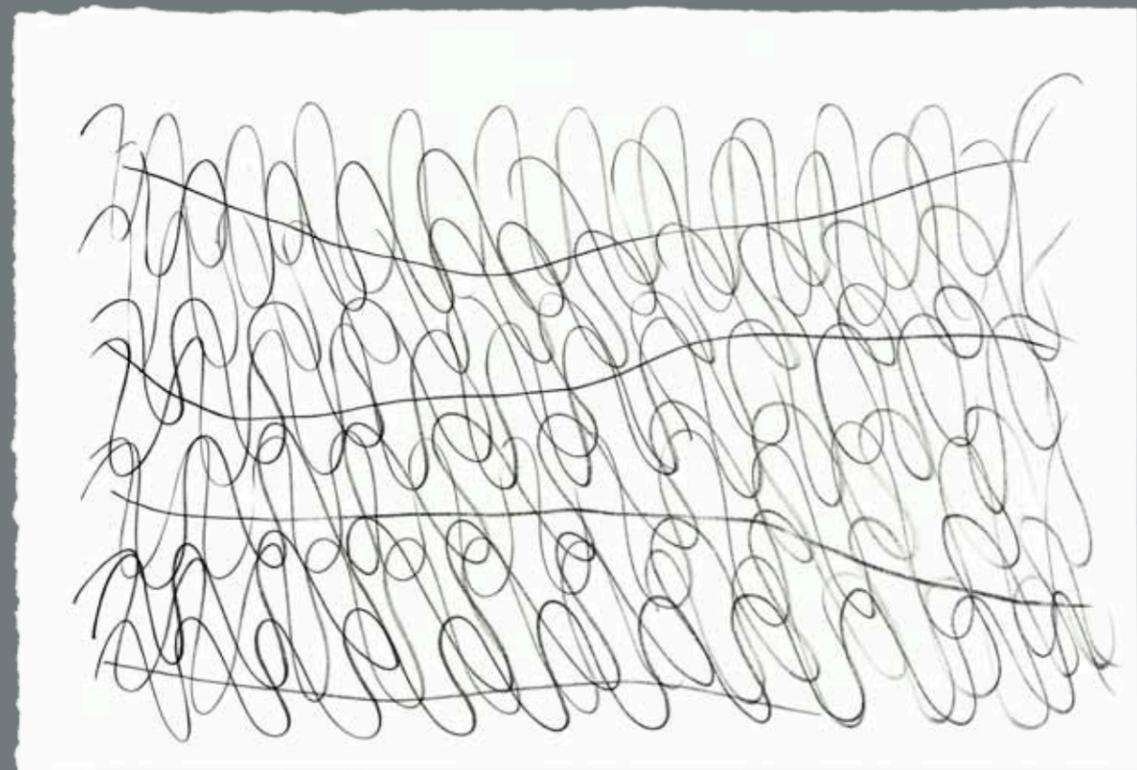
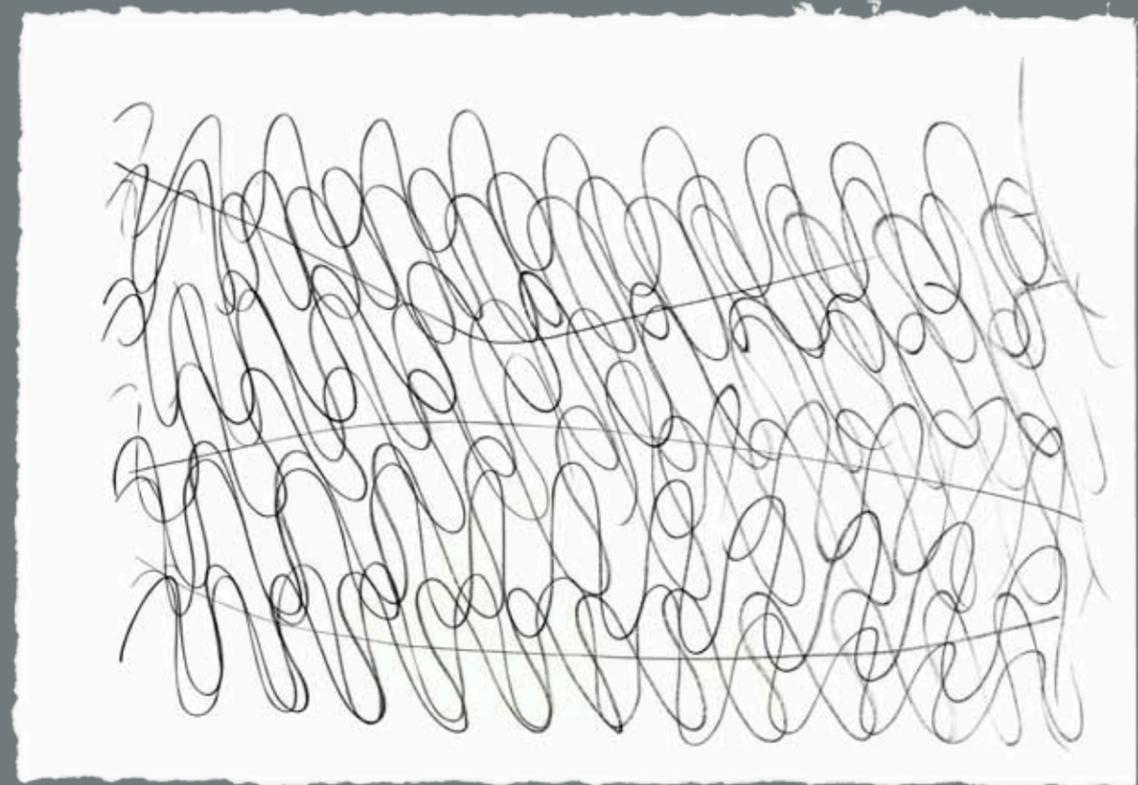


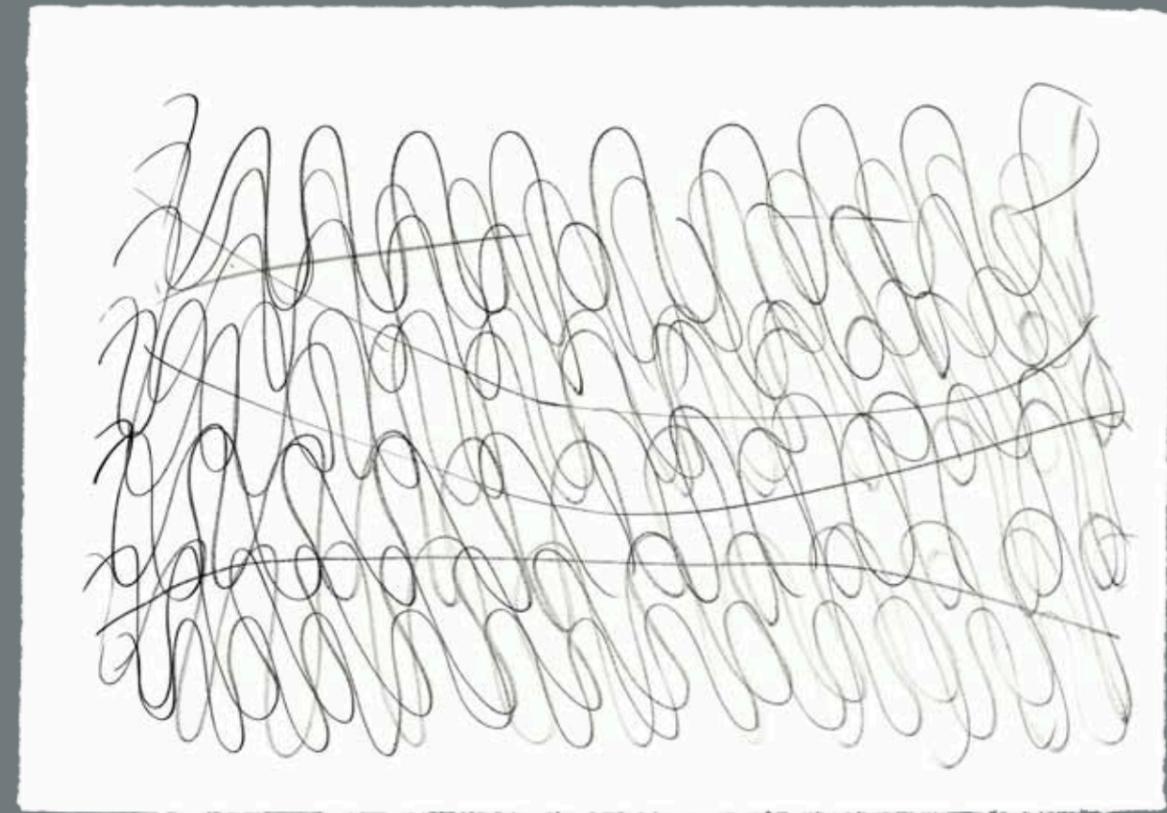


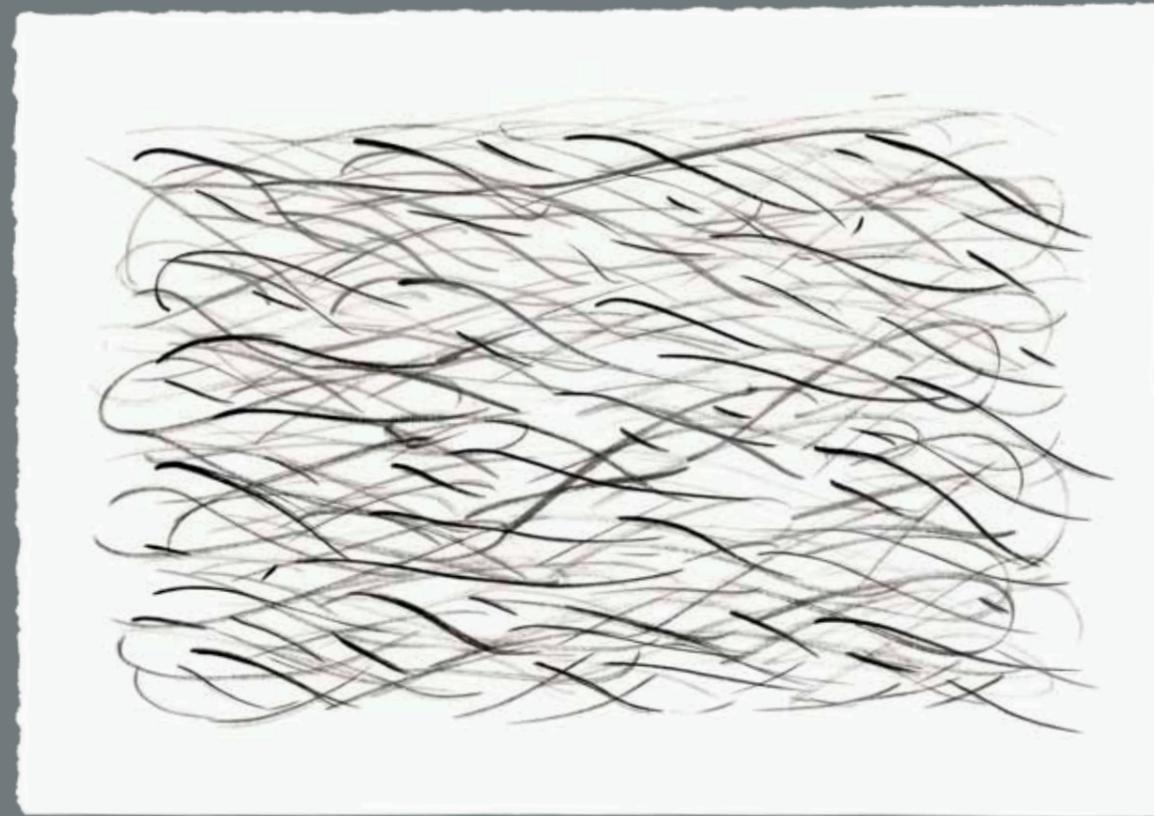
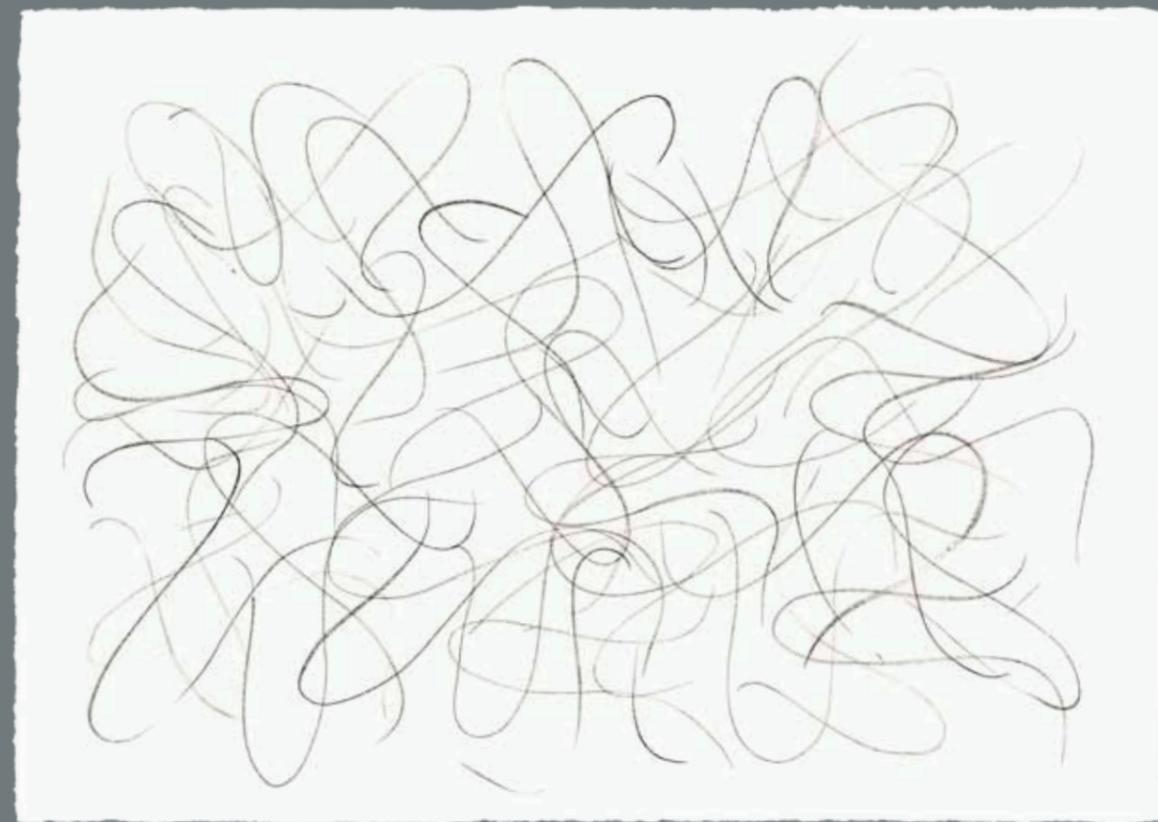


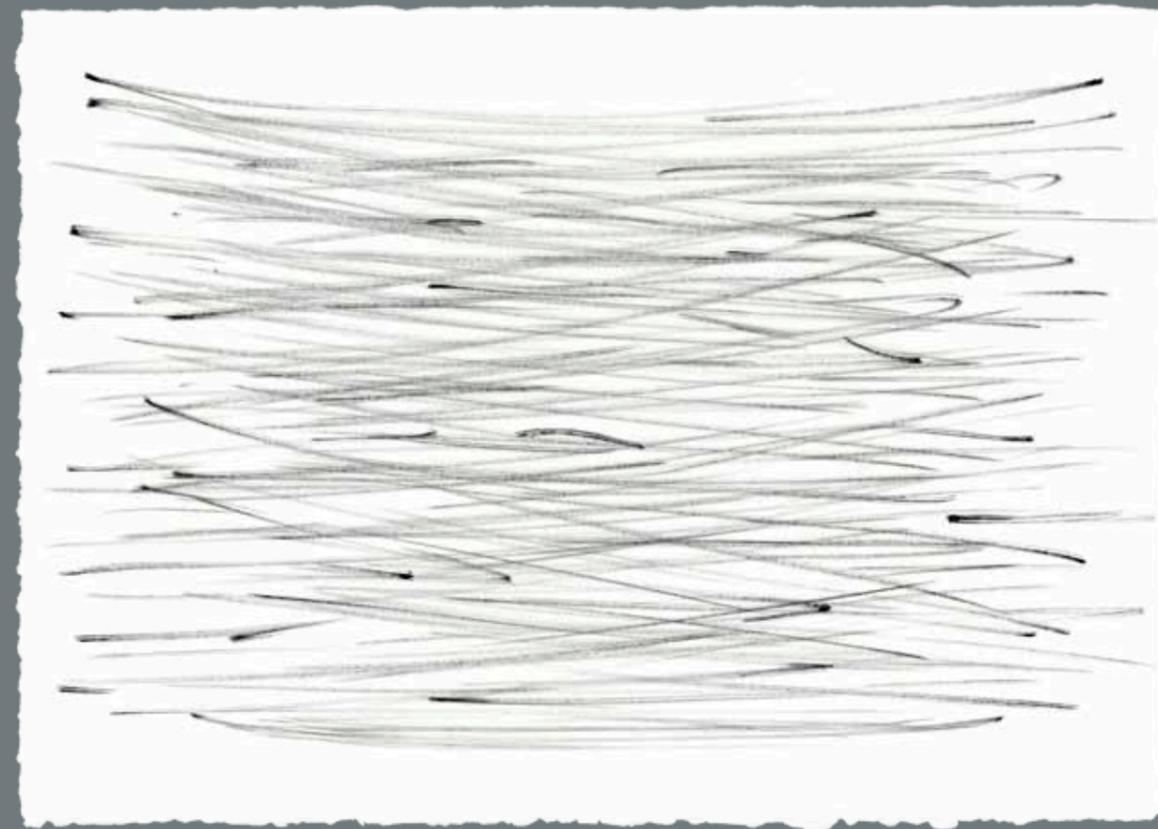




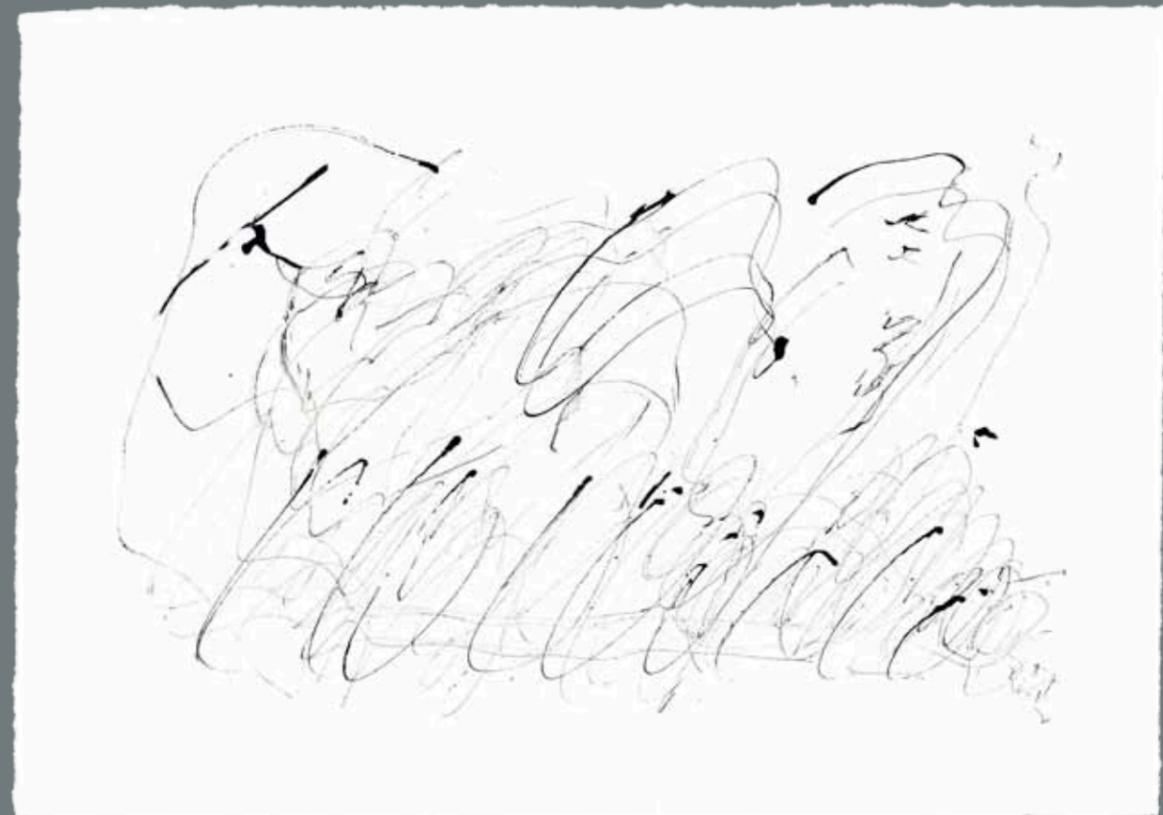


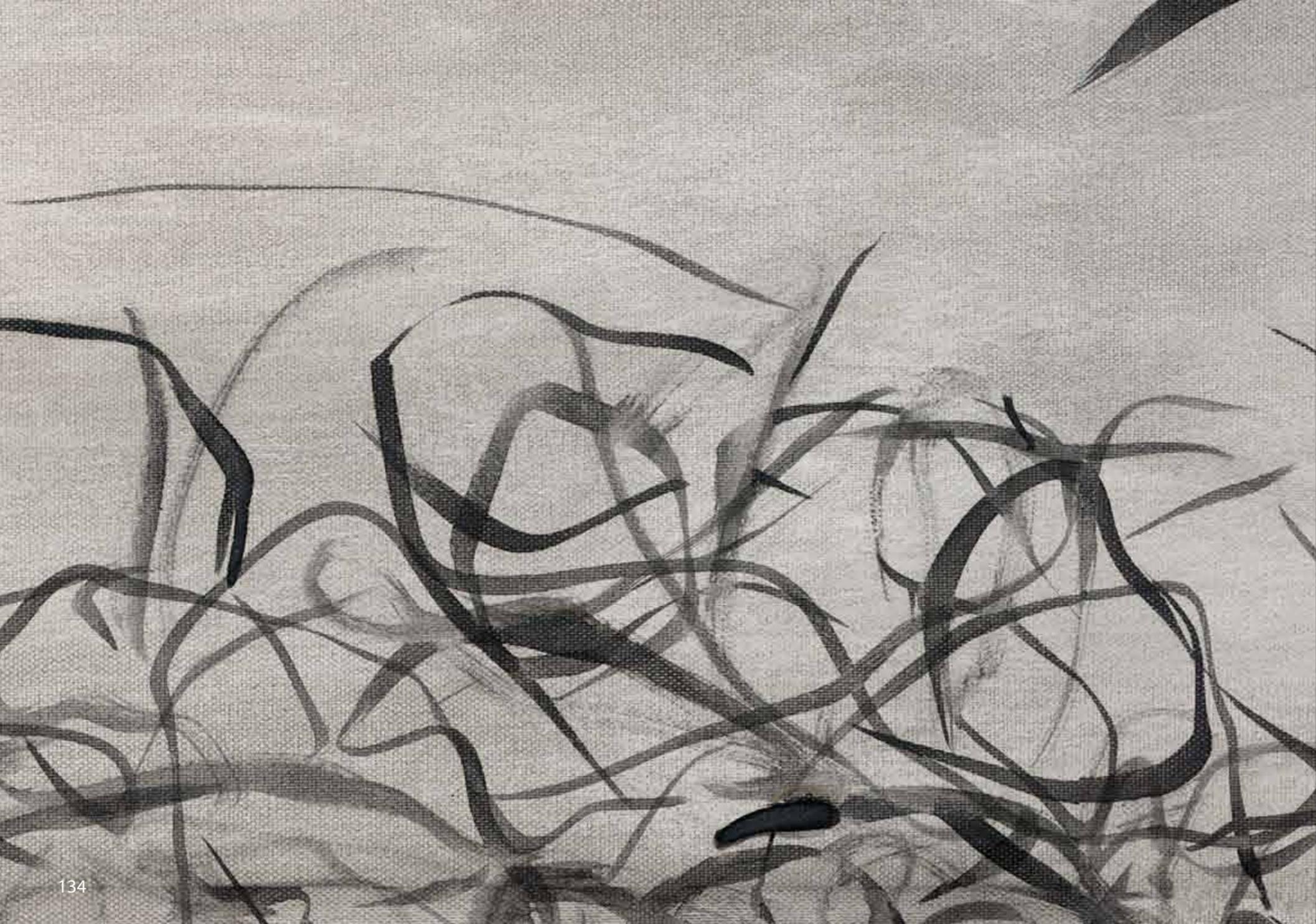












B - S E R I E S O N C A N V A S

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