

FABIENNE VERDIER

SOUNDSCAPES - THE JUILLIARD EXPERIMENT

PATRICK DEROM GALLERY  
BRUSSELS







EXHIBITION FROM DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup> 2016 TO FEBRUARY 11<sup>TH</sup> 2017

# FABIENNE VERDIER

SOUNDSCAPES - THE JUILLIARD EXPERIMENT

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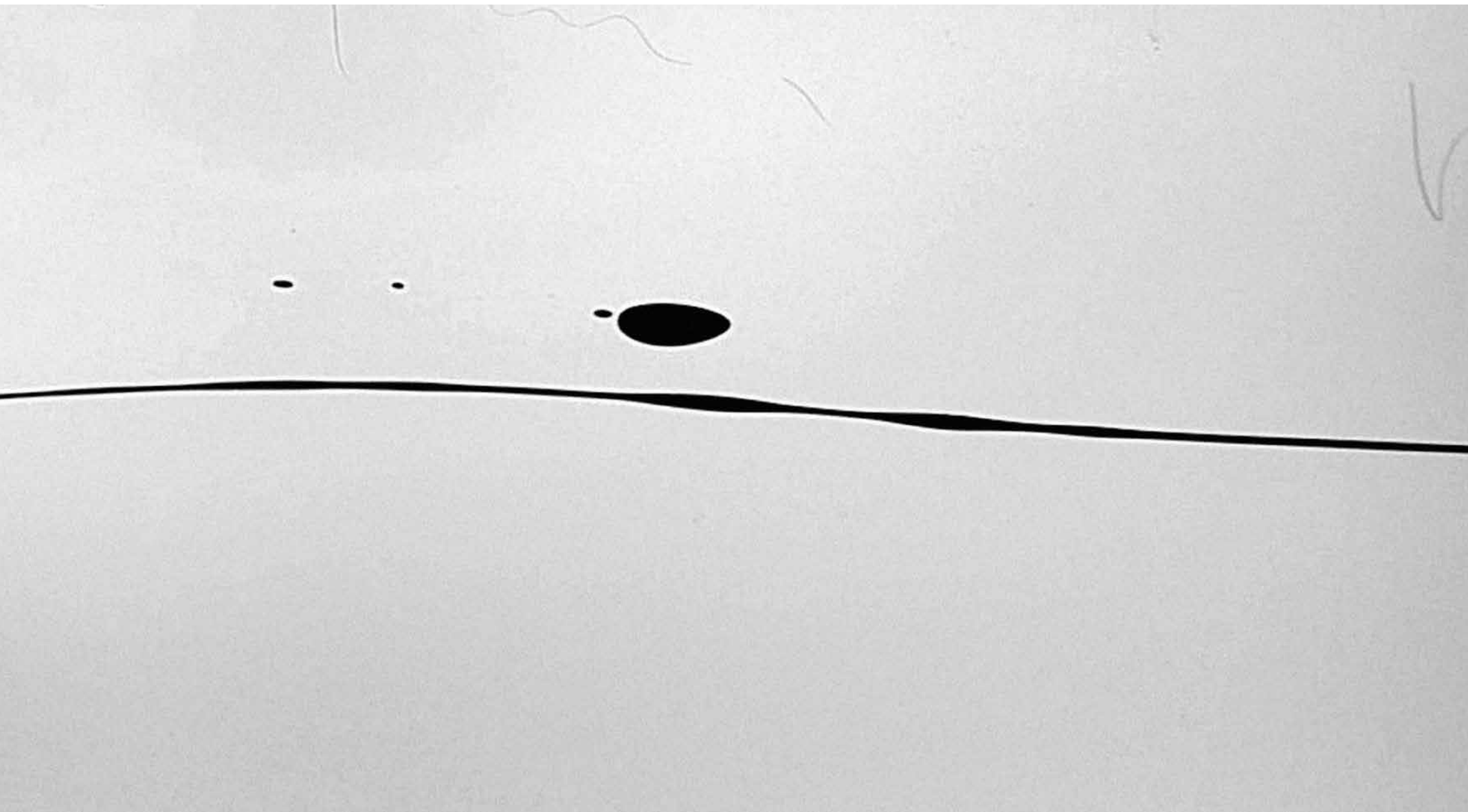
TABLE OF CONTENT

WHEN MUSIC AND PAINTING MEET	BERNARD FOCCROULLE	<i>page 12</i>
THE DEPTHS OF SILENCE	MARC COLLET	<i>page 17</i>
TO THE YOUNG MUSICIANS	FABIENNE VERDIER	<i>page 22</i>
CATALOGUE		<i>page 29</i>
BREATH COLUMNS		<i>page 30</i>
SILENCES		<i>page 36</i>
SOUND TRACES		<i>page 44</i>
MINIATURES		<i>page 56</i>
HOMAGE TO ELLIOTT CARTER		<i>page 64</i>
CERULEAN		<i>page 78</i>
JAZZ		<i>page 90</i>
BIOGRAPHY - BIBLIOGRAPHY - EXHIBITIONS		<i>page 108</i>
PUBLIC COLLECTIONS		<i>page 109</i>
CREDITS		
TECHNICAL NOTES TO THE CATALOGUE		<i>page 112</i>





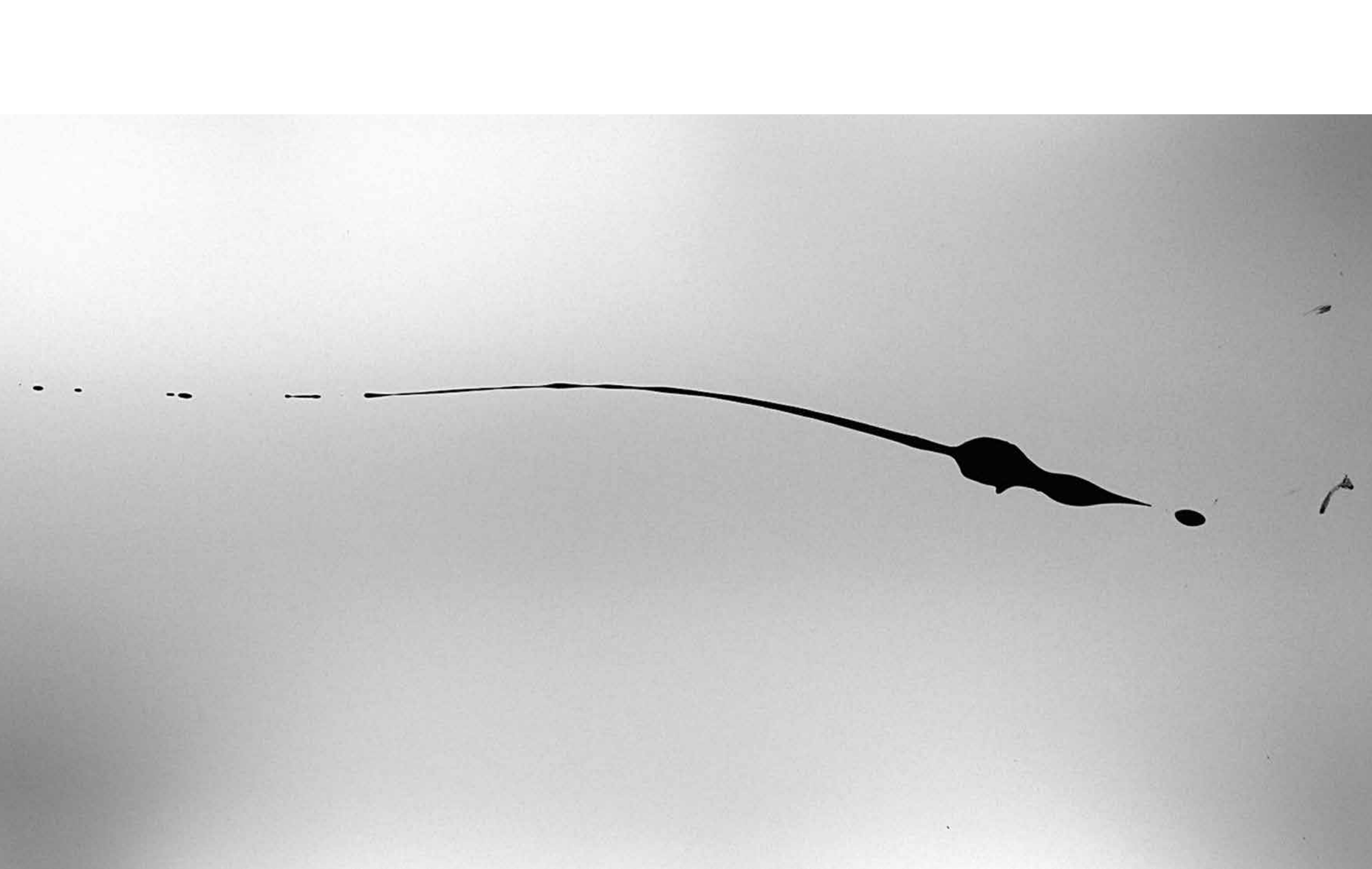
BUT WHERE DANGER LIES, SALVATION GROWS TOO











## WHEN MUSIC AND PAINTING MEET

PAINTING AND MUSIC ENGAGE WITH TIME AND SPACE IN FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT WAYS; AS SUCH, THEY COME TOGETHER ONLY RARELY. Plenty of paintings depict musicians or musical instruments; more rarely, a musical work will reference the art of painting (Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, for example). But can we really think of this in terms of dialogue? Drawing on her wide-ranging background and first-hand experience of Chinese painting, artist and music-lover Fabienne Verdier orchestrates an unprecedented encounter between the two art forms. Working in residence at The Juilliard School in New York, she was able to explore, experiment and create new works resonating with the medium of sound itself.

How can contemporary painters and musicians come together to explore new expressive forms? First, through silence, without which music cannot unfold. Music is born of silence, and inhabited by silence: the painter understands and feels this with particular intensity, by the very nature of her work.

Second, through abstraction. Abstraction lies at the heart of music in all its forms. It comes as no surprise, then, that an artist who engages profoundly with abstraction should develop an expressive language that resonates with the world of music.

Third, through expression – a trickier concept, and a dangerous, thoroughly loaded term that brings a risk of complete misunderstanding. But a word I like to associate with

abstraction nonetheless: it brings to mind the work of choreographer Trisha Brown, a great New York artist whose stagings of opera (notably Monteverdi's *Orfeo*) are based on an exceptional alliance of abstraction and expression, rooted in the work's drama, the meaning of its words, and the power of its music, in equal parts.

Painters and musicians talk readily about rhythm. Fabienne Verdier's work is especially eloquent here, it seems to me: her paintings at the Juilliard School are suggestive of musical scores, bearing the rhythmic imprint and accents of the music that inspired them.

Colour is another element linking painting and music – a connection explored less in Fabienne's paintings, it seems, perhaps



because working in colour is more time-consuming. Nonetheless, the textures in her work – sometimes in black and white, sometimes polychromatic – come very close to the textures of music, it seems to me, whether jazz or ancient polyphonies. When I think of Paul Klee, one of the most musical of the great 20th-century painters, I see a kind of kinship – or parallelism? – with Fabienne Verdier's work: both capture the mark of time in their paintings, especially in the rhythm and explosive, splashy quality of certain textures.

Virtuosity: I'm suspicious of this well-worn concept, too often associated with facile, spectacular but superficial forms of virtuosity. But I am a profound admirer of the

virtuoso 'gesture', brilliantly described by Luciano Berio, and imprinted throughout his work (not least the magnificent *Sequenzas*) and that of so many of his contemporaries. I see the same virtuosity in Fabienne Verdier's work, her improvised gestures, and the marks of time and tempo.

It will be fascinating to follow Fabienne Verdier's work as it evolves in the years ahead, to see just how far she takes the making of painterly, creative gestures in resonance with music.

'To encounter others, you first have to counter your own self,' writes Fabienne Verdier in her dedication to the young musicians she met at the great New York institution. 'In other words, you have to

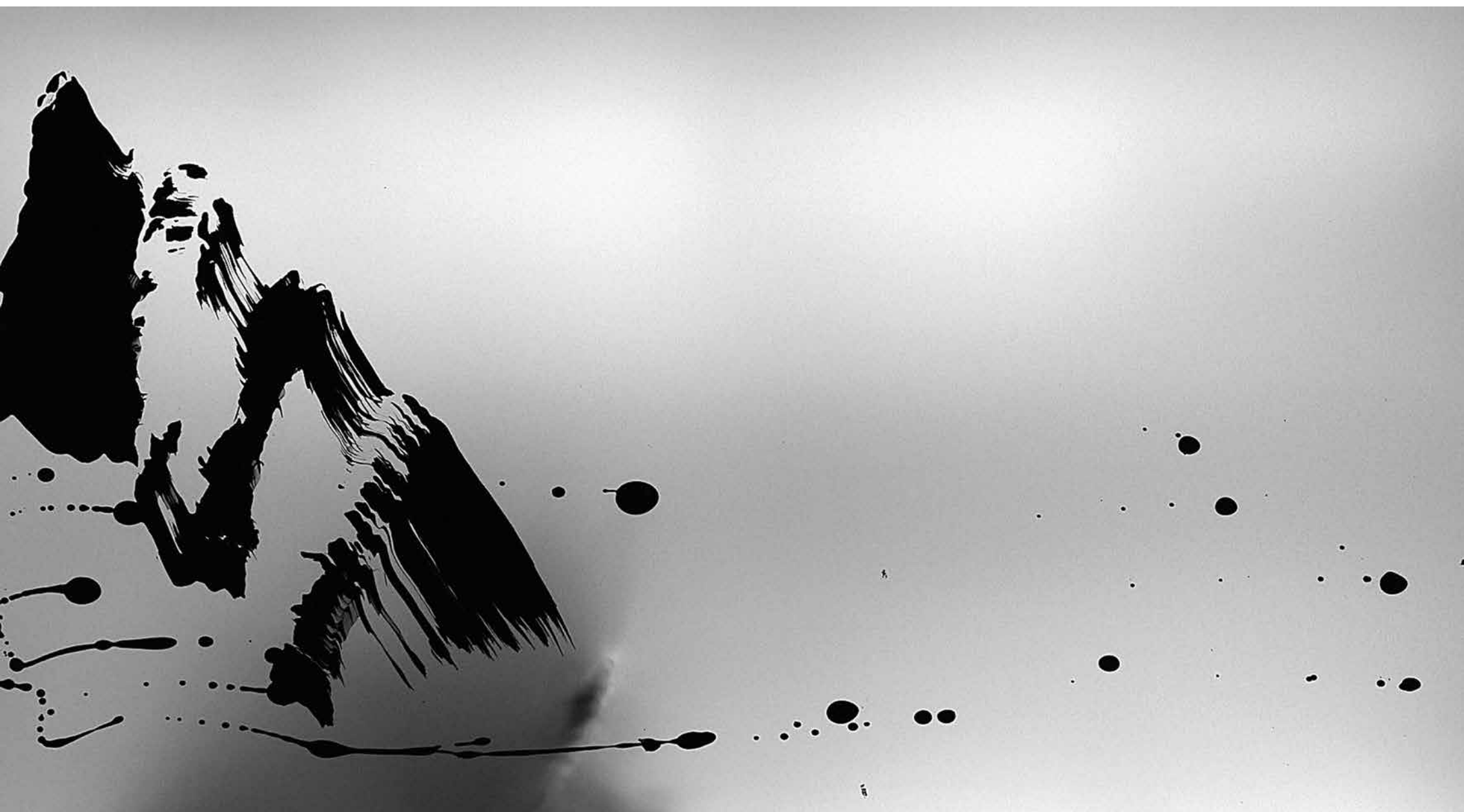
accept the need for personal jeopardy.'

Reaching out to others – other individuals, other cultures – is surely one of the greatest challenges we face in today's world, marked by migration, war, fanaticism, and cultural and religious conflict. I like the notion that to encounter others we must engage in a parallel quest for enhanced self-knowledge. The idea appeals because it applies to individuals and communities alike, perhaps even to entire nations.

That an artistic experiment can open our eyes to such questions confirms the intimate connection between artistic creativity and the major issues of our time.

BERNARD FOCCROULLE, spring 2016







## THE DEPTHS OF SILENCE

THE GENESIS OF FABIENNE VERDIER'S MUSICAL EXPERIMENT AT NEW YORK'S JULLIARD SCHOOL IS CLOSELY, AND LOGICALLY, CONNECTED TO THE GENESIS OF HER INVITATION TO THE GROENINGEMUSEUM IN BRUGES.

Experiments in pictorial light and depth through the use of transparent glazes; a quest for spirituality of a kind: at its most essential level, Fabienne Verdier's work possesses something of the Flemish primitives, and it is for this reason that the Groeningemuseum invited her to work *in situ*, and to exhibit the results, in its Old Master galleries.

Just as the Groeningemuseum offered Verdier the chance to create new work in response to the paintings in its historical collections, so the Juilliard School in New

York – inspired by the essentially musical quality of her work – invited the artist to make new paintings in response to music played live at the school.

'I've always understood a painted line in terms of a line of music. And in soundlines, I've always seen a kind of painterly, pictorial structure', says Verdier, who was attracted to themes from the world of music very early on in her career. *Fugue de Bach* ('Bach Fugue', 1992), *Cinabre et Sérénade* (1997) and *Hommage aux variations sans thème de Yehudi Menuhin* ('Hommage to Yehudi Menuhin's Variations Without a Theme', 1997) are some of the earliest manifestations of this in her work. More recently, in 2011 and, especially, in 2013, Verdier's *Polyphonie* series is a daz-

zling assertion of her interest in thought as sound: polyptychs presented in the great hall of the Hôpital Saint-Jean in Bruges feature motifs resonating with the imagery of the building's stained glass windows.

Painting and music have exerted an evident, mutual fascination since their earliest beginnings, but the most pertinent examples of musical influence on the visual arts came at the dawn of the 20th century, with the move into abstraction. While Kandinsky's close engagement with 'musical' composition and the works of Arnold Schoenberg is well known, it is Paul Klee who springs most readily to mind in this context – he who succeeded in incorporating musical constructions and modes of thought into his teaching on painting.

Pierre Boulez comments extensively on Klee's approach in his study *The Fertile Land*. But authentic examples of the influence of music on painting are still rare. Inevitably, an overly literal transcription from one realm to the other is a creative dead end. Verdier knows this: rather, her sense of the painterly value of a correlation to musical composition is derived from her appreciation of the two art forms at their most profound, essential level. If we can identify one intrinsic, properly musical quality in Verdier's work, it is the silence and resonance contained in the multiple layers forming the backgrounds of her canvases. The transparent glazes create a resonant space that seems to emerge from silence itself, across which multiple lines

unfold, each different from the next. We are reminded of how canvases by Mark Rothko immerse the viewer in profound depths of silence – a phenomenon Morton Feldman understands very well. Feldman was invited by the M  nil Foundation to write a musical work to be premiered in Houston at the Chapel housing fourteen specially-commissioned works by Rothko – a work that acts as a kind of extension of their silence. We remember, too, that Feldman composed the music for Hans Namuth's 1951 film about Jackson Pollock. And the extraordinary effect of the harmonics and cello *pizzicati* accompanying the trickles of paint on glass, filmed from the reverse of the transparent pane.

From Anton Webern to Arvo P  rt and the

iconic works of John Cage, the power of silence is an essential characteristic of 20th and 21st-century music. Feldman's work is one of its purest manifestations.

Counterpoint is another, more traditionally musical quality present in Verdier's work. Since the early 1990s, she has applied a seal whose form and colour specifically enact the concept of *punctus contra punctum*, the most elementary definition of counterpoint. Since the early 2000s, this 'counterfoil' function in her work has shifted to the traces left by flows of ink, anticipating or accompanying the artist's action on the canvas.

It is in this context – the daily practice of silence, the qualities of resonance and contrapuntal depth – that Verdier's new experiment at the

Juilliard School takes on its fullest meaning. 'I try to capture a moment of reality instantly, as it unfolds in space, in that eternity of the moment, and to live wholly in the exact moment at which I traverse the space of my canvas with the brush', as Fabienne Verdier explains to Daniel Abadie in his book about her encounter with the Flemish primitives. What better definition of her new experiment at the Juilliard School of Music? As Verdier says herself, she needed to 'dare to transform', and to 'let herself be penetrated by the very essence of sound.'

In the *Sound Trace* series, or the *Notations* based on Elliott Carter's *Figment*, it is interesting to note how painterly and musical space converge. We see how the lines and strokes

in Verdier's work reflect the temporality of music, moving and 'reading' from left to right. Beyond the preparatory traversing of the canvas with traces of dripped paint (contrapuntal elements that also echo the musical stave), Verdier invests the picture space as a whole from left to right, guiding our reading of the work in the same direction as the reading of a musical score.

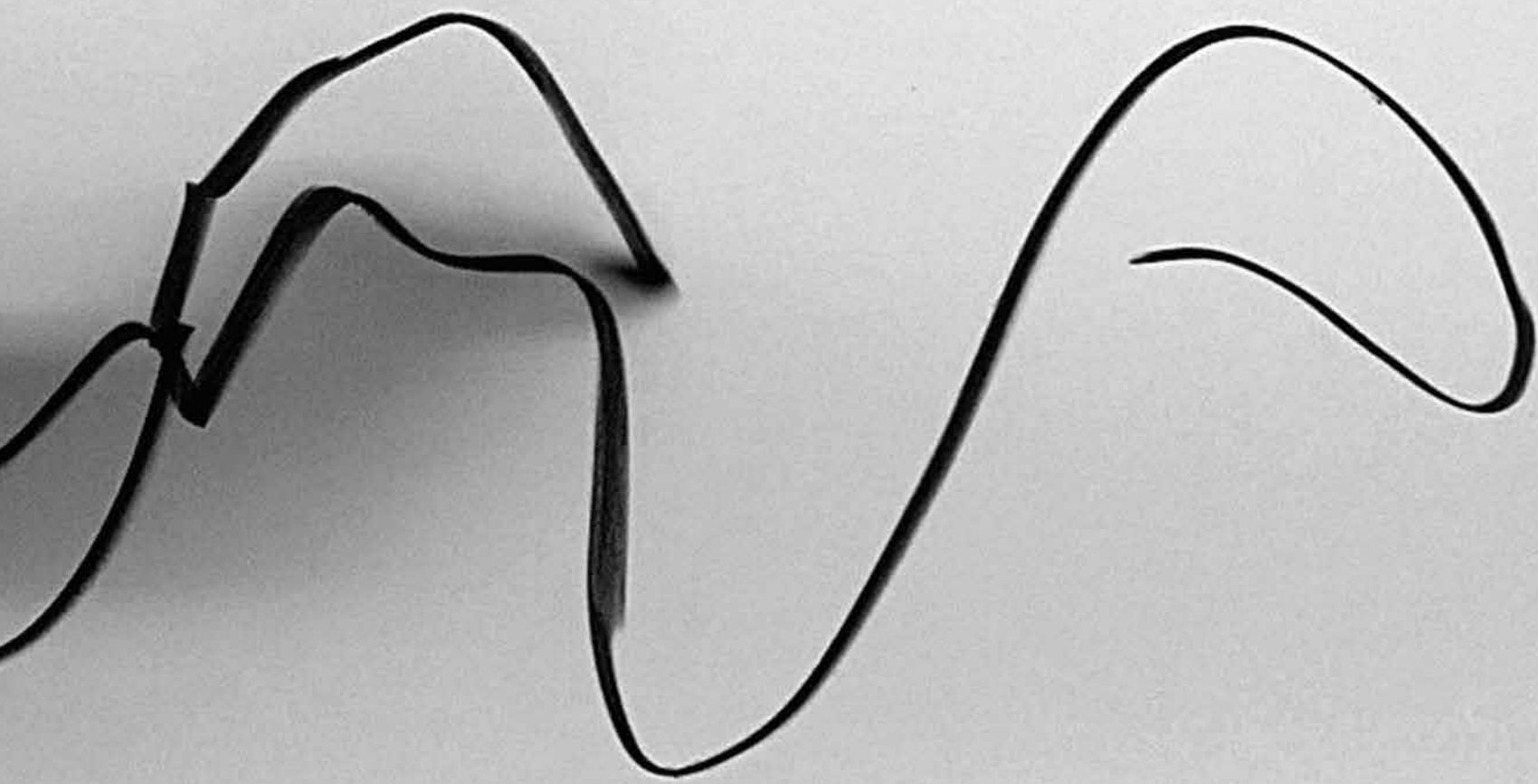
The uppermost parts of the canvas are, it seems, directly suggested by the 'texture' of sounds that inspire Fabienne Verdier in the making of her strokes. This vertical script is also characteristic of Verdier's works under the title *Breath Column*, inspired by the human voice and breath, in which the artist is borne along by the energy of sound. Traversed by

waves of sound, Verdier captures vibrations which she transcribes passively on canvas, like a seismograph. Conscious of the potentially limiting impact of her capacity 'to go far enough in the variation of these resonances', she has constructed new, extremely broad wild boar-hair brushes, designed to be more 'nervous' and responsive, 'alert to the slightest vibration'. These brushes have introduced a new repertoire of forms: the *Sound Board* series, evoking dense, polyphonic script.

In her extraordinary, intricately intertwined motifs inspired by jazz quintets, Verdier allows herself to be suffused by the particular timbre of each instrument, inspiring strokes of varying thicknesses and ultimately, introducing colour into her work.

Paradoxically, however, the essential musicality of Verdier's work has its most subtle expression in the ascetic *Silence* series. Here, for the first time, flows of black paint on canvas constitute the sole form of painterly expression: Verdier lulls the viewer with the gentle, rhythmic pull of the same undertow that animates the mature works of Feldman, transporting us to the frontiers of the inexpressible, the depths of silence.





## THE DECISION OF FABIENNE VERDIER

to leave the comfort zone of her painting studio by accepting The Juilliard School's invitation to work with musicians during an entire semester was a leap of faith. No one could have predicted the outcome of her efforts to attune her pictorial work to the sound of instruments and voices. It turned out to be a challenging but successful adventure, which would change the artist's work profoundly. Looking back at that semester Fabienne Verdier wrote the following words to the thank the musicians with whom she worked so closely and who were willing to explore those uncharted territories with her:

## TO THE YOUNG MUSICIANS

*One needs to travel for one's mind to brush up against and be polished by the thinking of others.*

Montaigne's words come to life for me as I tell this "traveler's tale." For, ironically, my residency at the Juilliard School was transformed into a journey. You allowed me to discover that a painter could apply her brush to the piano, the saxophone, or the voice; that she could perhaps even blend her palette with an orchestral score.

After John Cage's very intimidating *4 minutes 33 seconds of silence*, or Marcel Duchamps' famous *Fountain*, it is still possible to create. Man's abiding need to express his sensibility and to approach the world and the things that surround him in a spirit of adventure cannot be taken away from him. In the future, artists will be able to create only if they dare to confront new challenges, only if, in this spirit of adventure, they initiate encounters such as have not previously been approached between the arts, thus illustrating the possibility of inhabiting the world poetically.

I had the good fortune to be invited, as an artist, to enter the heart of a talent pool of the most gifted musicians. I came to under-

stand, working with you, that one must first learn to disengage from the self in order to think differently. Moreover, numerous artists have demonstrated the need for such a departure from self, the need for an obsessive sort of thinking against the self, to discover unexplored territories. I realized, there too, that to enter into an encounter with others, one first has to leave oneself behind. In other words, to put oneself at risk. This is Hölderlin's contention: "But where danger lies, salvation grows too."

This is something I had already experienced when I traveled to China, not long after the cultural revolution, to study and work with the last of the master painters. In the course of those ten years, I had to abandon many of my conditioned responses, in order to immerse myself in a radically different world and way of thinking. This encounter profoundly changed my perception of the world, and even my way of painting. During the months of my Juilliard residency, I had to rise to a similar challenge: how to implement a dialogue

between music and painting, between the line of sound and the line of picture, where one would not be subservient to the other, but where, on the contrary, an "interplay" would produce a spontaneous concomitance, a spontaneity that expresses a certain facet of life and that is an essential constituent of both music and painting. In the course of our work sessions, we observed that it was possible to communicate without recourse to words, but rather via abstract forms that seemed to emerge directly from experience and from memory. When on these "journeys," I often thought of Schumann, who claimed he could understand and even converse, through music, between two silences.

More broadly, I was able to note that musicians not only listen, they see; that the painter not only looks, but listens. As the eye listens, so too the ear can see. This possible but oft-doubted synchronism between music and painting was thus at the heart of our experimentation.

FABIENNE VERDIER, spring 2016













THE FACULTY MEMBERS, STAFF AND STUDENTS OF THE JULLIARD SCHOOL

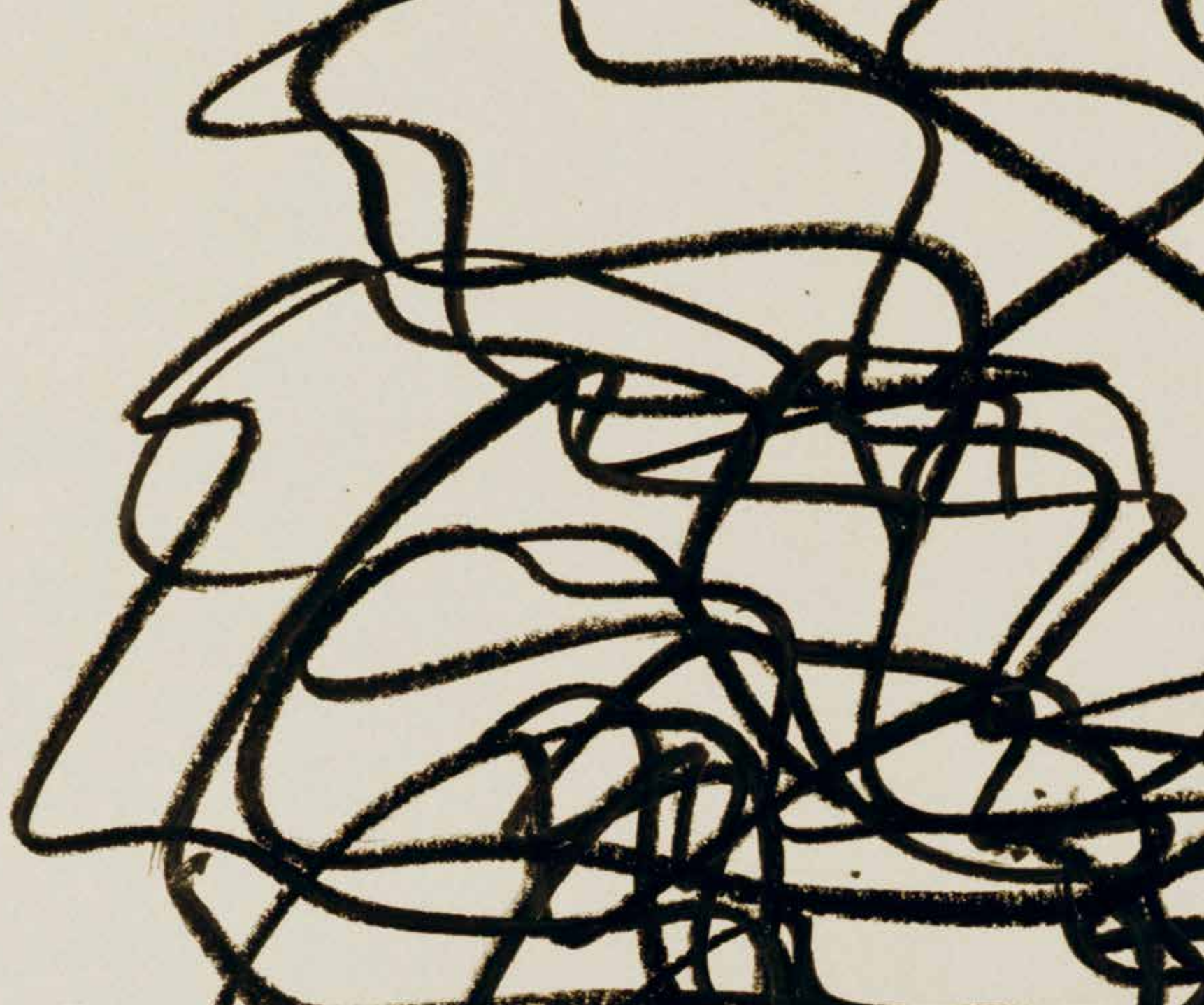
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Kenny Barron  
Stephen Carver  
William Christie  
Alexandra Day  
Ray Drummond  
Aaron Flagg  
Gloria Gottschalk  
Elizabeth Hurley  
Philip Lasser  
Joseph Mastrangelo  
Amanita  
Pleasant-Heird  
Benjamin D. Soslan  
Martha Sterner  
Robert Taubbi  
Edith Wiens

Reuben Allen  
Avery Amereau  
Paolo Benedettini  
Joey Chang  
Dan Chmielinski  
Patrick Doane  
Greg Duncan  
Lukas Gabri  
Bryony Gibson-Cornish  
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T.J. Tario  
Jordan Young



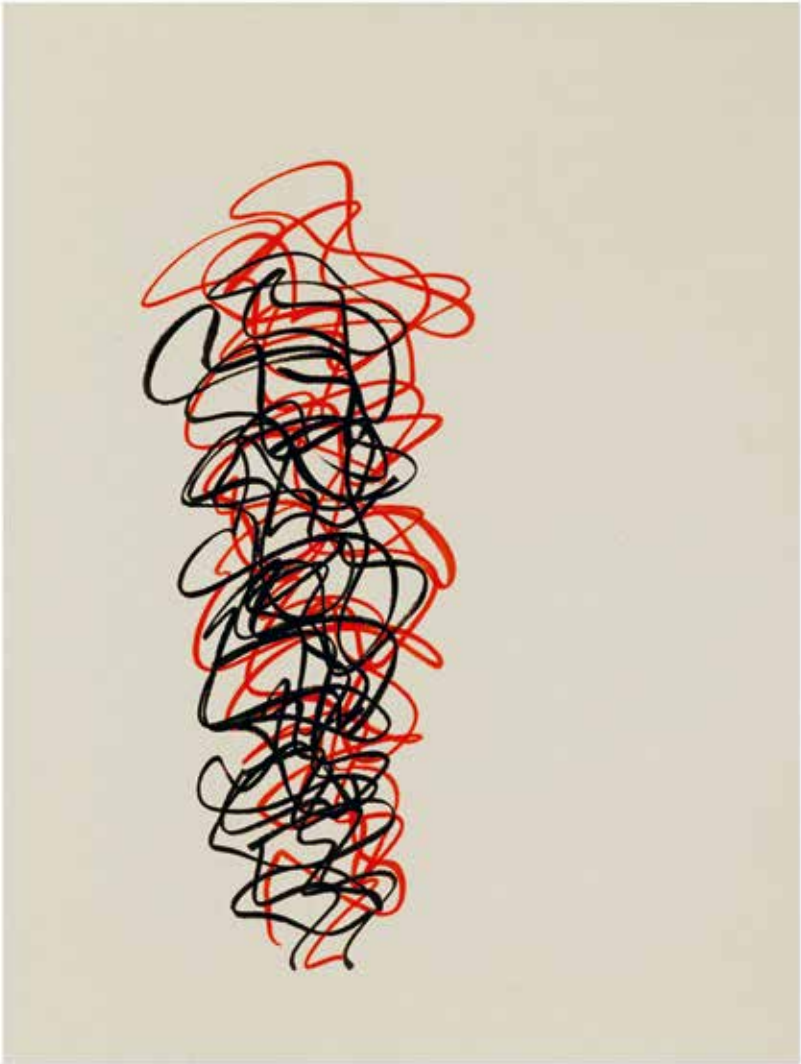


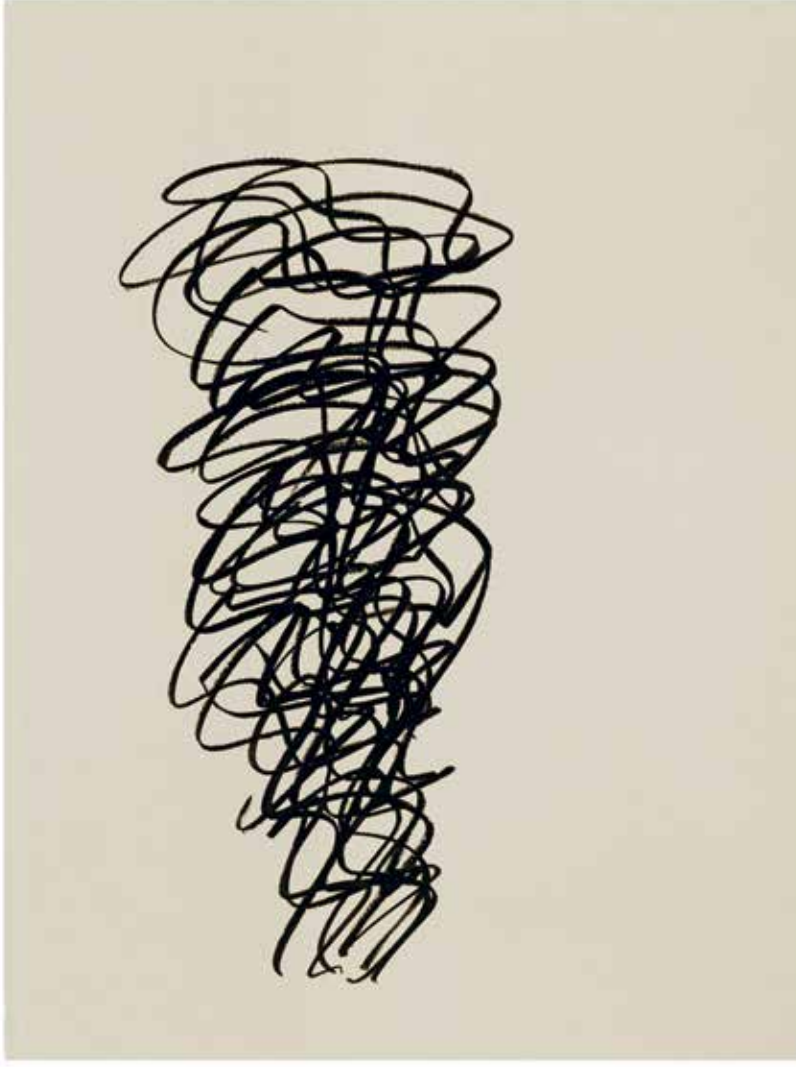




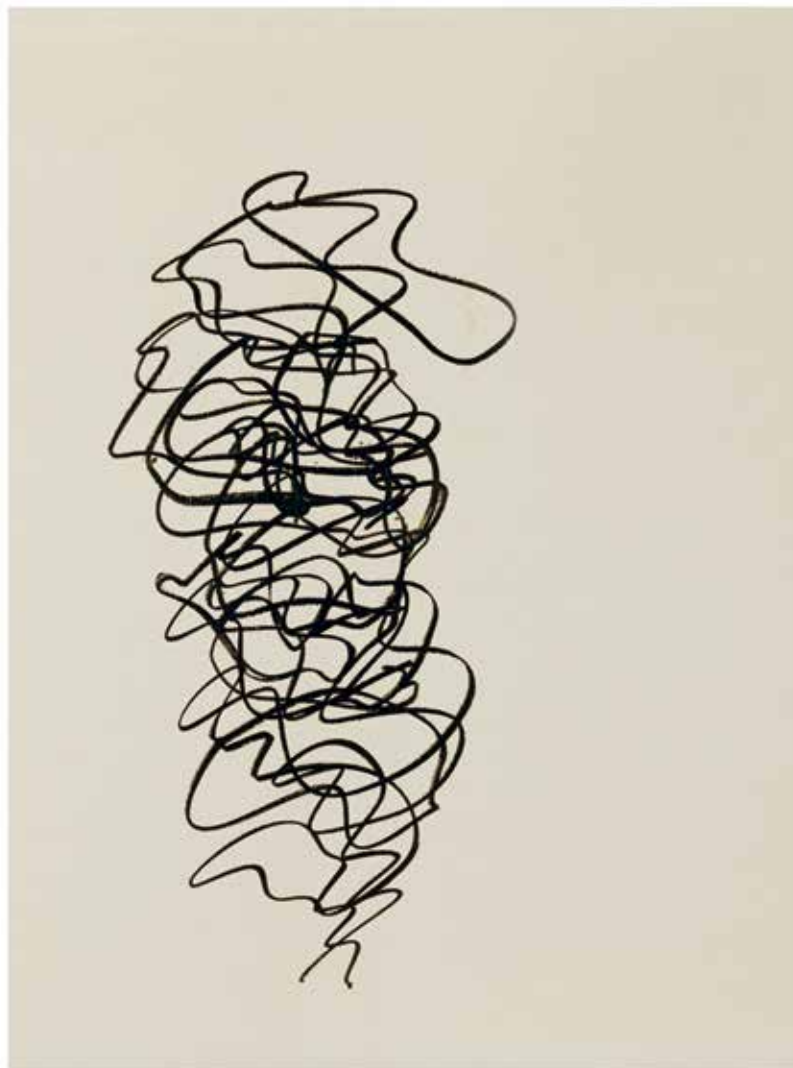


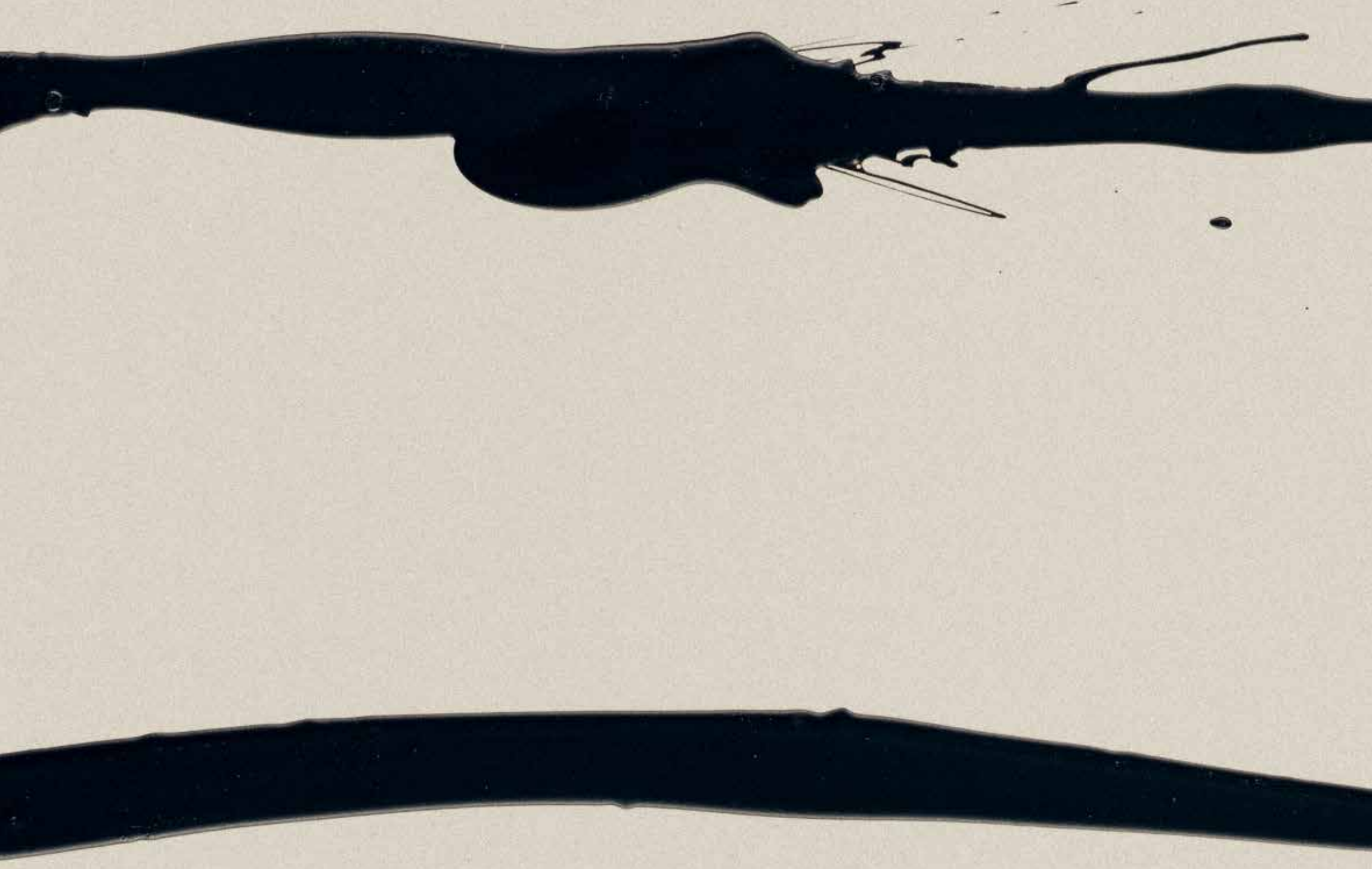








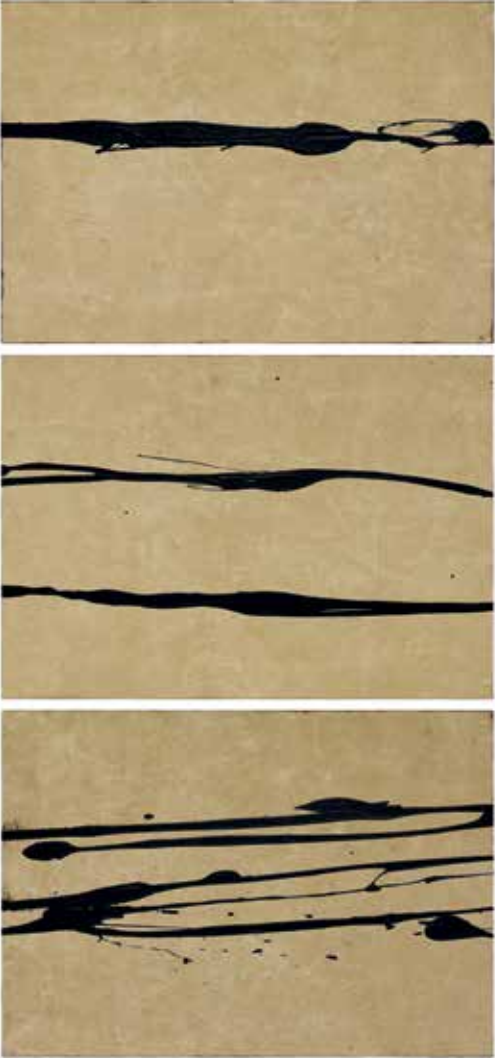




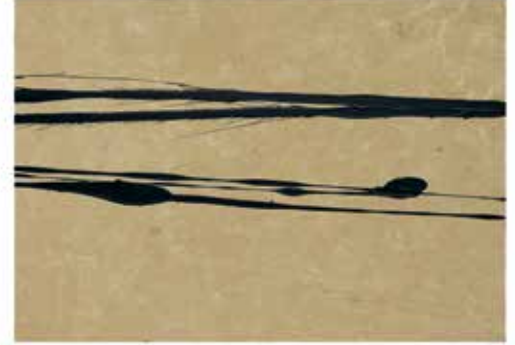
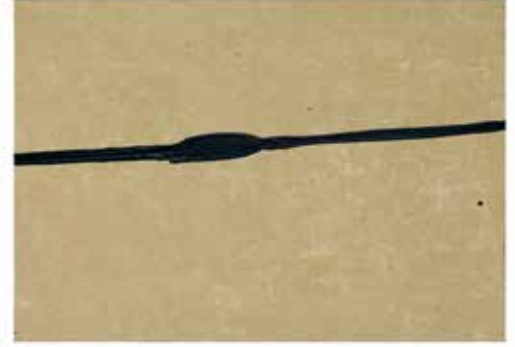
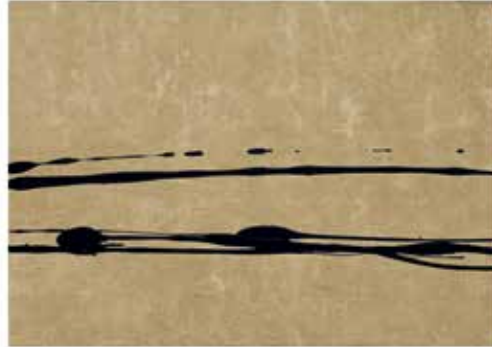
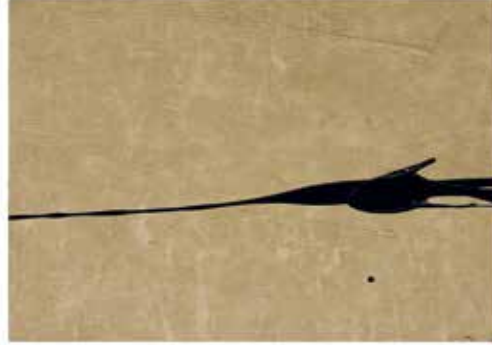


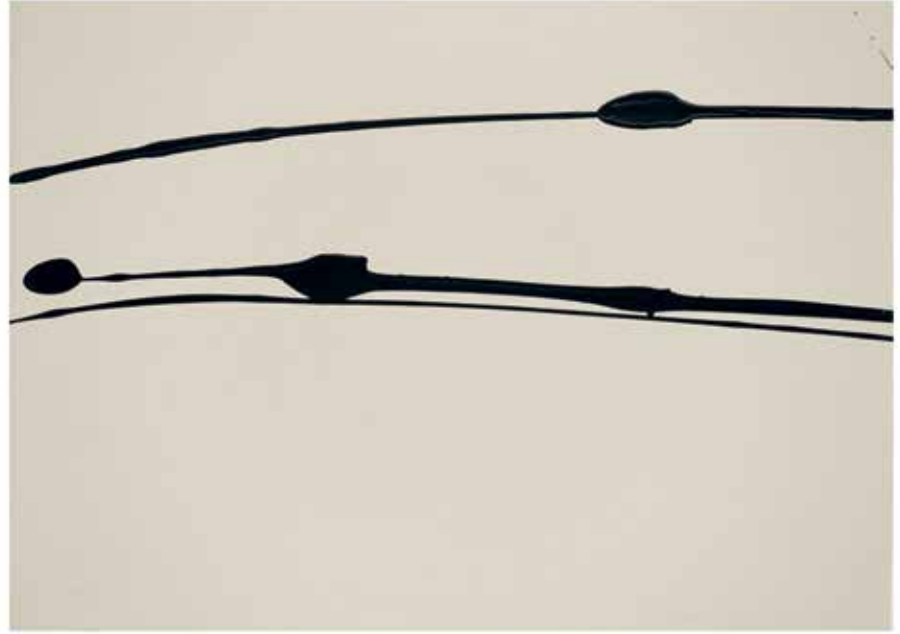
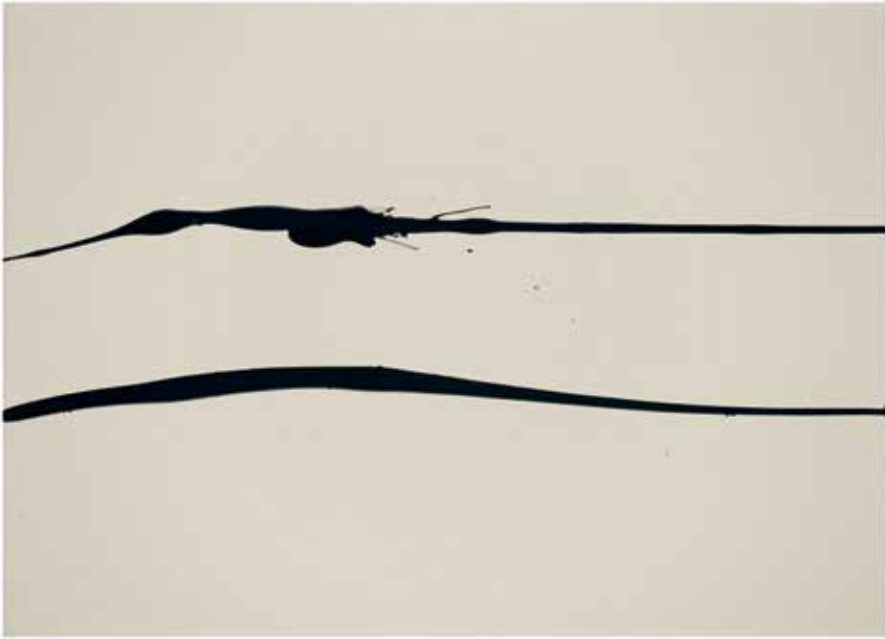


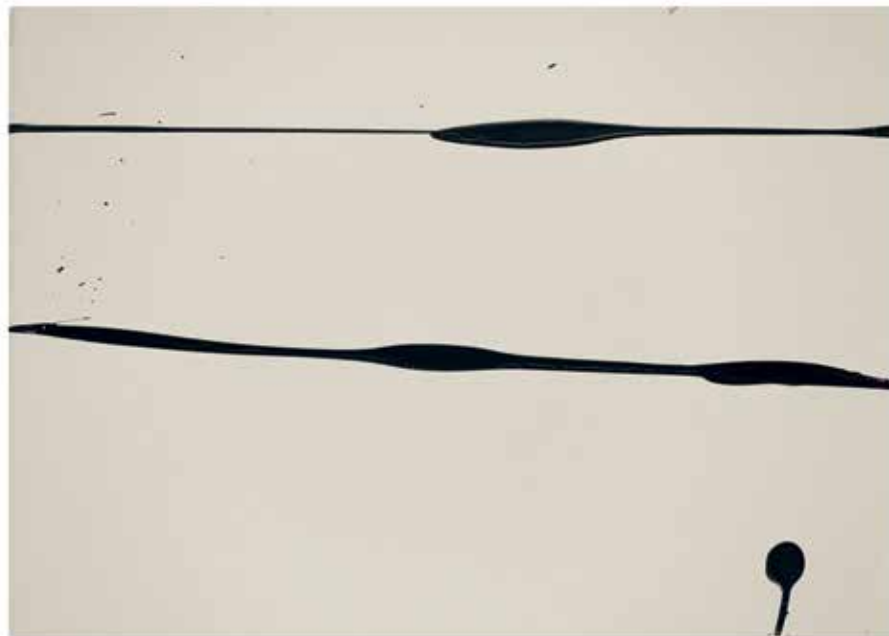
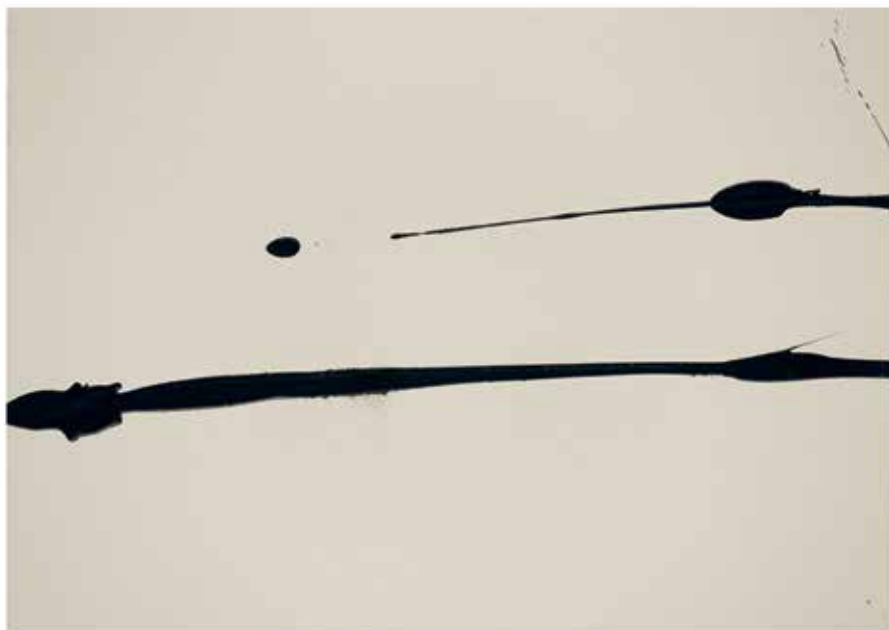
SILENCES 1/5, 4/5, 5/5 - 2016, acrylic and mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 101 x 48 cm (each panel 33 x 48 cm)



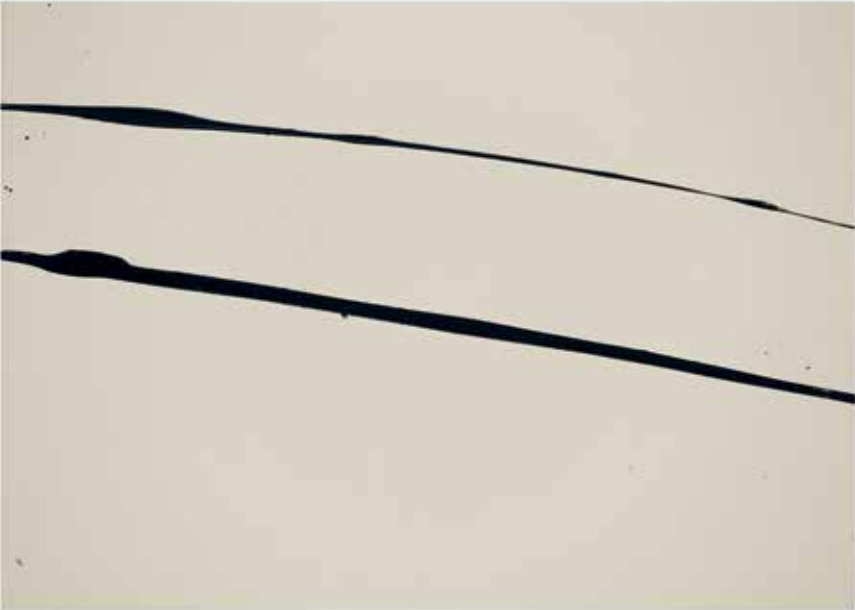
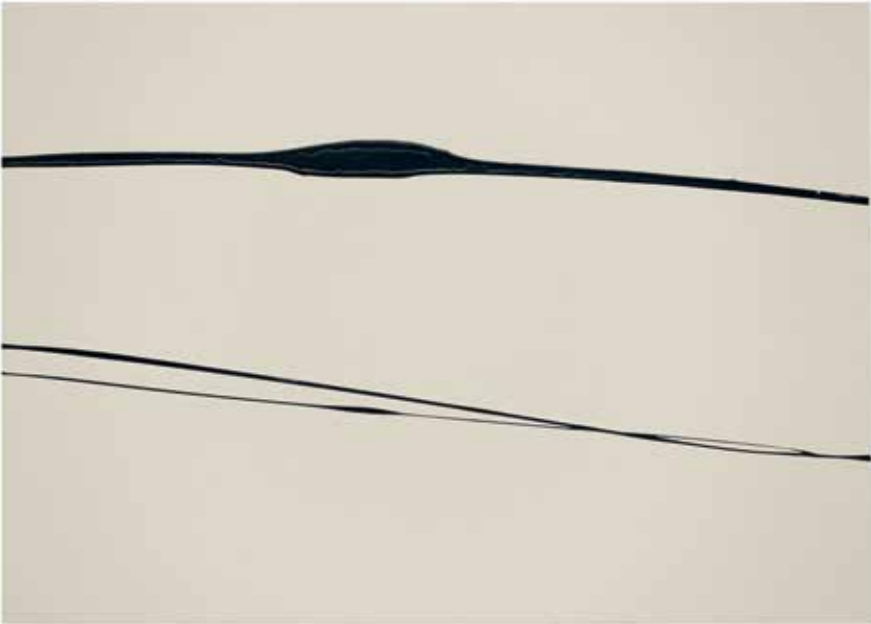


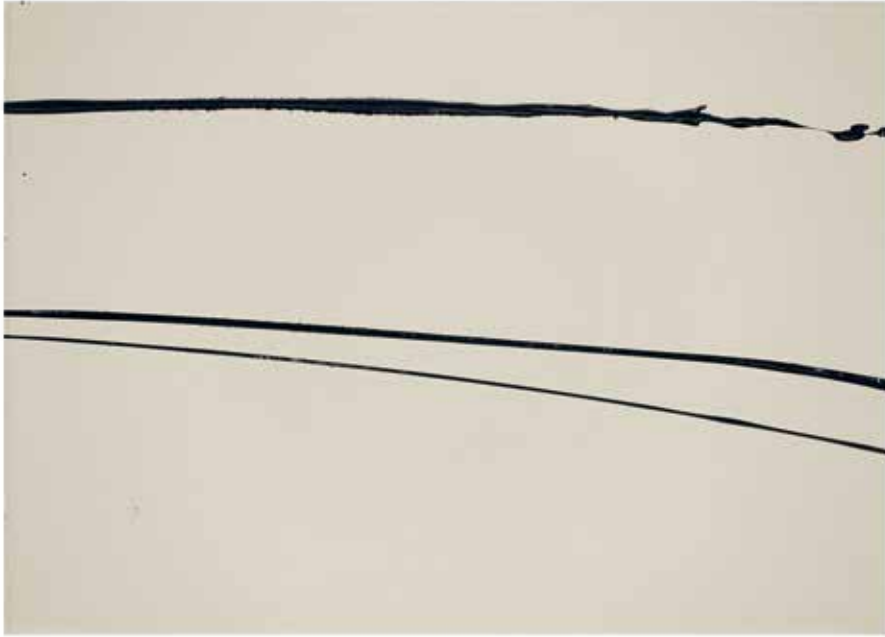


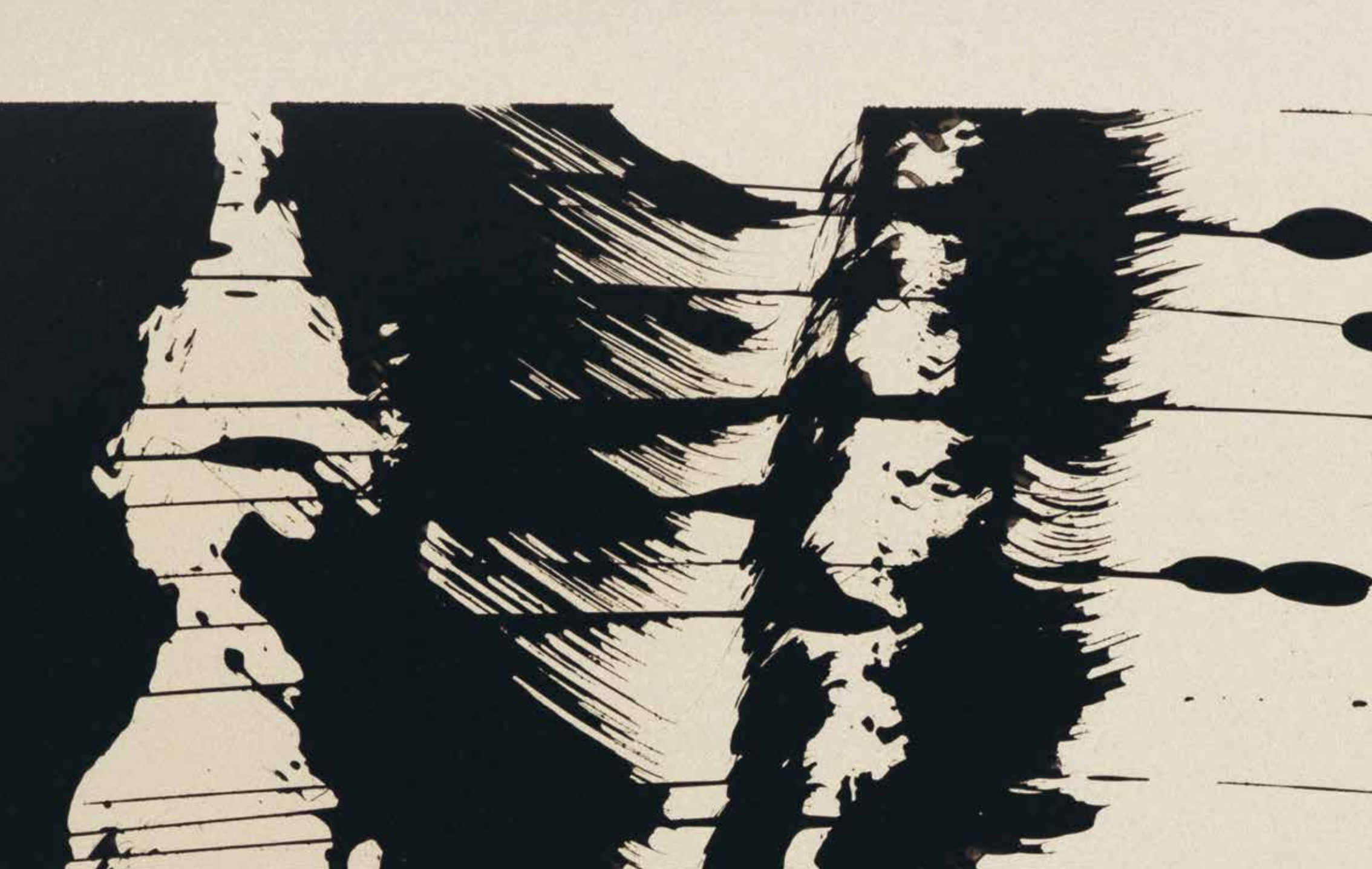




**SILENCE** - 2014, acrylic paint on Moulin du Gué paper, 38,8 x 54 cm











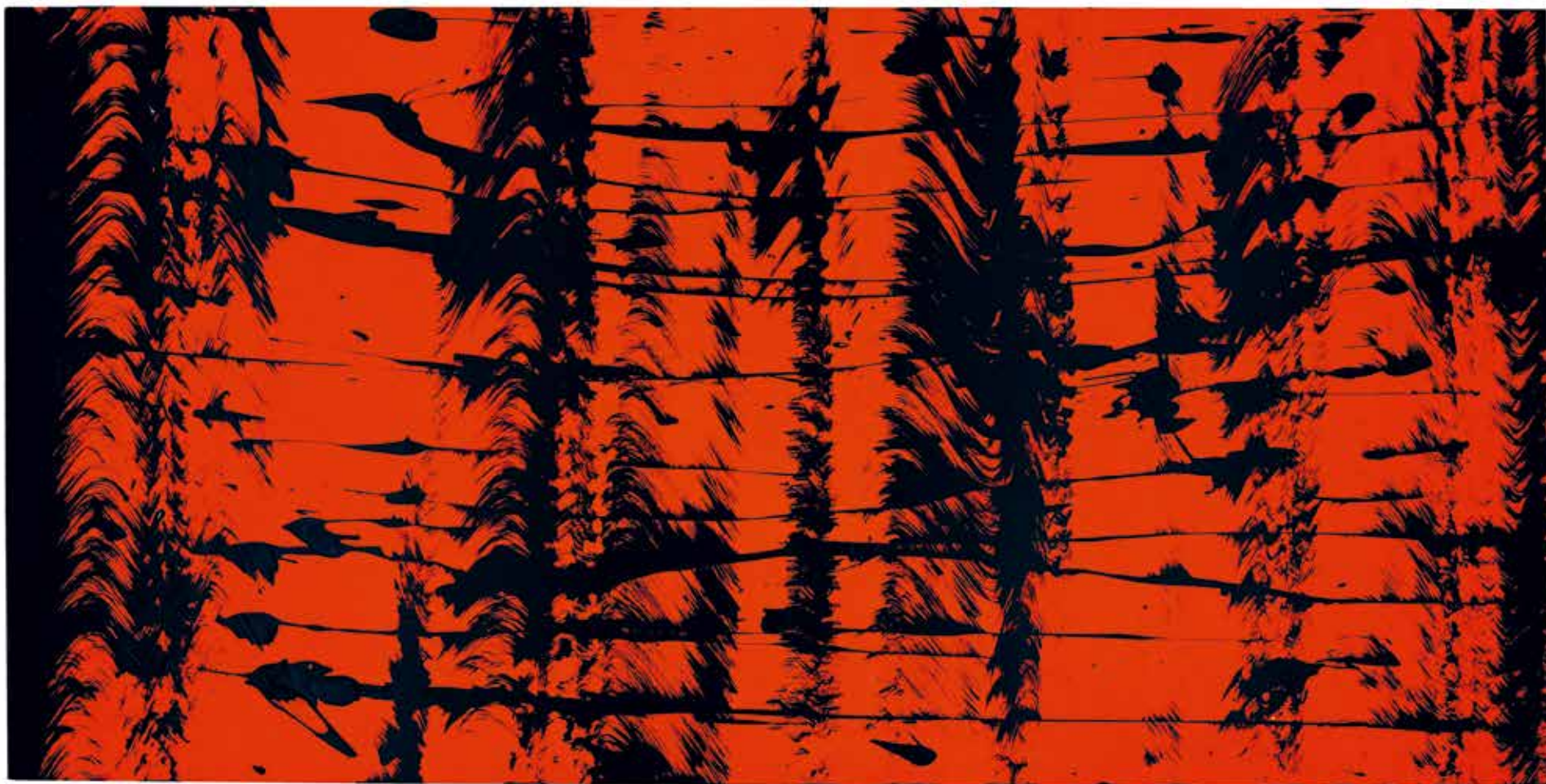










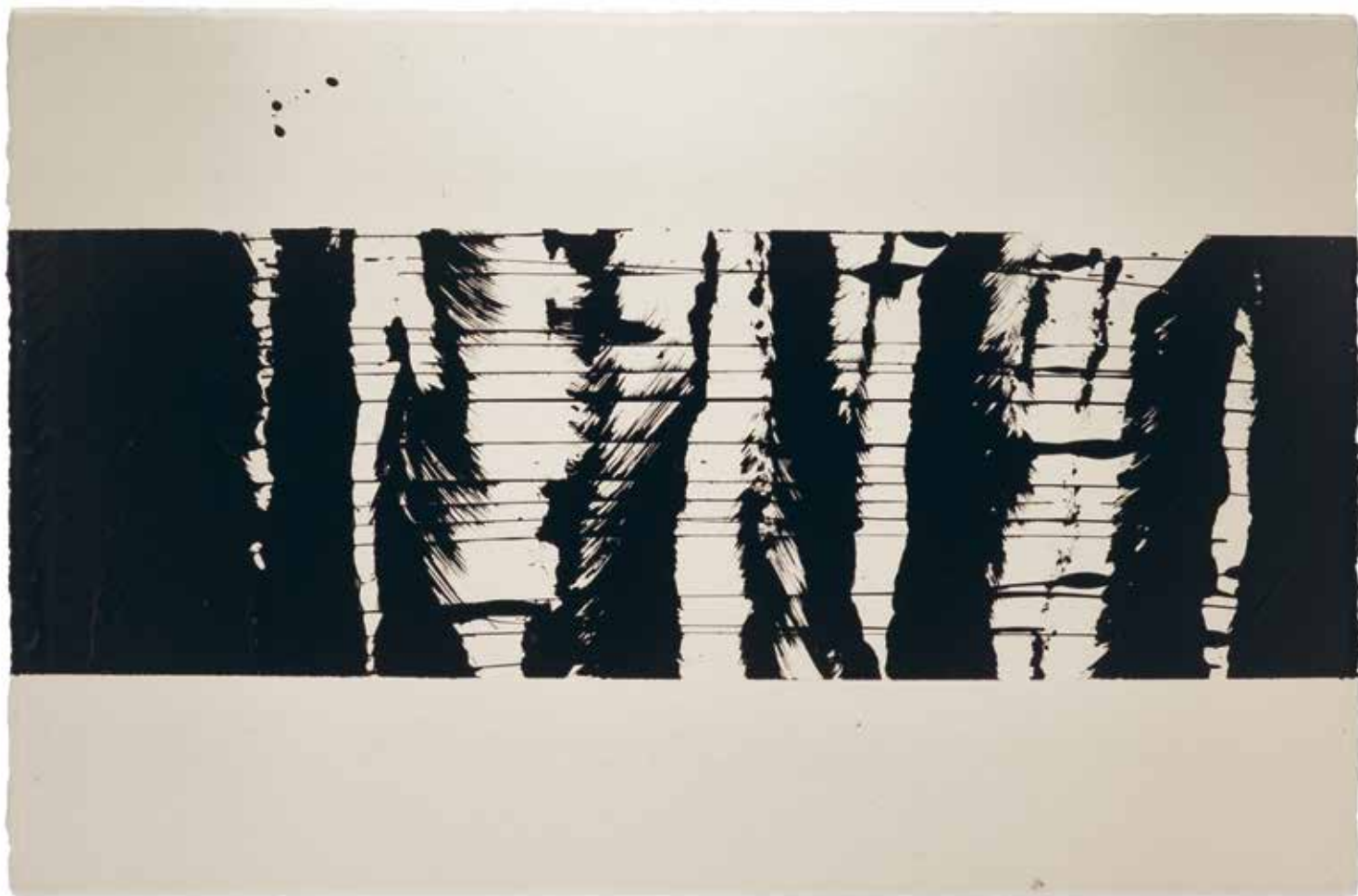










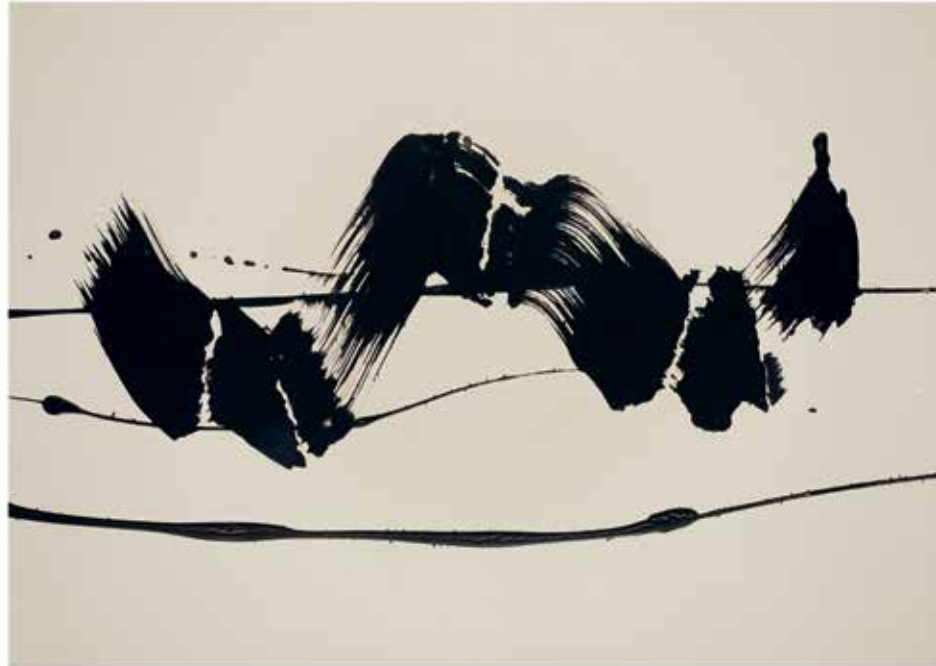




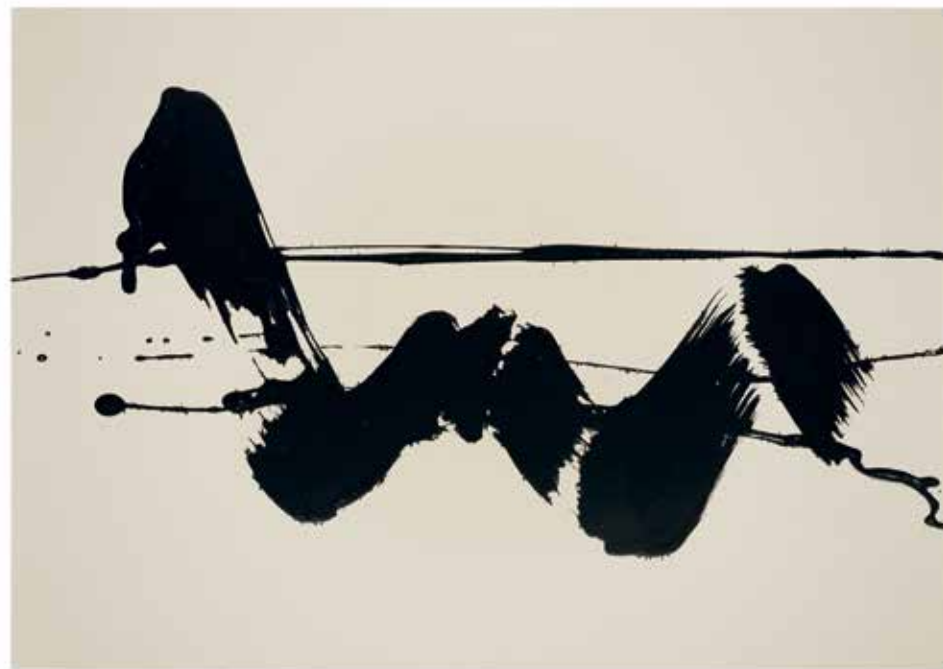
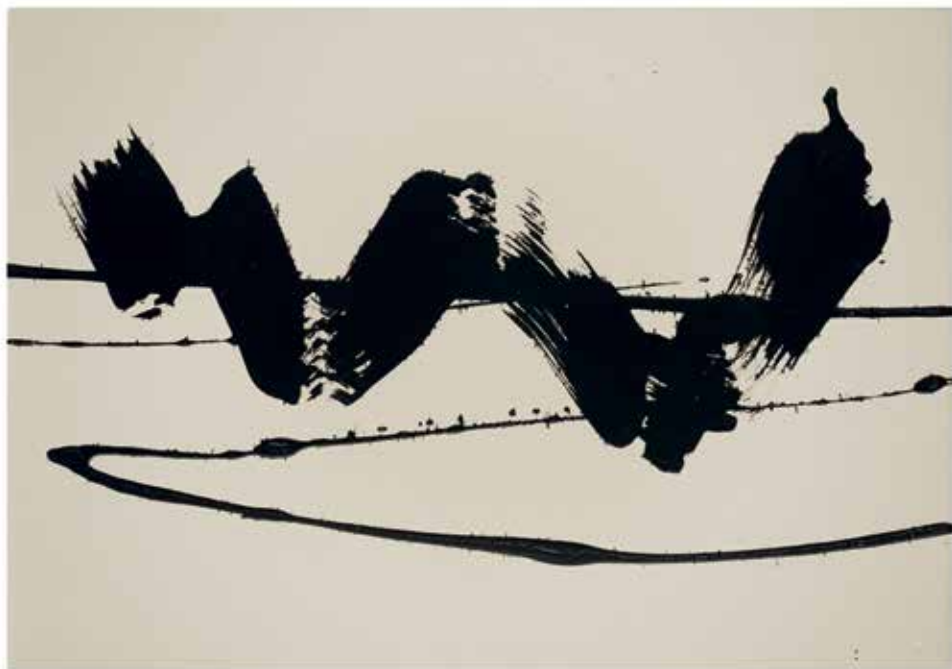










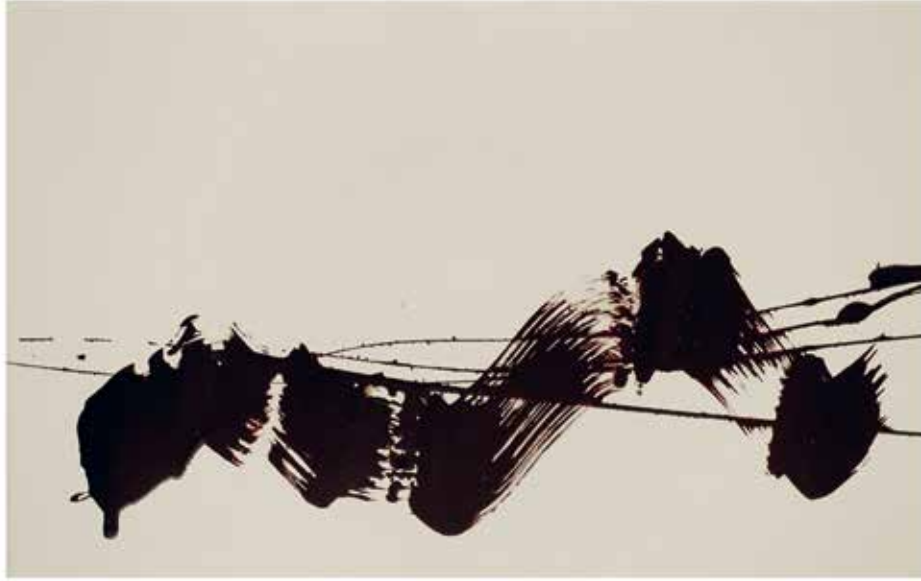
















HOMAGE TO ELLIOTT CARTER



**WHITE MELODY** - 2015, acrylic and mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 150 x 243,5 cm  
Signed, situated, titled and dated on verso

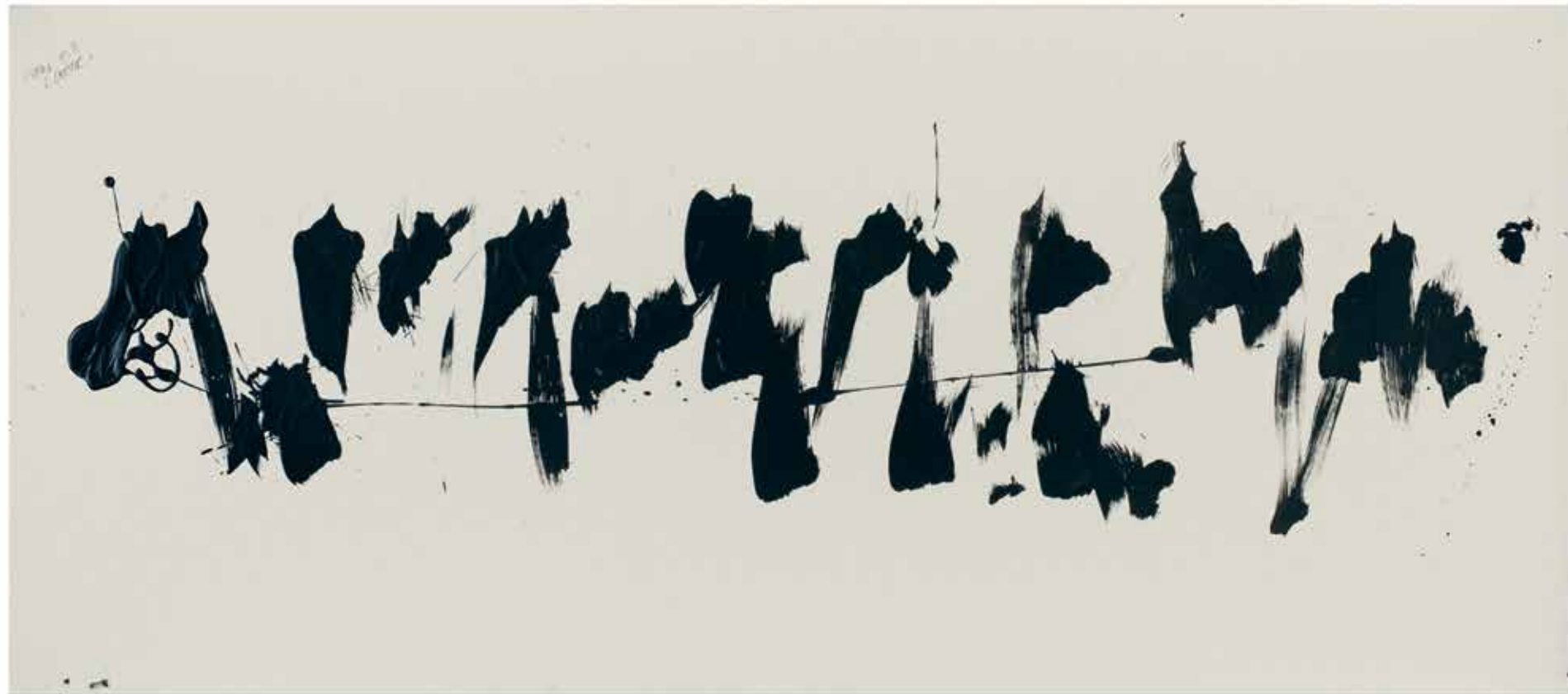




**ELLIOT CARTER. INSTALLATION RED TRIPTYCH** - 2016, acrylic and mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 166 x 137 cm  
Signed, situated, titled and dated on verso











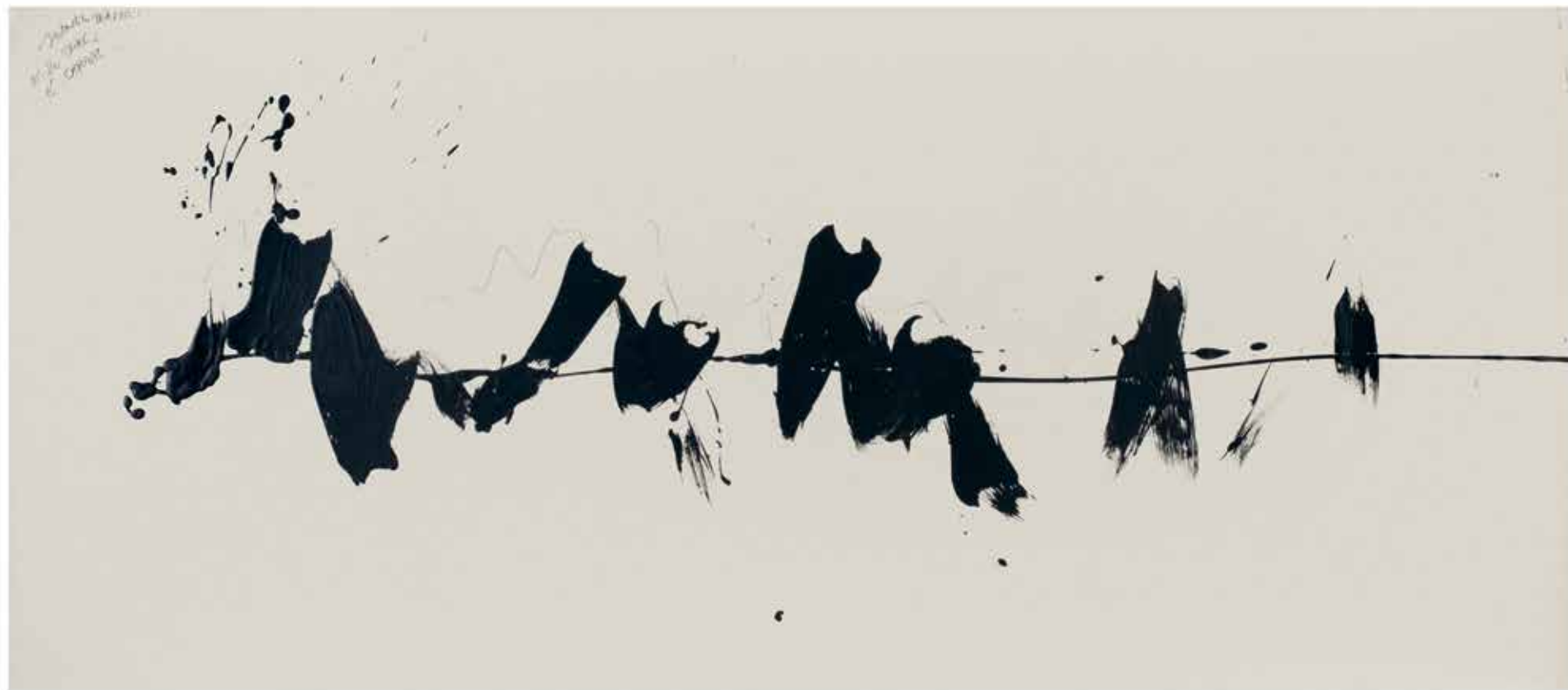




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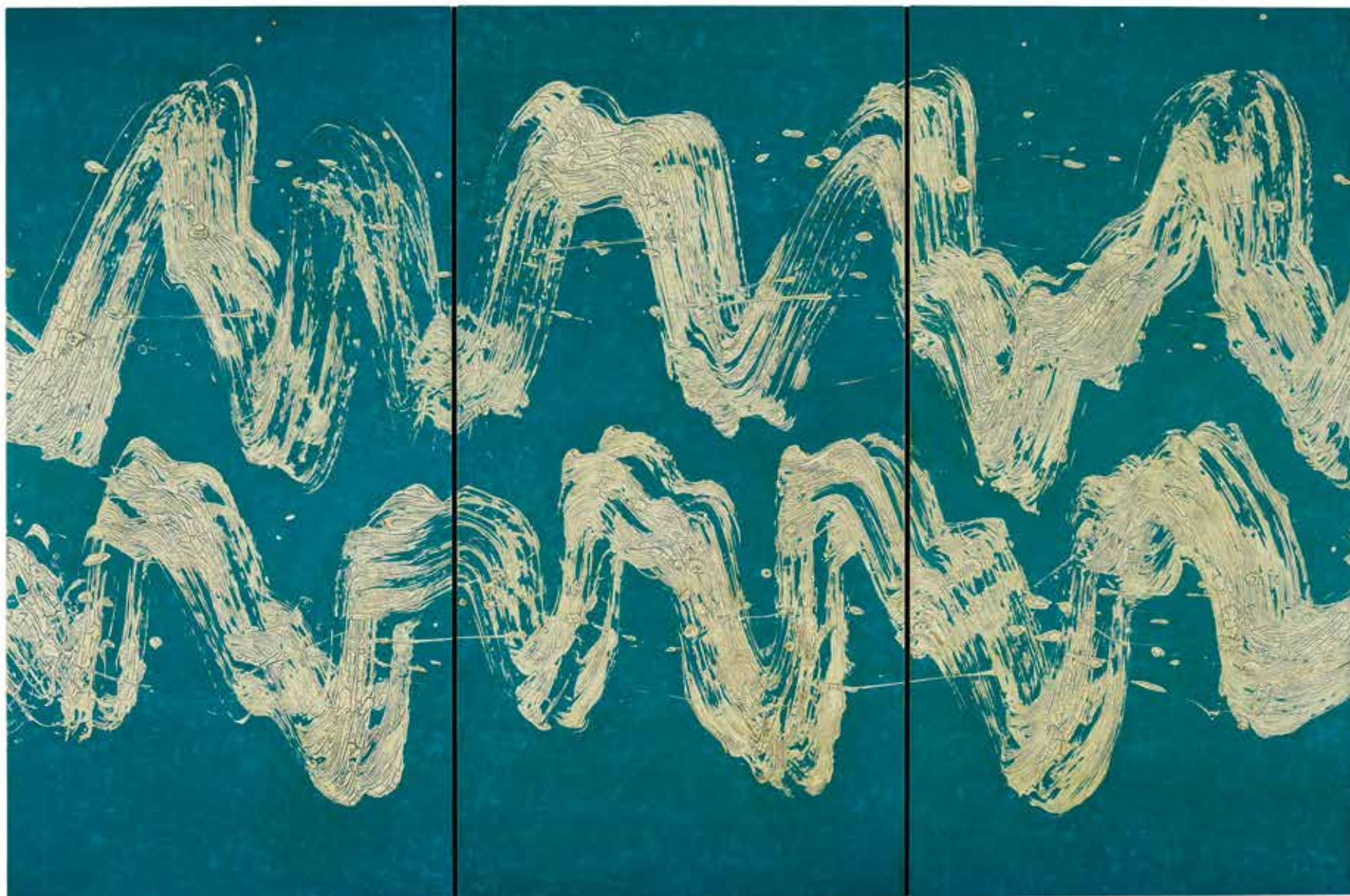




CERULEAN

**WHITE NOISE** - 2016, acrylic and mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 180 x 272 cm  
Signed, situated, titled and dated on verso































**JAZZ QUINTET** - 2014, oil pastel on polyester film, 92 x 203 cm  
*Notation n°03 of December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 - Tenor saxophone: Lukas Gabric - Bass: Paolo Benedettini -  
Drums: Jordan Young - Guitar: Greg Duncan - Piano: Reuben Allen - coached by Kenny Barron*



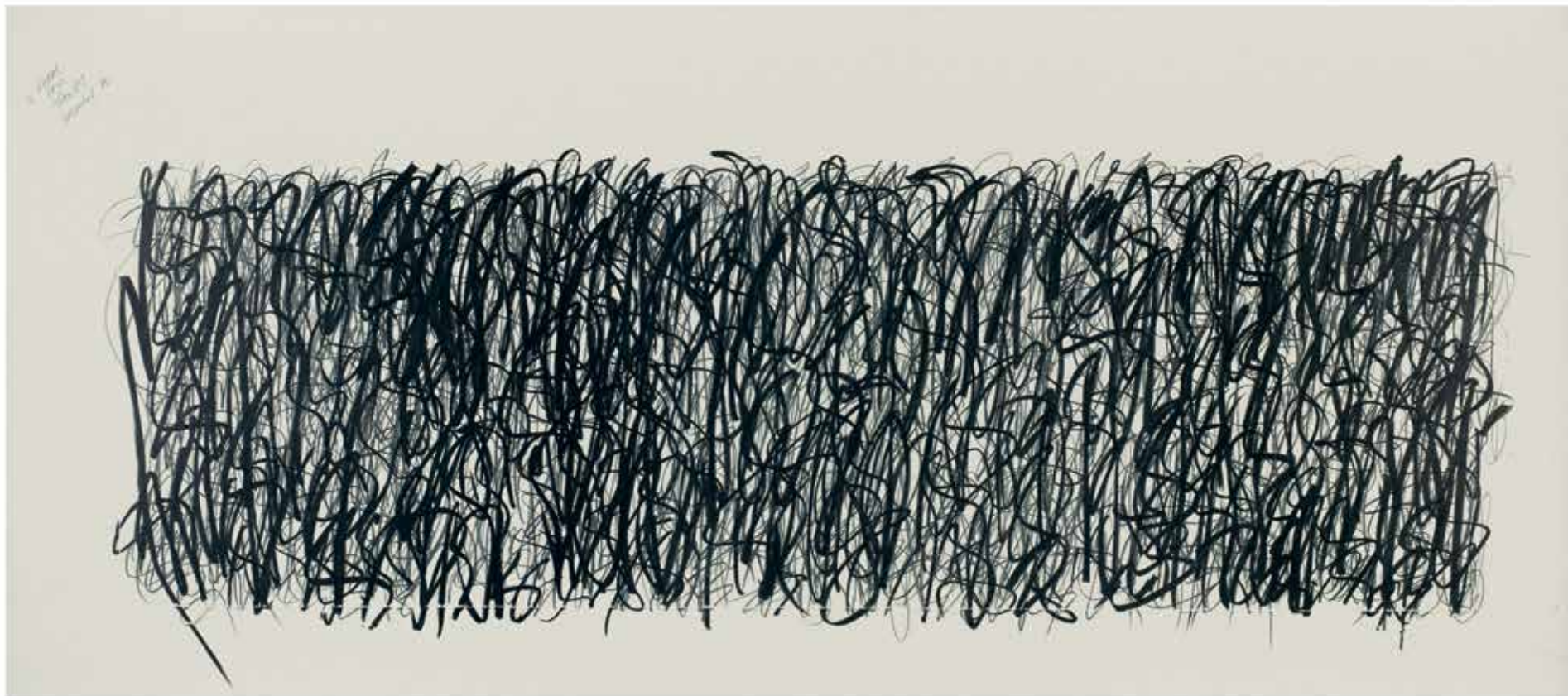


**JAZZ QUINTET** - 2014, oil pastel on polyester film, 92 x 203 cm  
*Notation n°04 of December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 - Tenor saxophone: Lukas Gabric - Bass: Paolo Benedettini -  
Drums: Jordan Young - Guitar: Greg Duncan - Piano: Reuben Allen - coached by Kenny Barron*

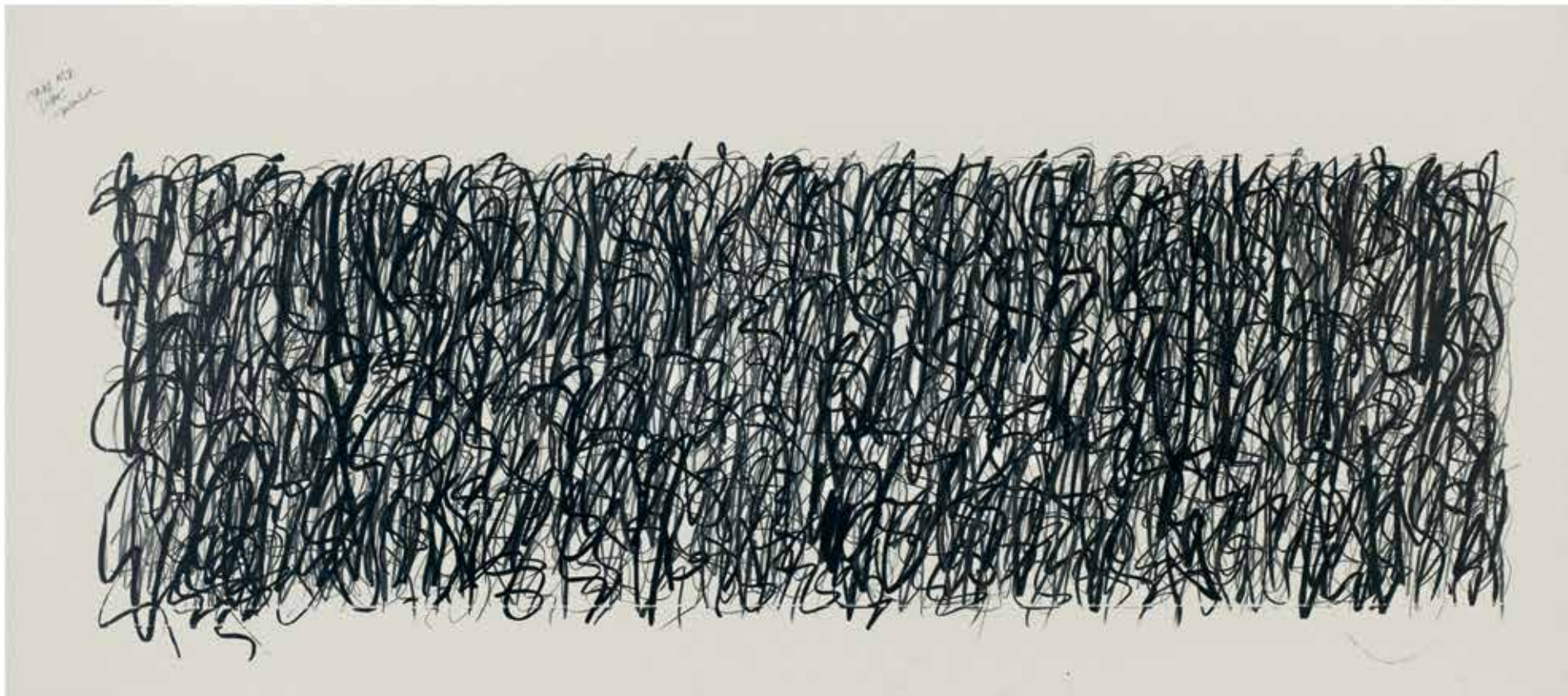








**JAZZ QUINTET** - 2014, oil pastel on polyester film, 92 x 203 cm  
*Notation n°02 of December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 - Tenor saxophone: Lukas Gabric - Bass: Paolo Benedettini -  
Drums: Jordan Young - Guitar: Greg Duncan - Piano: Reuben Allen - coached by Kenny Barron*











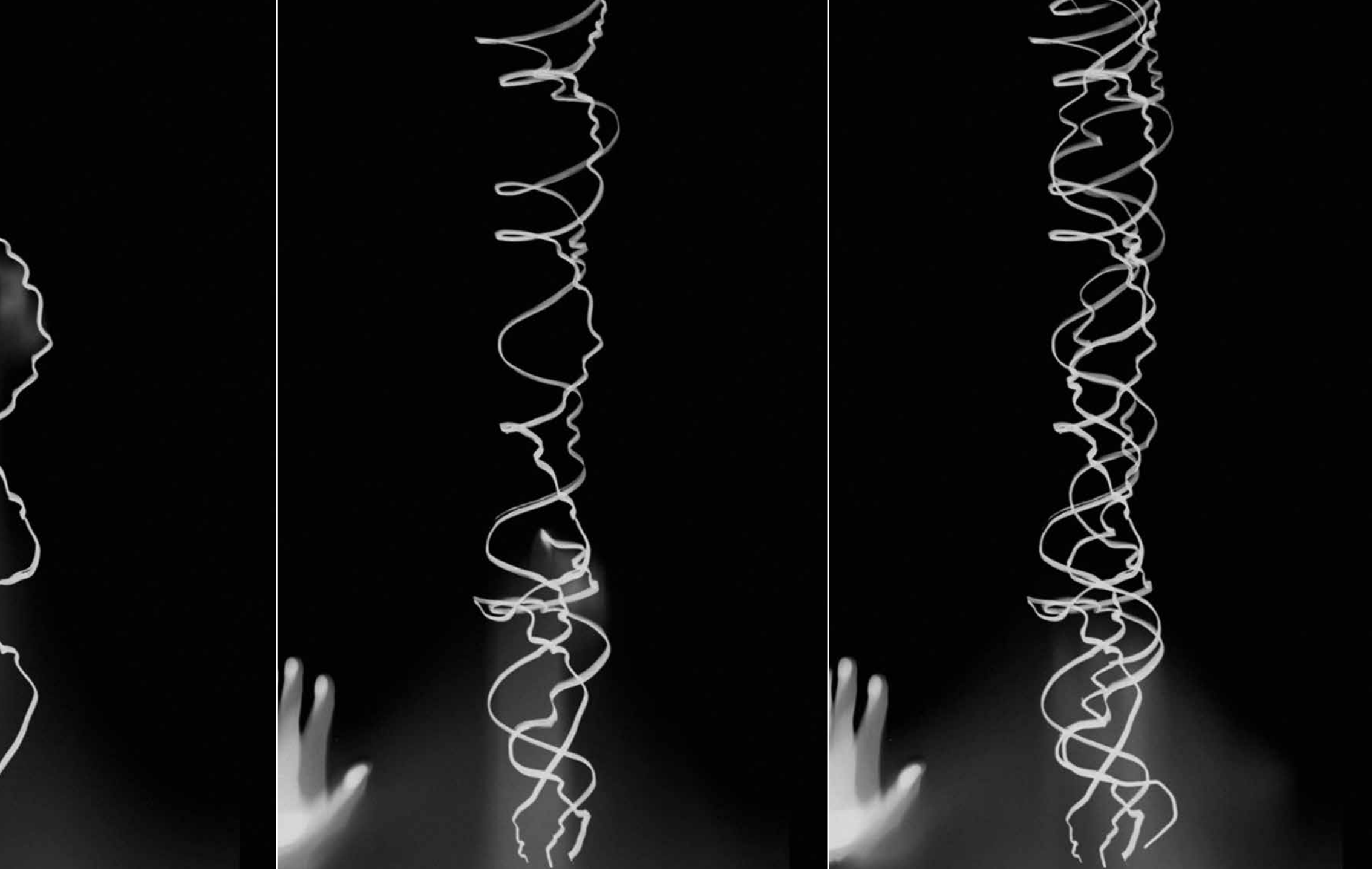














## BIOGRAPHY - BIBLIOGRAPHY - EXHIBITIONS

- 1962** Born in Paris.
- 1983** Graduated from Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Toulouse.  
Solo exhibition, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Toulouse.
- 1984** Awarded a post-graduate scholarship at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China.
- 1984-1993** Studied painting, aesthetics and philosophy at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute with some of the last great traditional masters.
- 1989** Solo exhibition, Fine Arts Museum, Chongqing, China.
- 1990** Group exhibition Contemporary Brushstrokes, Beijing Fine Arts Museum, Beijing.
- 1991** Solo exhibition, French Cultural Center, Beijing.
- 1992** Solo exhibition, Maison de la Chine, Paris.
- 1993** Solo exhibition, Hong Kong Contemporary Art Center, Hong Kong.
- 1995-1996** Solo exhibition, Galerie Joyce Ma, Palais Royal, Paris.
- 1997** Solo exhibition, Pacific Cultural Foundation, Taipei.
- 2003** Publication of *Passagère du silence* (Albin Michel, Paris) - a memoir of her years of apprenticeship with Master Huang Yuan.  
*Hommage aux variations de Yehudi Menuhin* enters the permanent collection of Musée Cernuschi, Paris.  
Solo exhibition, Galerie Ariane Dandois, Paris.
- 2004** Solo exhibition, Abbaye de Silvacane, La Roque d'Anthéron.
- 2005** Solo exhibition, Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne.
- 2007** Publication of *Between Heaven and Earth* (Albin Michel, Paris) by Fabienne Verdier and *Entretien avec Charles Juliet* (Albin Michel, Paris).  
Four large works commissioned by Hubert Looser Foundation to dialogue with selected American abstract and minimalist artists from the collection (John Chamberlain, Donald Judd, Willem de Kooning, Ellsworth Kelly and Cy Twombly).  
The painting *Pèlerinage aux monts des intentions pures* enters the permanent collection of Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris.  
Solo exhibition at Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne.
- 2009** Solo exhibition *Peinture*, Galerie Jaeger Bucher, Paris.  
Group exhibition *Elles@Centre Pompidou*, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris.
- 2010** Commission of two monumental works for the Palazzo Torlonia, Rome.  
Documentary film by Philippe Chancel: *Fabienne Verdier: Flux*, on the creation of the commissioned works and accompanying publication by Eric Fouache and Corinna Thierolf (Editions Xavier Barral, Paris).
- 2011** Group exhibitions *Art of Deceleration, from Caspar David Friedrich to Ai Wei Wei*, Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg; *Not for Sale*, Art Center Passage de Retz, Paris.
- 2012** Group exhibitions *My Private Passion - Foundation Hubert Looser*, Kunstforum, Vienna.  
Publication of Fabienne Verdier - *Painting Space* by Doris von Drathen (Edizioni Charta, Milano/New York).
- 2013** Documentary film by Mark Kidel: *Fabienne Verdier, peindre l'instant*.  
Solo exhibitions: *Fabienne Verdier, L'Esprit de la Peinture, Hommage aux Maîtres Flamands*, Groeninge Museum and Hans Memling Museum, Bruges (with accompanying publication by Daniel Abadie, Albin Michel, Paris).  
*Fabienne Verdier, L'Esprit de la Peinture, Notes et Carnets*, Erasmus House, Brussels;  
*Fabienne Verdier. Fioretti*, Patrick Derom Gallery, Brussels.  
Group exhibition *The Hubert Looser Collection*, Kunsthhaus, Zurich.  
Collaboration with architect Jean Nouvel for the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC) project in Beijing.



## PUBLIC COLLECTIONS [SELECTED]

- 2014** Solo exhibition *Crossing Signs*, Le French May Arts Festival at City Hall, Hong Kong.  
Group exhibitions *Formes Simples*, Centre Pompidou-Metz, Metz; *Köningsklasse II*, Pinakothek der Moderne of Munich, Herrenschiemsee Palace, Herrenschiemsee, Germany.  
Publication of *La Traversée des signes* (Albin Michel, Paris) by Daniel Abadie.  
Monumental work commissioned by Unibail-Rodamco, Majunga Tower, La Défense, Paris.  
Artist-in-residence at the Juilliard School, New York (for the fall semester).
- 2015** Solo exhibition *L'Œil écoute*, Galerie Alice Pauli, Lausanne.
- 2016** Acquisition by the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, of a series of seven paintings, *Mélodie du réel* - 2014.  
Group exhibition *The Looser Collection*, Folkwang Museum, Essen.  
Release of *Fabienne Verdier. The Juilliard Experiment*, a film by Mark Kidel.

Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris

Cernuschi Museum, Paris

Foundation Hubert Looser, Zurich

Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich

Foundation François Pinault, Paris and Venice

Palais de l'Assemblée Nationale, Paris

Majunga Tower, Unibail-Rodamco, La Défense, Paris

Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris (commissioned by the Festival d'Avignon)

Ministère de l'Équipement (Direction de l'Architecture), Paris

Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris

Chinese Ministry of Culture, Beijing

Honda Group, Tokyo







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