Carta(s)

Pop vs. the Popular

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MUSEO NACIONAL CENTRO DE ARTE REINA SOFIA

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Published by the
Editorial Activities &
Public Activities Departments,
Museo Reina Sofía

Editorial Coordination
Tamara Díaz Bringas
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Graphic Design
gráfica futura

Transcription
Beatriz Ruiz Jara

Translations
Spanish to English, p. 21:
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Diedrich Diederichsen

Pop versus the Popular: Distinction and Inclusion around 1960[1]

Lawrence Alloway once remarked that pop was mainly "just a friendly way to say mass culture." But although pop may be defined firstly as that which is "popular," several other categories are necessary to distinguish it, and these make clear that pop is not *just* "popular."

In this talk I focus on two major conceptual complexes around the category of pop. First, pop as a reentry of the distinction between high and low into the fields, which were the result of this distinction in the first place. This idea is inspired by system's theory according to Niklas Luhmann. Second, pop as a product of a certain stage of the culture industry. The latter concept, developed by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, is normally not seen as something that can have different stages; that is, it is a singular construct, a singular machine of ideology without historical stages, but I have some reason to introduce historical stages here, mainly because the real culture industry, outside of its description, was not only generating and distributing ideology via cultural content but did so differently in different epochs—epochs determined by the media that were produced and used by that very industry.

These two complexes exist relatively independent from each other, although they overlap. The main question is whether the systems theory, or critical theory, approach—as well as its Martin Heidegger–influenced media materialism opposition—can provide categories to describe pop on a categorical level in a satisfactory way. The two language games I'm using here, closed and open systems, inclusion and exclusion on the one hand, and culture industry as oppression and illusionary

betrayal of the masses on the other hand, do not go well together, and they both have their limits when talking about pop. But precisely because both are limited, the one needs the other.

The distinction between high and low culture, or between high culture and that which is just *popular*, is related to class division but also to the wish to overcome that division. In fact, most of the early descriptions of popular culture during the Enlightenment were in its defense. Writers such as Johann Gottfried von Herder idealized the people as morally superior to and thus essentially different from the decadent court and its culture. Later, more-politicized movements tended to use the distinction as a moral difference, painting a picture of popular culture as true and authentic and of high culture as decadent. In Herder the popular is parallelized with the human being. A people has a certain age, a certain character, and a certain mentality—and is to be judged accordingly. So in Herder's writings on popular culture, one finds judgments such as, "the Irish are a very young people, they are like a sixteen-year-old youth"; or "the Norwegians are a very old people, and they're very serious and have no sense of humor." (I just made these examples up, but that's the way Herder talks about various groups.)

In contrast, the culture of the upper class is only a more-or-less ritualistic and empty practice that has no heart, as opposed to the culture of the people. Exempted from this judgment on high culture is poetry. For the early writers on popular culture, high art and the soul of the people met in poetry.

This division between popular and high has been held by both sides, by the defenders of popular culture as well as the defenders of high culture. When popular culture became the culture of the urban masses in the mid-nineteenth century, defense became rare though. Mass culture was now generally

disregarded, although some anarchist and communist ideas of postrevolutionary societies speak of overcoming these cultural differences. And often in the nineteenth century you find the idea of wanting to uplift the lower classes through education.

Both sides used the division between high and low as a means to engage in a moral discourse. During the nineteenth century, defenders of high culture would argue moralistically that low culture was simply about easy, sensual pleasures. Hence the need for the masses to be educated. In the twentieth century, class division as well as a distinction between high and low cultures became increasingly difficult to maintain, increasingly difficult to live, increasingly difficult to argue for. Developments such as immigration, migration from the country to the city, new media, new art forms brought about by the new media, and, especially, new forms of distribution and circulation only made the situation more complex as the drawing of clear distinctions became increasingly problematic.

Still the categories of high and low culture remained stable until the advent of pop music and pop art during the 1950s. The main characteristic of both is that they combine an urge to overcome the distinction between high and low while paradoxically establishing a new distinction within the already distinguished fields. That is the idea of the reentry. The distinction reenters the field that has already been distinguished by it. The low is distinguished again in two halves; the high is distinguished again in two halves. Although pop music—for example, rock-and-roll, Motown, and folk rock—deals more often than not with overcoming or transgressing borders and expresses a pathos of reunion, gathering, unity, great groups, and so on, it applies the method of distinction to the already excluded and marked field of the popular. Pop music divides the field of popular music in two: to one side of the new division are the youth cultural styles; to the other side are the traditional, technologically unsophisticated formats, such as traditional music that is based neither on

ambition nor the market and deals with conservative ideas of community rather than the rise of a new market and the global masses. Such formats are neither market oriented nor political.

But this is not the only way the distinction can be described. The rhetoric of the new pop music speaks of an alliance with social movements; for instance, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, first prominent in the 1950s; then, during the late 1960s, the so-called Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia and the student rebellions that took place all over the world. The one commonality in all of these movements to which pop music attached itself was resistance to repression (rather than any specific political goals). But with these alliances pop music established itself as the better, truer popular music. Not only did it split the field; it argued more or less implicitly that it could better preserve the authentic, moral superiority with which popular music used to be associated.

Here we come to something else, something different, another reentry of the distinction between high and low, now in the field of visual arts. Beginning in the mid-1950s one could observe this in the United States and England, as well as in movements such as collage and *nouveau réalisme* in France, in certain Japanese proto-performance artists, or in singular developments such as Asger Jorn's paintings on paintings. In all of these acts and movements one sees a Dada-like revival of the entrance of objects of reality into the realm of art objects. Among much of what would later be called "pop art"—from Robert Rauschenberg to Andy Warhol, from Eduardo Paolozzi to the graphic design of situationist magazines and comic strips—the objects, materials, and look of mass culture found entrance into high-art practices. But unlike Dada, where such things stood for the dirty, the unholy, the not art-worthy, for the pop generation the shock of the abject was only one component of its visual program. More often than not we find here rather a celebration, stylization, and strengthening of the

daily, dirty, and mass cultural—albeit always as a specific form of the daily and not the daily and the dirty per se.

The same mechanism by which the field of the popular was divided by pop music into a high-low and a low-low, whereby the traditional became the low-low and pop music the high-low, was here also applied to the field of high art; specifically, the visual arts. In this process pop artists tried to be the low of the high, and they put the high of the high away, distinguishing themselves from that. Thus, while pop music divided the field of the popular into two fields and the secessionists took over the higher, more legitimate, more authentic segment, the "high of the low," in pop art (a term I use in a slightly extended sense) the situation is reversed: pop art is the "low within the high," and from the beginning both sides interacted with each other across the border they were sharing. In so doing, they were also making the broader division, the original division, more fragile.

A completely different perspective on the genesis of pop originates in the theory of the culture industry developed in the 1940s in the United States by Adorno and Horkheimer, who at this time, exiled from Nazi Germany, were colleagues at the Institute of Social Research. Together they wrote the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, one chapter of which—"The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception"—introduces the concept of "the culture industry."

How does this theory—the idea of the culture industry as a giant betrayal of the masses—relate to pop, given the fact that it appears in a text written ten years before the emergence of any of the phenomena we normally call "pop"? The theory was developed before pop, in the 1940s, but it also reacts to a major shift, an increasing impossibility to uphold the old division of popular and elite, high and low—due to the industrial, Taylorist production of culture, based on the division of labor, in advanced capitalism and the role of mass media. Above all: the

theory of the culture industry insists that contra other theories of capitalism that believe the capitalist will sell anything that can be sold and the semantic character of the commodity is indifferent to the capitalist exchange value, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the dominance of exchange value in cultural products (just as in any other) deforms every such cultural product into ideology, "beats it with sameness."

Normally one would say it was of no consequence for the capitalist market to sell something that had an ideological function. After all, capitalists would "sell us the rope by which they're to be hanged." Their only goal is to make a profit. Adorno and Horkheimer argue, however, that this is not the case with cultural production—not because someone designs cultural products to be different but because how they are produced as industrial products turns them into ideological objects.

The theory of the culture industry has gone through several versions since it was first conceived. In the 1950s and 1960s it was a pop phenomenon itself, widely admired as an explanation of the decline of the public sphere and for the connections it posited between capitalism and culture, entertainment and ideology. The term also became a code word for simplistic, culturally pessimistic conspiracy theories and gave rise to popular discussions of manipulation through mass media. Often it was used in support of a certain form of Protestant, puritanical argument for why children should abstain from certain types of cultural consumption, such as the cinema or comic strips. This, of course, was not Adorno and Horkheimer's intention.

In the 1970s, the term was sometimes replaced by *consciousness industry*, a psychedelic paranoid variation that sounds as if it were inspired by William Burroughs or Francis Ford Coppola. Actually, it was coined by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who tried to claim that the industry directly

produces consciousness, rather than cultural commodities, whose consumption in part is an ideology. For the arrival of adherents to the culture industry in visual art criticism, we largely have Benjamin Buchloh to thank. When he came to the United States in 1977, he brought with him, carefully wrapped, the central ideas of critical theory, which he then proceeded to unpack slowly over the course of the 1980s and afterward, introducing 1970s Frankfurt School thinking into English-language art theory. He also successfully launched the thesis that the visual arts are themselves part of the culture industry.

Often this latter idea is paraded past audiences that understand only the basic assertion that art objects are commodities too. But Adorno made a distinction: whereas the products of the culture industry were only commodities, works of art were something else as well: they were art objects and commodities, and they could not escape this fact. This is important, because if art works can still be considered singularities or specific objects, then on some level they resist integration into what Heidegger called "the gigantic," and the culture industry would not be total.

To preserve this possibility, Adorno insists, especially in his later writings on music and literature, on differentiating between, on the one hand, the double nature of art as at once autonomous and *fait social* and, as *fait social*, always a commodity; and, on the other hand, the sameness of cultural products, which are all just one homogenic thing. Here I add the possibility that certain pop objects, in music as well as in art, might claim a third nature. *Fait social* and a different *fait social* at the same time. Not art works and *fait social*, not art works and commodities, but also a composite nature made of only two things: commodity and noncommodity. But a noncommodity is not necessarily art; it can be something like a social practice, an idea of liberated space that is not necessarily in the world of art.

I thus question whether we are stuck with only two options: the commodities that are just commodities, and the art objects that are simultaneously commodities and autonomous objects. Perhaps in a way similar to how the art object, for Adorno, has two sides, certain pop objects also have two sides—only not as art objects and commodities but as commodities and noncommodities.

One of the most important criticisms levelled against the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that Adorno and Horkheimer, in conceptualizing the culture industry, failed to develop a coherent theory of the role played by media technology. The German media theorist Friedrich Kittler and his school accused Adorno of complete technical ignorance of even the media of his own time. That Hollywood films and commercial radio were Adorno and Horkheimer's prime examples of the culture industry is understandable, given that they were writing in 1940s Los Angeles. However, as a consequence of this, so Kittler and his school argue, Adorno and Horkheimer forced an understanding of some of the contingencies of 1940s American media as absolute characteristics, not least by ontologizing the technological state of radio as it stood in the late 1930s and early 1940s as intrinsic to the medium. For example, they failed to acknowledge that the technical idiosyncrasies of film and radio might not apply to incarnations of a culture industry built on quite different technologies and media. Thus, pop is sometimes an inadequate and sometimes an adequate application of different and new media and, above all, new relations between media and audiences. Given the advent of a completely new media situation and constellation, what happens through pop music and pop art in the mid-1950s may be read as an attempt not only to use these media but to do something adequate with them, in the same sense that high modernist theory normatively asked art to deal with media in an adequate way.

Kittler's hatred of Horkheimer and Adorno is legendary. In his savaging of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he refers to the pair

only as “the sons of factory owners.” What Adorno’s interpretation of radio crucially lacks, Kittler argues, is precisely what later Heidegger understands about technology, which Kittler summarizes as “the wish to establish the primacy of the object.” In doing so, Kittler writes, Heidegger “opened himself to criticism that was both clever and bourgeois.” And Adorno was the “stupidest and most bourgeois of Heidegger’s critics.” He continues, arguing that “Radio is no longer an existential entity that can be attributed to Being itself, as in *Being and Time*. On the contrary, it is something both gigantic and tiny that has assaulted people without their comprehension.” Kittler’s use of *gigantic* is a nod to Heidegger, who applies this term to his equivalent of “the culture industry,” especially in his main example, radio—of course without the Marxism and the critical theory.

Adorno and Heidegger were on opposite sides of theoretical discourse in the German-speaking world of the 1950s and 1960s. Kittler based his materialism of media and media technology on Heidegger’s anthropological understanding of human uses of technology, and he inherited from Heidegger a deep disagreement with *historical* materialism, its privileging of class relations, and its crucial privileging of the analysis of the commodity form and dedication to dialectical critique. But although his Heidegger-backed aggression toward Adorno and Horkheimer might seem to come only from the right wing, Kittler also tries to call out these cultural Marxists for being (embarrassingly) bourgeois. By supporting proletarian tinkerers and *bricoleurs* (one might call them nerds or geeks today) against a specifically upper-middle-class camp of ignorance of technology, Kittler turns “Marxist” arguments against Marxists themselves, seeing them as blinded by their own privileged existence. Even if Kittler’s argument here is partly reactionary against what seemed to him a leftist hegemony in academia in the 1960s and 1970s, he has half a point. The media materialism of Kittler and others, aiming to

outdo and surpass Adorno's economic materialism, cannot replace it but only compensate some of its shortcomings.

What we have here is a conflict between, on the one hand, the Marxist, leftist tradition of historical materialism and dialectical thinking and, on the other hand, an anthropological theory of the human, based on Heidegger, that, through Kittler, is strongly connected with media and the materialism of media. But those arguing from the anthropological position use new media to support their argument, while those, like Horkheimer and Adorno, arguing from the historical position, act as if media have no history, as if the culture industry is just a product of capitalism. But if it were just a product of capitalism, it could have easily come into existence one hundred years earlier. Thus, those who have based their thinking on historical thinking, such as Adorno and Horkheimer, have no historical shift in their thinking or in their judgment. In contrast, those who have based their thinking on the idea of anthropological permanence, such as Kittler when drawing from Heidegger, are referring to historical shifts, to historical changes.

Often overlooked in the criticisms against Adorno and Horkheimer are their concepts of the "fungible" and the "module." In several places, they point out that the sameness that infects everything goes far beyond just the standardization of artistic forms (e.g., the thirty-two bars of the so called Great American Songbook). This sameness also manifests itself in the way the boundaries between media are constantly being crossed. So any little module of meaning can interconnect with or be replaced by any other module of meaning. Ideological atoms and molecules can jump from radio advertisements to jokes in the newspaper and then reappear in the melodies we whistle on the street while on the way to a movie in which we are sold another module. The modules interconnect through the borders of media, because they are so much the same.

This sameness is not only on the level of meaning but on the level of media use. Kittler's argument against Adorno and Horkheimer overlooks this important point.

Advertising, which proliferates its brand messages in a variety of contexts and media environments, is here paradigmatic. Rather than "medium unspecificity," this may be described as a transgression of mediums, one that avails of a unified ideology, that operates regardless of the codes and laws of individual channels of communication. This inside, if never fully developed, constitutes one core of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and it is one that the critics from the field of media theory overlook. Because it is so fixated on the difference between the channels, on the way certain media channels broadcast something, media theory cannot see this cooperation among media. And unlike other aspects of Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, in this case the diagnosis is not just culturally pessimistic but a prescient observation of the mixed media strategies that became central, among other things, to advertising in the 1950s and have been with us ever since.

Consider the now-beloved "Mad Men," who, as the eponymous TV show depicts, were constantly engaged in leveling the differences between media and specific technologies through the homogenization of content. Thus the idea of logos, jingles, and all the other things the media use to communicate one product, one brand, on as many channels as possible is really a strategy of leveling and then transgressing the differences between media. Warhol, at a time when the artistic avant-gardes were mostly occupied in investigating the proprieties of a specific medium, was perhaps the first to concentrate on the consequences of this leveling, by responding with the idea of a factory that produces paintings *and* posters *and* music *and* film, all at the same time.

But the members of the Independent Group were the first to think about the mix of what Adorno called "fungible entities" in cultural production. The path to the discovery of pop leads through the study of installation, constellation, and the grouping of objects and images in space, something that is also a key characteristic of pop, or what I call "the second stage of the culture industry." The idea of the constellation and the installation is based on an understanding of what advertisements—and pop—do in transgressing media boundaries. If this social effect travels from the media technology, which is what Heidegger and Kittler were focused on, to the content itself, this has serious consequences for the arguments against critical theory at the leftist critique of ideology. The indifference to which media technology is deployed in advertisements and subsequent cultural formats is a hard fact that even a Kittlerist must concede. The Kittlerist idea that there is no such thing as content, that content is only an effect of technology, loses its grip precisely when specific media technologies—namely those that render the media no longer visible as a medium—are instrumentalized in giving priority to content. If the ideological sameness of the content is so strong as to make relevant the differences between media, this hierarchy no longer stands and even, so to speak, makes ideological content itself into a quasi-technological reality—in the same sense that the Kittlerists and the media scientists say technology is like the more fundamental basis of communication and not the content of communication. The implementation of sameness of content works just like that, but on an even deeper fundamental level.

When one takes seriously both this aspect of the theory of the culture industry and the many justified objections proffered by the media materialist faction, the story of the development of the "old gigantic" (to use Heidegger's term) of the 1950s into the "new gigantic" of our time, the Internet, must be told in a different way. The critiques of the media materialists need to

be taken seriously, but one must go beyond the fixation on the technological aspects and concentrate on how connections are formed between and among media in order to locate the origin of the infection with sameness. But when looking for this origin, one must also do what critics of ideology do: look at ideology as history and not just as sameness; or, restated dialectically, look at ideology as historical sameness, a sameness that can change or can become part of history, something on which the laws of history are applied. Then we will find that the historicity of ideology and the mass cultural, although it lies in the media and the constellation Adorno and Horkheimer overlook, was a pathway by which the different content of pop could enter the culture industry and interrupt here and there the eternal sameness.

To be able to do so, however, one has to introduce different historical stages of the culture industry. I distinguish three such stages, in each of which the leveling of differences between media and the channels of communication occur in distinct ways. The fact that digitalization will eventually, in the third and contemporary stage, complete the leveling process on a technical level will not do away with the problem if one acknowledges that standardization takes place not on the level of technology but on the level of meaning. And if the identity of this meaning has no bearing on the differences between one medium and another, the way they digitally interconnect all media would merely be the technical consummation of what has long since been achieved.

During its first stage, the culture industry operated via two constellations of technology: radio and cinema. The first, radio, provided public communication at home with a small box, first in the parlor and later in the kitchen. This small box offered everything from the world outside. From the announcements of the current time, with its disciplinary aspect, to propaganda messages and advertisements, but also to music that permitted

dreams of the distant places from whence it was composed, performed, and, above all, recorded. The second constellation of technologies, the cinema, meant leaving the home. One had to enter the public sphere, the real world, to access this space in which one could then have the opposite of public communication: dreams in the dark, alone. But those dreams took place in synchronicity with many others, who were invisible yet close enough to smell, to hear, or to touch. (Sergei Eisenstein was not the only one to speak about the fact that one purpose of the cinema is to create synchronized emotions so that its attractions unfold the effect collectively.)

These two constellations do a lot of contradictory things with you. One comes to you at home as the public; the other is met by you in the public and encourages you to do something you normally do at home: dreaming. But this dreaming is synchronized with other dreamers. In this way a new public is constructed. This complex constellation of media dispositifs existed parallel to each other and formed the core of what Adorno and Horkheimer called the "culture industry." The two sites produce contradictory kinds of relationships: the former, a private connection with messages from the outside and an invitation to a dreamlike visualization of the places from which the broadcast material might originate; the latter, a solitude reached with specific images that is experienced in the presence of others, in the public space. Both experiences disturb the existing differentiating structures of the bourgeois public in order to explore the gaps between the spaces constituted by the media themselves. Vague dream/specific image, inside/outside, family/public, contact/isolation: these were turned into atmospheric commodities.

Naturally, the bourgeois citizen initially bemoaned the fact that the traditional ordering structures were coming under attack, and opponents of the bourgeoisie rejoiced over the cinema and the radio. This was true of those on the left as well

as those on the right, who particularly valued audiences that were synchronized, disciplined, and receiving orders. Not only Adolf Hitler and William Randolph Hearst but Walter Benjamin and Sergei Eisenstein had high political hopes for the cinema. Yet, although radio and cinema disrupted the oral structures of the public sphere, they replaced them with an architecture that was rigid in its own way. After all, what had been connected and synchronized were merely previously existing places, the home and the theater. The new relationships and shared experiences these mediums enabled were relatively fixed, tending toward a consolidation to a single channel.

This changed during the second stage of the culture industry, when people themselves began to make their own bodies a medium of connection. In this second stage, people rather than media technologies forged connections between different sides. Although radio and cinema still played a role, this second phase was dominated by pop music and television. This is the phase when the high-low distinction reenters the already distinguished field. People could, much better than technology or art practices, aspire to be something different from what they were born into, so they were better made for the reentry. They could define themselves, for example, like the British mods or the upwardly mobile African-Americans in the U.S. soul culture, as the high half of the low. This was, after all, in accordance with the ideology of the new Fordist welfare state of the 1950s. In fact, around this time television came to fulfill Adorno and Horkheimer's observation that it "aims at a synthesis of radio and film."

Even more than radio, television controls time management as a schedule of shows brings the synchronizing power of the cinema into the home. People used to come home when the news was on and then live their lives after the main news programs ended. But the TV programs themselves made

escapist dreaming an integral part of everyday life. The negative synthesis of these two functions can be easily recognized as depoliticizing and ideologizing, much in the manner of the original culture industry. You are disciplined and get dreams at the same time; that is, you are turned into a passive, sedated person.

At the same time, viewers are trained to embody this politicized ideology in their own behavior. This is perhaps most evident in the effect of pop music, which straddled radio and television. Pop music essentially involves the conveyance of a nameable source of a specific recognizable voice into a private setting; for example, a teenager's bedroom. This is the first scene of pop music reception: you, alone in your bedroom, with a voice that comes from far away. But this voice is a specific voice, one you can recognize. You do not want just any voice or any song in pop music; you want a specific voice, a specific recording of a song. But the interaction remains incomplete if the recipient, dreaming of the voice in solitude, does not go out into public places—bars, discos, concert venues—where the same voice is also present. Once the record has been played at home and encountered in the nightclub, the two places are linked by the recipient's movements through public spaces. Only the person who has listened to the voice of Elvis (or whomever) in the private bedroom can estimate and validate the same voice again in the public setting, the bar, the discotheque. But enjoyment of the voice in the bar or discotheque can only really occur if the person has heard the voice at home, in a private setting. Both conditions are necessary. Pop music can live only with the help of bodies, the people who move back and forth from the private to the public space, from one place to another, perhaps meanwhile adopting the hairstyle or clothes or look of the person behind the voice.

Fans thus bring together the world's media outputs on a structural level. The metamedium of pop music is not a

semantic and ideological sameness, as in the first phase of the culture industry; rather it is the actions of real people who take ownership of various types of musical output: live music, records, radio broadcasts of records, jukeboxes—but also frequently repeated television images, magazine photos of the people who are singing. In different ways and in different places, real people then openly show affiliation or identification with a particular subculture or fan base by way of their haircuts, outfits, et cetera. In doing so they enact the distinction between popular and pop. They continually enact their participation in the higher low, not the lower low. The pop fan is then a critic of the old culture industry, enacting a criticism of the regime of radio and cinema that existed before—insofar as he or she has escaped the sedative effect and the mechanisms that infect everything with sameness. But the fan senses, and this is the birth of the dissident subculture we have known since the 1960s, that the gestures toward pop that put distance between him and his parents, who are tied to background and tradition, are simultaneously part of a huge movement toward integration. This distinguishing oneself, this going away from the old popular into pop is, on the one hand, an act of secession, an act of separation, while, on the other hand, an act of (re)integrating into something else. The desire to create new communities and Woodstock-nations where one is among one's own kind, with other people—who are themselves also media—is the productive backlash against the totalizing threat of this integration.

When you have played a part in creating the picture of the gigantic in which we live, the outcome is a picture of the world under your control. This is why, when people organized these integrating effects themselves, by creating festivals, parties, raves, and so on, they had the feeling they were in charge, that they were politically responsible for their fate. This shift would lead to the third state in the culture industry, that of the post-Fordist period we experience today. In this phase it no longer

seems necessary to connect media, whether through the equivalence of what is transmitted on the level of meaning or through fans making their bodies a medium as they seek to identify with a scene or subculture. The cultures of connection and engagement in pop music which were in the early forms reflected in the ecstasies of synchrony and harmony, from doo-wop to the guitar strumming of punk rock, have today become a metastructure of informality. Within a landscape of decentralized and increasingly mobile output devices, digitalization has already instituted these connections across and between media through technological conversions. The gigantic is no longer a potential reality but a fully realized one. Nothing is any longer far away and simultaneously within reach as in the days of the radio. Instead, everything is already everywhere; its natural home is the virtual space of the data cloud. People create diverse niches and subsystems that are often small and remote, but they no longer strive to break away or secede from the gigantic. In fact, they are dependent on the greater tendency toward integration in all of their functions.

If the first phase of the culture industry depended on a high degree of homogeneity, which was easily achieved because its model of consumption was based on Fordist industrial production, the contemporary incarnation, too, has its style of exploitation. What is now apparent is that the counterculture of the second period, of the second stage of the culture industry, turned into a kind of bioexploitation as soon as it took on the character of a new culture industry, a now normative model that exploits vitality, belonging, and enthusiasm. The current culture industry, that of the new gigantic, exploits life itself, instead of cultural labor, as in gastronomy, pornography, tourism, reality TV, and other genres in which people function as media. But it also exploits the observation and quantification of life as a data set of friendships and taste preferences. This has brought daily life into the realm of data processing and traded the coincidental

encounter, that basic condition of adventure, for scheduled ubiquity and the availability of suitable nearby bars on smartphone screens. Kittler's geeks have seized power not only through economic success but have conquered cultural hegemony also as a class, installing a culture of total transparency that has now been imposed on all of us. Rather than those "bourgeois Marxists" who have abandoned the utopia of self-fulfillment but continue to believe in the idea of art, these geeks are content with what can be calculated and implemented, just like the media materialists. Now, this new world, the third stage of the culture industry, easily appears as a totality. And not only if one goes through it as Adorno and Horkheimer did, with this imaginary vision of a former better world in mind. When we ask the question of how culture oppresses and exploits, we have to speak in the way I have done here tonight. But cultural pessimism imposes its own distorted views, and culture does other things besides oppressing and exploiting. And so I don't want to relativize this criticism of this new totality, but every concept of art as well as progress in culture, more generally, can be measured by its ability to resist totality. And this ability to resist totality is not necessarily the same as political resistance, even if the two are often confused. It is important whether the resistance to the gigantic takes place on the level of media or the technological composition at any given moment, or whether it is premised on a negation of the commodity form in specificity of, for example, an artistic object. But both conclusions have to be held against the very structure of the current stage of the gigantic of the cultural industry. And this is why we need a historicization of it, a historicization of the cultural industry. Only if we understand the historical context of the seemingly total and gigantic can that which is resistant, specific, and singular be described also in terms of its relationship to the media-technological base and the social conditions of its time. The dialectic of any cultural industry is this: its totality is always historical. It is the merit of pop, but also something like the task for pop, or future ideas

of pop (although pop for most of the time is part of the culture industry and its ideological machine), to break the news of the limited inevitability of the culture industry to a broader audience.

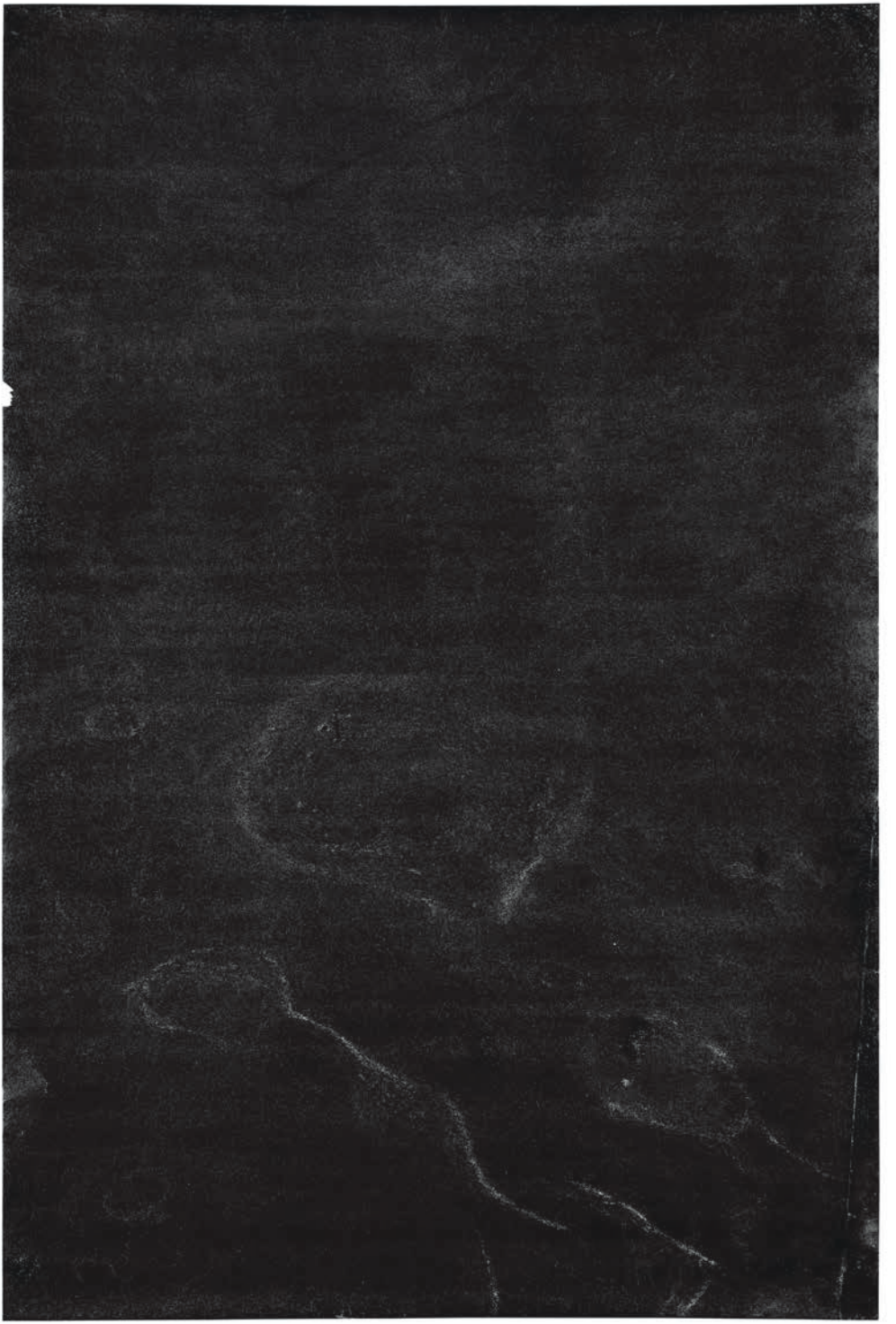
1. The present text is an edited transcript of the 2014 lecture Diedrich Diederichsen presented at "What Is It That Makes Pop So Different, So Attractive? Art and Popular Culture in a World Undergoing a Transformation," a seminar held at the Museo Reina Sofía (September 30, 2014).

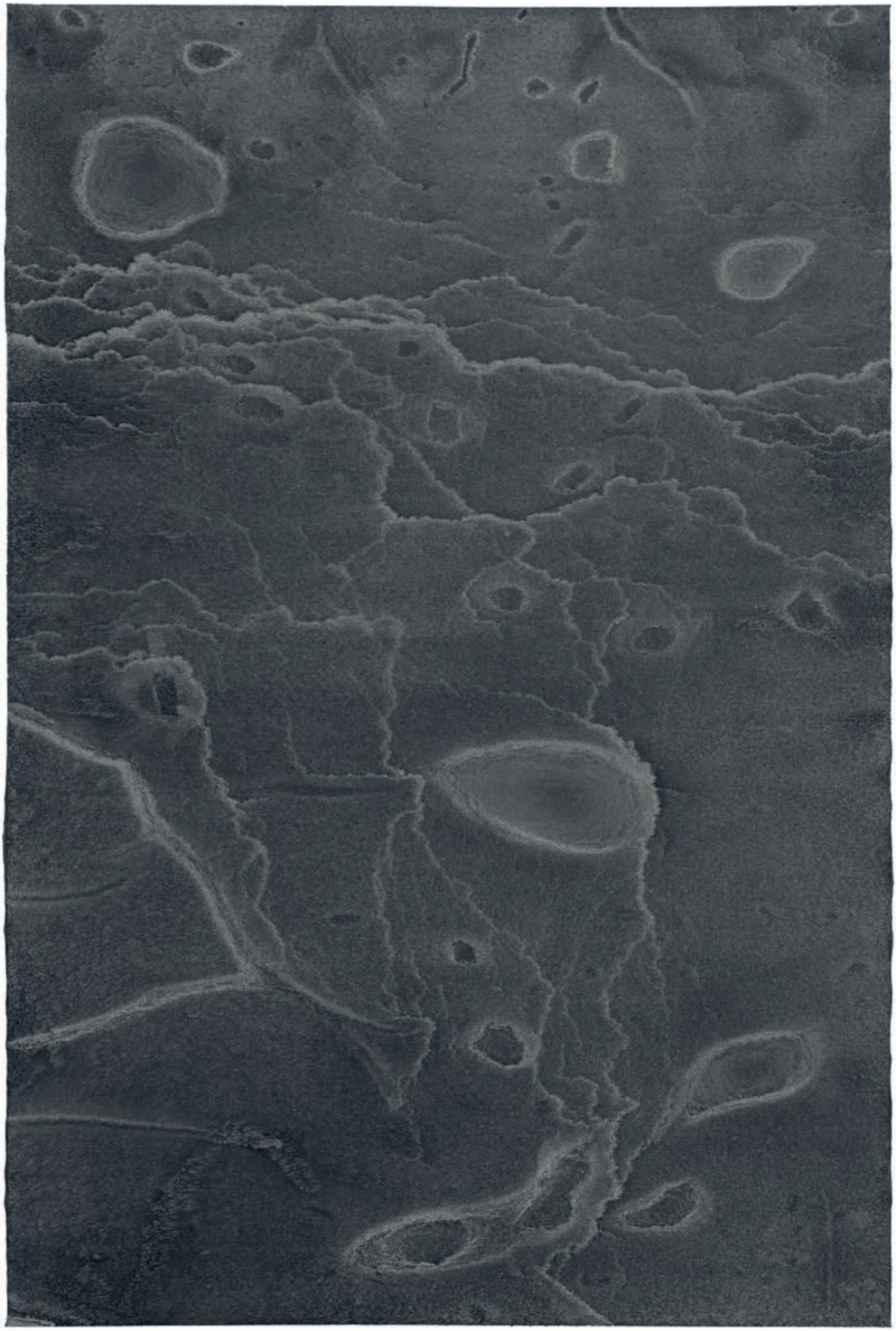
Exercises on Abstraction
Erlea Maneros Zabala

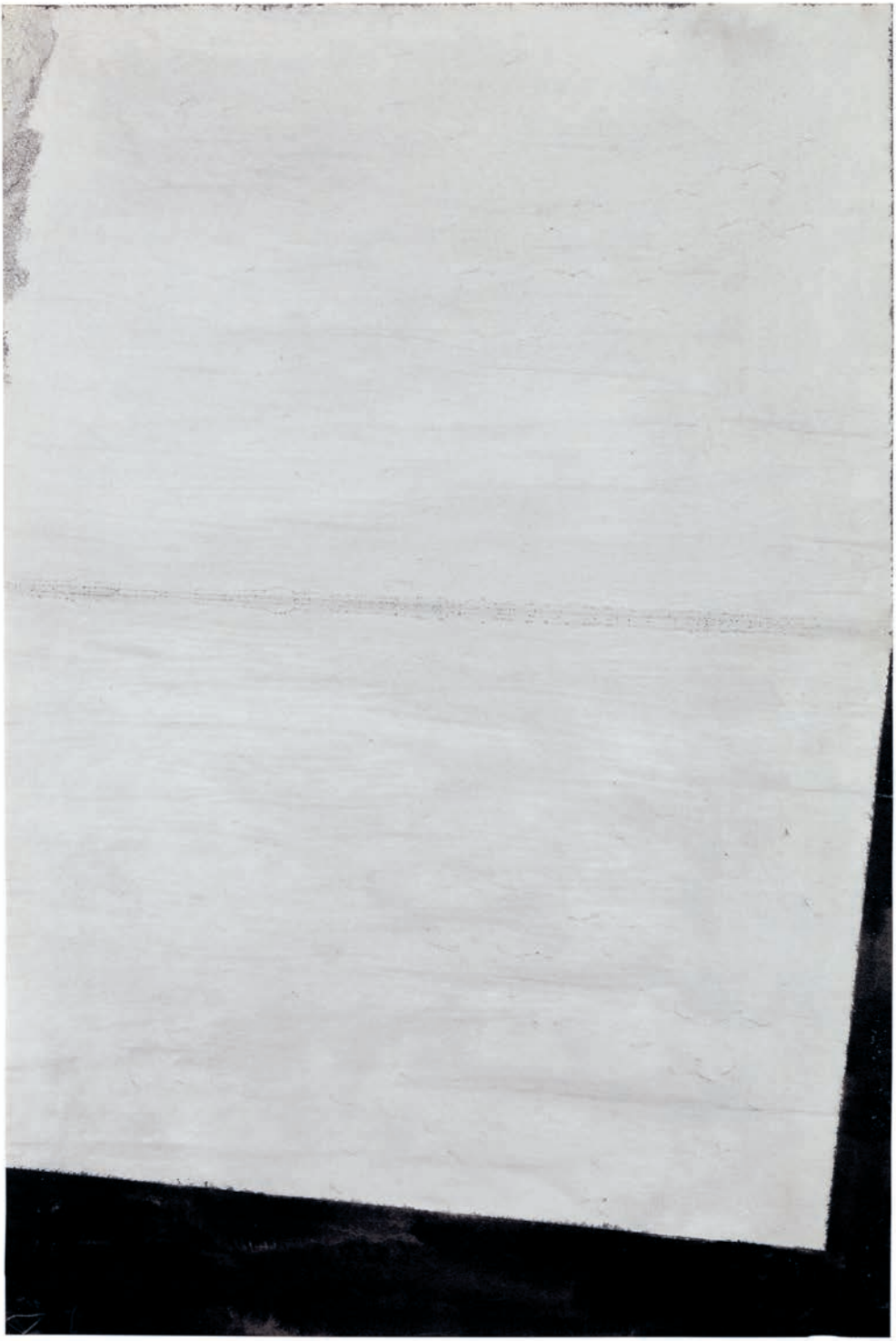
Exercises on Abstraction: Submerge offset paper in water sprinkled with india ink. Let chance leave its imprint. Avoid a defining style (or fiction). Question the notion of authorship. Deconstruct originality with repetitive processes. Decline singularity with virtually infinite variations. Summon artisanal techniques like that of paper marbling or marbled effect. Produce works—abstract painting—as the result of the application of a technique and not of a gesture of unrepeatable subjectivity. Emphasize the condition of abstract expressionism as a language; expressiveness as a practice, an exercise, a technology. Open up the code. Show the conditions under which the images were produced. With *Exercises on Abstraction*, Erlea Maneros Zabala slides a question along the languages of abstraction and, beyond that, demonstrates the precise historicity of artistic means of production.

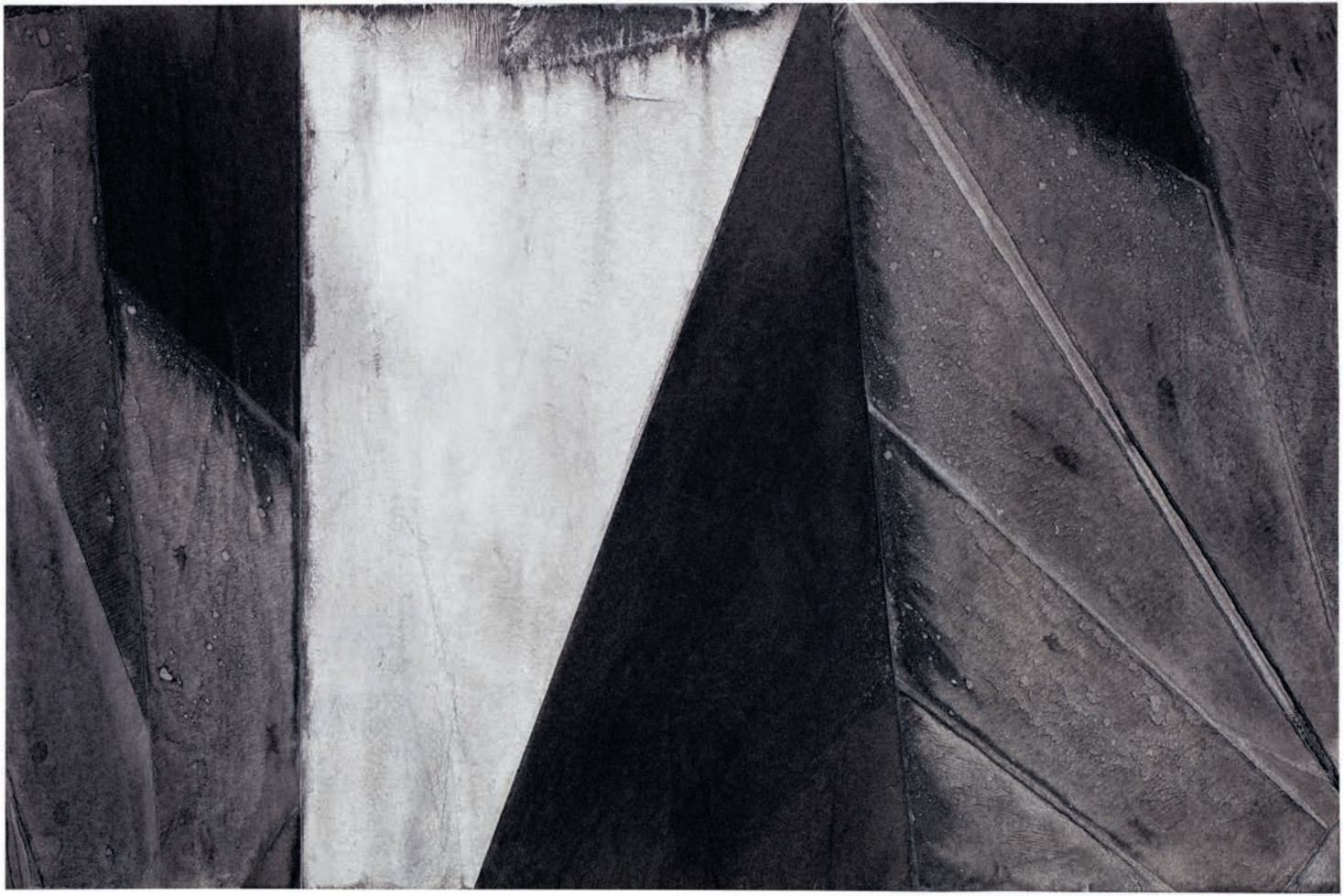
Exercises on Abstraction, Series I, 2009
India ink on offset paper, 91.5 × 61 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía
pp. 22-23

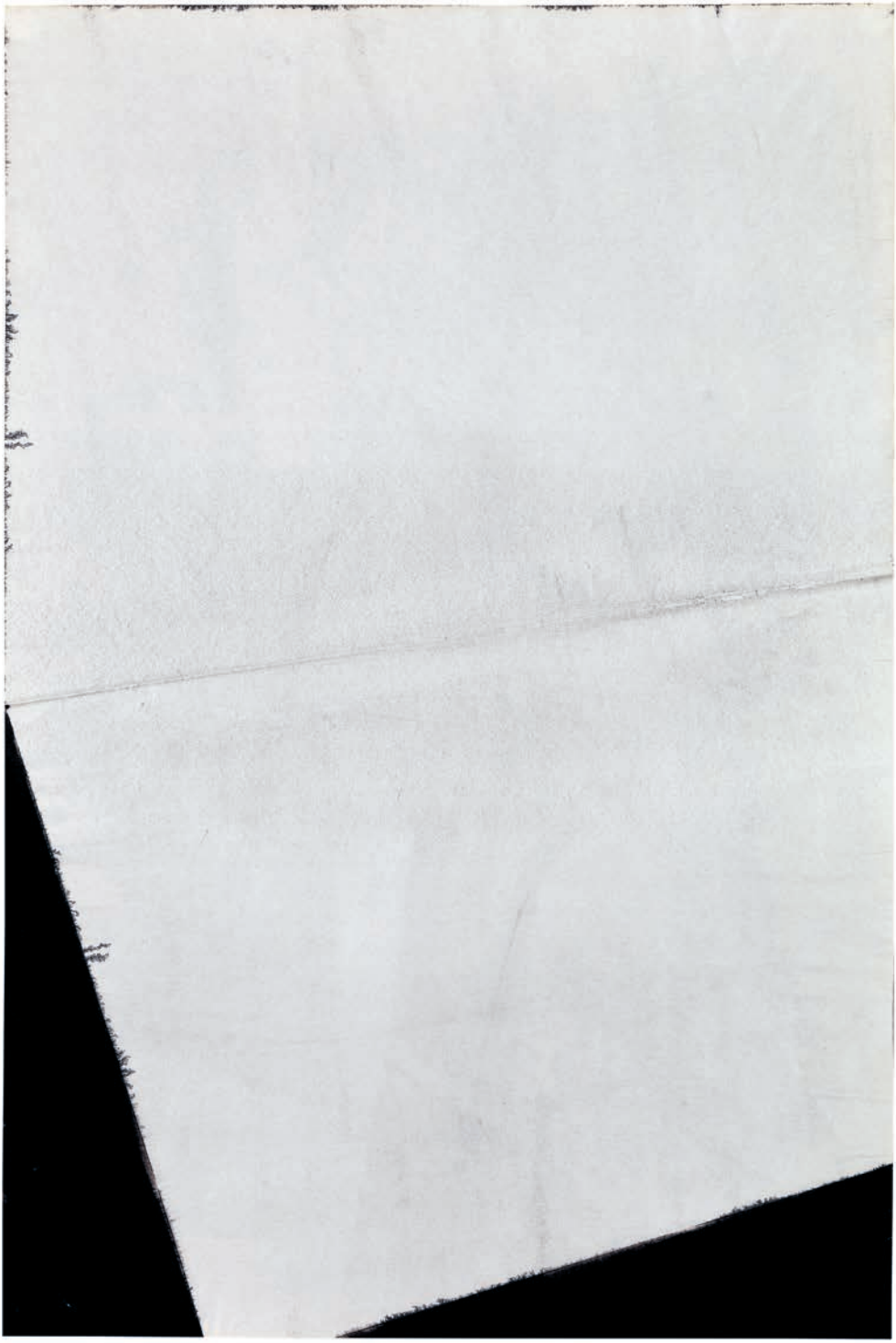
Exercises on Abstraction, Series V, 2015
India ink on offset paper, 91.5 × 61 cm
pp. 24-43

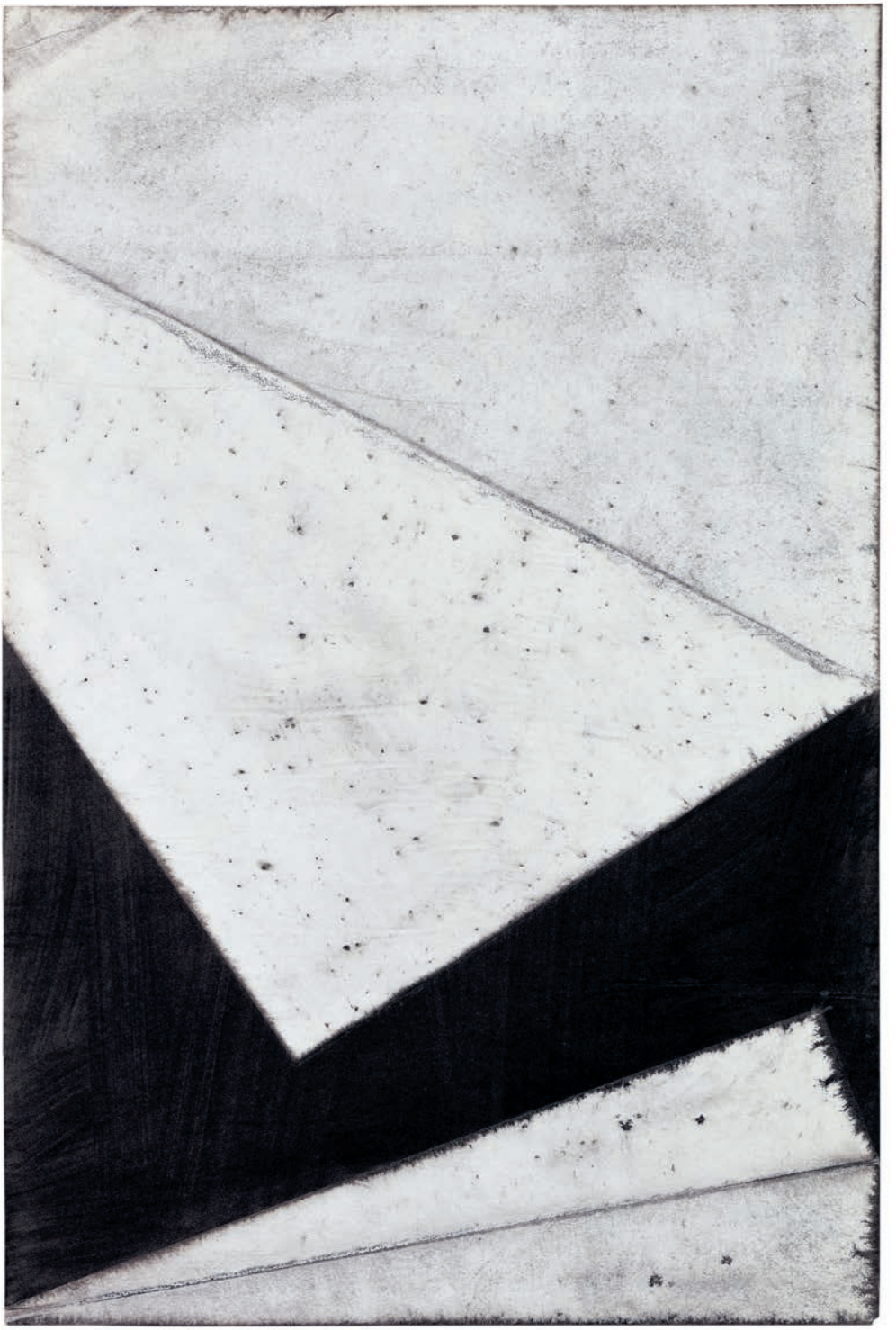


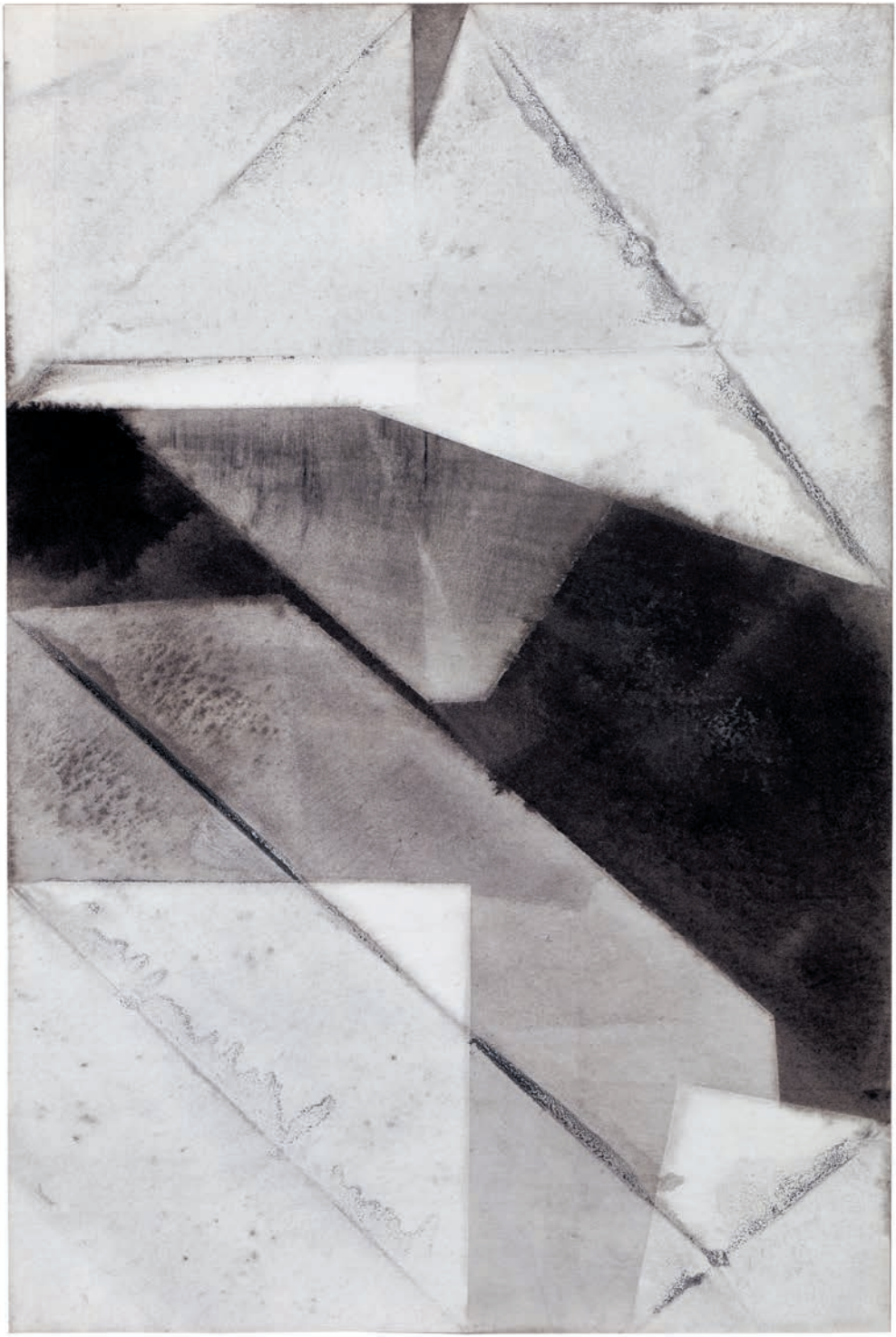


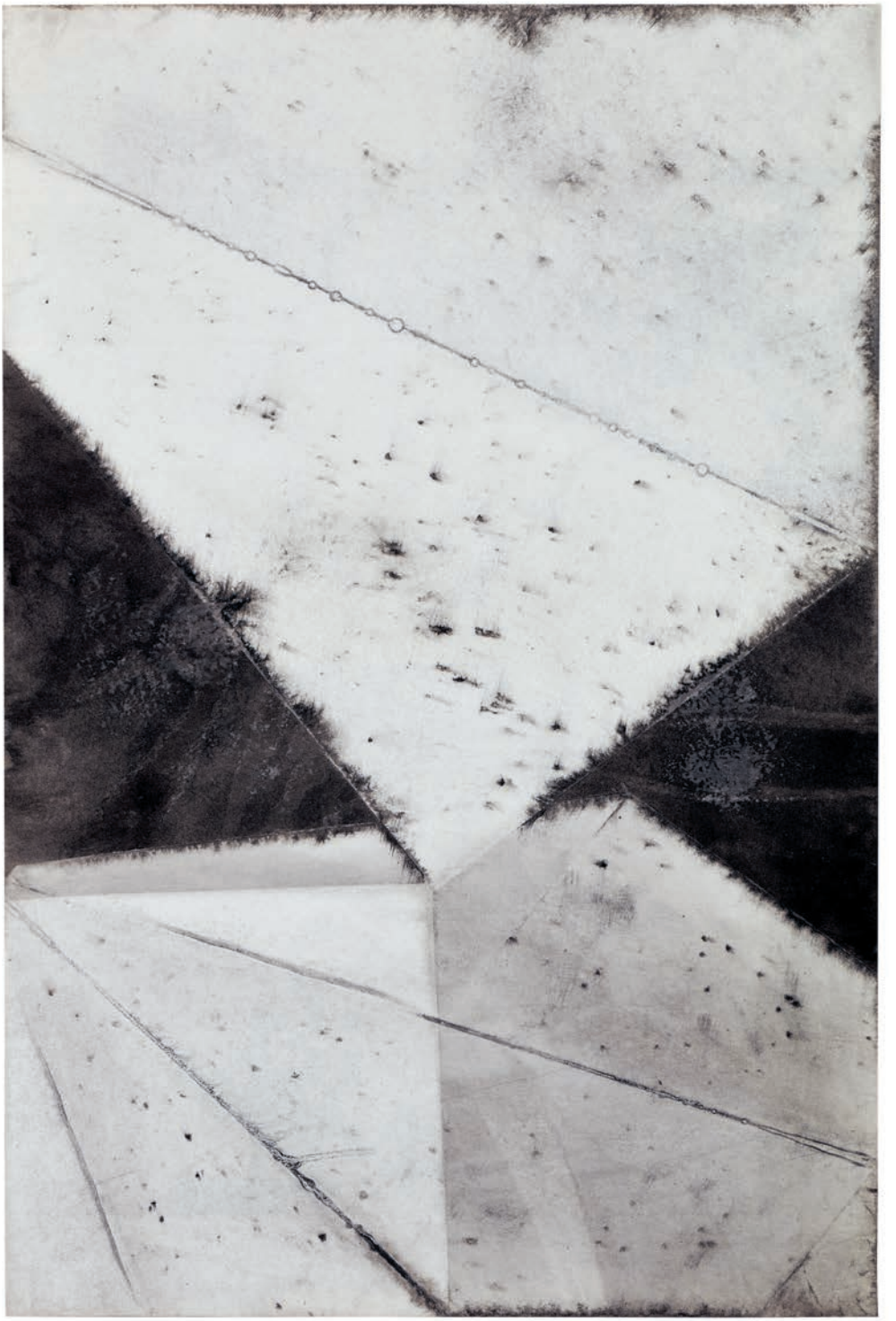


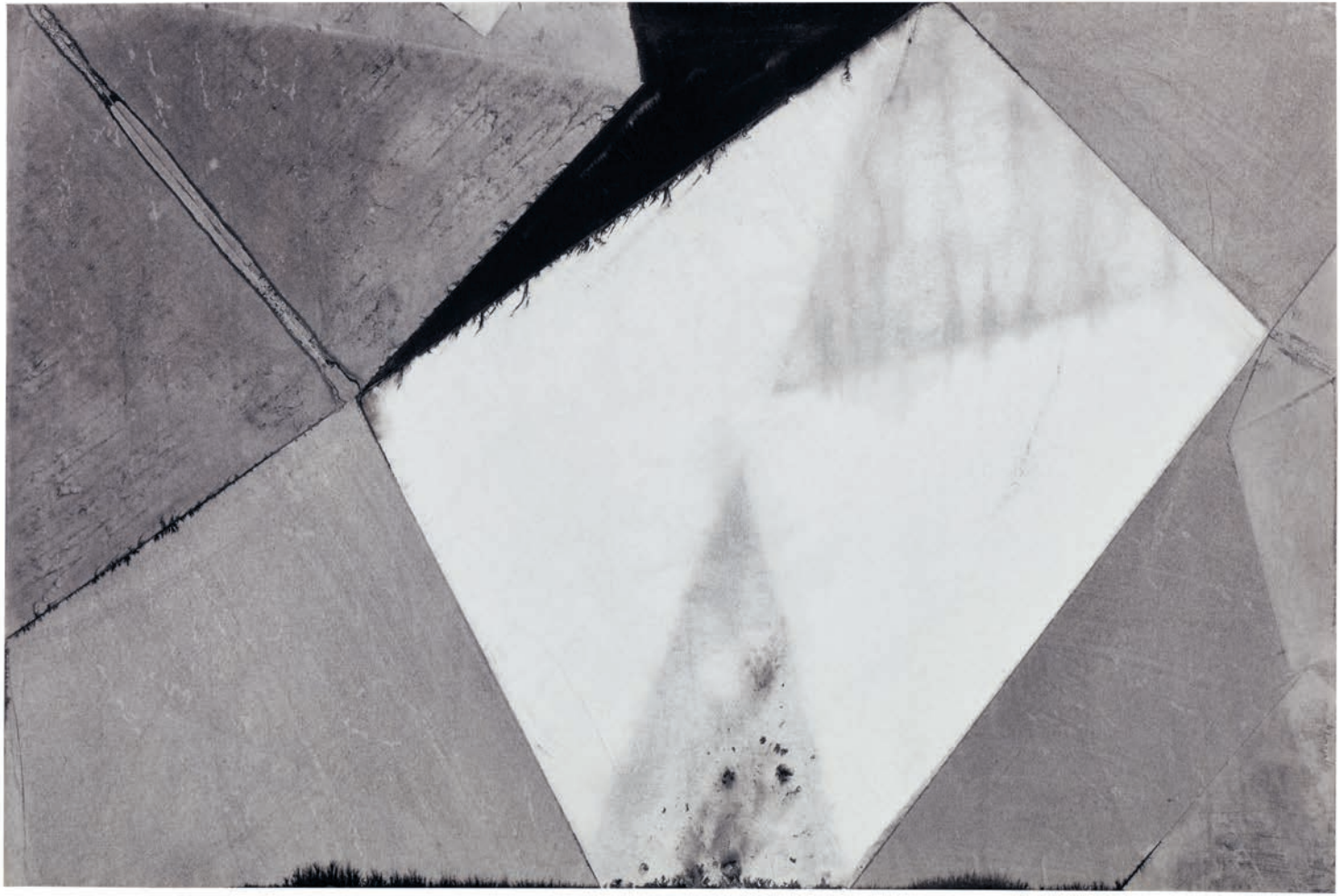


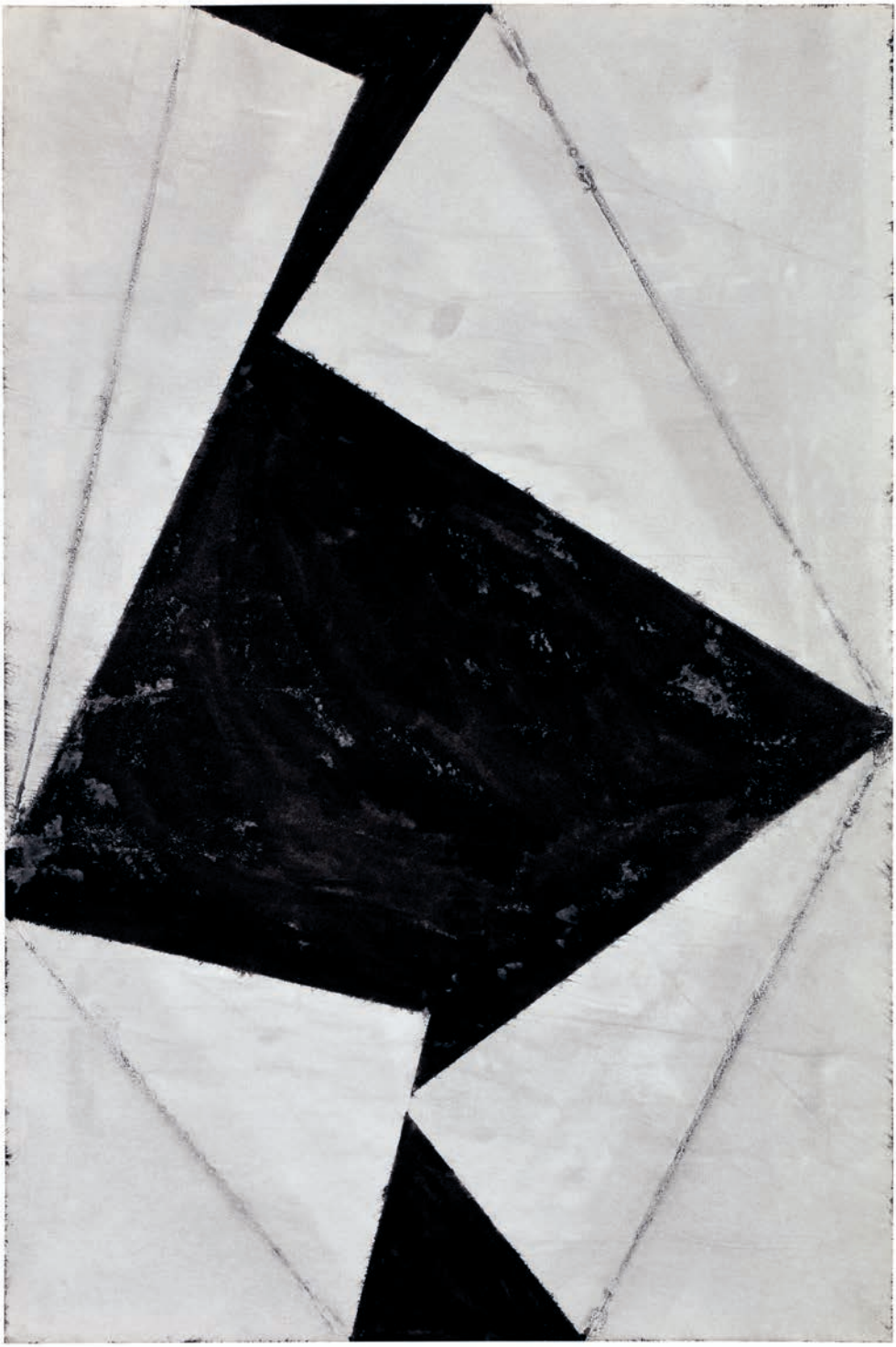


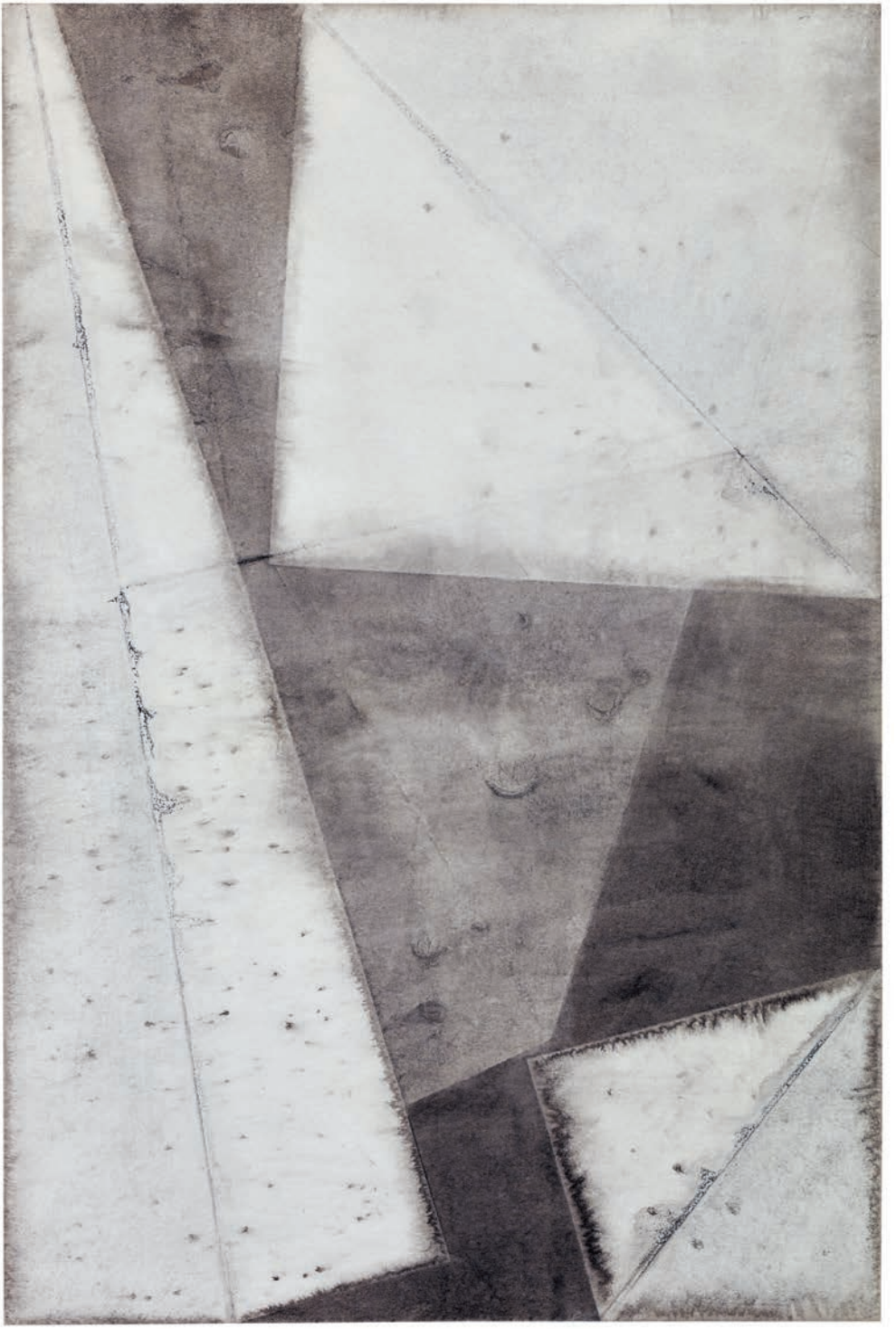












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Reina Sofía: Joaquín Cortes
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ISBN: 978-84-8026-587-4
NIPO: 828-18-011-0
L.D.: M-40865-2018

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