

ECHOES OF SILENCE

A solo show with *Santana Gohain*

Curated by Pratiti Shah

ABOUT THE ARTIST

On first encounter, **Santana Gohain's** playful transformation of materials, create an illusion of being solid, intense, and heavy, but are in fact, fragile constructions on paper that speak about the fickleness of notion. Altering perceptions is the crux of Santana's material exploration.

Santana graduated from Government College of Art and Crafts, Assam and then attained her Master's degree in printmaking from the Faculty of Fine Arts, MSU, Vadodara respectively. Santana's relentless and untiring work over decades has earned her an award in the International Print Biennale in Sarcelles, France (2007); the Junior Fellowship, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi (1999 - 2001) and the Merit Scholarship Directorate of Cultural Affairs Assam (1996 - 1998).

She has exhibited in numerous solo and group shows nationally and internationally, including Bose Pacia, Modern Art Gallery, New York (2009), Western Project, Los Angeles (2008), and a few in her hometowns Assam and Vadodara. She has actively participated in multiple workshops, including the most recent workshop with 10 Indian artists in Shanghai, China (2015); a printmaking workshop with Joaquin Capa (1998) and in Switzerland (2007). Besides printmaking and painting she also has gained experience in sculpture through workshops with Prof. Jean Louis Raymond (1997).

Santana lives and works in Vadodara, with husband and sculptor Ganesh Gohain.

CURATORIAL NOTE

A sculptor of paintings, Santana's printmaking training is evident not only in her technique but also her tendencies. Although her work tends towards a minimal aesthetic, its starkness is tempered by a texture and materiality in an almost ritualistic way of becoming dense, solid, somber and serious. Upon first encounter, her works create an illusion of being solid, intense and heavy but are in fact, fragile constructions in graphite on paper and speak more about the fickleness of notion. The manner in which perception can be altered forms the crux of Santana's material exploration. Converting a material as light and fragile as paper to resemble something as dense and cold as metal is in a manner of saying, an alchemical process. This transformation of material plays an important role in her work.

Santana's preoccupation is with materiality. While her works are stark and minimal to the sight, the making of these works hardly is. Each work is built layer upon layer of different mediums on the surface - somewhat akin to how rocks are formed, with layers of sediments of fine silt. This patient, meditative process of layer building can have numerous metaphoric connotations, as do her processes of peeling off layers, eliminating them and making marks.

Painting for Santana is a cathartic materialization of expression. It is the process of expression devoid of the content of what is expressed, and that becomes of chief concern. Her 'inscriptions' for instance, break away from the meaning of signs. The purpose of these is not to communicate specific information. These inscriptions are independent from the conventional norms of calligraphy and should be viewed as mere marks. In many ways, this draws from a childlike eagerness and enthusiasm to write, uncorrupted by learned formats, as though they are one's own secret language.

The "mark" here, is simultaneously a noun and a verb. The mark in her made-up script becomes the object, and the making of it becomes the evidence of the workings that

the artist leaves behind. Santana translates memories of her past, the history and the sense of sacred associated with certain overwhelming resonances that have impacted her more than others, into a poetic visual language through her art. She picks up from her memories and experiences with a beautiful quality, and releases them in an emotional purgation on to her compositions, which are beautiful on the surface but they hold numerous 'lacerations' within. To Santana, it is this mark/scratch that adds texture and character to the otherwise barren landscape of life. She celebrates each event, memory, and history by emphasizing its fractures and breaks, instead of hiding or disguising them.

“ For them it might stave off, what he could not help but see with clarity: that the world was silent cold and bare and that in this lay its terrible beauty. ”

David Guterson – Snow Falling on Cedars.

In many ways, Santana's art practice appears to resonate with the Japanese aesthetic defined as the beauty of things "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete". Their set of ancient ideals that include wabi (transient and stark beauty), and sabi (the beauty of natural patina and aging), underpin many of the aesthetic norms of what is considered tasteful and beautiful.

Santana frames a sublime picture of her childhood on the mountains of Assam, amidst a landscape red with the Flame of the forest and Rhododendrons (Gulmohar, Nakud). The red appears again in the borders of her Mekhela Chador, and again in the bright celebrations of Bihu. A desire to capture it in her own poetic imagination leads Santana to imitate the essence of the things that have fascinated her over the years. These signatures of nature are subtle and allow a viewer, with a quiet mind and a discerning eye, to relive and recreate them in an intimate manner.

Having grown up with grandmothers who were expert weavers in silk and cotton, Santana developed the skill and a fascination for weaving. She jokes about how she never had the patience to weave and would hurriedly complete her weaves by painting

the incomplete portions. She shared that often birds would get entangled in the loom while they worked outdoors. In order to free the birds, the threads would need to be torn and then joined again. A simple sounding task that needed immense patience and concentration, much like her art practice today.

As a student in Vadodara, while wandering the markets before navratri, Santana found herself drawn to the abundance of bright textile work in the traditional Gujarati clothing. As a result, she started engaging with techniques of dyeing, bandhani and abla work, and the unique stitch patterns that initially caught her attention.

While the color black is laden with connotations, most of which are negative, Santana's preoccupation with it is much simpler. It references the beginnings of her career with mark-making; writing with white chalk on black slates during school lessons. She especially remembers being fascinated by the multiple layers in broken slates. The metallic works that resemble steel or rusted iron with welding marks, indentations, patchworks and scratches, speak to her time spent in her studio in an industrial hub and her life married to a sculptor.

Santana speaks with fond nostalgia about her childhood in the 'The Abode of Clouds', Shillong and later in the new capital of Assam, Guwahati. She speaks simultaneously of beautiful reds in the landscape as well as of the violence her land endured between 1979 – 1985. At home she felt sheltered from the unrest, but little clues of distress like late night knocks on the door by protestors looking for shelter, perhaps became a part of her subconscious. There is no melancholy in her allusion to the violence. She simply states it as a fact of her experience - a scratch, if you will.

Layers are not only limited to Santana's technique but also inspirations and intentions. Her minimal works are meant to be felt and experienced rather than observed. They are meant to be echoes of silence.

- PRATITI SHAH





Invisible Presence 23 & 24

Acrylic and paper on board 48 x 36 in (each)

2018



Invisible Presence 11

Acrylic and paper on board
60 x 36 in
2018

Sense

Acrylic and paper on board
60 x 36 in
2019





Sense I

Acrylic and paper on board
60 x 36 in
2017

Sense 2

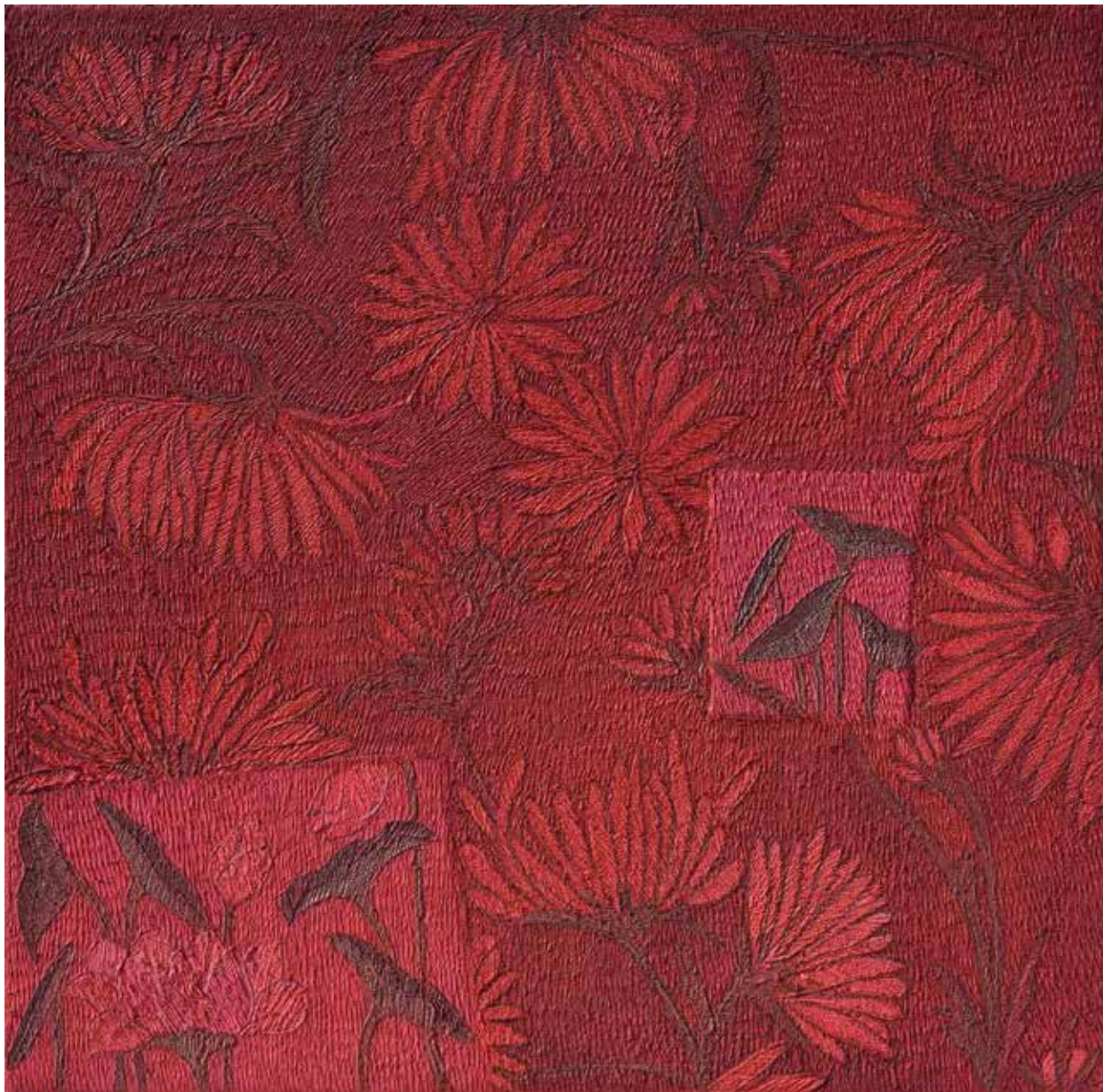
Acrylic and paper on board
60 x 36 in
2018





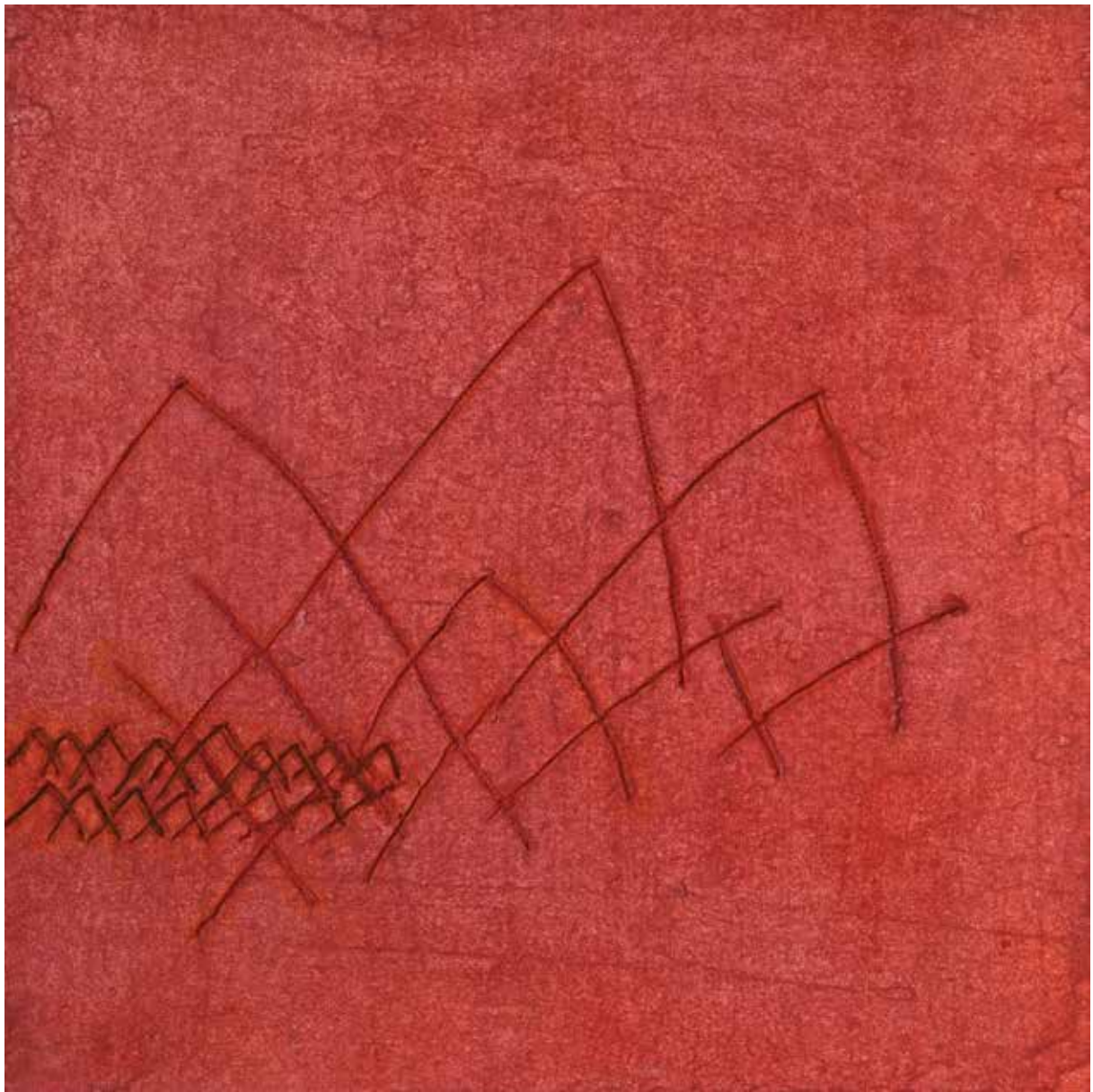
Invisible
Presence 22

Acrylic and paper
on board
48 x 36 in
2018



Invisible Presence 25

Acrylic and paper on board 11 x 11 in 2018

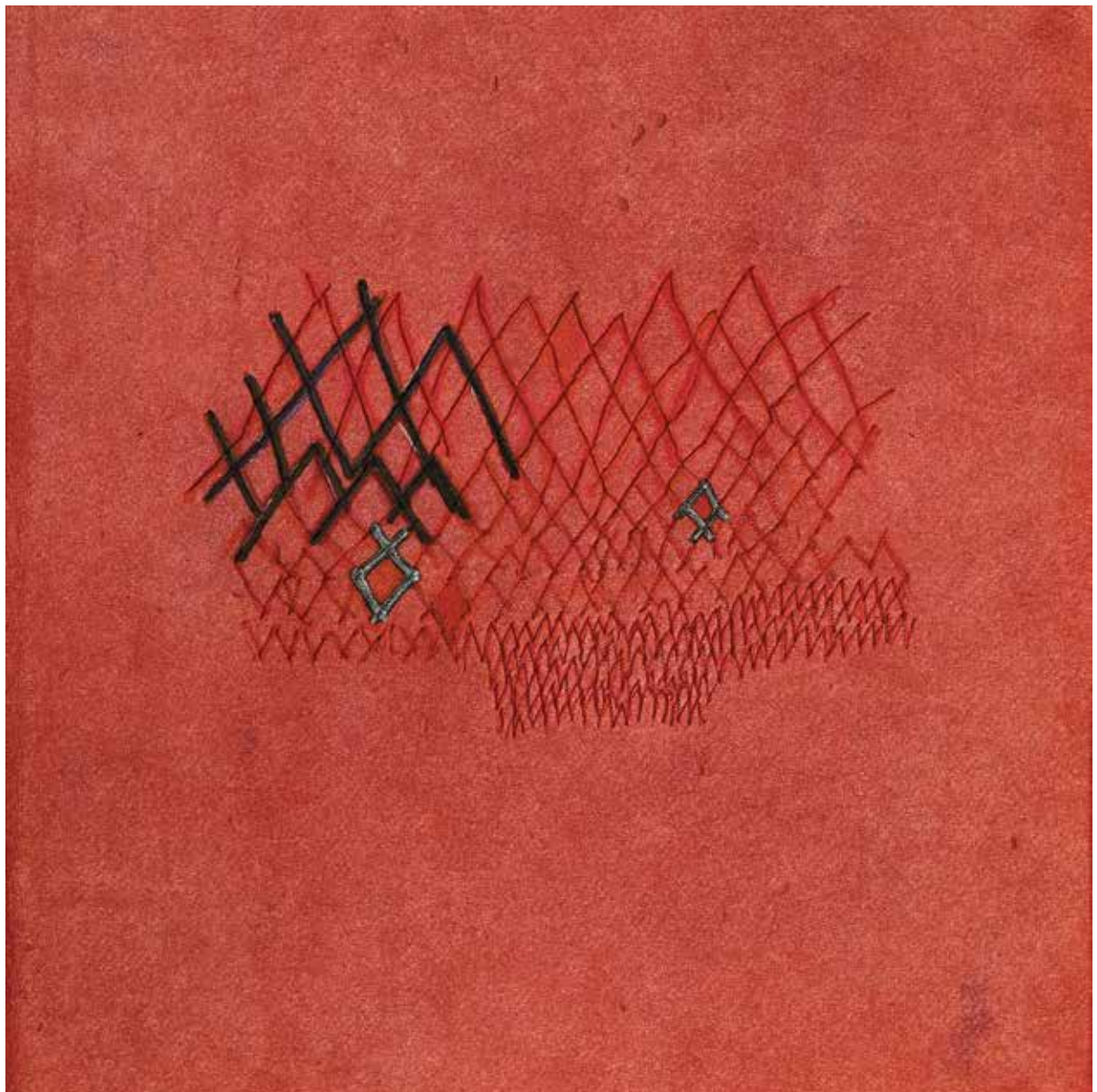


Invisible Presence 5

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018

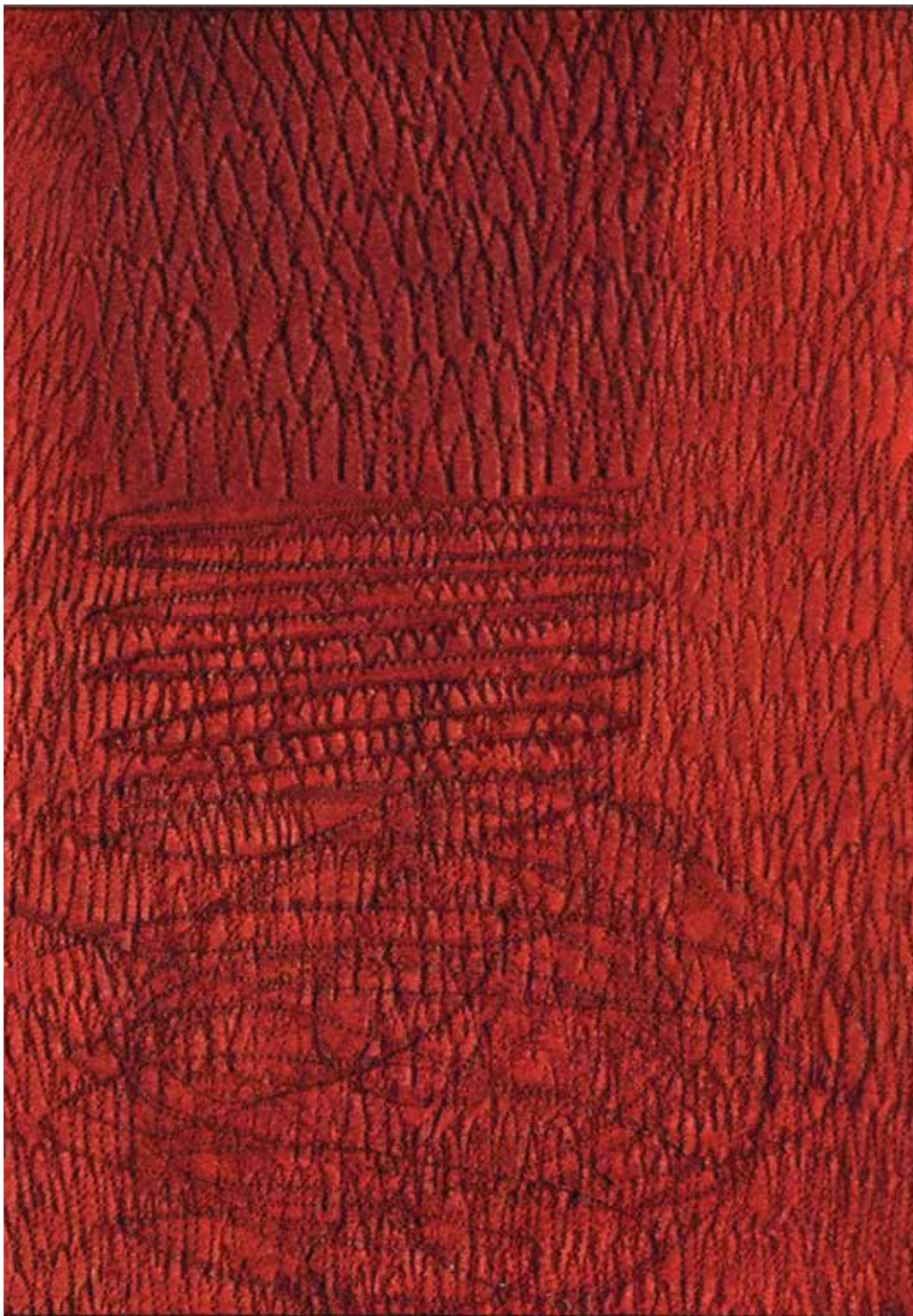


Invisible Presence 2

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018

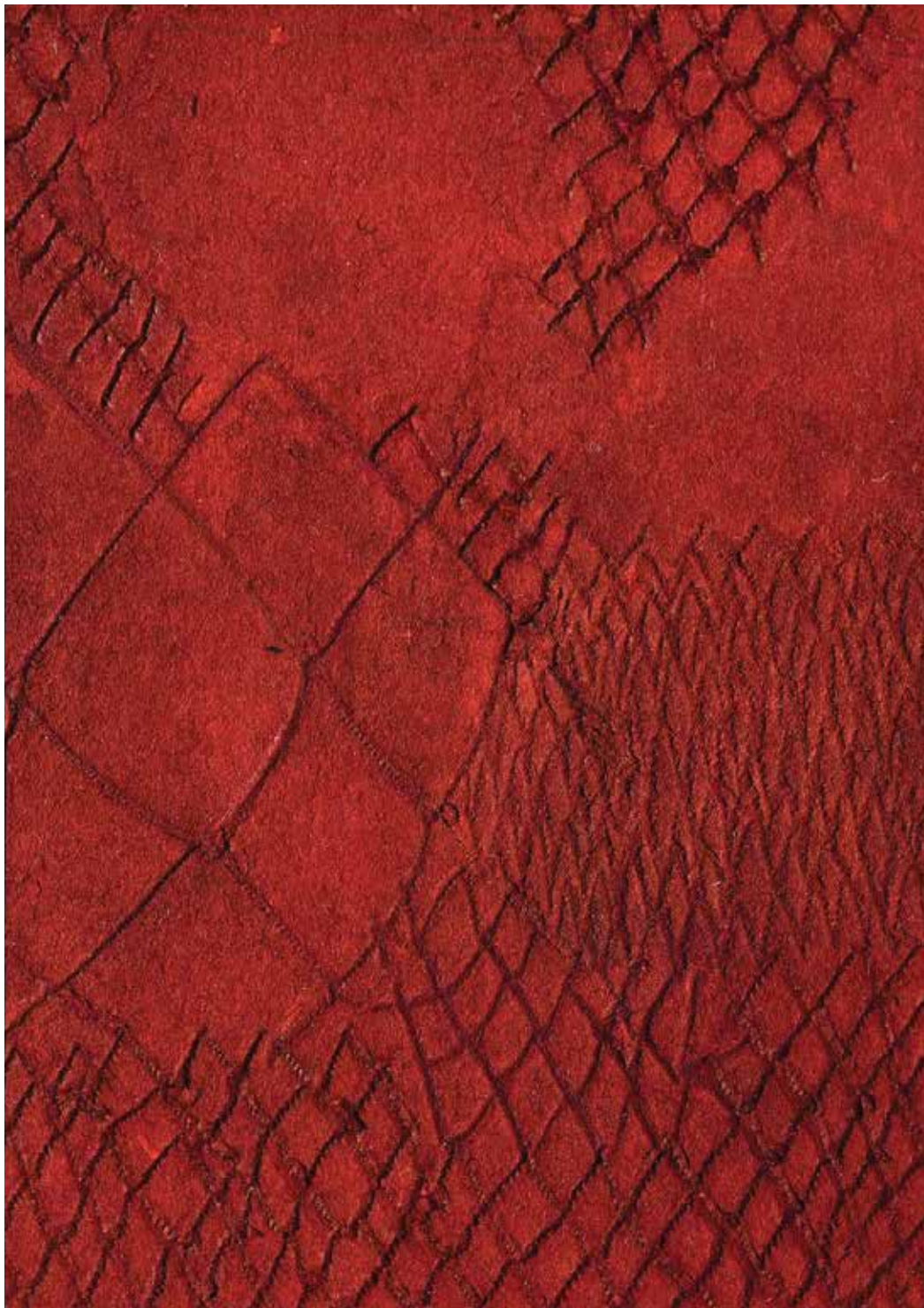


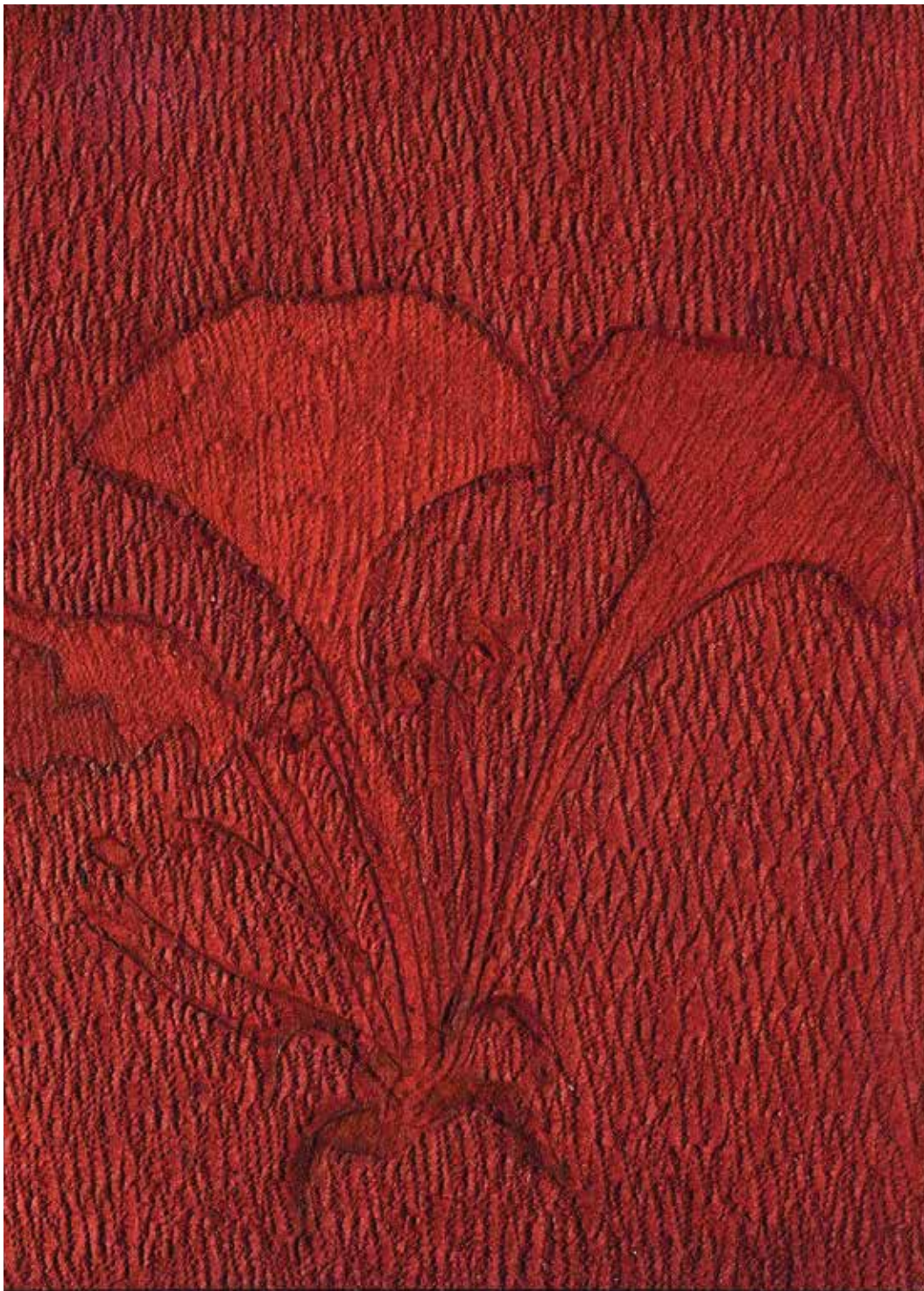
Invisible
Presence 16

Acrylic on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018

Invisible
Presence 12

Acrylic on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018





Invisible
Presence 14

Acrylic on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018



Untitled 2

Graphite, acrylic
and pigment on
paper and board
66 x 54 in
2010





Untitled 1

Graphite,
acrylic on paper
66 x 54 in
2010

Invisible Movement

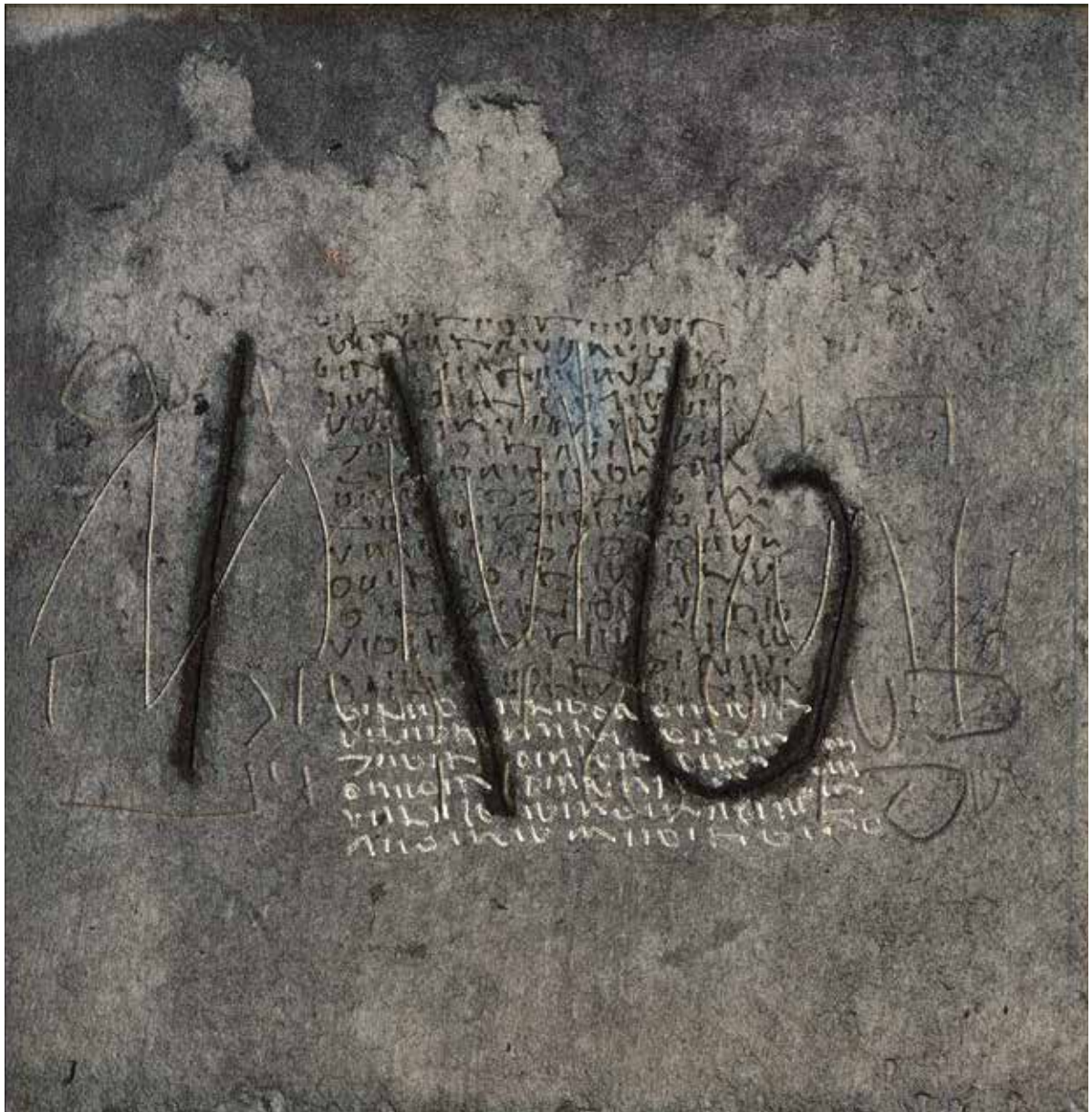
Graphite, acrylic and
paper on board
60 x 36 in
2019





Touch 3

Graphite, acrylic and
paper on board
60 x 30 in
2012

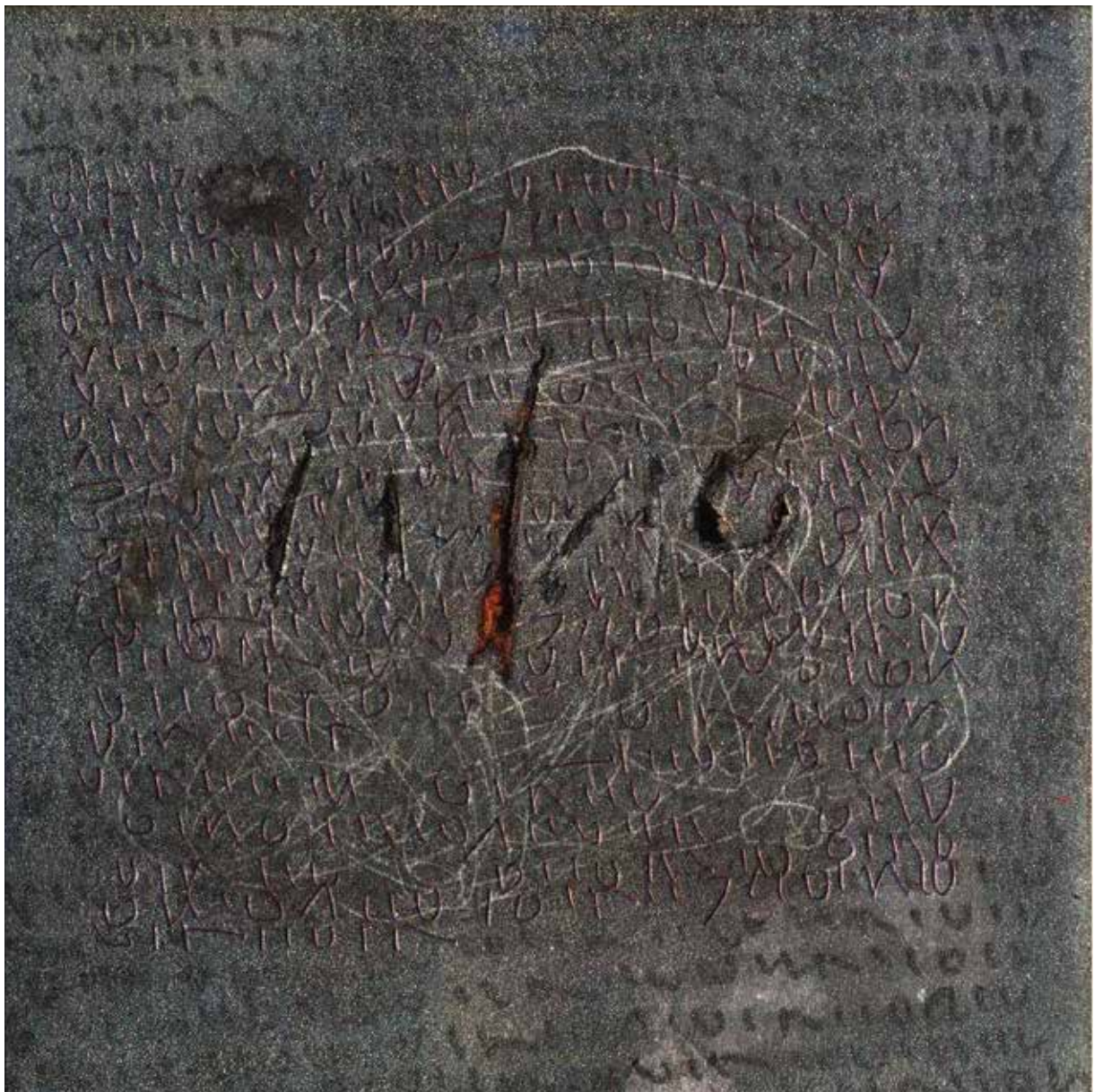


Invisible Presence 9

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018



Invisible Presence 1

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018

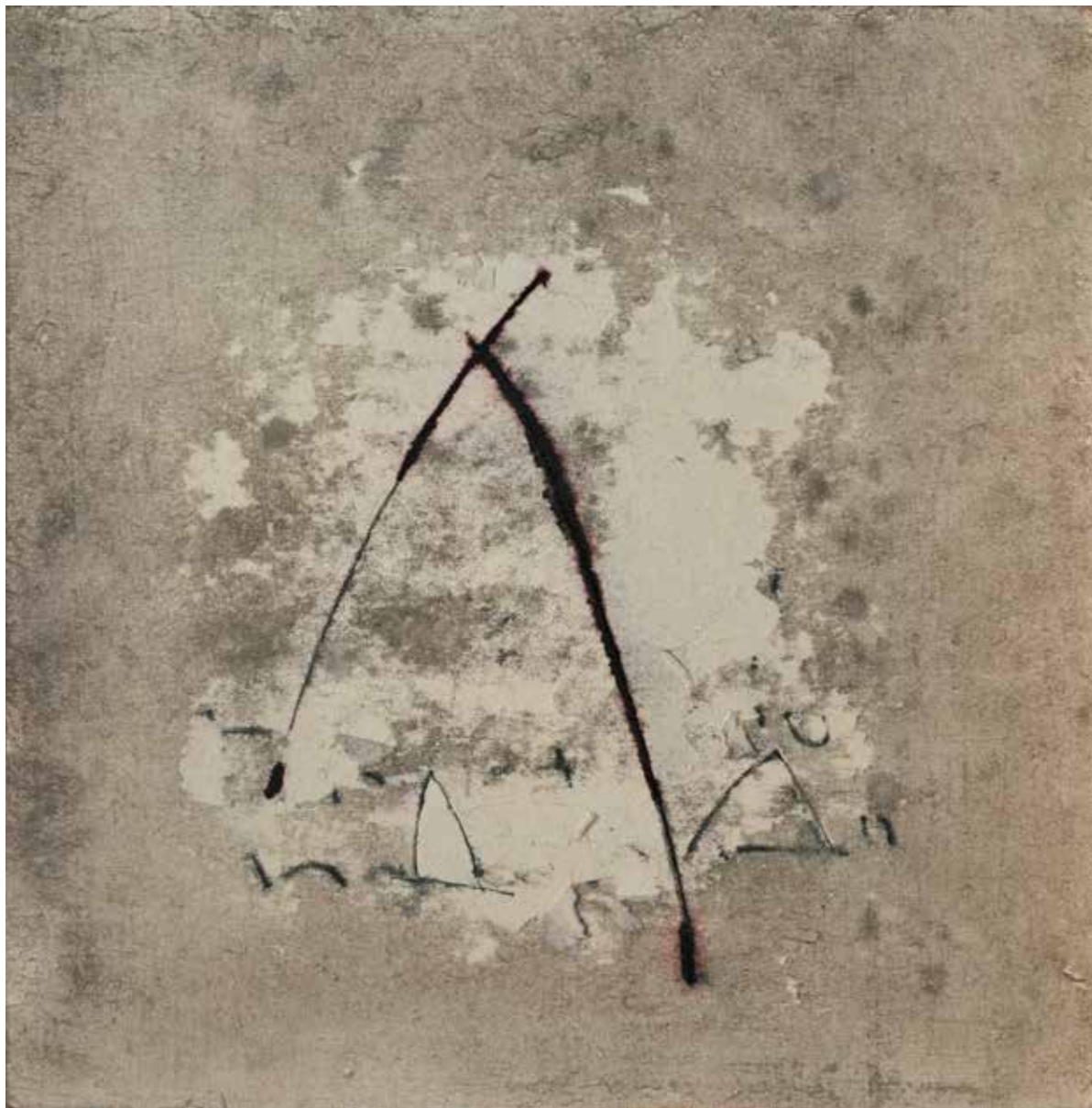


Invisible Presence 4

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018



Invisible Presence 7

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018



Invisible Presence 3

Acrylic and pen on paper

6 x 6 in

2018

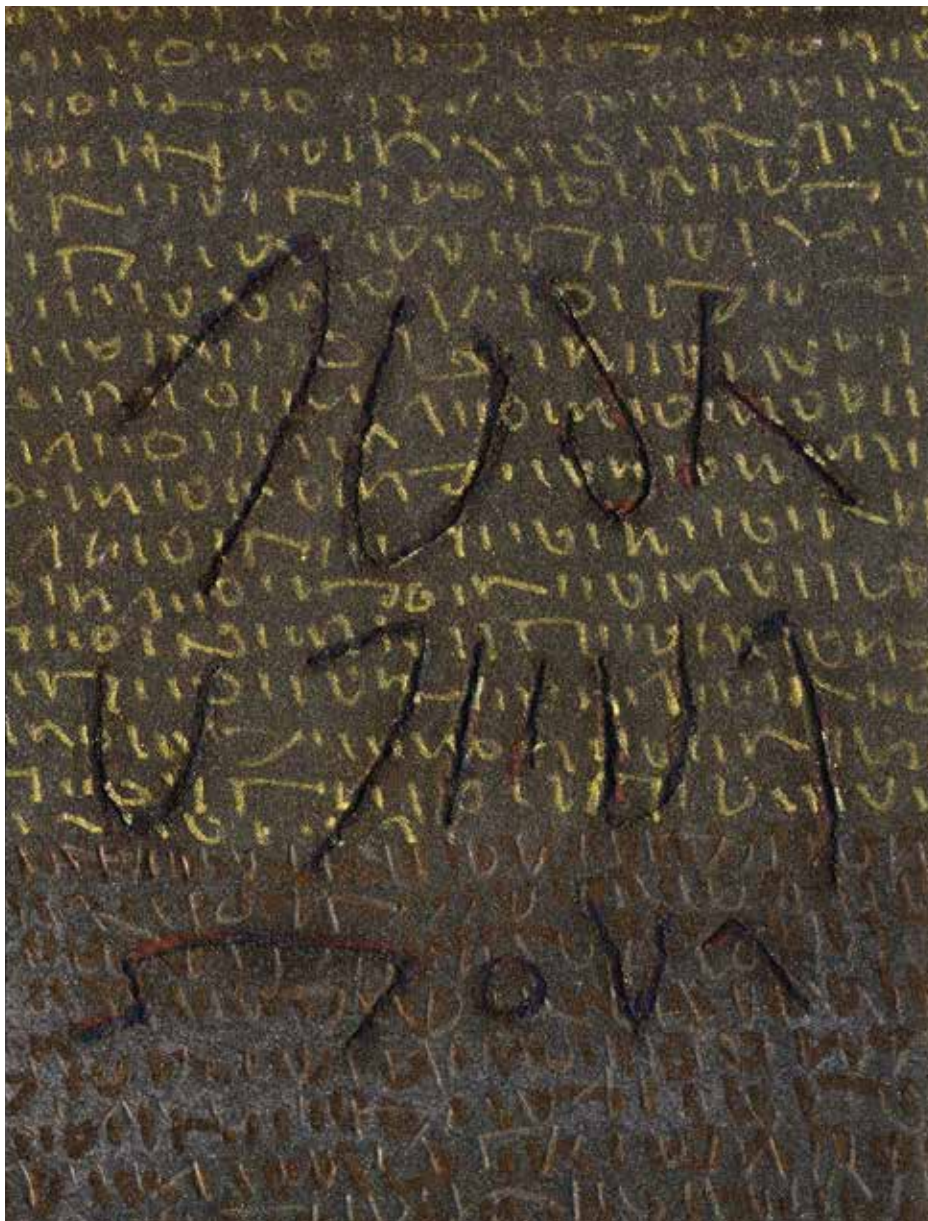


Invisible Presence 8

Acrylic on paper

6 x 6 in

2018



Invisible Presence 20

Pen, ink and acrylic on paper

3.9 x 3.1 in

2018



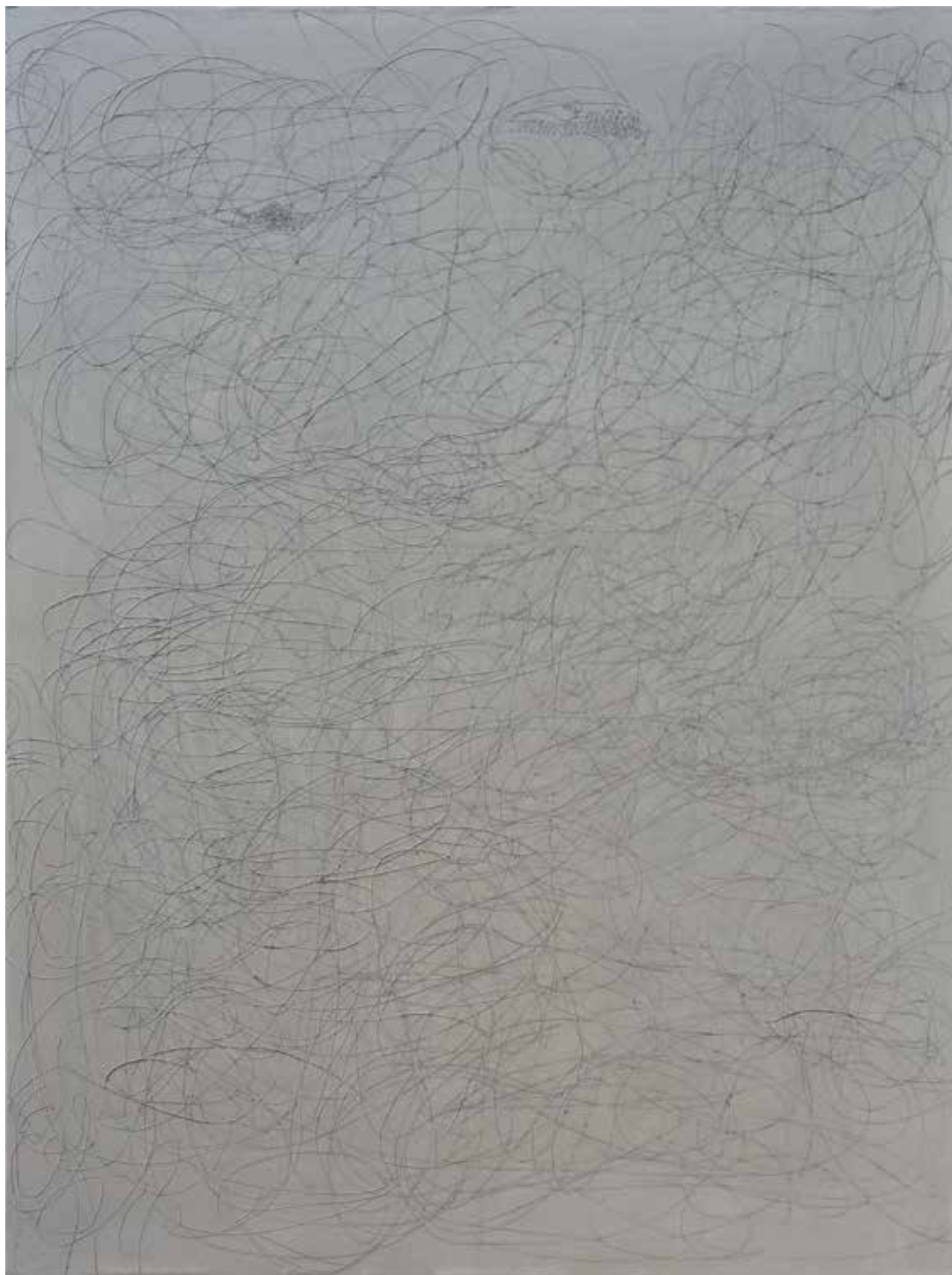
Invisible Presence 17

Ink and acrylic on paper

3.9 x 3.1 in

2018





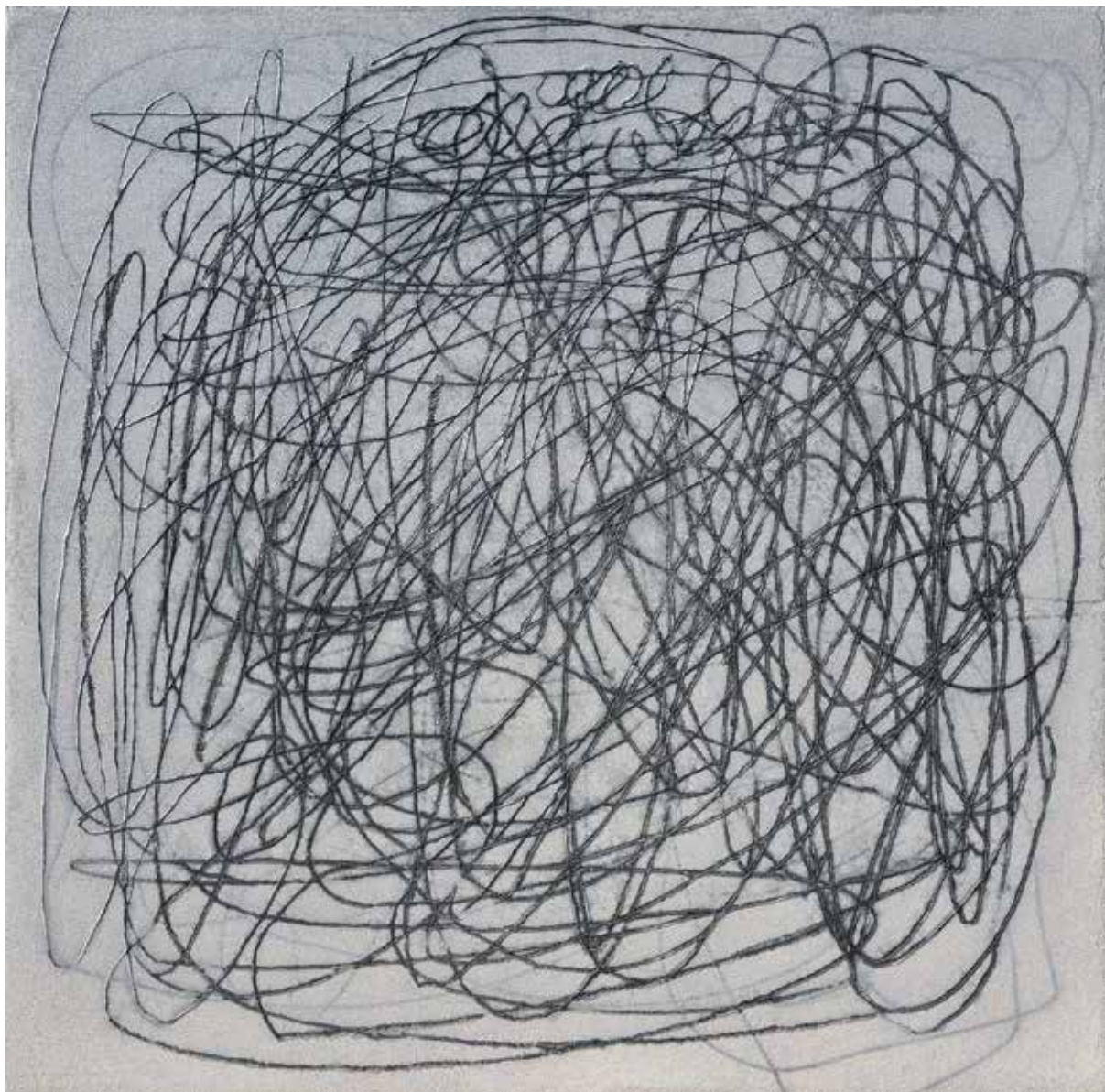
Invisible
Presence 27

Acrylic, pen and paper
on board
48 x 36 in
2018

Invisible
Presence 10

Acrylic, pen and paper
on board
60 x 36 in
2018



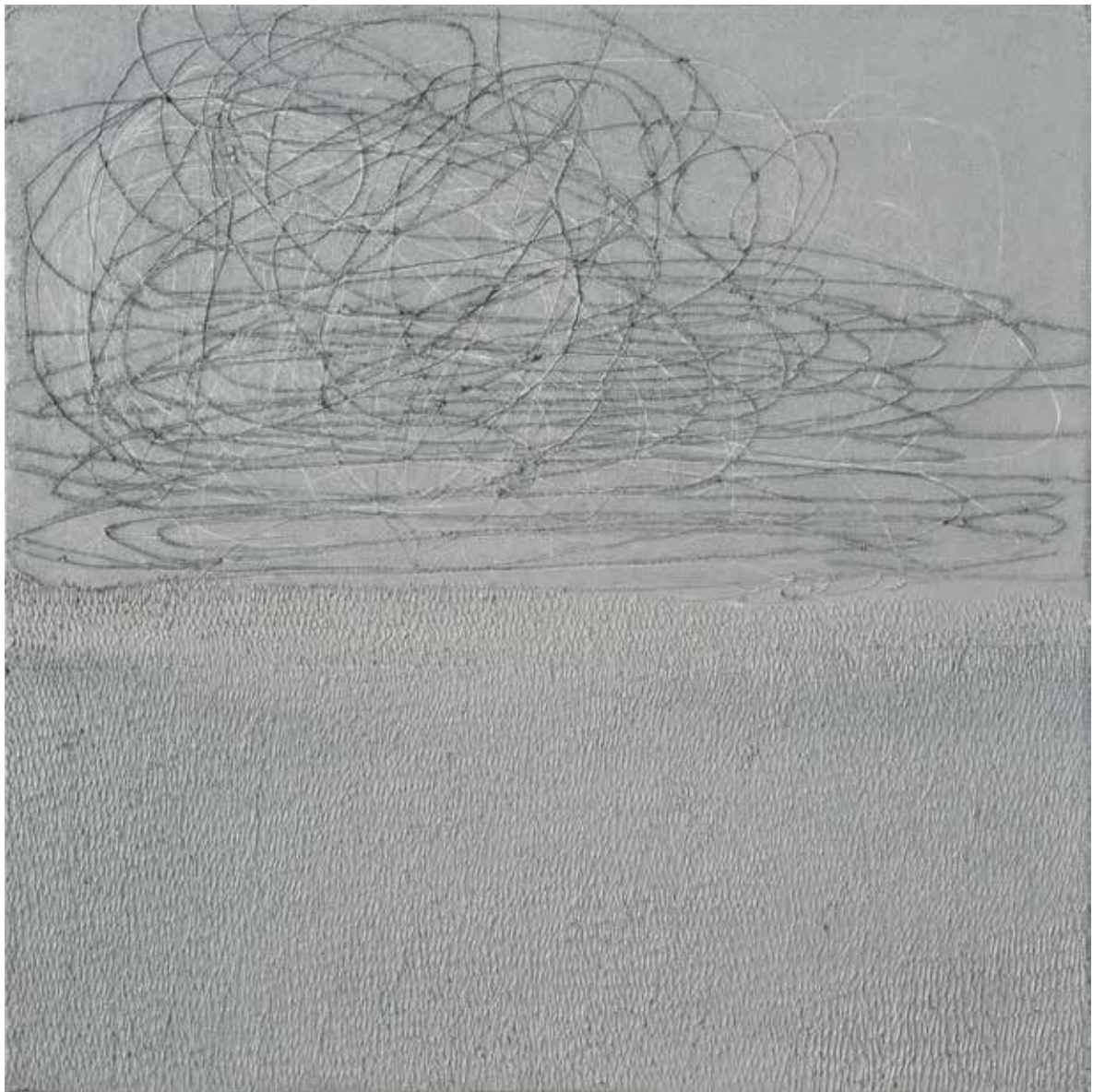


Invisible Presence 28

Acrylic and engraving on paper and board

11 x 11 in

2018



Invisible Presence 29

Acrylic and engraving on paper and board

11 x 11 in

2018

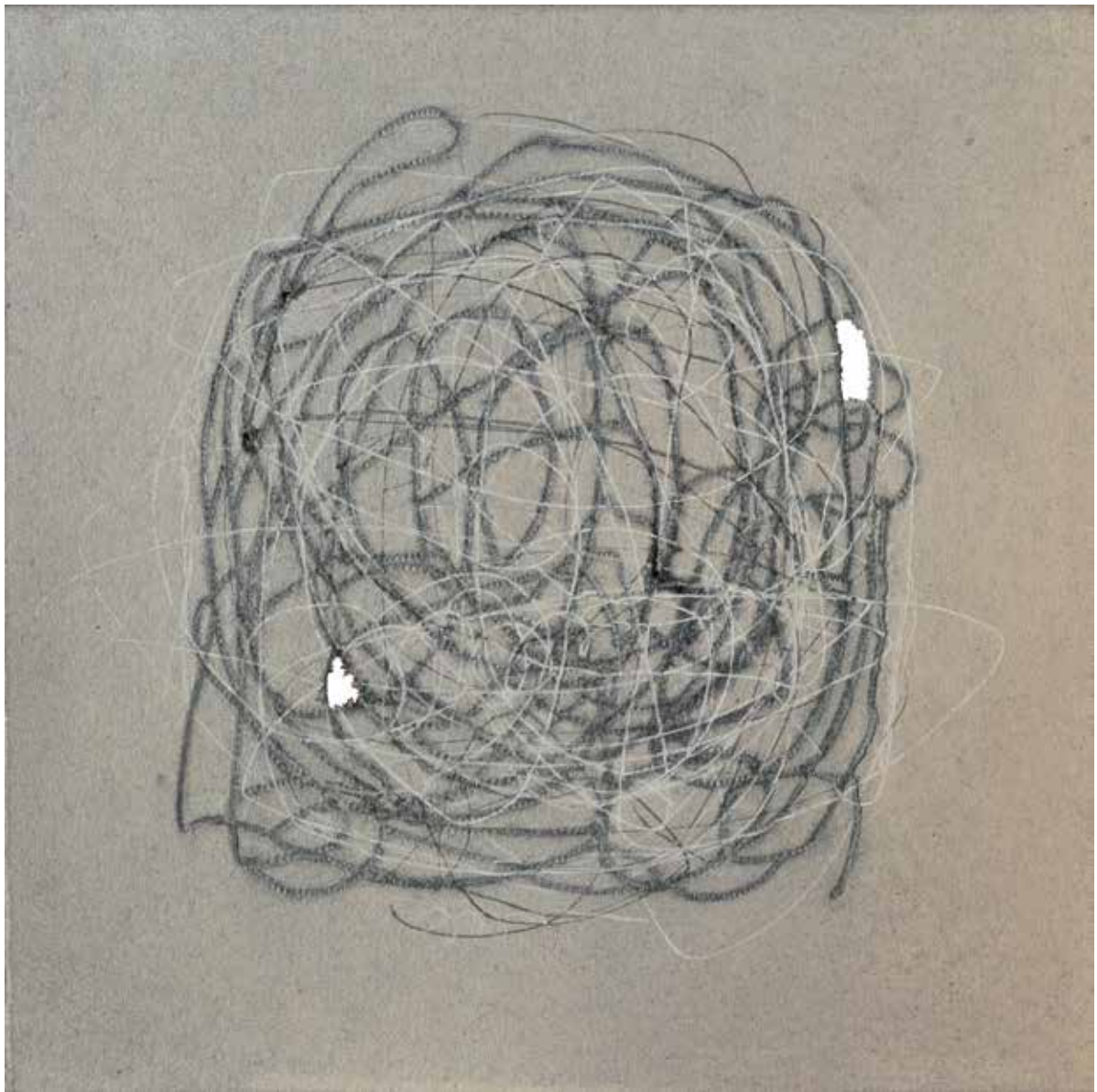


Invisible Presence 26

Acrylic and paper on board

11 x 11 in

2018 ₹



Invisible Presence 6

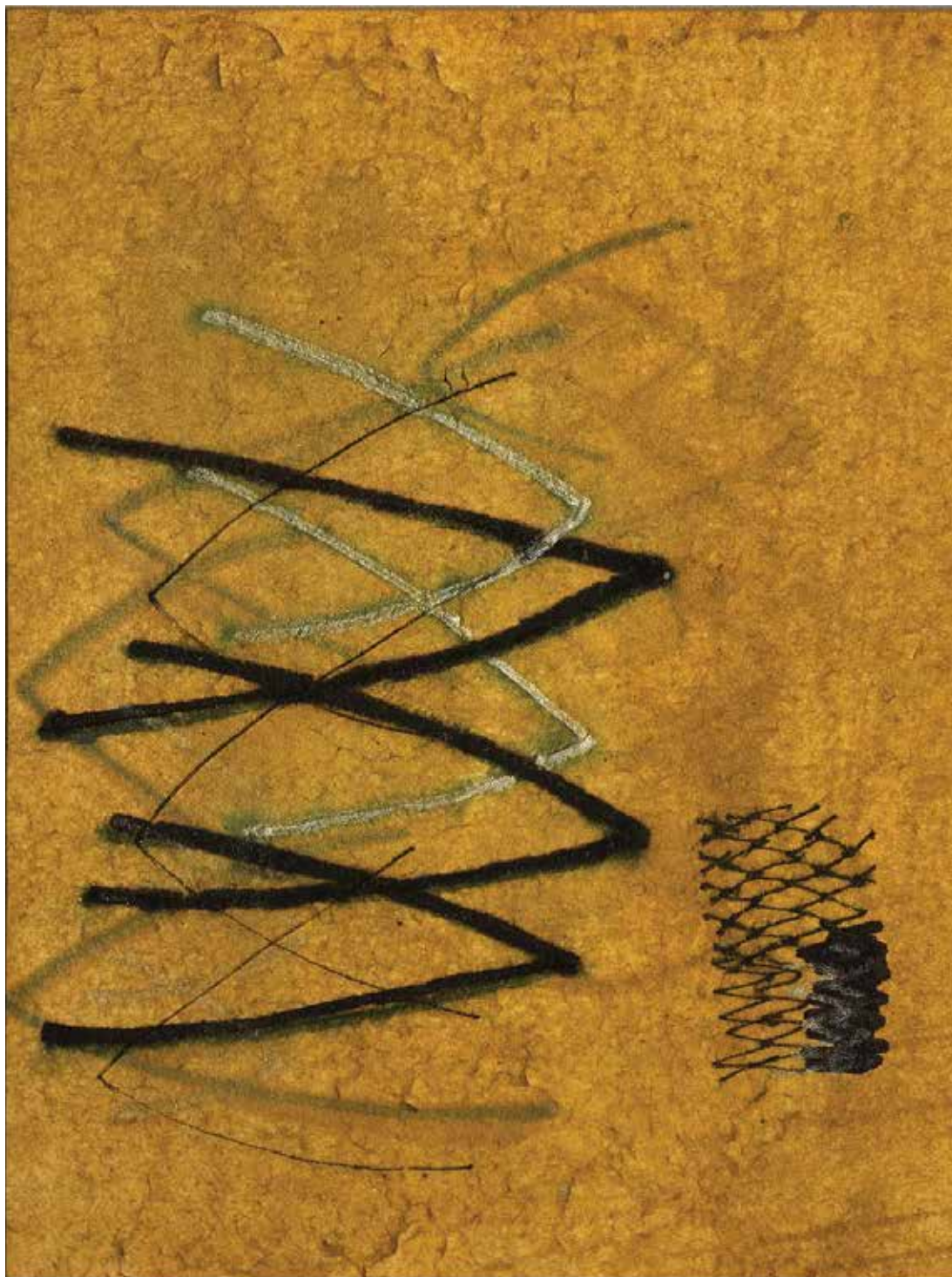
Acrylic and paper on board

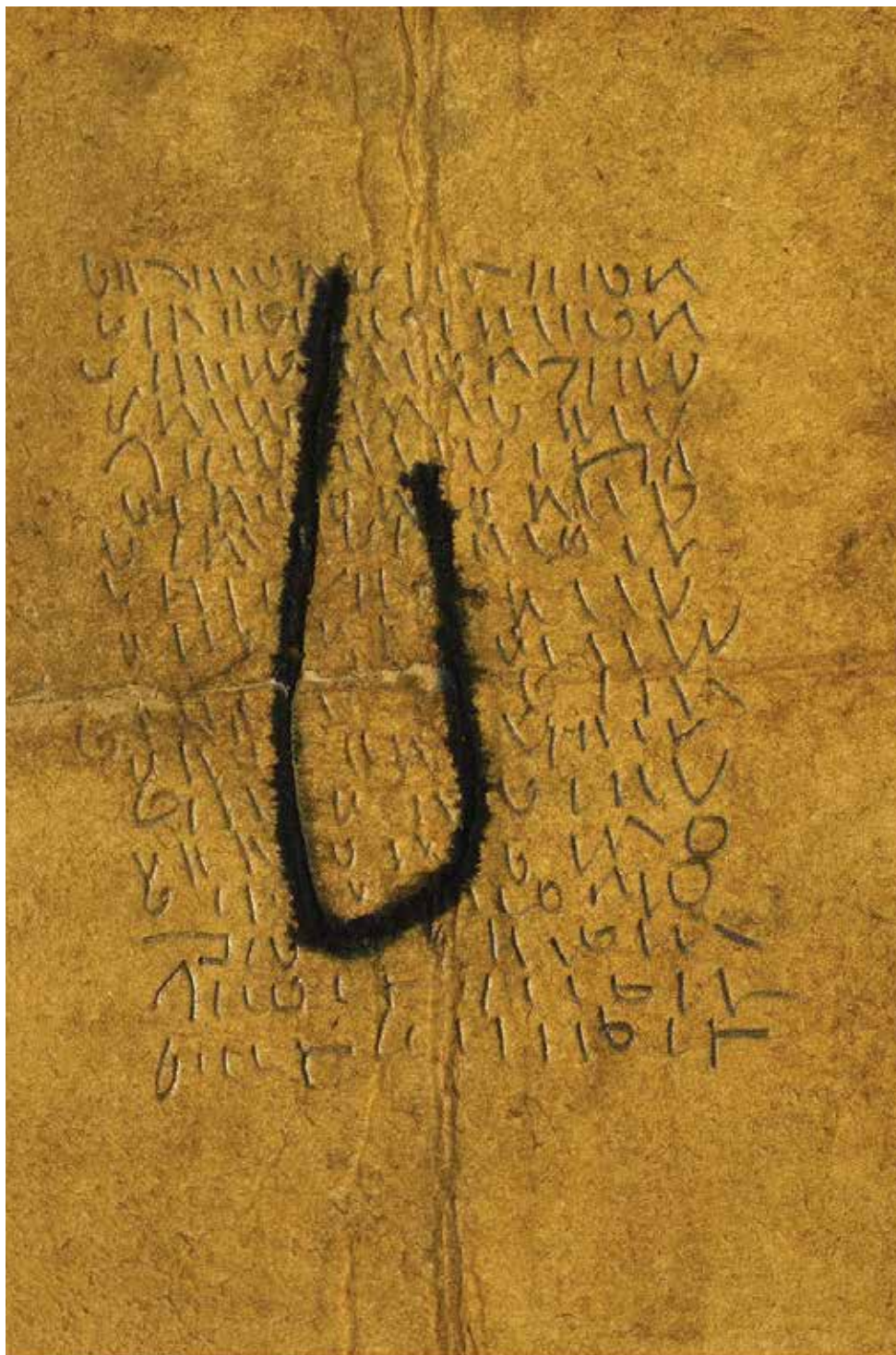
6 x 6 in

2018

Invisible
Presence 15

Ink and acrylic
on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018



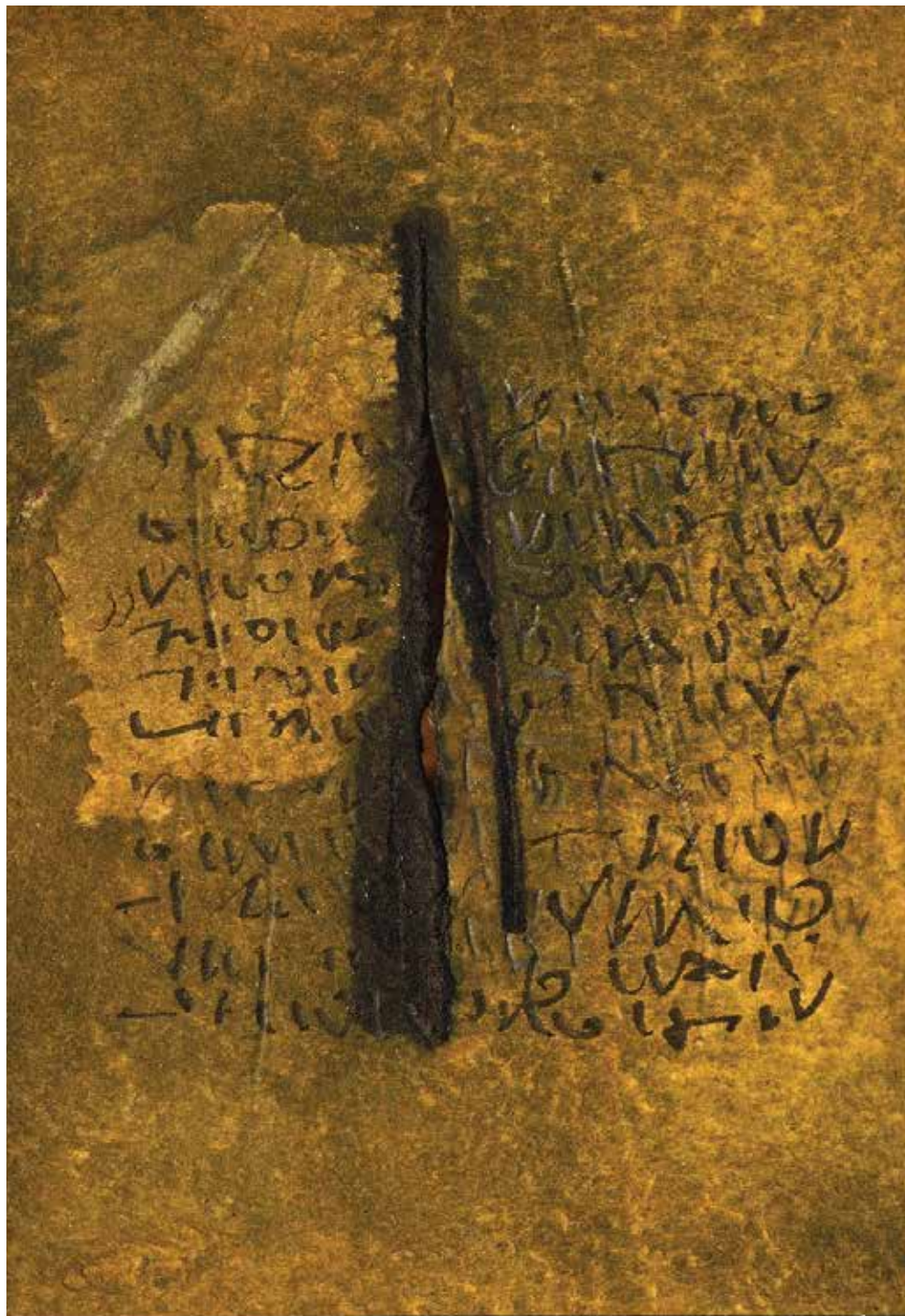


Invisible
Presence 19

Ink and acrylic
on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018

Invisible
Presence 18

Ink and acrylic
on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018





Invisible
Presence 13

Ink and acrylic
on paper
3.9 x 3.1 in
2018

NV

Echoes of Silence 2

Acrylic, pigment and paper
on board
72 x 48 in
2019





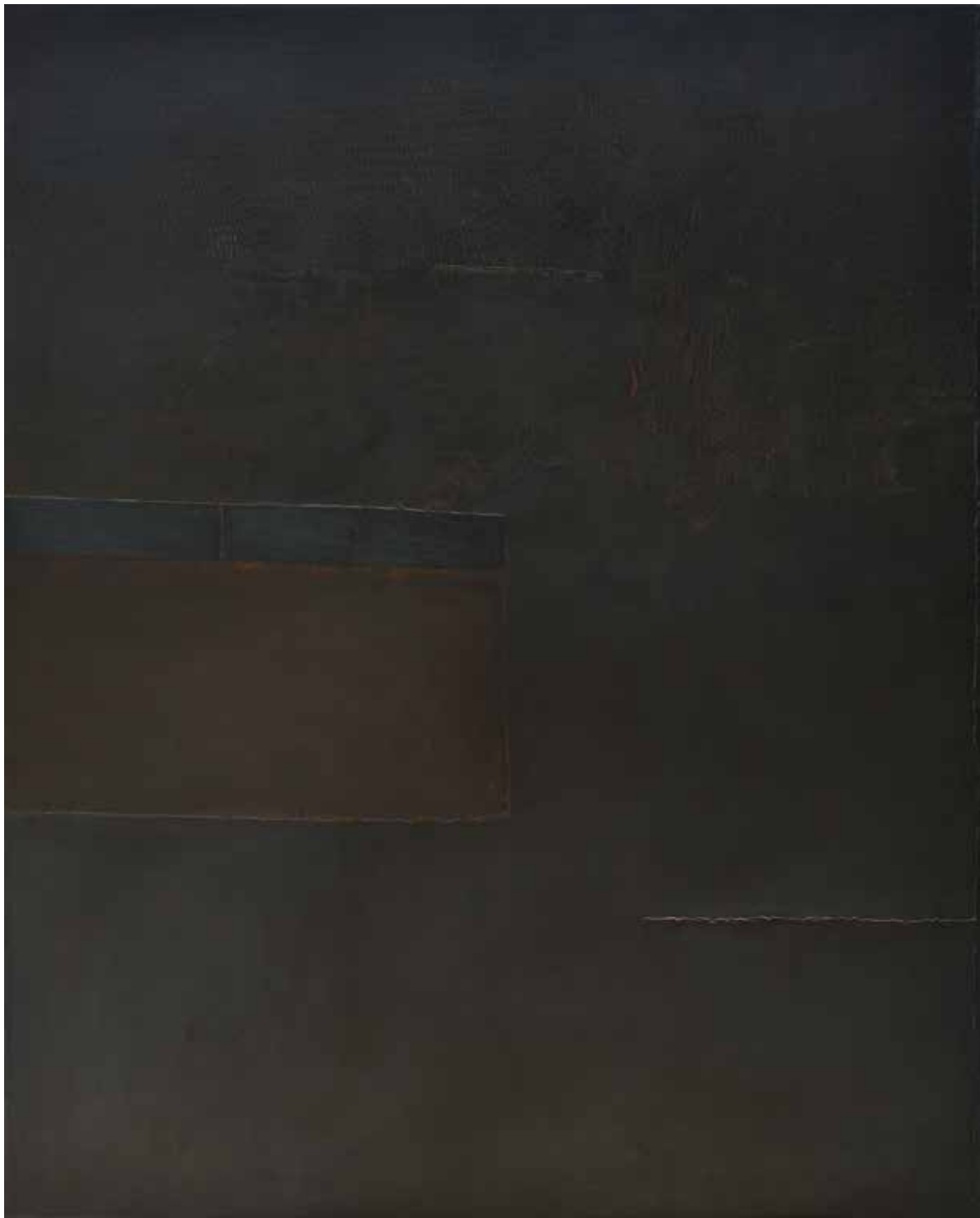
Unknown Change 1

Pigment, dry pastel and
graphite on paper and board
72 x 48 in
2010

Unknown
Change 3

Acrylic, pigment,
dry pastel and
graphite on paper
and board
60 x 48 in
2010





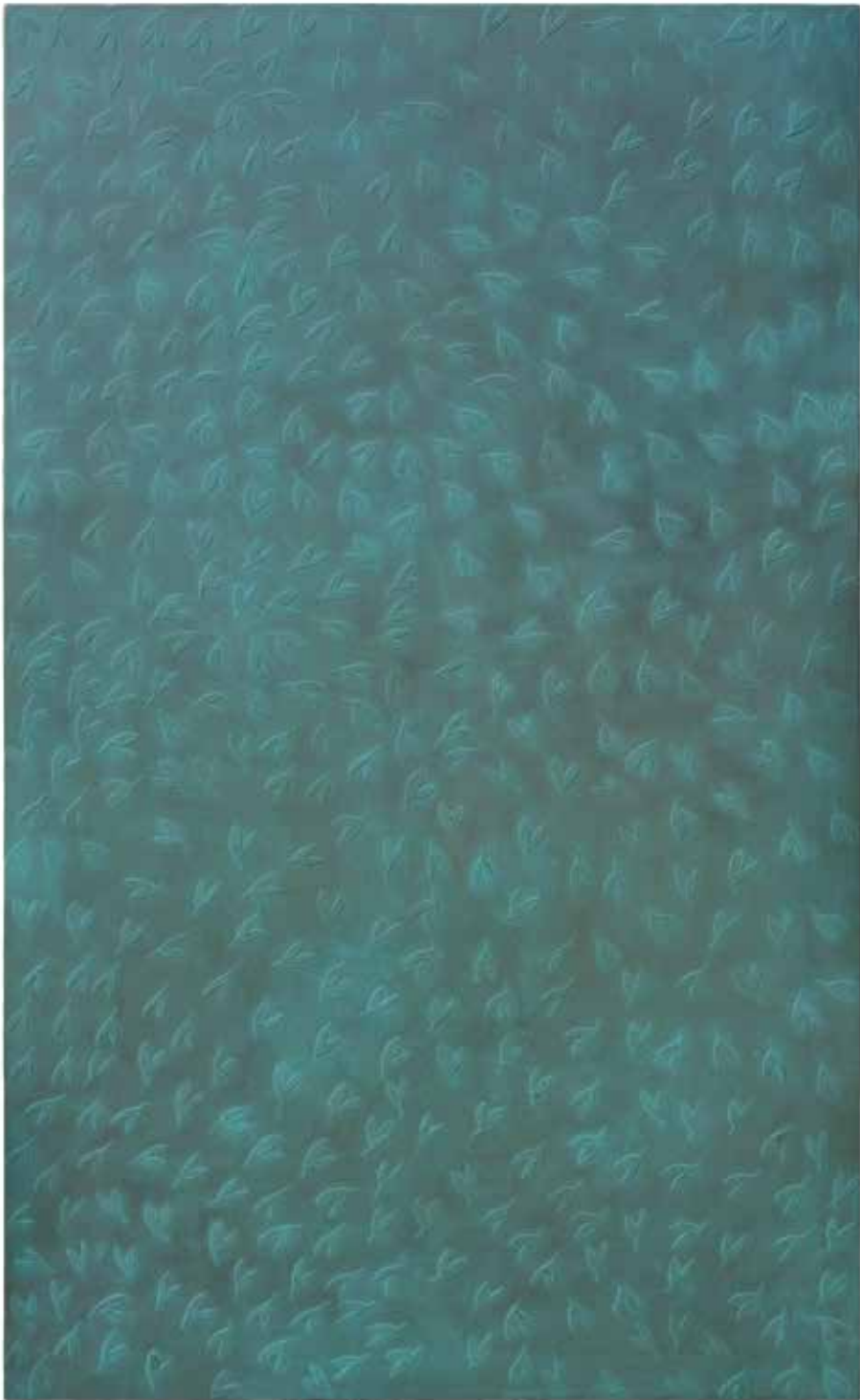
Unreal
Existence 1

Acrylic, pigment,
dry pastel and
graphite on paper
and board
60 x 48 in
2011

Patina 1

Acrylic, pigment
and paper on board
54 in x 42 in
2019





Echoes of Silence 1

Acrylic, pigment and paper
on board
60 x 36 in
2019



Echoes of Silence 1

Acrylic, pigment and paper on board

18 x 18 in

2019

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