

METHODICAL SCRIBBLING

To start, could you tell me a little bit about your background; where you come from, and how this has influenced what you do now as an artist?

68 The type of drawing I make may seem abstract at first sight and very minimalistic, which it is. But at the same time they are very much rooted in my own past as an office employee. I studied business administration and worked for many years in an office environment, and when I finally decided to pursue a career as an artist I felt an obligation to talk about it; this kind of jail that I know so well, and also not to leave it. It was as if I had gained a freedom but decided not to use it, or to open the door of the cage and not leave it, and rather work from within. To work with strict limitations and as a sort of cathartic process, you know? So in the beginning, when I started drawing the first thing I did - or the most instinctive kind of drawing I did, because it was the area I had most expertise with - was to work with Excel as a drawing tool. Also, because not many people used it as a drawing tool.

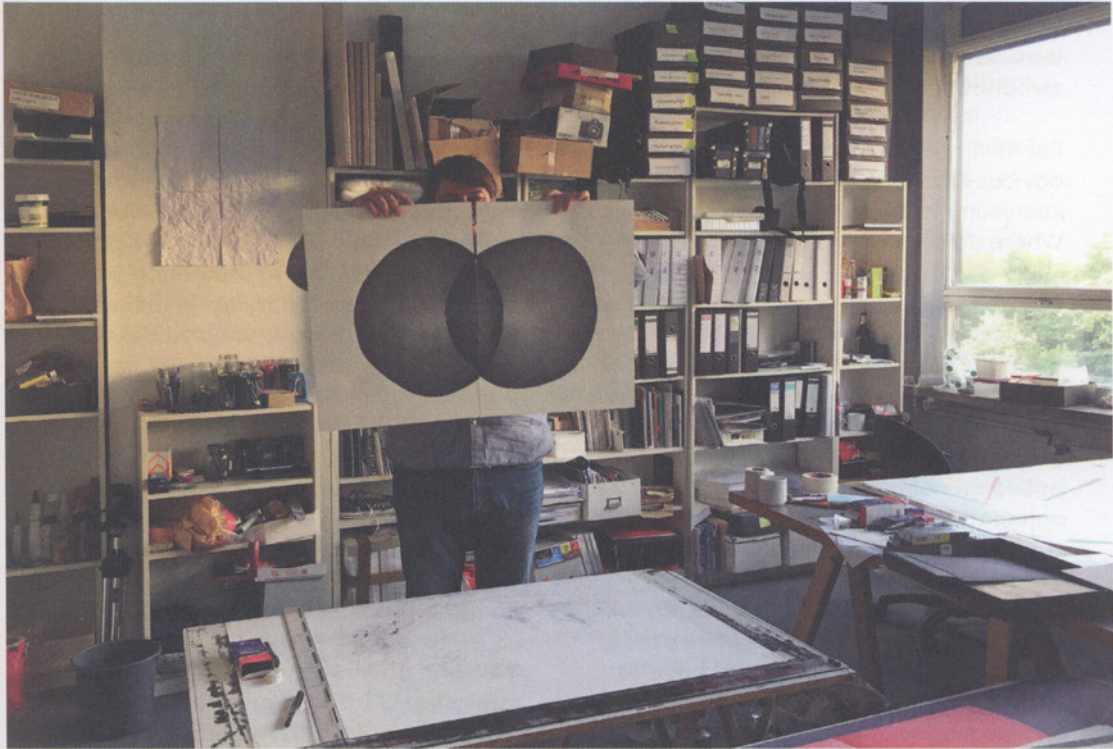
Yeah, I've never heard of that (laughs)

That's an Excel drawing on the wall, over there, the canvas. Sometimes I also did drawings with numbers and with dates. And by limiting myself so much to these

tools, or to these methods of working, and looking at them very very closely, almost like through a magnifying glass, you discover many things. For example you discover that a number has a particular density. Numbers when you count or when you have dates, appear periodically, you know? Every ten numbers the 9 will show up again and it has maybe less density than the 8 for example. And so there are images coming out of these very basic activities like counting. That's how most of my works function. I take a very small gesture, like scribbling, which is maybe what I'm known better for, and I do it in a very methodical way. Scribbling, it's an artistic moment while working in a routine way. You work productively and suddenly you have this moment and you scribble, which is a kind of creative escape. It's like a small resistance for a brief moment. You're not being productive for these couple of seconds and it's supposed to be quite free, or originally very free, and then I systematize it and turn it into something else that is very much like a work routine.

Is that also why you choose drawing as your preferred media, to use scribbling as a method? Would this work in painting?

No, I mean I've done some monochromes in painting where I just put fountain pen ink and coffee and pencil on the canvas.



I thought about what are the primary colors of the office and somehow I thought of coffee, ink and pencil. But that's it, I couldn't take it much further. Whereas with drawing I find a hundred possibilities, because drawing is so close to writing. Writing is organized very methodically, you write horizontally in a certain pattern with a certain density. My drawings often work the way that writing works. I use a typewriter and letters to write, but I turn them into a monochrome or a texture. Usually the instinct would tell you "Go crazy!" take it far away, you know? But I don't want to go so far away. I want to stay inside a boring reality and just add a little twist. Sometimes, almost by accident, you create a vibrant, immersive surface, but it's twice the fun if you achieve that with almost nothing, you know? Or maybe with a lot of work, but using only a very small little gesture.

With simple materials and actions?

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Yes, for example these installations with paper, you only fold each sheet twice and suddenly you have this "drawing" on the wall, where you have light and shadow. Some people even believe it is hand drawn and that I drew a shadow because it seems so unrealistic. At the same time it's so close to what we do everyday before putting a letter into an envelope. It's almost the same, I just changed the angle slightly and suddenly you have this little magical unexpected experience.

But you also follow a set of rules, a mathematical structure, when folding the papers in a very specific way?

Yes, that work specifically is extremely mathematical. You know, besides studying Business Administration, I did also study Audio Visual Arts for 2 years in Mexico and my goal was to become a screenplay-writer. In a way, the main aim of a screenplay, at least in my view, is to structure events in time. That actually

was also my specialty: to create narrative structures.

For me the relation to screenplay is not so obvious when seeing your work, but it's interesting to hear this background of yours. Where do you see the connection?

Before I start – you said it yourself – I set up a set of rules and then I just follow through. That's also in a way what happens in screenplay. I always do scripts first, actually most of my drawings I design first in Excel or in Word. Often they are based on numbers, so I have to start with a calculation and a composition. In a way it is a very simple, often a mathematical form of screenplay.

Also sometimes I do animations, and it's the same thing. A few of them are more complex, and there you really have to decide every shot beforehand. It's like choreography.

70 **There's one animation I have made where ring binders move in a shelf and do a kind of ballet. So for that I needed to not only calculate but also even draw every single shot, and I did it in Excel, because Excel is a grid. It was very easy to fill out and empty again those shelves.**

Also many drawings work as a sequence or a matrix with several sequences, like the Complex Scribble Matrix that you saw with the colors. There are all sorts of developments and narrative structures. It's not literally narrative but when your eye follows certain lines you have these developments.

So you always know quite exactly what you will do when you start a new piece. Do you ever have anything that is unplanned happening? Is there room for anything in that sense?

Not really, I mean the thing is, I always follow the rules that I set up beforehand. But then sometimes things happen that I didn't plan. Visual effects might happen and often enough they become the essence of the work.

I don't know how to draw; I couldn't draw anything figurative for example. So basically I am obliged to find systems that allow me to draw without knowing how to draw. Like using for example almost used up markers and seeing how the speed of the movement will influence the lightness of the line. Well this is something you just find out while you're trying to make a perfect monochrome. Then you exploit it.

What do you think is the most enjoyable part of the artistic process?

The most enjoyable part is to try something new and to see if it works or doesn't work. I can't wait to see how it will look.

So that's your motivation?

Yes, and often somehow weak ideas turn into great work, and great ideas turn into not so great works. It's hard to plan what will really work and be strong, it's weird. Because sometimes, especially now that I work with assistants, you have to have clear ideas. You have to organize your week and work for yourself and the others. Often enough, the initial idea, feels a little bit shaky or weak. The moment you start making it into something, either the idea is better than you thought or maybe a new idea comes out for the next work, which is much better. So there is a lot of experimentation involved. And then of course, there are systems that you have proved already that you more or less know will give you good results, because it's a technique you have mastered already. Those are the works that I enjoy least in the making. I make them because I believe it's not enough to make one work only once.

Do you want to see how far you can go with one idea?

Well, you want to kind of own it. I have questioned myself very often, how many paintings did Lucio Fontana have to cut up to be Lucio Fontana? He has done so

many of them, I don't know how many he did, but maybe they were all necessary. He owns cutting up a canvas. If he had made it once, it wouldn't be his.

The opposite would be like a dog that is peeing in every corner, you know, that's not enough. It doesn't mean you have to repeat and repeat yourself, but at least you have to follow through the idea, take it to the last consequence.

Sometimes you feel you've got it too early. You worked twice with the same technique, you made two versions of the same idea, but maybe you're still far away from finding mastership, or the real good one.

My works can be very different from one another but I try to at least keep some sort of temperature between the works, not too cold and not too warm. I don't know if it's a signature, but it's kind of a feeling that is also like a system. You keep it different enough to not be boring, but you can still feel all the connections between the works, so when you sum it all up it still makes sense, or it feels like a building where everything is kind of connected.

Do you see this when you put together the works in a show?

Yes, especially when I have a bigger solo exhibition and a little bit of freedom, that's when I have the chance to put together works that are similar enough to make sense and to be very strong. I love that. I love combining let's say a series of drawings with sound pieces made with typewriters or with voice. Showing that one idea translated well into different media and that in the end you are standing in the middle of a couple of works that are giving you many arguments in the same direction, that are convincing you on a sensitive level, or not allowing you to escape the idea, or not allowing you to ... I don't know how to put it. Growing the idea, I mean sometimes there's a difference between being redundant and adding works that are kind of different but develop strength together. They are taking you

in a direction without you even noticing. It's weird because I'm talking here about rather abstract ideas. I don't have a political message I want to convince you of. It's more about existential ideas.

What kind of existential ideas, can you say something more about them?

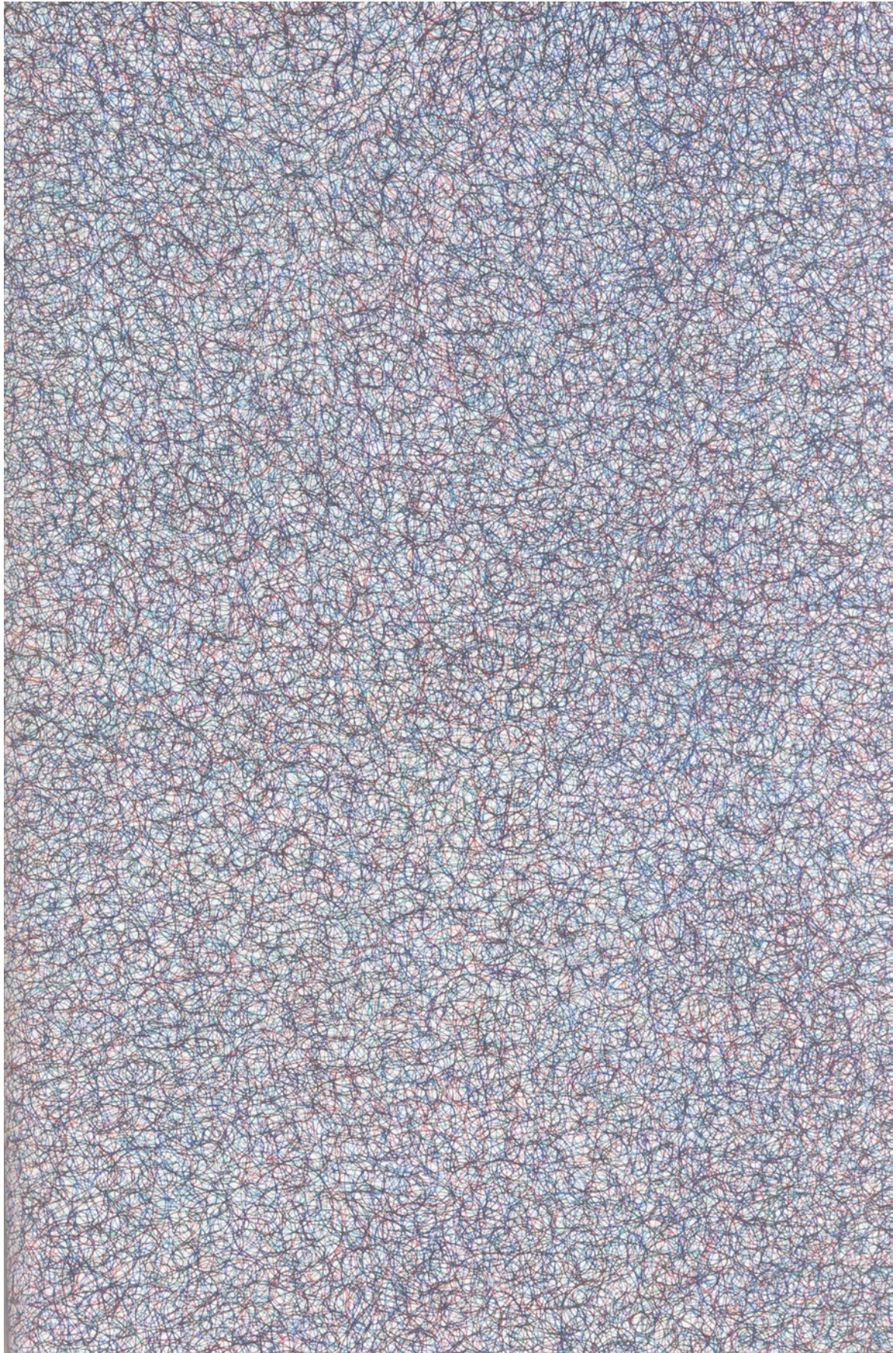
Yes, for example let's say Kafka or Hitchcock, they both manage something that I admire quite a lot. Their works, Hitchcock's films or Kafka's writings, to me they are like empty containers but everybody can bring their own questions and can get answers from it. Kafka you can interpret in a sociological, philosophical, political, religious – in many different ways. Depending on what glasses you put on you get a different set of answers. This doesn't mean that Kafka's work is empty or hollow, not at all.

I guess the works can be seen as universal?

Exactly. The same thing happens with Hitchcock. In the beginning, until the 50s or so, people thought it was pure entertainment. People just assumed, ok this genre is just about scaring people and it's a very simple genre of fun, not art.

And now the pieces are seen as masterpieces...

Yes, from the 60s on we also see all these other layers that have to do with the film analysis and psychoanalysis, with how we see the world and ourselves in it, with existential questions and fears. That to me is the ideal art form. To have a simple construction, but still offering different layers of meaning and allowing the audience to answer their own questions or alternatively just to have a good time. I think it's ideal when you manage to, as an artist, somehow seduce the other and bring that other person into your world and then allow different thoughts to grow. Especially with the exhibition 1s & 0s in Marco Vigo in Spain, I think I



managed that. The viewer got very basic information from the single works. But when you pieced them together you are immersed into a world that you might find very frightening, pleasant, calm or even boring. The whole show was in black and white, but every room had a particular tone, temperature and feeling. I was trying to seduce the audience into a mechanical, but organic, analogue version of a digital world.

So you are trying in some way to orchestrate the viewer?

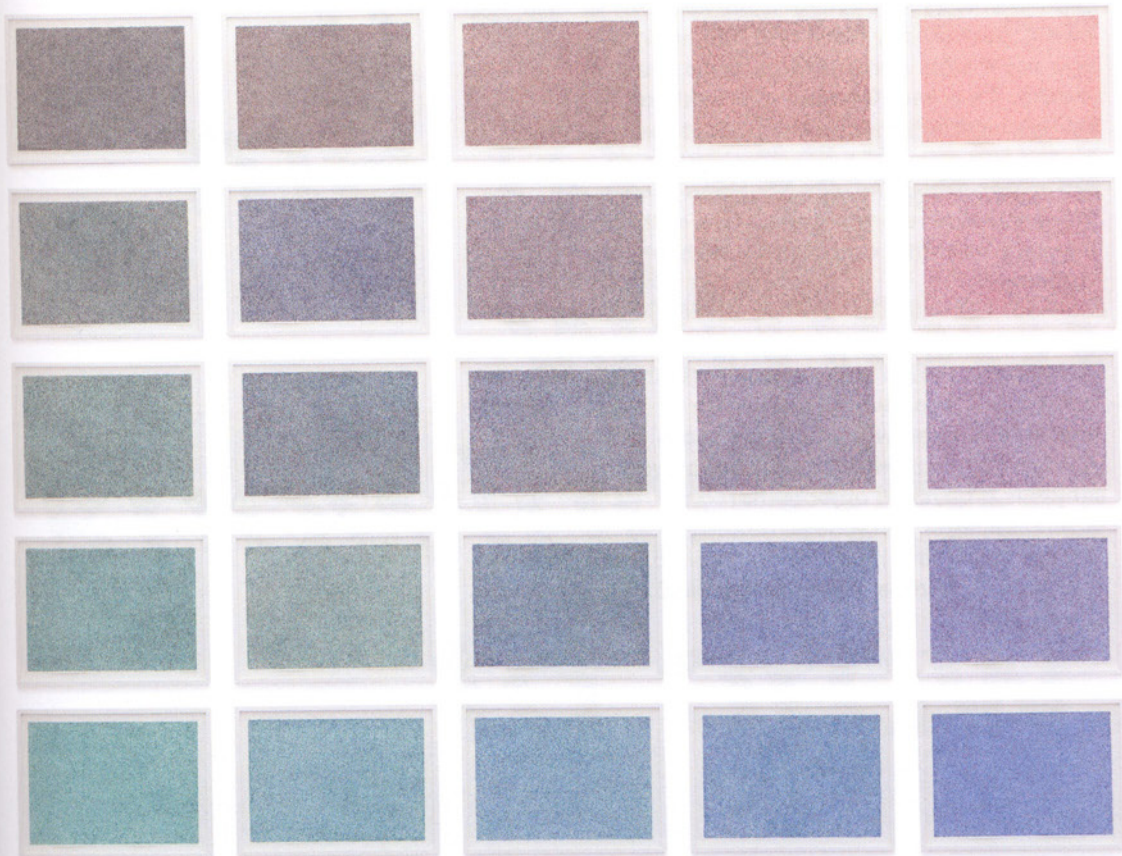
Well, I'm trying to seduce you. I'm trying to make you feel and think. Also, ok maybe this goes a little too far away, but with Gothic cathedrals I always found it so interesting that they had a hidden message to bring to you. There was somebody giving the money building a

cathedral, so on the surface it's about the Pope and the King and God. But then there were the Freemasons who had all sorts of beliefs and there are all these hidden messages of geometry and astrology. They are trying to bring this across in a way that you might not understand but probably sense.

You work a lot with routine in your work, both thematic and practical. Do you have any routines when you work in your studio - how is a perfect studio day for you?

It changes. I have a couple of months this rhythm, a couple of months another rhythm. It depends a lot on the people I work with. Now I work from 9 - 1 and 2 - 6 so it's two shifts of four hours. It's always a different person who comes for four hours. It's too hard for a whole day, this kind of work. We sit here, one in front of the other

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A conversation with Ignacio Uriarte

and to me it feels a little bit like a rowing boat, like a slave boat, because normally when you would do such a repetitive kind of work you would get distracted quite a bit. In a way when we sit together I kind of try to do what the other does. So basically we work through the day without distractions. The only thing we decide on is the soundtrack, what we are going to listen to. But basically I would work way slower if I were by myself.

And your future plans, what are you working on now? Are there new ideas you want to try out?

Well, I spend 90% of my time with drawing practice, but I would love to go back to making some simple animations. I would also love to make a sound piece, which I think will be quite difficult to make. I wanted to gather all the German words that have four syllables and have the accent on the first syllable. Because if you put one after the other, there is a typical 4/4 rhythm. Which is how 90% of music, particularly Rock and Pop, is. When you say it with words it really feels like a march. It's a very German phenomenon to have four syllable words with the accent on the first syllable. For example Klein-an-le-ger, Tau-send-sas-sa, Neun-mal-klu-ger, Krank-en-wa-gen... Most of them are very beautiful and colorful with lots of texture.

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The idea is to order them into four categories. I don't know exactly which categories those would be. But for example Erd-er-wär-mung is a more abstract phenomenon than Krankenwagen which is a physical object whereas Neunmalkluger is the description of a human being. So, I think once I have all the words, it should be easier to figure out the categories.

How would you present the piece?

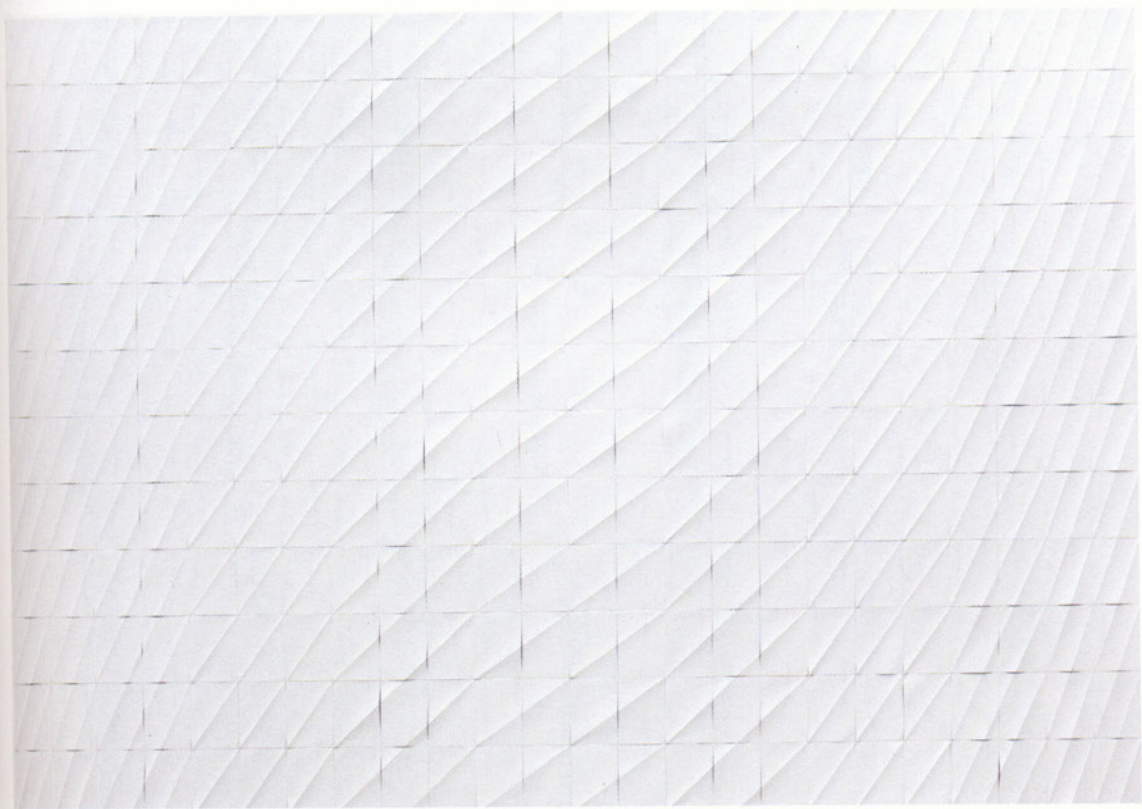
I would like to have a room where from each corner you would have one of these categories and you could move around and it would be a cacophony. You would always hear four words at the same time and depending on which speaker or which corner you would approach you would hear more one category or the other. But it's complicated because I basically need to convince someone, an editor of a big dictionary, to provide all the words for me. They must have data bank where they can filter by exactly those criteria; where is the accent, how many syllables. That should be possible for them. For me it would be, even if I worked on it for two years, impossible. So I am waiting for that data bank, one day...

**I am
obliged
to find
systems
that allow⁷⁵
me to draw
without
knowing how
to draw.**



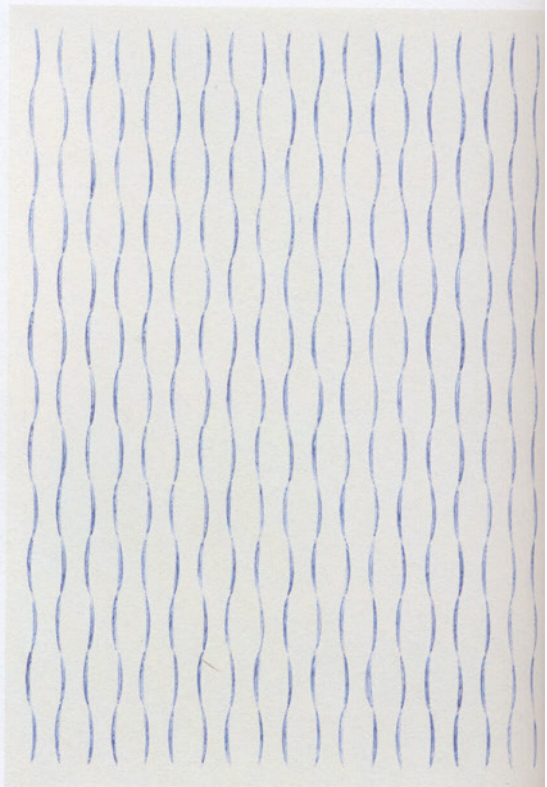
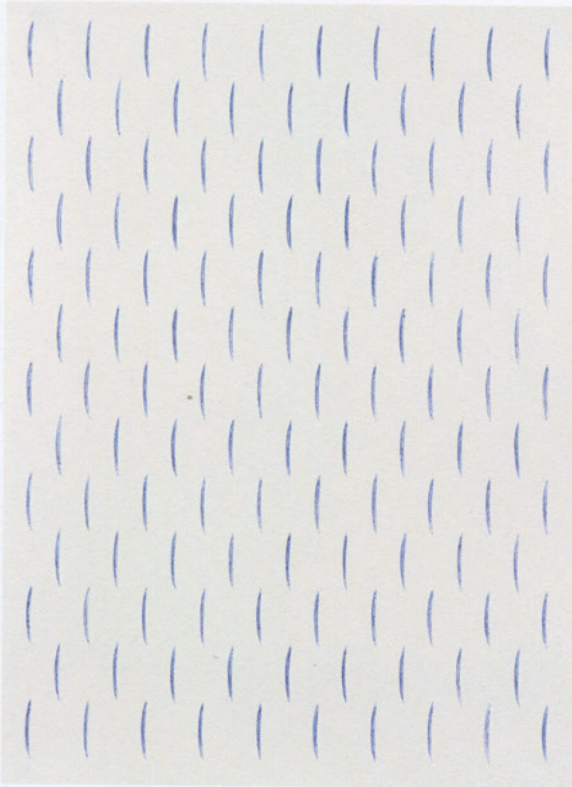
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Photo: courtesy MARCO Vigo/Enrique Touriño

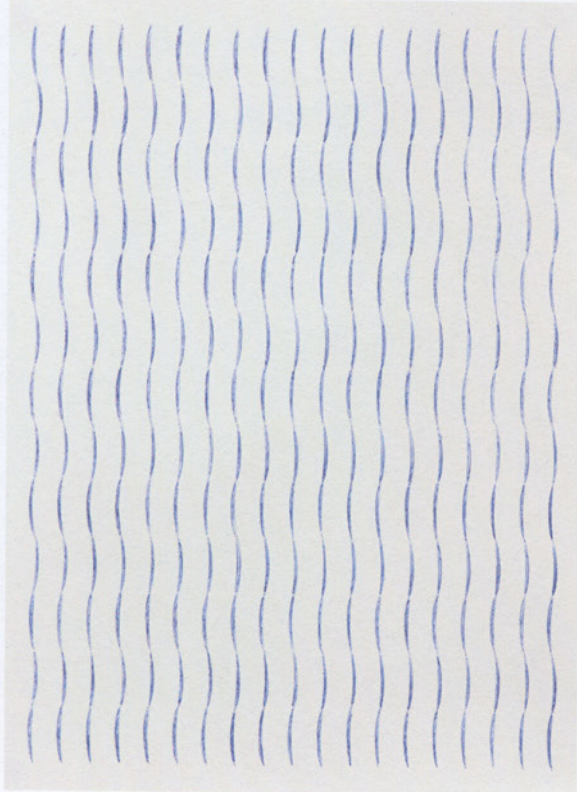


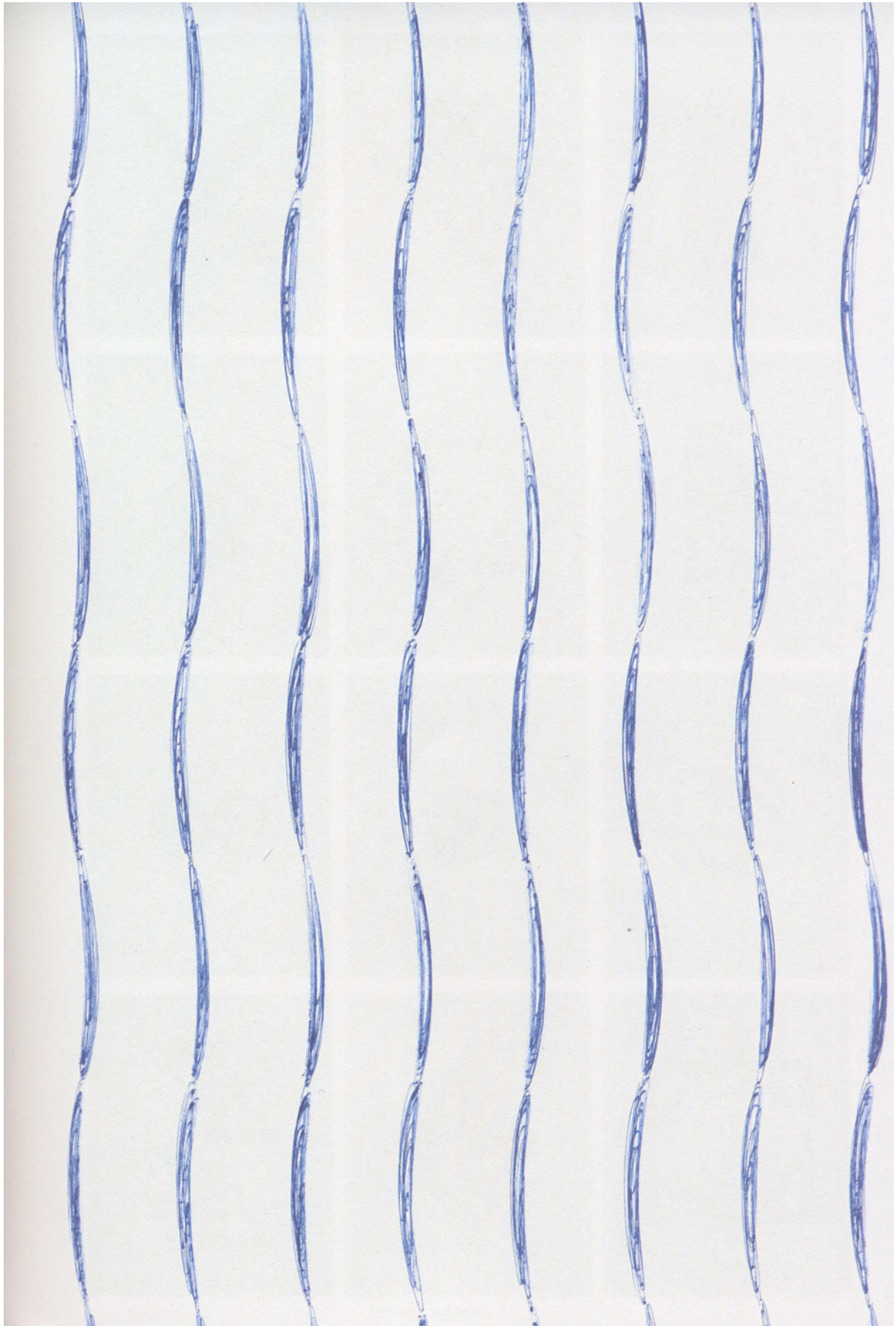
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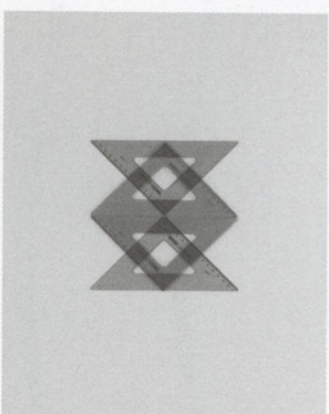
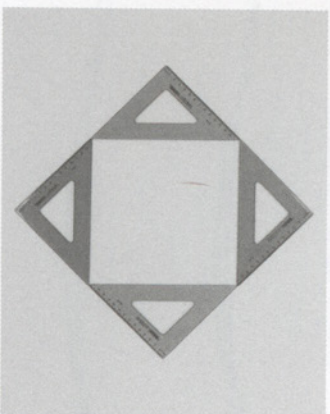
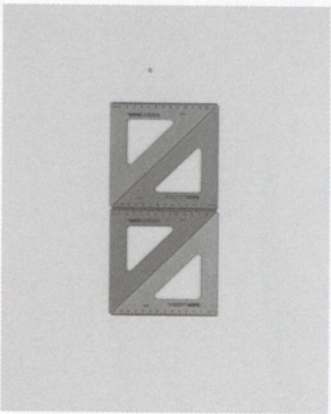
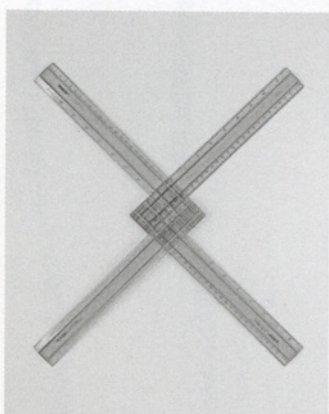
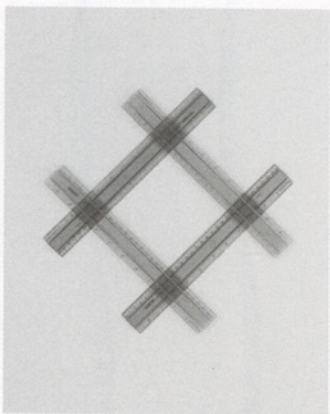
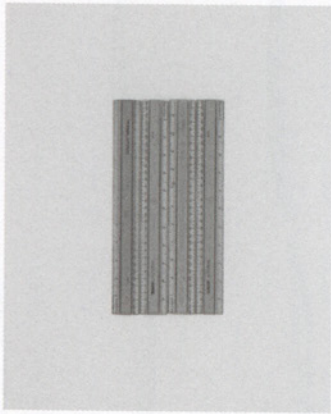




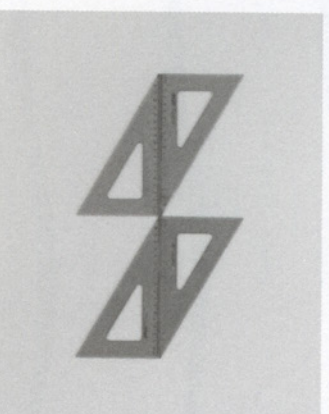
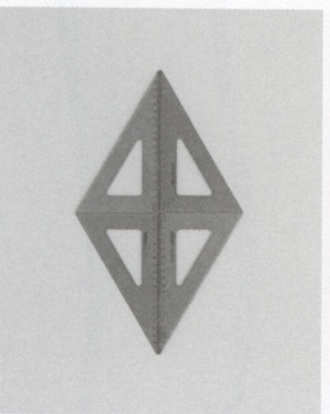
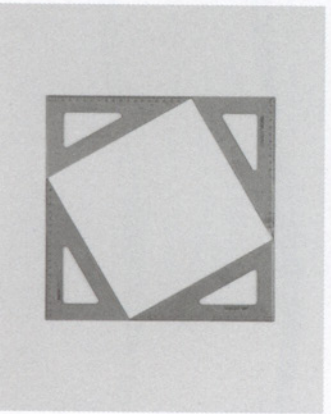
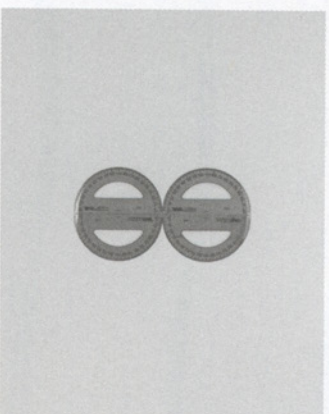
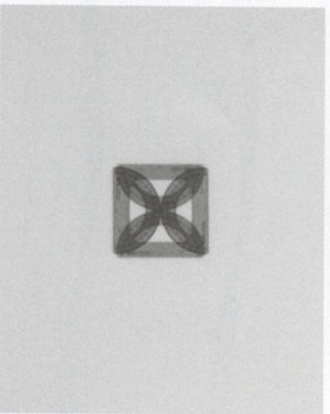
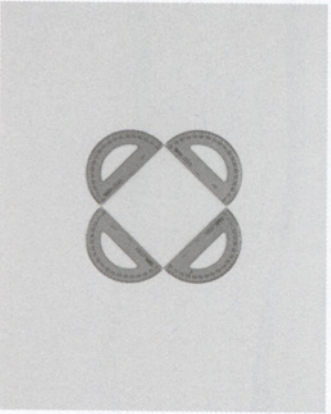
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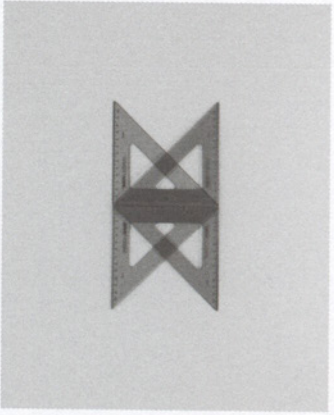
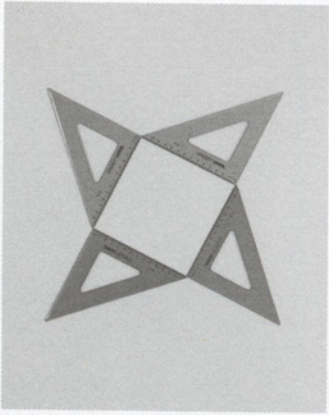
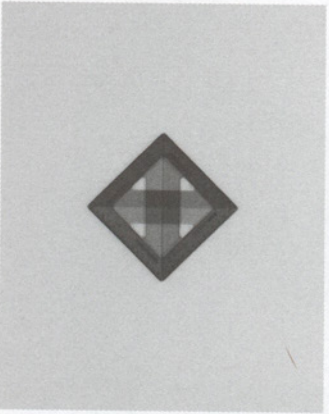
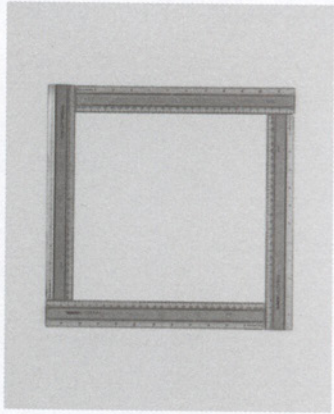
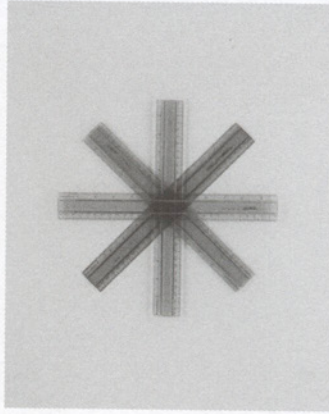
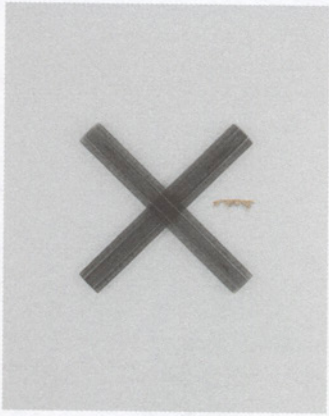




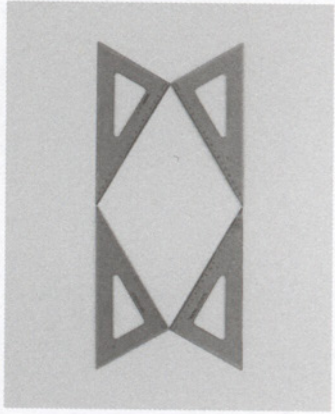
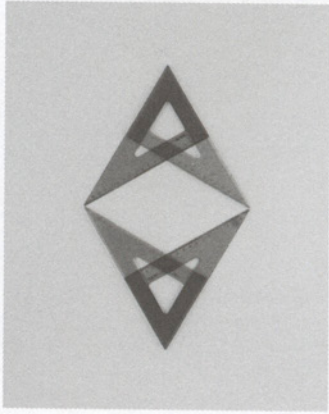
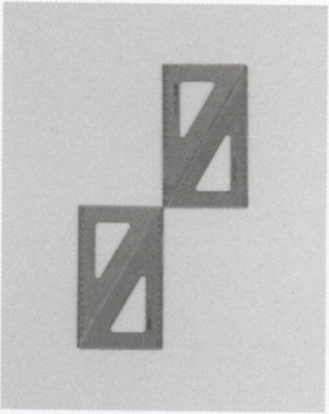
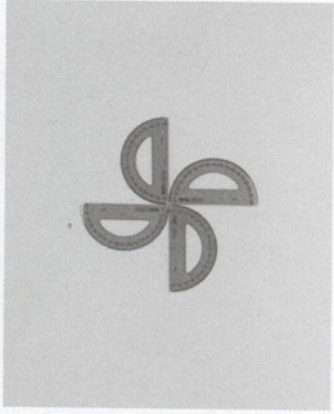
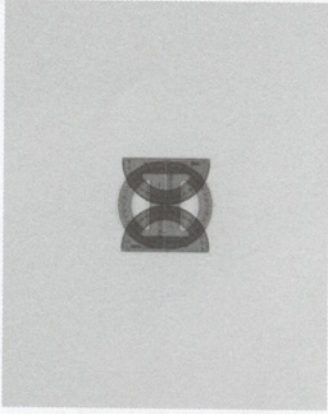
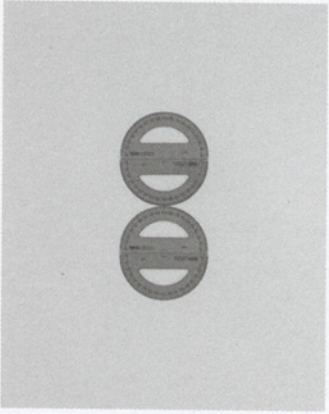


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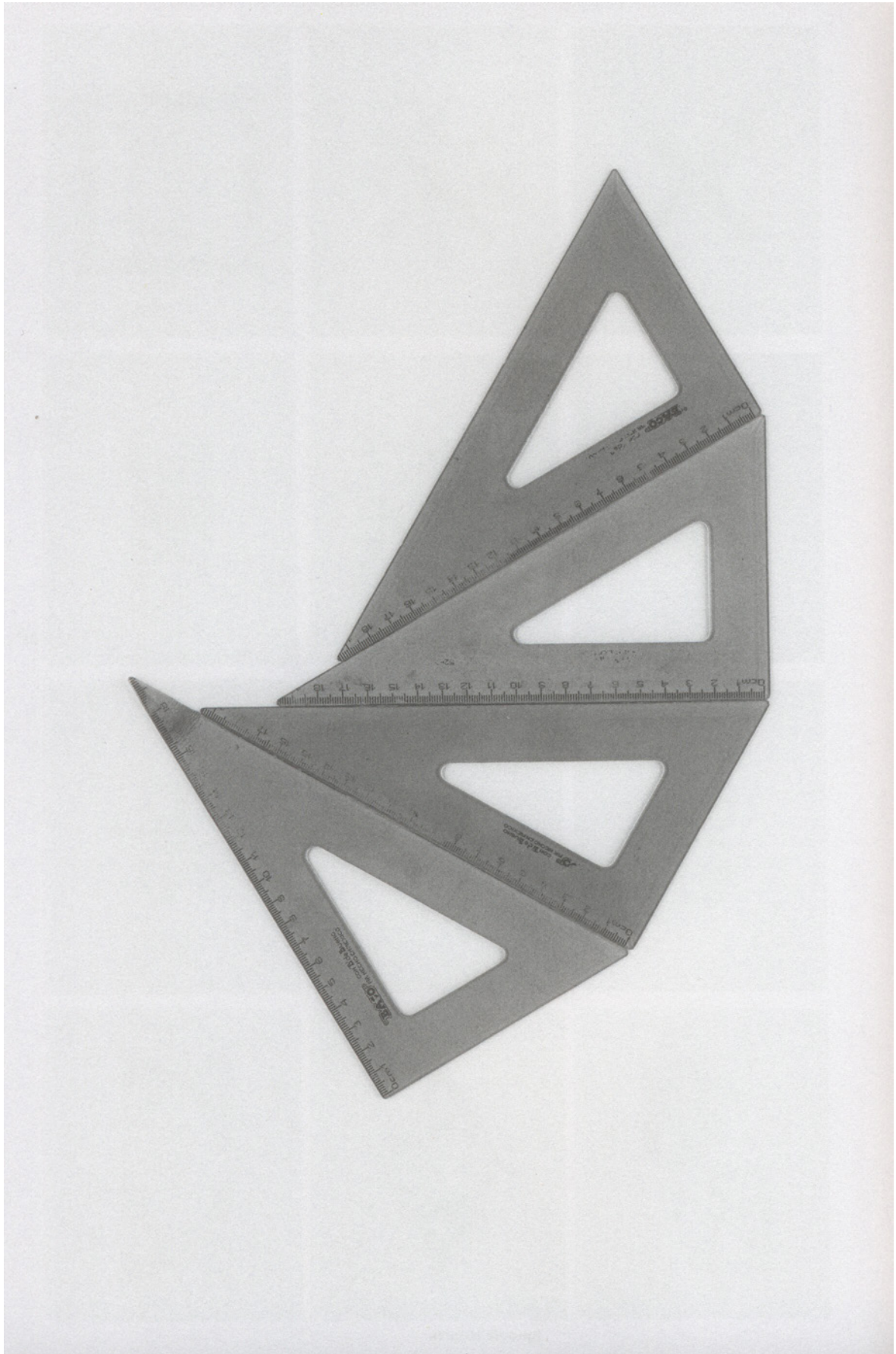


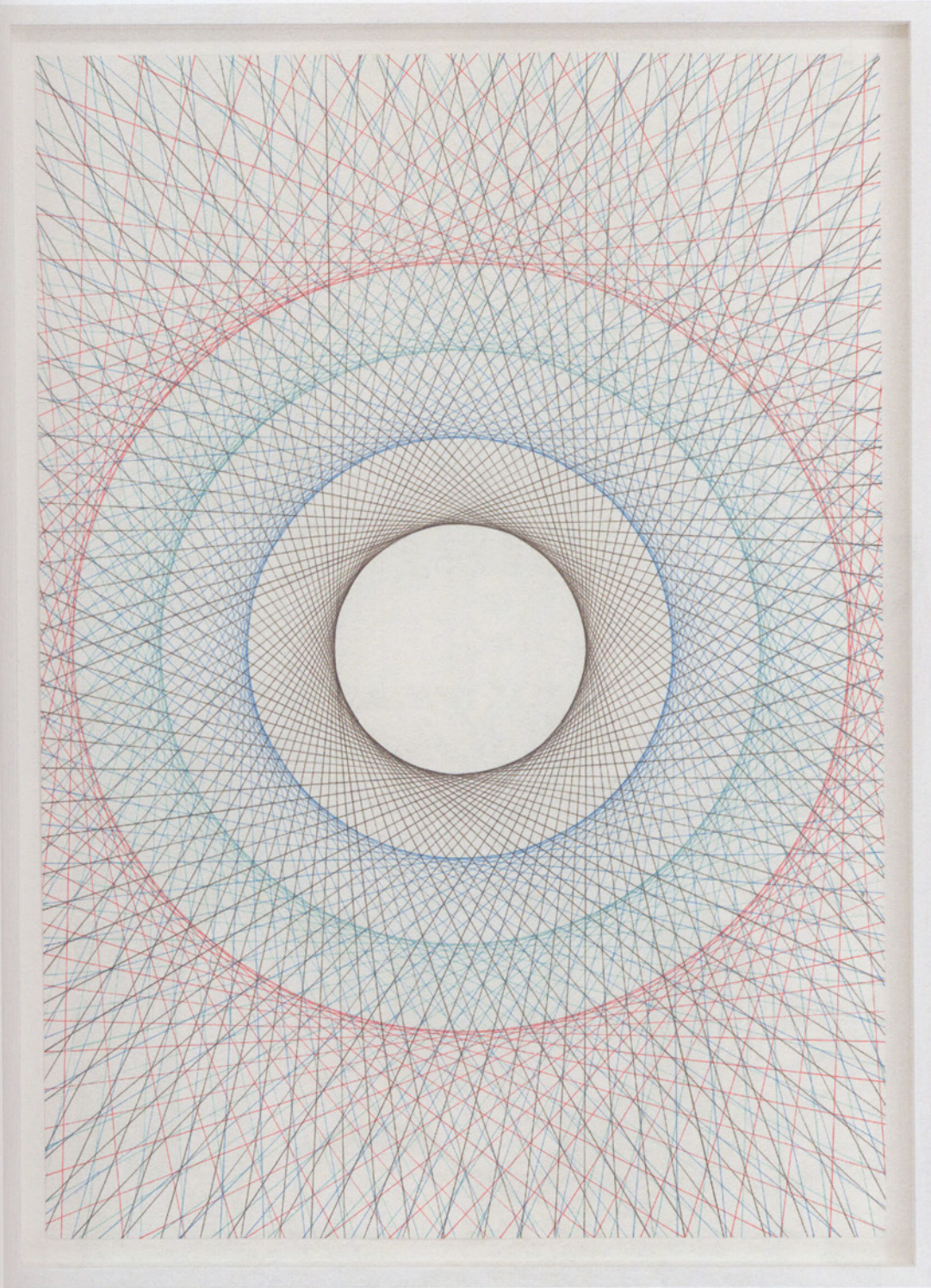


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Ignacio Uriarte





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