



jean-pascal flavien

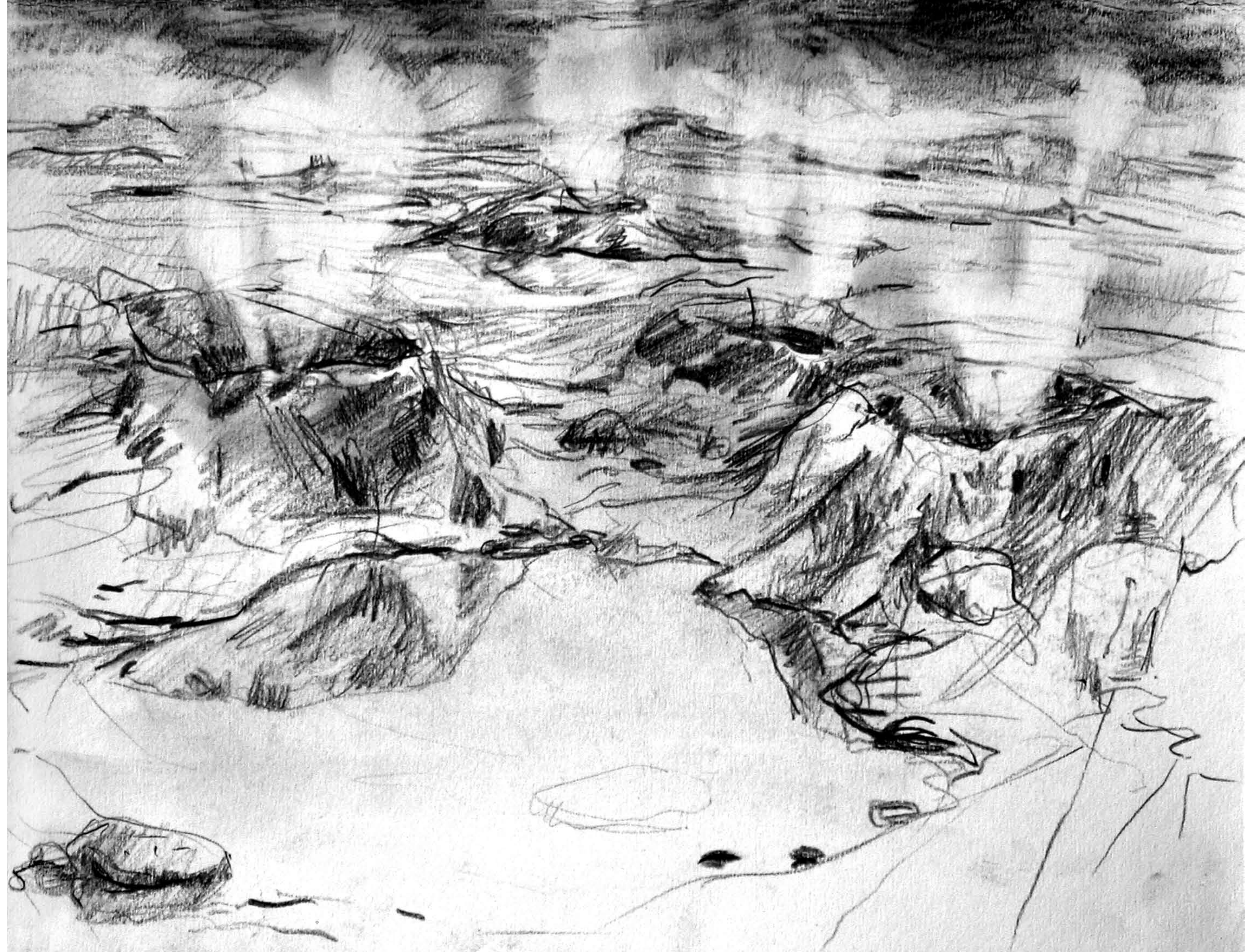
volcanos







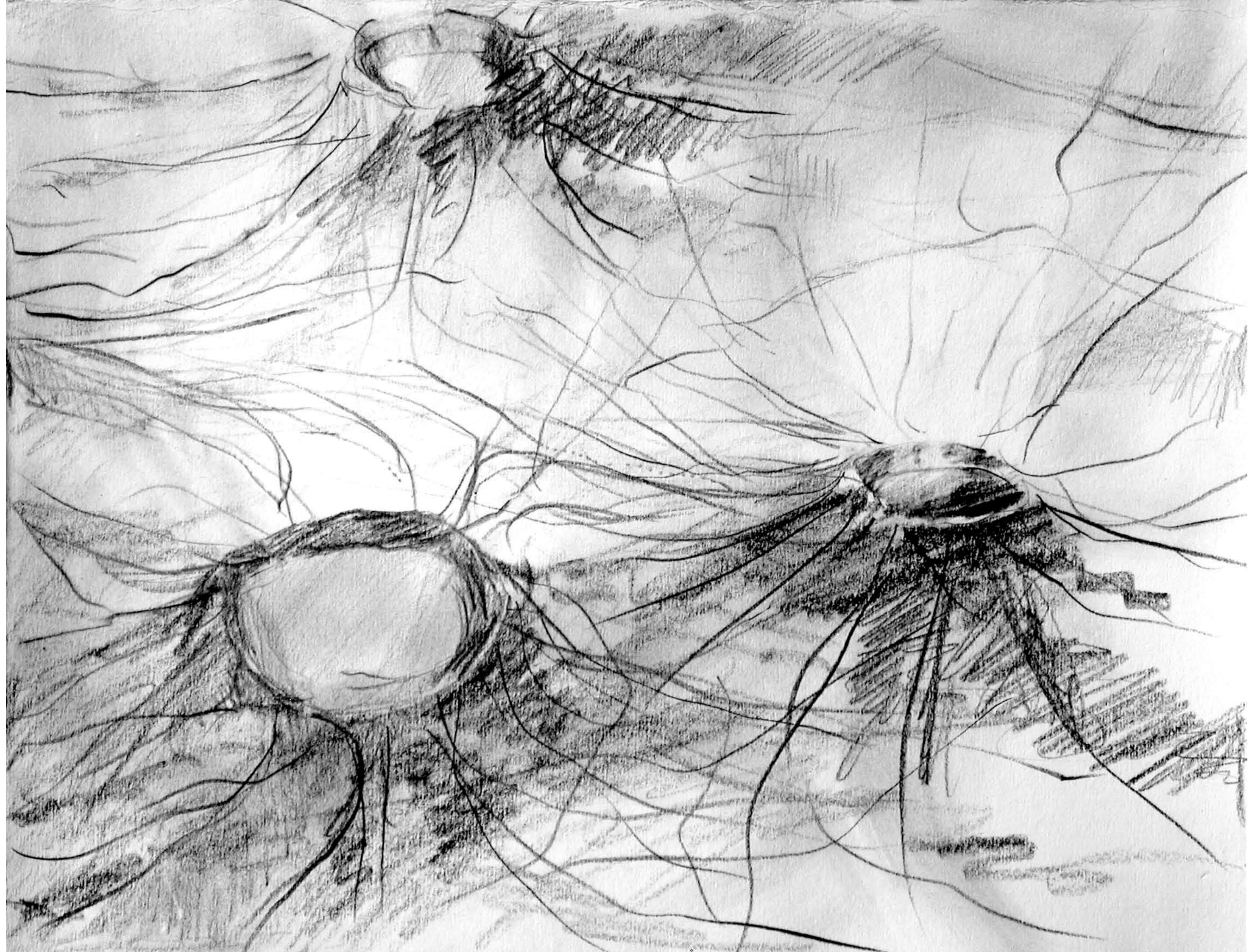








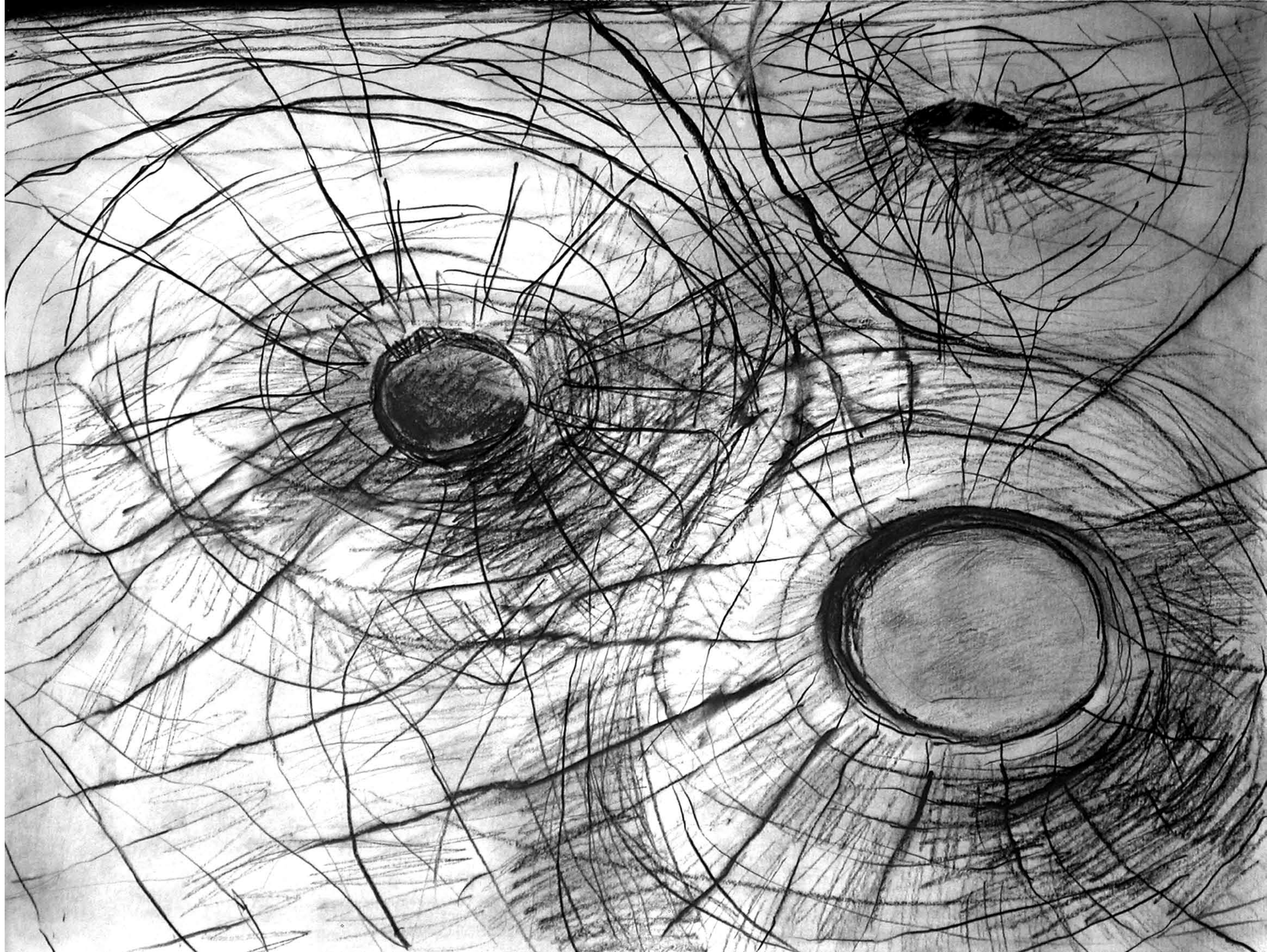












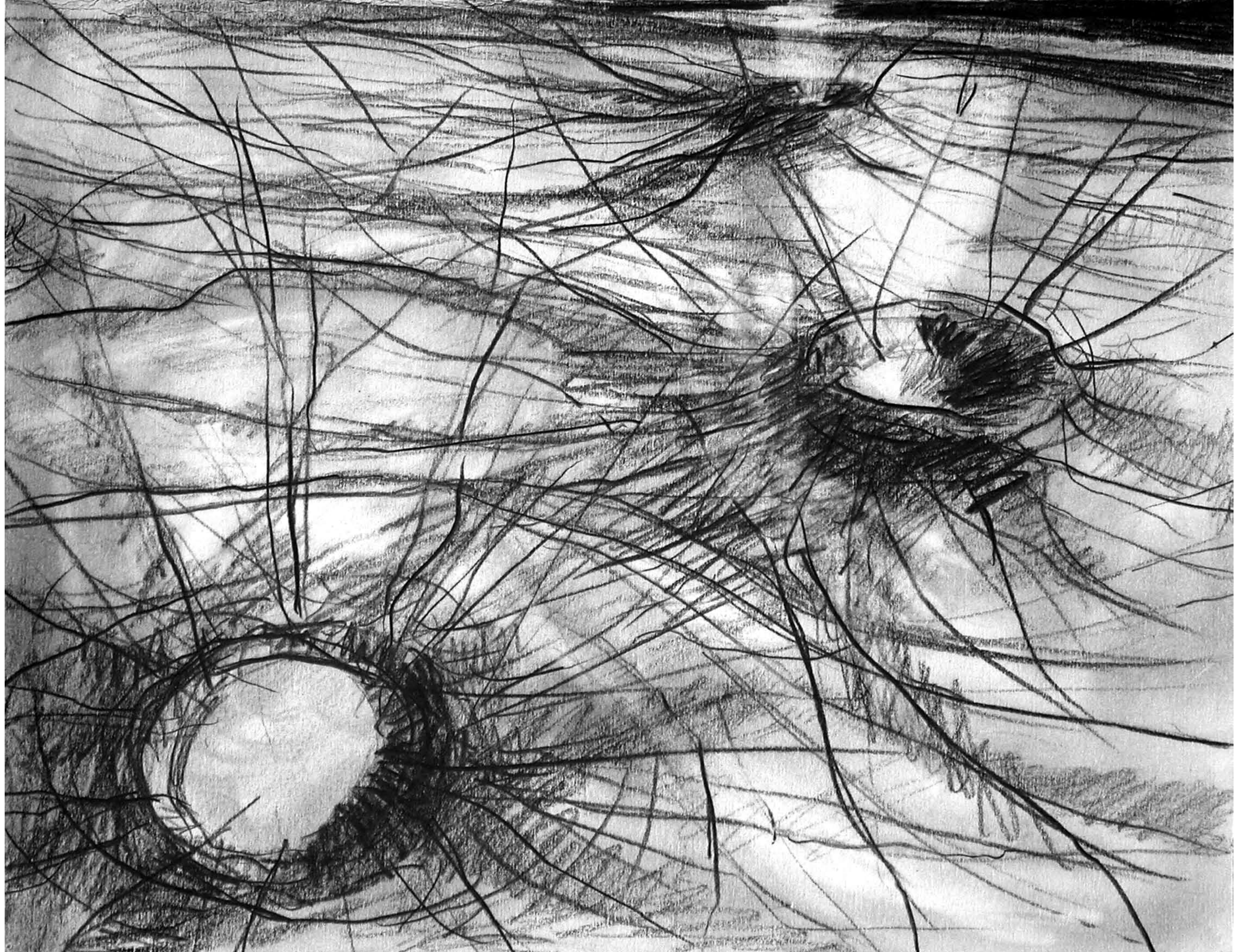




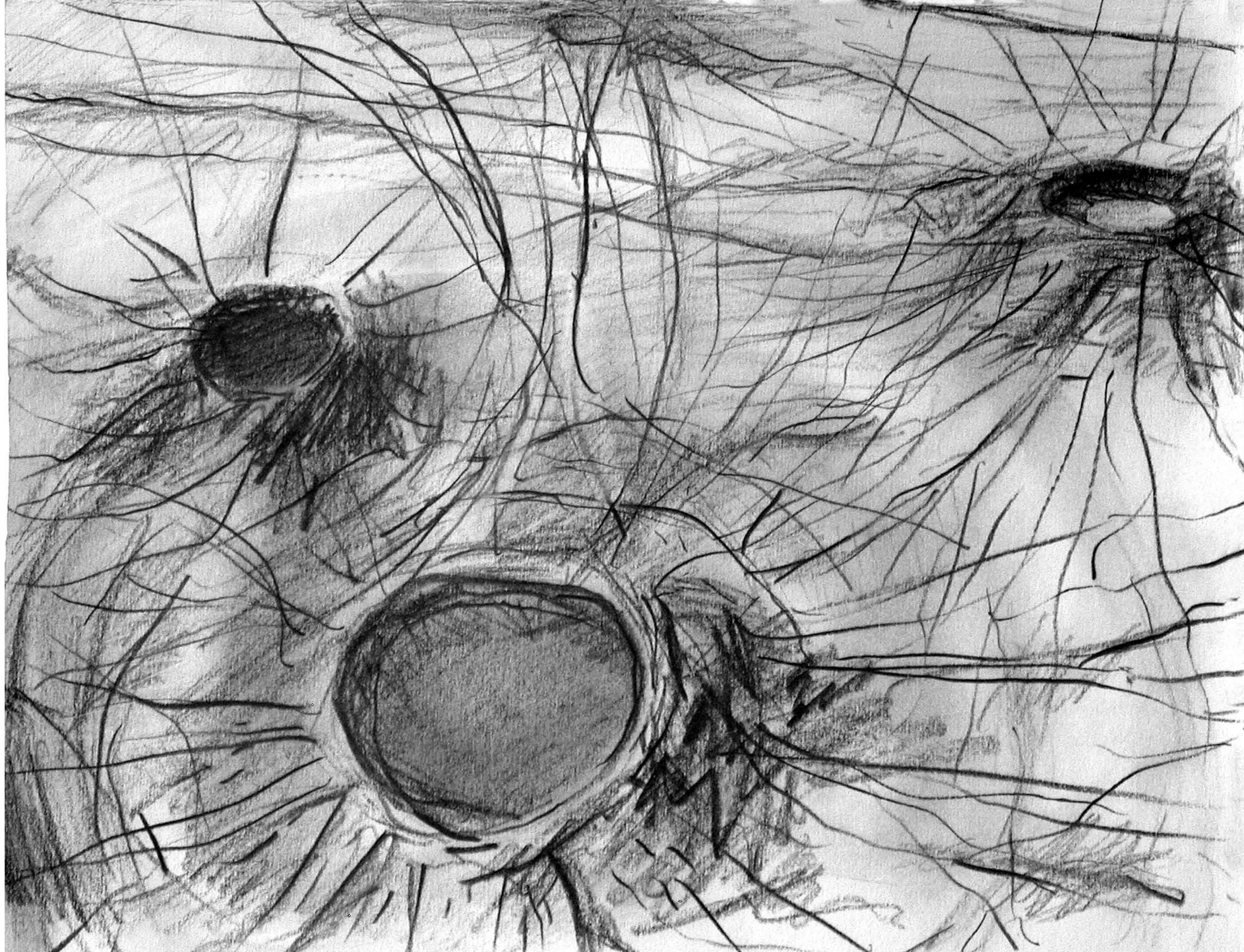




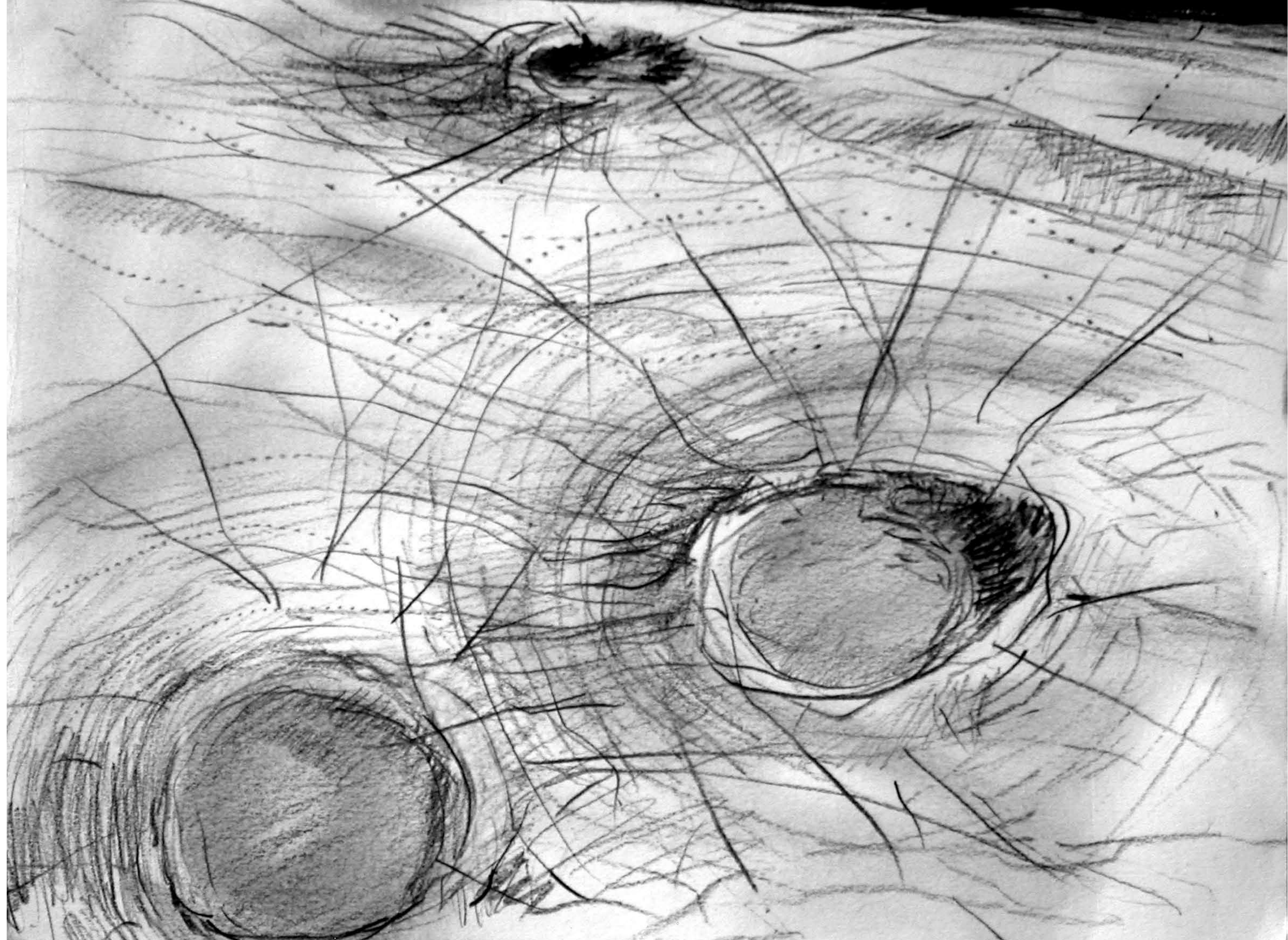






















julien jonas bismuth

a man called U...



At first he moved quickly through the crowded place. From the start, from the moment he came on the scene, U... was confronted with a cluttered confusion, a clamoring cacophony, a flood or flurry of words or worries.

"You are a man of straw."

"You are a dummy, you, a dummerel ..."

"Yours is a stuffed shirt and a head of hay, a web of fancies holds a ragged semblance of clothing against your burlap skin."

"I have seen the best of your kind, I have trumped others in your shoes, yours is a wooden tongue, yours are eyes of quartz, lips of foam, hands of painted clay."

At first. You can imagine him, at first, standing upright in a plain. His arms are extended on either side. A wind blows through him, a wind fills his mouth with bellowing laughter, a wind bounces tumbleweeds off of his chest, sinks pebbles into his crotch and brings tears to his blinking eyes. A wind blows around him, it ties a scarf around his throat, it draws a cape like a hood like a bell over his head over his shoulders over his body. A winds blows him into a crowded space.

"Who knows U...?" she asks, raising the silent promise of whispered confessions.

A man purses his lips, fingers his watch, and stifles a groan, a curse or a sob. A woman bunches her handkerchief in her hand. He smiles warmly at the host. She signals her assent with a quick swoop of her eyelids. He replies in kind with a fugitive smile.

It is then that U... enters the crowded banquet hall. He wears a dark black cape. He carries a gold cane. He has a red hat. He wears a mask, a white mask, a smooth white mask like a bowl over his face.

"I have only heard good things about you," she says, baring her white teeth as she smiles, "I am impatient to hear about your travels." Their fingers touch through the fabric of her gloves or is it her dress? She edges slowly towards the terrace, then into the garden, while he follows discreetly in tow.

The general resumes his story, while the butler clears the glasses and the band strikes another tune, just as the fat lady starts to sing while the dancers slowly gather in front of her, while servants fill up the bowls of punch and navigate carefully around the periphery of the hall, offering drinks and nourishment to those who would rather sit and talk, like the minister, his wife, and the foreign investor who are listening carefully to the general as he carefully describes a tropical setting, a dark conspiracy, a sudden betrayal, an accidental hero, a harrowing moment, and a satisfactory conclusion.



"Who is U...?" she asks, a finger poised on her lip, her absent gaze drifting toward the bay windows.

" You are the reason I have come here tonight."

" You are the one person I have been dying to meet."

" You cannot imagine how much he had changed!"

" You look as beautiful as always."

" You have something, allow me, you have something on your cheek."

It is a cold and blustery start to a long day. What is left of the caravan is piled up and lit to make a bonfire. The man called U... slips into the fading darkness, never to be seen again by those he had rescued from an ignoble fate. In the near distance, an owl screeches while high up in the distant hills, the last of a long line of noble warriors slowly falls asleep in the ant-infested hollow of a eucalyptus tree.



"You look like a ghost, you look like all the others, you look like you are not from these parts, you look a perfect mess, you look tired, you seem different, you are mad to have come all this way, we are no longer alone, you are no longer in control, we have lost our bearings, you have lost your ways, we are yours to dispose off, you have nothing to look forward to," and then they ran back down to their rooms and left him, left U..., standing, alone, all alone in the growing darkness.

He wore his sorrow on his sleeve, he bore a smile on his face, he carried a loosely wrapped bundle on his back and he held a lantern up to the sky. He was surrounded by piles of carefully stacked boxes coated in different shades of colored wax, some red, others blue, yellow, green, gray, brown, magenta or lamp-black. I will not say how U... felt, for I have no way of knowing and no desire to put myself in his shoes. He walked into a room, like a shed, like a cabin, walls made of planks and a circular window onto the outside world. He laid a box of papers on the floor, and threw his jacket on the bed. From his carpet bag, he took out a pen, a pen knife, and a notebook. I will not say what he thought about. I will not say what he did. It was dark, he was shrouded in darkness. I was elsewhere. U... was nowhere to be found, for the longest time, he was nowhere to be found. For the longest time, we lost sight of one another. It is only recently that he brought up this episode, I would never have imagined...

The window of the cabin rattled in its frame as the wind and the rain bore down on the tarpaulins and the water beat against the hollow walls of the vessel.

The window of the cabin rattled in its frame as the wind and the rain bore down on the tarpaulins and the water beat against the hollow walls of the vessel. U... had been at sea for a long time, U... had been at sea for as long as U... can remember. Can U... remember why or when or where U... left from or to or how U... left in the first place? U... had been at sea for a long time. A face tanned and glistening with sweat and saltwater, lips parched and curiously swollen, the lines of a puckered face concealing rivulets of dry salt, a mouth tinted with tobacco and fish oil, wearing a slicker and holding the helm as the craft dips in and out of the storm-tossed sea.

U... had been eating sea-biscuits from a tin, drinking rum and hot tea from a flask, and hurling hoarse invectives against the rudder, the helm, the hull, the sails and falling light. U... wore a sweater under a yellow slicker, U... smoked a pipe as U... ate biscuits from a tin and chewed flats strips of dry beef while the boat hopped across the flapping fabric of the storm-tossed sea.



"NOW!" he shouted and U... came to the fore, grabbed the rope and pulled with everything U... had, while the others dug up the earth, buried their heels and went to the edge of the line.

"We WON!" they screamed in unison, and she threw her burnished arms around his neck and kissed U... on the cheek. It was a beautiful day, there were cakes and cool drinks to be had, and they laughed and tumbled on the moist green grass until early evening.

"We OWN..." he started to say, having climbed up onto a fence post to address the crowd, but then a burst of enthusiasm from the crowd cut him short. A big purple and orange ball was tossed around as they rolled up their sleeves and took off their shoes and gathered around a small tub filled with red punch and bright green apples.

All the men wore monogrammed sweatshirts, with initials like "N.W.O." stitched on their breast. As the sun started to set, a tall blond woman dropped off a case of Williamstown Natural Orange soda, while the others laid gingham tablecloths on the overturned grass.

U... stood alone and whistled while looking up at the guard tower. U... had a belt, U... wore a robe, U... looked like a foreigner, U... looked like a native son. A day has passed and U... is still standing outside the city walls. The light of the kerosene lamps flickers against the thick sandstone walls. Like the others, U... waits. It is the next morning, and it is already hot and bright, and U... whiles the time away in the shade of a bamboo grove, whittling amidst scattered pieces of refuse and puddles of urine, spit, blood and muddied rain-water. Like the others, U... is preparing something. Like them, U... has been waiting for the right moment. Like them, U... has carefully inspected the fortifications. U... has drawn maps on the dirt. U... has a rope ladder, a spear, a dagger and a plan and is just waiting for the right moment.

It is already dark, and the kerosene lamps flicker against the thick sandstone walls. It is almost midday, and like the others the stranger hides in the refuse-choked bamboo grove, while the sentries in the guard towers scan the surroundings and pick off the stragglers with poisoned arrows. It is early morning and he is woken from a deep slumber by the sound of barking dogs, the smell of thick smoke, and the taste of blood in his mouth. He has bitten his tongue in his sleep. There are dogs surrounding the encampment. Someone has set fire to the makeshift camp. Like the others, he starts running. Like them, he takes his life in his hands and runs across the open patch of dirt, dodging slings and arrows then diving into the muddy river, using a hollow reed to breathe as the current carries him downstream. Meanwhile, a colorful procession makes its way across the bridge and into the citadel walls, while the others, once his neighbors, flee from the hounds, burn in the grove, bleed on the riverbank, or drown in the muddy stream.



Look at the man called U... . He carries a shoestring around his neck, both ends dangling on either side of his chest. He throws a horseshoe at the rounded tip of a polished stump. He bites into a slice of melon. He carries a jump rope and a bow, he drinks from a wineskin. He gazes longingly at the moon. Look at his soiled pants. He has just come in from river, he has drifted in from around a bend in the river. He wears a rusted scimitar, he carries a trusted trumped-up trumpet for minions, legions and strumpets. Look at him go, look at him turn on his heels, look at him flip on his heels, look at him land on his own two feet.

Here is another man, the third of his kind, the first in his category. He is a man called I... . He carries a spear, a stick, a flagpole and he leans upright against a lamp post. He has a perpendicular bulge in his pants. He has nothing to hide, he is not hiding anything from anyone. He stands, he sticks out. You might say he sticks out. He looks straight ahead at the church spire. A hawk plummets to the ground. The man called I... looks up, leans his head back and spits, the spittle rising and falling back into his mouth in a straight vertical trajectory.



