

*Drawing is thinking, thinking is moving.* These words summarize the layered work of Belgian artist Ronny Delrue (b. 1957). For many years, drawing has been central to his oeuvre. On the one hand, a drawing is an autonomous artwork, but on the other hand it is the direct crystallization of a fleeting line of thought that systematically opens the door to new work. Drawing is therefore not only the result, but also the engine of creativity for the artist, especially in the case of Delrue who not only ‘draws’ with pencil and paper, but also with photographs, ceramics, and other materials.

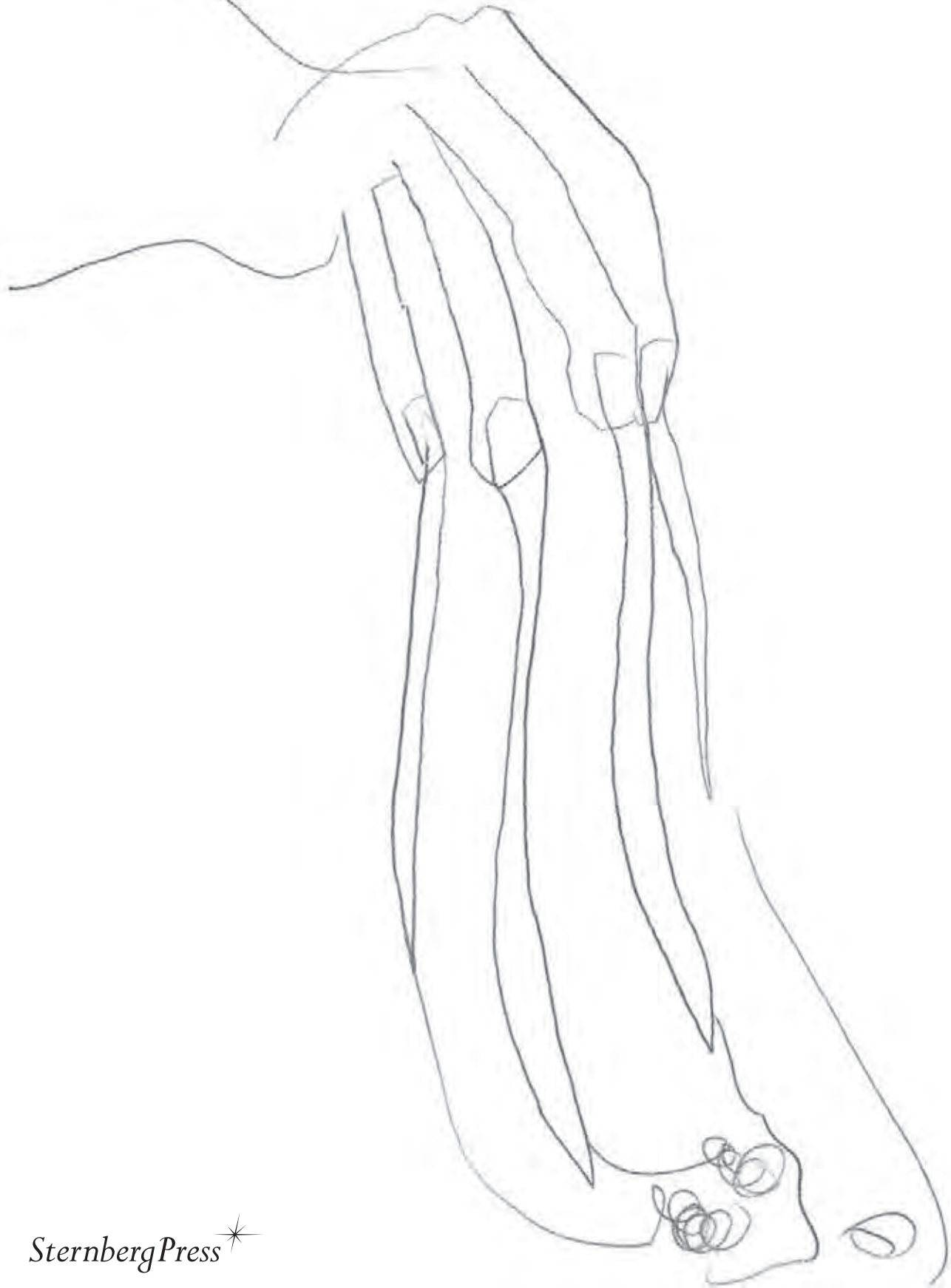
For Delrue, drawing is the culmination of a mental image, and the genesis of the image *and* its immediate meaning are contained in the lines of the drawing itself. That is why his drawings offer an intimate look inside the mind of an artist who, on the basis of his own reality — shaped by memories, emotions, and opinions — recreates the world a little bit on every page.

For this book, Philippe Van Cauteren (director of S.M.A.K., Ghent) selected a series of important drawings from Delrue’s extensive corpus. Three different authors focus on this selection and shed light on the importance of drawing in Delrue’s practice.



CORRESPONDANCES #1 RONNY DELRUE

Correspondances #1  
RONNY DELRUE



This selection of drawings allowed me to take a stroll among experiences and reflections from the past and present.

The archive of my thinking was ventilated.

Like an archaeologist, I concentrated on traces, frozen images, shards ...

Despite the cutting-edge technology and the tremendous expertise of the printer, the reproductions of the drawings in this book are nothing more than memories of a reality. They cannot possibly match the physical experience of viewing an original work.

Ronny Delrue



*Zundert*  
*Church*, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



Zundert  
*Church*, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



Zundert  
*Church*, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



Zundert  
Church, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



Zundert  
Church, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm





Zundert  
Church, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



Zundert  
Church, 2015,  
Chinese ink  
on Polaroid,  
5.4 x 8.5 cm



*Karel*, 2013,  
photograph  
of a Polaroid  
accentuated  
in Chinese ink,  
18 x 13.5 cm

# Correspondances #1

## RONNY DELRUE

For my father and my mother,  
John and Anne-Marie,  
Celine and Pepijn

16	Letter: To Ronny Delrue (3) PHILIPPE VAN CAUTEREN
20	Under the Skin FRITS DE CONINCK
62	The Case of the Face MARK SADLER
84	Seventy Drawings by Ronny Delrue HERMAN PARRET
180	As if It Had Just Happened INGE BRAECKMAN

# Letter:

## To Ronny Delrue (3)

### PHILIPPE VAN CAUTEREN

During our conversations in the studio — seemingly nonchalant and with my attention often distracted — I must have picked up more than a thousand drawings, one by one, and quickly cast my eye over them. The drawings were sorted into piles, ordered according to principles that were not clear. In just a few hours I efficiently — but quite inappropriately — rummaged through a productive process that spanned years. What struck me? All the drawings were the same size and, apart from a few exceptions, all were in an upright format. This linked them closely to portraits, the notion of the human, perhaps even the psyche. The recurring motif is the head, seat of ideas, arena of emotion and action. The drawings of the contours of the head are articulations of a zone that can be referred to as portraiture — or self-portraiture. Many artists preceded you in this: Helene Schjerfbeck, Miriam Cahn, Alberto Giacometti, to name a few. The human face explored in the form of a portrait, unravelled in colours, forms and lines. Drawing — or other physical actions — as psychography, an intimate exploration of the meaning of the face as the interface of thought, memory and remembrance. In science and marketing, the term ‘psychography’ refers to a type of research in which people are categorized on the basis of psychological characteristics, their values and ethics, opinions, tastes, interests ... If we move away from the functional systems of science, psychography becomes an artistic method which, in circumscribing the face, enables us to read the invisible. The Greek word *γραφειν* means to write or draw — an action which, guided by thought, leaves a trace. To write is to relate to time and memory, to draw is to relate to the invisible. Your drawings are not the drawings of a ‘master’, not well-considered, elaborate pieces of work. In their overwhelming abundance, the drawings seem like notes, nervous jottings that seem to want to defile the emptiness of the white paper like a stain. *Dagboeknotities* (Journal notes) was the title of your book published in 2005 which had at its core a series of 200 drawings selected by Laurent Busine, then director of MAC’s in Hornu. In this new publication, *Correspondances #1*, the emphasis has shifted from a linear whole to a corpus of drawings that proliferates uncontrollably. This time it is about connections, resonances, reflections, omissions and hesitations. What connects them is a kind of ‘cerebral drawing’. Or, as I put it a few years ago: something that appears to be a human form but is simply drawn armour which allows one to explore the quality of being in a nervy, uncontrolled collection of lines, strokes and planes.

Philippe Van Cauteren, Murches, 19 June 2019  
Artistic director S.M.A.K., the Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art Ghent





*My Mother,*  
2013,  
perforated  
photograph  
and silver  
paper,  
21 x 14.5 cm

7/7 Memory revisited 2, 2013 Sonya Delaney



# Under the Skin

## FRITS DE CONINCK

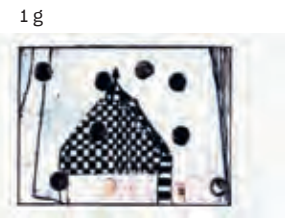
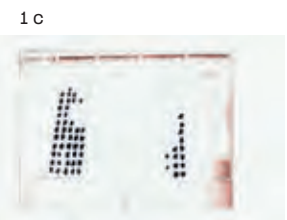
### 1. UNDER THE SKIN

Ronny Delrue’s world begins with drawing. For him, it is a way of looking, thinking and moving. It therefore assumes many forms within his practice. Delrue is a painter and photographer. He also makes installations and sculptures, works with ceramics, and adapts found photographs and paintings by drawing on them ... but he also draws, simply using a pen or pencil on paper. Drawing is looking, thinking and feeling in equal measure. It is like a hypersensitive camera that exposes what lies hidden beneath the skin or what our eyes are unable to see. For Delrue, drawing is the creation of a mental image.

This is certainly true of his works depicting Vincent van Gogh and his milieu. It all began with a Polaroid that Delrue took of the old church of Zundert in Brabant, where the young Van Gogh had once listened to his father’s sermons. Ronny Delrue initially saw and photographed the building on 8 April 2014 — or rather, took an ‘image’: since the photograph itself would serve as the starting point for a new work. By drawing a series of lines in black ink on the image, he imbued it, as it were, with new meaning. Thick lines, thin lines, as is ever the case with drawing [Ill. 1 a, b, c ,d, e, f, g].

It is precisely by drawing — or rather, by creating meaning through marking the photograph — that Ronny Delrue appropriates the image and makes it his own. Primarily in a visual sense, of course. The black lines seem to follow the trees and elongate the fence posts, while also forming a grid across the image. It is as though the lines create a scaffolding around the church, as a way of saving it from oblivion. Whereas the Polaroid has gradually faded away, leaving nothing but a patch of light behind, the lines on the image persist. And in this sense, the photograph has ultimately become a new image.

A work by Delrue is an ‘advance’ on time and a remedy against forgetting. He also intervenes in the meaning of the image. He transforms the lightness of the façade, and a church in the cold spring sunlight, into the weight of a memory. The church, the rectory, and Zundert itself: the place where it all began for Vincent van Gogh. It was a troubled life, as short as it was violent, one that became a desperate search for a hard-to-find happiness and an artistic calling. A life that was filled with desire but also extreme loneliness.



These associations are evoked by the lines on the photograph. A psychological narrative has been superimposed on the snapshot-like image of the religious building. The lines make tangible a story that is deeply embedded within the simple Zundert church. Ronny Delrue’s intervention makes this narrative visible, he ‘plants’ the tale, as it were, in our minds. While the image of the church has faded, Van Gogh’s story remains, the inspiring account of a sublime talent that has since become nestled in the collective memory. This photograph, which acquires new meaning by way of the lines, addresses the notions of appearance and disappearance, and the psychology of the in-between space. This is one of the central pillars of Ronny Delrue’s work. The church in Zundert is a pars pro toto for his artistic oeuvre.

### 2. THE PORTRAIT AS LANDSCAPE, THE LANDSCAPE AS PORTRAIT

The quest for an elusive inner world, the landscape of the human soul. This is the leitmotif within Ronny Delrue’s oeuvre and the impetus behind his drawings, paintings, installations and, of course, his adapted portraits.

The portraits he selects as his springboard often take the form of ‘found footage’. They are chance discoveries or items found at flea markets, such as an old, abandoned painting. Or a photograph in which it is impossible to establish the identities of the sitters. These are the kinds of photographs that people are quick to discard. After all, the subjects have long since died, their lives are definitively over, they have become both petrified and disposable. Ready to be forgotten. Once such photographs are viewed as old-fashioned, and the people forever lost, the images become anonymous and unrecoverable. The passage of time has washed away all the clues. The only place where such images might still exist is within the family photograph album, but even these are mercilessly disposed of at flea markets.

*Lost Memory/5* (2006) [Ill. 2] takes just such a found photograph as its starting point. It shows a woman and two men sitting arm-in-arm on a sand dune. A picture of a decades-old summer’s day. Delrue obliterates their faces with black pigment and, in so doing, recreates the people by turning them into something they never were, while their real identities

### 21

- 1 a  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 b  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 c  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 d  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 e  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 f  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 1 g  
*Zundert Church*, 2015, Chinese ink on Polaroid, 5.4 x 8.5 cm
- 2  
*Lost Memory/5*, 2006, photographic print, 121.11 x 178 cm



and occupations have vanished into the mists of time. Through that one simple intervention, Delrue sharpens the lens and focuses it on what is no longer visible. The face that once radiated an identity has become a black spot that obscures more than it reveals. In this way, he draws attention to what lies behind the countenance, to all that is hidden, to what we call the ‘inner world’, however unknowable it seems. The personal becomes the anonymous and, as such, vanishes forever. An old photograph has been transformed into an image with universal resonance.

Far more frequently, however, Ronny Delrue addresses the landscape of the soul through a contradictory intervention: he exposes this inner world by perforating, rather than obscuring, the image. *My Mother* (2013) [Ill. 3] is a reworking of a photograph of his mother as a young girl, a picture that only recently came into his hands. His search for old family photographs (of grandparents and parents, for example) became entwined with his voyage of discovery into the world of Van Gogh. He has also punched the family photographs in an attempt to understand their ‘mind’.

The act of perforation is an important intervention for Ronny Delrue. First of all, it is a method by which to appropriate a given image. It is almost as though the artist creeps under the skin of the sitter. It is also a form of visual intervention. The perfectly spherical holes turn the classical portrait into an interplay of shapes, one that not only opens up the surface but also imbues the image with additional layers. The psychological implication of the visual gesture is self-evident. The holes puncture the surface: they expose an inner world and draw attention to what lies within. To all that is elusive yet undeniably present, and to that which lies hidden within our innermost recesses. He expands and intensifies the found image that now bears his personal signature.

When it comes to the perforations in the photographic portrait of Vincent van Gogh, Ronny Delrue goes one step further. The link between the holes and the artist’s short, turbid life lends the portrait a threatening aspect. The piercings seem to become loopholes that allude to Van Gogh’s death. In a literal sense, to the pistol with which he ended his life, but in a more general interpretation to the idea that Van Gogh was murdered by society. The perforations not only lead us towards

his inner world, but also work in the opposite direction by allowing the black thoughts to escape. Through this intervention, Delrue transforms the portrait into an anti-portrait, and strips it of its status and grandeur. The resulting image is more moving, calmer and perhaps even more humane. A portrait as a door to an inner world, an intimate landscape.

Perforation is a visual technique that Ronny Delrue also uses in reverse. Instead of punching openings in the given image, he creates works from the circles of paper that have been removed. It is not only the aperture that is important, but also what is extracted. In 2017, Delrue participated in the Kathmandu Triennale (Nepal), the theme of which was *The City, My Studio — The City, My Life*. Within this context, he sought to learn more about life in Kathmandu and about Nepalese culture in general. To this end, he began collaborating with Nepalese artist Sanjeev Maharjan and told him about his family photographs. The power of memory, and how remote the sitters seemed in time, determined the degree to which Maharjan could glean their meaning. Ronny Delrue has also perforated copies of these photographs: the fewer the memories, the greater the number of holes. The memory, therefore, literally determines the extent to which we can discern the figure [Ill. 4 a, b]. Delrue took the circles of paper from his hand-cut holes, which evidently had an irregular shape, and used them in another artwork. This took the form of a large circular composition entitled *The Maharjan Caste* [Ill. 5 a, b]. Interspersed with the paper discs were the small coloured spots known as *tikkas*, which Hindu women (and sometimes men) wear on their foreheads. The *tikka* (or *bindi*) became a source of fascination for Ronny Delrue. It is a clearly visible sign that appears to have multiple meanings. First and foremost, there is the cultural significance of the circle: in Hinduism, a *tikka* stands for spiritual strength and is regarded as a third eye. Then there is the location on the body where the *tikka* is applied: on the forehead, between the eyebrows. This is the traditional seat of wisdom. But the sign also has social implications: it sends a very clear signal to wider society as to a woman’s marital status. The *tikka* is ultimately a symbol that represents everything that binds us together: the family, the social group, memory, religion. For a visual artist who thinks and looks through drawing, it is a telling motif.

22

3  
*My Mother*,  
2013,  
perforated  
photograph  
and silver  
paper,  
21 x 14.5 cm  
4 a  
*The Maharjan  
Family*, 2017,  
30 x 44 cm  
5 a, b  
*The Maharjan  
Caste*, 2017,  
fragments of  
photographs  
and tikkas,  
49 x 60 cm



4 b  
*The Maharjan  
Family*, 2017,  
perforated  
photographs,  
30 x 44 cm  
(x 4)





6  
*Black Snow, VII, 1*, 2016,  
oil on canvas,  
25.5 x 33 cm

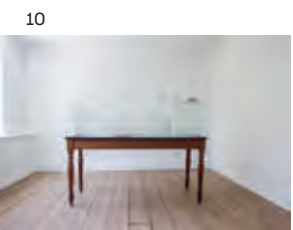
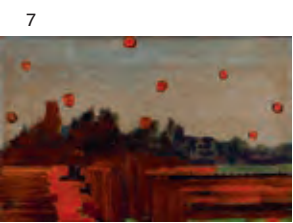
Ronny Delrue also uses the *tikka* symbol as he would other more ‘usual’ visual media. After his stay in Nepal, he incorporated it within several new works. Firstly, in *Black Snow, VII, 1* (2016) [Ill. 6] and *Chemical Snow, XI, 1* (2016) [Ill. 7], and subsequently in *When Cultures Come Together* (2017) [Ill. 8]. In these works, a flurry of coloured dots that closely resemble *tikkas* drifts across a Flemish landscape. But for a visual artist from the Western world, the association with the spiritual third eye isn’t relevant. Instead, Delrue uses *tikkas* to create a stratification within the image. A purely visual intervention. He also highlights the differences: the Hindu *tikka* is a perfect circle, whereas the hand-cut shapes are, by definition, imperfect.

More recently, he has also placed his work within an ecological perspective. In 2018 he took glass bell jars as his starting point and applied black or red dots to their surfaces. Whereas such a cloche would once have formed a protective cover for a venerated saint, in the hands of Ronny Delrue it becomes a completely transparent form, with all the visual power of an image, to which the addition of painted dots adds a pictorial twist. *Protected Tree* (2019) [Ill. 9], which forms a visual indictment of the pollution of the natural world, is just such an installation.

3. IMAGES OF ABSENCE

Just as the perforated photographs and images carry a psychological charge, so too do Ronny Delrue’s sculptures, albeit it in a different form. His three-dimensional works and installations, especially those that take the form of glass bell jars, evoke the idea of absence. Where once we might have expected the presence of a devotional figure beneath the cloche, for example, there is now only emptiness, as in *Landscape without Saints* (2015) [Ill. 10]. This installation comprises a number of glass bell jars on a wooden table: a family of related forms that differ only in size.

We recognize these cloches as relics from an almost extinct Catholic culture: the covers that once protected venerated statues of saints, which were placed in positions of honour, surrounded by glass, protected, ritualized. For centuries, these saints populated countless sitting rooms as Christian icons. Ronny Delrue has ‘thrown out’ the saints, as he himself says, since times have changed. The cloches



are now like houses without occupants: everything is ready, waiting for the person who is destined to never arrive. Nothing could make absence more tangible than a translucent glass cloche.

The transparent bell jar, with its straight sides and beautifully curved top, is already a replete image. By arranging side by side the empty forms on that bare table — by which they acquire, through mutual association, a new identity, one that has ceased to remind us of domestic devotion — they enter into a play with light. They catch the light and bounce it back into space, each cloche in its own unique way. Because the old religious figurines have long since disappeared, the eye focuses on the object itself, alighting upon every tiny deformation in the glass, on any kind of age-related degradation, upon the ever-changing light, and the dust that swirls within the empty interior space. In short, the eye is captured by an image that relates to time and space. The absence makes a new presence felt, one that is light and temporal, as fluid as the vanished saint.

An image of absence, but this was not Delrue’s original intention. The genesis of *Landscape without Saints* is as exceptional as it is serendipitous. When looking for one thing, you inevitably discover something else (which is partly the nature of looking). Columbus famously discovered America while believing he was sailing a new route to Asia. *Landscape without Saints* was also the fruit of an unexpected discovery. In 2010, Delrue was an artist in residence at the European Ceramic Work Centre in Den Bosch in the Netherlands. He was keen to have the space in which to experiment with ceramic forms. It wasn’t the sculptures that he’d set out to make that attracted his attention, but the unanticipated consequences of the creative process. What happens on the sidelines, the things that are somewhat beyond his control, have always been a source of fascination. The accidental, small white porcelain *Bomb Children* sculptures that he’d created were his ‘unexpected discovery’. He placed them under a dome, in that hallowed place once reserved for Catholic saints. This evolved into an installation that he exhibited in the Museum of Fine Arts in Charleroi. But the work was not yet finished. The installation was still too literal, too narrative and perhaps too conventional. But what is the consequence of no longer believing?

7  
*Chemical Snow, XI, 1*, 2016, oil  
on canvas,  
38 x 60 cm  
8  
*When Cultures Come Together, VIII, 2*, 2017, tikkas  
on oil painting,  
40 x 50 cm  
9  
*Protected Tree*, 2019,  
wood, glass,  
paint,  
63 x 26 cm  
10  
*Landscape without Saints*,  
2015, mixed  
media, dusty  
glass bell  
jars, table:  
165 x 63 cm



For it is not only the saints that are deprived of their existence, but also a centuries-old visual tradition. And the bases disappear alongside the figures, as well as the cloches. After the statues of saints, their ceramic successors must also vacate the field. The dome is no longer the carrier of an image: it is the image itself. And this ensemble on a plain wooden table became an installation, loaded with a psychological charge. This strategy — the arrival at a new image via a process of reduction and omission — is specific to Ronny Delrue’s practice.

In *House without Saint* (2016) [Ill. 11], the artist once again takes the glass cloche as a starting point, but this time deploys it within an installation that concludes in a drawing upon the floor. The installation consists of a small, wooden cabinet that hangs high on the wall, inside of which is a glass dome. Here too, the saint is conspicuous by its absence. Our attention turns to the slender, transparent object that is defined by its perimeter: a perfect dome that extends into two straight lines. And from that miniature chapel, an electric cable spirals down towards two circles on the floor. It would be impossible to draw a more efficient line with a pencil on paper. What began as a suggestion of absence, a contemplative image of silence, terminates in the physical line of an electric cable. In this way, an image becomes a drawing, like a tangible spatial trace. The art of drawing begins with the line, irrespective of how it might have been created.

4. THE LANGUAGE OF SIGNS

Ronny Delrue draws constantly. Drawing is a natural reflex through which thoughts flow and images are born. Images can become paintings, sculptures or photographs. Or they might simply remain as drawings. For Ronny Delrue, drawing is an attitude, an existential state. It is less about the actual drawings, and more about the act of drawing as part of an ongoing process. It is an intensely personal state of mind, one in which his artistry assumes its most agile, uninhibited and vulnerable guise, and which opens up a universe of ideas. His works on paper are resolutely direct and devoid of concealment. More than any other medium, drawing grants access to the artist’s thoughts and emotions. Delrue’s drawings expose the workings of his mind. The hand that holds the pencil



11

mediates between his creative thought processes and the resulting image. A pen, a pencil, a sheet of paper, these are the only requirements. There is no more direct route, neither in distance nor time — and certainly none more intimate. The act of drawing enables the viewer to get closer to Delrue’s creative skill. Drawing enables us to taste the true flavour of the artist.

Compared to painting, sculpting, making installations or adapting the found footage, drawing is the freest and least constrained of all activities. Furthermore, it requires only the bare minimum of resources. It is a process that charts its own course. Drawing is a form of travelling and outshines any elaborately devised itinerary, of the sort that is only devised to get you to a specific location at a given time. The artist rarely knows where he’s going. But this is where he begins, with drawing.

Ronny Delrue is a visual artist who travels down different paths to arrive at the consummate image. The medium is subservient. What he is seeking, or plans to communicate, determines the choice of materials. Which medium corresponds to which message? But also: which medium will enable me to express the message with the greatest precision? All being well, these two aspects, the message and the medium, will converge effortlessly. But there are inevitably drawings made beforehand, which are akin to philosophical exercises. For Delrue, drawing is a form of research, a way of articulating a nascent thought, the latter of which might branch off in many directions. In drawing, an idea can also be born. It is, quite literally, a primary act. As such, drawing forms the foundation of all Ronny Delrue’s visual work. And at the same time, it is also the cement that binds everything together. Drawing as the first expression of his creativity.

Drawing, as practised by Ronny Delrue, is ultimately a conceptual attitude. It requires nothing more than a pen or pencil and a sheet of paper. Anything less and drawing becomes impossible. If we consider his drawings to be conceptual, then they come close to what the Renaissance artist and theorist Giorgio Vasari implied by the term *disegno*. For Vasari, this was the design, the thinking that precedes the painting. The soul of the true artist manifests itself in the *disegno*, far more than in traditional painting or sculpture. Note that Vasari was describing the art of drawing

26

11  
*House without Saint*, 2016, wood, glass, electrical cable, 64.5 x 51 x 33 cm

itself, and not the academic genre. With Ronny Delrue, we can discern a similar approach. A drawing, within his practice, is the carrier of an idea, one that is not only conceived in advance, but is created and developed during the making of the work. Drawing is an attitude that throws open the doors of the rational mind. Moreover, it is conceptual because it also demands attention in its own right, as an independent medium. With Ronny Delrue, drawing is not just an act that leads to a concrete and recognizable depiction. Nor is it a preparatory sketch for another image. With every line that he sets down, he makes the viewer aware of its actuality, an abstraction with its own autonomous existence, in fact, self-propagating, line after line. As a viewer, you see the drawing emerge before your very own eyes, so to speak.

Delrue draws with a pencil or a dip pen. Slowly and searchingly. And with an acute awareness of what it means to draw. Because a line, if well executed, is immediately present. It all begins with that very first line. The work then enters into a relationship with the vertical and horizontal edges of the paper. The first line affects the emptiness of the white plane, it does not expel anything. If it is good, it will immediately create space. A left and a right is established, or an up and down, depending on the direction in which the hand works. With that first confident mark, a shape and a counter-shape emerge, rudimentary but unmistakable. Ronny Delrue’s lines are fragile, they seek their own way, sharing space, creating volume, suggesting emptiness, drawing absence.

In Delrue’s practice, drawing is an autonomous act. Form and meaning push against each other until they finally converge. Because when Ronny Delrue draws, he is embarking on a quest that may not yield anything. He only realizes what he’s looking for when he finds it. His drawings transport us, the viewers, into his world. A personal universe in which memories and associations, facts and dreams, experiences and illusions go hand in hand. That is what drawing does: it opens up his inner world. Few other media can achieve this as smoothly, mercilessly and directly as drawing.

Ronny Delrue draws as though it were a mental process. His drawings have all the force of an emotional state, are possessed of an authentic urgency and, ultimately, a private aspect. His drawings

are akin to a detour within himself, a quest, one that is as necessary as it is impracticable. Exposing your inner world, dredging things up from unfathomable depths: where words falter, the drawing speaks.

Is there nothing visible of the external world in Ronny Delrue’s drawings? The world in which we conduct our daily lives? Or the international merry-go-round of crises and disasters? The world in which the personal and intimate are increasingly being contaminated by globalization and Facebook? Or are ‘being polluted’, as he himself says? Much of what is happening in the world shines through in Ronny Delrue’s work. He is not a hermit. But he will never deploy an external reference in literal terms. He receives the information, lets it cure and ripen, and waits until it catches his eye again, at just the right moment. Then he picks it up and allows the pen or pencil to do its work. In its own unique way, in a personal language of form. And always abstract. Ronny Delrue draws what could be described as metaphorical images. He is not a reporter of facts and events. His creativity is allergic to such certitudes. Delrue aspires to receive the world through his finely tuned antennae and to transform it into a new, different and universal narrative. The story of the individual who seeks to interact with his or her inner world, a domain in which everything is stored, including a wealth of things we can’t yet know. And equally, the raging of the world.

Drawing is similar to the frosted glass windows in his studio. The panes filter the ingress of light, the moods and colours of the day. But they don’t allow us to see things with any clarity. Objects penetrate, in a timeless state of repose and contemplation, detached from the factuality of the outside world. Such a window is like a filter, which is equivalent to the workings of the artist’s eye and mind. Delrue filters the images, removes what he describes as ‘the pollution’, and gives them a new abstract form. A drawing. And with striking regularity, they contain the image of a head. He draws it like a mind map: a labyrinth of thoughts, a repository of fears, and of dreams and fantasies. For Ronny Delrue, the head is also a mirror of the world, and sometimes even a time machine. For example, he uses the portrait of Van Gogh, the doubly anonymous faces in the old photographs, and the head of the psychotic Karel. This is why heads appear in hundreds of drawings.

27







Delrue is the archivist of the soul, and what could be more intimate and direct than working with a pen or pencil [Ill. 12 a, b, c, d, e, f]?

Drawing brings total freedom, allowing one to relinquish the rules and push against the boundaries, or to inject the familiar with a sense of the fantastical. Drawing, for Delrue, means creating emptiness via lines on a sheet of paper. That emptiness is occasionally poignant. The lines sometimes allow us to acutely feel something that isn't there, or which hurts beneath the skin. This is precisely what transforms his drawings into mental spaces. When exercised in total freedom, drawing makes the unthinkable possible and lends shape to the invisible. But it is certainly paradoxical. In no other medium does one have as much freedom as in drawing.

### 5. APPEARANCE AND DISAPPEARANCE

A painting or drawing by Ronny Delrue looks and feels as though it has been created in front of our very eyes. As though it has been painted apart, drawn open. Every brushstroke, every apparent line, marks the beginning of a trace across the canvas or paper. Line after line, stroke after stroke. The image in the painting or drawing remains open, because it originates from nothing, and is never a representation of an actual object. What Delrue draws or paints is a mental image of an inner feeling, a sensation that is born of something he once saw or felt, but which now assumes a new and different form. And when the psychological message has been imparted, the drawing or painting stops. The result is always sketchy and open, with room to absorb the viewer's own empathy and interpretation. Seeing a drawing or painting appear before your vigilant eyes could be called 'genetic looking'. The viewer is a witness, as it were, to the genesis of the image that gradually unfolds. It appears, quite literally, and the viewer experiences this at first hand.

In the painting *2002, V, 1* [Ill. 13], we see the figure of Pope John Paul II looming before us, a shadow, a transient form sketched in paint. However provisional and rarefied it may be, we cannot help but recognize the outline of the Polish Pope, Karol Wojtyła, in whom the physical degeneration of advanced old age outweighs the symbolism of his elevated

ecclesiastical role. The man has become a shadow of his former self, which is also how he is painted by Ronny Delrue. In rapid brushstrokes, just enough to convey the symbolism of power but also to reveal the disappearance of the person behind it; this is a man who will soon be lost in the mists of time. All that remains is the suffering figure and the hand, which is raised in benediction — pontifical power on the brink of vanishing. Thus, we see the prelate emerging from the paint as an idea, as an incomplete reality. He is painted over again, like a phantom that is painted away. The idea of power disappears in a puff of smoke. Ronny Delrue is able to make the memory of the image appear and disappear, as though a continuous action, one that is never and nowhere concluded.

Painting the Pope as an all-powerful, secular potentate has a long tradition, one that contemporary artists have augmented by dismantling the superiority of the image and reducing it to the last vestiges of humanity, or to that which is left behind when power has evaporated. In the seventeenth century, Velázquez painted an official portrait of Pope Innocent X, a Roman prelate, in all his magnificence and glory. The painting is realistic and compelling, while the Pope is an unapproachable figure. Three centuries later, and Francis Bacon made his own commentary on Velázquez's imposing portrait. In *Head VI* (1949), he paints the very same Pope Innocent X, only this time trapped within an imaginary cage. The froideur of the all-powerful Church is reduced to a series of fleeting and expressive brushstrokes that suggest little more than a gaping mouth. The vestiges of the head have been painted out, they have disappeared, taking with them any notion of superiority. It becomes a shadow, just as its distant, twentieth-century successor has become a shadow in the hands of Ronny Delrue.

The appearance and disappearance of an apparition, of course, is also what takes place during the treatment of the old photographs and Polaroids. And doubly so in the case of the anonymous, found images. Because everything that has disappeared, such as the identities of the figures in the works *Unknown Soldier 14–18, 2018, IX, 1* [Ill. 14] and *Lost Memory/6* (2006) [Ill. 15], is returned to our attention by Ronny Delrue. The anonymous people are resurrected and given a second life, they are returned to us

30

12 b  
V.v. G. *Memory Revisited*, perforated photograph, 19.2 x 12.1 (frame: 33 x 24 cm)  
12 c  
*Unknown Soldier World War I, 2018*, perforated photograph, 20.1 x 12 cm (frame: 33 x 24 cm)  
12 d  
*clinsdag* [Tuesday] 11.08.2004, *Gent* [Ghent], 14:54, 25.08.2004, mixed media on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm  
12 e  
*Karel*, 20.03.2001, watercolour on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm

from oblivion. At the same time, Delrue manipulates the image and makes the faces disappear beneath the black ink, so as to direct the viewer's gaze towards an interior world. The old images therefore acquire a dual dynamic.

Delrue made what he calls his 'Alzheimer drawings' in 2009 and 2010. As is typical, the titles also refer to their dates of creation. In this case: the first work is entitled *A/1 december* [December] 2009, the second *A/2 januari* [January] 2010 and the third *A/3 januari* [January] 2010 [Ill. 16]. This ensemble of three large-format drawings is designed to be hung on the wall, unframed. The end of each work terminates in a roll of paper on the floor. A seemingly simple image, but with huge implications. Because the drawings do not emerge from the rolls but are being wound back into them, the figures are on the brink of disappearing. What we can't see doesn't exist — or at least doesn't *appear* to exist. The drawings correspond to the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. Drawn by Ronny Delrue as grey figures composed of countless tiny areas of hatching, these three sufferers have holes in their memories. And therefore, slowly but surely, the traits that make them human are vanishing. Language, time, space, memory. When all of these are gone, our fate is sealed, and we disappear into oblivion. Forever. Ronny Delrue's Alzheimer's sufferers are thin and almost completely transparent. White dots rain into their heads, their identities are nothing more than a collection of innumerable miniscule lines. At the end, a roll of paper is waiting. At the point where the man is about to dissolve into nothingness, the drawing disappears into the roll. Drawing as a form of appearance and disappearance, an agonizingly slow process.

The theme of appearance and disappearance is a unique way of making time visible. Not only time as a universal and elusive phenomenon, but also as a particular relationship within its own environment. On the occasion of his son Pepijn's first birthday, Delrue drew and painted the child wearing a party hat, like a king with a crown: *Xiamen, 01/05/2009* [Ill. 17]. Fragile and sketchy, composed of little more than a few contour lines, a silhouette emerges from the white sheet of paper like a figure stepping out of the mist. It feels as though the drawing is trying to alert us to the fleeting nature of time. As soon as we try to define time, it

is already over: the moment has slipped from our grasp. Drawing is akin to a simultaneous act of appearance and disappearance, which therefore makes it an irreplaceable form of memory, simply because there is no other medium that gets under the skin as instantly and deeply as drawing.

The image of Delrue's mother and father, taken just before they moved out of their house permanently, is just as personal and intimate. Ronny Delrue photographed them standing at the window of their home in Heestert, West Flanders. We see the sansevieria plants on the windowsill and, reflected in the glass, glimpses of their autumnal garden [Ill. 18]. This simple but poignant photograph, which marks the end of an era, became the starting point for a series of drawings and adapted photographs. Yet Delrue permits the image to ripen, allows time to wash over it. By making a private moment so tangible, Delrue enables the image to transcend the anecdotal concepts of time and place, thereby rendering it abstract and universal. This parting shot is actually of everyone, and of all times. Objects remain while people disappear; life goes on.

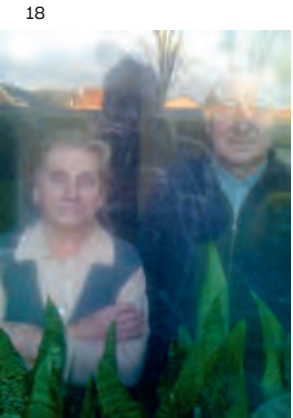
### 6. IN THE WORLD

Ronny Delrue's work is also predicated upon the anecdotal. This delineates his relationship with the world, the one beyond his studio, and begins with an event that touches him for some reason. A news bulletin — with a picture, of course, because Delrue is always looking for the image — about an armed Korean student who went on the rampage at an American university campus [Ill. 19]. A picture of the artist's parents just before they left their home for good. His encounter with a psychotic man, Karel, who inspired a handful of exceptional portraits. Delrue's day is topped and tailed by the world news, brought to him via the newspaper and TV despatches, but also by the inconsequential reports from within his own domestic sphere. The newspaper is his gateway to the world. It informs him about wars, crime, human misfortune ... in short, about the human condition. He gravitates towards the news because he is alert to the corruption of purity, the pollution of reason and of the natural world, and to the stripping away of human dignity.

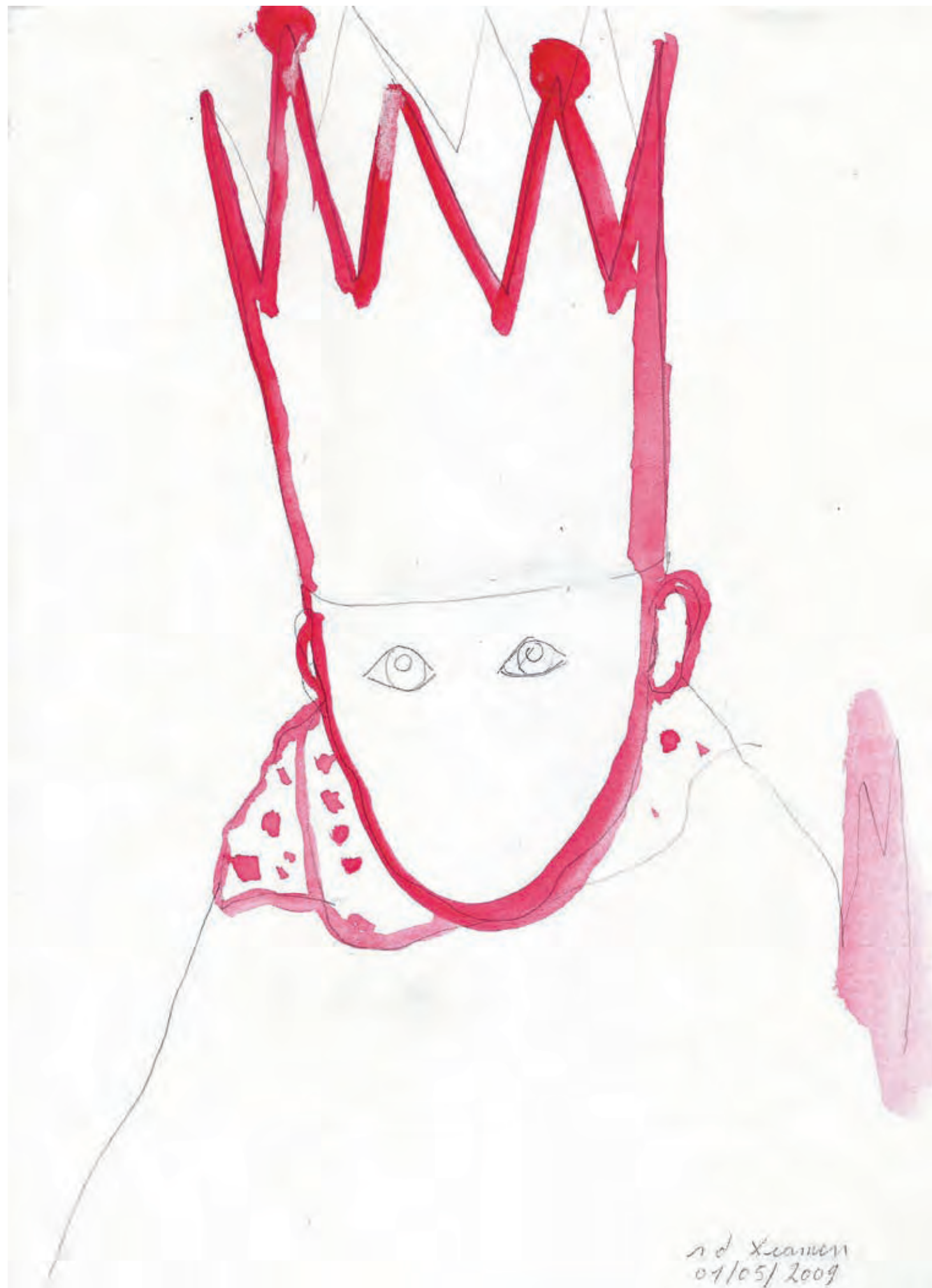
Delrue has been working for a long time on an unusual exchange of 'letters'

31

12 f  
*Ekeren Donk, maandag* [Monday], 26.02.2001, 14:51, pencil on paper, 30.1 x 24.7 cm  
14  
*Unknown Soldier 14–18, 2018, IX, 1*, acrylic paint on photograph and oil paint on glass and frame, 55.7 x 44.4 cm  
15  
*Lost Memory/6*, 2006, photographic print, 119.48 x 178 cm  
16  
*A/1 december* [December] 2009, *A/2 januari* [January] 2010, *A/3 januari* [January] 2010, 2009–2010, pencil on paper, 150 x 1000 cm (x 3, rolled)  
18  
*Herfst* [autumn], 2015, iPhone photograph, 16.2 x 12.4 cm







17  
Xiamen,  
01/05/2009,  
gouache  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



19  
C.S.-h, 2007/1,  
2007, acrylic  
paint and  
Chinese ink  
on canvas,  
200 x 200 cm

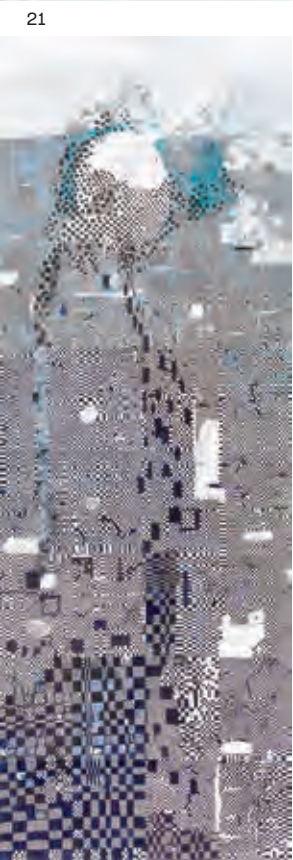


with the Iraqi visual artist Salam Atta Sabri, who has lived and worked in war-torn Baghdad since 2005, after returning from Jordan, where he had fled in 1997. The correspondence was instigated by Philippe Van Cauteren, the director of S.M.A.K. in Ghent. This is how it works: Ronny Delrue makes a drawing as a reflection of his daily life in Ghent, in the free, rich West. He folds the sheet, places it in an envelope, sticks a stamp on the front and mails it to Baghdad. Once delivered, Sabri continues the drawing by adding his own visual commentary, from the completely different perspective of his daily life in Baghdad, an existence in which fear and violence are commonplace. And Salam then posts the drawing back to Ghent, where Delrue adds more to this collaborative work-in-progress. It continues to this very day.

The starting point is a drawing that has become the messenger instead of the message. *The medium is the message, the message is the medium*. Simply by folding the drawing and inserting it in an envelope, writing the addresses of the sender and recipient, adding a stamp and sending it off to be franked. The reply assumes the same urgent form. The letters sometimes take a month to travel from the safety of Ghent to the war zone of Baghdad, and vice versa. Delrue is also engaged in a visual correspondence with the following artists: Mithu Sen from New Delhi, Sanjeev Maharjan from Kathmandu (Nepal), Martin Assig in Wiesenaue near Berlin and Roger Ballen from South Africa. This visual exchange is yet another way of relating to the world. Only in this case, the lines acquire an extra dimension. Art loses its apathy, becomes vital and engaged. The line, in this instance, becomes a razor-sharp expression of faith in humanity (even when we have reason enough to be sceptical).

In his drawings of Karel, a psychiatric patient in the grip of mania, Ronny Delrue has forged a personal bond with the fate of an individual. A person like Karel is also part of our world, he is one of us. Jan Hoet, the former director of S.M.A.K., who died in 2014, exhibited Karel's photograph, reworked by Ronny Delrue, in the *Middle Gate* art event in Geel, where Jan Hoet grew up [Ill. 20]. It was his last exhibition, but also the city in which his father had worked as a psychiatrist. A place which, over the centuries, has allowed mentally ill people to play an active part in public life.

Ronny Delrue got to know Karel, photographed him, painted him and drew him. Accessible and vulnerable. He vanquished



the portrait of Karel, so to speak, and transformed it into a mental image. It is as if he has opened a window into the head of the mentally ill Karel. As though he wants to bring us closer to Karel's fearful world, as a reminder that none of us are immune to such a fate. And at the same time, Karel is transformed from anxious patient to protagonist in a drawing: a dreamer, a fantasist and, in a sense, also an artist.

In 2015 Ronny Delrue, accompanied by other artists, walked part of the Camino de Santiago, the ancient pilgrimage route that leads through the northern Spanish countryside to Santiago de Compostela. A journey with a spiritual dimension that was ensconced in the tiring reality of the body propelling itself forward in the world, with all of the accompanying weather conditions and attendant inconveniences. Delrue has made drawings of that road, but not only of the actual path beneath his feet and the surrounding landscape, but also of his feelings and experiences. A glimpse into his inner world: the endlessness, the repetition, the rhythm of the countless steps that were taken day after day, losing the way, the emptiness, the arrival. In the Camino drawings, all of these sensations are articulated line by line, with the patience and despair of the pilgrim, as an almost obsessive form of monastic labour. All of those lines are akin to his innumerable steps, to the idea of a never-ending journey. The lines in the drawings converge, diverge, intensify and collide with the voids in the mind map. If drawing is a form of research, then it is also a search for the spiritual. It is undertaken through drawing but finds its origin in a real journey through the physical world [Ill. 21].

In other respects, the Camino drawings do more than just chart a journey. They are also a metaphor for drawing itself, as an artistic attitude. Because just as the pilgrimage to Compostela is about the journey, not the arrival, so too Ronny Delrue's drawings are about the mental process, the ongoing quest, the excursion into an emotional world. The never-ending journey. It is not the drawing itself that is the final goal, but the route that is taken. Drawing is like a pilgrimage, a detour, but one that offers the quickest route to ourselves.

The art of Ronny Delrue is perhaps akin to a form of poetry, one that inspires us to marvel at the world, at *our* world.

20  
Karel, 2013,  
photograph  
of a Polaroid  
accentuated  
in Chinese ink,  
18 x 13.5 cm

21  
El Camino,  
2016, ink  
on paper,  
237 x 84 cm



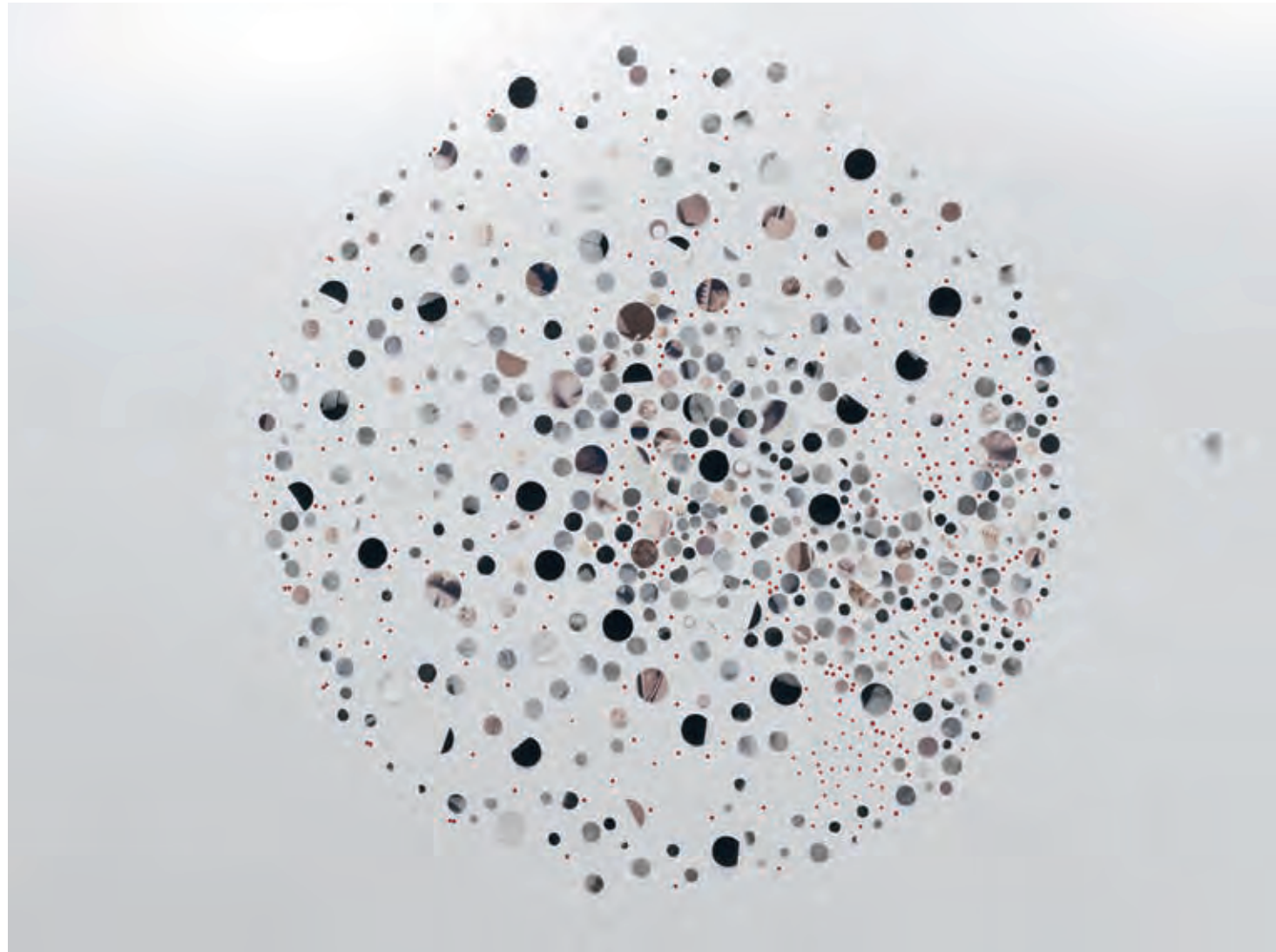


*Lost Memory/5,*  
2006, photo-  
graphic print,  
121.11 x 178 cm





*The Maharjan  
Family, 2017,  
30 x 44 cm*



*The Maharjan  
Caste, 2017,  
fragments of  
photographs  
and tikkas,  
49 x 60 cm*



*The Maharjan  
Caste, 2017  
(detail)*





*Chemical  
Snow, XI, 1,*  
2016, oil  
on canvas,  
38 x 60 cm





*When Cultures  
Come  
Together, VIII,  
2, 2017, tikkas  
on oil painting,  
40 x 50 cm*





*Protected  
Landscape,*  
2017, mixed  
media,  
20 x 45 cm  
Photograph:  
Faryda  
Moumouh





*Landscape  
without Saints,*  
2015, mixed  
media, dusty  
glass bell  
jars, table:  
165 x 63 cm



*House without  
Saint,* 2016,  
wood, glass,  
electrical  
cable, 64.5 x  
51 x 33 cm



V.v. G. *Memory  
Revisited*,  
perforated  
photograph,  
19.2 x 12.1 cm



Unknown  
*Soldier World  
War I*, 2018,  
perforated  
photograph,  
20.1 x 12 cm  
(frame:  
33 x 24 cm)



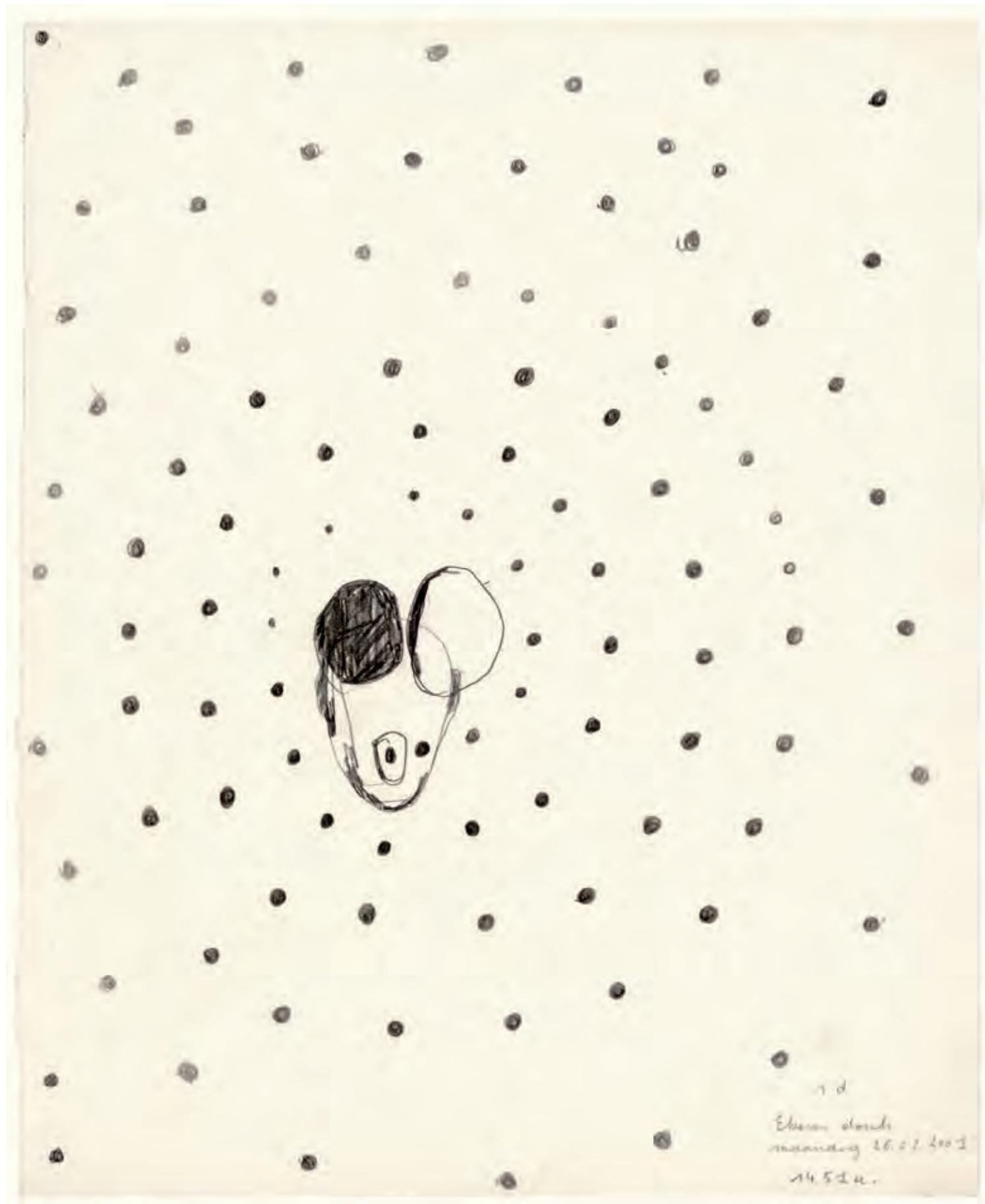


dinsdag  
[Tuesday]  
11.08.2004,  
Gent [Ghent],  
14:54,  
25.08.2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



Karel,  
20.03.2001,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

Ekeren Donk,  
maandag  
[Monday],  
26.02.2001,  
14:51, pencil  
on paper,  
30.1 x 24.7 cm







Unknown  
Soldier 14-18,  
2018, IX, 1,  
acrylic paint  
on photograph  
and oil paint  
on glass  
and frame,  
55.7 x 44.4 cm



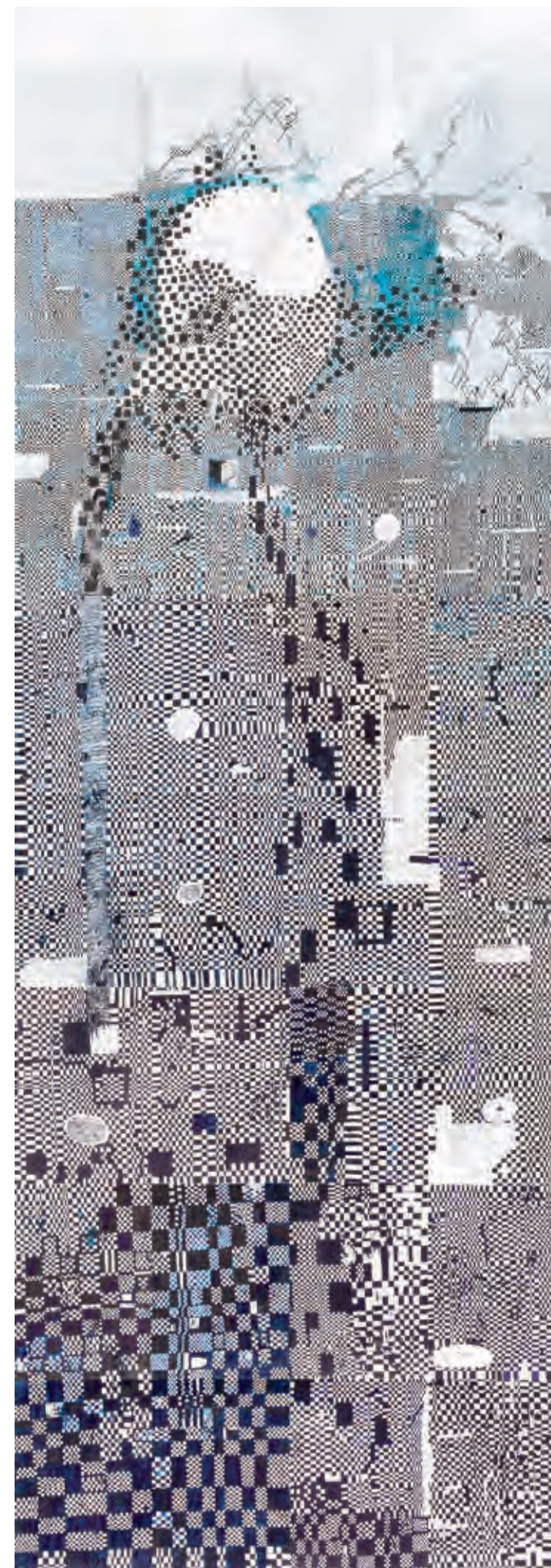
Lost  
Memory/6,  
2006,  
photographic  
print, 119.48 x  
178 cm





*A/1 december*  
[December]  
*2009, A/2 janu-*  
*ari* [January]  
*2010, A/3*  
*januari*  
[January]  
*2010, 2009-*  
*2010*, pencil  
on paper,  
150 x 1000 cm  
(x 3, rolled)





*El Camino*,  
2016, ink  
on paper,  
237 x 84 cm



# The Case of the Face

## MARK SADLER

Ronny Delrue draws as he paints and paints as he draws. The former does not prepare for the latter, nor the latter complete the former. His work is a lexicon that manifests itself across various scales and media, but the voice that originates it is always recognizable in its tenacity and in its patient translating of lived experience.

I am standing inside Ronny Delrue’s studio in Ghent, leafing through hundreds of drawings that constitute an archive of experience that has a diaristic aspect to it. These are the thoughts and movements of a traveller advancing on a decades-long journey between the two mysterious continents of the self and the other.

In his drawings, Delrue pursues a spatio-temporal mode of thinking that is situated both in the lived moment of looking at the world and in his own inner reflections. There is a web-like materiality to the often inky beginnings of many works apparently laid out to catch his subsequent thoughts like a spider its prey. The initial forms he draws provide a departure point for further meditations on the human condition and the mysteries of human consciousness. The subject matter and means of execution are imbued with tension: water-colour meets ink, the socially alienated outsider becomes interchangeable with the pathologically normalized good consumer, the ‘me’ merges with the ‘you’.

Like a dialogue between knowledge imbued by sight and the subsequent questioning and search for meaning via thought, these two registers drive the subjects of the drawings by complementary material handling. Proceeding through the sheets that are roughly A4 in scale, two distinct registers emerge. The first is the above webbed one, comprised of a repertoire of lines mostly in black or red, going up and down, back and forth, sometimes spiralling, sometimes morphing into punctuation dots. The second register is opaque, mysterious and troubling, operating as a kind of cloudy effacement which acts as a counterpoint to the clarity of the first.

Delrue’s repertoire of marks and colours is consistently recognizable as it weaves in and out of several overlapping subject categories. There are figures — drawing once a week from a live model provides Delrue with an exercise in looking, but more importantly, a departure point from which to arrive at a freer and



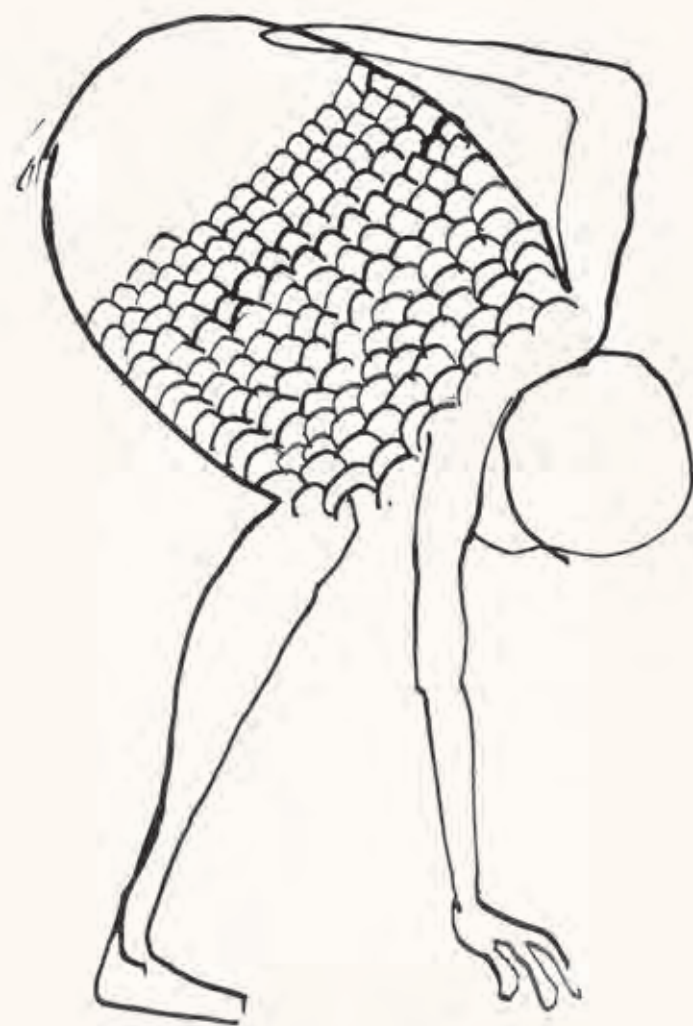
more radical image of the figure that he finds in the *Cerebriraptor* series. There are many faces — partially erased or rendered mask-like with schematic eyes. Next are the pages and pages of diagrams that are hard to classify, like lists of future tasks and plans written during a long train ride. Then finally there is the *Karel* series whose central character appears in the midst of Delrue’s journey like a guide to a new territory of the mind.

POROUS BORDERS OF THE FLESH:  
THE CEREBRIRAPTOR

Delrue’s life drawings are pretexts for describing aspects of inner experience that slip out of the grasp of language. He is not interested in the plastic reality of the model before him. The dry line describing the contour of a body is a porous border through which aqueous materialities and immaterialities pass freely. These clouds and dots reminiscent of organisms seen under a microscope feel alternately visceral and spectral in nature. They may refer to thoughts or vital energies emanating from the drawn figure but they are also a means to activate the drawing itself, to subvert the initial elegance of a well-placed line and render the thought process of an artist visible. Is this how thought moves through the mind? Which are the thoughts of the subject and which are those of the artist? The life drawings have an inherent reciprocity to them, whereby the model invites Delrue to tell them what is on his mind and Delrue, by using the model as receiver, gains access to his own subconscious manifested on the page as amorphous shapes and marks emanating from the body of the sitter. One is the doctor and the other the patient but which is which? And secondly, to whom does Delrue believe these weird shapes truly belong? If this mapping of physiology and psychology is an analysis of the personal subconscious — and potentially the collective unconscious — submerged in the materials of drawing, then Delrue’s activity might be considered that of a poetic clinician. In certain drawings (*13.07.2009*) [Ill. 1], Delrue draws tight concentric rings around the surface of the body, giving it the cartographical contours of a mysterious territory. In *19.11.2011*, *10.10.2011* [Ill. 2], a black disc with red spots functions as a menacing parasol over the delicate figure, completely masking its head. There



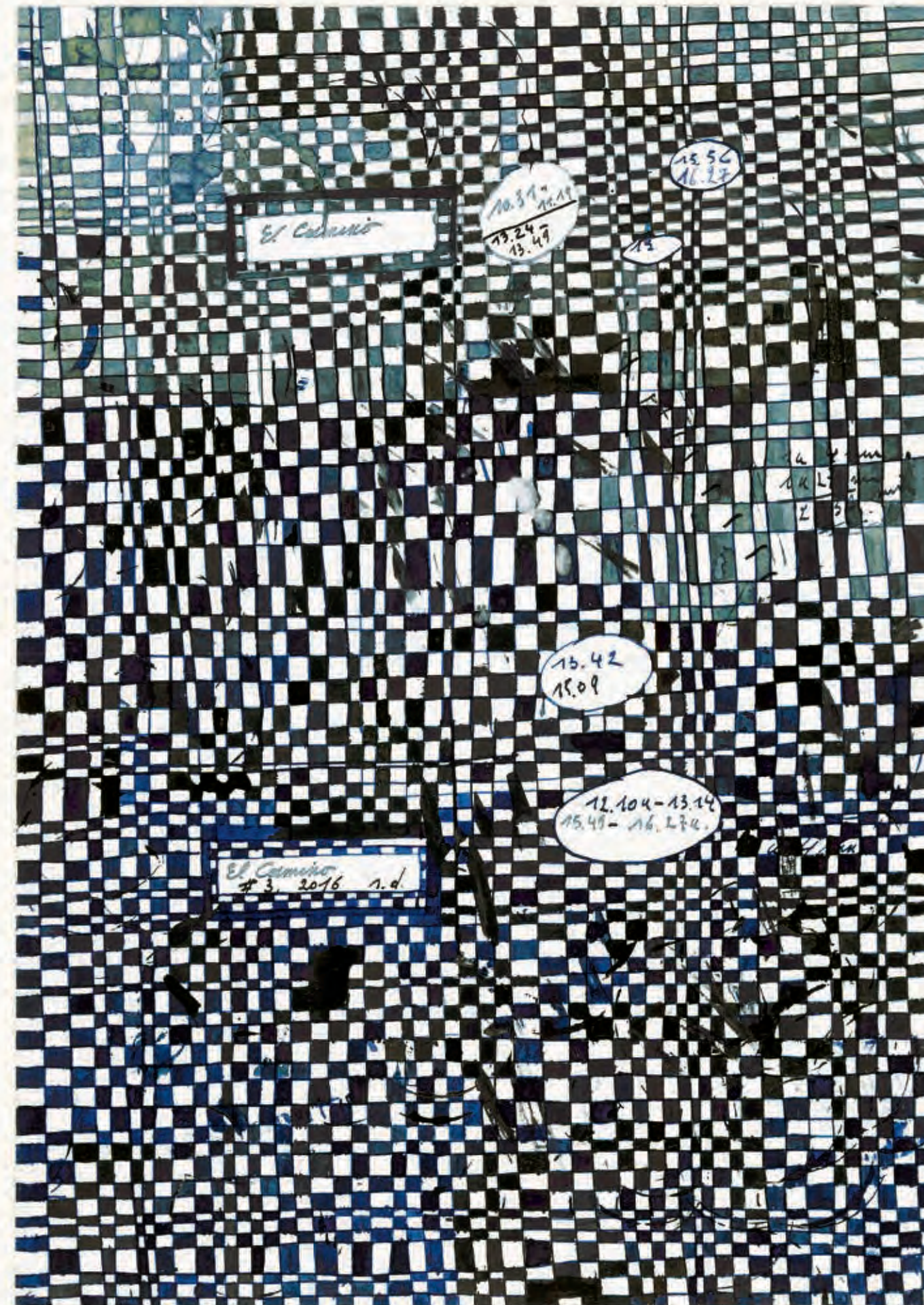
3  
Cerebriraptor,  
25.05.2016,  
21:05, Gent  
[Ghent],  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



- cerebriraptor -

n.d. 25.05.2016, 21.05u gent

4  
El Camino  
#3, 2016, ink  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





is progressive distortion until the hybrid cerebriraptor has been achieved. Here it is Delrue the poetic clinician who is at work, demonstrating explicit concerns for what he observes to be a contemporary social pathology: the cerebriraptor. The term is best summarized as the constant stimulation by electronic media which haunts our times like a mythical beast we cannot slaughter. Too many images, too many emails, too much electronic prompting — they all constitute an assault on our senses and work against the attainment of a meditative state. Delrue embodies this phenomenon as a phantom carnivorous parasite. The eponymous cerebriraptor drawing from 25.05.16 [Ill. 3] is the signature image of the entire series, describing a female form whose upper abdomen appears swollen with a multitude of little eggs. Bent over at a drastic pivoting angle due to the weight of her inner burden, she appears either pregnant or infested, struggling with what is growing inside.

THE MYTH OF FIXED IDENTITY

Delrue speaks openly of his wish to discover something he does not yet know through drawing. To that end, he employs methodologies and counter-methodologies. In *El Camino #3* from 2016 [Ill. 4], he refers to the famous Spanish pilgrimage, condensing hundreds of kilometres on one small sheet of paper. It is the intense journey of a doodler, patterning and scribbling around keywords, bridging them with some coloured squares and rectangles. The result is like a notepad page where important information written down at the beginning of a phone call comes close to being engulfed by the restless wanderings of a weary listener's pen.

In a series of drawings from 2005, Delrue wordlessly plots the morphological journey of a thinker. In *moen, 1:20, dinsdag [Tuesday], 19.07.2005* [Ill. 5], a featureless melancholy head rests heavily in the hollow of its hand. The next day (*moen 20.07.2005, 02:33*) [Ill. 6], the same head has raised itself up, developed eyes and thread lines reaching out from its forehead into the surrounding space. Within the hour (*moen, woensdag [Wednesday], 20.07.2005, 02:56*) [Ill. 7], these threads have attached themselves to a schematic house or barn which seems to pull the head back down into its melancholy torpor. By the next day (*21.07.2005, 01:23 — moen,*



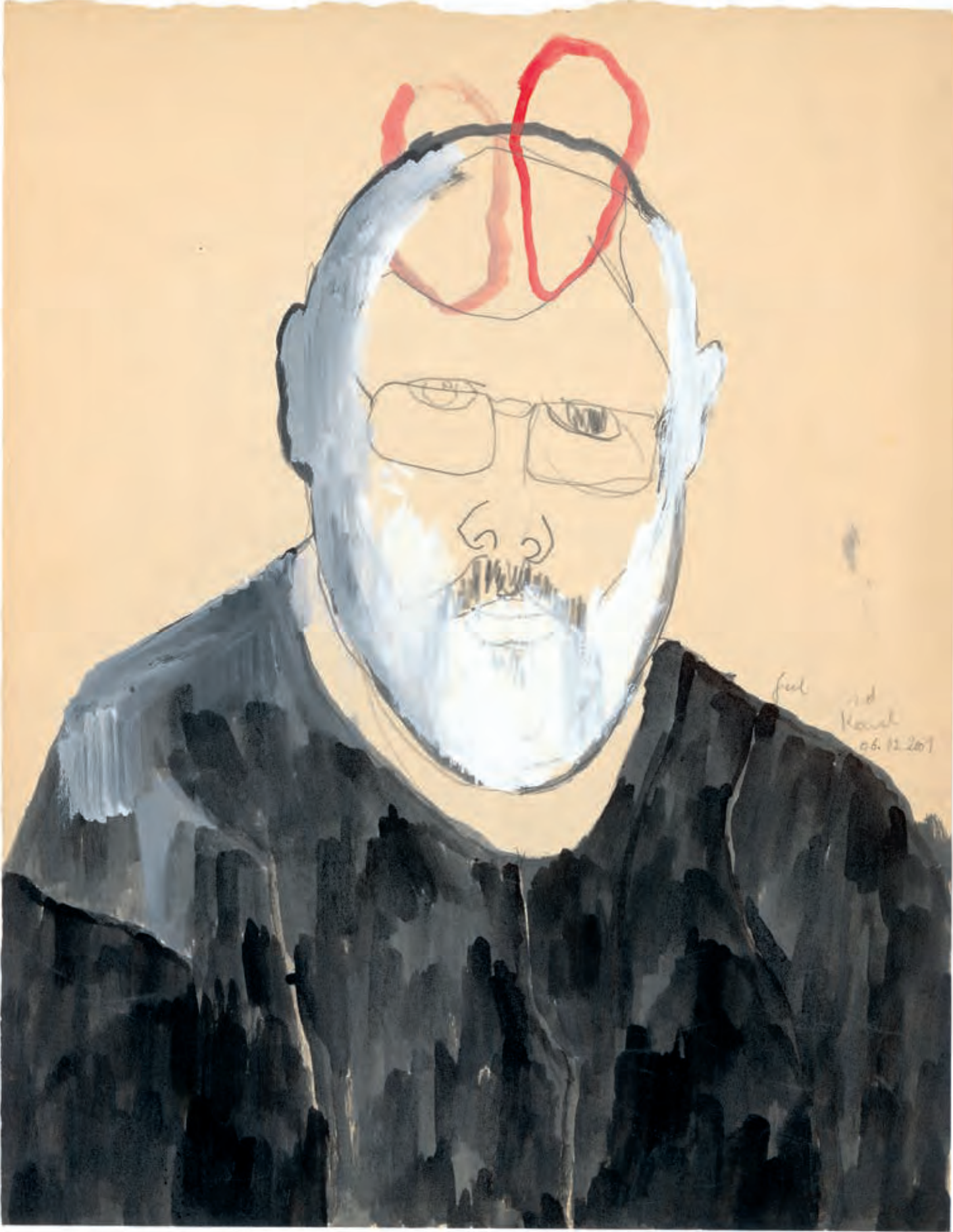
*21.07.2005, 00:19*) [Ill. 8], the barn/house has itself grown in size, transformed by warm watery colours into something more meaty: the head in turn has shrunk to a deflated black balloon. A tug of war ensues between head and house across half a dozen other drawings: the face generates masks, sometimes animal-like, the house becomes a harp to hang oneself from — till both are eventually merged, pinned down by violent strokes of grey, white and black paint through which the red woven grid of a tattered calendar glows *01:50, 21.07.2005, moen* [Ill. 9]. This series is profoundly melancholy, yet beautiful. If the heads are self-portraits, then there is an unbounded confessional aspect to them reminiscent of Samuel Beckett. Though shot through with sadness, Delrue's protagonists still seem to hint at a belief in other people and in communication. Many of his faces seem to be a meditation on the opacity of the other facing us and obscuring what could be interpreted as the access lines of empathy. Looking at these drawings calls to mind Emmanuel Levinas's phrase 'the face of the other' used in conversation with Philippe Nemo: 'Access to the face is straightaway ethical. (...) There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill.'<sup>1</sup>

LINES AS LEVELLERS

Ronny Delrue practises a kind of inversion of hierarchies throughout his oeuvre. He levels his subjects by means of blackening or greying over faces or entire bodies to create silhouettes. Thus the crowned head of his son, the same crown on anonymous adult shoulders, and a nineteenth-century child with a hoop all read as cyphers for Delrue to inhabit. Less a kind of overflowing of empathy, they are an imagined collapse of the self into the other. The inferred commentaries are not fixed by subject matter but embedded in material manipulations. The questioning of social status preoccupies Delrue and

66

5  
*moen, 1:20, dinsdag [Tuesday], 19.07.2005*, pencil on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm  
6  
*moen, 20.07.2005, 02:33, Chinese* ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm  
7  
*moen, woensdag [Wednesday], 20.07.2005, 02:56*, ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm  
8  
*21.07.2005, 01:23 — moen, 21.07.2005, 00:19*, mixed media on paper, 28.7 x 20.9 cm



12  
*Karel, Geel, 06.02.2001*, mixed media on paper, 32.5 x 25 cm



it extends beyond his drawings, encompassing his large-scale photo works, paintings and reappropriated images. A key work is *Eugène Bovy 2016, V II, 2* [Ill. 10], which consists of a framed oval oil portrait of a nineteenth-century gentleman that Delrue found at a flea market and overpainted, reducing the sitter to a charred silhouette. This gesture may be a snipe at the smug nineteenth-century bourgeoisie — like a moustache painted on for fun that got out of hand — but it is also a means to reinvigorate the painted image through overpainting, giving it a new lease of life, a new universal identity. The gesture of effacing Eugène Bovy may well have been an unconscious one, but without this erasure, the subsequent portraits of a twenty-first-century man may well not have happened. Here I am speaking of the series of portraits of Karel. Bovy’s loss will be Karel’s gain.

In 2001 Ronny Delrue met Karel, a resident at the psychiatric hospital (OPZ) at Geel, once a week for a total of eight weeks in the town where psychiatric patients live in town with ordinary families. Delrue’s visits to Geel formed part of the preparation for his participation in the exhibition *Y.E.L.L.O.W.* by the legendary curator Jan Hoet, whose father, a doctor, at one time worked in the Geel hospital. Delrue went to Geel once a week, finding in Karel, he says, an authentic artistic mind, unconstrained by the mask-wearing of contemporary society. Karel, who suffers from a psychotic mental illness, is a very talented and prodigious draughtsman. Delrue drew Karel and Karel drew Delrue. According to Delrue, Karel’s predisposition to fantasy, when not sedated by medication, provided access to inner territories that a self-conscious, so-called normal person struggles to reach. In *Geel, 06.02.2001* [Ill. 11], the fact that ‘Geel’, the name of the town where the psychiatric hospital is located, is also the Dutch world for ‘yellow’, a colour associated with mental illness, is capitalized on by Delrue who presents Karel as a schematic face with a yellow circle for a mouth. Entering or emerging from this mouth are a multitude of smaller yellow discs which form a halo around his head. Held within the halo and sat on the crown of the head are two further yellow shapes that resemble the hemispheres of the brain separated from each other. Is this Karel freeing himself from the sedative effect of his medication? This appears to be the case, since in



*Karel, Geel, 06.02.2001* [Ill. 12], Delrue presents a bearded, more classically recognizable Karel in a black shirt and with the two brain lobes still atop his head, but this time rendered in two red lines. This banalized, less fantastical image hints at the everyday sedation which Karel lives under much of the time.

In 2014 Karel became the subject of an exhibition by Delrue at the CIAP art space in Hasselt. Karel was present at CIAP in several ways: as a series of portraits by Delrue, in photographs, and lastly as name tags. These tags — all bearing the name ‘Karel’ — were distributed to each of the visitors on the opening night. Karel himself was present to witness first-hand this gesture of collapsing identities and merging into one. Everyone is Karel and Karel is everyone. The border between normality and psychiatric illness becomes a porous one.

This brings us back to the portrait of Eugène Bovy and its role in complexifying the portraits that Delrue made of Karel. The oval outline of the Eugène Bovy painting appears in the *Karel* exhibition as a red perimeter that frames the face and shoulders of Karel in several of Delrue’s full-length portraits [Ill. 13]. This gesture ties the process of the continual echo of a previous painted identity (Bovy) with that of a new contemporary figure (Karel). This palimpsest of identities also operates as a kind of security bubble around Karel’s head, recalling the safe zone of proximity commonly associated with autists, beyond which lies danger or the hell that is other people. It can also be viewed as a kind of auratic halo that delineates the frontier of the psyche as existing beyond the perimeter of the flesh.

### CONCLUSION

Several questions begin to emerge. Is Delrue’s gesture of ‘face-making’ one of effacement or masking? When he overpaints an antique oil portrait (*Eugène Bovy 2016, VII, 2*) or reduces a crowned figure to a blank silhouette (*The King, 16.02.2012*) [Ill. 14], or simply draws a mask in the place of a face: are these acts destructive, protective or salvatory? Is the empty face a zone of desolation or a merging of identities to provide a kind of Jungian collective territory? The face is a case in which consciousness dwells, in front of which hang masks and on top of which sit crowns or other attributes of social status.

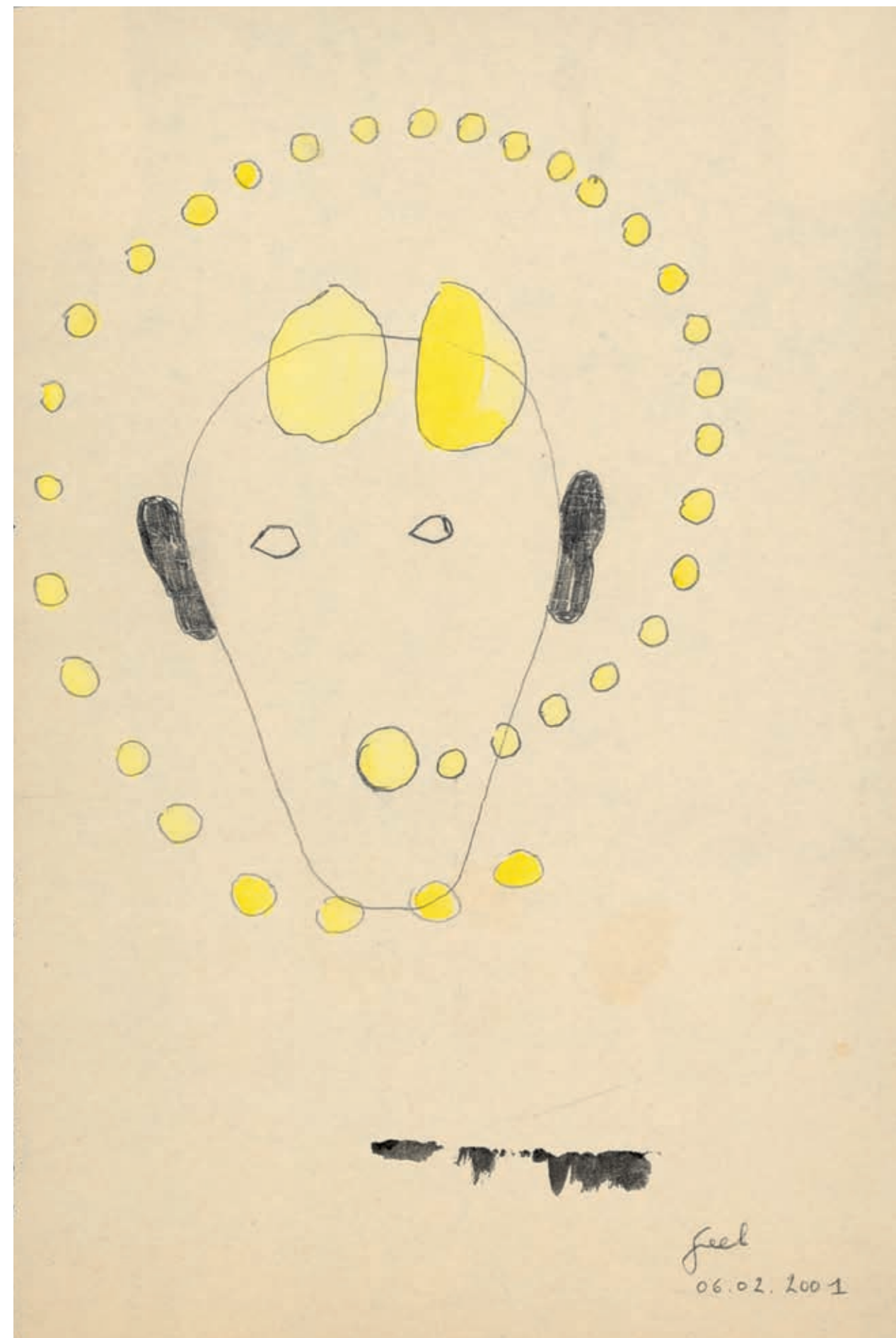
9  
*01:50, 21.07.2005, moen, mixed media on paper, 28.7 x 20.9 cm*  
10  
*Eugène Bovy, 2016, VII, 2, oil on canvas with frame, 77 x 69 cm*  
13  
*Karel, 2013, IX, 1, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm*  
14  
*The King, 16.02.2012, mixed media on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm*

This territory has already been mapped out by Delrue’s compatriot James Ensor. The mask and the crown are attributes that belong to archetypes and, like Ensor’s, Delrue’s archetypes hover between the carnivalesque and the psychologically troubled. Whereas Ensor navigated the psyche by means of caricature, Delrue seeks to uncase the face, releasing a rawer mode of existence from its protective vitrine and perhaps catching consciousness unawares in all its embarrassing poverty and nakedness that Levinas speaks of. In uncasing consciousness, we come to see the ego as prey to a continual morphology that dismantles the myths about selfhood and normality.

Mark Sadler  
Artist and writer

1  
*Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Trans. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1995, pp. 85-86.

Geel,  
06.02.2001,  
mixed media  
on papier,  
24,9 x 16,4 cm





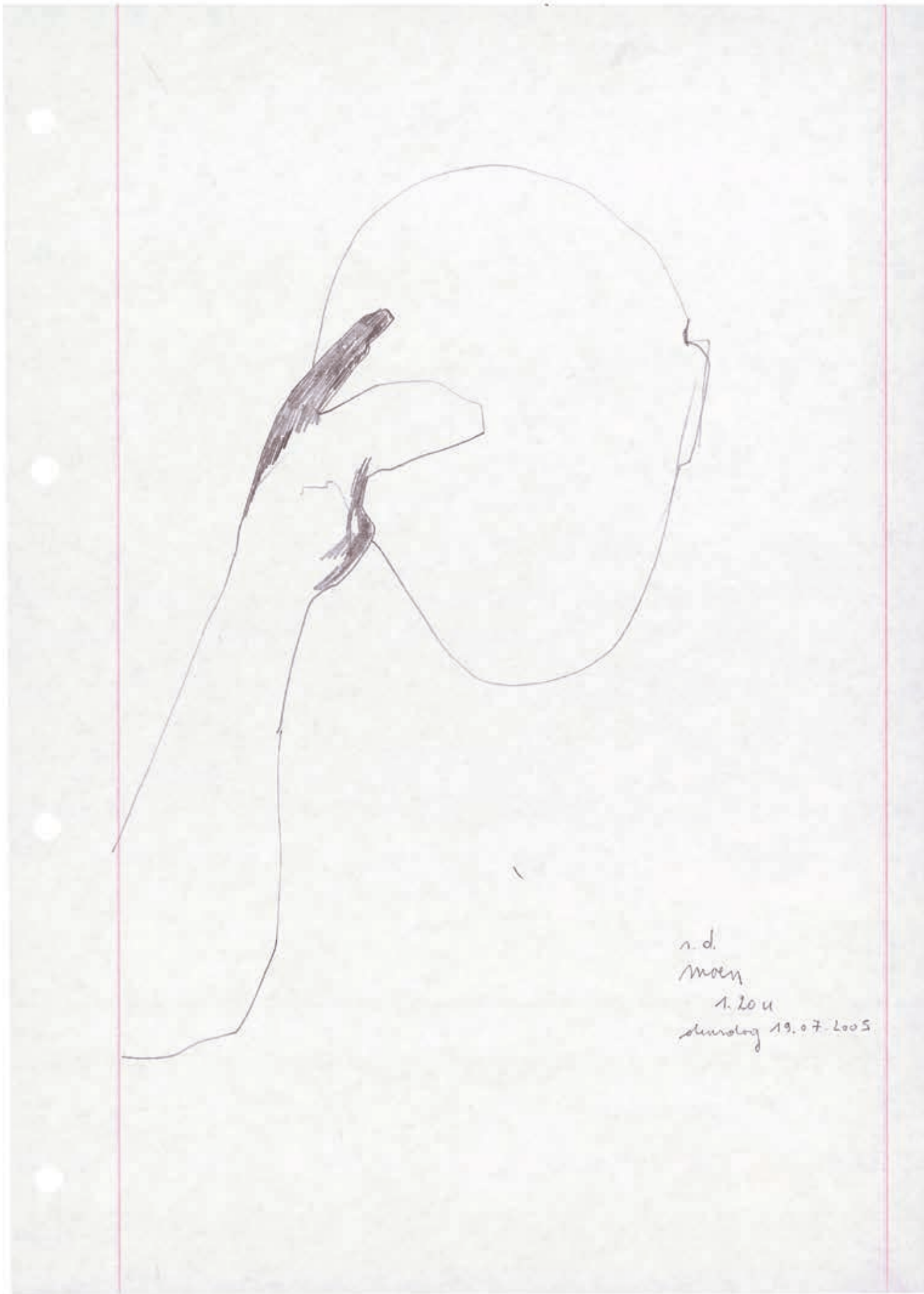


13.07.2009,  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
34.2 x 24.3 cm

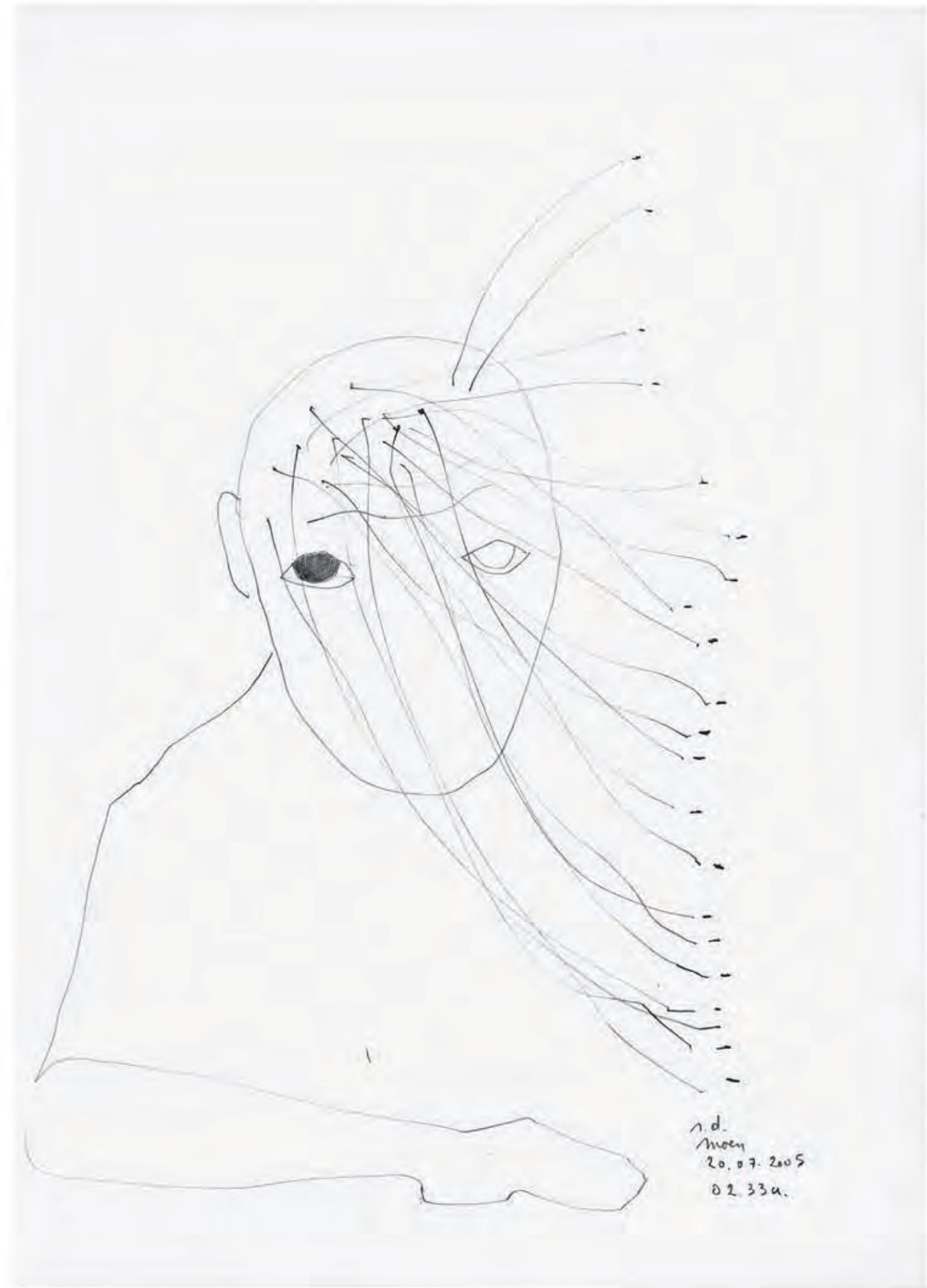


19.11.2011,  
10.10.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
34.2 x 24.3 cm

19.11.2011  
10.10.2011



moen, 1:20,  
donderdag  
[Thursday],  
19.07.2005,  
pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



moen,  
20.07.2005,  
02:33, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



moen,  
woensdag  
[Wednesday],  
20.07.2005,  
02:56, ink  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



moen woensdag 20.07.2005  
02.56 u.



21.07.2005,  
01:23 - moen,  
21.07.2005,  
00:19,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
28.7 x 20.9 cm



01:50,  
21.07.2005,  
moen,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
28.7 x 20.9 cm



*Eugène Bovy,  
2016, VII, 2,  
oil on canvas  
with frame,  
77 x 69 cm*





*Karel, 2013,  
IX, 1, oil  
on canvas,  
200 x 150 cm*



# Seventy Drawings

## by Ronny Delrue

### HERMAN PARRET

#### 1. THE HAND OF THE MAKER

On 17 October 1938, Paul Valéry gave his exalted and sensitive *Address to the Congress of Surgeons* in the amphitheatre of the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, a sublime apologia for the hand, be it that of a surgeon, an engraver or draughtsman.<sup>1</sup> The miraculous machine that is the hand can accomplish much: from the banal act of tying a knot, via creative interventions in communicative interactions (like when using a finger to point out something or make an ostensive gesture), to the ultimate philosophical act: *the ‘grasping’ (understanding) of reality through ‘touch’*. The ‘grasping’ of reality is always a triumph over scepticism, an exploratory discovery of potential, and the acquisition of positive certainty. The hand initially functions through its primal physicality and the impulse is to transcend this via the invention of words, concepts and reasons, which are subsequently shared within the subject’s community. The multifunctionality of the hand is immense and the taxonomy of its ‘interventions’, both in and upon the world, is inexhaustible: the hand pounds, beats and blesses, receives and pours, nourishes, curses, is a unit of measure, reads for the blind, speaks for the dumb, reaches out to friends and lovers, scratches to alleviate an itch, lashes out at intruders, and both pummels and caresses. This is also true of the surgeon’s hand that penetrates into the bloody living tissue of the body and, in so doing, probes the actual ‘life’ of the flesh. This hand, which is skilled in cutting and sewing, therefore develops an artistic approach. The surgeon, like the artist, does not execute an impersonal act that is governed by a predetermined programme. The surgeon is an artisan because the most essential thing is the physical doing, rather than the intentionality or stricture of completing a cognitive programme.

In these times of conceptualism and cognitivism, the hand is falsely considered to be the organ of the brain — which would imply that the surgeon’s hand is a kind of slavish enactor of a digital input. The fact that, on the contrary, the artist’s hand has a direct, fusional and indicative contact with ‘reality’ is confirmed by a study of Delrue’s drawings. I situate the draughtsman’s hand within a broader panorama of hands, including those belonging to the surgeon, pianist, engraver, ceramicist and sculptor. It is difficult not to refer to Michelangelo’s unfinished sculptures in which the brute materiality of the marble bears the scars of the obsessional work conducted by the carving hand and its prostheses, the hammer and the chisel. The art of ‘making’ is *manuopera*, manoeuvre, the hand’s ‘oeuvre’, the ‘doing/making hand’. It is erroneous to assert that the hand executes what the mind conceives, for the hand is not its slave. Nor does the hand produce the mechanics of the depiction but is rather the instrument of making it present, and this is the *labour* that perpetually vanquishes material resistance. Man’s awareness of the matter that surrounds him — rocks, tree stumps, leaves,

water — and of its natural resilience is principally experienced via the hand; their graininess, hardness or coldness, also their immobility, are all qualities that are registered by touch, and these immediate and radical sensations are not mediated by cognition and reflection. They rest upon, and simultaneously provoke, a sensory impact. The movement of the hand is not triggered by some kind of efficacy or need, but is rather a muscular experience that culminates in a euphoric or dysphoric sensation. Sensations emanate from the hand, this privileged part of the body, and spread further, unchecked by consciousness. Plurisensory lyricism is thus a product of the hand: from touching to stroking, and from grasping to probing, modes of aesthetic experience, lyrical but not conscious, unintentional. Yet the hand has an extended ‘physiological anatomy’ that is cultivated, among others, by draughtsmen. An excellent example of which are the fingers that culminate in being a hand. It seems as though the body, shoulders and torso are organized around the palm, and that the latter is constructed from the fingers, those energetic digits that glide, explore, press and capture. The hand ‘sings’ with its fingers and releases the forces of pushing and sliding, as evidenced by the liberated agency of the pianist’s fingers. The fingers’ flight across the keyboard is akin to the scuttling of a swift crab. In drunkenness, which loosens the hands and makes fingers overly agile and adventurous, there is no rational strategy or cogent project at work. Such lyrical dexterity of this kind merely follows the course of the intrepid crab that traces poetic figures in space and, in this respect, is akin to a signifying practice.

In the immense corpus of drawings that Delrue has executed since 2005, I can identify only five that depict hands — most of these are ‘portraits’ of one kind or another — each one exemplifying my phenomenological introduction to the artist’s way of working [drawings 1-5]. I consider this first group of works as the optimal gateway to understanding Ronny Delrue’s drawings. The basic intuition that leads Delrue to draw *a crab-hand*, the ‘making hand’, does indeed form the origin of the entire genealogy of themes that I will elaborate upon in this essay. The hands do not belong to a recognizable individual who can be deemed a poet or draughtsman — at most a pair of empty eyes are indicated, a schematic head broken down into concentric bands, a decorative mask with graceful abstractions of blue and red dots ... However, this is the ‘making hand’ of the draughtsman, which is explicitly referred to in the lower right-hand corner of drawing 1: the paper,

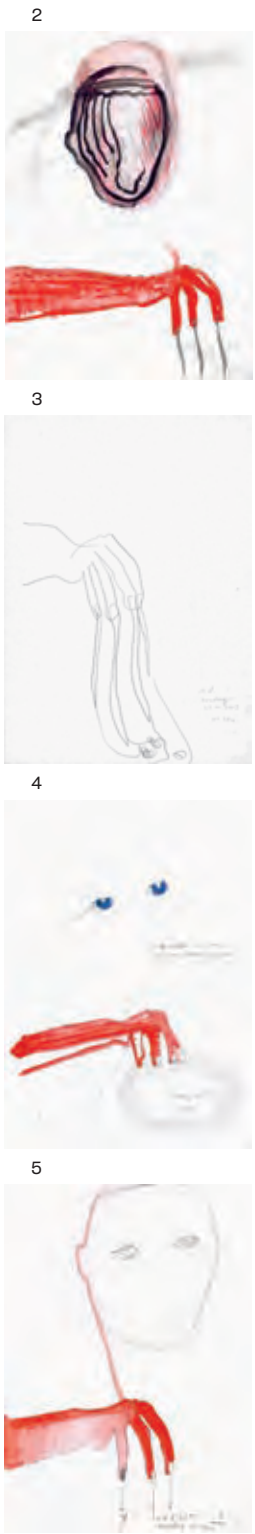




1  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
01:03, moen,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

or perhaps parchment, is opened out, and the left hand, connected to the crab-hand via a sketchy line, is the draughtsman's real hand, holding the pencil. Such an explicit link to an actual referent is exceptional in Delrue's work and is of extraordinary hermeneutic importance. The crab-hand, or the 'making hand', does indeed belong to the artist — but is dysphoric, scratching and injurious rather than caressing or euphoric. Its sharp, metallic, elongated nails 'scratch', incise and engrave. They have become, as it were, prostheses for the fingers, like a sculptor's chisel, the etcher's burin, or the draughtsman's nib and sharpened pencil, sandwiched between thumb, index and middle finger [drawing 2]. The 'crabbiness' of the instrumentalized hand is accentuated by the addition of these mechanical prostheses to the flesh of the draughtsman's fingers. The black-and-white drawing 3 suggests how the prosthetic protuberances of the hand create fibrous lines, shapes such as calyces, drawings *to be*. Drawing 5 reveals something similar: here the prosthetic fingertips generate mathematical formulas — the digits with their sharp, harmful nails produce 'knowledge', however preposterous. The 'making hand' of the draughtsman might engender beauty, but it is always shrouded in pain, imperfection and absurdity.

Drawing 4 is probably the crab-signature that throws the paradox of Delrue's 'making hand' into sharp relief. The blue pseudo-animate eyes seem to sympathize with the pseudo-creative process of the artist's fingers, the creators of a pond-like elliptical structure. Classical harmony and academic equilibrium are justified in a syntagma that Delrue has explicitly noted in this drawing dated 23.10.2005: 'Eyes *catch* more than/hands can *hold*.' The crab-hand *holds*, pinches and hurts, but the eye 'catches', although not in complete contiguity with its material correlate but from an alienating distance. And so it would seem that a 'reasonableness' is built into the 'catching' of the eyes: not the 'holding' of the crab but the 'catching' of the jaguar that takes its time in order to calculate the radical destruction of the intended prey [Details of drawings 1–5]. The 'making hand', which I praised as an opening into the aesthetics of Delrue's drawings, accentuates the fact that his artistic activity is determined by the tension between 'catching with the eye'



and 'grasping with the hand', or the jaguar and the crab. Determining the specific impact of sight and touch within the aesthetic experience is fiendishly difficult, as much for the *felix aestheticus*, or art viewer/lover, as for the creative artist himself. One hesitates to state that the reproductive aesthetic experience of the *felix aestheticus* and the productive aesthetic experience of the artist are both based on a *synaesthetic* interaction in which different sensory potentialities converge. It must surely be possible to connect, in some form or another, the proximity of the probing/feeling with the distance of the gaze from its material correlate. Looking and touching are never truly autonomous — embedded in the body, both eyes and hands are in a state of constant interaction. The subject 'sees' a movement because it is deduced through the motility of the hand. I would also point out that apprehending the spatial movements of lines, shapes and figures is accompanied by reflexive and anatomically restricted hand movements. The artist's hand can only be 'creative' when it becomes one with the eye. 'Doing', in the visual sense, presupposes the interaction of eye and hand, and of seeing and touching. The 'job' of looking can be dangerously derailed when it loses all 'feeling' for the 'presence of things', through extreme abstraction, symbolization and idealization for example, and consequently disregards the contribution of the hand. A loss of concreteness is the result of such a short circuit between hand and eye. An initial series of drawings by Ronny Delrue related to the 'making hand' [drawings 1–5] have thus led us to the core question at the heart of his aesthetics: what does it mean to say that drawing is a signifying practice?

## 2. DRAWING AS A SIGNIFYING PRACTICE

To describe the 'making/doing hand' as one that 'creates' only leads to inconsistency and mythologizing. 'Originality' and 'creativity' are sister concepts — *originality* is a myth of modernity, while *creativity* is more an idea with a romantic or neo-romantic origin. The artist is often praised for his inventiveness, originality, authenticity, and his singularity and uniqueness. The bestowal of the status of originality is based upon the idea that art can only be the product of an irresistible urge for singular purity, and thus a revolt against all that is conventional and traditional, the recognition of an origin in all its purity,

2  
moen,  
23.10.2005,  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
01:23, 01:08,  
02:11, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
3  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
23.10.2005,  
01:59, pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
4  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
23.10.2005,  
00:47, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
5  
moen, zondag  
[Sunday],  
01:14, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



a new birth. Originality thus becomes a metaphor that refers to the untainted sources of life. The ‘I’ as the absolute and unique origin alludes to a potential that perpetuates and regenerates itself through a process of continuous rebirth. Moreover, the sister notion of creativity is possessed of something magical that must be held to account. Seeing the artist as a God who creates ex nihilo is madness — and coincidentally, *creatus* does not mean ‘created’ but ‘grown’. Marcel Duchamp’s criticism of ‘artistic creativity’ is highly pertinent in this respect — in his view, such an outlook only results in mystical stammering, conceptual confusion and falsifying value judgments. Duchamp’s philosophy of the ready-made is thus a direct attack on the myth of artistic creativity. It is not inspiration — that romanticized gift of the Muses — that lies at the source of visual art, but the work of the Demiurge, who is so beautifully personified by the architect-artist, Eupalinos, the ‘constructor’, in Plato’s *Phaedra*. This is why we refer to the architect’s *sketches* as precursors to the drawings made within a signifying practice. The *work* of the architect, the composing and modelling fabricator, the person who possesses *know-how* in terms of shaping materials, inches us closer to something that is ultimately more essential to drawing as a signifying practice than the mystique associated with inspiration and creativity. *Making* is a predicate that is suggestive yet imprecise. However, it provides the only route to a relevant aesthetics of drawing. The semantics of making and doing are somewhat different: *doing* is less strategic and procedural than making; the agent of *doing* is less structured than that of *making*. An adequate theory of such a signifying practice depends more on an understanding of the process of making, therefore, than of *doing*. *Making* transforms the artist’s work into an *action*, but it is one that transcends his own psychology: the artist will never succeed in justifying the ‘action’ he performs through his own volition or in reducing it to a realization of his own psychological virtualities (what he thinks and wants, desires and projects). He can never fully control his ‘actions’ because all of the energies, all of the tensions and their release are grounded in his vital corporality, in all its opacity, the muddled life forces that are also involved in making art, and in the actions of the hand that makes.

To approach drawing as ‘making’ is certainly a germane way of understanding the practice but, at the same time, the wording is too general. Here, I have recourse to a book entitled *Dessiner. La gomme et les crayons [Drawing: The eraser and the pencils]* by the superlative draughtsman and painter Valerio Adami: ‘All the necessary information is provided by the drawing. The hand follows its own path, breaks free from the draughtsman and is propelled by an energy that is found within the drawing itself, before it eventually turns against the draughtsman. The finish line is comprised of points of suspension’ (Paris, Galilée, 2000, 30–31). At the origin of the drawing process is the hand that is driven by an energy, an *urge*, a *vital force* — the hand is implanted in the ‘sentience’ of the animal

body. No transparent intentionality here, no goal-orientated programme, but only an inexpressible urge that consumes the draughtsman and places him under invincible ties. During the drawing process, the hand will detach from the psyche of the draughtsman, and from his ideas and will. However, this initial impulse will exist within the drawing itself (‘all the necessary information is provided by the drawing’), not yet visible in all its fullness but suggested as an *aura*. The effect of the compulsion to draw is only a first (constitutionally necessary) moment in a dialectic whereby the artist’s identity, psyche, ambition and project regains its rights in the ongoing signifying process of drawing — the draughtsman transforms his work into a *sign*, an interpretable ‘object’ that can be discussed through references, comparisons and an affinity for art, and in which the specific artist finds his unique identity. The dialectic between the initial moment, the impersonal impulse of the hand attached to the body, and the final instance, the recovery by the identitary artist, the transformation of the object into a (semi-otic) sign that can be spoken about and debated. This kind of dialectic, as Adami puts it, knows ‘no finish line’ — the end is comprised of points of suspension. This is why Delrue’s drawings continue to fascinate: the battle between the opaque impulse and the urge to produce meaning, to make the drawing a sign with meaning, has never been resolved; a definitive reconciliation is ‘postponed’ ad infinitum. In his thesis entitled *Het onbewaakte moment* [The unguarded moment], Ronny Delrue translates this excruciating dialectic into another terminology. Here, the link between the impulse of the hand and meaning is referred to as the tension between control and uncontrollability, a tension that is geared towards a moment of reconciliation in the drawing.

This continuous ‘suspension’ brings openness to a drawing, a vital *incompleteness*. Compare an architect’s project drawing or sketch with a work made by an artist. For the architect, the project sketch is dynamic but leads to the most important thing, the building itself. The regime and value of such a sketch derives its meaning from the ultimate endpoint. The energy that the architect invests in his sketch is aimed at its termination and reconciliation with the final meaning. For the visual artist, the drawing is openness, the precursor to the suspension of the struggle between impulse and meaning. Drawing has something dramatic about it — the adjournment of the final meaning is the result of the weighty impact of the hand and its primal gestuality. A drawing that is both a sign and the product of a signifying practice is essentially unfinished, there is no ultimate meaning, the signifying universe of the drawing lies anxiously open, and is ‘suspended’ time and again with every interpretation.

That ‘sign’ and ‘drawing’ intrinsically refer to each other can be read in drawing 6: ‘Een gedachte is een *teken(ing)* in het geheugen’ [A thought is a *sign (drawing)*

88

in the memory]. Apart from the reference to ‘mentality’ (thought) and temporality (memory), Delrue’s sentence contains the homologation of sign and drawing. The dynamics of the drawing unfold as a progressive path, from the opacity of the urge to draw to the obsessional transparency of an explicit sign structure. The sequence of eight drawings from the body of work under consideration reveals just one possible way of analysing them, albeit in a rather arbitrary manner. Lines, shapes and figures emerge from the magma of the inscriptions, increasingly autonomous, yet still recognizable and replete with meaning. Drawing 7, dated 16.06.2017, appears as a purely abstract interplay of lines, a background graffiti to a calmly written story, while the more manipulated character of the second drawing [drawing 8], represents a different narrative, this time about Philippe Van Cauteren and the ‘Van Gogh walk’, in which Delrue participated and also drew — a one-eyed man, positioned within a classical oval frame, semi-filled with areas of mosaic; this latter technique lends an even more explicit meaning to the drawings from a later phase of Delrue’s oeuvre. The visual arises from the scriptural, which is also the case in the third drawing [drawing 9], which represents a man with a cylinder (cigarette), a flute and a rolled-up sheet of parchment. These three works cannot yet be fully considered as signifying as they do not rise above the impulsive scriptural pool. Drawing 10 only acquires ‘full meaning’ through the systematic and mathematical application of the mosaic technique (note the cluster of five-bar gates that bear witness to counting) that, in a typical Delrue strategy, is driven by the brain [drawing 11]. From as recently as 2017, Delrue has been combining the stippling and mosaic techniques in order to construct surreal figures, or a ‘sign of absurdity’, such as the face that is incorporated into a snail constellation [drawing 12] and the ‘man with a hat’, which unite both of the above techniques. With its excised ear (Van Gogh) and piercing gaze, the aspect of the latter work is altogether human. The more systematic and explicit the drawing techniques used (dots, mosaic), the more ‘meaningful’ the drawing becomes: the ‘man in a hat’ is a brilliant sign of a serious but perhaps tragic mood. While the mosaic technique functions positively in this rendering of meaning, the dots disrupt the euphoria and undermine its affirmative contribution.

6



7



8



9



10



12



13



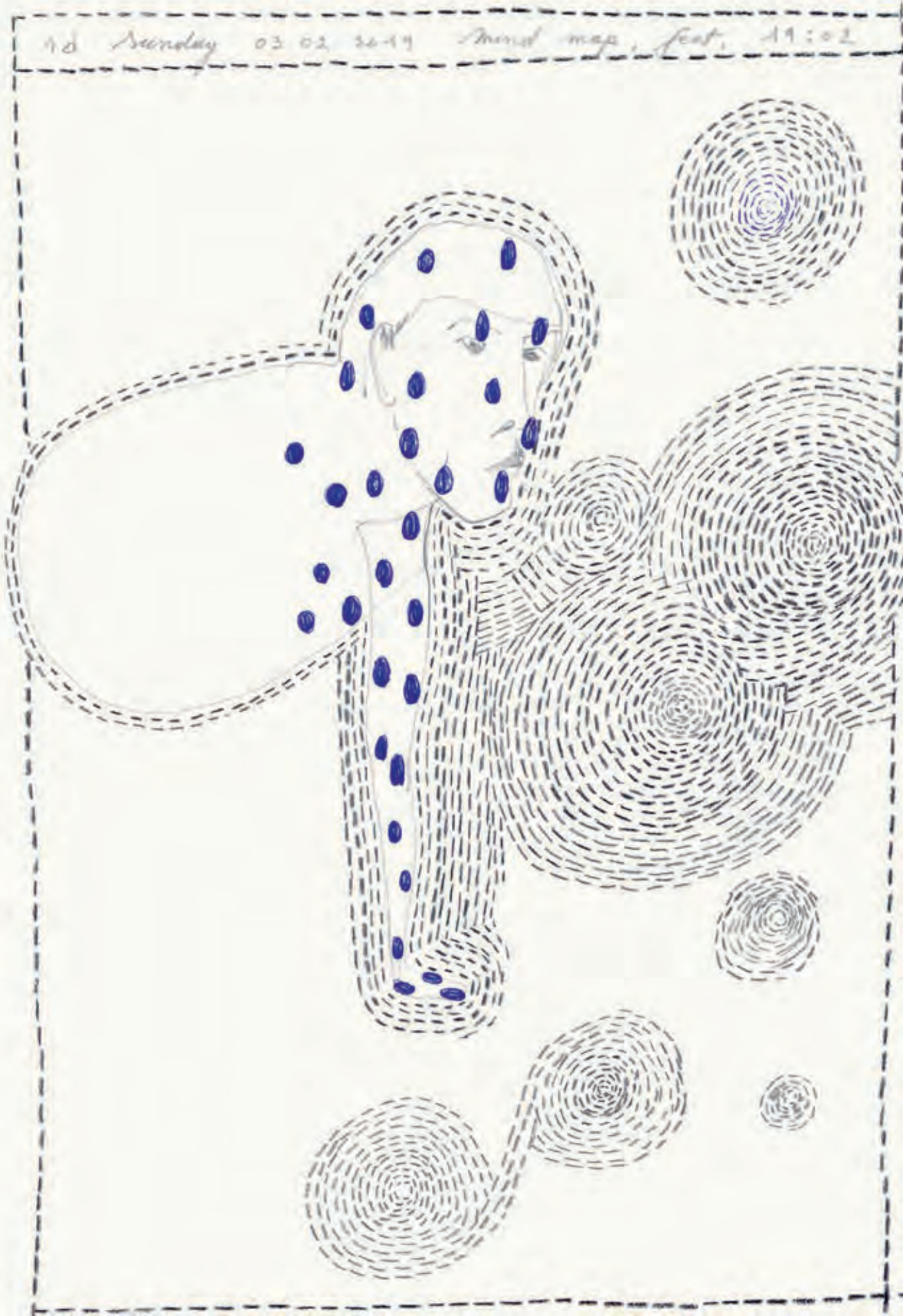
14



89

6  
gent [Ghent],  
13.09.2013,  
11:53, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
7  
tricksters,  
16.6.2017,  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
31 x 22.5 cm  
8  
12.07.2014,  
15:57, ink  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
9  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
20.5.2018,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
10  
Xiamen,  
20.05.2009,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
12  
Moen,  
5/7/2014, 17u.,  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
13  
rehabilitation,  
donderdag, 30  
juli [Thursday,  
30 July], 2015,  
07:15, pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
14  
5.8.2018,  
21.08.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





11  
Sunday,  
03.02.2019,  
*Mind map,*  
*Gent* [Ghent],  
19:02,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

Drawings 13 and 14 are the crown jewels in the corpus of Delrue’s drawings. Whatever the anecdotal context that led to the drawing of a contrasting pair of limbs, its value as a sign is optimal [drawing 13]: the inner left leg becomes, as it were, the prothesis of the crab-hand, and is identical to the threatening metal fingers of the latter, nothing but anatomical artificiality, and this in opposition to the aesthetically pleasing right leg, fully worked in the mosaic technique, both feet in profile like those seen in Egyptian reliefs. A sign of the tension between artificiality and naturalness, as well as that between cold mechanics and warm aesthetics. The fact that the artist’s primary urge is painfully and physically embedded in this work, and also acquires meaning through the ingenious contrast with the mosaic-work leg, is a particularly authentic example of a signifying drawing, and as executed by a consummate draughtsman. Drawing 14 is crowned by another depiction of a body which also rests upon a fundamental contrast: the natural body in its brute animality — the representation of genitalia is highly exceptional in Delrue’s oeuvre — and its aestheticization by means of a hatching technique. A beautiful example is the classical sketch of a female body that is transformed by a meaningful amendment: an artefact in the form of a chainmail tunic. It is as if the natural body is being corroded by a progressive metallization that is destined to engulf both the head and limbs. The meaning of this figure is not so much that the aestheticization of the body through the lines evokes amazement and admiration, but that the terrifying tension between naturalness and artificiality serves to pre-emptively undermine the purely aesthetic experience. The drawing plays with a fundamental unease in respect of such contrasts and tensions, and the fear that the advancing artificiality will completely devour the naturalness ...

3. FROM LINE TO CONTOUR —  
THE EXISTENCE OF FORMS

The urge of the drawing hand, the *desire of the line*. Picasso, Klee, Matisse — ‘désir de la ligne’ [the desire of the line], a syntagma by the latter artist. The power of the arrow’s line, of the ‘throw’ of the semen, the spraying of desire, *Entwurf*, the radius of the ‘first throw of the design’. Drawing has the shocking tempo of a line that, without being efficient and result-oriented, wants to discharge its boundless energy

in a figure or form. Lines can also be tamed: the abstract Euclidean line becomes a dancing one, as with Matisse, or a libidinal line that shapes the body, as with Picasso. Yet in the mysterious origins of drawing there is the desire of the line, that inexhaustible potentiality from which all drawing stems, the interplay of abstraction and concreteness. Abstraction, algebra, geometry: Euclid defined the line as a ‘length without width’, a line can only be ‘imagined’; and yet there is interaction with the concreteness, the skilful hand, the uncontrollable sway of the gesture that conflicts with the empirical limitations, such as material qualities and the dimensions of the support (paper, cloth) and the characteristics of the drawing implement. How can the desire of the line be tamed by realia such as pens and pencils? The first ‘time’ of the drawing is certainly the power of the ‘throw’ that initiates the drawing and also regulates its intensity and tonality, the quality of its upper finality — not an obvious beginning like the time-honoured routine gesture of the draughtsman, the temporary process of incising the copper plate with the engraving pen, or the scratching upon the parchment with the dip pen. Every line that is visibly and perceptibly realized in the drawing is a repercussion, the trace of the line’s desire, an Eros that evades detection and forms the quicksand in which the existential malaise of the draughtsman is trapped. The line is neither inert nor the projection of the artist’s psychism. The line is the throw that moves from the opaqueness of uncontrollable forces towards realization, by way of volumes, contours, melodies, choreographic steps, rhythms and cadences, always in accordance with the desire of the line, and without which no artistry would be possible, no aesthetic pleasure, no *energeia* for artistic drawing.

Euclidean geometry allows one to calculate how lines are extended and connected, or how they intersect and are distorted, how they delineate geometric planes (the pure abstraction of Malevich). But an axiomatic praxis on the line is hardly relevant in the light of Ronny Delrue’s corpus of drawings. In his case, the *line assumes the form of a contour*, and this leads one to a new range of semiotic-aesthetic considerations: how do these drawings relate to both *form* and *matter*? The line gives *life* to the form, but the form itself has to be constantly wrestled from the matter. A drawing does not, of course, have the same ‘materiality’ as a painting — there are no accumulated layers of pigment, there is no depth within the brute matter, which can sometimes comprise banal and everyday materials that have been attached with glue (Burri, Kiefer). In Delrue’s drawings, the ‘material’ with which the contours are ‘filled’ are liquid and transparent areas of *colour*. In concrete terms, the *shape vs the material* tension can be homologated with the tension between the contour vs *coloured plane*. Yet it is a volatile relationship and the dynamics witnessed in these drawings consist precisely of an incessant fluctuation in



the tension between contour and coloured area. The latter negates the contour and extends without limitation, while the contour reduces them to the status of ‘fill’ — and this is exactly what occurs in geometric abstraction (Mondriaan). The ‘world of forms’ has no absolute stability, and the ‘creativity’ of forms offers an abundance of affinities, dissociations and distortions as well as hybrid, chaotic and labyrinthine reconstructions. An artist’s oeuvre, not least that of Ronny Delrue, is a field of *metamorphoses*, a flux of sometimes radical ‘displacements’ in the tension between form and matter, and between contour and coloured plane. A primary axiom of art theory: the form is the construction of matter, but equally: the form can only exist in and through matter. This distinguishes our viewpoint from an idealistic and Platonic theory of art, but also from all kinds of formalisms (the form is only a surface, the exterior of a cavity, the skin around an emptiness, in fact, a skin without flesh). Because form and matter are mutually limiting, artistic practice is not a topological calculus; on the contrary: forms are bound to the weight, density, tonality and quality of the material’s flesh. Even the most ascetic (conceptual or digital) art is fed by matter. Form is always ‘in-carnation’, but it must also be said that the ‘carnal’ matter has a formal vocation. Artistic practice does nothing but exploit and cultivate the existence of forms in matter. The existence of forms is the history of metamorphoses as told through the playful interaction of form and matter and, in Delrue’s drawings specifically, of contour and colour.

Drawing 15, dated 30.06.2016, leads us into this sublime history of metamorphoses by means of an apologia for the *line*. The interplay of lines is not motivated by anatomical perfection, which would allow the accurate identification of an individual face — the countenance is interchangeable, a mobile mask, male and/or female — but by the *desire* that propels the drawing hand, with a few curves, edges and corners. The pleasure of drawing is derived from the scratching of the pen or the sharpened pencil. Hence the beginning of all signs: *the desire of the line*. Drawing 16 alludes to a yet deeper meaning, to a densified semantics that is harder to interpret: the scratching of the pen is equally intense — here and there ink stains transform into dots or lines, as in both legs, with the classical function of the perverse de-idealization and deterioration of the flesh. The line confirms these dysphoric semantics. This semantic accent presupposes the desubjectification of the body: a hood drawn with a pattern of perfectly parallel lines obscures all idiosyncratic expressiveness. In drawing 17, the line is blurred and elongated, grey and watery — in

defiance of Euclid, it does have a width in this case; the lines run horizontally and vertically, and the green and dark grey network of thoughts above the mere suggestion of a head contrasts in a classical aesthetic way with the faded fragility of the figure. Dilution of both line and colour, inverse desire, the longing to disappear, a draining away, an evaporation of the line. The painted line in drawing 18 is an exemplary example of the *line*’s limited function in relation to *contour* — the body of a diving figure is only suggested by a contour with a peculiar supplement: a head, angled downwards, which surrealistically extends to a leg — creating an astonishing confrontation between the contour/leg and the mottled limb, drawn with much greater precision, that plunges after the head. This contrast is a peculiar discovery that indicates the unique visuality of the *contour*. It already heralds the possibility of a further step, namely the tension between contour and coloured plane.

Drawings 19 and 20 directly reveal the role of colour within the drawing arsenal: the draughtsman imports his colour palette and experiments, like at the drawing academy. These green, blue and dark-red shades are reflected in fascinating shapes that are created by the tension between the contours and coloured areas. Drawing 21 is a masterpiece within Ronny Delrue’s corpus of drawings because of the disconnect between the two: to the right of the body floats a contour line that has apparently been detached from the coloured area, and its autonomy is reflected in the drawing of the fingers and parts of a schematic facial structure. The coloured surface of the elongated body, with one dark-red breast and birthmarks on the skin, generates an elusive significance — this is certainly a signifying drawing — which speaks of tragic finality and essential imperfection. It is mainly the dissociation of the coloured area and contour — a purely formal strategy on the part of the draughtsman — that evokes this emotion, a feeling of elastic transience from which the protective contour has ebbed away. To this work I would add three works [drawings 22-24] in which the coloured planes are equally mobile, and as elegantly dancing, with a bounding contour that functions differently each time: drawing 22 has a sharply defined contour of charming and somewhat frivolous hues (the figure represents a ballet dancer *en*

92

15  
Gent [Ghent],  
30.06.2016,  
20:59, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
16  
13.07.2009,  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
34.5 x 24.5 cm



93

17  
26.11.2012,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
18  
17.12.2007,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
19  
12.06.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
30.1 x 23.8 cm  
20  
2018, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
22  
01.12.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
36.1 x 26.9 cm  
23  
05.06.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
30.1 x 23.4 cm  
24  
10.10.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
25  
links [left],  
25.01.2016,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

21  
april, 2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



nd  
april 2008

26  
2004, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



n.d.  
2004.



*pointe* with a long-stemmed flower in her hand); drawing 23 again shows a contour that has partly detached itself from the coloured area, itself doubled in two beautifully complementary shades and, moreover, executed in the circles technique; while in drawing 24, in the disconnection of the contour and the coloured plane, the figure with outstretched arm gives birth to a heart-shaped calyx ... I wanted to add drawings 25 and 26 because they introduce two other figurative variants and postures, sitting and lying, each with the same disconnection from the contour and the area of colour. The intensity of the lines in these works varies considerably, from unbearably sharp in the case of the seated figure — sitting in the emptiness, with one leg dangling down and eagle-eyes — to incredibly vague for the prone figure — with head cracked open, thrust onto the ground by the geometry of the torturous arrows. I view this third group of drawings, here collated under the title ‘From line to contour — the life of forms’, as examples of a formal strategy that is explicitly implemented in Delrue’s drawings, namely the subtle treatment of the tension between contour and colour, and between form and matter.

#### 4. THE BODY AS A SHELL AND ITS ATTRIBUTES

In the immense corpus of Delrue’s drawings — which run into the hundreds — there is one dominant figurative subject: the body. The body, and thus not a rural or urban landscape, nor any cultural or social affairs, religious symbolism or historical reconstructions. Most of the drawings were made from a life model during public and regular drawing sessions. The body is the most replete and persistent incarnation of the interplay of form and matter, of contour and colour, as analysed above. What does the ‘body’ mean in this context and how and where can it be situated? It is an invariably isolated form and seems indifferent to any possible context, be it physical, psychological, historical, cultural or visual. How and where can Delrue’s image of the body be placed in the inexhaustible pantheon offered up by the history of art? The bodies of Adam and Eve by Jan van Eyck, Cranach the Elder and Dürer, the reclining Venuses of Velázquez, Titian and Manet, the hundreds of precisely defined bodies in Renaissance and baroque prints and pen-and-ink drawings, the anatomically correct and surgically dissected bodies depicted by a host of artists from Vesalius to Rembrandt ... all of these live within our imaginations. The naked body dominates the entire history of the visual arts and is present in countless forms, from the strict medico-physical reconstructions to the most fantastical

metamorphoses. In this panoply of heterogeneous figurations, however, there are stable determinative elements that can be discerned through a ‘phenomenology of corporality’. The only reason for identifying its principal components is to be able to determine the extent to which Delrue’s bodily figurations implement, evade or even transcend such a ‘classic’ aesthetics of corporality. Firstly, the ‘classical’ body is a junction of *interaction* with the world (the cosmic but also humane world in all its forms, from the directly interjecting individual to the most diffuse community). In this interaction with the world, the body remains relatively stable, yet the motives that determine the pursuit of permanence are largely uncontrollable, usually purely reflexive and unconscious. The body thus creates its own *spatiality*, concentrated and expanding, never abstract and geometric but perspectivating: the body *is* not in space but ‘inhabits’ it. Furthermore, the ‘classical’ body is experienced and represented in its *motricity*, not as an inert mass but rather as an allusive kinetic force of attraction and repulsion that will direct various ways of coexisting with other subjects. The body is also the seat of sensory sensitivity — it sees, hears, feels and tastes — and this ‘sensitivity’ can be elevated to the level of effects that intimately link the subjects and leads to cultural purification — culinary pleasure ... The senses interact within a coordinating body, and such coordination exacerbates the intensity of the physical sensations. The senses not only provide access to the world, but also create their own identity and the culture of the intimate enjoyment of life. The synaesthetic coordination and the feeling of a burgeoning identity also transform the corporality into an *interiority*, experienced and also perceived as such by the *Umwelt* and consequently presented this way in the arts. This interiority is then projected as a ‘space’ of emotions, impulses and passions but also of intellectual interests and intentions, whether planned or not. Finally, the body is experienced as expressive — the body’s expressiveness (the inner self is ‘shown’) has been a constant challenge in the history of the visual arts and the most original and fitting representation of physical expressiveness is always held in high regard.

The phenomenology of the ‘classical’ body as outlined above is comprised of five components: the body is a junction of interaction with the outside world, it has its own spatiality, it is the seat of sensual sensitivity, it possesses an interiority, and it is marked by expressiveness. Is this phenomenology of the ‘classical’ body applicable to the figurative representations in Ronny Delrue’s drawings? Not at all, since Delrue’s bodies are ‘post-classical’ (‘post-modern’) and the five characteristics of the ‘classical’ body have been set aside. Marcel Duchamp’s two most famous figurative works may elucidate a schematic analysis of the ‘post-classical’ body. In *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, which is typically called *The Large Glass (Le Grand Verre)*, (1915–23), the female body is presented as





a mechanical apparatus whose organs (a mill, a crusher, a gas lamp, a wasp, a weathervane and other artificial elements) are shamelessly programmed for sex. Duchamp’s female body is an erotic-mechanical metaphor, a schematic anatomy, devoid of psychology, lacking initiative, passive and compact. The viewer’s desire to analyse the cadaveric machine with diagrammatic precision is aroused, and in this dissection of the intimate secrets of the Artificial Woman, to discover that organic internality, a network of tubes and cylinders. Given *Étant Donnés 1° la chute d’eau 2° le gaz d’éclairage* (1946-1966), Duchamp’s last and invariably hidden installation, offers a totally different figuration of the hermaphrodite body. The body as an erotic machine is reduced to the absolute essentials by focusing on the vulva; the limbs have been amputated. Fragmentation, mechanization and depsychologization are the cerebral and obsessive hallmarks of the ‘post-classical’ body. One can certainly view Duchamp as the founder of the ‘post-classical’/‘postmodern’ paradigm, and it is evident that important branches of twentieth-century art exhibit such a schematization of corporality — for this kind of ‘post-classical’ corporality is a feature of all avant-garde movements, such as Futurism and surrealism, and of artists like Picasso and most other modernists, as well as of informal and abject art.

An analysis of Delrue’s representations of the body only becomes comprehensible after first having noted a number of reductions. The analyst can assume that these are not representations of persons, of actors in the world, of carriers of libidinal energies, of sources of originality. No bundles of passions, no carriers of cognitive or emotional skills are presented here. No interiority, therefore, but shells — the ‘I’ is reduced to the I-skin, the Flesh-skin that one cannot *deepen* but only *extend*: the I-skin expands with *prototypes*, with *attributes* that, however, do not succeed in installing an interaction with other subjects and with the world. The I-skin is a shell without any interiority, without a centred spatiality, without sensory sensitivity, without expressiveness.

Ronny Delrue’s corpus of drawings contains striking examples of such ‘post-classical’ representations of the body. When drawing figures, his style avoids any form of aggression, violence or explicit sexuality. Drawings 27 and 28 are two fascinating exceptions. In these works, the genitals — an erect penis and a vulva — accentuated in both cases by a circle, immediately catch the eye. And yet the visual language of the drawing offers semiotic aspects that transcend this accentuation: the elongated slenderness of the man’s arm and the way it hangs, the hatching technique used in the female arm. The bodies in these two drawings are undoubtedly highly sexualized,

although this accentuation contrasts with the hundreds of other examples that possess an entirely different focus. By way of example, I have outlined five modes in which the ‘body as a shell and its attributes’ are implemented in this corpus. Drawings 29 to 32 contain bodies whose appearance is accentuated by the addition of circles, whether filled or not, which are usually anchored at the joints of the limbs. Drawing 29 focuses, without symbolism or pathetics, on duplicated breasts which are merely the protuberances of a shell. Drawing 32 already combines a twofold strategy: on the one hand, the accentuation of the external appearance by the coloured dots, and on the other the addition of an attribute that is primordial to Delrue’s figurative representation: the barbed wire that isolates the body, imprisons it and prevents all interaction with the Other (the outside world and the co-subjects). This strategy is central to the second group of drawings: drawings 33 to 35. In this ensemble, barbed wire and bars have immense dramatic value. Imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to solitary confinement, the body is a shell with neither an inside nor outside. Drawing 34 is particularly moving: the barbed wire is transformed into a jewel, the coral-coloured necklace of a semi-invisible figure who elegantly raises his hands in the background. Never before has Delrue laid down his dysphoric image of mankind so explicitly as in this drawing: the essential attribute of the shell is its own painful limitation, the boundary between an inner void and the unattainable ‘Beyond’ of the co-subjects and of a worldly horizon. Drawings 36 to 38 illustrate another aspect of the ‘post-classical’ body: its fragmentation, fragility and solubility. It is as though the body is no longer held together by a binding inspirational principle — the one-armed figure sows the constitutive red and black elements that escape his body, the advancing form dissolves into its blood-red building blocks, the one-legged crouching figure loses the disconnected head ... Nothing links these physical fragments, there is no unifying principal (a soul, a psyche, a will) — just the merging of the solid structure, the breaking open of the figural unity. Drawings 39 to 41 develop a different visual strategy whereby the body in its empirical and conceptual reality is destroyed by the radical eclipse — an expanding black spot partially neutralizes the figural form of the

98



27



28



29



30



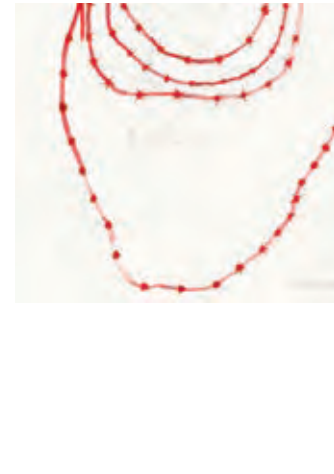
31



32



33



34

99

27  
20.09.2010,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
28  
2009, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
29  
Gent [Ghent],  
14.10.2013,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
30  
10.06.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
31  
09.06.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
32  
18.09.2017,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
33  
16.09.2017,  
22:10, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
34  
27.02.2010,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



36



37



38



39



40



42



43



44



100

- 36  
14.10.2000,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 37  
2014, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 38  
3.2.2014,  
5.2.2014, *Iris*,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 39  
2008, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 40  
21.04.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 42  
*Gent* [Ghent],  
22.11.2000,  
19:30, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 43  
*Dublin*,  
16.04.2000,  
17:04, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm
- 44  
2014, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

41  
2006, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm







45  
22.11.2000,  
Gent [Ghent],  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

body in drawing 39 and completely obliterates it in drawing 40. Drawing 41 evokes a particularly intense sensation because the eclipse is compact but fails to negate the excessively dense drama, the tragedy of the prone figure (fallen, knocked to the ground, crawling) with long hair, as wild as the goddesses of the forest.

Also exceptional among Delrue's drawings are the representations of co-subjectivity, namely the works that depict pairs of bodies. Drawings 42 to 45 are therefore exceptions: the two figures in drawing 42 have no identity (neither faces nor expressivity) and their 'togetherness' is not particularly humane. Together, they resemble a split tree trunk — the heads are cleaved from each other yet bound by a circular pencil line. It is difficult to see the figuration of co-subjectivity in this work, or in drawings 43 and 44. The pallid hues in drawing 43 further augment the sense of emptiness generated by a complete absence of physical or affective contact between the two protagonists. This also applies to drawing 44, in which two figures float independently through a frame, which is delineated by the typical black-dot technique. In Delrue's drawings, bodies do not possess a controlled spatiality and never measure up to each other's positions. Drawing 45 is wholly aligned with the same visual conception of physicality. In this work, three bodies are bound together yet never really 'touch', interact or communicate. The 'post-classical' body is a shell without an Inside or Outside, one that is merely extended with prostheses and the attributes of boundary markers (barbed wire, bars, contours).

##### 5. ROADS OF THE IMAGINATION

When interpreting artworks, critics often use biographical information about the artist and his psychological or even psychoanalytical identity, or deploy a sociological interpretation scheme, regardless of its thoroughness, as a way of contextualizing the object in question. Another approach is to allow oneself to only be guided by the inherent semiological characteristics of the artwork: what meaning is created in the work, how is it derived from what can be *seen* and *felt in vivo* in the aesthetic experience, and what are the rhetorical strategies that the artist develops in order to express this meaning *visually*? This is the road I have chosen to follow in my reflective approach to Ronny Delrue's vast corpus of drawings.

I would argue that Delrue's imagination is the power that lies at the root of his passion for drawing.

The child, the scientist and the artist often possess the greatest capacity for imaginative thought. A broad taxonomy of the definitions of the imagination runs through the entire history of philosophy, with Aristotle, Kant, Cassirer, Sartre, Bachelard and Ricoeur as the benchmarks. The history of Western civilization and culture is a eulogy to Reason, Certainty and Calculus. The inestimable needs of corporality and of the passions of the soul are permissible but only when contained within a dominantly rational 'I'. This means that dreams, fictions, fantasies, unsubstantiated beliefs and other 'products' of the imagination are to be distrusted. The imagination tends to be seen as the source of false memories, unsubstantiated love and hatred, prejudices and delusions, all of which causes us to fear an unknowable future. Imagination without reason gives birth to monsters. Fortunately, this mistrust has been fiercely rebutted by the arts (in romanticism, surrealism, etc.). The ebullience of the imagination generates a compact and poetic network of myths and symbols, of mysterious worlds, of analogies and metaphors. The contemporary human sciences have also alighted upon and installed this network as a way of understanding individuals and their communities, not to mention such basic concepts as the sacred, the mythical, the unconscious, the utopian, the ritual, the game, the spectacular, and all the other realms that cannot be claimed by the abstracting rationalism. In this way, contemporary human sciences support the intuitions that nourish key aspects of contemporary art. The production of art is thus a process of the imagination that generates unforeseeable worlds and utopic stories. Yet one should not view the imaginative space as a taxonomy of 'images', of visual representations that can be identified and, once recognized, can be enumerated and reproduced. The imaginary is not so much a 'world of images' as a productive and living process that shapes our emotions, ideas, actions and, above all else, artistic production.

Yet it remains difficult to interpret the power of the imagination with any precision. There are dozens of approaches to be found in philosophical literature. The imagination is viewed as a psychic function that generates 'possible worlds' (a world of possibilities) and thus gives rise to innovation in every sphere of creative productivity. One can therefore equate the imagination with an ability to think of something that is not perceived as present, but also as the capacity to appreciate artworks or objects of natural beauty in a sensory way and without immediately conceptualizing them or simply considering them as useful. I adhere to the following but rather general definition, which is also applicable to Delrue's corpus of drawings: the imagination is a 'disposition of the mind', of the mental capacity to transcend, change, transform and deform reality, and thus to create 'representations' of the unreal (the non-existent, the 'possible'). It is essential that the imagination remains attached to our *memories* (past) and our *expectations* (future),



and that it is charged with our own ethical and symbolic values. The imagination is utterly dependent upon twin inputs: on the one hand, heightened and intensified perception, and on the other memory and expectation, the recuperation of the past and the projection of the future. Perception, which feeds the imagination, is based on the sensory sensitivity of the whole body and thus all sensations trigger the imagination, although it is synaesthesia (the universal physical sensation) that is of primary importance. The imagination is playful — it toys with the ambiguity of the image, with the ambivalence of affective values, with the association of the substantive meaning with the sensory quality of the figure. Imagination exploits analogical similarities, establishes the continuity between the intellectual concept and the aesthetic appearance, and promotes the infinite nature of interpretation.

The playful yet powerful imagination of a visual artist like Ronny Delrue essentially manifests itself in metamorphization. The privileged strategy of the imagination is the metamorphosis, the transfiguration or transformation that results in an altered appearance, character, structure or form. Even if the imagination is a global disposition of the artist's mind, its impact on a draughtsman is necessarily 'visual' — the metamorphosis is mainly a transformation of the form (*morphè*), a distortion, a disfigurement that can extend from the application of a slight and barely noticeable touch to a radical intervention that invokes an utterly dislocated and monstrous figure. Throughout art history, the artist's deep motivation for such metamorphosis has been to express existential concerns as adequately as possible: the fascination for the transcendent and the sacred, for death and the afterlife, for radical alterity (from the divine to the animal), for Oneness and complete union, for the mysterious origin of life and humanity, for the utopias of eternity and absolute happiness. In Delrue's drawn universe, such motivation is principally achieved through the metamorphosis of the body or bodily parts (head, limbs) in which the boundaries of the physical form of the body (both spatial-temporal and symbolic-iconic) are then explored. It is remarkable how relative sexuality is within this mainly androgynous figuration and also how irrelevant the impact of opposites such as pure/impure, clean/dirty, innocent/guilty ... Almost all of Delrue's drawings depict a physical *metamorphosis*, with a richness that never fails to remind one of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* — the fates of Daphne, Herse, Europa, Coronis, Thisbe and Minos are also suffered by Delrue's bodies ... Within the field of literary stylistics and philosophical rhetoric, a range of strategies have been devised to determine the *metamorphosis of forms* (formation and deformation). Five of these inform my discussion of the drawings: two can be viewed as a pair (*condensation vs expansion*, and *metaphorization vs metonymization*), and *hypotyposis*, the latter being a rhetorical category that often characterizes the specific design of Delrue's works.

As an illustration of the *condensation* strategy, I have gathered a range of portraits [drawings 46-53] whose juxtaposition adequately demonstrates the meaning of the term: a centring around the essential, a focalization of the core, a reduction of all accidents. If Delrue reduces the body to a face (never in profile, always frontal), it will never be a perfectly drawn head with all the correct anatomical-physiological attributes. The face is often completely unknowable [drawing 53], partially obscured by lines [drawings 49-51], or by black and red dots [drawing 52]. In all of these works, the mouths, noses and ears are missing — Delrue's 'characters' do not speak or hear, they are deaf and dumb, and since they are devoid of lips, they also lack the 'organ' that tastes, feels and kisses, and which is capable of co-subjective caresses. In Delrue's portraits, the sensory sensitivity is reduced to *seeing* — four senses (hearing, taste, touch and smell) are switched off for the benefit of *sight*. This condensation of the senses leads to the hypostasis of the eyes — no 'portrait' lacks eyes, and in drawing 53 the eyes are only just visible through the almost impenetrable layers of paint. Drawings 46 to 48 are among the most significant drawings of the entire corpus. In drawing 46 there is a 'face-that-only-sees' (there is not the slightest suggestion of any other facial features). Just those huge, captivating eyes that stare into the emptiness like lighthouse lamps, and the intensity of the gaze. Drawing 47 is a related work: again, a face without any sensory potentiality, except for that skewed look (one dead eye and one living), a gaze that is akin to hopeless supplication. Drawing 48 is extremely inventive: here, a hand covers and silences the mouth while the outline of a pair of glasses accentuates the eyes. It is clearly all about the eyes and the reduction of sensitivity to sight. This is a particularly pertinent example of how every meaning is *condensed* to the absolute essence, to a core depiction of the body and mind that is rendered with exceptional coherence.

The visual strategy of *expansion* is the opposite of *condensation* because components are *added* to the body, thus creating an additional meaning through extension. That this is a productive strategy for Delrue is evidenced by three drawings, all of which inspire a deeply personal interpretation. In contrast to

104

the works that depict a condensation around sight, drawing 54 seems to be related to the body's ability to *hear*. While this is an exceptional reference within Ronny Delrue's oeuvre, it is also a confusing and misleading one. The auditory field is presented here as a folded, butterfly-like, listening figure, acutely sensory and far from abstract, appealing to our wondrous ability to see. This is a *visible* constellation of sounds — hearing becomes seeing — and this beautiful drawing certainly doesn't question the majesty of sight; on the contrary, it is an apologia for vision and also an illustration of its intrusive nature, which is so aptly represented via the strategy of expansion. Drawing 55 is equally fascinating in its Ovidian poetry. No drawing is more reminiscent of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the transformation of Daphne into a tree. Once again, the expansion — which takes the form of branches growing out of the skull — is directly related to the eyes, one of which is inert and the other damaged. The entire countenance is reduced to this, as dead and broken as the barren twigs implanted on an infertile cranium. Growth, enlargement and the *expansion* of a body that is slowly becoming part of the vegetal world of trees. Drawing 56 is one of the most mysterious drawings within the corpus. In this work, an utterly commonplace head is supported by a hand, but it is a head entirely lacking in relief, only marked in the middle of the forehead by a bizarre shape in contrasting red, an interiorized *expansion*, a fantasy, unidentifiable (a fetus, a person beckoning?). Ultimately, the three examples of expansion discussed here are extremely varied: an expansion that transforms hearing into vision, an expansion that suggests the transformation of the human into something vegetal, and an expansion in which the mysterious interiority of the body is represented.

In addition to this first pair of terms, *condensation vs expansion*, there is a second productive duo that characterizes some of the metamorphoses in Delrue's drawings: *metaphorization vs metonymization*. Certain metamorphoses can be analysed as *metaphors* or as exploiting a similarity or analogy between the human body and a being or form from a totally different order of reality, the animal or even the vegetal. The human body is then 'transformed' or 'deformed' into an animal or plant form: an unbearable metamorphosis in which



the aesthetic experience is then coloured by incomprehension, disgust and revulsion. I have isolated three drawings characterized by such a metaphorization and which are exceptionally difficult to interpret: drawings 57, 58 and 59. Does drawing 57 suggest a larva, or the carcass of a one-legged crab? Surely it must be something similar to these and not just a doubled-over figure? The limp arm in conjunction with the artificial leg complicates the identification but does not appear to be hugely important. That this depicts a metamorphosis in which there is a similarity or analogy between two orders (the human and the animal, for example) is essential. In drawing 58, an identification is equally difficult but actually superfluous. Is it a flying insect with large horns or an octopus with tentacles (and half-human because of the legs)? It belongs to the essence of the metaphor that the relationship between the two poles (human/animal) does not require identity but only a *likeness* or an *analogy*, and this does not need to be established 'objectively' (physically, measurably, scientifically verifiable) but can result from an interpretation, a subjective appreciation as it functions within any aesthetic experience. The same applies to drawing 59, another particularly charged metaphorical work in which a red circle indicates that the draughtsman is drawing attention to the 'domain' at its centre. Here, too, one can only guess at the identity of the animal being suggested — where do the horns lead? Is this just a smashed skull? And what is the meaning of the divided figure — masculine on the left and feminine on the right, as suggested by a pendulous breast? Metaphorization is an open strategy. The metamorphosis never reveals its secret.

In the case of *metonymization*, the relationship between the suggesting and the suggested pole of the relationship is not purely projective and interpretative, but rather empirically real; it is a relationship of *contiguity*. Despite this contiguity, all sense of scale has vanished: *this body is nothing but a head*. Four drawings from the corpus illustrate this metonymy. The body is emaciated, reduced to a tubular, worm-like and repulsive form that rises out of nowhere, surmounted by a head, a face containing nothing but eyes in the form of two black dots (sensuality is again reduced to a gaze that is actually blind). Drawings 60 to 63 have the same structure and the same 'message':

105

46  
2017, mixed media  
on paper,  
29 x 21.7 cm  
47  
woensdag [Wednesday]  
26/11/1997,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
48  
14.05.2002, Brugge  
[Bruges], 2002,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
49  
28/11/1997,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
50  
12:51, 2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





56  
11:32, Brugge,  
vrijdag [Bruges,  
Friday],  
17.05.2002, red  
paint applied  
by Christine  
Remacle,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
(collabora-  
tive project  
with Christine  
Remacle for  
Bruges –  
Cultural Capital  
of Europe  
2002)



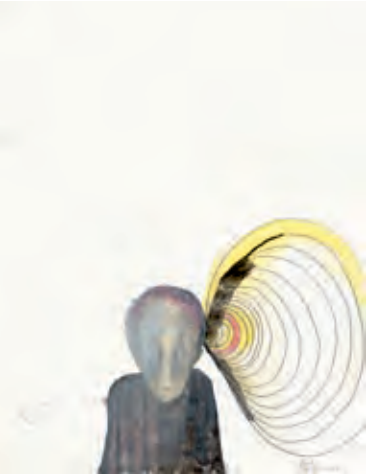
51



52



53



54



55



56



57



58

107  
51  
23.09.2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
52  
Gent [Ghent],  
2013,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
53  
vrijdag [Friday]  
17.05.2002,  
10:58,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
54  
Geel,  
06.02.2001,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
55  
21/11/1997,  
vrijdag  
[Friday],  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
57  
25.01.2016/1,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
58  
17.01.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
59  
9.02.2015,  
21:50,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





60



65



62



63



64



66



67

human nature and physical experience distilled to the workings of the mind and, moreover, all seeing is blind. The body has died — what remains is the shell of a cerebral emptiness, of subjective loneliness. This is the case in drawing 60 where the head is implanted in a kind of centipede, mysteriously scribbled with numbers, but also in drawings 61 to 63 where the snake-like bodies support tiny heads with the occasional suggestion of a pair of leather goggles. Notice how the boa constrictor in drawing 63, all that is left of humanity, has a small and helpless head in a stranglehold.

In the analysis of the mechanisms of the imagination that are evident in Ronny Delrue's corpus of drawings, a great many more rhetorical strategies could be identified, but I will limit myself to the prominence of *hypotyposis* — for which Quintilian has already provided the theory and which is useful for the analysis of not only literary texts but also artworks. Classically speaking, hypotyposis is determined as animation, theatricalization, baroque-ization, a dramatic densification and intensification of performance elements (hyperrealism is an example), with the result that the perceiving subject is profoundly moved and affected. Of course, both cause and effect are relative in hypotyposis (the intensity of the effect depends upon the sensitivity of the mind), and it also overlaps with the other above stylistic and rhetorical strategies. Examples in Delrue's corpus of drawings are only exemplary in this case. Take drawing 64, in which a contorted, naked body nestles or hides its head in a pillow structure. The unnatural and dramatic posture of the body bears witness to a theatricalization, a staging that aims to stir the mind. Drawings 65 and 66 also elicit the same emotive state, although here the instigation of theatricalization is cosmically fatal, so to speak. It seems as if the bodies are almost completely buried by meteorites that threaten to destroy all humanity. This threat has been overwhelmingly and acutely 'staged' so as to provoke a quasi-metaphysical fear of total annihilation in the viewer.

All the rhetorical strategies described above — condensation, expansion, metaphorization, metonymization, hypotyposis — lend intensity and transpositional force to the artist's *perception* and lead his *imagination* into original and fascinating territories. In addition to the heightened degree of perception, the

## 108

60  
moen, 02:52,  
woensdag  
[Wednesday],  
03:00,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
62  
maandag  
[Monday],  
5/1/1998,  
23:58,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
63  
dinsdag  
[Tuesday],  
6/1/1998,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
64  
2009, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
65  
18.02.2013,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
66  
the drawing  
is my best  
research,  
20.8.2011,  
7.8.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm  
67  
woensdag  
[Wednesday]  
12.05.2004,  
Gent [Ghent],  
12:32,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

artist has another faculty that feeds his imagination: *memory*. I found a figuration of this in Ronny Delrue's corpus of drawings: drawing 67, dated 12.05.2004, shows a head filled with the data of recent years — the brain is the repository of the past and that same brain is also the workshop of the imagination. Drawing 68 is a particularly strange figuration. The left-hand (euphoric) head (that of the past) offers the dissection of the right-hand (dysphoric) head (that of the present) — the head is a vessel that contains memories of all kinds of people with vague identities, held within, connected by a black wire to each other and to the actual head. Much less interpretation is needed to elucidate drawings 69 and 70 — an easily recognisable anecdotal and biographical fact (Pepijn, the artist's son, with his royal crown) is an obsessive memory that permanently stimulates the artist's imagination.

Herman Parret  
Emeritus Professor, Higher Institute of Philosophy, KULeuven

- Literature
- Valerio Adami, *Dessiner: La gomme et les crayons*, Paris, Gallée, 2000.
  - Henri Focillon, *Vie des formes*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1934 (new edition, 1939, 1964).
  - Jacques Fontanille, *Soma et Séma: Figures du corps*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2004.
  - Tim Ingold, *The Life of the Lines*, Oxford, Routledge, 2015.
  - Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945.
  - Jean-Luc Nancy, *Le plaisir au dessin*, Paris, Gallée, 2009.
  - Herman Parret, *La main et la matière: Jalons d'une haptologie de l'œuvre d'art*, Paris, Hermann, 2018, principally *Préambule: La pratique artistique comme œuvre de main. Lectures valéryennes*, 5-32.
  - Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, *L'imaginaire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2003.

## 109

1  
Ronny Delrue published his *Diary Notes* with Ludion in 2005, a collection of 200 drawings produced between 1996 and 2004. Thereafter, the artist continued his practice of drawing nearly every day. Since 2005, Delrue has worked unabated and produced hundreds of new drawings. This book offers a selection from this enormous production and the three contributions included here analyse and interpret some of the works, both in terms of their continuity and their diversity. Delrue's oeuvre, and more specifically his paintings and drawings, has been the subject of many critical studies, mostly in the form of exhibition catalogues. The most interesting studies are: Bernard Dewulf, 'Kopzorgen van verf', 2001, V, 31; Van Laere Contemporary Art, 2001, 10–15; Eva Wittcox, 'Ronny Delrue. Het portret in vraag gesteld', Mechelen, De Garage, 2002, 9–42; Peter De Graeve, 'Gelaten trekken', *idem*, 67–74; John Thompson, 'Paying Attention: The Drawings of Ronny Delrue',

*Diary Notes*, Ludion, 2005, 9–12; Bernard Dewulf, 'Chronicle of a Drawn Head', *idem*, 15–24; Rolf Quaghebeur, 'Explorations (in Search of Cerebriraptor)', in Ronny Delrue, *Celebriraptor*, Geel/Eupen, 2007, 33–63; Wolfgang Becker, 'Travels to the Sixth Continent', in Ronny Delrue, *Touching the Earth and the Sky*, Hasselt, 2009 (2010), 7–60; Frits de Coninck, 'Waarheen het tekenen kan voeren', in *J'essaye de me reconstruire*, Diepenheim, 2018, 7–9; Frits de Coninck, 'Onder de huid', and Mark Sadler, 'The Case of the Face', a contribution to this book. The publication that was of the utmost importance for my own contribution is Ronny Delrue's doctoral thesis, *Het onbewaakte moment. De gecontroleerde ongecontroleerdheid bij het tekenen. Ronny Delrue in gesprek met Luc Tuymans, Annie-Mie Van Kerckhoven, Roger Roveel, Katleen Vermeer, Kris Fierens, en Philippe Vandenberg*, Brussels, Mercatorfonds, 2011.





61  
maandag  
[Monday],  
20.01.2003,  
moen, 00:08,  
dinsdag  
[Tuesday],  
6/1/1998,  
23:52,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



68  
11:41,  
25.08.2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



69  
2012,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



70  
the king,  
10.02.2012,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm







moen,  
23.10.2005,  
zondag  
[Sunday],  
01:23, 01:08,  
02:11, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

M. O.  
Moe 23.10.2005  
Zondag  
01:23 u.  
01:08 u.  
02:11 u.



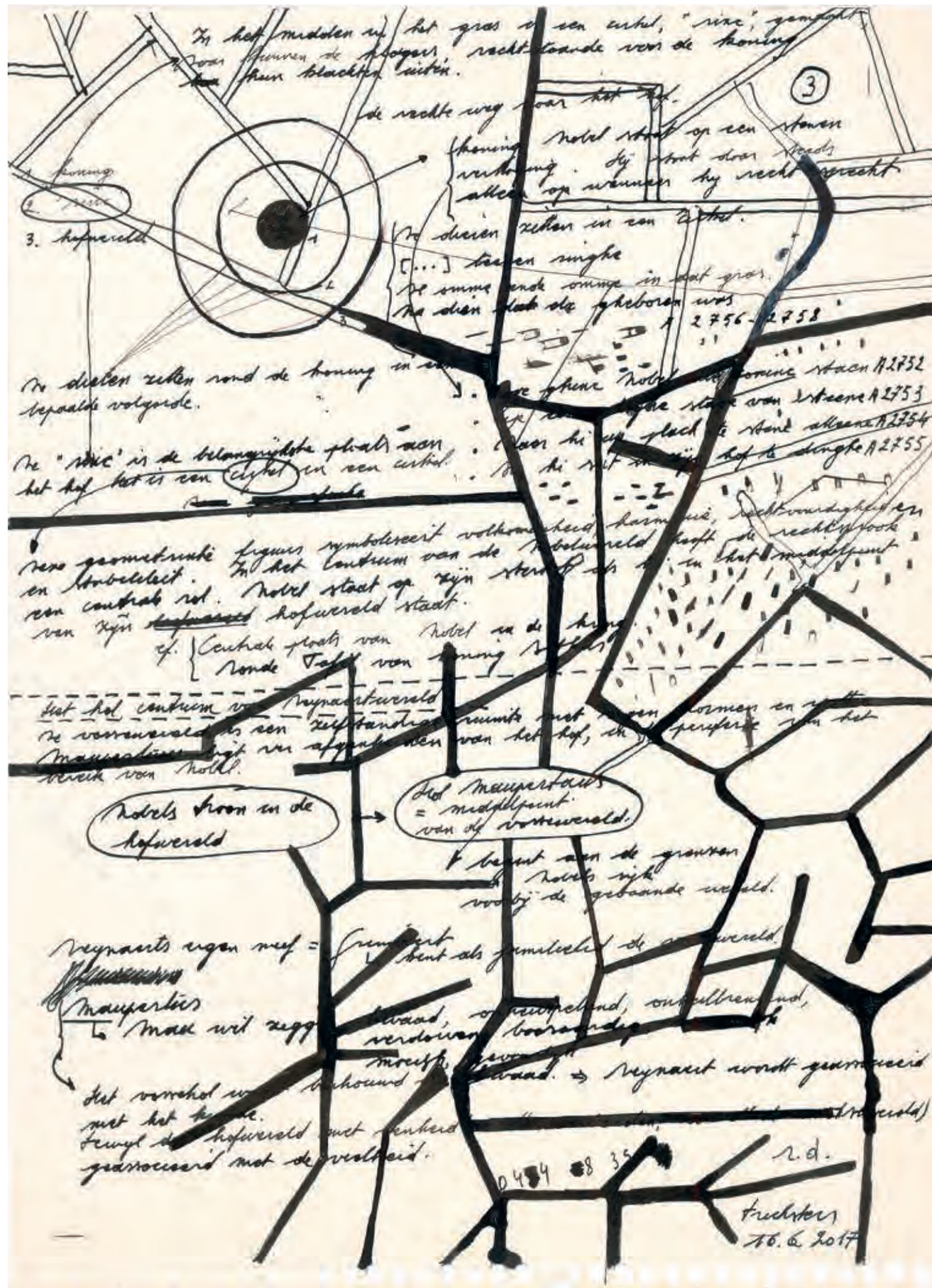
zondag  
[Sunday],  
23.10.2005,  
00:47,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



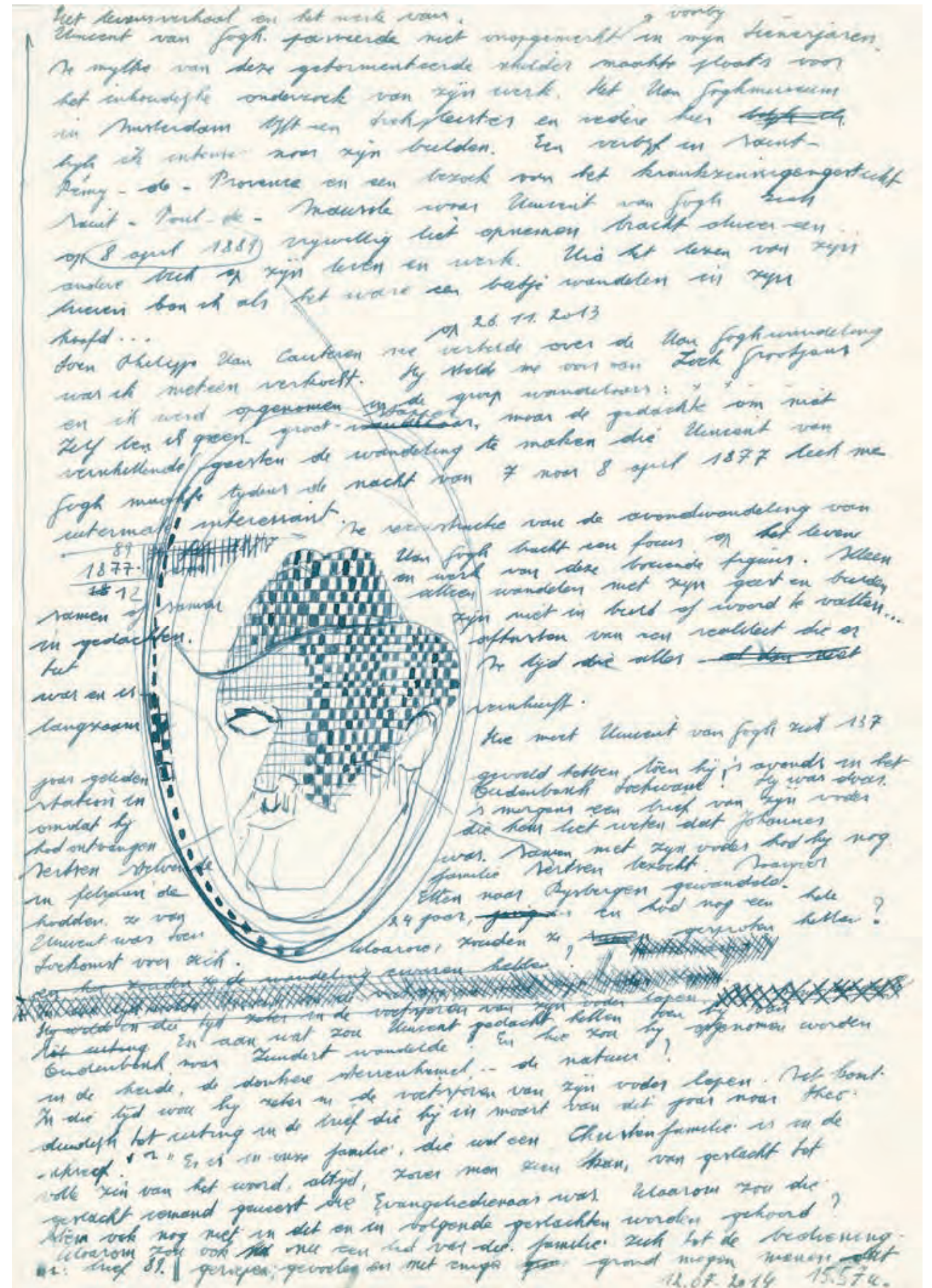
moen, zondag  
[Sunday],  
01:14, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm







tricksters,  
16.6.2017,  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
31 x 22.5 cm



12.07.2014,  
15:57, ink  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



Lexing Nijzenheim.  
 In deze lezing zou ik het willen de alle het kort  
 stellen over mijn doctoraal onderzoek: het subwoel moment,  
 de y.v. by het kienan. en daaropvolgende enkel voorbeelden  
 hiervan betreffen mijn beidend werk.



My. De vraagstelling in het onderzoek is: Is de betekenis en de  
 digitaal typisch een ideaal medium om het behelvenmoment te  
 ongecontroleerd en controle en beeld te hangen. Het is ook  
 hier niet over het buitgevoel maar de controle op het dat doeltreffend  
 overwaakt ontstond. Het is als als beidend beidende over  
 met wat een overwaakt dat een overwaakt de gevecht  
 tijdens het ontstaan of de genere van een beeld?  
 In dit onderzoek is de methodologie by dit onderzoek  
 bestond hoofdzakelijk uit interviews met beidende.  
 woord. Een woord werd beidend voor dit onderzoek.  
 te gebruiken waarbij het woord en het beeld metover  
 samen werd uitgegaan de vadingsteden van de  
 analyse en de besluitvorming van  
 Meesterfonds het doctrool.



Zondag 26.5.18

zondag  
 [Sunday].  
 20.5.2018,  
 mixed media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm

MS - 271130 v 022,

五五五五五  
 五五五五五  
 五五五五五  
 五五五五五



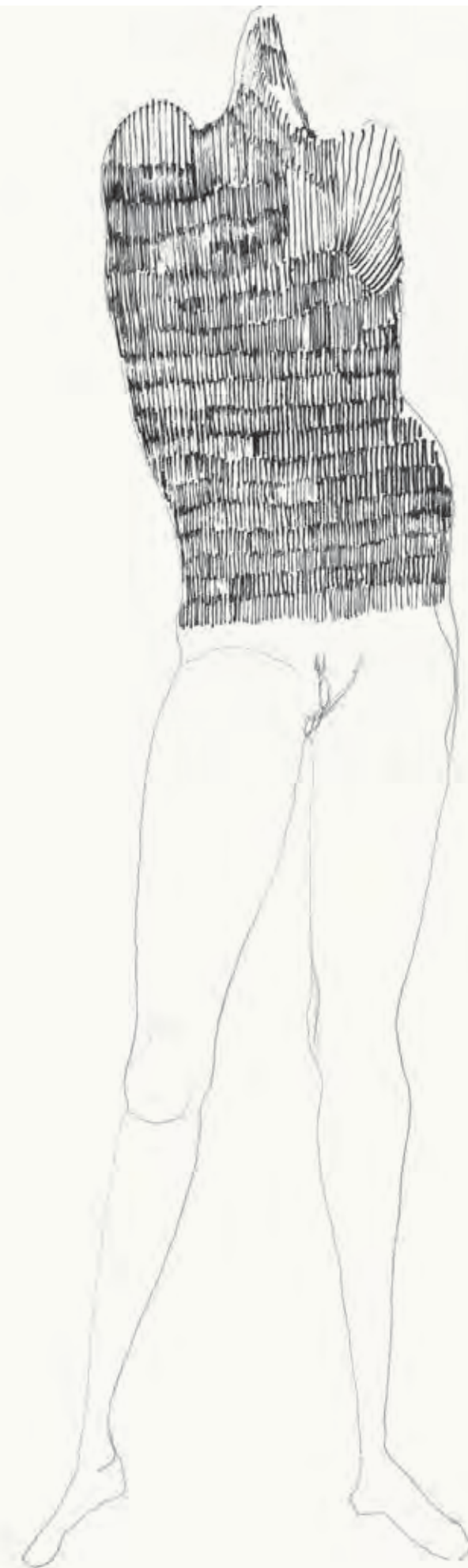
figures

nd.  
 Xiamen  
 25.05.2009.

Xiamen,  
 25.05.2009,  
 mixed media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm



5.8.2018,  
21.08.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



nd.  
5.8.2011  
21.8.2011

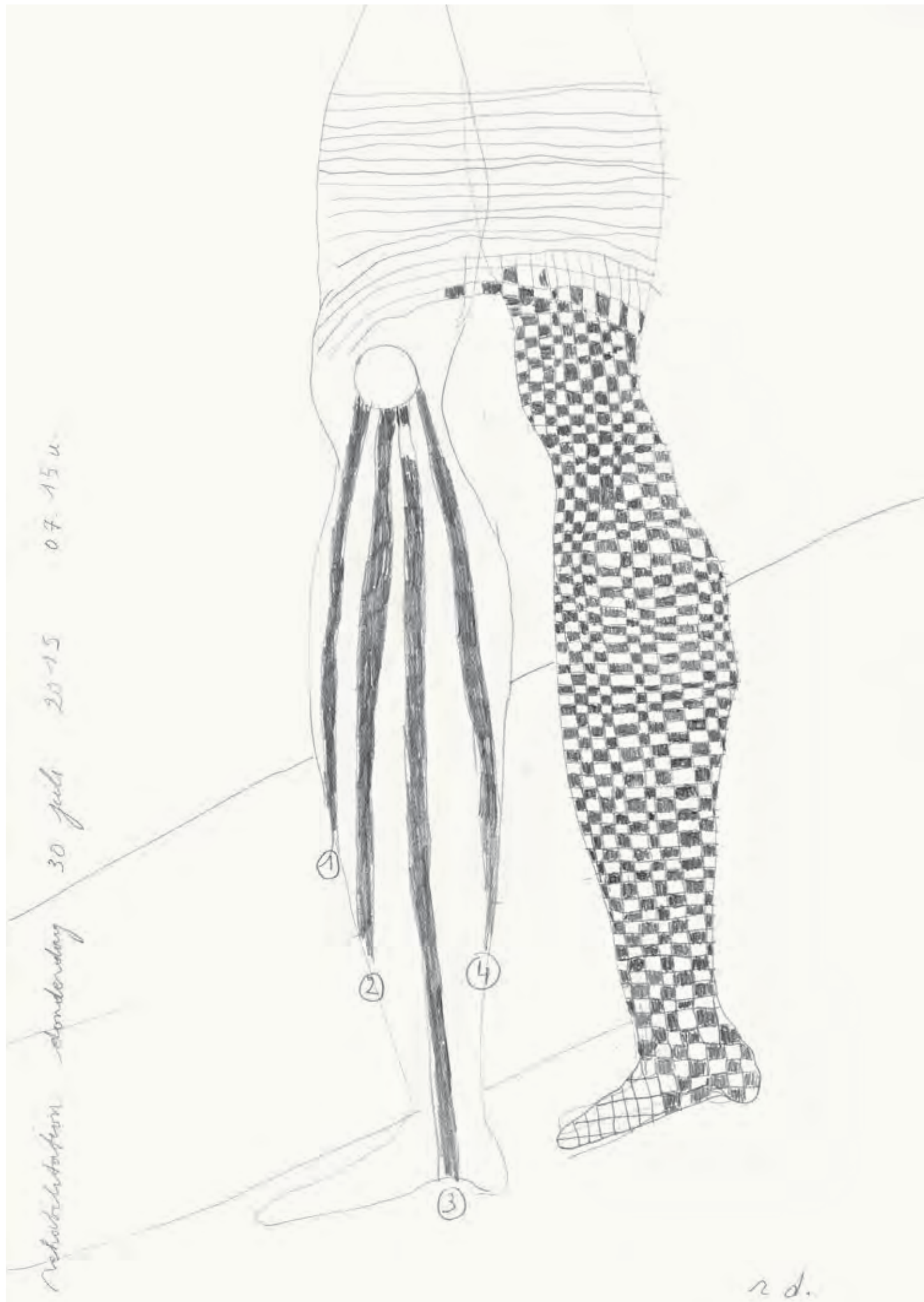


Moen,  
5/7/2014, 17u.,  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



Moen, 5/7/2014 17u.

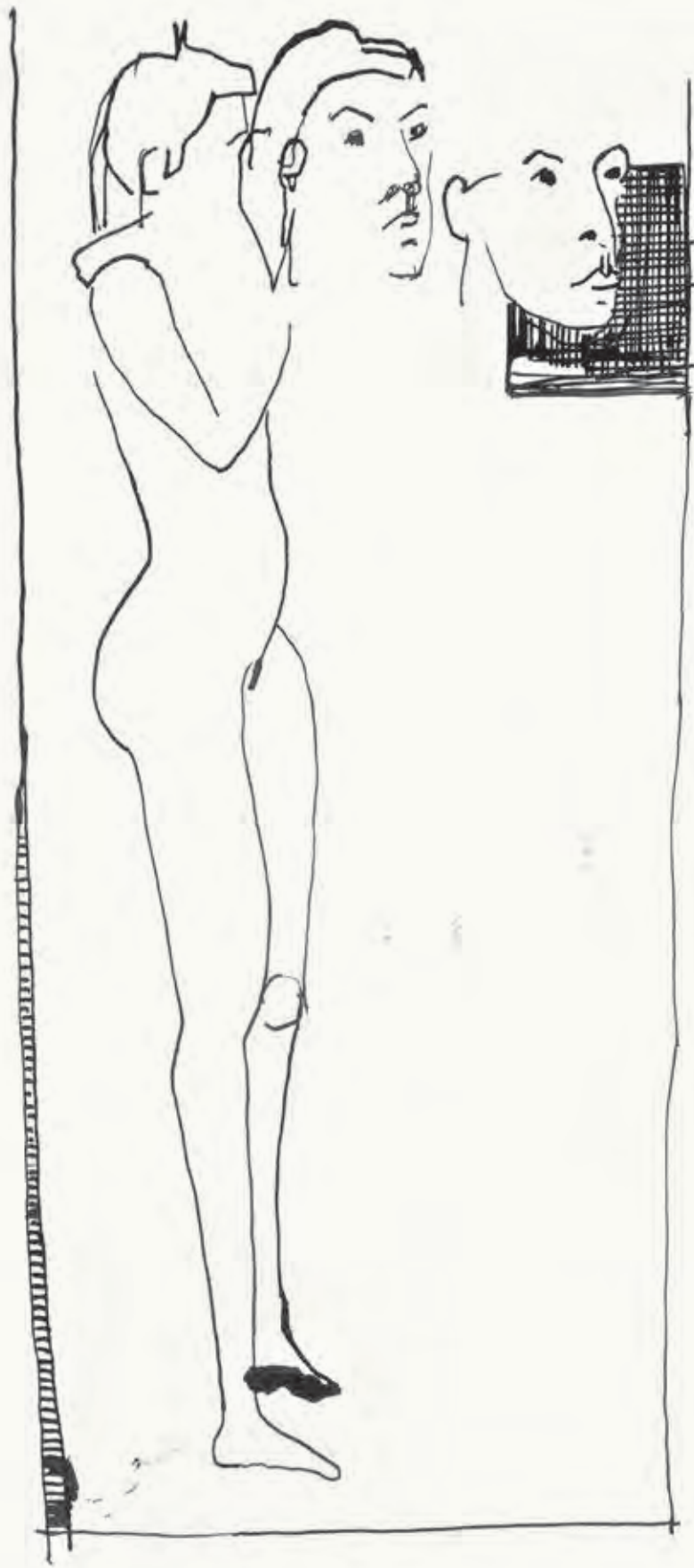
rehabilitation,  
donderdag, 30  
juli [Thursday,  
30 July], 2015,  
07:15, pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



rehabilitation donderdag 30 juli 2015 07:15 u.

2 d.





*Gent* [Ghent],  
30.06.2016,  
20:59, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

*Nanny Nelson - Gent - 30.06.2016 - 20.59*



13.07.2009,  
Chinese ink  
on paper,  
34.5 x 24.5 cm





26.11.2012,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



17.12.2007,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

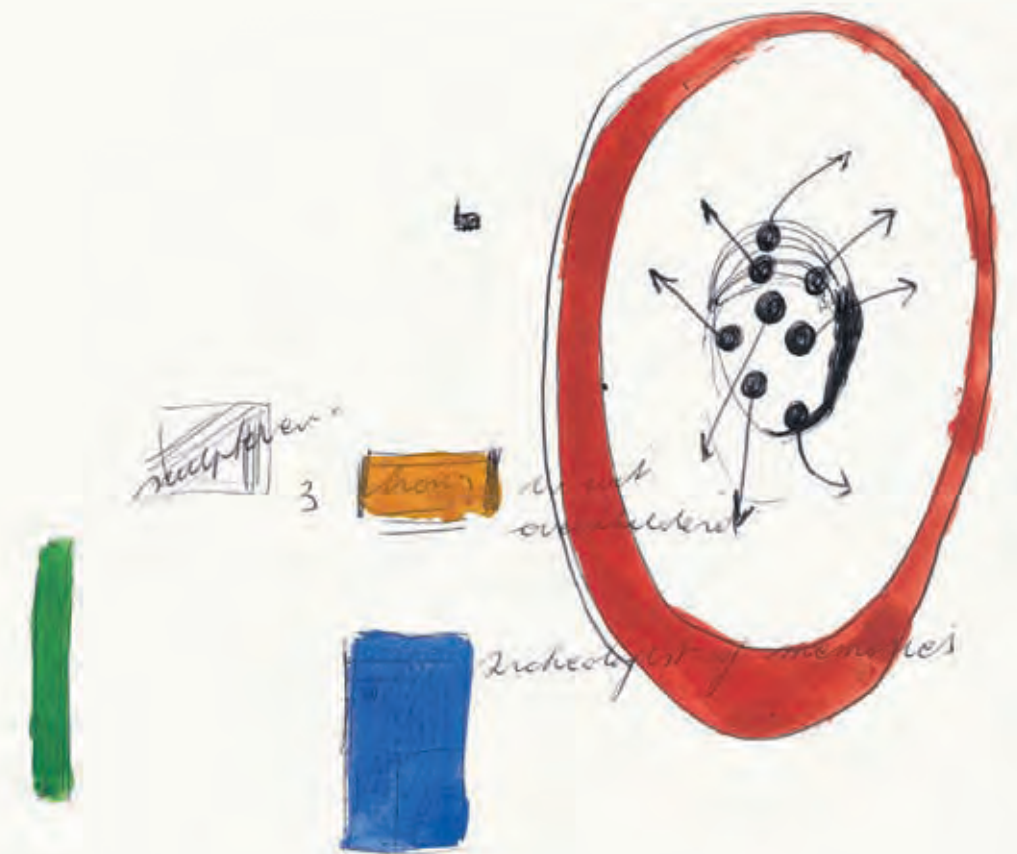


12.06.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
30.1 x 23.8 cm



n.d.  
12.06.2006





n.d.  
2018



01.12.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
36.1 x 26.9 cm



05.06.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
30.1 x 23.4 cm







10.10.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



links [left],  
25.01.2016,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





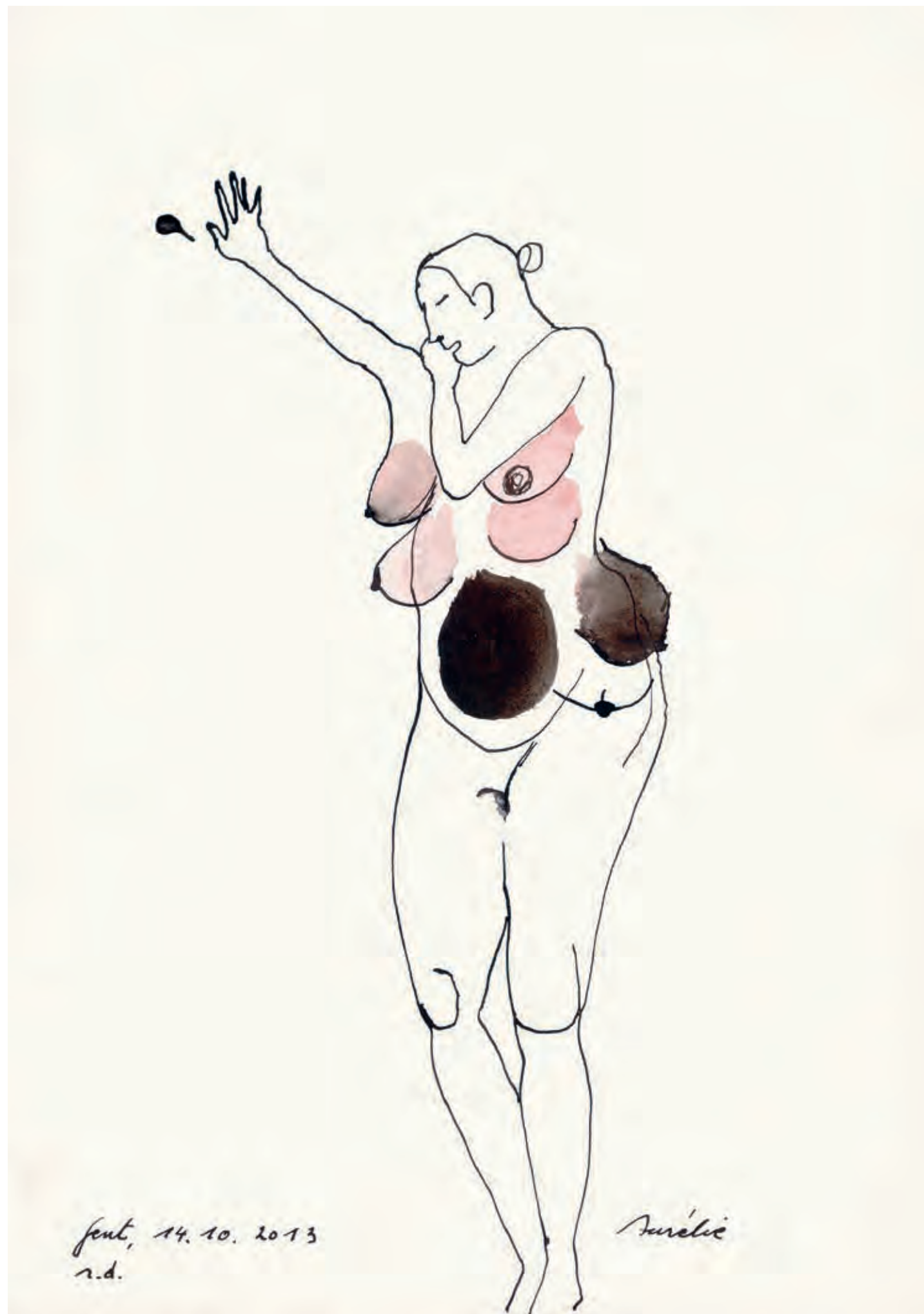
20.09.2010,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



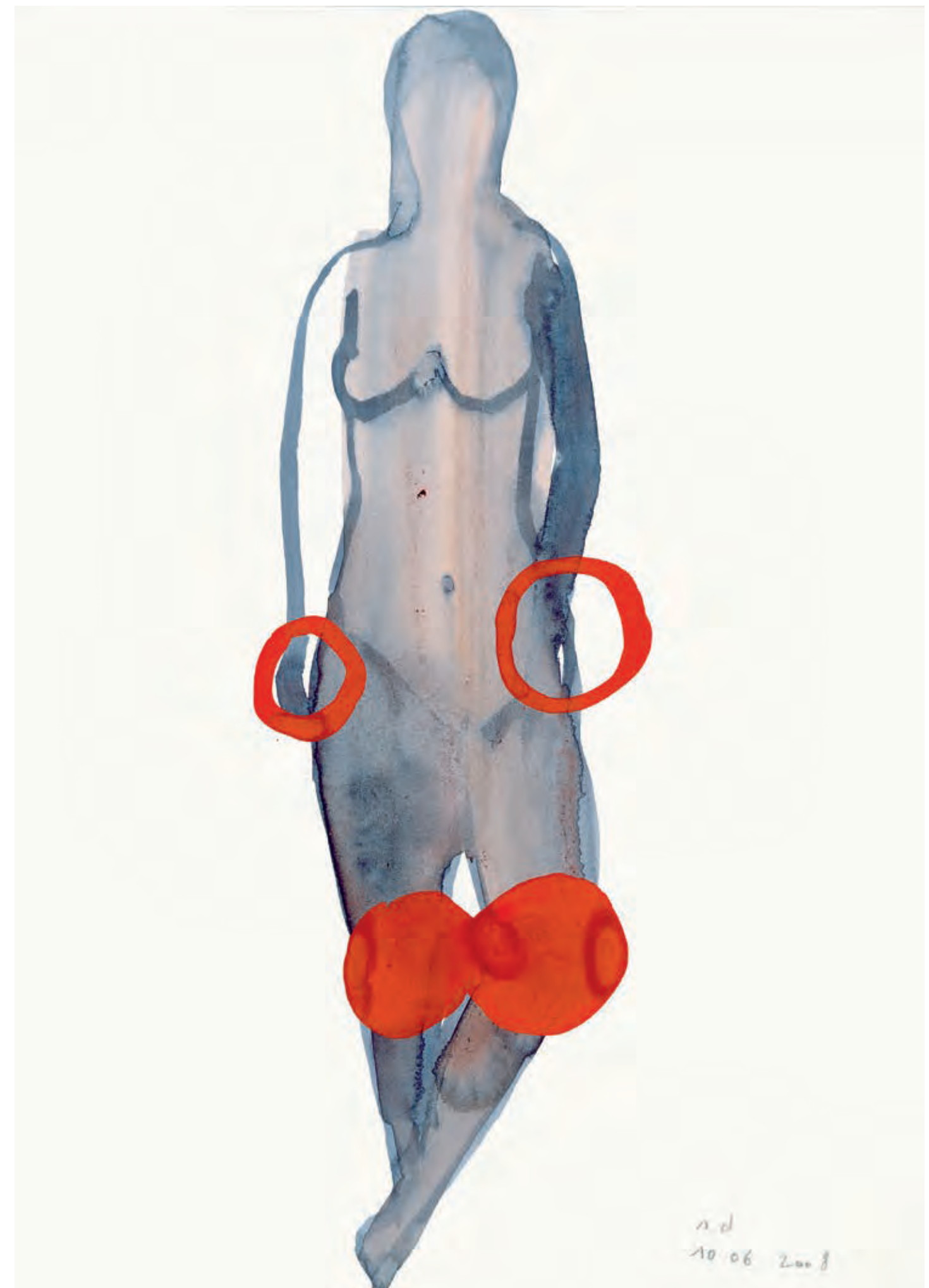
2009, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



*Gent* [Ghent],  
14.10.2013,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

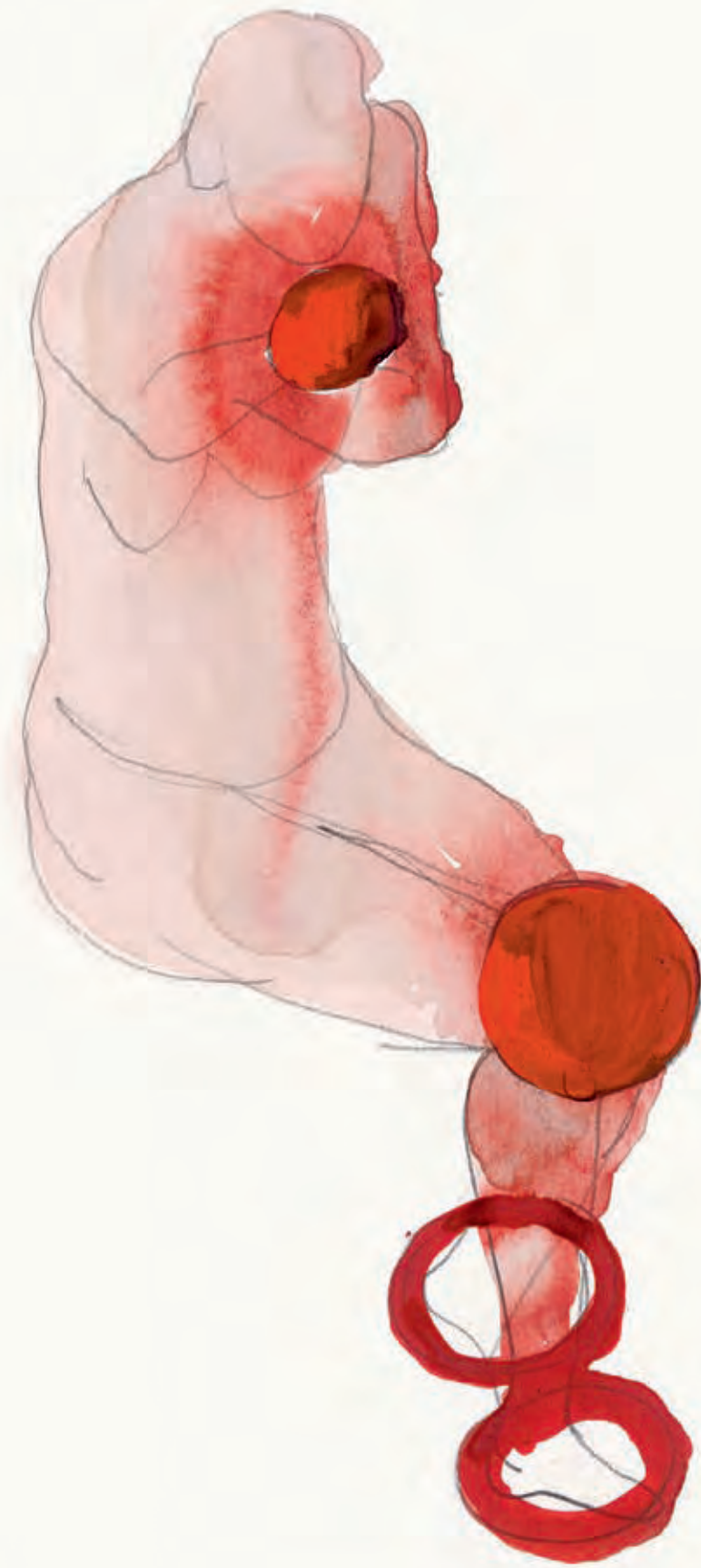


10.06.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





09.06.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



n.d.  
09.06.2008

18.09.2017,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



n.d.  
18.09.2017

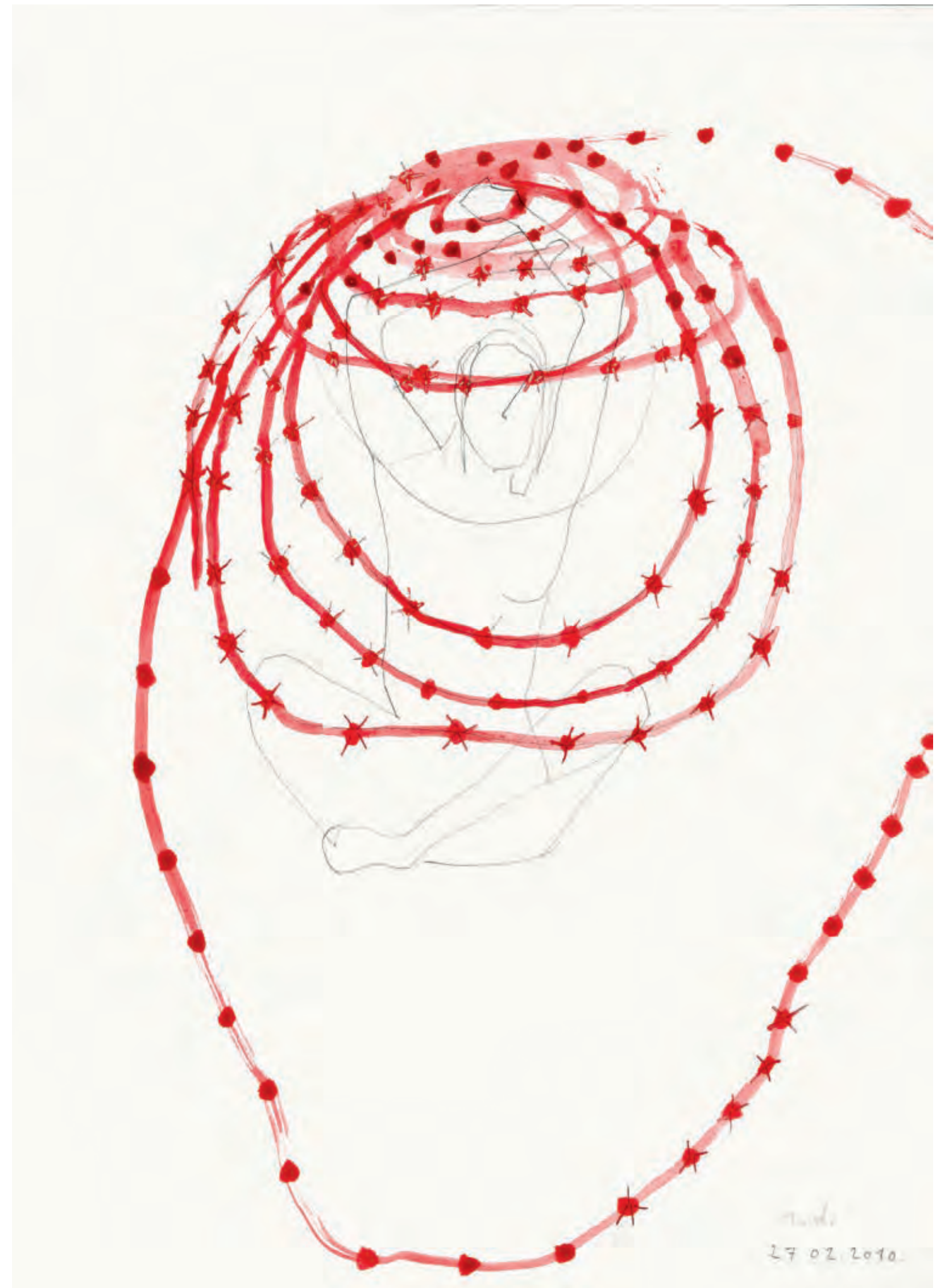


16.09.2017,  
22:10, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



n.d.  
16.09.2017  
22:10





27.02.2010







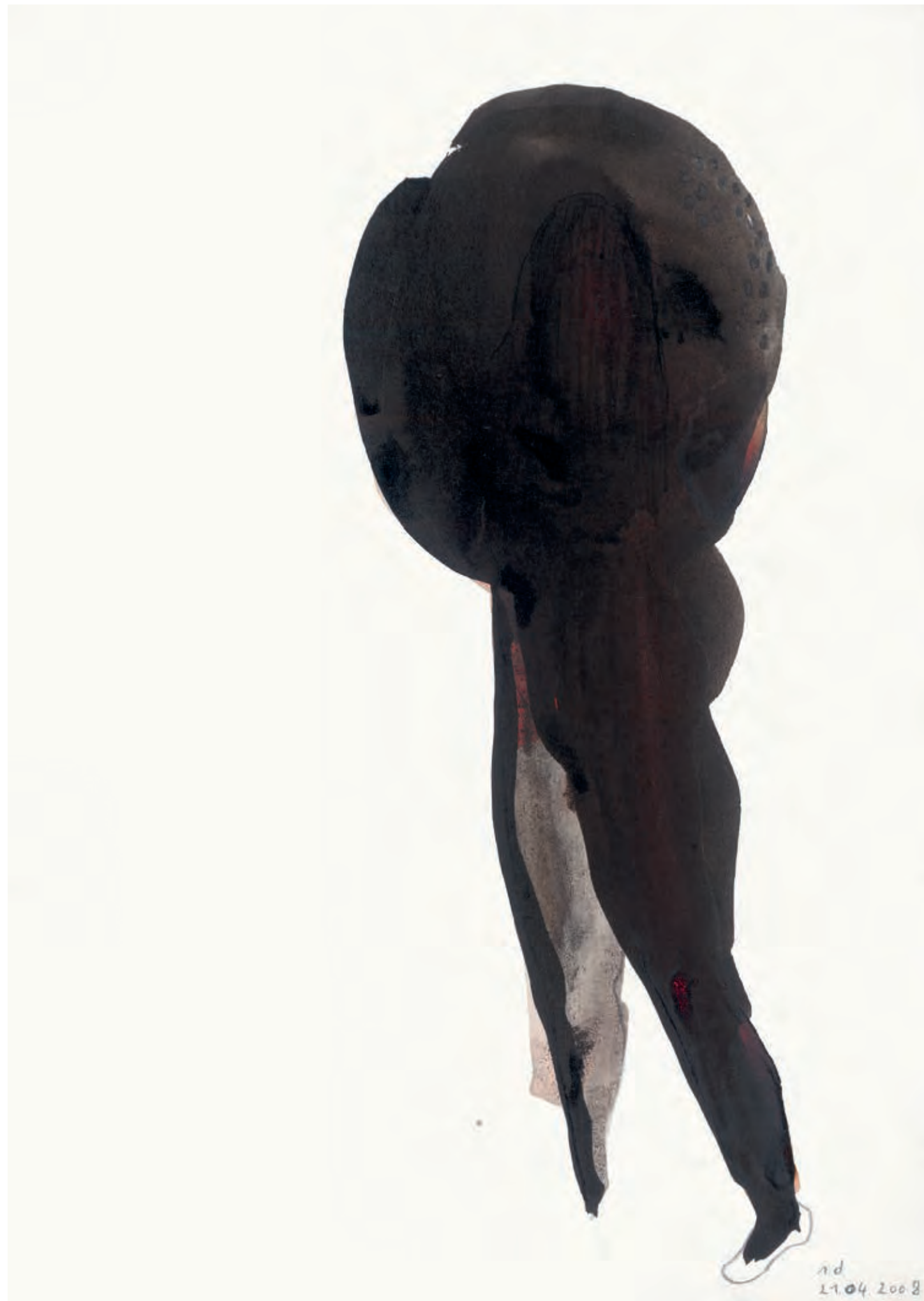


3.2.2014,  
 5.2.2014, *Iris*,  
 mixed media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm



2008, mixed  
 media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm





21.04.2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



Gent [Ghent],  
22.11.2000,  
19:30, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





Dublin,  
16.04.2000,  
17:04, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



2014, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





2017, 08:57,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29 x 21.7 cm



woensdag  
[Wednesday]  
26/11/1997,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





14.05.2002,  
Brugge  
[Bruges], 2002,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





28/11/1997,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



12:51, 2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





23.09.2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





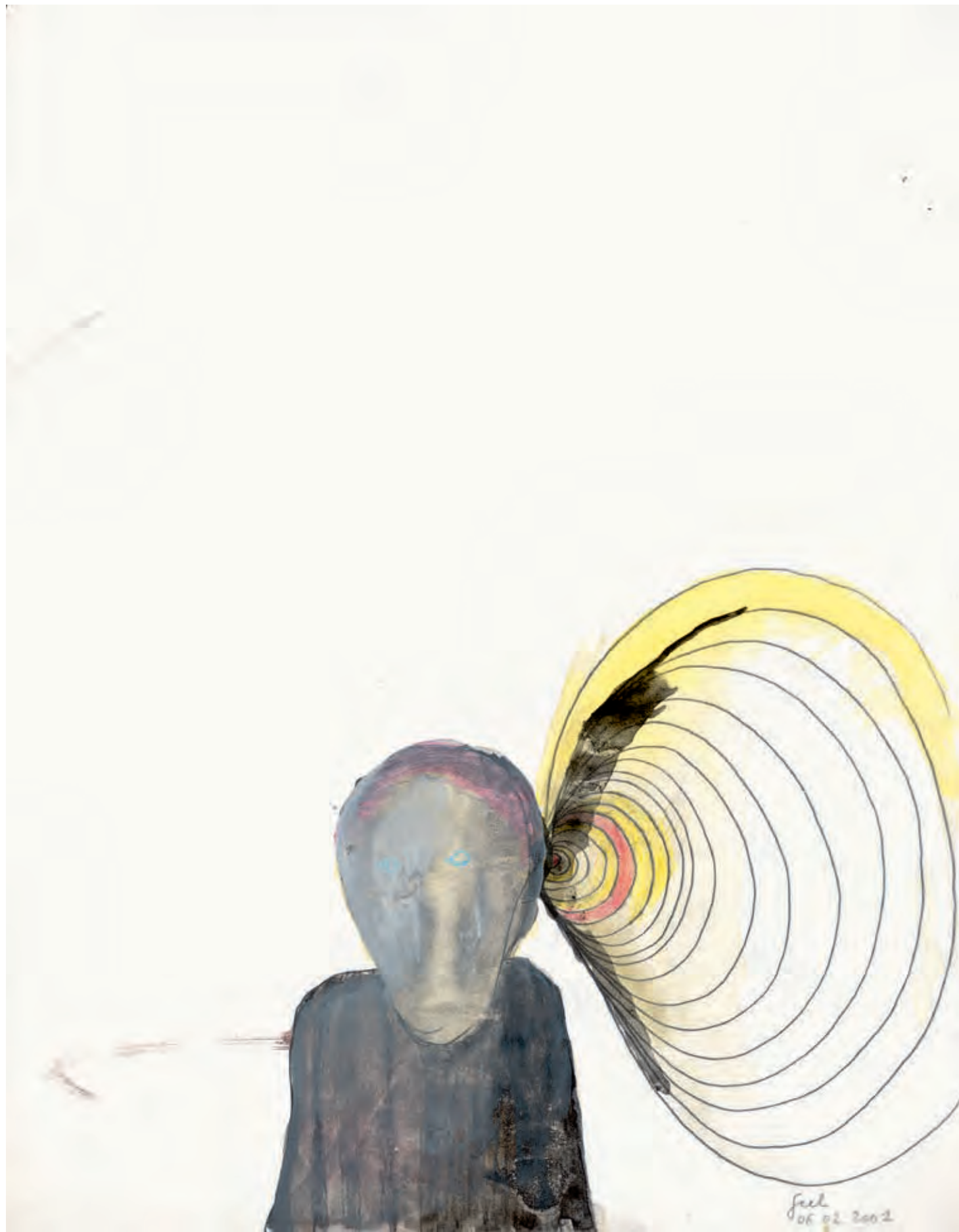
Gent [Ghent],  
 2013,  
 mixed media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm



vrijdag [Friday]  
 17.05.2002,  
 10:58,  
 mixed media  
 on paper,  
 29.7 x 21 cm



Geel,  
06.02.2001,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



21/11/1997,  
vrijdag  
[Friday],  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm









17.01.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



nd  
17.01.2011

9.02.2015,  
21:50,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

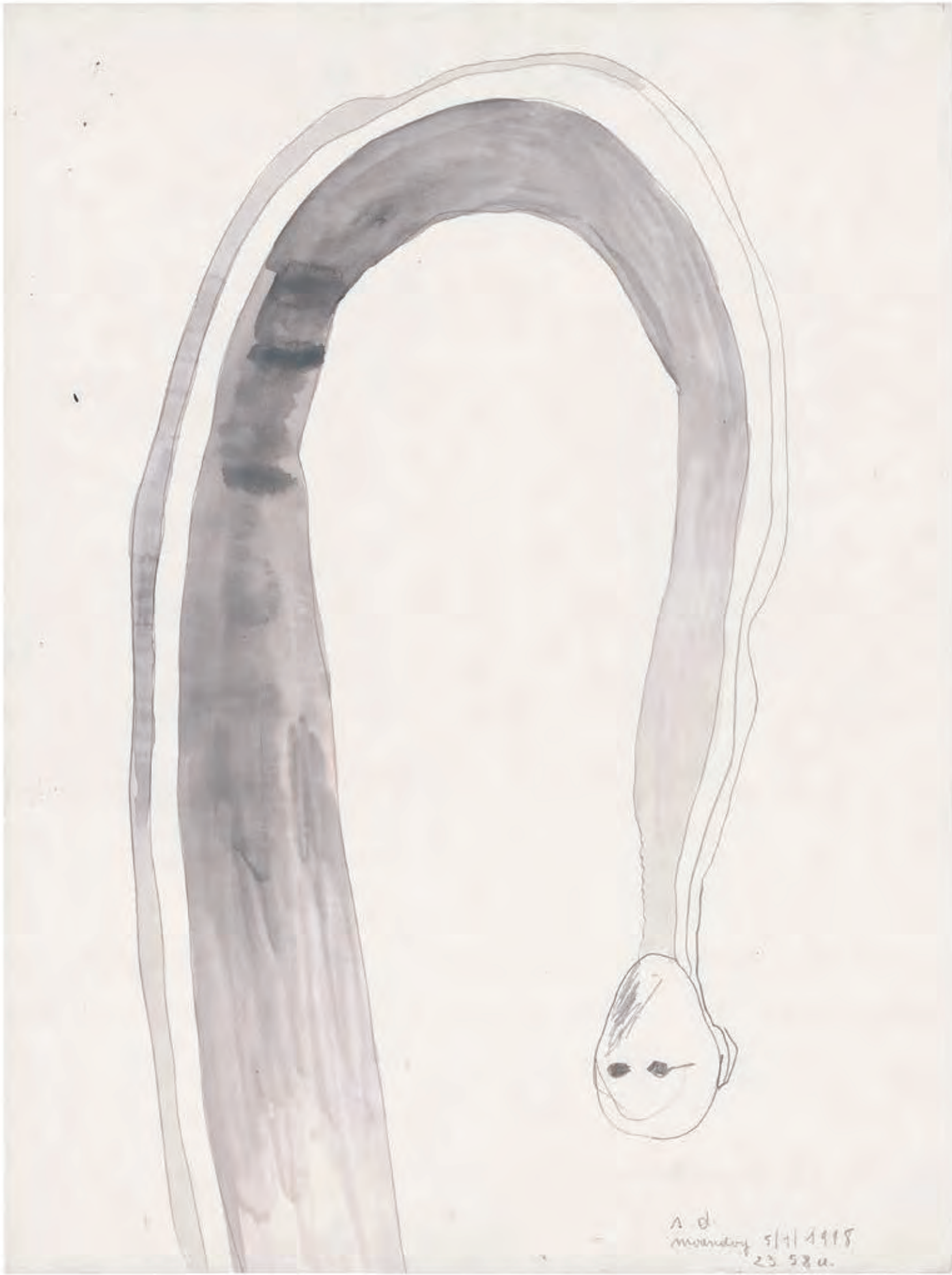
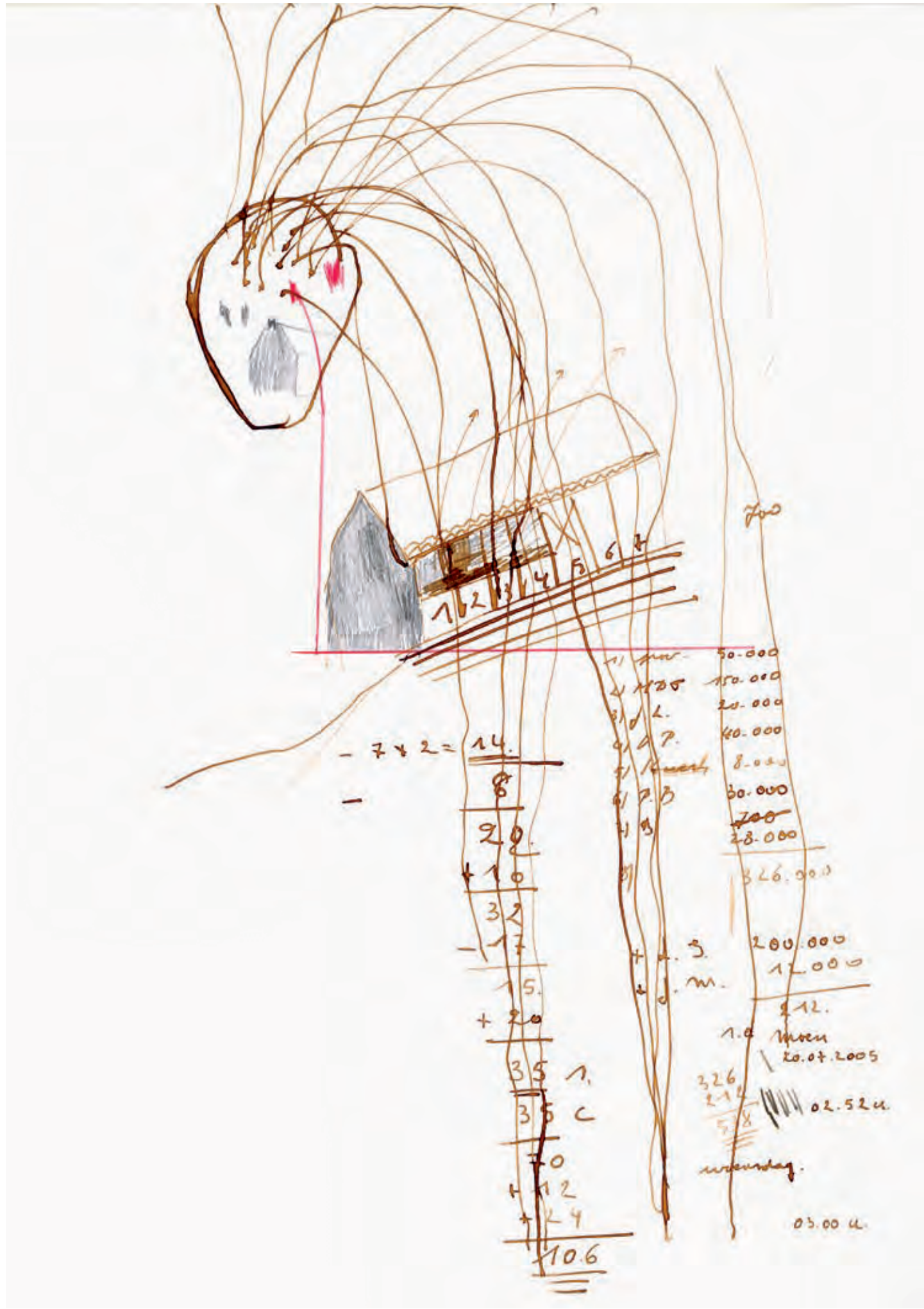
#ROM

TOY



nd  
9.02.2015  
21:50









dinsdag  
[Tuesday]  
6/1/1998,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



2009, mixed  
media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



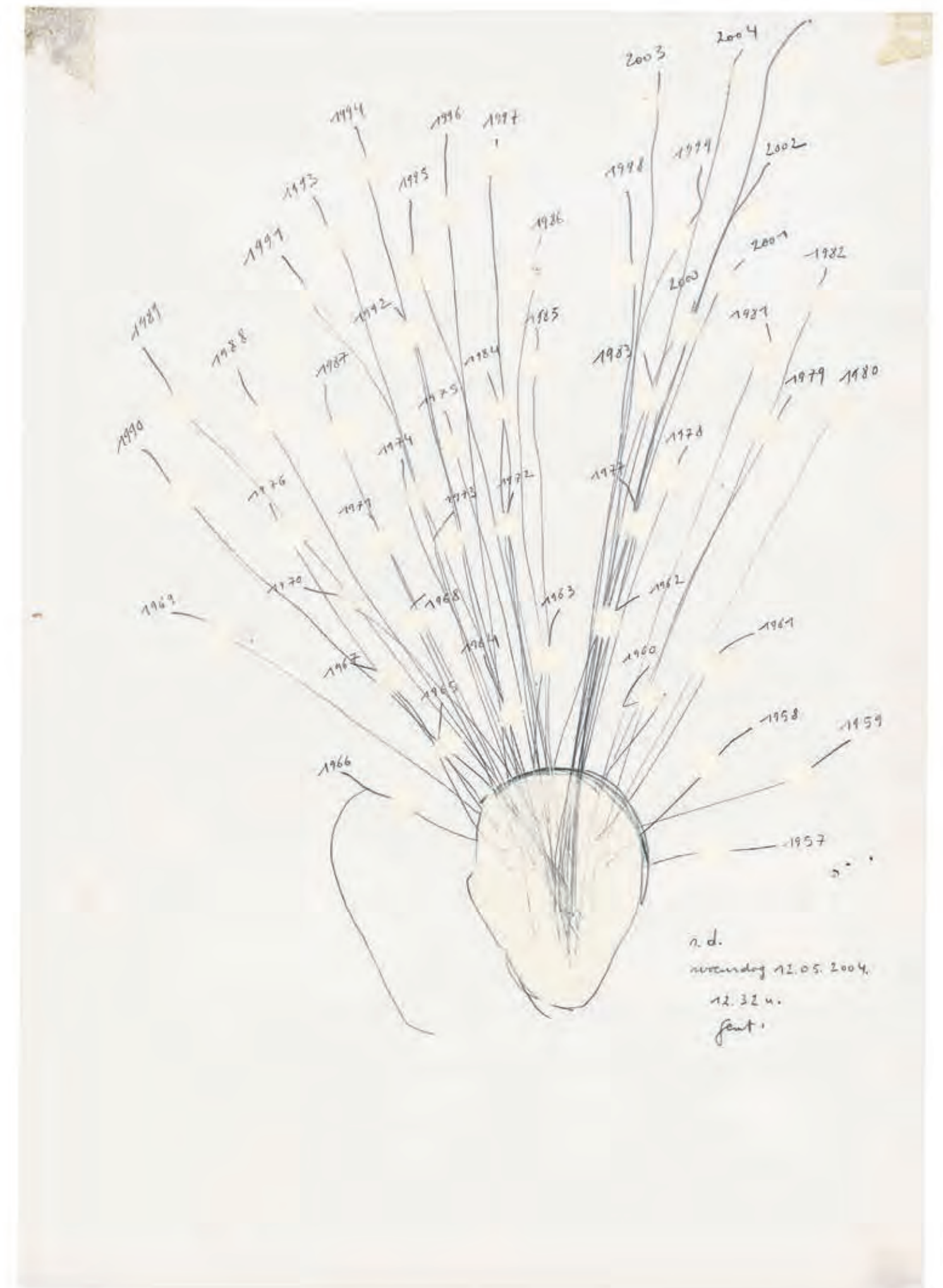


18.02.2013,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



the drawing  
is my best  
research,  
20.8.2011,  
7.8.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm





woensdag  
[Wednesday]  
12.05.2004,  
Gent [Ghent],  
12:32,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



# As if It Had Just Happened

## INGE BRAECKMAN

With the rarity of a woodpecker that rhythmically  
heralds the evening — naturalness enters here

casually, lines open themselves up generously, with  
a movement of the hand, too, that never screams,

drawing attention to themselves only *as such* —  
a logical step on the ladder of the unconscious

being, symbiotically merging with that which a sheet  
of paper is capable of as the breath of life. Never had there

been more beginning than now. A beginning that  
incessantly moves. And generates dailiness

in all its beauty. Now dancing like a silhouette  
in frail light. Now disappearing delicately as if it were

a shape in the mist. Thoughts like existential lines  
shake off the rusty framework. The memory

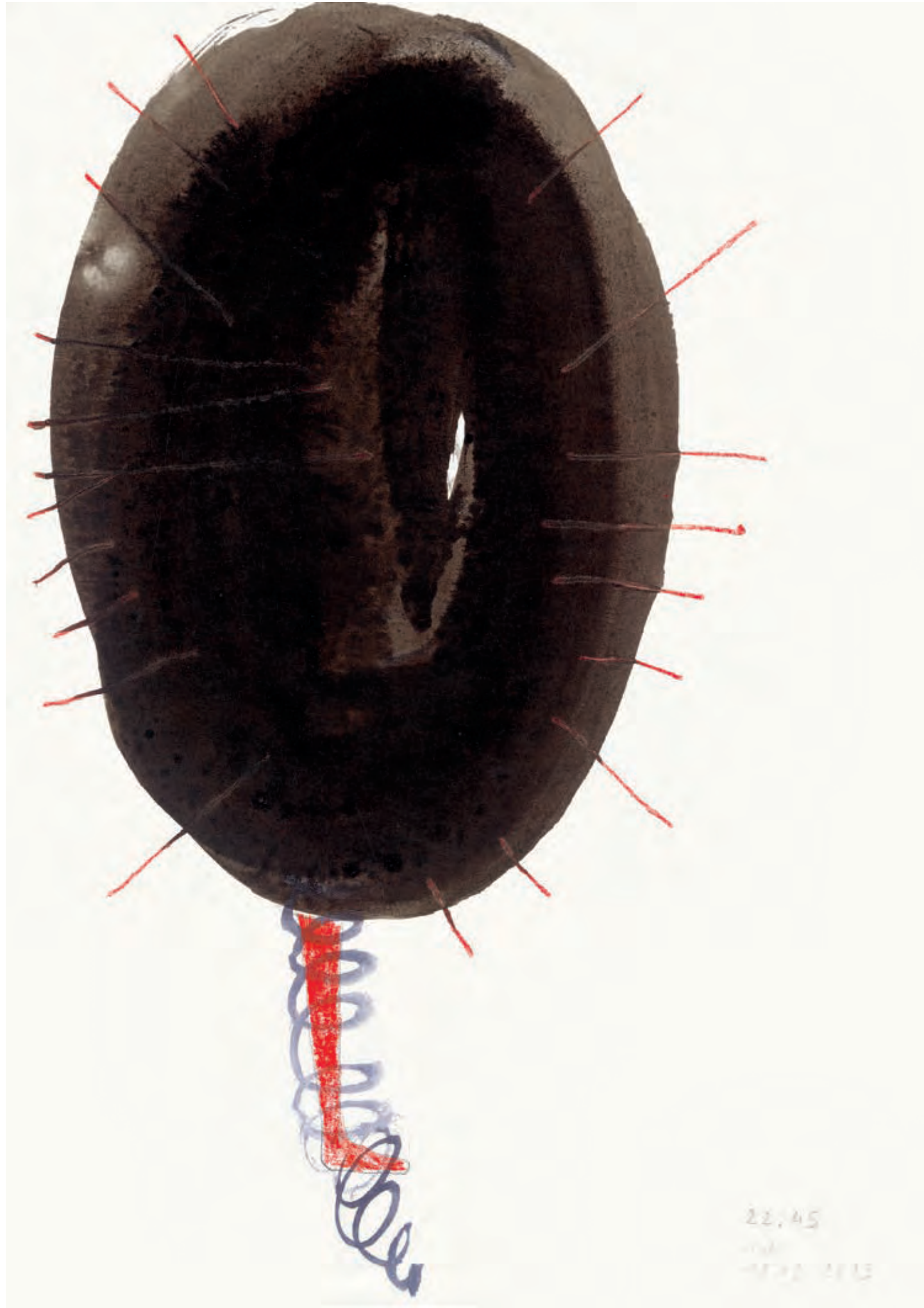
resides in the act of mere presence. Perforations  
like black holes of what life lacks. Folds

bring to mind a scenic quality or the soft  
curves of a skin, spontaneous wrinkles of water.

They open the drawing. The image, how fragile  
sometimes, always and unmistakably erect.

Translated by Dirk Verbiest





18.02.2013,  
22:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

22:45  
18.02.2013



2013, 19:17,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

19:17  
18.02.2013





23.02.2012,  
19:45,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

19 45  
nd  
23.02.2012



10.10.2014,  
16:50,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

16 50  
nd  
10.10.2014



22.02.2016,  
23:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



23:45

n.d. 22.02.2016.





02.09.2013,  
23:15,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



maart [March]  
2007,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



maart 2007

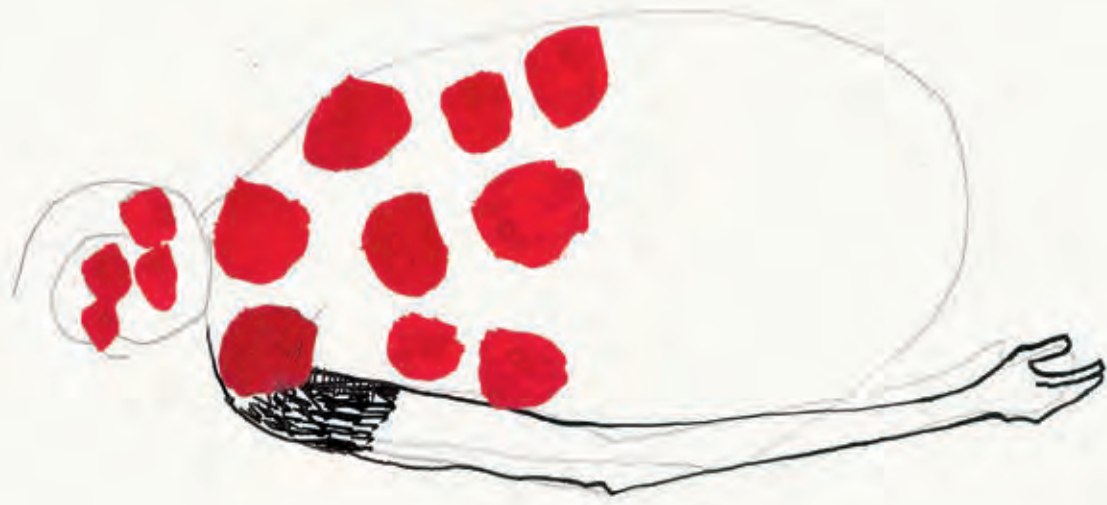
19.12.2017,  
19:12, 19:22,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



19:22  
19.12.2017



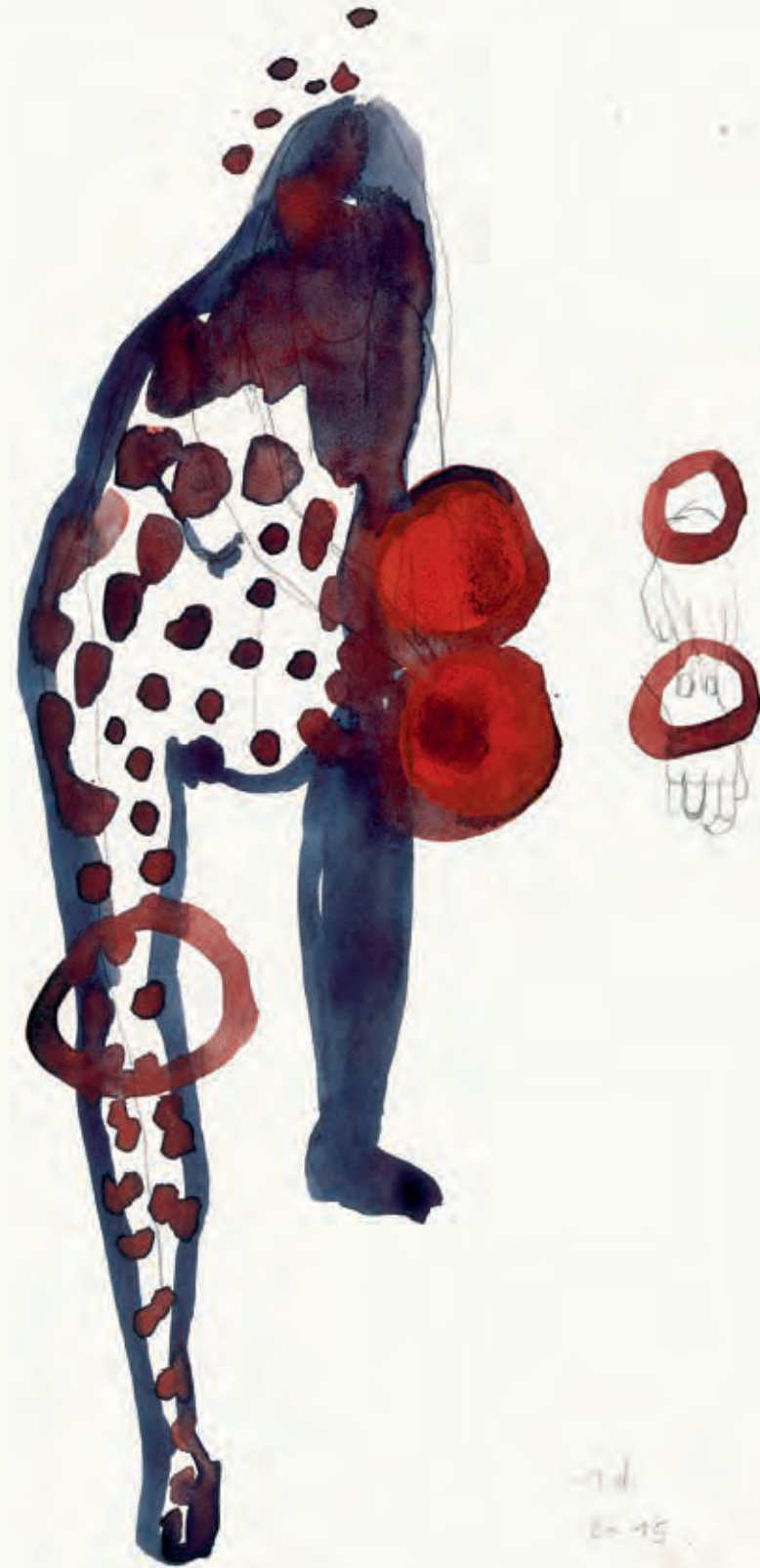
12.06.2017,  
21:05,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



12.06.2017,  
21:05,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



2015,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



nd  
21.04

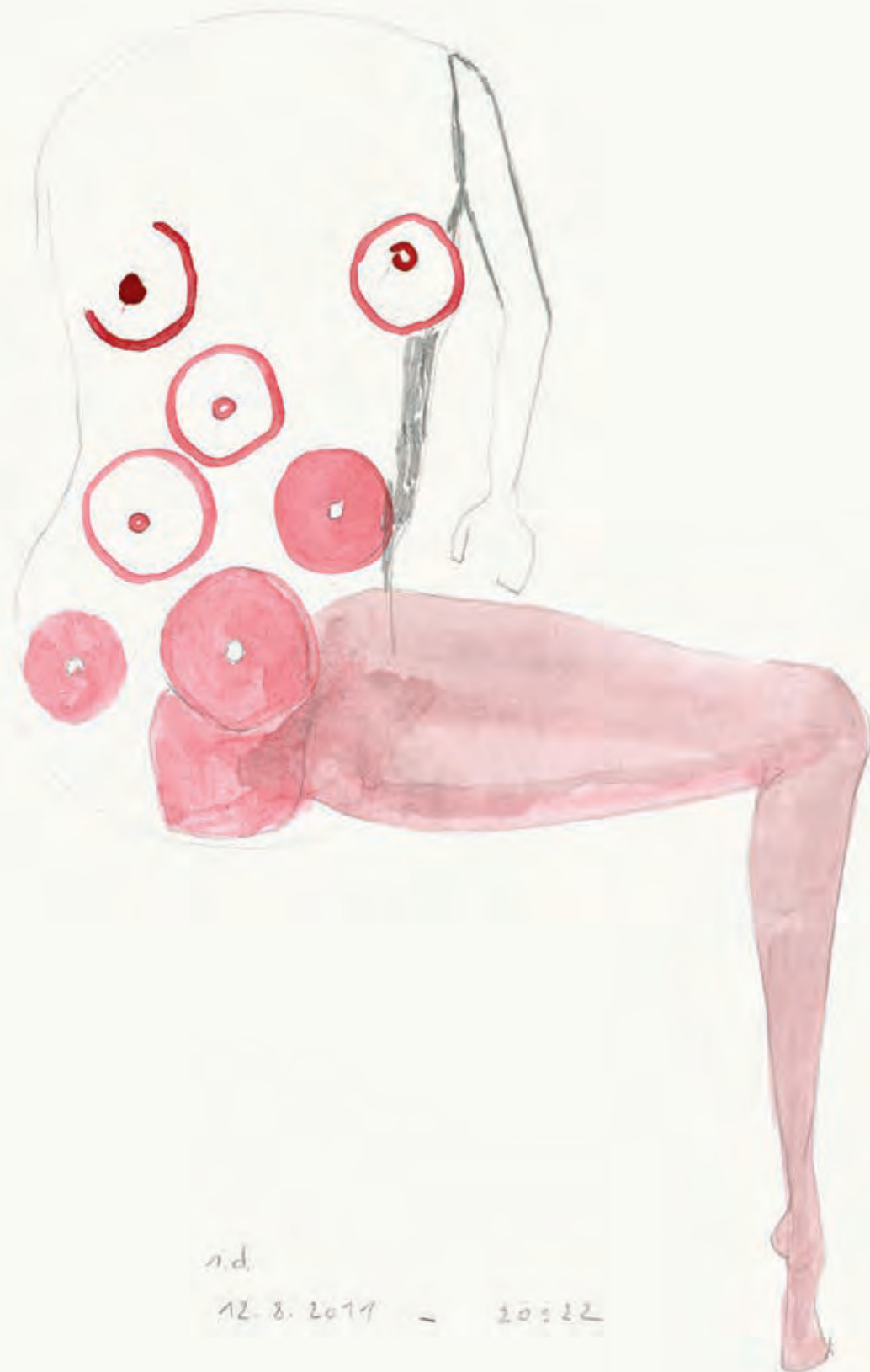
21.04.2008,  
21:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



21.45  
nd  
21.04.2008



12.8.2011,  
20:22,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



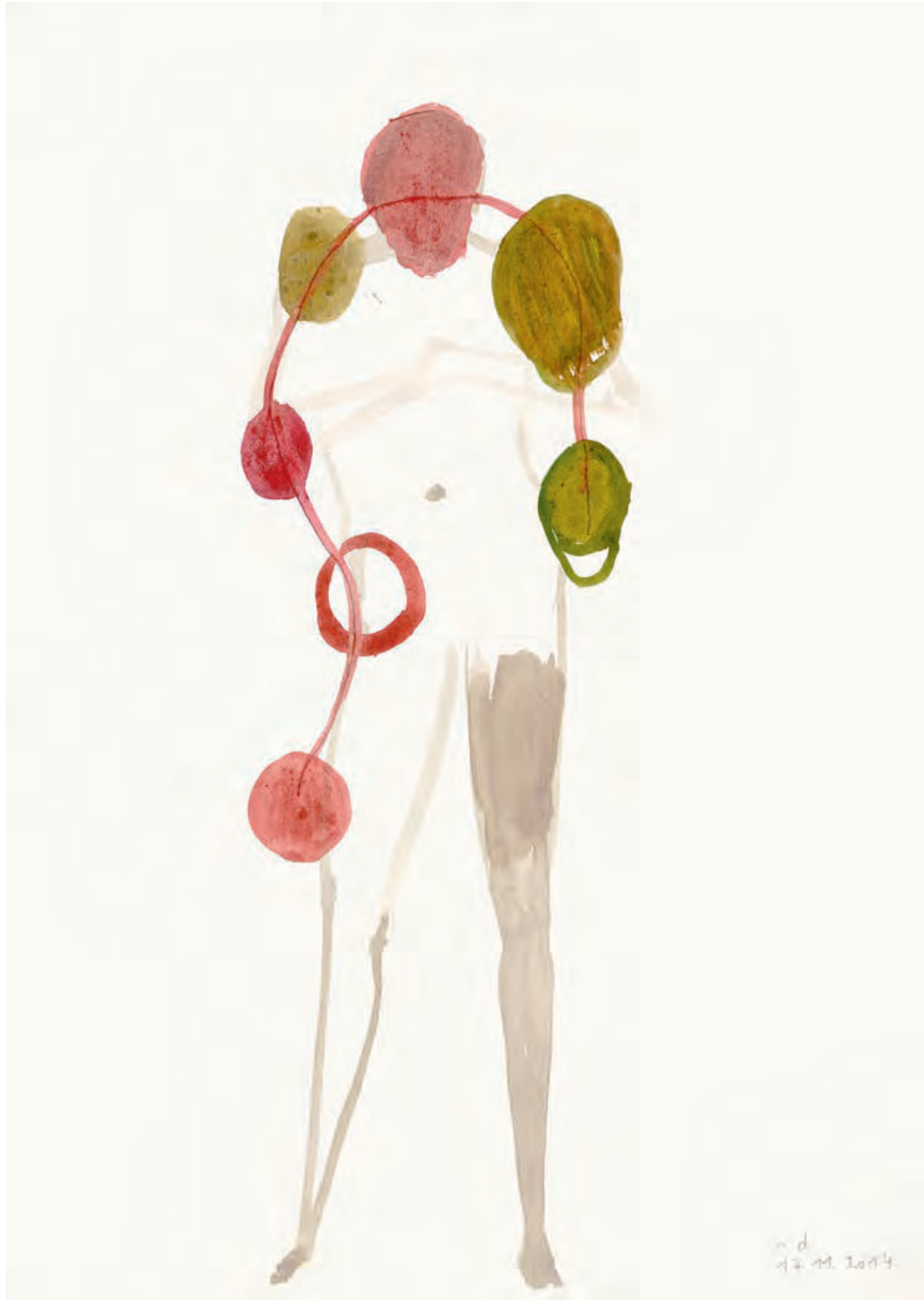
n.d.  
12.8.2011 - 20:22

22.06.2015,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

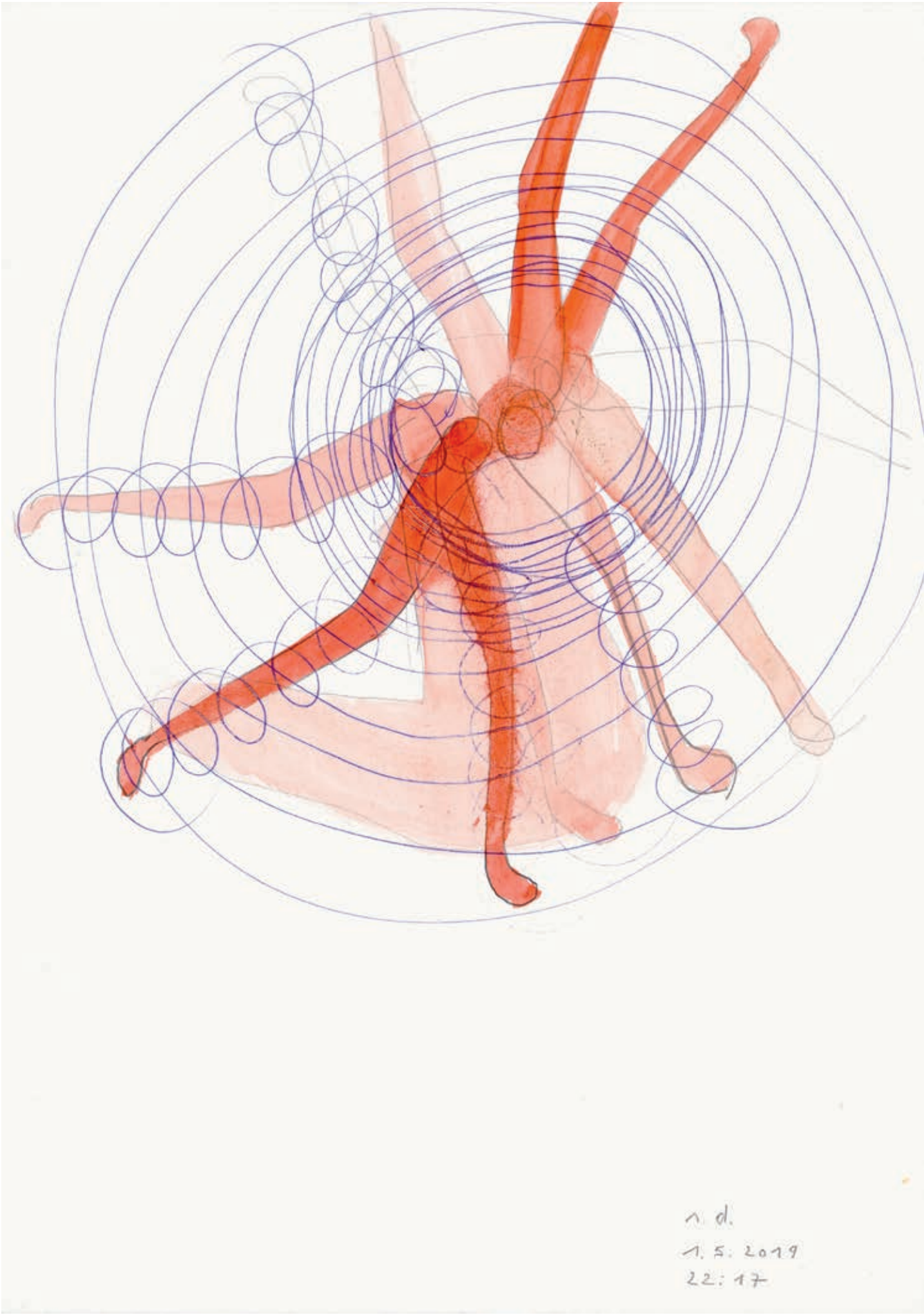


n.d. 22.06.2015.





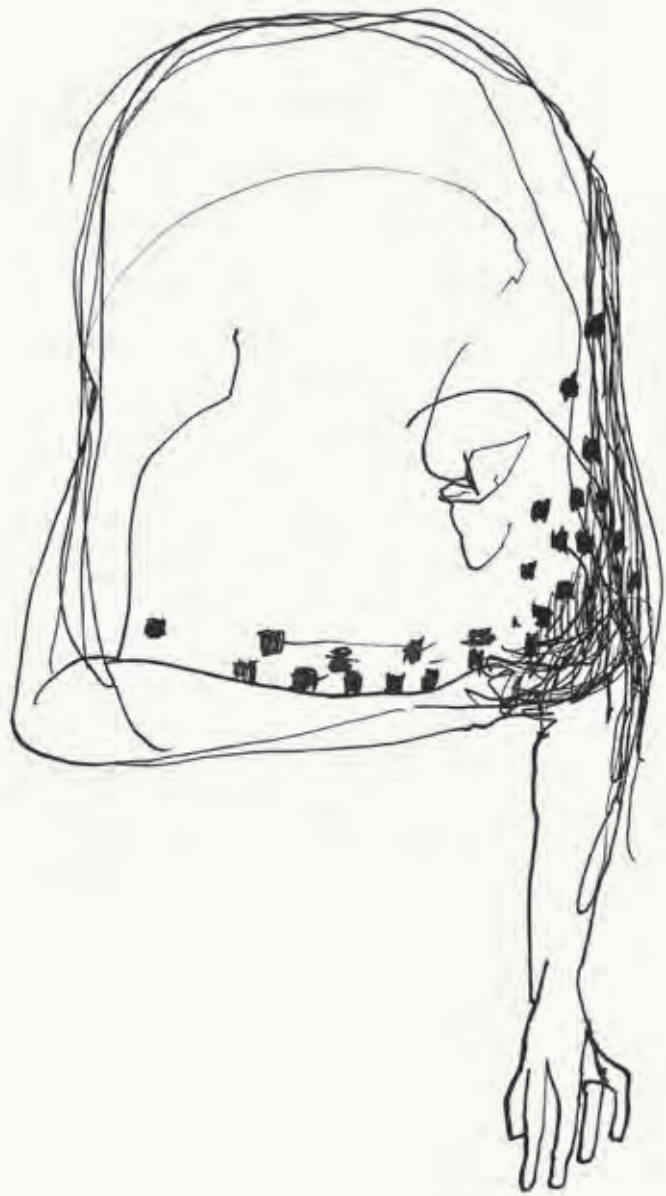
17.11.2014,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



1.5.2019, 22:17,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



4.01.2013,  
19:17, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



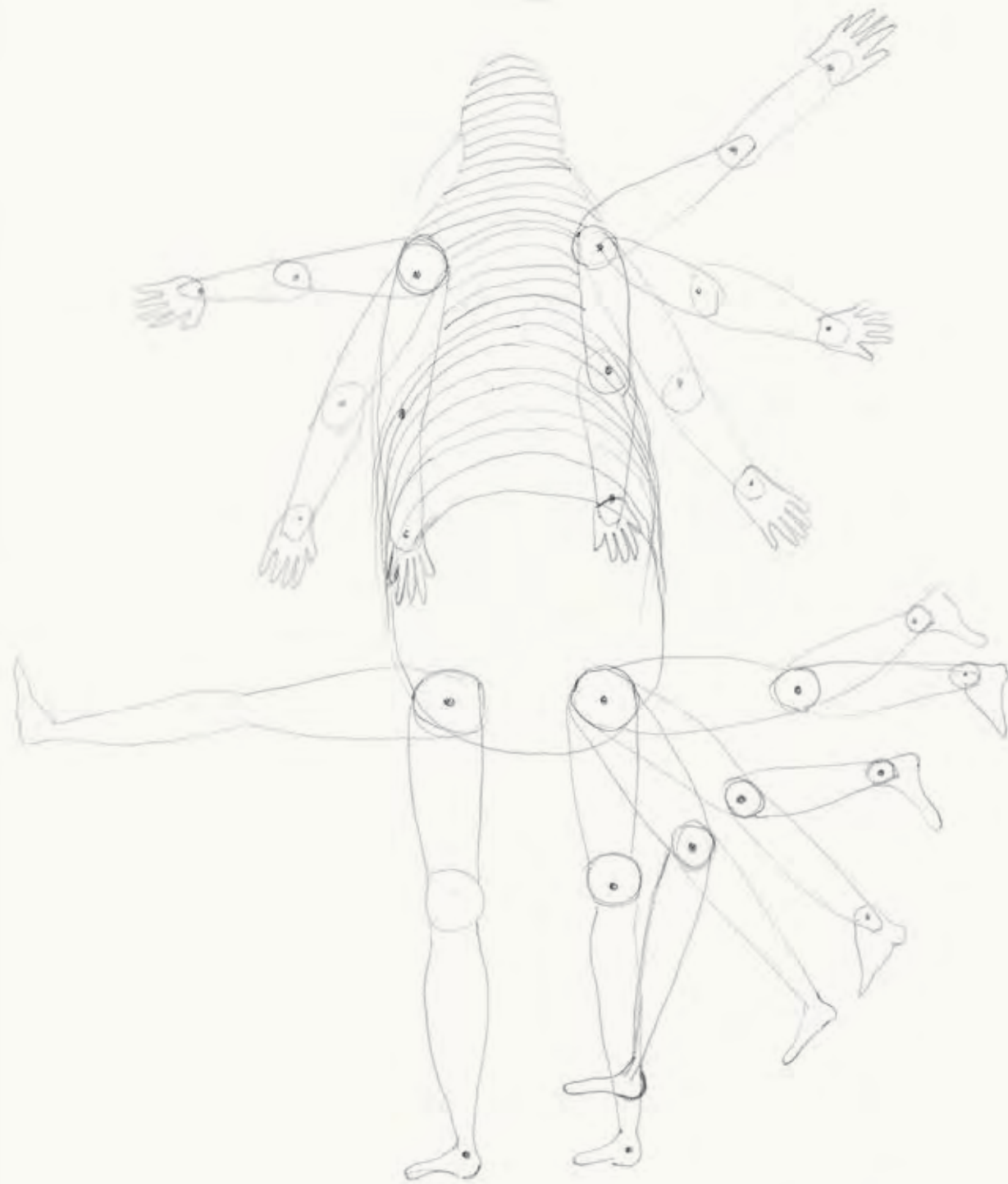
19:17

4.01

2013



3.8.2015, 13:57,  
rehabilitation,  
pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

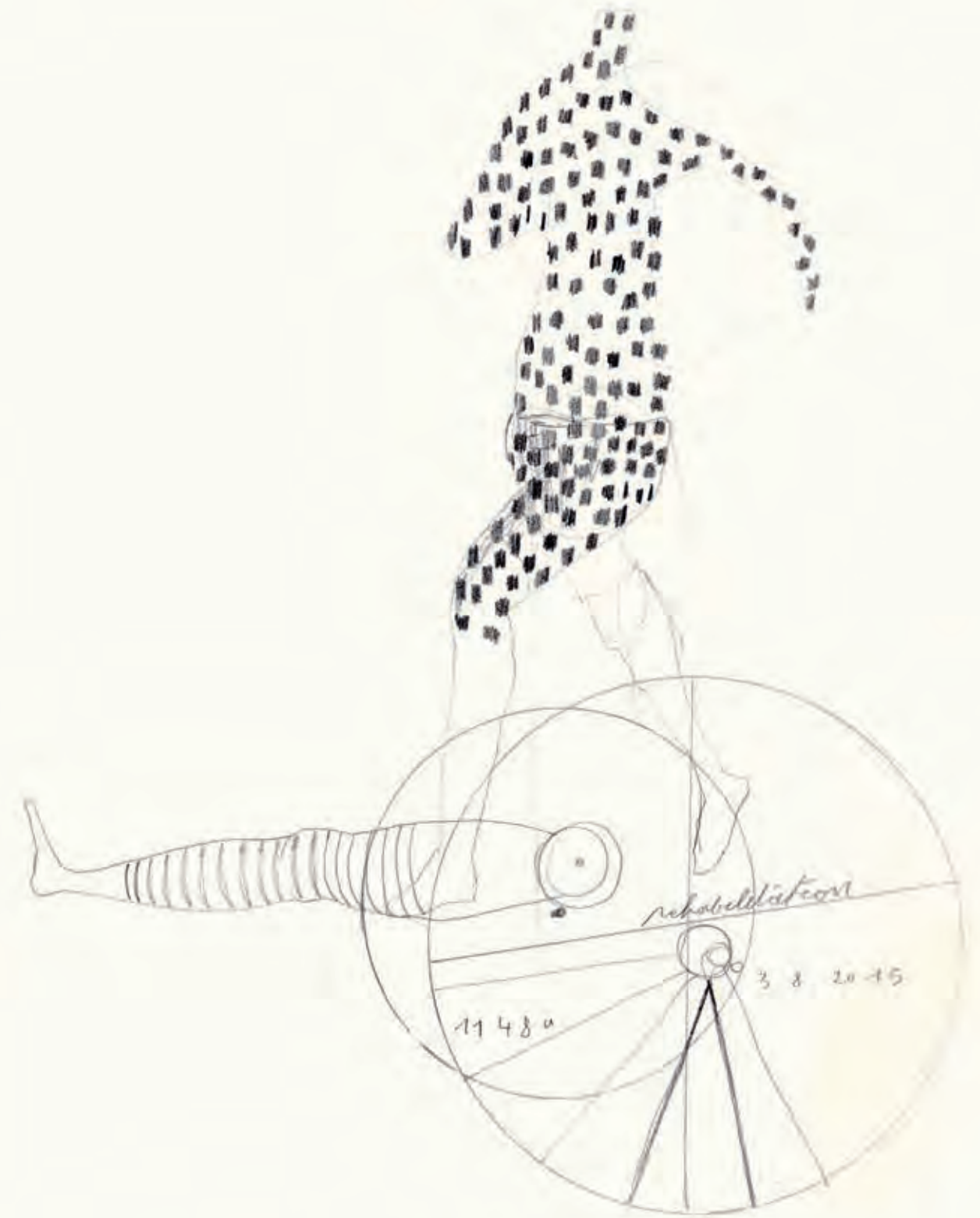


1 pz mit beweglichen Ledermatten, float, karton,  
Levansgrat,

rehabilitation 3.8.2015 13:57a

n.d.

3.8.2015, 11:48,  
rehabilitation,  
pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



n.d.

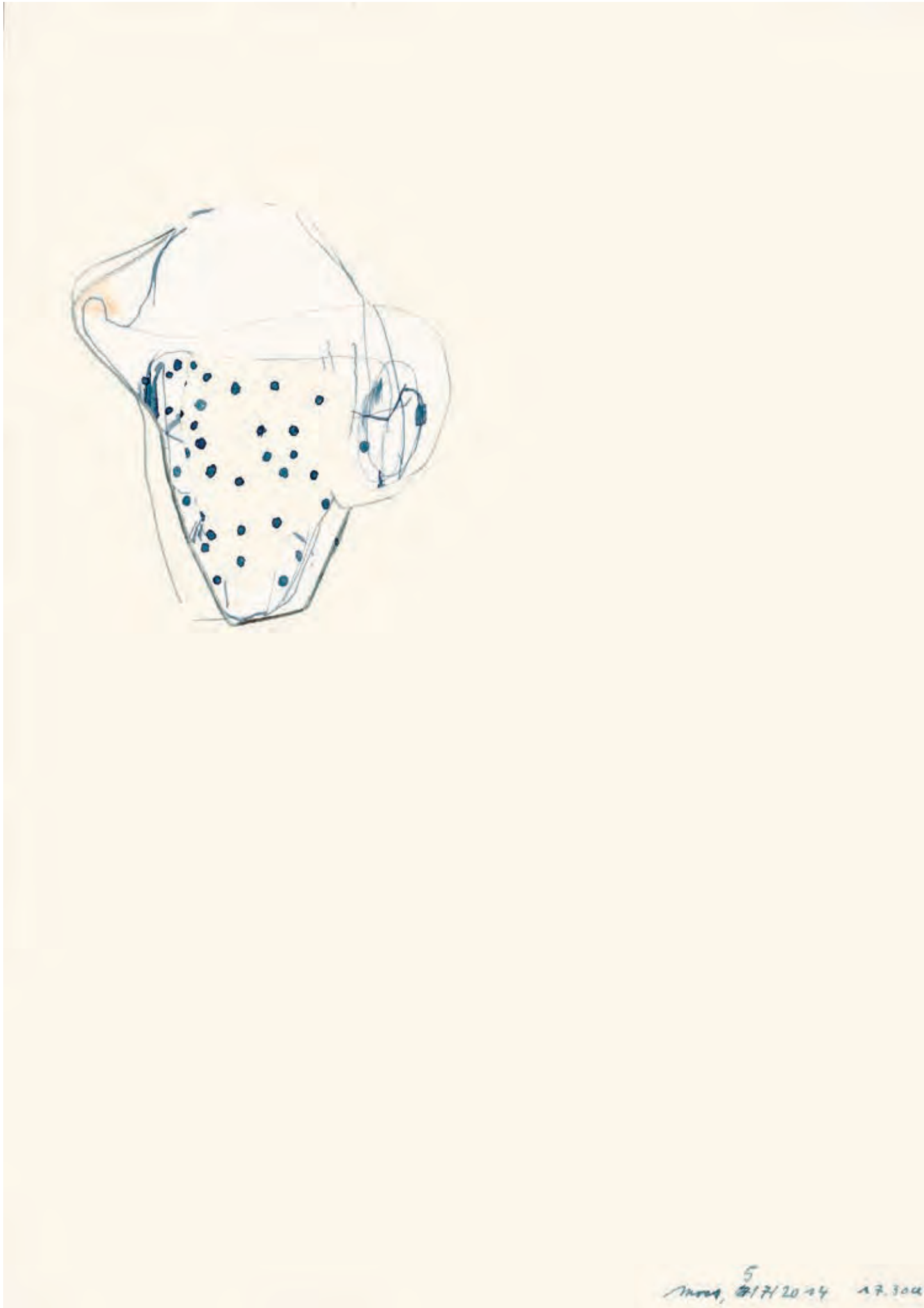


24.01.2011,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm  
10.01.2011,  
*windpokken*  
[chicken pox],  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



10.01.2011  
24.01.2011  
*windpokken*  
24.01.2011





Moen,  
5/7/2014, 17:30,  
ink on paper,  
29 x 21.9 cm

Moen, 5/7/2014 17:30



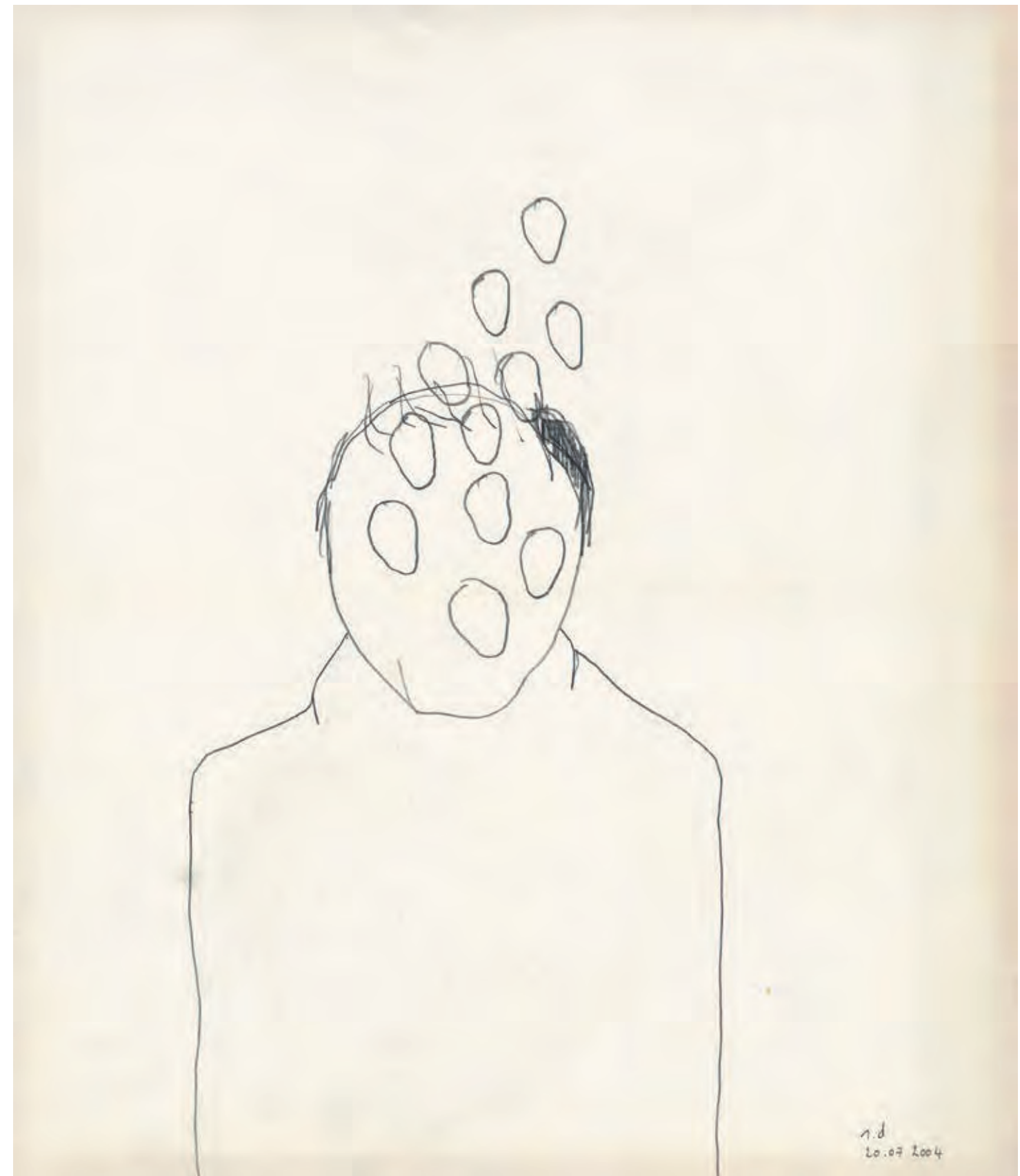
2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

n.d.

2008



20.07.2004,  
pencil on  
paper, 23.8 x  
20.4 cm



1. d  
20.07.2004



11.08.2004,  
14:37, Gent  
[Ghent], mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





woensdag  
[Wednesday]  
09.07.2003,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



dinsdag  
[Tuesday]  
08.07.2003,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





dinsdag  
[Tuesday]  
08.07.2003,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

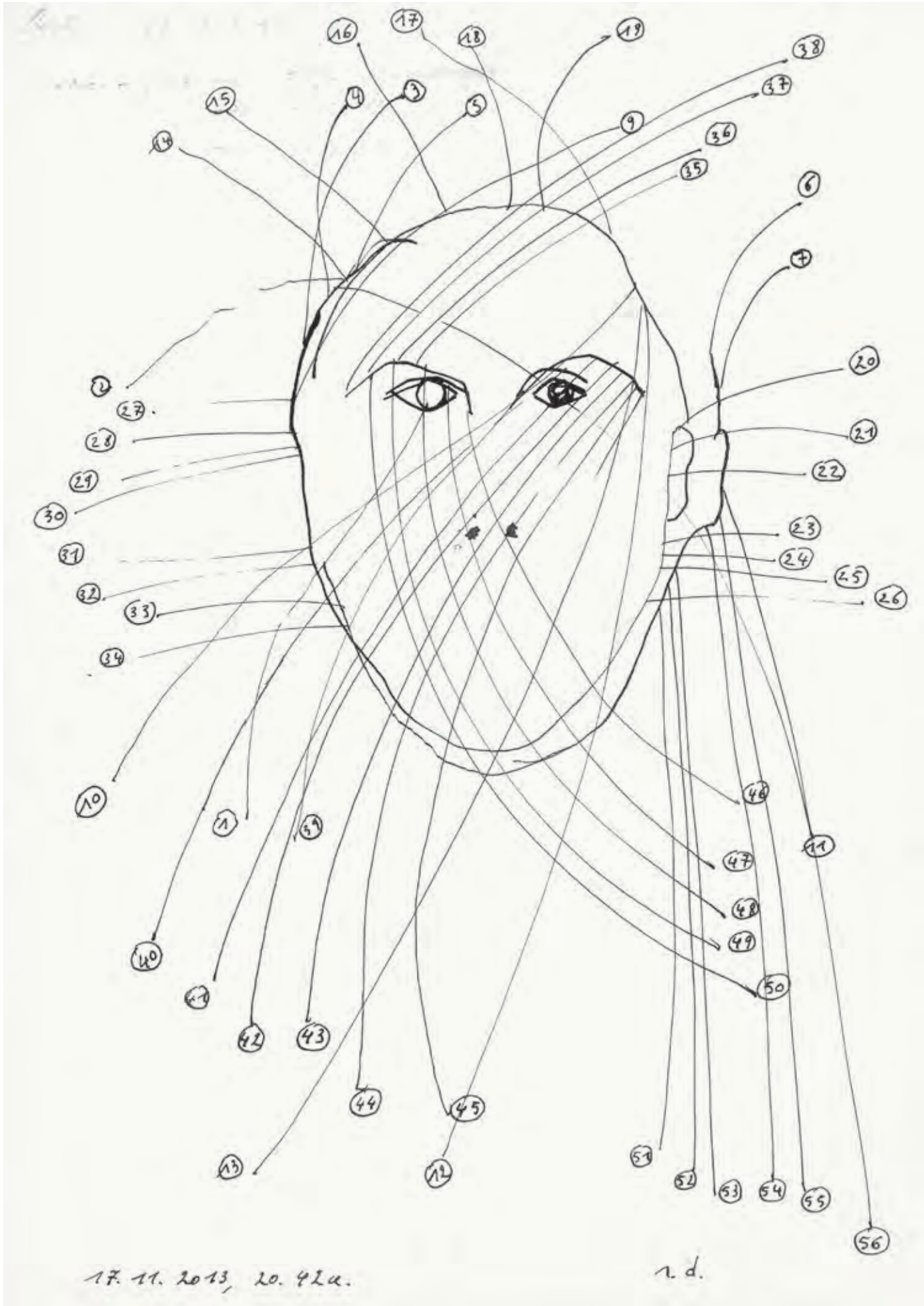


Dublin,  
07.04.2000,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

zondag  
[Sunday],  
23.10.2005,  
Moen, 01.09,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





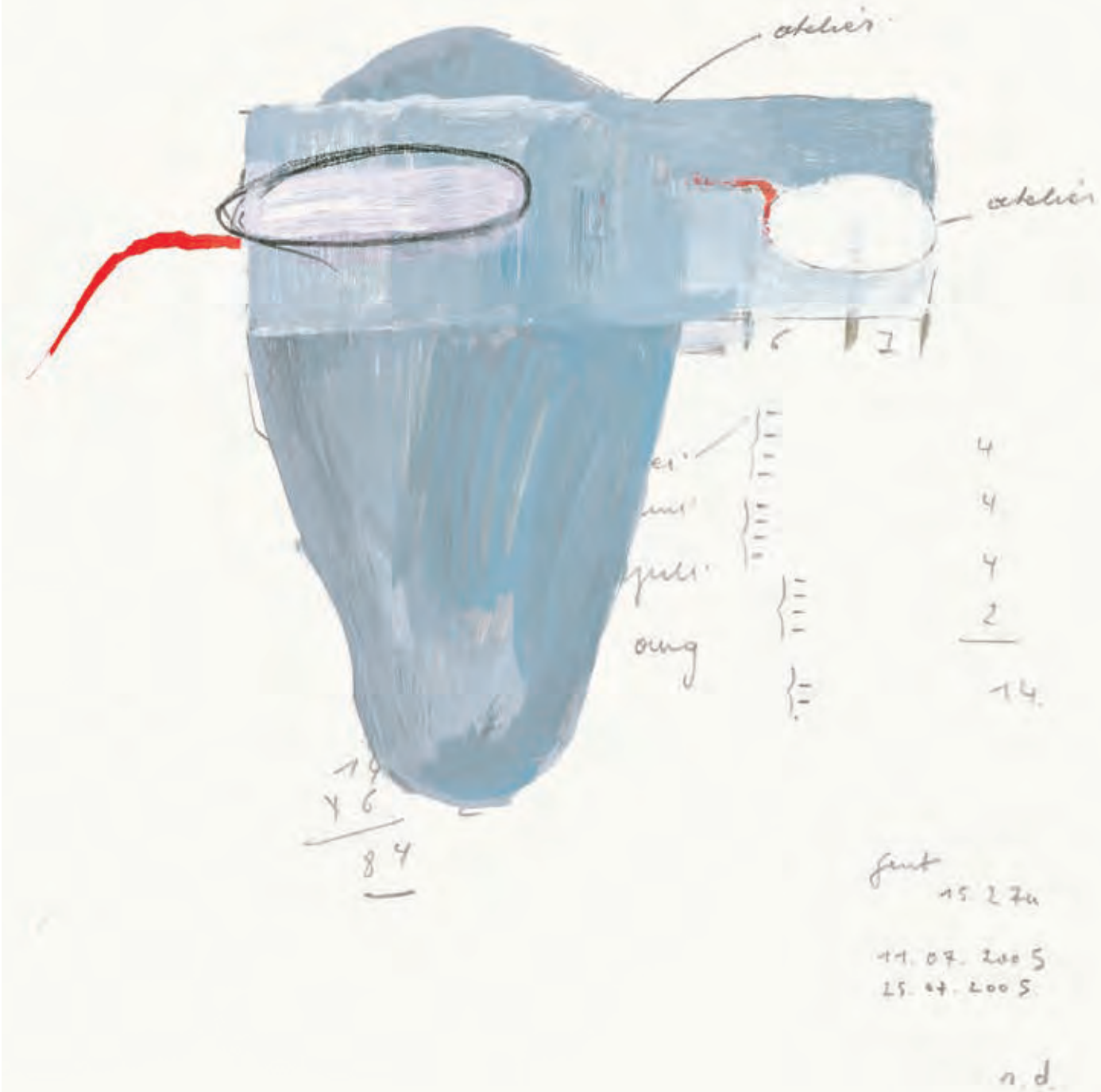


17.11.2013,  
20:42, Chinese  
ink on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



25.07.2005,  
Gent [Ghent],  
16:19,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

25.07.2005,  
Gent [Ghent],  
15:27,  
11.07.2005,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



25.07.2005,  
12:15,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





25.07.05  
links [left],  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



sd  
links  
25.07.05  
gent

Gent [Ghent],  
25.07.05,  
16:22, mixed  
media on  
paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

sd  
links  
25.07.05  
gent



sd  
gent  
25.07.2005  
16.22u

11 ontwerp

kaart 17,5 x 21,3 cm

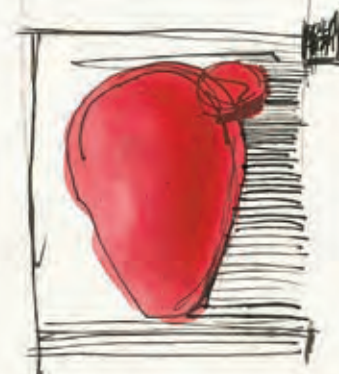
formaat kaart op ware grootte tek. van papier



4.2) tek. gemaakt op formaat van de kaart  
tek. papier langs de lijnenrijen

0 2 | 2 0 8 2 0

midelen  
gum



hellen  
0 9 1 9 9 9 9



functies

0 9 1 6 3 3 1 1

begint met

formaat 70 x 100 mm  
werk

- 3450.000
- 4770.000
- 341000.000

grotere

-150.
-280
-300
730

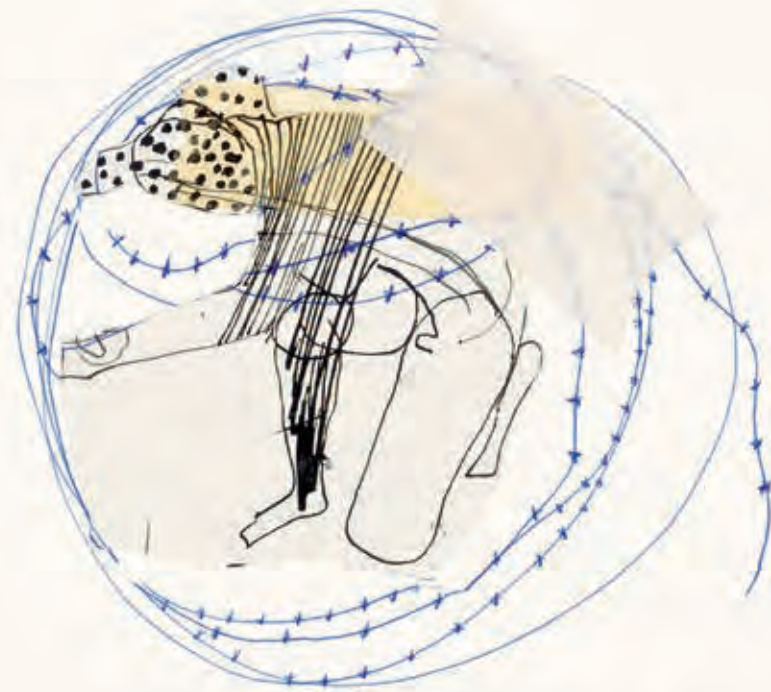
15.500  
16.42  
16.50 → A.S.

7 meegenomen

n.d.  
22.09.2004

22.09.2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





19.06.2017  
20:29  
03.07.2017  
19:23

n.d.

03.07.2017,  
19:23,  
19.06.2017,  
20:29,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



n.d.  
27.11.2017  
18:50

27.11.2017,  
18:50,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

17.8.2018,  
10:15;  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





26.07.2005,  
01:07, Moen,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



nd.  
26.07.2005  
01:07  
Moen

8.11.2012,  
21:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



nd.  
8.11.2012  
21:10  
Moen



7.04.2014,  
21:45,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



21.09.2015,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





17.04.2019,  
22:15,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



15.4.2019,  
21:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





07.08.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



07.08.2006

nd

08.08.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



08.08.2006

nd



n. d  
9.08. 2006  
12:05





n d.  
moen  
22.07 2005  
02 29 u.

CEREBRIRAPTOR.

Я О Т Ч А Я 1 9 8 3 Я Э С

07.08.2006,  
Cerebriraptor,  
pencil  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm

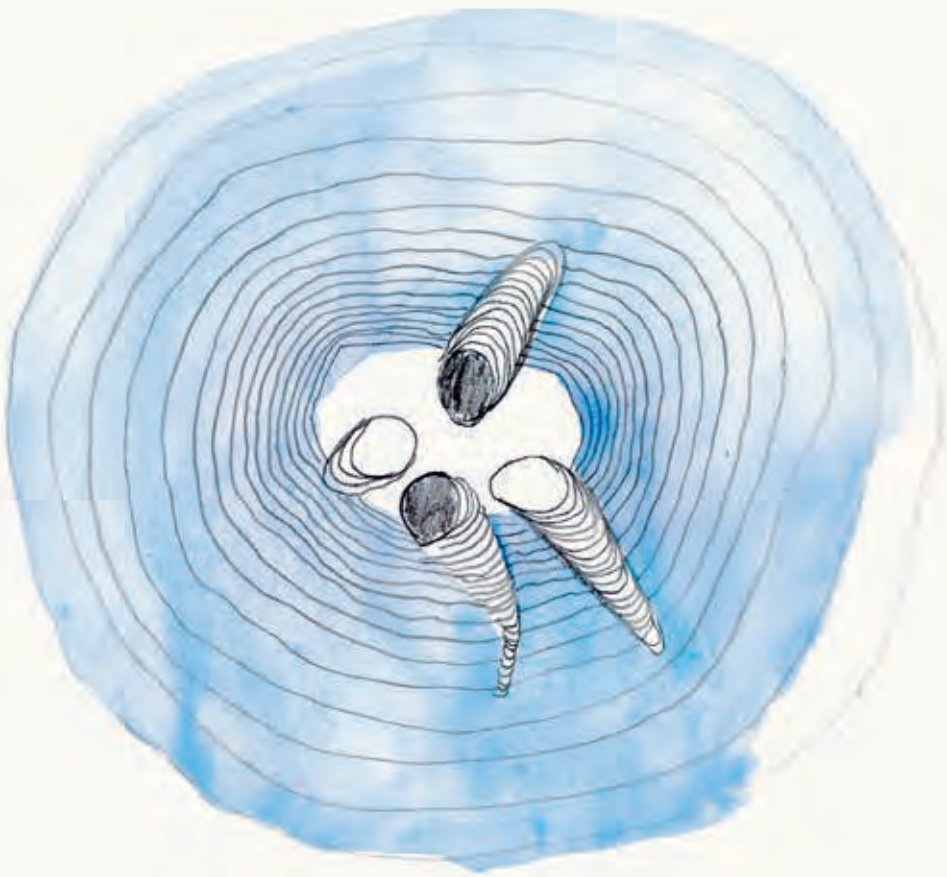


n.d.

26

07.08.2006

07.08.2006,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



n.d.

07.08.2006





2004,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



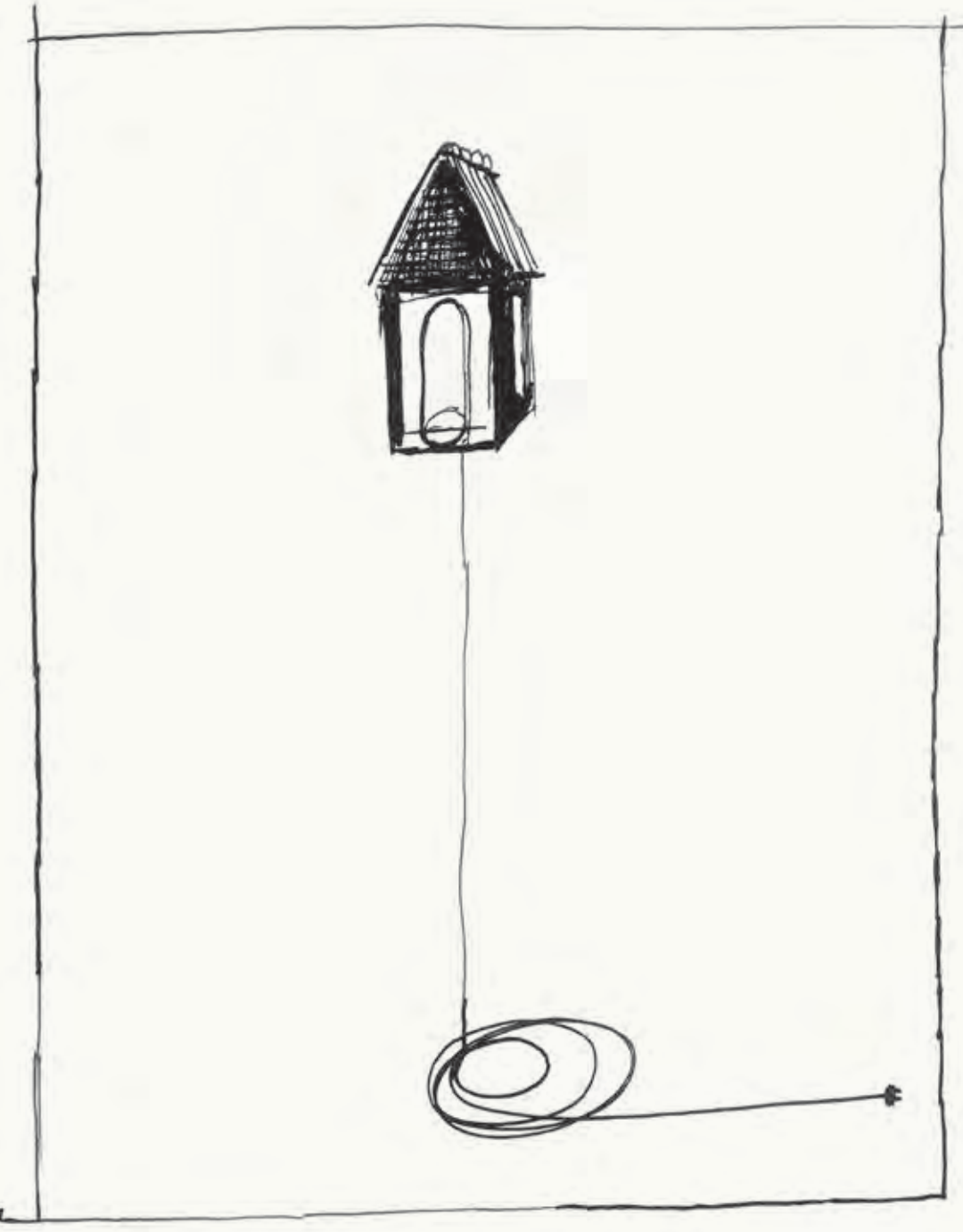
26.05.2012,  
23:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
22.5 x 20.8 cm

25.05.2012,  
13.09.2010,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



13.09.2010  
1st  
n.d. 25.05.2012

17.06.2017,  
22:07,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

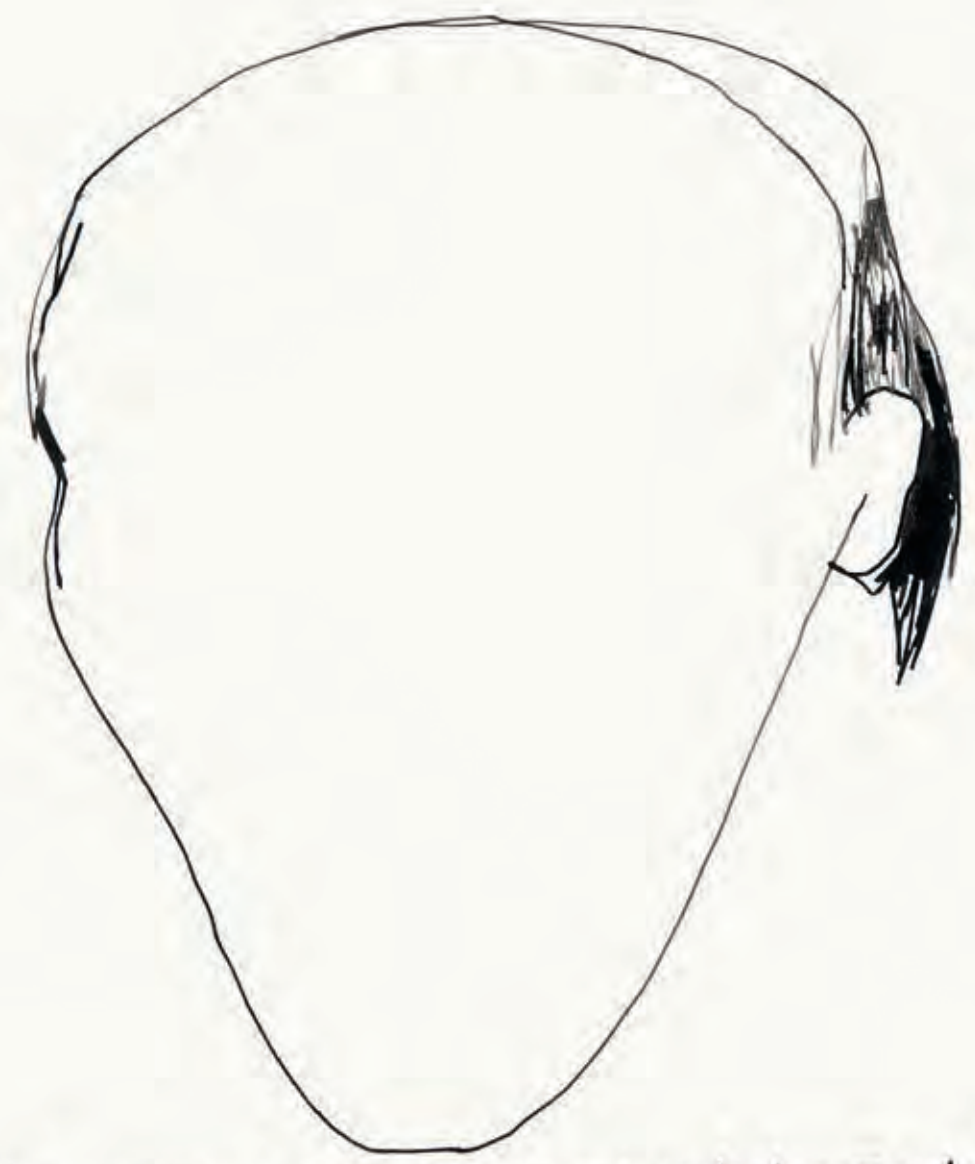


n.d.  
17.06.2017  
22:07



6.2.2019, 10:02,  
3.7.2018, 21:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



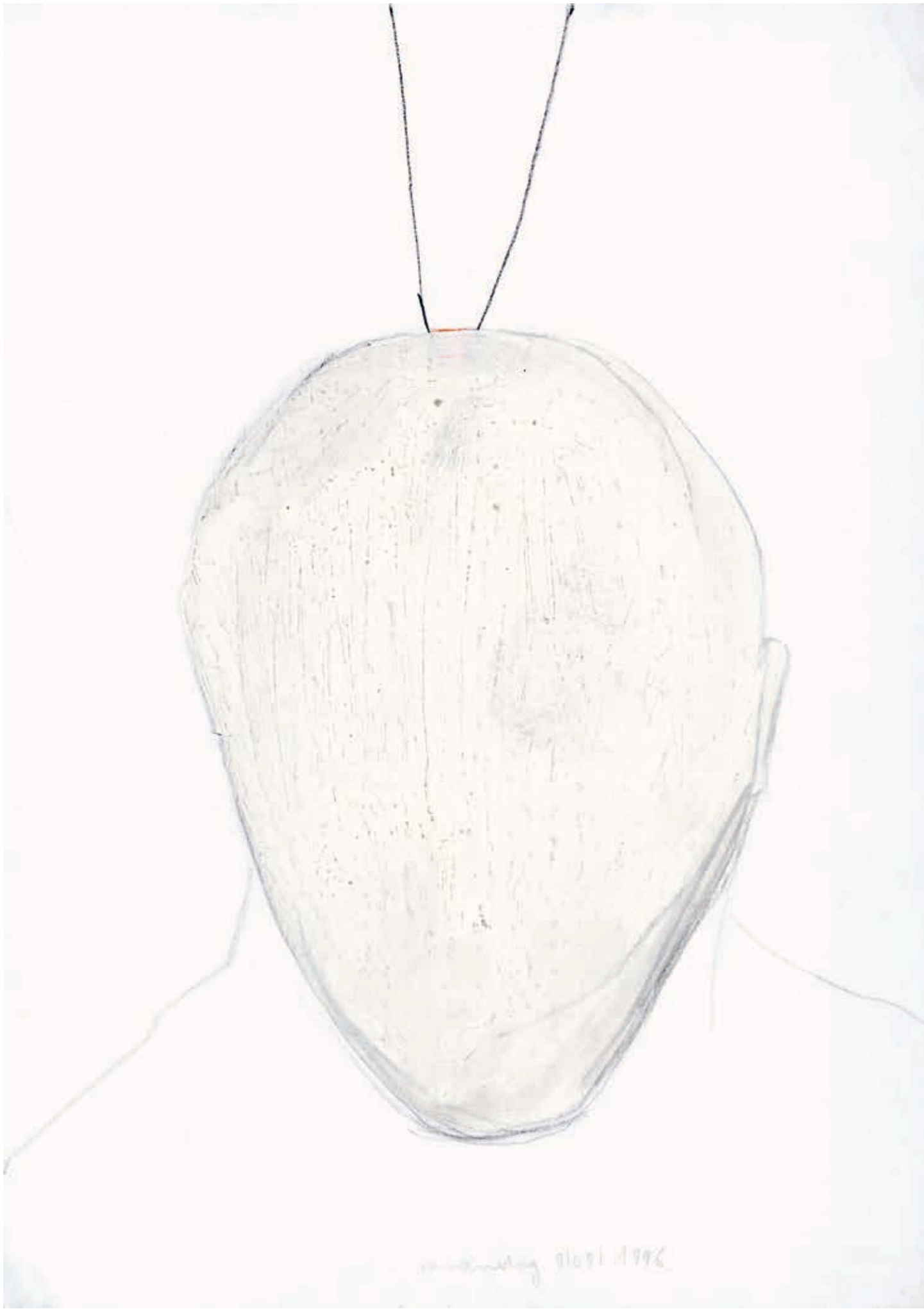


moandag dinsdag woensdag donderdag vrijdag zaterdag zondag.  
moandag dinsdag woensdag donderdag vrijdag zaterdag zondag  
moandag dinsdag woensdag donderdag vrijdag zaterdag zondag  
moandag dinsdag woensdag donderdag vrijdag zaterdag zondag  
moandag dinsdag woensdag donderdag vrijdag zaterdag zondag





25/12/1998,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



maandag  
[Monday]  
9.09.1996,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





11.08.2004,  
Gent [Ghent],  
16:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



28.11.1997,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





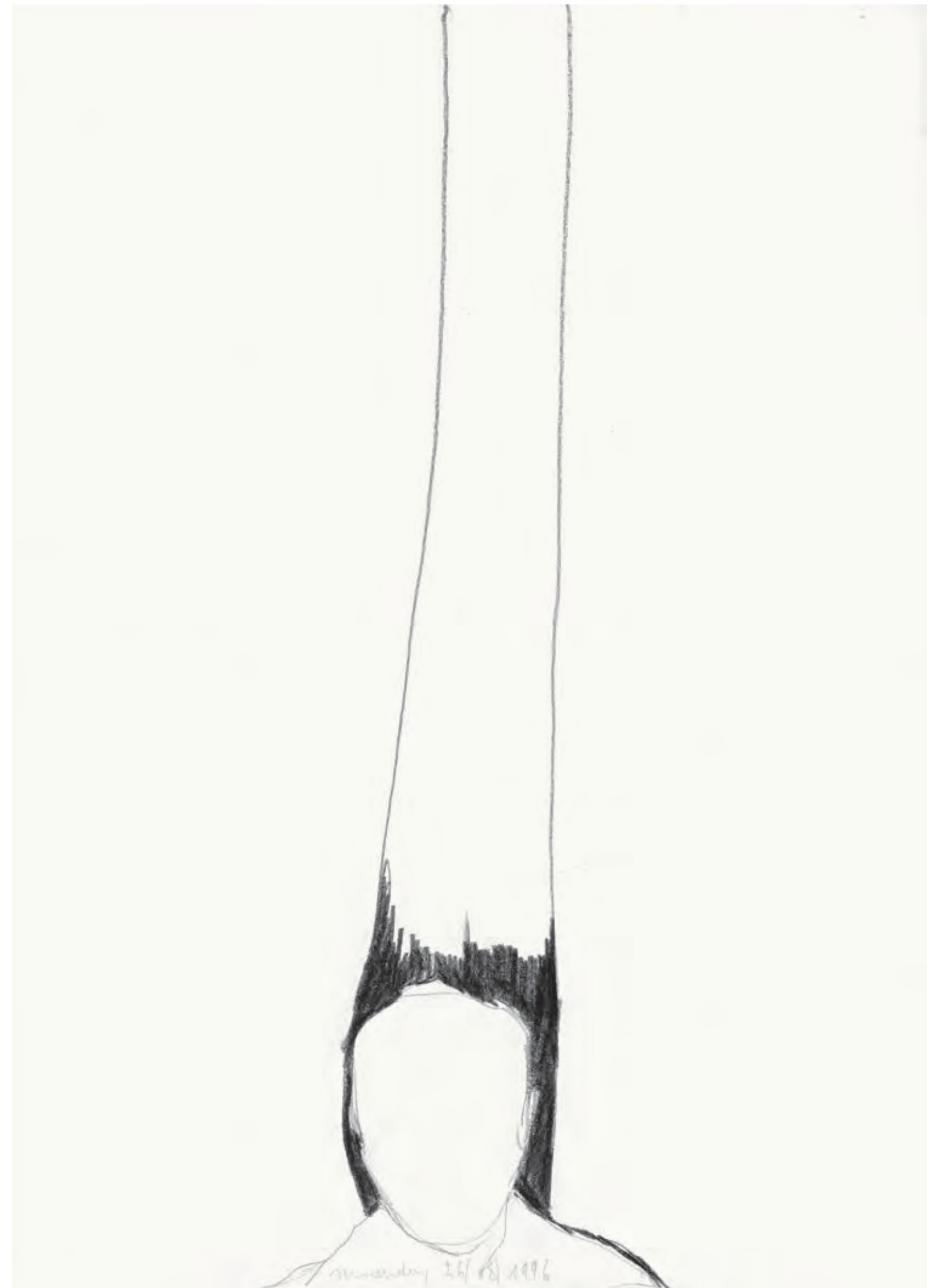
n.d.  
23.10.2005,  
01.17 u.  
Moen.

23.10.2005,  
Moen, 01:17,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

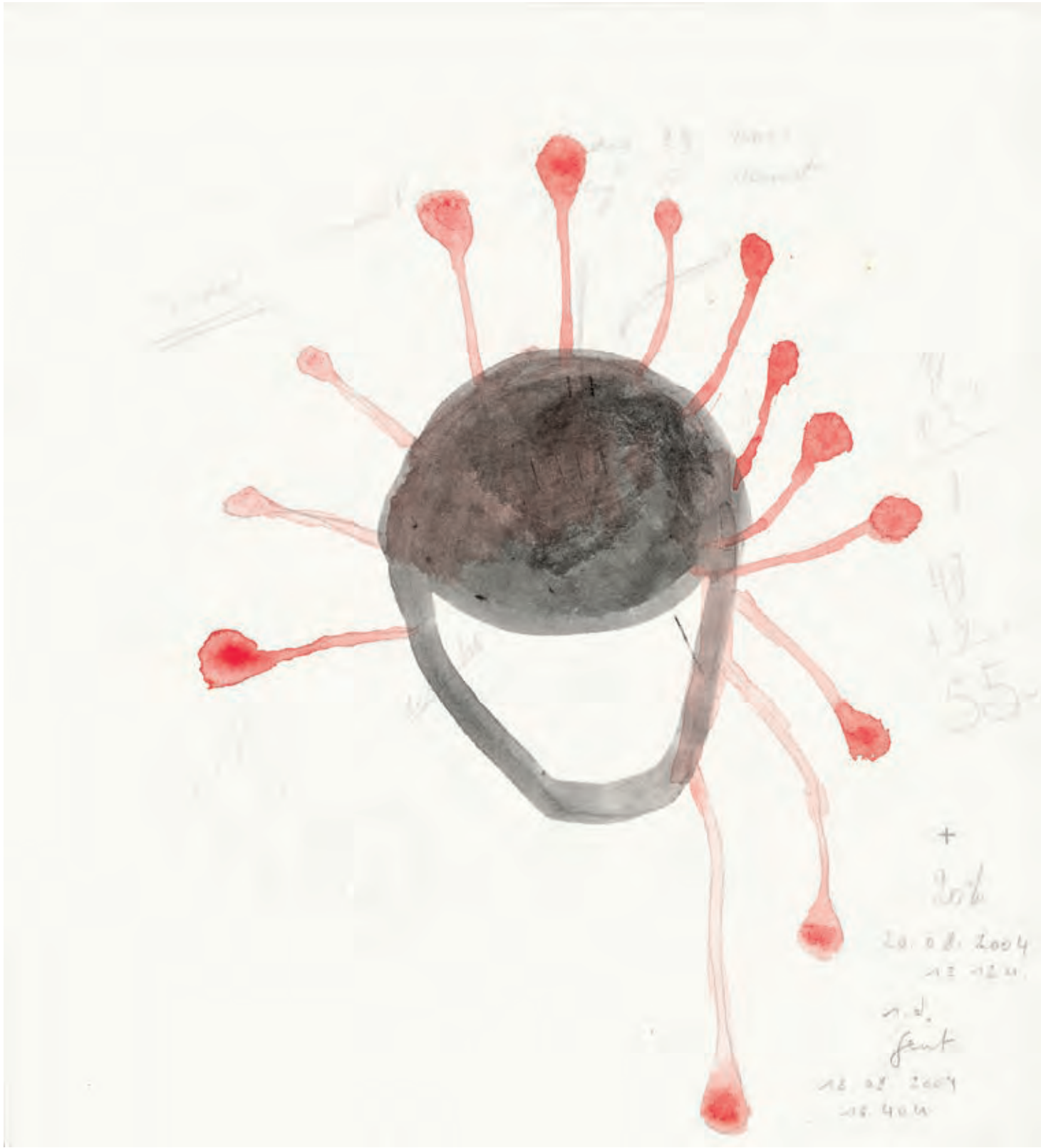


zondag  
[Sunday]  
21/12/1997,  
0:30,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

*maandag*  
[Monday]  
26.08.1996,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm





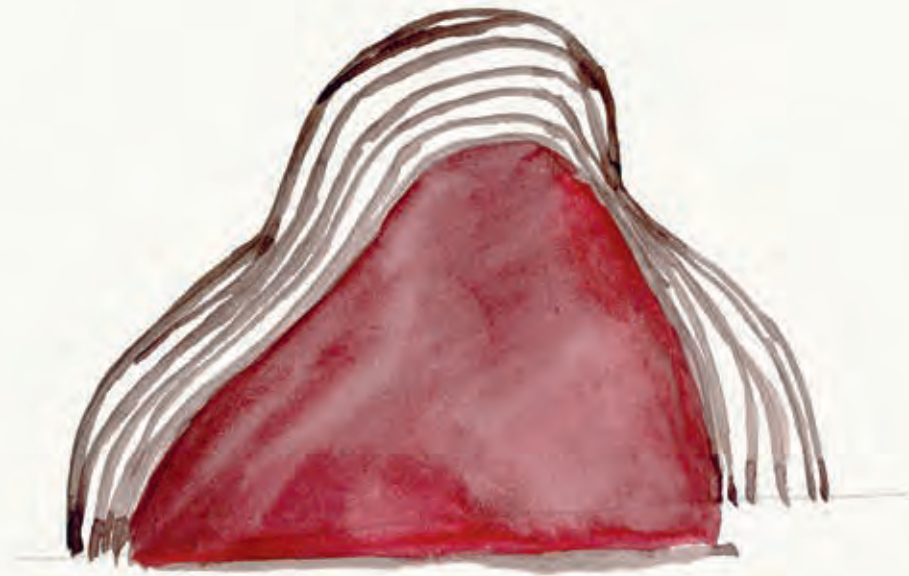


20.08.2004,  
12:12,  
18.08.2004,  
16:40,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
23 x 20.8 cm



januari  
[January]  
2018, 20:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm

2007, 19:07,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



19:07  
ekwc  
2007



22.07.2003,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



Beaustimmungsbereich  
terrein loopt onder water

n.d.  
ekwc  
22.07.2003

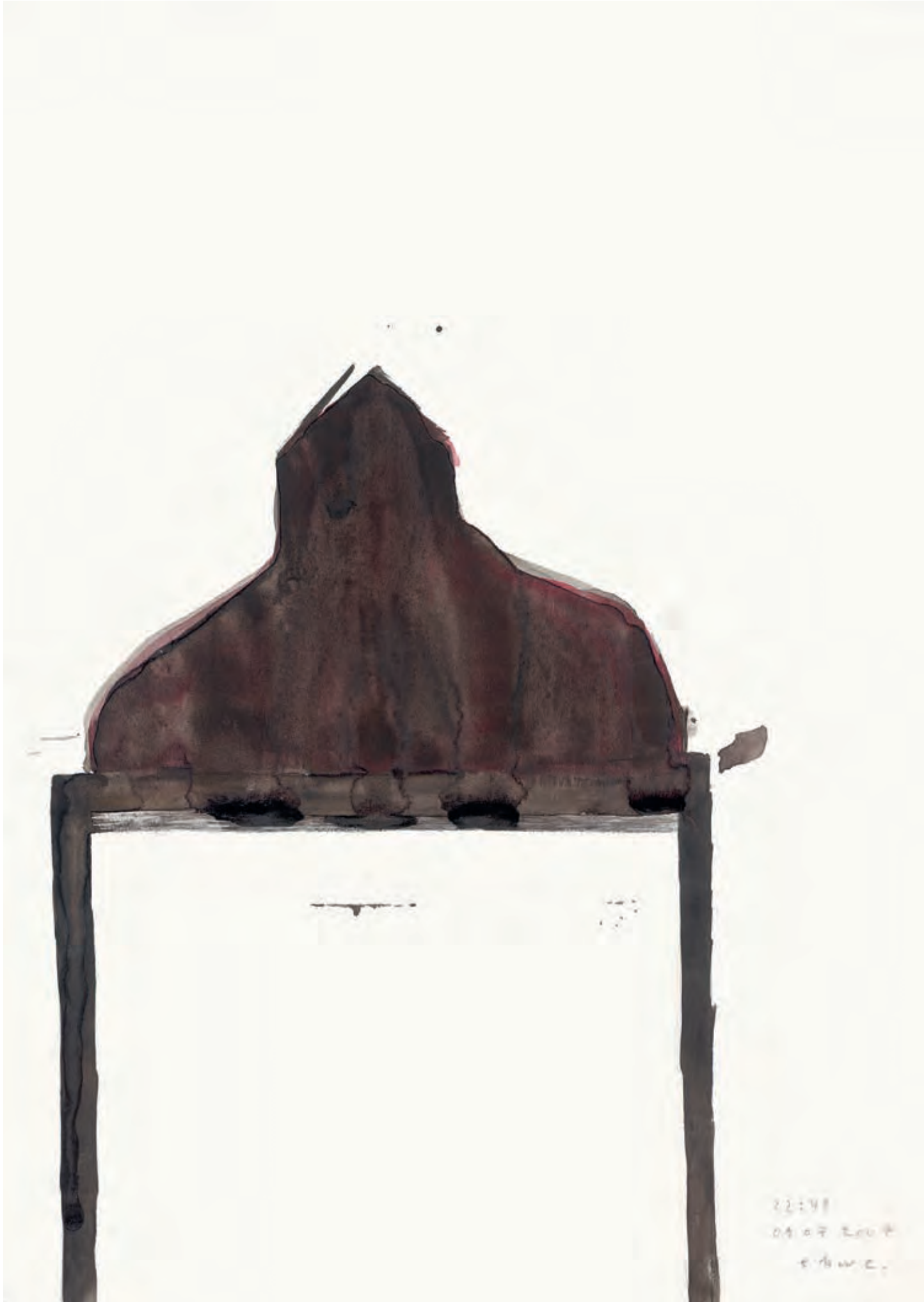
maandag  
[Monday]  
20.12.2004,  
ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



"Mind sculpture III, e.k.w.c."  
"K 129 → W.B.B. Wingerling"

n.d.  
e.k.w.c  
maandag 20.12.2004.

09.07.2007,  
22:49, ekwc,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



22:49  
09.07.2007  
ekwc.

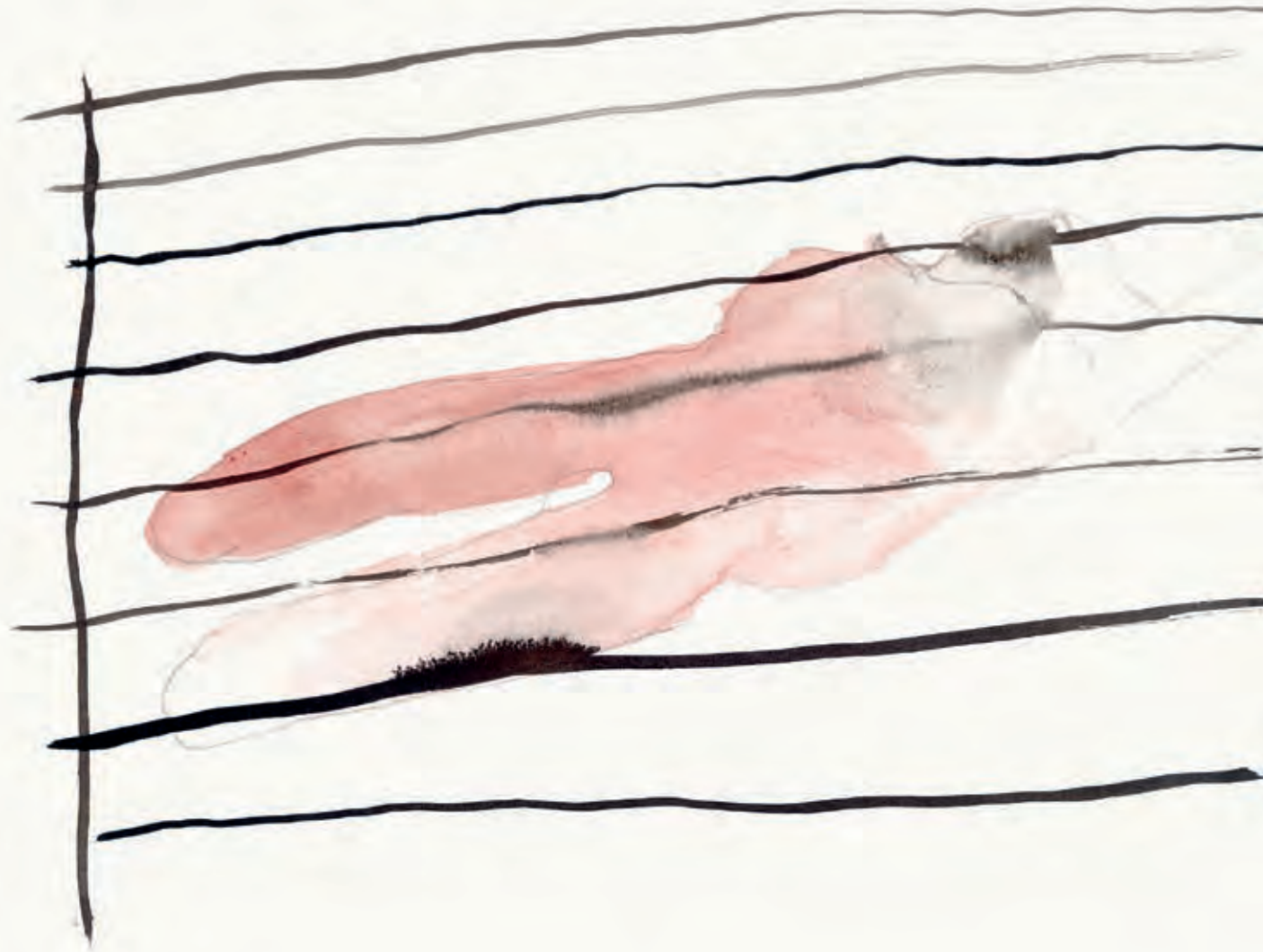
25.06.2007,  
21:15,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



21:15  
25.06.2007  
21:15



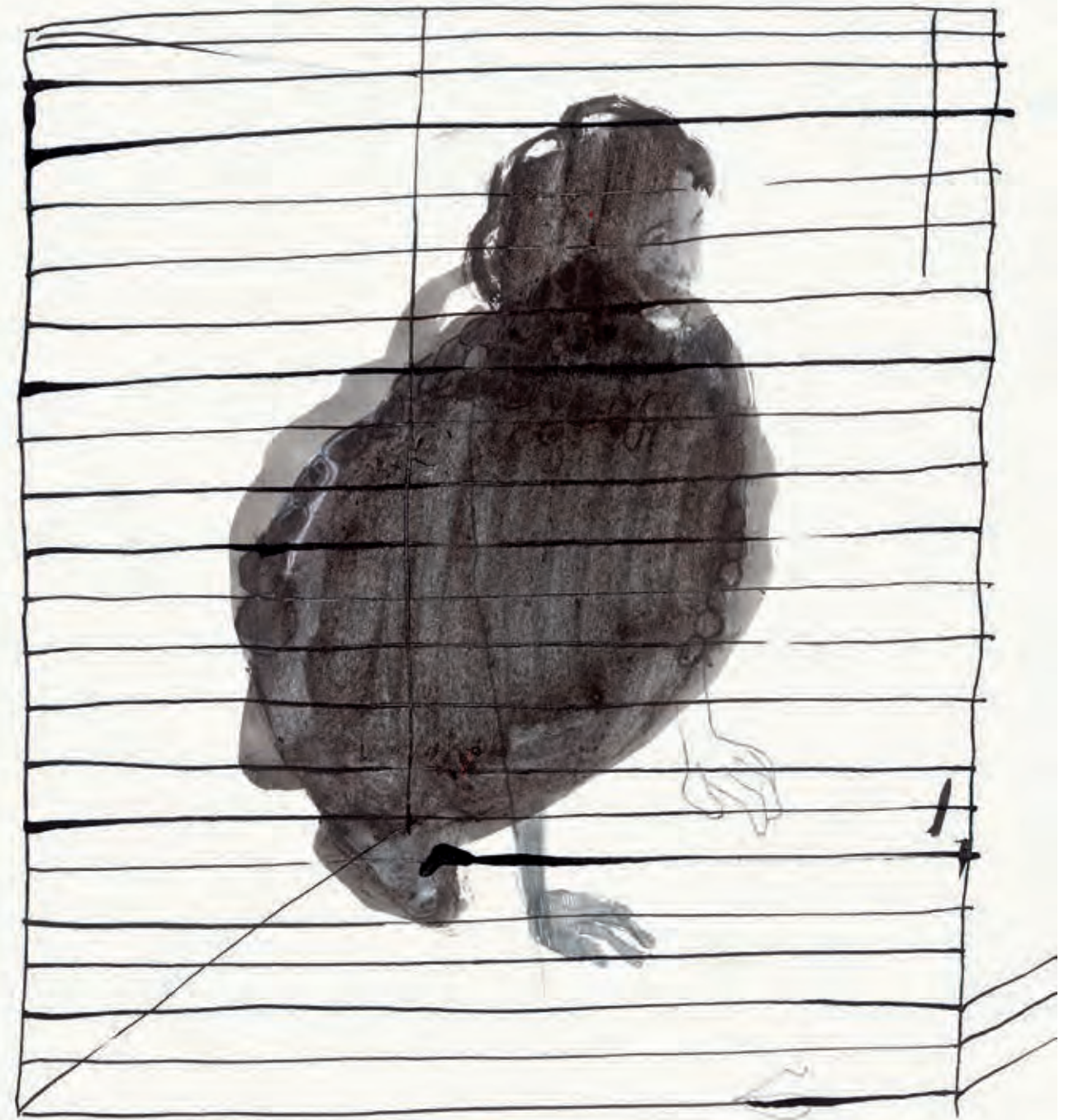
14.11.2011,  
21:46,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



21:46

14.11.2011

28.5.2018,  
19:35,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



28.5.2018  
19:35  
1.01





9.02.2015,  
20:43,  
watercolour  
on paper,  
29.7 x 21 cm



mei [May]  
2010, 15:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



15.11.2011,  
23:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



n.d.  
15.11.2011  
23:45

13.07.2007,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



n.d.  
13.07.2007

2008,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



23:10, 2012,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm







18.04.2019,  
17:45, 19:07,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



15.4.2019,  
21:10,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm  
  
15.4.2019,  
21:45,  
mixed media  
on paper,  
29.5 x 21 cm



n.d.  
12.7.2018  
21:45



Vincent  
Van Gogh,  
memory  
revisited,  
zaterdag  
[Saturday]  
18.04.2015,  
Zundert,  
perforated  
photograph  
and mixed  
media,  
33 x 24.1 cm



Vincent van Gogh, memory revisited, zaterdag 18.04.2015  
Zundert n.d.



Jacobus → koning Herodas  
↳ ter dood veroordeeld  
in Jeruzalem  
↳ begraven in Spanje

Herodas wilde het hoofd laten weghalen, door een  
niet omlet, hem handen boven het lichaam van Jacobus  
dood van Johannes → omhoog getrokken, natuurverschijnsel, → herodas de spij en  
regulier, maar gevallen kwamen de hoofd  
de vanden hem → geknield met zijn lichaam  
in zijn armen en hij vonden zijn lichaam  
en hoofd met hartbare  
rechteroefen in een van  
hertchanden gemaakte  
tak → te brachten dit  
van Jeruzalem → fabriek  
→ beproven het door →  
tot waar het op de huidige  
dag wordt versierd.

Herodas Jacobus was ont hoofd →  
wonder, zijn hoofd viel niet op de grond,  
maar hij vong het op in zijn armen → vragte  
dit naar de hemel, hij dat geknield hebben  
met zijn hoofd in de armen, tot de avond viel  
en zijn leringen, zijn lichaam bewaarden  
door enkele liden, vanden, ha de  
natuurverschijnsel, → herodas de spij en  
donder, slachtoffer, → Jacobus naar hem toe.  
Jacobus in Compostella begraven  
hoe beunen wortel inheuten?

duurde eenen  
voordat de Jacobuslegende  
haar uiteindelijke vorm heeft  
gekragen.

De belevingen naar Santiago de Compostella zijn gebaseerd op een  
legende die het resultaat is van een  
langdurig proces → oet de  
overgang, maar moet dienen van  
de echte aanwezigheid van het  
lichaam van de apostel Jacobus in Spanje  
De voortdurende detailisering →  
dat overtuigingskracht groter wordt.  
Gedurende de tijd van en onvoor  
→ in het onderzoek van de  
van algemeen aanvaarde autoriteiten

Pia praus  
in room bedrog!

De Jacobuslegende kreeg haar vorm  
in enkele personen van invloed  
beunen van de kerk, en  
vanilleke gunt. → het is een christelijke  
in het algemeen en specifiek van  
Spanje

Wat signatuur  
geschiedkundig  
word gebruikt.  
belangen. De Jacobuslegende sluit nauw  
geacht dat: zijn prediking in Spanje → het de Spaanse kerk apostolische  
waardigheid: zijn graf in Compostella verhoogde de positieve van de  
kerk, staat: zijn patroonstaande het proces van de  
paus, koningen, maar bevestigde voor de kerk van Spanje,  
de christelijke beleving van meer Spanje; zijn heilige naam  
gevoel van de orthodoxie van de Spaanse kerk en met een wapen  
tegen het.



Colophon	
Correspondances #I RONNY DELRUE	ISBN 978-3-95679-519-0
Editors Philippe Van Cauteren, Ronny Delrue Project coordination Jenke Van den Akkerveken Translation Helen Simpson (Dutch–English) Copy-editing Inge Braeckman, Patrick Lennon Graphic design Ine Meganck Printing die Keure, Bruges Binding Brepols, Turnhout Typeface Sharp Grotesk Book 19	© 2019 the artist, the editor, the authors, Hannibal Publishing, Sternberg Press All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form.
Photo credits Georges Charlier p. 21: 2; p. 31: 15; pp. 36–37; p. 57 Dirk Pauwels p. 22: 4a; p. 23; p. 39 Rik Klein Gotink p. 22: 5a, 5b; p. 26; pp. 40–41; p. 49 Tom De Visscher p. 24; p. 25: 7, 8, 9; p. 30: 12b, 12c; p. 31: 14; p. 34: 21; pp. 42–45; p. 47; pp. 50–51; p. 56; p. 61 Louise Degraeve p. 25: 10; p. 48 Argus Photography – Didier Verriest p. 29 Kristof Vranken p. 31: 16; pp. 58–59	Distributed by The MIT Press, Art Data, and Les presses du réel
	Published by <b>HANNIBAL</b> Hannibal Publishing is part of Cannibal Publishing Appelmarkt 8 B-8630 Veurne www.hannibalpublishing.com
	<i>SternbergPress</i> Caroline Schneider Karl-Marx-Allee 78 D-10243 Berlin www.sternberg-press.com
	 <b>Flanders</b> State of the Art

Every effort has been made to contact the rightful owners with regards to copyrights and permissions. We apologize for any inadvertent errors or omissions.

Many thanks to Philippe Van Cauteren for curating the exhibition (S.M.A.K., Ghent) and for coming up with the title.

Acknowledgements  
Celine Matton, Pepijn Delrue, Jan Leysen, Christine Depuydt, Inge Braeckman, Mark Sadler, Frits de Coninck, Herman Parret, Helen Simpson, Catherine Warnant, Ine Meganck, Jenke Van den Akkerveken, Philippe Van Cauteren and the team of S.M.A.K., Ghent, Carine Fol and the team of CENTRALE for contemporary art, Brussels, Régine Rémon, Jan Maes and the team of die Keure Bruges, Gautier Platteau and the team of Hannibal, Veurne, Caroline Schneider and the team of Sternberg Press, Berlin, Christa Vyvey, The Flemish Community

www.ronnydelrue.be

























