

Ester Fleckner
**All models are wrong,
some are useful**

July 8 – August 26, 2017

Opening: Friday, July 7, 6–9 pm

Barbara Wien
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Ester Fleckner *All models are wrong, some are useful*

Eröffnung: Freitag, 7. Juli 2017, 18–21 Uhr

Ausstellung: 8. Juli - 26. August 2017

In ihrer ersten Einzelausstellung in der Galerie Barbara Wien zeigt Ester Fleckner zwei neue Serien mit Holzschnitten: *All models are wrong, some are useful* und *Companions 1-5*, sowie Betonskulpturen. Auf den großen, unikatnen Drucken finden sich Muster, komplexe, scheinbar abstrakte, geometrische Motive, die von der exakten Geometrie abweichen. Es ist nicht einfach, diese ausgefalteten Formen gedanklich zusammensetzen oder sich die Konstruktionen vorzustellen, die aus diesen eigenartigen Bildern gebaut werden könnten.

Ergänzt werden die Drucke der Serie *All models are wrong, some are useful* durch Betonobjekte, die am Boden liegen und die vielschichtige Verbindungen zu den Drucken haben. Es scheint als seien diese dreidimensionalen Objekte räumliche Umsetzungen der aufgefalteten Polyederformen auf den Drucken.

Polyeder sind feste, geometrische Formen mit mehreren Flächen und klaren Kanten. Sie werden in vielen Disziplinen benutzt, hauptsächlich in der Mathematik, wurden aber auch schon als metaphorisches Werkzeug zur Erklärung der menschlichen Psyche verwendet. Im späten 19. Jahrhundert schrieb der amerikanische Psychologe und Philosoph William James über die "Komplexität der Persönlichkeit, die schwelenden emotionalen Feuer" und verglich als erster menschliche Charaktere mit der Form von Polyedern. Seine Auffassung von der Vielseitigkeit von Identität und Verhalten, die durch den amerikanischen Intellektuellen und Aktivisten Gregg Bordowitz aktualisiert wurde, ist die Inspiration für Fleckners letzte Serien. Fleckner bezieht sich auf diese geometrischen Anthropomorphismen und entwickelt Figuren, die zu unvollkommen aussehen, um als geradlinige Geometrie gelesen zu werden. Sie wirken fehlerhaft, nicht der Regel entsprechend, in gewisser Weise menschlich. Tatsächlich entstehen Fleckners Holzschnitte aus dem Handgelenk heraus und nähern sich dem Motiv durch Wiederholung – sie kopiert und wiederholt die Umrisse perfekter Polyedermodelle mit der Hand. Erwartungsgemäß entstehen auf diese Weise unvollkommene Formen und Asymmetrien.

Fleckners Polyeder wirken wie eine Sammlung krummbeiniger, verbogener Formen, die sich nicht zusammensetzen lassen. Die aus der Hand entwickelten Schwachstellen stören die geometrische Logik und verhindern ein effektives Ineinandergreifen.

Durch ihr mit Mängeln behaftetes System verweigert Fleckner eine normierende Ordnung, die chaotische und andere komplexe Formen geringschätzt. Ihr Vorhaben ist es, den wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen und Klassifizierungen, die danach streben, Fehler, Abweichungen und Unsicherheiten auszumerzen, etwas entgegen zu setzen.

Die zweite Serie *Companions 1-5* verbindet eine Sammlung vertikaler Formen. Sie ähneln anatomischen Zeichnungen von Körpern mit übereinandergelagerten und dadurch unscharfen Rastern und erinnern an Wirbelsäulen. Ähnlich den Polyeder-Puzzles ist es auch bei dieser Serie schwierig, sich vorzustellen, von welchen Formen die ausgefalteten Modelle der Zeichnungen stammen. Tatsächlich gehen die Formen auf ausgefaltete Globen zurück. Zu diesen Drucken gibt es keine vergleichbaren Objekte im Raum, die Aufschluss geben könnten. Durch Abstraktion, das Fehlen von Konturen, Normen und Kategorien verhindert Fleckner einfache Zuordnungen.

Ein anderer Aspekt der Arbeit von Fleckner ist die Sprache. Sie überarbeitet die unikatnen Drucke am Ende, indem sie Texte hinzufügt. Auch hier lassen Wiederholungen, Fehler und Durchstreichungen ihren Arbeitsprozess erkennen.

In dem Interview mit Mathias Danbolt "Fragments of Failure" (2015) fasst Fleckner zusammen: "My interest in abstraction lies in the opportunity it gives to work with alternative languages and existences that relate to very concrete and real questions of the perception of bodies and difference."

Gauthier Lesturgie

Ester Fleckner wurde 1983 in Dänemark geboren. Sie lebt und arbeitet in Berlin.

Nach ihrem Abschluss 2013 an der Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Kopenhagen, Dänemark, hatte sie mehrere Einzelausstellungen in der dänischen Hauptstadt, unter anderem 2016 im Overgaden Institute of Art. Sie hat an zahlreichen Gruppenausstellungen teilgenommen, u.A. im Kunstnerhus, Oslo, Norwegen (2016), KH7 Artspace, Aarhus, Dänemark (2016), im Schwulen Museum, Berlin, (2015) im LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, (2016), National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kiew, (2016), Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Lettland (2015), Dalian Art Museum, China (2014) und in der Malmö Konsthall, Schweden (2013). Ester Fleckner hat zahlreiche Stipendien und Preise bekommen, darunter von der Danish Arts Foundation (2014-2017), dem Aage og Yelva Nimbs Fond (2016), der Hielmstjerne-Rosencroneske Stiftelse (2016), den Art Brussels Solo Prize (2016) und der Ole Haslunds Kunstnerfond (2015).

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Ester Fleckner *All models are wrong, some are useful*

Opening: Friday, July 7, 2017, 6–9 pm

Exhibition: July 8, 2017 - August 26, 2017

For her first exhibition with Galerie Barbara Wien, Ester Fleckner presents two new series of woodcut prints entitled *All models are wrong, some are useful* and *Companions 1-5*, as well as concrete sculptures from 2017. The large and unique blackboard-like prints show manifold patterns: complex and seemingly abstract, flawed geometric motifs. It is rather difficult to foresee the outcome of these unfolded forms or the type of architectures which would erect from these odd images. On the floor next to *All models are wrong, some are useful*, concrete figures appear, creating multiple relationships with the prints. Here it looks like we have the three-dimensional folded realisations of the unfolded polyhedron-forms drawn on the prints.

Polyhedrons are solid geometrical figures with several faces and straight edges. Used in many disciplines, mainly mathematical, they have also been used as a metaphorical tool to explain the human psyche. In the late 19th century, the American psychologist and philosopher William James first wrote of the “complexities of personality, the smouldering emotional fires, the other facets of the character-polyhedrons”. Updated by the thinker and activist Gregg Bordowitz, this conception of identity and behaviour viewed as many-sided is the inspiration for Fleckner’s latest series.

Following this geometrical anthropomorphisms, her figures look too imperfect to be straight geometry, as faulty as humans’ irregularity. Indeed, Fleckner’s work is hand-driven, through a repetitive approach: she copies by hand perfect polyhedron models. As expected, it results in many imperfections and asymmetries.

Thus, once assembled, Fleckner’s polyhedrons appear to be a collection of bow-legged, unbalanced and crippled forms which are not able to ‘put themselves together’. Handmade vulnerability troubles the geometric logics of the structure, thus preventing an effective interlocking. With her deficient ‘shape-sorters’, Fleckner refuses to match a normalising system of order which disdain chaotic and other complex forms of profusion and intuition. Her undertaking unsettles the mathematical discipline which seeks to delete errors, deviances and uncertainty.

The second series *Companions 1-5* brings together a collection of vertical simili-backbones as many bodies’ anatomy with superimposed and therefore blurred grid patterns. Not unlike the polyhedron puzzles in the first series, it is again difficult to imagine exactly which forms these motifs are the unfolded drafts of. In this case they stem from the form of unfolded globes. This time, no plausible folded objects lie on the floor. Fleckner loses us in abstraction in a place where we have difficulty identifying, in others words: through lack of contours, norms and categories.

Another aspect of Fleckner’s work is the use of language. Often she adds to the unique prints texts and text fragments. Here as well, repetition, mistakes and crossing-out signal her working process.

In an interview with Mathias Danbolt "Fragments of Failure" (2015) Fleckner outlines: "My interest in abstraction lies in the opportunity it gives to work with alternative languages and existences that relate to very concrete and real questions of the perception of bodies and difference."

Gauthier Lesturgie

Ester Fleckner was born in Denmark in 1983. She is currently living in Berlin.

Since she graduated in 2013 from The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, Denmark, she has had several solo exhibitions in the Danish capital, including in Overgaden Institute of Art in 2016.

She had taken part in numerous group exhibitions such as “SEEABLE/SAYABLE” in Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo, Norway (2016), KH7 Artspace, Aarhus, Denmark (2016), “Homosexuality_ies” in Schwules Museum, Berlin, Germany (2015) and then in LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany (2016), National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kiev, Ukraine (2016), Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia (2015), Dalian Art Museum, China (2014) and Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (2013).

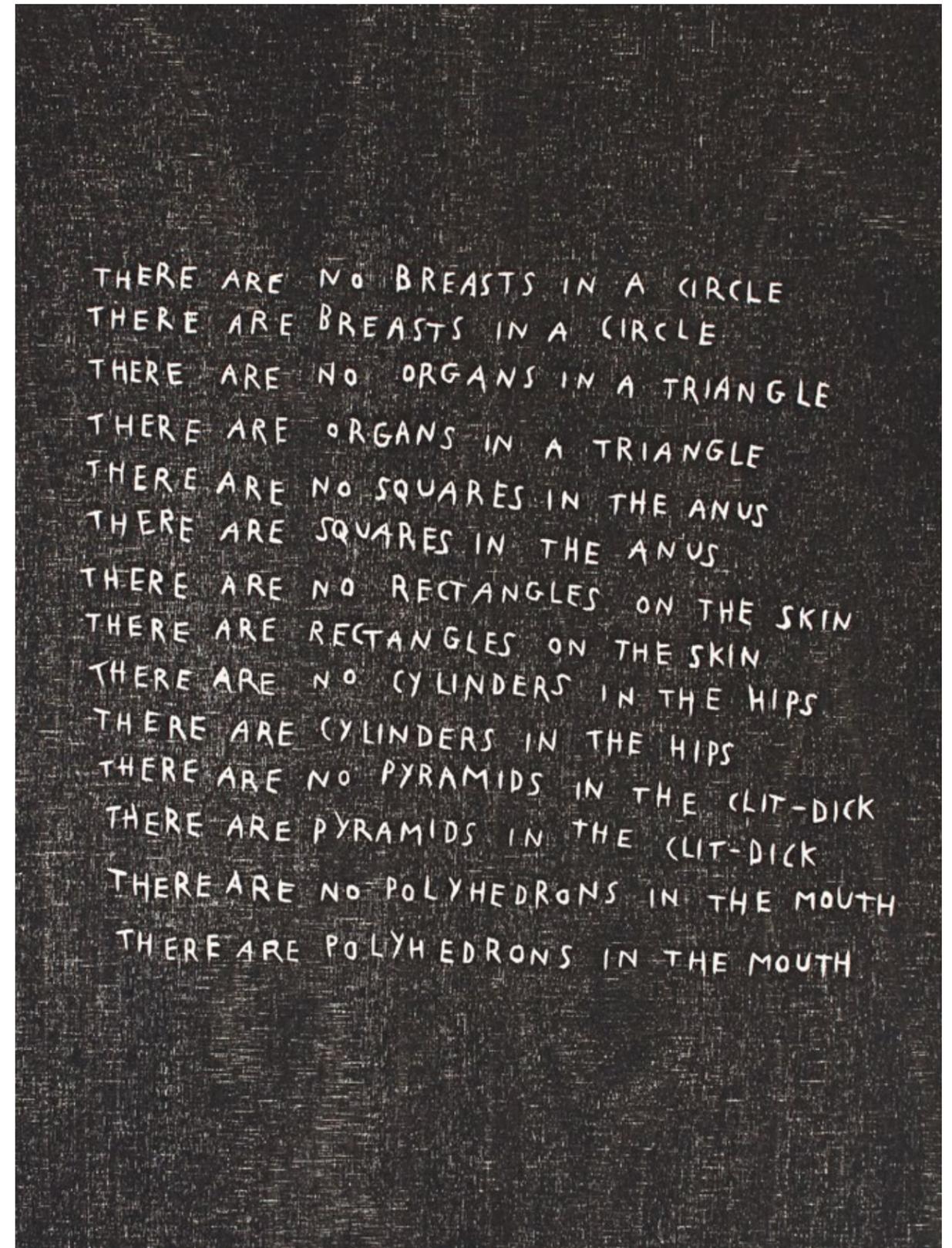
She has been the recipient of numerous grants and prizes including work grants from The Danish Arts Foundation (2014-2017), Aage og Yelva Nimbs Fond (2016), Den Hielmstjerne-Rosencroneske Stiftelse (2016), Art Brussels Solo Prize (2016) and Ole Haslunds Kunstnerfond (2015).



Compounds of convictions

2017

Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
98 x 63 cm



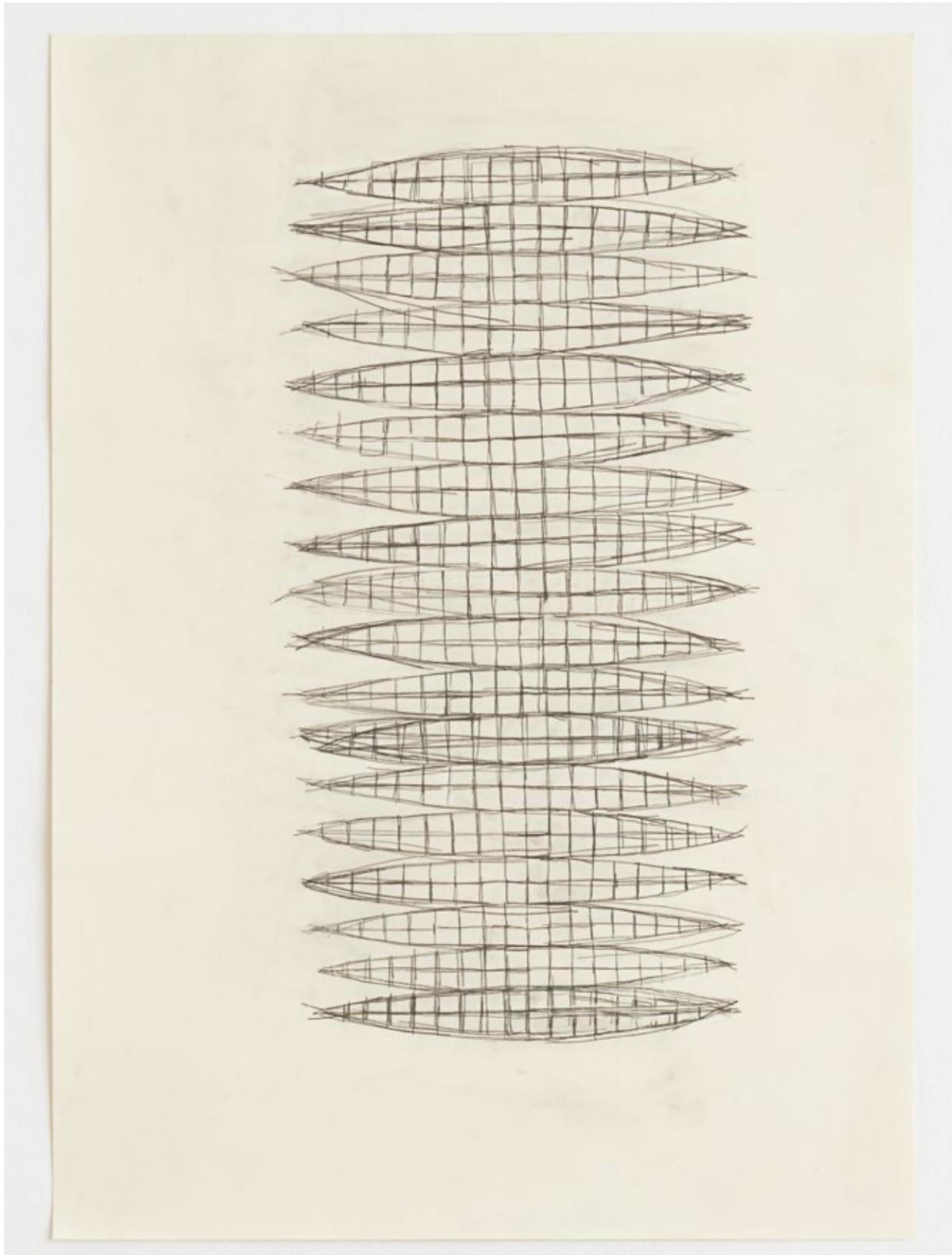
Compounds of convictions

2017

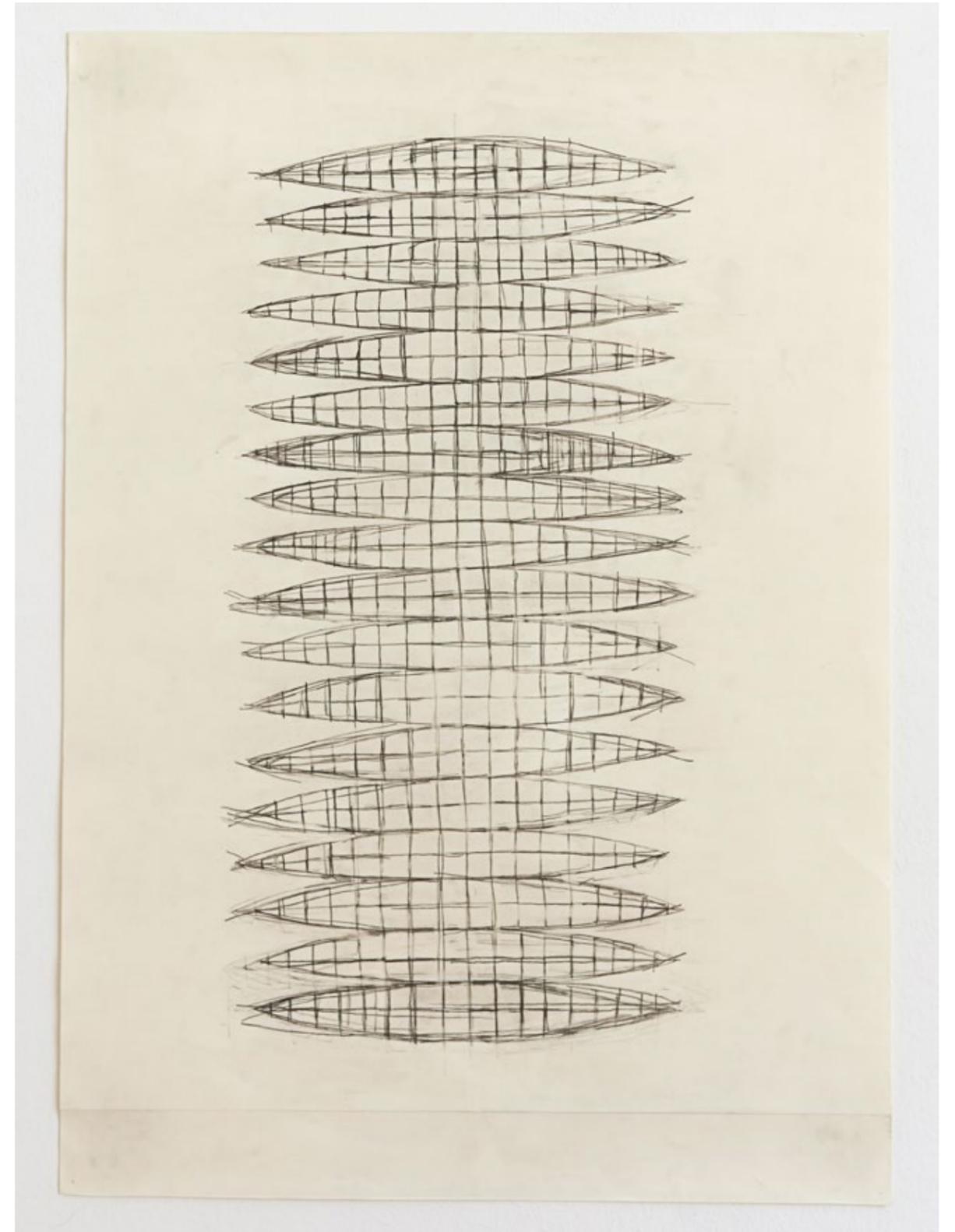
Detail



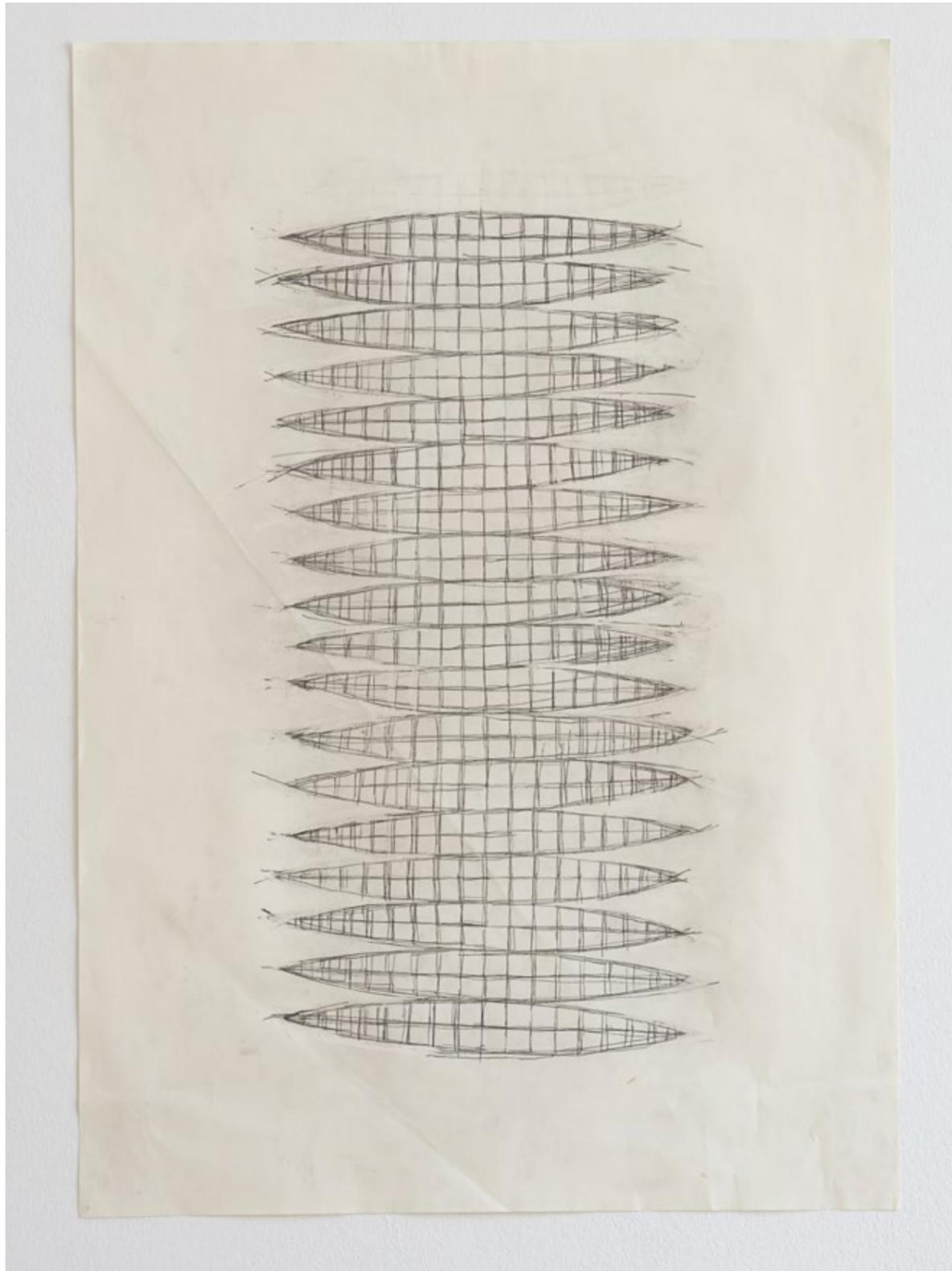
Companions (sketches)
2017
Installation view / Installationsansicht



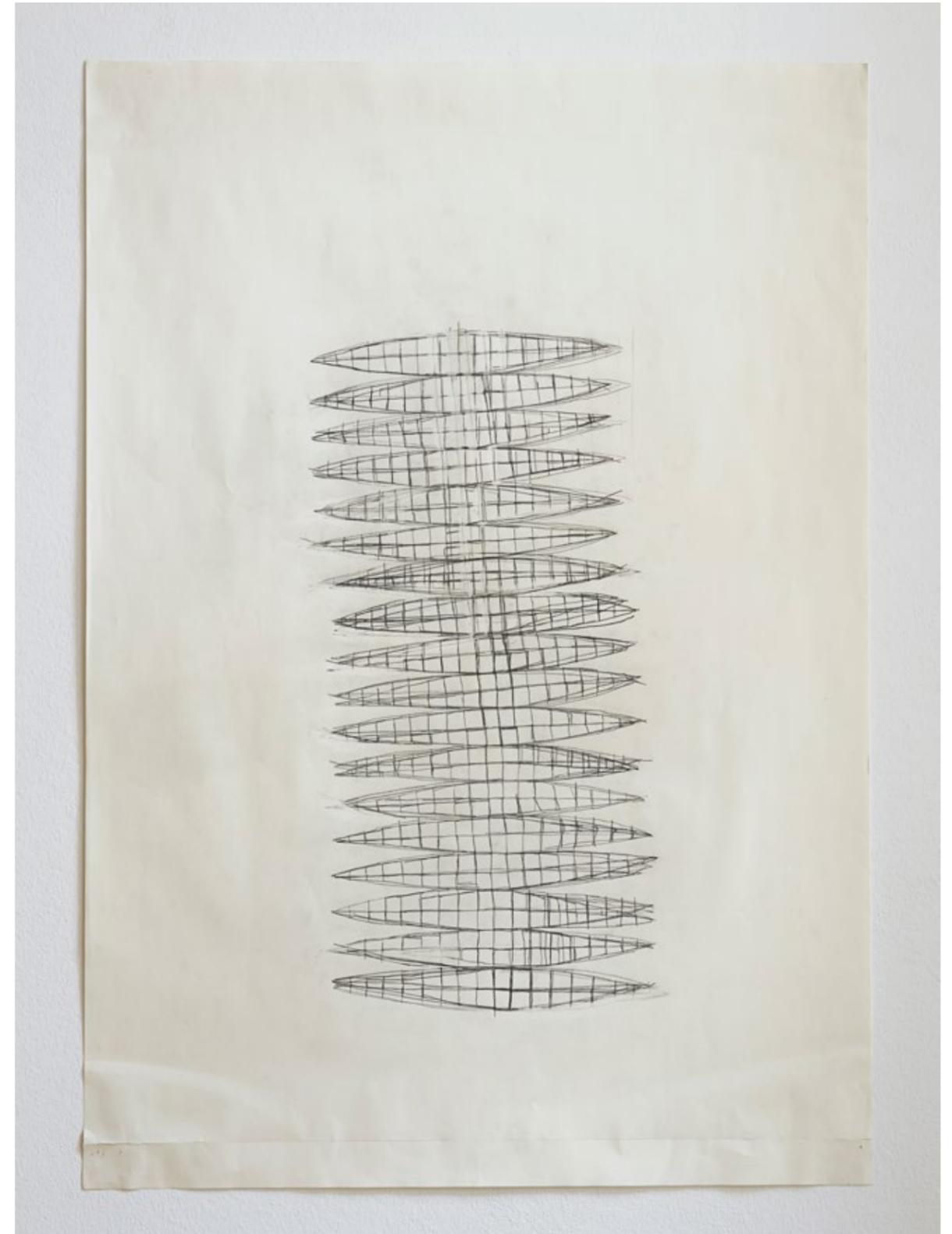
Companions (sketch) (No. 3)
2017
Drawing, pencil on paper
Zeichnung, Bleistift auf Papier
69,5 x 50 cm



Companions (sketch) (No. 4)
2017
Drawing, pencil on paper
Zeichnung, Bleistift auf Papier
69,5 x 50 cm



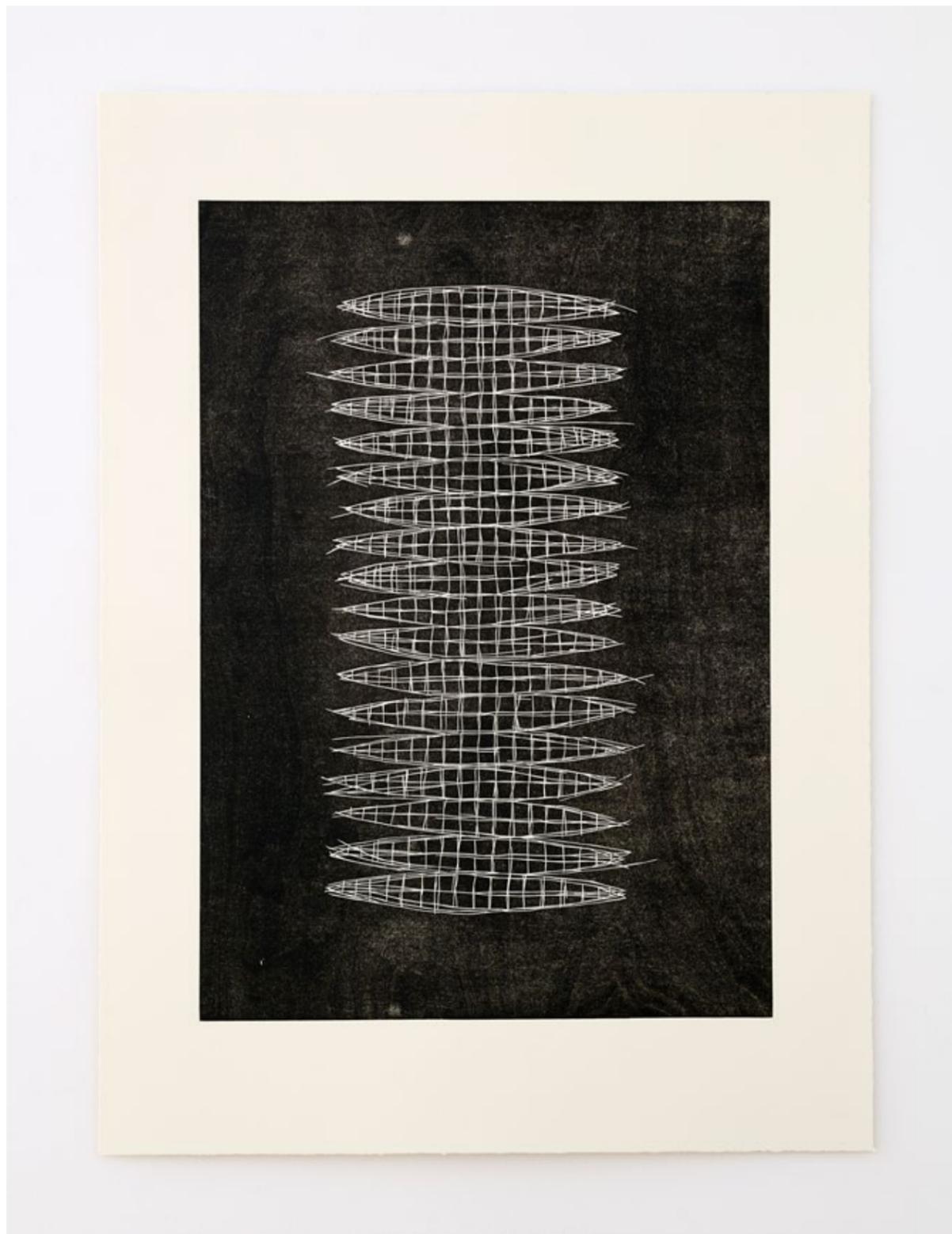
Companions (sketch) (No. 1)
2017
Drawing, pencil on paper
Zeichnung, Bleistift auf Papier
100 x 70 cm



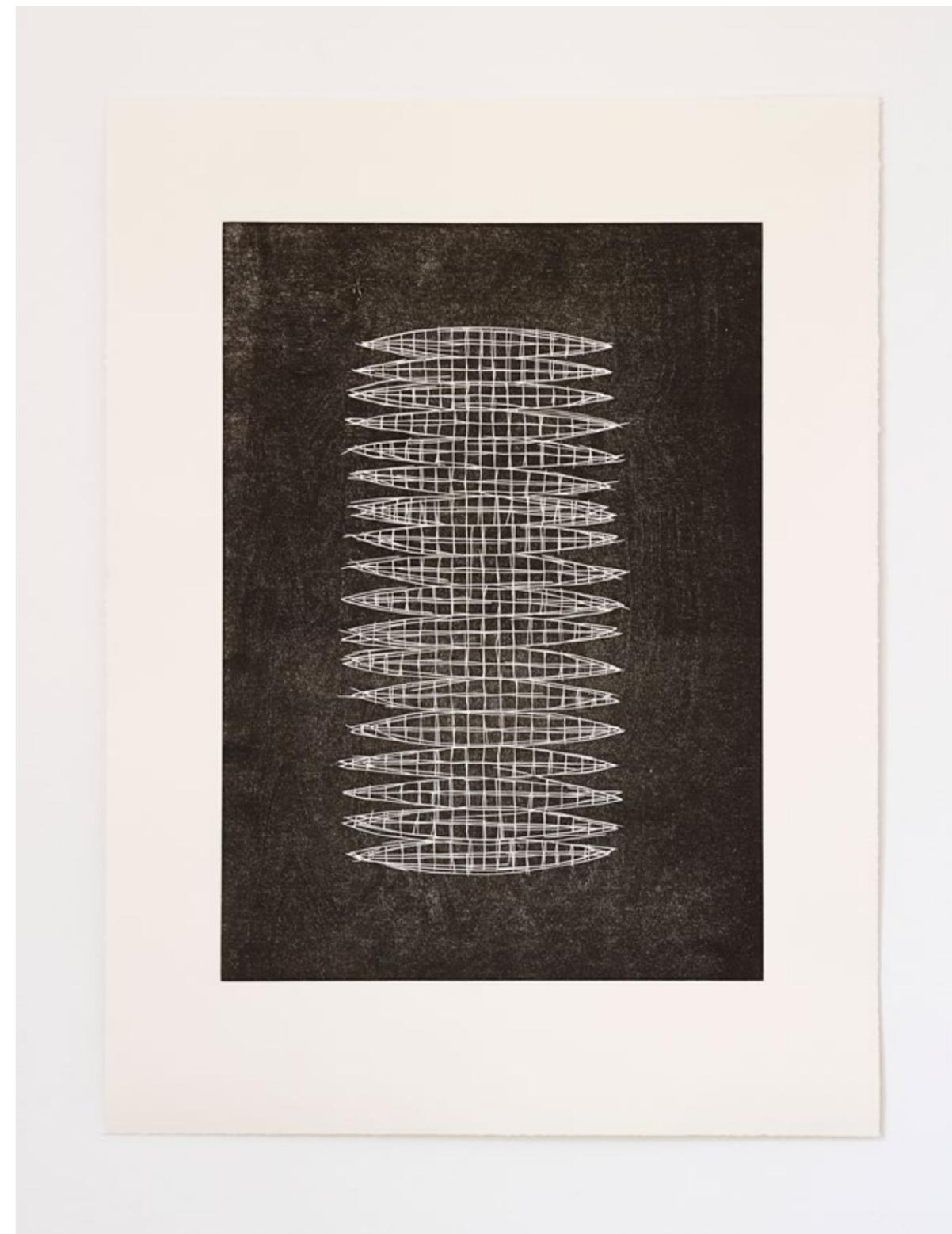
Companions (sketch) (No. 2)
2017
Drawing, pencil on paper
Zeichnung, Bleistift auf Papier
100 x 70 cm



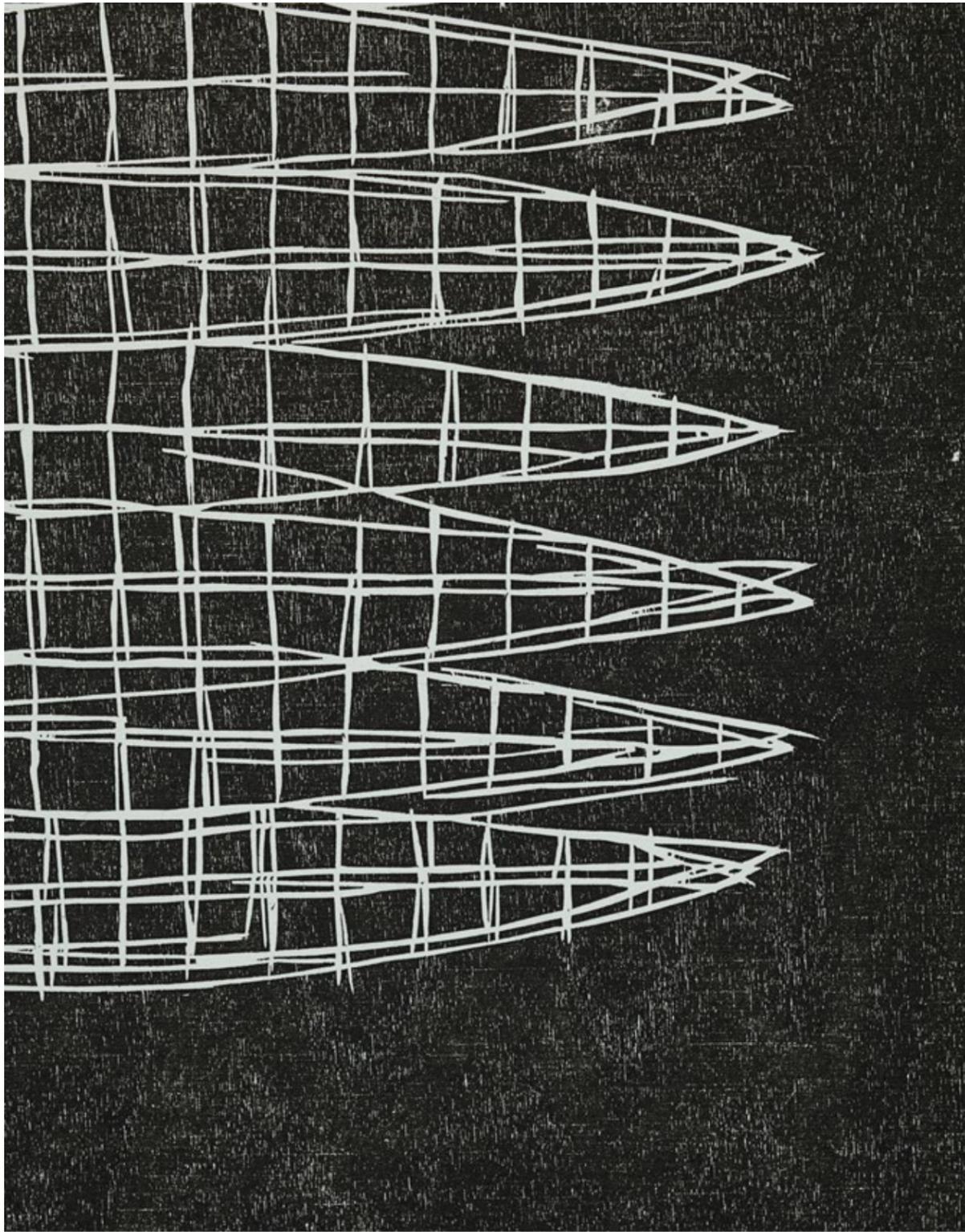
Companions, 5, 2, 3, 1
2017
Installation view / Installationsansicht



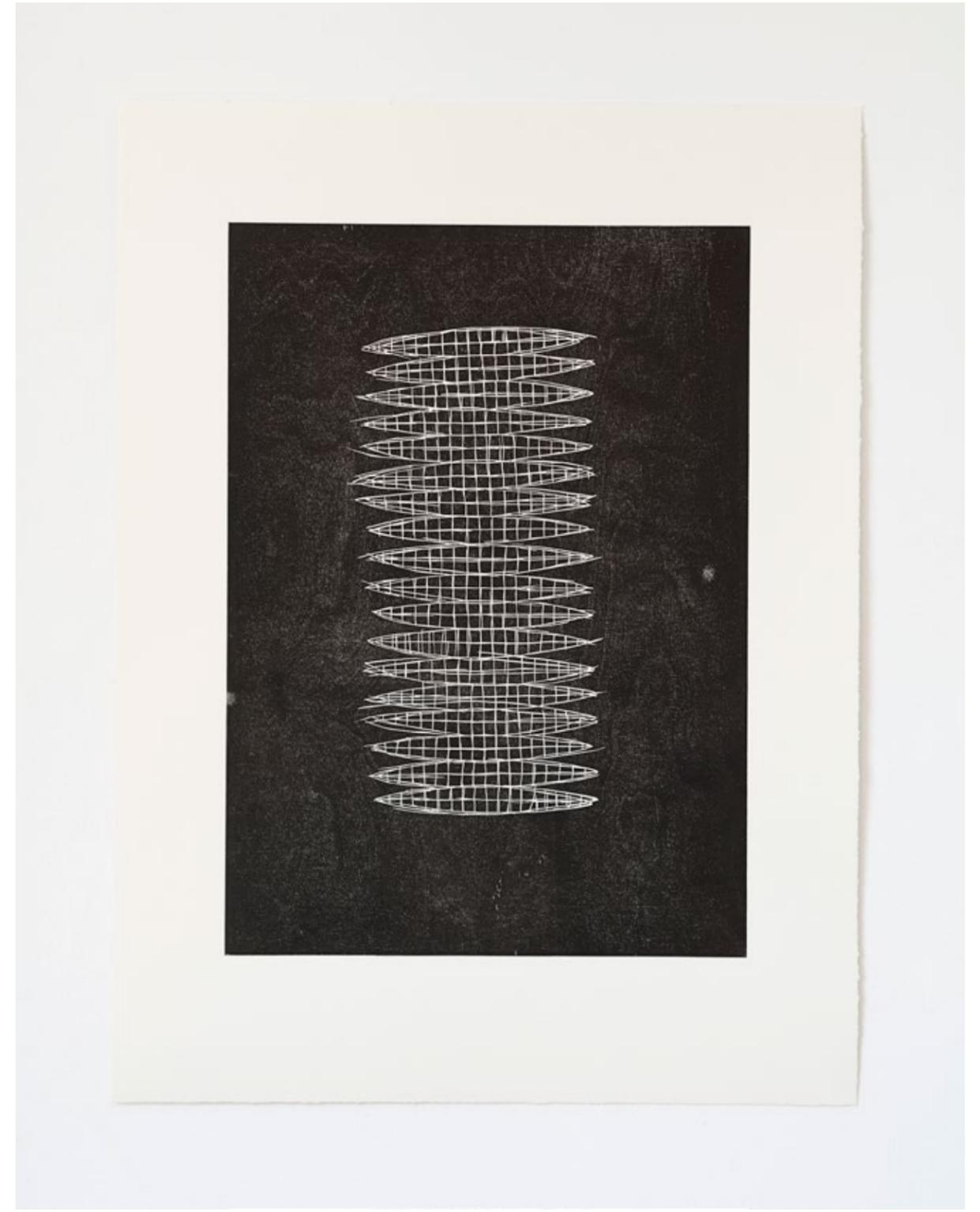
Companions, 5
2017
Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
129 x 94 cm



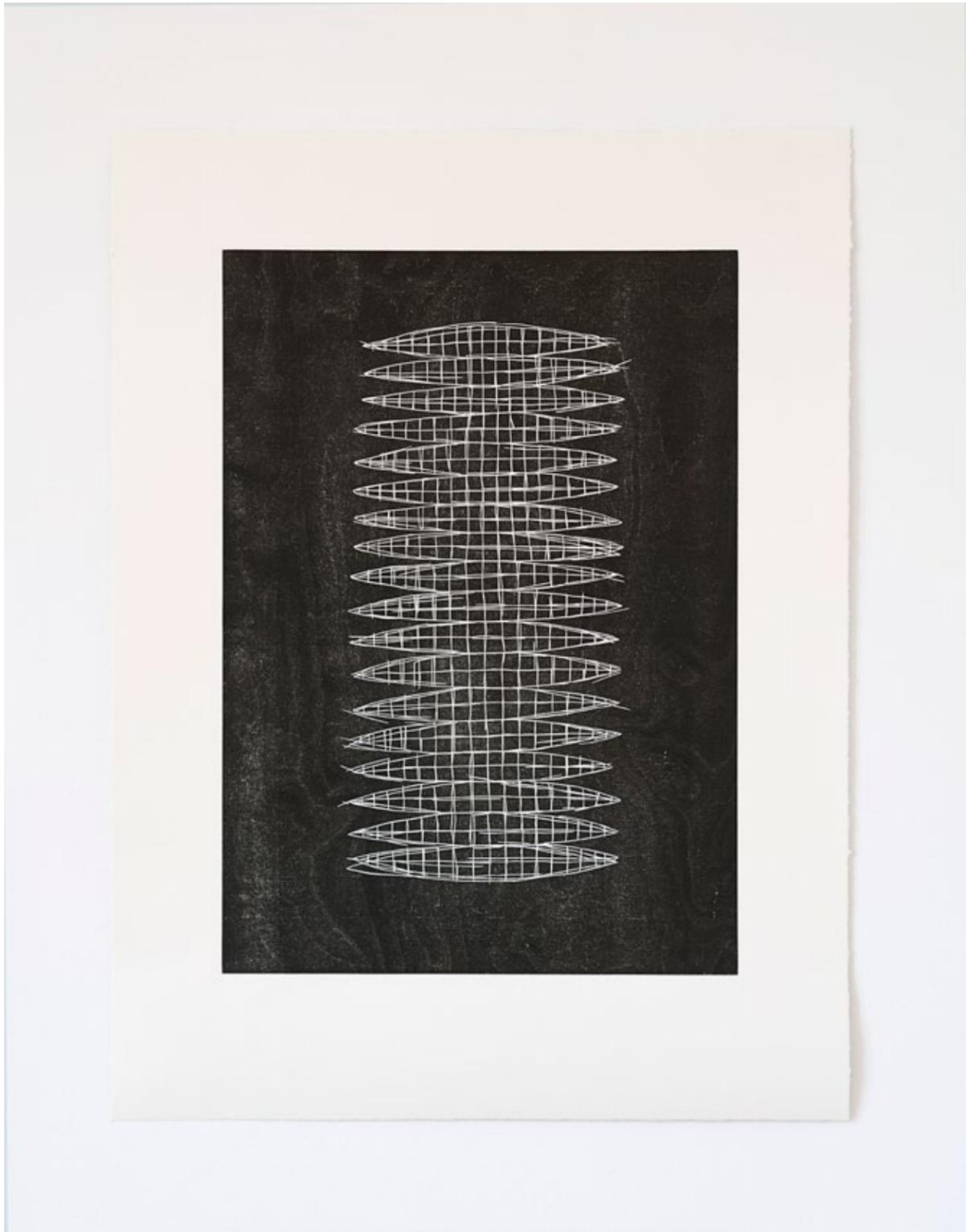
Companions, 2
2017
Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
96 x 71 cm



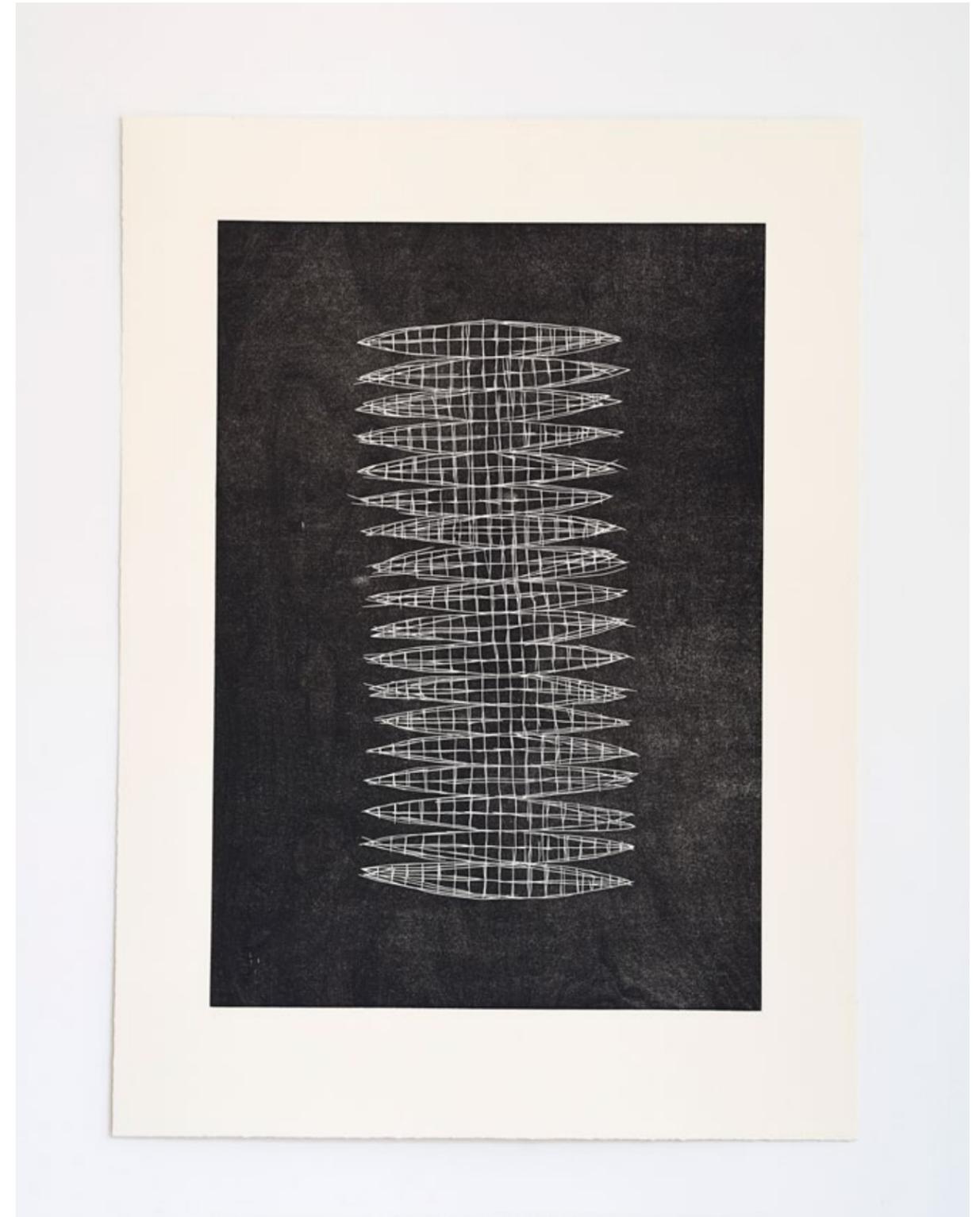
Companions, 2
2017
Detail



Companions, 3
2017
Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
96 x 71 cm



Companions, I
2017
Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
96 x 71 cm



Companions, 4
2017
Woodcut on paper
Holzschnitt auf Papier
129 x 94 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, I-3
2017
Installation view / Installationsansicht



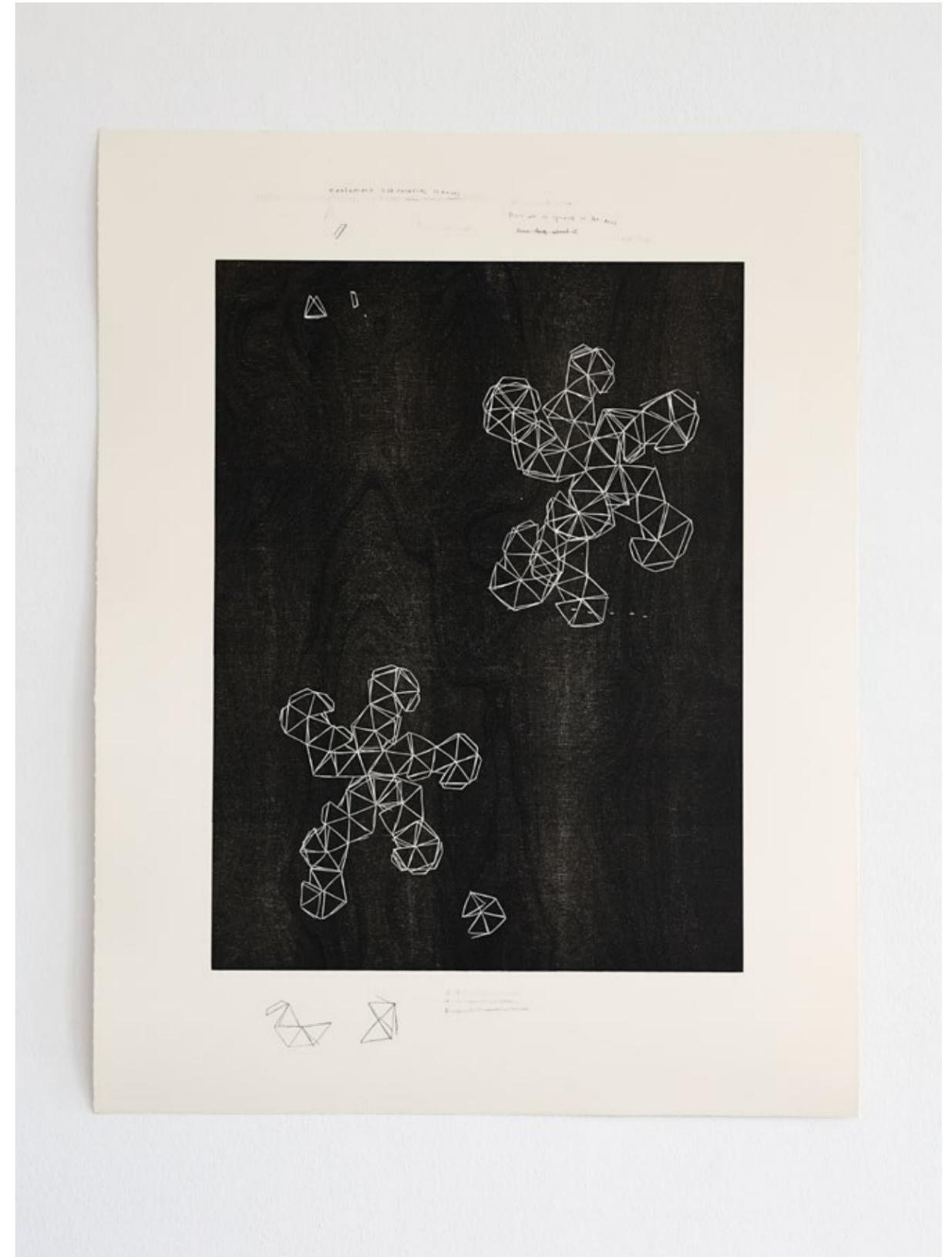
All models are wrong, some are useful, I

2017

Woodcut on paper, pencil and 2 concrete sculptures

Holzschritt auf Papier, Bleistift und 2 Betonskulpturen

Woodcut / Holzschritt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 9,5 & 10 cm



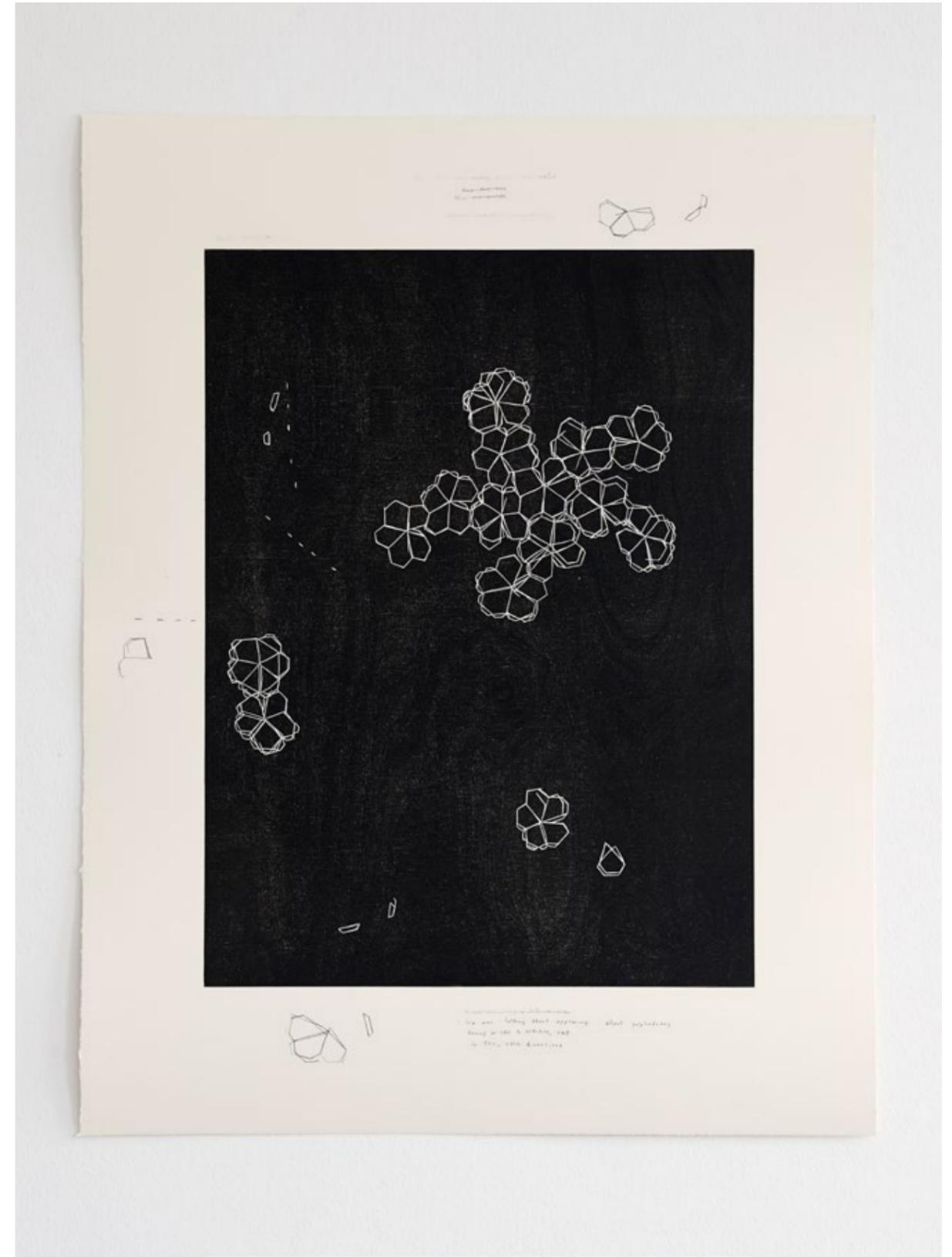
All models are wrong, some are useful, I

2017

Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 2
2017
Woodcut on paper, pencil and one concrete sculpture
Holzschnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und eine Betonskulptur
Woodcut / Holzschnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculpture / Skulptur: Ø 10 cm



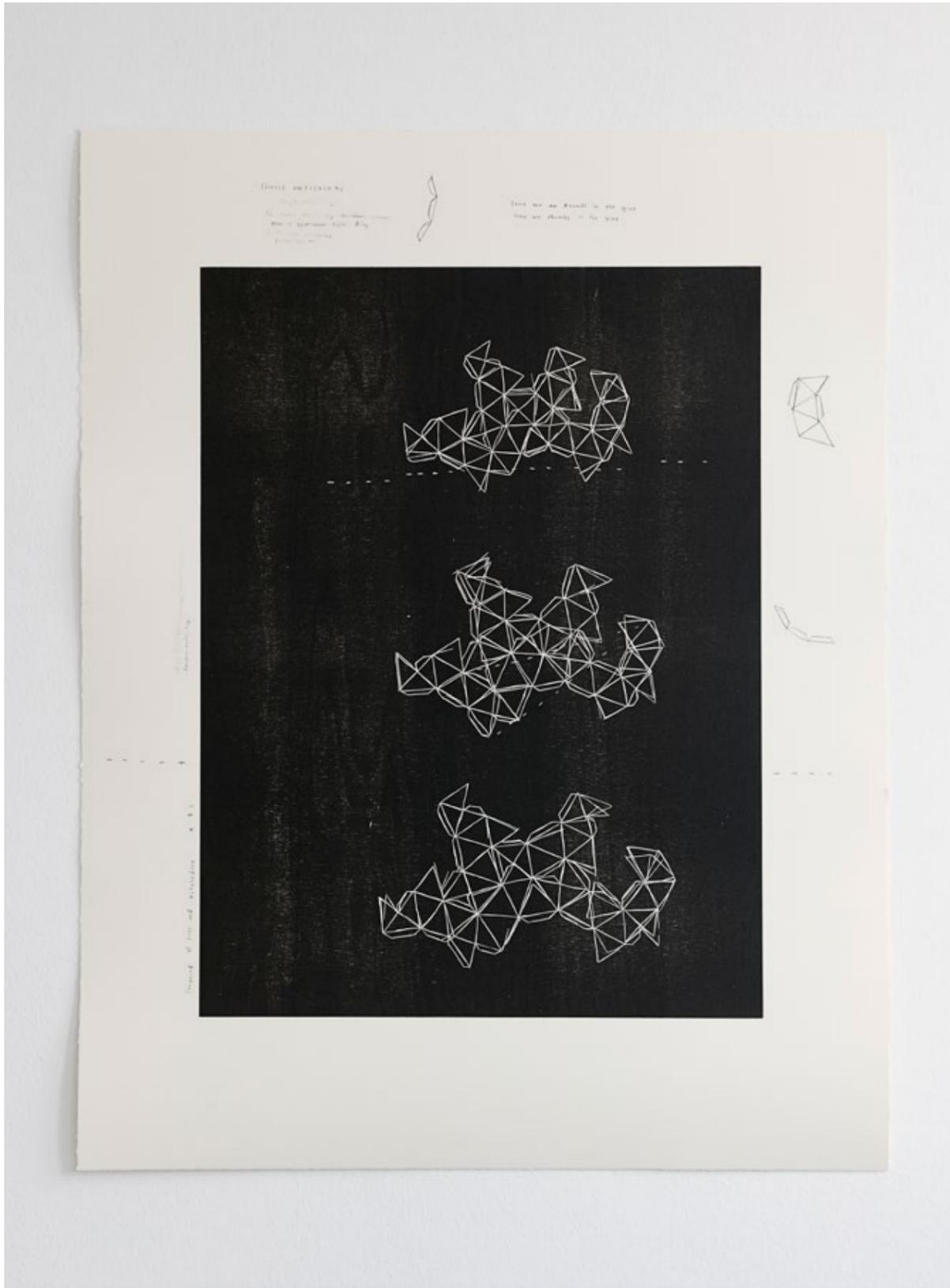
All models are wrong, some are useful, 2
2017
Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 2
2017
Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 3
2017
Woodcut on paper, pencil and 3 concrete sculptures
Holzschnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und 3 Betonskulpturen
Woodcut / Holzschnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 8 & 9 & 10 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 3
2017
Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 3
2017
Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 4-8
2017
Installation view / Installationsansicht



All models are wrong, some are useful, 4
2017
Woodcut on paper, pencil and one concrete sculpture
Holzschnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und eine Betonskulptur
Woodcut / Holzschnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculpture / Skulptur: Ø 12 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 4
2017
Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 5

2017

Woodcut on paper, pencil and 3 concrete sculptures

Holzchnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und 3 Betonskulpturen

Woodcut / Holzchnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 8 & 9,5 & 10 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 5

2017

Detail



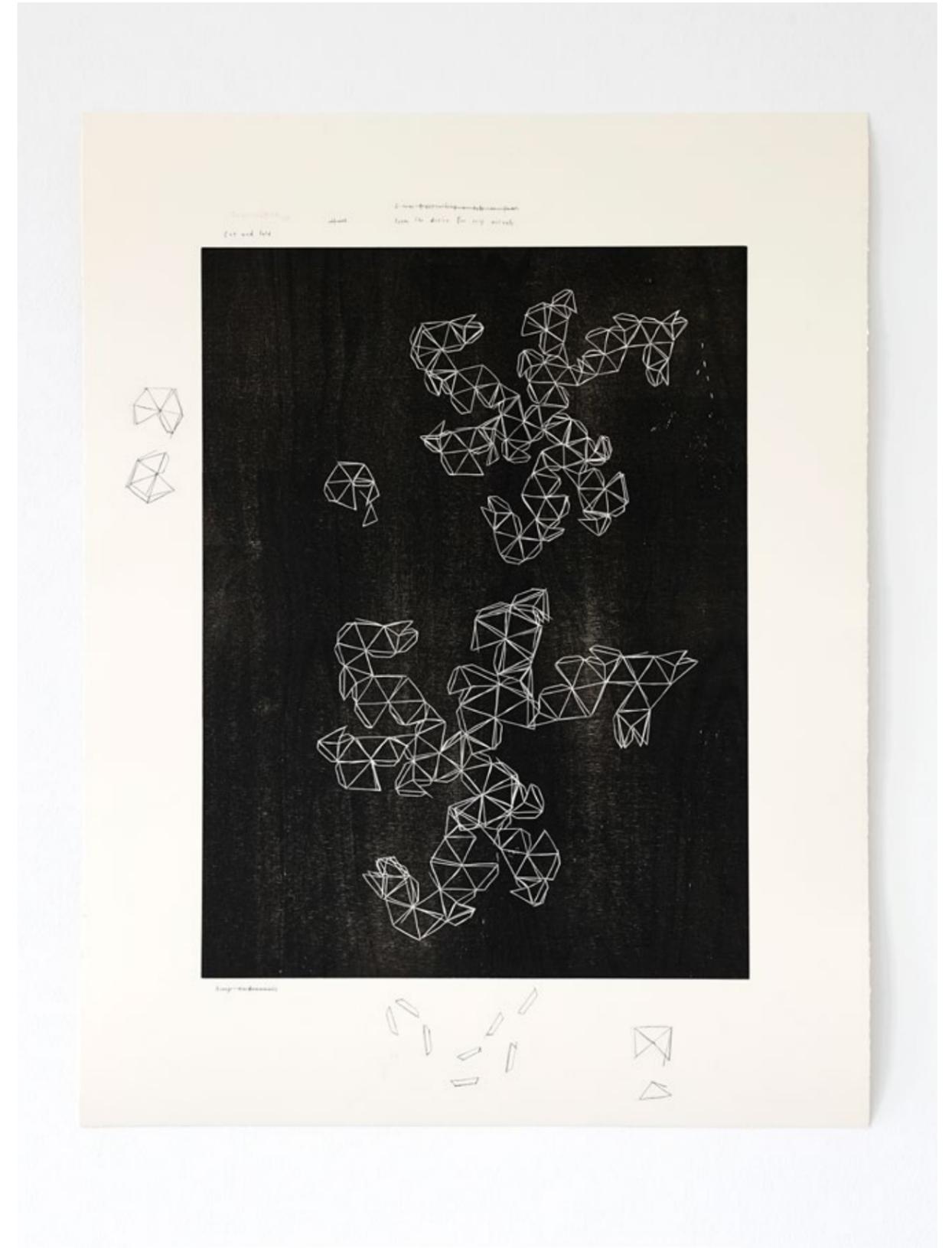
All models are wrong, some are useful, 6

2017

Woodcut on paper, pencil and 2 concrete sculptures

Holzschritt auf Papier, Bleistift und 2 Betonskulpturen

Woodcut / Holzschritt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 8,5 & 12 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 6

2017

Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 7

2017

Woodcut on paper, pencil and 2 concrete sculptures

Holzchnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und 2 Betonskulpturen

Woodcut / Holzchnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 9 & 9 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 7

2017

Detail



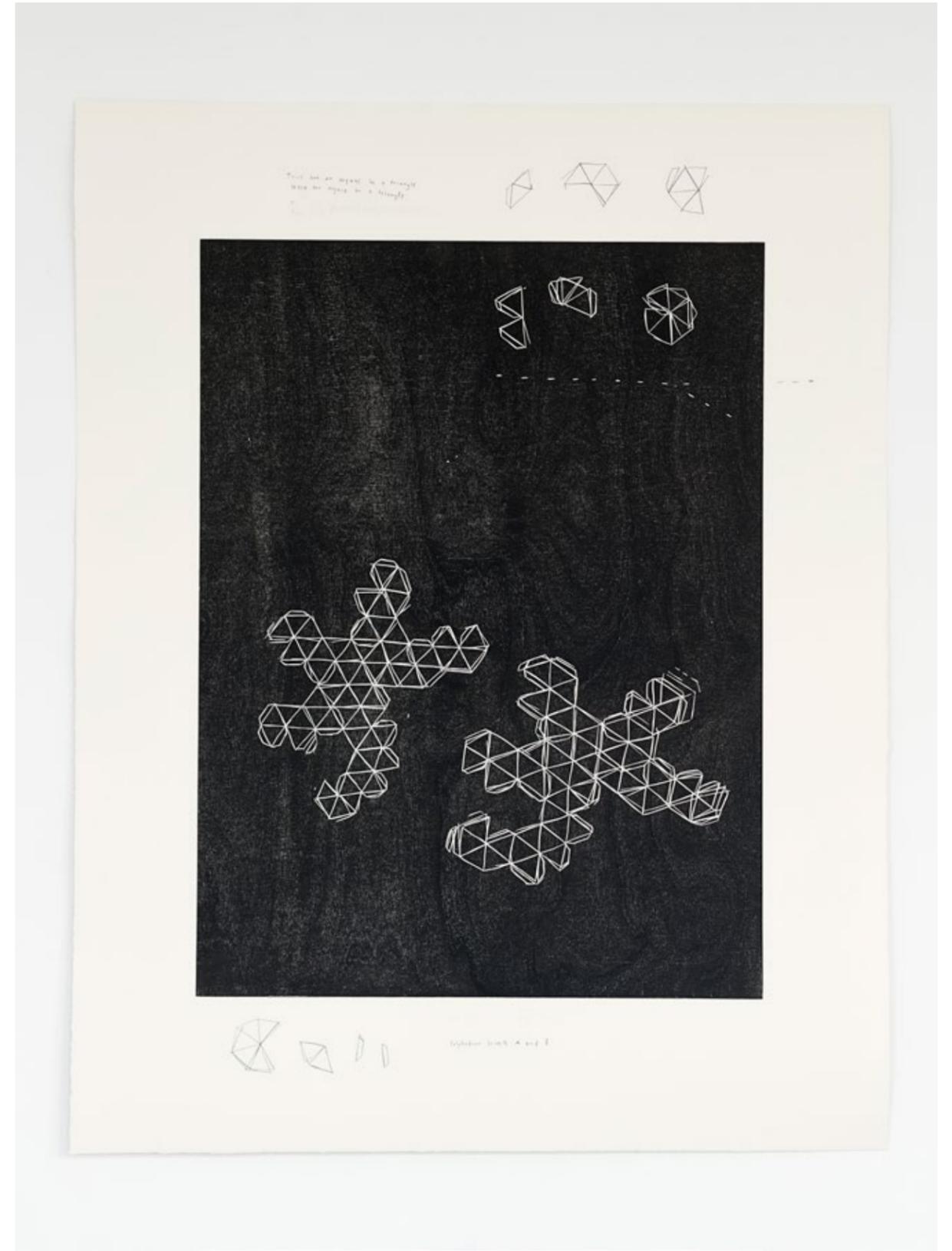
All models are wrong, some are useful, 8

2017

Woodcut on paper, pencil and 2 concrete sculptures

Holzchnitt auf Papier, Bleistift und 2 Betonskulpturen

Woodcut / Holzchnitt: 111 x 86 cm; Sculptures / Skulpturen: Ø 8,5 & 7,5 cm



All models are wrong, some are useful, 8

2017

Detail



All models are wrong, some are useful, 8
2017
Detail

CV
Ester Fleckner
b.1983 DK

Education

2007-13 The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, MFA, Copenhagen, Denmark
2010-11 Goldsmiths University of London, MA in Gender and Culture, England
2006-07 Aarhus Art School/ Byhøjskolen Aarhus, Denmark
2005-06 Aarhus Art Academy/ Aarhus Kunstakademi, Denmark

Solo exhibitions

2017
Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (September)
All models are wrong, some are useful, Galerie Barbara Wien, Berlin, Germany (July)

2016
A closet does not connect under the bed, Overgaden Institute of Art, Copenhagen, Denmark

2015
How to spell a sound that is physical, Avlskarl Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark

2014
Jeg navigerer i kollisioner (I navigate in collisions), C4 Projects, Copenhagen, Denmark

Selected group exhibitions

2017
BEERS 5 (part 3) – 100 Kvinder på Kro, Carlsberg Byens Galleri & Kunstsalon, Copenhagen, Denmark

2016
Seeable | Sayable, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Norway
Homosexuality_ies, LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Münster, Germany
Art Brussels, solo presentation, Avlskarl Gallery, Belgium
Identity. Behind the Curtain of Uncertainty, National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kiev, Ukraine
Survival K(n)it 7, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia
100 Kvinder på Kro, Huset for Kunst & Design, Holstebro, Denmark

2015
A Feminist Culture Reader, Grafikernes Hus, Copenhagen, Denmark
BEERS 5 – 100 Kvinder på Kro, Byens Kro, Copenhagen, Denmark
abc – art berlin contemporary, solo presentation at Avlskarl Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Å PARADIS – HELSINKI, Kunstplass [10], Art Fair Suomi, Helsinki, Finland
Survival K(n)it 7, Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art, Riga, Latvia
Just Frustration, SixtyEight, Copenhagen, Denmark
Homosexuality_ies, Schwules Museum, Berlin, Germany

2014
Vi tager intet ansvar 3, Q Space, Copenhagen, Denmark
Time Prints, Dalian Art Museum, China
Å PARADIS – Strategies on The Nordic Queer, Kunstplass 5, Oslo, Norway
BarHvaViHar#9, Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, Denmark
Literacy / Illiteracy, The 16th Tallinn Print Triennial, Kumu Art Museum, Estonia

Time Prints, Art College of Xiamen University, China

2013

The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over The Lazy Dog III, Baghuset, Copenhagen, Denmark
Afgang 2013 (MFA Degree Show 2013), Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark
24 Spaces – A Cacophony, Malmö Kunsthall, Sweden

2012

The Quick Brown Fox Jumps Over The Lazy Dog II, Baghuset, Copenhagen, Denmark
International Performance Art Festival, BarHvaViHar#5 art lounge, W9, Copenhagen, Denmark
Rundgang, the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark
BarHvaViHar#1, Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, Denmark

2010

Rundgang, The Royal Academy of Fine Arts/ private home Frederiksberg, Denmark

2009

Contemporary past: New Art Forms in Memorial Building, Vilnius, Lithuania

2007

Chinese Smorgasbord, Udstillingsstedet Q, Copenhagen, Denmark

Selected collaborative work

2012

- Foundation of *BarHvaViHar* - a queer feminist art bar with exhibitions, readings and performances. Initiated by Maja Moesgaard, Mette Clausen, Line Hvidbjerg and Ester Fleckner. Conducted on a regular basis in 2012-2014 in Warehouse 9, Copenhagen, Denmark
Jeg prøver at kigge ind men får gardiner i øjnene, exhibition and performative work, Q Space, Copenhagen, Denmark

Artistic publications

2015

Cruising horizontal lines, special edition woodcut print for Pist Protta 77, www.spacepetry.dk

2014

Kollision: fordi anus, min krop er botanisk; om tabertrang, clit-dicks og fejlede fællesskaber, text published in *Trappe Tusind#10* magazine, trappetusind.dk

2013

Arguments for desire, publication of graphic print, Den Danske Radeerforening

Talks and readings

2016

Artist presentations, the National Art Museum of Ukraine (NAMU), Kiev, Ukraine
Walk and talk // Ester Fleckner & Maria Kjær Thomsen, Overgaden, Copenhagen, Denmark

2015

FRANK Conversations, text reading and conversation, Den Frie, Copenhagen, Denmark
FRANK Conversations, text reading and conversation, Archive Kabinett, Berlin, Germany

2014

Å PARADIS, SKEIVT ARKIV og KUNST, artist talk, House of Literature Oslo, Norway

2010

SMK Fridays: Kunsten er queer, text reading, The National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen
Release of Trappe Tusind #10 magazine, performative reading with Maja Moesgaard, Kirsten Astrup and Mattias Agerkov, Rummet, Copenhagen, Denmark

Grants and prizes

2016

Aage and Yelva Nimbs Fond, artist honorary grant
Den Hielmstjerne-Rosencroneske Stiftelse, awarded work grant

The Danish Arts Foundation, work grant

Art Brussels SOLO Prize

2015

Ole Halsunds Kunstnerfond, awarded travel grant
The Danish Arts Foundation, work grant

2014

The Danish Arts Foundation, work grant

2013

Fr. Gerda Jensens Kunstnerlegat, travel grant

2010

Knud Højgaards Fond, scholarship
Nordea Fonden, scholarship
Grosserer L.F. Foghts Fond, scholarship

Selected press material

I first heard about Ester Fleckner in 2012, when I saw some of her collages exhibited at the queer feminist pop-up art bar *BarHvaViHar* in Copenhagen, organized regularly by Ester, together with Mette Clausen, Line Hvidbjerg, and Maja Moesgaard. *BarHvaViHar* provided a much-needed space in the city to present new queer feminist art and performance. My relation to Ester's work took proper hold after encountering the series *Clit-dick Register* at her graduation show at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 2013. The 22 almost identical woodcuts that make up the series are filled with rows of simple and uneven U-shaped figures. Printed in different shades of grey, the main variation between the prints are the poetic text fragments written on top of and on the margins of the prints. Operating in the switch-point between representation and abstraction, language and embodiment, reading and sensing, *Clit-dick Register* spoke to me in a very queer way. Since then I have followed her work closely. And this has led to a close friendship, strengthened by the fact that we have been invited to participate in different projects together over the last year, including FRANK's week-long salon at Skomvær Fyr in the summer of 2014. The following conversation took place over email in May 2015. Here we try to dwell on the questions of the relationship between queerness and art through a series of exchanges on the potentials in failure, abstraction, and losing one's way.

1. Text from Ester Fleckner's woodcut flyer for *I navigate in collisions*, 2014. My translation.



Ester Fleckner, *I navigate in collisions #5* (2014). Woodcut print on paper. 101 x 75 cm. Photo: Ester Fleckner.

MD “Relation. You talk in a way I don't know but that I'm missing. You talk about belonging differently. I bike through town with my eyes closed, or almost. I think about images one can recognize oneself in or not. I think about family trees. And having read that it demands synchronicity with the patterns and rhythms of a place to feel that one belongs. I want to have a relation to you and understand that we already have one.”¹

These are the words that brought us together, properly at least. They were the ones that made me want to have a relation to you, although we already had one. I might not have been the “you” that occasioned the text, but standing there on the street in the rain reading the letter from the woodcut taped to the gallery window where you showed your series *I navigate in collisions* (2014), I knew that this “you” had room for me as well.

The gallery was packed by the time I arrived. The window was steamy from the body heat of other “yous.” I recognized and lost myself in that love letter, and later in the prints and their figures of relationality that made me think of family trees and other trees, and about being in and out of sync with the patterns and rhythms of the place.

Now, over a year later, I remain drawn to these woodcuts. I can't help but to think that the power of the woodcuts in *I navigate in collisions* not only stems from the way they beautifully give space to represent alternative constellations of intimacy through their queering of the figure of the family tree, but also from the fact that they performatively seem to generate new intimate relations in, around, and between those who encounter them – including the two of us. Perhaps then, we could start by talking about the relationship between intimacies, audiences and communities. When including words such as “you” in your prints, whom do you have in mind as your imaginary recipients?

EF I actually wrote the text you quote right after a very touching performance by Emma Hedditch at the gallery space Bureau Publik in Copenhagen. She talked about alternative ways of belonging in such a sensitive way. When I was biking home that night, I was trying to remember

what she said and the way she said it, which of course was impossible. Surrounded by the disturbing city, I was constantly thinking of staying in the mood of and in touch with her piece.

At first, the “you” in the text was directed to her, but now this is a personal anecdote. There are many “yous.”

I placed the woodcut with the text in the window as an invitation to friends, relatives, as well as unknown others, who might feel a connection with the words, as you suggest. The text also worked as an introduction to the series of my abstract queer family trees in *I navigate in collisions*, that very few would see as potential family trees, or trees of alternative relations, without the text. I think the text allowed me to make the prints in the series so abstract, knowing they would still be approachable.

I wrote the text quite early in the making of *I navigate in collisions*, and it gave me a space to think about the different ways of relating that I am addressing in the piece. The woodcuts explore the dreams and desires one can have in relation to various “yous” in various ways. Relations that can be of biological as well as non-biological character: friendships, experimental love and sex relations, relations across physical and temporal reach, as well as across the divide between the human and non-human. The series is an attempt to consider such chaotic and nonlinear connections, and the many relations I have with people, artworks, and activist practices.

I didn't expect that some people would actually feel invited into the text as much as you do. But I am very glad to experience how you approach it and consider it an active opener for new relations and conversations. I guess the “I” and the “you” can be embodied anew by viewers.

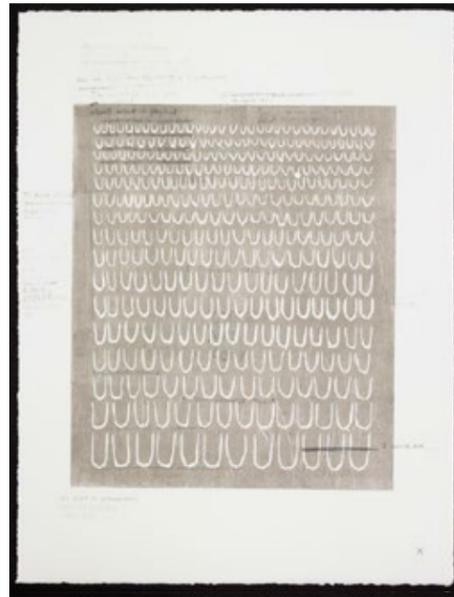
MD In linguistics, words such as “I” and “you” are called “shifters,” in reference to the way their meanings – but not necessarily function – shift depending on the context of the enunciation and reception. I'm often drawn to shifters such as “you” that allows me to step into the position of the one who is being addressed. Perhaps this is because I have an embarrassing tendency of always thinking that works of art or texts are addressing or hailing *me* specifically. There is something mildly megalomaniac or paranoid in this feeling of being addressed directly by a work or a text – as queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out in the title of her wonderful essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You.”² There is surely a difference in thinking that a work is *about* you or that it is speaking to you – the latter is less self-centred than the former – not that it is always easy to distinguish.

As a young (proto)gay boy, I was obsessed with Björk. I had this intense feeling that her songs not only told tales about my (imaginary) life but also that they were sung directly to me. Although this is probably a classic example of the projective powers of fandom, I remain interested in the intimacies that get established through aesthetic forms that circulate in public. And I wonder if this intimacy might derive some of its energy through, and not despite, its *impersonal* character: the surprise of being interpellated by someone unknown or something unexpected that resonates nonetheless. Although I have been trained to remain suspect toward emotional attachments and the imaginary projections so

central to being a fan, part of my work as an art historian remains driven by the thought that works of art speak to me. Instead of privileging “critical distance,” I remain invested in developing forms of “critical intimacy,” to borrow Mieke Bal's term, where the sense of being addressed prompts a response.³ A response that often involves desire and disagreement, conflicts and care, not unlike in my other intimate relations. But the intimacy of the art encounter also pertains to how I relate to works that I'm *not* a fan of – works that provoke agonistic responses.

I have had an aspiration to understand my art theoretical writing as a form of “conversation” between myself and the works of art I am engaging with. A conversation that is surely a strange and asymmetrical one, given that I'm speaking “with” an object whose ability to speak back to and “disagree” with my soliloquies remain limited. But I guess I'm using the metaphor of being in “conversation” with artworks in order to stress that I'm invested in questions of responsibility in intimate encounters of different sorts within and across the human-nonhuman divide. And by “questions of responsibility,” I also mean questions of who or what has the ability to respond.

This line of thought was prompted by your comment on how you are interested in connections and networks that are not limited to relations between humans. How would you, for instance, describe your relation to the materials you



Ester Fleckner, *Clit-dick Register* (2014), woodcut on paper, pencil. 50 x 65 cm. Photo: Anders Sune Berg.

2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123-152.

3. Mieke Bal develops this concept in dialogue with the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in “Critical Intimacy,” *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 283-323.

work with? Would it make sense for you to say that you are in “conversation” with the pieces of wood that you carve in, or the printing press that you work with? Or do you think with other metaphors?

EF I think there is a lot of potential in the idea of speaking with objects, and to consider intimacy in our relations or encounters with things and materials – encounters that generate emotional, generous, or unclear experiences. As I understand it, critical distance requires a somehow rational approach, which again requires a set framework and language to speak from and within. Critical intimacies, as an alternative, seem to give room for a bodily openness – where one doesn't only *reflect* at a distance on a piece but *experience* it.

This also makes me think about a comment that Kathy Acker made on “the need for literary criticism” : “If a work is immediate enough, alive enough, the proper response isn't to be academic, to write about it, but to use it, to go on.”⁴ I think this has something to do with the intimate encounters you talk about.

I am interested in connecting with as well as colliding with materials: To delve into physicality in various ways, make an imprint of the body in materials, think with it, and be affected by it. Like with the woodcut carvings. I love the resistance and unpredictability of the wood as well as of the printing process where differences, errors, and mistakes occur. I don't have an interest in getting to know or use a medium in a way where I can control the outcome and reach perfection. Quite the opposite: I seek to establish dialogues where I can explore a lost and chaotic intimacy with language and materials, while I continuously seek new methods of losing my way, so to speak, to use J. Jack Halberstam's words from *The Queer Art of Failure*.⁵ It is an interest in unstable identities and the failure of norms.

Recently I have been working with concrete. I had an idea of making a number of heavy abstract frames. I was interested in pushing the stiff and predictable character of

concrete, and ended up making very fragile and thin forms that all got slightly displaced in different ways in the process when the concrete hardened. The frames are part of my exhibition *How to spell a sound that is physical*. I like how they appear so heavy and massive, yet very skewed and maladjusted. It felt like one long dialogue to make this piece, and my conversation with it continues.

MD Your description of cultivating failure as an artistic method might sound paradoxical, as one could say that it has become a quite successful strategy in your work! But failure is of course a relational term, and always raises the question of what standards or measures one betrays, fulfills or seeks to abandon. As far as I understand how failure works in your practice, it seems to have less to do with personal success than with an

interest in resisting normative frameworks that discipline, not only the practice of artistic labour (woodcutting, printing, poetry writing, etc.), but embodiment more broadly. In your woodcuts you do not seem to try to conceal or correct errors in the carving or the printing of the works, instead the errors give emphasis to the processual nature of your practice. Words are frequently crossed out in your prints, and the notes written in pencil, on and around the prints, often bear the mark of having been erased or rewritten several times. If these marks “fail” to make the prints appear embellished or perfect, the traces succeed in bringing me closer to the body that has worked on these sheets.

“If at first you don't succeed, failure may be your style,” the legendary Quentin Crisp once quipped – a line that is one of the starting points of J. Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam has made a compelling argument about failure as a form of queer style, a set of practices that seek to escape or move beside the punishing norms that organize the logics and measurements of success and failure in capitalist society. While I remain inspired by this call for remembering the advantages of failing, I'm also a bit reluctant to embrace the notion of failure as

4. Kathy Acker, “A Few Notes on Two of My Books,” *Bodies of Work: Essays by Kathy Acker* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1997), p. 7.

5. Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011).



Installation shot of the exhibition *How to spell a sound that is physical* at Avlskarl Gallery, Copenhagen, April 10-May 9, 2015. On the wall: *How to spell a sound that is physical*, woodcut prints on paper, pencil (2014). On the floor: *Manoeuvring overload*, concrete (2014). Photo: Anders Sune Berg.

queer style. Despite the fact that this framework seeks to work as a starting point for structural critiques, it can easily stand at risk of romanticizing the experiences of failing or falling outside established frames of legibility and recognition. Experiences that when it comes to gender, sexuality, and race are often traumatic and life-shattering. But in the context of artworks, I am thinking more about how failure as a queer style tends to get attached or fixated to specific aesthetic gestures – including the trashy and the punk, central to Halberstam's project.

I guess I'm interested in how you relate to the temporality of failure in your work and work process. Do you "fail" differently now than before? I am

thinking of what the effect might be when certain gestures – like the crossing out of text or erasing words – turn into a form of an artistic "signature style" that one comes to expect from an artist. If this gets connected to a style of an aesthetic of "failure," this gesture might lose not only some of its immediacy or vulnerability, but also its frictional quality as something that falls out of the frame in different ways. Think of Danish artist Gudrun Hasle's text pieces, for instance, where she embroiders sentences in English that, due to her dyslexia, are filled with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. When I first saw works from this series almost ten years ago they had a very different effect on me than when I see the works she makes in a similar fashion today. If Hasle had suddenly made a text piece *without* any spelling mistakes, it would probably fail my expectations in a potentially interesting way (or not). My point isn't to fetishize "originality" and "newness," but to

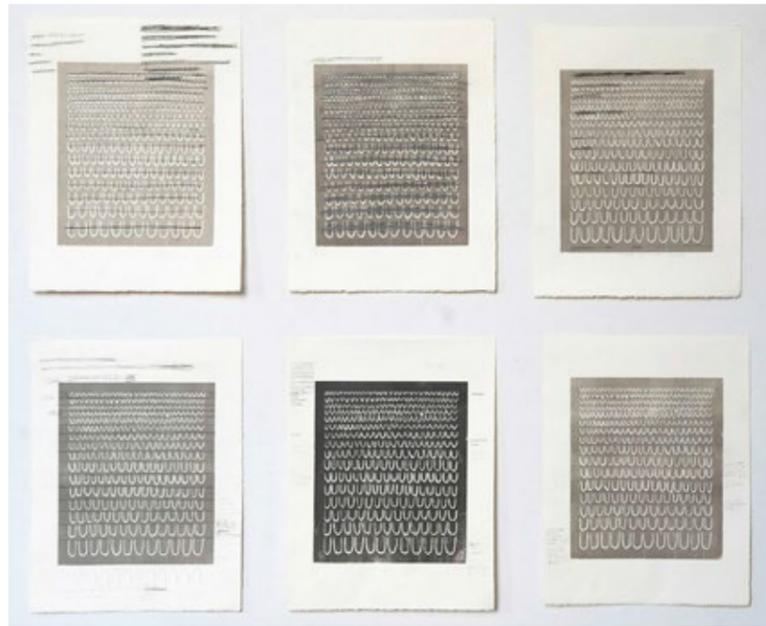
consider what happens when certain forms of failure become instrumental to the work and expectation of an artist's practice.

But perhaps the queer art of failure isn't only about the labour of failing again and failing better (to invoke Samuel Beckett's famous words), but also the "failure" to live up to the expectations of something "new" by insisting on working with the same kind of gestures again and again, despite the fact that some might find it repetitive and boring?

EF Talking about failure opens up very interesting considerations about expectations of values and successes, as well as positions and contexts. There is no doubt that failure has many faces, and that what fails in one context does not necessarily fail in another. I share many of your questions and concerns, and I try to reflect on failure in various ways in my work process and in the works themselves that I hope function as a space for reflection or on-going dialogue on these issues.

I agree that failure as an artistic strategy or cultivated method can appear paradoxical, although I don't think that is a direction I'm aiming for, but perhaps I'm already caught up in it, I don't really know. Failure is an integral part of my practice, and something I have explored in order to question and negotiate normative expectations and values in our society. When I cross out words and sentences in my woodcuts, I don't consider the print to be a failure or any less perfect. Instead I'm thinking about how language keeps failing, and the print becomes a space for reflecting about the failing relation that exist between, for instance, the body and language. When I let errors and mistakes become part of my works, it is because I am trying to connect to process, not results. I seek to stress and visualize a set of values that give uncertainty and the unfinished a central position. That is also why I mostly do serial work. The prints reflect different attempts in the process.

Thinking with and around notions of queerness, trans, and the fluidities of the body, I see my practice as an investigation of confusion, doubt, desire, collisions, failure, chaos, skewness, and suggestions. I don't only try to make work *about* – but rather *with* or *through* these topics – as I try to develop methods in close relation to the things I'm working on. In



Ester Fleckner, *Clit-dick Register* (2013).
installation at the graduation show
at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine
Arts, Charlottenborg, Copenhagen.
Photo: Ester Fleckner.

this sense you could say that failure has become both the content, an aesthetic, and part of my working method.

Halberstam's writing on failure opens up space to consider the importance of failure, negation, and chaos in relation to certain political modes of critique, while also embracing confusion as a value. There is certainly a risk of romanticizing failure, and for those of us who often experience failure in relation to different norms of gender or sexuality in our society, this approach can be embraced only with a certain ambivalence. I mean, I don't think Halberstam's project is useful in all contexts. But thinking of failure along these lines opened up a platform for me, from where I could work much more freely. It enabled me to consider my artistic practice as a place where I could reflect on different complex and overlapping questions related to queerness and trans – both as content for my work and as inspiration for an artistic approach to materials and language.

As my work often involves aspects of failure, it is very likely that people might start to "expect" this approach. That is fine. That is what I do. I think that errors can have a poetic and affective potential that goes in line with the content of my works. So I'm not so scared of being recognized as having a "signature," as long as the works are interesting. I'm not trying to be an artist who is surprising or innovative in that sense, and I don't think I'm interested in the act of "failing" people's expectations. Here I'd rather see my practice in line with the work that many feminists have done for years on the crucial political and artistic relevance of repetitions and insistence. Repetition can be explored in so many interesting ways, and the same thing

always changes character when explored anew. I'm not scared of repeating myself or to be recognized for my aesthetics, style, or approach. The last two years I have been making mostly woodcuts with various outcomes, and I will probably continue with that. But I am also very curious to continue working with other media and methods along the way, as in my recent interest in working with concrete.

I don't know if it makes sense to say that failure functions as a queer style in my work. But failure is an integrated part of my practice – it shapes my way of thinking, writing, and my physical approach to materials. It is a starting point in my desire to not know the outcome of my work in advance. When talking about aesthetics, I think that there is a lot of potential in abstraction that I would like to explore more. And perhaps there is a relation to failure there as well.

MD Abstraction is such an interesting and potent field, especially in relation to sex and sexuality. It not only opens up discussions about aesthetics – as in abstract and non-representational art – but also to politics of recognition more broadly. What is "abstract" for some might appear very clear and concrete for others. This relates to representation and images as much as thought and concepts. I have, for instance, always found your work to be brimming with desire and sex. Although I know that this is not necessarily something that might seem "obvious" to all

who encounter your work. I'm interested in the things that people "fail" to see, even though it is right there in front of them. This "de-sexing" of so much art might surely be related to the limited interpretive repertoires pertaining to sexuality and desire in mainstream discourses on art. Discourses that only allow sexuality to become a relevant perspective if it is the explicit subject of an artwork in such a way that even those who would prefer to not "see" or talk about it would have a difficult time arguing for its irrelevance. The frequent erasure of sexuality from the field of vision or critical relevance surely legitimates the "in-your-face" strategies of many artists working with queerness. Still, I remain interested in the queer potential that different strategies of abstraction can generate. I guess it was an encounter with Felix Gonzalez-Torres' work many years ago that blew my mind in relation to this. Especially his way to make the most sexy pieces out of the simplest forms and cheapest materials – wherein the erotic not only appears through campy encoded signs and symbols, that are clearly there for those who want to see them or know how to read them, but crucially also through the tactility of the encounter: from the eating of candies to the textures of paper and bead curtains.

There is this beautiful conversation between the art historians Jennifer Doyle and David J. Getsy on "Queer Formalisms" in *Art Journal*, which deals with how formal tactics have been used by artists for queer purposes.⁶ Tactics that range from using non-representational forms as a coded language for desire or sex, and to formal works that invite and produce queer modes of use. At a point



Ester Fleckner, *Arguments for desire #1*
(2013), woodcut on paper, 47 x 38 cm.
Photo: Ester Fleckner.

6. Jennifer Doyle and David J. Getsy, "Queer Formalisms: Jennifer Doyle and David Getsy in Conversation," *Art Journal* 72, No. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 58-71.

in the conversation, Doyle describes how her encounter with new theoretical work within transgender theory has pushed her to thinking about the erotic in art by making her consider “what sex becomes when practiced or expressed or manifested through things like speed, gesture, plasticity, or texture.”⁷ There is something really interesting in thinking about the radically different ways to express desire and erotic.

When I say I see desire and sex everywhere in your work, I'm not only thinking about what one could be tempted to call the erotic language that runs through your woodcut prints, specifically the signs you have called the “clit-dick” and “anus star.” In your latest series, *How to spell a sound that is physical*, these signs are not present, but instead each print presents a variation of what I think of as a sheet of lined paper where the parallel lines are falling and swaying. I find there to be something very erotic in these works as well. Sex manifested through rhythm and musicality, undulating movements of falling and rising, of rocking and touching.

Do you think about the relationship between abstraction and sexuality in your work as well? Or are there other aspects of what you call “the potential in abstraction” that interest you more?

EF I am very interested in abstraction, and it's difficult to articulate. Perhaps that is exactly why I am so drawn to it. I like spending time with things that are abstract and difficult to understand, but I also like to make the recognizable strange through letting elements collide with each other. Abstraction as a form of understanding and “dis-understanding” of objects, languages or images. Abstraction as a way to make new things appear. It allows for a displacement of perception and the rational understanding of things.

I really like your suggestion that non-representational forms or objects can express thoughts and desires in their own way, beside or because of their immediate unreadability. Abstract and non-representational forms require, or at least invite, openness and curiosity – and potentially a reconsideration of what we think we see, touch, or hear and thus know.

I'm interested in the embedded negation in abstraction. As an aesthetic format that gives room for the unclear and blurry, it resists easy recognition and translation to what is clear, rational, or readable. The resistance can ignite a dialogue or conversation on the level of emotions, physicality, and affect. This relates to our previous discussion of being “in conversation” with materials and objects: Abstract forms insist on other modes of existing and being.

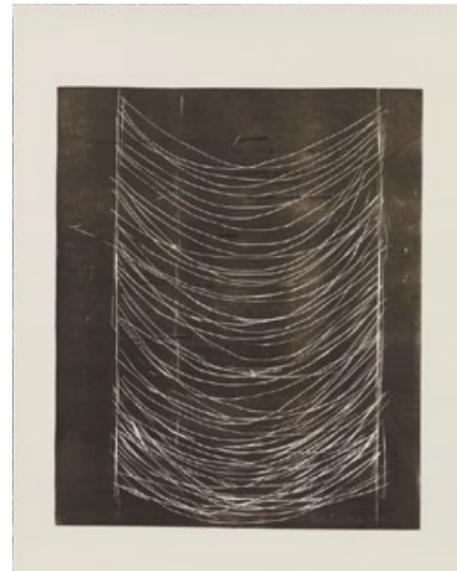
In relation to queerness and trans issues, abstraction gets very interesting, and there is a potential here that remains important to work with. An encounter with a body or object that differs from easily identifiable formats and frameworks often requires another temporal process of reading. Abstract things can call one to lose or break with the understanding of normalized and regular time frames, as well as reading habits and directions, as there are no clear interpretive lines to follow. No beginning or end. Or several. That is appealing.

The clit-dicks and the anus star that appear in some of my works are signs that have a lot to do with my negotiation with forms of recognition and knowledge that gets attached to bodies, desires, and languages. These small signs give me a way to consider how the language about bodies so often fail in relation to gendered and sexual identities and categories. The simple forms create estrangements or “abstractifications” of what is categorized and knowable in normative terms and understandings. I like

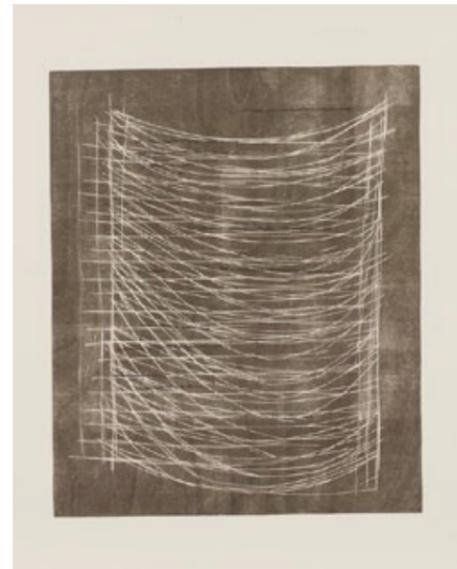
how the clit-dicks and anus stars can be part of several readings and both be recognized and not recognized, taking part in the question of how we know what something really “is.” Like you say, some people might not see the anuses and clit-dicks – others see them all the time. The titles and texts in my works offer opportunities to read the works as something else than complete abstraction.

Often people connect abstraction to something poetically remote, surreal or inoffensive. My interest in abstraction lies in the opportunity it gives to work with alternative languages and existences that relate to very concrete and real questions of the perception of bodies and difference. Sexuality and abstraction are often – maybe always – present in my work together

7. Ibid., p. 71.



Ester Fleckner, *How to spell a sound that is physical* (2014), woodcut print, pencil. Photo: Anders Sune Berg.



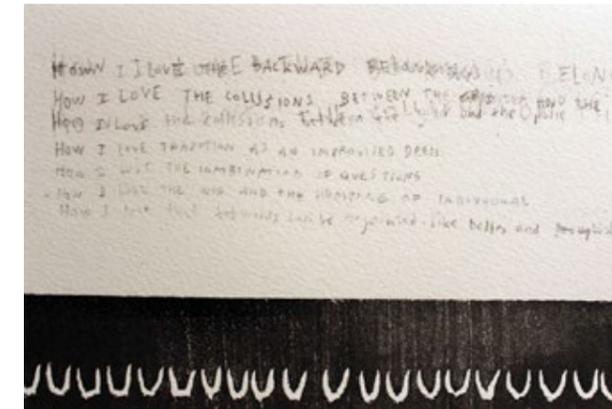
with other aspects of queerness that relates to questions about the politics of recognition – that is something I think about a lot. I want to continue exploring abstraction and estrangement as approaches that can open up alternative conversations on how bodies collide with social systems and structures. I hope that this might be a way to work against the simplified and superficial understandings of queerness that have gotten absorbed in the mainstream lately.

MD I share your concern for the uptake of certain forms of queer critique and aesthetics in the mainstream, especially the understandings of “queerness”

that correspond smoothly with the existing politicized languages of neoliberalism that privilege fluid and adaptable subjects open to be exploited in ever new ways. I think of your use of abstractions and your insistence on developing alternative languages to understand the relation between the body and society as a way to resist this current.

This also makes me think of Italian Autonomia-theorist Franco “Bifo” Berardi's recent turn to poetry as a site of resistance against the effects of what he calls the capitalist pollution of the “psychosphere.” The endless flows of information that we are asked to decode and process with mechanical functionality 24/7 today obstructs our sensibilities – “the ability of the human being to communicate with what cannot be said in words.”⁸ Bifo suggests that poetry can provide an alternative to the “ethical insensibility” that defines the language of the

economic order: “Sensibility slows interpretation procedures, making decodification aleatory, ambiguous, and uncertain, and thus reducing the competitive efficiency of the semiotic agent.”⁹ I don't think Bifo uses the term poetry as a descriptor of a specific literary form, but rather as a word that gestures toward alternative forms of world-making practices. Your work is certainly a form of poetry seen from this perspective. In relation to this, I am curious of how you see your interest in developing new languages in relation to your writing practice and to poetry and the poetic.



Ester Fleckner, *Clit-dick Register* (2014), woodcut print, pencil (detail).

8. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2012), p. 121.

9. Ibid., p. 127.

EF I am intensely drawn to the difficult and inadequate relation between language and the body. A relation that is usually organized in a hierarchical way that privileges language over body. Our written and spoken language categorizes, organizes, and governs us in juridical and social terms, and we use it to communicate and navigate with all the time. Usually people think that the body can be explained and described in language. This hierarchy often works in a similar way within the arts, when it comes to the relation between image and text. Titles, as well as texts that are included as a part of art works, are usually given a heavy significance in the approach and understanding of a piece. This also includes press releases, and other text forms that are written to frame our encounter with and understanding of what we are looking at or listening to.

I am really interested in this conflict and the potentials in it. As much as I am attracted to and want to connect with different materials and languages of abstraction, I remain drawn to written language as well, and work with poetry and text fragments as a part of my queer navigation of the clashes and collisions between bodies and their surrounding society.

Reading and writing is a crucial part of my artistic practice, and something I do intensely in certain periods. Literature and theory is a great source of inspiration. I am deeply inspired by poetry, and its way of offering other kinds of space, tones, and rhythms. Most of my writing happens in close relation to reading and thinking with poetry. When I come across a text that I find interesting and touching, I can spend days reading and re-reading it, as I need time to process it all. Often the processing of texts becomes integrated in the making of new works.

My own writing usually takes place on my laptop at first, where I generate long documents of fragmented text. The writing usually runs parallel to my investigations of images and material. But at a certain time in the process of a project, I print my texts and start integrating them in my sketches or directly onto the woodcuts or prints. I am really interested in this process of mixing text fragments with images, because unpredictable expressions surface when the texts work their way into the prints. The texts function so differently when written or cut out by hand, and when placed next to or as part of an image. In this process, new constellations and meanings appear that I cannot see or predict when the texts are on my laptop. What works on a computer does not necessarily work in a woodcut print, or it works in a different way. And sentences that appear banal on an A4 printed document can be interesting

in an image where variations in the size of the letters and words, or different strength of the pencil line can change the understanding and affective charge of the text.

We have talked about how my tendency to cross out, erase, and re-write words with a pencil on my woodcut prints have become a kind of signature. Besides being an aesthetically recognizable way to highlight my negotiation with language and image, it also marks my method of processual writing where texts appear that I wouldn't have been able to write or think otherwise.

MD I can really relate to your way of describing the act of writing as a creative process where thoughts are developed rather than merely written down. I often have ideas of how an article or argument might be in advance of writing it, but when I'm in the act of writing, I often get surprised by where the writing is taking me. How did I really end up *here*? Is this really what I'm thinking?

One of the main differences between the way words appear in our different practices is that you allow traces of the form of "material thinking" that takes place in language to remain visible and to shape the reading: the marks of edits, erasures, and rewriting. This messy process is seldom, if ever, visible in published texts – such as this one – where the labor of editing and proofreading have erased the traces of its jumpy production, as the text has been sent between us from Copenhagen to Berlin and back again. But perhaps it merely underlines how this conversation – like so many – is an effect of a particular navigation in collisions between different norms of successes and failures between languages and bodies. Or to borrow a line that appears in one of the woodcut prints in *Clit-dick Register*: "How I love the collisions of correspondences – the intimacy we share..."

OVERGADEN.

Ester Fleckner
A closet does not connect under the bed
23.01 – 13.03 2016



Ester Fleckner, *A closet does not connect under the bed*, 2016. Installation view. Photo: Anders Sune Berg

Closet Constructs

Reflections on Ester Fleckner's *A closet does not connect under the bed*

By Mathias Danbolt

A network of white and dotted lines spreads across Ester Fleckner's woodcut series *A closet does not connect under the bed* (2016). The lines form patterns of large and small squares and rectangles. The figures that emerge are flat. There are no shadows to give an impression of depth, or lines that mark the perspective we see the forms from. In some of the works the same figures are repeated side by side with small variations, like a series of sketches of an object or space trying to find a definitive form. In other woodcuts, the form is more defined, but the presence of pencil strokes continuing the printed lines makes these appear processual as well. A line of text in one of the prints tells us what kind of form we are looking at: "The closet I told you so". The word 'closet' recurs in the title of the series and in many of the text fragments written on the prints. The closets that emerge in the

woodcuts are, like the texts, disconnected and incoherent. The images look like blueprints with squares and rectangles delineating the contours of closet doors, sides, frames, shelves and legs – the components of a larger construction. The prints seem more instructional than abstract, like a series of patterns or proposals for new closets. Yet most carpenters would probably find the designs strange. The dimensions and scale seem to vary within a single image, and they would probably not look like any closet we know if they were actually built. The sketches extend far beyond the frame of the closet, challenging the very concept of it. Why this interest in the closet and its construction?

The closet is not only a piece of furniture for storing clothes and other stuff, it is also a metaphor for structuring knowledge. This

is expressed in the figurative meanings of expressions like 'come out of the closet'. Those of us who deal with this closet on a daily basis know that this is about more than a repetition of prosaic-spectacular statements like "I'm gay". Even though people often perceive the fact that someone comes out of the closet as 'news' they already knew, it can be seen as a performative ritual, a requirement in order to be recognised as an honest, open and contemporary lesbian or gay subject in a heteronormative world order. As a sentence in Fleckner's prints puts it: "The closet see you again tomorrow". The closet is a reminder of the privileged role sexuality has played in the knowledge and understanding of identity in the West since the 1800s. As a result, the closet as a metaphor does not only influence the lives of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans-people in various ways, although the social, material and political effects of being *in* or *out of* the closet do have significantly more impact on some lives than others. The fact that people today talk about coming out of the closet as a stay-at-home mother or ironman enthusiast (just a couple of the news headlines from the past year) does not mean that the closet metaphor has detached itself from its associations with the realm of sexuality and gender. Instead it shows how the closet has functioned as a central figure in Western thinking in terms of the delineation of boundari-

es between categories like visible / invisible, knowledge / ignorance, silence / speech, secrecy / disclosure, and private / public, as the queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick points out in her influential book *Epistemologies of the Closet* (1990)¹.

Since the Stonewall riots in New York in June 1969, the slogan 'Out of the Closet, Into the Street!' has been a mantra in the battle for the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans-people. And since the closet continues to be a symbol of oppression, it is hardly surprising that many of us attempt to come out of it again and again. The poetic phrase 'to come out' also rings with associations of flourishing and progress – like a photographic negative being developed into a positive image. What often gets forgotten in the focus on the transition from the dark to the light, is questioning the framework entered 'into' when coming 'out of' the dark space of the closet. Is openness and visibility really a guaranteed path to growth and progress for everyone in society today? What are the costs associated with the demand to demonstrate transparency and recognisability in exchange for being acknowledged as a legitimate sexual and gendered subject? And what kind of perceptions of truth and accessibility are we confined to by the logic of the closet?

Questions like these are not only relevant in encountering Fleckner's investigation of the construction of the closet. They are also relevant in this attempt to write about the works. Texts like this are often expected to reproduce the progress-focused logic of the closet by bringing the allegedly inaccessible contemporary art out into the bright light of clarity. Just as coming out of the closet can be both liberating and limiting, texts like this can both expand and limit the sphere of an artwork. Especially when themes like gender and sexuality come into the picture. These themes are often seen as clues to the 'true' meaning of artworks. When an artist like Fleckner uses something as familiar as the closet – something everyone has some kind of relationship to – there is a risk that people immediately presume to 'know' what the works are about, as if their starting point is their end point. Artists whose works deal with themes of identities in a political context can easily be pigeonholed in this way. Which is maybe why Overgaden asked me not to focus exclusively on sexuality in my reading of Fleckner's works. But if rendering sexuality perspectives visible creates new forms of invisibility, this is an effective reminder of the closet's structuring of what, from a presumably majority perspective, is relevant or irrelevant to talk about.

If Fleckner's literal approach to constructions of the closet draws attention to issues of gender and sexuality, it remains far from easy to describe or decipher what the works want with these issues. Fleckner's prints never come out of the closet with what they mean. Even though the sketches draw on blueprints as a genre, they are far from informative or instructive in any traditional sense. The closets that appear in the woodcuts seem abstracted, incapable of being assembled to keep either clothes or secrets. Instead, the repeated forms pursue their own order or logic. In this they apparently draw inspiration from the poet Gertrude Stein, who Fleckner has borrowed the exhibition's title from. "A closet does not connect under the bed" is a line from Stein's famous book of poetry *Tender Buttons* from 1914.² The line is taken from a poem in the first part of the book called *Objects*, a series of texts that has often been described as an example of 'literary Cubism'. Whereas Cubist painters like Pablo Picasso and Georges

Braque abandon the central perspective as a way of structuring the image, allowing objects to appear from a range of different angles simultaneously, Stein breaks the syntactic rules of language so the relationship between the words and objects is displaced and mixed up. Illegibility is central to Stein's writing, as the literary theorist Joshua Schuster underlines: "Stein does not allow meaning to settle on one interpretive system, instead continually moving between sound and sense, normative and non-normative grammar, familiarity and alienation, immersion and exclusion".³ Stein's poetry, in other words, demands an ability to see the possibilities in the confusion that emerges when the conventional rules and framework of language are abolished.

Fleckner's woodcuts can similarly be seen to focus on the potential of confusion in the movement between the literal and the abstract, the instructive and the obscure, the open and the opaque. Instead of coming out of the closet, Fleckner's woodcuts invite us into another space that tries to make room for what falls beyond established categories and frameworks – the fragmentary, the incomprehensible, the irreconcilable. Or as a sentence from one of the woodcuts describes it: "the closet from one to many, many to many, and between two".

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Translation: Jane Rowley



Ester Fleckner, untitled, 2016. Photo: Anders Sune Berg

Notes:

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
2. Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons: Objects, Food, Rooms*. New York, Dover Publications, 1997, p. 4.
3. Joshua Schuster, "The Making of Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*". *Jacket2*, April 21, 2011: [jacket2.org/article/making-tender-buttons].