



INK PAINTINGS

CHAK MAN LEI

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AUGUST 1 - SEPTEMBER 6, 2014

INK PAINTINGS

HEADBONES GALLERY

Artist Catalog: *CHAK MAN LEI - Ink Paintings*
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This catalog was created for the exhibition *CHAK MAN LEI - Ink Paintings*
at Headbones Gallery, Vernon, BC Canada, August 1 -September 6, 2014

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Introduction by Julie Oakes

Ink Culture: The Art of Chak Man Lei Essay by Gornon Laurin
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RICH FOG



Micro Publishing

CHAK MAN LEI

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INTRODUCTION BY JULIE OAKES WITH ESSAY BY GORDON LAURIN



Headbones Gallery - 2014

CHAK MAN LEI

From April 02 until May 30, Julie Oakes and Richard Fogarty of Headbones Gallery were at The Where Where International Art Residency in Beijing China run by the Canadian curator, Gordon Laurin. The Project Space Gallery was on the first floor and the studio on the second so each day, they would walk through the exhibition *Surface Rising* by Chak Man Lei. They both were smitten.

Lei's work is based on Ink. In Chinese art, ink was used for elevated work with an intent to connect with the spiritual, seated in calligraphy and painting. Traditionally, a landscape was not begun plein-aire but by walking through the landscape. In solitude, from memory, the painting was created. Ink came from tung derived from burning pine trees so the essence was soot with added elements increasing longevity for image making.



Chak Man Lei - 2014, Beijing Studio

Lei's large black ink paintings record his immersion in the urban, hustle-bustle, fast-pace rush of China today. Blurry, with multiple components registering as interconnected mass in movement, Lei's impressions are poignant for a glimpse of blue sky while living in the immensity of China's progress is rare, replaced by a smoggy obliteration of distance.

A visit to Chak Man Lei's studio sealed the resolve to bring his work to Canada and when Chak Man Lei served tea, shaving the bowl-shaped pressed leaves, pouring boiling water over the purple sand clay pot so that it passed through the tea tray slats to a container below; we drank to it. Celebrating Chak Man Lei's exhibition, *Tung and Soot* will open at Headbones Gallery on August 01 with a reception from 6 to 9 and the artist will be in attendance – all the way from China.

Born in Hong Kong, Lei grew up in Macau (Cantonese language) until he was 12 when his family immigrated to Canada. Lei became a Canadian citizen, went to OCAD, and after six years in Vancouver dealing Chinese antiquities while maintaining his ink art practice, Chak Man Lei bought a one-way ticket to Beijing. He learned Mandarin, set up a studio in one of the new art districts and now says "I feel more Chinese than the Chinese."

Julie Oakes - 2014



Where Where Art Space, Beijing - 2013



Chak Man Lei, Beijing Studio - 2014

Ink Culture: The Art of Chak Man Lei

Ink, the primary material of the traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy, has recorded the graceful movements of the artist's hand for thousands of years. It has provided the means to imprint the keenest of observations on nature, fixed in tangible form for posterity insights on humanity, and served as a primary means to communicate on the world around us. Given its central role in Chinese art over the past centuries, it provides a vast terrain for investigation, and one that Chak Man Lei has used as the basis for his contemporary artistic practice. Over the past 15 years, he has explored its artistic possibilities through an expanding number of diverse works.

Ink wash painting, also known as literati painting, was for centuries the most prestigious form of Chinese art. The pursuit of the literary painter was not to create the appearance of the subject but rather to reveal its essence, its spirit. The goal was not a physical resemblance arrived at by detailed copying but for the innate qualities of the subject to be revealed through as few lines and tones as possible. It was a form of expressionism that drew from the painter's knowledge and understanding of the subject. Lei has drawn on this concept of simplification and appreciation of the subject to develop alternative uses of ink. His interest is not to make copies, or stylistic reinterpretations of traditional Chinese work, but rather to explore the philosophical and spiritual motivations that gave rise to those works while realizing ingenious new stylistic forms that are both immediately contemporary and timeless.

In seeing his work for the first time one might have the impression that the series have been

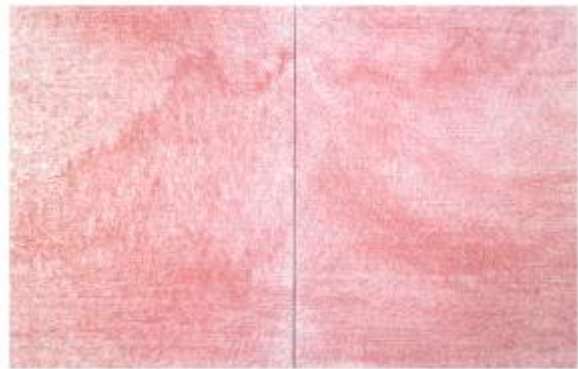
produced by different artists, but it is not a specific formal style that Lei is seeking to solidify. Rather he allows his developing understanding of ink to direct his work to new areas of artistic exploration. So what might at first appearance seem like independent bodies of work are on closer examination seen to be linked by a shared exploration of ink culture. Yet, while they all stem from this shared source, the conceptual and thematic direction of each series is unique. His efforts over the past five-year period since relocating from London, Canada to Beijing, features works on paper using a range of processes and materials including water and ink, candle smoke, felt-tip marker, ballpoint pen and paper cut-outs. The subject matter for the artworks; glimpses of his surroundings, mundane objects and images drawn from Chinese internet collectively form a poignant commentary on the contemporary human condition and demonstrate the continuing potential of ink to serve as the foundation for a vital contemporary practice.



Smoke Drawing



Smoke Drawing & Cut-out



Ballpoint Pen Drawing

Ink and Wash Paintings

Many artists have worked to integrate aspects of traditional Chinese art making and have them adapted to contemporary Western modes. What distinguishes Lei's work from these other efforts is his decision to forgo a formal quoting or copying of historical styles and instead use a conceptually informed process. In his recent large-scale ink and wash paintings, he uses the rich tonal qualities of Chinese ink to create biomorphic, abstract forms. In these works, the free flowing ink spreads over the surface producing patterns that while not referencing any specific subject are energized with the pulsing shapes of the natural world. Lei is allowing the movement of water infused with ink to organically find a final shape, using a gravitational spreading of liquid on a flat surface to mimic the intricate patterns and forms found in the natural world. The inert carbon in the ink is given new life in its interaction with water, creating images that represent both the micro and macro natural worlds in intricate, almost photographic detail.

This simplification of process and his controlled intervention into how the work unfolds relates back to the literati painter's goals of revealing the essence of things. Lei does not use the artist's hand to mark and represent but instead employs the entropic movement of the flowing water to show a natural force, using ink to index and record that process.

This series produced in 2013 draws on some of Lei's earliest investigations in abstraction beginning in his graduating year at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, Canada

(Lei as well has an MFA from University of Western Ontario, 2008). At that time he wanted to set aside the western-based materials and processes he had been using and focus on traditional Chinese materials. In a series of fifteen, small abstract, pointillist works, Lei began exploring the possibilities of ink in a purely formal manner, emptied of representational subjects and based on a tightly focused methodology. Lei references these works as an important starting point in his use of ink. As this investigation continued over the next decade, Lei would work increasingly to use ink as formal and conceptual base from which to create new work. While the work from this period was primarily abstract, it was not informed by the western modernist canon and the gradual elimination of the representation subject and artist's individual self-expression. Lei was interested more by the Daoist approaches toward death and rebirth, that to go forward something must end before a new beginning can emerge. The focus on abstraction provided a means to empty out all other content, and reduce the activity of art production to an essential, pure action from which new elements or approaches could gradually be introduced.

Chak Man Lei has carried out a thoughtful engagement with ink considering its production process, its cultural history, its tactile and luminous qualities, and built an artistic practice around its continuing potential. Trained within the western academy in Canada, in relocating to China, he has used ink as the thread that links his diverse experiences to create independent bodies of work that resonate with unique visual energy. Lei's practice uses a strong material-based process, the formal characteristics of ink, and its compositional components, provide the landscape through which he searches for new forms that reflect on our experience of the world. The earth (in the form of carbon), fire, water and air are directly utilized, giving the work a vital physical presence. There is a bit of the alchemist in Lei's fascination with the physical properties of ink, a belief that the essential essence of things that form the primary pursuit can be found anew in a trust in basic materials and processes. His attention to the organic life of ink is not an attempt to restage its earlier role, but to find new applications that function within the contemporary world, and bring new insights to our lives.

Gordon Laurin
Beijing, 2014



Where Where Art Space, Beijing - 2013

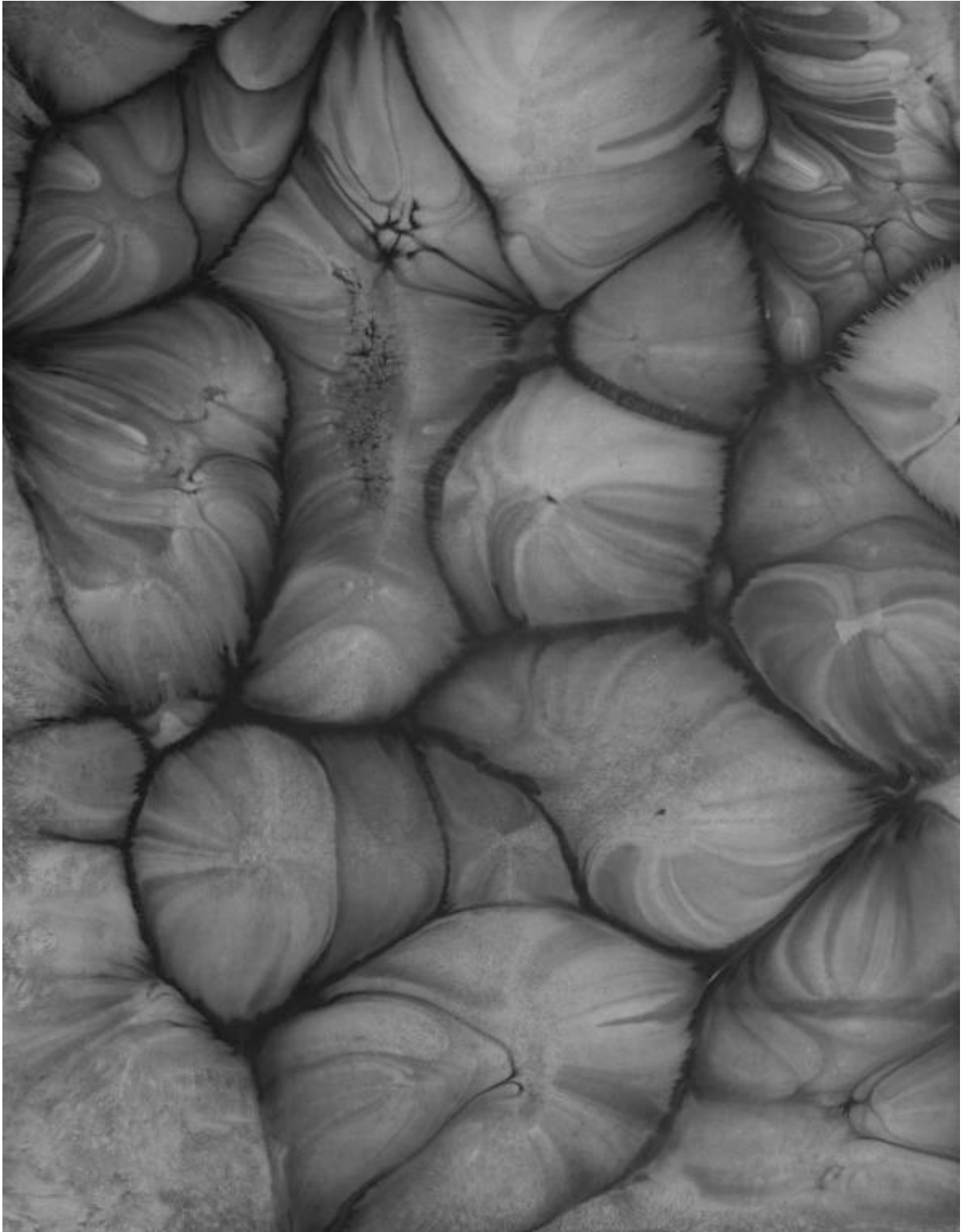
Space Formation I - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



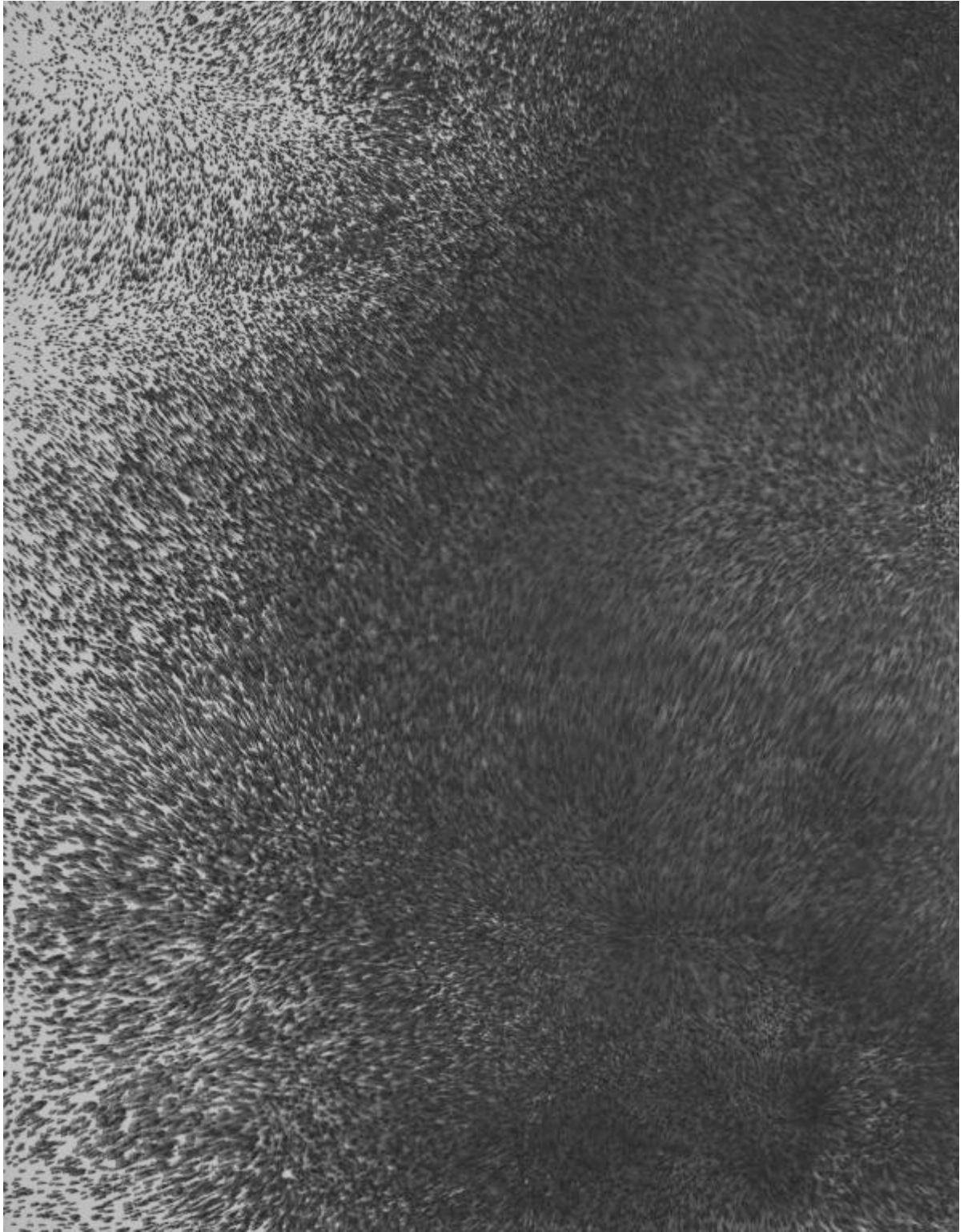
Space Formation II - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



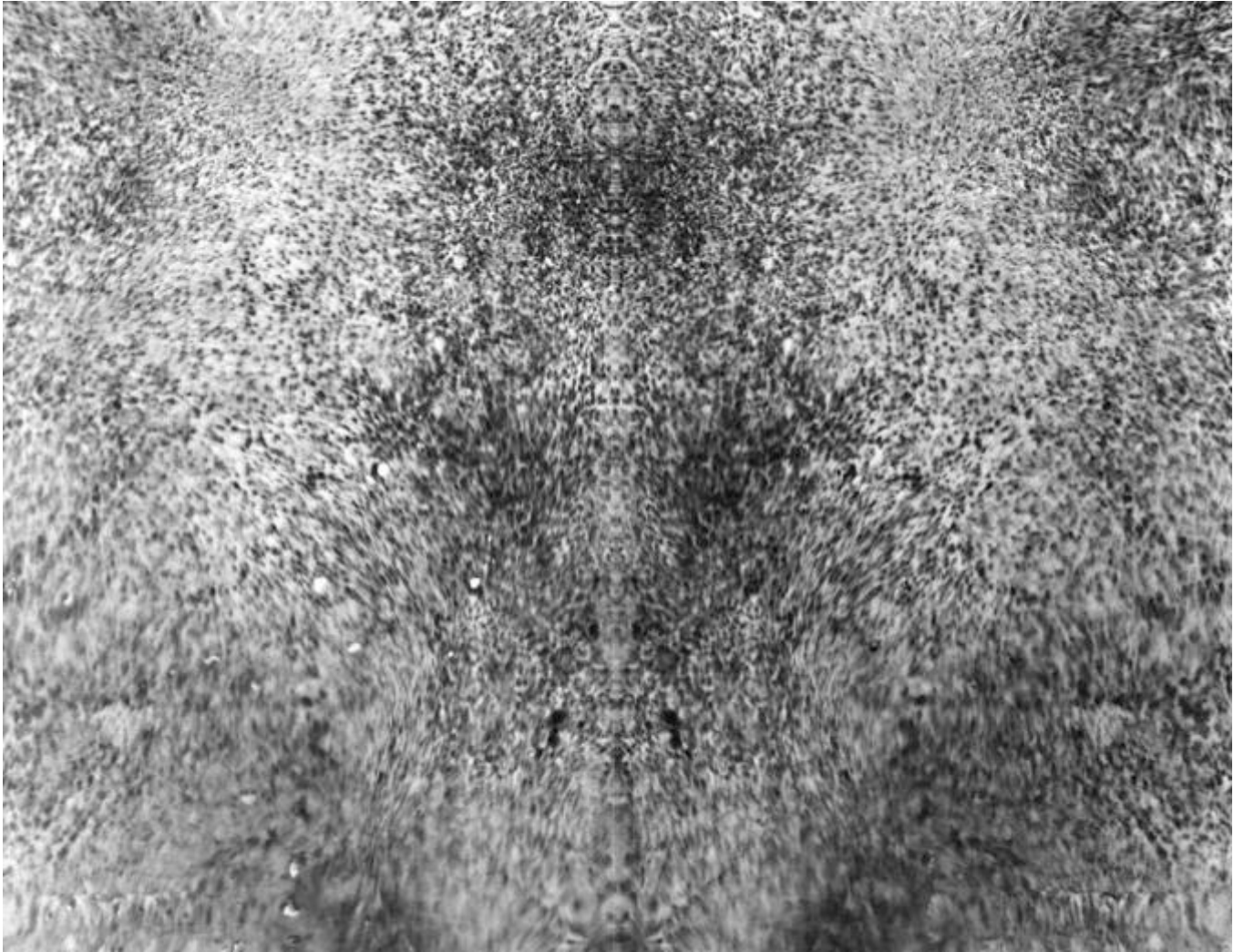
Space Formation III - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



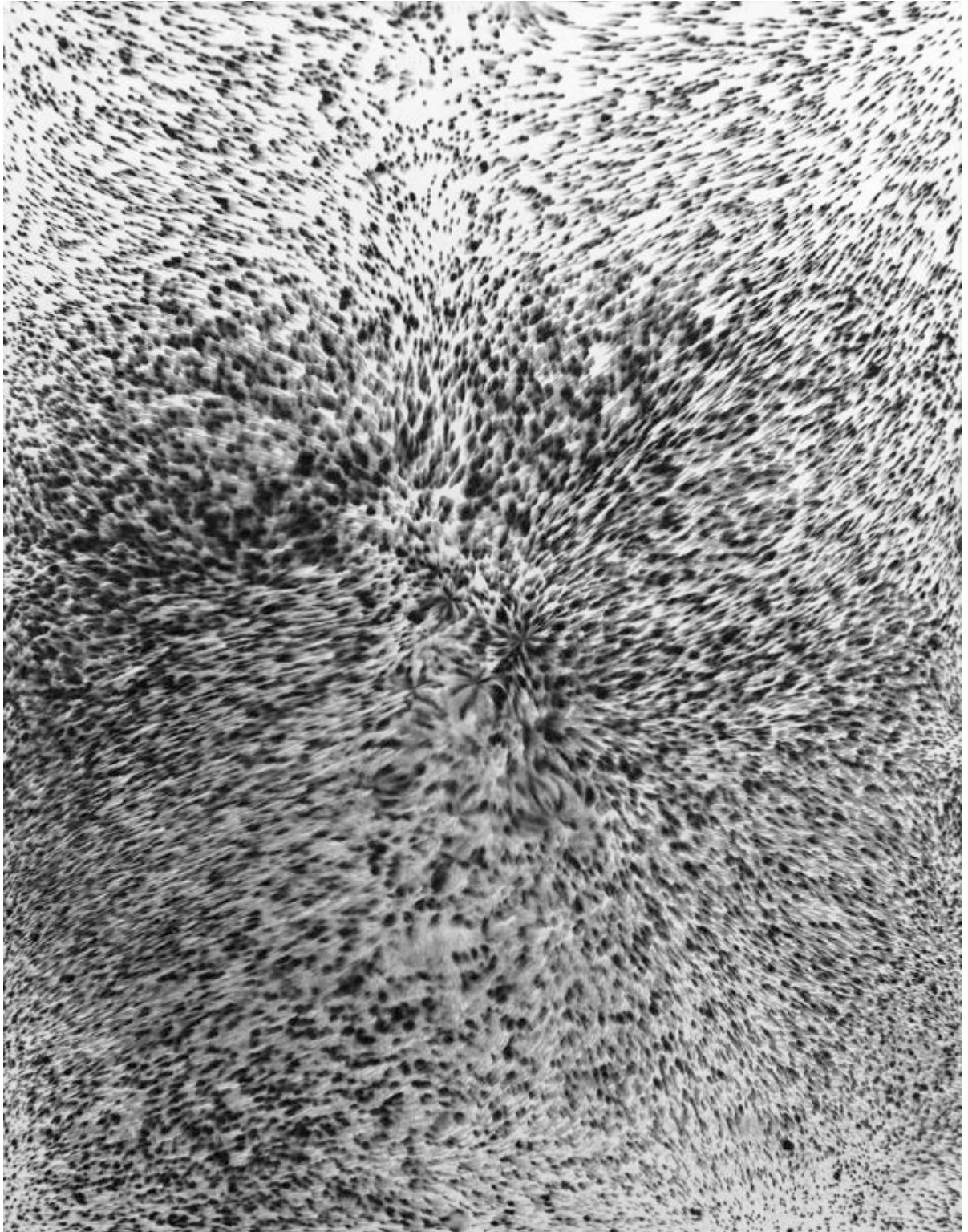
Space Formation IV - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



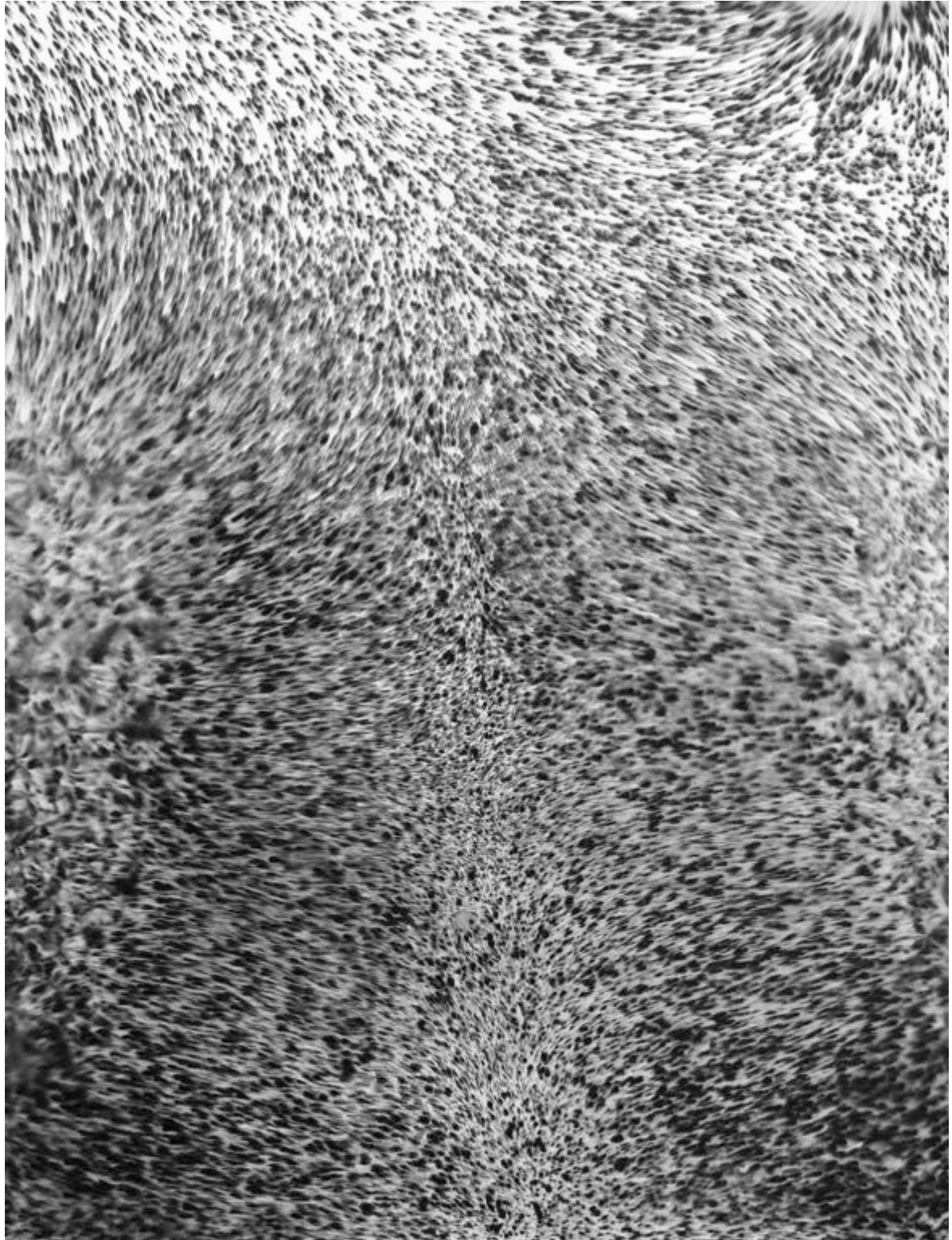
Space Formation V - 2014, Ink on paper on canvas, 140x180 cm



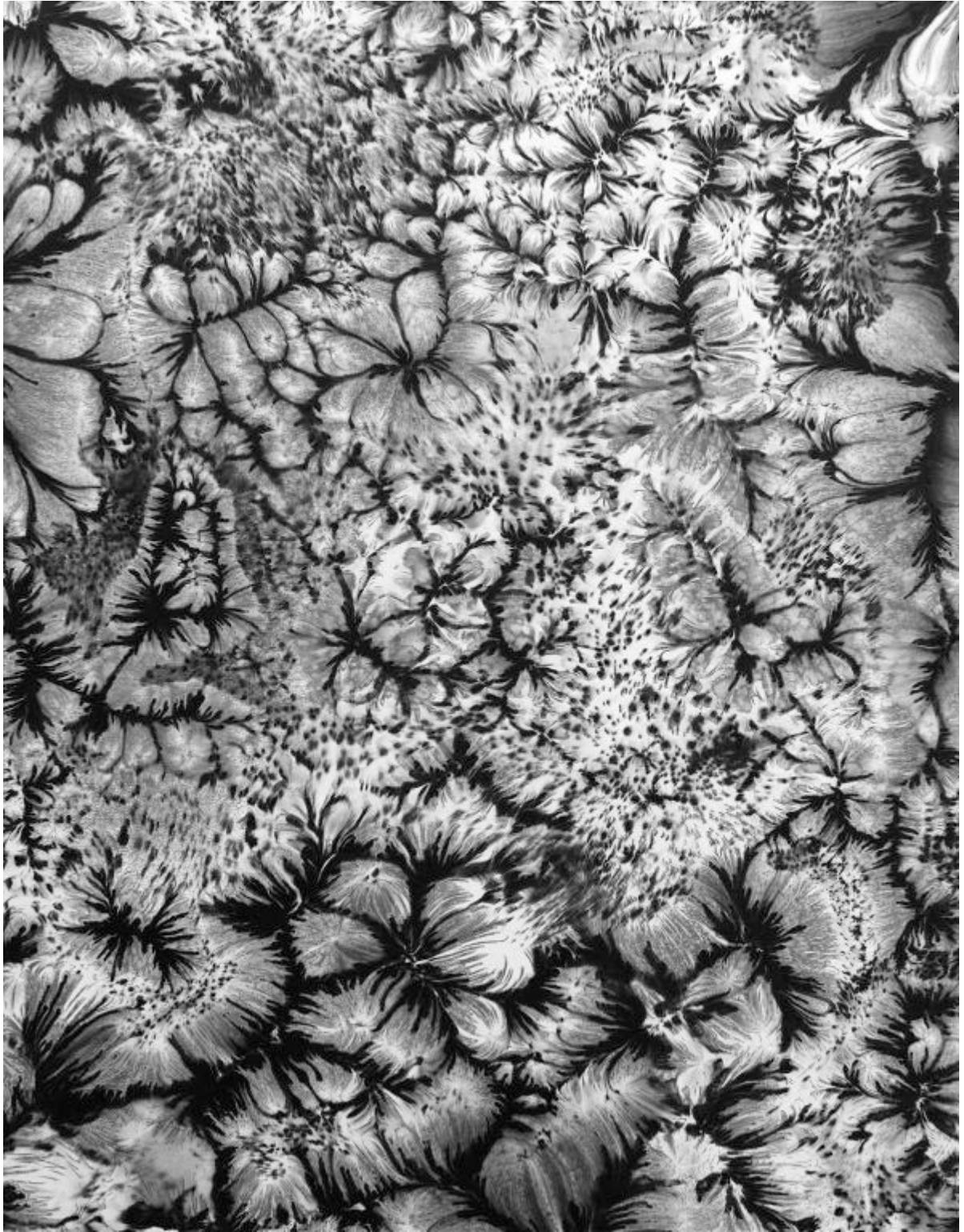
Space Formation VI - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



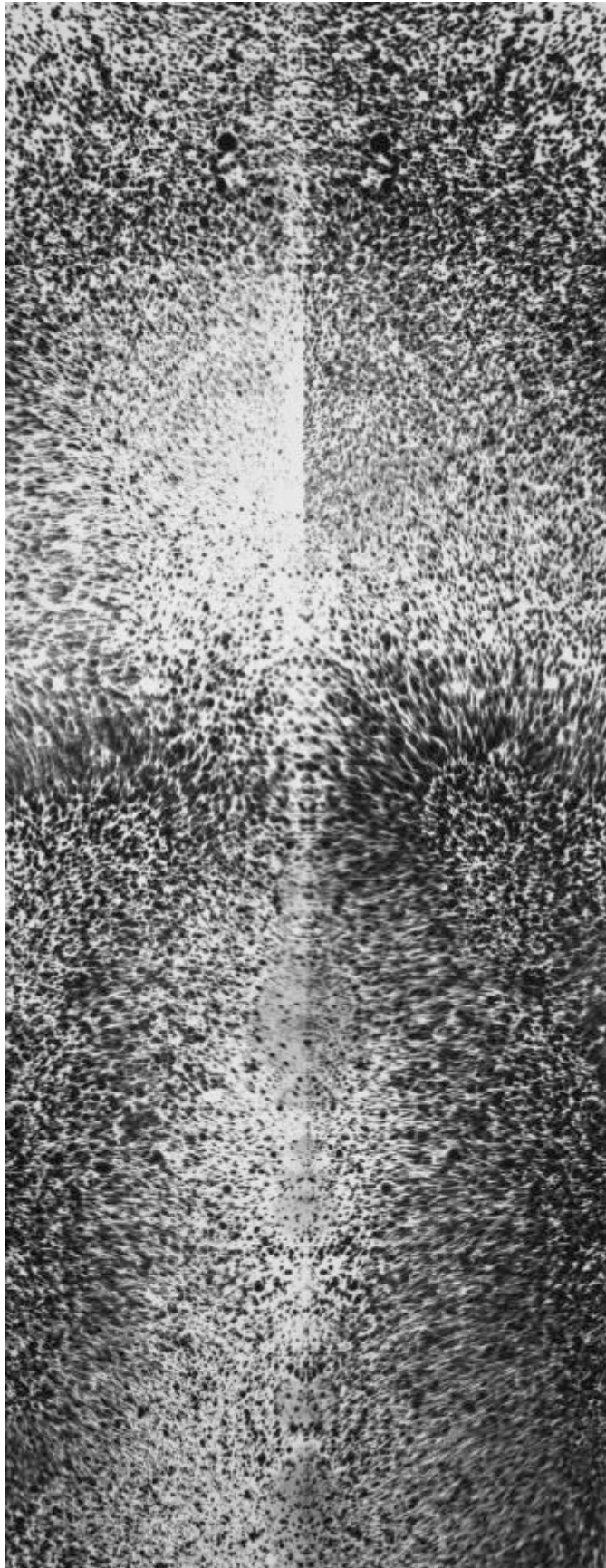
Space Formation VII - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



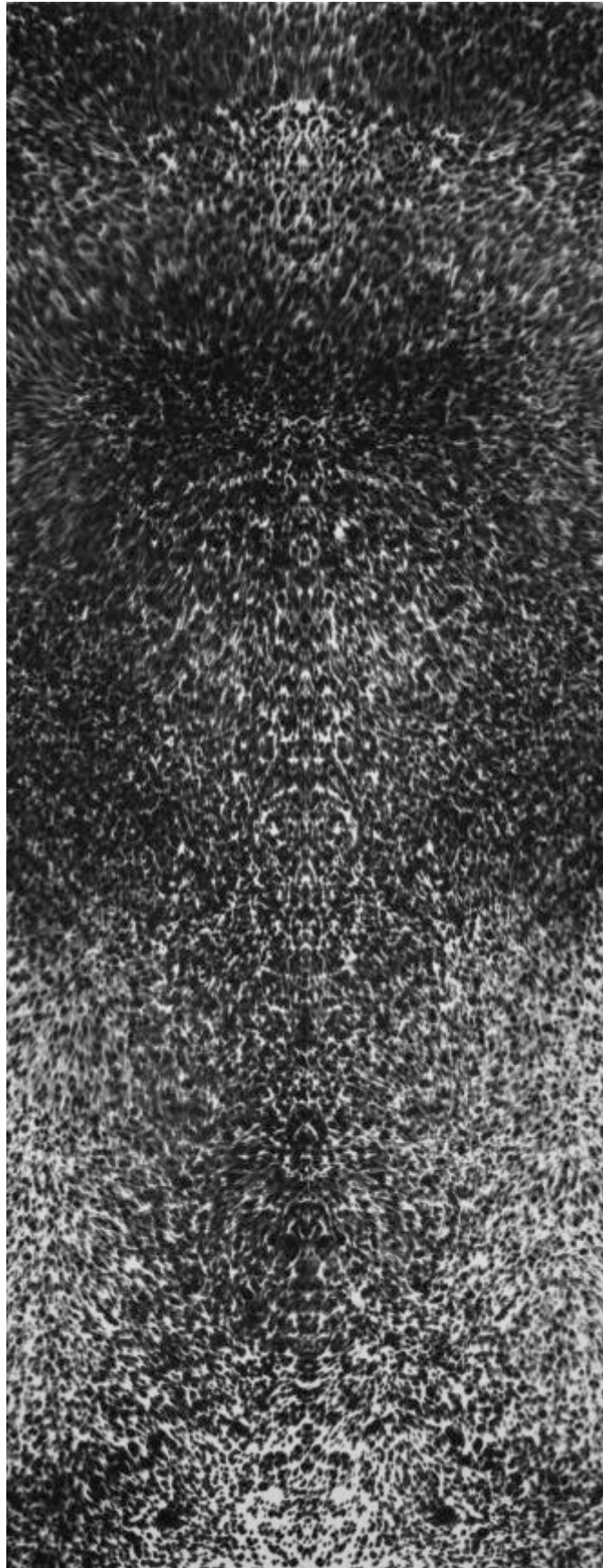
Space Formation VIII - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 180x140 cm



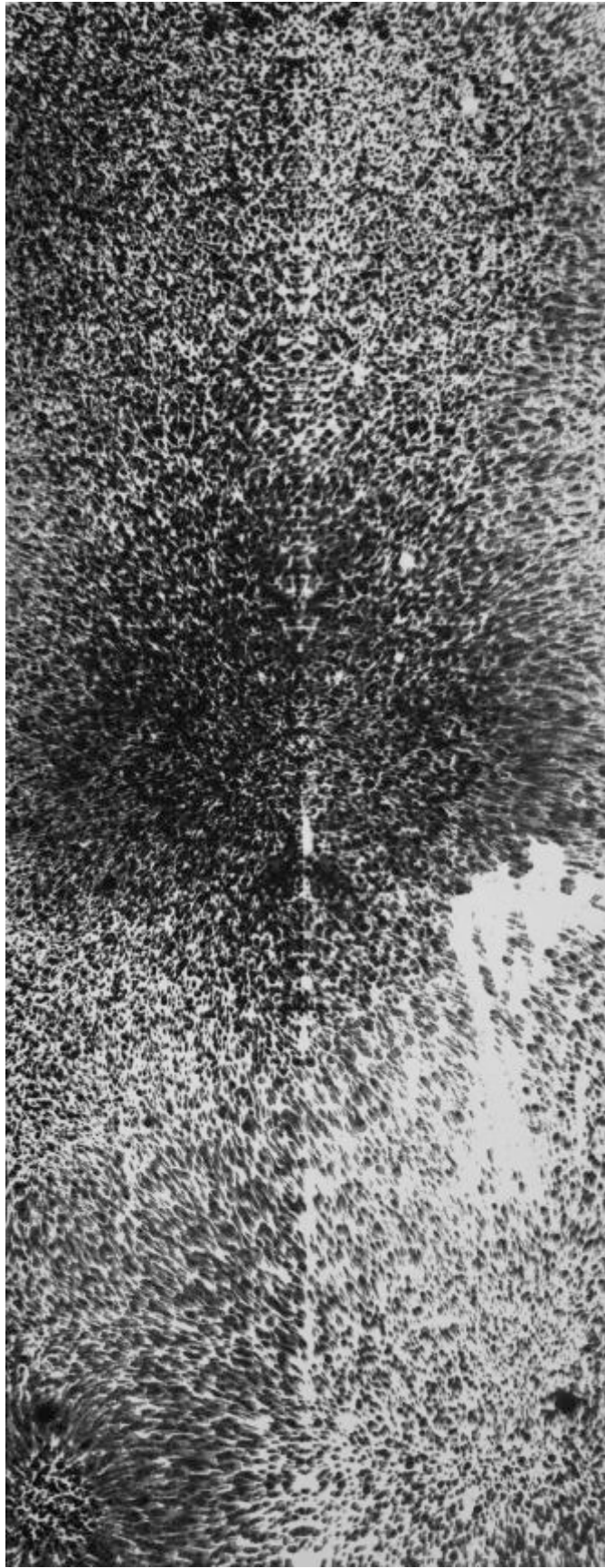
5:1 I - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



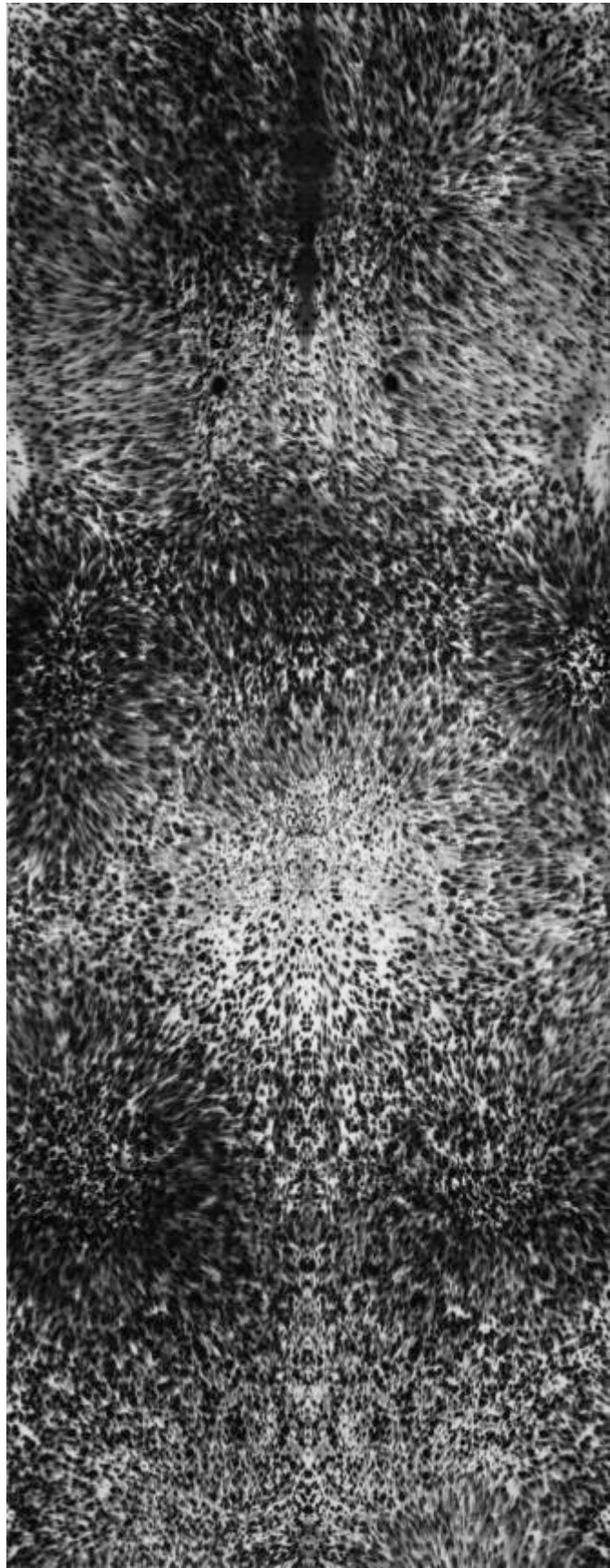
5:1 II - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



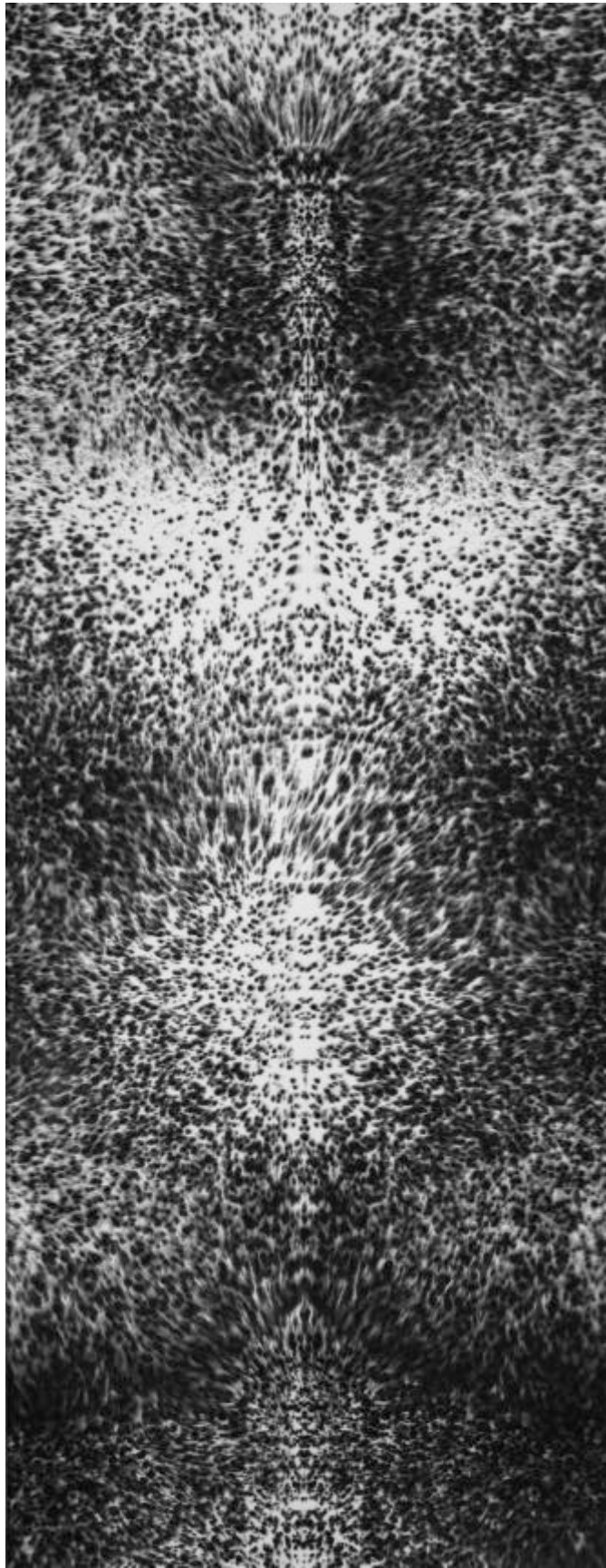
5:1 III - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



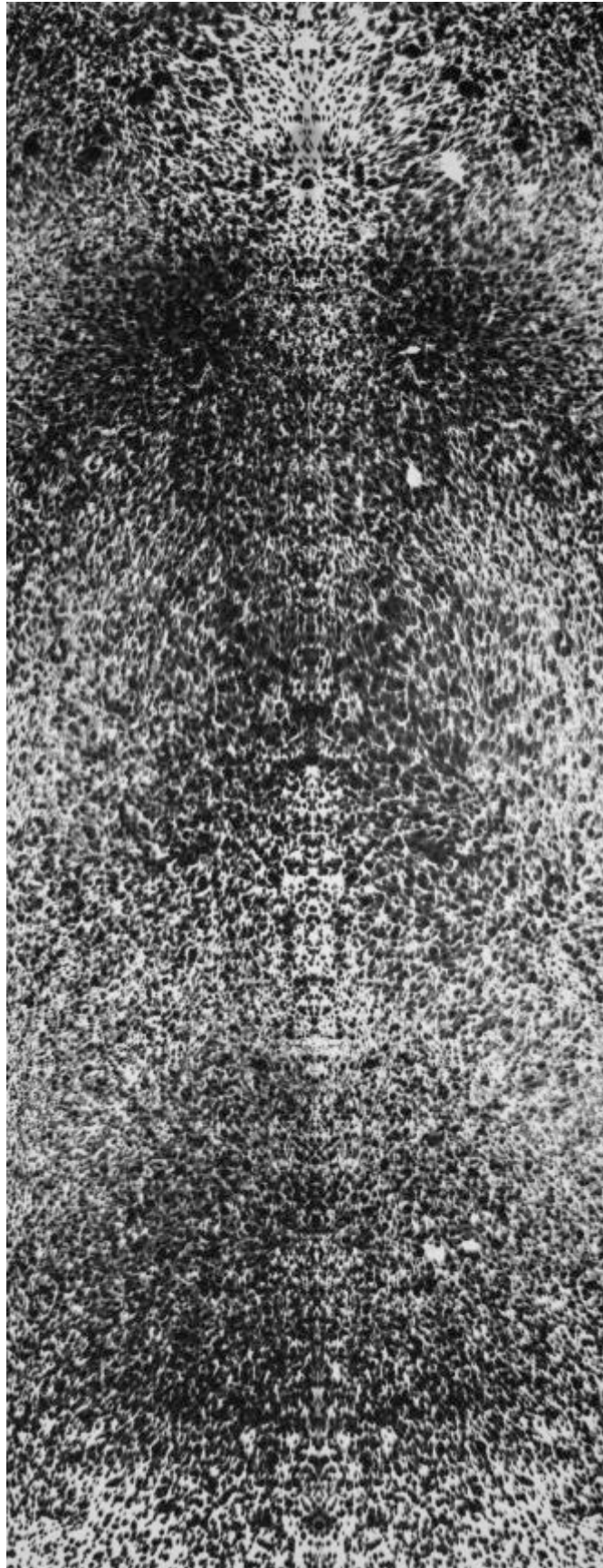
5:1 IV - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



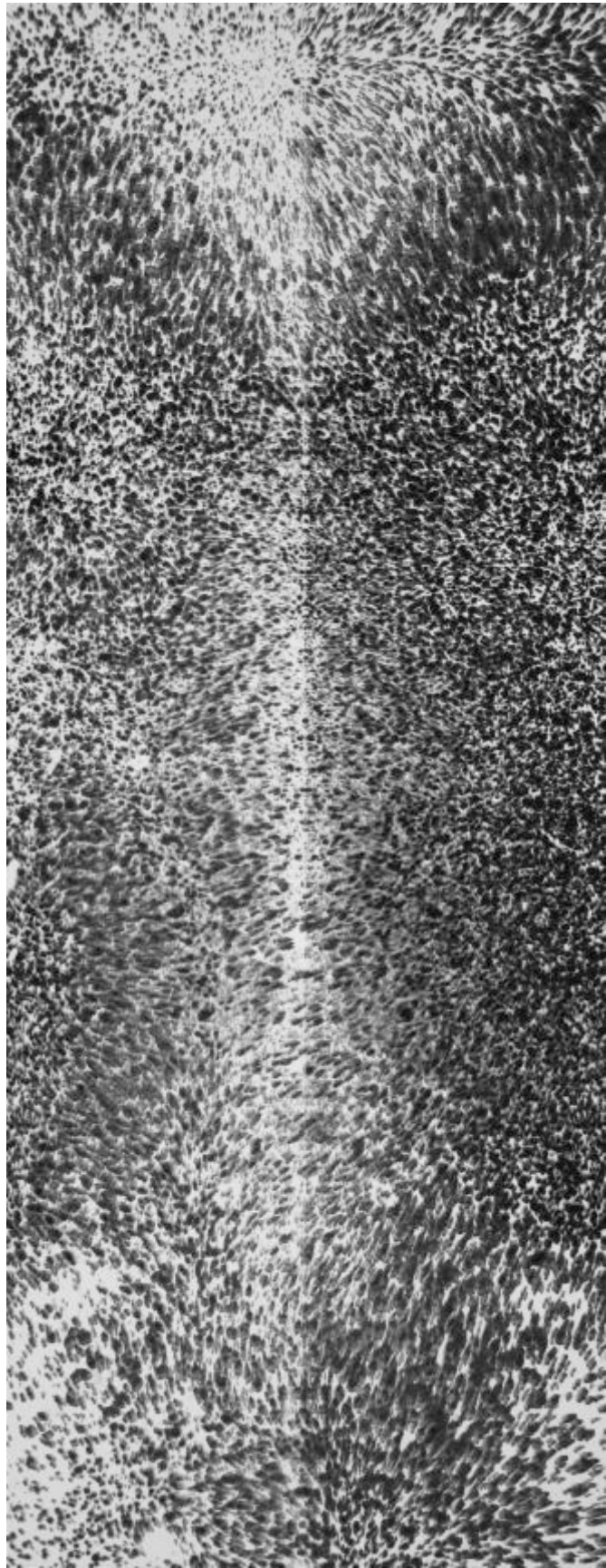
5:1 V - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



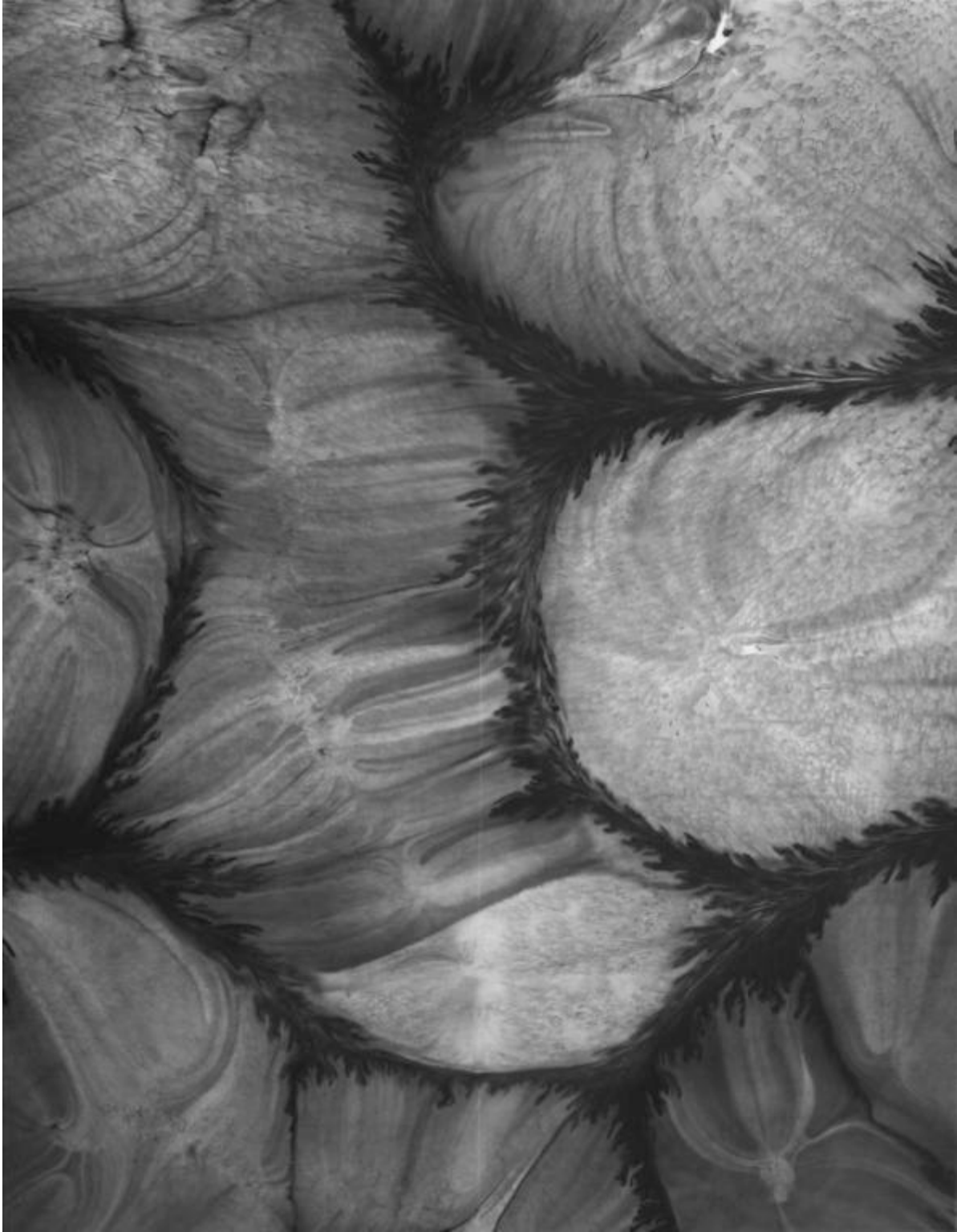
5:1 VI - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



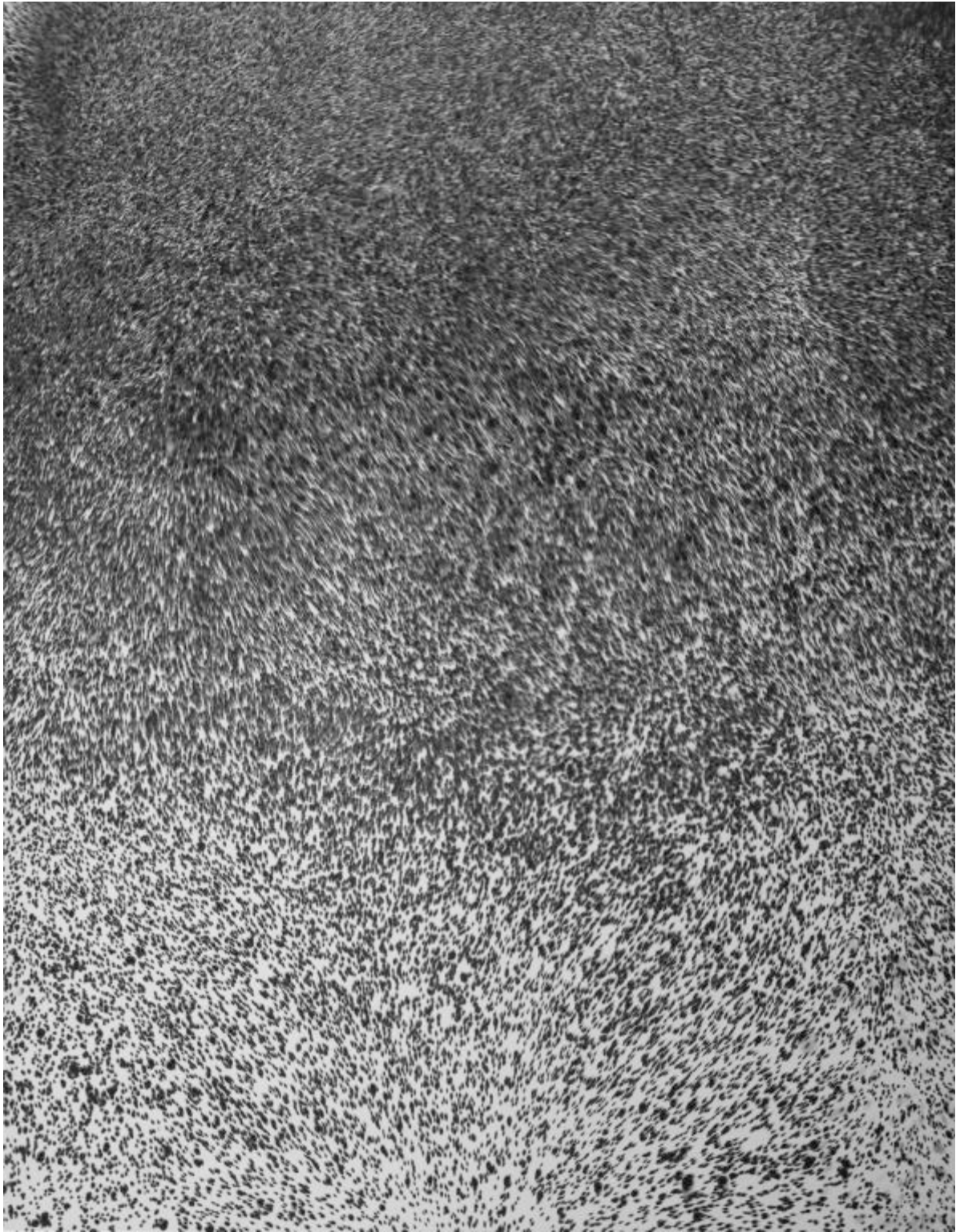
5:1 VII - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x65 cm



Space Formation IX - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x130 cm



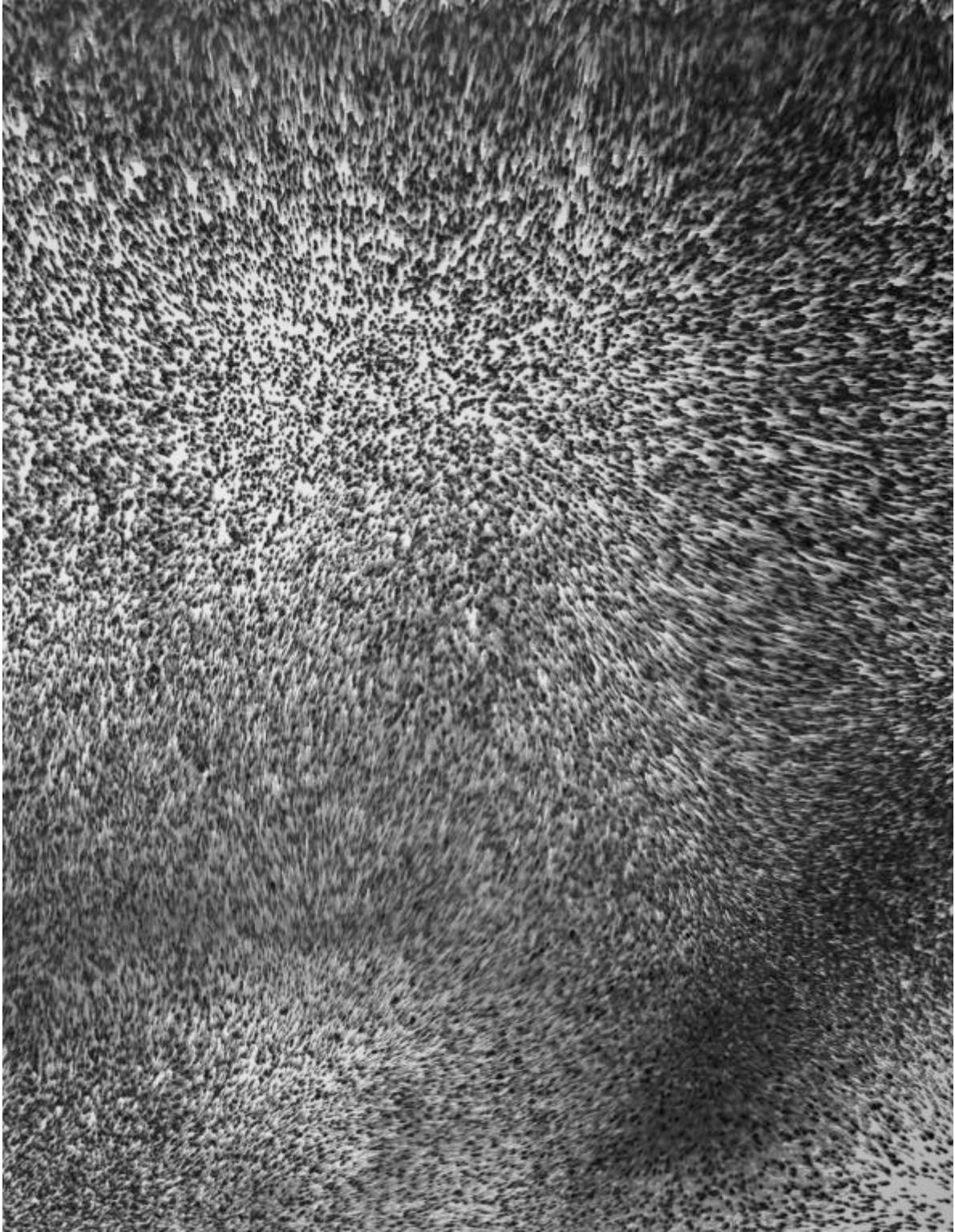
Space Formation X - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x130 cm



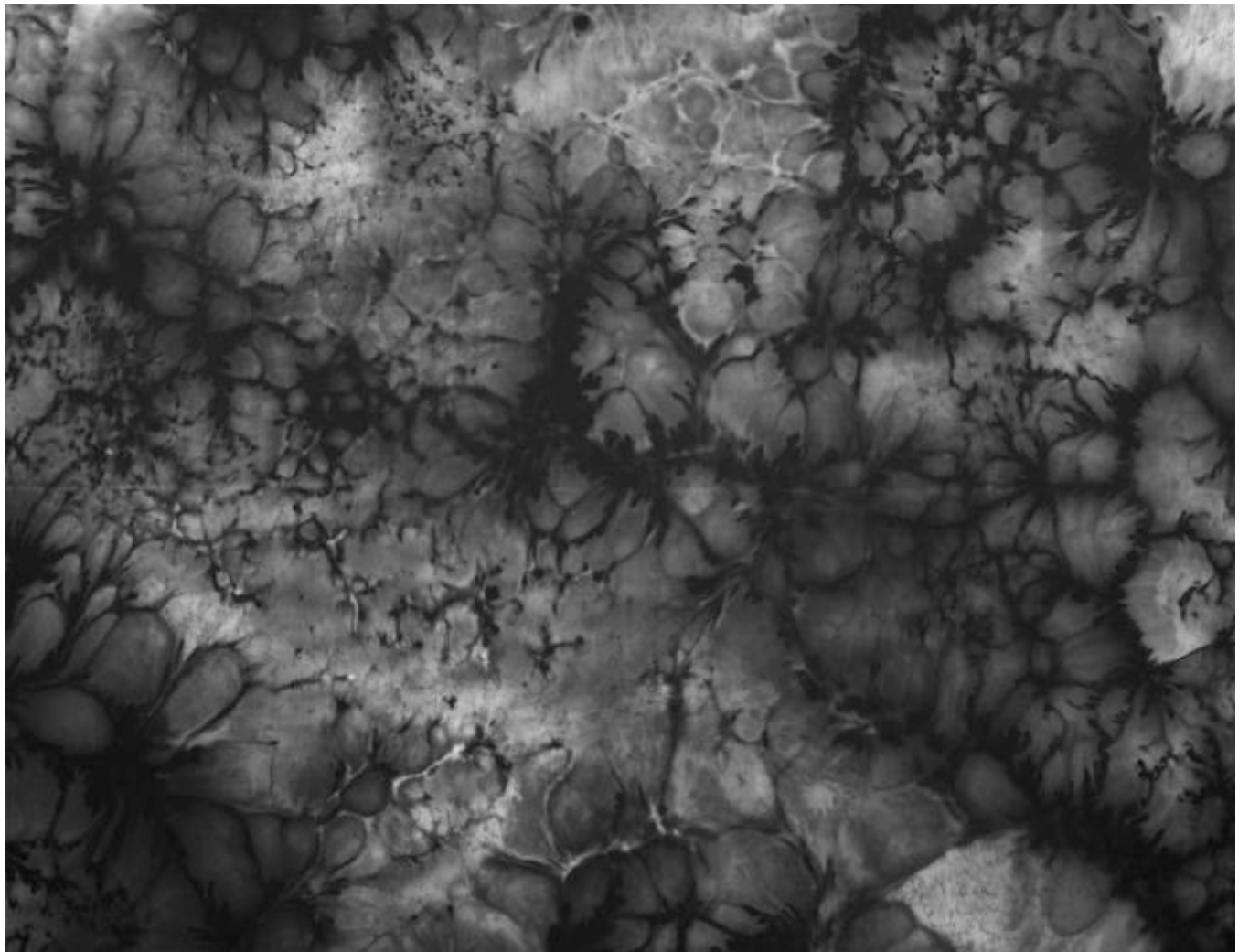
Space Formation XI - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x130 cm



Space Formation XII - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x130 cm



Space Formation XIII - 2013, Ink on paper on canvas, 168x130 cm



CHAK MAN LEI

Education

Master of Fine Arts (MFA '08)

University of Western Ontario (London, Canada)

Associate of the Ontario College of Art and Design (AOCAD '00)

Ontario College of Art & Design (Toronto)

École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (Paris)

Selected Exhibitions

2014 "Ink Paintings" Headbones Gallery, Vernon BC, Canada

2013 "SURFACE RISING" Where Where Art Space, Beijing

2012 "Memory Lost-and-Found" Beijing Art Space, Beijing

2011 "Tango" The Journey West, Beijing

2010 "Nature an Its Modern Forms" Mingyuan Art Center, Shanghai

2008 "Dark-Earth" ArtLab, London, Canada

2007 "180 degrees" ArtLab, London, Canada

2006 "Trailer S50 636" Pretty in Ink Gallery, London, Canada

2005 Dupont/Wade/Wallace Open Studio Exhibition, Toronto, Canada

2002 "Light" Kabat Wrobel Gallery, Toronto, Canada

Publications

2011 Exhibition catalogue: "Nature and Its Modern Forms," foreword written by Zhu Qi: "The Transformation of Tradition and the Modernity of Nature".

2011 Catalogue: 'If We Hold on Together', Charity Art Auction

2010 Two articles published for the exhibition "The Touch of History" at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany

2010 Online publication for the exhibition "In Oblivion" by Zheng Yisheng
<http://en.artintern.net/index.php/exhibition/main/html/845>

Other Professional Activities

2010 Founded the C4 Canadian Chinese curatorial collective that focuses on the exchange of contemporary art between Canada and China with Gordon Laurin and Doug Lewis

2010 Managing director for 1 ARTBANK gallery, Beijing Westin Chaoyang.

2009 International editor for the contemporary art magazine Art Map.

2009 International senior coordinator for the Beijing 798 Biennale.

2009 Guest translator, Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, China

2008 Completion of graduate thesis titled "Dark-earth Manual: Approaching an Ink-based Art Practice"

'06-08 Instructor at the University of Western Ontario (London, Canada)

Awards & Scholarships

2008 Faculty of Arts Alumni Grad Awards, UWO

2007 Western Graduate and Research Scholarship, UWO

2006 Western Graduate and Research Scholarship, UWO

2005 Toronto Arts Council Grant Level 1 Recipient



HEADBONES GALLERY
Presents
CHAK MAN LEI

AUGUST 1 - SEPTEMBER 6, 2014

Opening Reception 6-9 pm with Chak Man Lei in attendance
Friday, August 1, 2014

Animation Artist *Tian Xiaolei* in the Video Room
Cut-outs by *ZiRan* in the Drawers Gallery

6700 Old Kamloops Rd., Vernon, BC V1H 1P8
Tel: 250-542-8987
www.headbonesgallery.com - info@headbonesgallery.com
Hours: Tue-Sat 12-6pm

Image by Chak Man Lei: *Space Formation*, 2014, Ink on paper on canvas, 140x180 cm

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