

TOMASSO

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M I C H A E L
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TOMOKO KAWAO

川尾朋子

Selection of Works from the
Correlation Series
2024-2025

at Tomasso, London

Exhibition 28 October - 6 November, 2025



Tomoko Kawao: Correlation Series

Born in Japan, Tomoko Kawao is one of the foremost calligraphers in Asia.

A professor at the Kyoto University of Art and Design, and a teacher also of literature at other universities in Japan, she is one of the most versatile and adventurous of contemporary artists engaged in making calligraphy relevant to young audiences all over the world today. She has restructured the classical canon in response to the cultural expectations of a new age and has expanded her practice to include film (she was commissioned by the BBC for the films 'the Art of Japanese Life' and 'Van Gogh in Japan') as well as performance and installation.

With both of her recent series, 'Love' and 'Correlation', while both are rooted in the past civilisations of China and Japan, she has engineered a decisive departure from her early work and built a fresh pictorial language.

Calligraphy was always considered to be the most important of the arts in China and by the sixth century A.D. had come to Japan with the expansion of Buddhism.

It took until the late Heian period (794 to 1185 A.D.) for Japanese calligraphy to develop its own distinctive and fluid style from the Chinese Kanji characters. However, this assertion of Japanese taste was more an enrichment of, rather than a rupture from, a Chinese aesthetic that has left an enduring mark on Japanese cultural life throughout her history.

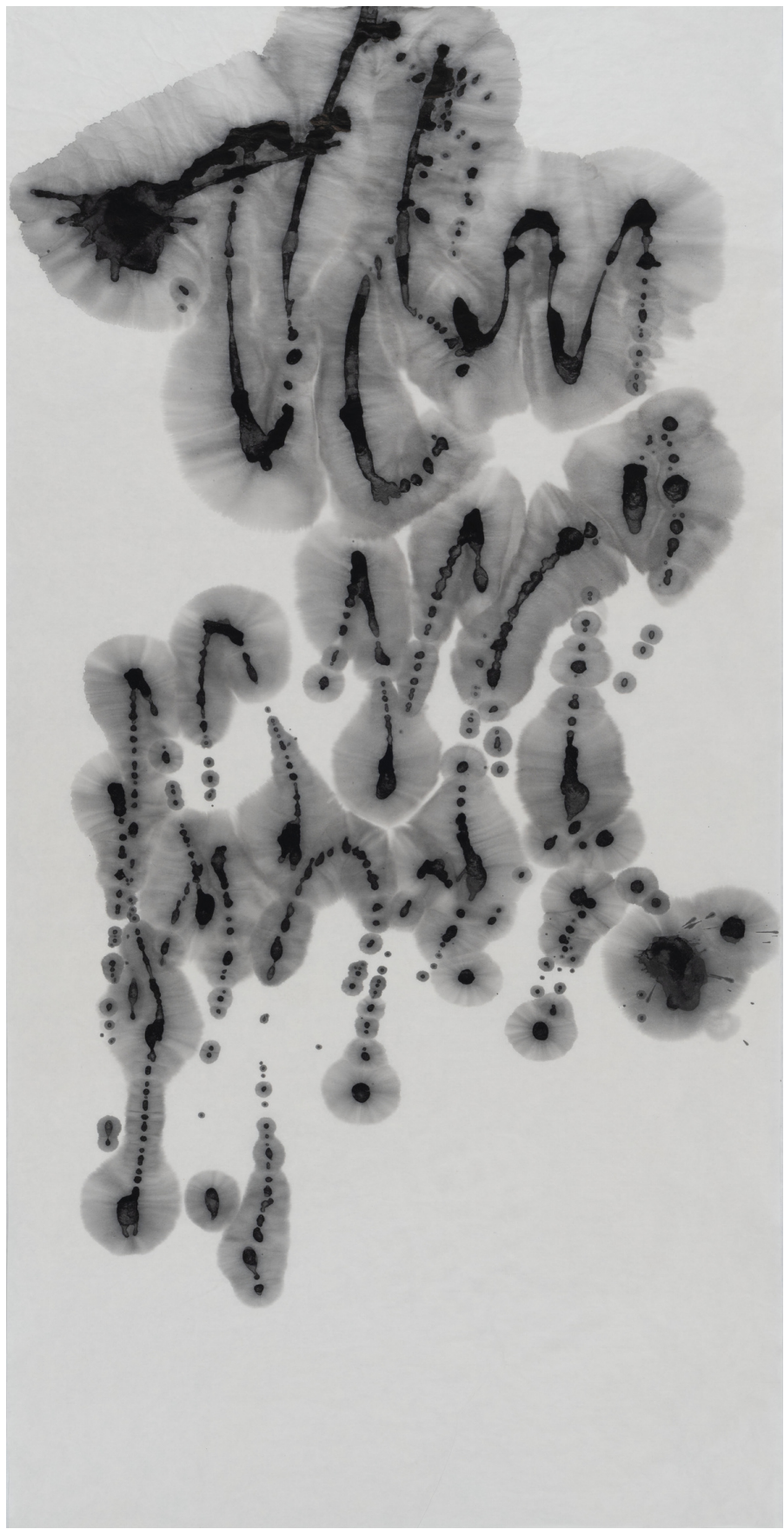
Traditionally executed with brush and ink on paper, calligraphy requires a high pitch of concentration and control, allied to intuition and intelligence. It is an art of interpretation, as the pianist interprets the composer.

Tomoko has been recognised as having been particularly experimental in exploring the various historical calligraphic sources from both China and Japan over many years and it is this cultural and technical commitment which has now led to her two great recent series 'Love' and 'Correlation', the latter being the subject of this exhibition.

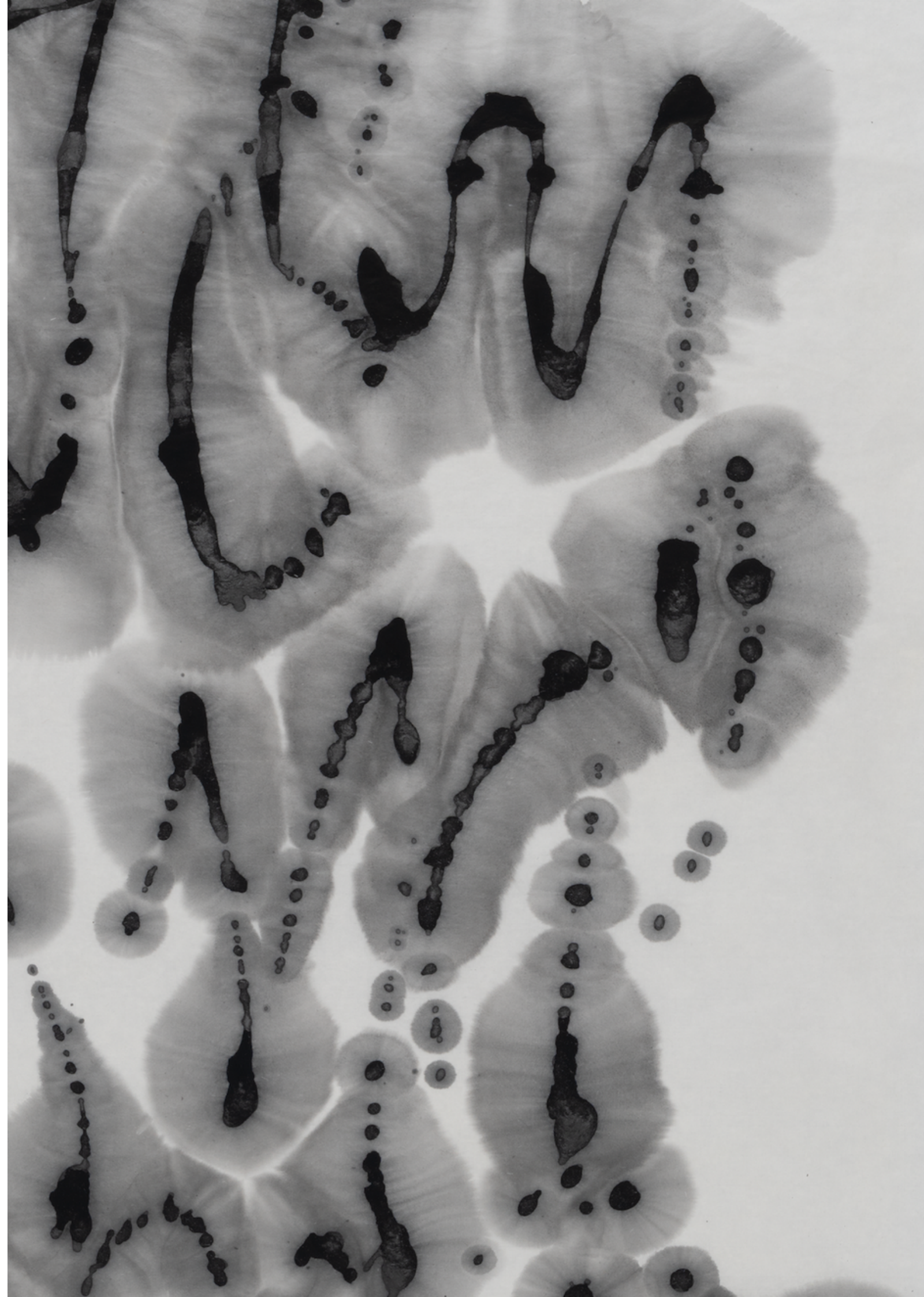
In the 'Correlation' series, her aim is simply to represent the gesture of the brush through space before it actually engages with the paper. She wishes to capture the equilibrium between the beauty of the gestural brushstroke and the brush as it hovers in the air above the paper.

It was through her long study of the old masters that she came to realise that "the movement of the brush in the air" is also a vital element in calligraphy.

She has described how she now aims to evoke the "image" of the movement of the brush through the air by executing "two dots and a drip". Using the same gesture as writing the Japanese Hiraga character "い", the first dot is released with an upward flick of the brush and the second permitted to drop to the paper. When using a heavily soaked large brush, the ink drops naturally from the first dot to the second, thus creating a visible trace of the brush's movement through space.

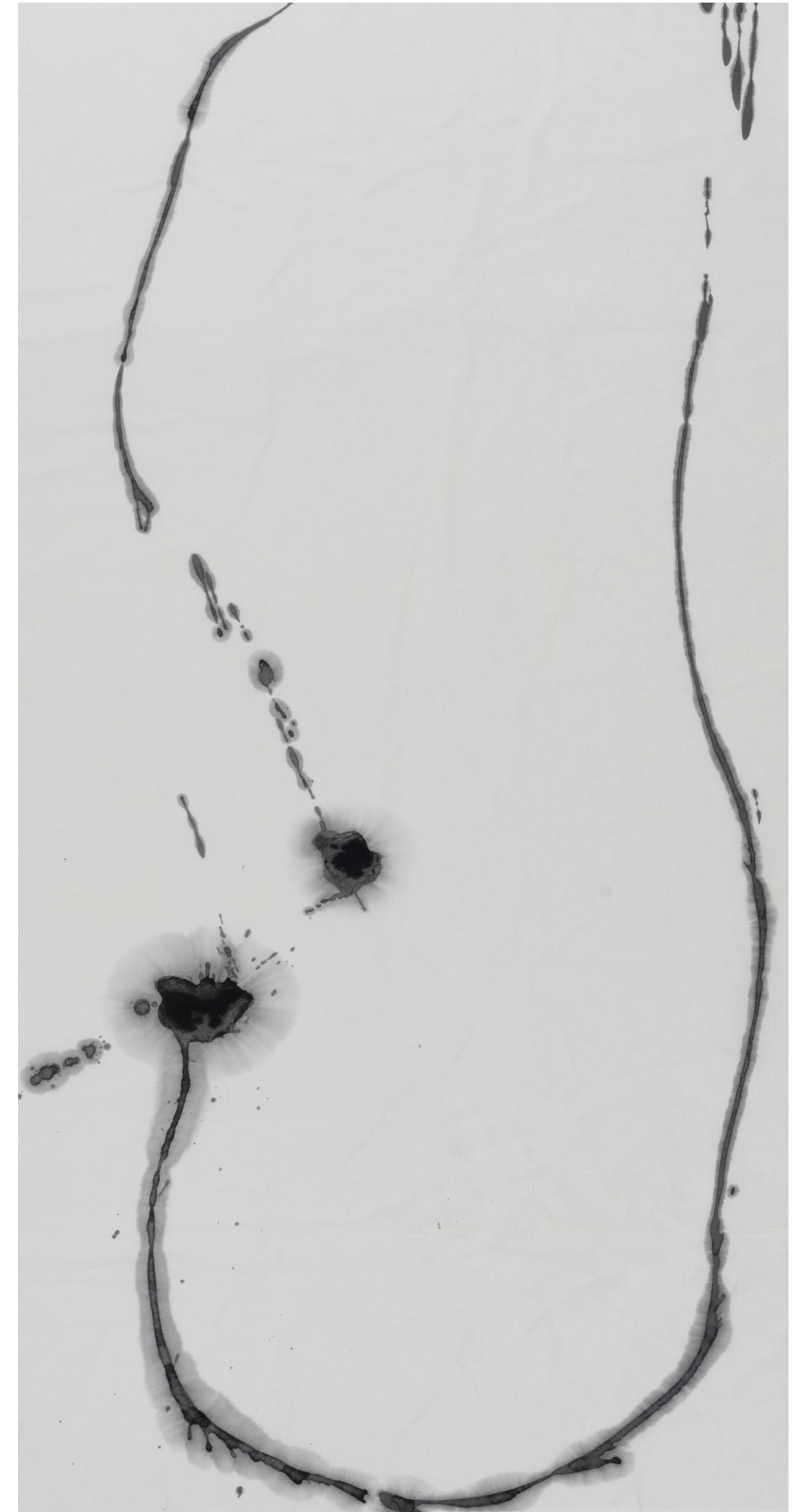
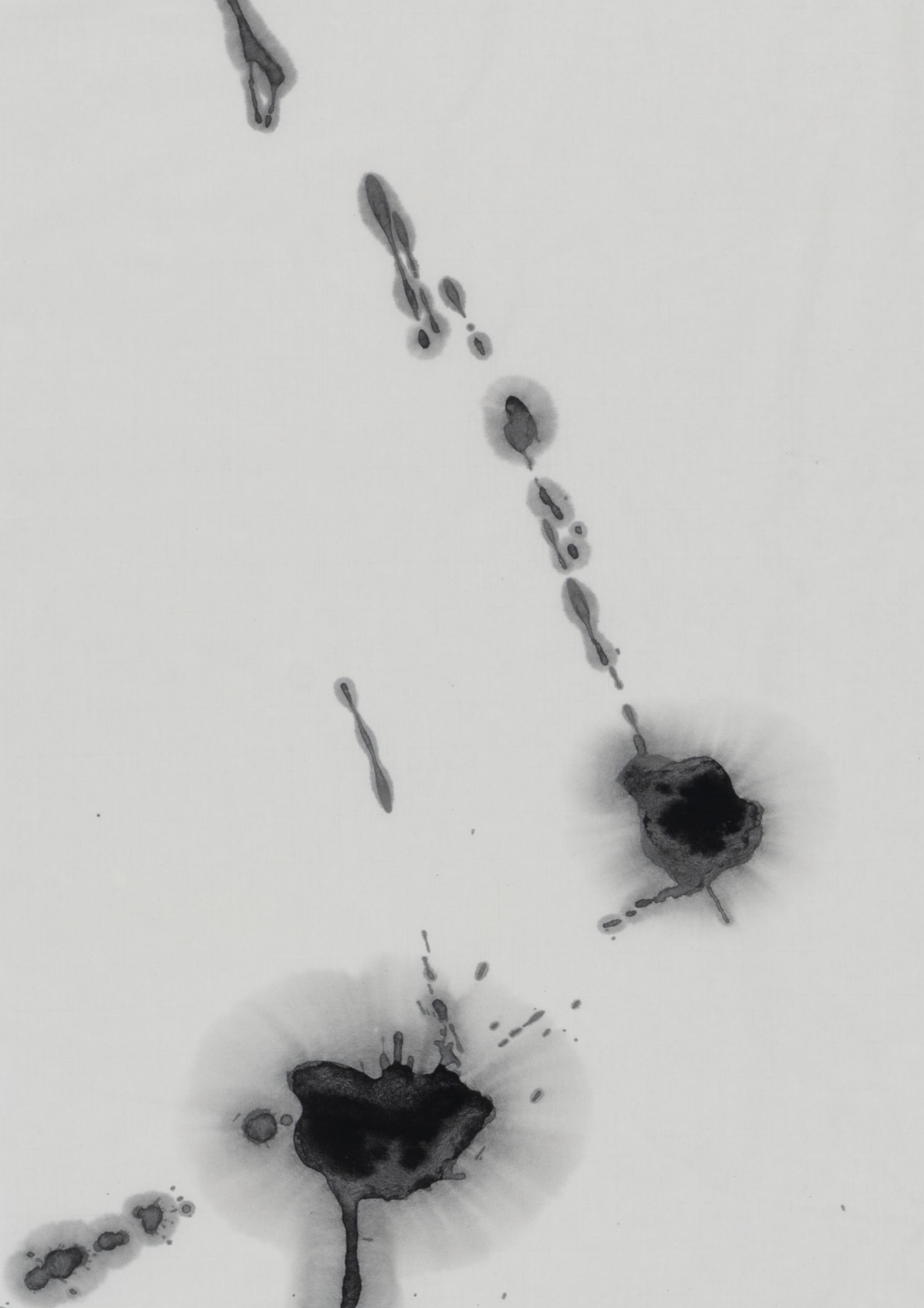


Correlation2024 - ruminare - #2
Ink on paper
135 x 70 cm

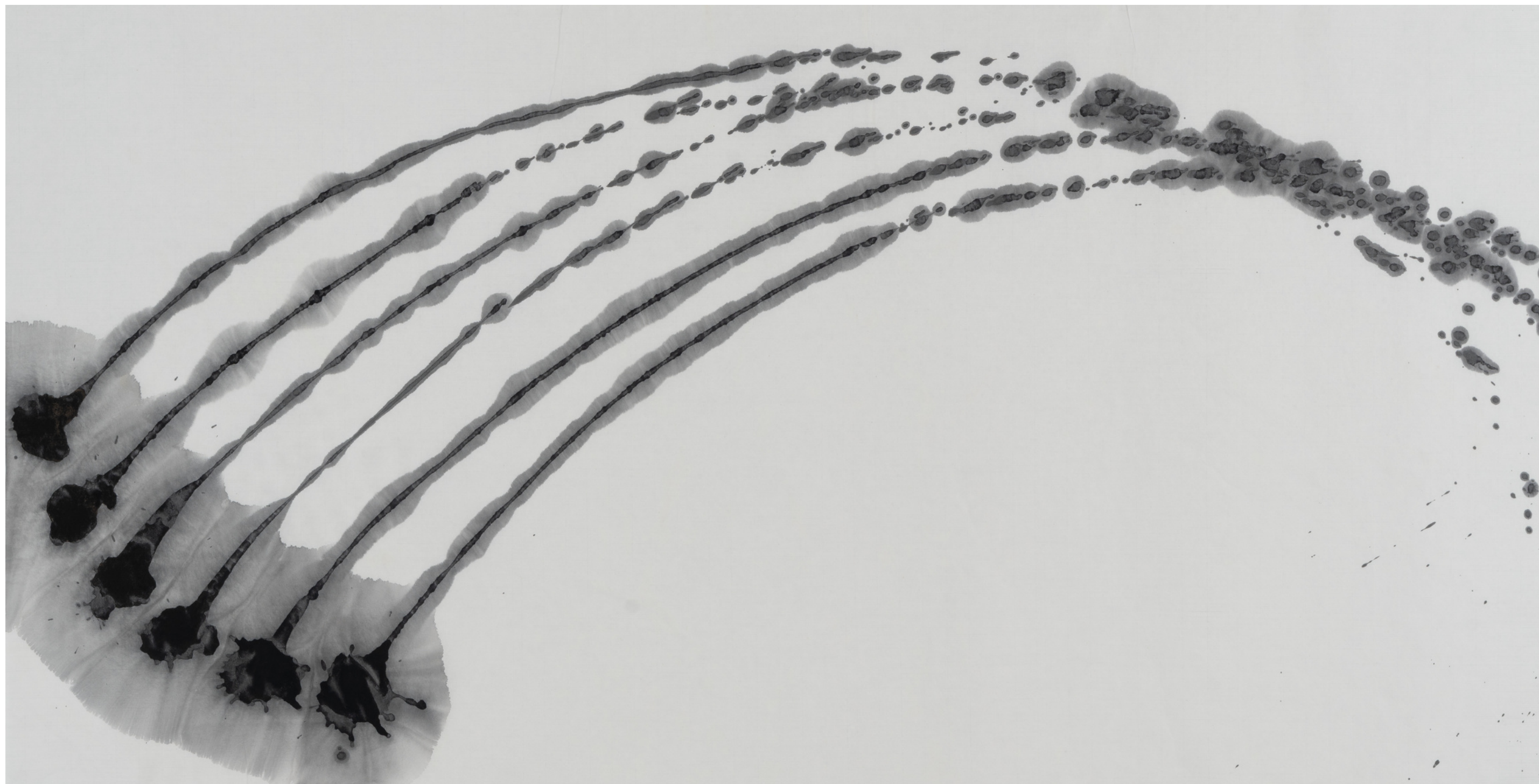




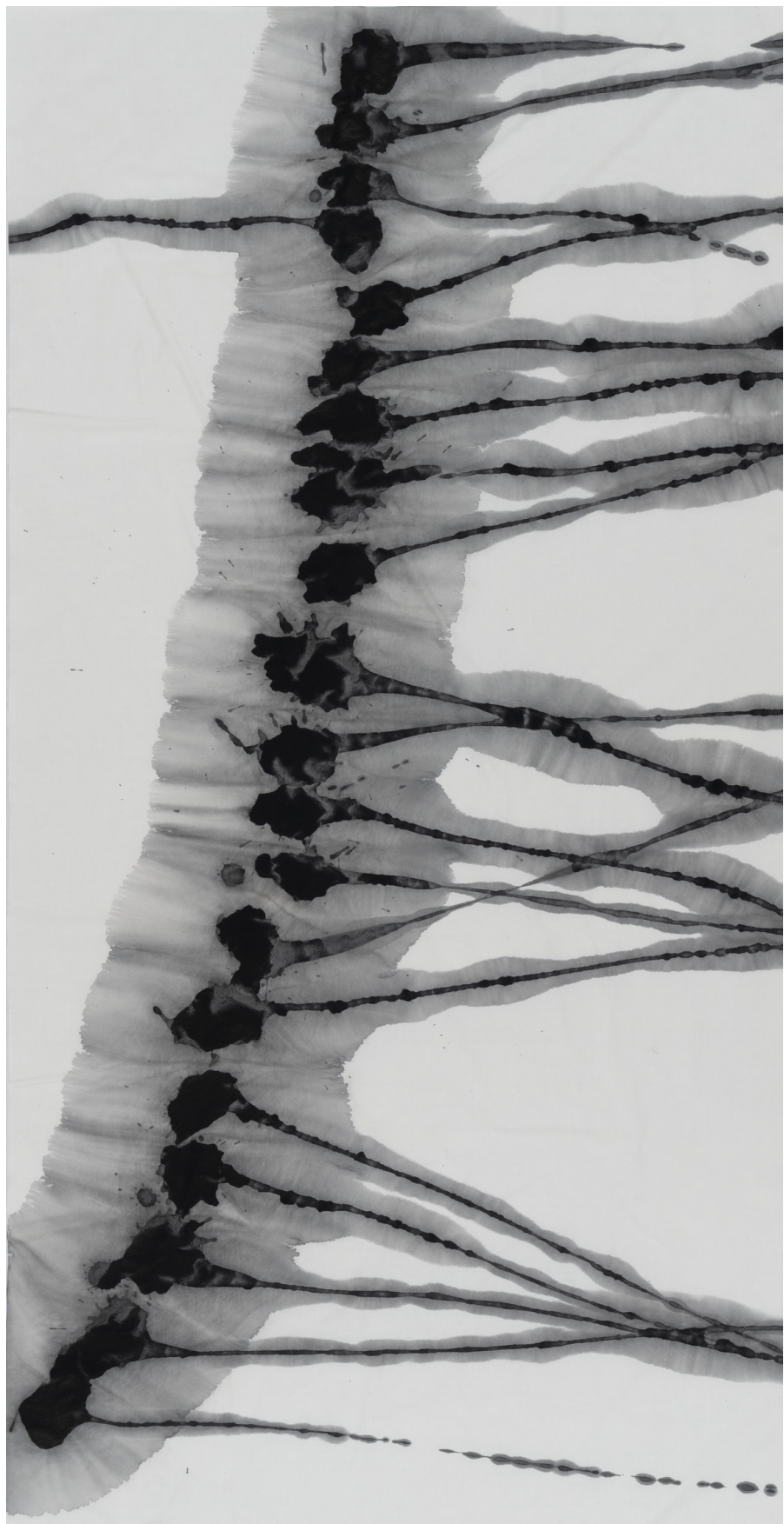
Correlation2024 - ruminant - #4
Ink on paper
70 x 135 cm



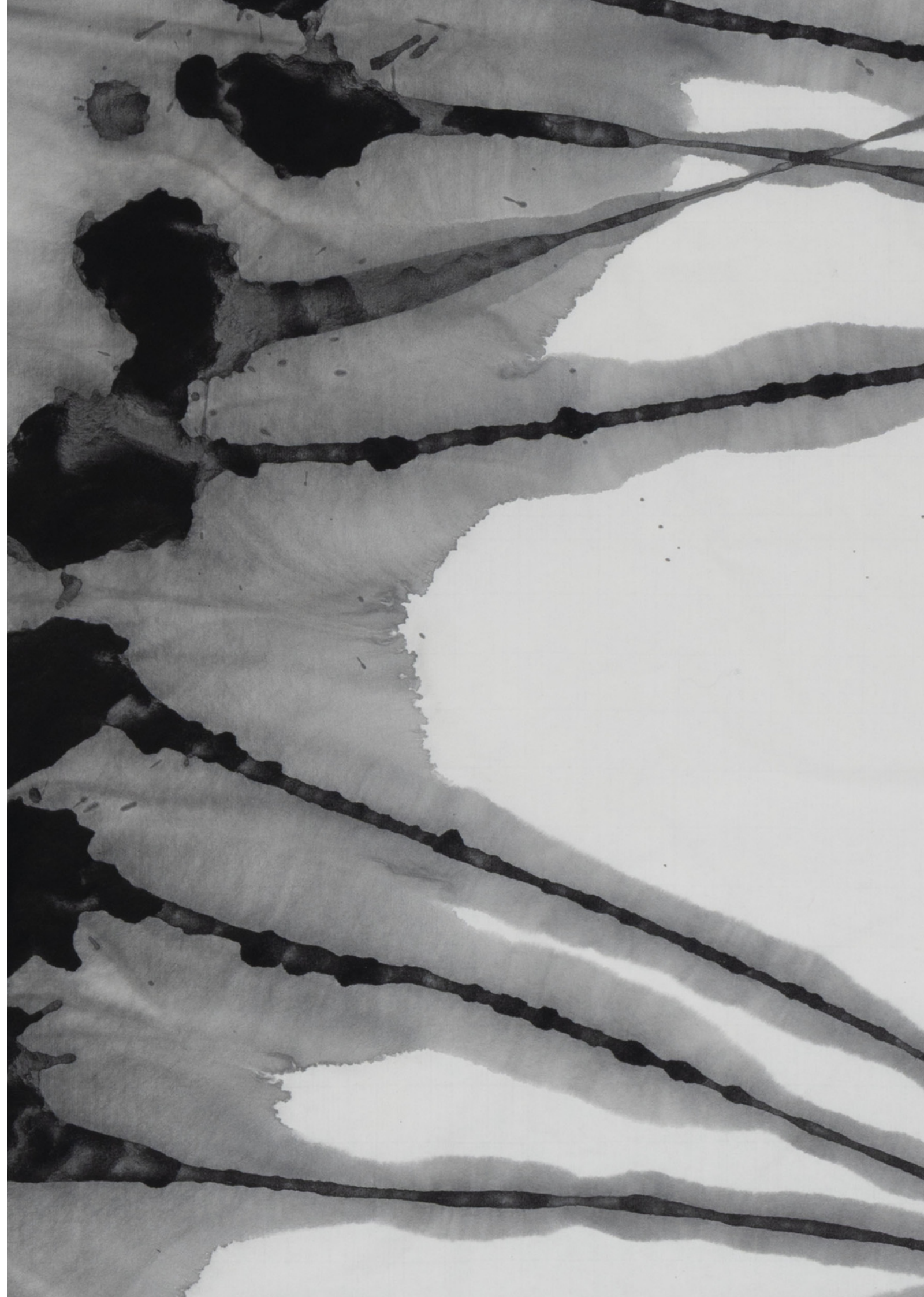
Correlation2025- resignation - #5
Ink on paper
135 x 70 cm



Correlation2024 - vector - #6
Ink on paper
70 x 135 cm



Correlation2024 - vector - #1
Ink on paper
135 x 70 cm

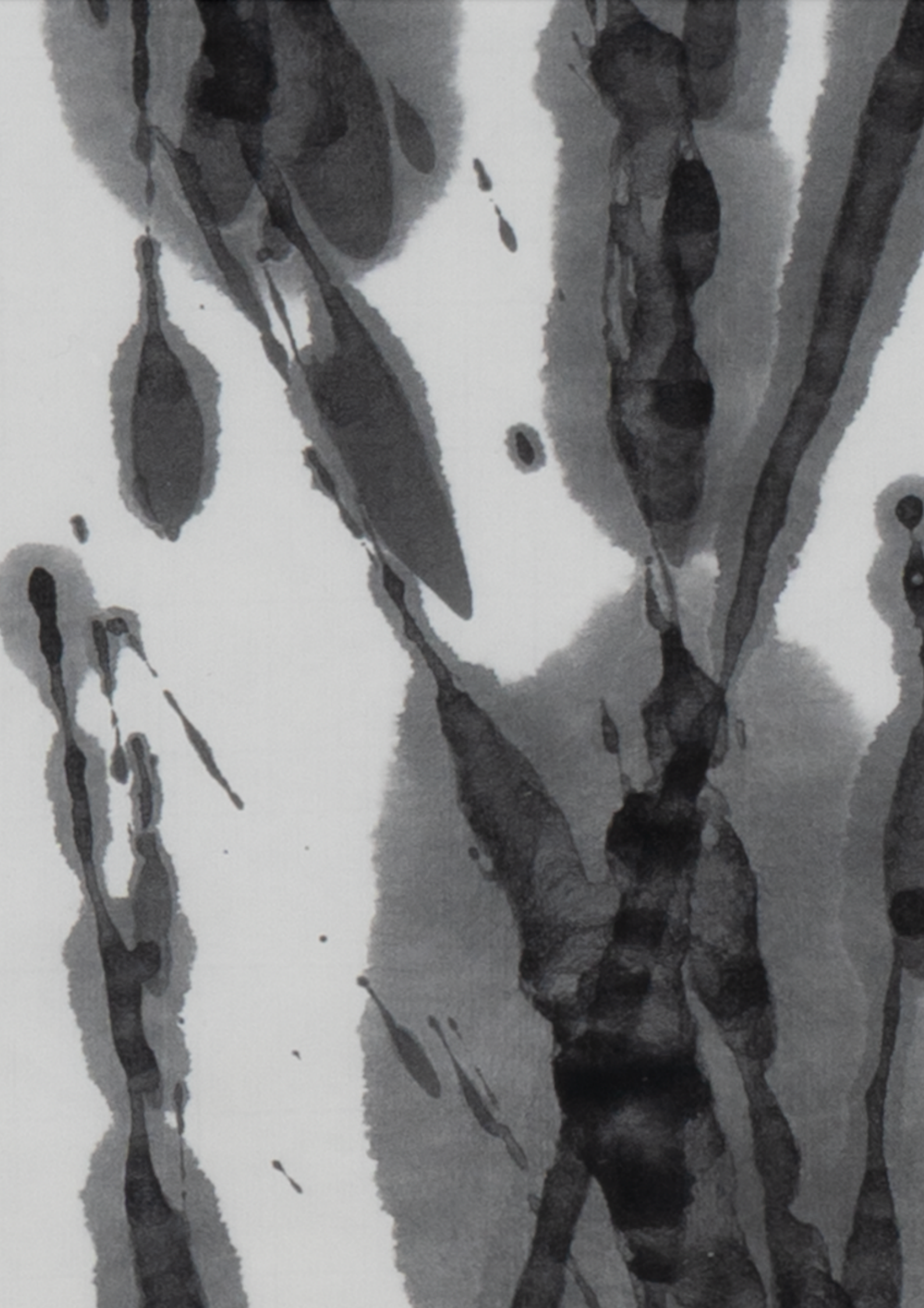




Correlation2025 - enso - #4
Ink on paper
135 x 35 cm per piece



Correlation2024 - vector - #2
Ink on paper
70 x 135 cm



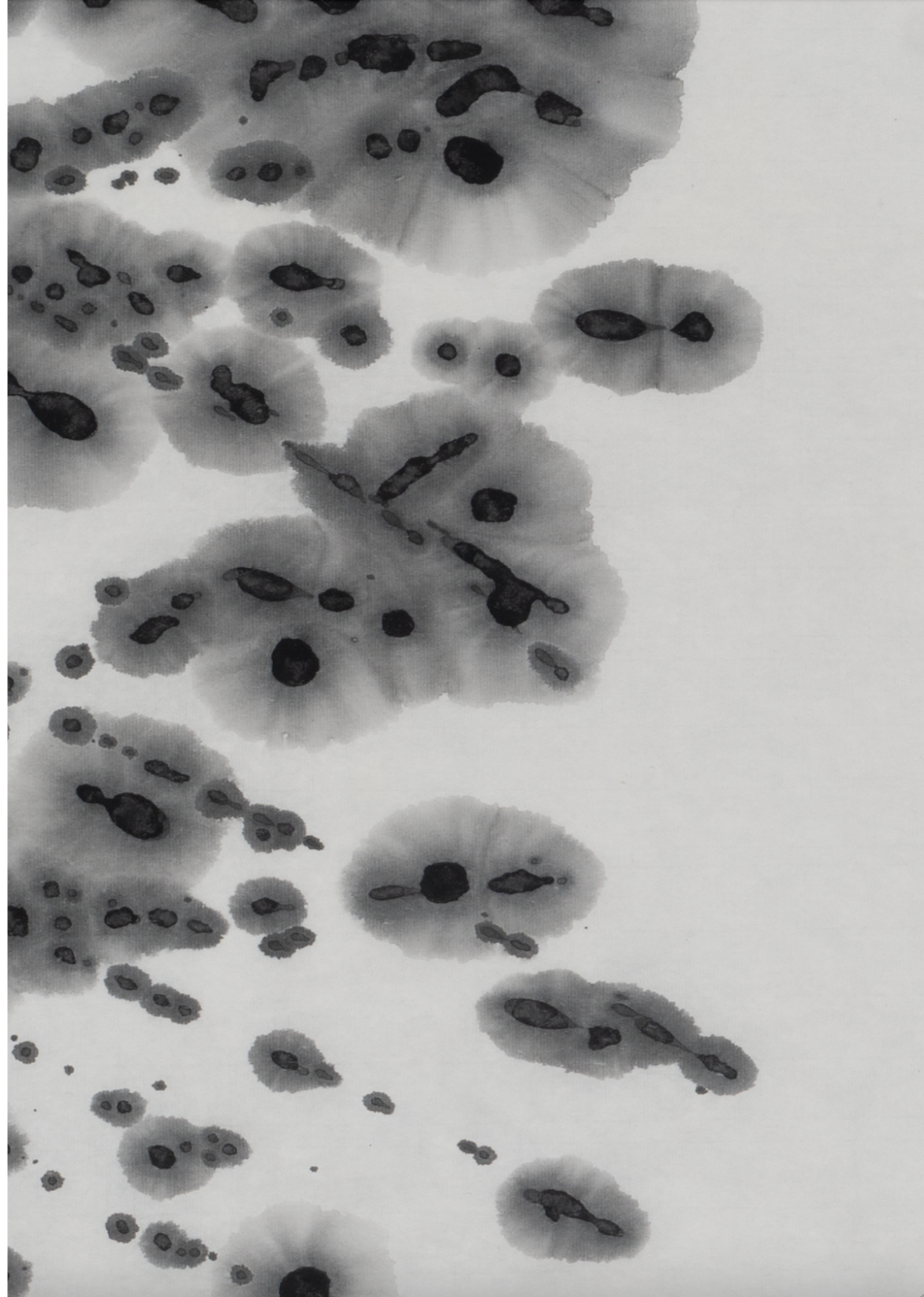
Correlation2024 - vector - #3
Ink on paper
135 x 70 cm



Correlation2024 - resignation - #9
Ink on paper
70 x 135 cm



Correlation2024 - ruminare - #5
Ink on paper
135 x 70 cm





The significance for Tomoko of this revolutionary concept is rooted in her need to describe the invisible connection, the correlation, that exists, or can exist, between two human hearts – the appeal from one human being to another. She views this potential link between one person and another as part of the complex of connections that can also exist between the individual and his or her experience and even the past and the future.

It is through these last years of work that Tomoko has been able to express her preoccupation with the need for dialogue, both internal and external and the importance of accepting the unfolding of fate with grace and, in the end, finally also accepting the embrace of the Zen concept of Ensō – the symbol of unity and emptiness.

In this exhibition and in all her recent work with its various complex roots and richly inventive style, she wishes to cross boundaries, both cultural and national and share her humanity and potential for joy with the world at large.

Michael Goedhuis