

MILAN GRYGAR

P420

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“I came to the certainty that what prevails in the world is correlation: sound is connected to the visual and the visual cannot exist without sound. Everything a human does is connected: visual and acoustic phenomena complement one another”.

Milan Grygar

For about half a century, starting in the mid-1960s, Milan Grygar has developed a body of work whose premise is the inseparable character of two senses occidental art has often seen as distinct: sight and hearing. His works have an essential connection with sound: they record its transpiring in visual form, or constitute a more or less detailed score through which to produce it.

The artist tells us that the start of his path of visual-aural research dates back to a precise episode, in 1964. Drawing with an unusual tool (a small stick dipped in ink), he realized that in the silent studio the tapping and tracing of the tip on the paper created an elaborate rhythm. Later, having recorded the sound on tape, it seemed just as interesting to him as the drawing that had generated it. This was the beginning of the series of *Acoustic Drawings*, works in which the criterion of visual composition (to trace abstract signs on a sheet of paper) and the meaning of the audio composition (the creation of given sounds in a given order) intertwine, both contributing to the final result.

It is important to emphasize that in this cycle of works the transcription of sound in visual form happens in keeping with “indexical” modes, i.e. not using conventional, stylized symbols (like traditional musical notation) or forms that evoke sound by analogy (as in an important current of abstract painting), but through a trace, a direct imprint: in this case, that of the inked objects on paper, still or in movement. Movement, in particular, has an essential role here. It is movement that intuitively connects sight to hearing, image to sound: it is thanks to movement that a line or a patch of ink (which, by the rules, record not a sound but a form, that of the object that has produced them) can be presented by the artist and “read” by the viewer as a trail of sound; it is their transpiring in time, continuous or interrupted, that (also) transforms them into recordings of an acoustic event. From this standpoint, the *Acoustic Drawings* are more comparable to vinyl records than they are to musical scores, where the grooves have recorded a sonic vibration through the material action of a stylus; and perhaps it is no coincidence that these drawings were born in a moment in which all sound recordings, on tape or disk, happened in keeping with the same principle, that of the etching of a sonic vibration through a mechanical instrument on a material medium. There is a link of a conceptual order between the *Acoustic Drawings* and the sound recordings on vinyl of their transpiring made by Grygar at the time (like, for example, *Akustická kresba / Adagio*, the record released in 1969 by the artist for the label Supraphone).

The movement, the action, in short, the performative component of the *Acoustic Drawings*, has not been limited by Grygar to the private, solitary space of the studio (or the recording studio). Starting at the end of the 1960s, Grygar did performances in which he drew in real time, in front of the audience, with a range of different tools including all sorts of objects, particularly spring toys dipped in ink, whose autonomous movement on the paper introduced an element of “controlled chance” in the drawings – and of playful spectacle as well. The available video recordings of these performances make you wish you had been there: standing in front of a table, in the guise of an «illusionist, musician and choreographer,» Grygar – extracting his singular drafting tools one by one from a top hat – staged enchanting little acts in which sound and vision, intent and chance, action and its trails all intertwined. From an aural perspective, these were micro-concerts in which the solo instrument of the first drawings gave way, as the artist himself puts it, to a «polyphony,» a multiplicity of sounds and rhythms that coiled together and overlapped.

Starting in 1967-68, Grygar has explored an opposite, complementary path with respect to that of the *Acoustic Drawings*. To introduce it, we can return to the comparison with vinyl records: the record is not just a material trace of sound, but also an instrument to reproduce that sound at will, over and over again. While the *Acoustic Drawings* make visually manifest a sound that has already transpired, other works have been

conceived as a sort of score, from which the artist himself or others, using heterodox or traditional instruments, can produce the sound compositions.

The first works produced in this vein were the *Ground Plan Drawings*, dashboard-like surfaces on which Grygar traced the outlines of the objects to utilize (a hammer, a top...) and indicated with numbers, letters and conventional musical signs the order and way in which to use them to perform the composition. These are works that establish a dialogue with the Fluxus instruction pieces, performances based a sets of directions someone puts into practice, and with the large current of musical scores based on visual indications of sounds of the neo-avant-gardes.

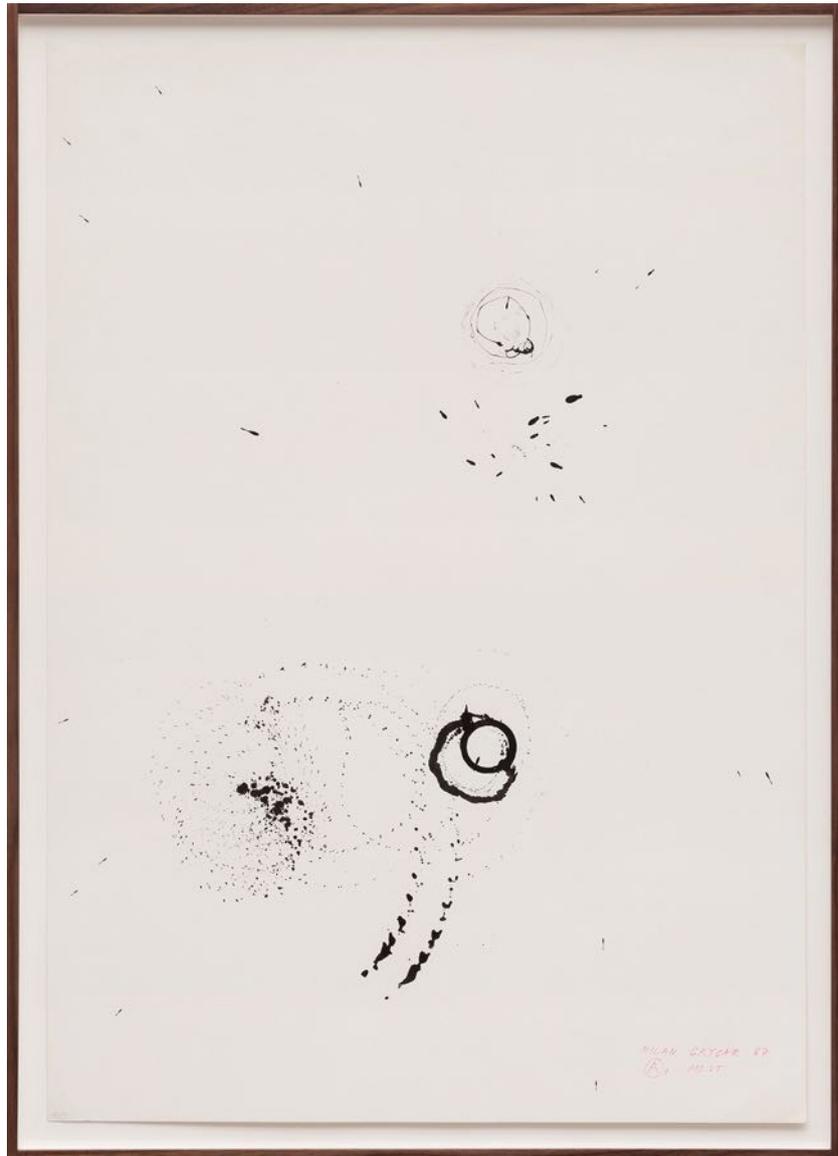
Both directions lead back to John Cage, to his idea of “composition” (and of its physical analog, the score) as a structure capable of coordinating and overlapping different media, different meanings, different roles. This was the idea Cage transmitted in his course at the New School for Social Research in New York at the end of the 1950s; it is no coincidence that his students included certain artists (like Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, George Brecht and, last but not least, Allan Kaprow) who were shortly to become outstanding figures of Fluxus.

The first *Ground Plan Drawings*, with their rather simple forms and precise instructions for use, have been followed in Grygar’s career by many other drawing-scores (the *Score-patterns*, the *Color scores*, the *Architectonic scores*...) whose general tendency, if one can be found, is that of gradually becoming less descriptive and more abstract, freed of determinate instruments and roles and instead striving to outline an idea of overall structure of the composition, leaving an increasingly large margin of interpretation for the performer.

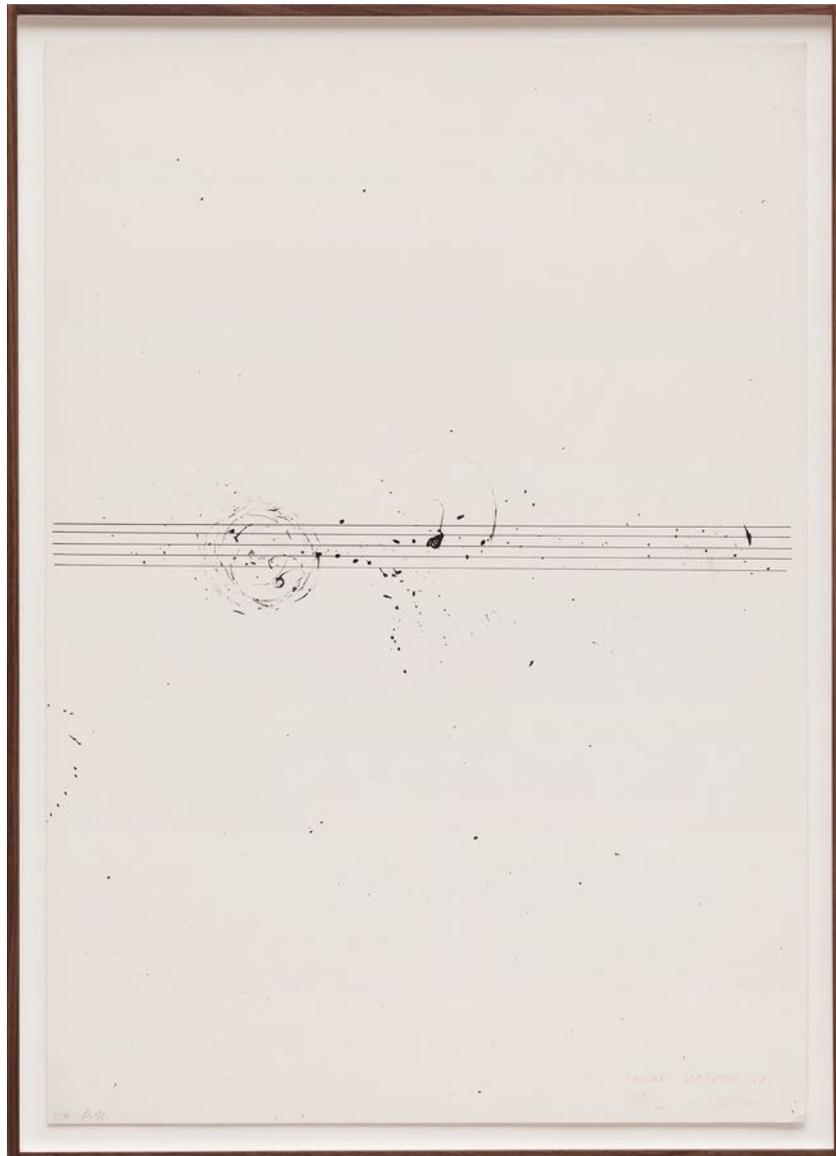
One of the highest points of this process of “abstraction” is undoubtedly reached with the *Acoustic/Plastic Drawings*, compositions on paper (with a fixed size of 88x62.5 cm) based on straight and curved parallel lines, drawn with such precision as to appear to be done by mechanical means. Inside a regular, predictable structure (usually the classic orthogonal grid), the artist introduces discrepancies: the lines change color (red instead of black), orientation, position with respect to a pre-set scheme, creating optical effects of vibration, virtual relief, etc. Grygar thinks of these austere geometric works as possible scores. «The line – he has stated, regarding a subsequent and related series, that of the *Linear scores* – is an imprint of energy, an orientation in space, on the surface and also in time. It is a duration.» Musicians who want to use the *Acoustic/Plastic Drawings* as scores are entrusted by the artist with the development of a criterion to effectively translate the lines in space into sounds in time; the composer and musicologist Erhard Karkoschka, for example, who has made a composition from one of them, *Drawing for Continuous Sound*, accomplished this with software. The crucial point, in any case, which must be kept in mind for any audio interpretation of the *Acoustic/Plastic Drawings*, is the irregular character of the grid, its turbulence and fractures: these irregularities give dynamism and unpredictability to otherwise static compositions. The artist defines the drawings as «loosened structures,» and more than one critic who has written about Grygar’s work (Jean-Yves Bosseur, Hana Larvová) has heard an echo, in this expression, of the «crippled symmetries,» thus made dynamic, that provide the title for one of the last works of the great American composer Morton Feldman. Feldman shared the focus on the dialogue between sound and sight: many of his compositions are dedicated to painter friends of the New York School (Franz Kline, Philip Guston); one piece in particular, the austere and metaphysical *Rothko Chapel* (1970), was written in relation to the non-denominational chapel in Houston for which Mark Rothko painted fourteen large, nearly monochromatic canvases.

Grygar’s work undoubtedly fits into this artistic lineage of dialogue between the senses, which attempts to compensate for the widespread tendency to separate and specialize them. More precisely (as we mentioned at the start, regarding the *Acoustic Drawings*, and now emphasize again as a conclusion), he belongs to that small, exclusive squadron of innovators who have tried to establish not just a relationship of analogy, but a truly reciprocal interchange between sight and sound. Inside this squadron, Grygar has a place of honor.

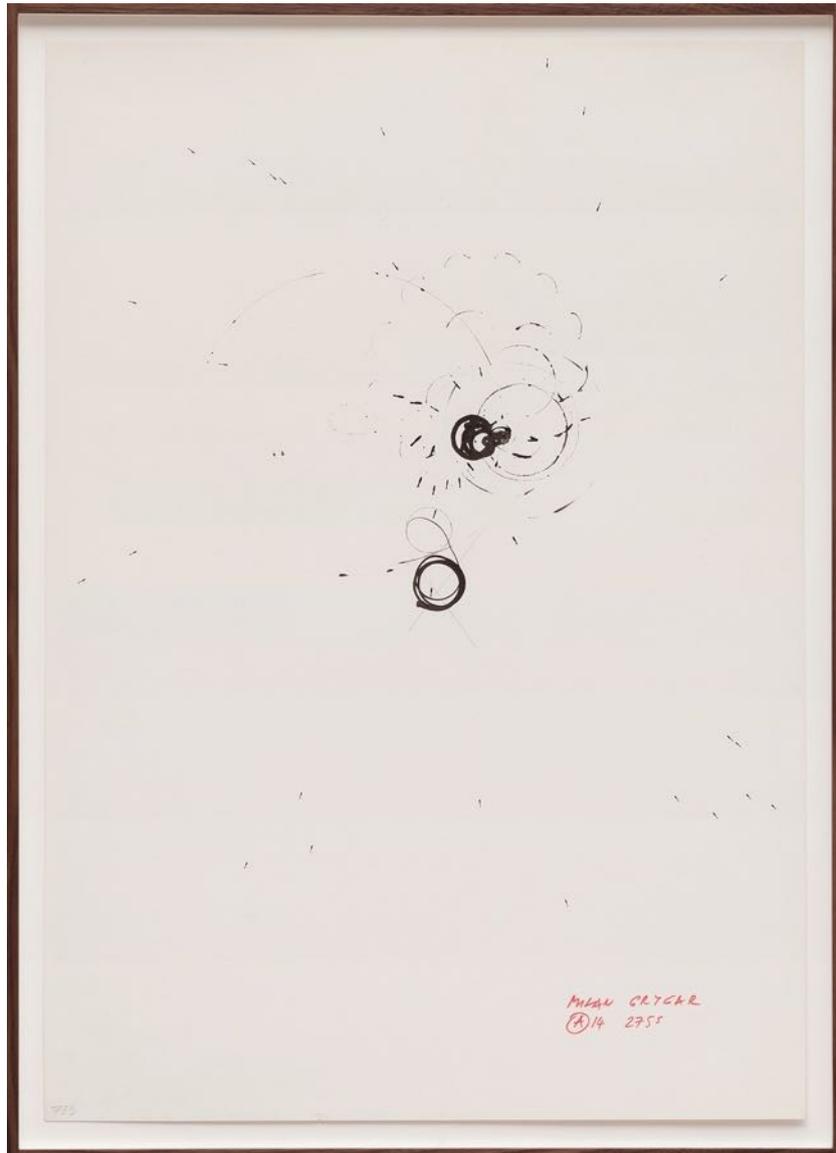
Simone Menegoi



Acoustic drawing, 1967-68, mixed media on paper, cm.73x51



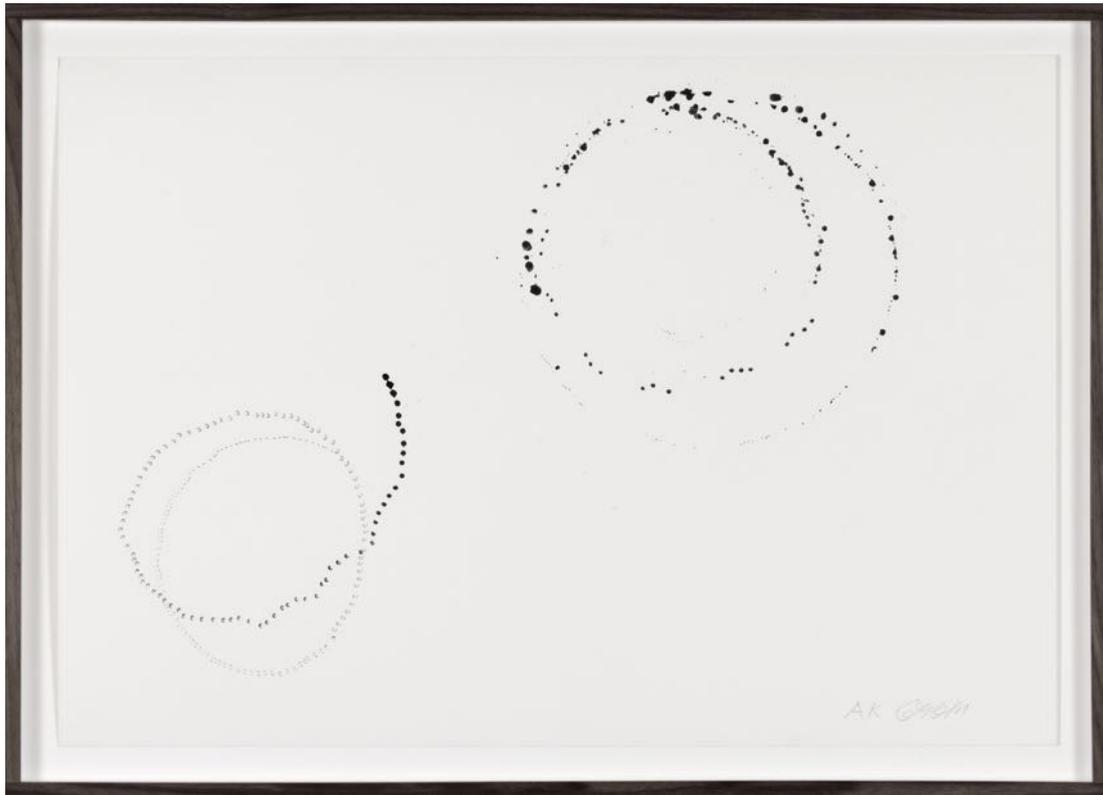
Acoustic drawing, 1967-68, mixed media on paper, cm.73x5



Acoustic drawing, 1967-68, mixed media on paper, cm.73x51



Acoustic drawing, 2001, ink on paper, cm.31,5x45



Acoustic drawing, 2001, ink on paper, cm.31,5x45



Drawing for Seven Tones, 1980, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



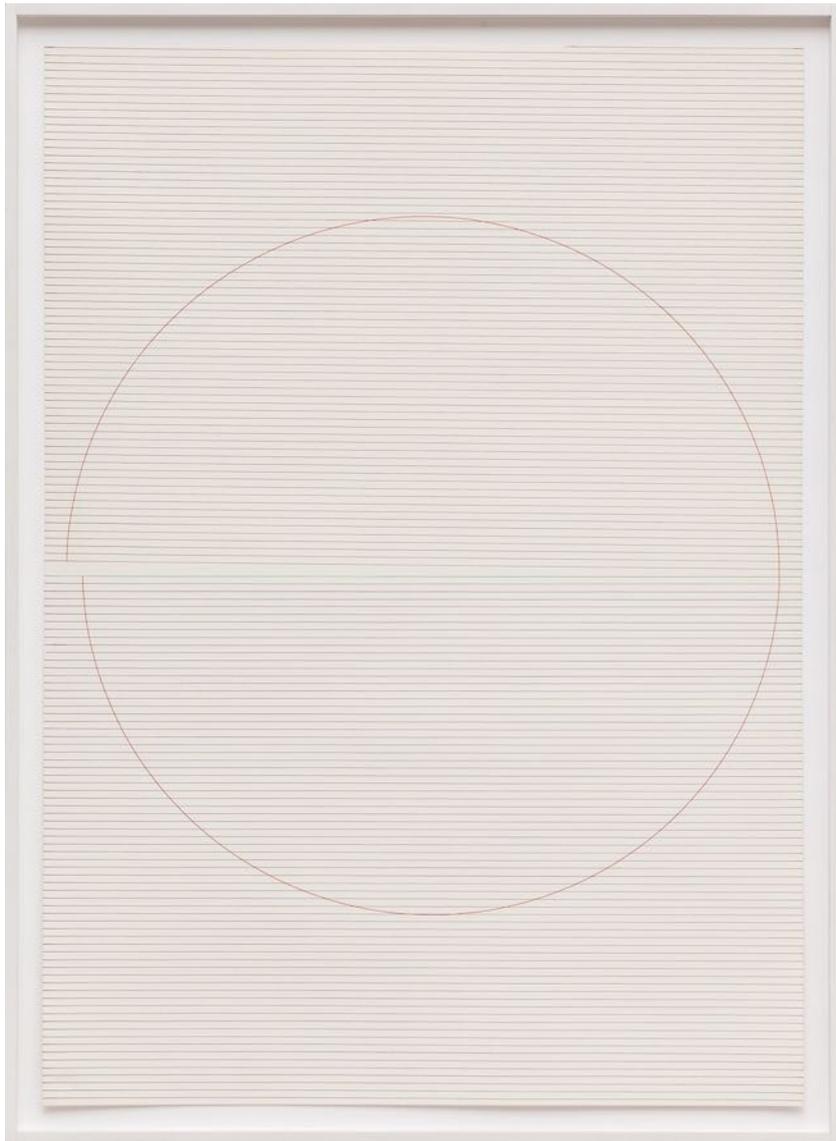
Linear Score, 1976, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



Linear Score, 1979, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



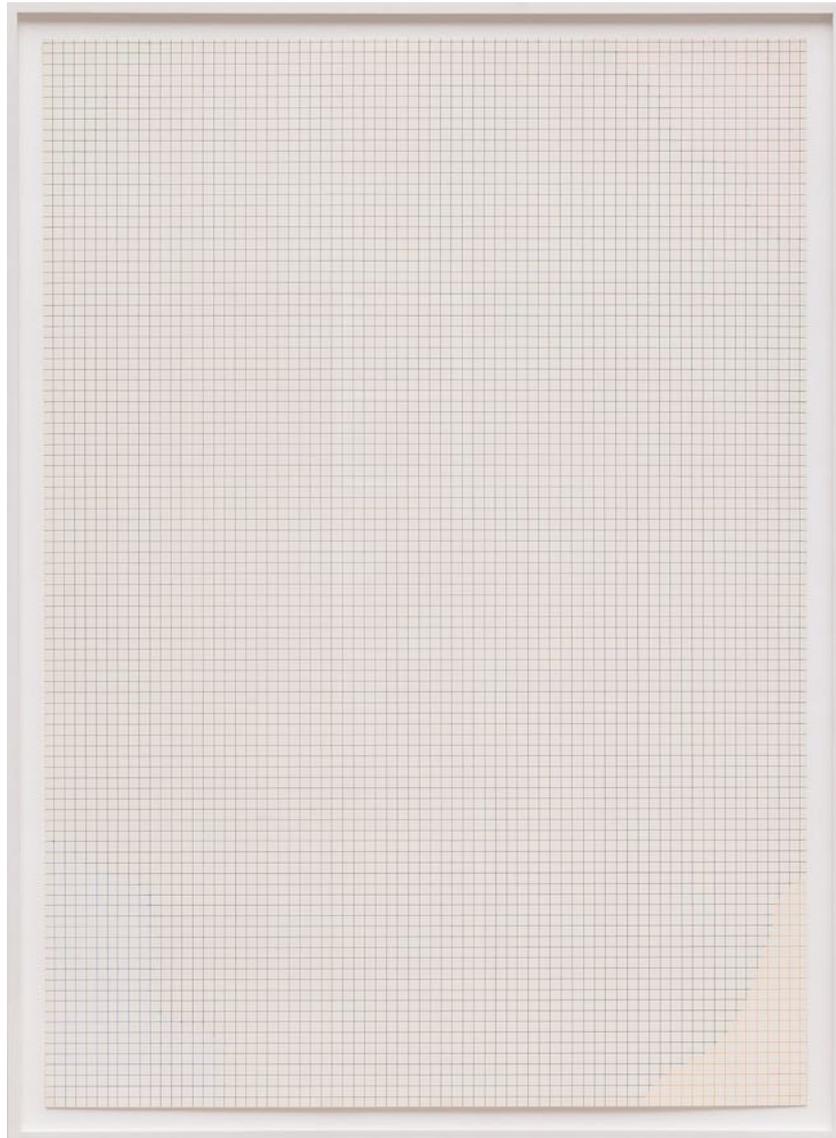
Linear Score, 1984, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



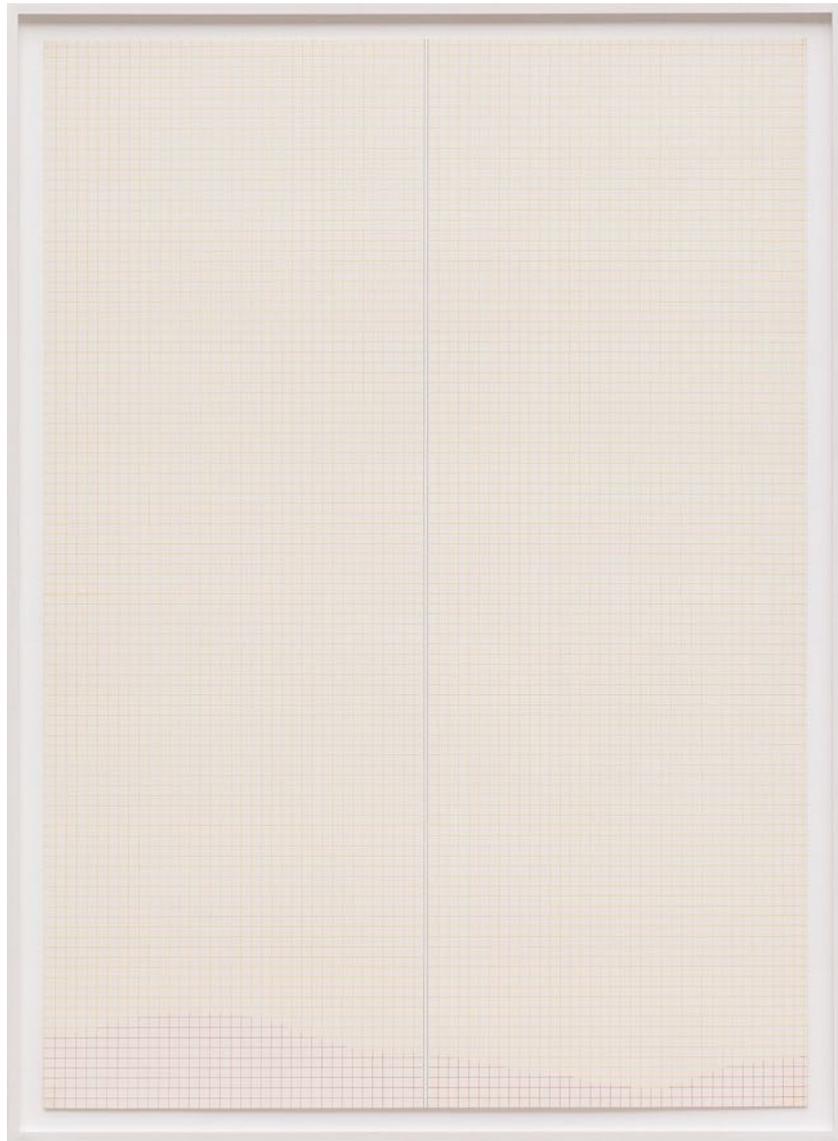
Linear Score, 1985, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



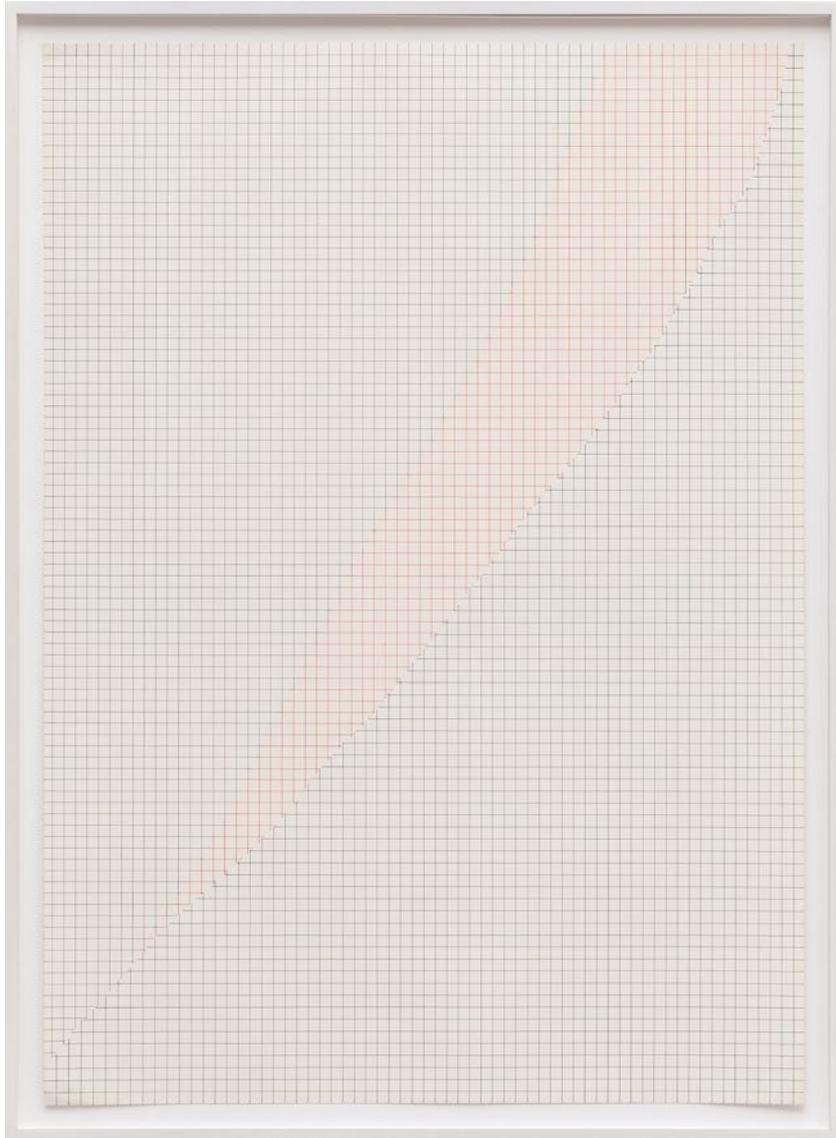
Linear Score, 1989, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



Sound Plastic Drawing, 1973, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



Sound Plastic Drawing, 1973, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



Sound Plastic Drawing, 1974, ink on paper, cm.88x65,5



Untitled, 2013, watercolor on paper, cm.40x32



Untitled, 2013, watercolor on paper, cm.40x32



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