Huguette Caland

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Everything Takes the Shape of a Person, 1970–78

edited by Aram Moshayedi

SKIRA

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Contents

Introduction

Aram Moshayedi

By the time of my first encounter with the work of Huguette Caland, the Lebanese-born artist had concluded a career that spanned nearly fifty years. In the years prior to a return to her native city of Beirut in 2013, Caland had lived and worked in Paris, and briefly in New York before settling in Los Angeles on the occasion of her lover's death in 1986. In Paris, a romantic and creative relationship with the Romanian artist George Apostu came thirteen years after she'd moved to the city to find her way to an artistic life that made an indelible mark on her work. One of three children born to the first President of Lebanon following the end of the French mandate, Caland had studied painting at the American University of Beirut before moving to Paris in 1970. Undoubtedly, the influence of the city and her proximity to its artistic communities led to new breakthroughs as Caland began to produce a vast array of intricate line drawings and colorful paintings that were decidedly erotic in scope and scale.

Through-lines apparent in Caland's work—the female body, eroticism, her own preoccupations with desire, to name a few—represent the joyously defiant output of an artist whose tendency was to pose a challenge through beauty and an engagement with otherwise taboo themes. A fixation on the poetics of line is evident throughout her oeuvre, whether in the sinuous drawn lines used to demarcate fragmented parts of her own body and those of her lovers in early works on paper or in the almost obsessive repetition of standardized linear marks in her later works. Caland's prolific output in the 1970s paved the way for interests that the artist maintained throughout her career; and though eroticism and female sexuality appeared to be less of a preoccupation in the decades that followed, Caland was known to revisit a naked body or pubic patch every now and again.

It is known that Caland was invested in her personal convictions, a characteristic that is reflected not only in her biography but also in the works that were produced after her departure from Beirut and her family in 1970. Artistically speaking, the period following this move afforded the artist new possibilities for exploring themes that had been otherwise dormant. Her drawings and paintings from these years tell a story of sexuality and desire, which Caland cultivated with equal measures of pleasure and defiance.

From an early age it seems, Caland was preoccupied with the weight of her body. In the series of paintings titled *Bribes de corps*, or body parts, fragments of bodies are translated into landscape-like shapes. Part and parcel of a language of abstraction, Caland's canvases from this series resemble curvilinear forms that are based on exaggerated features of the human figure. Often painted in a muted palette, the works that are part of her *Bribes de corps* reflect a consistent interest in depicting the body in a simplified visual

style, all the while implicating the artist's own physicality as source material. Speaking to a historical lineage in which the female nude was depicted from the standpoint of a distinctly detached masculine gaze, Caland's take on the body is marked by her feminine perspective, the subjectivity of the work enduringly present. In many characteristic works from this period, the view provided by the painting is such that Caland asks that we look at the world from her eyes, onto mountains of colorful flesh, hilly knees, undulating folds, and valleys of skin.

This publication presents for the first time a concentrated look at Caland's output from 1970 to 1979, with particular emphasis on works on paper and paintings that reflect the artist's preoccupations with an erotic impulse. In the pages that follow, writers Kaelen Wilson-Goldie and Negar Azimi provide new perspectives on a body of work that has patiently awaited this kind of critical attention. Wilson-Goldie's essay discusses the formative period of time that gave shape to Caland's artistic development and the years preceding her move from Beirut to Paris. Azimi's essay addresses the greater implications of the artist's relation to female desire and the ways in which these interests had been translated into the drawings and paintings included in this volume. These critical assessments of Caland and her work are the first in-depth offerings to deal with the artist's legacy, and it is the objective of this project to facilitate and enable further scholarship. A conversation between the artist and Lebanese author Hanan al-Shaykh, originally produced for Télé Liban in 1974, is also included to give greater insight into Caland's conceptions of herself as an artist at this time. It is the first occasion this conversation has been made available in English.

Like many artists of a certain age, Caland is receiving attention at the later stages of her life and career. Despite the supporters that have surrounded her for decades, there has been an unfortunate delay in a broader reception. It's often the case that it takes too long for an artist to receive the recognition she deserves, for what has essentially been a lifetime of work. Attempts such as this publication can only do so much in remedying the holes in a spotty art-historical past, of which Caland and her erotic lines are strikingly a part. The stories embedded within the lines of Caland's delicate drawings and seemingly abstract paintings are records of a life, documents of an artistic biography, and traces of the desires she cultivated.

When the Line Is Left to Live on Its Own

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

All of the erotic qualities in Huguette Caland's drawings and paintings come down to her line—to the diagonal thread on which she drapes a woman's body, to the posterior curve in the corner of an otherwise abstract canvas, to the "taut strings" that suspend her male and female figures, to the drawn tangles of pubic hair, a thumb hooked around a man's ribcage, the angle of a nose overlapping a face, an awkward kiss, a bent knee, a hanging breast, the long line of one leg meeting another, a vortex of circles or faces squeezed like a stylized hourglass between two broad expanses of empty space. Caland's drawing teacher at the American University of Beirut (AUB), where she studied in the 1960s, used to give her and her classmates assignments that involved starting with a pencil at the top of a page and drawing, say, a single association for fifty different words without lifting their hand or breaking their line, until they reached the bottom of the page and the end of the list. The vocabulary was pulled from the politics of the day, featuring words such as *refuge* and *nationalism*. Another assignment found them drawing the lines of a face using only curves, and then, with a ruler, creating depth and shadow through the repetition of straight lines alone. The students were also paired off and asked to draw each other's portraits over and over, again in a continual line, gazing into the same face day after day, an exchange between peers on multiple planes at once.

The artist Afaf Zurayk entered AUB as a sophomore in 1967. She was one of maybe a dozen students in the art department at the time. Caland had started a few years earlier, in 1964. Zurayk remembers the assignments of their drawing teacher, John Carswell, in part because she later tried to recreate them with her own students (she began teaching studio art in the late 1970s and continued until around 2016), but perhaps more importantly because they established a relationship between her hand and her mind, which opened her imagination and defined her work for decades. Arguably, the same could be said for Caland, who, prior to her studies at AUB, had made an audacious first painting with no lines at all, an enormous, almost cosmic red monochrome called *Red Sun* (1964). It was all energy, no escape. The line gave Caland an opening, some discipline, and a way out. It gave her the means to express her humor, to be as outrageous on the page as she was in everyday life. It also gave her the tools to capture a complex love life and to channel raw sexual desire into a wavering horizon or a whimsical trompe l'oeil of entangled limbs. Carswell's challenge to keep her line moving, to continue without interruption, surely influenced the trajectories of her art and life thereafter. The artist Helen Khal, who was her painting teacher at AUB, once said of Caland's work: "The line is so perfectly pure that it is left to live on its own."[1]

[1] Helen Khal, "Pure Visual Delight in Pencil and Ink: Never Tormented Always Amusing," in John Carswell (editor), *Huguette Caland: Works 1964–2012* (Beirut: Solidere, 2012), p. 23.

When Caland decided to study art, she was already in her thirties, married, with three children who were no longer babies. She was also the daughter of Lebanon's first post-independence president, Bechara el-Khoury, a hero of Lebanese nationalism. She had grown up in public, the girl who studied law and had a terrible car crash in Italy and was morbidly obese. She was odd and her friends were strange. She paled around with a band of misfits, the first of many, several of whom, such as Aref al-Rayess, would later become artists of note (Rayess, who grew up in Senegal, married a Venezuelan, and studied in the atelier of Fernand Léger in Paris, was recently described,[2] rather aptly, as the lone Dadaist of Lebanon). As a young woman born into a prestigious family, Caland behaved if not badly per se then at least unpredictably, and against the grain of expectations. She defied her father, falling hopelessly in love with the nephew of one of his worst political enemies—and he was French, no less. Huguette was precociously twelve years old at the time, and the object of her affection, Paul Caland, was seventeen. They married as soon as she turned twenty. Then, even more scandalously, she fell immediately out of love. Her husband took a number of mistresses. She had a lover (at least one), which was something that everyone in her society knew. They even knew his name, and spoke of Huguette, Paul, and Mustafa. The three of them were great friends, always together, hiding nothing from a world that seemed tolerant on the surface but was in fact deeply conservative, resentful, and provincial underneath.

By 1964, Caland had lost both of her parents, one right after the other, first her mother, then her father, whom she cared for during his long, slow demise from cancer (his nine-year-term as president had ended in 1952). She began painting *Red Sun* just after he died. It was initially an attempt to depict the work of his illness eating away at his body. Caland had been a typical student fifteen years earlier, studying at the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ) as a teenager, but that must have seemed like a lifetime ago. She was going back to school already an unconventional woman, and now an unconventional student, too. Where French Jesuits had founded USJ, AUB was the domain of protestant missionaries from the United States. The art department was unlike any of the other beaux-arts style art schools and faculties in the country. It built on the momentum of an informal art club that had been especially active in the 1940s. Its members would meet in the library, congregated there by a young artist named Saloua Raouda (later Saloua Raouda Choucair, Lebanon's preeminent modernist sculptor, who would spend the five following decades refining a language of abstraction all her own), as she was working at AUB as a librarian at the time. By the early 1950s, the university had established an academic

[2] As discussed during a panel on November 22, 2016, featuring Adrian Notz, Saleh Barakat, and Catherine Hansen, moderated by the author, and organized as part of the public programming for the exhibition *Yalla Dada*, curated by Nabil Canaan, Station, Beirut, November 9–December 6, 2016. The exhibition featured works by twenty-two artists, musicians, and performers, including Aref al-Rayess, Samir Khaddaj, Gheith al-Amine, and Ziad Abillama.

department to expand the spirit of the art club, mounting exhibitions on campus and offering free evening workshops to participants aged five to fifty, but also adding full-time faculty to teach courses in drawing, painting, ceramics, and design. AUB hired a handful of professors associated with the Art Institute of Chicago, including Maryette Charlton, George Buehr, and Margo Hoff. The idea was to bring the approach of the Bauhaus to Beirut, to have students learning from teachers who were themselves working artists, to have students learning from each other in constant dialogue with other disciplines, to be totally democratic, and through extensive public programs, to be open to everyone and to mean something substantial in the life of the school and the city in its time. Charlton and Buehr, in particular, organized workshops for children as well as an immensely popular series of public art seminars, which enjoyed the patronage of Zalfa Chamoun, Lebanon's elegant first lady. They brought Alexander Calder to Beirut, organized a show for Henry Moore and the touring exhibition *Young Artists from the Near East*, which included folk art from Ethiopia and children's drawings from Greece alongside paintings by Saloua Raouda, Helen Khal, and the Iraqi modern master Jewad Selim.

A few years into the running of the department, Charlton met John Carswell on an archeological dig in Jericho. She hired him on the spot to teach drawing at AUB. He was twenty-five, British, and a graduate of the Royal College of Art in London. He was equally obsessed with Henri Matisse and Ibn Battuta. He ended up staying at AUB for twenty years, leaving only when the fighting in Lebanon's civil war became so intense that the department itself closed down. During his time in Beirut, Carswell earned a reputation for being a beloved if radical and eccentric mentor. He wore a bow tie, always. He spent one fevered summer making white monochromatic paintings and sculptures on the upper floor of Nicely Hall, where the art department was based. He spent a longer stretch of time developing a gentle theory about the relationship between Islamic art and contemporary abstract painting in the Middle East (in brief: they were close and went way back and the east-west influence flowed in both directions). He tested out his ideas piecemeal in local magazines, and one often finds Caland's oil paintings—wild, serpentine abstractions from the late 1960s—illustrating his argument.[3]

If Charlton's day was characterized by an air of rarefied glamour—a long feature in *Life* magazine from the early 1950s shows her thin, prim, and striking, painting en plein air at an easel amid impossibly tall cypress trees—then Carswell's era was a little less innocent and far more politically charged. He and his students brought exhibitions about pollution and corruption into the common areas of the campus. From Arab nationalism to the

[3] See, for example, an untitled work by Caland from 1970 illustrating John Carswell, "Islamic Art and Contemporary Painting in the Middle East," in *Middle East Forum/Al-Kulliyah* (Winter 1972), p. 21, and another from 1969 illustrating John Carswell, "Art in the Middle East Today," in *Middle East International* (July 1971), p. 24.

Palestinian resistance, revolutionary movements were piling in through the university gates. "Politics were very high up in everyone's consciousness at the time," Zurayk recalls. "We all thought we could do something about it. The atmosphere was very volatile, experimental, and aggressive. Girls my age were being very adventurous and really exploring their sexuality. It wasn't only Huguette."[4] Caland and Zurayk carried a similar kind of baggage from their fathers. Constantin Zurayk was then the acting president of AUB, and one of the major ideological thinkers behind Arab nationalism. He came from an extremely ambitious family, both politically and intellectually. But Caland was simultaneously symptomatic of her era and totally exceptional to it. "It was a time when Twiggy was the woman to be—all legs, a flat chest, and half closed eyes," says Afaf Zurayk. "And who do I see in the art department but Huguette, massive, laughing, gregarious, eyes wide open, the complete antithesis of Twiggy. She was older, coming back to school at a different stage in her life, completely reinventing herself. And she had an almost masculine power. I was always impressed by how she combined a very masculine assurance and assertiveness with a very fine, translucent, almost transparent use of color. Her color relations were transcendent. It was a time of incredible personalities, forceful characters. Huguette and Helen were the two women who drew road maps for us. They were very different. But they made choices, and that was very important for us as young girls who looked up to them."[5]

Helen Khal joined the art department in 1967 and stayed for a decade. Born in Allentown, Pennsylvania, to a family of Lebanese descent, she had studied at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts (ALBA) in the 1940s, not long after it opened as the first stand-alone art school in Lebanon. Around the same time she married the poet Yusuf al-Khal, a founder, with the Syrian poet Adonis, of the groundbreaking poetry journal *Shi'r*. Together they opened an important gallery for modern art in Beirut, called Gallery One. And although she was more unassuming and subdued in her style, she also had numerous affairs, a falling out with her husband, an acrimonious divorce. Unlike Caland, Khal was quiet, wry. She came from a modest background, zero privilege, and never had any money. To make ends meet, she worked as a newspaper critic and a proofreader for hire. Toward the end of her life, she lived in an apartment near the sea in Beirut provided to her by a local chapter of the YWCA. And pretty much without variation, from her early twenties, she made color the end-all-and-be-all of her art. She began with portraits in the 1940s and ended up with several decades' worth of color field abstractions inspired by the Mediterranean.

Caland built her first studio along that same sea, albeit further up the coast, north of Beirut in the suburb of Kaslik. It was a building at the end of the garden of her family

[4] Interview with the author at Zurayk's studio in Beirut on January 19, 2017.
[5] Ibid.

home. When she was working, the space was forbidden for her children, sometimes her husband, often other adults. Khal was one of the only people allowed to enter, and in fact, she shared that studio—and others later, in other cities—with Caland, the two of them painting side by side. Not that it wasn't tricky. They shared a bond but often disagreed. It was an ambiguous time for friendships among women—in precisely the same years, the artists Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal were sharing a studio, and a life, elsewhere in Beirut. More to the point, it was an extremely volatile time for women in the wider region, and feminists in particular, in the fields of art, literature, and politics. The novelists Leila Baalbaki in Lebanon, Ghada Samman in Syria, and Latifa al-Zayyat in Egypt were all pushing the boundaries of what could be said about a woman's sexuality, her desire for intimacy, and her pleasure of experience. Baalbaki's novel *I Live* (1958) and her short story collection *A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon* (1963) were both banned in Lebanon, and she was taken to court on obscenity charges. Even a novelist who is now as beloved as Hanan al-Shaykh suffered in the reception of her early work, especially for having the audacity to write in the voice of a male protagonist in her debut novel, *Suicide of a Dead Man* (1970). The painter Inji Efflatoun, an early apprentice with the Surrealist movement in Cairo who had established an important women's organization with al-Zayyat, was jailed among the first so-called class of female political prisoners in Egypt, part of Gamal Abdel Nasser's crackdown on communists and the Muslim Brotherhood. Efflatoun's activism was threatening precisely because it gave equal weight to issues of gender and class, and because she was an artist from a privileged background who was able to bridge the gap and work in and among poor, rural communities in the Egyptian countryside.

Nineteen sixty-seven was obviously a major turning point in the region. The staggering defeat of so many Arab armies, and the loss of so much territory, in the Six Day War with Israel, represented a major rupture in the Arab psyche, if one can speak in such terms. According to the historian Samir Kassir, it was also the moment when the great synthesis of contradictions that was and had always been Beirut began to break down. All the same, one of the most unforgettable art spaces in the city's history began its activities that year. Janine Rubeiz's Dar al-Fan opened in an old Lebanese house on Bechara el-Khoury Avenue. A formidable woman, Rubeiz organized debates, film screenings, and exhibitions. She invited the novelist Marguerite Duras, the sociologist Maxime Rodinson, the charismatic Shiite cleric Musa Sadr, and the socialist leader (and Druze chieftain) Kamal Jumblatt to come and present their ideas. She also gave Caland her first hometown show, in early 1970 (Etel Adnan would exhibit a few years later, and return often for

lectures and poetry readings). Nadine Begdache, Rubeiz's daughter, remembers that her mother enlisted the local fire brigade to use their ladders to hang the show, placing the works high above viewers' heads. "They didn't understand what they were hanging," Begdache says, "and nobody understood what they were seeing."[6]

Was it necessary for Caland to leave Lebanon and move to Paris, alone, in order to make the work of her erotic period, which began in 1970 and became most intense in the years between 1973 and 1979? It seems probable that she would have never developed the nearly sculptural visual language of her magisterial *Bribes de corps* paintings had she not struck out on her own. But by nearly all accounts, her work was already erotic in the years before she left. Carswell described that period as one where Caland was "defining herself and making decisions . . . It was also a period of intense self-examination."[7] It might be more accurate to say that the erotic line was already there, but she needed to leave in order to let that line live. She needed to leave to escape the reaction of a public that felt entitled to her story, intimate in her intimacies, allowed to judge her life and its complexity. Begdache remembers seeing a painting of Caland's with the curve of an ass in its corner. "It was a scandal," she recalls. "People said: 'What is she crazy?' Everyone was imagining: 'It's Huguette. It's Paul. It's Mustafa.' She was a free woman and it was too much for Beirut."[8] She was painting nudes with great confidence and good humor. "The place of women in society was really changing," Begdache explains.[9] It had been a subject of several heated conferences organized by her mother, and Laure Moghaizel, a prominent attorney and advocate for women's rights, was fighting a very public battle to get real laws of equality on the books. "People were really scared. And for Huguette, that was the moment when she left."[10]

Begdache remembers another curious detail. She often asked Khal to show at the gallery she opened in her mother's honor, and she always refused. "You already have Huguette," Khal would say.[11] The night Caland announced that she was leaving her husband and her children and moving to Paris alone to pursue her art, she had an opening at her studio for the work of her and Khal. It was a few months after her Dar al-Fan show, in a year in which Caland's work had suddenly featured in half a dozen exhibitions around the world—in Paris, Tokyo, Venice, Rome, Washington DC, Beirut, and now Kaslik. There was dinner, champagne, good cheer, and Caland's bombshell declaration. The children, as far as Begdache remembers, knowing the story second hand, were not present in the room. Khal was standing quietly behind her. "When we have such mothers," Begdache says, "it's not easy. It's a very heavy inheritance."[12]

[6] Interview with the author at Galerie Janine Rubeiz in Beirut on January 18, 2017.
[7] John Carswell, "Huguette," in John Carswell (editor), *Huguette Caland: Works 1964–2012*, p. 15.
[8] Interview with the author at Galerie Janine Rubeiz.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Going to Pieces

Negar Azimi

"I have gone to pieces, which is a thing I have wanted to do for years."
Jane Bowles, *Two Serious Ladies* (1943)

It is said that Huguette Caland left Beirut, the city in which she was born, in the year 1970 to begin a new life in Paris, leaving behind a home, husband, three children, and a lover. Of course, to say that Paris is where one goes to find existential freedom is to indulge in an expression so trite, so atavistic, as to make one wince (nearly). And yet to veer away from it is to ignore the legion for whom Paris has been critical to their art.

But why did Caland leave in the first place? We can only speculate—the spirit is a mysterious thing—but perhaps being hemmed in by the rituals and duties associated with playing wife and mother had something to do with it. So, too, might have Beirut's narrowly bourgeois atmosphere. "Every dress was a catastrophe," she once told the writer Hanan al-Shaykh about the social and sartorial pressures of her time. Instead of the latest fashions, Caland, the daughter of Lebanon's first president, Bechara el-Khoury, scandalously took to wearing loose, tent-like kaftans.

There's another clue in the interview with al-Shaykh, a writer whose own fictional characters tend to chafe at their milieu's prohibitions. Caland was marked by a pear-like girth all her life, and tells her interlocutor that, as a young person, she grew fat "as a challenge." Who on earth grows fat *as a challenge*? Could Caland have delighted in shocking for shocking's sake? The statement is as queer as it is rare. And yet it offers an important insight into an individual who seemed to be at a right angle to the world from the start—and certainly at curious odds with her good breeding. The unerring clarity of purpose!

*

By the early 1970s, the body was beginning to assume pride of place in Huguette Caland's art. An intimation of what was to come, maybe, she painted *Maryam* in 1969, a portrait of a woman—nude—seated casually in what appears to be a patrician living room (landscape painting: check; handsome vase: check). *Exit*, a work from the year 1970, depicts a pile-up of faces—some of them will make return appearances—smooshed into in an irregularly shaped circle, evoking the bowels of an overcrowded elevator. If nothing more, it conjures a distinct claustrophobia. An oppressive cacophony, too. In the center of it all, a woman's pubis makes a cameo. Above it, a loose breast.

In Paris, where she settled into an apartment on Rue de Berri, Caland took to making

simple ink drawings that, very often, began with a simple line, doodling outwards into kaleidoscopic, acrobatic universes of their own. Their intimacy of scale, and beguiling child-like modesty, is breathtaking. And human. It was as if Caland, newly stripped of social baggage, had returned to the stuff of bare essentials. *It began with a line*, you might say.

Soon, she began making three-dimensional forms, including plywood mannequins on which hung extravagant kaftans (these again) of her own design. The mannequins are kooky human forms with asymmetrical, cubist heads and hokey stick legs. The surfaces of the textiles, in turn, are filled with the elaborate workings of her hand. A period designing kaftans for the fashion house of Pierre Cardin ensued. In a photo from that time, Huguette appears exquisitely tanned—ravishing—dressed in a chic charcoal kaftan of her own, blue kohl around her eyes. She's on top of the world.

Meanwhile, Huguette's doodly lines began to depict antic human forms. See a swell of the vulva, the curve of a breast, the sight of botoxy lips interlocked, a chaotic sea of pubic hair. Lumpy bodies lie on bodies in ecstatic tangles, dancing like charmed snakes, their flesh mingling; in many cases, it's impossible to divine where one body begins and the other ends. Orifices represent beginnings or endings or indeed both as directionality is turned on its head. These works are unequivocally sexual, and yet they are not obscene. They are also, in a sense, unwitting self-portraits.

Tas, from 1973, is a paradigmatic work from the period, a mélange of bodies. Nine faces feature; a neckline is contiguous with a nose which in turn locks lips with another. Her figures' heads are often covered in wraps or turbans. They have theatrical eyes. One can imagine them with eccentrically over-rouged cheeks, too. They are almost certainly women of a certain age, which is to say, they are not conventional sex objects. The multiplicity of heads—so many heads!—seems to call to mind the psychoanalytic subject, the divided self.

Another drawing, untitled and from the year 1972, captures bodies inscribed on bodies. A woman's long hair is filled in with a string of almond-shaped eyeballs, evoking the scales of a snake. Out of her neck comes another face, and her breasts serve as eyes. Caland's layering and the juxtapositions that ensue create delirious palimpsests—as if evoking hazy memories, or conjuring the multitude of persons that mark all the encounters of a life.

This should be said: Huguette Caland is funny, and a hammy humor is sprinkled throughout. Even among the most sexual and iconoclastic drawings, the sexual charge is inflected—undercut?—with playfulness. One subject's eyes are rendered droopy and overlarge, another woman's nose is fashioned from a penis and balls turned upside down,

while a set of braids also double as a man's balls. Limp arms hang from bodies and extend for what seem like kilometers, like rag doll appendages. Occasionally, a round mustachioed humpty dumpty male with a brush mustache appears—a former lover, so the story goes.

By 1973, Caland had extended her drawings into color with a series of colorful abstractions she titled *Bribes de corps*, or "body fragments." The rumblings of this journey could be found in an earlier work, from 1971, depicting a deep, narrow valley from which sprouts what appears to be a skinny palm tree. That work, suggestively titled *Self-Portrait*, summons female genitalia. In works that ensue, the lines of the body approximate landscapes—the curve of a mountain top or the bend in a river or even the occasional lonely markings on a map of a vast desert expanse. One painting, for example, evokes two lumpy piano legs ending at knobby knees, or alternatively, two hills under an azure sky. Another features a lonely flesh-colored breast. And yet another captures two body surfaces gently making contact. Oh, and cracks of the ass abound.

Caland's proto-bodies are far less busy than Georgia O'Keeffe's mille-feuille genitalia. Instead, they're closer to Ellsworth Kelly's organic forms distilled from everyday life, or, even Edward Weston's closely cropped photographic nudes. Like Weston, Caland could transform a corner of a thigh into an entire universe. At moments, these works also recall the abstraction of her Lebanese contemporaries Saliba Douaihy and Etel Adnan.

A lover's influence is palpable, too. George Apostu was a Romanian-born artist whose roly-poly sculptures took their inspiration from the worlds of folk art and the ethnographic. His drawings depicted large, curvy, nubile women. Apostu and Caland had met around the year 1983 in Paris, where he settled after leaving his native Romania. Her work from that time reveals drawings of the two of them in sundry sexual positions. *All the encounters of a life*.

*

There's a story that the American artist Hannah Wilke used to tell. It went something like this: When Vito Acconci masturbated under a wooden platform, it was called "Conceptual Art." But when Wilke herself set out to make a piece involving herself getting massaged in a massage parlor, her gallerist said this: "Hannah, why don't you come up to my hotel instead?"

Well-known double standards aside, Huguette Caland would not be the first woman to make high art from her sexual exploits. There's Joan Semmel, who painted lusty bodies entwined. Or Cosey Fanni Tutti, who worked as a model in pornographic films and

magazines, which in turn became the raw material for her art. More recently, Sophie Calle, has made art out of her jilted—and jilting—lovers. Frances Stark, for her part, has created films—and literature—out of online trysts with anonymous inamoratos. Examples abound. And yet I've seen no other "erotic" art quite like Caland's.

In *The Dangerous Sex* (1964), H. R. Hayes chronicled perceptions over time of women as unclean Pandoras with evil boxes, agents of the devil that pose threats to male supremacy. Caland's treatment of female sexuality—cozy, quirkily sensual—is as far from "evil" as can be. Her women having sex evoke fun and freedom. Theirs is a mirthful sex without shame, without inhibition. It is no wonder that, years later, a studio assistant recalled that Caland had had a sticker on her computer which read "Boobies." [*Cut to laugh track.*]

But are Caland's works actually erotic? Undoubtedly. And yet they demystify eroticism by embracing a remarkably diverse array of bodies—without pretentiousness, without artifice. These are imperfect bodies caught in perfect bliss. Her daughter Brigitte has said that if asked, Caland would argue that her own body had served her well over the years. "She wasn't uncomfortable with her body," she notes. "It was always *other* people who were uncomfortable with it."

Given her lightness of touch, Caland has other spiritual relatives among artistic peers. Like the voluptuous and eccentrically colored nanas of Niki de Saint Phalle, her forms seem to express an unabashed delight in their carnal liberation. (O'Keeffe's vaginal landscapes, made decades before, never had such a sense of humor.) In their occasional cartoonishness, they are also not wholly unlike Dorothy Iannone's stylized nipples, penises, and furry pubis, too (though they are certainly less overtly political.)

Motley comparisons aside, what, one might wonder, does Caland's work have to say about women, or Lebanon, or Arab women, or women who abandon their husbands anyway? It turns out: not all that much. Her "bribes de corps," for example, are fragmentary—partial—incomplete; they aren't at all stand-ins for larger narratives. If Caland's zigzag work and life have taught us anything, it is that it is sui generis; her choreography is her own.

*

One final story. At the turn of the last century, Huguette received a delegation of Arab women at her Venice studio, years after she had left Paris for California. ("Caland sounds like 'California-land,'" she was known to say. She moved not long after Apostu's passing.) Above her dinner table hung drawings of her former lover, nude, his penis alternately

flaccid and erect. Did she think of removing the paintings, her daughter asked, in advance of the visit? Not for one second.

Apparently, the meeting went very well.

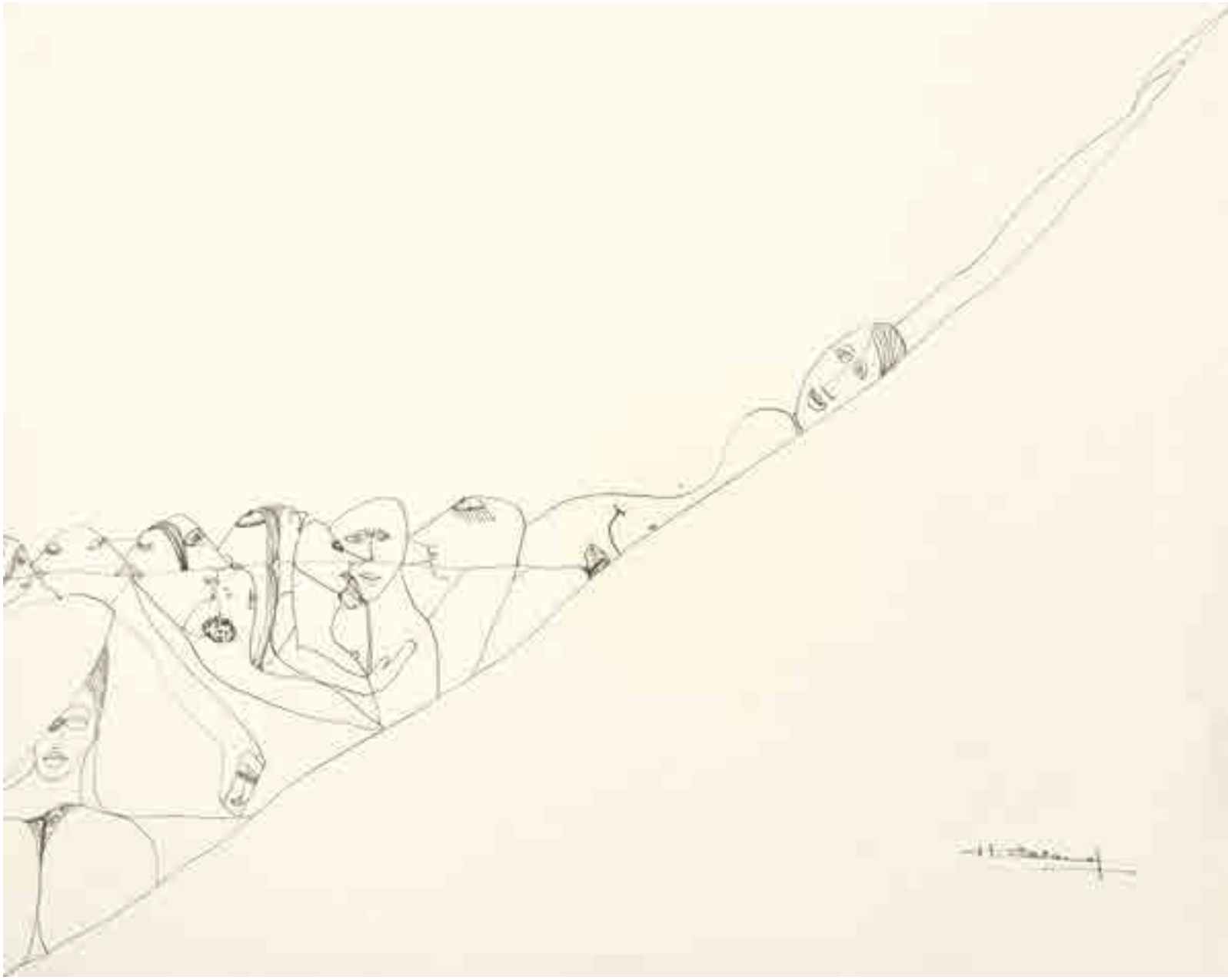
In this way, Caland's journey reminds me of the heroic literary duo of Mrs. Copperfield and Ms. Goering, two bourgeois women of fine bearing who deliberately jettison their square, respectable lives to find fulfillment in the exotic and lowbrow in Jane Bowles's cultish novel *Two Serious Ladies*. By the end of the tale, which was published in 1943 and met with almost universally baffled response, Bowles's two ladies sit in a louche bar looking back at their lives. Mrs. Copperfield, turning to her friend, says: "I have gone to pieces, which is a thing I have wanted to do for years… but I have my happiness, which I guard like a wolf, and I have authority now and a certain amount of daring which, if you remember correctly, I never had before."

Drawings

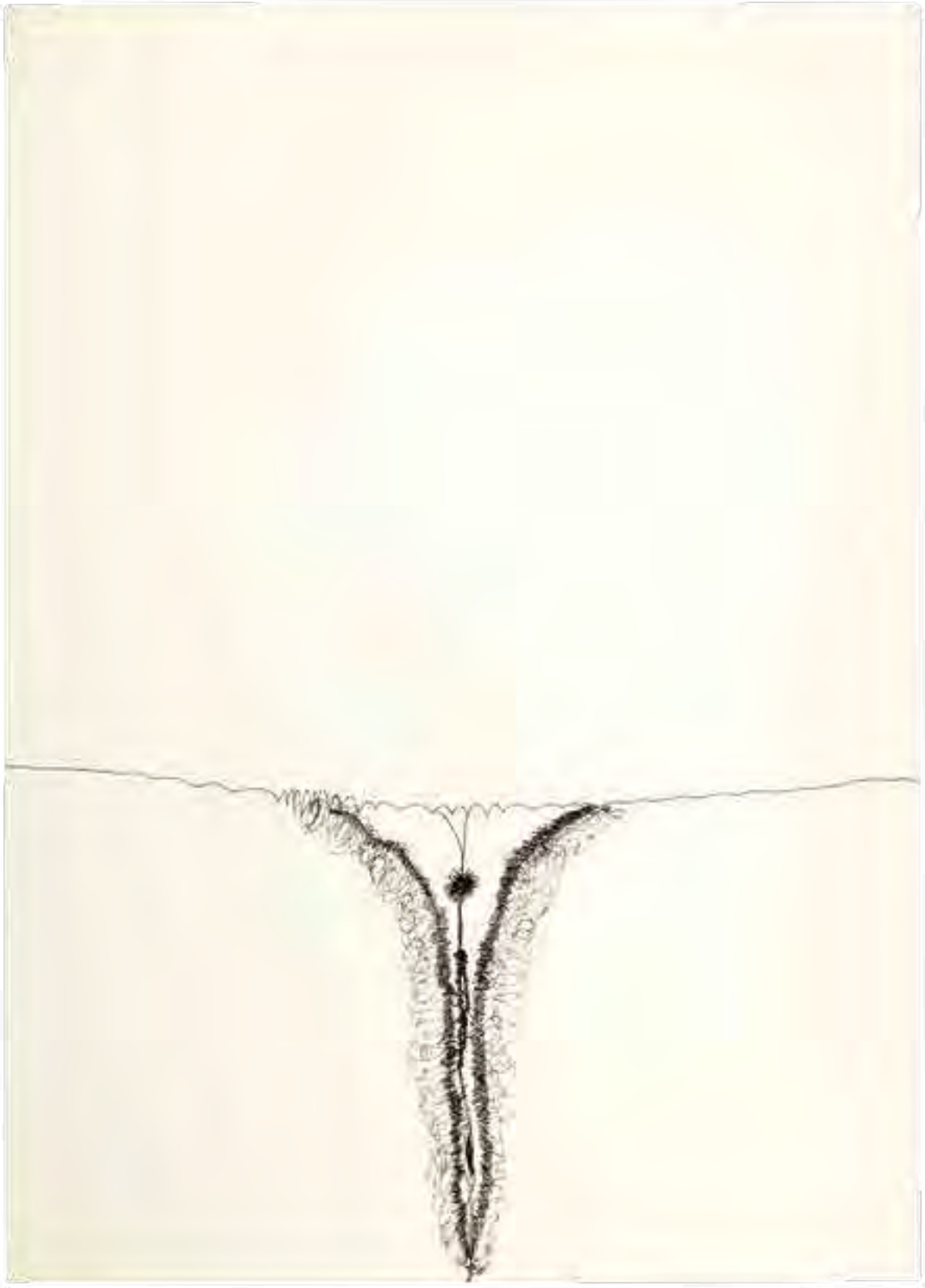
Untitled, 1970
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ⅝ in)

Untitled, 1970
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 9/16 in)

Mustafa, Poids et haltères,
1970
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 ⅝ x 9 ½ in)

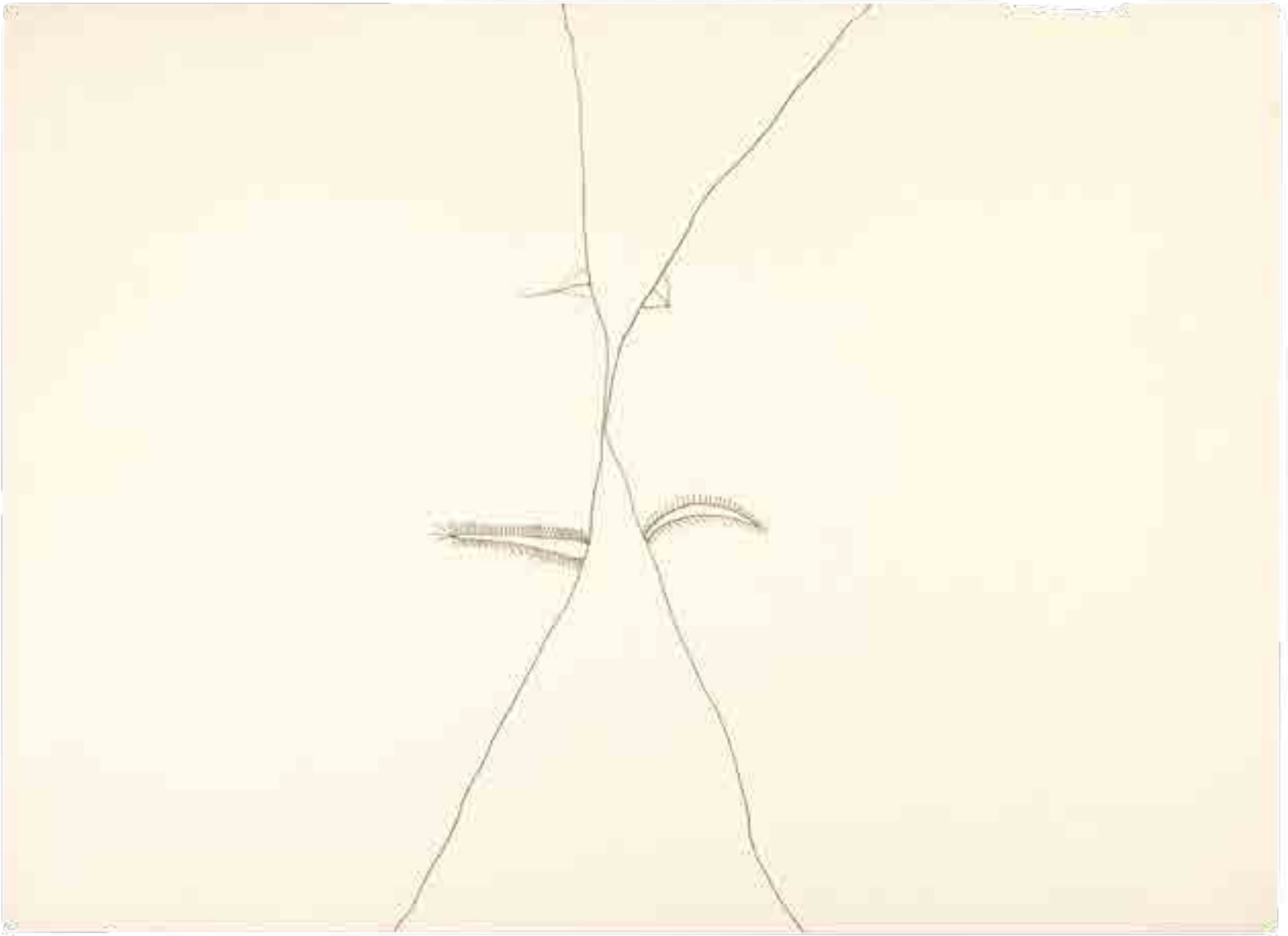


Couchée sur la colline, 1971
Ink on paper
26.6 x 34.3 cm (10 ½ x 13 ½ in)
Collection of Saleh Barakat, Lebanon



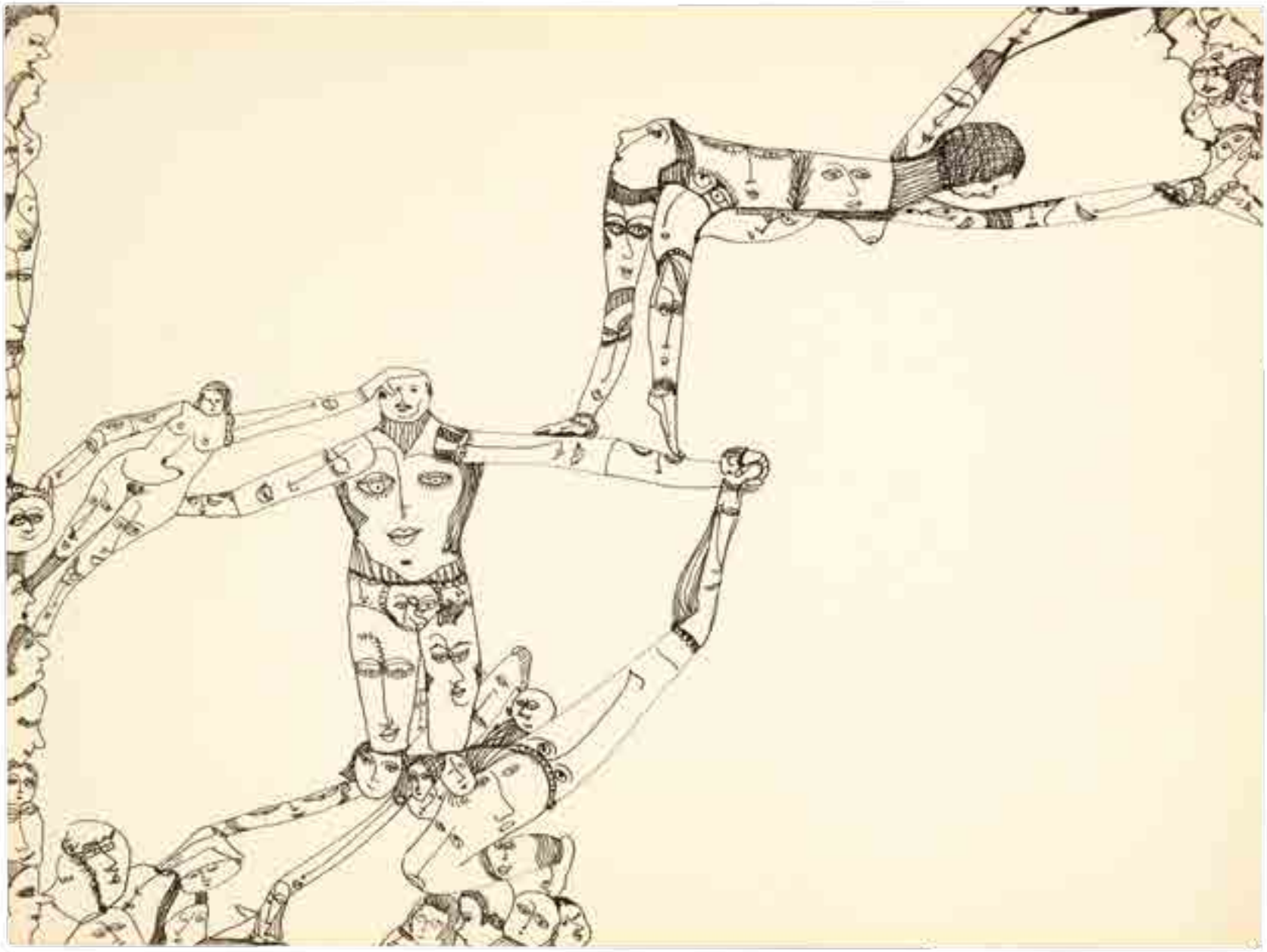
Self-Portrait (Bribes de corps),
1971
Ink on paper
35.1 x 25.1 cm (13 7/8 x 9 15/16 in)

Parenthèse II, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 33 cm (9 ½ x 13 in)



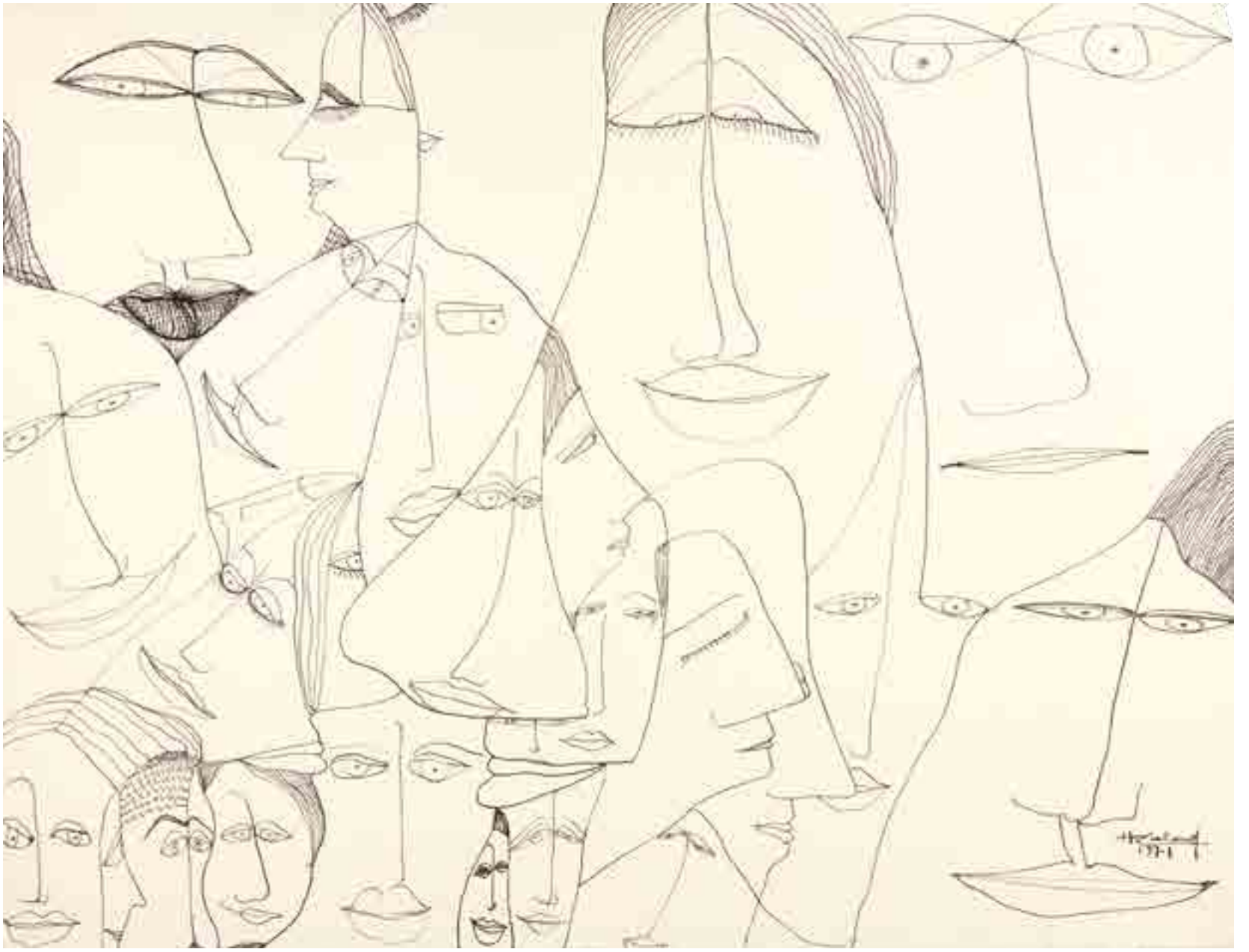
Upside Down, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 32.9 cm (9 7/16 x 13 in)

Partie carrée, 1971
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)

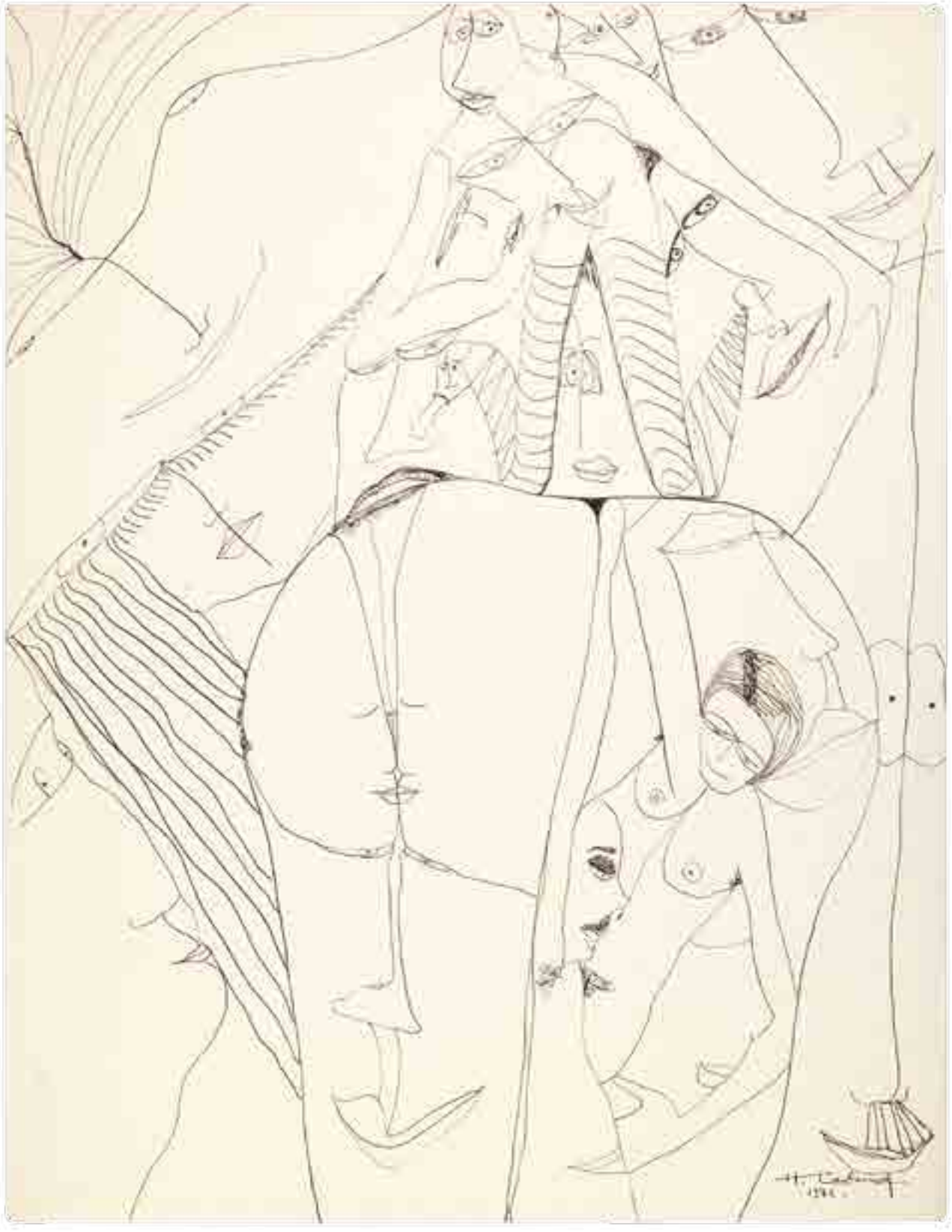


Mustafa acrobate, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ⅝ in)

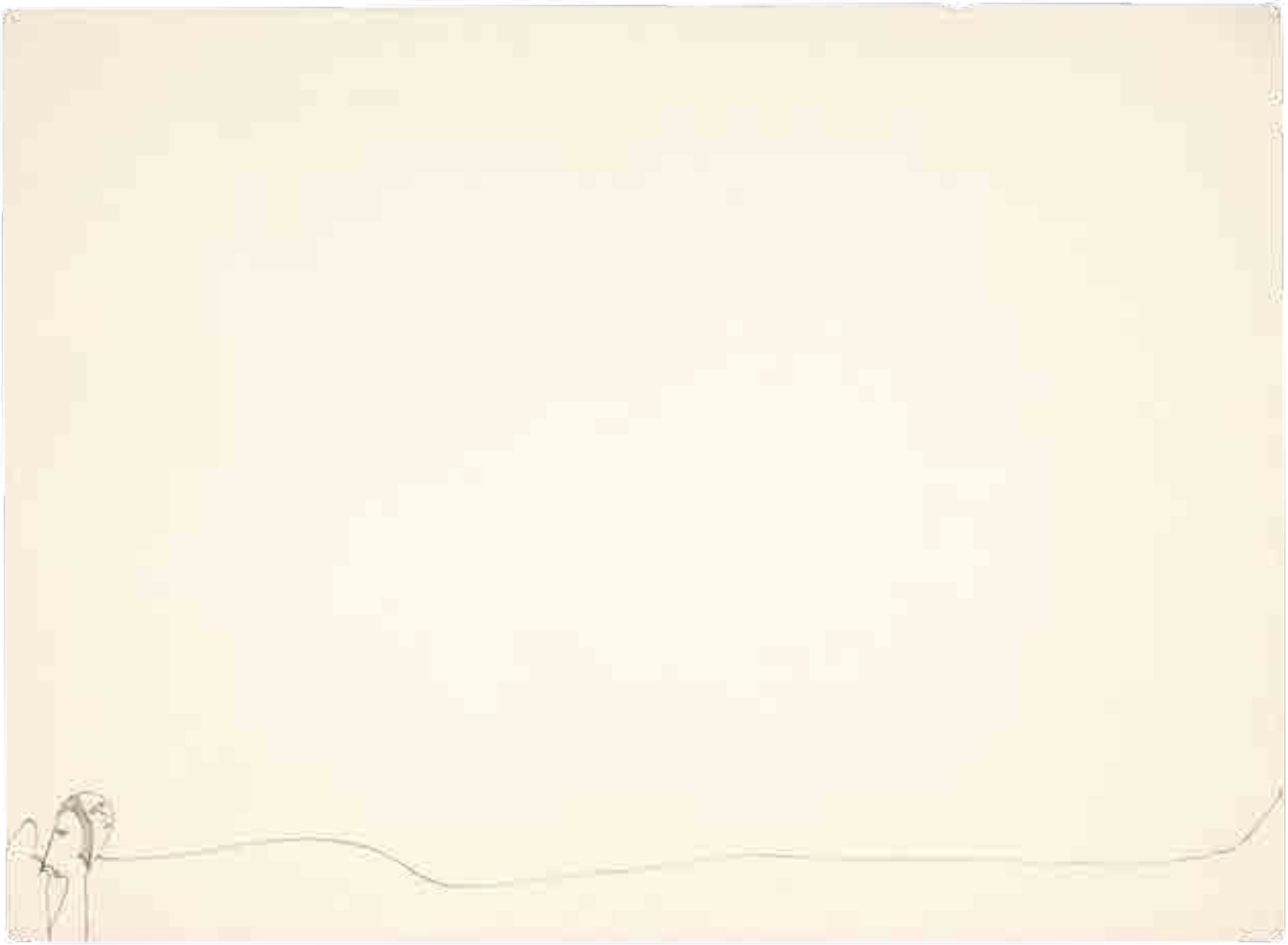
Paul, 1971
Ink on paper
35 x 27 cm (13 ¾ x 10 ⅝ in)



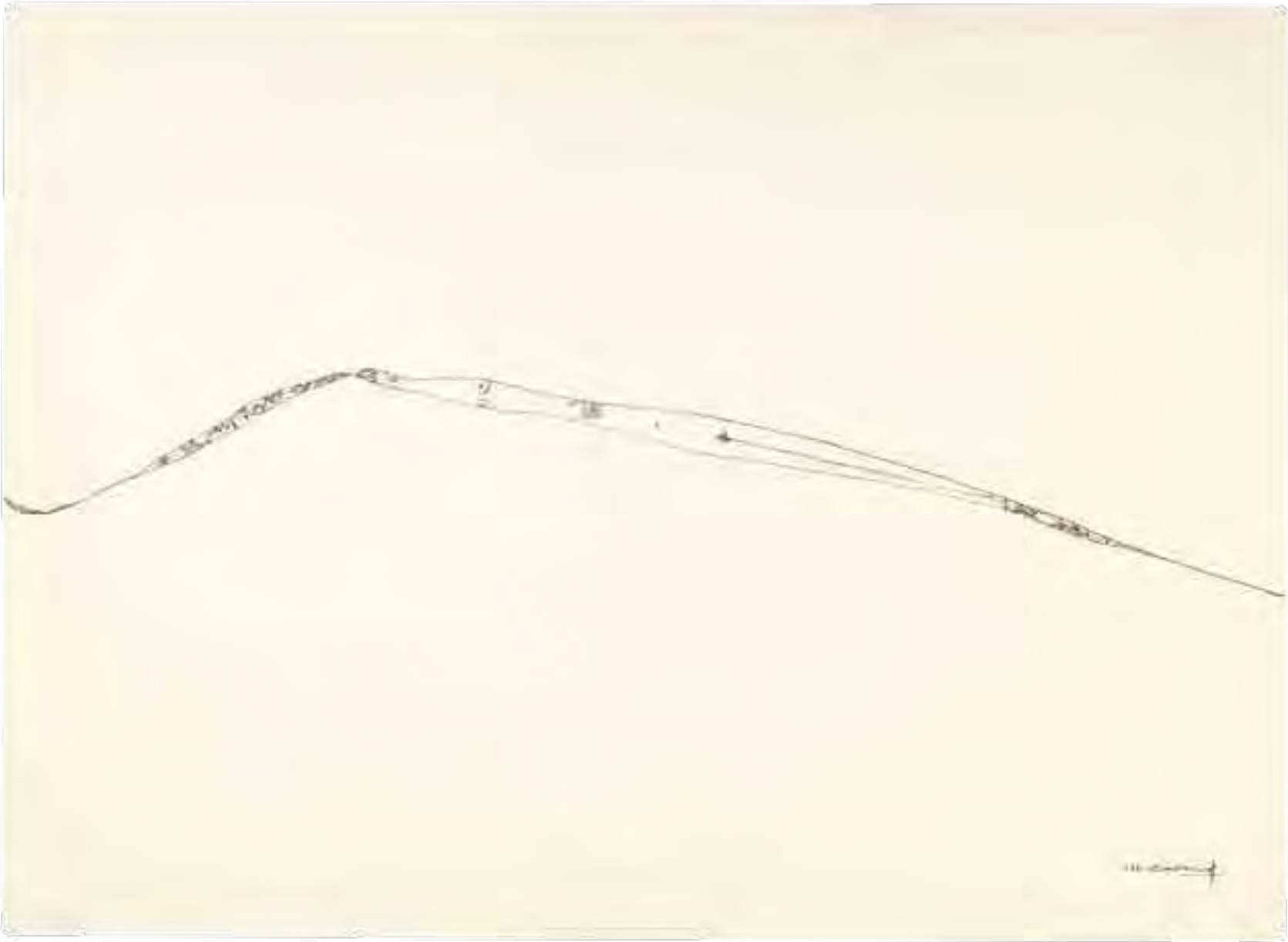
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)



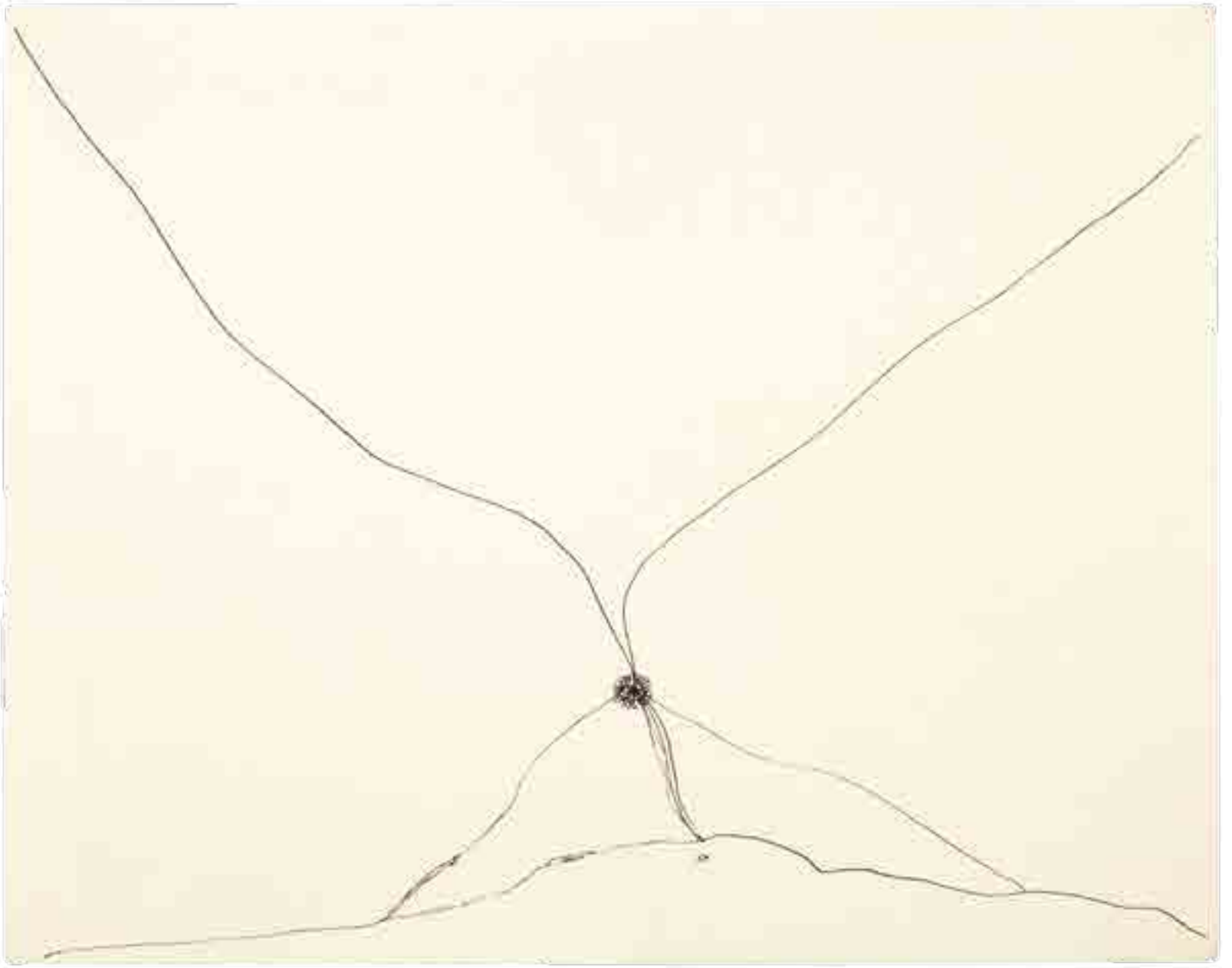
Cirque, 1971
Ink on paper
35 x 27 cm (13 ¾ x 10 ⅝ in)



Baiser volé, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 33 cm (9 3/8 x 13 in)

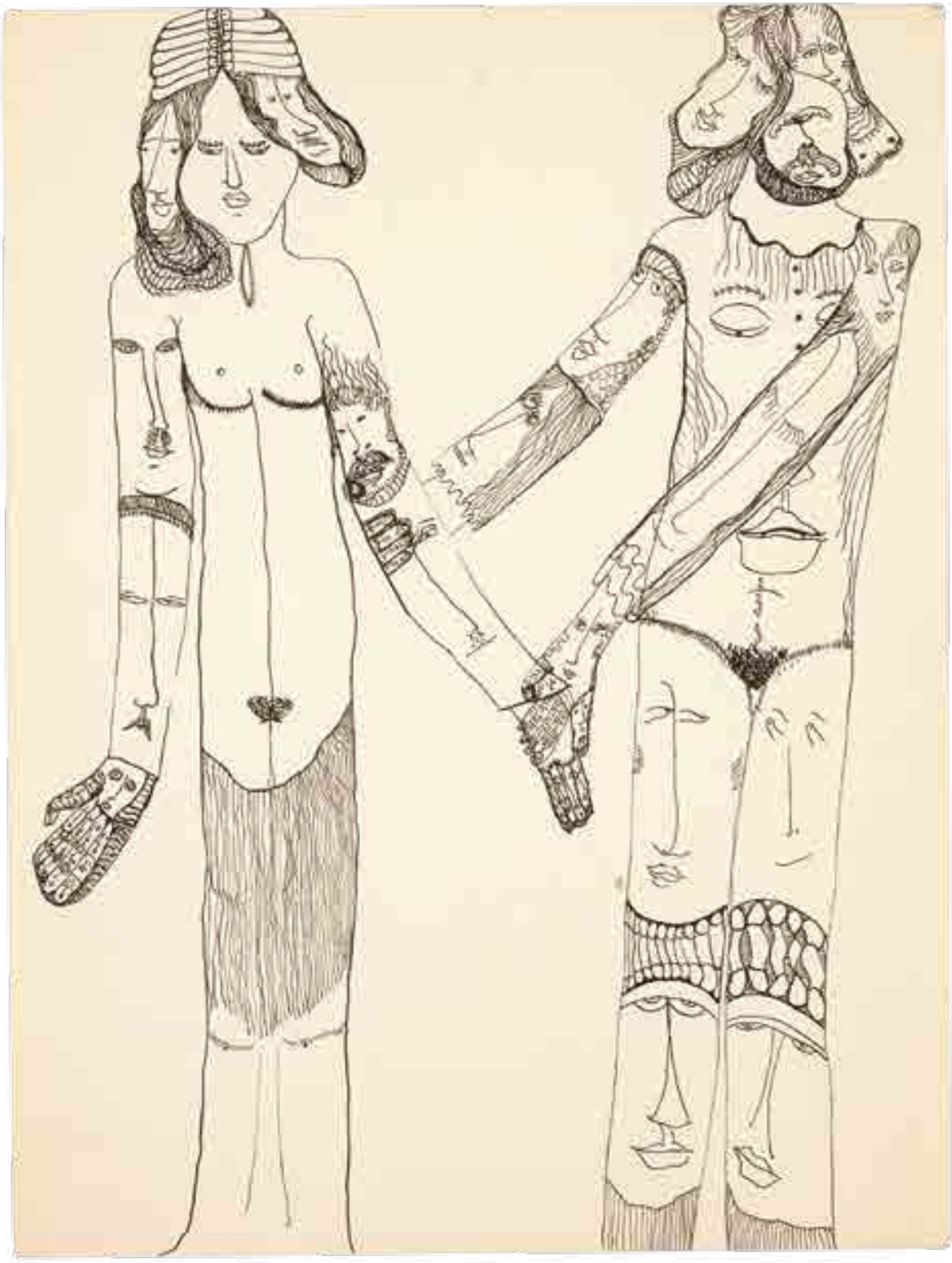


Compression, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 33 cm (9 7/16 x 13 in)



Parenthèse I, 1971
Ink on paper
19 x 24.1 cm (7 ½ x 9 7⁄16 in)

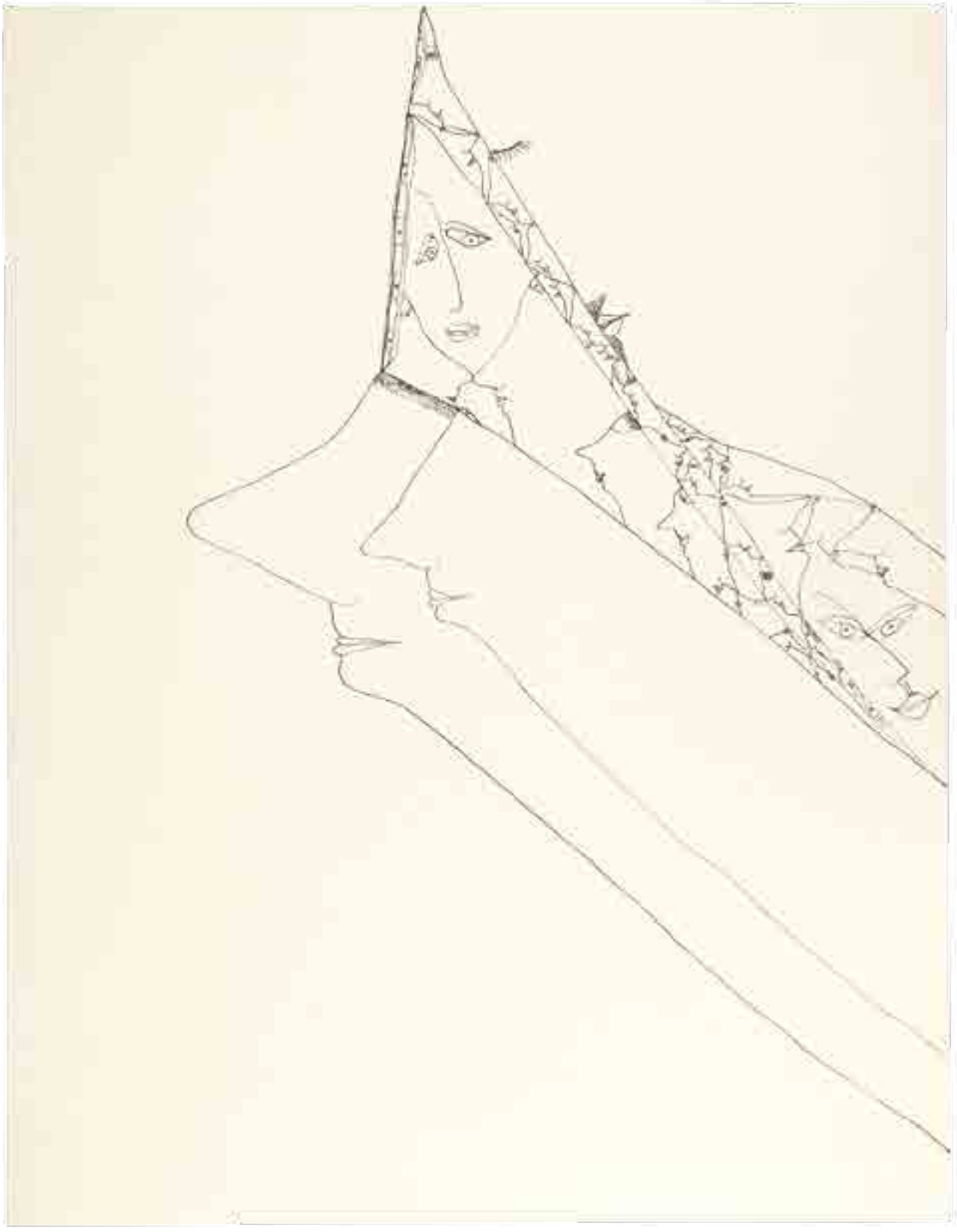
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



1er Dessin encre de Chine, hiver, 1971
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 ½ x 9 ⅜ in)

Sur la musique de Francois Boyle,
1971
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 9⁄16 x 9 7⁄16 in)

Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



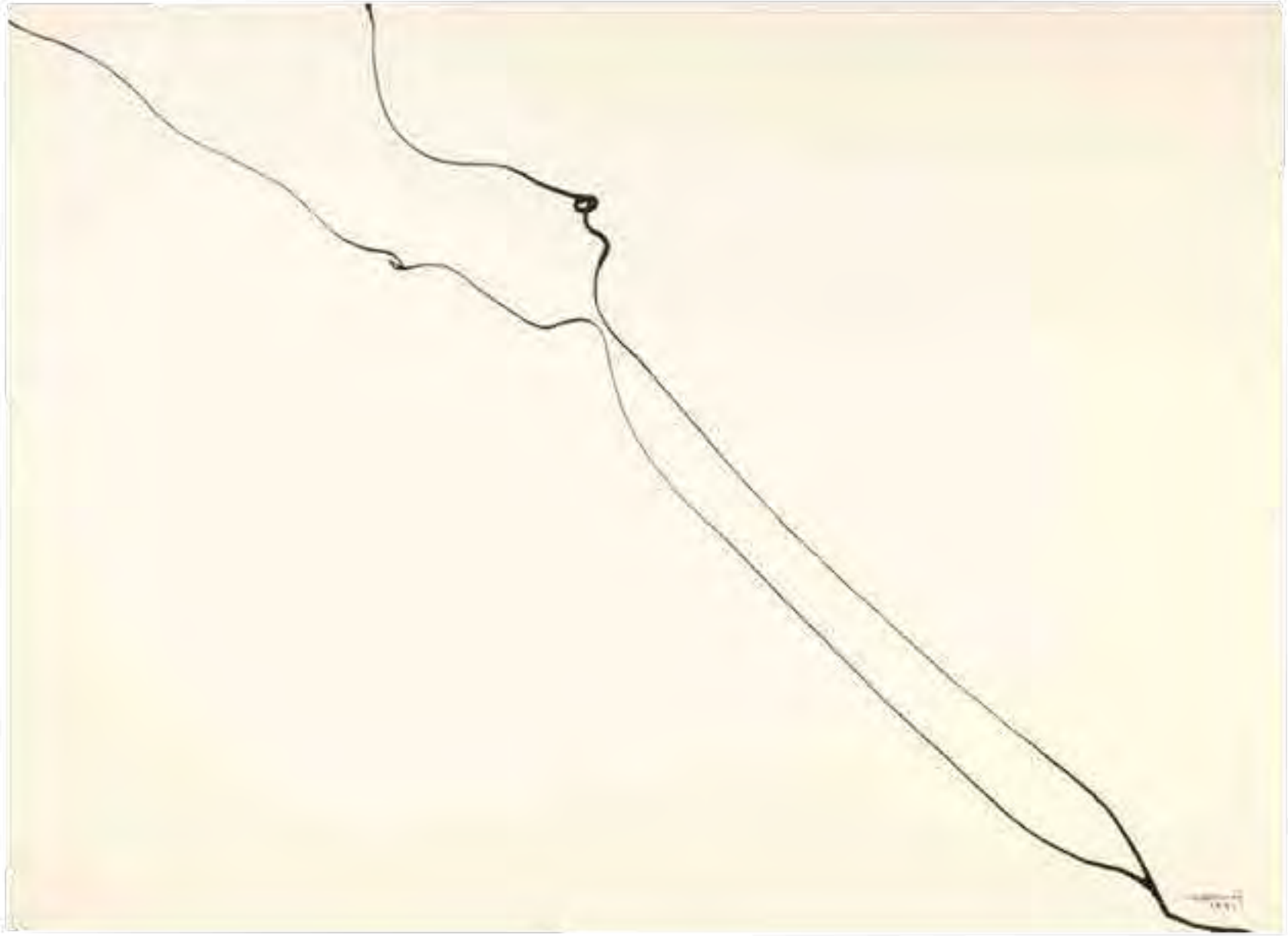
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
34.9 x 27 cm (13 3/4 x 10 5/8 in)

Fente, 1971
Ink on paper
24.1 x 31.7 cm (9 ½ x 12 ½ in)

Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
34.8 x 25.2 cm (13 3/4 x 9 15/16 in)

Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
50 x 65 cm (19 ¾ x 25 ½ in)

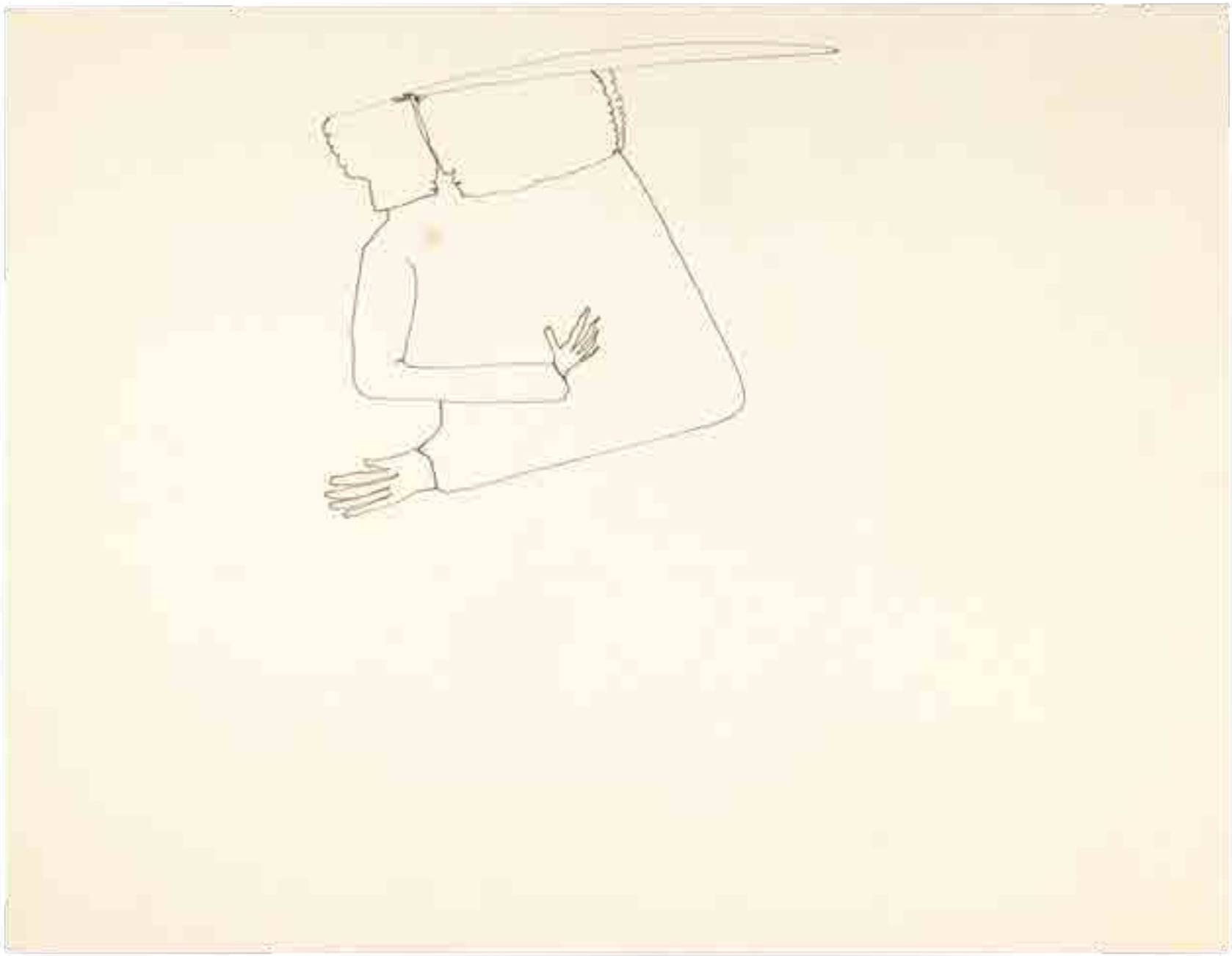
Il se passe des choses, 1971
Ink on paper
50 x 65 cm (19 5/8 x 25 1/2 in)



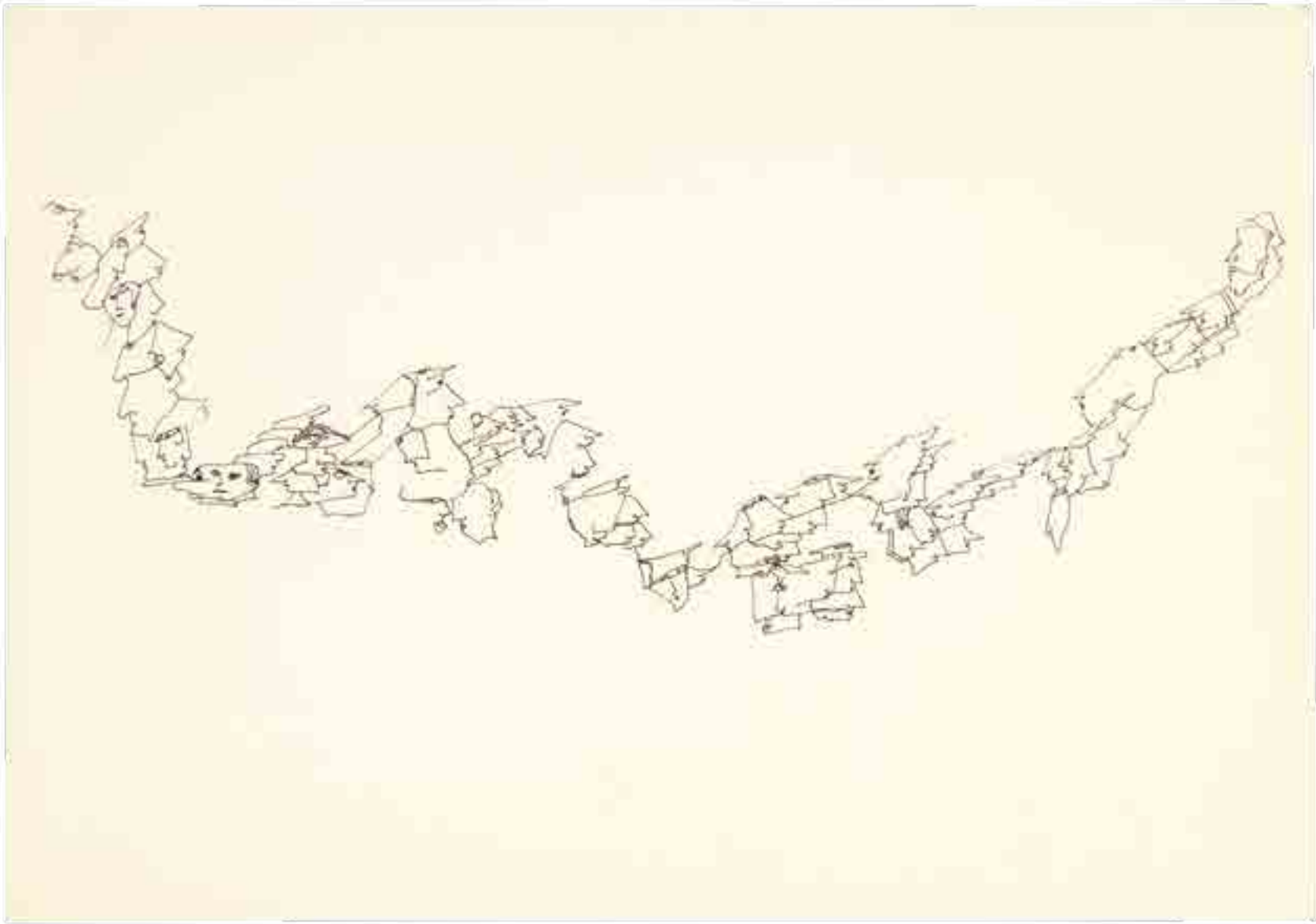
Stretched Kiss, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 33 cm (9 7/16 x 13 in)

Partie à trois, 1971
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 3/8 in)

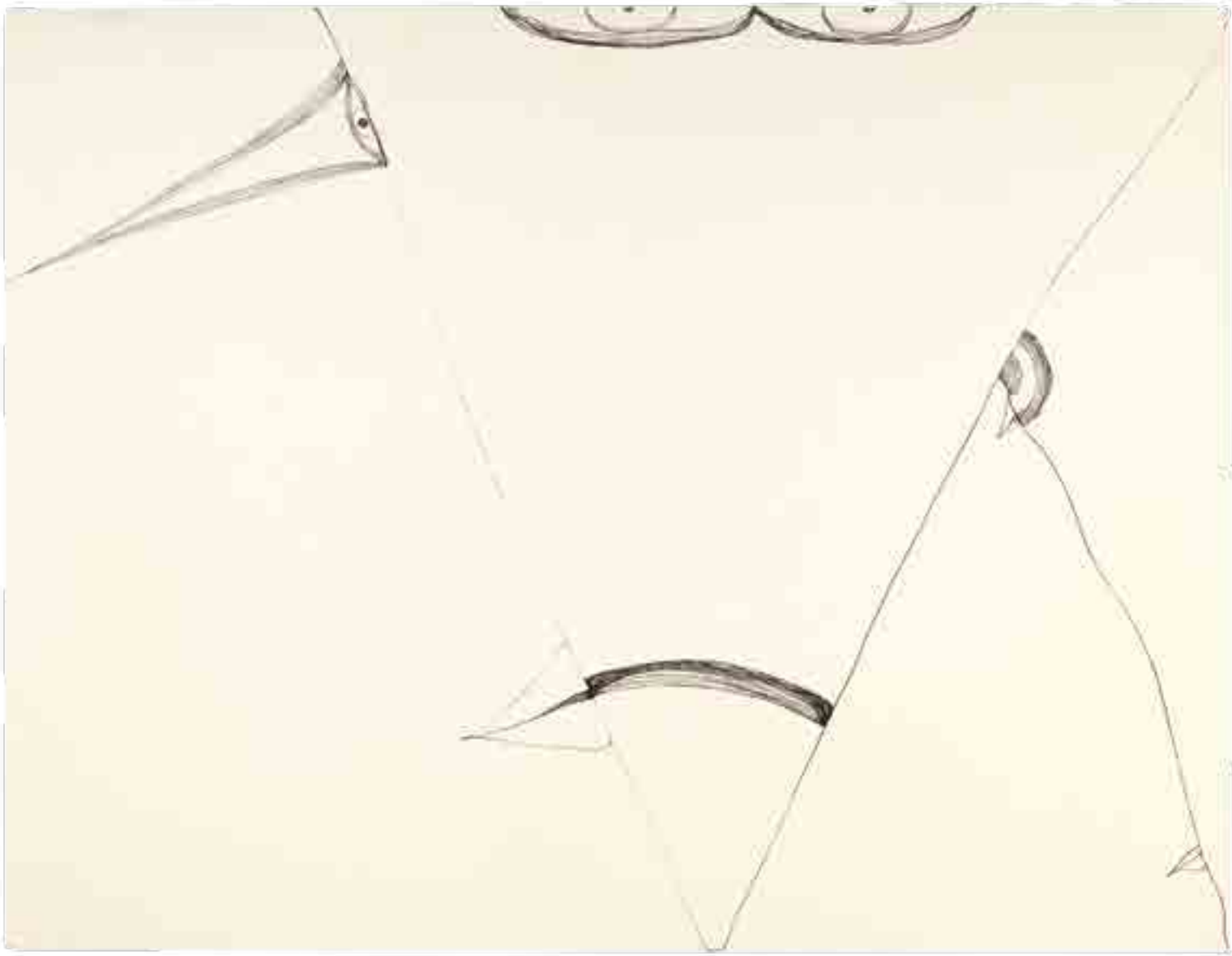
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 7/16 in)



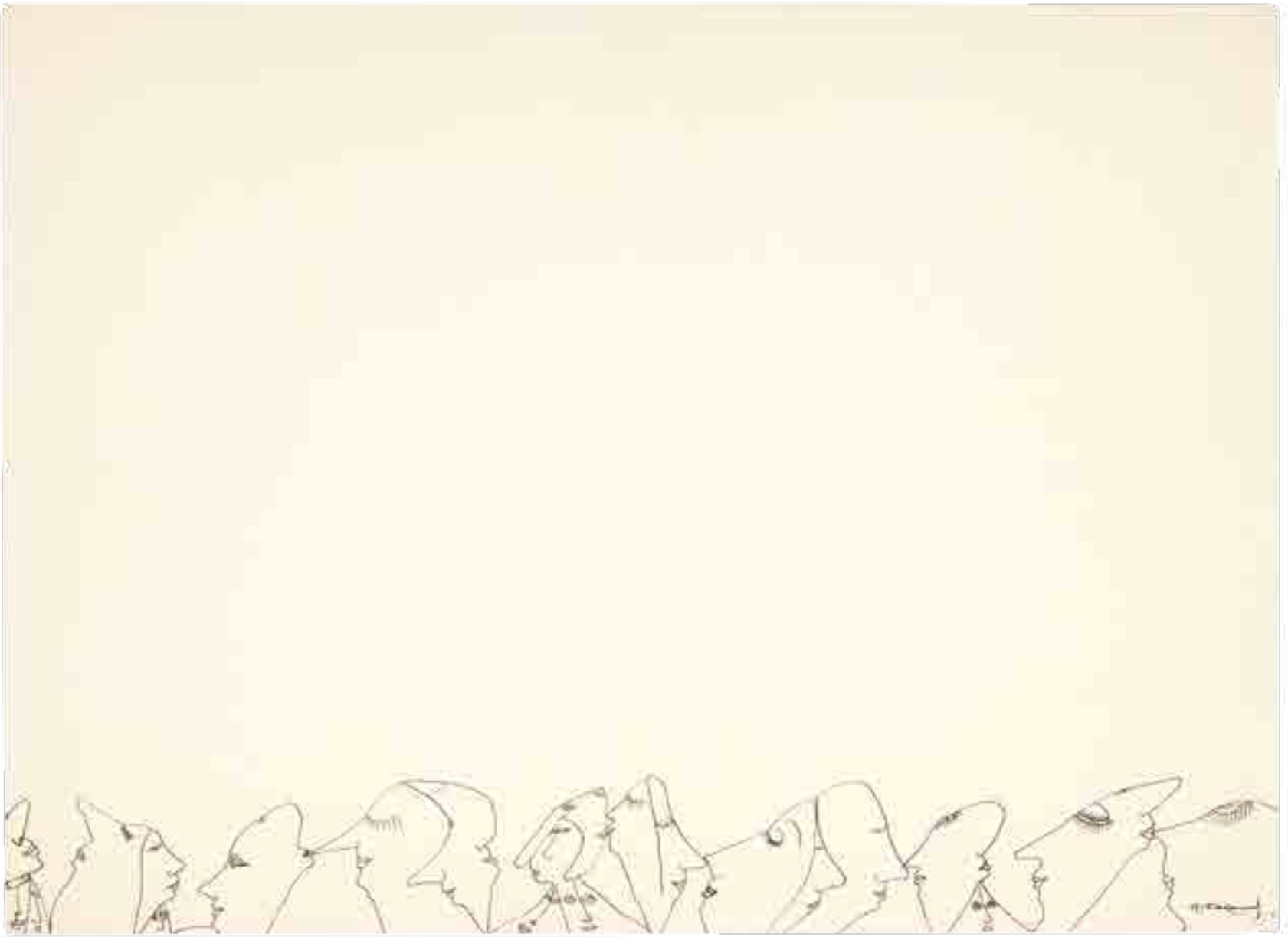
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 31 cm (9 7/16 x 12 3/16 in)



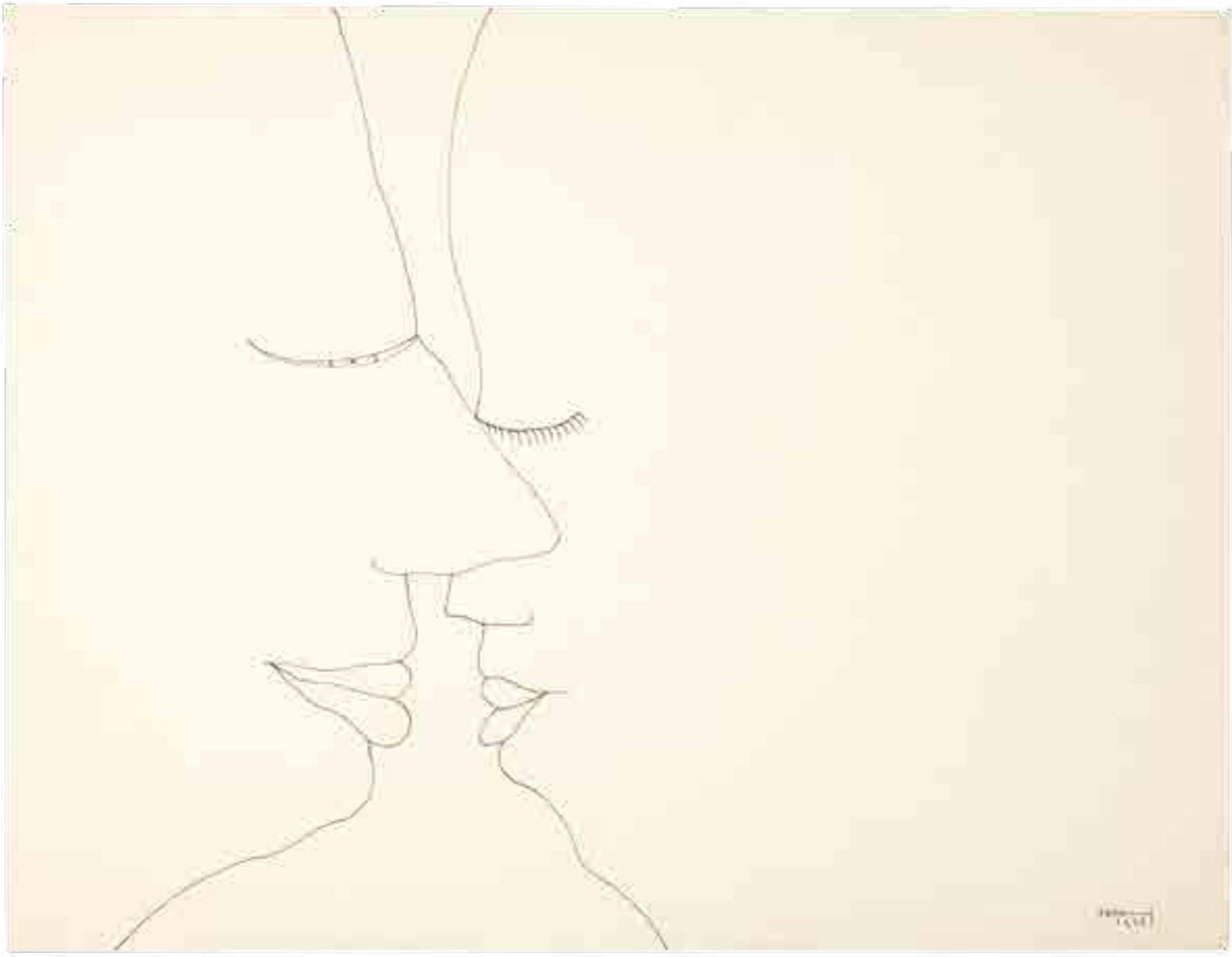
Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
24 x 34 cm (9 ½ x 13 ⅜ in)



Untitled, 1971
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)



Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
24.1 x 33 cm (9 ½ x 13 in)

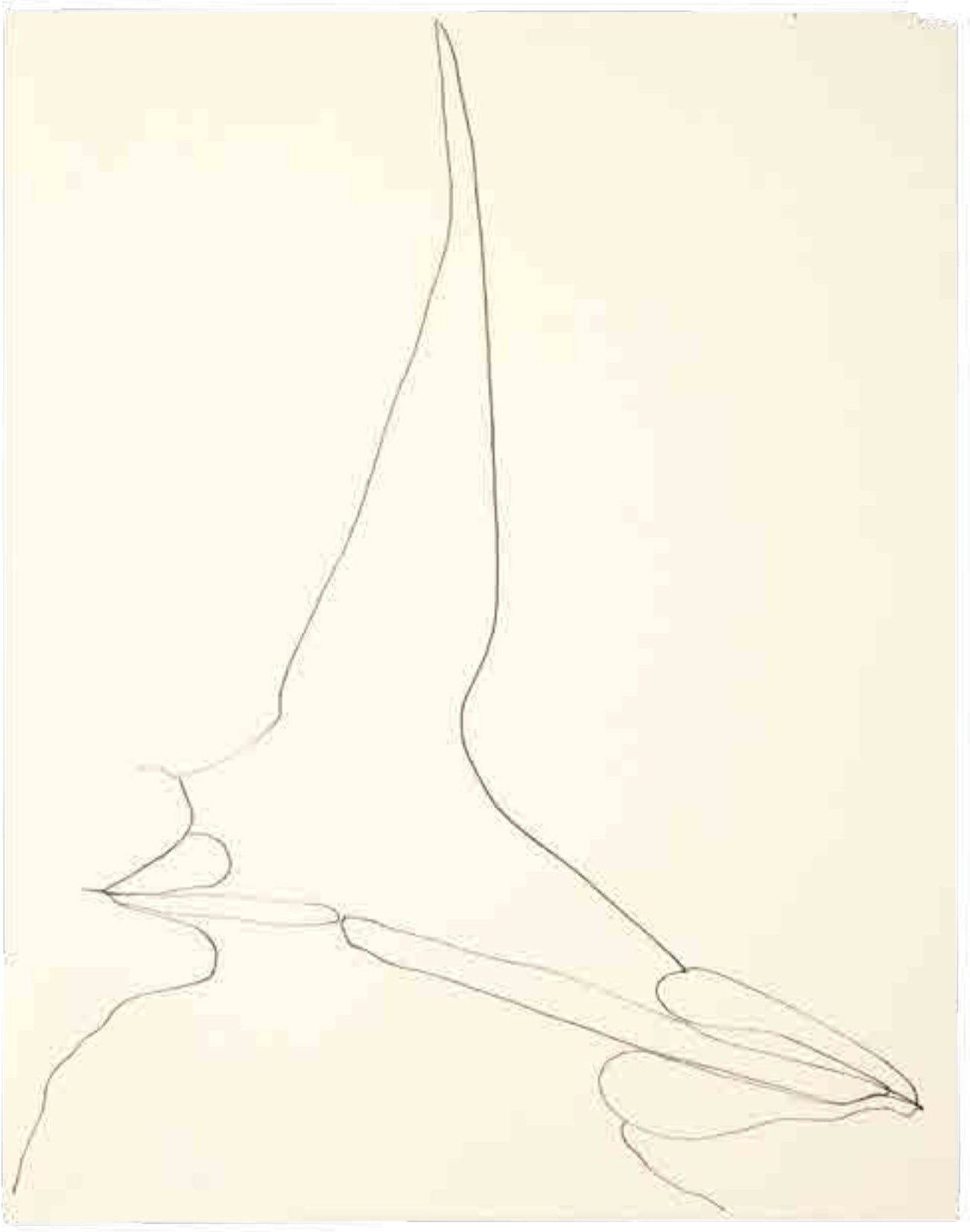


Bouches, 1972
Ink on paper
26.7 x 34.8 cm (10 9/16 x 13 3/4 in)

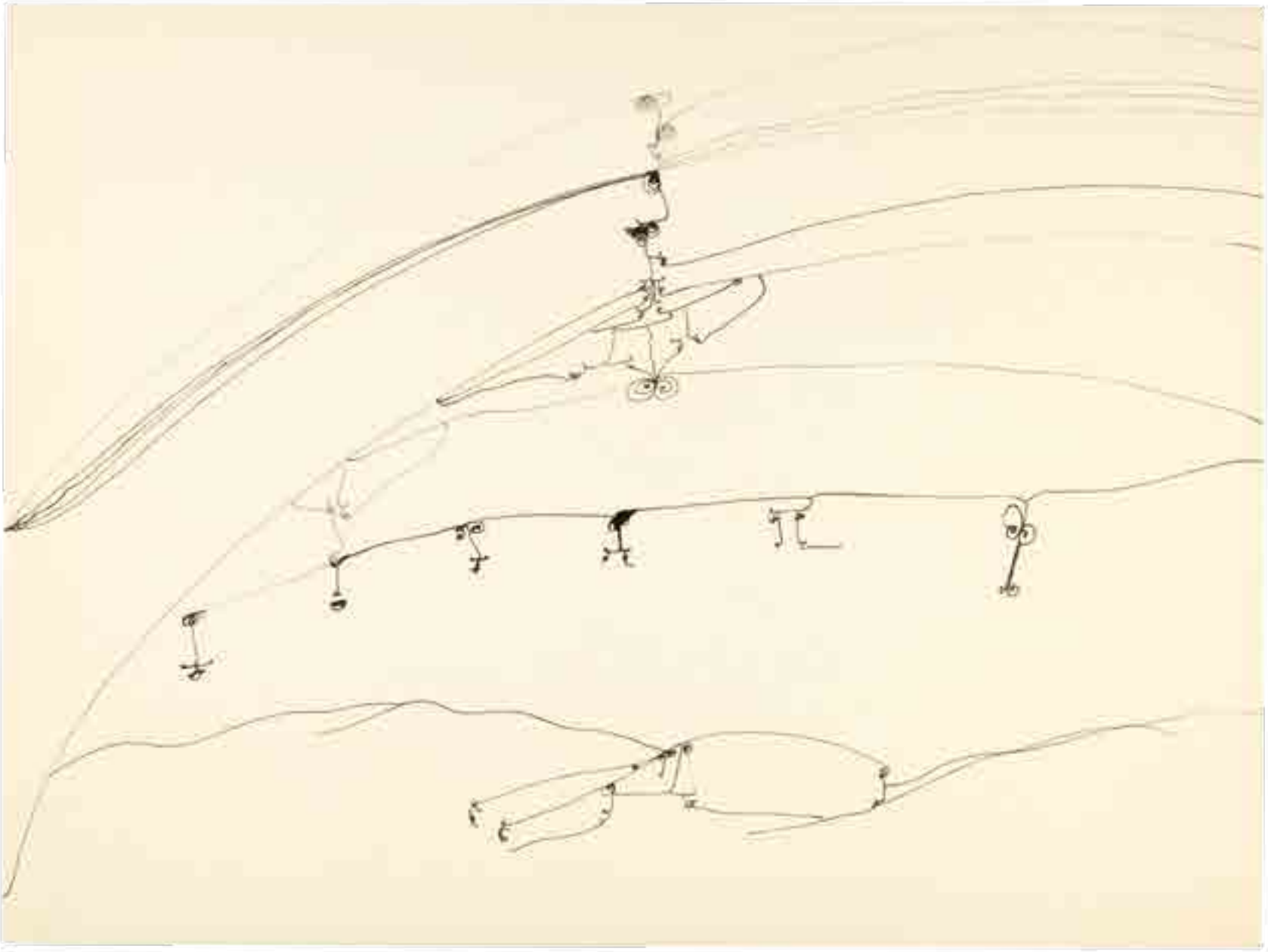
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
38 x 46 cm (15 x 18 ⅛ in)

Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
33 x 24 cm (13 x 9 7/16 in)

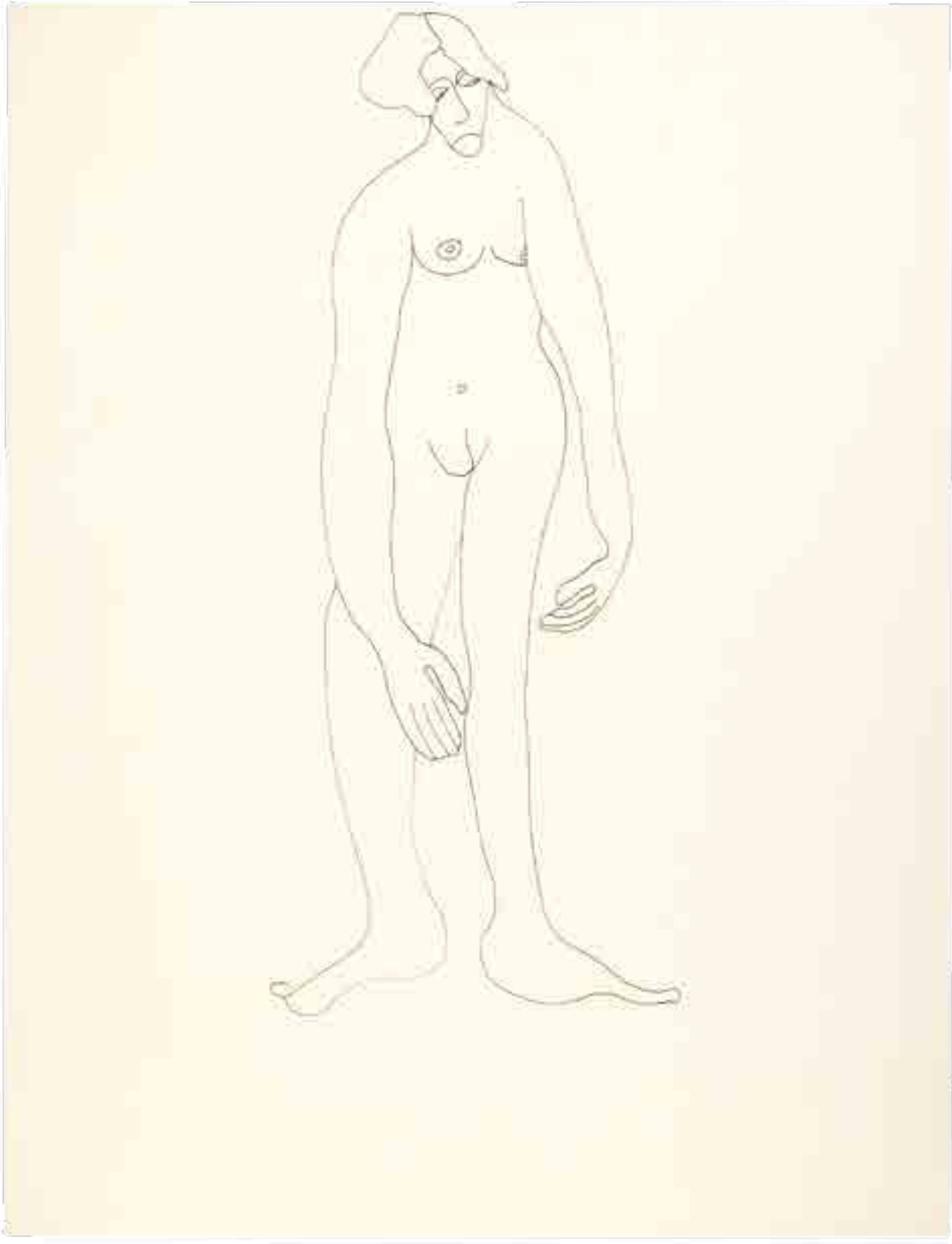
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)



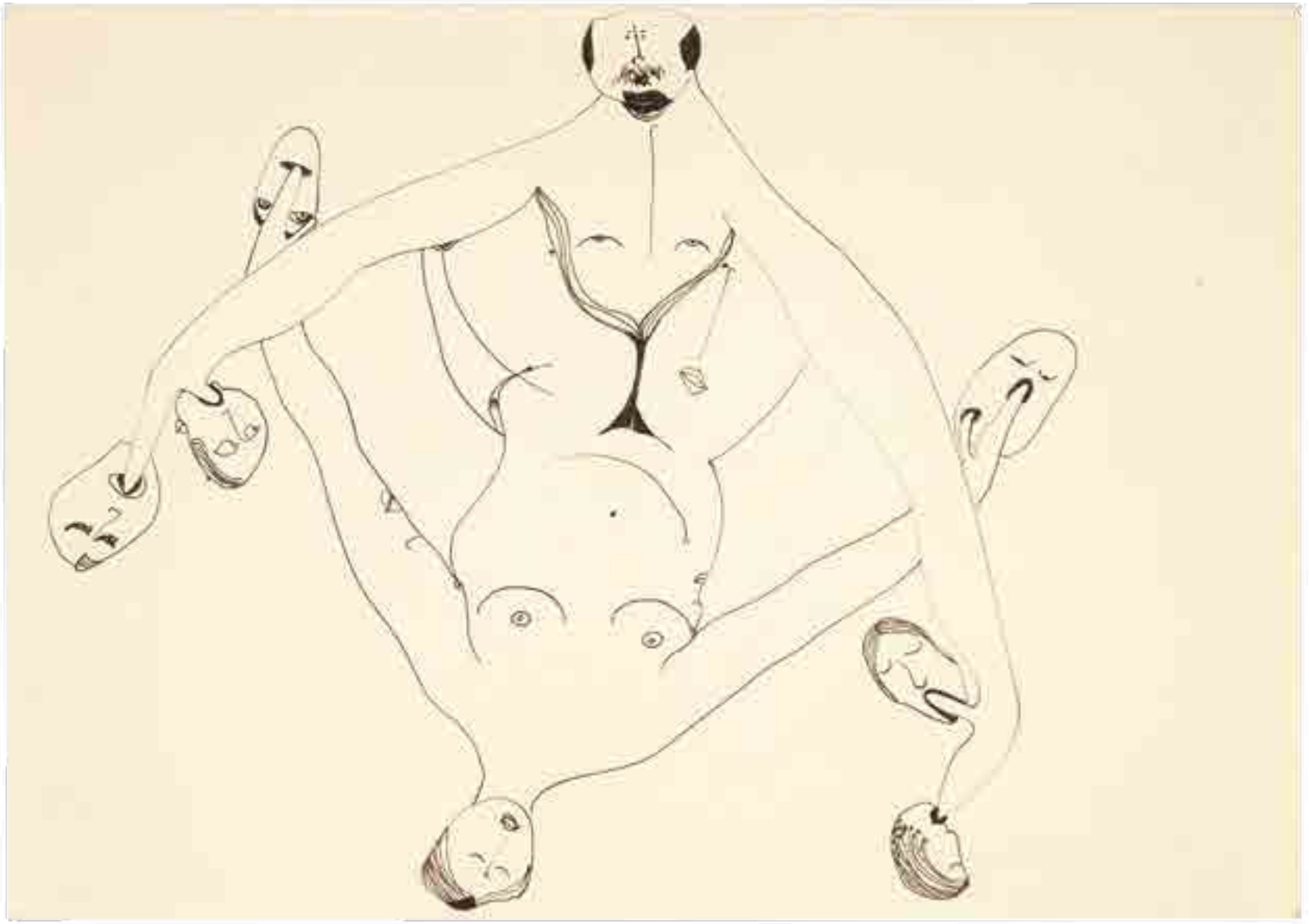
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
23.9 x 18.8 cm (9 7/16 x 7 7/16 in)



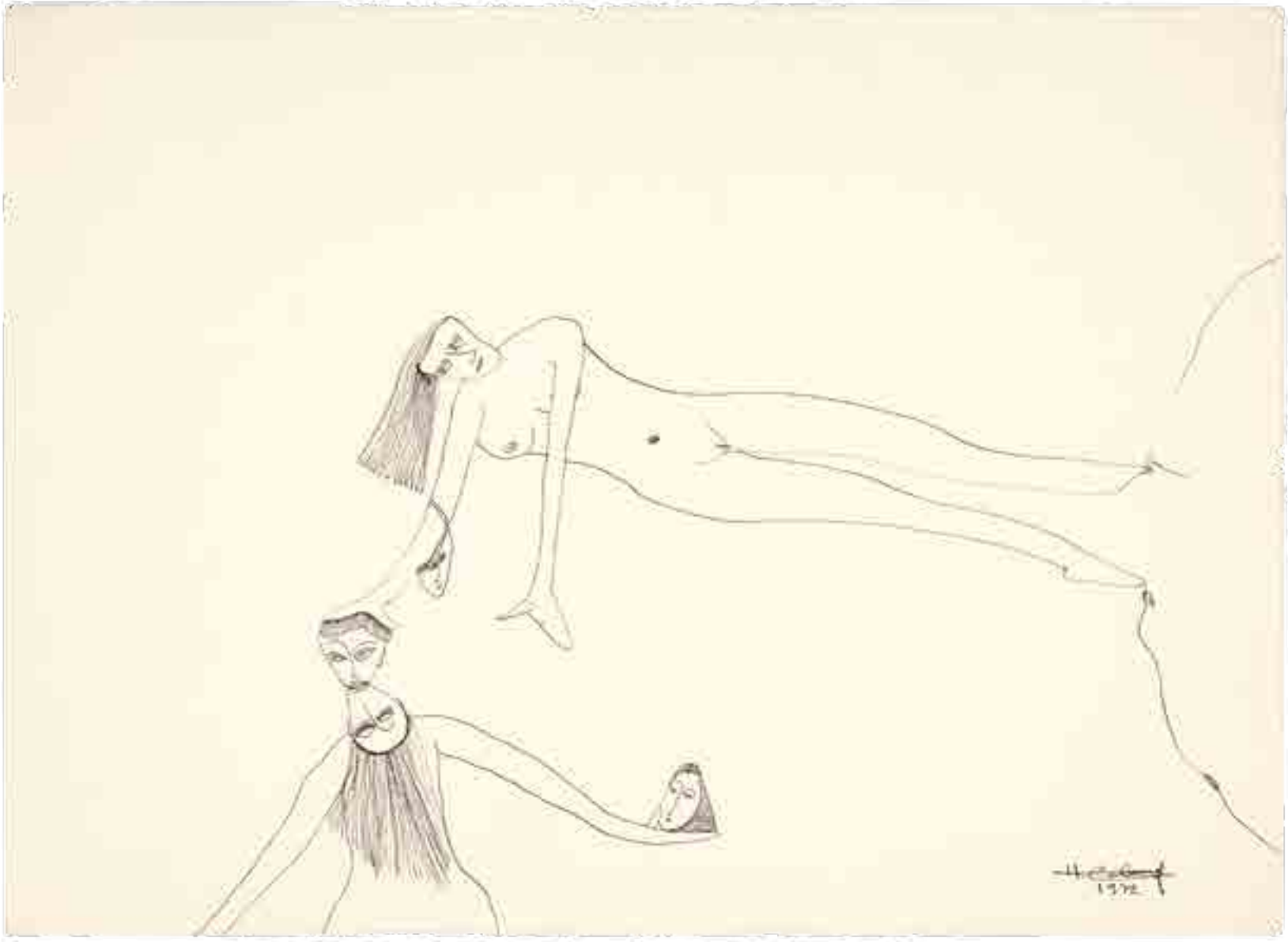
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
23.9 x 32 cm (9 3/8 x 12 5/8 in)



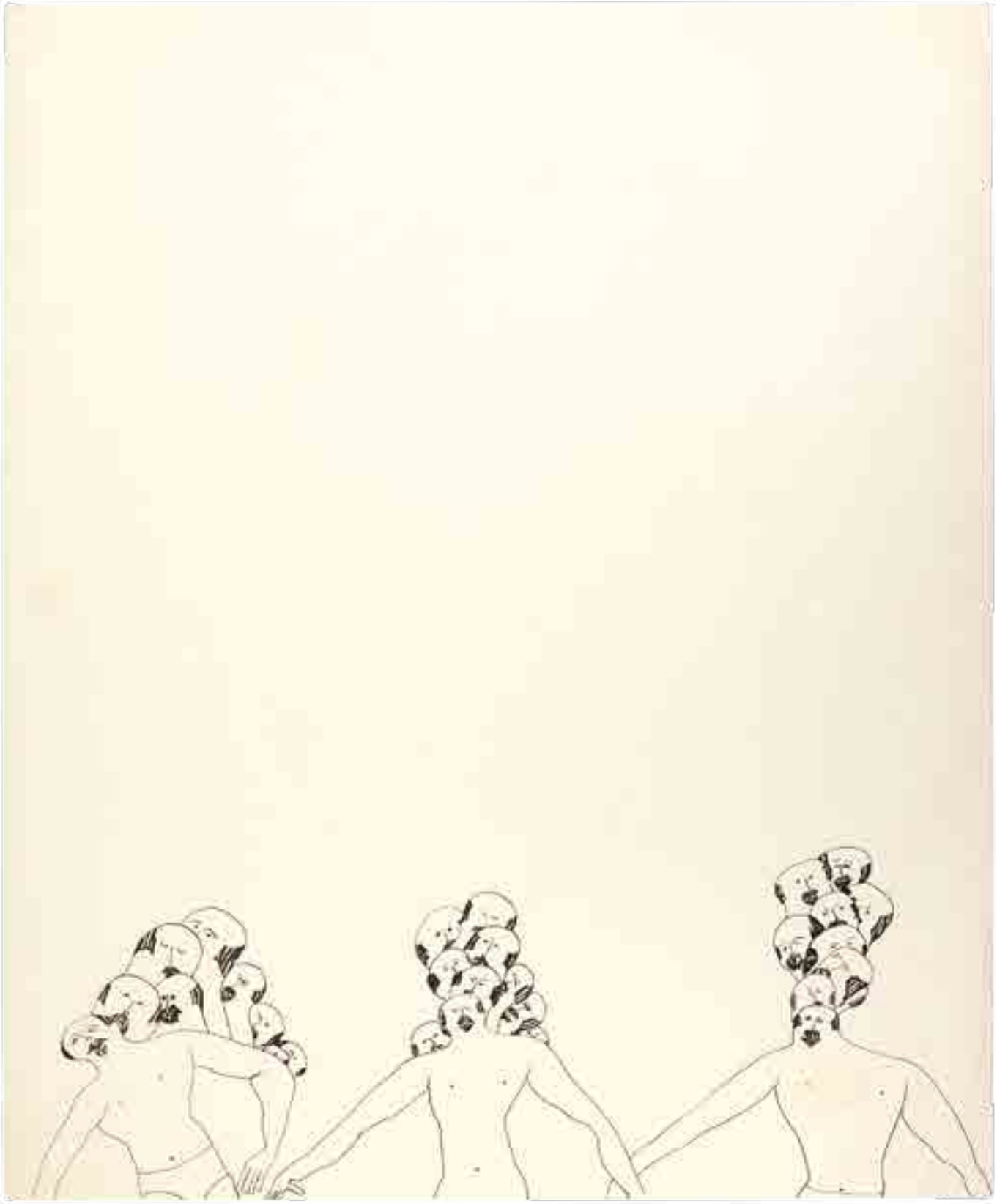
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
34.8 x 26.7 cm (13 11/16 x 10 ½ in)



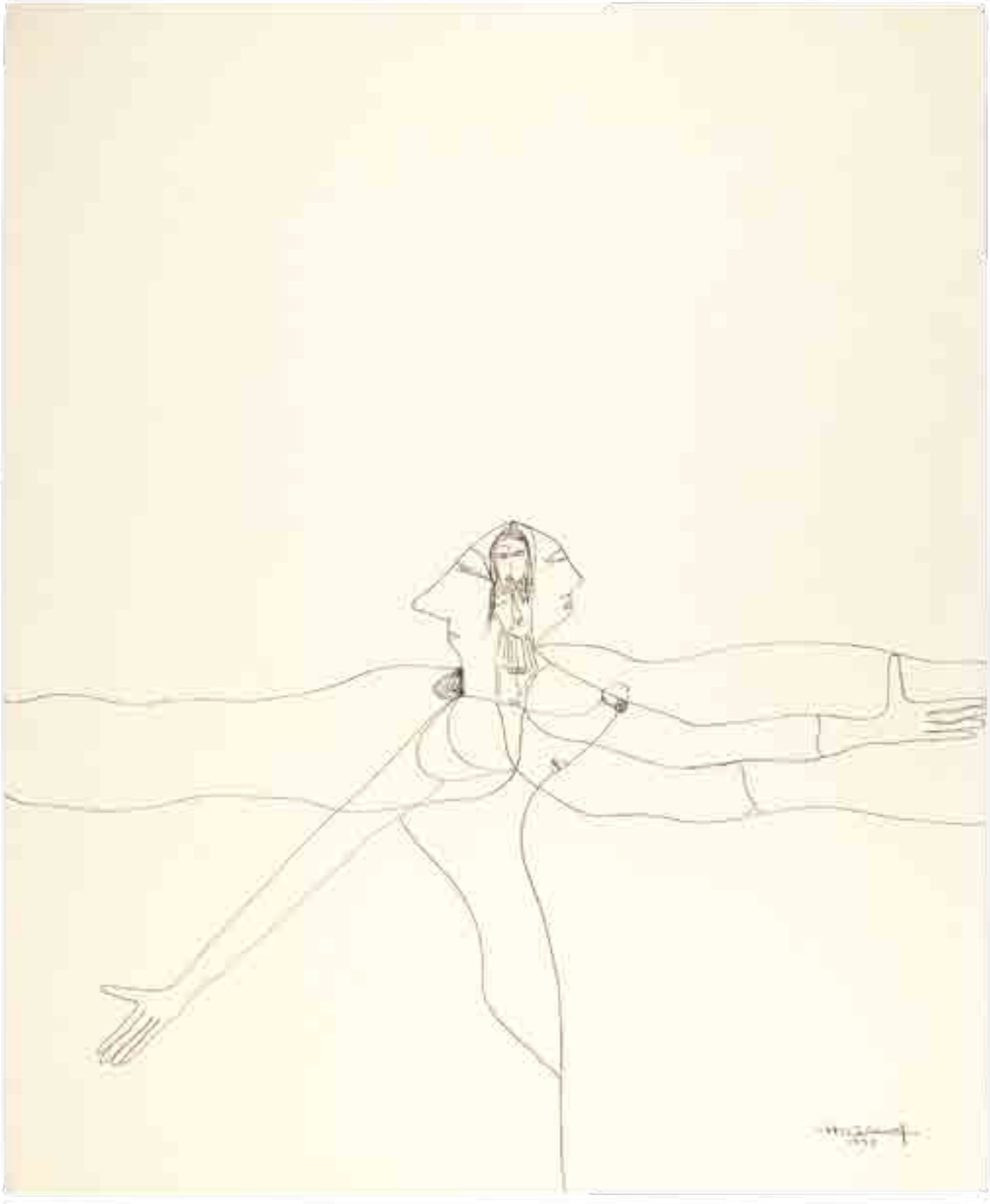
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
21 x 29.5 cm (8 ¼ x 11 ¾ in)



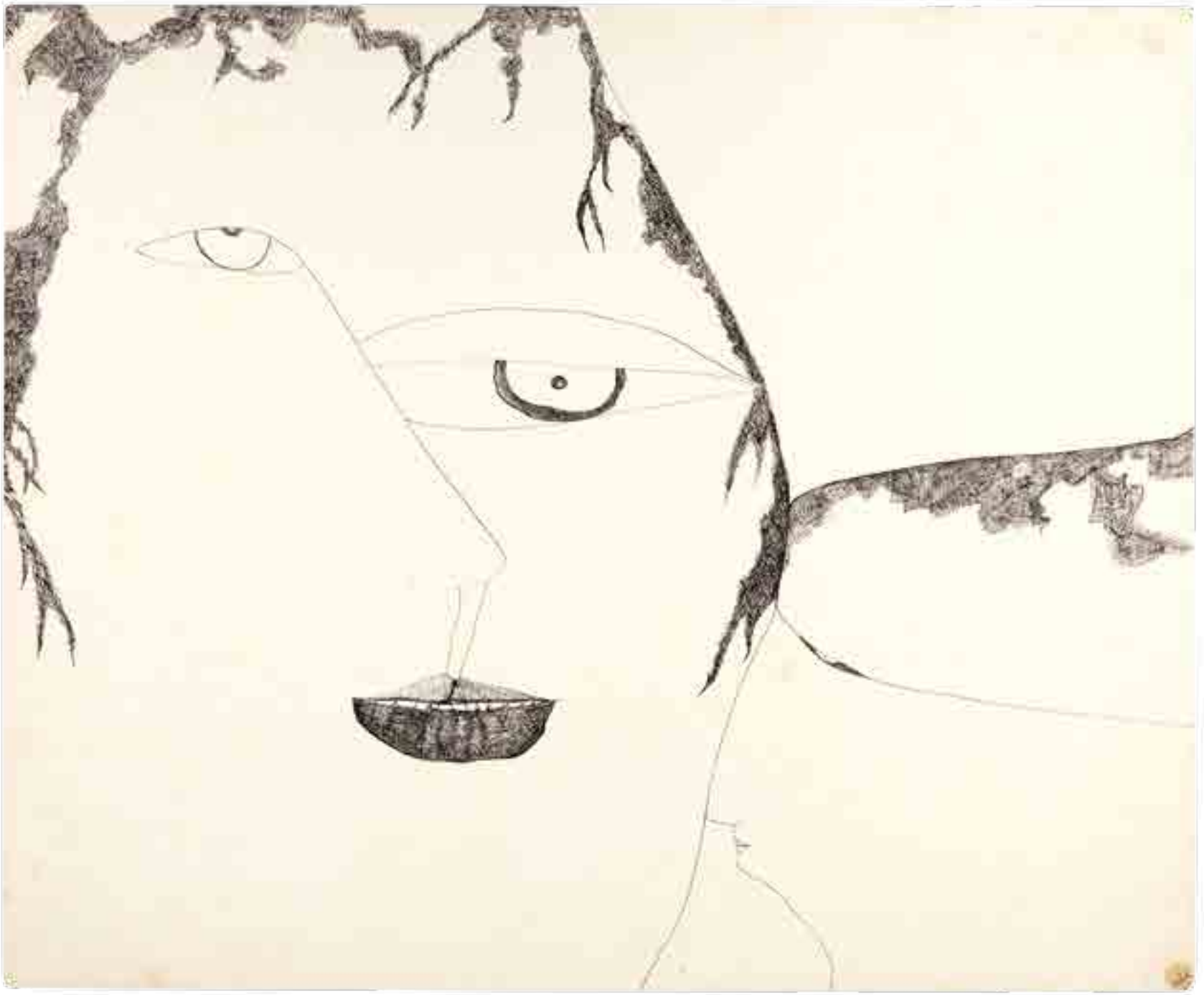
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
24 x 33 cm (9 3/8 x 13 in)



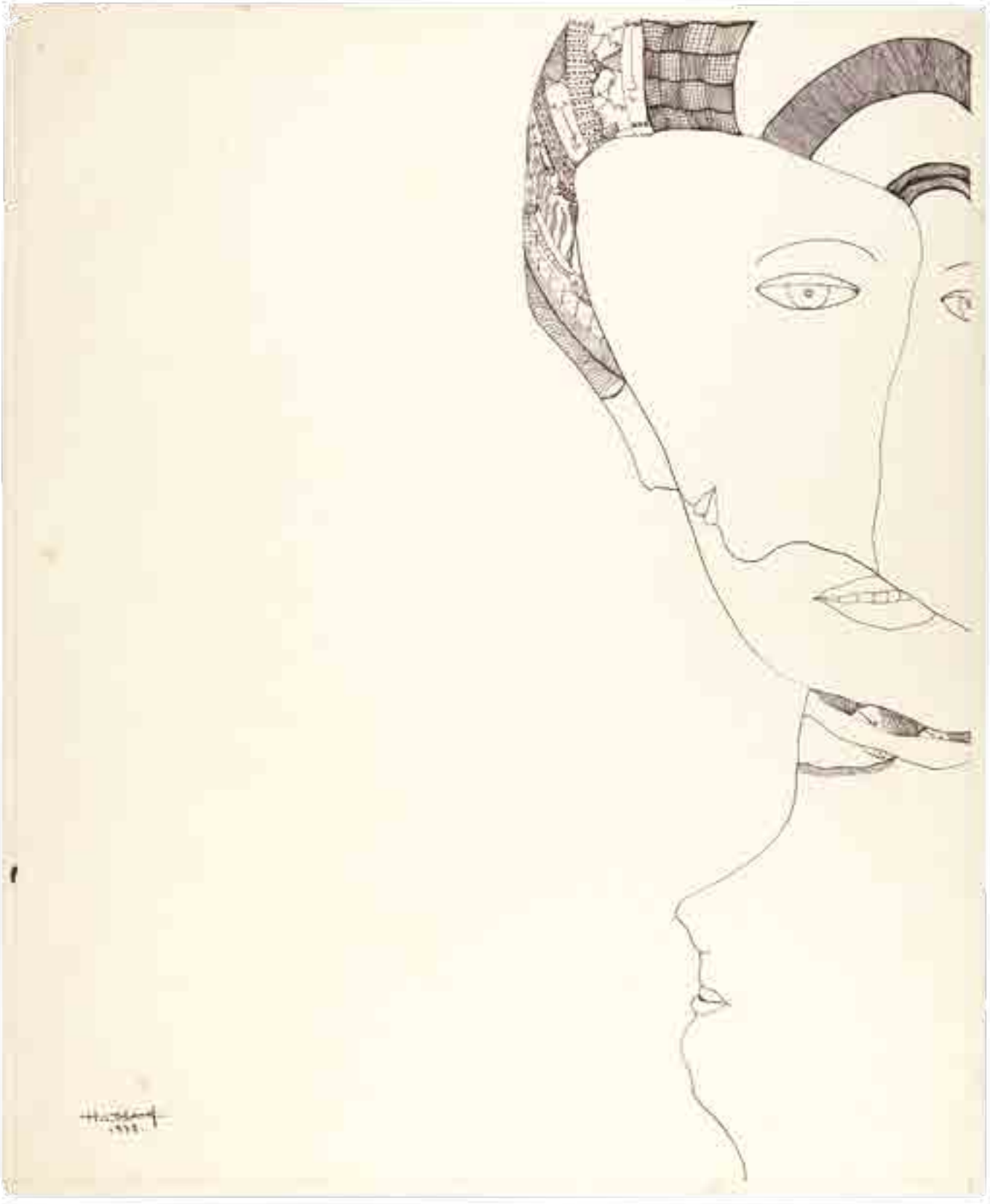
Mustafa haltérophile, 1972
Ink on paper
46 x 38 cm (18 1/8 x 14 15/16 in)



Gala gala, 1972
Ink on paper
46 x 38 cm (18 1/8 x 14 7/8 in)

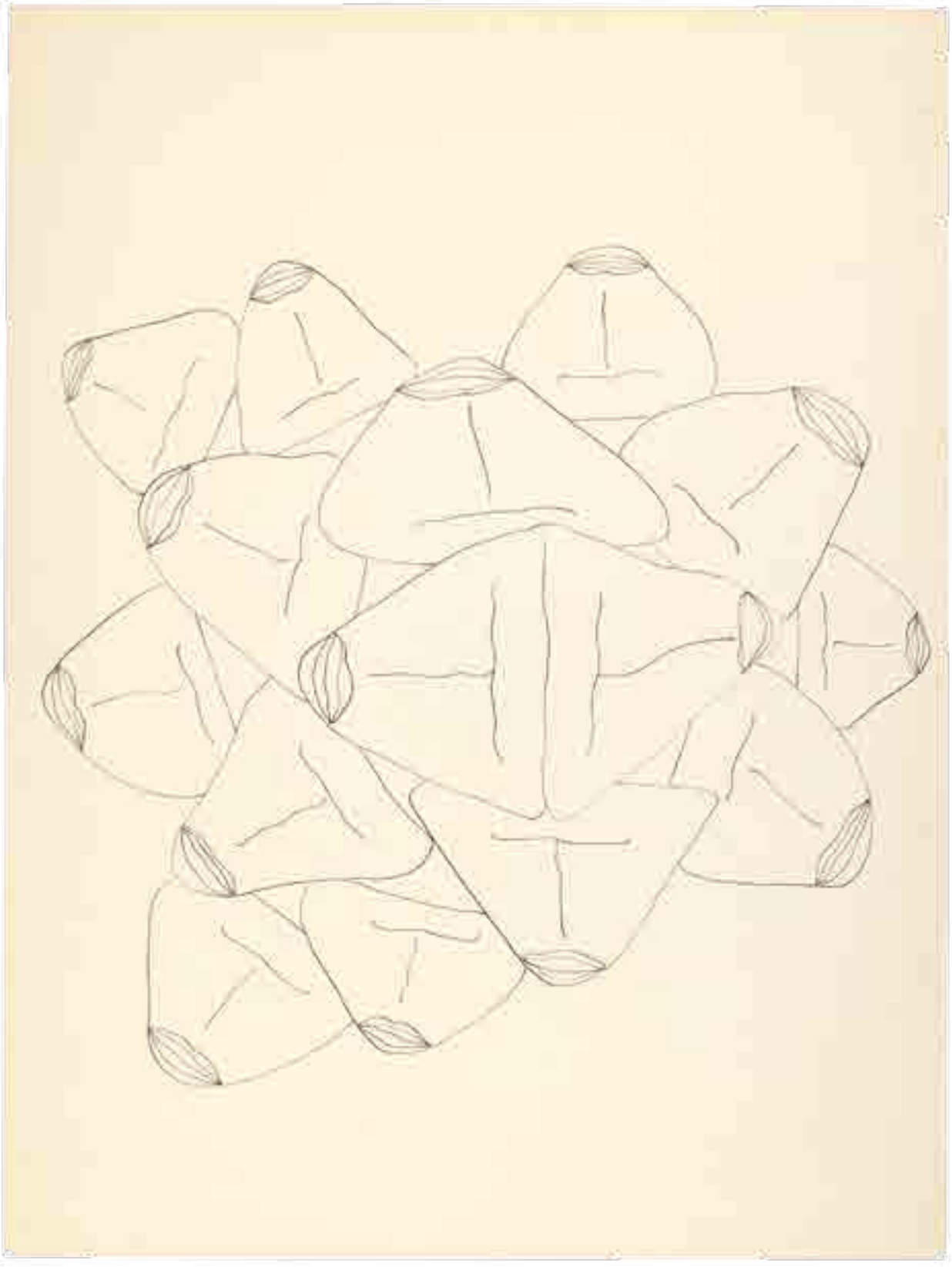


Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
38 x 46 cm (15 x 18 ⅛ in)

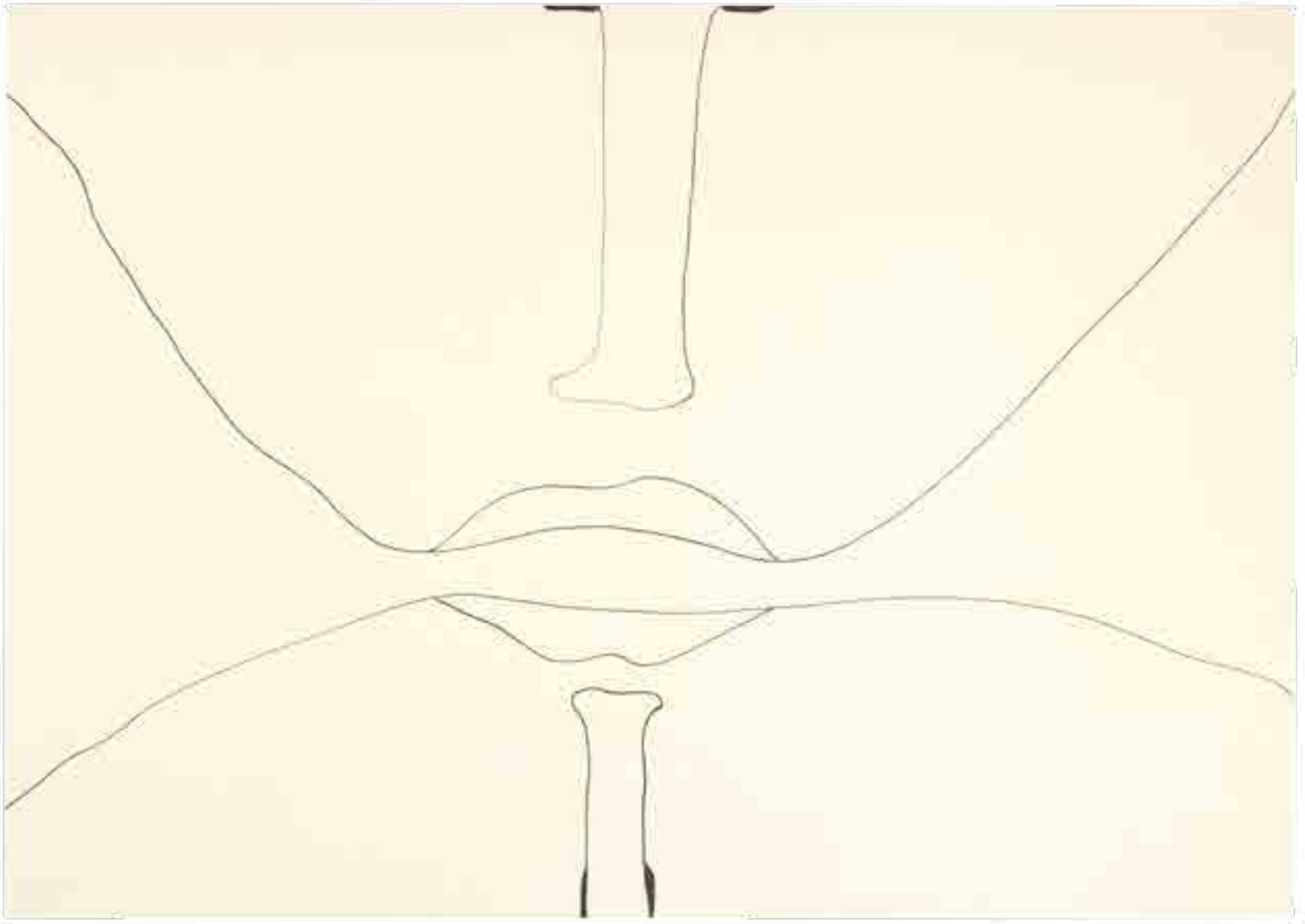


Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
46 x 38 cm (18 1/8 x 14 15/16 in)

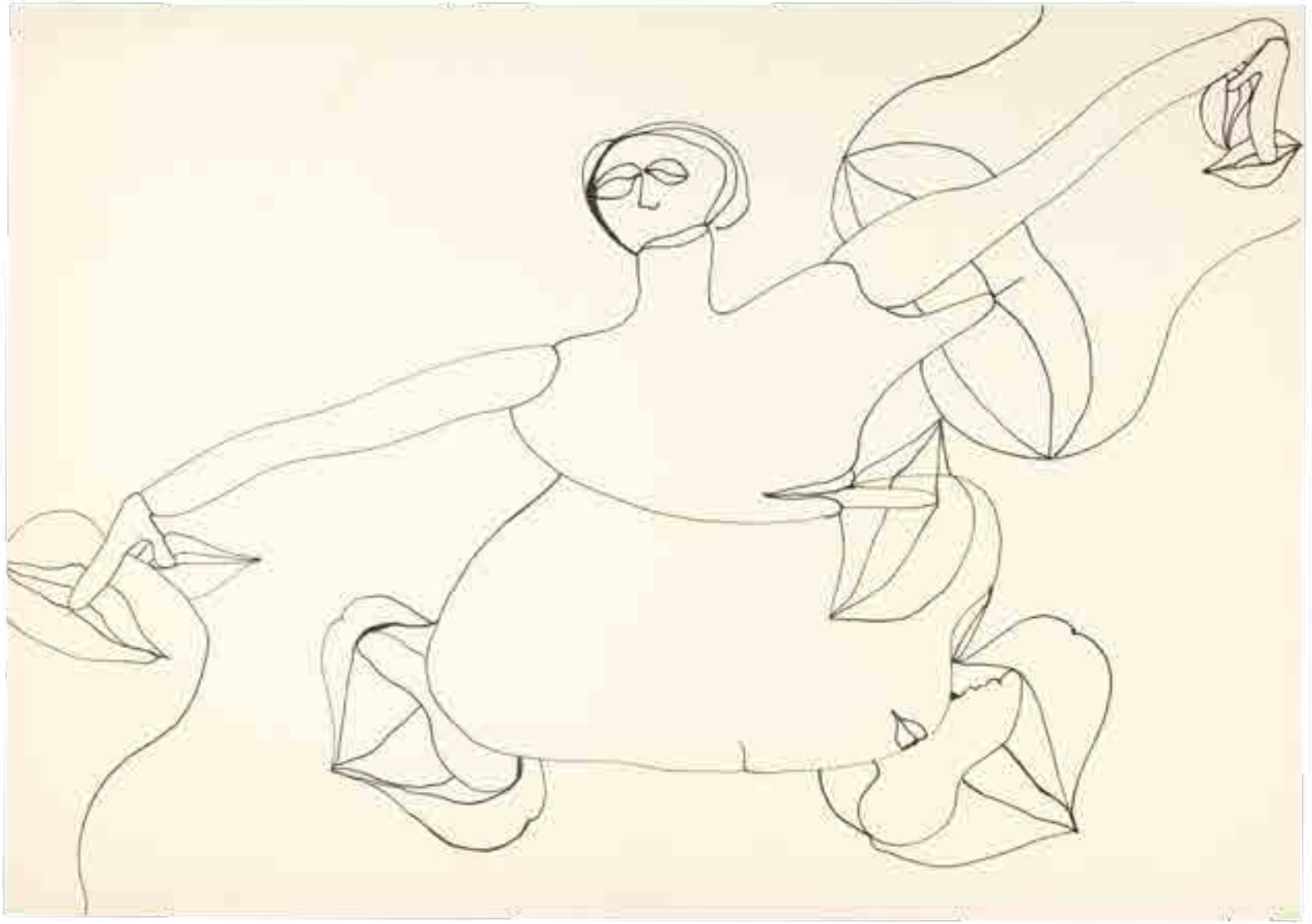
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
38 x 46 cm (14 15⁄16 x 18 1⁄8 in)



Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 1/2 in)



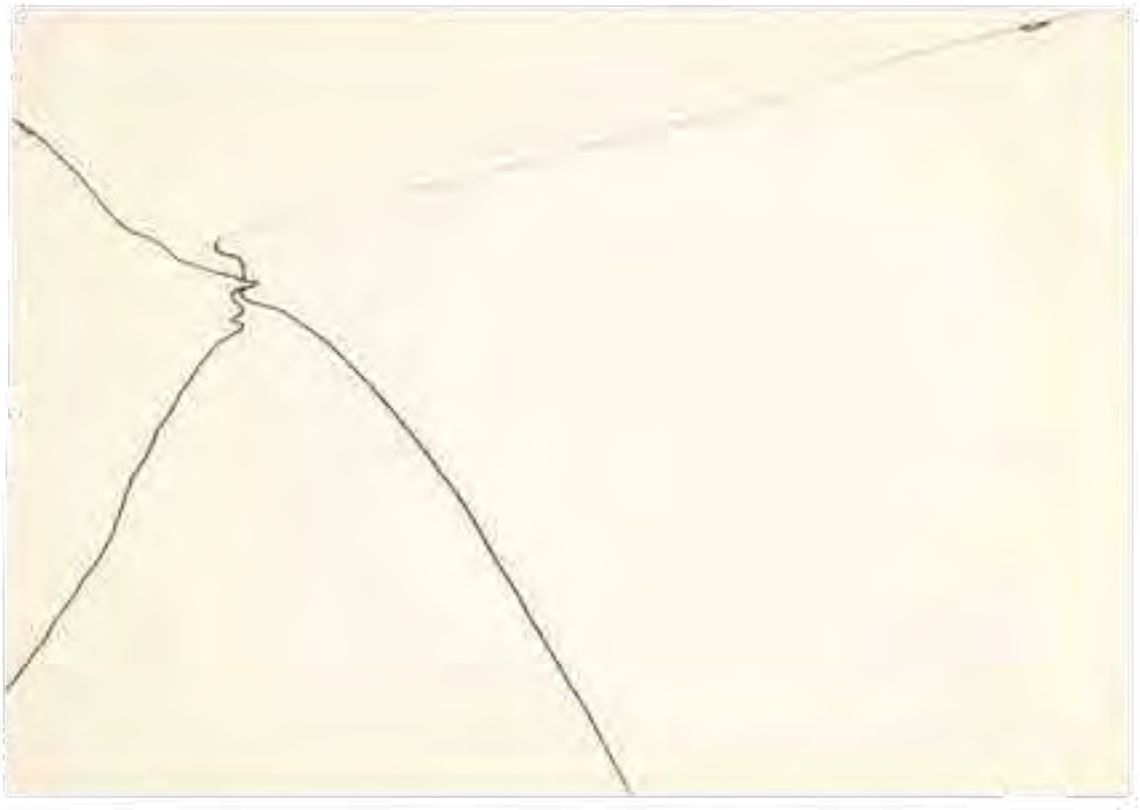
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
21 x 29.7 cm (8 ¼ x 11 ⅝ in)



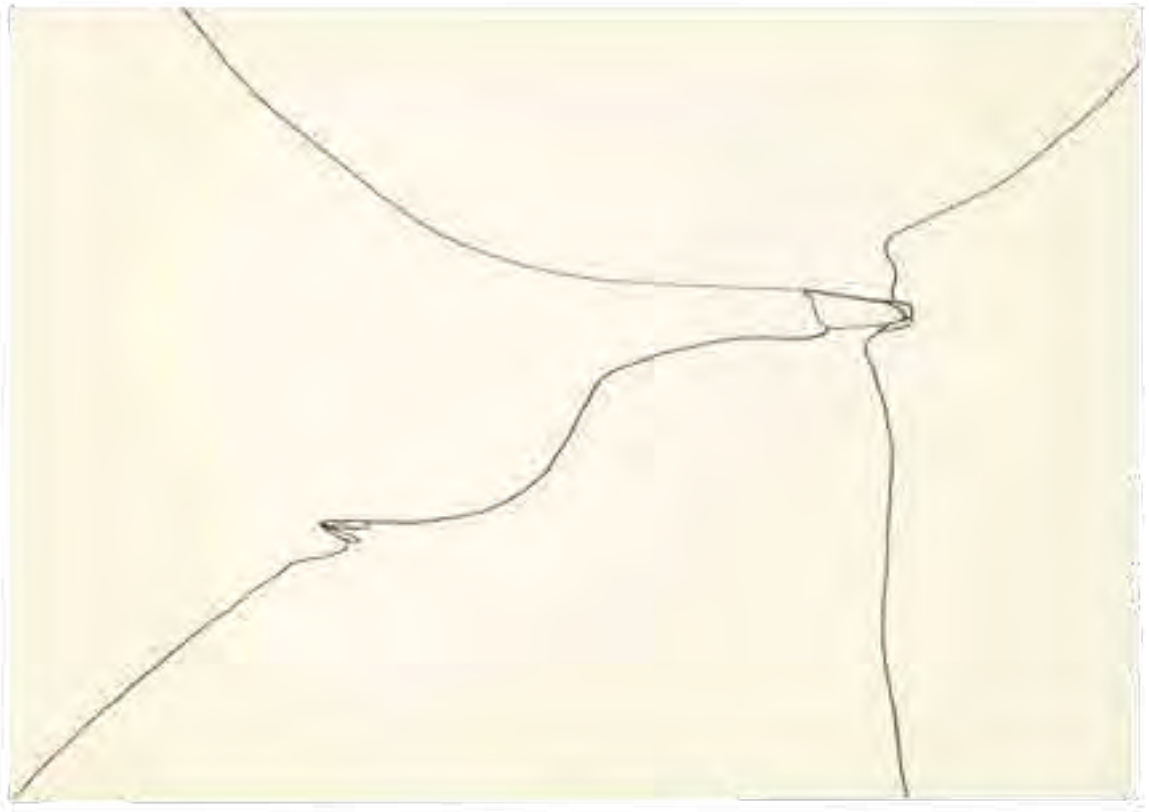
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
21 x 29.7 cm (8 ¼ x 11 ¹¹⁄₁₆ in)

Untitled, 1972
Ink and pencil on paper
24 x 27.5 cm (9 7/16 x 10 13/16 in)

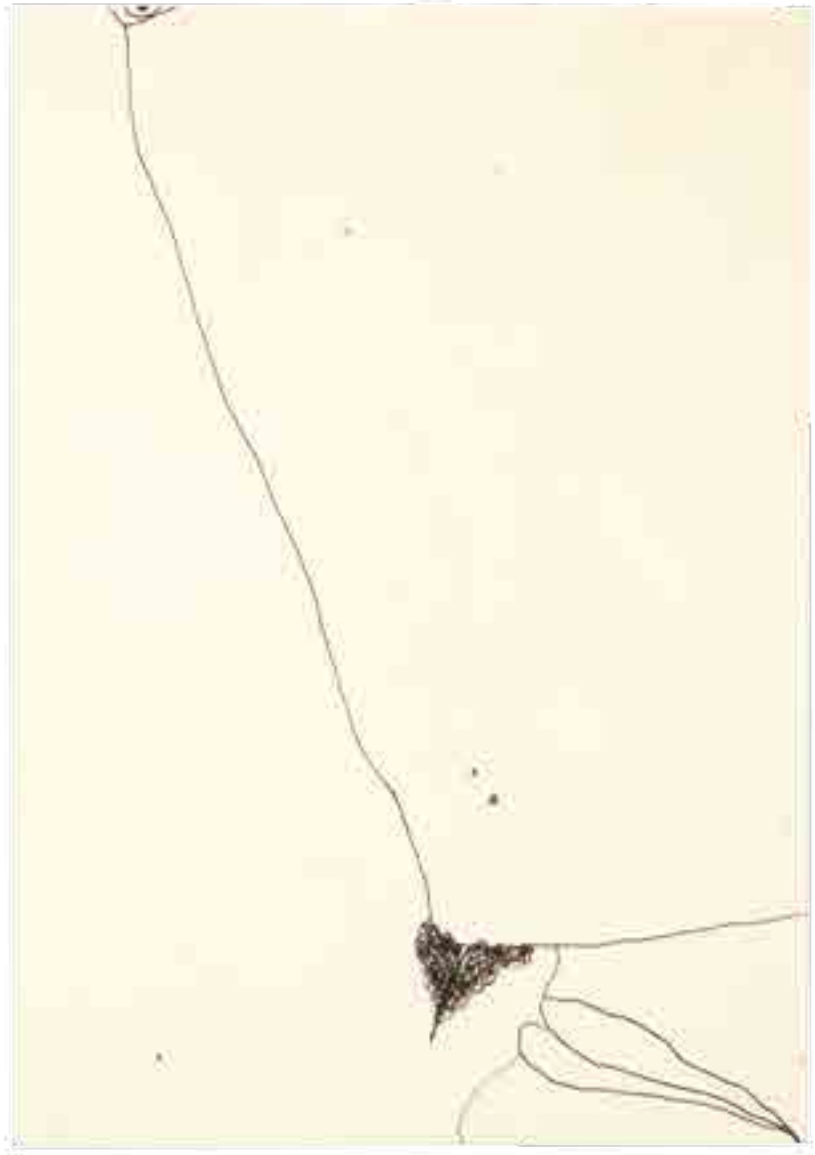
Flirt II, 1972
Ink on paper
17.1 x 12 cm (6 ¾ x 4 ¾ in)



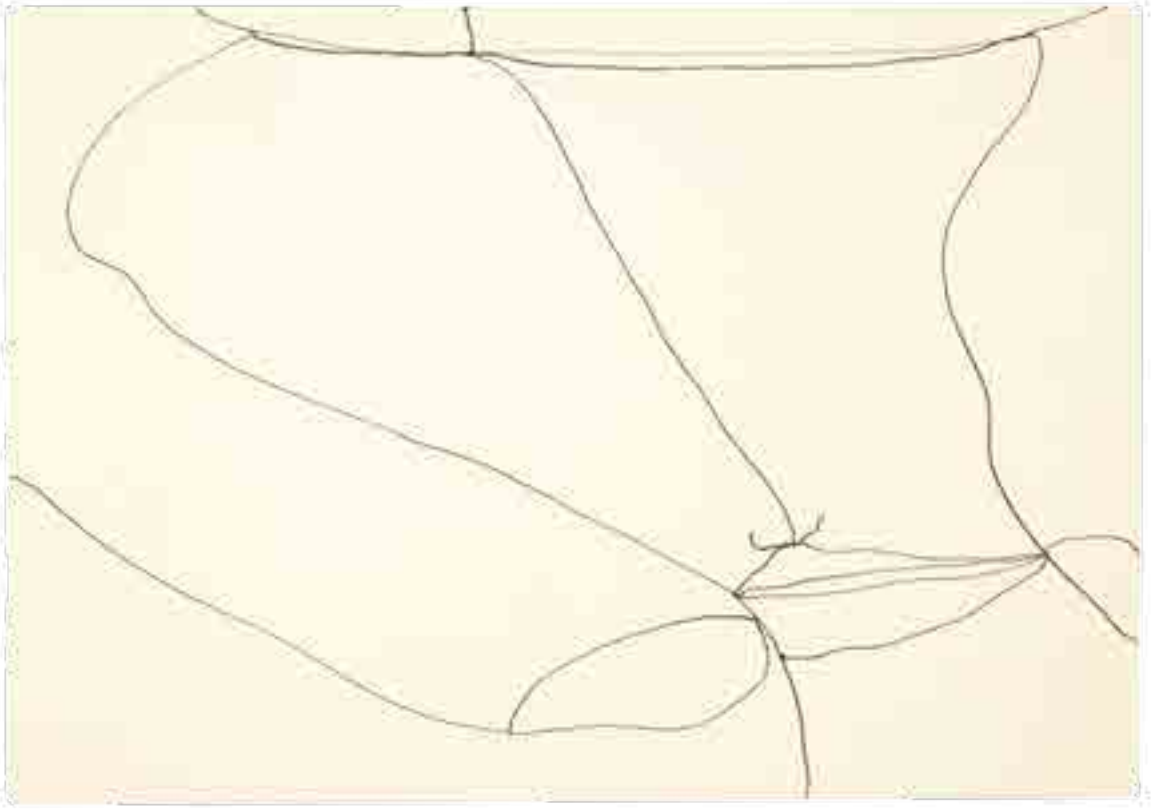
Flirt IV, 1972
Ink on paper
12 x 17.1 cm (4 ¾ x 6 ¾ in)



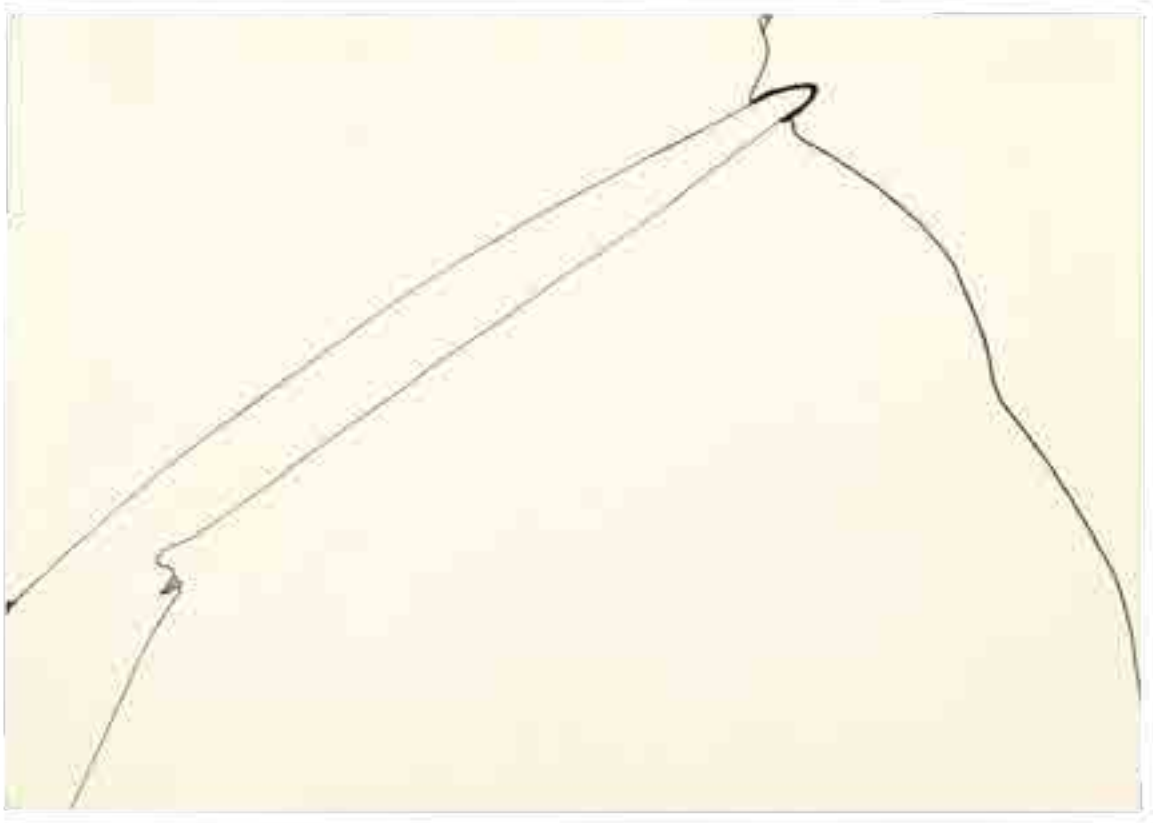
Flirt V, 1972
Ink on paper
12 x 17.1 cm (4 ¾ x 6 ¾ in)



Flirt VI, 1972
Ink on paper
17.1 x 12 cm (6 ¾ x 4 ¾ in)



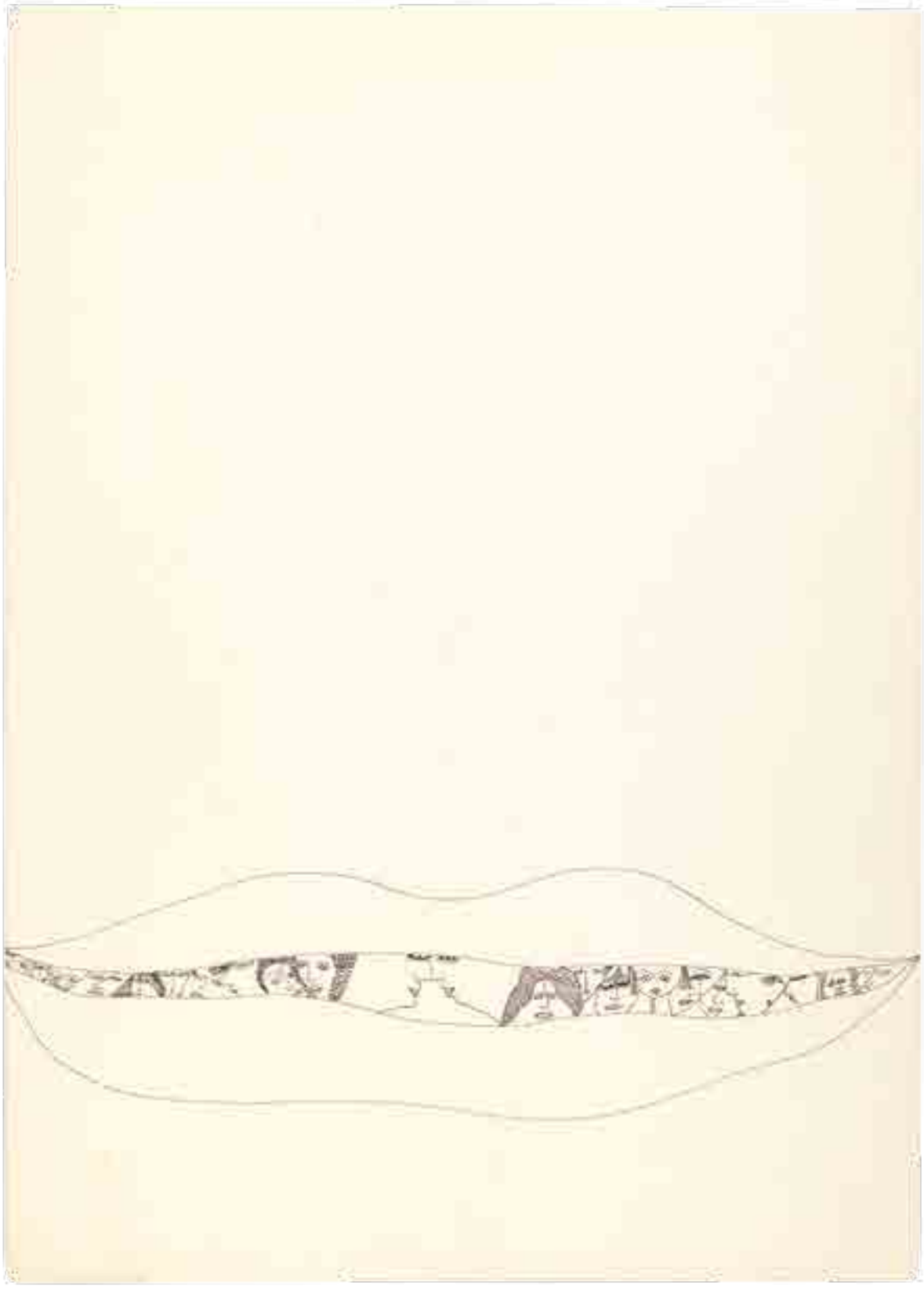
Flirt VII, 1972
Ink on paper
12 x 17.1 cm (4 ¾ x 6 ¾ in)



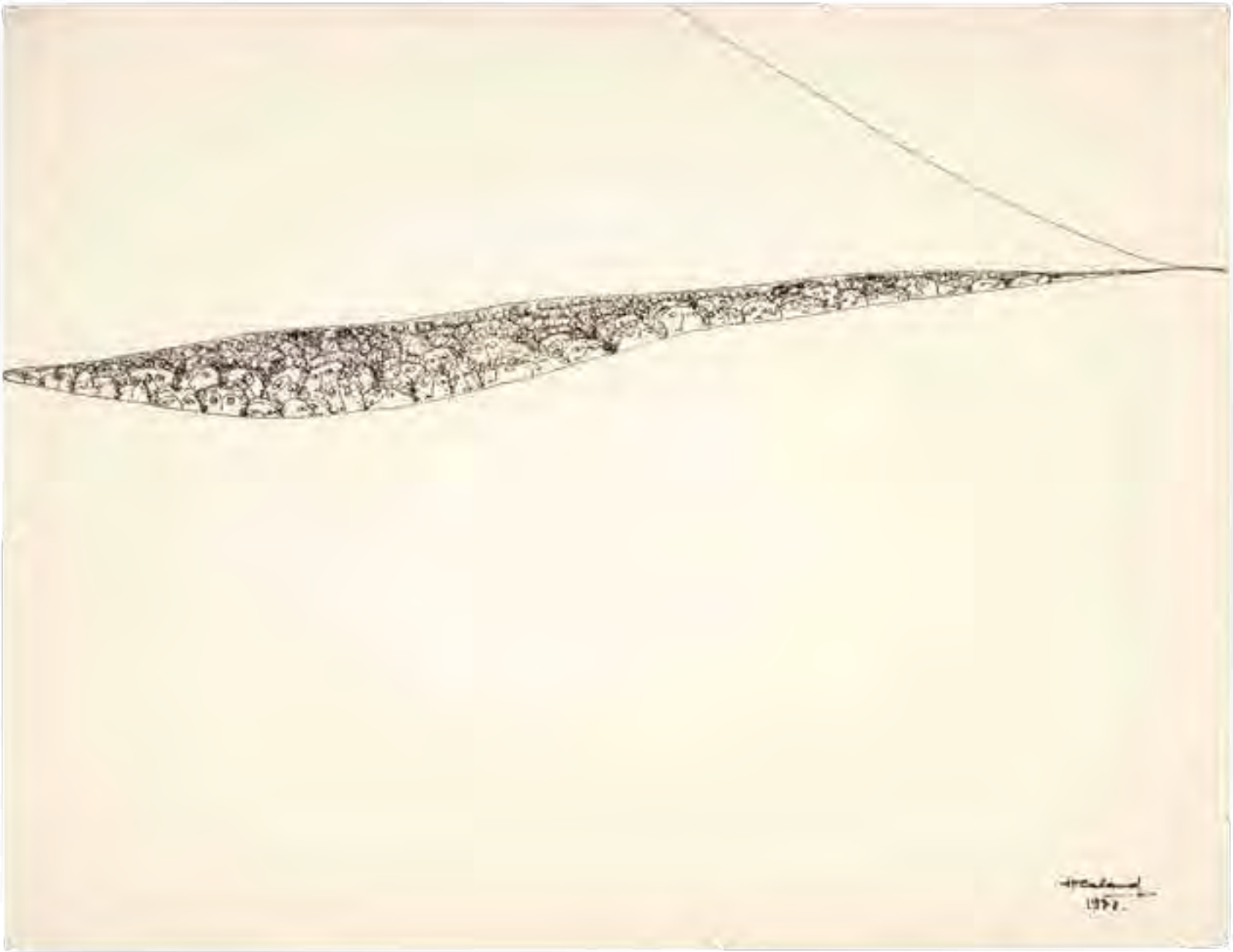
Flirt VIII, 1972
Ink on paper
12 x 17.1 cm (4 ¾ x 6 ¾ in)

Flirt X, 1972
Ink on paper
12 x 17.1 cm (4 ¾ x 6 ¾ in)

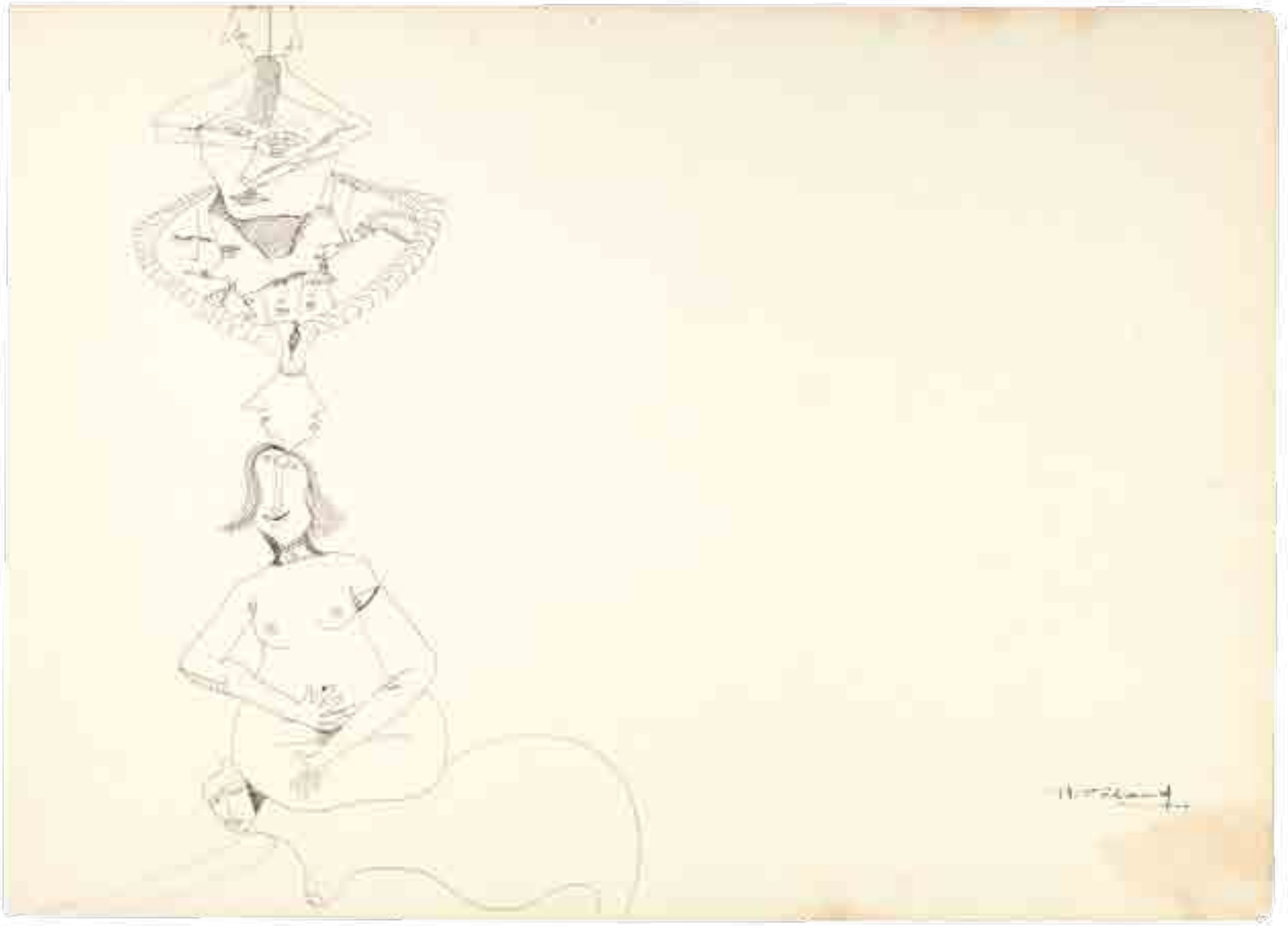
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
33 x 24 cm (13 x 9 7/16 in)



Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
35.1 x 25.2 cm (13 13⁄16 x 9 7⁄8 in)



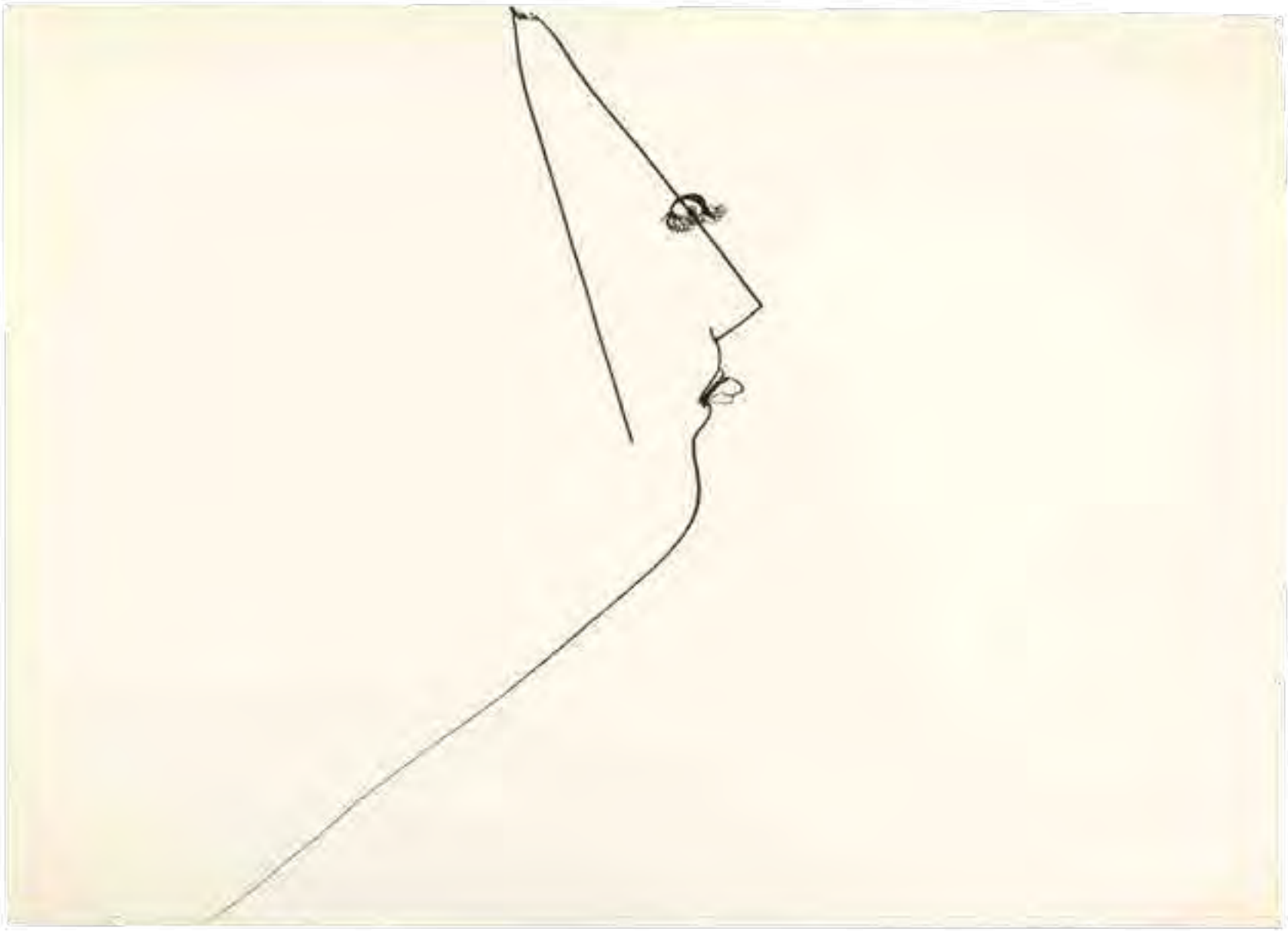
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)



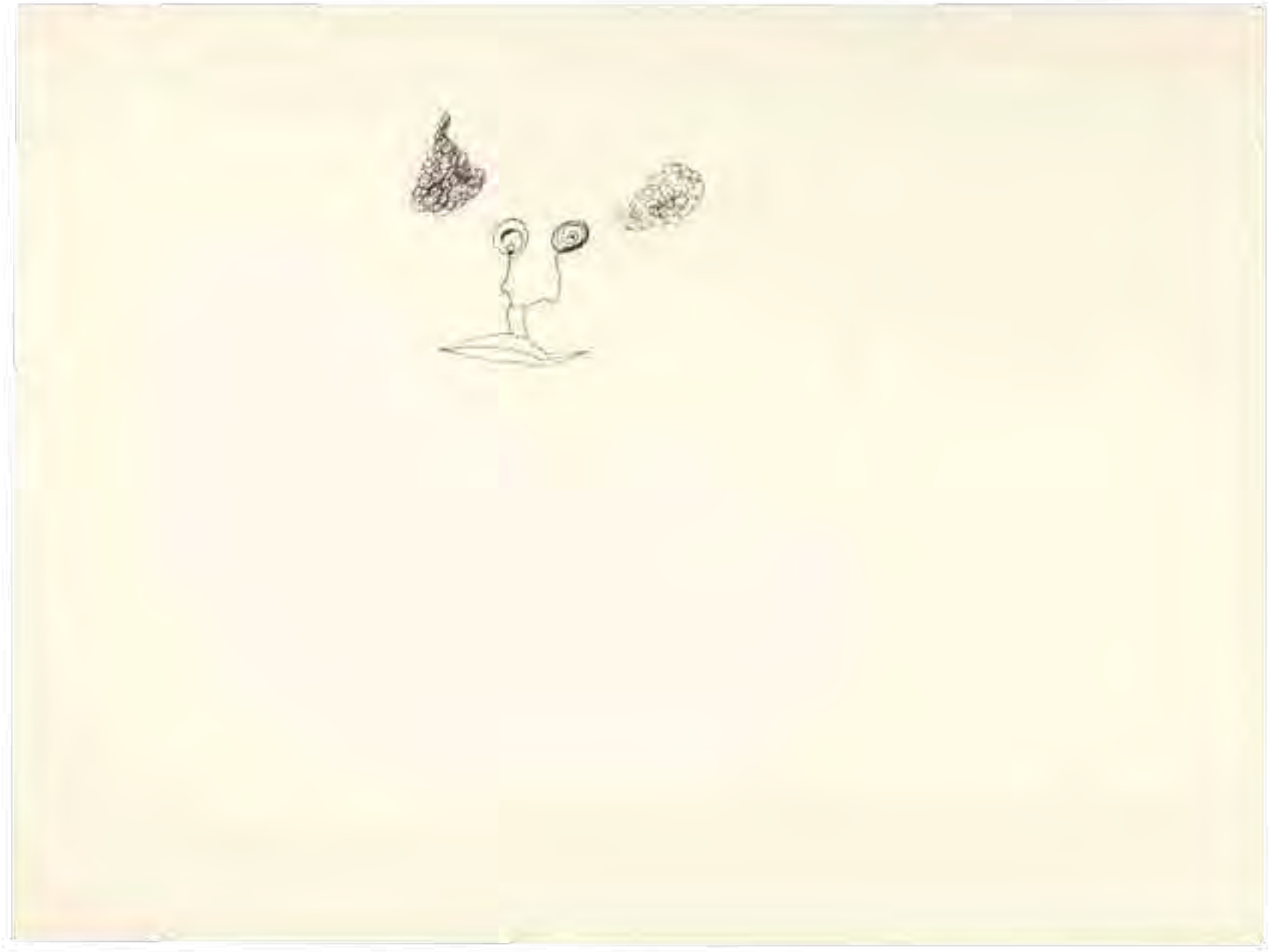
Who's the Boss?, 1972
Ink on paper
25.2 x 35 cm (9 15⁄16 x 13 13⁄16 in)

Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
34.4 x 25 cm (13 ½ x 9 ⅞ in)

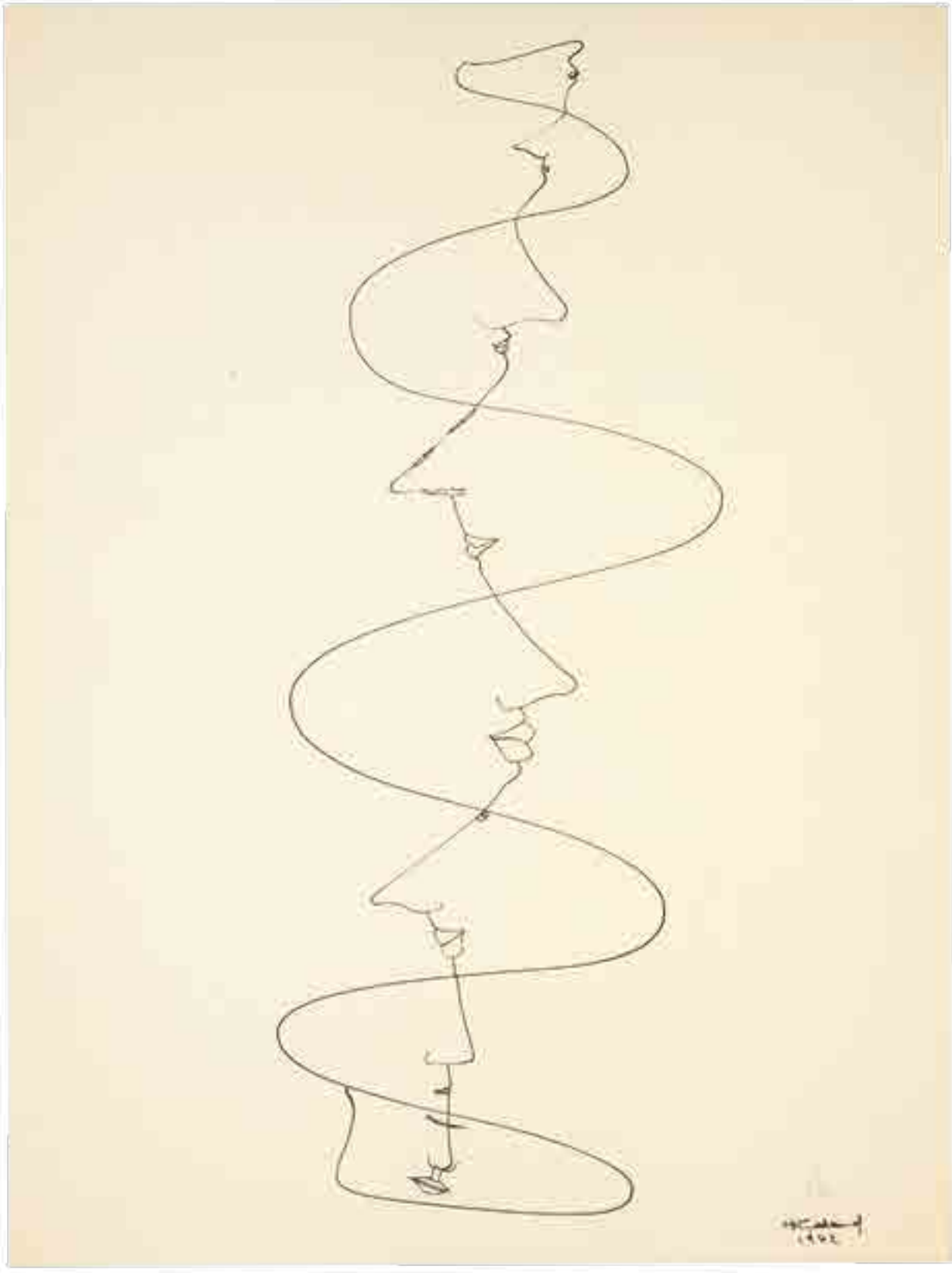
Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
23.9 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
25.2 x 35.1 cm (9 15⁄16 x 13 7⁄8 in)

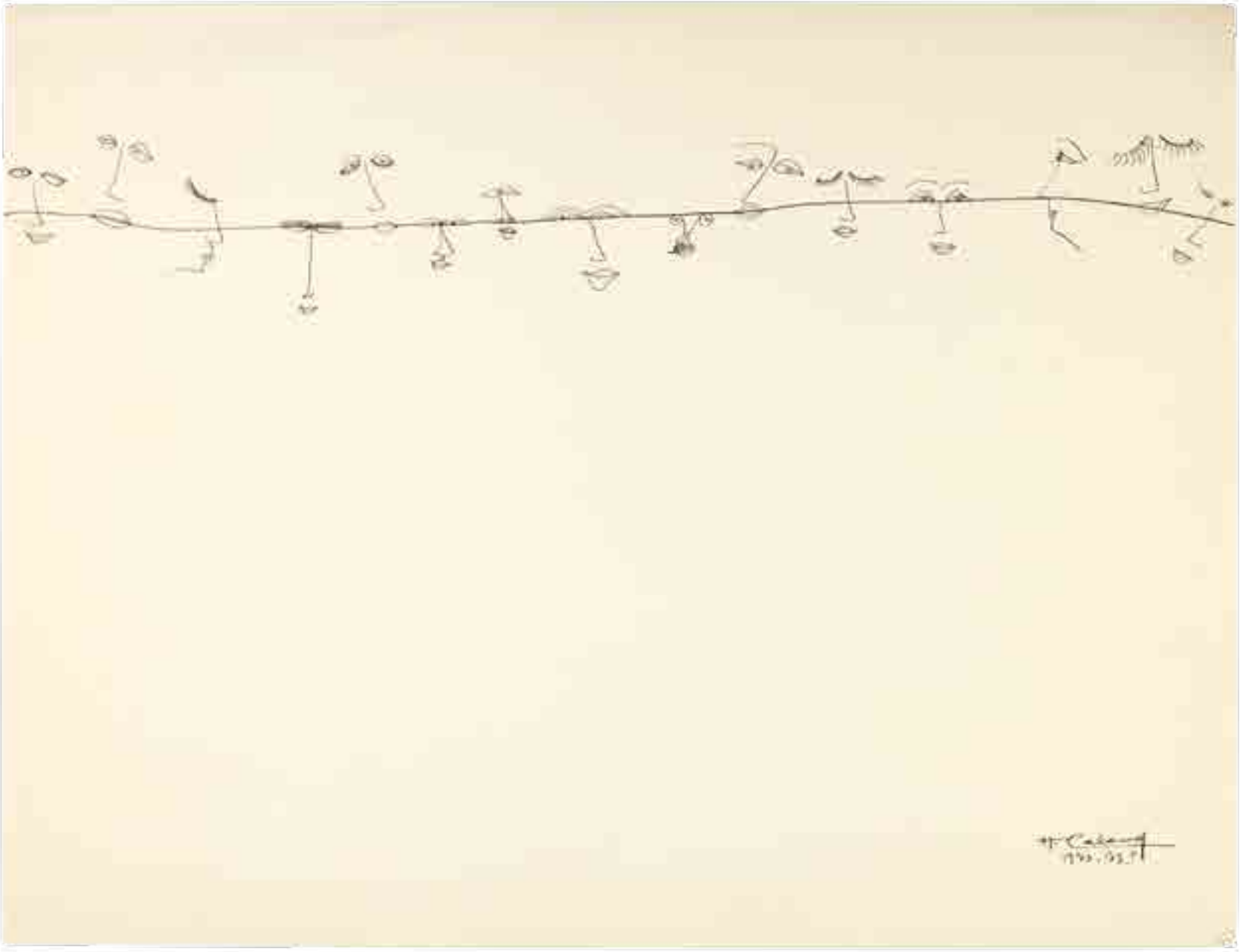


Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



Untitled, 1972
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 1/2 in)

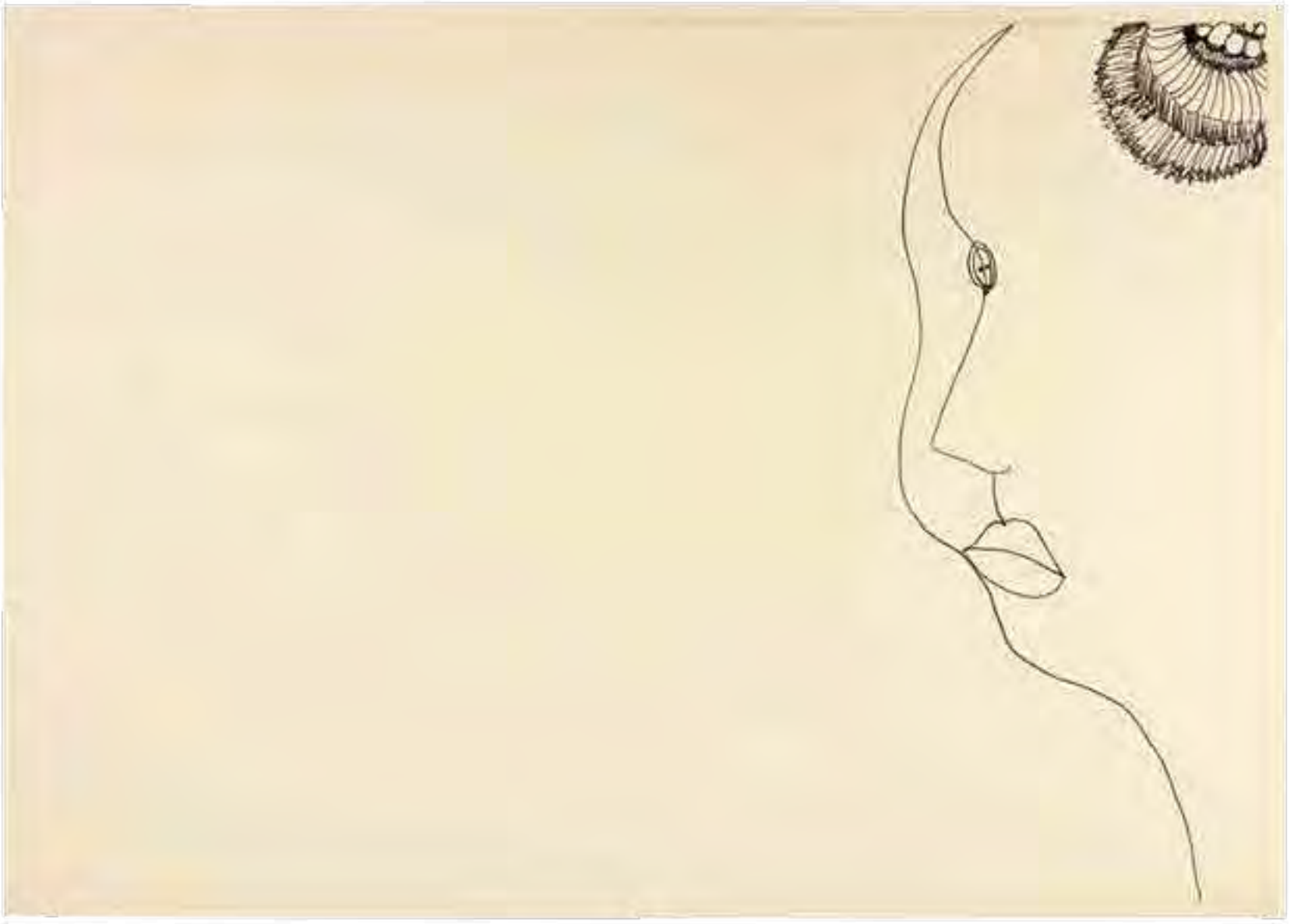
Untitled, 1972
Pencil on paper
23.8 x 32 cm (9 3/8 x 12 5/8 in)



Musique, 1972–73
Ink on paper
26.7 x 34.9 cm (10 ½ x 13 ¾ in)

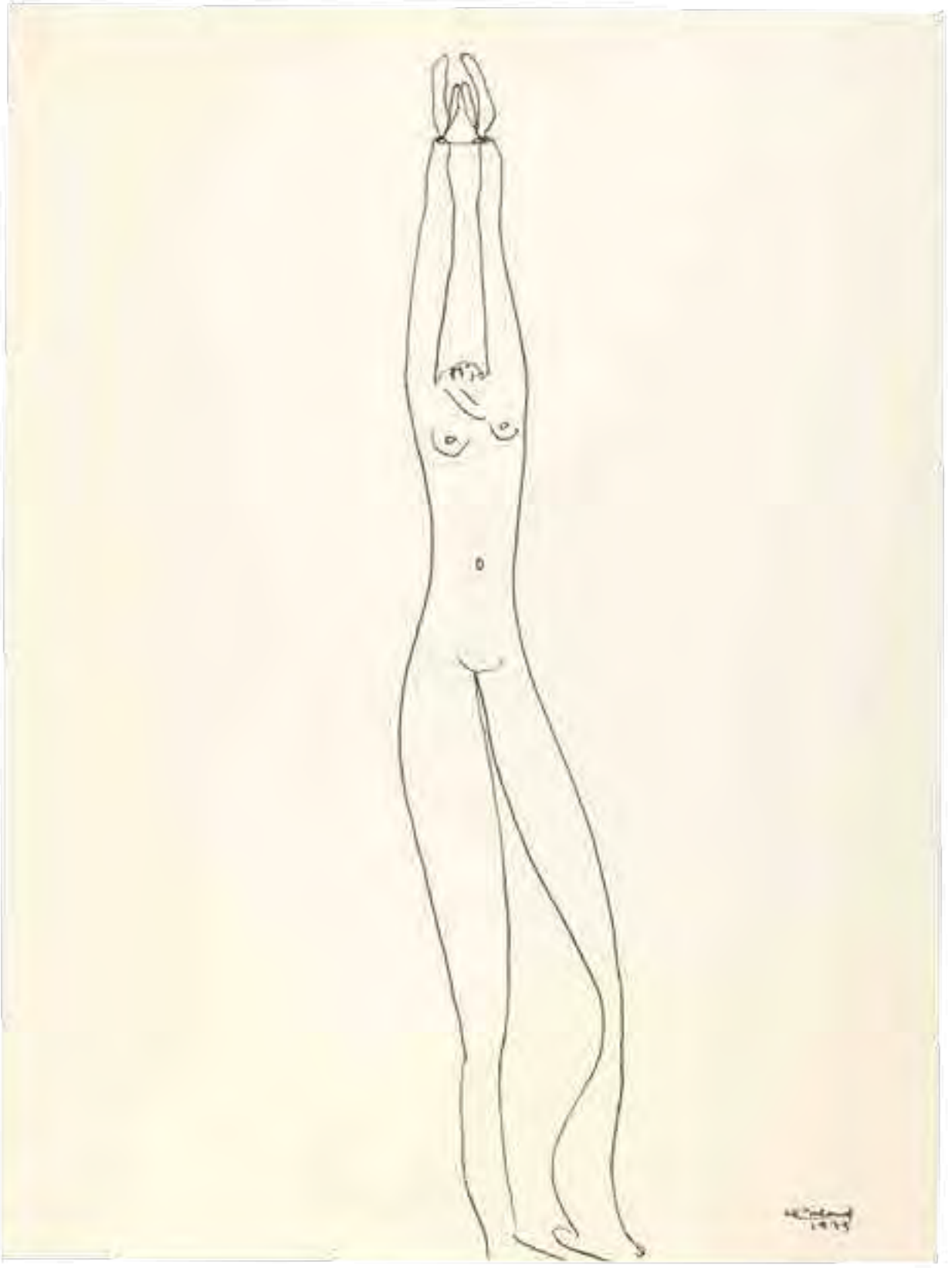
Untitled, 1972–73
Ink on paper
26.8 x 34 cm (10 ½ x 13 ¼ in)

Untitled, 1972–73
Ink on paper
27 x 35 cm (10 5/8 x 13 3/4 in)

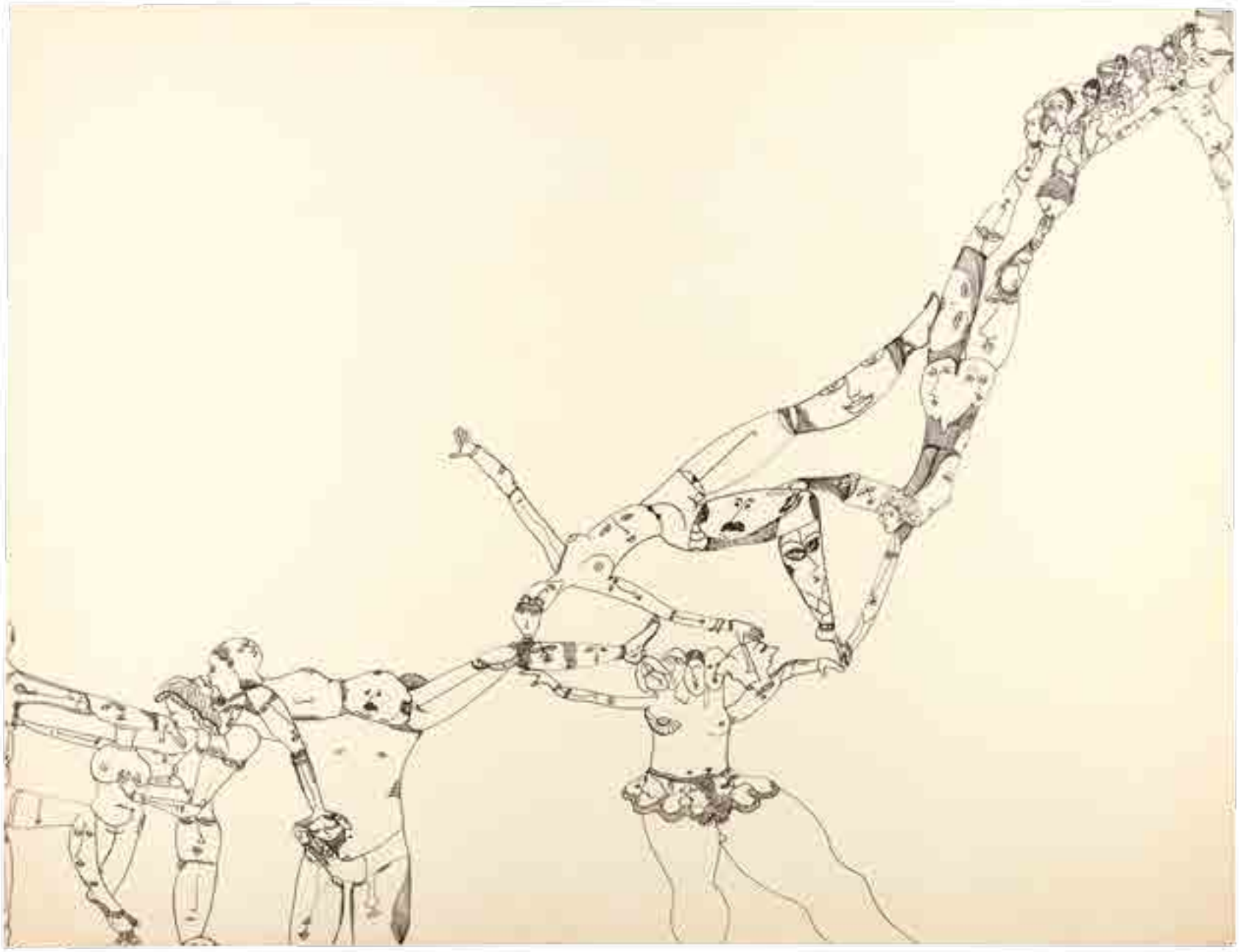


Untitled, ca. 1972–73
Ink on paper
29.8 x 41.8 cm (11 ¾ x 16 ½ in)

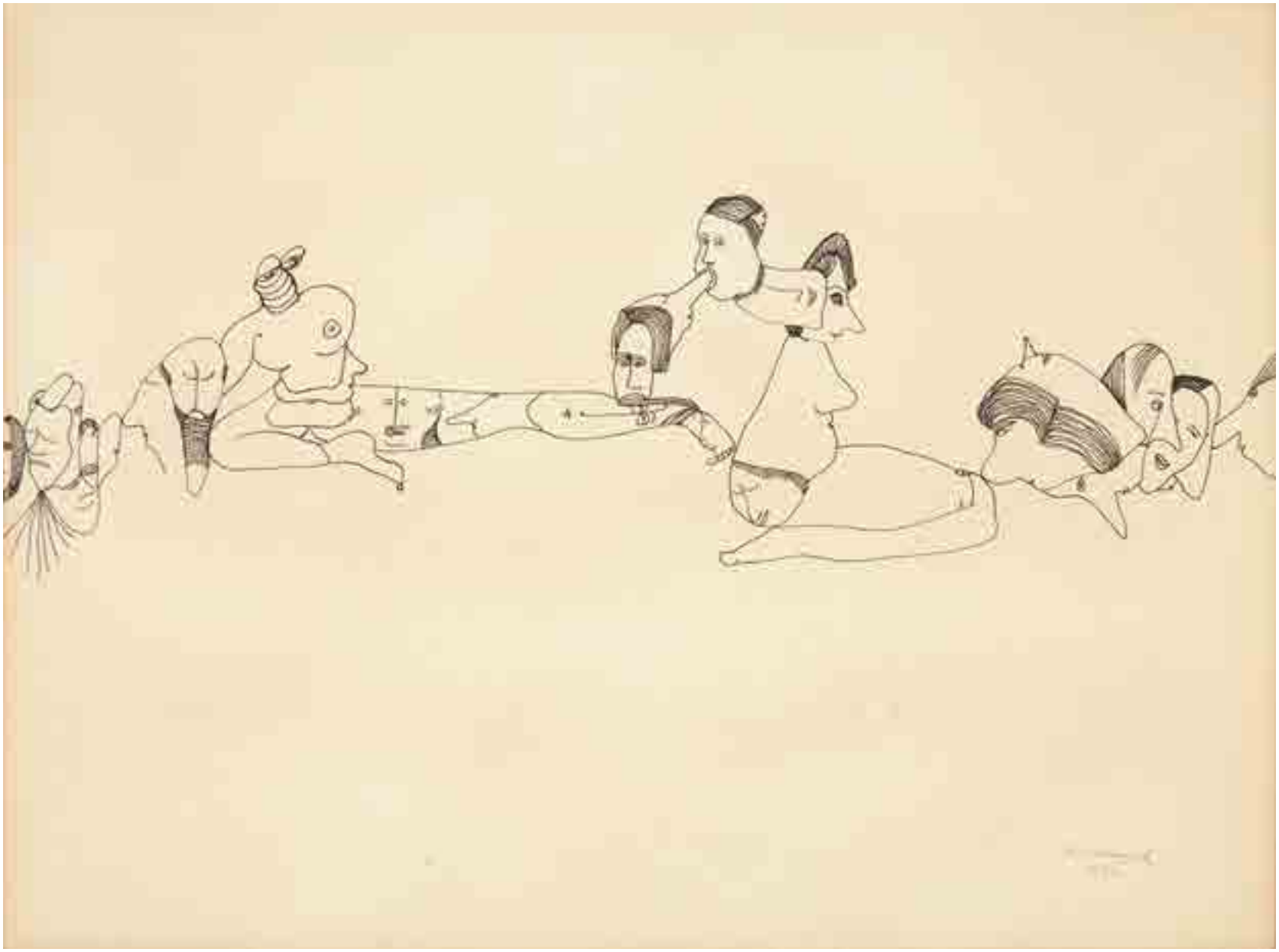
Untitled, ca. 1972–73
Ink on paper
29.8 x 41.9 cm (11 ¾ x 16 ½ in)



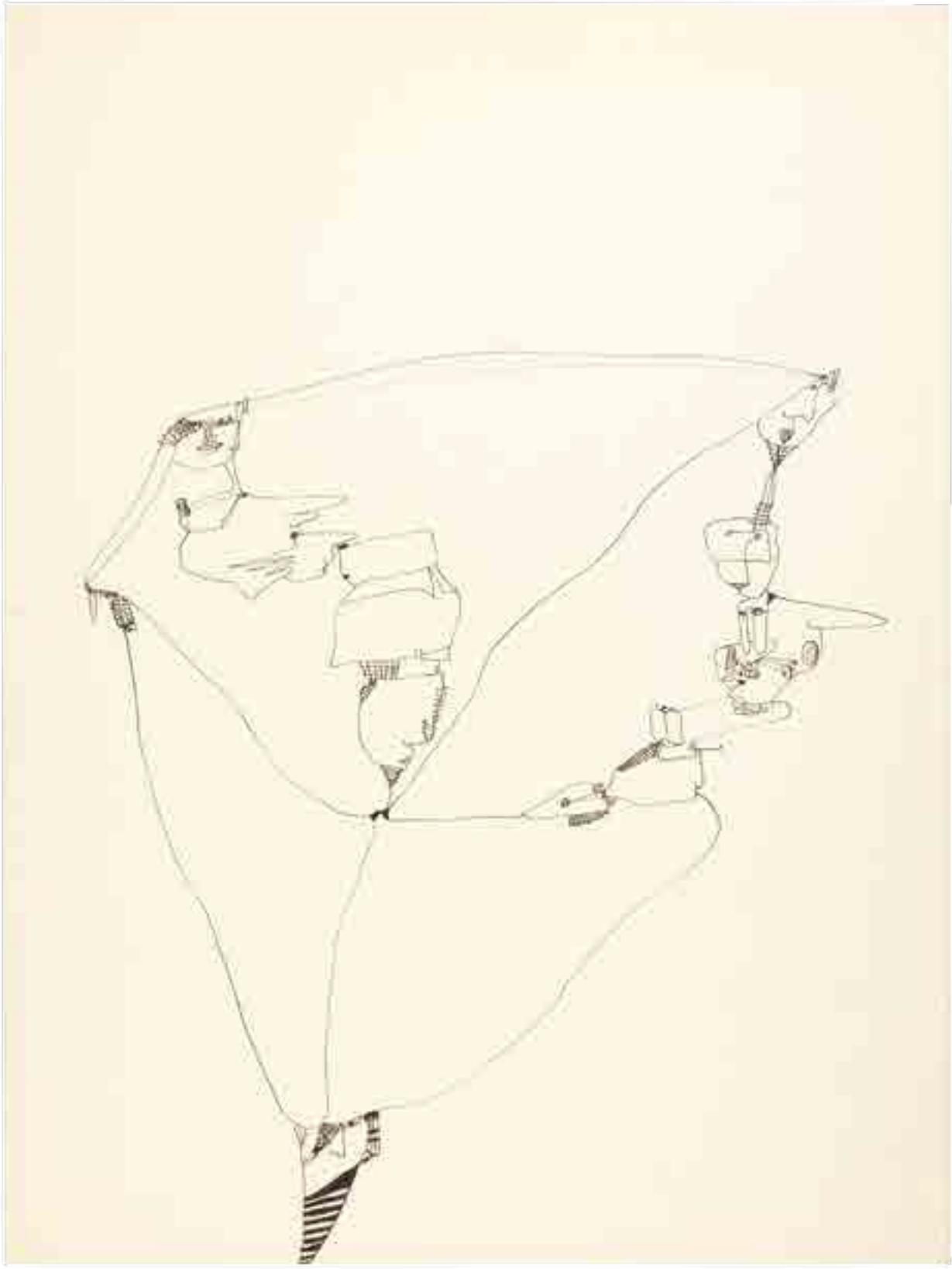
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
32 x 23.9 cm (12 9/16 x 9 3/8 in)



Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
50 x 65 cm (19 ¾ x 25 ⁹⁄₁₆ in)

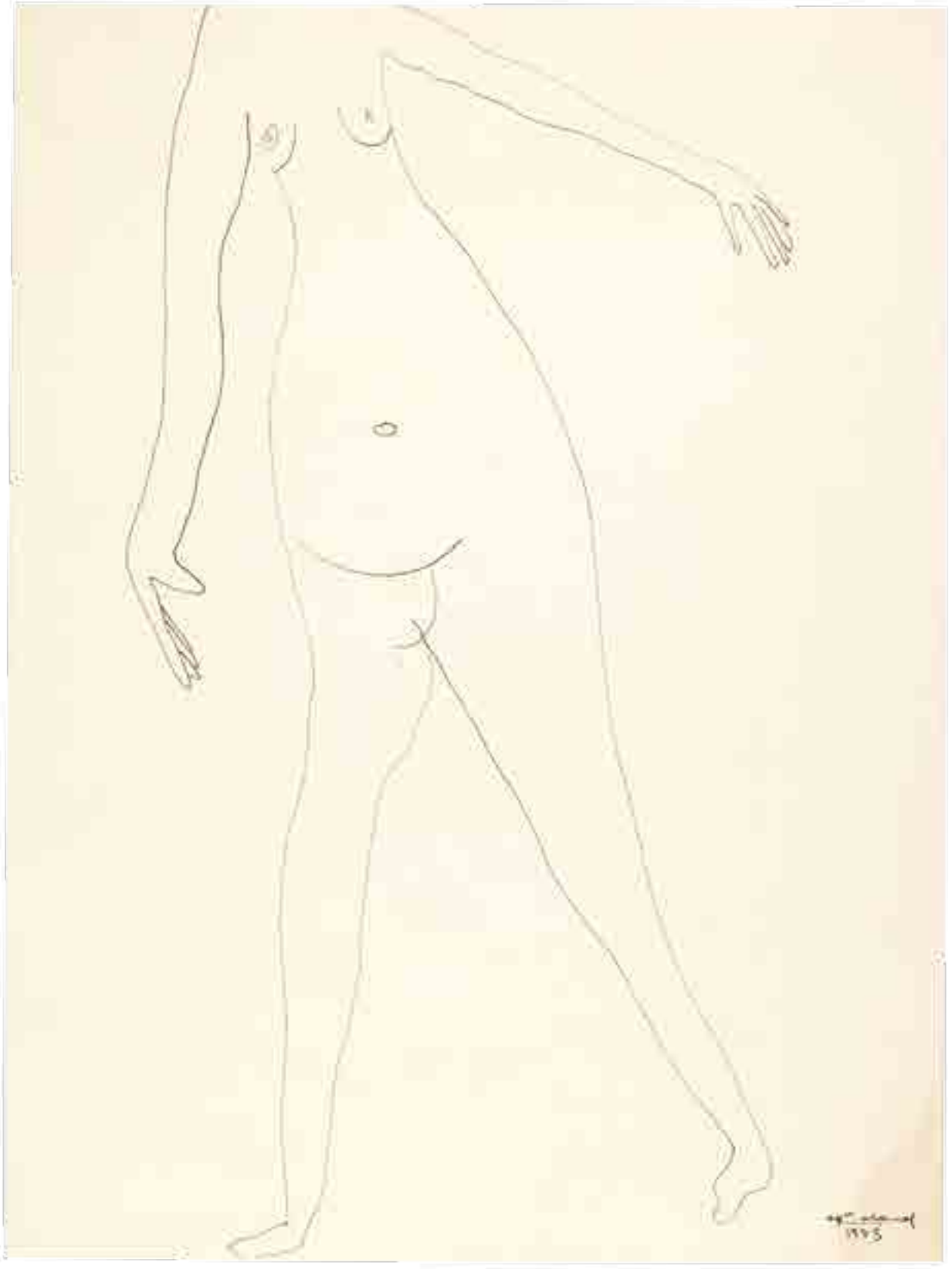


Straight Line, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ½ in)



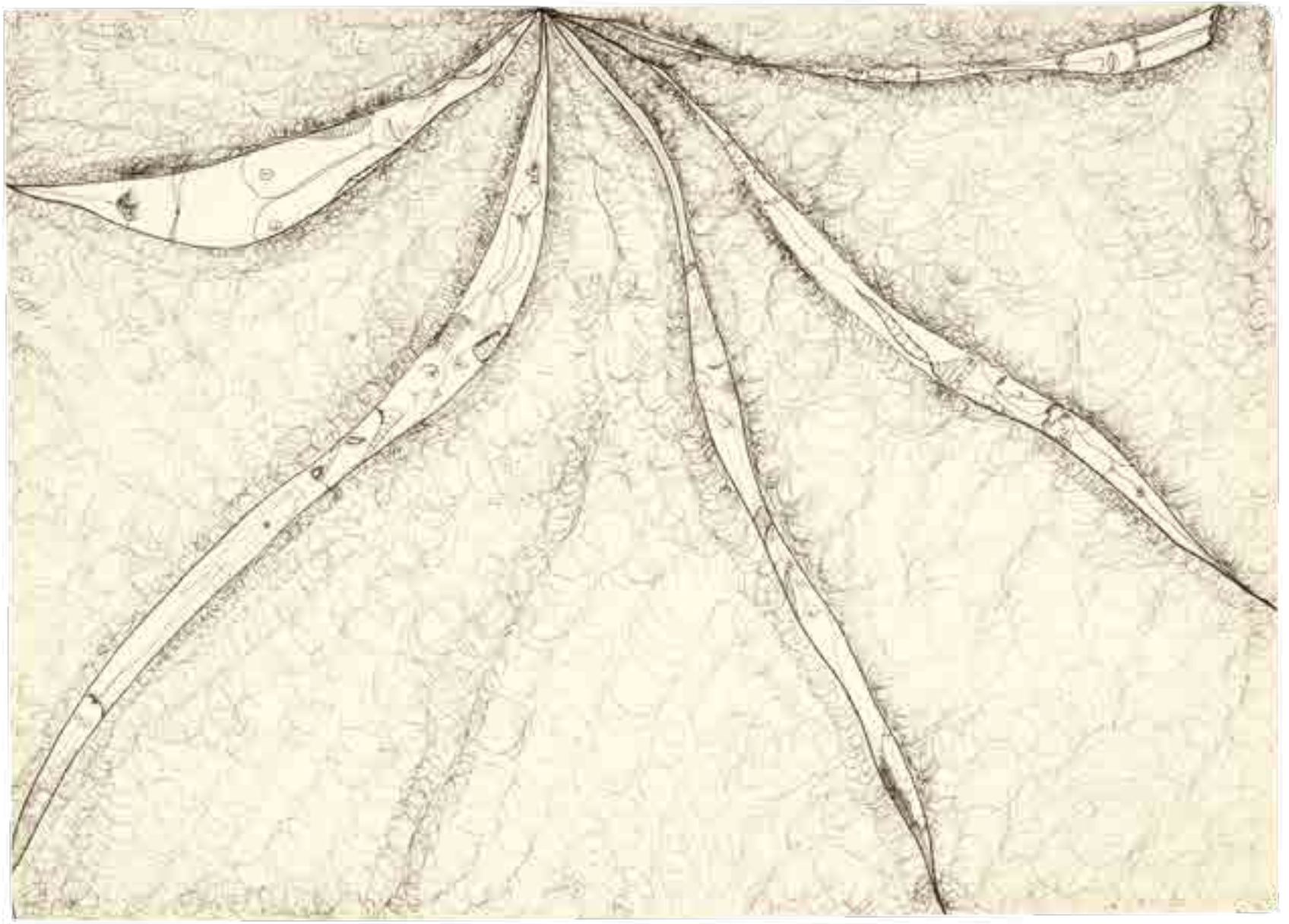
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 1/2 in)

Foule, 1973
Ink on paper
76.2 x 60.9 cm (30 x 24 in)



Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
31.9 x 23.8 cm (12 ½ x 9 ⅜ in)

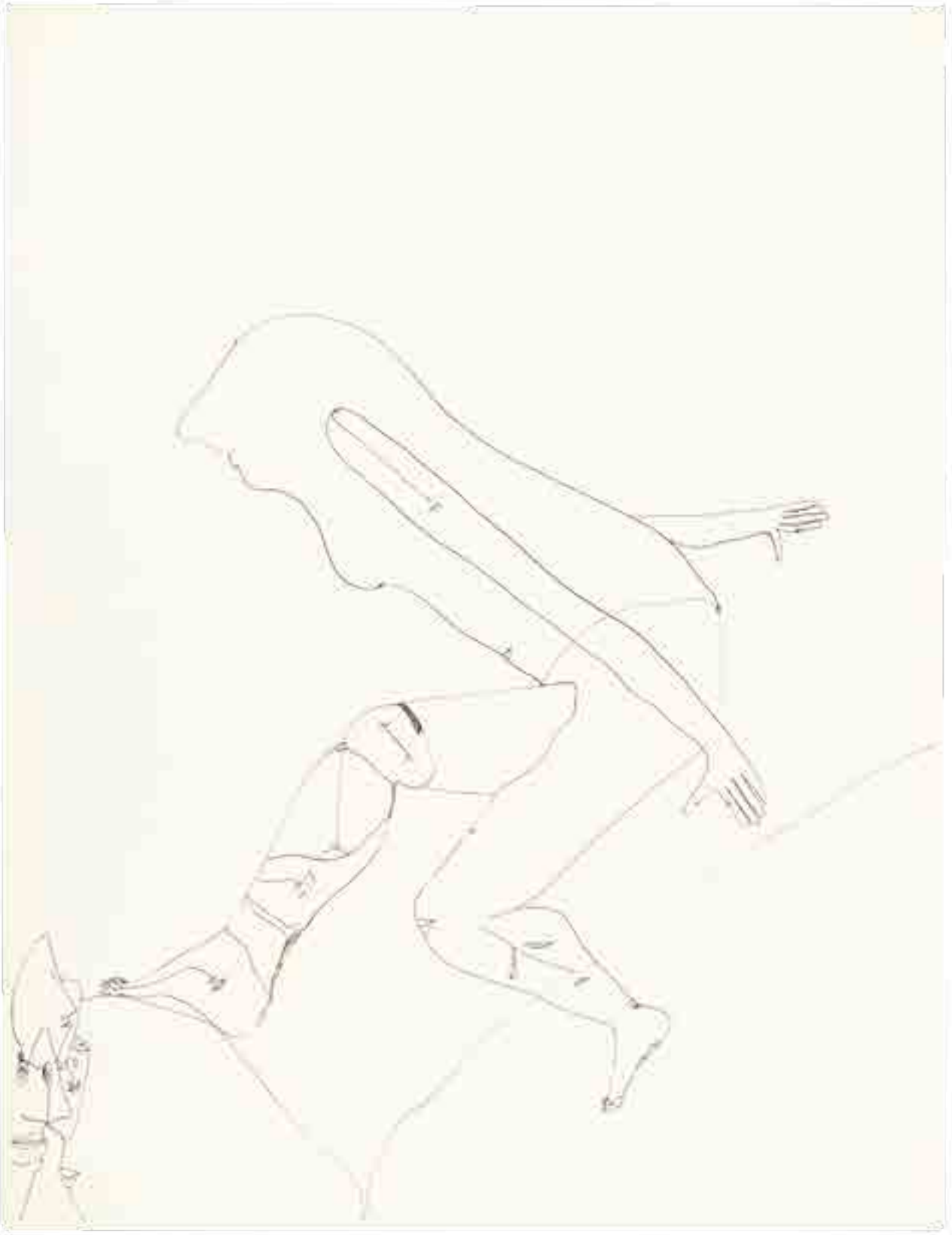
Hi!, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 9/16 in)



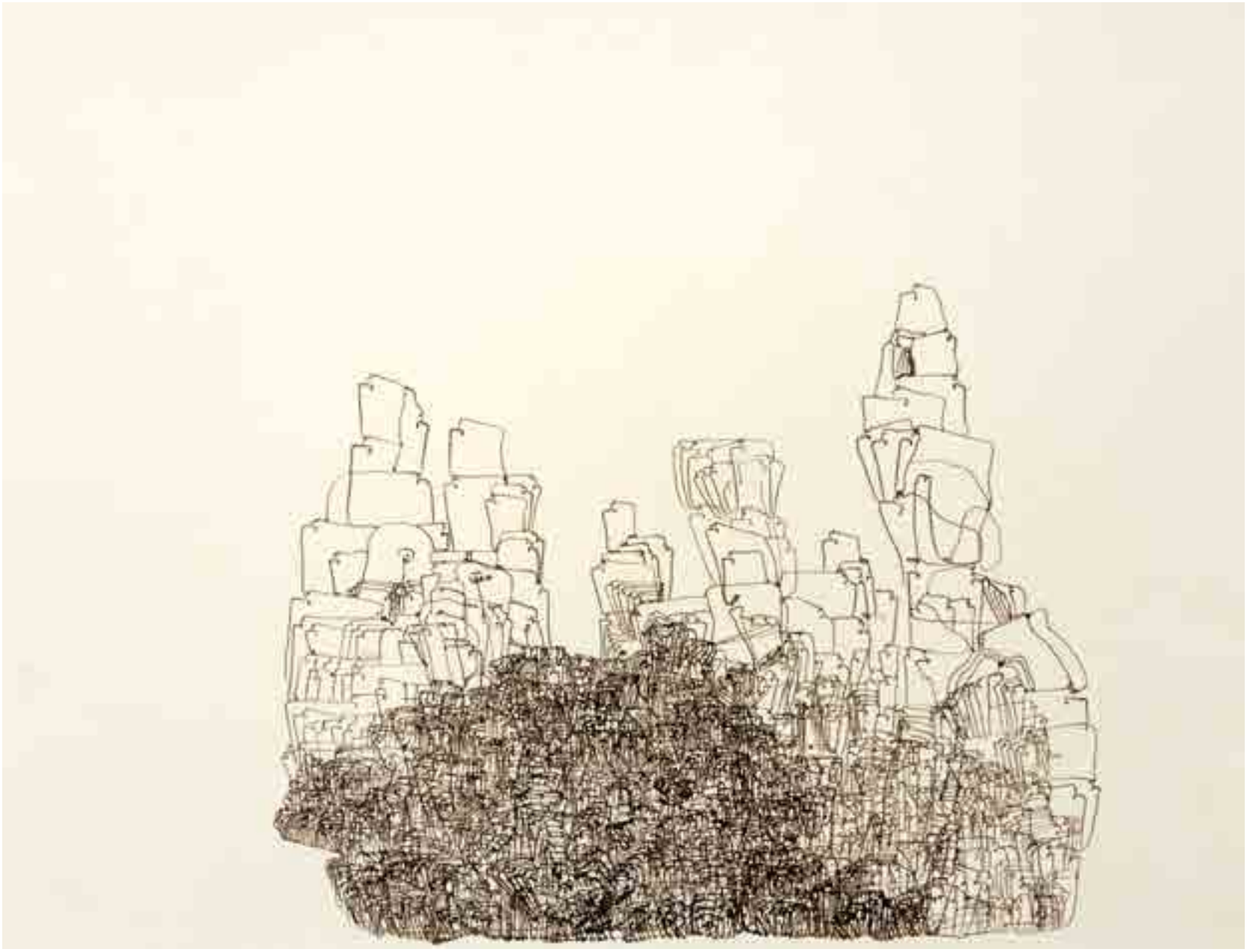
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
25.5 x 35 cm (9 7/8 x 13 3/4 in)

Alpinisme, 1973
Ink on paper
25.2 x 35.2 cm (9 7/8 x 13 7/8 in)

Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
65 x 50 cm (25 9/16 x 19 5/8 in)

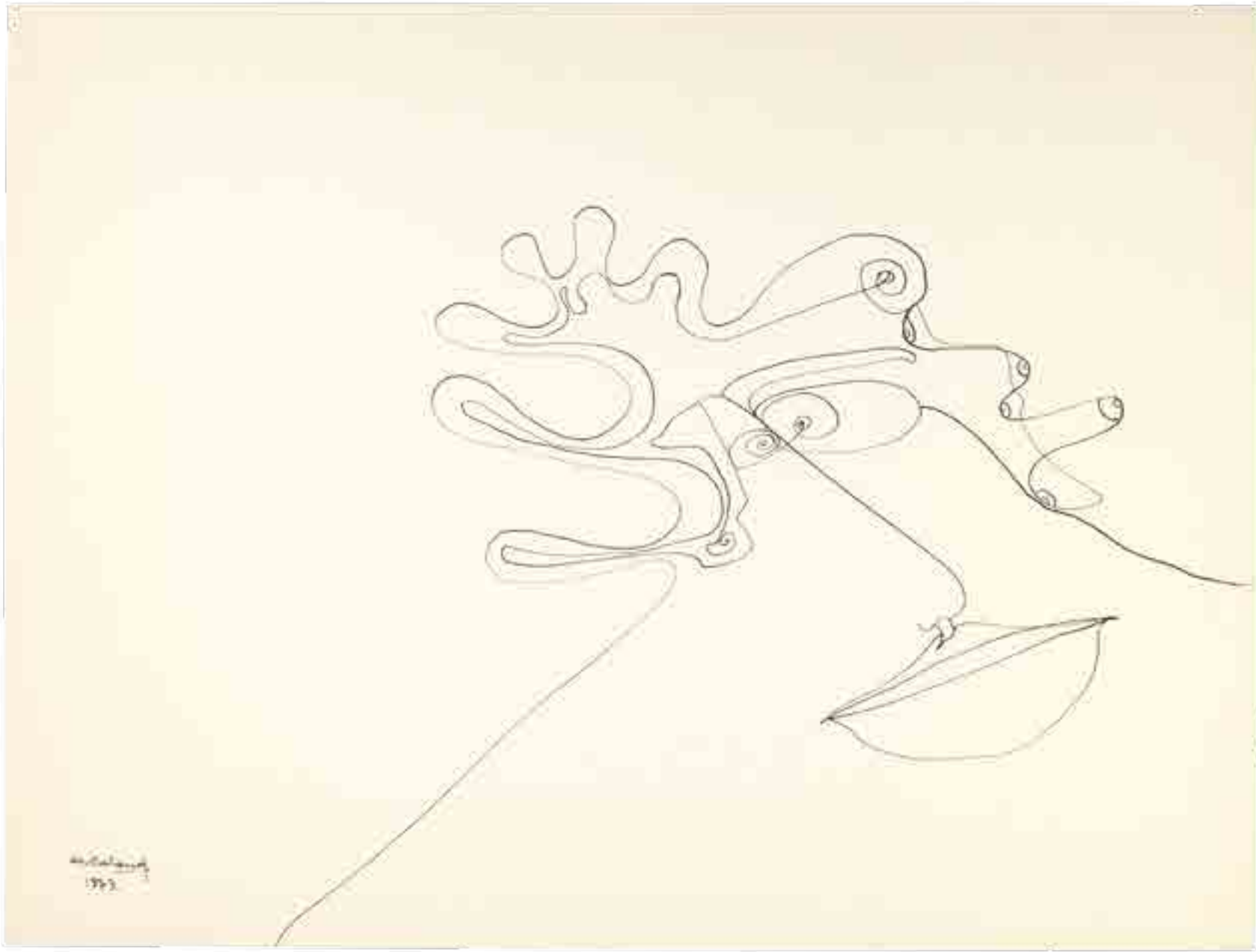


Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
65 x 50 cm (25 9/16 x 19 11/16 in)



Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
30.5 x 40 cm (12 x 15 ¾ in)

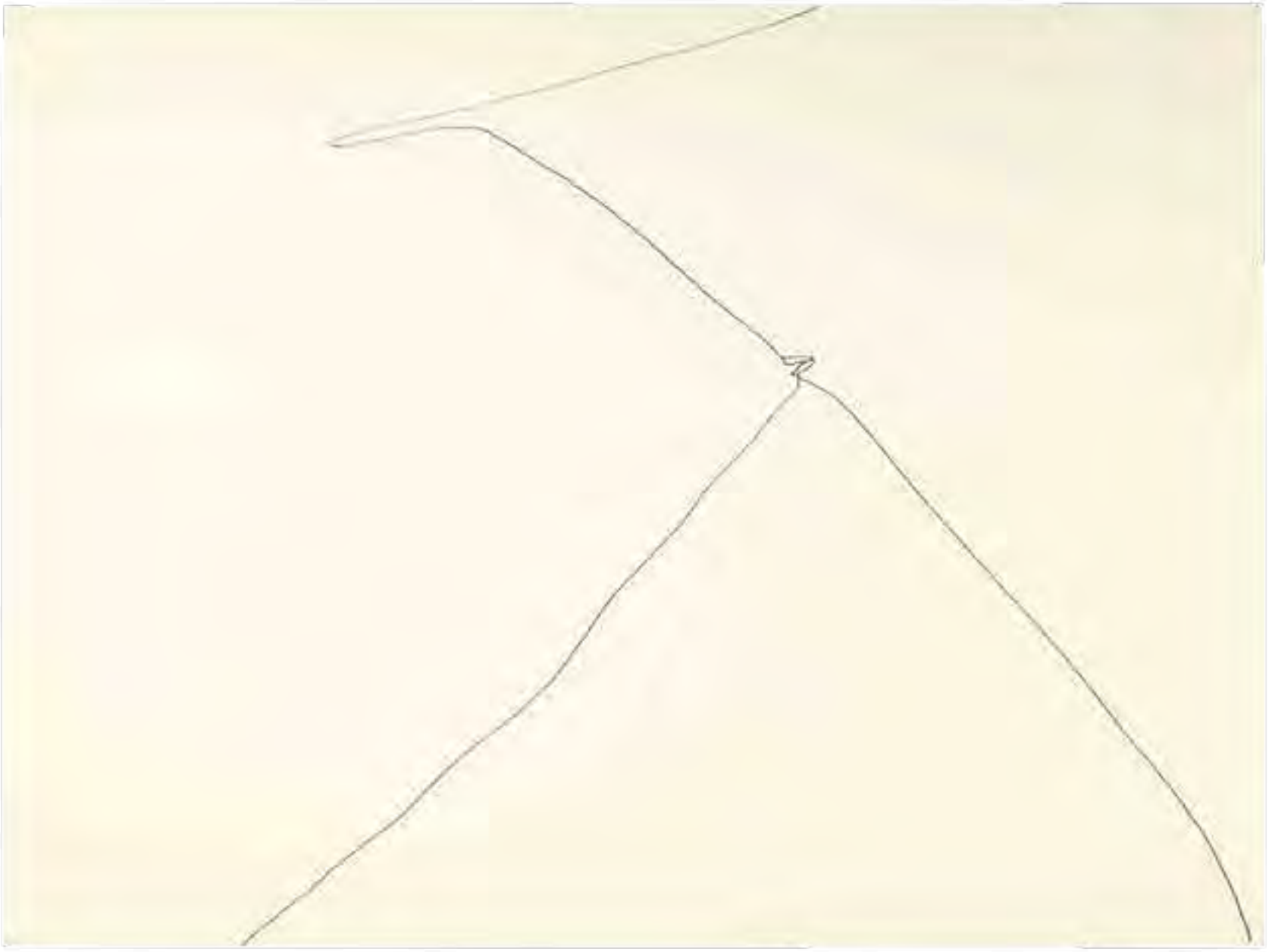
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



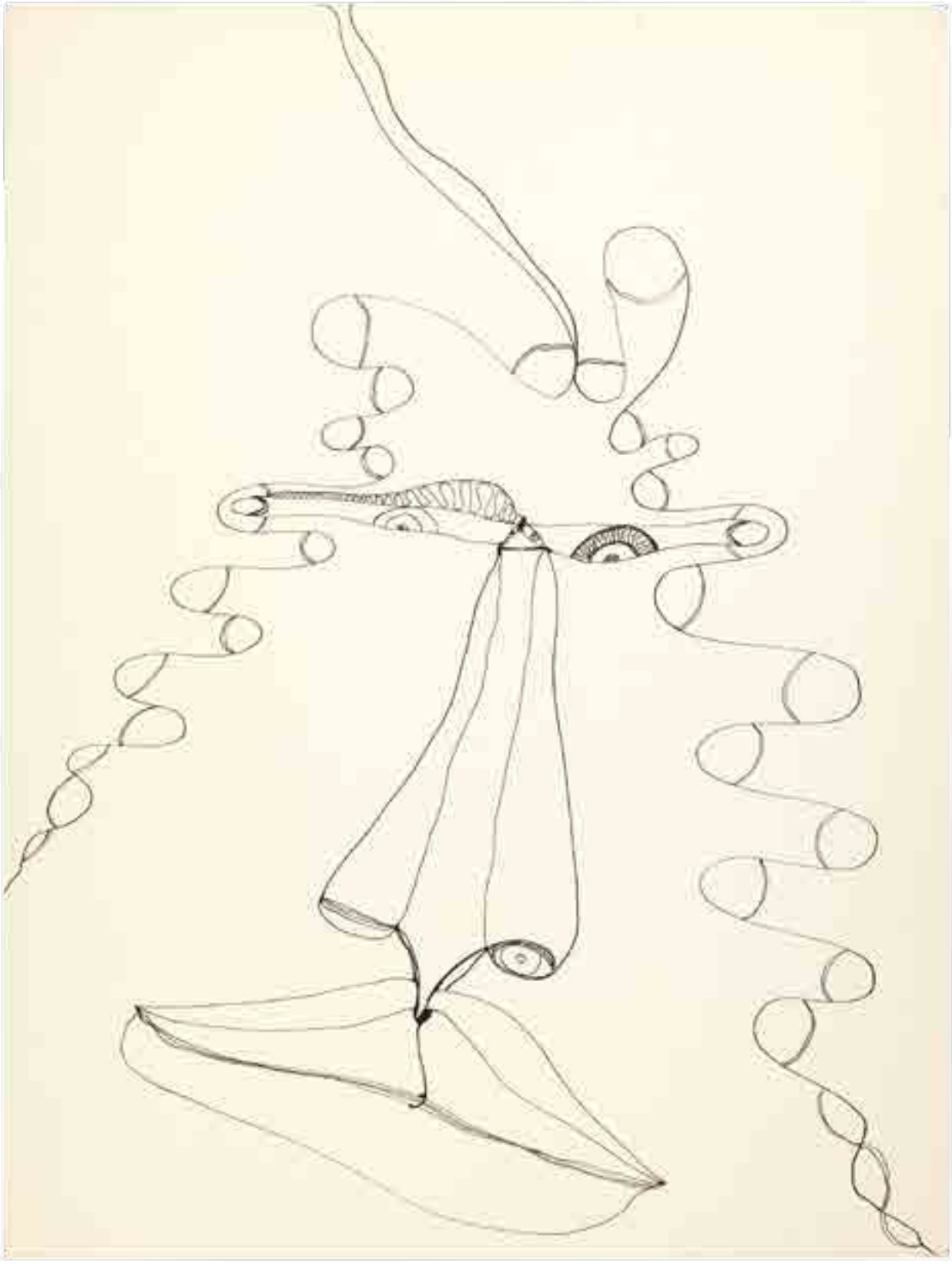
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ⅝ in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Colored pencil on paper
24.1 x 17.8 cm (9 ½ x 7 in)

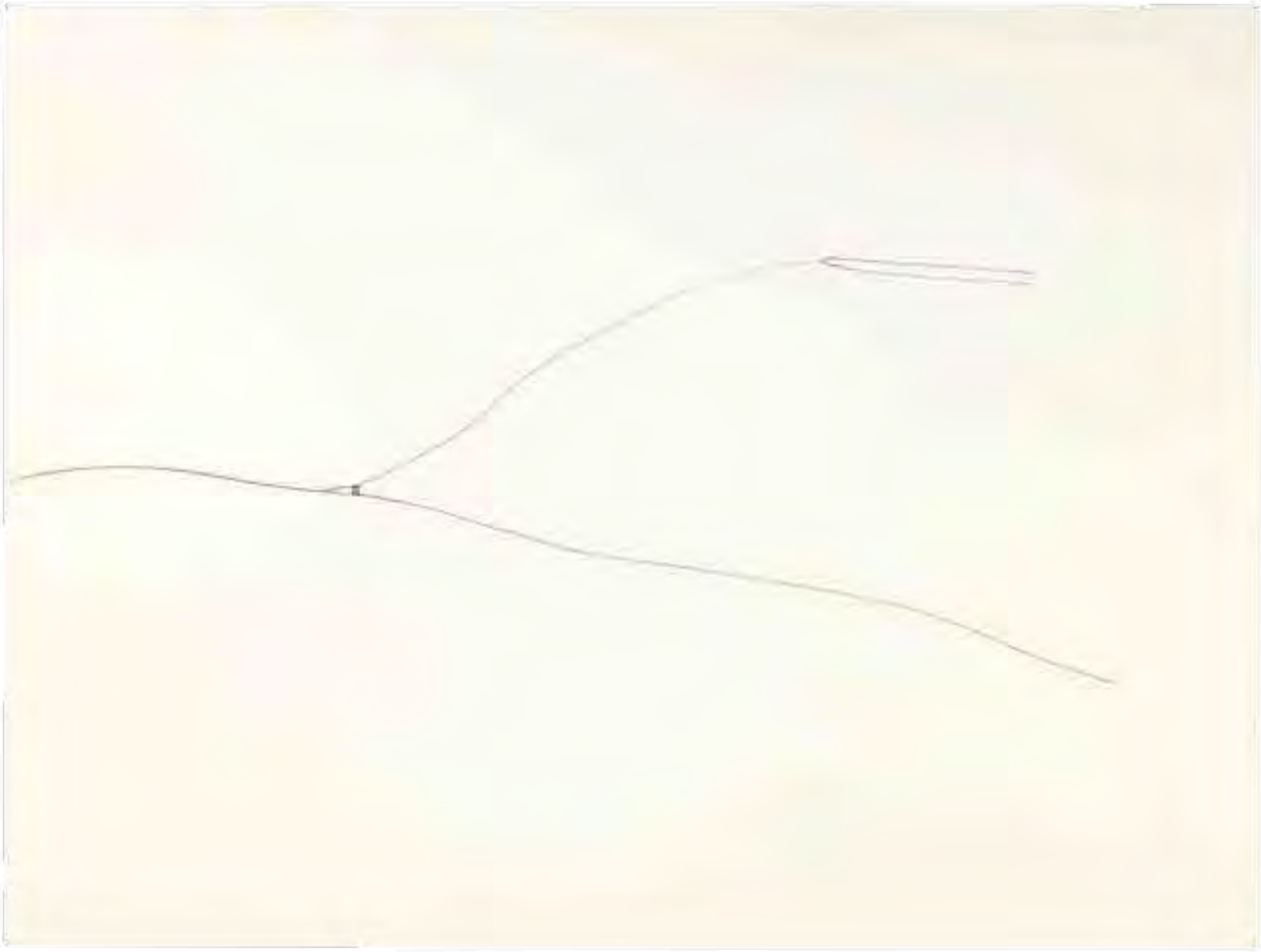
Bribes de corps, 1973
Acrylic on paper
23.8 x 32.6 cm (9 3/8 x 12 13/16 in)



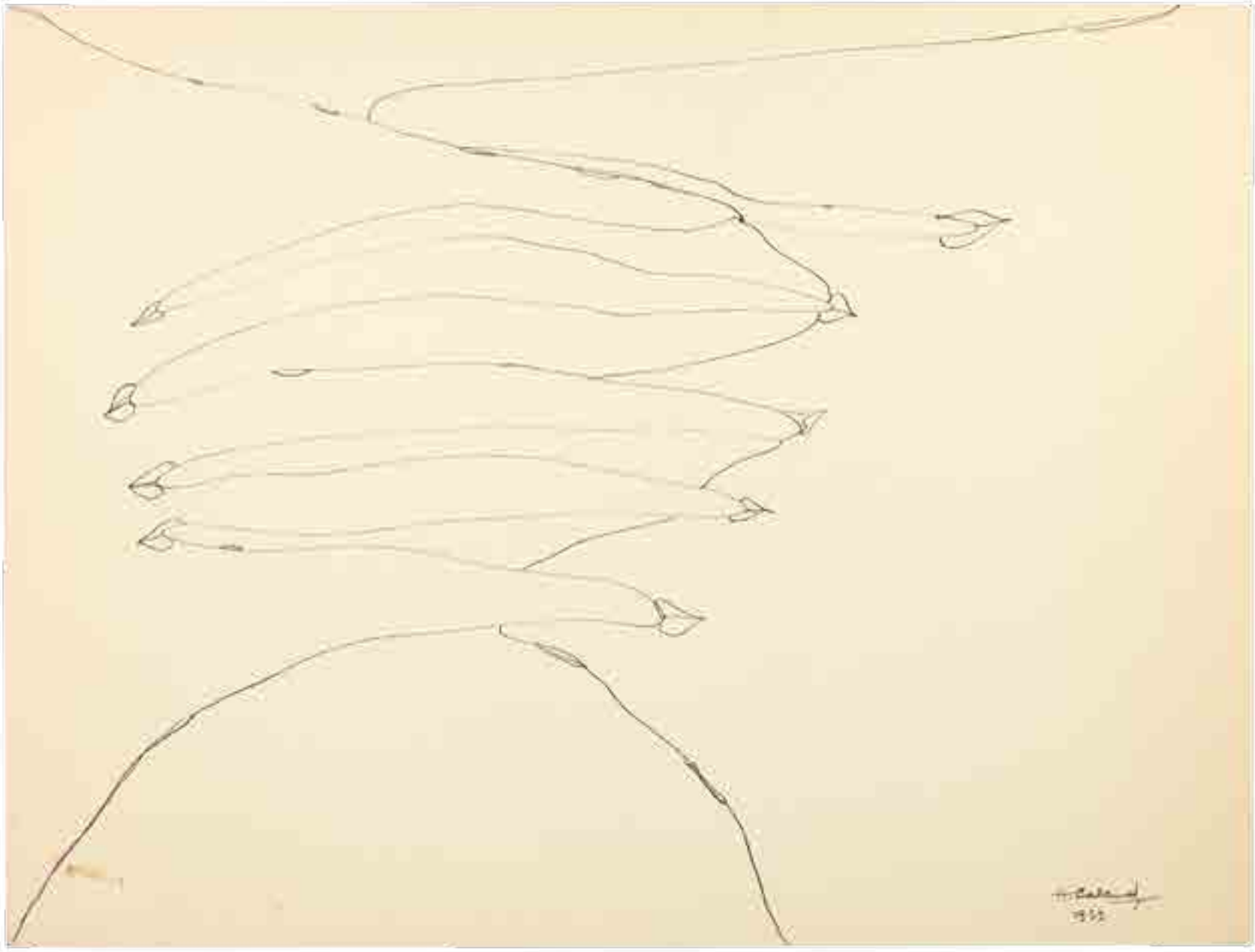
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 1/2 in)

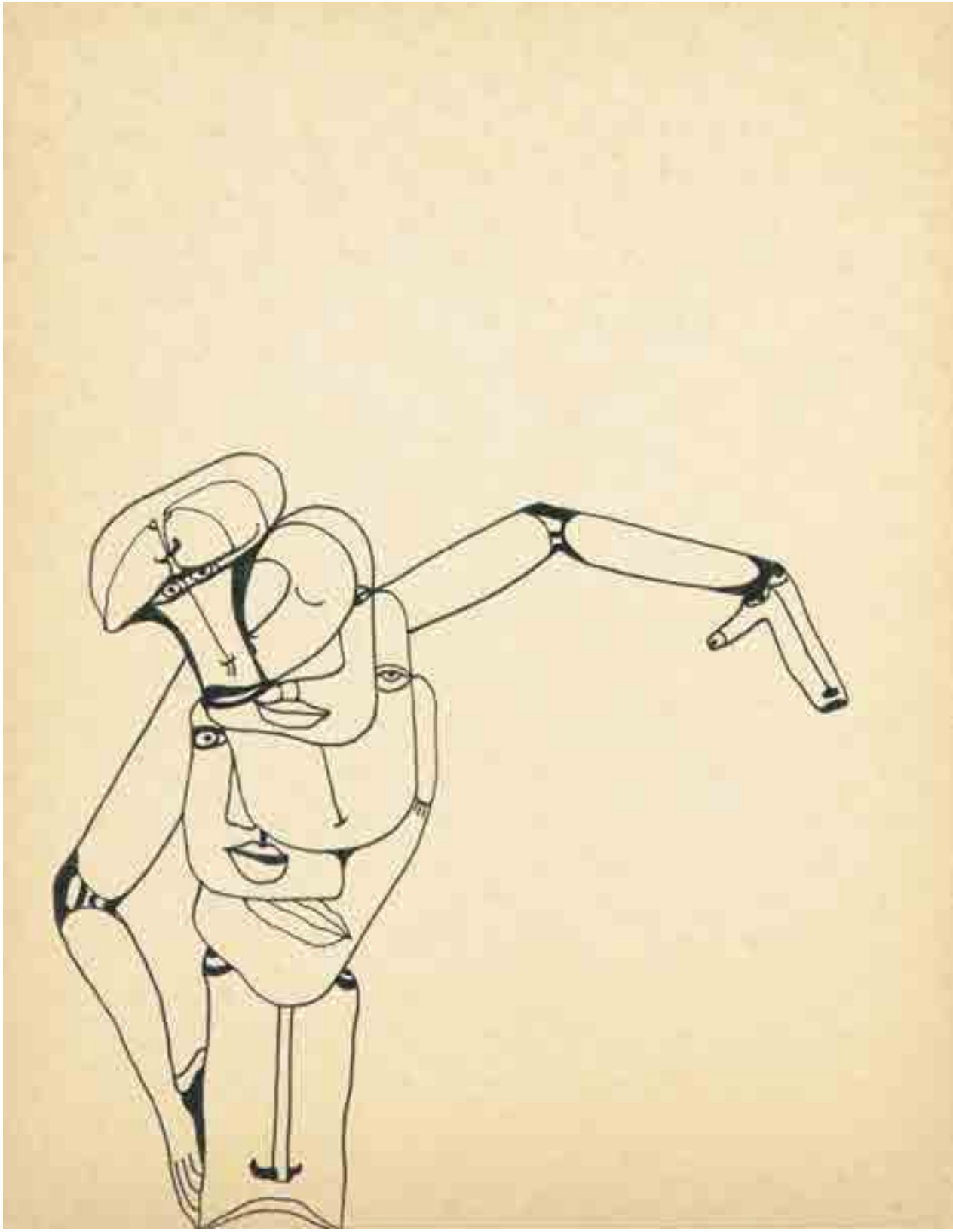


Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 7/16 x 12 5/8 in)



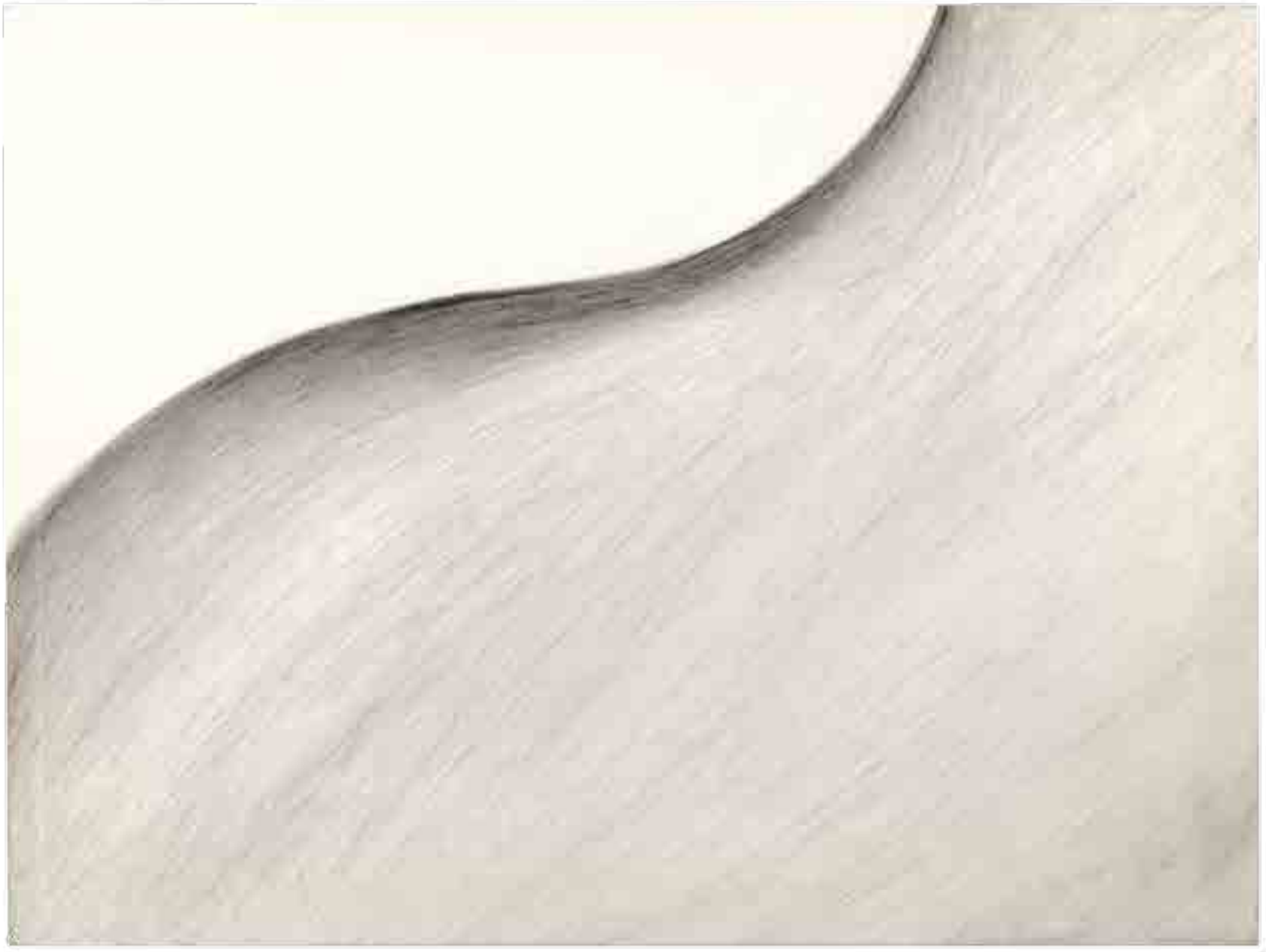
Untitled, 1973
Ink on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ⅝ in)

Tas, 1973
Marker on cardboard
27 x 21 cm (10 5/8 x 8 1/4 in)



Tender, 1973
Marker on cardboard
27 x 21 cm (10 5/8 x 8 1/4 in)

Untitled, 1974
Colored pencil on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 ⅝ x 9 ½ in)

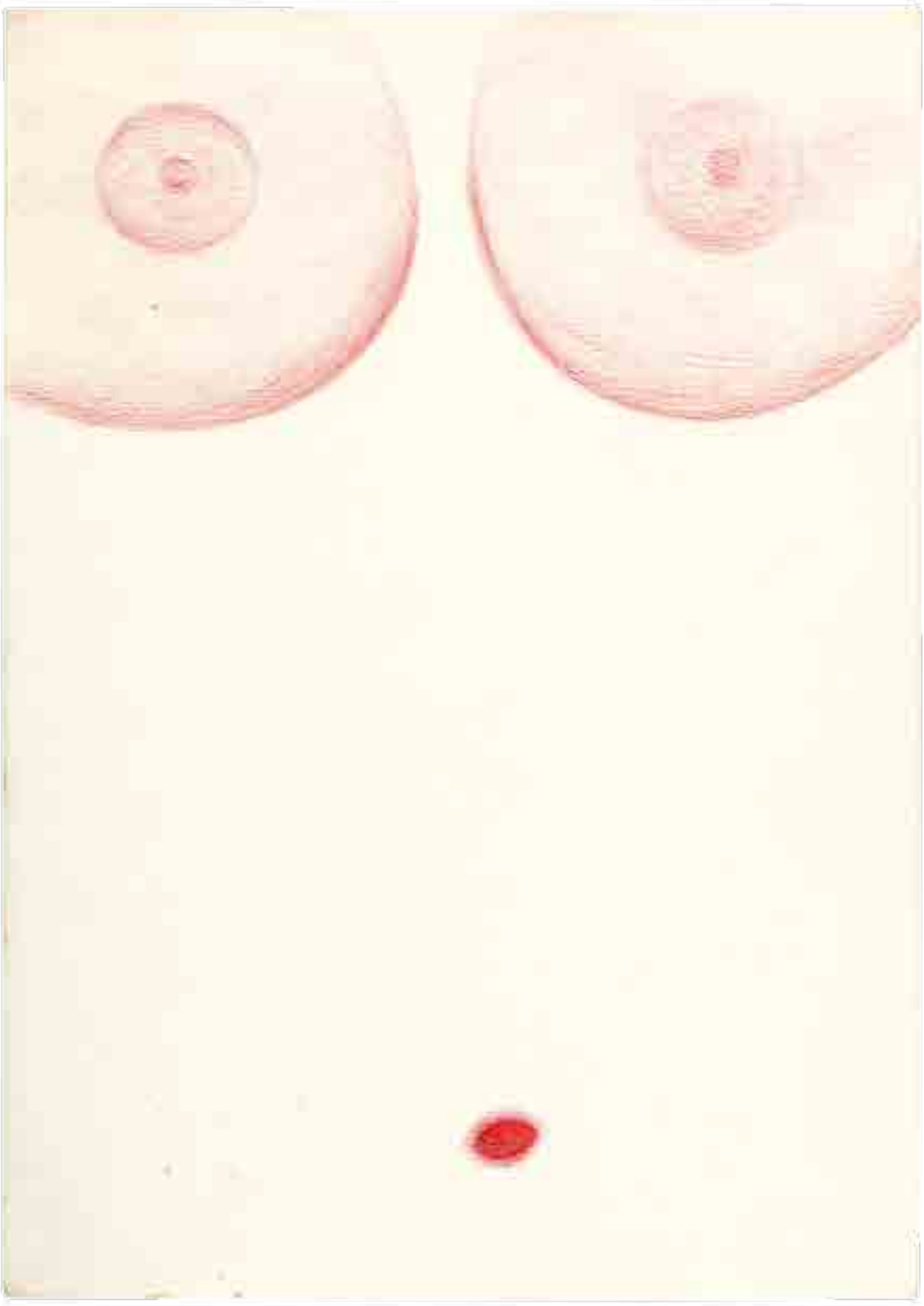


Untitled, 1974
Pencil on paper
24 x 32 cm (9 ½ x 12 ⅝ in)

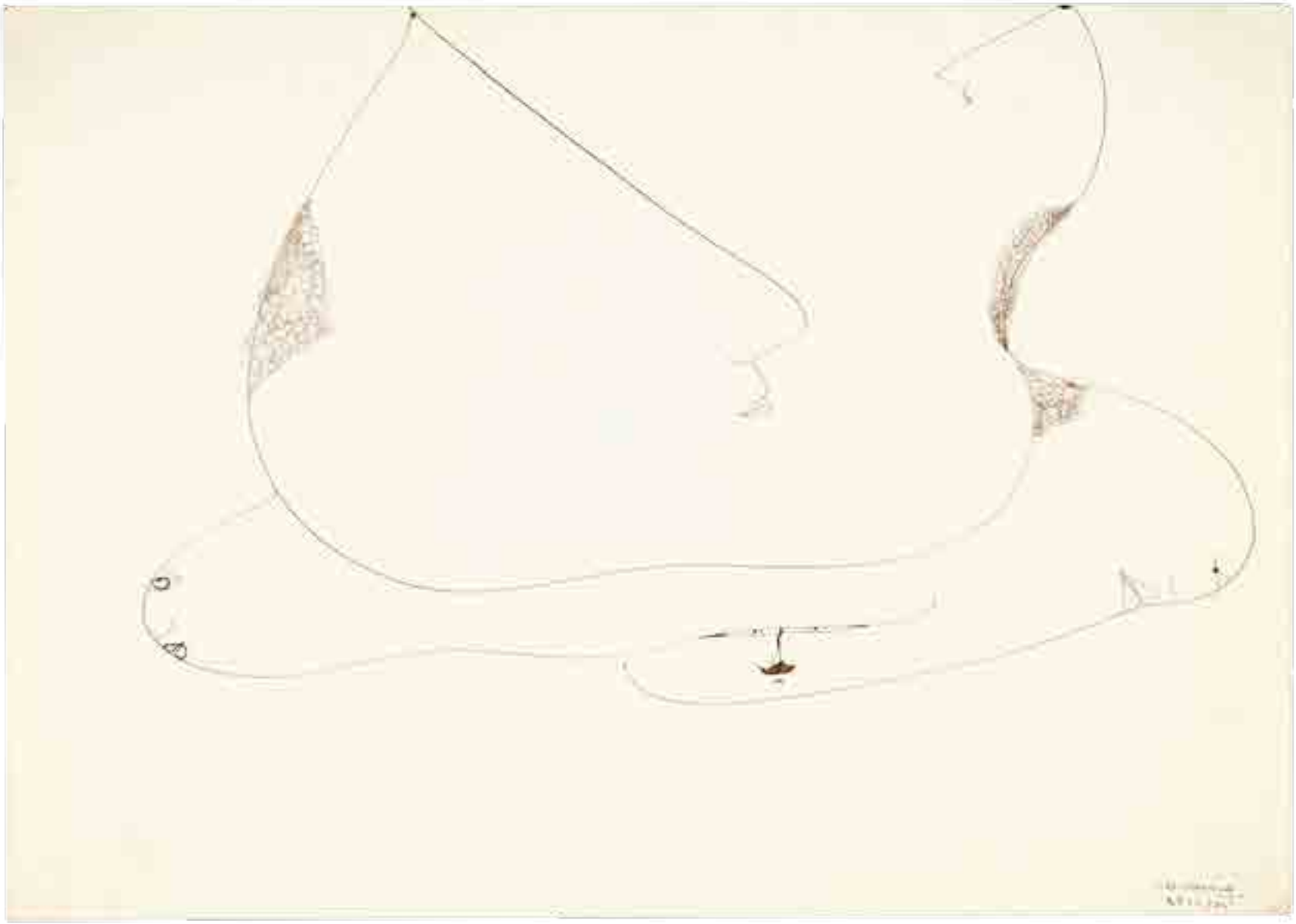
Father, 1975
Colored pencil on paper
75.8 x 56 cm (30 ⅛ x 22 ⅛ in)

Mother, 1975
Colored pencil on paper
75.5 x 56.5 cm (29 ¾ x 22 ¼ in)

Daughter, 1975
Colored pencil on paper
76 x 56 cm (29 7/8 x 22 in)



Untitled, 1975
Colored pencil on paper
33.8 x 24 cm (13 5/16 x 9 7/16 in)



Hidden Mustafa, 1975
Ink on paper
34.3 x 48.4 cm (13 ½ x 19 in)

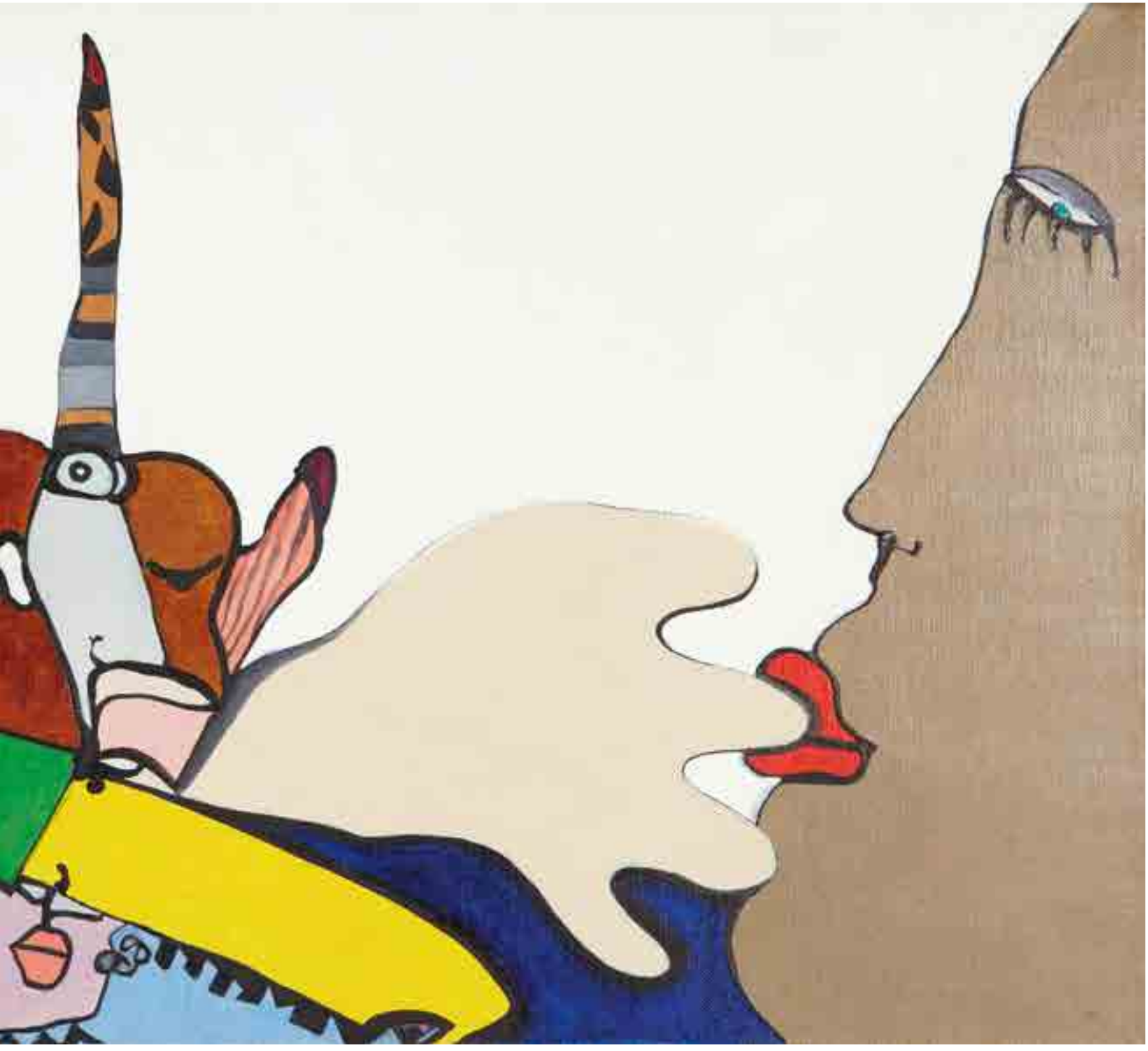
Untitled, 1975
Ink on paper
34.3 x 48.4 cm (13 ½ x 19 in)

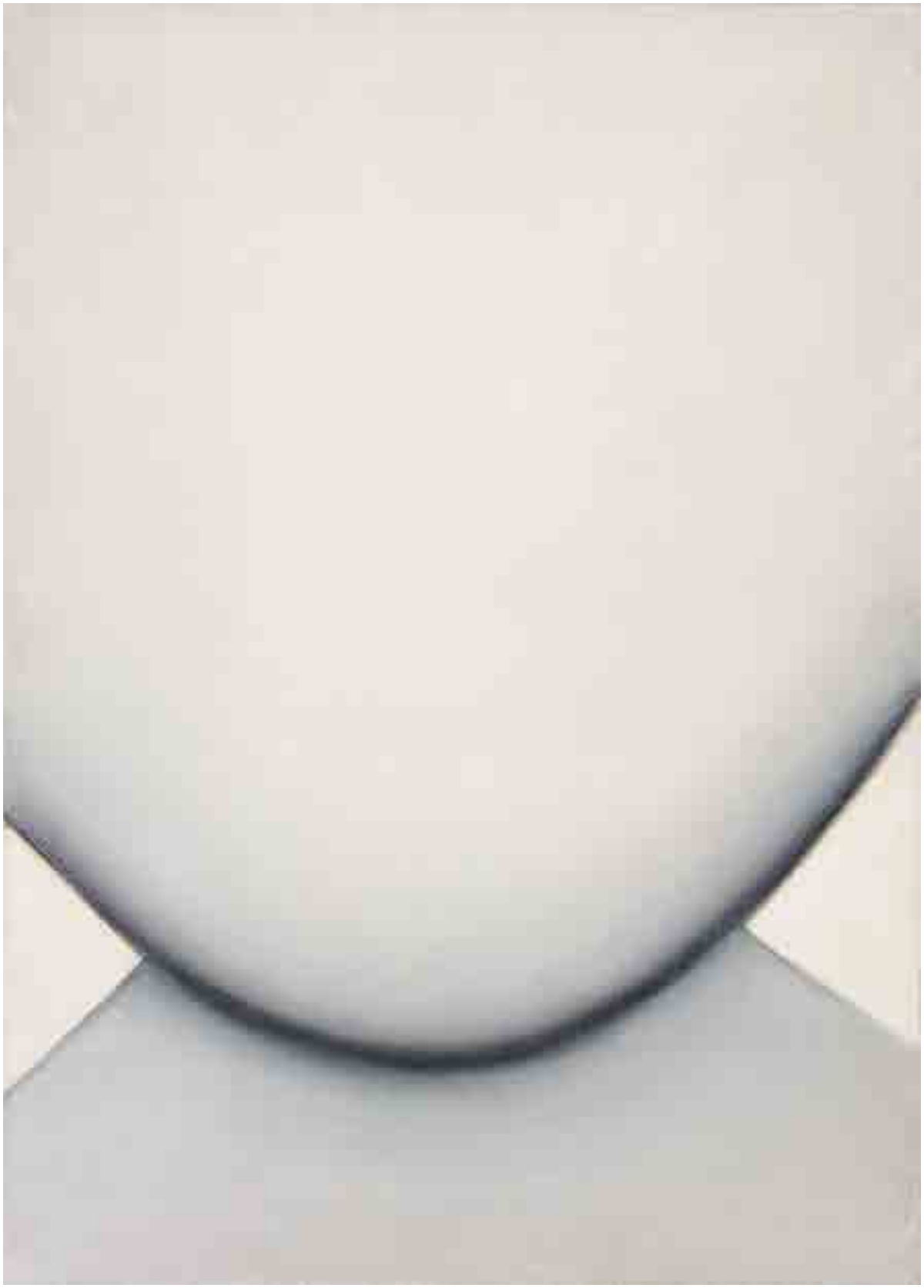
Untitled, 1977
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm (12 5/8 x 9 7/16 in)

Paintings

Exit, 1970
Oil on linen
118.7 x 119 cm (46 3/4 x 46 7/8 in)

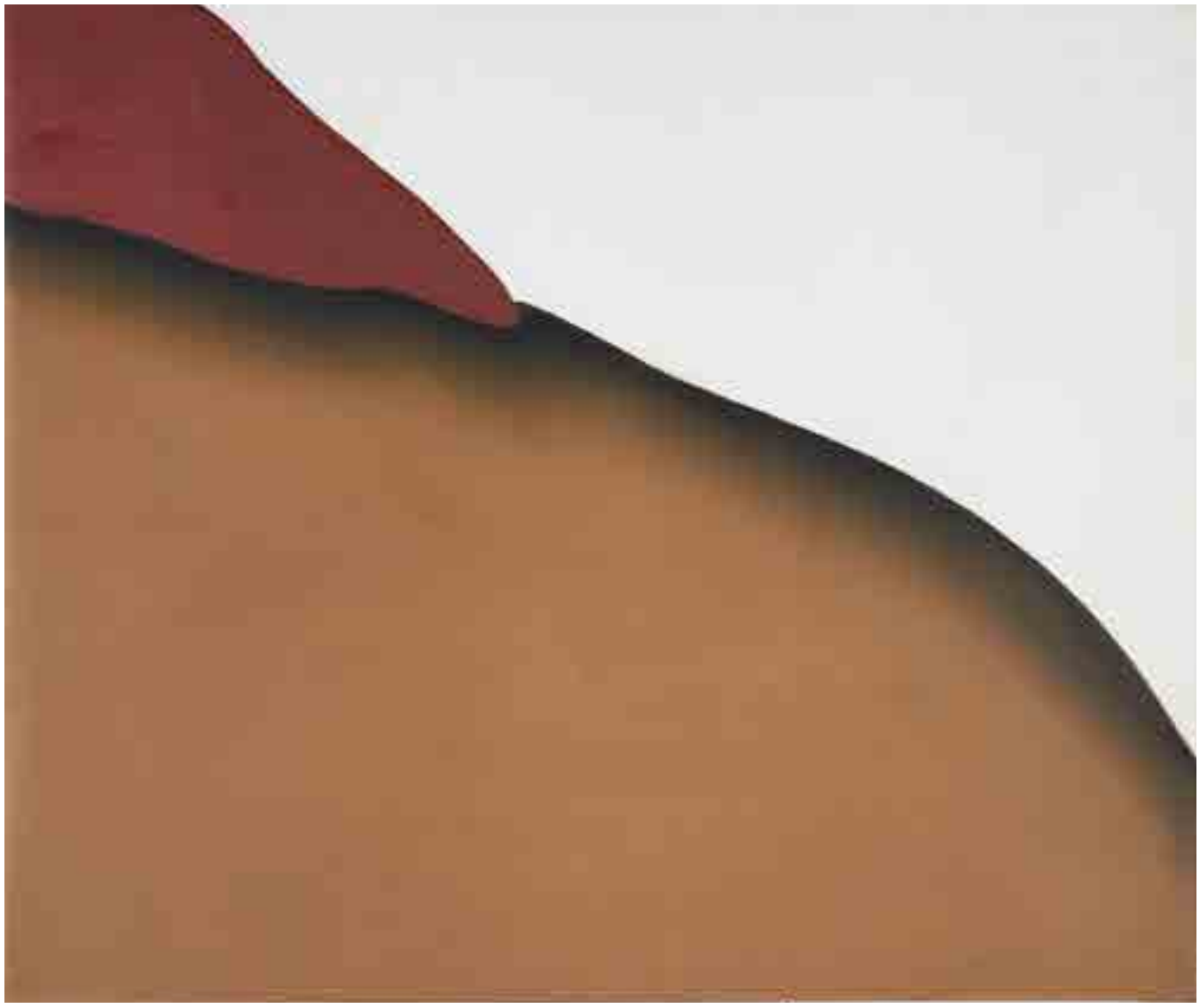
Enlève ton doigt, 1971
Oil on canvas
38.1 x 76.2 cm (15 x 30 in)



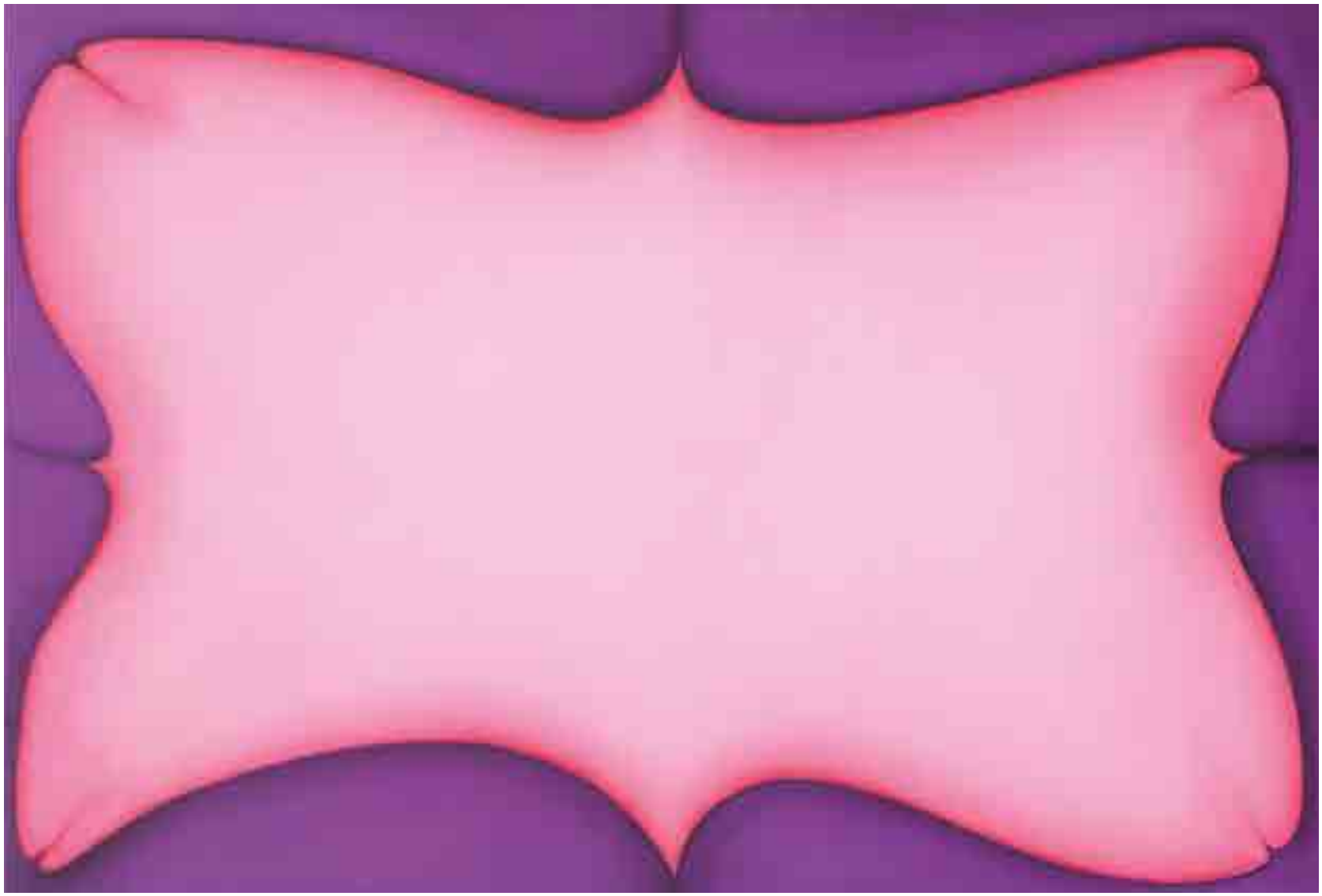


Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
49 x 35 cm (19 ¼ x 13 ¼ in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
60 x 60 cm (23 ½ x 23 ½ in)



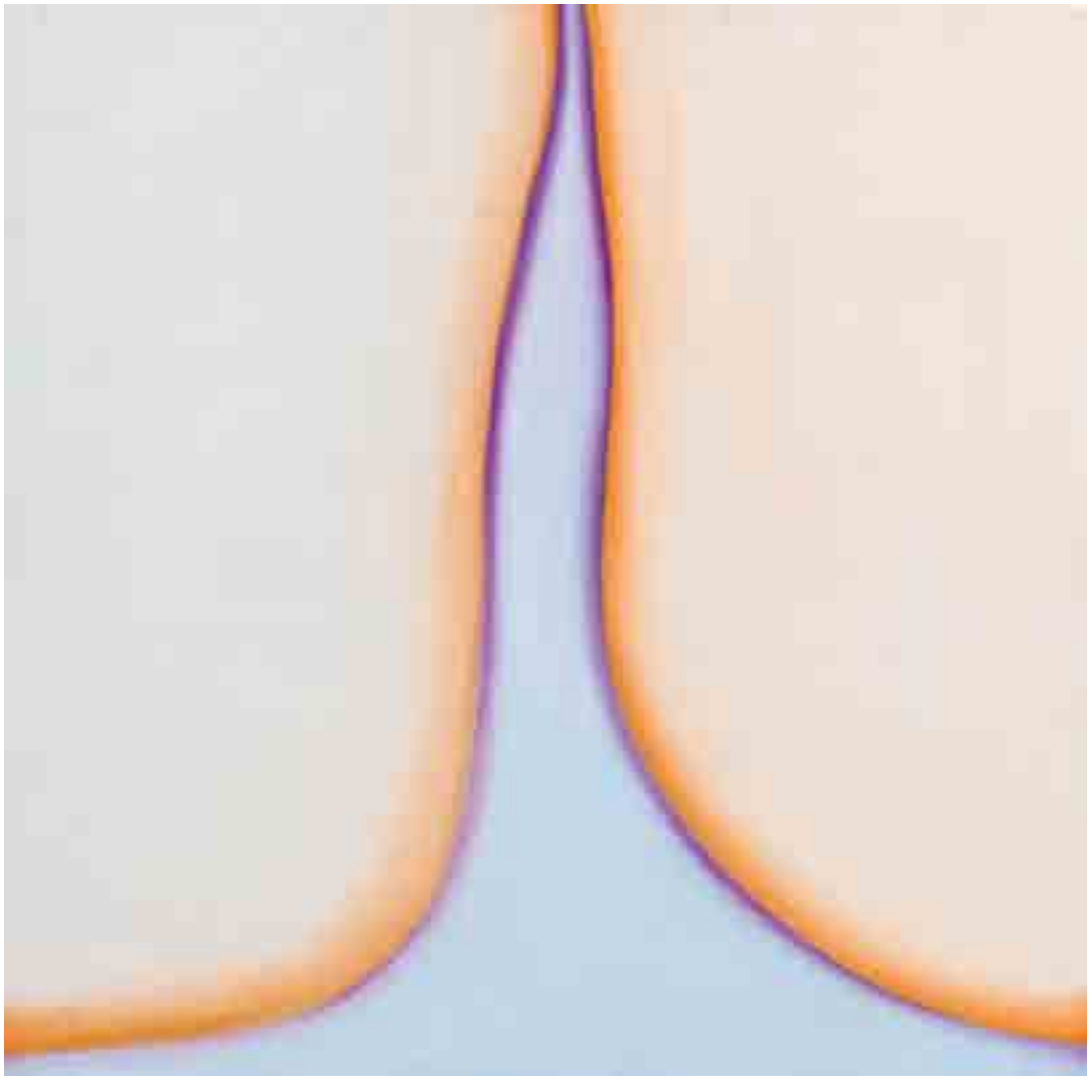
Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
46 x 54.5 cm (18 ⅛ x 21 ½ in)



Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
88.9 x 129.5 cm (35 x 51 in)
Musée national d'art moderne,
Centre Pompidou, Paris.
Gift of the KA Collection, 2013

Self-Portrait (Bribes de corps),
1973
Oil on linen
128.2 x 88.9 cm (50 ½ x 35 in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
129.5 x 88.9 cm (51 x 35 in)



Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
71.7 x 71.7 cm (28 ¼ x 28 ¼ in)
Private collection, Copenhagen,
Denmark

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
119 x 119 cm (46 ¾ x 46 ¾ in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Ink and oil on linen
130.8 x 129.5 cm (51 ½ x 51 in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
124.4 x 124.4 cm (49 x 49 in)

Self-Portrait (Bribes de corps), 1973
Oil on linen
120.6 x 120.6 cm (47 ½ x 47 ½ in)
Collection of Fondation Saradar, Lebanon

Page 158
Self-Portrait, 1973
Oil on linen
119.4 x 119.4 cm (47 x 47 in)
Private collection

Page 159
Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
120.4 x 120 cm (47 ⅜ x 47 ¼ in)

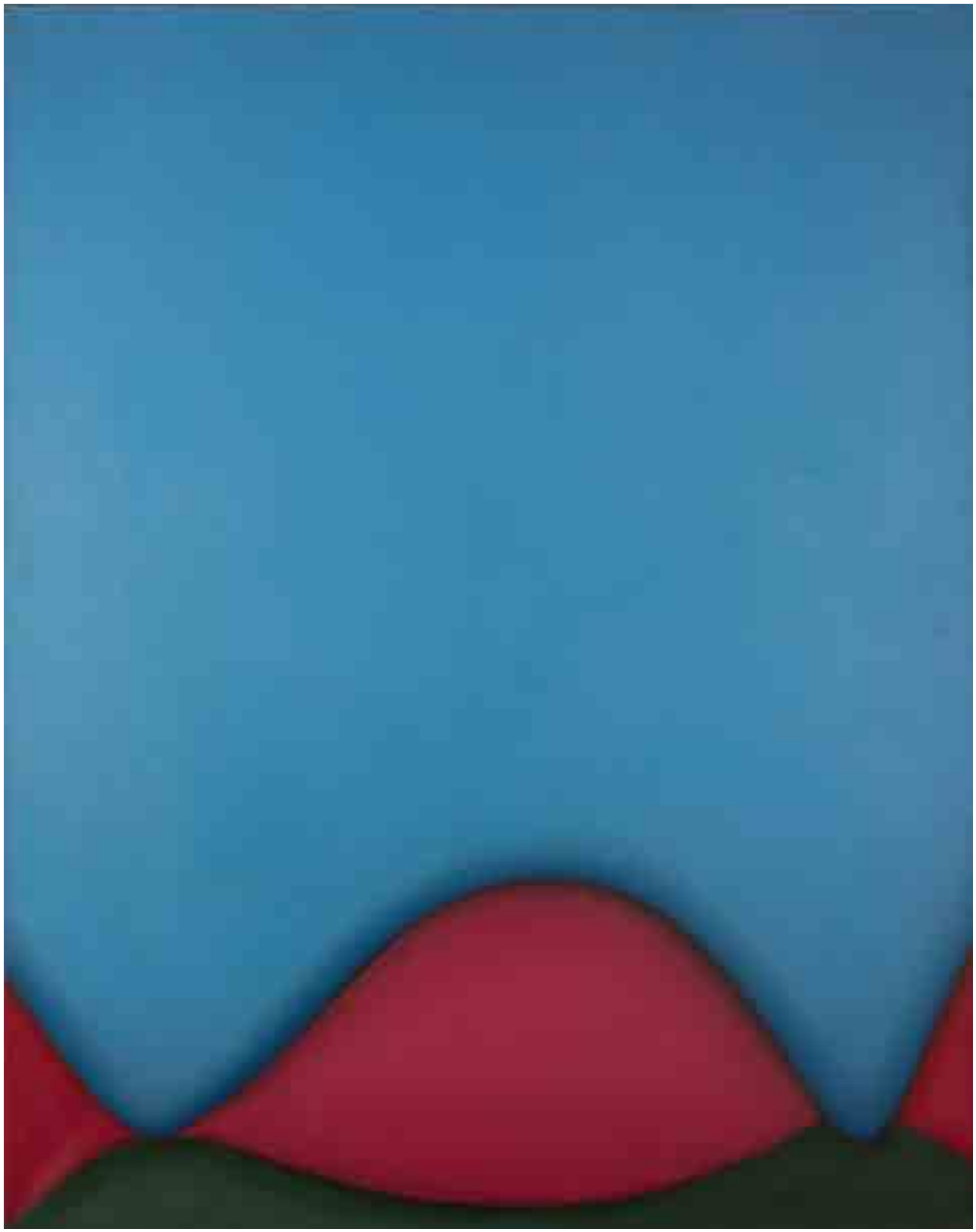
Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
60 x 60.2 cm (23 5/8 x 23 5/8 in)

Self-Portrait, 1973
Oil on linen
89.5 x 69.8 cm (35 ¼ x 27 ½ in)
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.
Gift of Erika J. Glazer

Bribes de corps, 1973
Ink and oil on linen
129.5 x 130 cm (51 3/16 x 51 1/8 in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
152.4 x 152.4 cm (60 x 60 in)
Collection of Viveca Paulin-Ferrell
and Will Ferrell

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
150.5 x 150 cm (59 ⅛ x 59 in)

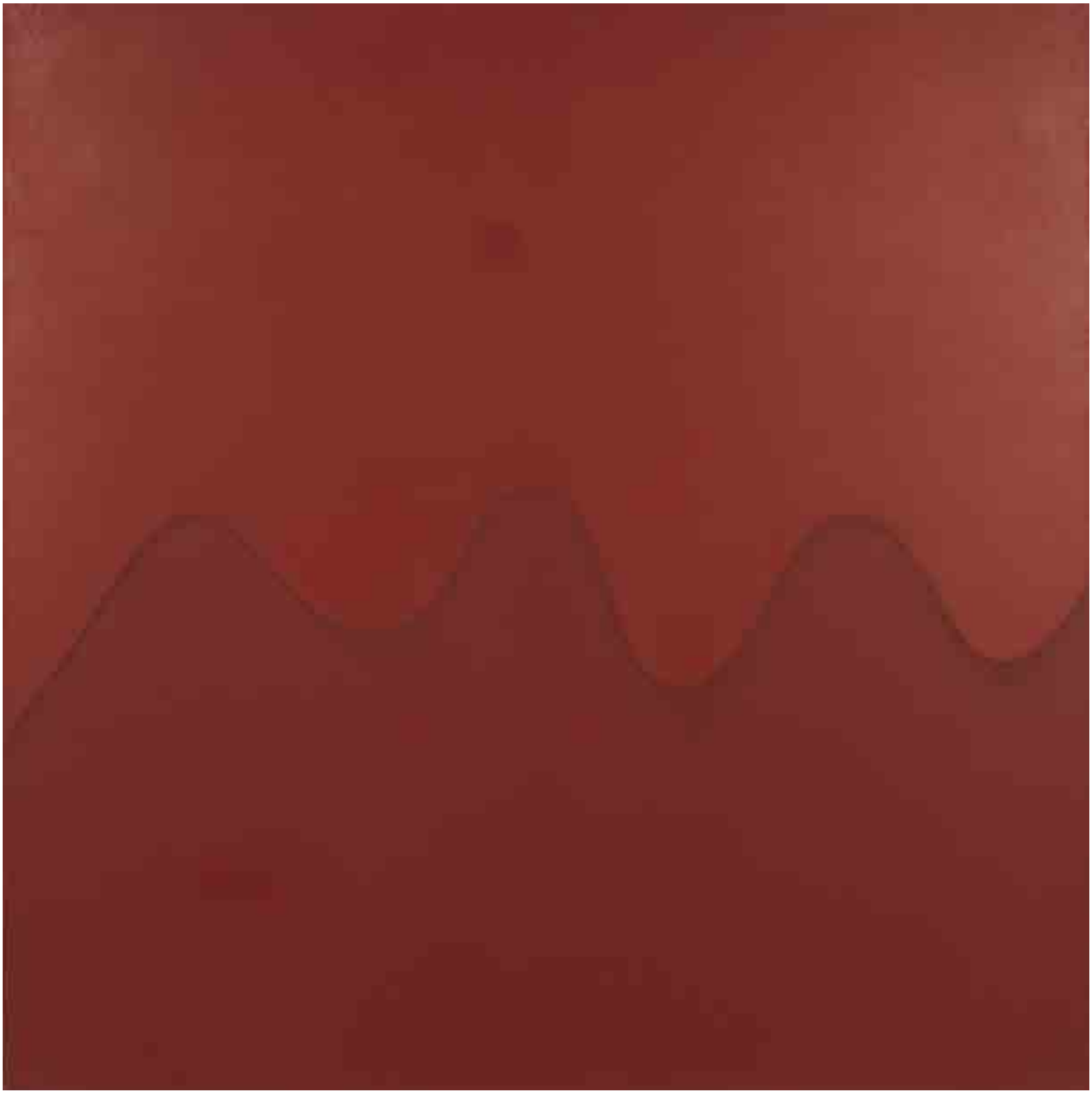


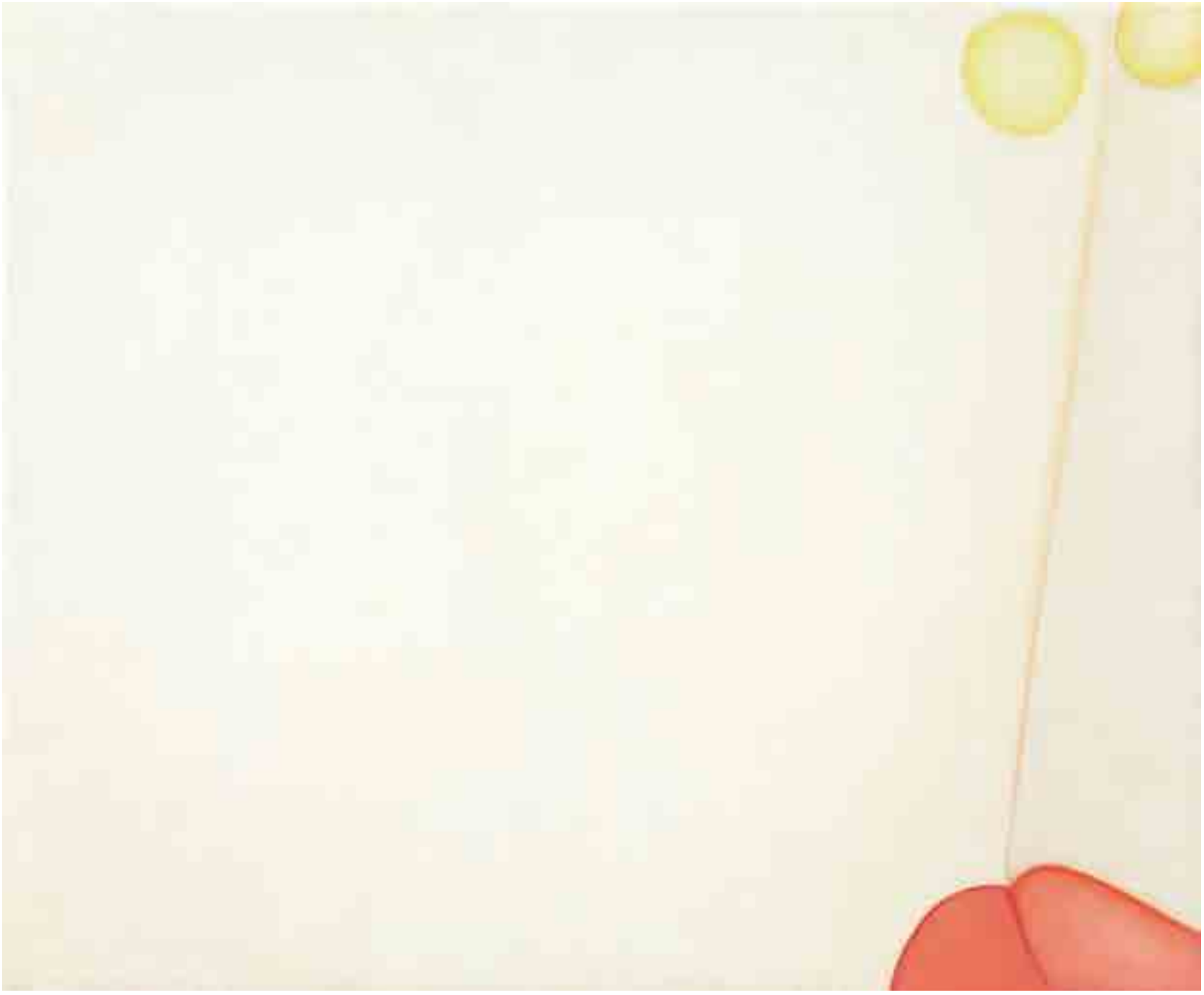
Corps bleu (Bribes de corps), 1973
Oil on linen
92 x 73.2 cm (36 3/16 x 28 7/8 in)

Bribes de corps, 1973
Oil on linen
150 x 150 cm (59 1/8 x 59 1/8 in)

Page 170
Red I, 1974
Acrylic on linen
76.5 x 80 cm (30 1/2 x 31 1/2 in)

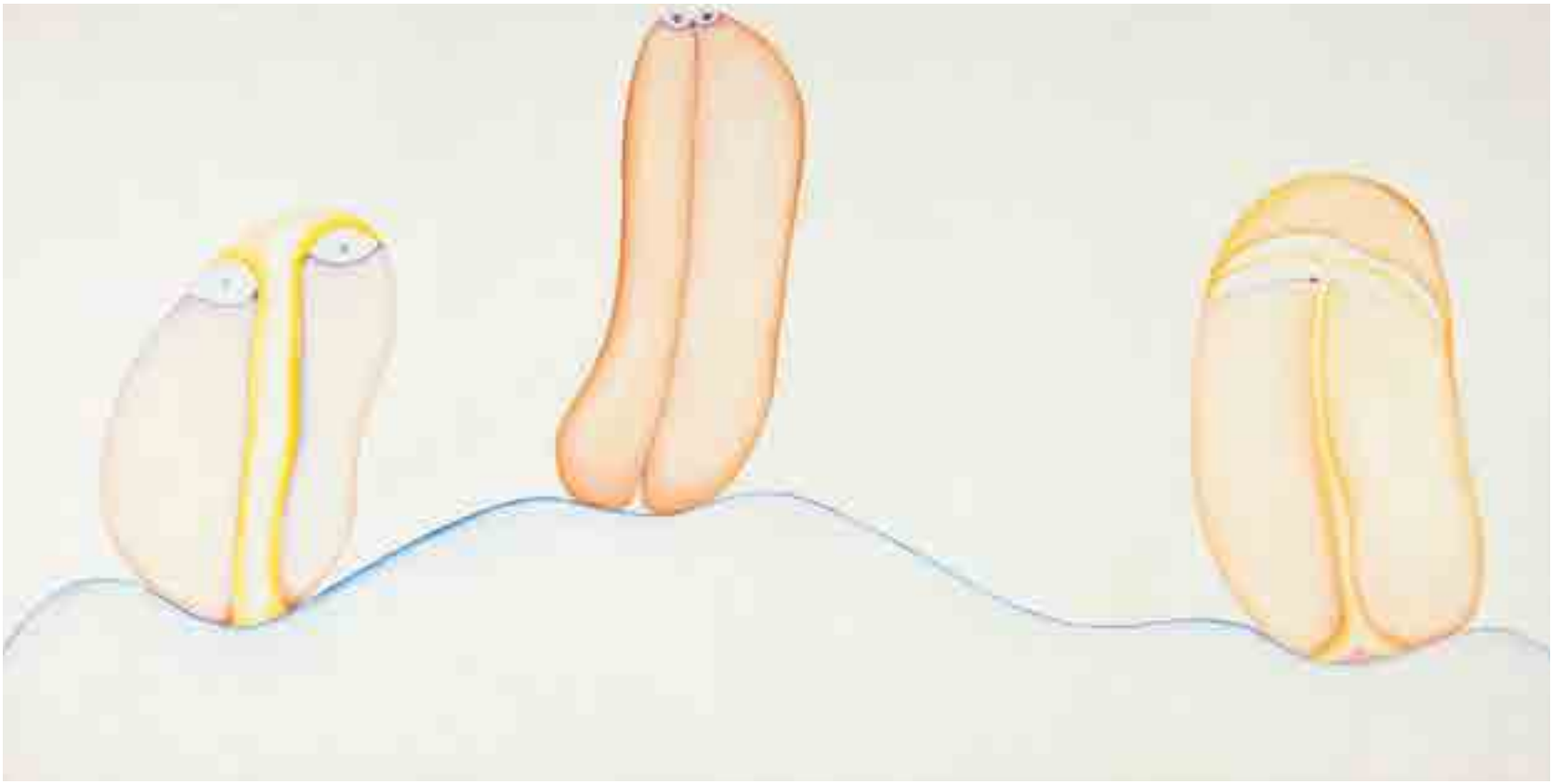
Page 171
Red II, 1974
Acrylic on linen
79.5 x 79.5 cm (31 3/8 x 31 3/8 in)





Bribes de corps, 1976
Oil on linen
59.7 x 72.4 cm (23 ½ x 28 ½ in)
Collection of Viveca Paulin-Ferrell
and Will Ferrell

Untitled, 1978
Oil on linen
50 x 50 cm (19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in)



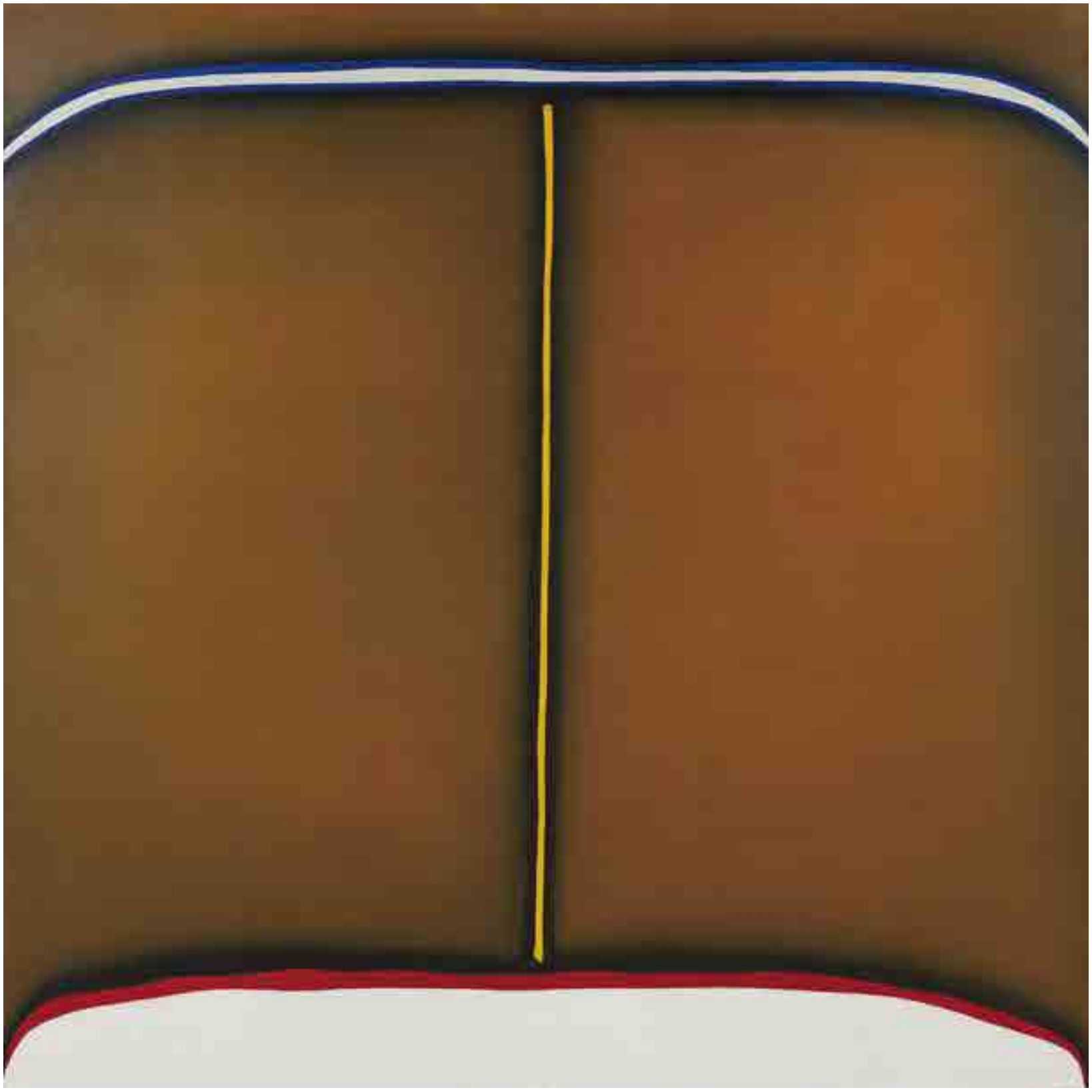
Untitled, 1978
Oil on linen
49.3 x 98.5 cm (19 3/8 x 38 3/4 in)

Visage (Bribes de corps), 1979
Oil on linen
80.6 x 80.6 cm (31 3/4 x 31 3/4 in)
Musée national d'art moderne,
Centre Pompidou, Paris. Gift of
Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut

Visage (*Bribes de corps)*, 1979
Oil on canvas
80.6 x 80.6 cm (31 ¾ x 31 ¾ in)
KA Collection, Lebanon

Page 178
Madame, 1979
Oil on linen
150.5 x 150.5 cm (59 ¼ x 59 ¼ in)

Page 179
Monsieur, 1979
Oil on canvas
200.6 x 200.6 cm (79 x 79 in)



Hanan al-Shaykh in conversation with Huguette Caland

The following transcript was edited from a conversation between Huguette Caland and Hanan al-Shaykh that aired on Télé Liban in October 1974

Hanan al-Shaykh: Being the daughter of Sheikh Bechara el-Khoury, the former President [of Lebanon], your life was different and exceptional. Was it for the better or worse?
Huguette Caland: I don't think one should see it this way. What happens happens. Now I think it was for the better, anyway, everything that happened to me in life was for the better.

HS: How were you different when you were little?
HC: At first it was very difficult. I was the only daughter of President Bechara el-Khoury, and younger than my brothers. I was also very fat—fat to the point that people would stare at me. I could not walk in the street without hearing: "What a pity, she is so fat, why doesn't she lose weight?" Maybe I became fat as a challenge, but I can't tell you how often I heard the question "Why doesn't she lose weight?" There were many difficulties. In the family some of us are fat, but I became fatter than I should have when I was young. When I was twelve years old my weight was frightening.

HS: You mentioned that it was maybe as a challenge. But who were you challenging?
HC: I don't know, one doesn't analyze, but now I can—on a personal level for myself—analyze why I was eating without conscience, and putting on weight. I think that I was creating difficulties—I began to create them, for me, in such a way. I began to get fat to see how one could live being fat, with a full life and without any restrictions.

HS: You said you wanted to create difficulties.
HC: Yes, I keep creating difficulties. I don't like things that come easily as if life were not difficult enough. And I love overcoming difficulties. I create them when there is nothing, I always find difficulties to overcome, maybe because it gives a taste to life.

HS: So you always find difficulties to make it easier on you?
HC: Not to make it easy. Maybe I accept them, I digest them, I resolve them. Every difficulty has its solution, and I guess everyone finds a convenient solution.

HS: And your weight caused a personal struggle with yourself?
HC: It created a problem between me and society because I was rejected at a time when fashion was about skinny and tall girls. It was difficult for sure. I never used to find

something that fit, every dress was a catastrophe, every time I went shopping with or without my mother, I suffered. And maybe this is why, all my life, I dreamed of dresses, or clothes, this is why I love Arabic clothing, because they conceal the body more than others.

HS: You mean like the *dishdasha* and the *jallabiya*?
HC: Yes, all these large dresses. But then by the time I reached the point where I could wear them, I began to lose weight. Maybe it was another sort of challenge. Because I loved them so much, I wanted them for their meaning and their beauty. Not only for concealing.

HS: You just mentioned when you were able to wear them. Why were you not able to wear these dresses before?
HC: Even when I began to wear them it was very hard. When I began, there were no hippies, no one had broken the rules of fashion. Every one was following the trend.

HS: A suit and a blouse?
HC: Not only. Tailors would constantly lengthen or shorten dresses, as if it is mandatory to wear certain clothes because magazines determine their length and colors. These things never convinced me. The first time I went out with an *abaya*, I cannot tell you how hard it was. At the American University, where I was a student, I suffered the first year.

HS: What year was this?
HC: The year after my father died.

HS: What did you study?
HC: Fine arts. I stayed four years, and I would sweat, every day, as I climbed the stairs of Nicely Hall in the art department, and would see three thousand pairs of eyes staring at me. People would say: "Ah, Sheikh Bechara's daughter became crazy," not at the American University, because the atmosphere was nicer, but…

HS: But on your way?
HC: When I decided that I would dress like this, I turned the page and never went back because it meant much more for me than fashion or clothes.

HS: What was the meaning of it?
HC: I knew that I was changing my whole life.

HS: After your father's death?
HC: After my father's death, I felt free to live my life.

HS: So how did this transition happen?
HC: It was something I had inside of me for a long time. If my parents had lived longer, I would have been happy because we got along very well. But as long as they were alive, I would never have decided or thought about changing so much in my life. However, when my mother died first and then my father, I felt totally free to live my life and be in charge of my destiny. Since, I have never lived in the past because the past dies every second. There is not a second where the past doesn't die.

HS: When your father was sick, I heard that you were constantly with him.
HC: Yes.

HS: And that your friendship strengthened a lot.
HC: Yes, we had a great relationship.

HS: So when he died all the family was concerned about you.
HC: Yes, because everyone knew we had a great relationship. There was a sort of understanding between me and my parents, especially in the later part of their lives. Our relationship was very sweet. We got along on everything, and when my father got sick and suffered a lot, I think I helped him die.

HS: How did you help him die?
HC: It was how I felt. He was sick and we were not fooling each other, he was very conscious about his illness and about everything.

HS: You helped him accept the idea of death.
HC: I made it lighter for him, yes, I did. He accepted it anyway. But, my presence and our relationship brought some lightness throughout his illness.

HS: You mentioned that when your father passed away, a change happened in your life, in what direction did you go?
HC: I knew all my life that I would be an artist, I drew a lot and played the piano for nine years, everyone thought I was going to write.

HS: Did you write well?
HC: I don't know if I could say "well," but I write. I drew for a year with Fernando Manetti here in Beirut when I was sixteen years old, but . . . I never talked about it. I kept silent and I would have all my life. But when my father passed away, my mother had died, and the children had grown a bit, I felt that I could own my life. And I started very quickly, right away, a week later, and painted the biggest canvas that I consider the most important one maybe. I painted it a month after my father's death.

HS: Ok, I understand from this that your father was against you becoming an artist?
HC: No, never. But it was not possible. I had responsibilities. I had the house to manage. I was not a great housewife, I can't brag about this, but I did my best to continue the tradition of an open house, where one could always find something to eat, no more than that.

HS: You grew up in a family unlike others where your father and mother could not see you a lot.
HC: No, no, thank God. A very open family, open to visitors, there were always lots of people. I cannot remember sitting at a dining table the five of us—my mother, father, brothers and me. We would have never dreamed of it, and it was a very good thing. There is nothing more claustrophobic than a family shut on itself, which doesn't see anyone. It was not easy, of course, to live in a *courant d'air* but the house was constantly full and I think we all benefited a lot from this.

HS: Did it not affect you relationship with your parents?
HC: No, because they never ran away from their duties towards us. My mother was very present.

HS: How was your relationship with your mother?
HC: Very sweet. She was very sweet, with a strong personality. She was dealing with

lots of things, and I think there was a strong understanding between her and my father. And the ambiance in the house was very sweet, despite the politics and the tiresome context. My mother's health, for sure, was very affected by it. She paid a high price healthwise.

HS: Why? Was she helping your father in his political life?
HC: She was his life companion, she didn't like politics but she embraced all her responsibilities, she was not the sort of person who ran away. When she saw that there were things to be done she accomplished them.

HS: And I think you also endured hardships when you were young. Events happened when they were searching for your father.
HC: Yes, indeed. The past is past. It didn't affect me.

HS: You were not frightened by those events?
HC: I'm not afraid. I'm afraid of things, not of men. I'm afraid of my own imagination maybe, which creates things, but not of things that may happen in the real world. When they arrested my father, they entered my room, and tore the mosquito net over my bed. But all those things are not very important in my life.

HS: You just mentioned that you were afraid of your own imagination—why?
HC: But I like fear, it's true.

HS: You mentioned at the beginning of our conversation that you liked difficulties, that you don't like to have it easy in life. So who influenced this? Your father or your mother?
HC: I don't know, maybe both. I think everyone is the result of two persons and the environment around. All the people whom I met, whom I dealt with, for sure, influenced me, but I can't say who influenced me on what. What I know is that their impact is permanent, and one accepts things from outside and then transforms them according to his or her capacities.

HS: Let's go back to your house and the notion of freedom. There was certainly a big sense of freedom in your house.
HC: Yes, very much so.

HS: As far as you were concerned, you went out and traveled with your mother—
HC: Yes, I traveled a lot with my mother and I would sneak out of the house. No, it was not very free, but we had the freedom of thought for sure.

HS: Were you able to give your opinion?
HC: I didn't ask for permission. First of all, no one grants freedom to others. No one gives it. You take it, you don't wait for permission to say something. You want to say something, you say it, whether others are happy or not, you say it.

HS: I'm sure you had a strong character to be able to say things you wanted without—
HC: I think it is normal. When you decide to say things the way you feel, it's hard at first, but it facilitates things afterwards. And then people accept what you say. When you don't exaggerate, when you don't say things to be provocative, but because you are convinced, they accept it. If you provoke them, they resent it.

HS: Why didn't you pursue your political ambitions, as you grew up in a very political environment?
HC: I never said that I had any political ambitions. Everything is political, I think, everything done consciously becomes political. And if there is consciousness and talent, then it becomes political and artistic. I don't think you can separate one thing from another, I mean, art is politics, and politics is an art. There are no borders.

HS: You can say this sitting at home, but you can't say that when you're involved in the government and the parliament.
HC: When I paint, I may be involved in changing the way of thinking about things, maybe there is a greater influence of art on politics than a political act itself, you cannot separate both. The same applies to clothes, everything has a political influence. Thinking has a political influence, talking has a political influence.

HS: Concerning your art, I noticed that there is much eroticism in your paintings.
HC: I don't know if there is an explanation. I never sit down in front of a drawing or a painting and think, "I'm going to paint something erotic." Erotic means life, there is no life without some form of eroticism. You can't separate eroticism from life.

HS: Regarding your paintings, you started with very clear, solid and strong lines, as if they were like you. And now I notice that this has changed in the paintings you're doing at present.
HC: I got more delicate.

HS: You got more delicate. Is it the impact of life?
HC: Everyone goes through stages in life. There is no one who is not influenced by life, but as I work, I don't analyze what is happening, or the reasons behind a piece.

HS: I am trying!
HC: But the beauty of art is that everyone can have a personal interpretation. When you show your work, you accept this idea. Nowadays my work is indeed more delicate.

HS: As if you are calm and more peaceful—
HC: It does not mean I'm calm or peaceful, but it does convey that the expression of things has changed. Maybe I say the same things more delicately, maybe with more pleasure than previously, maybe there is more mischievousness in my work now.

HS: More delicate mischievousness—
HC: Yes, maybe.

HS: In your drawings we always see people, people, people all the time.
HC: Maybe because I have seen so many! Everything takes the shape of a person.

HS: People who mean something to you?
HC: When I was young, in my room, as cars were passing by outside, at night, everything changed; toys, cupboards, chairs were transformed into faces. Everything became a person and each person would stare at me, talk to me, scold me. I was very scared. I would sit still in bed for hours to protect myself from fear.

HS: Now you are living in Paris.
HC: Part of the year.

HS: Why did you choose Paris? Why did you choose living there?
HC: I think for the difficulty of it.

HS: There too?
HC: Yes, it's even more difficult.

HS: You like challenging yourself very much.
HC: I do challenge myself. If someone has to challenge someone, it can only be oneself.

HS: I have a more personal question: why did you lose weight?
HC: I lost weight because I liked the clothes I was wearing and I didn't want them to only conceal me; I wanted to be good to them, to respect them. You know, I exercise everyday, it changes the body, all the movements. And I think everyone has to preserve his or her health. I think the least you can do towards society and the other is to preserve what exists. Of course, one can get injured, sick, hit by a catastrophe, or some unfortunate event, but when someone is in good health, preserving it is a duty. This is why I also lost weight.

HS: It appears that you are very often alone, and you think a lot.
HC: I think a lot. But I am not alone enough.

HS: I mean, you process. You make decisions.
HC: I process, but I think that now I reached a point where I don't process that much. I barely have time to live and work. There are many questions I have already answered, and I don't want to go over them all the time.

Translated from the Arabic by Brigitte Caland and Louise Gallorini

Biography

Huguette Caland (b. 1931, Beirut, Lebanon)

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2016
Silent Letters, Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York
2015
Bronzes, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
2014
Early Works: 1970–1985, Lombard Freid Gallery, New York
2013
Retrospective 1964–2012, Beirut Exhibition Center, Beirut, Lebanon
2011
Undercover, Peter Findlay Gallery, New York
Mes Jeunes Années, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
2009
Silent Memories, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
Autumn, LA Contemporary, Los Angeles
Silent Memories, Peter Findlay Gallery, New York
2006
Rossinantes, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
Rossinantes, Samy Kinge Gallery, Paris
2003
Introspective, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
2001
Silent Letters, Samy Kinge Gallery, Paris
2000
L'argent, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
1999
Silent Letters and Touchables, Off Main Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
1998
The Scapes & Escapes, Elena Zass Gallery, Laguna Beach, CA
1997
Faces and Places II, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
1994
Faces and Places I, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon
1992
Gallery 5, Santa Monica, CA
Toepel Gallery, Kirkland, WA
Bella Interiors Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
1980
Galerie Faris, Paris
1973
Contact Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
1972
Delta Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
1970
Dar al-Fan, Beirut, Lebanon

Selected Group Exhibitions

2017
Viva Arte Viva, 57th International Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
2016
Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
2015
Metropolis, Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York
2014
Prospect.3, New Orleans, LA
I shall stay the way I am because I do not give a damn… – Dorothy Parker, Lombard Freid Gallery, New York
2012
Le corps découvert, Arab World Institute, Paris
La création libanaise, 1959-2012, Espace Claude Lemand, Paris
California Art: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA
2011
Forces of Nature: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Louisiana Art & Science Museum, Baton Rouge, LA

California Art: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA
Elements of Nature: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Brevard Art Museum, Melbourne, FL

2010

Convergence, APEAL at the American University, Washington DC
National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC
Elements of Nature: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Contemporary Art Center, New Orleans, LA
Elements of Nature: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Carnegie Art Museum, Oxnard, CA

2009

Artists from Lebanon, Lucy Topalian Gallery, Kuwait City

2006

L.A. Art Scene: Selected Works by Local Artists from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Beverly Hills Municipal Gallery, Beverly Hills, CA

2004

Free Style, Pacific Design Center, Los Angeles

1998

Special Janvier 1998, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, Lebanon

1996

Blessings and Beginnings: Our Pathway to this Moment, Skirball Cultural Center and Museum, Los Angeles
L.A. Current: The Female Perspective, Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, Los Angeles

1995

Art Preview, Artopia Art Gallery, Los Angeles

1993

Forces of Changes, Artists of the Arab World, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC

1986

The Arab World Today, Permanent Delegation of the Arab States to UNESCO, Rennes, France
Espace Cultural, Permanent Delegation of the Arab States to UNESCO, Paris
Rajz/Drawing '86, Pesci Galeria, Pécs, Hungary

1985

A Thousand and One Nights, Cultural Center of Boulogne-Billancourt, Hauts-de-Seine, France

1984

Femina: In memory of Alicia Penalba, UNESCO, Paris
Lebanese Artists, Monaco Art Center, Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

1980

Galerie Faris, Paris

1972

L'estampe contemporaine, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Grafica d'Oggi, 36th International Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

1971

Islamic Contemporary Art, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

1970

Contemporary Lebanese Artists, Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
Sixteen Lebanese Painters, Delta Gallery, Rome, Italy
Lebanese Artists, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC
Helen Khal and Huguette Caland, Atelier Caland, Kaslik, Lebanon

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