

PRIÈRE — tragédie

RACINE





The introduction by B.H. Friedman and essay by F.W. Wagemans  
hold relevance to the series of work I produced for Paul Kasmin Gallery (NYC) "7 Months,"  
May 19th–June 18, 2011

## INTRODUCTION

By B. H. Friedman

For over twenty years and through ten solo shows, Jan Frank has been obsessed by line. An active line inspired by the gestural organic shapes of such Abstract Expressionists as Pollock and de Kooning. A line, as in Mondrian, that creates spaces in which he can put paint when he wants to. A line which risks "accidents," from which Frank recovers by ultimately incorporating them in the evolving image. A line which serves him well as he fluctuates between figurative and landscape sources.

There is an aleatory quality in Frank's work, emphasized by his naming all of his paintings from 1992 to 1997 after race horses (Cigar, Skinaway, J's Dream, etc.). In somewhat the same way that he picks winning horses from available data, he picks winning gestures from a vocabulary that extends from his Dutch roots (van Gogh, Mondrian) to the freer forms of his adopted country (Guston and Tomlin as well as Pollock and de Kooning and so many others).

Frank's portfolio of 1998 – about thirty 9" by 12" ink drawings on handmade paper of nude models – range from near-literalism to near-abstraction. The latter are especially abstract in those drawing which he re-enters and, to use Pollock's phrase, "chooses to veil the imagery" by using commercial white-out correction fluid – a strategic echo, perhaps, of some Abstract Expressionists' use of industrial enamel. But whatever his influences – beginning with information available to him from the fifties and continuing, decade by decade and movement by movement, to the present – Frank is clearly an independent and original artist who celebrates important contemporary traditions leading to his unique images. (B.H. Friedman, N.Y.C. 1998)

B.H. FRIEDMAN is the author of two full-length biographies, Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney: numerous monographs on such artists as Alfonso Ossorio, Michael Lekakis, Lee Krasner, Salvatore Scarpitta, and Franz Kline; six novels (Whispers was recommended for a National Book Award; two collections of stories (one received the Nelson Algren Award, another a CCLM award); and six plays, three presented in the Hamptons, three off-Broadway.

## CATALOGUE

### JAN FRANK: DRAWING FROM HISTORY

The work of Jan Frank belongs to the realm of drawing more than it belongs to any other in that drawing is more than a specific technique using a specific set of materials; it is primarily the marking of a trace of a presence through time. As such, drawing might occur in any medium, in two and three dimensions, in painting and in sculpture.

Jan Frank's working process is a singular synthesis of deliberate method and high-risk intuition. His method incorporates all impulses, and it is only at a later stage that he decides if a stroke, a mark or a color has resulted successfully. By allowing impulsive strokes to occur, even to fail, everything that happens remains; nothing is eliminated. Throughout history artists have proven that there are multiple styles and multiple methods. The rules of draughtsmanship show more than one approach, and contrary to the laws of physics, no definite resolution exists as to which approach is dominant. The rules of draughtsmanship do not exist in the vacuum of linear narrative history. All drawing exists simultaneously, in a continuous stream where available materials are reworked, where what had existed in the past is made new in the present. Great artists teach themselves by drawing after the work of other masters. This analytical interface as opposed to slavish copying often enables the motives that underlie the works of the masters to surface. This practice has existed since the Romans who reworked Greek art.

One facet of the process of drawing is demonstrated by Alexander Cozens (1717-1786) in his treatise *A New Method of Assisting the Invention in Drawing Original Compositions in Landscape* (1785). In his capacity as drawing master to the children in the British royal family Cozens practiced a highly revolutionary method. He taught his pupils to semi-consciously produce ink blots. While loosely applying ink on paper with a brush the pupil would have a generalized image of a landscape in mind. It was irrelevant if he had ever observed the scene he was visualizing. It might well be a mental image of a landscape as related in a novel, or one taken from an explorer's journal, or even a dreamed fantasy. The pupil would then freely associate from the blot and project details into it. In a gradual process he would transform the initial ink blot into a picture with clear suggestions of three-dimensional space.

One of Cozens' sources for this method were Chinese watercolors. Cozens had seen examples of these in the years spent as apprentice to his father who was master-shipbuilder to Tsar Peter the Great in St. Petersburg. Chinese watercolor drawings were in vogue among collectors in St. Petersburg at the time. A second, and widely known source was Leonardo da Vinci's famous comment that the stains and irregularities of a weather-beaten wall could inspire the viewer to project on to its surface figures, landscapes, cities, even battles between Milan and Florence. The Cozens method is based on associations proceeding from mental images. The associations reduce the potential of the blot by deciding on top/bottom and left/right; from here the illusion of a landscape is constructed, to which even narrative details can be added.

In contrast to Cozens' method Paul Cezanne's (1839-1906) drawing process proceeds by either approximating the original on the basis of engraved reproductions from books, or by observation of the actual work, in the Louvre or in the parks and streets of Paris. This is best shown in the Basel Sketchbooks in which Cezanne spent a good deal of time drawing after the masters, ranging from antique busts to Rubens and Poussin but was particularly interested in 18th and 19th century sculpture.

His is much more than a training of the eye and the hand. Cezanne often chooses details from larger compositions and his relationship to the subject in space is far from random. In the pencil drawings he attempts to master the space that surrounds the figure. He wants the eye to find its own way instead of confronting it with already well-defined delineation. Cezanne's drawings reproduce a given image as much as they record his own tentative approach to this image. Lawrence Gowing states in Paul Cezanne: The Basel Sketchbooks "Cezanne was calling the past in aid of the pursuit of form for current experience" (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1988, p.25). The drawing process generates lines and forms on its own, mazes of small broken lines, running parallel, breaking systems of curves, forms that are free from the observed original. Cezanne, according to Gowing, "was surely aware that he was using these drawings from sculpture as another artist might use drawings from life" (ibid. p.27).

Cezanne's method is the reverse of Cozens' method of association, which works an ink blot into a clearly structured image of an invented landscape. Cezanne works from the known into the unknown. The artistic genius is that he expresses not to be the a priori master of his observation. Observation is a process, the working of the mind. The drawing is a document of this meeting of the mind with reality. Drawing is also a process, and every sheet a provisional stop. Piet Mondrian (1872-1944) is one of the great masters of drawing and a direct influence on Jan Frank. In his "Ocean" and "Pier and Ocean" drawings of 1914-1915 Mondrian establishes a set of formal possibilities that can clearly be distinguished from 18th and 19th century examples. Mondrian proves the validity of these possibilities throughout his career, with the final painting *Victory Boogie-Woogie* (1944) an unmistakable climax. Mondrian's work in many respects is a continuation of a Dutch tradition of landscape painting that started with Philips Koninck (...) and was developed in the second half of the 19th century by Jan Weissenbruch (...). These painters transcribe the observed shifting light in a sky into a shifting color in the painted sky, usually in a limited color range that tends to be monochromatic. In a sky-lit Dutch museum, a viewer can see the physical reality of light outside of the picture frame moving across the illusion of shifting light inside.

In his drawings Mondrian achieves this identity in a minimalistic and abstract way. They are built from a pattern of horizontal and vertical lines in charcoal. The lines are abstractions of ocean waves as seen from the top of the dunes, rolling towards the viewer. The horizon is high. The recognizable form of a pier that vertically breaks the horizontal waves, still a suggestion of perceived space, gradually disappears from the drawings as more are made, as does the horizon. Mondrian then subjects the lines to a loose application of gouache paint. He brushes against them, in some places even makes them splash across, always keeping the underlying line visible. He transforms the initial image of the ocean into a living presence, physical and spiritual at the same time, not narrative, non-symbolic, but unfolding in time like the ocean itself. The picture planes are

1. WFF (Series 008), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 4 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
25 1/2 x 16 5/8 inches  
PK 15485
2. WFF (Series 005), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 4 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
23 3/8 x 16 1/4 inches  
PK 15482
3. WFF (Series 006), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 5 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
23 1/4 x 16 1/4 inches  
PK 15483
4. WFF (Series 003), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 4 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
21 1/4 x 16 inches  
PK 15480
5. WFF (Series 002), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 5 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
22 x 17 1/2 inches  
PK 15479
6. WFF (Series 004), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 4 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
23 1/8 x 16 1/2 inches  
PK 15481
7. WFF (Series 001), 2011  
ink, whiteout, tape on 4 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
25 1/2 x 16 7/8 inches  
PK 15478
8. BHF (Series 008), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 3/4 x 12 7/8 inches  
PK 15512
9. BHF (Series 007), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches  
PK 15511
10. BHF (Series 004), 2010  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 1/2 x 13 1/4 inches  
PK 15508
11. BHF (Series 005), 2010-11  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 1/8 x 12 3/4 inches  
PK 15509
12. BHF (Series 001), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 1/8 x 13 1/8 inches  
PK 15505
13. BHF (Series 006), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 x 13 1/8 inches  
PK 15510
14. MB (Series 006), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 x 13 inches  
PK 15496
15. BHF (Series 010), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 x 12 7/8 inches  
PK 15514
16. MB (Series 004), 2010-11  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 5/8 x 13 1/8 inches  
PK 15494
17. BHF (Series 009), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches  
PK 15513
18. BHF (Series 003), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 7/8 x 12 7/8 inches  
PK 15507
19. BHF (Series 002), 2010  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
18 x 12 7/8 inches  
PK 15506
20. WDK (Series 003), 2008  
ink, whiteout, tape on 2 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
16 5/8 x 11 3/8 inches  
PK 15488
21. WDK (Series 004), 2009  
ink, whiteout, tape on 2 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
16 1/2 x 10 7/8 inches  
PK 15489
22. WDK (Series 002), 2008  
ink, whiteout, tape on 2 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
14 7/8 x 12 inches  
PK 15487
23. WDK (Series 001), 2008  
ink, whiteout, tape on 2 sheets  
of handmade linen paper  
17 1/8 x 12 1/4 inches  
PK 15486
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ink, whiteout  
on handmade bamboo paper  
17 x 12 3/4 inches  
PK 15498
25. MB (Series 005), 2010  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 x 12 1/8 inches  
PK 15495
26. MB (Series 002), 2008-9  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 x 12 1/4 inches  
PK 15492
27. MB (Series 001), 2008-9  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade rag paper  
17 x 12 3/8 inches  
PK 15491
28. NB (Series 001), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 1/4 x 14 5/8 inches  
PK 15499
29. NB (Series 003), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 1/8 x 14 3/4 inches  
PK 15501
30. NB (Series 006), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 x 14 1/4 inches  
PK 15504
31. NB (Series 004), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 1/4 x 14 3/8 inches  
PK 15502
32. NB (Series 002), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 1/8 x 14 3/4 inches  
PK 15500
33. NB (Series 005), 2011  
ink, whiteout  
on handmade linen paper  
24 1/4 x 14 inches  
PK 15503



CAT. 33

arenas where each time a new a dynamic equilibrium is realized. The paintings are full of pragmatic solutions. No line, no white, is the same. The work seems to be motivated by a complete trust in the medium, by a complete surrender to the here and now, by a total grasp of the immediacy between painting and viewer.

Mondrian must have recognized this quality when he juried an exhibition for the Museum of Modern Art in 1943 and picked a Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) from the hundreds of paintings stacked against the wall. Only a few years later Pollock would radicalize paint's liquidity, would make gravity instrumental, would stretch canvas larger than the size of a man and start on field painting. On the telephone Pollock would ask others to give the finished works a title, further acknowledging non-referentiality as the subject of the work. Nevertheless the fields do have a left and a right, a top and a bottom. These axes are determined by slight touches of contrasting color that seem to be executed in the final stage of the painting process. The additions testify to Pollock's own reading of the field. For the viewer they are guiding lights through it. It is a necessary ambiguity, the slightest touch of a Cozens-style esthetics. Without it, the work would not communicate.

Another major influence on Frank's drawing is the metal floor sculptures of Carl Andre (born 1935) that date from the late 1960s and which are the materialistic progeny of Pollock's method. Andre's squares, lines and rectangles consist of elements that are identical in size. Stacked, the metal plates are anonymous. Once they are laid on the floor they become art. The viewer stands on and moves across the floor sculpture and by doing so becomes aware of its weight and resistance. The metals used: zinc, steel, copper, aluminum, lead and magnesium differ greatly in their physical properties. Scratches, turns of the heel have their particular impact, according to the density and pliancy of the material. Andre conceives of the piece as 'writing its own history' and the more frequent the use of the sculpture, the more intense this drawing/writing becomes. It is important to note that the metal pieces do not have a fixed place in the sculpture. Consequently the drawing, the 'history' of the piece, is formed of gesturally loaded elements that can change places within the sculpture every time its identity changes from a pile of metal to art; as it is taken out of storage and laid out again.

Jan Frank's drawings date from the early 1990s. They can be divided into three groups: black and white paintings of ink and alkyd on plywood, oil paintings on corrugated cardboard and oil paintings on canvas. Throughout the decade Frank also produces ink drawings on paper. Until the end of 1997 Frank builds his paintings on a foundation made up of fragments available from a select company of admired artists: Philip Guston, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Piet Mondrian, Vincent van Gogh and others. Frank appropriates their specific recognizable gestural traits by photocopying reproductions of these artists' works from books, enlarging details that he then transfers onto transparent sheets. He projects these details onto the plywood or cardboard. The ground is filled in rather arbitrarily with these heterogeneous lines and rudimentary imagery.

From 1998 onwards Frank draws and paints after the female nude. The relation to his mark making and brushstrokes is different. As there is no foundation of mechanically transferred lines, as was previously supplied by past art, the question of expression arises. A second question deals with the relation to the model itself. This is not a distanced, collectively organized academic procedure. The vis-a-vis with nude also differs radically from running one's fingers through an archive of reproductions from magazines.

From 1990 until 1997 Frank's work is, to a certain extent, based on premises that bear comparison with that of Phillip Taaffe, Sherrie Levine, and Peter Halley. Like them he makes use of a source book, like them he proceeds industrially. But Frank is intent on expression where they are intent on style. All that he borrows, he transforms: "It may sound strange to say it, but I believe that appropriating directly from Abstract Expressionism helps Frank to find his own style... the total effect of dizzying spatial ambiguities is very much Franks own achievement. In paintings that conjure up hints of landscapes and glimpses of figures, Frank tears apart the past for the sake of offering perceptual challenges in the present." (Raphael Rubinstein, *Art in America*, September 1998, p.95)

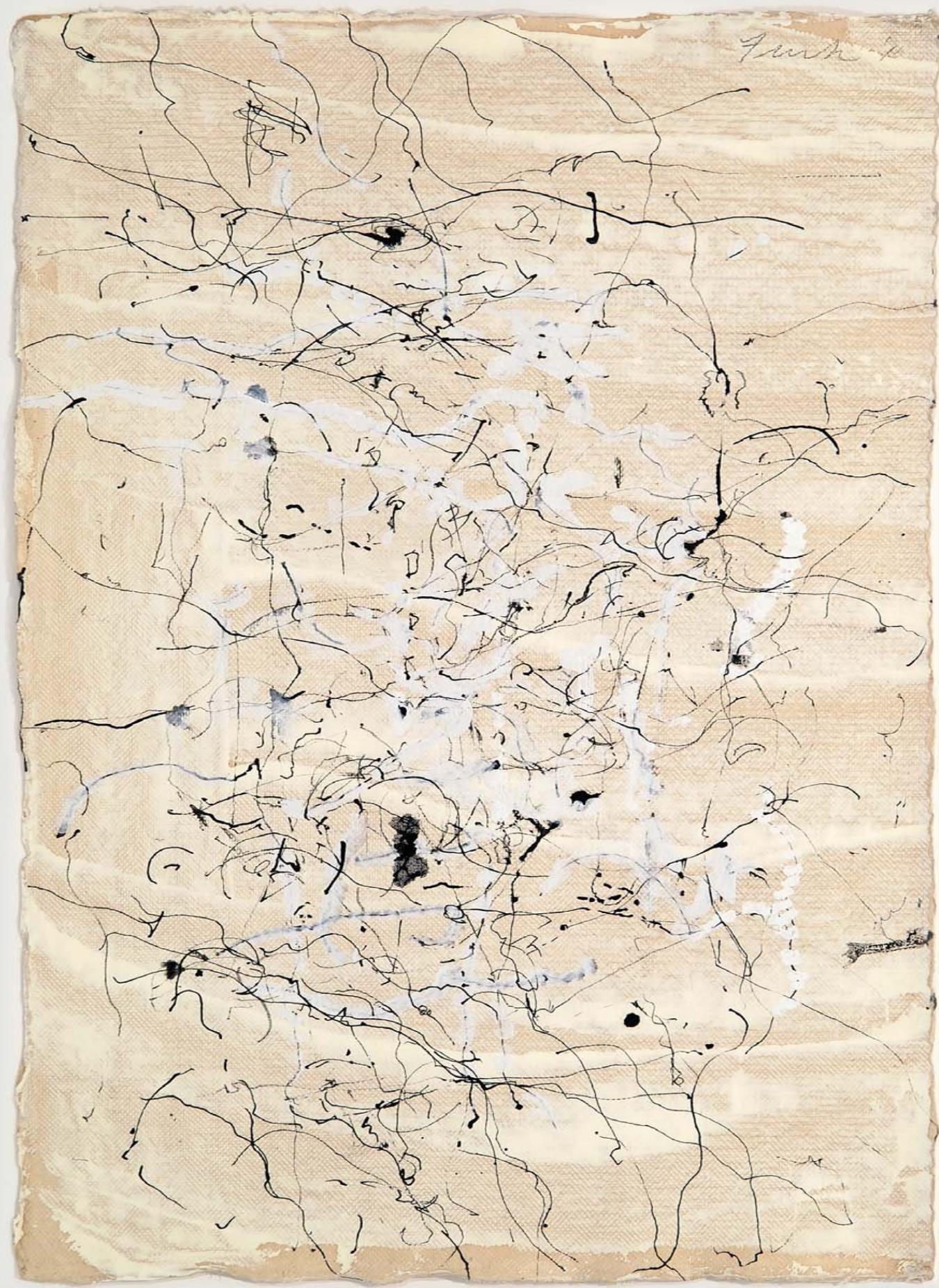
There seems to be a strong affinity between Cezanne's and Frank's method until this point. Both draw from fragments of images that they reinvest with content through a process of self-generative form/markmaking. Both are, despite the use of art of the past, the very opposite of academic. Frank's work differs radically from the art that dominates his generation, labeled as 'manic mourning' by Yve-Alain Bois in *The Model of Painting*, (MIT, Boston, 1990). Bois suggests that painting around 1990 springs from a commercially motivated need of 'style' and that artists willingly make use of the modernist notion of the end of painting. As opposed to 'style', a painting by Frank is invested with the tentative drawing-process qualities that are absent in the pre-conceived, a-priori products of his contemporaries. In the drawings and paintings after the nude, Frank seems to move closer to authentic New York School Painting. The intellectual step is taken to bring the subject of the work as close to home as possible. The groundwork of masters of the past, in particular De Kooning and Guston, is now a given. Rather than standing on top by way of a mechanized, industrial method, Frank has generated the space in which he can move alongside them.

Fred Wageman's  
JAN FRANK TITLE ESSAY, AMSTERDAM, HOLLAND, 1998

FRED (ALEXANDER FREDERIK) WAGEMANS (born 1954, The Hague, The Netherlands) is an art historian with two fields of interest: late 18th century European drawing, and American Minimal Art. The late Robert Rosenblum was the first champion of this connection. Wagemans has worked in the Kröller-Müller Museum, the Bonnefantenmuseum, the Rijksakademie, the Museum Fodor, the Stedelijk Museum. He learned about drawing at the Print Room of Leiden University. He learned about Piet Mondrian at the Gemeentemuseum The Hague. He learned about Minimal Art in New York.



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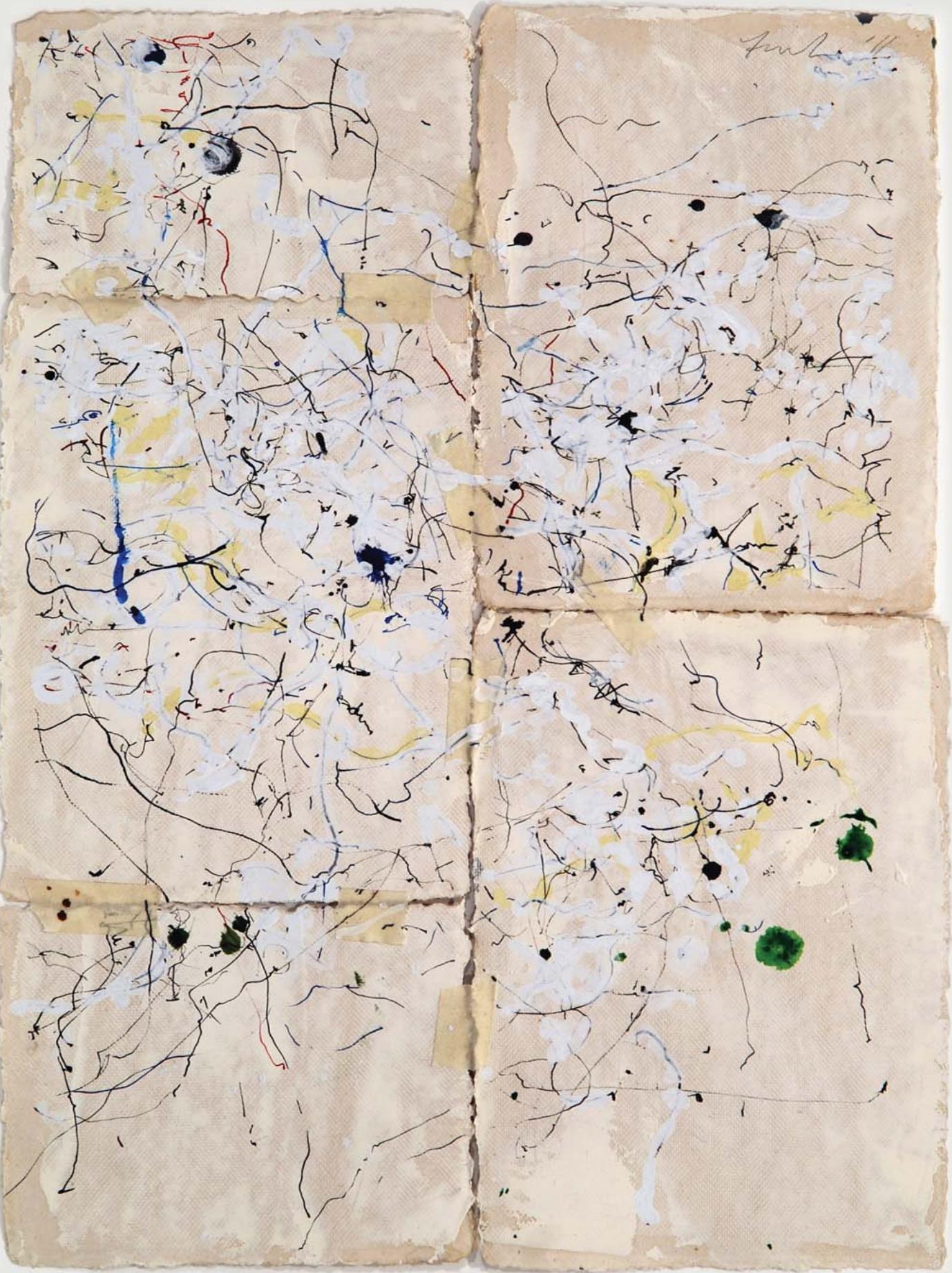
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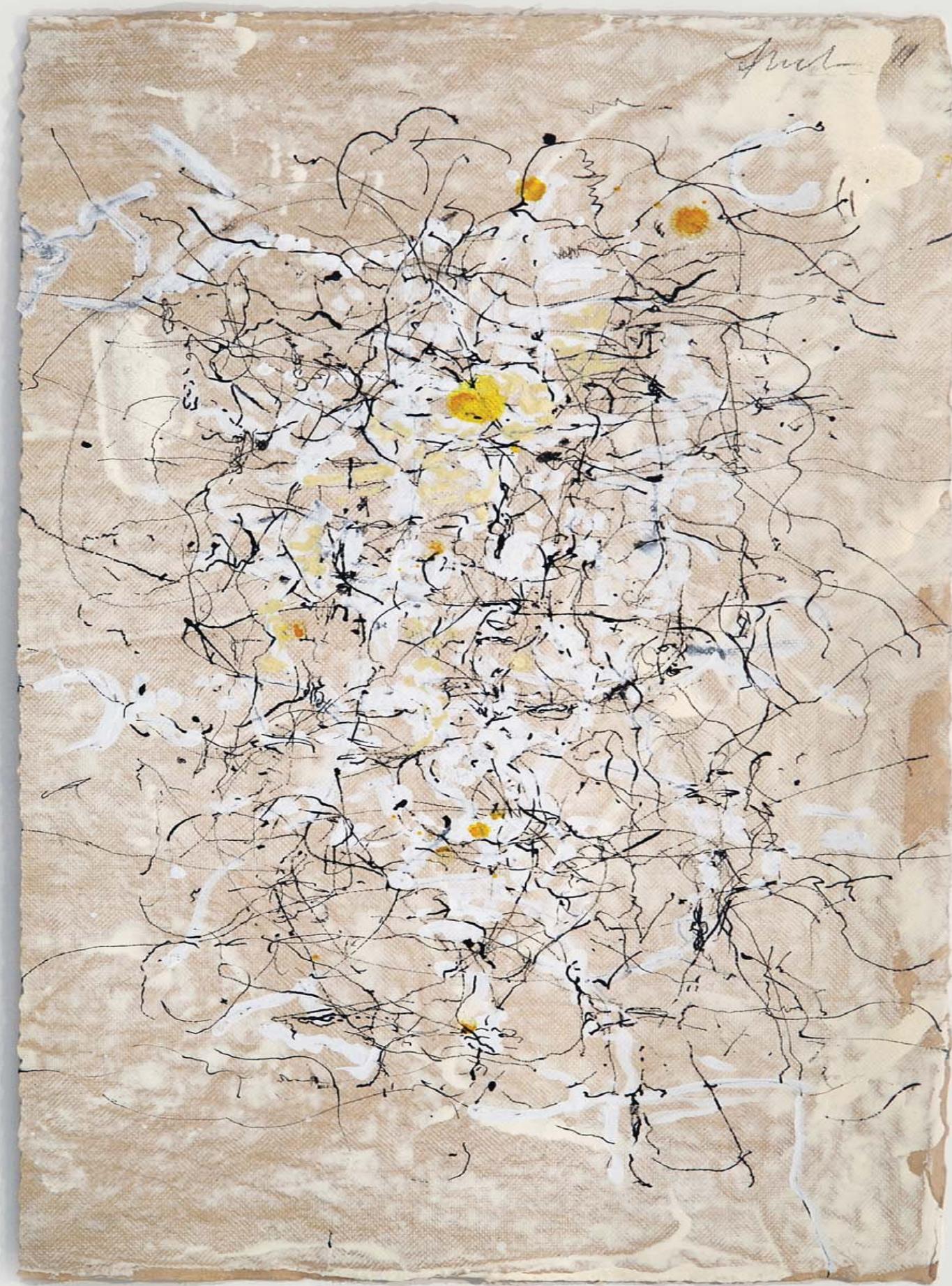
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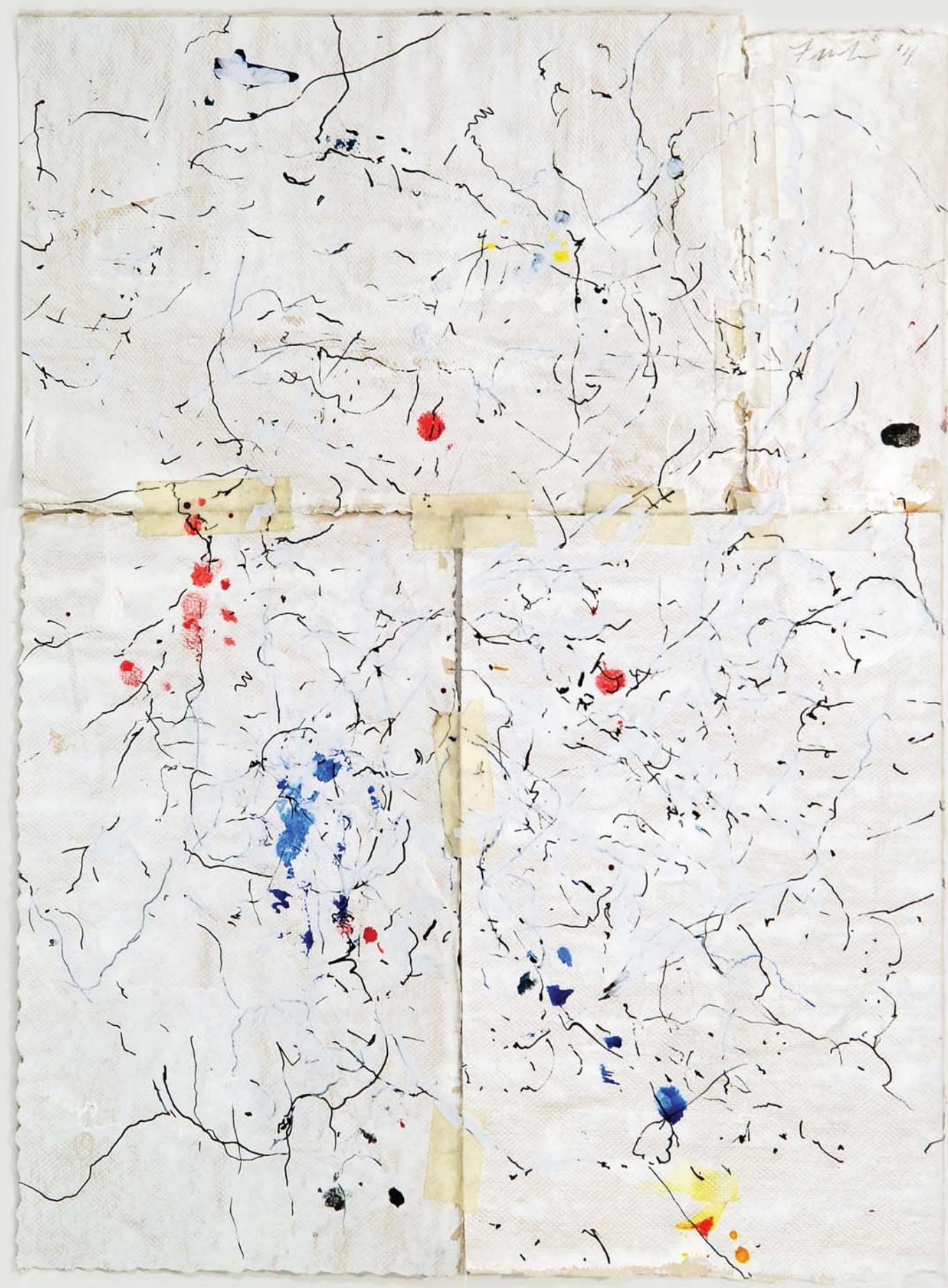
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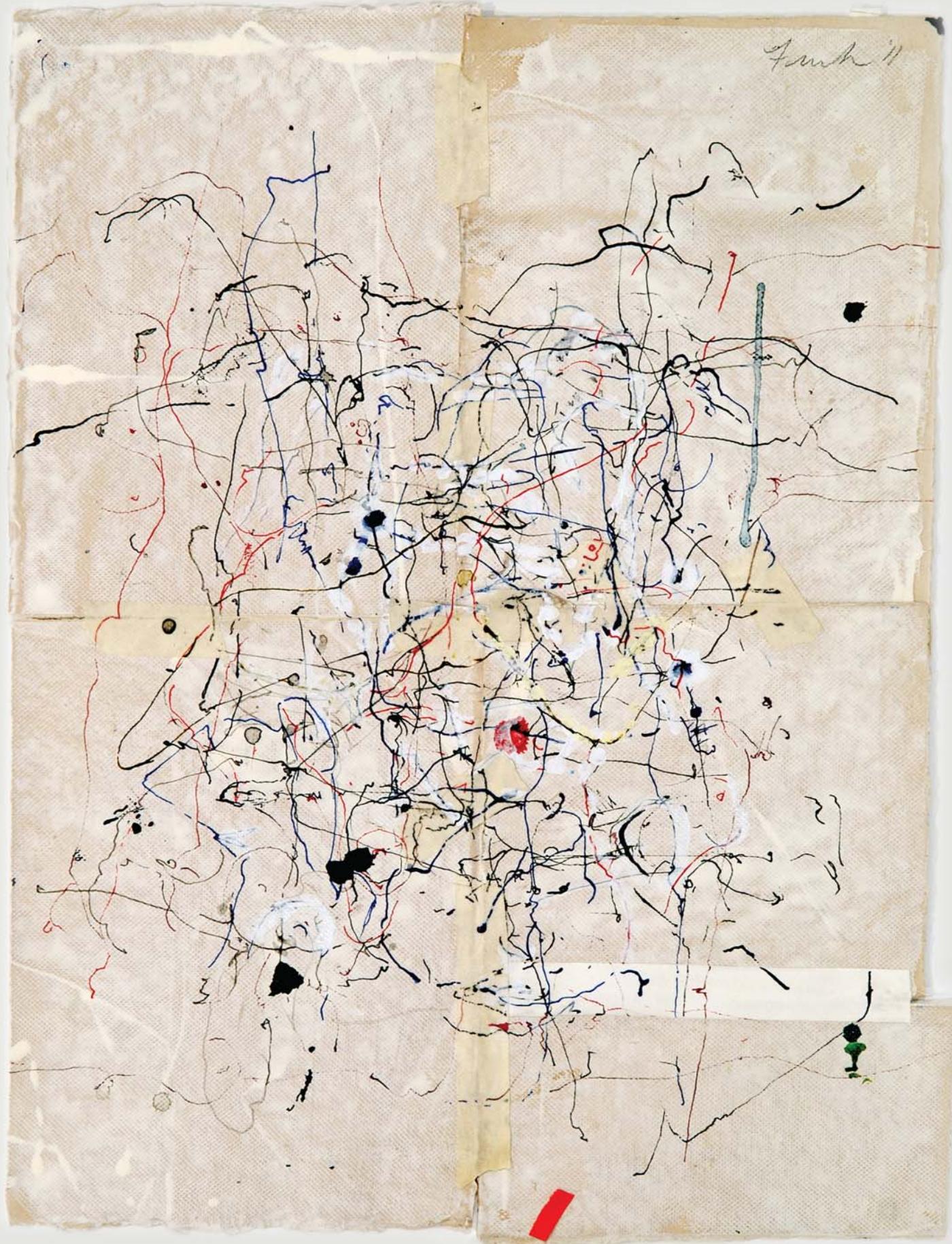
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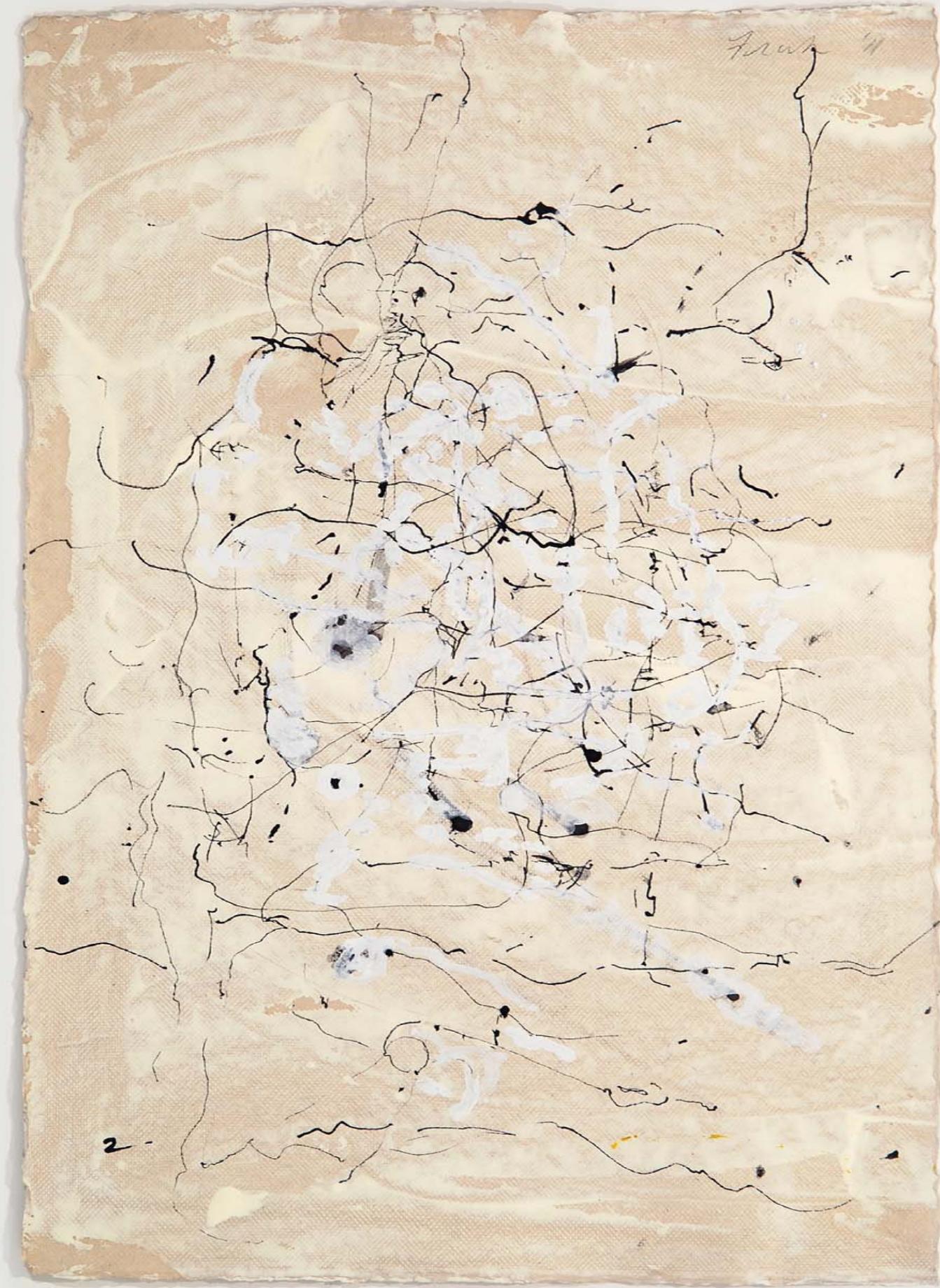
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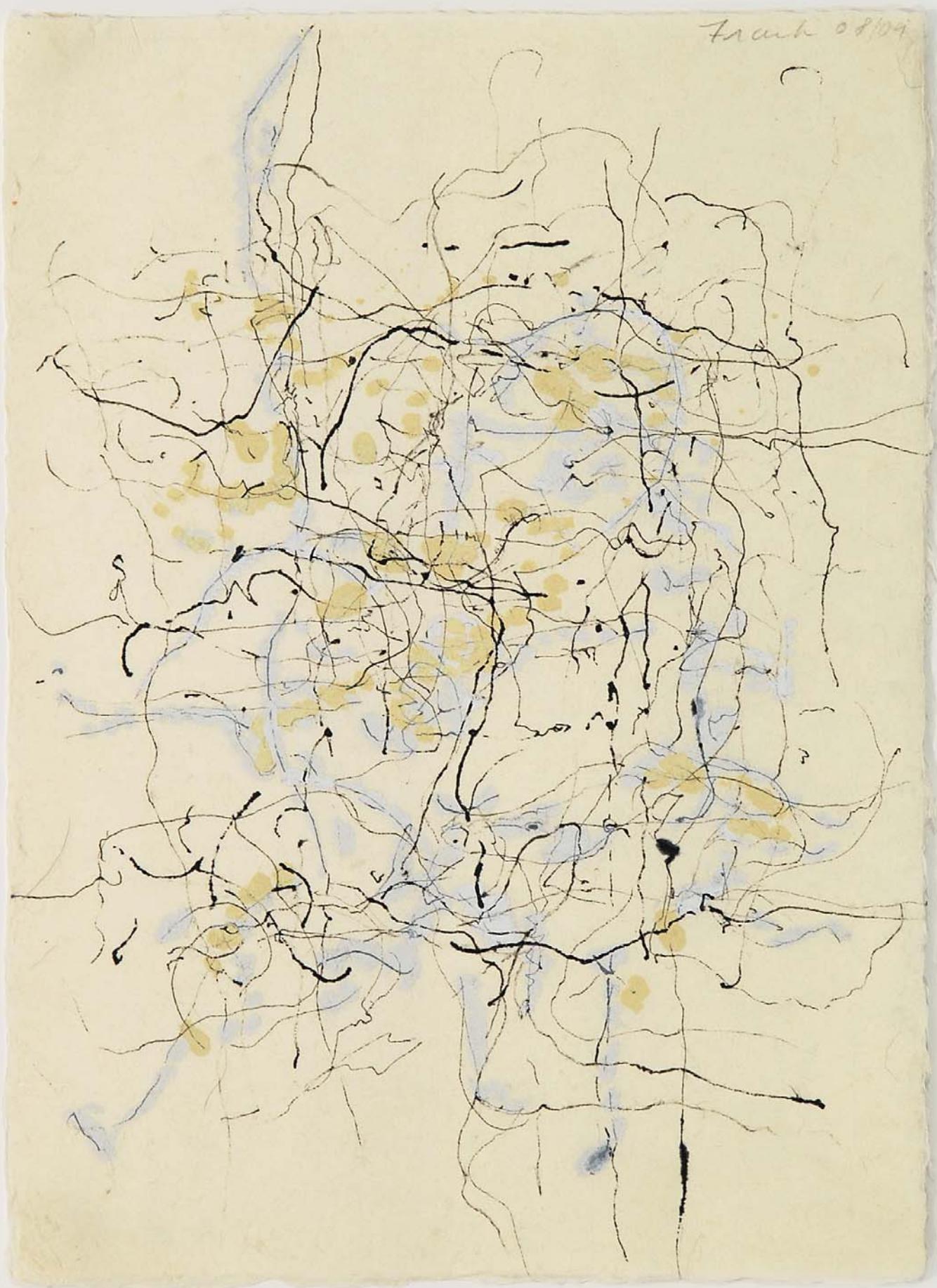
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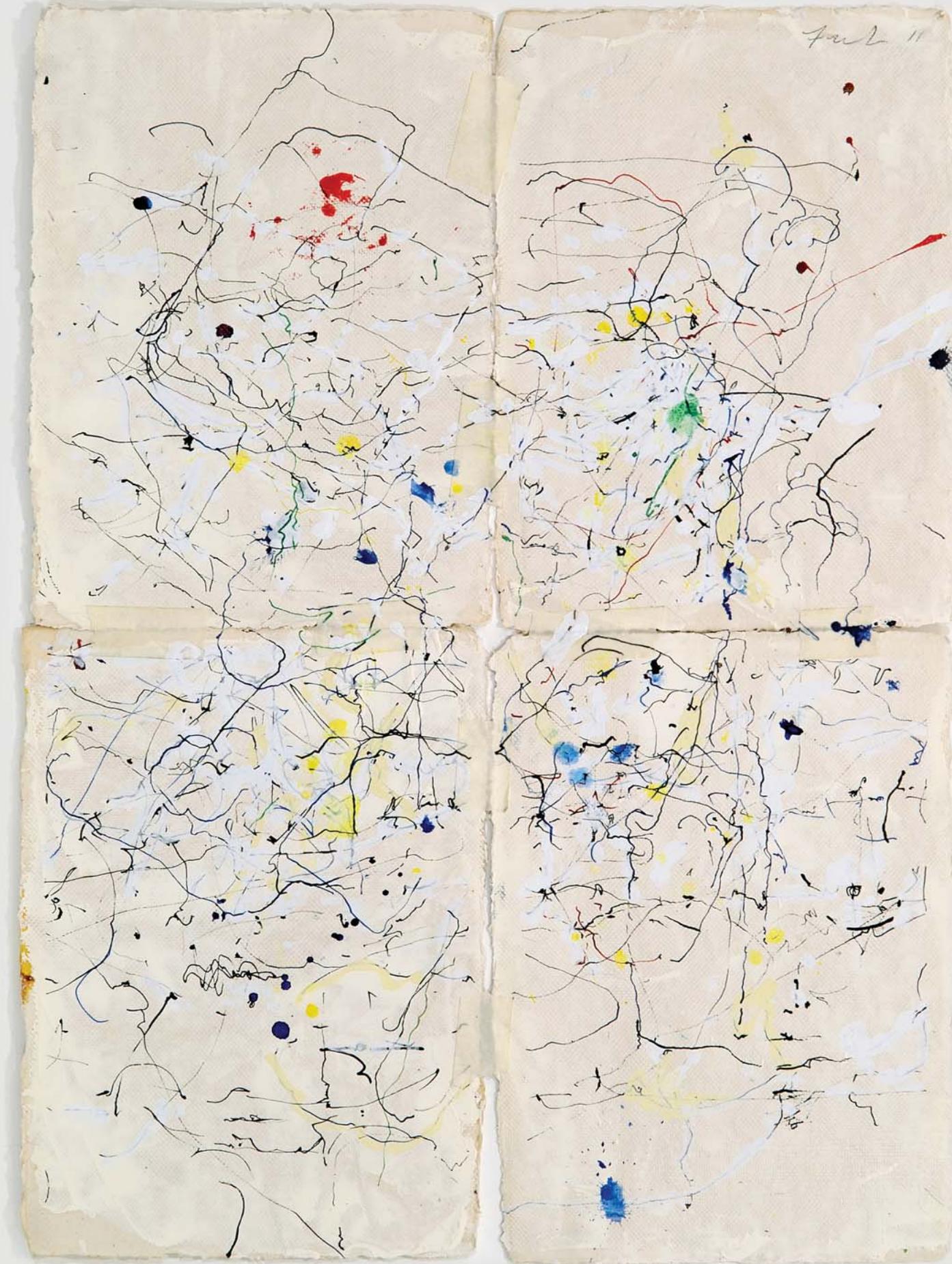
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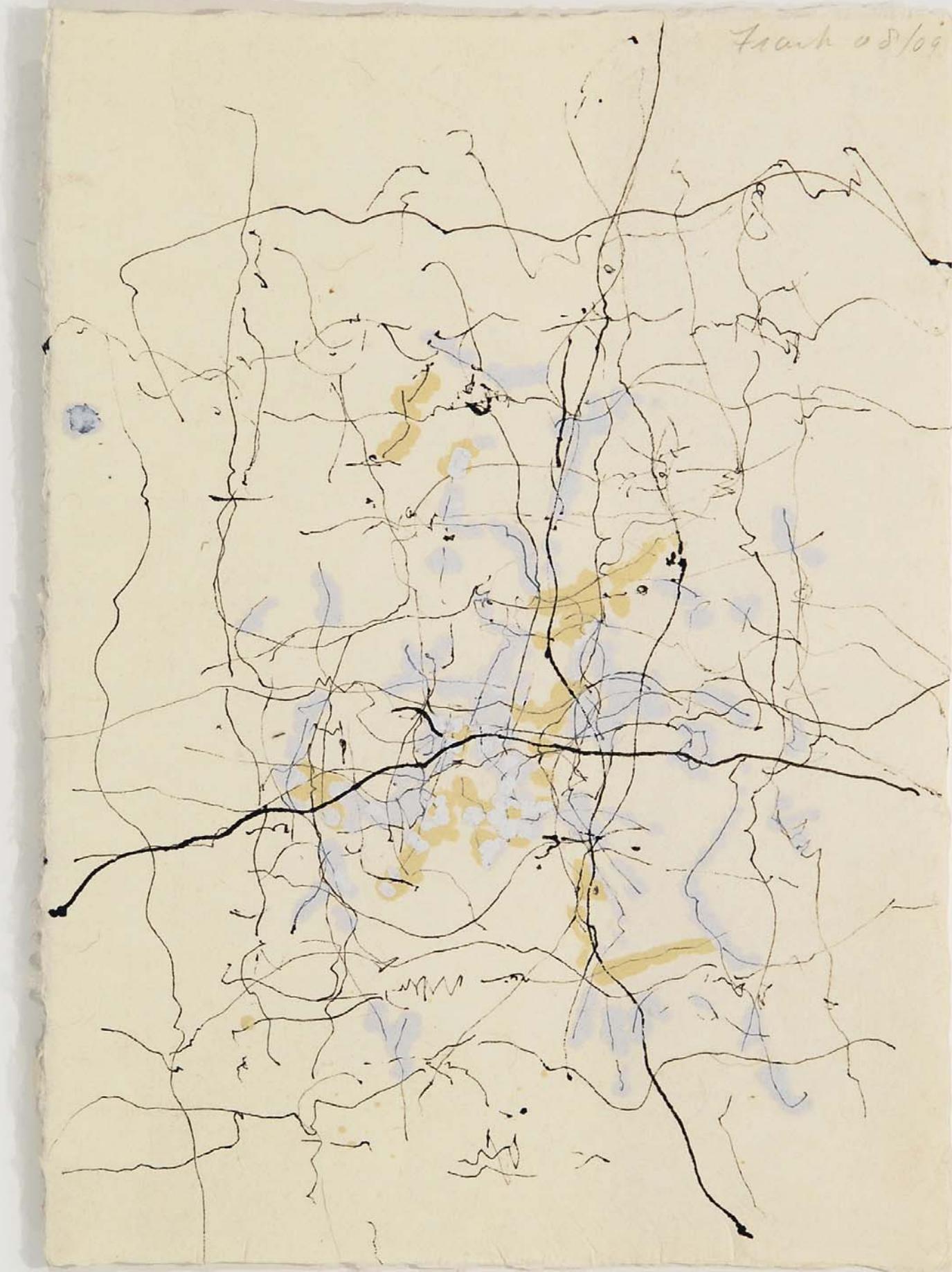
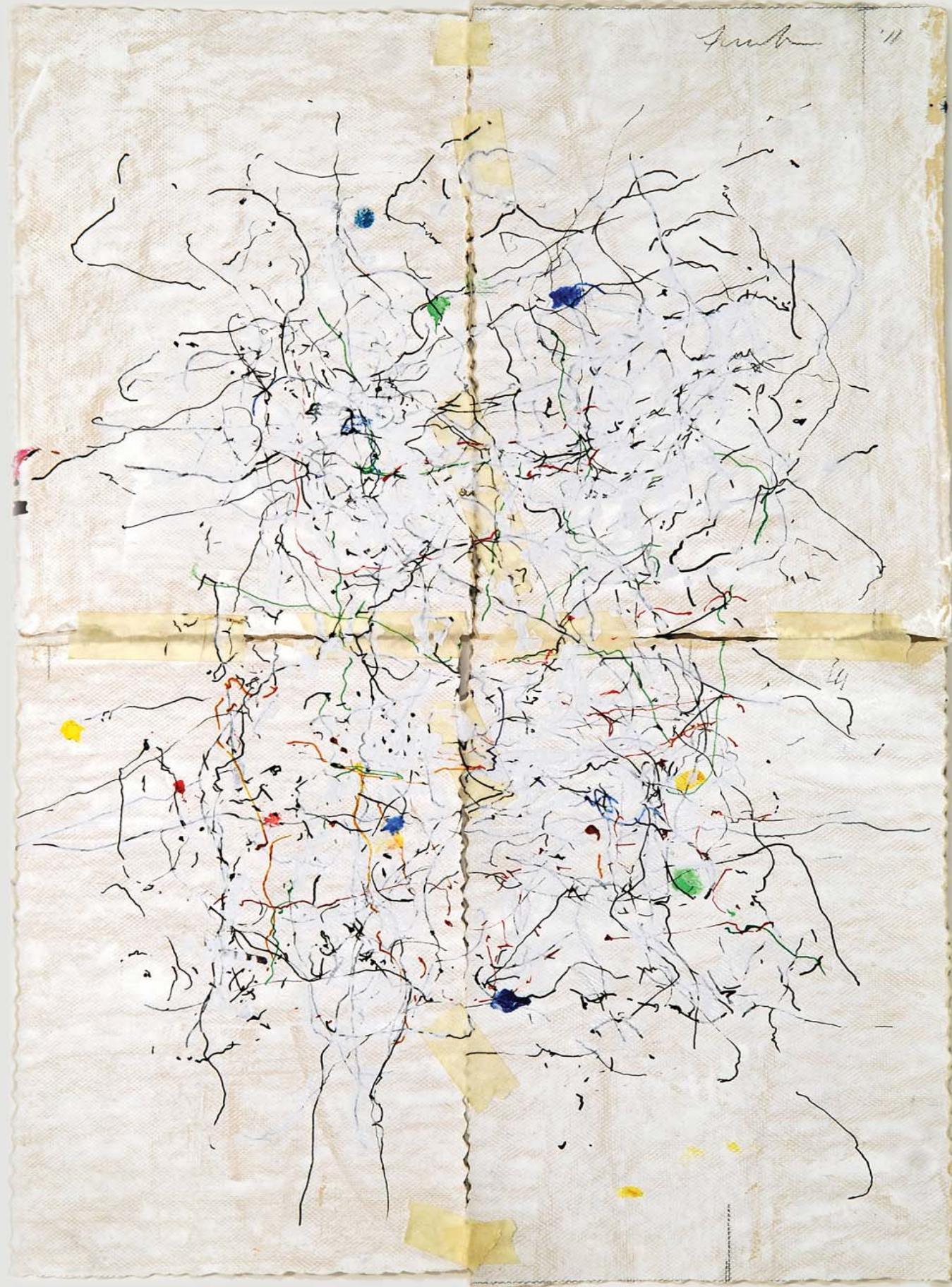
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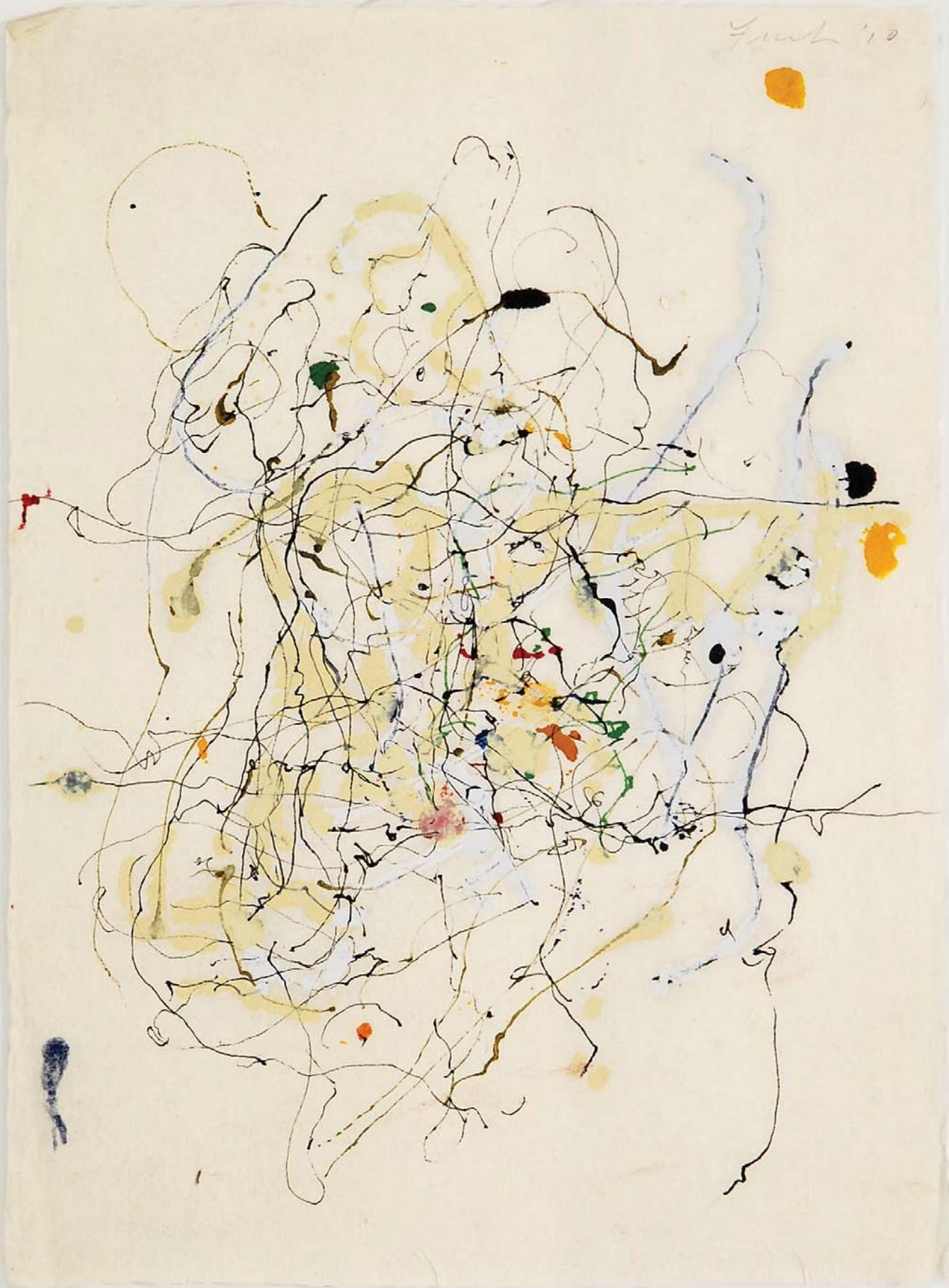
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Funk '10



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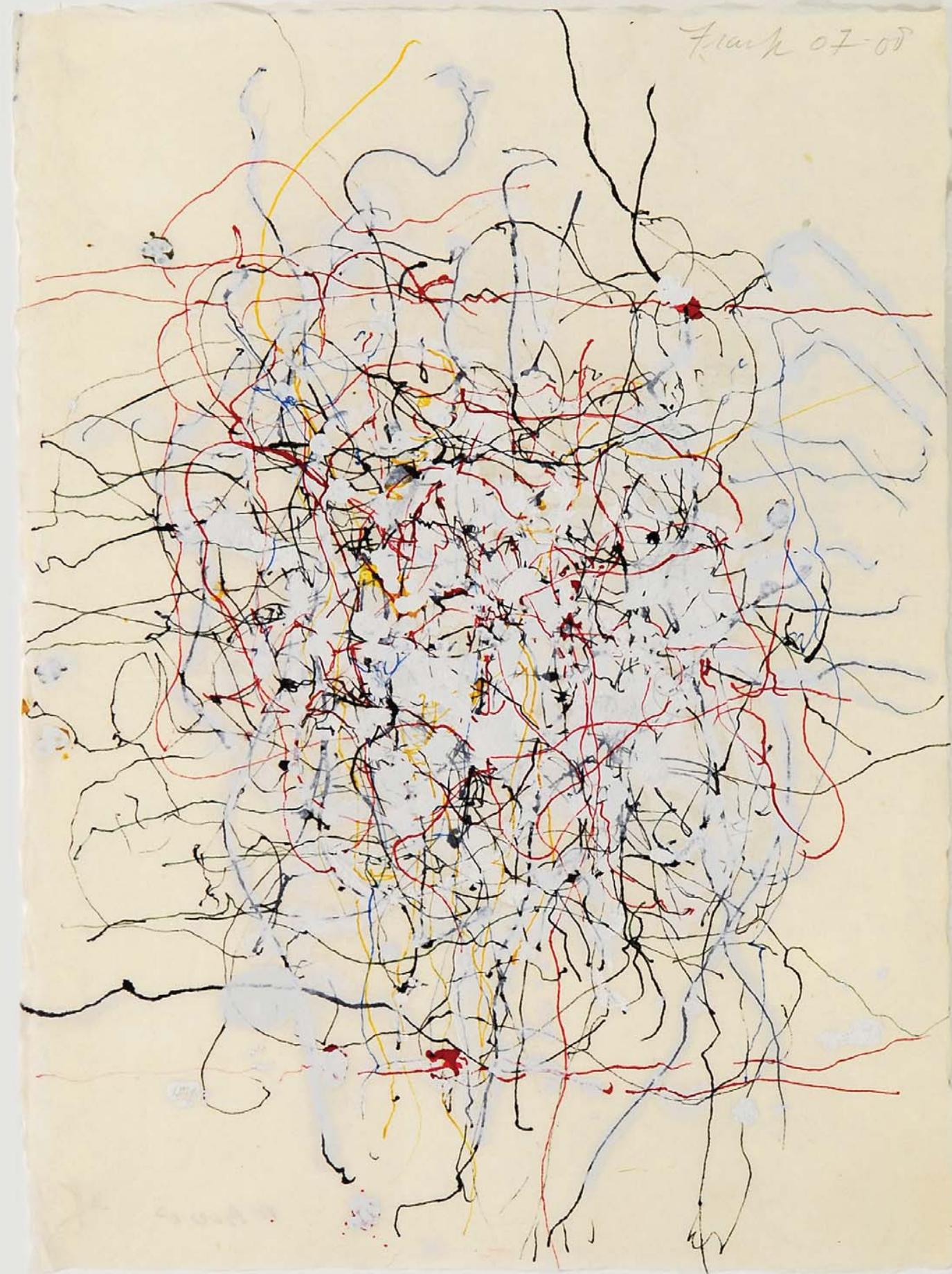
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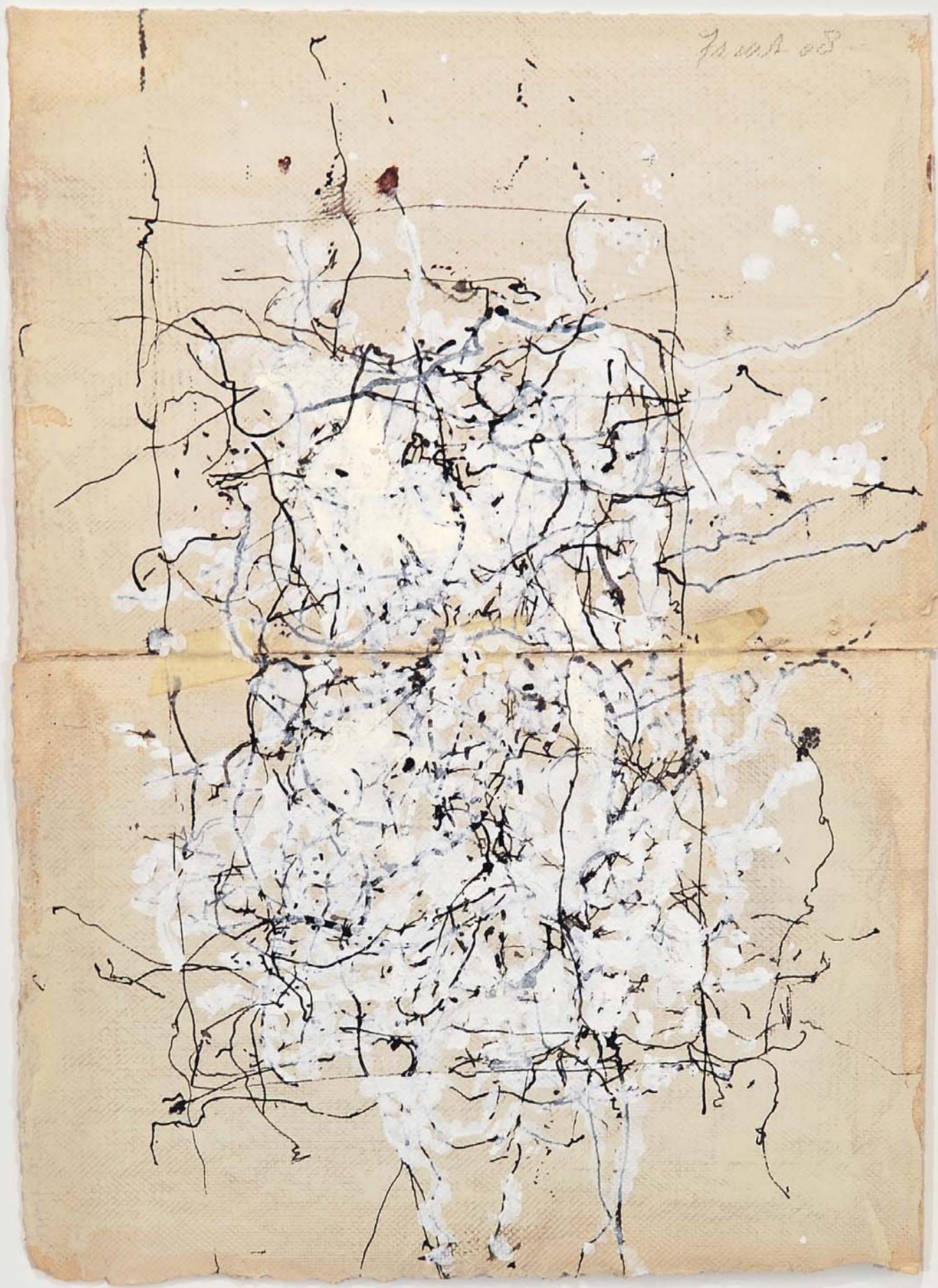
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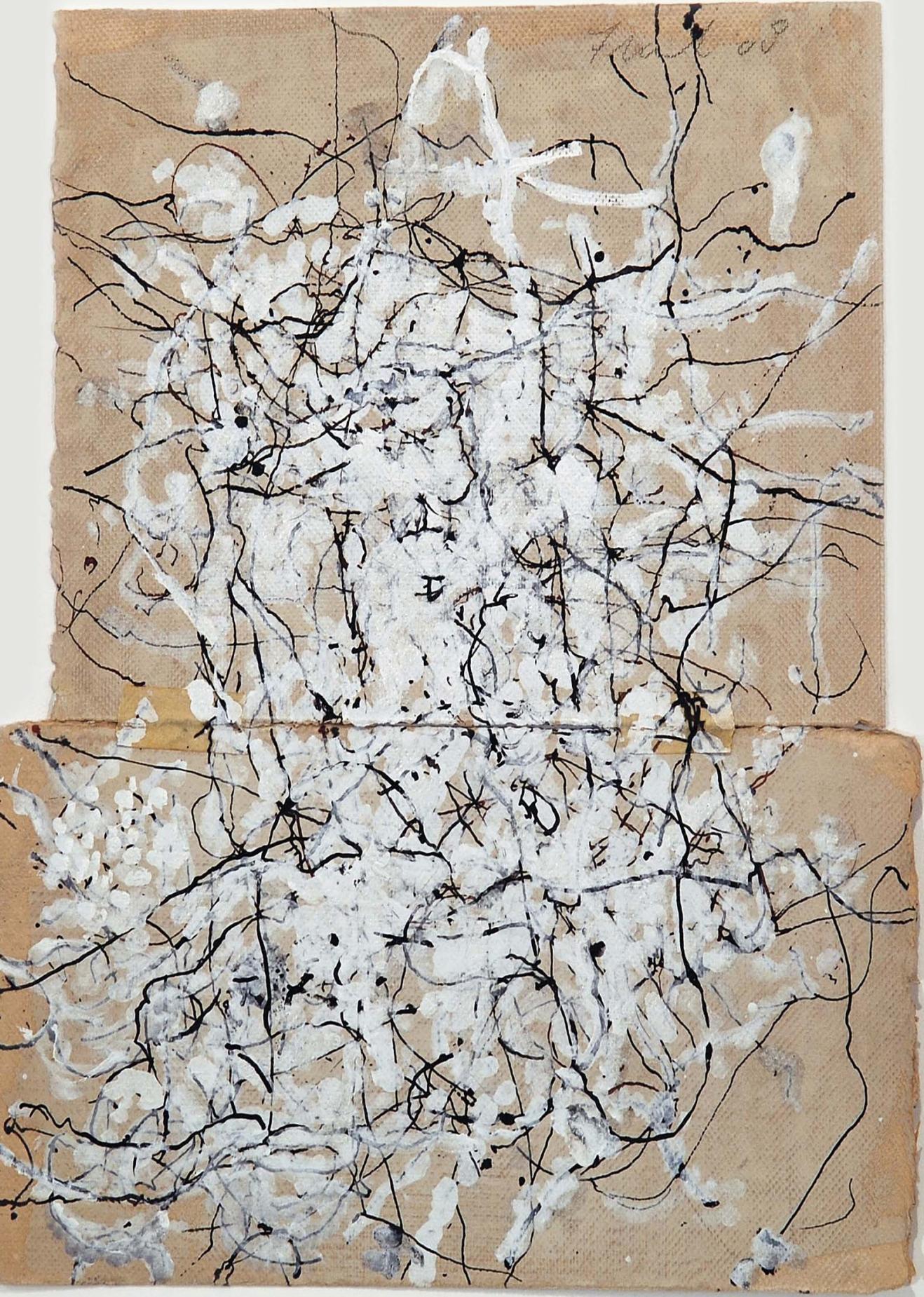
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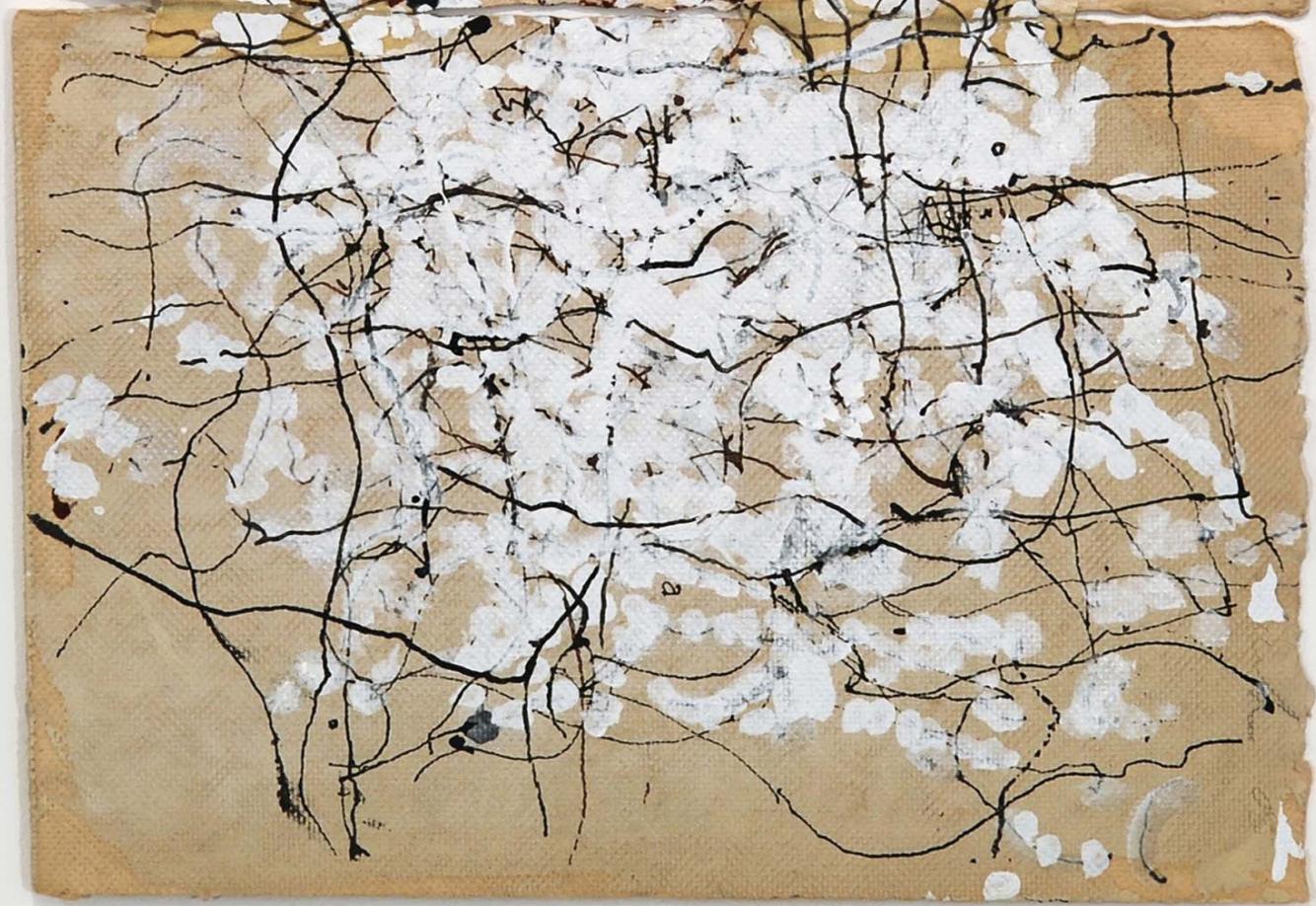
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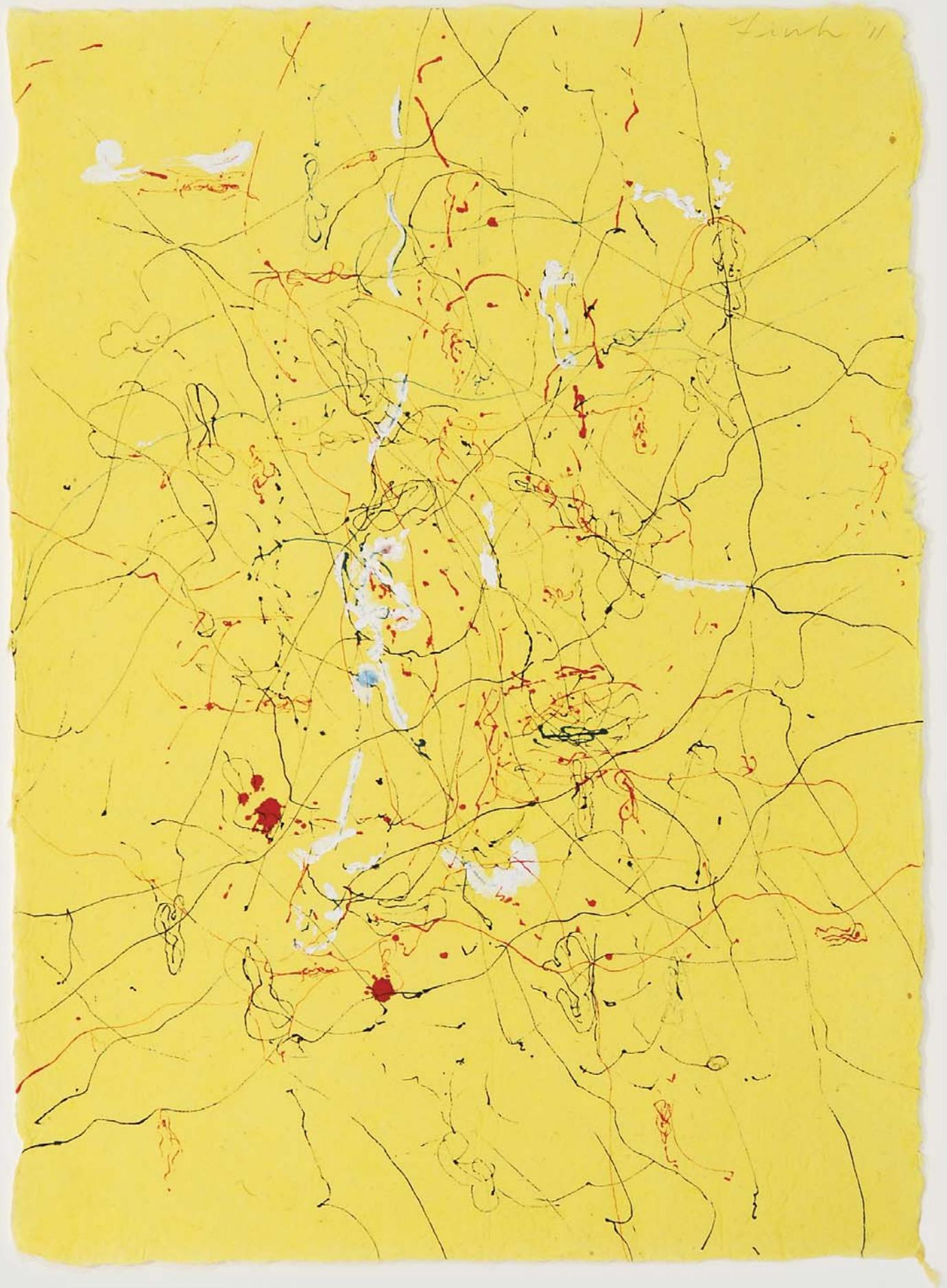
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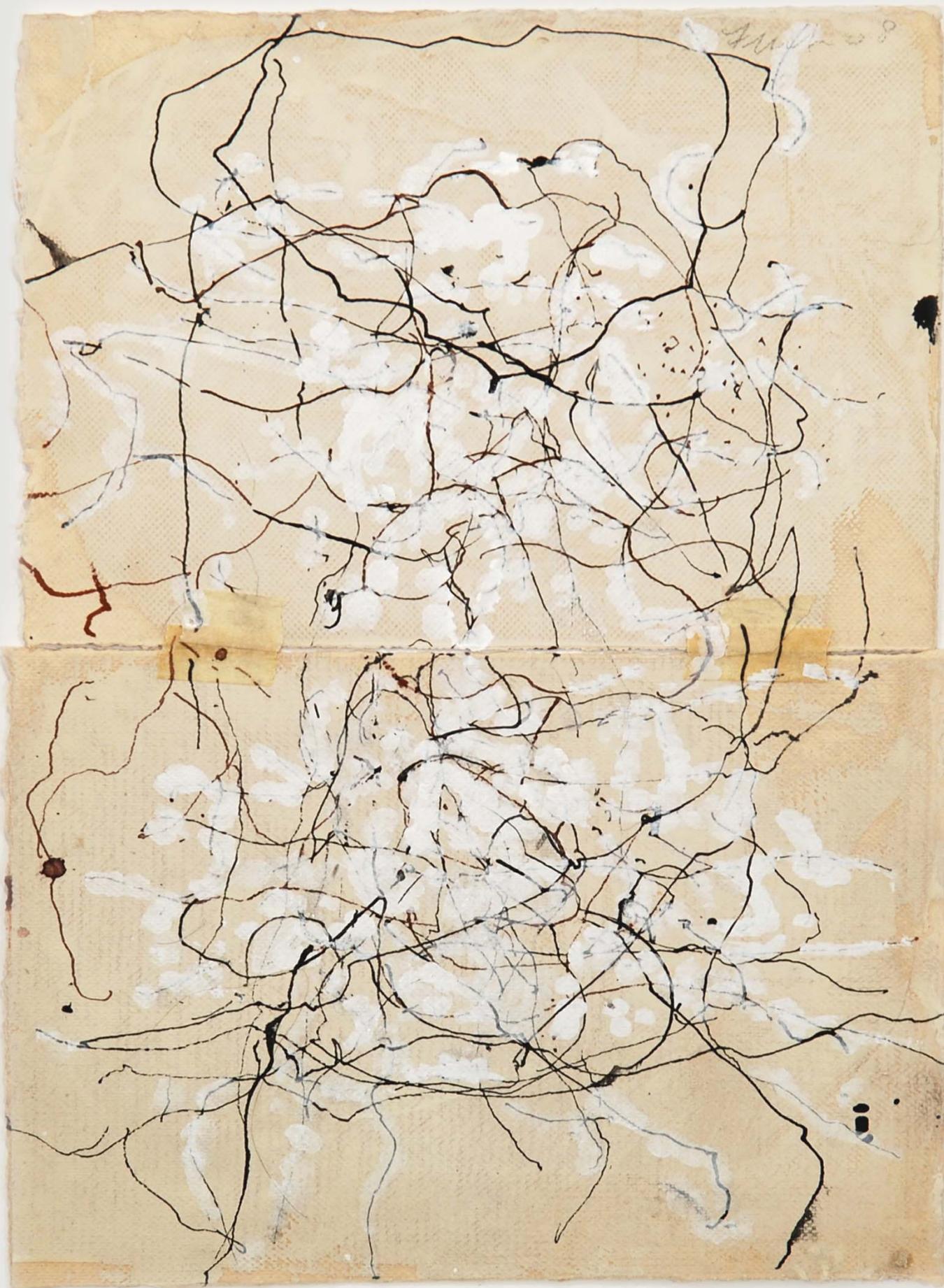
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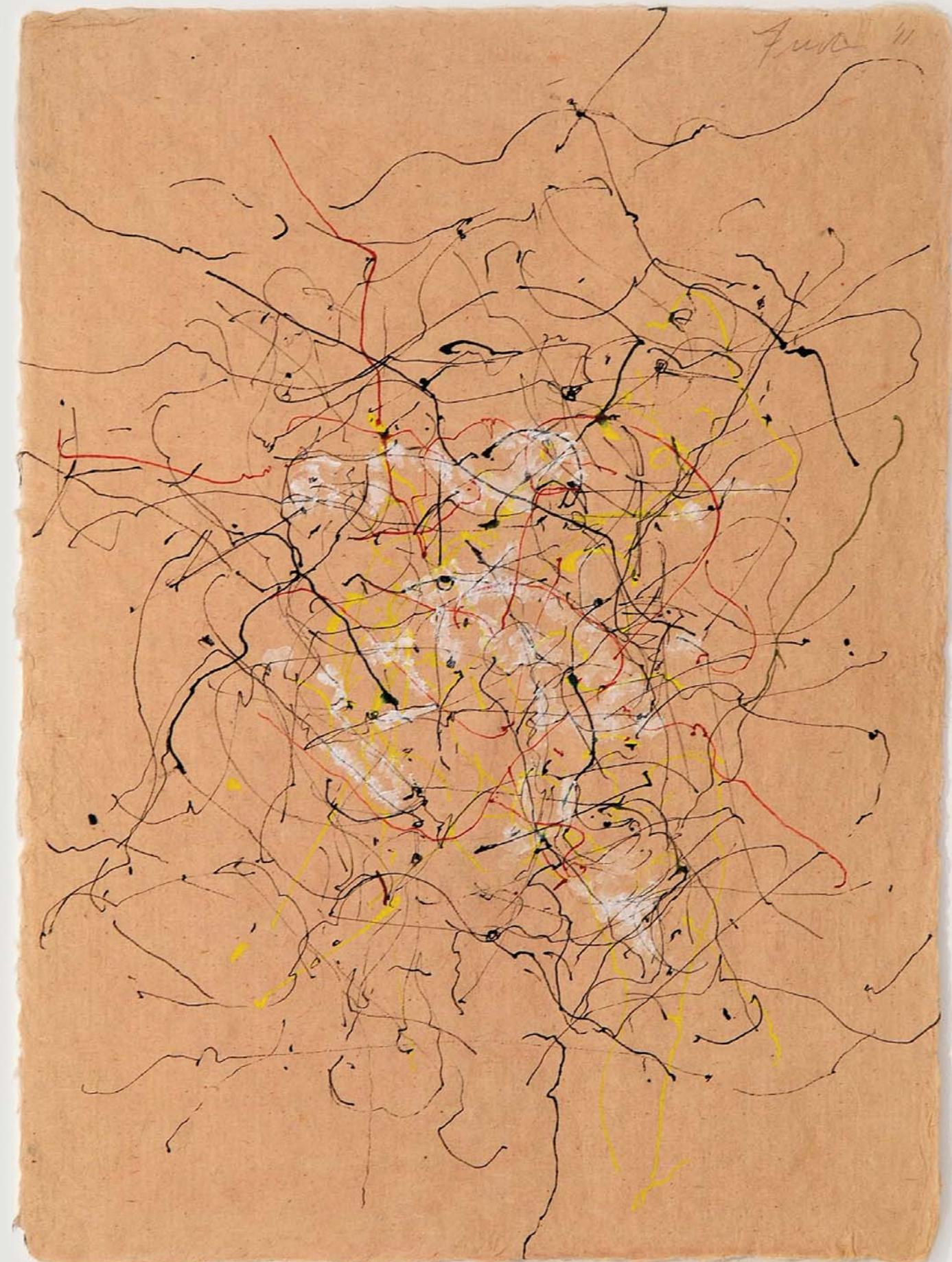
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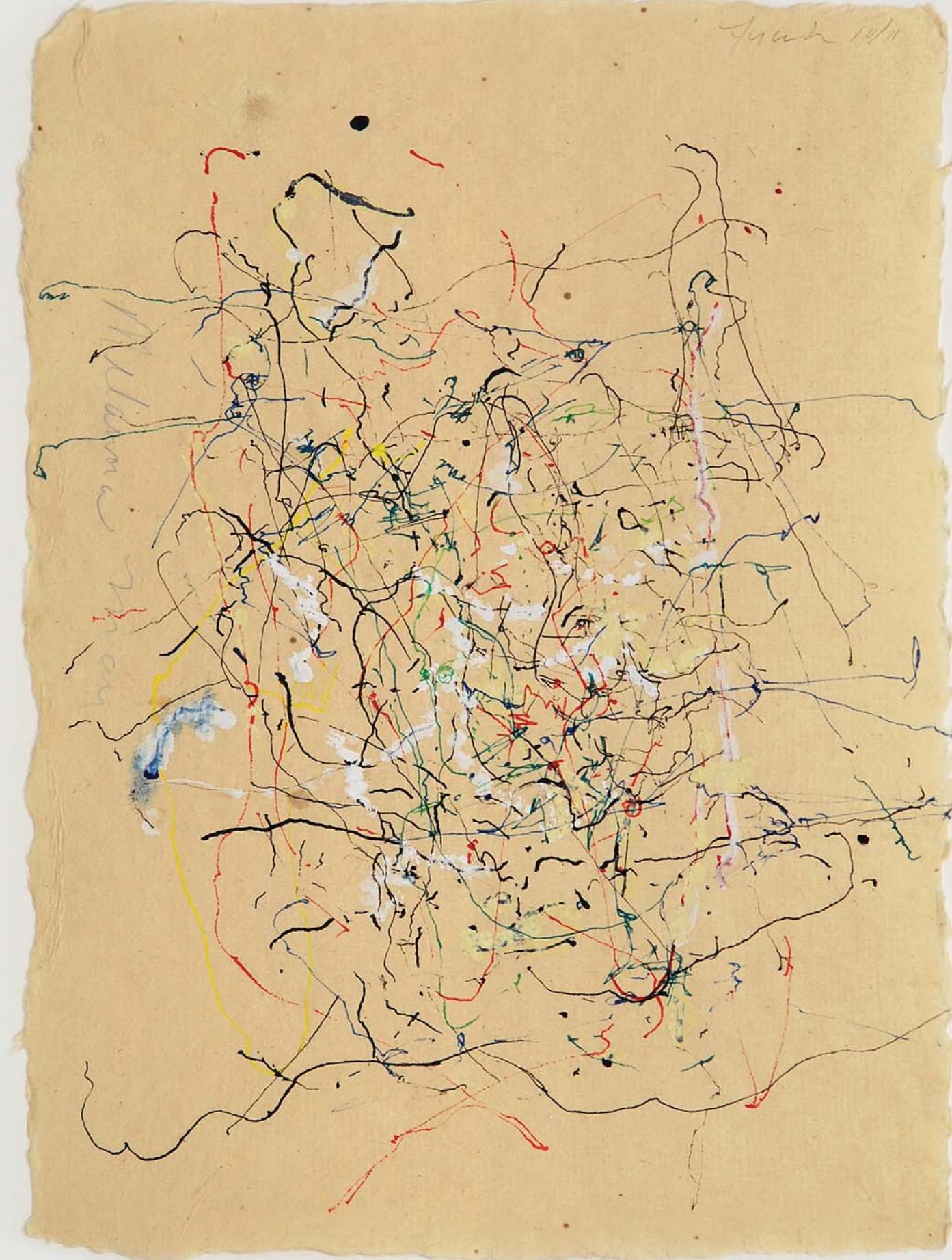
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Fish 11

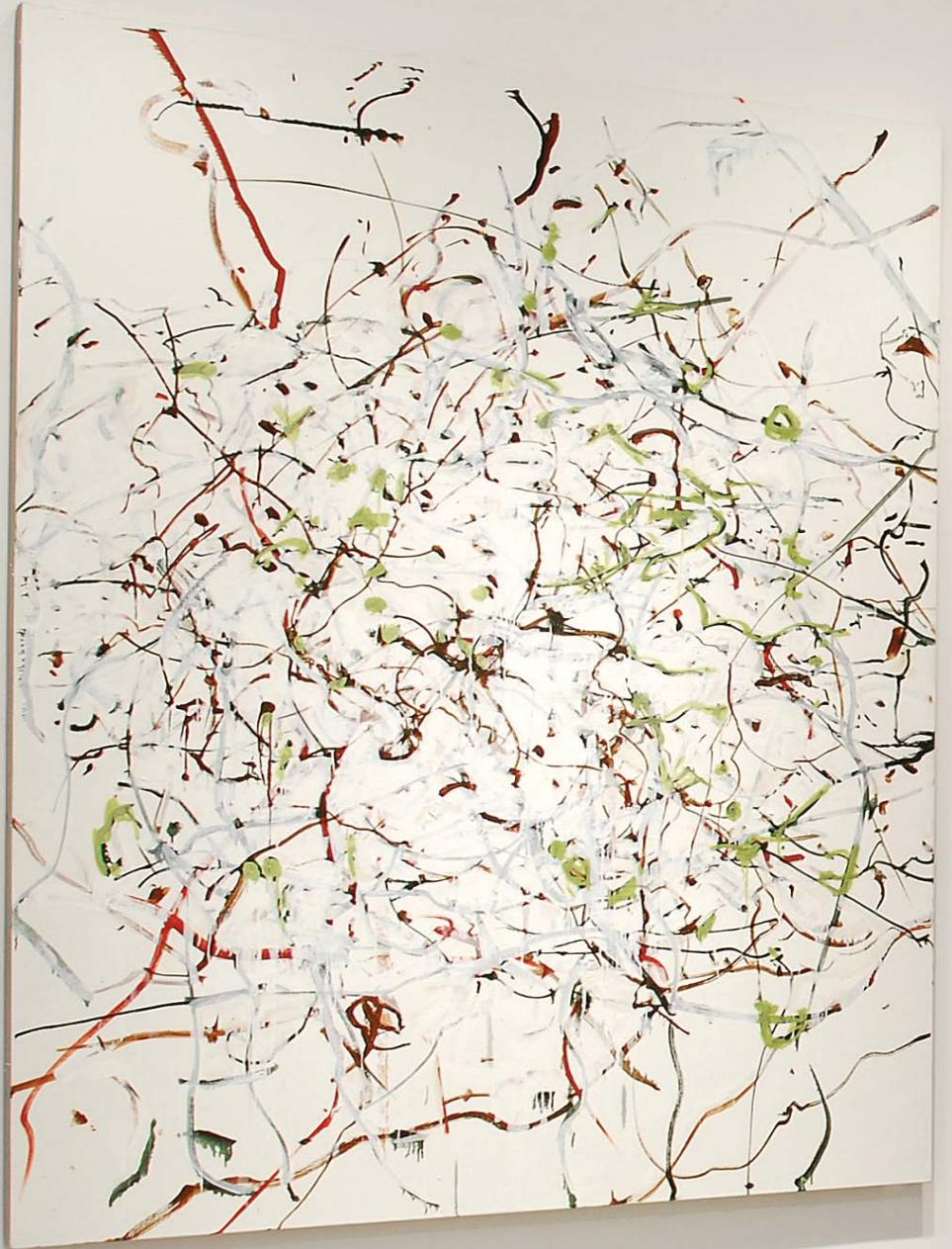


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Fish 16



CAT. 16



"JP's Gusto" (2010-2011) 90"x60" oil/linen



"Schizovervia" a Sculpture by John Chamberlain, 1994 (49"x43"x40")