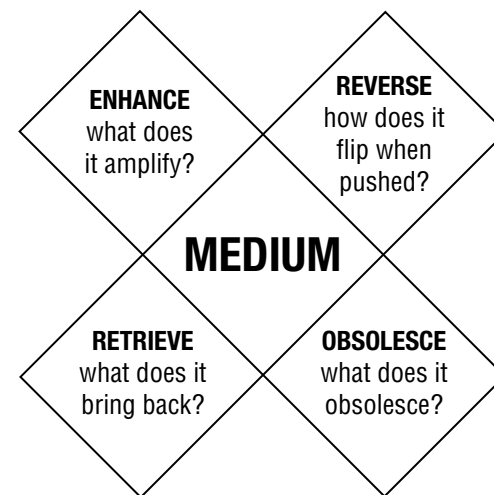


Neil le Roux

IN CASE OF EMERGENGE
(follow the bifurcation)



21 June – 19 July 2014
GALLERY AOP



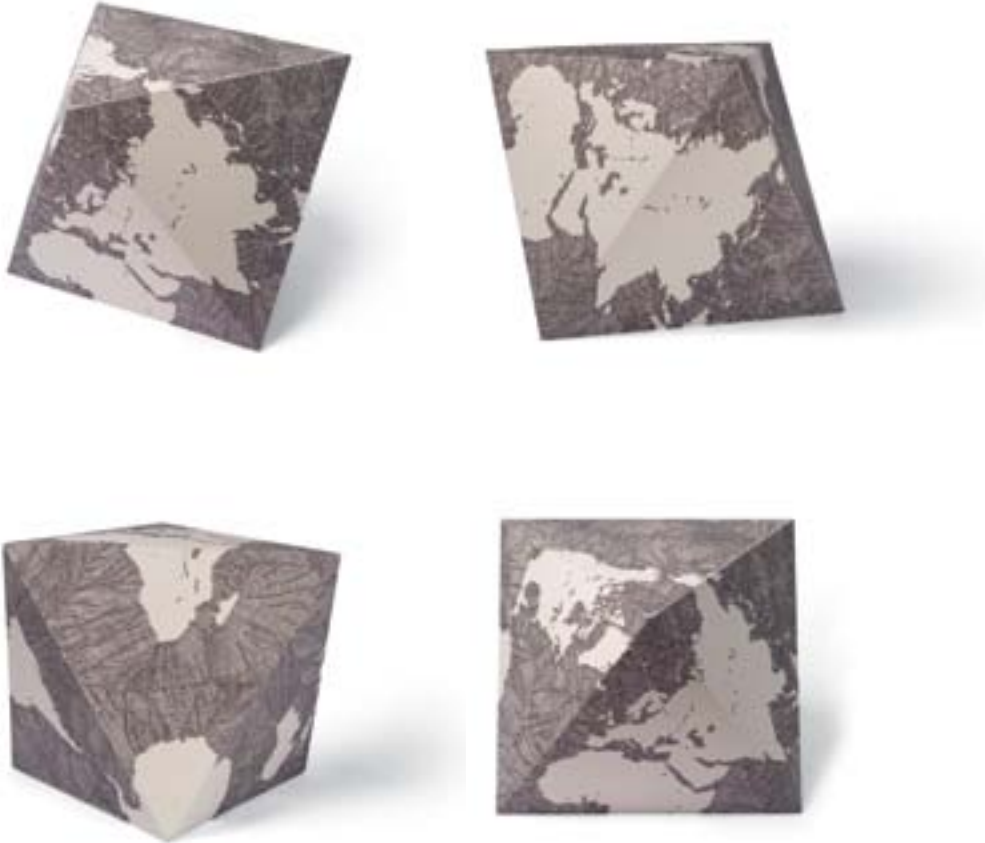
Tetrad of media effects (from McLuhan, M & McLuhan, E. 1988. *Laws of media: the new science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press).

“You numberless infinities”

New work by Neil le Roux

Repeated readings of the metaphysical poet John Donne's six Holy sonnets or *Divine Meditations* never fail to flabbergast with their audacious conceits, the most startling one certainly the opening verse of Sonnet 4: “At the round earth's imagined corners”. Donne might have referred to a map of the world represented on a two-dimensional sheet of paper or a piece of parchment, or even a spherical model of the globe, but he was more likely evoking a metaphorical world, conceived of as emanating from ‘all the corners of the world’, so to speak. Neil le Roux, a contemporary South African artist, has no difficulty turning the round globe into a squared out cube with four or more corners in a series of drawings and sculptures that he calls *Deterministic Chaos Drawings* and *Deterministic Chaos Objects*. Donne's vivid image of a round earth with various corners is followed by an equally compelling one in which angels are exhorting the countless souls – “you numberless infinities” – to regenerate in their own dead bodies, giving them new life and thereby effectively negating any notion of Cartesian Dualism which separates mind from body.

On face value, Le Roux's drawings and objects originate in the wake of Minimalism because of their obvious approximately geometric, vaguely austere, more-or-less monochromatic, and generally abstract-looking nature, making him a true descendant of the legacy of such artists as Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol Lewitt, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson. The praxis of these artists, variously called Primary Structures, Unitary Objects, ABC Art, Rejective Art, Literalism, and even Cool Art, had as its hallmarks abstract systems, definite transitions, isomorphisms, permutations, probabilities, progressions, rotations, reversals, sets, sequences, series, and simultaneity, according to Mel Bochner's inventory of definitive stylistic features of this so-called movement (1967). Theorists were, however, divided as to the interpretations and explanations they could sensibly provide about Minimalism. Some commentators called it the apotheosis of ‘modernist idealism’. Others considered Minimalism as completely at odds with the achievement of modernism. Yet another group had seen in Minimalist Art the initiation of a “postmodern critique of its institutional and discursive conditions”. The regular box-like or cubic forms of a Lewitt or a Judd have subsequently habitually and variously been classified as ‘idealistic’, ‘rational’ and ‘classic’, although there have been a few commentators who have seen just the opposite in exactly the same work: as something ‘sensuous’, ‘irrational’ and ‘obsessive’. Thus, by extension, Minimalism has been held by some to epitomize ‘a world without fragmentation, a world of seamless unity’, whereas for others it has shown us “a world without a centre, a world of substitutions and transportations nowhere legitimated by the revelations of a transcendental subject”, according to Rosalind Krauss (1977). And so Minimalism has come to be associated with industrial materials, modular units, regular or symmetrical or gridded arrangements, a kind of directness in the use and presentation of materials, and the



absence of craft and ornamentation or ornamental composition. All very different to the way Neil Le Roux generates his version of minimalist art.

At the outset, it is important to mention that Le Roux uses repetition as one of his 'definitive stylistic features', an aspect overlooked by Bochner. In the series of ball point pen drawings depicting world maps, Le Roux characteristically repeats the same line over and over, randomly placing continents in relation to one another. These maps are 'repeated', or literally re-drawn and cut out and folded into three-dimensional sculptural objects. So, for example, four-sided shapes such as tetrahedrons, six-sided shapes, or hexahedrons, eight-sided ones, or octahedrons, twelve-sided ones, or dodecahedrons, and twenty-sided ones, or icosahedrons, were generating a mathematically inspired terminology for the artist. Recently, in his "Trob" concept objects, Le Roux repeats the same geometric, brick-like yet organically generated shapes (moulded from clay, sand and recycled trash) and assembles them in various configurations. In repetition, then, lies variation. Each repeated line, each folded or moulded object is slightly different to the previous one and each successive one invariably different as well, due to, perhaps, a slip of the hand or a lapse in concentration.



The notion of repetition gives rise to a new theory or explanation of Le Roux's art, namely generative theory. Involuntary repetition is none other than natural generation, this theory holds, or does it? Le Roux prefers to call this process "Deterministic Chaos" in the case of his drawings. His process is thus trained on generative art production within an ecological framework, advancing such key, and seemingly naturally occurring concepts as 'emergence' and 'self-organisation', which, he maintains, is essentially 'cultural', if not 'cultivated' in nature. Nature, in other words, is culture, in Le Roux's diction.

Apart from the repetition, Le Roux also adopts a form of inversion. His initial and ongoing series called "Deterministic Chaos Drawings" – a veritable contradiction in terms - are seemingly random, inorganic repetitive marks, but highly calculated and structured in nature. Recently, however, Le Roux has generated his "Ecological Concept Objects": sculptural and organic self-organizations (or objects) of natural plant life, or permaculture. Permaculture is a systems-based design science geared towards sustainability, consolidating a "human-care-of-the-earth" with an "earth-taking-care-of-itself" philosophy. Le Roux essentially relinquishes his creative agency and decision making as an artist to impersonal forces, which, in turn generates anomalies, accidents or emergent forms in nature. This is what is now known as generative art. In his practice Le Roux abdicates his conventional role as an artist who creates the work in favour of an unconventional, non-linear mode of dynamism residing in the emergent potential that reveals itself on its own terms, effectively obviating the distinction between nature and culture. The 'deterministic' in his art becomes the unpredictable; the 'being' of the drawing gives way to the 'becoming' of the ecological concept object.

In repetition lies the possibility of establishing patterns. "We are lost without repetition", says Briony Fer in her book, *The Infinite Line* (2004). If we do not repeat, we do not remember but if we only repeat, we are unable to see recurrence, and thus we are incapable of thinking;



everything remains continuously new impressions continually perceived anew by the senses. Artists, Fer goes on to say, use various serial strategies with which to remember and with which to think about existence and about the world. The regular and repeated forms of these types of art works could easily be seen as a contemporary variant of a rational, classical order of measure and proportion, which is in itself traditionally taken as evidence of the higher and finer workings of the human mind. How is it then, in a world in which rationalism and humanism seemed to have been long abandoned by just about everyone, that such a lucid representation of pure reason almost seems irrational. In such a context one can envisage another imaginative alternative interpretation of Le Roux's work. His work represents not pure reason but almost the exact opposite: the outpourings of repetitiveness of an obsessional mind. The repetitive nature of his art has nothing to do with the economy of a mathematician's language. It has the loquaciousness of the speech of children or of the very old, in that its refusal to summarize, to use the single example that would imply the whole, is like those feverish accounts of events composed of a string of almost identical details connected by "and", numberless times and infinitely repeated. In place of reason, then, there is randomness, chance, seriality, repetition and redundancy. To get inside the systems of Le Roux's work is, to quote Krauss, "to enter a world without a centre, a world of substitutions and transportations nowhere legitimated by the revelations of a transcendental subject. This is the strength of this work, its seriousness, and its claim to contemporariness."

In its seriality and repetitions, in its avoidance of hierarchy and centredness, in its negation of the interior/exterior model of art, the type of minimalist art that Le Roux generates, negates its metaphorical equivalent: the idea that the meaning of such work resides in the subject's inner psychological life. But then, if meaning is not in the work, where is it? Krauss argues that meanings, rather than being inherent in words and objects, are produced only through the relationships with other words and objects. Meaning, that is to say, is produced externally, in the public rather than the private sphere; it will always be relative rather than absolute, dependent in some broad sense on context rather than pre-formed and fixed. Le Roux's drawings and objects could thus be regarded as numberless in their generative repetition and infinite in their meanings.

Wilhelm van Rensburg



Deterministic Chaos Object #002: Tetrahedron 2014 Ball point pen on paper, paper board
335X295X280mm

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #054: 'Tetra' (after Furuti) 2014 Ball point pen and pencil
705X1000mm



Deterministic Chaos Object #003: Hexahedron 2014 Ball point pen on paper, paper board
178X178X178mm

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #055: 'Hexa' (after Furuti) 2014 Ball point pen and pencil
705X1000mm





Deterministic Chaos Object #004: Octahedron 2014 Ball point pen on paper, paper board
285X250X210mm

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #056: 'Octa' (after Furuti) 2014 Ball point pen and pencil
705X1000mm



Deterministic Chaos Object #005: Dodecahedron 2014 Ball point pen on paper, paper board 285X285X230mm

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #057: 'Do deca' (after Furuti) 2014 Ball point pen and pencil 705X1000mm



Deterministic Chaos Object #006: Icosahedron 2014 Ball point pen on paper, paper board
295X335X280mm

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #058: 'Icosa' (after Furuti) 2014 Ball point pen and pencil
705X1000mm



Folk science and topological permutations: the *Trob Concept Object* series

As part of my current exhibition, *IN CASE OF EMERGENCE (follow the bifurcation)*, I have produced a series of sundried prototype bricks – constructed out of sand, clay and recycled trash. For brevity's sake, I shall henceforth refer to this assemblage of materials as 'Trob' (short for 'Trash cob'), as the concept is based on the ancient building technology known as *cob*. I have simply replaced one part of this long existent three-part material science, with an ingredient that is more abundant in our contemporary urban landscapes.

In the making of traditional *cob*, clay and sand are used as binding agents for dried grass stalks which by means of a complex entanglement provide the structural integrity for producing durable shelters. As there is a more pressing need to convert limited dried grass supplies into fecund compost, I have resorted to using recycled trash materials as the 'straw' for my *cob* – hence Trob.

The Trob bricks are produced by making a mixture of sand, clay and rubbish – typically plastic or other discarded packaging materials – and then removing the air between the particles by adding water. The liquid mixture is subsequently poured into wooden frames which determine the final shape that the bricks will take on. They are left in the sun until the water has evaporated and the materials amalgamate into the compact mass of an individual brick. Because the building material is malleable when wet, it is not necessary to cast it into bricks as complete walls could potentially be built *in situ*, and left in the sun to cure.

These bricks have acquired the moniker *Trob Concept Objects*, because they are conceptual in at least two understandings of the term. Firstly, they are *concept bricks* in the sense that car manufacturers would showcase *concept cars* at an automobile convention. It is a mechanism for publicising experimental ideas which may or may not be practicable or mass produced, gauging public opinion and subtly advertising the manufacturer's current research. The only difference is that I am not an industrial brick manufacturer. Therefore this endeavour has more to do with putting an idea into the public domain as an open-source blueprint for adaptation by builders looking for alternative construction materials.

Secondly, the particular formal configurations of these bricks have been conceived by means of an *abstract generative concept*. Like many noted works of pioneering conceptual artists who employed mathematical permutations as generative mechanisms for realising aesthetic¹ arrangements, the concept becomes the *medium* that generates the final perceptible object. This particular 'systems-aesthetics' strain of Conceptual Art is today being canonised under the technical term, *Generative Art*.

In their text, *What is Generative Art?* (2009), Margaret Boden and Ernest Edmonds attempt to define Generative art by picking out "cases of art-making in which personal control is deliberately diminished, or even wholly relinquished, and relatively impersonal processes



Trob Concept Object set 02 (variants 5 – 8) 2014 Clay, trash, sand, beeswax, candle wax, wax crayon, linseed oil, polyester resin Dimensions variable

pp18/19: *Trob Concept Object set 01* 2014 Clay, trash, sand, beeswax, candle wax, wax crayon, linseed oil, polyester resin Dimensions variable

¹ Aesthetic is here used in its classical sense, as "the science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception" (Harper 2001).



Trob Concept Object set 01 2014 Clay, trash, sand, beeswax, candle wax, wax crayon, linseed oil, polyester resin Dimensions variable

take over. Those impersonal processes vary greatly. They may be physical, psychological, sociocultural, biological, or *abstract (formal)*. *And if abstract, they may or may not be implemented in a computer*“ (2009: 29-30) [italics added for emphasis].

The generative idea for the specific form of the *Trob Concept Object* series stems from a curious physical exploration of the potential variants of any arrangement of four directly connected cubes. These geometric assemblages of square planes will be familiar to players of the pioneering computer game, *Tetris*. ‘Tetra-’ is the Greek prefix which is used to denote anything comprised of four parts. When extended into three-dimensional space, additional topological forms become possible from the ones that can be sufficiently depicted in a two-dimensional format (see *Trob Concept Objects* variants 6 – 8).

Owing to the fact that these configurations are comprised of cubes, all the possible polygonal arrangements share the traits of a cube – i.e. they each consist of six planes with square corners. Therefore they can be said to be *hexahedral*, which is to say that they are geometric solids with six faces. (*Hexa-* is the Greek prefix for anything containing six parts).

In order to accentuate the hexahedral nature of these tetrads, I have treated each of the six sides with a different material finish. This is also partly experimental as it tests the compatibility for media that could potentially act synergistically with *Trob*. A protective membrane is critical for any practicable appropriation of *Trob* (as is the case with traditional cob), because the material is water sensitive and will eventually dissolve if kept immersed. The following table documents some of my findings:

Medium	Pros	Cons	Notes
Beeswax	Ease of application	Melts at 62-64°C, limited supplies (large scale apiculture recommended)	Seemingly most elastic strength of all waxes
Crayon wax	Ease of application, quick setting time	Melts at 50°C	Melting a whole packet of crayons gives you browns
Candle wax	Ease of application	Does not bond so well, material inconsistency	Best applied with a brush. High-melting point microcrystalline wax might be more durable
Linseed oil	Affordable, available on a large scale. Ease of application.	Long drying time	Closest finish to neat display of brick. Most practicable tested medium on a large scale
Neat	No initial work	Causes quick wear and tear	Not really practicable for construction as it gives of dust with wear and tear
Polyester resin	Extremely strong membrane	Expensive, noxious fumes during application, long drying time	Brick look wet when applied in thin layers

Like the *Deterministic Chaos Drawing* series, these sculptures stem from my general practice of small-scale experimentation with some possibilities of Generative Art. By relying on the domain of the manual arts as a medium for my experiments, the ramifications of my actions are sheltered from the breakneck surge of our supposedly unavoidable industrial advancement. In this sense I wilfully accept my role as a 'perspectivist' as suggested by erstwhile art theorist Jack Burnham. "In evaluating systems", writes Burnham, "the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structure, input, output, and related activity inside and outside the system." (1974:17).

This particular project then, is surveying the possibilities of reconciling old and new media – trying to build connections between the existent and the ever-mounting detritus of our ancestral and personal historicity. I am furthermore particularly interested in the realist philosophical implications of this work as opposed to any generalised idealist tropes which typically tends to relativise everything into nihilistic double-binds.

I am a massive proponent of what I call *realist aesthetics* where abstract imagination is combined with sensory and cognitive exercise that channels actualised possibilities from the virtual plane. By engaging in such a methodology we can encourage reality to avail itself – whether it be by means of comparatively simple activities of the everyday or by exploring the complex mathematical permutations of abstract ideas.

In summation, I suggest that the *Trob Concept Object* series is an instance of a material folk science, where the topological permutations of a generative rule-set is being tested out in perceptible reality. This holds true only if the above account is taken as a description and not as a definition.

Neil Le Roux

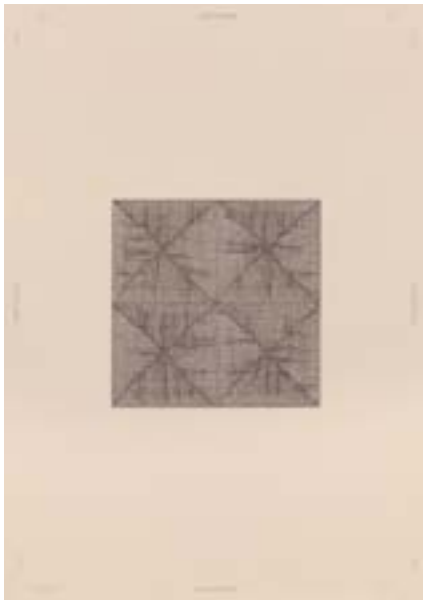


Trob Concept Object set 01 (variants 5 – 8) 2014 Clay, trash, sand, beeswax, candle wax, wax crayon, linseed oil, polyester resin Dimensions variable

Burnham, J. 1974. *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the meaning of Post-Formalist art*. New York: George Braziller.

Boden, MA & Edmonds, EA. 2009. 'What is generative art?'. *Digital Creativity* [e-journal] 20(1): 21-46. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14626260902867915>

Harper, D. 2001. aesthetic (n.). *Online Etymology Dictionary*. [O] Available: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=aesthetic&allowed_in_frame=0



Documentation for drawings pp 26 – 27, and for detail views pp 28 – 43: 2014 Ball point pen and pencil 500X705mm

Top to bottom, left to right

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #059: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #1)

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #060: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #2)

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #061: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #3)

Deterministic Chaos Drawing #062: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #4)

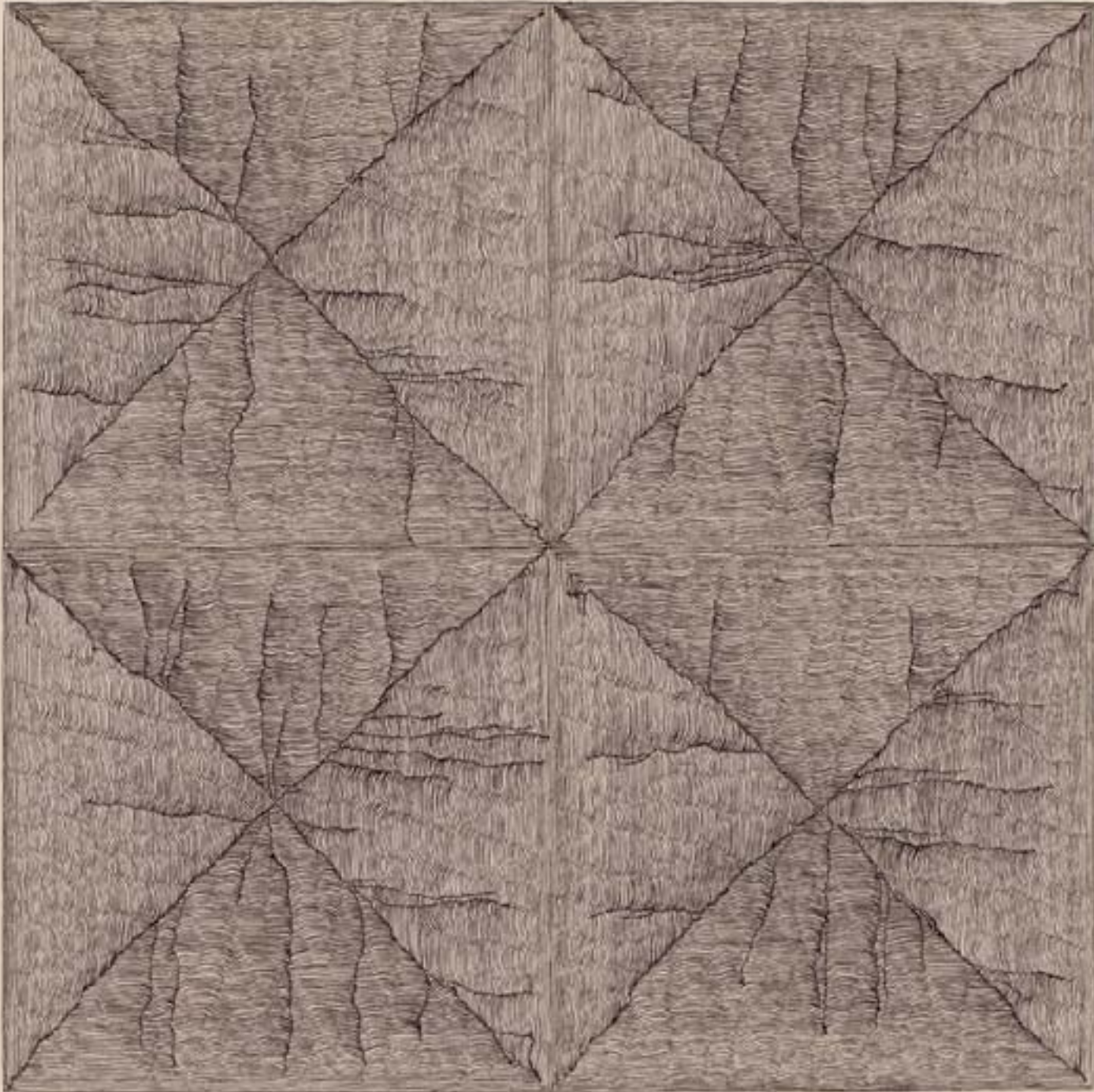
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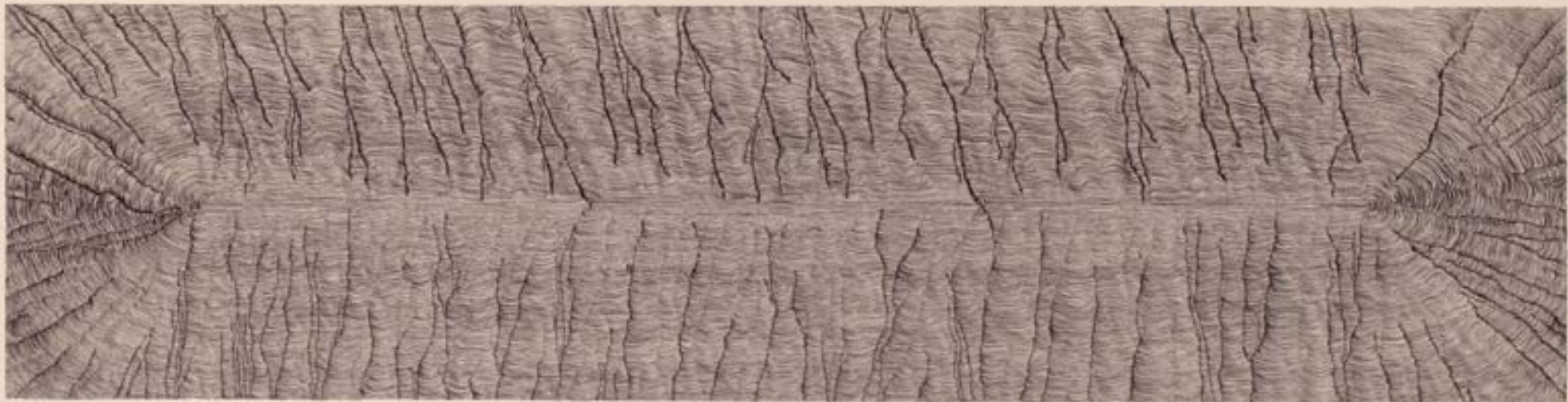
Deterministic Chaos Drawing #063: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #5)

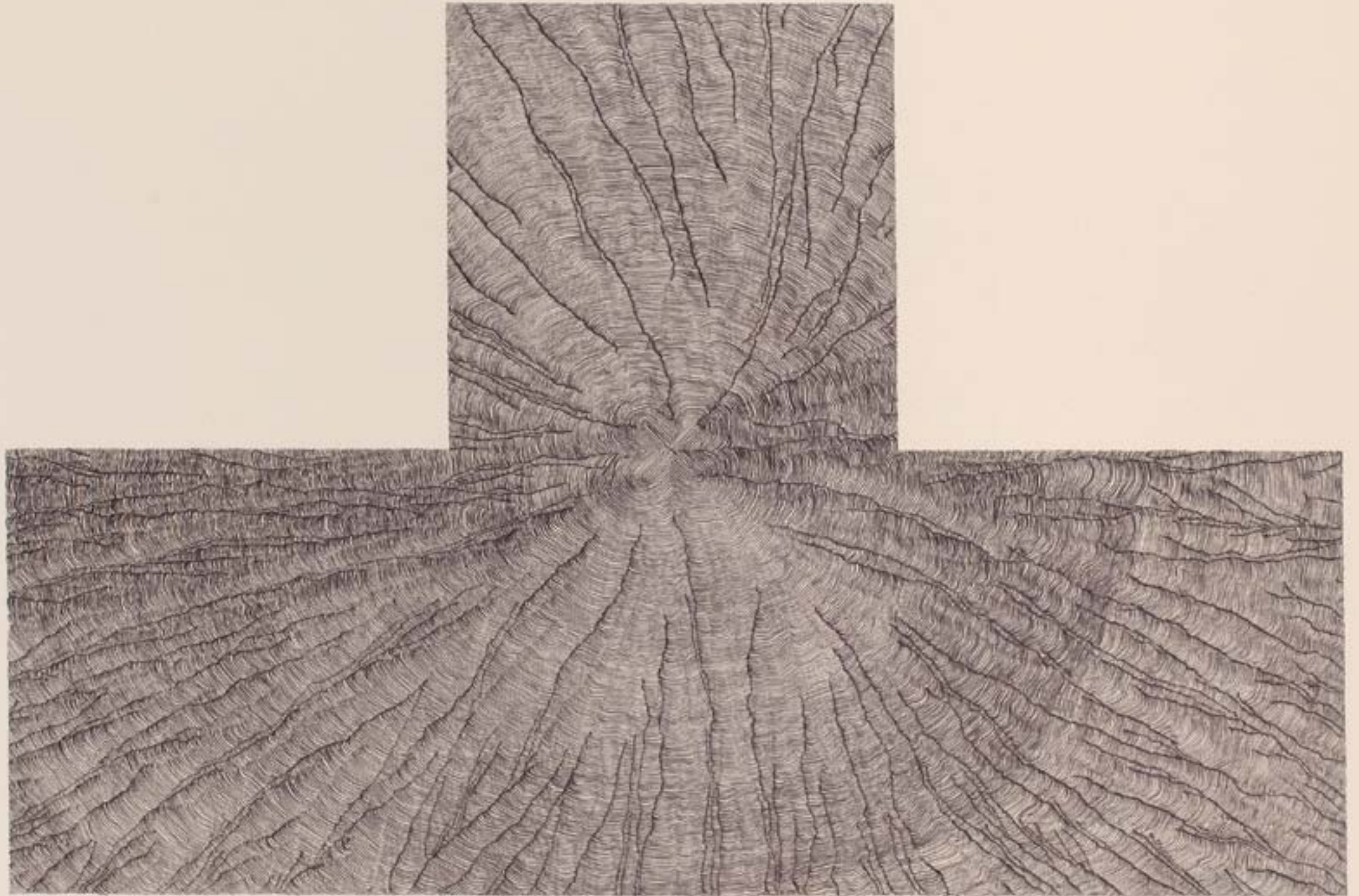
Deterministic Chaos Drawing #064: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #6)

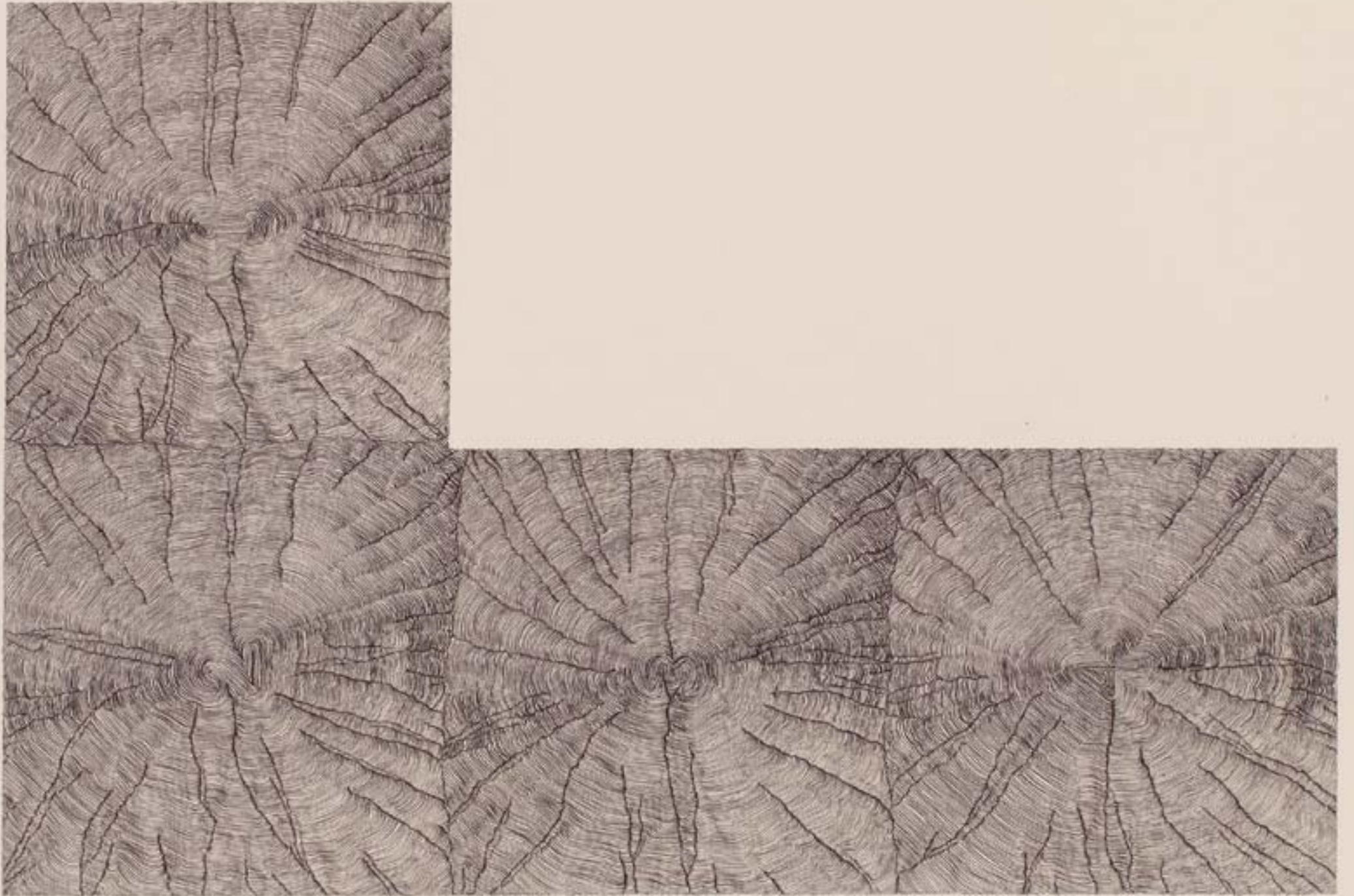
Deterministic Chaos Drawing #065: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #7)

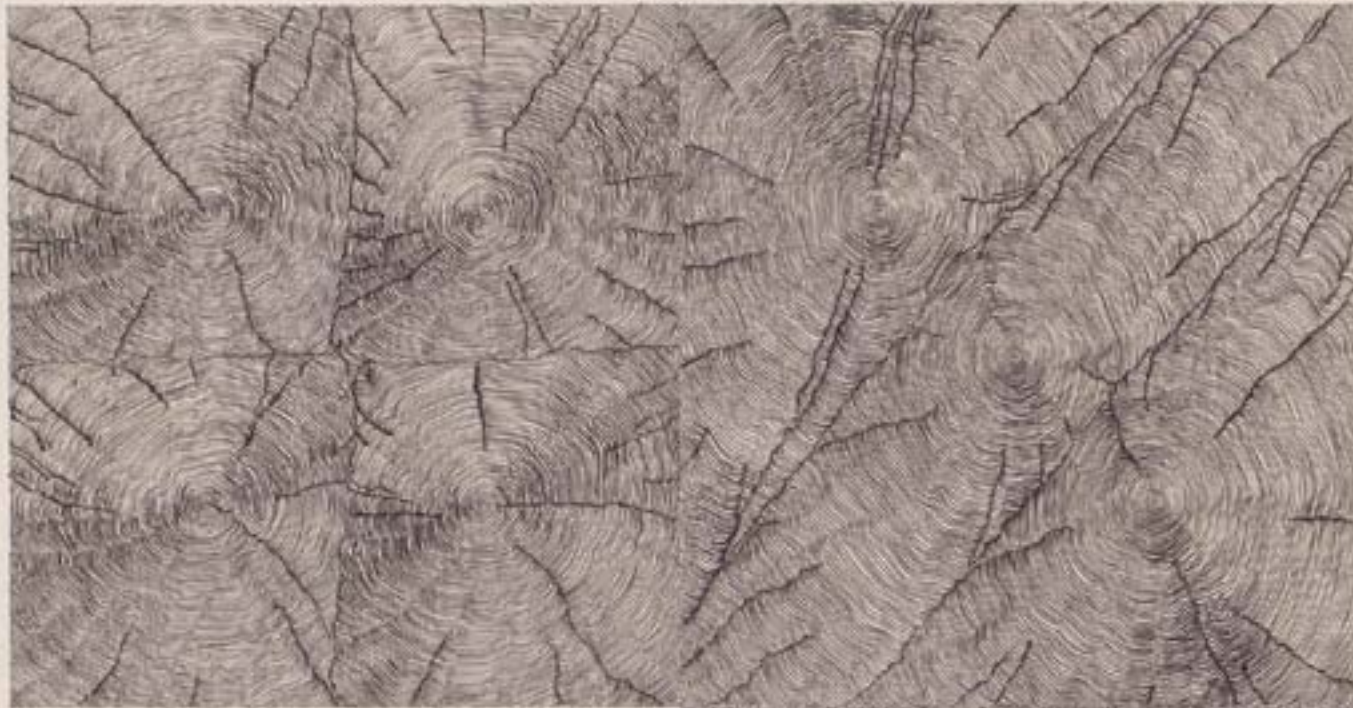
Deterministic Chaos Drawing #066: (Hexahedral tetrad variant #8)

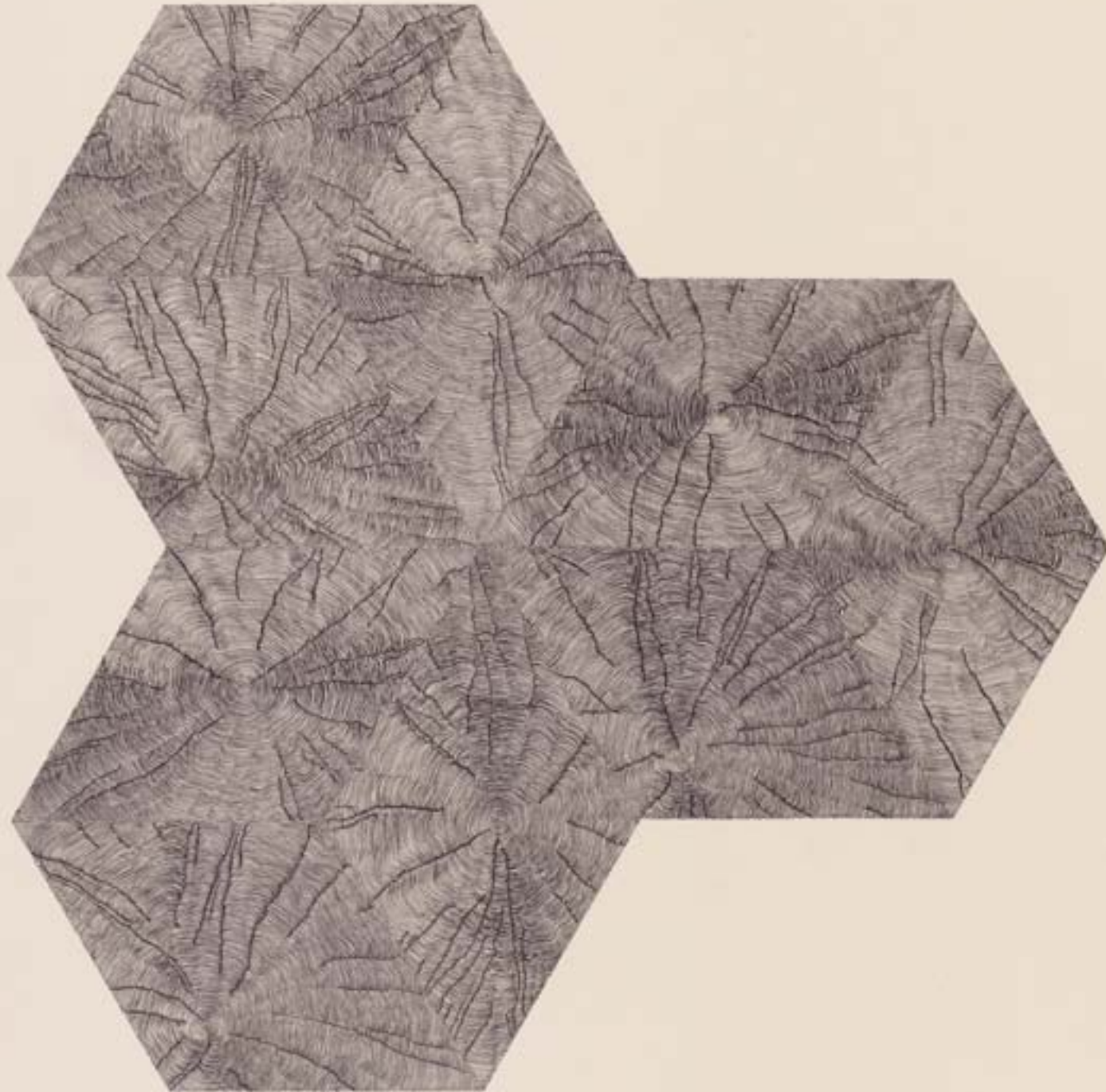


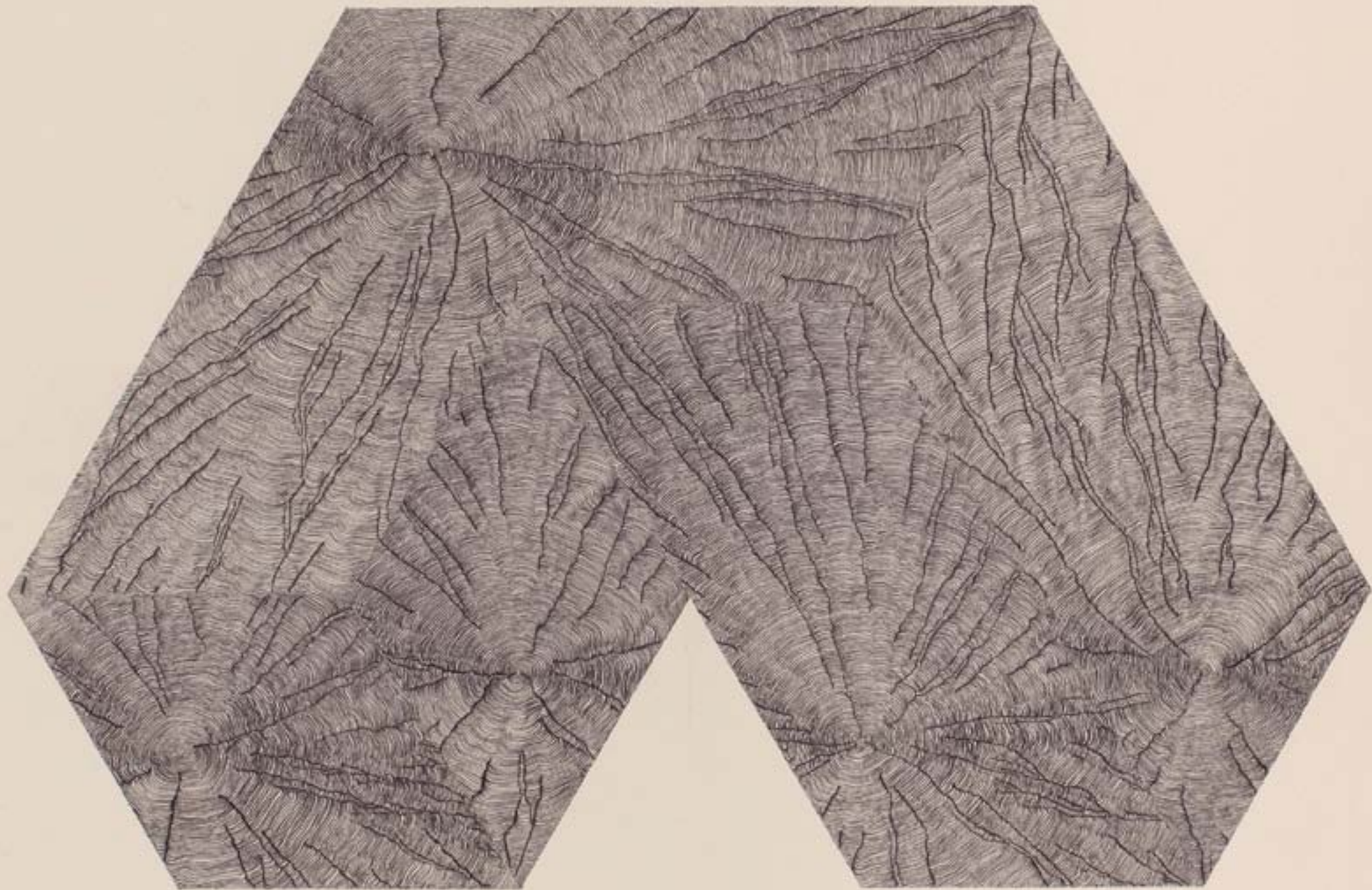


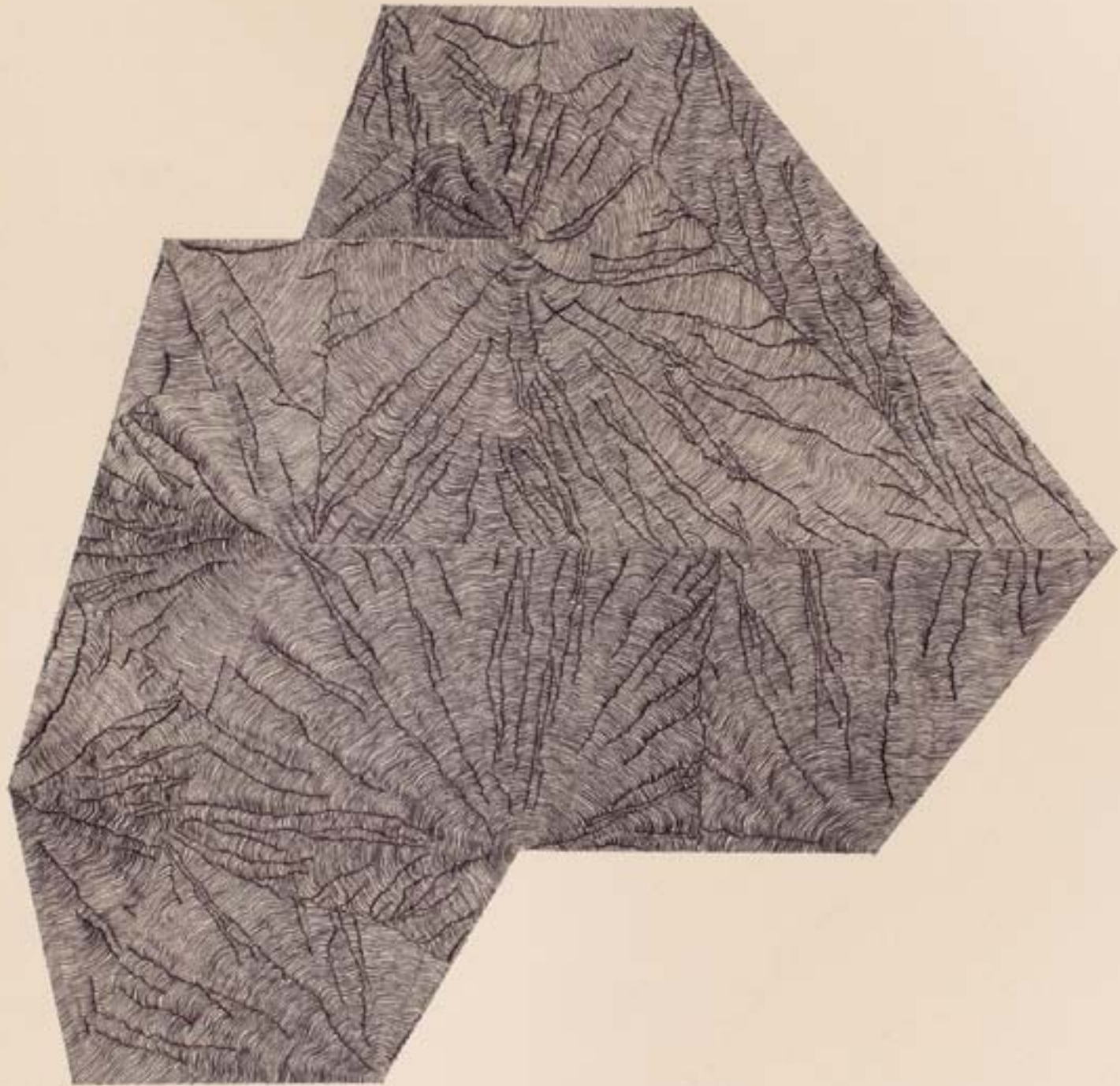












Neil le Roux was born in Pretoria in 1985. He graduated from Stellenbosch University with a BA Visual Arts (Fine Art) degree in 2008 and obtained his MA Visual Arts in 2014 with distinction from the same University. He was nominated for the Spier Contemporary Art Competition in 2010 and his drawings were included in the seminal Draw Links group exhibition at GALLERY AOP in October 2010. *IN CASE OF EMERGENCE (follow the bifurcation)* follows on *Self-Organized Systems*, his first solo exhibition at GALLERY AOP in 2012. He lives in Jamestown, Stellenbosch, where he has initiated and sustained a collaborative agro-ecological permaculture project.

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition *IN CASE OF EMERGENCE (follow the bifurcation)* by Neil le Roux at GALLERY AOP, June/July 2014

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  GALLERY AOP, Neil le Roux (artworks and text), W van Rensburg (text)

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Troch Concept Object set 02 (variants 1 – 4) 2014 Clay, trash, sand, beeswax, candle wax, wax crayon, linseed oil, polyester resin Dimensions variable

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