




**JACO VAN SCHALKWYK**  
**FUN AND GAMES...**

**GALLERY AOP**

**24 MARCH - 11 APRIL 2012**

# INTRODUCTION

## WILHELM VAN RENSBURG



Jaco van Schalkwyk plays Backgammon with Bridget Riley and Odili Donald Odita. “I wanted to play a game: to make a few drawings while questioning the distinction between form and colour”, he states while discussing his new work in relation to these two artists. The influence they exert on Van Schalkwyk’s work is an intricate and sensitive process that Harold Bloom, well-known American literary theorist would call ‘the swerve’. Influence of one artist on another, according to him, involves assimilating the invisible inner spirit of a precursory artist, and ‘misreading’ or swerving away from it. Since the creative spirit swerves within the confined space of the art work (the drawing on the paper in Van Schalkwyk’s case), Bloom goes on to say, the labyrinth of influence is forced by the irregular, if not random network of connections that such swerves have created in various pockets or regions of art history. Negotiating the labyrinth has become something of a game for Van Schalkwyk with ‘pockets’ of formal abstraction and of expressionism.


The elongated triangular shapes in most of his drawings invoke the ‘points’ of a Backgammon board. They constitute the playing field as two players move their checkers in a horseshoe motion or path from either end of the board to the other. Each player’s checkers have to be ‘borne off’ the board before the other one’s, the players continuously avoiding ‘blotting’ each other’s checkers on the bar that divides the two sides of play.

The 'bar' constitutes the space where the shapes in Van Schalkwyk's drawings assume delicate, even lyrical, forms. These forms, in turn, constitute the trails and paths of the laws of chance in Van Schalkwyk's work.

Much as these trails provide evidence of the gestural, abstract expressionist nature of Van Schalkwyk's artistic process, they also capture the structure or delineation of a conversation he wants to initiate with Riley and Odita. Describing the way in which he works, Van Schalkwyk mentions the fact that he often starts by placing six to ten sheets of paper on his studio floor and making marks with a special type of fluorescent ink simultaneously on all the sheets. The way in which the ink lands on the paper is as much determined by his gestural acts as they are by a draft blowing through his studio, shaping how thick or thin the line or form becomes on the paper. Van Schalkwyk is concerned with making drawings in which he can communicate "both decidable and undecidable compositional elements". He is concerned with communicating the nature of chance without reverting to randomness. His concerns culminate in what he calls, "framing lyrical events in formalism."

His forms contrast sharply with those of Riley. "Riley is stuck in form", Van Schalkwyk maintains, "Her obsession with geometric shapes such as the circle, the triangle, the oval, and the square means little to me. Her work essentially presumes a blind faith in form. I am an agnostic when it comes to form." The resultant forms in his work are literal cuttings up of any recognizable board game shapes.






Although form delineates the conversation Van Schalkwyk has with Riley and with Oditia, the actual conversation is about colour. This conversation is shaped by the viscosity, flow, gravity as well as application of the colour of the ink he uses. He quotes Riley in this regard: “You cannot just paint colour: if you try to do this you inevitably end up in the trap of monochromatic painting.” Colour, in other words, has shape. It is at this point that Van Schalkwyk involves Oditia in the conversation. “The colours I use are personal”, Oditia states. “They reflect the collection of visions from my travels locally and globally. I derive at colour intuitively, hand-mixing and coordinating them along the way. In my process I cannot make a colour twice – it can only appear to be the same. This aspect is important to me as it highlights the specificity of differences that exist in the world of people and things.”

With the same ‘specificity of difference’, the same ‘pattern or structure of chance’ Van Schalkwyk has his colours hand-mixed and colour-coded by a global manufacturer of lithographic printing ink, further in addition to hand-mixing in his studio.

The shape of Van Schalkwyk’s colour field has an ability to enter an irrational zone. It is almost as if he cannot control colour. As if the colour just sits on the paper, hiding the many other layers of colour underneath it, any one of them which could have worked. The real colour reveals itself eventually. Colour, ultimately, has more than mere emotional quality, it becomes spiritual.



Talking about one of his well-known paintings, *Torch Song*, Odita mentions the many hues of pink and blue in this work which resonate with the pinks and blues in Van Schalkwyk's. "*Torch Song*," says Odita, "is a song of lament of unrequited love. So I wanted the red to be a certain tone, to be a flame that gets extinguished as soon as it flares. That's why I brought the pink in... As a painter I feel much more affinity with musicians than with other artists. Music is so emotionally direct – people respond directly to it in a way they don't with other art forms. Right now I am listening to a lot of blues... I see the form of the blues, in the States, as a connection to Africa. And that makes it somewhat illicit there, because of elements within the blues that have little to do with Christianity, for example. As a form, the blues have the ability to address our sadness, our sense of loss both personal and spiritual, as well as the ability to call out to our ancestors and to the dead. It is about the humanity of all the people who have come before us, and our connection to this spirit."

And how does Van Schalkwyk draw with colour? The conversation he has with himself about this matter goes something like the following: "How can I draw atrocity? With a good, fleshy pink. Why pink? It is unexpected and remains invisible. Unless it shows you it's bits of red. And then? You might go mad: Atrocity erodes one's faculties of perception. How do I keep myself from madness? By grounding each colour empirically as an attribute of my Beloved."

# FUN AND GAMES...

JACO VAN SCHALKWYK

I wanted to play a game: To make a few drawings while questioning the distinction between form and colour, as expressed in the work of Bridget Riley. Please read her compact essay “At the end of my Pencil : My Lines” (2009). On the other hand, I looked at the work of Odili Donald Odita, particularly his highly personal connection with colour.

I landed up with the following unintended consequences of an inquiry:

## 1. DRAWING THE UNDECIDABLE

How can I make a drawing where I can communicate both decidable and undecidable compositional decisions?

*By relinquishing control.*

But won't each compositional decision be undecidable then?

*Only if I limit myself to dry media or pens, attempting to draw a loss of control without in fact losing control.*

So the drawings will be more like paintings?

*If they are to speak of the undecidable, yes, they need to include a select lexicon of painting: Viscosity, flow, medium, gravity, application.*

## 2. DRAWING CHANCE

How can I communicate the nature of chance without reverting to randomness?

*By framing lyrical events in formalism.*

Then these drawings are just interpretive illustrations?

*Unless they are themselves instances of chance events.*

Is that even possible?

*Given the division of space and the inaccuracies of measurement within a closed composition, yes, anything is possible.*

Really?

*Possibly.*

## 3. DRAWING COLOUR

How can I draw atrocity?

*With a good, fleshy pink.*

Why pink?

*It is unexpected and remains invisible. Unless it shows you it's bits of red.*

And then?

*You might go mad: Atrocity erodes one's faculties of perception.*

How do I keep myself from madness?

*By grounding each colour empirically as an attribute of my Beloved.*

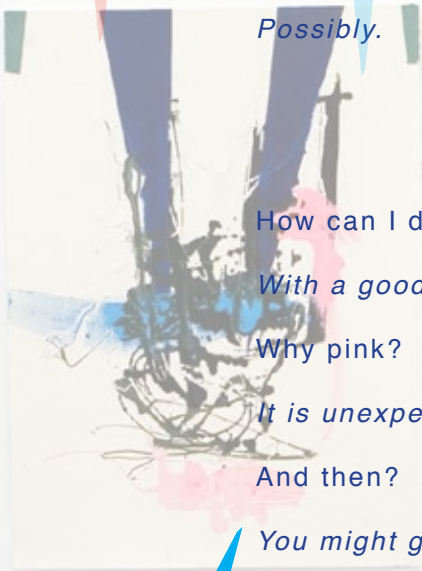
## 4. WORKING TOWARDS A DELICATE USAGE OF IDEAS

Can an idea be well formed when hanging, or must it be well grounded?

*It depends on what colour it is.*

Is a low-key idea more easily well grounded?

*Only if it is hanging from a high-key line.*



The background features several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. A large blue triangle points downwards from the top left. Below it, a red shape follows a similar downward-pointing path. A light pink rectangle is positioned behind the text. Further down, another blue shape points downwards, followed by a red shape, and then another blue shape. At the bottom left, a small green triangle is partially visible.

# **DRAWINGS**





*FUN AND GAMES... Hands*. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Eyes.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Secret.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Blush.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Touched.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Voice.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



FUN AND GAMES... *Fingers*. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Funny Joke.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.





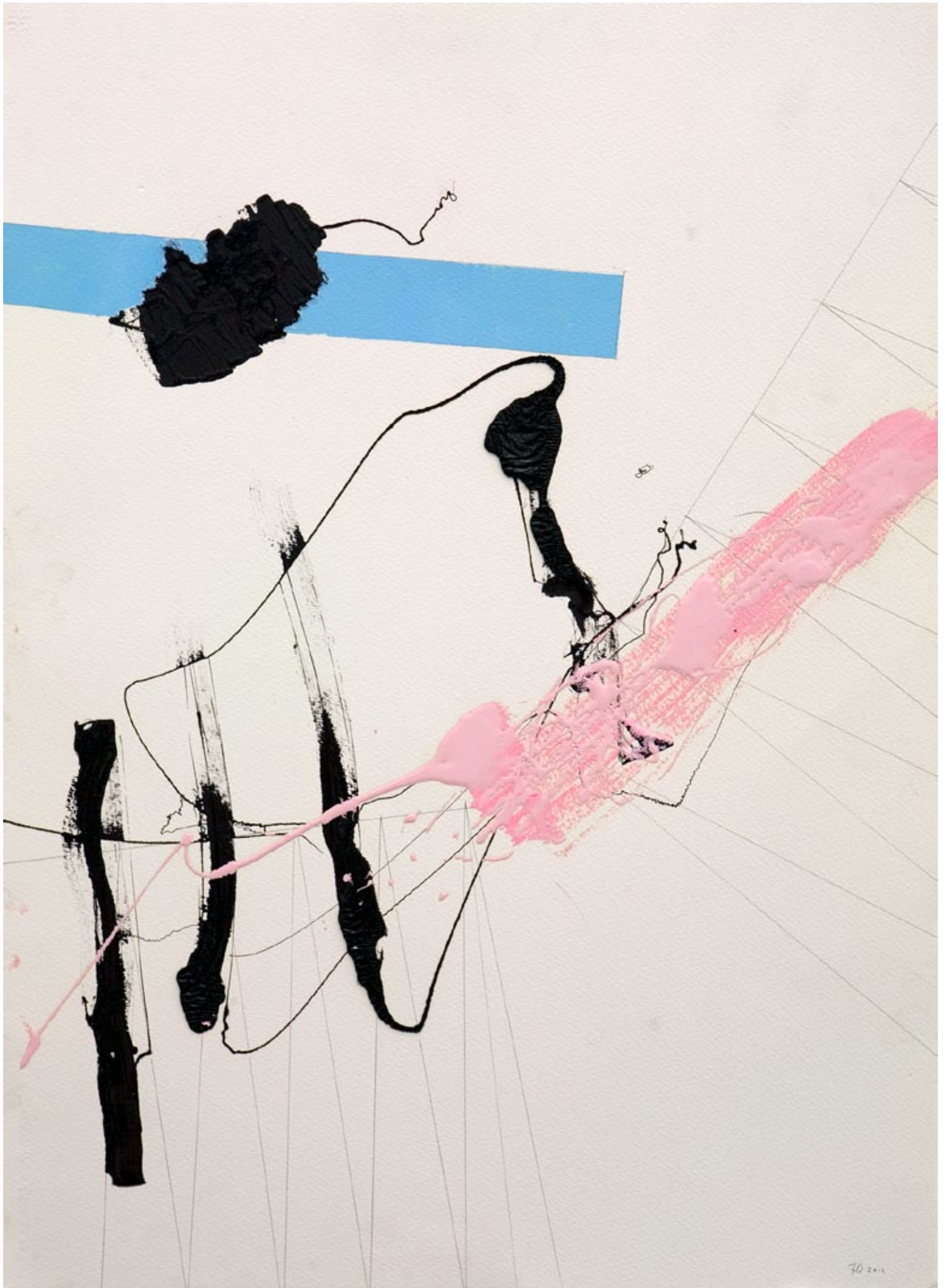
*FUN AND GAMES... Lips.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Hold on Tight.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Want.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Lighter Than.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Caution.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Desire.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.

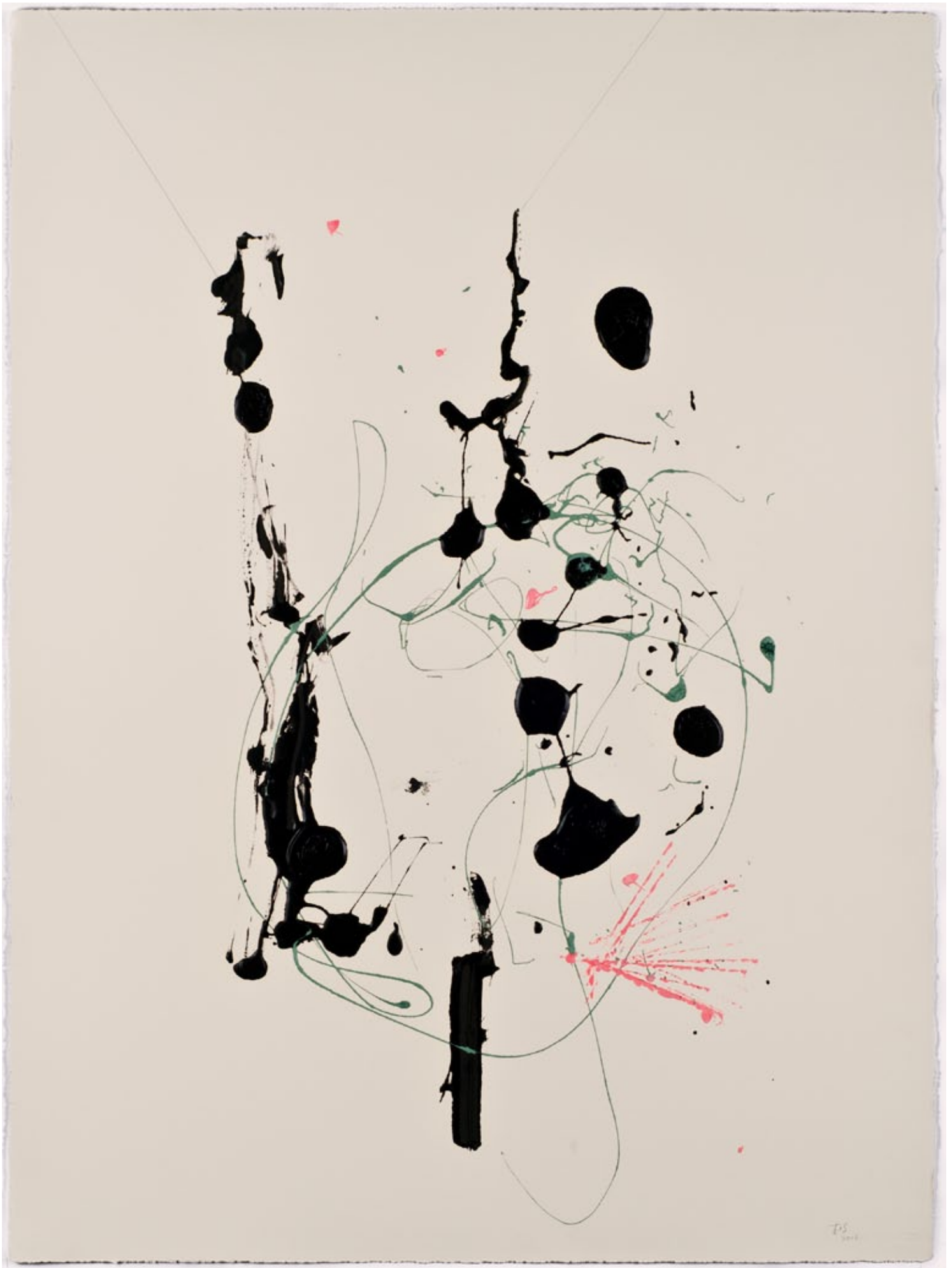


*FUN AND GAMES... Discomfort.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Frailty*. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.

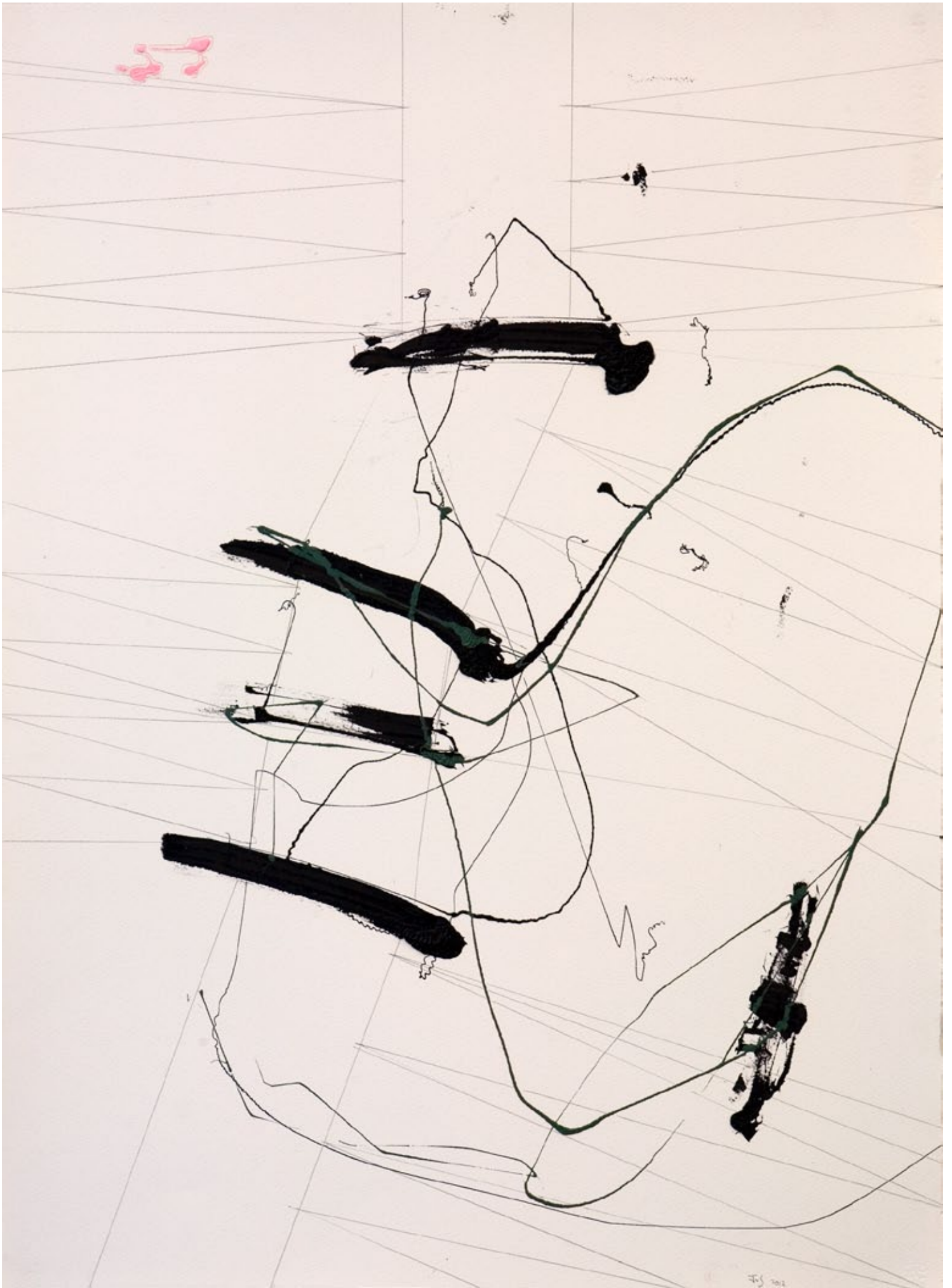




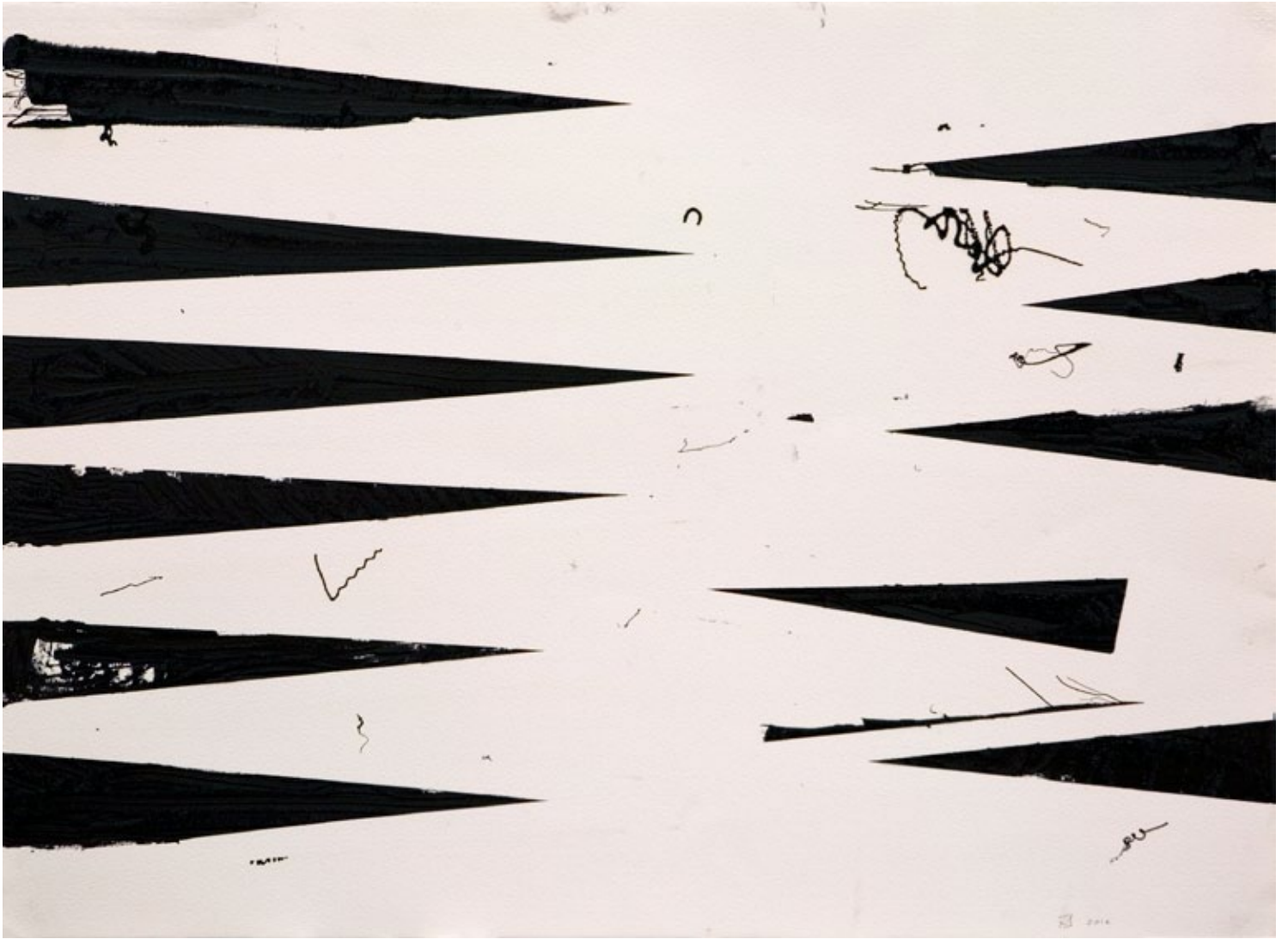
*FUN AND GAMES... Hanging on Threads.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Lost.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



FUN AND GAMES... *Whistle*. Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.





*FUN AND GAMES... An Old Frame is a Dead Match.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.



*FUN AND GAMES... Any Game Worth Playing is Worth Playing Twice.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 765 x 560mm, 2012.

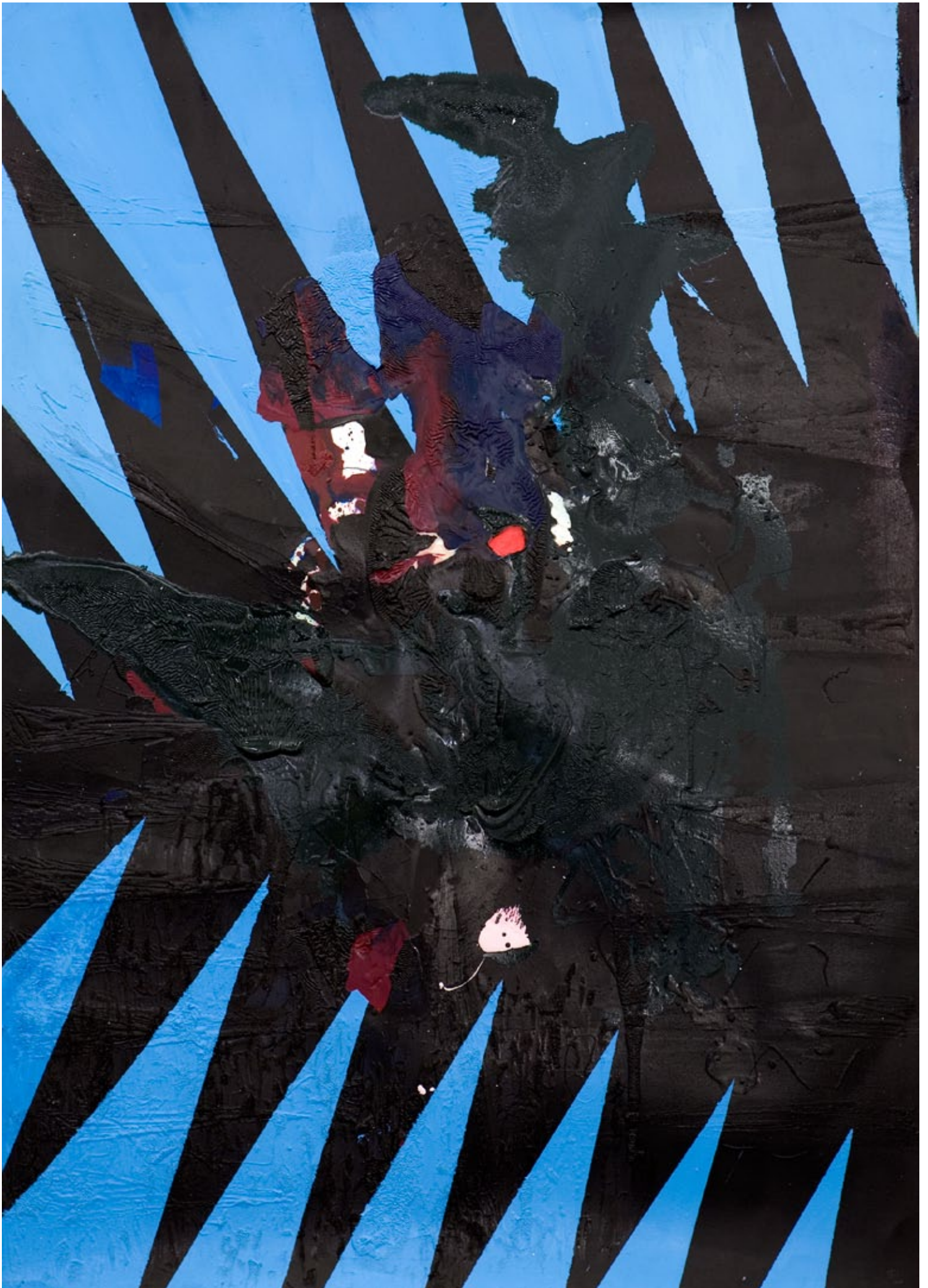


*Of Course You Can't.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 1250 x 1740mm, 2012.



*Of Course You Could've.* Lithographic ink, pencil on paper. 1250 x 1740mm, 2012.





*Of Course You Didn't.* Lithographic ink, wood glue on paper. 1250 x 1740mm, 2012.



Jaco van Schalkwyk

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GALLERY AOP

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