THESIS

RETICULATION: EARTH AND AESTHETICS

Submitted by

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Department of Art

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2009

COLORADO STATE UNVIERSITY

November 4, 2009

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY KIMBERLY ANDERSON ENTITLED RETICULATION: EARTH AND AESTHICS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

RETICULATION: EARTH AND AESTHETICS

My love and respect for the natural environment has deeply directed my artwork. This series of work evolves around an in-depth study of environmental issues. My artwork is a response to the research; some works simply use the issue as a starting point while other work clearly displays the concern. The printmaking lithographic process has also guided the development of this work, both conceptually and aesthetically. Within this series, I am trying to bring beauty, mystery, curiosity, and conservation of the land back into our daily focus through the image-making process. The work is my way of internalizing the natural world and expressing my concern for it.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family and loved ones for believing in me and for their continuous support. Additionally, I would like to thank the invaluable team of committee members, fellow graduate students, and faculty for their time and critical responses.

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"What is landscape art at the beginning of the 21st century?"[1] *Maya Lin*

Growing up on a small forty-acre farm in the rural South, we, as children, knew playing outdoors was one of the main ways to entertain ourselves; the rabbit ears on the television only picked up three channels. There were many different explorations that I might undertake in a single day: finding tadpoles in the creek; exploring the "unexplored" thick deep woods behind the house; chasing the chickens and cows; roaming the tobacco and vegetable fields. The natural world was always accessible to me, and I never knew anything different until I moved away. My father, a federal liaison for non-profit environmental organizations, was a scientist by profession and, most importantly, an environmentalist at heart. He taught us about the land: to love and respect the natural environment and at the same time to enjoy it.

This embedded respect and appreciation for nature has always shown up in my artwork subconsciously, but it was only in graduate school that I began to respond to my work with the natural environment being the primary conceptual focus. My early graduate work was influenced by working artist Vija Celmins. Her intensely meticulous and realistic paintings, drawings, and prints of the natural world captured my visual interest. Imagery of ocean scenes, night skies, spider webs, desert floors, and moon surfaces have been the predominant focus of her work (Fig. 1). Her printmaking processes, imagery, and formal qualities have guided my own work about the natural world.

Driven by Celmins, I began to find inspiration in the enormous collection of ordinary rocks that fill my studio and home. If I was going to collect them, then why not draw them? Using a magnifying glass, I began to study the lichen growing on my treasured rocks; I then drew the tiny organisms. While many studies developed from this, only one drawing was completed, *Lichen* (Fig. 2). During this exploration and discovery period, I was simultaneously focusing on cloud imagery as seen in *Paper Wing Series: Cloud Observation* (Fig. 3). The meticulous, time-consuming but meditative process of burnishing cloud forms from an aquatinted plate was another way for me to interact with the natural world. At this time, I was still struggling to find some grand conceptual idea. However, I realized later that my methodical way of working and the imagery *was* the idea; I did not need to look further. As Celmins stated about her own work, "There was never any symbolism or any real idea. I just went back to looking.... Going back to looking in such a thorough way reaffirmed something about the business of 'making'."[2] However, I felt the desire to push on and keep moving forward in search for a deeper, more personal connection to my work; some way to equally combine my passion for the land, my environmental concerns, and aesthetic quality all into one successful body of work.

I began researching several environmental issues around the world of importance to me: algae-blooms due to agricultural run off; the plastic in our oceans and the marine life mistakenly feeding from it; beetle kill pine trees that have forever changed the Western landscape; mining coal through the

destructive mountaintop removal process. After exploring imagery on these environmental issues, I decided on a local environmental concern: glacial shrinkage. This topic was intriguing to me on a global level, but learning that there are sixteen glaciers in Colorado (many of them only an hour away) really won me over. Here a body of work began to blossom.

Meanwhile, I had been overtaken with artist Maya Lin's work. Her ability to combine environmental issues with strong, simplistic artwork became a model for me. Works such as *Water Line* and *Caspian Sea* merged both factual scientific data with aesthetics (Fig. 4). I wanted the same factual tranquility to be found in my glacial work.

Colorado's glaciers provide much of the state with water in late summer when drought occurs. The freshwater is used for agriculture, drinking water, etc. Through my extensive research on this topic, I realized that statewide glaciers will disappear within this century, if not sooner, due to global warming. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "mountainous areas will face glacier retreat, reduced snow cover.... and extensive species losses".[3] Also, "Warming in western mountains is projected to cause decreased snowpack, more winter flooding and reduced summer flows, exacerbating competition for over-allocated water resources."[4] To know that these long-lived glaciers will forever be gone and that barren rock will sit in their place alarms me.

The most documented glaciers in Colorado are in Rocky Mountain National Park. Through my research, I discovered repeat photographs of local glaciers,

provided by the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Boulder.[5] The photographs range from the current state of glaciers (latest posted in 2007) to the earliest photo taken in the late 1800s. From the photographs I traced the exterior outline of the glacier form through the years, around every thirty years. I then overlapped them to create one linear image documenting the glacial retreat. Woodcuts were then produced from studies of Andrews glacier (Figs. 5, 6). For these pieces, I wanted the factual information of the work to quickly and strongly be conveyed, for the viewer to see the dramatic space between the receding lines.

Through this extensive research with glacial retreat, my focus was directed towards the growth of glacial tarns. This direction was only a natural progression for my work, both visually and conceptually. The research revealed that the glaciers are melting, therefore the tarns are expanding. A group of work derived from this study and the image of a tarn shape evolved. For example, in *Cross Section: Tarn* the growth of the lake is expressed through the heavy mass represented at the bottom of the shape (Fig. 7). Coincidently, line drawings reiterate tarn growth as seen through the studies in *Tarn Expansion* (Fig. 8). I then produced cyanotypes from the line drawings (Fig. 9). The cyanotype process lent itself to the technical drawings represented in the images, referencing blueprints. The line drawings were another way for me to visually present the growth.

A second body of work had been developing simultaneously. This work derived from a direct lithographic process using a tusche and water solution. The water for the mixture was originally collected from the Cache la Poudre River (fed by the glaciers I was studying), but later I began to use tap water (still from the Poudre River, just chemically treated). Once the solution had settled, I would pour the mixture, through a random and controlled manner, on a surface - paper, litho stone, or metal plate. An early paper pour work can be seen in *Reticulation Study* (Fig. 10). Once poured, I allowed the solution to dry naturally and form its own path, allowing the material to record its own process, this reticulated process. When dry, the tusche surface mimics a terrain-like landscape: a river basin, canyon wall, a valley, or a desert surface. These lithographic formations became the focus in this new body of work.

During early stages with this process, I was printing the entire poured image. Many times the print, in the end, was simply not strong enough to stand on its own. A few times, however, the image worked, as in *Recordings from the Cache la Poudre River* (in this litho pour, I used water directly from the river) and *Before:After* (Natural Disaster/Flood) and *Before:After* (Deforestation) (Fig. 11). I then went back into the print and enhanced the images with pigment. For example, in (Natural Disaster/Flood) I added red earth to the lithograph, and watercolor as seen in (Deforestation) (Figs. 12, 13). For these specific works, the colors strengthen the concept of environmental devastation through before and after color comparisons. For example, the rich greens in *Before:After*

(Deforestation) reference our green world, after deforestation the area is left empty, treeless and gray.

My continual disappointments with the prints led me to look at isolated formations within each piece. I began tearing down the lithographs to focus on the delicate and intriguing surfaces that were getting lost in the overall image. Works began to develop from this visually aesthetic process, as seen in *Topography, Topography III,* and *Chronological Order of Surface Terrain II* (Figs. 14, 15, 16). I would, many times at random, arrange the pieces until the small, torn lithographs were placed in a grid that visually worked. I viewed these works as studies of topographical surfaces since the tusche process mimicked the organic properties of the land.

While the grid was aesthetically pleasing within these works, it also became a major conceptual component. I began to arrange the lithographs in a tight grid such as in *Chronological Order of Surface Terrain* and *Topography II* (Figs. 17, 18). The grid led to the concept - it reminded me of today's landscape as seen from an airplane or in satellite photos: the gridded America. The land grid has developed through the progress of civilization and agricultural practices. The only thing visually breaking up the grid is the organic flow of rivers and unusable farming land.

The aerial grid guided my work to an in-depth study of present, past, and future agricultural practices. This had been an environmental issue that I have been following; it only seemed natural that this topic was of interest since I grew

up in an agricultural community. In 2007, humanity was using twenty-five percent of the world's land surface for food production. Agriculture also holds the majority in freshwater consumption, with seventy percent of the world's water use.[6] This clarifies why we see our aerial landscape as a grid today. *Topography IV* and *Aerial View* reference current agricultural practices (Fig. 19, 20).

Meanwhile, other work derived from the combination of the lithographic process and the glacial research. By observing images from both bodies of work, I began to notice the reoccurrence of the reticulation pattern. It became a theme within my work. I observed the reticulation as the linear element that described the retreat of the glaciers; as well as, in reverse, the lines in the tarn growth work; and in the reticulated pattern seen in the lithographs. I also observed the reticulation pattern everywhere in nature: on rocks, the ripples in water, in sand, water lines on river banks and canyon walls, etc. *Reticulation I* and *Reticulation II* are responses to those occurrences (Figs. 21, 22). These works can be viewed as either a growth or retreat, or simply viewed as the reticulated pattern. The process of tearing the paper and layering gives this piece an ephemeral feel, mimicking the reticulation seen in nature. This imagery unites both bodies of work.

Currently, I am still working on imagery within this body of work and plan to continue exploring it after I have completed my studies here at CSU. I do not feel as though I am quite ready to leave the lithographic process and there are other avenues that I would like to explore. For example, my latest work, *Strata,* is still

working with the poured tusche process and imagery, but is exploring a new concept with the medium (Fig. 23). This piece is focusing on layers of strata. Strata can easily be seen as you drive through a mountain who's side has been blasted away to make the road. This print is presenting layers of strata by cutting away layers of the image and imposing layers behind the opening.

Within my art, I do not want to rely heavily on factual information, but instead allow it to simply inform the work, give it a starting point. It is not necessary that the viewer interprets the environmental issue or concern, but rather allows the image to stay with him. I want him to think about the imagery through time - years maybe - before the imagery clicks and the reference is made. This is also why I keep my titles simple, instead of giving the viewer the direct concern that I am implying. As Maya Lin says about her own work, "If you are paying attention, you may notice it, if not, you won't".[7] There is also a strong formal reference to maps in my work; we use mapping as a way of understanding the world, the same idea goes into the making of my work.

I believe that I will never create art that is more powerful than that in the natural world. Nevertheless, my work is a response, a way of trying to internalize it and appreciate it's beauty, as well as expressing my environmental concern. I know that my continual love and curiosity of the natural world will always stay in my imagery in some form.

ENDNOTE

[1] Lin, Maya, *Boundaries* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 6:04.

[2] Relyea, Lane, Robert Gober, and Brioney Fer, *Vija Celmins* (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2004), 26.

[3] IPCC (Core Writing Team, Pachauri, R.K and A. Reisinger), *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC, 2007), 52.

[4] Ibid.

[5] NSIDC/WDC for Glaciology, *Glacier photograph collection* (Boulder, Colorado: National Snow and Ice Data Center/World Data Center for Glaciology, 2002, updated 2009), Digital media.

[6] McKibben, Bill. *Deep Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007) 62.

[7] Lin, 6:07.

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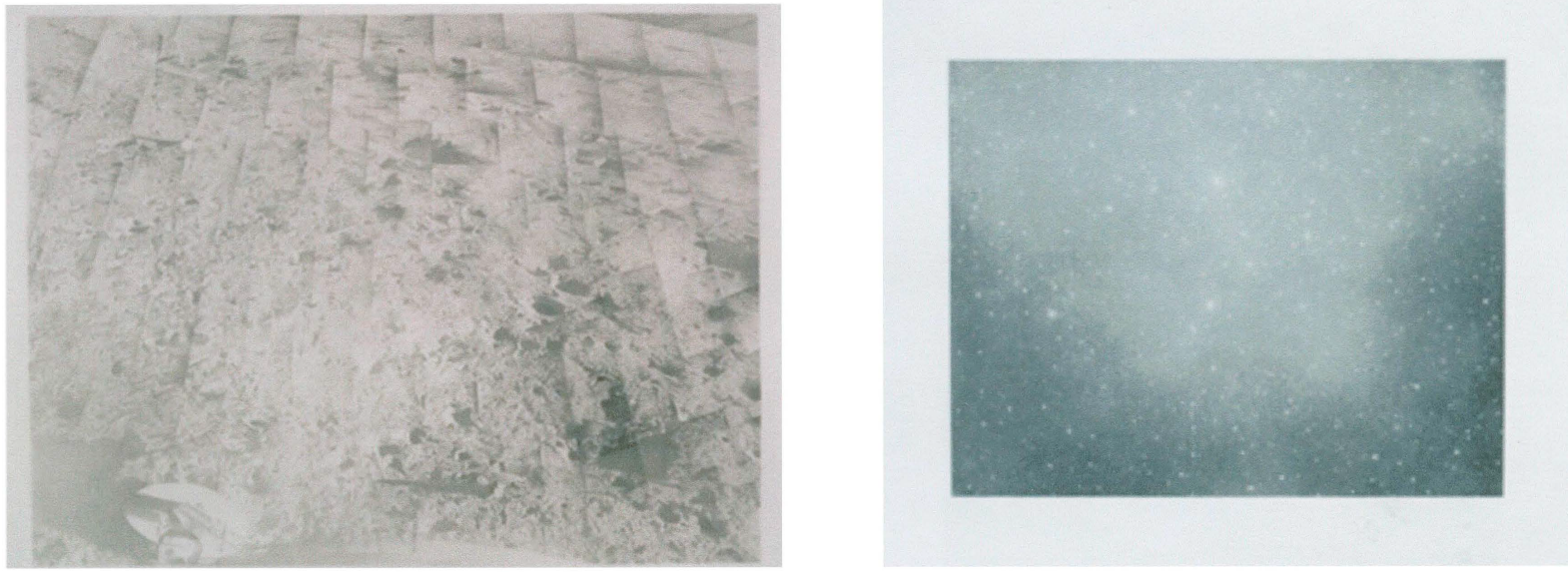

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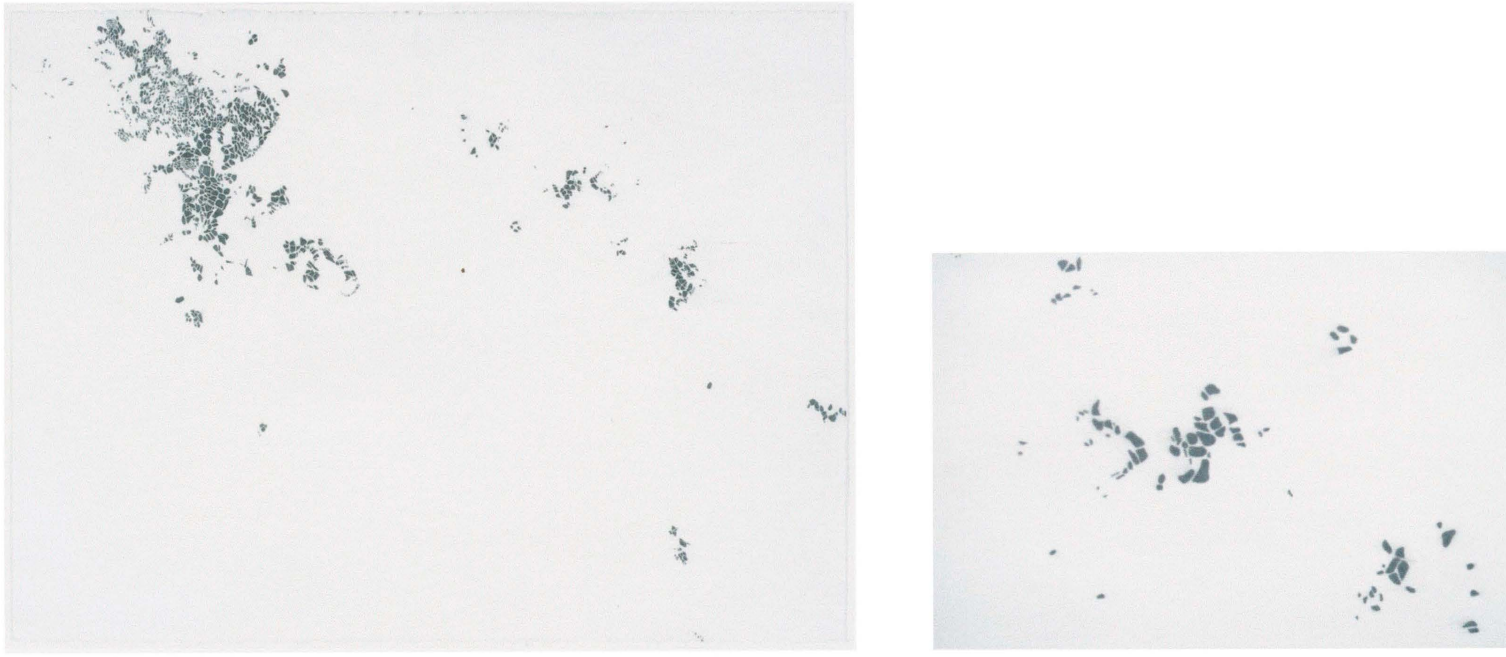

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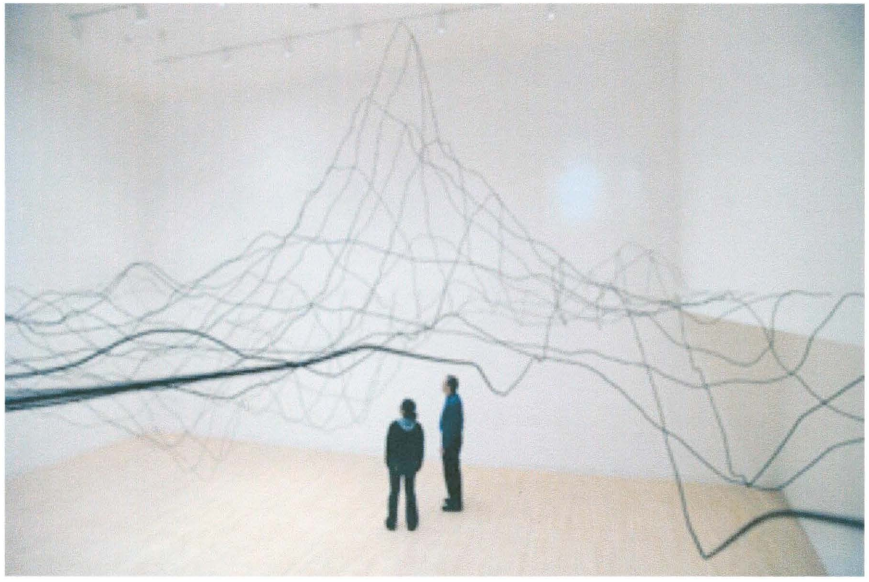

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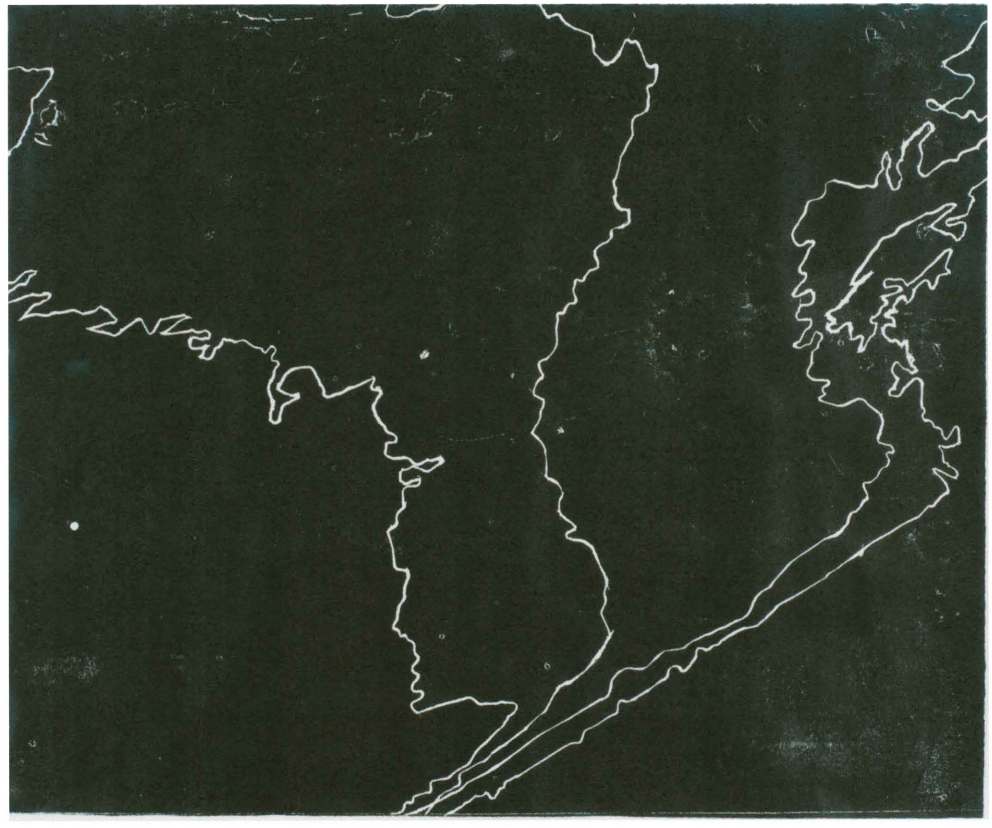

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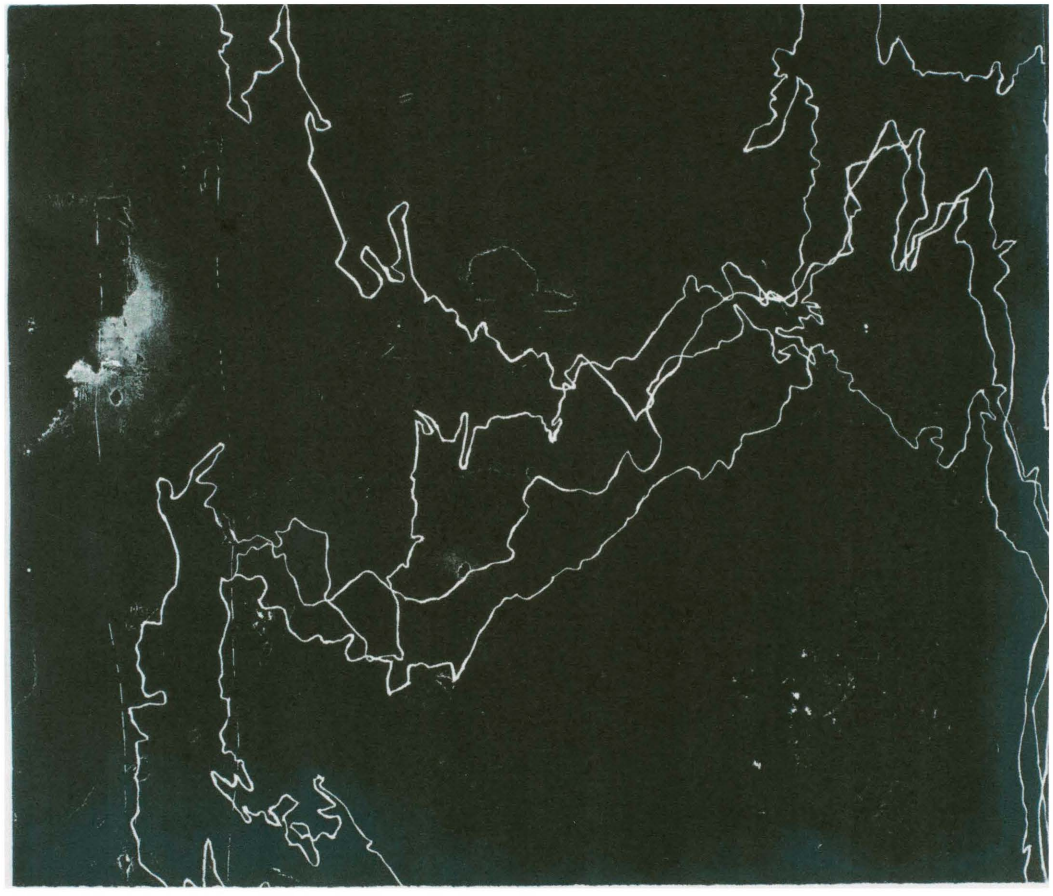

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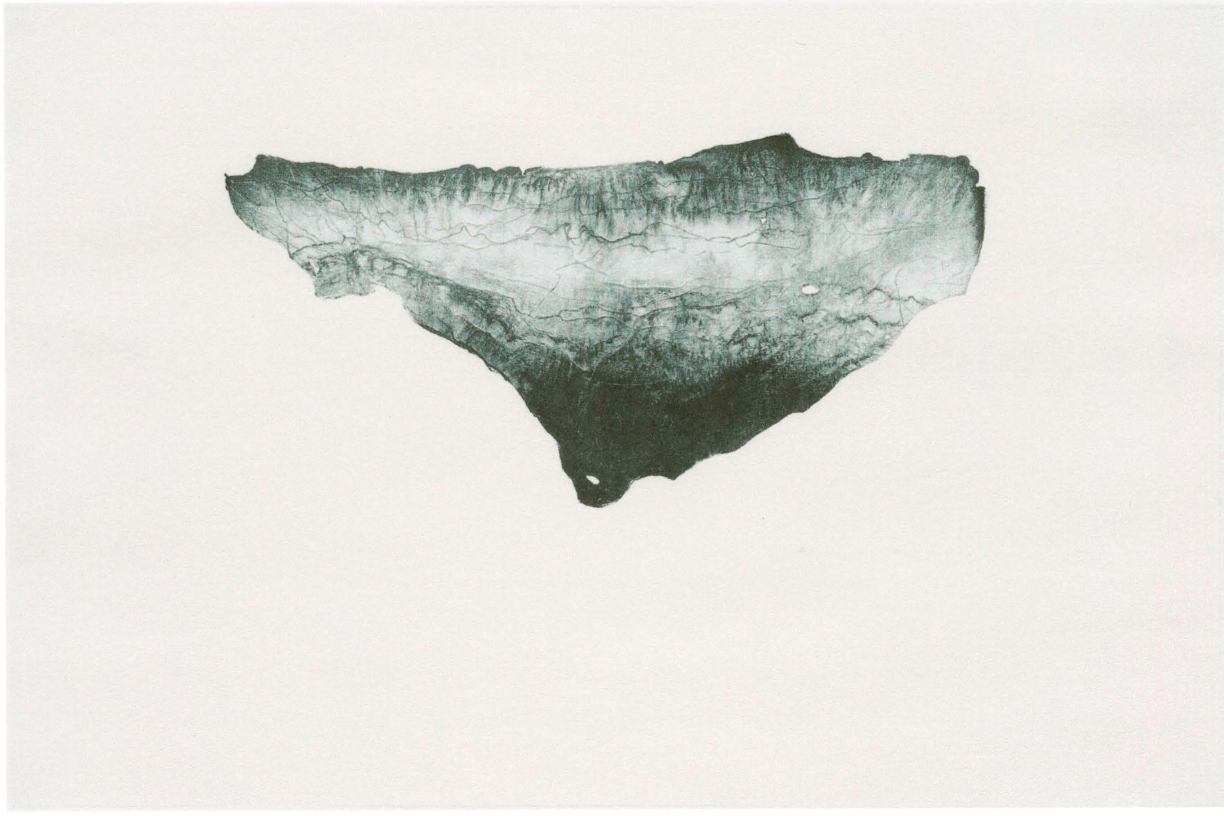

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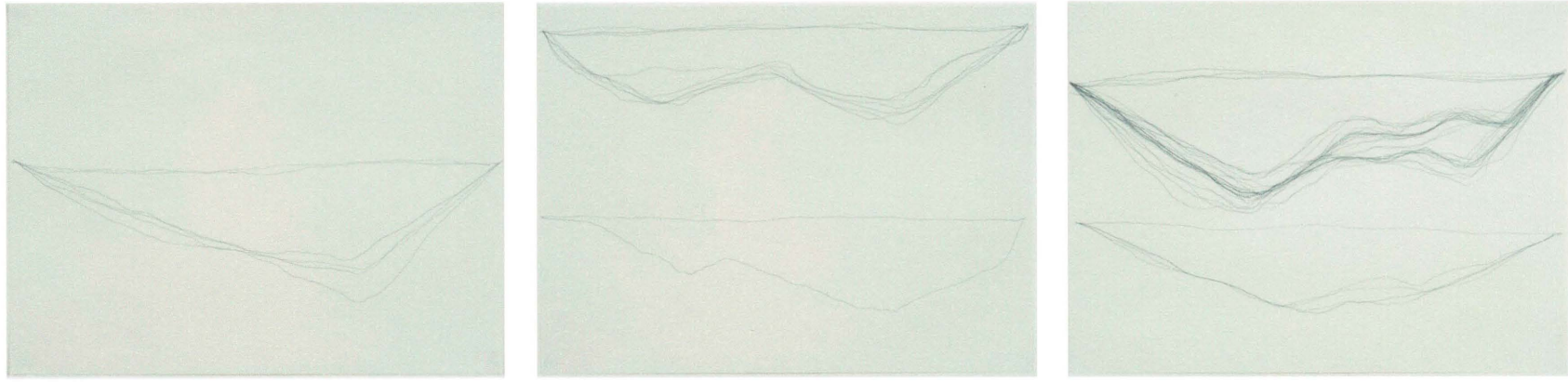

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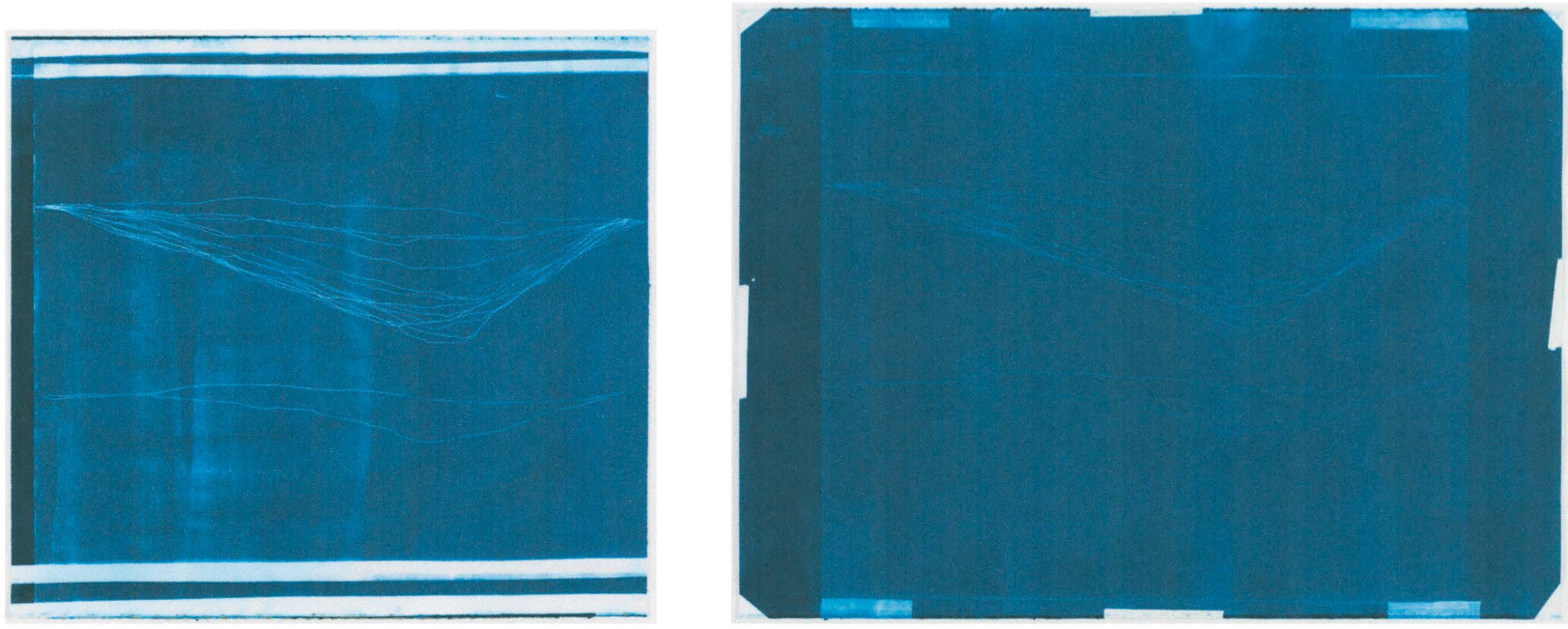

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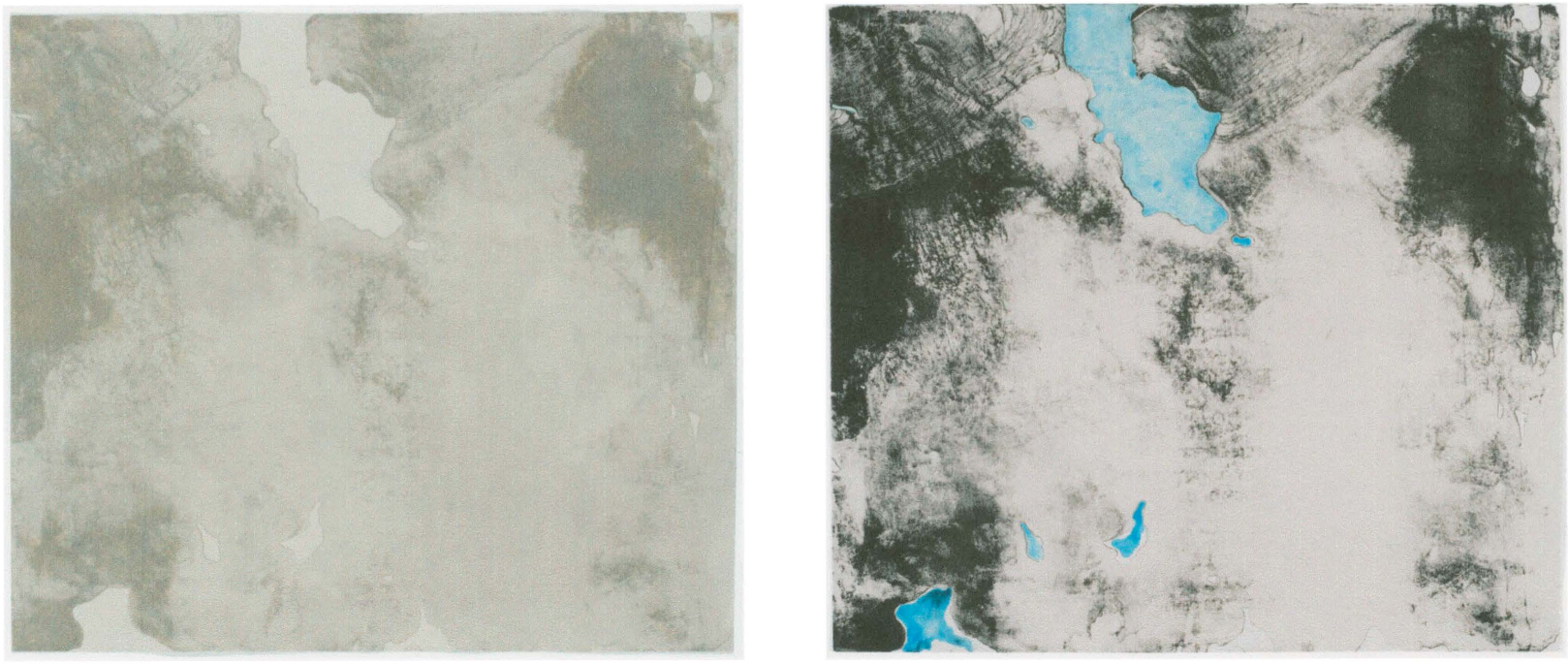

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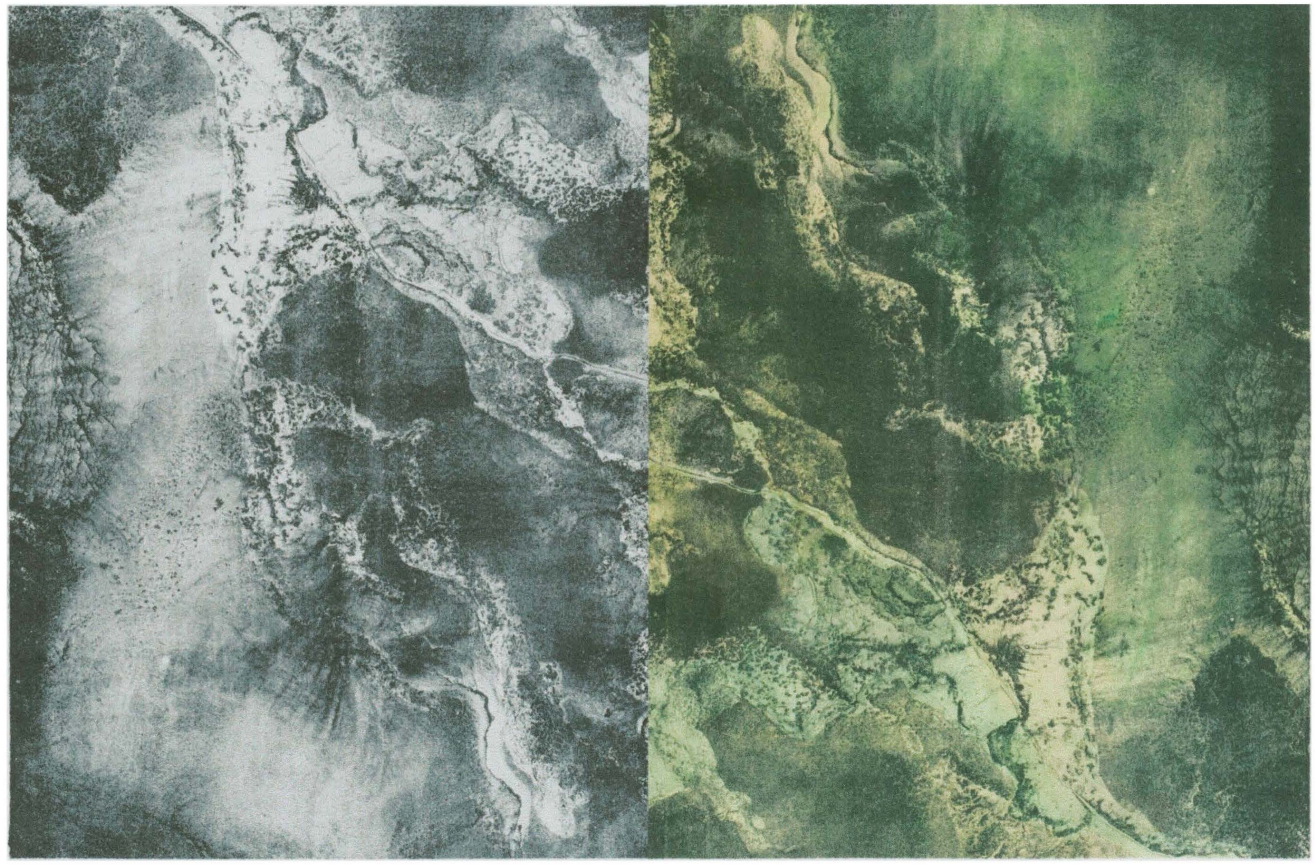

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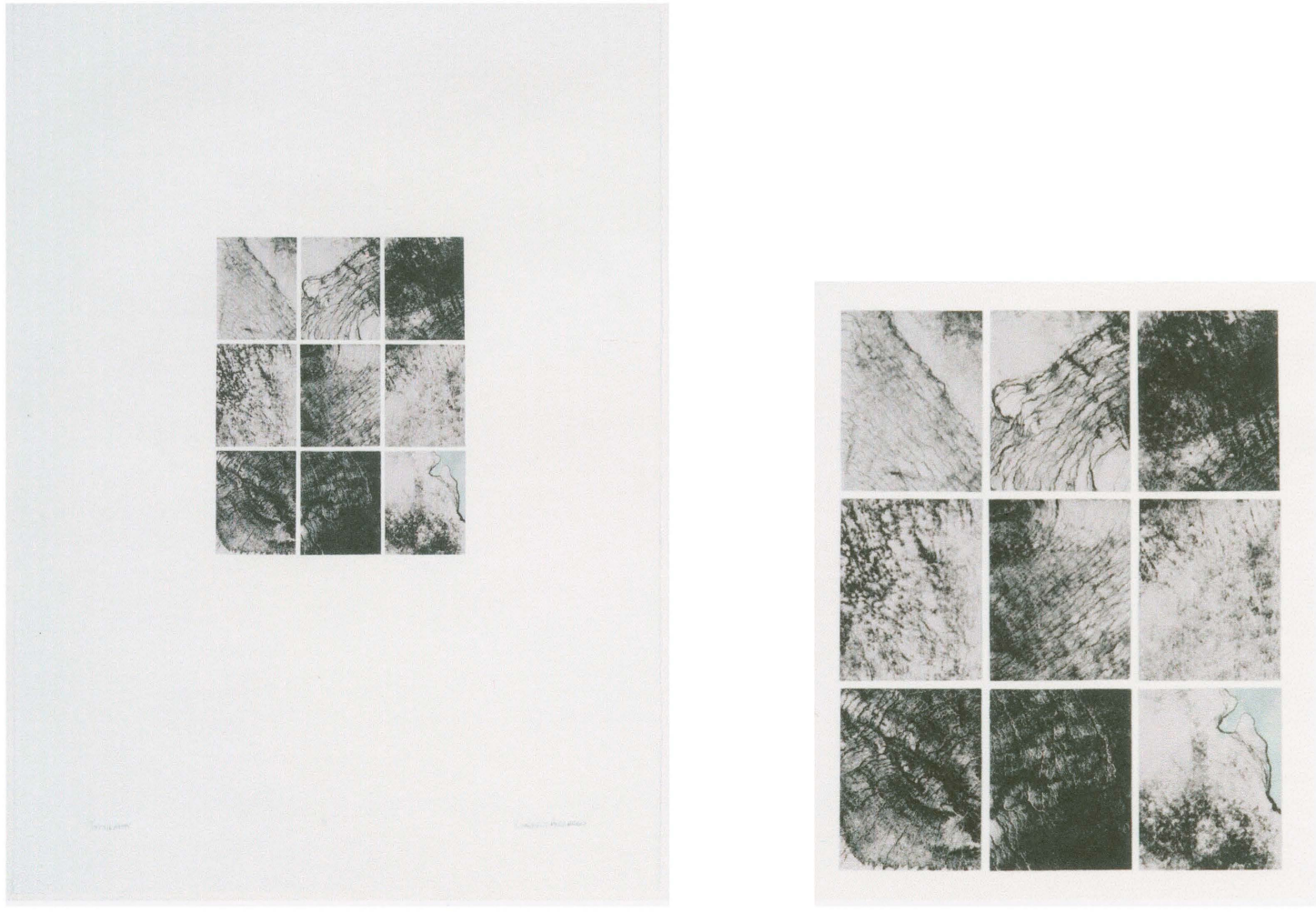

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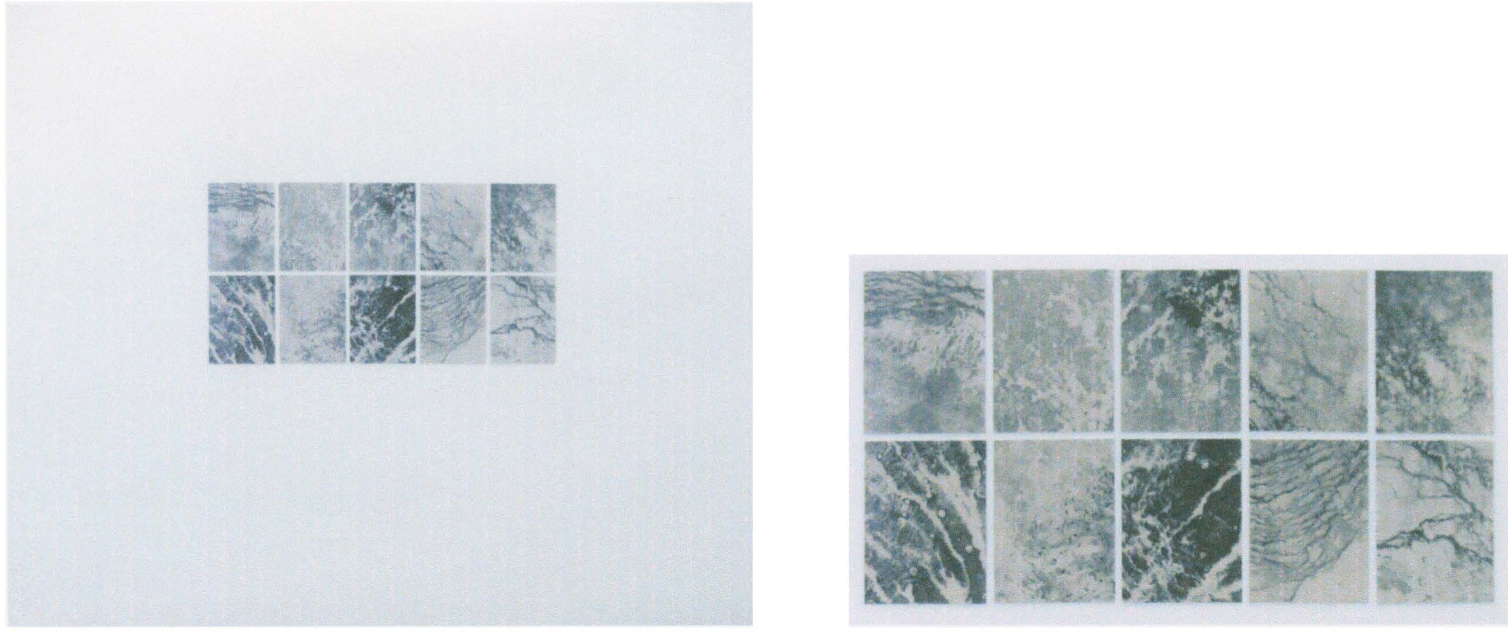

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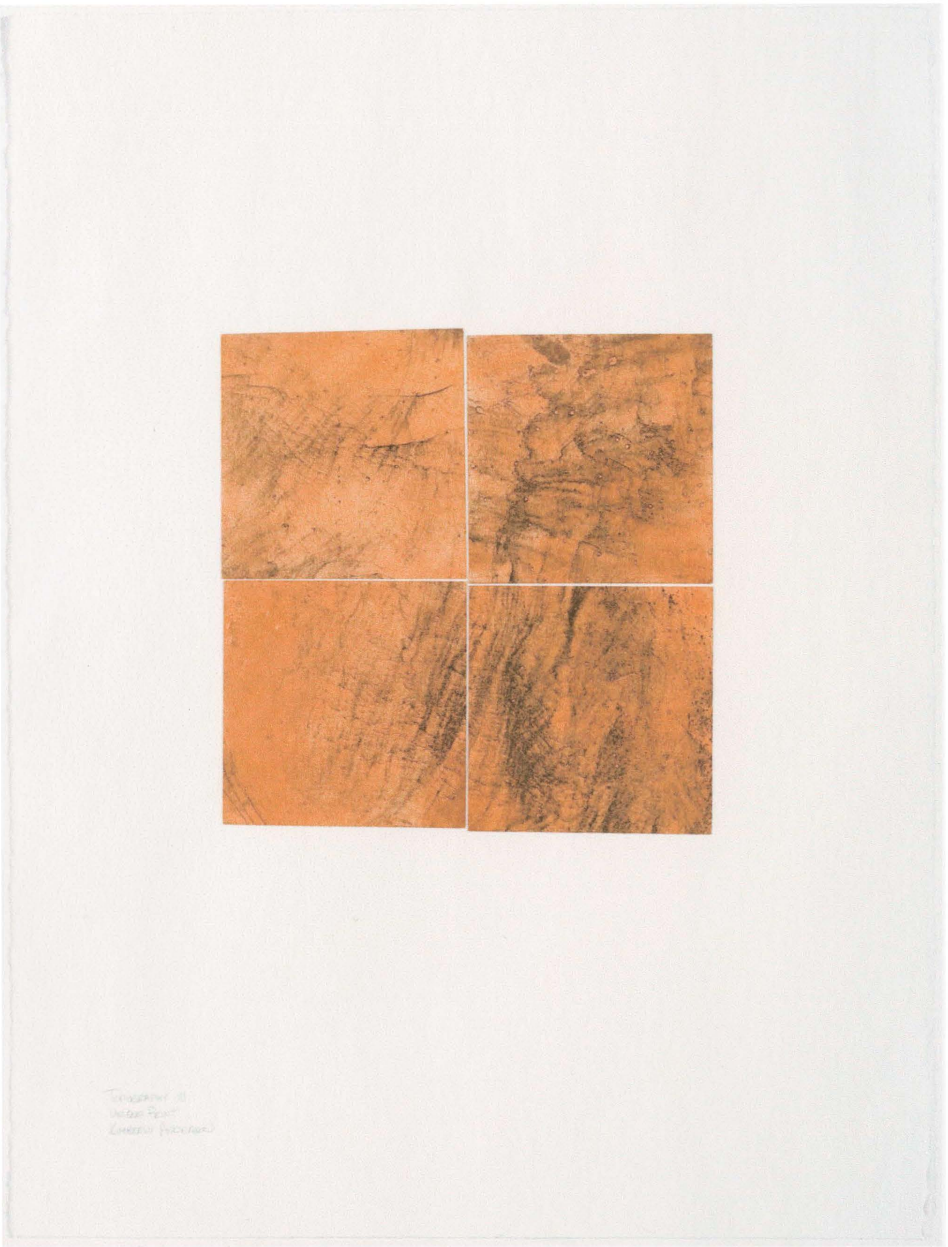

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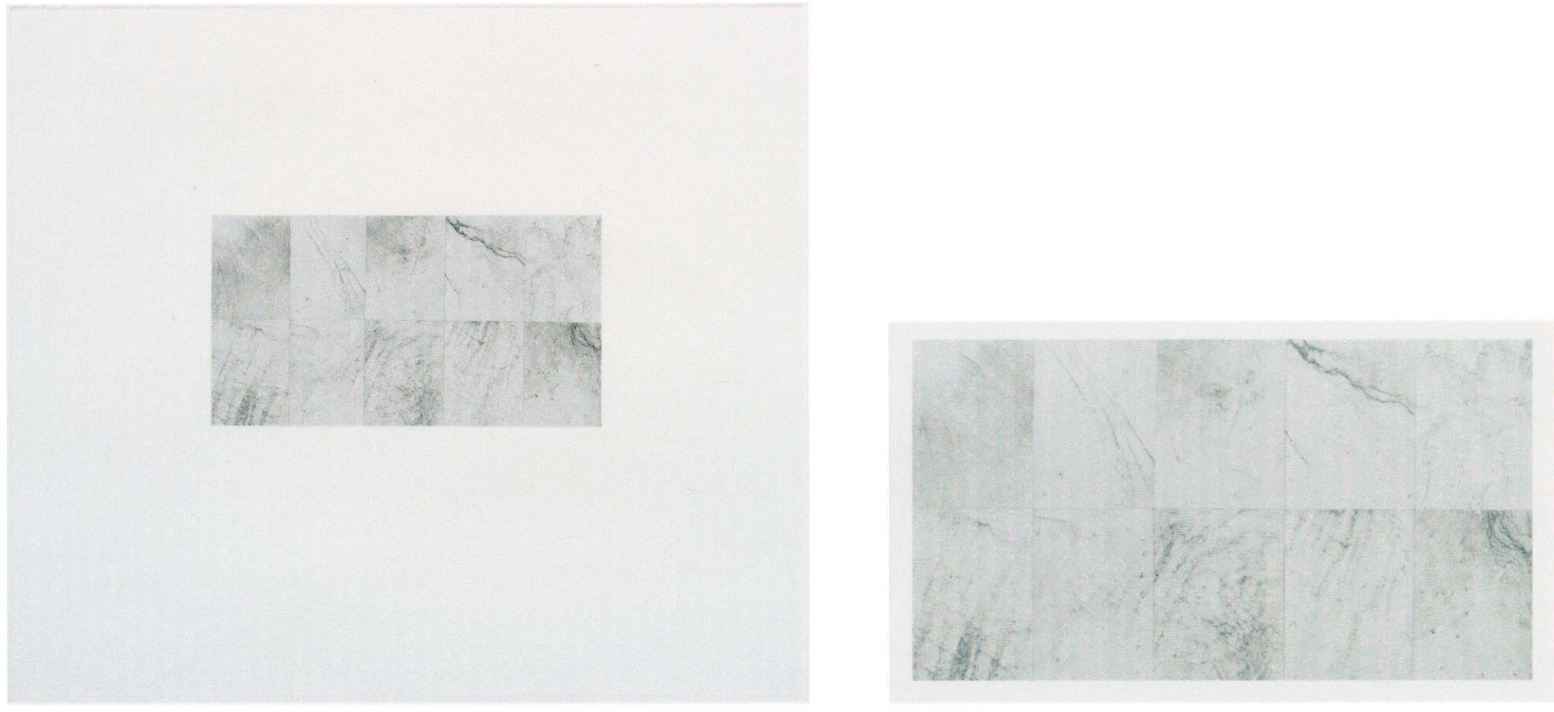

Fig. 17, Kimberly Anderson, *Chronological Order of Surface Terrain,* Lithograph, 22" x 30", 2009.

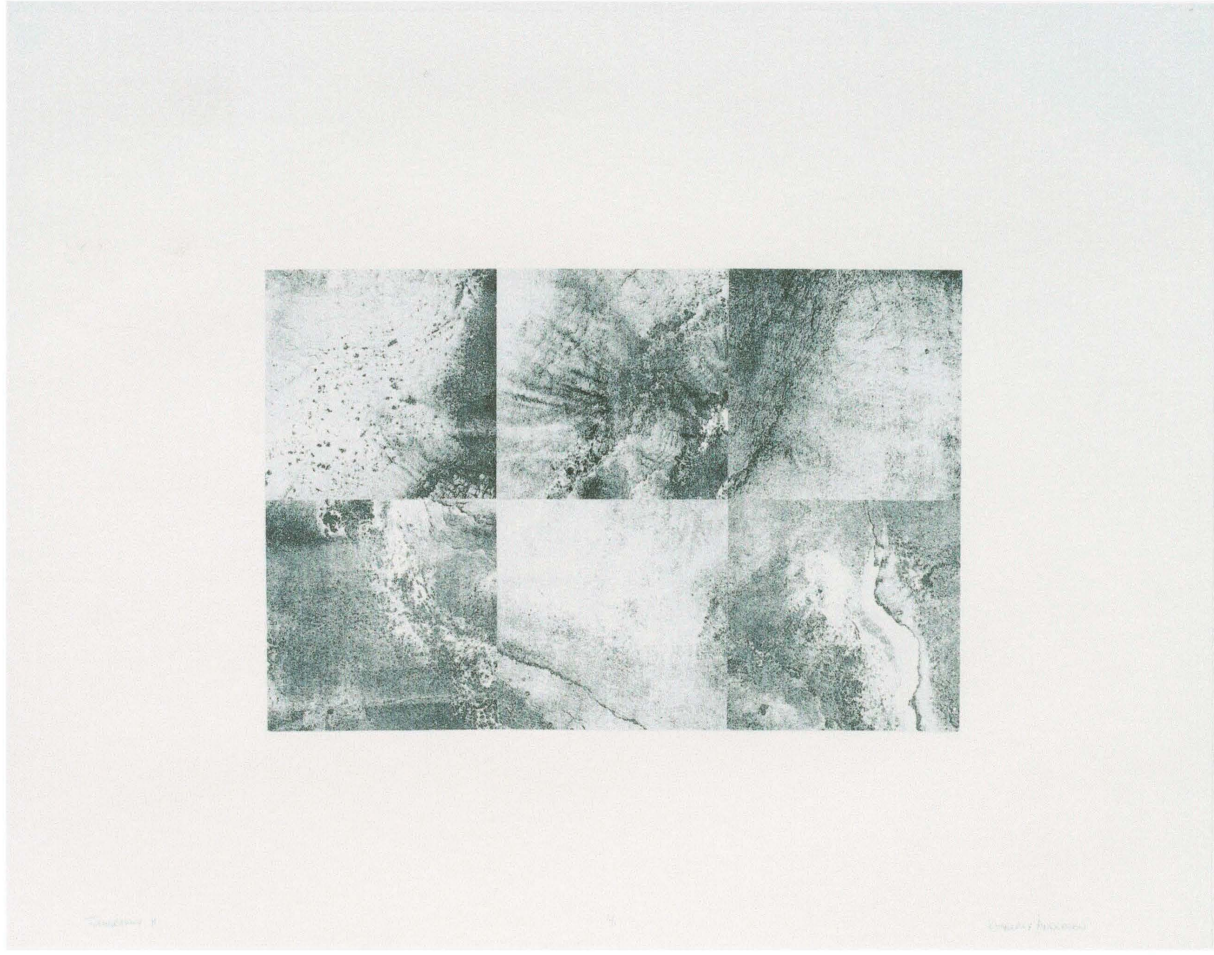

Fig. 18, Kimberly Anderson, *Topography II,* Lithograph, 31" x 25", 2009.

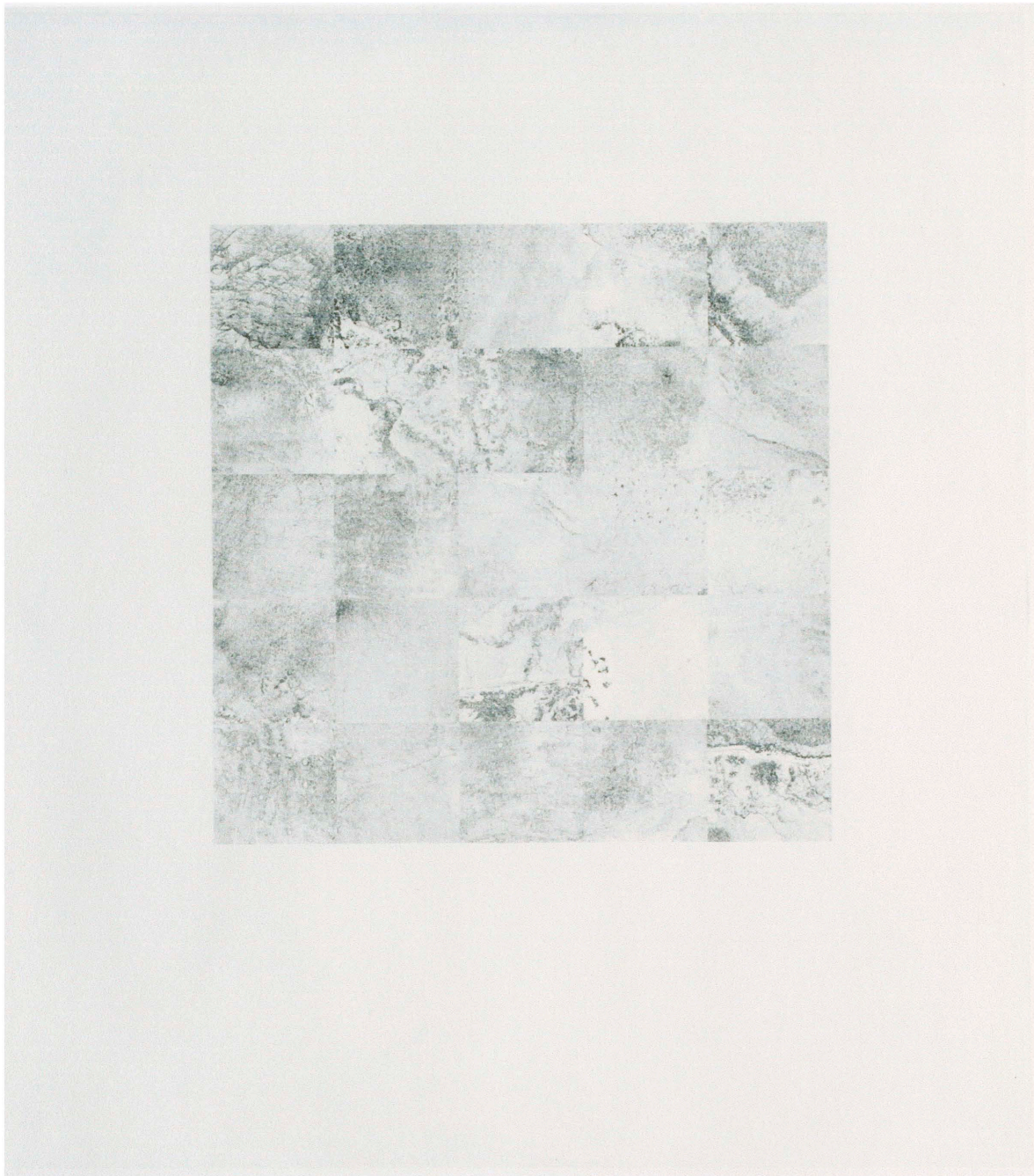

Fig. 19, Kimberly Anderson, *Topography IV,* Lithograph, 31¼" x 35¾", 2009.

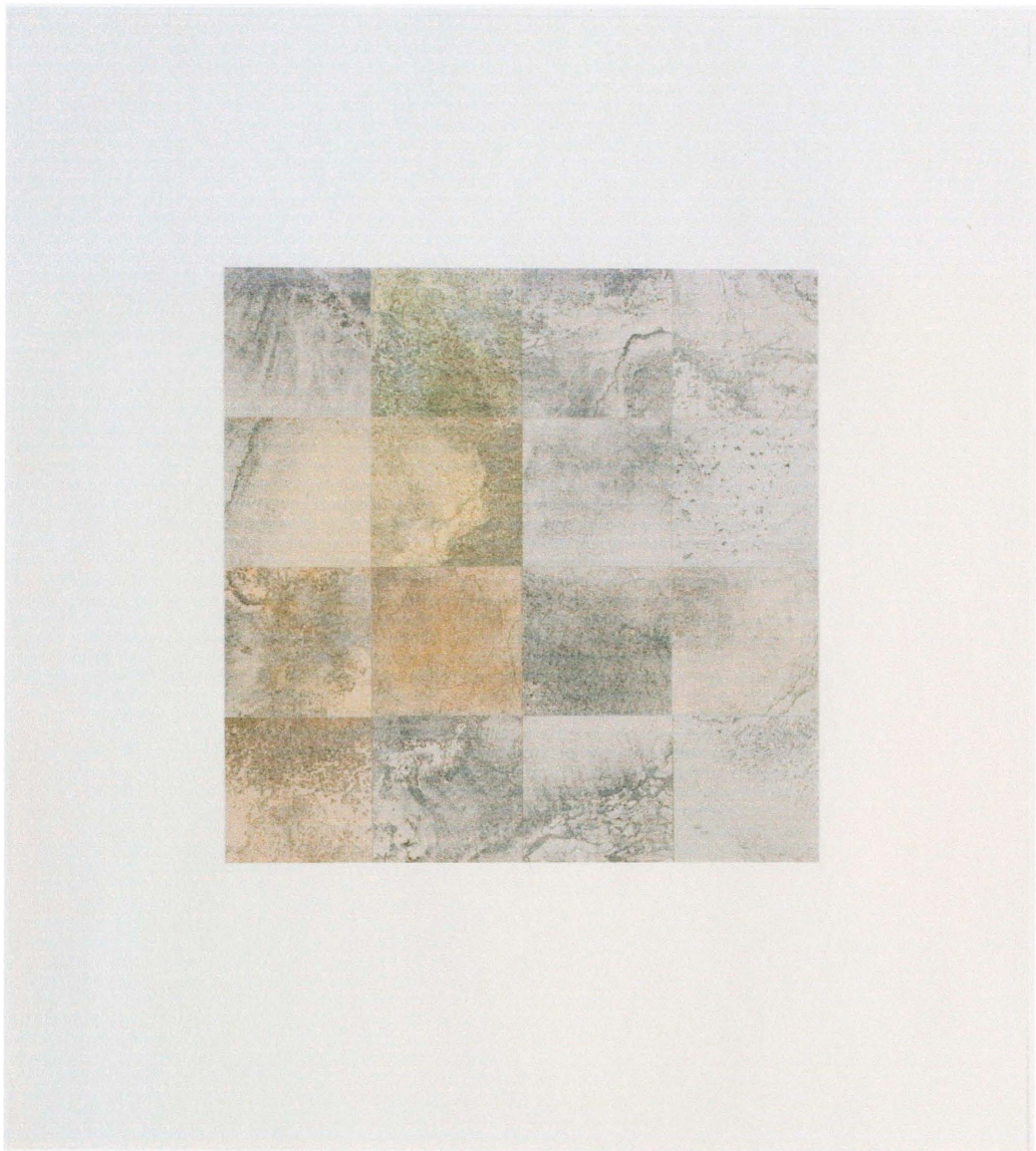

Fig. 20, Kimberly Anderson, *Aerial View*, Lithograph, Watercolor, 26" x 30", 2009.

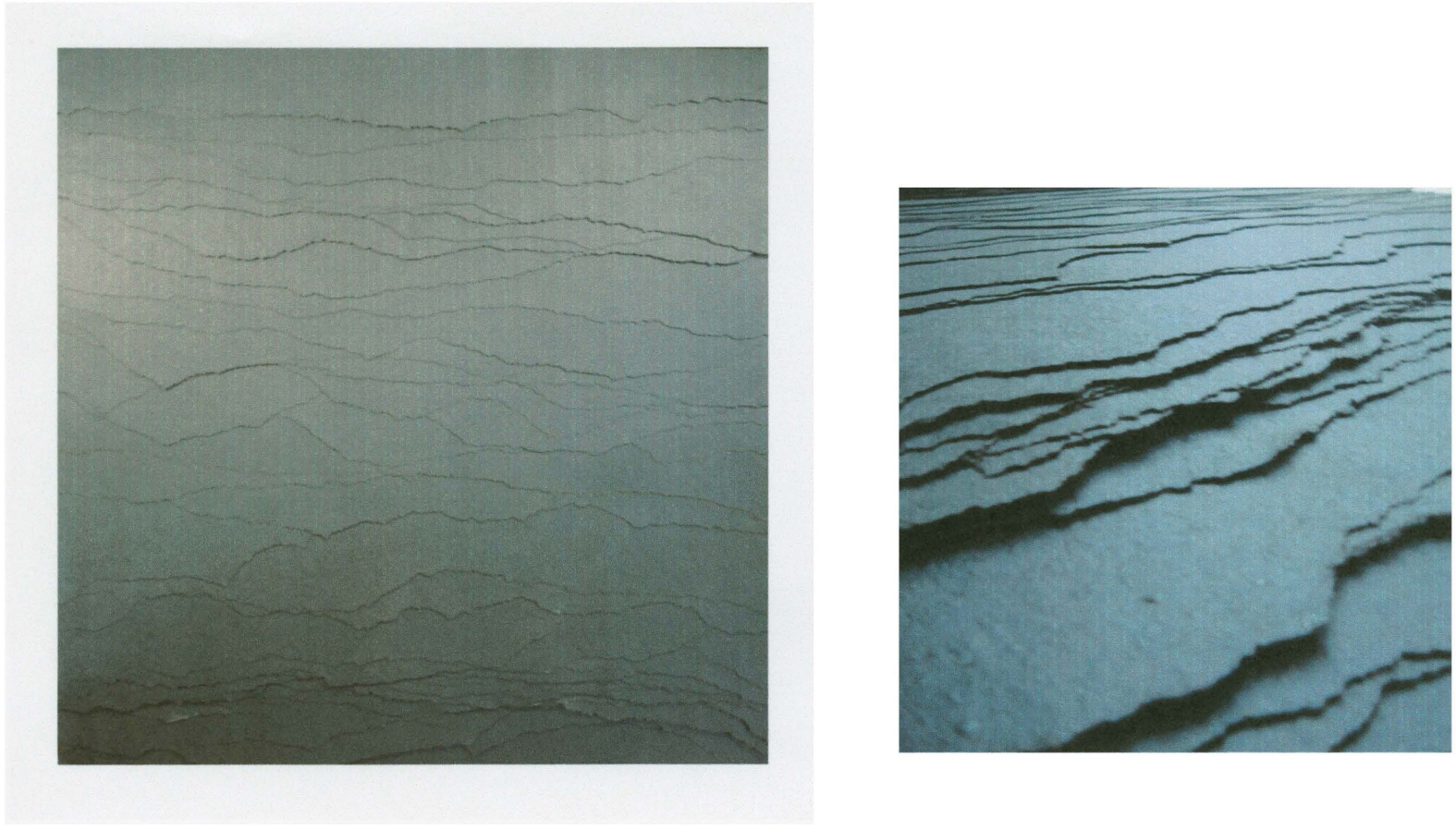

Fig. 21, Kimberly Anderson, *Reticulation*, Tar Paper, 36" x 36", 2009.

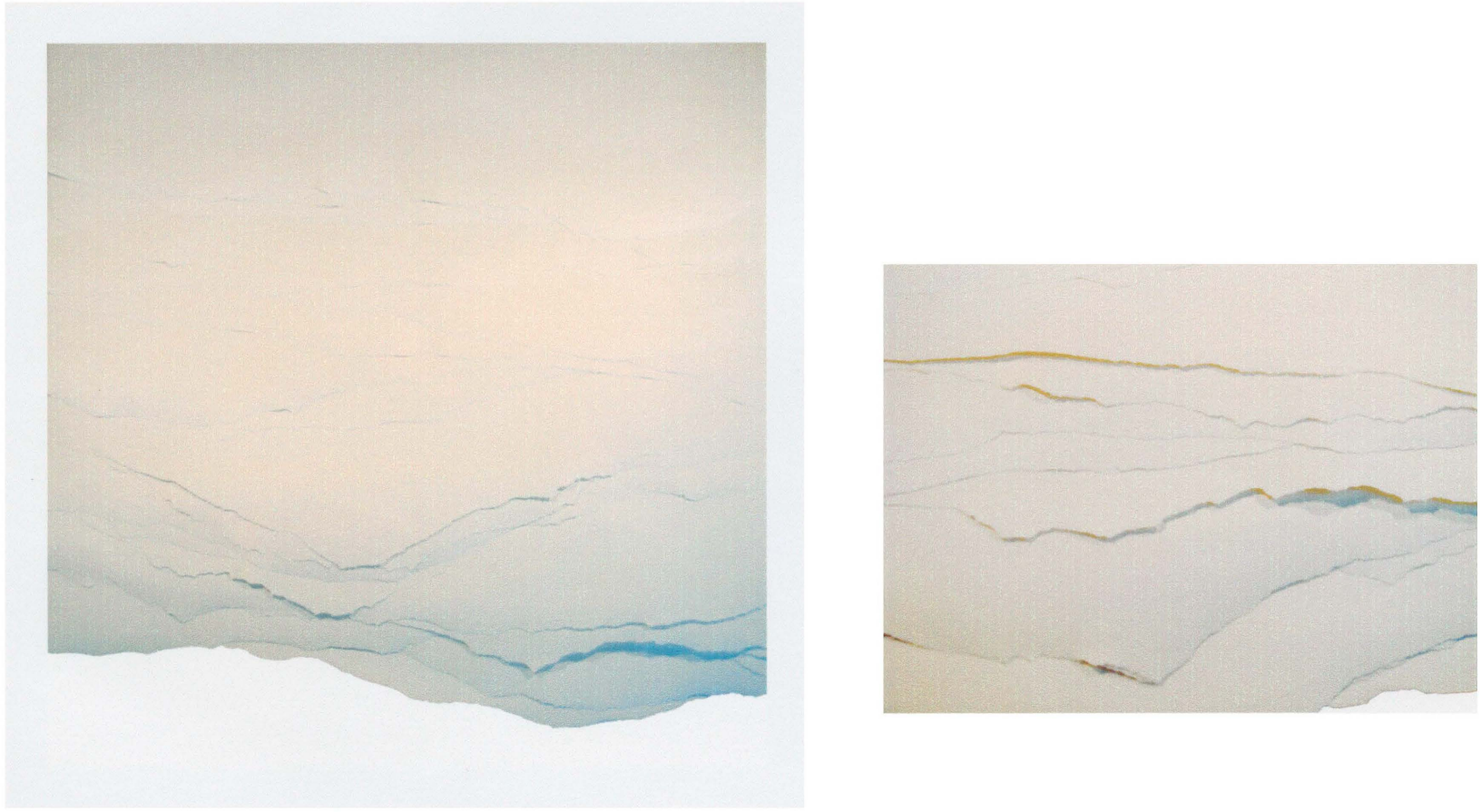

Fig. 22, Kimberly Anderson, *Reticulation II,* Paper, 36" x 35", 2009.

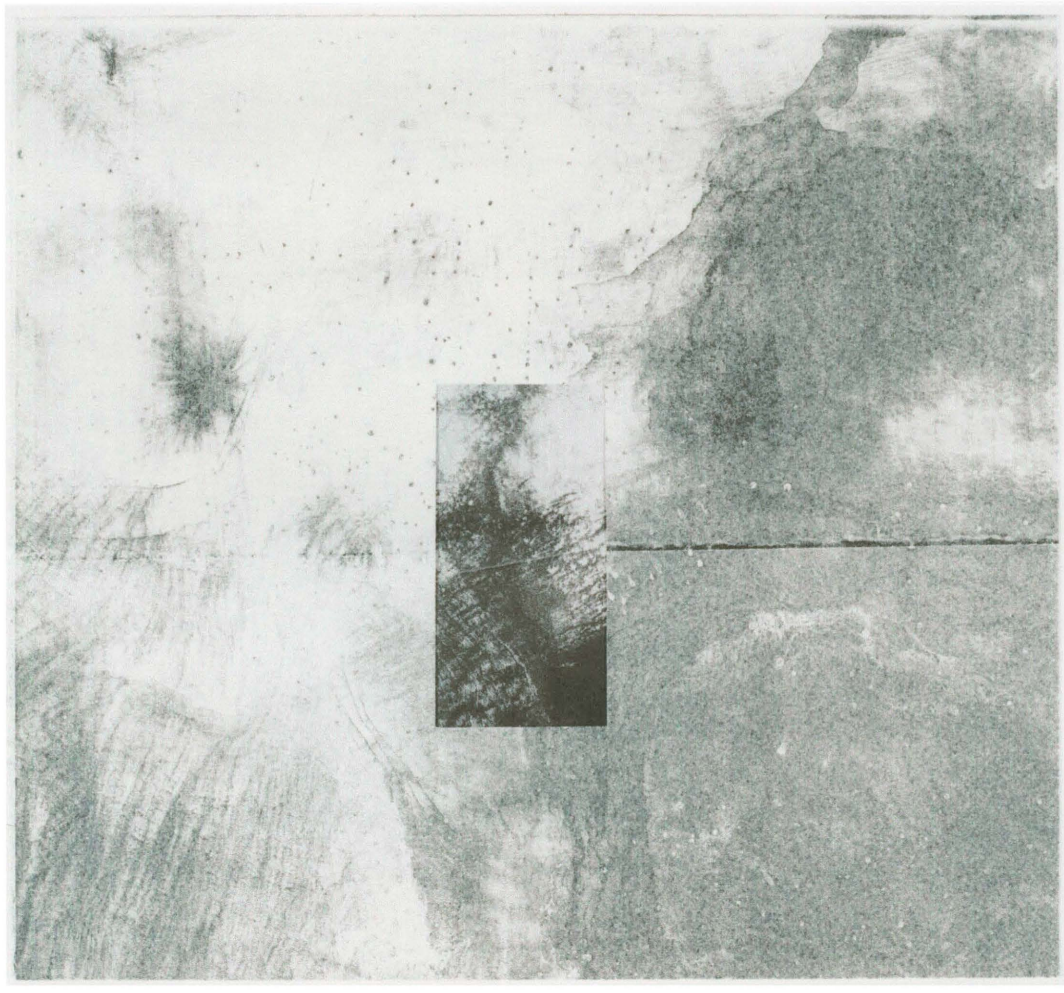

Fig. 23, Kimberly Anderson, *Strata,* Lithograph, Collage, 24¾" x 22¾", 2009.