

NAMGOONG Whan

(Work on paper)

On Namgoong Whan's Works: the Portrait of Transmigrating Multi-Morphologies

Yoo Jin-sang (Professor at Kaywon School of Arts and Design)

Here are spheres riddled with countless spots, pores, entrances which seem to lead to the depths. Namgoong Whan paints something indefinable that reminds you of sponges, embryos, or perforated epidermises of animals or plants. The artist paints everyday in his studio these globular shapes which look like an exploding object sometimes and other times, a black hole absorbing all things in the cosmos, as if practicing asceticism. Or rather, he might be indeed an ascetic, at least in the moment of painting them, because what is most required in his working process is a tremendous degree of concentration and bodily control which admits no room for error. His paintings use a brush, water and Korean ink equally as in Korean ink or watercolor paintings and are completed by placing thousands of the same dots, so that even one mistake will stand out promptly and prominently. Each spot is a combination of a thick black area and a surrounding blur in an extremely tiny space as a result of applying the technique called “xuanran”, or “seonyeom” in Korean. This Asian version of the sfumato method, that is, adding Korean ink dots one by one on paper dampened with clean water with total concentration brings a special intensity, having the effect that figurative reality and the dreaminess caused by repeated brush strokes exist together in the same picture plane. This intensity, which seems to abstract the viability of metamorphosing organisms, the condensation and implosion of energy, and even religious exultation, is the consequence not only of his technical skillfulness but also of his deep immersion in the working process that is as much as performance art.

Namgoong has continued this kind of drawings using Korean ink dots since 2007. In fact, this project titled *Transmigration* is an extension of the previous works of the same name. He has been worked with the theme of “souffle”, a French word meaning ‘breathing’ since 1998 and already began to employ the title *Whangoong: Palais du Souffle* for his graduation exhibition of Seoul National University, Korea. Immediately after graduating from college, he went to France for study, where he produced large scale paintings with gestural brush work since 2001. The largest of them all are the installation work of the same title, *Whangoong: Palais du Souffle*, created in The École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 2002, and *Transmigration-l’arc-en-ciel* made for the exhibition at Kumho Art Hall in 2005. These are almost temple-like circular rooms built up by the huge walls of regular square canvases which are full of concentric circles painted on numerous small circlets. In the solo exhibition held at Gallery Wooduk, Seoul in the same year, the artist established a vertical rotational axis between the floor and the ceiling, to opposite sides of which are attached his paintings in order to revolve. These works became the foundation for the *Palais du Souffle* series presented at Whanki Museum, Korea in 2008 and this 2009 exhibition. What is notable is the function of phosphorescent pigments applied in these installation works. Each work renders dramatic space in its own way under the indoor lighting alternating between brightness and darkness, which had some hallucination effect. This effect is in line with the visual overwhelmingness of the density of his Korean ink dots. In *Palais du Souffle* presented in 2008, concentric circles of different sizes appeared and disappeared repeatedly inside the round, double-layered walls according to the ever-changing lighting, and the

space between the walls are filled with different installation paintings in order that the viewers would be able to experience different spaces as they proceeded. By emphasizing the repetition of small pictorial units as well as the contrast between them and the enormous structure as a collection of these units, these works anticipated the accumulation or fractal form found in his later 'Korean ink dot' paintings. Considering the nature of the fractal pattern that a part includes the whole and the whole is identical with a part, the organic repetition in his works could be associated with the Buddhist thought of 'indramang' or the internal representation system of Leibniz's monad philosophy. According to Gilles Deleuze, a monad has within itself the particles of light and darkness which represent the world according to the hierarchy of neighborhood [voisinage]. Thus, 'repetition', to put it tersely, means that the world is repeated in a particle, and its accumulation implies that the same event also occurs in a much bigger or smaller dimension that is not yet visualized.

Namgoong used the term 'transmigration' as early as at the beginning of his artistic career. The word, meaning the 'migration' of the soul into another body after death, is often found in religions with a long history like Buddhism. The idea that all things in the universe are involved in the endless process of appearance and disappearance just as the wheels go round eternally, includes such views as the infinite extension and connection of the causal sequence, the inevitable plurality of beings and the world, multi-layered representation and so on. The same object can take innumerable different expression modes depending on the flow of time and perspectives. Accordingly, repetition not only shows each dissimilar phase of existence but also is in itself what brings about the divergence into diverse beings. The modes of being that are both identical and different are none other than that of transmigration which perpetually yields the cycle of karma. This explains why circular shapes repeat and form concentric circles in Namgoong's paintings. The architectural structure in the above-mentioned installation works shows a resemblance with the Buddhist mandala which illustrates the meaning of transmigration and the levels of understanding of it. The fabric of mandala is so concrete and significant that it deserves to be called the visual form of the Buddhist scriptures. This symbol is made up of the forms taking place in the mind of the experienced Buddhist monks who draw it with powdered pigments. Even though everything has been settled, the content of the mandala could be totally different according to the degree of training of those who paint it. It is both a picture manifesting itself in the process and an expression of temporary immersion and repletion. And the fact that it is wiped and destroyed immediately after being completed underscores the presentness of eternity. As for Namgoong, each of his painting is a perfect record of the period of time when it is being painted, rather than a representation of, or toward something else. While the image starts in the center and spreads in a spiral pattern to the margin, the painter loads up his brush with Korean ink only once. The more the ink proceeds outward, the lighter its color becomes. In the meantime, the brush marks which the artist puts one by one with perfect precision build up a big globular shape, which transforms itself each time according to the pattern conceived or intended by him, just as the mandala takes a different form in a different time.

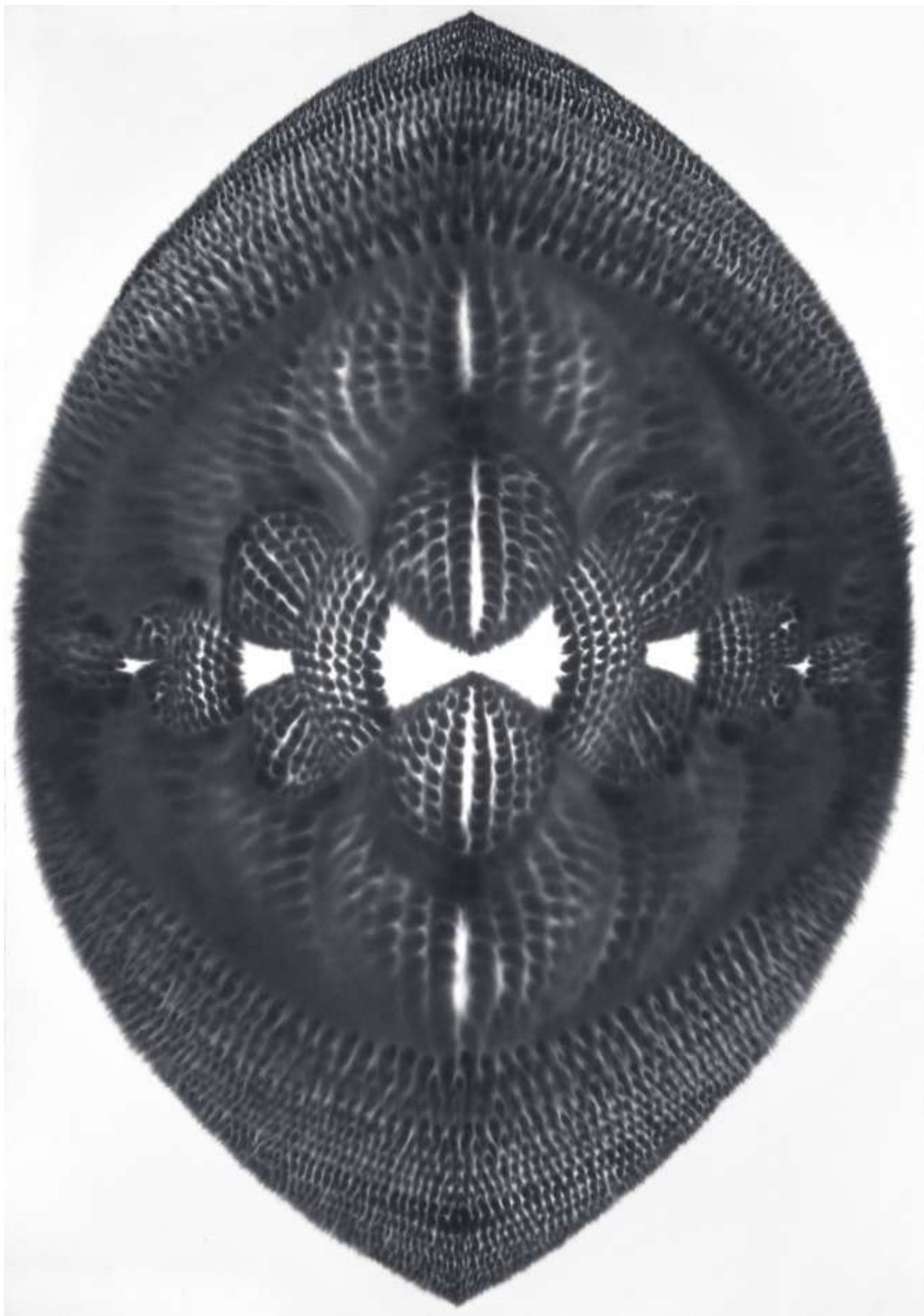
If his paintings are nothing but an embodiment of the mode of religious or metaphysical thought, it can be said that they are too representational. However, they are much more performative than representational. In other words, they are far more significant not that they draw something or express certain ideas but that they are a record of actions chosen by the artist who is doing it. The process of placing dots under extreme physical restraint is associated with Shi Tao's Ten

Thousand Ugly Ink Dots. If Shi Tao presented the pictorial utopia with much freer dots, Namgoong shows the stage of mental liberation through much deeper immersion in an experiential way. On the other hand, this kind of performative painting is replete with psychoanalytic symptoms. It would be necessary to mention about the representative element, 'pore'. Porosity evokes feelings of anxiety, suspicion, and futility. It not only suggests the inner hollowness in spite of morphological completeness, but also arouses fear about what will spring from each hole or the depths of it. When the artist painted cells with a nucleus or annular particles which have a hole inside and look like a group of frog's eggs in the *Transmigration, de centre* (2006), he treated each of them as an individual mass rather than as an aperture. However, in the recent series of the same title, individual grains overspread on the picture plane like pores formed by the depression of the surface made up of white osseous tissue, the perforations of the troglodyte habitations in Cappadocia, or passages connected through absolute darkness, marking stark contrast against the brightness of the surface. The object represented seems to be the outcome of the force which stretches from the inside to the surface infinitely. The spreading effect of the xuanran technique of the dots radiating in all directions extends into the air, creating the boundary between the interior of the mass and the brilliant light surrounding it, that is, the final splendor of energy rising from the inside to the outside like the solar corona. Pores and flames simultaneously show the inward descent and the outward extrusion. And all of these compose the surface. The artist continues to form concentric circles by dotting from the center, and the image completed in this way is born again as an abstract object which has the strong movement both of the heart and the surface on the perfect flatness called the picture plane.

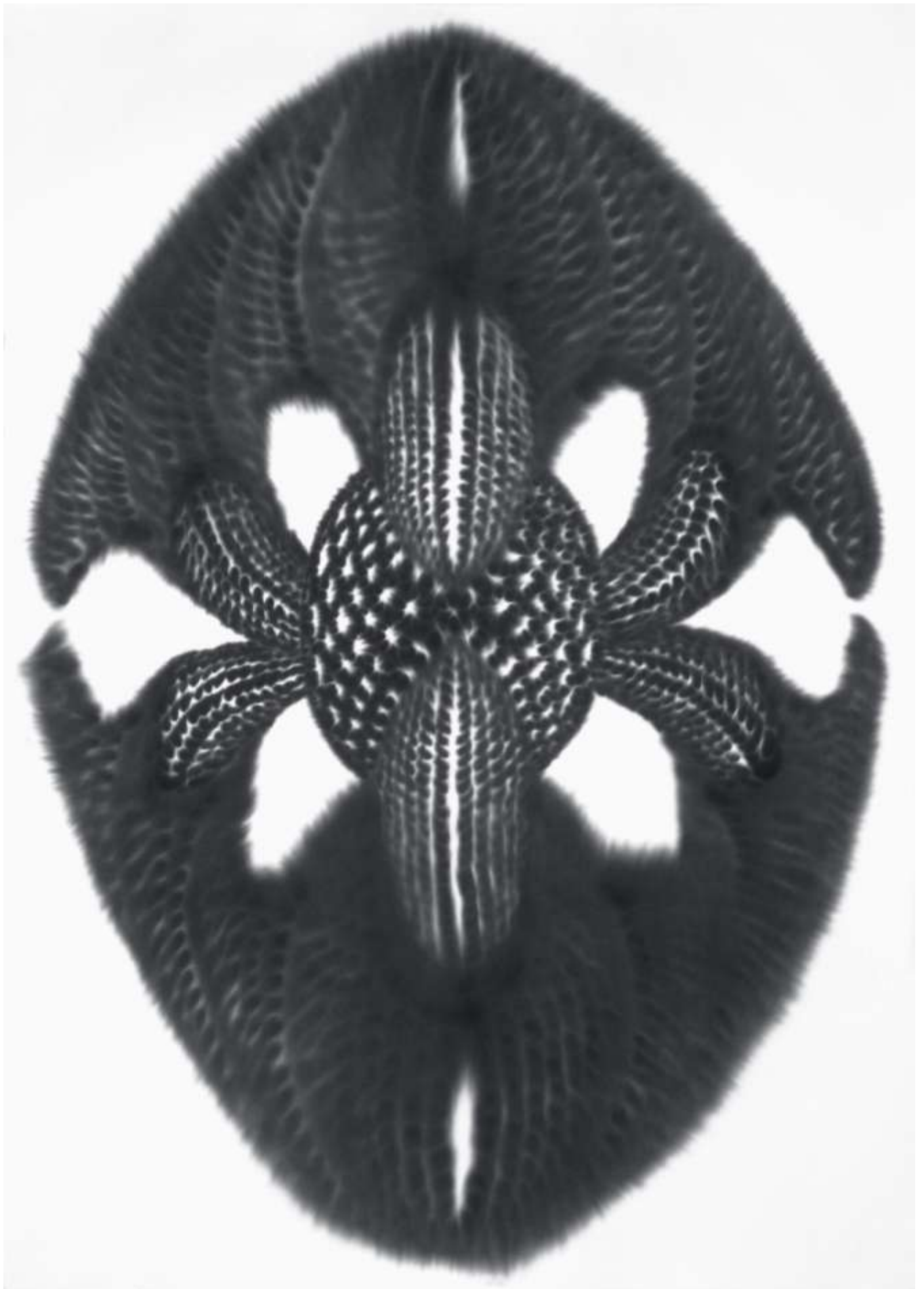
Namgoong says that these are also his own portrait. It might be so not only because the painted mass of light and blackness has a round face-like shape but also because the spiritual mode of the countless disruptive pores and flames covering over the surface resembles the artist's mentality. Furthermore, the multi-morphology consisting of the painting series that are identical every time but complex and multi-layered also reveals the ever-changing mode of the subject quite successfully. Nevertheless, his paintings should be understood as a reflection of the existential moment of all of those who look at them, as well as the artist's portrait. Their distinctive abstract quality is, above all things, exclusive in a great many representational attempts to disclose the universal spiritual structure. They may provoke surprise and fear at first, but in no time produce more powerful similarity and reflection due to the sympathy generated from the elements of them. When Namgoong says of 'transmigration', it means the metempsychosis of the subject as a multi-morphology overlapping infinitely with infinite layers, which is born again numerously but differently for each case and always renews itself. It reminds you of something like the bursting surface of a supernova which changes every hour because of the inner energy soaring upwards. Nevertheless, his paintings which present these images using traditional materials and subject matter, are extremely calm and moderate. Each image is projected on paper in such a determined and accurate manner as if it is a kind of spiritual inscription. The contradictory coexistence of the two states, exultation and serenity, is recorded in his works as it is. Possibly, this might be what transmigration is like—the mixture of intensity and intimacy. If the artist is opening up a new type of painterly or traditional domain, it would be so in this very point.



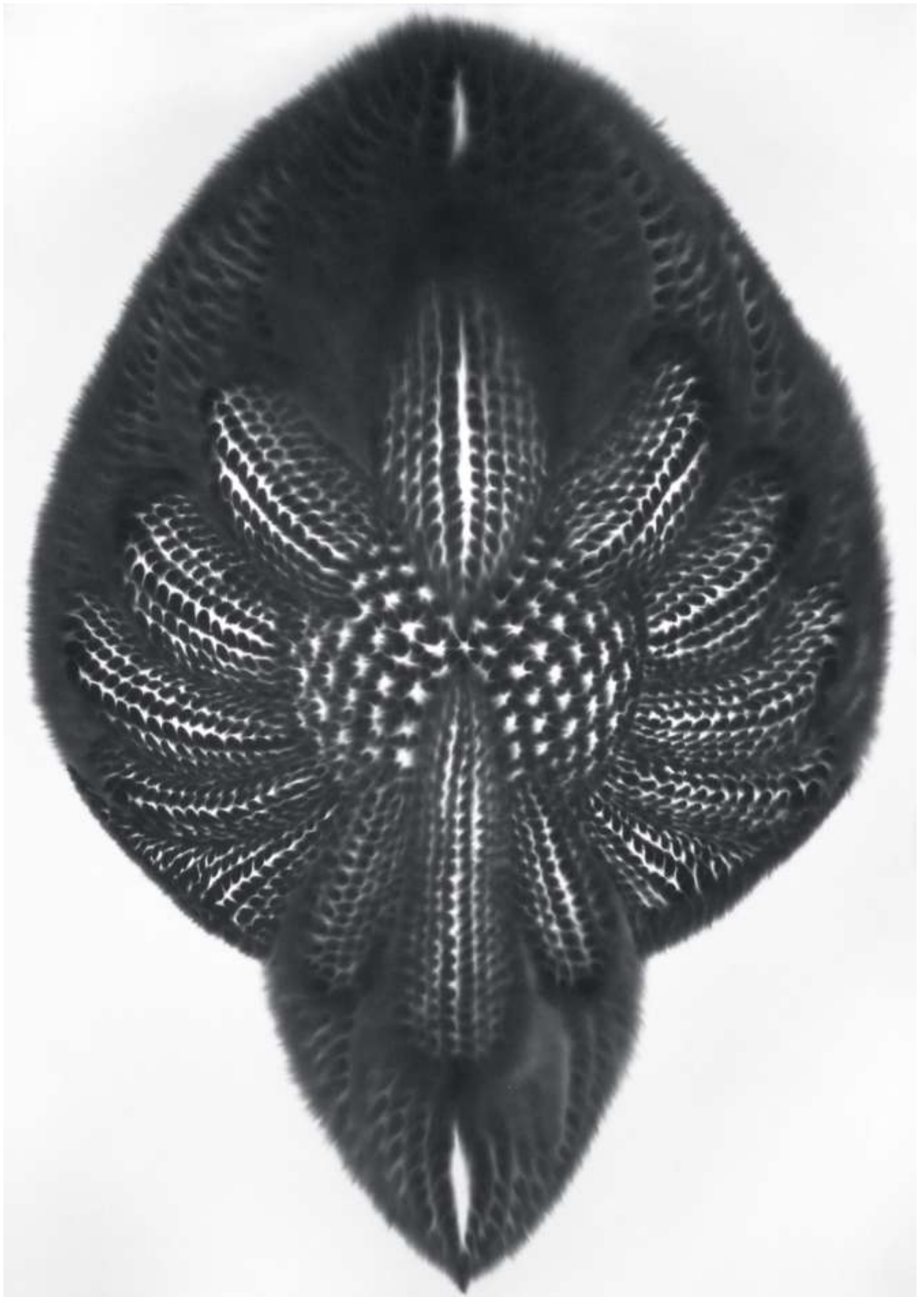
transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2011



transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2011



transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2011



transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2011



transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2011



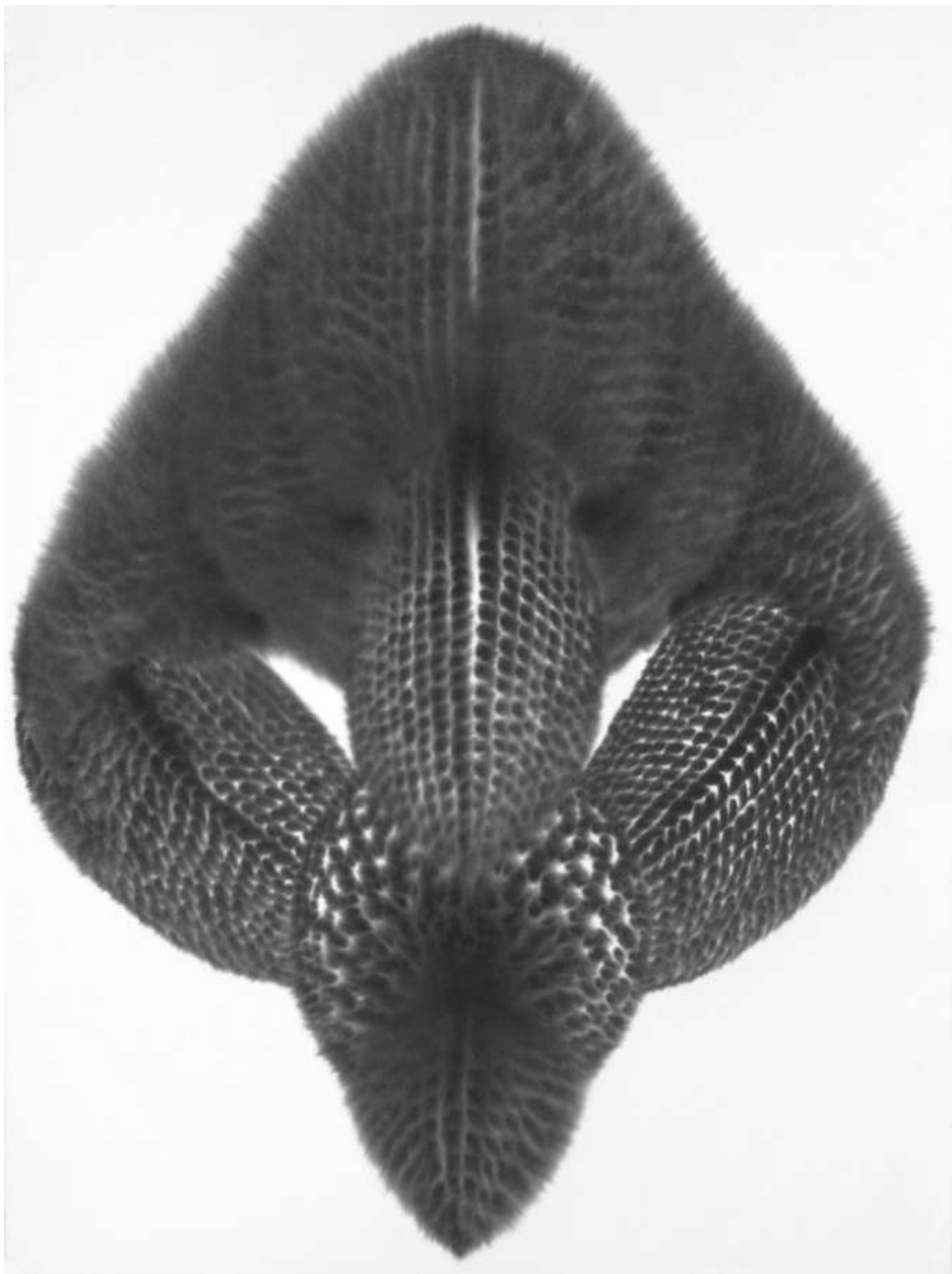
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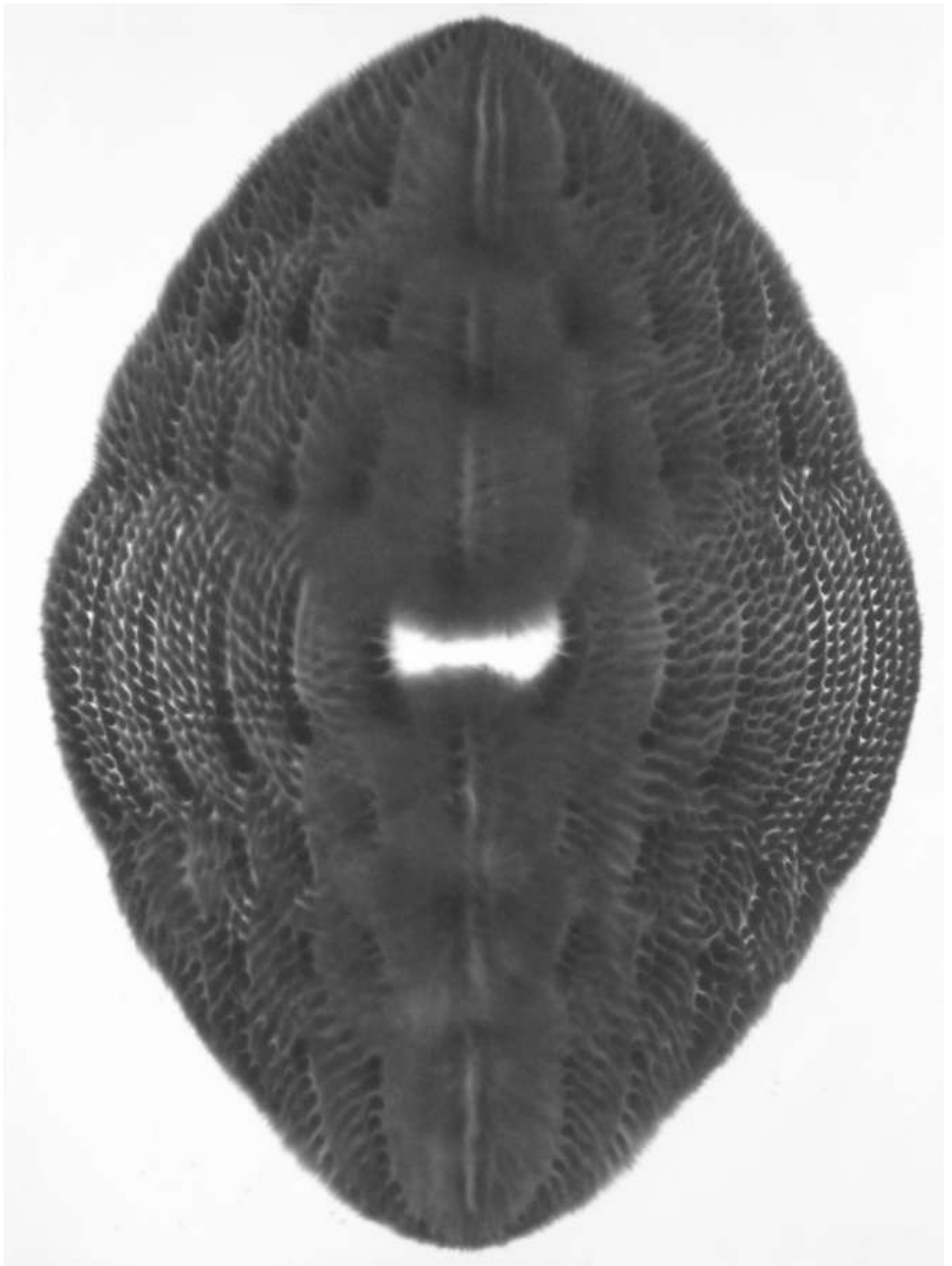
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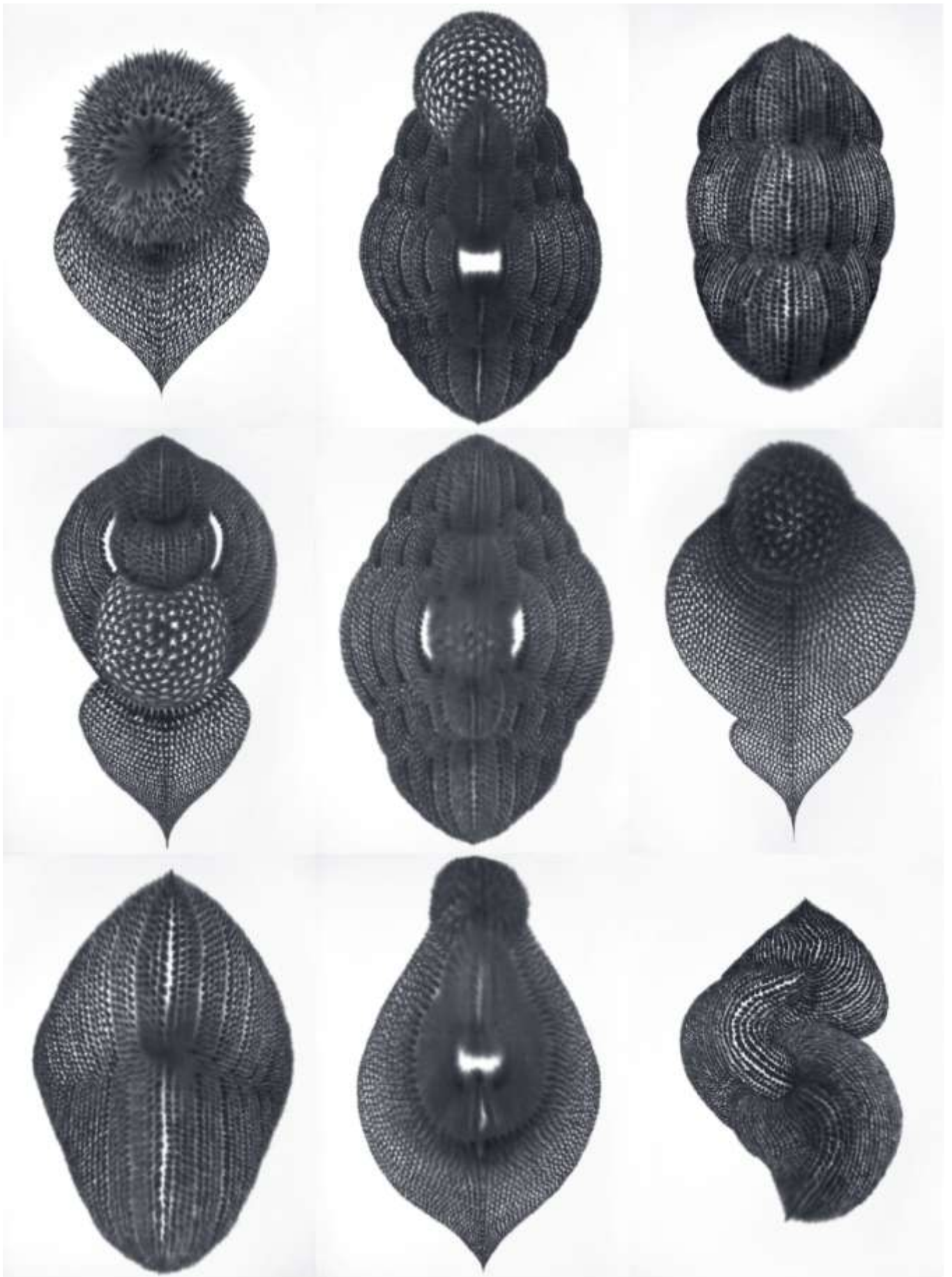
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transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2010



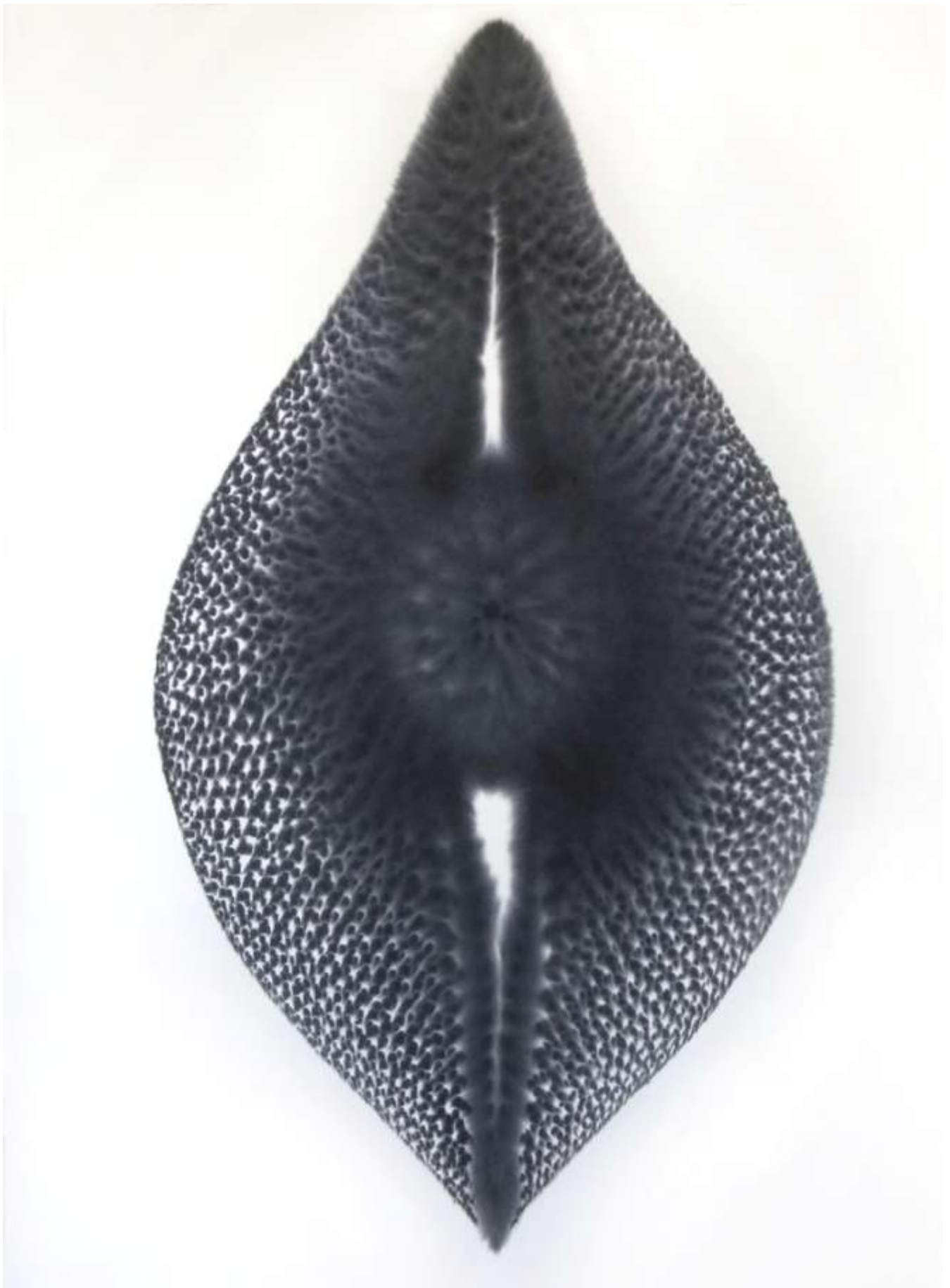
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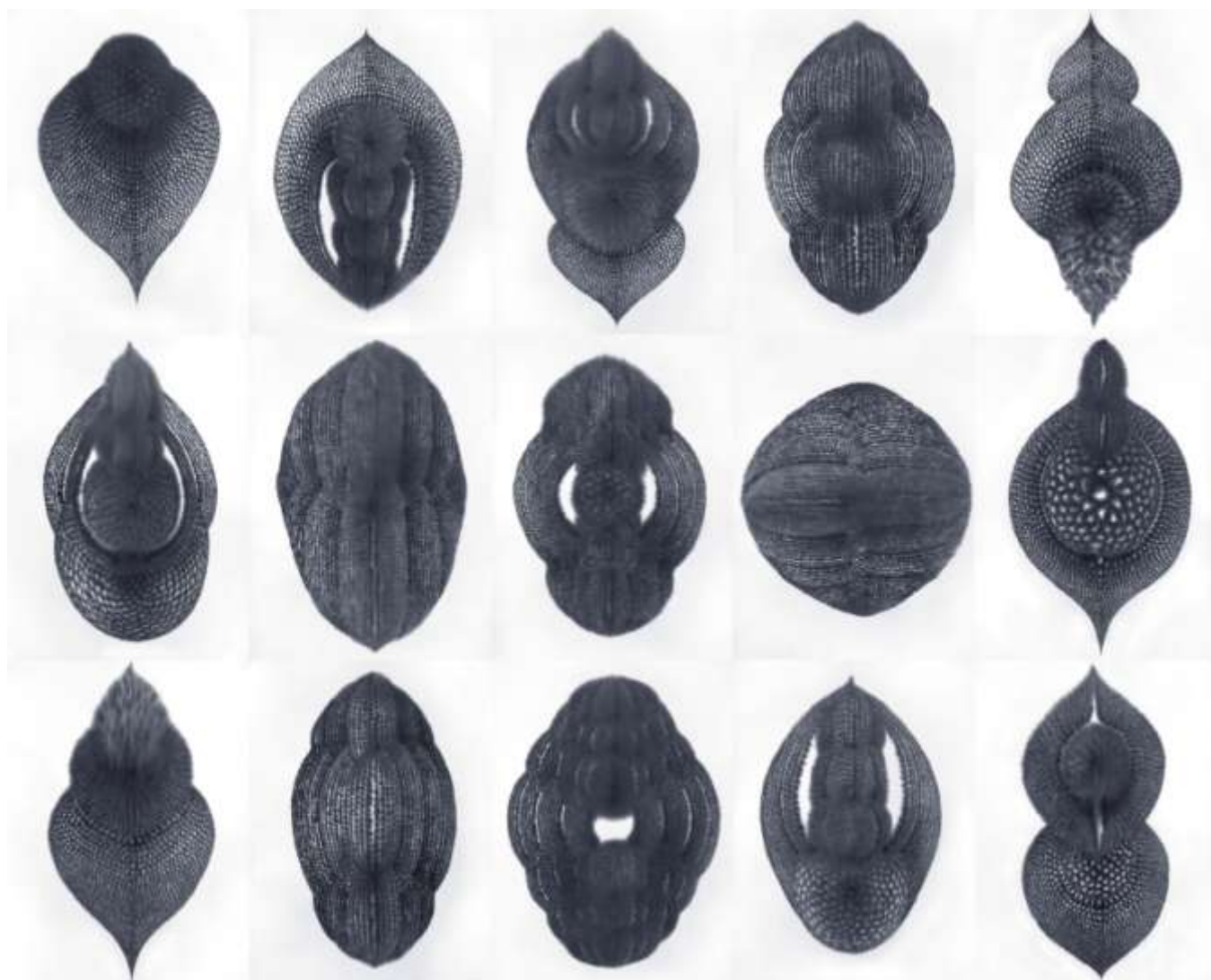
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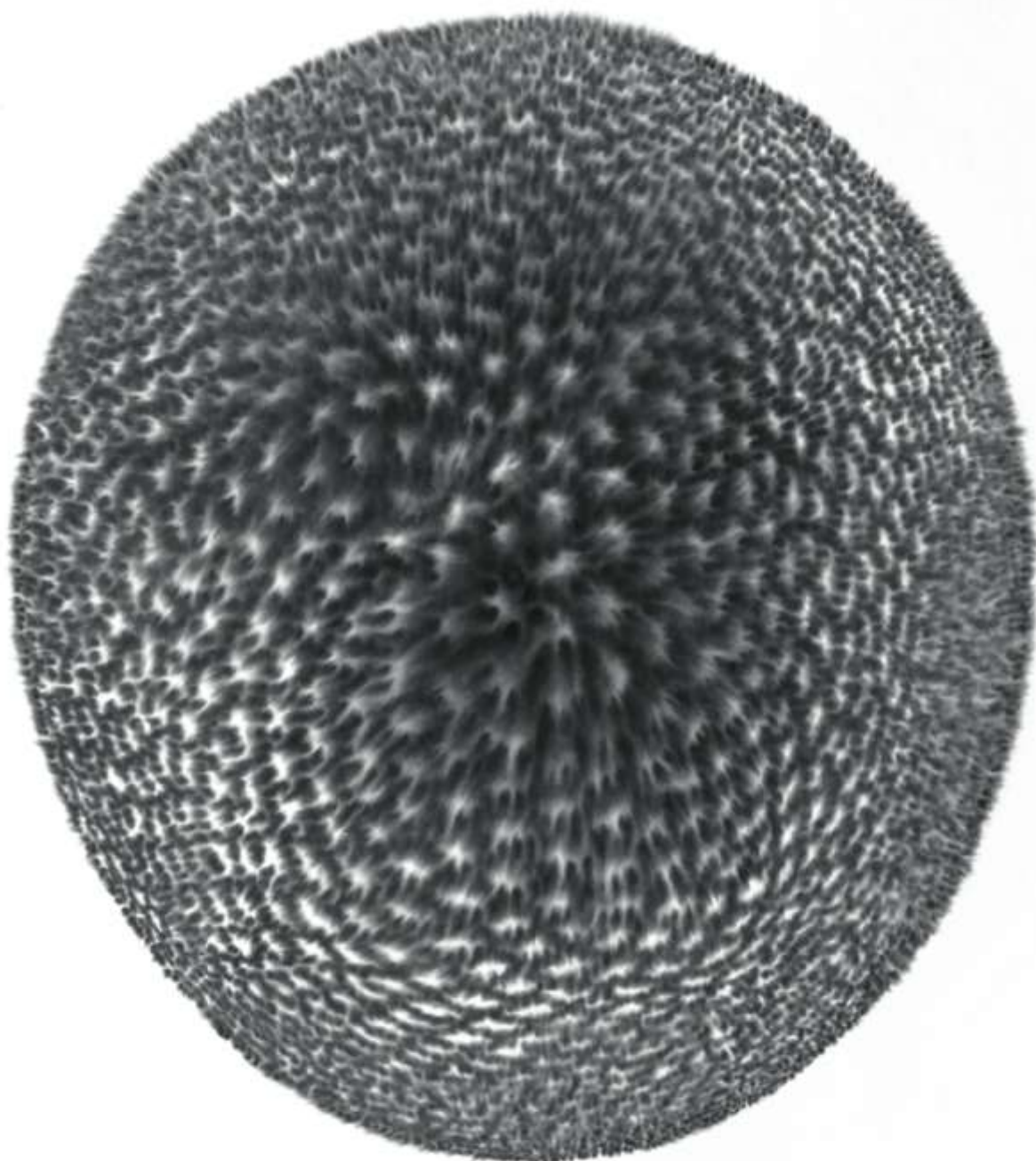
transmigration (76 x 56cm) x 63 ink on paper 2008~2011
insallation in Whanki museum Seoul



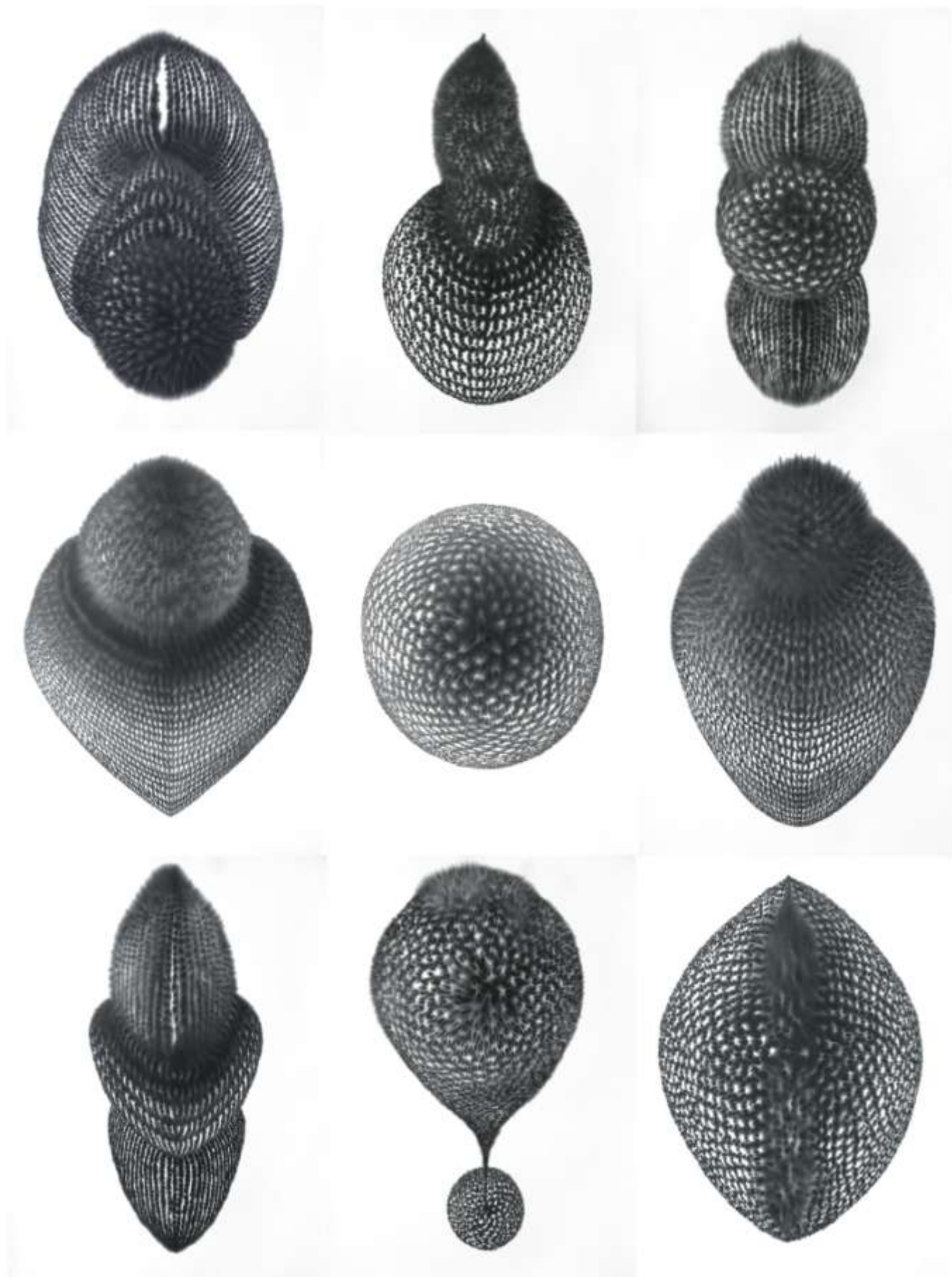
transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2010



transmigration (76 x 56cm)x15 ink on paper 2009~2011



transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2009



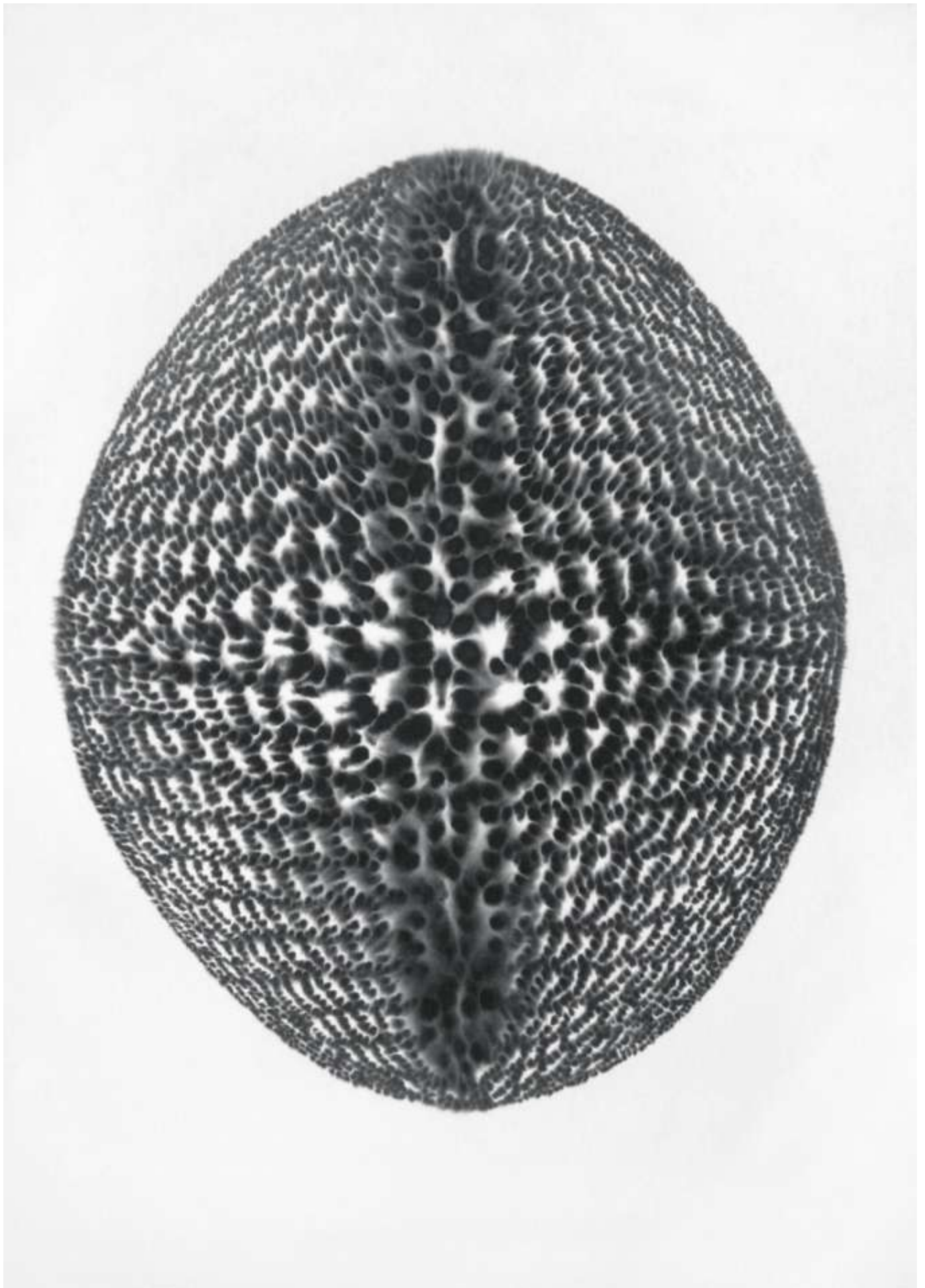
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transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2008



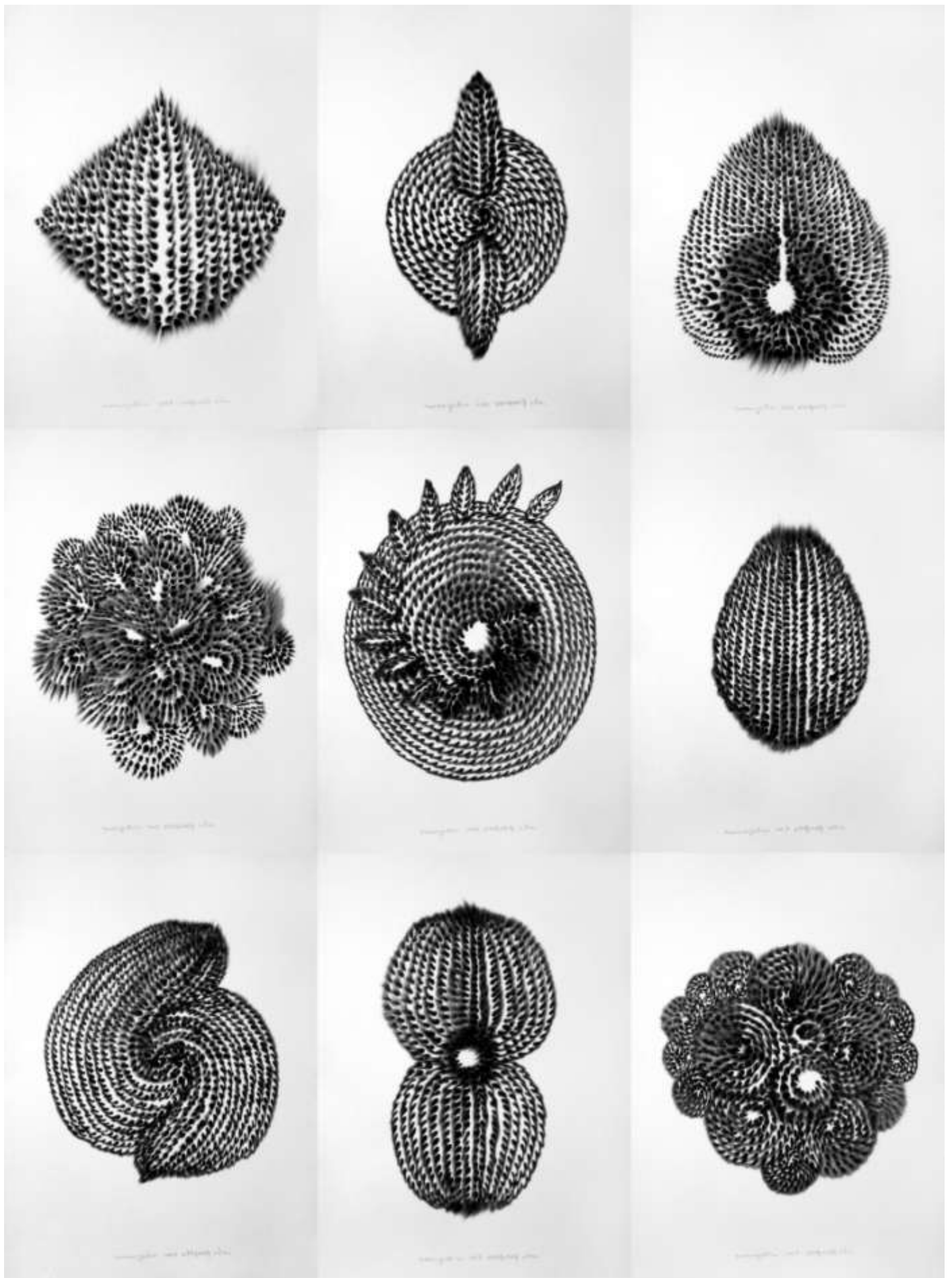
transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2008



transmigration 100 x 70cm ink on paper 2008



transmigration 76 x 56cm ink on paper 2007



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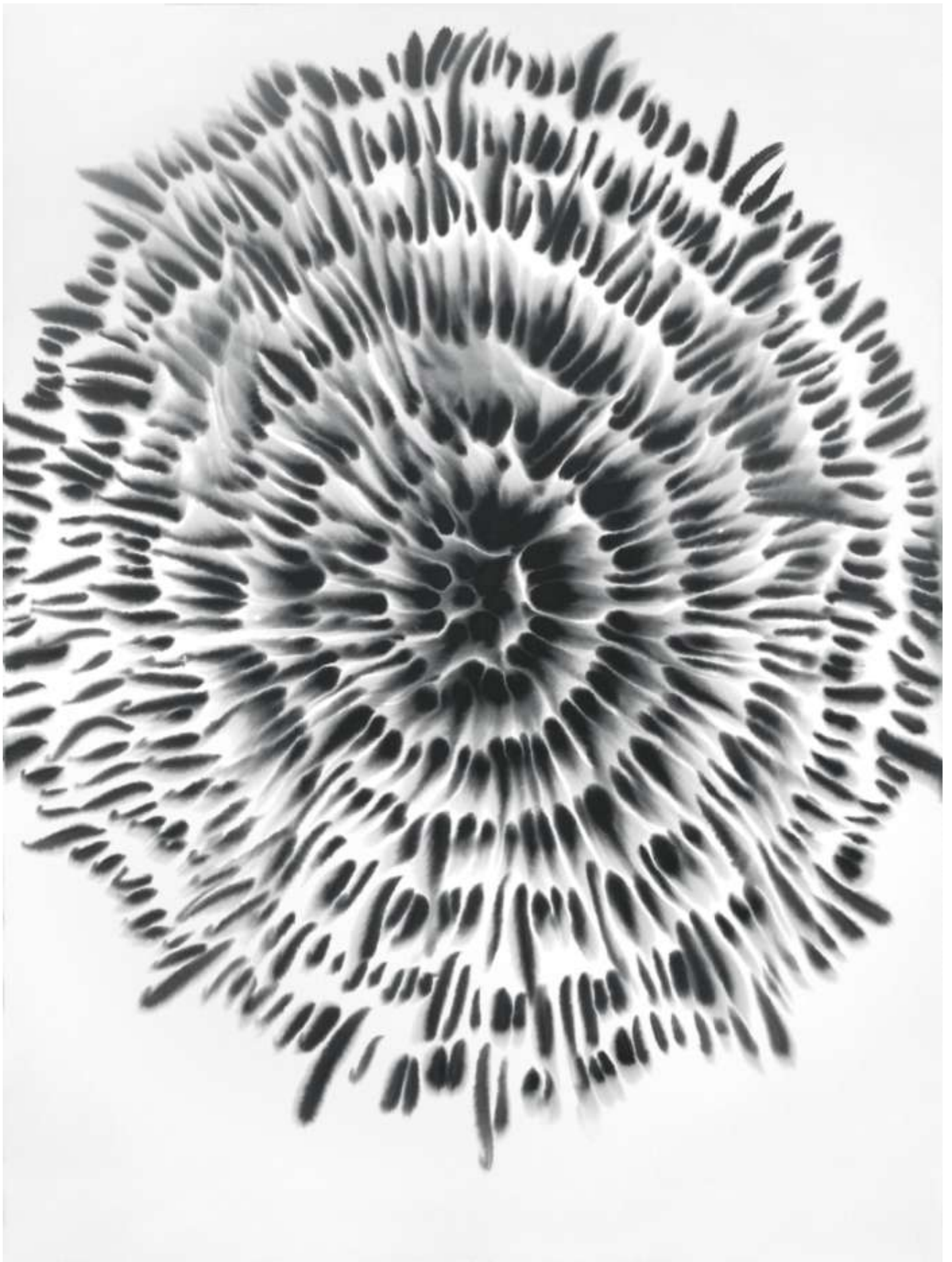
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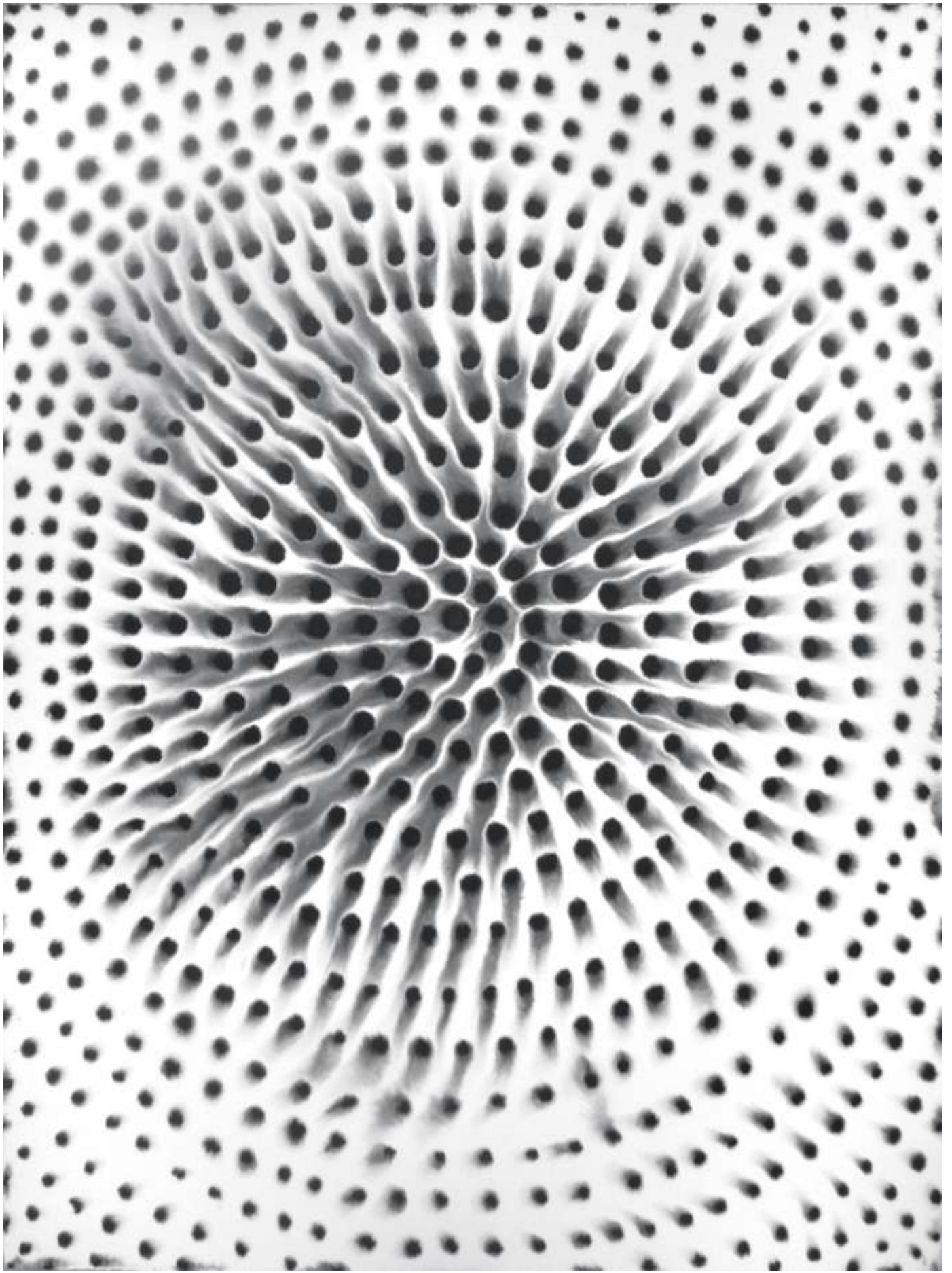
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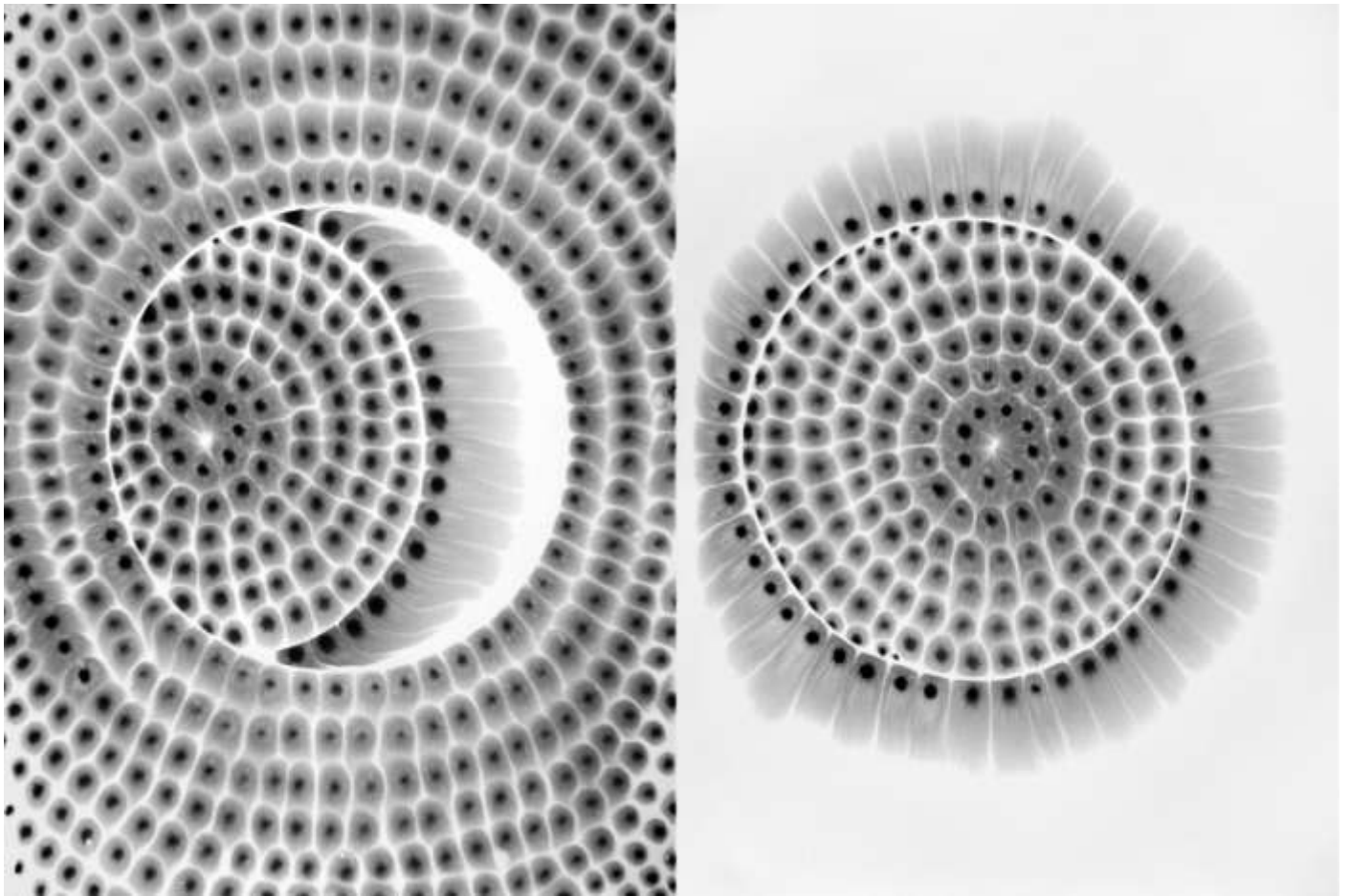
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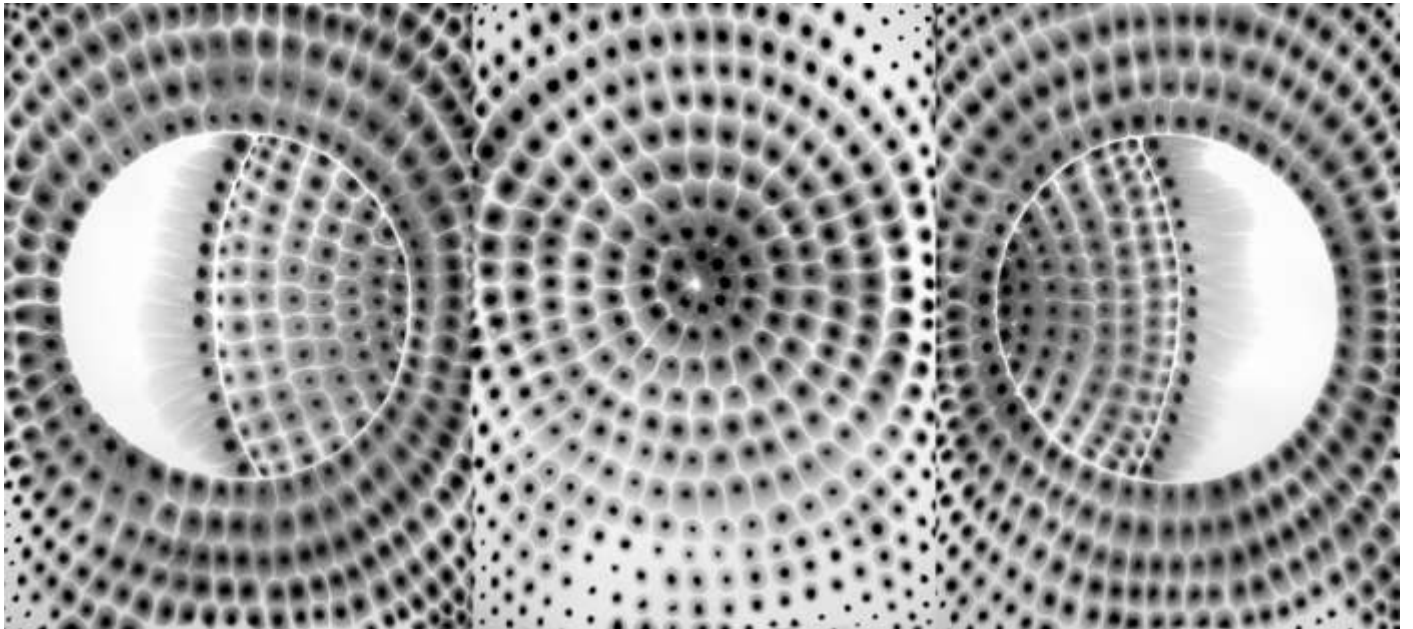
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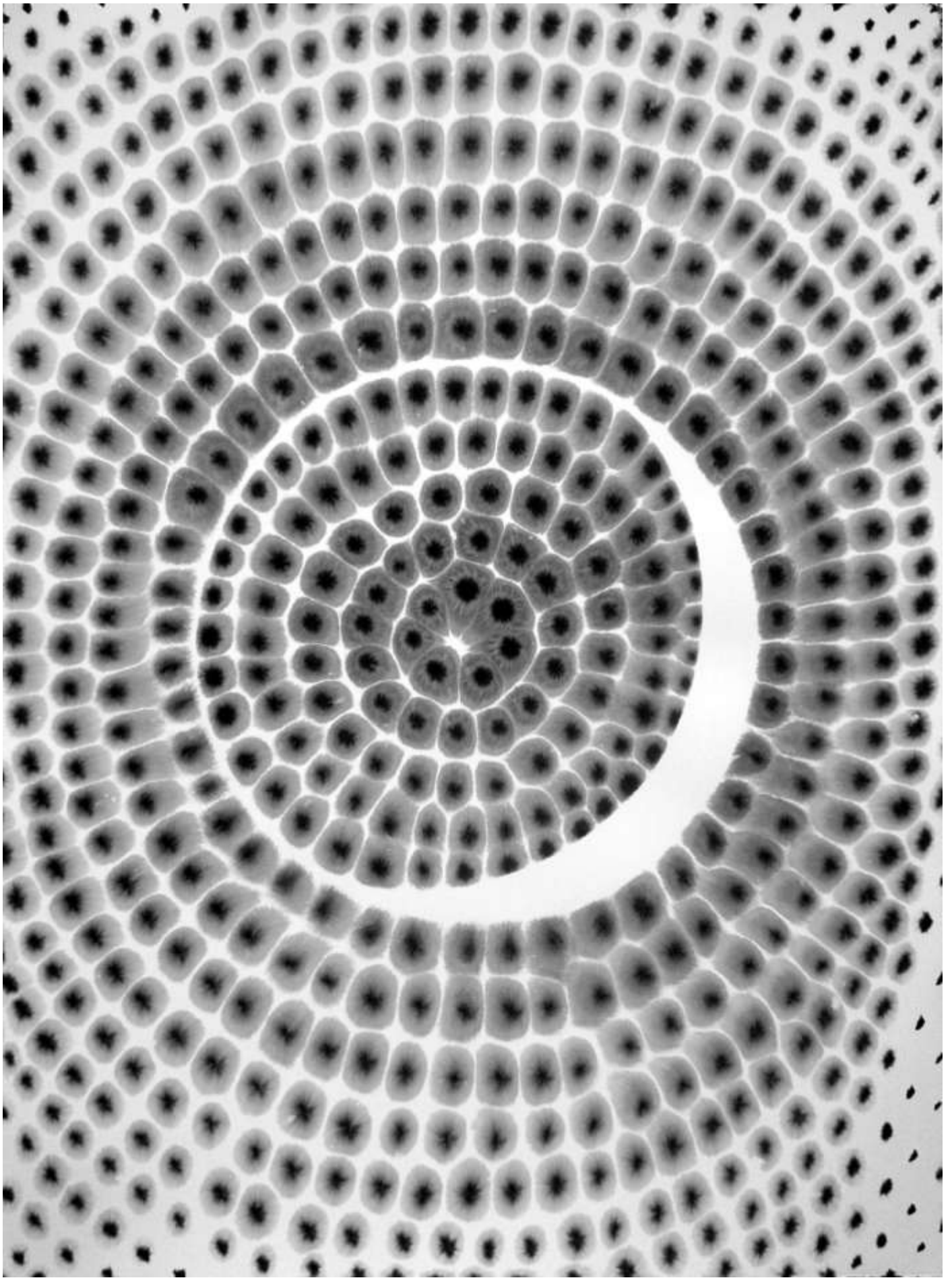
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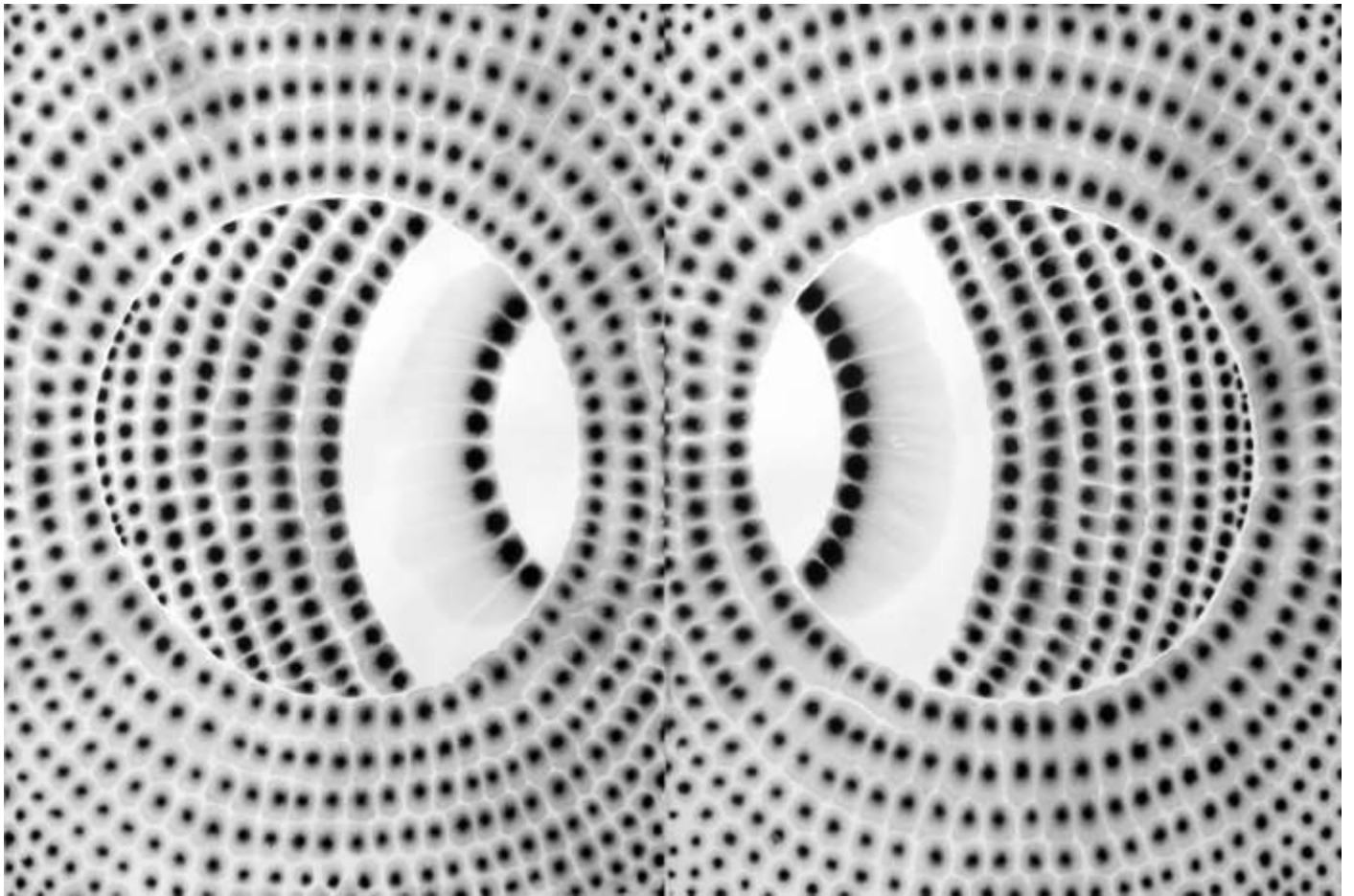
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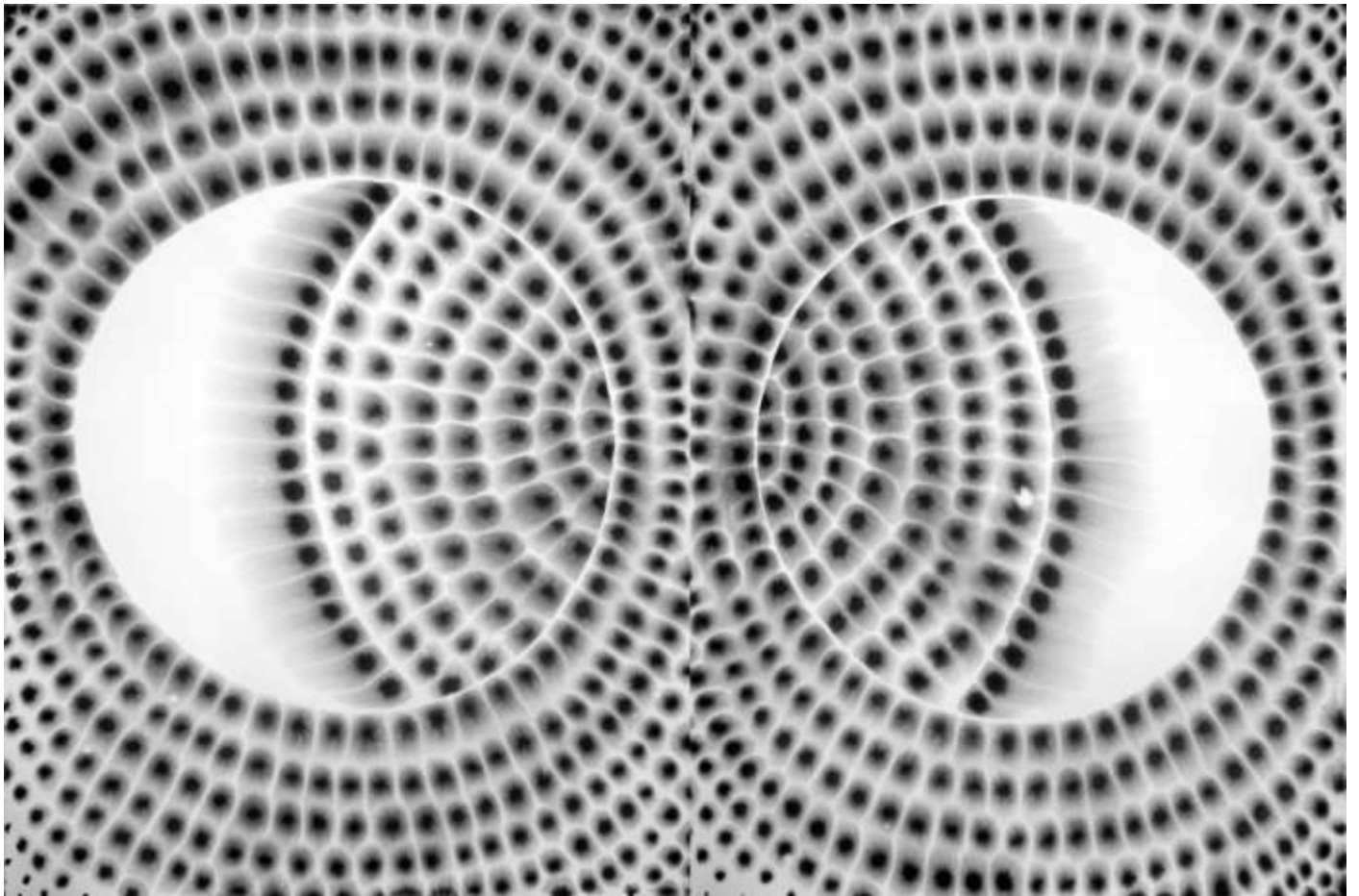
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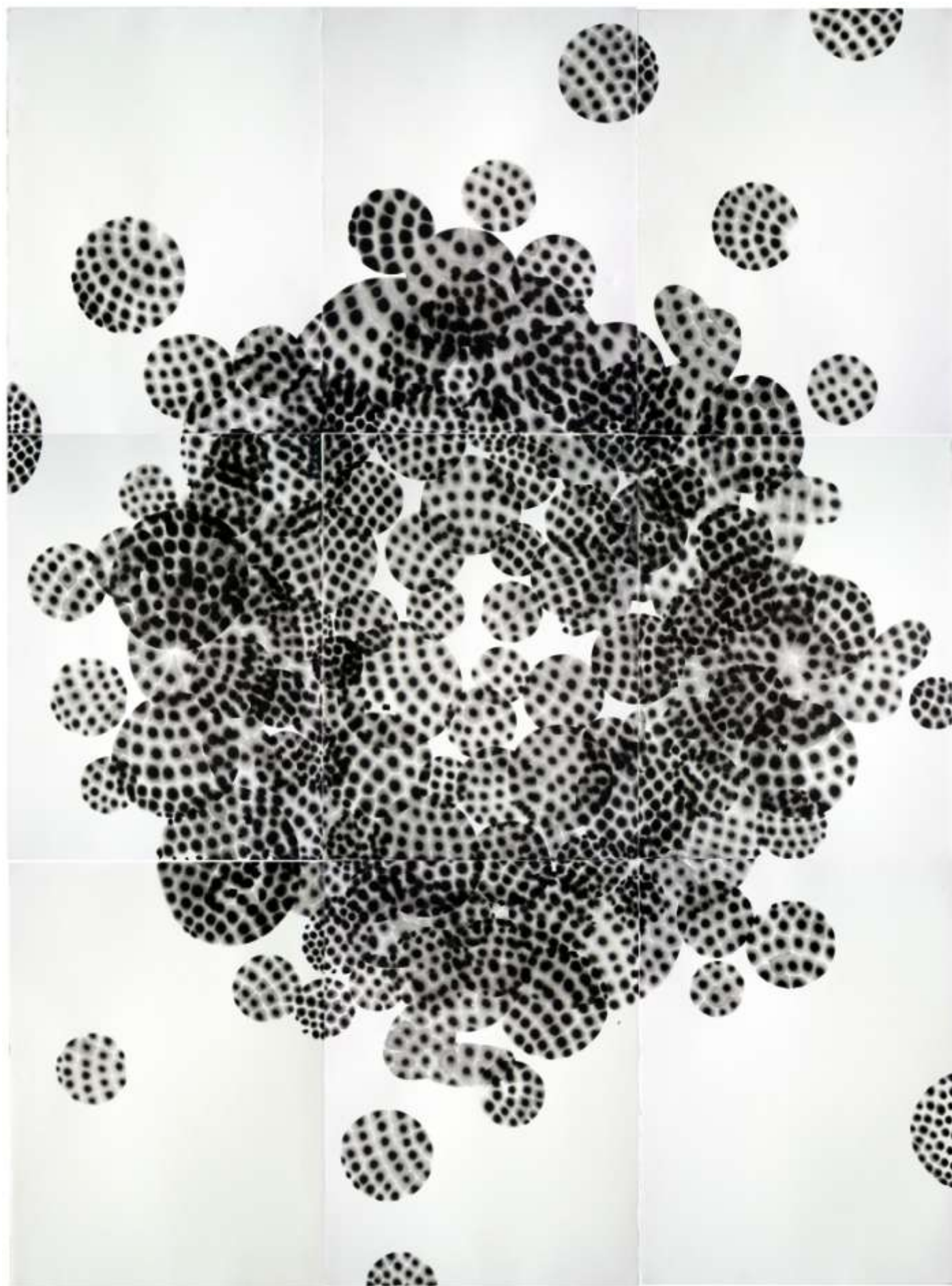
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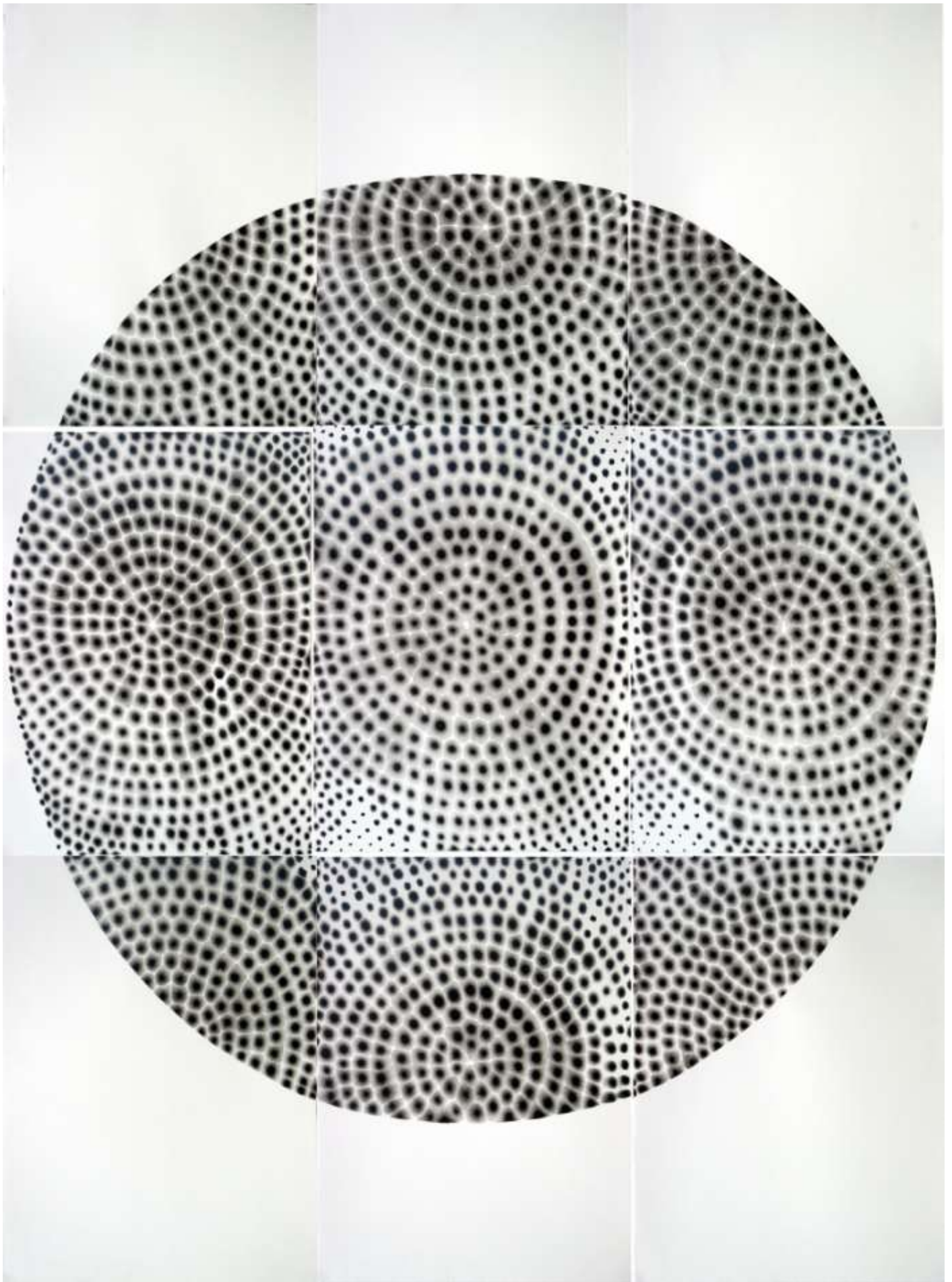
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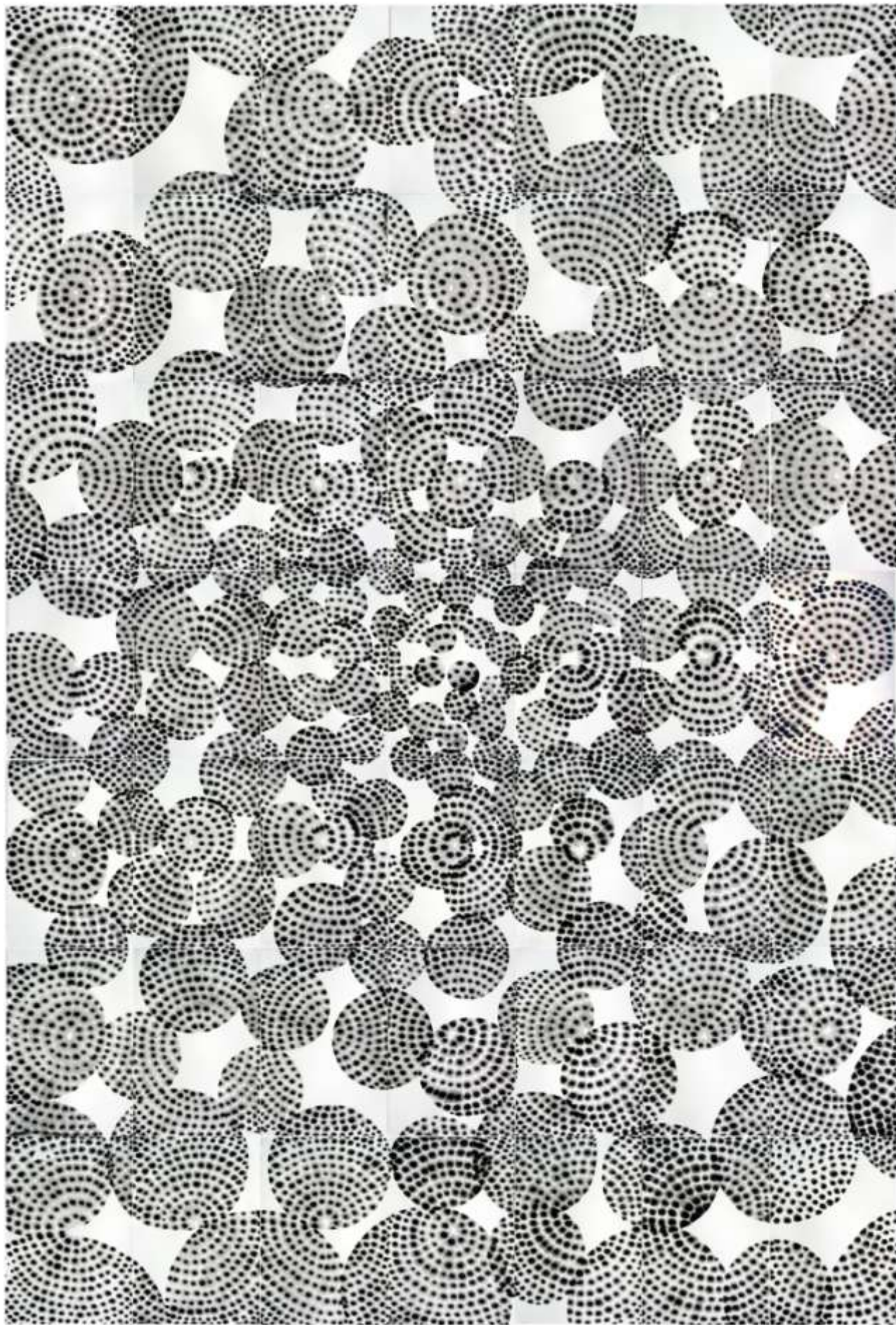
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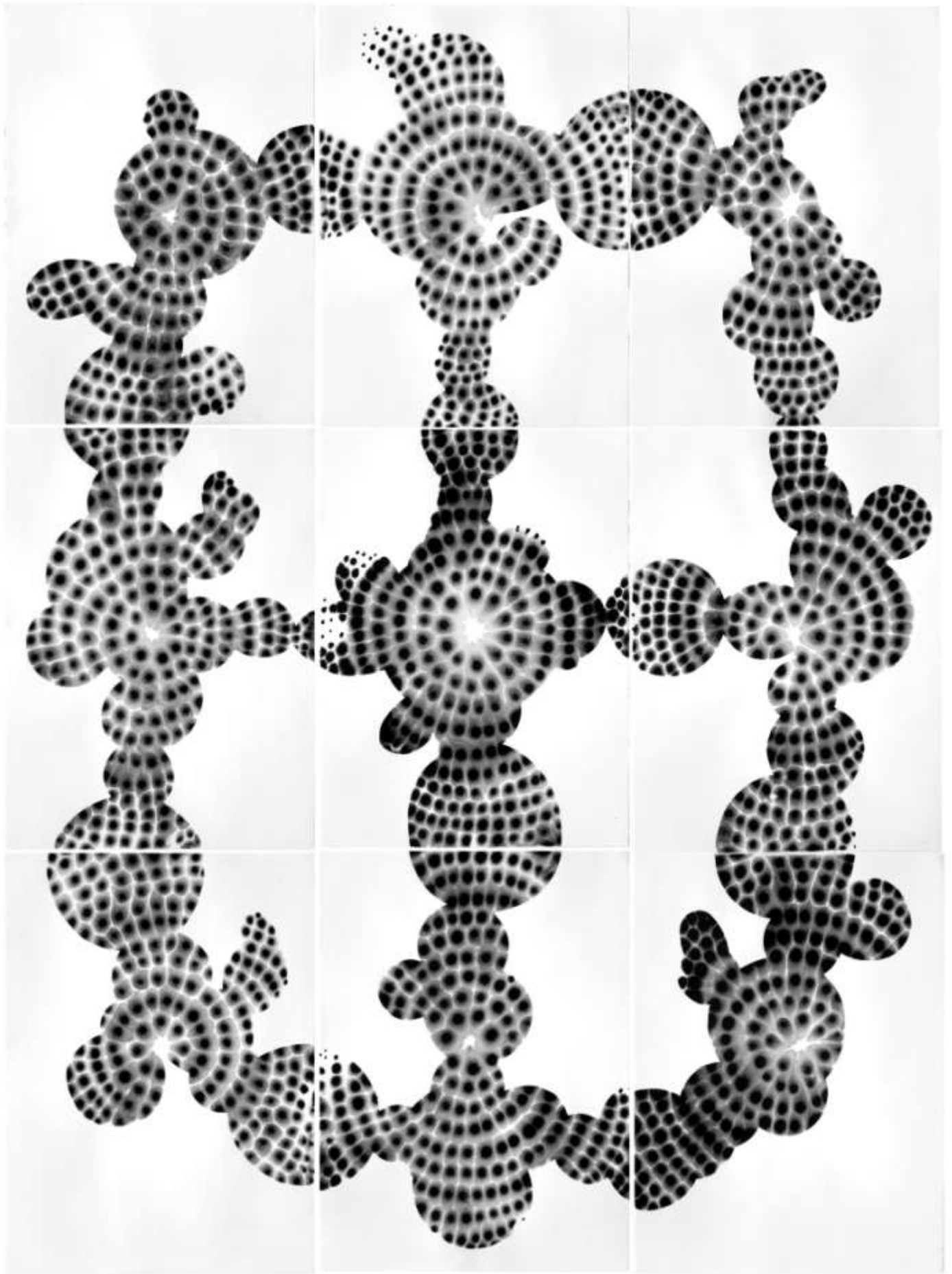
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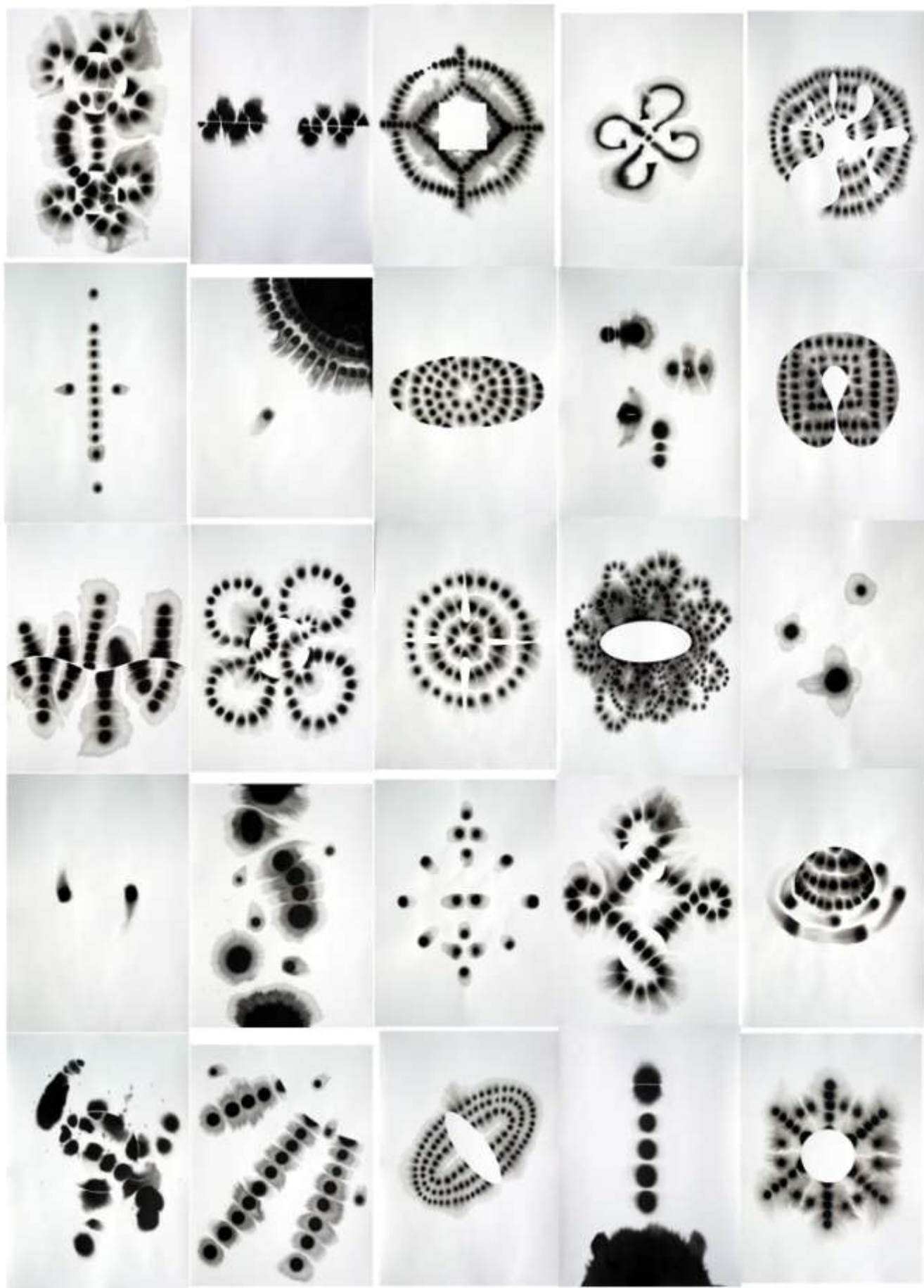
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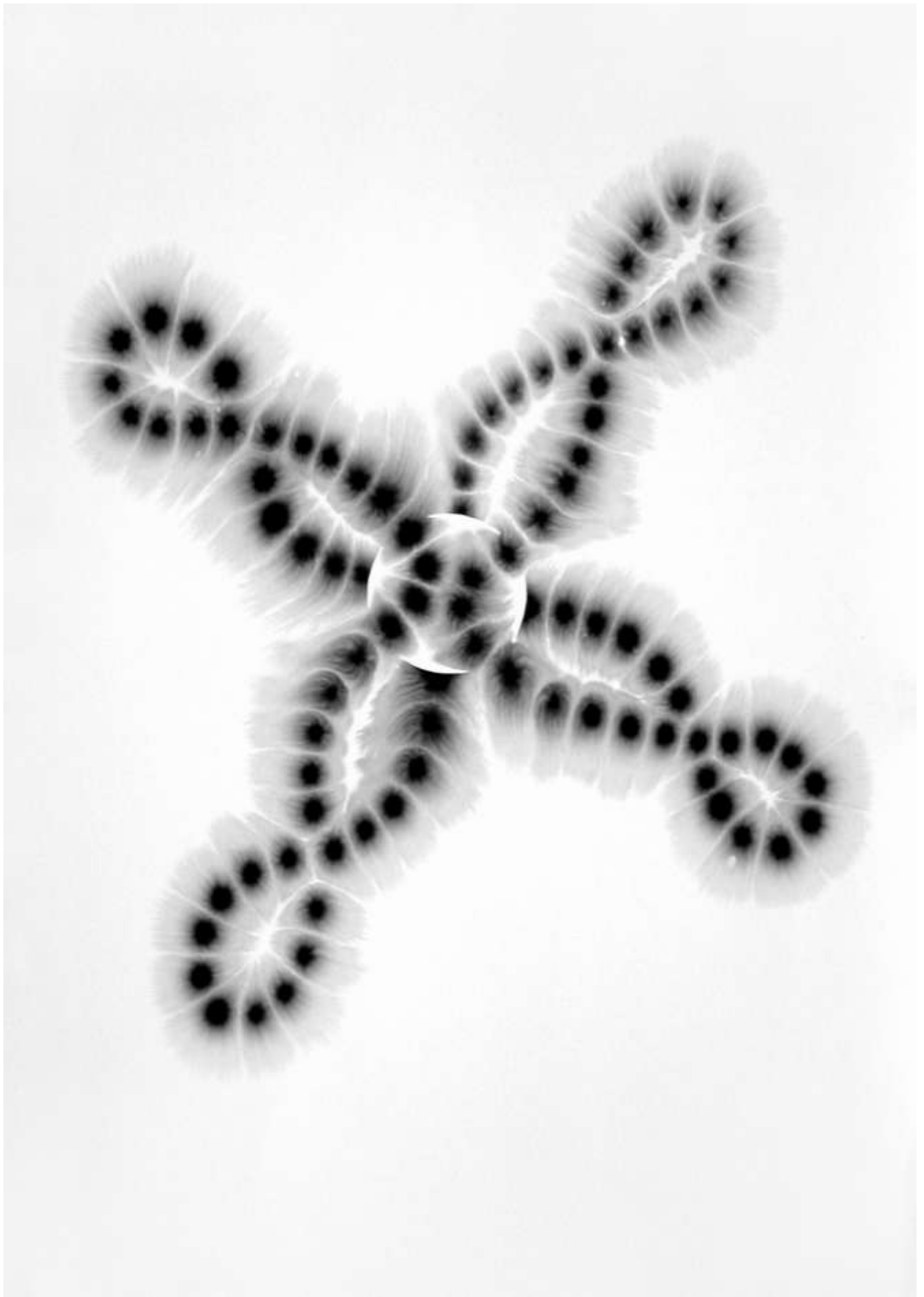
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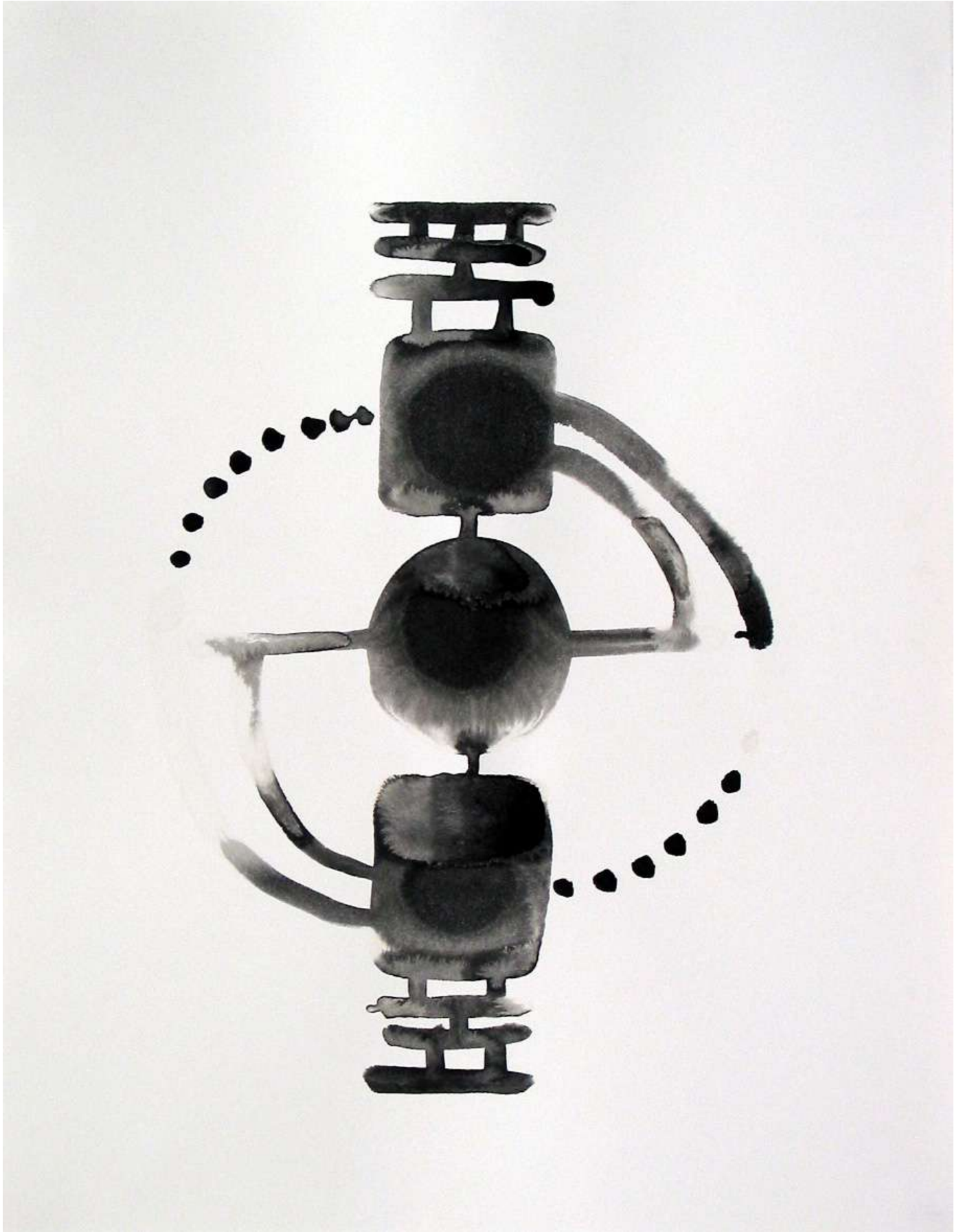
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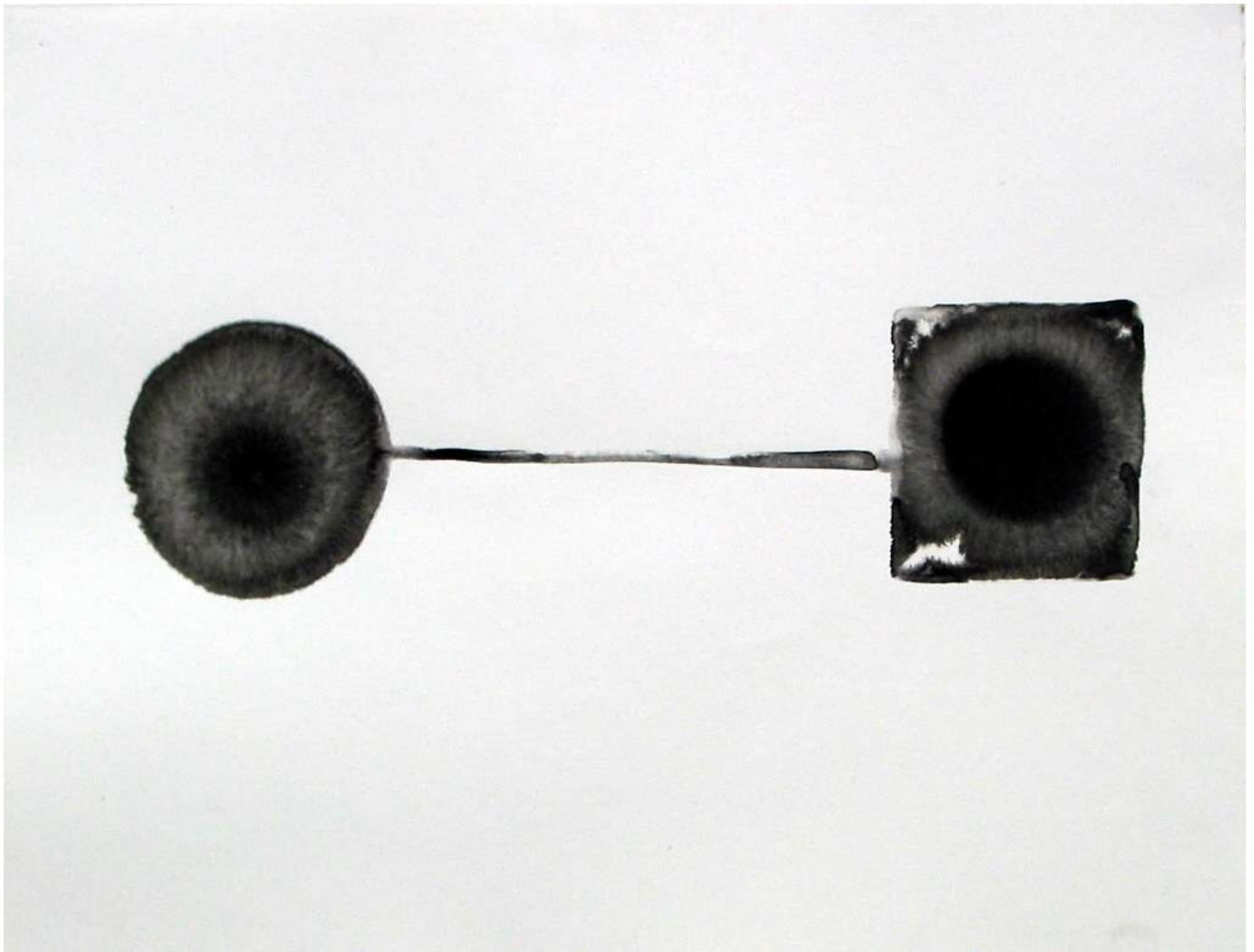
transmigration (76 x 56cm)x 25ink on paper 2003



transmigration 100x70cm ink on paper 2003



transmigration 70 x 50cm ink on paper 2002



transmigration 70 x 50cm ink on paper 2002

NAMGOONG Whan (born in 1975)

2003 D.N.S.A.P Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris

2000 B.F.A Seoul National University (South Korea)

Solo Exhibitions

2011 <Fort Interieur> Gallery Jean Brolly Paris

2010 <TRANSMIGRATION, Intermedia- > Gallery JINSUN Seoul

2009 <TRANSMIGRATION, IN- > Andy's Gallery Seoul

2008 <TRANSMIGRATION, IN- > Gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<NAMGOONG Whan Invitation Exhibition> I M ART gallery Seoul

2007 <TRANSMIGRATION, EX- > Sungnam art center Sungnam

<NAMGOONG Whan Invitation Exhibition> O'S Gallery Jeonjoo (Korea)

2006 <NAMGOONG Whan Invitation Exhibition> Namsong art museum Gapyoung

<TRANSMIGRATION de Centre> Gallery Wooduck Seoul

<NAMGOONG Whan Invitation Exhibition> Kimhyounjoo Gallery Seoul

<TRANSMIGRATION> Espace Ste Anasetase Paris

2005 <NAMGOONG Whan Invitation Exhibition> SEOHO Art museum

<NAMGOONG Whan Special Invitation Exhibition> DECOYA Seoul

<Young Artist Invitation Exhibition> KUMHO Art Gallery Seoul

2004 <TRANSMIGRATION> Espace L'HOMONT Harold WIMOTTE Paris

<INSA ART CARNIVAL> Insa art center Seoul

<TRANSMIGRATION> gallery FORUM Germany

2003 <TRANSMIGRATION> Espace prevert Saviny-le-Temple (France)

2002 <PALAIS DU SOUFFLE> E.N.S.B.A Paris

Group Exhibitions

2012 <10 Anniversaire de la galerie> Bastille Design Center Paris

<Today Mythology> Pohang steel Art museum Pohang Korea

2011 <Site Whanki - That World, Day & Night > whanki museum

<Picasso & Einstein 3.0> Seoul art center V gallery Seoul

<Salon du dessin contemporain> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<Korea International Art Fair> gallery Jinsun COEX Seoul

<Imagination Infecte> Santorini Gallery Chooncun Korea

2010 <Busan Biennale - Now! Asian artists> Busan cultural center Busan

<The sprit of times 2010> RyuHwarang gallery

<Main gauche> Kring Seoul

<Communion & Communication> POSCO gallery Pohang Korea

<Life is Life> Namsong art museum Gapyoung Korea

<Attention! please> gallery Jinsun Seoul

<Salon du dessin contemporain> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<Korea International Art Fair> gallery Jinsun COEX Seoul

2009 <COMTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATION IN KOREAN PAINTING> Seoul art center museum Seoul

<Carte blanche a la galerie Jean Brolly> gallery Ecole des beaux-arts de Renne France

<Salon du dessin contemporain> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<ART PARIS> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

2008 <THE ECHO OF BLUE> WHANKI museum Seoul

<Korea International Art Fair> gallery Jean Brolly, Im art Gallery COEX Seoul

<Art Paris AbuDhabi> gallery Jean Brolly AbuDhabi Emirates Palace

<SHANGHAI ART FAIR 2008> Im art Gallery Shanghaimart, Shanghai

<Taguer n'est pas jouer> gallery Bailly contemporain Paris

<Salon du dessin contemporain> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<ART PARIS> gallery Jean Brolly Paris

<NIAF> Namsong International Art Fair Sunnam art center Sunnam

<Comtemporany korean art - vision & version> AKA Gallery Seoul

<Half n One> Space Haam Seoul

2007 <The beautiful pattern of Korea> Finance center Seoul

<SAY POP> Espace L.D.A- La Generale des Arts Paris

<The beautyfull pattern of Korea> Finance center Seoul

<Animal in Art> Sunnam art center Sunnam

<Arts & Mathematics> Savina art museum Seoul

<Image of inside> Namsong art museum Gapyoung Korea

<Imaginary moments> Imart Gallery Seoul

<MANIF> Manif International Art Fair Seoul museum of Art

<NIAF> Namsong International Art Fair Sunnam art center Sunnam

<Half n One> Space Haam Seoul

2006 <The beauty of korean art - 100 artist> Namsong art museum Gapyoung

<Hanguel et Lumiere l'ombre> Sejool Gallery Seoul

<Korea International Art Fair> Kimhyounjoo Gallery COEX Seoul

<Deux Chambres> espace L'HOMONT Harold WILMOTTE Paris
 <KRIMIZ>Article art gallery Istanbul
 <Korean Artist of contemporary> A.S Gallery Tokyo
 <Dedans - Dehors> Galerie crous Paris
 <KCAF>- Koerea Contenporary Art Festival Seoul museum of Art
 2005 <KPUA.>-Korea young artist invitation exhibition> Danwon Art center Ansan
 <SHANGHAI ART FAIR 2005> Shanghaimart, hall 4F Shanghai Chana
 <ART COLOGNE 2005> Koelnmesse - hall 10 cologne Germany
 <Today of Korean art> Namsong art museum Gapyoung
 <ART SYDNEY 05> Royal hall of industries & hordern Pavillion
 <Seoul Young Artist Bienale> Seoul museum of Art
 <Korea International Art Fair> COEX Seoul
 2004 <ART SEOUL> Seoul Arts Center Seoul
 <COLOCOLOC> E.N.S.B.A Paris
 <UMBRA> SUNGKOK art museum Seoul
 <The Beauty of KOREA> Smsung art plaza gallery Bundang (Korea)
 2003 <AOOUIE> E.N.S.B.A Paris
 <Rococo & co> E.N.S.B.A Paris
 <Unfinished> Espace Raspail Paris
 2002 <11 Artistes COREENS> Rably sur layon (France)
 <Prix de Dessin Pierre Davide-Weil> Paris
 2001 <Titre A Venir> Espace Pantin Harold WILMOTTE Paris
 <La fresque des associations> Paris

Awards

2004 <DANWON Art Festival> Special Prize (Korea)
 2002 <Prix de Dessin Pierre Davide-Weil> The 3th prize concour dessin (Paris)

Public collections

National mueum of contemporary art, KOREA(Art bank)
 Kumho Culture Foundation, Wooduk Culture Foundation(Korea Yogurt)
 Namsong Art Museum, Gana Art Center ,Sunhill G.C
 Feragamo (korea)

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